



Yuliana Boycheva (ed.)



**ORTHODOX HEGEMONY  
AND ART. TRANSFER  
OF RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS  
ART TO THE BALKANS  
AND THE EASTERN  
MEDITERRANEAN  
(LATE 16<sup>TH</sup> - EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURIES)**

PUBLISHED BY



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INSTITUTE FOR MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES





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VISUAL CULTURE, PIETY  
AND PROPAGANDA:  
TRANSFER AND RECEPTION OF  
RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS ART IN THE BALKANS  
AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
(16TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY)

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Nikiforou Foka 130 & Melissinou  
PO Box. 119, Rethymno 741 00 • Tel. 28311 06003 • info@ims.forth.gr  
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### Russian Religious Art Transfers and Orthodox Hegemony in the Balkans

Yuliana Boycheva, IMS/FORTH

The Russian religious artefacts — icons, liturgical utensils, veils, vestments, and books — preserved in museums, as well as in church, monastic, and private collections across the Balkans constitute an poorly studied and significant corpus of material culture. At the same time, they represent crucial evidence for tracing the historical evolution of religious, political, cultural, and artistic relations between Muscovy and, later, the Russian Empire on the one hand, and the Orthodox populations in the broader geographical area encompassing south-eastern Europe, on the other. The incessant transfer of a significant number of religious artefacts from Muscovy and the artistic workshops and monastic centres of the Russian Empire to the Balkans constitutes an extremely interesting case of intercultural exchange and mobility of artefacts across regions. Furthermore, it serves to demonstrate the instrumentalization of religious art in shaping and mediating political, cultural, and ideological influence.

The dissemination of Russian devotional and liturgical objects throughout the Orthodox world between the mid-sixteenth century and the early twentieth century was facilitated by a network of diverse and interconnected channels. Among these, Imperial patronage played a pivotal role, orchestrating the movement of prestigious artefacts as diplomatic gifts, as ecclesiastical support or as expressions of personal devotion. Equally important were pilgrimage networks and the institution of alms-collecting missions “*zeteia*”, which served as major conduits by enabling the transfer of objects through the mobility of monks and lay pilgrims. Monasteries and major pilgrimage centres thus emerged as crucial sites of cultural mediation. The devotional practices of high-ranking political figures from the Balkans, who were integrated into the Russian state administration, as well as merchants and clergy travelling to or residing in Russia, further facilitated the dissemination of these objects. Major urban centres, most notably Constantinople, functioned as pivotal contact zones between Russia

and the Orthodox East, serving as hubs for the exchange of Russian and Balkan artistic production. A distinctive form of transfer was carried out by military actors who, during periods of war or occupation, often acted as agents of artistic transmission. The role of artists trained in monastic workshops and art academies of the Russian Empire is also essential in this framework. Serving as intermediaries, these artists transmitted the aesthetic principles of the Academic style and contemporary Russian painting into the sphere of local church iconography, integrating them into Balkan visual culture.

Taken together, a comprehensive analysis of these channels reveals a multifaceted and evolving network of relationships and motivations that shaped the appropriation of new iconographic schemes, their adaptation to regional tastes, and the emergence of stylistic convergence and hybrid forms of religious art across the early modern Orthodox world.

In the new environment, the social functions of artefacts went far beyond the intentions of their original creators or patrons. In their long history, they acquired various interrelated religious, ideological, political and aesthetic meanings, values and uses. Their transfer to and reception in the Balkans is a significant and poorly studied component of the larger cultural process by which artistic language and visual culture in the Balkans were transformed, transitioning from medieval to modern idioms. That same process also reflected the changing cultural and political relations between Russian empire and the Orthodox communities in the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in the Balkans over a long period. In fact, the wide range of devotional and liturgical objects used in public or private settings (icons, liturgical implements, vestments, books) can be viewed not only as objects of religious devotion and material artefacts, but also as instruments of Russian soft power and ideological hegemony in the region — an interpretive perspective that has been largely neglected in scholarly research.

The term ‘*Russian icon*’ is used in a generic sense to describe a large body of icons that share stylistic features, techniques and iconographic themes related to their origin. Previously unfamiliar in religious painting in the Balkan region, they came from workshops in the Russian Empire, including centres in cities such as Kyiv and Odessa, which are now in Ukraine. Whether masterpieces of religious art or objects of mass production, the icons are generally considered a “trademark” of Russia, the only existing Orthodox monarchy in the early modern world. With its broad geographic reference and emphasis on reception, RICONTRANS shows for the first time the complexity and contradictions of the phenomenon.

The volume comprises eighteen studies authored by project members and external scholars, originally presented and discussed at the final RICONTRANS conference which was held at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies-FORTH premises in Rethymno in January 2025. Together, these papers encapsulate the project’s principal research directions and offer critical reflections on their outcomes.

The contributions are organized around six broad thematic axes: 1) Alms Collection Missions as a Channel for Art Mobility and Exchanges in the Orthodox World; 2) Russian Miraculous Icons in the Balkan Context - Transfer, Veneration, Transformations; 3) The Dissemination of Russian Icons in the Balkans; 4) Artefacts and Written Evidence - Russian or Ukrainian? Defining the Origins of Art Objects, Visual Models and Professional Skills transferred to the Balkans; 5) Supporting Orthodoxy in the Balkans: Russian Donations to Churches and Monasteries in the Balkans during the 19th Century; 6) Sacred Objects out of Ritual Context - Russian Icons in Museum Collections.<sup>1</sup>

The policy of encouraging alms-collection missions in Russia, increasingly driven by aspirations to exert cultural influence and patronage over the Eastern Patriarchates, intensified with the rise of the Romanov dynasty and the accession of its founder, Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov (1613–1645). It reached its peak in the second half of the seventeenth century under his successor, Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov (1645–1676). During this period, alms collections became one of the principal mechanisms for distributing Russian material support to the Orthodox clergy and laity of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> The institution of alms collection (*zeteia*) involved the gathering of voluntary contributions — monetary donations, ecclesiastical objects, and other valuable items — by authorised representatives of the Eastern Patriarchates and monasteries, who regularly travelled across both Orthodox and non-Orthodox lands. These missions constituted one of the most significant official channels for the transfer of icons and other objects of religious art from Muscovy and the Russian Empire to the ecclesiastical centres of the Orthodox East. The three papers of the first thematic section of the volume “*Alms collection missions as a channel for art mobility and exchanges in the Orthodox world*” devoted to this topic offer an important contribution to scholarly research by presenting new archival data and examining the history of such alms collection missions from multiple analytical perspectives, highlighting their role in disseminating icons, liturgical utensils, vestments, books, and other forms of material culture.

In summarising the evidence presented in the three papers of this section, it becomes clear that two main categories of artefacts were brought to the monastic centres of the Ottoman Empire through alms-collection missions. The first and larger group consisted of iconostasis icons, liturgical utensils,

1 Boycheva, Yuliana. “The Example of Patmos: Various Routes of Russian Icons in the Orthodox East.” In *Routes of Russian icons in Greece and the Balkans (16th–20th c.)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, 105–136; Boycheva, Yuliana. “Studying Russian Icons on the Balkans.” *ISTORIYA* (2021): vol. 12, issue 5 (103) (DOI: 10.18254/S207987840015642–5).

2 Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, Helen. “Το φαινόμενο της ζητείας κατά τη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο.” *Ionios Logos* 1 (2007): 247–293; Saracino, Stefano. “Greek Orthodox Alms Collectors from the Ottoman Empire in the Holy Roman Empire: Extreme Mobility and Confessionalized Communication”. In Sarris, Kostas, Nikolas Pissis and Miltos Pechlivanos (eds), *Confessionalization and/as Knowledge Transfer in the Greek Orthodox Church*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021, 79–108.

books, and vestments — objects essential for the worship life of the monasteries. These cult objects were commissioned using the financial resources obtained from alms collections. They were procured not only from workshops throughout the Russian Empire, including major artistic centres such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kyiv, but also from smaller urban and monastic centres, as well as from Transylvania, Wallachia, Moldavia and territories of contemporary Ukraine, through which the monks passed on their route to Moscow. The second category comprised icons intended for private devotion, as well as other valuable items offered to monasteries with the explicit purpose of securing the incorporation of the donor’s name in the commemorative lists of the living and the dead, which monks compiled during their alms-collecting journeys.

In her analysis, **Yuliana Boycheva** examines the icon of Saint John the Theologian, one of the three Muscovite despotic icons placed in the central iconostasis at Patmos Monastery, which constitutes the focal point of worship for the community. The icon of Saint John, acquired by the Patmian monks during their alms-collection mission to Moscow in 1696–1698, constitutes a material testimony of particular significance for the history of the *zeteia* missions. It is also a noteworthy example of a composite artefact assembled in the course of such a journey: the painted icon was produced in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, while its silver revetment was crafted in a different artistic centre, most likely in the goldsmith workshops of Braşov. A comprehensive analysis of the icon, combined with relevant written sources and testimonies from 18th–19th-century travelogues, provides the basis for a multilayered examination and reconstruction of its material and social biography. The analysis of the icon thus serves as a case study illuminating the intersection of successive phases in the life of a cult object and an exceptional artefact, thereby revealing the complexity of art mobility and cultural exchange in the Orthodox world during the early modern period.

**Nikolas Pissis** uncovers and contextualizes evidence concerning representations of Russia among the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire, which served to shape the reception of Russian icons and other items of religious art in the Ottoman lands. He focuses on the rhetoric and argumentation of petition letters carried and submitted in Moscow by monks from the Patmian Monastery of St. John the Theologian in 1696, and especially in 1705, in order to trace indications of transformations and adaptations of imagery connected with contemporary Petrine reforms and the accompanying changes in the self-perception of the Russian monarchy.

**Sofia Katopi** undertakes a thorough examination of the memoirs and the alms collection notebooks of Gabriel Manaris, Abbot of Arkadi Monastery (in Rethymno, Crete), providing information on the income and expenses of the 1894–1896 journey to Russia, the names of donors and their donations and the route traversed by the “*taxidiotes*” (itinerant monks). The author further explores the factors contributing to the mission’s reduced revenues and the subsequent controversy that erupted upon Manaris’ return to Crete, seeking to situate these events within the broader political context of the period.

The transfer, veneration, and subsequent alterations of Russian miraculous icons within the historical and cultural environment of the Balkans during the early modern period are examined in three papers. These papers are of particular relevance and are unified in the second thematic section, which is entitled “*Russian miraculous icons in the Balkan context – transfer, veneration, transformations*”.

In his contribution, **Nenad Makuljević** investigates how copies of Russian miraculous icons were introduced into, integrated within, and venerated by Serbian ecclesiastical communities in the 19th century. Central to his study is the history of the copy of the Vladimir Mother of God, brought to Belgrade from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in 1727. Regarded as miraculous, the icon circulated among various monasteries throughout the 18th century, receiving the name of each foundation to which it was transferred and becoming known as the Mother of God of Vladimir–Vinčan–Bezdan. During the 18th and 19th centuries it emerged as one of the most revered icons among the Serbian population of the Habsburg Monarchy, as evidenced by the large number of surviving copies.

**Ivana Ženarju Rajović** addresses related issues in her study, presenting new evidence on the veneration of the legendary icon of the Peć Mother of God — the palladium of both the monastery and the city — which, according to tradition, was painted by Saint Luke and presented to the monastery by Saint Sava, the first Archbishop of Serbia. In fact, the icon is a copy of the miraculous Mother of God of Jerusalem, which was made by painters of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber in the early 18th century. A central contribution of Dr. Ženarju Rajović’s research is her thorough historical reconstruction of the icon’s veneration from its creation to the present day — by Muslims as well as Christians — and her demonstration of its enduring influence on the visual culture of the region.

A different dimension of miraculous icons veneration is examined by **Irena Ćirović**, whose study focuses on the the veneration and religious practices centered around the miraculous icon of the Mother of God Three-Handed, one of the most revered relics of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. In 1862, the icon was embellished with a new, richly decorated silver-gilt revetment adorned with precious stones, crafted in Moscow. This prestigious donation significantly influenced the veneration of the icon on Mount Athos and played a key role in the wider dissemination of its worship throughout Russia.

As previously mentioned, one of the central objectives of the project is to comprehensively document the transfer and reception of Russian religious art by identifying, studying, and introducing new artistic and historical ‘material’ into academic discussion. The analysis and interpretation of this material aims to illuminate the scope of this historical process, as well as the artistic and social significance of the intercultural mobility of religious artefacts from Muscovy and the Russian Empire to the Balkans between the second half of the 16th and the early 20th century. The third section of the volume, entitled “*The Dissemination of Russian Icons in the Balkans – Artefacts and Written Evidence*”, comprises studies that examine the dissemination of Russian icons in the Balkans. Two of

these contributions focus specifically on Russian artworks preserved in the churches and monasteries of Constantinople, while two other studies provide new material from the Balkans, specifically from the Peloponnese and Bulgaria.

**Natalia Komashko’s** research on the nine iconostasis icons made by Kremlin Armoury Chamber in identified in the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople represents a significant contribution to the field. Created in the late 17th and early 18th century in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber icon-painting workshop, they are displayed in various Orthodox churches in contemporary Istanbul. Komashko’s study is the first systematic examination of these valuable icons alongside relevant written sources. The author pays particular attention to the iconographic models used. Two particular categories are looked at in greater depth: the first is characterised by the creation of original models in accordance with the specifications and preferences of the commissioning patrons, while the second pertains to how artists incorporated iconographic elements into new compositional solutions of Russian origin.

While Natalia Komashko presents a significant number of Russian works preserved in Orthodox churches in Istanbul, **Ovidiu Olar’s** research focuses on icons from other Istanbul churches that have now been lost, but which are known to have existed thanks to written sources. What prompted his investigation was the discovery of photographs showing a large fresco of the Last Judgement in the Church of Saint Mary of the Mongols in Istanbul, in the travel album compiled in Istanbul by the Romanian diplomat Marcel Romanescu in 1932, and a 19th-century Russian icon of the Archangel Michael ‘Captain of the Heavenly Host’ still in the church. The study reconstructs the history of the Church of Saint Mary of the Mongols, contextualizing the lost Last Judgement and its thematic correlation with the icon of the Archangel Michael.

Recently discovered material, including both written evidence and artefacts, presented by Panayiotis Ioannou and Angel Nikolov, elucidate the particularities of the historical events that shaped artistic transfer in two different regions of the Balkan peninsula – the Peloponnese in Greece and Thrace and Dobrudja in Bulgaria.

**Panayotis Ioannou** offers a comprehensive overview of the results of bibliographical and fieldwork research based on both written sources and documented artefacts transferred from Russia to various regions of the Peloponnese, including Achaia, Corinthia, Ilia, Argolida, Arcadia, Messenia, and Laconia. Of particular interest for the study of the transfer history of Russian art in the Balkans is the identification of two despotic icons in the main iconostasis of the Monastery of the Taxiarches near Aegio in Achaia. These icons were donated by Diacoptites Meletios Sarantis, who, after undertaking an alms-collection mission to Constantinople, returned in 1785 with a substantial sum of money, liturgical utensils, vestments, and six Russian despotic icons for the monastery. This case exemplifies the role of Constantinople as a major hub for the commercial and cultural exchange of Orthodox artistic artefacts in the late eighteenth century.

**Angel Nikolov** examines a different category of artefacts: mass-produced 19th-century Russian icons that were donated to parish churches in villages and towns across northern and central Bulgaria, and which are today preserved in local historical museums. His analysis focuses on the dedication inscriptions, regarded as a crucial source for establishing the chronology of these objects. The study demonstrates that the majority of the icons were donated by private individuals for a variety of reasons, including personal piety, the desire to embellish the local church, and the intention to have their names recorded as benefactors.

The material presented in this section offers a valuable opportunity to analyse the diversity of Russian icons in terms of both their artistic quality and the social groups involved in their transfer across the Balkans. The icons preserved in the churches of Constantinople are primarily attributed to the icon-painting workshop of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber and represent the work of leading artists active in the late 17th and the first half of the 18th century. These artefacts reflect not only the aesthetic preferences of the Orthodox elite of Ottoman but also their considerable economic power. Similar in terms of artistic quality icons have been documented in the Peloponnese, donated by members of the higher clergy and by merchants who commissioned icons from workshops in Moscow and St. Petersburg for the churches and monasteries of their hometowns. In contrast, the icons originating from provincial churches in northern and central Bulgaria consist largely of mass-produced icons from 19th-century workshops in the Vladimir Province. Their donors — small traders, craftsmen, and very often Russian soldiers — appear to have donated these icons during or in connection with military operations in the region.

The subsequent series of articles focus on the identification, study, and introduction of new artistic and historical “material” — specifically, icons produced in workshops across the territory of the Russian Empire. At the same time, they raise the question of how these icons are identified, perceived, and studied in different national contexts, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria. The fourth section of the volume, *“Russian or Ukrainian? Defining the Origins of Art Objects, Visual Models, and Professional Skills Transferred to the Balkans”* brings together a series of studies examining the movement of art objects, visual models, and professional skills from the major artistic centers of the Russian Empire to the Balkans. These contributions provide new data and engage critically with the ways in which such objects are identified by local societies and categorized in the scholarly literature. A central issue addressed in this section is the precise determination of the objects’ origin, questioning whether they should be classified as “Russian” or “Ukrainian,” or understood as reflecting a more complex, hybrid cultural provenance. **Cristina Cojocaru** raises the question of how to identify and classify works of art originating from artistic workshops in Russian imperial territory. Should they be classified as “Russian” or it is more appropriate to use the names of local art centres within the Russian Empire, such as “Kyivan”, “Muscovite” or, alternatively, the national name “Ukrainian”? Cojocaru’s paper aims to provide a critical analysis of the stylistic labels and stereotypes applied to 18th-century Kyivan icons preserved in Romanian collections.

**Mother Atanasia Văetiși** presents the little-known example of how icon painting models from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra School of Painting came to be transferred to the religious community of the Poiana Mărului hermitage, founded in 1730 by a group of Slavic monks led by Abbot Vasile in Buzău County in south-eastern Romania. Văetiși reconstructs the history of the religious community, demonstrating how the icons, iconostases and mural painting commissioned by the monks contributed to the dissemination of the iconography and style characteristic of the Icon-painting School of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra within the Romanian cultural sphere. The creation of a novel visual identity and cultural paradigm for Romanian ecclesiastical art was initiated at Poiana Mărului, encompassing the surrounding hermitages and parish churches, the Buzău Mountains, and select monasteries in Moldova and Wallachia that were affiliated with the Philokalic movement initiated by Abbot Vasile.

**Ivanka Gergova’s** research focuses on descriptive analysis of how visual models and iconographical themes originating from old printed books produced in Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Pochaev Lavra, Lviv, and Chernihiv were perceived in Bulgarian art, and how these themes subsequently penetrated the works of local master painters. The research is oriented towards three main aspects: firstly, identifying Ukrainian models; secondly, examining how those models influenced the iconography of Bulgarian art; and thirdly, analysing representations of Ukrainian saints and miraculous icons that appeared in the repertoire of Bulgarian masters. Gergova’s conclusion is that, in contrast to the case in Serbia during the eighteenth century, Ukrainian art exerted less of an influence on Bulgarian cultural contexts.

Another aspect of the subject under discussion is the transmission of artistic models adopted and disseminated by painters who received training in monastic workshops and art academies in the Russian Empire, as demonstrated by **Ana Kostić**. Their education was made possible through financial support from various Serbian and Russian institutions, including fellowships provided by the Serbian Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Slavic Committees in Moscow and St. Petersburg, alongside private patronage. The author provides a comprehensive analysis of archival documents and personal correspondence held in the State Archives of Serbia, offering insight into the education of young Serbian painters in Russian monastery workshops and academies during the 19th century as icon-painting at Trinity-Sergius Lavra, Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, Higher School of Arts and Crafts in Moscow, Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. The author’s analysis of the sources reveals that the artistic development of these painters occurred in two distinct phases. During the first stage, they received traditional training in icon painting in monastery workshops, focusing on Orthodox iconography. The second phase of their studies took place at art academies in Moscow, Kyiv, and Saint Petersburg, where they developed new artistic skills and became familiar with contemporary Russian painting trends.

The fifth section of the volume, *“Supporting Orthodoxy in the Balkans: Russian Donations to Churches and Monasteries in the Balkans during the 19th Century,”* comprises two papers that examine how

the transfer of Russian religious art evolved from expressions of “religious hegemony” to instruments of “soft power politics” in regions under Russian influence.

**Marija Lakić** investigates the mechanisms and forms of Russian support for the Orthodox population in Bosnia and Herzegovina after 1850, focusing on the iconostasis crafted by Russian masters for the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo — the most prominent example of its kind. Her study also considers two travelogues: one by Monk Prokopije Čokorilo, documenting his journeys to aid churches in Mostar and its environs, and another by Archimandrite Sava Kosanović of Sarajevo, who travelled to Russia to secure donations for his city’s cathedral.

**Lora Gerd** provides a detailed analysis of archival sources from the Holy Synod of Russia, elucidating the procedures and motivations behind the granting of alms-collection permits. Her research examines how these permits were issued, how alms collection was conducted, and how this process facilitated the implementation of Russian policy in the Balkans between the Treaty of Adrianople and the outbreak of the First World War.

The final section of the volume, titled ‘*Sacred Objects Out of Ritual Context: Russian Icons in Museum Collections*’, addresses issues concerning the management, protection, conservation, and study of Russian icons outside their liturgical use in Bulgaria and Greece. **Rumyana Decheva’s** research examines the impact of state policy on the preservation of Russian icons in Bulgaria during two distinct periods: under Communist rule (1944–1989) and from 1989 to the present. Her paper analyses the role of various institutions — including historical and ecclesiastical museums, public art galleries, churches, and Old Believer communities — in safeguarding Russian icons as part of the national historical heritage.

The volume concludes with a contribution by **Anastasia Drandaki**, which highlights the extensive involvement of the Benaki Museum team in the ERC RICONTRANS research project. Her study offers a valuable illustration of how interdisciplinary collaboration was implemented, documenting art-historical, epigraphic, and technical analyses of Russian artworks in the Benaki Museum to reconstruct their material and social biographies. Drandaki also demonstrates how various RICONTRANS research results were presented to two Benaki Museum exhibitions held in different cities and venues across Greece.


This volume brings to light new data, enriching academic discourse on transferred objects of art that have often been overlooked in their new Balkan context and host environment. Our aim was equally to elucidate the actual transfer history of these objects and reveal the halo of their ideological interpretations, political uses and aesthetic receptions, both in general and, in particular, in the case of famous and venerated objects, such as that of the iconostasis at the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian on Patmos or the miraculous icon of Mother of God of Vladimir-Vinčan-Bezdan. But most importantly, the project aimed to disentangle the multiple transfers incorporated into the objects and their

agency - transfers which point to a dynamic artistic and visual exchange which both encompassed and transcended the Early Modern Orthodox World. The abundant new material presented in this collective volume constitutes an example for the synthetic investigation of composite questions concerning the transfer of art objects, related to the interrelationships between artistic form, visual culture, personal piety, political and ecclesiastical propaganda, and ideology.

The papers presented here, based on both textual evidence and documented material artefacts, assemble a large-scale body of data that makes it possible to reconstruct the routes through which Russian religious art was transferred to the Balkans and to identify the agents, mechanisms, and motivations shaping this process across different historical periods. By examining routes of mobility alongside processes of artistic transmission and local recontextualisation, the contributions demonstrate that the transfer and reception of these categories of artefacts should be understood as interconnected stages in the social life of religious objects.

A central aspect of this research is the recognition that Russian cultural influence was mediated not only through the physical circulation of objects, but also through the transfer of iconographic models, artistic techniques, and professional skills. This transmission was facilitated through the codification of Russian models in painters’ manuals and books of models, as well as through the movement of icon painters to the Balkans, which enabled the introduction of Russian visual forms through in situ production and collaboration with local artists. Artistic knowledge was further disseminated through the education of monks and artists from the Balkans in Russian monastic workshops and fine art academies; upon returning to their home regions, they incorporated Russian techniques and aesthetic principles into local artistic practices.

The volume presented to the editor certain challenges related to language issues. The international composition of the research team — comprising scholars from Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia, none of whom are native speakers of English, attenuated the problem of the absence of fully standardized English terminology for Russian icon painting and iconographic subjects. Therefore, particular care was taken so that the editing harmonizes as much as possible the varying in different national traditions iconographic terminology, with the help of established reference works in Byzantine and Russian hagiography.<sup>3</sup>

3  *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford University Press, 1991; Bobrov, Yury. *A catalogue of the Russian icons in the British Museum*, edited by Chris Entwistle, 2008. (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIB7329>); Evans, Helen C. (ed.) *Byzantium: faith and power (1261–1557)*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004.

Apart from the colleagues who share their research in this volume, several other people offered assistance and contributed in various ways so that this publication be successfully materialized and the ensuing problems maximally minimized. I would like to thank especially the co-ordination of the project and its publications Katerina Stathi, the language editor Ben Peter, Design Bond for the care of the book's design and Crete University Press for the overall care of the publication.

I

**ALMS COLLECTION  
MISSIONS  
AS A CHANNEL  
FOR ART MOBILITY  
AND EXCHANGES  
IN THE ORTHODOX  
WORLD**

# The Icon of Saint John the Theologian in the Iconostasis at Patmos Monastery. A Case of Complex Transcultural Contacts in the Early Modern Orthodox World

Yuliana Boycheva

“1698 μὴν ἰουλίῳ 16 ἦλθεν ὁ γέρον γεδεὼν ἀπὸ τὴν μωσχωβία. κε εἶφευεν τὴν εἰκόναν τοῦ μέγα θεολόγου. ἐγκωμοιασμένη ὡς καθὸς φένετ(αι), κ(αι) τοῦ ἔγηνε γρ(ό)σ(ια) 350... αὐτὰ ἐπαράδωσε ὀμπρῶς στὴ σὺναξῆ”<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The present paper examines the icon of Saint John the Theologian, one of the three Muscovite despotic icons placed in the central iconostasis at Patmos Monastery, which constitutes the focal point of worship for the community. The icon of Saint John, acquired by the Patmian monks for their monastery during an alms-collecting mission to Moscow accomplished in 1696–1698, is a material testimony of particular significance for the history of the zeteia missions, which functioned as one of the most important channels for the transfer of art objects from Russia to the religious centres in the Orthodox East up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Moreover, the icon is an exceptional example of a composite artefact crafted in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops and is decorated with a silver revetment manufactured in a different artistic centre, most probably in the goldsmith workshops of Braşov. Featuring embossed floral ornamentation and four scenes from the Book of Revelation to John, the revetment has an inscription in Greek containing a citation from the Book of Revelation, the name of the craftsman Theodore Stathis, the year 1697 and the abbreviation “GDŌ” that should be transcribed as ‘Γ(ε)δ(ε)ώ(ν)’, representing the acronym of the name of monk Gedeon who travelled to Moscow and brought the icon to Patmos. Comprehensive analysis of the icon, in conjunction with the relevant written sources data and testimonies from 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries travelogues, provides the basis for a multilevel analysis and reconstruction of the icon’s material and social biography. This icon is an extremely interesting example of how the different phases in the history of an object of cult and an outstanding artefact merge, demonstrating the complexity of art mobility and exchanges in the Orthodox world in the early modern period.

**Keywords:** Patmos Monastery, Zeteia missions, Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Braşov goldsmith workshops, Art mobility in Early Modern Orthodox world, Cultural transfer, Social biography of objects, Book of Revelation imagery, Western visual models in Orthodox context

1 “On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1698, Elder Gedeon returned from Moscow. He brought the icon of the Great Theologian decorated as it can be seen, and costing 350 kuruş ....and he gave these to the gathering of the brethren” (translation by Daria Resh).

## The icon

The present paper examines the icon of Saint John the Theologian, one of the three Muscovite despotic icons placed in the central iconostasis at Patmos Monastery, which constitutes the focal point of worship for the community.<sup>2</sup> The icon of Saint John was acquired by Elder Gedeon, the monastery’s σκευοφύλαξ (“keeper of the vessels”), accompanied by Filotheos προηγούμενος (former abbot) during an alms-collecting mission to Moscow carried out between 1696 and 1698.<sup>3</sup> It constitutes important material testimony to the history of the zeteia missions, which functioned as one of the important channels for the transfer of art objects from Russia to religious centres in the Orthodox East up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> c.

The monastery archives contain detailed records in two distinct codices, both dated 16<sup>th</sup> July 1698, pertaining to the official presentation of the zeteia and its outcome to the brotherhood gathering: “July sixteenth of 1698, Elder Gedeon came from Muscovy, and brought with him an icon of the Great Theologian, decorated as it can be seen”, with the cost of the icon being 350 (Ottoman) kuruş» along with a decorated Gospel book, a decorated pitcher, a cup, and a triptych.<sup>4</sup> Separately, in a different aide-memoire (A.C. 796, fol. 6), the scribe indicates that Elder Gedeon brought from Wallachia ‘the large icon of the Theologian’, in addition to a decorated Gospel book, a decorated pitcher, a cup, and

2 Baltoyanni, Chrysanthe. «Το Καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου της Πάτμου. Σκέψεις και παρατηρήσεις με την ευκαιρία των εργασιών συντήρησης.» In Μετ’επιλαβείας και έρωτος απλέτου. Το καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου, Πάτμος. Patmos: Iera Moni Theologou, 1995, 4–17. Καθηγούμενος Πάτμου Αντίπας. Το ξυλόγλυπτο τέμπλο του καθολικού της ιεράς μονής Πάτμου. Patmos: Ekdoseis Ieras Monis Theologou Patmou, 2005, 56–58. Boycheva, Yuliana. «Συλλογές ρωσικών εικόνων στην Ελλάδα.» In Θρησκευτική Τέχνη από τη Ρωσία στην Ελλάδα, 16<sup>ος</sup>–19<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας, edited by Yuliana Boycheva and Anastasia Drandaki. Athens: Benaki Museum - Institute for Mediterranean Studies- FORTH, 2017, 34–58.

3 РГАДА. Ф. 52. Оп. 2. Д. 695; Fonkich, Boris, Греческо-русские связи середины XVI - начала XVIII вв.: Греч. документы московских хранилищ: Каталог выставки к XVIII Международному конгрессу византинистов (Москва, 8–15 авг. 1991 г.), Moscow: Zhurnal Arhiv russkoy istorii, 1991, 64, № 799. Florentis, Chrysostomos. Βραβείον της Ιεράς Μονής Αγ. Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου Πάτμου. Athens: Εταιρεία Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Μελετών, 1980, 49, (n.1). Chentsova, Vera. “Писец Николай с Родоса и архимандрит Иаков с Мелоса: о некоторых документах, относящихся к пребыванию патриарха Макария Антиохийского в России в 1654–1656 гг. In Очерки феодальной России. 13. Moscow-St. Petersburg: Kabinet slaviano-grecheskoy arkheografii, 2008, 244–288 (274, 286).

Chesnokova, Nadezhda. “Связи Монастыря Иоанна Богослова на Патмосе с Россией в середине XVII – начале XVIII в. по документам Российской Государственного Архива Древних Актов.” In: Каптеревские чтения, 2024 (22), 151–203 (180–186). Resh, Daria. “Patmos Codices A.C. 1016a and A.C. 1016b: Three Stages of Cross-Cultural Translation.” In *Travelling Monks Through Space and Time: Two Alms Collection Synodiks from the Library of Patmos Monastery (A.C. 1016a, A.C. 1016b)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Publishing Series ARTMOBEX: Studies on History of Art Mobility and Exchange, IMS/FORTH (forthcoming in 2026).

4 Florentis, Βραβείον, 49, n. 1. Florentis, Chrysostomos, Papadopoulos Stelios. Νεοελληνικό Αρχείο Μονής Ιωάννου Θεολόγου Πάτμου. Κείμενα για την τεχνική και την τέχνη. Athens: Εταιρεία Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Μελετών, 1993, 59, n. 52.

a triptych,<sup>5</sup> and includes a record with the names of the individuals offering alms for charity and for their liturgical commemoration.

Despite the discrepancies, both records are accurate. The apparent contradiction about the icon may be attributed to a mistake made by the monk who penned the note. Obviously, the monks traversing the Danubian principalities on their way to Moscow and back to Patmos acquired a variety of precious objects, along with a decorated Gospel book, a decorated pitcher and a cup,<sup>6</sup> which were presented to the brotherhood gathering along with the Muscovite icon of St. John the Theologian. Gedeon's journey through the Danubian principalities is documented in the Alms Synodic (A.C. 1016a, 1016b) kept by Patmos Monastery.<sup>7</sup> These two manuscripts can be regarded as a distinct variety of alms mission "diary," wherein monks meticulously document the names of the towns and villages they traverse, the names of donors, as well as their living and deceased relatives who are to be commemorated in the monastery's liturgies. The Patmos Synodic contains a detailed list of the towns and settlements traversed by the monks, enabling readers to identify the specific "actors" involved in these journeys and to reconstruct their itinerary from Patmos through Constantinople, the Romanian principalities and Ukraine to Moscow, and their return to Patmos.

The icon<sup>8</sup> of Saint John the Theologian, described in the Complete Inventory of the Monastery's Treasures as "a fine example of Russian art",<sup>9</sup> is located on the central iconostasis of the monastery's catholicon, positioned between the icon of Christ and the diaconicon, to the right of the Royal Doors in the iconostasis. Its position and iconographical type are similar to the Byzantine icon of St. John the Theologian, the most venerated icon at the monastery<sup>10</sup> located in the narthex of the catholicon, situated

5 «Τα ονόματα σφύραρον ο γέρον Γεδεών από τη Βλαχία 1698 μην Ιουλίου 16 και έφερον την εικόνα την μεγάλην του Θεολόγου, και το άγιον ευαγγέλιον, εγκωμιασμένον, και ένα μαστραπά καμινιστό και έναν ποτήρι. Και ένα τριμώρη. Και εδώ γράφωμεν τα ονόματα όπου έδωκαν την ελημωσύνη διαφόρους τόπους (...)» (Ενθύμηση, χφ. 768, φ. 6).

6 Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota, "Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα." In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 230.

7 Resh, Daria. "Patmos Codices A.C. 1016a and A.C. 1016b."

8 Icon «St. John the Theologian» decorated with silver frame, 1697. Moscow. Wood, gesso, tempera. Dimensions of the icon: 128 x 92, 5 x 4, 5 cm.

9 The manuscript under consideration is unpublished, and is currently stored in the Patmos monastery library: Κατάλογος | μετά πλήρους περιγραφής των εν τοίς Σκευοφυλακείοις τῆς ἐν Πάτμῳ Ἱερᾶς καὶ Βασιλικῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου τεθησαυρισμένων ἱερῶν Λειψάνων, ἱερῶν Εἰκόνων καὶ διαφόρων ἄλλων ἱερῶν σκευῶν καὶ ἀντικειμένων, καταρτισθεὶς ὑπὸ τριμελοῦς ἐπιτροπείας ἐξ ἀδελφῶν αὐτῆς κατ' ἀπόφασιν τῆς ἀδελφότητος τῆς δεκάτης (10ης) Νοεμβρίου τοῦ χιλιοστοῦ ἐννεακοσιοστοῦ τριακοστοῦ ὀγδοῦ (1938) ἔτους. Fol. 17v.

10 Chatzidakis, Manolis. "Icons." In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 107–108. Chatzidakis, Manolis. *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*. Athens: National Bank of Greece, 1995, 45–48 (n. 22).

to the right of the central entrance. The monastery's oral tradition asserts that this icon was donated by the emperor Alexios I Comnenos to hosiou Christodoulos.<sup>11</sup>

The Muscovite icon features Saint John seated on a throne in a three-quarter pose. He is depicted as an elderly man wearing a tunic of heavy, gold-woven silk, a red chiton with floral ornamentation, and a dark green velvet mantel. The saint is represented holding a quill pen in his right hand, with which he is pointing to an open Codex in calligraphic script containing the opening verses of the Gospel According to John (John 1:1–10).<sup>12</sup> The Gospel book is rendered with meticulous attention to detail, including a graphic header with floral motifs adorning the page and the title of "Chapter One" and the initial written in red ink. Gold flowers are inscribed along the edges of the book.

The table in front of Saint John features a depiction of two double-bound codices with wooden boards and gold decorative patterns, a *kalamos* (quill) and a candleholder. Behind him there is a smaller oval table, on which there is an inkpot and a small quill knife. The knife blade bears the letter "M"<sup>13</sup>, though the exact meaning of this remains unclear. In addition to the realistically depicted writing accessories, allusion to his writings, the candle on the table and the books, the artist has incorporated three features adopted from the Western iconography of Saint John that are new to the Russian tradition of how Saint John the Theologian is presented. The most impressive among them is the image of the eagle, the symbol associated with Saint John, one of the four creatures described in Revelation (4:7) as surrounding the throne of God. The adoption of the eagle as the primary symbol in the iconography of Saint John the Theologian in Russian religious painting - replacing the previously used Lion - is first documented in the second half of the 17th century, in the icon of Saint John the Theologian "In silence" attributed to Simon Ushakov, currently housed in the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius museum collection.<sup>14</sup> The other two objects incorporated in the composition, the tall glass (goblet) and the cauldron in the bottom right-hand corner of the icon, are associated with two episodes in the tortures of the saint as described in the apocryphal *Apostolic Vitae*. The tall glass refers to the *Cup of poison* from the "Poison Trial of Saint John", and the *Cauldron* refers to the episode in which Emperor Domitian ordered that John be plunged into a cauldron full of boiling oil

11 Bute, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, 3rd Marquis of. *Essays on Foreign Subjects*. London: Gardner, 1901, 273. Malandrakis, Mikhail. *Η Πάτμος / εκ του αγγλικού υπό Μ. Η. Μαλανδράκη*, Odesa: Typografieio N. Khrysogelou, 1889.15. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/saint-john-the-theologian/3QGn2KuhGAw7EQ> (last visited 30.05.2025).

12 Papadopoulou, Stelios and Fatourou-Isychaki, Kanto. *Επιγραφές της Πάτμου*, Athens: Geniki Dieftynsis Archaioiton kai Anasiloseos (Dimosievmata tou Archaioilogikou Deltiou), no. 9), 1966, 27, n. 38, 39.

13 Although unlikely, read from a different perspective the letter could alternatively be "Σ".

14 *Симон Ушаков — царскій иконограф*, exhibition catalogue, 8 September 2015 – 10 January 2016, Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, 2015, Cat. no. 23, 150–153, . . , Cat., no. 26, 161–163

near the Porta Latina in Rome, but the saint emerged from the cauldron untouched.<sup>15</sup> Representations of Saint John with his individual attributes in combination with the Gospel Book and the Eagle appear in the visual repertoire of Western medieval art between the 12th and 14th centuries,<sup>16</sup> and were influenced by Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend.<sup>17</sup> A number of publications in recent years have noted close variations on the aforementioned iconographic type of Saint John the Evangelist among a group of icons originating from the iconostasis of churches in Moscow, as well as in some small icons intended for private use created by Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev.<sup>18</sup> The icon of Saint John the Evangelist from the main iconostasis in Patmos Monastery bears a strong resemblance to this group,<sup>19</sup> though at present it remains unclear whether the icon carries an inscription of the artist's name, since the silver revetment encompassing the icon's edges was not removed during the most recent restoration that took place in 1993–1994. The painting adheres to the principles of the “lifelike style” as established by the Kremlin Armoury workshops, melding Byzantine icon painting style with the Renaissance techniques of linear perspective and chiaroscuro. It is therefore evident that in addition to the stylistic features of the painting, the high quality of the pigments used, and the numerous similarities observed between the drawing of the saint's figure and icons by Filatyev, the portrait characteristics and the decoration of the garments in similar achromatic olive-purple shades adorned with characteristic ‘gold-plated’ ornaments are very close to the artistic style typical of his oeuvre.

It is well documented that in the latter decades of the 17th century, Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev, a distinguished artist in the royal Kremlin Armoury workshop, created a series of icons representing a novel iconographic type of Saint John the Evangelist. This incorporated iconographic elements and

15 Timmons, Jennifer Lynne Sandstrom. *Venenum Bibit: The Poison Trial in Medieval Hagiography*. PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2022 (<https://doi.org/10.6082/uchicago.4841>), 53–67, 72–116.

16 Denoel, Charlotte. « L'apparition des attributs individuels des saints dans l'art médiéval », *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, C.E.S.C.M., 50–198 (2007): 149–160.

17 Khachumjan, Anna. «Икона «Евангелист Иоанн Богослов» Тихона Филатьева из церкви Рождества Богоматери в Голутвине.» In *Филевские чтения. Вып. IX*, edited by Natalia Komashko. Moscow, 2006, 92–94.

18 Kochetkov, Igor' (ed.) *Словарь русских иконописцев XI–XVII вв.* Издание 2–е; Moscow: Indrik, 727–732, 862–863.

19 Antypko, Marina and Komashko Natalia. “Апостол и Евангелист Иоанн Богослов” (Catalogue entry 33) in *Иконопись Оружейной палаты из частных собраний*, edited by Natalia Komashko. Moscow: Central'nyi muzeii drevnerusskoi kul'tury i iskusstva imeni Andreyu Rubleva, 2017, 90–91. Saenkova, Elena. “Новооткрытые произведения мастеров Оружейной палаты из частного собрания. Традиция и новаторство в иконографии” In *Симон Ушаков и мастера Оружейной палаты: материалы научной конференции. [Simon Ushakov and the masters of the Armoury Chamber: materials from a scientific conference]*, edited by Elena Saenkova. Moscow: The State Tretyakof Gallery Publishers, 2019, 147–156. Preobrazhenskii, Aleksandr. “Апостол и Евангелист Иоанн Богослов” (Catalogue entry n. 53), “Апостол Иоанн Богослов. Медальон царских враг” (Catalogue entry n. 54). In *Преобразhenskii, Aleksandr (ed.) Россия в ее иконе. Неизвестные произведения XV — начала XX века из собрания Игоря Сысолятина. Каталог выставки. Музей русской иконы им. Михаила Абрамова. В двух томах. Т. I.* Moscow: Dukhovnaya niva, 2022, 134–135, 136–137.

personal attributes of the saint borrowed from the western visual tradition - in the new iconography, Saint John is depicted as an aged man seated on a throne and holding an open gospel. The table in front of him has representations of writing instruments, along with the eagle, the symbol of Saint John, plus the “Cup of Poison” and the Cauldron as symbols of Saint John's tortures, all of which are considered to be individual attributes of the saint.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of this innovative iconographic subject in the artistic output of the Kremlin Armoury workshop can be explained by a combination of two factors. Firstly, the New Menologion Reader, compiled by Saint Demetrius of Rostov (1651–1709), Metropolitan of Rostov and Yaroslavl, and printed in Kiev in 1689, contains a detailed version of the Life of Saint John the Theologian, whose memory is commemorated on 26 September.<sup>21</sup> A further significant factor that exerted a considerable influence on the artistic language of Russian religious painting in the Early Modern period was the dissemination of numerous albums containing reproductions of Western European engravings on biblical themes.<sup>22</sup> Summarizing our observations on the style and iconography of the icon of Saint John the Evangelist in the iconostasis at Patmos Monastery, we can conclude that it represents an outstanding example of a new iconographic type created by Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev in the Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop in Moscow during the closing decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the more traditional iconographic type of Saint John the Theologian ‘In Silence’, a close parallel in terms of style and technique in painting to the Patmian work is the iconostasis icon signed by Filatyev in 1686, in the Church of St. John the Theologian at Sinozerskaya “Pustyn” (Hermitage).<sup>23</sup>

20 Pastoureau, Michel. “Pour une histoire des attributs dans l'image médiévale », In *Des signes dans l'image. Usages et fonctions de l'attribut dans l'iconographie médiévale (du Concile de Nicée au Concile de Trente)*, edited by Michel Pastoureau and Olga Vassilieva-Codognot. Actes du colloque international de l'EPHE, Paris (23–24 mars 2007). Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, 11–19. Denoel, Charlotte. « L'apparition des attributs individuels des saints dans l'art médiéval », *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, C.E.S.C.M., 2007, 50 (198): 149–160. hal-00865748

21 Derzhavin, Aleksandr, “Четии-Минеи святителя Димитрия, митрополита Ростовского, как церковно-исторический и литературный памятник”, *Bogoslovskie Trudy*, no. 15 (1976): 61–145; no.16 (1976): 46–141. Marina, Fedotova, “On the History of the Publication of the Menaion Reader by Demetrius of Rostov (the Text On the Year of Death of Saint Mary of Egypt as an Additional Article to the Menaion Reader by Saint Demetrius).” *Slověne = Словѣне. International Journal of Slavic Studies*, No 1 (2015): 541–553.

22 Preobrazhenskii, Aleksandr. “Апостол и Евангелист Иоанн Богослов” (Catalogue entry n. 53). In *Россия в ее иконе. Неизвестные произведения XV — начала XX века из собрания Игоря Сысолятина. Каталог выставки. Музей русской иконы им. Михаила Абрамова. В двух томах. Т. I*, edited by eadem. Moscow: Dukhovnaya niva, 2022, 134–135. Gamlitskii, Aleksandr, „О времени появления западноевропейских увражей на библейскую тематику в России второй половины XVII века“, *Вестник сектора древнерусского искусства*, no. 1 (2024): 136–151.

23 The icon is currently being exhibited at the Cherepovets Museum Association. Kulikova, Olga. *Древние лики Русского Севера. Из музейного собрания икон XIV–XIX веков города Череповца.* [no place]: Grand Holding, 2009. Cat. 71, 232.

A comprehensive understanding of this iconography necessitates a profound knowledge of the saint's life and the circulation of icons depicting the two objects considered to be his individual "attributes" – the 'Cup of Poison' and the Cauldron – derived from apocryphal texts of the *vita* of John the Theologian and originating from the Western European visual tradition, which were not commonly adopted in Russian icon painting. Icons with this theme are prevalent in churches and monasteries patronised by the royal family, and are evidently intended for an educated, elite audience.

The decision by the monks of Patmos Monastery to select an icon for their iconostasis featuring this newly Westernised iconography, with references to the apocryphal texts on the saint's *vita*, is indicative of their erudition, open-mindedness and refined aesthetic sensibilities.

### The icon's silver frame – a donation by Elder Gedeon

The icon of St. John the Theologian is decorated with a silver-gilded frame and silver halo.<sup>24</sup> However, this aspect of the icon decoration has received minimal scholarly attention to date, primarily due to its position behind the iconostasis border.<sup>25</sup>

The silver halo is decorated with embossed floral decorative motifs, with the name "ΤΕΟΠΤΙ" inscribed in the centre, thus posing the question of who placed their name there - most plausibly the master goldsmith. However, it is the silver frame that is of particular interest in terms of its decoration<sup>26</sup>. Featuring embossed floral ornamentation and four scenes from the Book of Revelation to John, it has a Greek inscription containing a citation from the Book of Revelation, the name of the craftsman Theodore Stathis, the date "1697" and the abbreviation "GDŌ" which should be transcribed as 'Γ(ε)δ(ε)ώ(ν)', an acronym for Gedeon, the name of the monk who travelled to Moscow and brought the icon to Patmos.<sup>27</sup>

24 There are only two brief descriptions of the icon's silver frame: Baltoyanni, Chrysanthe. «Το Καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου της Πάτμου. Σκέψεις και παρατηρήσεις με την ευκαιρία των εργασιών συντήρησης.» In Baltoyanni, Chrysanthe and Baltoyannis, Stavros. *Μετέωλαβείας και έρωτος απλέτου. Το καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου, Πάτμος*. Patmos: Iera Moni Theologou, 1995, 11–12. Antypas, Archimandrite of Patmos. *Το ξυλόγλυπτο τέμπλο του καθολικού της ιεράς μονής Πάτμου*. Patmos: Ekdoseis Ieras Monis Theologou Patμου, 2005, 58.

25 The dimensions of the icon are approximately 128 x 932, 5 x 4, 5 cm and they were obviously meant for a much bigger altar barrier, because the measurements of the actual iconostasis, which is dated 1820, are 127 x 68 cm: Antypas, *Το ξυλόγλυπτο τέμπλο*, op. cit.

26 Frame of the icon with New Testament Trinity, four scenes from the Revelation of John and inscription, 1697, Brasov (?), silver, gilding. Dimensions: 126, 5 x 92, 5 x 8, 6 cm. (The width of the lower part of the frame is: 12cm)

27 Chatzidakis, Manolis. "Icons." In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 107–108.

The practice of adorning icons with precious metal revetments as a form of religious expression and devotion was widespread across the Orthodox world.<sup>28</sup> Our hypothesis is that the silver icon frame was ordered specifically for the new muscovite icon by Elder Gedeon during his stay in Braşov, where he acquired several other precious utensils and a richly decorated Gospel book.<sup>29</sup> The frame is composed of six parts, each of which has been meticulously adjusted to align with the dimensions of the icon. This observation indicates that the components were not originally manufactured to fit it, but instead adapted to align with its dimensions at a later stage. The vertical elements of the revetment feature ornamentation inspired by foliage, while the horizontal sections contain five scenes and an inscription displayed in elliptical medallions.<sup>30</sup> The vertical parts are richly decorated with embossed and chased floral motifs, including tulips and acanthus, which are characteristic of the art production of Transylvanian goldsmiths' workshops in Braşov and Sibiu during the late 17th and early 18th centuries.<sup>31</sup> The distinguishing feature of their output was the employment of decorative motifs drawn from the visual repertoires of Baroque and Renaissance decorative arts, as well as from the Oriental tradition, and the creation of a specific hybrid style of decoration known as "Brancovan".<sup>32</sup> The ornamental decoration on the Patmos icon frame strongly resembles objects bearing stamps that attribute them to Braşov goldsmith production. The most characteristic examples are a gilded silver plate from Cotroceni Monastery, dated approximately 1680, currently on display at the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest, an octagonal plate from the Church of Saint Nicholas in Braşov,<sup>33</sup> and eight hexagonal dishes, crafted in Transylvania in 1696, part of the Andrassy treasury, displayed at the exhibition entitled "Hungarian Treasure: Silver from the Nicolas M. Salgo Collection", held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2015.<sup>34</sup>

28 Grabar, André. *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Age*. Venise: Institut hellénique d'études byzantines et post-byzantines de Venise, 1975, 4–6. Durand, Janic "Precious metal icon revetments." In *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, edited by Helen Evans. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004, 243–251.

29 See note 5. At this stage in our research, we have not been able to identify the craftsman Theodore Stathis in the published lists of master goldsmiths in Braşov (Mitran, Gheorghe. *Arta aurarilor în Transilvania (sec. XIV – XIX)*, Braşov: Muzeul Judeţean de Istorie Braşov, 2003, 115–133).

30 Photographic documentation of the icon was provided by two photographers: Dimitris Giavassiss for the 2016 exhibition catalogue 'Russian Religious Art from Russia to Greece' and Georgios Makkas for the RICONTRANS research project. This documentation reveals the icon's revetment decoration and enables us to begin examining the iconography of the decoration.

31 Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota, «Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα.» In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 230. Chumsky, Melissa. *Grace Under Pressure: Hungarian Goldsmiths and Their Guilds*. <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/grace-under-pressure>

32 Vaetisi Atanasi. *Brancovan Art. The last synthesis in Romanian Art*. Bucharest 2025.

33 Nyárádi, Anna Mária. "Goldsmithery Made for the Cantacuzini. How Şeytanoğlu's Descendants Made the Arts Flourish in Wallachia." In *The Land between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 1300–1700*, edited by Alina Payne. Series: Mediterranean Art Histories, Volume: 5, Brill 2022, 220–238 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004515468>

34 See: Object Number: 2010.110.42, Object Number: 2010.110.43, Object Number: 2010.110.44, Object Number: 2010.110.45, Object Number: 2010.110.46, Object Number: 2010.110.47, Object Number: 2010.110.48:Hun-

The icon frame has not been restored, so it is not known whether it bears the stamp of the craftsmen and workshop where it was made. Therefore, at this stage, the typology of the ornamental decoration is one of the arguments for assuming that it was produced in Braşov. The second argument supporting this hypothesis is the highly specific iconographic programme of the figural decoration. The top of the frame has a medallion in the centre representing the *New Testament Trinity* (*Synthronoi type*). The composition features the juxtaposition of God the Father and the Son seated in the clouds with the celestial sphere positioned between them. The Holy Spirit is depicted as a dove, shown front on above the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity, at an equal distance from both. The scene reproduces one of the variations on the composition that emerged in Balkan art from the second half of the 16th century, including the image of the Sphere between the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity and the Dove frontal above the Sphere, influenced by Western European models.<sup>35</sup> The lower part of the icon revetment is decorated with five elliptical medallions depicting four scenes from the Revelation of John, while the one in the centre bears an inscription in Greek of a mixed nature, to which we will turn special attention below. The most significant aspect of the frame decoration are the scenes from the Revelation. The two medallions to the left of the inscription have been identified as representations of *The Vision of the Seven Candlesticks* (Rev 1:9–16) and *The Angel and the Book* (Rev 10:1–11). Those to the right feature two further images: the first is *The Apocalyptic Woman and the Dragon* (Rev 12:1–5) and the second, *The Angel Showing Saint John the New Jerusalem* (Rev 20:1–3). Illustrations from the Book of Revelation to John are a rare phenomenon in the context of late medieval Balkan art. The earliest examples from the cycle date to the second half of the 16th – 17th centuries, in two different groups of monuments: mural paintings in Mount Athos<sup>36</sup> and a range of Gospel book covers crafted in goldsmith workshops in Braşov (Transylvania) in the 1670s and 1680.<sup>37</sup> In the context of our research,

- garian Treasure: Silver from the Nicolas M. Salgo Collection <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/hungarian-treasure>
- 35 Kujumdzhieva, Margarita. “Visualizing God. Post-Byzantine Imagery of the Trinity in Orthodox Churches in the Balkans.” In *Древнерусское и поствизантийское искусство. Вторая половина XV — начало XVI века*, edited by A. Batalov et al. Moscow: Severnyi palomnik, 222–338. Kriza Agnez. “Pro or Contra Filioque? Trinitarian Synthronoi Images at the Crossroads of the Catholic West and the Orthodox East (ca. 1300–1500).” In *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions*, edited by Alice Isabella Sullivan and Maria Alessia Rossi. Berlin, Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2021, 157–178.
- 36 The earliest documented illustration of a Revelation of John cycle in the Balkans are the mural paintings at Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos (mid-16th century): Tsiboukis, Ioannis. *Η Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη στην μνημειακή ζωγραφική του Αγίου Όρους*. Athens: Bookstars-Giorgaras, 2013, 47–56.
- 37 Two of the gospel book covers with scenes illustrating the Book of Revelation were transferred to Symonopetra and Xeropotamou monasteries on Mount Athos, while a third was donated to the Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The fourth gospel book cover from this sequence was donated to Cotroceni Monastery in Bucharest and is currently on display at the Museum of Art in Bucharest (Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota. “Church Silver.” In *Simonopetra. Mount Athos*, edited by Stelios Papadopoulos. Athens: Hellenic Bank of Industrial Development (ETBA), 1991, 163–86. Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota. “Book cover 1629, by the hand of Loukas of Hungary-Wallachia’ and ,Iakovos, hieromonk of Simonopetra’ Simonopetra Monastery” (Catalogue entry). In *Catalogue*

the latter example represents a closer iconographic parallel for the revetment on the despotic icon of Saint John the Theologian in the Patmos iconostasis. Notwithstanding the absence of a stamp with the name of the goldsmith master on the frame, the typology of the ornamental decoration, the specific “Brancovean” motifs and the iconography of scenes from the Revelation adds weight to the hypothesis that the revetment was produced by the Braşov goldsmiths’ workshop earlier on, and was not originally intended for the icon. Further research is required to provide a more detailed examination of the theological meaning of this hybrid iconography, merging the composition of *New Testament Trinity* (*Synthronoi type*) that crowns the frame with the four scenes from the Book of Revelation, and its function as an image promoting the concept of the Filioque. Identification of the prototype for the four scenes and the Trinity composition on this revetment will furnish new data on the decoration of goldsmith artefacts in Braşov workshops during the final decade of the 17th century. Moreover, comparative analysis of the icon revetment with the gospel covers crafted in Braşov workshops that depict the Revelation of John Cycle will demonstrate how iconography functions as an instrument for the transfer of religious messages. Such covers were modelled on the woodcuts by Lucas Cranach illustrating the Lutheran Bible, which found wide circulation in Transylvania in the context of the pro-Lutheran propaganda that peaked in the final decades of the 17th century.<sup>38</sup>

## The icon and its reception: evidence from travelogues

Apart from the information that the archives offer us on this icon, comments sourced from travelogues are highly informative on both the material and the “social” biography of objects and how they were received by host societies and outsiders.

The earliest documented reference to the Muscovite provenance of the icons adorning the iconostasis at Patmos Monastery and their artistic quality dates to 1731. This information is found in the travelogue of Vasilij Grigorovich-Barsky, author of one of the most important Orthodox pilgrim travelogues of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> Grigorovich-Barsky briefly notes: “*The church of Saint John the Evangelist, which has*

- of the Exhibition at the Museum of Byzantine Culture*, edited by Athanasios Karakatsanis. Thessaloniki: Museum Of Byzantine Culture, 1997, 370–371.
- 38 Denise Alexandra Hartmann. “The Apocalypse and Religious Propaganda: Illustrations by Albrecht Durer and Lucas Cranach The Elder.” *Marginalia* 11 (October 2010): 1–10. Paolicchi, Anita. “Lutheran Apocalyptic Imagery in the Orthodox Context.” *Arts* (2023), 12: 99. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12030099>
- 39 Grigorovich-Barskij, Vassiliy. *Странствия Василья Григоровича-Барского по Святым местам Востока с 1723 по 1747 г. (Части I–IV)*. Saint Peterbourg: Типография V. Kirshbaouma, 1886. Della Dora, Veronica. “Light and sight: Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij, Mount Athos and the Geographies of eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox Enlightenment.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 53 (2016): 83–103.

been subject to numerous prophecies, is adorned with a magnificent iconostasis. All the icons within it are from Moscow”, yet the information provided does not take into consideration questions related to their origin and the iconography of the icons.<sup>40</sup>

In the mid-19th century, Andrei Muravyov, a prominent scholar and political figure, visited the monastery on Patmos. A writer and church historian, he was an honorary member of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences and secretary of the Holy Synod. From 1842 he was also a member of the joint presence in the Asian Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 1848 and 1849 Muravyov undertook a visit to the most significant religious centres of the Orthodox East, and later published a travelogue in epistolary form. In his “Letters from the East”, he provides a comprehensive description of the monasteries and churches visited, including their decoration and treasures.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note that, although the author describes the icon of the Virgin Mary of Kazan and the cross donated by Catherine the Great, which are actually exposed in the monastery’s museum exposition, he does not mention the fact that the icons on the iconostasis were from Moscow.<sup>42</sup>

The first detailed description and discussion pertaining to the provenance of the Muscovite icons on the iconostasis is provided in the travelogue by Aleksey Dmitrievskiy, the great Byzantinologist of the Kiev Theological Academy, who visited the monastery in 1891. Three years later he published his “Patmos Essays”, a full and comprehensive description of the island’s history, the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian and its treasures, as well as other churches and monasteries on Patmos island.<sup>43</sup> The author pays particular attention to the monastery’s relations with Muscovy, drawing on unpublished archival documents to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the subject. This aspect of the book is of particular significance, as it utilises a wealth of primary sources to offer a nuanced and insightful perspective on the historical interactions between the monastery and the Muscovite state. The Dmitrievskiy travelogue represents a significant source for the documentation of the monastery relics, and particularly those designated by the author as ‘Muscovite’. Perhaps surprisingly, they do not include the iconostasis icon of Saint John the Theologian, which Dmitrievskiy attributes to a Wallachian workshop, on the basis of information provided in Archival Codex 768, fol. 6. Of particular interest to our study is his opinion that “[...] from an artistic point of view, this Wallachian icon of Saint John the Theologian is considerably inferior to the iconostasis icons of the

40 Grigorovich-Barskij, Странствия, 60.

41 Murav'ev, Andrey. Письма с Востока в 1849–1850 годах. [В 2 ч.]. Ч. 2. Saint Petersburg: V tipografii III-go otdeleniya sob. e.e.i. v. v kancelarii 1851, 60–66.

42 Murav'ev, Письма с Востока, 60.

43 Dmitrievskiy, Aleksiy. Патмосские очерки. Из поездки на остров Патмос летом 1891 года. Kyiv: Тип. Г.Т. Корчак-Новицкого, 1894, 173.

Saviour and Mother of God, which were painted in Moscow”.<sup>44</sup>

The next travelogue to provide information on the Muscovite icons is that by the Scottish aristocrat and polymath John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute, translated into Greek by the scholar and teacher Michail Malandrakis and published in Odessa in 1899.<sup>45</sup> Crichton-Stuart’s description mentions the fact that the despotic icons of Christ and the Virgin in the katholikon’s main iconostasis are Muscovite, but states that they were donated to the monastery by Catherine the Great, evidently echoing the oral tradition that circulated among the monastic community. He does not designate the icon of St. John the Theologian as Muscovite; instead, he writes: “on the other side is a narrow entrance seemingly made for practical convenience, the proper place of the Door of the Diakonikon being occupied by a picture of St. John, copied from that in the Narthex”.<sup>46</sup>

There is a divergence of opinion between the above sources regarding the provenance of the three Muscovite icons on the Patmos iconostasis and their quality as works of art. In 1731, for Vasily Grigorovich-Barskij, the Muscovite origin of all three icons and their artistic value were not disputed. At the end of the 19th century, questions arose regarding their provenance, particularly in relation to the Western-style icon of Saint John the Theologian. John Crichton-Stuart does not identify it as Muscovite, while Aleksey Dmitrievski considers it to be of Wallachian origin, inferior to the Muscovite icons of Christ and the Virgin. At the same time, both John Crichton-Stuart and Aleksey Dmitrievski incorrectly identified the two icons of Christ and the Virgin as a gift from Catherine the Great. This error has been perpetuated in oral tradition to the present day, as it dovetails with the modern Greek national narrative, in which the Russian Empress occupies a prominent place.<sup>47</sup>

44 Dmitrievskiy, Aleksiy. Патмосские очерки, 173–174.

45 Bute, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, 3rd Marquis of. “Patmos”, *Scottish Review* (Glasgow) no 5 (January 1885), 103–137. Malandrakis, Mikhail. Η Πάτμος / εκ του αγγλικού υπό Μ. Η. Μαλανδράκη, Odesa: Typographeio N. Khrisogelou, 1889, 15–17.

46 Malandrakis, Η Πάτμος, 15; Bute, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, *Essays*, 273

47 Boycheva, Yuliana. “The Example of Patmos: Various Routes of Russian Icons in the Orthodox East.” In *Routes of Russian icons in Greece and the Balkans (16th–20th c.)*, edited by eadem. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, 105–136 (129–130).

## Conclusion

Taken together with the relevant written sources comprising the inscription on the silver revetment, records in monastic codices and data and testimonies from 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century travelogues, artistic examination of the icon of St. John on Patmos provided us with the basis for a multilevel analysis and reconstruction of its material and social biography. The icon is an extremely interesting example of how the different phases in the history of an object of cult merge with an outstanding artefact, demonstrating the complexity of art mobility and exchanges in the Orthodox world in the early modern period. The “biography” of the icon of St. John the Theologian can be conceptualised as a series of distinct transfers, of visual models on one side and the object itself on the other. The initial level in the transfer history of the icon can be defined as a phenomenon of simultaneous adoption of artistic and iconographic models from Western European visual art and their subsequent incorporation into Russian icon painting and Transylvanian goldsmith tradition. The novel iconographic type created by Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev was inspired by the profound change in Russian icon painting initiated by Simon Ushakov in the second half of the 17th century, and illustrates the new style imposed on the icon painting output of the Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop. The decoration of the silver frame, manufactured in the goldsmith workshops of Braşov, features floral ornamentation and four scenes from the Book of Revelation to John, based on the woodcuts by Lucas Cranach illustrating the Lutheran Bible, which found wide circulation in Transylvania in the second half of 17<sup>th</sup> c. The third stage encompasses the transfer of this composite object bearing those features from Moscow to the Orthodox monastic community in the Ottoman Empire, in this case to Patmos.

This icon - a product of the latest and best trends in Russian religious art at its time - was bought with the proceeds of an alms-collecting mission by Patmos monks and brought to their monastery to serve as a “replica” of one of the central objects of veneration, the Byzantine icon that was donated by Emperor Alexios I Comnenos to Hios Christodoulos was placed in the catholikon narthex transferring the new style and iconographic type to the monastery’s visual realm. As the study of the hitherto neglected silver frame revealed, on its way to Patmos the icon “brought” with it another distant western artistic approach towards Saint John’s life to the monastery.

Once incorporated into worship at the monastery, the icon’s original identity was disputed, or arguably “lost” in the new environment. Not only were its iconographic details and novelty incomprehensible in the new context, in the absence of familiarity with the pertinent textual and pictorial prototypes, but the very origin and quality of this Muscovite masterpiece was also misidentified by both visitors and the monastic community, who inscribed it into different narratives. In placing particular emphasis on their mobility, the closer study of objects of religious art such as this reveals the incessant movement of themes and styles in religious art across state and religious borders, raises important questions, and opens up new fields of inquiry.

## Appendix

Inscriptions on the icon and on the silver frame  
(Transcription and translation by Daria Resh)

### 1. On the silver frame:

+ ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι κ(αὶ) ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σαλ- πίγγος· λεγούσης ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἀ- κ(αὶ) τὸ Ὠ· ὁ πρῶτος κ(αὶ) ὁ ἔσχατος· Θεοδορί· Στάθη· ΑΧϞΖ ΓΔΩ	I, John, was on the island called Patmos. I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, saying “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.” by Theodore Stathis, year 1697 GDŌ
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*The translation is based on the New Revised  
Standard Translation of the Bible (Rev.1:9–10, 1:8, 22:13)*

### 2. On the silver halo

ΓΕΟΡΓΙ	Georgi
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### 3. On the icon

- On either side of the head:

ἸΩΑΝΝΗΣ ὁ ΠΡΩΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ἔσχατος	Icon of Saint John the Theologian
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#### 4. In the book:

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- In the open Gospel:

Left page:

ГЛАВА, ПЕРВАА·  
Зача́лоу, Пѣрвое·  
Ѣ Нача́лѣ бѣ Сло́во· Ѣ Сло́во  
бѣ о́у Бѣа, Ѣ бѣ Сло́во·  
Сѣ бѣ Ѣко́ни о́у Бѣа· Веа  
чѣмъ быша, Ѣ безъ него ни  
чтѣже бысть, ѣже бысть·  
Ѣ то́мъ живѣтъ бѣ, Ѣ живѣ  
бѣ свѣтъ члѣкѣмъ· Н свѣтъ  
вотмѣ свѣтъ, Ѣ тма ѣгѣ  
не ѣбѣтъ· Бысть члѣкѣ  
полаи ѣ Бѣа, Ѣма ѣмъ

Right page:

Ѣсѣанъ· Сѣи прѣидѣ вѣ  
вѣдѣтелство, да вѣдѣтъ  
лѣтъ ѣ ѣ, да вѣ  
чѣмъ вѣрѣ Ѣмъ· Не  
тоѢ свѣтъ, но да вѣдѣтъ  
лѣтъ ѣ ѣ· Бѣ  
свѣтъ Ѣстинный, Ѣже про  
свѣцѣтъ вѣкаго члѣка  
градѣцаго вѣ мѣрѣ· Бѣ мѣ  
рѣ бѣ, Ѣ мѣрѣ чѣмъ бысть,

Chapter One

Pericope One

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

Was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him

Not one thing came into being. What has come into being

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not  
overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all

Might believe through him. He himself was not the light,

But he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone coming into  
the world,

Was in the world, and the world came into being through him.

*The translation is based on New English Standard  
Revised Translation of the Bible (John 1:1)*





Fig. 1. Central iconostasis in the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, 1820, St. John the Theologian monastery, Patmos. © Patmos monastery.

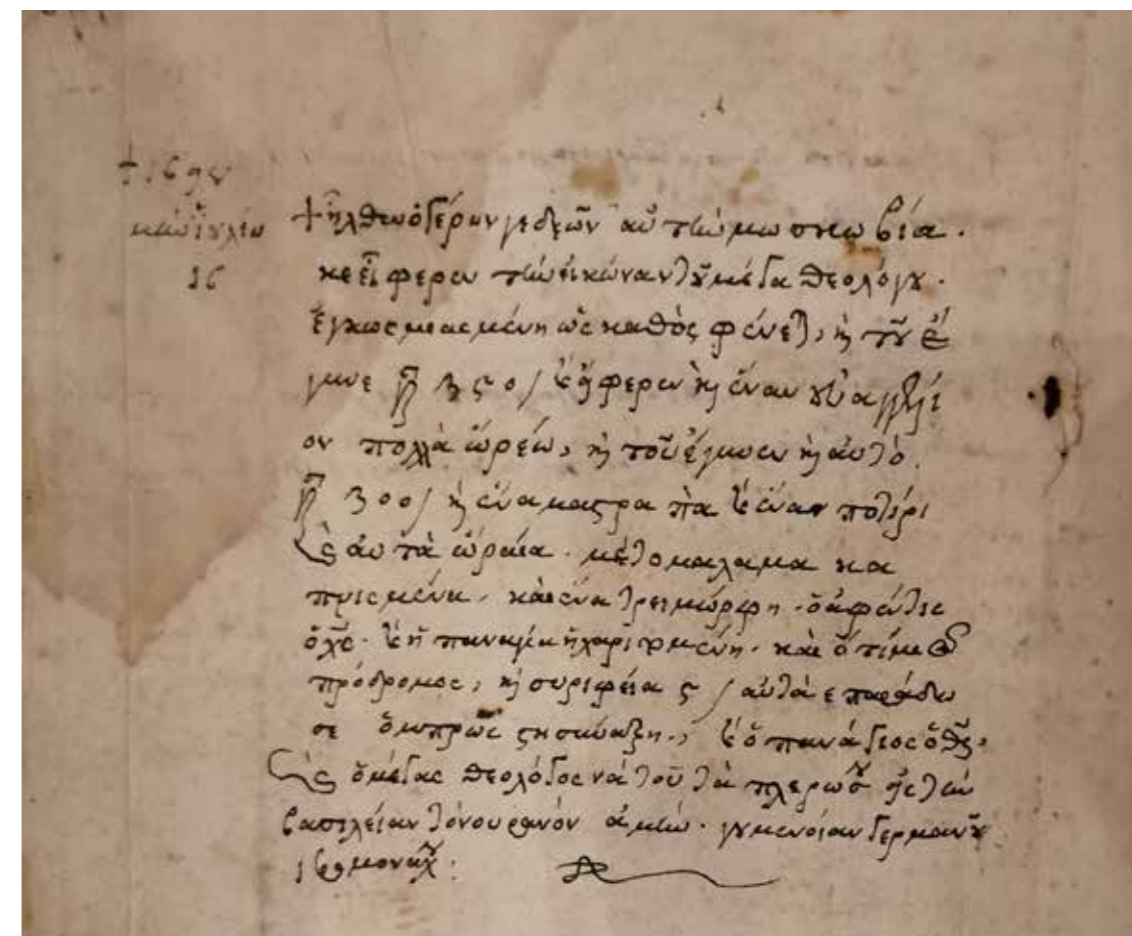


Fig. 2. Record in Archival codex 1001/196v, 1697, Patmos monastery library. Photo: Yuliana Boycheva. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 3. St. John the Theologian, 1697, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Painter Tikhon Filatiev, Central iconostasis in the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Patmos.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 4. The halo of St. John the Theologian with the name «ΓΕΩΡΓΙ», detail from the icon  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 5. Decorative ornamental decoration, detail from the icon frame. Photo: Georgios Makkas.  
© Patmos monastery.



Fig. 6. 'Adjusted' elements of the revetment on the corner of the icon, detail from the icon frame. Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.

Fig. 7. The Vision of the Seven Candlesticks (Rev 1:9–16), detail from the icon frame.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 9. The Apocalyptic Woman and the Dragon (Rev 12:1–5), detail from the icon frame.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 8. The Angel and the Book (Rev 10:1–11), detail from the icon frame.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 10. The Angel Showing Saint John the New Jerusalem (Rev 20:1–3), detail from the icon frame.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery)



Fig. 11. New Testament Trinity (Synthronoi type), detail from the icon frame.  
Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.



Fig. 12. Icon frame, detail of the inscription. Photo: Georgios Makkas. © Patmos monastery.

# Patmian Monks and the Imagination of Petrine Russia

Nikolas Pissis

## Abstract

The paper aims to uncover and contextualize evidence on representations of Russia among the fellow Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire that conditioned the reception of Russian icons and other items of religious art in the Ottoman lands. It focuses on the rhetoric and argumentation of petition letters carried and submitted in Moscow by monks from the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Patmos in 1696, and especially in 1705, in order to trace indications of transformations and adaptations of imagery connected with the contemporary Petrine reforms and the accompanying changes in the self-perception of the Russian monarchy.

**Keywords:** Russian-Greek relations, political imagination, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian on Patmos, petition letters

Documents produced in the context of alms-collection practices (e.g., petitions, travelogues, synodics, thanksgivings, imperial charters etc.) follow certain conventions, with which all persons involved are generally familiarized. Both the form and content of such texts show some standard functional characteristics that seem to resist historical evolution. And yet, closer reading and comparison may in many cases enhance historical understanding or even render such supposedly static testimonies indicators of historical change.

Ample material for studying this topic is offered by relations between the renowned Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos and Russia between 1656 and 1725, when Patmian monks undertook successive alms collecting missions in Moscow.<sup>1</sup> As a pertinent case in point, this paper focuses on

1 See in chronological order: Dmitrievskii, Aleksei A. *Патмосские очерки*. Kiev 1894, 58–80; Nystazopoulou-Pe-

one of the documents produced in the above context: a petition on behalf of the brotherhood written in March 1704 and addressed to Tsar Peter, which Archimandrite Nikiphoros and his entourage brought with them and submitted to the Muscovite authorities in January 1705.

The petition<sup>2</sup> is exceptionally neat in both appearance and content. On the lower part, beneath the signature, it bears a drawing of St. John with Blessed Christodoulos, founder of the Monastery in the eleventh century, holding the monastery complex in their hands.<sup>3</sup> It is also directly related to the central purposes of RICONTRANS, since the monks expressed their gratitude to the Tsar for the alms and icons which Brother Isaias Mazaris had brought back to the monastery the year before.<sup>4</sup> However, the focus of this paper will concern the rhetoric employed.

As already mentioned, petitioners who composed such letters — in great quantity during the seventeenth century and the proliferation of contacts between Moscow and the institutions of the Eastern Church under Ottoman rule — followed certain established patterns. In other words, they made use of an available arsenal of symbols, metaphors, tropes and topoi that served to articulate requests by ecclesiastical institutions in need of material support from an Orthodox ruler, be they monasteries, bishoprics, patriarchates, the Holy Sepulchre or even individual wandering monks or ex-prelates. Among the essentials were Byzantine imperial titles, the catalogue of imperial virtues, comparisons or typological allusions to biblical kings and Byzantine emperors, standard imperial symbols such as the sun, and references to the haven of the shipwrecked. These standard features, in all their conventionality, did serve concrete functions and convey implicit messages. They rhetorically confirmed a reality — the role of the Tsar as benefactor of churches and monasteries, as protector and supporter of the Eastern Church. They offered legitimation for the Tsar's claim to the leadership of the Orthodox world and — at least from the mid-seventeenth century onwards — the inheritance of the Byzantine emperors; more crucially, they employed praises and homages as subtle reminders of the Tsar's duties and the expectations he should fulfil as an Orthodox ruler.<sup>5</sup>

lekidou Maria. “Un monastère orthodoxe face au pouvoir Ottoman. Le couvent de Patmos au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.” In *Corneliae Papacostea-Danielopolu. In memoriam. Εἰς μνήμην*, edited by Lia Brad-Chicasof. Bucharest: Societatea Română de Studii Neelene, 1999, 9–16; Chesnokova, Nadezhda P. “Еще раз о русских документах в патмосском монастыре Иоанна Богослова.” In: *Русский мир в мировом контексте*, edited by S. K. Sevast'ianova, Barnaul-Rubcovsk 2008, 378–386; Boycheva, Yuliana. “The transfer of Russian Icons to Greece (16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries) and the Example of Patmos.” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Seyssel: La Pomme d'Or, 2016, 105–136; Chesnokova, Nadezhda P. “Связи Монастыря Иоанна Богослова на Патмосе с Россией в середине XVII–начале XVIII в.” *Кантревские Чтения* 22 (2024): 151–202.

2 Russian State Archive of Old Acts (hereafter: RGADA), fond 52, opis' 2, nr. 713.

3 See the reproduction in Chesnokova, “Связи Монастыря,” Appendix.

4 On the icons see Boycheva, “The transfer”, 127–128.

5 Pissis, Nikolas. *Russland in den politischen Vorstellungen der griechischen Kulturwelt 1645–1725*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2020, 237–272.

Indeed, if one takes a look at the petitions Patmian monks addressed to the Tsars on the occasion of their missions in 1647 and again in 1696, one encounters hardly striking language. The first one is rather colorless and plain, the second more sophisticated, with quotations from the Gospel of John (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God”) and definitions of charity as a virtue capable of sending the blessed straight to the Eternal Kingdom – all the more so when offered to monasteries.<sup>6</sup>

Instead, the letter of 1704 stands out from the bulk of these sources, and in particular from earlier Patmian petitions, in more than one way. First, it is composed in particularly polished language that accompanies the skilful handwriting and the drawing beneath the signature and the seal. Similarly refined and articulate are references to the Tsar’s role as protector and guardian of the Eastern Church, heir to the pious emperors, bastion of the Orthodox faith. Peter is the solid, unshakable foundation, the stone (*πέτρα*) of Orthodoxy, a mirror of imperial virtues combined (*ἔσοπρον βασιλικῶν ἀρετῶν*), virtues associated with Biblical models: the wisdom of Solomon, the goodwill of David, the piety of Jehoshaphat, and the bravery of Samson, as well as the apostolic zeal of Constantine. Rare though not unique in this kind of conventional document is the additional reference to the hopes and expectations of the enslaved and tormented Christians at a proximate, approaching liberation through the hands of their God-given savior, the Russian Tsar.<sup>7</sup>

The justification for the monks’ appeal and the Tsar’s obligation to live up to their expectations both come across as especially subtle and elegant. The argument is a providential one: God Almighty has in His wisdom granted the pious Russian Empire Peter, the god-like ruler (*θεοειδῆς ἄναξ*) for the sake of certain ends: for the defence of the Orthodox Church against any impiety and heresy, for the liberation of the captured Christian peoples, for the glory of the Trinity and, last but not least, for the relief and alleviation “of us, the humble servants of God and of your Highest Majesty”. The recital of the monastery’s sufferings that follows (burdensome taxes, haraḡ, assaults by pirates, looting), everything that has led the monastery to breathe its last (*εἰς ἐσχάτην ἀναπνοήν*) is of complementary, secondary importance.

6 For the concerns of this paper, it is of secondary importance that in all probability, the petition letter of 1696 was not drafted in Patmos, as indicated in the letter itself, but – like several of the “fake letters” in the seventeenth century, in the Danubian Principalities, where itinerant monks often obtained the mandatory documents for Moscow in specialized scriptoria in the local dependencies (metochia) of the Athonite and other monasteries. For details on the letter of 1696 and the overall problem see Tchentsova, Vera. “Le verbe ou la lettre? Retracer l’origine des documents grecs des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles.” In *Κολοφών. Τόμος προς τιμήν του Καθηγητή Ευθυμίου Κ. Λίτσα*, edited by Despoina-Eirini Tsourka Papastathi, Myrto Malouta, Nikolaos Toutos. Thessaloniki: Greek Paleographic Socoety, 2024, 875–884.

7 «Πρὸς τοῦτοις αἱ τῶν τυραννομένων χριστιανῶν ἐλπίδες ἐγγὺς τῆς πληρώσεως ἰστάμεναι μεγίστης παραμυθίας ἐπαίσθάνονται [...] εἰς τὴν αἰχμαλωτισθέντος χριστιανισμοῦ ἀνάκλησιν καὶ ἐλευθέρωσιν», RGADA f. 52, op. 2, nr. 713.

All of the above may be read as a particularly fine performance of inherited rhetorical tools, suitable for the purpose of the petition. What *is* instead unique and what perhaps renders this letter an indicator of transformations and adaptations in terms of the representations of Russia in the Greek world is the handling of Peter’s novel qualities. To praise his commencement of reforms, the monks evoke the notion of the Platonic philosopher-king: Plato would rejoice in experiencing the fulfilment of his wish in Peter, as a king who philosophizes and a philosopher who rules. At the same time, Peter is incarnating the model of the Roman Caesars. Yet he unambiguously surpasses them in both his military and his political deeds. Peter is a hero who overshadows all the accomplishments of his ancestors and raises trophies for future kings to emulate.<sup>8</sup>

Again, nothing in these discourses is truly novel or modern. They constitute part and parcel of court rhetoric from late antiquity to early modern times. The Platonic philosopher king was a figure evoked time and again in Byzantine panegyric literature, but also — in our context — in praises of the Russian Tsars, just as Alexei Mikhailovich was celebrated by Greek ecclesiastical men of letters such as Paisios Ligaridis in the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> The same goes for the encomium of the ruler who competes with his predecessors and surpasses their achievements. What is important is the context in which the image is invoked and the functions it is meant to serve. Faced with a modified situation, which requires some kind of deviation from the standard vocabulary and a re-adaptation of the discourse, it was incumbent on the laudator to select the most appropriate images and symbols from an available toolkit. It is generally accurate to say that Peter’s court ideologues articulated, justified and legitimised his ambitious reform program not so much by introducing innovative or supposedly western notions, but chiefly by employing time-tested, familiar notions, symbols and images cast in a new context. In the wake of such re-contextualisation, during the eighteenth century the Platonic philosopher-king became an emblem of later so-called enlightened absolutism.<sup>10</sup>

As for the Roman references, they constituted a central element of the transformed staging and legitimation of Peter’s rule. Already in the first years of his reign, the re-orientation of Russian imperial symbolic from New to Old Rome was manifest. It found particularly significant expression in the festivities and commemorative medals — depicting Peter as a Roman Caesar with a laurel

8 «Θεασάτω νῦν τὸ αὐτῷ ποθοῦμενον ὁ Πλάτων, βασιλέα φιλοσοφοῦντα καὶ φιλόσοφον βασιλεύοντα, ἐπιδυέτω καὶ τὸ ἐν ἀμφοτέροις εὖχος τοῦ ῥωμαϊκοῦ καίσαρος. Τοὺς καίσαρας γὰρ ἐκείνους ἢ ὑμετέρα μεγαλοπρέπεια ἀρρήτως τε καὶ ἀσυγκρίτως ὑπερηκόντισεν, ἐν ὀπλοῖς τε καὶ πολιτείᾳ, τηβέννῃ τε καὶ χλαμύδι γνωριζομένη ἀμίμητος.», RGADA f. 52, op. 2, nr. 713.

9 Pissis, *Russland*, 369–370.

10 Beales, Derek. “Philosophical Kingship and Enlightened Despotism.” In *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*. Edited by Mark Goldie and Robert Wolker. Cambridge: CUP, 2006, 497–524.

crown — to mark the conquest of Azov, Peter’s first military accomplishment, in 1696.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, the Roman references served the need of adjusting Muscovy’s political language and symbolic to that of contemporary European courts of the Baroque rather than implying a *translatio imperii* proper. “Any Roman element was the result of imitating Europe, not of making imperial claims”.<sup>12</sup> At the turn of the eighteenth century, Pagan Rome offered European monarchies a symbolic of sovereignty and military glory void of ecclesiastical tutelage. Perhaps more than any of Peter’s decisions, the one that illustrated this shift from “Byzantine” legitimation, as in his father’s days, to an antique “Roman” one — a shift of paramount consequences for the role of Greek churchmen as court ideologues of the Tsar — was his decision to abandon the imperial regalia (diadem, sceptre and orb) that Alexei Mikhailovich had ordered via Greek churchmen from Constantinople in 1660, in favour of western European, supposedly Roman trappings.<sup>13</sup>

Quite apart from the Petrine reforms, Tsar Peter’s at best unconventional matters were already manifest by the turn of the century, posing serious challenges for his court boyars and Russian churchmen, or at least some of them. The same applied to fellow Orthodox believers, who struggled to accommodate alarming news about the rapid developments in Muscovy with the traditional image of the great Orthodox Empire, and with whatever expectations they were used to projecting on the Orthodox Russian Tsars in their capacity as heads and protectors of the Orthodox Church. A case in point was Dositheos, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1669–1707), whose frequent correspondence with the Russian ecclesiastical and imperial authorities, as well as with Tsar Peter himself, betrays much about the anxieties and disillusionments triggered by news from Muscovy — such as Peter’s “Long Embassy”, that is his visit to western capitals — but also about efforts to reconcile the new situation with inherited principles and expectations.<sup>14</sup> We also have evidence of pertinent worries in the lower ranks of the Church. In 1701, when the Russian pilgrim Ivan Luk’ianov spent some time in Constantinople, on his way to the Holy Land, he was confronted at the Metochion of the Holy

11 Wortman, Richard S. *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995, vol. 1: 45–46; Pogolian, Elena A. *Петр I. – архитектор российской истории*. St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo SPb 2001, 35–41; Grebeniuk, V. P. *Панегирическая литература петровского времени*. Moscow: Nauka 1979, 13–15.

12 Bushkovitch, Paul. “The Roman Empire in the Era of Peter the Great.” In *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom Revisited: Essays in Russian History and Culture in Honor of Robert O. Crumme*. Edited by Chester S. L. Dunning et al. Bloomington: Slavica Publishers 2008, 155–172, p. 171; Cf. Uspenskij, Boris A., “Петр Первый и переосмысление понятия империя.”, *Факты и Знаки* 3 (2014): 209–250; Sashalmi, Endre. “Rome as an Unlaid Ghost in Sixteenth–Eighteenth-Century Russia: Rome Spiritual and Rome Secular from the Early Sixteenth Century to 1725.” In *Renovatio, inventio, absentia imperii. From the Roman Empire to Contemporary Imperialism*. Edited by Wouter Bracke et al. Turnhout: Brepols 2018, 117–136.

13 Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 1, 72–73.

14 Pissis, *Russland*, 356–358.

Sepulchre, Dositheos’ residence, with pressing interrogations by the Greek monks present: “Why did your Tsar introduce Frankish dress and the Frankish faith to Moscow? Why did he seclude the Empress (Evdokija) in a monastery?”<sup>15</sup>

Much is known of the role played by alms-seeking monks and churchmen returning to their monasteries and bishoprics in disseminating news, rumours, hearsay and images that shaped representations of Russia in the Greek world, alongside the accounts of merchants travelling back and forth to Russia.<sup>16</sup> In our case, it does not take much imagination and speculation to suppose that on his return to Patmos in 1703, along with the alms and icons Archimandrite Isaias Mazaris had a great deal to narrate to his brothers, and that his account must have played some part in the decision to update and upgrade the monastery’s argumentation and message. The monks were well acquainted with divergent communicative contexts and the need to vary their language in adapting to different addressees. For instance, this is evident in the brotherhood’s intense relations with Rome and the Papacy (in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century), and in the petitions they addressed to Catholic Church authorities or to Western Christian Rulers such as the Spanish King.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Isaias Mazaris was to travel to Rome a few years later, in 1710; it may well be that the same Archimandrite Nikiphoros who brought our letter to Moscow in 1705 had visited Rome two decades earlier.<sup>18</sup>

A final question regards the reception of this rhetoric in Moscow, i.e. the possible impact of the monk’s intellectual efforts. After all, the point of adjusting one’s rhetoric and vocabulary was precisely to meet the apparently modified expectations and taste of the addressee, in order to promote one’s own objectives. Judging from the fact that Nikiphoros and the Brotherhood did not get the desired imperial charter (the *zhalovannaia gramota*), the mission’s success was rather modest. Even Nikiphoros’ promises to recruit shipbuilders and sailors for the Russian fleet in the Aegean — a project pursued in those very years by persons the Patmian monks were indeed connected to — did not bear any fruit.<sup>19</sup>

15 “Путешествие въ святую землю свиященника Лукьянова.” *Русский Архив* 1 (1863): 130–332, here 202  
16 Carras, Iannis. “What to expect when expecting: Waiting for the Russians in the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire.” *History of European Ideas* 48/8 (August 2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2021.1970474>.

17 Maltezos, Chrysa. *Σχέσεις της Μονής Πάτμου με τον δυτικό κόσμο. Αρχαιακές αποδείξεις (13<sup>ος</sup>–18<sup>ος</sup> αι.)*, 2 vols. Athens: Academy of Athens, 2017, vol. 1: 239–247; Hofmann, Georg SJ. *Patmos und Rom* [Orientalia Christiana 11/2, nr. 41]. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1928; Miklosich, Franz and Müller, Joseph. *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi, Sacra et Profana*, 6 vols, Vienna: Carl Gerold 1860–1890, vol. VI: 387–428.

18 Hofmann, *Patmos und Rom*, 26–27, 43–46.

19 Chesnokova, “Связи Монастыря”, 159–162.

For our concerns — probably less so for the monks themselves — another instance is perhaps even more disappointing. As a rule, Greek letters addressed to the Tsar, be they petitions or reports of whatever provenience, were translated verbatim and in full by the trained translators of the Posol'skii Prikaz and kept together with the Greek original in the office's archive.<sup>20</sup> As a result, we have the original and a contemporary translation for a high proportion of such letters. But in our case it seems that the refined language, elaborate and ornate images, metaphors and rhetorical tropes of the Patmian petition were too strenuous a task for the overstrained perevodchiki. As an exception, the letter was summarized rather than translated in full. Mention was at least made of the drawing at the bottom. Yet, as might be imagined, the monks had crafted all their skilful rhetoric in vain, for it was omitted.

20 Tchentsova, Vera G., “Les fonds des documents, grecs (f. 52. ‘Relations de la Russie avec la Grèce’) de la Collection des Archives Nationales des Actes Anciens de la Russie et leur valeur pour l’histoire de l’Empire Ottomane.” *Turcica* 30 (1998): 383–396; Alexandropoulou, Olga, “Η ελληνική μονή του Αγίου Νικολάου στη Μόσχα. Στοιχεία από την ιστορία των ελληνορωσικών σχέσεων στο δεύτερο μισό του 17ου αιώνα.” *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* 6 (2000): 111–154, p. 115–121.

## Treacherous Times or Treacherous Monks: The 1894–1896 Alms Collection (Zeteia) in Russia by Monks from Arkadi Monastery, Crete

Sofia Katopi

### Abstract

In the early days of August 1894, following three unsuccessful attempts, the Abbot of Arkadi Monastery, Gabriel Manaris, was granted the requisite official permission to conduct an alms collection in Russia. The collection lasted just over two years, during which time Manaris and his colleague Akakios Daoundakis travelled extensively across Russia, from St. Petersburg and Siberia to the Black Sea and the Caucasus. They exhibited holy relics for veneration and offered memorial services. The memoirs and the alms-collection notebook of Gabriel Manaris preserved in the monastery archives provide insight into the route traversed, income and expenditure, and challenges encountered by the travellers. The two monks returned to Crete at the end of 1896 with considerably less money than had been anticipated, but with a number of ecclesiastical utensils, including luxurious hieratic vestments, a mitre for the Bishop of Rethymno, a silver reliquary, candlesticks, gospels, and censers. Upon their return, a controversy broke out concerning allegations of misappropriation of the funds they had collected. With this paper, I will attempt to reconstruct the monks' *zeteia* in Russia, their route and the difficulties they encountered. Additionally, I will examine the reasons for the reduced revenues and the controversy that arose upon their return to Crete and try to contextualize it within the broader political landscape of the time.

**Keywords:** Cretan revolt, Cretan Question, ecclesiastical utensils, hieratical vestments, Russia, alms

On August 18, 1894, Gabriel Manaris, Abbot of Arkadi Monastery, and Akakios Daoundakis, a monk at the same monastery, having overcome many difficulties, finally boarded ship at Istanbul for Odessa. They were going to Russia to collect alms for the restoration of their monastery. They returned to Crete two years later, in November 1896, with much less money than expected, leading to serious accusations of misappropriation of the funds they had collected. The story of the *zeteia* that we are going to narrate begins thirty years earlier, with the leading role of Arkadi Monastery (fig.1) in the early days of the so-called “Great Cretan Uprising” of 1866–1869, which resulted in the destruction of parts of the monastery and its abandonment by the monastic

community.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of the revolt, the walled monastery, one of the largest and richest in Crete, had served as a revolutionary centre, housing the local headquarters of the Christian rebels. On 8th and 9th November 1866, the monastery was besieged by the Ottoman army. When the Ottoman troops finally entered, the besieged blew up the gunpowder magazine, killing a large number of women and children who had taken refuge in it, along with monks, rebels and many of the Ottoman troops. The monastery was abandoned and the few surviving monks dispersed.

When the brothers began to return at the end of the three-year revolutionary period, in the spring 1869, the monastery was in a tragic state. The community was reestablished, but there was no money for restorations, while at the same time, serious conflicts and antagonisms broke out over administration. The protagonist of our story, Gabriel Manaris (fig. 2), played a leading role in many of the power struggles.<sup>2</sup> He was a nephew of Gabriel Marinakis, the “heroic abbot” of the monastery at the time of the 1866 revolt (fig. 3). Manaris came from a very rich family and was well educated. At the time of the uprising and subsequent blowing up of the monastery’s gunpowder magazine, he was away from Crete, studying at the Halki School of Theology in Istanbul. According to Manaris’s notes and memoirs preserved in the monastery archives, travelling to Russia to raise money for the restoration of the monastery had been his ardent desire ever since the news of its destruction had reached him in Istanbul.<sup>3</sup> He asserts that he was planning to return to Crete in the summer of 1866, but was discouraged from doing so by a letter from his uncle, Abbot Gabriel Marinakis. The abbot advised him to remain in Istanbul, citing the unfavourable circumstances on the island. As he wrote, “[...] the way things are going, the guns will surely start firing, and I tell you to be aware of that, but be careful, I don’t know how many of us will live or die. In fact, our monastery will suffer greatly because the Turks are raging against it. So, stay there to finish your studies. As you know, I am determined to send you to Russia if God spares my life. If I die, I hope you can go alone because your Country and, most of all, your

- 1 One of a series of revolts by the Christians of Crete against Ottoman rule, which began with the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830). The uprisings continued every few years throughout the 19th century, the main goal of the rebels being the union of Crete with the Greek State (Kingdom). For an account of the siege of Arkadi Monastery see Archbishop of Crete, Veneris, Timotheos M., *To Arkádi diá ton aiónon* [Arkadi Over the Centuries] (Athens: Pirsos 1938), p. 133–454. For an account of the Cretan monasteries serving as revolutionary centres and the condition of Arkadi Monastery six months after the siege and blowing up of the gunpowder magazine, see Skinner, John Edwin Hilary, *Roughing it in Crete in 1867*, London: R. Bentley 1868, p. 28–31, 70–78.
- 2 The sources are silent on the reasons for these conflicts, simply referring to the “evil” or “reactionary” characters of the fellow monks and their personal jealousies. It is not clear why none of the monks liked Gabriel Manaris and why they supported his opponents in most conflicts. See Dionysios Maragoudakis, *To Ierón kai Heroikón tis Krήτης Arkádi* [The Holy and Heroic Arkadi of Crete] (Athens, 2016), p. 191–199.
- 3 Arkadi Monastery Archive, *Notebook D*, p. 85, 87. Three uncatalogued notebooks by Abbot Gabriel Manaris on the *zeteia* in Russia are preserved in the monastery archives. From here on, I will refer to them as *Notebooks D, E* and *alms-collection notebook*.

Monastery will need you.” The letter’s authenticity is questionable.<sup>4</sup> What it describes as a possibility in the summer of 1866 in fact occurred in November of the same year, leading to the demise of the abbot and hundreds of women, children, monks, and men who had sought refuge in the monastery. On the other hand, the fact that the monastery was the local headquarters of the Christian rebels may have led the abbot to anticipate the consequences in some way. Whether fake or real, the epistle serves to prove that the *zeteia* in Russia was a wish and an order from the heroic abbot to his nephew Manaris, thereby legitimising the journey.<sup>5</sup>

This research was based on information obtained from three notebooks kept in Arkadi Monastery. *Notebook D* contains an account of Manaris’s first three attempts to go to Russia for the fundraising, the actions he undertook and the challenges he encountered in trying to acquire a license. It also contains various entries irrelevant to the alms collection, such as letters, poems, recipes and personal expenses. *Notebook E* contains a detailed narration of Manaris’s actions to secure the license that enabled him to travel for the *zeteia* in Russia in 1894, and his activities during the first month in Russia. Both notebooks take the form of memoirs. There is also the *alms-collection notebook*, which provides information on the incomes and expenses of the 1894–1896 journey to Russia, the names of donors and their donations and the route traversed by the *taxidiotes* (itinerant monks). The notebooks were indispensable for this research, as they provide an insight into the difficulties of preparing and executing a *zeteia*, the bureaucratic, political and economic problems encountered, as well as the personal sympathies and animosities that could lead to failure to acquire the requisite licenses.<sup>6</sup> The book on the modern history of Arkadi Monastery written by Dionysios Maragoudakis, Bishop of Petra, was another important source for this research.<sup>7</sup> The section of the book that concerns the *zeteia* in Russia relies heavily on Manaris’s notebooks and on his own narration of events to Maragoudakis. He considered himself a protégé of Manaris, as the latter was responsible for a great part of his

4 Dionysios Maragoudakis asserts that he had seen the authentic letter and that he delivered a facsimile of it to Archbishop Timotheos Veneris of Crete in 1937, 70 years after it was written. He also declares that when the archbishop passed away in 1941, his family delivered the copied letter to Dionysios Psaroudakis, then Abbot of Arkadi Monastery. I have tried to locate the letter in the monastery’s archives. For the purposes of this paper, I have referred to its published version in Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 189.

5 It should be noted that when first ordained a monk, Manaris took the name Kallinikos, which he changed to Gabriel when ordained hieromonk in 1872, in honour of the “heroic abbot”, Gabriel Marinakis. The fact that he repeatedly stated in his notebooks and letters that he wanted his name to be associated with the renovation of the monastery shows his ambition to be remembered not only as renovator, but also as one linked to the famous abbot, his successor in a line of “great men of Arkadi Monastery”.

6 I would like to express my gratitude to Archbishop Evgenios Antonopoulos of Crete (previously Archbishop of Rethymno and Avlopotamos), and the monks of Arkadi Monastery for allowing access to the notebooks. I own special thanks to Kostas Papadakis for facilitating the visit to the Monastery.

7 The book by Dionysios Maragoudakis, op.cit, was written between 1911 and 1920, but was first published 76 years later, in 1996. The 2016 edition is used here.

education.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, many of the views expressed in the book are not objective, as they are not only based on personal contact, but also reflect the writer’s very high opinion and admiration of Abbot Gabriel Manaris. The complexity of the story is underlined by the fact that Maragoudakis maintained cordial relations with Bishop Dionysios Kastriogiannakis, Manaris’s longtime rival, and the source of many of the latter’s troubles.<sup>9</sup>

## Early attempts and challenges

Manaris was one of the two candidates to fill the position of abbot at the monastery once it was reorganized in 1869. Having failed to be elected, as all the monks supported his rival Nikodimos Katsivelis (Konstandinidis), he returned to Istanbul during the years 1869–1871 and attempted to organize a *zeteia* in Russia from there. There were complications due to the conflicting entanglement of different agents with the same aim: financing the restoration of the destroyed parts of the monastery. Katsivelis asked for assistance from the local Ottoman government of Crete, and was promised 8000 Ottoman lira. Manaris was trying to get support to organize a *zeteia* in Russia with the same aim (funding the rebuilding of the destroyed monastery) from the central government, the Grand Vizier, the Patriarch and the Russian embassy in Istanbul. In the end, Abbot Katsivelis only received 1000 gold lira. On the other hand, Manaris was refused a license for alms collection in Russia because the central government considered the problem of financing the restoration solved by the money granted at the local level.<sup>10</sup>

Manaris made a renewed effort shortly before 1876; this time he was not granted a license by the new Abbot of Arkadi (Neophytos Alexandrakis) because, according to Manaris, his rivals had persuaded Alexandrakis that should Manaris succeed, his name would be associated with the reconstruction work rather than the abbot’s, although the latter was already involved in restorations.<sup>11</sup>

The third attempt took place in the summer of 1892. While everything appeared to be progressing according to plan, the endeavour failed at the final stage. By that time Manaris had become abbot of the monastery (since 1883), and was determined to fulfil his life dream of becoming Arkadi’s

8 Dionysios Maragoudakis joined Arkadi monastery when he was seventeen years old and worked there for a year as an assistant to Abbot Gabriel Manaris. After that, he was sent to finish school in Rethymno, then to the Theological School in Halki, and eventually to study in Moscow. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 10.

9 According to Maragoudakis, Dionysios Kastriogiannakis, an ardent Russophile, was the one who insisted that Maragoudakis pursue his studies in Moscow. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 10.

10 Manaris, *Notebook D*, p. 85–87. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 191–193.

11 Manaris, *Notebook D*, p. 87. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 198.

“Great Restorer” using Russian funds.<sup>12</sup> As the abbot recounted, he sold some of his sheep and goats as not to burden the monastery with financial expenses and left for Istanbul in May 1892. Once there, his friend Metropolitan Germanos, Archbishop of Herakleia, advised him to obtain recommendation letters from the Russian consul in Chania and submit a request to the Patriarch.<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Manaris returned to Crete to see the Russian consul, who asked for a request from the Bishop of Crete or the Bishop of Rethymno. Furnished with the recommendation letter from the Russian consul in Chania addressed to Ambassador Aleksandr Nelidov in Constantinople, and the request from the Bishop of Rethymno, he travelled back to Istanbul. There he managed to gain the sympathy of the Russian ambassador, and with the support of various political and ecclesiastical agents, he wrote a report to the Sultan. Just when everything looked bright, the venture was cut short due to rumours and allegations pertaining to his association with the revolutionary bishop Parthenios Kelaidis in Chania. According to the rumours, the alms collection in Russia was aimed at financing revolutionary causes. Even though the allegations were not true, they underline the complex political situation. The sceptical patriarch did not approve a travel license, fearing an escalation in the already tense relations between Crete and the Sublime Porte.<sup>14</sup> Six months after the commencement of the third attempt, a disheartened Manaris returned to Crete in November 1892. The following April he was advised by Bishop Ierotheos Praoudakis of Rethymno, on information from Bishop Dionysios Kastrinogiannakis of Cherronisos, that the Grand Vizier had granted the requested license the previous October, i.e. before Manaris had left Istanbul. The abbot did not initially believe the news, given his rivalry with Kastrinogiannakis, but prepared to depart for Istanbul regardless;<sup>15</sup> however, news of a cholera outbreak in the city during the summer of 1893 compelled him to postpone the journey.<sup>16</sup>

12 As already mentioned, he repeatedly records in his notebooks that he wanted to connect his name with the restoration of the monastery and be remembered as its “Great Restorer”.

13 The above is a synopsis of the actions undertaken by Abbot Manaris in his attempt to secure a license for a fundraising expedition to Russia in 1892. A comprehensive account of his actions in Crete and Istanbul is provided in *Notebook D*. The detailed exposition of the intricate bureaucratic networks involved in procuring a license for a *zeteia* in Russia demonstrates the difficulty of the endeavour, and tallies with Gerd’s conclusions on the labyrinthine bureaucracy faced by monastery representatives in obtaining licenses for alms collection in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. For a summary account of these, see Lora Gerd “The taxidiotes from the Balkans in Russia in 1830–1914: Orthodoxy and politics”, See here, p. 427–428.

14 Due to the “privilege question” of the previous years.

15 It is worth noting that Manaris was once again preparing to circumvent the Russian Consulate in Chania. This behaviour, which was recurrent, led to conflicts with local hierarchies as he persistently sought direct engagement with the centre. His pronounced disregard for established institutions and hierarchical structures reflects an attitude of entitlement and a sense of superiority, which partly explains the troubles Manaris had both with his superiors (such as the Archbishop of Rethymno) and his inferiors (such as his fellow monks at Arkadi Monastery).

16 Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 3. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 215.

## The *zeteia* of 1894–1896

In the spring of 1894, Manaris learned that yet another license to travel to Russia, issued by the Russian Embassy in Istanbul, was about to expire. He was unaware of this because the Bishop of Rethymno had not only withheld the information, but had replied to the Russian vice-consul in Rethymno that the Church would not allow the abbot to travel to Russia to collect alms.<sup>17</sup> Manaris went to the Russian consulate in Chania; he pleaded and begged, and persuaded the consul that he was still interested in the mission. The Christian government of Rethymno (dimogerondia) got involved in the case and the bishop had to agree to allow the journey, but insisted that a second monk, Akakios Daoundakis, should accompany the abbot to Russia.<sup>18</sup>

The two monks left for Istanbul on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1894. Ecumenical Patriarch Neophytos VIII agreed to the *zeteia*, but it took two more months to get all the permits, authorizations and the license for the second monk.<sup>19</sup> While in Istanbul, they prepared for the practicalities of their mission, asking a goldsmith to repair the reliquary, acquiring warm clothing for the Russian winter and reproducing photographs of the “heroic abbot” Gabriel Marinakis for distribution.<sup>20</sup> They had Cretan products with them, such as cheese, soap, honey, olive oil, and wine to offer to those whose help they asked, but at the same time, they were running out of money and in need of a loan. None of the Constantinopolitan merchants or their partners in Rethymno trusted them enough to lend them money. Finally, their monastery sent them some, and grateful to God and Russian Ambassador Nelidov, who had made the dream come true, they sailed for Russia on August 18.<sup>21</sup>

When they arrived in Odessa two days later, the deacon of the Greek community church, Konstantinos Kavadias, arranged for them to stay in the skete belonging to the dependency of the Russian Monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos. According to Manaris’s notes, the Greek consul in Odessa,

17 The reasons for this remain unclear. It is notable that the previous year, the same bishop informed Manaris of the license issued by the Sultan. It is highly probable that the reasons are related to the complex dynamics of political rivalries within the ecclesiastical community of Rethymno, in which Manaris was reportedly engaged. It is worth noting that during the same period the Archbishop of Crete was Timotheos Kastrinogiannakis, half-brother of Dionysios, Gabriel Manaris’s staunch adversary.

18 According to Gerd, *zeteia* delegations to Russia usually comprised three monks. See here, p. 428.

19 For a comprehensive description of Manaris’s activities in Crete and Istanbul during the months April–August 1894, see Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 3–15. According to his notes, Manaris was preparing to depart independently for Russia because of the delay in issuing a license for Akakios Daoundakis, despite having received explicit instructions to the contrary from the archbishop and the local government of Rethymno. As previously noted, this was a recurring pattern in Manaris’s behaviour, often leading to difficulties with his superiors.

20 Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 9.

21 Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 12, 16.

Ioannis Voutsinas, declared that he was indifferent towards the recommendation letters of the Greek ambassador in Istanbul, and was not willing to help with the *zeteia*.<sup>22</sup> The two *taxidiotes* left three days later, on August 23, and after a long and difficult train journey in third class, they arrived in Saint Petersburg five days later.<sup>23</sup> New bureaucratic hurdles awaited them there. With the help of Archimandrite Prokopios and Procurator Ioannis Triantafylidis they managed to overcome new refusals from the Imperial Procurator Popedonostsef, and secured a one-year license from the Synod and the necessary alms accounting book for recording incomes and expenses.<sup>24</sup> They were allowed to exhibit the relics for one and a half months in all the major churches of Saint Petersburg, and wherever else they wanted in the rest of Russia for the remainder of the one-year period. They had to hire an interpreter, as they had no knowledge of the Russian language,<sup>25</sup> and with the help of the aforementioned Archimandrite Prokopios, they managed to translate and print a pamphlet for distribution, explaining the reason for the *zeteia*, the story of the monastery and its destruction and the relics to be exhibited (fig. 4). These included a piece of the True Cross and relics of the Ten Cretan Martyrs, of St. John Chrysostom, of St. Gregory of Nyssa, of St. Charalambos, of St. Vlasios, of St. Ignatios, of St. Tryfon, of St. Jacob the Persian and of St. Panteleimon. While in Saint Petersburg they stayed at Kazanski Sobor, which was also where the alms collection began.

Unfortunately, the detailed descriptions in *Notebook E* stop after the first days in Saint Petersburg.<sup>26</sup> Although the *alms-collection notebook* documents incomes and expenses, it offers scant insight into the challenges confronting the two monks over the subsequent two years. Financial records show neat bookkeeping at first, but serious discrepancies emerge later, making it difficult to trace all transactions. In addition, it appears that income and expenditure are recorded only for the first year, and balance sheets are drawn up with incomes being recorded in less detail than expenses. In the second year of the alms collection, the opposite seems to be true: no expenses are recorded, but donations are recorded in detail.

Despite these shortcomings, we can follow the travellers' journey. They stayed in Saint Petersburg for three months, from the beginning of September until the beginning of December 1894, and from there

22 Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 16.

23 Manaris complained about flees, hunger, and the poor, filthy Russian travellers in third class. Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 17.

24 Manaris's account of the challenges encountered in Saint Petersburg is consistent with Gerd's observations regarding the rigorous bureaucratic controls exercised by ecclesiastical institutions concerning *zeteias* during the late 19th century. See here, p. 438.

25 At a monthly salary of 40 roubles.

26 The activities of the two monks during the first days of their stay in Saint Petersburg are narrated in Manaris, *Notebook E*, p. 17–21.

went to Psov (10–19 December 1894) and Ostrof (20–29 December 1894). Early in the new year they travelled to Kronzand (14–23 January 1895) and Novgorod (28 January – 7 February 1895), ending up in Moscow on February 8, 1895. From there they moved to Razan and Penza in May 1895. According to the *alms collection notebook*, the two monks were accompanied in these two towns by Lady Elizabeth Liamena, who donated 150 roubles and a very expensive reliquary.<sup>27</sup> They headed to Samara and Omsk in June, to Tver in July and returned to Moscow in August. In Moscow and Tver they also performed sanctifications in factories, for which the Morozovs made a donation of 300 roubles.<sup>28</sup>

The incomes from the alms collection are documented in summary during the first year. They derived from sanctifications and performing services in churches and private residences. Sometimes the denominations of the churches are mentioned in the notebook, though usually not. With regard to services performed in private residences, the donations made by individuals who received the two monks in their homes are usually not documented. In contrast, the expenditures related to the transportation there (e.g. money paid for carriages) are well documented in the notebook's expenses section.

The expenses of the two *taxidiotes* are meticulously documented over the first year of the *zeteia*. Most of the money was spent on rent, food, clothing<sup>29</sup>, the interpreter's salary, train tickets, and carriage fares to different places to perform services. Other types of expenses are also noted, such as many presents (tips) and charitable gifts for the poor, as well as various expenses for everyday needs such as medicine, lighting devices, writing materials, sewing and laundry, and books. Some outlays had to do with the alms collection, such as printing pamphlets, gilding the reliquary, and paying the Consistoria<sup>30</sup>. Financially speaking, the first year proved extremely disappointing. According to the notebook, expenses were almost entirely equal to income.

27 Manaris, *Alms collection notebook*, p. 88–93. The reliquary is mentioned by Maragoudakis as one of the most important donations made to the monastery. It seems to have disappeared from the monastery sometime during the 1940s. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 94.

28 This seems to be the highest donation of the entire *zeteia*.

29 Some of the clothing was quite expensive, such as fur coats and hieratical vestments.

30 Between 1720 and 1917, the Consistoria in the Russian Orthodox Church was an advisory and auxiliary council under the jurisdiction of an archbishop. The Consistoria's primary responsibility was to facilitate church administration. Under normal circumstances, this office could not demand any money or bribes from the *taxidiotes*. The existence of substantial financial transactions recorded by the monks, directed towards the Consistoria, suggests that, as they were obligated to submit all collected funds to the Synod, which then sent it via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the embassy in Constantinople and to the monastery, so they did it in parts through the local Consistoria. Another possible explanation could be that the Arkadi monks had to pay some form of local bureaucratic fee to collect alms in each area. However, it seems less probable that this would be the case, given the significant sums of money involved. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Lora Gerd for the information she so kindly provided on the Russian Consistoria.

We have no information on what the monks did from August, when they returned to Moscow, until we find them in Odessa in December. In all probability they were trying to renew their license for the *zeteia* for one more year, which they succeeded in doing.

During the second year of the *zeteia*, they travelled mainly in Ukraine and the Caucasus area, where there was a substantial Greek community. Having started out from Odessa, they went to Sevastopol and Simferopol in the Crimea in the first two months of 1896, to Taganrog in March, Rostov in April, Vladikavkaz and Krasnodar in June, and finally to Tikhoretsk. This part of the journey proved much more successful, obviously because of the many Greek donors. It is worth noting with regard to the *alms collection notebook* that during the second year of the *zeteia* there is no mention of expenses. In this section of the notebook, which runs from page 141 to 173, there are lists of the names of donors and their donations according to the town in which they resided. The names are written in different hands, in Greek and in Russian. Most of the donations are very small, ranging from one to five roubles. A few donations are as high as 10 to 50 roubles and a single donation is recorded at 100 roubles. Of particular interest are the instances where multiple names of family members are listed, including deceased individuals. Obviously, these are financial contributions in exchange for commemorations of the deceased in liturgy. Furthermore, in this section of the notebook with the name lists, some of the names belong to well-known personalities from the period in question, such as Varvakis and Skaramangas.<sup>31</sup>

The passing away of Bishop Ierotheos Praoudakis of Rethymno in February 1896 and the subsequent election of Dionysios Kastrinogiannakis as his successor marked the onset of new challenges for Gabriel Manaris.<sup>32</sup> The new bishop promptly ordered the monks to return to Rethymno in March 1896, yet, as previously observed, they remained in Russia until at least August of the same year. There is no information about their whereabouts until December, when they finally made it back to Crete.

31 Further research in this part of the notebook could yield highly interesting information on the Greek communities of the diaspora living in this part of the Russian empire.

32 Dionysios Kastrinogiannakis was elected Bishop of Rethymno and Avlopotamos for the first time on 8 March 1881. For various reasons he was not accepted by the people of Rethymno, and was transferred to the diocese of Cherronisos. For a comprehensive account of the bishopric controversy of the years 1880–1882, see Andreas Nanakis (archimandrite), *Το επισκοπικό ζήτημα 1880–1882 και η Εκκλησία της Κρήτης*, [The bishopric issue 1880–1882 and the Church of Crete], Katerini 1992.

## Allegations and controversy

Upon the monks' return, Manaris immediately faced accusations of misappropriating the funds collected.<sup>33</sup> They had collected a mere 747.5 French francs - a sum deemed insufficient for two years of fundraising in Russia.<sup>34</sup> Personal animosities further fuelled the controversy, with Kastrinogiannakis' longstanding rivalry with Manaris playing a central role.<sup>35</sup> The bishop ordered an investigation, focusing on the whereabouts of the money and looking for the bank they had supposedly deposited it. An expensive mitre brought from Russia (fig. 5), which had been ordered by Bishop Ierotheos, was confiscated and never paid for, leading to a long dispute between Arkadi Monastery and the bishopric of Rethymno. In addition, Manaris never received full salary compensation for the two years of his absence, though his companion on the *zeteia*, Akakios Daoundakis, was reimbursed. The funds were not utilized for the reconstruction of the monastery, as had been the initial purpose of the Russian journey. Instead, they were allocated to settle the monastery's debt.<sup>36</sup>

Only a month after the monks returned from Russia, the 1897 uprising began, ultimately culminating in the intervention of the Great Powers of Europe and the establishment of the *Cretan State* in 1898.<sup>37</sup> During that period, the discord between Manaris and Bishop Kastrinogiannakis assumed a distinctly political dimension, as one supported Prince George and the other Eleftherios Venizelos. As already

33 There is no information on the way the money was delivered to the monastery. According to Lora Gerd, the official way was to deliver the accounting notebook issued at the beginning of the *zeteia* to the Russian Holy Synod for inspection, and also turn in the money and ecclesiastical items collected to the Synod; only when everything was inspected and cleared could it be returned to the monks through the bank. See here, Gerd, p. 428.

34 According to Lora Gerd, who has studied the 19th century archives of the Russian Holy Synod and the fundraising missions of representatives of monasteries from the Orthodox regions in the Balkans and the Middle East, the two monks from Arkadi Monastery should have collected at least three times the sum they actually did. See here, Gerd, p. 428.

35 Gabriel Manaris had not supported Dionysios Kastrinogiannakis when the latter was first elected Bishop of Rethymno in 1881 because Manaris coveted the position for himself. This, along with the support of different political parties by the two men at a time of great political turmoil, led to a lifelong rivalry between them. Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 225.

36 For the difficulties that Manaris confronted upon his return to Arkadi Monastery, see Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 221–225.

37 In 1897, during one of the revolts, a Greek military force arrived on the island of Crete with the aim of annexing it. This development was met with opposition from the Great Powers, who subsequently intervened and occupied the island. A semi-autonomous, semi-colonial regime was established under the suzerainty of the Sultan, with four of the Great Powers acting as protectors. The newly established political entity, designated *Cretan Autonomy* (or *Cretan State*), lasted from 1898 to 1913. During this period, Crete was partitioned into British, French, Russian, and Italian zones of control. The region of Rethymno was partitioned to the Russians. See e.g. Detorakis, Theoharis, Kalokairinos, Alexis (eds). *Η Τελευταία Φάση του Κρητικού Ζητήματος* [The Final Phase of the Cretan Question], Heraklion 2001.

mentioned, the controversy between them, which had its origins in 1881–1882, when Manaris did not support Kastrinogiannakis for the position of Bishop of Rethymno, was also driven by political motivations. In 1902 Manaris was suspended by the bishop as Abbot of Arkadi monastery and Akakios Daoundakis was elected in his place.

## Reflections on the *zeteia*

Maragoudakis offers several explanations for the *zeteia*'s limited success.<sup>38</sup> Among significant factors, he cites the monks' advanced age (Gabriel Manaris was 53 and Akakios Daoundakis 39 years old when the *zeteia* began), lack of familiarity with the Russian language and ways of the Russian liturgy and customs, and, finally, competition from other delegations. According to him, during the same period, at least five other official alms-collecting missions were active in Russia, representing monasteries from Cyprus, Macedonia, Trebizond, and Mount Athos. As Manaris asserted, those delegations had more impressive relics in silver reliquaries, and they offered icons and crosses to donors among the faithful. In addition, there were unofficial alms collecting parties for Palestine, Mount Athos and from Russian monasteries.<sup>39</sup> Finally, one of the reasons given for the far from successful *zeteia* was the fact that the local Russian priests adopted a hostile stance towards foreign collectors. In relation to the allegations of misappropriation, Maragoudakis believes that the two monks may have generated a modest revenue for themselves for all the troubles they went through, given that Russians typically offered gratuities to the carriers of holy relics in addition to their donations.<sup>40</sup>

It is very curious that neither Maragoudakis nor Manaris says much about the ecclesiastical items and hieratical vestments which they are known from other sources to have brought back with them. Maragoudakis was only impressed by the precious reliquary offered by Lady Liamena, the rich, pious woman also mentioned in the *alms collection notebook*. In the same notebook, there is only one mention of a donation of an icon with the Virgin and the Baptist, a frame (revetment?) for an icon, a candlestick or censer and a few vestments.<sup>41</sup>

38 Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 221–225.

39 Ibid, p. 223. It is worth mentioning that according to Gerd, from 1865 the number of monasteries with representatives allowed to collect alms in Russia at the same time was strictly limited to four. Manaris's account to Maragoudakis of "at least five other official almsgiving missions" obviously contradicts the above law. It is uncertain whether the law was disregarded or whether the abbot's account is inaccurate. See Gerd, p. 438–439.

40 Maragoudakis, 2016, p. 225..

41 Manaris, *Alms collection notebook*, p. 154, 167.

Nonetheless, an alternate perspective is presented by the memoir of an acquaintance of Akakios Daoundakis, published in a local newspaper many years later.<sup>42</sup> This memoir contradicts the complaints about the unsuccessful *zeteia*. According to Xexakis, the two monks brought great wealth back from Russia. He narrates that "[...] in addition to roubles, they brought whole loads of sacred vessels, icons, gospels, candelabras, censers, most of them gold and with diamond ornaments. Expensive vestments and robes for all the monks and household utensils for all the cells. The Church of St. Constantine<sup>43</sup> literally abounded with brilliantly gilded and diamond-encrusted votive offerings. Above all, the large candelabra, like small chandeliers, were impressive."<sup>44</sup> Xexakis (1911–1999), who is describing his visits to Arkadi Monastery in the 1920s and 1930s, asserts that for many decades, every time he entered the monastery "[...] he always stood in the church for a long time and admired the richness of the sacred utensils that made it shine all over. [...]" He goes on to say that once Gabriel Manaris and Akakios Daoundakis had taken care of the needs of Arkadi Monastery, the catholicon, the cells and the monks, there were still some "leftovers". Objects such as porcelain plates with beautiful designs and a few enamelled mugs for tea and coffee were given to friends of Arkadi.<sup>45</sup> According to the same source, all these items began to vanish in the 1940s. Today, none of them survive in the monastery. A Russian reliquary was located in the cell where Manaris's notebooks are kept but it is definitely not the richly decorated one donated by Lady Liamena mentioned in the notebooks and Maragoudakis's book. One interesting fact Xexakis narrated in his memoirs is that Akakios Daoundakis often complained to the former's grandmother and father that during the *zeteia* in Russia, "when I was going around the neighbourhoods and monasteries, making sanctifications and collecting roubles and vows, the abbot was hanging out with the grandees."<sup>46</sup>

One thing is for sure from the written sources. Very few people liked Gabriel Manaris, and most did not trust him. Neither the monks, nor the bishop, nor even his travelling companion Akakios. Manaris came from a rich family, and must have been arrogant and definitely very ambitious, even though Maragoudakis presents him as an innocent, sincere victim of his time. On the other hand, the *zeteia* in Russia was a very personal venture. Manaris wanted his name to be associated with the restoration of the monastery.

42 Kostas A. Xexakis, "Από τη ζωή της Ι. Μ. Αρκαδίου περί το 1900. Ιερά κειμήλια και η ιστορία των" [From the life of the Holy Monastery of Arkadi around 1900. Holy relics and their history], *Επιλογή Δημοσιευμάτων: 1937–1997*, Association of Philologists of Rethymno Prefecture, Rethymno 1998, p. 124–126. The article was first published in the Rethymno newspaper *Ρεθυμνιώτικα Νέα* in April 1994.

43 The catholicon at Arkadi Monastery.

44 Ibid, p. 124–125.

45 Ibid, p. 125–126.

46 Ibid, p. 125.

A notable and curious omission in the records is the absence of any mention of the death and funeral of Tsar Alexander III, which occurred during the monks' stay in Saint Petersburg. Such a significant event would undoubtedly have influenced their mission, yet it is absent from their accounts. Similarly, the records do not explain why certain items such as ecclesiastical artefacts and fabrics brought back from Russia were omitted from the financial statements.

The *zeteia* in Russia highlights the complexities and the challenges of navigating cultural, political, and ecclesiastical differences in the turbulent times at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the notebooks provide valuable insights, their subjective nature leaves many questions unanswered. Did the monks genuinely misappropriate funds, or were they victims of their circumstances and rivalries? How did their mission influence the restoration of Arkadi Monastery, if at all? Further archival research may yet shed light on these unanswered questions and provide a fuller picture of this interesting episode in the history of the monastery.





Fig. 1. Arkadi Monastery, Rethymno, Crete. © <http://commons.wikipedia.org/>



Fig. 2. Gabriel Manaris (1841–1911), Archimandrite and Abbot of Arkadi Monastery. (Source: Maragoudakis, Dionysios. *Το Ιερόν και Ηρωικόν της Κρήτης Αρκάδι*. Athens 2016, p. 199).

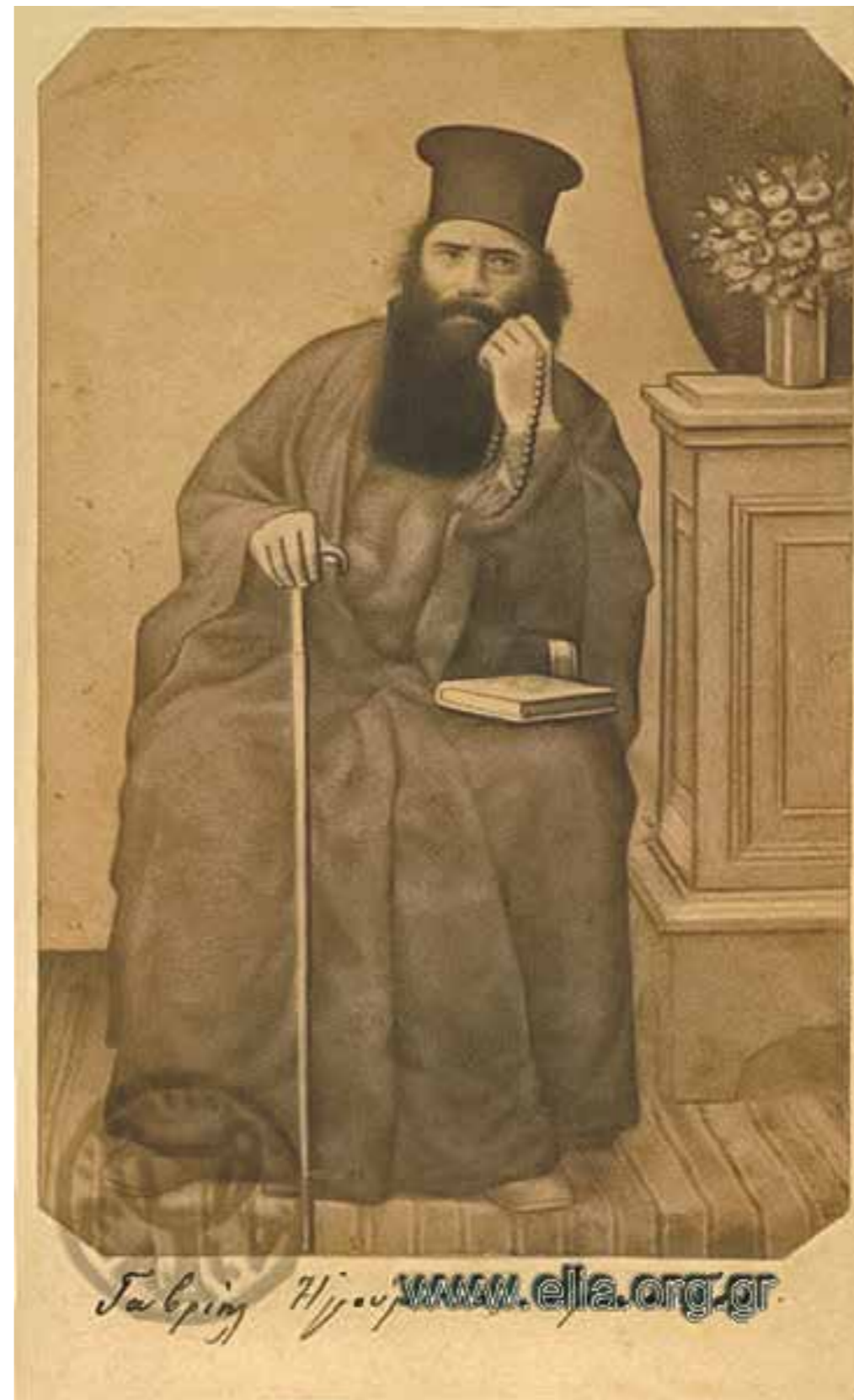


Fig. 3. Abbot Gabriel Marinakis of Arkadi Monastery, ca. 1860, Photo: A. Z. Vlachakis. (Source: ELIA digital collections, <https://digilib.gr:8080/eliasim/rec.aspx?id=501931>)

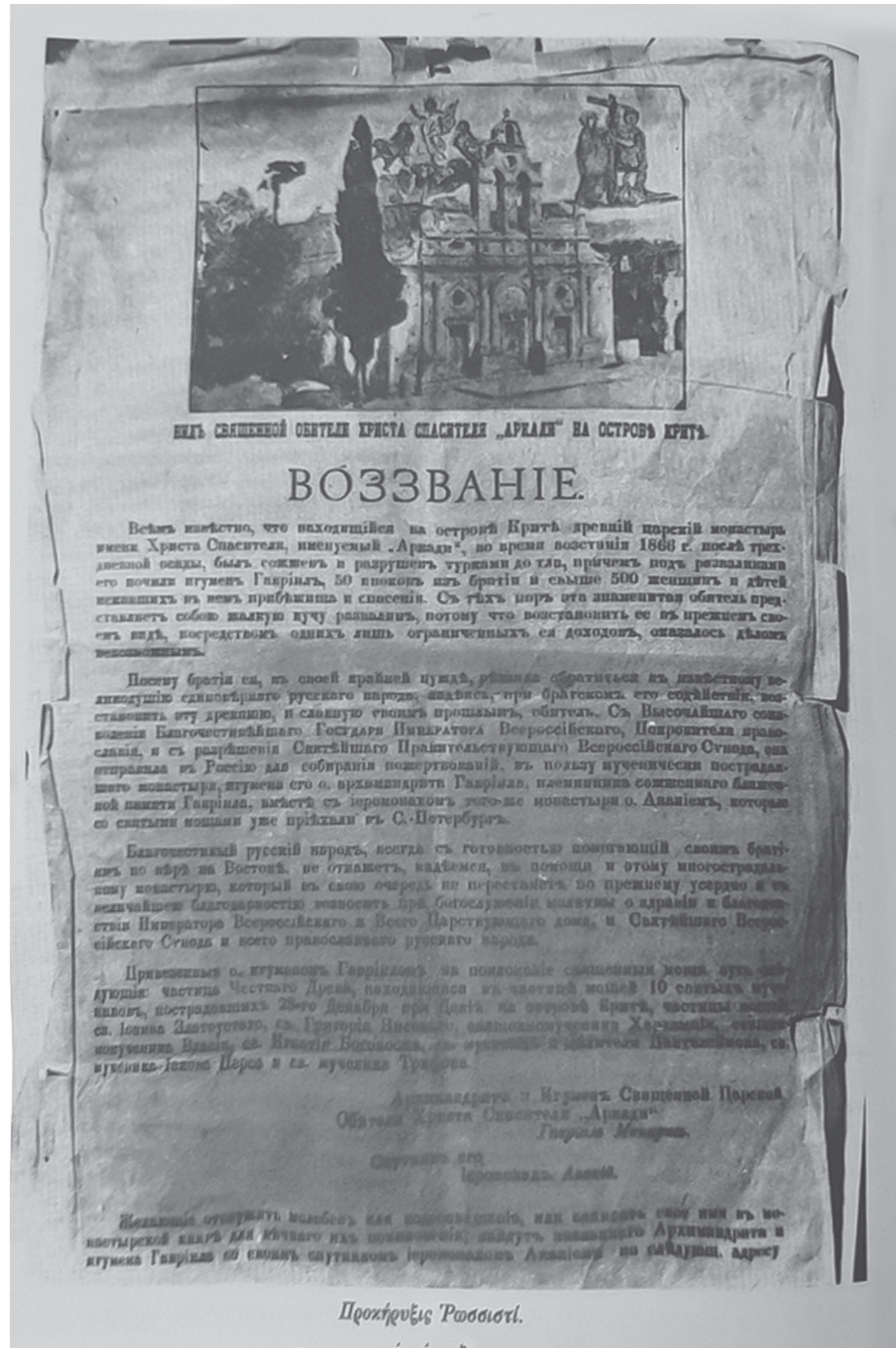


Fig. 4. Pamphlet in Russian advertising the fundraiser in aid of Arkadi Monastery, 1894. (Source: Maragoudakis, Dionysios. *To Ierón kai Hρωικόν της Κρήτης Αρκάδι*. Athens 2016, p. 222).



Fig. 5. Mitre manufactured in Moscow, 1895. Commissioned by Bishop Ierotheos Praoudakis of Rethymno, through the Abbot of Arkadi Monastery during the latter's fundraising mission (zeteia) in Russia, Ecclesiastical Museum of Rethymno. Photo: Sofia Katopi.

# II

## **RUSSIAN MIRACULOUS ICONS IN THE BALKAN CONTEXT - TRANSFER, VENERATION, TRANSFORMATION**

## Russian Saints and Miraculous Icons in the Serbian Churches (16th-19th centuries)

Nenad Makuljević

### Abstract

In early modern times there was an intensive transfer of Russian sacred visual culture to Serbian Orthodox churches, which saw numerous Russian books, icons, and iconostases arrive in the Balkan region. Some Russian sacred objects were purchased, but many were gifted by Russian benefactors. One of the significant characteristics and consequences of Russian-Serbian cultural communication was the transfer of icons and other sacred visual objects depicting certain Russian saints.

Copies of numerous miraculous icons were brought from Russia to Serbian churches in the same period. The most prominent cult among Serbs was dedicated to the icon of the Mother of God Vladimirskaya. Surviving icons of her are the oldest, with one example gaining special veneration as the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Vinča.

In the nineteenth century, icons and wall paintings depicting Russian saints of additional ideological significance began to appear. The best examples are those of Saint Alexander Nevsky, which were closely connected with the wars against the Ottoman Empire and Russian military aid.

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**Keywords:** Early modern times, Russian saints, Serbia, Vladimirskaya Mother of God, Mother of God of Vinča-Bezdin, catapetasma, St. Alexander Nevsky

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In second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, a time when the Balkans fell under Ottoman rule, Serbian church culture was significantly oriented towards Russian Orthodoxy. Travels to Russia, the education of clergy, monks and painters in Russian monasteries, the use of Russian books, and numerous translations into Serbian all led to a deep understanding of Russian Orthodox culture. Simultaneously, there was an intense transfer of Russian books, icons, and liturgical items to Serbian Orthodox

churches.<sup>1</sup> These extensive and long-lasting Serbian-Russian ties also facilitated the transfer of icons and other sacred visual objects associated with certain Russian saintly cults.

The relationship between Serbian and Russian religious cultures dates back to the Middle Ages;<sup>2</sup> Saint Sava Nemanjić, founder of the Serbian Church, was tonsured at the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos. Numerous appeals for assistance were made during the centuries of Ottoman rule, and Serbian monks travelled throughout Russia to seek aid. In the eighteenth century, part of the Serbian clergy from the Habsburg Monarchy attended the school at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, and Russian theological literature became exceptionally significant in the theology of the Karlovci Metropolitanate. The number of Serbian students in Russian theological schools increased over the following century, including prominent hierarchs of the Serbian Church such as Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanović of Belgrade and Bishop Nikodim Milaš of Dalmatia.<sup>3</sup> These centuries-old and intricate ties between the Serbian and Russian churches ensured that the Serbian hierarchy became well-acquainted with Russian spiritual culture and saintly cults, leaving numerous testimonies on the veneration of Russian holy objects.

One characteristic of Orthodox spiritual culture was the development of numerous local cults surrounding saints and miraculous icons. The miracles of the Mother of God and her icons were particularly venerated. Agapios Landos, a monk from Mount Athos, collected and published a book on the miracles of the Mother of God in 1641, which became very popular and was translated into Slavic languages. The theological understanding and popularization of miraculous icons were highly

- 1 The basic literature on the relationship between Serbian and Russian art is: Radojčić, Svetozar. “Веке између српске и руске уметности у средњем веку.” *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* I, (1948): 241–258; Petković, Sreten. “Руски утицај на српско сликарство XVI и XVII века.” *Starinar* XII, (1961): 91–109; Jovanović, Miodrag. “Руско-српске уметничке везе у XVIII веку.” *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* VII–1, (1963): 379–410; Jovanović, Miodrag. “Српска ликовна уметност и Русија крајем XIX и почетком XX века.” *Saopštenja Republičkog zavoda za zaštitu spomenika kulture* XV (1983): 119–126; Makuljević, Nenad. “Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији: (1882–1914).” Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu, 2007, 51–57, 159–181; Idem “Piety, Ideology, and Orthodoxy: Russian Icons in Serbian Church Culture (17th–19th Centuries).” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16th–early 20th Centuries)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, 137–145.
- 2 *Москва-Србија, Београд-Русија*, edited by Svetlana Dolgova, Ekaterina Ivanova, Anatolii Turilov and Tatjana Subotin-Golubović. Belgrade and Moscow: Arhiv Srbije, Glavnoe arhivnoe upravlenie goroda Moskvy, Federal’noe arhivnoe agentstvo, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv drevnih aktov, 2009.
- 3 Puzović, Vladislav. *Руски путеви српског богословља: школовање Срба на руским духовним академијама: 1849–1917*. Belgrade: Pravoslavni Bogoslovski fakultet, Službeni glasnik, 2017.

developed in Byzantine and Russian culture,<sup>4</sup> leading to the creation of literary works dedicated to them. This literature was also present and popularized in Serbian church circles.<sup>5</sup>

Existing insight into the transfer of Russian visual culture into Serbian churches shows that one of its essential characteristics was the arrival of copies of Russian miraculous icons. Most often crafted in “folk” workshops, these replicas were frequently brought to Serbia via trade routes, for believers who would purchase them, place them in their homes, or donate them to churches.

Numerous Russian icons are thus present in Serbian places of worship, from Dalmatia to Kosovo and Metohija. Serbian society became particularly familiar with them during the nineteenth century, and travelogues published in the press often highlighted their presence. Among many others<sup>6</sup>, the best known include the following: Mother of God Akhtyrskaya in the church in Doljani;<sup>7</sup> the icons of the Mother of God of Joy of All Who Sorrow in Doljani, Koprivnica, and Švica;<sup>8</sup> Mother of God Chelyabinskaya in Doljani;<sup>9</sup> the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya in Zalužnica<sup>10</sup> and Klinovac;<sup>11</sup> the Mother of God Smolenskaya in Tuzla<sup>12</sup> the Feodorovskaya icon of the Mother of God in Hilandar;<sup>13</sup> and Mother of God Kazanskaya in the monasteries of Hilandar and Rakovica.<sup>14</sup>

Probably the earliest Russian miraculous icon among the Serbs was the Vladimirskaya icon of the Mother of God.<sup>15</sup> One highly venerated and elaborately framed early copy, dating to the sixteenth century, was located in the Old Church in Sarajevo.<sup>16</sup> The Church of the Nativity of Saint John the

4 Lidov, A.M. (ed.). *Чудотворная икона в Византии и древней Руси*. Moscow: Martis, 1996.

5 Timotijević, Mirosлав. *Српско барокно сликарство*. Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1996, 356–358.

6 There is no complete list of copies of Russian miracle-working icons in Serbian churches.

7 Borčić, Vera. *Zbirka ikona Odjela Srba u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Povijesni muzej Hrvatske, 1974, 25.

8 Borčić, Vera. *Zbirka ikona Odjela Srba u Hrvatskoj*, 26, 45, 120.

9 Borčić, Vera. *Zbirka ikona Odjela Srba u Hrvatskoj*, 26.

10 Borčić, Vera. *Zbirka ikona Odjela Srba u Hrvatskoj*, 130.

11 Milovanović, Katarina. “Богородица Тихвинска.” in *Иконопис Врањске епархије*, edited by Mirosлав Timotijević and Nenad Makuljević. Belgrade and Vranje: Filozofski fakultet, Katedra za istoriju umetnosti novog veka; Eparhija Vranjska SPC, 2005, 118–119.

12 Rakić, Svetlana. *Иконе Босне и Херцеговине (16–19 вијек)*. Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1998, 328–329.

13 Petković, Sreten. *Иконе Манастира Хиландара*. Mount Athos: Hilandar Monastery, 1997, 58.

14 Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. *Манастир Раковица*. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2023, 207–209.

15 Tatić-Đurić, Mirjana. “Богородица Владимирска.” *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice srpske* 21, (1985): 29–50; Shchennikova, Ludmila. “Чудотворная икона «Богоматерь Владимирская» как «Одигитрия евангелиста Луки.» In *Чудотворная икона в Византии и Древней Руси*, edited by Alexei M. Lidov. Moscow: Martis, 1996, 252–286.

16 Rakić, Svetlana. *Иконе Босне и Херцеговине (16–19 вијек)*, 303–304.

Baptist in Stoni Beograd /Székesfehérvár houses a seventeenth-century version,<sup>17</sup> while Krušedol Monastery has a replica from the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

One unique example of Serbian-Russian spiritual connections and the veneration of Russian miraculous icons, as well as the transfer of their wonderworking powers in the eighteenth century, is linked to another version of the Virgin of Vladimir.<sup>19</sup> A monk named Paisios, a Greek from the island of Corfu, left a record of his life and the bringing of this icon to Serbia. Paisios was tonsured at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and, inspired by earlier saints who rebuilt and founded churches and monasteries, sought a place for asceticism and church-building.<sup>20</sup> Between 1717 and 1739, when northern Serbia was under Austrian rule, Orthodox ecclesiastical life underwent significant renewal, and so Paisios decided to come to Serbia. He arrived in Belgrade in 1727, bringing with him “the icon of our most holy mistress, the Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, which was painted by the Saint Apostle and Evangelist Luke, known as the Vladimirskaya Icon, ” adorned with silver, gold, and various embellishments. In Belgrade, Paisios was received by Bishop Stefan Ljubibratić, who placed the miraculous image in Belgrade Cathedral, where it “healed many of the sick.” Paisios then found and restored the abandoned monastery in Vinča near Belgrade. Two years later, on July 2, 1729, on the Feast of the Deposition of the Honourable Robe of the Mother of God at Blachernae, the icon was transferred from Belgrade to Vinča Monastery in a ceremonial procession with priests, deacons, Gospel readings, incense, and the singing of psalms. On arrival it was placed on a special throne, where it was highly venerated and assisted the faithful. The date of the icon’s transfer to Vinča became the monastery’s feast day.

In 1739, when the monks of Vinča fled to the Habsburg Monarchy before the advancing Ottoman army, the Virgin of Vladimir was transferred to Bezdin Monastery. Four years later, the icon’s significance and the veneration of its miraculous powers led Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović-Šakabenta to move it to the administrative centre of the Serbian Church in the Habsburg Monarchy, located in Sremski Karlovci, where it was housed in the patriarchal chapel. The patriarch commissioned a new silver cover for the icon in Vienna in 1745, and composed a prayer engraved on a silver plaque to mark the event.

17 Ševo, Ljiljana. *Црква Рођења светог Јована Претече у Стоном Београду*. Banja Luka: Art print, 2011, 125.

18 Timotijević, Mirosлав. *Манастир Крушедол*. Belgrade-Novı Sad: Draganić, Pokrajinski zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Vojvodine, 2008, Vol. II: 176.

19 Timotijević, Mirosлав. “Богородица Бездинска и верско-политички програм патријарха Арсенија IV Јовановића.” *Balkanica XXXII–XXXIII*, (2003): 311–339.

20 Ruvarac, Parion. “Судбина манастира Винче у Србији.” *Starinar* 2, (1887): 35–38; Grujić, Radoslav, “Прилози за историју Србије у доба аустријске окупације (1718–1739).” *Spomenik SKA LII, drugi razred knj.* 44, (1914): 167.

When the icon of the Virgin was returned to Bezdin in 1748, a copy of it was kept in the patriarchal chapel.<sup>21</sup> This was also highly venerated, and received a silver cover in 1750, along with a typical carved and gilded frame. The copy was transferred to the newly constructed Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Sremski Karlovci in 1781.

The Virgin of Vladimir-Vinča-Bezdin became one of the most popular icons among the Serbian population in the Habsburg Monarchy, with numerous copies preserved. It was also reproduced in prints,<sup>22</sup> contributing to the spread and growth of its cult.

Other Russian icons are also likely to have gained popularity in Serbian communities. One example appears to be the despotic icon of the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya from Velika Remeta, part of a larger group received by Abbot Grigorije in 1701, which originally belonged to Rakovica Monastery near Belgrade.<sup>23</sup> In the church at Stari Banovci there is an icon of the Mother of God with an inscription stating that it is a copy of the miraculous one from Velika Remeta, which it does indeed resemble. It was a gift from Abbot Grigorije, with iconography corresponding to that of the Tikhvinskaya Mother of God.<sup>24</sup> Another copy of the same Velika Remeta icon is on the “Virgin’s throne” proskynetarion in the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Zemun.<sup>25</sup> It is evident that during the 18th century, the cult of this Mother of God icon spread from Velika Remeta. Interestingly, the Mother of God painted by Leontei Stefanov in 1687 is yet another Russian icon at Velika Remeta that originally belonged to Rakovica Monastery, and it too is now venerated as miraculous.

## II

Intense Serbian-Russian spiritual ties also led to the presence of icons and wall paintings depicting certain Russian saints in Serbian churches.

21 The icon was kept in Bezdin Monastery until the First World War, after which Bishop Georgije Letić transferred it to Velika Kikinda and later to Vršac. The reason for its relocation was the annexation of the territory where Bezdin Monastery was located to Romania. Today, the icon is housed in the court chapel of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Banat in Vršac: Timotijević, Miroslav. “Богородица Бездинска,” 335.

22 Davidov, Dinko. *Српска графика XVIII века*, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2006, 301, 365–366, 376.

23 Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. *Манастир Раковица*, 193–205.

24 Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. *Манастир Раковица*, 204–205.

25 Momirović, Petar. “Две Богородичине иконе српске православне цркве у Старим Бановцима.” *Saopštenja Republičkog zavoda za zaštitu spomenika kulture XV* (1983): 285–294.

The treasury at Hilandar Monastery houses many such works, likely donated during frequent visits by Hilandar monks to Russia.<sup>26</sup> Surviving examples from the second half of the 16th century depict Saint Alexei the Wonderworker, Saint Leontius of Rostov, Saint Euthymius the Wonderworker, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, and Saint Theodore, Prince of Smolensk and Yaroslav, with his sons David and Constantine.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most characteristic Russian gifts was the Catapetasma, donated by Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible and his wife Anastasia in 1555. Its complex iconographic program highlights the tsar’s family, the role of the Russian Church, and Russian saints, connecting them to their Serbian counterparts. The central representation features Christ the Great High Priest, with the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist, while numerous saints are depicted in medallions. Among those shown are Saint Metropolitan Peter of Moscow and Saint Sava of Serbia, as well as Saint Sergius of Radonezh and Saint Simeon Nemanja of Serbia. Others include Saints Metropolitans Alexei and Jonah, John of Novgorod, Saint Leontius of Rostov, Saints Prince Vladimir, Boris and Gleb, and Saint Theodosius of Pechersk.<sup>28</sup>

In the Karlovci Metropolitanate, a large number of Russian saints were celebrated thanks to the use of Russian Menaion books. However, by order of the Austrian Count Koller, this practice was discontinued at the church-people’s assembly in Sremski Karlovci in 1769, when public celebrations of fifty-six feast days, twenty-seven of which were dedicated to Russian saints, were abolished.<sup>29</sup> The official veneration of Russian saints must have necessitated the acquisition of icons depicting them, though specific examples have yet to be precisely identified.

A significant testimony to Serbian-Russian cooperation and the success of Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanović was the establishment of the Serbian *podvorie* (metochion) in Moscow.<sup>30</sup> The Church of Saint Kir and John in Moscow was founded in the sixteenth century, and rebuilt by order of Empress Catherine II in 1762–1763, but fell victim to looting during Napoleon’s siege of Moscow in 1812. The Holy Synod and the Russian state gifted the building to the Orthodox Church of the Principality of Serbia as the Serbian representation in 1873. It was rapidly restored with the help of the Moscow merchant V. V. Sisoyev and other benefactors, and consecrated the following year. At that time, the church received a new

26 Petković, Sreten. “Хиландар и Русија у XVI и XVII веку.” In *Казивања о Светој Гори*, edited by Milka Janković. Belgrade: Prosveta, 1995, 143–170.

27 Petković, Sreten. “Хиландар и Русија у XVI и XVII веку,” 162–163.

28 Petković, Sreten. “Хиландар и Русија у XVI и XVII веку,” 161–162; Smirnova, Engelina, “Катапетасма 1555 г. К иконографической программе okayмления.” In *Осам векова Хиландара: историја, духовни живот, књижевност, уметност и архитектура*, edited by V. Korać. Belgrade: SANU, 2000, 495–502.

29 Kostić, Mita. *Гроф Колер као културнопросветни реформатор код Срба у Угарској у XVIII веку*. Belgrade: SKA, 1932, 135; Timotijević, Miroslav. *Српско барокно*, 377–378.

30 Jovanović, Platon. *Српско подворје у Москви*, Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1901.

dedication to the Annunciation, celebrated on November 30, coinciding with the feast of Saint Andrew the First-Called, a Serbian state holiday commemorating the issuance of the Hatt-i Sharif in 1830.<sup>31</sup>

During restoration work on the church, a new iconostasis was created based on the “Cross Church of the Merciful Saviour” in Rostov in the Yaroslavl region. This was a tall structure with four tiers of icons; those from the old iconostasis were purchased by Sisoyev and donated to a church in Montenegro. Six icons painted by “I.K. Kondrat on a gold field” were displayed on the church walls. They depicted Saint Sava of Serbia, the Unmercenary Saints Kir and John, Saint Andrew the First-Called, Venerable Sergius of Radonezh, the Moscow saints Peter, Alexis, Jonah, and Philip, Saint Basil the Blessed, and Great Martyr Barbara.

Wall paintings were executed in fresco technique on “golden fields”. Among the numerous Serbian and Russian saints depicted are: Saint Sava of Serbia; Saint Simeon Nemanja; Saint Cyprian, Metropolitan of Moscow; Saint Peter of Cetinje, Metropolitan of Montenegro; Saint Demetrius, Metropolitan of Rostov; Venerable Angelina, the Serbian Despotess; Saint Arsenius I, Archbishop of Serbia; Saint Maximus the Hungarian-Wallachian; Saint Stefan Dečanski; Saint King Milutin; Righteous Philaret the Merciful, “in memory of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow”; the Slavic enlighteners Cyril and Methodius; Saint Alexander Nevsky, “in memory of Tsar Alexander Nikolaevich, who gifted this church to the Serbian clergy”; and Great Martyr Catherine, “in memory of Empress Catherine II, who built this church.” Icons of the Mother of God Vladimirskaya and the Mother of God of Kaluga were placed on the altar.<sup>32</sup>

During the Serbian-Turkish Wars of 1876–1878, the presence and promotion of Russian saintly cults became particularly significant. One group of Russian volunteers carried a tent chapel dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky<sup>33</sup> onto the battlefield in Serbia. A church dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky was subsequently established in Belgrade, becoming the most important site for the dissemination of his cult in Serbia. Icons from the aforementioned military tent church are now located in the village church of Kloka near Kragujevac, including an icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky.<sup>34</sup>

31 “Osveštenje crkve srpskoga Podvorja u Moskvi na dan prvozvanog Andreja 1874. god.” *Sion* 45, (18. 12. 1874): 705–707; “Kratki opis Krsto-Blagoveštenske crkve srpskog podvorja, u Moskvi.” *Sion* 14, (16. 04. 1875): 209–212.

32 “Kratki opis Krsto-Blagoveštenske crkve srpskog podvorja, u Moskvi.” *Sion* 15, (21.04. 1875): 225–228.

33 Mežinski, Jelena, “Храм Св. Александар Невског у Београду.” In *Храм Светог Александра Невског у Београду: споменица поводом стогодишњице постојања храма 1912–2012*, edited by M. Arsenijević. Belgrade: Pravoslavna misionarska škola pri hramu Sv. Aleksandra Nevskog, 2013, 25–42.

34 Mežinski, Jelena. “Храм Св. Александар Невског у Београду,” 164.

During the Serbian-Turkish Wars, Nikolai Nikolayevich Rajevsky came to Serbia and died in battle. In his memory, a church was built in Gornji Adrovac by his relative Marija Rayevsky. The wall paintings, at least partially designed by Viktor Vasnetsov, memorialize significant events in Serbian and Russian history, along with national holy warriors, including the Coronation of Saint Stefan the First-Crowned and the Baptism of Rus, as well as Saint Prince Lazar and Saint Alexander Nevsky.<sup>35</sup>

Representations of Russian and Serbian saints are also to be found on the iconostasis of Sarajevo Cathedral.<sup>36</sup> Abbot Ignatius from the Monastery of Saint Sergius near Saint Petersburg was prominently involved in this gift from Russian benefactors, which bears depictions of numerous Russian and Serbian saints. Saint Arsenius of Serbia, Saint Sava of Serbia, Saint Alexander Nevsky, and Saint Eugene Bishop of Cherson all appear in the row of throne icons. Medallions above the depictions of apostles and prophets in the upper zone of the iconostasis show Saint Demetrius, Metropolitan of Rostov; Saint Eugenia the Great Martyr; Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow; Saint Prince Vladimir; and Saint Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh.

## Conclusions

Centuries-long cultural and spiritual ties between Serbia and Russia facilitated the transfer of Russian miraculous icons and iconic depictions of Russian saints into Serbian churches. Often painted by “folk” iconographers, they can still be found in numerous Serbian churches from Dalmatia to Kosovo and Metohija, clearly testifying to their immense popularity. A unique example is one copy of the icon Mother of God Vladimirskaya, which gained an entirely new life in the Serbian environment: it was venerated as miraculous, received a new name, and was celebrated as the Mother of God of Vinčan-Bezdan.

Depictions of Russian saints appear on individual icons, but their most extensive repertoire can be found on the Catapetasma of Ivan the Terrible for Hilandar Monastery, in the wall paintings of the Serbian podvorje in Moscow, and on the iconostasis of Sarajevo Cathedral. In these complex works, Serbian and Russian saints are depicted together, resembling a unified choir of saints. They bear clear testimony to shared Russian-Serbian spiritual culture.

35 Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност*, 23; Kostić, Ana and Rakonjac, Teodora, “Memorial Church in Gornji Adrovac as a Symbol of Serbo-Russian Cultural, Political, National, and Artistic Ties in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century.” *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta*, No. 1 (2024): 238–254.

36 Lakić, Marija. “Russian and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture in the 19th Century: Russian Donations and the Furnishing of the Orthodox Cathedral in Sarajevo.” In *The Transfer of Icons and Religious Objects From the Russian Empire to Serbian Communities*, edited by N. Makuljević, Belgrade. -Rethymno: Faculty of Philosophy University of Belgrade- Institute for Mediterranean Studies: FORTH 2025, 168–191.





Fig. 1. Mother of God Feodorovskaya, 1643, Hilandar Monastery, (Source: Petković, Sreten, *Иконе Манастира Хиландара*, Sveta Gora Atonska: Manastir Hilandar, 1997).



Fig. 2. Mother of God Vladimirskaya, 16th century, Old Church in Sarajevo, (Source: Rakić, Svetlana, *Иконе Босне и Херцеговине (16–19 вијек)*, Beograd: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1998).



Fig. 3. Mother of God of Vladimir-Vinča-Bezdin, 18th century, Bishop's Palace Vršac, (Source: [http://manastir-bezdin.blogspot.com/p/blog-page\\_9178.html](http://manastir-bezdin.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_9178.html)).



Fig. 4. Mother of God Tikhvinskaya from Velika Remeta Monastery, end of 17th century, Museum of Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade, (Source: Ženarju Rajović, Ivana, *Manastir Rakovica*, Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2023).



Fig. 5. Saint Leontius of Rostov, mid-16th century, Hilandar Monastery, (Source: Petković, Sreten, *Иконе Манастира Хиландара*, Sveta Gora Atonska: Manastir Hilandar, 1997).



Fig. 6. Catapetasma, donated by Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible and his wife Anastasia in 1555 to Hilandar Monastery, (Source: Petković, Sreten, *Хиландар*, Beograd: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1999).



Fig. 7. Saint Alexander Nevsky, 1903, Memorial Church of Nikolai Rayevsky in Gornji Adrovac.  
Photo: Ana Kostić.



Fig. 8. Iconostasis, 1871, Cathedral Church in Sarajevo. Photo: Marija Lakić



Fig. 9. Saint Alexander Nevsky, 1871, Iconostasis, Cathedral Church in Sarajevo. Photo: Marija Lakić.

## Russian Icons and Cults in the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery under Ottoman Rule

Ivana Ženarju Rajović

### Abstract

The strongest cult to emerge at the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery was that of the miracle-working icon of the Virgin, the palladium of the city. Believed to have been the work of St Luke, it was actually painted at the Armory chamber in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery possessed several other Russian icons from the 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them are representative of important cults in Serbian and Russian milieus, such as the icon of St Sava and St Simeon of Serbia and the icon of the Venerable Joseph Volotsky.

**Keywords:** Russian icons, miraculous icon, cults, Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

Along with the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome or New Constantinople,<sup>1</sup> Russia became the protector of Orthodoxy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the main destination for all seeking spiritual and material patronage. This idea flourished during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, who declared himself the patron of Christians in the Balkans in 1710, prompting representatives of Orthodox monasteries to travel to Russia.<sup>2</sup> In Moscow, many monastic delegations from the Ottoman Empire received alms

1 Poe, Marshall. "Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a 'Pivotal Moment'." *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49 (3) (2001), 412–413.

2 See: Dimitrijević, Stevan. "Грађа за српску историју из српских архива и библиотека." *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije* 53 (1922); Floria, B. N. (ed.), *Связи России с народами Балканского полуострова (первая половина XVII в.)*. Moscow: Nauka, 1990; Turilov, Anatolii Arkad'evich. "Културне везе Московске Русије и Србије од XIV до XVI века." In *Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија = Москва – Србија, Белград – Россия. Документа и материјали = сборник документов и материалов*, edited by Svetlana Dolgova et al. Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije; Moscow: Glavnoe arhivnoe upravlenie goroda Moskvy 2009, Vol. 1: 142–178; On these journeys and the reception and distribution of financial and other aid in Russia, see: Karterev, Nikolai Fëdorovich. *Характер отношений России к православному Востоку в XVI и XVII столетиях*. Moscow: tip. L. F. Snegireva 1885, 105–145.

certificates (donation charters) for their monasteries, which determined the interval of future visits to the city and the size of visiting delegations. They stated how often, for how many years, and how many monks could go to Russia to collect donations for their monastery. Many Serbian monasteries had such charters, including the Patriarchate of Peć.<sup>3</sup> At the request of Metropolitan Simeon, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery received an alms certificate from Emperor Michael Feodorovich in 1641. It allowed a delegation of three to four monks to travel to Moscow every seven to eight years for financial and other assistance.<sup>4</sup> The Patriarchate of Peć monastery was established by Archbishop Arsenije in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and had served as the seat of the Serbian Archbishopric in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was also the seat of the Patriarchate between 1557 and 1766, when it was annexed to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Peć Monastery was part of the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, as it is today. As a result of the Peć monks' visits to Russia, the monastic treasury once possessed several 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian icons.

The most significant Russian icon from the Patriarchate of Peć is also one of the most highly venerated objects of piety and worship at the monastery as a pilgrimage centre. It is the miracle-working icon of the Virgin (fig. 1), traditionally believed to have been painted by St Luke the Evangelist and brought to the monastery by the first Serbian archbishop, St Sava, from Jerusalem or Mount Athos.<sup>5</sup> Known as the miraculous icon of Peć, the palladium of the city, it was in fact painted at the Kremlin Armoury Chamber at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Peć icon depicts the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus Christ with a rolled-up scroll in his hand, surrounded by twelve miniature figures of the apostles, with four warrior saints below them – George, Procopius, Demetrius, and Mercurius. The infant Christ is on the left, on his mother's right hand, and iconographically, the work belongs to the Hodegetria Dexiokratousa type, being a copy of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God of Jerusalem, also known as the Virgin of Gethsemane. The icon is encased in a golden revetment assumed to be the work of Peć goldsmiths, which mirrors the inscription written on the icon.<sup>6</sup> Inscription is placed at the very bottom, on both sides flanking the warrior figures, and it contains a legend stating that it was painted by the hand of the Holy Apostle in the fifteenth year after the Ascension of Christ in Gethsemane, where the

3 Karterev, *Характер отношений России*, 133–134; Dolgova, Svetlana, and Ekaterina I. Ivanova. "Руско-српске православне везе од XVI до XVIII века." In *Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија = Москва – Србија, Белград – Россия*. 2009, Vol 1: 54, 74–75.

4 Dimitrijević, Stevan. "Прилози расправи, Одношаји пећких патријараха с Русијом у XVII веку." *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije* XXXVIII (1900): 60–61.

5 Brkić, Antonije. *Тивоти Срба светитеља под сводовима цркава Пећке патријаршије*. Peć: Uprava manastira Pečke patrijaršije, 1964, 13–14; Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. *Црквена уметност у Рашко-призренској епархији (1839–1912)*. Leposavić: Institut za srpsku kulturu Priština, 2016, 213.

6 Nikčević et al. (eds.), *Пресвета Богородица Красница Пећка – Заштитница и спаситељница рода србскога крстоноснога*. Cetinje: Svetigora; Peć: manastir Pečka patrijaršija, 2015, 59.

tomb of the Virgin Mary is located. It goes on to say that Emperor Leo brought the icon from Jerusalem to Constantinople, where it helped the city withstand Scythian invasions and performed many other miracles. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it was transferred to Kherson during a Russian attack on Constantinople. After the Russian prince Vladimir was baptized there, he took the icon to Veliky Novgorod. The text further states that it had an inscription in Greek, which was translated into Church Slavonic. At this point, the text written on the Peć icon becomes illegible, and nothing can be read except that it was transferred somewhere else by order of an unknown emperor.<sup>7</sup> The miraculous icon of the Mother of God of Jerusalem from the Kremlin Assumption Cathedral, believed to be the prototype, had almost the same inscription, written in Russian and Greek, to which it was probably transferred to Moscow in the time of Ivan the Terrible.<sup>8</sup> While the icon was at the Kremlin, it was restored by famous painter Kirill Ulanov, who worked at the Armoury and also made several copies of this icon, as well.<sup>9</sup> It remained at the Assumption Cathedral until Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, when it was stolen from the church, so it was replaced by the copy which is also revered as miraculous.<sup>10</sup>

The miraculous icon of Peć was and still is the focal point of the monastery's sacred space and is prominently displayed next to the graves of its founders. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it has stood on a magnificent carved wooden throne produced by Macedonian artisans and icon painters in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> As the protector of the monastery and the city of Peć, on certain occasions, such as severe and long-lasting droughts or epidemics of infectious diseases, the icon was paraded in ceremonial processions through the city, accompanied by local crowds, monks, and priests. Due to its apotropaic and healing properties, for centuries it has been an object of special veneration in female piety. Members of other religions also visited the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery to see the miraculous icon, seeking salvation and comfort, and it was known as Saint Merima among local Muslims.<sup>12</sup> The icon eventually got its own liturgical service, titled *The Service*

7 Nikčević et al. (eds.). *Пресвета Богородица Красница Пећка*, 36.

8 Tolstaia, Tat'iana. "Икона «Богоматерь Иерусалимская Гефсиманская» из Успенского собора Моск. Кремля и ее легенда." In *Византийский мир: искусство Константинополя и национальные традиции: к 2000-летию христианства*, edited by Mariia Orlova. Moscow: Severnui palomnik, 2005, 649; Pivovarova, Nadezhda Valer'evna. "Иерусалимская икона Божией Матери из Успенского собора Московского Кремля и ее утраченный оригинал. К вопросу о копировании древних икон московскими мастерами на рубеже XVII–XVIII веков." *Vestnik Sankt-Petersburgskogo universiteta Iskusstvovedenie* 8, no. 3 (2018): 439

9 For more about this painter: Kochetkov, I. A. (ed.). *Словарь русских иконописцев XI–XVII вв.* Moscow: Indrik, 2009, 668–676. About Ulanov's interest in the iconography of the Virgin of Jerusalem and its copies he made, see: Komashko, Nataliia. "«Богоматерь Иерусалимская (Гэфсиманская)» письма Кирилла Уланова." In *Византийский мир: искусство Константинополя и национальные традиции: к 2000-летию христианства*, edited by Mariia Orlova, 663–668. Moscow: Severnui palomnik, 2005

10 Tolstaia, Tat'iana. "Икона «Богоматерь Иерусалимская Гефсиманская», 647.

11 Ženarju Rajović, *Цркvena umetnost u Raško-prizrenskoj*, 213–214.

12 Petrović, Milić F., *Документи о Рашкој области: 1900–1912*. Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1995, 168.

of the Presentation of the Miracle-Working Icon of Peć (*Служба сретeњу чудотворне иконе пресвете Богородице зване Пећке*), written and published in 1812 owing to the efforts of the priest Nikodim Dimitrijević Svetogorac and the Prizren faithful. It also has an *Akathistos*, published in 1894, thanks to the Serbian Metropolitan Mihailo (Michael).<sup>13</sup> The miracle-working icon of Peć has played a significant role in the history of the monastery, and not only for devotional reasons: it helped repay the monastery's debt in 1907 when it toured the Diocese of Raška and Prizren in a fund-raising "holy expedition."<sup>14</sup> The icon's status could be compared to that of the Mother of God Ierosolymitissa, from the Church of the Tomb of the Virgin in Gethsemane in Jerusalem, painted in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

Mostly due to its cult status rather than artistic merit and style, the Peć icon has had an impact on the visual culture of the "host society," producing several known local copies. The oldest one, set in an exquisite wood engraving, was made by an unknown painter in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was brought to Gorioč Monastery from an endangered church during the March Pogrom of 2004, then to Ulije Monastery near Leposavić in 2021, and restored in 2023. Interestingly, only the central motif of this artwork is a copy of the Peć icon, with other saints selected to reflect the owner's personal devotional preferences. The same applies to other copies, such as two icons from the treasury of the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in Belo Polje, a metochion of Peć Monastery. One depicted the Virgin and Christ with two saints, while the other was painted with two angels. The church was burned and looted in 1999 and 2004, when the icons were probably destroyed.<sup>16</sup> The only copy of the Peć miracle-worker published so far is the one painted in 1806 by the famous Serbian icon painter Aleksije Lazović, commissioned by the Gavrilović family<sup>17</sup> (fig. 2).

Besides the miraculous icon of Peć, several other Russian icons mostly painted in the 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries once belonged to the monastery treasury and are now kept in the Museum of the Serbian

13 Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. "Economy and Cult of Relics: The Miracle-Working Icon of the Virgin and Financing the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery." In *Cultures of Economy in South-Eastern Europe. Spotlights and Perspectives*. Edited by Jurij Murašov et al. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020, 111.

14 *Ibid*, 111–122.

15 See: Keshman W., Anastasia. "Panagia Ierosolymitissa Icon – An Instance in the Mutuality of Traditions in the Holy Land of the 19th and 20th Centuries." In *Marginalia: Art Readings*, edited by Ivanka Gergova and Elissaveta Moussakova. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, BAS 2019, 307–320.

16 Jokić, Branko (ed.). *March Pogrom in Kosovo and Metohija, March 17–19, 2004: With a Survey of Destroyed and Endangered Christian Cultural Heritage*. Belgrade: Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, 2004, 40.

17 Matić, Miljana. "Богородица са Христом, пророцима и светитељима." In *Српско уметничко наслеђе на Косову и Метохији. Идентитет, значај, угроженост. Измењено и допуњено издање, Београд 2017 (каталог изложбе)*, edited by Miodrag Marković and Dragan Vojvodić. Belgrade: Galerija Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, 2017, 478.

Orthodox Church.<sup>18</sup> Some are now lost. Others, such as the icon of St Sava and St Simeon of Serbia and the icon of the Venerable Joseph Volotsky, are representative of important cults in both Serbian and Russian milieus.

The icon of St Sava and St Simeon of Serbia (fig. 3) represents a fine example of the Moscow style of icon painting from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> The renowned Serbian saints, a father and son, are depicted as standing figures with golden haloes in a rocky landscape, facing each other in a three-quarter stance. The inscription identifies them as Saint Sava, Archbishop of Serbia and Wonderworker, and the Venerable Simeon of Serbia the Myrrh-Gusher. They address Christ Emmanuel, shown blessing them from above in a segment of the sky. Saint Sava, on the left, is a young hierarch with brown hair and beard. He is dressed in episcopal vestments in red, green, and gold, consisting of a sticharion with an epitrachelion, over which he wears a richly embroidered gold-woven polystavrion with a multilayered stylized cross pattern. St Sava holds a gospel in his right hand. His father, painted opposite him, wears the Great Schema vestments – a simple light-colored monastic robe with a dark cloak and a hood, and an analavos decorated with the red Golgotha Cross. In his lowered left hand he holds an unrolled scroll with the text of Psalm 34:11: “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you to fear the Lord.”

Simeon was the monastic name of Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja, founder of the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty. His cult spread from Studenica Monastery, where his relics are located, boosted by encouraging impulses from Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, which he founded and where he took his monastic vow.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the historical facts and St Simeon’s importance as the great prince of Raška and the progenitor of the Nemanjić dynasty, the medieval Serbian ruling family that produced a number of locally revered saints and thus came to be known as “saint-bearing,” the strength of the associated cult rested on numerous miracles before his myrrh-exuding relics, as a result of which he was regularly designated as the Myrrh-Gusher.<sup>21</sup> During the Ottoman era, an iconographic pattern of St Simeon the Myrrh-Streamer as a *megaloschemos* monk with a model of Studenica in his hands emerged. It

18 I am grateful to my dear colleague Alexandr Preobrazhensky for his help in the dating and attribution of Russian icons from the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery.

19 Now in the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, this icon dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Matić, Miljana. “Свети Сава и Свети Симеон српски.” *ibid*, 474–475.

20 On the emergence of St Simeon’s cult: Popović, Danica. “О настанку култа светог Симеона.” In *Стефан Немања - Свети Симеон Мироточиви - историја и предање*, edited by Jovanka Kalić. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 2000, 347–369. On the use of his cult in the Metropolitanate of Karlovci: Timotijević, Miroslav. “Стефан Немања у барокном верско-политичком програму Српске цркве.” In Kalić (ed.), *Стефан Немања - Свети Симеон Мироточиви*, 395–407.

21 Pavlović, Leontije. *Култови Лица Код Срба И Македонаца. Историјско-етнографска Расправа*. Smederevo: Narodni muzej, 1965, 42.

emphasized his renunciation of worldly power and his ktetor role in founding the monastery, while at the same time glorifying the status of monasticism as the backbone of church organization and religious life under Ottoman rule.<sup>22</sup> Simeon’s youngest son, Rastko, took the monastic vow and the name Sava in his youth, later becoming the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its first archbishop. His cult spread from Mileševa Monastery, where he was buried, though strong centres of his cult were also to be found at the monasteries of Hilandar, which he founded with his father, and the Holy Trinity in Pljevlja, which held the relic of his left hand.<sup>23</sup> The usual representation of St Sava in Post-Byzantine art was a portrait with his father, St Simeon.<sup>24</sup> While his father is always painted as a monk, St Sava is dressed as archbishop, both typically rendered in frontal postures. They stand at the head of the sacred lineage of Serbian rulers, another dominant theme in Serbian religious art. Portraits of the members of the Nemanjić, Lazarević, and Branković ruling families create a visual program encapsulating the authenticity of the Serbian medieval legacy and direct links with the past, while simultaneously glorifying them.<sup>25</sup> However, while St Simeon was routinely painted as a *megaloschemos* monk and St Sava in episcopal vestments, other Serbian saints were shown in royal regalia, with attributes of royal dignity and martyrdom.

The presence of icons with images of the Serbian saints Sava and Simeon in Russia is not surprising, as they were known and revered in various Russian circles, not least from monks’ endowments. The earliest literary compositions mentioning St Sava emerged in Russia in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, and were soon followed by biographies and services dedicated to him.<sup>26</sup> A stronger influence on Russian literature was exerted by Theodosius’s *Life of St Sava*, which Grand Duke Vasily III received as a gift in 1517 from

22 On the iconography of St Simeon: Petković, Sreten. “О иконографији Светог Симеона Српског у доба турске владавине.” In Kalić (ed.), *Стефан Немања - Свети Симеон Мироточиви*, 383–392.

23 Pavlović, Leontije. *Култови Лица Код Срба И Македонаца*, 65–68; The cult of St Sava also spread to Russia, as well as to Bulgaria, where he died. See: Petković, Sreten. “Свети Сава Српски у старом руском сликарству.” In *Српски светитељи у сликарству православних народа*, edited by Sreten Petković. Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 2007, 7–31; *Ibid*, “Представе Светога Саве Српског у бугарској уметности XVI и XVII века.” In *Српски светитељи*, 32–43.

24 In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St Sava was celebrated as a patron of education. His first portrait as an educator, completely separating the cult surrounding him from that of his father, St Simeon, was painted in the Church of Ss Peter and Paul in Tutin, in the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Ženarju Rajović, Ivana. “St Sava in the religious art of the Raška and Prizren Diocese in the last century of the Ottoman rule.” In *Niš i Vizantija 15*. Edited by Miša Rakocija. Niš: Univerzitet u Nišu, Pravoslavna eparhija niška, Niški kulturni centar, 2017, 361–376.

25 On the creation of the Serbian choir of saints and its religious and political role in the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, see: Timotijević, Miroslav. “‘Serbia sacra’ и ‘Serbia sancta’ у барокном верско-политичком програму Карловачке митрополије.” In *Свети Сава у српској историји и традицији*. Edited by Sima Ćirković. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1998, 387–431.

26 Petković, Sreten. “Свети Сава у старом руском и румунском сликарству.” In *Свети Сава у српској историји и традицији*, 8.

the monk Isaiah of Mount Athos. It was translated into Russian by dozens of authors over the following decades.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Russian church officials were also familiar with the icons of St Sava and St Simeon thanks to the gifts of Serbian monks who went to Russia to seek help for their monasteries. Written sources show that the monks of Hilandar and Mileševa brought icons depicting the father and son to Moscow.<sup>28</sup> Ivan IV the Terrible received an icon of them encased in silver and decorated with pearls from a Hilandar delegation in 1550.<sup>29</sup> His successor, Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich, also received an icon of St Sava and St Simeon from a Mileševa delegation, and this tradition continued over the following centuries.<sup>30</sup> It is interesting that almost all known icons of St Sava in Russia date from the time of Ivan the Terrible.<sup>31</sup> His maternal grandmother was Ana Glinskaya, née Jakšić, whose father Stefan had been a prominent nobleman in the service of Matthias Corvinus, and her grandfather Jakša had been a duke under Despot Đurđe Branković.<sup>32</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, a period that saw an increased influx of Serbian monks, icons with images of Serbian saints also appeared.

The icon of the Virgin and the Venerable Joseph Volotsky (fig. 4) comes from the late 17<sup>th</sup> or very beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> The example seen here represents one of several variants – he kneels before the Virgin Mary, who is standing on the right, with a bust of Christ above him in a cloud. The Virgin Mary is standing on clouds, holding a scroll with the words of her intercessory prayer in her hands. The icon is badly damaged, with the paint worn off on the waist-length figure of Christ, of whom only some brown hair and one eye remain visible. A surviving drawing reveals that he was depicted in three-quarter view, blessing with his right hand and probably holding a closed book in his left hand. In other variations, Saint Joseph Volotsky tends to be shown as a stand-alone full-length or half-length figure; while a third variant, close to the one from the Patriarchate of Peć, renders him in three-quarter view as a standing figure addressing Christ or the Virgin Mary with Christ, positioned in the upper left corner.<sup>34</sup>

27 Ibid, 9.

28 Rogov, A. I. “Культурные связи России с Балканскими странами в первой половине XVII в.” In *Связи России с народами Балканского полуострова (первая половина XVII в.)*, edited by B. N. Floria. Moscow: Nauka, 1990, 116.

29 Petković, Sreten. “Свети Сава,” 11.

30 Sava and Simeon were painted in 1564/65, or repainted in 1666, in the first fresco zone in the Cathedral of the Archangel, where they are designated as miracle workers; Sava also appears as a stand-alone figure in the sanctuary, where he is joined by Russian hierarchs. Ibid, 15. pic. 1.

31 Ibid, 28.

32 Ibid, 13.

33 Published in Vasilic, Angelina and Mirjana Šakota. *Ризница манастира Пећке патријаршије*. Priština: Zavoz za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1957, Vol. 2: 11.

34 See Iana Zelenina and Ella Shevchenko. “«В телеси, яко безплотен»: Иконография преподобного Иосифа Волоцкого.” In «Сияние светильник учения его...» *Преподобный Иосиф Волоцкий в русской духовной культуре*, edited by L. I. Alekhina, Ia. Ė. Zelenina, I. V. Pozdeeva. Moscow: Leto, 2019, 246–336.

The Venerable Joseph (Iosif) Volotsky, born Ivan Sanin (1439–1515), also known as Volkolamsk, a Russian Orthodox Church theologian, was the founder and first *hegumen* (abbot) of the well-known Volokolamsk (Iosifo-Volotskii) Monastery,<sup>35</sup> which he established in 1479. In his monastic life he was active in ecclesiastical politics and authored sixteen discourses, comprising the Book against the Novgorodian Heretics commonly known as *The Enlightener*, and two monastic Rules.<sup>36</sup> He made his mark on his era through persistent work to establish orderly cenobitic monasticism as a well-functioning community throughout Russia. Among other things, Joseph Volotsky championed the concept of monastic landownership, promoted the idea of the divine origin of imperial power, and fought against heresy.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to icons associated with specific cults, the Peć treasury included other icons depicting saints and major feasts, celebrated across multiple Christian traditions. Now lost, they are known only from photographs taken by the Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Priština between 1981 and 1983, before and after their conservation. The only surviving icon is that of the Nativity of Christ (fig. 5), datable to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably from the Upper Volga region, perhaps from Kostroma, now in the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>38</sup> The icon is based on the Gospel accounts of the birth of the infant Christ by the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18–23, 2:1–12; Luke 2:6–20), but also includes some apocryphal stories. The complex multi-figure composition of the icon with the main inscription in the upper part of the integral frame reflects the complexity of the history of the renewal of humanity in Christ. It consists of many plotlines, which are easy to read separately, supplemented by inscriptions, and compositionally connected into a unified whole.<sup>39</sup> The Mother of God is positioned centrally at the top, with the infant Christ below, with an ox and a donkey bending over him. Above them is a flying angel with a star. In the upper left corner are the Three Magi on horseback, while opposite them, in the right corner, there is a scene in a garden, with an angel above the boy. Above the central image of the Virgin and Christ, two scenes show the bathing of the infant Christ and Joseph with a shepherd, who is interpreted either as an evil spirit

35 On the life of Venerable Joseph, see: Nazarenko A. V. (ed.). *Преподобный Иосиф Волоцкий*. Moscow: Institut ekonomicheskikh strategii, 2010.

36 Szeftel, Marc. “Joseph Volotsky’s Political Ideas in a New Historical Perspectives.” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 13, H. 1 (April 1965): 19 (19–29); Goldfrank, David. “Old and New Perspectives on Iosif Volotsky’s Monastic Rules.” *Slavic Review*, Volume 34, Issue 2 (June 1975): 279 (279–301).

37 Dunaev, Aleksandr I. *Историјско-богословска оцена односа између Цркве и државе у Русији у XV–XVI веку: (критичко-компаративна анализа)*. PhD diss., University of Belgrade, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, 2022, 75–82, 97–100.

38 Published in: Vasilic and Šakota. *Ризница манастира Пећке патријаршије*, Vol. 2: 10.

39 See: Kostsova, A., Musin. “Rozhdestvo Khristovo.” In *София Премудрость Божия. Выставка русской иконописи XIII–XIX веков из собраний музеев России*. Moscow: Radunitsa 2000, 170–171.

tempting him, or as the prophet Isaiah, who predicted the birth of the Savior.<sup>40</sup> There are also two scenes at the bottom. In the left corner, the Adoration of the Magi scene shows the Virgin sitting with the infant Christ on a throne in an edifice, while the Magi present their offerings. The Flight into Egypt is depicted on the right side of the icon.<sup>41</sup>

The late 17<sup>th</sup>- or early 18<sup>th</sup>-century icons at Peć include an icon of St Stephen the Archdeacon (fig. 6), depicted as a standing figure in his deacon vestment, with a trikirion in his right hand. Above the archdeacon, the frame of the icon features an image of Jesus Christ Emmanuel. An icon of a winged St John the Baptist (fig. 7) shows the saint in the desert, holding a scroll and the sacred chalice with the nude infant Christ. He is depicted addressing Christ in the upper left corner. An icon of St Nicholas (fig. 8) of Myra shows a half-length figure of the saint with the Gospel in his hand, with Christ and the Virgin Mary above his shoulders. There are also icons of the Ascension of Christ (fig. 9) and the Annunciation (fig. 10), likewise heavily damaged by the time they were photographed in the 1980s. Black-and-white photography makes it impossible to see the colour palette of these icons, but it is evident that they all had a coloured frame and a central theme painted in the recessed part of the icon. Icon of the Ascension of Christ is compositionally divided into two horizontal bands. The upper part depicts Jesus Christ ascending to Heaven, blessing with both hands, with his mandorla carried by four angels, while below them are the Virgin Mary with two angels and the apostles. The Annunciation icon employs an iconographical concept with the composition set in an interior, presenting the conversation between the Virgin and the archangel Gabriel, painted three times in this icon, with a standing figure repeated behind the archangel addressing the Virgin and once more receiving a blessing from God in the upper part of the icon. The icon of St George and St Demetrius (fig. 11) from the 17<sup>th</sup> century is an interesting depiction of a popular pair of saints, in which both are depicted as horsemen who defeat their enemy with a spear. Above their heads are angels crowning them. The scene is set against an architectural backdrop, with a princess also depicted standing at the door to a tower in the right-hand corner. One icon of the same iconography and from the same period appears in Bulgaria, in the Museum of the Bulgarian Revival and Constituent Assembly in Veliko Tarnovo.<sup>42</sup>

The Patriarchate of Peć, a major pilgrimage centre and important monastery, lay in the heart of the Serbian medieval state before it became part of the Ottoman Empire and is now an endangered religious site and cultural asset of Serbia in the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo. The presence of Russian icons

40 Ibid.

41 Icons of this type include Joseph's Dream, with the angel informing him of Herod's intention to kill the infants in Bethlehem and ordering him to hide with the baby in Egypt. Ibid.

42 I am grateful to Natalia Komashko for this remark.

at this monastery is indicative of several phenomena. First, most of the monastery's Russian icons were painted in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the time of its most intensive ties with Russia. This was after the great migrations of Serbs from the Ottoman empire in the Habsburg monarchy (1690 and 1737–1739), and in accordance with the revival of monastic life afterwards. The arrival of Russian icons led to the emergence of local yet very strong cults. The exquisite icon of the Mother of God *Jerusalimskaya*, painted in the Armoury Chamber, became so well-loved in the local community that in a few decades its cult took root, along with the legend about its provenance, leading to a liturgy being written at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earning it a specific feast day in the church calendar. Other Russian icons, such as those showing St Sava and St Simeon or St Joseph Volotsky, are fine examples of the transfer of national cults in both directions. The cult of the Serbian saints, father and son from the Nemanjić dynasty, was already known and present in Russia two centuries before the Peć icon of them was painted. Also, the monastic model of landownership promoted by St Joseph Volotsky was already present in the Serbian Orthodox milieu. Russian icons were not particularly numerous in Serbian space, and the fact that many are lost for good has led to another widespread phenomenon: the neglect and misunderstanding of them (along with everything that does not belong to medieval heritage). Only two Russian icons were mentioned in the only published catalogue of the monastic treasury in 1957 – the Nativity of Christ and St Joseph Volotsky. Along with the icon of Ss Sava and Simeon, these are the only Peć icons held in the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The miraculous icon remains on its sumptuous wooden throne in the monastery, while others were either stolen or burned during the years of terror against the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija.





Fig. 1. Mother of God of Peć, the miracle-working icon of Peć, early 18th century, Monastery of Peć Patriarchate. © Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia.



Fig. 2. Aleksije Lazović, Mother of God with Christ and Saints (1806), Museum of Serbian Orthodox Church.



Fig. 3. Saint Sava and Saint Simeon of Serbia, mid-17th century, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. © Museum of Serbian Orthodox Church.



Fig. 4. Venerable Iosif Volotsky in prayer to the Mother of God, late 17th – early 18th century, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. © Museum of Serbian Orthodox Church.

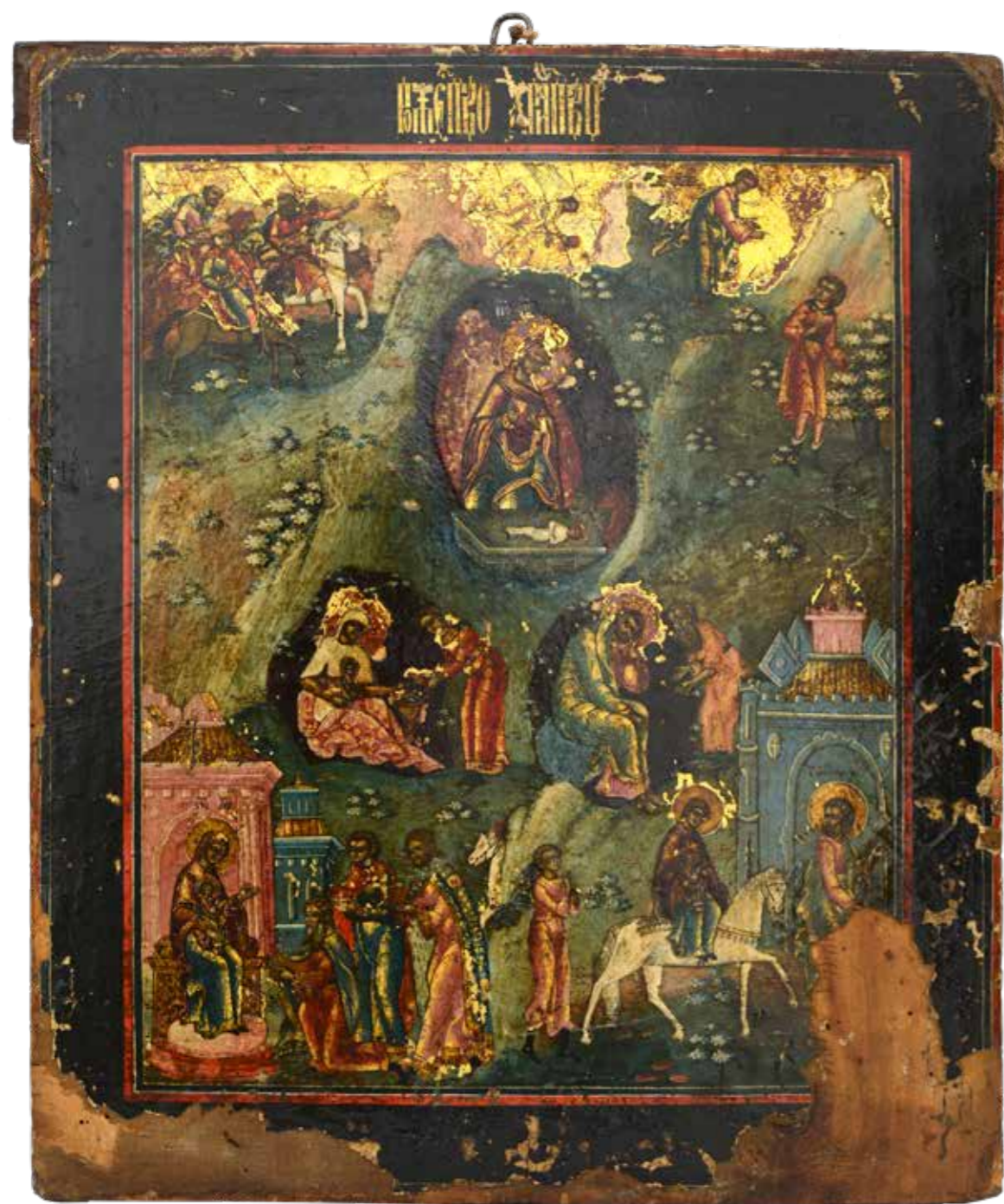


Fig. 5. The Nativity of Christ, late 18th century, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. © Museum of Serbian Orthodox Church.



Fig. 6. St. Saint Stephen the Archdeacon, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.



Fig. 7. St. John the Baptist, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.



Fig. 8. Saint Nicholas, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.



Fig. 9. The Ascension of Christ, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.



Fig. 10. The Annunciation, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.



Fig. 11. Saint George and Saint Demetrius, late 17th – early 18th century, icon now lost. © Municipal Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Priština.

## Russia and the Hilandar Monastery: The Icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God and Its Revetment

Irena Ćirović

### Abstract

The Icon of the Mother of God Three-Handed (Troeruchitsa) holds great significance as a sacred relic of the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. In 1862, a new revetment was donated by Russian benefactors, replacing the old one and altering the icon's appearance. Crafted by jeweller Fedor Verkhovtsev, it reflected the strength of the cult of the Three-Handed Mother of God and its influence on the icon's veneration in Russia. This donation highlighted the connection between Russia and the Hilandar Monastery, solidifying the icon's significance in both religious and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** nineteenth century, icon revetment, the Three-Handed Mother of God, the Troeruchitsa icon, Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov, Fedor Andreevich Verkhovtsev, the Hilandar Monastery, Russia

The icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God or *Troeruchitsa* is one of the most revered relics of the Hilandar Monastery. Among the many traditions surrounding the miracles of the icon is the one in which the Three-Handed Virgin herself revealed that she would govern the monastery. According to this tradition, Hilandar was administrated by the proigumen and the epitropes, while the miraculous icon of the Virgin Troeruchitsa was regarded as the true abbot. The icon is said to have chosen a place in the church near the abbot's throne, signifying its role as abbess of the monastery. It remains in this location to this day, situated in the central part of the nave of Hilandar's katholikon.<sup>1</sup>

1 Grigorovich-Barsky, Vasily. Пешеходца Василия Григоровича-Барскаго-Плаки-Албова, уроженца киевскаго, монаха Антиохийскаго, Путешествие к святым местам, в Европе, Азии и Африке находящимся, предприятие в 1723, и окончено в 1747 году. St. Petersburg: Imperatorskoj Akademii nauk, 650; Avramović, Dimitrije. Света Гора са стране вере, художества и поветнице. Belgrade: u Knj'azhesko-Srbskoj Knj'igorechatn'i, 1848, 24; Hilandarac, Sava. Историја манастира Хиландара: успомена на седамстогодишњицу оснивања. Edited by Tomislav Jovanović. Belgrade: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, 1997, 122; Dučić, Nićifor.

The icon is housed in a proskynetarion, positioned against the southwest pillar, right next to the abbot's throne (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

The Hilandar Three-Handed Virgin has long been a subject of scholarly interest, encompassing various aspects such as the cult of the Three-Handed Virgin, the origin and dating of the icon, its transfer to the Hilandar monastery, the traditions surrounding its creation, and its connection to Saint Sava of Serbia.<sup>3</sup> One of the central aspects of this study is the icon's revetment, which underwent a significant transformation in 1862 when a new cover was created, replacing earlier metal applications. This new revetment, which now covers the entire surface of the icon, plays a pivotal role in shaping the current appearance of the Hilandar Troeruchitsa, a distinctive feature by which it is recognized today (fig. 2).

The Hilandar Three-Handed Virgin is identified as a fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, with an iconography that differs from the general type by featuring a variant in which the Virgin holds Christ in her right hand (fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> Created as a processional icon, it measures 86 x 106 cm and is painted on both sides. The reverse side of the icon depicts Saint Nicholas of Myra (fig. 4). Traces of the support at the bottom of the icon further confirm its use in processions. Originally, the Hilandar Troeruchitsa

“Старине хиландарске.” *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 56 (1884): 29–30; Štavljanin-Đorđević, Ljubica. “Чудеса Пресвете Богородице Агапија Крићанина и ново чудо Богородице Тројеручице.” *Arheografski prilozi* 6–7 (1984/5): 278–279; Petković, Sreten. Хиландар. Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 2008, 28.

2 According to written sources, the icon of the Three-Handed Virgin had already been placed in that location in the church by the end of the seventeenth century: Miljković, Војан. “Повест о чудотворним иконама манастира Хиландара.” *Zograf* 31 (2006/7): 226.

3 Mirković, Lazar. “Хиландарске старине.” *Старинар* 3 (1935/1936): 83–94; Radojičić, Đorđe S. “Хиландарска икона Богородице Одигитрије Тројеручице.” *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 17/2 (1937): 283–284; Radojičić, Svetozar. “Уметнички споменици манастира Хиландара.” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 3 (1955): 174; Bogdanović, Dimitrije et al. Хиландар. Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1978, 112–114; Petković, Sreten. Иконе манастира Хиландара. Sveta Gora Atonska: Manastir Hilandar, 1997, 27; Đurić, Srđan. “Хиландарска Богородица Тројеручица.” In Казивања о Светој Гори, edited by Milka Janković, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1995, 100–113; Benčev, Ivan. “Икона Богоматери Троеручице у Хиландарском манастиру на Афоне.” In Византија и византијске традиције. Сборник научних трудов посвященный XIX Международному конгрессу византистов, St Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyj Ėrmitazh, 1996, 175–183; Petković, Sreten. “О культу светогорских чудотворних икона у Русији.” In Друга Казивања о Светој Гори, edited by Milka Janković, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1997, 132–142; Miljković, Војан. “Повест о чудотворним иконама манастира Хиландара.” *Zograf* 31 (2006/7): 219–228; Tatić-Đurić, Mirjana. “Тројеручица Светог Саве и њен култ у православном свету.” In Спалывање моштију светога Саве (1594–1994), edited by Episkop šumadijski Sava et. al, Belgrade: Štamparija Srpske patrijaršije, 1997, 133–160; Štavljanin-Đorđević, Ljubica. “Чудеса Пресвете Богородице Агапија Крићанина и ново чудо Богородице Тројеручице.” *Arheografski prilozi* 6–7 (1984/5): 275–284; Gergova, Ivanka. “О неким графичким приказима Богородице Тројеручице.” In Ниш и Византија: зборник радова. 6, edited by Miša Rakocija, Niš: Niški kulturni centar, 2008, 297–305; Radovanović, Ana. “Хиландарска икона Богородице Тројеручице.” *Hilandarski zbornik* 14 (2017): 173–188; Gergova, Ivanka. “Скопската Богородица Троеручица.” *Balkanoslavica* 47/1 (2018): 77–88.

4 Tatić-Đurić, Mirjana. “Тројеручица Светог Саве и њен култ у православном свету,” 565–592.

included a third hand as a votive offering, made of metal and applied to the icon. Traces of its attachment are still visible beneath the left hand of the Virgin on the painted surface. This earlier third hand differs from the one incorporated into the metal revetment made in 1862; in addition to occupying a different position, it had a narrower joint, and its thumb was positioned to the side. In addition to the third hand, there are also visible traces of other metal applications on the icon. The image of Saint Nicholas on the reverse side also features areas that were once covered, as indicated by traces around the halo and the saint's right hand.<sup>5</sup> All of these traces correspond with the descriptions of the Three-Handed Virgin recorded by visitors to the monastery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the most notable travel accounts was written by Monk Vasil Grigorovich-Barsky, who visited Mount Athos twice, in 1725 and 1744. During his first visit, he briefly noted that the Troeruchitsa icon had three hands represented or “*tri ruki izobrazhennykh*” (“три руки изображенных”) – two painted by the icon painter, and the third having appeared miraculously on its own, a reference to one of the legends surrounding the icon's origin.<sup>6</sup> During his second visit, he provided a more detailed description, stating that the icon of Troeruchitsa was covered in silver and gilded, with the third hand attached and made of silver.<sup>7</sup> Dimitrije Avramović, one of the first Serbian researchers of Hilandar's antiquities, visited the monastery in 1847. He described the Three-Handed Virgin: “It is bound with silver and decorated with gold; on her necklace, there are various old Greek and Roman coins, and several golden seals from Dušan's diplomas (...)”<sup>8</sup>

The current appearance of the Troeruchitsa icon, by which it is still recognized today, was shaped in the 1860s. A new revetment was placed on the icon, which also led to the removal of the old metal fittings and votives, the fate of which remains unknown.<sup>9</sup> Gilded and adorned with precious stones,

- 5 Benčev, Ivan. “Икона Богородице Троеручицы в Хиландарском монастыре на Афоне,” 175–183.
- 6 Grigorovich-Barsky, Vasily. Пешеходца Василия Григоровича-Барскаго-Плаки-Албова, ..., 142. For the traditions surrounding the origin of the Troeruchitsa icon, see: Štavljanin-Đorđević, Ljubica. “Чудеса Пресвете Богородице Агапија Крићанина и ново чудо Богородице Тројеручице”, 275–284; Tatić-Đurić, Mirjana. “Тројеручица Светог Саве и њен култ у православном свету”, 133–160; Miljković, Vojan. “Повест о чудотворним иконама манастира Хиландара”, 221–225; Zelenskaia, Galina Mitrofanovna. “Икона Божией Матери «Троеручица» из Воскресенского Ново-Иерусалимского монастыря.” In *Афон в истории и культуре Христианского Востока и России*, edited by Nadezhda P. Chesnokova, Vol. 14 of Каптеревские чтения. Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2016, 175–179; Lepakhin, Valerii Vladimirovich. “Икона Троеручицы: тайна третьей руки.” In *Герменевтика древнерусской литературы: Сборник 19*, edited by O. A. Tufanova and E. A. Andreeva, Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2020, 526–573.
- 7 Grigorovich-Barsky, Vasily. Пешеходца Василия Григоровича-Барскаго-Плаки-Албова..., 650.
- 8 Avramović, Dimitrije. *Описание древностей србски у Светой (Атонской) гори*, Belgrade: Pечатано у Knjigopечатn'ї Knižhestva Srbskog”, 1847, 3.
- 9 According to the practice of handling votives when replaced on icons, the old revetments and their parts were either preserved or transferred to other icons. Additionally, for highly venerated icons, the old coverings were sometimes left in place and covered with new ones instead of being removed: Loverdou-Tsigarida, Katia. “Revêtement de l'icône de la Vierge Vimatarissa datant de l'époque des Paléologues, monastère de Vatoped.” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 44 (2007): 423–434.

the new cover arrived from Russia as a gift to the monastery's holy relic. The revetment itself bears the names of the donors, who are prayerfully addressed in an inscription to the wonderworking icon (fig. 5). At the bottom of the cover, beneath Christ's foot, the following inscription is engraved: Оздрави параскевы михаи:/ла Елены Иоанна и чадъ ихъ. Надежды Николаа и чадъ / ихъ. марій ольги Наталіи и Сродниковъ ихъ. (“For the health of Paraskeva Mikhail, Elena, Ioann and their children, Nadezda, Nikolai and their children, Mariya, Olga Natalia and their relatives”).

At the time the new revetment was donated, the Hilandar monastery had already received a significant number of gifts from Russia, thanks to the long-standing ties between the two.<sup>10</sup> By this point, the cult of the Virgin Troeruchitsa was already highly developed in Russia, initiated through these relations.<sup>11</sup> Direct connections began in the 1550s with the arrival of Hilandar representatives asking Russian rulers for financial aid and protection. There are many examples of Hilandar petitioners bringing icons, relics, and various items from the monastery's treasury as gifts on these occasions.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, interest in Athonian relics, especially miraculous icons, was growing in Russia. Hilandar's traditions surrounding the miraculous icon of the Three-Handed Virgin became known via the monastery's monks during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. During a visit in 1558, Archimandrite Prohor along with other Hilandar monks shared several tales about miraculous icons, including that of the Three-Handed Virgin. A record of these tales has been preserved in the Collection of the State Historical Museum (Moscow), Aleksey Khludov Manuscript Collection, number 147 D.<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, this is the first known written mention of the icon of the Three-Handed Virgin being in the Hilandar Monastery. The chronicle also records that the icon was created in the city of Skopje, which aligns with other historical sources on its original location.<sup>14</sup>

- 10 Petković, Sreten. Хиландар, 54–55; Makuljević, Nenad. “Piety, Ideology, and Orthodoxy: Russian Icons in Serbian Church Culture (17th-19th Centuries).” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16th – early 20th Centuries)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva, La Pomme d'or: Seyssel, 2016, 138–139, 140–141, 143; Makuljević, Nenad. “Unutrašnjost katolikona manastira Hilandara u novom veku.” In *Osma kazivanja o Svetoj gori*, edited by Zoran Rakić, Belgrade: Finegraf, 2013, 184–185.
- 11 Petković, Sreten. “О култу светогорских чудотворних икона у Русији.” In *Друга Казивања о Светој Гори*, edited by Milka Janković, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1997, 132–142.
- 12 Petković, Sreten. “Хиландар и Русија у XVI и XVII веку.” In *Казивања о Светој Гори*, edited by Milka Janković, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1995, 143–170.
- 13 Turilov, Anatoly Arkadyevich. “Рассказы о чудотворных иконах монастыря Хиландар в русской записи XVI века.” In *Чудотворная икона в Византии и Древней Руси*, edited by Alexei Mikhailovich Lidov. Moscow: Martis, 1996, 510–525.
- 14 Miljković, Vojan. “Повест о чудотворним иконама манастира Хиландара”, 221–224; Gergova, Ivanka. “Скопската Богородица Троеручица”, 77–88.

The following decade saw important records on the arrival of the Troeruchitsa icons in Russia, all linked to the Moscow Patriarch Nikon and his inner circle. When the Hilandar archimandrite Viktor set off for Moscow in the autumn of 1657, he brought the icon of the Three-Handed Virgin as a gift for Patriarch Nikon.<sup>15</sup> This is likely the same icon mentioned in the list of the patriarch's household treasury from 1658, described as the "Icon of the Most Pure Virgin of Hilandar, painted in gold."<sup>16</sup> The Hilandar fathers subsequently gifted another icon of the Three-Handed Virgin to Tsarina Maria Ilyinichna Miloslavskaya, during an audience with Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich at the Kremlin in 1658.<sup>17</sup>

The second event was in 1661, when the icon of the Troeruchitsa was brought to Moscow and then to Novoierusalimskiy Monastery. The account by Archimandrite Leonid (Kavelin) has long been widely accepted regarding this matter. According to him, Archimandrite Theophan Srbin from the Kastamonitou Monastery brought a copy of the Three-Handed Virgin to Moscow in 1661 and then to New Jerusalem Monastery (*Novoierusalimskiy Monastyr'*) in 1662, where it was received with great respect by Patriarch Nikon. While staying at Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, Theophan wrote a description of the monasteries of Mount Athos, mentioning Hilandar and its miraculous icon of the Mother of God with three hands, one of which "was painted by itself."<sup>18</sup> These accounts have been challenged by new archival findings by N. Chesnokova. They revealed that it was actually Archimandrite Isaac from Iveron Monastery who brought the icon to Moscow in 1661, after Patriarch Nikon had requested that the Iveron monks create an image "from the miraculous icon of the Most Pure Virgin of the Three Hands, which is in the Hilandar Monastery," and send it to Moscow.<sup>19</sup>

Over time, the Three-Handed Virgin became one of the most widely revered icons in Russia. Many of her icons gained fame for their miraculous properties and are especially venerated in Russian churches

- 15 Chesnokova, Nadezhda Petrovna "Икона Богородицы Троеручицы из афонского Хиландарского монастыря для московского патриарха Никона." In Филевские чтения. Тезисы восьмой научной конференции по проблемам русской художественной культуры XVII – первой половины XVIII в. (16–18 декабря 2003 г.), edited by Natal'ia Ignat'evna Komashko, Moscow: MAKS Press, 2003, 86–87. Idem. Христианский Восток и Россия: Политическое и культурное взаимодействие в середине XVII века. По документам Российского государственного архива древних актов. Moscow: Indrik, 2011, 134–135; Dolgova, Svetlana et al. (comps.). Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија = Москва - Serbia, Belgrad - Russia: документа и материјали = сборник документов и материалов. Том 1 = Друштвене и политичке везе XVI–XVIII век = Обществено-политически XVI–XVIII вв, Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije; Moscow: Glavnoye Arkhivnoye Upravleniye Goroda Moskvy, 2009, 294–295.
- 16 Zelenskaya, Galina Mitrofanovna. "Икона Божией Матери «Троеручица» из Воскресенского Ново-Иерусалимского монастыря", 172.
- 17 Chesnokova, Nadezhda Petrovna. Христианский Восток и Россия..., 134–135; Dolgova, Svetlana et al. (comps.). Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија..., 294–295.
- 18 Leonid, Archimandrite. Рассказ о святогорских монастырях архимандрита Феофана (Сербина) 1663–1666. St. Petersburg: Tip. V. S. Balasheva, 1883, 3–4, 13.
- 19 Chesnokova, Nadezhda Petrovna. Христианский Восток и Россия..., 135–136.

and monasteries.<sup>20</sup> Alongside this, knowledge about the Hilandar Three-Handed Virgin was preserved and passed down through the ongoing connections between Hilandar and Russia. As a revered miracle worker, the icon attracted numerous believers from Russia, who sent donations to Hilandar. Particularly after the 1850s, increased pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mount Athos, as well as to Palestine and Sinai, was followed by a new wave of donations and the sending of even more church items from Russia.<sup>21</sup>

Credit for the new revetment made for the Hilandar Three-Handed Virgin is attributed to Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov, a Russian researcher who visited Mount Athos several times.<sup>22</sup> This information comes from Sava Hilandarac, a monk responsible for organizing the Hilandar archive and library. Sava, a prominent chronicler of Mount Athos at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, authored several books and articles.<sup>23</sup> In his descriptions of Hilandar and its treasures, he dedicated a section to the Three-Handed Virgin, emphasizing its veneration as a highly revered miracle worker. Along with the legend of the icon's creation and its arrival at Hilandar, Sava Hilandarac provided a detailed account of the Three-Handed Virgin's appearance, including the lavish covering.

Sava Hilandarac recorded that during his visit to the Mount Athos in 1859, Russian State Councillor Sevastyanov took measurements of the Three-Handed Virgin and ordered a golden revetment to be made in Russia. According to Hilandarac, this new covering was placed on the icon in 1864. The monastery librarian once again mentioned Sevastyanov in the context of his work on the monastery's library records.<sup>24</sup> It is also notable that in 1864, the same year Hilandarac refers to, two members of the Hilandar brotherhood returned to the monastery from St. Petersburg, where they had gathered aid for the monastery.<sup>25</sup>

Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov (1811–1867) was one of the leading researchers of Athonite monasteries in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> After a career in law, he devoted himself to travel and the study of Christian antiquities,

- 20 Zelenskaya, Galina Mitrofanovna. "Икона Божией Матери «Троеручица» из Воскресенского Ново-Иерусалимского монастыря", 171–216; Zlotnikova, Irina Vladimirovna. "Белобережская икона Божией Матери «Троеручица»: к вопросу о происхождении и датировке образа." In Вопросы истории и теории христианского искусства, Series V of Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского гуманитарного университета 2 (5), Moscow, 2011, 102–118.
- 21 Gerd, Lora. "Russian Sacred Objects in the Orthodox East. Archive Evidence from the 18th to the Early 20th Century." *Museikon* 4 (2020): 231–234.
- 22 Makuljević, Nenad. "Unutrašnjost katolikona manastira Hilandara u novom veku", 183.
- 23 Hilandarac, Sava. Историја манастира Хиландара, 194–196.
- 24 ibid, 103–104, 155.
- 25 Slijerčević, Đoko. Хиландарско питање у XIX и почетком XX века: студија. Cologne, 1979, 45.
- 26 Vzdornov, Gerol'd Ivanovich. История открытия и изучения русской средневековой живописи. XIX век. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986, 83–84; Gerd, Lora. "Russian Research Work in the Archives of Mount Athos." In

an interest made possible by an inheritance he received. In 1851 and 1852 he embarked on travels, during which he visited various places, including the monasteries of Mount Athos. A key element of Sevastyanov's subsequent research was his training in photography in Paris, a skill he used to document ancient artifacts.

Sevastyanov returned to Mount Athos in 1857, where he set up a photographic laboratory at the Skete of St. Andrew, focusing on the study of monastery libraries and artifacts. His next expedition to Athos took place in 1858, lasting from April to September. Upon his return, he held exhibitions in Paris, followed by shows in Russia at Moscow University and the Synod building in St. Petersburg, which were attended by Emperor Alexander II and Empress Maria Alexandrovna. Recognized for his achievements, Sevastyanov led his longest expedition to Mount Athos in 1859–1860. With recommendations from the Archaeographic Commission, he directed an international team that conducted extensive research, including photography, topography, copies, and drawings. The team consisted of Frenchman E. Vaudin; M. F. Granovskii, a student from the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts; F. Klages, an architectural monuments expert from the St. Petersburg Academy; Frenchman A. Leborgne; Bulgarian Kh. Khristov; Russian M. P. Zuru; and a Greek named Spiridon. One important participant was Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, a priest at the Russian church in Athens, who joined the research team in Athonite libraries between July and October 1859. The total cost of the expedition was estimated at 16,000 roubles, with the Synod covering part of the expenses (9,000 roubles) and Empress Maria Alexandrovna contributing the remaining 7,000 from her personal funds. At the end of this final expedition, Sevastyanov's research yielded an exceptional collection documenting hundreds of icons, frescoes, textiles, manuscripts, and books from the monastery treasuries, as well as plans of the monasteries and their surroundings.<sup>27</sup>

Sevastyanov and his team's efforts also included original-size reproductions of selected icons, one of which was the Three-Handed Virgin from Hilandar. Sevastyanov considered it particularly fortunate that the monastery elders granted him permission to remove the cover and make a direct copy of the icon itself.<sup>28</sup> This copy of the Three-Handed Virgin was among those created in colour, as noted in a

27 *Lire les Archives de l'Athos* (Travaux et mémoires 23/2), edited by O. Delouis and K. Smyrlis, Paris, 2019, 527–551. Dovgallo, Galina Ivanovna. “СобираТЕЛЬСкая деятельность П. И. Севастьянова: (по материалам его личного архива).” In Балканы. Русь, edited by А. I. Komech and О. Е. Ёtingof, Vol. 17 of Древнерусское искусство. St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1995, 242–256; Ryatnitsky, Yuri. “Византийские и поствизантийские иконы в России (часть 2).” Византийский временник 56 (1996): 247–251; Papoulides, Konstantinos K. “Πέτρος Ίβάνοβιτς Sevast'janov (1811–1867): προσέγγιση στο έργο του.” *Balkanika symmeikta* 9 (1997): 17–36; Ryatnitsky, Yuri. “«Отечества и дым нам сладок и приятен» Эпизоды из истории византийской коллекции Государственного Эрмитажа (окончание).” *Nashe nasledie* 112 (2015), [https://www.nn.media/magazine/112/277/Shekhovtsova\\_Irina\\_Pavlovna](https://www.nn.media/magazine/112/277/Shekhovtsova_Irina_Pavlovna). “По следам афонской экспедиции П. И. Севастьянова.” Вопросы истории и теории христианского искусства. Series V of Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского гуманитарного университета. 26. Moscow, 2017, 109–130.

28 Pivovarova, Nadezhda Valerievna. “Еще раз об афонских экспедициях П. И. Севастьянова.” In *Spicilegium*

report that Sevastyanov submitted in 1861 to Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna of Russia, President of the Russian Academy of Arts.<sup>29</sup>

The copy was created by the painter Mihail Granovskii, with Sevastyanov also involved in the process. In his correspondence with Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, Sevastyanov provided more detailed insights into the work on the icon. In a letter dated February 26, 1860, he mentioned that Granovskii copied miraculous icons at the Hilandar Monastery, including the Three-Handed Virgin, using colours. In a subsequent letter on March 19, Sevastyanov elaborated on the challenges they faced during this task:

“Я еще раз ездил в Хиландарь. И там мне делали препятствие снять ризу с иконы Треручицы, но мне удалось настоять на своем и кончить копию, прекрасно исполненную Грановским. На беду нашу эклезиярх забыл налить масла в лампадку и стекло три раза треснуло. Суеверы приписали чудо! Божия Матерь не желает, чтобы с Нее снимали копии. А я, с своей стороны подтвердил, что это действительно чудо, и Матерь Божия явно изъявляет свое неудовольствие на старцев, которые препятствуют мне достигнуть цели благочестивой и православной, и если бы Она желала изъявить свой гнев на нас, то имела бы силу выразить его явственнее. К успеху моему помог мне случай. Получено разрешение Хиландарцам ехать в Россию. Я дал несколько рекомендательных писем, и с того времени кредит ко мне неограниченный (...)<sup>30</sup>

*(I went to Hilandar once again. There, they made it difficult for me to remove the cover from the icon of the Three-Handed Virgin, but I managed to insist on my request and finish the copy, which was beautifully executed by Granovskii. To our misfortune, the ecclesiarch forgot to pour oil into the lamp, and the glass cracked three times. The superstitious attributed it to a miracle! The Mother of God did not wish for copies to be made of Her. As for me, I confirmed that this was indeed a miracle, and the Mother of God was clearly expressing Her displeasure with the elders who were preventing me from achieving my righteous and Orthodox goal, and if She had wished to express Her anger toward us, She would have had the power to do so more clearly. One circumstance helped me in my success. Permission was granted to the Hilandar monks to travel to Russia. I gave several letters of recommendation, and from that time on, my credit was unlimited...)* (Translated by the author)

29 *Byzantino-Rossicum. Сборник статей к 80-летию члена-корреспондента РАН И. П. Медведева*, edited by Lora Gerd, Moscow: Indrik, 2015, 235.

29 Durand, Julien. “Expédition archéologique au Mont Athos.” *Annales Archéologiques* 21 (1861): 175.

30 Gerd, Lora Aleksandrovna and Kirill Alekseevich Vakh. “К истории изучения памятников Афона: из переписки П. И. Севастьянова и архимандрита Антонина Капустина.” *Pravoslavnyj palestinskij sbornik* 114 (2017): 78, 82.

Sevastyanov's recommendations that the Hilandar monks be allowed to stay in Russia concerned an extension of their permit to collect alms, which had been granted to them in 1858. When the permit expired, the Hilandar monks submitted a request to the Synod for an extension.<sup>31</sup> In 1862, the request was repeated, with an additional plea for a place in St. Petersburg to be granted to them as a chapel. That same year, the Hilandar archimandrite Sofroni passed away in St. Petersburg, while hieromonk Antim and hierodeacon Jevstati remained in the city until early 1864, when they returned to the monastery.<sup>32</sup>

The exact replica of the Hilandar icon of the Three-Handed Virgin created during Sevastyanov's expedition likely served as a model for the new revetment. The task of crafting the cover was entrusted to one of the most prominent jewellers in St. Petersburg at the time, Feodor Verkhovtsev, as evidenced by the maker's stamp located next to the donor's inscription. The item also bears the hallmark of the St. Petersburg assay master Eduard Fedorovich Brandenburg, identifiable by the letters "E" and "B" positioned in the upper section of the stamp, separated by a dot. A horizontal dividing line bisects the stamp, with the year "1862" inscribed in the lower section accompanied by the number "84", indicating the silver standard (fig. 6).<sup>33</sup>

Verkhovtsev's workshop was established in St. Petersburg in 1819, specializing in the production of church artifacts. Fedor Andreevich Verkhovtsev (1804–1868), the founder, became a master of the Russian silversmiths' guild in 1826, and his exceptional talent distinguished him as one of the top craftsmen producing high-quality church artifacts. Thanks to the success of his workshop, Verkhovtsev enjoyed significant financial success, becoming a member of the merchants' guild in 1840, and being elected to the Craft Administration between 1849 and 1853. He received numerous awards for his works at both Russian and international exhibitions.<sup>34</sup>

Notable works by Verkhovtsev include numerous icon revetments. Some were created in collaboration with other renowned artists, such as the vestment for the icon of the Virgin Mary, Joy of All Who Sorrow, in the church dedicated to her in St. Petersburg, designed according to a drawing by academician Fedor Solntsev.<sup>35</sup> Verkhovtsev's works can also be found in abundance outside Russia, particularly in

31 Uspensky, Porfirij. *История Афона. Часть III*. St. Petersburg: Тип. Императорской Академіи наук, 362–363; Slijerčević, Đoko. *Хиландарско питање у XIX и почетком XX века*, 40.

32 Slijerčević, Đoko. *Хиландарско питање у XIX и почетком XX века*, 42–45.

33 Postnikova-Loseva, Marija. *Золотое и серебряное дело XV–XX вв.: (Территория СССР)*. Moscow: Yunves Trio, 1995, 179.

34 Kuznetsova, Liliia. *Петербургские ювелиры XIX – начала XX в. Династии знаменитых мастеров императорской России*. Moscow: Centropoligraf, 2017, 291–295.

35 *ibid.*, 293–294.

Orthodox churches across the Balkans. Russian political support for Orthodoxy in the Balkans during the nineteenth century involved both material aid and donations to churches. As part of one such a campaign, a large number of church items were stored in Moscow to be sent to Serbian churches. In 1857, the Holy Synod compiled a list of these items, which included 362 church utensils crafted by Verkhovtsev for the churches of Serbia. He was also the creator of a golden cross and enamel decorations for a mitre in 1858, originally intended for the Bosnian Metropolitan Dionysii. However, it was ultimately donated by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Metropolitan of Herzegovina, Gregory, and Archimandrite Ioannikii of Mostar.<sup>36</sup>

Verkhovtsev created an exquisite variant of the revetment for the Hilandar Three-Handed Virgin, adorned with lavish decorations. The visual impact of this new cover is captured in the writings of Sava Hilandarac. In his 1898 history of the monastery, he provides a detailed description that conveys the grandeur of the Troeruchitsa vestment: "Now this icon shines and glows under the new precious covering, richly adorned with amethysts, turquoises, chrysoprases, opals, and countless crystal beads. Around the head and crown of the Virgin Mary, there are up to 50 pieces of precious stones, on the left hand 20, and Jesus is adorned with 22 pieces of precious stones."<sup>37</sup>

Verkhovtsev created a type of revetment that covers the entire surface of the icon, leaving only the parts with the incarnate – the faces and hands of both figures, and the feet of Christ – visible in the painted layer (fig. 7, 8). The design faithfully replicates the icon's painted arrangement, with the Virgin Mary and Christ in her right arm. The decoration features gemstones, artistically manipulated in various colours within the structure. These stones are concentrated around the halo, accentuating the brilliance of their shine, particularly in the form of the Virgin Mary's crown (fig. 9). They also highlight key details such as the letters in Christ's halo, the three stars adorning the Virgin Mary, and the edges of the vestments. A filigree lace pattern is added to the base of the covering, complementing the decor on the halos, Christ's robe, and the edges of the Virgin's maphorion (fig. 10). The remaining surfaces are adorned with engraved floral ornaments spread across the maphorion and background. The floral decoration also highlights the medallions with signatures. Unlike the icon itself, where the Virgin is signed as Hodegetria, the revetment designates her as the Troeruchitsa (мр. ѿ. троеручицы прѣла бѣды), while the inscription of Christ remains the same (іс хс).

36 Gerd, Lora. "Between Politics and Charity: Russian Material Aid to the Balkan Orthodox Churches (1830–1877)." In *Christian Networks in the Ottoman Empire: A Transnational History*, edited by Yura Konstantinova and Eleonora Naxidou, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2024, 257–259.

37 Hilandarac, Sava. *Историја манастира Хиландара*, 104.

The semantics of the decoration extend to the revetment frame, which features a depiction of the Tree of Jesse. This subject was chosen as a complement to the central image of the Virgin Mary with Christ. The Tree of Jesse, along with the variants depicting independent images of the prophets, point to theological reflections on the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception, her role in the incarnation of the Logos, and Christ's birth. The presence of Jesse signifies the genealogical line, and in both cases, refers to the Virgin's foretold destiny for the role assigned to her.<sup>38</sup> The Tree of Jesse begins at the bottom of the frame with the reclining figure of Jesse, from which a grape vine emerges. It continues to develop throughout the frame, forming a frieze with medallions. Within these medallions are the figures of twenty-two prophets, depicted seated with books and scrolls in their hands (fig. 11). Moving clockwise from Jesse, they are Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Moses, Haggai, David, Joel, Isaiah, (?), Elisha, Jonah, Habakkuk, Elijah, Nathan, Zechariah, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Daniel, Nahum, Amos, Malachi, Hosea, and Samuel. At the top of the frame, among the row of prophets, is the figure of God the Father, surrounded by clouds. He blesses with both hands, and in front of Him is a medallion with the Holy Spirit depicted as a dove. The entire composition is completed by four-winged seraphim in each corner of the frame.

The main feature of the icon, the Virgin Mary's third hand, is positioned beneath her right arm, which holds Christ, extending horizontally along the frame of the covering (fig. 12). Its placement, along with its shape – characterized by the fingers gathered together and the flared sleeve – differs from the hand originally applied to the icon. One of its main characteristics is that it stands out across the entire revetment, as it is not gilded but retains the metallic sheen of silver. This deliberate choice allows the third hand to remain visually distinct from the rest of the covering, emphasizing its unique status. By leaving the third hand in silver, the revetment effectively preserves the original votive character of the icon's third hand, underscoring its role as an additional element that was applied as part of the icon's miraculous history. It also integrates the revetment into the narrative of the origin of the third hand on the icon, which was prevalent at Hilandar monastery. Among the various traditions regarding the origin of the Three-Handed Virgin icon that have been passed down through the centuries,<sup>39</sup> the narrative of St. John Damascene's healing was the dominant version at Hilandar Monastery during the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> According to this account, St. John Damascene was miraculously healed after his hand was cut off by the Prince of Damascus. In gratitude, he ordered that the hand be cast in silver and placed on

38 Davidov, Aleksandra. "Представа лозе Јесејеве у српској уметности XVIII века." *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice srpske* 22 (1986): 152–160; Milanović, Vesna. "The Tree of Jesse in the Byzantine Mural Painting of the 13th and 14th Centuries: A Contribution to the Research of the Theme." *Zograf* 20 (1989): 48–59

39 See footnote 7.

40 Аврамовић, Димитрије. Света Гора са стране вере, уметности и повестнице, 24; Дуčić, Нићифор. "Старине хиландарске", 26–28; Hilandarac, Sava. *Историја и опис манастира Хиландара*. Belgrade: Štamparija Petra K. Tanaskovića, 1894, 38.

the icon of the Mother of God in front of which he had prayed for healing. In this way, the revetment not only replicates the original votive concept of the third hand but also ensures that this distinctive feature remains a vital part of the icon's sacred identity.

This careful integration of symbolic and historical elements within the revetment not only underscores the ongoing veneration of the Three-Handed Virgin but also reflects the broader cultural and religious interactions between the Athonite monastic community and Russia. The donations and exchanges between Hilandar and Russia, especially during the nineteenth century, were pivotal in ensuring the continued veneration of the icon. This is most evident in the commissioning of a new revetment for the Hilandar miracle-working Troeruchitsa icon. The intricate craftsmanship of the covering, sponsored by Russian patrons, highlights the significant role Russian benefactors played in supporting Hilandar's sacred heritage. Furthermore, figures like Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov, through their scholarly involvement, underscore the multifaceted pathways through which religious art circulated between Russia and the Hilandar Monastery.



**FIGURES**



Fig. 1. The icon of Three-Handed Mother of God by the abbot's throne. Photo: D. Baubin (Source: *Hilandar: The Serbian Imperial Lavra on Mount Athos: To His Majesty King Peter I of Serbia. In commemoration of his distinguished visit on March 25, 1910,* [https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD\\_8DD983096D9599CD2C3CD7E2FED0F5B8](https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD_8DD983096D9599CD2C3CD7E2FED0F5B8)).



Fig. 2. Three-Handed Mother of God, 14th century, Hilandar monastery. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 3. The Icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God (without revetment). Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 4. Saint Nicholas of Myra, reverse side of the icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 5. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail of the donors' inscription. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 6. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail of the hallmark. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 7. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, 1862. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 8. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, reverse side. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 9. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 10. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 11. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail of the Tree of Jesse. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.



Fig. 12. The revetment of the Three-Handed Mother of God, detail of the Virgin's third hand. Photo: Vladimir Džamić.

# III

## **THE DISSEMINATION OF RUSSIAN ICONS IN THE BALKANS- ARTEFACTS AND WRITTEN EVIDENCE**

## Iconostasis Icons by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber Workshop in the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople

Natalia Komashko

### Abstract

The Orthodox churches of Constantinople contain a significant number of Russian icons. Of particular interest among them are nine large-format iconostasis icons created by artists from the icon-painting workshop in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber. Few documents concerning them have survived. There are Greek inscriptions on some icons, with the names of the donors and dates. The iconographic programme of certain sets corresponds to the traditions adopted in Constantinople, whereas others adopt an original iconographic solution.

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**Keywords:** turn of the seventeenth-eighteenth century, Russian icons, despotic icons, iconostasis, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop, iconographic programme, Orthodox churches, Constantinople.

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At the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an increasing number of large-format Russian icons were sent from Moscow to the Christian East. These were primarily intended for placement in the royal tier of church iconostases as ‘despotic’ icons. There is ample evidence of the dissemination of such icons, including examples of icon painters being commissioned to travel to Orthodox lands and the Holy Land to undertake commissions. While earlier examples of such exchanges are known, the practice did not become widespread and systematic until the late seventeenth century.

Such sets of icons intended for the royal tier of the iconostasis can be found in numerous churches in Balkan countries (Greece, Serbia, Romania) and on Mount Athos, as well as in the St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai. However, the largest collection is held in Greek churches and monasteries in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople).

The works of the artists of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop stand out for their large number, with more than ten sets having been identified to date.<sup>1</sup> This level of concentration in one city,<sup>2</sup> is completely unprecedented and is undoubtedly linked to Constantinople’s special status as the ‘Second Rome’ for the Muscovite state. The state regularly sent funds there to support the Orthodox Church and individual churches. Unfortunately, we have very little information about the Russian icons that were sent to Constantinople in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Certainly, wealthy Greeks from Constantinople could have ordered such sets for their churches in Moscow as private commissions. However, in most cases, these were state gifts. In some cases, icons were ordered by representatives of the Greek church hierarchy and the highest aristocracy as contributions to the city churches with which they were related. Sets of Russian despotic icons are located both in the city and in its suburbs, on the European shore of the Bosphorus Strait, in Chalcedon on the Asian side and on the Princes’ Islands. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to be sure that any set was originally sent to the church where it is now located. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Greek churches of Constantinople suffered from fires and earthquakes. Icons from closed or damaged buildings were sent to the Patriarchate and could later be transferred to a new location, in some cases moving several times. All the churches where Russian despotic icons are now to be found were completely rebuilt in the nineteenth century, so it is impossible to know whether they were originally there. However, in rare cases, documents and inscriptions on the icons help to clarify the history of the sets. Let us now turn to these particular instances and the available information on them.

The *first set* is in the church of Saint Demetrius Xyloportas, which was a patriarchal residence from 1597 to 1599,<sup>3</sup> before the seat was moved to the Church of Saint George in Phanar. During the period in question, the Saint Demetrius Church was still in its original primary Byzantine form, and it subsequently underwent two complete reconstructions.<sup>4</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria Meletius Pigas,

- 1 The tenth set, not yet studied by the author of the article, is located on the European shore of the Bosphorus, in the Church of the Great Martyr Paraskeva at Therapy (Tarabya), which has been the principal church of the Metropolis of Derkoi since 1655. The set includes icons of Christ Pantocrator, Mother of God Jerusalemkaya, and The Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian “*in Silence*”. They were not included in the new iconostasis when the church was reconstructed in the 19th century, and are currently located in various places on the walls inside the church.
- 2 This number only includes the sets by Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop artists. In addition to them, the churches of Constantinople also have Russian icon sets of a later date, though far fewer in number.
- 3 Hekimoglu, Evangelos (ed.). *Istanbul: Saint Demetrios Church in Ayvansaray. Restoration of the Icons and Iconostasis*. Thessaloniki: Tempus Fugit / E.N. Manos, 2006, 20, 21.
- 4 These reconstructions are mentioned in the commemorative marble plaques on the wall in the narthex of the church (Karaca, Zafer. *İstanbul’da Tanzimat Öncesi Rum Ortodoks Kiliseleri*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008, 285–286.

who was Locum Tenens of Constantinople, initiated the transfer of the residence there. He also maintained close contacts with Moscow.<sup>5</sup>

One more Russian icon in the iconostasis of this church, ‘Saint John the Baptist, Angel of the Desert,’ dates back to the end of the 16th century and is the earliest Russian icon found in Constantinople (Fig. 1). It may have been sent from Moscow as a gift to Patriarch Meletius, together with some other despotic icons that were later lost. In accordance with Greek tradition, the icon is located in second place, to the right of the Royal Doors and its iconography corresponds to that of a later set of three icons from the turn of the 17th–18th centuries, created by the artists of the Armoury Chamber workshop. These latter icons are slightly smaller in height. (fig. 1).

This set includes the paired Icons of the Mother of God Portaitissa and Deesis, placed on either side of the Royal Doors, and the icon of the patron saint of the church with the Miracle of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki, located in the second place on the left. An inscription in Greek, added in Constantinople, is present at the lower margin of the icon of the Mother of God.

“Δέησις τοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ Θεοῦ [Δα?]σκουλο τοῦ Μανοῦλ Χρισόγη, 1704 ἀγούστου [...]”  
(Prayer of the servant of God Thomas daskalos, [son] of the jeweler Manoil, 1704, August [...]).<sup>6</sup>

The inscription indicates that the icons set was created shortly before the indicated date.

Whereas the two icons with the Deesis and with Mother of God of Portaitissa fit into the iconographic context of other similar sets of iconostasis icons, in Constantinople churches, the subject of the icon of the patron saint of the church is on the contrary, unique. The scene depicting the Great Martyr Demetrius slaying Tsar Kaloyan is quite rare in Russian iconography. Additionally, three scenes from the saint’s life are depicted on the lower part of the icon.<sup>7</sup> This icon differs from the other two in its dynamism, though it is simpler in depiction. This icon differs from the other two in terms of its dynamic composition, artistic style and meticulous attention to detail. At the same time, its design is more simple. Apparently, the original painting of the saint’s face has not survived and has been restored, which explains the difference in the rendering of Dimitri’s face and hands, as well as the incorrect proportions of his figure.

5 Konstantin Panchenko, Boris Florja, Boris and Lev Ljuhovickij. “Мелетий I.” In Православная энциклопедия. Moscow: Orthodox Encyclopedia Church Research Center, 2016, vol. 44: 570–573.

6 All Greek inscriptions cited in the articles have been transcribed and translated by Vera Tchentsova.

7 Two scenes involving Saint Demetrius are depicted: Nestor’s visit to the saint in prison, and the blessing of Nestor for the fight against Lyaeus the gladiator. They are located in the top left and bottom right, in addition to the fight between Nestor and Lyaeus.

Several sets of icons attributed to artists from the Armoury Chamber workshop can be found in churches in the suburbs of the old city of Constantinople, which is now part of Istanbul. Most of these icons are located on the European shore of the Bosphorus, in former Greek villages where, from the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, travellers would wait for favourable weather conditions to sail into the Black Sea. The local population would assist ships leaving the strait with navigation.

The *second set* is located in the Church of the Archangels in the former Greek village of Mega Reuma (Arnavutköy) on the European shore of the Bosphorus. It is the largest Orthodox parish church in Istanbul now, with a history dating to early Byzantine times, though the ancient building was destroyed after the fall of Constantinople.<sup>8</sup> In 1576, a new church that had already been built in the village was visited by Stefan Gerlach, chaplain at the embassy of the Holy Roman Empire. In his diary, he listed the subjects of the icons on the iconostasis: Christ, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, Zachariah and Elizabeth, the Archangel Michael, the warrior saints George and Demetrius, Onuphrius, John Chrysostom and Athanasius of Alexandria.<sup>9</sup> A new, more spacious church was built on the site of the old one in 1677, funded by Manolis of Kastoria.<sup>10</sup> The building was later destroyed by fire on two occasions,<sup>11</sup> after which it was rebuilt in 1900.<sup>12</sup>

The royal row of the church’s iconostasis contains a large number of Russian icons, which were part of two different sets from the late seventeenth and second half of the eighteenth centuries. The earlier works of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop artists are located in the southern side chapel. On the sides of the Royal Doors there are paired despotic icons of Christ and the Mother of God in multi-figure compositions of the Deesis and Praises to the Mother of God (*Pokhvala Bogomateri*). The icon of Christ featured an inscription in the cartouche at the bottom, which has since been lost, while the icon of the Mother of God contained a later Greek text in the cartouche regarding the restoration of the icon in 1852.<sup>13</sup> The inscription of Christ’s name on the first icon is written in Russian in a paleography imitating Greek, which after Simon Ushakov was characteristic of the artists of the Armoury Chamber. All other inscriptions, including those on the open Gospel,

8 Gennadios, Metropolitan of Heliopolis. *Ιστορία του Μεγάλου Ρεύματος (Αρναούτκιογι)*. Istanbul, 1949, 18–20.

9 Gerlach, Stephan. *Tagebuch der von zween Glorwürdigsten Romischen Kaysern Maximiliano und Rudolpho... Franckfurth am Mayn*: In Verlegung Johann Savid Zunners, 1674, 206.

10 Gennadios, *Ιστορία του Μεγάλου Ρεύματος*, 27.

11 *Ibid*, 28–29.

12 *Ibid*, 32.

13 «άνεκενήσθη αὐτὴν ἢ || εἰκὼν διὰ ἐπιστάσια τῶν || εὐσεβῶν καὶ ὀρθοδόξων || χριστιανῶν συν γυναι||ξί καὶ τεκνοῖς || αὐνβ (This icon was renewed through the efforts of pious Orthodox Christians with their spouses and children, 1852) »

are written in Greek. Given the absence of any traces of the destroyed original Slavic inscriptions, it can be deduced that the icons were originally painted for a Greek patron.

The third icon in this set depicts a scene that is very rare in Russian iconography: the double miracle of the Great Martyrs George and Demetrius of Thessaloniki. It is noteworthy that, according to Stefan Gerlach, an older icon depicting these holy warriors together was also present in the old 16th-century church.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the fourth icon, ‘The Last Judgement,’ is now located in the iconostasis of the left side chapel (Fig. 4). In terms of composition and style, it bears a strong resemblance to the icon of ‘All Saints’ from 1700 by the renowned royal artist Kirill Ulanov.<sup>15</sup> The latter does not include the image of the ‘Hetoimasia’ (the preparation of the Throne for the Last Judgement) at the top, but features the scene of the ‘Coronation of the Mother of God by the Holy Trinity’. Furthermore, at the bottom in the centre, between the saints, one can observe the figure of John the Baptist. The icons are similar not only iconographically, but also in terms of painting techniques, which suggests that Kirill Ulanov was the author of the icon of the Last Judgement and, possibly, of other icons in the set in Mega Reuma Church.

Although there are no inscriptions to date the icons, stylistically they can be attributed to the end of the 17th century. The high quality of the pieces indicates that they were commissioned by an individual of considerable influence.

The Romanian researcher Ovidiu Olar discovered a letter dated 7 November 1696 from the Moldavian ruler Antioch Cantemir (1685–1700, 1705–1707), addressed to his agent in Constantinople, Scarlatos Rosseti.<sup>16</sup> The letter indicates that Dimitrie Cantemir, the ruler of the Principality of Moldavia from 1693 to 1710 and again from 1710 to 1711, who later became a Russian statesman and associate of Peter I, used to spend time in Arnavutköy, where he probably had a house. Available data on Russian icons in churches in the neighbouring Greek village of Neochori (now Yeniköy) on the Bosphorus confirms that it was highly likely Dimitrie who commissioned this set. The Greek village on the Bosphorus, Neochori (Yeniköy), was founded under Suleiman the Magnificent;<sup>17</sup> its inhabitants were engaged in navigation. In the mid-seventeenth century there were already three Orthodox churches here, noted by Paul of Aleppo. They were dedicated to Saints George and Sava, Saint Nicholas and the Mother of

14 See note 22.

15 Now in Saint Sergius Refectory Church at Trinity-Sergius Lavra.

16 BAR ms. gr. 974, f. 243r.

17 Çelebi, Evliya. *İstanbul Tarihi XVII. Asırda İstanbul*: İstanbul, 1988, 41.

God.<sup>18</sup> They still stand in reconstructed form to this day, each containing a set of Russian icons by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop.

The *third set* is located in the Church of Dormition of the Mother of God (Panagia Koumariotissa). The current building dates to 1837.<sup>19</sup> Four large icons are installed in ‘kiots’ (special cases for icons) on the walls next to the iconostasis. They appear to have been located in the iconostasis of a previous building of the church. The icons depict the Dormition of the Mother of God, to whom the church is dedicated, as well as the Annunciation, the Synaxis of the Archangels and the Deesis with the Archangels, Apostles and Saints (also the ‘Week Icon’ or ‘Sedmitsa’). Their painting style indicates that they belong to the work of two icon painters.

Despite following the style of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop, the first three icons are somewhat archaic in their painting. In that of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the artist deliberately emphasized the size of the figure of the deceased Virgin Mary; the depicted mourners have large heads and massive figures, and their facial expression is often naive. In contrast, the fourth icon featuring the Deesis with the Archangels, Apostles and Saints, was painted by a high-level court icon painter and is stylistically close to the works of Kirill Ulanov. All the inscriptions in this case, including the gold text of the Gospel, are in Greek. Unlike the other three icons, which have an inscription indicating the icon subject in Slavonic written in the top field, this icon has no author’s inscription. On the icon of the Annunciation the Greek inscription on the open book is original, whereas the names of some of the figures written in Greek in other icons were added later. Despite their stylistic differences, the icons are identical in format and board size, and they undoubtedly belonged to the same ensemble.

The *fourth set* is located in the Church of Saint George, known from documents since 1604.<sup>20</sup> Saint George’s is the smallest of the three churches in Neochori. After the Patriarch of Jerusalem moved his residence to Constantinople in 1645, it became one of the three Jerusalem metochions in the city,<sup>21</sup> a status which it retains to this day.<sup>22</sup> The current building was erected in 1857.<sup>23</sup> The Russian icon set displayed here is one of the most outstanding in terms of artistic quality, alongside other icons created by artists of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop in Constantinople. The ensemble

18 Paul, Archdeacon of Aleppo. Путешествие Антиохийского патриарха Макария в Россию в половине XVII века. Issue 1. P.P. Soikin publishers, 1896, 33.

19 Karaca, İstanbul’da *Tanzimat* Öncesi, 456.

20 Mentioned in the list of churches in Constantinople and the surrounding villages compiled in 1604 by Antonius Pateraki of Athens. (Sokolov, Ivan. Патриархия и храмы в Константинополе от второй половины XV века до настоящего времени. Исторический очерк. Petrograd: Senate Printing House, 1916, 42).

21 The church was first mentioned as the Jerusalem Metochion in 1690 (Çelebi, İstanbul *Tarihi XVII*, 43).

22 Karaca, İstanbul’da *Tanzimat* Öncesi, 69.

23 Ibid, 450–451.

comprises just three icons: Christ, the Mother of God and John the Baptist. (fig. 3). Christ is represented in the same Deesis composition as in the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The text on the open Gospel here is also written in Greek, in gold. It is clear that the same artist painted both icons. The year it was created (1699) is indicated on the step below Christ's foot is indicated. On the lower margin there is a Greek inscription: "Κώνσταντηνοῦ ἤς στο Νεόχ/ωρι...ἀγίου.../ || Γεοργηών ἤς στὴ μετοχή". (Demetrius, son of Constantin, sent this icon to Neochori in the metochion of Saint George). Thus, in 1669 the set was specially made in Moscow for the Church of Saint George in Neochori. Perhaps the person who paid for these very expensive icons was Dimitrie Cantemir, who, after his first brief stint as Moldavian ruler, lived almost continuously in Constantinople from 1691 to 1710. In 1699, he married and settled with his wife in Phanar. Thus, the kneeling warrior saints George and Demetrius were depicted on the icon because the church was dedicated to the first and the second was the patron saint of the donor. Judging by its similarity to the Deesis in the Church of the Dormition, this icon had the same patron. Dmitry Kantemir therefore donated icons to at least three churches on the Bosphorus, including those in Arnavutköy and Yeniköy.

The icon of the Mother of God belongs to the rare iconography of the Unfading Flower, where the image is placed in a luxurious wreath of naturalistically painted flowers. This detail was adopted from northern European engravings. The iconography of the Unfading Flower appeared in Russia at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and this is the earliest known dated example of it.<sup>24</sup> The last icon in the set depicts Saint John the Baptist, Angel of the Desert. This icon is the only one in the set that is painted on a light green rather than a gold background against a landscape backdrop.

The Church of Saint Nicholas in Neochori, where the *fifth set* is located, has also been rebuilt several times, most recently in 1839.<sup>25</sup> The iconographic program of the despotic icons located here is standard for Constantinople (fig. 4). On the sides of the Royal Doors there are paired icons of the Mother of God Hodegetria and Christ Pantocrator sitting on the throne. Behind them are depictions of Saint Nicholas (on the left) and Saint John the Baptist, the Angel of the Desert (on the right). It is interesting that there are waist-length representations of the saints on the left side of the Royal Doors, whereas the ones on the right are full-length. Such a discrepancy is also found in other Russian sets of despotic icons, even in paired icons of Christ and the Mother of God in the works of the artists of the Armoury Chamber workshop.<sup>26</sup>

24 Нромов, Oleg (ed.). «Солнце пресветлое». Русский свод сказаний о богородичных иконах. Исследование. Moscow: Pan Press, 2021, 226–230.

25 Karaca, *İstanbul'da Tanzimat Öncesi*, 443.

26 See the despotic icons by Kirill Ulanov in the katholikon of Saint Nicholas Monastery in Pereslavl-Zalessky (Komashko, Natalia; Katkova, Svetlana (Eds.). Костромская икона XIII–XIX веков. Moscow: Grand-Holding, 2004, 558–559, cat. no. 154–155, il. 252–253).

The icons themselves have late additions including a blue background, which on the icon of the Mother of God is covered in large gold stars. On the icon of saint John the Baptist, only the upper part of the background has been repainted. At the saint's feet there is a detailed landscape with the sky brightening towards the horizon. Such interpretation of the landscape, along with the chiaroscuro effect used to depict the flesh tones, suggests that the painting was created in the early eighteenth century. The icons were most probably all brought to the Church of Saint Nicholas at the same time and were preserved there during the reconstructions. In the 1890s they were adorned with silver halos, and the icon of Saint Nicholas was decorated with a revetment, as indicated by the Greek inscription on it.<sup>27</sup>

The *sixth set* was previously located in the Church of Saint George in Chrysokeros (Kuzguncuk) on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. It is first mentioned in the mid-seventeenth century;<sup>28</sup> the current building was erected in 1821.<sup>29</sup> In the early 1990s, under Metropolitan Joachim, two icons were moved from there to a newly built chapel in the Chalcedonian Metropolis building in Kadıköy.<sup>30</sup> They are paired two despotic icons of Christ with the four evangelists (fig. 5) and the Praises of the Mother of God in a Tree of Jesse type composition (fig. 6). Although both icons are distorted by later rough overpainting, the Slavic inscriptions on them are preserved.

The third icon in this set remains in the Church of Saint George in Kuzguncuk. Alexander Kariotoglou mentioned it in his publication on the churches of the Chalcedonian Metropolis, but incorrectly named the saints depicted as Hermolaus and Paraskeva;<sup>31</sup> it is in fact a hagiographic icon of Saint Hermolaus and the Great Martyr Panteleimon.

This icon sheds light on the history of the entire set. Very close to the Church of Saint George in Kuzguncuk is the Church of Saint Panteleimon. Its history goes back to early Byzantine times, when a church dedicated to the Mother of God stood on the site. Parts of the relics of the great martyr Panteleimon were kept there, but were later taken to Paris.<sup>32</sup> This fact led to the church being rededicated, this time to Saints Hermolaus and Panteleimon.<sup>33</sup> Having survived for some time after the conquest of Constantinople, it was eventually destroyed, only to be restored in 1587–1592. Under Metropolitan

27 Αφιέρωμα || τῶν εὐσεβῶν καὶ ὀρθοδόξων χριστιανῶν || Μάιος 189[...]. (Donation of pious and orthodox Christians. May 189[...]).

28 Çelebi, *İstanbul Tarihi XVII*, 47.

29 Karaca, *İstanbul'da Tanzimat Öncesi*, 503, 506.

30 Kariotoglou, Alexandros. *Chalcedon: The Historic Bishopric of Bithynia*. Athens: Milos Editions, 1996, 26–27. Il. 60, 62.

31 Ibid, 39.

32 Şarlak, Eva. *İstanbul'un 100 Kilisesi*. İstanbul: Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2010, 73.

33 Kariotoglou, *Chalcedon*, 37.

Gabriel (1686–1702) the Chalcedonian Metropolitan See was transferred there.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the set of icons was ordered in Moscow specifically for the main church of the Chalcedonian Metropolis, in connection with its renovation. During a complete reconstruction of the building in 1836–1837, the old icons were moved to the neighbouring Church of Saint George.

Three more sets of despotic icons by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop are located on the Princes' Islands. The connections between the islands' monasteries and the Moscow state in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are well traced in documents,<sup>35</sup> but mentions of icons are very rare in them. In 1691, the authorities of Trinity Monastery on the island of Halki (Heybeliada) sent a letter to tsars Ivan and Peter with a request that four icons be painted in Moscow for the iconostasis of the monastery katholikon - the Mother of God, Christ, John the Baptist and the Holy Trinity.<sup>36</sup> The letter was accompanied by working drawings that the icon painters were to use as a model, but these have not been preserved and their appearance is unknown. According to the documents from the Ambassadorial Prikaz (Posol'skij prikaz), in addition to the four despotic icons, six smaller ones were painted, also based on Greek models.<sup>37</sup>

According to V. G. Chentsova, the icons were delivered to Constantinople, where they remained for some time. At the beginning of the 18th century, Patriarch Jeremiah III transferred them to the Transfiguration Monastery on the island of Proti (now Kinaliada), where they remain to this day.<sup>38</sup> This is where the *seventh set* of Russian icons is now located. The Transfiguration Monastery was founded in the eleventh century, and the katholikon that currently stands was constructed in 1722 through the financial contributions of Greek merchants from Chios.<sup>39</sup> In the iconostasis there are four despotic icons by Moscow Armoury Chamber painters (fig. 7). However, they cannot be identified as those ordered by the monks at Trinity Monastery, since the set contains an icon of the Transfiguration (fig. 8), corresponding to the katholikon's dedication. Interestingly, it is located second to the right of the Royal Doors in the iconostasis, according to Russian tradition. The set also includes two half-length icons of the Mother of God Portaitissa and Christ Pantocrator, and a full-length icon of saint John the Baptist. The last icon is located on the third place on the right. Undoubtedly, these icons were created specifically for the monastery katholikon by

34 Şarlak, *İstanbul'un 100 Kilisesi*, 74.

35 Tchentsova, Vera. "Les monastères des Îles des Princes et la Russie muscovite". *Bibliologia* 54 (2020) (Bibliothèques grecques dans l'Empire ottoman, éd. A. Bingeli, M. Cassin, M. Détoraki, A. Lampadaridi): 75–101, 441–444.

36 Ibid, 95.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 68.

order of Patriarch Jeremiah, who is known to have asked Tsar Peter I to send them from Moscow.<sup>40</sup>

The *eighth set* is also located on Proti, in the parish church of the Nativity of the Virgin (fig. 9). It was built on the site where another monastery had been located in ancient times.<sup>41</sup> The island was abandoned in the eighteenth century, with the exception of monks in the Monastery of the Transfiguration. After the Greeks returned to the island in 1828–1830, a wooden chapel was built,<sup>42</sup> which was replaced by the existing church in 1886. The set includes three relatively small icons of Christ (fig. 10), the Mother of God (fig. 11), and John the Baptist. There may originally have been a fourth icon among them, corresponding to the dedication of the church it was intended for. The later silver revetments on the icons of the Mother of God and Christ have Greek inscriptions with the donors' names and the date 1850.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the icons were decorated before the construction of the church and were previously in another place. The third icon does not have a revetment, making it possible to appreciate the very high level of painting. Apparently, the shape of the icons changed before they got to Proti; the top of each one is now semi-circular, and all have been added to from below.

Finally, the *ninth set* is located in the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Prinkipos Island (Büyükada). Founded in Byzantine times, the monastery is mentioned in documents from the sixteenth century. The current katholikon was built in 1869.<sup>44</sup> The three despotic icons in it probably originate from the previous building (fig. 12) - they feature the Deisis, a brief version of the Praise of the Mother of God, and saint John the Baptist. In terms of composition, the icon of saint John the Baptist is the most dynamic of all Russian icons depicting the saint in churches in Constantinople.

On the lower margin of the icon with Deesis there is a Greek inscription reading: "1706 ΔΕΗΣΙ ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΣΠΙΡΙΔΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΓΟΝΕΟΝ ΑΗΤΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΚΑ(Ι) ΝΙΟ" (1706 Prayer of the servant of God Spyridon and his parents Nikolaos and Nia (?)). The date provided corresponds to the time of when icons were created, while the person mentioned was obviously the painter's client and donor.

Some of the Russian iconostasis icons in Constantinople may not have reached the present day in full. The icon of Saint Nicholas in the Church of Saint Paraskeva in Hasköy on the bank of the Golden Horn

40 Paschalis, Dimitrios. "Το εν τη νήσω Πρώτη Βυζαντινόν Μοναστήριον της Μεταμορφώσεως του Σωτήρος Χριστού. Μετόχιον της εν Άνδρω Μονής Παναχράντου." *Θεολογία* 24 (1953): 81.

41 Millas, *The Princes Islands*, 56.

42 Ibid, 44.

43 Αφιέρωμα || Όλυμπίας Θεοφίλου || Γρηγοριάδου || 1850 (Donation of Olympia Theophilou Gregoriadou, 1850); Αφιαίρωμα || Βλαδιμήρου κ(αι) Ευαγγελείας Γηρούιτς (Donation of Vladimir and Evangelia Gyrowitz).

44 Millas, *The Princes Islands*, 397.

probably comes from a disparate set. The church is known to have existed since early Byzantine times; the present building was first constructed in 1692 by Constantin Brâncoveanu, ruler of Moldova and Wallachia,<sup>45</sup> and then restored in 1833. Ties between the Danubian Principalities and Russia were quite strong under Constantin Brâncoveanu. The ruler himself built a large number of churches, some of which contain Russian despotic icons by painters in the Armoury Chamber workshop.<sup>46</sup>

At some stage, changes were made to the icon of Saint Nicholas: its light green background became dark blue,<sup>47</sup> flowers appeared on the ground below, and an inscription in Greek was added in a frame in the lower right corner, which is now poorly visible. Only individual letters and the name George can be read<sup>48</sup> - most likely the person who paid for the icon's renovation.

The Russian sets of despotic icons in the churches of Constantinople contain between two and four icons. Obviously, the last number corresponds to the full set. With rare exceptions, as in the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in

Neochori, the iconographic program is standard and corresponds to local Greek tradition. These are images of Christ, the Mother of God, John the Baptist and, in some cases, the feast or saint to whom the church is dedicated. At the same time, the iconographic solution adopted in the first three images varies considerably. By using similar sets of icons, which are located outside Constantinople, we can trace the compositional and semantic evolution of these images in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

**Images of Christ** in such icons are either single or part of multi-figure compositions. The simplest variant is a half-length image in the Pantocrator type, as in the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Proti. This resembles the icon painted by Tikhon Filatyev in 1700, in the equivalent set at Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos.<sup>49</sup> A more complicated depiction of Christ's clothes is seen in the icon in

45 Karaca, İstanbul'da *Tanzimat* Öncesi, 319. In 1833, the church was reconstructed, but overall it retained its appearance from the end of the seventeenth century (Ibid, 321). In 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarch gave the Paraskeva Church to the Romanian parish (Stavridis, Vasileios. *Αι εις την Πόλιν χριστιανικά εκκλησία, ομολογία, κοινότητες και παροικία*. Thessaloniki: Afoi Kyriakidi Ekdoseis, 2005, 84).

46 Church of Saint Gregory the New in Bucharest (Cristina Cojocaru, Elisabeta Negrău, Sultana-Ruxandra Polizu and Atanasia Văetiși. *Iconostase din București. Secolele XVII–XIX*. Bucharest: Editura Cuvântul Vieții a Mitropoliei Munteniei și Dobrogei, 2017, 66–67).

47 Fragments of the original background are clearly visible near the letters of the inscription with the name of the saint on the right.

48 η χ... ..ὠς... μήτηρ || Γεοργίου... ο || β..ηου.

49 Krasilin, Mikhail. "Русские иконы в монастыре Ватопед." In: *Панорама искусств, I*. Moscow, 2017, 203.

the chapel of John the Baptist at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. Under the influence of Western European examples, a new version of this iconography appeared in the early eighteenth century. This is the image of Christ as the Savior of the World (Salvator Mundi), as in the icon in the patriarchal chapel of Saint George in Bucharest.<sup>50</sup> Instead of the Gospel, he holds an orb crowned with a cross, symbolizing the universe.

Full-length images of Christ seated on a throne were more popular and varied in the Russian sets of despotic icons by Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop artists, as also applies to those in Constantinople. In the icon from the Church of Saint George in Kuzguncuk, Christ sits on a simple throne with a predominance of straight lines. A similar form is found in an icon at Iași Metropolitan Museum, and especially in the 1703 icon by Tikhon Filatiev at Sinaia Monastery in Transylvania. The version from Constantinople has additional images of the four evangelists in the corners. On the one hand, this shows continuity with the ancient iconographic type of the Christ in Majesty (*Spas v Silakh*), where not the evangelists themselves, but their symbols are placed in the corners. On the other hand, such a composition can be understood as an abbreviated variant of the image of Christ with the apostles. Icons of this type are not found in Russia.

In the icon at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Neochori, Christ sits on a throne of Baroque form - this was more popular than the simple one, and was often used by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop artist Kiril Ulanov. In particular, we can see it in the icon at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Radauti,<sup>51</sup> where Christ is presented in the type of the *Saviour of Tsar Manuel*, pointing at the text of the Gospel with his right index finger. Such images were popular in Russia, but are very rare among icons sent to other countries. In others with a Baroque throne, Christ is accompanied by twelve apostles placed on the branches of a tree. This is a full version of the iconography that came to Russia under Greek influence. It was only used in those icons that were sent abroad, such as in the Church of Prophet Elijah in Suceava by Kirill Ulanov from 1703<sup>52</sup> and the Church of Saint George tis Politias in Kastoria.<sup>53</sup> There are no apostles in the Constantinople icon, but two angels standing behind the throne. This is one of the details in a special version of the Deesis, called the *Week (Sedmitsa)*. In such a composition, each of the depicted persons was associated with one of the days in the weekly liturgical cycle.

50 Cojocaru et al., *Iconostase din București*, 97.

51 Sabados, Marina. "Icônes des peintres russes Kirill et Vassili Oulanov dans la région de Suceava". *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art: Série Beaux-Arts* V. XLVIII (2011): 142, fig. 4.

52 Ibid, 145, fig. 12.

53 Boycheva, Yuliana, and Anastasia Drandaki (eds.). *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη από τη Ρωσία στην Ελλάδα, 16ος–19ος αιώνας*. Athens: Benaki Museum and Institute for Mediterranean Studies – FORTH, 2017, 96, cat. no. 15.

A full version of such a Deesis with Christ in the traditional clothes of the Pantocrator is seen in two icons of identical composition from the churches of Dormition of the Mother of God and Saint George in Neochori, where the Mother of God and saint John the Baptist stand on either side of Christ. Between them and Christ there are two angels standing behind the throne. The six apostles are depicted above: Peter and Paul are in the centre, followed by the four evangelists. Kneeling patron saints George and Demetrius are in the foreground, with their backs turned towards the viewer. There is one more icon exactly like this, which is now kept in a private collection in Russia, but was previously in Europe for a long time,<sup>54</sup> painted by Kirill Ulanov in 1701. It was apparently also previously part of a set of despotic icons sent from Moscow to one of the Orthodox countries. Stylistically, all three Deesis icons are very close to each other.

Among the Russian despotic icons not in Constantinople, there are also examples of this type of Deesis with Christ Pantocrator, but in a brief form without the apostles and martyrs. This is true of an icon now located in the Church of the Three Hierarchs in Iași, which appears to be part of a set of despotic icons.

In the other icons from Constantinople, Christ is represented as the Great Hierarch. This iconography was very popular in Russian icon painting from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. The Christ Hierarch is depicted in the composition of the three-figure Deesis in the icons at the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Prinkipos and at the Church of Saint Demetrius Xyloportas. The royal robes and crown on the Mother of God sets the second icon apart; this version of the Deesis is known as “The Queen stands at your right hand (*“Predsta tsaritca odesnuju”*).” In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such an image was often placed in the centre of the Deesis tier on the iconostasis in Russia, but it is almost never found among despotic icons. A rare example is the 1676 icon by Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber artist Nikita Pavlovets in Novodevichy monastery in Moscow.<sup>55</sup> The icon from the Church of Saint Demetrius resembles it, apart from the fact that John the Baptist is also depicted wearing a royal crown. Another more accurate example of the same composition is the early eighteenth-century despotic icon in the iconostasis of the Church of Saint George the New in Bucharest, where the Deesis with the Great Hierarch includes the apostolic tree.<sup>56</sup>

54 Icon of Deesis 1701 with six apostles and saints Demetrius and George in a private collection. (Иконопись Оружейной палаты из частных собраний. Edited by Natalia Komashko. Moscow: Central Andrey Rublev Museum of Ancient Russian Culture and Art, 2017, 84–85, cat. no. 30.

55 VValentina Antonova and Nadezhda Valentina. Каталог древнерусской живописи XI – начала XVIII в.в. Опыт историко-художественной классификации. 2 vols. Moscow: The State Tretyakov Gallery, 1963, 394–395, cat. no. 896.

56 Cojocaru et al., *Iconostase din București*, 67.

Christ the Great Hierarch is depicted without other Deesis figures on an icon from the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on Proti. On both sides of him, above and below, are symbols of the evangelists. At the foot of Christ stand two saints, whose figures are greatly reduced. The revetment hides the inscriptions with their names, making it impossible to identify them, but they appear to be the patron saints of those who commissioned the work. The image of Christ the Great Hierarch also appears in an icon from Mount Sinai Monastery, where it is enclosed in a frame with an apostolic tree.

Finally, the image of Christ “*Kings of Kings*” is used in the icon from the Church of the Archangels in Mega Reuma. There he is dressed in a red royal robe and a crown. This iconographic type, based on the text of the Apocalypse, became popular in Russia from the late 1670s, but was not used in despotic icons sent abroad. The image of Christ is part of the composition in the multi-figure Sedmitsa-type Deesis. Here, the group of apostles is different from that in the icons in Neochori. Peter and Paul stand behind the Mother of God and John the Baptist. Above, James the son of Alphaeus, Judas, Bartholomew and Philip are depicted. Below, on the sides of the throne, are kneeling figures of James the son of Zebedee, John the Theologian, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas and Simon.

*Images of the Mother of God* within sets of despotic icons are usually rhythmically and compositionally correlated with paired images of Christ. The simplest iconographic variants are half-length depictions of the Mother of God and Child. In Constantinople there are two versions of the Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron with, in the Church of Saint Demetrius Xyloportas and at the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Proti. Icons of this type are often found in Russian icon sets sent abroad. This is not only due to the popularity of the Portaitissa replica in Moscow, originally sent from Athos; the creators of such icons usually took into account the iconographic preferences of residents in the places where they were to be sent.

The icon of Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron was perceived as well known to the Greeks. Its image is part of the iconostasis of the Chapel of John the Baptist at Mount Sinai Monastery,<sup>57</sup> as well as in several later eighteenth-century sets of icons.<sup>58</sup> The iconography of the Mother of God Hodegetria was neutral and, of course, also understandable to the Greeks. Such an icon is located in

57 Komashko, Natalia (ed.) *Russian Icons of Mount Sinai. Charters, icons and decorative and applied arts of the 16th to 20th centuries from Russia in Saint Catherine's Monastery*, Mount Sinai, Egypt. Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, 2015, 323.

58 In the Chapel of the Raifa and Sinai Martyrs in *Sinai* monastery (Ibid, 341) in the Colțea Church in Bucharest (Cojocaru et al., *Iconostase din București*, 40); from the Greek Church of the Trinity in Livorno (Passarelli, Gaetano (ed.). *Le Iconostasi di Livorno Patrimonio iconografico post-bizantino*. Con saggi di: Doriana Dell'Agata Popova, Antonia D'Aniello, Lucia Frattarelli Fischer. Pisa: Pacini 2001, 102).

the Church of Saint Nicholas in Neochori, in Vatopedi Monastery,<sup>59</sup> and in the Patriarchal Chapel of Saint George in Bucharest.<sup>60</sup>

Full-length images of the Mother of God enthroned were also common in iconostasis sets, but in Constantinople are only found as part of the multi-figure composition of the Praises of the Virgin Mary, which includes images of prophets. Two variants of such a composition can be traced. The first is typical of Russian icon painting of that time; it is used in the icon from the Church of the Archangels in Mega Revma. In the centre, the Mother of God sits holding the Child on the throne, flanked by twenty-four prophets depicted in several rows. The lowest and closest to the centre are David and Moses, who is the only one of all who holds his symbol - the Burning Bush. Behind them are Solomon and Aaron. In the middle of the seventeenth century such a clear scheme replaced a more conventional ancient variant of the iconography of the Praises of the Mother of God and was used by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop painters in Moscow. The icon in Mega Revma is the only example of it in the sets of despotic icons created to be sent abroad.

The second type of the Praises of the Mother of God - composition with the twelve apostles placed on the branches of a tree, similar to the image of Christ enthroned surrounded by the apostles - was developed under Greek influence and was used exclusively for export. At an early stage, the prophets were placed in medallions on the margins around the Mother of God seated on the throne with the Child in the centre, as in the icon intended to be sent as part of a set to Constantinople,<sup>61</sup> but which ended up in the Serbian monastery of Velika Remeta.<sup>62</sup> Realistically rendered vine shoots were soon added to the composition on the sides, surrounding the Mother of God. Smaller figures of prophets were placed on these shoots, and then a whole tree was added to the centre of the composition, with the Mother of God sitting on its crown.

59 Krasilin, "Русские иконы," 203.

60 Cojocaru et al., *Iconostase din București*, 97.

61 In 2023, Nadezhda Chesnokova found a document in the Russian Archive of Ancient Acts about the order of four icons in Moscow in 1686 by the Patriarch of Constantinople Dionysius IV and contacted the author of this article for advice. As a result of the analysis of the document, these icons were identified by me with the set that ended up in Velikay Remeta in 1701. These findings were used by Nadezhda Chesnokova in her further work (Chesnokova, Nadezhda. Пересматривая архивные документы о русских иконах в Галерее Матицы Сербской (Нови Сад). In: Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства. Moscow; Saint Petersburg, 2026 (in print). The patriarch's letter was accompanied by samples for copying. Thus, the appearance of this type of image of the Mother of God among the artists of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop was directly connected with the Greek order.

62 Rakić, Zoran. "Великореметске иконе из 1687 године и њихови аутори". Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности, 22 (1986): II. 4.

Several Russian icons of this type are attributed to artists of the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop from the turn of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. These icons can be found in various locations, including the Church of the Prophet Elijah in Suceava,<sup>63</sup> the Church of Saint George Tis Politias in Kastoria,<sup>64</sup> the Sinaia Monastery in Transylvania, and the Church of Saint Gregory the New in Bucharest, where the Virgin Mary is flanked by two angels.<sup>65</sup> This group of icons also includes the image of the Praises of the Mother of God in the Church of Saint George in Kuzguncuk, Constantinople. Under the influence of Greek iconography, a composition of the Praises of the Mother of God with only four prophets appeared in Russian icon painting, showing David, Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah around the throne. This composition is found in icons created both for Russia<sup>66</sup> and abroad. Among the Constantinople icons there are two variants of it. In the first, which more closely follows the Greek model, the reduced figures of the prophets are placed at the corners of the throne. This type is used in the icon in the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God on Proti, where two cherubs are added at the sides. In the second version, the prophets are proportionate to the Mother of God and surround her throne, as in the icon in the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Prinkipos.

*Images of Saint John the Baptist* in the Russian despotic icons are not so varied, but in each case have their own individual features. Many such icons have been preserved, both in Constantinople and elsewhere. They all belong to the same full-length Angel of the Desert type. The icons differ in the gesture made by John's right hand, the position of the cup in his left hand, the spread of his wings and other details. In all of them, the saint is depicted in a landscape.

There are five such icons in the Constantinople sets, while only three are known from other places: those in Velika Remeta Monastery of Ivan Maximov,<sup>67</sup> the Church of Saint George tis Politias in Kastoria,<sup>68</sup> and the Church of Saint Nicholas in Radeuti.<sup>69</sup> In Constantinople, similar icons of John the Baptist are in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Neochori and the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Prinkipos. Three other icons have additional hagiographical scenes in the landscape, all of which are different: the icon in the Church of Saint George in Neochori depicts the Nativity of Saint John and the Beheading; the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Proti has the Beheading and the Finding of the Honourable Head

63 Sabados, "Icônes des peintres russes," 145, fig. 11.

64 Boycheva and Drandaki, *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη*, 96, cat. no. 15.

65 Cojocaru et al., *Iconostase din București*, 66.

66 Triptych with the enthroned Virgin Mary, Christ the King of kings and John the Baptist, late 17th century, Andrey Rublev Museum (*The Holy Family in Religious Art in the 11th–20th Centuries*. Edited by Natalia Komashko. Moscow: Central Andrey Rublev Museum of Ancient Russian Culture and Art, 2024, 52–52, cat. no. 18).

67 Rakić, "Великореметске иконе," II. 1.

68 Boycheva and Drandaki, *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη*, 97, cat. no. 15.

69 Sabados, "Icônes des peintres russes," 144, fig. 9.

of saint John the Baptist; and the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on Proti has the Nativity, John in the desert, the Baptism of the people and the Beheading. There are no other known examples of John the Baptist with hagiographical scenes in sets of despotic icons sent abroad.

Though not required in sets of iconostasis icons, *images of Saint Nicholas* are usually present in those intended for a church dedicated to him. However, several such icons are known, two of which are in Constantinople. The first is of the half-length type, located in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Neochori. The second icon, in the Church of Saint Paraskeva in Haskoy, is unusual in its depiction. In the icons in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Radauti<sup>70</sup> and Velika Remeta Monastery,<sup>71</sup> the saint is depicted in the Nikola Zaraysky type common in Russia, with his arms spread wide. Here, a full-length version of the half-length type is used, with the saint's hands in front of his body. Probably, the choice of such iconography was dictated by the small width of the wooden base. This is another argument in favour of the hypothesis that the icon was originally part of a set that possibly included more than four images. Examples of such sets are known, though they have not survived in their entirety. Thus, the icon of Christ is now missing from the four despotic icons at Velika Remeta Monastery.

The numerous sets of iconostasis icons by the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber workshop in the churches of Constantinople are extremely diverse and interesting in their iconographic program. They reflect the creative approach of icon painters who sought to follow the tastes and iconographic preferences of the Greeks and, at the same time, introduce them to new compositional solutions of Russian origin.



70 Ibid, 144, fig. 10.

71 Rakić, "Великореметске иконе," II. 2.



Fig. 1. Iconostasis at the Church of Saint Demetrius Xyloportas. (Source: Millas, Akylas. Κωνσταντίνου Πόλις. Η εντός των τειχών ορθοδοξία. Athens: Militos Editions, 2005, vol. A: 413).



Fig. 2. The Miracle of Saint Demetrius, before 1704. Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Church of Saint Demetrius Xyloportas. (Source: Millas, Akylas. Κωνσταντίνου Πόλις. Η εντός των τειχών ορθοδοξία. Athens: Militos Editions, 2005, vol. A: 414).



Fig. 3. Iconostasis at the church of Saint George, Neochori (Yeniköy). (Source: Karaca, Zafer. *İstanbul'da Tanzimat Öncesi Rum Ortodoks Kiliseleri*. 2nd ed. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008, 453).

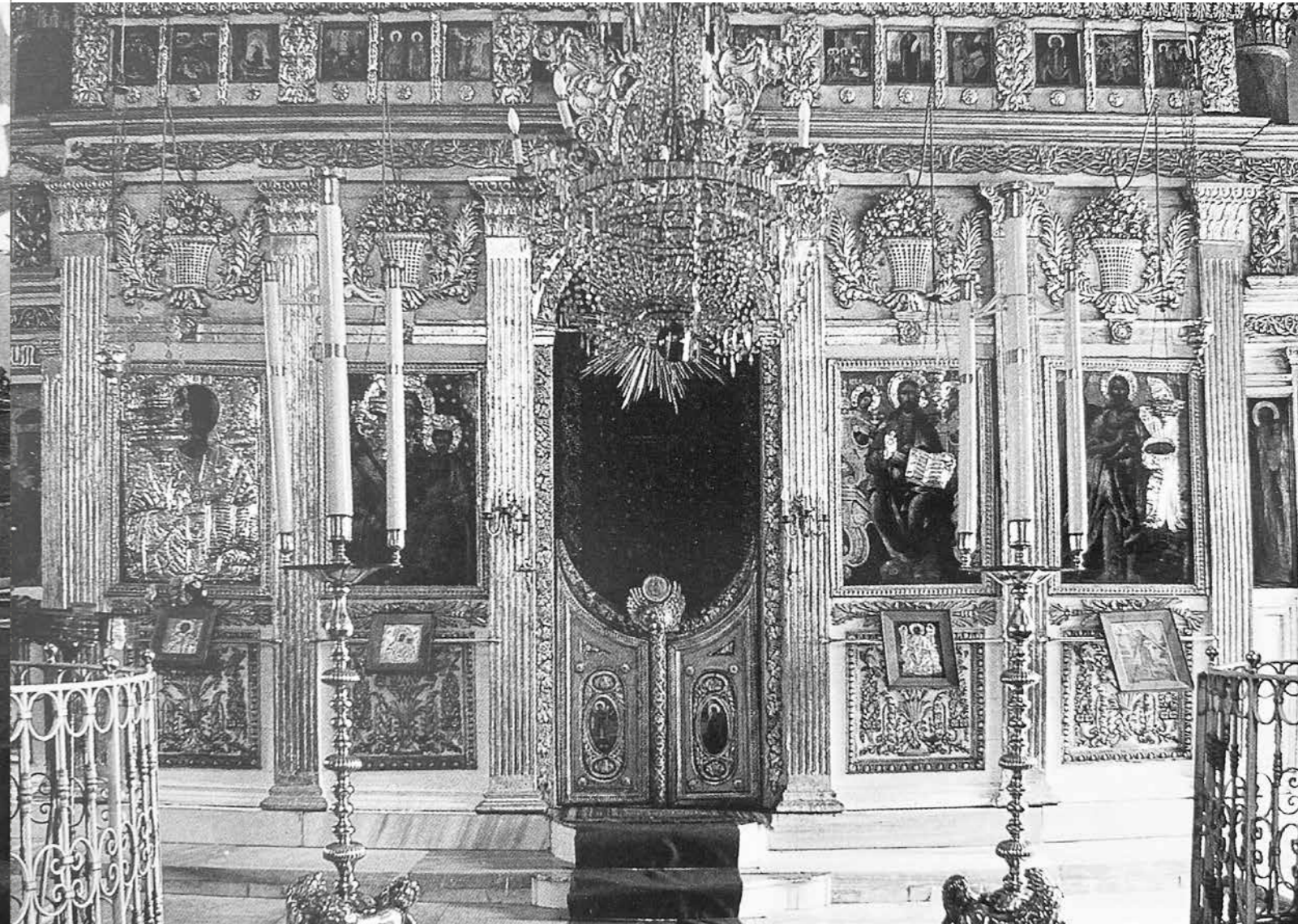


Fig. 4. Iconostasis at the church of Saint Nicholas, Neochori (Yeniköy). (Source: Karaca, Zafer. *İstanbul'da Tanzimat Öncesi Rum Ortodoks Kiliseleri*. 2nd ed. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008, 447).



Fig. 5. Christ Pantocrator on the throne with the four evangelists, late 17<sup>th</sup> – early 18th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Chapel in the Chalcedonian Metropolis in Kadiköy. Transferred from the Church of Saint George in Chrysokeramos (Kuzguncuk). (Source: Kariotoglou, Alexandros. *Chalcedon: The Historic Bishopric of Bithynia*. Athens: Militos Editions, 1996, 26).



Fig. 6. The Praises of the Mother of God, late 17<sup>th</sup> – early 18th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Chapel in the Chalcedonian Metropolis in Kadiköy. Transferred from the Church of Saint George in Chrysokeramos (Kuzguncuk). (Source: Kariotoglou, Alexandros. *Chalcedon: The Historic Bishopric of Bithynia*. Athens: Militos Editions, 1996, 27).

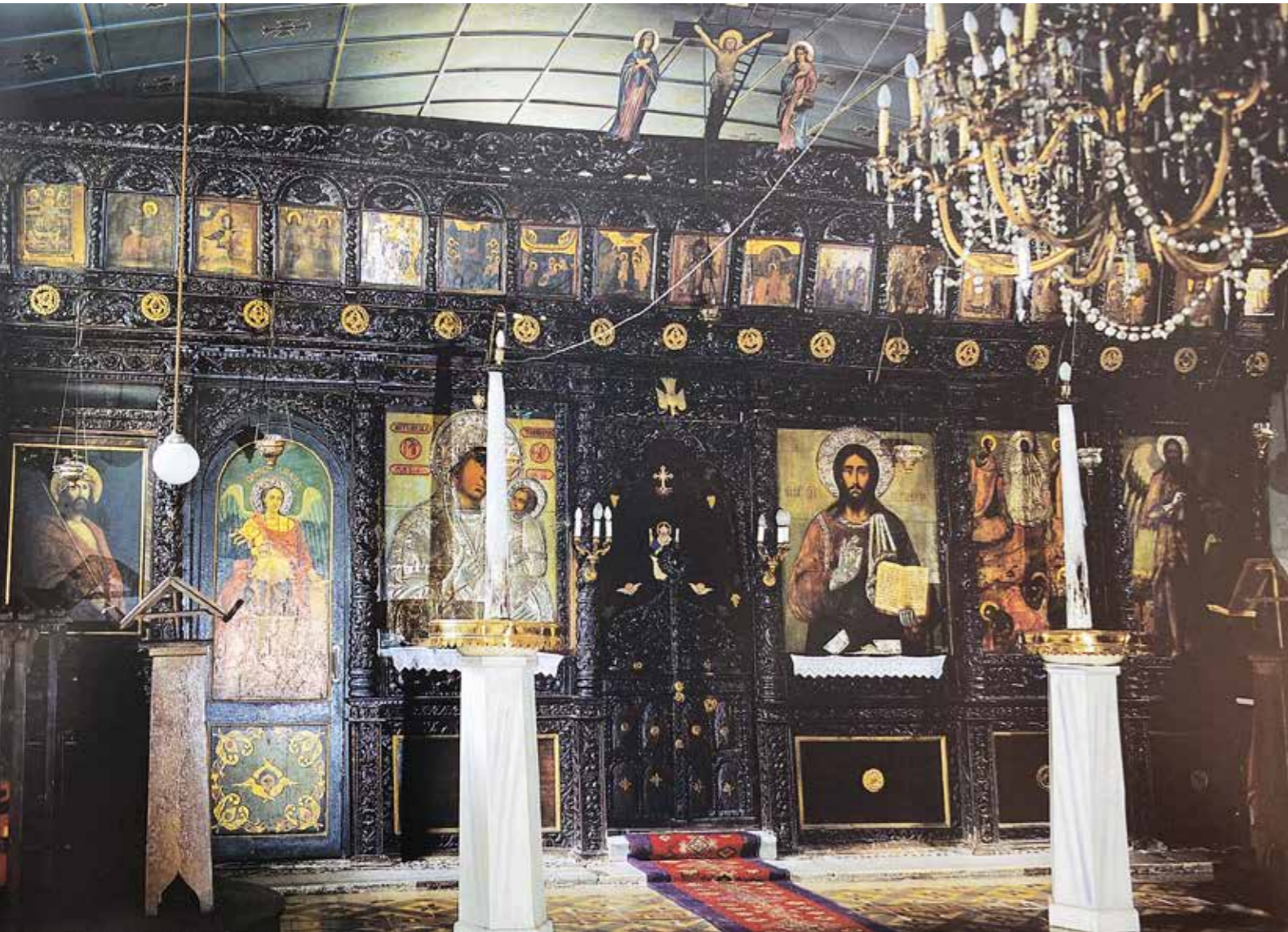


Fig. 7. Iconostasis at the katholikon of the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Protos (Kinalada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 69).



Fig. 8. The Transfiguration, late 17th – early 18th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Monastery of the Transfiguration on Protos (Kinalada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 70).



Fig. 9. Iconostasis at the Church of Nativity of the Virgin on Proti (Kinalhada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 56).



Fig. 12. Iconostasis at the katholikon of the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Prinkipos (Büyükada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 408).



Fig. 10. Christ the Great Hierarch, late 17th – early 18th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Church of the Nativity of the Virgin on Proti (Kinalhada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 58).



Fig. 11. The Praises of the Mother of God, late 17th – early 18th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Armoury Workshops, Church of the Nativity of the Virgin on Proti (Kinalhada). (Source: Millas, Akylas. *The Princes Islands. A Retrospective Journey*. Athens: Militos Editions, 2000, 59).

## Russian Icons in the Peloponnese: Evidence and Works

Panayotis K. Ioannou

### Abstract

This paper considers various sources on the presence of Russian icons in the Peloponnese. Some icons of particular interest throughout the Peloponnese region are then examined in conjunction with written evidence.

**Keywords:** Russian Icons, Peloponnese, Monasteries, Museums, Laconia, Achaia, Inscriptions.

As often happens in any research conducted simultaneously in the field and in written sources, the result is somewhat predictable: on the one hand, we find objects with little or no documentation, while on the other, we find evidence that does not correspond to specific objects. This reality is no different in the case we are interested in here: research into Russian icons in the Peloponnese and testimonies on them.

It is true that a large number of artefacts transferred from Russia are to be found in the various regions of the Peloponnese (Achaia, Corinthia, Ilia, Argolida, Arcadia, Messenia and Laconia): icons, church utensils and vestments, liturgical books and others. Relevant documentary evidence begins mainly from the period of the Orlov Revolt, which is understandable given that the Morea was one of the Russian forces' main theatres of operations.<sup>1</sup> Testimonies continue in the 19th century, with the foundation of the Greek State, since the Russian party remained strong in the Peloponnese up until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main reasons for the presence of these objects were donations by Russians, trips

<sup>1</sup> For the Orlov Revolt in the Peloponnese see Tassos Gritsopoulos, *Τα Ορλωφικά: η εν Πελοποννήσω επανάστασις του 1770 και τα επακόλουθα αυτής*, Athens: Mnimosini, 1967. Stefanos Papadopoulos, "Η Ελληνική Επανάσταση του 1770 και ο αντίκτυπός της στις Ελληνικές χώρες", in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, vol. 11, 1975, 58–83.

made by Greek monks and hierarchs mostly for alms collection (*zeteia*), and merchants, and lastly — perhaps in the majority of cases — donations by Greek expatriates to their places of origin.

Oral testimonies (rumors, to be more precise) often enter into written sources, mostly in local publications that reproduce unverified information about Russian icons or even an entire iconostasis. To give some examples, in various sources on the iconostasis of the Church of the Transfiguration in Kastanitsa, Arcadia, at times one reads that it was a gift from Catherine the Great, and at others that it was sent to Kastanitsa from Odessa by Ilias Maneses. Another similar case concerns claims that churches in Kynouria (a region in southeast Peloponnese) have Russian icons gifted by the Empress Catherine. The same applies to the information according to which the Church of Agios Nikolaos in Petsakous, near Kalavryta, completed in 1880, is "known throughout Achaia for its exceptional icons, crafted by Russian painters" (we did not find any Russian icon in this church). However, this stands as evidence of the great reputation enjoyed by Russian icons both in the past and the present day - a reputation that even spread to areas that do not have such works, and probably never did.

In fact, there are few times when we can partially trace the path of these Russian icons. This is the case, for example, with the "two old Russian art icons" found by the archaeologist George Sotiriou in the Church of the Transfiguration at Methoni Castle, in 1892, and deposited in the Christian Museum in Athens.<sup>2</sup> We assume that the icons in question are probably connected to the Orlov revolt, as Methoni in Messinia was one of the most important approach points for Russian forces in the Peloponnese.

On the other hand, in many churches, monasteries and Museums in the Peloponnese we find Russian icons for which we have little or (usually) no documentation. To give some examples:

In the Church of Saint Phanourios in Patras we find a Russian icon of the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya (fig. 1) occupying a prominent position in the entrance shrine. We do not have any information on the origin of the icon in question, which is possibly a donation to the recently built church.

The same is true of the eight icons now kept in the Metropolis of Sparta Museum of Ecclesiastical Art, roughly dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, none of which even have documentation

<sup>2</sup> «Επεσκέφθημεν τας εν τω αυτώ φρουρίω ηρειπωμένας εκκλησίας του αγίου Σάββα και της αγίας Σοφίας και τον εν αυτώ ενοριακόν ναόν της Μεταμορφώσεως [...] εν ω εύρομεν και δύο παλαιάς Ρωσικής τέχνης εικόνας, ας παραλαβόντες, κατεθέσαμεν υπ' αριθμ. 1719 και 1720 εν τω ημετέρω Μουσείω». Georgios Lambakis, *Μελέται, Εργασίαι και Περιηγήσεις των ετών 1892–1893*, Athens: ek tou Vasilikou Typografeiou N. G. Inglesi, 1894, 13.

of their location prior to being placed in the museum. The only certainty is that they originate from churches or monasteries in the area. The icons are as follows: Saint Nicholas Bishop of Myra (17th century); Descent into Hell (19th century) (fig. 2); Christ Pantokrator with Saints Nicholas of Myra, Demetrius and Archangel Michael (19th century); Saints Peter the Athonite, Onouphrios and Savvas and Saint Mandelios (18th century); Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host (early 19th century) (fig. 3); Saint Nicholas of Myra (early 19th century).<sup>3</sup>

Russian icons are also to be found in the Ecclesiastical Museum of Aegio, in Achaia. The museum collection mainly consists of works from churches and monasteries in the wider region. However, there are two Russian icons: one Mother of God Tikhvinskaya (fig. 4), dated to the nineteenth century, of unknown provenance; and an eighteenth-century Mother of God Vladimirskaya originating from the Monastery of the Holy Apostles.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, we have insufficient documentation on the many Russian icons of similar style held in the collection of the Metropolitan Church of the Annunciation (Evangelistria) in Patras. Founded in 1842 and inaugurated in 1846, it has been the cathedral of Patras since 1856. The additional Russian icons in the iconostasis — 19, to be precise — have never been studied in the least, but are accessible for worship. According to rather general and certainly unverified information contained in a brochure published by the Metropolis, these icons were “sent from Russia in the 1890s”. Perhaps this dating is related to the fact that during the same period, in 1890 and in 1892, many other Russian works (chandeliers, candelabra, gospels, antimensia, an Epitaph and a Tabernacle) were sent to the church from Odessa. Of these, six icons with inscriptions in Russian are placed in front of the corresponding despotic icons of the same name in the iconostasis, i.e. icons for worship. Specifically, they are the following: Saint Spyridon with Christ and the Virgin Mary; The Annunciation (fig. 5); The Virgin Mary with Child, Christ Pantokrator (fig. 6); The Beheading of St. John the Baptist; Saint George Slaying the Dragon. Eleven icons are located in the sanctuary, on the eastern wall of the central arch: The Presentation of the Virgin; The Three Hierarchs; Saint Demetrius on horseback; Saint Andrew; Saint Athanasios; Saint Spyridon; Saint Charalambos; Saints Constantine and Helen; The Synaxis of the Archangels; All Saints (fig. 7). All of them bear inscriptions in Greek, probably covering earlier Russian ones. Also, another icon of Christ Pantokrator, is on the parapet of the east sanctuary wall. Finally, two icons are placed to the left and

3 See illustrations in: Theocharis Mich. Provatakis / Georgia Mylonakou-Saitakis (ed.), *Θησαυροί και κειμήλια. Μουσείο Εκκλησιαστικής Τέχνης Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Μονεμβασίας και Σπάρτης*, Sparta: Iera Mitropolis Monemvasias kai Spartis, 1998, nn. 79–84.

4 *Εκκλησιαστικόν Μουσείον Αιγίου*, texts: Chryssa Dimitriou, Aegio: Iera Mitropolis Kalavryton kai Aigialeias – «Βιβλίο και Εικόνα», 2015, 40–41, 62–63, 124–125.

right of the church entrance, next to corresponding shrines: Saint Nicholas of Myra and Saint George Slaying the Dragon. They too bear inscriptions in Greek, which probably cover others in Russian.

In the city of Aegio, another nucleus of Russian icons and Russian objects more generally is the community of Asia Minor refugees, who arrived in 1922 from the villages of Aloni, Vori and Skupia on Proikonesos island in the Sea of Marmara. The relics that were saved — icons, liturgical utensils and vestments, books and others — are now kept in the repository of the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen and St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary.<sup>5</sup> Among the icons kept there is Mother of God Pecherskaya (fig. 8).<sup>6</sup> At least four other Russian icons dating back probably to the 19th century are still preserved: The Crucifixion; Saint George the Trophy Bearer; Saint Panteleimon; Mother of God the “Deliveress”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, there are also cases in which icons can be documented thanks to the inscriptions they bear and/or various other written sources, if only to a certain extent. We will dwell on some of these instances in more detail here.

The area around Geraki in Laconia is well known for its Byzantine paintings: from a dedicatory inscription found on a portable icon of the Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron (fig. 9) in the Parish Church of the Dormition of Mother of God, we are informed that the icon in question was painted in Moscow, at the expense of Daniel Bratis, then a monk at the Russian Monastery of Saint Panteleimon:

«Ἐγράφη ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ μου τῆς μητρός του ἐν Μοσχοβία τῇ κλεινῇ διὰ δαπάνης τῆς ἐμῆς Δανιὴλ προηγουμένου καὶ ἐλαχίστου τοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἁγίῳ Ὁρει τοῦ Ἀθωνοῦ ἐκ τῆς μονῆς τῶν Ρούσων τοῦ Ἁγίου Παντελεήμονος, οὗ μοι ἡ πατρὶς Πελοπόννησος, ἡ δὲ κώμη ἡ ἐμοὶ Ἰεράκι κρᾶζεται καὶ νῦν, ὁ πατὴρ δὲ ὁ ἐμὸς Γεώργιος ἐκόσταπράτη, οἱ προσκυνοῦντες δὲ αὐτὴν εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ τοῦ ταπεινοῦ. Ἰνδικτιῶνος 13 1690 Μαρτίου Α΄»<sup>8</sup>.

5 Agathonikos A. Tsakalos, *Το Κειμηλιαρχεῖο του ιεροῦ Ναοῦ Ἁγίων Κωνσταντίνου και Ελένης και Θεοπρομήτορος Ἀννης*, Aegio 2019.

6 Tsakalos, *Το Κειμηλιαρχεῖο*, 46–47.

7 Illustrations of these icons in: Tsakalos, *Το Κειμηλιαρχεῖο*, 100–103.

8 The inscription was published in Tassos Ath. Gritsopoulos, *Ἱστορία του Γερακίου*, Athens: Ekdotis tou Syndesmou ton en Attiki Gerakiton, 1982, 304–305. First publication, but with errors, in: Konstantinos G. Zisiou, *Επιγραφαὶ χριστιανικῶν χρόνων της Ελλάδος*, Part I: Πελοπόννησος, no 1: Επιγραφαὶ Λακεδαιμόνος, Athens: M. Chioti & K. Rousea, 1909, 29. The icon in question was first published in: Nikos P. Vatsouris, “Ἡ Παναγία του Γερακίου Σπάρτης. Ἐνα πολύτιμο στολίδι”, *Λακωνικά*, 45 (1971), 77. Many thanks to Mr. Dimitrios T. Vachaviolos for pointing out the icon and for the useful discussions we had, and to priest Nikos Georgantonis for the photograph of the icon.

«The icon of the Mother of my God was painted in glorified Muscovy at my own expense – I, Daniel, proēgoumenos and the least of all monks on the Holy Mountain of Athos, from the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon; My homeland is the Peloponnese, my village is called Ieraki, and my father was George Kostaprátēs. And you who venerate this icon, pray for me, the humble one. Indiction 13, March 1, 1690»<sup>9</sup>.

There were strong ties between the Bratis family and the Church of the Dormition of Mother of God; from another source, we know that it was built by Konstantinos Bratis, also a monk on Mount Athos, in 1702<sup>10</sup> (meaning that the icon was placed there at a later date). The fact that the icon dates back to 1690, when the Peloponnese was under Venetian rule, possibly lends special meaning to the fact that it was ordered from Russia.

Of particular interest are the icons kept in the Monastery of the Taxiarches near Aegio in Achaia, on which we will dwell a little longer. Founded by Saint Leontius at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the monastery was one of the most important in the Peloponnese during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Being stavropegic, it owned extensive property and held shares in various Greek regions, including Constantinople.<sup>12</sup> Due to its involvement in the Orlov Revolt, the monastery was almost completely destroyed in 1772. Ten years later, the few remaining monks began to rebuild and restore it to its earlier form,<sup>13</sup> which broadly corresponds to the depiction by Vasily Grigorovich Barsky (Barsky) in 1745,<sup>14</sup> including the catholicon, on the iconostasis of which there are now two despotic icons. They

9 Translation of the transcription by Daria Resh.

10 Gritsopoulos, *Ιστορία του Γερακίου*.

11 For the history of the monastery see Linos Politis, «Χειρόγραφα Μοναστηριών Αγίου και Καλαβρύτων», *Ελληνικά*, 11 (1939), 81–108. Averkios Papadopoulos, *Ο Άγιος Λεόντιος Παλαιολόγος Μάμωνας (1377–1452). Η μονή ταξιάρχων Αιγιαλείας (1620–1940): Συμβολή εις την Ιστορίαν*, Thessaloniki 1940. Theodoros Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονής Ταξιάρχων της Αιγιαλείας. Μετ' ανεκδότων εγγράφων*, Athens 1977. Pan. Panitsas / Pan. Papatheodorou, *Ο όσιος Λεόντιος και η Μονή Ταξιάρχων Αιγιαλείας*, Athens 1979. For the history of the monastery, mainly in the post-revolutionary period, see Konstantinos A. Papamentzelopoulos, *Επισκοπή Κερνίτσης, κατόπιν Μητρόπολη Καλαβρύτων και Αιγιαλείας. Ιστορία και διοικητικές μεταβολές*, PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 2022, 312–332.

12 The monastery's stavropegic privilege was repeatedly renewed by several ecumenical patriarchs (Dionysius IV, Jeremiah III, Cyril V, Sophronius II, Gregory V); see Papadopoulos, *Ο Άγιος Λεόντιος Παλαιολόγος Μάμωνας*, 58–68. For the share of the Taxiarches Monastery in Constantinople see Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονής Ταξιάρχων*, 26.

13 According to the so-called “Holy Codex” preserved in the monastery: “In the year of our Lord 1782, we began with God to renovate the pitiful ruins of the inhuman cremation of our holy monastery, the holy church and therefore the cells and other buildings. During the entire rebuilding and repair of the monastery, expenses totaled 27, 856, all from loans”. Papadopoulos, *Ο Άγιος Λεόντιος Παλαιολόγος Μάμωνας*, 58.

14 For Barsky's stay in Aegialia in 1740, see Arist. Stavropoulos, *Ιστορία της πόλεως Αγίου από των μυθικών χρόνων μέχρι των ημερών μας*, Patras: Eng. Kouloumpis, 1954, 292, where the interesting information that a monk at the monastery gave Barsky “many old icons to copy and a famous Panagia Glykophilousa” - the information

are an *Enthroned Virgin Mary* with a scepter, i.e. as the *Queen of Heaven* (fig. 10), and an *Enthroned Christ as Great Hierarch* (fig. 11). It should be noted that despite being prominently placed either side of the Beautiful Gate, neither icon has ever been mentioned in any publication, nor has the inscription (fig. 12) borne by them ever been read:

“ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗ ΚΑΙ ἘΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΤΑΞΙΑΡΧΗΤΟΥ ΜΕΛΕΤΙΟΥ ΣΑΡΑΝΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΔΙΑΚΟΠΤΗΤΟΥ ἘΝ ἘΤΕΙ ΣΩΤΗΡΙΩ, ἈΨΠΕ΄ ΜΗΝΗ ἈΠΡΗΛΙΩ ΙΕ΄ ἘΝ ΜΟΣΧᾶ”

(With the help and diligence of the Taxiarchite monk Meletios Sarantis of Diakopto during year of salvation 1785 in the month of April 11 in Moscow)

According to the inscription, the icons arrived at the monastery thanks to the energies of Taxiarchite (an epithet received by monks from the Monastery of the Taxiarches) Meletios Sarantis. Evidence for the identification of the latter comes from the monastery's codices. In one of them, now kept in the State Archives in Athens, dated 1853,<sup>15</sup> we read that Meletios Sarantis was abbot of the monastery at least in 1785, the same year as that in the inscriptions on the two icons. And also that he himself, who is described in the same codex as “a worthy and widely experienced man”, was sent to Constantinople together with another monk in around 1775. Equipped with letters of recommendation from the priors of Patras and Aegio, he intended to renew the monastery's privileges, and to obtain favourable arrangements from the Ottoman authorities.<sup>16</sup>

From another earlier manuscript, the so-called “Holy Codex” preserved in the monastery, we are informed that “Diacoptites Meletios Sarantis” went to Constantinople on *zeteia* (*ζητεία*). He stayed there for nine

15 was given to Stavropoulos in a letter by the professor of philology at the University of Kyiv Nik. Mihailov. Athens, State Archives of Greece, no. cat. 149, General Index no. 223. Cfr. Eleni Angelomatis – Tsougarakis, «Μία άγνωστη χειρόγραφη ιστορία της Μονής Ταξιάρχων Αιγιαλείας», *Πρακτικά Β΄ Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών*, Athens 1981–1982, vol. 3, 65–86, transcription of the text of the “Summary History”: p. 78–86.

16 «[ο Θεοφάνης Μαυρικιώτης] επέστρεψε εις την μονήν 3 έτη μετά την άλωσίν της συμπαραλαβών δε και δοκίμους και αυτός μεν έμενεν επισκευάζων και καθαρίζων την μονήν, τον δε Διονύσιο και Μελέτιον άνδρα άξιον και πολύπειρον διά συστατικών γραμμάτων των εν τέλει Πατρών και Αιγιών απέστειλεν εις Κωνσταντινούπολιν, όπου δια της συνδρομής των πολιτών ανανέωσαν τα φερμάντα και σιγίλλια και εκ των αντιγράφων τούτων βοηθούμενοι δι΄ εισφοράς των παρουσιάστησαν εις τον πρωθυπουργόν του σουλτάνου βεζιρην [...]» / “[Theofanis Mavrikiotis] returned to the monastery three years after the destruction, and he also received probationers and he stayed to repair and clean the monastery, and Dionysius and Meletius, a worthy and widely experienced man, he sent with constituent letters from the prelates of Patrae and Aegio to Constantinople, where with the help of the citizens they renewed the firmans and sigils and from the copies of these, assisted by their contribution, they were presented to the Sultan's Prime Minister, Vizier [...]”. Angelomatis – Tsougarakis, «Μία άγνωστη χειρόγραφη ιστορία», 84.

years, and on returning to the Taxiarches in 1785, presented the following: “19, 352 kuruş (gurush) a gilded silver chalice, four bronze manuals, priestly vestments, copper plates, and – of primary interest to us – six despotic icons of Russian art for the church”.<sup>17</sup>

Also, reading the Venetian land register of Vostitsa, we find that the Sarantis family owned estates in Diakopto. To be specific, they were in the area of Peramachalas and Katholiko (at a distance of approximately 30 kilometers), seat of the Bishop of Kernitsa, under whose jurisdiction the Monastery of the Taxiarches lay. The Sarantis must have been a wealthy Diakopto family.<sup>18</sup> They clearly had strong ties with Taxiarches Monastery, as apart from Meletios, at least three other members of the family — Makarios, Grigorios and Philotheos Sarantis — were abbots there.<sup>19</sup>

Meletius himself seems to have been a capable and energetic personality. Certainly, thanks to his own actions, in the following years the monastery regained not only its previous prestige but also its wealth.<sup>20</sup> The following owner’s note found in one monastery codex possibly also refers to this same Meletius: “and this, among others, belongs to Meletius” («καὶ τὸδε σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις Μελετίου τοῦ καὶ Ταξιαρχίτου»). Not by chance, moreover, the Holy Codex of the monastery describes him, as we have seen, as a “worthy and widely experienced man”. The second designation may even indicate a trip to Russia, possibly during the time he was in Constantinople.

In any case, we have no evidence of a trip by Sarantis to Moscow other than the two inscriptions on the despotic icons in the iconostasis (“IN MOSCOW”), the truth of which, however, there is no reason to doubt. More generally, we have very little specific information about possible relations between the monastery and Russia. It is testified that after a fire at the monastery, which must have happened in the 1740s, “[of the] monks who were saved, some went to Russia, others to Smyrna, Constantinople and elsewhere, and collecting money, they rebuilt the Monastery”.<sup>21</sup> If such a thing is true, it testifies to some longer-established contacts with Russia. These relations were possibly strengthened during the activity of Catherine the Great in the Greek lands and manifested themselves with greater intensity during the Orlov Revolt. Based on these contacts, we cannot rule out the possibility that Meletios Sarantis travelled

17 Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονῆς Ταξιαρχῶν*, 27.

18 Diakopto then included the villages of Katholiko or Episkopi, Pera Mahalas, Vrostheina and Kernitsa.

19 Makarios was abbot of the monastery from 1780 to 1783, and Grigorios from 1796 until at least 1800.

20 Meletius sent Philotheos and Germanus Sarantis on various missions in search of money. Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονῆς Ταξιαρχῶν*, 28, with testimony to actions by Meletius regarding extensive renovation works on the monastery. Politis, «Χειρόγραφα μοναστηριῶν Αιγίου και Καλαβρύτων», 82. It follows that Meletius was the owner of several codices.

21 Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονῆς Ταξιαρχῶν*, 14.

to Moscow and stayed there for some time between 1775, when he left Aegialia — immediately after the conclusion of the Treaty of Kuciuk Kaynarca — and 1785, when he returned.

In any case, there can be no doubt that the two icons now preserved in the iconostasis in the monastery church were among the “six despotic icons of Russian art” brought “for the church” by Meletius on his return from Constantinople. We do not know whether the two icons were originally placed in the iconostasis. The present icon screen was made by the woodcarver Nikolaos Metzovitis in 1815–1816.<sup>22</sup> The fate of the other four images is totally unknown. However, we should note that 17 icons were stolen from the monastery in 1834.<sup>23</sup> Additional Russian icons held there are as follows: Saint Tryphon; Mother of God Hodegetria; Saint Nicholas of Myra; Archangel Michael; Saint John the Baptist .

Meletius bought or more likely commissioned these icons. This is indicated by the phrase “ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗ ΚΑΙ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ” (assistance and diligence) in the dedicatory inscription. The first word, “ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗ” simply means the expense or at least the care of paying for the icon, and is often found in such inscriptions. For example: “This divine and holy church was built [...] with the *assistance* and expenses of Constantine and Georgios Lianas and by the hand [...] / Ιστορήθη ο θεῖος οὗτος και πάνσεπτος ναός [...] διὰ συνδρομῆς και δαπάνης Κωνσταντίνου και Γεωργίου Λιανῶν και διὰ χειρὸς [...] οι κάτωθεν ἔξι κουμπέδες Κωνσταντίνου ιερέως και της χώρας ταύτης και Σέριου μαθητοῦ αὐτοῦ», in 1787 in Katsanochoria of Ioannina.<sup>24</sup>

A much rarer word in dedicatory inscriptions is “επιμελεία”, which mainly denotes the care and effort made by the painters. This is the case, for example, in some inscriptions found in the 18th century. For example, in the inscription “study and diligence of the orthodox painters of the honorable Konstantinos and Mr. Athanasios and Naum of Korytzas”/«σπουδή και επιμελεία των ορθοδόξων ζωγράφων του τιμίου Κωνσταντίνου και κυρού Αθανασίου και Ναούμ λογιωτάτου των εκ Κορυτζᾶς τελούντων». <sup>25</sup> Or in another one by the painter monk Makarios from Galatista Halkidiki (“the present refectory was painted by the hand and care of Makarios the monk from Galatzista”/ («ανιστορήθη η παρούσα τράπεζα

22 Papageorgiou, *Ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονῆς Ταξιαρχῶν*, 37. Panitsas / Papatheodorou, *Ο ὀσιος Λεόντιος*, 45.

23 Papamentzelopoulos, *Επισκοπή Κερνίτσης*, 316.

24 Manolis Chatzidakis, *Ἕλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ την Ἄλωση (1450–1830)*, vol. 1: *Αβέρκιος-Ιωσήφ*. Athens: Institute of Historical Research, Department of Neohellenic Research – National Research Foundation, 1987, 297.

25 Chatzidakis, *Ἕλληνες ζωγράφοι*, 135. That the word literally means “diligence” here emerges from the fact that the obligation is explicitly mentioned in the relevant agreement: («λογιότατοι διδάσκαλοι κυρ Κωνσταντῆς και κυρ Γ Αθανάσιος]... υποσχέθηκαν ν[ά κάμουν] την τέχνην τους με μεγάλην επιμελείαν, με κεκρυ[μένα οποι] ἔχουν, τρόπον τινά να ἔχη διαφορά ἀπὸ όλ[ας τας ιστορίας] ὅσας ἔκαμαν ἐδὼ εἰς το Ἅγιον Ὄρος... υποσχέθημεν δε και εμεῖς (οι μοναχοί) να κοιτάζομεν με επιμελείαν εἰς το φαγί τους φροντίζοντας δε αείποτε [και διὰ] κρέας...») Chatzidakis, *Ἕλληνες ζωγράφοι*, 136, 225.

διά χειρός και επιμελείας Μακαρίου μονάχου του εκ Γαλατζίστας»<sup>26</sup>. However, it is possible that the word “επιμέλεια” is related to the iconography of the two icons, perhaps with the addition of the four evangelists in the corners.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the case may be, the most important thing is that there is an obvious naturalism in these Russian icons at the Monastery of the Taxiarches – a naturalism that comes not from the West, as we are used to thinking, but from the East. This issue is of particular interest, since it concerns one of the first manifestations of naturalism in ecclesiastical painting in the Peloponnese, but it goes beyond the limits of this text.



26 Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι*, 163.

27 Although we cannot expand here, suffice it to say that such an iconographic mix, specifically in the image of Christ, appears in an icon dated at the end of the seventeenth century, which used to be in the Monastery of Agia Triada in the village Trapeza of Aegialia and is now kept in the Aegio Ecclesiastical Museum. See illustration in *Εκκλησιαστικόν Μουσείον Αιγίου*, texts: Chryssa Dimitriou, Aegio, Iera Mitropolis Kalavryton kai Aigialeias – «Βιβλίο και Εικόνω», 2015, 40–41.



Fig. 1. Mother of God Tikhvinskaya, 19th century, Church of Saint Phanourios, Patras. Photo: Panayotis K. Ioannou.

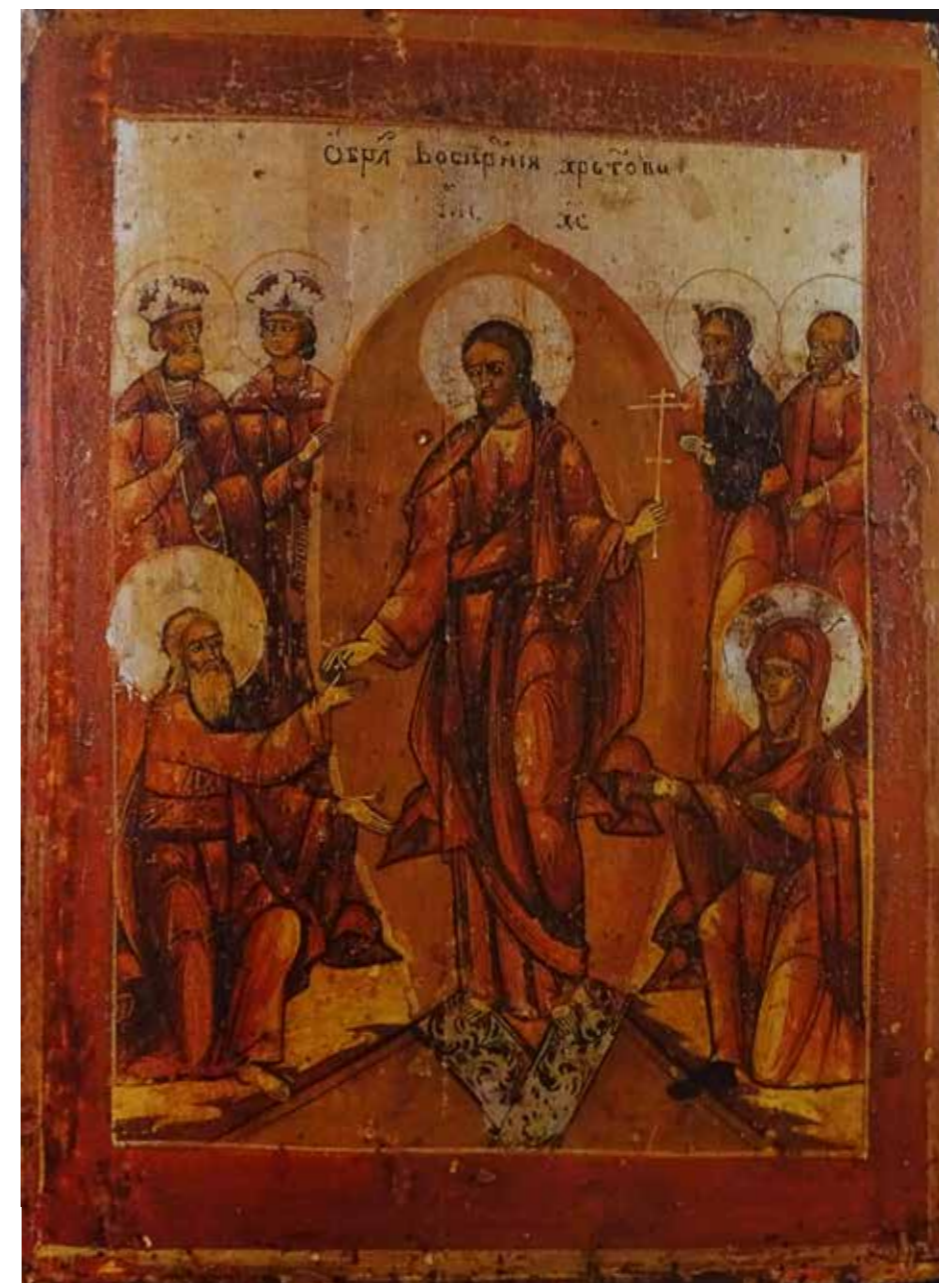


Fig. 2. The Descent into Hell, 19th century, Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta Museum of Ecclesiastical Art, Sparta. © Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta.



Fig. 3. Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, 19th century, Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta Museum of Ecclesiastical Art, Sparta. © Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta.



Fig. 4. Mother of God Tikhvinskaya, 19th century, Ecclesiastical Museum of Aigion. © Metropolis of Kalavrita and Aigialeia.



Fig. 5. The Annunciation, 19th century, Cathedral Church of the Annunciation (Evangelistria), Patras.  
© Metropolis of Patras.

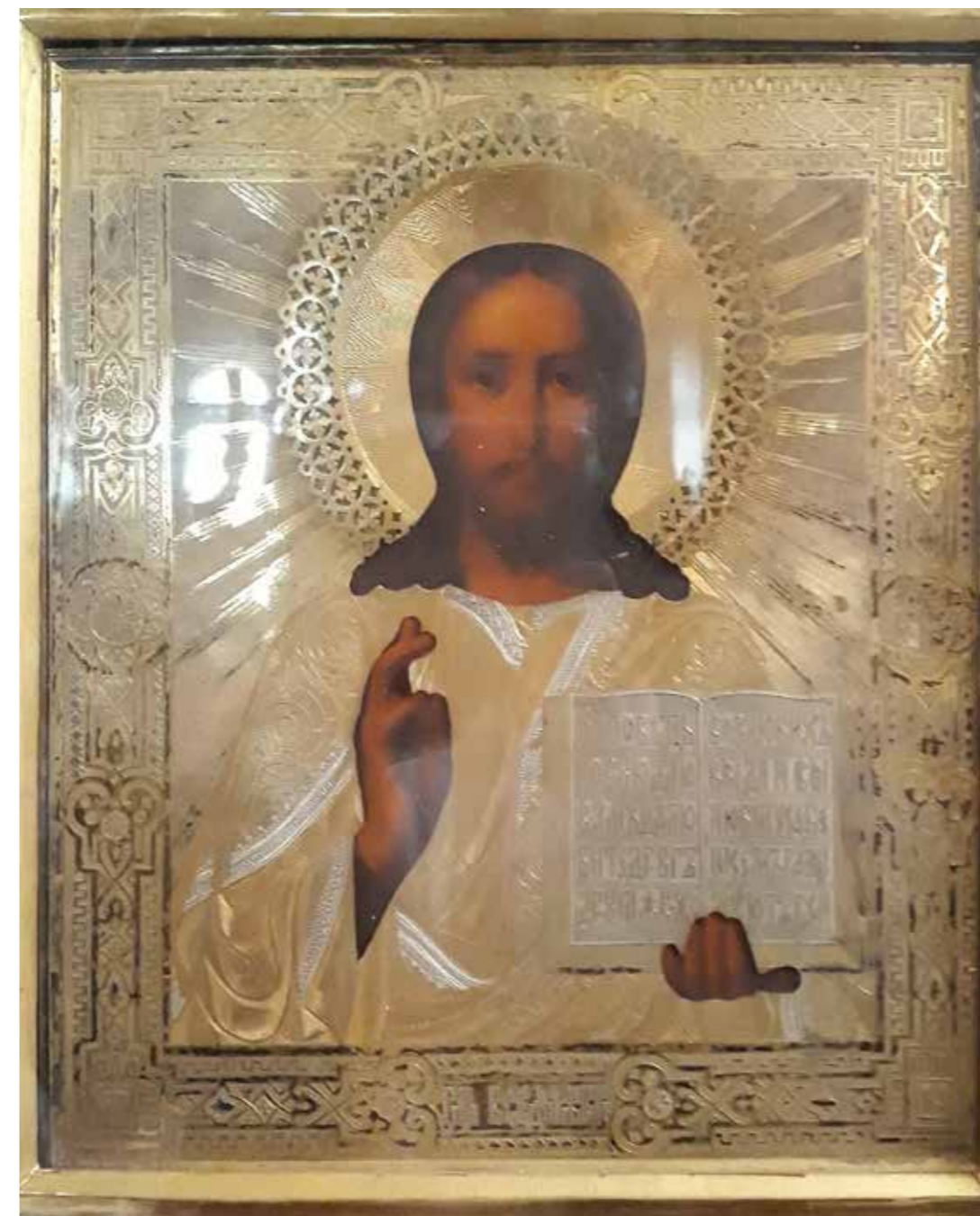


Fig. 6. Christ Pantokrator, 19th century, Cathedral Church of the Annunciation, Patras. © Metropolis of Patras.



Fig. 7. All Saints, 19th century, Cathedral Church of the Annunciation, Patras. © Metropolis of Patras.



Fig. 8. The Virgin of Pechersk, 19th century, Church of Saints Constantine and Helen and Anne, Aigion. © Metropolis of Kalavrita and Aigialeia.



Fig. 9. Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron, 1690, Parish church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, Geraki, Laconia. Photo: Dimitrios T. Vachaviolos



Fig. 10. Mother of God Queen of Heaven, 1785, Taxiarches Monastery Church, Aigion. © Metropolis of Kalavrita and Aigialeia.



Fig. 11. The Enthroned Christ as Great Hierarch, 1785, Taxiarches Monastery Church, Aigion. ©Metropolis of Kalavrita and Aigialeia.

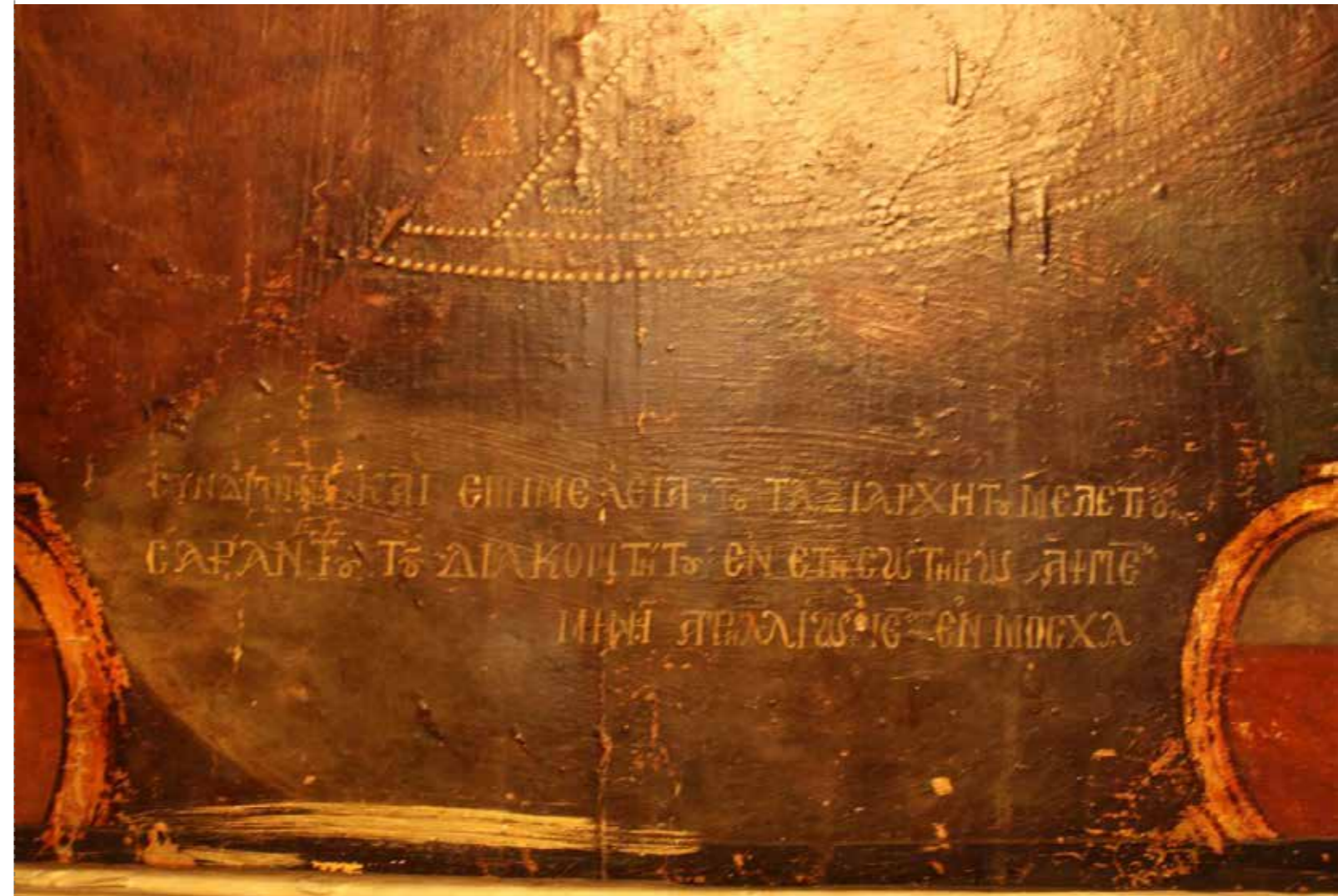


Fig. 12. Inscription on icon n. 10. Photo: Panayotis Ioannou.

## Russian Icons with Dated Inscriptions from Bulgaria

Angel Nikolov

### Abstract

This paper is dedicated to the Russian icons with dated inscriptions documented by the Bulgarian RICONTRANS project team during its work. Russian icons do not usually bear chronological indications, which makes precise dating of them impossible. Dated inscriptions are important because they give us a *terminus ante quem* for the appearance of the icons and sometimes reveal interesting data about their movements.

**Keywords:** Nineteenth century, Russian icons from Bulgaria, dated inscriptions on Russian icons, Pleven, Svishtov, Veliko Tarnovo, Central Northern Bulgaria

In the course of research on Russian icons in Bulgaria in recent years, we have had the opportunity to see that most of these artifacts (usually inexpensive “folk” or “Suzdal” icons from workshops in Mstera and Kholui<sup>1</sup>) do not bear any indication of authorship or dating<sup>2</sup>, which creates a number of difficulties in their interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Here, however, we will focus on some of the relatively rare

1 Tarasov, Oleg. “Русские иконы XVIII – начала XX в. на Балканах.” Советское славяноведение 3 (1990): 49–70. For more details on the “Suzdal” icons and trading in them see idem. *Икона и благочестие. Очерки иконного дела императорской России*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 1995, 155–214.

2 According to one estimate, less than one percent of the mass of Russian icons are dated - see Eberhard, Kurt. “Проблемы датировки поздних икон на основе датированных изображений.” In *Русская поздняя икона от XVII до начала XX столетия. Сборник статей*, edited by M. Krasilin. Moscow: GosNIIR, 2001, 211.

3 For various aspects of the presence of Russian icons in Bulgaria, see recently: Gergova, Ivanka. “Russian Icons in Bulgaria.” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans*, edited by Y. Bocheva. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, 149–159; idem. “Russian Orthodox art in the Bulgarian lands from the 16th until the late 19th century: The current state of investigation and avenues for further research.” *Museikon* 4 (2020): 195–204; Nikolov, Angel. “Saints and Soldiers’. 19th-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 317–328; Gergova, Ivanka. “From Petersburg to Shipka via Mount Athos: Slavic Saints on the Shipka Iconostasis.” *Slavia Meridionalis* [Online] 24 (2024), Article 3088: 1–28 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.3088> (accessed: 23.01.2025);

examples of icons with dated inscriptions, which give us a definitive *terminus ante quem* both for the creation of particular works and their arrival in Bulgarian lands.<sup>4</sup>

The oldest<sup>5</sup> inscription we have been able to document is written in Romanian in Cyrillic letters on the back of a Russian icon of the Mother of God Healer of Sorrows (fig. 1), owned by the Nikolay Pavlovich Art Gallery in the town of Svishtov, inscribed: “*Simeon Angilou 25 December 1810*”.<sup>6</sup> This date brings us to the dramatic fate of Svishtov during the Russo-Turkish War in the early nineteenth century. On 1 September 1810, the city was captured by troops under Major-General Guillaume Emmanuel Guignard, vicomte de Saint-Priest, and almost completely burned down two weeks later on the orders of Count Nikolaj Kamenskij, Commander in Chief of the Danube Army.<sup>7</sup> This forced the local Bulgarian population to move temporarily north of the Danube, into Wallachia. It is possible that the icon we are interested in was acquired there and brought to Svishtov after the refugees returned to their burnt city.

It should be noted here that due to its geographical location, in the eighteenth – nineteenth centuries Svishtov became one of the most flourishing centers of international trade along the lower Danube. In addition, after being razed in the autumn of 1810, the town was occupied by Russian troops in 1829, and in the summer of 1877 was the place where the Russian army first crossed the Danube at the beginning of

Komashko, Natalija and Ivanka Gergova. “Една икона във войни.” In *Изкуство и история. Изкуствоведски четения 2024. Модул Старо изкуство*. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2025, 179–200; Grigorova, Totka. “Аспекти на почитанието на към светите Кирил и Методий, отразени в няколко икони от втората половина на XIX век.” In *Кирило-Методиевски студии* 35 (2025), 211–212

4 Here we will not comment on several Russian icons with dated inscriptions that were presented by Bulgarian clergymen and monasteries to the Commander-in-Chief, Grand Prince Nikolaj Nikolaevich during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. On them see Nikolov, Angel. “Icons and Wars: Some Examples from the Russo-Turkish War 1877–1878.” In *Изкуство и история 2024*, 61–76.

5 Much older Russian icons with inscriptions from the collection of the National Museum of Church History and Archaeology in Sofia have only recently been published by I. Gergova. One of them was donated by three Bulgarians from Razlog to the Church of St. Panteleimon in Vidin in 1757 (Gergova, Ivanka, “Плодовета на Христовото страдание (Живият кръст).” In *Икони от Националния църковен историко-археологически музей*, edited by Alexander Kuyumdzhiev and Ivan Vanev. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2024, 393 (No. 413)), and the other was made in 1758 by the painter Stefan Danilov from the town of Gadjach (Ukraine) for the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, but was taken to the museum from the Church of St. Spas in Sofia (idem. “Св. Богородица Ахтирска.” In *Икони от Националния църковен историко-археологически музей*, 2024, 394 (No. 414)). An icon of the Holy Virgin Mary of Vladimir from the collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia bears an inscription that shows it was painted in Kiev in 1749: Gergova, Ivanka, Gatev, Y. and Vanev, I. *Християнско изкуство в Националния археологически музей – София. Каталог*. Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov”, 2012, 71 (No. 53).

6 Текст: “Сумѣω[.] аѣггѣлѣ 1810: декемрѣз: 25”.

7 Микхайловскій-Данилевскій, Александр. Описание Турецкой войны в царствование императора Александра, с 1806 до 1812 года. Ч. II. St Petersburg: Типографія Shtaba Otdel'nogo korpusa vnutrennej strazhi, 1843, 87–88; Pophristov, Georgi. Свищов в миналото 86–1877 г. Svishtov: Pechatnitsa P. A. Slavkov, 1936, 39; Manchev, Vasil. Спомени. Дописки. Писма. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniia front, 1982, 18–19, 25–26.

the next Russo-Turkish war. No wonder, then, that Russian icons enjoyed a certain popularity in the city.

Two examples that are directly relevant to the topic of this paper will suffice. In the ancient church at the Monastery of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul at Svishtov, there is a Russian icon of Christ Pantokrator with the name Alexander marked on the back (the surname of the owner or donor is almost completely erased), in addition to the year 1860 and the place – Svishtov.

Much more interesting is the second example, which clearly testifies to the widespread dissemination of Russian church art in the town in the second half of the nineteenth century. Several Russian icons from the Church of the Holy Transfiguration in Svishtov are now kept in the Regional Museum of History collection in Veliko Tarnovo. Our attention was attracted by a large icon of Christ Pantokrator (fig. 2), on the back of which there is a partially readable inscription from 1860, with a paper note stuck over much of it.<sup>8</sup>

The visible part of the inscription is difficult to decipher, but definitely includes the name Aleko, enabling us to hypothesise that the donor was the uncle of the famous Bulgarian writer and lawyer Aleko Konstantinov (1863–1897). Aleko Hadzhikonstantinov († 1892) was a wealthy and respected merchant from Svishtov who sympathized with the Bulgarian liberation movement. As an elected member of the Ruse provincial court during the Russian occupation, he took part in building up the judicial system of the newly established Principality of Bulgaria.<sup>9</sup> Hadzhikonstantinov is known to have been a devout Christian and a member of the board of trustees of the Holy Trinity Cathedral Church in Svishtov.<sup>10</sup> Of course, whether he owned the icon in question remains to be verified.<sup>11</sup>

Several Russian icons with dated inscriptions are preserved in the Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery in Pleven.

8 The icon's history is unclear, but from a second (and only partially readable) inscription on the back it appears to have been in the Church of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Svishtov (consecrated in 1874), was then transferred to the Church of the Transfiguration in the same town (definitely before 1944), and was subsequently handed over to the Regional Historical Museum in Veliko Tarnovo.

9 He was appointed to this honorary position on 23 August 1878, by order of the Imperial Russian Commissar in Bulgaria, Adjutant-General Prince Alexander M. Dondukov-Korsakov. See Yanovski, Boris. "Създаване на второинстанционните съдилища в България (1878–1879 г.)." *Годишник на Софийския университет. Юридически факултет* 79 (1986) No. 1: 21.

10 Veliko Tarnovo State Archive, F. 738k, Op. 1, a. e. 10, f. 8a.

11 The surname of the donor Aleko, as recorded on the back of the icon, raises a number of questions: if we read it correctly, it is "Tonitsa", yet no such surname is attested among the representatives of the family whose founder was Aleko's father, Hadzhi Konstantin. Of course, this may have been a nickname adopted by Aleko Hadzhikonstantinov himself, but it may also indicate that the donor of the icon was entirely unconnected with the family. On this occasion it is worth noting that the personal name Aleko was also borne by other representatives of wealthy Svishtov families, such as the entrepreneur, bookseller and publicist Aleko Angelov Krastich (c. 1835–1903). On this see Naydenov, Ivaylo. "В света на свищовските търговци братя Кръстич: предприемаческа култура, бизнес практики, етика и манталитет." *Исторически преглед* 75 (2019), No. 1: 57–84; idem. "Между предприемаческата кариера и интелектуалната дейност: шрихи към живота и делата на Алеко Ангелов Кръстич от Свищов. (втората половина на XIX в.)." *Съло* 16 (2020): 1–14.

The earliest example in the collection refers to 1867; it is written on the back of a rather damaged four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, and Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki<sup>12</sup> (fig. 3), which came from the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in the village of Varbitsa, in Pleven Municipality. The text reads:

*"This icon [is from] Haralampiy Yonkov, [who] brought it to the church to be consecrated on the 28th day of February 1867. Signed by priest Peno Tsankov the goldsmith. Let it be remembered when flour was worth 45 para<sup>13</sup> an okka<sup>14</sup>, wine 4 [grosh an okka], 20 [grosh] a pail<sup>15</sup>, and meat 4 grosh<sup>16</sup> and fish 12 grosh<sup>17</sup>."*

Since the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, was built between 1899 and 1903, and there was no church in the village before that, the icon was apparently consecrated at some unknown location elsewhere. It raises some eyebrows that the priest noted the prices of a variety of goods – something normal for a marginal note in a book or notebook, but hardly appropriate for an inscription on an icon.

The following inscription was made on a Russian icon of St. Nicholas (fig. 4), immediately below the image of the saint:

*"Presented by Master Nikola, Doctor from Klisura, 1868."*<sup>18</sup>

The icon came to the Pleven Gallery from the church of All Saints in the town of Koynare, in Cherven Bryag Municipality (50 km west of Pleven). Nothing is known about the personality of doctor Nikola. Moreover, there are several settlements that bear or have borne the name "Klisura" – a town in the Municipality of Karlovo, and villages in the municipalities of Berkovitsa (renamed Barziya since 1950), Sofia (district of Bankya), Samokov and Blagoevgrad.

On the back of another icon of St. Nicholas (fig. 5), we find an inscription recording that it was donated in 1875 to the Church of St. Paraskeva in the village of Odarne, in Pordim Municipality (about 30 km southeast of Pleven):

12 The Virgin of Kazan, St. Nicholas, Archangel Michael and St. George.

13 4000 para = 1 Ottoman lira = 6.61519 grams pure gold = 99.8292 grams pure silver.

14 Ottoman measure of mass = 1.28 kg.

15 Typically, 1 pail = 10 or 12 okka.

16 100 kuruş (in Bulgarian *grosh*) = 1 Ottoman lira.

17 Text: "Сиа икона харалампіа ѿнкѣва а донеси в цар[квата] за да са свети на м(с)ць феврърь: 28: день: 1867 подписа по(п) пено цанкува кѣюмджи да са памети кѣгатѣ бе брашното 45 пари вката а виното: 4: 20 ведрото а месото: 4: гро(ш) а рибата: 12: гро(ш)".

18 Text: "подарена ѿ гднѣ нїкола ѿ клисѣра 1868 г."

*“[This] icon of St. Nicholas belongs to Nikola Ivanov from Enina<sup>19</sup> and I bequeathed it to the church of St. Paraskeva in Odarne 1875, September 17”.*<sup>20</sup>

The village of Enina is located south of the Balkan Mountains, near Kazanlak. It is possible that Nikola Ivanov brought the icon of his heavenly patron St. Nicholas in Odarne from his birthplace, and eventually donated it to the local church, which was built in 1866.

The Pleven Gallery collection also holds three Russian icons presented to different churches in the period after the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule: in 1883, an icon of the Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts (fig. 6) was donated to the church of St. George in the village of Baykal, in Dolna Mitropolia Municipality<sup>21</sup>; in 1889, an icon with the Crucifixion of Christ, the Virgin of Kazan, St. Nicholas, Archangel Michael and St. George (fig. 7) was gifted to the church of St. Demetrius in the village of Byala Voda, in the Municipality of Belene<sup>22</sup>; and in 1903, two families, one of them from the village of Bozhenitsa, in the Municipality of Botevgrad, presented an unknown church with an icon of the Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts (fig. 8).<sup>23</sup>

Turning again to the Regional Historical Museum collection in Veliko Tarnovo, we found a fine example of a private icon inscribed by its owner. It is a depiction of the Resurrection of Christ with Chosen Saints<sup>24</sup> (fig. 9), from the Church of St. Paraskeva in the village of Belyakovets, in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality, on the back of which the following inscription was placed:

*“1873 Icon of Stoyan Kosyuv Stanchoolu January 6”.*<sup>25</sup>

19 Literally: “Yanina”. This form of the village name is documented in older literature, for example: De-Preradovich, Fjodor. Българското опълчение в Руско-турската война 1877–1878 (Въспоминания на бившия командир на I-та бригада на Българското опълчение). Превели поручиците А. Узунов и П. Стайков. Ruse: Skoropchatnitsa na vestnik “Slavyanin”, 1884, 114; Škorpil, Vladislav and Škorpil, K. Някои бележки върху археологическите и историческите изследвания в Тракия. Plovdiv: Oblastna pečatnitsa, 1885, 40–41; Dimitrov, Georgi. Княжество България в историческо, географическо и етнографическо отношение. Част II. Plovdiv: Targovska pečatnitsa, 1896, 310.

20 “[...] иконъ Св. николаи пренадлежи нъ никола ивановъ отъ янинъ и [...] завещава нъ церквѣтъ Св. параскевъ въ одърне 1875 септѣмври. 17”.

21 Text: “1883 на тази икѣна титоръ сиречь помощници пано николовъ и димитръ демано[въ] ноемвриа 7 дне”.

22 Text: “Подарява. Илия Нешюв. 8<sup>и</sup> марта. 1889 С[ело] Б[ѣла] Вода “.

23 Text: “Подары Стоднъ Петровъ съ домъ и чада, отъ с. Божиница Охраниско, въ лета 1903. и Подариха цeko. коцовъ сѣпрѣга ивана синъ коцо пахна юрдана пеша теодора за вечно воспоманіе”

24 The Mother of God, St. Nicholas, St. Florus, St. Laurus, an Angel, St. Zosima (of Solovki), St. Savvatij (of Solovki), St. John, St. Georg and St. Varvara.

25 Text: “1873 икона на Стодана Косюва Станчоолѣ Ианѣхаріе 6”.

In the same museum we also encountered cases of later notes affixed to the backs of icons with years written on them, the authenticity of which cannot be verified (unless some dated inscriptions remain under the notes). For example, 1860 is the year given for the icon of Christ Pantocrator (fig. 10) from the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in the village of Dobri Dyal, in Lyaskovets Municipality (consecrated in 1858). We find a similar case in the village of Gorsko Novo Selo in Zlataritsa Municipality: a note is glued to the back of an icon with the Crucifixion of Christ, the Virgin of Kazan, St. Nicholas, Archangel Michael and St. George, from the Church of St. Michael the Archangel (built in 1879), indicating that the icon came there in 1885 (fig. 11).

The same church has another identically themed Russian icon (figs. 12–13), on the back of which there are several inscriptions. One has been dated, though a paper note was subsequently affixed over the year. Another inscription testifies that at some point the icon was in the Dryanovo Inn, located in the centre of Veliko Tarnovo. It was later given to the church in the village of Gorsko Novo Selo, by a man with an illegible name from Elena. Curiously, the reverse side has a cleaning method (for icons?) in the same handwriting, the beginning of which is also covered by the above-mentioned note: “... *with an apple, cut in half, then scrub well, then wash with cold water, it will be cleaned*”.

The collection at the Regional Museum of Military History in Pleven holds a small icon with images of St. Archangel Michael, St. Venerable Eudokia and St. Martyr John (figs. 14, 15), testifying to the personal piety of a Russian soldier who seems to have participated in the siege of the town in 1877. On the reverse is an inscription containing a blessing from the soldier’s mother:

*“A gift and blessing to my son Ivan Mikhailovich Fokin. Your mother Avdoteja Fokina. 1876, 12<sup>th</sup> day of February, the town of Roslavl’, Smolensk Governorate.”*<sup>26</sup>

Finally, we would like to mention a rather exotic inscription on a Russian icon of Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie) (fig. 16), which came to Veliko Tarnovo Museum from the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (built in 1834) in the village (now town) of Dolna Oryahovitsa, in the Municipality of Gorna Oryahovitsa. On the obverse:

26 Text: “В дар и Благословение сыну моему Ивану Михайловичу Фокину. Твоя мать Авд[о]тея Фокина 1876 года Февраля 12 д[ня] г[ород] Рославль Смоленс[кой] Губер[нии]”. It remains unclear whether the soldier was killed in battle or whether for some reason his personal icon remained in Bulgaria. We have managed to find out that in 1907 the county paramedic (“уездный фельдшер”) in Smolensk Governorate was the governorate’s secretary (“губернский секретарь”) I. M. Fokin – it is possible that he is one and the same as the owner of the icon in the Pleven Regional Military History Museum. On this see Anon. Памятная книжка Смоленской губернии на 1907 год. Smolensk: Типография П. А. Силина, 1907, 113.

“MUSEUM OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD. 1940 Founded on 25 August 1940 by the two Christian brothers Todor S. Musev and Dimitar A. Filipov from the village of Dolna Oryahovitsa. 25 August Opened on 28 August [...] (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and visited by the numerous Christian and Dolna Oryahovitsa public”.<sup>27</sup>

Below this we read: “*This icon church 1834*”. The latter inscription also appears on the back of the icon.

Although the material presented here is rather limited, we can make some cautious generalizations about how Russian icons found their way into Bulgarian churches in the nineteenth century. The standard situation was that they were donated by private individuals, motivated either by Christian piety, or by a desire to contribute to the proper decoration of local churches, or by an aspiration to perpetuate their name as modest donors (the icons from the Holy Transfiguration Church in Svishtov, Varbitsa, Baykal, Byala Voda, and the one whose donors were from Bozhenitsa).

Sometimes, however, we also find more complex and individualized motivation that reveals specific features of the personal piety of the benefactors. Such is the case with the icon of St. Nicholas from the church in Koynare, which doctor Nikola from Klisura apparently gave as an expression of special respect to his heavenly patron. A similar motivation applies to the icon of the same saint from Odarne donated by Nikola Ivanov, but here we have an even more interesting case of a personal icon that was eventually bequeathed to the local church. There is no doubt that these two examples admirably illustrate the distinctly commemorative function of the donations.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the material analysed here once again confirms the well-known fact that Russian “popular” icons, although aesthetically very different from the canons of Balkan religious art, enjoyed popularity among the Bulgarians and often decorated not only their churches but also their homes.

27 „МУЗЕЙЪ СВѢТА БОГОРОДИЦА. 1940 г. Основан на 25. VIII. 1940 г. от двамата хрис[т]иянски братя Тодор С. Мусев и Димитър А. Филипов от с. Д[олна]-Оряховица. 25. VIII. отк[р]ит на 28. VIII. [...] (Успение Пресв[ета] Богородица) и посетен от голямата християнска и Долно-Оряховска публика”.

28 The inscription on a Russian icon from the National Art Gallery in Sofia, published by O. Tarasov, is also commemorative: “*brought from the Holy Sepulchre by Benyo Hristov (1824–1898)*” (Tarasov 1990, 51, 66). In the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in the village of Stoykite, Smolyan municipality (built in 1874–1881), a tin icon of the Resurrection of Christ with twelve scenes is placed on the bishop’s throne, produced in 1897 in the workshop of V. Bonaker in Moscow. On the back of the icon there is an inscription testifying that it was brought in 1938 from Jerusalem by the then priest of the village Feodor Fomichev, a Russian emigrant: “*Blessing of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Brought by priest Feodor An. Fomichev. In 1938 – 19/V.*” Father Feodor was a priest in Stoykite in 1931–1942, before that he was a priest in the village of Chaushovo (today Dobrostan), Asenovgrad municipality, and in 1942 he moved for health reasons to Zlatograd.





Fig. 1. Mother of God Healer of Sorrows, 1810, Nikolay Pavlovich Art Gallery, Svishtov. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Nikolay Pavlovich Art Gallery, Svishtov.

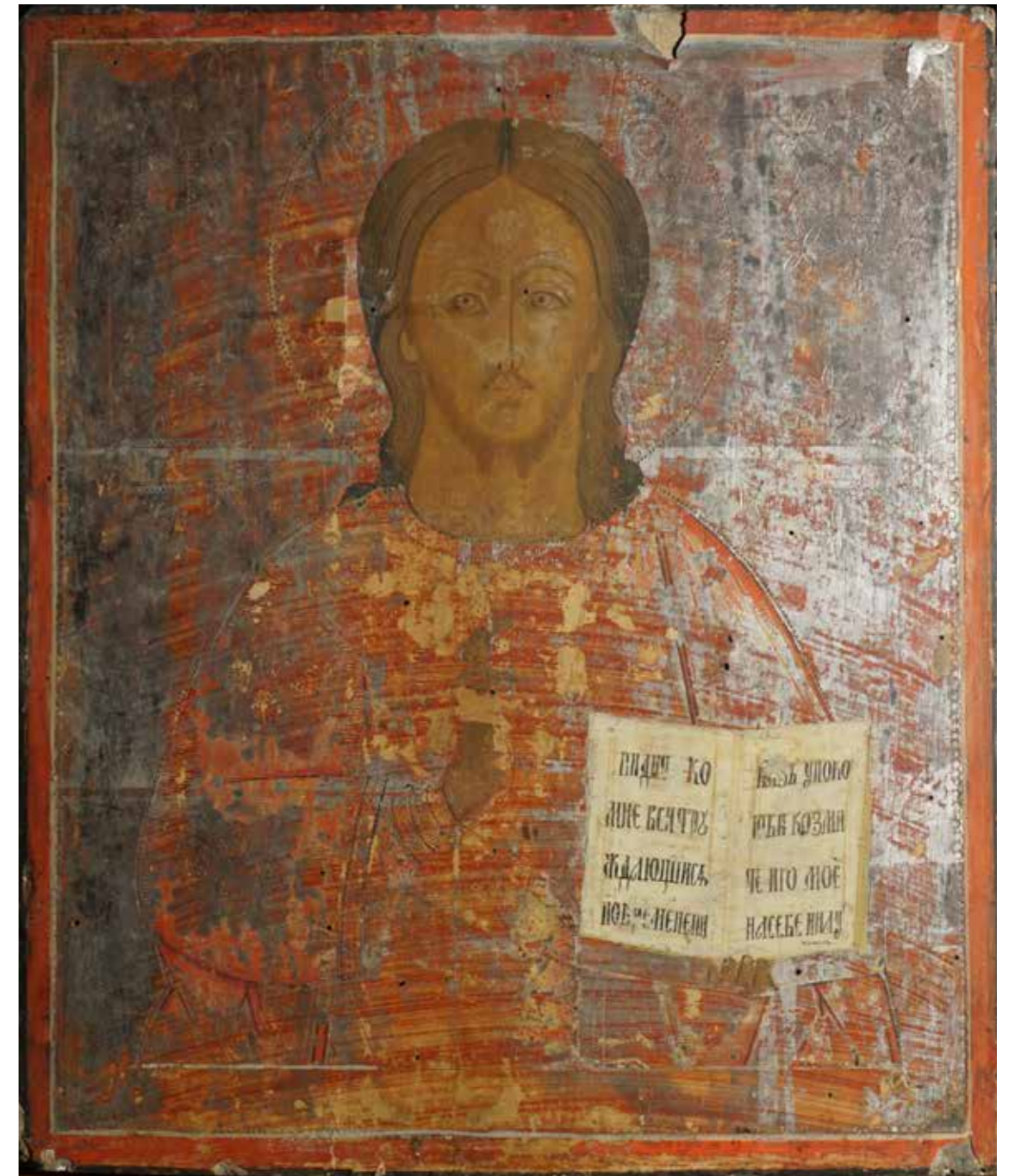


Fig. 2. Christ Pantokrator, 1860, Holy Transfiguration Church, Svishtov. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.



Fig. 3. Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, and Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, late 19th century, Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, village of Varbitsa. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Plevna.



Fig. 4. St. Nicholas, late 19th century, All Saints Church, Koynare. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Plevna.



Fig. 5. St. Nicholas, 1875, Church of St. Paraskeva, village of Odarne. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven.



Fig. 6. Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts, 1883, Church of St. George, village of Baykal. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven.



Fig. 7. Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host and St. George Slaying the Dragon, 1889, Church of St. Demetrius, village of Byala Voda. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven.



Fig. 8. Resurrection of Christ with Twelve Feasts, 1903, Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Iliya Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven.



Fig. 9. The Resurrection of Christ, with Selected Saints, 1873, Church of St. Paraskeva, village of Belyakovets. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.



Fig. 10. Christ Pantokrator, 1860, Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, village of Dobri Dyal. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.

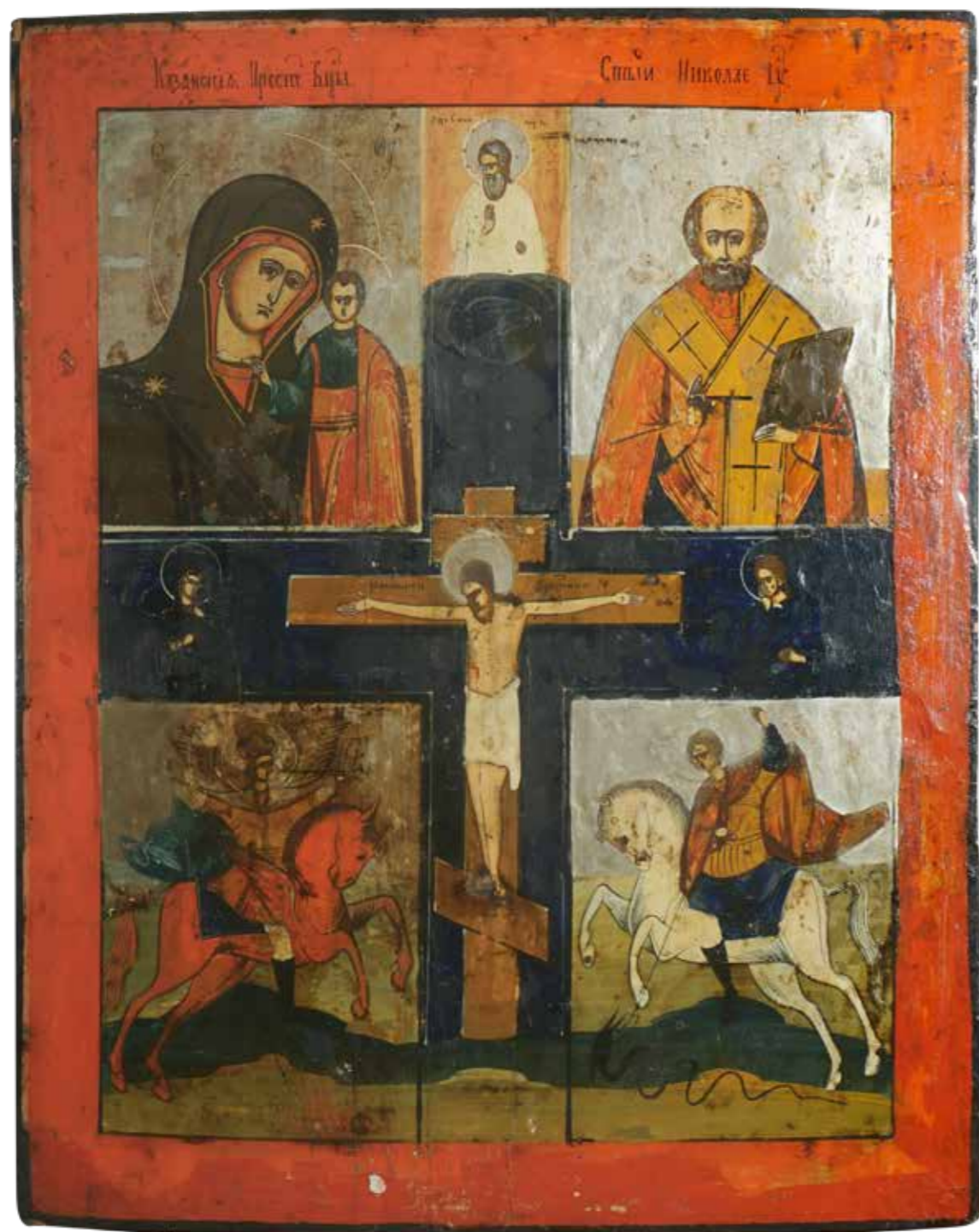


Fig. 11. Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host and St. George Slaying the Dragon, 1885, Church of St. Michael the Archangel, village of Gorsko Novo Selo. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.



Fig. 16. Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie), 1834, Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Dolna Oryahovitsa. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.



Fig. 12. Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host and St. George Slaying the Dragon, late 19th century, Church of St. Michael the Archangel, village of Gorsko Novo Selo. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.

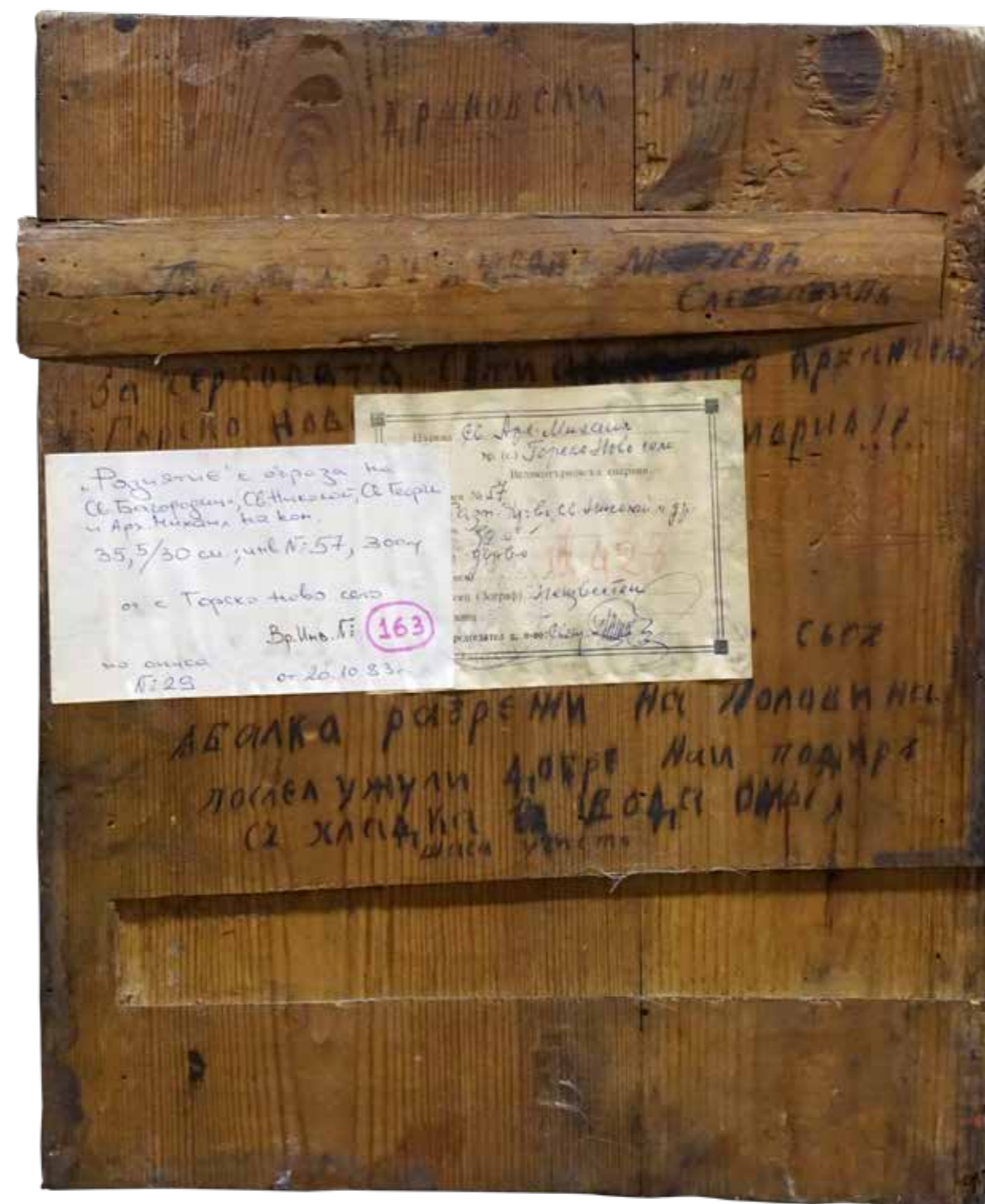


Fig. 13. Back side of the Four-part Icon of Fig. 12.  
Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History.



Fig. 14. St. Archangel Michael, St. Venerable Eudokia and St. Martyr John, 1876. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Pleven Regional Museum of Military History.

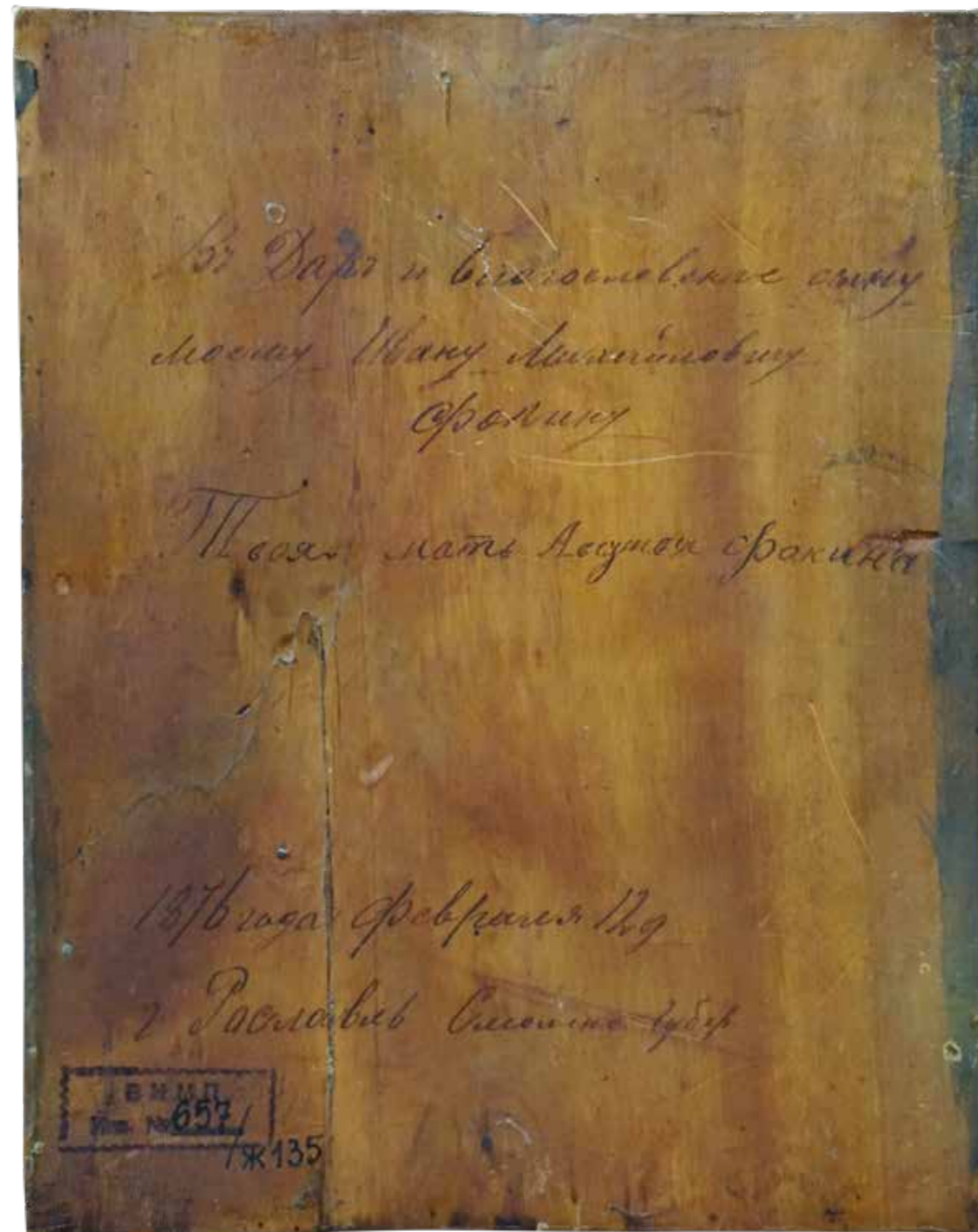


Fig. 15. Back side of the icon of Fig. 14. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Pleven Regional Museum of Military History.

## Making Sense of the End: The Lost *Last Judgement* in Saint Mary of the Mongols

Ovidiu Olar

### Abstract

In the 1930s, several Romanian writers, scholars, and diplomats visited Istanbul, a city that, despite no longer being the capital, continued to attract intellectual curiosity. Among the materials produced during these encounters is an album compiled in May 1932 and presented to the Romanian Academy later that year, containing thirty-two photographs by Jean Weinberg, owner of the renowned Foto Franse / Photo Français studio in Pera. Nineteen of these photographs depict houses and churches in the Fener and Balat neighborhoods, while the remaining thirteen reproduce documents related to the monastery of the Great Cave (Mega Spileon) near Kalavryta in the Peloponnese. Notably, three photographs feature a now-lost fresco of the Last Judgement, then preserved in the church of Saint Mary of the Mongols, whose iconography presents several noteworthy peculiarities. This paper uses Weinberg's photographs as a point of departure to examine a range of early modern representations of the Last Judgement and to situate the Constantinopolitan fresco within these typological developments. In doing so, it highlights specific features characteristic of eighteenth-century "Phanariot" art.

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**Keywords:** Last Judgement, Apocalypse, Saint Mary of the Mongols, Constantinople, Phanariots

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In November 1932, the Romanian historian N. Iorga presented the Romanian Academy with a travel album compiled six months earlier in Istanbul by the diplomat Marcel Romanescu.<sup>1</sup> It consisted of 32 photographs by Jean Weinberg, owner of the renowned Foto Franse / Photo Français studio in Pera. The first 19 images depicted houses and churches in the neighbourhoods of Fener and Balat,

1 \* This research was funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (ORTHPOL project; grant agreement no. 950287). For this mid-level diplomat, see Adrian Vițalaru. "Aspecte din activitatea unui diplomat român: Marcel Romanescu (1897–1955)." *Analele Științifice ale Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași – Istorie* 61 (2015): 467–481.

while the remaining 13 were reproductions of documents related to the Monastery of the Great Cave (Mega Spileon) near Kalavryta in the Peloponnese. Iorga promptly described and partially edited the documents, while Romanescu quickly wrote a paper on the "Romanian monuments" in Istanbul, incorporating photos from his album.<sup>2</sup>

These photos are particularly important. On the one hand, travellers were generally uninterested in the poor and decrepit Fener and Balat, gravitating instead toward grand palaces, imposing mosques, and bustling marketplaces. In fact, aside from Romanescu, Nicholas V. Artamonoff — a Russian-born amateur photographer who lived in Istanbul from 1922 to 1947 — appears to be the only one who developed an interest in their cultural heritage, and the Byzantine remains in particular (figs. 5–7).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, many of the monuments photographed in 1932 have since disappeared for good, as the neighbourhoods changed rapidly and dramatically.<sup>4</sup> In one case, the monument still exists, but part of its once-photographed inventory does not.

It was this missing part that sparked my curiosity and led to the present paper. In 1932, Romanescu visited the Church of Saint Mary of the Mongols and noticed a panel depicting the Last Judgement (figs. 1–4). Struck by what he believed to be the presence of Phanariot princes in the composition, the traveller asked Weinberg to photograph it.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the panel is no longer in the church. Yet among the items that do hang on the walls, one can see a mid-19th-century Russian icon depicting the Archangel Michael as the "Captain of the Heavenly Host." Although closely associated with the End of Days, this iconographic type conveyed a different meaning from that of the Last Judgement and never gained popularity in Southeastern Europe. There are no indications of when the icon was donated, and judging by its discreet placement on one of the inner pillars, it does not appear to have been widely revered. Nevertheless, the fortuitous yet symbolic replacement is intriguing. Saint Mary of the Mongols is widely regarded as one of the very few Byzantine churches to have remained in continuous Christian use since the Ottoman conquest of the city — a truly remarkable feat. So why has the post-1453 history of the sanctuary been largely overlooked by historians and art historians alike?<sup>6</sup>

2 N. Iorga. "Donațiile românești pentru Mega-Spileon și Vlah-Sarai." *AARMSI* (3<sup>rd</sup> Series) 13 (1932): 159–166; Marcel Romanescu. "Monumente românești la Stambul." *Boabe de grâu* 3, no. 6 (1932): 226–238.

3 Günder Varinlioğlu (ed.). *Artamonoff: Picturing Byzantine Istanbul, 1930–1947* (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2013). For Artamonoff's photographic collection, see <http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/aboutcollection> (accessed on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025).

4 Bogdan Stanciu. *Între Schengen și Levant. Reportaje și însemnări de călătorie prin România, Balcani și împrejurimi*. Bucharest: Corint, 2023, 494–500.

5 The photos are currently housed in the Engravings Section of the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest: BAR (Stampe) II AF 160.

6 Fortunately, Akylas Millas has meticulously collected data on the topic: *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*.

The following pages aim to retrace the history of the church, contextualize its lost Last Judgement, and reflect briefly on the significance of the Russian icon of the Archangel Michael.

## The Church

The church known today as the “Greek Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary” (Tr.: Meryem Ana Rum Ortodoks Kilisesi) has a long history, but reconstructing it is quite challenging.<sup>7</sup> The sanctuary’s origins trace back to the early eleventh century when it was known as the Panagiou (“All-Holy One”) Monastery. During that time, monk Antonios, its founder and *hegumen* (abbot), composed a *Life* of Saint Athanasios, founder of the Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos, presented himself as disciple and legitimate heir of the saint, and promoted the spread of his spiritual master’s monastic reform to Constantinople.<sup>8</sup> His efforts were not in vain: in 1083, the monastery’s *typikon*, one of the first extended and “modern” Byzantine monastic rules, served as the basis for the *typikon* of Petritzos Monastery (near present-day Bachkovo, in southern Bulgaria), newly built by the aristocrat Gregorios Pakourianos.<sup>9</sup>

The data for the following period is scarce. Was the Panagiou destroyed during Latin rule? This remains uncertain. The hypothesis that a new monastery dedicated to the Mother of God was built on the site immediately after the Palaiologan reconquest of Constantinople from the Latins in 1261 and that its frescoes were painted by a certain Modestos in 1265–1266 is no longer viable.<sup>10</sup> However, a document issued in

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*Ενορίες Αγιοτάτης Αρχιεπισκοπής*. Athens: Σύλλογος Ιστορικής και Λαογραφικής Έρευνας “Η Μνημοσύνη,” 1996), 140–151, 675–684 (notes 170–188). The works of Manouil I. Gedeon, the eminent Church historian and editor-in-chief of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s official journal (the *Ecclesiastical Truth*), are a treasure trove. These are just a few examples: “Χρονικά τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς Ακαδημίας.” *Εκκλησιαστικὴ Ἀλήθεια* 3, no. 31 (1883): 486–494, p. 493 (n. 89); “Δύω βυζαντιναὶ τοποθεσίαι: Φανάριον καὶ Πετρίον.” *Νεολόγον Ἑβδομαδιαία Ἐπιθεώρησις* 2, no. 2 (1892): 21–23 [reprinted in *Ἐγγραφοὶ λίθοι καὶ κεράμια*. Constantinople: Otto Keil, 1892, 105–113]; *Βυζαντινὸν ἑορτολόγιον*. Constantinople 1899, 208–209.

7 For an overview, see Andrei Yu. Vinogradov. “Панагии Мухлиотиссы монастырь.” In *Православная энциклопедия* 54 (2019): 376–378 (<https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2578780.html>, accessed on March 1st, 2025).

8 Dirk Krausmüller. “An Ascetic Founder: The Lost First *Life* of Athanasios the Athonite.” In *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries*, edited by Margaret Mullett. Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2007, 63–86.

9 Paul Gautier. “Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos.” *Revue des études byzantines* 42 (1984): 5–145. For Panagiou as “centre of monastic rigour” and as “« modern » community,” see Dirk Krausmüller, “Saints’ Lives and Typika: The Constantinopolitan Monastery of Panagiou in the Eleventh Century.” PhD diss., Queen’s University Belfast, 2001, 107–145; Krausmüller, “On Contents and Structure of the Panagios Typikon: A Contribution to the Early History of ‘Extended’ Monastic Rules.” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 106, no. 1 (2013): 39–64.

10 It was based on an erroneous reading of a note in the Suda lexicon, which in fact refers to a different church, dedicated to Saint Marina, as shown by Peter Schreiner: “Die topographische Notiz über Konstantinopel in der Pariser Suda-Handschrift.” In *ΑΕΤΟΣ: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango presented to him on April 14, 1998*, edited by Ihor Ševčenk and Irmgard Hutter. Stuttgart and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1998, 273–283.

October 1351 by Patriarch Kallistos I references the convent “of the Mongols” (τῆς τῶν Μουγουλλίων μονῆς), located in the Phanar neighbourhood (τοῦ Φαναρίου), in an area known as Panagiou.<sup>11</sup>

According to this judicial sentence, Maria Palaiologina, “Princess of the Mongols” and sister of the late Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, purchased a property from Maria Doukaina Akropolitissa and her daughter that included a church, a bath, orchards, and a vineyard. The buyer paid 4000 gold coins and expressed her intention to establish a convent dedicated to the “All-Holy” Mother of God, which would accommodate nuns without requiring a dowry. The princess bequeathed her entire fortune to the new foundation, encompassing both movable and immovable assets within and beyond Constantinople.

After her death, the princess’ possessions were inherited by her daughter, Theodora Arachantloun, whom the emperor married to the *panhypersebastos* Isaakios Palaiologos Asanes. As his wife died without bearing children, Isaakios obtained a chrysobull designating him as the legal protector of the convent. However, rather than fulfilling this role, he exploited it: he increased the number of nuns, demanded payment for accommodation, food, and other necessities, appropriated materials for his own buildings, granted the convent to his daughter, and allocated several of its buildings to his son. The nuns submitted a complaint to the Emperor, who entrusted the Patriarch with resolving the matter. Since Isaakios had recently passed away, his daughter Irene Asanina Philanthropene presented the chrysobull her father had received. It was proved to be a forgery. Consequently, despite Irene being the ruling emperor’s cousin, the convent’s rights were fully restored in accordance with the provisions of its founder.

The patriarchal document provides valuable insights into the sanctuary’s complex history. Maria Palaiologina (Diplobatzina) was an illegitimate daughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1261–1282) and the half-sister of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328). The epithet “of the Mongols,” associated with the Theotokos reflects Maria’s marriage in 1265 to Abaqa Khan, the second ruler of the Ilkhanate – an offshoot of the Mongol Empire that governed much of present-day Iran and neighbouring regions. Following her husband’s death in 1282, the “Princess of the Mongols” and her daughter, Theodora, returned to Constantinople. Maria acquired the church of the Mother of God and its associated properties, transforming them into a convent.

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11 Franz Miklosich, Joseph Müller (ed.), *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*. Vienna: Carl Gerold, 1851, Vol. 1: 312–317 (no. 136); Johannes Koder, Martin Hinterberger and Otto Kresten (eds.), *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel*. Vol. 3: *Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1350–1363*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001, 62–77 (no. 184). See also Jean Darrouzès. *Les registres des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*. Vol. 1: *Les actes des patriarches*; 5: *Les registres de 1310 à 1376*, Paris: Institut français d’études byzantines, 1977, 274–275 (no. 2330).

Did she take the veil there? Is she depicted in the Chora monastery as “the Lady of the Mongols, Melane the Nun”?<sup>12</sup> The sources remain ambiguous and have, to some extent, been overinterpreted. Still, it is evident that the convent in Phanar survived both the death of its founder and mismanagement by her son-in-law and his kin.<sup>13</sup>

Even more remarkably, the church survived the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Details are provided by an early eighteenth-century source. According to Prince Dimitrie Cantemir’s *History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, during the reign of Sultan Selim I (1512–1520), all churches in Constantinople were converted into mosques, except for the “Most-Holy Magouliotissa [Πανάγια Μαγουλιώτισσα] (sic).” Selim spared the church in gratitude to Christodoulos, a Greek architect who constructed his mosque in Edirne. This Christodoulos was the nephew of another architect, also named Christodoulos, who had built the Fatih Mosque for Mehmed II “the Conqueror.” In recognition of his work, Mehmed II had granted the earlier Christodoulos both the church and the neighbourhood in which it was located.<sup>14</sup>

Cantemir’s account was reiterated in nineteenth-century antiquarian depictions of Constantinople, such as the ones provided by Skarlatos D. Byzantios (1851) and Alexandros G. Paspatis (1877).<sup>15</sup> Conversely,

12 PLP 21395; Natalia Teteriatnikov. “The Place of the Nun Melania (the Lady of the Mongols) in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople.” *Cahiers archéologiques. Fin de l’antiquité et Moyen Âge* 43 (1995): 163–184 (with annexes by Lee F. Sherry and Catherine Asdracha); Nicholas Melvani. “Depictions of Nuns in Palaiologan Constantinople.” In *Women and Monasticism in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean: Decoding a Cultural Map?*, edited by Eleonora Kountoura Galaki and Ekaterini Mitsiou. Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation – Institute of Historical Research, 2019, 335–348.

13 For the context, see Alice-Mary Talbot. “Building Activity in Constantinople under Andronikos II: The Role of Women Patrons in the Construction and Restoration of Monasteries.” In *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*, edited by Nevra Necipoğlu. Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2001, 329–343; Ekaterini Mitsiou. “Late Byzantine Female Monasticism from the Point of View of the Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.” In *The Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople – An Essential Source for the History and Church of Late Byzantium*, edited by Christian Gastgeber, Ekaterini Mitsiou and Johannes Preiser-Kapeller. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013, 161–174; Alice-Mary Talbot. “Female Patronage in the Palaiologan Era: Icons, Minor Arts and Manuscripts.” In *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, edited by Lioba Theis, Margaret Mullett and Michael Grünbart, with Galina Fingarova and Matthew Savage. Vienna, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 2011/2012, 259–274.

14 Dimitrie Cantemir. *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire...*, transl. Nicholas Tindal. London: John, James & Paul Knapton, 1734, Vol. 1: 105 (n. 17), 160 (n. 35); Cantemir, *Istoria mării și decăderii Curții othmane*, edited by Octavian Gordon, Florentina Nicolae, Monica Vasileanu, transl. Ioana Costa, foreword by Eugen Simion, intro. Ștefan Lemny. Bucharest: Academia Română / Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2015, Vol. 2: 224–225, 368–373 (Latin text and Romanian translation).

15 Skarlatos Byzantios. *Constantinople: A Topographical, Archaeological & Historical Description...*, transl. & commentary Haris Theodoretis-Rigas, foreword Stephanos Pasmazoglou. Constantinople: Istos, 2019, 777–779; Alexandros G. Paspatis. *Βυζαντινὰ μελέται*. Constantinople: Antonios Koromilas, 1877, 388–389 (quotes Athanasios Komninos Ypsilantis’ *Twelve Books of Ecclesiastical and Political Events*, published in 1870, which is

many modern scholars view it with scepticism – and rightly so.<sup>16</sup> “Magouliotissa” was not the only church that remained in Christian hands.<sup>17</sup> The tale of the two men named Christodoulos is not confirmed by Ottoman sources and probably served to legitimize a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century reconstruction.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the prince inserted it into notes related to the Fall of Constantinople and to the decrees carrying the Sultan’s signature, called *hatt-ı şerif*, with the additional intent of emphasizing his position as protector of the Phanariot church. Still, regardless of the story’s veracity, the sanctuary was neither demolished nor transformed into a mosque and remained in Christian use. In 1593, the Russian merchant Trifon Korobeinikov included “the church of the Most-Pure Mother of God from the *mahalle* Mouchlion” in his list of parish churches in Constantinople, and provided the name of its priest, a certain Yorgos.<sup>19</sup>

Ten years later, in July 1603, an inhabitant of the neighbourhood named Thomas Kromydis purchased two houses for forty thousand aspers and donated them to the “All-Holy Mother of God Mougouliotisa” (Παναγία Θεοτόκο τῆς Μουγουλιώτισσας). The previous owners had fallen into debt, and the appointed administrators were about to sell their properties to “outsiders,” meaning Muslims. Fearing that the same fate might befall “his” church and having the means, Thomas decided to take action in (future) remembrance of his soul, his forefathers, his recently deceased sons, and Efrosyni.

While little is known about the donor, the document itself holds significant importance. The inclusion of Ottoman terms such as “administrators” (μουτεβελῆδες, from *mütevelli*) and “certificate of purchase” (χοτζέτιον, from *hüccet*) clearly reflects the legal framework within which the Christian community operated for quite some time. Thomas’ assertion that churches should not be lost due to the negligence of the Christians themselves, along with the fact that the witnesses were described as “the most honourable nobles and leading Christians” (τῶν τιμιωτάτων ἀρχόντων καὶ ἀρχομένων Χριστιανῶν), underscores the

based on Cantemir’s *History*).

16 Raymond Janin. *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’empire byzantine*, vol. 1: *Le Siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Oecuménique*; III: *Les églises et les monastères*. Paris, 1969<sup>2</sup>, 213–214 (no. 86).

17 Nicholas Melvani. “Patronage in Constantinople after 1453.” In *Ἐν Σοφίᾳ μαθητεύσαντες: Essays in Byzantine Material Culture and Society in Honour of Sophia Kalopissi-Verti*, edited by Charikleia Diamanti and Anastasia Vassiliou. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2019, 412–426.

18 Stéphane Yerasimos. *Légendes d’Empire. La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques*. Istanbul / Paris: Institut français d’études anatoliennes / Jean Maisonneuve successeur – Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1990, 145–150; Melvani, “Patronage,” 414–415.

19 “Хождение Трифона Коробейникова 1593–1594 г.,” edited by Khrisanf M. Loparev, in *Православный Палестинский сборник 27* (1888), 91 (“къ церкви пречистые Богородицы Муглия-магалета попу Юрью”). The church “in Platea Mouclio” is included on a list dated around 1600 and published by Charles du Cange, and is mentioned by the Athenian Antonios Paterakis in 1604 as Κογλίον (probably Μογλίον) Παναγία: Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus. “Ναοὶ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κατὰ τὸ 1503 (sic) καὶ 1604.” *Ὁ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ἑλληνικὸς Φιλολογικὸς Σύλλογος. Σύγγραμμα περιοδικόν* 28 (1904): 118–138.

emergence of an identity-building movement within the beleaguered community. Indeed, the transaction was validated by Dimitrios and Antonios Kantakouzenos, representatives of one of the wealthiest and most influential Christian families in the Empire. Thomas' donation thus serves as another indicator of the revival of the Constantinopolitan Greek elite during Ottoman rule.<sup>20</sup>

Such pious gestures enabled the church to function. The parish of “the Panagia from Mouchlion” is mentioned in a Patriarchal official record from 1648, issued by Parthenios II.<sup>21</sup> It is also listed in two inventories inserted by Chrysanthos Notaras after 1696 in a codex that belonged to him.<sup>22</sup> Yet during the reign of Ahmed III (1703–1730), the church was once again in danger of being converted into a mosque. According to his own testimony, Prince Cantemir intervened and presented the Grand Vizier Çorlulu Ali Pasha (1706–1710) with the ferman issued by Mehmed II to Christodoulos, which was preserved at the “Magulotissa.” Convinced, the Grand Vizier “ordered the Turks to give the Christians no farther molestation.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the troubles, the church played a significant role within the local Christian community. It was in constant need of repairs — a complex undertaking, given that the process required a special permit — as evidenced by two petitions submitted to the Ottoman authorities in the autumn of 1691.<sup>24</sup> Fires, neighbours, and officials can be difficult to deal with. But it did endure and maintain its liturgical function in a multi-ethnic “minority quarter” where Muslims, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews coexisted.<sup>25</sup> It is no coincidence that the love story between the Christian Albanian baker Dimos and the Jewish maiden

20 Manouil I. Gedeon. *Πατριαρχικαὶ Ἐφημερίδες. Εἰδήσεις ἐκ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας 1500–1912*. Athens: Τυπογραφεῖον Σεργιάδου, 1936, 75–77. The third witness is Konstantinos Gartanos (Gaitanos).

21 Manouil I. Gedeon. *Ἐκκλησίαι τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει*. Constantinople: Ἐκ τοῦ Τυπογραφείου Ν. Γ. Κεφαλίδου, 1888, 14–15 [reprinted in Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικοὶ πίνακες*, edited by Nikolaos L. Phoropoulos. Athens: Σύλλογος πρὸς διάδοσιν Ὠφελίμων Βιβλίων, 1996, 642–643]; Gedeon, *Ἐκκλησίαι βυζαντιναὶ ἐξακριβούμεναι (κυρίως ἢ Θεοτόκος τῶν Κύρου). Συμπλήρωμα τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ ἑορτολογίου*. Constantinople: Ἐκ τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Τυπογραφείου, 1900, 21–22 (ἡ ἐνορία τῆς Παναγίας τοῦ Μουχλίου). Gedeon's source was the “Juridical Collection” compiled for Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem in 1680: Dimitris G. Apostolopoulos, Panagiotis D. Michailaris. *Ἡ Νομικὴ Συναγωγὴ τοῦ Δοσιθέου: μια πηγὴ καὶ ἓνα τεκμήριο*. Athens: Κέντρο Νεοελληνικῶν Ἐρευνῶν Ε.Ι.Ε., 1987, 316–317 (no. 674).

22 Gedeon, *Ἐκκλησία βυζαντιναί*, 22–27 (ἡ Παναγία Μαχουλιώτισσα; εἰς τὸ Μουχλεῖον ἢ Παναγία Μαγουλιώτισσα). The first of the two lists dates from February 1653; the second is undated, but was written in the same hand. Chrysanthos' codex is currently in the National Library of Greece in Athens (MIT 427).

23 Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, vol. 1, 109 (n. 31); Cantemir, *Istoria mării și decăderii Curții othmane*, vol. 2, 232–235 (Latin text and Romanian translation).

24 Karen A. Leal. “Communal Matters.” In *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, edited by Shirine Hamadeh and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022, 365–393, p. 379–384.

25 Leal, “The Balat District of Istanbul: Multiethnicity on the Golden Horn.” In *The Architecture and Memory of the Minority Quarter in the Muslim Mediterranean City*, edited by Susan Gilson Miller and Mauro Bertagnin. Cambridge, MA: The Aga Khan Program, 2010, 175–210.

Mrkada — dated July 1667 and put into verse by the Armenian Constantinopolitan historiographer and polemicist Eremia Ch'elebi K'ēōmiwrchean — blossoms in Fener and reaches its happy ending in Wallachia.<sup>26</sup>

Judging by the amount of money paid yearly to the ecumenical Patriarchate, the revenues of Saint Mary of the Mongols were moderate: 160 *grosia* during the tenure of Joasaph II “the Magnificent” (1556–1565), 200 in 1741, and 250 from 1746 onwards. The lucrative parishes in the city paid more than double.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the church had its benefactors. The Tzoukis family, of Byzantine origin, ranked among the most important in the quarter. A document dated June 1669 described Konstantinos Tzoukis as “the most noble and useful among nobles” (εὐγενέστατος καὶ χρησιμώτατος ἐν ἄρχουσι), a formula reserved for the select few.<sup>28</sup> In May 1705, Thomas, son of the late Konstantinos, confirmed that his father had been the administrator of properties that belonged to the Most-Holy Mother of God “Magouliotisa”.<sup>29</sup> Given that such practices relied on trust, it can be inferred that the family remained a cornerstone of the neighbourhood for a prolonged period.

These documents not only provide insights into under-documented or informal financial practices, but also emphasize the importance of local connections for the “Phanariots.” Poulcheria, the second wife of Prince Nikolaos Mavrokordatos and mother of Prince Konstantinos Mavrokordatos — arguably the most significant Phanariot rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia — was born Tzoukis. Ekaterina, the second wife of Ioniță Cantemir — the son of Dimitrie Cantemir's elder brother — was the daughter of Thomas Tzoukis. The close-knit nature of the neighbourhood and their involvement in its life likely played a crucial role in fostering long-lasting ties.<sup>30</sup>

Other administrators, though less noble, were nonetheless effective. For example, in January 1759, Seferis the carpenter (κερεσεδζής) and Anastasios the furrier (γουναρής) secured two silver candlesticks

26 *Eremya Chelebi Kōmūrjian's Armeno-Turkish Poem “The Jewish Bride.”* Edited by Avedis K. Sanjian and Andreas Tietze, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981. The story, which carries a strongly anti-Jewish tone, was a bestseller in its Greek version, first printed in Venice in 1668: Andrei Pippidi, “Juifs, Chrétiens et Turcs. L'Histoire de Marcada, ses versions et ses lecteurs.” In Pippidi, *Byzantins, Ottomans, Roumains. Le Sud-Est européen entre l'héritage impérial et les influences occidentales*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006, 177–192.

27 Gedeon, *Ἐκκλησίαι τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων*, 18–20 [= Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικοὶ πίνακες* 1996, 645–646]; Gedeon, *Ἐκκλησία βυζαντιναί*, 35–38.

28 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 679 (n. 186).

29 Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικαὶ Ἐφημερίδες*, 205–206. See also Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 680 (n. 186).

30 Periklis G. Zerlenti. “Οἱ διδάσκαλοι τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Πατριαρχικῆς Μεγάλῃς τοῦ Γένους σχολῆς Ἀζαρίας Τζιγιάλας (1660–1740).” *Παρνασσός* 1, no. 12 (1877): 893–904, p. 895 (n. 2 – Ioniță Cantemir); Manouil I. Gedeon. *Ἱστορία τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ πενήτων, 1453–1913*. Athens, 1939, 113–115 (the Tzoukis family).

for the Panagia.<sup>31</sup> The flow of donations remained steady, too, without being striking. Two massive marble pedestals for large candles, positioned in front of the iconostasis, were donated in 1760, one by Ioannis Metaxas and the other by Ioannis Kalfas.<sup>32</sup> The identity of the first Ioannis remains difficult to ascertain; however, a certain Vasilis Metaxas is recorded as a witness in the aforementioned 1669 document concerning Tzoukis, suggesting the family had a history in the area.<sup>33</sup> As for Ioannis Kalfas, he may have been a Greek architect soon to be involved in the reconstruction of the Fatih Mosque, damaged by an earthquake in 1766 and completed in 1771. According to an Ottoman source dated 1789, Yani Kalfa, nicknamed “the Blind,” was “a master builder of imperial constructions” who “even built the noble mosque of the deceased Sultan Mehmed Khan the Conqueror.”<sup>34</sup> If the identification is correct, Ioannis / Yani may have been working in the neighbourhood at the time of the donation or may have had connections to the church.

Life continued uninterrupted. In 1779, 1784, 1794 and 1813 the church received financial support from the Wallachian Princes Alexandru Ipsilanti (r. 1774–1782, 1796–1797), Mihail Suțu (r. 1783–1786, 1791–1792) and Ioan Caragea (r. 1812–1818), as well as from the Moldavian Prince Alexandru Callimachi (r. 1795–1799).<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a school was established.<sup>36</sup> In July 1797, Georgios Samourkasis, administrator of the church’s properties, declared that a house he had purchased for 7500 *grosia* in the neighbourhood rightfully belonged to the school, as he had used its funds for the acquisition.<sup>37</sup> In June 1797, Prince Alexandru Ipsilanti made a donation to support it. Among those who contributed in the early nineteenth century was Hierodeacon Philotheos of Milies (in Thrace), one of its professors.<sup>38</sup> By 1884, the school had grown to include around 70 students and three teachers.<sup>39</sup>

31 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 680 (n. 187). The craftsman’s name is Kyriakos; he signs his name as χατζι Κυργιακος and identifies himself as a κουγιουμτζής (“goldsmith”).

32 † Αφιερώθη τῇ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκῳ διὰ συνδρομῆς τοῦ κυρ Ἰωάννου Μεταξᾶ • ΑΨΞ • † Αφιερώθη τῇ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκῳ διὰ συνδρομῆς τοῦ κυρ Ἰωάννου Καλφᾶ • ΑΨΞ •

33 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 679 (n. 186).

34 Ünver Rüstem. *Ottoman Baroque: The Architectural Refashioning of Eighteenth-Century Istanbul*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019, 217, 219.

35 Gheorghe Pîrnuță. “Documents concernant des aides accordées par les Pays roumains aux écoles grecques de l’étranger.” *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 7, no. 4 (1969): 647–655, p. 653; Constantin C. Giurescu. “L’aide accordée par les Pays Roumains à l’enseignement de la Péninsule Balkanique et du Proche-Orient.” *Revue roumaine d’histoire* 9, no. 5 (1970): 823–835, p. 827; Ariadna Camariano-Cioran. “Aides pécuniaires fournies par les pays roumains aux écoles grecques (I).” *RESEE* 17, no. 1 (1979): 123–151, p. 134. Giurescu and Camariano-Cioran believed that “Maguliotisa” and “Muhlió” referred to two separate churches or schools, but this was not the case. Moreover, only the charter issued in June 1797 pertained to the school.

36 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 145–146, 150, 678 (n. 183), 681–684 (n. 188).

37 Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικά Ἐφημερίδες*, 349, 351.

38 Gedeon, “Διαθῆκαι δύο θρακῶν διδασκάλων.” *Θρακικά* 7 (1936): 201–211.

39 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 678 (n. 183).

Yet, it was not always easy. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Republic of Turkey complicated the lives of Greeks in Constantinople. In September 1955, Saint Mary of the Mongols was one of the churches affected by state-orchestrated attacks that primarily targeted the Greek community. Nevertheless, it remains standing.

## The Last Judgement and the “Captain of the Heavenly Host”

The feat, recognized by all repertoires dedicated to the churches of Byzantine and Ottoman Constantinople, is in itself impressive.<sup>40</sup> But endurance had its price: change. Some researchers believed that the names τοῦ Μουχλίου or “Mouchliotissa,” given to the church after 1453, derive from the town of Mouchlion near Mystra in the Peloponnese, whose inhabitants were deported to Fener by Mehmed II in 1458.<sup>41</sup> This interesting hypothesis has not gained much traction, but sources confirm a profound transformation in the neighbourhood’s social fabric and demographic makeup following the Ottoman conquest.<sup>42</sup>

The architectural evolution of the building reflects this transformation.<sup>43</sup> Initially, the church was a domed quatrefoil – a rare type for the early eleventh century. Later, a tripartite narthex was added. By the eighteenth century, the south conch and most of the narthex had been replaced by a large room and an exonarthex. A bell tower was added in 1892, followed by additional interventions in more recent years. It is evident that the community, initially monastic and then a parish congregation, was growing in size.

40 Cornelius Gurlitt. *Die Baukunst Konstantinopels – Textband*. Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1912, 36–37; Alexander van Millingen. *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople: Their History and Architecture*. London: Macmillan, 1912, 272–279; Thomas F. Mathews. *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul: A Photographic Survey*. University Park, PA – London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976, 366–375 (no. 37); Wolfgang Müller-Wiener. *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls. Byzantion – Konstantinupolis – Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1977, 204–205; Vassilios Kidonopoulos. *Bauten in Konstantinopel, 1204–1328: Verfall und Zerstörung, Restaurierung, Umbau und Neubau von Profan- und Sakralbauten*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994, 88–90 (no. 1.1.39); Vasileios Marinis. *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople, Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 199–200.

41 Sokrates Kougeas. “Ο Γεώργιος Ἀκροπολίτης, κτήτωρ τοῦ Παρισίνου κώδικος τοῦ Σουΐδα.” *Βυζαντινά – Μεταβυζαντινά* 1, no. 2 (1949): 61–74. While Franz Dölger believed that the name Μουχλιώτισσα reflected the presence of Tatars in the area, Raymond Janin considered Μαγουλιώτισσα to be a foundation of a late-thirteenth-century member of the Magoulas family: “La topographie de Constantinople byzantine III. Études (1918–1938).” *Échos d’Orient* 38, no. 195–196 (1939): 380–416, p. 394–396. This is neither the time nor the place to go through all the hypotheses.

42 Stéphane Yerasimos. “Les Grecs d’Istanbul après la conquête ottomane.” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 107–110 (2005): 375–399.

43 Charalambos Bouras. “Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη.” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 26 (2005) [Περίοδος Δ’. Στη μνήμη του Γεωργίου Γαλάβαρη (1926–2003)]: 35–50; Edmund C. Ryder. “The Despoina of the Mongols and Her Patronage at the Church of the *Theotokos ton Mougoulion*.” *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 27 (2009–2010): 71–102.

Inescapably, the consequences for the decoration — both murals and icons — were severe. The fires that ravaged Fener and Balat in 1640, 1720, 1730, and 1784 — to name but a few — may also have caused damage and prompted modifications.<sup>44</sup> For example, it is likely that the “great blaze” of 1730 and that of 25 June 1784 affected the frescoes and necessitated the replacement of the iconostasis. Furthermore, tastes shifted: both clergy and the faithful favoured fashionable items that were better suited to expressing their devotion.<sup>45</sup> In the words of Alexander von Millingen, “Although the building has always been in Christian hands it has suffered alterations almost more drastic than any undergone by churches converted into mosques.”<sup>46</sup>

The obsession with the Byzantine strata of the church further cast aside the remaining non-Byzantine traces. In 1912, von Millingen noted only “a large picture of the Last Judgement” on the eastern wall — this is undoubtedly the one photographed by Weinberg for Romanescu twenty years later.<sup>47</sup> Beginning in 1924, Ernest Mamboury’s tourist guides mentioned that “on the wall almost opposite the entrance is an ancient representation of the last judgement which is still in a fairly good state of preservation.”<sup>48</sup> In 1936, Sergio Bettini also observed the “very Italianate depiction of the Last Judgement” almost facing the entrance. However, since it was clearly not “ancient” and the signs of repainting were obvious, he did not pay much attention to it. He recorded faint traces of possibly Palaiologan wall paintings in the narrow crypt and went on to study a deteriorated fragment of Byzantine mosaic depicting the Mother of God with Child, which had been extracted from the wall and framed as an icon.<sup>49</sup> A Palaiologan sculpture depicting Christ Emmanuel and another icon of the Theotokos were associated with Saint Mary of the Mongols.<sup>50</sup> The mosaic icon may, in fact, have originated elsewhere; meanwhile, the sculpture has been relocated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

44 Athanasios Komninos Ypsilantis. *Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν τῶν εἰς δώδεκα βιβλίον Η' Θ' καὶ Ι' ἤτοι Τὰ μετὰ τὴν Ἀλωσιν (1453–1789)*, edited by Archimandrite Germanos Afthonidis of Sinai. Athens: Dionysios Karavias, 1972<sup>2</sup>, 144, 313, 327–328, 638.

45 This is exemplified, for instance, by the popularity of Konstantinos of Adrianople in the circles of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the first half of the 18th century: Ioanna Bitha. “Σχόλια σε εικόνα του αγίου Χαραλάμπους, ἔργο Κωνσταντίνου Αδριανουπόλιτη (1739).” *ΔΧΑΕ* 24 (2003) [Περίοδος Δ'. Στη μνήμη του Νίκου Οικονομίδη (1934–2000)]: 333–346.

46 Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches*, 278.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Ernest Mamboury. *Constantinople: Tourist's Guide*. Constantinople: Rizzo & Son, [1924], 218–219. Dorotheos of Laodicea does not mention it: “Ἡ Παναγία τοῦ Μουγλίου,” *Ὁρθοδοξία* 9 (1934): 205–211.

49 Sergio Bettini. “Un inedito mosaico del periodo paleologo a Costantinopoli.” In *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di studi bizantini (Roma, 20–26 Settembre 1936)*, vol. 2: *Archeologia e storia dell'arte – Liturgia e musica – Cronaca del Congresso*. Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1940, 31–36, p. 33 (“una molto italianeggiante rappresentazione del Giudizio Universale, quasi di faccia all'ingresso”). For the mosaic icon, see also Georgios A. Sotiriou. “Ψηφιδωτὰ εἰκόνες τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως.” *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* 11 (1936): 70–81.

50 Øystein Hjort. “A Fragment of Early Palaeologan Sculpture in Istanbul.” *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 6 (1975): 107–113; Bouras, “Ἡ αρχιτεκτονική,” 48.

The Last Judgement is no longer extant. Unveiled in 1899, it was not there in 1948, according to Angelos S. Vlachos’ memoirs, *Once Upon a Time, a Diplomat*. Because the wall was damp, the fresco had swollen and was simply scraped off, with the permission of Patriarch Maximos V.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately, the three photographs in Romanescu’s album document it, albeit in an already fragmented and deteriorated state.

The scene is arranged in four horizontal tiers. The uppermost tier depicts the Ancient of Days, flanked by angels who roll up the scroll of time, signifying the imminence of the End.<sup>52</sup> Below, in the second tier, Christ is enthroned at the centre, accompanied by the Deesis and the twelve apostles – six positioned to His left and six to His right (though only ten are visible in the photograph). The next tier features Hetimasia’s throne at the centre. To the left stand the righteous (only partly visible), while to the right, the greedy rich are depicted, condemned for their lack of compassion. Only a quarter of the lowest tier has survived. The River of Fire is damaged beyond recognition, and little remains of the sinners. However, a peculiar depiction has been preserved: two emperors — one identified as Domitian — are shown pulling a cart full of sinners toward the mouth of Hell, with a devil holding the reins.

Manouil I. Gedeon tentatively dated the composition to the early seventeenth century or shortly thereafter.<sup>53</sup> However, this claim is no longer tenable: the style clearly indicates a much later date, and the vestments of the wealthy individuals condemned for their greed and lack of mercy are undoubtedly from the eighteenth century.

The phenomenon of artistic anachronism is not uncommon. In Last Judgement compositions within the Byzantine tradition, the merciful rich are depicted in stark contrast to the merciless, who are accused of failing to assist those in need and are consequently regarded as sinners. The former head towards Heaven, while the latter go to Hell. Both groups are portrayed in attire reflective of contemporary fashion, ensuring their recognizability to the faithful of the period. This iconographic motif is deeply rooted in biblical exegesis, particularly the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and aligns with the broader Orthodox theological critique of greed and the failure to aid the poor.<sup>54</sup>

51 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 144, 676–677 (n. 177). Ernest Mamboury’s 1951 guide still mentions it, without apparently reflecting the actual situation on the ground: *Istanbul touristique* (Istanbul: Çituri bira-derler basimevi, 1951), 279 (“sur le mur, presque en face de l’entrée, une représentation ancienne du jugement dernier est encore en assez bon état”).

52 For the theme, see Victoria Kepetzi. “Quelques remarques sur le motif de l’enroulement du ciel dans l’iconographie byzantine du Jugement Dernier.” *ΔΧΑΕ* 17 (1993–1994) [Περίοδος Δ'. Στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρική (1934–1991)]: 99–112.

53 Millas, *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, 149.

54 The critique was neither new nor specific to Eastern Christianity: Giuliano Milani, *L'uomo con la borsa al*

However, for the communities under Ottoman rule, the motif acquired particular significance.<sup>55</sup> The condemnation of those who amassed wealth without exercising charity or social responsibility was especially poignant, as their benevolent acts had become deeply needed.

Texts and images abundantly support this claim. A satirical comedy composed in Bucharest in the late 1780s, entitled *The Tempest of Madness* (*Τό σαγανάκι τῆς τρέλας*), attributes to its main character, the Wallachian prince Nicolae Mavrogheni / *Νικόλαος Μαυρογένης*, the decision to depict his predecessors in a highly unflattering manner – burning in Hell with purses full of gold coins in hand, a clear sign of the bribes they had taken.<sup>56</sup> The anonymous author portrays Mavrogheni as a madman, yet many, if not all, readers would have regarded his words as truthful: corruption was rampant, and duties were easily forgotten. An icon of the Second Coming painted in Constantinople in April 1794 by a certain Avraam, now housed in the Benaki Museum, depicts the “charitable nobles and prelates” ascending to Heaven and the “unjust rich” bound for Hell, all dressed in contemporary attire – thus linking the sacred narrative to the social realities of the period.<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, the loss of the composition and the limited nature of the surviving photographs prevent deeper analysis. The lost Last Judgement of Saint Mary of the Mongols does not resemble any of the depictions examined by Miltiadis K. Garidis.<sup>58</sup> It differs from the ones in central Albania.<sup>59</sup> The scroll of time, featuring the Zodiac, appears in several Moldavian examples, but the character of those earlier



*collo. Genealogia e uso di un'immagine medievale*. Rome: Viella, 2017. See also Valentino Pace (ed.), *Alfa e omega. Il giudizio universale tra oriente e occidente*. Castel Bolognese: Itaca, 2006.

55 Draginja Simić-Lazar has noted and explained the significance attributed to the poor in post-1453 Last Judgement compositions: “Le Jugement dernier de l’église des Saints-Pierre-et-Paul de Tutin en Yougoslavie.” *Cahiers Balkaniques – Histoire de l’art* 6 (1984) [= Tania Velmans (ed.), *Contribution à l’étude du Jugement dernier dans l’art byzantin et post-byzantin*]: 233–259.

56 Rigas, *Scrieri inedite*. Edited by Lia Brad Chisacof, Bucharest: Academia Română – Institutul de studii sud-est europene, 1998, 44 (“Καὶ ἔξω εἰς τὸ μεγάλο διβάνι νὰ ζωγραφίσουν εἰς μουσαμά τὴν κόλασι, καὶ πέντε-ἕξι προκατόχους μου αὐθέντας ὅπου νὰ καίονται εἰς ταῖς φωτιαῖς μὲ πουγγεῖα εἰς τὸ χεῖρι διὰ σημεῖον τῶν ρουσφετιῶν ὅπου ἄρπαξαν αὐτὰ ὅλα.”).

57 Angelos Delivorrias, Electra Georgula (eds.). *From Byzantium to Modern Greece: Hellenic Art in Adversity, 1453–1830*. New York: Onassis Cultural Center, 2005, 64–65 (no. 17 – Anastasia Drandaki); Anna Ballian (ed.). *Relics of the Past: Treasures of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Population Exchange. The Benaki Museum Collections*. Milan: Benaki Museum – 5 Continents, 2011, 196 (no. 64 – Anastasia Drandaki).

58 Miltiadis K. Garidis. *Études sur le Jugement Dernier post-byzantin du XIV<sup>e</sup> à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Iconographie – Esthétique*. Thessaloniki: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν, 1985.

59 Konstantinos Giakoumis. “Box of Contributions with the Last Judgement.” In Giakoumis (ed.). *Water in Arts and Crafts in the Berat Region, 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. to 19<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.* Tirana: Gent Grafik and University of New York Tirana, 2015, 91–96; Giakoumis, “Textual Visuality & Visual Textuality in Texts Correlated with Artworks. Nektarios Terpos’ *Pistis* and Last Judgement Scenes from Myzeqe, Central Albania.” *Art Readings – Old Art* 2016 (“Texts, Inscriptions, Images”), 203–245.

compositions is distinct.<sup>60</sup> In Ukrainian compositions, a sinner or a group of sinners travel to Hell in a handcart, though in a more plebeian manner: no persecuting emperor pulls the vehicle.<sup>61</sup>

Even less is known about the few surviving frescoes: the Pantokrator in the dome (fig. 7), the depiction of Theotokos Platytera in the altar apse, the large image of Saint Nicholas enthroned — surrounded by scenes from his life — above the entrance opposite the altar, and a barely visible Annunciation have never been the subject of scholarly discourse.

The same applies to the church’s icons and sacred objects. Apart from the few nineteenth-century pieces that bear donor inscriptions — such as the silver covers of the royal icons, which were donated in 1885 (fig. 6) — their date and provenance remain unknown. Who donated the large nineteenth-century Russian embroidery depicting Joseph, now exhibited in an imposing wooden frame? When was the small nineteenth-century Russian icon depicting the Archangel Michael as “Captain of the Heavenly Host” added to the inventory of Saint Mary of the Mongols? The precise answers may await in the Library of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as the church is under its jurisdiction and there is a strong possibility that its archives were transferred there. Still, the history of the “Captain of the Heavenly Host” provides useful clues.

Mounted on a red-winged horse, the crowned and winged Archangel blows a trumpet, holds a censer and a book, and spears Satan, who plunges into the abyss. Above, Christ stands before an altar, radiantly blessing the scene. The meaning of the composition remains enigmatic.<sup>62</sup> Was it inspired by the Book of Revelation, or could there be other references? While many details suggest links to the last book of the New Testament, others do not align with an apocalyptic theme.



60 Ileana Stanculescu. *Il Giudizio universale nella pittura murale esterna del Nord della Moldavia / The Last Judgement External Mural Paintings from the Northern Part of Moldavia*. Bologna: Aspasia, 2001.

61 Liliya Berezhnaya and John-Paul Himka. *The World to Come: Ukrainian Images of the Last Judgment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014, 66 (fig. 53 – Kam’ianka-Buzka, icon on wood, 1587), 200 (fig. 158 – Lipie, icon on wood, first half of the 17th century), 219 (fig. 172 – Nová Sedlica, icon on wood, end of the 17th century). Handcarts also feature in Last Judgements from Maramureş County (present-day North-Western Romania): Raluca Beta. “Icoana *Judecâții de Apoi* din biserica de lemn din Budești-Josani (județul Maramureş).” *Apulum – Series Historia & Patrimonium* (2013): 71–112; Beta, “Păcătoși și pedepse eterne. Iconografia Iadului în bisericile de lemn din comitatul Maramureş.” *Memoria Ethnologica* 13, no. 46–47 (2013): 86–101.

62 The literature on the topic is extensive. For a recent overview, see Ovidiu Olar, “« Menacing, Powerful and Frightful Captain of the Heavenly Host. » The Archangel Michael in Early Modern Eastern and Southeastern Europe.” In *The Archangel Michael Beyond Orthodoxies: History, Politics and Popular Culture*, edited by Alexandros Tsakos and Marie Steine von der Lippe. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2025, 63–93. Visual examples are provided in David’s blog entry, “Terrible Michael and His Flying Red Horse.” (June 9, 2014), *Icons and Their Interpretation: Information for the Objective Student of Russian, Greek, and Balkan Icons* (<https://russianicons.wordpress.com/tag/apocalyptic-icons/> – accessed on March 1st, 2025).

The key to this unique iconography lies in its origin: Muscovy under Ivan the Terrible (1533–1584). The Russian scholars have identified the main textual source as the *Canon to the Menacing Angel*, which some attribute to the Tsar himself. This prayer implores the “frightful and menacing” celestial being to show mercy to the penitent sinners at the hour of their death and on the Day of Judgement. The Angel of Death is not named and does not ride a horse. However, Michael’s popularity in Muscovy and his significant role in Muscovite state ideology made the association inevitable. Court-sanctioned icons, like the monumental *Blessed Be the Host of the Heavenly Tsar* from the Dormition Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin, depicted the mighty winged Archangel mounted on a winged horse. Subsequently, Michael was portrayed as winged knight, riding a winged horse. Therefore, this iconographic type may be connected to the Moscow Kremlin, the heart of the Muscovite state, and it may reflect the idea of Muscovy as the new, God-chosen Israel triumphing over evil. It did not spread widely outside Muscovy initially. However, starting in the second half of the seventeenth century, it gained significant popularity, particularly in Pomor’e, the Upper Volga region, the Ural region, and western Siberia.

The popularity stemmed from the religious reforms of Patriarch Nikon of Russia (1652–1658; d. 1681), which led to the rise of dissenting communities, such as the Old Believers. Nikon’s revision of liturgical texts and ecclesiastical ceremonies caused the Church to discard iconographic types and texts without Byzantine precedents as innovations. In response, communities opposing Nikon’s reforms embraced these “traditional” elements, reproducing them and ensuring their survival.

The case is fascinating: a court-related iconographic type becomes a favourite of state-defying groups. However, it did not spread in Southeast Europe until the eighteenth century, and its occurrences sometimes confuse researchers. For example, the “Archangel Michael Defeating Satanail” mural painting in the Church of the Dormition in the village of Kraynitsy, Bulgaria (nineteenth century) was hastily associated with the apocryphal *Homily of John Chrysostom on How Archangel Michael Defeated Satanail*.<sup>63</sup> The villagers who frequented the church may have heard of the combat between the two mighty angels — one fallen, the other not — but the iconographic model was Russian.

Although icons of the “Captain of the Heavenly Host” spread through the Balkans to Constantinople in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, the theme remained “largely incomprehensible”

63 Florentina Badalanova Geller. “Slavonic Redactions of the Apocryphal *Homily of John Chrysostom on How Archangel Michael Defeated Satanail*: Some Considerations.” In *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, edited by Lorenzo DiTommaso, Matthias Henze and William Adler. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017, 96–131, p. 98 (figure 10.1).

to Christians in the area.<sup>64</sup> Instead, they favoured a different iconographic type: the Archangel Michael depicted as both triumphant and a psychopomp.<sup>65</sup>

This post-1453 creation features prominently in Saint Mary of the Mongols. One of the icons in the altar depicts Michael dressed in Roman armour, holding a sword of fire in his right hand, carrying a soul in his left, and trampling a naked man (fig. 6). It is unclear whether the anonymous victim represents Satan, a sinner, or Hades, the personification of death. Still, the composition undoubtedly evokes the archangel’s military, psychopomp, and eschatological roles: the Judgement is near, and Michael, the devil’s victor, will accompany the soul before the heavenly Judge.

Consequently, the small Russian icon of the “Captain of the Heavenly Host” never gained widespread prominence. Nevertheless, its presence in a church like Saint Mary of the Mongols, though seemingly coincidental, is part of the larger phenomenon that Ricontrans investigates.

Natalia Komashko’s study of the royal icon complexes from Moscow in the churches of Constantinople documents an extensive collection of high-quality late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Russian artifacts in Saint Demetrios Xyloporta, the Church of the Archangels in Arnavutköy (Mega Revma), Saint George and Saint Nicholas in Yeniköy (Neochori), Saint George in Kuzguncuk (Chrysocheramos), the Transfiguration Monastery, and the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin on Kınalıada (Proti), Panagia Koumariotissa and the Transfiguration Monastery on Büyükada (Prinkipos), and Saint Paraskevi in Hasköy. One of the icons in Neochori was most probably donated by Prince Dimitrie Cantemir.<sup>66</sup> The icon at Saint Mary of the Mongols is notably later and of considerably lower quality. Nonetheless, it can be inferred that it arrived in Constantinople as part of the ongoing trend set by earlier, more meticulously crafted pieces.

## Concluding Remarks

Monuments such as Saint Mary of the Mongols should not be studied solely from a Byzantine perspective. Their history after the Fall of Constantinople is equally significant and deserves thorough examination.

64 Yuliana Boycheva, “Introduction,” in Boycheva (ed.), *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16<sup>th</sup> – Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*. Seyssel: La pomme d’or, 2016, 11–27, p. 13.

65 Irimi Leontakianakou. “Une création post-byzantine: L’archange Michel triomphant et psychopompe.” *Σοφιστικά* 33 (2009): 145–158.

66 See Natalia Komashko, “Royal Icon Complexes,” p. 147–148.

Reconstructing the post-1453 period is challenging due to several practical obstacles: the need to consult both Greek and Ottoman archival sources, the difficulty or impossibility of conducting archaeological investigations, and the lack of reliable data. Methodological shifts further complicate the task, as national historiographies have sought to appropriate Istanbul's imperial past. For instance, Marcel Romanescu, whose travelogue inspired this study, viewed the monuments he photographed through a national lens, asserting: "It is good for Romanians to know... that in Stambul, we too have our own stones."<sup>67</sup> To the Romanian diplomat, Saint Mary of the Mongols was, at least in part, Romanian.

Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, is avoiding the pitfalls of continuity. The church underwent continuous transformations, reflecting the evolving fortunes and challenges of the communities it served, as their destinies were intrinsically linked. The early eleventh-century Panagiotou Monastery founded by monk Antonios, the convent "of the Mongols" attested in 1351, and the Most-Holy Magouliotissa parish church of Tzoukis and Cantemir – all share the same space, shaping it while functioning in different contexts.

The paradox of Theseus' ship comes to mind: is it still the same entity, even though every component has been replaced over time? Philosophical conundrum apart, the religious images and liturgical objects — both past and present — discussed here bear witness to a dynamic process, shaped by continuous offerings, damage, relocation, loss, and eventual renovation or replacement. Saint Mary of the Mongols offers historians and art historians a rare opportunity to examine an exceptional case, and its lost Last Judgement tells a compelling story.

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67 Romanescu, "Monumente," 226. For details, see Mihai-Cristian Amărieuței and Ovidiu Olar. "Istanbul's Romanian Stones: Marcel Romanescu's Travel Album (1932)" [forthcoming].





Fig. 1. Exterior view of Saint Mary of the Mongols, 1932. Photo: Jean Weinberg. (Source: Romanescu, Marcel. "Monumente românești la Stambul." *Boabe de grâu* 3, no. 6 (1932): 235).



Fig. 2. Last Judgement fresco in Saint Mary of the Mongols, 1932. Photo: Jean Weinberg. (Source: Romanescu, Marcel. "Monumente românești la Stambul." *Boabe de grâu* 3, no. 6 (1932): 237).



Fig. 3. The Last Judgement fresco in Saint Mary of the Mongols, detail, 1932. Photo: Jean Weinberg. (Source: Romanescu, Marcel. "Monumente românești la Stambul." *Boabe de grâu* 3, no. 6 (1932): 237).



Fig. 4. The Last Judgement fresco in Saint Mary of the Mongols, detail, 1932. Photo: Jean Weinberg. (Source: Romanescu, Marcel. "Monumente românești la Stambul." *Boabe de grâu* 3, no. 6 (1932): 238).



Fig. 5. Exterior view of Saint Mary of the Mongols, March 1936. Photo: Nicholas V. Artamonoff. (Source: Artamonoff, Nicholas V. *Artamonoff Collection*. Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection [ICFA.NA.0063] (<http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/252>, accessed on March 1st, 2025).



Fig. 6. Iconostasis of Saint Mary of the Mongols, January 1938. Photo: Nicholas V. Artamonoff. (Source: Artamonoff, Nicholas V. *Artamonoff Collection*. Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection [ICFA.NA.0234] (<http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/253>, accessed on March 1st, 2025).



Fig. 7. Interior dome fresco of Saint Mary of the Mongols, January 1938. Photo: Nicholas V. Artamonoff. (Source: Artamonoff, Nicholas V. *Artamonoff Collection*. Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection [ICFA.NA.0232] (<http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/254>, accessed on March 1st, 2025).

# IV

**RUSSIAN OR  
UKRAINIAN?  
DEFINING THE ORIGINS  
OF ART OBJECTS,  
VISUAL MODELS AND  
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS  
TRANSFERRED TO  
THE BALKANS**

## Russian or Ukrainian? Kiyvan icons in the Romanian Principalities in the eighteenth century

Cristina Cojocaru

### Abstract

Besides the numerous icons produced in the famous Armoury Workshop in the Moscow Kremlin, and several others probably originating from Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Saint Petersburg, many icons made in the painting workshops in Kiyv were also brought to Moldavia and Wallachia in the eighteenth century.

Most of these Kiyvan icons were identified as Russian by contemporary historical sources in the Romanian Principalities. In just a handful of cases, more specific provenance from Malorossia was reported.

Such examples are to be found at various locations: at Putna Monastery in Suceava County, where about 80 icons donated by Metropolitan Jacob of Putna are preserved; at the Archbishopric of Roman in Bacău County; at Poiana Mărului Monastery in Buzău County; at Cetățuia Monastery in Iași; and at Snagov Monastery near Bucharest. In most cases, the presence of these icons in Moldavia and Wallachia is related to the expansion of monastic lineage networks established by the followers of the spiritual path initiated by St. Demetrius of Rostov, from Kyiv Pechersk Lavra via Mount Athos.

Although this type of icon has a specific, easily recognizable style, which has led some art historians to consider it a distinct school of painting, the similarity to Russian icons produced in Moscow and Central Russia in the first half of the 18th century is easily perceptible.

My paper aims to question the stylistic labels and ethnic stereotypes applied to 18th-century Kiyvan icons, before moving to more in-depth analysis of the mutual influence relationships arising between centers of art production within the territory of the Russian Empire and beyond.

**Keywords:** eighteenth century; style; icon painting workshops; ethnic/national framing; Kiyvan icons; Russian icons; Ukrainian icons; Putna Monastery, Suceava county; Saint Elijah Monastery, Suceava; Archbishopric of Roman, Bacău county; Poiana Mărului Monastery, Buzău county; Cetățuia Monastery, Iași; Hurezi Monastery, Vâlcea County; Snagov Monastery, Ilfov County.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, links between the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, the Russian Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth grew in strength and frequency. Many of the deposed Moldavian rulers, such as Ieremia Movilă, Miron Barnovschi and Moise Movilă, fled to Poland to seek military support and lived there for several years. Also, some of the metropolitans of Moldavia had close ties to Poland, such as Dosoftei, who ended his life there. The reverberations of these close relations extended into neighboring Wallachia, notably through Prince Vasile Lupu, who, following his agreement with Matei Basarab, erected the Stelea Monastery in the capital, Târgoviște, and subsequently commissioned an iconostasis adorned with despotic icons painted by Andrey of Lviv.<sup>1</sup> Also, in about the same period, Metropolitan Stephen I of Ungrovlahia commissioned an entire iconostasis painted in “Ukrainian” style for his foundation in Bălănești-Râmești, Vâlcea County. Thus, the fashion for so-called “Ukrainian Baroque” style iconostases encompassed both Moldova and Wallachia in the decades from the middle of the seventeenth century. Some other well-known examples of this type are the iconostasis originally in the chapel at Neamț fortress, dating to 1643, now kept at Neamț Monastery, with icons by a painter from Lviv signed “Maler Baraski”, or the iconostasis dating to 1658 in the princely church in the village of Rădeana, Bacău County.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, political, spiritual and economic relations between the Romanian Principalities and Kyiv — the second important cultural center in the Ukrainian area — gained crucial importance. This was especially true after the Moldavian noble Petru Movilă, son of the ruler Simion Movilă of Wallachia and nephew of Ieremia Movilă, prince of Moldavia, became Metropolitan of Kyiv and founded the Spiritual Academy there in 1633. At that time, the influence of the monastic center at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra (or Kyievo-Pecherska Lavra), where Petru Movilă became a monk and where he had the first headquarters of his Academy, became increasingly relevant for Romanian space. Many Romanian monks, some of them future hierarchs,<sup>3</sup> visited Pechersk Lavra or attended the Theological Academy in Kyiv, and became the spreaders of a new ideology and a new artistic vision established by Petru Movilă.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, in 1654, the local Cossacks placed the southern part

- 1 Identification made by Ana Dobjanschi, in her article “Influențe moldovenești în arta Țării Românești în secolul al XVII-lea.” *Ars Transsilvaniae* VI (1996): 43–48. Also Dobjanschi, Ana, and Georgescu, Maria, *Icons of Târgoviște. The XVIIth – XIXth centuries*, Bucharest: Daim Publishing House, 1998, 26, 106.
- 2 Sabados, Marina. “Icoane și iconostase din Moldova secolelor XVI–XVII.” In Vol. 1 of *Arta din Romania, din preistorie în contemporaneitate*, edited by acad. Răzvan Theodorescu and acad. Marius Porumb. Bucharest / Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy Publishing House / Mega Publishing House, 2018, 486–498.
- 3 Such as the monk Pachomius (1674–1724), founder of the Pokrov Hermitage in Neamț County, who later became the Bishop of Roman, and now is a saint of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the name Saint Hierarch Pachomius of Gledin. He considered himself a disciple of Saint Dmitry of Rostov, visited the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra many times and traveled extensively throughout Russia.
- 4 Olianina, Svitlana. “Catholic Counter-Reformation Art Forms Serving the Revival of Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the 17th Century.” In *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian*

of Ukrainian territory, including Kyiv, under the authority of the Russian Empire. Pechersk Lavra's influence in the Principalities grew over the following centuries, surpassing that of Ruthenia, which remained under Polish authority. The most important factor was the current of spiritual revival developed in the Romanian Principalities by certain monks from Pechersk Lavra, such as Basil from Poiana Mărului and his disciple Paisius Velichkovsky, which thus became known as *Paisianism*. This was to achieve enormous popularity during the nineteenth century, leading to the reformation of Romanian monastic life in its entirety and the growth of a new consciousness in line with the ideas and artistic tastes of the Pechersk Lavra community. A network of affiliated monasteries was set up in both Moldavia and Wallachia, linked to Pechersk Lavra and Mount Athos, spreading the stylistic precepts of a new church art updated to contemporary baroque taste. This fact led to the mass import of Russian and Kiyvan art into the Romanian Principalities, which exerted an influence and change in vision so extensive that it largely determined the Westernization of Romanian ecclesiastical art, starting in the early eighteenth century and peaking in the mid-nineteenth century. Almost as a statement, many of the monasteries that formed part of the Paisian network were decorated with iconostases fitting the so-called “Ukrainian Baroque” type, easy to spot thanks to the register of oversized standing apostles flanking the central *Deisis* icon, as well as lush, brightly coloured, heavily gilded decorative wood carving. Some of them, such as that in the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary at Poiana Mărului Monastery (1777–1791) (fig. 1), Buzău County, are believed to have come straight from Kyiv.<sup>5</sup> Other similar works are found at Putna Monastery, in the wooden church dedicated to the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple (1760) and in the Dormition of the Mother of God Church (1771–1773), at the catholicons of Dragomirna (1781) and Sucevița (1801) Monasteries, all in Suceava County, and at the Church of the Icon in Bucharest (c. 1786)<sup>6</sup>. Also, documents show that several Romanian or Vlach painters active in the Romanian Principalities during the eighteenth century studied in Kyiv or elsewhere in Malorussia, such as Jovan Četirević



and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century, edited by Ana Dumitran and Mirosław Piotr Kruk, Cluj-Napoca /Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House / National Museum of the Union Publishing House, 2023, 254, 258, 262–263, 265. The author launches an innovative view on the topic, claiming that “the shift in the visual concept of Ukrainian iconostasis which occurred till the middle of the 17th century, was initiated by Metropolitan Peter Movilă within the context of his reform activities” (*op. cit.*, 254), and also she argues that Movilă introduced “Counter-Reformation art forms into the artistic language of the Kyiv Orthodox Metropolitanate” in order to carry out a kind of “Orthodox Counter-Reformation” aimed “at inhibiting potential religious conversions to the Catholic or Protestant faiths by convincing the believer of the superiority of the Orthodox faith.” (*op. cit.*, 265), statements that I consider to be highly relevant in the context of the so-called “Ukrainian influences” issue in Moldavia and Wallachia.

5 Geacu, Sorin, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, Buzău: Editura Alpha MDN, 2017, 66, 71.

6 All the years in brackets indicate the dating of the iconostases in those churches, most of the ecclesiastical buildings that house them being older.

Grabovan,<sup>7</sup> active both in Bucharest and in the Roman Diocese, and monk Veniamin,<sup>8</sup> who painted in the Suceava and Iași areas.

Thus, besides the numerous icons produced in the famous Armoury Workshop in the Moscow Kremlin,<sup>9</sup> and several others probably originating from Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Saint Petersburg, many icons made in the painting workshops in Kyiv and other centers in Malorussia were also brought to Moldavia and Wallachia in the eighteenth century. At that time, most of these Kiyvan icons were identified by historical sources in the Romanian Principalities as Russian. Only in very few cases was more specific provenance from Kyiv or Belgorod reported. In most instances, the presence of these icons in Romanian Principalities is again related to the expansion of monastic lineage networks involving followers of the spiritual path initiated by St. Demetrius of Rostov, from Kyiv Pechersk Lavra via Mount Athos. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the particularly lively relations between Mount Athos, the Danubian Principalities, and Kyiv Pechersk Lavra (the main religious centre in Malorussia), was largely facilitated by Catherine II's church diplomacy in the Balkans. Numerous donations and contributions from the Russian imperial family to Balkan monasteries, and in particular to the Moldavian monasteries, strengthened the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and its cultural heritage in this region.<sup>10</sup>

All over Romania,<sup>11</sup> especially in Moldavia, there are many and varied examples of eighteenth-century icons that most likely come from the territory of Malorussia. As will be seen, the difficulty in precisely circumscribing these icons is caused by the visual filters superimposed by our traditional mental setting and intellectual training, on the one hand, and on the other, by the fact that some icons have a mixed



7 Kucekovic, Aleksandra. *Jovan Četirević Grabovan: (oko 1719–1789)*, Matica Srpska Gallery, Novi Sad, 2022; Cojocaru, Cristina. “The Painter Grigorie Popovici and His Master Jovan. Contacts Between East and West During the Second Half of the 18th Century”. *Museikon* 5 (2021): 249–316.

8 Pr. Popovici, Ioan, “Comunicări.” In *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice XXVI–XXVIII (1933–1935)*, 183. Sabados, Marina, “O operă de artă uitată: vechiul iconostas al Mănăstirii Todireni – Suceava.” *Ars Transsilvaniae XXVII–XXVIII (2017–2018)*: 103–116.

9 In the research I conducted on this topic within the RICONTRANS project, I found approximately 100 icons produced in Moscow workshops during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the present territory of Moldavia and Wallachia.

10 Tarasov, Oleg. “Русские иконы XVIII — начала XX в. на Балканах.” *Советское славяноведение* 3 (1990): 54.

11 The case of Transylvania was not the focus of our interest for this study, but painters from Kyiv or Ruthenia probably worked in this area as well. Vasile Zborovski, who painted the iconostasis of the church in Certege, is a possible example of this kind. See: Dumitran, Ana. “Ukrainian Features in Transylvanian Icon Paintings in the 18th Century.” In *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century*, edited by Ana Dumitran and Mirosław Piotr Kruk, Cluj-Napoca /Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House / National Museum of the Union Publishing House, 2023, 309–312. There are also documented cases of iconostasis transfers from Malorussia to Transylvania. See: Dumitran, Ana, and Kosiv, Roksolana, and Ilieș, Bogdan, and Buda, Andrei. “Strâmba Monastery and the Oldest Wide-Intrados Iconostasis in Transylvania”. *Museikon* 9 (2025), 85–117.

style or atypical features, to the extent that even specialists cannot agree whether they are Russian or Ukrainian or something else. Three major types of icons fall into this category. The first type is represented by the 85 icons at Putna Monastery, and two other paired icons of the *Mother of God with the Child* and *Christ Pantokrator* from Saint Elijah Monastery, both in Suceava County, which will be discussed further on. Together with them are *Mother of God in Sorrow* (fig. 2) and *Christ the Man of Sorrows*, from Poiana Mărului Monastery in Buzău County, and two smaller icons, the *Mother of God with the Child* and *Jesus Christ Pantokrator*, from the Beatrice and Hrandt Avakian Collection in the permanent exhibition at the Museum of Art Collections in Bucharest.<sup>12</sup> This type closely resembles the despotic icons in the iconostasis of the Holy Trinity Church at the Kyiv Caves Monastery.<sup>13</sup> Related to this type, yet still quite different, are the three icons from the repository at the Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman in Bacău county: *The Mother of God Enthroned as Empress with the Child*, *Jesus Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch enthroned* and *Saint Nicholas Enthroned* (fig. 3), signed on August 11, 1795 by the painter Antoni.<sup>14</sup> Despite their different appearance, which could encourage their attribution to a Romanian painter, the icons in Roman share a technical feature with the Putna icons: the boards making up the wooden panel are glued together on the reverse with tow and resin, a technique never found on any other Romanian icon.

The second category is that of relief icons, which have parts carved into the wood of the wooden panel or added in stucco. This includes the icons from the iconostases of the wooden churches in Coada Stâncii (fig. 4) and Brădicești, Iași County, an icon of *Christ Pantokrator Enthroned* from the Cetățuia Monastery Museum in Iași, and the large icon of *The Mother of God Enthroned Queen of Heaven with the Christ Child and the Holy Archangels and Four Saints* found in the Dormition of the Mother of God Church in Bran, Brașov County. Similar icons are to be found in volumes on Ukrainian art, for example *Christ Pantokrator*, inv. i-19, from the National Museum of Art in Kyiv.<sup>15</sup>

12 Inv. No. 82790 and 82791, 19, 5 x 13, 5 cm. In classification order 3834 / 14.10.2016 issued by the Romanian Ministry of Culture, positions 89–90, they are described as Russian icons. Photographs of them are available at: <https://clasate.cimec.ro/Detailiu.asp?tit=icoana-pe-lemn--Iisus-Hristos-Mare-invatator-Icoana-ferecata&k=D558F91B58AA4603A942494AC47B7E86>; <https://clasate.cimec.ro/Detailiu.asp?tit=icoana-pe-lemn--Maica-Domnului-cu-Pruncul-Icoana-ferecata&k=F4AC4DBE3473412CAE-300482C3914A4F>

13 Miliaeva, Lioudmila. *L'icone ukrainene XIe-XVIIIe s.*. Bournemouth / Saint Petersburg: Parkstone / Aurora, 1996, cat. 201–202.

14 The author's inscription is written in black ink along the lower side of the icon of Saint Nicholas.

15 Miliaeva, Lioudmila. *L'icone ukrainene XIe-XVIIIe s.*. Bournemouth / Saint Petersburg: Parkstone / Aurora, 1996, cat. 210, p. 239.

The third category is closest to examples of Ruthenian art, and includes icons of average quality, which are the most difficult to classify because they are most easily confused with creations by Romanian painters. Such cases are the icons from the iconostasis of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church at Poiana Mărului Monastery<sup>16</sup> (fig. 5), whose wooden structure is dated 1777, but painted in 1791 by the painter Teofan (Feofan), who was either Romanian or Ukrainian. A very similar style is also to be found in the iconostasis icons at the Church of the Icon in Bucharest, which I have attributed to the same painter Teofan.<sup>17</sup> The icon of *Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch Enthroned with Archangels*,<sup>18</sup> from Cetățuia Monastery Museum in Iași, could also be included in the same kind.

All of the abovementioned icons were supposedly painted in Kyiv or the surrounding area, but despite being contemporary the differences between them are so great that they make one wonder whether they really come from the same place. For comparison, I think it is useful to take a glimpse at the distinction between Ukrainian-Ruthenian and Ukrainian-Kyivan icons, both in visual and theoretical terms. Although the circulation of Ruthenian icons in Moldavia and Wallachia significantly diminished in the eighteenth century as compared to the previous century, there are still examples that can clearly be seen as coming from the Polish-Lithuanian area, such as the miracle-working icon of the *Mother of God with the Child* from Putna Monastery<sup>19</sup> or another icon on the same theme from Golia Monastery (fig. 6), kept in the heritage repository of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia. In this way, the much finer and more humanized manner of representing figures in Ruthenian icons is noticeable. In my view, one regrettable error some scholars make is to compare early seventeenth-century icons from the Polish-Lithuanian area with late eighteenth-century icons from the Russian Empire, without taking into account that Ruthenian icons also changed over the intervening two hundred years.

In Romanian art history literature, a theoretical approach to icons produced on the territory of present-day Ukraine and their assignment in terms of style and denomination has long been avoided or evasively

16 Pavel, Lelia. *Bisericile de lemn din județul Vrancea*. Focșani: Pallas Publishing House, 2005, 131. For the attribution of the iconostases from the two churches in the Poiana Mărului Monastery to certain workshops from the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and for the first mention of the name of the painter Teofan, see: Pavel 2005, 131; Pavel 1992, 12; Geacu 2017, 61–72.

17 Cojocaru, Cristina. “The Painter Grigorie Popovici and His Master Jovan. Contacts Between East and West During the Second Half of the 18th Century.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 256.

18 Inv. no. 14–120-e0290.

19 Sabados, Marina. “Icoane”. In *Sfânta Mănăstire Putna*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Putna: Mitropolit Iacov Putneanul Publishing House, 2023, 372–373. For a reproduction of the icon, see: <https://www.putna.ro/ro/iv-2011-cuvinte-ca-tre-tineri/Icoana-Maicii-Domnului-de-la-Putna-898>

carried out. Loose and confusing terms such as “Russian-Ukrainian”<sup>20</sup> art, “Carpathian icons”<sup>21</sup> or “Ukrainian Baroque”<sup>22</sup> have been used in past publications in order to sidestep what is a complicated issue, especially since these aspects have always had a sensitive and risky ideological and political background. Only recently, within the development of the RICONTRANS research project, have more substantial studies been devoted to this topic and gathered in a volume titled *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century*.<sup>23</sup> However, even that collective work failed to address some relevant questions<sup>24</sup> regarding the distinction between icons produced in the Kyiv region and artifacts originating from the north of Ukrainian territory (i.e. Ruthenia), and omitted some important art objects that did not fit into the framework or have not been researched and published to date. This is why this paper now aims to question the stylistic labels and ethnic stereotypes applied to eighteenth century Kiyvan icons, and to provide more in-depth analysis of the mutual influence occurring between centres of art production within the territory of the Russian Empire and beyond.

- 20 Romanian authors who have focused on this subject, approaching it under the cover of the concept of “foreign influences” in Romanian art, include Ana Dobjanschi, Marina Sabados, and Alexandru Efremov. Dobjanschi only distinguishes between Russian influence (e.g. the despotic icons from Three Hierarchs Church in Iași), and what she calls “Polish” influence (i.e. the iconostasis from the Neamț fortress chapel), see: Dobjanschi, Ana and Simion, Victor, *Arta în epoca lui Vasile Lupu*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1979, 61. Although she has long used the term “Ukrainian”, in her latest synthesis publication Marina Sabados exclusively uses the term “Ruthenian” for all non-Muscovite East Slavic tendencies and influences. See: Sabados, Marina. “Icoane și iconostase din Țara Românească în secolele XVI–XVII” and “Icoane și iconostase din Moldova secolelor XVI–XVII”. In *Arta din Romania, din preistorie în contemporaneitate*. Vol. 1, edited by acad. Răzvan Theodorescu and acad. Marius Porumb, Bucharest / Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy Publishing House / Mega Publishing House, 2018, 373–381, 486–497.
- 21 Term introduced by Polish researcher Janina Klosinska in the volume *Ikony* (Krakow, 1973) and then used for a period in Romania by researcher Marina Sabados.
- 22 In Romanian historiography, the “Ukrainian Baroque” tag is largely applied to a wide range of iconostases and icons, showing quite different features. Alexandru Efremov, author of the latest synthesis on Romanian icons, prefers the term “Kiyvan Baroque”, which he appreciates as an “innovative school” in the Romanian area, characterized by the floral relief decoration of the backgrounds, the influence of Western post-Renaissance art and a tendency for realistic rendering. However, he does not distinguish between the two centers of Lviv and Kyiv, speaking in the same work both of the “influence of Russian art in the conception of Moldavian iconostases”, coming directly through the Russian painters from the Three Hierarchs Church in Iași and indirectly through the Lviv school, and also of “Russian influences coming through Poland”. Efremov, Alexandru. *Icoane românești*, Bucharest: Meridiane, 2002, 53, 113, 141.
- 23 Dumitran, Ana, and Kruk, Mirosław Piotr (eds). *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century*. Cluj-Napoca / Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House / National Museum of the Union Publishing House, 2023.
- 24 Such as: Is there a stylistic distinction between the icons of the northern part of Ukraine (Ruthenia) and the southern part (Kyiv), just as there is a clear distinction between the painting of the two Romanian Principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia? Are the so-called “Ukrainian” influences in Romanian painting (in both Moldavia and Wallachia) due to the Ruthenian or the Kiyvan route? What is the relationship between Ruthenian, Kiyvan and Russian icon painting?

As early as the middle of the seventeenth century, some icons and iconostases made in Lviv were easily identifiable as “Russian” to the eyes of travellers who came from the Levant, but who were nevertheless familiar with East Slavic art, such as Paul of Aleppo, son and secretary of Patriarch Makarios III of Antioch. Proof of this lies in the description he gives of Stelea church in Târgoviște, where Vasile Lupu had installed an iconostasis in 1646, in line with the new fashion. According to the attribution made by Ana Dobjanschi, this was endowed with a set of despotic icons signed by Andrey of Lviv, which are now preserved in the National Museum of Art of Romania.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, in 1653, in order to praise the modern tastes of the Moldavian ruler, Paul of Aleppo described the iconostasis as follows: “[it] is of Russian workmanship, shines brightly and has three doors”.<sup>26</sup> Also, regarding the icons at the Three Holy Hierarchs Church in Iași, likewise founded by Vasile Lupu, he states that they are Muscovite: “The iconostasis has four tiers of absolutely marvellous, peerless icons. The icon of the Lord, that of His Mother, and those of the Three Hierarchs and St. Nicholas are Muscovite, made of silver and gold”.<sup>27</sup> Investigating three of the despotic icons preserved<sup>28</sup> from the Church of the Three Holy Hierarchs (fig. 7), currently on display in the Three Holy Hierarchs’ Monastery Museum and in the Metropolitan Residence in Iași, we come to the conclusion that they also belong to the so-called “Ukrainian” style rather than that of Moscow workshops.<sup>29</sup> This is despite the puzzling fact that there are documents<sup>30</sup>

- 25 Dobjanschi, Ana. *Icons of Târgoviște*. Bucharest: Daim, 1998, 26, 106. For reproduction of the icon along with its pair see: Dumitran, Ana, and Kruk, Mirosław Piotr (eds). *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century*, Cluj-Napoca /Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House / National Museum of the Union Publishing House, 2023, 154–156.
- 26 Paul of Aleppo, *Jurnal de călătorie în Moldova și Valahia*. Translated by Ioana Feodorov. Bucharest / Brăila: Romania Academy Publishing House, Istros Publishing House of Brăila Museum, 2014, 243.
- 27 *Ibid.* 190.
- 28 The icons were partially repainted in 1851, especially the faces. See: Urechia Alexandrescu, Vasile. Vol. 3 of *Istoria școlilor de la 1800–1864*. Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1894, 59.
- 29 For comparison, see the icons found in the wooden church from Șcheia village, near Iași, which was used as a place of refuge by Vasile Lupu during the Cossack invasion in 1650, and which are signed by the Armoury painter Ivan Paisein.
- 30 Dragomir, Silviu. “Contribuții privitoare la relațiile bisericii românești cu Rusia în veacul al XVII–lea.” *Analele Academiei Române*, XXXIV (1911–1912): 1088–1091. The author publishes a letter dated September 13, 1638, sent by Prince Vasile Lupu to Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich, in which the Moldavian ruler asks for good painters to paint his new church in Iași. In another letter from December 29, 1639, Vasile Lupu thanks the tsar after receiving some of the icons painted in Moscow for his iconostasis in the Three Holy Hierarchs Church. The succession of these letters and the chronology of events shows that the icons were most probably painted by native Russian painters, not by the Moldavian craftsmen sent to Moscow to learn the craft, since the servants of Vasile Lupu mentioned in the letter who were allowed to work on the iconostasis and the Crucifixion could only have worked on the carved part of the pieces. These craftsmen could not have been Silvestru the monk from Zografu Monastery and Nicolae the painter, also subjects of Vasile Lupu, because they were only sent to Moscow in January 1641. A clear analysis of the facts shows that the Russians were not expected to make the carved part of the icons (the frame and the background of the panel); this must have been assigned to Romanian craftsmen, whom we know to have made a significant contribution, as they spent two years working in Moscow. Another argument that the Moldavians did the sculpture work is that Vasile Lupu asked the tsar’s permission

showing they were painted in Moscow, possibly by some of the Tsar's painters, such as Sidor Pospeev, Iakov Gavrilov, Deiko Yakovliev and Pronka Nikitin, who were subsequently sent from the Kremlin to Iași in 1641 to complete the work at the Church of the Three Holy Hierarchs. Here we have just one of several cases found in Romania for which there are both contemporary descriptions and archival documents or signatures indicating that we are dealing with Russian icons, yet visual analysis by art historians<sup>31</sup> does not corroborate this in terms of style. Another similar case concerns the two despotic icons discovered in the wooden church of the Holy Archangels in Cacova, Piscu Mare village, Stoenesti commune in Vâlcea County, currently owned by the Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu Vâlcea County Museum in Râmnicu-Vâlcea (fig. 8). The icons were first published by researcher Ioana Ene,<sup>32</sup> who claims that in the early 1980s she was able to make out an inscription on the lower part of *Mother of God with the Child*, reading: "Alex ... zu ... [M]osc[ow] 718[?] m[e]s[e]ța oct[omber] 5". The author dated the icons to the eighth decade of the seventeenth century and attributed them to a Muscovite workshop, and they have thus been recorded in Romanian historiography as Russian icons. Unfortunately, storage conditions since that time have resulted in the loss of the color layer at the bottom of the icons which supported the supposed inscriptions, meaning that the information can no longer be checked precisely. However, a few years ago the icons were restored in the Conservation and Restoration Department at the National University of Arts in Bucharest, under the coordination of lect. dr. Cristina Serendan,<sup>33</sup> who confirmed through microscopic investigations and laboratory analyses that there were once extensive inscriptions on the lower frame of both works. From a stylistic point of view, the icons present a strange mix of features, simultaneously pointing to Polish-Lithuanian and Kiyvan models. While most of the work, meaning the flesh and the garments, is in the Ruthenian style, one detail stands out as distinct, i.e. the stucco-decorated background, which was made using a different technique from that commonly found

for certain elements of the icons to be made in the Moldavian fashion, and this kind of carved decoration is really „non-specific” to the Russian tradition. Still, the Russians must have done something for these icons too, because otherwise Vasile Lupu would have had no reason to thank the Tsar, and the entire work (i.e. the sculpture and painting of the icons) would have been done in Moldova, by local craftsmen alone, with no need for them to travel to Moscow. In conclusion, my opinion is that the part that can be attributed to Russian artists is the painting, a layer that is likely under the repaints, and can no longer be seen today. (*Ibid.*, 1089–1090, 1161).

31 I thank the Russian art researchers Natalia Komashko, Yuliana Boycheva and Aleksandr Preobrazhensky for their support and expertise regarding these icons.

32 Ene, Ioana. *Icoane brâncovenesti și postbrâncovenesti din județul Vâlcea (1680–1730). Studiu și catalog*. Râmnicu Vâlcea: OFFSETCOLOR Publishing House, 2011, 16, 122. For further references see Negrău, Elisabeta. "The Stylistic Influences of Ruthenian Painting in the Wallachian Principality in the 17th Century." In *Intercultural and Visual Art Transfer in Central Europe and the Balkans. Ruthenian-Ukrainian and Romanian Art from the 15th to the Early 19th Century*, edited by Ana Dumitran and Mirosław Piotr Kruk, Cluj-Napoca /Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House /National Museum of the Union Publishing House, 2023, 155–183.

33 Serendan, Cristina, and Firea, Ciprian, and Ișvanca, Simina, and Chelmuș, Alexandru. "Original Colours and Painting Technique of Two 17th Century Post-Byzantine Icons." In *Acta Artis Academica* (2020), Proceedings of the 7th Interdisciplinary ALMA Conference 16th–18th October 2019, Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, 13–26.

in central Europe. The sharper and more refined craftsmanship of the carved background in the icons from Cacova is almost the same as that of the despotic icons from Platărești Monastery in Călărași County. The latter have been considered Russian works,<sup>34</sup> except for their unusual background, which has not been accepted as being specific to either Russian or Ruthenian art.

So, what explanation could there be for this apparent mix of styles and confusion of perception? Were these icons really the joint works of different craftsmen, who deliberately mixed styles at the special request of the donors? Or did the people of the past just use the term "Russian" as a generic cover for all local forms of the new style of religious painting in the East Slavic world, whether it was from Lviv, Kyiv or Moscow?

Of course, according to the conventions of political history, all the artifacts created within the territory of the Russian Empire in the second half of the seventeenth and the entire eighteenth century should be considered "Russian art". By its scientific logic, this finding seems indisputable and discourages any further debate. But following that logical conclusion would mean that all art produced in the territory of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries would be called "Ottoman art". Which would of course mean obliterating all art of the Byzantine tradition with its local Greek, Bulgarian and Romanian painting schools. And that would clearly be wrong.

What do we know for sure is that Russian icons were highly valued in Wallachia and Moldavia during this period, and that their style was considered particular enough to be tagged as such and highlighted in documents, as further demonstrated in the inventory compiled by Archimandrite John, Abbot of Hurezi Monastery in Vâlcea County.<sup>35</sup> Drawn up in the closing years of the seventeenth century, when the decoration and endowment of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu's most important foundation was finally

34 Sabados, Marina. "Icoanele împărătești de la Plătărești. Ipoteză de datare și atribuire." In *Închinare lui Petre Ș. Năsturel la 80 de ani*, edited by Ionel Căndea and Paul Cernovodeanu, Brăila: Istros Publishing House of Braila Museum, 2003, 479–494; Sabados, Marina. "Influences occidentales dans la peinture roumaine d'icônes du XVIIe siècle." *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux-Arts*, XXXIX–XL (2002–2003): 36–37; Costea, Constanța. "Icoanele de la Aninoasa și unele probleme ale imaginii în Țara Românească în a doua jumătate a secolului XVII și la începutul secolului XVIII." In *Artă, istorie, Cultură. Studii în onoarea lui Marius Porumb*, Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napocae Publishing House, 2003, 221 and note 2. For the most recent proposed dating of the icons see: Cojocaru, Cristina. "O nouă propunere de datare a icoanelor împărătești de la Mănăstirea Plătărești", *18th Annual Session of the Medieval Art and Architecture Department, G. Oprescu Institute of Art History*, National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest, April 28–29, 2022.

35 Father Bălașa, Dumitru. "Constantin Brâncoveanu Voievod și Ioan Arhimandritul. Un manuscris inedit al lui Ioan, egumenul mănăstirii Hurezi (1692–1726)". *Mitropolia Olteniei*, XXV, 11–12 (1973): 993–100. The manuscript, written in Romanian with Cyrillic letters, is kept at the County Division of the National Archives in Râmnicu Vâlcea.

completed,<sup>36</sup> the catalogue of endowments of Hurezi Monastery lists the church's treasures, including "three icons from Moscow, silver-plated and gilded, two of St. Constantine and one of St. Procopius".<sup>37</sup> I consider this a significant detail, since the provenance or style is not specified for any icon or object in the inventory other than these three icons and two gospels, a large one and another smaller one, also from Moscow. Unfortunately, the icons mentioned by Abbot John are no longer in Hurezi Monastery today, so it is impossible to check whether their stylistic labeling reflected reality. However, another set of four Russian despotic icons still preserved at Hurezi, now exhibited in the museum, but once part of the iconostasis of the catholicon, attests to Constantin Brâncoveanu's connection with Russia and his interest in Muscovite icons. This set of icons is also important because, yet again, it shows a combination of styles: the figures are typically Russian, but are placed against gilded backgrounds incised with a decorative pattern to imitate stucco backgrounds, while the inscription on the Gospel held by Christ is written in Romanian, but using Cyrillic letters and Russian fonts.

Romanian publications contain even more references to icons and iconostases brought from Russia to Moldova which actually cover artifacts produced in Kyiv and Malorussia. For example, in the historical file at the wooden church in Coadă Stâncii, Iași County, it is stated that "according to local tradition (...) the icons of the iconostasis were brought from Russia to the old church, from where they passed to the current church".<sup>38</sup> The same source says that the old church was built in around 1750 by hermit monks who came from Russia. Likewise, the aforementioned icons of *Mother of God in Sorrow* and *Christ the Man of Sorrows*, found in the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church at Poiana Mărului Monastery, were assessed to be "Russian" works by two reputable historians of the Romanian Orthodox Church from the last century.<sup>39</sup>

Oleg Tarasov also speaks of the two "Russian" icons located in the narthex of Saint Elijah Monastery church in Șcheia, Suceava — *Christ Pantokrator* and the *Mother of God with Child* (fig. 9) — which, according to their donor inscriptions, were specially ordered in Moscow and made there in 1783, together with the carved iconostasis.<sup>40</sup> From Tarasov's point of view, this once again confirms the widespread

36 The construction and entire decoration of the monastery's catholicon were completed in 1694, but the inventory was most likely compiled after all the works in the complex were finished three years later. See: Popa, Corina, Ioanna Iancovescu, Vlad Bedros and Elisabeta Negrău. *Repertoriul picturilor murale brâncovenești. I. Județul Vâlcea*. Bucharest: UNArte, 2008, 41–42.

37 Father Bălașa, Dumitru. "Constantin Brâncoveanu Voievod și Ioan Arhimandritul. Un manuscris inedit al lui Ioan, egumenul mănăstirii Hurezi (1692–1726)." *Mitropolia Olteniei*, XXV, no. 11–12 (1973): 997.

38 <https://coadastancii.mmb.ro/6811-istoricul-parohiei-coada-stancii>.

39 Constantinescu, Horia and Cocora, Gabriel, "Poiana Mărului". *Glasul Bisericii*, XXIII, no. 5–6, (1964): 467.

40 In fact, the inscription written on the quadrilobe medallion on the pediment of the icon of the *Mother of God with Child* does not mention anything about Moscow and the donors, but says the following instead: "The

practice of ordering icons from Russia in the Danubian Principalities at that time.<sup>41</sup> The problem is that these icons, which a Russian art historian saw as Russian three decades ago, would now be considered "Ukrainian". In fact they are very similar to the Kyiv icons from Putna Monastery discussed below, and probably linked to them in some way.<sup>42</sup>

## The icons and inventory from Putna Monastery

The most relevant document proving the different perception of what "Russian icon" meant in the Romanian Principalities during the eighteenth centuries is *The inventory of treasures and objects of Putna Monastery*.<sup>43</sup> Found in the Putna Monastery archives, this 83-page manuscript was compiled sometime in the fall of 1769<sup>44</sup>, following the installation of Paisius Ioanovici as abbot. It was signed and sealed on November 26th in the same year by Archimandrite Isaia Baloșescu, as delegate of the Consistory and assessor. Unlike other areas, drawing up such inventories of monastery assets was not common in the Romanian Principalities, but the political context of northern Moldavia at that time justifies this activity. In 1775 the northern half of Suceava County and the Chernivtsi region, which had formerly belonged to Moldavia, came under the authority of the Habsburg Empire. Monastic life in the area was soon reorganized in accordance with the reforming ideas of Emperor Joseph II, that caused the closure of about a third of the Austrian monasteries after 1781.<sup>45</sup> In this context, all the assets and properties of the monasteries in the north of Moldavia were inventoried in order to be valued or transferred. Putna was one of only three monasteries that remained in use in the entire area, meaning that a considerable quantity of books, documents and works of art were moved there from elsewhere. The inventory of "treasures, vessels, vestments, books and all kinds of objects and church ornaments" unexpectedly begins with the icons in the catholicon, which are listed before other more precious objects, such as holy vessels or revetments made of precious metals and gemstones. This shows the high value

return of the relics of Saint John the New Martyr from Zhovkva to Moldova in the year 1783 from the Birth of Christ, month of May". Considering this and the fact that the saint's relics arrived in Suceava only in September 1783, we can assume that the icons with their frames, decorated with upper medallions and pedestal icons, were actually painted in Zhovkva, near Lviv, not in Moscow. Why Tarasov misread the original inscription is unknown, but it could be because the icons were only recently restored.

41 Tarasov, Oleg. "Русские иконы XVIII — начала XX в. на Балканах." *Советское славяноведение* 3 (1990): 55.

42 It is known that there has always been a connection between Putna Monastery and St. Elijah Monastery in Șcheia, Suceava, both having been founded by Stephen the Great, with monks who moved from one to the other.

43 Father Cojocaru, Alexie. "Inventarul de odore și obiecte ale Mănăstirii Putna (1796)." *Analele Putnei* 1–2 (2006), 5–98.

44 This follows a previous inventory dated October 23, 1783, which has not been located to date in the Putna Monastery archives or in the repositories of some other monasteries in the area.

45 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Austria/Early-reign-of-Joseph-II-1780-85>.

that the local monks attached to religious painting and provides an opportunity for descriptions which are of great interest for shaping local art historical discourse. The anonymous monk who compiled the inventory makes relevant remarks on the style of the icons, reflecting the perceptions of educated contemporary society on art and painting, especially as regards the new style of religious painting. The first item described in the inventory is the iconostasis in the Dormition of the Mother of God Church (fig. 10), made between 1771–1773 at the behest of Metropolitan of Moldavia Jacob of Putna, who had previously been abbot at the monastery. Apart from basic information regarding the dimensions and number of icons and their iconography, the description of the “new and skillfully made” iconostasis also includes details on its despotic icons, which prove highly relevant to the topic of Russian icons in Moldova: “The craft of painting on two of the great ones [n. icons], that is the *Assumption* and the *Apostles* (fig. 11), is very skilful, made in Russia with good paints, and for *Christ* and all the other icons in this iconostasis, the craft is Greek, poorly done and out of proportion, but in good paints”.<sup>46</sup> It is also stated that “its wood carving is made according to the new and most exquisite fashion”, meaning that it is one of the first Baroque iconostases with Rococo elements in Moldova. The two Russian icons in the iconostasis mentioned in the inventory are indeed genuine Muscovite paintings, donated in 1722 by Metropolitan of Voronezh Pachomius Shpakovsky<sup>47</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that besides these two icons, Putna Monastery holds many other Russian works<sup>48</sup> in its collection, as a result of the direct connections it had with Russia from the end of the fifteenth century onwards. This started due to the kinship between its founder, the Moldavian ruler Stephen the

46 Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Inventarul de odore și obiecte ale Mănăstirii Putna (1796).” *Analele Putnei* 1–2 (2006), 7.

47 According to some Russian sources, Pachomius was born into a noble family of Serbian origin in Wallachia in 1672. He moved to Moldavia and became an archimandrite and Abbot of Biserican Monastery in Neamț county. After the defeat of the Christian alliance at the battle of Stănilești in 1711, Pachomius fled to Moscow together with the Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir. Due to the fact that he carried out some state affairs related to the Ottoman Empire, Pachomius came to the attention and favour of Peter I, who appointed him Metropolitan of Voronezh and Yelets in 1714. At some point in 1720, Pachomius was reported to be performing liturgical services in St. Petersburg. He died in 1723 and he was buried in the Cathedral of the Annunciation at Mitrofanov Monastery. See *Русский биографический словарь*. A. A. Polovtsov (ed.), Vol. 13, *Павел преподобный — Пётр (Илейка)*, (1902): St. Petersburg: Imperial Russian Historical Society, I. N. Skorokhodova Printing House, 418–419.

48 The Putna Monastery repository holds a total of 20 Russian icons dating between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, and another 106 icons made in the territories of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. The information comes from the extensive research I have conducted over the last two years to catalog the icons of Putna Monastery, due to be published soon by the Metropolitan Iacob Putneanul Publishing House in the volume *Tezaurul Mănăstirii Putna. Icoanele*. See also: Smirnova, Enghelina. “Icoane ale meșterilor ruși din secolul al XV-lea la Mănăstirea Putna. Registrul apostolilor și prăznicarele.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2010): 7–32; Sabados, Marina. “Vechi icoane rusești la Mănăstirea Putna.” *Ars Transilvaniae* XIX (2009): 109–116; Paradis, Claudiu. *Comori ale spiritualității românești la Putna*. Iași: Publishing House of the Metropolitanate of Moldova and Suceava, 1988.

Great, and the Grand Prince of Moscow and all Russia, Ivan III, who were parents-in-law. Later on, relations between Putna and Moscow were certainly resumed at the end of the seventeenth century, when, in 1692,<sup>49</sup> the then abbot, Father Philotheus, obtained an audience with Tsar Peter the Great to ask for money for his monastery, under the terms of the Russian Empire’s almsgiving policy. Relations with Russia and visits by monks to Moscow definitely continued during the eighteenth century, as the monastery archive preserves documents showing that the Putna fathers brought some miracle-working icons from Russia and offered them as a precious gifts to their hierarchs.<sup>50</sup>

The description in the Putna inventory continues with the second iconostasis in the main church, located in the narthex: “Four large icons, in frames, [n. decorated] with pillars carved with flowers, are in the church anteroom [n. in original *tinda*]; they have the same faces [ i.e. iconographical representations] as the large icons that were described in the iconostasis [ n. in the nave], but the four are very skillfully crafted in Russia, with good paints”.<sup>51</sup> Also, in this case, the icons described by the inventory are still preserved in the monastery, stored in the heritage depository, but this time the comparison between the “made in Russia” tag given by the scribe monk, and the stylistic features of the icons leaves room for surprise. The four large despotic icons (fig. 12), representing *the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Mother of God with the Child, Jesus Christ Pantocrator* and the *Dormition of the Mother of God*, were donated in 1743<sup>52</sup> by another Metropolitan of the Russian Empire, the former abbot of Putna Monastery,

49 Dragomir, Silviu. “Contribuții privitoare la relațiile bisericii românești cu Rusia în veacul al XVII-lea.” *Analele Academiei Române*, XXXIV (1911–1912): 1126–1127. The author states thus: “On March 7, 1692, Abbot Philotheus and the *namesnik* Anthony from Putna Monastery arrived in Moscow. They said that they did not have almsgiving charter because no one from their monastery had been to Moscow before. They came to ask for alms for their monastery, which had been devastated by the Turks in 1691. Then the pagans stole all the holy vessels and took Abbot Philotheus and the *namesnik* Anthony captive, along with two other monks and 60 people serving at the monastery. Now they have no money to redeem these 60 too. Only 14 monks remained in the monastery, who also sent a letter to the Tsar. It seems that in Moscow they did not trust the monks from Putna. Therefore, they called Bishop Nicholas of Rădăuți, who was there at the time, to the „Office” and asked him about Putna Monastery. He confirmed what the monks had said, adding that Putna had always been rich, accommodating about 30 monks, and was now in great need after the devastation of the Turks. Afterwards, the two monks were received in audience by the Tsar, receiving 6 roubles each as alms, and their servants 2 roubles each, and they were allowed to ask for alms at the St. Sergius Lavra as well”.

50 In an undated letter (prior to 1756), written on December 29, Metropolitan Jacob of Putna ordered that a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God, among those brought from Moscow, to be sent to Bishop Ioanichie of Roman. Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Mitropolitul Iacob Putneanul, al doilea ctitor al Mănăstirii Putna.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 266, note 11.

51 Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Inventarul de odore și obiecte ale Mănăstirii Putna (1796).” *Analele Putnei* 1–2 (2006), 7–8.

52 The bottom line of the icon depicting *The Dormition of the Mother of God* icon has the following donor inscription: “These four icons were made at our expense, the humble one, and they were sent to the Holy Monastery of Putna to be in our memory and that of our parents. Metropolitan Anthony, 1745, July 1<sup>st</sup>.” (transcribed and translated by the author).

Anthony of Putna, who became Metropolitan of Chernigov and Belgorod.<sup>53</sup> Despite being partially repainted at the end of the nineteenth century, the icons still surprise with their very modern stylistics and stucco-decorated backgrounds, designed in classical style. Certainly, as the donation inscription states, Metropolitan Anthony sent the icons to Putna from abroad during the time he was in Belgorod. We can thus assume that they were made there, and that the scholar monk was right to call them “Russian icons”. This information is also confirmed by a contemporary document, *The History of Putna Monastery*, written by Archimandrite Vartolomei Măzereanu in 1761, which states that “also in the same year [n. 1756] carved and gilded wooden frames were made in the exonarthex of the church for all four icons that Father Antonie the Metropolitan [n. previously] sent as a gift from Belgorod through Theodosius Gheorghiescu, the hieromonk of this monastery”.<sup>54</sup> However, Belgorod was located in the border area between Great Russia and Malorussia and the style of the icons is also in between, but closer to the so-called “Ukrainian” type. This is an exemplary case in relation to the topic of this article: although the icons are known to have originated from Russia (even according to current political geography), they do not look like Russian icons, nor are the materials and techniques used to make them the same as those used in Moscow, making their assignment more difficult. Indeed, the icons were massively repainted in the provincial Academic style in 1893 by the painter and architect Vladimir Mironescu,<sup>55</sup> who did some kind of restoration work at Putna, but in the areas where the original layer is still visible, a few distinctive elements stand out: the anatomical details are made in the fleshy, puffy manner usually associated with the Ruthenian school; the stucco-decorated background has vegetal patterns modeled in relief, but not in the so-called Ruthenian style,<sup>56</sup> but in *a l’antica* manner, foreshadowing the neoclassical style; the inscriptions, including the one on the open gospel held by Christ Pantokrator, are in Romanian, but with Russian fonts. Of course, several hypotheses may arise: first, the icons could indeed have been painted in Belgorod, but by a painter who came there from elsewhere, from Kyiv or

53 Anthony of Putna was Bishop of Rădăuți (1728–1729) and Metropolitan of Moldavia (1730–1740), then bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan of Belgorod and Oboianschi (1739–1742), and Metropolitan of Chernihiv and Novgorod-Seversk (1742–1748). During the Russo-Turkish War (1735–1739) he was loyal to the Russian government, which is why, in 1739, he had to leave Moldavia and settle permanently in Russia. However, he maintained close relations with his monastery of origin, to which he sent gifts and financial aid. He is credited with having convinced Paisius Velichkovsky to come to Moldavia, while the two met in Kyiv during his office as Metropolitan of Chernigov. He also recognized the miracle of the icon of the Mother of God of the Akhtyrka, which occurred in 1739, in the diocese he headed in Belgorod, and in honor of the event sent an icon to Putna that is the earliest representation of the *Akhtyrskaya Mother of God*, dated 1743. See: pr. Cojocaru, Constantin. “Antonie, mitropolit al Moldovei, al Cernigovului și al Belgorodului.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 171–194 and Pippidi, Andrei. “Mitropolitul Antonie, Ion Neculce și rușii.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 195–204.

54 Măzereanu, Vartolomei. *Istorie pentru Sfânta Mănăstire Putna*. In “Inscripțiuni dupe manuscrise. Comunicări și note” published by Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia. *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, s. II, IX, (1886–1887): 62.

55 According to the inscriptions on the backs of the icons.

56 The style that is common on Gothic altars in central Europe.

even from Moldavia, bringing his own style with him. Second, the diversity of artistic manifestations in Russian territory went beyond known classifications, and painters may deliberately have combined elements characteristic of different schools of painting.

The third mention of the “Russian” tag in the 1796 inventory of the Putna Monastery is even more interesting and intriguing. Ten positions further on in the list, at inventory number 12, the author mentions a cluster of “eighty-four icons, all the same height, each 1ft and 3 1/2 inches, and each 11 inches wide, that is: all the Great Feasts and the saints with the Polyelos and slavoslovlje of the year”.<sup>57</sup> Regarding these, the author considers that “both the craftsmanship of the painting and the paints are good, made in Russia”.<sup>58</sup> Also he states: “on the back of each one is written in ink: *Staraniem Preosviștennago Iacova Metropolita Moldavscago*. These icons are placed in the altar in three panels, decorated with frames, 12 per panel, i.e. 36 [n. in total]; and [n. there are also] 37 above the pews, in the main church, also in frames, placed all around in a row. And in the church narthex [n. there are] 10 and one is left free for the *tetrapod* (lectern).”<sup>59</sup> According to *The History of Putna Monastery*,<sup>60</sup> in 1757 Vartolomei Măzereanu, Abbot of Putna at the time, went to Kyiv<sup>61</sup> on the behalf of Metropolitan Jacob of Putna to buy icons, books and other liturgical objects for his monastery. As Măzereanu states in the history he himself wrote,<sup>62</sup> he brought back 86 icons<sup>63</sup> of all the saints and the feasts of the year to be displayed on

57 Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Inventarul de odore și obiecte ale Mănăstirii Putna (1796).” *Analele Putnei* 1–2 (2006): 8.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*

60 Măzereanu, Vartolomei. *Istorie pentru Sfânta Mănăstire Putna*. In “Inscripțiuni dupe manuscrise. Comunicări și note” published by Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia. *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, s.II, IX, (1886–1887): 53–64.

61 The icons most probably came from a workshop in Kyiv, not from those at the Pechersk Lavra, as otherwise the text would have mentioned that the three monks were at the Monastery of the Caves.

62 *Ibid.* 62. The text says: “And in the year 1757, at his own expense, his holiness [n. Jacob of Putna] sent to Kyiv the Archimandrite of this monastery, Vartolomei Măzereanu, and Hieromonk Callistru from Putna, and Hieromonk Michael from Sihăstria Putnei, to beg for alms, and they brought 86 icons, of all the great and small feasts of the year, and 2 large church flags, and other things necessary for the church, by which the holy church was greatly adorned.”

63 The 76 icons depict the following holidays and saints: *Saint Simeon Stylites; The Holy Prophet Zechariah; The Nativity of the Mother of God; Saint Anne; The Exaltation of the Holy Cross; Saint Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian; Saint Thomas the Apostle; Saint Paraskeva; Saint Demetrius; The Holy Doctors Cosmas and Damian; The Council of the Holy Archangels; Saint Hierarch John the Merciful; Saint John Chrysostom; Saint Philip the Apostle; Saint Apostle and Evangelist Matthew; The Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple; Saint Andrew the Apostle; Saint Barbara; Saint Sabbas the Sanctified; Saint Nicholas; Saint Spyridon; The Holy Five Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius and Orestes; The Holy Prophet Daniel; Saint Archdeacon Stephen; The Holy Hierarch Basil the Great; The Circumcision of the Lord; The Baptism of the Lord; The Council of Saint John the Baptist; The Flight into Egypt; Saint Theodosius the Cenobiarch; Saint Anthony the Great; The Holy Fathers Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria; Saint Euthymius the Great; Saint Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople; The Three Holy Hierarchs; The Presentation of the*

the proskinetarya located in the nave, in front of the holy altar, to be venerated by the faithful. Together with this set of icons he also brought two double-sided liturgical banners (*khorugv*), which are also still preserved in the monastery. This is a rare case where icons whose provenance is mentioned in a historical document can not only be precisely identified in inventories, but are also physically preserved in the same place almost 300 years later. Currently, 76 of these icons are kept in the Putna Monastery repository (fig. 13–14), representing a remarkable and highly valuable corpus, since it is the oldest and largest set of festal icons for daily display and worship on a *tetrapod* in Romania.<sup>64</sup> Also, a noteworthy fact is that they were continuously used for worship from 1757 until the early 2000s, when they were finally moved to the museum. It seems likely that two icons missing from the set had already vanished from the monastery within just a few decades of their acquisition, prior to the 1796 inventory. Two others, *The Nativity of the Lord* and *Saint Catherine*,<sup>65</sup> are known to have been stolen from the church in the 1970s; in order to replace them, the monks specially ordered copies which are still kept in the repository to this day. Many of the remaining icons have been partially or completely repainted and some are quite badly preserved, but still show very interesting features relating to the problem debated in this paper. The style and composition of those 76 icons, strongly influenced by engravings from Western prints, such as the *Ectypa* and *Piscator* pictorial or illustrated Bibles, seems to be different from both Ruthenian and Russian icons. Yet there is something in between.



*Lord; Saint Theodore Tiron* (formerly Stratilat); *The Finding of the Head of Saint John the Baptist; Holy Martyr Eudokia; The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste; Saint Alexius the Man of God; The Annunciation; Saint George; Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mark; Saint James (son of Alphaeus) the Apostle; The Resurrection of the Lord; The Sunday of Thomas; Myrrh-bearing Sunday; Weak Man's Sunday; Samaritan Woman's Sunday; Blind Man's Sunday; Saint Prophet Jeremiah; Saint Prophet Isaiah; Saint Pachomius the Great; Saints Constantine and Helen; The Ascension of the Lord; Sunday Of The Fathers Of The First Ecumenical Council; The Descent of the Holy Spirit; The Holy Trinity; All Saints' Sunday; Saint John the New of Suceava; Holy Apostles Bartholomew and Barnabas; Saints Onuphry and Peter the Athonite; Saint Jude the Apostle; The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist; Holy Apostles Peter and Paul; The Council of the Holy Apostles; Saint Andrew of Crete; Saint Athanasius the Great from Mount Athos; Saint Procopius; Saint Anthony of the Kiyv Caves; The Holy Prophet Elijah; Saint Panteleimon; The Transfiguration; The Holy Mandylin; The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist.*

64 However, such sets of old festal icons intended for worship are quite rare in Romania, and can apparently only be found in very important monasteries that were connected with Pechersk Lavra and the Paisian movement, including: Văcărești Monastery near Bucharest (a set of 15 double-sided icons from 1781, painted by Grigorie Popovici, today kept at the National Museum of Art of Romania, see Cojocaru, Cristina. “The Painter Grigorie Popovici and His Master Jovan. Contacts Between East and West During the Second Half of the 18th Century”. *Museikon* 5 (2021): 249–316); Hurezi Monastery, Vâlcea County (a set of 16 double-sided icons from 1817, painted by Ioan from Teiuș, kept in the repository); and Cernica Monastery, Ilfov County (a set from the mid-nineteenth century, partially exhibited in the monastery museum).

65 This is quite possibly the icon traded in October 2022 by the Haynault Auction House in Belgium, after spending several decades in the collection of a diplomat posted to Central and Eastern Europe. <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Saint-Catherine/009545550E763C77B276A9AC1AE6B021>

Some striking details and inscriptions are recorded on the back of the icons. Apart from various inventory numbers written on metal, paper or directly onto the wood panel, each piece is stamped with an inscription in Slavonic,<sup>66</sup> made in black ink with a stencil, stating that the icons are the property or donation of Jacob, Metropolitan of Moldova.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the title of each iconographic theme is written on the reverse in (Kiyvan) Slavonic, in black ink, together with some peculiar symbols and letters<sup>68</sup> that have intrigued specialists (fig. 15). After two or three years of questioning I managed to figure out that these signs are just some codes indicating how the icons are paired and placed within a display system. The inventory reports that the set of icons was displayed on the walls of the altar apse, and that the icons were placed in three panels of twelve pieces each, making up a kind of iconostasis with carved wooden frames. The same sign on the back appears on two different icons, meaning that the two formed a kind of pair, so we can conclude that the 12 pieces that made up each panel were arranged in two rows (as seen from the plates in fig. 13). Last but not least, three names<sup>69</sup> — John, Timuș and Vasilko — are written in black ink on the back of some of the icons, in handwriting similar to the titles of the themes or the saints' names, as previously described. I suspect that these names could belong to the painters responsible for the icons, since it is also evident from visual analysis that they were created by three similar yet distinct hands.

In addition to the above set, in the Putna Monastery repository I found several other icons painted in the same style, most likely dating from the same period and coming from the same Kiyvan workshop. Among these, there are seven despotic icons<sup>70</sup> (fig. 16) originating from Sihăstria Putnei, a hermitage affiliated with Putna, which was closed after the Habsburg occupation, and two smaller paired icons of *the Mother of God with Child* and *Christ Pantocrator*, coming from the same place. *The History of*



66 Страніємъ преосвещеннаго Іакова, митрополит Молдавскаго.  
67 Jacob of Putna / Iacob Putneanul (1719 – 1778) was Metropolitan of Moldavia between 1750–1760 and was sanctified by the Romanian Orthodox Church in 2016. He entered Putna Monastery at the age of only 12, and was the spiritual son of Metropolitan Anthony of Putna and his most important successor, who continued his work on the reforming path of the Russian-inspired Orthodox revival. Starting in 1744 he was Abbot of Putna Monastery and then, from 1745, he became Bishop of Rădăuți. During his mission and at his care, Putna Monastery underwent significant and intense restoration, modernization, embellishment and endowment, which led to Jacob being considered the second founder of the monastery after Stephen the Great. See Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Mitropolitul Iacov Putneanul, al doilea ctitor al Mănăstirii Putna.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 265–308.  
68 Some of them are drawings with bisected circles or rectangles, affronted triangles, crosses and stars, others are letters written in Cyrillic, like D, G, T or the beginnings of words, followed by lines or crosses: e.g. *La* + + + +, *Doi* + + +, *Goi* + + +, *Băr* + +, *Boi* +, *Farm* etc. Thus, 33 pairs of different symbols were identified, plus others that no longer have a pair.  
69 Nine icons are inscribed with the name *Timuș*, four with *Ioanu* and three with *Vasilko*.  
70 They represent the following holidays and saints: *The Mother of God Enthroned as Empress with the Child and the Holy Archangels; Jesus Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch enthroned with the Holy Archangels; The Mother of God as Empress with the Child on the clouds; Jesus Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch on the clouds; Saint Hierarch Nicholas; The Annunciation; and The Venerable Fathers of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.*

*the Putna Monastery* also informs us that in 1757, on his journey to Kiyv, Vartolomei Măzereanu was followed by monk Mihail, Abbot of Sihăstria Putnei,<sup>71</sup> who probably took the opportunity to buy some icons from the same workshop for his own monastery. All the works were moved to Putna before 1796, as they are mentioned in the inventory, but are strangely not described as “Russian”, despite having exactly the same features as the festal icons donated by Metropolitan Jacob. This is despite the fact that, throughout the entire inventory, the author pays considerable attention to assessing the style and age of each individual icon and insists on arguing that Greek craftsmanship (i.e. the Byzantine tradition<sup>72</sup>) is poor and outdated, and that the local (i.e. Moldavian) style is even worse, so that the Russian style and new craftsmanship are the best. Ultimately, this inconsistency may cast a shadow over the historical source in question, implying that people in the past drew no distinctions between Russian and Ukrainian, and that all such differences are just our problem in the modern world. Nevertheless, I believe it is relevant to reflect on how distinctions have been made over time.

Returning to my original dilemma of whether the Kiyvan icons from Putna and other similar ones found in Romania can be considered Russian in a broad sense, and therefore included in the research within the RICONTRANS project, or whether are they something else, more related to Polish or Ruthenian art, I will now take a less conventional route to reach a possible answer. It is a well-known fact that following the dissolution of the Armoury workshops in the Kremlin in 1711, the master icon painters scattered and moved to other centers in Russia, such as Saint Petersburg, or travelled westward, working for certain intervals in the Romanian Principalities and Serbia, as for instance Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev presumably did.<sup>73</sup> Of course, on their way they may have reached Kiyv and some of them may have stopped there for good.

Also, the second half of the eighteenth century is a period when Russian icon painting visibly changes and becomes increasingly influenced by Baroque and Rococo elements. Colour, lighting, brushwork, and even composition change as well, becoming more intense, bright, picturesque and Western-like in the sense of Neoclassical and Academic painting. Compared to the previous Armoury style, the new trend in Russian painting is certainly something different, and the distinctions are significant. A lot of icons

71 Father Cojocaru, Alexie. “Mitropolitul Iacov Putneanul, al doilea ctitor al Mănăstirii Putna.” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 268.

72 It is not always clear whether they used the term “Greek” as in *maniera graeca*, as was used in Renaissance painting treatises to designate the “Byzantine” style. See also Mickunaite, Giedre. *Maniera Greca in Europe’s Catholic East: On Identities of Images in Lithuania and Poland (1380s–1720s)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023.

73 See the iconostasis at Krka Monastery in Croatia. Savić, Milorad. *Сликаство у српским црквама сјеверне Далмације*, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2000, 167–170; Čolović, Branko. *Manastir Krka*. Zagreb: Srpsko kulturno društvo “Prosvjeta”, 2006, 96, 105–107.

were painted in this new style of Russian art, some reaching a high and refined level of craftsmanship, such as the two paired icons *Mother of God the Unfading Rose* and *Jesus Christ the Heavenly King and the Great Hierarch Enthroned*, displayed in the narthex of Golia Monastery, and others proving a fairly vernacular level, as evidenced by the icon of *Saint Barbara With the Scene of Her Martyrdom* (fig. 17), owned by the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați, originally from a church in Brăila. An even better example for my argument is provided by three icons representing Great Feasts, found in the southern part of Romania (former Wallachia). The first one, representing the *Nativity of the Virgin Mary* (fig. 18) is kept in the repository of the National Museum of Art of Romania; according to the inscription left by the author on the back, it was painted in Moscow in 1795 by the painter Mikhail Ivanovici.<sup>74</sup> The second one, representing the *Resurrection of the Lord* as the Rising from the Tomb, belongs to a private collection<sup>75</sup> and is temporarily on view in an exhibition at the Palace of the Romanian Patriarchate. The third depicts the *Dormition of the Mother of God* (fig. 19) and is exhibited at the Cernica Monastery Museum in Ilfov County. Of course, the most obvious and convincing case is the great *Deisis* icon, kept at Snagov Monastery in Ilfov County (fig. 20) which was once part of the apostles’ tier of a large, no longer preserved iconostasis.<sup>76</sup> This icon is closest in style to the Kyivan icons from Putna, and if its provenance could be traced,<sup>77</sup> it would probably prove to be a joining point between the two schools. Many other icons similar to these are found in museums and collections in Russia and have been reproduced in volumes or albums on Russian art<sup>78</sup> or can be checked in databases on the Internet.<sup>79</sup>

Comparing these aforementioned icons, which are undoubtedly Russian, with the feast set from Putna Monastery, we find that there are significant similarities in terms of composition, background architecture and landscapes, lighting with flashes of gold and the decoration of textiles with specific

74 Nr. inv. i. 193, GAVR a MNAR, 45 x 30 cm; Drăghiceanu, Virgiliu. *Catalogul Colecțiilor Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*. Bucharest: Atelierele SOCEC, 1913, 16, cat. 97; Vasiliu, Gabriela. “Reflexiile timpului. Zgravi și icoane din Țara Românească în a doua jumătate a veacului al XVIII-lea.” PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2016, 279–280.

75 Dobjanschi, Ana. *Collection of Old Religious Art from Romania (XVth–XIXth Centuries)*. Bucharest: 2020, 27, cat. 27., 122. The icon is misidentified by the catalog author as Greek.

76 Thanks to Russian art researcher Natalia Komashko, who pointed out to me that this is a Russian icon.

77 The icon certainly did not belong to Snagov Monastery, but was brought there during the Communist period from one of the monasteries in the area designated as a centre of heritage concentration, such as Cernica, Căldărușani or Pasărea.

78 Komashko, Natalia. *Русская икона XVIII века*, Moscow: Агеј Томеш, 2006, 40/cat. 11, 57/cat. 28, 58/cat. 29, 60/ cat. 32–33, 197/cat. 168.

79 <https://www.dorichhousemuseum.org.uk/2020/11/30/four-saints-beneath-a-cloud-late-18th-century/> <https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/ikonopis/drzh-2259/index.php?lang=en> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holy\\_Metropolitans\\_of\\_Moscow\\_Peter,\\_Alexis,\\_Jonah\\_and\\_Phili\\_%281730–40s,\\_priv.coll\\_%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holy_Metropolitans_of_Moscow_Peter,_Alexis,_Jonah_and_Phili_%281730–40s,_priv.coll_%29.jpg).

patterns also drawn with gold. Of course, the icons from Putna also share many features with those from the Ruthenian workshops, with their round rosy faces, rendered with smooth brushwork and sweet features inspired by Central European Gothic rather than Byzantine tradition, and especially by their more painterly approach. Although Kyiv icons have a specific, easily recognizable style that has led some art historians to consider the city home to a distinct school of painting,<sup>80</sup> one can undoubtedly notice their similarity to Russian icons produced in Moscow and Central Russia in the first half of the eighteenth century.

## Conclusions

In light of the examples I have discussed in my work, I believe it is necessary to reframe some concepts and terms used in the field of art history and to shift to a different way of looking at the artistic realities of past centuries, outside the national paradigm or contemporary policies or ideologies.

First, we need to reconsider how painters and artisans worked and moved around in the world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and keep in mind that many icons may be collaborative works by several authors, who could have come from different countries and workshops. We should also be aware of the possibility that painters from a particular school of painting could produce works different from their characteristic style in order to please a foreign patron or to follow a trend set by a certain influence, as happened with the Muscovite painters and their Romanian clientele. Also, many painters travelled long distances and worked on the move in other territories, carrying with them a certain craft and style, even if the materials and languages they used were different. This is how hybrid artifacts emerged; although they do not tick all the boxes of a particular painting school and fall outside traditional classifications, leading to confusion among scholars, they nevertheless need to be considered, explained and put into context. We have to accept that in some situations we cannot clearly state that a given icon is Russian, Ukrainian, Ruthenian or Moldavian and just consider that some works are *in-between*. As shown by the sources quoted above, even in past times there was no unanimous opinion on the distinction between Russian and Ukrainian art, and even less so between what was Ruthenian and Kiyvan. On the other hand, this does not mean that there are no differences at all and that we may use these terms indiscriminately as if they were synonymous.

80 Miliaeva, Lioudmila. *L'icone ukrainene XIe-XVIIIe s.*, Bournemouth / Saint Petersburg: Parkstone / Aurora, 1996.

Secondly, we should also re-evaluate the meaning we give to some expressions and concepts in art history, such as *Baroque* or *Ukrainian Baroque*, both in relation to the specifics of the local context and also to the wider regional perspective. To do so, we must be aware of the multitude of shades that a term like *Baroque* could take on in the changing context of the entangled world at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not least because this cultural current is manifested equally at the same time in all states of the Orthodox world: in addition to Ukrainian Baroque or Cossack Baroque, we also have a Russian Baroque, a Moldavian Baroque, the *Brancovan* style which would be the equivalent of a Wallachian Baroque and almost the same as the Greek Baroque. All these frames overlap at certain points and get confused in the border areas.

Yet another weakness arises from shaping territories according to today's mental setting and current state borders, without taking into account the political realities of the past. For example, in the early modern era the Principality of Moldavia was a much larger state, better integrated with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russian Empire than with neighboring Wallachia. Unfortunately, the research we recently carried out within the RICONTRANS project failed to include half of the former territory of Moldavia, i.e. the current territory of the Republic of Moldova, ultimately creating a gap in the research map precisely in an area that is so important for cultural transition from Russia. This happened mainly due to logistical and administrative reasons, but also because of the segregation mindset, which makes us perceive this territory, and others like it, which shifted their statehood several times over the last two centuries, as distinct countries, different realities or foreign territories.

In the fourth place, my examples show that, as specialists, we should soften our assessment and interpretation of style markers and adapt the way we use them to better suit the context, as in the case of stucco decorated backgrounds. These are a notorious and perpetual subject of dispute and controversy for researchers, who on first glance consider them the prerogative of a certain school of painting, without paying attention to the fact that despite a somewhat similar visual effect, the technique used to create these gesso decorations can vary. In any case, on overviewing them we find that they are actually spread over very wide areas and replayed over and over again throughout the centuries, and thus are not really that useful for pointing to certain influences, such as "Ukrainian". The same applies to other markers of style often invoked in art history literature, such as naturalism in the rendering of figures, the design of thrones, miniature landscapes and perspective background architectures, decorative elements on clothing, etc. All of this should be revisited in light of the remarkable results yielded by research in the RICONTRANS project.

Last but not least, regarding the history of the Romanian Principalities, I believe my arguments clearly show that the impact of Russian art — considered as a whole, encompassing all Russian imperial territories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — was far more significant and established much earlier than previously thought. Also in this case, the examples of the hitherto uninvestigated,

unpublished icons from Putna Monastery reshape the known historical narrative and show the key role played by the monastery in introducing new Baroque artistic trends, alongside the Orthodox monastic revival movement in Moldavia and then in Wallachia, a few decades before Paisius Velichkovsky's arrival in the Romanian Principalities. Such opportunities to rewrite history will probably only arise in the event of a similarly extensive research project carried out in the future.





Fig. 1. The iconostasis, 1777–1791, Nativity of the Virgin Mary wooden church, Poiana Mărului Monastery, Buzău County, Photo: Ana Dumitran. © Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



Fig. 2. The Mother of God in Sorrow, second half of the 18th century, Nativity of the Virgin Mary wooden church, Poiana Mărului Monastery, Buzău County. Photo: Ana Dumitran. © Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



Fig. 3. The Mother of God Enthroned as Empress and Christ Child and Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch Enthroned and Saint Hierarch Nicholas Enthroned, painter Antoni, 1795, Saint Paraskeva Cathedral of the Archbishopric of Roman. Photo: Cristina Cojocar. © Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.



Fig. 4. Christ Pantokrator Enthroned, mid-18th century, Saint Demetrius Church, Coadă Stâncii, Iași County. Photo: Biserici Înlemnite, Ana Chiricuță. © Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Suceava – Archbishopric of Iași.



Fig. 5. The Mother of God as Empress and Christ Child, painter Theofan, 1791, Nativity of the Virgin Mary wooden church, Poiana Mărului Monastery, Buzău County. Photo: Ana Dumitran. © Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



Fig. 6. The Mother of God and Christ Child, second half of the 18th century, heritage repository of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia at Golia Monastery, Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church, Zagavia, Scobinți, Iași County. Photo: Mihai-Alex Olteanu. © Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Suceava – Archbishopric of Iași.

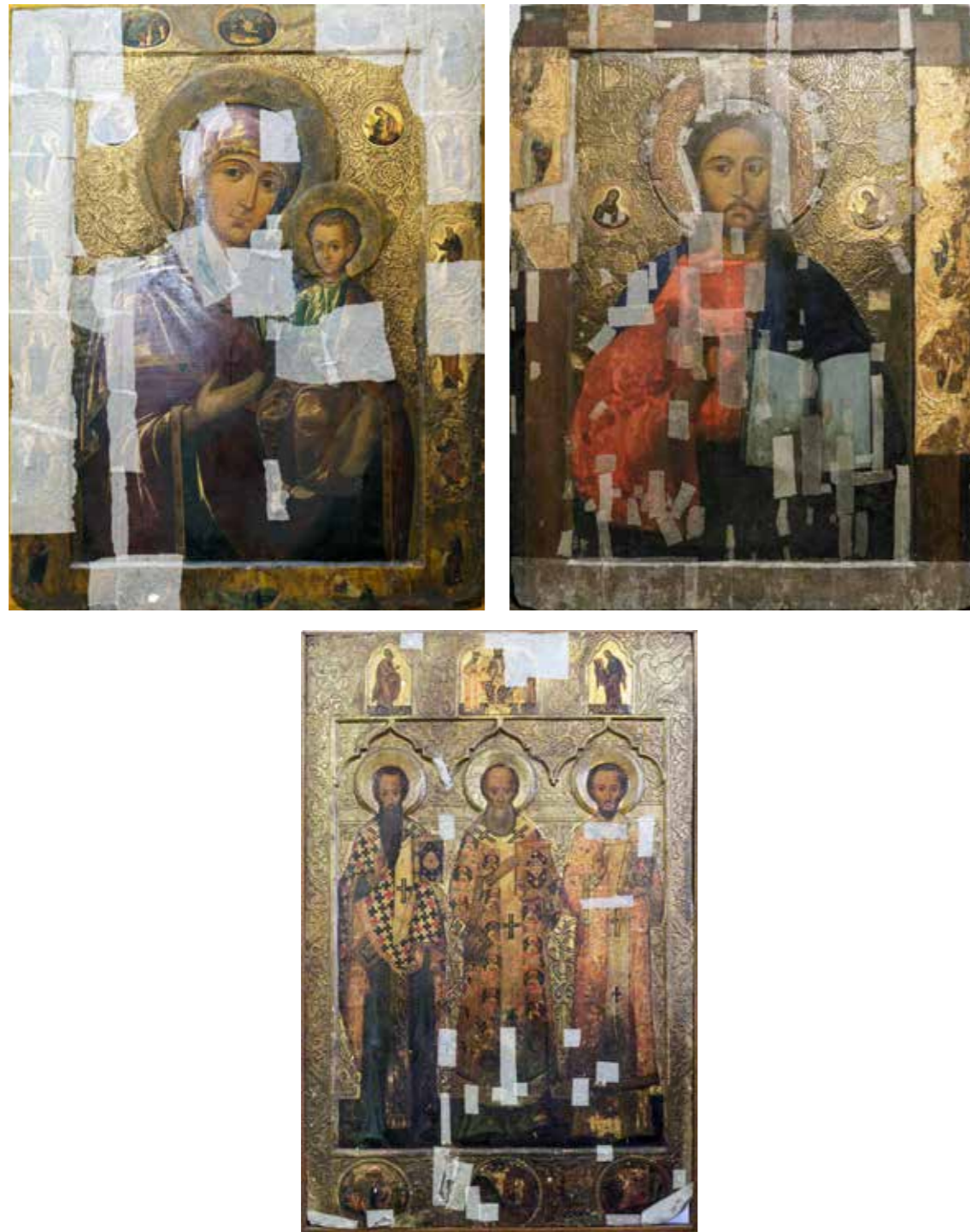


Fig. 7. The Mother of God and Christ Child with the twelve Prophets and six scenes from her life, Christ Pantokrator with the twelve Apostles and The Three Holy Hierarchs with Deesis and three scenes from their lives, c. 1637–1639, The Residence of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia in Iași / Museum of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia in Iași / Three Hierarchs Monastery Museum, Iași. Provenance: Three Holy Hierarchs Church in Iași. Photo: Father Silviu Cluci © Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Suceava – Archbishopric of Iași.



Fig. 8. Christ Pantokrator, c. 1680–1689, painter Alex[...], Holy Archangels wooden church in Cacova, Piscu Mare village, Vâlcea County. Photo: Cristina Serendan © Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu Vâlcea County Museum, Râmnicu-Vâlcea.



Fig. 9. The Mother of God and Christ Child and Christ Pantokrator, 1783, Saint Elijah Monastery, Șcheia, Suceava. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru & Father Timotei Tiron. © Archbishopric of Suceava and Rădăuți.



Fig. 10. The iconostasis, 1771–1773, Dormition of the Mother of God Church at Putna Monastery, Suceava County. Photo: Ana Dumitran. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 11. The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul blessed by the Holy Trinity, early 18th century, prior to 1722, Moscow workshop, the Dormition of the Mother of God Church at Putna Monastery, Suceava County. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 12. The Mother of God and Christ Child, Jesus Christ Pantokrator, Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, The Dormition of the Mother of God and, first half of the 18th century, prior to 1743, Belgorod workshop, heritage repository of Putna Monastery, The Dormition of the Mother of God Church at Putna Monastery. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 13. Thirty-six festal icons for daily worship, mid-18th century, prior to 1757, Kyiv workshop, heritage repository of Putna Monastery, The Dormition of the Mother of God Church at Putna Monastery. Photo: Father Timotei Tiron. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 14. Forty festal icons for daily worship, mid-18th century, prior to 1757, Kyiv workshop, heritage repository of Putna Monastery, The Dormition of the Mother of God Church at Putna Monastery. Photo: Father Timotei Tiron. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 15. The backs of the festal icons from Putna Monastery, with craftsmen's signatures, positioning marks, the donor's inscription and the names of the holidays represented. Photo: Father Timotei Tiron. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 16. The Mother of God as Empress with the Child on the Clouds, Jesus Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch on the Clouds, Saint Hierarch Nicholas, The Mother of God Enthroned as Empress and Christ Child with the Holy Archangels, Jesus Christ King of Kings and the Great Hierarch Enthroned with the Holy Archangels and The Venerable Fathers of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, mid-18th century, prior to 1757, Kyiv workshop, heritage repository of Putna Monastery, The Annunciation Church at Sihăstria Putnei Hermitage. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru. © Putna Monastery.



Fig. 17. Saint Barbara with the Scene of Her Martyrdom, late 18th century, Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați, Deanery of Brăila. Photo: Ana Dumitran © Archbishopric of the Lower Danube.

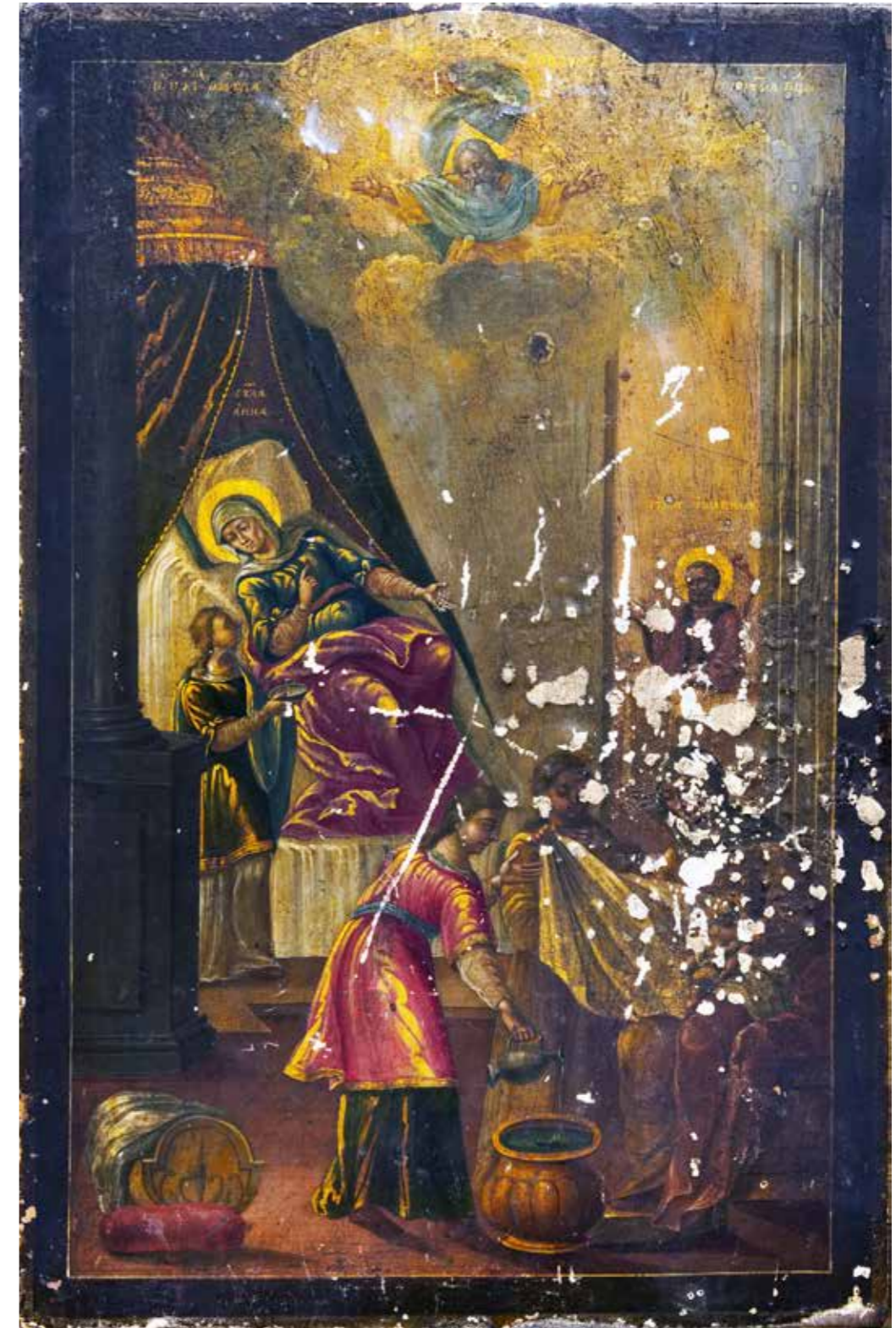


Fig. 18. The Nativity of the Virgin Mary, painter Mikhail Ivanovici, 1795, Moscow. Photo: Camil Iamandescu. © The National Museum of Art of Romania.



Fig. 19. The Dormition of the Mother of God, late 18th century, Cernica Monastery Museum, Ilfov County. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru © Cernica Monastery.



Fig. 20. Deesis - *The Queen Did Stand...* (Christ the Heavenly King and the Great Hierarch Enthroned with Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist), late 18th century, The Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple Church at Snagov Monastery, Ilfov County. Photo: Cristina Cojocaru.

## A New Visual Culture: The Spiritual and Artistic Patronage of Poiana Mărului Hermitage (mid-18th - 19th centuries)

Atanasia Văetiși

### Abstract

In 1730, a community of Slavic monks led by Abbot Vasile settled in the mountainous area of southeastern Romania (Buzău county), where they founded the Poiana Mărului hermitage. This is the place irradiating a new spirituality, of a new type of monastic organization and, at the same time, the place from which the dissemination of new artistic forms began. Through the icons, iconostases and mural painting that these monks commissioned, they brought to Romanian space the iconography and style specific to the School of Painting at Pechersk Lavra. The material culture preserved at Poiana Mărului, as well as in the surrounding hermitages and parish churches, are witnesses to a new visual identity of Romanian ecclesiastical art. This can be found in the area of the Buzău Mountains, and in some monasteries in Moldova and Wallachia that were linked to the Philokalic movement initiated by Abbot Vasile.

This study shows how a spiritual center that marked a religious revival became an artistic centre, establishing a new cultural model.

**Keywords:** Paisianism, religious revival, Romanian ecclesiastical art, Kyivan Baroque, iconostasis, hermitages in Buzau Mountains, monastic painting schools in nineteenth century

Born in Poltava and educated at the Theological Academy in Kyiv, Abbot Paisie Velicikovski (1722–1779) initiated a spiritual movement that resulted in an ascetic and philological school for monastic culture in the Romanian Principalities.<sup>1</sup> Yet *Paisianism* was not simply a spiritual revival of monastic communities based on the Philokalist Renaissance, as bibliography on the subject matter might

1 Tachiaos, Anthony-Emil N. "Introduction." In *The life of Paisij Velyčkovs'kyi*. Translated by J.M.E. Featherstone. Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1989, I–XIV.

imply. It also involved a transfer of visual culture that was concomitant with the monks' journeys along the routes from the Slavic regions in what is now Ukraine to the Romanian Principalities.

The history of these "monastic movements", which also encompass an artistic phenomenon, begins with Abbot Vasile "from Poiana Mărului" (1692–1767),<sup>2</sup> the spiritual father of Paisie Velicikovski. Originally from Cherkasy region in the south of Kyiv,<sup>3</sup> he had lived for three years in the wilderness under the guidance of hieroschemamonk Ioan Kmita, spiritual father at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the Kyiv Caves Monastery.<sup>4</sup> He came to Wallachia accompanied by eight Slavic monks, amongst whom were hieroschemamonk Mihail, Abbot of Motreanski Monastery, and hieroschemamonk Ștefan, a hermit in Cernigov region,<sup>5</sup> both of whom already had apprentices in Romanian and Kyivan hermitages.<sup>6</sup> The above ascetics left their lands because of the ecclesiastical reforms made during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, and put down roots at Dălhăuți Monastery in Buzău County, a monastic settlement dating back from the seventeenth century. It was there that Vasile was ordained. The monastic community remained in Dălhăuți until 1730, when it moved to a more isolated place, founding a new hermitage at Poiana Mărului (henceforth referred to as PM).<sup>7</sup>

2 Only one monograph, a doctoral thesis in Theology written by Dario Raccanello, has been dedicated to Abbot Vasile: Raccanello, Dario. *La preghiera di Gesù negli scritti di Basilio di Poiana Mărului*. Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thomas Aq. in Urbe, 1986. Texts by him were translated into English in 1996: *Elder Basil of Poiana Marului (1692–1767): His Life and Writings. Translated into English with Introduction and Notes by A Monk of the Brotherhood of Prophet Elias Skete, Mount Athos*. Indiana University: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1996. The work has also been published in Romanian: *Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Introducere în rugăciunea lui Iisus și isihasm*, edited by Ioan I. Ică jr. Translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr and Maria-Cornelia Ică jr with an introduction by Dario Raccanello. Sibiu: Deisis, 2009.

3 According to Abbot Paisie's autobiography: "he had lived for a long time in Russia, and in the hills of Moșny, and in other deserted places with great zealots of the monastic life, and had then come with his disciple, the aforementioned most venerable elder Myxajil the hieromonk, to live in the land of Muntenia." Tachiaos, Anthony-Emil N. *The life of Paisij Velyčkovs'kyi*. Translated by J.M.E. Featherstone. Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1989, 75. The area of these hermitages has been identified by modern biographers of Abbot Vasile as being Cherkasy (Черкаська область), located on the banks of Nipru River, near Poltava Paisie's place of origin. See McGuckin, John. "Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului." In *Holding fast to the Mystery of the Faith. Festschrift for Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, edited by Daniel Munteanu and Sorin Șelaru. Paderborn: Brill/Schoningh, 2022, 38; Raccanello, Dario. "La figure de Basile de Poiana Mărului et son enseignement sur la prière de Jésus." *Irenikon* 61 (1988): 41–66; Raccanello, Dario. "Vasilij de Poiana Mărului." In *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, edited by M. Viller, C. Baumgartner, A. Rayez. Paris: Beauchesne, 1994, vol. 16: 292–298.

4 Tachiaos, Anthony-Emil N. *The Life of Paisij Velyčkovs'kyi*. Translated by J.M.E. Featherstone. Cambridge: Harvard University Ukrainian Research Institute, 1989, 56.

5 Idem, 69–70; 88.

6 Idem, 67.

7 Ciocănel, Gheorghe. "Monastirea Poiana Mărului." *Vocea Bisericii* 24 (1895): 3–4; Mihail, Paul. "Schitul Poiana Mărului, un centru ortodox cărturăresc." In *Spiritualitate și istorie la întorsura Buzăului*, edited by Antonie Plămădeală. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului și a Vrancei, 1985, 32–44; Cocora, Gabriel and Constantinescu, Horia. "Poiana Mărului." *Glasul Bisericii* XXIII (1964): 466–500; Cocora, Gabriel. "Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului".

From Romanian monachism's point of view, the Early Modern period (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) was a time when PM radiated a new form of spirituality and a new way of organizing monastic life. In parallel, as will be explained below, it also became a substantial artistic centre. Newly imported stylistic forms and a new visual culture emerged and spread from this small hermitage in the south-east of Romania, following the routes of monastic migration and spiritual paternity.

While the monastic communities led by Paisie Velicikovski settled in historical monasteries — Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț, in Moldavia — which already had paintings, icons and liturgical furniture, Abbot Vasile and his followers founded new churches. Consequently, artistic demand for the endowment of these monastic settlements emerged. The resulting work was indebted to the artistic environment where the monks originated from — the workshops in Kyiv and Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.<sup>8</sup>

The current article aims to trace back this phenomenon, starting with the change that began to appear in Romanian ecclesiastical art after Abbot Vasile and his followers settled in the Buzău Mountains. Scholars have paid scant attention to this subject matter to date: as the bibliography goes to show, PM Hermitage preoccupied theologians from the 1960s to the 1980s,<sup>9</sup> and historians from 1990–2000.<sup>10</sup>

8

In *Mănăstiri din eparhia Buzăului. Vetre de cultură și trăire românească*. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului, 1987; Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017.

For Ukrainian art during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see: Zholtovs'kyi, Pavlo M. *Український живопис XVII–XVIII ст.*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1978; Idem. *Художнє життя на Україні в XVI–XVIII ст.*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1983; Idem. *Монументальне малярство на Україні XVII–XVIII ст.*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1988. For Ruthenian-Ukrainian icon art, see: Klosinska, Janina. *Ikony*. Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 1973; Stepovyk, Dmytro. *Історія української ікони X–XX століть*. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1996; Janocha, Michal. “Wplyw brzeskiej unii kościelnej na refleksję o sztuce oraz ikonografii malarstwa cerkiewnego w XVII i XVIII wieku.” In *Polska-Ukraina 1000 lat sąsiedztwa, Vol. 5, Miejsce i rola Kościoła greckokatolickiego w kościołach powszechnym*, edited by Stanisław Stępień. Przemysł: Poludniowo-Wschodni Instytut Naukowy w Przemyslu, 2000, 165–190; Stepovyk, Dmytro. *Мистецтво ікони. Рим, Візантія, Україна*. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2008; *L'epoca d'oro delle icone Ucraine. XVI–XVIII secolo*, edited by Giovanni Morello. Torino: Umberto Allemandi & Co, 2010; Rizhova, Olga. “Іконопис Києво Печерської лаври кінця XVII початку XIX століття. Особливості формування та розвитку стилю й іконографії.”

In *Al'manakh Kul'tura i Suchasnist 1* (2014): 141–150; Eadem. *Іконопис у художній культурі Київської кінці XVII–XVIII століть: Монографія*. Kyiv: Vydavnycho-polihrafichnyu tsentr “Kyuyivs'kyu universytet”, 2020. For the definition of religious art specifically destined for the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic population in the Polish-Lithuanian Republic and its proper terminology (Ukrainian vs. Carpathian icons), see: Himka, John-Paul. “Episodes in the Historiography of the Ukrainian Icon.” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 29 (2004), 1: 149–167.

9

Cocora, Gabriel and Constantinescu, Horia. “Poiana Mărului.” *Glasul Bisericii XXIII* (1964): 466–500; Cocora, Gabriel. “Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului.” In *Mănăstiri din eparhia Buzăului. Vetre de cultură și trăire românească*, edited by Antonie Plămădeală. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului și a Vrancei, 1987; Mihail, Paul. “Schitul Poiana Mărului, un centru ortodox cărturăresc.” In *Spiritualitate și istorie la Întorsura Buzăului*, I, edited by Antonie Plămădeală. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului și a Vrancei, 1983, 355–384.

10

Pavel, Lelia. *Bisericile de lemn din Județul Vrancea*. Focșani: Pallas, 2005; Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017.

More recently, the scriptorium in Poiana Mărului has been reevaluated,<sup>11</sup> revealing new information on book circulation and the reading horizon of the monks in Abbot Vasile's community. Nevertheless, the artistic patrimony preserved in PM and the hermitages from which the spiritual movement led by Abbot Vasile and his followers radiated remains virtually unknown. The fieldwork I carried out as part of the Ricontrans project in 2020–2023 has enabled me to document this phenomenon and reach several conclusions.<sup>12</sup>

## The iconostases. A new visual language

The oldest church in PM — the “Russians' church”, as it was known — is dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. It was founded in 1776 by Abbot Teodosie, after Abbot Vasile's first church burned down in 1771. The later church preserves an iconostasis made in a Kyiv workshop.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 1) It was attributed to the Kyivan environment thanks to a now missing document belonging to the National Institute of Heritage archive in Bucharest. Nevertheless, the attribution is too vague: the iconostasis could have been made in the painting workshop at Pechersk Lavra, or in another workshop in Kyiv, or the monks there could have intervened to satisfy a request from the hermitage in the Buzău Mountains. We do not have any information in this regard, though stylistic data do support the attribution to Kyivan origins.

The Baroque traits of the iconostases that came from artistic centres in the territory of present-day Ukraine have already been exhaustively researched.<sup>14</sup> The set of common features in architectural structure, colour palette and decorative repertoire make it possible for the iconostasis at PM to be placed within the Baroque tradition. In comparison to other art of its kind in Wallachia, this iconostasis represents something entirely new:<sup>15</sup> it is very richly decorated, has tiers of different heights, and a

11 Mutalâp, Daniar. “Contribution privind scriptoriul de la Poiana Mărului. Copiști și manuscrise.” In *Zamferei Mihail Omagiu*, edited by Lia Brad Chisacof, Simona Nicolae, Cătălina Vătășescu. Cluj-Napoca: Scriptor & Mega, 2024, 726–758.

12 I am grateful for this to Ana Dumitran (Museikon Departament, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia), for inviting me to be part of the Ricontrans Project research team and for leading all field research so excellently. I thank her once again for the opportunity she offered me to research this chapter in Premodern Romanian Art History.

13 Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017, 71. Geacu refers to a document (the church's inventory) preserved in the archive of Focșani Archpresbyterate, in Vrancea county. The inventory repeats the information from a description of the monument in the file preserved in the National Heritage Institute's archive (INP) mentioned by Geacu. In 2022, when I consulted INP fonds related to Poiana Mărului, I did not find this file.

14 Olianina, Svitlana. *Український іконостас: символічна структура та іконологія*. Kyiv: ArtEk, 2019 is the most complete monography on this subject matter.

15 For iconostases in Wallachia, see: Dumitrescu, Florentina. “Trăsături specifice ale sculpturii în lemn brânco-

projecting central section. The canopy has a broken arch surmounting the central part. The icons are framed by high bas-relief, with distinct Rococo elements for each tier. These belong to the late stage in the evolution of Ukrainian iconostases during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Classical language details interfere with existing Baroque and Rococo elements. This is the case in PM, with the grooved colonettes that separate the icons, as well as with the frieze cornices horizontally separating the icon tiers.

The iconostasis in PM church also introduces iconographic elements that are new to Romanian space. It has Prothesis Doors with the same structure as the areas dedicated to the Royal Icons. As a result, four new painted panels are added: Saint Archangels Michael and Gabriel (in the upper tier) and scenes with the miracles they worked (in the lower tier, at the base of the iconostasis). Above the Royal Doors are icons with the Last Supper and the Mandylion.<sup>16</sup> The panels below the royal tier display various scenes related to the topic in the icons surmounting them.

Inscriptions play an important aesthetic role in the composition of the PM iconostasis. The entablatures separating the tiers of icons contain texts related to the image represented there: they either bear the saints' names (the names of the apostles above the Deisis tier), or a liturgical text (above the Royal tier, with the troparion of saints represented there). Besides these, the iconostasis in PM also has several inscriptions with historical data. Under the icon of Jesus Christ we read: "*Iconostasis 1777/ Hieroschemamonk Matei, with his brother*" ["СІА КАТАПЕТЪСМА 1777/ ІЕРОСХИМОНХА



venești." In *Pagini de veche artă românească*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1972, Vol. II: 259–304; Eadem. "Sculptura în lemn brâncovenească." In *Pagini de veche artă românească*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1974, Vol. III: 9–145; Costea, Constanța. "Iconostasil." In *Stavropoleos. Ortodoxie, artă, comunitate.*, edited by Protos. Iustin Marchiș. Bucharest: Fundația Stavropoleos & Ed. Meridiane, 2002, 61–82; Ene, Ioana. *Icoane brâncovenești și post-brâncovenești din județul Vâlcea (1680–1730). Studiu și catalog*. Râmnicu Vâlcea: Muzeul județean Aurel Sacerdoțeanu Vâlcea & Offsetcolor, 2011; Văetiși, Atanasia. "Date noi despre trei iconostase brâncovenești și icoanele lor. Bizanț, Orient și Occident în câteva ctitorii bucureștene în primele decenii ale secolului al XVIII-lea." In *Tradiție și noutate în cultura și spiritualitatea epocii brâncovenești*, edited by Ștefan Zara. Praxis: Râmnicu-Vâlcea, 2016, 112–235; Văetiși, Atanasia. "Preliminaries to a history of Bucharest iconostasis of 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Centuries." *Museikon* 1 (2017): 123–136; Cojocar, Cristina, Elisabeta Negrău, Sultana-Ruxandra Polizu and Atanasia Văetiși. *Iconostase din București. Secolele XVII–XIX*. Bucharest: Cuvântul Vieții, 2017; Negrău, Elisabeta. "The Evolution of the Iconostasis in Wallachia in the 16th century." In *Byzantine Heritages in South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, edited by Andrei Timotin, Srdan Pirivatrić, and Oana Iacubovschi. 2022, Vol. XI: 269–302.

<sup>16</sup> During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, such "liturgical" themes (the Last Supper, the Holy Trinity at Mamre, and the Mandylion) spread in iconostasis art in the Balkans. Marghirita Kuyumdzhieva recalls two early copies in Greece that include the Mandylion. Nevertheless, the combination of the two, the Last Supper and the Mandylion, is a Ukrainian import to Romanian space. Kuyumdzhieva, Marghirita. "Revisiting a Hypothesis: Abraham's Hospitality as Icon Above the Doors of the Late Medieval Iconostasis." In *Marginalia. Art Readings 2018*, edited by Ivanka Gergova and Elisaveta Moussakova. Sofia, 2019, Vol. I: 191–205, see 195–196.

МАΘΙΑ Ζ ΒΡΑΤІ ЕГО"]<sup>17</sup> Matei governed PM between 1774–1799, and supervised the reconstruction of the hermitage after a fire in 1771. The fact that the iconostasis was commissioned by him is confirmed by a cardboard label applied to the wooden countertop in the 1960s, reading: *1777 Abbot Matei Rusu* ["1777 Starețul Matei Rusu"]. This label mentions a well-known tradition in the monastery, according to which the iconostasis was made with the abbot's contribution, and that he was Russian (or Malorussian), i.e. of the same origin as the hermits who had accompanied Vasile.

The inscription beneath the icon of the Virgin Mary reads: "*This saint icon was made at the expenses of God's servant, the schemamonk Macarius from Bucharest*" ["S-au făcut această sfântă icoană cu cheltuiala robului lui (i) D[u]mne[e]zeu Macarie schimona[h] ot Bucure[șt](i)"]. The icon of St. Nicholas bears the painter's signature: "*1791 АΒΓΧΤΑ/ΘΕΟΦΑΝΤ*", most likely recording the year when the painting of the icons was finished. The panel at the basis of the north deacon's door bears another inscription synthesizing the scene represented there: the meeting between the angel and Balaam (Numbers 22:21–34), followed by the year 1776. This is the earliest year recorded on the iconostasis, which we can thus date between 1776 and 1791. (fig. 2)

The iconographic program is arranged in six tiers: the cropped silhouettes of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist are placed on either side of the cross, on the canopy, while St. Joseph and St. Nicodemus appear on the lateral parts of the curved cornice. On their tier, the prophets are grouped in pairs and painted on panels with golden frames. Two of them are detached, with the rest forming part of the canopy, below the cross, where the Mother of God is represented praying in the centre. The tier dedicated to the apostles is taller than the other two above and below it. The apostles are rendered standing – they are in pairs, as are the feasts represented on each panel, in an unusual association and arrangement that follows neither the order of the liturgical year nor that of the gospels. From left to right, they are: the Nativity of the Virgin and the Dormition of the Mother of God; the Transfiguration and the Descent of the Holy Spirit; the Ascension and the Resurrection of Christ; the Entry into Jerusalem and the Annunciation; the Presentation of Christ in the temple and the Baptism; the Adoration of the Magi and the Presentation in the temple of the Mother of God.



<sup>17</sup> The inscription is barely legible. It was misread in the past as follows: "... *la una... catapeteasma 1777... Ieremia Monaha... zbrateiu.*" Pavel, Lelia. *Bisericile de lemn din Vrancea*. Focșani: Pallas, 2005, 131, repeated in Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017, 71. The title "hieroschim Monk" was confused with "Jeremia monk", and the name Matei was not mentioned.

The iconographic models for the above depictions are found on the 1760–1762 iconostasis of St. Theodosius cave church at the Far Caves Lavra.<sup>18</sup> The Pechersk Lavra school of painting created its own artistic tradition and defined a fixed style for over a century. Under the influence of European painting and engraving, it established new compositional patterns, different from the traditional Byzantine ones. These served as models not only for Kyiv and its surroundings, but also for distant territories such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.<sup>19</sup>

The feast icons at PM have golden frames sculpted in relief, which are emphasized by the red background of the iconostasis. Above the Royal Doors are the Last Supper and the Mandylion, in golden frames of different shapes. This iconographic option was typical of the iconostases in the Carpathians area from the seventeenth century onwards. As a counterpoint to the ornamental richness of the Baroque, the entablatures surmounting the icon tiers are treated in a Neoclassical style, with cornices and architraves with plain mouldings. The columns and colonettes are treated in marbled chromatic, emphasizing the dynamism of the whole assembly. Those on the upper tiers are plain, whereas those framing the Royal Icons are grooved. The Royal Doors are decorated with the sun-with-rays pattern, with clouds and roses - themes present in the decorative repertoire of the Kyivan workshops. In the centre is the dove, symbolising the Holy Spirit. The medallions with the Annunciation and the four evangelists on the Royal Doors are also richly framed, and the rose motif (in various colours, shapes and sizes) is present over the whole openwork surface of the panel, executed in high relief Baroque style. The six panels below the icons complete the iconographic program, rendering scenes in the following order: the Appearance of St. Nicholas to Emperor Constantine in a Dream (placed under the icon of St. Nicholas signed by Teofan); the Meeting between the Angel of the Lord and Balaam, on the north deacon door, where the Archangel Michael is represented. Jacob's Ladder is painted under the icon of the Mother of God, and Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the fountain under the icon of Jesus Christ. The south deacon door has a depiction of a miracle by the Archangel Gabriel. On the panel under the patron icon are Saints Joachim and Anne, in the scene known in the Kyivan area as "The Conception of Mary": the Virgin's parents are holding two stems that unite into one flower, from which Mary arises.

In her monography dedicated to Ukrainian iconostases, Svitlana Olyanina shows that the sculpted ornamentation and architectural structure of these masterpieces bear as much meaning as the iconographic program. This aspect, which is also evident at PM, is increasingly being considered in contemporary

18 Analyzed by Olga Rizhova in her monograph. See Rizhova, Olga. *Іконопис у художній культурі Київської кінці XVII–XVIII століть: Монографія*. Kyiv: Vydavnycho-polihrafichnyy tsentr "Kyiv's'kyu universitet", 2020, 318–313.

19 Eadem, 394–395.

research.<sup>20</sup> The architectural and decorative framework of the iconostasis, dating from 1776–1779,<sup>21</sup> turns out to be a tool with numerous historical and cultural significations. Aspects related to shape, style and iconography open up the possibility of exploring it as a historical source.<sup>22</sup>

In this regard, attention is drawn to the richly decorated frames surrounding the icons. Olyanina shows that the new shape of the Ukrainian iconostases made from the seventeenth century onwards may have common roots with their Greek and Balkan counterparts as concerns their rich ornamentation and wish to cover the entire surface with decorations. Yet at the same time, they have a new element absent from Greek tradition: the idea of the religious image being placed within frames. The presence of frames, borders, and the emphasis on the framework highlighting the icon's value all come from the artistic universe of the Renaissance. This function of the Renaissance-type framework is taken over in the iconostases' plastic language, where each icon receives its own frame. Olyanina also refers to a pair of contemporary iconostases: the one in Friday Church in Lviv, and that in Protatos Cathedral on Mount Athos. She shows that while the iconostasis in Athos was conceived of as a façade for the building and designed accordingly, the Ukrainian iconostasis is influenced by Latin rather than Greek tradition. Even if it, too, is not entirely unrelated to the building's façade architecture, as it has typical architectural shapes (such as columns, cornices, consoles, and a gateway), the new language of the Ukrainian iconostases equally suggests an interpretation related to the problematics of the painted image's framework. This phenomenon began in Western art with the Renaissance: the role of a sculpted, boldly protruding framework implies that its plastic presences are in competition with the icons, referring to what Olyanina calls "a cultural phenomenon that highlights a symbol". Their symbolism is related to the "Garden of Eden" theme as an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. Beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century, Ukrainian iconostases began to assume an ascending form, growing taller in their central section and leading the view towards the altar's axis. In the Ukrainian researcher's opinion, this reflects a series of ideas spread within the theological exegesis of that time, concerning heaven as a mountain topped with a flower garden.<sup>23</sup>

20 Zvezdina, Yu. N. "Растительный декор поздних иконостасов". In *Иконостас. Происхождение. Развитие. Символика* edited by Aleksey Lidov, Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2000, 651–669; Tarasov, Oleg. *Рама и образ. Риторика обрамления в русском искусстве*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2007; Milayeva, L.S. *Церква Спасо-Преображення і поетика українського бароко*. Kyiv: Rodovid, 2010, 9–19.

21 According to the three years that were inscribed on the iconostasis: 1776 (the panel at the base of St. Nicholas's icon), 1777 (in the donator's inscription) and 1791 (in the painter's name inscription).

22 Olyanina, Svitlana. *Український іконостас: символічна структура та іконологія*. Kyiv: ArtEk, 2019, 12.

23 See Olyanina, Svitlana. "Іконостас як образ райського саду." *Kul'turolohichna dumka* 16 (2019): 36–45.

All these plastic elements and symbolic significations were new for churches in Wallachia. Prior to that moment, the iconostases in the south of Wallachia were similar to all those in the Balkans. “Russian” iconostases only existed in Northern Moldavia,<sup>24</sup> but did not have an impact on artistic demand in Wallachia.

In the case of the modest wooden church in PM, we cannot infer that there may have been a connection or some correspondence with the architecture, nor can we assume that, when its iconostasis was commissioned, there may have been a programmatic assumption of a symbolic dimension. In this case, what functioned was a mere phenomenon whereby artistic forms were imported along with their symbolic significations. And this happened thanks to the spiritual connections between the monks who founded the hermitage in Buzău Mountains and the artistic centre in Kyiv at the time. Nevertheless, it was precisely these spiritual connections that turned PM into an artistic centre from which a new artistic language and a new visual culture began to spread.

The iconostasis at PM is the beginning of a series. In the monasteries and hermitages in the Buzău Mountains associated with Abbot Vasile’s hermitage, there are icons that took over the Baroque compositional principle or elements of its decorative and iconographic repertoire.

The first in this series also comes from PM: it is the iconostasis in All Saints’ Church (henceforth referred to as PM II), founded in 1810–1812. Its decorative repertoire brings together Baroque and Neoclassical elements: eggs and denticles, stems and roses, flower vases and grooved colonettes. It has a powerfully protruding vegetal decoration displaced in a projecting section. Just as in the case of PM I, the tiers are of different sizes. The festal icons have oval frames and render the following, in this order: the Nativity of the Mother of God; the Presentation of the Mother of God; the Birth of Jesus; the Baptism; the Presentation in the Temple; the Anunciation; the Entry in Jerusalem; the Resurrection; the Ascension of the Lord; the Descent of the Holy Spirit; the Transfiguration; the Dormition of the Mother of God. (fig. 3) They have Slavonic title inscriptions and Baroque style painting treatment, with dynamic, diagonally built compositions showing characters in whirling garments, and interiors displaying Baroque and Neoclassical elements.

24 Pănoiu, Andrei. *Mobilierul vechi românesc*. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1975, 19–22; Sabados, Marina Ileana. “L’iconostase de Moldovița: un repère dans l’évolution de l’iconostase moldave.” *Series Byzantina VI* (2008): 27–44; Sabados, Marina Ileana. “Sculptura în lemn din Moldova.” In *Arta din România. Din preistorie în contemporaneitate*, edited by Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb. Bucharest/Cluj Napoca: Editura Academiei Române/Editura Mega, 2018, Vol. II: 66–68 and Sabados, Marina Ileana. “Pictura murală și icoanele din Moldova în secolul XVIII.” In *Idem*, 69–75.

The panels beneath the Royal Icons bear witness to a purer Kyivan style than those in the upper tiers, either because they were made by somebody else, or because they did not undergo any repainting that could have modified their original pictorial style.

The demand for art at PM functioned as a pattern for several neighbouring hermitages, as they were rebuilt and reactivated with the contribution of the abbots who belonged to Pious Vasile’s community. The hermitage at Dălhăuți was rebuilt in 1780 with the help of Abbot Matei from PM and populated with monks from there. Others from PM were moved to Ciolanu in 1764, to reactivate the monastery that had been deserted in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> In 1819, on the initiative of Abbot Teodosie from PM, nuns from Bonțești were moved to Cotești hermitage. By the middle of the eighteenth century Bonțești lay deserted, so Abbot Vasile placed a community of nuns there.<sup>26</sup> Găvanu hermitage was rebuilt in 1828 with the contribution of Archimandrite Elisei from PM, while Rogozu hermitage was reconstructed in 1830 and then submitted to PM.<sup>27</sup>

The iconostases installed during the 1820s and 1830s at PM II, Dălhăuți (fig. 4), Ciolanu and Găvanu (fig. 5) continued to function as models in the second half of the nineteenth century. Masters and local workshops took over the decorative elements, compositional solutions and iconographic themes that spread throughout the whole south-eastern area. This new type of iconostasis may be associated with the artistic production of monastic and bishopric painting schools, which lent a stylistic identity to ecclesiastic art in the Romanian Principalities during the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

## Unique iconographic themes and their spread from PM

There are several iconographic themes that entered and spread from the Buzău Mountains in the early

25 Lupu, Emil. *Cititori și cititorii la curbura Carpaților în veacurile XIV–XVIII*. Iași: Doxologia, 2011, 157.  
26 Ibid.  
27 Cocora, Gabriel and Constantinescu, Horia. “Poiana Mărului.” *Glasul Bisericii XXIII* (1964): 486–488.  
28 For the monastic and eparchial painting schools, see Georgescu, I.L. and [Stanciu], Roman Ialomițeanul. “Zugravul Nicolae Polcovnicul la Mănăstirile Cernica și Pasărea.” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română XCI* (1973): 1290–1294; Iorgulescu, Basil. “Pitarul Nicolae Teodorescu și Școala de pictură din Buzău.” *Literatura și Arta Română V* (1900–1901): 366–367; Cojocaru, Cristina. “Pictura religioasă din Țara Românească în secolul XIX.” In *Arta din România din preistorie în contemporaneitate* edited by Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018, Vol. II: 226–231, and most recently Văetiși, Atanasia. “Monastic Schools of Painting in the Romanian Principalities (End of 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and the Role of the Russian Icon in their Stylistic and Iconographic Approaches.” Paper at *Ricontrans hands-on Workshop “Religious art, visual culture and collective identities in Central and South-Eastern Europe (16<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century)”*, Alba Iulia, 20–23 June 2023, unpublished.

decades of the nineteenth century, with artistic demand from PM hermitage as their common source. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, their dissemination can also be traced beyond this area, along monastic circulation routes to the West (in the painting schools at Cernica and Căldărușani monasteries, and at Râmnic Bishopric), as well as to the East (in monasteries integrated into the Paisian movement, and in the painting schools at Neamț and Secu).

This circulation of iconographic motifs can be seen both on the routes that marked the relationships between monasteries and in the circumstances surrounding the artistic formation of painter-monks.

### Jesus Christ as an archpriest with orb with landscape

In the Royal tier at PM I, Jesus Christ and the Mother of God are rendered standing, with the set of attributes typical of monarchic iconography: the crowns, sceptre and orb. From a stylistic point of view, the icons present features that refer to the artistic milieu of the Carpathian, Ruthenian-Ukrainian icon, as regards physiognomy, the decorative treatment of the garments, the presence of angel-putti heads between the clouds, and the halo painted as a disc made of different sized rays.<sup>29</sup> Besides, we can notice one special detail: the orb in the hand of Jesus Christ has a landscape painted within it. (fig. 6)

This motif recalls the group of manuscripts of the *Bible moralisée* (or *Bible Allégorisée*) made in France in the thirteenth century,<sup>30</sup> with Jesus as the architect of the universe. Jesus holds a compass in one hand and an orb in the other, rendering the amorphous matter that is to become the Earth. This theme is widespread in *Salvator Mundi* type Renaissance paintings, where the orb appears in different shapes, including metallic spheres, transparent glass, or terrestrial globes. In Flemish art, the orb adopts local landscape elements from everyday reality.<sup>31</sup> This European visual culture was familiar to

29 See above, note 8.

30 “God as architect of the world”, with compass, in the manuscripts at the Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 2554 (1220–1226) and Codex Vindobonensis 1179 (1220–1230). Here, Jesus sits on the throne and holds the orb in one hand. The orb displays the amorphous matter that is to become Earth. In the Bible of Toledo, He is enthroned. For more examples and their iconographic analysis, see Lowden, John. *The Making of the Bibles Moralisées*. I. The Manuscripts. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, passim.

31 Gottlieb, Carla. “The Mystical Window in Paintings of the Salvator Mundi.” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 56 (1960): 313–332; Białostocki, Jan. “The Eye and the Window.” In *Festschrift für Gert von der Osten*, edited by Herbert von Einem and Rudolf Hillebrecht. Köln: Verlag M. Du Mont Schauberg 1970, 159–176; Gottlieb, Carla. “The Window in the Eye and Globe.” *The Art Bulletin* LVII (1975), 559–560. Pächt, Otto. “Der Salvator Mundi des Turner Stundesbuches.” In *Florilegium in honorem Carl Nordenfalk octogenarii contextum*, edited by Per Bjurström, Nils-Göran Hökby and Florentine Mütterich. Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1987, 181–190; Łanuszka, Magdalena. “Salvator Mundi: a late-gothic canvas from Cracow after a lost Early-Netherlandish painting. A suggested new dating and possible identification of the donor.” *Folia Historica Cracoviensia* 23

those in the painting workshop in Pechersk Lavra, where the theme was assimilated and adapted to icon-specific language. Portfolios with drawings made by pupils and teachers at the Pechersk Lavra workshop — bearing witness to the process of painting instruction at one of the oldest art schools in Eastern Europe — contain sketches and drawings that include the theme of *Jesus with the Orb in His Hand*,<sup>32</sup> featuring orbs with landscape details. The apprentices at Kyiv Pechersk Lavra were familiar with European painting and engraving, as their educational system was grounded in reproducing works from Western European albums.

We do not have data to confirm that painter Teofan from PM was ever an apprentice at the renowned Kyivan workshop, but painting handbooks may have played a role in the circulation of this motif. Furthermore, painter Teofan may have been the apprentice of another master taught at Pechersk Lavra. There was such a case in Wallachia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Teofan could have worked together with a master who had studied in Kyiv, such as Grigore Popovici,<sup>33</sup> a remarkable representative of the Western movement in Romanian painting.

In 1812, when the second church at the monastery in PM was built, the community still included many “Russian” monks.<sup>34</sup> The Royal Icons of the iconostasis in All Saints Church are also rendered here in the “royal type”, with crowns on their heads. Jesus Christ, Emperor of Emperors, with sceptre and orb, is nevertheless no longer represented standing, as in the icon in PM I, but enthroned. (fig. 7) This is an

(2017), 2: 241–276; See also: <https://artmirrorsart.wordpress.com/2017/04/09/mirror-spheres-or-adventures-of-globus-cruciger-in-flanders/> (27.02.2024).

32 Zholtovskyi, Pavlo M. *Малюнки Києво лаврської іконописної маістерні*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1982, 194 (cat. 1211).

33 Grigorie Popovici never went to the painting school in Pechersk Lavra, but his works include stylistic elements and iconographic details belonging to the Kyivan school. Popovici was his follower, and he painted together with Jovan Četirević Grabovan, an Aromanian painter who came from Albania, and who is known to have been in contact with the painting school in Pechersk Lavra between 1746–1750. After this, in 1766, Grigorie Popovici became his apprentice. Elements of Western Baroque and European engraving entered the icon paintings in the Wallachian monastic environment through Popovici and the icons he painted for Cernica Monastery (1800–1802). See Kučeković, Aleksandra. “Jovan Četirević Grabovan – an 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Itinerant Orthodox Painter. Some Ethnic and Artistic Considerations.” In *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art: Crossing Borders. Art Readings*, edited by Emmanuel Moutafov and Ida Toth. Sofia, 2018, Vol. I: 362–363; Eadem. “Painters Jovan Četirević Grabovan and Grigorije Popović. Addenda to the Biographies of the Master and the Apprentice.” *Saopštenja* LII (2020): 138–152; Eadem. “Ерминія Слика Рајована Четиревіћа Грабована. Записи и цртежи (Hermeneia of the Painter Jovan Četirević Grabovan. Records and Drawings).” *ЗМЦЛВ/Матика Српска Journal for Fine Arts* 49 (2021): 60–83. See also Cojocar, Cristina. “The Painter Grigorie Popovici and His Master Jovan. Contacts Between East and West During the Second Half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 249–316.

34 The Russian presence is attested until mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. See Archive of the Metropolis of Ungro-Wallachia, File 5586/[1841–1850], ff. 76–78: *Data requested from all the monasteries for the number and name of the monks and nuns, also of the brothers and sisters who are living in each of them*. 68 monks were living at PM in 1850, of whom 47 were from Russia, as was the abbot.

iconographic type developed in Russia from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. The Cathedral of the Archangel in the Moscow Kremlin has examples of this theme dating back to 1680. From the imperial capital, the pattern spread to provincial workshops, where it became extremely popular and remained in use until the late nineteenth century. In the PM II icon, the orb held by the hand of Jesus has the type of landscape evocative of “the days of Genesis”. This is the type that spread in the hermitages and parochial churches in the Buzău Mountains: Jesus enthroned, with garments recalling both the Byzantine sakkos, and his cloak as *Salvator Mundi* from Occidental painting, slightly raising the leg that supports the orb. The same depiction appears in the iconostases in Găvanu (1828) and Rogozu (1830) hermitages, both of which were rebuilt in the decades that followed its usage in PM II, with the help of the abbots in PM (fig. 8). They show us that a prototype had already been created, and that its circulation was made possible by painters and local demands. The theme reached parochial churches, as is attested in an icon preserved in Buzău and another in storage at the Vrancea Archbishopric Museum, where icons collected from parishes are kept. Some copies also remain *in situ* in rural churches.

During the same period, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, the painter Nicolae Teodorescu Pitarul<sup>35</sup> painted the iconostasis for the Church of the Holy Apostles at Ciolanu Monastery.<sup>36</sup> The “orb with landscape” motif was used for the icon of Jesus Christ, though neither the “standing” nor the “enthroned” typology in PM I and PM II respectively. As he was a school painter, teacher and initiator of a new painting style, Teodorescu created a new type: Jesus rendered three-quarters, without a crown on his head. Via the same artist, the theme and its corresponding iconographic detail also began to be adopted by painter-monks at monasteries and bishopric painting schools who were active in the mid-nineteenth century.

Before he became leader of the painting school at Buzău, opened in 1836 with the support of Bishop Chesarie, Nicolae Teodorescu “had learned the art of painting in Căldărușani”,<sup>37</sup> as his biographers tells us. By the end of the eighteenth century, the monastery there — in Ilfov county, near Bucharest — had a painting school functioning around a painter whom tradition records under the name of Ivan the Russian. This is where Nicolae Teodorescu arrived in 1804 and learned a new “Russian” painting technique, in addition to what he gained from the models in the painting handbooks circulating in the

35 Săndulescu-Verna, Constantin. “Zugravii de la Buzău.” *Îngerul X* (1937): 4; Iorgulescu, Basil. “Pitarul Nicolae Teodorescu și Școala de pictură din Buzău.” *Literatura și Arta Română V* (1900–1901): 366–367.

36 Norocel, Epifanie. *Mănăstirea Ciolanu*. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului și a Vrancei, 1986, 40. The icons are preserved in the monastery’s museum. In the church there is a second set of Royal Icons, painted by Gheorghe Tattarescu in 1886.

37 Iorgulescu, Basil. “Pitarul Nicolae Teodorescu și Școala de pictură din Buzău.” *Literatura și Arta Română V* (1900–1901): 224.

monastery.<sup>38</sup> The manual by Dionysios of Fournas had been translated into Romanian at Căldărușani in 1808, for the use of painters working there.<sup>39</sup> Another student at the school was Evghenie Lazăr, who painted the icons for the iconostasis in the main monastery church of St. Dimitrie between 1853 and 1855.<sup>40</sup> The original structure is no longer in position: the upper section is on display in the monastery museum, and, in 1965, the two Royal Icons were displayed in the funeral chapel of St. John the Evangelist. That is where the icon of Jesus Christ is still to be seen, with the Saviour standing, floating on the clouds and surrounded by heads of putti (just as in the icon at PM I), one hand holding an orb covered in a landscape of mountains, waters, and skylights from the fourth day of Genesis. (fig. 9) In elaborating this composition, Evghenie Lazăr was influenced by the compositional solutions at PM I. I do not exclude the possibility of him having known the iconostasis there, as Căldărușani owned lands and cloisters in Buzău county.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that a now lost painting handbook led to dissemination of the theme, through painter Ivan Rusu (the Russian) and his apprentices. As founder of the painting school in Căldărușani, Rusu worked (and died) in the area, while painting the church at Unguriu in Măgura province, which is a metochion of Căldărușani Monastery.<sup>42</sup>

Earlier on, in 1840, the “orb with landscape” theme was also used by Gherontie Gheorghe, a painter active in the Vâlcea area, in the icon of Jesus Christ he made for the iconostasis in the Church of the Dormition of Mother of God at Dintr-un lemn Monastery in Vâlcea County (fig. 10).<sup>43</sup>

38 Nicolae Teodorescu himself copied a now lost painting handbook. Grecu, Vasile. “Versiunile românești ale Erminiilor de pictură bizantină.” *Codrii Cosminului I* (1924): 117. In his will, he wrote that he “had worked with drawings”. It has been proved that the painters from painting schools at Cernica and Căldărușani generally used such painting handbooks. See Grecu, Vasile. “Versiunile românești ale Erminiilor de pictură bizantină.” *Codrii Cosminului I* (1924): 105–174.

39 Grecu, Vasile. “Manualul de pictură a lui Dionisie din Furna în românește.” *Codrii Cosminului VII* (1931–1932): 49–59; Grecu, Vasile. *Cărți de pictură bisericească bizantină. Introducere și ediție critică a versiunilor românești, atât după redacțiunea lui Dionisie din Furna, tradusă la 1805 de Arhimandritul Macarie, cât și după alte redacțiuni mai vechi, traduceri anonime*. Cernăuți: Tipografia «Glasul Bucovinei», 1936.

40 Sabados, Marina and Stroe, Aurelian. “Zugravul Evghenie Lazăr de la Căldărușani în documente inedite.” *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor XVIII* (2007): 68–74; Cristea, Gherasim. *Istoricul Sfintei Mănăstiri Căldărușani*. Râmnicu-Vâlcea: Editura Sf. Episcopii a Râmnicului, 1997, 24. Nevertheless, it was replaced, and the upper part was taken to the monastery’s museum. In 1965, two of the Royal Icons were mounted in the church’s cemetery.

41 Lupu, Emil. *Ctitorii și ctitori la Curbura Carpaților în veacurile XIV–XVIII*. Iași: Doxologia, 2011, 153; Cristea, Gherasim. *Istoricul Sfintei Mănăstiri Căldărușani*. Râmnicu Vâlcea: Editura Sfintei Episcopii a Râmnicului, 1996, 34; 93; 97–102.

42 Iorgulescu, Basil. “Pitarul Nicolae Teodorescu și Școala de pictură din Buzău.” *Literatura și Arta Română V* (1900–1901): 224.

43 Brătulescu, Victor. “Zugravul cântăreț Gheorghe Gherontie.” *Mitropolia Olteniei XIV* (1962): 23–32; Bulat, I.G. “Un stareț vestit al Mănăstirii Hurez: Hrisant Penetis (10 oct. 1832–30 mart. 1852).” *Mitropolia Olteniei XIV* (1962): 434–448; Fuiuagă, Tecla and Barac, Teodosia. *Monografia Mănăstirii Dintr-un lemn*. Târgu Jiu: Măiastra, 2009, 79–82; 279 (il.).

From his biography and thanks to his annotations on a painting handbook,<sup>44</sup> we learn that painter and miniaturist Gherontie Gheorghe arrived in Bucharest in 1844 and travelled to the surrounding monasteries. We are also informed that he had connections with hierarchs of Râmnic who came from Căldărușani, such as the former Abbot Filaret<sup>45</sup> or St. Bishop Calinic. Gherontie was thus familiar with the artistic environment at Căldărușani Monastery, and could have learnt of the theme from the painting handbook there. As he had a free approach, painter Gheorghe created an original composition. Rather than repeating the landscape of Genesis days, as represented in the models in the Buzău area, he followed Flemish painters in introducing a scene familiar to him from everyday life. The orb held in Jesus's hand at Dintr-un lemn Monastery combines the *orb with stars* theme with a landscape rendering a *proskinitar* at Vâlcea monasteries. Gherontie Gheorghe may have seen the “with stars” type in at least two icons that survive to this day in Bucharest churches: in the Chapel of St. George at the Metropolitan Church (1723) and at Stavropoleos Monastery (c. 1733). The monastery *proskinitar* was a theme very well known to Gherontie Gheorghe. The fresco in All Saints' Chapel at Cozia Monastery (in Vâlcea county) shows an Athonite *proskinitar*, as does the porch in Church of the Dormition of Mother of God at Polovragi Monastery (Vâlcea County). Gherontie Gheorghe was a monk at Cozia and knew the paintings in Vâlcea monasteries. It was there that he borrowed the composition with Mount Athos monastery topography and applied it to the monasteries in the south of Oltenia he was familiar with. In 1830, Gherontie Gheorghe had already painted such a topography. In *Raport asupra câtorva mănăstiri* (1887) [*Report on several monasteries*], the historian, archaeologist and epigraphist Grigorie Tocilescu describes a painting he had seen at Bistrița Monastery. It was a scene rendering how boyar Barbu Craiovescu had entered the monastery, with monasteries from Vâlcea county (Bistrița, Arnota and Păpușa Hermitage) in the background, in a composition that anticipated the topography in the Saviour's orb at Dintr-un lemn.<sup>46</sup> This is the endpoint in a series that had begun with painter Teofan from PM I in 1791, and ended, according to the data we have gathered so far, with Gherontie Gheorghe at Dintr-un lemn Monastery (1840) and Evghenie Lazăr at Căldărușani Monastery (1853), both of whom were monk-painters from monastic painting schools.

44 Ms. rom. BAR 2151: *Erminia meșteșugului zografii* (1841–1842); [Ghenadie al Râmnicului]. *Iconografia. Artă de a zugrăvi templele și icoanele bisericesti*. Bucharest: Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1891.

45 Enăceanu, Ghenadie. “Mitropolia Ungro-Valahiei. Filaret II.” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* V (1881), 5: 314–327 and V (1881), 7: 443–463; Zara, Ștefan. “Filaret al Râmnicului și contribuția sa la dezvoltarea traducerilor patristice în limba română.” <https://revistaclipa.eu>. I (posted feb. 5, 2020) and II (posted iun. 20, 2020). (15.08.2024).

46 The painting is signed by Gherontie Gheorghe: “Această mușama s-au scos după cea veche, prin osârdua Sfinției sale Părintelui Cyr Gavriil Egumen Sf. M-re Bistrița. 1830/de Fratele Gheorghe/ zugrav ot Cozia/1830 octom(brie) 25” [This canvas was made after the old one, through the diligence of His Holiness Father Kir Gavriil, Abbot of Bistrița Monastery. 1830/by Brother Gheorghe/ painter of Cozia/1830 October 25]. *Raporturi asupra câtorva Mănăstiri, Schituri și biserici din Țară prezentate Ministerului Cultelor și al Învățământului public de Gr. G. Tocilescu Directorul Muzeului de Antichități*, Bucharest: Tipografia Academiei Române 1887, 43–44. The painting described by Tocilescu is no longer preserved, but a 20<sup>th</sup> century copy of it is now to be found in the pronaos of the church at Bistrița Monastery.

## The Coronation of the Virgin

Another iconographic theme that spread from the spiritual and artistic centre in PM through Wallachia was the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity.

Besides the four Royal Icons on the iconostasis of Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God (PM I), Teofan also painted an icon depicting the Coronation of the Virgin. (fig. 11) It is not signed, but the attribution can be made without doubt, through analogies with the series of four icons on the iconostasis at PM I.<sup>47</sup> It was commissioned so as to be placed in front of the iconostasis for veneration, and is now in the naos of All Saints Church.

The Coronation of the Virgin was a theme that entered Ukrainian iconography in the middle of the seventeenth century, taken over from Western art through engravings.<sup>48</sup>

The icon at PM I shows the Virgin kneeling in the centre of the image, flanked by God the Father holding an orb and His Son holding the cross. They are placing a crown on her head, with the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove above them. They all have halos made of lines like rays. This exact representation is seen in the patterns notebooks from the painting school at Pechersk Lavra (fig. 12).<sup>49</sup>

The theme of the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity was present in Romanian space even prior to this moment. It has been in Moldavia since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the exterior painting of the Resurrection of the Lord Church at Sucevița Monastery.<sup>50</sup> The theme appears in Wallachia as early as 1707, in the exterior painting of the Trinity Church at Surpatele Monastery.<sup>51</sup> At PM, however, it was not painted as in the above cases on an exterior fresco, and is rendered in a different composition. The Virgin is

47 Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017, 65 and Cocora, Gabriel and Horia Constantinescu. “Poiana Mărului.” *Glasul Bisericii* XXIII (1964): 469 state that it dates from 1791, like the icon of St. Nicholas on the iconostasis, which has a signature and the year 1791 inscribed on it. The icon is now framed, preventing us from viewing its entire surface and any date inscribed on it.

48 For the patristic and apocryphal sources of the iconography and the theme's presence in Western Art from the earliest depictions of it (12<sup>th</sup> century Gothic sculpture), see Verdier, Philippe. *Le Couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique*. Paris: Librairie J. Vrin, 1980. See also González, José María Salvador. “The iconography of *The Coronation of the Virgin* in late medieval Italian painting. A case study.” *Eikón / Imago* 3 (2013): 1–48.

49 Zholtovskiy, Pavlo M. *Малюнки Кієво лаврської іконописної майстерні*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1982, cat. 399.

50 Musicescu, M.A and Berza, M. *Mănăstirea Sucevița*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1958, 88–89.

51 Iancovescu, Ioana. “Biserica Sfânta Tremie a Mănăstirii Surpatele.” In *Repertoriul picturilor murale brâncovenesti. I. Județul Vâlcea*, edited by Corina Popa, Ioana Iancovescu, Vlad Bedros and Elisabeta Negrău. Bucharest: UNArte, 2008, 300.

kneeling, not standing, and the image is dominated by the figures who are crowning her: God the Father and His Son.

The Coronation of the Virgin reached the artistic environment at Pechersk Lavra from Western art, where it had begun to develop in the 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century, as a fulfilment of the doctrine and iconography dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin.<sup>52</sup> In Rhenish Renaissance painting there are several paintings dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century in which the orb, held in the hand of either Jesus or the Father (as an attribute of the monarchy), also includes landscape elements.<sup>53</sup> Once it reached PM, through the demands of the monks who had connections with the artistic environment at Pechersk Lavra, the theme became one of the most widespread in nineteenth century icon painting.

Even at PM there is still an icon preserving this theme, in a modest copy of the one painted by Teofan. It was made in 1859 by “*Atanace Anghel zug(rav) din Ploiești*” [Atanace Anghel, painter from Ploiești], who is known to have painted many works in that area in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity was one of the favourite themes in the monastic painting schools at Cernica and Căldărușani Monasteries, at Buzău Bishopric, and at Râmnic Bishopric. It was rendered precisely in this typology, with the Virgin kneeling, as attested in numerous icons preserved in the churches or repositories of monasteries and eparchial centres in both the south of Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>54</sup>

Being typical of the post-Tridentine Marian dogma, the Coronation of the Virgin cult also had an impact on the representation of the Virgin as an Empress with a crown on her head (a reference to Psalm 44:10–15 and to 1 Kings 2:19) from Western art. In monasteries related to the Paisian tradition this was a frequent Marian iconographic type: the Virgin, standing or enthroned, holds a sceptre in her hand, sometimes with a flower, and has a crown on her head. In some representations she is being crowned by angels, pointing to the Coronation theme.<sup>55</sup>

52 Therel, Marie-Louise. *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Église. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1984.

53 See, for example: Master of the Lyversberger Passion, *Coronation of the Virgin with donors* (c. 1464) in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (WAF 625) or Master of the Sacristy of Kaufbeure, *The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (c. 1485–1490) in the Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp.

54 Atanasiu, Mihai Bogdan and Palade, Mihaela. *Mănăstirea Pasărea. Credință, artă, educație*. Bucharest: Basilica, 2013, 320–323; Museum of Cernica Monastery: inv. M 147 (signed by Costache the Zograph, dated 1825); Museum of Căldărușani Monastery: inv. 961 (signed Nicolae Grigorescu, dated 1855), inv. 956 (painted by Evghenie Lazăr, dated 1859, the icon comes from the Chapel of Saint John the Evangelist at Căldărușani Monastery), and inv. 993, among many other examples.

55 The theme of the *Coronation of the Virgin by the Angels* is widespread throughout the Balkans, circulated via Athonite paper icons. Paper icons with the Three-Handed Mother of God, Mother of God Portaitissa or Mother

## Synaxis of the Archangels with Tobias

The Royal Icons tier in All Saints Church at PM also has an icon of the *Synaxis of the Archangels* (fig. 13). It introduces a compositional detail that was to spread in the Paisian monastic environment, both as an icon and as book illustration. Next to the Archangel on the right (whom we can thus identify as Raphael) there is a child – Tobias, who performed healing acts with fish entrails (cf. Book of Tobias). The theme is also to be found in the repertoire at Kyiv Pechersk Lavra,<sup>56</sup> where it was taken over from Italian and Flemish engravings and paintings. The Archangel Raphael is rendered according to this formula in Western art, holding Tobias by the hand, while the child holds a fish in his other hand. This is how the scene appears in the earliest 15<sup>th</sup> century version, in the series of *Otto Prints* engravings made in Florence and attributed to Baccio Baldini or to his workshop, dated c. 1465–1480,<sup>57</sup> and in the next century by Marcantonio Raimondi, in the engraving *The Guardian Angel Raphael Takes the Young Tobias by the Hand* (1500–1575)<sup>58</sup>. It is also encountered as a favourite theme in Renaissance painting: in Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo (*Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1465–1470); in Filippino Lippi (*Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1475–1480; *Three Angels and Young Tobias*, c. 1485); in Pietro Perugino (*Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1496–1500); and in Titian (*Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1540–1545).<sup>59</sup> The archangels in the Synaxis icon are not identified by special attributes in Byzantine traditional iconography. Nevertheless, through European painting and engraving, the Raphael and Tobias motif was integrated into the composition. This occurred in the workshop at Pechersk Lavra, as attested by surviving drawings.

In addition to the fact that there was a scriptorium at PM for a period of time,<sup>60</sup> the community led by Abbot Vasile frequently exchanged manuscripts with Paisian-movement monasteries in Moldavia.

of God Axion Estin, for example, circulated in monastic environments. They include the detail of the crown being placed on the Virgin's head by the angels. From paper icons, the pattern migrated to icons. See Gergova, Ivanka. *Светогорски теми в изкуството по българските земи (XVIII–XIX в.)*. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2022, 15–77.

56 V.I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. *Drawings and Sketches by Students of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Monastery Workshop. Album Number 14 [1700–1799]*, f. 84 and 100<sup>v</sup>.

57 Bayer, Andrea. *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. Exhibition catalogue (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, in 2008–2009). New York and New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2008; *Early Italian Engravings from the National Gallery of Art I*. Edited by Jay A. Levenson, Konrad Oberhuber, and Jacquelyn L. Sheehan. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1973.

58 Shoemaker, Innis and Broun, Elizabeth. *The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi*. Lawrence: The Spencer Museum of Art, 1981, p. 62, no. 6.

59 Hart, Trevor. “Tobit in the Art of the Florentine Renaissance.” In *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, edited by Mark Bredin. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006: 72–89.

60 Mihail, Paul. “Schitul Poiana Mărulei, un centru ortodox cărturăresc.” In *Spiritualitate și istorie la Întorsura Carpaților*. I, edited by Antonie Plămădeală. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului, 1983, 355–384.

Amongst the miscellanea gifted to the PM Hermitage, there was a manuscript now in the Romanian Academy Library: ms. sl. BAR 381 (late eighteenth century) written by Mitrofan, the biographer of Abbot Paisie.<sup>61</sup> Before the manuscript pages, the codex includes an engraving with the *Synaxis of the Archangels* (fig. 14), including the detail with Tobias painted next to the archangel on the right. This composition assimilated the motif from Western art, but left out the fish in Tobias's hand. It is possible that the engraving included in the Slavic miscellanea written by Mitrofan could have reached PM as a gift from the copyist and was used as a pattern for the icon painted for the iconostasis in 1812.

The iconographic type in the icon of the *Synaxis of the Archangels* at PM II is picked up by the iconostasis at Găvanu Hermitage, in 1828. The motif was also used in printed works at Neamț Monastery, where, in 1833, Ghervasie made a drawing that adopted the engraving pattern included in the miscellanea manuscript.<sup>62</sup> His new engraving was made to illustrate the Akathist service for St. Vayvodas and was also printed in the Horologion of Neamț, in its 1833 and 1874 editions, thus disseminating the theme through printed books.

### The Unsleeping Eye

In All Saints Church there is a framed canvas that displays two themes: the *Unsleeping Eye* (*Недреманное Око*) and *Archangel Raphael Holding Tobias by his Hand*, dated 1817. The *Unsleeping Eye* is represented in the formula with the crucified Jesus leaning on the ladder seen by Jacob in his dream, while God the Father is blessing and the instruments of the passions (*Arma Christi*) are spread all around (fig. 15).

This rendition of the *Unsleeping Eye* theme shows the “sleep of Jesus” after the Crucifixion. According to New Testament teachings, although Jesus is asleep as a human, as God He is always awake. (“Behold, he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”. Ps. 121, 4–5). In the Greek iconography tradition of the Anapeson theme, reference is made to another fragment of Scripture, from Genesis 49:9. It

61 The ascetic Miscellanea preserved in the Romanian Academy Library (ms. sl. 381) was thought to have been written by Mitrofan, in the scriptorium at Poiana Mărului. Panaitescu, P.P. *Catalogul manuscriselor slavo-române și slave din Biblioteca Academiei Române*, edited by Dalila-Lucia Aramă, G. Mihăilă. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2003, Vol. II: 175–179. A recent analysis proves that Mitrofan only copied manuscripts in the Paisian community at Neamț, and not at Abbot Vasile's hermitage. After he became an eremite, Mitrofan gifted the manuscript to the Hermitage in Poiana Mărului. See Mutalâp, Danian. “Contribuții privind scriptoriul de la Poiana Mărului. Copiști și manuscrise.” In *Zamfirei Mihail Omagiu*, edited by Lia Brad Chisacof, Simona Nicolae, Cătălina Vătășescu. Cluj-Napoca: Scriptor & Mega, 2024, 732–733.

62 Racoveanu, Gheorghe. *Gravura în lemn la Mănăstirea Neamțul*. Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1940, 24 and II. VII.

narrates the blessings given by Jacob to his sons, Judas being named a “lion cub”, that “is bending his knees” (“reclining he slept as a lion, and as a [lion's] whelp; who shall rouse him up?”). These words are Jacob's messianic prophecy, and the Messiah is seen as a sleeping lion.

The iconographic version seen at PM was elaborated in European art, the earliest known example being a Dutch engraving from the sixteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The theme was cultivated by Italian and Flemish painters and engravers, and from the eighteenth century was to become popular in the territory of present-day Ukraine and in the central and northern regions of Russia. The National Art Museum of Ukraine<sup>64</sup> and the Museum in Lvov<sup>65</sup> preserve numerous icons, many associated with other saints or different scenes such as that in the icon at PM. The panels come from artistic centres such as Kyiv, Podolya and Cernigov, and date back from the nineteenth century.

A similar canvas, contemporary with the one at PM, is held in the repository at Dălhăuți Monastery. In a simplified formula, the scene also appears in a mural painting in the naos of the church at Găvanu Hermitage, painted in 1828 with the contribution of Abbot Rafael from PM.

### The Slavic type of pious saints: an iconography trail from Lavra Pecerska (Kyiv Pecherska Lavra) to Poiana Mărului, and the “Paisian” monasteries in Moldovia

One of the most spectacular iconographic transfers from the environment in Pechersk Lavra to churches and hermitages in Buzău area is that featuring groups of monks and nuns.

In All Saints Church at PM, on the interior of the polygonal domes and on the naos and pronaos walls, there are paintings of monks, hermits and pious fathers. The church was built in 1806–1812, during the tsarist military occupation of Wallachia, during “the days of the Orthodox Emperor Alexandru

63 On the theme of the *Unsleeping Eye*, with examples of iconographic types, see: Ciobanu, Constantin. “L'icographie orthodoxe du *Sommeil de l'Enfant – Jésus, endormi comme un lion*, et ses variantes roumaines.” *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux-Arts*, XLIX (2012): 17–82. Ciobanu shows how the iconographic type with Jesus sleeping on the cross began circulating, having come from Italy and Flanders during the sixteenth century. It was a favourite subject matter for Bolognese masters, used many times by Guido Reni, and entered Flanders early, as is proven by an engraving by Cornelis Galle. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the theme crossed over the frontier of the Catholic world and became more and more popular in the Orthodox world, and amongst the Armenians. To this day it is used in numerous items in modern Ukraine. (Ibidem, 70–73).

64 Melnyk, Anatoly. *Український іконопис XII–XIX ст. з колекції НХМУ*. Kyiv: Artania Nova, 2005, cat. 61, 139, 140, 144. They come from Nadduiuprianskyna and Poltava Regions, and are dated between 1735 and 1857.

65 <http://icon.org.ua/gallery/nedremne-oko/>. There are 70 registered examples, dating from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

Pavolvici of Russia, with the blessing of Bishop Constandie of Buzău, with the perseverance of Abbot Teodosie II”<sup>66</sup>. Literature recounts that the church was built by Russian constructors, though the authors follow an oral tradition for which there is no epigraphic or documentary testimony.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, this notion is supported by the presence of Russians in the community at that time, attested to by documents (see above).

The wooden church with five polygonal-domed steeples is also painted in its interior. In their study from 1964, Cocora and Constantinescu recall two signatures: Ioasaf, 1826 (Russian, they suppose) and Atanasie Anghel, painter from Ploiești. They mention these names as being present on the icons.<sup>68</sup> Subsequent authors transferred the signatures onto the mural assembly,<sup>69</sup> thus introducing confusion that was indiscriminately perpetuated by later bibliography. Tascovici<sup>70</sup> says that the church was painted between 1812 (the year when it was built, as mentioned in the inscription) and 1859, the year that appears on the icon of the Coronation of the Virgin by painter Atanasie Anghel (see above). Moreover, he states that the painters were Russian, but only by association with local tradition and without offering any proof on the matter. Geacu says the church was painted in two stages, and considers that Ioasaf and Atanasie Anghel were responsible for the mural painting.<sup>71</sup> In actual fact the assembly is unsigned, and the supposition that Atanasie Anghel, who painted the icon of the Coronation of the Virgin, also created part or all of the mural assembly, cannot be supported from a stylistic point of view. The name of another painter, Ioasaf, was discernible on several festal icons included in the study carried out in 1964.<sup>72</sup> Nowadays, however, none of the icons preserved at the hermitage or on the church walls bear his name. The mural paintings have inscriptions in Romanian, and were indeed completed by two painters.

66 According to the inscription in Romanian preserved *in situ*.

67 Constantinescu, Horia. *Biserici de lemn din eparhia Buzăului*. I. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului, 1987, 57.

68 Cocora, Gabriel and Constantinescu, Horia. “Poiana Mărului.” *Glasul Bisericii* XXIII (1964): 469.

69 “Biserica a fost pictată de călugări-zugravi ruși, în etape, între 1821 și 1859” [“The church was painted by Russian painters-monks, in stages, between 1821–1859”]. And “s-au păstrat totuși pe două icoane numele a doi zugravi: Ioasaf (1826, probabil călugăr) și 1859 (Atanasie Anghel din Ploiești, în naos). Ioasaf a fost rus” [“nevertheless, two painters’ names are preserved on two icons: Ioasaf (1826, a monk, probably), and 1859 (Atanasie Anghel from Ploiești, in the naos). Ioasaf was Russian”]. Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017, 65. For this, Geacu quotes Potlogea, I. “Biserici din Lapoș.” *Îngerul* 7–12 (1941); Tascovici, Radu. “Poiana Mărului.” In *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești*, edited by Mircea Păcurariu. Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2010, 493 and Horia Constantinescu. *Biserici de lemn din eparhia Buzăului*. Buzău: Episcopia Buzăului, 1987, Vol. I: 57. However, Geacu non-critically adopts information also mentioned in other sources and, through reformulations, reaches a wrong conclusion. As the author of the most recent monograph dedicated to the Hermitage in Poiana Mărului and the matter of the painting there, he assimilated all previous errors.

70 Tascovici, Radu. “Poiana Mărului.” In *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești*, Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2010, 493.

71 Geacu, Sorin. *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*. Buzău: Alpha MDN, 2017, 65.

72 Cocora, Gabriel and Constantinescu, Horia. “Poiana Mărului.” *Glasul Bisericii* XXIII (1964): 469.

The first of them has a more careful manner, featuring scenes with neutral backgrounds. The second adopts a more emphasized Baroque manner, uses rather careless brush strokes, and creates elaborate backgrounds with landscapes and drapery. The calligraphy of the inscriptions also reveals the presence of two painters. The mural assembly was repainted several times. Successive layers of circumstantial touch-ups and repainting have led to mural clogging that makes it difficult for the painting to be studied and for the painters’ style or origin to be identified.

The scenes are placed within rectangular, triangular and trapezoidal frames of various sizes. The altar includes depictions of hierarchs, the naos has hierarchs and martyrs, and the pronaos monks and pious fathers (fig. 16). There are also scenes from the Christological cycle (in the naos) and ecumenical synods (in the pronaos, at the steeple base), while the rest of the space is dominated by figures of monks. On the naos walls and the two high steeples there are representations of monks and nuns standing alone or in pairs. They are pious fathers from the first centuries of Christianity, as well as Russian monks, in the typology spread in the Russian environment, with analabos and cloak, sometimes with schemas and rosaries in their hands. The bishops in the naos are also rendered in the Russian monastic typology from the end of the seventeenth century.

The monastic thematic is central to the iconography at Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. The Church of the Dormition of Mother of God at the monastery complex was totally destroyed during the Second World War, but several photos have been preserved in restoration files (fig. 17). They show the presence of the pious fathers, rendered in the same style as that seen at PM II.<sup>73</sup> A group of monks is also present in the only original mural wall preserved at the Lavra complex, in the Gate Church of the Trinity.<sup>74</sup>

The monastic theme was widespread in the iconography of the areas associated with the spiritual centre of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. In this regard, book engravings had an essential role to play. The Kyiv Pechersk Patericon was first printed in 1661, in an edition illustrated by engraver Ilya.<sup>75</sup> The

73 See the National Reserve Archive at Pechersk Lavra. Fonds *State Committee for the construction of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Report on the restoration of the mural painting of the Caves near the Kyiv-Pechersk State Historical and Cultural Preserve*. File Kyiv 1/1985 (Journal of restoration work). I thank Alina Kondratiuk (National Reserve at Pechersk Lavra) for the information and for access to the documents in the archive.

74 Kondratiuk, Alina. *Монументальний живопис трійцької надбрамної церкви Києво-Печерської Лаври. Каталог*. Kyiv: KVITS, 2005, 25–25, cat. 4–6.

75 *Patericon of the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves* (1661). See Zapasko, Yakym P. and Isaievych, Yaroslav D. *Пам’ятки книжкового мистецтва: Каталог стародруків, виданих на Україні*. Lviv: Vyshcha Shkola, 1981, 73 (cat. 402); Oksana Yurchyshyn-Smith. *The Monk Ilia (1637–1663). Catalogue. Ukrainian and Romanian Baroque Engraving*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Kyiv: Museum of the Book and Printing of Ukraine, 2021, 22.

collection of hagiographies of the Holy Fathers at the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves canonised by Peter Mohyla in 1643 was sumptuously ornamented. It established the iconographic patterns for icons with hagiographic scenes (*vita icons*) and served as the model for subsequent illustrated editions of the Patericon. Ilya's engravings were also published separately as an album<sup>76</sup>. The second set of engravings for the Lavra Patericon was created by Leon Tarasevich in 1702, repeating the compositional patterns of the first set.<sup>77</sup>

The monastic theme is encountered just as frequently in the iconography of churches and iconostases.<sup>78</sup> Prior to engraver Ilya's illustrations in the Patericon, monks were represented blessing with one hand and holding a scroll in the other, but after publication of the drawings they began to be rendered holding rosaries in their hands. The icons on the iconostasis from 1700 in the Ascension of the Holy Cross Church in Pechersk Lavra are the oldest ones to display this new iconographic type, which migrated from the Patericon illustrations to paintings.<sup>79</sup> The same thematic and typology are also to be found in many drawings from the painting workshop.<sup>80</sup>

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, images of Ss. Anthony and Theodosius of Pechersk Lavra spread among the churches in the eparchies of Peremyshl and Mukachevo. One of Roksolana Kosiv's studies demonstrates that paintings at Dobromyl, Lavriv, Peremyshl, Zhuravyn and Ulyuch emulate the modelling power of Pechersk Lavra.<sup>81</sup> The painters who worked there were those who contributed to the development of the Kyivan saint monks' cult in the region's iconography. They are also encountered in Maramureş, in the north of Romania, painted on three wooden churches in the eighteenth century, at Borşa, Poienile Izei and Ieud Deal.<sup>82</sup>

76 Yurchyshyn-Smith, Oksana. *The Monk Ilya (1637–1663). Catalogue. Ukrainian and Romanian Baroque Engraving*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Kyiv: Museum of the Book and Printing of Ukraine, 2021, 23.

77 Zapasko, Yakym P. and Isaievych, Yaroslav D. *Пам'ятки книжкового мистецтва: Каталог стародруків, виданих на Україні*. II. Lviv: Vyshcha Shkola, 1984, 18 (cat. 779); Logvin, G.N. and Glibin, Z. *Гравюри українських стародруків XVI–XVIII століть*. Kyiv: Dnipro, 1990, 87–88; il. 266–276.

78 Rizhova, Olga. *Іконопис у художній культурі Київської кінці XVII–XVIII століть: Монографія*. Kyiv: Vydavnycho-polihrafichnyy tsentr "Kyivskyy universytet", 2020, 121–122. Rizhova describes the iconostasis of the Ascension of the Holy Cross Church in Lavra Near Caves, presenting the pious saints with analabos and rosaries, like the ones in the Patericon engravings.

79 Ibidem, 122.

80 Zholtoivskyi, Pavlo M. *Малюнки Києво лаврської іконописної майстерні*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1982, 176 (cat. 2029) and 206 (cat. 1237).

81 Kosiv, Roksolana. "Господи нехай буде благословення Твоє на цьому місці": іконографія та причини популярності св. Антонія і Теодосія Печерських на творах риботицьких майстрів 1670–1750." *Вісник Львівської національної академії мистецтв, Проблеми Пластичного та Узhytkovoho Mysterstva* 36 (2018): 93–107.

82 Filip, Daniela-Dumitrița. "Transfer and reception of the Kyivan spiritual, artistic and cultural environment in the iconography of three wooden churches in Maramureş, Eighteenth century." *Annales Universitatis Apulensis*.

The figures of saints Theodosius and Anthony, next to the main church in Pechersk Lavra, is a theme<sup>83</sup> also seen on the western wall of the church at PM, proving both the spiritual and artistic affiliation of PM to Pechersk Lavra.

Portraits of the pious fathers played a highly significant role in the visual culture of the Lavra. In the nineteenth century, they were found in the interior of bishopric residences, in monastic refectories, in xenodochia, and also in monachal cells.<sup>84</sup> On the cell walls, among the icons, portraits of ascetics contemporary with the community in Lavra were also to be seen. By analysing a collection of portraits held in the archive of The National Preserve at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, O.V. Lopuhina has shown that there was a practice (a secular practice, as the author puts it) of gifting portraits of spiritual fathers to spiritual sons, as a sign of friendship or a blessing.<sup>85</sup>

The spread of monastic portrait art must be related to the presence of the theme in paintings on cell walls from the eighteenth century. This is where desert fathers from the first Christian centuries were represented, as well as the fathers of Russian monasticism. Some fragments have survived to the present day in murals from the Lavra Near Caves and Lavra Far Caves (paintings from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century), proving that this visual culture was typical of the communities in Pechersk Lavra.

Through the monks and patrons from PM, Slavic monastic typology also reached Romanian space in the early nineteenth century, if we consider that its presence at PM II since 1812 is the earliest. Monastic iconography is also to be found in other churches in the Buzău area, all of which were spiritually connected with PM. We see it, for example, on the walls of St. Trinity Church at Cotești Monastery (fig. 18), where nuns from Bonțești Hermitage came to stay in 1819. Their community had been gathered under the guidance of Abbot Vasile. As it was a nuns' monastery, the walls have portraits of spiritual mothers as well as of monks. Because of aggressive re-paintings, the mural

Series *Historica* I (2021), 25: 261–280.

83 The two saints' iconography is old, going back to the thirteenth century (the oldest icon dates from 1288, now at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow). But it spread to monasteries and hermitages thanks to the artistic movement of the painting school in Pechersk Lavra as well as to the circulation of engravings and book illustrations. The printing press in Lavra disseminated engraved portraits of the two saints, which served as models for icon painters rendering them. For more on this, see Janocha, Ks. Michał. "Ikonografia świętych ojców ruskiego monastycyzmu." In *Rola monasterów w kształtowaniu kultury ukraińskiej w wiekach XI–XX*, edited by Alicja Nowak and Agnieszka Groniek. Krakow: Szwajpolt Fiol, 2012, 13–42.

84 Lopuhina, O.V. "Образи Лаврських ченців у портретах хіх–початку хх століття з колекції національного Києво-Печерського історико-культурного заповідника." *Lavr's'kyu Al'manakh* 24 (2009): 75–81.

85 Idem, 75.

assembly in Cotești cannot be dated to establish whether it is the original one (the church was built in 1759), i.e. whether it is older than the one at PM II, or dates back to the hermitage's rebuilding in 1819.<sup>86</sup>

At Dălhăuți Hermitage, the painting in the Church of the Life-Giving Spring (1820) and that in the Holy Archangels Church (1827) include portraits of monks in the naos. Both mural assemblies can be attributed to local painters who took over patterns from PM and Cotești.

At Găvanu Hermitage, building restoration works and the reactivation of spiritual life are connected with Abbot Elisei from PM.<sup>87</sup> On the Last Supper panel, in the medial tier of the naos's polygonal dome, we see the year 1828. This is the first stage of Găvanu painting, when the altar, dome and naos walls were decorated. All title-inscriptions of the scenes are in Romanian, correctly and carefully calligraphed, pointing to a Romanian painter. They are well preserved, unlike those at PM II, which helps us establish the identity of the saints. They are "Sf. Preacuv[ioși]" or "Sf. Cuv[ioși]"<sup>88</sup> Gherasim, Varlaam, Ioasaf, Moise Arapul, Macarie (with beard and palm leaves, not with a cloak like Moise Arapul, who was also a saint from the Egyptian desert), Alexie man of God (with a short brown tunic, as in classical iconography of him), Ioan Colibașul (with a short tunic, as in the iconography of pious saints in the Patericon), Efrem Sirul and Ilarion, Avramie, Pahomie, Eftimie, Sava, Simeon Stâlpnicul (with cloak, Slavic kamilavka and rosaries, not represented on a pillar, as in standard iconography of him) (fig. 19).

Church of the Dormition of Mother of God at Găvanu has the following inscription in Romanian: "This vault was painted in the days of His Excellency, Filoteiu, Bishop of Buzău, through the perseverance and piety of Father Arsenie, Abbot of this hermitage. Year 1855, by painters Gheorghie Basilescu, D. Mehtupciu ["Această boltă s-au zugrăvit în zilele preasfinției sale Filoteiu episcopu Buzău, prin strădania și evlavia sfinției sale pă(rintelui) Arsenie starițu acestui schit. Anul 1855, de Gheorghie Basilescu. D. Mehtupciu pictori"]. The two painters are attested in the Buzău area, as representatives of the first generation of painters who were trained at the Buzău Bishopric painting school.<sup>89</sup> The pronaos has monks and nuns painted in the same Slavic typology, which the two "scholar" artists transferred from the early nineteenth century paintings at PM II and in the naos at Găvanu.

86 The Royal Icons at Cotești, signed by Sava the painter, can be dated to the stage when the hermitage was rebuilt. The mural painting may be contemporary with the iconostasis, but its conservation status does not allow it to be correctly evaluated.

87 Ionescu, Pr. Ioan. *Mănăstirea Găvanu din județul Buzău*. Buzău: Tipografia și Legătoria de Cărți Dumitru Bălănescu, 1928, 34.

88 The same on all inscriptions.

89 Iorgulescu, Basil. "Pitarul Nicolae Teodorescu și Școala de pictură din Buzău." *Literatura și Arta Română V* (1900–1901), 226; Cocora, Gabriel. "Școala de zugrăvi de la Buzău." *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 3–4 (1964): 366–367.

The spacious vaulted ceiling in the pronaos reunites scenes and saints in four tiers. From the top down, the first tier includes prophets, the second tier displays 14 scenes from the Akathist Hymn together with the Life-Giving Spring scene. The third tier, which also continues on the church walls, shows paintings of "Pious Saints" [Sf. Cu[vioși]] Ghelasie, Nil, Grigorie, Eftimie, Pimen, Vasile, Pafnutie (?), Isidor, Cosma, Atanasie, Ioan Damaschinul, Sisoie, Ștefan, Macarie, Maxim, Dometian, Ioanichie and Daniil, and "Pious Women Saints" [Pre cu[vioase]]<sup>90</sup> Teodora, Eufrosina, Pulheria, Pelaghia, Matroana, Melania, Macrina, Teoctista, and Xenia (incorrectly written as Klenia), in that order.

Following the routes of masters and the handbooks used by painters in monastic painting schools, the Slavic theme and iconographic type spread over the mountains into Moldavia. It is encountered once more in the only Paisian monastery to be painted during the nineteenth century, in the Beheading of John the Baptist Church at Secu Monastery.

Secu was one of the monasteries where the community of Paisie Velickovski settled and was to stay for four years, between 1775 and 1779. During the nineteenth century, Neamț and Secu Monasteries were under common governance. The original painting (from 1602) of the Beheading of John the Baptist Church at Secu Monastery was destroyed in 1821. Today, only fragments of the original layer are preserved in the area by the tombs. During the governance of Abbot Neonil (1834–1839; 1843–1853), who was a continuator of the Paisian tradition, the church was rebuilt.<sup>91</sup> The new paintings at Secu Monastery were done in 1850 by Constantin Lifșicar and Tudorache Ionescu, who led a team of painters-monks.<sup>92</sup> In their work, we find the monastic typology known from the monasteries led by Abbot Vasile in Buzău. (fig. 20) Among the founding fathers of Primitive Monachism (Anthony, Ilarion, Sava) are the figures of Anthony and Theodosius, founders of Pechersk Lavra.

In addition, given that the original iconographic program at Secu included the Menologion in the pronaos, and architectural space allowed for it, the same theme was also preserved in the new painting. In this vast hagiographic display of the Menologion, all pious saints are rendered like the monks in Pechersk Lavra, irrespective of the period they lived in or their geographical origin.

As Byzantine painting manuals require, the representation of the saints in all areas of the church, not just the pronaos, has the force of a collective portrait. This is in fact the whole point of displaying such a vast presence of pious saints in the iconographic program of a monastic church: to establish

90 Ibidem.

91 Câmpanu, Iustin. *Mănăstirea Secu. Monografie*. Iași: Doxologia, 2021, 105.

92 Ibidem.

a connection between the saint monks on the walls and the monks living in the monastery, who are all inside the church together in prayer. And at Secu, just as in the churches in the Buzău Mountains, monks are painted all over the church.

## Conclusions

The painting and icons preserved at both PM and the Buzau Mountains monasteries looking to it as their spiritual centre bear witness to a new style of painting and decorating churches. Through the migration of Slavic monks and new artistic demand, themes in Western art that were taken over and reinterpreted according to Orthodox Church doctrine and the Byzantine icon tradition entered the Romanian Principalities. Both the aesthetics of liturgical space and, implicitly, monastic visual culture in this area gradually started to change.

This artistic phenomenon was the secondary consequence of spiritual relations, and not a cultural gesture to be explicitly assumed. It was a cultural transfer that took place via the Slavic origin monks who settled in Wallachia, even if they had not set it as the goal of their isolated life as hermits.

The phenomenon is definitely related to the Modern period, the circulation of masters and patterns, the development of the printing press and contacts with Western Europe. This “new style” was also spreading in Greece, Mount Athos and the entire Orthodox world in the Balkans.

To a greater extent than documentary sources, material testimonies stand as proof of this stylistic import of the European Baroque, introduced into the Romanian Principalities by Slavic monks and eventually assimilated in local monastic workshops.

This is a formal, cultural point of view. But my analysis can show that this transfer of artistic models followed the route of spiritual filiations, of connections between monasteries, monks, abbots, and their apprentices and followers.

What made it difficult for Romanian research to assimilate the visual aspect of the Paisian movement was the impossibility of reconciling an art that was in debt to the European Baroque, and implicitly related to the Catholic Church, with the revival of Philokalist spirituality.

On the one hand, in the world to which Abbot Vasile belonged, stylistic imports gradually emerged after the Union in Brest, due to proximity to and common history with various Catholic church communities. On the other hand, in Romanian space, where the Byzantine tradition was better preserved, this style entered late, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was perceived as a rupture. For theologians

and the historians who analyzed the Philokalist spiritual movement, it was difficult to associate it with a visual culture such as that introduced by PM and the surrounding hermitages.

Yet this entire phenomenon only occurred at the formal level. Liturgical life, spirituality, and the entirety of Eastern Christian Church teachings were not contaminated by Catholic Church liturgical theology or practice. In the monastic space of the Romanian Principalities, the occidentalization of the Byzantine inheritance did not lead to theological innovations. In this regard, the authority of the patristic model had an essential role to play, as these monastic communities placed it at the center of their teachings.

This is also the reason why this “imported” visual culture could continue on into the next generation, in painting schools and workshops governed by Romanian abbots and bishops in monasteries and bishoprics, such as the ones in Căldărușani, Buzău, and Vâlcea, as I have shown. The definition of a new local and national style in ecclesiastical art during the second half of the nineteenth century was made based on stylistic and iconographic innovations that had been introduced to Romanian space by Abbot Vasile and his apprentices and imposed through his foundations in PM, in the Buzău Mountains. In 1836, when bishop Chesarie and painter Nicolae Teodorescu founded a painting school at Buzău Bishopric, the entirety of this monastic visual culture had already been assimilated by a generation. All they did was to continue it, and thus, together with other bishops, abbots and painters, contribute to changing the image of liturgical art in the Romanian Principalities.



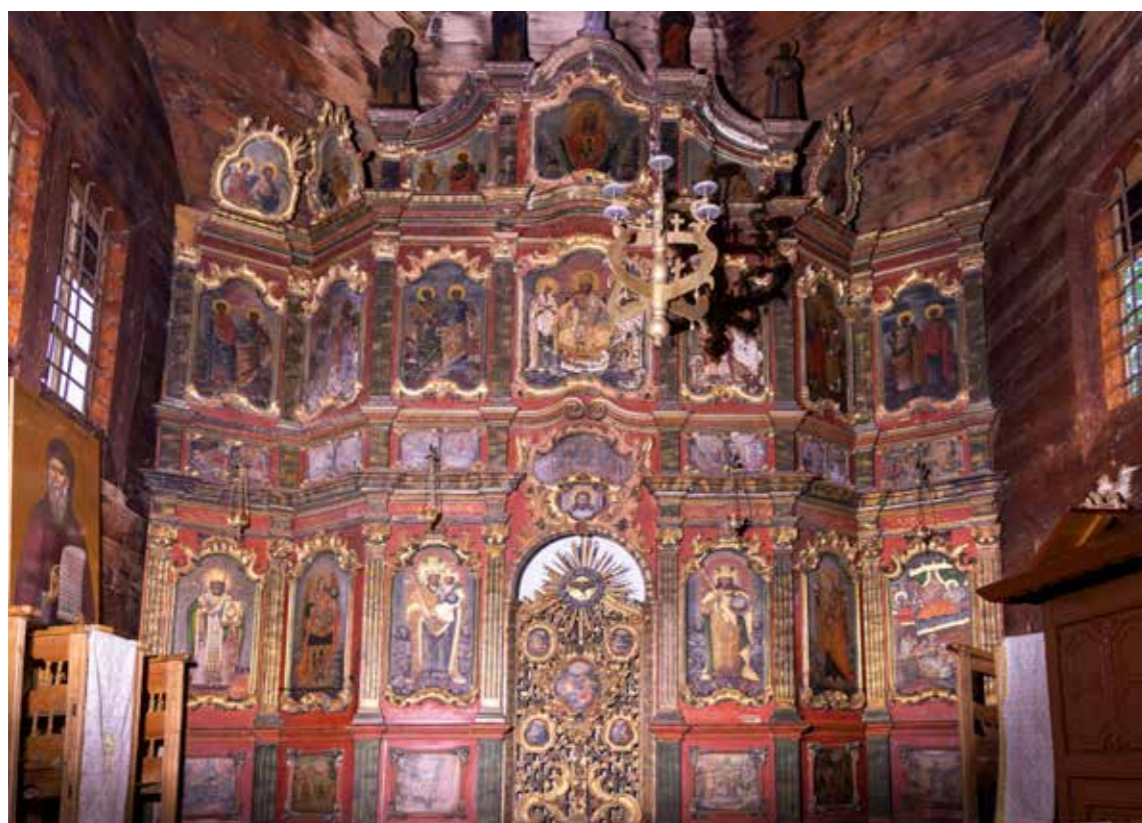


Fig. 1. Iconostasis, 1776–1791, Nativity of the Mother of God Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 2. Inscriptions from the iconostasis, details with donors' name, painter's name and years, Nativity of the Mother of God Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Atanasia Văetiși.



Fig. 3. The iconostasis, detail, 1810–1812, All Saints Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 4. The iconostasis, detail with the upper tiers, 1827, Holy Archangels Church, Dălhăuți Monastery. Photo: Ana Dumitran.



Fig. 5. The iconostasis, detail, 1828, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Găvanu Hermitage. Photo: Ana Dumitran.



Fig. 6. Jesus Christ archpriest, with sceptre and orb, 1791, Painter Teofan, Nativity of the Mother of God Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 7. Jesus Christ enthroned, 1812, All Saints Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Ana Dumitran.



Fig. 8. Jesus Christ enthroned, 1828, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Găvanu Hermitage.  
Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 9. Jesus Christ with orb, 1853, Painter Evghenie Lazăr, St Demetrios Church, Căldărușani Monastery.  
Photo: Teodora Necula. © Căldărușani Monastery.



Fig. 10. Jesus Christ with orb, 1840, Painter Gherontie Gheorghe, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Dintr-un lemn Monastery. Photo: Ana Dumitran.



Fig. 11. Coronation of the Virgin, Painter Teofan, Nativity of the Mother of God Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Atanasia Văetiși.



Fig. 12. Coronation of the Virgin, 1728–1760, drawing from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Workshop. (Source: Pavlo M. Zholtovsykyi, *Малюнки Кієво лаврської іконописної майстерні*, Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1982, cat. 399).



Fig. 13. Synaxis of the Archangels with Tobias, 1812, Royal icon, All Saints Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Ana Dumitran.



Fig. 14. Synaxis of the Archangels, engraving from Ms. sl. BAR 381 manuscript. Photo: Atanasia Văetiși. © Romanian Academy Library.



Fig. 15. The Unsleeping Eye and the Guardian Angel with Tobias, 1818, oil painting on canvas. Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 16. Pious fathers, 1810–1812, tower of All Saint Church, Poiana Mărului Hermitage. Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 17. Holy venerable fathers, 1720 with repaintings from the 19th century. Documentary images, late 19th century, Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. © Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra National Reserve Archives.



Fig. 18. Venerable female saints, c. 1819 with repaintings, Holy Trinity Church, Cotești Monastery.  
Photo: Atanasia Văetiși.



Fig. 19. Holy venerable fathers, 1828, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Găvanu Hermitage.  
Photo: Răzvan Gabriel Rus.



Fig. 20. Holy venerable fathers, 1850, Painters Constantin Lișicar and Tudorache Ionescu, The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist Church, Secu Monastery. Photo: Atanasia Văetiși.

# Ukrainian Traces in Bulgarian Artistic Heritage

Ivanka Gergova

## Abstract

This text outlines some aspects of the presence of Ukrainian works or subjects in Bulgarian artistic heritage. Attention is focused on works of graphic art, namely illustrations in early Ukrainian books and prints, some of which were used by Bulgarian masters as models. Specifically, Ukrainian themes include the following: Saints Anthony and Theodosius of Kyiv-Pechersk; the Council of Kyiv-Pechersk Saints; Mother of God Pecherskaya; the miraculous Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of Mother of God; The Appearance of the Mother of God on Mount Pochaev; the miraculous icon of the Mother of God Pochaevskaya; and the Kyiv icon of Sophia the Wisdom of God. All of the above are present both in various images and in the work of Bulgarian icon-painters.

**Keywords:** seventeenth-twentieth centuries, Ukrainian Orthodox art, Kyiv-Pechersk Saints, miraculous icons, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Pochaev Lavra.

For methodological and ideological reasons which will not be discussed here, Ukrainian themes and artifacts in Bulgarian artistic heritage have not been systematically studied. Although Ukrainian territories were within the borders of the Russian Empire for centuries, the identification of Ukrainian visual culture with Russian culture that was common in the past<sup>1</sup> is incorrect. Ukrainian church art has its own stylistic appearance and, to some extent, its own themes, conditioned by the historical fate of the land and its geographical position on the border of Orthodox and Catholic territories. There is only one

1 No such distinction is drawn, for example, in Mavrodinov, Nikola. *Връзките между българското и руското изкуство*. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1955. Furthermore, some studies of old printed books do not distinguish Russian editions from Ukrainian ones. See Atanasov, Petar. *Българо-руски литературни връзки през XVII и XVIII в.* Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1986. On the ignorance of Ukrainian art in the West see Deluga, Waldemar. "Ukrainian art. The past and present of scientific research." *Academia Letters* (2022): Article 5720. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL5720>.

scientific study dedicated to Bulgarian-Ukrainian artistic relations – a book by the Ukrainian researcher Dmytro Stepovich, published in Kyiv in 1975.<sup>2</sup> In line with the times and the author's knowledge, this raises some general questions, but contains very little on church art.

The topic of Ukrainian connections with Bulgarian artistic heritage is extensive and requires special study. The modest purpose of this text is to highlight some aspects of it and point out individual examples. Research could move in three main directions: investigations in Bulgarian churches, museums and library collections for works created in Ukrainian lands; examination of how Ukrainian models influenced the iconography of Bulgarian works; and analysis of those Ukrainian saints and miraculous icons appearing in the repertoire of Bulgarian masters.

Bulgarian contacts with Ukrainian territory and culture have varied in their dynamics down the centuries, but also had some prerequisites, the most significant of which was their shared Orthodox religion and the use of Church Slavonic. Bulgarians passed through Ukrainian territories on their way to Moscow, sometimes staying in them at length; in the aftermath of Russo-Turkish wars, large groups of Bulgarians even emigrated and settled in Ukraine, where there is still a large Bulgarian community.<sup>3</sup> During the Bulgarian National Revival and especially in the nineteenth century, Odessa was an important centre of Bulgarian emigration,<sup>4</sup> and Bulgarian merchants operated out of Kyiv and Odessa.<sup>5</sup> A number of Bulgarians received education in Kyiv, including icon-painters studying in the workshops at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, the largest source of Ukrainian works on Bulgarian lands are old printed books, which, as a rule, are decorated with engravings and ornamental frames and initials. In Bulgarian churches and libraries there are editions from Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Pochaev Lavra, Lviv, Chernihiv and other printing houses in the Ukrainian lands (fig. 1–2). The chronological range is wide – from the sixteenth

2 Stepovik, Dmytro. *Українсько-болгарські мистецькі зв'язки*. Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1975; *ibid.* "Творческие связи сербских и болгарских художников с Украиной в XVIII–XIX вв." In *Славянские культуры в эпоху формирования и развития славянских наций XVIII–XIX вв.* Moscow: Nauka, 1978, 288–191.

3 Doynov, Stefan. *Българите в Украйна и Молдова през Възраждането (1751–1878)*. Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", 2005.

4 *Ibid.*; Dianova, Nataliya. "Болгарский вопрос в деятельности Херсонско-Таврического архиепископа Инокентия (Борисова)." *Известия на института за исторически изследвания*, XXXI (2014): 144–150.

5 Mavrodinov, *Връзките между българското и руското изкуство*, 57.

6 Попов, Nil. *История Славянского благотворительного комитета в Москве. Второе пятилетие (1863–1867)*. Moscow: Universitetskaya tipografiya, 1872, 25–26; Vasiliev, Asen. *Български възрожденски майстори*. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1965, 615. For Bulgarian painters who studied in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century see: Tonchev, Simeon. "Applying Russian Style & Iconography. Bulgarians who have studied at Russian art schools (19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century)." (in print).

century, when Ukrainian territory lay within the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, to the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> The largest collections of Ukrainian early printed books are held by the National Library of Sofia,<sup>8</sup> Rila Monastery,<sup>9</sup> and the Ivan Vazov National Library in Plovdiv, as well as in rural monasteries and parish churches.<sup>10</sup> The decoration in these printed books could be perused by monks, priests and teachers, but its important role was in inspiring Bulgarian icon-painters. They studied the engravings in Ukrainian books, copied them into drawing albums, and used them as models for icons or wall paintings. For example, drawings in the album kept by icon-painter Toma Vishanov from Bansko (Ivan Duichev Centre for Slavic-Byzantine Studies, Cod. D. Slavo 48),<sup>11</sup> include images of the evangelists faithfully reproduced from a Kyiv edition<sup>12</sup> (fig. 3–4). It has been established that some of the Western European motifs and iconographic solutions came to Bulgarian territory indirectly, via Ukrainian prints. The study of old printed books and their illustrations requires great effort and resources, and will probably remain as a task for Bulgarian researchers for some time to come. Among the scholars who have touched on this topic, I should mention Petar Atanasov,<sup>13</sup> Elena Genova,<sup>14</sup> who has made the most significant contribution to the study of Ukrainian iconographic models in Bulgarian art, as well as Ralitsa Russeva,<sup>15</sup> who found the primary source for the Apocalypse cycle in Ukrainian engravings.

- 7 Atanasov, Petr. “Украинские старопечатные книги XVI–XVII веков в Болгарии.” *Советское славяноведение* 6 (1972): 72–83; Velinova, Vasya and Nina Vutova. *Опис на ръкописите, старопечатните, редките и ценните издания в Националния исторически музей*. Sofia: Национален исторически музей, 2013.
- 8 Raykov, Vozhidar. “Опис на славянските старопечатни книги от XV и XVI в. в НБКМ.” *Известия на Народната библиотека Св. св. Кирил и Методий*, VII (XIII) (1967): 225–253; Vozukova, Maya. “Опис на руските и украинските кирилски печатни книги от XVIII в. в НБКМ.” *Известия на Народната библиотека Св. св. Кирил и Методий*, XXII (XXVIII) (1994): 285–345; Mincheva, Voyana. *Опис на славянските кирилски старопечатни книги от 19 в. в колекцията “Старопечатни книги, редки и ценни издания” на Националната библиотека “Св. св. Кирил и Методий”*. Sofia: Natsionalna biblioteka “Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodiy” 2013.
- 9 Atanasov, Petar. “Руските старопечатни книги в Рилския манастир.” *Старобългарска литература* 12 (1982): 85–99; Hristova, Boriana. “Библиотеката на Рилския манастир.” In Margarita Koeva (ed). *Рилският манастир*. Sofia: “Prof. Marin Drinov” Academic Publishing House, 2000, 32–57, 42.
- 10 Gergova, Ivanka. *Църквата “Рождество Богородично” в Берковица*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2016, 156–165; idem. *A Collection of Christian Art at the Historical Museum-Batak*. Batak: Historical Museum, 2022, 43–49.
- 11 Boryana Hristova, Akseyina Dzhurova and Vasya Velinova. *Опис на славянските ръкописи от Центъра за славяно-византийски проучвания “Проф. Иван Дуйчев” към СУ “Св. Климент Охридски” XIV–XIX в.* Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, 2000, 144–149, табл. LXX.
- 12 Genova, Elena. “Модели и пътища за модернизирание на църковната живопис в българските земи от втората половина на XVIII и XIX век.” *Historical Future* 2 (2001): 45–74, 57 and 58.
- 13 Atanasov, “Руските старопечатни книги,” 97–99.
- 14 Genova, “Модели и пътища”; idem. “Темата “Покров Богородичен” в живописата на самоковските зографи.” In *Традиции, приемственост, новаторство*. Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Marin Drinov”, 2001, 492–508; idem. “Догматични изображения на св. Богородица върху луна/Непорочно зачатие.” In *Сборник в чест на 80-годишнината на професор протопрезвитер Николай Шиваров*. Veliko Tarnovo: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodiy”, 2014, 318–348.
- 15 Lozanova, Ralitsa. “Първообрази на Апокалипсиса в българското църковно изкуство.” *Art Studies Quar-*

Recently, while working on the topic of Ukrainian and Russian engravings in Bulgarian collections, I came across an unknown set of calendar engravings which have turned out to be an exceptional find (fig. 5).<sup>16</sup> The twelve leaves depict the saints and holidays of the whole year. The set is dated 1628 and signed by Pambo or Pavel Berinda, *protosyngel* of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Berinda was a great Ukrainian intellectual and encyclopaedist, who directed the printing house at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra towards the end of his life.<sup>17</sup> Together with a variant made by the same master and assistants and now held in the Bodleian Library,<sup>18</sup> this set of calendar images is the earliest example of this kind of engraving, which subsequently gained immense popularity and spread throughout Russia. At the time the prints were made, the Ukrainian lands were under considerable religious pressure in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with only Kyiv remaining as a small Orthodox island in a sea of Catholic and Uniate territories. The choice of saints in the calendar has its own programmatic ideological significance.

As a result of inter-church contacts, several *antimensions* made in Ukrainian territory and consecrated by local bishops ended up in Bulgaria: one example was consecrated by Metropolitan Peter Mogila during the reign of Polish king Vladislav IV in 1646, and used in the diocese of Sliven; another from the mid-seventeenth century was consecrated by Athanasius Żeliborski, Bishop of Lviv, Galicia and Kamenets-Podolsky under the Polish king John Casimir. A further *antimention* from the same period was consecrated by Metropolitan of Kyiv, Galicia and all Russia Dionysius Balaban (1657–1663); yet another from 1707 was printed during the reign of Peter the Great and used in Orhanie (Botevgrad) ecclesiastical district; and an *antimention* from the time of Empress Elisaveta Petrovna (1741–1761) was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Kyiv and Galicia Timothy, who resided at Zograf Monastery.<sup>19</sup> Only two of these antimensions have been published.<sup>20</sup>

- terly 3 (1998): 40–49.
- 16 Gergova, Ivanka. *Украински и руски гравюри от XVII–XIX век в България*. Sofia: Академично издателство “Проф. Марин Дринов”, 2024, 124–128.
- 17 V’yunik, A. O. “Графіка.” In *Історія українського мистецтва*. Vol. 2. Київ: Academia nauk URSS, 1967, 337–374: 344–349; Losik Oresta. “Памво Беринда.” In *Наукове товариство імені Шевченка: енциклопедія [онлайн]*. Київ, L’viv: NTSH, Institut yentsiklopedichnikh doslidzhen’ NAN Ukraїni, 2015 (<https://encyclopedia.com.ua/entry-239>).
- 18 Deluga, Waldemar. *Grafika z kręgu Ławry Pieczarskiej I Akademii Mohylańskiej XVII i XVIII wieku*. Kraków, 2003, 77; idem. “The Ukrainian Prints from the Lavra Pecherska Monastery in Kiev (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries).” *Apulum. L. Series Historia & Patrimonium*. Alba Iulia, 2013: 26, fig. 12 <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/5baca01e-05f6-4fb2-a1d4-5a1a5be39876/surfaces/c740bce4-3646-4a6c-96c9-f7903296aaaa/>.
- 19 Goshev, Ivan. *Антиминьят. Литургическо и църковно-археологическо изследване*. Sofia: Hudozhnik, 1925, 98–100, 102, 109, 110, 112, № 4, 6, 13, 18.
- 20 Ibid, ill. 12, 17; Mavrodinov, *Връзките между българското и руското изкуство*, ill. 29.

Continuing with graphic art, we should focus on two large-sized prints representing the Christ and the Virgin Mary with Christ Child enthroned surrounded by various scenes (fig. 6), forming a complex iconographic programme.<sup>21</sup> Copies of this prints are preserved in Bulgarian collections (in the Historical Museum of Samokov, the Stanislav Dospevski graphic archive at the National Art Gallery in Sofia, and private collections). However, I have not identified any examples outside Bulgaria, which leads me to conclude that the plates were brought into and used specifically within Bulgarian lands. The margins contain a number of Ukrainian iconographic themes. Most characteristic is the reproduction of the miraculous icon-reliquary once kept at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, known as the “Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of Mother of God.” The image of a small door with metal hinges, located beneath the bed of the Virgin, is the key detail that identifies this specific iconographic type. The original miraculous icon-reliquary, formerly housed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, disappeared during the Second World War.<sup>22</sup>

A Ukrainian graphic model was used in the booklet „Scroll or Prayer to the Most Holy Mother of God“, published by Nikola Karastoyanov in Samokov in 1868.<sup>23</sup> It opens with a woodcut depicting the Virgin Mary being crowned by the Child. Both figures are depicted on a crescent moon, which is held by two angels. <sup>24</sup> At the end of the previous century, exactly the same image had been printed in Chernigov, and in the early eighteenth century it was reproduced by the press at Pochaev Lavra.<sup>25</sup> The specific model used in the Samokov printing house is not known to me, but it is apparently an engraving of Ukrainian origin.

Ukrainian ties with Mount Athos are centuries old, and have left some traces in Bulgaria. Once notable example is a manuscript 740 housed in the Saints Cyril and Methodius National Library <sup>26</sup>. Concerning

21 Gergova, *Украински и руски гравюри*, 98–106, fig. 38–43.

22 Deluga, Waldemar. “Зображення Богородиці у графіці Києво-Печерських майстрів на зламі XVII–XVIII століть.” In *Могиланські читання 2000 року*. Київ: Feniks, 2001: 88–90; Vereshchagina, Nadezhda. *Християнские культы и реликвии Древнего Киева (конец X – первая треть XIII в.)*. Odessa: Astroprint, 2019, 508–518.

23 Stoyanov, Manyo. *Българска възрожденска книжнина. Аналитичен репертоар на българските книги и периодични издания 1806–1878*. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1957, 204, № 4474; Gergova, *Украински и руски гравюри*, 2024, 184–189.

24 Tomov Evtim. *Български възрожденски щампи*. Sofia: Balgarski hudozhnik, 1975, ill. 47 – according to the author the xylography is by Anastas Karastoyanov. This attribution is not persuasive, as by that time Anastas Karastoyanov was living in Belgrade and had broken off ties with his father’s publishing activities in Samokov (see Nikolov, Lyubomir. *Самоковските светлосцици. Анастас Карастоянов*. Samokov: Historical Museum-Samokov, 2023, 88–96). The illustration is most probably the work of Sotir Karastoyanov.

25 Hromov Oleg (ed.). *Солнце пресветлое. Русский свод сказаний о богородичных иконах*. Исследование. Moscow: Pan Press, 2020, 220–224.

26 Tsonev, Venuo. *Опис на ръкописните и старопечатни книги на Народната библиотека в София*. Т. 2. Sofia: Darzhavna pechatnitsa, 1923, 402, 403; Gergova, Ivanka. *Чудесата на Пресвета Богородица в културата на Българското възрождане*. Sofia: Omorphor, 2012, 36, 37; idem, *Украински и руски гравюри*, 162–167.

the Miracles of the Virgin Mary, it was translated from Greek into Slavonic by a Ukrainian monk Samuil Bakachich who lived on Mount Athos. The text is decorated with copperplate engravings, with fragments of prints glued into it at certain points. The copyist, monk Patermutiy Mushinsky from the Balushev skete is depicted holding a scroll with a prayer to the Mother of God (fig. 7).

One of the earliest icons signed by a Ukrainian icon painter in Bulgaria is the Mother of God Akhtyrskaya, now preserved in the National Museum of Church History and Archaeology in Sofia.<sup>27</sup> The inscription on the lower part of the frame states that it is a reproduction of the miraculous icon discovered in the village of Akhtirka in 1739. There is an even more interesting inscription on the reverse, according to which the icon-painter Stefan Danilov Medlinsky from the town of Gadyach (in Poltava region) donated the icon to the Church of the Presentation of the Mother of God on the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos), i.e. Hilandar monastery, in 1758, as he had promised. The icon was acquired by the museum from Saint Spas Church in Sofia. It is an early copy of the highly popular Ukrainian icon of Mother of God Akhtyrskaya, officially declared miraculous only a few years earlier, in 1751.<sup>28</sup> Other later replicas are to be found in Bulgarian churches and collections, some executed in the primarily market-oriented icon painting workshops of Kholui, a village in Vladimir region.

The iconostasis icons in the church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Kazanlak were signed in 1896 by an artist from Odessa named M. Burxer. (fig. 8)

Based on their stylistic and iconographic features, it is likely that the two icons of Christ in the Plovdiv City Art Gallery were painted by Ukrainian or South Russian artists.<sup>29</sup> One of them (Inv. No. 85) depicts Christ Salvator Mundi seated, with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holding an orb. (fig. 9). The inscription reads: “вбразомъ вбретеса яко же человекъ.” ( “...being made in human likeness.”).<sup>30</sup> The other icon (Inv. No. 204) likewise represents Christ holding an orb.

At Shipka Monastery there is an icon donated by Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in the early twentieth century (fig. 10). It is a replica of the miraculous Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God, made

27 Inv. 3991, 31, 4x27, 8x3 cm. Gergova Ivanka. “Богородица Ахтирска.” In *Икони в Църковния историко-археологически музей в София*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2024, 396, cat. 414.

28 Shchennikova, Lyudmila, E. P. I. “Ахтырская икона Божией Матери.” In *Православная энциклопедия*. Т. 4, Moscow: Tserkovno-nauchnyy tsentr “Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya”, 2002, 217, 218.

29 According to the attribution by Natalia Komashko.

30 Book of Philippians 2:7 (Translation based on New English Standard Revised Translation of the Bible)

in the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>31</sup> with an inscription that reads: “изображеніе и мѣра чудотворнаго вобраза оуспеніа престѣла бѣи ѣже вбрѣтаетса в лаврѣ киевпечѣрск” („True-to-Scale Representation of the Miraculous Icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God from the Church of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra“).

One of the oldest replicas of Mother of God Vladimirskaya in Bulgaria, it was undoubtedly executed in Moscow in the sixteenth century, but its journey through Kyiv is documented by an inscription carved into the background, reading: “КИЕВЪ 1749” (“Kiev 1749”).<sup>32</sup>

There are also records of donations sent by Bulgarians in Ukrainian territory. For example, in 1861 Hristo Dinchev sent an embroidered epitaphios and an icon from Odessa to the town of Panagyurishte,<sup>33</sup> though what became of them is unknown. During the Russo-Turkish War, which led to liberation from Ottoman rule, Bulgarians living in Romania ordered a flag for the Fifth Bulgarian Volunteer Company, which was made in Kyiv, as shown by the inscription on the metal spike: “Кіевъ 1877 18 октября” (“Kyiv, 18 October 1877”).<sup>34</sup>

Bulgarian churches and museums hold an enormous number of lithographs on various subjects, printed in Odessa printing houses of E. I. Fesenko, V. Til, D. Plyushchev and T. Korchag-Novitsky, dating from the 1860s to the early twentieth century. The Regional Historical Museum in Varna has a large collection of such lithographs, taken from the church in Asparuhovo village near Varna.

Part of the “Ukrainian traces” in Bulgarian artistic heritage comprises images of Ukrainian saints, regardless of where and by whom they were executed. By this I mean the saints of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. Bulgarians became acquainted with the Council of Kyiv-Pechersk Saints as an iconographic theme via Russian or Ukrainian engravings. Here one could point to an engraving in the Historical Museum collection in Samokov<sup>35</sup> (fig. 11), or a similar later version from 1865, printed at Anton Avramov’s press in Moscow and now located in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Samokov.<sup>36</sup>

31 According to the attribution by Natalia Komashko.

32 Gergova Ivanka. “Russian Icons in Bulgaria.” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, 149–159, fig. 8. The icon belongs to the National Archaeological Museum collection in Sofia, inv. 2815, 25x30x2.5 cm.

33 *Из архивата на Найден Геров*. Sofia: Balgarska akademiya na naukite, 1911, Vol. 1, (A-L): 517, № 833.

34 Naydenova, Radka. “Знамената на българското опълчение.” *Izvestiya na Natsionalniya voennoistoricheski muzey*. III (1977): 114–121, 117.

35 Inv. X478, 107ДБ, 31x38 cm.

36 32x38 cm.

The two founders of the Great Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra — Saint Anthony and Saint Theodosius — are often depicted in a variety of contexts. The National Archaeological Museum in Sofia holds an icon of Mother of God Pecherskaya set in a gilded carved frame.<sup>37</sup> Saints Theodosius and Anthony are on either side of the Virgin and Child, above the Monastery with its caves and the main church in the centre. The icon was probably made in a Kyiv workshop at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This particular composition is highly popular in Ukrainian art,<sup>38</sup> finding its place in old printed book illustrations.

Anthony Pechersky embraced monasticism on Mount Athos, which may be one of the reasons for his popularity among the Bulgarians. Images of the two Kyivan saints, Anthony and his disciple Theodosius, also can be found in Bulgarian church art. In the most representative monument of the Bulgarian Revival art - the catholicon at Rila Monastery - the two Kyivan saints are depicted in the narthex, side by side in full-length, next to Saint Demetrius of Rostov.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, they both feature in the Chapel of Saint John of Rila at the Old Hermitage, located a short distance from the main monastery complex.<sup>40</sup> As is known, the frescoes were painted by Dimitar Hristov from Samokov between 1840 and 1845. Twenty years earlier, in 1824, the same artist decorated the Chapel of Saint John the Theologian in the eastern wing of Rila Monastery. There, he depicted Saint Theodosius Pechersky alongside his patron saint, Theodosius the Great. (fig. 12). The monastery also has an icon of the two saints. It was probably kept in the cell of a Rila monk of the same name. (fig. 13).

The influence that the frescoes in the churches and chapels at Rila Monastery had on contemporary and later Bulgarian painters is well known. Perhaps other images of the Kyivan saints owe their existence to this influence, such as the depiction of Saint Theodosius Pechersky in the frescoes at the Church of Saint Anna in the village of Yana near Sofia (1845)<sup>41</sup> and Saint Anthony Pechersky in the Church of Saint Petka in the village of Breze (1848), also near Sofia.<sup>42</sup> The two Kyivan saints are shown full-length

37 Inv. оп. 23, п. 273, 13, 5×18×1 cm. Ivanka Gergova, Yordan Gatev and Ivan Vanev. *Християнско изкуство в Националния археологически музей – София*. Sofia: “Prof. Marin Drinov” Academic Publishing House, 2012, 71, cat. II. 588.

38 Rizhova 2023, Olga. “Reflection of the Tradition of Hesychia in the Images of Saints Antony and Theodosius of the Caves in the Lavra Iconography.” *Konstantinove listy*, 16/2 (2023), 68–81, fig. 4, 5.

39 Курумдзиев, Александар. “Църква “Рождество Богородично”, Рилски манастир.” In *Корпус на стенописите от първата половина на XIX век в България*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2018, 455–494, 467, № 5–7.

40 Ibid., 479.

41 Zaharieva, Maya. “Църква „Св. Анна“, с. Яна.” In *Корпус на стенописите от първата половина на XIX век в България*, edited by Aleksandar Kuyumdzhiev and Emanuel Mutafov. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2018, 567–578, 571.

42 Курумдзиева, Маргарита. “Църква “Св. Петка”, с. Брезе.” In *Корпус на стенописите от първата половина на XIX век в България*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2018, 729–742, 733.

in frescoes from 1871 in the nunnery church of The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at Kazanlak, most probably executed by the local painter Petko Iliev (fig. 14).<sup>43</sup>

A carved icon in the National Archaeological Museum collection in Sofia<sup>44</sup> features two saintly monks with unmarked names — without doubt the two most famous Kyiv-Pechersk saints - flanking the Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of Mother of God (fig. 15). The icon, executed in the early twentieth century by the master M. Nikolov, originally belonged to Rila Monastery.

Of particular interest for our topic is a triptych from a Sofia church in the National Museum of Church History and Archaeology collection in Sofia.<sup>45</sup> A relief cast copper alloy icon of the Deisis (*Sedmitsa/Week*) is mounted above the central section. The icon is typical of the repertoire of Russian Old Believers' foundry workshops, though the painting itself is by a Bulgarian master and is possibly inspired by Russian triptychs with mounted metal icons or crosses. The wings depict the full-length figures of Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky, while the central panel features Saint John of Rila and Saint Haralampius. According to Alexander Kuyumdzhiev, the painting was created by the young Samokov icon-painter Stanislav Dospevski, who was working with his father Dimitar Hristov at Rila Monastery at the time. The presence of the two Saints Anthony and Theodosius of Kyiv - Pechersk alongside Saint John of Rila suggests that the triptych may have been painted for a monk's cell at Rila.

There are also a number of icons in Bulgaria that were created using different techniques and that relate to the great Ukrainian Lavra at Pochaev. According to legend, this monastery is associated with the appearance of the Mother of God, who left a footprint over which the monastery's catholicon was built.<sup>46</sup>

Another treasure is the highly-honoured miraculous icon of the Mother of God Pochaevskaya. It was presented to the monastery in the sixteenth century by Ana Gojska, who had received it from the Bulgarian Metropolitan Neofit prior to 1559.<sup>47</sup> From 1713 to 1832 the monastery was Catholic, a during

43 Dinova-Ruseva, Vera. "Стенописите в храма "Въведение Богородично" в Девическия манастир – Казанлък." In *Светогорска обител Зограф III*. Sofia: Gutenberg, 1999, 309–323.

44 Inv. 1166, 13, 5x17, 5x2 cm. Gergova, Gatev and Vanev, *Християнско изкуство*, 450, cat. V. 15.

45 Inv. 6379, 22x20x1, 9 cm. Kuyumdzhiev, Aleksandar. „Триптих.“ In *Икони в Църковния историко-археологически музей–София*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2024, 251, cat. 214.

46 Історія Почаївського монастиря — Вікіпедія (accessed 07.11.2024)

47 *Сказание историческое о Почаевской Успенской лавре бывшего наместника Лавры архимандрита Амвросия, с дополнительными главами о позднейших покойных священно-архимандритах Лавры, архиепископах: Агафангеле, Димитрие и Тихоне.* – 3-е изд. – Pochayev: Pochayevska lavra, 1886 (accessed 10.11.2024). It would be an interesting research task to identify this “Bulgarian metropolitan” and therefore the Balkan roots of the iconography. Whatever the case may be, here we have evidence of a “Bulgarian trace” in Ukrainian cultural heritage.

which period the icon was officially recognised as miraculous by the Church and was ceremonially “crowned”. The Bulgarians may have become familiar with the Mother of God Pochaevskaya in various ways, for example from engravings in editions produced at Pochaev Lavra. There is no evidence as to how Paul of Lovech, a priest who copied it into his manuscript Book of Katavasia in the 1830s, became aware of it.<sup>48</sup> (fig. 16).

A later icon held in the National Church Museum in Sofia<sup>49</sup> is identical to a lithograph of the Pochaev Lavra printed in Warsaw. In churches all over Bulgaria we find chromolithographs reproducing the icon, which were no doubt disseminated throughout the country by trade. In most of them, the famous footprint of the Mother of God is visible beneath the Virgin and Child.<sup>50</sup> The legend of how the Mother of God appeared to a hermit and a shepherd is itself illustrated in an icon at the City Art Gallery in Plovdiv (fig. 17).<sup>51</sup> The church banner (*chorugv*) displayed at the Regional Historical Museum in Pleven, bearing the image of the Pochaev icon, may also have been purchased following Bulgaria's liberation in 1878. (fig. 18).

The famous icon of Sophia the Wisdom of God from Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv was well known in Bulgaria. A zograph from Tryavna reproduced it in an icon that belonged to the Church of the Dormition of Mother of God in Veliko Tarnovo (fig. 19).<sup>52</sup>

An eloquent testimony to the popularity and authority of Ukrainian Orthodox culture among the Bulgarians is the legend of the miraculous icon at Glozhene Monastery, which was said to have “flown” from Kyiv, while the monastery itself was founded by a Kyiv prince named George Glozh. The icon was covered with silver revetment, with scenes from the life of Saint George added to it. All of the above is clear evidence of an advanced cult. I once had the rare opportunity to photograph the original icon without the revetment; despite the poor condition of the painting, it can be argued that the icon is Ukrainian or Russian.<sup>53</sup>

48 Boriana Hristova, Elissaveta Moussakova and Iskra Hristova-Shomova *Славянски и гръцки ръкописи в Регионален исторически музей–Ловеч*. Sofia: Logis, 2022, прил. XLVIII.

49 Gergova, Ivanka. „Богородица Почаевска.“ In *Икони в Църковния историко-археологически музей в София*. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies, 2024, 475, cat. 544.

50 Ivanka Gergova, Anka Stoilova and Liubomir Mikov. *Свещени стъпки в християнството и исляма*. Sofia: Avangard prima, 2021, ill. 17, 18.

51 Ibid., ill. 35.

52 Gergova Ivanka. “Реплики на руски чудотворни икони в България.” *Art Studies Quarterly* 1 (2010): 35–39, 37, 38.

53 Gergova, “Russian Icons,” 154, 155, fig. 5.

The final example I will focus on is the work of Ukrainian White Cossack emigrants who settled in Burgas and founded the Burgas Cossack Society. In 1939 they donated an icon to the Burgas cathedral church of Saints Cyril and Methodius (fig. 20).<sup>54</sup> The iconography is original: the Virgin Mary with an omophorion in her hand is in the heavens, above a fortress wall with closed gates. Two Cossacks are standing at the gates. As the inscription explains, the icon embodies the emigrants' hope of returning to their lost homeland through the intercession of the Virgin Mary: *“Мати Божия Заступнице усердная покрый ни честним твоим омофором и в разсеянии ни сущих въ селения отчих водвори. При царуването на Благочестивиятъ Борис III царъ на българите, казашка национална Станица в гр. Бургасъ, презъ месецъ януарий 1939 направи настоящата икона – по случай пребиваването тука на емигриралите казаци, получили приемъ в братската страна – България”*. (“Mother of God, our zealous intercessor, cover us with your honest omophorion and and lead us to the homelands of our ancestors. During the reign of the pious Boris III, Tsar of the Bulgarians, Cossack National Stanitsa [the Cossack Society –note of the Ed.] in the city of Burgas, in January 1939, made this icon on the occasion of the stay here of the emigrated Cossacks who were welcomed in the brotherly country of Bulgaria”).

In conclusion, it could be argued that Ukrainian art is not as influential in Bulgaria as it was among the Serbians in the eighteenth century, for example. Nevertheless, there were constant, if not intense, interactions with Ukrainian artistic traditions, and this topic definitely deserves special attention in future studies.



54 ■ Kehlibareva, Sonya. *Петро Бургас*. Burgas: Znatsi, 2012, 89, 93.



Fig. 1. Saint John Damaskinos, engraving from a Triodion printed in 1664 at the Lviv Printing House. Historical Museum, Batak. © Historical Museum, Batak.



Fig. 2. Christ Pantokrator and the First Page of the Gospel of Matthew, engraving from a Tetraevangelion printed in 1746 at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Printing House. Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Berkovitsa. Photo: Maya Zaharieva.



Fig. 3. Evangelist Mark, engraving from a Tetraevangelion printed in 1746 at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Printing House. Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Berkovitsa. Photo: Maya Zaharieva.

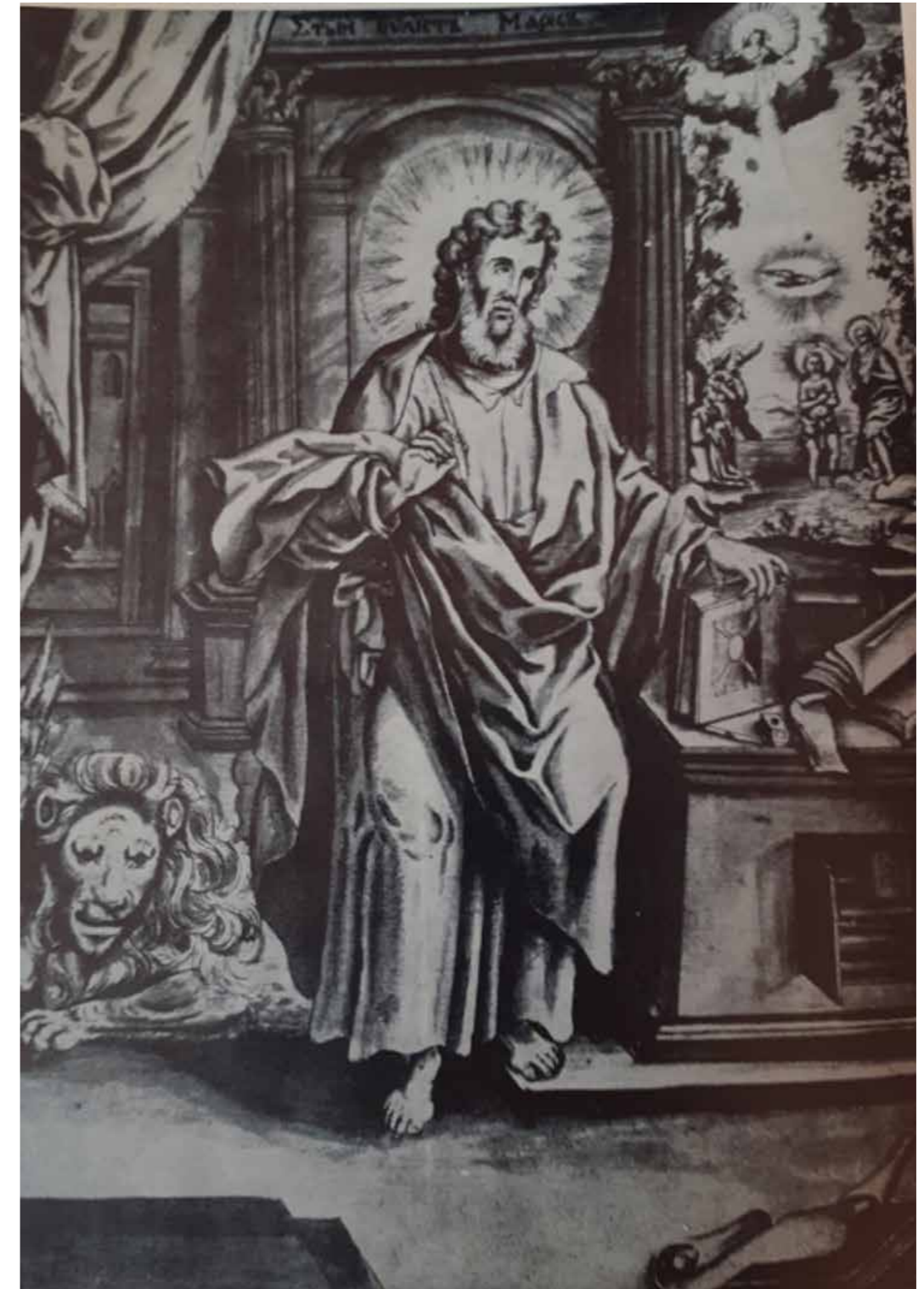


Fig. 4. Evangelist Mark, drawing from the Album kept by the icon-painter Toma Vishanov from Bansko. (Source: Vasiliev, Asen. Тома Вишанов Молеpa. Sofia: Bulgarski hudozhnik, 1969, fig. 14).

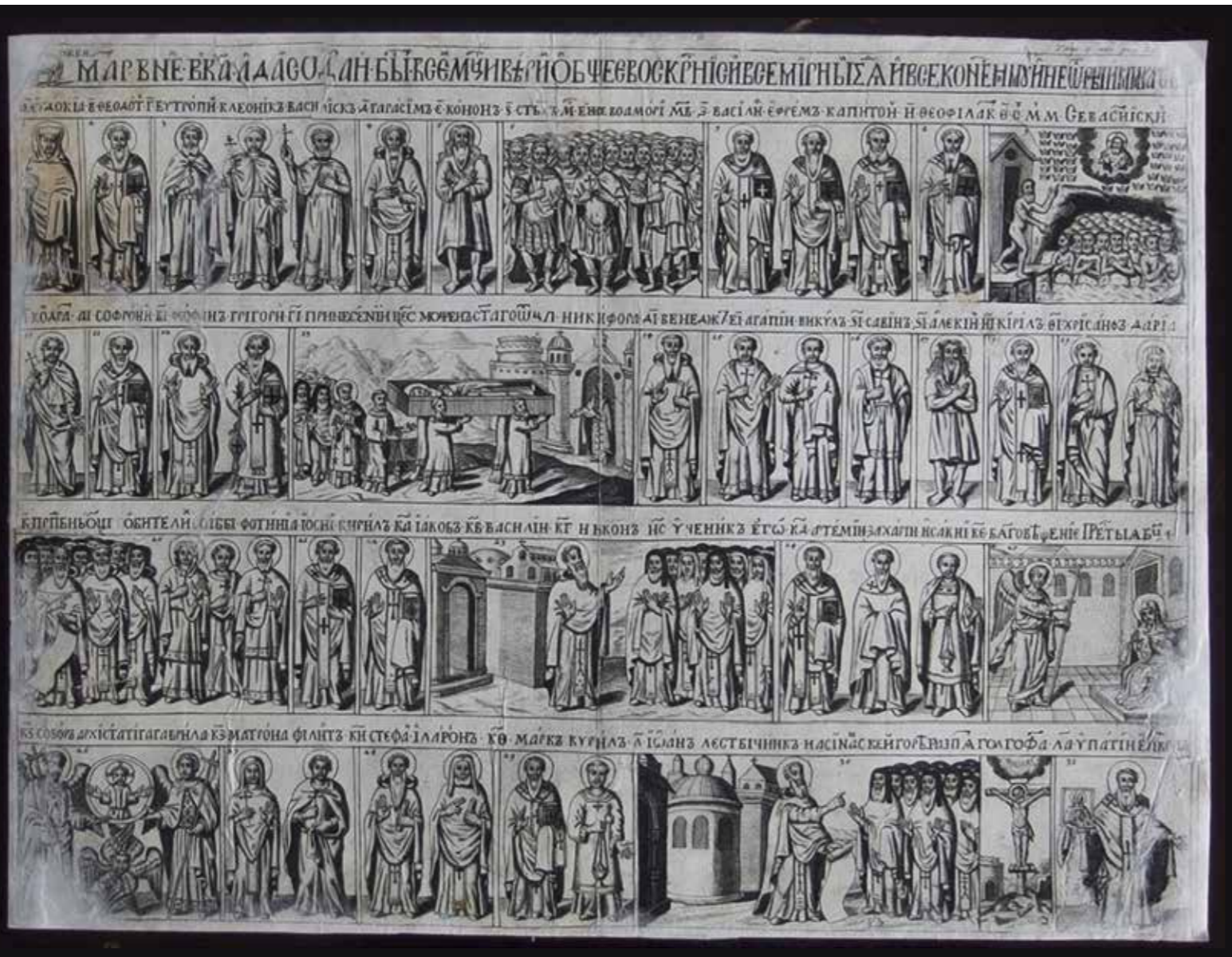


Fig. 5. Calendar, 1628, Pamvo Berinda, National Historical Museum, Sofia. © National Historical Museum, Sofia.

Fig. 6. Virgin Mary with the Child enthroned with scenes, Historical Museum of Samokov. © Historical Museum-Samokov.



Fig. 7. Self-portrait of monk Patermutiy Mushinsky, Saints Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia.  
© Saints Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia.



Fig. 8. Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Painter M. Burxer from Odessa, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Kazanlak. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 9. Christ *Salvator Mundi*, City Art Gallery, Plovdiv. © City Art Gallery, Plovdiv.



Fig. 10. Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Shipka Monastery. © Shipka Monastery.



Fig. 11. The Council of the Saints of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Historical Museum of Samokov. © Historical Museum, Samokov.



Fig. 12. Saint Theodosius the Great and Saint Theodosius Pechersky, 1824, wall painting in the Chapel of Saint John the Theologian, Rila Monastery. Photo: Georgi Linkov.



Fig. 13. Saint Theodosius the Great and Saint Theodosius Pechersky, Rila Monastery. Photo: Georgi Linkov.



Fig. 14. Saint Antony and Saint Theodosius Pechersky, 1871, wall painting in the Kazanlak Monastery. Photo: Ivanka Gergova.



Fig. 15. Kyiv Caves Dormition of the Mother of God, early 20th century, National Archaeological Museum, Sofia. © National Archaeological Museum, Sofia.



Fig. 16. Virgin Mary Pochoevskaya, Father Pavel's Book of Katavasia, 1830s, f. IVb-1r, Regional Historical Museum, Lovech. © Regional Historical Museum, Lovech.



Fig. 17. Virgin Mary appearing to a hermit and a shepherd, early 20th century, City Art Gallery, Plovdiv. © City Art Gallery, Plovdiv.



Fig. 18. Church banner, Regional Historical Museum, Pleven. © Regional Historical Museum-Pleven.



Fig. 19. Sophia the Wisdom of God, Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Veliko Tarnovo, National Archaeological Museum-Sofia. © National Archaeological Museum, Sofia.



Fig. 20. Icon donated to the Saints Cyril and Methodius Church in Burgas by Ukrainian White Cossack emigrants to Burgas, 1939. Photo: Ivanka Gergova.

## Archival Documents on the Education of Serbian Painters in 19th century Russia

Ana Kostić

### Abstract

second half of the nineteenth century, Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich sent Serbian students to study art and iconography in Russia, with the help of the Serbian Ministry of Education and Russian benevolent organizations. Correspondence preserved in the State Archives of Serbia testifies to how young painters experienced their education abroad. Based on archival documents and personal correspondence, this paper aims to offer a better insight into the processes of educating young Serbian painters in Russian monastery workshops and academies.

**Keywords:** nineteenth century, religious painting, education of Serbian artists in Russia, Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich

During the nineteenth century, Serbian artists received their education in various centres across Western Europe, as well as in monastery workshops and at academies in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Kyiv. Although Serbian apprentices were educated in Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century, the intensity of education increased significantly after the Crimean War (1853–1856). This shift was driven by the need to strengthen Russian influence in the Balkans, particularly among the Orthodox Slavic population.<sup>1</sup> In addition to students enrolled in Russian military, theological, medical, and agricultural schools, many were also sent to art schools.<sup>2</sup> Significant support for the education of Serbian artists in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century came from Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich, who led the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1859 to 1881, and

1 Savic, Mirjana. “Школовање српских ђака у Русији и Митрополит Михаило.” In *Живот и дело митрополита Михаила (1826–1898)*, edited by Dimitrije Stefanovic. Belgrade: SANU, 2008, 263–268; Blazic Pejic, Jovana. “Московски словенски комитет и српско питање.” PhD diss., Belgrade University, 2021.

2 Ibid., 165–166, 465, 458.

again from 1889 to 1898 (fig 1).<sup>3</sup> Having studied at the Kyiv Theological Academy in Russia, he later supported and initiated more profound political, ecclesiastical, and cultural ties between the two countries, reforming the Serbian church according to the Russian model. An essential part of that work involved the import of Russian icons, liturgical objects, and books, plus the education of Serbian priests and painters in Russia, thereby transferring Russian religious culture and art extensively to Serbian soil.<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan Mihailo advocated for the education of artists in Russian centres due to the increasing presence of non-Orthodox icons in Serbian territory. At that time, there was a lack of understanding regarding the differences between Orthodox and Catholic iconography, and there was no proper school of icon painting or academy in the Principality of Serbia.<sup>5</sup> Education in Russia, the fount of Orthodoxy, would enable young painters to accept Eastern Church iconography and paint dogmatically correct religious paintings, which would be the first step in the defence of Orthodoxy. Through his contacts in Russia, Metropolitan Mihailo sought places for Serbian students in icon-painting workshops in Moscow and Kyiv, and via the Serbian Ministry of Education advocated for artist scholarships and the provision of better living conditions during their education. The ministry covered the costs of the students’ travel to Russia and provided them with material support during their education, with varying degrees of success. In addition, Serbian artists educated in Russia were financially supported by numerous benevolent organizations founded by the Slavophile movement, which had broader political and cultural interests in the education of Slavs from the Balkans.<sup>6</sup> Archival documents concerning the education of Serbian artists in Russia are preserved in the Archives of the Serbian Patriarchate and the Serbian State Archives in Belgrade, within the repository of the Ministry of Education, the Metropolitanate of Belgrade, and the repository of Gifts and Redemption. The preserved material enables us to partially reconstruct how Serbian painters were educated in Russia, as well as the challenges they faced.

3 For more on Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich see Dimitrijevic, Stevan. *Михаило Архиепископ Београдски и Митрополит Србије, као православни јерарх, Србин, Словен и немар југословенства*. Belgrade: Stamparija Privredni pregled, 1933; Slijepcevic, Djoko. *Историја српске православне цркве*, Vol. 2. Belgrade: BIGZ: 1991, 355–384; Stefanovic, Dimitrije. (ed.) *Живот и дело митрополита Михаила (1826–1898)*. Belgrade: SANU, 2008; Rajcevic, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” *ZLUMS* 19 (1983): 263–274; Makuljevic, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*. Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy, 2007, 51–57; Kostic, Ana. *Црквена уметност у Кнежевини Србији (1830–1882)*. Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy, 2022, 89–94; Vradic, Teodora. “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне уметности у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898).” PhD diss., Belgrade University, 2024.

4 Vradic, Teodora. “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне уметности у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 23–180.

5 Makuljevic, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 52–54.

6 Blazic Pejic, Jovana. “Московски словенски комитет и српско питање,” 165.

Metropolitan Mihailo's first attempt to send Serbian artists abroad was in 1865, when he sought funding from the Russian Holy Synod to educate two icon painters.<sup>7</sup> Although this effort proved unsuccessful, the metropolitan soon arranged with Archimandrite Antoni Medvedev for three students to be admitted to the icon-painting workshop at Trinity-Sergius Lavra near Moscow.<sup>8</sup>

Metropolitan Mihailo informed the Serbian Ministry of Education of the agreements he had reached, asking it to hold a competition for painting students, finance their trip to Russia, and provide two ducat scholarships per month.<sup>9</sup> The competition was announced on December 20, 1869, in *Novine Srbske*, the leading daily newspaper in the Principality of Serbia (fig 2).<sup>10</sup> The requirements were that candidates be boys of limited means between 13 and 16 years old, and that they hold a health certificate. Without delay, on February 9, 1870, it was decided that three Serbian cadets met the required conditions and should be sent: Mihailo Borisavljevich, Zivko Jugovich, and Blagoje Kulich.<sup>11</sup> Before leaving for Russia, the cadets signed a contract with the Ministry of Education on their obligations during their studies and following their return to the homeland. In short, they were obliged to study for at least 3 years, to submit a progress report to the Ministry of Education twice a year, live an exemplary and modest life, and work in the civil service once they returned for at least as many years as they had been granted a scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Any violation of the agreement entailed termination of the scholarship. Upon completion of their studies, the state had the right to conduct a special exam with an expert committee to determine whether the painters had acquired the knowledge for which they had been sent abroad.<sup>13</sup> After signing the contracts, the three students set off in the winter of 1870 to study icon-painting at Trinity-Sergius Lavra. Metropolitan Mihailo informed the Archimandrite there of their imminent arrival.<sup>14</sup>

Archived documents regarding the education of Serbian painters at Trinity-Sergius provide insight into the training process, the knowledge offered to students, and the living and working conditions they experienced. During the winter of the 1870/71 school year, the Serbian students found themselves in

7 Ibid., 79.

8 Rajcevic, Ugljesa. "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији," 263–264.

9 Idem. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," *Sveske* No 14, 7 (1983): 88.

10 *Srbske novine*, Belgrade: 20. December 1869, No. 156, 3.

11 DAS-MPs 1880, F. V, г. 69; DAS – MPs 1878, F. I – 259; Rajcevic, Ugljesa. "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији," 264; Idem, "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 89.

12 DAS-MPs 1880, F. V, г. 69; Rajcevic, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 89.

13 Ibid.

14 Jovanovic, Miroslav, Timofejev, Aleksej and others (eds.). *Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија: Документа и материјали*, Vol. 2. Belgrade-Moscow: The State Archives of Serbia, Main Archival Administration of the City of Moscow and State Archives of the Russian Federation, 2011, 239.

poor health, struggling to adjust to the harsh Russian climate. Eventually, all three requested to return home for recovery. Metropolitan Mihailo, informed of their poor health, intervened with the Ministry of Education and received 12 ducats for the two students, Mihailo Borisavljevich and Blagoje Kulich, for accommodation and treatment in a warmer area in Russia for two months.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after returning to the Lavra, student Mihailo Borisavljevich wrote a letter to Serbia's Minister of Education on August 31, 1871, which exudes dissatisfaction with life and work at the school of icon-painting.<sup>16</sup> He was unhappy with the food on offer, considering it insufficient to maintain health, and expressed his frustration at the students being forced to live like monks, adhering to strict fasting rules. He pointed out that even if better food was available, it was unaffordable due to the insufficient stipend. Additionally, he criticized the teachers at the school, claiming that they lacked both theoretical and practical knowledge of painting. The students copied icons, but since no teacher was qualified to improve their drawings, they were forced to rely on their own abilities. Borisavljevich pointed out that all the icon painters were self-taught monks who had learned the craft by visiting various monasteries in Russia and copying existing icons. He noted that their lack of skill and knowledge in painting negatively affected both the students and the art form in general. Additionally, he mentioned that even the students attending the school lacked the ambition to improve their painting skills, because they were poor. For them, staying in the monastery provided shelter and food.

According to Borisavljevich's testimony, the education provided was limited to achieving a minimal level of knowledge, with the primary goal being the copying of icons.<sup>17</sup> He considered the school at Trinity-Sergius pointless, saying that he had learned nothing by copying icons independently without a teacher to guide him, and that he had even forgotten what he had learned in Serbia. In his letter, he desperately begged the Minister of Education to "save" him from the "meaningless school", in which he was experiencing "self-destruction" both in terms of health and intellect. He also asked to be allowed to study painting at a "real art school in Moscow", for which he needed a more substantial scholarship than the one he received, which was insufficient due to the high cost of living in Russia.<sup>18</sup> The minister responded negatively to these complaints. Although Borisavljevich was disappointed by the decision that he had to stay put, he did not abandon his quest for a solution. He thus wrote again on November 18, 1871, asking the minister to increase his scholarship so that he could transfer to the Moscow School

15 Rajcevic, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 90.

16 DAS-MPs 1880, F. V, г. 69. Published in whole in: Rajcevic, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 90–91.

17 Ibid., 90–91.

18 Ibid., 92.

of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture at the beginning of 1872. Otherwise, he sought money to return home, saying that his stay in the monastery had cost him his physical health and talent.<sup>19</sup>

Borisavljevich demonstrates a high level of self-awareness, saying in one letter that he understood his friend Blagoje Kulich had no higher ambition to acquire painting skills beyond those offered at Trinity-Sergius, but that he had a sense of duty towards the money given by his people for his education, so he could not accept anything less than to study art as hard as possible and thus serve his state and nation.<sup>20</sup> Having received no response, on January 9, 1872 he again begged for money to return to Serbia due to serious health problems.<sup>21</sup> Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich was constantly informed about the condition of the Serbian students, so he insisted that Borisavljevich be allowed to return home, and sent funds for the trip. In his February 1872 report, the doctor at Trinity-Sergius pointed out that Borisavljevich's health condition was terrible, and that staying in the cold Russian climate could cause tuberculosis. Therefore, he recommended a change of residence or a return home to a warmer climate.<sup>22</sup> The Ministry sent 30 imperial ducats for the journey.<sup>23</sup> According to documents preserved in the State Archives of Serbia, the other two students, Kulich and Jugovich, also had health problems, no doubt brought on by the harsh Russian climate, poor nutrition, and insufficient clothing.

Blagoje Kulich was also very dissatisfied with life at Trinity-Sergius. In a letter to the Minister of Education dated July 14, 1872, he requested an increase in his scholarship to provide clothing and food. He spoke even worse of the food than Borisavljevich, describing it as pigswill that was not even edible, let alone sufficient to maintain good health.<sup>24</sup> He also criticized the clothing allowance, as the students were only entitled to one suit yearly, worn daily and on holidays, with just one pair of boots. Students had to pay out of their own pocket for everything else necessary, such as shirts, socks, hats, and other warmer clothes, as the scholarship did not cover those costs. Due to the lack of food and clothing and high prices in Russia, Kulich expressed his concern that he would not survive the next winter if he did not recover and regain strength during the summer.<sup>25</sup> The Ministry did not respond positively to

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 93; DAS-MPs 1880, F. V, r. 69.

21 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 93.

22 DAS-MPs 1880, F. V, r. 69.

23 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 93.

24 Marjanović, Lilijana. "Благоје Р. Кулић као питомец Митрополита Михаила приликом школовања српских сликара у Русији и наченик среза Сокобањског." In *Живот и дело Митрополита Михаила (1826–1898)*, edited by Dimitrije Stefanović. Belgrade: SANU, 2008, 280–281; Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 94.

25 Marjanović, Lilijana. "Благоје Р. Кулић као питомец Митрополита Михаила приликом школовања српских сликара у Русији и наченик среза Сокобањског," 280.

the request to increase the stipend, but there is information that Kulich returned to Serbia during the winter to recover.<sup>26</sup>

Serbian students studying in Russia often wrote to Metropolitan Mihail Jovanovich when problems arose or when the Serbian Ministry of Education did not agree to their pleas, which were mainly for an increase in their scholarship. The Metropolitan solved the issues by forwarding them to the Serbian Ministry of Education or relevant addresses in Russia, or by personally sending money.<sup>27</sup> One of Kulich's surviving requests was sent to Metropolitan Michail on October 15, 1872. The list of necessary books it includes suggests that church history was thoroughly studied at the Trinity-Sergius school, as most of the titles were dedicated to that topic.<sup>28</sup> Like Borisavljevich, though in a less harsh tone, Kulich addressed another letter to the Serbian Minister of Education on May 15, 1875, asking to continue his education at the Academy in Moscow, since the knowledge acquired at Trinity-Sergius was very modest.<sup>29</sup> From the correspondence sent by Borisavljevich and Kulich, we learn the fundamental objections of the Serbian students to their education at the monastery in the 1870s. Firstly, these concerned the poor living conditions — inadequate nutrition and clothing, coupled with the harsh Russian winters — and secondly, the limited knowledge passed on by the self-taught icon-painter monks, and their insistence on copying icons, which Serbian students judged as insufficient. This was why the scholars asked to be transferred to other schools to improve their painting skills.

What did Trinity-Sergius Lavra offer at the time the Serbian students were there, and what status did it enjoy in the second half of the nineteenth century? A great medieval monastery, the Lavra of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius played a significant role in the history of Russia. It was founded in 1337 by one of the most venerated Russian saints, Sergius of Radonezh. The most beautiful artistic treasures at the monastery date from the time of its foundation, and over time, with numerous gifts, it became a prominent art centre where Andrei Rublev and Daniel Teherni painted frescoes and icons on the iconostasis of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity.<sup>30</sup> The earliest attempts to organize an icon-painting school date back to 1746, though for a long time it was barely maintained. The situation only began to improve from the 1830s onwards, thanks to the energies of Archimandrite Antoni Medvedev, who

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 263–268.

28 Ibid., 282–283.

29 Ibid., 284–285.

30 <sup>29</sup> Kenworthy, Scott. *The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism, and Society after 1825*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010; Armeeva, Ludmila Alekseevna. "Училищ иконописания при Троице-Сергиевой лавре в 1885–1918 гг.: попытка возрождения традиционного иконописания," *Bulletin of PSTGU. Series V: Questions of the History and Theory of Christian Art* (2011): 193.

arranged and expanded the student quarters and work areas in 1849.<sup>31</sup> The school attracted considerable attention from the clergy after the 1860s, becoming international. At that time, “with full monastic support, Greek icon-painting was taught to up to sixty boys from different regions.”<sup>32</sup> A modernization process was implemented from the 1870s until the end of the nineteenth century, but failed to meet expectations. According to reports on activities after 1883, the primary concerns were that although many students enrolled in the iconography course, few completed it; even fewer went on to pursue a career in iconography, and a significant number were expelled for inappropriate behaviour.<sup>33</sup> The school’s financial situation was far from healthy – for instance, just 3, 000 roubles were earned from student work, but more than 150, 000 went on school support. Self-taught icon painters were the instructors in the school, and priority was given to copying icons. At the time when our Serbians attended the Lavra, from the 1870s to the end of the nineteenth century, the students were led by the hieromonk Simeon, who “was a self-educated painter, engaged in iconography voluntarily without any scientific knowledge, theory or knowledge of the rules of painting.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, his contemporaries considered him highly skilled. Due to its reputation among the clergy and patrons the school attracted students from Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Bosnia.<sup>35</sup> In the reports evaluating the work accomplished from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, we see that it was attended by poor students, maintaining more of a humanitarian character than a strictly professional one. According to the inspectors, learning was still through independent copying of icons, which could not create professional icon-painters.<sup>36</sup> Such views expressed in later Russian archival materials largely coincide with those of the Serbian students described above.

It was undoubtedly the good name that Trinity-Sergius Lavra had among the clergy that led Metropolitan Mihailo to believe it was a good school of icon-painting, as he emphasized when asking the Serbian Ministry of Education to help provide scholarships for students to go there.<sup>37</sup> The choice of institution and the connections he established with Archimandrite Antoni Medvedev, who boosted the school’s reputation, indicate that the Metropolitan was convinced he was doing the very best for Serbian students. He continued to send Serbian boys over subsequent years, as in 1870, when he sent Stojan Vojinovich, a student from the Belgrade Theological Seminary who was originally from Mostar. In his letter to Archimandrite Antoni, the metropolitan emphasizes the necessity of educating this young man as



31 Ibid.  
 32 Ibid.  
 33 Ibid., 194.  
 34 Ibid., 195.  
 35 Ibid.  
 36 Ibid., 198–200.  
 37 Rajčević, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” 264.

an icon-painter, because it would “provide the student with the opportunity to be useful in his native region, where there is not a single artist.”<sup>38</sup> Vojinovich was admitted to the icon-painting school with the Metropolitan’s mediation, but eventually left Russia because he could not continue his education at the Moscow Academy.<sup>39</sup> Lazar Krdzalich also began his education at Trinity-Sergius,<sup>40</sup> transferring to the Higher School of Arts and Crafts in Moscow in 1880.<sup>41</sup> After Krdzalich successfully completed his education at the Lavra, Metropolitan Mihailo sent a request in 1880 for the admission of Mihailo Vasiljevich.<sup>42</sup> Dragoljub Pavlovich also entered the school in 1895, though we have no further information on his education.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to training at Trinity-Sergius, we learn from preserved archival documents that some Serbian students were admitted to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.<sup>44</sup> An educational institution was established there in 1866,<sup>45</sup> offering training in icon-painting and a detailed study of the iconography of the saints. As such an academic institution, it did not differ much from its counterpart at Trinity-Sergius. The curriculum was divided into two halves, with one focused on learning the art of icon painting, while the other was dedicated to copying icons and fulfilling orders for painting churches, iconostases, and individual icons. Students completed these tasks under the guidance of monk-icon painters from the Kyiv School.<sup>46</sup> Among the first Serbians to attend in the nineteenth century was Zhivko Jugovich, who, along with Mihail Borisavljevich and Blagoje Kulich, belonged to the first generation of Serbian painters educated in Russia.<sup>47</sup> Upon Metropolitan Mihailo’s recommendation, Milutin Bl. Markovich also attended Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, studying for one year under the guidance of Hieromonk Theogonos



38 Jovanovic, Miroslav, Timofejev, Aleksej and others (eds.). *Москва – Србија, Београд – Русија: Документа и материјали*, Vol. 2: 545–546.  
 39 Ibid., 246–247.  
 40 DAS – MPs 1878, registers and protocols for year 1878, No. 3 594, No. 6071; DAS – MPs 1878, registers and protocols for year 1879, No. 3652; Rajčević, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” 266.  
 41 Savić, Mirjana, “Школовање српских ђака у Русији и Митрополит Михаило,” 267.  
 42 Armeeva, Ludmila Alekseevna. “Училищ иконописания при Троице-Сергиевой лавре в 1885–1918 гг.: попытка возрождения традиционного иконописания,” 195–196.  
 43 Ibid., 197.  
 44 DAS-MPs 1895, F. XLIX, r. 23; DAS-MPs 1881, F. VI, r. 162; Rajčević, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” 267; Jovanovic, Miodrag. “Српска ликовна уметност и Русија крајем XIX и почетком XX века,” *Saopštenja XV* (1983): 122.  
 45 On the Kyiv school of icon-painting: “Киевская школа иконописи.” Accessed November 28, 2024. <http://gelos.kiev.ua/news/2007/06/08/kievskaya-shkola-ikonopisi/>  
 46 Ibid; Vradić, Teodora. “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне уметности у Кнежевину/ Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 112–113.  
 47 Jovanovic, Miodrag. “Српска ликовна уметност и Русија крајем XIX и почетком XX века,” 122; Rajčević, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” 269; Medaković, Dejan. *Српска уметност у XIX веку*. Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1981, 184–185; Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 182–183.

and graduating in 1889.<sup>48</sup> In 1891, Metropolitan Mihailo sent two students to the same school,<sup>49</sup> most probably including Petar Knezevich (monastic Pimen, 1871–1948), who is known to have been educated in Russia until 1896.<sup>50</sup>

Having commenced studies at the Kyiv-Pechersk and Trinity-Sergius schools, but considering the knowledge offered there insufficient, many Serbian painters wrote to their national Ministry of Education to request further training at the academies in Moscow, Kyiv, and St. Petersburg, or in Western European centres. Some were given a state scholarship to continue their education in Russia. Others managed to do so with the help of Metropolitan Mihailo, through benevolent organizations founded by the Slavophile movement. If training in monastery icon painting workshops is considered the first phase in the Serbian artists' education in Russia, then art academies represent the second.

Mihailo Borisavljevič was among the first to apply to continue his education, coveting a place at the Moscow Academy, i.e., the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. When he first applied in 1871, the Serbian Ministry did not grant him a scholarship, and later withdrew his funding because of his harsh attitude towards the school at Trinity-Sergius Lavra.<sup>51</sup> However, Metropolitan Michail supported his further training in Russia.<sup>52</sup> In a letter sent to the Metropolitan from Moscow on 11 September 1873, the young artist informed him that his education was progressing well, but that further financial assistance was needed. From the letter, we learn that Archimandrite Antoni, rector of the school at Trinity-Sergius, had helped Borisavljevič “like a parent” by giving him money to buy books and sewing him warm clothes for the winter. However, his assistance was terminated when management of the school passed from him to the Lavra Council.<sup>53</sup> The same letter shows that the Moscow Slavic Committee also helped Borisavljevič with his education, by giving him 20 roubles.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, we learn that he sought extra financial assistance from Nil Popov, secretary of the Slavic Committee in Moscow, but was rejected.<sup>55</sup>

On August 13, 1874, Metropolitan Michail mediated with the Serbian Ministry of Education, and

48 Rajcević, Ugljesa. , *Сликари Милутин Бл. Марковић*, “*Saopštenja XVII* (1985): 219.

49 Bradić, Teodora. “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне уметности у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 110.

50 ДАС, МП-с-Ц, 1891, Ф. II, р. 112.

51 Rajcević, Ugljesa. “Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века,” 92, 95.

52 Ibid., 95.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 DAS-MPS 1880, F. V, r. 69.

Borisavljevič regained a scholarship to complete his studies in Moscow.<sup>56</sup> From preserved archival documents we see that during the winter semester of the same year his assistance from the Slavic Committee in Moscow was withdrawn. He thus moved to Saint Petersburg, where financial assistance promised by the local Slavic Committee enabled him to enrol in the Imperial Academy of Arts there (fig 3).<sup>57</sup> Borisavljevič's letter to the Serbian Minister of Education, dated December 28, 1874, explains the reason for his transfer from Moscow to Saint Petersburg, which was financial in nature. He also informed the ministry that Blagoje Kulich had been left without a scholarship from the Slavic Committee in Moscow, and so had returned to Trinity-Sergius from the Moscow School of Art, Sculpture, and Architecture.<sup>58</sup>

At the time of Borisavljevič's transfer, the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg offered much better educational opportunities than the Moscow School, as he himself writes: “the teaching is much more rigorous and extensive than at the Moscow School of Painting”.<sup>59</sup> Borisavljevič remained in Saint Petersburg until his fourth year, when he was left without the help of the Slavic Committee there. He then received an increased scholarship from the Serbian Ministry of Education to complete his education, as did his colleagues Kulich in Moscow and Jugovich in Rome.<sup>60</sup> Based on preserved archival materials, Borisavljevič studied in Saint Petersburg until 1878, supporting himself by his own work and funds from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Blagoje Kulich attended an art school in Moscow until 1876, when he returned to Serbia during the Serbian-Turkish wars of 1876–1878. This interrupted his education, which he never resumed due to a lack of funds.<sup>61</sup> With the support of Metropolitan Mihailo, Zhivko Jugovich also received a scholarship for further education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Moscow, following a year spent at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.<sup>62</sup> He then continued his education in Italy (Rome) and Munich.<sup>63</sup>

56 DAS-MPS 1880, F. V, r. 69.

57 Rajcević, Ugljesa. “Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века,” 97.

58 DAS-MPS 1880, F. V, r. 69.

59 DAS-MPS 1880, F. V, r. 69.

60 DAS-MPS 1880, F. V, r. 69.

61 Savić, Mirjana. “Школовање српских ђака у Русији и Митрополит Михаило,” 267; Marjanović, Liliјana. “Благоје Р. Кулић као питамац Митрополита Михаила приликом школовања српских сликара у Русији и наченик среза Сокобањског,” 290–291.

62 Rajcević, Ugljesa. “Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији,” 273.

63 Jovanović, Miodrag. , *Српска ликовна уметност и Русија крајем XIX и почетком XX века*, “*Saopštenja XV* (1983): 121.

After the first generation of Serbian students to head to Russia — Borisavljevich, Kulich, and Jugovich — other painters followed in their footsteps. Some are known only by name, as no written or material traces of their education or work have survived. Among those who brought a different approach to Serbian religious painting, following contemporary Russian artistic trends absorbed during studies, were Nastas Stefanovich, Milutin Bl. Markovich, Lazar Krdzalich and Rafailo Momchilovich.<sup>64</sup> The above artists were sent for education during and after Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich's return from emigration to Russia (1881–1889),<sup>65</sup> indicating that the Metropolitan strengthened ties with the Russian church and state dignitaries who accepted Serbian artists for education. After their return home, the artists were busily engaged in painting iconostases and icons.

As previously mentioned, Lazar Krdzalich (1854–1926) began his education at the Trinity-Sergius school, from which he transferred in 1880 to the Higher School of Arts and Crafts in Moscow.<sup>66</sup> There is information that he studied painting in Kyiv for a while,<sup>67</sup> and finally completed his studies at the Saint Petersburg Academy (fig 4).<sup>68</sup>

Another artist whose education is known about from surviving archival materials is Milutin Bl. Markovich.<sup>69</sup> He began his education at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in 1889, as mentioned above, and one year later transferred to the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in Moscow, where he graduated in painting in 1895 (fig 5).<sup>70</sup> Metropolitan Mihailo was highly committed to providing him with financial assistance. During and after his return from emigration, the Metropolitan wrote regularly to the chairman of the Moscow Ministry for the Education of Slavs, publicist Dimitri Fyodorovich Samarin. Their correspondence covered various issues, one of which was assistance to Markovich.<sup>71</sup> A letter from Metropolitan Mihailo to Samarin in 1890 requested an exemption from fees at the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in Moscow, arguing that if this could not be granted, financial assistance should be provided through the president of the Slavic Benevolent Society, Prince Meshchersky, so that Markovich did not forfeit the right to his education.<sup>72</sup>

64 Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 159.

65 Bradic, Teodora. "Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне уметности у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898)," 84–96.

66 Savić, Mirjana. "Школовање српских ђака у Русији и Митрополит Михаило," 267.

67 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији," 269.

68 Simić Milovanović, Zora. *Сликаре у српској историји уметности*. Belgrade: Sloboda, 1938, 30.

69 DAS- MPs 1895, F. XLIX, r. 23.

70 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Сликара Милутин Бл. Марковић," *Saopštenja XVII* (1985): 219; Idem, "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији," 266–267.

71 Blazić Pejić, Jovana. "Из историје српско-руских веза: Московско попечитељство за школовање Словена (1889–1892)," *Miscellanea XLI* (2020): 176.

72 Ibid., 185.

Through the efforts of Metropolitan Mihailo's successor, Metropolitan Inokentie, Rafailo Momcilovich also began his education in Russia, at the Stroganov School in Moscow.<sup>73</sup> As with previous students, documentation has survived on him suffering from poor health brought on by the cold climate. It testifies that in 1901 he was sent to Serbia for recuperation.<sup>74</sup>

Based on preserved archival materials, some Serbian students including Kulich, Borisavljevich, and Momcilovich sent works to the Serbian Ministry of Education while studying abroad, as proof of their progress in painting.<sup>75</sup> Although the reports reveal which works were submitted, they have yet to be found or identified. The paintings in question could doubtless shed some light on the educational processes of Serbian painters in Russia.<sup>76</sup>

Upon returning to the Serbia as former state scholarship holders, the abovementioned painters were supposed to repay their dues by working for the state in their field. To date, details of where all of them were employed remain unclear. We do know that one group of scholarship recipients did not contribute to the development of religious painting at all, but instead did administrative work in the civil service, as in the case of Blagoje Kulich, who was the clerk of the court in Knjazevac, Niš, Negotin, and then the head of Sokobanja district.<sup>77</sup>

Some painters worked as drawing teachers in schools. Mihailo Borisavljevich taught drawing and painting in Belgrade, Smederevo, Kragujevac, and Niš until 1914.<sup>78</sup> His work in the field of icon-painting is not known. Still, the fact that Serbian painter Olga Krdzalich studied under Borisavljevich at the Women's High School in Belgrade testifies among other things to his successful pedagogical work.<sup>79</sup> Other drawing and painting professors included Milutin Bl. Markovich at the gymnasium in Niš, and Lazar Krdzalich at schools in Šabac, Valjevo and Parachin.<sup>80</sup> In addition to teaching, these two painters left a significant oeuvre in the form of icons and iconostases for numerous churches in Serbia.<sup>81</sup>

73 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских ђака у Русији," 267; Idem, Рафаило (Георгије) Момчиловић: монах, сликар и мученик (1875–1941). Belgrade: Itaka, 1989: 8–9, 61–63.

74 Ibid., 64–65.

75 DAS- MPs 1880, F. V, r. 69; Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 98.

76 Rajčević, Ugljesa. Рафаило (Георгије) Момчиловић: монах, сликар и мученик (1875–1941), 9; Idem, "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 98.

77 Marjanović, Lilijana. "Благоје Р. Кулић као питомец Митрополита Михаила приликом школовања српских сликара у Русији и наченик среза Сокобањског," 291–292.

78 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Како су се школовали српски уметници у Русији с краја XIX века," 100.

79 Ibid., 28.

80 Rajčević, Ugljesa. "Митрополит Михаило и школовање српских сликара у Русији," 269.

81 See: Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 177–179; Bradic, Teodora.

Zhivko Jugovich, Nastas Stefanovich (fig 6), and Rafailo Momcilovich (fig 7) also embarked on fruitful careers in the field of religious painting after completing their education in Russia and in Western Europe centres,<sup>82</sup> as testified by numerous surviving individual icons and iconostases.

To conclude, archival materials on Serbian student artists in Russia reveal that the primary support for their education came from Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovich, followed by the Ministry of Education, which provided varying levels of financial assistance. Additionally, Serbian students were financed by various institutions in Russia, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Slavic Committees in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The main challenges they faced in Russia included the harsh winters, which many found difficult to endure, and the high cost of living — including expenses for food, accommodation, and clothing — which their scholarships could barely cover. Their education consisted of two phases: initially in monastery icon-painting workshops, which many students reported dissatisfaction with, and subsequently through additional studies at academies in Moscow, Kyiv, and St. Petersburg. In the monastery icon-painting workshops, Serbian painters adopted Orthodox iconography; however, at the academies, they adopted the style and trends in contemporary Russian painting,<sup>83</sup> which from the 1870s onwards focused on reviving medieval Russian art.<sup>84</sup> Drawing on these experiences, the artists developed their own style of religious painting. Although they gained foundational skills in the monastery workshops, they did not adopt the older artistic models prevalent in Russian icon painting. Instead, they concentrated solely on iconographic solutions. The artistic expression they embraced was contemporary Russian academic painting, aligning with the general demands and trends in Serbian religious painting during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Serbian artists

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“Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне умтености у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 102–108; idem, “Иконостас цркве Светих Апостола Петра и Павла у Врчину – рад Лазара и Олге Крцалић.” *Bastina* XXX (2023): 401–415.

82 See: Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 179–180; Bradic, Teodora. “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне умтености у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 109–111; Kasanin, Milan. “О Рафаилу Момчиловићу.” *ZLUMS* 2 (1966): 369–373; Rajčević, Ugljesa. *Рафаило (Георгије) Момчиловић, монах, сликар и мученик (1875–1941)*, 17–28.

83 Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 160.

84 Ibid, 160–177; Maleeva, Ekatarina Nikolaevna, “Религизная тема в Русской художественной культуре XIX века.” PhD diss., Saint Petersburg 2008; Bradic, Teodora, “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне умтености у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 112.

85 In the mid-nineteenth century, Serbian religious painting underwent a transformation that involved abandoning the Zograph model of Orthodox painting and adopting an exclusively contemporary academic style. As a sign of progress and the creation of their own national identity, the Church and the State initiated and supported these reforms, which were legally regulated through institutions. These were the main reasons why Serbian painters educated in Russia embraced modern academic Russian painting. The accepted iconography was appropriate because it was Orthodox, but the style had to be academic to be accepted by the relevant state and church institutions. For more on this process see Kostić, Ana. *Црквена уметност у Кнежевини Србији (1830–1882)*, 27–53, 79–94, 391–472; Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 150–181.

frequently incorporated iconographic templates from their education in Russia into their works, allowing them to be well-received when painting churches in Serbia.<sup>86</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Metropolitan Mihailo and the Serbian clergy deemed the education of Serbian artists in Russia important, as it ensured both dogmatic and iconographic integrity. It aligned with contemporary artistic trends from the East, as opposed to the West, which had influenced the earlier training of Serbian artists.<sup>87</sup>

86 Bradic, Teodora, “Митрополит Михаило Јовановић и трансфер руске сакралне умтености у Кнежевину/Краљевину Србију (1859–1898),” 113.

87 For more see Makuljević, Nenad. *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, 53, 159–181.





Fig. 1. Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanovic (Miloje Jovanović), 1826–1898. (Source: “Босанска вила“, January 15 1897, Sarajevo, No.1/ XII, 1).



Fig. 2. Competitive scholarship announcement. (Source: “Србске новине“, December 20 1869, No.156/ XXXV, 3, [https://nbs.rs/sr\\_RS/o\\_nbs/arhiv-i-biblioteka/arhiv/srpske-novine/](https://nbs.rs/sr_RS/o_nbs/arhiv-i-biblioteka/arhiv/srpske-novine/)).



Fig. 3. St Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts, 1912. (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial\\_Academy\\_of\\_Arts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Academy_of_Arts)).



Fig. 4. Despotic icon of Jesus Christ, 1887, Painter Lazar Krdzalich, Bukovo Monastery. Photo: Nenad Makuljević.



Fig. 5. Iconostasis, Painter Milutin Bl. Markovich, Church in Joshanica. Photo: Ana Kostić.



Fig. 6. The Resurrection of Lazarus, iconostasis, Painter Nastas Stefanovich, Church of the Archangel Gabriel, Veliko Gradiste. Photo: Nenad Makuljević.



Fig. 7. Upper parts of the iconostasis, 1901–1902, Painter Rafailo Momchilovich, Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Velika Krsna. Photo: Irena Ćirović.

# V

**SUPPORTING  
ORTHODOXY IN THE  
BALKANS: RUSSIAN  
DONATIONS TO  
CHURCHES AND  
MONASTERIES IN  
THE BALKANS  
DURING THE  
19TH CENTURY**

## Russian Aid to Churches and Monasteries in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second Half of the 19th century

Marija Lakić

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to present the mechanisms and specific forms of Russian assistance to the Orthodox population in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the period after 1850. Although a significant number of donated items related to churches and monasteries cannot be found on-site today, this does not diminish the historical value and importance of the support Russia provided to the Orthodox population during very challenging times. The pinnacle and most brilliant representation of this process remains the iconostasis crafted by Russian masters for the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo. The study also touches on the travels of the monk Prokopije Čokorilo from Mostar and the contributions he collected for Herzegovinian churches during his journey, as well as the journey made by Archimandrite Sava Kosanović of Sarajevo, who travelled to Russia to gather donations for the newly constructed cathedral in his city.

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**Keywords:** Russia, Alexander Hilferding, Orthodox Christian population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1856–1877, Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee, the iconostasis in the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo, Prokopije Čokorilo, Sava Kosanović.

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**I**Russian aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the latter half of the 19th century was conducted systematically and organized through various institutional and non-institutional organizations and associations. Although the timeframe of these events spans just over twenty years (1856–1877), this relatively brief period is rich with significant political and social developments.

To understand the drivers behind these events, we should first examine the impact of the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire and the provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856. The Tanzimat reforms aimed to Europeanize the Ottoman Empire and bring it closer to the standards of the time. This transformation encompassed various aspects, including political, economic, and military administration,

as well as personal rights. The Tanzimat reforms resulted in an improvement in the status of non-Muslim communities, allowing for greater expression of different religions in the public sphere of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the primary issues addressed by the Great Powers during the Paris Peace Treaty was the fate of the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In 1856, Article 9 of this treaty came into effect, affirming the right of foreign countries to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. A significant consequence of this provision was that Russia lost its status as the sole protector of the Christian population within the empire, a role it had held since 1774. Shortly thereafter, all the major European powers established consulates in Sarajevo and Mostar. The two powers most invested in resolving the “Bosnian Question,” each in their own interests and from their own perspectives, were Russia and the Habsburg Monarchy. As a result, both countries exerted considerable cultural influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina during this period.<sup>1</sup>

The origins of Russian diplomatic relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina date back to 1856, when the first Russian consulate was established in the westernmost Bosnian *vilayet*.<sup>2</sup> The same year also marked the conclusion of the Crimean War and the issuance of the Edict of Hatihumayun in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The primary roles of the consulate in Bosnia and Herzegovina included overseeing the implementation of the provisions in the Hatihumayun Edict and protecting the interests of the Orthodox population in the region.<sup>4</sup>

The first Russian consul in Sarajevo was twenty-five-year-old Alexander Hilferding. Approximately six months elapsed between the decision to establish a Russian consulate in Sarajevo and his arrival. In October 1856, it was decided to open consulates in both Sarajevo and Shkodra, and the newly appointed consul arrived in Sarajevo in late spring of 1857.<sup>5</sup> Hilferding can be viewed both as a political ideologist and a scientist. His contributions to linguistics include writing a pan-Slavic grammar, and he is remembered as an advocate of a unified Slavic language and alphabet. Additionally, in the realm of travel literature, his work *Travels in Herzegovina, Bosnia, and Old Serbia* provides significant

1 Mel'chakova Valer'yevna, Kseniia. *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA v obshchestvenno-politicheskoj zhizni Rossii v 1856–1875 gg.* Moscow: Indrik, 2019, 11–18; Makuljević, Nenad. “Tanzimat i vizuelno kreiranje javnog identiteta u Bosni i Hercegovini.” In *Indentitet Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju*. Edited by Husnija Kamberović, Vol 2. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011, 213–226; Blažić Pejić, J. “Moskovski slovenski komitet i srpsko pitanje.” PhD diss., Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2021, 35.

2 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 55–65.

3 Ibid., 9.

4 Tepić, Ibrahim. *Bosna i Hercegovina u ruskim izvorima 1856–1878*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1988. 21; Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 57.

5 Tepić, *Bosna i Hercegovina*, 21.

insights into the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>6</sup> His political stance was clearly Slavophile, and he is recognized as one of the six main ideologists of Pan-Slavism, alongside Khomjakov, Pogodin, Aksakov, Danilevsky, and Lamansky.<sup>7</sup> Hilferding's university education, his travels, and his role as consul in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as his membership of the Moscow Slavic Committee, his work in the Asian Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and his position as president of the Slavic Committee in St. Petersburg all contributed to his being recognized as one of the earliest and most significant figures in the Slavophile movement.<sup>8</sup>

Through its consulates in Slavic countries under Ottoman rule, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia sought to establish itself as the sole true patron of the Slavic peoples in the Balkans, assisting them in their efforts to liberate themselves from Turkish control.<sup>9</sup> However, Russia's diplomatic mission extended beyond politics; it also placed significant emphasis on cultural and religious support. This was evident in efforts to send books, provide educational assistance, and facilitate the schooling of Serbian young men and women in Russia. Additionally, churches and monasteries were supplied with financial aid, liturgical books, implements, as well as liturgical cloths and vestments.

The primary beneficiaries of all forms of Russian aid were the Orthodox population, who found themselves in a very difficult situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were no schools for them in the settlements, and many churches had been destroyed. The responsibility for these churches fell to the Greek clergy, who often prioritized personal gain over the needs of their congregation.<sup>10</sup> Before the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman government had allowed the coexistence of various religious groups, but imposed strict limitations on their visibility in public spaces. The construction and renovation of places of worship were closely monitored.<sup>11</sup> Although the reforms aimed to improve the situation, their implementation was slow and faced significant challenges. Hilferding estimated the number of Orthodox Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina at between four and five hundred thousand. However, he mentioned that there were barely fifty churches, describing half of them as wooden sheds, which, by Russian standards, were not even fit to be used as huts.<sup>12</sup>

6 Ekmečić, Milorad. "Predgovor" In Giljferding, Aleksandar. *Putovanje po Hercegovini, Bosni i Staroj Srbiji*. Translated by Branko Čulić. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1972, 5–18.

7 Ibid., 11.

8 Tepić, *Bosna i Hercegovina*, 35–36.

9 Ekmečić, "Predgovor," 11.

10 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 11.

11 Makuljević, "Tanzimat i vizuelno kreiranje."

12 Giljferding, *Putovanje po Hercegovini*, 335.

In his travelogue, Hilferding characterizes the situation regarding the senior hierarchy, and the Greek bishops in particular, as a *great evil*.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, he provides a series of descriptions that portray the lower clergy as extremely uneducated, although he highlights some individuals as particularly deserving of opportunities to open schools and promote enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> While in Sarajevo, he noted that the following individuals were among the most loyal to Russia: Mostar Archimandrite Joanikije Pamučina, Prokopije Čokorilo, Nićifor Dučić, Serafim Perović, the Sjenica priest Ilija, the Vlasenica priest Zaharija, and the Prijepolje priest Josif.<sup>15</sup> In their ranks, one cannot overlook the contribution made by Archimandrite Sava Kosanović of Sarajevo, later Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosnia.

Hilferding expresses admiration in several places for how the people in this region managed to preserve their faith despite numerous hardships. He witnessed his first church service on the soil of Herzegovina at Duži Monastery. There he felt the spirit of an Orthodox community strongly rooted in unity and love, prompting him to ask himself: "How did this people, in a remote and unfamiliar region of Herzegovina, remain steadfast in the Orthodox Church amidst ignorance, persecution, and temptation?"<sup>16</sup> Despite challenging conditions, the small number of clergy and churches, and infrequent services,<sup>17</sup> faith remained closely intertwined with nationality. Although support from the church organization was limited, the commitment to faith was deeply rooted in personal knowledge and feelings.<sup>18</sup>

## II

Several charitable organizations in Russia provided assistance of various forms to the Orthodox population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In her book, Ksenia Melchakova highlights the St. Petersburg Charity Committee of Countess Bludova, the Holy Synod, the Moscow Slavic Charity Committee — which later established a branch in St. Petersburg — as well as aid channelled through the priest Mikhail Fyodorovich Raevsky, via Vienna. Archives contain numerous records detailing the methods and types of assistance that reached Bosnia and Herzegovina through these organizations. However, it

13 Ibid., 365.

14 Ibid., 368–369.

15 Tepić, *Bosna i Hercegovina*, 29.

16 Giljferding, *Putovanje po Hercegovini*, 32.

17 For example, in the important medieval monastery of Dobrun, services were held only three times a year, when a large number of pilgrims gathered at this place. Nevertheless, after such information, Giljferding concludes: "Thank God that services can be heard even three times a year! How many districts in Bosnia there are with thousands of Orthodox Christians, where a peasant lives his entire life and never sees a church." Giljferding, *Putovanje po Hercegovini*, 109.

18 Ibid., 361.

is difficult to identify many of these examples in actuality, as they were likely destroyed over time due to neglect and, ultimately, war. We will present examples of aid shipments that are known of, mostly thanks to the work of Ksenia Melchakova.<sup>19</sup>

The year 1856 marks another significant event in the connections between Russia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The circle of Countess Antonina Bludova was then granted the status of an officially recognized organization known as the *St. Petersburg Charity Committee*.<sup>20</sup> Through the mediation of Hilferding and Protopresbyter Raevsky, the philanthropists Bludova, Vasilchikova, and Protasova were well-informed about the conditions and situation of the Orthodox population in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Old Serbia.<sup>21</sup> From documents, we learn that Countess Bludova's organization provided assistance to the church community in Visoko, near Sarajevo, and also sent funds to aid the restoration of Mileševa Monastery.<sup>22</sup>

Duži Monastery was one of the main centers for uprisings against the Turks, and so came under frequent attack. As a result, none of the old items donated in the 18th and 19th centuries have survived. Princess Tatyana Vasilchikova, assistant to Countess Bludova in organizing the work of the St. Petersburg Charity Committee, was a long-time patron of Duži; records show that 1, 500 roubles of aid were sent to the monastery.<sup>23</sup> The abbot, Nićifor Dučić, appealed to her for help in 1861. Through the consulate in Dubrovnik (Ragusa), a bell was donated from Russia as part of restoration works. Additionally, through Hilferding, Abbot Dučić requested funds for an iconostasis. In 1870, he expressed his gratitude to Princess Tatyana for the charitable contributions she had made.<sup>24</sup>

There are numerous surviving records of the assistance provided by the St. Petersburg Committee to various regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is also worth mentioning that in addition to providing educational literature, Princess Protasova sent financial aid, church items, and priestly vestments for the church in Modriča (Posavina, Bosnia and Herzegovina).<sup>25</sup> Significant funds were also sent for the education of students; beyond Hilferding's mediation, Metropolitan Mihailo was the most dedicated to this cause.<sup>26</sup>

19 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 129–170.

20 Ibid., 129–132.

21 Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 61.

22 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 130.

23 Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 62.

24 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 129–130.

25 Ibid., 130–131.

26 Ibid., 131; Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 61–62.

The diligent efforts of these philanthropists to assist Orthodox Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are illustrated by the case of Countess Bludova, who in April 1860 requested documents from Raievsky testifying to the difficult situation of the people. She intended to translate them and, using her influence in imperial family circles, present them to Alexander II and Gorchakov.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the significant efforts of the St. Petersburg Charitable Society, this organization was criticized by Hilferding. He pointed out their lack of organization and the frequent dispatch of aid to the same locations.<sup>28</sup> The society's official activities ceased in the mid-1860s, although Countess Bludova continued to take an interest in maintaining Russian-Serbian relations, primarily through Metropolitan Mihailo.<sup>29</sup>

Hilferding acted as one of the main intermediaries for obtaining aid from the Holy Synod for the population, churches, monasteries, and schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He wrote a detailed document that he intended to present to the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, Alexander Petrovich Tolstoy. The document contains reflections on how to assist the Orthodox churches in Herzegovina. As specific needs for the churches, Hilferding emphasizes liturgical books, church utensils, and priestly garments, and suggests the consulates in Belgrade, Shkodra, and Vienna as the best conduits for delivering the aid. His entire plan was thoroughly developed, including a cost estimate, all aimed at making the assistance as effective as possible.<sup>30</sup> Through the Holy Synod, the aid mostly came in the form of books. The Synod responded to Hilferding's request for the dispatch of books to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In October 1857, the Synod decided to send twenty sets of liturgical books, with special bindings made for the Gospels.<sup>31</sup> A list of titles intended for churches, monasteries, and schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina is preserved in the Russian State Historical Archive.<sup>32</sup> In 1858, a shipment of fifteen sets of liturgical books was sent to Vienna to Protopresbyter Raievsky, so that he could distribute them according to his discretion. It is also known that a consignment of books was sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1866.<sup>33</sup> In addition to sending the necessary items for the clergy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Synod's blessing and permission for travel in Russia to collect donations for the churches and fund the construction of new ones were of crucial importance. On the other hand, the Synod did not always respond to requests for assistance for the Orthodox in

27 Ibid., 62.

28 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 131–132.

29 Blažić Pejić, Jovana and Ivanova Vladimirovna, Jekaterina. "Pisma mitropolita Mihaila grofici A. D. Bludovoj: prilog proučavanju rusko-srpskih odnosa (1871–1874)." *Mešovita grada (Miscellanea)* 35 (2014): 121–138.; Idem. „Prepiska mitropolita Mihaila I grofice A. D. Bludove o dogašajima u Sribiji 1868." *Mešovita grada (Miscellanea)* 34 (2013): 193–218.

30 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 133.

31 Ibid., 139.

32 Ibid., 139–140.

33 Ibid., 140.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is recorded that in 1866, the Synod did not respond and or assist with the construction of churches in Brod and Višegrad.<sup>34</sup>

In February 1858, the Moscow Slavic Charitable Committee was established as a social organization aimed at assisting the South Slavic peoples — primarily within the Ottoman Empire, and later within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy — in church, cultural-educational, and economic matters, under the auspices of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>35</sup> The main sources of income for this charitable organization were members of the imperial family, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Additionally, regular members of the society made annual contributions, donations were collected from private individuals, and funds were raised through the organization of musical, literary, and theatrical evenings.<sup>36</sup>

Examples of the charitable work by the Moscow Slavic Committee for Bosnia and Herzegovina are numerous. From 1868 to 1874, fifty-five requests for assistance and mediation were sent from the region to the committee. Chief among them were the following: a request for help for the Church of St. George in the Sanjak of Travnik; reports from Russian consuls about the needs of churches and schools; a request from Vasa Pelagić for support for the seminary in Banja Luka; requests for scholarships for studies in Russia; documents for organizing Sava Kosanović's trip to Russia; confirmations of assistance received in Goražde; and requests for help with the construction of the Cathedral Church in Mostar, along with confirmations from Russian consuls regarding the receipt of financial aid.<sup>37</sup> The Moscow Slavic Committee annual report for 1871 shows that assistance was provided to Papraća Monastery,<sup>38</sup> which was well connected to Russia. The inventory book from 1859 records that a small bell was brought from there by foundation's restorer and reviver, Hajji Zaharia, who allegedly transported it hidden in a barrel.<sup>39</sup> From 1868 to 1875, the expense reports indicate that Moscow's attention was redirected towards Bulgaria.<sup>40</sup>

The Petersburg branch of the Slavic Charitable Committee began its work in 1869,<sup>41</sup> with support

34 Ibid.

35 Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 56.

36 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 162.

37 Ibid., 155.

38 Ibid., 156.

39 Ševo, Ljiljana. "Pravoslavni manastiri Sjeverne Bosne – obnove u 19. vijeku." In *Kulturno-istorijski kompleks Detlak*. Edited by Ranko Kuzmanović. Banja Luka: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Republike Srpske: Republički zavod za zaštitu kulturno-istorijskog i prirodnog nasljeđa RS, 2015, 218.

40 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 156.

41 Ibid.

for schools as its primary focus, though not much is known about its activities in aiding Bosnia and Herzegovina. As for church assistance, one important piece of information concerns a donation of 250 roubles by P. P. Demidov in 1871, towards the purchase of items for the newly built church in Sarajevo.<sup>42</sup>

In the process of sending aid to churches and monasteries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an important role was played by Mikhail Fyodorovich Raevsky, a protopresbyter and head of the church at the Russian Embassy in Vienna, where he served for about four decades. He could be considered the link between all the aforementioned aid systems, important figures, and contacts. Most of the funds sent from Russia passed through him.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of donations from Russia went to Sarajevo and its surrounding areas, Posavina, the area around Tuzla, Herzegovina, and Sjenica, on the border with Principality of Serbia. There is even mention of significant aid sent to the village of Lopiže near Sjenica, with Empress Maria Alexandrovna donating 150 roubles in silver to the local Orthodox community.<sup>44</sup> Lopiže boasted a school, and was even described by Hilferding in his travelogue, along with Ilija, a resourceful priest from Sjenica.<sup>45</sup> The churches of Saints Peter and Paul in Sjenica and St. George the Great Martyr in Lopiže have two very similar, mass-produced iconostases in the Russian style. These are from a later period, sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the icons were probably imported through one of the firms that dealt with such matters.<sup>46</sup>

Although the abovementioned charitable societies greatly helped the Orthodox population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was still some disorganization in their work regarding the sending and distribution of donations. From the letters of Russian consuls, it is clear that this lack of coordination was a frequent issue, and it often happened that items were lost, mixed up or sent to the wrong addresses. Raievsky himself often distributed the gifts through merchants without informing the consulates, and it even happened that during the consuls' absence, their secretaries frequently made mistakes by not keeping proper records of what had been sent and where.<sup>47</sup>

42 Ibid., 161.

43 About Raievsky: Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 165, 169; Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 45–47.

44 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 144.

45 Ćirović, Irena. "Religija i vizuelna kultura u vreme osmanskih reformi XIX veka: hram Svetog Georgija u Lopižama." In *Mileševski zapisi 10*. Edited by Siniša Mišić. Prijepolje: Muzej u Prijepolju, 2014, 81–82.

46 Ibid., 87–88.

47 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 164.

### III

The most notable example of Russian aid to churches in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the interior decoration of the Cathedral Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sarajevo (fig. 1).<sup>48</sup> Following the changes brought about by the Tanzimat reforms, the construction of this monumental church began in the city in the early 1860s. The Russians did not participate in the actual construction. Financial support and permission to build the church was provided by Sultan Abdulaziz. Additional financial assistance came from Prince Mihailo of Serbia and merchants from Sarajevo, Belgrade, Vienna, Dubrovnik, and Trieste. The largest contributions came from the church community, specifically the Old Church in Sarajevo, as well as from residents of the city and surrounding villages. The prominent builder Andreja Damjanov and his team led the construction effort. Although the work was completed by 1868, it took additional time to furnish the interior of the church, and the consecration ceremony took place on St. Elijah's day in 1872.<sup>49</sup>

The interior features a large-scale iconostasis entirely crafted by Russian artisans (fig. 2). The precise details of how the need for this iconostasis in the newly built church became known in Russia have not yet been fully established, nor is much known of the route and organization through which the iconostasis was transported to Sarajevo. However, surviving letters from the time do provide valuable assistance in understanding the process. In the spring of 1871, Ignatii (Malyshev)<sup>50</sup>, *hegumen* (abbot) at the Coastal Monastery of Saint Sergius near St. Petersburg, sent five chests containing 73 icons, a high altar throne cross and liturgical banners to the Russian consulate in Sarajevo. The accompanying letter exudes a spirit of brotherly love and care, detailing the items sent from the monastery to Sarajevo.<sup>51</sup> Notably, Abbot Ignatii expresses Slavophile ideas and indicates that he is only interested in events affecting his fellow Slavs, showing little concern for broader European affairs. Additionally, we learn that the imperial family contributed to the creation of the iconostasis, with the emperor's children donating some icons. Abbot Ignatii also expresses his satisfaction with the opportunity to create an iconostasis

48 Lakić, Marija, "Russian and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture in the 19th Century: Russian Donations and the Furnishing of the Orthodox Church in Sarajevo" In *The Transfer of Icons and Religious Objects. From the Russian Empire to Serbian Communities*. Edited by Nenad Makuljević. Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy, Center for Visual Culture of the Balkans; Rethymno: Institute for Mediterranean Studies: Foundation of Research and Technology Hellas, 2025, 168–199.

49 Kosanović, Sava. "Nova srpsko-pravoslavna crkva u Sarajevu." *Bosanska vila* god. 3. br. 17 (1888): 270–271.

50 For Ignatii Malyshev: *Ty moi Bog, ia Tvoi rab... Zhizneopisanie nastoiatelia Troitse-Sergievoi pustyni Arkhimandrita Ignatiiia (Malysheva)*. Saint Petersburg 2007; Lakić, "Russia and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture" p. 171–173.

51 The letter was published in: Kotlyarov, Vladimir. "Troitse-Sergieva pustyn' Petrogradskoy yeparkhii. (Istoricheskiy ocherk)." In *Mitropolit Sankt-Peterburgskiy i Ladozhskiy Vladimir: Zhizn' i trudy (k 70-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya)*. Saint Petersburg 1999, 289.

in the monastery without the need of additional funds. At that time, the consul in Sarajevo was Alexei Kudryavtsev. He responded with great gratitude, explaining the positive feelings that this gift inspired among the Orthodox believers in Sarajevo. Furthermore, he promised to advocate for the recognition of the abbot's efforts in this matter.<sup>52</sup>

Another of Kudryavtsev's surviving letters was sent to Peter Nikolaevich Stremoukhov, then director of the Asian Department.<sup>53</sup> From this, we learn more about the process of making and gilding the iconostasis structure carried out by the masters from St. Petersburg working in Sarajevo. We also find mention of these masters in other sources, in Hadži Makso Despić<sup>54</sup>, Sava Kosanović<sup>55</sup>, and in the work of Ksenia Melchakova, who drew on documents from the Russian Foreign Policy Archives<sup>56</sup>. The same masters were further engaged in making and gilding the pulpit and bishop's throne. From this letter, we also learn that Kudryavtsev fulfilled the promise he had made to Abbot Ignatii and mediated for him to be awarded an honorary order. Most of the aid to the Orthodox in the Balkans went through the Asian Department, and a letter from Consul Kudryavtsev to Stremoukhov indicates that this time too, the Asian Department probably had a hand in financing and organizing furnishings for the interior of the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo.

The cathedral iconostasis in Sarajevo is both monumental and luxurious, featuring a multitude of saints and important events from church history. It is designed with despotic icons, along with the obligatory imperial doors depicting the Annunciation (fig. 3). Above this row are images representing the feasts of Christ and the Virgin Mary, along with the four holy fathers. The central focus of the iconostasis is a large depiction of the Resurrection of Christ, flanked on either side by the significant feasts of the Transfiguration and the Ascension of Christ. Further to the north and south above the representations of major holidays, there are standing figures of apostles and prophets, surmounted by medallions inside which the figures of various saints are painted. The highest painted part of the iconostasis consists of seven medallions of holy archangels, which are in the upper section framing the scene of the Resurrection. The entire iconostasis ends with a large cross resting on a spherical base.<sup>57</sup> The master in charge of most of the work on the icons was monastery icon painter Aleksandar

52 Published in *ibid.*, 289–291.

53 Published in *ibid.*, 291–293.

54 Despić, Hadži Makso. *Zapisi starog Sarajlije*. Edited by Dragana Tomašević. Sarajevo 2019, 58–59.

55 Kosanović, "Nova srpsko-pravoslavna crkva," 270–271.

56 Mel'chakova Valer'yevna, Kseniia. "“Voin” na dukhovnom poprishche. Sarajevskii arhimandrit Savva Kosanovich i ego poezdka v Rossiiu v 1872–1874 gg." In *Slaviane i Rossiia: problemy voyny i mira na Balkakh: XVIII–XXI vv.* Edited by Danchenko, Svetlana Ivanovna. Moscow: Institut slaviianovedeniia RAN, 2017, 75.

57 More on the iconostasis in Lakić, "Russia and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture" p. 177–191.

Kolchin, certainly assisted by other painters. Given his education in painting, everything was arranged, supervised and assisted by Abbot Ignatii.<sup>58</sup> Among the saintly figures, the Serbian saints Simeon the Myrrh-bearer, Arsenije, and Saint Sava (fig. 4), should be highlighted, while the Russian saints on the iconostasis include figures of Saint Alexander Nevsky, Prince Vladimir, Saint Alexios Metropolitan of Moscow, Saint Demetrius of Rostov, and Saint Mitrophan Bishop of Voronezh, as well as the patron saint of the monastery, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, who, like Simeon the Myrrh-bearer, has a place on the wall next to the iconostasis.

Chief among the interior furnishings of the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo is the iconostasis, alongside which are the pulpit and thrones, as well as necessary liturgical objects, books, priestly vestments, and processional items, only a small number of which have survived. These objects established and highlighted the reputation and name of Russia as a strong patron of Orthodoxy in the Balkans. From the letters of Alexei Kudryavtsev to Abbot Ignatii and Stremoukhov, we learn that the gifts for the Orthodox faithful in Sarajevo caused tears of joy and a sense of *piety and religious reflection*.<sup>59</sup> We will see that Russia also made a significant contribution to the further furnishing of the Cathedral Church, even after its consecration.

#### IV

Significant aid for churches and monasteries from Russia also arrived via the monks who went on fundraising missions to collect the necessary funds, liturgical items, books, vestments, and everything required for the smooth functioning of the church and worship services. In this capacity, Herzegovinian monks Prokopije Čokorilo and Serafim Perović<sup>60</sup> travelled to Russia, as did Archimandrite Sava Kosanović. After Sarajevo, a Russian consulate was also opened in Mostar in the summer of 1858.<sup>61</sup> Among its main activities was providing assistance to Herzegovinian churches and monasteries. Less

58 Mel'chakova, "Voin" na dukhovnom poprishche. Sarajevskii arhimandrit Savva Kosanovich i ego poezdka v Rossiю v 1872–1874 gg. 75; Lakić, "Russia and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture" p. 171–173

59 For the letters see Kotlyarov, "Troitse-Sergieva pustyn'," 289–293.

60 The journey of Serafim Perović will not be discussed in the paper, as the main goal of his journey was to raise funds for the establishment of a seminary at Žitomisljić Monastery, and his journey can also be characterized as unsuccessful due to a series of frauds committed by him. What is interesting to highlight in relation to visual culture is that Serafim Perović was awarded a golden pectoral cross in Russia by Tsar Alexander II: Mel'chakova Valer'yevna, Kseniia. "V gostiakh u «moskovov». Slaviane iz Bosnii i Gercegoviny v Moskve v 1850–1870-e gody." In *Slaviane i Rossiia: Slaviane v Moskve*. Edited by Danchenko, Svetlana Ivanovna. Moscow: Institut slaviiianovedeniia RAN, 2018, 110–113.

61 Radulović, Jovan. *Slavno doba Mostara*. Mostar: SPKUD Gusle – SPCO Mostar, 2010, 78.

than a year after the consulate's establishment, a third shipment of generous gifts (books, vestments, and liturgical items) had already arrived from Russia.<sup>62</sup>

The most renowned figure in the ecclesiastical history of Herzegovina is Prokopije Čokorilo, a monk from Mostar.<sup>63</sup> With the help of Alexander Hilferding, his dream "of setting foot on free Christian soil, offering his prayers in the sanctity of Russian monasteries", and seeking alms from kind people for the impoverished Herzegovinian churches and monasteries, was realized in 1858.<sup>64</sup> Above all, Čokorilo sought to raise funds for the construction of churches in areas where Catholic propaganda was gaining strength. Vladimir Čorović has published a valuable letter from the archives of Mostar Municipality, revealing plans to file a complaint against the Mostar consul Bezobrazov for squandering part of the money that had arrived from Russia.<sup>65</sup> The letter vividly depicts the state of affairs in Herzegovina at the time. The municipality complains that Orthodox Christians in four kadiluks in northwestern Herzegovina (Mostar, Konjic, Duvno, and Ljubuški) were interspersed among *Turks* and *Latins* (local Muslims and Catholics), and that there was no church anywhere except for the small one in Mostar.<sup>66</sup> The author further explains that a monk named Prokopije Čokorilo had gone to Russia to gather alms from devout benefactors to establish churches in Konjic, Bijelo Polje, Duvno, Ljubuški, and Stara Gabela, as well as the grand Cathedral Church in Mostar, in order to "preserve these poor sheep so they might not, before long, be devoured by wolves".<sup>67</sup> During his journey through Russia (1858–1860), Čokorilo achieved significant results.<sup>68</sup> He collected 4,000 ducats, and shipments of donations from Russia continued to arrive in Mostar for a considerable time. The primary organizer of these gifts was the aforementioned Countess Bludova.<sup>69</sup> Among notable individual contributions were donations from Russian Emperor Alexander II and Empress Maria. The empress sent an archbishop's vestment for the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Mostar and donated 1,200 roubles for the girls' school in Mostar. In gratitude to this Russian benefactor, the chapel in the girls' school was dedicated to Mary Magdalene.<sup>70</sup> Among the

62 Ibid., 79.

63 On Prokopije Čokorilo see Maksimović, Vojislav. "Tri monaha ljetopisca" In *P. Čokorilo, J. Pamučina, S. Skenderova Ljetopisi*. Edited by Maksimović, Vojislav and Šekara, Luka. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1976, 8–16; Radulović, *Slavno doba Mostara*, 121–125.

64 Giljferding, *Putovanje po Hercegovini*, 57; Mel'chakova, *V gostiakh u «moskovov». Slaviane iz Bosnii i Gercegoviny v Moskve v 1850–1870-e gody*, 108.

65 A letter in Čorović, Vladimir. *Srpski manastiri u Hercegovini*. Beograd 1999, 285–289.

66 Ibid., 286.

67 Ibid.

68 On his journey see Radulović, *Slavno doba Mostara*, 190–192; Mel'chakova, *V gostiakh u «moskovov». Slaviane iz Bosnii i Gercegoviny v Moskve v 1850–1870-e gody*, 106–110; Idem., *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA v obshchestvenno-političkoj zhizni Rossii v 1856–1875 gg.*, 207–216.

69 Ibid., 213.

70 Radulović, *Slavno doba Mostara*, 190; Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 213.

donors, mention is also made of Tatyana Vasilychikova, who sent contributions, and Mikhail, Gavril, and Alexander Sergeevich, who sent icons, books, and vestments. Additionally, Peter Kurtukov donated 500 roubles in silver for the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Gabela.<sup>71</sup>

Russia invested a significant amount of money in the construction of the monumental Cathedral Church in Mostar, which is very similar to Sarajevo Cathedral, with the same master builder, Andreja Damjanov, overseeing both projects (fig. 5).<sup>72</sup> The extent to which Russia was involved in the interior furnishing of the church is not known. From old photographs of the interior and the iconostasis, it is noticeable that both the iconostasis structure and the artistic style in which the icons were painted are very similar to those in Sarajevo, and the church furnishings including the thrones and pulpit are almost identical. Vice-Consul Ilarionov is known to have written to the Slavic Committee asking for a painter to decorate the iconostasis. However, Russia did not respond positively at first. Although this request was definitely repeated, the outcome remains unclear.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Ilarionov suggested securing funds so that the masters from Russia who had worked on the iconostasis in Sarajevo could do the same in Mostar.<sup>74</sup> Again, we have no way of knowing whether this request was fulfilled, but similarities between the carpentry work in Sarajevo and Mostar are evident (fig. 6). In the accounts of Hadži Maksim Despić, when describing events related to the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo, there is a claim that the Mostar iconostasis was also made at Trinity-Sergius Monastery in St. Petersburg.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, it is generally attributed to Marko Gregović, a painter from Petrovac.<sup>76</sup> The Church of the Holy Trinity in Mostar was completely destroyed during the war in 1992, so any subsequent conclusions about the iconostasis can only be reached through written sources.

After the consecration of the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo, the church community was heavily in debt. It was crucial to collect more funds for repayments, as well as for the necessary liturgical items, books, and vestments. After several unsuccessful applications to seek alms across Russia, Archimandrite Sava Kosanović finally set off in October 1872.<sup>77</sup> He took with him the most significant relic from the Old

71 Radulović, *Slavno doba Mostara*, 190.

72 On the architecture of the church see Kadrijević, Aleksandar. "Saborna crkva Svete Trojice u Mostaru." In *Srbi u Mostaru: rasprave i ogledi*. Edited by Pištalo, Borivoje. Beograd 2001, 471–481.

73 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 215–216; Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 356.

74 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 216.

75 Despić, Hadži Makso, *Zapisi starog Sarajlije*, 59.

76 Lucija Đurašković, "Marko K. Gregović 150 godina od rođenja (1867–2017)" Budva: JU muzeji i galerije Budve 2018, 6. [https://muzejiigalerijebd.me/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/150\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_186-1-1.pdf](https://muzejiigalerijebd.me/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/150_____186-1-1.pdf)

77 On the journey of Sava Kosanović to Russia see Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 353–383; Mel'chakova "Voin" na duhovnom poprishche. Sarajevskii arhimandrit Savva Kosanovich i ego poezdka v Rossii v 1872–1874 gg." 72–84; Idem. "Сава Косановић В Русији" *Srpski istorijski časopis* br. 1 (2018): 154–170; Idem. "V gostiakh u «moskovov». Slaviane iz Bosnii i Gercegoviny v Moskve v 1850–1870-e gody." 113–115;

Church in Sarajevo, the hand of Saint Tekla, and was accompanied by the prominent merchant Hadži Makso Despić.<sup>78</sup> Sava was greatly assisted in Russia by the Moscow Slavic Committee, and especially by Nil Aleksandrovich Popov, who was in constant correspondence with Sava and worked hard to ensure that as many donations as possible were collected for Sarajevo.<sup>79</sup>

From various sources, we learn about the contributions that arrived at the Cathedral Church as a result of the journey. Kosanović himself testifies that he collected a beautiful collection of icons, liturgical vestments, vessels and over 2, 000 cekins.<sup>80</sup> Thanks to the relics of Saint Tekla, he was very well received in some parts of Russia and generously gifted, and sources also testify to some miracles that occurred.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the nuns from Saratov sent a *riza*<sup>82</sup> decorated with pearls and precious stones to the church in gratitude for the healing of the abbess, after a prayer service was held over the relics of Saint Tekla.<sup>83</sup> Kosanović was also well received in Kazan. There, he collected around 500 roubles in silver, many church utensils, a mitre, an archimandrite's cross, and a mantle.<sup>84</sup> Hadži Makso Despić mentions an embroidered epitaphios (shroud), worth 12, 000 roubles, which was donated by Countess Vorontsova for use during the Vesper service of the Epitaphios on Great Friday.<sup>85</sup> Nil Popov gave Kosanović two embroidered epitaphia for the churches in Sarajevo and Vareš,<sup>86</sup> and Bishop Leonid gave him twenty copies of the Psalter.<sup>87</sup>

At the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo, a chalice made in Russia is still in use today (fig. 7). Based on the craftsmanship of this item and the inscriptions, it is assumed to be a donation received by Sava Kosanović during his travels. It is silver, with four repoussé medallions on the cup depicting Christ, Saint John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and the Crucifixion. Above

Idem. *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni Rossii v 1856–1875 gg.* 221–238; Lakić, "Russia and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture" p. 193–96.

78 Čajkanović, R. J. "Kratki životopis svete prvomučenice I ravnoapostolne Tekle." *Dabro-bosanski istočnik* god. 3, br. 21–22, Sarajevo (1889), 345–347; on the difficulties they encountered during the journey see Despić, Hadži Makso, *Zapisi starog Sarajlije*, 61–62.

79 Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 60; Kosanović, "Nova srpsko-pravoslavna crkva," 171; Mel'chakova "Voin" na duhovnom poprishche. Sarajevskii arhimandrit Savva Kosanovich i ego poezdka v Rossii v 1872–1874 gg." 77.

80 Kosanović, "Nova srpsko-pravoslavna crkva," 171.

81 Mel'chakova, *BOSNIA i HERTSEGOVINA*, 232.

82 Probably a metal cover for an icon rather than a priestly vestment.

83 Mel'chakova "Voin" na duhovnom poprishche. Sarajevskii arhimandrit Savva Kosanovich i ego poezdka v Rossii v 1872–1874 gg." 79.

84 Ibid., 80.

85 Despić, Hadži Makso, *Zapisi starog Sarajlije*, 59.

86 Blažić Pejić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet," 372.

87 Ibid., 380.

them, at the top of the cup, is an inscription of the prayer said during communion: ТЪЛЮ ХРИСТОВО ПРИМИТЕ ИСТОЧНИКА БЕЗСМЕРТНАГО ВКУСИТЕ. A further inscription at the edge of the base reads: “С. П. Бурзь За упокой Маріи 26. Янв 1873. г.” (*S. P. Burg For the repose of Mary’s soul 26 January 1873*). Sava Kosanović was in Russia at the time the chalice was donated, which further confirms that it arrived through the archimandrite.<sup>88</sup> A very similar chalice made in a Moscow workshop two years later, with the same images of saints in the medallions and the same prayer inscribed on the top of the cup, is now kept in the treasury of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Vranje.<sup>89</sup>

The assistance provided by Russia to the Orthodox churches in Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals a well-organized system aimed at portraying Russia as a major patron of Orthodoxy in the Balkans. The most significant contributors to this system included the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the St. Petersburg Charity Society, and the Moscow Slavic Committee. Key figures in the effort were Countess Bludova and her associates, as well as Protopresbyter Rayevsky, through whom much of the aid was delivered. The Russian consuls in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not least Alexander Hilferding, played an active role in these endeavors. Clergy, primarily monks from Bosnia and Herzegovina, also contributed by reaching out for donations which helped finance the construction and equipping of numerous churches. However, due to wartime destruction and other forms of devastation, it is often challenging to locate many of the items referenced in historical sources. One notable exception is the iconostasis from the Cathedral Church in Sarajevo, which has been preserved and exemplifies the craftsmanship of Russian artisans. This piece illustrates the complex processes involved in the construction and furnishing of churches, all of which were made possible through the support and patronage of Russia.



88 Lakić, “Russia and Serbian Sacral Visual Culture” p. 196.

89 Dautović, Vuk. “Riznica crkve Svete Trojice u Vranju” In *Saborni hram Svete Trojice u Vranju (1858–2008)*. Edited by Nenad Makuljević. Vranje: Fond “Sveti Prohor Pčinjski” Pravoslavne Eparhije vranjske 2008, 165–166.

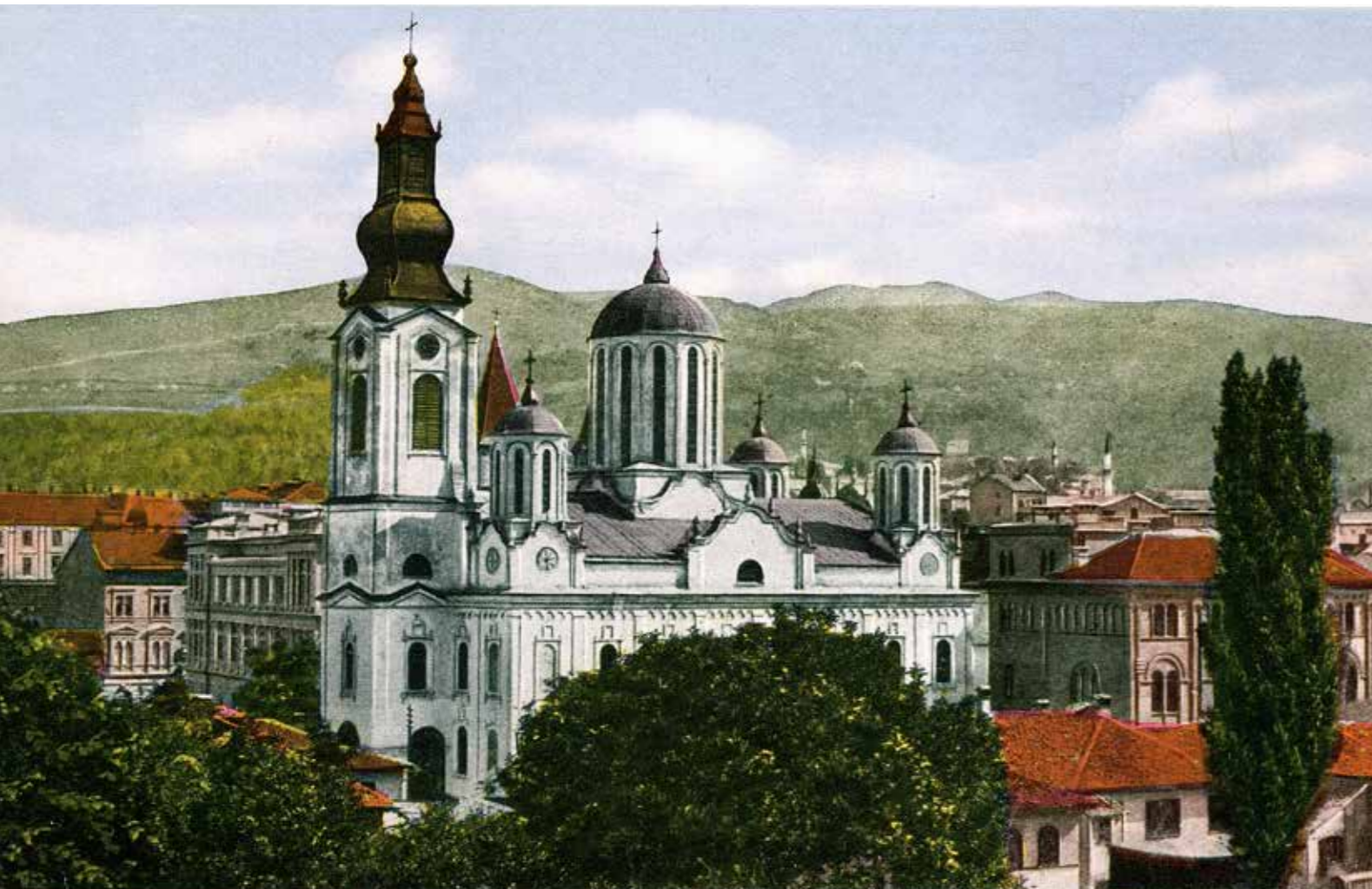


Fig. 1. The Cathedral Church, Sarajevo. (Source: Historical Museum of Serbia, 141–45).

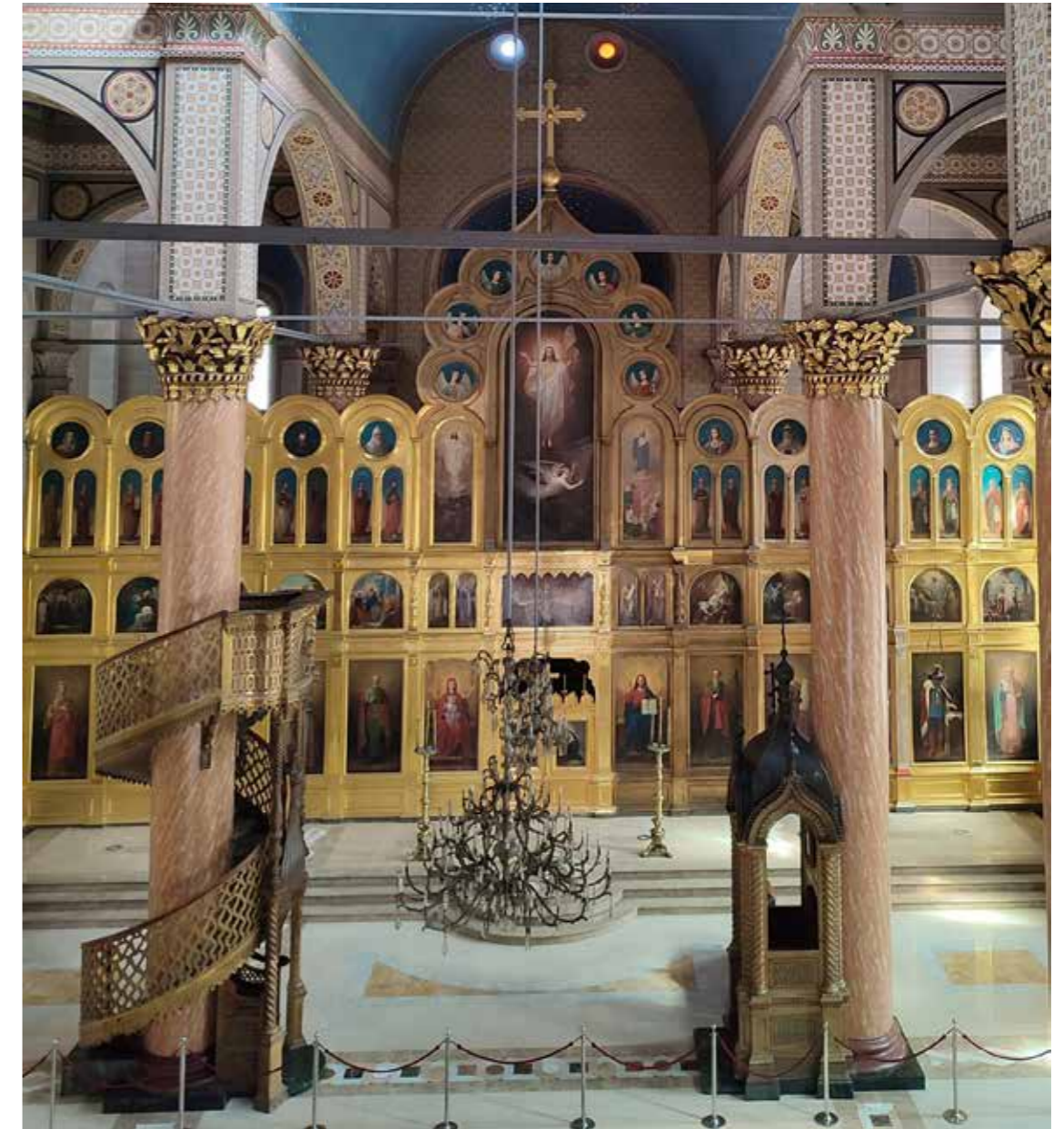


Fig. 2. Iconostasis, thrones, and pulpit, interior of the Cathedral Church, Sarajevo. Photo: Marija Lakić.



Fig. 3. Despotic icons of the Virgin Mary, Christ, and the Annunciation on the Royal Doors.  
Photo: Marija Lakić.



Fig. 4. St. Sava of Serbia, detail. Photo: Marija Lakić.



Fig. 5. The Cathedral Church, Mostar. (Source: Cathedral Church in Mostar Archive).



Fig. 6. Interior of the Cathedral Church, Mostar. (Source: Michel, Robert. *Mostar*, Prague: Carl Bellmann, 1909).



Fig. 7. Chalice, Cathedral Church, Sarajevo. Photo: Marija Lakić

## The Taxidiotes from the Balkans in Russia in 1830–1914: Orthodoxy and Politics

Lora Gerd

### Abstract

Support from Russia became an important source for financing Orthodox monasteries and churches in the Ottoman Empire from the late sixteenth century onwards. Limited and regulated in the eighteenth century, this assistance began increasing after the 1830s, and became an instrument of Russian political influence in the Middle East and the Balkans. Alms collectors (*taxidiotes*) from Greek and Slavonic lands regularly came to Russia, and the money and church objects they received (icons, utensils, and garments, as well as books) served as a sufficient material base for many years. The present article, based mainly on archive sources, focuses on analysis of the ways and means of seeking Russian material aid, and the motives for issuing alms collection permits. The author aims to answer the following questions: what was the procedure for issuing permits and how did alms collecting work? When were permits granted and when were petitioners refused? What were the preferences of the Russian Foreign Ministry in issuing permits? How did alms collecting contribute to Russian policy in the Balkans during the period between the treaty of Adrianople and the beginning of the First World War?

**Keywords:** Russian foreign policy, church policy, Balkans, Ottoman Empire, Eastern Question, Orthodox church, Panslavism

The Russian Tsars provided systematic support for the Orthodox monasteries and churches in the Ottoman Empire throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Numerous representatives from different Greek and Slavonic monasteries, bishops and even patriarchs would arrive in Moscow and receive generous donations. They were encouraged to bring relics and icons, which often remained in Russia to serve as an ideological buttress for the authority of the Russian Tsar, as the heir of the Byzantine Emperors. The reception of these monks in Moscow followed the protocol applying to diplomatic missions from Western Europe. The petitioners normally stayed in the capital, either in the Iveron Monastery of St Nicholas or at the dependency of Chilandar Monastery, and with a few exceptions had contacts only with a narrow circle within the Russian elite. The Tsars would issue documents to some monasteries guaranteeing annual support, and their representatives would be invited to Moscow every

five or seven years to receive the money.<sup>1</sup> These missions differed radically from the post-Byzantine tradition of *taxidiotes*, monks who travelled through the Balkans collecting alms.<sup>2</sup>

Russian foreign policy changed after the reforms of Peter I: the Tsar's attention was mainly focused on Western Europe, and systematic contacts with the Orthodox world of the Ottoman Empire declined. In the eighteenth century, the traditional channels of material support for the monasteries and churches of the Ottoman Empire were revised. From 1735 onwards, aid was regulated by the "Palestinian states", a list of church institutions and monasteries which received a fixed annual donation.<sup>3</sup> This way of supporting the Orthodox institutions in the Ottoman Empire replaced the donations by Russian Tsars in the seventeenth century. Following the turbulence of the Russo-Ottoman wars, the regular sending of money recommenced, via banking orders handled by the Russian embassy in Constantinople.<sup>4</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, after a series of wars in the Balkans and the Near East, Russia entered the struggle among the Great Powers known as the Eastern Question.<sup>5</sup> In the new international situation, it was clear that the old methods of uncontrolled aid dispatches would not meet the objectives of Russian policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The money from the "Palestinian states", though regularly paid out, was rather modest. In 1819 Tsar Alexander I proposed increases, but the idea was rejected in

- 1 Nikolai Kapterev. *Характер отношений России к Православному Востоку в XVI и XVII столетиях*, Sergiev Posad: M.S. Elov editions, 1914 [Reprint: The Hague/Paris, 1968]; Vera Tchentsova. *икона иверской богородицы (очерки истории отношений греческой церкви с Россией в середине XVII века по документам ргада)*, Moscow: Indrik, 2010; Nadezhda Chesnokova. *христианский восток и Россия. политическое и культурное взаимодействие в середине XVII века*, Moscow: Indrik, 2011; Nikolaos Pissis. *Russland in den politischen Vorstellungen der griechischen Kulturwelt, 1645–1725*, Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2020.
- 2 Kriton Chrysochoidis. «Άθως και η Ρωσία (15ος–18ος αιώνας). Ίδεολογήματα και πραγματικότητα. Μία προσέγγιση.» In *Ρωσία και Μεσόγειος. Πρακτικά Α΄ διεθνούς συνέδριου (Αθήνα, 19–22 Μαΐου 2005)*, edited by Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, Vol. A, part E, 267–282. On the *taxidiotes* in the Balkans see: Ivan Radev. *Таксидиотството и таксидиоти в българските земи през XVIII–XIX век*, Sofia: BAN, 2009; E. Aggelomati-Tsougkaraki. "Το φαινόμενο της ζητείας κατά τη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο." *Ionios Logos* 1 (2007): 247–293; Kriton Chrysochoides. «Ο ανέκδοτος αγωνιστής «κώδιξ παραδόσεων των ταξιδιωτών» της μονής Σταυρονικήτα (εισαγωγικά σχόλια)», *Αρετή την Καλλίστην. Σύμμεικτα προς τιμήν Καλλιόπης (Κέλλυς) Α. Μπουρδάρη*. Athens and Thessaloniki: Sakkoulas, 2021: 2009–2117.
- 3 The text of the "Palestinian states" exists in several archive copies. See: N. Chesnokova. "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам в контексте конфессионально-политических связей России и Православного Востока в XVIII в." *Kapterevskie Chteniia* 17 (2019): 201–202.
- 4 *Oukaz* (decree) of Tsar Paul I, May 4, 1798. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, henceforth RGIA) fund 796, op. 8, d. 165: 13–14.
- 5 M.S. Anderson. *The Eastern Question, 1770–1923. A Study in International Relations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966; Michael Laskaris. *Το Ανατολικό Ζήτημα, 1800–1923*, Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1978; Benedict H. Sumner. *Tsardom and Imperialism in the Far East and Middle East, 1880–1914*. London: Archon Books, 1968; Barbara Jelavich. *St Petersburg and Moscow: Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy 1814–1974*, Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1973; Lucien Frary and Mara Kozelsky (eds.). *Russian–Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

order to avoid complications with the Ottoman authorities. The Russian government then returned to proven traditional methods, based on the foundation of dependencies and enabling itinerant monks to solicit donations in the empire.<sup>6</sup> The present article aims to uncover the motives and mechanisms behind Russian government permits issued to alms collectors from the Balkans, as well as the geography of the taxidiotes' travels and the methods they employed between the late 1830s and 1914.

The first delegate from the Balkans to arrive in Russia in the late 1830s was a Bosnian priest named Pavle Tvrtkovich. On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1839, Minister of Foreign Affairs Karl Nesselrode reported to the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod Count Nikolai Protasov that the honoured clerics and elders of Bosnia had sent a petition in the name of the Emperor and of the Synod about delegating the priest Tvrtkovich to Moscow and Kyiv to purchase church books and utensils for their churches.<sup>7</sup> The permit was issued in October the same year, and in March 1840 a project for large-scale support of the Orthodox Bosnian people was composed in the Synod and submitted for approval to Emperor Nicolas I. Apart from books and utensils, a sum of 1000 roubles was assigned for the education of young Bosnians in Russian theological seminaries. On his arrival in Russia, Tvrtkovich submitted another detailed petition to the Tsar and the Synod concerning the needs of the Bosnian parishes (a letter from September 14, 1841).<sup>8</sup> After a stay of more than one year, Tvrtkovich returned to Serbia, having received 800 roubles from the Synod for the journey home. His mission had been more than successful: by early 1842, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow reported to Ober-Procurator Protasov that Chudov Monastery in Moscow, where the church items for Bosnia had been accumulating, did not have enough space, and proposed taking in further donations elsewhere in the city, at Zlatoustov Monastery.<sup>9</sup> The campaign to collect church garments, utensils and books continued until the end of the 1840s. The archives of the Synod contain long lists of these items, which were mainly sent via the Russian resident in Belgrade. The nature of Tvrtkovich's mission was very much like that of the Orthodox monks and bishops who arrived in Moscow in the seventeenth century. On his arrival in

6 During the nineteenth century, along with the already existing Monastery of St. Nicholas Iveron [“Nikolo-Perervinsky” monastery] in Moscow, a number of new dependencies were founded in Moscow: of the Patriarchates of Jerusalem (1817), Antioch (1849), Alexandria (1855) and Constantinople (1882). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Russian Mount Athos monasteries were allowed to open their dependencies: St. Panteleimon Monastery in Moscow and St. Petersburg (1879) and Odessa (1876), St. Elias and St. Andrew sketes in Odessa. Apart from the new ones, some old dependencies and lands of Mt. Athos and Sinai monasteries (the so called “inclined properties”) continued their existence after the Russian annexation of Georgia (1801) and Bessarabia (1812). Their owners (the monasteries of Vatopedi, Zographou and Iveron) administrated the estates and received the incomes until 1873, when the dependencies were confiscated by the state. From then onwards the owners received 2/5 of the income, and administration was carried out by the Russian authorities.

7 RGIA, fund 797, 2 otd. 2 stol, op. 9, d. 25645, f. 1. The original petition (June 14, 1839): *ibidem*, f. 5–6.

8 A copy from the decision of the Holy Synod, October 15/16, 1841. *Ibid.*, f. 66–76v.

9 *Ibid.*, f. 99.

Russia he stayed at Chudov Monastery, and addressed his letters to the high clergy and the Synod. In its turn, the Synod asked local metropolitans, bishops and the abbots at the biggest monasteries to donate garments and utensils from their storages. The books came directly from the Synodical printing works, and the money assigned for the education of Bosnian young men came from the state treasury by Tsar's decree.

In the 1840s, bishops delegated by the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria arrived in Moscow, installed themselves in monasteries and spent many years collecting donations for their churches. During their stay in the imperial capital they managed to gather sizeable sums of money (for example, the Patriarchate of Alexandria collected 49, 000 roubles over 10 years). Their missions ended in the foundation of dependencies in Moscow, which should have provided a stable income in the years to come.<sup>10</sup>

### **Taxidiotes in Russia in the nineteenth century**

Along with the above means of support for the Orthodox church in the Balkans and the Middle East, from the mid-1840s onwards the Russian government began issuing permits for *zeteia* (alms collecting) to monks who were to travel all over Russia with venerated icons and relics from their monasteries, saying prayers in churches and private houses.

The protocol for collecting aid was strictly regulated by the imperial bureaucracy. The procedure was as follows: the monastery had to submit a petition to the Holy Synod detailing its needs. The application was first sent to the Russian embassy in Constantinople, and could be supported with earlier documents in favour of the monastery issued by the Russian Tsars in the seventeenth century. The ambassador then asked for additional information from the local consul, and in case of approval he sent the petition with his own summary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Synod. Once archival research into the monastery had been completed, a draft decision on the permit was presented to the Emperor for signing. The necessary conditions were that the monastery had not sent taxidiotes for a long time, its income was low, and genuine needs were confirmed. Additional evidence was also taken into consideration, such as letters of recommendation from the Patriarch of Constantinople, Russian noblemen and other important persons. Political factors were considered as well, normally reported by diplomats in the

10 O.E. Petrunina, L.A. Gerd, K.A. Vach (eds.). *Александрийский Патриархат и Россия в XIX веке. Исследования и документы*. Moscow: Indrik, 2020; L.A. Gerd, O.E. Petrunina (eds.). *Антиохийский Патриархат и Россия в XVIII–начале XX века. Исследования и документы*. Moscow: Indrik, 2023.

Ottoman Empire and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Political motives played an increasingly important role in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the context of the worsening Eastern Question and national confrontation in the Balkans. Issuing a decision could take considerable time, from several months to one or two years. Permits were normally granted for one year, and could subsequently be extended for two or even three years.

The taxidiotes collected passports for travel to Russia at the embassy in Constantinople, and on their arrival in St Petersburg were received at the Synod, where they were handed a corded book for inscribing all kinds of donations. Advertisements were published in the newspapers. The monks (usually three — one archimandrite or abbot and two assistants) lived in rented flats for some weeks in St Petersburg and Moscow, before setting out on their travels in the provinces of Central Russia. In every town they had to visit the local bishop, present him the documents and receive permission to lead prayers in the central cathedral or another church. They were often invited to pray at the houses of merchants and the nobility. The geography of their travels usually followed the Volga towns, especially including Nizhnii Novgorod during the fair, which was attended by many pious rich merchants. The South Russian provinces were also visited, especially where Greeks lived (Taganrog, Odessa, etc.). After the first year of *zeteia* the taxidiotes returned to St Petersburg, where they would submit the money and church objects collected to the Synod. Following inspection of the donations and the book, if no abuse was found the monks could return home, and the aid was sent to the monastery via the Russian embassy. Taxidiotes usually asked for an extension to the *zeteia*, undergoing the same procedure at the end of the second year. The sums collected — the officially reported figure normally varied from 10 to 15 thousand roubles per year, with roughly the same amount being sent directly by banks or agents — were large enough to improve the monastery's financial situation. The monks could pay off debts, build a new church, restore the old buildings and construct new ones. The extra money was deposited in a bank, either in Russia or in their own country.

Among the first who were allowed to gather donations all over Russia were the monks of Mount Athos. In the nineteenth century, veneration of Athos among the Russians increased. Given that it was on the itinerary of Russian pilgrims to the Holy Land, they again became an important link between their homeland and Athos. The nineteenth century was a period of mythologisation of Athos in Russia: peasants, merchants and pious noblemen alike were ready to donate for the monasteries of “the Mother of God's Garden on Earth”. With the increasing number of Russian monks on Athos it became part of the messianic vision of the Russian presence in the Orthodox East.

In 1846, Esfigmenou Monastery on Athos received a permit to collect alms. Abbot Agathangelos and two monks brought a part of the True Cross with them, limiting their travels to the provinces of St

Petersburg and Moscow.<sup>11</sup> In 1849 they presented the Synod with the 10,000 roubles they had gathered and were allowed another year of travel. Apart from the provinces surrounding the two capitals, they asked to visit the fair at Nizhnii Novgorod, and on their return to Athos to pass through Kyiv, Kishinev and Odessa.

The work of the Russian bureaucracy can be well traced in the case of the Athonite monastery of Xenophontos. In 1851 the abbot and the brotherhood applied to the Holy Synod to send taxidiotes to Russia, basing their request on the need to complete the newly constructed Church of St George. On receiving their application, the ambassador consulted the Russian consul in Thessaloniki, and learned that the church was almost finished, as only the wall paintings remained. This information was presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Synod. Lev Seniavin, director of the ministry's Asian Department pointed out that firstly, there were already many foreign taxidiotes in Russia at the time, and secondly, that the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Metropolitan of Trebizond were awaiting their turn to send monks to collect alms.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the Xenophontians' appeal was left unanswered.

In early 1853 the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs again received a letter from the Patriarch of Constantinople and the brotherhood of Xenophontou seeking permission to gather alms, on the assumption that the previous letter had gone astray. This time their request was supported by Ambassador Alexander Ozerov and the consul to Thessaloniki Angelos Mystoxidis,<sup>13</sup> but the Crimean War blocked any progress on the matter. Meanwhile, in 1859 a certain monk Gavriil (probably a Russian kelliote from Xenophontou) learnt that the Xenophontians were seeking a permit, and attempted to obtain it by himself on the monastery's behalf. In a letter addressed to Empress Maria Alexandrovna (a well-known benefactor of the churches of the East), he represented himself as a delegate of the monastery and described the awful state of the catholicon church. In characteristic fashion he added that the monastic brotherhood consisted of “Russians, Bulgarians, Moldavians and Greeks”.<sup>14</sup> An investigation was undertaken by the Russian embassy, which determined that the Xenophontians did not know of any monk Gavriil. In fact, the father-guardians (*epitropoi*) of the monastery were afraid this abuse could have negative consequences. A permit was eventually issued by the Synod in 1860, and over the following years (1861–1863), the taxidiotes were reported to have collected 18,745 roubles and numerous church objects.<sup>15</sup>

11 RGIA, fund 797, op. 16, delo 38133.

12 Lev Seniavin to N. A. Protasov, November 3, 1851. Ibid., fund 797, op. 21, delo 46773, f. 8–9.

13 Lev Seniavin to Nikolai Protasov, January 27, 1853. RGIA, fund 797, op. 23, 2 otd. 2 stol, delo 393, f. 1–1v.

14 Ibid., fund 797, op. 23 (2 otd. 2 stol), delo 393, f. 10–10v.

15 Decision of the Holy Synod, January 21/February 4, 1863. Ibid., f. 60–62v.

Details about the zeteia of Athos monks in the 1860s emerge from the itinerary by Meletios, an alms collector from Konstamonitou Monastery, who accompanied Abbot Symeon.<sup>16</sup> The taxidiotes arrived in Odessa in May 1862, bringing relics of saints and part of the True Cross. Having received the cord book for inscribing donations and letters of introduction, they travelled via Central Russia to Southern Siberia and arrived in the town of Kiahta, at the Chinese border. At some point Meletios stayed in Irkutsk, while Abbot Symeon returned to St Petersburg and then headed to Kyiv. The monks asked for permits and letters not only from local bishops, but also from the civil authorities. Meletios studied Russian and offered prayers in Slavonic, which added to the success of the collecting work. During their travels the alms collectors visited monasteries and received information about donors they could turn to. Moreover, they were accompanied by pious women and maidens who helped them establish contacts with the locals. Meletios returned to Russia later on, this time as a private individual, and spent some time selling crosses and small icons in the churches of Russia, using the links he had established. Thanks to these travels in Russia a new catholicon church was built at the monastery, and Meletios was able to found a school for girls in his native Veria.

As a whole, the Russian government tried to maintain balance in issuing permits. In 1865 Esfigmenou Monastery applied for a new licence to send taxidiotes. Inquiries in the synodical archive revealed that in 1860 the same monastery had already received permission to send Archimandrite Agathangelos to Russia along with two other monks. At the same time, information was received that considerable aid had been gathered during the previous alms collecting mission to the country in 1846 - enough not only to construct a new building, but also to deposit an amount in the bank. As a result, after a presentation to the Tsar, the permit issued to Archimandrite Agathangelos was withdrawn.<sup>17</sup>

For reasons of sound donation management, the Russian government preferred to issue permissions to coenobitic monasteries with a well-organized monastic life rather than to idiorrhythmic ones where donations could be misused by the elder members of the brotherhood. In the same year as Esfigmenou, Dionysiou Monastery asked to send taxidiotes. In its decision dated May 31/June 20 1865, the Synod pointed out that the monastery was among the few coenobitic ones on Mount Athos, and deserved support from Russia - as soon as a free place became available for *zeteia*, a permit would be issued.<sup>18</sup>

16 Meletios published notes on his travels to *Russia: Περιήγησις Μελετίου Κωνσταμονίτου εις Ρωσίαν από έτους 1862-1869*. Αθήνα, 1882. See: Tasos Kostopoulos. "Icon Goldsmiths, Pious Widows, and Holy Maidens. Adventure Narratives of Greek Monks Travelling in Late Imperial Russia", *Museikon*. Alba Iulia. 6 (2022): 169-180.

17 RGIA, fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 54.

18 Ibid., fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 50.

On the other hand, even serious reasons such as destructive fires could not guarantee the success of *zeteia* applications in cases of abuse or unrest. Thus, in 1866 both Chilandar and Iveron monasteries were refused. The Ober-Procurator reported to the Foreign Ministry that the request from Iveron had been followed by another letter, signed by Archimandrite Policarpus and sixty other members of the brotherhood, complaining that only a small circle around the abbot would share out money and incomes amongst themselves, while the rest of the monks were living in abject poverty. The Ober-Procurator concluded that the idiorrhythmic regulations did not benefit the monastery, and despite the fire in December 1865, no permission to gather alms in Russia could be allowed.<sup>19</sup> Attempts to communicate with the Patriarch about introducing the coenobitic order were left unanswered.

One outstanding example of a long-term stay by taxidiotes in Russia were the travels of the Simonopetra monks Abbot Neofytos and Deacon Ioannikios between 1888 and 1892. Simonopetra Monastery had good relations with the Russian monastery on Athos, and supported the Russians during the critical events of 1873. In return, Abbot Makarios of St Panteleimon promised to intercede for the issue of permit to collect alms in Russia. St Panteleimon monks recommended Simonopetra several times (in 1875, 1876, 1877 and 1881), but only achieved their aim in 1888.<sup>20</sup> The Simonopetra monks arrived in Russia with relics of St Mary Magdalene, St Panteleimon and St Anna. Thanks to the journals of Hierodeacon Ioannikios, who accompanied Abbot Neofytos on his journey, we know the details of this *zeteia*. In June 1891 the taxidiotes were ready to return to their monastery when they received terrible news of a catastrophic fire the previous month, which had destroyed the whole monastery. As an exception, they were then allowed to continue their *zeteia* for a third year.<sup>21</sup>

## Issuing permits as a political instrument. *Taxidiotes* from the Slavonic lands

As early as the 1840s, the Russian government paid special attention to Slavonic monasteries. This tendency increased after the Crimean war, in the context of Panslavist policies during the reign of Alexander II.<sup>22</sup> In the 1860s and 1870s money and church objects were donated by members of the

19 RGIA, fund 797, op. 36 (2 otd.), delo 36.

20 The itinerary of the Simonopetra monks is preserved in two manuscripts at Simonopetra monastery: Cod. 13/02/02/1-2 and Codex 45. An edited Russian translation has also been published: Lora A. Gerd and O.E. Petrunina (eds.). *Дневник путешествия по России греческих монахов Афонского монастыря Симонопетра игумена Неофита и иеродиакона Иоанникия*. Moscow: Indrik, 2014; see also: T. Kostopoulos, "Icon Goldsmiths, Pious Widows: 169-173.

21 Special collections were held all over Russia in the wake of earthquakes in Thessaly in 1859, Zakynthos in January 1893, and Chalki in 1894.

22 Antonia Dialla. *Η Ρωσία απέναντι στα Βαλκάνια. Ιδεολογία και πολιτική στο δεύτερο μισό του 19<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα*.

imperial family, rich noblemen, monasteries and various private individuals, while aid collection was organized by Slavonic committees all over Russia.<sup>23</sup>

In 1848, Rila Monastery in Bulgaria asked the Synod for permission to collect alms in the wake of a destructive fire. Archimandrite Stefan Kovachevich was allowed to visit Russia for one year, followed by one monk.<sup>24</sup> In his letter of recommendation, Ambassador Titov stressed that “it would be very useful to satisfy the request of the aforementioned monastery, which is the foremost in Bulgaria and has a strong influence over the local population. Archimandrite Kovachevich’s journey to Russia offers the opportunity to receive detailed information from him about the state of the churches in Bulgaria, and to confirm the good advice of the government towards the Bulgarian clergy”.<sup>25</sup> As a highly esteemed guest, Kovachevich enjoyed a special pension during his stay in Russia, and the monastery’s permit to conduct *zeteia* was extended twice. In 1851 Rila Monastery received a visit from Nikolai Mukhin, Russian consul in Adrianople, who wrote a detailed report stressing the importance of the monastery in supporting Bulgarian education and self-awareness in the country. Alms collecting in Russia was one of the main means of supporting the abbey.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the money collected by *zeteia*, the Synod satisfied Stefan Kovachevich’s request for a long list of Slavonic liturgical books and manuals for the school at Rila, as well as a large number of church objects.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, the Russian government regarded this monastery as the main centre of Orthodoxy in the Bulgarian lands. Kovachevich’s next step was to ask for the establishment of a Bulgarian dependence in Kyiv. Metropolitan Filaret of Kyiv had no objections, but in 1851 the Synod ultimately refused the Bulgarians.<sup>28</sup> Instead, another permit to send taxidiotes was issued to Rila Monastery.

In 1858 a permit to gather aid in Russia was granted to the Slavonic Serbian Chilandar Monastery on Athos, after Abbot Sofronios was recommended by two famous Russian travellers and researchers, Andrei Muraviev and Petr Sevastianov. Sophronios also received a special recommendation from Filaret Drozdov, the Metropolitan of Moscow, the most influential person in the Russian church at that time.

Athens: Alexandria, 2009; Eadem. “Russian Nationalism and the Eastern Question: the Case of Panslavism (1856–1878).” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* Vol. 24/25. (2008/2009): 73–91; Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric. *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans, 1830–1880: Images of the Self and Others*. New York: Boulder, 1994.

23 See for ex.: Отчет Княгини Т. В. Васильчиковой и графини Н.Д. Орловой о получении сумм на вспомоществование нуждающимся православным на Востоке. St Petersburg: General Staff Typography, 1859; S.A. Nikitin. *Славянские комитеты в России в 1858–1876 годах*, Moscow: Nauka, 1960.

24 Holy Synod decision of February 13/March 18, 1848. RGIA, fund 797, op. 18, delo 41798.

25 Ibid., f. 7–8.

26 Ibid., f. 44–53v.

27 RGIA, fund 797, op. 19, delo 48369.

28 Holy Synod decision of November 28/December 31, 1851. RGIA, fund 797, op. 20, delo 45038, ff. 11–12.

The abbot, Filaret wrote, “was witness to the Bulgarian Question in Constantinople at Easter and has closely followed the Kukush Question. He is a man of strong critical thought and strong hope”.<sup>29</sup> The Chilandar monks arrived in Russia with the icon of the Three Handed Mother of God and the True Cross; advertisements were published in the newspapers. After one year their permit was prolonged. Archimandrite Sophronios died in Russia in 1863, and his personal belongings were sent to the monastery.

Supporting the application by the Russian Athos St Panteleimon Monastery for permission to send taxidiotes in 1856, Ambassador Alexei Lobanov–Rostovskii stressed that the monastery received thousands of Bulgarians pilgrims annually, and that the teachings of the monks “could become a useful measure for spiritual influence upon the Bulgarian people”.<sup>30</sup>

Kalofer Nunnery in Bulgaria, consecrated to the Nativity of Virgin Mary, received permissions for *zeteia* many times. Alms collectors were sent in 1876, and stayed in Russia until 1881, including the entire duration of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. The money gathered was used to restore the monastery following its destruction during the war, and the church was supplied with Russian icons, garments and utensils.<sup>31</sup>

### Taxidiotes from Greek monasteries

Greek monasteries in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire also received permission to collect alms. Priority was given to those of them intending to start a school for the local children. In 1848, Abbot Parthenios of the Holy Archangels Monastery in Caesarea, Cappadocia, was granted such a permit.<sup>32</sup> He brought a large number of little pearl crosses with him to Russia for distribution among the donors. Contacts with influential members of the nobility resulted in a donation from Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, famous for her sympathies for the Eastern churches, who gifted a long list of liturgical objects. During the first year of the *zeteia* Parthenios collected over 6, 000 silver roubles, and asked Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich for a special donation for the school. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

29 RGIA, fund 797, op. 28 (2 otd. 2 stol), delo 371, f. 15–15v. This refers to the events of Easter 1860 in the Bulgarian church in Constantinople, when Bishop Ilarion omitted the name of the Greek Patriarch during the liturgy, thus challenging his authority. This act was the first official starting point for Bulgarian church and political independence. The second event mentioned is the short-lived Union of Kukush, which threatened Orthodoxy among the Bulgarians of Macedonia. For more bibliography see: Vera Boneva. *Българското църковнонационално движение (1856–1870)*. Veliko Tŭrnovo: Za bukвите, 2010.

30 I. Tolstoi to A. Tolstoi, September 2, 1859. RGIA, fund 797, op. 26 (2 otd. 2 stol), delo 446, f. 17–18.

31 RGIA, fund 797, op. 46, (II otd. 3 stol), delo 28.

32 RGIA, fund 797, op. 18, delo 41808.

Synod were rather restrained on this matter, and in several communications proposed that the donation be commensurate with the school's needs, or rather that its initial success be verified before any money was sent.<sup>33</sup> Supported by high ranking noblemen, Parthenios managed to receive certain sums from the Grand Dukes and from Emperor Nicolas I. Over two years, the *zeteia* raised 13, 375 silver roubles. This success encouraged the lucky abbot so much that he sought permission to install alms boxes in every railway station in Russia, and was planning to address letters to all Russian noblewomen named Elena (patroness of the monastery), as well as requesting an allowance to gather donations at all Russian military schools. The Synod found this too much, and refused the abbot's application on all points, with one exception: that 3000 roubles be deposited in a Russian bank in support of the school.<sup>34</sup> Warning notices were also sent to the directors of the institutions that the abbot had in mind.

Russian pilgrims mainly served as alms gathering assistants for the Holy Sites in Palestine and Athos, though also in other places. In 1849 the Synod received a petition from Kikkos Monastery to send taxidiotes from Cyprus. The letter was delivered by a Russian pilgrim named Varvara Kataeva. The view taken by Constantine Basili, Russian consul in Beirut, was somewhat negative, as he reported abuses in the distribution of income at the monastery.<sup>35</sup> In his opinion, competition from Latin propaganda and poor administration in the Orthodox Church could be improved by establishing a school for the Greek clergy. After further hesitation, the Synod issued Archbishop Cyril a permit to send two monks to Russia for *zeteia* over two years.<sup>36</sup>

On her return from pilgrimage in 1850, Ekaterina Abramova asked the Synod for permission to gather donations for St Lazarus Church in Cyprus. After receiving information from Ambassador Titov on the Monastery of St Lazarus and the needs of the school in the village of Scala, as well as on the petitioner herself, the Synod issued a one year permit.<sup>37</sup>

The political motivation behind permits is well seen in the issue of documents to monasteries in the Eastern Pontus, an area closely monitored by the Russian government after the Crimean war and especially after 1878, when the Russian Empire concurred waste territories from Eastern Turkey. The abbots at Soumela, Vazelon and St George Peristera monasteries received such permissions many times, without any serious delay.<sup>38</sup>

33 Holy Synod decision of March 28/ April 30, 1850, *ibid.*, f. 43–49v; L. G. Seniavin to A. I. Karasevskii, August 4, 1850. *Ibid.*, f. 53–54.

34 Holy Synod decision of June 6/30, 1851. *Ibid.*, f. 74–83.

35 L.G. Seniavin to N.A. Protasov, March 22, 1851. FRIA, fund 797, op. 20, delo 45049, f. 5–6.

36 Holy Synod decision of September 2/30, 1853. *Ibid.*, f. 27–28.

37 RGIA, f. 797, op. 20, delo 44999.

38 See: Lora A. Gerd. "Греческие монастыри Понта и Россия в Новое время." *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo*

## Supporting Russian *taxidiotes* from Mount Athos: pro et contra

The three Russian monasteries on Athos (St Panteleimon, and the two sketes of St Andreas and St Elias) enjoyed a privileged position in receiving financing and conducting collections. On the one hand, the Russian monks on Athos were formally regarded as foreigners and had to apply for permits via the embassy in Constantinople. On the other, the government easily granted them permission for *zeteia*, as useful actors of the Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Support for Russian monasticism on Athos gradually increased after the 1860s, when St Panteleimon monastery was officially recognized as Russian (1873). According to the treaty of Berlin (1878, Article 72), foreign monks on Athos enjoyed the protection of their governments. At the same time, according to a decree of 1816, those who took their monastic vows abroad were not regarded as monks on their return to Russia. This contradiction existed up until the First World War, and gave diplomats some leeway in their relationship with the numerous Russian monks on Athos, while also offering considerable opportunities to the monks themselves.

In 1841 a certain Irinei Parfenov from Athos arrived in Russia, bearing no letters of recommendation from diplomats or the Patriarch. In 1840 he had taken monastic vows at St Panteleimon Monastery, and was then sent by Abbot Gerasimos to collect alms in Russia. Without presenting himself to the Synod he set out on his *zeteia*, recording the donations in a book given to him by the abbot. Over one year he gathered about 600 roubles and some church objects, but was eventually detained by the police and brought before the Synod for explanations. At the session of the Synod, it was stressed that Russians who had taken their monastic vows abroad should seek permission from the embassy for *zeteia*. Nevertheless, rather than being punished, Parfenov was allowed to gather donations for a further year.<sup>39</sup> Encouraged, he asked the Synod to allow taxidiotes from St Panteleimon monastery to visit Russia every three years. Although this request was refused, it is striking that the Synod took a much more favourable position towards Parfenov than to other monks from abroad. In 1851, the police arrested a certain monk Irinei from St Panteleimon on Athos staying at the dependency of Konevets Monastery in St Petersburg, again gathering donations without official permission – it was probably the same Irinei Parfenov.<sup>40</sup>

The Skete of St Elias, which also enjoyed attention from the Russian Government,<sup>41</sup> sent alms collectors to Russia many times. In 1847, monk Ignatios addressed a petition to Ober-Procurator Nikolai Protasov

*Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, Istorii* 66 (2021), 1: 98–113.

39 RGIA, fund 797, op. 11, delo 28812.

40 RGIA, fund 797, op. 24 (2 otd. 2 stol), delo 428.

41 On the history of the skete see Nicholas Fenell, P. Troitskii M. Talalai. *Ильинский Скит на Афоне*, Moscow: Indrik, 2011.

to gather alms in aid of constructing the church of St Mitrophan Bishop of Voronezh. He received a one-year permit, and reported collecting 1500 roubles and a cross for the Holy Altar; the actual sum would obviously have been much greater. Having received an extension to the *zeteia*, he installed a gilded iconostasis in a widow's house in St Petersburg and went there every morning to receive visitors. This attracted the attention of the police, who were informed that the iconostasis had been ordered from various different craftsmen, and that more time was needed for its completion.<sup>42</sup>

St Andrew's Skete, which became Russian in 1849, received generous donations.<sup>43</sup> It also regularly sent alms collectors to Russia. In 1862, Deacon Theodorit sent the Synod a petition for a *zeteia* permit, as he needed money to reconstruct the old patriarchal house and its church, and to build a hospital, an almshouse and a hotel. The permit was issued and extended twice; collecting continued until 1865.<sup>44</sup> Taxidiot Ivan Jakovlevich Bulgakov (later monk Ilarion) from St Andrew's set out on *zeteia* in 1865, and maintained contact with donators from Taganrog over several decades.<sup>45</sup> In the 1860s and 70s new buildings were constructed, and an iconostasis was installed in the church. In 1877 money was first collected for a magnificent new catholicon, which was consecrated in 1900.

Special respect for Athos among the Russians, and the favourable government attitude towards Russian monks led to numerous attempts to collect money unofficially. Thus, in 1856 when monk Petr Bykov was arrested in the town of Fatezh, he claimed to be gathering aid on behalf of the abbot of St Pantocrator Monastery.<sup>46</sup> Many Russians, especially peasants from the southern regions, came to Athos as pilgrims and settled there. Unlike Russia, on the Holy Mount they could easily become monks and buy a small kellion from one of the big Greek monasteries. They would then begin gathering donations for construction of a church and a residential building and would attract novices.<sup>47</sup> The money was collected in different ways: by sending letters to pious Russians asking for donations, or by what was usually illicit, unsanctioned *zeteia*. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century some kelliots had become rich abbots. Having been refused by the Athos Koinotes, they attempted to start monastic communities outside the

42 A detailed report on the alms collected see: Extract from Holy Synod decision of March 22/April 10, 1849. RGIA, fund. 797, op. 17, delo 39985, f. 24–25v.

43 See the bibliography on the history of St. Andrew's Skete: O. Ulianov. "Апостола Андрея Скит." In *Pravoslavnaia Encyclopedia* (2001): 399–404; Nicholas Fenell. *The Russians on Athos*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001: 51–83.

44 Extract from the Decision of the Holy Synod, October 17 / December 2, 1862 г. RGIA, f. 797, op. 32. 2 otd., d. 260, f. 4–5v.

45 Evdokim Vatorpedinos, M. G. Talalai. "Драгоценнейшая Гостья Таганрога": связи Афона и Таганрога по материалам Русского Андреевского скита." *Russkii Archiv* 12 (2024) 1: 16–29.

46 RGIA, fund 797, op. 46 (2 otd. 2 st), delo. 448.

47 See about the Russian kelliotes in: P. Troitskii. *История русских обителей афона в хх–хх веках*. Moscow: Indrik, 2008.

Holy Mount, for example in Serbia (Dechani), or in Lebanon. In such cases they could be supported by the Russian government and even receive financial aid from the treasury.<sup>48</sup>

The position of the Russian authorities towards the activities of the Athos kelliots was with few exceptions strict and negative. Normally in the papers reporting on cases of illegal *zeteia*, such monks are classified as semi-criminal elements seeking personal enrichment. This view is unfair and not entirely correct: the Russian monks were usually pious people originating from the southern provinces, who had no aim other than to build a monastery according to their own notions of beauty and pious aspirations; breaking free from the strictures of Russian bureaucracy for a spiritual goal should hardly have been regarded as a crime. The diplomats wrote many pages in their reports outlining the harm to state interests caused by the taxidiotes, who were contributing to the flow of Russian money out of the country and investing it in institutions which belonged to others, i.e. the Athonite sovereign monasteries. Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov wondered why the monks needed luxuriously decorated churches. Special criticism was reserved for those of the kelliots who arrived in their native villages and stayed in their family homes while collecting money. On a personal level, however, the Russian consuls in Thessaloniki did sympathize with one or another kelliot and help them.<sup>49</sup>

In late 1864, the new Russian ambassador to Constantinople Nikolai Ignatiev took special measures against the kelliots. He asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Synod for immediate action. Ignatiev presented a list of Athos monks who were in Russia at the time, gathering aid without permission.<sup>50</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> February 1865, Ober-Procurator Alexei Akhmatov sent an encyclical letter to all bishops in Russia, with a request that they clarify the situation regarding the taxidiotes in their dioceses. At the same time, Russian consuls in Turkey received instructions to warn abbots against unofficially delegating taxidiotes.<sup>51</sup>

In his report dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1865, the Russian Consul in Thessaloniki Alexander Lagovskii complained that the Athos monks had acquired considerable real estate in Ierissos and Cassandra, while sending illegal taxidiotes to Russia to collect alms. He stressed that some Russian monks were especially active there. Lagovskii insisted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should take measures to limit pilgrims, and strictly monitor taxidiotes and all the monks arriving in Russia. Support for

48 Lora A. *gerd. константинопольский патриархат и россия. 1901–1914 гг.* Moscow: Indrik, 2012, 180–297.

49 See details in: L. A. *gerd. русский афон 1878–1914. очерки церковно-политической истории*. Moscow: Indrik, 2010, 84–102.

50 Reports of N. Ignatiev dated December 1 and 9, 1864. RGIA, fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 9, f. 2–3v, 4–5v.

51 RGIA, fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 9, f. 22–23v.

the monasteries themselves, the consul continued, could also be limited to meeting the real needs of the institutions without taking into account the recommendations of influential persons.<sup>52</sup>

### Further limitations and restrictions of the *zeteia*

The reports by Ignatiev and Lagovskii resulted in exhaustive information being gathered on the number of the taxidiotes then in Russia. Strict limits were introduced, to the effect that representatives of up to four monasteries would be allowed to collect aid in the country at any given time.<sup>53</sup> Together with an increasing number of alms collectors and constant complaints about their behaviour, the practical consideration of keeping money inside the country led to further measures. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1895, the Synod issued a restriction on the bringing in of any kind of venerated icons and saints' relics.<sup>54</sup> The official reason was that during their travels the monks could not keep the holy objects in proper condition. This measure substantially limited the success of *zeteia*; the monks tried to overcome it many times, but were always refused. In practice, this restriction had applied since the mid-1880s. Thus, the Simonopetra taxidiotes who arrived in St Petersburg in 1888 had almost no success in collecting alms during the first two weeks of their stay in the capital, and only saw things improve when they received permission to say prayers in front of relics. Hierodeacon Ioannikios wrote in his Journals that without this permission they would not even have covered their travel expenses.<sup>55</sup> In 1894, Filotheou Monastery applied for *zeteia*. The Synod replied that permission would be granted as soon as a free place became available, but the monks' request to bring the venerated icon of the Virgin Glykofilousa with them was refused from the outset.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the strict measures, in addition to Russian monks from Athos, Greeks and Persians also arrived in Russia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and persistently attempted to collect alms without permission. Most of them were easily caught by the police, though some managed to stay in the country for long periods. In 1877, a Greek monk from Zakynthos named Constantin Kladionos was arrested in Perm', and certain saint's relics were taken from him and placed in the town cathedral. An investigation showed that he had been in Russia since 1859, when he had applied to gather donations and was evidently refused. Over almost 20 years he had engaged in the practice illegally, but in the end he

52 Ibid., fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 76.

53 A. Akhmatov to A. Mukhanov, March 31, 1865. Ibid., fund 797, op. 35 (2 otd.), delo 76.

54 Holy Synod decision dated February 6/ March 23, 1895. RGIA, fund 797, op. 65 (2 otd.), delo 153.

55 L. A. Gerd, O. E. Petrunina (eds). *Дневник путешествия по России греческих монахов Афонского монастыря Симонопетра игумена Неофита и иеродиакона Иоанникия*, 24.

56 Holy Synod decision dated February 16/March 4, 1894. RGIA, fund 797, op. 64 (2 otd. 3 stol), delo 27.

was subject to deportation from Russia.<sup>57</sup> From the 1870s onwards, local consistories were required to submit a regular report on all foreign clerics in the Empire, which was carefully checked by the Synod.

### Conclusion

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, material aid was sent from Russia to the monasteries and churches of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans in the following ways: 1) regular financing from the state (the “Palestinian states”); 2) occasional donations of money, church objects and books by state institutions and private persons; 3) permits to collect alms given to taxidiotes; 4) the establishment of dependencies in Moscow, St Petersburg and other towns, or support for existing dependencies. The permits given to taxidiotes from the monasteries were issued in a formal bureaucratic way and limited to four monasteries at any given time; from the late 1880s, the bringing of relics and icons was also forbidden.

Political motives for issuing permits existed throughout the period, and increased after the Crimean War. The general principle was to support Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, but preference was given to monasteries with coenobitic rules, especially if running schools. Slavonic monasteries enjoyed the advantage of Panslavist policies and could send more taxidiotes, especially from the 1850s to the 1870s. The Russian monasteries on Mount Athos were obviously accorded special status, though certain measures against independent kelliots were also taken. As a whole, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century two contradictory trends collided: on the one hand, the amount of Russian material aid for the Orthodox East increased, while on the other, measures were taken against the success of free *zeteia* in Russia (the number of taxidiotes was limited, and imported relics and icons were banned). In the early twentieth century, the general tendency was towards the centralization of aid in government hands and use of it to serve political ends.

57 A letter by Ju. Tolstoi to the Minister of Internal affairs A. Timashev, August 6, 1877. RGIA, fund 797, op. 47 (2 otd., 3 st.), delo 128, f. 3–4v.

# VI

**SACRED OBJECTS  
OUT OF RITUAL  
CONTEXT - RUSSIAN  
ICONS IN MUSEUM  
COLLECTIONS**

# Remarks on the Preservation State of Russian Icons and Religious Art Objects in Bulgaria

Rumyana Decheva

## Abstract

This paper deals with Russian religious heritage in Bulgaria. Nowadays, Russian icons are displayed or stored in museums and galleries or in churches. Sometimes the condition of these specific art objects reflects the cultural and political situation and trends in Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** preservation, conservation-restoration, Russian art, icons, churches

Objects of Russian religious art reached Bulgaria in various ways.<sup>1</sup> Some arrived with the Old Believers, who built new homes for their faith. Others were brought by soldiers and their commanders during the Russo-Turkish wars. In memory of the Russians who fell in combat, memorial churches were built and supplied with iconostases, icons, furnishings and church vessels, often near the sites of the greatest battles. Long before the liberation of Bulgaria from five centuries of Ottoman rule, liturgical books in Church Slavonic were despatched from Russia and Ukraine for use in Bulgarian churches.<sup>2</sup> Relations between Bulgarian and Russian clergy date back centuries (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

1 Ivanka Gergova. "Russian Orthodox Art in the Bulgarian Lands from the 16th until the Late 19th Century: The Current State of Investigation and Avenues for Further Research." *Museikon* 4 (2020): 237–246.

2 Maria Polimirova and Vasya Velinova. "Valuable Ukrainian Printed Books from the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Century in Bulgaria." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2022): 38.

3 Rumyana Decheva. "Реставрация на обекти върху хартия, собственост на музея на Рилската света обител." In *Културното наследство на Рилския манастир – състояние и перспективи на проучването, опазването и реставрирането му*, edited by Sv. Kuyumdzhieva, E. Musakova, V. Velinova, Y. Kuyumdzhiev and A. Atanasov. Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Iztok-Zapad": 2011. In 1466, a contract was signed between Rila Monastery and the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos. Restored by the author of this article, the document is now on display in Rila Monastery Museum.

Some icons reached Bulgaria as gifts, others as family possessions. During the socialist period (1944–1989), the Bulgarian state took special care of the monuments and churches associated with the Russo-Turkish Wars, but many other churches housing Russian icons were left to the care of the local clergy, among a population forced to abandon church life. In the depopulated villages, many churches were abandoned to their fate. Worse still, atheistic upbringing encouraged theft and desecration at places of worship. Many of the icons were moved to storage in local metropolises, museums and galleries, while others were destroyed or stolen. After 1989, the trend towards the depopulation of small settlements continued, though freedom of religion lent impetus to the restoration of churches and care of their inventory.

Russian icons are now held in state museums and galleries, in churches, and in private collections. In most major libraries, such as those at the monasteries of Rila, Troyan and elsewhere, there are valuable Russian manuscripts and representative collections of early Russian printed books. Some institutions possess collections of graphic works, including Russian prints and lithographs.

## Museums and galleries

These institutions offer the best conditions for the preservation and research of religious art objects. Inventories contain information on where a particular object originated and how it was acquired, including cases of donations, purchases or stolen objects handed over to the museums by the police. In this way, a picture of how society evolved over a certain period can be built up.

For example, in the second half of the twentieth century, a group of inhabitants in the Old Believers village of Kazashko offered the Revival Museum in Varna – part of the Regional History Museum – the chance to purchase Russian icons and metal relief icons owned by their families. Thanks to the funding opportunities at that time, several valuable icons and religious objects have now joined the museum's collections. They have been taken care of and some have been restored. Nowadays, however, the owners of such artefacts usually contact private collectors first, so works of Russian religious art are rarely seen or studied. Despite financial difficulties, most museums and galleries are working to improve the conditions needed to preserve and exhibit Russian icons along with other holdings, by inventorying and in some cases digitising them. Particular attention has been paid to Russian icons in the museums of cities where there were battles during the Russo-Turkish War of Liberation, such as Pleven. There, in the Pleven Epopee 1877 Panorama, which forms part of the Regional Museum of Military History, objects of Russian religious art have been preserved and exhibited with great professionalism and care. The presence of a restoration laboratory usually has a positive impact on conservation efforts, by carrying out restoration interventions on endangered objects, planning restoration measures, maintaining suitable temperature and humidity conditions in exhibition areas and storerooms, and conducting disinfection and disinsection. However, not every museum or gallery has such facilities or

specialists. Currently, the Ministry of Culture has announced funding sessions for the restoration and establishment of modern repositories and exhibition areas. This will enable well-motivated projects to provide funds for professional maintenance of collections by licensed professionals, in this case restorers. It is noteworthy that the collections of Russian icons in Bulgarian museums and galleries have not been adequately surveyed to date, as research interest in them is non-existent. This is probably due to the prolific output of the Russian icon-painting villages of Vjatka, Kholui, Mstera and numerous other icon-painting centres. In many cases, restoration intervention is limited to mandatory measures such as disinsection and the use of protective paper coating. Lack of familiarity with the technology of Russian icons may also be a factor discouraging restorers, especially in the younger generation, from caring for these works. In some ways this hands-off attitude is preferable to working without sufficient knowledge of the original materials and technology of Russian icons, but a solution to the problem must be found. Good results would be obtained by organizing joint workshops and learning about the experience of Russian restorers. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine interrupted the relations between Bulgarian and Russian specialists that had been built up over decades. The process of denigrating things Russian did of course begin much earlier, immediately after the democratic changes in our country at the end of the twentieth century; after 45 years of totalitarian rule and development in the orbit of the Soviet Union, Russian culture and its importance for Bulgaria came to be profaned and seriously belittled. Most of the leading specialists in cultural heritage management of the recent past had received their education in the former Soviet Union and trained their students and followers in that tradition. Nowadays, however, education is mainly oriented towards Europe and the USA, there is no interest in establishing contacts with conservator-restorers from Russia, and the progress achieved in some Russian institutes in the application of modern scientific achievements in restoration, such as nanotechnologies, etc., is no longer being followed. The current situation in cultural heritage preservation is a negative example of the influence of politics on scientific and cultural interactions.

## Churches

After the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule, many churches were built in memory of fallen Russian soldiers. Even before that time, there were field churches in use during the war, as in the case of the unfinished church of St. Demetrius in the village of Gorna Studena, which was located next to the Russian army headquarters.<sup>4</sup> By order of the Russian Emperor, the church was provided with an iconostasis, icons and bells. Today it has lost its former splendour, some of the icons are damaged, and unauthorized restoration work is being carried out, such as the application of bronze over the original

4 Gergova "Russian Orthodox Art," 240.

gilding on the royal doors, and efforts to restore one of the icons (fig. 2). The building's current condition is the result of long-standing problems including leaks from the roof, which have led to damage to the icons and the gilding of the iconostasis. Another problem lies in the fact that the icons were painted in oils, which has resulted in tears in the paint layer and widespread cracks due to the paints and varnish cracking (fig. 3). What is required here is careful planning of any restoration intervention rather than just partial measures.

It should be noted here that the situation at Gorna Studena is common, in the sense that those responsible for churches – the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, represented by the church board and the local metropolis – do not abide by the Cultural Heritage Act. This is especially true in smaller settlements, where the law is disregarded, despite the fact that any restoration work requires the preparation of a conservation-restoration project in coordination with the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage. Even when funding for construction and restoration activities is available under various programs, it is often insufficient because imperfections in the legislation have led to restorers being subcontracted by building companies. Often after building conservation works are completed there is not enough funding left over for the restoration of art objects inside the church. Thus, work on iconostases and icons is frequently outsourced to persons without the relevant qualifications. In many cases this is also done out of ignorance, combined with religious sentiment and a desire for improvement. There are many such examples. The Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo was reconstructed and furnished with icons and iconostasis with the participation of Russian soldiers stationed there during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829. In the 2010s, the local priest decided to repaint the iconostasis and varnish the icons. The intervention was disastrous, as the iconostasis was painted in bright, high-gloss paints, while the icons were coated with a synthetic gloss varnish which disrupted their aesthetics and is difficult to remove (fig. 4). Another example of unregulated intervention carried out with good intentions is at the Church of St. Athanasius in the village of Nikolaevka near Varna, where Russian troops were based during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877. The villagers decided to rename the village in honour of the commander-in-chief Prince Nicholas Nikolayevich, who sent them icons, books and money. Today, the small church is well cared for, and houses a small museum. Yet rather than being restored as part of a project coordinated with the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage, the icons have been treated unprofessionally and unsystematically by unlicensed restorers relying on funds collected in the parish (fig. 5). Out of a desire to "clean" them, the icons are being damaged, and the coloured varnishes applied to the metal coatings are being removed, which again indicates a lack of knowledge about the technology of Russian icon painting. Unfortunately, this is the practice in many Bulgarian churches in smaller settlements.

The oldest Old Believers church Pokrov Bogorodichen is located in Tataritsa, today part of the village of Ajdemir near Silistra. We can only guess about its history from what we know of the church chronicle, which disappeared decades ago, but which was used to supply the information attached to the church's

registration as a monument of local cultural importance in 1974. According to the registration document, the church was built in the 1770s, enlarged in the 1930s, and reached its present size in 1921.<sup>5</sup> The building still has dozens of icons in the naos, arranged according to the Old Believer tradition (fig. 6). The five-tier iconostasis reaches up to the base of the dome, with other icons visible in the narthex. The church owns four manuscripts (fig. 7), several rare old printed books and two valuable shrouds. Two of the oldest icons are from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but most date from the nineteenth century. They were mainly made in Starodubje, Vjatka, in the Vladimir icon-painting villages around Mstera, in Central Russia, and in Lipovan workshops.<sup>6</sup> They are in varying states of preservation – the two rows of apostles on the iconostasis suffered significant direct rainwater damage before the last roof repair (fig. 8). Many of the icons in the church and all the festive icons on the iconostasis have a recessed panel (“kovcheg”) made of one or several boards, stabilized with different types of crossbars. There are counter crossbars, “empire” crossbars, and hidden, usually horizontal splines. The panels are made of lime, poplar and other softwoods, whereas the crossbars are mainly of oak or other hardwoods. The paint layer on some icons includes gilding and other metal coatings, which are often engraved. Many of the icons require urgent restoration intervention, but this is not possible due to the unclear ownership status of the church, despite it having been declared a monument of local cultural importance. Only the owner, usually the local metropolis, can apply for state restoration funding if the project is approved by the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage. The local Old Believer community is making efforts to gain official recognition as a religious denomination, so far without success. Due to these administrative problems, it is not possible to plan legitimate restoration measures.

Highly interesting icons are also to be found in the Old Believers church of Pokrov in the village of Kazashko, founded in 1905 on the shores of Lake Varna. In 2007 the building was renovated with financial support from the Russian Consulate in Varna and private donations. Most of the icons date from the nineteenth century, though one is from the seventeenth century. The icons were made in various icon painting centres, at Starodubje (Vjatka), the Vladimir icon painting villages, Mstera, in Central Russia, the Urals, Romania, and in Lipovan workshops.<sup>7</sup> In terms of technology, they represent different traditions. Many of the wooden panels are recessed, made of one or more boards of lime, juniper or cypress, depending on the local tree species. The panels are stabilized with counter crossbars of different shapes and embedding methods, with additional hidden horizontal splines located at the top and bottom edge of the panel. The icons are in poor condition, partly due to the humid climate in

5 The document, with many lacunae, is held in the National Archives of the National Institute of National Heritage, number 11209/19.06.2013.

6 Dating and attribution by Natalia Komashko at our first inspection.

7 Dating and attribution by Natalia Komashko at our first inspection.

the area: in many cases the wood is damaged, the crossbars are missing, the panels are deformed and the painting layer is missing in places. Some of the panels are painted on the back, others have frames nailed onto them.<sup>8</sup> In the church and the village there are some manuscripts and old printed books (fig. 9),<sup>9</sup> and some of the locals keep icons and other religious artifacts related to their family history.

As mentioned above, several churches in Bulgaria were built to preserve the memory of fallen Russian soldiers. The first memorial church, dedicated to St. Alexander Nevski, was built near Jambol in 1879 and consecrated in 1884. The iconostasis is from Russia, with some icons painted at Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra; most of those in oil on canvas are poorly preserved. The memorial church at Shipka Monastery is not far from the site of the heroic Battle of Shipka Pass. Architectural restoration work on the church has been funded by the Bulgarian and Russian states, as well as private donations. The iconostasis was made in St Petersburg, and the icons – including depictions of numerous Bulgarian saints – were ordered from the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos (fig. 10).<sup>10</sup> The iconostasis and icons have never been restored and are still in excellent condition, due to the quality workmanship typical of the icon-painting workshop in the Russian Athonite monastery. Icons of the same origin are held in the collection of the Regional Museum of Military History in Pleven. The icon of St. Panteleimon (figs. 11, 12) makes it possible to view the face and back of the icon,<sup>11</sup> to assess the quality of the paint layer and the cypress panel, as well as the crossbars, in this case made of oak in the shape of a “goose beak”.

The icons and iconostasis in the chapel of St. Cyril and Methodius at the Church of the Holy Trinity at Ruse are of similarly high quality, typical of the icon-painting tradition at the Holy Trinity Sergius Lavra.<sup>12</sup> The chapel was consecrated on March 16, 1886. Despite some damages to the paint layer and gilding, the icons have come down to us in very good condition, without any restoration intervention (fig. 13). The icons for the chapel of St. Alexander Nevski in the same church were also painted at the Holy Trinity Sergius Lavra. In 1979 the marble iconostasis was dismantled and brought to the church in Loznitsa, together with the icons.<sup>13</sup>

Another example of an exceptionally high-quality iconostasis is in the Church of the Joy of All Who Sorrow (Pokrov), built in Sofia in 1922–1925. The iconostasis, icons and church vessels were bought by the

8 No photos are attached, as photography is banned in the church.

9 *Apocalypse*, late seventeenth century illuminated manuscript restored by the author.

10 Ivanka Gergova. “From Petersburg to Shipka via Mount Athos: Slavic saints on the Shipka iconostasis” (V. Ivanova, Trans.). *Slavia Meridionalis* 24 (2024) 2024, 9–19.

11 The icon has been restored by Tatyana Trifonova.

12 Viktor Mutafov. Възрожденските храмове в Русе. Sofia: Blago slovo: 2022, 26.

13 Ibid, 25.

building committee from a Turkish pasha, having originally formed part of the Church of St. Panteleimon at the Russian Hospital in Constantinople, which was built with the assistance of Count Ignatiev in 1875. The iconostasis was made in the Russian Athonite Monastery of St. Panteleimon, and the icons in the icon-painting workshop at the Belozersky Skete of St. Nicholas on Mount Athos. The iconostasis and icons have recently been restored, and the restored gilding has regained its original splendour.

Many other churches boast icons and iconostases from Russia. Among them is the Cathedral Church of the Dormition of Mother of God in Varna. In 1901 and 1904, Tsar Nicholas II donated small and large icons for the iconostasis (fig. 14). In the Church of St. Nicholas in Tutrakan there are royal doors made in Russia in 1893 (fig. 15) – together with 41 icons made at the Holy Trinity Sergius Lavra,<sup>14</sup> they were originally intended for the cemetery church of St. George, but were redirected to St. Nicholas by Sakellarios Ignatij Chernev.<sup>15</sup> One interesting example of an iconostasis is that in the Russian church of St. Panteleimon in Knjazhevo (Sofia), built in the 1930s at the House of the Disabled White Guards. It is painted on canvas and apparently once belonged to a military field church (fig. 16).

## Observations on the technology and conservation issues of Russian icon painting based on the objects examined

As stated above, the poor condition of some works of Russian religious art in Bulgaria is mainly due to improper storage and unsuitable climate conditions. In the case of icons, the technology used to create them is of great importance. It involves preparing the wooden panel, applying a ground, a metallic coating, a paint layer, and a varnish coating usually of “olifa”. Each of these actions has a consequence for the durability and condition of the icon over many years thereafter.

### Wooden panel

The panel is made of one or more boards, depending on the size of the icon. The choice of wood – usually from local species – is important, as is the season when it is sawed. Depending on how boards are cut relative to growth rings, the panel may warp; the closer the cross-section of the board is to the middle of the trunk, the less likely it is to warp. Assembling multi-board panels is another way to avoid warping. It is preferable for shrinkage to occur from the back of the icon. The wood is protected with crossbars,

14 Viktor Mutafov. История на храмовете в Русенска епархия. Втора част. Разградска, Поповска и Тутраканска духовни околии, Silistra: Kovachev Pres OOD: 2021, 287.

15 Ibid, 283.

especially for larger icons or those with a panel composed of two or three boards. While the wood for the panel can be of lime, poplar, cypress or juniper, hard oak is usually used for the crossbars. The shape of the crossbars varies, with two wedge-shaped pieces usually being installed from opposite directions, though small icons may only have one. Crossbars may be profiled in “empire”, “goose beak” or other styles, and may lie flush with the back of the panel (fig. 17) or extend above it. There are also hidden crossbars set in a channel through the panel. Another type are splines – usually embedded horizontally in the groove at the top and/or bottom of the panel, though vertical ones are also found. The joints in a multi-board panel are reinforced at the back, usually with “dovetail” inserts (fig. 18), but we have also seen the use of metal staples (fig. 19) and an unusual back reinforcement (fig. 20). On the face, the board may be flat or have a recessed “kovcheg” panel. Unlike in the Balkans, where recessed panels are rarely encountered after the seventeenth century, Russian icon painters continued to use what was often a double “kovcheg” throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The surface of the frame can also serve as a painting field.

### Ground, painting, varnish application

Before applying the ground, a canvas is glued to the face. It is noteworthy that on later and mass-produced icons, canvas was glued over the joints between panels rather than to the entire board, for reasons of economy; some icons even have paper strips used for this purpose.<sup>16</sup> It is in these areas that subsequent movement of the wood as a result of shrinkage or standing in a humid environment will mean the paint layer and the ground are not stable and may detach from the surface. Many Russian icons are painted on a gilded ground, often with engraved ornaments. Gold was mainly used on older icons.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes silver or other metal alloys of the same colour were used for economy, as was common among nineteenth-century Russian icons in Bulgaria. A coloured varnish may have been applied on top to imitate gilding - this varnish should not be removed during restoration, as it is part of the icon’s original appearance. The painting technique is mostly classical, using tempera paints and egg binder. Iron-gall ink is sometimes used for fine details and text.<sup>18</sup> Oil painting was used for later icons, allowing for very smooth transitions between colours and modelling. In some icons, the application of varnish has caused the oil paint layer to tear over time, often due to the faster drying of the varnish compared

16 Elena Badea, Cristina Carșote and Dumitrita-Daniela Filip. “New Insights into the Transfer and Reception of Russian Icons in Transylvania based on the Interdisciplinary research of the RICONTRANS Project.” In *Russian icons from Transylvania: exhibition catalogue*, edited by Ana Dumitran and Dumitrița-Daniela Filip. Alba Iulia: Editura Muzeului Național al Unirii Alba Iulia; Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2023, 79.

17 Viktor V. Filatov. Русская станковая темперная живопись, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo “Iskusstvo”, 1961, 16.

18 Badea, Carșote and Filip, “New Insights,” 86.

to oil paints in the paint layer, the use of asphalt lac as a paint, the addition of siccatives to the oils, etc. Traditionally, Russian icon painters used “olifa”, a varnish based on linseed oil. Especially on later icons, other oils and resins may have been added to the varnish, making it very difficult to remove during restoration.<sup>19</sup> Varnish removal or thinning is undertaken after careful analysis of the degree of darkening or destruction of the original varnish, the presence of coloured varnish on the metal coating and the icon’s original colouring.

The specific technological characteristics of the Russian icons discussed above suggest that thorough analysis is necessary before proceeding with any restoration. It is recommended that work should be carried out by an interdisciplinary team, including art historians and researchers, who should apply non-destructive methods of analysis to the materials involved in the icon-making process.




19  Filatov, Русская станковая темперная живопись, 28.



Fig. 1: Contract between Rila Monastery and the Russian Monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, 1466. Photo: R. Decheva. © Rila Monastery

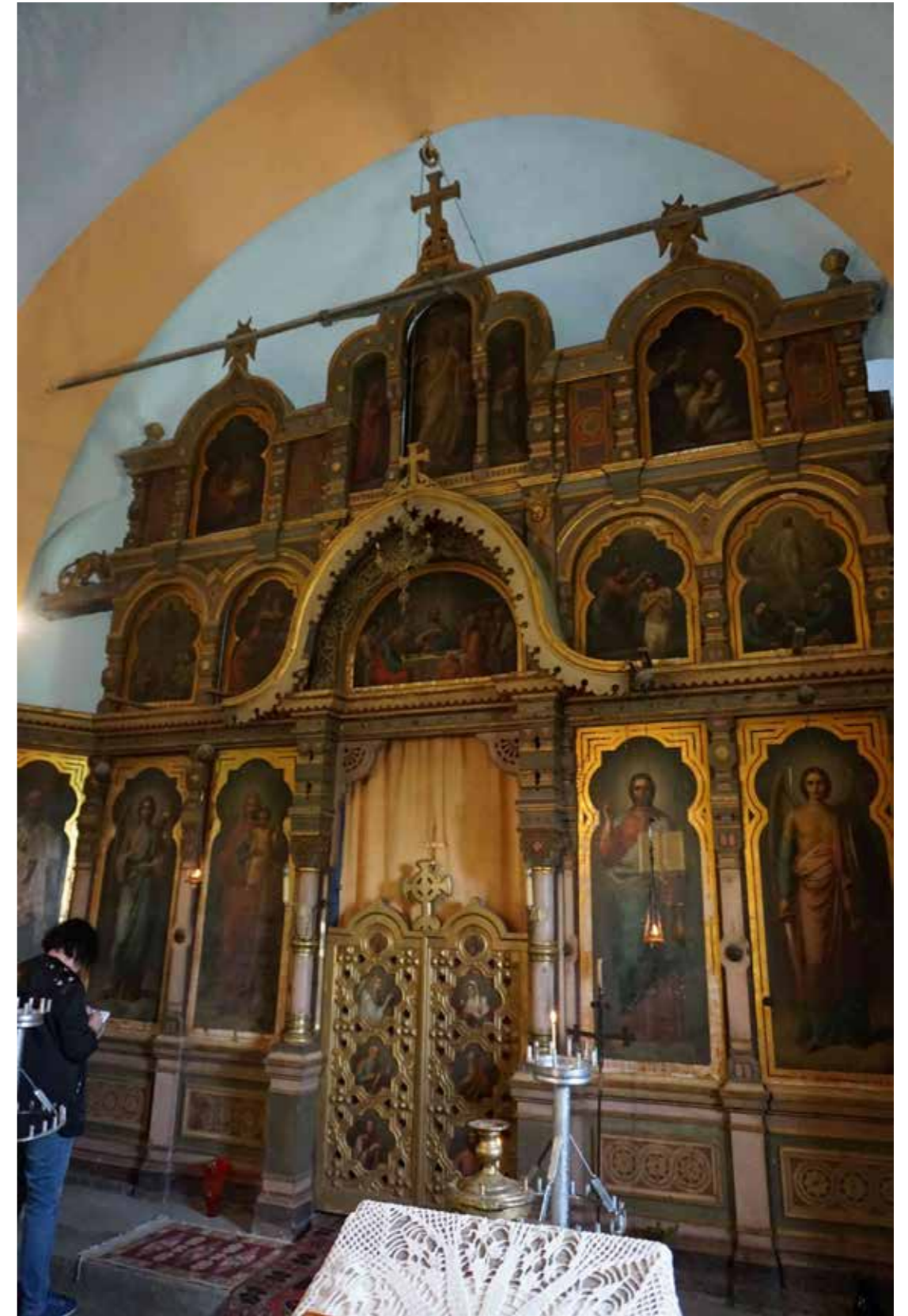


Fig. 2: Staint Demetrius Church, Gorna Studena. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 3: Staint Demetrius Church, Gorna Studena, cracks in the oil painting. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 4: Iconostasis, Dormition of the Mother of God Church, Malko Tarnovo. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 5: Staint Athanasius Church, Nikolaevka. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 6: Pokrov church, Tataritsa. Photo: A. Nikolov.

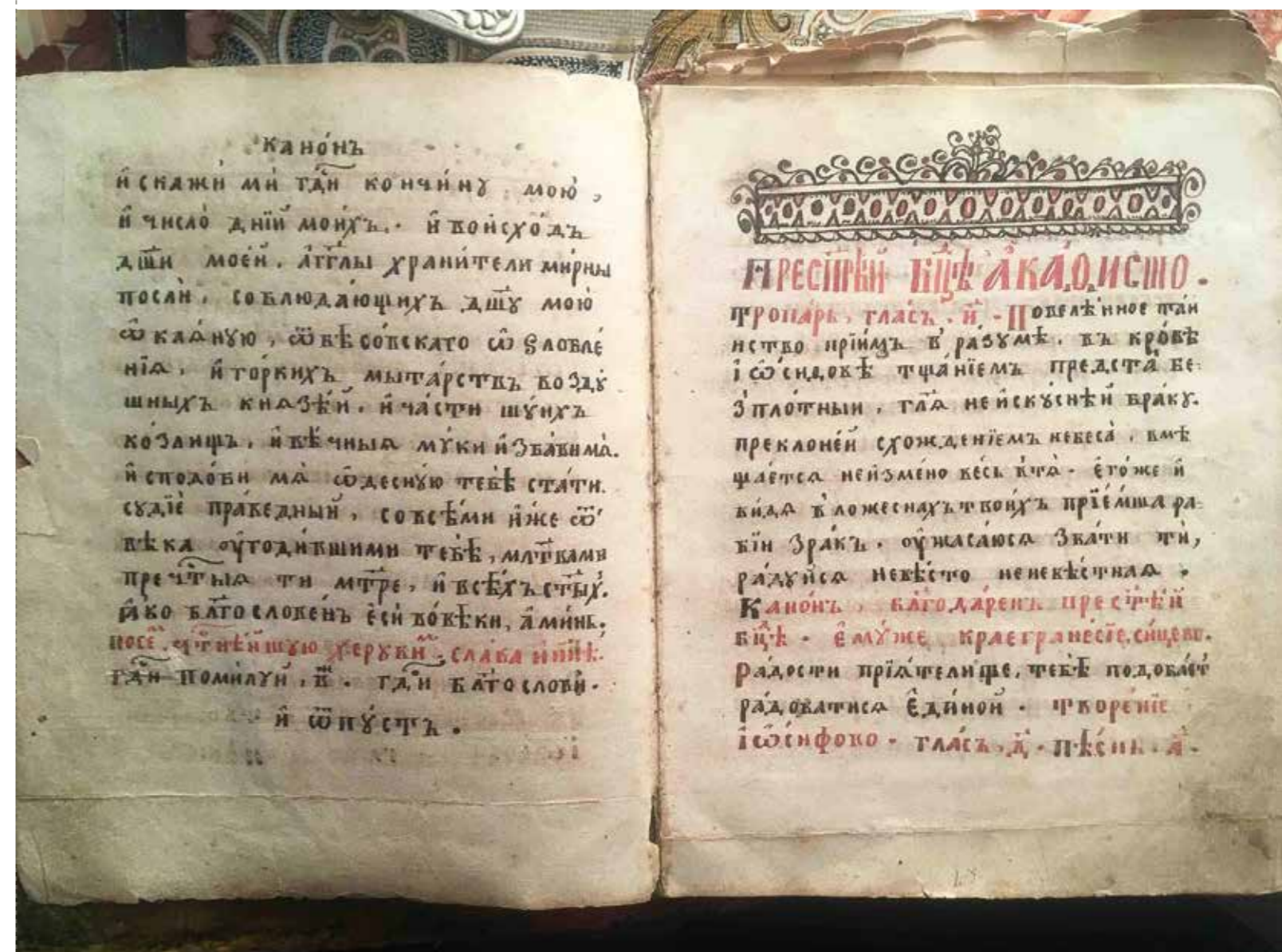


Fig. 7: Manuscript, Pokrov church, Tataritsa. Photo: R. Decheva.



Fig. 8: Iconostasis, Pokrov church, Tataritsa. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 9: *Apocalypse*, late 17th century. Photo: R. Decheva.



Fig. 10: Iconostasis, Memorial church, Shipka Monastery. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 11: Saint Panteleimon. Photo: A. Nikolov. © Regional Museum of Military History in Pleven.



Fig. 12: "Goose beak" crossbars, Saint Panteleimon. Photo: A. Nikolov. © Regional Museum of Military History in Pleven.



Fig. 13: Chapel of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Holy Trinity Church, Ruse. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 14: Iconostasis, Dormition of Mother of God Church, Varna. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 15: Royal door, Staint Nicholas Church, Tutrakan. Photo: A. Nikolov.

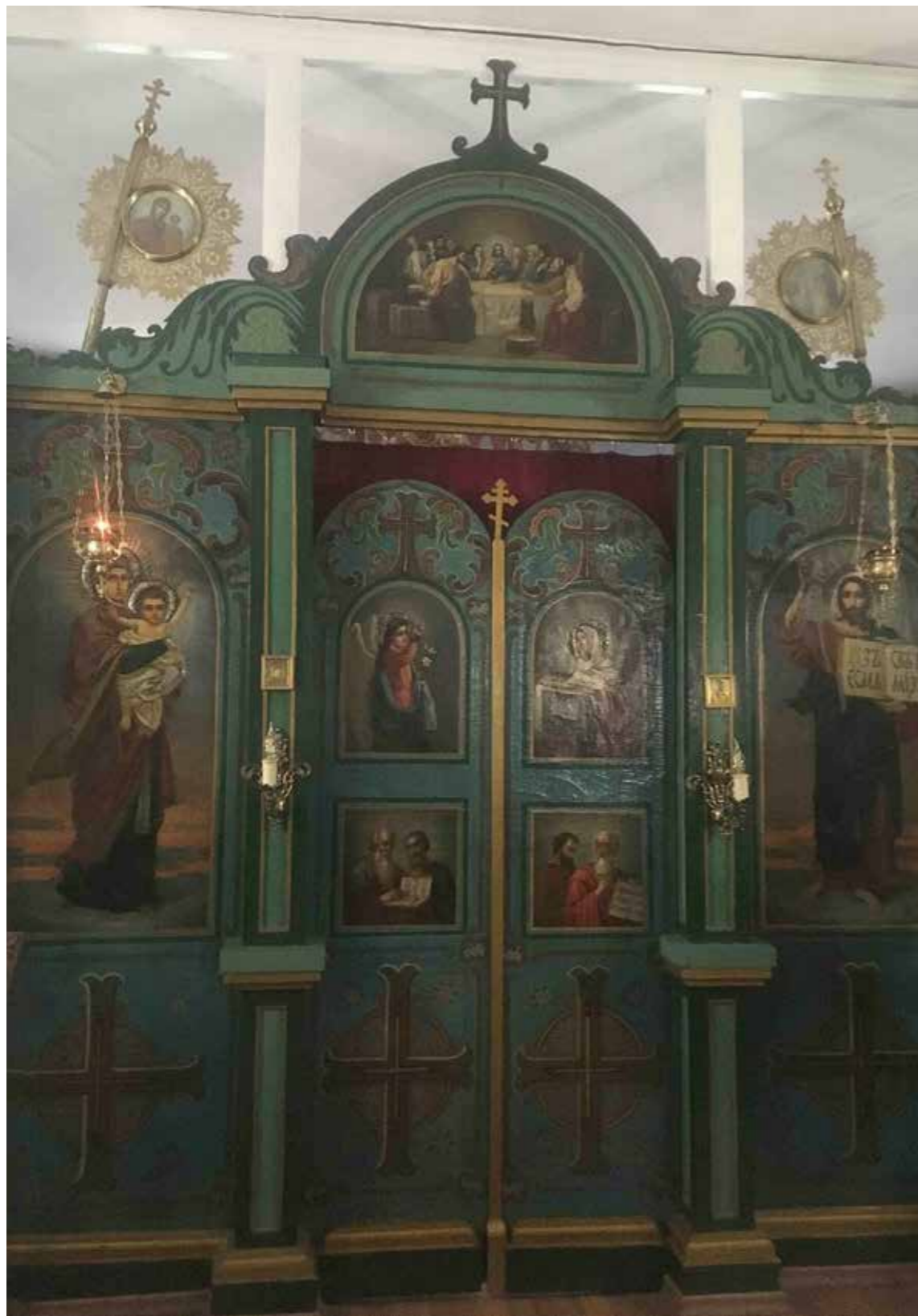


Fig. 16: Staint Panteleimon Church, Knjazhevo, Sofia. Photo: R. Decheva.



Fig. 17: Crossbars flush with the panel. Photo: A. Nikolov. © Regional History Museum in Varna.



Fig. 18: “Dovetail” insert, detail of fig. 12. Photo: A. Nikolov. © Regional Museum of Military History in Pleven.



Fig. 19: Metal staple reinforcement. Photo: A. Nikolov.



Fig. 20: An unusual back reinforcement for a panel, Инв. ВИИ 377. Photo: A. Nikolov. © Regional History Museum in Varna.

## Studying and Exhibiting Russian Icons at the Benaki Museum

Anastasia Drandaki

### Abstract

The ERC RICONTRANS research project presented an opportunity to study Russian religious art from the Benaki Museum collections through an interdisciplinary approach and in collaboration with various researchers involved in the project. Although catalogued, these works had not previously attracted scholarly interest. Art-historical, epigraphic, and technical analysis enabled us to reconstruct the identities and often tumultuous biographies of the objects leading up to their current museification. Simultaneously, we hope this multifaceted study provides a repository of reliable data that can serve as the foundation for improved understanding and secure conservation of numerous other Russian artworks located in regions such as Greece, where the techniques and materials of Russian icons remain largely unknown, despite the religious practices and concepts they embody being quite familiar. Additionally, preparing for the exhibition of these works has been equally instructive, culminating in two exhibitions organised by the Benaki Museum in distinct cities and venues in Greece: the Benaki Museum modern building at Pireos 138 (2022–23) and a historical building, Santirvan, a beautifully restored Ottoman mosque in Drama (2024–2025). The two exhibitions, which garnered excellent reviews and were warmly received by the public, merit evaluation against the current challenging international context that shapes a difficult conversation between the global audience and Russian religious art.

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**Keywords:** Greek and Russian icons, technical analyses, icons and politics, early modern period, Benaki Museum Athens

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The systematic engagement of the Benaki Museum team with the Russian artworks in its collections had a somewhat unorthodox and rather unpleasant starting point: in the autumn of 2017, as Yuliana Boycheva and I were in hectic preparations for the opening of the “Religious Art from Russia in Greece” exhibition, which included loans from all over Greece, at the last minute the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, under the directorship of Dr Aik. Dellaporta refused to lend the Benaki Museum renowned Russian works from its

collections.<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1) This was despite the relevant entries for the exhibition catalogue having been written and the museological planning of the exhibition, which included several works from the Byzantine Museum, being fully completed. This unfortunate last-minute development, occurring too late for us to seek additional loans from other institutions, compelled us to attempt to fill the exhibition gaps by rummaging through the Benaki Museum’s storerooms and nooks in search of any previously unknown Russian artwork to complete the display. As anyone working in a museum knows, excavations in the storeroom can sometimes be more productive and fruitful than systematic digs at archaeological sites. This was also true for the Russian religious works at the Benaki Museum, a considerable number of which were ‘rediscovered’ while lying in oblivion on the shelves. Those previously unknown works, retrieved and exhibited for the first time in the 2017 exhibition, brought to light several scholarly issues in the documentation of the Russian icons in the collection that had previously been overlooked by research beyond the basics of cataloguing. In other words, I found myself confronted with a series of questions that had never crossed my mind as a curator of the collection, as Russian art had implicitly and unconsciously slipped outside the horizon of my interests. The questions that emerged from this almost incidental rediscovery of Russian artefacts in the Benaki depot largely shaped the objectives of the museum’s research team in the framework of RICONTRANS.

The primary focus of our research questions concerned the materiality of Russian work, alongside reconstructing the temporal and spatial context of their creation and the successive stages of their biography leading up to the moment of their museification. The lack of knowledge and sufficient literature on Russian icons outside of Russia created significant difficulties regarding dating and attribution to workshops and regions, as the designation ‘work of Russian art’ was the only label accompanying the artworks. In this research stage, which is the foundation for any further historical and art historical interpretation, we would not have completed the task without the assistance of our colleagues from RICONTRANS, who provided their knowledge and expertise. Apart from the constant and invaluable support of Yuliana, most of this expertise was offered by Daria Rees, who systematically transcribed, translated, and documented the inscriptions of the works in SYNTHESIS in exemplary fashion, and

1 The Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens holds exceptional Russian artworks, notable among which are the sumptuous gifts from the Empress of Russia Catherine the Great to the Greek community of Livorno. See Evgenia Chalkia and Dimitrios Konstantios (eds). *Αυτοκρατορικά δώρα. Αφιέρωματα της Μεγάλης Αικατερίνης στην ελληνική εκκλησία του Λιβόρνο*, exhibition catalogue, Athens: Byzantine and Christian Museum, 2000; Yuliana Boycheva, “Δίανλοι μεταφοράς, υποδοχή και χρήσεις των ρωσικών εικόνων στον ιδιωτικό και τον δημόσιο χώρο στην Ελλάδα (16ος–τέλος 19ου αιώνας).” In: Yuliana Boycheva and Anastasia Drandaki (eds). *Θρησκευτική τέχνη από τη Ρωσία στην Ελλάδα, 16ος–19ος αιώνας*, exhibition catalogue, Athens: Benaki Museum, 2017, 59–62.

by Natalia Komashko, who, along with Juliana, guided us on the dating and attribution of the works during workshops. Their valuable contributions complemented the kick-off training seminars with which the RICONTRANS consortium began its journey in 2019. It would be a serious oversight not to acknowledge the contributions of other colleagues at that time, Dr Elena Saenkova and Prof. Alexandre Preobrazhenskii, who, regrettably, due to international politics and circumstances beyond our control, were unable to remain part of this consortium. We remain in their debt.

Another significant challenge for our understanding of Russian icons in the Benaki was the lack of data concerning the materiality of the works. What materials and techniques were employed in their manufacture and decoration? How do these compare to contemporary icons produced in Greek workshops, for which substantial information has been gathered and expertise developed regarding their handling and conservation? What insights can we obtain about the level of knowledge or the intentions of the commissioners, as evidenced by the materiality of the objects? How have the interventions or alterations that these works have undergone throughout their lifetimes been documented? In what historical context can these interventions be explained, and how should the museum handle the material evidence of the objects' adventures?

These inquiries were the focal point of research conducted in collaboration with two teams from the Benaki Conservation Lab: one from the Department of Icon Conservation and the other from the Department of Metal Conservation.<sup>2</sup> It is not my intention to elaborate on my colleagues' research, which is presented in detail in the forthcoming publication by the museum.<sup>3</sup> What I wish to highlight here is the critical role that technical study has played in enhancing our understanding of historical questions concerning Russian icons and the artistic trajectory of their production, whilst also considering the developments occurring concurrently in Greek icon workshops. I am especially interested in the still poorly explored historical question regarding the artistic and technical dialogue between these two Orthodox spheres, the Greek and the Russian, with their various centres of icon production.<sup>4</sup> This line of inquiry is especially pertinent, as research conducted under the RICONTRANS initiative has

2 Some of the art historical and technical findings resulting from this research have been showcased in two exhibitions organised by the Benaki Museum under RICONTRANS (see further below) and are published in the concise exhibition catalogue: Anastasia Drandaki (ed.). *Routes of Icons 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century: Art and Technology*. Athens: Benaki Museum and Santirvan 2024. For the technical study, cf. 73–105.

3 Anastasia Drandaki (ed.). *Russian Religious Art at the Benaki Museum: piety, art, materials and techniques*. Athens: Benaki Museum – RICONTRANS, 2026 (in print).

4 See on the topic, Graikos, Nikolaos. "Russian Icons in Churches in the Hellenic Area in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> – Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries." In: Yuliana Boycheva (ed.) *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Seyssel: La Pomme d'or, 2016, 161–192.

confirmed that Russian icons increasingly entered Greek Orthodox space from the 17th century onward.<sup>5</sup> This influx led, as we surmised, to significant iconographic, stylistic, and technical exchanges between Greek and Russian workshops, rendering the topic particularly intriguing. I will briefly discuss only one such occurrence.

Among others, one direction of the technical study conducted at the Benaki Museum focused on the various gilding techniques used on Russian icons from the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>6</sup> The research carried out by Lenia Farmakalidis and her team from the Department of Conservation at the University of West Attica documented different gilding techniques and materials applied to Russian icons from the Benaki collection, which were sometimes even used concurrently on the same panel. The composition and techniques used in the gilding were found to align with the artistic intentions and target purchasing groups of the various Russian production workshops. For instance, it was not surprising but rather a confirmation of our understanding that many mass-produced icons, primarily from the workshops of Old Believers, utilised a cheaper silver leaf instead of gold, which was then treated with coloured varnish to give the impression of luxury, imitating gold.

From the perspective of dialogue and exchange within an expanded and polycentric Orthodox world with multiple centres of icon production, certain developments in gilding methods and the decorative techniques applied to Russian works are particularly noteworthy. On many icons, decorative motifs on the metal leaf have been executed using a combination of punched, sgraffito or engraving technique. (fig. 2) While punched decoration has a long tradition in icon painting dating back to medieval times,<sup>7</sup> sgraffito and engraving motifs are more modern decorative solutions and, interestingly, appear a few decades later in Greek icons as well. Greek icons featuring such 'innovative' decoration predominantly originate from workshops active on Mount Athos and the Greek mainland, regions with dense networks

5 Boycheva, Yuliana. «Εικόνες μοσχόβικαις..., εὐμορφώτατα πράγματα». Η μεταφορά ρωσικών εικόνων στον ελληνικό χώρο από το 16ο ως τις αρχές του 20ού αι.» *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaeologikes Etaireias* 36 (2016): 219–234. doi: <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.1781>

6 Amalia Bouras, Helen Veronika Farmakalides, and Andreas Sambatakos. "Exploring the correlation between the metallic substances used on the gildings of Russian icons from the Benaki Museum collection and their artistic backgrounds." 7th ARCH\_RNT Archaeological Research & New Technologies international congress, 6–8 October 2022, Kalamata, Greece. [https://benakiconservation.files.wordpress.com/2022/11/7th-arch\\_rnt-poster.pdf](https://benakiconservation.files.wordpress.com/2022/11/7th-arch_rnt-poster.pdf)

7 See for example the numerous publications on this topic by Mojmir Frinta: "On the punched decoration in medieval panel painting and manuscript illumination." In: Note on the punched decoration of two early painted panels at the Fogg Art Museum: St Dominic and the Crucifixion." In: *The Art Bulletin* 53 (1971): 306–309. "Stamped halos in the 'Maesta' of Simone Martini." In: Bellosi, Luciano (ed.). *Simone Martini. Atti del convegno. Siena, 27–29 marzo 1985*. Florence: Centro Di, 1988, 139–145. See also the online database of the "Punched decoration in Medieval panel Paintings" project. <http://corpuspitturafiorentina.bmlonline.it/s/punch/page/punches>

of communication with the North and a strong appreciation for Russian icons that arrived via various channels and routes. One such example is an 18th-century icon from an Athonite workshop, depicting the Enthroned Virgin and Child with Saints Demetrius and Nestor in a somewhat stiff and linear configuration, one figure next to the other, without real interaction between them.<sup>8</sup> (fig. 3) Despite extensive damage to the painting surface, the primary characteristic of this work is the dense decoration with diverse designs applied in sgraffito on the figures' garments, bestowing the small and rather unassuming icon with an illusion of luxury. The garments are painted over the gold leaf, and then the pigments are partially scraped away to reveal the gold leaf beneath, creating various decorative designs in striking contrast between the gold and the pigments. The technique can be traced back to Russian works of the previous century, like the famous *Ελεούσα η Κυκκώτισσα* (Eleousa of Kykkos) painted by Simon Ushakov in 1668 for the iconostasis of the Moscow church of St Gregory of Neocaesarea, now in the Tretyakov Gallery.<sup>9</sup> The process of sgraffito, which involves carving pigments covering metal leaves, is indeed costly, particularly when gold leaf is used instead of other metal alloys. However, its application is often more mechanical and repetitive compared to the painstaking, delicate, and varied gold striations achieved with the use of burnished gold leaves seen on earlier Byzantine and Italian icons. This medieval technique continued to be applied rigorously by Cretan and Ionian workshops well into the 18th century. Nevertheless, the new gilding techniques, which I suspect may have originated in Russia, facilitated the creation of a significantly richer decorative effect featuring rosettes, lines, rhomboidal designs, and so forth, which appears to have been de rigueur in the aesthetics of icons within the Orthodox world during this period.

A different aspect of the open-ended dialogue between Russian and Greek workshops, along with the diverse and eclectic artistic output that arose from this conversation, can be traced through studying an elegant seventeenth-century composition of the Virgin of the Passion in the Benaki Collection. The icon, donated to the Benaki Museum by the renowned Georgian émigré dancer Maria Manon Renieri, while executed in a distinctive Muscovite artistic idiom, adopts an iconographic model inspired by Greek, specifically Cretan, models.<sup>10</sup> (fig. 4)

8 Drandaki, Anastasia. *Greek Icons. The R. Andreadis Collection*. Athens and Milano: Benaki Museum and Skira, 2002, 236–239.

9 *Симон Ушаков — царский иконограф*, exhibition catalogue, 8 September 2015 – 10 January 2016, Moscow: Gallery Tretyakov, 2015, 130–132, no. 17 (E. Saenkova).

10 Maria Manon Artemieva Renieri came to Athens from Tbilisi in 1917. In 1934, she opened a dance school near Ardittos Hill in central Athens. She bequeathed her modernist house to the Hellenic State, and it now houses the Ephorate of Speleology. See Tsatsou-Symeonidou, Dora. “Ελληνικός χορός έντεχνος.” In: *Elliniki Ekpaideftiki Egkyklopaideia. Theatro, Kinimatografos. Mousiki. Choros* [Greek Educational Encyclopedia. Theatre, Film, Music, Dance], edited by Dora Tsatsou-Symeonidou, Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1999, 124–127.

The iconographic type of the Virgin of the Passion, where the Virgin and Child are accompanied by angels holding the instruments of the Passion, is a Komnenian creation inspired by sermons and hymns dedicated to the Virgin. A beautiful early example is to be found in the wall paintings of the Virgin Arakiotissa in Lagoudera, Cyprus (1192).<sup>11</sup> Variations of this type became extremely popular among Cretan workshops from the fifteenth century onwards, evolving into one of the hallmarks of Cretan painting. The adoption of Cretan models by Muscovite workshops attests to a reverse route of cultural transfers, this time from the Greek world to Russia. The routes of this reverse transfer could be various: trade, or perhaps gifts, mainly from Greek prelates and monks who travelled regularly to Muscovy for *ζητεία*, seeking alms and patronage for their religious institutions in the powerful Orthodox Empire of Russia.<sup>12</sup> Some of the icons they carried along were copies of famous miracle-working icons housed in their monasteries, like the Virgin of Kykkos, which Simon Ushakov copied in his own distinctive style.<sup>13</sup> In other instances, they presented their Russian brethren with icons that encapsulated and celebrated the character and sanctity of the holy place the monks represented. This is the case with another Muscovite icon depicting St John the Evangelist and his disciple Prochoros in the Cave of the Apocalypse. That icon, now in the Patmos Monastery Library,<sup>14</sup> features a distinctly Patmian iconography that was crystallised by Cretan workshops in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the close ties between the Monastery of St John the Theologian and Crete, as well as the international fame of Cretan icon painters, it is reasonable to assume that Patmian monks who often travelled to Muscovy for *ζητεία* brought along Cretan panels featuring Patmian iconography, which in turn provided new models for Russian icon painters.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the Benaki icon depicting the Muscovite version of the Cretan Virgin of the Passion, it is impossible to identify its exact model or trace the exact route of any Cretan icon that may have inspired the Muscovite workshop responsible for its creation. However, it is noteworthy that the Benaki panel

11 The literature on the Virgin of the Passion is quite rich. See, among others, Baltoyanni, Chryssoula. *Icons. The Mother of God in the Incarnation and the Passion*, Athens: Adam Editions, 1994, *passim*; Vassilaki, Maria and Niki Tsironis. “Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of Christ.” In: Vassilaki, Maria (ed.). *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, exhibition catalogue, Athens: Benaki Museum, 2000, 453–463. On the Komnenian wall painting in Lagoudera, see Konstantinidi, Chara. “Byzantine Painting in the Church of the Panagia tou Arakos.” In: Papageorgiou, Athanasios et al., *The church of Panagia tou Arakos*, Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation / A.G. Leventis Foundation 2018, 67–69. On the dissemination and afterlife of the type in the Christian world, Milliner, Matthew. *Mother of the Lamb: The Story of a Global Icon*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2022.

12 Agelomati-Tsougkaraki, Eleni. “Το φαινόμενο της ζητείας κατά τη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο.” *Ionios Logos*, 1 (2007): 247–293. Nystazopoulou, Maria. “Τέσσερα άγνωστα ρωσικά έγγραφα υπέρ της εν Μήλω Μονής της Θεοτόκου (1656–1705).” *Byzantine Symmeikta* 1 (1966): 231–256.

13 Above, n. 9.

14 Yuliana Boycheva, forthcoming.

15 On the ties between Patmos and Russia, see Yuliana Boycheva et als. in this volume.

reinterprets one of the most widespread Cretan types of the Virgin, which became immensely popular in both the Orthodox and Catholic worlds from the fifteenth century onwards.<sup>16</sup>

Another testament to this process of exchanges and shared artistic considerations and technical solutions in applying gold striations is offered by a pair of imposing despotic Greek icons from Epirus, precisely dated 20 and 24 May 1773.<sup>17</sup> (figs. 5a-b) The garments of the enthroned Christ and Virgin and Child are adorned with shell gold. Painterly golden highlights are created using metallic dust blended with a binder instead of the traditional gold striations, which are applied with either burnished or unburnished gold leaf over bolo, mordant, or garlic juice. This technique of gilding garments by applying gold dust, much like any other pigment, became widespread in Russian icons from the second half of the 17th century, following the groundbreaking and influential work of Simon Ushakov and his followers.<sup>18</sup> In Ushakov's paintings, featuring his distinctive naturalistic, softly modelled figures, the garments are accentuated by the generous application of broad gilded surfaces, to which – instead of gold leaf – gold paint mixed with gum Arabic was applied using a brush. The same gilding technique is found in the Benaki pair of despotic icons, dating a century later. The skilled Epirot workshop that created them fused the Byzantine tradition with modern decorative and technical solutions in both the background and the garments.<sup>19</sup> It is no coincidence that solutions such as those mentioned above primarily characterise the art of Greek workshops that operated either in regions that had close trade relations with the northern Balkans and Russia, such as Epirus, or were located in the great melting pot of Orthodoxy, Mount Athos, all regions that were familiar with and appreciated high-quality Russian icons.

These observations provide new insights into the ongoing dialogue and the potential adoption of technical solutions from Russian sources that have not been sufficiently recognised in scholarly research on Greek icons. Within the Greek research context, for historical reasons I have discussed elsewhere, the category “icon” has primarily referred to the Greek icon as an autonomous artistic phenomenon that retained anachronistic Byzantine characteristics while occasionally incorporating modern elements of Western European origin.<sup>20</sup> Recent technical studies, the documentation of

16 Milliner, *Mother of the Lamb* 2022.

17 Drandaki, *Greek Icons*, 250–253, nos 63–64.

18 *Симон Ушакови* 2015.

19 The background of the two despotic icons, decorated with interlocking ogival patterns and anhemia made of stucco in low relief, reflects patterns widespread in sumptuous Ottoman and Venetian textiles that appear simultaneously on Russian, Romanian and Greek icons of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Drandaki, op.cit.)

20 Drandaki, Anastasia. “The discreet charm of a brand: methodological considerations for attributing unsigned icons to Cretan painters of the 15th–17th centuries.” *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaeologikes Etaireias* 41 (2020): 237–252; eadem. “A taste for all things Byzantine: Byzantium in the collections of Antonis Benakis.”

Russian icons, and the interpretation of their routes and reception in the Greek Orthodox space have, to some extent, challenged this entrenched and restrictive perception of Greek icons. Research conducted under RICONTRANS has made it evident that the central role of icons in the cult practices and identity-building of Greek Orthodox communities, whether viewed as a work of worship or a collector's item, has often resulted in the hellenisation of the inscriptions accompanying Russian icons. In some instances, the intervention provided a definitive solution: scraping off the original Slavonic inscriptions and substituting them with Greek ones. This is the case with a fine seventeenth-century triptych from the Stroganov workshops.<sup>21</sup> (fig. 6) I believe that in most of these instances, the reason behind this drastic change in the identity of the icons — or their nationality, if you prefer — lies with art dealers aiming to attract the interest of Greek collectors. During the interwar period, when this triptych was acquired by Alexandra Choremi, the sister of Antonis Benakis, only to be donated later to the Benaki Museum, Greek icons had become a fashionable and highly sought-after collectible. They were infused with ideological significance as a crucial stage in national painting, associated with Greek religiosity, much as Russian icons had been for Russia since the second half of the 19th century, within the context of the national ideology introduced under Tsar Nicholas I (1825–55) and the (re)emergence of Byzantium and its culture as the ancestor of and model for the Russian state.<sup>22</sup> This ideological orientation and the high demand for Greek icons whetted art dealers' appetite for greater profit, resulting in the alteration or even falsification of the objects' history and identity.<sup>23</sup>

21 Kalliga, Alexandra Eleni, and Athina Georgia Alexopoulou. “Russian Icons, 17th–18th c. Non-Destructive, Non-Invasive Diagnostic Methodology for an Integrated Study of Micrographic Triptychs from the Benaki Museum Collection” *Heritage* 6.2 (2023): 1325–1343. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage6020073>; Kalliga, Alexandra Eleni. The *Stroganov* Micrographic Triptych of the Benaki Museum Collections. A Non-Invasive Study on Materials and Technique.” In: *Άγγελος. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Άγγελου Δεληβορριά*. Athens: Benaki Museum 2023, 131–152.

22 Taroutina, Maria. *The Icons and the Square. Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival*. University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2018, esp. chapters 1 and 2; Pyatnitsky, Yuri. “Император Александр III, А. А. Половцев и приобретение коллекции А. П. Базилевского для Императорского Эрмитажа.” In: Konivets, Anna Valentinovna (ed.). *Stories about the Hermitage, “Collection of Motley Chapters...”*, Part II, Saint Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, 2014, 34–41. Lidova, Maria. “The Rise of Byzantine Art and Archaeology in Late Imperial Russia.” In: Elsner J., (ed.). *Empires of Faith in Late Antiquity: Histories of Art and Religion from India to Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020, 128–160; Kirichenko, Evgenia Ivanova. *The Russian Style*, tr. A. Tait. London: Laurence King Publishing 1991; Foletti, Ivan. *From Byzantium to Holy Russia: Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and the Invention of the Icon*. Rome: Viella - Liberia Editrice, 2017.

23 Drandaki, “The discreet charm of a brand.”

However, in other instances where the Slavonic inscriptions are merely overpainted by Greek ones, the two successive layers in the icon's biography require special treatment by the Museum to ensure they are highlighted appropriately. Today, with the aim of conservation and museological display focusing not on an uncritical restoration of the object's original state but on documenting and preserving the traces of their journeys and adventures, it has been decided, wherever possible, to keep both sets of inscriptions visible, as for example in the case of an icon of St John the Baptist. (fig. 7) This approach enables the successive phases of the icon's history to remain visible and encourages the public to reflect upon its adventures.

A second change that occurred to Russian icons' identity when transferred to the Greek Orthodox environment was the loss of the special confessional statement they carried when created for a Russian audience that could and was interested in deciphering such theological messages. This observation applies mainly to the icons of the Old Believers, painted panels, as well as a multitude of brass cast triptychs, polyptychs and crosses with enamel and/or gilding. The technical features of the host of brass icons in the Benaki collection have been thoroughly studied in collaboration with the Museum's team of metal conservators: Depy Kotzamani, Anthia Foka, and Maria Zacharia.<sup>24</sup> Through their iconographic and stylistic conservatism, materials and technique, these portable icons asserted the religious identity of their original Old Believers audience. Interestingly, it was precisely these characteristics that facilitated their transfer to the Balkan region and their warm reception by the Greek Orthodox public. In the case of brass icons in particular, the conservative and repetitive nature of their iconography, along with their relatively inexpensive mass production that conveys a sense of luxury through gilding and coloured enamels, as well as their generally small dimensions, has resulted in the presence of hundreds of such works in churches, homes, and collections throughout the Greek world. In this new environment, the visual language of these works, rich with doctrinal nuances and religious-political messages pertinent to the Old Believers milieu, loses its symbolic content and is ultimately re-appropriated with a pan-Orthodox significance for the Greek public, finding a place in its religious practices and museums.

The second inquiry that we focused our research on concerns the final stage of the biography of Russian icons: their museification, not only at the Benaki Museum but also throughout Greece. This process fundamentally transforms not only the context of their use but also their very identity, shifting them from objects of public or private devotion into collectible works of art and historical testimonies intended for

24 Kotzamani et al. "The conservation of Metal Icons and Crosses" and "Technology of Metal Icons and Crosses." In: Drandaki (ed.), *Routes of Icons*, 80–85 and 96–103.

public discourse. In this new environment, they are embedded in an artificial yet meaningful context that addresses the priorities and inquiries set by curators and museologists regarding the historical past and its reconstruction.

It is precisely our perceptions of the past, shaped by our academic training as art historians and curators, and the boundaries of scholarly fields, that direct modern divisions between works which coexisted smoothly in the same context at the time of their creation. This is beautifully exemplified in the case of the chapel of the Burning Bush at Sinai, where, in the 17th to 19th century, alongside the Byzantine mosaics, many Russian icons, as well as Byzantine and Cretan ones, hung against the colourful wall tiles from Damascus. A rich combination of colours and styles, multilingual Greek, Arabic, and Slavonic inscriptions, along with various woods and frames, created a vibrant and diverse panorama of icons that coexisted, establishing an Orthodox devotional space with a multinational character.

By contrast, in the contemporary museum milieu of the 20th and 21st centuries, geopolitical origins and the language of inscriptions often serve as the primary criteria for interpreting objects and distributing them among different departments. This brings me to the final research direction we have been exploring within RICONTRANS: the organisation of exhibitions.

How does a Greek museum engage with its audience today, conveying the knowledge, experience, and interpretations gathered from the systematic study of Russian icons? This question may seem straightforward, yet it is quite complex within the current political context. In 2017, when we first engaged with Russian works from the Benaki collections — rather hastily, for the reasons mentioned at the beginning of this paper — the exhibition we organised marked the conclusion of the celebrations for the Year of Greece-Russia. These celebrations included a series of significant icon exhibitions and events held in both countries.<sup>25</sup> The Greek-Russian Year followed similar annual celebrations previously organised between Russia and other European states, resulting in the orchestration of magnificent exhibitions, such as the majestic *Sainte Russie: l'art russe des origines à Pierre le Grand*, held at the Louvre in 2010 during the year of Russia in France.<sup>26</sup>

25 The celebrations included art exhibitions and academic conferences, such as the international Congress on *Byzantine Influences in Medieval Russia*, organised by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Museum of Byzantine Culture, and even a special edition of stamps commemorating the Greece-Russia Year 2016 (see: [https://www.thephilatelists.gr/index.php/grammatosima/ellada-grammatoshma/ελλαδα-ασπραγιστα/2011\\_eos\\_simera/greece\\_2016\\_mnh\\_2921-nomismata-grammatosima-sylloges](https://www.thephilatelists.gr/index.php/grammatosima/ellada-grammatoshma/ελλαδα-ασπραγιστα/2011_eos_simera/greece_2016_mnh_2921-nomismata-grammatosima-sylloges)).

26 Durand, Jannic, Dorota Giovannoni, Ioanna Rapti (eds). *Sainte Russie: l'art russe des origines à Pierre le Grand. Paris: Musée du Louvre Editions, 2010. On the exhibition see* [https://mini-site.louvre.fr/sainte-russie/FR/index\\_a.php](https://mini-site.louvre.fr/sainte-russie/FR/index_a.php).

In 2022, when the Benaki Museum organised the first of the two exhibitions conducted within the framework of RICONTRANS, the circumstances could not have been more different from those just five years earlier.<sup>27</sup> The war in Ukraine, the elephant in the room overshadowing RICONTRANS, has radically altered the international political landscape. It reminds us, in the bluntest and most compelling way, that while we strive to historicise and understand the cultural phenomena of the past, we are simultaneously historical subjects ourselves. The interpretation and negotiation of cultural heritage can never be approached in a sterile manner, detached from current political circumstances. Ultimately, the political dimension of religious art, which Yuliana Boycheva astutely placed at the centre of our reflection within this project by using “Piety and Propaganda” in the subtitle of RICONTRANS, has proven to be not only remarkably timely but also tragically incisive.

On the one hand, for the Western world Russia is caught in a cultural *damnatio memoriae*, where even its mention is often meticulously avoided, especially in terms of icon exhibitions — a domain, icons, that for many European countries has been more intertwined with Russian works than with Greek icons since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, under the present circumstances, this topic has become quite contentious. For example, the Ikonen Museum in Recklinghausen, renowned for its extensive and well-published collection of Russian and Greek icons, has just launched a new exhibition titled: “Icons in-between. Eastern Christian Art from Border Areas: Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Western Balkans, Greece”.<sup>28</sup> The topic of this exhibition is exceedingly interesting. Particularly for someone like me who despises academic boundaries, the concept of in-betweenness is especially appealing. However, I cannot help but wonder how and where Russia, with its conspicuous absence from the title, fits into this negotiation, even though a handful of Russian icons are included in the exhibition and their centres of production are marked on the nice map in the catalogue. Furthermore, I contemplate how the centre-border dichotomy is defined in a representation of the Orthodox world through its cult icons.

The other side of the same coin — namely, the centrality of Russian icons in today’s public space — has become quite pronounced within Russia itself. This is evident in the transfer, by presidential order, of Andrei Rublev’s *Hospitality of Abraham* from the Tretyakov Gallery to the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, and in the forcible de-museification of an emblematic icon from its museum environment to a cult space in order to facilitate popular pilgrimage amid wartime — a tested and successful practice

27 The *Routes of Icons 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century* exhibition was held at the Benaki Museum, Pireos 138, from 8/12/2002 to 5/2/2023 [https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_events&view=event&id=1019496&Itemid=164&lang=en](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_events&view=event&id=1019496&Itemid=164&lang=en)

28 The exhibition was curated by Dr Lilya Berezhnaya, who also edited the accompanying catalogue (Recklinghausen 2025) under the ORTHPOL project (Horizon 2020) <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/950287>.

of medieval Byzantine origins.<sup>29</sup> (fig. 8) In all instances, the political weight of ideologically charged religious works from the past warrants careful observation and reflection.

In the two exhibitions I curated for the Benaki Museum under the RICONTRANS initiative, we focused on the reception and coexistence of Russian icons alongside those from other production centres in the Greek Orthodox context. (Figs 9–10) We aimed to reconstruct the historical realities of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as delineated by the sources and the objects themselves, which inform us of commissions, donations, and transfers of icons from workshops scattered over a very wide geographical area. Icons travelled from place to place in ships and caravans, by land and sea, crossing territories belonging to different states and empires. Works made in various centres in Russia, Venetian Crete and the Ionian Islands, Ottoman Constantinople, the pan-Orthodox Mount Athos, or the Aegean islands could be found side by side in monasteries, churches and pilgrimage sites, as well as in the private icon niches that adorned and protected the homes and workshops of Orthodox Christians.

The two exhibitions, one at the Benaki premises at Pireos 138 in 2022, and the other, open until the end of April 2025 in a beautifully restored Ottoman mosque in the city of Drama, aimed to reconstruct such a diverse ensemble of icons from this period. Through the juxtaposition of works of different provenance, we wished to explore the stylistic and technical diversity of the icons that circulated in Greek Orthodox space from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The concept of space was treated not so much as a geographical entity but, above all, as a social construct that is consistent with the notion of community created by an Orthodox identity and shared by populations with different traditions, ethnic backgrounds, political allegiances, and language. The common Byzantine background created a shared legacy of iconographic subjects and technical solutions that were constantly enriched in various ways in each centre of production without, however, disrupting the constants that allowed the movement of icons from place to place and their common use in the same place of worship from Russia and Ukraine to the Ionian Islands, Crete and Asia Minor. The second part of both exhibitions was exclusively devoted to the technology and conservation of Russian icons, conducted by the Benaki conservators under RICONTRANS. The objective was to share new knowledge acquired from our recent research with the public, while also allowing visitors to engage with the issues, processes, and operations of museums today.

29 See, for example <https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/trinity-icon-venerated-in-moscow>. For a reflection on such topics, Foletti, Ivan, *Russian Imperialism and the Medieval Past*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press 2024.





Fig. 1. View of the “Religious Art from Russia to Greece” exhibition, Benaki Museum, 14/12/2017 – 11/02/2018. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis. © Benaki Museum.



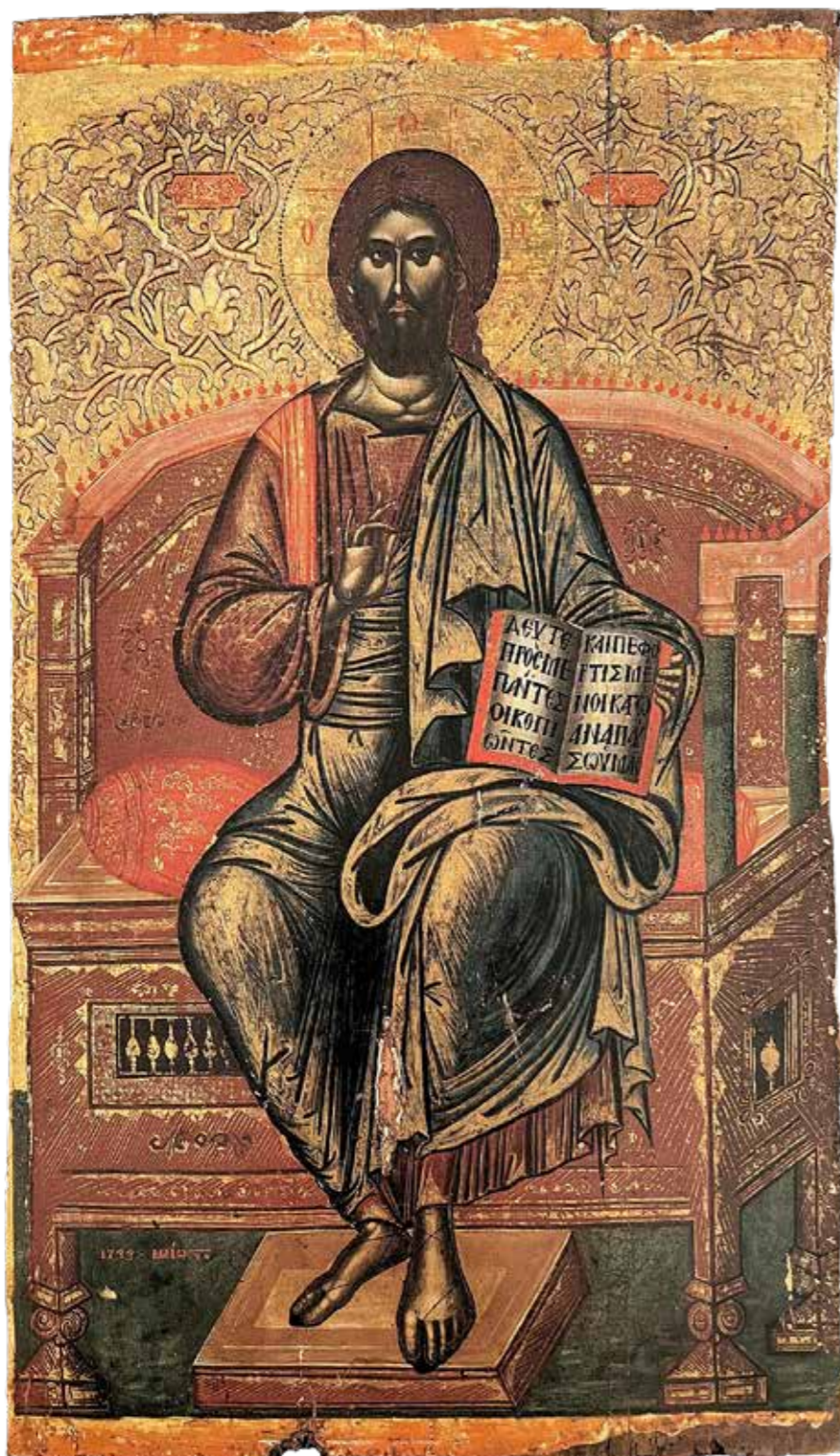
Fig. 2. The Virgin of the Passion, 17th century, Moscow, with sgraffito decorated background, Benaki Museum, no. 29533, Gift of Manon Renieri. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis. © Benaki Museum.



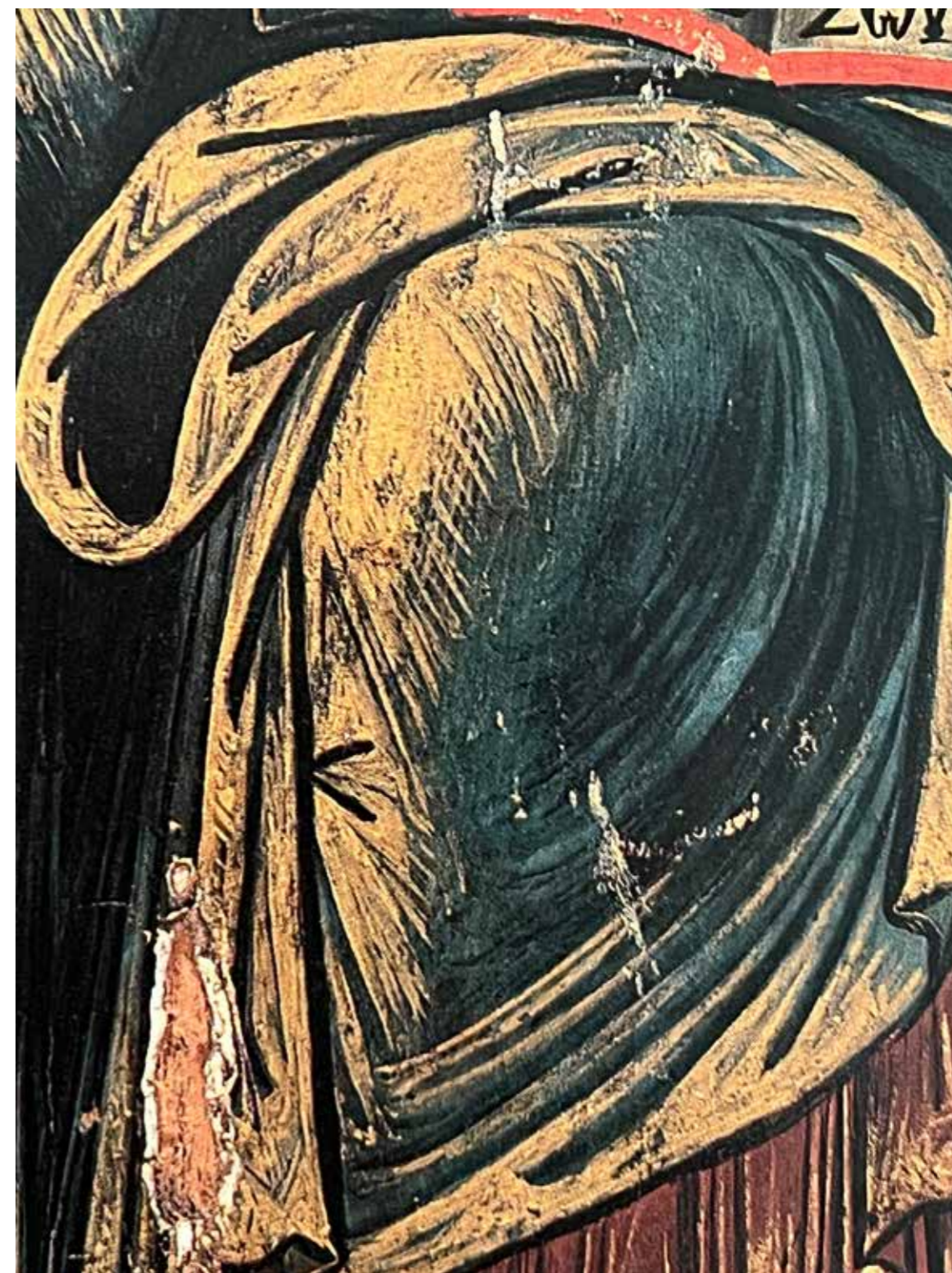
Fig. 3. Virgin and Child, Saints Demetrios and Nestor, with sgraffito and punched decoration on the gold leaf, 18th century, Mt. Athos workshop, Benaki Museum, R. Andreadi Collection. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis. © Benaki Museum.



Fig. 4. Virgin of the Passion, Painter Emmanuel Tzanfournaris, Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice. (Source: Public Domain Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virgin\\_of\\_the\\_Passion\\_by\\_E.Tzanfournaris.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virgin_of_the_Passion_by_E.Tzanfournaris.jpg))



a



b

Fig. 5. a-b. Christ Pantokrator Enthroned and detail, 20 May 1733, Epirot workshop, Benaki Museum, R. Andreadi Collection. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis. © Benaki Museum.



Fig. 6. Triptych with the Presentation of the Virgin, the Annunciation, the Nativity and other scenes, 17th century, Stroganov workshops, Benaki Museum, no 14147. The Greek inscriptions are later additions, inscribed over the erased original Russian ones. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis.



Fig. 7. St. John the Baptist with Russian inscriptions, overpainted by Greek lettering, 18th century, Mstera Workshop, Vladimir region, Benaki Museum, no. 31409, gift of Meni Koufaki. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis. © Benaki Museum.



Fig. 8. The Hospitality of Abraham by Andrei Rublev in Christ the Savior Cathedral, Moscow, June 2024. (Source: <https://ottawa.citynews.ca/2023/06/04/russias-most-famous-icon-handed-over-from-museum-to-church-despite-protests/>).



Fig. 9. View of the “Routes of Icons 17th-19th century” exhibition, Pireos 138, Benaki Museum, 8 December 2022 - 5 February 2023. © Benaki Museum.



Fig. 10. View of the “Routes of Icons 17th-19th century: Art and Technology” exhibition, Santirvan, Drama. 14 December 2024- 27 April 2025. © Benaki Museum.

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Exhibition: *Hungarian Treasure: Silver from the Nicolas M. Salgo Collection* <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/hungarian-treasure>

**Yuliana BOYCHEVA**

Art Historian, Principal Researcher,  
Centre of Art History “El Greco”,  
Institute for Mediterranean Studies - FORTH  
Principal investigator *RICONTRANS* ERC Consolidator Grant project

**Irena ĆIROVIĆ**

Art Historian, Assistant professor,  
Department of History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

**Cristina COJOCARU**

Art Historian, Scientific Researcher, Department of Medieval Art and  
Architecture, «G. Oprescu» Institute of Art History, Bucharest

**Rumyana DECHEVA**

Conservator/Restorer,  
Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Prof. Ivan Dujcev”, Sofia University St.  
Kliment Ohridski

**Anastasia DRANDAKI**

Art Historian, Assoc. Prof. of Byzantine Art and Archaeology,  
Faculty of History and Archaeology, National and Kapodistrian University of  
Athens & Academic Advisor – Benaki Museum

**Lora GERD**

Historian

**Ivanka GERGOVA**

Art Historian, Professor of Art history,  
Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

**Panayotis IOANNOU**

Art Historian, Associate Professor of Art History,  
University of Crete & Collaborating Faculty Member, Institute for Mediterranean  
Studies-FORTH

**Sofia KATOPI**

Art Historian, Postdoctoral Researcher,  
Institute for Mediterranean Studies-FORTH

**Natalia KOMASHKO**

Art historian, Independent Researcher

**Ana KOSTIĆ**

Art Historian, Assistant Professor of Art History,  
Department of History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

**Marija LAKIĆ**

Art historian, PhD, Department of History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy,  
University of Belgrade

**Nenad MAKULJEVIĆ**

Professor of Art History,  
Department of History of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

**Angel NIKOLOV**

Historian, Associate Professor in Medieval Bulgarian History,  
Faculty of History, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

**Ovidiu OLAR**

Historian, Nicolae Iorga Institute of History, Romanian Academy, Bucharest  
/ Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences,  
Vienna

**Nikolas PISSIS**

Historian, Assistant professor of History, Department of History and Digital  
Humanities, Ionian University

**Atanasia VĂETIȘI**

Art Historian, Stavropoleos Monastery, Bucharest

**Ivana ŽENARJU RAJOVIĆ**

Art Historian, Principal Research Fellow / Assistant research professor  
Institute for Serbian Culture Priština & Leposavić









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Nikiforou Foka 130 & Melissinou

PO Box. 119, Rethymno 741 00 • Tel. 28311 06003 • [info@ims.forth.gr](mailto:info@ims.forth.gr)

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