

This monograph examines Russian icons and liturgical objects preserved in the Balkans and the Mediterranean as mobile artefacts embedded in networks of transfer, mediation, and reception. Rather than approaching these objects solely as devotional images or works of religious art, it foregrounds their trajectories, agents of circulation, and the visual knowledge accompanying them. By tracing routes of mobility alongside processes of artistic transmission and local recontextualisation, the study conceptualises transfer and reception as interconnected stages in the social life of religious objects.

Religious Art and Soft Power: transfer and reception of Russian Art in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean (late 16th- early 20th cc)

DRAFT

Institute for Mediterranean Studies -
F.O.R.T.H.Rethymno 2026

Yuliana Boycheva

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RICONTRANS

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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The reception of Russian artistic models was facilitated by their codification in painters' books of models. Instructions based on Russian prototypes and iconographic schemes formalised their transmission and stabilised their authority within local practice. A characteristic example is the Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna, which includes a chapter entitled How to Paint Icons (Traditional/Russian Approach), signalling the institutionalisation of Russian stylistic principles.

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ABSTRACT: Russian icons in the Balkans and the Aegean Islands: an instrument of political propaganda and transfer of modern artistic models and techniques (17th-19th century)

Russian icons kept in churches, monasteries, museums and private collections throughout the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean make up both a collection of precious art objects and a body of tangible evidence. These icons demonstrate the historical development of religious, political, cultural and artistic relationships between Muscovy and the Russian Empire on one side, and the Orthodox population across the vast region of Southeast Europe on the other. Russian icons are immensely popular. They are venerated as objects of devotion in the spheres of public worship – including churches and monasteries – and private worship, alike. Since the late 19th century, they have also become objects that figure in art collections.

Over the course of their long history, these artefacts have taken on numerous and interdependent meanings, values and uses that are at once religious, ideological, political and aesthetic. In this new environment, their purpose has moved well beyond any intentions those who made and disseminated them may have had. The spread of Russian icons to the Balkans, and more particularly their reception in that region, illustrate the little-studied process by which the artistic language in Southeast Europe evolved from a medieval dialect to a modern dialect. Whether they are masterpieces of religious art or mass-produced objects, these icons have generally been viewed as ‘trademarks’ of Russia – the only Orthodox monarchy in existence when the modern world began. This talk will explore Russian icons in the Balkans and the Aegean Islands as a corpus of art that, though little noticed, permeated the visual culture of these societies. The talk will examine the key role these icons played as both an instrument of political propaganda for the Russian Empire, and a vector of modern artistic models and techniques.

This monograph examines Russian icons and liturgical objects preserved in the Balkans and the Mediterranean as mobile artefacts embedded in networks of transfer, mediation, and reception. Rather than approaching these objects solely as devotional images or works of religious art, it foregrounds their trajectories, agents of circulation, and the visual knowledge accompanying them. By tracing routes of mobility alongside processes of artistic transmission and local recontextualisation, the study conceptualises transfer and reception as interconnected stages in the social life of religious objects.

PART I: ROUTES, AGENTS, AND NETWORKS OF TRANSFER

Chapter 1: Tsarist, Imperial, Ecclesiastical, and Diplomatic Transfers.

Objects of Russian piety reached the Balkans over a long period through a dense and evolving network of interconnected channels. The aim of the first chapter of this monograph is to identify, reconstruct, and analyse the transfer of Russian religious artefacts—icons, liturgical vessels, priestly vestments, books, and other devotional objects—which circulated continuously within the Balkan Peninsula and the Aegean Islands from the second half of the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By tracing the routes of circulation and examining the agents and networks that enabled their movement, the chapter establishes the historical and structural framework necessary for understanding the subsequent reception, recontextualisation, and changing identities of these objects in new religious and cultural environments.

Russian religious artefacts—icons, liturgical vessels, veils, vestments, books, and objects of private piety—preserved today in museums and in church and monastic collections across the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean constitute a substantial and heterogeneous corpus of objects of the material culture. Beyond their artistic value, these objects represent important historical evidence for the long-term development of relations between Russia and the Orthodox populations of South-Eastern Europe. More specifically, they illuminate the evolving confessional, political, cultural, and artistic connections between Muscovy and the Russian Empire, on the one hand, and the Orthodox communities of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, on the other. Among this material, icons form the most widespread and socially embedded category. They are encountered not only in the iconostases and proskynetaria of churches and monasteries, but also in domestic contexts, where they occupy a central place in family altars and private devotional practices. Whether exceptional works of religious art or mass-produced objects intended for broad circulation, icons came to be widely perceived as a distinctive marker of Russian Orthodox culture.

In the early modern period, when Russia emerged as the only Orthodox monarchy, icons functioned as a visual and material “trademark” of Russian piety and authority. An eloquent testimony to their aesthetic reception is the inclusion of the “Icons of Muscovy” among the most beautiful things in the world in the *Canon of Hymns Comprising Many Exceptional Things* by

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Kesarios Dapontes,¹ one of the leading figures of the Greek Enlightenment, composed in the late eighteenth century.

This study adopts the methodological framework of cultural transfer,² combined with recent theoretical approaches developed at the intersection of art history, visual studies, and social anthropology³. Its aim is to reconstruct the phenomenon of the circulation of Russian religious artefacts in its *longue durée* by identifying preserved objects in the region; tracing the routes and agents of their transfer; analysing the driving religious, political, ideological, and social factors behind their movement; and examining the contexts of their reception in diverse cultural and social environments. At the same time, the study seeks to analyse and classify these artefacts according to their iconographic and stylistic characteristics, and to assess their impact on the visual culture of the host societies.

The transfer of icons and liturgical objects produced in workshops across the vast territory of the Russian Empire and disseminated in culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse settings reflects the shifting political and cultural relations between Russia and the Orthodox communities of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states over several centuries. Rather than approaching these artefacts solely as objects of worship or as works of religious art, this study considers them as active vehicles of cultural transfer and, in certain contexts, of political and ideological influence. As they moved across borders and were integrated into new environments, these objects entered into complex processes of interaction, adaptation, and reinterpretation within the societies that received them. Within this framework, Russian icons from the Balkans and the Aegean Islands are examined as a largely understudied artistic corpus, gradually “infused” into local visual cultures, and as a crucial source for the history of early modern and modern Orthodox art. Their trajectories

¹ K. Dapontes, *Κανών περιεκτικός πολλών εξαιρέτων πραγμάτων των εις πολλάς πόλεις & νήσους & έθνη & ζώα εγνωσμένων* (1778), ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens, 1991).

² Espagne M., Werner M. *Transferts. Les Relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco—allemand (XVIII—XIXe siècles)*. P., 1988; Espagne M. *L'histoire de l'art comme transfert culturel: l'itinéraire d'Anton Springer*. P., 2009.

³ Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986. Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”, in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64-91.

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allow us to observe how foreign visual models could be appropriated, domesticated, or rendered invisible, while continuing to shape devotional practice and aesthetic perception.

A substantial category of Russian religious artefacts reached the Balkans and the Aegean through official channels closely connected to imperial strategy and ecclesiastical policy. These transfers form the starting point for the analysis of the routes, agents, and networks through which Russian religious material culture entered the region and laid the groundwork for its subsequent reception and recontextualisation.

Tsarist Patronage and Confessional Politics

The first or “official” channel of icon transfer was linked with Russian foreign policy and was already evident from the sixteenth century, having as a key feature the pursuit of religious and political influence over the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire. Giving or sending Russian icons as a “gift” for Balkan Christians was part of an economy of symbolic and material exchanges reflecting the relevant needs and aspirations of both the recipient and the donor. On the part of the latter, the nature and process of these exchanges went through different phases, corresponding to the evolution and transformation of the specific objectives of the Russian state.

The close contact of Muscovy with the Greek world started in the sixteenth century, milestones being the recognition of the royal title of Ivan the Terrible by the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1560, the establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589 and its recognition by the Patriarch of Constantinople Jeremiah II.⁴ The various generous donations in cash, furs, and relics made by the Russian tsar in the sixteenth century to the Orthodox patriarchates of the East and Mount Athos were associated with the need of the Russian dynasty for external assistance in addressing internal dynastic, political, and ideological conflicts, as well as with affirming the international power of the Russian kingdom.⁵ With these acts, the tsar was for the first time presented and acclaimed as a patron of the entire Orthodox East, a praise indicated with the mention of his name in the liturgy

⁴ Б. Фонкич, “Греческие грамоты в Советских хранилищах,” *Cyrrillomethodianum* 11 (1987): 9–31. Idem, “Россия и Христианский Восток,” 52-82; Pissis, “Η ανατολική εκκλησία και η Ρωσία”; В. Ченцова, “Ктиторовство и царский титул: Россия и Хиландарский монастырь в XVI в.,” *Славяноведение* 2 (2014): 15-24

⁵ Л. Столярова, “Обмен дарами между русским правительством и Афоном в XVI в. 1509-1571 г.,” *Первый российско-греческий форум гражданских обществ. Российско-греческие государственные, церковные и культурные связи в мировой истории (Moscow, 2008)*, 79-90.

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of the Eastern Church.⁶ During this period, the political doctrine that presented Moscow, the largest center of Orthodoxy after the Fall of Constantinople, as the “third Rome” crystallized.⁷

Donations by Russian tsars and members of the imperial family combined personal piety with confessional diplomacy. These offerings functioned simultaneously as symbolic gestures of protection toward Orthodox communities under Ottoman rule and as material expressions of Russia’s self-positioning as guardian of Orthodoxy.

Historians have addressed this phenomenon primarily within the framework of relations between the Russian state and Church and the Orthodox populations of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Fall of Constantinople (1453) to the beginning of the twentieth century, and more specifically in connection with the policy of patronage adopted by Russia towards the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ The donation, circulation, and sale of icons, liturgical utensils, books, textiles, and other ecclesiastical objects for Orthodox churches and monasteries in the Balkans occupied a central place in studies of Russian church history already from the mid-nineteenth century. This historiographical tradition has succeeded in reconstructing the historical contexts within which these processes of transfer unfolded, while also assembling substantial evidence concerning their objectives, agents, and mechanisms—particularly for the period prior to the nineteenth century. The emphasis has been placed largely on officially orchestrated channels of dissemination, directed from Russia towards the Balkans and the Eastern Patriarchates. Nevertheless, despite the richness of this scholarship, significant divergences remain among

⁶ Фонкич, “Греческие грамоты,” 21; Pissis, “Η ανατολική εκκλησία και η Ρωσία,” 285.

⁷ Н. Сеницына, Тратей Рим: Истоки и эволюция русской средневековой концепции (XV-XVI vv.) (Moscow, 1998); Daniel B. Rowland, “Moscow—The Third Rome or the New Israel,” *Russian Review* 55/4 (1996): 591-614; С. Maltezou, “Les Grecs devant Moscou - ville Imperiale,” *Studies on the Slavo-Byzantine and West-European Middle Ages. In memoriam Ivan Dujčev* (Sofia, 1999), 68–74.

⁸ Муравьев А. Н. Сношения России с Востоком по делам церковным. СПб., 1858—1860. Т. 1—2; Каптерев Н. Ф. Характер отношений России к православному Востоку в XVI и XVII столетиях. М., 1885. С. 105—145; Дмитриевский А. А. Путешествие по Востоку и его научные результаты: Отчет о заграничной командировке в 1887/88 году. Киев, 1890; Дмитриевский А. А. Патмосские очерки. Из поездки на остров Патмос летом 1891. Киев, 1894; Фонкич Б. Л. Россия и Христианский Восток в XVI — первой четверти XVIII в. Некоторые результаты изучения. Источники. Перспективы исследования) // *Acts. XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Selected Papers: Main communications. Moscow, 1991. Vol. I: History / ed. I. Ševčenko, G. G. Litavrin, W. K. Hanak. Shepherdstown, WV, USA, 1996. P. 187—209; Tchentsova V. G. Le 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 Ottoman // *Turcica. 1998. 30. P. 383—396.**

Russian and Balkan historians with regard to the scale, chronology, and dynamics of the phenomenon. These differences stem both from the heterogeneous nature of the source material employed and from the national historiographical narratives within which these processes have been embedded. Thus, Russian scholarship has traditionally foregrounded the seventeenth century as a period of intensified icon donation and religious exchange, only more recently extending its focus to later phases,⁹ whereas Greek historiography, for example, has tended to privilege the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Russian involvement became closely intertwined with the political, ideological, and symbolic dimensions of the Greek struggle for independence¹⁰. Such chronologically segmented approaches, however, have often treated transfer as a unidirectional movement, insufficiently addressing the subsequent reception, adaptation, and recontextualisation of Russian religious artefacts within the diverse social, cultural, and visual environments of the host societies.

The rise of Russia's prestige in the Orthodox world after the Fall of Constantinople and the emergence of the doctrine "Moscow the Third Rome" turned the Russian Tsar into a figure embodying the salvation and defense of Orthodoxy, to whom every Orthodox could theoretically petition for help and support. As early as the 16th century, the Russian Tsar and the higher clergy assumed such a protectionist role and began to send regular donations and offer alms to the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹

⁹ Tchesnokova N. P. Les icones russes, comme l'objet d'économie en Méditerranée au XVII siècle // *Economia e arte secc. XIII—XVIII. Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", Prato. Atti della "Trentatreesima Settimana di Studi"*, 30 aprile — 4 maggio 2001. Firenze, 2002. P. 407—410; Чеснокова Н. П. Русская благотворительность Христианскому Востоку в середине XVII в. // *Каптеревские чтения. М., 2009. Вып. 7. С. 163—182*; Чеснокова Н. П. Христианский Восток и Россия: политическое и культурное взаимодействие в середине XVII в. М., 2011. С. 113—158; Chesnokova N. Russian Icons in Jerusalem: The Icon Of Holy Apostle James, Brother of The Lord (1644) // *Routes of Russian Icons in Greece and the Balkans (16th—20th c.) / ed. Boycheva Y. A. Seyssel: La Pomme d'or, 2016. P. 89—104*

¹⁰ Ροτζάκος Ν. Ενθαφύπνιση και εθνογένεση. Ορλωφικά και ελληνική ιστοριογραφία, Αθήνα. 2007; Πίσσης Ν. Τροπές της "ρωσικής προσδοκίας" στα χρόνια του Μεγάλου Πέτρου // *Μνήμων. 2009. Τ. 30. С. 37—60*; Καρράς Γ. «Από την ύλη των ονείρων πλασμένοι»: Έλληνες και Ρώσοι πριν από τη Ρωσική Επανάσταση // *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη από τη Ρωσία στην Ελλάδα 16ος — 19ος αιώνας. Αθήνα, 2017. Σ. 22—33*

¹¹ Каптерев Н. Ф. Характер отношений России к православному Востоку... С. 103—145; Χρυσοχοϊδης Κρ. Άθως και Ρωσία 15ος — 18ος αι. Ιδεολογήματα και πραγματικότητες (μια προσέγγιση) // *Ρωσία και Μεσόγειος. Αθήνα. 2011. Τόμος Α. Σ. 267—282*

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On the one hand, icons and liturgical utensils were transferred to the Balkans—most prominently to Mount Athos—through acts of dynastic and ecclesiastical patronage articulated as votive donations “for health” and “for the eternal peace of souls.” Far from constituting sporadic gestures of piety, these donations functioned as structured practices of symbolic exchange, whose intensity and iconographic content were closely responsive to moments of political tension and dynastic crisis.¹² Therefore, the marked increase in Russian donations to Mount Athos around 1560 coincided with Ivan IV’s efforts to secure the recognition of his royal title by the Patriarch of Constantinople, while subsequent large-scale offerings commemorating the death of Ivan Ivanovich invested these objects with an explicit memorial and expiatory function.

EXAMPLES: “*Obraz Spasov*” (*The Image of Saviour*), 16th c. *Xenophontos monastery, Mother of God of Vladimir*. Late 16th–early 17th cc, *Simonopetra monastery, Gold embroidered epitrachelion with dedicatory and liturgical inscriptions donated to Vatopedi monastery by the tsar of Russia Fiodor Ivanovitch (1593)*

The continuity of such transfers during the Time of Troubles (1598–1613), despite acute political instability and economic contraction in Muscovy, underscores their strategic importance.¹³ Under Boris Godunov, the dispatch of icons, liturgical vessels, and financial aid to the Orthodox East operated as a means of reinforcing Moscow’s claim to spiritual primacy as the only Orthodox polity. Within this communicative framework, the circulation of material gifts was embedded in a reciprocal economy of prestige, in which Eastern Patriarchs and monastic communities responded by transmitting miracle-working icons and relics to Moscow, thereby contributing to the symbolic accumulation of sacred capital in the Russian centre.¹⁴

¹² Столярова Л. В. Обмен дарами между русским правительством и Афоном в XVI в. // Российско-греческие государственные, церковные и культурные связи в мировой истории. М., 2008. С. 79—89; Ченцова В. Г. Ктиторовство и царский титул: Россия и Хиландарский монастырь в XVI в. // Славяноведение. 2014. 2. С. 17, 21; Smirnova E. S. Russian Icons, Iconographers and Iconographic Models in Countries of the Orthodox World in the late 15th and 16th centuries. // *Routes of Russian Icons...* P. 29—50.

¹³ Ульяновский В. И. Православный Восток и Московское царство в начале Смуты: духовные миссии, посольства, проблема восприятия власти, символика даров. // *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*. 2012. № 2 (12). С. 55—90; Τσεσνοκόβα Ν. Π. Διάδοση των ρωσικών εικόνων στην Ορθόδοξη Ανατολή // *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη από τη Ρωσία...* Σ. 15—16

¹⁴ Баталов А. Л. Гроб Господень в сакральном пространстве русского храма XVI—XVII вв. // *Восточнохристианские реликвии / ред.-сост, А. М. Лидов. М., 2003, 513-523. В. Ченцова, Икона*

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The controlled nature of this process is particularly evident in a set of instructions issued in 1603, which regulated the iconographic repertoire deemed appropriate for presentation to “Greek” clerics and monks. According to this document, the donated icons were to depict universally recognisable Christian themes—such as the Trinity, the Virgin and Child, or Christ Pantokrator—alongside selected Russian iconographic types and saints.¹⁵ This carefully considered iconographic approach strikes a balance between recognisability and differentiation. Shared visual codes made these objects legible and acceptable within the established devotional frameworks of the Orthodox East. At the same time, selectively articulated Russian iconographic themes asserted the symbolic importance of the newly recognised Russian Patriarchate and its saints.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

2 icons with St. Alexios Metropolitan of Moscow Mid-16th c. Hilandar monastery; 3 icons of with Saint Leontius, Bishop of Rostov, Wonderworker (Hilandar monastery); 6 Icons with the Virgin Svenskaya-Pecherskaya (...); Archieratic panagiaron-enkolpion (3 Benaki museum, 1 Tatarna monastery); Royal icons donated to the church of St. Nicholas, Ermoupoli by the Consul of Russia Georgios Douvinos in 1866-1867. In 1908 the icons were transferred to the new orthodox Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Ermoupoli, Syros

Official donations and institutionalised patronage: from monastic alms collection missions “Zeteia” to the state register “Palestinian state”

From the mid-seventeenth century onward, precious gifts functioned as material expressions of protection, with Russia presenting itself as the guardian of Orthodoxy. These artefacts were not merely devotional objects; they bore significant symbolic weight and served to promote Russia’s geopolitical aspirations, prestige, and symbolic authority. This policy, characterized increasingly

Иверской Богоматери (Очерки истории отношений Греческой церкви с Россией в середине XVII века по документам РГАДА) (Moscow, 2010); Tchepokova, Христианский Восток и Россия, 113-158; idem, “Русская благотворительность Христианскому Востоку в середине XVII века,” Каптеревские чтения 7 (2009): 163-182; V. Tchencova “Le 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 Ottoman,” *Turcica* 30 (1998), 383-396

¹⁵ Смутное время Московского государства (1604—1613 гг.): Материалы, изданные Обществом истории и древностей российских при Московском университете. [М., 1918]. Вып. 1: Акты времен Лжедмитрия I (1603— 1606 гг.) / ред. Н. В. Рождественский. § 19. С. 17.

by the pursuit of cultural influence and patronage over the patriarchates of the Orthodox East, Following the rise to power of the Romanov dynasty and the enthronement of its founder, Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov (1613–1645), relations between Russia and the Orthodox East intensified significantly, reaching a peak in the second half of the seventeenth century during the reign of his successor, Aleksey Mikhailovich Romanov (1645–1676).¹⁶ Within this framework, the exchange of relics and miracle-working icons assumed a particularly important role in political and diplomatic interactions between Russia and the Eastern patriarchates, as well as major monastic centres of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷

One of the most significant transfer routes involved items obtained during officially sanctioned alms-collection missions “*ζητεία*” carried out by representatives of Orthodox monastic institutions in Russia. These missions were subject to concurrent regulation by both the Russian state and the authorities of the Orthodox Church, thereby playing a pivotal role in the regular exchange of icons and liturgical objects between Russia and the Orthodox East. Alms collection developed into one of the major paths for the allocation of Russian material aid to the Orthodox clergy of the Ottoman Empire. The institution of “*ζητεία*” took the form of the collection of voluntary contributions (in money, ecclesiastical articles, and other valuable objects), conducted by authorized representatives of the Eastern patriarchates and monasteries who peregrinated regularly in both Orthodox and non-Orthodox countries.¹⁸ The standardization and official formalization of the rules of how this

¹⁶ Фонкич, “Греческие грамоты,” 45–60; idem, “Россия и Христианский Восток,” 52-82; O. Alexandropoulou, “Το ρωσικό ταξίδι του Αθανασίου Πατελλάρου και ο «Προτρεπτικός λόγος» του προς τον τσάρο Αλέξιο (1653)” *Μνήμων* 21 (1999): 9–35; idem, “Η Ελληνική μονή Αγίου Νικολάου στη Μόσχα. Στοιχεία από την ιστορία των ελληνορωσικών σχέσεων στο δεύτερο μισό του 17ο αιώνα,” *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* 6 (2000): 111–154.

¹⁷ Tchesnokova N. P. *Les icones russes, comme l’objet d’économie...*, P. 407—410; Чеснокова Н. П. *Христианский Восток и Россия...* С. 115—198; Τσεσνοκόβα Ν. Π. *Διάδοση των ρωσικών εικόνων...* Σ. 15—21; Чеснокова Н. П. *Выписка из книг Посольского приказа о восточнохристианских реликвиях (XVI—XVIII вв.) // Каптеревские чтения. М.: ИВИ РАН, 2020. Вып. 18. С. 181—231; Tchencova V. G. *Le fonds des documents grecs...*, 385; Зверев А. С. *Константинопольские и греческие реликвии на Руси // Христианские реликвии в Московском Кремле. М., 2000. С. 111—146; Фонкич Б. Л. Чудотворные реликвии Христианского Востока в Москве в середине XVII в. Икона Иверской Богоматери. М., 2004. С. 5—8; Русские иконы на Синае: Жалованные грамоты, иконы и произведения декоративно—прикладного искусства XVI—XX вв. из России, хранящиеся в монастыре св. Екатерины на Синае / [Авт.] Игошев В. В., Герасименко Н. В., Зеленина Я. Э., Комашко Н. И., Саенкова Е. М., Семесько-Бабару Т. М., Чеснокова Н. П. М., 2015. М., 2015.**

¹⁸ Kriton Chrysochoidis. «Αθως καὶ ἡ Ῥωσία (15ος–18ος αἰώνας). Ἰδεολογήματα καὶ πραγματικότητες. Μία προσέγγιση.» In *Ῥωσία και Μεσόγειος. Πρακτικά Α΄ διεθνούς συνέδριου (Αθήνα, 19–22 Μαΐου 2005)*, edited by Olga Katsiardi–Hering and Athina Kolia-Dermizaki, Vol. A, part E, 267-282. E.

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institution was applied in Russia during the reign of the first Romanovs clearly reflects the intensification of the contacts between Russia and the Orthodox East during the second half of the seventeenth century¹⁹ and Russia's ambition to emulate Byzantium by unifying the "Orthodox space." In this direction, a new political-ideological doctrine was launched, according to which the tsar of Russia, as a new Constantine, would undertake the restoration of the Byzantine Empire.²⁰

The symbolic exaltation of Moscow as an ecumenical center of Orthodoxy was the dominant element of this phase of Russian relations with the Orthodox East. During this period, the donations of Russian icons, money, and other valuables through the institution of "ζητεία" become part of an economy of symbolic and material exchanges in which the peregrinating Eastern Orthodox monks offered icons and relics from the Orthodox East and aimed as a whole to symbolically reconstitute the lost Constantinople in Moscow.²¹

In 1721, Peter the Great abolished the Moscow Patriarchate and replaced it with a Holy Synod.²² His ecclesiastical reform opened up a new period in the history of the Russian church, which became more independent from the Eastern patriarchates²³ and was directed, from that point, by the apparatus of the secular state. The Russian Church continues to devote sustained institutional attention to supporting Orthodoxy in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.

A key instrument of this policy was the establishment, in 1735, of the state register known as the "Palestinian State".²⁴ Building on earlier medieval practices of alms-collection missions (zeteia),

Aggelomati-Tsougkaraki. "Το φαινόμενο της ζητείας κατά τη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο." *Ionios Logos* 1 (2007): 247–293;

¹⁹ O. Alexandropoulou, *Ο Διονύσιος Ιβηρίτης και το έργο του «Ιστορία της Ρωσίας»* (Irakleio, 1994), 25–31; idem, "The History of Russia in Works by Greek Scholars of the Seventeenth Century," *Cyrrillomethodianum* 13–14 (1989–90): 61–91.

²⁰ Tchesnokova, *Христианский Восток и Россия*, 195–202.

²¹ V. Tchentsova, *Икона Иверской Богоматери (Очерки истории отношений Греческой церкви с Россией в середине XVII века по документам РГАДА)* (Moscow, 2010); Tchesnokova, *Христианский Восток и Россия*, 113–158; idem, "Русская благотворительность Христианскому Востоку в середине XVII века," *Каптеревские чтения* 7 (2009): 163–182; V. Tchentsova "Le 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 Ottoman," *Turcica* 30 (1998): 383–396

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²³ N. Pissis, "Τροπές της «ρωσικής προσδοκίας» στα χρόνια του Μεγάλου Πέτρου," *Mnimon* 30 (2009): 37–59 (here 52–53).

²⁴ N. Chesnokova. "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам в контексте конфессионально–политических связей России и Православного Востока в XVIII в." *Каптеревские Чтения* 17 (2019): 201–202. Lora Gerd. "The taxidiotes from the Balkans in Russia in 1830–1914: Orthodoxy and politics",

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this register transformed charitable giving into a modern, formalised system for the regular allocation of financial support to Orthodox ecclesiastical institutions under Ottoman rule. The system was administered by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and financed directly from the state treasury. The “Palestinian State” was conceived as a hierarchically organised register comprising fifty-three ecclesiastical institutions. Priority was accorded to the four Eastern Patriarchates—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—followed by selected metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, and major monastic centres across the Balkans, Asia Minor, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Monasteries located in regions of heightened confessional and political significance, including Mount Athos, Crete, Corfu, the Princes’ Islands, and the Danubian Principalities, were systematically incorporated into this network of support. The Holy Synod distributed approximately 4,000 rubles in silver annually among monasteries included in the register. These monasteries were entitled to send representatives to Russia every five years to collect charitable donations, which often included not only funds, but also icons, liturgical utensils, vestments and books. The Russian state covered travel and accommodation expenses²⁵. As an alternative, financial support could be provided through the Russian embassy in Constantinople. This option became increasingly common in practice, further integrating ecclesiastical patronage into diplomatic infrastructures. In this way, financial assistance was institutionalised as a durable mechanism of confessional solidarity and ecclesiastical diplomacy, linking material support to broader strategies of religious and political influence.

Although the basic scale of payments remained largely unchanged throughout the eighteenth century, the differentiated distribution of funds reveals the symbolic and political priorities underpinning Russian patronage. The Patriarch of Constantinople, for example, received a substantially higher annual allowance than other recipients, while certain monasteries and shrines were granted additional support in recognition of their spiritual prestige, historical ties to Russia, or their role in the circulation of relics to Russian territory. Financial assistance thus functioned

Yuliana Boycheva (Ed.) *Orthodox Hegemony and Art. Transfer of Russian religious art to the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (late 16th - early 20th centuries)*. Rethymno: Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH. (forthcoming)

²⁵ E.P. Kudryavtseva. Русско-греческие политические и церковные связи в 20–30-х гг. XIX в. 26 *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 13 (3), 2020, 26-40, DOI 10.24833/2071-8160-2020-3-72-26-40

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not merely as charitable aid, but as a calibrated mechanism of symbolic exchange that reinforced hierarchies of authority and reciprocity within the Orthodox world.

This system was further consolidated in the nineteenth century. By decree of 27 January 1826, Tsar Nicholas I significantly increased the annual stipends allotted to the Eastern Patriarchs, underscoring the continued centrality of ecclesiastical patronage within Russian imperial policy. All payments were channeled through the Russian diplomatic mission in Constantinople, embedding religious support even more firmly within the structures of imperial diplomacy.

Particularly prominent within the list named “*Palestinian State*” were the monasteries of Mount Athos, long regarded by the Russian Church as a focal point of Orthodox spirituality. Their preferential treatment reflects both their symbolic authority and their function as nodal points in the circulation of relics and icons. In this context, material exchanges encompassed monetary support, sacred objects, and relics, forming part of a broader economy of religious prestige and visual diplomacy through which Russia articulated its role as protector and patron of Orthodoxy beyond its imperial borders.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

- *Patmos monastery: 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*

The icon of Saint John the Theologian, one of the three Muscovite royal icons placed in the central iconostasis at Patmos Monastery, which constitutes the focal point of worship for the community.²⁶

The icon of Saint John was acquired by Elder Gedeon, the monastery’s *σκενοφύλαξ* (“keeper of the vessels”), accompanied by Filotheos *προηγούμενος* (former abbot) during an alms-collecting mission to Moscow carried out between 1696 and 1698.²⁷ It constitutes important material

²⁶ Baltoyanni, Chrisanthi. «Το Καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου της Πάτμου. Σκέψεις και παρατηρήσεις με την ευκαιρία των εργασιών συντήρησης.» In *Μετ’ευλαβείας και έρωτος απλέτου. Το καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου, Πάτμος*. Patmos: Iera Moni Theologou, 1995, 4-17. Καθηγούμενος Πάτμου Αντύπας. *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^{ος}-19^{ος} αιώνας*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva and Anastasia Drandaki. Athens: Benaki Museum - Institute for Mediterranean Studies- FORTH, 2017, 34-58.

²⁷РГАДА. 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.

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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 19th c.

The monastery archives contain detailed records in two distinct codices, both dated 16th 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.²⁸ 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 a triptych,²⁹ 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,³⁰ 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

Βραβείον της Ιεράς Μονής Αγ. Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου Πάτμου. Athens: Εταιρεία Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Μελετών, 1980, 49, (π.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 Российского Государственного Архива Древних Актов.” In: *Кантереvские чтения*, 2024 (22), 151-203 (180-186). Resh, Daria. “Patmos Codices A.C. 1016 and A.C. 1016a: 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. 1016, A.C. 1016a)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Publishing Series ARTMOBEX: Studies on History of Art Mobility and Exchange, IMS/FORTH (forthcoming in 2026).

²⁸ Florentis, *Βραβείον*, 49, π. 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, π. 52.

²⁹ «Τα ονόματα ούφωρεν ο γέρων Γεδεών από τη Βλαχίαν 1698 μην Ιουλίου 16 και έφερεν την εικόνα την μεγάλην του Θεολόγου, και το άγιον ευαγγέλιον, εγκωμιασμένον, και ένα μαστραπά καμνιστό και έναν ποτήρι. Και ένα τριμώρφη. Και εδώ γράφωμεν τα ονόματα όπου έδωκαν την ελημωσύνη διαφόρους τόπους (...))» (Ενθύμηση, χφ. 768, φ. 6).

³⁰ Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota, “Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα.” In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 230.

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Synodic (A.C. 1016, 1016a) kept by Patmos Monastery.³¹ 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 icon³² of Saint John the Theologian, described in the Complete Inventory of the Monastery's Treasures as “a fine example of Russian art”,³³ 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 monastery³⁴ located in the narthex of the catholicon, situated 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 hosios Chrystodoulos.³⁵

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).³⁶ The Gospel book is rendered with

³¹ Resh, Daria. “Patmos Codices A.C. 1016 and A.C. 1016a.

³² 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.

³³ The manuscript under consideration is unpublished, and is currently stored in the Patmos monastery library: Κατάλογος | μετὰ πλήρους περιγραφῆς τῶν ἐν τοῖς 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, καταρτισθεῖς ὑπὸ τριμελοῦς ἐπιτροπείας ἐξ ἀδελφῶν αὐτῆς κατ’ ἀπόφασιν τῆς ἀδελφότητος τῆς δεκάτης (10ης) Νοεμβρίου τοῦ χιλιοστοῦ ἑνεακοσιοστοῦ τριακοστοῦ ὀγδόου (1938) ἔτους. Fol. 17v.

³⁴ Chatzidakis, Manolis. “Icons.” In *Οἱ Θεσσαυροὶ τῆς Μονῆς 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).

³⁵ 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: Typografeio N. Khrysogelou, 1889.15. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/saint-john-the-theologian/3QGn2KuhGAw7EQ> (last visited 30.05.2025).

³⁶ Papadopoulos, Stelios and Fatourou-Isychaki, Kanto. *Επιγραφές της Πάτμου*, Athens: Ellinikes ekdosis, 1966, 27, n. 38, 39.

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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”³⁷, 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.³⁸ 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 near the Porta Latina in Rome, but the saint emerged from the cauldron untouched.³⁹ 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,⁴⁰ and were influenced by Jacobus de Voragine's

³⁷ Although unlikely, read from a different perspective the letter could alternatively be “Σ”.

³⁸ *Симон Ушаков—царский изограф*, exhibition catalogue, 8 September 2015 – 10 January 2016, Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, 2015, Cat. no. 23, 150–153., , Cat., no. 26, 161–163

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ 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.

Golden Legend.⁴¹ 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.⁴² The icon of Saint John the Evangelist from the main iconostasis in Patmos Monastery bears a strong resemblance to this group,⁴³ 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. 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 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

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² Kochetkov, Igor’ (ed.) *Словарь русских иконописцев XI-XVII вв.* Издание 2-е; Moscow: Indrik, 727–732, 862–863.

⁴³ 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 Andreya 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 Tretyakov Gallery Publishers, 2019, 147-156. Preobrazhenskii, Aleksandr. “Апостол и Евангелист Иоанн Богослов” (Catalogue entry n. 53), “Апостол Иоанн Богослов. Медальон царских врат” (Catalogue entry n. 54). In Preobrazhenskii, 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. 1.* Moscow: Dukhovnaya niva, 2022, 134-135, 136-137.

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tortures, all of which are considered to be individual attributes of the saint.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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 17th 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).⁴⁷

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

⁴⁴ 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-Codognet. 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

⁴⁵ 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 = Словъне. International Journal of Slavic Studies*, No 1 (2015): 541-553.

⁴⁶ 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. 1*, edited by eadem. Moscow: Dukhovnaya piva, 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

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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.⁴⁸ However, this aspect of the icon decoration has received minimal scholarly attention to date, primarily due to its position behind the iconostasis border.⁴⁹

The silver halo is decorated with embossed floral decorative motifs, with the name “ΓΕΟΡΓΙ” 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 decoration⁵⁰. 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 monk who travelled to Moscow and brought the icon to Patmos.⁵¹ The practice of adorning icons with precious metal revetments as a form of religious expression and devotion was widespread across the Orthodox world.⁵² Our hypothesis is that the silver icon frame was ordered specifically for the new muscovite

⁴⁸ There are only two brief descriptions of the icon's silver frame: Baltoyanni, Chrisanti. «Το Καθολικό της Ι. Μονής Θεολόγου της Πάτμου. Σκέψεις και παρατηρήσεις με την ευκαιρία των εργασιών συντήρησης.» In Baltoyanni, Chrisanti and Baltoyannis, Stavros. *Μετ'ευλαβείας 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 Patmou, 2005, 58.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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)

⁵¹ Chatzidakis, Manolis. “Icons.” In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, 107-108.

⁵² 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.

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icon by Elder Gedeon during his stay in Braşov, where he acquired several other precious utensils and a richly decorated Gospel book.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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”.⁵⁶ 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,⁵⁷ and eight hexagonal dishes, crafted in Transylvania in 1696, part of the Andrásy treasury, displayed at the exhibition entitled “Hungarian Treasure: Silver from the Nicolas M. Salgo Collection”, held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2015.⁵⁸ The icon frame has not been restored, so it is not known whether it bears the stamp of the craftsmen and workshop

⁵³ 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).

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota, «Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα.» In *Οι Θεσσαυροί 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>

⁵⁶ Vaetisi Atanasi. *Brancovan Art. The last synthesis in Romanian Art*. Bucharest 2025.

⁵⁷ 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>

⁵⁸ 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:Hungarian Treasure: Silver from the Nicolas M. Salgo Collection <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/hungarian-treasure>

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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.⁵⁹ 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 Athos⁶⁰ and a range of Gospel book covers crafted in goldsmith workshops in Braşov (Transylvania) in the 1670s and 1680.⁶¹ In the context of our

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ 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

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research, the latter example represents a closer iconographic parallel for the revetment on the royal 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 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.⁶²

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 18th century.⁶³ Grigorovich-Barsky briefly notes: “*The church of Saint*

Simonopetra' Simonopetra Monastery” (Catalogue entry). In *Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Museum of Byzantine Culture*, edited by Athanasios Karakatsanis. Thessaloniki: Museum Of Byzantine Culture, 1997, 370-371.

⁶² 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>

⁶³ Grigorovich-Barskij, Vassiliy. Странствия Василя Григоровича-Барского по Святым местам Востока с 1723 по 1747 г. (Части I-IV). Saint Peterbourg: Типография В. Kirshbaouma, 1886. Della Dora, Veronica. “Light and

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John the Evangelist, which has 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.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵ 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, he does not mention the fact that the icons on the iconostasis were from Moscow.⁶⁶

The first detailed description and discussion pertaining to the provenance of the icons 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.⁶⁷ 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

sight: Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij, Mount Athos and the Geographies of eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox Enlightenment.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 53 (2016): 83–103.

⁶⁴ Grigorovich-Barskij, *Странствия*, 60.

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Murav'ev, *Письма с Востока*, 60.

⁶⁷ Dmitrievskiy, Aleksey. *Патмосские очерки. Из поездки на остров Патмос летом 1891 года*. Kyiv: Тип. Г.Т. Корчак-Новицкого, 1894, 173.

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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 Saviour and Mother of God, which were painted in Moscow*”.⁶⁸

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 monk Michail Malandrakis and published in Odessa in 1899.⁶⁹ Crichton-Stuart’s description mentions the fact that the royal 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*”.⁷⁰

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-Barkskiy, 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.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Dmitrievskiy, Aleksiy. *Πατμοσκιε οτσερκι*, 173-174.

⁶⁹ 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: Typografeio N. Khrysogelou, 1889, 15-17.

⁷⁰ Malandrakis, *Η Πάτμος*, 15; Bute, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, *Essays*, 273

⁷¹ 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).

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Taken together with the relevant written sources comprising the inscription on the silver revetment, records in monastic codices and data and testimonies from 18th-19th 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 17th 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, 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

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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.

Furthermore, from the early nineteenth century onward, the growing presence of competing religious propagandas in the Orthodox East—most notably Catholic and Protestant—combined with the evolving dynamics of the Eastern Question and the rise of rival Balkan national movements alongside Russian Pan-Slavism, produced an increasingly fluid ideological and political landscape. Within this shifting environment, the relationship between political strategy and cultural patronage did not diminish; rather, it became more complex, situational, and strategically articulated. Religious artefacts, visual models, and acts of patronage continued to operate as key instruments through which confessional affiliation, political loyalty, and cultural influence were negotiated and asserted.⁷²

Across these contexts, icons and church utensils functioned not merely as devotional necessities but as instruments of symbolic occupation, facilitating the rapid transformation of religious space and reinforcing Russia's claim to act as both military power and confessional protector within the Orthodox East. The new diplomatic framework created favourable conditions for the further circulation of Russian religious artefacts, stimulating their integration into local ecclesiastical settings. In this way, icons and liturgical objects operated not merely as devotional gifts but as instruments of visual diplomacy, embedding imperial authority and political claims within the ritual and material culture of Orthodox communities across the Balkans and the Aegean.

Gifts to institutions vs. gifts to persons

A distinct subcategory consists of official gifts addressed to prominent political and ecclesiastical figures. Such objects functioned as markers of prestige and instruments of symbolic communication within trans-imperial networks of power.

⁷² Герд Л. А. Константинополь и Петербург: русская церковная политика на Православном Востоке. М. 2006; Gerd L. A. Russian Sacred Objects in the Orthodox East: Archive Evidence from the 18th to the Early 20th Century // *Museikon* 2020. N 4. P. 227—236; Διάλλα Α. Η Ρωσία απέναντι στα Βαλκάνια. Ιδεολογία και πολιτική στο δεύτερο μισό του 19ου αιώνα. Αθήνα. 2009; Διάλλα Α. Η χριστιανική Ανατολή και η ρωσική διπλωματία — λόγοι και πρακτικές (β' ήμισυ του 19ου αιώνα) // Ρωσία και Μεσόγειος, Πρακτικά Α' Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου (Αθήνα, 19—22 Μαΐου 2005). Αθήνα, 2011. Τ. Α'. Σ. 381—396.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

- **Cross donated to Constantinople Patriarch Joachim III (1908-1912) by the Tsar of Russia Nicholas II, Moscow, workshop Kozma Konov, Inv. 8313, Benaki museum (Athens)**

The pectoral cross of Patriarch Joachim III consists of three parts: the body of the main cross, a small patriarchal miter with a cross and chain on the upper arm, connected by rings, and a round pendant bearing a glass stone imitating amethyst attached to the lower arm. The main cross consists of a silver case in which a synthetic ivory inlay is set. At the center of the cross is a relief silver depiction of the Crucified Christ with a gilded halo. The four arms of the cross are adorned with a delicate wire-like latticework featuring floral motifs inscribed within square frames. The contrast between the white color of the “ivory” and the gilded latticework creates the two-tone simplicity of the decoration. This cross is part of the artistic movement that emerged in the early 20th century under the influence of a broader interest in early Christian art, which liberated objects from the rich ornamentation characteristic of 19th-century ecclesiastical silver and gold work.

The “decorated pectoral cross” (Krest s ukrasheniami) in the Benaki Museum is an example of a special category of objects of the highest ecclesiastical distinction established after the abolition of the Patriarchate of Russia and the founding of the Holy Synod by Peter the Great in 1721. The cross seals attest that the object is the work of the renowned goldsmith Kosma Konov, owner of one of the largest workshops for the production of ecclesiastical and secular objects in Moscow in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This workshop was part of what was then the largest commercial and industrial association for the production and distribution of ecclesiastical and secular goldsmithing in

Russia, owned by the Oloviashnikov brothers, suppliers to the Imperial Court. The Benaki Museum’s archives contain the correspondence regarding the donation of the object, as well as the official document from the Patriarchate of Constantinople,

dated June 7, 1919. The document certifies that the cross was donated to Patriarch Joachim III by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and was subsequently purchased by Dr. Alexander Spanoudis at the auction held after the patriarch’s death, on February 18, 1913. The object was donated to the Benaki Museum in 1933, following the death of A. Spanoudis, by his brother Konstantinos Spanoudis, biographer of Patriarch Joachim III.

- **Icon with the Virgin of Kazan, Grachev Brothers workshop, St Petersburg, 1897, Gift of the Greeks of Russia to the General Constantine Smolenski (1843-1915), Hellenic army officer at the Greco-Turkish War of 1897**

The icon depicts the Mother of God of Kazan, one of the most revered icons of the Mother of God in Russia. The Mother of God is depicted in the style of the Hodegetria, with Christ standing and blessing beside her. According to tradition, the icon was miraculously discovered in 1579 in the city of Kazan. In 1649, by decree of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov, the veneration of the miraculous icon as the patroness of Moscow and all of Russia was established throughout the Russian state. 139 The Virgin of Kazan is associated with a series of significant events in Russian history from the 16th to the 19th century: the liberation of Moscow following Prince Dmitry Pozharsky's victorious campaign and the expulsion of the Polish invaders (1613), Peter the Great's victory over the Swedes (1720) and the Russians' victory over Napoleon (1812). First in Moscow, in front of the Kremlin (1625), and later in Saint Petersburg (1811), cathedrals dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan were built. Russian icons depicting this theme are among the most popular in Russia, as well as in Greece and throughout the Balkans. The icon in the Benaki Museum is distinguished by its decorative style, which combines three techniques: enamel, pearl embroidery, and painting. The oil painting on metal depicts only the faces and hands of the Virgin Mary and Christ, following the conventions of 19th-century academic art. The heavy frame is decorated with cloisonné enamel, which combines two types of decorative motifs: multicolored floral motifs in the so-called "Russian style" for the frame and halos, and a simple two-color geometric grid covering the entire surface of the icon. The figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ are formed by bead embroidery, while the embroidery itself forms the folds of the garments and the floral decorative motifs. The use of decorative elements embroidered with pearls, which follow the style of embroidery found on liturgical vestments and are integrated into iconography, is a distinctive feature of Russian ecclesiastical art from the 16th to the 18th century. From the second half of the 19th century, pearl embroidery on icons became independent of vestments, as the production of a new type of icon increased and prevailed, entirely covered by a metal overlay with the exception of the figures' faces and hands, while large sections of the composition are rendered with pearl embroidery and luxurious fabrics.

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Our Lady of Kazan is the most common iconographic subject in this type of luxury icon,¹⁴² and the icon in the Benaki Museum is a prime example. The hallmarks on its silver frame indicate that it was manufactured in the factories of the Grachev brothers (ГРАЧЕВЪ) by a craftsman with the initials “AP” and a mark indicating the purity of the silver. The Grachev brothers owned the largest factories producing ecclesiastical and other luxury decorative items in Russia. Their business was founded in 1866 in Saint Petersburg, and in 1892 it became an official court supplier, a position that granted the Grachevs the right to add to their products the seal featuring the double-headed eagle, the coat of arms of the Russian state.¹⁴⁴ From the archives of the Benaki Museum, we know that the icon was a gift to General Konstantinos Smolenski, a hero of the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, from the “Greeks of Russia.” For this reason, the icon constitutes an interesting piece of evidence regarding the use of works of Russian ecclesiastical art that were offered as gifts to figures in the Greek political scene.

Chapter 2: Religious Patronage as an Instrument of “Soft” Political Propaganda: Art Transfer in Wartime and Commemorative Practices

One of the fundamental features of the Russian Empire’s policy toward the Balkans from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century was the support and consolidation of Orthodox communities within the Ottoman Empire. This policy was grounded in the ideological framework of a shared Orthodox identity between Russians and the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman territories, with Russia presenting itself as their protector.⁷³

Following the rise of Russia as a major power on the international stage after the reign of Peter the Great, and in the context of its expanding geopolitical ambitions in the East during the eighteenth century, significant changes occurred in the traditional practices of donation and patronage directed toward the Orthodox East. These practices, which had been established since the second half of the sixteenth century, acquired new political dimensions. From the eighteenth century onward, Russia pursued a broader geopolitical strategy aimed at securing access to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. This strategy was implemented in parallel with policies supporting Orthodox Christian populations and encouraging their resistance to Ottoman rule.

Within this framework, the traditional image of the pious Orthodox ruler was enriched with the attributes of the modern, enlightened monarch, embodied above all by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. During this period, the concept of the “Russian expectation” among Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire underwent an important transformation. The long-standing imperial ambition to capture Constantinople—although never realized—remained a powerful

⁷³ Κοντογιάννη Π. Οι Έλληνες κατά τον πρώτον επί Αικατερίνης Β' ρωσοτουρκικόν πόλεμον. (1768—1774). Αθήνα. 1903. Σ. 90; Κιτρομηλίδης Π. Από την Ορθόδοξη Κοινοπολιτεία στις εθνικές κοινότητες. *Ελληνορωσικές πνευματικές σχέσεις // Τα Ιστορικά / Historica*. 1989. 10, 29—46; Οικονομάκη-Παπαδοπούλου Γ. *Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα // Οι θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*. Αθήνα, 1988, 221—Ροτζώκος Ν. *Εθναφύπνιση και εθνογένεση : Ορλωφικά και ελληνική ιστοριογραφία*. Αθήνα, 2007. Chrissidis, Nikolaos. *The Russian Holy Synod and the Greeks: Reconsidering Greek-Russian Relations in the Early Modern Period (16th–18th Centuries)*, *Canadian-American Slavic studies*. (2020), 54:72-98, DOI:10.30965/22102396-05401006

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element in Russia's political imagination and served as a catalyst for its foreign policy toward the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁴

In this context, the Russo–Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked an important transformation in the practice of religious patronage. The systematic procurement and distribution of liturgical vessels, vestments, books, and icons to Orthodox churches in territories occupied or influenced by Russian forces became closely connected with the ideological and political objectives of the Russian Empire. These objects were thus transformed into instruments of what may be described as a form of “soft” political propaganda.

The present chapter focuses on documentary and material evidence relating to such donations of icons and liturgical objects within the framework of Russian imperial patronage toward Orthodox communities during the Russo–Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through the analysis of written sources and the documentation of artefacts—including liturgical vessels, books, and icons—this study explores the multiple dimensions of their reception by local communities. Evidence from Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania reveals three categories of donations:

1. Institutional gifts provided by representatives of the state, the Church, or the military
2. Donations by Russian Military Forces to Churches in Regions under Russian Administration: Institutional and Private Soldiers' Offerings;
3. Foundation and equipment of memorial churches dedicated to Russian soldiers who fell in the wars.

During wartime, devotional practices intersected with commemoration and the projection of imperial presence. Icons and liturgical objects introduced through military channels contributed

⁷⁴ Πίσσης, Νικόλας. «Χρησμολογία και ρωσική προσδοκία» in Sophoulis Panos (ed.) *Σλάβοι και Ελληνικός Κόσμος. Πρακτικά Α' Επιστημονικής Ημερίδας Τμήματος Σλαβικών Σπουδών Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών*. Athens: Pelekanos, 2014, 149-168. Πίσσης Ν. Τροπές της “ρωσικής προσδοκίας” στα χρόνια του Μεγάλου Πέτρου // *Μνήμων*. 2009. Τ. 30. Σ. 37—60. Carras, Iannis. “What to expect when expecting: waiting for the Russians in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire” *History of European Ideas*, 2021, 48(8): 1074–1088. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2021.1970474>

not only to the liturgical life of local communities but also to the symbolic affirmation of Russian patronage over the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire. Within this broader framework, the present chapter examines various aspects of the use of Orthodoxy as a key ideological instrument in the implementation of the Archipelago Expedition and in the development of Russia's policy of state-regulated religious patronage during the Russo–Turkish Wars of 1768–1774 and 1787–1791. Particular attention is given to the different forms of reception of these policies by local communities. The war itself, closely connected with Catherine II's so-called “Greek Plan,” held particular importance for the establishment of a Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁵

Institutional gifts provided by representatives of the state, the Church, or the military

Russian state and ecclesiastical authorities also dispatched offerings directly to churches, monasteries, and, in some cases, secular institutions in the Balkans. From the eighteenth century onward, Russia's growing presence on the international stage and its expanding geopolitical ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean substantially reshaped the character of these practices. Whereas earlier donations had been grounded primarily in notions of charity, intercessory piety, and confessional solidarity, during the eighteenth century they increasingly became integrated into a state-regulated system of cultural and political influence directed toward the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁶ This transformation is closely linked to the imperial strategies of Catherine II and, in particular, to the so-called “Greek Project,” as well as to the emergence of Russia as a naval power in the Mediterranean. The Archipelago expedition, launched during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768–1774 under the command of Count Alexey Orlov, marked a decisive moment in this process. In this context, donations of icons and ecclesiastical furnishings functioned as tangible signs of imperial presence and protection.

⁷⁵ Smilianskaia, Elena B., Smilianskaia Irina M., Velizhev Mikhail B. *Россия в Средиземноморье. Архипелагская экспедиция Екатерины Великой*. Moscow: Indrik, 2011; Smilianskaia, Elena. “Protection” or “Possession”: How Russians Created a Greek principality in 1700-1775’, in Maria Baramova, Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, Vania Racheva (eds.) *Power and Influence in South-Eastern Europe: 16th–19th century*, Berlin-Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2013, 209-17.

⁷⁶ Герцман Н. Э. Энкомии Петру Великому в фондах Национальной библиотеки // *Россия и Христианский Восток*. М., 1997. Вып. 1. С. 197—206; Πίσσης Ν. Τροπές της “ρωσικής προσδοκίας” στα χρόνια του Μεγάλου Πέτρου // *Μνήμων*. 2009. Τ. 30. Σ. 37—60.

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Catherine the Great offered significant gifts to churches belonging to Greek communities that had provided financial support to the Russian fleet during the campaign. These gifts were also given to churches in territories temporarily occupied by Russian forces, as well as to those within the short-lived political formation of the Archipelago (1771–1774)⁷⁷. Further gifts were given during the subsequent Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1791.

The official and private correspondence of Empress Catherine II from this period constitutes a rich source of information. In May 1769, letters from Admiral Grigorii Spiridov reveal that he formally requested the replacement of the old liturgical equipment on the eight ships assigned to the Aegean mission with new “*gold and gilded crosses, liturgical vessels, vestments, and books*”.⁷⁸ In another letter of the same month, dated 6 May 1769 and addressed to Alexei Orlov, the Empress noted that she had sent him “*special campaign medals and panagiaris (engkolpia)*.”⁷⁹ Further evidence appears in an official letter of June 1769, in which Catherine II informed Admiral G. A. Spiridov that he had received “*all the necessary items for equipping fifty churches, including vestments, sacred vessels, and books*.”⁸⁰ She specified that these ecclesiastical objects were intended to support the common undertaking with Count Orlov, who was entrusted with deciding where they should be distributed, particularly to those in greatest need. The same issue is addressed in Catherine’s later correspondence with the Bishop of Saint Petersburg and Novgorod, Gabriel. In a letter of February 1788 she wrote *that every ship of the Russian fleet during the Archipelago campaign had pious and learned priests on board. The ships were equipped with liturgical vessels*

⁷⁷ Χαλκιά Ε., Κωνσταντίος Ν. Αυτοκρατορικά δώρα. Αφιέρωματα της Μεγάλης Αικατερίνης στην ελληνική εκκλησία του Λιβόρνου. Κατάλογος έκθεσης. Βυζαντινό και Χριστιανικό Μουσείο. Αθήνα, 2000. Смилянская Е. Б. “Россы в Архипелаге” или греческое княжество Екатерины Великой // Россия в Средиземноморье. Архипелагская экспедиция Екатерины Великой. М., 2011. С. 143—145; Charchare E. Russian icons in the Greek diaspora communities: Venice — Livorno — Trieste, 16th — 19th centuries // Routes of Russian Icons... P. 197—214

⁷⁸ Ulyanitskiy, Vladimir. Дарданеллы, Босфор и Черное море в XVIII веке. Очерки дипломатической истории восточного вопроса. Moscow: Типография А. Gatzuli, 1883, XCVI.

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⁸⁰ «*хотя для кораблей в Кронштате ризница состоящая в ризах патрахелях и поручнях и утварь дароносицы, кресты и книги молитвенныя имеюща, но известно ... адм. коллегии что по болей части старое и ... по врученной же мне экспедиции потребно иметь на осми военных судах ризы а особенно из оных одни весьма видные хорошия тож поручни и патрахели кресты же и дароносицы и лжицы серебряные а ежели разсудится и вызолоченные и все служебные и церковные книги дать и об оном ... коллегию прошу чтоб соблаговолено было определение зделать и купить ис церковных денег ... и отпустить к началу июня месяца на отплывающие семь кораблей и один фрегат*”: РГА ВМФ. Ф. 212. Оп. 4. Оп.4 Д. 58. л.224

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and books not only for use in the shipboard chapels and temporary field churches of the Russian navy, but also with the intention that some of these objects should be offered to “those who share our faith and suffer under the Turkish yoke.” The Commander-in-Chief, she added, had at his disposal a considerable number of such items for distribution.⁸¹ Additional documentary evidence confirms that such donations were indeed made to local ecclesiastical institutions. A letter of thanks preserved in the Russian State Archive of the Navy, dated 29 March 1772 and addressed to Admiral Spiridov, records the gratitude of Peter the Martyr and Stephen, Archbishop of Paros, for the generous alms offered to their poor nunnery on the island.⁸²

A related letter from Catherine II to the Bishop of Saint Petersburg and Novgorod Gabriel further clarifies the intentions behind this policy. Writing on 10 February 1788, the Empress explained that during the expedition of the Russian fleet against “our enemy, who is also the enemy of all Christians,” it was her wish that each ship should be accompanied by pious and educated clergy, preferably with knowledge of the Greek language. Liturgical vessels and books were to be provided for the temporary churches of the camps, serving not only the spiritual needs of the Russian army and navy but also those “who share our faith and suffer under the Turkish yoke.” The Commander-in-Chief would therefore be supplied with a large number of such objects for distribution. Bells were likewise to be sent, and Admiral Greig was instructed to oversee their transport.⁸³

The discovery in 1899 of the treasure of St Eustathios, the largest ship of the Russian fleet sunk at the Battle of Tchesme in 1770, and the descriptions of the rich finds - gold coins, liturgical objects,

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⁸³ Letter from Catherine II to Gabriel, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Novgorod [...]: “Κατά την παρούσαν [την εις Πελοπόννησον δήλα δη εκστρατείαν] του ημετέρου στόλου εν τη Μεσογείω εκστρατείαν εναντίον του εχθρού ημών τε και άπαντος του χριστιανισμού, προτιθέμεθα να χορηγήσωμεν τω ημετέρω στόλω ιερείς ευσεβείς και αμέμπτου διαγωγής, συμφώνως τω αριθμώ των πλοίων, κυρίως δε άνδρας κεκτημένους συν τη ευσεβεία και παιδειαν' λίαν δε λυσιτελές θα ήτο εάν τινες αυτών εγίνωσκον την Ελληνικην γλώσσαν' προσέτι δε ναούς προχείρους του στρατοπέδου, ιερά σκεύη και βιβλία, άτινα να χρησιμεύσωσιν ουχι μόνον εις τας κατά γην και θάλασσαν δυνάμεις ημών, αλλά και να έχη ο αρχιστράτηγος υπό την διάθεσιν αυτου αρκετόν ποσόν εξ αυτών προς διανομήν τοις υπό τον τουρκικόν ζυγόν στενάζουσιν ομοδόξοις ημών. [...] Επειδή δε συγχρόνως αποστέλλονται και κώδωνες, και περί τούτου αποτάθητε τω ναυάρχω Γρένυ. Δύνασθε δε ίνα μη απόλλυται μάτην ο καιρός να γράψητε εις Μόσχαν να αποσταλώσιν ενταύθα δια ξηράς. Πετρούπολις 10 φεβρουαρίου 1788 (σ. 460-461) Κ. Α. Palaiologos, "Ρωσικά περί Ελλάδος έγγραφα νυν το πρώτον εις την Ελληνικην μεθερμηνευόμενα". Parnassos 2 (1878): 459-464.

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vestments, icons and books, and other luxury items transported by the Russian fleet - confirm the written sources' data on the provision of liturgical objects for offering to the Orthodox population of the archipelago⁸⁴. The official report of the Russian Agent K. Flegel records the events surrounding the discovery of this treasure⁸⁵. Agent Flegel wrote in his report that a third of the treasure was lost and sold in the markets of Aivali, another third was transported to Constantinople and also lost, and only a small part was bought by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, who donated it to the St Petersburg Maritime Museum. The discovery in 1899 of the treasure of the *St Eustathios*, the largest ship of the Russian fleet sunk during the Battle of Chesme in 1770, and the descriptions of the rich finds—gold coins, liturgical objects, vestments, icons and books, as well as other luxury items transported by the Russian fleet—confirm the evidence provided by written sources regarding the presence of liturgical objects intended for distribution among the Orthodox population of the Archipelago.

The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the treasure are recorded in the official report of the Russian Agent K. Flegel. He describes in detail the underwater search carried out by Greek divers at the site of the Battle of Chesme. According to his report, the treasure was discovered on the wreck by a captain from Kalymnos, Mikis Koufos. Realizing the importance of the find, the captain sought official permission from the authorities in Constantinople to conduct further investigations. Flegel's report also contains a list of the recovered objects, which included gold and silver blocks, coins, medals, liturgical vessels, Gospels, and icons with gold and silver revetments. Among them was an icon of Saint John the Warrior with a gold revetment, which, according to the report, had been given to Admiral Spiridov by Empress Catherine II before his departure for the expedition. Flegel further noted that a significant portion of the treasure was lost: approximately one third was reportedly sold in the markets of Ayvalık, another third was transported to Constantinople and subsequently disappeared, while only a small part was later acquired by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and donated to the Maritime Museum in Saint Petersburg.

It should also be noted that the French Newspaper *Le Temps* (1 June 1899), in its “International News” column under the section “Turquie,” published a short but detailed article on this discovery, which was subsequently reprinted in the Russian press. According to the report, the Ottoman

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government had signed a contract with Greek divers from the island of Mytilene to explore the remains of the Russian ship *St Eustathius*, which had been destroyed during the Battle of Chesme. The divers reportedly discovered a considerable treasure consisting of 12,000 gold ducats, 20,000 quarter ducats, and a large quantity of gold and silver coins, as well as liturgical vessels made of copper alloy, a gold candlestick, icons with gold and silver revetments, weapons, and silver trays. The divers were paid 276,000 francs for their work.

In his report, the Russian agent K. Flegel identified the coins among the finds as Dutch ducats of 1768 struck in Russia. During the late eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, large quantities of imitations of Dutch gold ducats were minted in Saint Petersburg, where they served as an important financial instrument for supporting the empire's military operations.

It is remarkable that this episode resonates not only in official reports and press accounts but also in memoirs and local oral tradition. Photis Kontoglou, the prominent twentieth-century Greek icon painter and writer, was born in Ayvalık, near the bay where the naval Battle of Chesme took place. In his book *Famous Men and Forgotten Men*, he recounts childhood memories of Captain Rogo, one of the divers who participated in the discovery of the treasure of the *St Eustathius*.⁸⁶ According to Kontoglou's memories, Captain Rogo repeatedly told him the story of the discovery of the "untold" treasure of the Russian ship. The event had even inspired a kind of corsair-like song celebrating the divers and the wealth they had recovered. As Kontoglou recalls: "*I remember them singing a song, like a corsair ballad, about Rogo and his companions who had found Orlov's captain's boat. The song spoke of the treasure they had discovered and of the coins they had taken from the captain's boat: 'kai svantizeks [an obsolete coin name] kai troupies [coins].'*"⁸⁷

The many icons and sacred objects carried on the ships were not only to be offered to Orthodox churches in need of help and support. The Russian fleet had liturgical "equipment" that was well suited to equipping the former churches, which had been turned into mosques by the Ottomans, to be returned by the Russian soldiers to their Orthodox co-religionists. The many icons and sacred objects carried on the ships were not only to be offered to Orthodox churches in need of help and support. The Russian fleet had liturgical "equipment" that was well suited to equipping the former

⁸⁶ ' Φημισμένοι άντρες και λησμονημένοι

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churches, which had been turned into mosques by the Ottomans, to be returned by the Russian soldiers to their Orthodox co-religionists. Adamantios Korais, a prominent figure of the Greek Enlightenment, formulated this expectation of the local Orthodox population in *Mémoire sur l'état actuel de la civilisation dans la Grèce, published in Paris in 1805*⁸⁸. Korais describes the basic motives of the Greeks for joining the Russian forces, commenting that some were simply seeking revenge on their oppressors, while others saw fighting on the side of the Russians as a religious duty, hoping that they would also help to restore their ancient churches, which had been destroyed or converted into mosques⁸⁹. The conversion of Navarino Castle's mosque (today Church of Transfiguration of Christ) into an Orthodox church dedicated to St. Catherine on 21 April 1770 is one of the more characteristic examples of this practice⁹⁰. (Fig. 1) Originally constructed as a mosque in the late 16th century, it was later converted into a Catholic church during the Venetian domination from 1686-1715. In the brief period of Russian control of the fortress from April to June 1770, the temple was converted into an Orthodox church⁹¹. After the Russian fleet abandoned Navarino, it was once again used as a mosque. Finally, some years after the Greek liberation around 1842, the religious building was reconverted into an Orthodox church. The history of this religious building reflects the dynamic political and religious changes in the Peloponnese from mid-16th until mid-19th centuries.

The policy of converting mosques into churches is attested by the issuance of a special commemorative medal. In 1768, the St. Petersburg Mint struck a medal entitled “*To the Defender of Orthodoxy*”, created specifically “for the current military cause”⁹² (**Fig. 2**). On the obverse, the “young” Catherine II is depicted wearing a crown and mantle, with the ribbon of an order draped

⁸⁸ Korais, Adamantios. *Memoire sur l'etat actuel de la civilisation dans la Grece*, : lu à la Societe des Observateurs de l'homme, le 16 Nivose, an XI (6 Janvier 1803). / Par Coray, docteur de Medecine, et Membre de Ladite Societe. Paris : F. Didot, 1803, 20-21, 23—24

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⁹⁰ Smilianaskaya, Elena. *Греческие острова Екатерины II. Опыты имперской политики России в Средиземноморье*. Moscow: Indrik, 2015, 222

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⁹² Jones, Mark. The medal as an instrument of propaganda in late 17th and early 18th century Europe. Part 2. – *The Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. 143, 202-213; Mollo, Evgeniy. Медаль “Поборнику православия”, *Военная Бель*, N. 127 Mart 1974 (<http://lepassemilitaire.ru/medal-poborniku-pravoslaviya-evgenij-mollo/>); Ulyanitskiy, Vladimir. *Дарданеллы, Босфор и Черное море в XVIII веке. Очерки дипломатической истории восточного вопроса*. Moscow: Типография А. Gatzuli, 1883. Shchukina, Yevgeniya. *Медальерное искусство в России XVIII века*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 1962. Shchukina, Yevgeniya. “Наградные медали Архипелагской экспедиции 1769 - 1770 гг.” *Нумизматика. Труды Государственного Эрмитажа*. XII (1971): 178-185.

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over her shoulder. The surrounding inscription reads: “By the Grace of God Catherine II, Empress and Autocrat of All the Russians, intercessor for the faithful.” Beneath the portrait appears the name of the medallic artist, Timofei Ivanov. On the reverse, a turbulent seascape is depicted, with large waves in the background. A mosque minaret is shown collapsing beneath a dominant Christian cross. The circular inscription reads “Prayer” on the left and “And he will go down” on the right, while the exergue bears the inscription: “To the Defender of Orthodoxy”. The medal was intended to be distributed to Greeks who revolted against the Ottoman Empire and supported Russian military forces. Only a few examples have survived to the present day. Gold and silver specimens are preserved in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum, reportedly forming part of the treasure recovered from the wreck of the Russian ship *St Eustathius Plakida*, discovered in 1899 near Çeşme⁹³. In Greece, the only known silver specimen is held in the treasury of the Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos⁹⁴ (**Fig. 3**).

Official Gifts from Empress Catherine the Great and High-Ranking Military Officials

One of the most famous donations During the war of 1768-1774, two sumptuous set of liturgical objects comprising two Gospel Books, sacred vessels, sacerdotal vestments were offered to the churches of the Greek communities - Holy Trinity in Livorno [1764] as compensation for their financial support for the Russian fleet's expedition to the Aegean.⁹⁵ There are a two documents (1763-1765) in RGADA archival collection testifying the donation of complete liturgical equipment, consisting of 20 items for the new built Greek church in Livorno⁹⁶. (Fig. 4) Similarly, donations of liturgical vessels and 12 icons for an iconostasis have been made to the Greek

⁹³ See note 10, 11.

⁹⁴ The medal is unpublished. It was identified by the author during a research mission in Patmos in August 2023.

⁹⁵ Chalkia Evgenia, and Dimitrios Konstantios. (eds.) *Αυτοκρατορικά δώρα. Αφιερώματα της Μεγάλης Αικατερίνης στην ελληνική εκκλησία του Λιβόρνο*. Athens: Byzantine and Christian Museum, 2000.

⁹⁶ Журнал С.П. Хметевского. (Приложение 8, с. 691); "Ливорне есть одна греческая церковь, изрядно украшена, имеет вызолоченой [и] канастас, подачею россиян сосуды, крест, евангелие и ризница весьма богата, присланная из России нашею великою государынею; сказывают, что была другая церковь на площади, большая и украшена внутри церкви мрамором и все столбы мраморные, только католики оную церковь у греков отнели и зделали католицкою". (Smilianaskaya, Elena. *Россия в Средиземноморье: архипелагская экспедиция Екатерины Великой*, Moscow: Indrik 2011, с. 691)

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community's church in Porto Mahon, which was transferred to Livorno in 1780 following the disintegration of the Greek community there.⁹⁷ (Fig.5)

These icons are actually in the Museum a stylistically homogeneous group of twelve icons has been attributed to the Kremlin Armory workshop and probably identified as a gift of the Russian imperial court to the Greek church of Minorca and, subsequently, to that of Livorno. There is three despotic icons with the Virgin and Child (“Portaitissa ton Ivion), (Fig. 6) St. John the Baptist (Fig. 7), and St. Nicholas (Fig. 8), and nine smaller ones representing the Birth of the Virgin, the 12-year-old Christ in the Temple, the Transfiguration, the Incredulity of Thomas, the Ascension of Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Birth of St. John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles, and All Saints. (Fig. 9) At an early 20th century, the Greek community of Livorno was dissolved and the sacred vessels were transferred for safekeeping to the Municipal Museum of Livorno. In the 1930s, with the intervention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Greek Embassy in Rome, ten of them were transferred to Greece and became part of the collections of the Byzantine and Christian Museum.

This type of religious patronage was not only employed in the Archipelago campaign, but also in subsequent Russo-Ottoman wars in the Balkans. This reflects a consistent strategy of Russian imperial patronage, which aimed to consolidate influence through ecclesiastical networks. The identification of the liturgical objects offered during the war 1768-1774, 1787-1791 as described in the sources cited, is rather difficult. The material evidence consists of two categories of artifacts official gifts on behalf of the Empress Catherine the Great, by the army, private donations by Russian warriors or members of the clergy identified during fieldwork research of our team on the islands of Naxos, Paros, and Patmos.

According to oral tradition, the Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos received a precious pectoral cross as a gift from Catherine the Great. Known as the “Cross of Catherine the Great”, it is currently on display in the Great Sacristy of the monastery. The cross is four-armed, surmounted by a crown-shaped headpiece, and features a decorative pendant suspended from its lower section. At its centre is an oval medallion decorated using the finift technique — painted enamel on metal

⁹⁷ Τωμαδάκης N.B. "Ναοί και θεσμοί της Ελληνικής Κοινότητας του Λιβόρνου". *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 16 (1940), 81-127; Capetanio A. I “Paramenti sacri della Chiesa greco-ortodossa della SS. Trinità di Livorno. Museo civico Giovanni Fattori. Pisa (Giardini) 1978. Dell'Agata Popova Doriana. “Due donazioni di Caterina II alle chiese greche di Livorno e di Porto Mahon.” *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi*, III (1983), Bologna, 343-363.

— a method particularly associated with Russian workshops, especially those in Rostov. The medallion depicts the Resurrection of Christ. Crafted in silver and adorned with precious stones.⁹⁸ **(Fig. 11)** According to two Russian travelers, Aleksey Dmitrievskii and Andrey Mouraviev who visited Patmos in the second half of the 19th century, the cross was highly revered within the monastery. It has been worn by many abbots and displayed for veneration during festive occasions.⁹⁹ This imperial donation, together with the special veneration accorded to the object, is a notable example of the Monastery of Patmos' importance as a major pilgrimage centre within the Archipelago Principality's insular territories.

Another donation from Catherine the Great, in keeping with the tradition, was a Gospel book, placed on display for veneration in the Metropolitan Church of Naxos. The Gospel was printed at the Moscow Typography of the Holy Synod in November 1791. Its cover is richly adorned with enamel medallions depicting scenes from the life of Christ, along with semi-precious stones arranged in the form of a central star. The central medallion represents Christ's Descent into Hades, while scenes from the Passion of Christ appear in smaller round medallions along the rays of the star, alternating with rays set with semi-precious stones. In the corners, the four Evangelists are depicted in oval medallions, accompanied by their symbolic attributes. On the upper side, between Matthew and Mark, a smaller round medallion depicts the Coronation of the Virgin, while the lower side shows the Dormition of the Virgin. The edges of all medallions are further enriched with semi-precious stones. **(Fig. 12)** The Gospel is placed in a special proskinitarium near the miraculous icon of the Virgin Chrysopolitissa, making them the most venerated objects in the church. Although the documents concerning the donation have not been identified, the Gospel book is dated 1791, suggesting a possible connection between the donation and the conclusion of the Second Russo–Turkish War (1787–1791), as well as the signing of the Treaty of Jassy. The Monastery of Patmos also preserves a medal of Empress Catherine II, minted to commemorate the

⁹⁸ Ikonomaki-Papadopoulou Yota, «Εκκλησιαστική αργυροχοΐα. » In *Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου*, edited by A.D. Kominiis. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1988, p. 222, 377 n. 4. Игошев В. В. Русские произведения церковного искусства XVI — начала XX века в греческом монастыре Иоанна Богослова на острове Патмос // *Неизвестные произведения. Новые открытия: Сборник научных статей к юбилею Музея имени Андрея Рублева*. Moscow 2017, 386–407 (ill. 10, p. 397).

⁹⁹ Dmitrievskiy, Aleksiy. Патмосские очерки. Из поездки на остров Патмос летом 1891 года. Kyiv: Tip. G. T. Korchak-Novitskogo, 1894, pp. 82, 203. 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 kanceliarii 1851, 194, 197.

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same treaty (Fig. 13). Considered together, these objects may be viewed as material traces of continued Russian imperial patronage in the Aegean islands following the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, reflecting the sustained projection of Russian political and religious influence in the region.

This range of donations—the splendid pectoral cross, the richly decorated Gospel book, and the silver and gold medals, all attributed to Catherine the Great—reflects the broader strategy of Russian imperial patronage. Under this strategy, religious objects functioned not merely as devotional items but also as instruments of symbolic authority and cultural influence. Taken together, these offerings illustrate how material objects were strategically employed to reinforce religious networks and embed Russian symbolic authority across the Eastern Mediterranean.

A distinct category of Russian material has been identified on the island of Paros, the military and administrative center of the Archipelago principality. Several monuments of Russian art are preserved there, although their precise provenance remains undocumented. Based on their stylistic and iconographic characteristics, which allow them to be dated to the eighteenth century, as well as their typology—including liturgical vestments and large-scale icons—it is plausible to assume that these objects were brought during the Archipelago expedition and subsequently consecrated in local churches and monasteries.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

Among the Russian art objects in Paros potentially associated with the Principality period are:

- An 18th-century Russian archbishop's mitre preserved in the Ecclesiastical Museum of Panagia Ekatontapyliani in Parikia (Fig. 14).
- An 18th-century Russian icon of the Annunciation with inscriptions in Greek and Russian, located in the Church of the Assumption (Faneromeni) in Naoussa (Fig. 15). This icon is situated in the proskinitarium on the west side of the nave and is based on an engraving from The Gospel of Jerome Nathalis.
- An icon depicting the Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles, produced in the Oruzheynaya Palata workshop, Moscow, which hangs on the wall of a monastery refectory (Fig. 16). This icon is considered miraculous, and legend holds that it protects against fire. Its iconography and painting style closely resemble the main icon of the Church of the Twelve Apostles in the

Moscow Kremlin, painted by Mikhail Milyutin (1682) and renovated in 1901 by V.P. Guryanov.¹⁰⁰

- Following the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarçı (1774), which established Russia as the official protector of the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire, such practices intensified. Initiated under the reign of Catherine II, this practice reveals the extent to which material objects of worship were mobilised in anticipation of territorial control and confessional reordering, embedding Russian Orthodox visual and ritual norms within newly occupied or contested spaces. Material evidence from the Bulgarian Black Sea region attests to the continued circulation of icons and liturgical furnishings supplied by the Russian army to local churches.¹⁰¹

Donations by Russian Military Forces to Churches in Regions under Russian Administration: Institutional and Private Soldiers' Offerings¹⁰²

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

- **The diaries of Vladimir Bronevsky**

The diaries of Vladimir Bronevsky, an officer in the Russian fleet, describe incidents on Samothrace and Imbros during military operations in the Russo-Turkish War (1806–1812). On April 5, 1808, the Russian forces landed on the southern side of Imbros to procure supplies. The local Greek population welcomed them warmly and, in a lengthy speech, requested permission to restore their church, which had been destroyed by the Turks. Bronevsky reports that he presented

¹⁰⁰ Pavlenko, Alla. “Михаил Милютин - царский изограф XVII века” in Krassilin, Mikhail (ed.) Русская поздняя икона от XVII до начала XX столетия. Сборник статей. Moscow: GosNIIR, 2001, 153–158; Kochetkov, Igor’. “Милютин Михаил Иванов” in Словарь русских иконописцев XI—XVII веков. Moscow: Indrik, 2003, 414-418.

¹⁰¹ Gergova I. Russian icons in Bulgaria // Routes of Russian Icons... P. 149—160; Gergova I. 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. 2020. N 4. P. 237—246

¹⁰² Nikolov, Angel. “Saints and Soldiers’. 19th-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” Museikon 5 (2021): 317-328; Nikolov, Angel. “Icons and Wars: Some Examples from the Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878.” In Ivanka Gergova, Marina Koleva and Ruslan Stoychev (eds.) Изкуство и история. Изкуствоведски четения 2024. Модул Старо изкуство. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2025, 61-76; Komachko, Natalia, Gergova, Ivanka. “Една икона във войни” in Ivanka Gergova, Marina Koleva and Ruslan Stoychev (eds.) Изкуство и история. Изкуствоведски четения 2024. Модул Старо изкуство. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2025, 179-199.

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the priest with a bronze triptych as a gift; “he was so happy with this gift, he didn’t know how to thank me and began showing it to everyone.” Bronevsky describes similar events on Samothrace, where he offered the priest a cassock and an icon of Saint Nicholas with a metal frame.¹⁰³

- **Icon of Christ Pantocrator (1854) and Mother of God with Christ infant (1854), National Institute of Archaeology and Museum in Sofia. (Fig. 16, 17)**

An inscription on the icon states that it was commissioned by Lieutenant-General Soimonov on 22 January 1854, with contributions from the staff and senior officers of his detachment. The icons were offered to the Church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in Giurgiu, which was previously a Turkish mosque and was converted by the Russian troops during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I. The revetment was therefore created to thank God for the victories over the Turks in the 1828 and 1829 campaigns¹⁰⁴.

- **Icon with Transfiguration, 1879 and icon with St Alexander Nevsky, 1878, two icons painted by lower-ranking soldiers of the 139th Morshansk Infantry Regiment, Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven¹⁰⁵ (Fig.18, 19)**
- **Metropolis of Rethymno**, Liturgical utensils, 1897, a gift from the Holy Synod of Russia
- Church of Saint Constantine in Agios Konstantinos village, Rethymno - Icon with Christ Pantokrator, liturgical utensils **Fig....)**
- **Apodolou village, southern Crete** - information on three small icons in the church of St. John the Baptist and three others in a priest’s home. The church houses a blessing cross and a Gospel dedicated by Nikolai Petrov, with a dedicatory inscription stating that it was a donation by Nikolai Kapetanovich Petrov in 1900.
- Donations to the **Monastery of the Ascension on Mount Bakadzhik, main church of St Alexander Nevsky, Yambol region (Bulgaria): an icon of St Alexander Nevsky**, dating to the mid-nineteenth century, depicts the saint in half-length, clad in armor and a fur-lined cloak, wearing a crown and holding a sword and a scroll. Affixed to the back of the icon is a damaged paper inscription, which records that the icon was donated in the spring of 1879 to the Church of St Alexander Nevsky by the 118th Shuya Regiment of the 30th Infantry

¹⁰³ Bronevsky, Vladimir. *Письма морского офицера*. Moscow: Tipografia Semena Selivanovskogo, 1818-1819, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Cat. 56, 57

¹⁰⁵ Cat. 43, 44

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Division, dedicated to the same saint. A **Russian Gospel** was also donated to the same church. Evidence of the foundation of the monastic church on 12 May 1879 can be found in an inscription on the first blank page of a gospel book printed in Moscow in 1875. The inscription records the donation and lists the principal donors and their families: 'Donated to the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky, built near Yambol on Ascension Hill, in memory of the preservation of the life of His Majesty Emperor Alexander II from an assassination attempt, by the 30th Infantry Division and other officers of the Russian Army' (Yambol, 12 May 1879). The following individuals are named: General Adjutant Mikhail D. Skobelev, Major General Nikolai F. Shnitnikov, commander of the 30th Infantry Division; Major Arkadi I. Golov; Aleksandr G. Sorokin, the Russian Consul in Tulcea; Nikolai G. Hartwig; Mikhail M. Chikhachov; and Zacharia D. Zhechev..¹⁰⁶

Foundation and equipment of memorial churches dedicated to Russian soldiers who fell in the wars.

A further category of Russian religious artefacts is associated with the foundation and furnishing of memorial churches dedicated to fallen Russian soldiers. These monuments were established to commemorate the heroism displayed during the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–1878, particularly in Bulgaria—for example, the Nativity of Christ Monastery at Shipka and the Monastery of Saint Alexander Nevsky near Bakadzhik in the Yambol region—as well as in Serbia, such as the Church of the Holy Trinity at Gornji Adrovac. Another example is the Church of St George at Mersindzhik, built between 1899 and 1914 near the site of the naval Battle of Çeşme. These projects exemplify state-sponsored patronage expressed through monumental architecture, serving to reinforce collective memory and imperial ideology. At the same time, these churches were furnished with Russian art icons and portable liturgical objects—such as crosses, books, and vestments—thus linking monumental commemoration with the circulation of religious artefacts.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

- *Church of the Holy Trinity, Gornji Adrovac, Serbia (Fig. 21)*

¹⁰⁶ Nikolov, Angel. “‘Saints and Soldiers’. Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 321-322 (321, ill. 11, 12)

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A commemorative church was built in honour of Colonel Nikolaj Rajeovski, who fell in battle on 1 September 1876 at Golo Brdo, Gornji Adrovac.....

- *Shipka, Memorial Church of the Nativity of Christ, Shipka Monastery (Bulgaria)*

Count N. P. Ignatiev, ktitor of the Monastery of St Panteleimon, initiated the construction of the church in memory of Russian soldiers who had fallen during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Funds for the project began to be collected throughout Russia from 1879 onward, the first donation being made by Emperor Alexander II. With the emperor’s approval, the Committee for the Construction of an Orthodox Church in Southern Bulgaria for the Eternal Memory of Soldiers Who Fell in the War of 1877–1878 was established in St Petersburg on 25 April 1880. Chaired by N. P. Ignatiev, the committee supervised the project until 27 May 1903, coordinating fundraising and construction while reinforcing the symbolic presence of Russian imperial patronage in the region. The iconostasis is carved in linden wood and richly decorated with gilded ornamentation. It was produced in the workshops for artistic objects and architectural details of the architect A. Yu. Yang in Ukraine, according to a design by Prof. A. N. Pomerantsev, whose project reflects the historicist aesthetic characteristic of late nineteenth-century Russian ecclesiastical architecture. The icons were painted in 1901 in the icon-painting workshop of the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, and were donated to the church in Shipka.¹⁰⁷ The iconostasis comprises eighty-three richly gilded icons painted on cypress wood panels. Sixteen of these depict the saints who are the protectors of prominent Russian generals who participated in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. Twenty-six of the icons represent the most venerated Bulgarian saints, while two portray popular Serbian saints. This selection of saints reflects a meticulously designed commemorative programme that connected Russian military leadership with the sacred geography of the Balkans while also recognising the spiritual traditions of local Orthodox communities. Thus, the iconographic programme served not only as a devotional ensemble, but also as a visual

¹⁰⁷ Диакон Петр Пахомов, “Строительство храма на Балканах для поминовения православных воинов погибших в войну 1877-1878 гг.” in *Граф Игнатъев и Русский Свято-Пантелеимонов монастырь на Афоне*. - *Святая гора Афон* : издание Русского Свято-Пантелеимонова монастыря на Афоне, 2016.(= Русский Афон XIX-XX вв., Гл. ред. иером. Макарий (Макиенко), Т. 12), Mount Athos, Русский Свято-Пантелеимонов монастырь, 2016, p.12), p. 603-632. Nikolov, Angel. “‘Saints and Soldiers’. Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 317-328 (323–325, ill. 18-23).

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expression of imperial memory and Russia's symbolic role as protector of the Orthodox peoples of the region. In the sacristy of the church are many icons donated by high ranking ecclesiastical

- *St. George, Russian memorial church in Mersindzhik near the naval of Battle of Cesme (1899-1914).*

An analysis of the surviving objects and written sources demonstrates that, in the Balkans and the Aegean islands, three principal categories of Russian war-related offerings can be identified, reflecting the structured and multifaceted character of Russian imperial patronage during the Russo-Turkish wars. The first category comprises official donations, made during military campaigns and in occupied territories by state and ecclesiastical authorities, often mediated through military forces and administrative or clerical representatives. The second includes private donations and dedications, carried out both during and after the conflicts, which are more closely linked to expressions of personal piety by both high-ranking officers and ordinary soldiers. A third category is represented by the foundation and furnishing of memorial churches, established to commemorate fallen soldiers and to monumentalize imperial presence in the region. Taken together, these categories reveal a coherent strategy in which religious objects and institutions functioned not only as elements of devotional practice but also as instruments of symbolic authority, cultural influence, and collective memory. Whether in the form of portable artefacts—icons, crosses, books, and vestments—or in monumental architectural projects, these material expressions of faith contributed to the reinforcement of Orthodox networks and the embedding of Russian imperial ideology in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. As such, they constitute a significant yet often “invisible” dimension of warfare, illustrating how religious material culture operated as a subtle but effective vehicle of political and ideological projection in the early modern and modern periods.

Chapter 3

Private Agency, Diasporas, and Informal Networks

Alongside official channels, a dense network of unofficial and private transfers played a decisive role in the dissemination of Russian religious artefacts.

3.1 Merchants, Intellectuals, and Balkan Communities in Russia

Merchants, intellectuals, and political figures from the Balkans who lived in or maintained commercial ties with Russia constituted an important group of donors. Their offerings circulated through diasporic and commercial networks, highlighting the central role of **private agency** in processes of cultural transfer. These practices may be interpreted as a manifestation of **modern evergetism**, understood as a social, economic, and political phenomenon. The study of Russian religious artefacts donated to the benefactors' places of origin offers valuable insight into the forms and meanings of charitable activity in the modern era.

The donors included men of letters, members of the upper social strata, representatives of prominent Greek merchant families established in southern Russia and Ukraine, as well as clergy integrated into the hierarchy of the Russian Church. On this basis, the following typology of donations can be proposed:

1. **Lifetime donations** to churches or monasteries associated with family lineage, typically by members of the upper classes (intellectuals, political figures).
2. **Large-scale donations**—such as entire iconostases or complete liturgical furnishings—made by merchant families and often specified in wills, directed primarily to their places of origin. These were frequently accompanied by broader benefactions, including the construction of schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions.
3. **Modest donations** made by diaspora members, likewise directed toward their native communities.
4. **Clerical donations** by members of the Russian Church hierarchy to their birthplaces or to major monastic centres.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

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- *Donations provided by Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first Governor of Greece, and his sustained patronage of the Monastery of the Virgin Platytera in Corfu.*

A notable example of the first category of donations—those made throughout a benefactor’s lifetime to a church or monastery associated with a family lineage—is provided by Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first Governor of Greece, and his sustained patronage of the Monastery of the Virgin Platytera in Corfu. Born in Corfu in 1776 and assassinated in Nafplio in 1831, Kapodistrias held prominent political positions, serving in the government of the Republic of the Seven Islands (1802–1807), as a diplomat in the service of the Russian Empire (1808–1815), and as Minister of Foreign Affairs under Tsar Alexander I (1816–1822), before becoming Governor of Greece (1828–1831). According to monastic tradition, in 1792 he was miraculously saved from death after a fall from his horse outside the monastery, an event that established a lasting bond between the Kapodistrias family and the institution. Their financial support proved crucial for the restoration of the monastery following its destruction by fire during the French occupation in 1798. Archival evidence attributes to Kapodistrias the donation of two Russian icons depicting the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, described in contemporary sources as “masterpieces of the Moscow school.” Additional references to these icons appear both in archival registers and in his correspondence. Beyond these works, Kapodistrias also offered a richly decorated revetment for the icon of the Virgin Glykofilousa, a church clock, and other valuable objects, reflecting both his personal piety and his role as a benefactor.

The stylistic and iconographic features of the Archangels suggest a connection with the circle of Vladimir Borovikovsky, one of the leading painters of the St Petersburg aristocracy at the turn of the nineteenth century. Their close resemblance to comparable works attributed to Borovikovsky—such as icons held in the Tretyakov Gallery and in regional collections—supports the hypothesis that Kapodistrias acquired them in Saint Petersburg, possibly directly from the artist’s workshop, before donating them to the monastery in Corfu.

To illustrate the second category—large-scale donations, such as entire iconostases and complete sets of liturgical furnishings commissioned by Greek entrepreneurial and merchant families established in Russia—we may consider two examples from Epirus.

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- *Donations provided by Rizari brothers to the Church of St Athanasius in Monodendri (1810)*

The first is the Church of St Athanasius in Monodendri, the birthplace of the Rizari brothers. The church, a three-aisled basilica with a narthex, bears a construction date of 1804 on a recessed plaque in the pediment, while the threshold of the south entrance is inscribed with the date “29 April 1839.” The carved wooden iconostasis, likely contemporary with the ambo and the episcopal throne, is decorated with pierced floral and animal motifs. Of the nine despotic icons, five were donated by the Rizari brothers: the *Dormition of the Virgin* (March 1806), *St Panteleimon* (21 June 1810), the *Virgin Iverskaya* (27 October 1810), *Christ Pantocrator*, and *St John the Baptist*.

- *Donations provided by Hadzikosta brothers to the Church of St Nicholas Agora in Ioannina (1840–1841)*

A second example is provided by the Church of St Nicholas Agora in Ioannina (1840–1841), associated with the benefactions of the Zosima brothers and Georgios Hatzikostas. In his will, Hatzikostas allocated substantial funds for the construction and furnishing of several churches and monastic institutions in Epirus, including the Church of St Nicholas, where he financed the creation of an elaborate wooden iconostasis. Although construction initially began with support from the Zosima brothers of Moscow, it was ultimately completed through Hatzikostas’ contributions. He also funded the construction of a nearby hospital, illustrating the broader philanthropic dimension of his activities. Two inscriptions on the west side of the church attest to his decisive role, noting that the church was consecrated on 12 December 1840. The numerous liturgical objects and icons he donated further confirm this date, as they were produced in Moscow between 1840 and 1842. These include eight icons for the iconostasis—seven bearing the inscription “Prayer of Georgios Hatzikostas for his brother Anastasios and his parents and relatives, in Moscow in 1841,” and one inscribed “Prayer of Ioannou Hatzikonsta”—as well as additional icons placed around the sanctuary and nave.

The donation also encompassed a wide range of liturgical furnishings: an epitaphios above the north entrance, a chalice and Gospel book, a chandelier and four candelabra in the main church, a

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seven-branched lamp and baptismal font on the upper floor, and further icons for the iconostasis of the Chapel of St Eleftherios.

Complementary examples of large-scale donations are found in Kefalonia, where prominent diaspora families similarly commissioned ecclesiastical furnishings from Russian workshops.

- *Donations provided by Dimitrios Igglessis to the Church of the Evangelistria in the village of Pessada, near Argostoli, 1835*

The Church of the Evangelistria in the village of Pessada, near Argostoli, was built in 1835 on the site of an earlier Byzantine church dedicated to the Annunciation. The new church was erected by the Inglis (Igglessis) family, whose origins trace back to Scotland but who became firmly established on the island. The iconostasis was donated by Dimitrios Igglessis, mayor of Odessa, who commissioned the despotic icons, liturgical textiles, and the Gospel book from Moscow, while the doors of the iconostasis were decorated with icons produced in Constantinople. This combination of artistic centres reflects the wide commercial and cultural networks within which these benefactors operated.

- *Donations provided by Nikolas Sklavou family to the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the village of Domata, near Argostoli, 1839*

A second example is provided by the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the village of Domata. Its iconostasis and liturgical furnishings, dating to the late nineteenth century and produced in Moscow workshops, were donated by the family of Captain Nikolaos Sklavou. Sklavou is historically associated with the recovery and transfer of the body of Patriarch Gregory V from Constantinople to Odessa, an act that enhanced the symbolic prestige of the family. The coffin constructed for this purpose has been preserved in the church of Panagia in Domata. The commissioning of iconostases and liturgical objects from Moscow in both cases reflects not only the economic strength of these families but also their sustained commercial ties with the Russian Empire. At the same time, these donations contributed to shaping the aesthetic preferences of the local elite. The icons produced for these iconostases follow the principles of the **academic style** of Russian ecclesiastical painting, which became dominant from the 1830s onward, and thus

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functioned as a key channel for the introduction and diffusion of this style within the visual culture of Kefalonia.

3.2 Clerical Mobility and Ecclesiastical Careers

High-ranking Greek clerics serving within the Russian Church constituted an important channel for the transfer of Russian religious material culture to the Balkans and the Aegean. Their donations—icons, liturgical vessels, and textiles—combined expressions of personal devotion with the maintenance of transregional ecclesiastical networks, thereby facilitating long-term cultural exchange.

CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES

- Donations of Arsenios Elassonas

A large number of Russian icons, liturgical vestments, and church furnishings were donated by Greek priests and monks living in Muscovy, the most notable example being Archbishop Arsenios of Elasson. Arsenios was born in Thessaly but spent most of his life in Russia (1588–1625) as a high-ranking clergyman of the Russian Church. He donated more than 50 icons, liturgical objects, and books to the monasteries of Meteora, Dousikou in Thessaly, Tatarna in Eurytania, Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the Holy Land.

Tatarna monastery (case study)

Throughout its long and turbulent history, the Monastery of Tatarna, one of the oldest and richest of continental Greece, has seen both heyday and decay: fires, natural disasters, looting, but also reconstruction. The researcher examining its history has to deal from the beginning with a set of complex questions related to the motives and practices, cultural, ecclesiastical and economic alike, which led to its foundation and rise to prominence. What drove hieromonks David and Methodios, as well as the two other monks accompanying them, to relocate and find a new coenobitic monastery? Moreover, why did their coenobium, shortly after its foundation, receive the name of the Virgin of Tatarna? Which was ‘the great monastery of Savior Christ’ from which the aforementioned monks started their journey? And finally, why were important offerings sent from

‘Moscow of Great Russia’ to such a remote monastery? According to the oral tradition, close to the monastery’s current location was a Byzantine monastic foundation, built ‘a thousand years before us’¹⁰⁸. Its existence, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, is attested by sporadic mentions in the textual sources, and the Byzantine heirlooms in the contemporary sacristy¹⁰⁹.

Nevertheless, the oldest written sources, providing solid documentation on the current monastery’s foundation, date to 1555/6. Its foundation document was compiled in January 1556 by hieromonk David, while a sigillum was issued by Patriarch Dionysius II (in office 1546-1556) later in the same year¹¹⁰. Both documents refer to David as the ‘venerable prohegumen of the great monastery of Savior Christ’ (σεβάσμιου προηγούμενου της μεγάλης μονής του Σωτήρος Χριστού), who came to Tatarna accompanied by hieromonk Methodios and two other monks. These four found a site fit for a monastery’s establishment, in the light of their desire to lead an eremitic and peaceful life¹¹¹. Both sources enumerate the various offerings, e.g., liturgical objects, manuscripts, as well as the important estates presented to the monastery by the local flock¹¹². According to the selfsame sigillum, the monastery is granted the status of patriarchal and stavropegial, with the ‘most reverend David, prohegumen of the great monastery of Savior Christ’ (ο οσιώτατος κυρ Δαβίδ, ο προηγούμενος της μεγάλης μονής του Σωτήρος Χριστού) being appointed hegumen. After its foundation, the monastery’s stavropegial status was confirmed four times by sigillia issued in 1586, 1676, 1782 and 1797¹¹³. Interesting information on two landmarks in the monastery’s function, namely the erection of the *katholikon* and its painting, is preserved in two notes in an early seventeenth-century manuscript. According to these notes, the *katholikon*’s construction

¹⁰⁸ Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 37 (no. 2).

¹⁰⁹ Theochari, “Εκκλησιαστικά άμφια”, 123 (no. 3). Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 37 (nos. 3, 4). Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 13-14.

¹¹⁰ Roulitsas, “Επιγραφαί, Ενθυμήσεις και Σιγίλλια”, 284-287. Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 139-143.

¹¹¹ ‘Επειδή τοιγαρούν και ημείς εγώ τε δηλαδή, ο ελάχιστος εν ιερομόναχοις και πνευματικούς και προηγούμενος της σεβασμίας μονής του Σωτήρος Χριστού, και ο συν εμοί ευλαβέστατος εν ιερομόναχοις κυρ Μεθόδιος, και άλλοι των αδελφών, των ερημικών και ησύχιον ποθήσαντες βίον, και ιεράν μονήν, επ’ονόματι της Θεοτόκου...μόλις εύρομεν τον επιτήδιον τόπον εις πλάτανον καλούμενον, ...έγγειστα του Ασπροποτάμου κακείσε τα σύνορα, της τοιαύτης μονής πήζαντες, ναόν εκ βάθρου της γης τη Θεοτόκω ανηγείραμεν, επικλειθείση φανερωμένη και μοναστήριον απεκατεστήσαμεν καθώς νυν οράται, σπουδάζοντες και έτι επί τη βελτιώσει και αυξήσει αυτού...’ (ibid., 139)

¹¹² ‘...πλείστα αφιερώματα...σκεύη ιερά τε, και βιβλία καυκία και κούπας αργύρας και όσα άλλα κινητά και ακίνητα πράγματα...’ (ibid., 140)

¹¹³ All six sigillia have been publish by P. Vasileiou (ibid., 139-152).

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began by hieromonks David and Methodios in 1555/6 and was completed in September 1580; while its decoration with wall paintings finished much later, in September 1600¹¹⁴.

The monastery's estate took shape during the early period of its history, that is to say from its foundation until the first decade of the seventeenth century. It consisted mainly of oblations by local squires and a network of support by the Orthodox communities in the wider area¹¹⁵. This is evidenced by the donating deeds and bestowals preserved in the conventual archive¹¹⁶, which illustrate that the monastery should be associated with the sixteenth-century wave of monastic foundations or reestablishments in Ottoman Greece, a phenomenon with notable intensity in Thessaly¹¹⁷.

In the foundation act hieromonk David writes that the temple he erected was dedicated to the invoked Phaneromene (επικλειθείσα Φανερωμένη)¹¹⁸. The same appellation is repeated in the first two sigillia issued in 1556 and 1586. In the first, the monastery is mentioned as the 'venerable and holy monastery of Panagia...the invoked Phaneromene' (σεβασμία και ιερά μονή της Παναγίας...της επικεκλημένης Φανερωμένης). In the second it appears to have been dedicated to the most holy Theotokos, the so-called "Revealed" (τη τιμωμένη επ'ονόματι της υπεραγίας Θεοτόκου της καλουμένης Φανερωμένης)¹¹⁹. The toponym Tatarna is a later addition to the name, with different versions of the Virgin of Tatarna appearing from 1599 and on¹²⁰. This appellation appears for the first time in the dedicatory inscription of the Russian icon of the Dormition of the Virgin presented by the Archimandrite of the Holy Sepulcher Damaskinos. According to the inscription, Damaskinos had it commissioned in 1599 for the venerable stavropegial monastery in Tatarna, dedicated to the nativity of the immaculate and the perpetually Virgin Mary¹²¹.

¹¹⁴Ετελειώθη ο πάνσεπτος και περίφημος ναός της Υπεραγίας και αιμαρθένου Μαρίας, του όντος πλησίον του Λευκοποτάμου της κεινώς καλούμενης Τατάρνης ετελειόθη εντάυτα ΖΠΗ (1580) και ιστορήθη και τούτο ΖΡΗ (1600)' (idem, *Ενθυμήσεις, Επιγραφές κι ένα Σιγίλλιο*, 5-6)

¹¹⁵ As a sidenote, it is interesting that two icons from the first templon of the church, depicting Saint George (1598-9) and the Virgin's Nativity (1593-4), were by the painter Lampros from Agrafa (Florou, "Εικόνες του 16ου αιώνα", 295).

¹¹⁶ Theochari, "Εκκλησιαστικά άμφια", 125 (no. 1).

¹¹⁷ Greene, "History in High Places", 5-10. Kotzageorgis, "Τα μοναστήρια ως οθωμανικές τοπικές ελίτ", 185.

¹¹⁸ Phaneromene is one of the many epithets of the Virgin in the Orthodox tradition, literally meaning 'the Revealed', and usually refers to a miraculous discovery or revealing of an icon, which when becomes the center of veneration in the monastery or church built in the location it was found.

¹¹⁹ Vasileiou, *Το Μοναστήρι*, 143-145.

¹²⁰ E.g., Παναγίας Τατάρνα[η]ς, Παναγίας Ταταρνωπίσσης, Θεοτόκου Πεφανερωμένης της επικεκλημένης Τετάρνας

¹²¹See cat. 1 in the appendix. Also see Kissas, "A Russian Icon from Tatarna Monastery".

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There are quite a few hypotheses regarding the origin of the monastery's name¹²². In our eyes, the most convincing is that the aforementioned toponym refers to the nearby watermill 'in Tatarna' (*εις την Τατάρναν*). To the watermill also belonged a *poros* (πόρος), either a lugger or a moving bridge, one of the monastery's many estates. This watermill was built in the narrowest point of the Achelous River, with its owner essentially controlling the passing. The well-known bridge of Tatarna was erected on the same location in the seventeenth century. It stood there until 1963, when it was demolished and the artificial lake of Kremasta was created¹²³.

The choice of the specific location for the monastery can be attributed to many different reasons: e.g., the ruins of an older monastic structure, the river and its largest wellspring (Madracha), which provided access to drinkable water. But its more prominent asset was its proximity to the basic crossing from Thessaly to Agrafa. The choice of the specific location provided to the newly-founded monastery access to an arterial road and the river's crossing, a trait we see in other Thessalian monasteries built during the second half of the sixteenth century. Their erection in strategic locations, close to rivers, bridges and passages, supported the development of road networks in the mountainous region of Pindus¹²⁴. In other words, the foundation of the Monastery of Tatarna by the watermill and its *poros* basically was the first step towards the development of a new arterial road, which connected Evrytania with Valtos through the bridge of Tatarna.

An open question in the history of Tatarna remains the 'great monastery of Savior Christ', to which hieromonks David and Methodios and their two companions associate with. The monasteries which feature the definition Savior Christ (του Σωτήρος [Χριστού]), meaning 'the Transfiguration of our Lord', and which could have actively participated in Tatarna's foundation, were the Monastery Saint Bessarion of Dousiko (Μονή του Αγίου Βησσαρίωνος-Δούσικο), also known as the Monastery of our Savior of the Great Gates (Μονή του Σωτήρος των Μεγάλων Πυλών), and the Monastery of the Transfiguration of Our Savior in Meteora (Μονή Μεταμορφώσεως του Σωτήρος στα Μετέωρα), also known as the Great Meteoro (Μεγάλο Μετέωρο)¹²⁵. Regrettably, the

¹²² On the monastery's name see Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*. 28-34.

¹²³ The monastery's contemporary premises were built to the west of the village of Tripotamos (Evrytania), very close to its original location. Regrettably, the old structure collapsed after the 1963 earthquake (Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 15).

¹²⁴ For an analysis of this aspect see Greene, "History in High Places".

¹²⁵ Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 27-28 and 37-41. Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 13-14. Dositheos, *Ιερόν Τρίπτυχον*, 121-176. Boycheva, "Συλλογές ρωσικών εικόνων στην Ελλάδα", 38 and 51.

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existing scholarship has not clarified this matter yet, and perhaps only further research in the archives could offer new illuminating evidence¹²⁶.

Be it as it may, the hypothesis that the Monastery of the Virgin of Tatarna was founded by monks of Dousiko Monastery seems to me less plausible, considering that a strong earthquake destroyed its *katholikon* in 1544. This disaster obliged the brotherhood to dedicate itself to necessary restorative works until 1577¹²⁷. Still, one cannot categorically rule out the possibility that Tatarna's founding fathers came from Dousiko. This is so first because Ottoman documents in its archive attest the concentrated effort to expand the monastery's estates during the sixteenth century¹²⁸. Then, the important ensemble of heirlooms presented to Tatarna by a high cleric who emanated from Dousiko Monastery, the Archbishop Arsenios (1550-1625), could be interpreted as an act of support to the effort by monks of the brotherhood he used to belong to¹²⁹.

On the other hand, one should take into account that the foundation of Tatarna coincides with the Great Meteoro's economic and spiritual heyday: its leading role among the monasteries in the whole of Central Greece, not only of Stagoi or Thessaly, is clearly indicative¹³⁰.

In the *Sygramma Istorikon* (Σύγγραμμα Ιστορικών), an episcopal act written a bit after 1529¹³¹, it is stated that no monastic, not from Great Meteoro or any other convent, held the title of hegumen in the region, with the exception of the Protos of the Hermitage of Stagoi¹³². The writer seems to be ill-disposed towards Great Meteoro, as he implies that the change in the governance of the Stagoi Hermitage became the instrument of the other monasteries' obliteration¹³³. In any case, the *Sygramma Istorikon* points out that by the first half of the sixteenth century, at the latest, the dispute regarding primacy in Meteora was resolved in favor of the Great Meteoro Monastery. From now on, the other monasteries of Meteora were obliged, as an expression of submission and

¹²⁶ E.g., tracing the sultanic firman granting permission for the monastery's establishment could provide a clear answer to this question.

¹²⁷ Alexandropoulos, "Τα Οθωμανικά Τούρκικα έγγραφα". Kotzageorgis, "Τα μοναστήρια ως οθωμανικές τοπικές ελίτ".

¹²⁸ Alexandropoulos, "Τα Οθωμανικά Τούρκικα έγγραφα", 118.

¹²⁹ The view that the monastery's founders came from Dousiko is embraced by Vasileiou (*Το Μοναστήρι*, 45), Dimitrikopoulos ("Αρσένιος Ελασσόνας", 149, no. 91), Greene, "History in High Places", 5-10.

¹³⁰ Uspensky, *Восток Христианскии*, 160. Vapheiadis, *Η μονή*, 109-110.

¹³¹ See Uspenskij, *Vostok Christianskij-Putešestvie*, 408-413. **Vogiatzidis, Το Χρονικόν των Μετεώρων**. Nicol, *Meteora*, 71-72. Sofianos, *Η Σκίτη των Σταγών*, 32-33. **Rigo, La Cronaca**, 53-109.

¹³² '...οὐδεις ὄνομα ἡγουμένου ἐκέκτητο, οὔτε εἰς τὸ Μετέωρον οὔτε εἰς ἄλλην μονήν. Καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο δηλον ἦν κἂν τοῖς πολλοῖς, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀγνούμενον. Οὕτως γὰρ παρεκτὸς τοῦ πρώτου τῆς σκίτεως οὐδεις ἄλλος ἡγούμενος ὠνομάζετο. Οὕτω γὰρ ἡ συνήθεια ἐπεκράτει, ὅτι ὁ πρώτος εἶχεν καὶ τὸ τῆς ἡγουμενίας ὄνομα...' (ibid., ln. 66-70.)

¹³³ Ibid., ln. 126-128, 145-146.

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docility (ύποταγῆς καὶ εὐπειθείας ἔνεκεν), to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of the Great Meteoro.

However, as already stated, the leading role held by the Great Meteoro was not limited to the abbeys and monastic cells of Stagoi; its influence exceeded by far the borders of today's Thessaly. Furthermore, Dousiko Monastery as well fell under the jurisdiction of the Great Meteoro according to the epistle of confirmation and will of its founding father, Saint Bessarion (d. 1540)¹³⁴. His will testifies to the authority that the Great Meteoro enjoyed during the sixteenth century, to such an extent that Dousiko Monastery was considered its dependency. The same status is also reserved for the Monastery of the Transfiguration of Zavorda, located in Western Macedonia (Greece), as the will of its founding father, Saint Nikanor (1491-1549), attests¹³⁵. It should also be observed that monasteries outside the region of Meteora were founded in the sixteenth century by initiative of monks of the Great Meteoro. For example, characteristic is the case of the Monastery of Saint Athanasius Omvriakis (Domokos), which was founded in 1565 by monk Athanasius of Great Meteoro¹³⁶.

Beyond shadow of doubt, the establishment of dependencies of the Great Meteoro Monastery in nodal point of continental Greece is a phenomenon worth of further discussion. During the sixteenth century Meteora faced a housing, nutritional and housing crisis due to the great confluence of incoming monks¹³⁷. This state of affairs obliged the Great Meteoro not only to erect a more spacious *katholikon* in 1552 and a two-storey hospital-rest home in 1572¹³⁸, but also to proceed with new conventual establishments in select and appropriate locations, usually where monasteries used to stand¹³⁹. Besides a much-desired decongestion, the ultimate aim of these moves was the expansion of the monastery's estates and the increment of its revenue, as well as the control of nodal points and arterial roads by a centralized monastic network¹⁴⁰. In fact, the

¹³⁴ ...εἰ δὲ βαρὺν τε καὶ ἐπιπαχθῆς τυ]γγάνον εἶη τὸ ἀμάρτημα [μοναχοῦ τινός], καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ καθηγουμ(έν)ου τῆς μονῆς δυνάμεως, ἀναχθῆτω αὐτὸ πρὸς τὸν ὀσιώτατον καθηγούμενον τοῦ Μετεώρου, καὶ παρ' ἐκείνου ἐχέτω τὴν διόρθωσιν, εἰ ἐξῆν· ὃν ὡς μείζονα τῆς σκήτε(ως) ὄντα πν(ευματ)ικὸν π(ατέ)ρα δίδωμι αὐτῷ, τὸ τὰς με/[γάλας καὶ] δυσδιωρθώτ(ους) ἐμπταισμέν(ας) πράξεις, διορθοῦν κανονικῶς τε καὶ ἐπιστημόν(ως) τοῦ ἡμετέρου λέγω μοναστηρίου' (Sofianos, "Ὁ ἅγιος Βησσαρίων", In. 22-24 on page 227).

¹³⁵ Delialis, "Ἡ Διαθήκη τοῦ ὀσίου Νικάνορος", In. 72-80, 90-104 on pages 422-423.

¹³⁶ See selectively Giannopoulos, "Χρονικὸν τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Ὀμβρικοῦ".

¹³⁷ Skouvaras, "Μεθέωρα", 1076, 1088; Vasileiou, *Το Μοναστήρι*, 45.

¹³⁸ Vapheides, *Ἡ μονή*, 113-117.

¹³⁹ Alexandropoulos, "Τὰ μοναστήρια τῶν Μετεώρων".

¹⁴⁰ Skouvaras, "Μεθέωρα", 1088. Alexandropoulos, "Τὰ μοναστήρια τῶν Μετεώρων", 84-86.

founding of Tatarna by the four monks, who perhaps came from the Great Meteoro brotherhood, could be interpreted within the frame of this considerable expansion.

After its establishment, Tatarna developed rapidly, receiving many land endowments in the wider region¹⁴¹. Its heyday from 1556 until the beginning of the seventeenth century is also attested by the sumptuous ecclesiastical vessels treasured in its contemporary sacristy¹⁴². Likewise, its fame reflects on its inclusion by Kaisarios Dapontes (1713/4-1784) in his poem on the monasteries and churches dedicated to the Virgin (Απαρίθμησης των ονομαστών ναών και μονών της Παναγίας και περί του Αγίου Όρους)¹⁴³.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the monastery associates to rebellious movements and is set on fire many times, like many other monasteries in continental Greece. Viz, in 1600 Tatarna becomes the epicenter of the rebellion led by Dionysios the Philosopher (d. 1611), metropolitan of Larissa, which leads to its destruction by the Ottomans in 1601. The monastery is reconstructed with the sponsorship of Scarlatos (fl. sixteenth century)¹⁴⁴, a Phanariot originally from Agrafa, who becomes its second founder¹⁴⁵. In 1602 Arsenios of Elassona, Archbishop of the Cathedral of the Archangels of Moscow, will send icons and other objects to the monastery, which were presumably meant to cover urgent needs after its destruction.

The group of Russian heirlooms to be discussed comprises of six portable icons, a pectoral panagiaron-encolpion and an illuminated manuscript. Unfortunately, the existing scholarship suffers from inaccuracies regarding their dating and iconography¹⁴⁶. The relatively thin bibliography includes studies dedicated to the icon of the Dormition of the Virgin¹⁴⁷, Arsenios's oblations¹⁴⁸, two of the icons' dedicatory inscriptions and the manuscript¹⁴⁹. A key text for the objects' contextualization is the illuminated manuscript itself, compiled in Moscow and presented

¹⁴¹ Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 79-83. Greene, "History in High Places", 5-6.

¹⁴² Theochari, "Εκκλησιαστικά άμφια", 123-147. Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 83-99. Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdroliia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 22 and 134-146.

¹⁴³ '...Τατάρνα μοναστήριον... της Παναγίας / παρόμοιον ως τα λοιπά εις τας θαυματουργίας...' (Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 31).

¹⁴⁴Theocharis, "Nikolas Mavrocordato", 319-340. Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdroliia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 15. Sdroliia, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού της μονής Πέτρας (1625)*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁵ Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁶ E.g., Vasileiou, *Ενθυμήσεις, επιγραφές κι ένα σιγίλλιο*, 12. Idem, *To μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 45. Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdroliia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 134. Φλώρου, "Εικόνες του 16ου αιώνα", 293-298.

¹⁴⁷ Kissas, "A Russian Icon".

¹⁴⁸ Komashko, Sayenkova, "The Iconographic program of Russian Icons", 73-88.

¹⁴⁹ Poulitsas, "Επιγραφαι, Ενθυμήσεις και Σιγίλλια". Dimitrakipoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνοζ*.

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to Arsenios in 1596 by the Metropolitan of Myreon Matthaïos (1550-1624). Upon the manuscript's dispatch in 1602, Arsenios noted his oblations propria manu adding a clear designation of origin: 'from the Orthodox Megalopolis of Moscow of Great Russia' (*από της ορθοδόξου Μεγαλοπόλεως της Μοσχοβίας της Μεγάλης Ρωσίας...*)¹⁵⁰. He mentions a silver-gilt icon of the Descent into Hades (*έν εικόνη αργυρόχρυσον την ανάστασιν του Κυρίου Ημών Ιησού Χριστού Εις Άδου*)¹⁵¹, as well as 'a most fine' (*εκλεκτώτατον*) silver-gilt casket¹⁵². Their transit to Tatarna was undertaken by the Archimandrite of the Holy Sepulcher Damaskinos, who was accompanied by monks Symeon and Pachomios. Other heirlooms in the monastery's collection, not mentioned by Arsenios, can also be associated to the same dispatch: e.g., the icons of the Vision of Saint Sergius of Radonezh¹⁵³, of Christ Pantokrator¹⁵⁴, of Panagia Phaneromene of Tatarna (*Παναγία Φανερωμένη Ταταρνιώτισσα*)¹⁵⁵, and a pectoral panagiaron-encolpion¹⁵⁶. Their iconography and style place them towards the end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, which is roughly the same period that Arsenios's dispatch of gifts was planned and executed. As a side note, it should be highlighted that Arsenios donated a large number of Russian religious artifacts to Orthodox religious centers: Thessaly (Meteora and Dousiko), the Church of St. George of the Greeks in Venice, Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the Holy Land. His oblations are estimated to some fifty icons, other liturgical objects and illuminated manuscripts¹⁵⁷.

The earliest dated heirloom of this group, perhaps the earliest Russian object in the whole collection as well, is the small icon of the Dormition of the Virgin, gifted by Archimandrite Damaskinos in 1599 (Fig. 1). Its complex iconographical program and dedicatory inscription summon much interest. One of the two dedicatory inscriptions on the icon's reverse side details Damaskinos's act of piety¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁰ Poulitsas, "Επιγραφαι, Ενθυμήσεις και Στιγίλλια", cat. 66 on page 270 and cat. 96 on page 276. Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος*, 127-150.

¹⁵¹ Gratsiou, *Die dekorierten Handschriften* 145-146. Vasileiou, *To Μοναστήρι*, 45. Dositheos, *Προσκόνημα*. I. Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 134.

¹⁵² The casket is no longer in the monastery's sacristy (Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος*, 137)

¹⁵³ Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *To Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 134.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁷ Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος*, 124– 164, 221– 232. Kissas, "A Russian Icon from Tatarna". Vocotopoulos, "Encore deux icônes", 167–170; Saenkova, Komashko, "The iconographic program", 73– 88; Σαενκόβα, "Ο Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος και τα αφιερώματά του", 73 – 76. Charchare, *Russian icons in the Greek diaspora communities*, 200-202.

¹⁵⁸ See cat. 1 in the appendix. Although this icon is regarded to be an offering to the Monastery of Tatarna, it should be noted that Kissas encountered it in 1974 in the church of Aroniada, a village in the region of Valtos

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The icon's center is occupied by the Dormition of the Virgin; while on the left and the right corners appear two sets of buildings. The Virgin, lying on her deathbed, is mourned by two groups of Apostles, the hierarchs Dionysius the Areopagite, Hierotheus of Athens, James the Just and the two weeping women, who stand at the far edges. The eleven Apostles are again depicted in the upper register standing as half-figures on nebula under the guidance of angels¹⁵⁹. Christ is framed by a double *mandorla*, symbolic of his glory. The internal *mandorla* is topped by a red Cherub, while from the external blue *mandorla* emerge two angels holding candlesticks. He holds the Virgin's swaddled soul "*eidolon*", a detail characteristic of sixteenth-century Russian painting¹⁶⁰. What is more, the painter's rendering of the episode of the Jewish priest Jephonias, in the very foreground, constitutes an iconographical innovation of the beginning of the seventeenth century. In this variation, Archangel Michael takes a left, and not right, step, while raising his sword to cut Jephonias's hands¹⁶¹. The combination of these two details points out to a transitional iconography, caught between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.

Above the Dormition the painter placed two scenes inspired by New Testament apocrypha: The Descent of Mary's Girdle to the Apostle Thomas, and the Metastasis of the Theotokos. In the first scene, the Virgin within an oval "glory" is about to drop her girdle (*zone*) down onto Apostle Thomas, while being taken up to heaven by two angels. In the latter scene, on the icon's upper frame, we see a female figure swaddled in white and sitting on a throne, decorated with four lit candlesticks and palm trees. The figure makes a gesture of acceptance with her hands in front of her chest, while two Archangels bend their knee towards the throne. According to the apocryphal text attributed to Saint John the Theologian, the palm symbolizes the Tree of Life¹⁶². This composition can be perceived as a visualization of apocryphal texts associated to the dogma of the

(Aitolokarnania), and then in 1985, in the Church of Saint Athanasius in Amfilochia. (Kissas, "A Russian Icon", no. 1 on page 261).

¹⁵⁹ Porfiriev, Апокрифические сказания, 270-279 and 292-293. Wratislaw-Mitrovič, Okunev, "La dormition de la Sainte Vierge", 134–174.

¹⁶⁰ From the beginning of the seventeenth century Christ appears in Russian religious iconography to be holding the Virgin's soul with His left hand, while blessing with His right (Komashko, Saenkova, "О некоторых русских иконах, 244-246).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 244-246.

¹⁶² Mimouni, *Dormition et assomption de Marie*, 130. Van Esbroeck, "Les textes liturgiques sur l'Assomption", 269.

Dormition of the Virgin, with or without Resurrection, and with Her soul appearing on the Tree of Life, where it unites with Her body after the Metastasis¹⁶³.

The icon's frame features fourteen prophets and forefathers, who hold in their hands Marian symbols or *eileta*. According to the encomia of Saint John of Damascus (c. 675/6-749) relevant to the feast, these holy figures were present at the Dormition of the Virgin, alongside the Apostles¹⁶⁴. The reverse side features two dedicatory inscriptions, one hymnographical inscription and the Cross of Golgotha (Calvary) (Fig. 2). The artist renders the white cross and the Arma Christi (Λόγγη – Σπόγγος) against a red background. The Calvary (Κρανίου Τόπος) is executed as a terraced plinth over the buried skull of Adam. Asymmetrical scrolling vegetation emanates from the base, filling the whole of the interstice between the cross and the bordure. Although the upper board binding has perished, one can discern two birds, which most probably sat on the cross's upper antenna¹⁶⁵. The composition is complemented by the apotropaic inscription [ΙΣ ΧΣ] ΝΙ ΚΑ (Ιησούς Χριστός Νικά) and four cryptograms¹⁶⁶. Therefore, this is an allegory of the Cross of Golgotha as the Tree of Life and Paradise, which functions as an apotropaic symbol when juxtaposed to the cryptograms¹⁶⁷. The Cross of Golgotha, paired with Arma Christi, appears in double-sided icons which were particularly venerated in Moscow during this period, such as the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Vladimir, also known as the palladium of the Principality of Moscow¹⁶⁸, and its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies¹⁶⁹. A version of this representation is also found in an icon of enthroned Christ with Metropolitan Cyprian (c. 1336-1406) in the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin (Kremlin)¹⁷⁰.

The icon's reverse side also features two inscriptions in verse (iambic dekapentasyllable) which are placed perimetrically on the frame, as well as a third one in the lower board binding¹⁷¹. The outer inscription, written in lowercase, records the patron. The inner inscription, written in

¹⁶³ The scene is identified by Kissas as 'the winged spirit of the Virgin' (Kissas, "A Russian Icon", 263). However, it should be noted that the aforementioned article was written prior to the icon's conservation. For this theme, see Xyggopoulos, "Η πτερωτή ψυχή της Θεοτόκου", 1-12.

¹⁶⁴ Kissas, "A Russian Icon", 267.

¹⁶⁵ Kissas, "A Russian Icon", no. 11 on page 264.

¹⁶⁶ See cat. 1 in the appendix. On cryptograms see Rhoby, "Secret Messages?". Moutafov, "Typology and Semantics of Cryptograms", 49-75.

¹⁶⁷ Walter, "IC XC NI KA.", 194. Moutsopoulos, "Θωράκιο βυζαντινής σαρκοφάγου". Karagianni, "Ο σταυρός στη Βυζαντινή μνημειακή ζωγραφική", 161 and 178. Rhoby, "Text as Art?", 265-283.

¹⁶⁸ Brouk Y. V. (Ed.) *Государственная Третьяковская галерея. Каталог собрания*. Том I, cat. 1 (Korina).

¹⁶⁹ Bourenkova et al. (eds), *Симон Ушаков — царский иконограф*, Cat. 1 (Gladysheva).

¹⁷⁰ Tolstaya, *Иконы Успенского собора Московского Кремля.*, Cat. 2 (Markina).

¹⁷¹ See cat. 1 in the appendix.

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uppercase, provides the hymnographical text relevant to the icon's main subject, namely the Dormition of the Virgin. Finally, the second dedicatory inscription on the lower board binding, again in lowercase, informs us on the icon's transfer from Moscow.

Obviously, the decoration of the icon's reverse side follows the same formula we see in icons gifted by Arsenios to other monasteries in Central Greece¹⁷². The known examples include the icon of the Intercession of the Theotokos (1589)¹⁷³, and of Our Lady of Vladimir (1592), both presented to Varlaam Monastery¹⁷⁴, as well as a multi-personal icon of thirty saints depicted in bust (1579), presented to Dousiko Monastery¹⁷⁵.

In any case, the icon's complex iconographical program suggests a special commission by a cultured patron¹⁷⁶. Thus, it is worth considering the impact that Damaskinos's sojourn in Moscow (between 1594 and 1602) had on his spiritual interests and artistic taste¹⁷⁷.

The only icon in the Tatarna sacristy which is safely attributed to Arsenios by a dedicatory inscription is the Descent into Hades (Εις Άδου Κάθοδος) (Figs. 3 & 4)¹⁷⁸. This must be the silver-gilt icon (εικόνισμα αργυρόχρυσο της Αναστάσεως) noted by Arsenios¹⁷⁹, that is if we assume that its revetment perished later in time. The scene of the Descent into Hades is based on the apocryphal evangeliary of Nicodemus and constitutes a symbolic representation of the Resurrection of Christ¹⁸⁰. Christ dominates the symmetrical composition, enclosed in a mandorla with gold rays (glory) and against a background of rock mountains. Out of the caves come forth groups of the Righteous (Δικαίοι). Above Christ two facing angels hold symbols of the Passion, the Golgotha Cross and the Holy Lance. Christ stands on the broken gates of Hell and turns to the left to raise

¹⁷² Preobrazhenskii, "Russian Images of Greek Donor", 51-72.

¹⁷³ Boycheva, Drandaki, Ρωσική Τέχνη στην Ελλάδα, cat. 10 (Matzana, Tsimpida)

¹⁷⁴ Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνας*, 228.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁷⁶ The extensive inscription on the icon's reverse side speaks of his personality (Kissas, "A Russian Icon". Poulitsas, "Επιγραφαί, Ενθυμήσεις και Σιγίλλια", cat.64 on page 270).

¹⁷⁷ Gratsiou, *Die dekorierten Handschriften*, 145-146. Kissas, "A Russian Icon from Tatarna", 268.

¹⁷⁸ 'αρχιεπίσκοπος ελασσόνας και αρχαγγελων Αρσένιος στέλω το παρόν εικόνισμα του [κυρίου] ημων ι(ησο)υ χ(ριστο)υ εις την σεβάσμιαν και ιεράν μονήν [της της πανάγνουθε(στο)κου και αειπαρθένου μαρίας, την] πλησίον Τατάρνας] εκ της μεγαλοπόλεως μοσχοβίας εις [ψυχικήν αυτού] σωτηρίαν: Ετει ζρ[ί] μηνί απριλίω,(ινδικτιόνος)ιε´.1602..' (Poulitsas, "Επιγραφαί, Ενθυμήσεις και Σιγίλλια", cat. 66 on page 270). See cat. 2 in the appendix.

¹⁷⁹ Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνας*, 139 and 226.

¹⁸⁰ See Millet 1916, l'Évangile, 517-540. Xyggopoulos, "Ο ύμνολογικός εικονογραφικός τύπος", 113-129. Lange, *Die Auferstehung*. Radovanović, "Les représentations rares", 34-37. Bagatti, "L'ikonografia dell' Anastasis", 239-272. Gouma-Peterson, "A Byzantine Anastasis Icon", 48-61. Kartsonis 1986. Smirnova, "Une icône de la Descente aux Limbes", 54-59. Δεληγιάννη-Δωρή, "Παλαιολόγια εικονογραφία", 399. Koukiaris, "Οι ανεπίγραφοι ανιστάμενοι", 305-318. Καλαφάτη 2001, 173-180. Cf. Varpeiades, *Περί της εν Άθω Κρητικής ζωγραφικής*, 183-189.

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the kneeling figures of Adam with his right hand and Eve with his left hand. Behind Adam stands Saint John the Baptist with an *eileton* in his hand, pointing Christ to the Apostles. On the other side of the icon, behind Eva, stand Prophets David and Solomon, followed by other Old Testament figures. Below Christ are the broken gates of Hell, revealing scattered locks, keys and chains, as well as an image of Hades-Satan. An angel holding a hammer forges the chains of Hades-Satan. Such detailed depiction of the Underworld was a prevalent trend in Russian iconography during the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century¹⁸¹.

Despite the absence of dedicatory inscriptions, the icons of Christ Pantokrator (The Savior “Oplecnii” / Εἰς τὸν ὄμῳν) and of the Vision of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, can still be associated with Arsenios’s oblation on iconographic and stylistic grounds¹⁸². If this hypothesis stands firm, then they were gifted either by clerics who participated in the same expedition or other unknown donors.

The first is a small recessed icon of a frontal bust of Christ Pantokrator, who is portrayed as half-figure (Fig. 5). His cruciform halo bears the inscription Ο ΩΝ (He who is)¹⁸³. This is an older Christological type known as the Savior “Oplecnii” (Εἰς τὸν ὄμῳν)¹⁸⁴. Its calligraphic inscriptions, rendered in gold, provide a decorative effect¹⁸⁵.

Although one would expect that the identification of the specific type would not present scholars with difficulties, the icon has been given vastly different interpretations. Panos Vasileiou, one of the pioneering scholars of the monastery’s history during the 1960s and 1970s, gave to the unsigned icon a Byzantine attribution, together with the certainty that it belonged to the 1555 *katholikon*¹⁸⁶. On the other hand, Archimandrite Dositheos, the monastery’s current hegumen, mentions the icon first as a fifteenth-century Russian icon of the Saint Mandylion¹⁸⁷, and then, in a more recent publication, as a sixteenth-century Russian icon of Jesus Christ the Life Giver

¹⁸¹ Samoιlova, “Икона «Воскресение – Сошествие во ад»”, 256–280. Saenkova, “Новые сюжеты в изображении преисподней в иконографии Воскресения Сошествия во ад”, 60-74.

¹⁸² Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος*, 139 and 226.

¹⁸³ See cat. 3 in the appendix.

¹⁸⁴ Sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Russian icons of the Savior “Oplecnii” are also preserved in Saint Catherine’s Monastery of Sinai. For the iconographic theme see T. Tolstaya (ed.) *Иконы Успенского собора*, Cat. 6 (Ostashenko); E. M. Saenkova and others (Ed.), *Зряце пречистыя образы*. Cat. 10 (Saenkova). N. I. Komashko and others (ed.), *Русские иконы Синая*. Cat. 40 (Saenkova),

¹⁸⁵ See cat. 3 in the appendix.

¹⁸⁶ ‘...την μικρή εικόνιτσα του Χριστού αξιόλογο έργο βυζαντινής τέχνης χωρίς όνομα ζωγράφου και χρονολογία, που ασφαλώς προέρχεται από το ναό του 1555...’ (Vasileiou, *Ενθυμήσεις, Επιγραφές κι ένα Σιγίλλιο*, fig. 16 in appendix IV. Idem, *Το μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 45. Dimitrakopoulos, *Αρσένιος Ελασσόνος*, 139 and 226).

¹⁸⁷ Dositheos, *Προσκόνημα*.

(Ιησούς Χριστός η Πάντων Ζωή)¹⁸⁸. The most recent monograph on the monastery's history, which includes a catalogue of the sacristy as well, identifies the theme as the Sant Mandylion, while proposing a seventeenth-century dating¹⁸⁹. Overall, one should not discard the discussion of these misidentifications as mere mistakes. They could be manifestations of a process of subtle cultural translation, during which an imported object's familiarity may protect its identity from radical transformation, leading to its moderate modification instead.

To continue, the Vision of Saint Sergius of Radonezh is a prime example of a widely disseminated icon-heirloom (Fig. 7). It was customarily offered to pilgrims as a blessing and souvenir by the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius¹⁹⁰. As one would expect, the icons were massively produced for the needs of the Lavra in the monastic workshop and the surrounding villages. They were either sold or offered, providing steady income to the monks.

The Lavra, founded by the Venerable Sergius of Radonezh (1314-1392), the patron-saint of Muscovy and all Russia since 1422, was the most important pilgrimage site in Russia since the mid-fifteenth century. Travelers to Moscow usually included in their schedule a visit to the monastery, in order to pay their respects to the city's patron saint¹⁹¹. The effect of this customary visit is probably traceable in the wide dispersal of icons with 'The Apparition of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh' outside Russia as for example in Dousiko Monastery, the Metropolis of Tricca and Stagoi,¹⁹² Saint Catherine's Monastery of Sinai¹⁹³. Their similarity in style and manufacture, as well as their dating (second half of the sixteenth-first half of the seventeenth century), suggest they were produced in the same workshop.

This iconographic theme is known as 'The Vision of Saint Sergius of Radonezh' or 'The Apparition of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh'. It combines an episode from the saint's vita, which is interpreted as a moment of epiphany, with the addition of symbolical

¹⁸⁸ Idem, *Ιερόν Τρίπτυχον*, 88.

¹⁸⁹ Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *Το Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 134.

¹⁹⁰ Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *Το Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, cat. 134, fig. on page 53. Tchesnokova, *Χριστιανικὴ Ὀστική καὶ Ρωσσία: πολιτικὸ καὶ κουλτουρικό αλληλεπίπλοισμα ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τοῦ XVII αἰῶνος*. Μ., 2011, 100. Eadem, "Ἡ Διάδοσις τῶν Ρωσικῶν εἰκόνων ἐν τῇ Ὀρθόδοξῃ Ἀνατολή", 19-20.

¹⁹¹ Tchesnokova, *Χριστιανικὴ Ὀστική καὶ Ρωσσία*, op.cit.

¹⁹² Dimitrakopoulos, *Ἀρσένιος Ἐλασσόνας*, 231-232. Boycheva, Drandaki, *Θρησκευτικὴ τέχνη ἀπὸ τῆς Ρωσσίας ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι*, Cat. 12 (Mantzana, Tsimpida).

¹⁹³ Komashko et al., *Русские иконы Синай*. cat. 7 (Saenkova), cat. 27 (Komashko)

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elements¹⁹⁴. Its importance lies in the fact that already in the mid-fifteenth century this was the only case that an episode that had been detracted as an independent scene from saint's iconographical cycle.

The icon's center is occupied by the Virgin's meeting with Sergius and Nikon of Radonezh (1355-1426). She appears holding an abbatial staff and is accompanied by Apostles Peter and John. The two Russian saints are turned towards the Virgin. Saint Sergius holds both his hands steady in supplication. Nikon supplicates in the same way with his left hand, but holds an *eileton* in his right hand. The scene takes place in front of built structures which symbolically represent the Trinity Lavra. The red textile canopy, hanging from the roofs of the facing buildings, is a detail revealing the scene as an epiphany¹⁹⁵. Only a few letters from the standard identifying inscription remain¹⁹⁶. Moreover, the theme is complemented by new iconographical elements¹⁹⁷. One of them is the replacement of Micheas with the Venerable Nikon of Radonezh. This detail refers to the saint's vita and normally appears in his biographical icons, showing his successor in the monastery's abbotship. After Nikon's canonization in 1547 and the erection of a small chapel on his relics, adjacent to the *katholikon*, the need for the dissemination of his cult apparently became more pressing. Thus, this theme is created in order to stretch the monastery's spiritual genealogy and continuity¹⁹⁸.

The second symbolic element is the presentation of the monastery's patron, the Holy Trinity, floating within a stylized grey cloud over the canopy, a detail borrowed from the iconography of the Hospitality of Abraham (Φιλοξενία του Αβραάμ)¹⁹⁹. Overall, the iconographic subject 'The

¹⁹⁴ Lifshits, "Иконография Явления Богоматери преподобному", 79–94; Preobrazhenskii, "Ранние изображения преподобного Сергия в Троице-Сергиевом монастыре", 76–85. Gusseva, "Особенности сложения иконографии 'Сергиева видения'", 120–138. Smirnova, *Icone Russe*, Collezione Banca Intesa, cat. 14 (Smirnova)

¹⁹⁵ Papastavrou, "Le voile, symbole de l'Incarnation".

¹⁹⁶ See cat. 4 in the appendix.

¹⁹⁷ The text referring to the episode goes in Greek as follows: 'Ο Άγιος βγήκε γρήγορα από τὸ κελλί του στὸν προθάλαμο, ὅπου τὸν περιέβαλε ἕνα φῶς, πὸ λαμπρὸ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν ἥλιο. Αἰσιώθηκε νὰ δῆ ὀλοφώτεινη τὴν Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ συνοδευόμενη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀπόστολο Πέτρο καὶ τὸν Εὐαγγελιστὴ Ἰωάννη. Μὴ μπορώντας νὰ ἀντέξει τὴν ἐκτυφλωτικὴ λαμπρότητα τοῦ ὁράματος, ὁ Ὅσιος ἔπεσε καταγῆς. Ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος ἔσκυψε, τὸν ἄγγιξε μὲ τὰ χέρια της καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: -Μὴ φοβᾶσαι ἐκλεκτέ μου! Ἦλθα νὰ σε ἐπισκεφτῶ, γιατί ἄκουσα τίς προσευχὲς ποὺ κάνεις γιὰ τὸ μοναστήρι καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς. Μὴ λυπᾶσαι καὶ μὴν ἀνησυχῆς λοιπὸν γιὰ τὴν μονὴ αὐτή. Ἀπὸ τώρα καὶ σὺ ἐξῆς θὰ ἔχει κάθε εὐλογία. Δὲν θὰ παύσω νὰ φροντίζω γιὰ τὸν τόπο αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ποὺ ζῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἐκδημία σου...' (I. M. Παρακλήτου Ὁρωποῦ Ἀττικῆς)

¹⁹⁸ Melnik, "Практики почитания", 93-99.

¹⁹⁹ On The Hospitality of Abraham see Kuyumdzhieva, *Λικύτ на Бога*, 161-162. Mouriki, "Η παράσταση της Φιλοξενίας του Αβραάμ. Cf. Kalopissi-Verti, *Die Kirche der Hagia Triada*, 45, 169-177. Uliyanov, *Φιλοксения Авраама*, 216-232; Koukiaris, *Τα θαύματα-Εμφανίσεις των αγγέλων και αρχαγγέλων*, 106-110. Karagianni, *Το Ημέτερο Κάλλος*, cat. 20 on pages 232-235 (K. M. Vapheides).

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Apparition of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh' promotes the idea of the Virgin's protection of Muscovy and the veneration of its national saints, such as Sergius of Radonezh and his disciple Nikon.

Furthermore, the Tatarna monastery's holdings include two other roughly contemporary Russian artifacts: a pectoral panagiaron-encolpion and the icon of the Panagia Phaneromene of Tatarna (Παναγία Φανερωμένη Ταταρνιώτισσα). The intricate decoration of their silver revetments, decorated with enamels and semi-precious stones, as well as their style, allow us to date them somewhere between the end of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

The pectoral panagiaron-encolpion is one of the most splendid artifacts in the monastery's sacristy, notable for its excellent craftsmanship (Figs. 9-10)²⁰⁰. Already since the fifteenth century, such ecclesiastical artifacts were destined for dignitaries and the high clergy of the Orthodox Church²⁰¹. A similar pectoral panagiaron-encolpion, also a gift by Arsenios, is preserved at the Museum of the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice²⁰².

It consists of two ivory medallions intricately carved in relief and mounted with silver and gilt-silver. The medallions' filigree metal revetment is inlaid with green and blue enamels, which bring out the vegetal pattern. It should be noted that this technique is thought to have been transmitted to Russia through Western Europe. The use of semi-precious stones on the external facets provides an extra layer of luxury. Finally, the metal suspension eyelet bears on the one side an engraved Cherub and on the other, the Saint Mandylion carved in relief.

The iconographical program of the internal facets combines the representation of the Virgin of the Sign²⁰³, accompanied by celestial powers and twelve prophets within roundels²⁰⁴, with the image of the Holy Trinity (The Hospitality of Abraham), surrounded by the twelve Apostles in bust and within roundels (Fig. 10). The right external facet's center is occupied by a larger medallion with the Three Hierarchs. This is framed by twelve smaller medallions which feature an array of saints, hierarchs, martyrs and venerables depicted as half-figures: Saint Athanasius, Saint Nikolaos the Wonderworker, Saints George and Demetrius, the metropolitans of Moscow Alexius, Peter, Jonah and Cyprian, the great martyrs Georgios and Demetrios, Sergius and Nikon of Radonezh, Zosima

²⁰⁰ Κουμουλίδης, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *Το Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 140-141

²⁰¹ Οικονομάκη-Παπαδοπούλου, *Εκκλησιαστική αργυρά*, 13; Drpić, *Notes on Byzantine Panagiaria*, 54. Liakos, "Παρατηρήσεις σε παναγάρια", 427-428.

²⁰² Kazanaki-Lappa, *Ελληνικό Ινστιτούτο. Οδηγός του Μουσείου*, 129.

²⁰³ In this type the Virgin Orans is portrayed in half-length holding the Christ Child on her chest

²⁰⁴ This is the scene Άνωθεν οι Προφῆται ('Prophets from Above')

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(d. 1478) and Savvaty Solovetsky (d. 1435) (Fig. 9). The left external facet's center is occupied by a larger medallion with the Crucifixion. This is framed by ten smaller roundels which carry evangelical scenes: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the Baptism, the Raising of Lazarus, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection (The Descent of Christ into Hades), The Ascension of Christ and the Dormition of the Virgin.

The internal facets are inscribed with two hymnological extracts in perfectly grammatical Greek (Fig. 10). Surprisingly, quite a few Cyrillic inscriptions around the individual saints and scenes are misspelt²⁰⁵. Considering this detail, one can assume that the artisan reproduced the Greek inscriptions as a decorative element, slavishly copying them from a written text, while for the Slavonic inscriptions he made use of his own deficient orthography.

Around the Virgin appears, in consistent lettering, the second part of the sublime *megalynarion* and *theotokion Axion Estin*²⁰⁶. Respectively, around the representation of the Holy Trinity is the Troparion of Pentecost²⁰⁷. On the other hand, the inscriptions associated to the individual saints and scenes are in Old Slavonic, an indirect piece of evidence pointing out that the object was made for export.

It comes as no surprise that the iconographic program of the pectoral panagiaron's carved decoration links the Marian scene 'the Prophets above' (Ἀνωθεν οἱ Προφῆται) with the Hospitality of Abraham on the internal facets, and the Crucifixion with the Three Hierarchs on the external facets²⁰⁸. A Russian pectoral panagiaron-encolpion at the Benaki Museum collection presents more or less the same iconography²⁰⁹. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the seven saintly Hierarchs of the Russian Church in the object's decoration is a peculiarity. This could again be attributed to the Russian Church's effort to promote its national saints towards the mid-sixteenth century. This effort reaches its apogee when, under the auspices of the Metropolitan of Moscow Macarius (1482-1563), the two synods of 1547 and 1549 proceeded with an impressive number of canonizations²¹⁰. The year 1549 seems to be the terminus post quem for the Benaki Museum pectoral panagiaron's

²⁰⁵ I am thankful to my colleague Daria Rash for drawing my attention to this detail. See cat. 5 in the appendix.

²⁰⁶ See cat. 5 in the appendix.

²⁰⁷ See cat. 5 in the appendix. Both hymnological texts accompany the ritual raising of the bread (Elevation) honoring the Virgin. See Kondakov, *Памятники Афона*, 231. Yiannias, *The Elevation of the Panaghia*, 231-232.

²⁰⁸ Drpic, *Notes on Byzantine Panagiaria*, 51-52; Karakatsanis, *Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους*, Cat. 9.8, Cat. 9.9.

²⁰⁹ Boycheva, Drandaki, *Θρησκευτική Τέχνη από τη Ρωσία*, cat. 20 (Boycheva), 108-110.

²¹⁰ Golubinskii, *История канонизации святых в Русской Церкви*, 92-108.

manufacture, especially considering that it features Saint Cyril of Beloozero (1337-1427) and the Venerable Stephen of Perm (1340-1396), who were both canonized in the aforementioned synods. It may also be reasonable to assume that these objects were destined as gifts to foreign clergymen as a strategy of spreading the word on the new national saints of the Russia. After all, the Russian Church laid claim to its independence from the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1589, when the bishop of Moscow took the title of patriarch.

Finally, it seems possible that the most venerated icon of the monastery, the “Revealed” Virgin of Tatarna (Παναγία Φανερωμένη Ταταρνιώτισσα), arrived with the same shipment of gifts (Fig. 11)²¹¹. It rests on a shrine in the monastery’s *katholikon*, incorporated inside a later case, which comes from an old *prothesis* (Table of Oblation)²¹². Oil lamps and votive offerings hang in front of the icon, which is considered to be miraculous.

This small icon is almost completely covered by an impressive silver revetment. Its ornate filigree develops an intricate net of stylized vegetation, thoroughly inlaid with navy blue, turquoise and pastel green enamels. The Virgin’s halo and external crown are adorned with inlaid semi-precious stones and pearls. It is unfortunate that the wear of the faces’ painting prevents us from studying the icon’s overall style. Even so, its high quality is evident in the fine execution of the Virgin’s garment (*maphorion*), which is richly-decorated with golden fringes. The same attentiveness to detail is observed in the chrysography in Christ’s *himation*. The revetment’s decoration, especially the motifs, recalls other published works, such as the early seventeenth-century Theotokos of Tikhvin in Venice’s Hellenic Institute²¹³, the late sixteenth-century Our Lady of Kazan, the 1594 Saint Nikolaos, made in Kremlin’s royal workshops,²¹⁴ and the seventeenth-century Mother of God Kazanskaya in the British Museum²¹⁵. The artistic affinities shared by these works provide the ground for a late sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century dating of the Tatarna icon.

III. Closing Remarks

²¹¹ Konstantinidi, “Η Αχειροποίητος-Φανερωμένη”.

²¹² Koumoulidis, Deriziotis, Sdrolia, *Το Μοναστήρι της Τατάρνας*, 134.

²¹³ Kazamia-Lappa, *Οδηγός του Μουσείου*, 138. Charchare. *Ρώσικα πολιτιστικά αγαθά στο Ελληνικό Ινστιτούτο της Βενετίας*, fig. 2.

²¹⁴ The icons of Our Lady of Kazan and Saint Nikolaos are both preserved at the sacristy of the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergei (Vorontsova, Tcherkashina, Shitova, *Ριζνιца*, 209 and 250). Also see the triptych with Our Lady of Vladimir, and the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir in the Prokhorov collection (Комашко, Гнутава, *Древности из собрания*, 2-4).

²¹⁵ Bobrov, *A Catalogue of the Russian Icons*, cat. 27.

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The body of objects discussed in this article presents increased interest foremost because it remains in its original context. This crucial element provides ground to the researcher for substantiated interpretations of the motives behind their gifting and of their afterlives in the new cultural environment. At a first reading, these oblations are the acts of pious patronage of two Greek clergymen, the Archbishop Arsenios of Ellassona and Archimandrite of the Holy Sepulcher Damaskinos. But the wider historical context may offer another reading as well. First, the donation coincides with the Time of Troubles (1598–1613), an era of political instability and deep economic crisis for Russia. However, the published official state Acts of the period mention that the presentation of portable religious artifacts to the “Greek” clergymen visiting Moscow continued according to the established practice uninterrupted.²¹⁶ According to these documents, icons offered to “Greek hierarchs” had to reproduce common Christian themes, such as the Holy Trinity, the Virgin with the Child, Christ Pantocrator, or important Russian iconographic subjects and Russian saints. As we have seen, the Russian religious artifacts offered to Tatarna monastery fulfill these criteria and they have been accepted and worshipped by the monastic community continuously for a long period of time. Obviously, they were originally intended for use in a Grecophone context, as testified by the use of church Slavonic for the iconographic inscriptions and of Greek for the hymnographic and dedicatory inscriptions. Moreover, it seems important to stretch that within their new environment, much of these object’s original identity was lost or altered. The misreading of the iconographic type of Christ Pantokrator is one of the results of this multifaceted process; while the naturalization of the Virgin Tatarniotissa, to the point of becoming the monastery’s most venerated icon, indicates how powerful the specific dynamic could be.

Thus, the above presented oblations are distinguished not only by their refined craftsmanship, but also by their status as a historical source, documenting the contacts between local ecclesiastical actors in the Ottoman Balkans and prominent clergymen from the Patriarchates of Russia and Jerusalem. Moreover, the relevant textual sources, namely the objects’ inscriptions and other documents, offer the rare opportunity to study these gifts in comparative perspective and within the wider context of the relations between Russia and the Orthodox patriarchates in the East. Finally, the presence of other objects of Russian manufacture in the Tatarna collection, such as the largely unpublished eighteenth- and nineteenth-century icons and constitute an important

²¹⁶ Rozhdestvenskii, *Акты времен Лжедмитрия I–го*, 17. Komashko and others, *Русские иконы Синая*, 23-26, 53-72. Chesnokova, “Written sources on Russian icons of the 17th century, 222-224.

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testimony on the monastery's enduring contacts with Russia, which continued well beyond the time of Arsenios.

- *Donations provided by Archimandrite Grigorios Sihnis to the Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos, 1828*

A notable example is the donation of Archimandrite Grigorios Sihnis to the Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos. According to an inscription preserved on the reverse of the icon of the Annunciation, he offered, on 1 March 1828, a set of seventy-five icons of the liturgical calendar, described as works of fine quality painted in Russia and executed in uniform dimensions. This donation, together with other objects attributed to the monastery's Russian connections—such as an eighteenth-century icon of the Mother of God “Vatopedi (Sfagmeni)” and two gold-embroidered epitaphioi—illustrates the scale and significance of clerical patronage.

- *Donations provided by Archimandrite Neophytos Pagidas (1833–1892) to the parish church of the Dormition of the Virgin (“Panagia Philotitissa”), Philoti, Naxos*

Equally significant are the benefactions of Archimandrite Neophytos Pagidas (1833–1892), a prominent figure of the Greek ecclesiastical community in Saint Petersburg and a native of Philoti on Naxos. Serving as head of the Greek church in Saint Petersburg from 1862 until his death, he maintained strong ties with his place of origin, where he contributed to the construction and embellishment of the parish church of the Dormition of the Virgin (“Panagia Philotitissa”).

Among his donations are a gold-embroidered epitaphios and an icon of the enthroned Virgin with the Christ Child, displayed on the west wall of the church. Particularly noteworthy are two complete chalice sets. The first, made of silver and dated by workshop marks to 1870, includes a chalice, a diskarion with asterisk, a communion spoon, and a lance; it was donated in 1872, as indicated by an engraved inscription referring to the “fraternity of Philoti.” Its decoration is relatively restrained, consisting of crosses, floral motifs, and symbolic figures. The paten bears an engraved representation of Christ Anapeson, accompanied by an angel rendered against a clouded background. A second, more elaborate chalice set—also donated in 1872—was executed in silver gilt and comprises a chalice with cover, a diskarion with cover and asterisk, a cross, an artophorion, and three liturgical veils (aerai). In contrast to the first set, its decoration is markedly more intricate.

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The artophorion, conceived in the form of a ciborium, is crowned by domed elements surmounted by Russian-type crosses, while its four sides are adorned with medallions depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, St John, and the figure of the “Lord Sabaoth,” rendered within radiant frames. The chalice and diskarion, together with their covers, are similarly enriched with elaborate ornamental schemes, combining vegetal motifs and symbolic imagery. The donation is further complemented by a group of four processional banners (*khorugv*), now preserved in the local Museum of Icons and Religious Relics. These banners consist of embroidered textile panels bearing painted iconographic scenes on both sides, including representations of St Nicholas, the Mother of God of Kazan, the Dormition of the Virgin, the Baptism of Christ, and the Resurrection. Their form—often swallow-tailed or with multiple streamers terminating in tassels—and their suspension from horizontal crossbars attached to vertical poles correspond to Russian liturgical practice, further attesting to the transmission of ceremonial forms alongside material objects. The benefactions of Archimandrite Neophytos Pagidas extended beyond Philoti to neighbouring communities, including the donation of sets of hieratical vestments preserved today in the museum at Sagkri. These vestments, decorated with gold embroidery in floral and geometric patterns, exemplify the high level of craftsmanship associated with Russian ecclesiastical workshops and reflect the continued role of diaspora clergy in mediating artistic and liturgical influences.

Taken together, these donations illustrate how clerical mobility operated as a key vector for the circulation of Russian religious art, combining personal piety, institutional affiliation, and cultural transfer within a broader network linking the Russian Empire to the Orthodox communities of the Aegean.

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