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The RICONTRANS Project

ERC Consolidator Grant 2018

Funded by the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant 2018, under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 818791), the RICONTRANS project "Visual Culture, Piety and Propaganda: Transfer and Reception of Russian Religious Art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (16th-early 20th c.)" is directed by Dr. Yuliana Boycheva (IMS-FORTH). Host institution of the project is the Institute for Mediterranean Studies / Foundation for Research & Technology – Hellas (IMS-FORTH) in cooperation with the Benaki Museum (Athens). The 25 senior researchers of the team, experts in art history, history, philology, social anthropology, museology and art conservation, are leading scholars and promising junior researchers from 12 academic institutions, universities and museums in Greece, Germany, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia. The project duration is 60 months, from 1/05/2019 until 31/04/2024.

The aim of RICONTRANS is to investigate for the first time the transnational phenomenon of artefact transfer and the various aspects of their reception in the region, in different historical periods and circumstances, in a systematic way, and in collaboration with an international and interdisciplinary team of experts. Applying the cultural transfer approach in combination with the recent theoretically challenging openings of art history into visual studies, this project aims to: (1) map the phenomenon in its long history by identifying preserved objects in the region (16th-early 20th c.); (2) follow the paths through which these art objects were brought to the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, identify, and classify the mediums of their transfer; (3) analyse the dynamics and the various moving factors (religious, political, ideological) of this process during its various historical phases; (4) study, analyse, and classify these objects according to their iconographic and artistic particularities; (5) inquire into the aesthetic, ideological, political, and social factors which shaped the context of the reception of Russian religious art objects in a long period of time and in various social, cultural and religious environments; (6) last but not least, investigate the influence of these transferred artefacts on the visual culture of the host societies.

The close communication and cooperation of historians, philologists, and art historians will enhance the analytical potential of RICONTRANS. It will enable an investigation based on fresh and abundant material of composite questions concerning the interrelationships between artistic form, visual culture, personal piety, political and ecclesiastical propaganda, and ideology, such as the following: Through which practices of signification do the transferred icons and church objects, originally objects of private devotion, acquire political meanings

and are turned into vehicles of state political and ecclesiastical propaganda? How important is their artistic quality and style in this process? How important is the 'political' role of these objects for their artistic impact in local icon painting and in the visual culture of the host society in general? How necessary were acts of 'active' intervention on the objects (such as re-naming of icons, replacement of original inscriptions with translated versions thereof, painting of additional explanatory inscriptions etc.) for their "acceptance" and incorporation to the local liturgical practices and rites?

The first step of the research will be the identification and collection of two types of evidence – textual and material – on the transfer of Russian ecclesiastical art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, aiming to construct a large and representative basis of evidence. On the one hand, textual evidence will be provided by extensive and systematic bibliographic and archival research, which will examine selected bodies and types of material (ecclesiastical, state and private archival collections, travelogues, newspapers, and journals) in Russia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and North Macedonia. This research will collect information relative to the paths and mediums of Russian religious art transfer in the Balkans (e.g. Russian official donations of icons to monasteries and churches in the region; missions of Balkan monks and clerics to Russia for alms collection (*ζητεία*) and various orders of Russian icons; maritime and inland trade with Russian icons; acts of donation of Russian icons by emigrants from the region to their places of origin etc.). It will also document publicly or privately expressed attitudes (aesthetic or ideological) towards these objects.

On the other hand, material evidence (*i.e.* Russian icons and other art objects held in churches, monasteries, museum, and private collections throughout the region) will be identified and photographically reproduced through field research missions. These will also render oral testimonies on the ways in which these icons reached their final destinations and observations on the attitudes of the people using them or being responsible for them (local clergy and lay population, museum curators and employees, private collectors). This type of evidence (oral) is particularly important for the investigation not only of their first, but also of their 'second reception', *i.e.* the current place of some of these objects in museum and private collections (*musealization*).



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)

Dragoş Gh. Năstăsou, Ferenc Mihály, Lorand Kiss

Monumente Medievale de pe Valea Târnavelor,

Bucharest, Editura ACS, 2018.

A well-documented guidebook of the medieval monuments of the Târnavale Valley, with over 700 unique images – aerial, interior and exterior photos, details of the mural painting, maps of the monuments and several tourist routes, accompanied by documented texts authored by specialists in medieval art history and restoration. Fifteen of the most representative medieval cultural landmarks of the area are presented: the reformed (Calvinist) church in the village of Alma, the evangelical (Lutheran) churches in the villages Aţel, Băgaci, Biertan, Brateiu, Curciu, Dârlos, Ighişu Nou, Mălâncrav, Moşna, Nemşa, Richiş, and Şmig, as well as the main religious and civil buildings in the cities of Mediaş and Sighişoara. Architecture, sculpture, and medieval wall paintings are equally presented, as well as objects with artistic and historical value (polyptych altars, furniture, liturgical inventory, etc.). The *Art Conservation Support Association* uses the funds obtained by marketing this guide for editorial and cultural projects dedicated to the conservation and promotion of the Romanian cultural heritage.

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