

Icons Depicting Sacred Sites in the North-Eastern Mediterranean: Exploring the Connections Between Landscape Painting, Pilgrimage, and Identity in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries

Author **Elisabeta Negrau**

G. Oprescu Institute of Art History , e_negrau@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The study explores icons featuring loca sancta as topographical representations of geographical and architectural sites integrated into sacred iconography. The introduction of various forms of topographic landscapes in icons during the post-Byzantine period is a relatively understudied phenomenon. This article is the third in a series that previously discussed pilgrimage proskynetaria from Jerusalem (2018) and maritime ex-votos and icons with cartographic representations (2023). The third category, addressed in this article, consists of icons depicting architectural and geographical representations of holy sites of Sinai and monasteries of Mount Athos and Meteora.

The phenomenon of Palestinian proskynetaria icons coincides with that of icons portraying holy sites created in the Greek environment of Mount Athos, Meteora and the Greek islands. All appear to have been prompted by the spread and availability of pilgrimage and the emergence of ethnically and territorially constructed identities in Europe and beyond. Hence, icons depicting religiously significant sites like the loca sancta emblematic among Orthodox Christians symbolised historical and territorial identity, as well as the Orthodox faith. This symbolism emerged in tandem with the consolidation of the concept of nationhood in its first form in the early modern period, as a kind of “biblical national identity”, an idea of chosen people, or sacred nation.

Keywords: *cartography, landscape painting, loca sancta, post-Byzantine pilgrimage art, paper icons*