

ICONS DEPICTING SACRED SITES IN THE NORTHEASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LANDSCAPE PAINTING, PILGRIMAGE, AND IDENTITY IN THE SEVENTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURIES

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Visual depictions of landscape, scenery and recognisable locations and buildings in artwork have been around since ancient times, evolving during the Greek, Roman and Byzantine times. But it was mathematical advancements in painting representation during the Renaissance that led to a deeper understanding of perspective and proportion, which had a profound effect on space and landscape painting, revolutionising the way scenery was depicted. Landscape, along with architectural painting, became independent genres in the early sixteenth century, particularly in the painting of the Low Countries and Germany. Although they were considered of low significance by art authorities like the Académie Royale in France (1648-1793), the rise of these pictorial genres on the Netherlandish art markets in the mid-seventeenth century gave them impetus to evolve and diversify.¹ This evolution, along with the advancement of cartography in the West, sparked a heightened interest in landscape painting, engraving and drawing, including in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Russian and Greek icon painting, influenced by Western trends, began to incorporate increasingly detailed depictions of sites linked to sacred histories or church ensembles housing miracle-working relics.² These compositions typically had two overlapping sections: the celestial domain, governed by traditional iconographic conventions, and the terrestrial world, serving as a medium for visual experiments aligned with cartographic and aerial views of sites and architecture, featuring chorographic and topographic details.

This article is the third part of a broader study project that focused on the increasing presence of topographic details in Orthodox icons from the mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. The study developed as a three-part triptych that categorised the painting material based on function and origin: maritime ex-votos and icons with cartographic depictions from the Greek islands,³ proskynetaria icons of Jerusalem (pilgrimage icons; from Gr. προσκύνησις, meaning obeisance, reverence or kissing)⁴ and the third category, which is the subject

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¹ For a general survey of the evolution of landscape as a genre in European painting, from antiquity to modern times, see Professor Nils Büttner’s companion *Landscape Painting: A History*. Translated by Russell Stockman (New York: Abbeville Press, 2006).

² Denis A. Khotimsky, *Visualizing Images of the Invisible: A Concurrent Look at a Russian Icon and an Early Western Printed Map*, lecture given at the Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton, Massachusetts, May 2012. The text has been kindly put at my disposal by the author.

³ Elisabeta Negrău, “Icônes avec cartes, icônes en tant que cartes : une géographie de la dévotion”, *Cartes & Géomatique. Revue du Comité français de cartographie* 251 (Mars 2023): 63-83.

⁴ Eadem, “Pelerini din Țările Române la Ierusalim. Profiluri sociale și culturale (sfârșitul sec. XVI – prima jumătate a sec. XIX)” [Pilgrims from the Romanian Countries to Jerusalem. Social and Cultural Profiles (End of the 16th Century – First Half of the 19th Century).], in Cristina Bogdan, Silvia Marin-Barutchieff, eds., *Călători și călătorii. A privi, a descoperi, Colocviu Internațional, Universitatea din București, Facultatea de Litere – Departamentul de Științe ale Comunicării, 23-24 Oct. 2015*, vol. I: *Incursiuni*

of this article – paper icons portraying the monastery sites of Sinai, Mount Athos, Meteora and other sites related to wonderworking relics and icons. It could be argued that the last two categories partially overlap as pilgrimage icons or images of *loca sancta*, and that, additionally, they also exhibit compositional similarities with the first category of maritime ex-votos depicted in the Greek islands. But the development of the last category of images, depicting sites of Sinai, Mount Athos and Meteora, drew upon different visual sources compared to the Palestinian proskynetaria of Jerusalem.

The first studied category were the pilgrimage icons representing the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Recently, the painted pilgrimage icons of holy places in Jerusalem have become the focus of research for several Israeli researchers, including Rehav Rubin,⁵ Mat Immerzeel⁶ and Pnina Arad,⁷ as well as researchers from the Eastern and Central-Eastern European space, such as Waldemar Deluga.⁸ These specialists have been interested in the visual strategies used to represent geographical places and the descriptive and narrative techniques of these icons. While souvenirs and images from the holy places of Jerusalem have been popular since the first Christian centuries,⁹ large, foldable canvas paintings depicting biblical places in Palestine, with a focus on the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre Basilica, are a relatively late addition to the art world. These icons, typically created by iconographers from Palestine and offering a unique interpretation of the sacred sites, began to spread in the second half of the eighteenth century and became increasingly popular up to the end of the nineteenth century. The large proskynetaria icons, painted on canvases exceeding one metre in width, depicted the key locations associated with the life of the Savior, often accompanied by scenes of significant feasts and cycles, such as Genesis, the Last Judgment and sometimes the Apocalypse. They became very fashionable and widespread as pilgrims purchased these icons from the holy places they visited and brought them back to their home countries. Today, they can be found in various collections, from Poland and Hungary, through the Orthodox countries, to Egypt and Ethiopia.¹⁰ Such painted proskynetaria can also be found in Romania, housed in the collections of monastic museums, as well as in diocesan museums and various churches.¹¹ A detailed map of Jerusalem has been depicted in a fresco in the nave of the Văcărești Monastery church, which served as the metochion of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (1717-1722).¹² Their painters were using

în istorie și artă [Travelers and Journeys. To Look, to Discover. International Colloquium, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters – Department of Communication Sciences, October 23-24, 2015, vol. I: Excursions into History and Art.] (București: Editura Universității din București, 2016), 13-38; Eadem, “Harta pictată a Ierusalimului de la Mănăstirea Văcărești” [The Painted Map of Jerusalem from the Văcărești Monastery], *RALA* 1 (2018): 31-43.

⁵ Rehav Rubin, “Greek-Orthodox Maps of Jerusalem from the 18th and 19th Centuries”, *e-Perimetron* 8, no. 3 (2013): 106-132.

⁶ Mat Immerzeel, “Souvenirs of the Holy Land. The Production of Proskynetaria in Jerusalem”, in Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai, and Hanna Vorholt, eds., *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 463-470.

⁷ Pnina Arad, “Landscape and Iconicity: Proskynetaria of the Holy Land from the Ottoman Period”, *Art bull.* 100, no. 4 (2018): 62-80.

⁸ *Series Byzantina. Studies on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art*, vol. III-IV: Waldemar Deluga, ed., *Proskynetaria from Jerusalem. Souvenirs of Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Proceedings of the Conference held at “Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński” University, Warsaw, Oct. 9-10 2003* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2005-2006).

⁹ Kurt Weitzmann, “Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine”, *DOP* 28 (1974): 31-55; Gary Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (1st ed., 1982, 2nd ed., Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications, 2010).

¹⁰ See *Series Byzantina*, vol. III-IV.

¹¹ Negrău, “Pelerini din Țările Române”, 29; see also Adriana Scripcariu, *Comunitate și sfinți în Bucureștiul medieval* [Community and Saints in Medieval Bucharest], doctoral thesis, University of Bucharest, 2012.

¹² Negrău, “Harta pictată”, 31-43.

image prototypes that dated back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and followed quite conservative types of composition and visual perspective. Their modes of representation continued to pay homage to ancient, layered perspectives and differ radically from both the optical perspective and the cartographic refinement and conventions developed in the West.

The second category, the ex-voto type icons containing cartographic representations, has been little studied. There have been only a few sporadic attempts to analyse such specimens, undertaken by Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou,¹³ Veronica Della Dora,¹⁴ Rostislava Todorova¹⁵ and Margarita Volgaropoulou.¹⁶ In a recent article, I analysed several Greek icons dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of them unpublished, representing patron saints of Greek islands – Corfu, Zakynthos, Kefalonia, Strophades, Hydra, Paros and Cyprus – concluding that such images seemed to serve as a statement among Orthodox Christians, signifying ethnic and territorial identity, as well as Orthodox faith, emerging concurrently with the solidification of the nation concept,¹⁷ first constituted in the early modern period as a kind of “biblical national identity”.¹⁸ These post-Byzantine cartographic icons are different from depictions of landscape in Byzantine or late-Byzantine imagery. Post-Byzantine icons often use Western cartographic and landscape representations in their compositions. The image is generally divided into two planes, corresponding to the celestial world, still governed by traditional iconographic conventions, and the terrestrial world, which begins to evolve towards more realistic representations, containing chorographic and topographical details, corroborating types of aerial and cartographic views. Western artistic influence not only produced stylistic consequences but also brought about a change in vision by introducing a division between the heavenly and terrestrial worlds, a symptom of early modernity, plus a change in scale by adding chorographic and topographical details to traditional iconographic schemes.¹⁹ The second category stands in stark contrast to the first in its innovative approach, incorporating Western cartography into its composition and introducing a Western devotional dimension through the popularisation of maritime ex-votos.

The third category consists of views of Sinai and Mount Athos with their monasteries. The images of the three *loca sancta*, Jerusalem, Sinai, and Mount Athos, evolved independently, and the first of them was certainly Jerusalem, which has medieval representations in Western Europe.²⁰ The second location was Sinai, which, while appearing in iconography as a background landscape around the ninth century in

¹³ Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou, “A Map of Cyprus in a Post-Byzantine Cypriot Icon”, in G. Tolias, D. Loupis, eds., *Eastern Mediterranean Cartographies* (Athens: Institute of Neohellenical Research, 2004), 337-346.

¹⁴ Veronica Della Dora, “Turning Holy Mountains into Ladders to Heaven. Overlapping Topographies and Poetics of Space in Post-Byzantine Sacred Engravings of Sinai and Mount Athos”, in S. Gerstel and R. Nelson, eds., *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 505-535; Eadem, “Windows on Heaven (and Earth): The Poetics and Politics of Post-Byzantine ‘Cartographic Icons’”, *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38, no. 1 (2012): 84-112.

¹⁵ Rostislava Todorova, “Icons as Maps: Cartographic Icons in Orthodox art”, *Eikón/Imago* 7, no. 1 (2015): 13-30.

¹⁶ Margarita Volgaropoulou, *The Icon of Our Lady Skopiotissa, Savina Monastery, Montenegro*, accessed in 21 January 2023, <https://mappingeasterneurope.princeton.edu/item/the-icon-of-our-lady-skopiotissa-savina-monastery.html>.

¹⁷ Negrău, “Icônes avec cartes”, 79.

¹⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Diana Muir Appelbaum, “Biblical Nationalism and the Sixteenth-Century States”, *Natl. Identities* 15 (2013): 317-332.

¹⁹ Negrău, “Icônes avec cartes”, 64.

²⁰ M. Levi-Rubin, R. Rubin, “The Image of the Holy City in Maps and Mapping”, in Nitza Kosovsky, ed., *City of the Great King. Jerusalem from David to the Present* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 352-379.

icons of the Burning Bush and Moses receiving the tablets of law, only emerged as an independent landscape containing the monastery of St Catherine in the late sixteenth century.²¹ The third location, Mount Athos, was likely first depicted in the early sixteenth century, possibly in connection to the apparition of the *Patria* type writings about the history and miracles of Mount Athos.²² In Moldavia, at Dobrovăț Monastery (1527-1531), the cycle depicting the three holy sites of Jerusalem, Sinai, and Athos emerges in an early form through two miracles: the miracle of St. Sabbas of Jerusalem and the miracle of St. Athanasius the Athonite, accompanied by the scene representing Jacob's ladder, which symbolizes Sinai.²³ By the seventeenth century, the three sacred places began to be depicted together to form a cycle, as mentioned in sources in Wallachia, illustrated in fresco in the vestibule of the today-disappeared Metropolitan Palace in Târgoviște (ca. 1640). The landscapes depicting the three sacred places of the Orthodox world were seen at the Metropolitan Palace in Târgoviște in 1657 and mentioned in his journal by the Syrian traveller Paul of Aleppo.²⁴ This third category of sacred places, which includes Mount Athos, Sinai and other venerated monastic sites like Meteora, is linked to the practice of pilgrimage, like the first category of Jerusalem proskynetaria. They were depicted as the holy mountains of God (Sinai) and of the Mother of God (Mount Athos) respectively, where theophanies and sacred events occurred, so in these cases space itself, or place itself, became an icon. Subsequently, these events and the sacred narratives and miracles associated with these mountains led to the development of pilgrimages. Then, the visual representations of the holy mountains were developed to be included as illustrations in guidebooks for pilgrims or to be sent in their metochia to be sold and thus collect financial resources for their monasteries.²⁵

These "landscape icons" have been rousing researchers' interest for some time.²⁶ However, research on this subject is still in its early stages, given the growing awareness of this phenomenon. Dory Papastratos' 1990 catalogue, *Paper Icons*,²⁷ and Veronica della Dora²⁸ addressed these types of icons, which were engraved and printed on leaflets in the monasteries of Mount Athos, Meteora and other places between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries for wide distribution.

In the case of Orthodox/Oriental cartography, the traditional east-west cartographic orientation was preferred over the north-south common in the West. This east-west orientation is used in representations of Jerusalem executed by Palestinian artists: the icon kept in the Palace of Saumur, France, dated 1704;²⁹ the icon from St George's Monastery in Jerusalem, 1735;³⁰ and an icon from 1766 kept in the

²¹ Gustav Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters' und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen", *OCLXV* (1981): 163-218.

²² Spiridon Lambros, "Τα πάτρια του Αγίου Όρους" [The Patria of Mount Athos], *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων* 9 (1912) 116-161 and 205-244.

²³ Constanța Costea, "Narthexul Dobrovățului. Dosar arheologic" [The Narthex of Dobrovăț. Archaeological File], *RMITLX* (1991) 1: 20.

²⁴ Paul din Alep, *Jurnal de călătorie în Moldova și Valahia* [Travel Journal in Moldavia and Wallachia], ed. Ioana Feodorov (București – Brăila: Editura Academiei Române – Editura Istros, 2014), 254-255.

²⁵ Dory Papastratos, *Paper Icons. Greek Orthodox Religious Engravings 1665-1899*, 2 vols. (Athens: Papastratos S. A. - Publications, 1990), I, 19-20.

²⁶ Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta", 54-55.

²⁷ See above, note 25.

²⁸ See above, note 14.

²⁹ Rubin, "Greek-Orthodox Maps", 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

collection of the Benaki Museum in Athens.³¹ West–east oriented maps are also quite common, such as the illustration of the Ottoman conquest of Jerusalem made by Giorgios Klontzas in his *Chronographia*, inspired by German engravings.³² However, apart from the Jerusalem map from Văcărești, which has a north–south orientation, only a few other maps of the Holy Places oriented north–south are known from the Orthodox world: the Jerusalem drawing from the Codex Graec. 346, fol. 8a, in the Munich State Library, a Sinaite work from 1634 by the hieromonk Akakios the Cretan from Mount Sinai, and a Jerusalem icon in the Zakynthos Museum, also dating to the first part of the seventeenth century, painted by a Sinaite monk after the drawing of Akakios and brought to the Ionian Island by refugee Sinaitic monks (fig. 1).³³

El Greco's representation of Mount Sinai, painted on the back of the central panel of a triptych signed by the artist and dated around 1569–70, housed in the Galleria Estense of Modena, Italy,³⁴ has an east–west orientation (fig. 2). However, it is believed that this prototype does not belong to El Greco, but rather to an Italian artist, likely Giovanni Battista Fontana, a Veronese painter trained in the Venetian environment (fig. 3).³⁵ Fontana's 1569 engraving of Sinai, produced in Venice, bears striking similarities to El Greco's work, including the east–west orientation, the depiction of the mountain as three rock columns or massifs, the overall modern vision, and specific details such as the depiction of pilgrims and the diagonal position of the monastery compound. While it is unclear where Fontana found his prototype, it is entirely possible that both Fontana and El Greco utilised the same source in portraying Mt Sinai.³⁶

This theme became popular among Cretan painters in the late sixteenth century. A few Cretan triptychs from the latter part of the sixteenth century have depicted the view of Mt Sinai in a similar manner.³⁷ This indicates that the iconographic scheme used by Fontana and Theotokopoulos in Venice was also in circulation in Crete in the late sixteenth century, but it is unclear whether the prototype came from Crete to Venice or vice-versa. It was also embraced by painter Georgios Klontzas, who was a contemporary of Theotokopoulos and worked in Heraklion, Crete, which then belonged to the Republic of Venice.³⁸ El Greco's use of the engraving extended beyond the Modena triptych, as he also employed it in another panel with the view of Mt Sinai, which circulated through various collections before ending

³¹ Ibid., 125.

³² Levi-Rubin, Rubin, "The Image of the Holy City", 368; M. Grigoriou-Verra, "Τοπογραφία των Αγίων Τόπων σε εικόνα της Ζακύνθου" [Topography of the Holy Places in an Icon from Zakynthos.], *DChAE* 42 (2003): 323.

³³ Grigoriou-Verra, "Τοπογραφία των Αγίων Τόπων", 317–332; Rubin, "Greek-Orthodox Maps", 110–114; Negrău, "Harta Ierusalimului", 36–37.

³⁴ M. Vassilaki, "Three Questions on the Modena Triptych", in N. Hadjinicolaou, ed., *El Greco of Crete. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Artist's Birth (Iraklion, Crete, 1–5 September 1990)* (Municipality of Iraklion, 1995), 119–132.

³⁵ Maria Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, Maria Vassilaki, and Robin Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ. A Recent Acquisition of the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete", *DChAE* 26 (2005): 227–240, 236.

³⁶ Depictions of Sinai as two mountainous columns appear as early as the twelfth-century Beatus Map or Beatine Map in Turin; Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters'": 206, fig. 30. The design of four icons, three of which depicting Moses before the Burning Bush and one depicting Mount Sinai as three massifs, has also been suggested as a possible source. However, the icons have not been successfully dated to determine if they precede or follow Fontana's engraving. Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta", 54, fig. 54, 55; Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters'", 162–168, figs. 3–6.

³⁷ Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, Vassilaki, and Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos", 236.

³⁸ Ibid.; Manolis Chatzidakis, "Το τοπίο του Σινά" [The Landscape of Sinai], in M. Chatzidakis, *Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος Κρης. Κείμενα 1940–1990* [Domenikos Theotokopoulos the Cretan. Texts 1940–1990] (Athens 1990), 145.

up in the Historical Museum of Heraklion, Crete. This second painting was recorded in the inventory of the Fulvio Orsini collection in Rome, supposedly executed during El Greco's stay in Rome (around 1570-1575/76) while in the palace of the antiquarian Fulvio Orsini, librarian of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.³⁹



Fig 1. Icon depicting the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings, first part of the 17th century, Sinaitic provenance, Byzantine Museum of Zakynthos (after Grigoriou-Verra, “Τοπογραφία των Αγίων Τόπων”, 318).

³⁹ Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, Vassilaki, and Cormack, “Domenikos Theotokopoulos”, 237-238; Christa Gardner von Teuffel, “El Greco's View of Mount Sinai as Independent Landscape”, in Hadjinicolaou, ed., *El Greco of Crete. Proceedings*, 161-172.



Fig. 2. El Greco, the back of the triptych housed in the Galleria Estense of Modena, Italy, 1569-1570: The Annunciation, Mount Sinai, and the Interdiction of the forbidden fruit (source: Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3. Giovanni Battista Fontana, View of Mount Sinai, Venice, 1569 (after Vassilaki, Cormack, "Domenikos Theotokopoulos", 238).

This model, distributed widely through engravings,⁴⁰ likely influenced the fresco of Mount Sinai in the disappeared Metropolitan Palace in Târgoviște, and was also reproduced in four colour miniatures in the Georgian Psalter Cod I-182, dated to 1740,⁴¹ and in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sinaite icons.⁴² However, other Sinaite icons utilised varying compositional settings, arguing for the diverse origins of the topographical depictions of Mount Sinai.⁴³ Gustav Kühnel emphasised that prior to the advent of printing, the various depictions of Mount Sinai were not connected to each other, leading to the absence of a dominant iconographic representation of Sinai, which only came with the use of printing technology in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁴ George Sotiriou,⁴⁵ Kurt Weitzmann,⁴⁶ Gustav Kühnel⁴⁷ and later Christopher Walter⁴⁸ proposed that the composition portraying the Holy Mount Sinai and its surroundings was likely influenced by depictions of the biblical story of Moses at Sinai, incorporating elements such as the receiving of the tablets and the Burning Bush. Additionally, specific topographic details of the holy sites were combined in these narrative icons, to serve as illustrations for pilgrim guides printed in Venice. The portrayal of pilgrims in Fontana's and El Greco's Sinai compositions, rather than sacred or biblical narratives, suggests that the original image prototype was intended for use as an illustration in pilgrimage guides. This indicates that the original prototype was likely an engraving, as it would have been more practical for this purpose. However, the image was ultimately included by El Greco in the Modena triptych alongside biblical and evangelical scenes such as the Creation of Adam and Eve, the Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, the Baptism and the Harrowing of Hell, in order to serve a broader artistic and iconographic purpose as a painting.

The tradition of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of Jerusalem and Sinai has a deep-rooted history in early Christianity, persisting throughout the Byzantine period.⁴⁹ While in the Middle Ages it was primarily associated with monks, by the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pilgrimages began to gain popularity among the general population in the Balkans, mirroring the significance of the Muslim hajj. This shift in popularity led to the widespread embrace of pilgrimages by laymen.⁵⁰ These pilgrimages

⁴⁰ Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters'", 163-218.

⁴¹ Zaza Z. Skhirtladze, "Four Images of Mount Sinai in a Georgian Psalter (State Art Museum of Georgia, Cod. I-182)", *Le Muséon* 119, no. 3-4 (2006): 429-461.

⁴² Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta", 54-55; Christopher Walter, "A Little-Known Typological Representation of the Monastery at Sinai", *DChAE* 17 (1993-1994), 359-362.

⁴³ See Doula Mouriki, *Icons from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century, Sinai Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: K. S. Manafis, 1990), 15, 225, 243.

⁴⁴ Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters'".

⁴⁵ Giorgios Sotiriou, "Εικὼν ἐθίμων τῆς μονῆς Σινᾶ καὶ ἱστορικῶν σκηνῶν τῆς ἐρήμου" [An Icon of Customs of the Sinai Monastery and Historical Scenes of the Desert], *DChAE* 2 (1960-1961): 1-7.

⁴⁶ Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta", 54-55.

⁴⁷ Kühnel, "Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters'", 168, 200.

⁴⁸ Walter, "A Little-Known Typological Representation", 361-362.

⁴⁹ A. Kuelzer, "Byzantine and Early Post-Byzantine Pilgrimage to the Holy Land and to Mount Sinai", in Ruth Macrides, ed., *Travel in the Byzantine World: Papers of the Thirty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000* [Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications, vol. 10] (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2002), 150; Alice-Mary Talbot, "Pilgrimage in the Eastern Mediterranean between the 7th and the 15th Centuries", in *Egeria. Monuments of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2008), 38.

⁵⁰ Valentina Izmirlieva, "Christian Hajjis – The Other Orthodox Pilgrims to Jerusalem", *Slavic Rev.* 73, no. 2 (2004): 322-346.

expanded to include visits to different sites of Palestine, but also Mount Athos and Meteora⁵¹, as the notion of *locum sanctum* began to exceed the strict biblical history and become more fluid by incorporating also places that hosted wonderworking icons or which were reputed to have witnessed theophanies and miracles.⁵² Due to the complexities of organising such journeys, they were not easily repeatable for the inhabitants of Southeastern Europe. Therefore, undertaking such a trip presented a unique opportunity to visit numerous sacred sites in one go. Pilgrimage guides from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and travelogues from the nineteenth century often detailed these extensive journeys, encompassing all these significant locations.⁵³

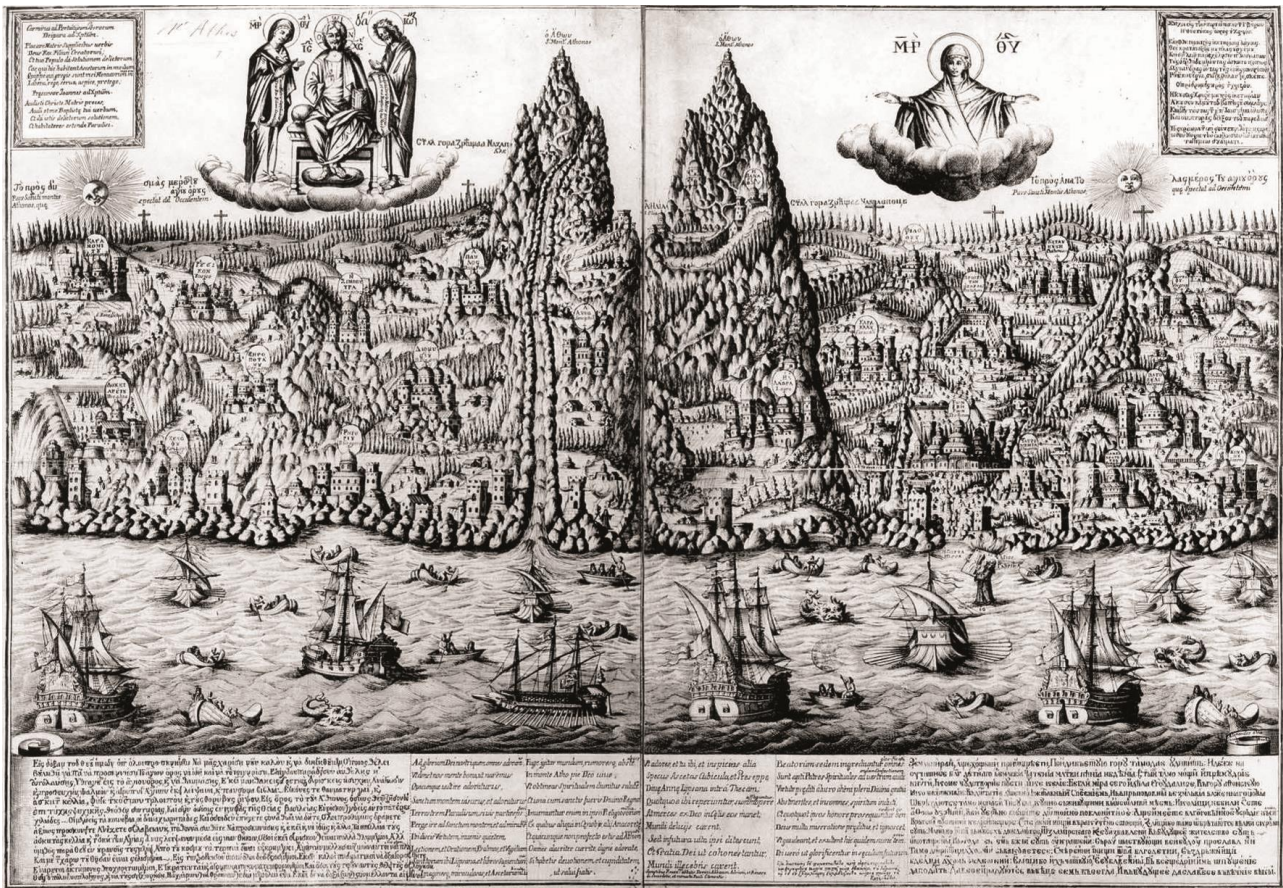


Fig. 4. General view (dikorphon) of Mount Athos, by Alessandro Dalla Via, Venice, 1707. Hand-coloured print. 74.5 cm x 100.7 cm. (source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

⁵¹ Veronica Della Dora, "Mapping Pathways to Heaven: A Topographical Engraving of Meteora (1782)", *Imago Mundi. The International Journal for the History of Cartography* 65 (2013) 2: 217-233.

⁵² Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, II, 498-530.

⁵³ Negrău, "Pelerini din Țările Române", 30.



Fig. 5. Mount Meteora by Monk Parthenios, 1782 (after Della Dora, “Mapping Pathways to Heaven”, 222).

Therefore, following the model of the Jerusalem proskynetaria or the images of Sinai, the holy mountain par excellence,⁵⁴ paper icons also began to be printed by Mount Athos, first in foreign presses such as in Venice and Vienna, and then in the Athonite monasteries' printing presses, becoming active during the eighteenth century,⁵⁵ and being included in such pilgrim guides as Ioannis Komnenos' *Proskynetarion of Mount Athos*⁵⁶ or being sent to their metochia to be sold all over the Orthodox space. The depiction of Mount Athos with its monasteries was influenced by the iconography of Mount Sinai (fig. 4). Mount Athos was depicted featuring two distinct massifs with monastery compounds spread across them. The composition combines views of the Athos Mountain from both the west and east, ultimately mirroring the iconic depiction of Mount Sinai viewed from the east. The representations of individual monasteries and their patron saints followed the structure of Greek maritime ex-voto icons, featuring aerial landscapes and seascapes in the lower part, the composition being divided into two planes: the lower portion displaying a view of a monastery and its surroundings, and the upper part showcasing a religious

⁵⁴ Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, II, Mount Sinai: 337-385; Jerusalem: 367-372.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 27-29.

⁵⁶ 'Ιωάννου Κομνηνού *Προσκυνητάριον του Αγίου Όρους Αθωνος* [Proskynetarion of Mount Athos], Snagov, 1701; for Athonite pilgrim guides, see Sotiris Kadas, *Οι Άγιοι Τόποι. Εικονογραφημένα προσκυνητήρια 17ου-18ου αι.* [The Holy Places. Illustrated Pilgrimage Books of the 17th-18th Century.] (Athens: Kapon, 1998).

composition related to the monastery's patron or its hagiography.⁵⁷ Views of these revered places on Athos, often depicted in wood or metal engravings and printed on paper for distribution to pilgrims, became a popular trend lasting until the late-nineteenth century. They were given to their metochia to be sold further, to the monks that collected alms or to pilgrims that reached the Holy Mountain from all over the Orthodox world, and as a result, their designs spread widely, reaching as far as Russia and Ukraine. The concept of *locum sanctum* expanded to include monasteries and sites hosting wonderworking icons, such as those found in Meteora (fig. 5), Serres, Moschopolis, Soumela, Kykkos and Evangelistria of Tinos.⁵⁸ In turn, they inspired the creation of icons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of other *loca sancta* such as those of the Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv and other monasteries such as Rila, Bachkovo and others in Bulgaria⁵⁹ or Studenica in Serbia,⁶⁰ and various monasteries in Russia, as this circulation and adaptation of iconographic styles and themes extended the influence of these sacred sites and their representations across a wide geographical area (figs. 6-7). This happened also because some of the woodcuts of Mount Sinai were carved and printed, on paper and cloth, in the second half of the seventeenth century by Orthodox monks in Lwow, in the Kingdom of Poland, and distributed among leaders such as the Polish King John Sobieski and Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa.⁶¹ This was also a means to collect alms and gather financial support for St Catherine's Monastery of Sinai, by selling these woodcuts in other Christian countries, as seen, for example, from a letter of Joannikios, archbishop of Sinai, to his trader Hatzikyriakis in Lwow, who supervised the execution of these woodcuts: "Do send as many monasteries and saints as you have for everyone outside had learnt about them and begs our fathers for them". Other monks wrote: "send us a hundred or so or even more of whatever sort you have [...] for we need a great many in these parts (Silistra, Bulgaria)", or "they are writing to me that we should send them up to 1,000 prints [...] that they are a great help to the mendicants", and "We should print a 1,000 copies of the monasteries and saints for them [...] they'd like it to be 10,000".⁶² The wood engravings were sent off in their thousands to Sinai and any of its metochia in Muscovy, Constantinople, Moldavia, Wallachia and Serbian and Bulgarian lands.⁶³ After the opening decades of the eighteenth century, woodcuts were replaced by engravings on copper plates, ordered in printing presses of Venice, Vienna and Moscow. The plates were works by skilled Italian or German engravers such as Alessandro della Via, Innocente Alessandri, Piero Scattaglia, the Zulian brothers, Ignatio Colombo, Thomas Mesmer and J. A. Diettel, but also Hristofor Žefarović, who account for such western visual elements as the influence of landscape and cartography, Baroque décor and the shading and expressiveness of the figures.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, II, 385-498.

⁵⁸ Ibid., II, 498-530.

⁵⁹ Ibid., I, 26; Ivanka Gergova, "Гравьорът монах Леонтий Рус" [The Engraver Monk Leontius Rus.], *Проблеми на изкуството* 1 (2022): 20-32.

⁶⁰ Papastratos, *Paper Icons*, I, 25.

⁶¹ Ibid., I, 19.

⁶² Ibid., I, 19-20.

⁶³ Ibid., I, 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., I, 20.



Fig. 6. Sts Anthony and Theodosius of Pechersk Lavra, Kyiv, beginning of 18th century, Archdiocesan Museum, Przemyśl, inv. MAPrz Ia/5523 (photo courtesy of Ana Dumitran).

In 1674, an encyclical from Joachim, patriarch of Moscow, prohibited engravings of religious subjects printed in Catholic centres such as those in Lwow or Vienna to be spread in Russia, citing their heterodoxy or ignorance of Orthodox Church tradition. The Muscovite patriarch declared that only icons painted on wood by pious *zographoi* were recognised by the Russian Church.⁶⁵ However, the circulation

⁶⁵ Ibid., I, 24.

of these engravings had already influenced the iconography, style and subject selections of icon painting. Later, the circulation of Russian icons in Southeastern Europe reintroduced this transformed model, which then made its way back into the Greek space. Consequently, icons of Saint Gerasimus of Kefalonia with views of his monastery on the Ionian island of Kefalonia began to appear, painted in the style of Russian icons of the time that depicted Russian monastic saints and their monasteries (fig. 8). All these were, in fact, originally inspired by the Proskynetaria type icons printed on paper by the monasteries of Sinai and Athos.



Fig. 7. Monastery of St Ivan Kasinets near Vratsa, Bulgaria, by monk Leontion the Russian, Tryavna, 1822 (after Gergova, “Травърът монах Леонтий Рус”, 26).



Fig. 8. St. Gerasimos of Kefalonia, Greek, early 19th century, Shapiro Auctions, 18.03.2017, lot 283 (source: <https://www.shapiroauctions.com/auctions/past>).

Conclusions

The appearance of icons containing views or maps of various sites during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be understood through three interwoven dimensions that influenced the development of these images: the visual culture of the time, which included cartographic images and landscape painting, the religious practices with the wide spread of pilgrimage, and the emergence of “biblical” narratives related to territorial, ethnic and religious identity,⁶⁶ particularly during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

In the seventeenth century, visual culture saw a significant rise in the prominence of landscapes as an independent genre in the art of Central and Western Europe. This period witnessed the development of geographical exploration and cartography, leading to the increased availability and commercialisation of printed maps, which were embraced as fashionable items in bourgeois households. Artists such as the Netherlandish Jan Vermeer depicted interiors adorned with maps, and maps and aerial views of cities became more prevalent in atlases and books.⁶⁷ Simultaneously, the landscape genre gained traction among painters, patrons and art merchants and collectors. Italian painters and Western engravings of maps and aerial views of cities significantly influenced painters in the Venetian-dominated territories of Southeastern Europe.⁶⁸ This trend was also embraced in Istanbul and Ottoman communities in the Balkans, where landscapes adorned the interiors of houses and mosques. Views of such cities as Constantinople, Kastoria, Elbasan and Moschopolis were depicted in engravings such as those of Hristofor Žefarović⁶⁹ and in painted settings in urban dwellings and Ottoman mosques, with the Topkapı Palace featuring the first painted views of cities from the seventeenth century, eventually spreading to affluent homes in Istanbul, Asia Minor and the Balkan provinces.⁷⁰

However, in the Western tradition, landscapes primarily depicted pastoral scenes or reflected inner emotional states, whereas in the Orthodox tradition, landscape icons served as representations of identifiable sacred places, embodying a physical and spiritual geography simultaneously⁷¹. The widespread use of print (copper engraving and woodcut) significantly contributed to the uniformity of iconographic representations of Mount Sinai, as well as the dissemination of its visual model through inclusion in pilgrimage guides on a large scale. Consequently, its iconographic influence has permeated icon and fresco painting, shaping representations of other *loca sancta* such as Mount Athos, Meteora, Pechersk Lavra and others. This occurred concurrently with a progressive expansion of the concept of *locum sanctum* or sacred

⁶⁶ See above, note 18.

⁶⁷ James A. Welu, “Vermeer: His Cartographic Sources”, *Art bull.* 57, no. 4 (Dec., 1975): 529-547.

⁶⁸ Negrău, “Icônes avec cartes”, 74 et pass.

⁶⁹ Andi Rembeci, Sokol Çunga, “Vithkuq of Moschopolis: The Cradle of the Early Inhabitants of Kozani, According to Oral Tradition”, in Χαρίτων Καρανάσιος, Βασιλική Διάφα-Καμπουρίδου, eds., *Η Κοζάνη και η περιοχή της από τους Βυζαντινούς στους Νεότερους Χρόνους*, πρακτικά Γ΄ Συνεδρίου Τοπικής Ιστορίας, *Κοζάνη, 7-9 Δεκεμβρίου 2018* [Kozani and its Region from the Byzantines to Modern Times, Proceedings of the 3rd Conference on Local History, Kozani, December 7-9, 2018] (Kozani, 2019), 119, fig. 2.

⁷⁰ Yıldırım Özbek, “City Depictions on Wall Paintings in Ottoman Period in Cappadocia”, in *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* IV, 1 (2014): 215-230; Abdulhamit Tüfekcioğlu-İlker Gümüş, “Geç Dönem Osmanlı Mimarisi Duvar Resimlerinde Bazı Dokuma Tasviri Örnekleri Ve Düşündürdükleri” [Weaving Description Samples of Late Period Ottoman Architecture Wall Murals and Their Implications], *Arzış* 12 (2016): 19-29.

⁷¹ Iordanes Dimakopoulos, “Παραστάσεις εκκλησιών της Κωνσταντινούπολης, της Βενετίας και της Κρήτης σε φορητές μεταβυζαντινές εικόνες” [Church Representations of Constantinople, Venice, and Crete in Portable Post-Byzantine Icons], *DChAE* 10 (1980-1981): 35-42.

space, encompassing not only the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and Sinai, but also extending to Mount Athos, Meteora and revered monasteries in both Greek and Slavic regions, such as Pechersk Lavra, Studenica and Rila. These sites were simultaneously instrumental in solidifying the notion of a chosen people or sacred nation.

This leads us to the second aspect, which pertains to devotional practices. Orthodox pilgrimages to these holy sites were increasingly influenced by the model of the Ottoman *hacılık* (from Arabic *hajj*, Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca). The Ottomans actively promoted and facilitated this trend by providing transport to the east through caravans, collecting substantial pilgrimage fees.⁷² Additionally, mirroring the Muslim model, the Ottomans accorded privileged social status to Christian *Hatzis* (from Arabic *hajji*, a name for someone who has completed a pilgrimage). The surge of pilgrims from the Balkans to Jerusalem, beginning in the seventeenth century and peaking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sparked an iconographic transformation within the more traditionalist world of the Christian East. While not adopting modern forms of cartographic representation, this constant movement of people generated an emphasis on topographical representations, albeit employing more traditional and conservative methods of image conception and construction.

Thirdly, the appearance of Palestinian proskynetaria icons, of icons of *loca sancta* and of Greek icons with representations of islands coincides temporally. All appear at the same time, likely prompted by the emergence of territorially and religiously constructed identities in Europe and beyond. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marks a significant milestone in this context, but the first manifestations of such ideas can be traced back to the Dutch space, where Calvinist Judaism shaped perceptions of identity in the early seventeenth century. These perceptions were constructed on a biblical model and drew parallels with the people of Israel. God's election is expressed through a promise made to His chosen people, typically in the form of territory, prosperity, and/or power, whereby that people becomes a source of blessing for other nations⁷³.

But the Greeks also seem to exhibit similar tendencies. Certainly, Byzantine Orthodoxy was the first to embrace a universal mission, which later provided Greek nationalists with a foundation nourished by political dreams and apocalyptic prophecies of the reconquest of Constantinople and the restoration of Greek Byzantium and its Orthodox emperor. Byzantine scholar Cyril Mango notes the intensification of these prophetic texts during the eighteenth century,⁷⁴ which coincides with the proliferation of topographical representations of the holy sites of the Greek world and local saints who served as protectors of distinct territorial units, such as the Greek islands. The sacred sites were simultaneously instrumental in solidifying the notion of a chosen people or sacred nation among Greeks and Slavs. Therefore, icons featuring geographical representations seemed to serve as a statement among Orthodox Christians, signifying a historic, religious and territorial identity constructed through a *locum sanctum* – which is also linked to an idea of *chosen people*, for Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians, but also Palestinian Christians – as well as through Orthodox faith itself, emerging concurrently with the rising European mythologies of the nation concept and its linkage with religious covenant.⁷⁵ This is evident not only in

⁷² Oded Peri, *Christianity under Islam in Jerusalem. The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* [col. The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, vol. 23] (Brill: Leiden, 2001), 161-200.

⁷³ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 46.

⁷⁴ Cyril Mango, "Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 35-36.

⁷⁵ See Smith, *Chosen Peoples*.

the case of Mount Athos or Constantinople as sacred centres of identity for the Greeks, but also in the abundance of representations of Jerusalem as a site of identity in Palestinian painters, reflecting the life and ethnicity of Jesus Christ, and the territorial and ethnic identity of Palestinian Christians.

The seventeenth to nineteenth centuries marked the onset of the construction of territorial, historical and religious identities in Europe and beyond. Additionally, there was a deliberate adoption of local saints in the devotional and iconographic practices of the time in Southeastern Europe.⁷⁶ Consequently, icons featuring geographical representations became a statement in the Christian Orthodox world, marking the threshold of the consolidation of the concept of nation.

⁷⁶ Della Dora, "Windows on Heaven (and Earth)", 104-105.