

# Icon Goldsmiths, Pious Widows, and Holy Maidens Adventure Narratives of Greek Monks Travelling in Late Imperial Russia

Tasos Kostopoulos

Institute for Mediterranean Studies / Foundation for Research  
and Technology—Hellas (IMS-FORTH), Rethymno (GR)

RÉSUMÉ : L'article explore un aspect peu étudié de la réception de l'art religieux russe par les communautés orthodoxes balkaniques du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle : l'image de la Russie et de ses peuples, que les moines collectant les aumônes (*zeteia*) avaient relayée, à leur retour, dans leurs monastères d'origine et/ou aux communautés environnantes. L'objectif principal des voyages entrepris par ces moines était de convertir une partie considérable de dons et bénéfices collectés en une variété d'objets ecclésiastiques précieux et/ou revêtements d'icônes. La présente étude analyse trois récits différents de deux de ces voyages, effectués dans les années 1860 et au début des années 1890 par des moines athonites. Elle explore également deux approches dans cette collecte d'aumônes (traditionnelle vs entrepreneuriale) et la manière dont le regard porté par les voyageurs en question sur la société russe, ses institutions religieuses, ses mœurs et ses habitudes, a pu en être affecté.

KEYWORDS: Mont Athos ; Russie ; icônes russes ; collecte d'aumônes (*zeteia*) ; voyages.

REZUMAT: Articolul explorează un aspect mai puțin studiat al receptării artei religioase rusești de către comunitățile ortodoxe balcanice din secolul al XIX-lea, și anume imaginea Rusiei și a popoarelor ei, pe care călugării care au călătorit în Rusia în scopul adunării de milostenii (*zeteia*) o transmiseseră, la întoarcerea lor, către mănăstirile de origine și/sau comunitățile din jur. Obiectivul principal al călătoriilor întreprinse de acești călugări a fost acela de a converti o parte considerabilă din donațiile și profiturile adunate într-o varietate de obiecte bisericești prețioase și/sau ferecături de icoane. Acest studiu analizează trei relatări diferite despre două astfel de călătorii, făcute în anii 1860 și la începutul anilor 1890 de călugării athoniți. De asemenea, explorează două abordări ale acestei colectări de milostenii (tradițională vs. antreprenorială) și modul în care aceste abordări divergente au afectat privirea călătorilor respectivi asupra societății ruse și a instituțiilor, moravurilor și obiceiurilor sale religioase.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: Muntele Athos; Rusia; icoane rusești; colectă de milostenii (*zeteia*); călătorii.

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 818791).



MONTRAS

VISUAL CULTURE, PIETY  
AND PROPAGANDA:  
TRANSFER AND RECEPTION OF  
RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS ART IN THE BALKANS  
AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
(15TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY)

Reception of Russian religious art among the Balkan Christian public has never been just a question of its intrinsic aesthetic or monetary value; ideological factors, most of all popular perceptions about its place of origin, also strongly influenced this appraisal. Beside some general (and well-known) geopolitical considerations, like the expectations fostered by St. Petersburg for deliverance from the “Ottoman yoke” or the emergence of the “Panslavist” specter during the 1860s, a crucial role in the construction of these perceptions was played by the agents of such transfers themselves.

*Zeteia* (officially sanctioned alms-gathering by Balkan monks travelling in foreign lands) constituted one of the main channels through which Russian religious art found its way to the Balkan Orthodox communities. According

to the available primary sources, a considerable part of the alms gathered during such travels was usually transformed *in situ* into a variety of precious ecclesiastic utensils and/or icon vestments, both as a universally appreciated investment and as a way to commemorate the individual monks' contribution to the well-being and glory of their monasteries. For similar reasons, icons or other religious objects were also often ordered by Russian donors, usually at the instigation of the travelling monks. On their return, the latter brought with them not only the products of their peculiar labor, but also first-hand information on the Russian Empire, its institutions and peoples, the morals and customs prevailing there. In most cases the bulk of this information was orally transmitted, while in a number of cases, the travelers decided to

write down their experiences, either as an account to be examined by their colleagues or as a travelogue with more personal overtones.

In my article, I study this mode of transfer of religious art from Russia to the Southern, Greek-speaking Balkans through the elaborate autobiographic narratives of two such endeavors by Greek monks from Mount Athos monasteries who collected alms for some years across the Russian Empire during the second half of the 19th century. The first narrative was compiled by Meletios Konstamonites, describing in detail his extensive trips between 1862 and 1869 from Odessa to Finland and from Vilnius to Irkutsk, posthumously published as a book in 1882<sup>1</sup>. My second source is a couple of manuscripts from the Athonite Archives, dealing with the 1888-1892 travel in Central Russia of a group of monks from the monastery of Simonos Petra (or Simonopetra).<sup>2</sup> Among other things, the juxtaposition of these two sources allows us to distinguish between two fundamentally different perceptions of (and ways to conduct) *zeteia*: the second was a “traditional” (or bureaucratic) one, while the first had been permeated by a modern aura of religious entrepreneurship.

### Modalities of Holy Begging.

As already said, *zeteia* (literary: “begging”) had been a form of alms-gathering carried out by delegates of an Orthodox religious instance (monastery, bishopric or even Patriarchate) under Ottoman domination, in order to repay its debt or otherwise remedy its financial difficulties. Officially called also a “travel” (ταξίδιον), and the delegates “travelers” (ταξειδιῶται), *zeteia* could be performed within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire or in foreign countries, with Orthodox Russia gradually substituting Western Europe as the most profitable destination.<sup>3</sup> Although there are concrete data for such missions to Moscow from Mount Athos since 1497<sup>4</sup> and from the Eastern Patriarchates (and Ohrid Archbishopric) from the 16th century onwards,<sup>5</sup> the earlier form of *zeteia* had been restricted to just a reception of royal gifts without any contact with the population at large, let alone any possibility of unhindered movement across this foreign realm.<sup>6</sup> During the 19th century, officially sanctioned “travelers” were however provided with special permits authorizing them to visit any part of the Empire they wished and to organize special ceremonies for alms-gathering with the help of local religious and administrative authorities.<sup>7</sup> The permits were provided to the interested instance by the Russian Synod, usually at the instigation of the Russian diplomatic mission in Constantinople, as a form of special privilege linking it with its northern patron.<sup>8</sup> Such a function was especially discernible in the case of Mount Athos, transformed since the 1860s into a battlefield between Greek and Russian nationalists seeking to control as much as possible of its monasteries, with various forms of economic lure or pressure as the main weapon of both sides.<sup>9</sup> So fierce had been this rivalry, that in 1891 the Greek Consul in Salonica, Georgios Dokos, went as far as to advise Athens to seek an absolute ban on “travels to Russia of Abbots or other envoys from the Greek monasteries of Mount Athos looking for money”.<sup>10</sup>

After obtaining a permit for *zeteia*, allowing a specific small number of monks to travel for alms gathering in Russia, the monastery should choose its envoys. They

would first travel to Constantinople, where they were provided with the necessary papers by the Patriarchate and with a collective passport by the Russian Embassy; after their arrival in St. Petersburg, the latter was replaced with individual internal passports for travel within the Empire. The travelers were free to move around within the Tsar’s realm; when visiting Siberia, they were also entitled to free accommodation and food, arranged by the local authorities, in their capacity as guest dignitaries.<sup>11</sup> Their itinerary was usually scheduled on the basis of fraternal advice provided by local monks, priests, bishops and lay citizens,<sup>12</sup> or according to their expectation (and often miscalculation) of profit maximization.<sup>13</sup> As a rule, industrial centers and mining towns provided the best hope for a good remuneration of their effort, especially when they happened to meet there the owners of factories and mines or had been invited by them to visit the place.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, it was the inhabitants (or the elders) of a certain town or village who asked for them, after having learnt their presence on the environs.<sup>15</sup>

The Russian Synod also provided the traveler monks with a special book, denoting their status as officially-sanctioned alms-gatherers, where any alms should be written down in detail in order to be legally transferred through the channels of the host Church: the money was to be regularly deposited to the Consistory (духовна консистория), i.e., the collective administrative organ of the provincial church; the latter should forward it to the Synod, who would then transmit it to the beneficiary institution.<sup>16</sup> In fact, as our sources explicitly testify, only a small portion of the proceeds actually underwent this official procedure; most of the money collected (either as a contribution to the monastery or as a personal offer to the *travelers* themselves – a distinction allegedly “common in Russia” but hard to confirm<sup>17</sup>) was on the other hand either directly sent to Mount Athos through the banking system<sup>18</sup> or just kept in the monks’ pockets.<sup>19</sup> Before their repatriation, or at certain intervals during their travel, the monks also used to dispatch some highly appreciated local goods to their monastery (like caviar, barrels of butter or salted fish, as well as carpets, cloth or various garments);<sup>20</sup> last but not least, as already said, they bought from Russian workshops a number of emblematic pieces of ecclesiastic art (mostly icon revetments made of silver and gold, but also precious crosses, chalices, censers, priest vestments, even bells), in order to render their personal achievement and contribution more visible to both the coming generations of fellow monks and the monastery’s future visitors.<sup>21</sup>

### The Simonopetra Brothers.

When in November 1888 Neophytos Molakas, the Abbot of Simonopetra, his Deacon Ioannikios and a third fellow monk, left their monastery for Russia, the rivalry between Greek and Russian nationalist apparatuses on Mount Athos had already reached its apex, leaving very few margins (or no margins at all) to individual monasteries for an independent course. Heavily indebted due to the ill-timed recent construction of new buildings, the loss of its major estate in Bucharest, expropriated in 1863 by the Cuza government and a protracted judicial conflict with the nearby monastery of Xeropotamou over a disputed piece of land,<sup>22</sup> Simonopetra monastery had been supplicating the Russian Embassy since 1865 for a permit to conduct *zeteia* in the Russian hinterland, but its





▲ Fig. 1. *The Simonopetra Monastery in 1883, photographed by Athelstan Riley.*

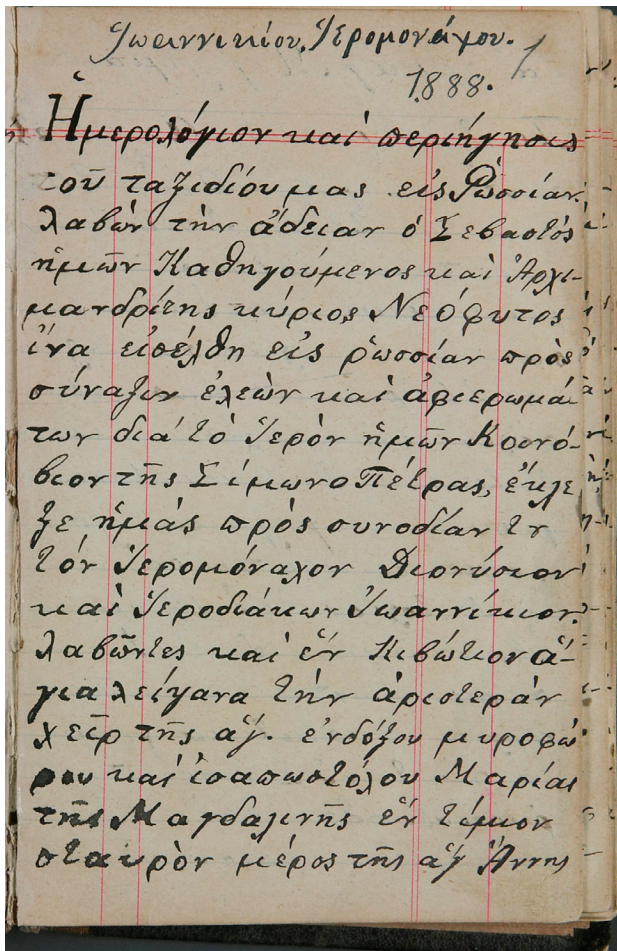
Source: Riley 1887.

requests remained unanswered for 23 years.<sup>23</sup> According to Gerasimos Smyrnakes, the first Greek historian of Mount Athos (a Greek nationalist and a monk by profession in the Esfigmenou monastery), this delay was nothing but a form of pressure in order to obtain from the monastery the concession of its harbor (or part of it) to the Russian one of St. Panteleemon.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, Simonopetra's efforts to stay in good terms with both sides of the Greek-Russian conflict were not especially esteemed by anyone: in 1887, one year before the long-awaited permit was finally granted, Consul Dokos described Abbot Neophytos not only as "*narrow-minded and a laggard*", but also as "*a good Christian who is however lacking any national consciousness at all*".<sup>25</sup>

Originally restricted to one year, the travel of the Simonopetra Brothers in Russia lasted in fact for no less than four years, from December 1888 to November 1892. The permit granted to them by the Russian Synod was easily extended for a second year in early 1890, but not further; therefore, in March 1891, the travelers ordered silver revetments made by Moscow goldsmiths for three icons<sup>26</sup>, and took an eastward journey home, through Vladimir, Nizny Novgorod and the Volga basin, trying to prolong their stay on Russian soil as much as possible. Without an official permit, they could not organize official alms-gathering; nevertheless, they went on collecting "*small amounts of money*" in every stop of theirs, as well as various gifts in kind – a load of "*red and black caviar*", donated in Astrakhan, considered as the most noteworthy.<sup>27</sup> Arriving at Rostov, they learned by telegraph that Simonopetra had just been accidentally burned to the ground;<sup>28</sup> so they went back to St. Petersburg to ask

for a new permit for *zeteia*, in order to contribute to the reconstruction of their monastery.<sup>29</sup> Five months later, they obtained it – according to Smyrnakes, by satisfying the long-standing Russian demand concerning their harbor,<sup>30</sup> a fact both manuscripts tacitly avoid to touch (although Neophytos is somehow cryptically apologetic, for his choice to stay in Russia instead of rushing "*to Athens*" for help<sup>31</sup>). When the new permit expired, and the Synod refused to extend it, the Simonopetra Brothers finally returned to Mount Athos through Odessa and Sinop, after having bought "*some [more] things*" – of unspecified nature – in Moscow.<sup>32</sup> According to their official account, their earnings of the first two years added up to 70.000 rubles, while during the second *zeteia* they collected around 45.000;<sup>33</sup> on top of that, the traveler monks ordered in Moscow and brought back with them four icon revetments made of gold and silver, a number of priest vestments, chalices, censers, as well as a heavy bell weighting no less than 20 puds (320 Kg).<sup>34</sup>

During those four years, the group's composition underwent a number of changes, with its strength reinforced to four; apart from the Abbot and his deacon, the other two posts were covered by four monks in rotating terms; one of them, father Gervasios, died of influenza in St. Petersburg hospital in 1891.<sup>35</sup> They travelled extensively across many European provinces of Russia: after three months in St. Petersburg and one month in Moscow, they proceeded eastwards for eight months to Samara and back; in 1890 they toured the southeastern provinces, making Saratov and Astrakhan their main stops. The third round, undertaken in 1891-1892 after the destruction of their monastery, was mostly consumed in the two capital cities and in the northeastern provinces of Yaroslav, Kostroma and Vologda, with an intermediate three-week trip to Kronstadt, where the ultra-conservative and extremely influential Father John (Ivan Sergiev)



▲ Fig. 2. The manuscript of Deacon Ioannikios relating his group's alms gathering trip to the Russian Empire.

Source: Codex 45 of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras.

concelebrated with them.<sup>36</sup> At every stop of theirs, the Simonopetra Brothers exposed their relics in a church (often -but not always- the local cathedral), overlooking them for most of the day, asking for donations, selling small icons, crosses or copper engravings ("paper icons")<sup>37</sup> and receiving calls by a number of citizens to bless their homes; a task they usually performed late in the evening, touring by coach the houses to be blessed.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, while their activity during the first two years has been described in detail by deacon Ioannikios in an unofficial manuscript of 92 pages, the last part of the journey is sketched only by Abbot Neophytos in his official narrative - and this in too laconic a way (in just one page, half of which is dedicated to Gervasios' illness and death). Moreover, both accounts are permeated by what could be described as the bureaucratic mentality of religious *aparatsiks*: references to the surrounding Russian society are minimal, except for a binary dichotomy of each place's inhabitants into "pious" (ευλαβεῖς) or "impious" (ανευλαβεῖς), according to the quantity of money they poured in the monks' donation box<sup>39</sup> - although in a few cases they acknowledge that their modest earnings were due to nothing more than sheer poverty or even hunger, as the last phase of *zeteia* coincided with the last wave of widespread famine in the history of Tsarist Russia.<sup>40</sup> Factories in St. Petersburg, in the town of Yegorevsk and in the hinterland of Vladimir

are however especially referred to by Ioannikios, as *loci* of affluence that deserved a visit at the invitation of the local bosses.<sup>41</sup> The wealth of some Orthodox cathedrals (σοβop) or Monasteries was also considered worth mentioning, even incidentally: Kyivo-Pecherska Lavra is "a monastery huge and extremely rich";<sup>42</sup> St. Panteleemon's dependency in St. Petersburg is "a large church" where "more than 30 people live" with "big earnings as they work day and night chanting the mass, supplications, memorial services etc";<sup>43</sup> in the industrial centers of Shuya and Ivanovo-Voznesensk (today Ivanovo) there are "many big churches, full of silver and gold";<sup>44</sup> etc. Most interesting is the confirmation of a blatant disproportion between the number of monks and that of nuns met almost everywhere: while monk monasteries had usually no more than thirty inhabitants, the nuns in the female monasteries were counted by the hundreds.<sup>45</sup> Equally remarkable is Ioannikios' enthusiastic description of Russia's higher clergy:

No monk, archimandrite or bishop is allowed to eat meat. They are very pious [...]. When they ordain a priest, they don't take a penny. All of whom I saw performing the Mass, they always cried over the altar when the holy bread is transformed. They live however in big, large houses and each one of them has two or two-and-a-half millions of Christians under him.<sup>46</sup>

The main problem confronted by the Simonopetra Brothers was the refusal of the Holy Synod to explicitly permit them to make use of the holy relics they had brought with them from Mount Athos: "the left hand of Saint Mary Magdalene Equal to the Apostles and a part of Saint Anna and martyr Saint Panteleemon".<sup>47</sup> The reason evoked for this denial was a recent edict (указ) of Emperor Alexander III, prohibiting any exposure of such relics in public.<sup>48</sup> For the Athonite monks, such an interdiction was tantamount to a financial catastrophe: "If we moved around with only the book [of the Synod] in our hands, ignoring even the [local] language and lacking any reference, it was very dubious if we could earn even our daily expenses", explained Neophytos ad posterio.<sup>49</sup> In fact, while the Holy Synod itself remained adamant in its refusal, most of the local bishops or metropolitans approached by the travelling monks proved to be far more lenient: some of them, Isidor of St. Petersburg<sup>50</sup> en tête, provided them with written permits to expose the relics in their dioceses; some others restricted their authorization to some secondary churches or to the villages only, with only a few staying absolutely faithful to the orders of their leadership. Little by little, our heroes managed thus not only to find their way but also to gradually adapt themselves to the local customs and realities; Ioannikios quickly learned the Russian language and, after having changed three different interpreters during their first year in Russia, by the end of 1889 the traveler monks did not need them anymore.<sup>51</sup> As Neophytos explicitly acknowledged, this adjustment considerably boosted their earnings; an improvement that occurred despite the famine and the cholera pandemic that had broken out in the meantime, restricting both their movements and the financial potential of their audience, mostly composed by "common people".<sup>52</sup>

An assortment of local helpers facilitated this development. Some of them, like Professor Alexei Dmitrievsky in Kyiv or Bishop Modestos of Nizhny Novgorod were old acquaintances from Athos (the first)<sup>53</sup> and/or close friends



of Makarii Sushkin, the Abbot of the Russian Monastery there.<sup>54</sup> Some others, like the monks who advised their colleagues to go to Astrakhan, “where there are rich and pious Christians”,<sup>55</sup> or a number of local “benefactors” who contributed substantially to the travelers’ coffers and stayed in contact with them ready to remedy the Monastery’s future needs,<sup>56</sup> remain anonymous in both narratives. Female assistance, in the person of a number of nuns and abbesses of nun monasteries, pious widows of various towns, “great and rich” Apolinaria in Saratov or “old lady Anysia” (γράια Ανυσία) in St. Petersburg, are almost always mentioned by name, as their help was considered more than decisive for the success of the *zeteia*.<sup>57</sup> The last one persuaded the people to call the monks to bless their houses and had a full priest vestment ordered for them; the nuns of Spaskiy Monastery, in Simbirsk, not only fed them and made a number of priest vestments for them, but also repressed the hostile reactions of a local priest;<sup>58</sup> those of another, near Arzamas, provided them with money and various clothes and sent them off with religious songs.<sup>59</sup> A notable exception to this rule was however provided by a nun monastery in Kazan, whose Abbess, described as “a voracious woman”, did not allow them to expose their relics, in order that they would not compete with her own “miraculous icon” of the Holy Virgin.<sup>60</sup>

Occasional crowding of antagonistic seekers of donations constituted a real source of trouble,<sup>61</sup> as we also learn from other *zeteia* accounts.<sup>62</sup> For the Simonopetra Brothers, however, a far more serious hindrance was produced by the official ban on the public exposure of their relics, despite its circumvention by the local bishops. If the masterminds of the prohibition had aspired to relieve the Orthodox cult from superstition or from the vestiges of the notorious “double faith” (δвоевѣрие),<sup>63</sup> popular perception of the measure – at least among the faithful folk – was in fact quite different, as Abbott Neophytos explained in his narrative:

Wherever we went, we feared that they would not accept us, nor allow [the relics’ exposure], as it happened indeed – but fortunately only in a few places; in some others, we were allowed [to expose them] but in an entirely unofficially way, without welcoming us

on arrival nor an escort [to the local church]. Because it is a general custom in those provinces, to welcome the miraculous icons in motion at a distance from the town with a procession of priests and deacons in full dress, with icons, flabella, bell-ringing etc; the same also takes place when the icons depart. As the people did not see anything like that happening to us, what we could wait for? We lost many days [looking for a permit] and very often a rumor was circulating that we are just crooks with no license. Some of the bishops and their proto-presbyters allowed [the exposure], but were not kind enough to bow before the relics, neither they burned incense in front of them, although they were officiating nearby; some of them even told us that they do not recognize them [as holy relics], because they are not referred to in the Synod’s book.<sup>64</sup>

### Meletios, the entrepreneur.

With the notable exception of the relics’ prohibition, all of the above-mentioned factors could also be seen in action thirty years earlier, when Meletios Konstamonites and his colleagues undertook their own *zeteia* in the Russian hinterland.

Born in the Greek-speaking Macedonian town of Veroia in 1822, and a monastery internee at the age of 14, Meletios is still known in his hometown as a great benefactor who built the town’s first School for Girls with money he had earned during his travels in Russia. Filled with interesting remarks of an ethnographic or sociologic nature, his book – in fact, an unconventional travelogue – discloses an author not only extremely intelligent, but also eager to learn and wide open to new experiences. More than once he acknowledges having travelled to certain places “out of curiosity” (περιεργείας χάριν),<sup>65</sup> while equally revealing is the introduction of his narrative:

▼ Fig. 3. *The Konstamonitou Monastery in 1858, photographed by Piotr Sevastjanov.*

Source: <http://www.isihazm.ru/?id=518>.

▲ Fig. 4. *Meletios Konstamonites, in a rare photograph of him.*

Source: Παύλειος Λόγος, 101 (2013).



I shall write about this tour of mine in Russia, about things and about men, [about] whatever noteworthy I saw or I heard of, without adding or concealing anything. I am hardly literate and I shall write just the truth in a simple way. If the reader also hears any of those things that educated men know to suppress, he must not be surprised; I shall write it down, because I think this is good.<sup>66</sup>

The group initially dispatched to Russia from the Konstamonitou Monastery, composed of Abbot Symeon, Meletios and another monk, arrived in Odessa in May 1862 with its load of holy relics and two pieces of Holy Cross. After having obtained the necessary permits in St. Petersburg in July, they toured the Russian hinterland for a whole year, from Moscow to Kyakhta, a town on the frontier with China, in the Far East. Back in Irkutsk, the group split in July 1863, for reasons that had mostly to do with a latent rivalry between Symeon and Meletios, exacerbated by their opposing views on the working method to follow. The Abbot returned to St. Petersburg, where he declared Meletios as allegedly dead, asking the Holy Synod to replace him with another monk from Athos; the third monk followed his way some days later, leaving Meletios in Irkutsk with some of their relics and a small piece of Holy Cross. Symeon and Meletios would meet again two years later in St. Petersburg, the first coming back from Ukraine and the second from Siberia, and live together for three months in very cold terms before Symeon's departure from Russia in April 1865. Meletios undertook a second trip to his Siberian retreats, served for nine months as a parish priest of the "Greek Monastery" in Moscow, made a third trip to Siberia plus a tour to various popular destinations of religious tourism around Lake Ladoga, before leaving Russia by train to Nizhny Novgorod, going downstream Volga and Don to Taganrog and then proceeding by land to Odessa, where he grabbed the opportunity of a cholera pandemic to expose his relics in the cathedral for a whole month. After his return to Mount Athos, he rebuilt the Catholicon of Konstamonitou monastery from the ground with his earnings, in tandem with Abbot Symeon;<sup>67</sup> when he proposed to give a full account of his donation to the other monks, we read in his Memoirs, the latter dissuaded him arguing that, if every monk knew the actual financial status of the Monastery, "there would emerge demands for unnecessary expenditure".<sup>68</sup>

The key for Meletios' success, described in detail in his book, was his decision to adjust to the local customs and realities, looking for those agents and channels who would allow him to penetrate the social fabric of disparate communities, both urban and rural, making use of the primitive devotion of their inhabitants to their own concept of Divine.

First and foremost, the contacts he developed allowed him to continue his *zeteia* on a personal basis, although he lacked any authorization from the Russian Holy Synod for such an endeavor: instead of the religious authorities, he turned to the secular ones, securing a special permit from the General Governor of Eastern Siberia with the help of local acquaintances; half a year later, the sheer display of this document brought about the issue of an identical one for Western Siberia, by the respective authority there.<sup>69</sup>

Having already observed that the Abbot's insistence to say the Mass in Greek according to the Byzantine rite alienated the locals, thus minimizing the group's

income,<sup>70</sup> Meletios also decided to use Church Slavonic and the Russian rite in order to maximize his appeal to his prospective audiences.<sup>71</sup>

In his narrative, he describes five kinds of such local agents, who assisted him in penetrating the depths of otherwise secluded local communities.

Monks or nuns of various monasteries were of course the first to be approached. The latter, especially, much more numerous everywhere as we have already seen, repeatedly introduced Meletios not only to the population at large, but also to affluent prospective donors; in Kurgan, a town of the Tobolsk Governate, they even went themselves to collect the donation of "a benevolent gentleman" who could not be otherwise approached, because his wife was in the process of giving birth.<sup>72</sup> Ordinary priests could also provide precious advice: in the small town of Glazov, for example, the local archpriest (or archpresbyter) explained to Meletios that it would be better for him to advertise not only his relics, but also an icon of Mother of God he had brought with him from Athos, because "in those countries the inhabitants have no idea about the holy relics and have no much faith on them; they put all their hopes on Our Lady, respecting and honoring her icon".<sup>73</sup>

A second group to link with, were the close relatives of Russian monks residing (or having resided) in Athos. All of them, Meletios remarked, were welcoming him and his companions "as if we were their own relatives".<sup>74</sup> Most noteworthy among them he seemed to consider the father-in-law and a brother-in-law of Serafeim Veslin, best known under his nickname of "Sviatogorets", a tremendously influential writer who had been the first to popularize Athos among the Russian public.<sup>75</sup>

Far more crucial a role was however played by another social category: "Blissful" persons (блаженные), i.e., – in Meletios' words – "men and women who deceive both themselves and the people" by pretending they possess divinatory powers. His first acquaintance of the kind was a lady from Irkutsk, who promoted him by claiming to know "by divine revelation" whatever she had been previously told by him about Athos and its monasteries. When this mediation enhanced considerably his profits, Meletios decided "to look everywhere for such блаженныи, male or female, who provide major gains to the traveler, most of all through the women, whose consciousness they have under their command".<sup>76</sup> Although he acknowledged having made considerable use of such persons during his *zeteia*, Meletios made on the other hand clear that their moral deeds "are abominable", as himself had the opportunity to discover; he professed, however, that his firsthand knowledge concerned only the misdeeds of men but not those of women, which he knew only from hear-say.<sup>77</sup>

Pious Widows with a considerable fortune constituted Meletios' fourth target group. The first two of them, Evlampia and Nataliya, were introduced to him in Irkutsk by the local *Blissful*. When they called him for diner, coupled with a 100- ruble donation from each of them, the mother-in-law of Nataliya leaped to imitate them; "apart from her dinner, she added a donation of 100 rubles, while to the Abbot she had given only fifteen", Meletios remarked as a proof to the effectiveness of his method.<sup>78</sup> Another widow would literally save his mission in the rich mining town of Yeniseisk, whose inhabitants initially snubbed him at the instigation of their priests:



five days after his arrival, she began to preach that she had dreamed of Saint Stephen and Saint Tryphon, whose relics Meletios carried with him; the believers rushed to the site of their exposure, calling him to bless their homes and compelling the priests to change their attitude.<sup>79</sup> Most of the widows were persuaded to offer not only money, but also precious items of religious art as gifts; some other female “sponsors” of the same kind are on the other hand referred to only as “rich” (or “very rich”), with no mention at all of their marital status. The case best described is a “remarkable” lady in Minusinsk, whose defunct husband had bequeathed her a goldmine: during his stay for a week in her house, in September 1863, we read,

she used to serve me during our dinner in person with piety, although she had three maids to serve her; she offered me 500 rubles for the monastery, together with gifts made of silver and gold; to me, she gave woolen clothes, fur coats, tobacco cases and similar items. On my part I worked very hard, obliged as I was every night to talk to her till midnight about the Holy Mountain and the salvation of the soul; while I was talking, she usually wept; after midnight, she would escort me to my room in tears.<sup>80</sup>

Last but not least, the fifth category of agents mobilized by Meletios, and the most effective of all, were his so-called “Holy Virgins” (Святые Девицы): young village women who left their homes in order to follow a “holy man” throughout their province for months. In Meletios’ case, two such girls, Stefanida and Martha, began following him in the village of Uní in the Viatka region (today Kirov oblast). He is not very clear on the circumstances of their recruitment, mentioning only that he promised to their parents to bring them back one year later; from historical literature on female religiosity under the Russian Empire we know, however, that similar phenomena were not at all rare at the time, reflecting a widespread will of individual or collective deliverance from the oppression felt by young women in the Russian hinterland.<sup>81</sup> Stefanida and Martha moved around preaching to the villagers about him, persuading them to call him to bless them and suppressing or by-passing any resistance of the local priests or headmen through recourse to the appropriate mobilization. When the village priests of Kolopóva, for example, refused to accept Meletios, “saying that they themselves had crosses and Mothers of God in their churches”, the two girls persuaded the local ruling body (правления), a member of which happened to be a relative of Martha, to call him, handing them the keys of the village church.<sup>82</sup> Such had been the effect of their example, that by the end of his tour in Viatka Province, a whole year later, Meletios was followed by no less than sixteen such *святые девицы*.<sup>83</sup>

Visits to the villages followed a standard procedure, described in detail by Meletios in his book.<sup>84</sup> The “Holy Virgins” were the first to go in, cultivating the ground and preparing his reception, in cooperation with the local priest (or priests). Then, Meletios would come from his earlier stop-over at the head of a religious procession, numbering between thirty and fifty male peasants ceremoniously carrying his icon of Virgin Mary brought from Athos. In the Mass held in the village church, the first part (a “royal *paraklesis* for the Emperor and the preservation of the Russian Empire”) was free, while the second (a “*paraklesis* for the poor”) was paid for by the

villages, at a standard cost of 12 kopeks per family. Those who wished to have their homes blessed by Meletios and his icon were on the other hand individually burdened with 3 rubles per visit, a price fixed “so that not everybody could invite us, inhibiting the rest of our work”. The monk and his *девицы* followed a strict division of labor: he blessed village homes and sick villagers, wrote down the names to be memorialized and received the most important donations, while they “were selling candles and announcements, passed the plate for donations, distributed holy water, oil, cotton wool and incense from the holy relics, talked to the people about the miracles of Virgin Mary and the holy relics and spoke about charity and salvation of the soul; they also collected small donations from women”. The daily harvest of such an activity was estimated at around 200 rubles; the party stayed in each village “usually one night, rarely two”.<sup>85</sup> When Meletios finished his tour, he had visited at least once every village in the region.<sup>86</sup>

A considerable part of his audience was composed by people who, although officially Orthodox, were at the same time worshiping “their ancestral gods in the woods” – a rather typical instance of the notorious *двоеверие*. Nevertheless, he admits, they also showed “a great respect for my holy relics; nearly all of those who had been baptized invited me in their homes to chant a blessing and offered me their money”.<sup>87</sup> “Schismatic” (раскольники) or “Old Believers” (староверцы), who refused to follow the new rituals adopted by the Russian Church in the 17th century, showed on the other hand a more ambivalent attitude towards his endeavor: some of them “did not respect the holy relics, nor the holy cross or our icons”, Meletios remembered, while there were also those who asked him to allow them to say their own prayers in front of them.<sup>88</sup>

Miracles contributed to his success. Meletios mentions explicitly only one, the mental recovery of “a deranged woman” who “had been considered by the locals as a possessed one”, after he read a prayer to her; he makes it clear, however, that the same also happened to “other patients”.<sup>89</sup> He was clever enough not to claim any authority for such healings, attributing them instead to the strong faith of those recovered: “Since we left Glazov we were always followed by sick men and women, as we toured those blessed villages, where we found a [strong] faith, as Jesus had found in Capernaum; thanks to this faith, a lot of patients were healed”.<sup>90</sup> As the news circulated, he was accused by some people to be an incarnation of Antichrist; his fans, on the other hand, spread the rumor that a “schismatic” woman who had been disseminating such an accusation suffered a stroke. “I kept on working”, Meletios noted meaningfully in his book, “leaving the solution of similar affairs to the hands of the *девицы*”.<sup>91</sup>

Whatever their appreciation of miracles, a number of mighty provincial notables jostled each other for primacy in the donor game. In the town of Nolinsk, noted Meletios, “a dispute took place among many people, who will be the first to have a silver vestment made for our icon of Virgin Mary; when our landlord did it, the rest wanted to have it gold-plated, but he did it by himself, too. *Ispravnik* Michailovitch then offered me a new wooden box for the Holy Cross, adding another cross made of silver and gold, weighting 27 zlotniks”.<sup>92</sup> Some gifts were a little bit difficult to be carried home; such was the case of a huge bell donated by the senior foreman of the Barnaul goldmines, a present that Meletios found better to resell in the local market.<sup>93</sup> Offerings could take even the form

of symbolic or virtual slavery. A notable in the town of Yaransk donated for example to Meletios his “most virtuous” daughter, Olympiada; the latter should consider him as her “spiritual father” and was obliged “to send the fruits of her labor to Athos throughout her life”.<sup>94</sup>

Taking into consideration that the region of Viatka was considered a stronghold of Old Belief, whose adepts officially grew by 25 % during the 1860s,<sup>95</sup> what kind of impressions the writer kept of them? Already accustomed to the existence and the peculiarities of such communities since his stay in Tiumen, Tara and Tobolsk during the previous year, Meletios made a clear distinction between their various sub-groups in his book: “Some of them have their own priests and churches, others don’t; no sect of theirs has any arch-priest, however, because such a thing is forbidden by the government; their priests are ordained by the Orthodox bishop, who is allowed to officiate once a year in their churches, but the Orthodox priest cannot conduct a service there, nor anyone of theirs in the Orthodox church. The churches of the schismatic are similar to ours, while their icons are painted blessing with two fingers, just like they cross themselves”.<sup>96</sup> This delicate balance possibly referred to the official policy of “unity in faith” (единоверие), adopted by the Russian state in 1800 in order to incorporate those Old Believers who were disposed to accept the authority of the official Church, while keeping their own rituals.<sup>97</sup> Meletios’ attitude towards them gradually evolved from repulse to accommodation, reflecting also their own conduct. In Tiumen, for example, he attributed the unfavorable reception of him to the presence of “many schismatics, who are also the richest” in town.<sup>98</sup> In Tara, he left his lodging when he learnt that the landlord was also an Old Believer, who, “like all schismatic, did not pay any respect to the holy relics, neither to the holy cross nor to our holy icons”;<sup>99</sup> in the same town, however, he had no problem to grant his holy relics to a different group of “priestless” Old Believers (безпоповцы), who “paid well” for them: “There are also some schismatic who have no priests, and the latter’s duties, concerning marriage, baptism etc, are performed by a secular man. [...] Those schismatic have no churches but houses of prayer and respect the holy relics of old Saints. For this reason they invited me to their house of prayer in order that they could pray over them”. Their prayer lasted for “about three hours”, during which he was constantly watching the relics, in order – he claims- to prevent any theft.<sup>100</sup> Later, he would discover that the bishop of Tomsk, who had no objection to officiate with him in the Greek rite, used to conduct each Thursday a service “in the temple of the schismatic, together with their priests”.<sup>101</sup> A similar background, unknown yet to him, may also be discernible at Meletios’ earlier problems in Tobolsk: the town’s inhabitants wanted him to officiate the Christmas liturgy in the Greek rite (instead of the westernized Russian one that has been introduced since the late 17th century, i.e., at the time of the Schism), he wrote, but the “anti-Greek” (ανθέλλην) local bishop “did not allow it”;<sup>102</sup> most probably, this prohibition had nothing to do with “Greece” at all, but was born out of fear that the Greek / Byzantine rite was too close to the relevant practices of the Old Believers.<sup>103</sup>

Narrating his one-year tour of the Viatka hinterland, Meletios sporadically sketched the “schismatic” communities there as a purely external factor, at most an annoyance. He was on the contrary amazed at the instances of двоеверие he witnessed among the indigenous, non-Russian inhabitants of that region: “Viatkans

are a pagan people, who have their own language, but no alphabet. Some of them have embraced the Orthodox religion and perform their Christian duties, but at the same time they go to the woods worshipping their ancestral Gods, to whom they sacrifice animals etc. [...] They showed great respect for my holy relics; all of those who had been baptized among them invited me in their homes for a blessing and gave me money. [...] They are gentle people, not prone to promiscuity like the others”.<sup>104</sup>

The last apostrophe referred to another source of amazement for the alms-gathering monk from the Balkans, during his decade-long residence in Russia: his discovery that “an extreme moral breakdown reigns all over Siberia”,<sup>105</sup> where locals used to make sex in public places (from village openings to ship decks or in rooms filled with other people), meeting no reaction at all from eventual by-standers; “little by little I got accustomed to it”, he admits in his book, “but I couldn’t persuade myself that such acts don’t betray a lack of decency, at least”.<sup>106</sup> Equally telling is his description of an intimate theological feud he had with the village priest in Pavlodar: the latter insisted that adultery is for a cleric a sin more pardonable than eating meat.<sup>107</sup>

Less than a year after his return to Mount Athos, Meletios was sent again to Russia in June 1867, this time as unofficial escort to a new zeteia mission. As every monk was legally forbidden to participate in more than one such travel, he obtained a passport with a lay friend as a guarantor.<sup>108</sup> He proceeded to St. Petersburg as a private traveler and met there with the head of the group – a certain Ananias, traveling under false name due to bureaucratic reasons and sketched by him as a man not only “inexperienced” but also totally incompetent and almost stupid.<sup>109</sup> No wonder that they soon parted company, at least temporarily, with Meletios returning to his old fief around Viatka and proceeding northwards to Arkhangelsk; “with no relics at all nor any letter of introduction”, he boasted in his book, “I managed to collect some money and order two icon revetments made of gold and silver as well as a crozier” (πατερίσσα).<sup>110</sup> During the last phase of their travel, however, the two monks will tour together the Ryazan province, where Meletios will discover a new talent of him:

As I was responsible for the monastery’s holy relics, and I feared that they could be stolen because of my colleague’s gullibility, I had to stay close to him. In order not to stay idle, I decided, therefore, to be a trader of ecclesiastic objects in the churches’ narthex. I bought booklets, rosaries, crosses, [blessed] oil etc in Moscow or in the Troitsa Monastery and I resold them (or, sometimes, presented them) to the Christians, earning 90 % because people were buying them not for their intrinsic value but out of piety, as they thought they originated in Mount Athos. The booklets I was selling had been edited by the Russian monks of Athos and contained the miracles performed in the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleemon. In fact, one of their miracles was how enthusiastically people were buying them, paying for them without stint.<sup>111</sup>

A considerable part of those profits ended up as an order of religious objects to the Moscow goldsmiths. Meletios had already given them work in 1866 and did it again in 1869. “They have so much developed their art”, he explained in his Memoirs, “that all the royal utensils made of gold or silver are manufactured here”. As a whole, he ordered three large icon vestments and a number of smaller ones,



“two chalices, a Gospel, a censer and a pateritsa, twelve hanging lamps and other ecclesiastic utensils, all of them made of silver and gold”, as well as three precious boxes for the tools of his trade: “one for the Holy Cross and part of the relics of St Andrew the First-Called, another for the relics of the Saints Stephen and Tryphon, and a third for the relics of the Apostles Andrew and Luke and the martyr St Panteleemon”.<sup>112</sup>

Another part of his personal profits was used by Meletios as a kind of primitive social security. A written contract between him and his Monastery provided for his retirement there under a special status, enjoying a considerable degree of personal independence and total immunity from any future intra-monastic feuds; he lived in his own cell, outside the monastery’s compound, thanks to the money he had earned during his last trip to Russia.<sup>113</sup> The last reference on him (as still alive) that I have tracked down in the digitalized Mount Athos archives is dated January 9, 1881,<sup>114</sup> according to the most trustworthy version, advanced by an old secretary of the Mount Athos Community and a local historian of Veroia, he died that same year.<sup>115</sup>

In the meantime, an equally considerable part of his profits had been spent for the construction of Veroia’s first school for girls,<sup>116</sup> as well as for the salary of a female teacher, hired and brought there by Meletios from Athens<sup>117</sup> – an indication that, just like so many entrepreneurs of the Greek Orthodox Diaspora before him, the Athonite alms-gatherer had been in fact a supporter of enlightenment and an enemy of those same popular superstitions he had skillfully exploited in order to enrich himself; a fact also confirmed by some passages of his book, where he castigated the indifference of the Russian state to educate its subjects.<sup>118</sup> Who knows? Even his unusual book published in Athens (i.e., at a place where – in contrast to the Ottoman Empire or Russia – no preventive censorship was imposed to any edition) just after his death, with his cynical narrative and self-confessed record, may have been nothing but a conscious attempt to demystify, subvert, and help destroy the whole world

he had lived in since his late childhood.

Whatever his innermost intentions, Meletios’ message was fully understood by those affected by it, who responded accordingly with the imposition of a sinister form of *damnatio memoriae*: his book was either passed into complete silence or explicitly denounced, without ever mentioning neither its title nor the name of its author. In the summer of 1883, for example, Meletios’ name was completely absent from the short account of the 1860s *zeteia*, narrated to Athelstan Riley during his stay in Konstamonitou monastery by Symeon and Ananias (the monastery’s former and actual Abbot, respectively).<sup>119</sup> The next year, a travelogue on Mount Athos, published in the post prestigious Greek newspaper of Istanbul, attributed most of the profits of the 1860s *zeteia* to Abbot Symeon, still alive and self-proclaimed as “the second founder of his monastery”, crediting him with “a marvelous good taste” in “his choice of decent, but extremely charming chandeliers brought from Russia”, while suppressing even Meletios’ name. It was an omission not at all due to ignorance, as the anonymous writer also referred in an off-handed way (and rather disapprovingly) to “the extremely original pamphlet, in both its form and content, recently published in Athens” by “the other enterprising monk”, who had written down the “utmost strange details” of their trips in the Russian hinterland.<sup>120</sup> Even less ambivalent was the ultra-conservative former Great Chartofyllax and official chronographer of the Constantinople Patriarchate, Manuel Gedeon (1851-1943), in his Memoirs published in 1934. Meletios, whose name is once more left unsaid, is misleadingly portrayed there as “an ill-mannered and rude hieromonk from Athos, who met during his stay in Russia some anti-Greek persons” (μισέλληνας τινάς) and “published a voluminous and extremely vulgar libel, where it abused every Russian who had been or would be born”.<sup>121</sup> This condemnation was coupled, in that same book, with Gedeon’s extolling of the Simonopetra brothers for “having kept their love for the Russians [...], in contrast to some others, who collected alms in favor of a similar monastery, only to insult afterwards Russia and the Russians in print”.<sup>122</sup>

## Notes:

1 *Περιήγησις Μελετίου Κωνσταμονίτου εις Ρωσσίαν από έτους 1862-1869*, Athens, 1882 [thereafter: Μελέτιος 1882].

2 Untitled account by the Abbot Neophytos Simonopetrites, in Codex 13/02/02/1-2 of the digitalized Athonian Archives, p. 99-113 [thereafter: Νεόφυτος 1888-1892]; Ιωαννικίου Ιερομόναχου, «Ημερολόγιον και περιήγησις του ταξιδίου μας εις Ρωσσίαν», in Codex 45 of the H. M. Simonos Petras, p. 1-92 [thereafter: Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891; *Idem*, «Σημειώσεις», op.cit., p. 149-158 and 178-181 [thereafter: Ιωαννίκιος 1892]. Cf. Σταματόπουλος 1998, for an earlier use of the last documents. A digital copy of Codex 45 was obtained by the author grace to the kind help of father Kosmas Petrites and Archmandrite Elissaios of the Simonopetra Monastery.

3 For a comprehensive survey of *zeteia* as an Orthodox institution under the Ottoman Empire, see Αγγελομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη 2007. For earlier such “travels” in Western Europe, see also Saracino 2021.

4 Fennell 2001, p. 57. Gerasimos Smyrnakes puts this first trip in 1509 (Σμυρνάκης 1903, p. 661).

5 Αγγελομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη 2007, p. 266-271.

6 Χρυσοχοϊδης 2011, p. 271-272.

7 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 21; Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 9-10; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 99.

8 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 4; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 99; Κτενάς 1935, p. 610.

9 On the Greek-Russian rivalry over Athos, see Дмитриевский 1895, p. 156-199; Σμυρνάκης 1903, p. 187-287 and 380-703 in passim; Fennell 2001; Gerd 2014, p. 84-98. For a number of cases, where specific monasteries of Mount Athos were financially bailed-out thanks to their *zeteia* missions in Russia: Κτενάς 1935, p. 545, 571 and 650.

10 G. Dokos to the Greek MFA, Salonica 31.10.1891, No. 1080, copies in ΙΑΥΕ/1891/ΑΑΚ/Varia and ΑΣΤΔ/32/8, p. 8.

11 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 37.

12 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 13; Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 26 and 72-73.

13 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 43 & 50; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 100.

14 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 29-30, 41-43, 53, 55 and 79. Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 86-88, 90.

15 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 21-22, 58 and 62; Μελέτιος 1882, p. 64 & 71.

16 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 59; Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 67. On the Consistory institution, in general, see Freeze 1983, p. 27-28, 40 and 451, as well as its official Statutes (Уставъ 1843).

17 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 36. Cf. Μαραγκουδάκης 1996, p. 202; Αγγελομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη 2007, p. 283.

18 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 69-70; Ιωαννίκιος 1892, passim.

19 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 90 and 101; Ιωαννίκιος 1892, p. 158.

20 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 76; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 101-102 and 104.

- 21 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104; Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 76, 86 and 90; Μελέτιος 1882, p. 21, 83 and 97.
- 22 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 99; ΑΣΤΔ/32/1, G. Dokos to the Greek MFA St. Dragoumis, Salonica 24.8.1887, No. 1051, p. 53-55. On the dispute with Xeropotamou, see also Codex 13/02/02/1-2 of the digitalized Athonian Archives, p. 200-207. On the 1863 expropriation of monastic estates by the Cuza government: Συμρνάκης 1903, p. 197-198; Stavrianos 1958, p. 352; Jelavitch 1984, p. 130-152.
- 23 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 99.
- 24 Συμρνάκης 1903, p. 594.
- 25 ΑΣΤΔ/32/1, G. Dokos to the Greek MFA St. Dragoumis, Salonica 24.8.1887, No. 1051, p. 53.
- 26 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 90.
- 27 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 102; Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 91-2.
- 28 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 102 (and p. 105-107, for a detailed narrative of the disastrous accident). On the destruction of Simonopetra by that same fire, see also Συμρνάκης 1903, p. 593-594; Ταχιάος 1991, p. 27, and Codex 13/02/02/1-2, p. 121-123, for a full list of the materials lost.
- 29 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 102.
- 30 Συμρνάκης 1903, p. 595.
- 31 "If I crossed the border of Russia and descended to Athens, my return would be very difficult, as I have already explained" (Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 102).
- 32 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 103.
- 33 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104. Ioannikios detailed account of the first two years is somehow different, but it may also include some of the earnings invested into precious items of ecclesiastic art: 35.891 rubles during the first year and 45.912 during the second, i.e., a total of 81.803. Of them, only 4.602 rubles (5,6 %) were transferred through the official channels of seven regional Consistories, while other 3.000 were directly deposited to the Russian Holy Synod; the rest were either sent to Athos through various banks (Russian, French and Greek), or had been carried in cash (Ιωαννίκιος 1892, p. 149-158).
- 34 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104. A catalogue of the monastery's movable property compiled after the 1891 fire listed, among other things, two Russian Gospels dressed in gold and silver, one Russian Gospel in bronze, two Russian crosses from silver and gold and one from copper and gold, a Russian pallium and "four icon revetments made in Russia in 1890-91 from silver and gold [...], each one weighting 10 puds and all of them 41 puds, i.e., approximately 13½ okas of pure silver" (Codex 13/02/02/1-2, p. 131-132).
- 35 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 100-103.
- 36 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 103. On Father John of Kronstandt, see Laqueur 1993, p. 49-52; Kizenko 2000; Dixon 2008a, p. 225-226.
- 37 Between 1849 and 1902, Simonopetra ordered more than 40 sets of such "paper icons", to be either sold or donated as an act of public relations (Ιουστίνος 1991, p. 246-247).
- 38 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 65-66; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104.
- 39 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 37, 40-41, 60, 64-65, 67, 73 and 87; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 105.
- 40 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 49; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 102 and 104. It is estimated that more than 400.000 people died in 1891-1892 in Russia from famine-related causes (Robins 1975, p. 189).
- 41 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 24, 88 and 90.
- 42 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 6.
- 43 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 8-9.
- 44 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 24. According to the official 1897 census, Shuya had 19.560 and Ivanovo-Voznesensk 54.141 inhabitants (Тройницкий 1900, p. 58-61).
- 45 In Arzamas, for example, there was one male monastery with just 20 monks and two female with 850 nuns; in Tula, 15 monks and 350 nuns; in Orel, 10 monks and 500 nuns; in Tambov, 15 monks and 400 nuns, etc.
- 46 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 82-83.
- 47 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 1-2.
- 48 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 10.
- 49 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 100. Also: Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 10.
- 50 For biographical data on Isidor: Берташ 2011; Зеленина and Лопухина 2011.
- 51 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 99-100 and 104. The first interpreter, a Greek priest hired in Odessa, received a monthly salary of 50 roubles; the next two, hired from March to July 1889 and from July to December 1889, respectively, were paid 35 roubles per month (Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 4, 19, 33 and 50).
- 52 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104.
- 53 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 5. Dmitrievsky, a professor of church archaeology in the Kyiv Theological Academy since 1884, had carried out research at the Athos Monasteries in the summer of 1886, during his second trip in the Orient (1887-1888), in the summer of 1889 and again in 1891 (Эльмуратов 2009, p. 59-62). According to Ioannikios, "he was obliged" to the Simonopetra monks, after having spent "a week in our library taking notes".
- 54 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 26. On Makarii Sushkin, Abbott of St Panteleemon (1875-1889) and a leading figure of the Russian movement in Athos, see his biography by Dmitrievsky (Дмитриевский 1895); also, Fennell 2001, p. 93-108 and 138-155.
- 55 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 73.
- 56 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 60, 75, 78-79 and 90; Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104.
- 57 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 15, 46-47, 57, 60, 77 and 88.
- 58 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 42-43 and 47.
- 59 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 27-31.
- 60 Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 38-40.
- 61 He group's failure in the town of Borisoglebsk, for example, is ascribed by Ioannikios to the recent passing of "a miraculous icon of the Blessed Virgin", which had absorbed most of their potential earnings (Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891, p. 85).
- 62 Μαραγκουδάκης 1996, p. 199 and 201, for the stiff competition between rival *zeteia* groups from various monasteries of the Ottoman Empire who carried out simultaneous tours in the Russian hinterland in 1894-1896.
- 63 On the (inconsistent) efforts made by successive imperial governments and/or the church hierarchy to eradicate religious superstition and the remnants of alleged "dual faith" among the Russian Orthodox masses, see mostly Freeze 1998 and Dixon 2008a. For the concept of *δωοεверие*, see Кольванов 2006, as well as the critical approach of Leonid Heretz (Heretz 2008, p. 15-21).
- 64 Νεόφυτος 1888-1892, p. 104-105.
- 65 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 42, 80 and 82.
- 66 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 4.
- 67 Βουδούρης 2011, p. 89.
- 68 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 90-91.
- 69 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 46-47.
- 70 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 39.
- 71 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 47.
- 72 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 58.
- 73 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 62.
- 74 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 76.
- 75 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 71 (brother-in-law of Serafeim in Kiknour), 74 (father-in-law of Serafeim in Tsarevosanchurskhoursk) and 75 (son of the father-in-law in Velikorechie); also p. 70, 76 and 79, for other monks' relatives. For Serafeim Veslin and his writings: Святогорец 1850 and 1873.
- 76 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 44-46.
- 77 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 46.
- 78 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 45-46.
- 79 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 50-51.
- 80 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 52-53. Minusinsk (4.221 inhabitants) is described by Meletios as "an out-of-the-way town that had never been visited by any traveler, neither Greek nor Russian".
- 81 Alpern Engel 2006, p. 321; Freeze 2006, p. 291; Wagner 2007, p. 134-8; Dixon 2008b, p. 339-340; Chulos 2008, p. 366-7; Wagner and Barnitt 2017.
- 82 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 70.
- 83 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 80.
- 84 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 64-66.



- 85 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 64. Village women mostly donated not money, but a quantity of hand-made cloth. The latter was subsequently sold by Meletios to itinerant traders who followed him “from one village to the other, as they usually do with the local priests or monks who travel around from time to time, carrying their own icons” (*ibidem*, p. 67).
- 86 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 79.
- 87 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 63.
- 88 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 34-6 and 78. On the Old Believers, in general, see Heretz 2008, p. 42-75; Marsden 2015; *Старообрядчество* 2020.
- 89 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 74.
- 90 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 76.
- 91 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 78.
- 92 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 68-69. *Ispravnik* (Исправник) was a police official, responsible for law and order within the boundaries of an *uezd* (уезд, a subdivision of governorate).
- 93 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 55.
- 94 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 72.
- 95 Машковцева 2014, p. 53.
- 96 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 35.
- 97 White 2020.
- 98 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 31.
- 99 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 34.
- 100 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 35-36. A good survey of the “priestless” Old-Believers – the more radical current of traditionalist religious dissidence within Russian Christendom- and their various factional offshoots is provided by Heretz (2008, p. 65-72).
- 101 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 39.
- 102 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 34.
- 103 On the reactions against the change of rite in late 17th century, see Morosan 1991, p. 126-127.
- 104 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 63.
- 105 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 31.
- 106 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 54.
- 107 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 57-58.
- 108 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 92-93 and 103.
- 109 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 93, 96-98 and 101. Ananias, no doubt a Symeon’s protégé and his heir, was elected as Monastery’s next Abbot in 1881 (Riley 1887, p. 347-8). The Greek consul in Salonica, who met him in 1887, described Ananias -an ethnic Greek from Agrafa- as “very stupid and uneducated” (ΑΣτΔ/32/1, G. Dokos to the Greek ΜΕΑ St. Dragoumis, Salonica 24.8.1887, No. 1051, p. 67).
- 110 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 97.
- 111 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 98-99. The “Troitsa Monastery” mentioned by Meletios was the important Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, situated in Sergiyev Posad near Moscow (Μελέτιος 1882, p. 18-19) and a major source of mass-circulation print of religious content for the increasingly literate flock of the Russian Church (Miller 2010, p. 221; Kenworthy 2010, p. 192-194).
- 112 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 21.
- 113 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 101-103.
- 114 Codex 21/02-02/00811-408, Kyrillos Dionysiou to the Superintendence of the Holy Community of the Holy Mountain, Constantinople, 9.1.1881.
- 115 Κτενάς 1935, p. 610; Χιονίδης 1961, p. 40.
- 116 Χριστοδούλου 1960, p. 86; Χιονίδης 1961, p. 40; Βουδούρης 2011, p. 35 and 65-67.
- 117 Undated letter by Veroia male teacher Ioannis Evangelides, attached in General Consul Konstantinos Vatikiotis to the Greek Foreign Ministry, Salonica 20.7.1872, No. 492, ΙΑΥΕ/1872/77.1.
- 118 Μελέτιος 1882, p. 47 and 63.
- 119 Riley 1887, p. 348.
- 120 «Επιστολαί εξ Αγίου Όρους», Νεολόγος, 30.8.1884, p. 2.
- 121 Γεδεών 1934, p. 300.
- 122 Γεδεών 1934, p. 300.

### Bibliographical Abbreviations:

- Alpern Engel 2006 – Barbara Alpern Engel, “Women, the family and public life”, in Dominique Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Vol. II. *Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 305-325.
- Chulos 2008 – Chris Chulos, “Russian piety and culture from Peter the Great to 1917”, in Michael Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Vol. 5. *Eastern Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 348-370.
- Dixon 2008a – Simon Dixon, “Superstition in Imperial Russia”, in *Past and Present*, Supplement 3 (2008), p. 207-228.
- Dixon 2008b – Simon Dixon, “The Russian Orthodox Church in imperial Russia 1721-1917”, in Michael Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Vol. 5. *Eastern Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 325-347.
- Fennell 2001 – Nicholas Fennell, *The Russians on Athos*, Oxford, Berlin and New York, Peter Lang, 2001.
- Freeze 1983 – Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1983.
- Freeze 1998 – Gregory L. Freeze, “Institutionalizing Piety. The Church and Popular Religion, 1750-1850”, in Jan Burbank and David Ransel (eds), *Imperial Russia. New Histories for the Empire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 1998, p. 210-249.
- Freeze 2006 – Gregory L. Freeze, “Russian Orthodoxy: Church, people and politics in Imperial Russia”, in Dominique Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Vol. II. *Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 284-305.
- Heretz 2008 – Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity. Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Jelavitch 1984 – Barbara Jelavitch, *Russia and the formation of the Romanian national state, 1821-1878*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Kenworthy 2010 – Scott Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia. Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism and Society after 1825*, New York, Oxford University press, 2010.
- Kizenko 2000 – Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint. Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People*, University Park PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Laqueur 1993 – Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred. The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia*, New York, Harper Collins, 1993.
- Marsden 2015 – Thomas Marsden, *The Crisis of Religious Toleration in Russia. Bibikov’s System for the Old Believers, 1841-1845*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Miller 2010 – David B. Miller, *Saint Sergius of Radonezh, his Trinity Monastery and the Formation of the Russian Identity*, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2010.
- Morosan 1991 – Vladimir Mosoran, “Liturgical Singing or Sacred Music? Understanding the Aesthetic of the New Russian Choral School”, in William Broomfield and Milos Velimirovic (eds), *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.124-130.
- Riley 1887 – Athelstan Riley, *Athos or the Mountain of the Monks*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1887.
- Robins 1975 – Richard Robins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892. The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1975.

- Saracino 2021 – Stefano Saracino, “Greek Orthodox Alms Collectors from the Ottoman Empire in the Holy Roman Empire: Extreme Mobility and Confessionalized Communication”, in Kostas Saqrīs, Nikolas Pissis and Miltos Pechlivanos (eds), *Confessionalization and/as Knowledge Transfer in the Greek Orthodox Church*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021, p. 79-108.
- Stavrianos 1958 – L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, London, Hurst, 2000 (1958).
- Wagner 2007 – William G. Wagner, “‘Orthodox Domesticity’: Creating a Social Role for Women”, in Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman (eds), *Sacred Stories. Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007, p. 119-145.
- Wagner and Barnitt 2017 – W. G. Wagner and K. Barnitt, “A Quantitative Study of the Transformation of Female Orthodox Monasticism in Imperial Russia”, in *Вестник СпбГУ. История*, 62/4 (2017), p. 751-776.
- White 2020 – J. M. White, *Unity in Faith? Edinoverie, Russian Orthodoxy and Old Belief, 1800-1918*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2020.
- Αγγελιομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη 2007 – Ελένη Αγγελιομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη, «Το φαινόμενο της ζητείας κατά τη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο», in *Ιόνιος Λόγος*, 1 (2007), p. 247-293.
- ΑΣΤΔ – Stephanos Dragoumes Archives, Gennadeios Library, Athens.
- Βουδούρης 2011 – Αθανάσιος Βουδούρης, *Ο Βεροιώτης Ιερομόναχος Μελέτιος Κωνσταντινίτης*, Veroia, ΕΜΙΡΝΕ, 2011.
- Γεδεών 1934 – Μανουήλ Γεδεών, *Μνεΐα των προ εμού*, Athens, Τα Ηρονικά, 1934.
- ΙΑΥΕ – Greek Foreign Ministry Archives, Athens.
- Ιουστίνος 1991 – Ιερομόναχος Ιουστίνος, «Χάρτινες εικόνες», in *Σιμωνόπερα. Άγιο Όρος*, Athens, ΕΤΝΑ, 1991, p. 220-248.
- Ιωαννίκιος 1888-1891 – Ιωαννικίου Ιερομονάχου, *Ημερολόγιο και περιήγησις του ταξιδίου μας εις Ρωσσίαν*, Codex 45 of the H. M. Simonos Petras, p. 1-92
- Ιωαννίκιος 1892 – Ιωαννικίου Ιερομονάχου, *Σημείωσις*, Codex 45 of the H.M. Simonos Petras, p. 149-158 and 178-181.
- Κτενάς 1935 – Χριστόφορος Κτενάς, *Άπαντα τα εν Αγίω Όρει Ιερά Καθιδρύματα*, Athens, I. S. Alevropoulos & Cie, 1935.
- Μαραγκουδάκης 1996 – Διονύσιος Μαραγκουδάκης, *Το ιερόν και ηρωϊκόν της Κρήτης Αρκάδι*, n. p., 1996.
- Μελέτιος 1882 – [Meletios Konstamonites], *Περιήγησις Μελετίου Κωνσταντινίτου εις Ρωσσίαν από έτους 1862-1869*, Athens, Perris Bros, 1882.
- Νεόφυτος 1888-1892 – Neophytos Simonopetrites, Untitled account of the 1888-1892 zeteia trip, Athonian Archives, Codex 13/02/02/1-2, p. 99-113.
- Σμυρνάκης 1903 – Γεράσιμος Σμυρνάκης, *Το Άγιον Όρος*, Athens, Τυπογραφεϊον Α. Konstantinidou, 1903.
- Σταματόπουλος 1998 – Κώστας Σταματόπουλος, «‘Ζητείες’ Αγιορειτών στην Ρωσσία: δύο ανέκδοτα οδοιπορικά Σιμωνοπετριτών μοναχών στην Ρωσσία του περασμένου αιώνα (1888-1892)», in *Νέα Κοινωνιολογία*, 26 (1998), p. 52-63.
- Ταχιάος 1991 – Αντώνιος-Αμίλιος Ταχιάος, «Εικοστός αιώνας», in *Σιμωνόπερα. Άγιο Όρος*, Athens, ΕΤΝΑ, 1991, p.27-30.
- Χιονίδης 1961 – Γιώργος Χιονίδης, *Σύντομη Ιστορία του Χριστιανισμού στην περιοχή της Βέροιας*, Veroia, 1961.
- Χριστοδούλου 1960 – Αναστάσιος Χριστοδούλου, *Ιστορία της Βέροιας*, Veroia, 1960.
- Χρυσοχοΐδης 2011 – Κρίτων Χρυσοχοΐδης, «Άθως και Ρωσία (15ος-18ος αιώνας). Ιδεολογήματα και πραγματικότητα», in Όλγα Κατσαρδή-Hering et al. (eds), *Ρωσία και Μεσόγειος*, Athens, Herodotus, 2011, vol. I, p. 267-282.
- Берташ 2011 – Александр Берташ, «Исидор (Никольский Яков Сергеевич)», in *Православная Энциклопедия*, vol. 27, Moscow, 2011, p. 190-197.
- Дмитріевскій 1895 – Алексей Дмитриевскій, *Русскіе на Аѳонѣ. Очеркъ жизни и дѣятельности игумена русскаго пантелеѣмонаскаго монастыря, Священно-архимандрита Макарія (Сушкіна)*, St. Petersburg, Tipografiya A. Dobrodyava, 1895.
- Зеленина and Лопухина 2011 – Я. Э. Зеленина and Е. В. Лопухина, «Исидор (Никольский Яков Сергеевич). Иконография», in *Православная Энциклопедия*, vol. 27, Moscow, 2011, p. 197-198.
- Колыванов 2006 – Г. У. Колыванов, «Двоеверие», in *Православная Энциклопедия*, vol. 14, Moscow, 2006, p. 242-244.
- Машковцева 2014 – В. В. Машковцева, «Старообрядцы Вятской губернии во второй половине XIX – начале XX в.: социально-демографический аспект», in *Вестник Вятского государственного гуманитарного университета*, 9 (2014), p. 52-64.
- Святогорец 1850 – *Письма Святогорца к друзьям своим о Святой Горе Афонской*, St Petersburg, Tipografiya K. Fishera, 1850 (Vol. 1), and Tipografiya Shtaba Otdel'nago Korpusa Vnutrennej Strazhi, 1850 (Vol. 1).
- Святогорец 1873 – *Биография Святогорца, письма его к друзьям своим о Святой Горе Афонской до ныне неизданные и келейныя записки*, St Petersburg, Tipografiya A. A. Sokolova, 1873.
- Старообрядчество 2020 – *Старообрядчество в истории и культуре России: проблемы изучения к 400-летию со дня рождения протопопа Аввакума*, Moscow, Институт российской истории РАН – Государственный исторический музей – Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН, 2020.
- Тройницкий 1900 – Николай Александрович Тройницкий (под ред.), *Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской Империи, 1897 г. VI. Владимирская губерния. Тетрадь I*, St. Petersburg, Центральный Комитет Статистического Комитета Министерства Внутренних Дел, 1900.
- Уставъ 1843 – *Уставъ духовныхъ консисторій*, Sankt Petersburg, Sinodal'noj Tipografii, 1843.
- Эльмуратов 2009 – Р. К. Эльмуратов, «Научные командировки за границу профессора КДА А. А. Дмитриевского и их значение для российской литургической науки», in *Сборник студенческих научных работ*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo RSTGU, p. 57-68.

## Linguistic supervision:

Mihail Qaramah (Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918”, Alba Iulia);  
Alice Isabella Sullivan (Tufts University, Boston).

## Peer-reviewed by:

Yuliana Boycheva (Foundation for Research and technology - Hellas, Rethymno);  
Henrik von Achen (Universitetet i Bergen).