

I. KYZLASOVA

GREEK ICON OF THE XVIII c. WITH THE VIEW  
OF THE MONASTERY OF CHRIST PANTOCRATOR ON  
MOUNT ATHOS

The great collection of icons of the Moscow Historical Museum possesses an unique, never published before and previously not closely studied monument — a greek icon that we refer to the middle of the XVIII c. It can be titled “The Transfiguration with the By-standings and the View of the Monastery of Christ Pantocrator on Mount Athos” (И VIII 3645/58271). It is a well preserved icon of the middle size (0,55 × 0,4 m) with a trustworthingly drawn architectural ensemble, historical characters and inscriptions in greek. Greek origin of this relic is without any doubt. From ancient times russian iconpainting school included a tradition of making icons in which a picture of a town or more often a monastery occupied an important place. For greek monuments it is a very rare thing. Not long ago a group of triptychs became known that had been created in the XVI c. and had been dedicated to the monastery of St. Catherine on the Synai. Each triptych together with the other subjects has a detailed description of the monastery. It is an enigma for researchers why only this monastery was done such an honour of an iconpainting glorification unlike many others, the depiction of which can be found only on the engravings. Such engravings circulated widely in the XVII - XIX centuries. They were available for many pilgrims and had to remind them of holy things they had seen, serve as a support in their stories about pilgrimage and even prove it.

The entry in the inventory book about the icon that interests us is rather peculiar: instead of the objective information about this monument it contains a wordy account of the whole hypothesis explaining the subject. E. S. Ovchinnikova, who made this entry many years ago mistakingly read the name of the monk as “Nikon” instead of “Ioanikios, Emperor’s Brother”, whose figure is depicted to the left side of the cartouche with the “Transfiguration”. The first mistake was followed by others. The figure close to the imaginary Nikon, “Basileos Alexios” was misinterpreted as “Tsar Alexei Michailovich”.

Among other by-standings three Patriarchs are specially noticeable: St. Callistos and Anfim from Constantinople and Paisios from Pecz. The idea to link this icon to the Russian history turned to be so appealing and probably the general view of the drawing seemed so peculiar that it was characterized later on as an icon ordered to glorify a good turn of Patriarchs who had come to Moscow in 1666 to try Patriarch Nikon who had been later on turned back to monk and exiled to the North. The inventory book states that in the lower side of the icon Constantinople is depicted and suggests that it was drawn after the departure of Patriarchs and was sent to Alexei Michailovich as a gift.

Even from the first acquaintance with the monument we can see that there is a difference in the names of the Patriarchs who came to Moscow with those presented on the icon. Besides it becomes clear that even taking into account the tradition of the relative depiction of towns that existed all through the middle age period it is impossible to connect the painting on the lower side of the icon with the former Byzantine capital with its well-known one-headed St. Sophie's Cathedral. On the icon we see an architectural ensemble of the typical Greek monastery with the five-headed cathedral with its main icon "Transfiguration" (it is depicted twice on the larger cartouche in the upper zone and above the entrance gate of the monastery) and the environs painted in detail. Lifting a glance to the upper side of the relic in the narrow cartouche we can already find the title of the cloister "Pantocrator"<sup>1</sup>.

Starting to explore the subject of the icon it is necessary to find a Greek abbey with the same title situated most probably on the shore of the sea. The style of this icon proves to the fact that it relates to the middle of the XVIII c. An intense blue background of the by-standing figures, the form of the cartouche with the "Transfiguration" and a major detailisation of the picture show to that fact. Some figures of monks and life scenes near the monastery walls reflect a nonprofessional painting. It is obvious that this is a large abbey with three-storeyed walls and a "ring" of small temples outside and around the wall. Their titles are inscribed: St. Onufrios, St. Dimitrios, SS. Out-of-Moneys, SS. Apostles and Panagia. Only a widely respected monastery could order an icon in its honour, reminding of its own view, its main holy thing (an icon) and its history (by-standing figures). In accordance with an ancient

1. Unfortunately the signatures on the margins of three other cartouches were accurately cut away. And only the first letter "χ" from the word "χερ" that is "by the hand" was left from the traditional form of writing the name of the author on the right side of the lower margin.

tradition one group of by-standings was composed of monastery founders, the other of the contemporaries to the painting or its original. The sign tells us that Constantinople's Patriarch St. Callistos — "agios" was depicted with a nimbus. In the right group there are no people honoured as holy; the names of Patriarchs-Anfim from Constantinople and Paisios - from Pecz - are preceded by the word "cir" (master) used only when addressing a living person<sup>2</sup>. To the right there are also Abbot Ananias and Noble Parpulas with three boys.

There are several Patriarchs in the history of the greek church known as Callistos and Anfim as well as several Patriarchs named Paisios in the serb town of Pecz. But precisely the figure of the last Patriarch helps us to find a supplementary chronological reference-point: the Pecz Patriarchy is known to be destructed in 1766. What monastery is depicted on the icon then? If it was serbian this fact should have been reflected in signatures. Most probably it is a greek abbey connected with the Balkans. No doubt the only place for it could be Athos.

Among twenty four main monasteries of the "Holy Mountain" there is one dedicated to Pantocrator. We tried to explore its history and find a description of the architectural ensemble preferably of the XVIII c.

Russian monks — scientists Vasilij Grigorovich — Barskij and bishop Porfirij Uspenskij were outstanding specialists on Athos. The first visited and discribed the monastery twice shortly in 1725 and at large in 1744<sup>3</sup>. During the last visit he made a wonderful drawing of the monastery's general look from a close hill from another then on the icon point of view. But we can easily recognise main buildings and other peculiarities of the monastery and its surroundings as well as the same form of the gulf and the location of this ensemble on its shore. Trying to make a precise and lively view of the place, the painter couldn't but depict monks' figures walking or carrying loads, swimming in a boat. The picture made in 1744 coincides with the icon in every detail. The coincidence is seen not only in the buildings of the monastery itself — a cathedral, a belfry, three storeyed cells, walls and towers with two entrances, "thresholds" on the pillars, the sacred image on the wall, a pavilion for rest of the monks — but also in temples outside the wall, a cross near the covered well, a mill, an aqueduct, a yard, a cemetery, two ship depositories

2. On the opinion of B. L. Fonkich who gave a consultation about all the signatures of the icon.

3. *Stranstvovaniy Basil'y Grigorovicha-Barskogo po Svytim Mestam Vostoka s 1723 po 1747 g.*, SPb., 1885, ch. 1, s. 232; SPb., 1887, ch. III, s. 182-189.

and at last in the river and the sea that surrounds the monastery from the East, and in its precipice shores and narrow, shallow entrance for ships. A hundred years later Porfirij Uspenskij shortly and expressingly related what his respected predecessor had seen: the monastery “stands on the firm, precipice as a wall high place more than twenty sages above the water, overhanging surprisingly and awfully the sea; and there are the cells there hanging over the water with those sitting inside not even able to hear each other but only the raw of the waves”<sup>4</sup>.

V. Grigorovich-Barskij had already mentioned two brothers: “Greek Tsar” Alexios and John later Father Ioanikios the founders of the abbey. But only Porfirij Uspenskij who critically studied written and other sources was the first to restore a true picture of the creation of Pantocrator monastery. This is a precious work for us. The researcher obtained a more specific information about the mistakes of those who rewrote the history of the monastery and who erroneously read one important date. Thus he rejected a false monastery legend. The core of this discovery was following. There was a document in the abbey according to which its founding brothers had lived in the XIII c. and Alexix had been the “Tzar of Romans” because of the fact that he was a Stratopedarch and his infantry had liberated Constantinople from latins in 1261 and afterwards he became Caesar. The document turned to be false. “Pantocratorians would not deceive a specialist on Byzantian history”, — the scientist wrote. The monastery wanted to lengthen its history to the utmost and exalt it by relating to the Emperor’s family. Certain non-direct grounds surely existed for that: the brothers had lived in XIV c. and John’s wife had relatives in the Emperor’s family. Approximately in 1353 the brothers had helped Empress Anna Penkernissa to return one of her estates seized by foreign oppressors. In reward the Pantocrator monastery founded earlier had been given its estate. After Alexix had died Great Primirkirij John had built the abbey to the end, took monastic vows and died in 1363<sup>5</sup>.

It is known that St. Callistos I was a Patriarch in 1350-1353, 1355-1363. We see that the icon from the Historical Museum correctly reflects the existence of the monastery’s founding fathers in the XIV c. and a legend about “Basileus Alexios”.

4. Porfirij Uspenskij, *Vostok Hristianskiy. Afon: Pervoe Puteshestvie v Afonskie Monastiri i Skiti. 1846 god.*, M., 1880, ch. 2, otd. 11, s. 109-110.

5. Porfirij Uspenskij, *Vostok Hristianskiy. Afon. Istoriya Afona*. Ch. III. *Afon Monacheskij*, Otd. II, SPb., 1892, s. 119-127; Pelekanidis S. M., Christou P. C., Tsioumis Ch., Kadas S. N., *The Treasures of Mont Afons. Illyminated Manuscripts*, Vol. I, Athens, 1974, p. 120.

Major difficulties occur when we try to decipher the group of by-standings to the right. It seems that we should never possess any data about a Father-Superior and a Noble. The figures of the two Patriarchs also present difficulties. The only time the years of the rule of Constantinople's "Patriarch Anfim and Pecz's Patriarch Paisios" coincided was 1623. They are Anfim II (1623) and Paisios I (1614/1615-1646). The style of our icon cannot be referred to such an early time, thus we can only suggest that that was the time when a protooriginal (maybe an engraving) was created which was repeated in the icon later on. The date of 1623 doesn't contradict the history of existence of a peculiar, not widely known type of gravings and icons known in the European literature as "topographic loca sancta". As mentioned above the tradition of precise depiction of orthodox holy places goes to the XVI c.<sup>6</sup> It became relatively popular in the XVII c. That's why a suggested version is quite rightful. But Paisios I was never related to Athos<sup>7</sup> that's why another version seems to be reasonable: in XVIII c. when this icon was created an unknown figure on the protooriginal was replaced by the figure of Paisios II. No historical data is left about this Patriarch—even about the precise time of his rule. It was probably one or two years (about 1755). History left us nothing but a usual supplement to the name — "greek". Does an icon from Moscow indeed give us a true depiction of this person not at all mentioned both in Greek and Balkan sources? In this case we cannot exclude a possibility that this man himself ordered an icon. The date — 1755 — corresponds to the style of the relic very well.

There is still another moment that can indirectly prove our considerations. It was already mentioned that simplified monks' figures near monastery's walls differ from the drawings in the upper part which are rather modest but professional in form and colouration. That's why it seems quite probable that this icon was made on the basis of an earlier engraving. An iconpainter could more easily interpret in familiar terms the upper part of the composition than the view of the monastery and its surroundings.

There are several engravings left which can be related to the last quarter of the XVIII-middle of the XIX c.<sup>8</sup> Except for several details they reproduce

6. Sotheby's, 28 november 1991, Russian Pictures, Icons and Works of Art, London, 1991, N541, p. 96, bibl.

7. This opinion was rather categorically expressed by S. Petkovich.

8. Mylonas P. M., *Athos and its Monastic Institutions Old Engraving and Other Works of Art*, Athen, 1963, p. 104, N40; Polevoy B. M., *Iskusstvo Gretsii*, M., 1984, T. 2, s. 278, N37; Παπιστράτου Ν., *Χάρτινες εικόνες, ορθόδοξα φράγγικα χαρακτικά, 1665-1899*, Αθή-

very accurately a general view of the abbey, its territory, the sea. In the upper side of the engravings there is an icon "Transfiguration" and three main scenes from the life of prophet Ilya and his small and secluded monastery (it is absent on the icon). We know that Ilya's small and secluded monastery got a special significance in the end of the XVIII c. and in the XIX c. thanks to the ukrain and moldovian monks headed by the famous Paisij Velichkovskij.

The presence in Pantocrator at the end of 1750 of a large group of monks closely connected with Russia gives us a possibility to suggest cautiously that Ilya's small monastery possessed russian icons painted in the mentioned above tradition of the depiction of architectural ensembles. They could have made a greek icon-painter think about turning of the engraving into a colourful painting on a desk. No doubt Ilya's small monastery attracted the attention of the public mainly because of a community charter previously unknown on the "Holy Mountain" put in force by Paicij Velichkovskij.

Thus compositions with donators on the sides of the upper part were not regarded as necessary a few time ago. The drawings of the monastery and its main holy thing were most often made in the same manner. This tendency was probably born in the middle of the XVIII c. when one figure of a donator could possibly be replaced by another.

It is remarkable that a peculiar manner of painting started appearing in the monastery already in XIV c. Thanks to Porfirij Uspenskij we know that in one of the church-porches there was a marble tomb of the founders and above it there was a niche with Pantocrator and Alexix' and John's signs proving their donatorship were beneath. In the XVI c. a new figure and another donator sign were added nearby<sup>9</sup>. So untill XVI-XVII c. which were the centuries of the development of "Topographic loca sancta" ancient patterns of monumental painting existed, becoming more complex. The fresco was ruined only in the middle of the XIX c. during the repairment.

It should be mentioned here that a well known icon "Pantocrator" (1363) from Hermitage which is one of the best bysantian icons in all russian collection also relates to this composition. In the lower part of the icon we see small kneeling figures of Alexix and John and the same signs as on the fresco above

va, 1986, t. II, N 477, p. 446 (1779 y.); N. 478, p. 446-447 (about 1850 y.); N 479, p. 448 (1844 y.). I thank S. Petkovich because he sent to me photographs of two engravings. On his opinion the date of one engraving (Παπαστράτου N., N 478) about 1830 y.; the origing of another sheet (1844 y.) is Xilandar.

9. Porfirij Uspenskij, *Vostok Hristianskiy. Afon: Pervoe Puteshestvie v Afonskie Monastiri i Skiti. 1846 god.*, M., 1880, ch. 2, otd. II, S. 112-114.

the tomb. We possess only a small piece with a part of an elder brother's figure. John, unlike on the icon of the XVIII c. is presented in a secular dress with a two-headed eagle<sup>10</sup>.

Two greek relics created in one and the same monastery of Athos with an interval of 400 years are found in two russian museums.

A whole series of frescos from the collection of Hermitage comes from this monastery as well as a wonderful and often reproduced icon "Twelve Apostles" (first third of the XIV c.) from the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts and a fragment of the fresco "Christ of the Vigilent Eye" from the Historical Museum (about 1360-1370)<sup>11</sup>. Most of these relics were in XIX c. removed from Athos by famous collectors A. Muraviev and P. Sevastyanov.

A. Muraviev visited the monastery in autumn 1849 and saw the repairment there, many of the frescos were ruined. A russian writer and pilgrim A. Muraviev appreciated ancient drawings: "I didn't see such frescos even in Italy", — he said, trying to explain to the monks who made the reconstruction what they were doing. In the result they started to regret about the destruction. A small piece of a fresco (0,45 × 0,35 m) with the head and an arm of "Christ of the Vigilent Eye" was already brought down, but "I collected the parts and carried the fragments to Russia", — Muraviev wrote. He also found some relics in a "pile of stored icons". Besides he stated that Alexix' and John's tomb was moved to another place at that very time and a window made instead of drawing in the niche, the view of the monastery and donators signs ...<sup>12</sup>.

Finally we should say that the origin of the icon of the XVIII c. described above is still unknown. It is clear only that in 1920-s it was kept in the State Museum Fund a major part of which was in the Historical Museum. This icon was not necessarily brought to Russian by a collector because it was intended for a pilgrim. Icons dedicated to the same theme were already known in Russia in the first half of the XVII c. There is a precious illustration to that: the Solovetskij Monastery's monk Alexander Bulatnikov placed the

10. Bank A. V., *Vizantiyskoe Iskusstvo v Sobraniyah Sovetskogo Sojuza*, L.-M., 1966, s. 324-325, N 265-269; *Iskusstvo Vizantii v Sobraniyah SSSR. Katalog Vystavki*, L., 1987, N 947.

11. *Vizantiya, Balkany, Rus'. Ikony Kontsa XIII — Pervoy Poloviny XV Veka. Katalog Vystavki, Gosudarstvennaya Tretyakovskaya Galereya. Avgust-Sentyabr' 1991 goda*, M., 1991, s. 263-264, Prilozhenie A (I. Kyzlasova).

12. [Murav'yov A. N.], *Pis'ma s Vostoka v 1849-1850 godah*, SPb., 1851, s. 182, 346; [Murav'yov A. N.], *Opisanie Predmetov Drevnosti i Svytyni, Sobrannyh Puteshestvennikom po Svyatym Mestam*, Kiev, 1872, s. 16.

icon “Mount Athos” in his abbey<sup>13</sup>. But still among the previously published and preserved till nowadays icons the same portrayal of the Athos’ monastery wasn’t seen either by the historians of art from Greece and Balkans to whom the author of this article showed the icon in the museum’s depository or by those who saw it in the exhibitions “Postbysantian Painting. Icons of the XV-XVIII c. from the Collections of Moscow, Sergiev Pasad, Tver and Ryazan”, that took place in Moscow in July-August 1991<sup>14</sup>.

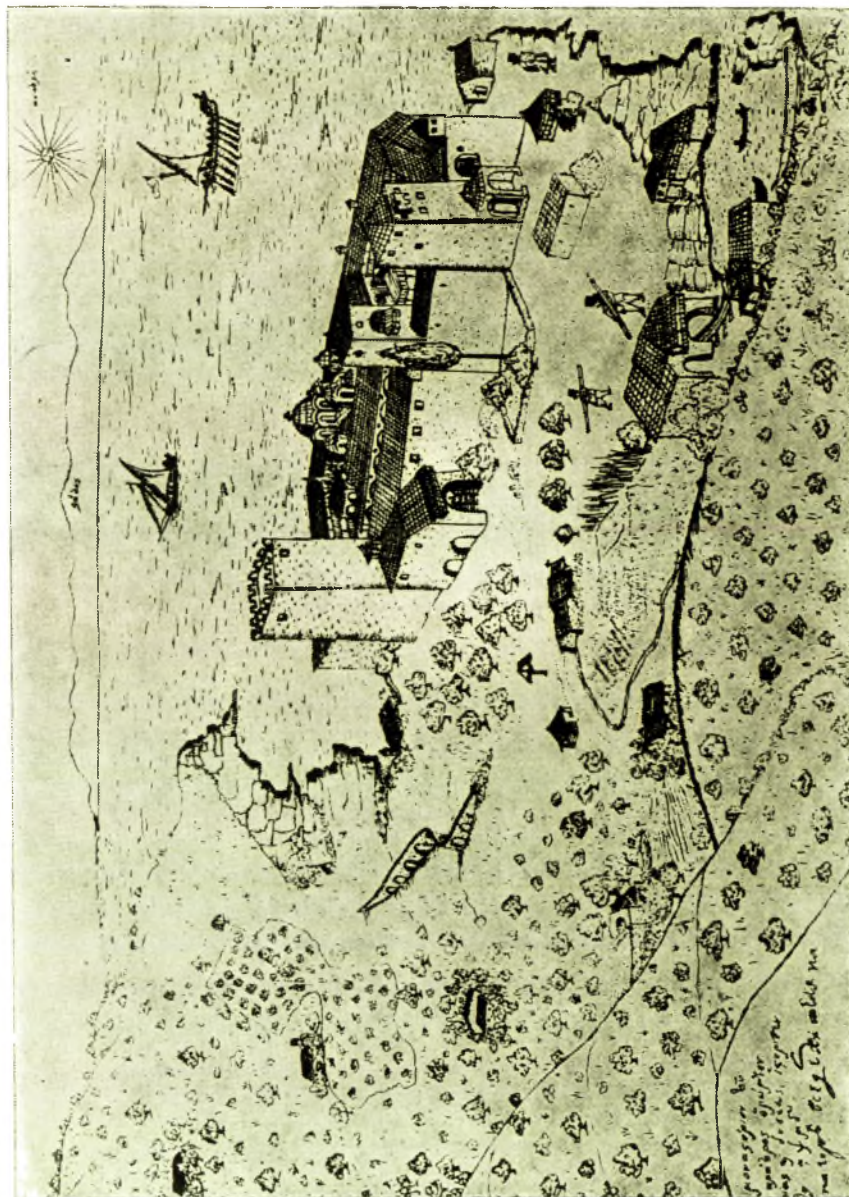
13. Shchennikova L. A., *Voprosy Izucheniya Solovetskih Ikon XVI-XVII vv.—Drevnerusskoe Iskusstvo. Hudozhestvennye Pamyatniki Russkogo Severa*, M., 1989, s. 274.

14. *Postvizantiyskay Zhivopis’*. *Ikony XV-XVIII vekov iz Sobraniy Moskvy, Sergieva Posada, Tveri i Ryzani. Katalog Vistavki. Gosudarstvennyy Musey Izobrazitel’nyh Iskusstv. Iul’—Avgust 1991 goda*, N 106 (I. Kyzlasova), v pechati.





1. Icon "The Transfiguration with the By-standing and the View of the Monastery of Christ Pantokrator on Mount Athos". Middle of the XVIII c., Moscow Historical Museum.



2. Fragment of drawing by V. Grigorovich - Barskij. "Monastery of Christ Pantocrator on Mount Athos". 1744 y.





3. Athor unknown. Engraving "Monastery of Christ Pantocrator on Mount Athos". Middle of the XIX c. Byzantin Museum in Athin.