

INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS



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**WORKS OF ATHONITE ICON PAINTERS
IN BULGARIA (1750-1850)**

AUTHOR SUMMARY

OF A THESIS PAPER FOR OBTAINING A DSc DEGREE

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2021

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IN ART AND FINE ARTS, 8.1,
THEORY OF ART

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Sofia

2021

The DSc thesis has been discussed and approved for public defense on a Medieval and National Revival Research Group meeting held on October 16, 2020

The DSc thesis consists of 371 pages: an introduction, 5 chapters, conclusion and illustrations` provenance, 1063 illustrations in the text and a bibliography of 309 Bulgarian, and 162 foreign titles.

The public defense will be held on 16th March 2021, 11:00 am, at the Institute of Art Studies. Members of the scientific committee: Assoc. Prof. Angel Nikolov, PhD, Sofia University; Assoc. Prof. Blagovesta Ivanova-Tsotsova, DSc, VSU; Prof. Elena Popova, DSc, Institute of Art Studies – BAS; Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov, PhD, Institute of Art Studies – BAS; Prof. Ivan Biliarsky, DSc, Institute of Historical Studies – BAS; Corr. Mem. Prof. Ivanka Gergova DSc, Institute of Art Studies – BAS; Prof. Mariyana Tsibranska-Kostova, DSc, Institute for Bulgarian Language – BAS; Assoc. Prof. Ivan Vanev, PhD, Institute of Art Studies – BAS, substitute member; Prof. Konstantin Totev, DSc, National Archaeological Institute with Museum – BAS, substitute member.

The materials are available to those who may be interested in the Administrative Services Department of the Institute of the Art Studies on 21 Krakra Str., Sofia.

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WORKS OF ATHONITE ICON PAINTERS IN BULGARIA (1750-1850)

I. General Characteristic of the Dissertation

The text aims to track down and explore the murals and icons located on the present-day territory of Bulgaria which were made by Athonite icon painters. Their works from Mount Athos itself and the Balkan countries are used merely as comparative material since they are not part of Bulgarian art.

The known sources show that the so-called “Athonite icon painters” must be divided into two types. The first one includes those who were trained on the spot at Mount Athos in the two studios there: the one of Nicephorus of Karpenisi and the other of Macarius of Galatista. The other icon-painters from the period, who worked only at Mount Athos, without being trained on the spot, are defined as Mount Athos-related masters. In a separate part are examined the anonymous works from the territory of Bulgaria that can be linked to Athos. Their selection from among the huge quantity of unsigned icons is determined by two factors: stylistic similarity with the works of Athonite masters, or ktetor’s inscriptions, sources and other historical data that link, in a categorical manner, an anonymous work in Bulgaria to its Mount Athos origin. This part also pays attention to the Bulgarian icon painters of whom it is incorrectly assumed that they were trained on Athos.

The chronology stated in the title is formally generalized and marks solely the limits of the period in which the two Athonite studios emerged and developed. If we approach in a more specific manner the topic should be limited to the period between 1773, i.e. the date of the first known work of an icon painter from the two studios, and 1821 when the occupation of Mount Athos put an end to the wide spreading of Athonite icons outside the monastic republic. But before and after the above years there are processes and facts that are part of the formation, development and the concluding stage of existence of the two Athonite studios and therefore the chronological limites are slightly broadened to the period 1750-1850.

In the conclusion are analyzed the roads by which the works of the Athonite icon painters made their way to on the territory of Bulgaria although the evidence known to science do not provide a full picture of the events. And yet the main emphasis is put on the institution of itinerant monks [taxidiotes] that should be considered the principal intermediary in commissioning and delivery of icons in Bulgarian lands. Attention is also paid to the role of the individual personality since the predominant number of examples is private ktetor commissions. In this context is also mentioned the pilgrimage which, according to the available data, almost completely overlaps with the ktetor commissions and is unjustifiably considered the most wide-spread reason for the entry of Athonite production in Bulgaria.

II. Review of Literature

In the research of the Athonite art related to Bulgaria there is uncertainty about some basic questions. In order to clarify them the literature on the Athonite icon painters has been selected and given a critical review as it has been tied to drawing the necessary conclusions as early as in that part. This method enables the reader to be already aware, when (s)he gets to the essence of the text, i.e. the presentation of the works of the Athonite icon painters in Bulgaria, of what is understood here by some key concepts such as an “Athonite icon painter” and an “Athonite style,” which have been biasly not commented on in the literature.

1. “Athonite” and “National” in the Literature

The notion from older literature that the monuments from Mount Athos itself are part of Bulgarian art has been revised. The large-scale Bulgarization of the Athonite icon painters

aiming to include them into our Revival art and the highlighting of the national nature of Bulgarian ktetorship in the Athonite monasteries considered a conscious patriotic act have been criticized. In fact, the latter is quite common religious donation aiming at a leading sacred center and carries a higher degree of social, not national, prestige.

It is also necessary to differentiate between the art created on Mount Athos and the art from the Bulgarian lands because there is no actual evidence of a bilaterality of the links which can bring together the artistic processes from the two territories. The patterns and influences run in a one-way direction: from Mount Athos to the Bulgarian territory, and just individual works of art were incidentally transferred from Bulgaria to Mount Athos, which merely imitate bilateral relationships. There is no documented case of direct commission or invitation from Athos to Bulgaria's lands before the murals of Zahari Zograf in the Great Lavra (1852), while the examples to the opposite are numerous and cover the second half of the 18th and early 19th c.

2. The Opposition of Foreign/Athonite – Local/Bulgarian Icon Painter

A new approach can be observed in the post 1990s literature. In it now it is clearly emphasized that the "Athonite" art was made by foreign icon painters, mostly Greeks by birth. In this context is examined the so-called "common international style," formally referred to as "Athonite," which cannot be specified in artistic terms since it is a definition that includes the works accumulated for centuries on Mount Athos and made by icon painters of different nationalities whose professional abilities and places of training were not the same. Therefore, this style is understood as a "conditional concept" that conceals not a definite circle of icon painters or works but designates the geographical place itself. Sources supporting this conclusion have been cited which prove that only in the period from the second half of the 18th and the first quarter of the 19th c. one can actually speak of the existence of Athonite icon painters, without that definition being entirely conditional.

3. "Athonite Icon Painter"

3.1. Bulgarization of the Athonite Icon Painters in Literature

The Bulgarization of the Athonite icon painters is in fact part of the common Balkan tendency in the literature after the Second World War of large-scale "nationalization" of artistic facts and masters from different places. In this respect Mount Athos is very convenient because it is a territory that is perceived solely as Orthodox and, at the same time, it has a multiethnic presence. As for the Athonite art, it is not representative of a country or an ethnic group, it has no "nationality" of its own and no "sovereign protection," respectively. For this reason it becomes an object of appropriation. But in reality it is not designed based on the enclave model so that one can consider every icon painter having "entered" the "Bulgarian territory" of the Zograf Monastery or the "Serbian" one of the Hilandar Monastery becomes immediately a bearer of artistic ideas and an author of production which are part of the art of those countries. Nor is every Athonite monastery, regardless of its formal association with an ethnic group or a country an enclosed artistic circle where no outside influences can make their way into. Therefore, it is not only imperative to differentiate between the art created on Mount Athos and the art from the national territories of the Balkan countries but it is also useless to discuss the ethnic origin of the icon-painters. Because from the point of view of art until the struggles for autocephalous Church and political liberation of the Balkan states the nationality of an icon painter is a marginal question. A question born solely by contemporary thought, state of affairs and populism that should be avoided in every specialized approach to such material.

3.2. Identity and Professional Status of the Athonite Icon Painters

On the basis of their signatures and the evidence of their origin in this part an attempt is made to determine who the two studios' Athonite icon painters themselves perceived to be. Traditionally, they specify in their signatures their birthplaces as well as their teacher's name. It was not until the later examples dating from the mid-19th c. on that one can observe a general trend of the icon painters working on Mount Athos being designated as ones related to a certain Athonite center or monastery as a name under which they sought to affirm their reputation and as a place they could be sought for a commission. This shows that despite its wide-spread use today the designation of "Athonite icon painter" is later and artificially created term that can designate only the geographical place while in fact the icon painters themselves did not have such well-developed self-consciousness and did not consider themselves icon painters – representatives of an Athonite artistic school.

The Athonite icon painters of the two studios were monks which is proven for each of them. But the predominant importance is their icon painting craft. Therefore, they must be examined as an artistic community organized in monastic environment, and not as monks engaging in painting. Thus, the Athonite masters are in fact quite common post-Byzantine icon painters of Greek origin, and what actually set them apart from the other similar masters is the mandatory monkhood, the quality of their works as well the geographical place where they founded their studios and worked. Indeed they had an image of "adroit" masters who had to be sought for at the Mount Athos itself to be found. The sources also make it clear that they got higher pay than the other icon painters circulating at the same time on Athos, and now this explains their signatures in which they used their teacher's name as their surname.

4. "Athonite Style"

4.1. Conditionality of the Term

Style is the main factor determining our contemporary understanding of Athonite art. The specific characteristics of that style, however, remain unspecified. There is also no certainty as to the chronological limits in which the expression "Athonite style" can be used since as a rule it refers to all works located on the Mount Athos. As a result of that almost everything that is subject to the assessment of "first quality" performance in post-Byzantine style using Baroque motives described both specifically and quite generally as "Western influences," is being called "Athonite". And such a broad description "opens up" an opportunity for defining almost any quality work from the period as an Athonite one.

Along with that science is stalled in using conditional terminology. Over the years and due to the increasing volume of the literature related to the Athonite style, its descriptions in terms of artistic characteristics and terminology reach some exorbitantly broad ranges containing any type of definitions that can be entirely contradictory. Thus, today's description of the "common Athonite style" is impossible to be univocally understood, and therefore this term is made fully pointless.

However, the term "Athonite style" is unknown to the sources from the period, at least in this pure form as a definition. Thus, it turns out that the "Athonite style" is yet another artificially created concept in contemporary literature aiming to replace the entire "Athonite art", without referring to a specific time, monument, icon painter or studio. A generalized "Athonite style" however cannot exist. Style is a concept related to the work of the individual master or studio, and not of the totality of Athonite icon painters as a whole. The concept of "style" as an artistic category cannot meet those high requirements and be an art itself because style is part of that art, and not the vice versa.

4.2. Parameters of Style

The high qualification and prestige the Athonite icon painters had are fully relative concepts today. Thus, the assessment of their works depends entirely on the point of view, taste and

preferences of each researcher. There was a similar situation in late 18th and early 19th c. when it seems there was no clear answer to the question concerning what precisely set the icons of the Athonite masters apart from those of the other Greek icon painters. This speaks of a “stylistic unity” among the Greek icon painters from different geographical places and of different training. This paradox is due to the late time in which the icon painters worked and to the accumulation of stylistic characteristics of diverse nature which at that time were long assimilated in post-Byzantine art and were obviously appropriated in different places and by different icon painters all over Greece, and not only on Mount Athos.

As regards Mount Athos, this means that there is an artistic phenomenon where the geographical location replaces the aesthetic and artistic categories, fully overlaps with them in the ideas of the people of that time and gave them a guarantee of quality. This is clearly attested in the sources where the “Athonite” icon painters were considered elite masters, which means that the Athonite style does not allow the primitive. What is meant here by “primitive” is naivete and insufficient professional skills, and not deformation of the forms or ignorance of the perspective since the last two characteristics appear in the Athonite icon painters. But they are always skillfully masked by the exquisite and highly professional execution of the works themselves and thus they actually lend a “character” to their icons and murals thanks to which we often recognize them. In this sense the assessment of M. Chatzidakis who calls the Athonite art from the late 18th c. “craftmanslike” is true only from in terms of the technique of execution of the works themselves which stands at a very high level and corresponds to a superbly mastered craft. But from aesthetic point of view his phrasing is unjustified because it provokes the idea that we would meet something “primitive” in the works of the Athonite icon painters who are “craftsmen” with a “rural background”. After such a description the example that immediately comes to Bulgarian researcher’s mind is solely the production of Tryavna icon painters from late 19th c. Thus, the problem with characterization of the Athonite style becomes also a problem of national perception, training and taste of each researcher.

III. Athonite Icon Painters after 1750

The first characteristic that can categorize an icon painter as “Athonite” is his place of training. If we exclude the elusive evidence of the functioning of an Athonite studio with local monks in the 17th c. and the so-called “students” around Dionysius of Fournas, the period, most broadly speaking, between the last quarter of the 18th and the first quarter of the 19th c. is the only one during the post-Byzantine art when one can speak of “Athonite” icon painters. The reason why is that it was not until then that two studios were formed where icon painters were systematically trained, and this is clearly supported by the sources and repeatedly documented. These icon painters were monks and lived mainly on Mount Athos. They did not only work on the spot but also carried out the external commissions in case that a populated area sought Athonite icon painters. Thus, Mount Athos for the first time became a functioning artistic center that “emanated” icon painters and thus influenced Balkan art.

1. Icon Painters Trained on Mount Athos in the Two Studios There

The Athonite studios were housed in two cells in Karyes belonging to the Karakallou Monastery which rented them out. They were led by Nicephorus of Karpenisi and Macarius of Galatista who are considered students of Damascene of Karpenisi. The first studio led by Nicephorus who directly succeeded Damascene as a teacher was organized at the All Saints cell as the evidence that it accommodated icon painters covers the period from 1773 to 1890, of course, with certain interruptions. Some of Nicephorus’s students with whom he worked as a team are Metrophanes of Vize and Nicephorus’s nephew Josaphat of Karpenisi who, in turn, taught new students and worked with them. Jacob who separated from the group and worked

while based in Nea Skiti is another student of Nicephorus. According to P. Uspensky Josaphat trained his brother Nicephorus II and Gerasimos of Vize, and their students were Anthim and Gabriel. Since following Uspensky it is known that Nicephorus trained 12 icon painters, while the names of no more than three or four of them are known, we can assume that the monk Dositheus of Peć, Serbia, who is now considered in the literature to have been trained in the same place and whose belonging in general as an icon painter working on Mount Athos is clearly identified, belonged, at least indirectly, to that studio.

The second studio was organized in the Nativity of Theotokos cell and the stay of the icon painters there is evidenced in the period 1785-1882, again with interruptions. Macarius of Galatista is considered the founder of that studio as in the early period of its development it is accepted that there were only relatives of Macarius – his nephews Zechariah and Benjamin. Their brother Macarius II became their student, and after him came a number of other students, including ones having joined the studio at the time when the icon painters left Mount Athos after 1821 and worked in Skiathos and Skopelos. The remaining icon painters of the studio are later, and some of them did not work on Mount Athos where the only prominent representative until mid-19th c. remained Macarius II who sometimes worked in partnership with Gregorius and Benjamin Kontrakis.

2. Nature of Training at the Athonite Studios

The known data show that apprenticeship at Athonite studios was accompanied by becoming a monk that goes along with the start or puts the end of training itself. This means that all icon painters associated in the literature with training on Mount Athos, who are referred to as “daskaloi” [teachers] according to the evidence from the sources that we have or, to put it otherwise, who have not taken the religious vows but are part of the laity, could not have been trained at the two studios on Mount Athos. Therefore, from now on any expressions related to “schooling at the Athonite studios” and suchlike parasite clichés that create a distorted picture of the training conducted on Mount Athos at that time should be carefully specified. As if anyone could have gone there and could have become an icon painter as the training is described in our older literature. Because it is now clear that it is all about private studios organized almost entirely on the principle of kinship. This conclusion is directly related to the Bulgarian icon-painters and, in particular, to Hristo Dimitrov who is referred to as “daskalos” [teacher] in 1793 in the chronicle of the Bishop Church in Samokov, and this automatically excludes him from the icon painters trained on Mount Athos because he had not taken the religious vows to become a monk.

3. Works in Bulgaria

3.1. General Overview and Episodic Works

The occupation of Mount Athos (1821-1829) puts an end to the quality Athonite art. After 1834, there was no living icon painter left from the first generations trained at the two studios. On top of that the occupation also puts an end to the practice of commissioning icons from Mount Athos for Bulgarian towns and villages and monasteries. Therefore, it is logical that almost none of Nicephorus’s students working from the 1830s on has any works in Bulgaria as the same is also valid for the followers of Macarius of Galatista, after the death of Benjamin (+1834) and Zechariah (+1822). We know only one icon made by Nicephorus II depicting St. Eleutherius which is kept at the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum. It dates from 1836.

Much more complicated is the case of the icon of the Three Holy Hierarchs from the Church of Ascension of Christ in Vratsa painted in 1844. It was also made by the icon painter Athanasius who is thought to originate from Galatista. In fact his signature was not deciphered correctly in the literature and it turns out that he was born in Naousa and has

nothing to do with Mount Athos. However, it is possible that he was the father of Alexi Atanasov of whom there is indirect evidence that was an icon painter too.

3.2. Nicephorus of Karpenisi

It seems that Nicephorus was most famous among his contemporary Athonite masters from the second half of the 18th and early 19th c. He repeatedly worked outside the boundaries of Athos as part of that production is his icons within Bulgaria's present-day borders. Alongside his works that have already been published, among which stand out the despotic icons made in 1805 for the Church of St. Nicholas in the town of Elena, a great part of his other works are attributed to Hristo Dimitrov. This is valid for a total of four iconostasis sets: one for the Bishop Church in Samokov (1793), another for the old Church of St. Nicholas in Vratsa (1803), one for the Church of the Holy Trinity in Ruse (1807-1808) and his undated icons for the Church of the Assumption in Pazardzhik.

Several individual icons such as the one of Andrew the Apostle which at the present is in the Church of St. Theodore Stratelates in Dolno Raykovo, the Virgin Hodegetria originating from the Church of the Assumption in Haskovo, St. Pantaleon from the Rozhen Monastery or St. Nicholas on a throne with Deesis which is from the Church of St. Constantine and St. Helen in Plovdiv, can be attributed to the hand of Nicephorus.

For the time being there is not a single known icon signed by him in Bulgaria. There is no evidence that he had ever resided on the territory of today's Bulgaria or that he was directly related to any Bulgarian settlement and certain ktetor. However, there is sufficient data that his works emerge mainly in relation to the nunneries of the Hilandar Monastery and the Zograf Monastery whose total number covers practically all more important towns and villages in present-day Bulgarian lands. There are indirect sources for two of the commissions showing that they are likely of private ktetor nature. These are his icons for the Bishop Church in Samokov donated by Bishop Filothei and the ones for Pazardzhik where Bishop Dionysius emerges as the principal donor. But in both cases the icons were commissioned from Mount Athos, and not personally to the icon painter. It is possible that some of his works made their way to Bulgaria also via nunneries of the Vatopedi Monastery, one with which Nicephorus maintained lasting relations. Single works of his may have reached Bulgaria via itinerant monks [taxidiotes] carrying their personal belongings across the Bulgarian lands which are kept at the present in various museums all over the country.

3.3. Metrophanes of Vize

Metrophanes is probably the most senior student of Nicephorus of Karpenisi who succeeded him as the head of the team after his death in 1816. It is unknown how he turned up on Mount Athos because obviously he has no kinship to his teacher. His works are relatively well-known, and his origin from Vize, Thrace is beyond any doubt. It is known that he did not leave Mount Athos as he stayed there even during the 1821-1829 occupation. He lived in the All Saints cell where he received commissions and where he died, probably in the beginning of 1830s because no works of his are known thereafter, at least for now.

Similarly to his teacher his works are found in Bulgaria mainly through the nunneries of the Athonite monasteries. Such is the case with his icons for the Church of Archangel Michael in Etropole from 1815, one of which is signed. His relation to Vatopedi Monastery, by way of which the greatest number of his works appears outside the boundaries of Mount Athos, is well-known. In Bulgaria one of them is the icon of Panagia Esfagmeni which is kept at the Crypt Branch of the National Gallery. It is unsigned but is dated in 1809 and has an inscription on the reverse mentioning the name of Hadji Paschalis and the Vatopedi Monastery.

A big set of despotic and feast icons made by Metrophanes for the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in the village of Shipochane has remained partially published so far. They most probably date from the second decade of the 19th c. In terms of their stylistic characteristics and comparison to the icon of Panagia Esfagmeni the icon of Our Lady of Sorrows [Mater Dolorosa] with the Crucifixion of Jesus and prefigurations related to Jesus' death upon the cross can also be attributed to Metrophanes. It is placed in the inside of a reliquary from the collection of the National Historical Museum which originates from the Eikosifoinissis Monastery.

3.4. Dositheus of Peć

The monk Dositheus of Peć is not quite well-known today but he is an icon painter who had some enviable professional skills. His biography is unclear but as far as it is known he worked on Mount Athos during the second and third decades of the 19th c. It is believed that he was a monk in the St. John the Baptist cell at the Iviron monastery where he made a series of icons of his contemporary new martyrs which were preparing for martyr's death in the St. Nicholas cell at the skete. In stylistic aspect the icons made by Dositheus approximate those made by Nicephorus of Karpenisi and therefore it can be assumed that he was trained at his studio. Although he was born in Serbia, a fact repeatedly underlined by the icon painter himself in his signatures, the writing of the inscriptions from the icons reveals his entirely Greek training and his tie to the Athonite art.

The six despotic icons from the iconostasis of the church at the Nunnery in Samokov can be attributed to him as his works in Bulgaria. Those icons are incorrectly attributed to Hristo Dimitrov, Yoan Ikonopisets or Dimitar Hristov but they belonged to the old church at the nunnery erected in 1818. Two of the icons, Panagia Pantanassa and the Intercession of the Theotokos, are dated to 1819, and the remaining four can be dated on the basis of those two.

3.5. Hierodeacon David and the Monk Jacob

These icon painters are known in our literature as authors of the murals from the Church of St. Nicholas in the town of Elena (1810-1811). An undoubted stylistic parallel to the icon painter Jacob's work are the murals from the chapel in the cell of St. Apostles of the Dionysiou Monastery signed by the icon painter and dated to 1818. Thanks to this monument the origin of the icon painter Jacob who was a student of Nicephorus of Karpenisi is made clear. It is known that he separated from his group and worked based in Nea Skiti.

There are more works made by Jacob in Bulgaria which have not been known to date. Those are six icons of 1818 originating from the Church of St. Demetrius in Sliven and one icon of the Holy Mother of God with 17 hagiographic scenes from the Monastery of Troyan of the same year. Sources show it is very likely that all those icons were brought to Bulgaria all at once by the Hilandar itinerant monk Leontios who showed up in 1818 at the Monastery of Troyan and was held back there by the hegumen to make several prints.

After the identification of Jacob now we can consider David's training on Mount Athos a fact. It is quite possible that he is yet another student of Nicephorus as the stylistic characteristics of his icons also point to that fact. Three of his icons are known to science. They were made in 1813 for the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in the town of Elena. The murals on the dome of the Katholikon at the Bigorski Monastery dated to about 1800 were also made by David.

There is a notebook preserved at the National Gallery which belonged to Ioan Popovich, an icon painter from the town of Elena, and which contains drawings made by Jacob. Those drawings are the first actually documented example of influence, and maybe, of training of a Bulgarian icon painter by an Athonite icon painter, and one trained personally by Nicephorus of Karpenisi at that.

3.6. Macarius of Galatista

Macarius is thought to have trained alongside Nicephorus at the studio of Damascene of Karpenisi but we do not know of any actual proof supporting such a conclusion. In addition, in contrast to Nicephorus the earliest signed works of Macarius are outside Mount Athos and it was not until 1785 that he rented the Athonite monastic cell of the Nativity of Theotokos together with his nephew Benjamin. Thus, it remains a matter of dispute whether he should be considered an authentic Athonite master trained on Athos, or whether he should be declared an “external” icon painter. But renting a cell on Mount Athos can be understood solely as an act of settlement in that place, and the subsequent production should now be examined as an entirely “Athonite” one.

His works in Bulgaria should be attributed to the years of his creative maturity when he was well-established as an Athonite icon painter. His majesty icons of 1789 for the Church of the Dormition at the Pchelina Nunnery at the Rila Monastery have long been published but here we add to them fifteen apostolic icons from the same iconostasis set dating from 1792. His remaining works in Bulgaria are isolated as today they are scattered in different places. The royal doors he made in 1787 and several undated feast icons are at the Rila Monastery and there are four icons made by him at the Bishop Church in Samokov among which the one of the Prophet Elias fed by ravens being incorrectly attributed to Hristo Dimitrov, stands out.

All known icons made by Macarius in Bulgaria are unsigned and should be dated mainly to the late 18th c. The earliest among them is the icon of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin from the collection of the National Historical Museum dating from 1786, and the latest one is the icon of the Dormition dated 24 March 1809, now at the museum in Koprivshtitsa.

3.7. Zechariah and Benjamin of Galatista

The work of the two nephews of Macarius which is related to Bulgaria is almost entirely unexplored. This is due to the attribution of a great part of their works in Bulgaria to the hand of Hristo Dimitrov. Before this text there was not a single known work of Benjamin made for the Bulgarian lands, and only several icons from the iconostasis of the old Hrelja’s Church at the Rila Monastery, dating from 1791, were known as works of Zechariah. The confusion of their icons and murals with the works of Hristo Dimitrov is associated almost entirely with the incorrect attributions from the older literature which have created some distorted idea of the creativity of the Samokov master by attributing to him a number of icons and murals which were done by the Athonite icon painters. Among them are all mural monuments from the Rila Monastery from the late 18th c. as well as a huge number of icons from the Rila Monastery and Samokov dating to the entire last decade of the 18th c. when they repeatedly resided at the monastery. There are also several known individual icons which today are at different places in Bulgaria as the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria of 1795 made by Zechariah, today at the National Archaeological Institute with Museum, and a replica of the Iviron Panagia Portaitissa made by Benjamin, today at the Varna Museum, which was painted in the last years of his life, stand out among them.

It should be noted that we do not have signatures of the two icon painters except for those of Zechariah from his Rila icons (1791). In stylistic terms their works in Bulgaria are distinguished from their later works but it is known that their style underwent a radical change after 1803-1804 and their work on the murals at the katholikon of the Hilandar Monastery. There they repainted the 15th-century layer in some places, and their encounter with that painting led to some substantial changes in the iconographic patterns they used in painting the inscriptions, the coloring, and their overall understanding of painting. Thus, their works from the Rila Monastery and Samokov do not only fill a substantial gap in our knowledge of their

work but are also the only examples known today that attest their early period when they still differed from their uncle's devices and style.

IV. Icon Painters Tied to Mount Athos

In the second half of the 18th c. and the beginning of the 19th c. there were numerous icon painters working on Mount Athos who have no relation to the two Athonite studios. They were not trained on the spot and therefore they cannot be categorized as "Athonite icon painters" but are external masters. As a rule these icon painters had diverse ethnic origins, did not have the same professional abilities and were not necessarily monks. A great number of them are also completely anonymous today. There is a variety of reasons for them showing up on Mount Athos. They could be linked to specific commissions caused by their fame gained due to some earlier works but also to personal offering of their services to the Athonite monasteries which were apparently well known for their numerous monuments. Their works might have turned up on Mount Athos by chance via the activity of the nunneries, the network of itinerant monks, pilgrimage and, last but not least, personal acquaintances and private commissions. However, gaining recognition locally was associated with many difficulties because the practice not only on Mount Athos but also in a great part of Orthodox monasteries on the Balkans shows that as a rule there were quite many requirements for the icon painters in order to be hired. The guarantees demanded from the icon painters clearly attest that Mount Athos was at that time an artistic center where only the most famous icon painters working in the Orthodox post-Byzantine style could get large-scale commissions. It is for this reason that a selection is made here of precisely such more famous masters who worked intensively on Mount Athos in that period and practically determined the directions of Athonite painting, and who also have works in Bulgaria, most of whom have been unknown to science to date.

1. Constantine and Athanasios of Korçë

Probably the most popular among the masters from the period tied to Mount Athos are the brothers Constantine and Athanasios of Korçë. Their works in Bulgaria are partially known. Those are five icons from the Rila Monastery dating from 1757. The icon of St. John of Rila and St. Luke, probably from 1759, which also originates from the Rila Monastery but was kept at the Ecclesiastical Seminary in Plovdiv and today is at the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum, have also been attributed as works of their studio. There are three more icons from the territory of Bulgaria that can be assigned to their work. The first one is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross dated to 1751 and originating from the Church of St. Nicholas in Dupnitsa, now part of the collection of the National Archaeological Institute with Museum. The second one is the Entry into Jerusalem from the icon collection of the Plovdiv Gallery. The third one is the icon of Archangel Michael from the cemetery Church of the Dormition in Sofia, now at the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum, which we should link rather to the work of Constantine's son, Tarpo Zograf. The last icon we can attribute to Constantine and Athanasios is the one of St. Pantaleon with hagiographic scenes from the Vidin church of the same name.

None of the aforementioned works is signed. The emergence of all those icons is due to individual ktetor's commissions, and, in particular, those from the Rila Monastery are associated with the fraternization effected between it and the Hilandar Monastery in 1757. There is no information that the icon painters had ever resided on Bulgarian territory and their works were apparently commissioned and transported directly from Mount Athos.

2. The Monk Metrophanes of Chios

It is difficult to put the works of Metrophanes in order because he is extremely productive, with numerous works both on Mount Athos and all over the Balkan Peninsula. Not very much

is known about his origin except that he was born in the island of Chios and probably was an Athonite monk. Generally, it can be said that he worked on Mount Athos during the entire second half of the 18th c. engaging in both icon painting and mural painting.

Part of his works from Mount Athos have already been published, and the preserved sources related to the painting of the phiale of the Docheiariou Monastery (1773-1774) attest that he had students/assistants, and thus one can speak of a studio/workshop around him. However, this explains not only his huge production, often made within the same year, but also the stylistic differences in some of his works which were probably made by his assistants.

Today, on the territory of Bulgaria there are many icons made by him as a major part of them is still not attributed. However, the icon painter made no murals in Bulgaria and there is no information that he had been invited in person to any of the icon commissions made. Probably his icons turned up by way of ktetor's commissions such as the one with the depiction of St. Thomas with hagiographical scenes dating from 1783, which is a private donation made by Hadji Toma Hadji Tsenovich to the Church of St. Pantaleon in Vidin or via the activity of the Athonite nunneries. Quite a few of his icons are linked to the completion of sets of iconostases in some of Bulgarian monasteries. Such are the commissions for the Rila Monastery where the icon painter has at least two sets of icons, the Teteven Monastery and the Alino Monastery. He also worked for the churches in Samokov, Bansko, Vidin, Zheravna, and several of his works are found in different towns and villages in Bulgaria, including museum collections and private collections. He is also the author of a very interesting replica of the Iviron Panagia Portaitissa which found its way to Varna and was later presented as a gift to the Russian emperor Nicholas I.

V. Icon Painters Presumably Linked to Mount Athos

The absence of precise criteria when determining the icon painters linked to Mount Athos has resulted in unjustified categorization as "Athonite" of a number of masters working outside the monastic republic. A huge quantity of anonymous works is also thought to be related to Mount Athos due to their similarity to the "Athonite style". In fact the only criteria by which we can consider an anonymous work to be an "Athonite" one are the historical evidence proving its Athonite origin. Such are for instance the ktetor's inscriptions attesting an Athonite client. But a ktetor's Athonite belonging is not necessarily a guarantee that the icon painter having made an icon commissioned by such ktetor is associated with the monastic republic. For a lot of those monks were in fact itinerant monks being in a constant state of flux outside the boundaries of Athos and, respectively, they could have commissioned an icon anywhere along their way. The replicas of the Athonite wonder-working icons should be approached with the same caution since they could have been made based on a print, without any contact to the original and without any direct or indirect relation to Athos on part of either the icon painter or the ktetors.

1. Icon Painters of Known Names

This part makes an overview of Bulgarian icon painters who are associated with Mount Athos. It examines the Samokov icon painters Hristo Dimitrov, Yoan Ikonopisets and Kosta Valyov are examined in this part one after another as well as a monument: the murals from the Church of Archangel Michael in the town of Rila which resembles one made by an Athonite icon painter in terms of its stylistic characteristics. In fact it is part of the earlier works of Kosta Valyov.

Attention has also been paid to some icon painters outside Samokov such as Filip, Nedko Todorovich and Alexander Popgeorgiev who were in fact local masters having been formed without the direct interference of the Athonite art but by way of contact with its

manifestations in the regions where they lived and worked. By way of that indirect relation they appropriated and adopted some manners and devices characteristic of the Athonite art. Finally the research points out some works by hieromonk Cyprian who can be considered an icon painter and woodcarver directly related to Mount Athos. A piece of royal doors made for the Monastery of Troyan and dating from 1794 is among his known works.

2. Anonymous Icon Painters

Here are presented icons made by three icon painters who worked intensively in the Bulgarian lands during the period and whose names are unfortunately unknown. The stylistic characteristics of their works closely approximate the Athonite production, and one can find many icons on Mount Athos itself that can be attributed to them. For this reason they should be considered icon painters tied to the monastic republic who also worked occasionally in Bulgaria.

The first of them has quite many works made on Mount Athos from the beginning to the middle of the 19th c. There are four known icons of his in Bulgaria, scattered in different locations as the earliest among them is the icon of Panagia Portaitissa from the Varna Museum, dating from 1815. In stylistic aspect the works of that icon painter resemble the works of Metrophanes of Chios and therefore he might have been his later follower.

There are several known icons made by the second anonymous icon painter from the Rila Monastery which are incorrectly attributed to Hristo Dimitrov. They resemble the works of Gabriel and Gregory of Kastoria who are known, first and foremost, by their murals in the katholikon of the Gregoriou Monastery of 1779.

The predominant quantity of works made by third anonymous icon painter is at the Rila Monastery but there are known icons of his from other regions as well. His work is linked to the studio of Constantine and Athanasios of Korçë but due to the fact that he worked in the late 18th c. he can only be considered their follower.

VI. Roads by Which the Works of Athonite Icon Painters Made Their Way into Bulgaria

1. The Institution of Itinerant Monks

An overview has been made of what is known of the institution of itinerant monks because it can be identified as a main road by which the Athonite icons made their way into Bulgaria. Data has been presented on the importance of itinerant monks who are traditionally referred to as “prohegumens” as well as sources of the role of the local nunneries through which the commissions for icons were given to Mount Athos.

2. Dissemination of the Athonite Production through the Nunneries and Commissions to the Athonite Monasteries.

Many examples have been presented of icons by Athonite icon painters in Bulgaria as well as pieces of documentary evidence of the manners by which they were commissioned, executed and delivered to the respective place. The special role of the Athonite monasteries which became intermediaries in commissioning and executing icons via their nunneries has also been taken note of. Special attention has been paid to the 1760s and 1770s when the works of Mount Athos were commissioned directly to the monasteries, and they transferred the commissions to the icon-painters they had closer contacts with because the latter were residing at the time of commission at their monastery working on something else. This practice is attested time and again, concerns all monasteries and icon-painters, and is also related to a later time when the two studios had already been established. Thus it should be qualified as the oldest and most authentic manner by which the Athonite icon painters made their way all over the Balkan Peninsula.

3. Ktetor's Commissions and Role of the Individual

The role of private ktetors in the Athonite works making their way into Bulgaria has been analyzed. A number of examples of such type of commissions as well as the names of some more important ktetors from the Bulgarian lands have been cited. On the basis of what is known to date a conclusion has been made that in quite a few cases there is a mixed variant of taxidiotic activity and ktetor's commission as a result of which an icon could have been commissioned personally by a ktetor through the intermediation of an Athonite monastery and then delivered to the respective place via the taxidiotic network. One such example of an icon of 1783 intended for Hadji Toma Hadji Tsenovich of Vidin has been analyzed.

4. Pilgrim's Icons

This part examines the importance of pilgrimage for the penetration of the Athonite works into Bulgaria. It is pointed out that it is very difficult to precisely identify that type of icons because on Mount Athos there was no practice similar to the one in Jerusalem of almost manufacturing execution of icons of certain subjects to be sold to the pilgrims. On Mount Athos this practice was almost entirely replaced by the prints and if the pilgrim visiting Athos in the late 18th c. wanted to acquire such an icon he had to specially commission it. However, this unambiguously categorizes the icon as a ktetor's commission, and not as pilgrim's behavior. Thus, in the major part of the cases the icons considered pilgrim's icons coming from Mount Athos in fact overlap with private ktetor's commissions.

VII. Conclusion

Starting with Dionysius of Fournas and the students around him more and more icon painters turned to settling and working on Mount Athos understood mostly as a center where the old Orthodox art was preserved and where they could find more commissions. Gradually, that led to an exceptionally rich picture of artistic life in the monastic republic. Around the mid 18th c. the studio of Damascene of Karpenisi was formed where Nicephorus was trained. A little later Macarius of Galatista also settled there founding a second studio, probably on a purely kinship basis. At the same time in the second half of the century there were already icon-painters of "external" training working extensively on Mount Athos such as Metrophanes of Chios, Constantine and Athanasios of Korçë, Gregory and Gabriel of Kastoria who defined the main stylistic directions of the art created on Athos. Via the network of itinerant monks and the nunneries of individual monasteries it unfolded to such an extent that covered even the remotest places on the Balkan Peninsula where works showed up which had been made by the icon painters working on Mount Athos. Until the 1820s that was a process which constantly expanded and only the occupation of Mount Athos put an end to that practice. After 1830 the recovery of the studios was slow, and the icon painters who did it were neither as famous nor of such quality. Despite their efforts the popularity of Athos as an artistic center faded away in the course of the following decades although the production it emanated increased twofold or threefold because after the mid-19th c. a great number of icon painters worked there.

Against this background the Bulgarian Revival masters seem almost completely marginal. Until the mid-19th c. they almost had no direct contact with Mount Athos, and the artistic processes and influences were in one direction only. A great quantity of prints were transferred from Athos to the Bulgarian lands, icons were commissioned icon-painters were invited from Mount Athos, while some individual works incidentally showed up in the opposite direction, whether by way of pilgrims' donations, or through the Athonite nunneries. However, those isolated examples have been given some speculative interpretations in our older literature creating the impression that there existed some conscious and active artistic

relations in both directions. In reality, those are private and episodic manifestations which merely imitate a mutual influence between the two geographical places, and the mass practice shows that for decades the artistic processes in Bulgaria ran under the influence of the old Orthodox tradition venerated on Mount Athos.

VIII. Principal Contribution of the Dissertation

- The works of the Athonite icon painters from Bulgaria's present-day territory have been collected, analyzed and systematized for the first time.
- Some new theoretical formulations regarding the meaning of the terms "Athonite icon painter" and "Athonite style" have been drawn, thus correcting some basic inaccuracies existing in the literature so far.
- A number of incorrect notions with respect to the historical, social and artistic importance of the Athonite painting for the Bulgarian lands have been revised.
- The works of all icon-painters known today, who were part of the two Athonite studios, in Bulgaria have been collected, found and studied. Numerous new attributions and redates of icons that have been multiplied for decades by erroneous data in the specialized literature have been made.
- The nature of training at the Athonite studios has been made clear and the identity and professional status of the Athonite icon painters have been studied. New data has been presented regarding the organization of the two studios, their formation and their operation on a kinship basis. The closed nature of the studios and the participation in them of some strictly defined icon painters working constantly as a team in which no external masters were allowed, have been shown.
- The art created on the territory of Mount Athos has been distinguished from the art made within the borders of the Bulgarian lands in the second half of the 18th c. and the first half of the 19th c. Thus, the outdated view that certain monuments of Athonite art are part of Bulgarian Revival art has been corrected. In this context the so-called "Bulgarian" monuments on Mount Athos and, in particular, the murals at the Zograf Monastery and the Hilandar Monastery have been reexamined and placed outside the scope of our Revival art because they were made entirely by Athonite icon painters of Greek origin.
- The data on the roads by which the Athonite icons made their way into Bulgaria have been systematized and the principal manners for commissioning and delivering them have been deduced. The role of the institution of itinerant monks, which turns out a main factor for Mount Athos's transformation into an artistic center on the Balkans in the end of the 18th c. and the beginning of the 19th c., has been indisputably demonstrated in this regard.

IX. Publications

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Translated by Atanas Igov