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Russian Pilgrimage to Mount Athos in the Light of Pilgrims' Tales[1]

The monastic history of Mount Athos can be divided into three periods. Athos belonged to the Byzantine Empire from the empire's beginning until the end of the Byzantine rule in 1424, then to the Ottoman Empire, for nearly 500 years (1453-1912), and finally to Greece from 1912 until the present day, apart from a brief interval between 1913 and 1919 when it was an international protectorate administered by Greece.

Athos in the Byzantine Empire

Abbot Daniil

The earliest Russian account of the East is the pilgrim's tale by Abbot Daniil (d. 1122), about his sixteen months' pilgrimage to Constantinople and the Holy Land.[2] He did not follow the Greek model, but created a unique Russian tale (*khozhdenie*), the salient characteristics of which are its religious content and focus on personal faith and bravery. Abbot Daniil's *Tale* provides detailed information about distant lands, churches, shrines, events, and miracles, and about the hardships and misfortunes during the journey. It reads like an adventure story. The *Tale* was accepted by the Church and other institutions, thanks to its religious content, and became a prototype for later Athonite pilgrim writers for centuries, although Daniil himself never visited Athos.[3]

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[1] I should like to express my deep gratitude to the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters for providing me with grants over the last twenty years to cover the costs of my field research on the Holy Mountain of Athos.

[2] *Puteshestvie igumena Daniila po sviateishchem zemle v nachale XII v.* (St Petersburg, 1864); René Gothóni, *Paradise within Reach. Monasticism and Pilgrimage on Mt Athos* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), pp. 26-30; Pentti Hakkarainen, 'Bysantin itsenäisten luostareitten nousu', *Ortodoksia*, 47 (1998), 79, 95-6; Alexander Grishin, 'Vasyly Barsky and the "xoženiya" tradition', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 16 (1992), 30-1.

[3] Theofanis G. Stavrou and Peter R. Weisensel, *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1986), pp. xxix-xxx, 1-5; P. Steeves (ed.), *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, vol. 6 (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic

It survives today in 150 manuscript codices, from which we can gauge its popularity among the Russians. The number of surviving copies suggest that many more were in circulation in the twelfth century. The *Tale* indicates that pilgrimage often inadvertently became a grand tour because, like many pilgrims, Daniil also made excursions to the biblical holy places *en route*.

Few pilgrims' tales of Russian pilgrimage to Athos are extant between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. The break of more than five centuries was due to the fall of Kiev and the subsequent Mongol occupation, as well as to the Russo-Turkish wars.[4]

Ignaty of Smolensk and Zosima

There are two pilgrims' accounts of a journey from Moscow to the Black Sea from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries: those of Ignaty of Smolensk (d. 1405) and Zosima (d. 1422). Their diary-like reports were the first official records of an ecclesiastic or diplomatic mission.[5] Their accurate detail made them models for later pilgrim authors, notably Monk Isaiya (1489), Abbot Paisy (1550), and Abbot Ioakim (1560).

Ignaty of Smolensk's[6] *Journey to Constantinople* is an important historical document elucidating numerous aspects of late fourteenth-century history in Russia and Byzantium. His account of the journey from Ryazan' down the river Don to Azov is unique, and the first official Russian record of the Don river route to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The meticulous cataloguing of landmarks along the Don suggests that his fellow passengers knew the river well and could provide him with the information needed to record the voyage. The boats plying the river to Azov facilitated regular commerce between Muscovy and Azov, perhaps even as far as to Constantinople.

Ignaty noticed the numerous Russian pilgrims in the Byzantine capital, where he visited its many shrines and relics, and was entertained by Russians living in the city.[7] Parts of his

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International Press, 1988), pp. 215-16; George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 19 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), pp. 6-7; B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en orient* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fink, 1889), pp. 3-83.

[4] Nicholas Fennell, *The Russians on Athos* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 55.

[5] Stavrou and Weisensel, op. cit., pp. xxxi-xxxii.

[6] Ignaty of Smolensk seems to have been an influential cleric, probably a monk, who travelled in the entourage of Bishop Mikhail of Smolensk. See Majeska, op. cit., pp. 52-7.

[7] Ibid., p. 92.

Journey bore some resemblance to Abbot Daniil's *Tale*. Describing his visit to Thessaloniki and Athos in his *Abbreviated Chronicle*, he merely mentioned the monastery of Great Lavra, where he sojourned, and which he seemed to know well.[8]

Whereas Ignaty's account is in diary form, Monk Zosima's *Tale* is more complex and event-oriented, describing people he met during the voyage including traders from Kiev, a frightening storm on the Black Sea, and other dangers he experienced. He made his three-year pilgrimage between the summer of 1419 and May of 1422, first from Moscow to Kiev and then from Belgorod to Constantinople and the Holy Land, where he spent a year, before returning via Athos to Constantinople and finally to Russia.[9]

Like his predecessors, Zosima gave accounts of the holy places and their relics, and probably had a copy of Daniil's *Tale* to hand while editing his scanty notes on the shrines in the Holy Land: the similarities in style and detail are not coincidental. He was also familiar with other copies of *khozhdenie* tales, notably those by Stefan of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople in 1349, and the so-called *Anonymous Description*, a tale dated to between late 1389 and early 1391.

Towards multinationalism

During the ascendancy of Serbian rule in the fourteenth century, Serbian rulers, notably Emperor Stefan Dušan and various princes, made large donations to Simonopetra, St Paul's, and especially Hilandar. Serbian monks continued to arrive in large numbers, even after the Turks had deprived the Serbian rulers of their power. Dionysiou was also a Serbian monastery in the mid-fifteenth century. The benevolence and support of the Serbs was much appreciated on Athos after the numbers of Russian monks and pilgrims dropped to almost zero.[10]

The multinationality of Athos was originally due to the ecumenical attitude of St Athanasios the Athonite. The successful conversion of the Slavs reflect the recognition of Athos as the heart of Orthodox spirituality throughout the Balkans and Russia. Athonites constantly struggled for financial survival during Ottoman rule, relying on alms raised in Slav lands to cope with the taxes levied in exchange for their self-governing status and the dues imposed by the sultan on their wares. The support from Serbian rulers helped to increase the number of Serbian monasteries.

[8] Ibid., pp. 55-6; de Khitrowo, op. cit., pp. 147-9.

[9] Majeska, op. cit., p. 166.

[10] For other accounts of Russians in Constantinople and the Holy Land, see de Khitrowo, op. cit., pp. 37-195, and Majeska, op. cit., pp. 15-47, 114-65.

The principal recruiting areas for pilgrimage to Mount Athos during the first centuries of Athonite monasticism were those in which missionary work had been successful and Orthodoxy had rooted itself in the form of a monastery and/or church. The Eastern Church and Athonite spirituality became the religious essence of national identity of the Balkan countries and Russia, especially around the Kiev Caves monastery, the monasteries near Moscow and Novgorod, and around Lake Ladoga.[11]

Eastern European pilgrims easily outnumbered western travellers before the early twentieth century. It is difficult, however, to get a clear picture of the demographic because there are only three official reports of monastic conditions on Athos at the beginning of the Ottoman Empire, written by Monk Isaiya (1489), Abbot Paisy (1550), and Abbot Joachim (1560).

Athos under the Ottoman Empire

Monk Isaiya

Monk Isaiya's *Tale of the Holy Mountain of Athos* (1489) is an informative account of living conditions on Athos after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. At the request of the Metropolitan of All Russia, he recited his story to the metropolitan's secretary, Moscow having declared itself the Third Rome when Constantinople came under Ottoman rule. The ecclesiastical authorities in Moscow began to map out the conditions in the various churches and monasteries to get an adequate picture of the current situation.[12]

Monk Isaiya's route went via the Kiev Caves monastery, which was then a centre for all Russian pilgrims heading east to Constantinople, the Holy Land, and Athos. He may have come from the St Sergy monastery near Moscow, which houses two surviving Russian manuscripts of the *Tale* from the sixteenth century. An anonymous monk copied these manuscripts and Archimandrite Leonid (Kavelin) published them in 1882.

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[11] Paschalis Kitromilides, '"Balkan Mentality": History, Legend, Imagination', *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), pp. 163-91; Ismo Pellikka, 'Monasteries as Bridges between Athos, Russia, and Karelia', in René Gothóni and Graham Speake (eds), *The Monastic Magnet: Roads to and from Mount Athos* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 63-88.

[12] See Klaus-Dieter Seemann, *Die Altrussische Wahlfahrtsliteratur: Theorie und Geschichte eines Literarischen Genres* (München: Fink, 1976), p. 303; de Khitrowo, op. cit., pp. 259-63.

After returning from Hilandar, where he had been staying,[13] Isaiya reported back on the economic and political conditions on Athos: the state of its monasteries, numbers of monks, the churches, and relics. From other sources, we know that Athonites made ends meet by sending monks on alms-gathering missions.[14] It is likely that the abbot of Hilandar asked Isaiya to inform Moscow about the heavy taxes the monastery had to pay for their self-governing status. He had to persuade the Russian authorities to give financial and political support in the face of relentless Ottoman pressure.[15]

Isaiya provided a detailed record of the Russian and Serbian monasteries, especially of St Panteleimon and Hilandar, as well as of Great Lavra and Vatopedi. The Russians naturally frequented the monasteries of their own nationality, where they could speak their mother tongue and eat their own food. According to Isaiya, there were 2,246 monks in the twenty ruling monasteries in 1489, and between six and ten in each of the 1,000 dependencies, giving a total figure of about 8,000.

We learn that there were 66 monks in Zograf, predominantly Wallachian; 120 in Dochiariou, the majority Serbian, and 120 in St Panteleimon, mostly Russians; 40 in Simonopetra (Bulgarians); 270 in Grigoriou (Serbs); 80 in Dionysiou (Serbs); 190 in St Paul's (Serbs); 60 in Koutloumousiou (Moldavians); and 170 in Hilandar (Serbs).[16] There were approximately 1,116 Slav monks in the ruling monasteries, accounting for about half of the population. There is no record of Russian pilgrims on Athos. However, there were evidently some pilgrims from Russia and many more other Slavs, mostly Serbs. Only a few became monks; most returned to their respective homelands.

Abbot Paisy

Also at the request of the Metropolitan of All Russia and following in the footsteps of Isaiya, Abbot Paisy orally dictated his account of Athos to a secretary in 1550. The secretary then compiled the

[13] See Stavrou and Weisensel, op. cit., p. xxxii.

[14] F. W. Hasluck, 'The First English Traveller's Account of Athos', *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 17 (1910-11), pp. 103-31.

[15] René Gothóni, *Tales and Truth. Pilgrimage on Mount Athos Past and Present* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1994), pp. 26-7.

[16] For the details, ibid., pp. 28-9.

Tale of the Holy Mountain of Athos. There are no precise biographical details of Abbot Paisy, but it is likely that he, too, was a monk from the monastery of St Sergy near Moscow.[17]

Paisy knew Athos from his experiences in Hilandar. He did not visit all the ruling monasteries, but relied on hearsay. Consequently, the numbers of Serbian monks and the data on the Serbian monasteries are more accurately recorded than those of the other monasteries.

The Athonite monastic population had decreased by about 2,000 during the sixty years from 1489 to 1550. Paisy did not mention the number of Russian pilgrims, but as the number of Serbian monks in Dionysiou monastery, for example, was increasing, there were probably also pilgrims visiting the other Slav monasteries. Paisy's record focused on taxes and dues, however, which by this time had increased and were being more efficiently collected.

Abbot Joachim

The last Old Russian *Tale of the Holy Mountain of Athos*, a lengthy account of St Panteleimon, was written just before Abbot Joachim returned from the Holy Mountain at the request of Metropolitan Makary.[18] He returned to Moscow on 6 November 1560 hoping to gain support for Athos and save it from the Turks. His *Tale* is more comprehensive than the previous accounts. It is an up-to-date inventory of what was known about the Holy Mountain at the time: a list of the current twenty-one ruling monasteries, the numbers of the monastic population, a list of churches, details about the flora and fauna, the mode of life, and taxes.

There were 2,831 monks listed in the ruling monasteries in 1560; the Slav population had increased by 124 during the first century of Ottoman rule. The real number was probably higher because, as Paisy frankly reported in 1550, 'when the scribes [of the sultan] come to take a census, we do not report exact numbers for fear of heavy duties and taxes.'[19] This fact is well corroborated if one compares the numbers of monks Isaiya reported with the Ottoman Cadastral Survey from 1520, which records 804 fewer, whereas forty years later Joachim recorded 685 more than Isaiya. There must have been a considerable number of Slav pilgrims because the Athonites did not give the correct population figures, particularly in the Slav monasteries, as many had sought refuge there

[17] de Khitrowo, op. cit., pp. 279-82.

[18] Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin, 'Skazanie o svyatoy gore igumena russkogo Panteleymonova monastyrya Ioakima', *Pamyatniki Drevney Pis'mennosti (i Iskusstva)*, 30 (St Petersburg, 1882), p. 30; Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, pp. 36-40.

[19] Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, p. 40.

from Ottoman officials. Only a few of the Slav monks and pilgrims were Russian, the majority being Serbs (Table 1).

Table 1. The numbers of monks in the ruling monasteries[20]

Ruling monastery		Isaiya 1489	Joachim 1560	Decline/ increase	Ottoman C. Survey 1520
Protaton		30	21	- 9	33 (+ 3)
Great Lavra	(G)	300	300		200 (- 100)
Vatopedi	(G)	330	270	- 60	271 (- 59)
Hilandar	(S)	170	200	+ 30	132 (- 38)
Iviron	(G)	50	250	+ 200	151 (+ 101)
St Panteleimon	(R)	120	170	+ 50	25 (- 95)
Zograf	(W)	66	200	+ 134	114 (+ 48)
Dionysiou	(S)	80	200	+ 120	118 (+ 38)
St Paul's	(S)	190	140	- 50	34 (- 156)
Pantokrator		40	200	+ 160	91 (+ 51)
Philotheou	(A)	70	160	+ 90	18 (- 52)
Simonopetra	(B)	40	120	+ 80	4 (- 36)
Stavronikita	(G)	--	120	+ 120	(establ. 1540)
Koutloumousiou	(M)	60	120	+ 60	39 (- 21)
Xeropotamou		90	50	- 50	27 (- 63)
Grigoriou	(S)	270	60	- 110	39 (- 131)
Dochiariou	(S)	120	30	- 90	20 (- 100)
(Esphigmenou)	(G)	50	70	- 20	30 (- 20)
Konstamonitou		90	50	- 40	41 (- 49)
Xenophontos		50	40	- 10	51 (+ 1)
Karakalou		30	60	+ 30	4 (- 26)
Total		2,146	2,832	+ 685	1,442 (- 804)

A = Albanian, B = Bulgarian, G = Greek, I = Iberian, M = Moldavian, R = Russian, S = Serbian, W = Wallachian

Tales of westerners

Travellers' accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries written by westerners also provide glimpses of the Slavs on Athos. John Covel (d. 1722) wrote in his *Athos Notes* of 1677: '[In Megiste Lavra] there are four hundred and fifty monks, of which one hundred and fifty are abroad

[20] W. Heath Lowry, 'A Note on the Population and Status of the Athonite Monasteries under Ottoman Rule (ca. 1520)', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes,* 73 (1981), pp. 115-35; Gothóni, *Tales and Truth,* pp. 38-40.

to beg alms and, as missioners, bound by a vow of obedience to the abbot. Many go as far as Russia, Moscow, Morea, Palestine, Istanbul and Smyrna.'[21]

Covel records 6,000 monks on Athos, of whom one third were abroad on missionary work and in search of financial and political support to resist Ottoman pressure. He does not mention Russian monks or pilgrims, but relates that Bulgarian monks were living together with Greek monks in Vatopedi, and that 1,000 Bulgarian monks went to Hilandar when it was built.[22]

Covel's *Notes* contain the first known report of the number of pilgrims and visitors on Athos. He wrote that about 500 visitors came to the Great Lavra at Christmas and Easter, and on Trinity Sunday and 15 August. The previous Easter there had been 2,000 visitors at Koutloumousiou.[23] Most of the pilgrims and visitors were Greeks, but there were also many Slav pilgrims in the Slav monasteries, as well as some Russians.

Joseph Georgirenes (d. 1722), Archbishop of Samos and Icaria (1666-71), notes in his *Description of the Present State of Samos, Nicaria, Patmos and Mount Athos*, dedicated to Prince James, Duke of York, and published in 1677, that there were only twenty monks in St Panteleimon.[24] This suggests that there cannot have been many Russian pilgrims on Athos at that time. He mentions, however, numerous refugees from the Slav countries who were living in the Slav monasteries either in disguise or as novices. According to him, there were about 4,200 monks living in the ruling monasteries, of whom 1,200 or so were Bulgarians.[25]

Père François Braconnier (d. 1716), attaché to the French Embassy at Constantinople, recalls in his *Mémoires* from 1706–7 that contacts between the Athonite monasteries and the Balkan princes were both close and frequent, apparently owing to the common enemy, the Turks. As the Balkan princes supported all the ruling monasteries, Hilandar became Serbian and Zograf Bulgarian. Many monasteries were built and restored with funds especially from Wallachian voivodes. Braconnier mentions that there were many visitors from all over Europe, namely the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Italy, England, Holland, and Sweden. Strangely enough, he does not mention the Slav countries, from where there must have been pilgrims, too.[26]

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[21] Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, p. 48.

[22] Ibid., p. 52.

[23] Ibid., p. 56.

[24] Ibid., pp. 56-7.

[25] Ibid., p. 59.

[26] Ibid., pp. 69-70, 71-3.

Barsky's account

The most meticulous account of early eighteenth-century Athos is that of the Russian Vasily Grigorovich Barsky (d. 1747). He visited the Holy Mountain twice, first at the outset of his travels in 1725/6 and then in 1744 before his return to Kiev in 1747.[27]

Barsky's diary of more than a thousand pages, written in Slavonic and containing numerous drawings, was left untitled because he suddenly died. In the various editions it is referred to as 'The Travels of Barsky to the Holy Places of the East from 1723 to 1747'.[28] It can be divided into three sections, reflecting the stages of compilation and attitude in the traditional genre of *khozhdenie*.

The first section covers Barsky's travels from Kiev to Venice. The second covers his departure from Venice in February 1725 to the end of 1729. He learned to speak Greek in Venice by socializing with the Greek community there and practised drawing with the specific purpose of illustrating his account. His naïve but accurate bird's-eye-perspective drawings of the Athonite monasteries are excellent examples of his highly personal style of depicting scenery. His text adheres to the Church Slavonic *khozhdenie* tradition, like Abbot Daniil's model, but is original, thanks to Barsky's critical observations, descriptive realism, and a touch of human drama.[29]

The last section of Barsky's diary covers the period between 1730 and 1744. Here the style of writing is different: he presents assembled primary material, fieldwork notes as it were, precise descriptions, epigraphic data, transcriptions from documents and manuscripts, records of measurements, and oral accounts. He edited this meticulously assembled material in Constantinople, in the library of a Russian resident with whom he became friendly. By comparing his own descriptions with the pilgrimage account of John Komnenos he finalized his text in accordance with the *khozhdenie* genre.[30]

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[27] Grishin, 'Vasyly Barsky and the "xoženiya" tradition', pp. 32-3; Veronica della Dora, 'A Pilgrim and Enlightener on the Holy Mountain: Vasily Grigorovish Barsky's Journeys to Mount Athos 1725-1744', *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* (2015), pp. 32-43.

[28] The most accurate edition is the one by N. Barsukov (ed.), *Stranstvovaniya Vasyliya Hryhorovyča-Bars'koho po Svyatym mestam vostoka s 1723 po 1747 g*., 4 vols (St Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Kirshbauma, 1885-7).

[29] Although robbed and deserted, he nevertheless struggled in the desert towards Jerusalem to repent of his sins at the Holy Sepulchre: Grishin, op. cit., pp. 33-7.

[30] Ibid., p. 38. John Komnenos's pilgrimage account was first published in 1701. The Athonite edition was published in Karyes in the series Agioreitika Tetradia (2) entitled *Ioannou tou Komnenou, Proskynetarion tou Agiou Orous tou Athonos* (1984).

Barsky's monastic population figures do not indicate any great change from the early eighteenth century: there were about 2,000 monks on Athos. There were only a few Russian monks in the monastery of Pantokrator. He noted that there used to be 200 monks in Hilandar, but now there were no more than 30 or 40. The monks of Zograf, formerly Bulgarian, were now Greek, with some Russians. He mentioned St Panteleimon as a Russian monastery with 10 to 12 monks in 1725, but in 1744 it was in Greek hands and the Russian monks were seen 'wandering hither and thither in the hills, living by manual labour'.[31]

In 1744 many of the monastic buildings were almost beyond repair and spiritual life was at a low ebb. St Paul's had been a Bulgarian and Serbian monastery, and was still Bulgarian in 1725, but now it was Greek. Barsky does not mention Russian pilgrims, describing only the monasteries from the outside, and the icons, relics, and treasures inside. There were many Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian monks living in *kellia*,[32] and some were refugees. They cultivated land, took care of the vineyards, or engaged in handicrafts or icon painting. Some, originally pilgrims, settled on Athos and became monks.[33]

St Paisy Velichkovsky

St Paisy Velichkovsky (1722-94) arrived on Mount Athos in 1746 at a time when the monasteries were heavily in debt to the Turks. The population had fallen drastically since the unexpected renaissance of 1261-1453, when Serbian rulers played a significant role in the monastic revival and St Gregory Palamas was victorious in the hesychast controversy.[34]

It is paradoxical that Paisy, a young student at the Theological Academy of Kiev who was frustrated by the secular tone of the teaching, left Kiev to become a monk on Athos and pursue his spiritual calling at a time when the Holy Mountain was also in a state of severe spiritual crisis. When he reached Athos, Paisy immediately looked for a spiritual father and for patristic texts on

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[31] Graham Speake, 'St Paisy Velichkovsky and Mount Athos', in R. Hämäläinen *et. al.* (eds), *Pilgrimage of Life: Studies in Honour of Professor René Gothóni* (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters & Study of Religions, University of Helsinki and Maahenki, 2010), p. 315.

[32] A *kelllion* (plural *kellia*) is a separate house with a chapel and several rooms, usually inhabited by between three to six monks, living on the produce of their soil and handicrafts.

[33] Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, pp. 78-80.

[34] Gothóni, 'Mount Athos during the Last Centuries of Byzantium', in Jan Olof Rosenqvist (ed.), *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture*. Papers Read at a Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1-5 December 1999. Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions, 13 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2004), pp. 57ff.

spiritual life in the original Greek. He initially failed, as '[only] few of our Rus' brethren knew holy Scripture'.[35] Neither could the Greek Athonites he met read the old texts. Many of them had not even heard of the spiritual literature he spoke of.

Having searched systematically but in vain for the texts in the ruling monasteries, he eventually came across a specialist calligrapher in the St Basil skete. This monk had numerous patristic texts, which he had copied over a period of two years and gave to Paisy just before he left Athos. Finally, Paisy accomplished his second mission – finding the books and texts he had been looking for.

Paisy lived in ascetic solitude for two and a half years, engaged in ceaseless prayer of the heart, and following the instructions in the patristic texts and the books he had borrowed from the monastery of Hilandar. He lived an ascetic life of poverty and humility.[36] He intended to continue thus indefinitely, but as so often happens on Athos, those in search of a spiritual father soon hear about the solitaries and visit them to find out for themselves about their spirituality. At first, he rejected a Wallachian monk who begged him to receive him in obedience, but finally accepted him not as a disciple, but as an equal. Gradually more monks were drawn to Paisy and he was soon surrounded by a group of disciples obedient to him.

As the group grew, Paisy was granted a charter by Pantokrator to convert the *kellion* of the Prophet Elijah into a skete. In 1762, less than five years later, the brotherhood had expanded to sixty monks. Impressed by his success, the Holy Community asked Paisy to take charge of Simonopetra, which was heavily burdened with debt and almost deserted. He arrived there in spring 1762 with thirty-five monks. The task proved to be impossible, because the monastery had been deserted for too long and was too deeply in debt to be saved by monks dedicated to the ceaseless prayer of the heart and translation of the *Philokalia*. In 1763 Paisy left Mount Athos to return to Moldavia, and eventually settled down in Neamț in 1793.[37]

St Paisy had a significant impact both on the spiritual life on Athos and on the Slav countries, especially Russia. His fame spread quickly around Athos, and he 'acquired spiritual children of many tongues'.[38] Nearly all the ruling monasteries at the time were idiorrhythmic, but Paisy insisted on a strict cenobitic rule in his skete, which meant obedience, prayer, and work through self-sufficiency. While the brotherhood rested, Paisy copied books and studied texts on

[35] Speake, op. cit., p. 314.

[36] Fennell, op. cit., p. 65.

[37] Speake, op. cit., pp. 314-16, 322.

[38] Ibid., p. 316.

spiritual life, which he used as his 'spiritual father'.[39] Not without reason, he has been called 'the reviver of the hesychastic movement', which had flourished in the fourteenth century but had almost completely died out by the beginning of the eighteenth.[40]

His invaluable contribution to the Slav countries was the meticulous and time-consuming translation of the Greek texts into Slavonic and Moldavian by him and his disciples. He had already learned about the hesychast tradition during his stay on Athos in 1754, and about St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (d. 1809). With the help of St Makarios, Metropolitan of Corinth, St Nikodemos compiled the *Philokalia,* published in Venice in 1782. This eventually became a gigantic work of five volumes, containing sayings of the Church Fathers from the fourth to the fifteenth century and dealing principally with the theory and practice of the Jesus Prayer. It proved to be one of the most influential publications in the Orthodox world and it is still widely read both by monks and the laity.[41]

With enthusiasm and energy, Paisy produced a Slavonic translation of the *Philokalia*, published in Moscow in 1793, only a decade later than the Greek original, although he never returned to Russia. He was appointed abbot of the monastery of Neamț, which soon became a great spiritual centre with more than 500 brethren who gathered around him for spiritual advice and helped him to translate the Greek Fathers into Slavonic.

St Paisy insisted on obedience to an elder or *starets*. The best-known *starets* in nineteenth-century Russia was St Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833). Another notable *starets* was St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), who began his spiritual struggle in St Panteleimon in 1892, and lived in humble obedience for the rest of his life. He became the spiritual father of Archimandrite Sophrony (1896-1993), who at his elder's request edited and published his handwritten notes on spiritual life and salvation. Sophrony's books about his teacher ensured that the saint's life came to the attention of a wider public.[42]

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[39] Fennell, op. cit., p. 64.

[40] S. Papadopoulos (ed.), *Simonopetra. Mount Athos* (Athens: Hellenic Industrial Development Bank, 1991), p. 24.

[41] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 100; Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Unity of the Philokalia and its Influence in East and West* (Athens, 2004), pp. 41-61.

[42] John A. McGuckin (ed.), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 446-7; Archimandrite Sophrony, *The Monk of Mount Athos: Staretz Silouan* 1866-1938 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975). St Silouan the Athonite was canonized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1987.

Russian pilgrims' tales in the nineteenth century

The Turkish occupation of the Holy Mountain in 1821–9 drastically changed the Athonite social setting. Turkish controls made it virtually impossible for Russians to visit. The monasteries were impoverished and St Panteleimon was ruined. Nevertheless, it was revived and reoccupied in the mid-1830s. By 1866 it had paid off its outstanding debts and, in 1869, the Elder Ieronim (Solomentsov) successfully negotiated the right to conduct services in Church Slavonic as well as to have the refectory readings on alternate days in Church Slavonic.

A new pilgrimage boom started in the late 1830s, lasting until the early twentieth century. Russian pilgrims' tales significantly contributed to the rapid growth of the Russian population in St Panteleimon. The first brief accounts reviewed below reflect the deteriorated situation in the monastery. They are followed by descriptions showing the rapid increase of Russian monks.

Archimandrite Anikita (Shirinsky-Shikhmatov) (d. 1837) travelled from the Yuriev monastery near Novgorod to the Holy Land via Athos in 1834.[43] He returned from Palestine to St Panteleimon in 1836 only to find that the Greeks had banished the Russians from the monastery. His pilgrim's account provides the following meticulous itinerary from Novgorod to Athos: Novgorod-Zaytsevo-Kresttsy-Valday-Vyshny Volochek-Torzhok-Staritsa-Zubtsov-Sychyovka-Lipitsy-Dernov-Ostaskov-Bunakovo-Azarovo-Vyazma-Teplukha-Gzatsk-Mozhaysk-Arkhandelskoe-Vereya-Horoshevo-Pushkari-Petrovsky monastery-Moscow-Tula-Elets-Zadonsky monastery-Voronezh-Nizhnedevitsk-Svitkovskoe-Belgorod-Kharkov'-Poltava-Aleksandriya-Elizavetgrad-Nikolaev-Odessa-Uspensky monastery-Constantinople-Balaklia-Pera-Antigona-Marmaris-Athos.[44]

After Anikita's arrival on the Holy Mountain, he first stayed in the monastery of Xeropotamou, where he met Archbishop Gerasimos, whom the Patriarch of Constantinople had sent to Athos to persuade all monasteries to return to the cenobitic rule. Only the monks of Xeropotamou

[43] Archimandrite Anikita was born Prince Sergey Aleksandrovich Shirinsky-Sikhmatov. His pilgrim's account was published in *Khristiankoe chtenie* in 1890, 'Puteshestvie ieromonaha Anikity po svyatym mestam Vostoka' (The Travels of Hieromonk Anikita to the Holy Places in the East). For his biography, see *Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya,* vol. 2 (Moscow, 2001), pp. 437-8.

[44] *Khristianskoe chtenie*, 1 (1891), 73-117.

agreed to comply.[45] From there he went with Schema-Monk Feodor to the Prophet Elijah skete, and continued to the monasteries of Pantokrator, Stavronikita, and Iviron. On the way he met some Russian monks living in *kellia*. He continued to the monasteries on the western side of the peninsula, to Grigoriou, Simonopetra, St Paul's, Xenophontos, and Dochiariou. He stayed two days around Karyes, in Koutloumousiou, and in the St Andrew skete. Returning to St Panteleimon, he met the Russian Archimandrite Prokopy and other Russian monks in 1836.

Anikita also visited the monasteries of Zograf, Hilandar, Esphigmenou, and, briefly, Vatopedi, then returned to St Panteleimon and finally continued to Thessaloniki.[46] He and his wealthy friends in St Petersburg had planned to buy back the lands of St Panteleimon, recently appropriated by other monasteries.[47]

Hieromonk of the Great Schema Parfeny (Ageev, d. 1878), adopted as a child by a wealthy tradesman's family belonging to the Old Believers, dreamt all his youth of becoming a monk. When he came of age, he run away to a monastery of Old Believers, where he was tonsured Monk Paisy. In 1836 he converted to Orthodoxy and left for Athos in 1839, where he was tonsured Rasophor Pamva. In the spring of 1841 he was tonsured to the Great Schema with the name Parfeny and then sent back to Russia to convert his Old Believer parents. In 1843 he was on Athos, but he was made to return to Russia via Jerusalem and Constantinople. His masterpiece was his *Tale of Wandering and Journeying*, which was widely read in Russia. It was a detailed eye-witness account of the reoccupation of St Panteleimon by the Russians led by Elder Ieronim (Solomentsov) in 1841.[48]

Hieromonk Seraphim (Vesnin, d. 1853) travelled to Athos via Odessa and Constantinople in 1843.[49] He was tonsured to the Great Schema with the name Sergy at St

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[45] *Istoriya Russkogo Svyato-Panteleimonova monastyrya na Afone s 1735 do 1912*, vol. 5 (Svyataya Gora Afon, 2015) [*SRA 5*], p. 166.

[46] *Khristianskoe chtenie*, 1-2 (1891), pp. 113–17, 525–34.

[47] *SRA 5*, p. 168.

[48] Hieromonk of the Great Schema Parfeny was born Pyotr Ageev. The masterpiece's full title is *Skazanie o stranstvii i puteshestvii po Rossii, Moldavii, Turtsii i Sv. Zemle postrizhennika svyatye gory Afonskiya inoka Parfeniya* (1855). Cf. Svyataya Rus, *Bol'shaya entsiklopediya russkogo naroda. Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Moscow: Istitut russkoy tsivilizatsii, 2009), pp. 2, 468-70; *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917. Biograficheskiy slovar. 4. M-P* (Moscow: Nauchnoe izdatelsstvo «Bolshaya rossiyskaya entsiklopediya». Nauchno-vnedrencheskoe predpriyatie «Fianit», 1999), pp. 536-7.

[49] Hieromonk Seraphim was born Semyon Avdeevich Vesnin. He was known to his readers by his pseodonym Svyatogorets (the Hagiorite). Svyatogorets, *Pis'ma Svyatogortsa k druzyam svoim o svyatoy*

Panteleimon.[50] On his arrival he was told that there had been no abbot or monks at the monastery from 1820 to 1832. However, the Russian brotherhood had since grown to about thirty and in the 1840s there were 200 monks, including Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Moldavians, and one converted Jew.[51]

Monk Seraphim was well known among the Russian nobility and clergy. He made St Panteleimon known in Russia with his many publications and thus contributed to the monastery's reputation as a spiritual centre. Among his many acquaintances were Nikolai Gogol' and Prince P. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov.[52] On 18 May he walked from St Panteleimon to Xeropotamou to venerate a piece of the True Cross. He continued to Simonopetra and thence to Grigoriou, Dionysiou, and St Paul's. In Dionysiou the abbot told him that, in exchange for visiting the library, high-ranking Russian travellers had promised that the Russian government would support the monastery economically. However, the travellers took away valuable books, but later neither sent any word of their whereabouts nor offered any economic support. From St Paul's he visited New Skete and the skete of St Anne, where he met the abbot who was fluent in Russian and asked about the monasteries in Russia. On 20 May he ascended the peak of Mount Athos. On his descent, he visited Kafsokalyvia skete, with its thirty-five *kellia* and eighty monks, of whom five were Russian. Its Bulgarian abbot spoke Russian. From there he visited Megiste Lavra, which was huge, but in debt; then, on 22 May, he moved to Iviron and the *kellion* of Patriarch Gregorios as well as the *kellion* of the two middle-aged cousins, Philipp and Isaac (Korenev), formerly merchants from Stary Oskol.[53]

The Russian diplomat A. N. Muravyov (d. 1874) was born in Kiev.[54] He served in the army in the Russo-Turkish wars (1828–9), and worked for the Foreign Ministry and the Holy Synod. He travelled to the Near East and Athos and was regarded as an unofficial political and religious missionary there.

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gore Afonskoy 1 (St Petersburg: v tipografii E. Fishera, 1850); E. V. Kustova, 'Prepodobny Stefan Fileysky i traditsii afonskogo monashestva na Vyatke', *Vestnik Ekaterinburgskoy duhovnoy seminarii* (Ekaterinburg, 2015), pp. 4 (12), 112-23.

[50] Svyatogorets, op. cit., pp. 2-6.

[51] Ibid., pp. 60-4.

[52] The brother of Archimandrite Anikita. *SRA 5*, p. 475.

[53] Elder Ieronim (Solomentsov) was also of merchant stock from Stary Oskol. Svyatogorets, op. cit., pp. 134-88.

[54] For Muravyov's biography, see *Russkie pisateli: 1800-1917. Biograficheskiy slovar* (Moscow: Bolshaya rossiyskaya entsiklopediya, 1999), pp. 4, 156-60.

Muravyov's knowledge of St Panteleimon was patchy. His narratives were a collage of European and Russian studies, and travel stories, which he spiced up with legends and his own opinions about the Athonite monasteries. He refers particularly to Grigorovich Barsky's book and other earlier Russian writers, notably Archimandrite Anikita (Shirinsky-Shikhmatov)'s memoirs.[55] In 1849-1850 he found some fifty Russian and 150 Greek monks in St Panteleimon. He also visited most of the ruling monasteries along the coasts as well as the sketes of Prophet Elijah, St Anne, and St Andrew.[56] He saw the ruling monasteries to be very similar in structure, but blamed their misuse of money. In Stavronikita he met the Russian Schema-Monk Prokopy, mentioned also by Anikita. Muravyov was delighted to have met other Russians in Stavronikita and he expressed his wish that this monastery would also become a centre for Russian monks.[57]

The writer, philospher, and physician K. N. Leontyev (d. 1891) gave up medicine to become Russian consul in Macedonian Greece, Crete, and the Balkans.[58] Having nearly died of cholera in July 1871 while in Thessaloniki, he turned to religion and went for a year to Athos upon recovery. Owing to the austerity of monastic life, his deteriorating health, and the unwillingness of the St Panteleimon fathers to tonsure him, he had to leave the Holy Mountain. He eventually became a monk in Russia. In his memoirs he mentioned neither his travelling routes nor the number of monks on Athos. He went there for comfort and spiritual healing.[59]

Archimandrite Paisy (Yatsko), from the Saratov Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery, set out on a pilgrimage to Constantinople, Athos, and Jerusalem in 1841.[60] He arrived on Athos on 22 July, first stopping at St Panteleimon monastery where he was shown the relics he asked to see. Thence he walked to Xeropotamou, Simonopetra, Grigoriou, and Dionysiou. Having stayed a while

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[55] *SRA 5*, pp. 268-9.

[56] He was instrumental in obtaining stavropeigic status for the St Andrew skete.

[57] A. N. Muravyov, *Pisma s Vostoka. V 1849-1850 godah. I-II* (St Petersburg: V tipografii III Otdeleniya Sob. E.I.V. kantselyarii, 1851), pp. 110-366.

[58] *Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya* (Moscow, 2015), pp. 40, 564-7; K. N. Leontyev, 'Moya ispoved'', *Polnoe sobranie sochineny i pisem v dvenadtsati tomah. Tom shestoy. Kniga pervaya. Vospominaniya, ocherki, avtobiograficheskie proizvedeniya 1869-1891 godov* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo «Vladimir Dal'», 2003), pp. 228-52.

[59] *SRA 5*, pp. 468-70.

[60] Paisy, 'Zapiski Saratovskogo Spaso-Preobrazhenskago monastirya Ieromonakha Paisiya, puteshestvovavshego v Ierusalim na Sinay i Afonskuyu gory v 1841 godu', *Chteniya v Obshestve lyubiteley dukhovnogo prosveshseniya*, 8 (1887), 59-76. Cf. Ismo Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja venäläisistä pyhiinvaelluskertomuksista', *Ortodoksia*, 47 (1998), 117-47.

in St Paul's, he continued to the monasteries on the eastern side of the peninsula, eventually crossing over from Vatopedi and Hilandar to Dochiariou and Xenophontos. His scanty account of the monasteries focused on liturgical life, relics, and biblical sites, and on recording his impressions of them. He apparently based his writing on notes jotted down *en route* and later edited.

Monk Paisy resumed his journey to Jerusalem on 9 September, apparently staying there until Easter the following year, given his detailed account of the festivities. After visiting Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Cairo, he revisited Athos the following year by ship from Cyprus via Lemnos. This time he sojourned in St Panteleimon and the Prophet Elijah skete. He stayed on Athos until early March 1843, when he returned to Constantinople and thence back to his Saratov monastery.

Paisy's account differs from those like Abbot Daniil's in the scantiness of its statistics. He concentrated on what he saw, experienced, and considered worthy of attention. Paisy was a typical pilgrim in the Greek sense of the word (*proskynitis*) – a humble monk who surrendered to God. He was clearly not an observer, but a pilgrim focusing in his description on the liturgical life, the relics, and the Easter services, the ultimate aim of his pilgrimage.[61]

In the 1890s an anonymous pilgrim who simply signed himself A. A. published an article about his journey to Athos, entitled 'From Odessa to Athos'.[62] He travelled from Odessa to Constantinople where met many other Russian pilgrims. On board the ship bound for Athos and Thessaloniki, A. A. noticed that there were numerous European pilgrims other than Russians. He commented: 'And now Athos is a unique monastic republic within the Turkish Empire. There are three Russian monasteries, one Serbian, one Bulgarian and one Romanian, and the rest (of the twenty monasteries) are Greek. Moreover, there are some *kellia* and sketes.'[63]

A. A. noted that of the twenty ruling monasteries, twelve were cenobitic and eight idiorrhythmic. He also recorded some sketes and a total of 800 *kellia* and *kalyves.* He did not dwell on the tension between the Greek and Russian monks, but like Paisy focused on the asceticism, Orthodox beliefs, and the veneration of the icons and relics. He also observed that all monasteries had to pay heavy Ottoman taxes. He rated the cenobitic rule as the best and in accordance with Christian monasticism in its original form.

Of special interest is his history of Athos and Russia dating back to the founding of the Kievan monasteries. Athos was regarded as the spiritual school of the Russians, and Athonite

[61] Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja', 135-6.

[62] No exact date for the travel is given. The article was published in 1896: ibid., p. 145.

[63] Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja', 137.

asceticism had influenced many monasteries in Russia over the centuries. The anonymous pilgrim praised the national pride of the Russians and other Slavs: 'Nowhere on the Holy Mountain do we meet similar spontaneous joy and brotherly caring as in the Russian and the Slav monasteries – in St Panteleimon, the sketes of St Andrew and the Prophet Elijah – and among the Serbs of Hilandar and the Bulgarians in Zograf.[64]

The Englishman Athelstan Riley (1858-1945), author of *Athos, or Mountain of the Monks*, published in 1887, noted the tension between the Greek and Russian monks. The Greeks claimed that the Russians had established themselves there by false pretences: their aim was to outnumber the Greeks, thereby striking a blow at the authority of the Patriarchate in Constantinople, and eventually removing it to Moscow. Riley heard this interpretation from an Athenian professor visiting Athos, and from a Vatopedi guest-master. Although Russian pilgrims preferred not to comment on it in their tales, Russian expansion on the Holy Mountain was explosive and the tension between the Greeks and the Russians was apparent.[65]

According to Riley, the tension originated in 1839 when the Russians asked Abbot Gerasimos of St Panteleimon to bring eighteen Russian monks to the monastery, declaring in writing that their number should never increase beyond fifty. There were 150 Greek monks in the monastery at that time. Despite the promise, the Russians gradually brought servants from Russia, and by making them monks their number increased to 400 by 1869, when Gerasimos was very old. The Russians tore up the document limiting their number and managed to expel all the monks who opposed them. The Vatopedi guest-master was the last of these Greek monks and an eyewitness. According to him, having thus gained a firm foothold in St Panteleimon, the Russians took possession of a *kellion*, which eventually became the Prophet Elijah skete. In the same way, they founded the skete of St Andrew, which, according to Riley's figures, numbered 230 Russian monks and 60 servants in 1883.[66]

An explosive Russianization began. The method of expansion was first to purchase a *kellion*, then to enlarge it, and gradually to exceed the lawful number of inmates. Eventually the superior presented a petition with strong diplomatic and pecuniary backing for the conversion of the *kellion* to a cenobitic skete, which, although still a dependency, housed more monks than its ruling monastery. The Russians thus acquired the skete of St Andrew.

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[64] Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja', 138.

[65] Athelstan J. Riley, *Athos, or the Mountain of the Monks* (London: Longmans, Green, 1887), pp. 246-8; René Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, p. 111.

[66] Riley, op. cit., pp. 248-9.

A Finnish historian has compiled a summary of twenty-eight Russian pilgrims' accounts published between 1881 and 1914.[67] It focuses on the Russians' conception of their Athonite legacy. The pilgrims argued that there was a historical continuum between Athos and Russia since the beginning of Athonite monasticism and the days of St Antony of Kiev. Athonite oral and literary tradition was well known from the beginning, and awareness of the Holy Mountain was widespread in Russia. Consequently, the monasteries founded in Russia have reflected the Athonite model and pilgrims have visited monasteries in Russia and on Athos in increasing numbers.

A. G. Stadnitsky's (d. 1936) diary notes from 1885 emphasize the Russians' attitude that Athos was a Holy Mountain. Between the 1840s and 1866 they were already providing substantial financial support to the monastery of St Panteleimon. The prime reason for this benevolence was the rapidly increasing numbers of Russian pilgrims and their awareness of the heavy taxes the monasteries had to pay to the Ottoman rulers, but it was also prompted by the bitter tensions between the Greek and Russian monks and monasteries. According to Stadnitsky, Athos was regarded as an integral part of Russian cultural heritage.[68]

The phrases 'as I have seen, so I have written' and 'I have seen all this with my very own eyes' occur in most of the early pilgrims' tales; Stadnitsky also referred to himself as an eyewitness.[69] He described in some detail his meals at St Panteleimon, which reminded him of the early days of Christianity when bread was communally broken and everything was shared. He recalled how St Athanasios at the outset of Athonite monasticism introduced the cenobitic rule, maintained in St Panteleimon ever since.[70]

The priest and writer A. A. Smirnov (d. 1924) spent two weeks on Athos in the 1880s. He first visited Bogoroditsa Xylourgou, where, he reminded his readers, the first Russians, St Antony in particular, settled. There is a hint of pride in his observation that 'it is so strange to imagine that almost nothing has changed during the centuries.'[71]

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[67] Ismo Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy? A Close Reading of some Russian Pilgrims' and Travellers' Accounts on Mount Athos', in R. Hämäläinen *et. al*. (eds), *Pilgrimage of Life: Studies in Honour of Professor René Gothóni* (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 2010), p. 348.

[68] Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy?', pp. 346-7.

[69] A. G. Stadnitsky, *Dnevnik studenta palomnika na Afon* (Kiev: Tipografiya G.T. Korčak-Novickago, 1886), 54, 131, 161-163.

[70] Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy?', pp. 349-50.

[71] A. A. Smirnov, 'Dve nedeli na Svyatoy Gore', *Russky Vestnik*, 6 (1887), 824-90.

The fall of Byzantium put an end to Greek supremacy. The Muslim invaders allowed the Orthodox to continue with their way of life, but, according to Smirnov, the Russians preserved the essence of Byzantine spirituality, many of the Greek monasteries having adopted the idiorrhythmic system. He observed that the strong bond between Athos and Russia was not broken by Muslim rule. The increasing numbers of Russians on Athos, especially during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, prompted him to write: 'You hear Russian spoken all over the place there, you can observe your homelike manners and meet persons who are familiar from your childhood, you tend to forget that you are, in fact, in Turkey.'[72]

Smirnov interviewed Russian compatriots during his pilgrimage; many had come on foot to Odessa to sail to Athos. One of the commonest reasons why his fellow travellers were making the pilgrimage was a desire 'to see what it [Athos] really is like'. Some were having personal crises and longed for an alternative way of life; others simply wanted to leave their life behind.[73]

Stadnitsky and Smirnov both mentioned many Russian monastics whose fame had spread to Russia and who attracted many pilgrims from their homeland. Stadnitsky, for example, referred to Archimandrite Makary (Sushkin), who came from a wealthy family and had lived in St Panteleimon for thirty years. He fell seriously ill soon after his arrival and seemed sure to die. However, miraculously he recovered during a liturgy, was considered especially blessed, and hence was elected abbot of his monastery.

Stadnitsky also met a civilized and well-educated monk who taught himself to think clearly and logically by reading secretly in his cell. Another who attracted his attention was a hesychast who taught him the difficulties of silence. These Athonite descriptions became known to Russians back home and aroused their curiosity; and eventually some decided to make a pilgrimage to 'their Holy Mountain'.[74]

Another significant theme in late nineteenth-century Russian pilgrims' tales explaining the tension between the Russian and Greek Athonites is that of Russia and 'the other', 'the other' being Greece. The Russians were proud of the education of Russian monks, who were at least as advanced as the Greeks. Many of them had studied in Kiev, where they learned many

[72] Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy?', p. 350.

[73] Smirnov, op. cit., p. 887.

[74] Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy?', pp. 351-2.

languages and published historical and spiritual works.[75] There had been tensions between Russia and Greece during the Crimean War, when the Greeks hardened their attitude to the Russians. In the late 1820s there had even been an attempt to prevent Russians from entering Athos and to close St Panteleimon on the pretext that there were only a few monks left in the monastery. The escalation of this conflict was abruptly and decisively stopped by the Ecumenical Patriarch, who intervened and recognized the Russian right to St Panteleimon.[76]

Both Greeks and Russians adopted extreme positions that were more political than appropriate to monastic life. This was understandable during the Ottoman period when Athos was struggling to maintain its ascetic tradition and self-governing status. The Greeks naturally wished to protect Athos as the last bastion of Byzantium; the Russians wanted to maintain St Panteleimon on what was also '*their* Holy Mountain'. According to Stadnitsky and Smirnov, there is an ancient historic link between the Kiev Caves monastery and Athos; and there had long been renowned *startsy* in St Panteleimon, with its numerous treasures and ancient monastic tradition. Some of the Russian pilgrims' accounts describe Athos as part of Russia, calling it 'Russian Mount Athos'.

Russian pilgrimage to Athos in 1880–1914 reached its apogee. This coincided with the Russian Steamship and Trade Society and the foundation of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in 1882, which organized group excursions for pilgrims, offering hospitality for them in Odessa, Constantinople, and on Athos. Russian pilgrims frequently wrote with concern about the future of the Holy Mountain: most of the monks were Greek, and the self-governing monastic republic was now subsumed into the Ottoman Empire.[77] An American researcher has called these pilgrims' tales 'verbal icons', arguing that all Orthodox art, including the tales, was iconic and aimed to show the reader a glimpse of 'transcendental reality'.[78]

I. I. Sokolov (d. 1939) made a pilgrimage to Athos in 1902, and wrote a scholarly article entitled, 'The Monastic Republic. My Own Experiences and Observations'. He stressed the

[75] Anon., 'Putevyya zametki palomnikov-studentov Kazanskoy dukhovnoy akademii', *Pravoslavny Sobesednik*, 2 (1907; fevral), 235-266.

[76] S. F. Sharapov, *Desyat' dney na Afon* (St Petersburg, 1892). Cf. Pellikka, 'How did the Holy Mountain become Holy?', pp. 352-3.

[77] Ibid, p. 356.

[78] Gail Diane Lenhoff Vroon, 'The Making of the Medieval Russian Journey', University of Michigan dissertation (1978), p. 13.

importance of the Holy Mountain for the spirituality of Christianity.[79] He also praised the monks' learning, and their comprehensive archives and libraries. Having described the geographical position of Athos, its nature, climate, and wildlife, and given a summary of its history, he split the monasteries into two groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Sokolov's list of cenobitic and idiorrhythmic monasteries

Cenobitic	Idiorrhythmic
St Panteleimon	Megiste Lavra
Zograf	Iviron
Konstamonitou	Pantokrator
Grigoriou	Hilandar
Dionysiou	Vatopedi
St Paul's	Dochiariou
Koutloumousiou	Xeropotamou
Simonopetra	Philotheou
Karakalou	
Esphigmenou	
Xenophontos	
Stavronikita	

Sokolov did not describe the monasteries in detail, but characterized their general features: 'all monasteries outwardly resemble fortresses.' He defined sketes and *kellia*, stating that there were 13 sketes and 197 *kellia*, of which 148 were Greek, 31 Russian, 5 Bulgarian, 12 Romanian, and 1 Georgian. The monasteries housed 7,521 monks in 1902, to which he added a total of 180 novices and 2,500 workers who were living on Athos. His statistics on the number of monks in 1902 are interesting because of the rapid increase in Russian monks and pilgrims in the second half of the nineteenth century (Table 3).[80]

Table 3. The number of monks on Athos in 1902

Russian	3,615

[79] According to Sokolov, Archimandrite Anikita (Shirinsky-Shikhmatov), Elder Ieronim (Solomentsov), and Abbot Makary (Suskin) were particularly influential spiritual fathers of Athonite monasticism. See I. I. Sokolov, 'Monasheskaya respublika. Iz nablyudenii i vospominanii o svyatoy gore Afonskoy', *Istoritshesky Vestnik*, 92: 4 (1903), 948-72, and 93 (1903), 163-88. Cf. Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja venäläisistä pyhiinvaelluskertomuksista', pp. 128-32.

[80] Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja', p. 130.

Greek	3,207
Bulgarian	340
Romanian	288
Georgian	53
Serbian	18

Athelstan Riley's account of 1883 also confirms the rapid changes in the monastic population, St Panteleimon having far surpassed the three largest monasteries (Vatopedi, Iviron, and Lavra) by then. Carlyle and Hunt counted 15 monks in St Panteleimon in 1801, and, Curzon gave the figure of 130 in 1837. Fifty years later, in 1883, Riley recorded 1,600 Russian monks on Athos, half of whom lived in St Panteleimon. The Russian population amounted to about 2,000, including the servants, almost half of the entire population of Athos.[81]

Sokolov discussed everyday Athonite life, the liturgy, and prayer. He praised the good education of the monks, pointing out that 'among them are former students of universities and theological seminars, physicians, lawyers, and artists.' He described the history of the Russians on Athos from the time of St Antony until the end of the eighteenth century, and the dilapidation of the monasteries, including St Panteleimon. Next, he reported on the renewal of the ascetic tradition on Athos, especially through luminaries such as Archimandrite Makary (Sushkin). With detachment, he discussed the tension between Greek and Russian monks, and concluded that the fault was on both sides, the cause being political rather than spiritual.[82]

According to Riley, the changes on Athos were attributable to the fact that St Panteleimon presented itself as a 'go-ahead colony':

> The inhabitants pride themselves upon being the subject of a first-class European Power and despise the Greek civilization as a relic of Oriental barbarism. The whole place is more like a small town than a monastery … for all around it and down to the water's edge there are workshops, and storehouses, and dwelling houses; and still the monks are building more, so that the great monastery is increasing in extent year by year.[83]

[81] Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, pp. 109, 118-20.

[82] I. I. Sokolov, op. cit. 93 (1903), 182; Pellikka, 'Lähdekriittisiä pohdintoja', 131-2.

[83] Riley, *Athos or the Mountain of Monks*, p. 241. Cf. Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, p. 109.

Believing St Panteleimon was a government affair supported by government money, Riley asked, 'what interests other than religion can Russia have on Athos?' He concluded that Athos was of primary importance to Russia for access to the Mediterranean. Its acquisition would provide her with a practically unconquerable fortress amid European Turkey, whence the conquest of Thessaloniki, a town second only to Constantinople in political importance, could be ensured by cutting off the transportation routes between Thessaloniki and Turkey.[84] The tsar and the Russian government, possibly because of the many retired officers from the Russian army who were still in the prime of life and had first-hand contacts in the government, generously supported the Russian monks. The Greek monasteries found it difficult to pay their taxes. Consequently, the monasteries on the eastern side of the peninsula had to change to the idiorrhythmic system to make ends meet.

The anonymous writer of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, described the dawning of spirituality in Russia. The protagonist, a Russian peasant, has left his home in search of the right way to pray. He tramps across fields from village to village and monastery to monastery to find an answer to his spiritual questions, carrying only a Bible and the *Dobrotolyubie* (*Philokalia*) in his rucksack,[85] and gathering the strength to travel from his unceasing prayer. *The Way of a Pilgrim* clearly shows the significance and importance of the *Dobrotolyubie* among the Russian Orthodox, and also of the revitalized pilgrimage movement.[86]

By the end of the nineteenth century St Panteleimon had grown into a great village-like monastic compound, and the St Andrew skete into a large monastery with the biggest church on the Holy Mountain. Athonite monasticism was flourishing again, especially in St Panteleimon, the St Andrew skete, and in various *kellia*, despite the Ottoman presence on the peninsula. After the First World War famous Russian ascetics, such as Elders Sophrony (Sakharov) and Nikon (Shtrandtman) of Karoulia, lived on the Holy Mountain.[87]

Athos as a Part of Greece

[84] Riley, *Athos or the Mountain of Monks*, pp. 242-243. Cf. Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, pp. 109-10.

[85] Timothy Ware, op. cit., pp. 120-1.

[86] St Theophan the Recluse (d. 1894) issued a greatly expanded Russian translation in five volumes during the years 1876-1890: Timothy Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[87] Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, 'Gerald Palmer, the *Philokalia*, and the Holy Mountain', *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* (1994), pp. 24-6; Donald M. Nicol, 'A Sojourn on the Holy Mountain in the Year 1949', *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* (2001), p. 94.

Decades of Russian monastic decline

When Ottoman rule on Mount Athos ended in 1912, the Athonite population was at its height at 7,754 monks, the greater part of them Russians (3,496). During the following decades, until the early 1970s, there was a steady decline in the number of monks living on the Holy Mountain. The turning-point came in 1972 with an increase of one monk since 1971 and more in the following years as Table 4 shows.[88]

Table 4. Numbers of Athonites between 1912 and 2011

Decline	
1912	7,754 monks of whom 3,496 were Russians
1913	6,345 monks
1943	2,878 monks
1956	1,893 monks
1968	1,238 monks
1971	1,145 monks
Increase	
1972	1,146 monks
1980	1,191 monks
1984	1,266 monks, 12 at St Panteleimon
1991	2,536 monks, 38 at St Panteleimon
Decline[89]	
2001	2,262 monks
2011	1,811 monks

In 1912 the total population of monks was calculated as 7,754, falling to 6,345 in 1913 and to only 2,878 in 1943. The main reasons for the decline were the natural mortality of the Russians as well as the expulsion of 1,000 rebel Name-Glorifiers in 1913.[90] The Greeks felt threatened by the many Slavs who had rapidly gained a majority on what they considered *their* Holy Mountain. The unstable political situation in the Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century

[88] For more on the statistics, see George Mantzaridis, 'New Statistical Data Concerning the Monks of Mount Athos', *Social Compass*, 32: 1 (1975), 97-106; id., 'Mount Athos and Today's Society', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 26: 3 (1981), 225-35; Gothóni, *Paradise within Reach*, pp. 31-2. Fr Niphon from Simonopetra supplied the statistics from 1991.

[89] No statistics for the number of monks in St Panteleimon available.

[90] Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*, p. 119.

eventually led to a massive attack against the Ottoman forces in Europe, and to their withdrawal from Macedonia. Athos was finally liberated on 15 November 1912 without a struggle when the Turkish Aga vacated his office in Karyes, ending nearly five centuries – 488 years to be exact – of Ottoman rule.[91]

The Greeks now occupied the peninsula. Afraid that Athos would fall under Russian control, they restricted the admission of Russian monks as soon as Greek sovereignty was recognized in 1923. The 1917 Revolution and Bolshevik anti-religious policy made the task easy for the Greeks. Recruitment from Russia ceased altogether, which resulted in the decline of Russian monks, as the statistics clearly show. The other Slav monasteries suffered a similar fate. The process was accelerated by the First World War, and by the Greek Civil War (1946-9), which almost completely isolated Athos from the outside world and created unfavourable conditions for the recruitment of Greek novices. Consequently, in 1963, when the millennium of Athos was marked, pessimistic observers said that the celebrations could also be regarded as the funeral of monastic life on the Holy Mountain.[92]

Because of the political changes in Russia and Eastern Europe, pilgrim traffic shifted from Eastern to Western Europe until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and especially after the millennium of Athonite monasticism in 1963, when westerners rediscovered Athos as a holy mountain and a sacred pilgrimage centre.[93] The 1970s proved to be a turning-point regarding the number of pilgrims visiting Athos: there were about 3,000 in 1970, whereas when I began my yearly field research in 1984 there were 19,688, rising to 35,359 in 1992 and more than one hundred thousand in 2014.[94]

An article in the *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* of 1997 describes how the Russian Prophet Elijah skete brotherhood was expelled and replaced by Greek monks in 1992. At the time it was the only major Russian house on Athos to have been continuously in Russian hands since its foundation by St Paisy Velichkovsky in 1747.[95] According to Donald M. Nicol,

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[91] Graham Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 157.

[92] René Gothóni, *Paradise within Reach. Monasticism and Pilgrimage on Mt Athos* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993, p. 32.

[93] Gothóni, Tales and Truth, pp. 173-83.

[94] Statistics from the port authorities in Ouranoupolis and Fr Niphon at Simonopetra.

[95] Fennell, 'The Prophet Elijah Skete', *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* (1997), p. 53.

there were twenty-five Serbian monks in Hilandar in 1949, and only five Russians.[96] Athos was occasionally visited by Russian dignitaries, for instance, the Russian Foreign Secretary, and, in 2005 and 2015, President Putin. I have met a few Russians during my field research between 1984 and 2014, and there seems to have been something of a boom immediately following the fall of Soviet Union in 1991.[97]

Summary

Considering the pilgrims' tales we have described, the Bulgarians seem to have been the pioneer Slavs on Mount Athos in the tenth century, closely followed by the Russians and Serbs. These Slav nations already had their own monasteries from the early eleventh and late twelfth centuries. Zograf was originally a Greek monastery. The first document that refers to it as 'the monastery of the Bulgarians' is dated 1276. The Russian monastery of Bogoroditsa Xylourgou is dated 1016 and the foundation of Hilandar as Serbian is 1198. There was a high tide for Russian pilgrims to Mount Athos until the thirteenth century, after which there was an abrupt ebb due to the fall of Kiev and, later, the Russo-Turkish wars. This lasted until the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there were always small groups of Russian monks and pilgrims travelling from the monasteries in Russia to Athos and back. Much later, a low point was reached by the Bulgarians who had numbered some 1,000 monks at Hilandar in the late seventeenth century.

Serbian pilgrimage was at its height from the first half of the fourteenth century, when Emperor Stefan Dušan made large donations to many monasteries, until the mid-fifteenth century and even after the beginning of Ottoman rule in 1453. Athonite monasticism was already strongly rooted in the Slav countries and its spirituality was the religious essence of the national identity in the Balkans and Russia. Athos became truly multinational.

The foundation of many of the ruling monasteries coincided with the spread of Orthodoxy to the north. Bulgarians, Russians, and Serbs first established *kellia* and then ruling monasteries, enlarged and rebuilt many times over the centuries by benefactors from these countries and from Greece. Of the ruling monasteries, Megisti Lavra, Vatopedi, Dionysiou, Pantokrator,

[96] Nicol, op. cit., p. 76.

[97] Gabriel Nicos Pentzikis, 'Report from the Mountain: 2005', *Annual Report of the Friends of Mount Athos* (2005), p. 24.

Philotheou, Stavronikita, Xeropotamou, and Esphigmenou, Konstamonitou, Xenophontos, and Karakalou are of Greek origin.

In conclusion, since the birth of Athonite monasticism, owing to the ebb and flow of monastic populations, monks of different nationalities have not always lived in their respective monasteries. Depending on benefactions and donations, groups of monks have moved to other ruling monasteries. Hence, multinationality has characterized Athonite monasticism: during periods of low tide, groups of monks in some of the monasteries have restored economic and spiritual life to serve its original purpose. This tradition has continued uninterrupted from the early eleventh century to the present day, but at some points less strongly than at others. The heyday of the Bulgarians was between the late seventeenth to early nineteenth century, of the Serbs between the end of the fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century, and of the Russians between the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century (Table 5).

Table 5. Numbers of Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian monks

Centuries/ Nationalities	10th -12th	13th-14th	15th-16th	17th-18th	19th- 20th and 21st
Bulgarians 911	oooo	●●●●●●● oooo	OO	**OOO** oooo	••• •
Serbs 1015	•••	•••• oooOOOO	●●● •••	••	•••• ••
Russians 1016	•••	••••	●●● •••	••••• •••	**OOO** ●● •••

• = fewer than 100 monks; ● = more than 200 monks; o = more than 400 monks;
O = more than 600 monks; **O** = more than 1,000 monks

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