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POETIC TEXT AND ITS ICONOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION: THE AKATHISTOS HYMN IN THE RUSSIAN AND CRETAN RELIGIOUS ART

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This paper focuses on topics relevant to the visual interpretation of poetic verbal texts in their source culture as well as the target culture for which they were translated. The research was realized on fresco and icon cycles that illustrate the poetic text of the Akathistos Hymn. The Greek original text of the hymn is examined in contrast to its Slavonic translation through a parallel comparative analysis of their iconographic interpretations in Russian and Cretan religious art. Seeing as they have never been comparatively studied before, this analysis provides fertile ground for interesting discoveries and research. The Cretan tradition is studied through two complete Akathistos fresco cycles (from the church in the village of Roustica and the cathedral of Valsamonero Monastery), four incomplete Akathistos fresco cycles from the 14th – early 15th century, and the margin scenes on the icon of *Panagia Galactotrofousa* (1748) by G. Kastrofilakas. The Russian tradition is studied through a fresco cycle from the Ferapontov monastery (approx. 1500) by Dionisius, and the margin scenes on six Russian icons representing different iconographic schools of the 16th – early 17th century. The differences between these two iconographic traditions in regard to the text's interpretation are divided into two categories: a) those related to the differences between the original text and its Slavonic translation; and b) those related to the different connotations of the original text and its Slavonic translation in the source and target cultures. Typical examples of both categories are presented. As far as the first category is concerned, we discuss whether the variations of the cycle structure in the Russian tradition were caused by the absence of the alphabet acrostic in the Slavonic translation. The second category is studied both through examples of different fragments of the same poetic text illustrated by painters and through different symbolic verbal image interpretations by means of visual art in both traditions. The results of the comparative analysis demonstrate that Cretan painters were more creative in the visual interpretation of the poetic text's symbolic background due to the fact that they interpreted the original text of the hymn in the context of the culture in which it was created. This provides numerous verbal and non-verbal connotations for each verbal sign of the text. On the other hand, the Russian iconographic tradition did not have this direct contact with the text due to the translation process it had gone through, as well as due to the semiotic gap between the source and the target culture. This is why it failed to display an equally as large number of symbolic interpretations. However, it did discover and emphasize other messages and connotations of the same poetic text which became more important in the context of that other culture. Therefore, the comparative study of religious art traditions helps us understand the various ways a single text that has close ties to the semiotic features of different cultures can be perceived and interpreted in said cultures.

Keywords: visual interpretation of poetry, Akathistos hymn, Akathistos iconographic cycle, Cretan religious art, Russian icons with the Akathistos hymn.

ПОЭТИЧЕСКИЙ ТЕКСТ И ЕГО ИКОНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ: АКАФИСТ В РУССКОМ И КРИТСКОМ РЕЛИГИОЗНОМ ИСКУССТВЕ

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Статья посвящена визуальной интерпретации поэтических вербальных текстов в их исходной культуре, а также в той целевой культуре, для которой они были переведены. Исследование проводилось на материале фресковых и иконописных циклов, иллюстрирующих поэтический текст акафиста. Греческий оригинальный текст гимна рассматривается в контрасте с его славянским переводом через параллельный сравнительный анализ их иконографических интерпретаций в русском и критском религиозном искусстве. Поскольку они никогда не были изучены в сравнительном отношении, этот анализ даёт благодатную почву для интересных открытий и исследований. Критская традиция изучается на примере двух полных циклов акафиста на фресках церкви деревни Рустика и собора монастыря Вальсамонеро, четырёх неполных циклов акафиста на фреске XIV – начала XV в., а также на примере клейм иконы Панагии Галактотрофусы Г. Кастрофилакаса (1748). Русская традиция изучается на материале цикла фресок Дионисия из Ферапонтова монастыря (ок. 1500), а также клейм шести русских икон, представляющих различные иконографические школы XVI – начала XVII в. Различия между этими двумя иконографическими традициями в отношении интерпретации текста делятся на две категории: а) связанные с различиями между оригинальным текстом и его славянским переводом; б) связанные с разными коннотациями оригинального текста и его славянского перевода в исходной и целевой культурах. Приведены типичные примеры обеих категорий. К первой относятся дискуссии о том, были ли вариации структуры цикла в русской традиции вызваны отсутствием акростиха в славянском переводе. Вторая категория представлена на примерах различных фрагментов одного и того же поэтического текста, иллюстрируемых художниками, а также на основе различных символических интерпретаций вербальных образов средствами визуальных форм искусства в обеих традициях. Результаты сравнительного анализа свидетельствуют о том, что критские художники были более творческими в области визуальной интерпретации символического фона поэтического текста за счёт того, что они интерпретировали оригинальный текст акафиста в контексте той культуры, в которой он был создан. Это даёт множество вербальных и невербальных коннотаций для каждого вербального знака этого текста. С другой стороны, русская иконописная традиция не имела такого непосредственного контакта с текстом из-за того процесса перевода, через который он прошёл, а также из-за семиотического разрыва между исходной и целевой культурами. Вот почему она не смогла создать столь же значительное количество симво-

лических интерпретаций. Однако она обнаружила и подчеркнула другие сообщения и коннотации того же поэтического текста, которые стали более важными в контексте иной культуры. Таким образом, сравнительное изучение традиций религиозного искусства помогает понять, как один и тот же текст, тесно связанный с семиотическими особенностями разных культур, может иметь различные способы восприятия и интерпретации в этих культурах.

Ключевые слова: визуальная интерпретация поэзии, акафист, акафистный иконографический цикл, критское религиозное искусство, русские иконы с акафистом.

The extent and way the complex and multivalent structures of poetic speech can be interpreted with non-verbal symbols and illustrated with visual images is an interesting topic for both philologists and art historians. The philological aspects of said topic are mostly focused around the semiotic issues of translating poetry into a different language, i.e. a different system of verbal signs. R. Jakobson distinguished 3 types of translation in his article "On the Linguistic Aspects of Translation"; namely *rewording*, which is an "interpretation of verbal signs by other signs of the same language"; *translation proper*, which is our familiar interlingual translation; and finally *transmutation*, which constitutes "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" [Jakobson 1059, 233]. The scholar comes to the conclusion that no matter which of the abovementioned methods is followed, poetry remains untranslatable. The only thing that could be employed in the case of poetry, according to R. Jakobson, is *creative transposition*. It could be "either intralingual transposition – from one poetic shape into another, interlingual transposition – from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another, e.g. from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting" [Jakobson 1059, 238].

The goal of this paper is to follow the process of this transposition on the iconographic cycles that interpret the Akathistos Hymn either in the Greek original language in the Greek iconographic tradition, or its Church Slavonic translation in the Russian iconographic tradition. In the second case, we observe the phenomenon of double translation, first from Greek to Church Slavonic (interlingual translation), and subsequently from verbal to visual images (transmutation).

We will begin by sharing some information about the text that was the starting point of this tradition, i.e. the Akathistos hymn. Apart from being one of the greatest masterpieces of Byzantine hymnography, the Akathistos hymn is also a very mysterious piece of poetry; despite the extensive bibliography devoted to it, it still has not fully revealed its secrets. Neither the author of the hymn nor the time period of its composition are known, with the latter ranging from the 4th up to the 8th century [Detorakis 1993, 20–41]. According to its typical features, the Akathistos hymn is a kontakion consisting of 24 (the number of the letters of the Greek alphabet) stanzas – *oikos* – with an alphabet acrostic and two preambles – *prooimion*. During the period we are focusing on, only the second – probably not original – *prooimion* (Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ) was used in the hymn. However, the Akathistos is structurally different from the classic kon-

takion, which makes this text unique. Some of the differences between the two include: two alternate types of stanzas, short ones and long ones, consisting of 6 pairs of the so-called *Chairetismoi* (i.e. verses starting with the appeal χαῖρε ("Rejoice")); two types of refrains (Χαῖρε, Νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε and Ἀλληλούια); and the combination of Christological and Mariological topics [Borisova 2008, 42–44]. Thematically, the first half of the hymn retells in the poetic form the Gospel story, starting from the Annunciation and ending with the Presentation of Christ in the Temple; while the second half is devoted to dogmatic issues regarding the Mystery of God's Incarnation, as well as the protective role of the Holy Virgin for all Christians.

From the very beginning, the Akathistos managed to move past the borders of the culture from which it had originated. Among the cultures that were influenced the most by this hymn, the Slavonic culture should probably be mentioned first due to the great popularity of the text had among Slavs throughout the history of Slavonic Orthodoxy (from the 10th century to this day). The first Slavonic translation of the Akathistos probably dates back to the end of the 9th century up to the beginning of the 10th century. Since then, several subsequent corrections of the Slavonic text were carried out in accordance with the Greek original. The version the Slavs used during the time period of our research originated from the Mount Athos book correction of the late 13th century [Borisova 2016, 70–73]. The text of the translation generally follows the original with word-to-word accuracy alongside several mistakes. However, this specific translation failed to reproduce many poetic devices of the original, including the alphabet acrostic. The exact differences between the Greek original and the Slavonic translation in regard to the text and its poetic structure will be analyzed below.

The cycle of images illustrating the 24 oikos of the Akathistos hymn that appeared in Byzantine art no later than the end of the 13th century [Patzold 1989, 8–9; Etingof 2000, 376] probably constitutes the first attempt in Orthodox art to present the poetic hymnographic text in a visual way. This practice, which started either in Constantinople or in the monasteries of Northern Greece and Mount Athos, rapidly spread to all Orthodox cultures, taking the form of fresco cycles, codex illustrations, and, later, icon margin scenes. The rapid expansion of this iconography in the 14th – 17th century is connected to the new perception of the Akathistos hymn in the context of the hesychazm tradition. It should be stressed that the Akathistos, which has always been one of the most popular Christian hymns up to the 14th century, retained its uniqueness, seeing as there were no imitations of it. The perception of this hymn not only as a masterpiece of religious poetry, but also as a paradigm of the attraction the human soul feels towards God, appears to be a contribution of hesychazm. Based on this concept, numerous other hymns could be composed. It was in this same spirit that the initial attempts to create a cycle of 24 iconographic images illustrating 24 oikos of the hymn were made. It is not a coincidence that some of the first codex illustrations with the Akathistos cycle found were miniatures of the illuminated codex *Sinod. Gr 429* [Lixačeva 1972, 253–264]. These were ordered by the Ecumenical Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (1300–1379) for the same codex where his own Akathistos imitations were placed, following the authentic text of the hymn [Proxorov 1972, 248–249]. The attachment of a cascade of symbols, sound repetitions, paronoma-

sia and, of course, the icon itself onto the poetic text was seen as a redundancy in words and images by the representatives of hesychazm, which, when removed, led to the revelation of the inexpressible divine essence.

Another reason for the popularity of the fresco cycles of the Akathistos is due to the so-called didactic function of Ecclesiastical art, which provides believers with the proper interpretations of the polysemantic hymnographic texts. The Akathistos hymn was not only poetry, i.e. the expression of the individual spiritual world of a poet, but hymnography as well, i.e. a common prayer to God by all Christians. In other words, each believer has to identify with the creator of the text in order to participate in this common appeal and this effort to interpret and co-create. This is exactly what iconographers do; they promote their own way to interpret the text to believers. Subsequently, said believers can follow this way during the process of perceiving the specific text, as well as in their individual prayers. In the case of Slavic iconographers (note that the first Slavonic iconographic Akathistos cycles date back to the 14th century), their interpretations are secondary because they did not interpret the original text, but the Slavonic translation, which constitutes the translator's interpretation.

What was discussed above evidences the importance of a parallel comparative research of the original and translated texts of the Akathistos hymn alongside the corresponding iconographic traditions. The results of said research could be a topic of interest in the fields of philology, comparative culturology, semiotics, and history of arts.

The study presented in this paper is carried out based on Cretan and Russian iconography. The Cretan tradition, which, to the best of our knowledge, has never been used for comparative analysis, is represented by two full (i.e. consisting of 24 images) cycles of frescoes with Akathistos scenes. The first one is found in the Church of *Panagia Katochoriani or Levadiotissa* at the Roustica village of the Municipality of Rethymno, and is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin and the Transfiguration of Christ. These frescoes that date back to 1390–1391 AD are the oldest existing evidence of the Akathistos iconography on the island of Crete [Spatharakis 2005, 8–18]. The second cycle is preserved in the cathedral (katholikon) of the Holy Monastery of Valsamonero near the Vorizia village in the Kainourgion Province of the Municipality of Zaros [Spatharakis 2005, 24–34]. This church, now three-aisled and dedicated to Saint Fanourios, originally had only one northern aisle dedicated to Panagia Hodegitria. It is on the walls of this aisle where the Akathistos frescoes are found, dating back to probably 1430 AD. Apart from these two full cycles, another four incomplete (not completely saved) cycles exist in Crete, namely:

1) Twelve oikos of the Akathistos cycle dating back to the beginning of the 14th century are preserved in the cathedral (katholikon) of the Monastery of Hodegetria in the Kainourgion Province of the Municipality of Zaros [Spatharakis 2005, 35–41],

2) A partially preserved Akathistos cycle dating back to the beginning of the 15th century is kept in the Church of the Holy Virgin near the village of Kavousi in the Municipality of Hierapetra [Spatharakis 2005, 41–42],

3) A partially preserved (in a rather bad condition) Akathistos cycle dating back to the beginning of the 15th century is kept in the Church of the Holy Virgin

at the village of Meronas, in the Amari Province of the Municipality of Rethymno [Spatharakis 2005, 18–24],

4) A partially preserved (in a rather bad condition) Akathistos cycle dating back to the beginning of the 15th century is kept in the Church of the Holy Virgin near the village of Vori in Pyrgiotissa Province [Spatharakis 2005, 43–44].

These incomplete cycles will be used in our research for comparative purposes. For this same reason, we will also examine subsequent holy icon evidence in Crete, i. e. the margin scenes with the Akathistos cycle on the post-Byzantine icon of *Panagia Galactotrofousa* (Nursing Virgin Mary or Madonna Lactans) by the prominent Cretan painter Georgios Kastrofilakas (1748), kept now in the so-called "Small" St. Menas Cathedral in the city of Heraklion, Crete (fig. 1) [Kuriakaki-Sfakaki 2013, 63].



Fig 1. Panagia Galactotrofousa with Akathistos by Georgios Kastrofilakas. Crete, 1748.

The Russian tradition is mainly studied based on various well-known works of art, namely the Akathistos fresco cycle from the katholikon dedicated to the Nativity of the Holy Virgin, which is found in the Ferapontov monastery in the

Vologda region, and was painted by the great Russian iconographer Dionisius (about 1500) [Michelson 1966, 144–164; Samsonova 2007, 16–17]. Said cycle will hereinafter be referred to as the Dionisius cycle. We have also analyzed the margin scenes with the Akathistos cycle on a number of Russian icons of the 16th – early 17th century, namely:

1) The icon of the Theotokos of Tikhvin with the Akathistos; Pskov iconography school; first half of the 16th century; Pskov State United Historical, Architectural and Fine Arts Museum-Reserve, Pskov, Russia; Cat No. PKM 4777 [Vasil'eva 2006, 144–153]; hereinafter referred to as Theotokos of Tikhvin.

2) The icon of the Annunciation with the Akathistos; Yaroslavl iconography school; first half of the 16th century; Museum of History and Architecture, Yaroslavl, Russia; Cat No. 40946, ИК 142; hereinafter referred to as Annunciation 1 [Maslenitsyn 1983, 23–24].

3) The icon of the Exaltation of the Virgin with the Akathistos; Moscow iconography school; mid-16th century; Russian museum, Saint-Petersburg, Russia; Cat No. ДРЖ 1834 [Petrova 1989, 143–156]; hereinafter referred to as Exaltation 1.

4) The icon of the Exaltation of the Virgin with the Akathistos; Moscow iconography school; second half of the 16th century; Assumption Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, Moscow, Russia; Cat No. Ж 197 [Sophia God's Wisdom 2000, 326–327]; hereinafter referred to as Exaltation 2.

5) The icon of the Annunciation with the Akathistos; approx. 1570; Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia; Cat No. 29558; hereinafter referred to as Annunciation 2.

6) The icon of the Annunciation with the Akathistos; first half of the 17th century; Annunciation Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, Moscow, Russia; Cat No. Ж-1284 [Salikova 1999, 264–279]; hereinafter referred to as Annunciation 3.

It should be noted that all the abovementioned Greek and Russian frescoes and icons generally follow the same method of text iconography (fresco or margin scene) devoted to one specific oikos of the Akathistos hymn. As far as the long oikos are concerned, only their beginnings were illustrated, although the Chairetismoi are not usually taken into account by iconographers. Another tradition which depicted several images of the long oikos with separate images illustrating the Chairetismoi also existed in the iconography of the 14th – 15th century [Smirnova et al 1982, 345–353; Preobrazhensky 1999, 233–244], but it was not very widespread and ended up disappearing.

While analyzing the differences between the Cretan and Russian cycles of the Akathistos in regard to the approach and interpretation of the text, one can divide them into two main categories: a) those originating from the differences between the original text and its Slavonic translation; and b) those originating from different connotations of the original text and its Slavonic translation in both the source and the target culture.

We provide some examples of these two categories below. Starting with the first category of differences, we will focus on the poetic characteristics of the original text that the translation failed to reproduce. Among said characteristics, the acrostic played a dominant role, as we have already mentioned before. The structure of the Greek text was based on an alphabet acrostic that symbolically equated the text with the entire universe, which was also described with

these 24 letters [Detorakis 1993, 15]. The alphabet acrostic strictly determined the number and the order of stanzas, while the prooimion Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ, which stayed outside this structure, was considered an additional element. This is why Greek iconographic cycles didn't illustrate the prooimion, even though they never failed to illustrate the oikos. They organized those oikos in the correct order according to the first acrostic letter of the corresponding stanza, which is not only prominently visible but also usually plays a central role in the entire composition, as one can easily see on the icon by G. Kastrofilakas. However, in the iconographic versions based on the Slavonic translation, due to the fact that the acrostic is lost [Borisova 2016, 71], this strict structure could no longer be easily supported. Moreover, from the 15*th* century, a new way of stanza numeration is adopted in the Russian tradition with each short oikos being called kondak and only the long oikos retaining the name oikos. The *prooimion* in the manuscripts is also marked as *kondak* (Kondak 1), and there are two different numerations for *kondak* (*prooimion* and short oikos, from 1 to 13) and *oikos* (long oikos, from 1 to 12) being used. These changes, which could be thought of as consequences of the absence of an acrostic, lead to the *prooimion* becoming an equal element in the text's structure and the order of stanzas being downgraded to a rather vague and insignificant feature that can be easily changed to fit the goal of the artist. Consequently, only two Russian cycles, namely *Annunciation 1* and *Exaltation 2*, do not depict the prooimion [Salikova 1998, 53]. The scenes of the former follow the text's (or the Greek tradition's) order with some minor changes, while the latter only illustrates 17 stanzas (missing stanza 6 Ζάλην ἔνδοθεν ἔχων, stanza 11 Λάμψας ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ; stanza 13 Νέαν ἔδειξε κτίσιν; stanza 16 Πᾶσα φύσις Ἀγγέλων; stanza 18 Σῶσαι θέλων τὸν κόσμον; stanza 20 Ὕμνος ἅπας ἡττᾶται; and stanza 24 Ὦ πανύμνητε Μῆτερ), which are placed in a rather random order with the exception of the first 5 stanzas. The *Theotokos of Tikhvin* illustrates the prooimion [Salikova 1998, 61] and, due to the fact that the total number of icons cannot exceed 24, it does not illustrate the last stanza (Ὦ πανύμνητε Μῆτερ, kondak 13 in the Slavonic tradition). Furthermore, stanza 17 and 19 (oikos 9 and 10 in the Slavonic tradition) are not found in their "expected" positions according to the order of the text. In *Exaltation 1*, the prooimion is seen in the penultimate position, while the corresponding 23*rd* stanza (Ψάλλοντές σου τὸν τόκον, oikos 12 in the Slavonic tradition) is missing. It should be noted that, on this icon, even though two different stanza names – kondak and oikos – are used, the numeration is still consecutive (from 1 to 24). The prooimion is marked as kondak 23. On *Annunciation 3*, the prooimion composition is illustrated first instead of oikos 1, along with the composition of a battle near the defensive walls of Constantinople. However, in the right upper corner of the same composition, one can see a small scene of the *Annunciation at the Well*, typical for an illustration of this oikos. It should also be noted that the prooimion composition with the battle of Constantinople became popular in the Russian art of the late 16*th*–17*th* century due to a historical parallel: The Holy Virgin that once saved the capital of the Byzantine Empire from unfaithful invaders now protected the state of Moscow from all its foreign enemies [Salnikova 1999, 266–267]. Lastly, the *Dionisius cycle* and *Annunciation 2* illustrate all stanzas as well as the prooimion, therefore increasing the number of scenes. While in the *Dionisius cycle* the prooimion is

painted last in the fresco cycle [Salikova 1998, 60], in *Annunciation 2* it occupies the penultimate (of 26) position.

Another example is the inaccurate translation of the seventh Chairetismos of stanza 23 (penultimate), which reads as follows: Χαῖρε, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀσάλευτος πύργος (χαῖρε, τῆς Βασιλείας τὸ ἀπόρθητον τεῖχος)[1]. The Slavonic translation conveys the πύργος (tower) as СТОЛПЪ (column). As stated above, the icons devoted to the long oikos illustrated only the first part of the stanza without the Chairetismoi. However, the symbolic images of the Chairetismoi still influence the iconography of the cycle, and could therefore be depicted on the icon of some other oikos to which they are related thematically and symbolically, depending on the painter's vision and ideas. These Chairetismoi can be symbolically connected to the beginning of stanza 19 (Τεῖχος εἶ τῶν παρθένων, oikos 10 in the Slavonic tradition), which shares the concept of the Holy Virgin as a defensive wall (τεῖχος – СТЕНА). It is no coincidence that, in the Cretan tradition, the iconography of this oikos (the Defense of Virgins composition) depicts towers on the town walls [Spatharakis 2005, 32]. These towers are not included in that same composition in the Russian tradition due to the absence of the corresponding word in the translation.

However, the vast majority of differences between the Cretan and Russian iconography of the Akathistos are caused not by the differences in the texts themselves, but by the different connotations the same concepts receive in the context of these two cultures. As far as the illustration of the Chairetismoi is concerned, it is worth mentioning that the 8*th* Chairetismos of stanza 11 (Λάμψας ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, oikos 6 in the Slavonic tradition) which reads: χαῖρε, σκέπη τοῦ κόσμου πλατυτέρα νεφέλης, has no symbolic images in the Cretan tradition; whereas, on some Russian icons (see *Annunciation 2, Annunciation 3*), the painter includes the Protective Veil in the hands of the Holy Virgin in the composition for stanza 19 [Salnikova 1999, 271–272]. The symbol of the Protective Veil from the Akathistos hymn is connected to the general idea of the Holy Virgin as the Defender of all Christians. It thus appears on Russian compositions due to the great importance of said concept in the Russian religious conscience.

While analyzing other differences in the cultural interpretation of the same poetic text, it should be stressed that representatives of different cultures often choose to illustrate different excerpts from the same stanza. This significantly changes the semiotic accents as well as the message itself during the interpretation of the corresponding text. A typical example of this can be observed in the interpretation of stanza 6 (Ζάλην ἔνδοθεν ἔχων, kondak 4 in the Slavonic tradition), which starts with the doubts and troubles of Joseph the Protector, and ends with his joy when he realized the Holy Mystery of God's Conception. The Cretan tradition illustrates the beginning of the stanza by having the entire composition and positions of the figures of the Virgin and Joseph show nervousness, confusion, accusations, and protests. These emotions become clear through gesticulations, the movement of the figures, as well as the storm raging around them. On the contrary, the Russian tradition generally illustrates the last verses of the same

[1] Both here and further into the document, the Greek text of the Akathistos is cited from the following edition: Trypanis 1968, 29–39.

stanza by showing the reconciliation of the protagonists. Therefore, the composition has an atmosphere of calmness and harmony, as one can see in the *Dionisius cycle* [Mikhelson 1966, 155–156].

One more example can be found in the illustrations for stanza 22 (Χάριν δοῦναι θελήσας, kondak 10 in the Slavonic tradition). The Russian tradition uses the composition of the *Harrowing of Hell* for the illustration of this stanza, which depicts the first verses: ὁ πάντων χρεωλύτης ἀνθρώπων, ἐπεδήμησε δι' ἑαυτοῦ, πρὸς τοὺς ἀποδήμους τῆς αὐτοῦ Χάριτος. The torn scroll never plays a central role in the compositions, even though it exists in the majority of them. On the contrary, Cretan iconography illustrates that same stanza with the composition of the Cancellation of Old Debts, which corresponds to the verse καὶ σχίσας τὸ χειρόγραφον. It places the figure of Christ tearing up a scroll into two symmetric pieces in the middle of the composition. In the Valsamonero fresco, one can see the figure of Adam on the left and that of Eve on the right in the surrounding crowd of people [Spatharakis 2005, 32]. An interesting detail can also be seen on the Roustica composition. In the Valsomonero cycle, as well as in the other similar cycles in Greek and Russian traditions, the scroll remains empty (without a text) – or less often full of unreadable symbols as in *Exaltation 2*. However, in the Roustica icon, the torn scroll contains the beginning of the illustrated stanza; in other words, Christ is tearing the Akathistos hymn. In this way, the semiological cycle is completed: Christ tears the scroll (manuscript) – the author of the Akathistos hymn describes this fact in the other scroll (manuscript) – Christ tears that second scroll (manuscript), thus putting emphasis on the superiority of the divine essence over human creations. It is in that same spirit that the remaining iconography of the Roustica fresco for the final 24th stanza (Ὦ πανύμνητε Μῆτερ) is painted, which, to the best of our knowledge, is unique in the Orthodox tradition. In it, the Holy Virgin is surrounded by angels who offer her the text of the Akathistos hymn on four separate scrolls [Spatharakis 2005, 16–18].

We can generally state that the Cretan tradition depicts much more symbolic images as well as the symbolic background of the text, whereas the Russian tradition, especially in the first "historic" part of the text, is limited to visual narratives of the corresponding Gospel story. This becomes clear in the example of stanza 4 (Δύναμις τοῦ Ὑψίστου, kondak 3 in the Slavonic tradition), which describes the Conception of the Holy Virgin. In Russian tradition, said stanza is generally illustrated by one more versions of the Annunciation scene. In Cretan iconography, however, another interpretation of the same scene has prevailed, with the power of God (δύναμις τοῦ Ὑψίστου) being symbolically depicted as a red veil (or red with green background as in the Meronas cycle [Spatharakis 2005, 21]) held either by maidens (Roustica or Meronas) or angels (Valsamonero cycle). In the icon by G. Kastrofilakas, the figures of the angels are preserved but the power of God is depicted as a golden rain that falls from the sky.

In the case of stanza 8 (Θεοδρόμον ἀστέρα, kondak 5 in the Slavonic tradition), the following verses are depicted: Θεοδρόμον ἀστέρα, θεωρήσαντες Μάγοι, τῇ τούτου ἠκολούθησαν αἴγλῃ·καὶ ὡς λύχνον κρατοῦντες αὐτόν δι' αὐτοῦ ἠρεύνων κραταιὸν Ἄνακτα. A remarkable detail, which to the best of our knowledge appears only on the Cretan frescoes, should also be highlighted here: next to the star in the upper corner of the scene that shows the way to the

Magi in all known illustrations of the stanza, there appears a second "star". This is a lamp or torch held by the first Magos who uses it to illuminate the way. This icon, therefore, illustrates a simile used by the poet: ἀστέρας... ὡς λύχνος, by separately painting the literal and the figurative meaning of the trope (instead of a star that is like lamp, we have both a star and a lamp) and dividing the symbolic image into two images. There is also the figure of an angel that observes the Magi from above in the Roustica cycle, which is a unique feature of this scene [Spatharakis 2005, 12] (another angel appears in the same scene in the Russian *Annunciation 3*).

In stanza 10 (Κήρυκες θεοφόροι, kondak 6 in the Slavonic tradition), in the scene of the Return of the Magi to Babylon (Κήρυκες θεοφόροι, γεγονότες οἱ Μάγοι, ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Βαβυλῶνα), Cretan iconographers did not limit themselves to the depiction of the narration of the stanza, but tried to show its symbolic message, in contrast to Russian tradition. In front of the Magi there is the schematic image of a fortified city with a figure wearing imperial garments at the entrance, which personifies the city of Babylon as a source of sin. The personification of Babylon in the Roustica composition is especially expressive, seeing as it appears as a female figure luxuriously dressed in Eastern clothes bearing one breast. A similar figure personifies Egypt in the scene for the following 11th stanza (Λάμψας ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, oikos 6 in the Slavonic tradition). The Valsamonero cycle showcases a more common composition for the same stanza with the white silhouettes of idols falling from the fortified walls, illustrating the words of the poet τὰ γὰρ εἴδωλα ταύτης Σωτήρ, μὴ ἐνέγκαντά σου τὴν ἰσχὺν πέπτωκεν. A similar composition with black or white idols also existed in the Russian tradition (see *Theotokos of Tikhvin, Annunciation 1, Exaltation 1*). It is interesting to note the symbolic color division of the Valsamonero composition into two zones: the orange zone, which surrounds the figures of the Holy Family and symbolizes light; and the black zone of Egypt. This is how the painter chose to show the opposition in the verses: Λάμψας ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, φωτισμὸν ἀληθείας ἐδίωξας, τοῦ ψεύδους τὸ σκότος. A similar color symbolism can be seen in the corresponding scene of the *Dionisius cycle* [Mikhelson 1966, 154].

In general, the methods of expressing the symbolic verbal images of the poetic text of the Akathistos hymn through visual non-verbal means is a topic that needs to be researched further. In this study, we will only present some examples based on the iconography of stanza 21 (Φωτοδόχον λαμπάδα, oikos 11 in the Slavonic tradition), where the following starting verses are depicted: Φωτοδόχον λαμπάδα, τοῖς ἐν σκότει φανεῖσαν, ὁρῶμεν τὴν ἁγίαν Παρθένον. Thanks to the exceptional expressive power of the language, the poet had the freedom to unite the Holy Virgin and the candle into one symbolic image. On the other hand, painters who interpret these verses and "translate" them into visual images have to choose what to depict: only the literal meaning (i.e. the candle); only the figurative meaning (i.e. the Holy Virgin); both of them separately; one of them with some characteristics of the other, and so on.

First, it is important to note that, to the best of our knowledge, no Akathistos cycle, neither in Greece nor in Russia, depicts the candle on its own. This is due to the didactic message of the cycle with emphasis being placed on the Holy Virgin. Apart from this one common feature, the preferences of the painters differ. In

the oldest known Akathistos cycle in the cathedral of the Panagia Olympiotissa in Elasson, dated between 1296 and 1354 AD, only the Holy Virgin is presented with the top of the candle, the flame of which is over her head [Patzold 1989, 11–12]. The same method of incorporating the literal meaning into the figurative one was later used by G. Kastrofilakas. However, in his composition, the Holy Virgin holds the Infant God in her hands and is surrounded by people to depict τοῖς ἐν σκότει φανεῖσαν. In the background, one can also see a black cave illuminated by the candle's light, which achieves an even better symbolic depiction of the darkness. The Valsamonero composition also shows the Holy Virgin with Christ and the candle above her head, but in this case, her figure is flanked by two angels which hold the incorporeal light. The figures of the people behind them are difficult to discern due to the bad condition of this fresco [Spatharakis 2005, 32]. In the Roustica cycle, the candle does not exist, but the Holy Virgin herself becomes a candle, seeing as she is surrounded by the luminous mandorla with beams of Holy light. This composition also showcases the symbolic image of people receiving the incorporeal light inside the dark cave, and looks similar to the one on the miniature picture from the illuminated manuscript codex Sin. Gr. 429 (State Historical Museum, Moscow) [Xyggopoulos 1938, 330]. However, according to the painter's interpretation, the symbolic image in the latter is "doubled": alongside the Holy Virgin who acts as a candle (with a luminous mandorla), the literal candle is also painted. The same "doubled" image can be found in the 14*th* century Tomic Psalter [Schepkina 1963, 151–152].

The Russian tradition mainly follows this interpretation by having the two aspects of the symbolic image being depicted separately (or relatively separately) as two independent concepts. Starting with the *Dionisius cycle*, the Holy Virgin is not depicted as a candle, but rather with a candle [Mikhelson 1966, 158], while the close connection between these two concepts is shown through the small distance between the corresponding objects: the Holy Virgin is holding the candle in her hands (*Dionisius cycle, Exaltation 1, Annunciation 3, Theotokos of Tikhvin*). Note that on the Russian icons *Annunciation 1* and *Exaltation 2* [Lifshiz 2000, 326], the corresponding scenes include a long rod or crosier which in reality replaces the symbolic image of the text with another one: Aaron's flowering rod (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐβλάστησεν ἡ ῥάβδος Ἀαρὼν εἰς οἶκον Λευὶ καὶ ἐξήνεγκε βλαστὸν καὶ ἐξήνθησεν ἄνθη καὶ ἐβλάστησε κάρυα, Numbers 17:23). This symbolic image does not exist in the text of the Akathistos hymn, even though it was common in the Orthodox tradition [Borisova 2001, 53–54]. It seems that it appeared in the Russian tradition thanks to the resemblance of the shape of the rod with that of the candle.

Summarizing the results of our short comparative analysis of the Cretan and the Russian iconography traditions in regard to the Akathistos hymn, we should stress that the Cretan painters, who were under Venetian rule during that time period and retained cultural relations with Constantinople, showed more symbolic details and were generally more creative in the visual interpretation of the symbolic background of the poetic text. This seems logical enough if one takes into account the simple fact that they interpreted the original text of the hymn in the context of the same culture in which it had been born. This provides much more verbal and non-verbal connotations for each verbal sign of the text. On

the other hand, the Russian iconographic tradition did not have this immediate connection to the text due to the translation process, during which some meanings were unavoidably lost, and also due to the semiotic gap between the source and the target culture. That is the reason why it failed to illustrate as many symbolic interpretations and even sometimes misrepresented the very nature of the symbolic images. At the same time, however, it was able to find other "shades" of meaning for the same symbolic complexes, and discovered and emphasized other messages and connotations of the same poetic text, which become more important in the context of the other culture. Further comparative analysis of the Akathistos cycle as well as other similar iconographic cycles will undoubtedly provide us with important information regarding the different ways the same texts were perceived and interpreted in different cultures, as well as the nature of these cultures themselves.

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