Light and sight: Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij, Mount Athos and the geographies of eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox Enlightenment

Veronica della Dora
Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX, UK

Abstract

While over the past fifteen years there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the value of thinking ‘geographically’ in understanding the nature of eighteenth-century intellectual culture, the geographies of non-western European Enlightenments still remain largely uncharted. This article focuses on the Orthodox Enlightenment through the lens of the accounts and sketches of Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij (1701–1747), a Kievian Orthodox ‘self-enlightener’ who for twenty-four years travelled by foot across central Europe and the Ottoman Empire recording the places he saw in the utmost detail. His texts and images have usually been considered separately and used by scholars as valuable sources of factual information. Set in conversation with each other, however, they open a fascinating window on the role of the Russian Orthodox Enlightenment in shaping perceptions and representations of space and place, and to show how tensions between critical enquiry and Orthodox tradition were negotiated by Barskij through narrative and visual strategies.

On 20 July 1723 a twenty-two-year-old student and son of a wealthy merchant from Kiev left his degree, his family and his native country. He would only return home twenty-four years later. Sustaining himself mainly on charity, during these years he uninterrupted journeyed by foot through what are today Poland, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Greece, the Holy Land, Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Romania. He visited their main Christian shrines; he perfected his Latin; he picked up Italian and became familiar with its dialects; he learnt Greek; he became a monk. About a month after his return to Kiev in 1747, he died.

Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij (1701–1747) – such was the name of the wanderer – left us with over a thousand pages of accounts of his travels in Slavonic accompanied by scores of drawings. As he moved throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Barskij described and sketched places, buildings, monuments, artifacts, church rituals, costumes and any other thing that he deemed curious or worthy of attention – and he did so in the utmost detail. The resulting manuscript was first published in a highly abridged and corrupted edition in 1778 (over thirty years after his death) and underwent at least four reprints. Forgotten for decades, it was republished in 1885 in a much improved edition sponsored by the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. To date, most of the text remains untranslated.

Because of their extensiveness and almost obsessive attention to detail, Barskij’s writings have generally been used by ecclesiastical and architectural historians and Byzantinists as a precious mine of factual information on church architecture and on monastic and

1 The accounts, known as The Travels of Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij in the Holy Lands of the East, survive in the autograph manuscript of 503 folia, and are accompanied by approximately 150 drawings. The manuscript is preserved at the Akademiia Nauk Archive, Kiev v, No. 1062.

2 There are later editions dated 1785, 1793, 1800 and 1819.

3 The most accurate published edition is N. Barsukov (Ed.), Stranstvovaniia Vasil’ia Grigorovicha-Bars’kogo po sviatym mestam vostoka s 1723 po 1747 g, 4 vol, St Petersburg, 1885–1887. The only substantive part of Barskij’s travels that has been translated into English is his journeys to Cyprus, see A. Grishin (Ed.), A Pilgrim’s Account of Cyprus: Bars’kay’s Travels in Cyprus, Altamont/New York, 1996. Other parts of his accounts have been translated into other languages, but there is no complete translation or critical edition. The most significant effort has been made by architect Pavlos Mylonas and his successors, which has resulted in a Greek translation and critical edition of over 700 pages of Barskij’s journeys to Mount Athos, see P. Mylonas (Ed.), Bars’kay Ëkpeafraklak, Meâfki: ta taxíka twn sto Aítio Óros, 1725–26 kai 1744–45, Thessaloniki, 2009. All the translations from this text in the following pages are mine.
secular life in the Orthodox East. Likewise, for the same reason, Barskij’s sketches are usually valued for their architectural accuracy in an age before photography. Seldom, however, have text and image been considered together, and even more rarely has Barskij’s work caught the attention of historical geographers. Set in conversation, his texts and images provide not only valuable historical records, but also fascinating windows on the spatial perceptions and complex geographies of Orthodox Enlightenments in the first half of the eighteenth century. Together, they offer a unique insight into the largely unknown world of non-Western Enlightenment geographies and the previously unexplored spatialities of religion at this time.  

Over the past twenty years the conception of the Enlightenment as a unified secular, metropolitan and scientific philosophical movement has been increasingly problematized. Indeed, the very idea of Enlightenment as a fixed set of beliefs has been largely replaced by an understanding of Enlightenment ‘as a way of thinking critically in and about the world’. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the term ‘philosophy’, J.G.A. Pocock argues, was not always taken to indicate a body of systematic thought: it was ‘a method rather than a system’. Likewise, the term ‘Enlightenment’ was understood differently from how we use it today. Was it not employed to mark a period of European history, but was it used as a label for generalization, or as an inclusionary (or exclusionary) definition. Pocock thus suggests that we would do better to think of ‘a family of Enlightenments — various movements comprising both family resemblances and family quarrels’. This approach leads to a picture of Europe as a complex world of cross-fertilizations in which rationalism and revealed religion sometimes clashed, but in many other cases coexisted and attempted to come to terms with each other. It was a world in which the Enlightenment project coexisted with a pluralist account of Enlightenments.  

As Charlie Withers and others have painstakingly shown, Enlightenment ideas (including critical, analytical and scientific concerns) were not simply dependant on centre-periphery relationships, nor did they ‘free-float’ over territory. On the contrary, as they moved across space they took on new meanings and were appropriated in ways peculiar to their cultural contexts of reception. These processes of appropriation often resulted in new and unique formations which were often very different from western European forms of radical Enlightenment (such as the French). There was, for example, Pocock argued, a distinctive ‘Protestant Enlightenment’ in which English Calvinists particularly became involved. Other forms of ‘soft’ or ‘moderate’ European Enlightenments, which sought to reconcile Pietism and rationalism, spanned the German Aufklärung, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Neapolitan Illuminismo.  

In eighteenth-century Russia, of which Kiev and western Ukraine were part, local ‘enlighteners’ produced a rich culture that effectively blended Enlightenment ideas of progress, reason and critical enquiry with Orthodox spiritual tradition. As with moderate mainstream and religious Enlightenments across Europe, this Enlightenment ‘reconciled reason and revelation, science and religion, human autonomy and providence’, and yet, as we shall see, it bore a typically Orthodox imprint which made it distinctive from those European moderate Enlightenments.  

These Orthodox Enlightenment principles moved through, and largely by means of, pre-existing religious infrastructures and networks. Church intellectuals actively contributed to the transmission of European ideas to Russia and the rest of the Slavic world, and made an original contribution to the pan-European republic of letters. Their conception of Enlightenment, however, had to do first of all with the enlightenment of the human soul (which was perfectly in line with the Orthodox doctrine). As Elise Kimerling Wirtschaffer observes, ‘for lay intellectuals reason guided the moral development of the human person. For church intellectuals right reason strengthened religious faith and encouraged conscious Orthodox belief, at least among educated believers’. Unlike its Western radical counterparts, or the Greek Diaphotismos, the Russian Orthodox Enlightenment was a project for the transformation of the human being, even before that of society.  

During his lifelong journey Barskij moved through extended and well-established international networks of Orthodox shrines, ecclesiastical schools, monasteries, patriarchates and other religious institutions which often also served as centres for learning. Towards the later part of his journeys he participated in the Greek Enlightenment movement in Cyprus and acted as a peripatetic link between the Russian and Greek Orthodox worlds. Traced on a map, Barskij’s travels allow us to chart the networks and key nodes of eighteenth-century Orthodox geographies of knowledge. Perhaps even more interestingly, however, Barskij’s travel accounts and

---

4 As Alexander Grishin notes, Barskij’s accounts and sketches are in many instances either our earliest, or sometimes our only, records for the original appearance of Byzantine buildings, or for buildings that no longer exist, especially in Greece and Cyprus. For example, his detailed drawing of Hosios Loukas and its accompanying annotations have been invaluable for conservators and art historians trying to determine the original eleventh-century iconographic programme which was severely damaged during the following century. See A. Grishin, A Byzantine pilgrim: Barskij’s manuscript and its real and imagined audiences, in: G. Kratzmann (Ed.), Imagination, Books and Community in Medieval Europe Melbourne, 2000, 147.  


8 C.W.J. Withers, Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason, Chicago, 2007, 1.  


13 Unlike its Western radical counterparts, or the Greek Diaphotismos, the Russian Orthodox Enlightenment was a project for the transformation of the human being, even before that of society.  

14 During his lifelong journey Barskij moved through extended and well-established international networks of Orthodox shrines, ecclesiastical schools, monasteries, patriarchates and other religious institutions which often also served as centres for learning. Towards the later part of his journeys he participated in the Greek Enlightenment movement in Cyprus and acted as a peripatetic link between the Russian and Greek Orthodox worlds. Traced on a map, Barskij’s travels allow us to chart the networks and key nodes of eighteenth-century Orthodox geographies of knowledge. Perhaps even more interestingly, however, Barskij’s travel accounts and

---

11 Withers, Placing the Enlightenment. On the Scottish and Neopolitan Enlightenments, see Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment.  

12 E. Wirtschafter, Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia: The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon, DeKalb, IL, 2013, 5.  

13 Wirtschafter, Religion and Enlightenment, 21.  

14 The term Diaphotismos refers to the Greek Enlightenment. Like the Russian Orthodox Enlightenment, the Diaphotismos emphasized the role of education. Its historical significance, Paschalis Kitromelides observed, however, lay in its aspiration ‘to transform the life of the Balkan peoples living under the Ottoman domination, on the model of Western culture, and ... to integrate the nations of the European periphery into the common historical destiny of the continent’, see P. Kitromelides, The Enlightenment East and West: a comparative perspective on the ideological origins of the Balkan political traditions, Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 10 (1983) 55. See also S. Batalden, Catherine II’s Greek Prelate: Eugenios Voulgaris in Russia, 1771–1806, New York, 1982.
sketches provide us with a unique insight into Orthodox Enlightenment geography, not so much as a physical space or as a discipline, but as a discourse, that is, as a set of embodied and representational practices through which eighteenth-century educated Orthodox Ruthenians (the inhabitants of present-day Belarus and Ukraine) came to know, imagine and represent the world. A self-made Orthodox enlightener, Barskij moves us away from the Enlightenment of famous European thinkers (or influential Russian statesmen and clergy) and opens a window on a deeper and more widespread layer of thought and practice that is intertwined with older traditions of pilgrimage and learning. More significantly, he challenges our sense of what ‘Enlightened’ could mean in eighteenth-century Europe.

The goal of this article is three-fold. Firstly, it aims to contribute to debates on the geographies of Enlightenment and religion from a non-Western ‘bottom-up’ perspective. Secondly, it aims to explore the role of Orthodox Enlightenment in shaping perceptions and representations of space and place, and to show how tensions between critical enquiry and Orthodox tradition were negotiated by Barskij through narrative and visual strategies. Finally, taking a biographical approach, it aims to capture Barskij’s lifelong process of becoming an Orthodox enlightener.

The first two, and more historiographic, sections of this article place Barskij and his travels within the historical context of the reforms instituted by Peter the Great and within the geographies of the Orthodox Enlightenment, its networks, and its characteristic syncretisms. The following sections analyze Barskij’s accounts and sketches, with specific reference to his two journeys to Mount Athos in Greece, one of the most sacred places in the Orthodox world. By focusing on the role of the eyewitness, clear vision and light in Barskij’s textual and visual narrative, these sections trace a unique blend of Enlightenment ‘ways of seeing’ and pre-modern pilgrimage traditions and representations of space. Sight and light operate as persuasive and pervasive metaphors for sensuous and spiritual knowledge at the core of the Orthodox Enlightenment. Sight and light also signpost the transformations Barskij underwent from the start to the close of his lifelong pilgrimage. Using Steve Daniels and Catherine Nash’s metaphor of the ‘lifepath’ as a bridge between geography and biography, we can thus imagine Barskij’s journeys as a lifepath running through Athos and the Christian East and linking shrines and centres for learning with an ongoing inner process of self-illumination and moral progress — the ultimate goal for every Orthodox enlightener.

Between East and West: the Kiev Mohyla Academy and the Petrine reforms

Barskij is not an easy character to pin down. Some scholars have referred to him as a devout Orthodox pilgrim; others as an Enlightenment traveller; others as some sort of explorer; others as a talented artist; others as a fond antiquarian; others as ‘a cultural geographer of his time’; others even as a philosopher. To different extents, Barskij fits and yet at the same time transcends each one of these categories. In a sense, he embodies and epitomizes the ambiguities and the hybridities of the Orthodox Enlightenment culture in which he moved and thrived.

The geographical setting of Barskij’s upbringing contributed to his hybrid, multifaceted personality. Split between the Orthodox Russian Empire and the Roman Catholic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, eighteenth-century Ukraine, and Kiev in particular, was a cultural crossroads between East and West, as its Byzantine churches externally covered with western Baroque-style accretions still remind visitors today. Starting in the fourteenth century, Western influence over the region became especially intense in the sixteenth century and continued well into the late eighteenth century. Over these centuries, Jesuits introduced the use of Latin and new pedagogical methods which were appropriated by the Orthodox Church. While attentive to defending the dogmas of their doctrine from what they considered heretical and schismatic beliefs, Ruthenian Orthodox clergy embraced Catholic instructional methods, language and belles-lettres to the point that, as Ihor Sevcenko has noted, ‘the struggle against the seemingly invincible West was waged officially in the name of Greek faith of the forebears, but, in fact, it was waged with the help of the same weapons to which the West owed its successors’.

The key institution in this contested world was the Kiev Mohyla Academy, where Barskij studied theology. The Academy was born from the vision of Peter Mohyla, the Metropolitan of Kiev (1627–1646) and head of the newly restored Orthodox Church in Ruthenia. A native of Moldavia schooled in Poland, Mohyla has been defined as a man ‘of many worlds’ and many facets: a pious Orthodox believer and loyal subject to the Catholic Polish king, archbishop of the Orthodox Church and diligent follower of Jesuit educational practices, a scholar equally at home in Patristic literature and Greek mythology. At a time when Jesuit education went hand in hand with conversion to Catholicism, Mohyla’s ambition was to create an institution that could compete with its leading Catholic counterparts, and thus make it unnecessary to send Orthodox students to the West for higher education.

The establishment of Mohyla’s school in 1632 when Kiev was under the Polish crown has been interpreted as a manoeuvre to contest the Counter-Reformation. However, in a Catholic commonwealth in which the Orthodox faithful were subject to discrimination and even persecution, Mohyla understood that no steady development was possible for the Orthodox Church without a cross-fertilization with Western culture. His goal was thus to help his students ‘master the intellectual skills and learning of contemporary Europe and to apply them to the defense of the

15 Withers, Placing the Enlightenment, 12.
18 Sevcenko, Ukraine between East and West, 174. Kiev was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth since the sixteenth century. It passed under the suzerainty of Moscow in 1686.
19 Sevcenko, Ukraine between East and West, 177.
20 The Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was legally restored in 1633. Since the establishment of the Uniate Church in Ruthenia in 1596 (by a group of former Orthodox bishops who accepted union with Rome), the Orthodox Church virtually ceased to exist for the Polish state and all its churches and properties were forfeited and transferred to the Uniates. For a detailed account, see L. Charipova, Latin Books and the Eastern Orthodox Clerical Elite in Kiev, 1632–1780, Manchester, 2006, 17–35.
23 Charipova, Latin Books, 54.
Orthodox faith. Degradation and discrimination, he believed, could only be combated through education. In his 1631 declaration of intent he wrote:

I, Peter Mohyla … having recognized the great distress of the Orthodox Church brought forth by the clergy’s ignorance and lack of enlightenment among the youth … bid to overcome this deficiency … I have resolved to found schools, so that the youth may be properly enlightened in piety, virtuous habits and the liberal arts.

Besides acknowledging the superiority of Jesuit organization and training over traditional Orthodox monastic schools, Mohyla also recognized the necessity of teaching Latin, the official language of the state. Attracted at with suspicion by Orthodox zealots for its Western character and feared by the Jesuits as a dangerous competitor, the school was nonetheless immensely successful and attracted students from all parts of the commonwealth and beyond. Raised to the status of an academy, by the early eighteenth century it had become the leading centre of higher studies in the Slavic Orthodox world.

Barski thus studied in an Orthodox institution that followed the Jesuit model, with Latin as the primary language of instruction and scholasticism as a key approach to learning. The academy enjoyed links with Polish Jesuit schools and German Protestant universities, and many of its staff were part of a republic of letters which included both German Pietists and Protestant enlighteners. The theology course typically lasted four years and was taught by Ruthenian scholars who had received their first education at the academy and then in the leading centres of Catholic Europe. The theology course was preceded by a three-year philosophy course. It was usually taught by the same instructors to the same students and placed strong emphasis on empiricism and inductive reasoning. Philosophy was conceived of as an introduction to theology, which was in turn regarded as ‘the ultimate science, as the systematic investigation of the content of belief by means of reason enlightened by faith.’ Students were thus discouraged from studying philosophy ‘for the sake of itself’. From an Orthodox perspective, the study of secular subjects was pedagogically necessary, but futile on its own. As Metropolitan Platon of Moscow argued later in the century, ‘without prayer and piety all human endeavors are empty. … Education allows the child to enter into himself through knowledge, to know his Creator, and to know the purpose of creation’.

The academy, it has been observed, was pivotal in shaping a Ukrainian consciousness. It provided an alternative to the Polonization of the Ruthenian elite while at the same time delaying its Russification until the late seventeenth century. However, when Kiev came under the suzerainty of Moscow in 1686, the local patriotism attached to the academy was replaced by Russian patriotism, or rather by the notion of an ‘all-Russian oneness’. As a result Barski identified himself as a ‘Russian’ and as a member of the Moscow Church. More significantly, at the close of the seventeenth century the academy began to have a direct effect on ecclesiastical and political affairs in Moscow.

Notoriously, the academy schooled Bishop Feofan Prokopovich (1681–1736), Peter the Great’s chief adviser in ecclesiastical, cultural and propaganda matters, and the mastermind of his ecclesiastical reforms (or Spiritual Regulation) of 1721. These reforms were part of the tsar’s plan to modernize Russia according to Western patterns. Caught up from a young age in the scientific and technological upheaval emanating from western Europe, Peter enacted what many have called a cultural revolution. While his chief priority always remained the enhancement of Russia’s imperial power and its armed forces, Peter also understood that transformation into a modern state presupposed the creation of new scientific institutions, the importation of technicians and scholars from western Europe (including Germans and Dutch), as well as drastic reforms to the existing education system and Church administration. The Spiritual Regulation replaced the Moscow Patriarchate with an Ecclesiastical College (later renamed Holy Synod), whose members were clergy directly appointed by the monarch. This in effect brought the Church under the tsar’s control, reducing it to a manageable sphere of governance.

Like Peter Mohyla, Bishop Feofan was ‘a man of many worlds’. Before joining the Kiev academy he spent time studying in Rome, and to do so he temporarily converted to Catholicism. The owner of a private library of three thousand books, Feofan possessed competency in Latin and Greek, a good teaching knowledge of Descartes, Leibniz and Wolff, and a keen interest in central European trends like Socinianism and Halle Pietism. His openness towards the West was reflected in the ecclesiastical reforms. The concept of the Ecclesiastical College, for example, was inspired by Swedish-Lutheran models of governance, whereas the well-known Protestant appeal to the scriptural principle of the priesthood of all believers (1 Cor. 12:12–13; 1 Pet. 2:9) was used to fend off the idea that clergy was superior to laity.

The ecclesiastical reforms also rationalized monasteries and raised the minimum age for men entering one to fifty, in order to increase the number of recruits for the army. They also set as a key target the fight against superstition, or those practices and beliefs that did not conform to Christian law and were deemed


25 Quoted in Charipova, Latin Books, 47.

26 Orthodox Ruthenians needed a knowledge of Greek and Church Slavonic for religious purposes. However, for political activity, Mohyla argued, they needed not only Polish, but also Latin: ‘In both chambers of parliament, in the courts, in dealings with the crown, in all political matters, Ruthenians, as crown citizens, should know both these languages … It would be neither right nor decorous for a Ruthenian to speak Greek or Slavonic before a member of the senate or diet and would be taken for a stranger or a simpleton. Even in explaining matters of faith, one should be able to give a reply in the language in which one is asked the question’. See Sevcenko, The many worlds of Peter Mohyla, 171.

27 Initially, the school was only allowed the title of collegium for fear of competition with Jesuit institutions. However, in 1701 it was officially upgraded to ‘academy’.

28 Kolesnyk, Strategies of Self-representation, 31.

29 Cracraft, Theology at the Kiev Academy, 75–78.

30 Quoted in Wirtschaftler, Religion and Enlightenment, 42.

31 Sevcenko, The many worlds of Peter Mohyla, 184.

32 Sevcenko, The many worlds of Peter Mohyla, 183.

33 J. Cracraft, The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture, Cambridge, MA and London, 2004, 172–182. Not only had candidate clergy to swear loyalty to the sovereign, but they also had to report any opposition they might discover, even when hearing confession (a clear violation of the canon law which prohibited priests from divulging anything heard in confession).


35 This reform was justified by Feofan on the ground that Byzantine emperors (whose heir Peter proclaimed himself to be) ‘had been too lenient in the matter of allowing monks to move from remote places into the towns. This had resulted in their being insufficiently self-supporting and idle’. He and his colleagues went as far as to partly ascribe the fall of Constantinople to ‘the excessive number of monks’, see Israel, Enlightenment Contested, 308. This claim is reminiscent of the thesis about the fall of the Eastern Empire later developed by Gibbon.
‘superfluous, not essential to salvation’. According to Feofan, the defeat of superstition and ignorance was the precondition for a more orderly and more Orthodox society. For the bishop the promotion of sciences, the study of Latin and Greek, and the war on superstition mattered ‘just as much as the struggle against libertinism and atheism’. While obvious parallels can be drawn with other moderate Enlightenments, the Orthodox conception of what was deemed superfluous to salvation was clearly different from the Protestant, for example. The Spiritual Regulation, for instance, did not deny the existence of wonder-working icons, nor did it condemn their veneration; its preoccupation was rather with ‘false miracles’. It is against this background that Barskij’s accounts should be read.

Barskij’s geographies of knowledge

Barskij enrolled in the Mohyla Kiev Academy in 1715 or 1716, but he never completed his degree. He wrote that he had to interrupt his studies because of a huge ulcer which appeared in his leg and which local doctors were unable to cure. In 1723 he thus left his native Kiev for Lviv, a main centre in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth famous for its surgeons. He was hoping to get cured there and to continue his studies in the city’s renown Jesuit college. Studying abroad was a common pattern for Kievan students in the eighteenth century. By that time the academy had developed a strong language programme and many of its students often continued their education outside the country, requiring conversion from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism. Upon their return to Ukraine, these students would turn back to Orthodoxy and attain positions in the clergy or academia (like Bishop Feofan). By sending students abroad for education, the academy played a pivotal role in transmitting western European knowledge to Ukraine and Russia.38

Barskij’s fate, however, took a different course. His leg was healed in Lviv, but he only spent few days at the Jesuit college. The institution only accepted Catholic students, and Barskij, who was Orthadox and had tried to disguise himself as a Polish Uniate (a member of the Eastern Catholic Church), was soon discovered and expelled, ‘like a wolf from the forests of Kiev’.39 At this point, rather than returning home, Barskij decided to travel and ‘see other cities, other people and other customs’.40

Travel for self-enlightenment was encouraged in the Petrine period. In 1717 Bishop Feofan regarded travel abroad as part of a sound education and argued that a sensible man ‘sees also in foreign nations, as in a mirror, himself and his own people, both their good points and their bad’.31 Motivated by an insatiable thirst for learning, Barskij thus set out on his lifelong journey through Europe and the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 1). In the course of his peripatetic movements he moved through a transnational network of Orthodox communities and centres of learning. These communities (particularly in western Europe) often shared a hybrid cosmopolitan character akin to the Kiev Mohyla Academy. Not only did they serve as important nodes in post-Byzantine intellectual life, but, at different stages, they also represented important stations in Baruskij’s life and his pathway towards self-enlightenment.

The Greek community of Venice, for example, was one of the most prosperous Greek communities outside the Ottoman Empire and a key node in the network of Diaphotismos and post-Byzantine education in general. It included a sixteenth-century cathedral decorated by Cretan and Venetian artists, a nunnery, a hospice for the poor and the Flangian Institute, an ecclesiastical school established in 1664 and linked to the University of Padua. Located in the heart of one of the main centres for printing Greek books, the institute played a crucial part in the development and spread of the Greek Enlightenment. Its curriculum encompassed advanced philosophy, rhetoric, philology and logic, and amidst its teaching staff and students were key figures of the Diaphotismos, such as Theo-philos Korydalos and Eugenios Voulgaris,42 As an Orthodox traveller, Barskij was offered hospitality in the community twice, despite the fact that he did not speak Greek. During his second stay he attended church services and was allowed to audit some of the classes in the school. He also started to study Greek, which would become a lifelong commitment.

While the Greek community of Venice was a fundamental benchmark in Barskij’s intellectual development, his formation as an Orthodox enlightener took place mainly in the course of his journeys through the eastern Mediterranean. In 1734 Barskij was tonsured monk by the Patriarch of Antioch Sylvester the Cypriot. Under Sylvester’s protection, he spent substantial periods of time in Tripoli and above all on the island of Patmos to further his studies and knowledge of Greek. In those years he effectively became an agent of the Diaphotismos, as the patriarch sent him on repeated missions to Egypt, Cyprus and the Aegean islands. Barskij spent the most extended period of his otherwise erratic journeys in the theological school of Patmos, the main centre for ecclesiastical education in Greece. By this stage he had come to master the Greek language and also taught Latin to local children. He even produced a Latin grammar for Greek speakers.43

Barskij’s immersion in the Greek Diaphotismos had an impact on his writing. Besides becoming increasingly critical in the evaluation of sources, it has been noted how over this period he grew more and more interested in antiaturianism and ethnography.44 More significantly, however, he increasingly came to appreciate the value of education as a ‘common good’ benefitting society rather than just the individual. Barskij describes Father Makarios Kalogeras, the founder of the Patmos school and his old teacher, as the model hero of Orthodox Enlightenment, combining, as he did, monastic humbleness and charity with knowledge and erudition. Through his work, Barskij argued, Makarios ‘illumined’ [not just] the small and humiliated island [of Patmos], but ‘almost the whole of

36 Shevzov, Russian Orthodoxy, 19.
37 Israel, Religion and Enlightenment, 19.
38 N. Barskij, Воць вчителювіть його іменем Мітросав, in: Р. Муцона (Ed.), Митрополит, 64–66; M. Sharpe and F. Kortchemnyk, The Kievian Academy and Its Role in the Organization of Russia at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century, New York, 1976. As Wirtschaftsleben, Religion and Enlightenment, 124-125 comments, ‘in the reign of Tsar Peter I (1682–1725) ... Europe had become the perceived centre of intellectual progress, and to be “modern” required the adoption of knowledge from Europe.’
39 Quoted in Barskij, Воць вчителювіть його іменем Мітросав, 65.
40 Quoted in Мпарску, Τα ταξίδια στο Αττικό Πανεπιστήμιο, 66.
43 The Patmos school (Patmiakia), where Barskij was based from 1737 to 1743, was established in 1713. See M. Malandrakis, Η Πατμιακή Σχολή, Athens, 1911; A. Grishin, Bars’kyj and the Orthodox community, in: M. Angold (Ed.), The Cambridge History of Christianity, Cambridge, 2006, 224. Barskij’s Latin grammar is lost to us. In 1749, two years after Barskij’s death, monks from Mount Athos founded a school near the Monastery of Vatopedi, which would later be named Athmos Ecclesiastical Academy and attracted many students from the whole of the Orthodox world. From 1753 to 1759 Voulgaris was appointed director of the school, see Batalden, Catherine II’s Greek Prelate.
Turkish Greece... He created a school and gathered many students, not only from Patmos, but also from the surrounding countries. He taught Grammar, Rhetoric, Philosophy, in Greek and Latin, and turned many fishermen and farmers into philosophers and theologians.45

Following Makarios’ advice and example, Barskij eventually decided to return home to take up a new teaching position in Greek in the academy and to ‘enlighten’ his homeland where this language – the language of the gospels, of the Church Fathers and of ancient philosophers – was still largely unknown. His ambition, however, was never fulfilled. On his way back home he fell seriously ill. He dragged himself to Kiev, but his health was so broken that he soon died in his family’s house.

Pilgrim and enlightener

While the pan-Orthodox network of diasporic communities and ecclesiastical schools provided Barskij with physical and intellectual sustenance, his journeys focussed mainly on famous Orthodox shrines and sites of pilgrimage: the Holy Land, Sinai, the monasteries of Mount Athos, Cyprus, Meteora, and of Saint John the...
Theologian on Patmos. As it has been noted, however, Barskij did not set off from Kiev as a traditional pilgrim, but mainly as a student who was curious about the world. His first journeys took him to central Europe and Italy, well off the customary circuits of Orthodox pilgrimage. He travelled to Italy disguised as a Catholic pilgrim in order to obtain the patents necessary to enable him to beg for alms. He even ended up dining at the pope's table, which he nonetheless described as 'a trial to his faith'. He certainly followed Feofan's advice to 'see both the good and bad points' of foreign nations, and he did not fail to praise the virtues of certain Catholic monks and laymen. Indeed he portrayed himself an impartial observer recording customs and curiosities, sometimes using careful observation and critical enquiry to question the validity of Catholic beliefs and practices.

When Barskij's travels shifted from the Catholic West to the Orthodox East, piety and curiosity continued to coexist. This coexistence is best captured in the epitaph on his gravestone:

... Listening to divine inspiration, For over twenty years he walked from country to country. On the land and at sea he endured many sufferings And he paid careful attention to everything that he saw. The depth of the ravines and the height of known mountains He measured with his footsteps and with his span ....

This encapsulates Barskij's two souls: on the one hand, the devout Orthodox pilgrim who travelled guided 'by divine inspiration'; on the other, the Enlightenment observer who meticulously measured, examined and recorded 'everything he saw'. On the one hand, moved by piety, Barskij-the-pilgrim journeyed through old, well-established sacred topographies. On the other hand, Barskij-the-curious-enquirer surveyed the land and its antiquities. His vision was grounded in first-hand observation, in careful measurement, in critical examination — in an Enlightenment optics of truth. Piety and curiosity co-existed in a creative tension. And it was this tension that set Barskij in motion — on a continuous march towards an ever-shifting horizon.

Piety and curiosity entailed different ways of seeing, representing and imagining space. The Orthodox pilgrim moved over the land horizontally, through a sequence of stations; he stopped at each of them to venerate relics and icons. Indeed, the Greek word proskynema indicates the act of bowing down before a relic or an icon. For the Greek proskynetes what was between one shrine and the next did not really matter. This can be seen in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century proskynetaria, or Greek Orthodox pilgrims' travel guides.

Proskynetaria featured shrines in the order in which they were encountered along the journey and listed the relics and icons found at each of them. The following opening verses from Ioannēs Komenēnos' Proskynetaria of Mount Athos (1745[1701]), which Barskij used as a compendium, illustrate this perception of space:

Ὄστοιος θέλει βουληθῆ, νὰ πά νὰ προσκυνήσῃ. Τὸ Ἀγιὸν Ὀρος νὰ ίδῃ καὶ νὰ τὸ τριγύρησῃ. Αἱς διαβάτησί τὸ παρόν, ἐπεὶ τὰ νὰ κινήσῃ. ... Νὰ προσκυνήσης ἀπάντα ... Απὸ τὴν Λάυραν σὰν βῆς, νὰ πᾶς στὸν Καρακάλουν. Καὶ ἐνοῦ βράδον ἕαν ποθῆς, νὰ πᾶς στὸν Φιλοθέουν. Καὶ ἄπτος ἐκεῖ σὰν κατεξεῖς, νὰ πᾶς εἰς τὴν Ἡβῆρον. Νὰ προσκυνήσῃς κε ἐκεῖ, εἰτὰ νὰ πᾶς τριγύρῳ. Κυράν τὴν Πορτάτισσαν, να τὴν εὐχαριστήσῃς. Με πόθον κι εὐλάβεισθε, και να τὴν προσκυνήσῃς. He who wishes to visit Mount Athos. To see it and tour it around. Let him read this, and then set off.

... Go and venerate everything ... As you exit Lavra, go to Karakalon And by the evening, if you wish, go to Philotheon And from there, as you walk down, go to Ivron. Venerate there as well, and then go around. Thank our Lady the Portaitissa. And venerate [her miraculous icon] with desire and pioussness.

These short rhymed verses suggest rapid transitions from one station to the next. The pilgrim is invited to venerate the icons and relics in each monastery and then quickly press on to the next one. His is a sort of collection of eulogies ('blessings') in the shortest time possible. Space is experienced topographically, as a sequence of places.

Unlike the Greek proskynema, the Russian tradition placed greater emphasis on the physical journey. Through the hardships experienced along the way the pilgrim underwent a process of spiritual growth, which eventually led to the enlightenment of the soul. As Barskij wrote:

[The pilgrim] marches, either for the sake of a vow or by his own will, for his salvation. He visits the Holy Sites and bows down before the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ and the relics of the saints. Such should be the virtuous life that leads to the...
forgiveness of sin. For this reason, while the traveler can die unexpectedly, I believe, not only is he not denied the kingdom of God, but he receives the crown of martyrdom through illnesses, through the hardships, the heat, the rain, the snow, as by his own will he walks to death for God’s sake.55

In his accounts Barskij emphasizes the act of veneration — ‘as I arrived [at the monastery], I first went to the church and duly venerated the holy icons’.56 He also emphasizes the embodied experience of travel, of walking from one place to the next. ‘By sunset I was exhausted, because we had been walking for several hours’, he records on his way to Mount Athos. Or, ‘since I left Venice, I journeyed by ship for twelve months, during which my body underwent the hardships of walking, to the extent that I was [now] feeling tremendous pains in my legs and I could barely walk’.57 Or again, on the Mount Athos peninsula, walking from one monastery to the next, he notes how he got badly scratched while attempting to make his way through a pathless forest: ‘And not only: it poured sans wet and I encountered so many difficulties that I was overcome by tears. I was wet and exhausted. I walked like this, off the path, for three hours, sighing and praying to God to show me the right way. I then found the main path, and made it to the monastery’.58 Unlike Greek proskynētaria, the landscape and the pathway between one shrine and the other occupy a central place in Barskij’s accounts.

In spite of their differences, in both the Greek and the Russian traditions the pilgrim’s journey remained a ‘horizontal’ one: it was a journey articulated through a network of shrines. In both cases, the pilgrim’s gaze remained a gaze from ground level fixed on the final destination, the heavenly Jerusalem. By contrast, the typical eighteenth-century Enlightenment traveler was generally moved by scientific curiosity rather than by piety. He was moved by a desire to put the world in order, to measure and to classify it. His gaze was a clinical gaze resting on secular empirical evidence — on the physical, rather than on the metaphysical. It was a gaze grounded in an ‘optics of truth’, or rather in the certainty that ‘truth [could] indeed be seen’.59 It was a realist, detached and perspectival gaze. Only what had been seen, measured and critically assessed was to be believed. If the pilgrim’s gaze was ultimately directed upwards, to the kingdom of heaven, the enlightener’s gaze was turned downwards, to the landscape and the earthly horizon.

In Barskij’s accounts and sketches these two ways of seeing coexist and complement each other. Barskij measures objects, monuments, shrines and distances. He carefully describes the topography of the terrain and changes in the weather. He scrutinizes plants and stones with the eye of the naturalist and of the antiquarian. He transcribes epigraphs and excerpts from manuscripts and chrysoseals. He carefully records rituals and local costumes in the best ethnographic tradition. He pays close attention to everything he deems beautiful or curious. At the same time, however, unlike western Europeans travelling to the Levant, his gaze is not that of a detached outsider, but of a passionate insider sharing with his hosts the spiritual joys of church services and monastic life.

While usually taken as a hallmark of Western Enlightenment and modernity, observation and measurement were part of a long pilgrimage tradition. Early Christian pilgrims noted down distances between one place and the other, and their medieval and early modern counterparts actively used their bodies to measure shrines and monuments in the Holy Land and Sinai as a ‘special act of devotion’.60 Likewise, descriptions of secular features were included in sixteenth-century Russian khodzhdenia — diaristic accounts of pilgrimage — and can be found as early as the twelfth century in the writings of Abbot Danil of Kiev.61 Pilgrims felt compelled to provide as much detail as possible in order to effectively bring the holy sites before their readers’ eyes. As a rule, however, as Galina Yermolenko observes, ‘pilgrims [did] not lose track of their main purpose among such practical details. Either they reverted quietly to the reverent description of the holy sites, or they use[d] the prosaic details to magnify the significance of those sites’.62 In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries secular narrative increasingly permeated khodzhdenia, as non-religious travel, including scientific and geographical exploration, intensified under Peter the Great, himself a lover of ‘curiosities’.63 Descriptions of curiosities and secular wonders — such as city plans, water supplies and fortifications — would have thus formed part of the expectations of Barskij’s audience.

In his Petrine period, Barskij’s style usually followed a standardized formula which included the diary form, the detailed presentation of the course of the journey, and the descriptions of shrines and secular wonders.64 As Alexander Grishin has noted, however, while Barskij’s initial accounts tend to follow these conventions, his later descriptions are much more systematic and analytical.65 His eye becomes more and more critical and his authorial voice displays increasing self-confidence. Stories and traditions are increasingly researched, questioned and critically assessed in the light of visual empirical evidence. Where this is absent, Barskij either consigns the stories to the realm of ‘tradition’ or integrates them with ‘reliable’ textual sources. Sometimes entire excerpts from manuscripts are incorporated into his text. The provenance of the manuscript, the materiality of the medium and its perceived age are taken as guarantors for authority and thus credibility.66

Similarly, as Barskij gains proficiency in the Greek language and in drawing, growing attention is paid to philological enquiry and his topographic sketches become increasingly accurate and technically sophisticated. If in the early accounts he aimed at satisfying the curiosity of his imaginary audience, in the later ones he aimed at educating and edifying it. In other words, Barskij’s style and approach reflect his progressive ‘enlightenment’ as he journeys over the land and through life, as he transforms from curious

55 Mparski, Ta tezbiia sto Aigio Oro, 73.
56 Mparski, Ta tezbiia sto Aigio Oro, 131.
57 Mparski, Ta tezbiia sto Aigio Oro, 126.
58 Mparski, Ta tezbiia sto Aigio Oro, 147.
59 M. Edney, Reconsidering Enlightenment geography and map making: recognition, mapping, archive, in: D.N. Livingstone and C.W.J. Withers (Eds), Geography and Enlightenment, Chicago, 1999, 178. Early examples of accounts by eighteenth-century Western travelers and antiquarians to Greece and the Levant include R. Pococke, A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries, London, 1745, and A. Drummond, Travels through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia as far as the Banks of the Euphrates, London, 1754.
60 For example, Felix Fabri wrote how Johannes Tucher of Nurberg (1479) ‘examined the Lord’s sepulchre with the most minute care, and took its measurements with his hands, feet, and stretched arms’, quoted in Z. Zalay, Christian pilgrimage and ritual measurement in Jerusalem, Micrologus 19 (2011) 138.
61 Korobenikov’s account of his journeys to the Holy Land, Egypt, Antioch and Constantinople (1582–1584 and 1593–1594), for example, circulated in hundreds of manuscript copies through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from 1793 to the late nineteenth century it appeared in no less than forty printed editions, see G. Yermolenko, Early modern Russian pilgrims in the Holy Land, in: J. Hayden and N. Matar (Eds), Through the Eyes of the Beholder: The Holy Land, 1517–1713, Leiden and Boston, 2013, 53. See also S. Bushuev, Russian Travellers to the Greek World, 12th—1st Half of the 19th Century, Moscow, 1995.
62 Yermolenko, Early modern Russian pilgrims, 60.
65 Grishin, Bars’kij and the Orthodox community.
66 Common formulae are: ‘As I read on an old parchment manuscript …’; ‘I found this account in the library [of the monastery] in an old parchment book’, Mparski, Ta tezbiia sto Aigio Oro, 221, 572.
student into wise teacher, and from simple layman into illuminated clergyman. This process of ‘self-enlightenment’ and the constant dialectic between the two ways of seeing — of Barskij the pious pilgrim and Barskij the curious enquirer — is especially apparent in the accounts of his journeys to Mount Athos. Focusing on this part of Barskij’s accounts and on his sketches of the Athos monasteries, the following section explores the co-existence of spatial perceptions and representational techniques that belong to the pilgrim and to the enquirer.

Barskij’s journeys to Mount Athos

Barskij travelled to Athos twice — in 1725, at the outset of his journeys to the East, and in 1744, on his way back to Kiev. In a sense, the Holy Mountain acted as a sort of symbolic landmark sign-posting the beginnings and the culmination of his lifelong journey towards self-enlightenment. A mountain-peninsula in northern Greece, the largest monastic community in the Orthodox world and Holy Mountain since the tenth century, Athos was an obvious destination for Barskij. He was attracted by a form of pure Christianity, perhaps as a response to the Petrine reforms.65 Indeed, it has been suggested that his focus on the Christian antiquities and the Holy Land of the East was part of a ‘general desire to provide a record of early and authentic traditions of Christianity in which Slavs could base their reforms’.66 Along with the shrines of the Holy Land and the monasteries of Sinai and Egypt, Athos and its twenty Byzantine monastic foundations provided Barskij with a living fragment of that ancient world. They also provided him with an ideal narrative framework and a unique space for graphic spatial experimentation. And here lies the irony: his rediscovery of authenticity came through largely modern Western conceptual and representational tools.

The first time Barskij visited Athos it was as a poor student en route to the Holy Land, a sort of pilgrim-in-becoming. ‘My soul longed so much to visit this holy place and its amazing monastic community. … I promised the Lord that I would visit all the monasteries on the Mountain’, he enthusiastically wrote as he was about to set off.67 However, he was generally not well received on the peninsula. He spoke Latin and Italian, but very little Greek, and when the monks learnt that he had visited Rome and the Catholic countries they initially even denied him holy communion. Worried about the arrival of the winter, Barskij spent a very short time in each monastery in order to visit them all.68 His was a proskynēma in the most literal sense of the word.

The second time, Barskij visited the peninsula under very different circumstances. He was now a Greek-speaking monastic, an experienced traveler holding a permit signed by a Russian chief minister, and an accomplished scholar and sketcher — in other words, a true ‘Orthodox enlightener’.69 This time he was much better received. He was allowed into the monasteries’ famous libraries and given the permission to examine manuscripts, chrysobulls and relics. His pace had slowed down too: overall he stayed seven months on the peninsula and was able to spend a much longer period in each monastery. This allowed him to conduct detailed observations and measurements, and to produce accurate descriptions and sketches of each monastery and its key attractions.

The two visits to Athos resulted in two separate accounts: the one short, and the other extended and illustrated with drawings.70 These take up a quarter of the entire manuscript, which suggests the importance Barskij ascribed to the Holy Mountain. Both accounts are arranged by monastery, as Barskij encountered them during his circuits of the peninsula (Fig. 2a and b). This topographic pattern is akin to Komnenos’ proskyneitēron. The monasteries serve as narrative units, as spatial containers for objects, people and stories. In the second account this information is organized according to a systematic pattern which includes the history of the foundation of each monastery, numbers and nationalities of its monks and their daily occupations, descriptions of its buildings and of the topography of their surrounding area, lists of relics, miraculous icons, notable manuscripts and chrysobulls, and precise accounts of religious rituals.

Athos’ self-enclosed geography facilitates this spatialised ordering of information. During his first visit Barskij observed how ‘as seen from the sea, Athos gives the impression of being an island’.71 Yet, for Barskij, Athos was not just an insular space, but a container of insular spaces. In his account Athos’ twenty monastic foundations feature as sequential self-enclosed microcosms. Joined together through Barskij’s steps, they form a sort of micro-itinerary within his lifelong itinerary — a pilgrimage within pilgrimage. Barskij calls Athos a ‘small country’ in which the monasteries are like ‘cities in miniature’.72 Captured in his sketches from a bird’s-eye perspective, the monasteries appear as serene little worlds embedded in verdant surroundings — as islands on the land; or rather, as islands suspended between the land and the sea, between earth and heaven (Fig. 3). The insular effect is created by the high walls of the monasteries and it is often reinforced by Barskij’s portrayal of their surrounding curved topography (Fig. 4). Self-enclosure facilitates observation, and it is to this that we shall now turn.

Eyewitnessing

The monasteries typically feature as jewel boxes filled with riches: precious marbles, mosaics, illuminated manuscripts and exquisite liturgical objects. Here Barskij’s gaze zooms in on the fine detail. For example, inside the main church of Lavra he notes how parts of the walls are covered with ‘precious tiles that are so beautifully and carefully decorated with flowers that … the whole wall looks like a seamless textile’.73 Likewise, while scrutinizing the icon of St Nicholas in the monastery of Stavronikita, he calls the reader’s attention to ‘the invaluable art [of which this icon] is made. For it is not painted with colours, like contemporary painted icons, but it is made of microscopic precious stones. If you don’t look carefully, it is impossible to tell it apart from a painted icon. How great were the wisdom and diligence of the ancient icon makers!’74 Attentive observation becomes a virtue that enables Barskij (and in turn his readers) to fully appreciate the virtue of the ancients, of that authentic world he was after. As with the works of those diligent icon makers of old, Barskij’s precise and accurate observations grant his accounts virtue, and therefore credibility.

67 Barskij’s detailed descriptions of liturgical ritual, arrangement of church furnishings and organization of the Greek Orthodox Church, Grishin maintains, was meant as ‘a contribution to the purification and preservation of the Orthodox tradition both in Ukraine and Russia’, see Grishin, Bars’kyi and the Orthodox community, 226.
68 Grishin, Barskij’s account of the monasteries of Cyprus, 27.
69 Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 127.
70 ‘Nowhere did I procrastinate, as I wanted to visit all the monasteries quickly. I feared that with the arrival of the winter I might not be able to see all the monasteries’, Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 141. Having visited all the monasteries, he spent a month in the Russian monastery of S T Panteleimon, waiting for spring.
71 At this time, he noted, Greeks looked at Russia in the hope she would free them from the Ottomans, see Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 216.
72 Of the sketches of the twenty monasteries, seventeen have survived.
73 Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 129.
74 Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 152.
75 Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 227.
76 Mparski, Γα ταξέως στο Άγιο Όρος, 139.
In the second account, the monasteries thus become jewel boxes filled not only with material, but also with spiritual treasures. Tales of monks and miracles often occupy several pages and are sometimes explicitly used as moral lessons. Yet they are never taken for granted. Barskij is always keen to reassure the reader that he saw the marks of those miracles. ‘I saw this with my eyes’ and similar formulae multiply in proportion to the extraordinariness of the story. When it comes to miraculous icons of the Mother of God – icons that bled, changed their posture, or reached Athos by sea during iconoclasm – Barskij never fails to remind his readers that he saw them ‘with [his] own eyes and kissed [them] with [his] sinful lips’. Knowledge is measured through observation. Authority is conveyed through direct physical experience.

As with measurement and description, Barskij’s emphasis on vision and eyewitnessing can be traced back to the dawn of pilgrimage writing. For example, in the fourth century the Spanish nun Egeria was equally insistent on having seen the sites of the Holy Bible ‘with her own eyes’. A main goal of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Sinai was to bring those places before the eyes of her sisters who had remained in Spain and to help them better memorize Scripture through mental spatial visualization:

I know it has been rather a long business writing down all these places one after the other and it makes far too much to remember. But it may help you, loving sisters, better picture what happened in these places when you read the Books of holy Moses.98

Nine centuries later, Abbot Daniil of Kiev adopted a similar strategy:

And by the grace of God I arrived in the Holy Land safe and secure and I saw with my own eyes those holy places where the feet of our Blessed Lord trod and where he performed his wonders. My sinful eyes took in all of this and over many days the Lord allowed me to see things I longed to behold.99

The goal of these pilgrims was to enable their readers (or listeners) to visualize the sites in their mind in an accurate manner and to make their accounts credible. They therefore adopted narrative strategies that would evoke a direct experience of the place. These included the use of the second person when addressing the reader and a continuous emphasis on having seen

---

97 Μπαρσκί, Τα ταξίδια στο Άγιο Όρος, 138.
things in first person. Barskij inherits both devices and constantly reminds his readers of the care he took in recording and sketching what he saw ‘for [their] own benefit’. However, he also goes well beyond that. He literally takes his readers by the hand, helps them orient themselves in the monastic complexes and constantly guides their minds’ eyes through the landscape using formulae such as ‘and now let’s walk outside of the monastery and look at the marvelous things in its surroundings’, or ‘here ends the western slope of Athos; let’s go and see the other ten monasteries’. And where words fail to capture space, there his artistic skills intervene: ‘I present this in drawing for the curious [readers] so that they can see and better understand’, he often reminds his audience. Barskij does not want his readers to be passive receptacles of knowledge. He wants them to see and to understand. He also wants them to pray for him: ‘when you look at this drawing, I beg you to pray for me’. The graphic medium thus operates as a vehicle for the enlightenment of his audience and for his own salvation.

Sketches also become tools for reinforcing the credibility of his eyewitnessing. Devoid of any baroque element, or allegorical figures, they speak a plain rhetoric of truth. Barskij often embeds his own physical presence in the topographic sketches of the Athonite monasteries (Fig. 5a). These depictions of himself are the visual equivalents of his eyewitnessing formulae. Barskij’s diminutive presence is meant to validate his own experience without distracting the viewer. Most of the time, he portrays himself on the move (Fig. 5b). Walking grants Barskij detachment. It is a form of xenitia, of ascetic self-exile. By giving up home, the pilgrim makes heaven his home. And in making heaven his home he takes a distance from earth. He puts earthly things into perspective, and he allows his readers to do the same.

Unlike his pre-modern predecessors, Barskij does not take anything for granted. In his account of his second visit to Athos, eyewitnessing, hearsay and his travel guide (Komnenos’ proskenetarion) are always tested through critical enquiry, which is the hallmark of his work. His observations and reflections rest on the dialectic between faith and reason typical of the Orthodox Enlightenment and should be read in the context of the Petrine reforms. Rationalism and empiricism allow the boundary between tradition and superstition to be traced. They allow the faithful to challenge received knowledge and at times even question well-established traditions. For example, according to local tradition, on her way to Cyprus to visit Lazarus, the Mother of God was said to have been diverted to Athos by strong winds, to have fallen in love with the place and proclaimed it ‘her garden’. Barskij, however, argues that he ‘did not find any information in reliable Greek books’ and therefore concludes that the Mother of God never travelled outside of Jerusalem, Galilee and Egypt. Hence, Athos was blessed not because of her physical visit, but ‘because of her intercessions and because of the virtuous monks who settled there’. Here Barskij the rational enlightener seems to win over Barskij the pious pilgrim.

At other times, however, the two voices are in tension. For example, in the monastery of Vatopedi Barskij finds an unusual and

80 Such things about the beauty of the katholikon [of Lavra] I have written for you, pious reader, as I saw them; ‘I saw and wrote everything with care’, Mparski, Τα ταξιδια στο Άγιο Όρος, 234, 236.
81 Mparski, Τα ταξιδια στο Άγιο Όρος, 243, 440.
82 Mparski, Τα ταξιδια στο Άγιο Όρος, 280.
83 Grishin, Barskij’s Travels to Cyprus, 8.
84 Nowadays the monks still refer to Athos as ‘το περιβάλλ της Πεντάχες’ (the garden of the Mother of God).
85 Mparski, Τα ταξιδια στο Άγιο Όρος, 218.
beautiful Byzantine cup made of some precious stone which the monks call *iaspis* (jasper). They say that drinking holy water from this cup heals all sorts of infirmities. Barskij spends a long time examining the cup, but questions the name of the material based on lack of evidence. He concludes that the stone is not jasper,
because I haven’t heard of any such stone in imperial treasuries. On the contrary, the name of the stone comes from the Greek verb iao, which means to heal’. However, when it comes to the process of healing, he admits that ‘it is not our job to investigate whether the healing occurs naturally or supernaturally. We should not examine this, but thank our wise Lord who grants humans with such gifts’.87

In these and other passages we can hear Barskij the inquisitive enlightener and Barskij the pious pilgrim conversing with one other. However, there is no dissonance nor contradiction between the two voices. While the Orthodox enlightener acknowledges the agency of reason, he also humbly recognizes its limits before God’s mystery. In line with Patristic tradition, Orthodox enlighteners made a theological distinction between the logical faculty of dia
donia (reason) and nous (the intellect, or ‘eye of the heart’). The former was the site of human learning and sensual wisdom, whereas the latter was the site of spiritual knowledge.88 For the Orthodox enlightener, different types of knowledge could thus coexist without contradiction, while the supremacy of spiritual wisdom was recognized over sensual human learning.89

Clear vision

Athos’ monasteries provided Barskij not only with effective narrative containers, but also with objects for graphic spatial experimentation. In his sketches the monastic buildings are captured from impossible vantage points. In some cases, the artist places himself above the sea; other times above Athos’ rugged topography. His goal is to show as much detail as possible: ‘I sketched this monastery [Lavra] and all its external beauties [as seen] from north-west, in order to show the most important things that are found in it’.90

Barskij adopts a high-angle bird’s-eye view in order to allow the viewer to see, as he says, ‘most details’. The view encompasses what is inside and outside the monastic compounds, including other buildings (like chapels and cells) which he also describes in the text. Barskij is always keen to remind the reader that he sketches on the spot and to emphasize the verisimilitude of his drawings, even though they are taken from imaginary viewpoints. The equation between clear vision, knowledge and truth is a productive one,Barskij converts a (typically Western) ground plan of the main church of Lavra into a sort of interactive map of liturgical performance (Fig. 8). Key features and key actors are numbered, captioned and mapped so that, as Barskij says, the reader can better understand my account, seeing the church as in a mirror.91

We are therefore offered a synoptic, God-eye’s view; or rather, we are offered a combination of views and moments in time. Readers are meant to use the plan for orientation as they read Barskij’s detailed descriptions of liturgical ritual. In the text Barskij explains how the beautiful marble floors of the church are decorated in coloured patterns which have the practical function of helping the monks find their place during church services:

Because the deacon stands afar when he reads the Gospel, farther from the centre of the main nave. … The ektenis takes place in front of the Royal Door, whereas the Apostle is read on another spot, … and in another spot the verses ‘Blessed is the man’ are pronounced, and yet in another spot the tone is announced, and elsewhere the Psalms are read.92

Seen through the eyes of Barskij the enlightener the church becomes a three-dimensional map. While the monks follow ground patterns to remember their place, the ‘enlightened’ reader is offered an empowering God’s-eye view, a simultaneous view from multiple angles as in Byzantine representations.93

Text and drawing once again complement each other here. The text provides detail; the sketch allows that detail to be located in space; and space is animated through performance. Thus, Barskij’s sketches linger between space and place; between old sacred topographies and Enlightenment visual enquiry; between Western and Eastern spatial conventions. Perhaps more intriguingly, they linger between sight and the geographical imagination — the capacity to picture in one’s mind places the eye cannot reach or grasp in their fullness.

87 Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 396. Examples in which he questions the authenticity of relics and miracles include his visit to Saint Nicholas’s relics in Bari and to the Panagia Trooditissa in Cyprus. See Grishin, Vasyi Hryhorovic Bars’kyj, 13–14 and Grisin, Bars’kyj’s Travels in Cyprus, 66–67.
88 Wirtschafter, Religion and Enlightenment, 36–37 and 44.
89 Throughout his second Athos account, Barskij refers to two types of truth: that of reason/evidence and that of tradition, of the monks. For example, he recounts how in the monastery of Pantokratoros ‘I examined all the folia of the manuscript from beginning to end, but did not find any signature nor any sign that can prove that this gospel belonged to St John Kalybites. Even the monks do not have any proof of why they still call it [Kalybites’ gospel], other than according to tradition’, Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 384; see also 393–395.
90 Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 222.
91 Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 413.
93 Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 277. Once again, such detailed descriptions of liturgical performances were probably written with the ecclesiastical reforms at home in mind. Early descriptions of church services are found in Barskij’s accounts of his stay in the Greek Orthodox community of Venice. However, while these early descriptions are more about differences between the Greek and Russian ritual, reinforcing the superiority of the latter, the descriptions of Athenite services fulfil the opposite function. They are meant as ‘guides’. See Grishin, Vasyi Hryhorovic Bars’kyj, and Gonneau, L’Odyssee religieuse.
94 Mparski, Ta ταξιδιά στο Αγιορ. Όρος, 297.
Fig. 6. Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij, View of the monastery of Simonopetra, 1744.
Clear vision is not just an artistic or narrative trope for Barskij. It is a powerful metaphor throughout his accounts and his life path. It is the precondition for mapping. It is the mysterious force that brings Barskij-the-pilgrim and Barskij-the-enlightener together. As he moves through the landscape, Barskij finds himself in a continuous state of instability. He walks over the land suspended between light and darkness; between safety and peril; between clarity of vision and lack of vision. Light is Barskij’s ally. It allows him to see his path; it allows careful observation. It allows him to sketch. For Barskij light is truth, light is hope, light is knowledge — light is God. Light is
Fig. 8. Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij, Explanatory plan of church services featuring the katholikon of Great Lavra, 1744.
also beauty. On Athos Barskij’s favourite features seem to be marble floors ‘that shine like mirrors’, ‘white columns’, and churches filled with natural light through their many windows.96

By contrast, darkness, and lack of clear vision in general, are Barskij’s enemy. He is upset when he is lodged in dark rooms, and envisages this as a reflection of his hosts’ lack of education (and lack of interest in his sketching and writing activities).37 On various occasions Barskij is assaulted by thieves or loses his way in the darkness of the night or in the dense fog. This tension between clear vision and lack of visibility reaches its apotheosis in the account of his ascent of the summit of Mount Athos during his second visit. As he heads towards the mountaintop Barskij is initially disappointed that ‘[he] could not see distant landscapes, as [he] had wished’.

The fog was so thick that I marched in the darkness, and I couldn’t see ahead of me more than a stone’s throw and I could barely see the path. … Suddenly I heard strong creaks … I could not see anyone and I got so scared, thinking it could be some bad demon. I started to cross myself … then above me I saw black wild goats. … I was so scared … I wasn’t sure whether they were goats or demons, for painters represent demons in such a fashion.98

On the mountaintop, as the wind dispels the clouds, Barskij finally sees the whole peninsula unfold under his feet ‘like a green valley with beautiful thick forests and the many monasteries and sketes and cells and huts in different places here and there, all beautiful’.99 From that elevated spot he is enabled to survey all the sites he visited during his stay on the peninsula. Under the eyes of the curious enlightener, Athos becomes a giant map.

While in the first Athos account the dialectic between light and darkness is mostly descriptive and confined to anecdotal occurrences or rhetorical formulae — such as ‘I walked enlightened by God’ — in the second account it becomes more pervasive and metaphorical.100 Light and clear vision stand for knowledge; darkness and lack of vision for ignorance. For example, Barskij defines the Bulgarian monks of Zographou as ‘ignorant fanatics’ and their elder as ‘a one-eyed [man] among the blind’. Barskij engages in a long theological discussion on the problem of second baptism, a practice that zealot Slav monks applied not only to Catholic Ruthenians converting to Orthodoxy, but also to the Orthodox who had spent time in the Catholic countries. He spends several pages questioning the validity of this practice, but all his words are in vain — ‘I did not achieve anything with those stubborn ignorant [monks]’.101 In the later part of his journeys, Barskij has come to despise Slav Orthodox zealot clergy to the same extent he despises the ‘papists’ encroaching into the Orthodox lands and the Ottomans oppressing the Greeks. As with Bishop Feofan, he envisages the ignorance and stubbornness of those old believers as the real obstacle to the Petrine reforms and the ‘enlightenment’ of his Church.102

In eighteenth-century Russian culture the Enlightenment metaphor of light as knowledge blended easily with Christian Orthodox doctrine, liturgical rituals and their spaces, permeated with light and images of illumination as they were.103 It is therefore no surprise that Barskij places so much emphasis on his dispute with the Bulgarians. In the Orthodox Church, the mystery of baptism is defined as a moment of illumination and the feast of the Theophany (Christ’s baptism in the Jordan), also known in the Orthodox world as ‘Feast of the Lights’, celebrates ‘the illumination of the world by Christ’. Liturgical practices and spaces reinforce the sacramental mystery of baptism, guiding the faithful along the path of phoistis (enlightenment) which ultimately leads to theosis (union with God).104

As has been noted, the last part of Barskij’s account moves away from being a simple diary or guidebook and incorporates extensive sections akin to polemical treatises, such as the discussion with the Bulgarians, or hagiographic accounts, such as the description of the martyrdom of monks from various Athonite monasteries by Unionist Latins in 1274 (here one can clearly see a contemporary parallel with Uniate and Orthodox Ruthenians). After these events, Barskij writes, ‘the light of Truth shone over the churches of God’.105 Mapping topographies of light and shadow allows Barskij to expose truth and falsehood, to mark the boundaries between orthodox teachings, heresies and superstition for the benefit of his homeland. Close to the end of his journeys, Barskij no longer limits himself to observing the monks from a distanced bird’s-eye perspective. Instead he makes himself bold and ends up teaching them what is right and what is wrong. From being a simple pilgrim, he has now come to envisage himself as a true enlightener, because, as he writes:

Where there is education, there is the enlightenment of the soul. And where there is the enlightenment of the soul, there is also the knowledge of truth. And where there is the knowledge of truth, there is the Wisdom of God, and where there is the Wisdom of God, there is also virtue. And where there is virtue, there is also the Grace of the Holy Spirit.106

Conclusions

Over the past fifteen years there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the value of thinking geographically in understanding the nature of eighteenth-century intellectual culture. There has also been a serious attempt to rethink Enlightenment geographies in more nuanced ways than through traditional diffusion models, national Enlightenments and big thinkers. Withers, for example, has challenged us to imagine the Enlightenment’s geography ‘less as a map of national boundaries fixed in space than one of myriad lines of movement across space, lines connecting sites of knowledge-making and reception’.108 We can think of Barskij’s lifepath as one of these many lines; a line running from the Kiev Mohyla Academy through intersecting, often overlapping, networks of shrines and centres of knowledge-making at, and beyond, the periphery of Europe. Barskij’s journeys to Athos represent just two short segments of this line, yet they neatly capture the complexity and hybridity of Russian Orthodox Enlightenment ways of seeing and representing space and place, suspended as they were between Eastern and Western conventions and sensibilities. They also allow us to trace Barskij’s own transformations through his

96 See, for example, his descriptions of Docheiariou and Xenophontos: Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 468, 482.
97 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 544.
98 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 257–258.
99 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 258. Similar descriptions of mountain top views are found in the accounts of his journeys to Cyprus. See Grishin, A Pilgrim’s Account of Cyprus, 70 and 84.
100 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 127; see John 1:7 and Is. 2:5.
101 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 456.
102 On Barskij’s attitudes towards other denominations and religions and towards Slav zealots, see Conneau, L’Odyssée religieuse.

103 Wirthschafter, Religion and Enlightenment, 21.
105 Grishin, Bars’kyj and the Orthodox community, 226; Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 571.
106 Mparski, Ta ταξίδια στο Αγίων Ορέος, 103–104.
107 Withers, Placing the Enlightenment, 40.
lifepath, and invite us to think about the Orthodox Enlightenment more as a process than as a static concept.

The Orthodox Enlightenment of which Barskij was part was just one expression of soft Enlightenment. It was a unique synthesis of Orthodox tradition and empiricism — and one stressing morality and learning. Barskij embodies this synthesis of modern Western and traditional Eastern Christian approaches and sensitivities. While emphasis on eyewitnessing and measurement was part of a long tradition of pilgrims’ writing, and attention to secular elements was becoming increasingly common in the Russian khorenina during the eighteenth century, what makes Barskij’s account truly distinctive is his critical and spatial approach.

The Kievan pilgrim-explorer worked with a combination of perspectives and scales. First of all there was a topographic, ground-level perspective, whereby space is perceived as a sequence of places, as he moves from town to town, from shrine to shrine, from monastery to monastery. Mount Athos is a station (or a place) in his lifelong journey and the Athonite monasteries are stations (or places) within his journeys on Athos. The latter act as spatial containers for objects, people and stories, as well as spaces for graphic experimentation. Secondly, there is the view from above. The monasteries are captured through impossible bird’s-eye views and architectural plans, whereby space becomes an abstract geometrical dimension in the best Western tradition. And yet, Western conventions blend with the particular perspective and multi-temporality of Byzantine art.

Finally, besides shifting his visual angle (or combining different visual angles), Barskij also shifts scale as he walks around the Athonite peninsula. He constantly zooms in and out, from the tiny detail of an icon or a cup, to the space of the church, to the monastic compound and its surroundings, to the whole peninsula as seen from the summit of Athos’ peak.

These angles and scales reflect the different narrative registers Barskij adopts in the text: of the pilgrim walking over the land; of the prosekhynetes bowing down before an icon; of the curious traveler wondering at unusual features; and finally, of the enlightener searching for truth. If the earlier Barskij was after curiosities and adventure, the later Barskij was after fragments of an authentic Orthodox past in the present. He was after an original Christianity, as the source of truth and virtue. For Grishin, the emphasis of Barskij’s accounts moved away from being a guide book, diary and autobiography to being a scholarly treatise designed to defend Orthodoxy and benefit his homeland, ‘a guide to ancient — and by implication pure — traditions of Orthodoxy as they survived in the Holy Land, in the Greek lands and on the Holy Mountain’.

If Barskij was indeed a defender of Orthodoxy committed to bringing home an undefiled, authentic form of faith, however, he, ironically, largely did so by using the analytical and the representational tools of that other world he was campaigning against.

Not only do Barskij’s accounts lie at the intersection of different traditions and geographies. They have also been, and continue to be, subject to different appropriations and geographies of reception. Barskij’s accounts owe most of their popularity to the 1885 edition sponsored by the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society at a time when Russia was trying to reinforce its presence in the Holy Land and was striving against Catholic propaganda. In line with the reading of Nicolaj Barsukov, the editor of the volume, some scholars have seen Barskij as a champion of Orthodoxy, while often downplaying his connections with non-Orthodox networks in the first part of the journey through central Europe and Italy, and even the fact that he dressed up as a Catholic pilgrim to obtain patents and alms. Others, by contrast, have seen in him a cosmopolitan scholar more preoccupied with education than religious affiliation, and have similarly ignored the anti-Catholic (and anti-Ottoman) attacks and the hagiographical elements in the later part of his accounts, or discounted them as literary topos. In order to make sense of Barskij, however, we need to place him in the complex context of Orthodox Enlightenment geographies made of syncretisms and ambiguities. We need to give up the (Enlightenment) idea of classification and come to accept his lifepath as a fluid process rather than as a fixed script or a static map. Conversely, if we wish to better comprehend the internal complexities of the Enlightenment geographies of the ‘periphery’, further attention needs to be paid to the lifepaths of individuals like Barskij.

Acknowledgements

Drafts of this paper were presented at various conferences and seminars. I am grateful to the organizers Nirit Ben Arye Debby, Felix Driver, Vassiliki Frangiskou, Katrine Kogman-Appel, Michael Richardson, Rehav Rubin and Graham Speake, and to the participants of these events for their precious input. I am especially thankful to three anonymous referees for their constructive feedback and most helpful suggestions, to Miles Ogborn for his excellent editorial guidance, and to Malcolm Kelsey for drawing the maps. Finally, I would like to thank Fr. Maximos Constas for directing my attention to Barskij and inspiring me to write this paper.

Veronica Della Dora is Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research interests and publications span historical and cultural geography, the history of cartography and Byzantine studies with a specific focus on landscape, sacred space and the geographical imagination. She is the author of Imagining Mount Athos: Visions of a Holy Place from Homer to World War II (University of Virginia Press, 2011), Landscape, Nature and the Sacred in Byzantium (Cambridge University Press, 2016) and Mountain (Reaktion, 2016).

108 Grishin, Bars’kyj and the Orthodox community, 226.
109 Grishin, Bars’kyj and the Orthodox community, 226.
110 Kolesnyk, Strategies of Self-representation.