

Claire Brisby*

**Eugenios Voulgaris and Bulgarian Painters Hristo and Zahari
from Samokov: Their European Perspective 1760-1852**

A European outlook is an intrinsic attribute of the renown of the Bulgarian National Revival icon-painters Hristo Dimitrov (c. 1750-1819) and his son Zahari (1810-53): Hristo is historically alleged to have trained in Vienna while Zahari aspired to academic training in St. Petersburg and vaunted his instruction from French painters in Bulgaria.¹

An outward-bound perspective is a common characteristic of Bulgarian painters, historically perceived as individual personalities, and the correlation of trans-border perspectives and of personal identities hints at the filtering of European Enlightenment notions of self-awareness into conventional icon-painters' consciousness.

Whilst Neofit Rilski acclaimed Hristo Dimitrov from Samokov as a skilful Athonite icon-painter, he considered his son Zahari to have surpassed him, without however articulating the implied western influence that contributed to his acclaim.² The western perspective of the Austro-Hungarian ethnographer Felix Kanitz is alert to the foreign influences of an unnamed Triavna-based icon-painter from his sons' experience in Russia and Vienna.³ The anonymous painter has been identified with another pioneering National Revival icon-painter with attributed western consciousness, Konstantin Vitanov (c.1762-1814).⁴ The local predilection for the prestigious attribution of foreign dimensions to Bulgarian icon-painters is manifest again in the epithet "molera" –German for painter– awarded to yet another eminent National

* Art historian, former art-history director at Inchbald School of Design and lecturer at Sotheby's Institute, Victoria and Albert Museum, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

¹ Asen Vasiliev, *Български възрожденски майстори* (Bulgarian Revival Masters) (Sofia: 1965), 357-94.

² Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 315, fn. 4 citing Neofit Rilski, *Описание Болгарскаго Священнаго манастиря Рилскаго* (Description of the Bulgarian Holy Monastery of Rila) (Sofia: 1879), 76.

³ Felix Kanitz, *La Bulgarie Danubienne et le Balkan: Etudes de voyage 1860-1880* (Paris: 1882), 187-8.

⁴ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 20-6.

Revival painter Toma Vishanov (c.1760) from Bansko.⁵ However, a generation later Zahari belittled his avowed trans-border outlook by identifying himself professionally with the eastern conventions of painting, styling himself in Greek “zograf” and in Bulgarian “iconopisets.”

Critical assessment of western influence in regard to these painters has been exhaustively concerned with evaluating their engagement with western art in mechanical terms, yet factual evidence of Hristo’s alleged academic training remains elusive and Zahari’s debt to western sources has been comprehensively quantified in his use of western prints. The study of these painters’ western awareness in technical terms is enriched by the exceptional archive of their workshop materials, including large collections of western prints, now preserved in the National Art-Gallery in Sofia and in the Historical Museum in Samokov.⁶

⁵ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 489-506.

⁶ The archive of drawings, prints and other working materials associated with Zahari is compiled with acquisitions from the painter’s descendants (Zahari’s granddaughters) made by the National Archaeological Museum [hereafter HAM] from Anna Rakovska in 1933, which were transferred in 1952 to the National Art Gallery [hereafter HXГ] in Sofia with the transfer code HXГ 5.III.1952 HAM 670г 13 и 143, by the Samokov History Museum (СИМ) from Christina Kuzmanova (also known as Kuzmova) in 1937, Vera Mandel in 1952 and Elizaveta Manova during the 1960s. The common provenance justifies reference to these materials collectively with the term Samokov Archive. The archive is not catalogued and it is only partially published in descriptive surveys by Andrei Protic, “Денационализиране и възраждане на нашето изкуство от 1393-1879 год” (Denationalisation and Revival in our Art from 1393 to 1879), in *България 1000 години 927-1927* (Bulgaria 1,000 years 927-1927) (Sofia: 1930), 383-540; Vasil Zahariev, *Захари Зограф* (Zahari Zograf) (Sofia: 1957); Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 332-43; Doroteya Sokolova, “Националната галерия–етапи и система на формиране на институцията 1892-1948” (The National Gallery–The Steps and Systems of the Formation of the Institute 1892-1948), *Проблеми на изкуството* 1 (1994): 39-50; Doroteya Sokolova, “Критическа оценка на произведенията на изкуството в България до средата на 40-те години” (Critical Assessment of Works of Art in Bulgaria until the mid-40s), *Проблеми на изкуството* 3 (1996): 3-14; Doroteya Sokolova, *Захари Зограф 1810-1853* (Sofia: 2010); For some selected items from the Samokov History Museum by Nevena Mitreva see Liubomir Nikolov, *Захари Христович Зограф 1810-1853* (Zahari Hristovic Zograf 1810-1853) (Samokov: 2010); Nevena Mitreva–Ivan Patev–Liubomir Nikolov, *Димитър Христович Зограф 1796-1860* (Dimitar Hristovic Zograf 1796-

Assessment of the Samokov painters' use of prints has also revealed their greater debt to Orthodox engravings, and research into Hristo and Zahari's work has shown the predominant role of two composite Orthodox prints published in Venice.⁷ These assessments of the Samokov painters' working practices and uses of printed models have established that the prints selected for use as models originate from as early as the late 17th century and from across a broad region of the European continent bordering both the northern Russian and southern Greek Orthodox spheres, with centres of production as dispersed as Lviv and Venice. However disparately located, these centres commonly harboured environments of cultural engagement between eastern Orthodox theological conventions and prevailing western European humanist Enlightenment thought.

Established scholarship of the Samokov painters' working practices and treatment of inherited Orthodox and assimilated western painterly traditions offers the basis to enquire here into the painters' consciousness of the cultural ideas, which conditioned the production of their printed models, and to assess how such awareness informed their approach to their role as icon-painters. Just as painters' self-awareness of their civic status can arguably be attributed to western humanist values of personal self-determination, so painters' awareness of theological

1860) (Samokov: 2011); Olga Yurchyshyn-Smith, "Rare Paper Icons from Mount Athos," *Print Quarterly* xxxii 2 (2015): 143-61, fig. 120; Further drawings of floral ornament in the archives of Institute of Art History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia (БАН) are attributed to Zahari in Anna Roshkovska, *Възрожденска декоративна стенопис от самоковски зографи* (Revival Decorative Wallpainting by Painters from Samokov) (Sofia: 1982), ills 45, 55; Anna Roshkovska–Liliana Mavrodinova, *Стенописен орнамент* (Ornamental Wallpainting) (Sofia: 1985), 287, plates 206, 208; Roshkovska–Mavrodinova, *op.cit.*, 288, plate 209.

⁷ Elena Popova, "Реинтерпретации на чудотворната икона на Св. Богородица от Кикос в българската живопис от края на 18-19 век" (Interpretations of the Miraculous Icon of the Holy Mother of God of Kykkos in Bulgarian Painting from the End of the 18-19th Century), *Проблеми на изкуството* 4 (1998): 32-41 (36, ills 10, 11, 12-5); Elena Popova, *Зографът Христо Димитров от Самоков* (The Painter Hristo Dimitrov from Samokov) (Sofia: 2001), 182-5; Claire Brisby, "Zahari Zograf and Western Consciousness: interpreting working practices in the Samokov painters' archives 1800-1850," *Проблеми на Изкуството/Art Studies Quarterly* 4 (2013): 14-24; idem. "The Role of Orthodox Religious Engravings in the Samokov Painters' Archive: Visual Prototypes?", *Series Byzantina* VI (2008): 87-101.

and cultural concepts responsible for the printed imagery they selected as sources deserves to be assessed likewise, as does the specific question of Hristo and Zahari's awareness of the eminent patronage and purpose of the composite Orthodox print, to which they each referred for mural and panel painting.

This article, therefore, seeks to broaden the scope of enquiry into the painters' cultural consciousness with an explorative investigation of their reference to central European cultural capitals in Hapsburg-controlled territories, inhabited by Orthodox communities coexisting with neighbouring Catholic communities. It enquires into the hitherto underestimated impact of European Enlightenment thought in these painters' consciousness by assessing agencies of transmission in the Ottoman-occupied Balkans and by analysing its reception by the Orthodox Church hierarchy, primarily on Mount Athos, and as particularly evident in the field of education. These enquiries are conducted by reviewing the biographical trajectories of each painter in the fresh perspective of the cultural environment of their native town of Samokov, as it is documented in Zahari's experience of it, reflected in his correspondence with Neofit Rilski, and as it is known in the earliest historical account by Hristo Semerdjiev in 1913.⁸

A starting point for tackling these investigations is a portrait print from the archival material which belonged to the painters Hristo and Zahari (Fig. 1).⁹

As identified in the Greek script visible below the figure, the print represents Eugenios Voulgaris, a Greek theologian with the baptismal name Eleftherios Vulgares (Εὐγένιος Βούλγαρης). The portrait print in the painters' archive matches in both imagery and dimensions the frontispiece portrait of Eugenios' book entitled *Logic*, which was published in Leipzig in 1766.¹⁰ The print, which survives in the Samokov painters' archive, has lost the inscription "J. M. Stock ad viv. del. et sculps. Lipsiae, 1766" under the image, which records that the portrait

⁸ Hristo Semerdjiev, *Самоковъ и околността му* (Samokov and its Surroundings) (Sofia: 1913); Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 359-94; Maria Ogoiska, *Междуписания Захарий Хр. Зограф–Неофит П. П. Рилски* (The Correspondence between Zahari H. Zograf–Neofit P. P. Rilski) (Sofia: 2010).

⁹ Sofia, HXF, Samokov Archive inv. no. II 903 (18 x 12 cms).

¹⁰ Brisby, *Zahari Zograf*, 17 fig. 5 frontispiece plate, *Logic* (20 x 11.5 cms).

was made by the German-named engraver, known to have been active in Nuremberg, Johann Michael Stock (1737-73).

Both the figure portrayed and the methods of portrayal, together with the technical aspects of production relating to this print, represent the cultural engagement in mid-18th-century central Europe. The eastern European theologian is portrayed by Johann Stock with standard conventions of western European portraiture. The bearded male figure dressed in the black habit and tall headdress of the Greek clergy is accessorised with attributes of learning, in the form of the book he is shown holding in his right hand and of the inkwell with a quill pen next to a letter resting by his left hand. The figure is shown under an illusionistic architectural arch, recognised as a conventional device framing the composition.

The Greek inscription incorporated into the architectural frame on an illusory stone plaque, identifying the figure portrayed by name, signals the cultural dimensions of the portrait and alerts us to the cultural diversity of Eugenios' life. The course of his life spans the century chronologically and straddles the European continent geographically, from his birth in Corfu in 1716 to his death in St. Petersburg in 1806. As a Greek Orthodox theologian, his renown for grappling with secular scholarship on the European Enlightenment, manifest, for example, in translations of Voltaire at the Imperial Russian Court, earned him his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society London in 1788.¹¹ The publication of *Logic* in Leipzig in 1766, as the first of several philosophical and religious texts leading to his academic renown, marks the height of his career in Europe before he settled at the Court of Catherine the Great in Russia.

The survival of the frontispiece plate in a Bulgarian painters' archive and its purpose there, divorced from its original frontispiece role in a book, attests to an altered function of the print with trans-cultural implications. The print is therefore a useful tool for illuminating routes of cultural transmission and the transformative consequences of

¹¹ Iannis Carras, "Understanding God and Tolerating Humankind: Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment in Evgenios Voulgaris and Platon Levshin," in *Enlightenment and Religion in the Orthodox World*, ed. Pascalis Kitromilides (Oxford: 2016), 78, fn. 26.

cultural exchange. It sharpens our focus on specific personalities with important contributions to the cultural development of the National Revival not only in Zahari's time but also in the earlier period of Hristo's activity, contemporaneous with Voulgaris' later life. Discussion below begins by uncovering the print's journey to Bulgaria and the circumstances of its acquisition by Samokov painters and then continues to investigate its significance to Hristo and Zahari in turn, in terms of their reception of its formal imagery and their awareness of the figure represented, Eugenios Voulgaris.

Zahari (1810-53) and the portrait-print of Eugenios Voulgaris (1716-1806)

As one of many prints in the painters' archive, the journey of Stock's frontispiece plate from Leipzig in the hands of Bulgarian painters in Samokov exemplifies the story of these painters' collection of western prints, which have been conspicuous to scholars because of their size and diversity. I have discussed elsewhere how from remarks by Zahari in a letter to his mentor Neofit Rilski dated February 25, 1841, about obtaining models from French painters passing through Plovdiv, evidence of the painter's acquisition of the prints, we can assume were of western origin.¹² This documentary evidence of acquisition is also important for explaining the haphazard condition of the collection, not only randomly diverse in content but also haphazardly preserved, gathered in folios or pasted into albums. Such compiled print-albums are typical of western painters' portfolios of model images. Consequently, we can reconstruct the journey of these western prints to Bulgaria, travelling in portfolios carried by western painters seeking opportunities in eastern Europe and handed over to a Bulgarian painter in Plovdiv.

Although Zahari does not identify the painters from whom he acquired prints by name, their presence in Bulgaria is associated with the steady stream of European painters known to have catered for the long-standing desire for portraitists and decorators in the Ottoman capital in Constantinople, lying close to the eastern Bulgarian border.

¹² Brisby, *Zahari Zograf*, 19-21.

Relevant to the issue of naming the anonymous, allegedly French, painters is the recruitment of teachers from western Europe to staff art schools established in newly independent Greece to the south. An eligible candidate for impersonating the anonymous painters is Pierre Bonirote (1811-91), a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Lyon in 1824 and Prix de Rome scholar between 1836 and 1839. His appointment to the School of Art in Athens, where he directed instruction in painting from 1840 to 1842, coincides with the date of Zahari's letter in February 1841, in which he mentions encounters with French masters once they had reached Plovdiv from Koprivshtitsa.¹³ Known for leading painters' study tours travelling from Athens to investigate or supervise painting, Bonirote's potential venture to Koprivshtitsa and Plovdiv would help name the painters with whom Zahari engaged.

As for the culminating role of Eugenios' portrait-print on the arrival in the Bulgarian Samokov painters' collection, it is appropriate to explain the case for its function as a model for Zahari's "Self-Portrait," on the basis of formal similarities in the format and construction of the composition (Fig. 2a).¹⁴

Zahari's "Self-Portrait" composition adopts the format of Stock's precedent, portraying the scholar half-length with matching silhouette contours and gesturing, and it diverges only in the choice of attributes, with the literary accessories of the model replaced in the painter's portrait by a paint brush held aloft in his right hand. Zahari's fidelity to the print replicates even the treatment of the folds of the robed sleeves at the wrists. The simple stone sill in Zahari's portrait alludes to the illusory architectural arch seen in the frontispiece plate and Zahari's frontal gaze imitates the virtually frontal representation of the frontispiece portrait, even if the viewpoint is from the opposite side, which suggests Zahari's use of a mirror in the transfer process.

Zahari's portrait then updates the model print by dispensing with the background perspective behind a conventionally draped billowing curtain and by discarding the view into a book-lined interior. Zahari's elimination of distracting elements of composition sharpens the focus

¹³ Brisby, *op.cit.*, 20.

¹⁴ Brisby, *op.cit.*, 19 fig. 6: Zahari, *Self-Portrait*, Sofia, HXT, inv. no. 2 (76 x 50 cms).

on the figure itself, which is brought forward to the viewer's gaze to enhance the monumentality of its impression against a neutral ground.

Zahari's use of Stock's frontispiece adds to the other known case of Zahari's debt to a western print as a source for painting. As discussed in a separate publication, Zahari's representation of the Demoniac in two of his four icons of the Bogoroditsa "Живоносен Източник" (Zoodochos Pigi) of 1837 and 1838 replicates the recumbent figure of Ananias, conspicuous in Raphael's tapestry cartoon composition illustrating the *Death of Ananias*.¹⁵ Zahari's awareness of this composition is evidenced by the preservation amongst the painter's archived working materials of Agostino Veneziano's engraving of the cartoon and it is also attested by the copy-drawing of the composition's recumbent figure, which also survives in the painters' archive. However, in contradistinction to this selective appropriation from a western source for an isolated feature in Orthodox iconography, Zahari's use of Stock's portrait-print of Voulgaris as a template for the novel painting type of portraiture and for the oil-painting technique manifests this painters' conscious engagement with western models and painting formats.

Zahari's interpretation of the portrait-print prompts questions about the Bulgarian painter's knowledge of western portraiture and of the conventions of scholars' portraiture as exemplified in Holbein's portrait of Erasmus (c. 1523) to which Stock's frontispiece plate arguably indebted (Fig. 2b).

Zahari's assured treatment of the structural formalities of western portraiture, evident in his "Self Portrait," implies a conscious awareness not only of the frontispiece plate but also of contextual knowledge, which can confidently be attributed to his engagement with western painters. Remarks in the painters' letter to Neofit, dated April 20, 1840, account for his instruction from French painters during the

¹⁵ Claire Brisby, "An icon of the Theotokos Zoodochos Pighi—Mother of God Life-Giving Spring: Aspects of Later Byzantine Art," *Проблеми на изкуството/Art Studies Quarterly* 4 (2003): 30-44; Print: Sofia, НХГ, Samokov Archive folder II 1192 (26.5 x 40.5 cm), insc. left *invinit Rap.....Roma*; insc. right *Raph. Urbino*, illustrated in Sokolova, *Захару Зограф*, 157; further insc. below; drawing: Samokov, СИМ 3104 Mandel archive, *Recumbent Male* (32.7 x 22 cms overall), illustrated Moskova (2002) 21.

course of three months the previous winter.¹⁶ Early in the following year, Zahari writes in a letter dated February 5, 1841, of further tuition in academic methods such as working with models –presumably prints– and in principles of scale and perspective as applied to composition and anatomical proportion.¹⁷

Related to the reception of Stock's portrait-print in Bulgaria and the issue of Zahari's instruction in European portraiture is the other of Zahari's two portraits. Zahari's portrait of Neofit Rilski pairs closely in scale with his "Self-Portrait" to attribute it to the same time, from which to infer Zahari's concentrated attention to the technique and format of western European portraiture (Fig. 3).¹⁸

The date inscribed on Neofit's portrait of 1838 indicates that it predates the documented references in Zahari's correspondence, dated 1840 and 1841, to encounters with western painters, so that we can establish that Zahari's engagement with western painters can be traced back at least three years prior to the documented date of encounter.¹⁹ Zahari's pioneering use of the oil medium for both portraits is further a material endorsement of his formal education in western portraiture indebted to the instruction he sought from western painters during this period.

In resonant similarities with Stock's portrait-print of Eugenios, presenting the Bulgarian scholar in clerical headdress handling several

¹⁶ Zahariev, *op.cit.*, 46, note 3: Rila Monastery, no. 84: letter dated 20 April 1840.

¹⁷ Ogoiska, *op.cit.*, 211: letter dated 5 February 1841: "при двамина майстори француски зографезимах 3. матими за соразмерението на живописството;" Zahariev, *op.cit.*, 32, 142 transcribes "съразмерението/proportion;" Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 390 transcribes "споразумението/agreement."

¹⁸ Zahari, *Portrait of Neofit Rilski 1838*, Sofia, НХГ, inv. no. 3 (84 x 64 cms).

¹⁹ Plamen Petrov, "За човека, увековечен в картина или няколко бележки върху портрета на Неофит Рилски от колекцията на НХГ (инв. Но. 11 ж 43)" (On the Man Immortalized in a Picture or a few Notes on the Portrait of Neofit Rilski from the Collection of the NAG (inv. no. 11 G 43), in *Наследството на отец неофит рилски: изкътвоведски, богословски и филологически аспекти* (The Legacy of Father Neofit Rilski: Issues of Art-history, Theology and Philology), ed. Svetlana Kyumdzhieva–Ivan Gelev–Rumiana Damianova–Elena Uzunova–Elisaveta Musakova (Sofia: 2012), 175-8, on the basis of related archival documentation portrait originates from 1835.

bound volumes of books beside a quill poised in an inkwell, Zahari's portrayal of Neofit signals his predilection for western appropriation even if the comparatively less assured treatment of the formalities of western portraiture in relation to the "Self-Portrait" suggests that it predates the latter as the Bulgarian painter's initial attempt of the genre.

As concerns the Bulgarian painter's European consciousness, the representation of Neofit's teaching aid –the globe– is emblematic of the global awareness Zahari shared with Neofit, as it is also gleaned from repeated references to geography books in correspondence with the period Neofit's portrait is dated, two years into his teaching master's role at the school in Koprivshitsa. In one letter dated November 7, 1838, there is specific allusion to Konstantin Fotinov's translation (1843) of a Greek geography book: "why Konstantin does not give the Geography book away."²⁰ Their enthusiasm for promoting geography as a subject in the school curriculum reflected the prevailing theological thought addressed in Voulgaris' "Logic," which synthesised Enlightenment philosophy and Orthodox theology in the concept of manifesting God's existence in the Creation and in phenomena of the natural world.

Having assessed the case of recognising Eugenios' portrait-print as the template for Zahari's "Self-Portrait," it is appropriate to continue by questioning the significance of this in estimating the young Bulgarian's awareness of the Greek theologian Voulgaris. How conscious was the Bulgarian of the Greek scholar's intellectual achievements and critical renown?

The survival of the painter's correspondence is an informative source for reconstructing this Bulgarian's cultural consciousness and critical self-awareness. The primary subject of concern in Zahari's letters addressed to Neofit Rilski over the period of eighteen years from 1835 to 1853 is the development of education in schools teaching a Bulgarian language curriculum. In vigorous terms that express his

²⁰ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 369: letter dated 14 June 1836, "Georgi has not agreed to give up his Geography Book" (Ogoiska, *Междуписания*, 98-100); Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 376: letter dated 24 June 1838, "Why Konstantin does not give the Geography Book way" (Ogoiska, *Междуписания*, 137-9); Ogoiska, *op.cit.*, 213: letter dated 6 April 1841, "Zahari refers to Receiving in Plovdiv a Geography Book and Volumes of an Encyclopaedia."

concern for these matters of primary importance to aspirations of national identity, Zahari's letters tell of the tasks expected of the school governor's role he assumed in Samokov and Plovdiv, as they are described by Semerdjiev, being duties to secure teaching staff and teaching materials and to manage schools' finances.²¹ Zahari's appeals to Neofit to accept teaching posts abound in the letters addressed to him in the mid 1830s, anticipating the prelate's appointment as master teacher of the new Bulgarian school in Koprivshtitsa from June 1836 to 1839. They also tell us of Zahari's call on Neofit's intervention to prevent the departure of another schoolmaster, "our Krusholiya (Крушолия)."²²

Moreover, Zahari's personal engagement with school building emerges in his enticing report to Neofit on May 10, 1836: "they have decided where to build the school too. The place is beautiful."²³ Zahari's involvement with school building continues, as a later letter indicates on November 21 of the same year: "Chorbadjji Vulko made a Bulgarian church in Filibe St. Petka. It is quite spacious and is in a very good spot and I think there is the best place for our national Slavic school to be opened."²⁴ Two years later, a letter on May 8, 1838, tells us of his ongoing involvement with the building of schools as well as of his efforts to develop school textbooks.²⁵ The following year, Zahari's request in a letter dated February 2, 1839, for "the alphabetical books and primer [...] the one that was translated in Bulgarian from Greek" shows how assiduously he pursued the securing of textbooks.²⁶ Petar Beron's inaugural Bulgarian primer was published a decade earlier, in 1824, and Zahari's reference to translation reflects the prevailing industry of foreign language books' translation, primarily Greek, in order for them to be used for teaching in the Bulgarian language.

Zahari's promotion of book publication responds to the introduction, starting from 1828, of secular printing in Bulgaria by his fellow

²¹ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 140-55.

²² Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 381: letter dated 7 November 1838.

²³ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 367.

²⁴ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 373.

²⁵ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 375.

²⁶ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 385.

citizen in Samokov, Nikolai Karastoyanov, clandestinely acquiring equipment from abroad and operating from their basement. On June 29, 1839, Zahari suggests to Neofit that he could “include Kara Stoyancheto (the son of Kara-Stoyanov) in the typography,” i.e., the printing of his dictionary – the event aborted for lack of official permit.²⁷

Remarks in Zahari’s letters imply his association with education was publicly recognised, notably as a student grant-giver on a generous scale, as inferred from comments relayed to Neofit about the young Naiden Gerov: “he had heard that all poor young Bulgarians who lived in the schools used to come to me for advice and some financial help so that they would not abandon their studies (some of them still owe me money).”²⁸

Zahari’s engagement with leading Bulgarian teaching masters is gleaned from the mention of names in his letters to Neofit. Several remarks about a certain Chavdar may identify Chavdar Sotirov, a Bulgarian who, having graduated in Athens and as schoolmaster in Bulgaria, introduced class groups by age, segregating older students in a separate room and added geography to the curriculum, teaching with a globe and maps.²⁹ The aforementioned Krusholiya may perhaps be identified with Zahari Krousha (1808-81), a two years senior fellow student of Neofit and teacher in Koprivshitsa, Sofia and Samokov.³⁰ Krusholiya’s extravagant behaviour crops up repeatedly in a lengthy letter in November 1838.³¹ Zahari’s request to Neofit, fifteen years later, on March 29, 1853, to send back his “Aesop’s book” with “Mr. Zakhariya h Gyurova” may well refer to Zahari Krousha’s translation of Aesop’s Fables from Greek.³² Other names peppering the letters include those of younger students of Rilski, Naiden Gerov (1823-1900), Mr. Raina (Popovic?), and Nikolai Tondzharov, all contrib-

²⁷ Ogoiska, *op.cit.*, 175.

²⁸ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 385: letter dated 2 February 1839.

²⁹ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 383: letter dated 12 July 1839; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 389: letter dated 28 October 1845; Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 140-55.

³⁰ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 190.

³¹ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 379-82: letter dated 7 November 1838.

³² Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 393: letter dated 29 March 1853 postscript; Por Krousha see Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 190 ff.

uting to education in Bulgaria as teachers in Koprivshitsa, Samokov and Plovdiv.³³

Zahari's reliance on Zakhariya Gyurov, as named in the letter of 1853 cited above, demonstrates how his patriotism led him to associate with Bulgarian nationalists. Zahari Gyurov/Gurov (c. 1810-92), was a contemporary in Samokov and fellow student of Neofit who outlived the painter as an activist for the independence of the Bulgarian Church, which was finally achieved in 1871. Zahari zograf was also personally related to Zahari Gyurov, the brother of the wife the painter records marrying on the eighth day of an unspecified month early in 1841.³⁴

The names of leading Bulgarian nationalists sprinkled through Zahari's letters attests to his awareness of acknowledged leaders effectively active in foreign centres in the decades leading up to the Crimean War, such as Vasil Aprilov (1789-1847) and Nikolay Palauzov (1821-99).³⁵ Frequenting Samokov and Plovdiv together with the patronage bases of Koprivshitsa and the principal Bulgarian monasteries in Rila, Troyan and Veliko Turnovo, Zahari's familiar environments were the leading economic and political centres of Bulgarian culture.

Zahari's excitement for Bulgarian education is likely to have eclipsed by his appreciation of Eugenios Voulgaris' contribution to Greek secular education in the previous century. However unfamiliar was Eugenios' renown for Zahari, the painters' letters convey his acknowledgement of contemporary Greek teachers in Bulgaria. The repeated references to Adam can be referred to the Vlach Adam Zapecos, who had introduced Neofit to the Greek language and literature in

³³ For Naiden see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 380: letter dated 7 November 1838; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 385: letter dated 2 February 1839; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 388: letter dated 26 September 1839; For "teacher Nikolaya" Tondsharov see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 383: letter dated 12 July 1839; For "Mr Raina" see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 382-3: letter dated 26 February 1839.

³⁴ For a record of Zahari Zograf's marriage see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 360, "Kaca Teφpeп" II, 1841 "I got married on 8th" (no name given); For family relationship see Zahariev, *op.cit.*, 134-6, ills: 137, 139; For Zahari Hadji Gyurov see Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 80.

³⁵ For Aprilov see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 376: letter dated 24 June 1838; For Palauzov and Naiden see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 380, letter dated 7 November 1838.

Melnik in the 1820s and whose subsequent inauguration of a Greek school in Plovdiv is reported by Zahari, as are the activities in Koprivshtitsa and Plovdiv of the Greek-named Dimitri Kalambaki and “teacher Hristaki.”³⁶ Zahari’s adoption of Neofit as a personal mentor is the legacy of the latter’s role as his schoolmaster in Samokov and of his teaching there from 1827 to 1831.

It is therefore likely that just as Zahari was indebted to western painters for the acquisition of the model print, his choice of the portrait-print from the collections of miscellaneous western prints for use as template for his first attempts at portraiture was steered by his engagement with the western painters rather than by local renown of Eugenios. Having portrayed the esteemed Bulgarian theologian in mirror image to the portrait-print of theologian Eugenios, Zahari’s “Self-Portrait” models his self-image on those of the venerable educators.

Disappointingly for Zahari’s aspiration, posthumous assessment of him, half a century later, failed to recognise his civic ambition and contribution. Semerdjiev –perhaps conditioned by long-standing social prejudices– categorised him strictly as an artisan, and as such merely a secondary family member to the elder painter Hristo, to whom he gives priority when discussing arts and crafts in Samokov, thereby denying Zahari the biographical outlines other Samokov citizen-teachers and nationalists earned from his pen.³⁷ Accounting for the biblical images printed in Nuremberg in the painters’ possession, Semerdjiev attributes their function as models for the elder painter Hristo.³⁸ This attribution is clearly wrong, since the reverse of the frontispiece title page of the series of plates concerned, *Historiae Ce-*

³⁶ For Adam see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 373: letter dated 21 November 1836; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 375: letter dated 8 May 1838; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 376: letter dated 24 June 1838; For Kalambaki see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 366: letter dated 22 April 1836; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 370: letter dated 1 July 1836; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 373: letter dated 21 November 1836; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 370: letter dated 1 July 1836; Adam’s identity: bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/неофит_Рилски; For “Hristaki teacher” see Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 389: letter dated 28 October 1845.

³⁷ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 221-7.

³⁸ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 222; The volume of plates from Christophor Weigel’s *Historiae Celebriores Veteris Testamenti* (Celebrated Old Testament Stories) (Nuremberg: 1712) is accessioned in Sofia, HXF, Samokov Archive II 1191.

lebriores Veteris Testamenti, published by Christophor Weigel in Nuremberg in 1712, is inscribed in Cyrillic with the date and place of its acquisition coinciding with the period Hristo's son, Zahari, undertook a scheme of mural painting at the Grand Lavra monastery on Athos in 1852.³⁹ A series of six copy-drawings of plates from the series preserved in the painters' archive attests to the role of the western plates as models, which were although acquired well after Hristo's death.⁴⁰

Hristo (c. 1750-1819), Vienna, and Athos

If Zahari's awareness of Eugenios Voulgaris was derivatively acquired through his engagement with western European painters and, consequently, not consciously acknowledged, it is likely that his father Hristo had direct experience of the Greek scholar's legacy during his repeated journeys to Mount Athos in his work as an icon-painter. Indeed, we can arguably attribute Zahari's exceptional training in Samokov to Hristo's awareness of the secular orientations in Greek education introduced on Athos by Eugenios. Instead of the elementary reading, writing and mathematics he would have learned by attending a monastery cell-school, Zahari's experience of a scholarly curriculum taught by Neofit reflected the effective impact of Eugenios' role directing the Academy School on Athos in the 1750s, which Hristo encountered on Athos during sojourns on the Holy Mountain during the succeeding decades.

With regard to Hristo's world view and contrary to his son's insular outlook, what is known about his life –which is less coherently known in comparison to his son's, Zahari's, documented biography– is most-

³⁹ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 354.

⁴⁰ Brisby, *Zahari Zograf*, 17-18; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 1191: selected Plates; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 684 *Expulsion from Eden* after Pl. 2, Genesis III 24, illustrated in Sokolova, *Закану Зограф*, 155; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 628 *Lot & daughters flee Sodom* after Pl. 11, Genesis XIX 25-6; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 853, *Joseph interpreting dreams* after Pl. 27, Genesis XL; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 603 *Moses slaying the Egyptian* after Pl. 34, Exodus II 12; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 602 *Samson & gates of Gaza* after Pl. 67, Judges XVI 3; Sofia, HXΓ, Samokov Archive II 854 *Ahijah's prophecy* after Pl. 101, I Kings XIV 4-5.

ly connected with him travelling: to Athos and, allegedly, to Vienna. The pervasive oral family tradition of artistic training abroad was chronicled in the early years of the 20th century by Daskalov from the painter's grandson, also named Hristo, and was repeated shortly after by Semerdjiev in his history of Samokov.⁴¹ The tale of the painter acquiring skills in Vienna led to scholarly notions of him training at the Academy and to the perception of the painter's knowledge as "true academic principles" and "academic draughtsmanship which makes no concession to Byzantine tradition" in his work.⁴²

The notion of Hristo's western training exists in parallel with the belief that most of his activity as a painter was on Athos, predating even his training in Vienna. Despite the lack of confirmed biographical data establishing a firm chronology of Hristo's artistic development, it is possible to map some moments of cultural significance in the geographical and conceptual fields of the painter's artistic formation.

At its longest estimation, Hristo's life covers the period from 1745 to 1819. It starts with his birth in the village of Dospei, close to Samokov, and continues with a period of apprenticeship as a painter on Mount Athos, followed by further training in Vienna. After this, he returned to Bulgaria and taught his sons before taking up commissions on Mount Athos, where he allegedly died. Although recent scholarly consensus dispels Hristo's training in Vienna attributed to the decade of the 1770s and the idea of his death on Athos, it is useful to investigate the factual realities of the legendary allegations. Much of this landscape has already been drawn by Elena Popova in her monograph on Hristo Dimitrov so that the following merely contributes some further relief to the existing picture.⁴³

The journey to Athos from a young man seeking apprenticeship in painting on the Holy Mountain is plausible, given the custom of the period for extended Bulgarian families to have a member take prestigious monastic orders at one of the monasteries favouring Serbian and

⁴¹ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 221-7; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 314 citing D. Daskalov, "Летописи" (Chronicles), *Изкуството в България* 3 (1901): 117.

⁴² Protic, *op.cit.*, 511-2, 519-20, 515, 517, fig. 157; illustrated: Sokolova, *Захари Зограф*, 44: Bachkovo Monastery, church of St. Nicholas, exonarthex.

⁴³ Popova, *Зографът Христо*, 248-70.

Bulgarian communities, namely the Hilandar and Zograf Monasteries. Semerdjiev's description of Hristo's patron as a relative-monk has led other scholars to identify the young painters' sponsors in the abbot of the Hilandar Monastery, Lavrenti, and the deputy-abbot Paisii Hilendarski (c. 1722-73), renowned as the author of the cataclysmic account of the Bulgarian nation *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya/History of the Slavo-Bulgarian People*, on the assumption of their acquaintance through shared birthplace in Dospei.⁴⁴ Whatever the merits of these hypotheses are, connections between Bulgarians in Bulgarian lands and on the Holy Mountain were sufficiently developed for us to accept that a promising adolescent from the region of Samokov may have been sponsored by his relatives to go to the Holy Mountain, where his aptitude for painting was developed even if he did not follow convention and take monastic orders.

The debated period of Hristo's youth occupies a time frame of twenty years, starting from the 1740s, which dovetails with Paisii's presence at the Hilandar Monastery from c. 1745-62. Indeed, the legendary attribution to Paisii Hilendarski a role in Hristo's formation on Athos may be factually explained by the impact of Paisii's pilgrimage through Bulgaria promoting his *Istoriya* in manuscript.⁴⁵ Popova's chronological outline situates Paisii in Samokov around 1771 and his presence in Hristo's domestic environment could be accepted as a catalyst for the young painters' orientation to Athos.

It is on Athos that Hristo encountered Eugenios' legacy on the Holy Mountain. The young Bulgarian's arrival there is placed in the two decades following the Greek scholar's directorship of the Academy School during its formative years from 1753 to 1759. It is therefore possible to explain Hristo's youthful journey to Athos with his awareness of the educational opportunities there, not only as traditionally known at the monasteries but also as offered at the academy on Athos since its establishment in 1749. As a new teaching institution based in the Vatopedi Monastery, the Athonias was established with Greek Or-

⁴⁴ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 222; Bogdan Filov, *Geschichte der bulgarischen Kunst unter der türkischen Herrschaft und in der neueren Zeit* (Berlin, 1933), 31-6; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 314; Popova, "Реинтерпретации," 260 refers to Lavrenti as Paisii's elder brother.

⁴⁵ Popova, "Реинтерпретации," 263.

thodox Patriarchal endorsement to renew ecclesiastical education through the integration of ancient philosophy and modern physical sciences with classical theology. Significantly for us, its charter reflected unprecedented outreach, welcoming both clerical and lay candidates from abroad as well as from Athos, and the extent of its appeal is attested by the attendance numbers that increased from twenty to several hundreds during Voulgaris' tenure.⁴⁶

This opens a perspective in which to assess Hristo's cultural experience on Athos. Popova dates his work on the Holy Mountain to successive spells (1779-87, 1787-93, and again from 1797).⁴⁷ These were critical times for the monastic community; it negotiated the divergencies between the impact of Humanist thought of the Enlightenment manifest in teaching at the Academy School and the traditionalist theologies related with hesychast prayer and ritual practices epitomised by the correct preparation and consumption of "kollyvades" –boiled wheat in commemoration of the dead. This reactionary response to the secular pressures of the European Enlightenment culminated in the *Philokalia*, a compilation of ancient theological texts by Nikodimos of Athos (1749-1809) and Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805) published in Greek in Venice in 1782, when Hristo was located working on Athos.⁴⁸ This reactionary Orthodoxy had its greatest impact on the Slavonic sphere. Paisii Velichkovskii (1722-94) translated many of these texts into Church Slavonic, which were published in Moscow during Hristo's lifetime, in 1793, entitled *Dobrotolublye*.⁴⁹

The effect of these intellectual debates on Hristo's role as an icon-painter calls for applied study and critical evaluation of every aspect,

⁴⁶ Graham Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (London, 2002), 136-7.

⁴⁷ Popova, "Реинтерпретации," 309.

⁴⁸ Speake, *op.cit.*, 139-43.

⁴⁹ Kallistos Ware, "St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman–Bradley Nassif (Oxford: 2012) DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390261.003.0001; John McGuckin, "The Making of the *Philokalia*: A Tale of Monks and Manuscripts," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman–Bradley Nassif (Oxford: 2012), 40-1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390261.003.0002>; Andrew Louth, "The Influence of the *Philokalia* in the Orthodox World," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman–Bradley Nassif (Oxford: 2012) DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390261.003.0003.

in order to explain how the painter's consciousness of debate may explain the hybrid elements characterising his questioning treatment of inherited iconographies. Hristo's religious painted imagery was instrumental in expressing the nationalist agenda of the local Orthodox Church and realised in programmes of church building and decoration in Bulgarian lands, which were sanctioned by the close relations between the Samokov Diocese and the monastic community on Mount Athos.⁵⁰ Born near Samokov, Hristo was at the centre of Bulgarians' reception of Athonite culture, as epitomised in the iconostasis ordered from Athos to be carved by Antonii the Monk and to be erected in the metropolitan church of the Virgin in Samokov in 1793.⁵¹ On the other side, by fulfilling his commissions on Athos, Hristo also contributed to the cultural developments of the Holy Mountain.

Reflecting on the influence of the "kollyvades" thought on developments in religious imagery not only were the first Greek and Slavonic editions of Nikodim's *Philokalia* published in Hristo's lifetime but also Nikodim's account of Christian martyrs of Turkish oppression, *New Martyrologion*, which was published in 1799 in Venice. The subject chimed with the prevailing Bulgarian cult of Ivan Rilski, which Hristo promoted in innovative imagery, his representations of the newly acclaimed national saint in mural painting in the chapel of St. Luke at the Hermitage of the Rila Monastery being of pioneering iconographical significance (Fig. 4).⁵²

Attributed to 1798-99, at the time of the *New Martyrologion's* publication in Venice, Hristo's mural composition of the Bulgarian monastery's patron saint Ivan significantly is reminiscent of a previous one on Athos. The earliest narrative cycle of the saintly figure in painting is in a chapel dedicated to the saint at the Hilandar Monastery dated 1757.⁵³ Hristo's representation of the Bulgarian national patron saint in the mural scheme in the chapel of St. Luke, as well as the earlier image at the ossuary chapel of the Bogoroditsa *Pokrov* (c. 1795), also

⁵⁰ Popova, "Реинтерпретации," 255-65.

⁵¹ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 477.

⁵² Speake, *op.cit.*, 139-43.

⁵³ Popova, "Реинтерпретации," 184-5.

at Rila, which features the earliest depiction of the saint in full-length, collectively imply that he was aware of its precedent on Athos.⁵⁴

It is appropriate to comment here on the intervention of figures associating with *kollyvades* in the iconographical developments of the next generation. Hristo's son Zahari was to copy images from a graphic print, being sponsored by Stephanos and Neophytos Skourtaios, monks on Athos and friends of Nikodimos, the author of the *Philokalia*, who died in his "kellion" (cell community of monks) above Karyes on Mount Athos in 1809.⁵⁵ Zahari's treatment of the Akathist imagery honouring the Mother of God in the Incarnation of Christ at the Troyan Monastery is derived from the preceding set by the composite engraving of the Theotokos Akathist published in Venice in 1819. Regrettably neglected in scholarship on Zahari, his mural representation of the Akathist canticle in the vaults and upper wall registers of the *katholikon* narthex, inscribed with the date 1848, demonstrates the painter's debt to the Skourtaios brothers' engraving, published at the Giannantonio Zuliani's printing house as one of the five engravings the Skourtaios brothers commissioned when they were in Venice between 1818 and 1820 supervising the publication of further texts by Nikodimos the Athonite.⁵⁶ The debt is evident in Zahari's replication in his mural scene of the distinctive centralised composition distinguishing the printed image of the *Journey of the Three Magi*, in which the figures gaze collectively up at the star. A print of the Skourtaios' engraving survives in the Samokov painters' archive, albeit in fragments which, nonetheless, include the centralised composition of the *Journey of the Three Magi*, to evidence the painter's practical model (Fig. 5).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Попова, "Рейнтерпретации," 48, narthex, east wall, second register.

⁵⁵ Brisby, *The Role*, 87-102; Ware, op.cit.

⁵⁶ Dori Papastratos, *Χάρτινες Εικόνες: Ορθόδοξα Θρησκευτικά Χαρακτικά 1660-1899* (Paper Icons: Orthodox Religious Engravings) (Athens: 1986) cat. no. 122 (73 x 50 cms).

⁵⁷ Sofia, НХГ, Samokov Archive inv. nos. II 880 *Journey of the Magi*, II 930-42, II 944-45; II 1190/59-62.

Another print survives intact at the Troyan Monastery itself, offering a second source known to Zahari.⁵⁸

Zahari's use of imagery established by the Skourtaios brothers in a strategically conceived engraving raises the question of the Bulgarian painter's awareness of the Skourtaios' brothers connection with Nikodim the Athonite, a connection which may have been diffused by their evidently executive role in Venice supervising the repeated manufacture of prints of their composite "Akathist" engraving and wide distribution to Greek communities in the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor, including school teachers in Kydonia.⁵⁹ How much Zahari was conscious of the Skourtaios brothers' endorsement of innovative imagery for the purpose of promoting traditional liturgical piety is a deserving topic of interdisciplinary attention elsewhere.

Returning to Hristo's experience from cultural environment on Athos, it would also have been shaped by Eugenios' legacy as it was reflected in Paisii Hilandarski's *Istoriya*. The unprecedented treatise-format text compiled on Athos by the Bulgarian monk at the Serbian monastery from 1745 to 1762 acknowledges Eugenios' introduction of academic scholarship on Athos, arguably incentivising Paisii's study of classical sources when he was an envoy from Athos to the Orthodox Bishopric in Sremski Karlovci between May and July 1761.⁶⁰ Paisii's treatise acknowledges his debt to European sources and his text cites Mavro Orbini's *The Realm of the Slavs* (1601) repeatedly, but disparagingly.⁶¹ Paisii's journey to Sremski Karlovci and the intellectual exploration of European historical texts identified as sources for *Istoriya* describe a vibrant route of cultural dissemination and ex-

⁵⁸ Troyan Monastery Museum, inv. no. 139, n. 5; For the Skourtaios' brothers' print production see *Zahari Zograf*, 17.

⁵⁹ Papastratos, *op.cit.*, cat. no. 122; George Golobias–Justino Simonopetritis, "Paper Icons: From Venice to Mount Athos," in *La Stampa e l'illustrazione del libro greco a Venezia tra il Settecento e l'Ottocento*, ed. Chryssa Maltezou, *Atti della Giornata di Studio Convegno* 3 (Proceedings of the Conference Study Day 3) (Venice: 2001), 61.

⁶⁰ Попова, "Реинтерпретации," 263, fn. 34; Dejan Medakovic, *Monastir Chilendar XVIII vek* (Novi Sad: 1976) 86-7; I. Ruvarac, "Ein document zur Biographie des bulgarischen Historikus Paisii aus dem Jahre 1761," *Archive fur slawische Philologie* XXII (Berlin: 1900) 620-1.

⁶¹ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 314.

change, relevant for explaining the Bulgarian painters' alleged foreign training.

Cultural Capitals – European Orientation

Indeed, notions of Bulgarian painters training abroad have some factual basis. A painter –confusingly also named Hristo with the patronymics Dimitur Petrovich– travelled in 1725 from Kalofer to Russia and returned to Bulgaria settling in Samokov to be continued nationally as well as on Athos.⁶² A century later, a Georgi Hadji Mitov from Samokov is known to have graduated from the academy in Florence in 1835.⁶³ A common factor in these isolated cases of Bulgarian painters' travelling abroad is the role of Samokov as their destination on their return to Bulgaria and a centre of their career thereafter. This attests to the status of Samokov in the Ottoman empire as a destination centre and, to the extent of its cultural renown, a description of our painters' cultural outlook.

Hristo and Zahari lived at a time of transformation in Samokov, which was sustained by the financial independence deriving from an iron-ore industry of medieval origin indebted to local mineral resources and agricultural cultivation of cereal crops as well as cotton, leather, and textile production.⁶⁴ Consequently, Samokov's importance as a commercial centre in trade routes linked to new markets in the Austro-Hungarian Empire caters for cultural transmission as a commodity in merchants' caravans.

More specifically, relevant to the question of Samokov's links with centres in Hapsburg lands is the re-location of the Arie family from Vienna to Samokov in 1793.⁶⁵ Coming first to Vidin, the family of the

⁶² Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 315, fn. 6 citing article by D. Katsev-Burski in 1939.

⁶³ Filov, *Geschichte*, 57-61.

⁶⁴ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 195 ff.; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 485, note 1, 487-9.

⁶⁵ Anna Roshkovska, "Българската възрожденска художествена култура и еврейското население" (Bulgarian Revival Artistic Culture and the Jewish Community), in *Проучвания за историята на еврейското население в българските земи XV-XX век* (Studies on the History of the Jewish Population in the Bulgarian Lands XV-XX Centuries) (Sofia: 1980), 35-52; the Arie Chronicle: Sofia, Bulgarian National Archive, Institute of Balkan Studies, T.1.

Jewish money-lenders chose to settle in Samokov in 1793 to advance the business connections with the Ottoman capital.⁶⁶ Their entrepreneurial skills led them to the role of the controller of the salt and mineral mines around Samokov and the associated tax-collecting, generating a wealth and social prominence, which they marked in material terms by building town houses in Samokov and then Plovdiv, displaying the latest stylistic assimilations from the central European capital.⁶⁷ Whilst the Arie's Sarafska House in Samokov introduced symmetry in plan and proportions, which derived from western examples, the house of the succeeding generation, in Plovdiv and now lost, was renowned for its ostentatious scale and opulent furnishings imported from central Europe, exemplifying the vogue for hybrid *alafraŋga* fashions in Bulgaria.

Although the presence of Bulgarian painters at the Academy in Vienna has not been traced, opportunities for Orthodox painters in the European capital were available in the last decades of the 18th century at Jakob Schmutzer's school of engraving. Hristo's alleged sojourn in Vienna in the early 1770s falls in the decade after Schmutzer had established a school admitting that non-German speaking students were formally barred from the royal painting academy in 1766.⁶⁸ Ultimately preparing students for work as engravers, Schmutzer's curriculum emphasised the importance of drawing skills just like in European academy schools as well as other aspects of the training Schmutzer himself had in Paris. Schmutzer's school attracted candidates from the newly acquired eastern regions of the Hapsburg Empire, famously including the Serbian Orthodox engraver Zaharija Orfelin. With a curriculum modelled on that of the Viennese Academy and receiving imperial funding, Schmutzer's school eventually amalgamated with the Academy itself as part of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste estab-

⁶⁶ Semerdjiev, *op.cit.*, 114-34; Roshkovska, *op.cit.*, 35-52.

⁶⁷ Milko Bichev, *Български барок* (Bulgarian Baroque) (Sofia: 1955) 77-8, ills. nos. 26-33; Roshkovska, *op.cit.*, 84, figs. 68-71; Roshkovska, *op.cit.*, 94-6, figs. 81-3; Sarafska House (of the elder Abraham Arie), Samokov; Roshkovska-Mavrodinova, *op.cit.*, plates 268-9, 377-81; Nina Hristovska-Nevena Mitreva-Desislava Kanasirova-Liubomir Nikolov, *Samokov* (Samokov: 2010), 4-5.

⁶⁸ Angelika Plank, *Akademischer und schulischer Elementarzeichnenunterricht im 18 Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: 1999), 84.

lished in 1772.⁶⁹ Even if Hristo's alleged sojourn in Vienna post-dated the merging of Schmutzer's school with the Imperial Academy, the opportunities for apprenticeships for students coming from the eastern territories of the empire in other artists' workshops in the imperial capital, such as the one offered to Hristofor Žefarović at the engraving studio of Thomas Messmer (1717-77), should be further explored.⁷⁰

Sremski Karlovci

In addition to the Hapsburgs' imperial capital in Vienna, the Danubian seat of the Serbian Orthodox bishopric at Sremski Karlovci, 545 kilometres to the north-west, should be recognised as a primary cultural capital in eastern perspectives, in which the two cities are often conflated. Academic scholarship also confuses Sremski Karlovci with Vienna, known to Bulgarians by the Turkish form Беч, as is the case with the illustrated Slavic heraldry *Stemmatographia* inspired by Mavro Orbini's work on Slavic heraldry, published by Thomas Messmer in Vienna in 1741, which is famously attributed to the Slav Hristofor Žefarović. This is to the serious detriment of the patron in Sremski Karlovci, Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta in collaboration with the local theologian and poet Pavle Nenadović.⁷¹ The importance of this publication for the development of Balkan national self-awareness, nonetheless, oriented an outlook in Bulgaria to the collective cultural hub of these two central European cities.⁷² With regard to the impact of Žefarović's engravings of religious imagery in the Balkans, it is well discussed by Elka Bakalova in reference to a

⁶⁹ Plank, *op.cit.*, 190.

⁷⁰ Plank, *op.cit.*, 199, fn. 515: citing J. Roca, "Dva stoljeca nastave crtanja u Hrvatskoj" (Two Centuries of Drawing Instruction in Croatia), *Vjesnik* 1-2, 1311-2 (Zagreb: 1986).

⁷¹ [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Arsenius_IV_\(Jovanovic-Sakabenta\)_of_Pec](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Arsenius_IV_(Jovanovic-Sakabenta)_of_Pec) (accessed 23-7-2018).

⁷² Atanas Bozhkov, *La Peinture Bulgare* (Sofia: 1974), 292; Atanas Bozhkov, *Българската икона* (Bulgarian Icons) (Sofia: 1984), 463; Nikola Mavrodinov, *Изкуството на българското възраждане* (Art of the Bulgarian Revival) (Sofia: 1957), 232, use of the portraits of the medieval Tsars Boris, Ivan Asen, Ivan Shishman, Ivan Vladimir and the national emblem of the lion as standard models; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 447, debt of a Samokov painter, Nicola Obrazopisov, to the emblematic motifs.

composite engraving of 1743 and the development of the saint from Ohrid acclaimed as Bulgarian, St. Naum.⁷³

The case of identifying Sremski Karlovci as the actual destination for aspiring Bulgarian painters has already been convincingly argued in regard to Toma Vishanov's achievements.⁷⁴ The city's renown in the Orthodox domain rests on the innovative academic institutions developed by successive patriarchs, building on the city's strategic political importance, having hosted pioneering negotiations between the European Holy League and the Ottoman Empire. These negotiations culminated in the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 resolving the Ottoman territorial claims and temporal security for Serbs and the Orthodox Church in the region. An academic school after the Jesuit model adopted in Kiev was established during the tenure of Metropolitan Mojsije Petrovic from 1726 to 1730.⁷⁵ Then, in 1743, Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta inaugurated a school of painting, formalised as an academy and intended to standardise the religious artistic practice of the Serbian Orthodox Church by mandating professional icon-painters' training at the Academy.⁷⁶ A direction for the Academy's curriculum was brought from Kiev by the first instructors, the painters Jov Vasiljevič and Vasilije Romanovič, whose students inaugurated a national current of Orthodox religious painting.

The role of Sremski Karlovci as a centre of learning for Bulgarians is evidenced by the aspirations of Partenii Pavlovich (1695-1760) leaving his natal Silistra for education in Serbia, which culminated in

⁷³ Elka Bakalova, "Една неизвестна житийна икона на св. Наум от софийския археологически музей" (An Unknown Historiated Icon of St Naum in the Sofia Archaeological Museum), *Проблеми на Изкуството* 4 (1993): 12-20.

⁷⁴ Elena Popova, "Барокът в иконописа на Тома Вишанов Молер" (The Baroque in Painting by Toma Vishanov Moler), *Изкуство* 9-10 (1990): 34-41 (34, fn. 2 Vishanov's icon published in Bansko Artistic Centre Symposium, Sofia, 1985, cat. no.17).

⁷⁵ Jelena Todorović, "Investiture into history: the ideals of the Orthodox Church as represented in the ephemeral spectacle for Bishop Moisei Putnik," *Object-Graduate research and reviews in the History of Art and Visual Culture*, no. 4 (2001/2002), 93-116, fn 12: for *Diploma Leopoldinum* 1691, ref. Sremski Karlovci, Archbishopric Library [P.-19-1691].

⁷⁶ Jelena Todorović, *An Orthodox Festival Book in the Habsburg Empire: Zaharija Orfelin's Festive Greeting to Mojsej Putnik 1757* (Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 22.

his appointment to the patriarch Pavel Nenadović in Sremski Karlovci shortly before the latter's death in 1768 cut short his tenure from 1749.⁷⁷ The case for Vishanov's experience of Sremski Karlovci rests on the formal and stylistic assimilations from Serbian painters of the 1780s-90s, freshly indebted to training at the Karlovci Academy and in Vasiljevič's workshop. Vishanov's foremost models are identified in works by Teodor Kračun (1730-81), whose further training in Vienna in 1769 led to a practicum as a religious painter working for both Orthodox and Catholic patrons equally willing to sponsor his competent assimilation of western Baroque art. Kračun's hybrid art met the demand for extensive decorative schemes of religious painting in new churches and monasteries in Serbia, as represented variously in the central iconostasis of the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Sremski Karlovci in the 1780s and in individual icons in the Serbian Art Gallery, Novi Sad.

Vishanov's regard for Kračun's professional hybrid style defines a critical perspective in which to re-appraise the western consciousness in Hristo's work. Hristo's handling of hybrid western appropriations of imagery is less formally and stylistically overt than his Bulgarian counterpart from Bansko, as assessed in the latter's treatment of new subjects pertaining to the narratives of Christ and the Virgin and emphasising the Passion and adoption of anatomical composition and expressive rhetorical gesture delineated with notional tonality and decorative ornament.⁷⁸

Hristo's regard for such appropriations is less persuasive of direct experience of central Europe but attests, nonetheless, to awareness of western prints. More particularly, the Samokov painters' archive originating from the time of the elder Hristo attests to the icon-painters' new task of forming print collections –of both eastern Orthodox and western production– for using them as models, outshining comparables in quantity and variety.⁷⁹ In parallel with Kračun, Hristo's

⁷⁷ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 314.

⁷⁸ Elena Genova, "Непознатият Тома Вишанов Молер и модернизацията на православната живопис" (The Unknown Toma Vishanov Moler and the Modernisation of Orthodox Painting), *Проблеми на изкуството* 2 (1995): 6.

⁷⁹ Lascarina Bouras, "Working Drawings of Painters in Greece after the Fall of Constantinople" in *From Byzantium to el Greco*, ed. Myrtali Acheimastou-Potami-

achievement exemplifies the development of the religious painter's role executing both panel and mural painting to meet similar demands for schemes of religious imagery in restored monasteries and new churches in Bulgaria and also on Mount Athos, even if the Bulgarian's approach is comparatively conservative and respectful of the doctrinal principles of the Orthodox iconography and his use of model prints is, as has been found, restricted to Orthodox prints only. Hristo's three images showing St. Luke painting icons of the Mother of God in a mural series of four, attributed to 1799 in the eponymous chapel of St. Luke attached to the Hermitage dependency of the Rila Monastery (Fig. 6a), are modelled on the three narrative compositions of the border cycle of a composite engraving of the Theotokos Eleousa tou Kykko which was published in Venice in 1778 (Fig. 6b).⁸⁰

Two of these printed border scenes exist in fragments in the painters' archive, identifying Hristo's model images.⁸¹ Hristo's respect for the doctrinal prescriptions of icon-painting explains his systematic rejection of the fixed-point perspective scheme for illusory spatial recession created by the converging lines of floor tiling distinctive in the printed model compositions and his substitution of a two-dimensional lozenge shaped pattern (Figs. 7i-iii).⁸²

anou (London: 1987), 54-6, figs. 198-9; Thessaloniki Museum of Byzantine Culture and Holy Community of Mount Athos, *The Treasures of Mount Athos* (1997), 202-5, nos. 3.1-3.5; Andromachi Katselaki–Maria Nanou, *Ανθίβολα από τους Χιονιάδες, Συλλογή Μακρή Μαργαρίτη* (Antivola from Chioniades, Makris Margaritis Collection) (Athens, 2009).

⁸⁰ Popova, "Рейнтерпретации," 36, ills 10, 11, 12-5; Popova, *Зографът Христо*, 182-5 and note 20, ills. 54-5; Ivanka Gergova–Elena Popova–Elena Genova–Nikolai Klissarov, *Корпус на стенописите в България от XVIII век* (Corpus of Frescoes in Bulgaria of the 18th Century) (Sofia: 2006), 237 scenes 1-2, 242 and ill. 245 for inscriptions, 243 scene 4 and ill. 248 for inscription; engraving, Papastratos, *op.cit.*, cat. no. 539.

⁸¹ Print fragments, Sofia, НХГ, Samokov Archive inv. nos. II 906, II 911; these are two fragments from a group surviving from a dismembered print II 905-11, II 913-7, II 949, II 954.

⁸² Brisby, *Zahari Zograf*, 16 discusses Hristo's rejection of fixed-point perspective scheme governing compositions of the printed border images and the conversion of the converging lines of tiled flooring of the printed scenes into a two-dimensional lozenge pattern.

Hristo's treatment of the Theotokos "Zoodochos Pigi" imagery in an icon surviving in the Metropolitan Collection in Plovdiv chimes with the prevailing promotion of this cult in Orthodox imagery but in comparison with Kračun's version shows that Hristo's negotiation of hybrid assimilation drew on earlier central European Orthodox models, as established a generation earlier by Hristophor Žefarović in an engraving attributed to Vienna dated 1744 (Figs. 7a, 7b, 7c).

If Hristo's alleged world view is only diffusely apparent in his achievement, Zahari's is on the other hand visually asserted –most explicitly in the prominence accorded to the globe in Neofit's portrait. Zahari's open outlook is also apparent in the global contextualisation of his own critical self-appraisal, comparing himself with painters across the Christian world mapped through reference to Jerusalem, Turkey, Istanbul, and Mount Athos, as well as Roumelia, even if it does not venture westwards where "I cannot draw comparison with someone who has studied in Europe."⁸³

In relation to Zahari's expansive horizons, the rate at which Zahari and Neofit exchanged letters attests to the speed of communication intensifying cultural transmission between Samokov, Rila, Plovdiv, Melnik, Gabrovo, and Sofia as well as some destinations abroad in Brasov, Bucharest, Odessa, and Istanbul. The letters also illustrate mechanisms of international travel in the third and fourth decade of the 19th century, such as Zahari's report to Neofit in 1839 that one of his students in Koprivshitsa, the sixteen year-old Naiden Gerov, had "taken out a passport for Bucharest" and "could take another [...] for Kraguevats," as well as the young travellers' reliance on "promisory notes," i.e., travellers' cheques, from Neofit to cover his costs together with a supply of rice to sell for petty cash.⁸⁴ Given the increasing mobility of people in the course of two generations, Zahari's aspiration for artistic training becomes a realistic objective and his appeals to Neofit to intercede on his behalf in Odessa to Aprilov and Palauzov for sponsorship to attend the Academy in St. Petersburg manifest the painter's concern about practical aspects of admission, attendance and

⁸³ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 389; Ogoiska, *op.cit.*, 141.

⁸⁴ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 385: letter dated 2 February 1839, "Naiden has been," letter dated September 1839.

financial budgeting.⁸⁵ Although Zahari's project at St. Petersburg was not realised yet, his professional activity in Bulgaria suggests that this aborted ambition was not of great consequence to the painter who compensated for the lack of attendance at a formal Academy with tuition from western –presumably academically trained – painters in Bulgaria.

Conclusion

The foregoing investigation of the Samokov painters Hristo and Zahari's European consciousness explored the scope for assessing their experience of European cultural centres geographically through travel and for defining it derivatively through identified agencies of transmission active through mapped routes of commercial and educational exchange.

It reveals the pathways connecting the painters to the greater European landscape of their time, identifying the focus of their orientation in the central European capitals of Vienna and Sremski Karlovci and also on Mount Athos. It situates Hristo's achievement more closely in the context of his peers in central Europe and estimates Zahari's debt to western prints, with specific reference to his enterprising portraiture. Moreover, the investigation of these painters' assimilation of European values concerning scholarly excellence and academic methods in education as well as in artistic practice broadens the perception of their intellectual capacities through an estimation of their awareness of the Greek and Bulgarian scholars, Eugenios Voulgaris and Paisii Hilendarski.

This focussed discussion of the cultural experiences of two painters from Samokov offers a critical perspective receptive to application to other pioneering painters of the Bulgarian National Revival, thereby enhancing the understanding of the role of art in the formation of Bulgarian national consciousness in Europe.

⁸⁵ Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 376: letter dated 24 June 1838; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, 389: letter dated 30 June 1838.



Fig. 1: Print, Eugenios Voulgaris, *Logic*, Leipzig, 1766
Sofia, HXГ, Samokov Archive II
903 (18 x 12 cms)



Fig. 2a: Zahari, Self-Portrait
c. 1838, (76 x 50 cms) Sofia,
HXГ, inv. No. 2



Fig. 2b: Holbein -Younger,
Erasmus c. 1523, London,
National Gallery, L658



Fig. 3: Zahari, Neofit Rilski,
1838, (84 x 64 cms), Sofia,
HXГ, Inv. no. 3



Fig. 4: Christo, mural painting, St. Luke Chapel, Hermitage, Rila Monastery 1799, scene 4 St John of Rila with Boy bitten by Snake



Fig. 5: Print fragment *Journey of the Magi*, from engraving *Theotokos Akathist*, Venice 1819, border panel, Akathist Stanza 8; Sofia, HXF, Samokov Archive Inv. II 880



Fig. 6a: Christo, mural painting, St Luke Chapel, Hermitage, Rila Monastery 1799, scenes 1-3: St Luke painting icons of the Theotokos



Fig. 6b: Print, border series *St. Luke painting icons of the Theotokos* from engraving *Theotokos Eleousa tou Kykkou*, Venice 1778; Thessalonika, Museum of Byzantine Culture, BXE177XIX43_2



Fig. 7a: Theodor Kračun,
panel icon, Zoodochos Pigi,
before 1781



Fig. 7b: Christo, panel icon, Bogoroditsa
Живоносен Източник; Plovdiv, Orthodox
Metropolitanate Collection (64 x 44 cms)

Fig. 7c: Engraving, inscr. above:
Zoodochos Pigi;
below printed frame: *Hristophor
Zefar a national painter 1744*;
attrib. Vienna (30 x 292 cms)

