
Reviewing the sacred object. Vassiliy Barskiy as the first Russian researcher of the Christian East

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The article deals with the origins of the Russian Christian Archaeology namely with pilgrim notes of Vassiliy Barskiy. The author is reviewing Barskiy's text as one of the first scientific descriptions of the sacred places, wonder-working icons and holy places. His descriptions of sacred objects are structured, they include illustrations, information from written and verbal sources as well as critics of these sources. He makes conclusions about relevance of information and relics themselves. Based on this, the author believes Vassiliy Barskiy should be recognized not only one of the sources of Russian scientific tradition, but the first Christian archaeologist.

Key words: Grigorovich-Barskiy, Christian archaeology, Orthodox churches history, relics, icons, Cyprus, Middle East, pilgrim notes.

Relationships and Activities: not.

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A native of Kyiv, Vasily Grigorovich-Barsky (1701-1747) lived a short and bright life, having managed to be a student, a pilgrim, a monk and a consultant of the Russian resident in Constantinople. He spent a half of his life on a journey which, started as a small adventure, later turned into a life journey, gradually enriching itself with new meanings. He kept travel notes, studied Greek in order to organize teaching this language at homeland and applied his knowledge by copying and translating inscriptions on the ruins of ancient buildings, as well as documents from the mount Athos monastic archives. In the words of V.A. Turilov, for the first Russian scientists-travelers (V.I. Grigorovich, Bishop Porfiry (Uspensky), Archimandrite Leonid (Kavelin), Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) Barsky's notes were the same as the Homeric Iliad was for Heinrich Schliemann during excavations on the Hissarlyk hill [Turilov 2013:13]. We should add that Barsky's notes have a transitional status not only as a source similar to medieval travelogs and ancient epics, but also as a fundamental work in Russian language from the point of view of the methodology of the Humanities, which in the 19th century were called Christian archaeology. Later, they were divided into Archaeology, Ethnography, History, Art History and Source studies, tied to certain regions and time periods, many of them lost their essentially field status.

In this article, we will focus on some critical descriptions of miraculous icons and relics. There is very little literature about Barsky in Russian [Chesnokova 2006:104-106; Askochensky 1854; Gilyarevsky 1889; Grekov 1892; Danzig 1965; Belous 1985]. There is one popular book in Ukrainian [Rodachenko 1967]) and a number of reprints of his notes, in full and in part, including in Greek (journey to Athos) [Ταχιάος 1998; Γρηγόριοββιτς Μπάρσκι 2009] and Ukrainian (full text) [Grigorovich-Barsky 2000]. Greek and Cypriot scholars used his notes actively to study the churches and monasteries he described [Stylianou 1997:75, 98, 179, 236, 305, 306, 368, 456, 497], see the Greek publications above.

The basis of the Barsky method was simple. He wrote travel notes and made sketches. Then he copied the text, adding and clarifying it, providing drawings, and sent the final versions to the city of Kyiv. In 1723 in the city of Vienna at the beginning of the journey the traveler mentioned that he kept a diary for the first time: "We went to spend the night in a hotel where pilgrims are provided with three days' lodging and food... on Wednesday Morning, we sat at home making notes" [Wanderings 1885: 34]. Later, Vasily also began to draw, first from engravings, then from nature [Buzykina (in print)].

Gradually, Barsky developed a scheme for describing a monastery or a city, which he most likely borrowed from the travel literature he knew. The diagram included a description of its location, the presence or absence of water sources and their nature, the architecture of the monastery, the composition of its buildings, the architecture

of its cathedral, the internal structure, including the iconostasis, paintings (if any), lamps, books, relics and miraculous icons, the description and analysis of which we are interested in. In this regard descriptions of Cypriot antiquities, made in 1734-1735, when he went around the monasteries of the island, waiting out the epidemic, and made something like a report on their condition are especially complete.

Vasily did not just provide information about relics and icons — legends, historical information, and eyewitness accounts — he subjects them to analysis. Those were more characteristic of the scientific thought of his era elements of critical analysis. The description of miraculous icons and relics was accurate and supplemented with information Barsky knew or heard them about.

Here is a description of the famous in the East and unknown to Barsky icon of Our Lady of Kykkos: “In the temple there is an icon of the Virgin, called Hodegethria. She holds Our Lord Jesus on her right hand, in the form of a tender baby, like this. The painting is not visible — it is all covered, except for the face, with forged silver. It is famous for miracles from the ancient times to the present days; the monks sing the kanon in front of it every day. Not only the people of Cyprus, but also in distant countries that are around, they venerate this icon” [*Wanderings* 1885:401].

The sarcophagus of Saint Mamant [*Buzykina, Loseva* 2016] with the anointing oil flowing from it, Vasily described with the caveat that the relics most likely did not survive. It is noteworthy that he gave two opinions about the relics of the martyr, and only after it he wrote that he leant to the second point of view: the relics were unlikely to have survived since on the territory of the Ottoman Empire at that time untouched relics had been very rare. He did not comment on the news of anointing oil flowing from the tomb, which was used by believers for healing. “The Church is really beautiful in every sense; to the right of the wall there is an icon of the holy martyr Mamant and a marble sarcophagus, in which, as some say, are his relics, others say that they have not been preserved, which is more likely, since in the Turkish land there are few places that could remain intact in our days. Let it be known that from the sarcophagus comes myrrh, they are smeared with believers, and receive healing from diseases” [*Wanderings* 1885:404-405].

Even from this brief remark about the preservation of relics, it is clear that Barsky did not just describe relics and did not just retell pious legends about miracles. He always expressed his attitude to this information, supporting it with arguments and references to what he had known before.

In some cases, new information obtained on the spot, happily complements the knowledge that Barsky had before. This is the legend of Our Lady of Kykkos (see about her: [*Loseva, Makhanko* 2013:428-439]). The traveler knew about three icons of the Virgin,

painted by the St. Apostle Luke. The first two ones were known by their names and place of residence, the third one information was not available about. “Here it is appropriate to cite the traditions about this icon of the Evangelist Apostle Luke, since some claim that this icon is not his, but another’s. Greek historians tell¹, that during his lifetime he painted three icons of the Most Holy Theotokos. The first is located in Malorossia, in the city of Vilno (sic! — Yu. B.). It is called Eleousa². She is holding Our Lord Jesus Christ on her left hand³. The second icon is located in the Morea, in a huge cave, it is depicted standing, praying with Her hands extended⁴. About the third one they write that its location is unknown”.

After that, Barsky gave information about the icon of the Mother of God of Kykkos from two sources — the monastic chronicler and the local legend of the Lady of Kykkos — and it was associated with the St. Evangelist Luke in both cases.

“In this Cypriot monastery the monks have a chronicle where it is stated that this icon is one of the ones painted by Luke and that it is called Hodegethria” [*Wanderings* 1885:403]. The chronicler from whom Vasily spoke probably had included the text of “The Legend of the three icons painted by the Apostle Luke, where each of them is located, and the icon of the Virgin called Kykkos, which is located in Cyprus”. It is based on the year 1422 story of hieromonk Gregory. “The Legend...” is known in five copies of the 17th–18th centuries. In addition to this source, the history of this icon is also summarized in the Chronicle of Leontius Maheras (the first half of the 15th cent.) [*Bliznyuk* 2018:66–67]. As for post-Byzantine sources, the most valuable information about the Kykkos icon is contained in the “Description of the honored and Royal Kykkos monastery” (Venice, 1751) by Ephraim the Athenian and actually in the “Travels to the Holy places of the East” by Grigorovich-Barsky himself, who visited the Kykkos monastery in 1727 and 1735 [*Loseva, Makhanko* 2013:429].

Then Barsky retold the legend of Our Lady of Kykkos, in which he also mentioned that the icon was painted by Luke the Evangelist

¹ Barsky does not say what they are and does not refer to anything. Though with a high degree of probability, the source is books of Cyrillic printing published in Kyiv, Mogilev, Lviv, for example, collections of the type “Nebo Novoye (New Sky)” [*Goliatovskii* 1699:117, 123, 129]. This refers to the three icons painted by Luke, namely, Czestochowa, Roman and Constantinople of the Hodegetria. Thanks for the consultation to N. I. Komashko.

² Most likely, we are referring to Our Lady of Vilna. Maybe Barsky knew the composition of the Polish Jesuit Wojciech of Koyalowicz [*Koialowicz* 1650]. However, Our Lady of Vilna belongs to the Hodegetria typ, and Vilna is not located in Malorossia.— Yu. B. About the icon, see: [*Piskun* 2004:475–476].

³ Our Lady of Vilna actually holds the Baby on her left hand.

⁴ Perhaps we are talking about Andronikovskaya icon of the Mother of God, also called Monemvasian. The preserved image is a chest-high image and does not match the description given. About this icon there is a legend about the authorship of the Evangelist Luke. According to sources, in 1347 it was given by the Emperor Andronikos to The Monemvasian monastery in the Morea, where it was located before the Greek war of independence [*Khristianovskii* 1999].

[*Wanderings* 1885:401-404] (1727, June. The first description of The Kykkos monastery, then he will return to it in 1734). Thus, Barsky, combining the two sources, closed the gap by finding the third icon of the hand of Luke the Evangelist, which he previously had only known that it existed, but it was unknown where it was and what its name was.

Not all pious traditions were retold by him without criticism. In some cases, he mercilessly criticized his sources trying to give the information contained in them a rational justification and separate facts from fiction.

The veneration of the icon of the Mother of God with a heavy stone attached to its back in the Trooditissa monastery caused Barsky the sceptical attitude. "On the back of the icon there is a stone, a fragment of rock, artificially attached to it, about which I have heard many contradictory information from locals. Most of it is not worth bringing and unlikely, because the common people, without an official version, compose tall tales, the most likely versions I will present here, so that the reader himself will appreciate them" [*Wanderings* 1886:291].

The first "decent-to-read" version tells us about a boy who was miraculously healed according to a his parent's vow to be sent to a monastery. After recovery they decided to replace him with a rich contribution. At that moment a heavy stone fell from the wooden roof to crush the boy: "In some miraculous way from a wooden (sic!) ceiling of the Church fell a stone to kill the boy for his parents' lying", but he was saved by the icon of the Virgin, who came out of the iconostasis and shielded him. Barsky criticized the legend. Noting that even if the stone had originally supernaturally been immersed in the panel, it could have fallen off and been attached again, acquiring a modern appearance, since the place of the stone's adjunction to the panel was carefully disguised: "This stone is very similar to other stones found on this mountain, dark, almost black, weighing about two pounds; it is seen that it is not immersed in the wooden panel of icon, but is attached to it. In addition, if it had fallen naturally, it would not have sunk into the wood, since the church is low and the stone is small, and the wood of the icon is strong. The stone could only sink into the wood in a supernatural way. Even if it was something supernatural, then the stone fell off and had to be reattached. It's possible" [*Wanderings* 1886:292].

The second version differs from the first: in it the stone still killed the boy, but then he has been resurrected by the prayers of the Mother of God. The third version is extremely prosaic. After a very strong hail (apple-size) in the mountains, a piece of a rock was knocked off the rock and fell down. This was seen by a priest who was hiding from the foul weather in a cave. He took a piece of rock and brought it to the monastery. The monks decided that the stone

testifies to the miracle⁵ of the Virgin and put the stone in the altar. After this a pious legend that combined the fragment of a rock and the revered image of the Mother of God into one conceptual block was formed, and the monks completed this combination in the literal sense of the word: “Worshippers who often come to the image of the Mother of God, and the stone is also revered by them, especially the common ones. For years the stone lay in the altar useless, but then the veneration of him began to increase day by day, then monks attached to the back of the icon, on the altar side; attaching painted over and made to be not visible. In this form, the stone is still revered along with the icon. Whether the stone is worthy of reverence and worship, I leave it for consideration for ones more intelligent than me” [*Wanderings* 1886:292-293].

Finally, there is one case — doubts about the authenticity of the most important Shrine of the Catholic world — Loreto⁶. After visiting Nazareth in 1729, Barsky recalls the house of the Virgin in Loreto, where he visited in 1724, and came to the conclusion that it was inauthentic. He argued for his position by the silence of Greek and local sources, both oral and written ones especially emphasizing the discrepancy between the material of the Italian Loreto (brick) and the white stone from which the whole of Nazareth was built: “I realized for some reasons that the Roman Catholic version is a lie. The first reason is that the Greeks resist this and claim that they have never heard or read about the house of the Virgin being moved from Nazareth to another country. The second reason is that the people of Nazareth themselves, as well as their fathers and forefathers, never heard that the house of Joseph, in whole or in part, have ever been moved somewhere, either before the construction of the monastery in this place by Empress Helena, or after. The third and most important reason is that the buildings themselves do not correlate.

In Loreto, the house is made of red baked brick, whereas in Nazareth bricks were never used for construction, natural white stone only, which is mined in the nearby mountains. There are no bricks there in principle, neither new nor old, neither on the road, nor anywhere else, even if you look very carefully. I searched for it myself and didn't find it, although I looked very carefully.

⁵ In this case, it is difficult to say what the miracle was. Rockfalls in the mountains due to bad weather are a common occurrence. It is possible that the situation reminded them of the biblical text about the Stone of Mount, where the stone broke away from the rock without human influence (Dan. 2, 34-35).

⁶ According to current information, it was actually transported in the end of the 13th century after the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem from Nazareth construction, revered as the house where the blessed Virgin lived. Perhaps it is the remains of a memorial structure erected on this site specifically (under Constantine or Justinian). In 1291 The house of Our Lady was dismantled by the rulers of Epirus and transported (according to legend — miraculously moved by angels) in the city of Trsat (Tersatto) in Dalmatia (now the area of modern Rijeka in Croatia), in 1295 — in Loreto. In 1295 the “Holy house” was surrounded by a wall; in 1389, it received the status of sanctuary. In 1507, Pope Julius II commissioned Donato Bramante to build an architectural complex around it [*Bliznyukov* 2011: 50].

It follows that there never were brick houses in Nazareth, either large or small, because brick is used if there is no stone, or there is little of it. Where there is stone, especially so convenient one for working as in Nazareth, who would be so unreasonable to build with brick? After all, brick is not stronger or more beautiful than natural stone, besides in Nazareth in the mountains, the stone is beautiful, clean and white as milk and it is convenient to process it.

In addition, it is inconvenient to make bricks in Nazareth, because firewood is brought from far away and there are so few of them that people use animal dung as fuel. Moreover, not only there, but in all of Galilee and Palestine, I haven't seen any brick building. But enough of this, because it is a lie, while the truth is obvious" [*Wanderings* 1886:146-148] (this story will be the subject for further publication).

The above allows us to conclude that Vasily Barsky, describing Christian shrines, was not just a pilgrim, but a researcher who was called upon to report to his motherland accurate information about the far Eastern countries, their history, nature, architecture, customs, cities and shrines, their appearance and condition, rejecting fiction and not avoiding inconvenient facts and contributing with his researches both to education and the purity of the Orthodox faith. There was no contradiction for him in that situation. In the last years of his life Barsky formulated his attitude to the "craft of the historian" and the difficulties of the profession which he hoped to avoid: "It is shame for a true and conscientious historian to conceal the truth, because when the good deeds of the ancients are described and praised, it benefits the readers giving an example, while stories of bad deeds encourage them to withdraw from evil" [*Wanderings* 1887:408].

At the end of the description of his Athos expedition, Barsky retold the story he had discovered about the events related to the Second Council of Lyon (1274-1282), "written in Greek and Bulgarian dialect", copies of which he saw in the Iviron monastery (in Greek) as an old manuscript and in the Zograph (in Bulgarian). The story was about an attempt to persuade the monks of Athos to join a union made by the Emperor Michael Palaiologos and the Patriarch John Vekk [*Wanderings* 1887:317-319], which ended tragically for the monks (sinking in a ship, burning alive in a tower, beheading with a sword and hanging and besides God's wrath in the form of an earthquake).

The authenticity and antiquity of the story did not cause any doubts in Barsky, but he noted that he had not met it among Greek historians or anywhere else. However, he named the Byzantine historians Eusebius Pamphilus (3th – 4th cent.) and George Kedrin (late 11th – early 12th cent.), who had lived earlier and could not had written about it if they wanted to. However, Barsky, who did not know

the exact date of the events, and especially the composition of the story, justified them, explaining the omission by the political situation or potential danger. In summary, he emphasized the importance of unbiased objectivity for science and the need to take into account all known facts, and this is quite consistent with the criteria of modern science.

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