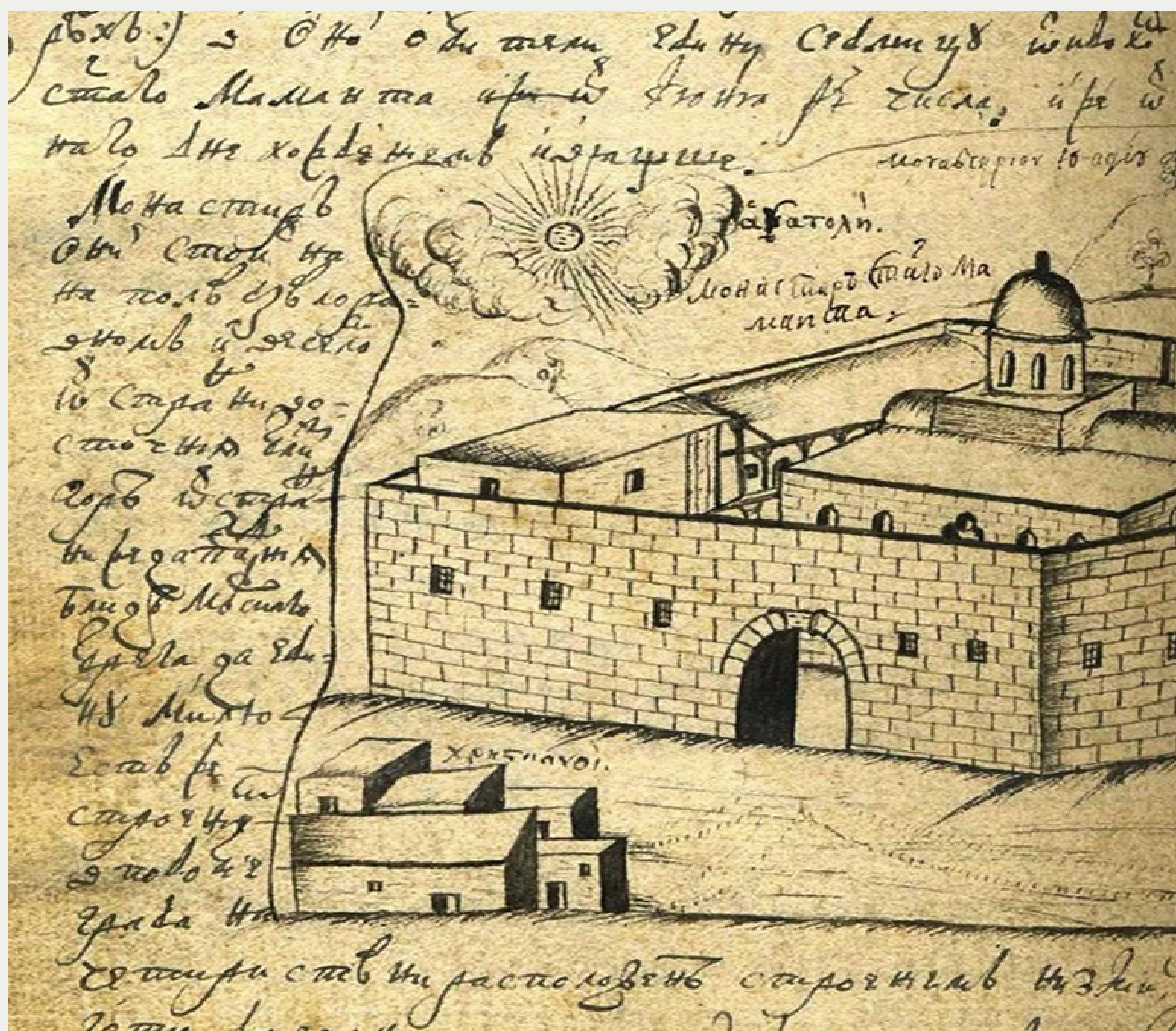


WRITING ACROSS CYPRUS

THE DIARY AND GRAFFITI OF VASILIJ GREGOROVICH BARSKIJ



The travel account of Vasilij Gregorovich Barskij remains a most valuable description of the island of Cyprus in the first half of the 18th century. The Russian monk travelled extensively from Kyiv to central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East for more than twenty years, leaving a detailed and lively description of his pilgrimage trips to monasteries and places of cult and worship.

During his travels, he visited the island of Cyprus four times. The first three visits were quite short, while the fourth one lasted for almost two years (1734-1736). During this time, in order to escape the plague spreading primarily in the island's cities, Barskij embarked on a long journey across the island. In his diary, he kept a detailed description of Cypriot villages, churches, people and traditions, enriched with 25 drawings of selected sites. Inside five churches (Panagia tou Araka-Lagoudera, Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis-Kakopetria, Agios Ioannis Lambadistis-Kalopanagiotis, Agios Mamas-Morphou, Apostolos Andreas-Kykkos) Barskij's left his graffiti, something he did not practice anywhere else, as far as we know. Barskij's graffiti are Greek inscriptions defined within a leaf-like frame surmounted by a cross.

All graffiti inscriptions feature the date (1735), his name, his social status, and his nationality. Some of them offer additional information, such as the signing phrase 'the humblest between the monks', his origin and the aim of his visit.

In these churches, Barskij placed his mark in different locations, showing a different approach and attitude to every single building. By leaving his inscription, Barskij marked his passage and presence in each space aspiring to receive grace. The roots of this tradition can be traced in antiquity and continue to this day with worshippers leaving votives at a specific cult site or sacred place.

The documentation and study of Barskij's graffiti led by the APAC Labs/STARChave utilized the application of advanced digital imaging techniques (RTI, Multispectral imaging) as well as non-invasive chemical analysis (XRF) on the remaining inks and pigments used. The main aim is to analyze and compare the material aspects of every graffiti inscription and based on the results relate them in the context of his manuscript describing his visit. The documentation and study of Barskij's graffiti will provide researchers with new information on a still little-aspect of his Cypriot travels – the making on graffiti – adding original elements for the understanding of the monk's attitude towards sacred space.

