

## **IEROSOLIMITIKA: A different kind of Icon Painting on Canvas from the Holy Places. Historical Data, Materials, Present State and Conservation Techniques.**

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Paintings on canvas bought by pilgrims from the Holy Places are known as Ierosolimitika or Panagiotafitika or Proskynetaria. They first appeared at the beginning of the 17th century and were still produced up to the early 20th century. They all show common iconography, of Jerusalem surrounded by biblical scenes.

By the 4th century, Christians went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and were baptized in the river Jordan. These pilgrims, who were known as “Hantzides” in Greece, used to turn with souvenirs. Icon workshops in Jerusalem increased because of the influx of so many visitors and the need of icons for the Orthodox Churches of the Holy City. From the 17th century ierosolimitika were one of the most popular souvenirs and their production grew steadily. Paintings on canvas were preferable, because they could be rolled or folded, and therefore were easily transportable. In the early 20th century the need for mass produced and low cost souvenirs resulted in this sort of icon painting being abandoned.

Ierosolimitika apart from a religious hagiographic concept also present topographic elements of the places that the buyer visited. As the central theme we find depicted the city of Jerusalem with the city walls and the Holy Grave, as well as buildings of religious importance and features of the local scenery. These are surrounded by small icons of Saints, episodes from their lives, biblical scenes, the Virgin Mary, Christ and local legends. The inscriptions were written in Greek and in some cases in Arabic. They usually included the name of the owner and the date.

The state of preservation of this type of paintings is usually particularly bad. The degree of

folded edges. Usually, the canvas support appears extremely weak and parts of the painting have been lost down as far as the surface of the support. In some cases, after transport, there were stretched on panels in order to be hung. As a result, the edges of these works have been badly damaged and have an irregular shape.

Due to particularity of their preservation state, the treatment undertaken for the conservation and restoration of Ierosolimitika is, usually, extensive and complicated. It concerns, mainly, reshaping. Reinforcing the textile support, usually by lining it, is also an essential measure. Consolidation of flaking and detached paint is equally significant. Each work's treatment is considered individually.

In this paper a number of cases will be from the collection of the Benaki Museum and private ones. These icons date from various chronological periods and are of different iconography. Each case presents different types of deterioration and damage. Reference will also be made to the conservation procedures undertaken and the exhibition specifications required.