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Transferring Jerusalem to Moscow: Maksim Grek's Letter and Its Afterlife

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Abstract

Few debates in late seventeenth-century Muscovy were as heated as the controversy over the naming of the Resurrection “New Jerusalem” Monastery (1656). This essay draws attention to an overlooked sixteenth-century source, a letter by the Greek-born Slavic translator Maksim Grek (d. 1556), which played an important role in shaping the Church's thinking. Maksim's letter helps to explain why Jerusalem ideology took a very different path in Russia than it did in Western Europe, and why replications of the Holy Sepulcher are only very rarely encountered in Muscovy. Maksim's letter introduces several themes which foreshadow the course of the later debate: the irrevocability of Jerusalem's name; the inalienable holiness of the *loca sancta*; and the connection between the holy sites and churches built on them. These themes, in turn, invite a reconsideration of the success of Jerusalem ideology in Muscovy, which has often been taken for granted. We first situate this contrarian text in its original context and then trace its mediation through important Ruthenian authors who guaranteed its wide reception in Moscow. Our study demonstrates that the Russian clergy and the Moscow Synod of 1666/67 based their critiques of the ‘New Jerusalem’ Monastery's name on a reading of Maksim's letter and its mediators.

In his 1670/71 petition to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich the Old Believer polemicist Starets Avraamii complains that Patriarch Nikon had dared to build a third Jerusalem, even though there are only two holy cities worthy of that name: the earthly historical Jerusalem and its heavenly counterpart: “No one ever conceived (*zadumal*) a third Jerusalem except the Cursed Montanus and his son, the ruinous Nikon, but they have done so unworthily.”¹ Linking Nikon's patronage of the Resurrection New Jerusalem Monastery, which stands on the Istra River to the west of Moscow, to the notorious second-century heretic Montanus, Avraamii claims that only Satan and his followers would give a newly built “dwelling or city” (*zhilishche ili grad*) the name “Jerusalem.” Avraamii was one voice among the many heterodox groups and conservative clerics known collectively as Old Believers who saw signs of the end-time in Nikon's reforms, and they conflated the New Jerusalem Monastery with

¹“Chelobitnaia startsa Avraamiiia,” in *Materialy dlia istorii raskola za pervoe vremia ego sushchestvovaniia*, ed. N. I. Subbotin, 9 vols. (Moscow, 1885), 7:381. On the petition see Robert O. Crumney, “The Origins of the Old Believers' Cultural Systems: The Works of Avraamii,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 55 (1995): 128.

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the New Jerusalem prophesied in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 3:12; 21:2). The use of this holy name in the context of early modern Moscow, so they believed, dishonored the original city and contradicted Old Testament prophecy, since only Jews wait in expectation of the Messiah's first coming.

Avraamii's reasoning about the name "Jerusalem" was informed by an important sixteenth-century source that has been overlooked in the scholarship on the New Jerusalem controversy: a letter in which the Athonite monk and translator Maksim Grek (d. 1556) cautions against referring to Moscow as Jerusalem.² Indeed, Avraamii cites Maksim explicitly in his concluding attack on the patriarch's building project, writing:

For the blessed Maksim Grek says in his book: "Thus, do not call any other city 'Jerusalem,' even if it should rule over all of creation. For there is only one Jerusalem in the world, and only one Judean land where Christ was born, and where He was baptized in the Jordan, was transfigured on Mount Tabor, was crucified on Golgotha, and was interred in parts nearby; and for forty days after His resurrection, He dwelled with His disciples, and from the Mount of Olives He ascended into heaven."³

Maksim's claim that there is only one holy city impacted the trajectory of Jerusalem ideology in Muscovy. Understanding his line of argument thus sheds light on one of the most contentious debates in the 1660s—the name of Nikon's New Jerusalem Monastery. Maksim's letter was studied not only by the patriarch's critics, such as Avraamii, but also by his supporters within the Church. The letter reveals that the disagreement over the monastery's name was not unmotivated, as has sometimes been asserted, and it helps to explain why Jerusalem discourse took a different path in Russia than it did in Western Europe.⁴

A plethora of late medieval European towns, including London, Paris, Varallo, and Montañone, boasted churches and monasteries that replicated the Holy Sepulcher.⁵ In contrast, there is only one Orthodox copy of the Holy Sepulcher, located in Mtskheta, Georgia.⁶ Conceived in the wake of the crusades, the Western monuments speak to Europeans' fascination with Jerusalem's holy sites and the desire to transplant the East into the West. Their patrons, some of whom were members of the Knights Templar, assumed that reproductions of Jerusalem's Christian monuments "take nothing away from the power and authority of the original [city]; on the contrary, they strengthen its central position."⁷ However, under the influence of Maksim and perhaps other authors, Russian hierarchs came to believe that such copies *dishonored* the original buildings—or at least that copies given the name "New Jerusalem" did. Church leaders evoked Maksim's focus on the name of the city in their objections to applying the name to new locales.

Following an introduction to Nikon and the New Jerusalem Monastery, the four parts of this study introduce the context of Maksim's letter, the main lines of his argument, his influence upon later readers, and his importance for the Great Moscow Synod of 1666–67, which rejected the name of the New Jerusalem Monastery. Our diachronic approach shows that the 1660s debate over that monastery's name is best understood through the layers of reception of Maksim's letter.

² L. I. Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst Maksima Greka: Rukopisnaia i literaturnaia traditsii*, 2 vols. (Novosibirsk, 2008–11), 2:156–61. We have found only one brief mention of the letter in the Jerusalem literature: Iu. M. Lotman, "Otvzuki kontseptsii 'Moskva—tretii Rim' v ideologii Petra Pervogo," in *Istoriia i tipologiia russkoi kul'tury*, ed. L. N. Kiseleva and Lotman (St. Petersburg, 2002), 353. The most important collection of essays on the Jerusalem idea in Russia is Andrei Batalov and A. M. Lidov, ed., *Ierusalim v russkoi kul'ture* (Moscow, 1994).

³ Subbotin, *Materialy* 7:381–82; Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:160. On Avraamii's adaptation of Maksim see R. A. Klostermann, "Maxim Grek in der Legende," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 53 (1934): 189 n.121.

⁴ Maureen Perrie, for example, asserts that "references to Moscow as 'Jerusalem' ... were perfectly acceptable in previous years [i.e., before the 1660s]." See Perrie, "Moscow in 1666: New Jerusalem, Third Rome, Third Apostasy," *Quaestio Rossica* 3 (2014): 79.

⁵ Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago, 2006), 49–144.

⁶ Tamila Mgaloblishvili, "How Mtskheta Turned into the Georgians' New Jerusalem," in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. Bianca Kühnel et al. (Turnhout, 2014), 59–66.

⁷ Kühnel et al., *Visual Constructs*, xxiii.



Throughout the 1660s the Russian Church was riven by internal divisions. Over the course of the preceding decade, Patriarch Nikon had instituted a series of controversial policies, including the confiscation of “Latin” and “Frankish” icons in Moscow; the erection of large monasteries necessitating taxes levied on small parishes; and the requirement of burdensome paperwork for priests, which limited their mobility. From city to countryside, factions broke out in protest over a patriarch who was seen as overly hungry for power. Nikon’s most outspoken critics, including Ivan Neronov (d. 1670), an Old Believer and member of the Zealots of Piety, appealed to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich in hopes of finding a sympathetic ear. Like other critics of the patriarch, Neronov argued that Nikon had thwarted the Kremlin’s good-faith efforts at reform.⁸ Nikon’s reputation suffered a nearly fatal blow when he sought to revise Russian liturgical books in line with Greek manuscripts, an action that stoked the ire of his challengers within and without the church hierarchy. By the 1670s the situation had worsened to the point that Nikon was frequently likened to the Antichrist by his opponents, and entire communities of the faithful left the official church—some led by dissenting members of the clergy, and others on their own, believing the priesthood itself had fallen.

The New Jerusalem Monastery was the third building project aimed at pilgrims that Nikon initiated in the 1650s. Its scale, cost, and complexity, however, far surpassed its two predecessors: Iverskii Monastery (1653) and Krestnyi Monastery (1656).⁹ Nikon had secured the land in 1656, and construction began just two years later under the patronage of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, who had approved of its designation as “New Jerusalem” as early as October 1657.¹⁰ The project, nevertheless, advanced slowly, and construction stalled after Nikon was exiled to Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery by the Great Moscow Synod. Work resumed in 1679 under Tsar Fedor Alekseevich, and in 1685 the monastery was finally dedicated under the joint reign of Tsars Ivan and Peter Alekseevich.¹¹

Although Nikon resisted Western influences in the Church, his builders, drawing on a heteroclitic architectural tradition, consulted scaled architectural drawings of the Holy Sepulcher by the Franciscan traveler Bernadino Amico of Gallipoli, as well as verbal descriptions in Arsenii Sukhanov’s *Proskinitarii* (1649–53), a text that was close in form to Greek *proskynetaria*.¹² The layout and furnishings of the katholikon closely adhere to the Jerusalem model, likewise housing a life-sized replica of Christ’s tomb aedicule beneath a massive rotunda. In 1723 the dome collapsed and would only be rebuilt in 1749 by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli under the patronage of Elizabeth I.¹³ The Moscow church, also like the original, houses chapels dedicated to the Passion and Golgotha, which were erected under Elizabeth and Catherine the Great.¹⁴ In the walls and pillars, forty-eight white stone plinths bear inscriptions explaining the significance of the referenced sites in the church.

The monastery’s grounds served an equally important role in evoking a first-hand experience of the Holy Land. The building complex stands on a picturesque bluff, evocative of Golgotha, overlooking the Istra. Structures adjacent to the walled quarters, including the chapel on the “Mount of Olives,” copy famous pilgrimage destinations, whereas the walls, built under Peter, are dotted with towers that later came to be known as Zion, Gethsemane, David’s house, the tribes of Israel, Baruch, Ephraim, and Damascus.¹⁵ Modifications to the surrounding landscape create a veritable copy of Palestine

⁸ Georg Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, 1999), 54–57.

⁹ See, with bibliography, V. V. Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy* (Moscow, 2004), 527–619; and Kevin Kain, “Before New Jerusalem: Patriarch Nikon’s Iverskii and Krestnyi Monasteries,” *Russian History* 39 (2012): 112–70.

¹⁰ A. G. Avdeev, “Kto i kogda nazval Voskresenskii monastyr’ Novym Ierusalimom,” in *Sbornik posviashchennyi 400-letiiu so dnia predstavleniia Nikonika Sviatishhego Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi*, ed. A. G. Avdeev (Moscow, 2006), 89–98.

¹¹ Kevin Kain, “Conceptualizing New Jerusalem: The Resurrection of the Resurrection ‘New Jerusalem’ Monastery in the Reign of Tsar Fedor Alekseevich (1676–1682),” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 54 (2020): 134–69.

¹² Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 627–57, with bibliography. For Greek *proskynetaria* see Sotiris N. Kadas, *Hoi hagioi topoi: Eikonographēmena proskynetaria 17ou–18ou ai.* (Athens, 1998).

¹³ Galina Zelenskaia, *Sviatyni Novogo Ierusalima* (Moscow, 2002), 47–49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235–42, 327.

¹⁵ G. M. Zelenskaia, “Eleonskaia chasovnia v Novom Ierusalime,” *Nikonovskie chteniia v Muzei ‘Novyi Ierusalim’* 2 (2005): 233–47.



in miniature outside Moscow. Each of the additional sites bears a name drawn from the Gospels: Samaria, Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, Cana, and so on.¹⁶ In essence, the monastic complex acts as a massive mimetic compressor in which structures, pathways, and landscape index pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land, channeling their sanctity in Moscow. For this reason, scholars have referred to the complex as a “hierotopy,” or “sacred space” which mediates the city just as an icon connects the faithful to a saint.¹⁷ In an age when many in the Russian Church were suspicious of Catholics and Uniates, such a sweeping re-creative effort, in the manner of a Western building tradition, was highly suspect.

In Muscovy, there was a tradition of invoking Jerusalem in rituals and epithets, but nothing could have prepared the Russian citizenry for the New Jerusalem Monastery. While public processions, including the Palm Sunday reenactment of Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem, identified St. Basil’s Cathedral with Jerusalem, the building itself did not closely resemble the church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁸ Such symbolic associations were familiar from Byzantium. Greek writers regularly refer to Constantinople and the Pharos Chapel, which housed relics of the Passion, as “Jerusalem” and “Zion,” a closely related epithet.¹⁹ Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century East Slavic writers also use these epithets to describe Kiev and the Monastery of the Caves, but, as in the Muscovite context, neither the city nor the building resembled Jerusalem or its churches, and the rhetoric serves as an encomiastic trope.²⁰ However, the monastery on the Istra, which so boldly imitated the Holy Sepulcher and its adjacent topographical features, made the nature of the association less clear. Was the name “New Jerusalem” to be understood figuratively? Or did the name denote a true transferal from Palestine, implying the honorary site was removed from the Holy Land? These questions worried hierarchs in the Russian Church, and they sought answers in Maksim’s letter and its various Ruthenian adaptations.

MAKSIM’S LETTER IN CONTEXT

There are two recensions of Maksim’s letter, the Rumiantsev and Khludov, the first of which was probably a draft for the latter, more polished text.²¹ In the Rumiantsev copy, Maksim identifies his addressee as “Gerasim,” who was most likely Archimandrite Gerasim Zamytskii of the Simonov Monastery in Moscow, where Maksim also resided for some time.²² While the letter cannot be dated with any precision, Maksim anticipates the charge that he is a Greek outsider, declaring his love for Moscow, so probably he was writing many years after his arrival in 1518.²³

In the later Khludov text, the letter bears the title: “The monk Maksim Grek’s teaching that *the holy places* are in no way defiled (*ne oskvernaiutsia sviataia*), even if [these] cities have been under the

¹⁶ Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 644–45.

¹⁷ Aleksei Lidov, “Patriarch Nikon’s Hierotopy: The New Jerusalem Hermitage as a Seventeenth-Century Spatial Icon,” in *Russia’s Early Modern Orthodox Patriarchate: Apogee and Finale, 1648–1721*, ed. Kevin Kain and David Goldfrank (Washington, 2021), 77–98.

¹⁸ Michael S. Flier, “Breaking the Code: The Image of the Tsar in the Muscovite Palm Sunday Ritual,” in *Medieval Russian Culture*, ed. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1994), 2:239–40.

¹⁹ Erwin Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae* (Munich, 1968), 102, 109, 115 n.3, 121, 135, 139, 170, 250, 284, 317, 323; Wolfram Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte* (Vienna, 1974), 180.

²⁰ See Christine Worobec, “The Long Road to Kiev: Nineteenth-Century Orthodox Pilgrimages,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 30/31 (2014/15): 4–7; Serhii Plokhyy, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine* (Oxford, 2001), 155, 263–64, 279; Feofan Prokopovich, “Slovo v den’ sviatogo ravnopostolnago kniazia Vladimira” (1705) (*Kievskaia starina* 22 [1888], 1–14 [appendix 1]); and Feofan Prokopovich, “Slovo privetstvitel’noe na prishestvie v Kiev ego tsarskogo presvetlogo velichestva” (1706) (*Slova i rechi* [St. Petersburg, 1760], 1–11). Both homilies develop Psalms 149:2, “Let the children of Zion rejoice in their king.”

²¹ Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 1:330–31, 378–84. The Khludov copy (Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka, Bol’shakov 285, late 1540s/early 1550s), contains annotations by Maksim himself, although none appear in the Jerusalem letter.

²² Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 1:379, 2:156; N. V. Sinityna, *Prepodobnyi Maksim Grek: Sochineniia*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2008–14), 2:409.

²³ Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 1:380, 2:156. Sinityna (*Sochineniia*, 2:410) cautions against following A. I. Ivanov’s linking of the text to Daniil’s appointment as metropolitan and proposing an early date of ca. 1522 (Ivanov, *Literaturnoe nasledie Maksima Greka* [Leningrad, 1969], 154–55 [no. 225]).



control of non-Christians for many years (*i mnoga leta obladaemy sut' gradove ot poganykh'*).²⁴ Intriguingly, the earlier Rumiantsev copy refers to his teaching about “the holy churches of God (*sviataia Bozhiia tserkvi*),” anticipating his discussion of the Holy Sepulcher at the end.²⁵ The shift from “churches” to “holy places” in the final version, which repeats the Holy Sepulcher remarks, is small but important, as it moves the emphasis from the man-made structures to the sites themselves, which witnessed the events of the Bible. In turn, the twin focus on both site and church in the Khludov recension, which is the text analyzed below, helps to explain why later readers cited Maksim’s letter in their critiques of the New Jerusalem Monastery, since its *katholikon* imitates both Jerusalem’s churches and the *loca sancta*.

In the opening sentence, Maksim states the letter’s theme, noting that Gerasim had asked “whether it is befitting for renowned Moscow, which rules over the cities of Orthodox Rus’, to be called ‘Jerusalem,’ as if the Old Jerusalem were defamed, being in the possession of the most impious Saracens for many years.”²⁶ Basing his reply on a “general religious principle,” Maksim asserts that Jerusalem *cannot* lose its sanctity, even under Muslim rule, for God never abandoned this city.²⁷ Maksim uses a similar line of reasoning in another letter where he criticizes the metropolitan of Moscow for appointing bishops without the blessing of the patriarch of Constantinople.²⁸ The metropolitan’s supporters had pointed to the sacking of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks as a justification for their claim to authority over the Greek patriarch.²⁹ Maksim’s response in the second letter—that *Constantinople* cannot lose its sanctity—echoes his thinking in the Jerusalem letter. Whether Jerusalem or Constantinople, Maksim maintains that the sanctity of holy cities blessed by God is not eroded if they fall into enemy hands. God’s grace operates independently of political fortune in holy cities.

Maksim’s lack of sympathy for Gerasim’s argument was likely due to his Greek background. Maksim was born in the Despotate of Epirus, a successor state to the Byzantine Empire which shrank to a fraction of its former size after the Fourth Crusade (1202–4). Throughout the fifteenth century, Epirus was governed by the powerful Tocco family from Benevento, which finally succumbed to the Turks in 1479. For centuries, Greek elites had viewed Jerusalem with detachment, as an alien city where even the liturgy was conducted in Arabic.³⁰ They felt no sympathy for the crusaders who sought to win back the city. Moreover, since the seventh century, the patriarch of Constantinople had an agreement with Muslims to maintain autonomy over Jerusalem’s shrines, and the Ottoman conquest did not alter this arrangement.³¹ For Maksim, there would have been no reason to withdraw the city’s name since its holiness was never contingent on Christian governance. His ability to persuade later Russian hierarchs, who came from a very different background, of this stance is, however, remarkable.

The Maksim-Gerasim exchange anticipates the debates of the 1660s. Crafting an “imaginary dialogue,” Maksim abandons the conventions of epistolography to make a “public statement,” imbuing

²⁴ *Ibid.* 2:156 (emphasis added).

²⁵ *Ibid.* (emphasis added). Maksim made two small edits in the Rumiantsev text, so we can be sure that he saw this copy.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ V. S. Ikonnikov, *Maksim Grek i ego vremia*, 2nd ed. (Kiev, 1915), 485–88.

²⁸ In the first edition of Maksim’s writings the two letters are printed one after the other (*Sochineniia Prepodobnogo Maksima Greka* [Kazan’, 1859–62], 3:154–56, 156–64). They do not appear together in any of Maksim’s early manuscripts, however (Sinitzyna, *Sochineniia* 2:337; Sinitzyna, *Maksim Grek v Rossii* [Moscow, 1977], 234–36). The Kazan’ grouping and associated reasoning have led scholars to read the Jerusalem letter as a veiled discussion of the patriarchate. See G. Ch. Papamichael, *Maximos ho Graikos: Ho prōtos phōtistēs tōn Rōsōn* (Athens, 1950), 266–67; and Bernhard Schultze, *Maksim Grek als Theologe* (Rome, 1963), 279–81, 347. In our discussion we take Maksim’s text at face value.

²⁹ Prior to the sack of Constantinople in 1453, Greek writers made similar arguments for Constantinople’s primacy. See Paul Magdalino, “The Beauty of Antiquity in Late Byzantine Praises of Constantinople,” in *Villes de toute beauté: L’ekphrasis des cités dans les littératures byzantine et byzantino-slaves*, ed. Paolo Odorico and Charis Messis (Paris, 2012), 110–11, 120 (item 13).

³⁰ Jonathan Shepard, “Holy Land, Lost Lands, *Realpolitik*: Imperial Byzantine Thinking about Syria and Palestine in the later 10th and 11th Centuries,” *Al-Qantara* 33:2 (2012): 505–45, esp. 506–10.

³¹ B. Hendrickx, “The ‘Abominatio Desolationis,’ Standing in the Holy Place: Remarks on the Conquest of Jerusalem and the ‘Pact’ between Muslims and Christians,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 13:1 (2002): 165–76.



the letter with an air of generality.³² Maksim argues that it is blasphemous to call *Moscow* “Jerusalem” since Jerusalem never lost its sanctity. In parallel, the Church in the 1660s cited Maksim to persuade Nikon that it is blasphemous to call *Moscow’s monasteries* “Jerusalem” since the *loca sancta* never lost their sanctity. Maksim’s rhetoric places the burden of proof onto the patriarch to demonstrate that the Church was not robbing Jerusalem or the church of the Holy Sepulcher of its name. Nikon would respond by claiming that he was not taking “Jerusalem” away from the city but expanding the name semantically, as God intended. Nikon supported his argument by invoking liturgical commentaries which equated church space with the *loca sancta*. But Church leaders, focused like Maksim on the historical events of the Bible, sought to limit the name “Jerusalem” to Holy Land sites and thus affirmed his principle.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT IN MAKSIM’S LETTER

Maksim begins with a clear statement of his principle that holy sites never lose their sanctity:

I wish to remind you [Gerasim] that holy places never lose the sanctity which they have received from the divine grace that has come down to them from above—and this notwithstanding that the cities in which they have been founded are in the possession of the infidels through the inscrutable judgement of God. “For irrevocable,” says holy scripture, “are the gifts and calling of God” (Rom. 11:29). And second, to honor any man or city or country above merit adds rebuke, moreover, and neither glory nor praise, according to the divine fathers.³³

In this passage Maksim finds evidence for the inalienable status of the name and blessing of the holy sites in Paul’s Letter to the Romans. There the apostle says that “the gifts and calling” (*darovaniia i zvanie*) of God are “irrevocable” (*ne raskaiiana*). If the holy sites lose neither their blessing nor their name, then it is wrong to call *Moscow* “Jerusalem.” What is more, while such epithets may seem pious, they actually bring rebuke on the Russian city.

Next Maksim offers scriptural proof of his principle. Pointing to the idolatry of Old Testament kings who defiled the Temple as well as to the Babylonian exile, Maksim observes that “God’s holy churches” (*sviatyia Bozhiia tserkvi*) never lost their sanctity. Countless miracles performed by the ancient prophets definitively prove that God continued to reside in Jerusalem and its environs: “For divine grace (*blagodat*) from on high and the gift of prophecy did not depart from the holy places in any way.”³⁴ If neither the sins of Israel’s kings nor its people ever caused God to revoke his presence, then Muslim rule cannot either, Maksim indicates.

For Maksim, calling *Moscow* “Jerusalem” is a misuse of supersessionist theology, an unacceptable appropriation of the city’s name whereby Russia’s capital usurps the Israelite city. Transitioning to New Testament events, Maksim points out that Jerusalem is unique in that it witnessed Christ’s Resurrection. Taking the toponym “Zion” as a common synecdoche for “Jerusalem,” Maksim cites a hymn sung at Vespers on Great Saturday which calls Jerusalem the “mother” of all churches:

Let the verses composed by the wise John of Damascus convince you to quit the unbecoming thoughts you harbor, because these [verses] clearly and with great solemnity exalt the most holy, New Zion, proclaiming: “Rejoice, holy Zion, mother of the churches, God’s dwelling place; you are the first to have received remission [of your] sins through the

³² Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:156, 1:379–80. On Maksim’s epistolary genre see D. M. Bulanin, *Perevody i poslaniia Maksima Greka: Neizdannyye teksty* (Leningrad, 1984), 117–23.

³³ Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:156–57.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 2:157.



resurrection.”³⁵ Thus does the wise teacher understand [Zion] to be “holy, the mother of the churches, God’s dwelling place,” naming it so, but then do we reckon Jerusalem unworthy of being called so, just because for many years already it has been in the possession of the godless Saracens?³⁶ Yet it is not the city itself which is defiled, but those living there amongst themselves in an evil and foul way who are defiled.³⁷

Identifying Zion as the “first” church to have experienced the power of the Resurrection, Maksim asks whether anything could revoke this privilege and warrant calling another city by Jerusalem’s name.³⁸ Positing that immoral actions corrupt the persons who perform them, not the places where they are carried out, Maksim argues that the holy sites remain untouched by sin.³⁹

Maksim finds evidence of God’s ongoing presence in Zion in the miracle of the Holy Fire which occurs in the church of the Holy Sepulcher every Easter. This event is described in numerous medieval pilgrimage accounts, including several by East Slavs.⁴⁰ Maksim writes:

Do not dishonor or disparage (*Ne okhuzhdai ubo, nizhe unichizhai*) this holy city, beloved by God from the beginning, and about which He Himself, the Truth, says: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation (*Iako izbra Gospod’ Siona i izvolil’ ego v’ zhilishche Sebe*): ‘This is my resting place forever; here I will reside, for I have desired it’” (Ps. 132:13–14). Being (chosen) in this way and being so beloved by God, do not deprive [Jerusalem] of the holy name appointed it from above (*ne lishai ego narechennago emu svyshe sviashchennago imenovaniia*), so long as the one God, who is correctly praised in hymns as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the holy, glorified, almighty Trinity, remains there. Because each year on the evening of Great Saturday, a holy, immaterial light is sent down from Him, igniting the lamps hanging over the Savior’s life-giving tomb as a testimony and proclamation of the Orthodox faith in Him, and a rebuke to the godforsaken Jews and godless sons of Hagar.⁴¹

In this excerpt Maksim claims that Gerasim “dishonors” and “disparages” Jerusalem when he transfers its name to Moscow. Characterizing the Holy Sepulcher as God’s “resting place” (*pokoi*)—a word that also means final resting place, namely a proleptic reference to Christ’s tomb—Maksim notes that the Psalter says God “chose” (*izbra*) Mount Zion.⁴² Since God never built a new home, it is wrong to transfer the name “Zion”—“Jerusalem”—to other cities.

Finally, in the letter’s conclusion, Maksim drives home the historical uniqueness of Jerusalem. This city, and this city alone, witnessed all of the major events of Christ’s life. Avraamii quotes Maksim’s conclusion to argue that there is only “one” (*edin*) holy city (see passage quoted above).

³⁵ The hymn verses, or *stichera*, appear in the Octoechos (tone 8). See Alexandra Nikiforova, “Podobny v vizantiiskoi gimnografii: Etapy razvitiia (na materiale voskresnykh, rozhdstvenskikh, bogoiavlenskikh pesnopenii),” *Przegľad Wschodnioeuropejski* 6:1 (2014): 204.

³⁶ Gal. 4:26.

³⁷ Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:158–59.

³⁸ Maksim may be conflating the Holy Sepulcher with a church named Zion which stood on the Temple Mount, commemorating the site of the first gathering of the apostles.

³⁹ Curiously, Maksim later draws the categorical nature of his principle into question, writing: “The Orthodox cities and the holy sites within them are only defiled when the believers living there depart ... from the blessed, pure faith and righteous life, and take up the foul, sacrilegious customs and demonic teachings of the godless sons of Hagar” (Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:159). Maksim may have in mind the Books of the Maccabees, which describe the suffering of the Hebrews who refused to recant their faith during the Seleucid occupation of Jerusalem, as well as the desecration and rededication of the Temple.

⁴⁰ Haris Skarlakidis, *Holy Fire: The Miracle of the Light of the Resurrection at the Tomb of Jesus: Seventy Historical Accounts (4th–16th c.)* (Athens, 2015).

⁴¹ Zhurova, *Avtorskii tekst* 2:160.

⁴² I. I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevne-russkogo iazyka po pismennym pamiatnikam*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1903), s.v. *pokoi* (2:1110–11).



In sum, Maksim cites scripture, hymnography, and pilgrimage accounts to defend his principle that holy sites never lose their sanctity and that Jerusalem's name cannot be transferred from the city. Maksim's focus on Jerusalem's churches and the *loca sancta* paved the way for his letter's revival in the 1660s, when debate over the implications of naming the New Jerusalem Monastery became paramount under Patriarch Nikon. Crucially, Nikon had to deflate the Greek monk's assertion that transferring the name to other locales robs Jerusalem of its name and dishonors the city.

The New Jerusalem Monastery was not the first building project in Moscow to draw its sanctity from a mimetic link to a prototype in the Holy Land. In the early seventeenth century Boris Godunov had sought to build a replica of the Holy Sepulcher in the Kremlin, but while his plans failed—in part due to the same accusations of vanity that would later be leveled at Nikon—he did succeed in installing measurements of the Jerusalem church in Dormition Cathedral.⁴³ Between 1611 and 1620 these measurements were replaced by a model of Christ's grave to which, in 1624, Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich added a ciborium to hold a piece of Christ's chiton. This micro-architectural canopy evoked the *loca sancta* and sharpened devotion to an important Passion relic.⁴⁴ Like similar small-scale shrines used during Holy Week in Novgorod during the 1540s, this assemblage referred to the holy city through tangible evocations of Christ's life, developing a metaphorical equation of church space with Jerusalem in the liturgy. In contrast, the New Jerusalem Monastery went beyond merely evanescent comparisons, concretizing the *loca sancta* and closely imitating the appearance of the Holy Sepulcher. The holy city no longer had to be ritually reconstituted through performances tied to the feast calendar, for, as church officials were quick to point out, it seemed to many ordinary believers to be standing before them in stone.⁴⁵ Nikon had transcended the limits of liturgical mimesis, but in so doing he reignited the charges of vanity that had plagued Godunov's Jerusalem project.

MAKSIM'S LETTER IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In the 1580s the Ruthenian, anti-Catholic polemicist Vasilii Surazhskii adapted Maksim's letter in the first chapter of his *Book of Faith* (1588).⁴⁶ Vasilii's writings are filled with references to Maksim, among other sixteenth-century Muscovite authors, so his interest in the text is no surprise. Writing in the tumultuous years leading up to the Union of Brest (1595–96), when the Ruthenian Church placed itself under papal jurisdiction, Vasilii used Maksim to defend the “one true church of the East,” which he identified with Jerusalem.

In the early 1640s the hegumen Gideon of the Biziukovo Feast of the Cross Monastery in the Smolensk lands rewrote Vasilii's chapter in the opening pages of his own *Book of Faith*.⁴⁷ Gideon's book had a major impact in Moscow because of the Zealots of Piety—a circle of intellectuals that included the fiery polemicist Avvakum and the tsar's confessor, Stefan Vonifat'ev.⁴⁸ Stefan brought a copy of Gideon's *Book of Faith* to Moscow where, at the order of the tsar, it was translated from West Russian (*prostiaia mova*) into Church Slavonic and published in 1648 in a print run of twelve hundred

⁴³ Daniel Rowland, “Moscow—The Third Rome or the New Israel?” *Russian Review* 55 (October 1996): 608–9.

⁴⁴ A. L. Batalov, “Grob gospoden' v sakral'nom prostranstve russkogo khrama XVI–XVII vekov,” in *Vostochnokhristianskie relikvii*, ed. A. M. Lidov (Moscow, 2003), 513–32.

⁴⁵ We agree with scholars who frame Nikon's monastery as a modernizing project, which pushed Russian architecture in a bold, new direction. (Cornelia Soldat, participant in the roundtable, “Jerusalems here, Jerusalems there . . . : The Current State of Research on the Theme of Jerusalem in Early Modern Russia,” ASEES Virtual Convention, December 1, 2021).

⁴⁶ Vasilii Surazhskii, “O edinoin istinnoi pravoslavnoi vere,” in *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka*, vol. 7 (St. Petersburg, 1882), cols. 607–18. On Vasilii and his book see Hans Peter Niess, *Kirche in Russland zwischen Tradition und Glaube?* (Göttingen, 1977), 33–35.

⁴⁷ *Kniga o vere edinoin istinnoi pravoslavnoi* (Moscow, 1912), 10r–14r. See, for Gideon, N. V. Savel'eva, “Kto byl avtorom ‘Knigi o vere’?” *Russkaia literatura* 4 (2010): 149–54. See Niess, *Kirche in Russland*, 66, 68–69 (on Gideon's sources), and 147–50 (on chap. 1).

⁴⁸ On the Zealots see Wolfgang Heller, *Die Moskauer “Eiferer für die Frömmigkeit” zwischen Staat und Kirche (1642–1652)* (Wiesbaden, 1988).



copies. In time, Gideon's book helped to shape views about the New Jerusalem Monastery's name among Church officials and Old Believers alike.⁴⁹

Gideon tells us that he compiled his small book about Orthodox piety to atone for temptations he felt while studying Latin rhetoric under the Jesuits. Writing for his brothers and sisters, the Smolensk hegumen cultivates an acute sense of the end-time when, he believes, the faithful will be led astray by false teachers.⁵⁰ Unlike Vasilii, who amplifies Maksim's principle with lengthy scriptural quotations, Gideon cites Church Fathers, whom he obviously knew very well. Most of the points of agreement between Maksim's letter and Gideon's *Book of Faith* have a precedent in Vasilii's own *Book of Faith*. Gideon's book was the one most familiar to Muscovite writers of the 1660s, however, and we shall therefore focus on his text.

Gideon opens chapter 1 with a prophecy from Isaiah: "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).⁵¹ In patristic literature, this verse is taken to mean that the sanctity of Zion is irrevocable, but Muscovite theologians, reading it in a supersessionist light, claim that it means the opposite: the word had "gone out" to other places that now kept the faith *more truthfully* than the holy city.⁵² Thus, in his *Debate on Faith with the Greeks* (1650), Arsenii Sukhanov argues that the Greek Church broke the "law that went forth from Zion. ... The holy apostles penned the canons in Zion, which is to say Jerusalem, but the apostolic canons are steadfastly kept here [namely, in Moscow and not Jerusalem]."⁵³ Nikon, as will be discussed below, used Isaiah's verse in the same spirit, but for Gideon that was an incorrect reading.

Defending the "truth (*pravda*) of the Church of Zion," Gideon, like Maksim, emphasizes Jerusalem's historical privilege by listing the events of Christ's life that occurred there.⁵⁴ Next, he elaborates on Isaiah: "'Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness,' the mother of cities (*mati gradovym*"), the true Zion, which is in Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 1:26). This glory and name (*imia*) were given to the Zion in Jerusalem. If it is countered that this [name] belongs to the heavenly Zion, we shall show from the divine scriptures that it belongs to the earthly one."⁵⁵ Fulfilling this pledge, Gideon cites John of Damascus's hymn (per Maksim) and comments extensively on the epithet "mother of all the churches."⁵⁶ Rejecting the idea that "the holy places were thus (that is, sacred) in the beginning, but now have fallen into foul hands and so are all polluted (*a nyne oderzhashchu vsia ta sviataia mesta poganinu, i vsia ouzhe poprana bysha*)," Gideon argues that "all those places, which are worthy and deserving of honor, are not vainly and futilely deemed so in the faith of our catholic church (*sobornei tserkvi v" veri*), but are more blessed and worthy than every so-called Christian church (*khristianikh" imenouemykh" tserkvei*)."⁵⁷ One need only look to Psalms 132:13–14 (per Maksim), where the Lord is said to have "chosen Zion ... [for his] resting place," or "dwelling place (*zhilishche*)."⁵⁸ Speaking of the "ancient church (*drevniia tserkov*)" emptied out because of the ferocity of the Jews, Gideon extends Maksim's discussion of the Temple, claiming that because of the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension "the holy places became worthy of God's grace (*blagodati bozhii*)."⁵⁸ He then, like Maksim, invokes the martyrs who "perished at the hands of worldly rulers," observing that "yet the church and the holy places have not been lost (*pogibeli bo radi mir'skiia vlasti, tserkov', i sviataia*

⁴⁹ Avraamii cites chapter 1 of Gideon's book in his polemic against Nikon (Subbotin, *Materialy* 7:379).

⁵⁰ See the discussion in Niess, *Kirche in Russland*, 55.

⁵¹ *Kniga o vere*, 10r.

⁵² M. Dulaey, "Venez, montons à la montagne du Seigneur": Is. 2:2–6 (Mi. 4:1–3) dans l'exégèse paléochrétienne," in *Pèlerinages et lieux saints dans l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge: Mélanges offerts à Pierre Maraval*, ed. Béatrice Caseau et al. (Paris, 2006), 159–78.

⁵³ A. P. Bogdanov, "Preniia s grekami o vere" 1650 g.: *Otnosheniia grecheskoi i russkoi tserkvei v XI–XVII vv.* (Moscow, 2020), 466.

⁵⁴ *Kniga o vere*, 10r–v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11r.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11v–12r. Cf. Vasilii, who treats this epithet quickly, as does Maksim ("O edinovi vere," cols. 607–8).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*



mesta nepogibosha).⁵⁹ Finally, still like Maksim, he concludes with an account (albeit much longer) of the miracle of the Holy Fire.⁶⁰ Following Maksim—via Vasiliĭ—at every step, Gideon argues that the *loca sancta* and churches in Jerusalem are not defiled. God’s word has not “gone out” from Zion in the sense that he has abandoned the city because Jerusalem is the eternal dwelling place of God’s holy presence.

In the 1660s, Maksim’s views and their mediated form in Gideon’s *Book of Faith* became relevant when controversy broke out around Nikon’s New Jerusalem Monastery. In 1657, at the prompting of Arsenii the Greek, headmaster of the Greco-Latin academy at the Kremlin, Nikon invited to Moscow the metropolitan of Gaza, Paisii Ligarides.⁶¹ In time, Paisii became one of Nikon’s most vociferous opponents. In the following year, 1658, disputes upended the Church, leading Nikon to abandon the throne and retire to the New Jerusalem Monastery. When Paisii finally arrived in 1662, tensions between the tsar and patriarch were at a breaking point and the Church was on the verge of Schism. Failing to reconcile Nikon with the tsar, Paisii quickly became convinced of the disgraced patriarch’s guilt after the boyar Semen Luk’ianovich Streshnev delivered an excoriating denunciation of him in thirty objections.⁶²

Streshnev’s document marked the opening salvo in a bitter exchange that would rage in the years leading up to Nikon’s trial. Writing as a neutral agent of the Church, Paisii provided answers to Streshnev’s objections in a reply delivered to Nikon on August 15, 1662. Questions 13 and 14 in the document addressed the name of the New Jerusalem Monastery. The first of these reads: “Nikon is currently building a monastery, and he has named (*nazval*) it ‘New Jerusalem.’ Is it permissible that the name (*imĭa*) of the holy city be thusly transferred (*pereneseno*) and given to another (city) and defamed (*opozoreno*)?”⁶³ Paisii’s rhetorical question implies that Nikon has taken the name of the holy city in vain. Exposing vividly the dangers inherent to mimetic ambitions, Paisii suggests that the act of copying can slip imperceptibly into counterfeiting, a duplicitous act of replication that dishonors the prototype.

In his retort Nikon argues that he has not insulted the city’s name. Citing Isaiah’s prophecy, he asserts that the “word” has “gone out” from Zion, and thus *anyone* who keeps God’s commandment can be called a citizen of Jerusalem: “For, who, then, has designated a locality for the law which goes out from Zion? ... Not all who are from Jerusalem are Jerusalemites, but rather that person who keeps the law which has gone forth from Jerusalem [is a Jerusalemite].”⁶⁴ Here Nikon reverses Gideon’s reading of Isaiah’s prophecy by claiming that the text expands, rather than restricts, the name’s reference. One need not live in the Biblical city to be a citizen of Jerusalem. Rather, one must simply follow the law delivered there.

Much of Nikon’s response consists of a defense against the accusation that the monastery’s name implies the existence of a new messiah; since the Christian messiah (Jesus of Nazareth) was born in Jerusalem, then the new messiah (the Antichrist) would be born in a city called “New Jerusalem.” However, since only the Jews wait in expectation of a second messiah, as the Church teaches, it follows that the New Jerusalem Monastery must be a breeding ground for the Antichrist.

⁵⁹ Cf. Zhurova, where Maksim recalls “how much blood of the martyrs was spilt by the ancient torturers and persecutors, living in all the cities, countries, and villages of the faithful” (*Avtorskii tekst* 2:159).

⁶⁰ *Kniga o vere*, 13v–14r.

⁶¹ On Arsenii see B. L. Fonkich, *Grechesko-russkie kul’turnye svyazi v XV–XVII vv.* (Moscow, 1977), 108–25.

⁶² See N. Gibbenet, *Istoricheskoe issledovanie dela Patriarkha Nikona*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1882), 2:518–550; and Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 980–85, 1005.

⁶³ Gibbenet, *Issledovanie* 2:530; discussed in L. Buseva-Davydova, “Ob ideinomu zamysle ‘Novogo Ierusalima’ Patriarkha Nikona,” in *Novye Ierusalimy: Ierotropiia i ikonografiia sakral’nykh prostranstv*, ed. A. M. Lidov (Moscow, 2009), 176.

⁶⁴ Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 230. Here and below we have revised the translation by William Palmer, *The Replies of the Humble Nikon* (London, 1871). Nikon’s phrasing echoes standard Christian supersessionist interpretations of Rom. 2:26–29.



The apocalyptic anxieties of the 1660s—manifest, incidentally, among Jews as well as Christians—contributed an urgency to the debate over the monastery’s name.⁶⁵ In his interrogation of Nikon, Paisii repeats Maksim’s claim that “there is only one Jerusalem on earth,” while adding that the second Jerusalem is in heaven.⁶⁶ Nikon counters that Paisii has overlooked the fact that the holiness of the two cities is equally unbounded: “For show me the precise circumscription of the quality and quantity of either the heavenly or the earthly (Jerusalem) (*Pokazhi mi opisanie, iakozhe nebesnago, takozhde i zemnago kachestvo i kolichestvo*).”⁶⁷ Nikon implies that the earthly Jerusalem’s holiness has spread throughout the whole earth, noting that the name “Jerusalem” is used by Christians the world over. Returning to his definition of the Jerusalemite, Nikon asks Paisii whether “the person who keeps the law carried out of Jerusalem by the apostles can be called a Jerusalemite (*naritsati ierusalimlianin*),” and then draws an analogy with the designation Christian.⁶⁸ Originally, “Christian” signified the first community of believers in Antioch, but now the faithful everywhere are so called. In a similar way, Jerusalem was the first city chosen by God, but now every Christian city can be called “Jerusalem.”

Paisii’s second question for Nikon about the monastery’s name (number 14) concerns Byzantine liturgical commentaries which call the holy bread “Bethlehem” and the altar the “Holy Sepulcher.”⁶⁹ Paisii believes that this usage entails that only the bread and altar should be identified with Jerusalem, but Nikon, whose book on church ritual, *Skrizhal* (1656), included new translations of these passages by Arsenii the Greek, asserts that the city’s name can be extended to the entire church building.⁷⁰ Nikon sees no problem with multiplying the references to Jerusalem because every instance of the name involves a new context, thus distinguishing the concept of the copy from the original:

For the names of all other things, whether of holy churches, or monasteries, or cities, are taken from the prototypes (*pervoobraznykh*); but each separate thing which is so named is distinguished from the first by times and localities (*vremeny i mesty*). ... The name “New Jerusalem” is not circumscribed, nor restrictively defined (*ne opisano, ni opredeleno*). For “Jeru” (*hiero-*) is a sanctuary or consecration, and “salem” (*salim*) is interpreted as peace; and “Jeru” being coupled with “salem,” and pronounced together, makes “Jerusalem,” that is, “Holy-Peace.” It should be clear to everyone, then, that the Church is also a Jerusalem, that is [a dwelling place of] holy peace, in which men are sanctified by holy baptism, and are enlightened with the unction of the holy oil and the holy chrism.⁷¹

With this faux etymological sleight of hand Nikon transforms “Jerusalem” from a proper name into a general noun. The name, instead of referencing the historical site of God’s one-time choice, conveys how God extends his blessing of peace—his “salem”—to other “holy” locales. To apply the name to the Moscow monastery is thus not stealing glory from Zion but recognizing the starting point—the original Jerusalem—of a process of ecumenical “Jerusalemization.” This argument is the force of Nikon’s invocation of the spatio-temporal qualifier, which disentangles God’s original speech act from a widening referential arc. In essence, Nikon treats the name as a universal—as designating “Jerusalemesque” qualities—not as a title linked to a series of historical events. Seen this way, the name is not “taken” from the Palestinian city because it refers to the uncircumscribed prototype (universal) manifest equally in every church. In a few short strokes, Nikon mirrors the Western medieval

⁶⁵ One might recall the concurrent messianic expectations of the Sabbateans.

⁶⁶ Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 232.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cf. Vasilii for a similar rhetorical question (“O edinoi vere,” col. 615).

⁶⁹ Germanus I, *Historia mystica ecclesiae catholicae* 3, 6. Germanos’s commentary is widespread since Kievan times. See T. I. Afanas’eva, *Drevneslavianskie tolkovaniia na liturgiiu v ruskopisnoi traditsii XII–XVI vv.* (Moscow, 2012), 229–30, 231.

⁷⁰ *Skrizhal* (Moscow, 1656), 23–24, 26.

⁷¹ Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 237; commentary at 929.



stance, quoted in the introduction to this essay, that the many “copies” of Jerusalem “take nothing away” from the holy city.

While Nikon’s defense builds on *Skrizhal*, he extends the application of the name “Jerusalem” beyond the dissimilar copies assumed by the Byzantine liturgical commentaries. On one hand, his extrapolation of their metaphors for the altar and Eucharist reflects the contingent nature of a high-stakes polemic, but on the other, it bespeaks his attempt to reshape attitudes about church architecture. In earlier periods, the liturgical version of the Jerusalem metaphor marked church space as a spiritual reflection of a prototype, but Nikon sought to define churches *as Jerusalem* through a descriptive, material copy. Nikon’s emphasis on pilgrimage across his three monastic building projects suggests that he believed that such a copy could reduce the degrees of separation between believers and the holy sites that testify to Christ’s life.

THE SYNOD’S RESPONSE TO NIKON

In the months leading up to the Great Moscow Synod, a preliminary council of Russian hierarchs met to respond to a petition from the estranged patriarch. Quoting the conclusion to Maksim’s letter (later cited by Avraamii), the council categorically affirmed that “there is one Jerusalem on earth (*edin’ est’ Ierusalim’ na zemli*).”⁷² The hierarchs had reason to believe that Nikon might accept Maksim’s authority because his own *Skrizhal* quotes extensively from the Greek monk’s teachings about the Creed and ecumenical Councils.⁷³ Insisting that the words “New Jerusalem” be removed from the monastery’s title, the council proposed two alternative names: “Monastery of Christ’s Resurrection in the Image of the Jerusalem Church” or “New Monastery of the Resurrection.” At the 1666–67 Synod the Eastern patriarchs affirmed the ruling against the New Jerusalem Monastery’s name. Focusing, like the draft text, on the *loca sancta*, they chastise Nikon for his vain personal attachment to the monastery, even after his abdication from the throne: “Nikon continues to renovate, construct, and consecrate monastic sites with unbecoming titles and vain names, calling them New Jerusalem, Golgotha, Bethlehem, Jordan, and Galilee, mocking the divine things and renouncing the holy things.”⁷⁴ The Synod’s resolution would hold until 1749 when Elizabeth reclassified the monastery as a *stavropegic* institution and restored its name to “Resurrection Monastery, which is called ‘New Jerusalem.’”⁷⁵ In selecting other possible titles, the synod sought to shield the patriarch from the charge that he had built a breeding ground for the Antichrist—an accusation instigated by Paisii in 1662 and thereafter adopted by Bishop Aleksander of Viatka, Avvakum, and others. Stressing that the monastery had been built “in the image” of the Jerusalem Church and was simply a “new” monastery of the Resurrection (that is, a “new” Holy Sepulcher Church), the synod knotted the name’s semantics to the famous building in Jerusalem that it so faithfully copied.

Underlying the synod’s concern about the name was the naïveté of the Russian people. As the draft document states:

The Russian people, being ignorant, have stumbled (*blazniatsia*) because of the name of the New Jerusalem Monastery, and have done so in these last days, when the end of the ages is upon us and when their stumblings (*blazni*) would be a mighty, abusive reproach of the most-pious Patriarch Nikon, the vileness of which it is impossible to describe: for

⁷² Ibid., 1147 (“Chernovoi spisok deianiia sobora rossiiskikh arkhieriev”). Avraamii’s quotation of this passage may indicate that he had access to a copy of the synod’s draft response.

⁷³ *Skrizhal*, 818–30.

⁷⁴ Shmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 1182. The same charge appears in a letter dated December 6, 1666, from the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch to Patriarch Nectarius of Jerusalem (Arkheograficheskaia komissiiia, *Delo o patriarkhe Nikone* [St. Petersburg, 1897], 306).

⁷⁵ Zelenskaia, *Sviatyni Novogo Ierusalima*, 48.



this reason, it is not suitable to write, nor call the Monastery of the Holy Resurrection of Christ, “New Jerusalem.”⁷⁶

Here the synod claims that Nikon inadvertently led ordinary believers astray by making them think that the *loca sancta* had been transferred to Moscow. In his reply to Paisii, Nikon claims that copies of Jerusalem are “distinguished from the first [city] by times and localities,” but the Russian people, the synod implies, did not experience this spatio-temporal difference. Indeed, the synod suggests, Nikon’s audacious act of mimesis—which evoked not just the Holy Sepulcher but the topography of the Holy Land in its entirety—coupled with his insistence on “New Jerusalem” in the monastery’s name, caused believers to identify the copy with the original. In his reply to Paisii, Nikon had sought to dispel this worry, drawing on iconophile theory to argue that the monastery, like an icon, can be called by the same name as its prototype.⁷⁷ No one mistakes, Nikon reasons, an icon for the actual person, even though the two bear the same name, and the same is true for a spatial icon, that is, a hierotopic architectural ensemble. For the synod, however, the analogy does not hold. Calling the monastery “Jerusalem” suggests to the faithful that the sanctity of the holy sites has been transferred to Moscow, creating the impression that the end-time has arrived. Refusing to conflate architectural with pictorial copies, the synod underlined the role that Jerusalem’s holy sites played in sacred history and the subsequent historical experience of the city’s churches, which have no analogue in the medium of icons.

In sum, Maksim’s letter and Gideon’s adaptation of his argument fundamentally shaped how Church officials in the 1660s interpreted the name of Nikon’s monastery. Far from a trivial quarrel about words, the debate reveals a serious disagreement about whether a building’s holiness derives from historical events or the liturgy. For Maksim, Paisii, and the synod, the name “Jerusalem” points to single historical occurrences, such as God’s bestowal of the name in the Old Testament and Christ’s Resurrection, which are inextricably linked to Jerusalem’s built environment, especially the Holy Sepulcher. This way of viewing the holy city’s churches finds a precedent in early Christian literature, harkening back to Eusebius calling the Holy Sepulcher a “witness to the resurrection,” a phrase that is echoed in the hymn by John of Damascus quoted by Maksim and Gideon.⁷⁸ Alternatively, a church’s sanctity can be described in liturgical terms, which is the practice Nikon invokes when he explains “Jerusalem” by way of the repeatable rituals of baptism or anointing with holy oil and chrism. Byzantine writers had generally not applied this liturgical mode of explanation to the churches in Jerusalem, but for Nikon, it provided a powerful and ingenious way of sidestepping Maksim’s reasoning.⁷⁹ Moreover, it offered a means of casting his building project in familiar, ecumenical terms by claiming that the name of the holy city traveled with the preaching of the Gospels to the four corners of the earth, and thus the distribution of the name “Jerusalem” enacted God’s evangelical will.

CONCLUSION

Maksim’s letter brings into focus the controversial nature of the Jerusalem idea in early modern Russia. Comparing Moscow and its churches to Jerusalem was a fraught endeavor, and supporters of the Jerusalem epithet had to navigate a series of objections put forth by Maksim and others influenced

⁷⁶ Schmidt, *Patriarkh Nikon: Trudy*, 1147–48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 233, 622–23 (commentary); quoting *Synodicon orthodoxiae* lls. 72–75 (Jean Gouillard, ed., “*Le Synodicon de l’Orthodoxie. Édition et commentaire*,” *Travaux et mémoires* 2 [1967]: 49). See, on the passage, Kain, “Conceptualizing New Jerusalem,” 140; A. L. Batalov and T. N. Viatchanina, “Ob ideinom znachenii i interpretatsii Ierusalimskogo obraza v russkoi arkhitekture XVI–XVII vv.,” *Arkhitekturmoe nasledstvo* 36 (1988): 42.

⁷⁸ Eusebius, *V. Const.* 3.33.1, quoted in Robert Ousterhout, “The Sanctity of Place and the Sanctity of Buildings: Jerusalem Versus Constantinople,” in *Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium*, ed. Bonna Wescoat and Robert Ousterhout (Cambridge, England, 2012), 301.

⁷⁹ Ousterhout notes that Byzantine writers defined the sanctity of churches in Constantinople via the liturgy but not those in Jerusalem (*ibid.*).



by his principle.⁸⁰ Church leaders used Maksim's claims about Jerusalem's name to present the Grecophile Nikon with an argument, seemingly couched in Byzantine practice, against adopting the Jerusalem epithet at a time when fears of the apocalypse and the Antichrist were spreading like wildfire through their parishes. Moscow as the "New Jerusalem" never became a hegemonic idea, due in part to the continued relevance of Maksim's letter.

In his conversations with Russian ecclesiastics, Maksim often speaks on behalf of the Byzantine Church, but one should remember that his view of the Jerusalem epithet specifically reflects the worldview of an early modern Greek born into the aftermath of the crusades. Previously, many Byzantine writers had viewed the Jerusalem epithet as an expression of piety, not heresy, but Maksim understood such usage as a misguided application of supersessionist theological strategies. For Russian churchmen, largely unfamiliar with Greek encomiastic rhetoric, Maksim's views were serious and gained momentum with the recasting of his argument by Vasilii and Gideon, who deal explicitly with Church primacy. Channeled through these Ruthenian intermediaries, Maksim's letter functioned as an authoritative text that equated calling Moscow and its churches "Jerusalem" with an aggressive act of dishonor toward the holy city.

Patterns of usage involving the Jerusalem idea show that competing interests within the Russian Church had to negotiate a variety of historical positions for or against the New Jerusalem Monastery's name. Over the last century scholars of Muscovy have shown that epithets played a crucial role in shaping collective identity in early modern Russia, providing frameworks for understanding the tsar's agency, the built environment, and religious confession. The story of Maksim's letter validates this historiographical trend, but it also complicates the scholarly binary of Moscow as New Rome or New Jerusalem. In recent decades historians have challenged the fixation of the Soviet era on the Third Rome ideology (with Moscow as the political and cultural successor of Rome and Constantinople), arguing that parallels with Jerusalem or Israel provided a more fundamental sense of Muscovite identity.⁸¹ Indeed, as scholars have observed, Filofei of Pskov's letter of the 1490s—where the Third Rome epithet originates—is, in fact, ambiguous, because the most accurate manuscripts of the text refer to Moscow the New Jerusalem.⁸² This scholarly realignment tracks a broader historiographical trend that seeks to elucidate how premodern Christian societies filtered contemporary events through Old Testament historical models. However, the case of Maksim cautions against overcorrecting for past mistakes, pointing beyond the Rome/Jerusalem binary to a more complex picture of the collective myth-making strategies that shaped various strata of Muscovite identity. While "New Jerusalem" was certainly one way of conceptualizing the present, it had clearly defined limits as a heuristic. Taken to its logical conclusion, Maksim argues, it could lead to blasphemy, the negation of the unique place of Jerusalem in the Christian narrative of salvation. Whether Gerasim or his contemporaries accepted Maksim's argument remains unclear, but the Greek monk's letter found a sympathetic audience among many of Nikon's supporters and critics.

The 1660s marked the end of widespread engagement with Maksim's letter, which is not to say that Jerusalem ideology itself ceased to play a role in Russian culture. To be sure, the Jerusalem idea found novel applications in the epideictic rhetoric of Peter's court, which operated on Old Testament models while expanding to encompass classical imagery and early Enlightenment discourse.⁸³ But neither the rhetoric of the Petrine era nor the renewed building at the monastery on the Istra itself and the return of its former name under Elizabeth in 1749 caused Church leaders anxiety. Maksim's Jerusalem letter

⁸⁰ The limits of Jerusalem discourse often receive little scholarly treatment. See, for example, Jelena Erdeljan, *Chosen Places: Constructing New Jerusalem in Slavia Orthodoxa* (Leiden, 2017).

⁸¹ See Rowland, "Moscow—The Third Rome or the New Israel?"; and Isaiah Gruber, *Orthodox Russia in Crisis: Church and Nation in the Time of Troubles* (DeKalb, IL, 2012), 23–50.

⁸² Donald Ostrowski, "'Moscow the Third Rome' as Historical Ghost," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York, 2006), 171; and Joel Raba, "Moscow—the Third Rome or the New Jerusalem?," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 55 (1995): 302.

⁸³ See Feofan Prokopovich (footnote 20 above); also Michael S. Flier, "Transporting Jerusalem: The Epiphany Ritual in Early St. Petersburg," in *Rites of Place: Public Commemoration in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Emily Johnson and Julie Buckler (Evanston, 2013), 15–33.



by this time had followed the same path as the rest of his correspondence; the epistle was still read by Old Believers but less and less by Church leaders.⁸⁴

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⁸⁴ On Maksim’s later reception see A. T. Shashkov, “Maksim Grek i ideologicheskaja bor’ba v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVII–nachale XVIII v.,” *TODRL* 33 (1977): 80–87.