

A Discursive Gaze on the Holy Mountain: Early Nineteenth-century British Military Explorers on Mount Athos

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IN THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 2ND, 1836, I Lieutenant Webber Smith, a British military officer, ascended the peak of Mount Athos, which was over 6349 feet high.¹ Despite his great exhaustion during the hike (although he mostly stayed on horseback), he found the view at the peak quite rewarding, as though he was seeing a map of the entire northern Aegean unfolding right in front of him.

[O]n looking to the eastward, the island of Thasos, distant thirty miles, Lemnos, distant forty, and Samothraki, distant sixty miles, appeared almost at my feet. Turning to the westward, I overlooked the projecting peninsulas of Longos and Kassandra, which, compared to the peninsula of Athos, may be considered as low; and from the late survey it appears that the highest point of the former does not exceed 1596 feet, and of the latter not above 1078 feet above the sea. I looked in vain for the shores of Thessaly, and the range of Olympus, which, towering to the height of 9754 feet, would on a clear day be distinctly visible, although at the distance of ninety miles.²

British military explorers who visited Mount Athos in the years 1800–1840 shared much of Lieutenant Smith’s fascination with the landscape. Just as Smith attempted to see beyond the boundaries of the Athonite peninsula, British military explorers in the early nineteenth century believed that Mount Athos was by no means a singular existence. Their scrutiny went beyond the monastic aspect of the Holy Mountain, which had occupied the attention of many past travelers to this land. Instead, they tried to engage open-mindedly with as many things as Athos would offer. Also, like Smith, British military explorers keenly exercised all of their perceptive skills to understand the landscape. They all prioritized observation, investigation, and historical imagination above all else. For example, Smith’s optical illusion pulled the distant islands of Thasos, Lemnos, and Samothraki right beneath his feet, while his careful, investigative analysis offered a detailed and quantitative depiction of the Holy Mountain. Ultimately, their probe into Mount Athos did not regard it as a geographical unit, but as a place framed by a much wider geographical, political, and historical context of the early nineteenth-century.

This paper examines the ways in which early nineteenth-century British military explorers interacted with Mount Athos. Temporally and geographically, this paper focuses on Mount Athos between 1800 and 1840, including its natural, cultural, and historical landscape, and, most importantly, British military explorers as its visitors. However, the larger political and cultural framework complicates the understanding of their experience on Mount Athos. Therefore, through perusing

¹Lieutenant Smith recorded this measurement in his own report, which was surprisingly accurate compared to the modern-day measurement of 6670 feet. See Webber Smith, “On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries; With Notes on the Route from Constantinople to Saloniki, in June, 1836,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 7 (1837): 65–66.

²Smith, 68–69.

their travel narratives as well as reports while unpacking those framing contexts, it aims to elucidate their discursive characteristics on Mount Athos. Particularly, by analyzing the narratives of three British military explorers to Mount Athos, Lieutenant-Colonel William Martin Leake (1777–1860), Lieutenant Webber Smith (1778–1853), and Lieutenant T. A. B. Spratt (1811–1888), this paper argues that their narratives of explorations on Mount Athos contributed to the production of a British military discourse on Mount Athos.

Historiography

Past scholars have examined the experience of early nineteenth-century British military explorers on Mount Athos by focusing on either the geographical landscape of Athos or the larger political context in which those explorations took place. The historical geographer Veronica della Dora argues for the distinctiveness of Mount Athos with respect to its location, natural environment, the existence of classical antiquity and unique monastic culture. She demonstrates how explorations to Mount Athos illuminated the interplay between the European geographical, scientific, and historical imagination and memorialization in the early nineteenth century.³ Malcolm Wagstaff, Trajčo Arsov, and Margaret Deacon place the experience of early nineteenth-century British explorers on Mount Athos within a much broader context. Wagstaff argues that Colonel Leake's visit to Mount Athos in 1806 was primarily motivated by a mission of espionage.⁴ Arsov sees Leake's activities as being significantly framed by a larger British political interest in northern Greece.⁵ Deacon's study of Lieutenant Spratt pinpoints his contribution to the development of British hydrography in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and it also acknowledges the role of military explorers in the development of British hydrographic investigations in the Mediterranean.⁶ Their contextualized analyses bring in a larger historical framework that shaped the experience of British military explorers on Mount Athos.

Pandeleimon Hionidis, Margarita Miliori, and Xanthippi Kotzageorgi trace the discursive specificities of early nineteenth-century British travel narratives on Greece and its people. They see British travelers to Greece as a cultural encounter. Hionidis and Kotzageorgi focus on how Greece in the early nineteenth century embodies cultural stereotypes to British travelers.⁷ Miliori explores the ways of putting "British discourse of the Greeks within the context of a wider British discourse on the national, in its relation to politics and history, and in its relation to the identity of Europe."⁸ René Gothóni, on the other hand, studies early modern European pilgrims to Mount Athos and their different ways of pursuing spirituality.⁹ Significantly, all of the above-mentioned scholars

³Veronica Della Dora, "Mountains and Memory: Embodied Visions of Ancient Peaks in the Nineteenth-Century Aegean," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33, no. 2 (2008): 217–232; Veronica Della Dora, "Geo-Strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity: Surveying Mythical Hydrographies in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1784–1869," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33, no. 3 (2007): 514–41; Veronica Della Dora, *Imagining Mount Athos: Visions of a Holy Place from Homer to World War II* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), chaps. 4–5.

⁴Malcolm Wagstaff, "A British Spy on Mount Athos: The Visit of Colonel Leake, 22 October–3 November 1806," *Friends of Mount Athos Annual Report*, 2005, 41–53.

⁵Trajčo Arsov, *Marbles and Politics: William Martin Leake's Missions in the Ottoman Balkans, 1799–1810* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2010).

⁶Margaret Deacon, *Vice-Admiral T.A.B. Spratt and the Development of Oceanography in the Mediterranean, 1841–1873*, *Maritime Monographs and Reports* 37 (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum, 1978), 1–4.

⁷Pandeleimon Hionidis, "Civilized Observers in a Backward Land: British Travellers in Greece, 1832–1862" (*Cultural Tourism in a Digital Era: First International Conference IACuDiT, Athens, 2014*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 297–312; Xanthippi Kotzageorgi, "British Travellers in the Early 19th-Century on Greece and the Greeks," *Balkan Studies* 33, no. 2 (1992): 209–21.

⁸Margarita Miliori, "The Greek Nation in British Eyes 1821–1864: Aspects of a British Discourse on Nationality, Politics, History and Europe" (St. Hilda's College, Oxford University, 1998), 10.

⁹René Gothóni, *Tales and Truth: Pilgrimage on Mount Athos Past and Present* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1994).

prioritize textual analysis of travel narratives by reading them with and against the grain to show aspects of British perception of Greece and the Greeks.

However, existing scholarship on British military explorers on Mount Athos in the early nineteenth century lacks the perspective of focusing on their experience and interaction with the Athonite landscape and its culture. Della Dora uses the account of those explorers only as a means to analyze the literary construct of Mount Athos in the early nineteenth century. Wagstaff and Arsov downplay the significance of Colonel Leake's subjectivity. They argue that Leake was consumed by his professional identity as a "subordinate" military officer to the British empire, and their studies pay little attention to Leake's specific interaction with Mount Athos. Deacon's work, on the other hand, considers Lieutenant Spratt's exploration to Mount Athos in 1838 only as a preparatory activity that paves way for his later professional career. Furthermore, besides Gothóni who specifically works on pilgrims traveling to Athos, Hionidis, Kotzageorgi, and Miliori seem to either ignore the experience of early nineteenth-century British military explorers, or conflate it with travel experience of other kinds. To sum up, past scholars fail to recognize the distinctiveness of each of the explorers' interaction with Mount Athos. Neither have they analyzed the characteristic ways in which individual explorers made sense of the landscape.

This paper, therefore, focuses on the experience of British military explorers on Mount Athos. By perusing narratives on military explorations in the Holy Mountain, this paper also seeks to place them in the larger political, geographical, and cultural context of early nineteenth-century Mount Athos. First, it offers an overview of a British military discourse on the landscape of Mount Athos that arose in the political, cultural, and intellectual context of the early nineteenth century. Then, it delves into the narratives of Colonel Leake, Lieutenant Smith, and Lieutenant Spratt, and analyzes how each of them interacted with Mount Athos and how each of their narratives contributed to the production of a discourse. Finally, this paper concludes with the ways in which British military explorations on Mount Athos in the early nineteenth century reflected a distinctive way of understanding and articulating knowledge.

A Military Gaze

In the early nineteenth century, the landscape of Greece and the Aegean Sea fascinated British travelers. A large number of them, who came for a classicizing experience, went to the south where the classical past was best preserved with material evidence.¹⁰ Still, some set out to explore the less trodden northern Greece, where one would scarcely find physical existence of classical antiquity. Northern Greece had been characterized in the British narrative as a more barbaric land than the rest of Greece.¹¹ As for the land of Mount Athos, however, its Orthodox monasticism created a much more distinctive cultural environment than elsewhere in Greece where one would encounter the classical past or the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Lieutenant Webber Smith concisely traced important British explorers of the past who traveled to Mount Athos in the early nineteenth century.

The classic land of Greece has formed the subject of so many descriptions and researches, and more especially during the present century, by our own countrymen, Clarke in 1801,

¹⁰David J. Constantine, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Richard Stoneman, *Land of Lost Gods: The Search for Classical Greece* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Helenē Angelomatē-Tsounkarakē, *The Eve of the Greek Revival: British Travellers' Perceptions of Early Nineteenth-Century Greece* (London: Routledge, 1990); Robert Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land: The History and Literature of Travel to Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Kotzageorgi, "British Travellers in the Early 19th-Century on Greece and the Greeks."

¹¹T. R. Joliffe, a British traveler to northern Greece, describes the land in his account of northern Greece as "a semi-barbarous state." See Kotzageorgi, "British Travellers in the Early 19th-Century on Greece and the Greeks," 212.

Colonel Leake in 1805 and 1806, and Dr. Holland in 1812, that little would seem left to be gleaned by future travellers, more particularly since the recent publication of Colonel Leake's valuable travels in northern Greece.¹²

Although Smith referred to Edward Clarke and Henry Holland, both of whom explored Mount Athos, it is apparent that he actively engaged with explorations undertaken by Colonel William Martin Leake, a military officer serving for the Royal Artillery. Lieutenant T. A. B. Spratt also seemed to embrace Leake's legacy when he prefaced his investigation of the isthmus of the Athonite peninsula.

These doubts [upon the existence of the Canal of Xerxes at the Athonite isthmus], however, as well as those of the eminent traveller Pococke, who is one of the sceptics of modern times, have been fully confuted by the testimony of . . . Colonel Leake.¹³

Indeed, Leake's exploration on Mount Athos commenced a series of explorations undertaken by British military explorers to Mount Athos. Past explorers of other identities found themselves unable to mobilize the same sorts of resources and technologies. Neither did they exercise the same kind of attention to Mount Athos. For example, Richard Pococke, a British explorer who visited Mount Athos in the mid-eighteenth century, could not quantitatively characterize the landscape in the same way that British military explorers did.¹⁴ Clarke and Holland, having visited Athos in 1801 and 1812, respectively, found themselves being busy with hunting precious manuscripts and identifying other valuable treasures in the monasteries.¹⁵ By contrast, early nineteenth-century British military explorers formed a unique discursive pattern of characterizing Mount Athos. They cast a military gaze on Mount Athos.

This British military discourse originated in and was shaped by the larger cultural and political environment of the early nineteenth century. The British discourse on Greece, influenced by the idea of Philhellenism, showed that the country symbolized both its classical grandeur of the past and contemporary Ottoman misgovernance.¹⁶ While, Philhellenism, a cultural obsession with the land of Greece, attracted British attention to this land, British political interest in the eastern Mediterranean tied deeply to Greece, exemplified by frequent British-Ottoman interactions. On the one hand, cultural fascination prompted British political ambition in Greece. On the other hand, British government in the early nineteenth century regarded Greece as a place in the east where Britain could gain significant cultural and political influence, due to its confidence that the Ottoman Empire would soon lose control of the Balkan peninsula.¹⁷ In the meantime, Britain had to compete fiercely with France and Russia, both of whom were also fighting for political

¹²Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 61–62. Although Smith seemed to talk generally about British travelers to "the classic land of Greece," both Clarke, Leake, and Holland were notable explorers of northern Greece, especially known to have visited Mount Athos. Here, he seemed to engage with past British travelers to Mount Athos rather than to the entire land of Greece.

¹³T. A. B. Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 17 (1847): 145.

¹⁴Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East, And Some Other Countries*, vol. 3 (London: By W. Bowyer; and sold by J. and P. Knapton, W. Innys, W. Meadows, G. Hawkins, S. Birt, T. Longman, C. Hitch, R. Dodsley, J. Nourse, and J. Rivington, 1743), 144–45.

¹⁵Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, vol. 2 (London: Herman Williams, 1813); Henry Holland, *Travels in the Ionian Isles, Albania, Thessaly, Macedonia, Etc. during the Years 1812 and 1813*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819).

¹⁶Kotzageorgi, "British Travellers in the Early 19th-Century on Greece and the Greeks," 211–17; Hionidis, "Civilized Observers in a Backward Land: British Travellers in Greece, 1832-1862," 301–5.

¹⁷Both Kotzageorgi and Crawley have identified that Britain was interested in gaining political control of Greece. See Kotzageorgi, "British Travellers in the Early 19th-Century on Greece and the Greeks," 217–21; C. W. Crawley, *The Question of Greek Independence: A Study of British Policy in the Near East, 1821-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 1–2.

hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, there was a high demand for British military personnel to commute between Asia Minor, Greece, and Britain for the purpose of diplomacy.¹⁸ Geographically, northern Greece and the northern Aegean Sea offered an important connection between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, both by land and by sea.¹⁹ Surveying the surrounding landscape, hydrography, and demographic components of the region could not only benefit military travelers, but also served for a larger British political ambition in the region. Prompted by such political environment, narratives written by British military explorers formulated a discourse on those connective spaces.

The establishment of the Royal Geographical Society of London (RGS for short) in 1830 also influenced the production of such discourse. Upon its foundation, military officers made up a significant portion of the composition of the Fellowship for the RGS. Among 460 fellows, 87 of them were officers of either British Navy or Army.²⁰ Leake was one of the founding members of the RGS, and later, Smith and Spratt, having become fellows of the RGS, successively published their reports of Mount Athos on the journal affiliated with the RGS, *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*.²¹ In the case of military explorers to Mount Athos, the RGS regarded their efforts as particularly laudable, for they had “done much towards removing our ignorance of this highly interesting country.”²²

Meanwhile, the RGS did not simply offer a platform for the publication of geographical surveys. Its foundation showed the articulation of a specific field of study and its methodology, that is, geography, cartography, and survey.²³ The RGS proposed an interdisciplinary approach to understand geographical spaces.²⁴ Moreover, RGS’s patronage relationship with the British royalties as well as its affiliation with British politics enhanced the production of an official discourse on geographical explorations, for such survey activities were to the interest of British imperial agenda.²⁵

[A]dvantages (of the Royal Geographical Society of London) are of the first importance to mankind in general, and paramount to the welfare of a maritime nation like Great Britain, with its numerous and extensive foreign possessions.²⁶

Thus, with respect to the “numerous and extensive foreign possessions” of Britain, the RGS particularly took care in recording “facts” regarding both “physical and geological characters” and

¹⁸Richard Clogg, ed., *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770-1821: A Collection of Documents* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976).

¹⁹With respect to land travel, the Via Egnatia, a road connecting Ioannina by the Adriatic coast of Greece to Istanbul, acted as a central communicative network in northern Greece. In the early nineteenth century before the Greek Independence, Ali Pasha, the Turkish governor of Ioannina, had been in close contact with both Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, passing by the Athonite peninsula, Via Egnatia was much traversed by both British and Turkish people. With respect to sea travel, since one would only approach Istanbul from the west through northern Aegean Sea, the area around the three Halkidiki peninsulas along with the island of Lemnos, Thasos, and Samothraki was crucial for both British and Turkish travelers by sea. See Della Dora, “Geo-Strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity.”

²⁰For a table of Composition of the RGS Fellowship in 1830, see D. R. Stoddart, “The RGS and the ‘New Geography’: Changing Aims and Changing Roles in Nineteenth Century Science,” *The Geographical Journal* 146, no. 2 (1980): 191.

²¹Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, “Members of the Royal Geographical Society,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 1 (1831): xvii.

²²Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, “A Sketch of the Progress of Geography; And of the Labours of the Royal Geographical Society, during the Year 1836-7,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 7 (1837): 178.

²³Stoddart, “The RGS and the ‘New Geography,’” 190.

²⁴John Barrow, “Prospectus of the Royal Geographical Society,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 1 (1831): x–xi.

²⁵Duncan Cumming, “Royalty and the Royal Geographical Society,” *The Geographical Journal* 143, no. 2 (July 1977): 171–78.

²⁶Barrow, “Prospectus,” vii.

“distinctions of the human race or of language.”²⁷ These claims, backed by both intellectual and political environment of early nineteenth-century Britain, significantly contributed to the birth of a military discourse on Mount Athos, the focuses of which largely coincided with what the RGS initially proposed.

However, British military discourse on Mount Athos only made up a small component of British narratives of geographical exploration in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, as it attempted to etymologically define geography from ancient Greek as “the description and study of the earth,” the RGS targeted its scope of geographical investigation to the entirety of the world.²⁸ The *Journal*, as an important means to disseminate the studies and results of geographical investigations, also dedicated itself to the publication of survey reports. Quite contemporary to explorations to Mount Athos, the RGS also sponsored much grander undertakings such as Back’s Arctic exploration in 1832, Biscoe’s Antarctic exploration in 1833, Alexander’s South African exploration between 1836 and 1838, and Grey’s Australian exploration in 1837.²⁹ This is by no means to decrease the significance of explorations to Mount Athos, but a common mistake of past scholarship on British narratives of geographical explorations is to group all geographical exploration under British imperial ambitions around the world. None of the RGS sponsored explorations should be a footnote to British imperialism. Instead, they all uniquely showcased, in the word of Frédéric Regard, “the history of the construction of a British identity ‘in context,’ which is to say as an intersubjective linguistic event occurring on a specific terrain.”³⁰ In other words, narratives of geographical exploration should only be read contextually, with respect to political, social, cultural, and intellectual specificities of regions in particular.

Then why Mount Athos? What elements of this peninsula potentially attracted the attention of British military travelers? First of all, Mount Athos, as an integral part of northern Greece, offered some of the most wonderful natural landscapes that attracted military explorers. Particularly, the peak of Mount Athos draws much of their attention. In the passage cited at the beginning of this paper, Smith exercised his cartographical imagination of the entire northern Greece after ascending the Athonite peak. Mountain peaks and heights offered a panoramic view, which would greatly promote understandings of a much larger geography.³¹ Also, the hydrography around Mount Athos had been characterized in literature as full of unforeseen possibilities of fear and danger since the time of Herodotus.³² Conducting surveys would compensate for the lack of British geographical knowledge of the region.

The idea that Mount Athos occupied a geopolitical location on pathway between the east and west also appealed to British military travelers. Mount Athos was not only located strategically between the east and west, but it connoted literary and cultural significance between the two worlds as well. In the account of Herodotus, which became one of the most authoritative ancient texts for British military explorers on Mount Athos to cite and refer to, Xerxes the king of Persia cut through

²⁷Barrow, “Prospectus,” vii, xi.

²⁸Ian Cameron, Donald Gordon, and James Vance Marshall, *To the Farthest Ends of the Earth: 150 Years of World Exploration by the Royal Geographical Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 13.

²⁹Cameron, Gordon, and Marshall, 275.

³⁰Frédéric Regard, ed., *British Narratives of Exploration: Case Studies of the Self and Other*, Empires in Perspective 9 (London: Routledge, 2016), 6.

³¹On how mountain peaks excited nineteenth-century geographical surveyors, see Della Dora, “Mountains and Memory,” 226–29. Much of della Dora’s analyses can be applied to the case of Mount Athos. Besides the fact that the Athonite peak provided one of the best views of the entire northern Greece, there was also a sense of conquering, taming, and mastering a landscape as wild as that of Athos through ascension and surveying.

³²Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. vi.44, 96; Della Dora encapsulates how Mount Athos existed as a literary topos after classical authors like Herodotus and Vitruvius characterize the landscape as wild, dangerous, and in need of taming. See Della Dora, *Imagining Mount Athos*, 29–33.

the isthmus of Mount Athos and built a canal on his way to invading Greece in the late 480s BCE.³³ In the text, Mount Athos existed in the connective space, between the east and west, i.e. Persia and Greece, an idea further enhanced by the construction of the canal.³⁴ When it came to the early nineteenth century, as Britain found itself closely engaged with the Greek independence, the Greek Orthodox Church, according to the British discourse on the independence, best preserved the “Greek identity” during the reign of the Ottoman Empire.³⁵ As the discourse on independence claimed to restore Greek-ness to the land of Greece, Britain valued Orthodox monastic institutions, exemplified by the monastic region of Mount Athos. Therefore, for early nineteenth-century British military explorers, Mount Athos represented a literary and cultural connective space between Britain and the Ottoman Empire.

In light of both political, intellectual, and cultural aspects of Mount Athos and the context of the early nineteenth century, the military discourse on Mount Athos primarily unfolded around three aspects: quantifying and systematically describing nature and geography, investigating monastic organizations and demography, and surveying features of the classical antiquity. British military explorers often applied means of quantitative reasoning in order to systematically characterize the natural environment of Mount Athos. Those include numerical data, maps, charts, or explanatory descriptions that incorporate the above-mentioned quantitative approaches. They used similar methods for investigating monastic communities, quantifying demographics as well as monastic political structure. Explorers also never failed to note the races and ethnicities of monks and administrative personnel on Mount Athos. Lastly, their philhellene obsession with physical remains from the classical antiquity drove their attention to surveying notable landscapes that were mentioned in ancient texts. As archaeologists of sorts, they interacted with Mount Athos with a combination of observation, field survey, and, most importantly, historical imagination with respect to textual evidence. The only thing, however, that British military explorers failed to engage with is Athonite monasticism itself: its monastic rules, daily routine and duties of monks, and its spirituality.³⁶ In short, the military discourse diverged from the traditional Athonite travel narratives which centralized the pilgrimage experience, but focused on the natural, organizational, and historical aspects of Mount Athos.

Now, it is important to turn to contextualizing the British military narratives on Mount Athos. This paper primarily focuses on three texts, chapter XXIV of the third volume of Colonel Leake’s *Travels in Northern Greece* (1835), Lieutenant Smith’s “On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries; With Notes on the Route from Constantinople to Saloniki, in June, 1836” (1837), and Lieutenant Spratt’s “Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos” (1847).³⁷ The reports of Smith and Spratt fall into the general framework laid out by the RGS and the *Journal*. Leake’s *Travels*, written much earlier and published as a personal travel account, differs from the two reports in genre and, in many ways, offers Smith and Spratt much inspiration.³⁸ A scrutiny of the three texts illuminates that,

³³Herodotus, *The History*, chap. vii.22-24; For how British military explorers regarded Herodotus as an authoritative text, see William Martin Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, vol. 3 (London: J. Rodwell, 1835), 143 ff.; Smith, “On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries,” 73; Spratt, “Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos,” 145–48.

³⁴Della Dora, “Geo-Strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity,” 528–33; On how straits and isthmoi worked as strategic connective spaces, see Della Dora, 518–20.

³⁵A representative of the British discourse on Greek independence, Phillips addresses the ways in which Orthodoxy preserved the Greek national identity in his introductory remarks to his volume on Greek independence. See W. Alison Phillips, *The War of Greek Independence, 1821-1833* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1897), 1–9.

³⁶Gothóni traces the literary tradition of early modern European pilgrimage narratives to Mount Athos. See Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*.

³⁷Leake visited Mount Athos in the fall of 1806, Smith in the summer of 1836, and Spratt in the late summer of 1838.

³⁸Wagstaff notes that Leake’s published account was a much amplified version of the materials Leake wrote down on his manuscript journal that he had brought with him during his visit to Mount Athos. See Wagstaff, “A British Spy on Mount Athos,” 43.

on the one hand, narratives of Leake, Smith, and Spratt help produce a military discourse. On the other hand, later surveyors respond to earlier ones with regards to their observations, analyses, and conclusions about Mount Athos. In other words, not only do military narratives on Mount Athos formulated a discursive pattern, but interactions between them also constituted the internal dynamism of the discourse.

Lieutenant-Colonel William Martin Leake

When the sun was about to set on October 22nd 1806, Colonel Leake, having spent almost two months sailing around mainland Greece, landed on Mount Athos right beneath the steep cliffs on which Skete of Aghia Anna suspended.³⁹ Leake did not conceal his excitement when he approached the Holy Mountain. From a distance, he seemed to have already engaged with the land.

We now stand over to Mount Athos, which appears very near, though still 40 miles distant; the wind blowing down the gulf of Saloniki will but just allow us to lay our course, and it is not until sunset we are abreast of Cape St. George, anciently called Nymphaeum, from whence Mount Athos rises abruptly to the very summit.⁴⁰

This passage encapsulates much of Leake's fascination toward Mount Athos. He perceived Athos with both observation, quantification, and imagination, geographically as well as historically. Standing on board of a *sakoleva* (a sailing vessel) and imagining seeing the Athonite peninsula from 40 miles away, Leake was also able to observe and conjecture the wind and current coming from Saloniki, which must have been another 40 miles to his west. Meanwhile, he frequently referred to places by their classical toponyms.⁴¹ Throughout his narrative of Mount Athos, Leake's active engagement with the landscape with a plurality of perceptive skills marked his unique military gaze, one of the first to be cast on the Holy Mountain.

The purpose of Leake's exploration has always been debated, but it is all too easy to argue with Wagstaff and call Leake a British spy on Mount Athos.⁴² Wagstaff correctly points out that Leake's travel was framed by a British military context.⁴³ Arsov also locates Leake at the very juncture where British-Ottoman diplomatic relationship was reflected by his travels and activities in northern Greece.⁴⁴ More importantly, however, having been militarily and politically framed, Leake's travel on Mount Athos yielded a fascinating account that subtly showed how Mount Athos was constructed by Leake with respect to his individual, contextualized interactions with the landscape. In other

³⁹According to Leake, exploring Mount Athos was the purpose of his third journey in northern Greece, to which he dedicated this third volume of his narrative. See Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:1.

⁴⁰Leake, 3:114.

⁴¹Wagstaff also contextualizes Leake's account of how he arrived to Mount Athos. See Wagstaff, "A British Spy on Mount Athos," 42–43. A note on Leake's geographical imagination: despite the great height of the peak of Mount Athos, 40 miles on the Aegean Sea is still a great distance for anyone to clearly perceive of a landscape. Also, the ways in which Leake concluded that the wind which drove the current must come from the Gulf of Saloniki (now named the Thermaic Gulf, at the northern-most point of which the city of Thessaloniki locates) must be a conjecture. That said, Leake's conclusion would rely on intertextuality between his geographical knowledge of the northern Aegean and the existing charts and theories of hydrographies in the Mediterranean. Having received education in classics in school, Leake's antiquarian pursuit was framed by his background and a broader cultural norm in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Britain. For Leake's youth and his early career as a military officer, see John Howard Marsden, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Lieutenant-Colonel William Martin Leake* (London: Printed by Whittingham and Wilkins for private circulation only, 1864).

⁴²Wagstaff, "A British Spy on Mount Athos."

⁴³Wagstaff offers an important piece of archival text that frames Leake's travels in northern Greece. Under the instruction of Lord Harrowby, the Foreign Secretary of the time, Leake was to make himself acquainted with the landscape and important geographical features that might benefit the British. Mount Athos, with its mountainous peninsula and the towering peak, with its geopolitical location in the northern Aegean Sea, seemed to fall under Harrowby's instructions as well as Leake's interest. Quoted in Wagstaff, 49–50.

⁴⁴Arsov, *Marbles and Politics*, 49–65.

words, while one may argue that Leake's activities were militarily and politically contextualized, the production of Leake's account of his own activities represents a meta-self-reflective moment. On the one hand, such meta-self-reflection of his own activities showcases his own agency. On the other hand, Leake's account contributed to the birth of a military discourse, in that it pointed to potential ways in which subsequent military travelers could engage with and reflect on their experience on Mount Athos.

Leake's narrative of his travels in Mount Athos primarily opened up three potential aspects of discourse: on natural and geographical environment, on monastic organization, and on classical imagination of Mount Athos based on archaeological remains. Leake's fascination toward the natural environment of Mount Athos was mostly driven by a scientific quest for facts – what dwells and grows on the Holy Mountain? The landscape of Mount Athos was not simply a static presentation of nature. Instead, Leake saw it as offering the possibility of human interaction. His obsession in recognizing every species that grew on the peninsula was epitomized by the most commonplace example of timber on Mount Athos. While he astonished at the fineness of timber sources, he also lamented when he saw nature left unused due to the lack of care or human correspondence to it.⁴⁵ Leake also recorded how monastic agriculture, industries, and economy development based on the availability of natural resources. Near the Monastery of Iviron, located down the east slope to the southeast of Karyes, which was beautifully surrounded by vineyards, chestnut trees, and hazelnut trees, Leake noted that the ship-building business adapted itself precisely in order to fit the natural environment.⁴⁶ In the same way, strategic locations on Mount Athos interested him. He mentioned that the anchorage near Xeropotami seemed to be the best along the western coast, and he later commended the location of Vatopedi.⁴⁷ Factual knowledge about the natural environment of Mount Athos did not limit to how nature was presented with its resources and ecosystem. Instead, the landscape invited its monks and explorers to interact with it. For Leake, his way of interaction was exactly that of observation and inquiry, and he carefully delineated the results for both in great detail as he was producing this account.

A remarkable disappointment came to Leake as he was informed that he was not able to ascend the peak of Mount Athos. As a significant natural landmark, the Athonite peak would never fail to attract the explorer. Readers would find it easy to understand his disappointment, because Leake considered the experience of ascending to the height as a valuable opportunity to observe and measure the entire area. As the most notable occasion when Leake recorded that he failed to interact with the landscape, this passage illuminates what he would imagine himself doing if he were to ascend the peak.

In the afternoon I return on foot to Iviron, disappointed to find that the season for ascending the 'Athona [i.e. the peak of Mount Athos] is considered to be past. But when the autumnal tempests have begun in this the stormiest quarter of a sea in all parts fickle and subject to gales, weeks may pass away before such a day occurs as would secure a *perfect view* of distant objects from the summit. The monks are in the habit of repeating that Constantinople may be seen from thence, but this is undoubtedly a vulgar error; for though very high land might in a peculiarly favourable state of the atmosphere be visible at the distance of Constantinople, so low a situation as that of the capital cannot possibly be above the horizon. But undoubtedly with a clear sky the angular intervals might be *measured* from thence between many of the most remarkable points of Asia, the islands, and Greece.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:126.

⁴⁶Leake, 3:130; For Leake's description of the area around Karyes, see Leake, 3:122.

⁴⁷Leake, 3:116, 131.

⁴⁸Leake, 3:127–28. Italic emphasis added by the author of this paper.

Leake highlighted two things: he would gain “a perfect view” of the surrounding landscape of Mount Athos, and he would be able to take measurements of the “angular intervals” between significant landmarks in the entire northern Aegean. In other words, so much as this passage shows Leake’s disappointment, it also shows what Leake would imagine as his ideal manner to engage with a landscape, namely observation and quantitative analysis. The high Athonite peak offered Leake a perfect spot for both activities, as it would give Leake the ability to see beyond what he could see elsewhere. Moreover, with such vision, Leake would exercise his quantitative analytical skill, which would collaborate with his observation to construct a better understanding of the natural landscape. Despite his failure of ascension and dismay, Leake subtly reflected his ideal ways of interacting with Mount Athos – observation and quantification.

Another realm of Leake’s fascination concerns monastic organization of Mount Athos. Monastic organization differs essentially from Athonite monasticism as a pursuit of Orthodox spirituality, which occupied the attention of past pilgrim travelers.⁴⁹ Leake was interested in the human politics in the Holy Mountain. His characteristic fascination is reflected by his narrative in the attention to the ethnicity and cultural background of Athonite monks and the ways in which Mount Athos functioned as a community under a particular power dynamic. Both aspects join in Leake’s discussion of the city of Karyes, the monastic capital of Mount Athos.

At Karyes resides the Turkish governor of the Holy Mountain: a bostanji of Constantinople, who is supported, together with a guard of Albanians, at the expense of the holy community . . . and there is a sort of bazar . . . On Saturdays there is an ἀγορὰ , or market . . . Karyes is the residence also of the Archons or Epistatae. These are Caloyers deputed from the twenty monasteries to superintend the civil affairs of the mountain . . . The Epistatae are four in number, and are changed every year . . . Ecclesiastically the Oros [i.e. Mount Athos] depends immediately on the patriarch of Constantinople. The archons are competent to punish small offences, and to determine such differences between the monasteries as are not sufficiently important to be decided at Constantinople, where, however, the monks are too apt to carry their causes and to spend money in litigation for the benefit only of the Turks.⁵⁰

Leake almost dedicated three pages of his narrative to Karyes with great care. But the passage above, having already left off a significant number of details, captures Leake’s focus on the monastic organization of Mount Athos. First of all, he distinguished the Turkish governor and his Albanian guards from Greek monastic leaders, i.e. the Epistatae and archons. Further, he recorded the bazar as well as the Saturday ἀγορὰ at Karyes, particularly noting their differences. Leake’s contemporary readers would understand that while bazar was a Turkish thing, an ἀγορὰ would be, on the contrary, part of the Greek (or more of an ancient Greek) culture.⁵¹ Once again, he highlighted such distinction by explaining why the archons, who were Greek by their ethnicity, would rarely convey matters to the patriarch at Constantinople, the monks among whom were predominantly Turkish. Significantly, those instances reflected a larger concern of Leake. He categorized people whom he encountered by ethnicity in the way he understood it, and he grouped them under certain cultural backgrounds.

Secondly, as Leake was exploring the power structure of Mount Athos, he regarded the Holy Mountain as a political community, like any other polity that functions under a particular social and

⁴⁹For early modern European pilgrim travelers to Mount Athos, see Gothóni, *Tales and Truth*.

⁵⁰Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:122–23.

⁵¹Leake intensified the distinction between the two cultures by his use of the ancient Greek vocabulary for marketplace, ἀγορὰ . This might further suggest that what Leake considered as Greek was mostly framed by his understanding of ancient Greece, since by the time of his visit in 1806, Greece was still generally ruled by the Ottoman Empire.

political structure. The ways in which Leake described the rights and obligations of the Epistatae and archons reflected Leake's effort to rationalize Mount Athos, namely that this "holy community" must run under a top-down, systematic power structure. What's more, the superior of the Athonite community was the Turkish patriarch of Constantinople. Here, both aspects of Leake's understanding of the Athonite monastic organization come together. According to Leake, although Mount Athos represented itself as a culturally mingled community, it was politically subjected to Turkish rule.

Another significant component to Leake's interest in Mount Athos was his historical quest of the classical past. Being able to see the classical past from Mount Athos where Orthodox monasticism had dominated for almost a millennium, Leake only highlighted his philhellene spirit by exercising his classical vision in the Holy Mountain. Leake's Philhellenism was not uncommon among early nineteenth-century British travelers to Greece. European travelers to Greece from the sixteenth century onward had always possessed an antiquarian spirit of resurrecting the vanished glory of classical Greece.⁵² Significantly, Leake brought Philhellenism to the attention of subsequent British military explorers to Mount Athos.

As Leake referred to the classical toponym of Cape St. George in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, he also made use of a specific set of vocabularies while he exercised his classicizing vision of Mount Athos. Epitomes of such vocabularies are "ancient" and "Acte." As Leake investigated some archaeological remains near the Monastery of Khilandari, he asserted that there once stood "one of the *ancient* cities of *Acte*."⁵³

[O]n the hill which separates the vale of Simenu from that of Khilandari is a tower standing on the edge of the cliff above the sea: some part of its wall is said to be of Hellenic masonry . . . It is also reported that there were formerly many Hellenic foundations at the Arsana of Khilandari, which is a mile below that monastery, and in particular the remains of a mole, part of which is now left . . . [T]here seems little doubt that here stood one of the ancient cities of *Acte*.⁵⁴

For Leake, "Acte" is simply a classical toponym of the Athonite peninsula.⁵⁵ However, here, as well as all occurrences of this word in Leake's account of Mount Athos, "ancient" refers to "of or belonging to classical Greece." The word denotes both temporal, geographical, and cultural limitations. First of all, things "ancient" should date back to the classical antiquity, roughly before the fourth century CE.⁵⁶ Secondly, by calling features on Mount Athos as "ancient," Leake assumed that the Athonite peninsula was inherently a part of the classical Greco-Roman civilizations. Thirdly, things "ancient" suggest that the initial purpose for which they ought to come into being was framed by a classical context, and not by an Orthodox context. For Leake, an appropriate watershed moment in history for determining if something is culturally ancient was Constantine the Great (272 – 337 CE).⁵⁷ Generally, Leake's use of "ancient" and "Acte" reflects how he ordered the past. There seems to

⁵²Constantine, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal*; Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land*.

⁵³Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:141. Italic emphasis of "ancient" added by the author of this paper; "Acte" italicized as a classical toponym by Leake.

⁵⁴Leake, 3:141.

⁵⁵... and in other parts of the 'Aion Oros, or holy mountain, which name is not confined to Mount Athos, but comprehends the entire peninsula, *anciently* called *Acte*." See Leake, 3:115. Both italic emphases added by the author of this paper.

⁵⁶Leake also considered Roman remains as "ancient." See Leake, 3:117 when Leake confirmed the existence of an "ancient" city based on some Roman tiles that he found on the spot.

⁵⁷"Vatopedhi is larger than any of the monasteries except Lavra, and is the most *ancient* of all, its first foundation having been by Constantine the Great." See Leake, 3:131. Italic emphasis added by the author of this paper. In describing a monastery as being ancient, Leake was as though marking a moment where the classical (and pagan) tradition joined with the Christian (and subsequently Orthodox) tradition during the reign of Constantine, the first Christian ruler of the classical civilizations.

be little doubt that he valued classical antiquity over Orthodox monasticism. Such persistence influenced subsequent military explorers to Mount Athos to engage with the classicizing vision of Leake.

Just as the Athonite peak attracted Leake to geographically understand Mount Athos and Karyes attracted him to inquire monastic politics, the Canal of Xerxes, located near the isthmus of Mount Athos, fascinated Leake due to its classical reminiscence. While Leake's investigation of the Canal of Xerxes only followed a tradition of explorations of this feature, he innovatively exercised his classical and historical vision while exploring this land.

I proceed from Khilandari to the *Isthmus of Acte* ... The modern name of this neck of land is Provlaka, evidently the Romaic form of the word προαύλαξ, having reference to the canal *in front* of the Peninsula of Athos, which crossed the isthmus and was excavated by Xerxes. The breadth of the isthmus, or length of the canal, appears to me not quite so much as the Roman mile and a half which Pliny assigns to it. It is a hollow between natural banks, which are well described by Herodotus as κολωνοὶ οὐ μεγάλοι, the highest points of them being scarcely 100 feet above the sea. The lowest part of the hollow is only a few feet higher than that level.⁵⁸

As Leake's classically oriented interest unfolds around his use of "ancient" and "Acte," here he displayed himself as an all-rounded classicist who mastered a synthesis of archaeological, historical, and philological method in his investigation of the area around the isthmus. Besides his classicizing vision, he also took note on the natural and geographical aspects of the feature. Later, as he tried to rationalize Xerxes' decision to cut a canal at the isthmus of Mount Athos, Leake combined observation and quantitative analysis with his military-oriented geo-political awareness of geographical features.⁵⁹ The significance of Leake's investigation of the canal was precisely reflected by his attempt to exercise all of his professional training as both a classicist, geographer, and a military officer.

As one may see from Leake's investigation of natural environment, monastic organizations, and classical features on Mount Athos, Leake's military gaze on the Holy Mountain was by no means singular. Instead, he engaged with the landscape dynamically, often making use of a combination of various perceptive skills to understand Mount Athos and construct its significance. As one of the first British military explorers to set foot on this land, Leake opened up an unlimited range of possibilities for future exploration. On the one hand, what Leake was able to see offered a foundation of understanding, while on the other hand, what Leake had dreamt to see, more importantly, encouraged subsequent military explorers to enrich the discourse developed by Leake. As Lieutenant Smith and Lieutenant Spratt, who came later to the military discourse, were continuously in conversation with Leake's account, Leake, as a forerunner, foundationally furnished the British military discourse on Mount Athos.

Lieutenant Webber Smith

On May 27th, 1836, Lieutenant Smith of the 48th Regiment in the Royal Army arrived at Mount Athos from Istanbul. It had been almost two decades since Leake's travels on Mount Athos, but his account was not published until 1835 and it immediately excited the interest among British military explorers, exemplified by Smith.⁶⁰ Smith's exploration on Mount Athos was also prefaced by the

⁵⁸Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:143. Italic toponym and emphasis added by Leake.

⁵⁹"Xerxes, therefore, was perfectly justified in cutting this canal, as well from the security which it afforded to his fleet, as from the facility of the work, and the advantages of the ground, which seems made expressly to tempt such an undertaking." See Leake, 3:145-46.

⁶⁰"The classic land of Greece has formed the subject of so many descriptions and researches, and more especially during the present century, by our own countrymen, Clarke in 1801, Colonel Leake in 1805 and 1806, and Dr. Holland

establishment of the RGS and the development of British cartography as well as hydrographic survey in the 1830s.⁶¹ As the practice of military exploration became increasingly articulated, Smith's visit to Mount Athos in 1836 was particularly significant. Through quantifying and systematizing Mount Athos, Smith intended to weave together a landscape that seemed more approachable for future explorers. In other words, Smith provided an important intermediate step in the development of a military discourse on Mount Athos.

Compared with Colonel Leake's descriptive analysis of Mount Athos, Lieutenant Smith's approach was much more quantitatively oriented. In his report named "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," a significant portion was devoted to the description of natural and monastic environment of Athos, substantiated by well-quantified and documented analyses. Smith carried out what Colonel Leake had dreamt of, namely to take measurements of the geography and to precisely understand the landscape.⁶² Besides much quantitative observation and inquiries, Smith also exceeded Leake by his active engagement with systematizing Mount Athos. For it was the general understanding of "the physical geography of the country," especially Mount Athos, that Smith valued the most.⁶³

Smith's exploration on Mount Athos was fundamentally motivated by a desire for geographical knowledge. Building his project on top of Leake's recently published travel narratives in northern Greece and especially on Mount Athos, Smith claimed that the landscape deserved much more scrutiny on a geographical level than on its reminiscence of the classical past.⁶⁴ His travels from Istanbul to Thessaloniki in the summer of 1836 were indeed prompted by such quest of geographical knowledge.

[D]uring the past summer, I travelled from Stambul to Saloniki, ascended Mount Athos, and visited its monasteries, and have, since my return, through the liberality of the hydrographer to the Admiralty, been permitted to correct my own hasty observations by the valuable survey of those coasts just completed, I trust I may venture to offer my notes as a slight contribution towards the improvement of our knowledge of the geography of this beautiful, but misgoverned country.⁶⁵

Smith seemed to highlight three aspects from his journey through northern Greece that he found particularly fascinating: the peak of Mount Athos, Athonite monasteries, and, as one may infer from his self-reference as a hydrographer to the Admiralty, hydrography. However, those aspects could be best understood contextually with respect to other hidden aspects of Smith's attention. This key passage, which serves as the introductory remarks to his report on his exploration on Mount Athos, denotes a number of Smith's assumptions that shed light on how he perceived his identity as a military explorer and how he legitimized the significance of his exploration.

Firstly, like Leake, human politics on Mount Athos fascinated Smith. He frequently took note on the number of Caloyers (elderly, more respected monks in Orthodox monasteries) and other monks.⁶⁶ He also paid attention to how monastic organization works on Mount Athos, especially intrigued by the city of Karyes where the monastic government of the Holy Mountain was located.⁶⁷

in 1812, that little would seem left to be gleaned by future travellers, more particularly since the recent publication of Colonel Leake's valuable travels in northern Greece." See Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 61–62.

⁶¹In addition to previous discussions, also see G. S. Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart: British Naval Hydrography in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: The Pentland Press, 1995), 292–93.

⁶²For discussions on Leake's ideal engagement with Mount Athos, please consult page 16 and 17 of this paper.

⁶³Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 62.

⁶⁴Smith might be implying that Leake's travels and investigations had been heavily classical. However, Smith did not entirely renounce any interaction with the classical past of Mount Athos, but he engaged with it in a much more moderate manner than Leake.

⁶⁵Smith, 62.

⁶⁶Smith, 66–67.

⁶⁷Smith, 67.

Smith's contribution to the military discourse on Mount Athos was by no means limited to geographical aspects. Instead, taking up much of Leake's legacy, Smith also engaged with Athonite monasteries.

Secondly, Smith's acute awareness of how nature related to different types of human governance points to a hidden spectrum in his report. Smith's attention to monks' ethnicity and forms of polity in Mount Athos reflected the political nature of this British military discourse on the landscape. In Smith's introduction, he noted that the eastern part of northern Greece, i.e. Macedonia and Thrace, was subject to "Moslem rule," and called the land of northern Greece as a "beautiful, but misgoverned country."⁶⁸ Those seemingly off-hand comments on the political dynamics of the region illuminated the ways in which Smith's report on Mount Athos served for a larger political and cultural purpose. They corresponded to what the RGS proposed for its sponsored explorations in the *Prospectus*: "to pay attention to human geography as well as distinctions of race and languages."⁶⁹ As a result, Smith was interested the ethnicities of Athonite monks and especially how many of them were Greek versus people of other nationalities, such as Turkish, Bulgarian, or Russian.⁷⁰ Smith's instinct to note human politics behind natural landscape further cast light on the political nature of British military discourse on Mount Athos.

Furthermore, Smith's self-referential claim as a hydrographer suggests that he, through the "liberality" of being a British military explorer, was able to mobilize resources exclusive to his position. Either to correct or substantiate his "hasty observations" during his travels, Smith incorporated results from past geographical surveys of the area, most of which must have been collected from explorations supported by the British military or the RGS.⁷¹ Thus, Smith's report engaged with the already existing bodies of knowledge of the region. The interdependent relationship between Smith and organizations that supported military explorations marked a significant way of building and understanding knowledge in the early nineteenth century.

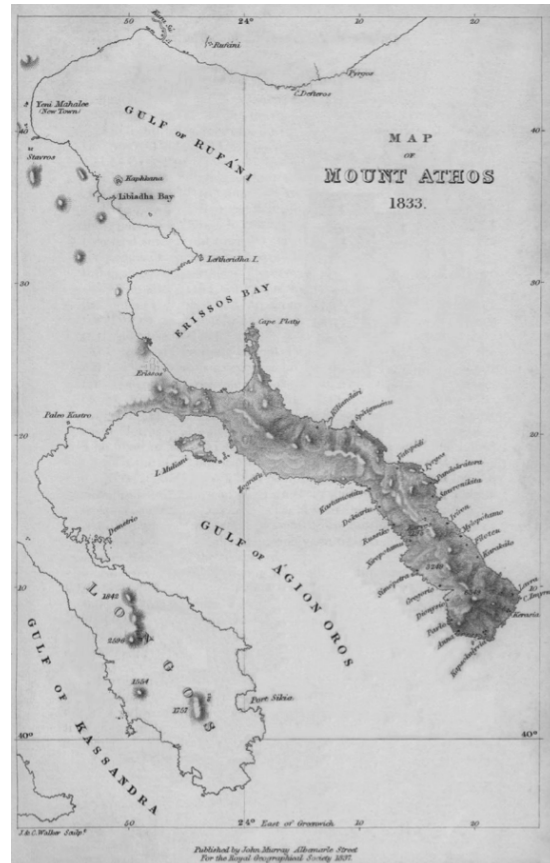


Figure 1: Map of Mount Athos, drafted by J. &C. Walker and incorporated into Smith's report. Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," map between pages 72 and 73.

⁶⁸Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 62.

⁶⁹Barrow, "Prospectus," xi.

⁷⁰For instances where Smith took note on the ethnicity of Athonite communities, see Smith, 66–67, 70, 72–73.

⁷¹Smith, 69, 74; For RGS supported geographical surveys in Greece around the time contemporary to Smith's exploration on Mount Athos, see Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, "A Sketch of the Progress of Geography; And of the Labours of the Royal Geographical Society, during the Year 1836-7," 177–78.

The most significant way of Smith's understanding of Mount Athos concerns quantitative analysis. His quantitative approach unfolded in a number of ways. One finds numerical data as the most commonplace. Data helps quantify the number of distance, of height, of taxation and monastic tribute, and of different demographic components that are useful to the understanding of Mount Athos. While Smith must have consulted past results, he also conversed with *Igumenoï* (monastic leaders in Athonite monasteries) and conducted inquiries on his own, through which Smith also corrected fallacies reported by past surveyors and produced the latest description of the landscape.⁷² Another quantitative feature that stands out in Smith's report is a map drafter by J. Walker and C. Walker in a 1833 survey around those waters. Cartography, from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, had become an increasingly popular way for Europeans to engage with imagining both the geographical and historical world. For British military explorers to Mount Athos, maps provided a holistic visual representation of quantitative elements of the landscape.⁷³ The inclusion of charts and tables also helped Smith order quantitative results in a synoptic way for his readers. In short, Smith's quantitative approach exemplified his military gaze on Mount Athos.

Fundamentally, the ways in which Smith works with quantitative results produced an *account*, a key foundation from which the military discourse arose. In his report, Smith often referred to Captain Richard Copeland of the Royal Navy and his survey around the Athonite peninsula in 1831. At the end of his report, Smith even attached a chart produced by Copeland showing elevations of significant mountain peaks in the entire northern Greece. However, Copeland was not known to Smith by any treatise that he had written on his explorations in the region. Rather, it was the data, the measurements, and the method of Copeland's survey that Smith valued.⁷⁴ Similarly, other past survey results existed not in the form of narratives, but in singular elements, be they numerical data, maps, or charts.⁷⁵ Therefore, Smith was not simply packing past materials into his report, but organized them in a systematic way so that his report could offer an account, the most up-to-date and comprehensive, of Mount Athos. The importance of Smith's contribution to the military discourse was precisely how Smith turned facts and results of quantitative analysis on Mount Athos into a narrative. In such process, Smith weaved singular elements of knowledge into a descriptive account, which furnished the military discourse on Mount Athos.

The comprehensiveness of Smith's account owed much to his attention to systematizing the landscape. Before Smith, Mount Athos as it existed in past travelers' accounts seemed to be geographically and culturally fragmented. Since the Renaissance, Mount Athos, despite the fact that it was a peninsula connected to the Halkidiki through a narrow isthmus, had been represented in the literary tradition as an island isolated from the rest of Greece.⁷⁶ In Leake's account, he recounted his episodic experience at each of the communities and notable places, but scarcely attempted to weave his scattered narratives into one geographical identity as Mount Athos. As Leake approached Mount Athos by sea, he also failed to note how Mount Athos situated itself

⁷²Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 66, 72.

⁷³The RGS also highlighted the significance of cartography in conducting geographical surveys. It called for activities of both map-making and map-collecting. See Barrow, "Prospectus," xi; Della Dora also contextualizes the importance of maps in the development of historical geography in the early nineteenth century. See Della Dora, *Imagining Mount Athos*, 125–26.

⁷⁴"During the late survey of these shores [around Mount Athos] in October, 1831, Captain Copeland, R.N., had his theodolite, &c., conveyed to the summit, as I am informed by an officer who was employed on the survey, and from that elevated station took the angles between Pelion, Ossa, Olympus, Pierus, &c., within a radius of at least ninety miles." Note that Smith was informed of Copeland's survey not through any form of written records produced by Copeland and his crew, but verbally through one of Copeland's subordinates. See Smith, 69.

⁷⁵For other instances when Smith referred to results from past surveys, see Smith, 62, 66, 72, 73. Also see map inserted between page 72 and 73.

⁷⁶Veronica Della Dora, "Mapping a Holy Quasi-Island: Mount Athos in Early Renaissance Isolarii," *Imago Mundi* 60, no. 2 (July 2008): 139–65.

within northern Greece.⁷⁷ However, Smith's report differed from past narratives on Mount Athos as it particularly noted the ways in which places on the Holy Mountain were connected to each other. In his report, Smith emphasized that roads were key to bringing the entire Athonite peninsula together. He first noted detailedly and quantitatively how he journeyed from Istanbul to Mount Athos. Later, Smith's description of Mount Athos became more meticulously map-like.

Four miles further south on the eastern slope of the mountain ridge, and at a nearly equal distance from the east and west shores, is situated the town of Karyes, picturesquely placed amidst vineyards and gardens. A good road leads hence down a steep valley to Iviron on the east. A fine richly-wooded valley also leads in a north-easterly direction towards Pandokratora and Vatopedi; and the road to Xiropotamus is good, but hilly.⁷⁸

Aiming for the best precision as he possibly could, Smith seemed to be ekphrastically describing a map – it could well be the case that Smith has a map in front of him as a reference. But his report also reflected three-dimensionality of a landscape that maps found themselves incapable to convey: how roads wound down with the slope, how Karyes was surrounded with greens, and how monastic communities were bound by bypasses reaching out to different directions. Smith's use of quantitative and directional language connected familiar spaces on Mount Athos.

Another way employed by Smith to systematize Mount Athos concerned ascending heights and seeing beyond the geographical boundaries of a landscape. From the passage cited at the very beginning of this paper, one can see how Smith's geographical imagination of the entire northern Greece and Aegean Sea unfolded in front of his eyes as he stood on top of the Athonite peak. Looking out from mountain tops would certainly insure a crowning, panoramic view.⁷⁹ However, Smith also invited his readers to appreciate the view offered by natural features of less dominant heights. Smith seemed to be well impressed by the Monastery of St. Dionysius, which only rose to a moderate elevation from the sea.

The position of this monastery surpasses all I have seen. It is perched on a lofty rock, almost overhanging the sea, and at the mouth of a striking ravine.⁸⁰

Smith also commended the location near the Monastery of Karakalo on the eastern slope of the Athonite peak, from which "a beautiful view of Samothraki, Thaso, and Lemnos" is granted.⁸¹ Indeed, Smith embraced every opportunity offered by Mount Athos to understand the area around and beyond. Smith's efforts in systematizing the landscape of Mount Athos were substantiated by his keen awareness of natural features that offered a synoptic view of the geography beyond its limits.

Despite Smith's remarkable contribution to the body of geographical knowledge about Mount Athos and the military discourse, Smith's report generally took a very modest tone. Smith suggested that his report provided an intermediary research that welcomed and paved way for future scrutiny by area specialists. In the same way as he borrowed past results and available resources from past explorations, he expected future engagement with his report. He never too hastily exacted his authority as a military explorer on Mount Athos. Instead, he posed research questions and points to viable possibilities of understanding.

⁷⁷A typical way that Leake recorded his journey between places on Mount Athos is exemplified by his description of his ride from Xeropotami to Karyes: "From Xeropotami to Kares, or Karyes, a beautiful ride of an hour and a half across the ridge of the peninsula, leaving the Athona, as the peak of Athos is called." See Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:121.

⁷⁸Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 65–66.

⁷⁹Della Dora, "Mountains and Memory," 225–26.

⁸⁰Smith, 70.

⁸¹Smith, 67.

I remarked a singular appearance at the base of the rock, where . . . a groove has been formed for some hundred yards distance, apparently by the beating of the waters . . . Can the Mount have been upheaved? Or may the waters have subsided? Perhaps some geologist will examine the subject.⁸²

Smith's modesty was crucial to the understanding that the formation of British military discourse on Mount Athos was a dynamic process, in which the accounts produced by military explorers continuously engaged with the discourse and welcomed engagements by future explorers to Mount Athos. Smith's self-consciousness stood out among numerous military explorers who casted a military gaze on Athos. On the one hand, his contribution to the existing realm of knowledge about Mount Athos had been best reflected by his quantitative and systematic account of the landscape. On the other hand, Smith's efforts tremendously encouraged future British military explorers to enrich the military discourse by delving deeper into specific investigations of the land.

Lieutenant T. A. B. Spratt

Two years after Lieutenant Smith's exploration, Lieutenant Spratt of the Royal Navy arrived at the southern-most tip of the isthmus of the Athonite peninsula, bearing an explicitly pronounced survey mission.

In the latter part of August 1838, I was sent by Commander Graves, in the 'Beacon's' tender 'Isabella,' to measure across the Isthmus of Mount Athos, at the spot where the canal was cut by Xerxes. (Herodotus, vii. 22, &c.)⁸³

Spratt's scope of investigation differed remarkably from that of Leake and Smith, for it was exclusively the region around the isthmus of Mount Athos that occupied Spratt's attention. Although Leake and Smith did not fail to note some of the features around the Athonite isthmus, Spratt's survey, having a central focus and a certain set of questions to be answered, was arguably the most detailed, thorough, and systematic examination of the isthmus.⁸⁴ On the other hand, having been inspired by Smith's encouragement for specific investigations of the land, Spratt's research exemplified a type of British military explorations to Mount Athos. Continuing from what Smith had left off, namely to invite specialists for future scrutiny on particular aspects of Mount Athos, Spratt's survey project was question-oriented and aimed for a much closer examination of a particular geographical feature on the Holy Mountain.

Spratt's investigation of the isthmus of Mount Athos was framed by a larger European interest in this specific landscape. Commander Graves, who dispatched Spratt to engage with this project, was himself a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and took interest in the landscape.⁸⁵ Besides Leake and Smith, earlier explorers had provided their own testimonies of this landscape as well, including Richard Pococke who visited Athos in the 1740s, French explorer Auguste de Choiseul-Gouffier in the 1790s, British traveler Philip Hunt in the 1810s.⁸⁶ Notably, all of those interests

⁸²Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 69–70.

⁸³Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 145. Note that "Beacon" and "Isabella" are both names of H.M.S. naval vessels that belong to the Royal Navy. Reference to Herodotus added by Spratt.

⁸⁴Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:142–53; Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 73. Although Leake's treatment of the isthmus seemed to be quite exhaustive, Spratt made a number of significant innovations based on Leake's investigations and remarks. This will be analyzed in the following sections of this paper.

⁸⁵Not much is known about Commander Graves besides what the title of Spratt's report provided. Titles of reports published at the RGS would all follow such format as to provide general information about the communicator of specific explorations. In this case, Commander Graves was the communicator at the RGS and the one who dispatched Spratt for his project. See Spratt, 145.

⁸⁶Spratt himself mentioned a number of past travelers who had examined the isthmus and Xerxes' Canal. See Spratt, 145; Della Dora offers a detailed analysis of early modern European travelers who remarked on the isthmus as well as the existence of the Canal. See Della Dora, *Imagining Mount Athos*, 126–29.

seemed to be originated in an antiquarian spirit, for it was the account of the classical historian Herodotus, who claimed that there was a canal cut by the Persian king Xerxes around 480 BCE, that guided the visit of all explorers. Neither of them failed to refer to Herodotus, but debate had arisen concerning the historical existence of Xerxes' Canal the degree to which Herodotus' report of the Canal was true. Spratt's mission, therefore, focused on this uniquely fascinating landscape and took up this long-debated matter.

I offer a few observations to explain the accompanying plan which was then made of it. . . . [T]he few remaining traces of this canal may have totally disappeared in another century, when the absence of such evidence might perhaps again produce doubts upon the *truth* of this historical record [of Herodotus], such as have been expressed with regard to the veracity of Herodotus on this point, both in ancient and modern times. . . . A careful examination of the locality removes all doubt.⁸⁷

By conducting an investigation of the isthmus of Mount Athos, Spratt wished to accomplish three things. Firstly, he was to offer insights into how the canal was then made by Xerxes' laborers. Secondly, he wanted to conduct "a careful examination of the locality." Lastly, through observation, investigation, and analysis, he attempted to restore the authority of Herodotus and his account regarding the existence and history of the Canal of Xerxes, namely, to remove all doubts concerning this matter and draw the debate to a close.

Spratt's approach in an attempt to accomplish the above-mentioned goals was a combination of field surveying with regards to both archaeological and geological aspects of the landscape and cross-referencing survey results with classical texts. Spratt's interaction with the Athonite landscape could truly be characterized as a "gaze" – he valued observation and physical engagement with surveying a landscape. Quite different from Leake, who would choose to inquire from other people on the Holy Mountain, and Smith, who sometimes relied on information provided by past surveys, Spratt insisted on investigating features in the flesh. His description of his finds clearly reflected Spratt's own presence and the ways in which he moved across the isthmus. A bit inland from the southern extremity of the canal, Spratt saw water creatures residing in a swamp, measured the distance that a ditch extended, and conjectured the relationship between this land feature and the canal.

Turtle and small eels abound in the swampy bed of the water course. The ditch, however, continues about 100 yards beyond the junction of the watercourse, towards a hollow or depression of the isthmus, through which the canal must have been cut, but there is nothing in this part that would lead a *casual observer* to suppose that the ditch was more than the natural result of the winter torrents flowing from the neighbouring hills.⁸⁸

More importantly, Spratt's gaze differed essentially from that of other past travelers, for he could see beyond and understand the landscape much better than "a casual observer," most likely referring to past explorers to the isthmus who either hastily denied the existence of the canal or failed to investigate the landscape to a sufficient degree. Leake, for instance, lacked both precision and exhaustiveness in characterizing the isthmus, as he gave either approximations with respect to distances or very general summaries of a vast spatial span.⁸⁹ Smith, on the other hand, did not even venture into investigating the landscape, but, having been informed by past survey results, was

⁸⁷Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 145. Italic emphasis added by the author of this paper.

⁸⁸Spratt, 146–47. Italic emphasis added by the author of this paper.

⁸⁹"[The canal] is a hollow between natural banks, which are well described by Herodotus as *κολωνοὶ οὐ μεγάλοι*, the highest points of them being scarcely 100 feet above the sea. The lowest part of the hollow is only a few feet higher than that level. About the middle of the isthmus, where the bottom is highest, are some travels of the ancient canal; where the ground is lower, it is indicated only by hollows, now filled with water in consequence of the late

very positive about the existence of the canal.⁹⁰ Compared with Leake's generalized description of the landscape and Smith's superficial confidence in the existence of the canal, Spratt's treatment of the isthmus in order to retrace the canal could be seen as methodologically innovative. For Spratt, intensive observation and investigation combined with extensive field survey marked what he considered as the most reasonable means of geographical investigation.

On the other hand, textual evidence recorded by classical authors provided an important source of reference for Spratt's field survey around the isthmus of Mount Athos. Indeed, Spratt's philological and historical awareness of classical texts assisted him to accomplish two of his goals, namely to explain how the canal had been cut and to solidify the textual authority of Herodotus. Therefore, Spratt's gaze on the physical landscape extended to the gaze upon classical literature written on it. More importantly, both visions sought to interact with each other through the means of cross-referencing. Accompanying a discussion on the geological component of the soil near the isthmus, Spratt consulted Herodotus to offer his evaluation on how the canal could have been successfully built by the Persians.

Herodotus (vii. 23), in his account of the manner of carrying on the work of excavation, shows that no impediment existed in the nature of the ground; for we have an illustration of the softness of the material dug through . . . the Phoenicians alone avoided this by making the excavation in the highest part twice the width of what it was to be in the lowest, this fact is confirmed by the geology of the district. The part of the isthmus through which the canal was cut is a bed of tertiary sands and marls, so that this work of the Persian king, on which three years were spent, is really insignificant compared with many works that are executed at the present day.⁹¹

If the passage above shows that, while Spratt, Spratt based on the veracity of Herodotus' account while conjecturing the practicality of the construction with his geological investigations, he, in turn, referred back to his own research in order to establish the veracity of Herodotus.

Herodotus estimates the width of the isthmus, at the place where the canal was made, at about 12 stadia, or 7200 Greek feet (vii. 22), which agrees very well with the true dimensions.⁹²

This flexible use of classical texts in geographical surveys exemplifies Spratt's distinctive engagement with the Athonite landscape. As classicizing and antiquarian as Spratt's obsession with ancient texts might seem, it centered itself around the project of geographical survey. Recall the ways in which Lieutenant Smith placed a much less emphasis on the classics in his report while Spratt actively engaged with classics as well as geography. What's more, bearing a unique "mission" to remove all doubts on the account of Herodotus as well as the historical existence of a canal, Spratt worked reciprocally between physical, literary, and historical engagement with the landscape. In this way, Spratt re-united what Smith posed as dichotomies: classics and geographical investigations.

rains. At the northern end in particular, there is a large pond, divided only from the sea by a narrow ridge of sand." See Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:143–44. As it has been previously discussed, although Leake's approach of understanding the canal was interdisciplinary, it failed to go into much depth of either the classical, geographical, or geological aspect of the canal and the isthmus.

⁹⁰"At the extremity of the high land of the peninsula we descend about 300 feet to the isthmus, and continue along its northern shore over undulating ground, till we reach the site of the canal cut by order of Xerxes, but which has been so much filled up, from some cause or other, that I honestly confess I could see no traces of it; but I did not leave the road to seek them. Of its existence there cannot be a doubt; and I am told the officers on the late survey traced it without much difficulty." See Smith, "On Mount Athos and Its Monasteries," 73.

⁹¹Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 146.

⁹²Spratt, 147.

Map was another significant component to Spratt's report on his investigation of the Athonite isthmus. Drafted by John Arrow-smith, this map shows not only the contour of the region around the Athonite isthmus, but also vertical elevation of the landscape. Extraordinarily, Spratt chose to integrate the observed landscape with the investigated landscape, that is, the physical geographical features near the isthmus with the "Vestiges of Xerxes' Canal."⁹³ Taking a step further than Smith, who saw maps as a visual amalgamation of all sorts of quantitative analyses, Spratt used maps to embody physical geography with historical geography.⁹⁴ Historical cities such as Sane and Uranopolis existed on the same map as natural features as well as metokis of Athonite monasteries, which stood to Spratt's days. As the vestiges of the canal, which no longer existed and traces of which remained undiscernible to casual observers, realized themselves on a map and juxtaposed themselves with real geographical features on a map, Spratt successfully brought historical imagination back to reality.

As a British military explorer, Spratt's investigation of the Canal of Xerxes conveyed a larger political significance. As Spratt was concerned with the practicality of building a canal through the isthmus of Mount Athos, he also placed this undertaking within a broader context. Notably, early nineteenth century saw a burgeoning interest among British explorers in investigating strategic hydrographies.⁹⁵ As a passage way between the east and west, Xerxes' Canal represented itself as an important connective space in northern Aegean. One recalls how Leake commended the utilitarian value of the canal, had it not been totally worn away in time.⁹⁶ For Spratt, however, investigating Xerxes' Canal was also related to "many works that are executed at the present day."⁹⁷ Quite contemporary to Spratt's investigation and as early as 1833, plans for the construction of the Suez Canal were continuously attracting the attention of British surveyors and hydrographers.⁹⁸ Therefore, as a case study of the practicality of constructing a canal, Spratt's project served for a larger British concern of canal building and investigating hydrographic junctures that embodied geo-political significance. The military discourse was much enriched not only by Spratt's investigative approaches, but also by this larger political significance reflected through Spratt's project.

Conclusion

Although Spratt's investigation of the Canal of Xerxes might have concluded a series of geographical survey at the isthmus, British military explorers continuously ventured into the Holy Mountain even after 1840. Their accounts took up and responded to issues raised by previous



Figure 2: Map of Spratt's survey of the Isthmus of Mount Athos, drafted by John Arrow-smith. Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," map between pages 145 and 146. Picture credit: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Library.

⁹³Spratt, map between pages 145 and 146.

⁹⁴Della Dora, *Imagining Mount Athos*, 131–33.

⁹⁵Della Dora, "Geo-Strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity."

⁹⁶Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 3:145.

⁹⁷Spratt, "Remarks on the Isthmus of Mount Athos," 146.

⁹⁸Della Dora, "Geo-Strategy and the Persistence of Antiquity," 535.

accounts, thus further enriching the military discourse developed by Leake, Smith, and Spratt. Contextually speaking, the experience of British military explorers on Mount Athos between 1800 and 1840 was foundational. It was through their account of their travels and surveys in the Holy Mountain that a discourse of British military explorations on Mount Athos arose. Such discourse, having been shaped by political, cultural, and intellectual environment of the early 19th century, was dynamically engaged with by both Leake, Smith, and Spratt. All of them produced “accounts” as their manner of developing the discourse. Furthermore, all of them explored an interdisciplinary approach to understand the landscape, the most distinctive of which were observation, quantitative analysis, physical investigation, and textual cross-reference. Most importantly, all of them illuminated in their accounts their unique, contextualized vision of understanding and articulating new knowledge.

The experience of Leake, Smith, and Spratt on Mount Athos locates itself at the intersection of a number of larger themes that have emerged in the history of the early nineteenth century. Events, such as the Greek Independence between 1821 and 1832, shed lights on the political environment in northern Greece as well as close interaction between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Conjunctions, such as the development of geography and geographical surveys in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, British cultural obsession with the land of Greece, and British imperial curiosity in various places around the world, framed the motivation of British military explorers to Mount Athos. However, the specificity of the case military explorers on Mount Athos is exactly that their gaze was influenced by and, at the same time, influenced the above-mentioned themes as well as events. Therefore, this paper, having focused on the ways in which individual military accounts constructed knowledge about Mount Athos and contextualized them with respect to framing topics of the early nineteenth century, hopes to elucidate the characteristic significance of the British military discourse on Mount Athos. The instance of early nineteenth-century British military explorers on Mount Athos is not a case study of any of the larger themes raised above. Instead, a scrutiny of their unique experience and ways of producing knowledge as well as discourse is worth pursuing by itself.

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