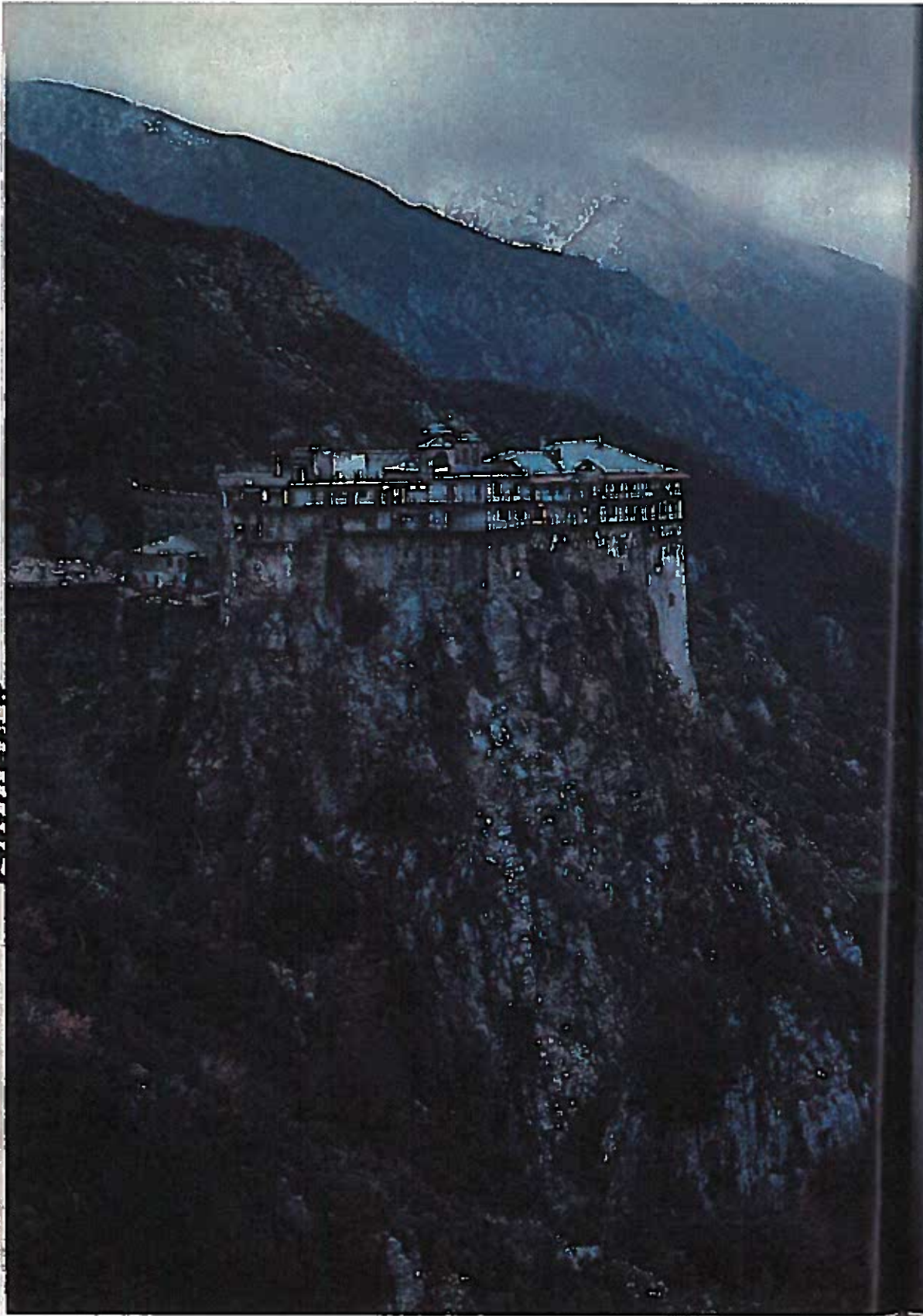


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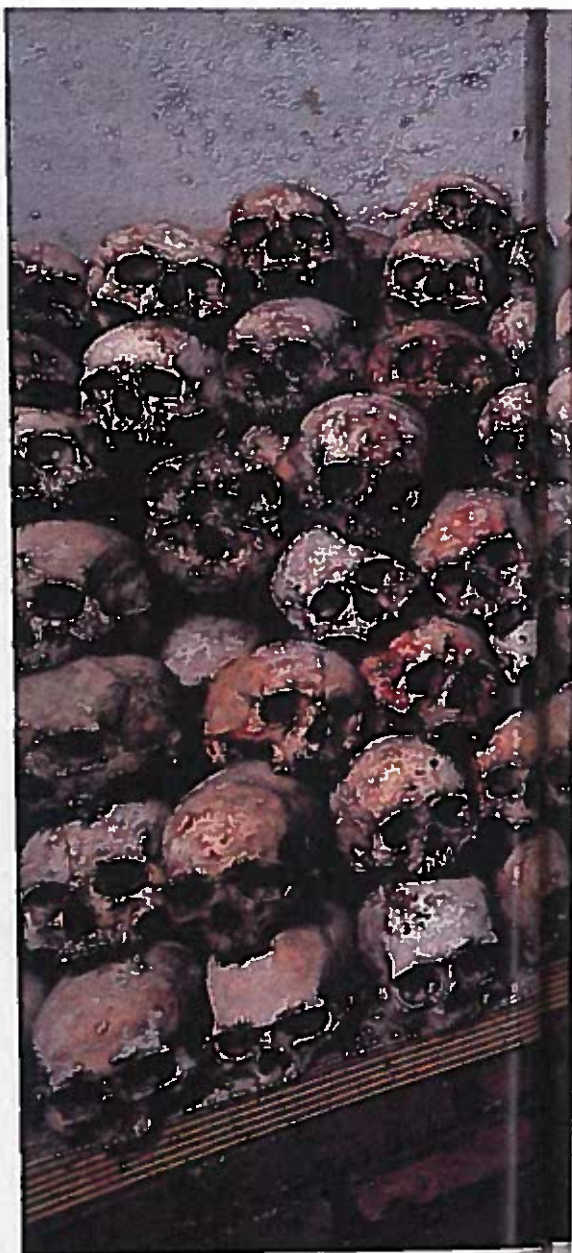
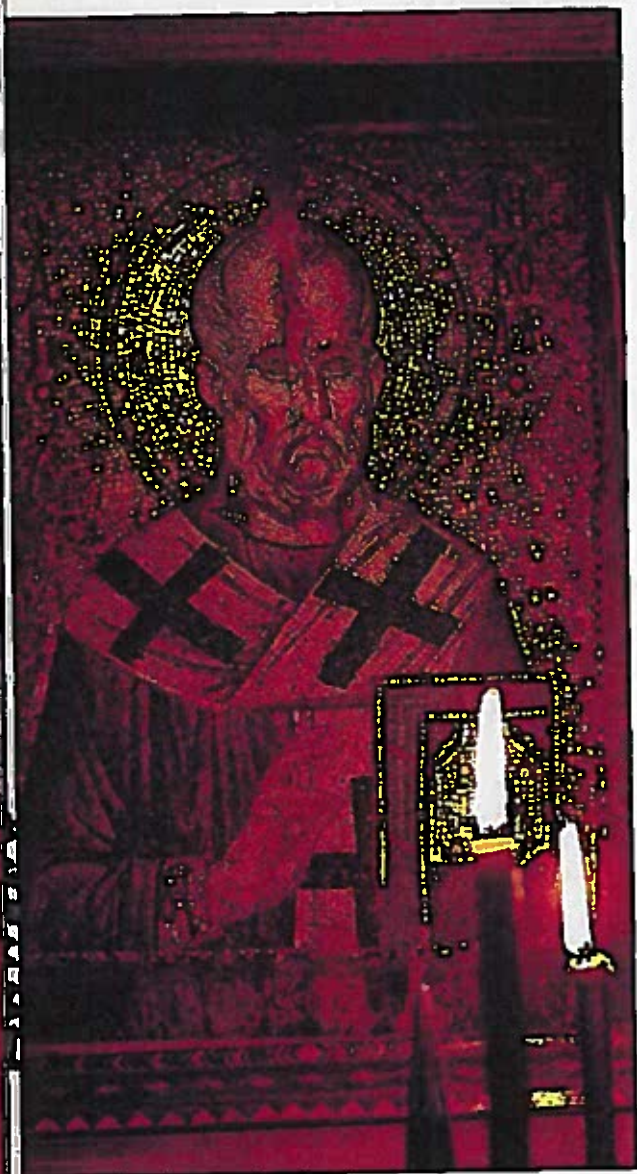
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Mount Athos

FAR AWAY from the worries of the rest of humanity, the Simonopetra Monastery (left) towers high above the Aegean Sea on a small peninsula of northeastern Greece. Founded in the mid-14th century, it stands like a fortress with 19 other Eastern Orthodox monasteries and a host of small compounds in a religious community named after snowcapped Mount Athos, background. Within these sanctuaries, pious men retreat from the world in a tradition dating back to the start of the Byzantine era. Father Niphon (below), a master carver, has lived as a hermit for more than 50 years.





SAINTS ruled the lives of men who died in faith. A mosaic at Stavroniketa Monastery earned its name—St. Nicholas of the Oyster (*above*)—in the 16th century after fishermen found the icon with an oyster embedded in its forehead.

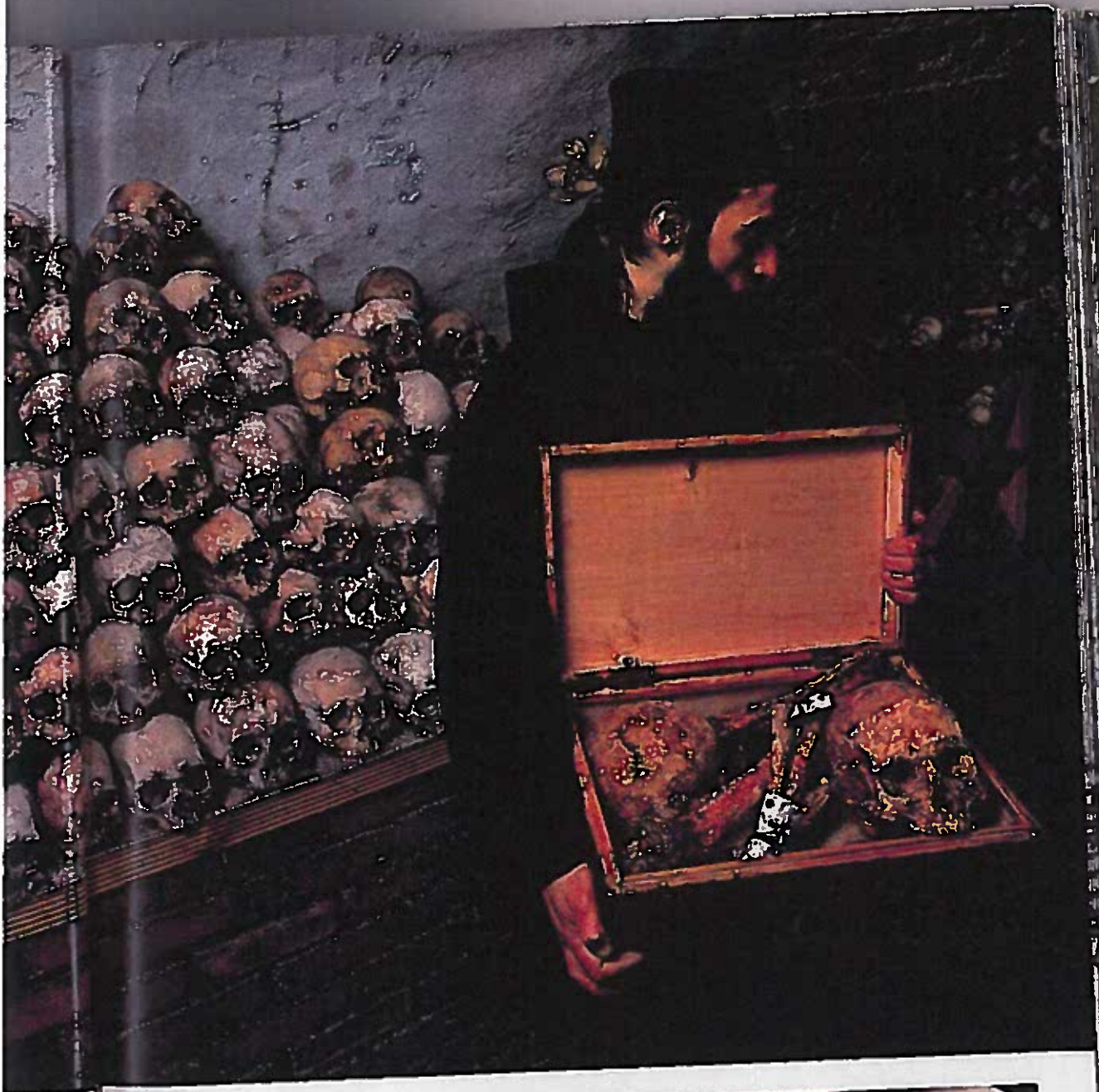
At Simonopetra monks pile the bones of brothers in a charnel house. The remains of a former abbot (*above right*) rest in a special

box held by Father Macarius. To the monks who pray here, these orderly rows of skulls evoke the monastery's long history and the devotion of the men who kept alive its spirit. The inscription on a skull (*right*)—at St. Anne's monastic community—records the death of a Father Gregentios in 1979.

Hermit monks came to Mount Athos as early as the ninth century. The first

monastery, Great Lavra, was founded by St. Athanasios in 963 with financial help from the Byzantine emperor. By 1400, 19 of the 20 monasteries active today had been completed. Expansion later took place among the *sketes*, or outlying ascetic settlements. Some 1,500 monks now inhabit the Holy Mountain.

The monasteries are living museums of



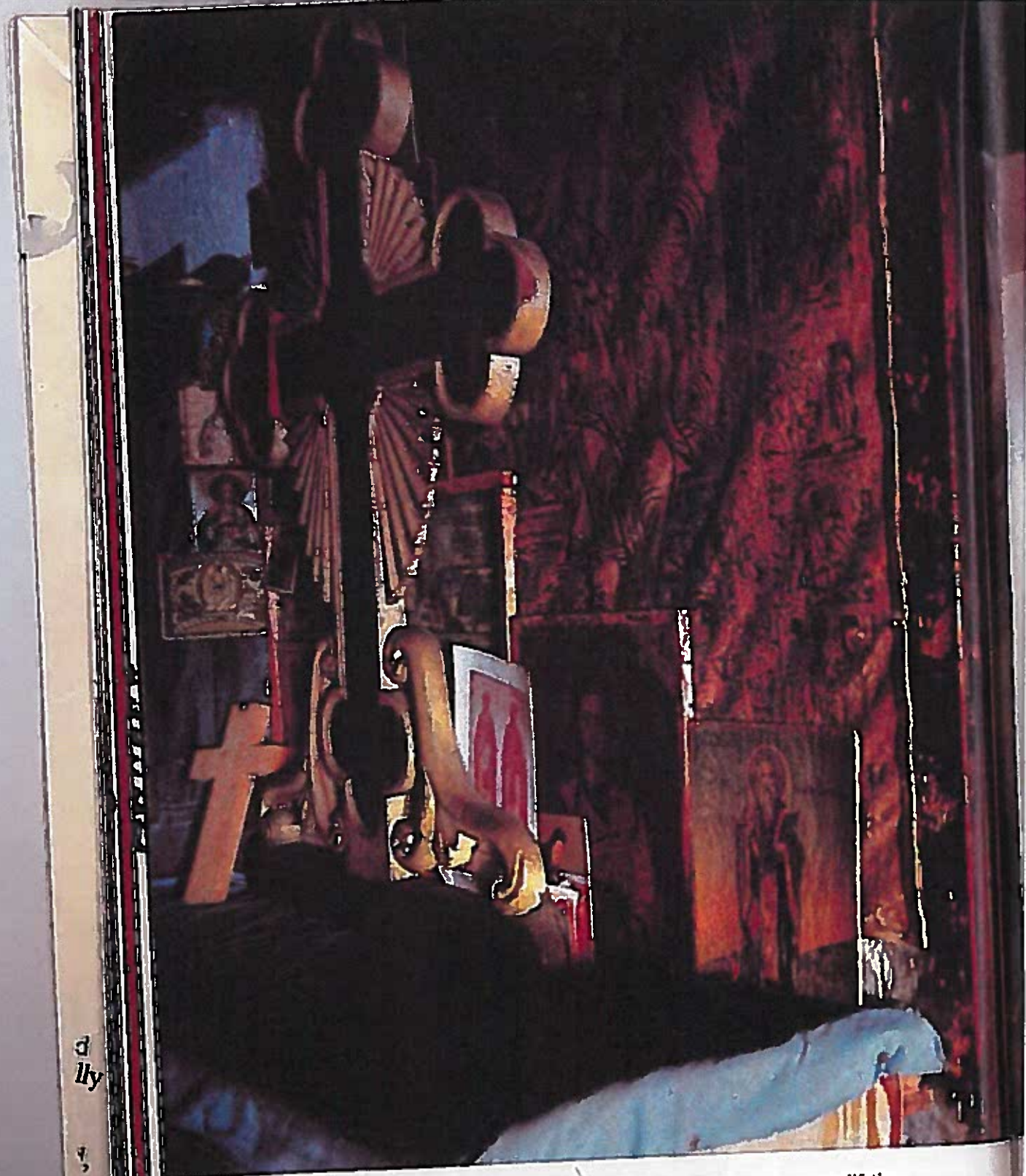
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Byzantine culture. Church walls are covered with frescoes, the earliest from the late 12th century. The monks' libraries hold about 15,000 manuscripts, many from the classical and medieval periods. Treasured relics include reputed fragments of the True Cross, a cloth dropped by the Virgin Mary at Calvary, and part of Christ's crown of thorns.

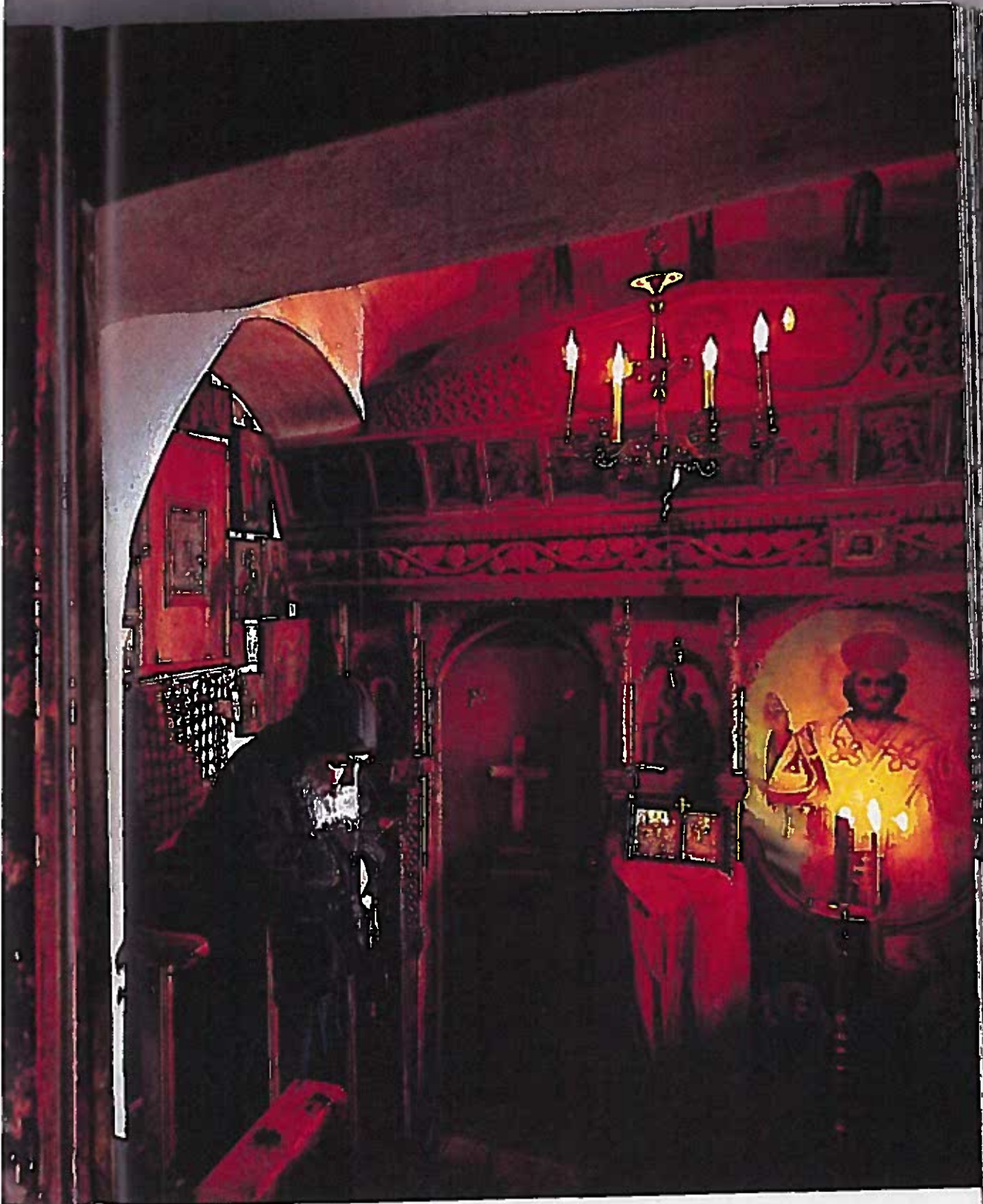




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ALONE WITH HIS PRAYERS, Father Niphon has spent a lifetime communing with God in isolation. He dwells in a small house on the sheer cliffside of Karoulia, where some two dozen hermits inhabit caves and

National Geographic, December 1983



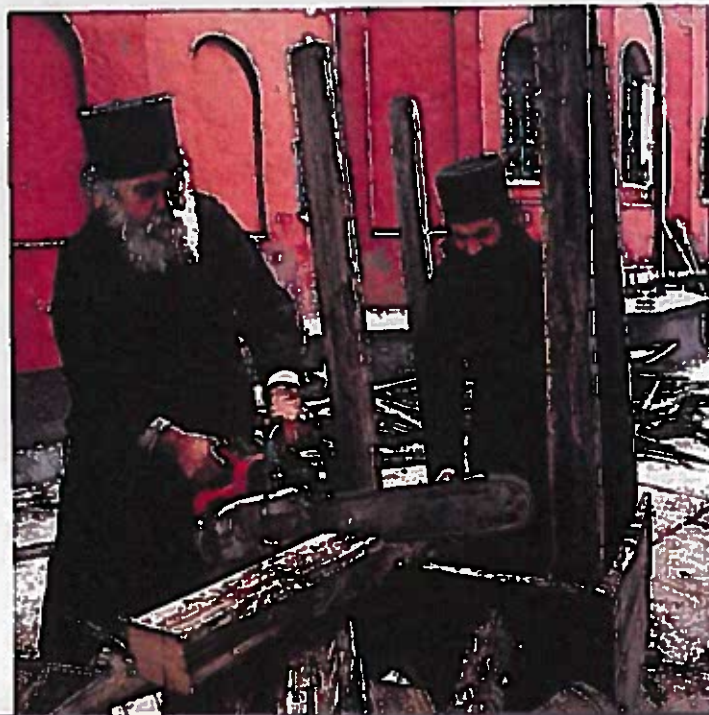
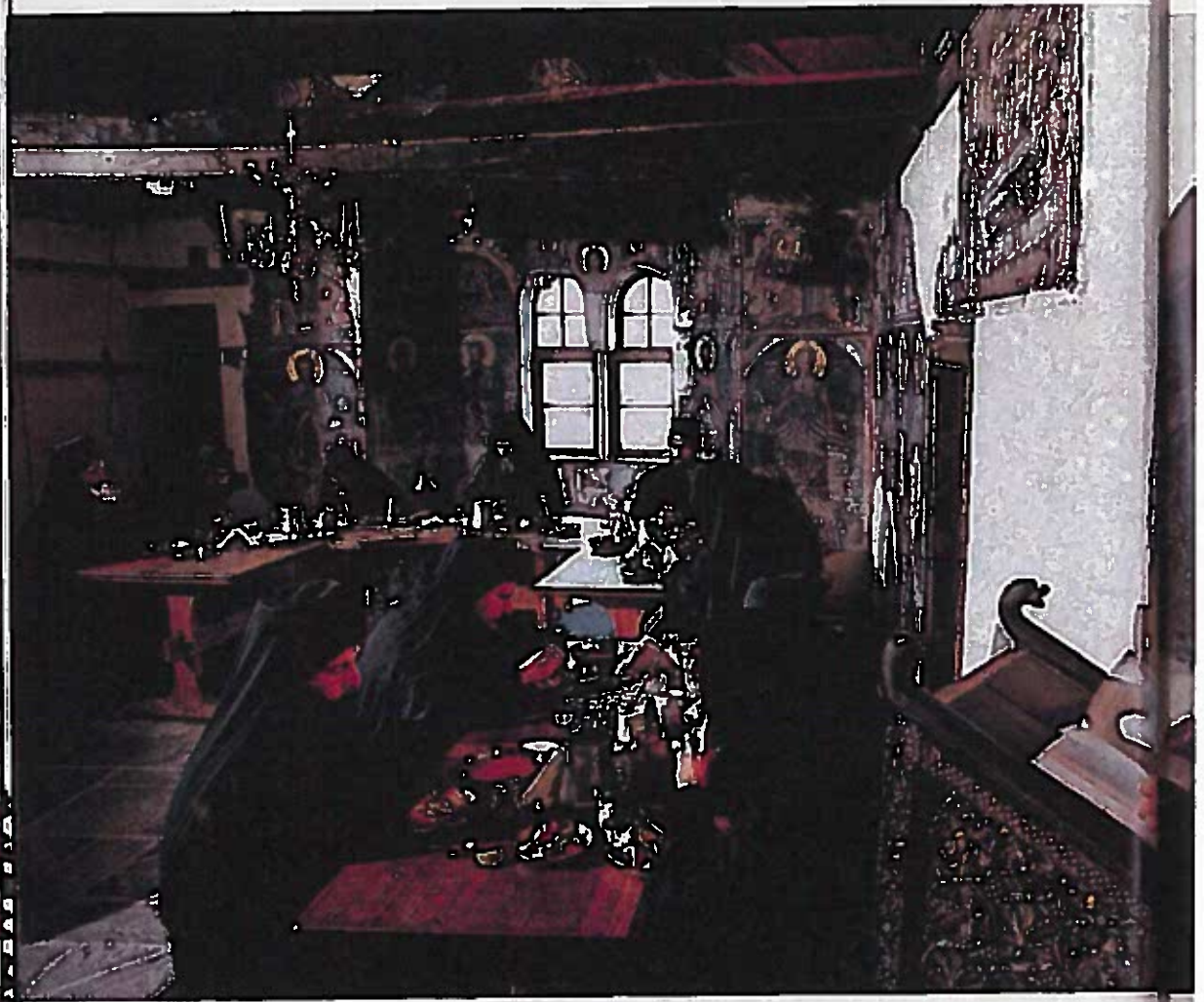
Spartan huts. When he first came to Karoulia, Father Niphon shared the house with three other monks. "One became blind and went back to the world. Two went to sleep," he said. "I miss the others now and then."

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Mount Athos

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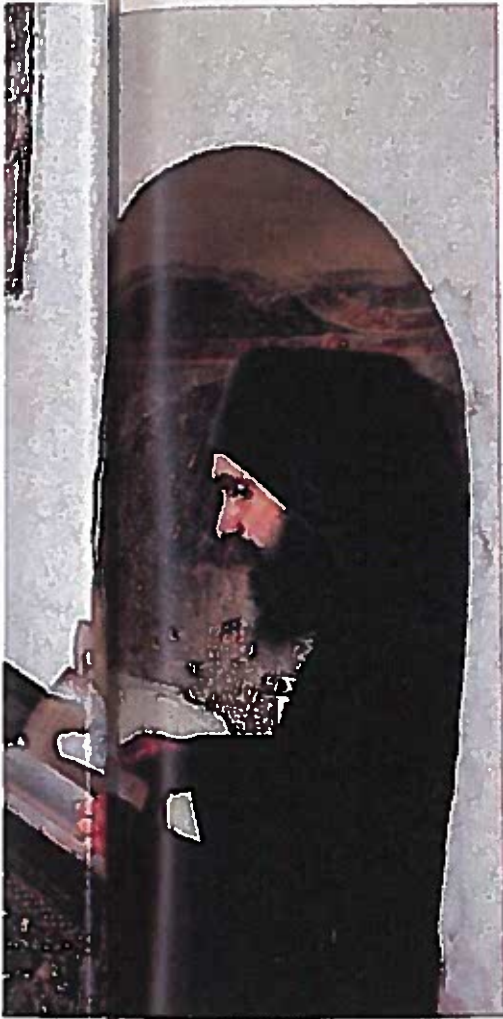


NO WOMEN may visit Mount Athos, under a constitution followed since 1045. But men with religious or scholarly purposes are welcome to free food and lodging. Meals are simple and solemn at the Stavroniketa Monastery (*above*), where the monks refresh themselves with soup, olives, bread, and wine, as one brother reads a lesson against gluttony.

Most monasteries follow a Byzantine system of time that begins the day at sunset. Sworn to chastity, obedience, and poverty, monks fill the

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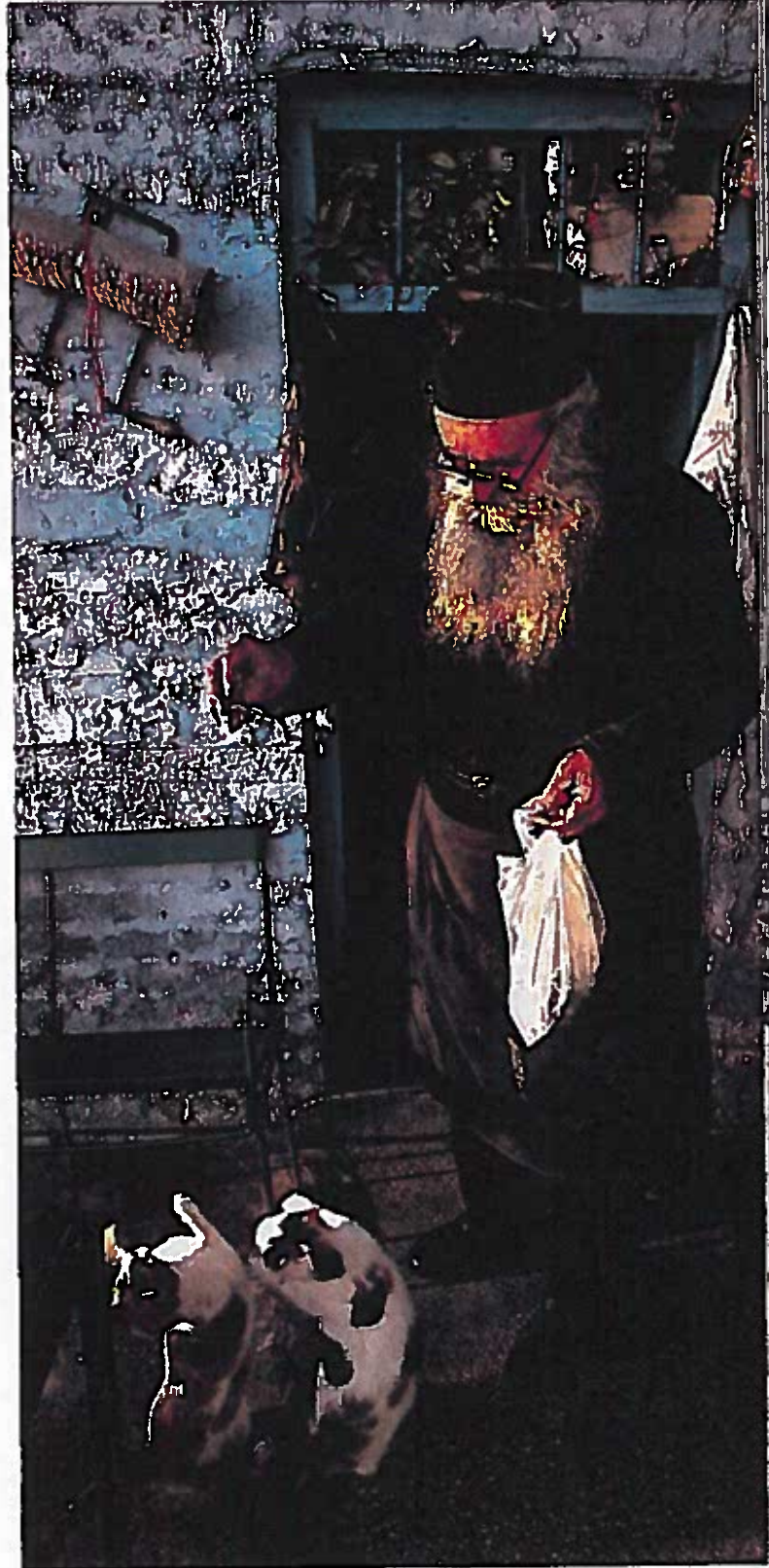
hours with labor, private meditation, and communal prayer. Father Mothestos (left) cuts old beams in a project to restore the Dionysiou Monastery.

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The majority of the monasteries are run as strict communes. The rest are less rigid, allowing monks to have personal property and to keep their own hours.

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No fish may be eaten during Lent. But at a branch of St. Paul's Monastery called New Skete, Father Spiridon (right) believes that there should still be just a little for the cats. * * *



(Continued from page 736)

Slavic invasions of the Balkans and Lombard conquests in Italy drove a wedge between the remaining two. Rome, deprived of imperial support, linked its fortunes to the rising Germanic West. Constantinople's contracting empire became increasingly Greek.

The break came in 1054, when Rome and Constantinople exchanged excommunications. The Latins had added *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed, making it read that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*; they also used unleavened rather than leavened bread in the Eucharist.

Absurd that East and West should sunder over a phrase and a pinch of yeast? Not when eternal salvation seemed at stake.

This was the lesson of Byzantine monasticism: I saw men bend their necks to the yoke of obedience and, through self-denial and punctilious repetitions of ritual, follow unquestioningly an ordained path of salvation. For as Orthodoxy was central to Byzantium, monasticism, ever the conservator of traditions, is the living heart of Orthodoxy.

THE FACE OF THAT BOY still haunts me. I saw him on the boat to Mount Athos—father and son come from Germany to see the Holy Mountain. He was about 13, the same age as my son. We boarded at a Greek port at the base of the steep-walled peninsula that juts 35 miles into the northern Aegean. The motors revved up, and with a flurry of monks crossing themselves and murmuring "*Kyrie eleison*—Lord, have mercy," we were off for a United Nations of monastic communities—Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian—where no female has been allowed to set foot for a thousand years.

I saw the boy again when we debarked at Daphni. We crowded in, wall-to-wall black robes and black cylindrical hats, for the jolting bus ride up the mountainside to Kariai, headquarters village for the monastic republic, the world's oldest. Then, as I trudged off to join the rounds of worship and work and share Spartan meals in half a dozen monasteries, the boy slipped from mind.

Stavroniketa, thrusting massive walls and crenellated keep above the sea, was a hive of purposeful piety. There the rhythmic beats of the semantron wakened me in the

night. Noah had summoned the animals into the ark with such a resonant wooden plank and mallet, I had been told. Now it called the faithful into the spiritual ark, the church, to save them from the deluge of sin.

In Stavroniketa's church, under the brazen eagles of Byzantium a gleam in chandelier coronas, I stood absorbed by the symphony of motion—monks bowing, prostrating themselves, making rounds to kiss the icons, lighting and snuffing candles, swinging the smoking censer, reading and singing antiphonally, raising voices in fervent prayer. The frescoed church itself mirrored the cosmos, martyrs and saints and angelic hosts rising in a scale of sanctity toward the symbolic vault of heaven where a stern Pantocrator, the almighty Christ, looks down disturbingly into the depth of one's soul.

To relax my limbs, I shifted position.
"Hisssssssssss!"

I had clasped my hands improperly. As the hours wore on, if any one made a false move or kissed an icon in the wrong order, a hiss signaled instant correction.

Back in our guest cell near dawn, my cell mate, an American anthropologist, whispered: "Reminds me of the military. The Benedictines in France are the infantry; the Franciscans in Italy, the air force, free and easy. These Orthodox monks are the marines—a crack outfit of shock troops under a tough master sergeant. No sloppiness here."

As I topped a shoulder of the 6,670-foot Holy Mountain, wincing at each sharp penitential stone in the steep path, I found monks building a wall. A decade earlier dilapidated Philotheou Monastery had seven graybeards. I counted ten times that many monks, beards as black as their robes.

Father Nikon, the young *archontaris*, or guestmaster, radiated inner peace and joy as he offered me the ritual brandy, coffee, gummy sweet *loukoumi*, and water, then showed me to a neat guest room near a flower-lined balcony over the courtyard.

"People come to us troubled," Father Nikon said. "A day or two in the monastery brings peace, and they leave refreshed."

On Athos, even meals are a continuation of worship. A bell clangs in the courtyard. The monks file in, stand silently at long tables until the abbot blesses the food. After

a communal prayer, all sit, and eat swiftly under the eyes of frescoed saints lining the refectory walls while a monk at the lectern reads from a saint's life. A bell tinkles. He returns the book to its niche, kneels to kiss the abbot's hand, receives his blessing. Then all file out silently. After Vespers, the monastery gates swing shut and everyone turns in, soon to rise for the night's round of prayers, for the first hour of the Byzantine day begins with sunset.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Pinpoints of lamplight in the cells silhouette monks in ceaseless prayers of repentance. Four hours of solitary prayer before the call to four hours of communal prayer. Bread and tea, a snatch of sleep, and then silent prayer continues as the monk goes about his daytime tasks, in the kitchen, garden, at manual labor.

One moonlit night at Dionysiou Monastery a howling wind rattled the window of my cell. Dawn disclosed gray clouds beetling the brow of the Holy Mountain, and the face of the sea furrowed in anger. Below,

waves slammed over the landing. No mail boat today. To get to Gregoriou, next monastery along the coast, meant going by foot.

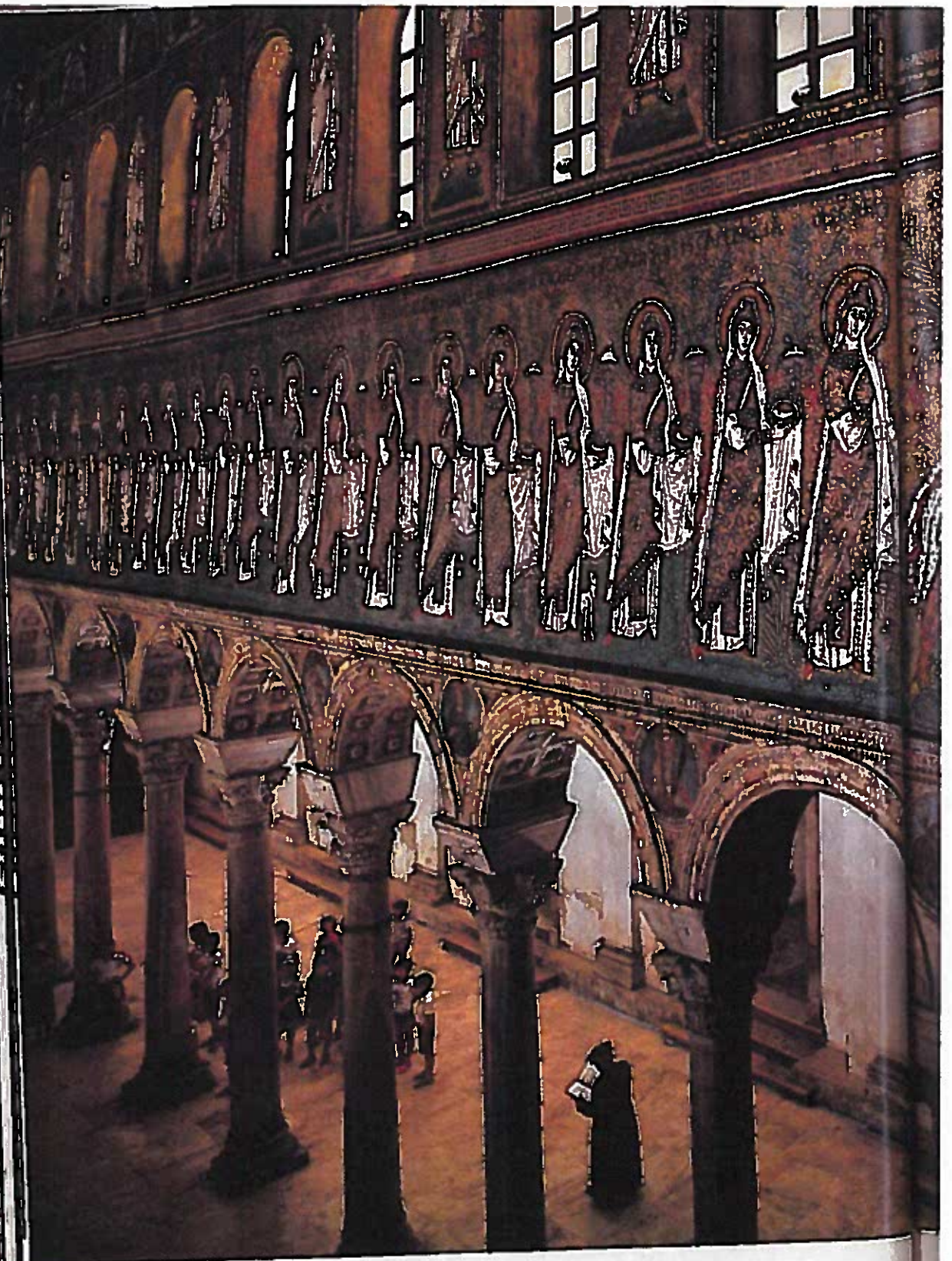
"It's a very dangerous path," cautioned Father Euthymios as we set out together. The gangling, New York-born Vietnam veteran was coming from the "desert," hermitages farther out on the peninsula, where he paints icons. "Part of it is along a causeway swept by the sea." Then came an afterthought of small comfort: "Darius lost his fleet here in such a storm." Three hundred of the Persian king's ships and 20,000 men dashed on the rocks of Athos in 491 B.C.

Pausing on a crest, buffeted by a devil of a wind, Father Euthymios said, "I always fear this next stretch. It's along a cliff with a straight drop to the sea. But with God's grace we will make it." We did. And next day, we again tempted fate.

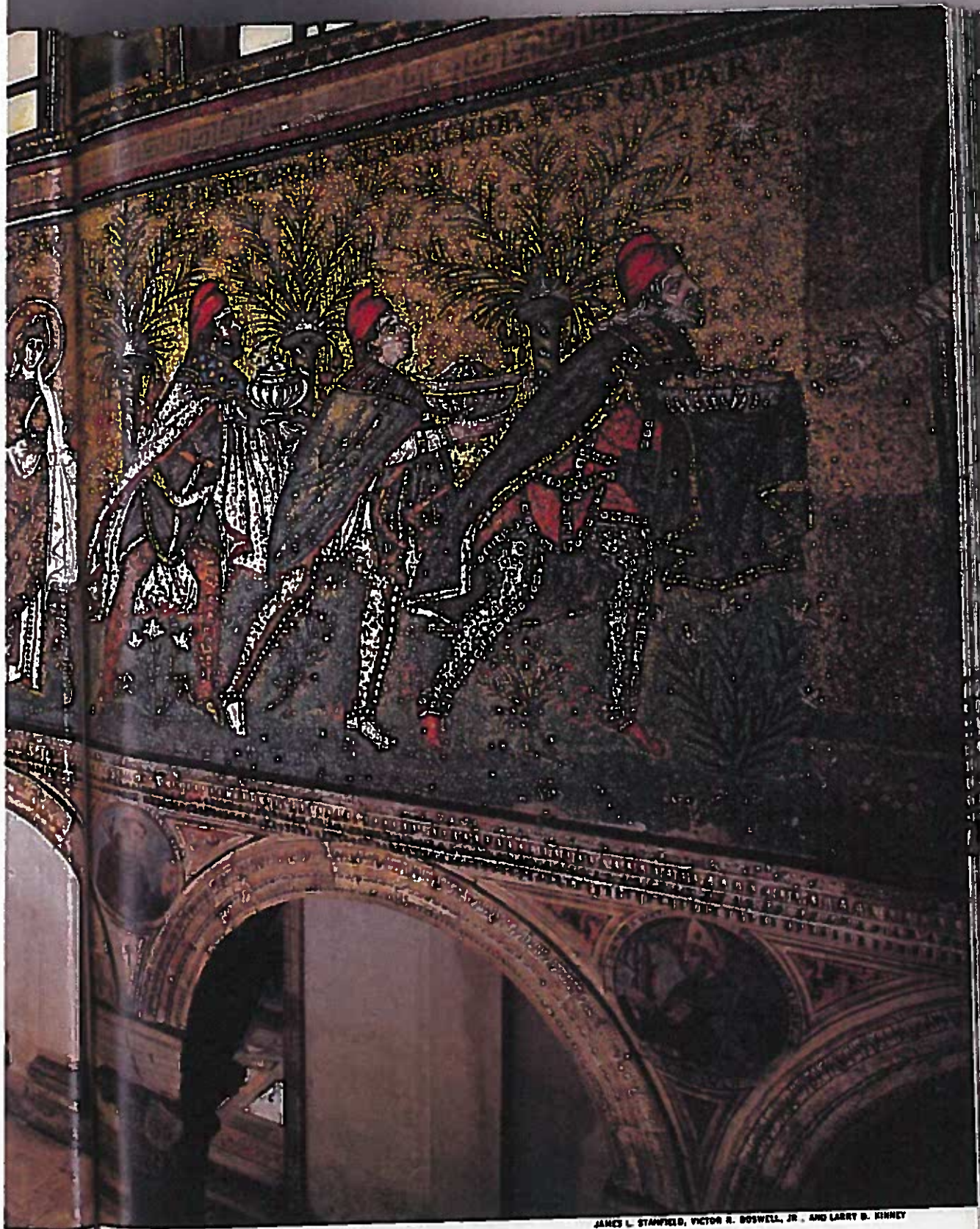
The storm roared unabated. Winds clutched at us as we climbed and descended ravines, bone weary, wet through. Breakers roared as we leaped from rock to slippery rock at the base of sea cliffs. Too close.



Breath of a guardian dragon, Greek fire wins victory for the Byzantines. As depicted in a 13th-century manuscript, a secret volatile liquid, such as hot oil, is ignited and projected by a flamethrower at an enemy warship. Russia's Prince Igor reportedly lost 10,000 vessels to Greek fire in a battle in 941.



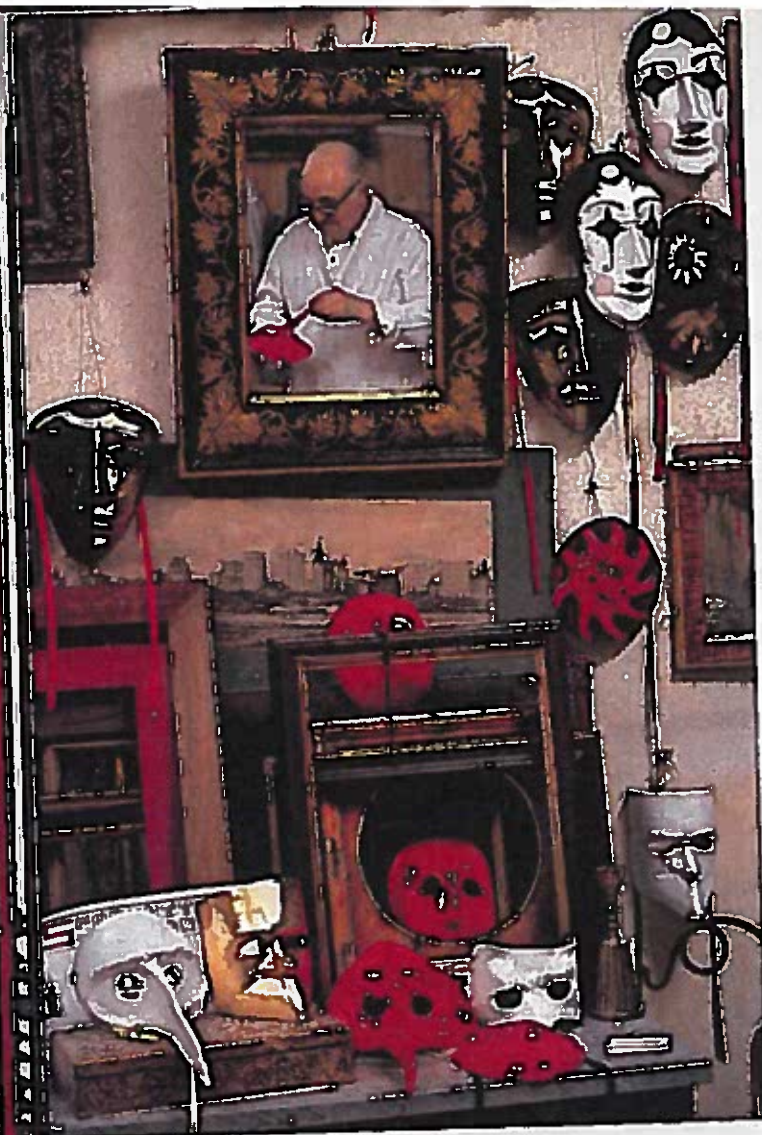
Led by the Three Wise Men, a procession of virgins approaches the Madonna and Child in a mosaic at Sant'Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna, Italy. Last capital of



JAMES L. STANFIELD, VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR., AND LARRY D. KINNEY

the old Roman Empire, Ravenna would flower from the fifth through the eighth centuries as a fountainhead of Byzantine culture on the Italian peninsula.

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Dressed in borrowed finery, Venice wears Byzantine arches and mullioned windows along the Grand Canal (right). Under Constantinople's sway from the seventh to the ninth centuries, Venice took control of her own destiny and ultimately usurped Byzantium's trade routes. She helped finance the Fourth Crusade, which in 1204 plundered treasures of Constantinople, including the famous bronze horses now adorning the lagoon city's Cathedral of St. Mark.

The tradition of false faces to hide the identities of bacchanals during carnival also dates from the 13th century. Masks are still crafted by artisans such as Giuseppe Donà (above, in mirror).

If you must wait out an Athos storm, you will find no more dramatic haven than Simonopetra, high on a spur above the Aegean. It opens its dovecote of cells onto tiers of rickety balconies propped by aged beams. To walk along one 800 feet over the sea in a storm is an act of faith. Clutching the splintery rail, stepping over a gap in the floor planks, I looked down mesmerized at walls of water battering walls of rock.

Next day Simonopetra no longer shook. The wind had lost its howl; the sea was flattening its crests. No more dodging waves. I had been lucky. Not so that boy who looked like my son. As he leaped across the rocks, a wave swept him away before his father's eyes. When the boats ran again, they found his body and brought it in from the sea.



THE YEAR 1071 was a bad one for the Byzantines, East and West. At Manzikert, in the highlands of eastern Turkey, the multinational Byzantine Army, riven by dissensions and desertions and for once sloppy in reconnaissance, was annihilated by the invading Seljuk Turks it had marched east to destroy. Anatolia, breadbasket and prime recruiting ground for Byzantium, subsequently was stripped forever from Christendom, opening the way to later Ottoman invasions of Europe.

In Bari, port city in southeastern Italy, I saw blood on the pavement. Assassins had gunned down a political opponent, and grieving partisans marched around the stain in bitter memorial. Nine centuries earlier blood had flowed in the streets of Byzantine

Bari, sacked by the Normans after a three-year siege. Five years after the Battle of Hastings in England, the Normans had conquered southern Italy.

The year 1204 was even worse. On April 13, Fourth Crusaders en route to Jerusalem committed what historian Sir Steven Runciman called "the greatest crime in history"—the Christian sack of Constantinople. Burning, pillaging, raping, the crusaders looted what they didn't destroy to enrich Venice, Paris, Turin, and other Western centers with "every choicest thing found upon the earth." (They even brought back *two* heads of John the Baptist, so rich was Constantinople in relics.)

When, after 57 years, a Byzantine emperor once again reigned in Constantinople, the

Heaven paved in gold, the Pala d'Oro altarpiece in St. Mark's enshrines the art of Byzantium. In a solid-gold setting, 2,500 gems enhance 324 enamels portraying Christ surrounded by angels, prophets, and saints.

Universal Empire was but a large head on a shrunken body. The Venetians and Genoese had a stranglehold on its trade. Franks still held territory. Trebizond ruled an independent empire on the Black Sea. Byzantine princes had set up their own power centers in Greece. Byzantium was soon pressed between the Ottoman Turks and the Serbs.

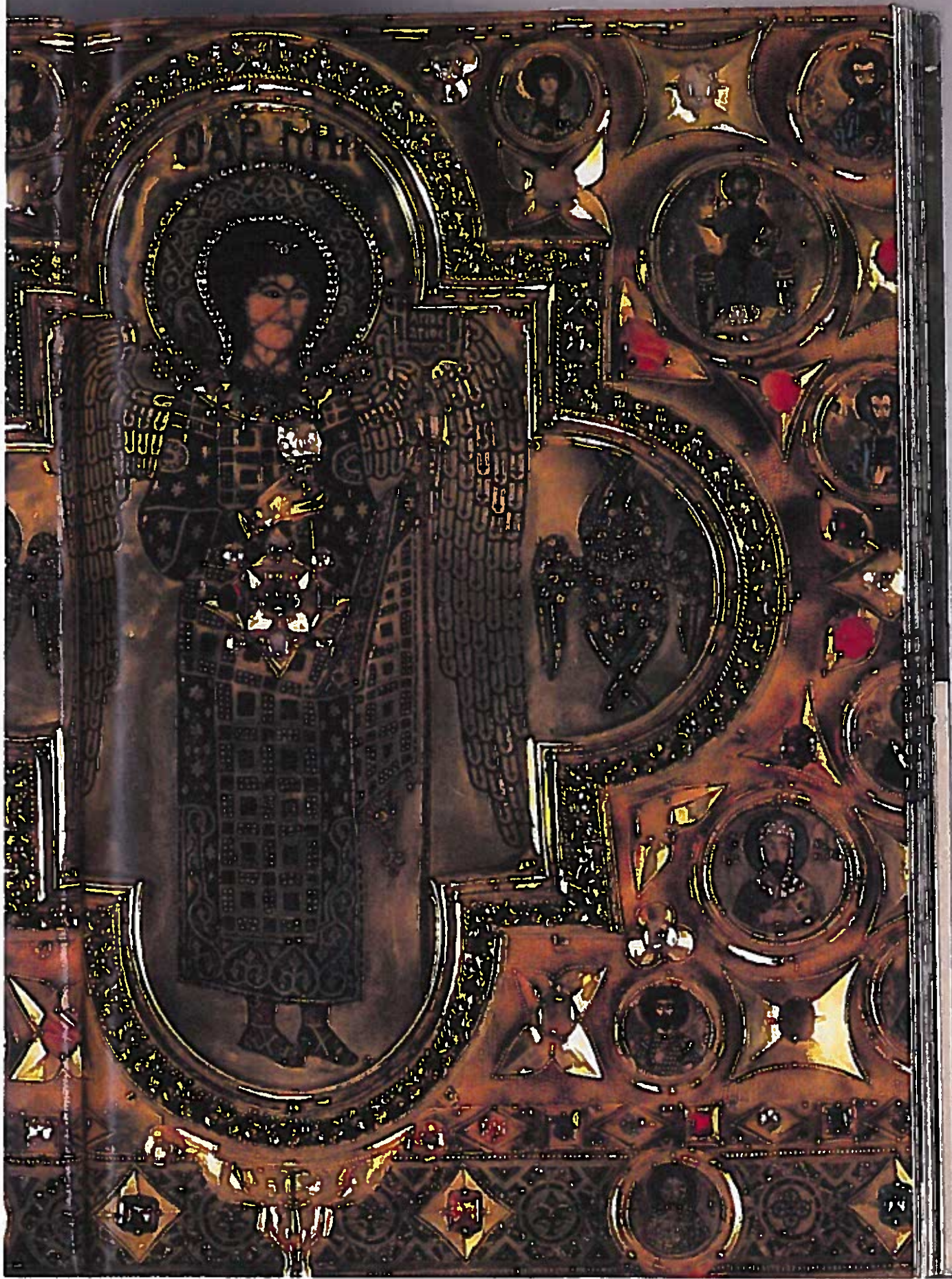
Crossing the Dardanelles, the Turks first settled in Europe at Gallipoli in 1354. A year later, with Serbian power at its peak, Stephen Dushan, who had proclaimed himself emperor of Serbs and Greeks, made his bid for Constantinople. Death robbed him of a chance to sit on Byzantium's throne, but the Serbs never forgot the common Balkan dream of conquering Constantinople. Nor will they ever forget the collision three decades later with the Turks.

IN THE MISTS of morning rolling over brown-tiled earth at Kosovo in Yugoslavia, I peeped that "field of the black-birds" with Turks and Serbs locked in battle. A physical defeat, it was yet a moral victory the Serbs celebrate to this day. Folk legend and epics extolling Serb bravery fed the fires of nationalism during the five centuries the Serbs suffered the Turkish yoke. Kosovo: June 28, 1389. How ironic that Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria chose June 28 of all days to make his entry into Sarajevo, where his assassination by a Serb patriot plunged the world into war in 1914.

As the Turkish shadow lengthened, Byzantine emperors traveled west to reconcile differences in an effort to secure military aid. Neither pope nor patriarch considered the rupture of 1054 final. Twice, union of the churches was proclaimed (only to founder on the reef of residual hatred for the crusaders' desecration of holy Constantinople in 1204). As for aid, the West dragged its feet. Venice arrested one emperor for debt.

On a spur of snow-crowned mountains walling Sparta's valley in the Peloponnesus





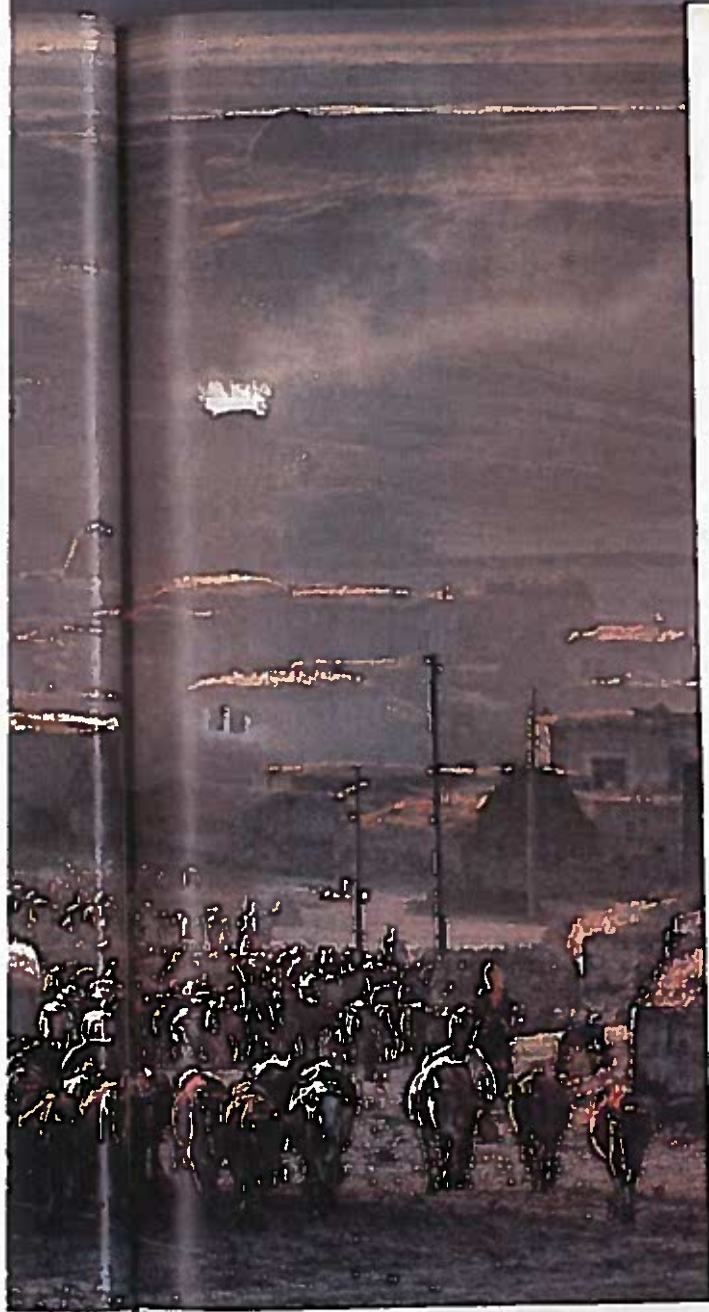


clings the Byzantine city of Mistra. Today its citadel, palace, red-roofed churches, and dwellings lie empty. Only a few nuns live in this once vibrant city, the renown of its scholars and artists outshining the empire's fading power. Here in 1449, where a double-headed eagle is carved in the cathedral's marble paving, the last Byzantine emperor was crowned.

With him as he journeyed north went a legend: Constantinople's last emperor would bear the same name as the first. His

name? Constantine. And his mother, like the mother of Constantine the Great, was named Helena.

Acclaimed by the populace, tolerated by the indolent Sultan Murad II, he could settle, it seemed, for peaceful coexistence. Having failed in besieging Constantinople and succeeded in crushing a crusader army at Varna on the Black Sea, the sultan was content, in his sumptuous capital of Edirne (ancient Adrianople) in Thrace, to let Constantinople wither on the vine while he



Where battle once raged on the field of Manzikert near this Turkish village of Erentepe, cattle move to pasture. Here Christians fell to the Seljuk Turks in 1071, heralding the end of Byzantium as a great territorial power.

peaceful cemetery by walls where 40 carts could not have carried away the Turks slain in a single assault, noted an eyewitness to the siege. Imagination restored these impressive ruins to the triple-tiered ramparts raised by fifth-century Emperor Theodosius II—13 miles around, studded with 192 towers to landward, 110 to seaward, and pierced by 50 gates. In my mind's eye I saw centuries of invaders—Huns, Avars, Persians, Arabs, Rus, Bulgars, Turks—pour out their blood in futile assaults.

Mehmed (Muhammad) II invested the city with the largest force it had yet faced: an estimated 100,000 troops deployed to landward, the Ottoman fleet massed offshore. Against this: a scant 8,000 to man the walls, and a few ships behind the chain across the Golden Horn.

Why so few defenders? Stripped of the lands that gave it food and fighters, Constantinople was a skeleton, and divided against itself. The West had finally promised help—but at a fearful price: submission of Byzantium's Holy Orthodox Church to the Church of Rome. The pope's emissary presided over a *Te Deum* in a nearly empty Hagia Sophia to sighs of dismay. "Better the Turkish turban than the Latin miter!" ran the popular sentiment. Still, they had the invincible walls. Optimists quoted the old saying: The city would stand until ships sailed over land, a manifest impossibility.

THE THUNDER of Mehmed's attack on April 11, 1453, shook the invincibility of those walls. Ramparts shattered under the barrage of bronze cannon, the largest the world had ever seen. The smallest of the sultan's 67 guns fired a 200-pound stone shot. The biggest, three feet in bore, hurled a 1,200-pound ball. Sixty oxen were needed to draw it from Edirne, preceded by road and bridge builders and flanked by 10,000 cavalry. Fortunately for the defenders, the Basilica, as Mehmed

sported with his stable of stallions and his harem of hundreds of women.

Murad's death in 1451 changed that. His mantle fell to his eldest son, who began his reign typically by strangling his baby brother. Scarcely 20, he burned to conquer Constantinople. As legend would have it, he bore the Prophet's name—Muhammad.

Mounting the walls of Constantine's city, I scanned the line of towers. The green of garden vegetables flooded moats that in 1453 had run red. An aged Turk tended a

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called it, took so long to clean and load that it could fire only seven times a day.

Filling breaches in the ramparts by night, the defenders beat back assault after assault. Turkish sappers were countermined and slaughtered underground. When four ships made it through the Turkish gantlet into port, the furious sultan gave his admiral a hundred lashes.

Seven weeks: Still the city held. Advisers urged Mehmed to raise the siege.

Give up his dream? Never! The impetuous sultan would press the siege to victory.

If he could get a flotilla inside the Golden Horn, the Byzantines would have to thin out to defend that side too. His engineers built a log slipway over the hill between the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. Brute force—man and beast bending to the ropes—inched some 70 ships over the crest.

Dismaying sight! Descending to the Golden Horn, canvas bellying to the breeze, were "ships sailing over the land!"

IT IS MAY 28. For the last time the setting sun glints on the cross atop Hagia Sophia. This evening, as on all others, the tireless Constantine attends holy services and checks the guards on the walls, though his courtiers have begged him to flee. Day by day anxious eyes have scanned the horizon for relief that does not come. Now the city is one, the thin line of soldiers determined to sell their lives dearly.

For several evenings the Turkish lines have blazed from the Sea of Marmara to the Golden Horn, the din of trumpets, drums, shouts driving a deep wedge of terror into the night. Tonight, in sultry air, the lines fall ominously silent.

Two hours after midnight men on the wall hear a rustle: the Turks moving 2,000 scaling ladders into the moat and up to the walls.

Flames roaring from cannon mouths signal the attack. Batteries concentrate on St. Romanos Gate. Here the emperor takes the point of greatest danger beside the Genoese captain, Giustiniani (Italian for Justinian), whose 700 men have fought valiantly.

Turkish archers, musketeers, slingers rain deadly fire on the parapets. Turks swarm up the ladders, but are hurled back. Heavy infantry attack through breaches pounded by the cannon. Defenders repel

them. Mehmed commits his elite Janisaries. Hand-to-hand battle seesaws.

Then, Turks discover a lightly guarded sally port in the moat. They pour through. "The Turk is in the city!" The emperor turns to meet the new threat. As night fades, he falls, hidden as bodies heap up around his.

Dawn reveals a lurid sight: streets crimson with blood as Turkish soldiers race through the city, slaughtering, sacking. Screams split the air as they drag women and children from hiding places in looted homes. They topple altars, seize golden chalices. They force open the massive bronze portals of Hagia Sophia and burst in upon the last Christian service ever held in Justinian's great church.

At midday, Mehmed, whom history will call the Conqueror, rides into the city on his white horse. The chronicler Kritovoulos reports that the sultan shed tears of compassion: "What a city we have given over to plunder and destruction!"

It is Tuesday, May 29, 1453. Don't ever ask a Greek to embark on an important project on a Tuesday. That's the unlucky day his city fell to the Turk.

CATASTROPHICALLY, the Byzantine Empire was no more. Zealots of Islam removed the cross from atop Hagia Sophia, and soon the muezzin's chant rang from minarets rising by the Bosphorus. But Byzantium lived on.

Priding himself as a new Constantine sitting on the throne of the Caesars, Mehmed the Conqueror repopulated his new capital and restaffed its bureaucracy partly with Greeks and Serbs. In his court, influenced by Persian as well as Byzantine traditions, he became an aloof autocrat surrounded by elaborate ceremony.

The once migratory Ottomans, now based on Constantine's city, proceeded to conquer a mosaic of nations similar in extent to Justinian's empire. The Ottoman Empire let its Orthodox subjects keep their Christian religion and Greco-Roman laws—so long as they paid tribute, kept their churches inconspicuous so as not to offend Islamic eyes, and furnished levies for its armies and administration. This tithe in humans periodically took the strongest, most intelligent Christian Balkan boys, aged eight to fifteen,

converted them to Islam, and drafted them into the elite army corps, the Janissaries, or trained them as court functionaries.

The conquerors emulated Hagia Sophia in their great single-domed shrines, such as Istanbul's Blue Mosque, built over and using materials from the Great Palace. Greeks became prominent in trade, seafaring, banking, and medicine; Greek and Serbian initially served alongside Turkish as the languages of the chancery; and the Turks, who had long used Byzantine currency in foreign exchange, minted their own gold coins two decades after the conquest.

"When we Turks came off the steppes, we were nomads with little culture," Dr. Nezhir Firatli, then director of Istanbul's Museum of Archaeology, told me. "It was natural to adopt some Byzantine ways. Our forebears had no ovens for making bread—only portable iron griddles for unleavened flat cakes. Hence the Turkish word for oven comes from the Greek." The Turkish *han* replaced the Byzantine caravansary, and the

famed Turkish bath, the Byzantine bath.

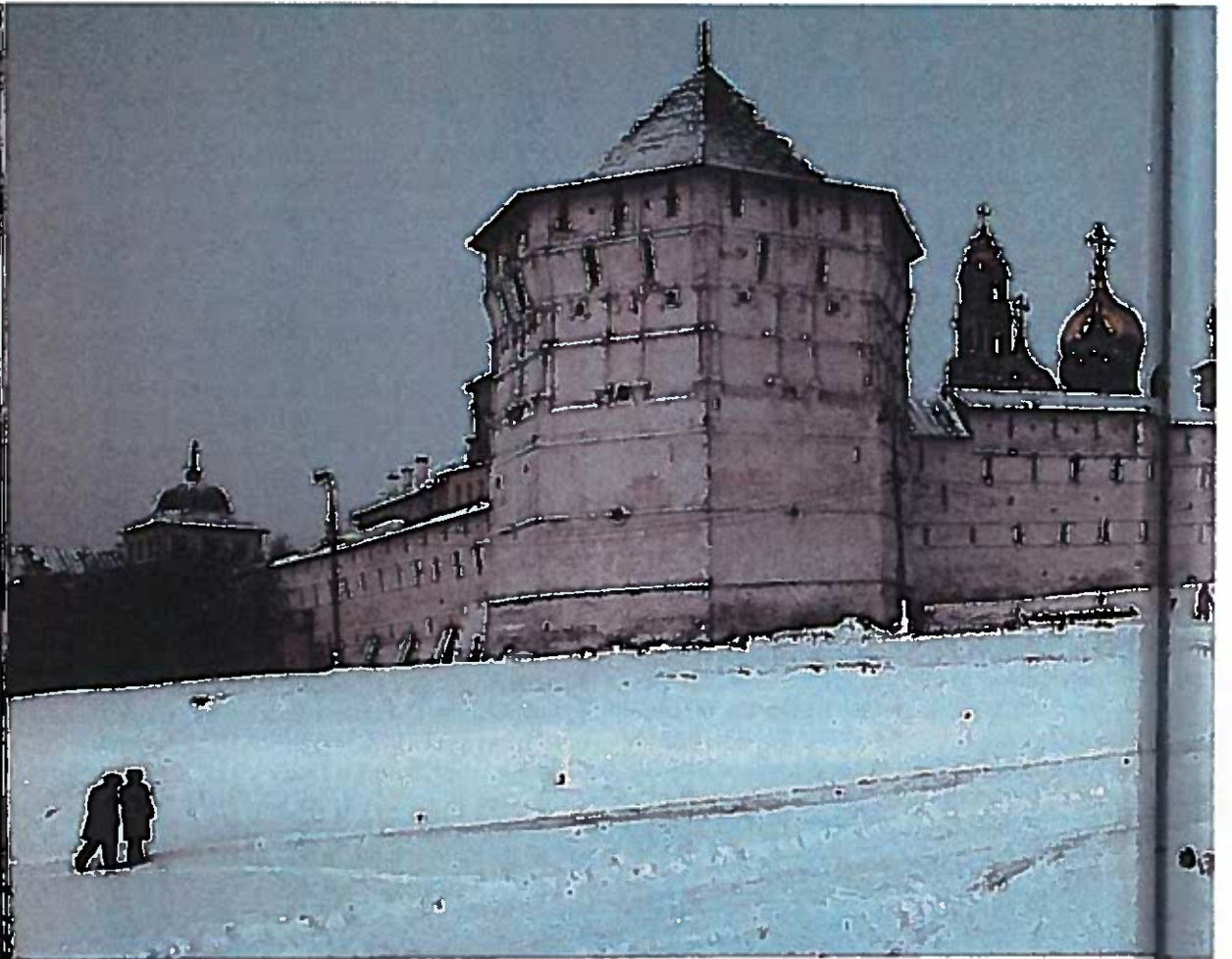
Daily life in Nicaea or Philadelphia (Turkish *İznik* and *Alaşehir*) only two generations ago differed little from Byzantine times. "Byzantine continuity is not a popular idea in Turkey," said Dr. Firatli, looking me squarely in the eye, "but it is the truth."

To create a modern Turkish state, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) turned his back on cosmopolitan Constantinople and made his capital at Ankara in the heart of Anatolia (though, ironically, the national flag bore the crescent-and-star device first stamped on coins of ancient Greek Byzantium). In 1922, during an abortive Greek attempt to reconquer Ionia, considered a "cradle of the Hellenic civilization," came a violent break with the Byzantine past.

In that fateful year Atatürk's army hurled the invaders back into the sea amid the wreckage of 3,000 years of Greek settlement in Asia Minor. This rout triggered a mass exodus from Turkey. A 23-year-old correspondent for the *Toronto Daily Star*, Ernest

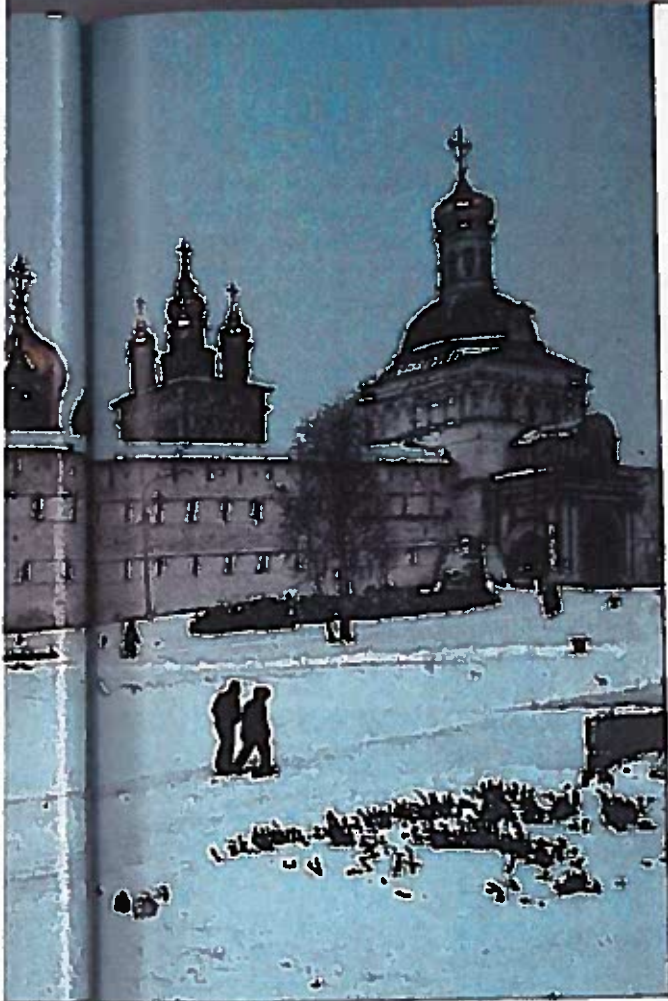


Martyred by Tatar invaders in 1330, a humble Greek tradesman from Trebizond wins sainthood as St. John the New and becomes Moldavia's patron. This scene of his death appears in silver on a panel of his coffin, a treasure in an Orthodox church at Suceava, Romania



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Soul of medieval Russia haunts Zagorsk, burial place of Tsar Boris Godunov and a favorite setting for Russian film epics. Founded in the 14th century, the walled monastic compound of a dozen churches harks back to an age when Russian rulers began to call themselves "tsar" for Caesar, convinced they were heirs to the Byzantine Empire. The Bolshevik Revolution shattered those dreams in 1917 and nearly destroyed Russia's Orthodox Church. Today Zagorsk's theological seminary, where neophytes sing at evensong (left), is one of the last schools to train priests.

Christianity took root in the Ukraine when Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, sent his envoys shopping for a religion. Impressed by Byzantine liturgy, in 988 he chose the Orthodox faith over Islam, Judaism, and the Roman Church.

Hemingway, described a silent, ghastly procession: "Twenty miles of carts . . . with exhausted, staggering men, women and children . . . walking blindly along in the rain" as the Christians of eastern Thrace jammed the roads toward Macedonia.

NEAR the Byzantine walls of Thessalonica, which threw back waves of medieval Slavs, nestles the Byzantine Church of St. David. Lamp flicker animated a beardless fifth-century mosaic Christ and caressed the deep-etched face of a woman. She told me of the tragic exchange of populations—one and a quarter million Greeks from Turkey, 400,000 Turks from Greece. Her gnarled hands clasped and unclasped, tears ran down her cheeks as she recalled her family's being wrenched, when she was 14, from their village near Ankara, and dying one by one of malaria in a refugee camp in a Macedonian swamp.

I had visited a village like hers near Konya (Byzantine Iconium) in Anatolia, its Greek Orthodox church padlocked, the screened women's balconies empty, the ornate iconostasis gaping eyeless, stripped of icons.

I had climbed a spectacular mountain gorge behind walled Trebizond, the last Byzantine city to fall—in 1461, eight years after Constantinople. Ancient Trebizond, where Xenophon's 10,000 Greek soldiers exulted to reach the Black Sea. Fabled Trebizond, where caravans brought riches of Persia and China, and monarchs sought the beauty of its Byzantine princesses. Noonday Trebizond, where phalanxes of schoolchildren in black smocks pour out onto cobbled streets teeming with colorfully garbed women and turbaned merchants hawking fish, hot chestnuts, and fruit.

Eight hundred feet over a foaming mountain stream I had climbed to a great monastery that seemed to cling to the towering rock wall by faith alone. Founded even before the age of Justinian, Soumela in the later Middle Ages was one of the richest monastic establishments in the East. I found it gutted, blackened by fire. Since 1923 no chant of Greek liturgy has sounded in that solitude, as it still does in the western mountains and valleys of Cyprus, where achingly empty Turkish villages tell of another more recent transfer of populations. These have lessened

the danger from fifth columns but have done nothing to allay the hatred that has poisoned relations between Greek and Turk.

There on Cyprus I saw barbed wire and military checkpoints in the divided capital city of Nicosia, and white-painted UN tanks patrolling the advance lines of the Turkish Army, which had invaded in response to a Greek overthrow of the island republic. This 1974 coup brought to mind the *Megali Idea*—the Great Idea—that fired the Greek imagination for generations: reconquest of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire.

FOR GREEKS there is only one city. *The City*—Constantinople," the widow of a Greek Army officer told me in Thessalonica. "Even the Turkish

name 'Istanbul' comes from the Greek *eis ten polin*—to the city." Her sentiments echoed 19th-century patriots: "Our capital is Constantinople. Our national temple is Hagia Sophia, for 900 years the glory of Christendom. The Patriarch of Constantinople is our spiritual leader." In cherished legend a priest bearing the chalice, interrupted in the last liturgy in Hagia Sophia, will emerge to complete the service when the shrine is again Christian.

The Greek dream, however, collided with Balkan dreams of imperial glory. The sultan fanned endemic hatreds by classing all his Orthodox subjects—whether Serb or Bulgar, Greek or Albanian or Romanian—as the *Rum Milleti*, the Roman people, and putting them under the civil as well as



A stubborn faith continues to fill Soviet churches despite deterrence by a government that has converted many

churches into museums with antireligious themes. A young Muscovite is christened (above)

ecclesiastical control of the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople. Patriarchs adopted the eagle symbol, ceremonies, dress, and functions of a Byzantine emperor and set their Greek bishops to hellenizing the proud Balkan peoples.

In the 1820s Greece rose against the Ottoman overlord; in 1830 it was the first Balkan nation to break free. But many more Greeks lived outside the new kingdom than in it. With *enosis*—union—with Greece the battle cry, the modern map of Greece was assembled piece by piece, escalating the hatred of her neighbors, who watched with cannibal eyes and devoured one another in two Balkan Wars.

Then Sarajevo . . . 1914. Today it is a market city tucked amid the stern Bosnian

mountains of Yugoslavia, where minarets of nearly 80 mosques thrust like rockets above Orthodox and Catholic churches, and men in fezzes and women in veils and baggy trousers thread a booth-lined bazaar. Near this crossroad of cultures Emperor Theodosius the Great in 395 ran the line dividing the unwieldy Roman Empire administratively into East and West. Here, by the embanked Miljacka River, a pistol shot split the world when a Serbian student assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had annexed lands once Serbian. Austria, backed by Germany, determined to crush Serbia. "Holy Russia" came to the aid of her Slavic Orthodox brother. And interlocking alliances swept Europe's nations into a war that claimed ten million lives.

Greece, entering that holocaust with the prospect of Turkish territory, at war's end occupied ancient Smyrna (today palm-shaded İzmir ringing its spacious Aegean harbor). Then, with defeated Turkey in revolt and the sultanate toppling, the Greeks saw their big chance. But their invasion deep into Asia Minor, hurled back, perished in the carnage of Smyrna and the mass exodus that ensued.

IN ISTANBUL'S Rum Patrikhanesi, a garden of peace amid the city's clamor and squalor, stands the 18th-century terra-cotta basilica of St. George and the modest residence and offices of the spiritual leader of the Orthodox faithful throughout the world. His All Holiness, Dimitrios, "by the Grace of God, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch," rose from his desk and took my hand warmly in both of his.

The patriarch told me he sees as his role the promotion of understanding and harmony among "sister" Orthodox Churches. Many separated from Constantinople's fold when their nations broke free of the Turks.

More than 70 percent of the baptized Orthodox today dwell in Communist countries. Churches in exile abound. The national churches of Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia are autocephalous (self-headed), with their own patriarchs. But the Ecumenical Patriarch is *primus inter pares*—first among equals—and his spiritual sway extends far beyond the confines of



GEORGIAN ENAMEL, CA 1100; KIEV MUSEUM

in honor of St. Dimitry (above), guardian of Thessalonica, long Byzantium's second most important city.

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his church in Istanbul, which he heads as a Turkish citizen.

With a dwindling flock, stripped of the last vestige of civil authority, even forbidden to proselytize in his few Turkish parishes, why does he remain in a Muslim city? The Archbishop of Constantinople became head of the Byzantine Church because of his special position at the capital of the empire, he said. He is bound to this historic see.

On my way out I paused by the patriarchate's central gate, painted black and welded shut. Here a patriarch was hanged for treason when the War of Greek Independence broke out in 1821. As I stepped into the teeming streets where a priest is forbidden to wear his clerical garb, I thought back on the fallen glories of Byzantium's great church, still claiming universal dominion, still clinging in the City of Constantine.

GOD HAD PUNISHED the Greeks, Russians piously observed in 1453 when the Turks took Constantinople. For betraying their faith by submitting to Rome, He withdrew His protection, and their empire fell. Now Moscow moved from the periphery to the center of the Orthodox world, shining in the purity of her faith. "Two Romes have fallen. A third stands fast. A fourth there cannot be," ran the monkly prophecy.

Rising from medieval isolation in Russia's forested northern plains, Muscovy shook off the Mongol yoke that had crushed Kiev, overcame Novgorod and other fur-trading rivals, and pushed back Catholic Lithuanians and Poles. Ringed by enemies of her faith, xenophobic Moscow raised onion-domed churches and monasteries in forest clearings all the way to the inhospitable shores of the White Sea and fiercely clung to traditional rites.

Ivan the Great married Sophia Paleologus, niece of the last Byzantine emperor, adopted the Byzantine double-headed eagle and the title of tsar, derived from Caesar. Holy Russia became one great religious house, ever purging herself. Military campaigns became crusades. The court banqueted to sacred readings. In homes the father took on the abbot's role, wielding absolute power over wife, child, servant, and serf. With the clanging of Moscow's 5,000

church bells in their ears, visitors commented on fasts, church discipline, and seven-hour standing services "severe enough to turn children's hair gray."

Dogma and ritual from Byzantium fossilized in spiritual isolation and distrust of inquiry; so did the political and social structure rigidify, with sacred and temporal power vested in the tsar, supported by a subservient church. Inheriting the Byzantine conviction of her destiny to rule, and suspicious of the heretical and corrupt West, Russia grew to a giant with Orthodoxy in her veins, whether she worshiped at the shrines of the Mother of God or Marx. She knew no middle ground between autocracy and anarchy.

The tsars are gone; the Revolution of 1917 homogenized Russian society. But even the "new" Russian, embracing a Western ideology and Western technology, cannot escape his Byzantine roots. Ubiquitous party leaders' portraits are the icons of today. And the living iconostasis of officials at a review of armaments in Red Square is as precisely ordered as the ranks of saints flanking the image of Christ in Zagorsk's cathedral.

"There can be no change. It is a terrible thing. The program is the idol. If one link in the chain is broken, we will not be able to grasp the end." As he said this, shock showed on the face of the young Novosti Press agent with whom I would travel thousands of miles in the Soviet Union.

Involved was not the writ of God, but an itinerary prepared by bureaucrats. Yet the suggestion that it be altered to my objectives stirred the same visceral response that impelled thousands of Old Believers to choose death rather than change.

Since claiming the Byzantine birthright, Russia has looked possessively, obsessively south. In the 1770s she wrested from the Turks that ancient Byzantine frontier land, the Crimea. A treaty empowered her to build and protect a church in Istanbul. She interpreted this as a protectorate over the Balkan Orthodox, many of whom saw Holy Russia as a savior. Russian Pan-Slavism influenced Russian expansionism in the push toward the Mediterranean.

"Economic and political motives figure as well," Soviet scholars told me in Moscow. "But yes, there was a Russian crusade to put the cross back on top of Hagia Sophia."

Like the Greeks, Catherine the Great had her own Great Idea—a restored Byzantine Empire in the Balkans, to be ruled from a reconquered Constantinople by her grandson Constantine. She even hired John Paul Jones, unemployed naval hero, to command a Russian flotilla fighting in that cause in the Black Sea. Ironically, Russia came within a hairbreadth of gaining Constantinople and the Straits in World War I. The Allies promised them to her upon Turkey's defeat. Then her revolution knocked Russia out of the war, scuttling that prospect.

Neither Britain nor France had wanted Russia in the Mediterranean. Six decades earlier, both had supported Turkey against Russia in the Crimean War, which put Tennyson's stirring "into the valley of Death rode the six hundred" on every tongue.

While in the Crimea I sought Soviet permission to visit that valley where the Light Brigade, those cavalymen who were unquestioningly but to do and die, had charged. But I was not allowed to go. Nor was I told the reason why.

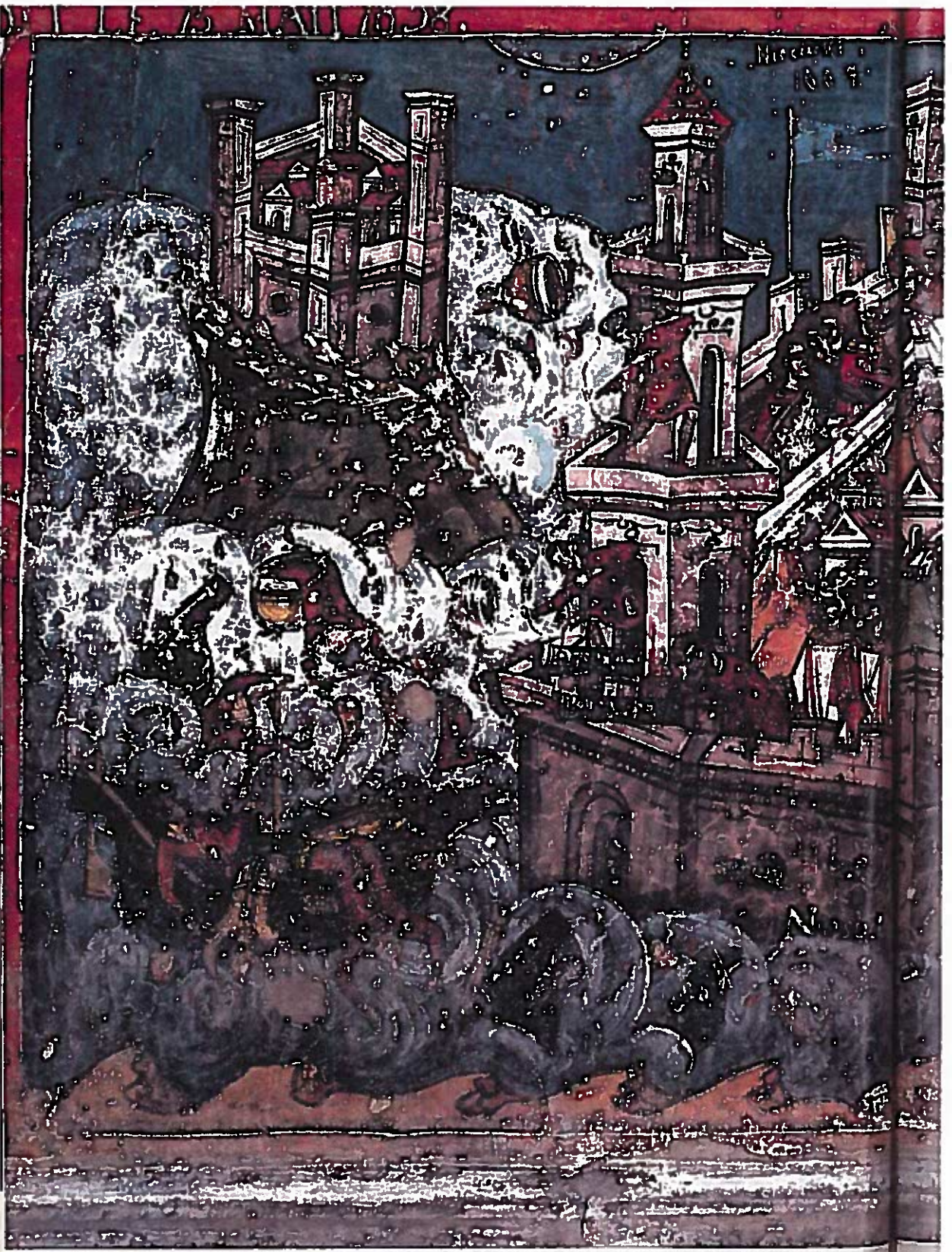
"The Crimean War really began in Bethlehem," Yosef Uziely, then treasurer of Jerusalem, told me on the garden terrace of his home near the Israel Museum. The Ottomans, he said, had trouble keeping peace among Christian sects, who bloodied the shrines with their strife. In 1853 Russia's dispute with France over guardianship of Holy Land shrines came to a head. The Russians based their claims on the Byzantine establishment of these shrines; the French, on their reconquest by Latin crusaders.

Riot broke out in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity. Several Orthodox monks were killed. Tsar Nicholas, accusing the Turkish police of complicity, reasserted his claim that he was protector of the sultan's Orthodox Christian subjects, invaded Turkey's Danubian provinces, ordered his ships to sea, and sank a Turkish fleet in port. The specter of Russia cutting the England-to-India lifeline soon brought Britain into the war, a war which ended 17 months later with the fall of Sevastopol.

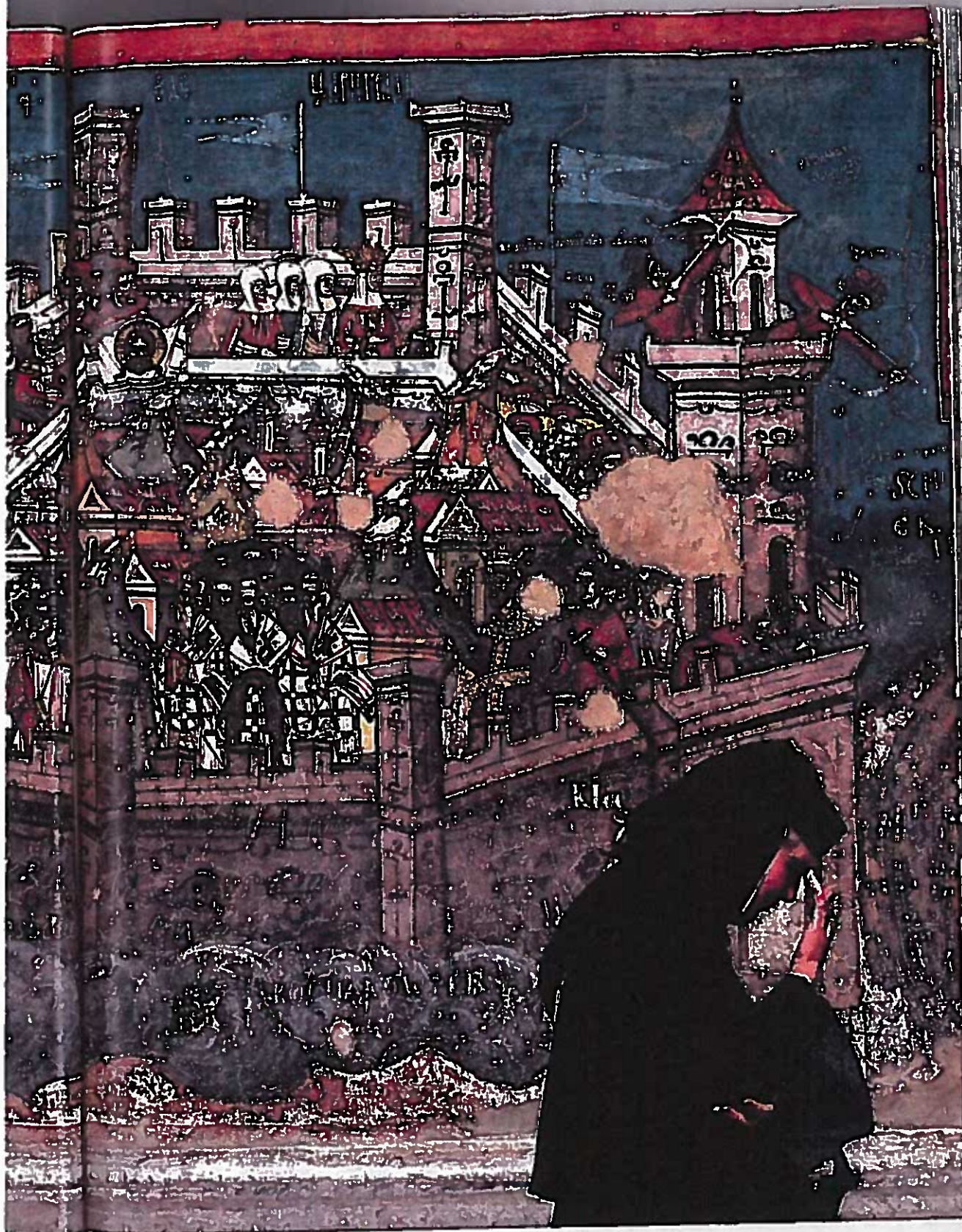
"Now it's Russian against Russian in



A stitch in time, of gold and silver thread, helps restore a 15th-century embroidery of Christ and the Virgin in a textile restoration laboratory of the art museum in Bucharest, Romania. Such luxury goods were often the exclusive monopoly of imperial workshops, which during Justinian's time employed thousands of craftsmen.



Day of wrath for Eastern Christendom, depicted on a Romanian fresco, came on May 29, 1453, when Constantinople fell after a seven-week siege by Mehmed II and



100,000 Ottoman troops. Manned by 8,000 defenders, the walls proved invincible to the largest cannon the world had yet seen—until a lightly guarded portal offered a way in.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER JODI COBB (RIGHT)

The True Cross of Christ, held by St. Helena and her son Constantine, adorns a Cappadocian fresco (above). According to legend, Helena—first famous Christian pilgrim to the Holy Land—not only found the Cross, but also the tomb of Christ. Her son ordered a magnificent building raised above the Resurrection site; parts are incorporated in the present-day Church of the Holy Sepulchre (facing page, foreground) in Jerusalem's Old City. The Dome of the Rock, background, marks the traditional site of Muhammad's ascension to heaven.

Constantine's dream of a universal church would not survive the Orthodox split with Rome in 1054. But all Christendom, a quarter of mankind, owes his empire an enduring debt for its spiritual and civic legacy.

Jerusalem," Mr. Uziely went on. "The Soviets against the émigré Russians. They've been battling in Israeli courts for years. At stake are millions of dollars of ecclesiastical properties in Israel."

In 1948 the new State of Israel, desperate for diplomatic recognition, acceded to the Soviet demand that all Russian religious holdings in Israel be turned over to its Orthodox Church in Moscow—despite their belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, now headquartered in New York City. The crowning irony: After the Six Day War in 1967, the Soviet Union severed relations with Israel.

IT IS THE EVE of Easter in Jerusalem—Easter by the Orthodox calendar. From early morning, pilgrims have filled the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the ceremony of the holy fire, to me the most exalting ritual of the Eastern churches.

Squeezed against a parapet amid that press of humanity, I watch black-clad women kneel to spread oil on the Stone of Uncion, said to be the slab on which the body of Jesus was anointed, and press their weeping faces against it.

The thump of maces and rhythmic clapping and chanting draw my eyes to phalanxes of the faithful slowly moving around Christ's tomb in the center of the rotunda. In the banners and gleaming vestments I see Byzantium pass in review: skull-capped Syrians, Armenians in pointed hoods, turbaned Copts of Alexandria, Greek Orthodox in cylindrical hats and robes of gold and crimson and black.

Thrice circling the tomb in solemn procession, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem pauses at its entry. He steps inside. The clamor in the rotunda fades to silence. The church is dark, the tension electric.

Suddenly, I see a lighted taper thrust from the tomb—the holy fire, symbolizing Christ rising from the dead. Flames leap from taper to taper until the darkness is punctured by a thousand fiery holes. Tower bells thunder, shaking the very walls. Cries rise in a multitude of throats as the splintered churches of Byzantium coalesce into a single mass of believers celebrating the Resurrection.

"He is risen!" Through faith in this miracle Byzantium lives. □

