



Russian Icons from Transylvania

Exhibition Catalogue

edited by Ana Dumitran & Dumitrița-Daniela Filip

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Exhibition Catalogue



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RICONTRANS

VISUAL CULTURE, PIETY
AND PROPAGANDA:
TRANSFER AND RECEPTION OF
RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS ART IN THE BALKANS
AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
(16TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY)



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Russian Icons from Transylvania:

Exhibition Catalogue

Edited by
Ana Dumitran &
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip

Alba Iulia  
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Dem Ko: Einbildung Gubernium wird aufgegeben, die die Reichs-
 Hofe Ländkammer, und ähnelnde das gemeine Volk nur zu Trunke
 hundert Jahre in das Land nicht einzulassen zu lassen. Wien
 den 28. Juli.

8989. 755.

Dem Ko: Ung. Statthaltern, und Einbildung Gubernium wird
 die die Mittel befohlen, auf was ent man die Reichs Hofe
 hundertjährige Leistungen, wieder zu machen müßte?

9070. 755.

Schon dem Statthaltern unter dem Titel: Rechnung der Mittel,
 die Ung. Hofe die geringen Leistungen zu hundert Jahren, welche
 die Überstimmungen ausgedrückt gewesen, p. worden 100 - 100.
 100. Exemplaria mit dem Auftrag gegeben, daß die p. hundert
 Jahre die in dem 15. Blatt angegebenen Hauptbestände in die
 Landes Hofe übertragen lassen, und die Verteilung, an die geringe
 Bestände, welche durch die Überstimmung gelitten haben das
 möglichst herzustellen, und bewirken soll. Wien 28. Juli 755.

Cod: cum Orig per Regensorem +

Die Einföhrung eines besondern Hofes, der Rechnung für
 hundert Jahre, wird dem Ko: Statthaltern, und Einbildung Gubernio, dass
 die Hofe Hofe und Einbildung Thesaurariae angeschlossen.

9085. 755.

Die Ko: Majestät haben geordnet anzubringen gemacht, daß
 auf die Einföhrung eines besondern Hofes mit der Einföhrung der Rechnung
 bei hundert Jahren die auch bei den übrigen Stellen eingeföhrte werden soll, zu
 welchem allenfalls derselben befohlen wird, daß die Einbildung nicht allein das, sondern
 auch ihre angehörenden mit Rechnung Hofe hundert Jahren, und solche mit
 Hofe Hofe versehen.

The Russian Icons of Transylvania. From Political Destabilization to Cultural Transfer

translated by Mihail K. Qaramah

Ana Dumitran National Museum of the Union Alba Iulia

The exhibition followed by this catalogue was part of the RICONTRANS research project, dedicated to the transfer and the reception of Russian religious art to the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean.¹ When the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia became part of the team that undertook this research, a conclusion was already emerging: among the old icons preserved in Transylvania, the number of Russian icons was very small. There were several explanations for this situation, but they were no more than suppositions. At the end of three years of research in Transylvanian archives and collections, as well as a number of collections in Moldavia and Wallachia, we seek to present the facts we uncovered together with the researchers who joined us along the way. Their investigations, even if they did not explicitly concern Transylvania, allow us to reconstruct an overall picture of the Romanian area, with the help of which the subject could be approached in terms of terminology, not only from the point of view of quantity or artistic value of the icons identified. Also, the diversity of the social levels involved in the transfer process, with their political and economic implications, as well as the human and spiritual contribution of the monks from the Russian Empire – following the footsteps of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului and Saint Paisie Velichkovsky – who supported the monasteries in Moldavia and Wallachia, sheds light on the situation in Transylvania, where the only potential beneficiaries of the cultural transfer belonged to the lower classes of society. This explains why the icons manufactured in the workshops of the Armoury Palace are completely lacking, because there was no political elite worthy to receive them and no commanders capable of supporting the purchase of such expensive objects. However, the large number of Orthodox, who in turn were trying to attract Moscow's support,² was the focus of the Tsarist propaganda apparatus at least throughout the 18th century, and the icon seems to have been the most effective agent in raising the awareness of the masses.

The earliest known record of the Russian icon trade in Transylvania, dated May 22, 1761, gives us precisely this image of the icon

◀ Fig. 1. Register entry concerning the imperial decree of July 28, 1785, which led to the expulsion of Russian icon peddlers and their ban on entering Transylvania in the future. The National Archives of Hungary, Hungarian Royal Chancellery, *Liber normalium et dignitatum*, no. 6, p. 351.

Copyright: The National Archives of Hungary.

Notes

1 RICONTRANS project *Visual Culture, Piety and Propaganda: Transfer and Reception of Russian Religious Art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (16th–early 20th c.)*, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant 2018, is implemented at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies / Foundation for Research & Technology – Hellas (IMS-FORTH) in cooperation with the Benaki Museum (Athens), National Museum of the Union (Alba Iulia) and Faculty of Philosophy (University of Belgrade). <https://ricontrans-project.eu/>

2 Dragomir 1920, p. 124 *sqq.* (1743 journey of Protopope Eustatie Grid to the Court of Tsarina Elisabeta Petrovna, to challenge the Heterodox attacks on the church in Braşov), p. 198 *sqq.* (1749 journey of Protopope Nicolae Pop of Balomir,



▲ Fig. 2. *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Rusca, Caraș-Severin County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat

▶ Fig. 3. *Four-part Icon, with Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon and Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa*, end of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: unknown. Copyright: Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca.



Notes

former vicar of the Greek-Catholic bishop Inochentie Micu); Dragomir 1930, p. 107 *sqq.* (1757 journey of monk Nicodim), p. 110 *sqq.* (1758 journey of priest Ioan of Aciliu), p. 299 *sqq.* (regarding the involvement of the Court of St. Petersburg in the religious conflicts within the Habsburg Empire).

3 *Detinentur hic in Carceribus nostrates quidam turbulentissimi, ac plane proiecti animi viri saeculares Iconarii, qui cum Iconibus per totam patriam divagabantur denunciantes rudiori Plebi, quomodo Mosci veniant et quemcumque absque Imaginibus in domo reperirent, gladio occident, adeoque omnis orthodoxus Imagines emant, si distingui et vivere volunt; insuper sub Imaginibus fidem nescio quam novam nunciebant, ac venditabant. Sanctissime sane faceret Augustissima, si eos Iconarios cum aliis sibi similibus, ad Praesidia custodienda, aut Valla fodenda legaret, sunt enim apposite apti, nempe veloces, robusti, tenelli, qui, si dimissi et remissi fuerint, certe malum peius facient [...].*

as a weapon. The time was extremely critical, and the document – although enigmatic in many respects – highlights its full drama. It is a letter that a monk from Blaj, the future Greek-Catholic bishop Grigore Maior addressed to General Adolph von Buccow, who had been sent to Transylvania by the Empress Maria Theresia to put down the uprising against religious union led by the monk Sofronie from Cioara. His main mission was to clarify the confessional situation in each community, the Romanians being invited before a commission to freely express their opinion on whether or not they wished to preserve the union with Rome, concluded by the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania in 1697-1701. The General was to introduce the opponents of the union to their new spiritual leader, the Serbian Orthodox bishop of Buda. Describing the way the commission acted, clearly dissatisfied with the fact that it did not urge the population to speak out in favour of preserving the union, Grigore Maior seems to have found other culprits for the success of Orthodoxy, whom he describes as follows:

Some very turbulent fellow-citizens and laymen with entirely indolent souls are held here in the dungeons: the so-called icon peddlers, who have travelled throughout the country announcing to the more uncivilized people that the Muscovites are coming and will pierce with the sword all those who are found without icons in their houses, so that all those of the true faith would do well to buy the icons, if they want to be spared and live. Moreover, using these icons as a pretext, the icon peddlers preached and spread



▲ Figs 4-6. *Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon and Seven-part Icon (Sedmitsa)*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy worship. Provenance: Bichigiu, Bistrița-Năsăud County.

Copyright: Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean, Năsăud.

◄ Figs 7-8. *Saints Constantine and Helen and Four-part Icon, with Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, and Saint George Slaying the Dragon*, end of the 18th century. Provenance: Călinești-Căeni, Maramureș County.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

some new kind of faith. It would be a most sacred act if Her Most August Majesty would send these icon peddlers, together with others of the same kind, to act as guards or to dig fortifications: for they are suitably fit, equally quick, robust, and agile, and, if they are forgiven and set free, they will commit even greater evil [...].³

It is not clear from Grigore Maior's account whether these "icon peddlers", the term by which he identifies the icon sellers, were local or Russian, nor whether the icons sold were painted by Transylvanian artists or brought from Russia, but the inclusion in the equation of the imminence of a Muscovite attack and comparison with a similar message conveyed by a survey organised in 1785⁴ is sufficient to conclude that at least the icons were Russian. Gregory Major's letter is later than the information provided by the Suzdal Protopope Anania Fedorov, who records for the year 1754 the presence of icon traders from Kholuy and Palekh *v Tcessariu* (в Цесарии)⁵ i.e. a territory ruled by the Kaiser. Its location in a chain running from Poland to Bulgaria forces us to recognise the Habsburg Empire under this name. The combination of the two sources allows us to conclude that the "icon peddlers" were also Russians. What remains a mystery is the "new faith" they were spreading, the suppression of which did not come to the attention of the authorities, who did not take any further interest in the icon sellers until another conflict that required the intervention of the army, the so-called Rebellion of Horea, which broke out in November 1784. It should be noted, however, that throughout this period, although no restrictive measures were taken against them, they could be arrested and imprisoned as foreigners, being considered

Notes

The document was made available to us by Radu Nedici, a member of the teaching staff of the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, who discovered it in the National Archives of Hungary. For the translation of the Latin text, we benefited from the generous support of Prof. Vasile Rus from the "Babeș-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca.

⁴ "[...] certain peddlers from Russia go about in Transylvania with icons for sale, and, in order to be able to distribute them for a better price, they endeavor to convince the non-united people that, if they did not have such icons on them, they would be exposed to the danger of being killed by the soon-to-arrive Muscovites" (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex II).

⁵ Тапатов 1995, p. 203.

► Fig. 9. *Nativity of Christ*, end of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Pădureni, Timiș County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

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⁶ Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex 1/a.

⁷ Ladislau Balo, Viscount of Lower Alba County, informed governor Samuel von Brukenthal on November 11, 1784, of “some individuals – sometimes three or four in number – who are constantly wandering around here peddling Muscovite icons, chestnuts and the like” referring to the fair in Aiud in early November. On 8 or 9 November he arrested two of them, but had to release them because they had “free passes.” One of them, because “he was aimlessly, barely carrying a bag of chestnuts and selling them at double the price to those who wanted to buy,” was arrested again. Balo goes on to ask for instructions from the governor on what to do next. In the reply from the Gubernium, dated November 15, 1784 and sent from Sibiu on November 16, the barely carrying a bag of chestnuts a “Muscovite” and the Viscount is asked to interrogate him on “where he came from; also for what purpose; what he had to do there; where he had wandered until then. And, after the interrogation is over, to submit, without delay, to the attention of the Gubernium, a statement based on all the circumstances, specifying at the same time where the others went and by whom the free passes were issued; should you find him innocent, release him” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex 1/a-b).

Alexander Bethlen, the supreme Count of Târnava County, reminds the authorities in charge of the Principality that: “during a riot, such inhabitants of Moscow were intercepted here and I ordered an investigation into their actions, but unfortunately I did not find anything certain, and [as] the Wallachian people, who thought that any



by default guilty of the turbulence that took place in the territories they crossed. One such event in Bihor County brought them to the attention of Grigore Maior in 1761, and also because of the Romanian uprising in the Western Carpathians, in November 1784, a group of such peddlers was arrested in Aiud.⁶ But justice took its course and, if it was proved that they were not guilty, they were released, with the recommendation to leave the province.⁷

It may have been precisely their frequent presence in the context of such turmoil that put them, in the winter of 1784, at the top of the list of those who might have incited the peasants to riot. The conviction of the exegetes of this terrible event, namely that the authorities were looking for a scapegoat in order to avoid admitting their own guilt in the unmeasured exploitation of the Romanians, turns out to be entirely unfounded.⁸ The Romanians’ predisposition to listen to the advice of the “alleged Russian icon sellers” is also recorded at the lower levels of the Principality’s administration, not only at the top. The survivor of one of the massacres committed by peasants in Hunedoara County, Barbara Göttfy, testifies in her memoirs published four decades later:

The need for this close vigilance was all the more unavoidable; because at that time, under the guise of treason, many suspicious Russians were lurking among the Wallachians. Whom they welcomed and cared for, and tried to talk to them secretly. For which mistake, when the Wallachians were reprimanded by their superiors, it was not only difficult for them, but they even dared to answer their superiors like this: “In vain, you warn us not to socialize with the Muscovites, because we will continue to do so from now on; being



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harm would turn out to be to [their] advantage, did not want to reveal at that time the false pretences of those Muscovites, I finally set the latter free, sending them to their country” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/m).

8 In Macedonia too, Russian icon merchants were suspected of being agents of the Russian Empire; see Kostopoulos 2021. The same in Romania in the last decades of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century; see Sorescu 2019-2020.

▲ Fig. 10. *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: unknown. Copyright: ‘Octavian Goga’ Museum, Ciucea.

► Fig. 11. *Saint George Slaying the Dragon*, second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Bichigiu, Bistrița-Năsăud County. Copyright: Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean, Năsăud.



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⁹ *Ezen szoros vígyáztatásra annyival elkerülhetlenebb szükség vala; mivel azon időben, képek' árulgatásának színe alatt, az Oláhok között sok gyanús Oroszok lappangottak. Kiket azok igen szívesen fogadván, és ápolgatván, velek titkon beszéllgethetni igyekeztek. Melly hibáért, az Olahokat ha megfeddették Előljárójik, ez azoknak nemcsak nehezen esett, hanem még merészeltek ezeknek így feleselni: "Hijában intetek bennünket, hogy a' Muszkákkal ne társalkodjunk, mert mi ezt ezentúl is fogjuk tenni; állhatatosan meglevén győződve azeránt, hogy Isten ellen vétkeznek mind azok, kik minket az Oroszokkal való együttlételettől eltiltanak; kikben megbecsülhetetlen jó szív ver, és a' kikkel mi egy valláson vagyunk."* (Götffy 1823, p. 7-8; in Romanian translation, the fragment has been published by Meteș 1933, p. 261).

¹⁰ Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex VI-VII.

¹¹ Dragomir 2014, p. 114-167.

¹² Abrudan 2022, p. 300.

firmly convinced that all those who forbid us from being together with the Russians are sinning against God; in whom an inestimable good heart beats, and with whom we share the same religion."⁹

To what extent such contacts were truly dangerous for the Habsburg Empire is impossible to determine today on the basis of the few and inconclusive sources preserved. What is certain is that on July 28, 1785, Emperor Joseph II issued a decree calling for the immediate expulsion of Russian merchants and a ban on their future entry into the Empire¹⁰ (fig. 1). The extremely small number of icons preserved seems to suggest that the decree was strictly enforced during the Empire's subsequent existence. Also, the difficulty of dating the icons with certainty before 1785 leaves room to suspect that, even if the decree was strictly enforced, there were other ways of bringing the icons into the province. The most handy may have been the shepherds' journeys outside Transylvania in search of grassland, which took them from Sibiu and Brașov not only to the provinces bordering Transylvania, but also to those of the Russian Empire.¹¹ It was on such occasions that the two icons still preserved in the church of Tălmăcel (Sibiu County) (cat. 18, 36), of genuine artistic quality, which came into the possession of the church in the last decades of the 18th century, were most probably acquired.¹² The Macedonian-Wallachian merchants may also have been the colporteurs of some of the valuable icons, such as the icon donated in 1798 to the church of Joseni (Harghita County) (cat. 1). The total lack of *krasnushki* (lit. "reddened") icons in the collections studied supports the assertion that mass-produced icons specific to the



◀ Fig. 12. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Jebel, Timiș County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

19th century never reached Transylvania, although they did penetrate massively into Romanian communities in Moldavia and Wallachia. The activity of workshops that painted on glass, a technique that made the icon accessible, even if not always cheap, successfully made up for the lack of Russian manufactured icons on the market. Transylvania may thus have become unattractive to the *ofenyas* (peddlers), hence the view that the decree of July 28, 1785 was strictly adhered to, although after a while it may simply not have needed renewing.

If it is difficult today to distinguish how much truth there was in the accusations of political destabilization that accompanied the distribution of Russian icons in Transylvania, it is no less easy to appreciate the impact of these icons in the process of cultural transfer. In practice, what has been preserved is below the quality threshold that would have led local artists to take over certain models and perpetuate them as a consequence of the ban on importing new copies. Even themes such as the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* or the *Resurrection with Twelve Feasts*, which would become widespread in the 19th century in the form of icons on glass, cannot be said to originate exclusively in Russian models, because most depictions of the Virgin Mary do not follow the

- Fig. 13. *Mother of God Smolenskaya*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Berzasca, Caraș-Severin County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

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13 Dumitran 2018, p. 4.

14 See the contribution of Ilya Borovikov in this volume.

15 The report of the Vicecount Ladislaus Balo, whose official residence was in Aiud, sent on June 10, 1785, states that: “the *Tabula Continua* reverently reported to Your Excellency and the High Imperial Gubernium that some Russians of this kind had previously wandered here and there in this County with icons for sale” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/k).

16 The report from Biia District, Târnava County, addressed to Supreme Count Alexander Bethlen on May 28, 1785 tells of three “Moskal riders with a wonderful carriage who, last autumn, sold many icons painted on wood – some more expensive, some cheaper – to Romanians in Aiud on Saint Gallen’s Day (1 July), in Cetatea de Baltă on Saint King Stephen’s Day (20 August)” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/n).

17 The mayor of Alba Iulia reported, on May 25, 1785, that: “it was clearly found out that in the recently passed year of 1784, in September, two Muscovite icon peddlers visited here the non-Uniate priest Nicolae Rusan – then alive, now deceased – and that, as a result of a deception-following a single trick according to which, if any of the Wallachians were not endowed with such icons, they would not be good Christians, some of the Wallachians bought the icons and hung them on their walls” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/i).

18 The mayor of Bistrița reported, on May 20, 1785: “those inhabitants of Russia who are said to cross this Great Principality with icons for sale, were also in this place last year and exhibited their icons for sale, among the Wallachian population” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/b).



type of the miraculous *Akhtyrskaya* icon, with her head uncovered and her hands clasped in a Western-inspired pietistic gesture. Also, the *Resurrection* depicted only in the version of the *Empty tomb*, not in combination with the *Descent into Hell*, as in Russian icons. A rather suspect echo, but of no importance in the overall art of Transylvanian iconography, is the representation of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* with the two lobes of his forehead very pronounced and the top of his head bald, belonging to an anonymous icon painter active in the southern part of what is now Alba County at the end of the 18th century (fig. 15). Another anonymous painter, hired at the beginning of the 19th century by communities in the northern part of the present Alba County, may have had similar sources of inspiration. Three royal icons painted by this artist and belonging to the wooden church of Valea Largă – Sălciua are preserved (figs 16-18). The one depicting the Virgin Mary seems to follow the Russian iconographic type of the *Unfading Rose*.

I have only found one intentional instance of the faithful reproduction of a Russian icon and that is a work by Nicolae Oancea from Vale (Sibiu County), a very prolific icon painter, known especially for painting icons on glass. In 1833 he painted, for the church in Poiana Sibiului, a duplicate of a Russian icon, which – for some inexplicable reason – he painted on the back of his model (cat. 33). In the same year, he also reproduced the image on glass (fig. 19).¹³

But what seems spectacular and, in any case, unexpected is the double status of the Russian icon peddlers, who turned out to be icon-painters



◀ Fig. 14. *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Sub Piatră Monastery, Alba County. Credits: Alina-Geanina Ionescu.

and not just merchants, at least some of them. The commissioned painting of icons, such as that of the *Christ Pantokrator* preserved in the collection of the Diocese of Covasna and Harghita, with the text of the Gospel written in Romanian, to which is associated the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (see p. 40-41, figs 18-19) and perhaps others, now lost, proves the ability of these pilgrims to adapt to local tastes, to which they responded using the technique and manner learned at home. Other icons, whose wooden support seems to have arrived in Transylvania unpainted, also indicate the intention of the pilgrim artist to be prepared to respond to occasional requests.¹⁴

The documents locate the *ofenyas* in the fairs of Aiud,¹⁵ Cetatea de Baltă,¹⁶ Alba Iulia,¹⁷ Bistrița,¹⁸ Târgu-Mureș,¹⁹ and very probably Brașov,²⁰ but also moving from house to house across the villages of Târnava County (today under the jurisdiction of Alba and Mureș Counties),²¹ but certainly also through other Romanian villages located on the routes between or around the cities with important fairs. Traces of them can still be found today only where buyers donated (part of) the icons they bought to the church and to the extent that these icons were collected in time, before being thrown away as a result of the renovation initiatives of the last century. These icons, which had entered the collections of ecclesiastical bodies or state-sponsored museums, were joined over time by other icons collected by specialists outside Transylvania or acquired from people from other Romanian provinces who had settled in Transylvania after its integration into Romania in 1918. Among these, a special place is occupied by emigrants from Russian territories or who returned to Russia as a result of the peace treaties concluded after the two World Wars.

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19 The mayor of Târgu-Mureș said: “it was discovered that such Muscovites put on sale even in this place certain icons until November of the last year; indeed, these icons were even bought by some inhabitants of Greek rite” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/e).

20 The mayor of Brașov similarly stated, on May 28, 1785, that: “I found nothing but that in recent days only one Serb arrived here with icons for sale, [and] he had tried to persuade the people to buy these icons only with the argument that anyone who professes to be a good Christian must buy those icons, and that he who did not bother to buy them was not worthy of the name of a Christian” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/g).

21 The report of the Biia district, already quoted, mentions them in the villages over which the Biia district exercised jurisdiction and indicates Biia, Veseuș, Sânmiclăuș and Valea Sasului as places where these Russians advised people to “Buy these icons because they will be of use in the future.” In the other villages, like Sântămărie, they did not say such things (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/n).

The report from Delenii District, Târnava County, addressed to Supreme Count Alexander Bethlen on May 31, 1785, states that in the villages of Blăjel, Velț and Bazna icons were sold for two Maria Theresia thalers and that many people bought them. The sellers advised the people to “buy, because whatever comes into your house will show that you are Christians” (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/o).

The report from Band District, Târnava County, addressed to the Supreme Count Alexander Bethlen on June 20, 1785, states that ten witnesses from Band, Oroi, Berghia and Morești were examined “again” in relation to the actions of the Russian icon peddlers. They all stated that

- Fig. 15. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, Romanian icon painter, who used a Russian icon as a model. Provenance: Cioara, Alba County. Copyright: Museikon.



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the peddlers advised Romanians to buy these icons because they would make it possible to distinguish between the houses of Romanians and those of Hungarians, and that if the Russians came these icons would be useful (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/p).

The report from Șinca District, Târnava County, addressed to the Viscount on May 20, 1785, states that investigations were carried out in the villages visited by the wandering Russian icon peddlers. In Ceuașu de Câmpie, two men said that icon peddlers were in their village the previous autumn and winter and that they told the Romanian inhabitants that when the Russians attacked, they would not kill those who possessed such icons. In Voiniceni, a man and his wife confessed that they had heard similar statements from peddlers, adding that the reason the Russians would not harm those who own such icons was that they would consider them true Christians (Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, Annex v/r).

²² Fazakas 2020, p. 169.

The Museikon collection in Alba Iulia is to date the only Transylvanian institution known to possess icons that once belonged to refugees from the Russian territories. Most of them had been given by Old Rite Believer families to the priest Paul Mihail, a refugee from Chișinău who initially settled in Iași, and later in Bucharest. His daughter, Zamfira Mihail, a remarkable Slavist, donated the icons in 2019 to the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia, to be part of the Museikon collection. Since these icons were received over a period of several decades from acquaintances and friends of the Mihail family, the information about their journey to their final destination has been lost.

The only example of this category that has a different provenance is an icon of the *Dormition of the Mother of God* with a silver revetment (cat. 16) which was among the objects confiscated in 1951 from the house of Count Szász Pál, an important figure in the political and cultural life of Aiud. He was arrested by the Communist regime and imprisoned at Ocele Mari, where he died in 1954.²² The icon entered the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia and was exhibited for a long time as an artefact belonging to the rural Romanian world, although its provenance was unknown. How such an object ended up in the house of a Hungarian noble did not seriously concern anyone until the silver revetment was removed and the restoration process begun, in order to become part of the RICONTRANS project exhibition. The cleaning of the silver revetment brought to light

both the year of manufacture, 1882, and the stamp of a Moscow workshop, while the exceptional quality of the painting proved once again that this is a precious work, which could not have come from a random purchase in an antiquarian shop or fair in Transylvania, as was initially assumed. The mystery of the painting's provenance was solved by the Count's kinship with a family of refugees from Russia, through his marriage to the Baroness Anastasia Arpsgofen in the 1940s. She was the daughter of a First World War hero, Major-General Andrei Vladimirovich Arpsgofen, born in 1875 in Warsaw, a descendant of an Estonian family ennobled in 1791 by Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg, and later naturalised in the Russian Empire, in whose army several family members went on to brilliant military careers.²³ Anastasia arrived in Transylvania in the company of her father and paternal grandmother, following the Bolshevik takeover of Russia. Her mother, Valentina Vladimirovna Romanenko, had already died in 1916,²⁴ when Anastasia was barely 3 years old.²⁵

Settled for a time in the Bălți district of Bessarabia, where she was granted residence on October 31, 1921,²⁶ the General's family was registered at the population office in the town of Turda on August 18, 1923.²⁷ In the academic year 1938-1939 Anastasia Arpsgofen studied German at the University of Cluj,²⁸ possibly in addition to her studies at the University of Sorbonne.²⁹ According to the *ex-libris* on the books – also confiscated – in the library of the Alba Iulia Museum, she travelled several times to Russia, perhaps even to Moscow.³⁰ She died in 1995, with no known attempt to recover her possessions confiscated in 1951. These few biographical details do not help us to know whether the icon among them was a family legacy or a purchase occasioned by one of her trips to relatives in Odessa. However, at least its presence in the house of a Catholic nobleman and the fact that it did not arrive in Transylvania in violation of the prohibitive legislation issued by Emperor Joseph II in 1785 are clarified.

A collection condemned to remain somewhat surrounded by mystery is that kept in the 'Octavian Goga' Memorial Museum in Ciucea (Cluj County). There are no written records concerning the provenance of the artefacts; all we can be sure of is that in 1946 they were already in the Ciucea home of the poet and extreme right-wing politician Octavian Goga (d. 1938), and his wife, Veturia Mureșan, a famous opera singer and close friend of Adolf Hitler. In 1946, following the takeover of Romania by the Communists and the Soviet army, Veturia was accused of espionage, war crimes, participation in the theft of objects from the Russian Embassy building in Bucharest in 1941, theft of the property of deported Jews and other crimes committed in her capacity as vice-president of the Council of Patronage of Social Works, founded in 1941 by Ion Antonescu and led by his wife.³¹ From 1946 until 1957, when she was forced to live in Ciucea, and afterwards, until her death in 1979, the amount of her art collection remained unchanged, despite the good relations that its owner had with the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party.

This collection includes several Russian icons, among which four stand out for their size and exceptional artistic quality. Dating from the middle or perhaps even the first half of the 17th century, but with some repainting at the behest of Old Rite Believers in the 19th century, three of them (the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham* – **fig. 24**), the *Transfiguration* – **fig. 22** and the *Descent into Hell* – **fig. 23** belonged to the same iconostasis, which must have been of impressive dimensions, if we take into account that the icons of the Great Feasts

Notes

²³ Stackelberg 1930, p. 282-285.

²⁴ ANRSJA, *Arpsgofen family corpus*, file no. II/A/1/ 27 April 1916: imperial decree by which General Baron Andrei Vladimirovich Arpsgofen is appointed guardian and is entrusted with the custody of his two children, Vladimir and Anastasia, following the death of his wife. The document was part of the exhibition *Family corpora in the repositories of the Alba National Archives*, which opened at the headquarters of the Alba County Service of the National Archives on September 30, 2013.

²⁵ Stackelberg 1930, p. 285.

²⁶ ANRSJA, *Fosztó family corpus*, file no. 10. The document was part of the exhibition *Family corpora in the repositories of the Alba National Archives*, (see n. 24 above).

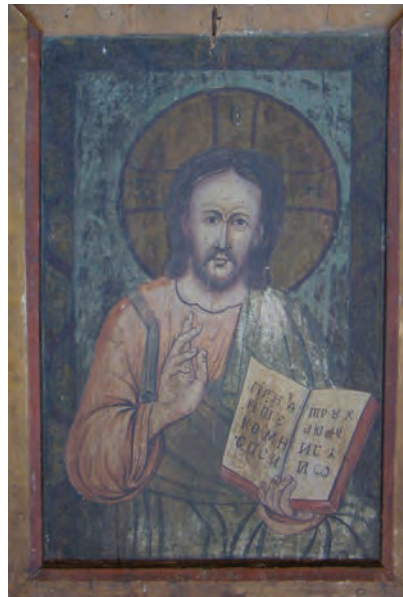
²⁷ ANRSJA, *Arpsgofen family corpus*, file no. II/E/2. The document was part of the exhibition *Family corpora in the repositories of the Alba National Archives*, as above.

²⁸ *Yearbook of the King Ferdinand I University of Cluj 1938-1939*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Cluj, 1940, p. 245 (<https://documente.bcu-cluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/anuaruluniversitatiincluj/1938-1939.html>, accessed on 26.12.2022).

²⁹ Socaciu, Takács 2002, p. 276-277.

³⁰ Stînea 2013, p. 579.

³¹ Cheșcu 2010, p. 283-292.



▲ Figs 16-18. *Mother of God the Unfading Rose, Christ Pantokrator and Saint Nicholas of Myra*, Romanian icon painter, who used Russian icons as models. Provenance: Valea Largă, Alba County.
Copyright: Museikon.

▶▶ Fig. 19. Nicolae Oancea from Vale, *The Resurrection with Twelve Feasts*, 1833; glass icon copied after a Russian icon found in Poiana Sibiului church. Carmen and Gheorghe Mușat Collection, București.
Source: Dumitran 2018, p. 4.

◀ Fig. 20. The interior of the church in the 'Octavian Goga' museum complex in Ciucea. Foto Szabó Tamás.
Source: Ghițulescu 1975.

alone each measured 77/78x63/64 cm. The fourth icon, slightly larger and depicting *Saint Nicholas of Myra and Saint Menas of Egypt* (fig. 21), may also have belonged to the same ensemble, but was not by the same hand.³² Three other icons, which were part of the *Deesis* row (an Archangel and two Apostles) were stolen in 1990 and have yet to be recovered.³³ How and when these icons came into the possession of the Goga family we can only guess. No matter how many possible scenarios there may be, there are definitely two that should not be lightly dismissed, namely the possibility that, as the organizer of the hospitals in Bessarabia and Transnistria, Veturia Goga had the icons brought from there, or had them stolen from the German Embassy in Bucharest in 1941.

The exhibition dedicated to the Russian icons from Transylvania seeks to illustrate all the ways in which they arrived in the province identified during the research: as a result of the itinerant trade practised by the communities of icon painters in the villages of the Vladimir-Suzdal region; through acquisition outside Transylvania, by people with a prosperous material situation, for the purpose of donation to churches; as a result of refuge from political and social persecution; through donation by contemporary religious and scholarly personalities; and last but not least through the trade in antiques developed especially in the period after the anti-communist Revolution of December 1989, when private collectors began to show interest in this category of art objects as well. This exhibition is intended to document these channels of diffusion rather than the specificity and diversity of the Russian icon itself, for which the very few examples in Transylvania have almost no illustrative qualities.

As part of a transfer phenomenon with a remarkable history in the other territories inhabited by Orthodox populations, the Russian icons in Transylvania – a multi-ethnic and multid denominational space – never achieved more than peripheral status either in terms of quality or quantity. The explanations for this obvious failure of Russian propaganda among Transylvanian Orthodox Romanians are to be sought not so much in the prohibitive legislation adopted at any given moment, but more particularly in the legislation that allowed the Romanian community in Transylvania as a whole, whether of Orthodox

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³² I am grateful to Aleksandr Preobrazhensky and Ilya Borovikov for their help in describing these icons.

³³ A photograph of very poor quality (fig. 20), published in Ghițulescu 1975, is the only evidence of their existence. I am grateful to Bogdan Ilieș for his kindness in pointing out this group of icons.



or Greek-Catholic denominations, to progress socially, economically and culturally in such a way that it began to look for its models directly in the West, of which the Habsburg Empire that governed the territory was a part, and thus become, little by little, part of the social and political cohesion. This would have been the exact opposite of what the pan-Orthodoxy of the Russian Empire aimed to achieve. Even the denominational division, finalized in precisely the same year as the first attestation of the presence of Russian icon peddlers, was an asset to the Romanian communities, almost all of whom were forced – from 1761 onwards – to build a second church, next to the old one, which often contained treasures ravaged by the anti-Union revolt of the monk Sofronie from Cioara. This duality of sacred space offered more engagements for painters, whose numbers rapidly expanded in the second half of the 18th century, unlike in much of the rest of the





▲ Fig. 21. *Saint Nicholas of Myra and Saint Menas of Egypt*, first half or middle of the 17th century, renovated in the 19th century. Provenance: unknown. Copyright: 'Octavian Goga' Museum, Ciucea.

Romanian territories, where the artistic needs of the Christian masses had to be met almost exclusively by icon merchants from Russia. If the rapid spread of the craft of painting on glass almost immediately after the imperial decree of 1785 could be connected with what may have been the protectionist attitude of the authorities towards an industry that was just gaining momentum in Moravia and Bohemia, from where other itinerant merchants headed with icons to Transylvania, it would put the imperial decision to expel the *ofenyas* in a different



light. Even if, in the end, this policy was still a failure, since the Romanians immediately developed their own glass painting workshops, such a policy, insofar as it existed, stimulated Romanian society and gave it another westernizing impulse. The history of the Russian icon in Transylvania thus turns out to be a late echo of medieval solidarities, inevitably doomed to fail in a society that, however gradually, was nonetheless moving towards modernization, under pressure from the Theresian-Josephine reforms and Enlightenment ideas.

▲ Fig. 22. *The Transfiguration*, first half or middle of the 17th century, renovated in the 19th century. Provenance: unknown. Copyright: 'Octavian Goga' Museum, Ciucea.



▲ Fig. 23. *The Descent into Hell*, first half or middle of the 17th century, renovated in the 19th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: 'Octavian Goga' Museum, Ciucea.

▼ Fig. 24. *The Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham*, first half or middle of the 17th century, renovated in the 19th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: 'Octavian Goga' Museum, Ciucea.



► Fig. 25. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*, signed: “Pisal Vasiliy (... illegible);” end of 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Bichigiu (Bistrița-Năsăud County), from a private collection in Romania. Credits: Ioan Ovidiu Abrudan.

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 Metropolitanate of Transylvania – Archbishopric of Sibiu
 Archbishopric of Argeş and Muscel
 Archbishopric of Bucharest
 Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea
 Archbishopric of the Lower Danube
 Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău
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 Bishopric of Huși
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 Dragomirna Monastery
 Frumoasa Monastery, Iași
 Galata Monastery, Iași
 Găvanu Monastery, Ghighiu Monastery
 Golia Monastery, Iași
 Hurezi Monastery, Neamț Monastery
 Pasărea Monastery, Putna Monastery

Poiana Mărului Monastery
 Râmeţ Monastery, Rogozu Monastery
 Secu Monastery
 Stavropoleos Monastery, Bucharest
 Sub Piatră Monastery, Sucevița Monastery
 Surpatele Monastery, Toplița Monastery
 Trei Ierarhi Monastery, Iași
 Uspenia Monastery, Slava Rusă
 Valea Neagră Monastery, Văratec Monastery
 Vladimirești Monastery
 Vovidenia Monastery, Slava Rusă
 St. John the Baptist Church in Ciorțești, Iași County
 Dormition of the Mother of God Church in Poiana Sibiului (Sibiu County)
 Saint George Church in Tecșești, Alba County
 Saint George Church in Vorovești, Iași County
 Library of the Holy Sinod, Bucharest
 ‘Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu’ Vâlcea County Museum, Râmnicu-Vâlcea
 Brâncoveanu Palace, Potlogi
 Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu
 Bucharest Municipality Museum
 ‘Carol I’ Museum of Brăila, Brăila
 ‘Curtea Domnească’ National Museum Complex, Târgoviște
 Ethnographic Museum of Maramureş, Sighetu Marmăției
 Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca
 ‘Moldova’ National Museum Complex, Iași
 Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube, Galați
 Museum of the Archbishopric of Argeş and Muscel, Curtea de Argeş
 Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea, Buzău
 Museum of the Archbishopric of Râmnic, Râmnicu-Vâlcea
 Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău, Roman
 Museum of the Bishopric of Huși, Huși
 Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat, Timișoara
 Museum of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca
 Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași, Iași
 ‘Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean’, Năsăud
 ‘Octavian Goga’ Museum, Ciucea
 ‘Prima Școală Românească’ Museum, Braşov
 ‘Ștefan cel Mare’ Vaslui County Museum, Vaslui
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Eighteenth-Century Russian Folk Icons in Transylvanian Collections

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Moscow

The character of the Russian icon in the Modern Era was predetermined by the stratification of culture into “higher” and “lower” realms. Though this delineation was first explicitly outlined in the 17th century, it would take another century before it reached stable forms.

Naturally, there were mass produced icons in the Middle Ages, and they were aimed at a relatively wide range of consumers. However, medieval icon painting did not yet bear the imprint of “estate” affiliation in style and quality. Old Russian art was a holistic phenomenon and the works created before the 17th century were mainly characterized by a unity of artistic language, which did not fall below a certain standard. At the level of the consumer, this unity of language was heterogeneous – self-conscious masterpieces found in aristocratic circles coexisted with the “less than formal” icons found in the homes of common people. However, the ownership of the icons in terms of the demographics of the consumer, as well the accompanying variety of technical skill employed in their production, is almost never reflected, at least not systematically, in their artistic language. As a rule, this language has a universal character.

One of the most significant references to the mass production of icons, the reduced quality of which directly corresponded to the fact that they were destined for the lower strata of society, is found in a treatise called *Poslanie nekoeго izugrafa* (*Послание некоего изуграфа*) (1660-1666), written by the court icon painter, Iosif Vladimirov.¹ The author of this famous work condemns the “violent,” and “poorly painted” icons which, “the Shuyans and Kholuyans, the Paleshans sell at craft fairs” and which are “delivered through the remote villages and sold for an egg and an onion ... for leftovers and for calves, and for all sorts of junk they exchange.”² At around the same time, in the year 1669, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich delivered an edict that forbade Kholuyans from engaging in icon painting because their icons reflected “Old Believer” symbols. These and other sources allow us to say with certainty that, by at least the mid-17th century in the villages of Vladimir province,³ there were already icon-painting workshops with a wide customer base. Craft traditions had been formed there much earlier of course, but almost no details are known about them, though it is obvious that initially there was only a small circle of professionals



▲ Fig. 1. *Nine-part Icon*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (?), mid-18th century. Provenance: Satu Nou, Braşov County.

Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery.

◄ Fig. 2. *Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa*. Wood, gesso, tempera. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Temereşti, Timiş County.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Timișoara.

Notes

1 Tarasov 2002, p. 134.

2 Овчинникова 1964, p. 33.

3 The present-day Vladimir and Ivanovo regions, an important area



serving private customers.⁴ Only later did production gradually increase and this, in turn, was associated with a loss of quality, or rather the development of a set of original characteristics that were, on the whole, simpler than those associated with elite icon painting. Nevertheless, together these two directions of icon production represent a remarkable artistic phenomenon.

It is in the second half of the 17th century that appeared the earlier Russian folk icons having common artistic techniques and stylistic orientation. This is an already established type of icon, determined by the category of the social estate to which it was addressed, cheap to produce and sell, and marked by a striving for maximum attractiveness.

They are not defined by overproduction, or cheapness, or simplicity, which are certainly features that can be observed in folk art in earlier eras, but rather they emerge as large groups of works connected by a commonality of techniques and style.

To this end, the folk icon turned not just to the ancient tradition, but also to the Baroque, which meant that it was no longer, strictly speaking, a conservative phenomenon. It was also not for the most part “Old Believer” art due both to the consequences of the policies of prohibition pursued by the Holy Synod, and to lack of interest in such material from the general population, which was quite indifferent to

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for artistic production at that time, with the most notable centers of icon painting being concentrated in the settlements of Palekh, Kholuy, and later Mstyora.

⁴ Тихонравов 1857, p. 27.



the notion of “truth” that the Old Believers demanded of their holy images.

All these qualities – extreme simplicity, brightness, adherence to popular subjects, a combination of archaism and innovation and the absence of demonstrable Old Believer symbols – are the main artistic qualities that unite the early Russian folk icons in the Transylvanian collections.

Of the approximately 60 such icons we examined that had ended up in Transylvania from private collections and ethnographic expeditions throughout Romania, we singled out 18 of the earliest examples, dating from the mid-18th to the early 19th centuries. They have a number of common characteristics. I am referring to the so-called “mass-circulation” icons,⁵ that is those that were not specially commissioned, but were made for off-the-shelf sales, obviously brought to Romania by icon peddlers, known as *ofenyas*, together with some, presumably, that were made on the spot. They are manufactured in the traditional icon painting style that developed in Russia in the Middle Ages, but in a style slightly modified under the influence of Baroque and Rococo and extremely simplified painting technique. It seems likely that these are examples of the products of the same Vladimir province listed in the *Treatise* of Iosif Vladimirov, still being made a century after he first

Fig. 3. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania and Archbishopric of Sibiu.

Fig. 4. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery.

Notes

⁵ Tarasov 2002, p. 345.

- Fig. 5. *Transfiguration*. Wood, gesso, tempera. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Ucea de Jos, Braşov County. Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery.



mentioned them.

We have divided the folk icons identified in Transylvanian collections into three groups. The first six icons are among the most archaic and very close to the traditional icon painting style. The second group of four icons are an example of artefacts in the so-called Frankish style (*Friazh*), that is, a synthesis of the traditional and the modern icon painting style. Finally, as regards the eight works of the third group, although they are related to the first, there is a degree of uncertainty as to their provenance, which will be discussed below.

Perhaps the most ancient of the icons of Group 1 is the *Nine-part icon* (fig. 1). Special mention should be made of the form it takes. Such multi-figured icons are an invention of the Early Modern period popular culture, and its modernism lying in the fact that it breaks with the concept of likeness to God which is basic for the traditional art. Such icons do not reproduce a particular religious theme, but rather combine several such subjects in the pattern of the table. The earliest version of such a combination, found around the end of the 17th century, is the “Three-part icons,” where the upper register is reserved for the half-length images of the Mother of God and Saint Nicholas of Myra. The lower part, on the other hand, features full-length figures of the folk saints, such as Florus and Laurus, Blasius, Modestus, holy warriors George and Demetrius, the holy women Paraskeva, Barbara, Catherine, and Anastasia. The similarities in iconography, in style and execution, suggests that these icons were produced at the same time in some kind of artistic center, probably in the same Vladimir province.

Alongside the “Three-part icons” or perhaps not long after them, the multi-scene icons, some of them with seven scenes, and similar variations appeared (figs 10, 16, 17).

Multi-scene folk icons testify interesting evidence of changes in the characteristics of religious self-consciousness during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. During this period, the “personal” nature of piety, inherent in elite circles, gradually penetrated other social strata. Multi-part icons were generated by the old “collective” form of religiosity, since the set of scenes combined in them is archaic, universal. At the same time, the very idea of increasing the attractiveness of the icon by bringing together various saints / scenes in one plane, i.e. by focusing on the psychology and preferences of the buyer, was an original phenomenon in icons. This consideration of individual perception indicates a certain humanization of sacred art, which is certainly a sign of the times.

As was typical for this category of icons, the icon with nine scenes from the collection of the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery combines several different iconographies. The icon represents the ultimate image of holiness according to the popular hierarchy: the *Nativity* and the *Resurrection of Christ* in the upper register illustrate the most important milestones of the church year related with the *Mother of God and Christ Child*, supplemented with the image of *Saint Nicholas of Myra*. In the middle row are the figures of saints and martyrs, framing the image of two saints patrons of cattle, Saint Modestus of Jerusalem and Saint Blasius of Sebaste, with the miracle of the *Resurrection of the Cattle by Modestus*. In the lower tier, the scene of the *Miracle of Saint George*, the heavenly patron of horse breeding, and the most venerated holy women, Saints Paraskeva, Barbara, and Anastasia. In fact, we have before us a brief summary of all the sacred *topoi* of the Russian village world, the combination of which satisfied the basic needs of thrifty peasants for sacred images, allowing them to make with one icon rather than investing in several.

The production of the icon, starting from the wooden support with a double *kovcheg* (niche) hollowed out of the wooden panel and ending with the technique of incrementally applying tempera layers from dark to light, on a “gold” ground, using strong black contours on the figures and other depictions, fully corresponds to the medieval painting tradition. However, there are also a number of signs that are indicative of Modern Era art. These include the intensely whitened faces – an echo of the influence of the “lifelike” bright-faced images in the work of the 17th century Moscow Armory, whose impact on the folk icon was not fully reflected until the 18th century. In 1722, the Holy Synod decreed that it was to be forbidden to paint the Virgin in the *Nativity* as “sick,” i.e. as lying down. This particular prohibition was based on the notion that such an image contradicted the doctrine of Mary’s “Perpetual Virginity,” marked by the painlessness of childbirth.⁶ After 1722, therefore, an icon could only indirectly indicate the half-figure of the Virgin towering over the manger. Additionally, the ornamentation in the margins, consisting of stylized “daisies,” garlands, and ovals, is close to the Rococo style of decoration, thus shifting the likely dating of the icon to the mid-18th century.

Two slightly later icons, dating to the second half of the 18th century, are similar in composition to the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* type (figs 3-4). An icon with this name was revealed as wonderworking in Moscow in 1688 and reproduced in two different iconographic schemes.⁷ In the two icons from Transylvania we have a kind of mix-

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⁶ Бусева-Давыдова 2019, p. 52.



▲ Fig. 6. *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Teiuș, Alba County. Copyright: Museikon.

ture of the two iconographic schemes: from the first one the painter uses the image of the Mother of God without the Christ Child on the background of the Garden of Eden, and from the other – the figures of four selected saints above the groups of suffering on the sides of the Virgin. The details borrowed from the second type are typical for the Moscow iconography of the icon. In the case of the two icons of *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*, the complementary saints of the composition are replaced by more popular among peasant population saints as Saint Tikhon Amaphunt, Saint Nicholas of Myra, the Wonderworker, Saints Florus and Laurus. The essence of the scene is the “visiting of the suffering in trouble” by angels led by the Virgin, to which the multi-figure scenes are dedicated on the original icon. Here, this theme is reduced to only four figures in the lower register, where the angels bow over the suffering, and the inscription reads “clothing the naked.” Cartouches with inscriptions, set at an angle on the original icons, as if falling out to the sides from the figure of Virgin Mary, are placed horizontally here, dividing the image into “bands,” and giving this Baroque composition a more static and, therefore, archaic, “medieval” character. However, features indicative of the Modern Era are also conspicuous in the icon, such as the whitened “pseudo natural-looking” faces. Despite the significant archaism of the images, the inscription *Iisus* (*Иисус*) follow the New Rite doctrine. The inscriptions are no longer in ecclesiastical semi-character, but in a script with secular cursive features.

The same type of inscription was preserved on the icon with *Transfiguration* (fig. 5), whose painting has been badly lost. According to the surviving figures of the apostles, one can reconstruct its original composition. With its expression, simplicity and expressiveness, the icon is related to the already mentioned works.

The icon of the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (fig. 6, cat. 17) is more in line with the spirit of the Modern Era, since its iconography, which reproduces that of the miraculous icon revealed in 1732 in the southern Russian Tsardom, is largely Europeanized. Unfortunately, the state

Notes

7 On this iconography: Комашко 2004, p. 22-34.



◀ Fig. 7. *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Cioara de Sus, Alba County.

Copyright: Museikon.

◀ Fig. 8. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (Kholuy), late 18th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania and Archbishopric of Sibiu.

of preservation of the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* is problematic – the painting having been greatly disfigured by later overpainting. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the face, fragments of the hands and draperies show the features of folk art already familiar to us, mixing archaic and Baroque: i.e. simplicity, expression, contrast between the dark ground and powerful whitewash.

Unlike the *Transfiguration* and *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* icons, the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 7, cat. 37) has come down to us in almost its original form. Darkened dried oil hides its original bright, saturated colors. The semicircular ornament on the edges of the icon is merely an extremely simplified form of the *rocaille* motifs, which often adorned folk icons of the second half of the 18th century. The face is painted in layers in two tones, which gives the impression of volume, but the hands are painted in a single layer, so they seem flat, as if dressed in white gloves. This is a characteristic feature of folk art, especially those works that have received the unofficial nickname of “white hand”. The colors, painting techniques, and script of the inscriptions are close to the icons discussed above, so it is possible that they come from related workshops that came to Romania at about the same time.

On the *Saint Nicholas of Myra* icon there is a very unusual frontal arrangement of the figures in the *Miracle of Nicaea* scene. In the vast majority of cases, Christ and the Mother of God in this scene turn towards Saint Nicholas, handing him the Gospel and the omophorion. But here they are shown full face. Therefore, the original message of the iconography – God’s choice of Nicholas as a bishop – is eroded.

- Fig. 9. *The Savior Not Made by Human Hands*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (Kholuy), middle – second half of the 18th century. Provenance: unknown. Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery.



The composition is similar to the upper register of the “multi-part” folk icons already familiar to us, being divided into three independent prayer images: Christ, the Mother of God and the Miracle Worker of Myra – the so-called “folk Trinity”, in which Saint Nicholas is the central figure. Connecting the worlds of earth and heaven, he acts as an intermediary between the people and the celestial powers.

It is curious that this atypical iconography is repeated in another icon of the Transylvanian collections: a late 18th century image of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 8). This work belongs to Group II, which is marked by the growing influence of new pictorial trends. Comparing these two images of Saint Nicholas will reveal something of this evolution. Whereas, in the first case, we are dealing for the most part with a traditional Russian icon, endowed with some Baroque features, in the second, we are dealing with what might be called the “low-level Baroque” in its purest form. We note the rejection of the traditional panel with the niche, the Europeanization of the methods of rendering the draperies as well as the patterning of them, the blue background with “landscape” clouds, and the innovative arrangement of the inscription. Yet, despite the stylistic similarities of both icons, the repetition of the extremely rare version in the scene of the *Miracle of Nicaea* attests to their relationship. Sadly, what prompted the painters of two works so different in style to adopt the same iconography remains a mystery.

Both icons of Saint Nicholas demonstrate nicely the aesthetic bifurcation that occurred in Russian religious art of the 18th century. Icon painting of this period developed in various ways. One of its branches remained faithful to the medieval tradition; the other followed the pictorial principles of the European Baroque. Icons favouring archaism or



◀ Fig. 10. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (Kholuy), last third of the 18th century. Provenance: unknown.

Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery.

innovation could be created simultaneously in one artistic workshop. The icon painters themselves called these coexisting styles “Greek” and *friaz’ / fryazhsky / Frankish*. However, neither of them was monolithic. Many works were created in a mixed manner.

One example of this is the icon of the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands* (fig. 9). The work is largely characterized by signs of traditionalism: a panel with a double frame, classic iconography, and largely preserved signs of an archaic linear painting language. However, the stylistic reference point for the author of the icon was not the ancient images of the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands*, but the works of the Armory Masters, who were relatively close in time to the origins of this subject, created in the third quarter of the 17th–early 18th century. This accounts for the Baroque character of the modelling of the faces in a *chiaroscuro*, volumetric manner. The ornamental decoration on the holy “Cloth” in the style of domestic peasant paintings and the blue background also increased the gap between this sort of painting and the models of medieval church art.

If the hand of the Master of the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands* can be described as somewhat tentative or indeed more like that of a student, this cannot be said of the professional manner of the painter of the next icon, *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 10). A balance between the traditional linear-style painting and the pictorial techniques of the Baroque is skilfully achieved by this artist. The author’s quick and confident broad-brush strokes and bold lines produces a sculptural effect, depicts faces and draperies, ornaments and scenes, finding the simplest and most effective solution for each element, apparently de-



▲ Fig. 11. The *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Russia, Vladimir region (Kholuy), late 18th century. Provenance: Mihalț, Alba County. Copyright: Museikon.

tered by nothing and, not caring about the accuracy and completeness of the drawing, but leaving an impression of an effortlessly, somehow even dashingly easily and artistically, accomplished task.

The icon of the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (fig. 11, cat. 3) was painted in much the same vein, although by a less confident hand. Despite the simplicity of the execution, the painter's efforts to achieve anatomical accuracy in the depiction of flesh is obvious. The full, rounded face of the Virgin Mary is a remote echo of secular portraiture. Its whiteness and the glowing reflections on the draperies contrast with the deep shadows and dark background. This is typical of the Baroque, with its desire to create dramatic lighting effects.

The icons of the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands*, both icons of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* and the *Three-Handed Mother of God* represent different degrees of what contemporaries called the *friaz'*/ Frankish manner. One of the markers of this branch of 18th century church art is the blue color that dominates them. Sometimes it can be used in balanced combinations with green and red (as in the image of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* – fig. 10), but most often it is the dominant color in the icon. Due to this, outside of the professional art historian environment, among art experts, there is a conventional classification into “red” (designed in the traditional color scheme) and “blue”, similar to the four images that form Group II, even settled down.

It was color that turned out to be decisive in defining Group III, in which the rest of the icons of the Romanian collections, dating from the second half of the 18th–early 19th centuries, tend to be included. This group consists of eight works. Three of them, *Mother of God*, *Joy of All Who Sorrow*, *Mother of God Hodegetria*, and *Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa* (fig. 12, cat. 13; fig. 13; fig. 14, cat. 43), date to the second half of the 18th century and are similar to the icons of the first group, apart from the color scheme and the nature of the scenery. The other three – *Deesis with Archangels*, *Apostles and Saints* and two four-part icons (fig. 15, cat. 24; fig. 16, cat. 44; fig. 17, cat. 45) date back to the early 19th century.

The icon of the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* reveals an iconographic relationship with two icons of the same subject from Group I. Here too the Mother of God is represented without the Child, but holding a sceptre. The *Mother of God Hodegetria* and *Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa* are also related in style and date to the icons of Group I. They are extremely simple, being, on the whole, still traditional icons, though with features of folk Baroque. The quality of the painting is low, but that it belongs to the brush of a Russian master is undeniable. However, they do not quite have the usual color and decoration. A specific shade of bright blue plays an important role in the color system of these icons, and we can confidently state that this color is completely uncharacteristic of the palette of folk icons made in the Vladimir province workshops. These icons are made even more unusual by having edges decorated with scarlet and black circles (*Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*), “petals” (*Mother of God Hodegetria*), or a red-on-white grid (*Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa*).

The next three icons in our selection – *Deesis with Archangels*, *Apostles and Saints* and the two four-part icons – are so similar to each other that they undoubtedly came from the same icon-painting workshop. These are typical mass-produced folk icons of the early 19th century with one difference from their Russian counterparts – the presence in their palette of the same special bright blue tone, a color that is not found on works in Russia.



The integrity of this ensemble of works, and most importantly, their unusual coloring, suggests that they were created by Russian icon painters – *otkhodniks*, that is, masters who were trained in the Vladimir school, but who created their works in Romania, where they went to work in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Icon panels (with double frames carved using axe and chisel, with the inner frame (W. 3-4 cm) being significantly wider than the outer one; there are also sliding battens in grooves specially carved on the reverse – typical Russian carpentry work), as well as the paint layers on them, were made according to traditional technologies, however, the actual paints themselves were bought locally, which led to the unusual palette used in these creations.

The group discussed here has a couple more icons – the *Christ the Great Bishop* (fig. 18) and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 19) from the end of the 18th century, the strangeness of which sets them apart. Their painting is distinguished by the Vladimir province style. But the proportions and shape of the panels with their profiled frames are uncharacteristic of Russian handiwork. The very unusual placement of the figures of the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist in the upper corners of the composition in *Christ the Great Bishop*, which is thus turned into a *Deesis*, has few iconographic parallels, and the hands of the intercessors are crossed in a gesture of prayer that is alien to Russian and Romanian art. The most noticeable feature of the icon is the Romanian text in the open Gospel.

One can only assume that we are nevertheless dealing with the work of a “Suzdalian”, but one who significantly adapted his art to the needs of the Romanian customer and created an icon from local materials, influenced by the local language and to some extent by its iconographic tradition. These icons testify to the reciprocal influence and exchanges between Russian and Romanian icon painters, and prove the hypothesis that the icons in the third Group may have been painted by itinerant icon painters from Russia, most likely from the Suzdal artisan village of Kholuy.

- Fig. 12. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* (cat. 13). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Masters of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), second half of the 18th century.

Provenance: Mogoș-Miclești, Alba County.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj.

- ▲ Fig. 13. *Mother of God Hodegetria*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Masters of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Southern Transylvania.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania and Archbishopric of Sibiu.



▲ Fig. 14. *Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa* (cat. 43). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Masters of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Valea Drăganului, Cluj County.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureş and Sălaj.



▼ Fig. 15. *Deesis with Archangels, Apostles and Saints* (cat. 24). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Master of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), early 19th century. Provenance: Mogoş-Micleşti, Alba County.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureş and Sălaj.

Where did the *ofenyas* who did business in Transylvania come from? It seems that they are most likely to have originated in the Vladimir-Suzdal craft village of Kholuy.⁸ The Kholuy settlement was first mentioned in a charter dated 1546, where it is reported that it belonged to the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius. This subsequently determined not only the growth of artistic production in Kholuy, but also to some extent the local style of painting, which will be discussed below.

From the charter of 1613 we learn for the first time that the Kholuyans were engaged in icon painting. Other 17th century documents have also been preserved, testifying to the involvement of local masters in icon painting and fresco works. Probably at that time there was a workshop of professional painters serving a narrow circle of elite customers. In addition, the Kholuy peasants provided the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius near Moscow and the Saviour Monastery of Saint Euthymius in Suzdal with icons for the pilgrims. Thus, the foundations for the mass production of icons were laid here a long time ago, though nothing is known of the form this took until the second half of the 18th century. The early 18th century preserved many folk icons, connected by shared stylistic and technical characteristics. Undoubtedly, most of them are the work of the Kholuyans. According to a list of 1752, originating from the Suzdal spiritual consistory, the settlement numbered a spectacular 350 icon painters, which exceeded the number of those in Palekh and Mstyora. However, one can only speculate as to which of the folk icons of the first half of the 18th century should be attributed to the masters of Kholuy. For example, mention should be made of the unique “Florentine Collection” of Russian icons acquired in Russia by Duke Leonardo of Lorraine for the Florence Academy.⁹ All icons in the collection are related in terms of artistic language and the fact that they date back to the second quarter of the 18th century. One of the icons, *Mother of God Tikhvinskaya*, 1733, was signed by the artist Vasily Gryaznov. The surname Gryaznov is known in Kholuy in the 19th century, which most likely confirms the hypothesis that

Notes

⁸ On the history of the icon-painting village of Kholuy: Тарасов 1995, p. 158-159.

⁹ Бусева-Давыдова 2019, p. 83-84.



the entire group comes from this artistic center. The artistic style of these icons is a mixture of tradition icon painting and Baroque with all techniques tending to be executed in simplified form. They had been more homogenous as a group and more primitive, these works could well have corresponded to the type of mass-produced icons of the middle – second half of the 18th century, which are represented in the Transylvanian collections by Groups I and III.

There are indeed more reasons to associate the icons of Group II with the Kholuy icon-painting center, as works marked by a more pronounced influence of the Baroque, also sometimes called “Ukrainian” style. We know that it was the local peasant farmers who supplied their overlord, the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius near Moscow, with icons intended for pilgrims. This primarily concerns the inexpensive icons of Saint Sergius of Radonezh – the venerable founder of the monastery, the greatest Russian saint of the 14th century – intended for sale or donation to donors. It is noteworthy that these were not the only images of Saint Sergius, the multi-figured scene *Saint Sergius’s Vision*, representing an episode from the life of the saint, the appearance of the Mother of God with the apostles Peter and John to him and his disciple Micah (fig. 22b). This iconography was a kind of emblem of the Lavra’s sanctity and it was widely replicated.¹⁰

In the middle of the 18th century, the Kyiv monk and icon painter Pavel Kazanovich led a team of monastic artists in the reworking of the traditional iconography of *Saint Segius’s Vision*. Kazanovich’s version interpreted the *Vision* scene in the European Baroque style, combining the genres of traditional icons and historical paintings on a religious subject. In 1753, Kazanovich took ten young Kholuyans to study icon-painting to Kyiv, where they remained for some eleven years before returning to their native village.¹¹ From then on, many images of *Saint Sergius’s Vision* appear in the Russian tradition, representing a simplified version of the Kazanovich icon and, undoubtedly, one made in Kholuy.

► Fig. 16. *Four-part Icon* (cat. 44). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Master of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), early 19th century. Provenance: Geaca, Cluj County.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureş and Sălaj.

▲ Fig. 17. *Four-part Icon* (cat. 45). Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Master of the Vladimir region in Romania (?), early 19th century. Provenance: Vima Mare, Maramureş County.

Copyright: Collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureş and Sălaj.

Notes

¹⁰ Ушаков 1906, p. 39.

¹¹ Бусева-Давыдова 2019, p. 82-83

- Fig. 18. *Christ the Great Bishop*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Master of the Vladimir region in Romania, end of the 18th century. Provenance: Eastern Transylvania. Credits: Daniel Constantinescu.



There are no icons with this iconography in the collections being discussed here. However, the image of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 10) undoubtedly goes back to the stylistic system that was formed in Kholuy under the influence of a Kyivan monk and is connected by the homogeneity of its artistic language with the icons of *Saint Sergius's Vision* first created in Kholuy. It represents a typical example of the low-level “Ukrainian Baroque” with its use of essentially pictorial, but radically simplified techniques for the rendering of faces, hands, draperies and landscapes. Characteristic details, such as extremely schematized *rocailles* in the corners of the frame in the image of Saint Nicholas, find close parallels, albeit more complex in terms of the drawing, in the *Saint Sergius's Vision* icons belonging to the Kholuy “Kazanovich tradition” (fig. 22).

Moreover in the documented artistic heritage of Kholuy there are close parallels to the style of the icon of the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (fig. 11, cat. 3). These are icons with a blue or brown background, in a range of bright hues, with contrasting white faces with simplified but lifelike features. They are created in a linear painting manner, based not so much on traditional art, but on the Baroque with its Europeanized concept of volume and light, and theatrical space. All this, of course, is reduced to something rather formulaic. This type of mass-produced Kholuy icon was called “Gorbunovka” in honor of the Gorbunov dynasty of icon painters (Ivan, Nikita, Andrej, Stephan and others), who signed their works over at least two generations.¹²

Nowadays, the icons manufactured by the Gorbunovs' workshop are the most numerous identified and localized icons with identified

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¹² Monographs on the works of the Gorbunov dynasty have yet to be written. References to them in the literature are sporadic, for example: Данченко, Красилян 1994, no. 39, p. 14. Gorbunov icons are frequently found in the antiques market. Discussion of them with examples can be seen in particular here: <https://www.icon-art.info/phpBB2/view-topic.php?t=4231>.



◀ Fig. 19. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*. Wood, gesso, tempera, silver leaf. Master of the Vladimir region in Romania, end of the 18th century. Provenance: Eastern Transylvania.

Credits: Daniel Constantinescu.

author mass folk icons of the late Baroque.

Though the Transylvanian *Three-Handed Mother of God* does not bear the signatures of the masters of the Kholuy dynasty, it must nonetheless have been created by an artist quite close to their circle (fig. 21). Along with *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, it is part of the thread that connects the icons of Transylvania with the ancient fishing village and perhaps allows us to extend their common origin to the entire range of icons we have looked at here.

The fact that the products of the Vladimir icon painters penetrated into Transylvania may seem surprising at first glance, but there is nothing truly incredible here. For many centuries, the trade of the *ofenyas* had flourished in the villages of Vladimir. As of the last quarter of the 19th century, in the three craft icon painting villages of Palekh, Kholuy and Mstyora and another 150 surrounding villages, the main occupation of the population was icon-painting.¹³ In the spring, once the track was suitable for wheeled vehicles, countless cartloads of icons left the yards of the Vladimir icon-painting workshops, some of them traversing thousands of miles. The flourishing activity of the *ofenyas*, carried on throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, left its traces in the form of many thousands of folk icons from Vladimir, now kept not only in remote corners of Russia, but also in European countries, especially Slavic ones, for example in Serbia and Bulgaria. Some relatively early documents have also preserved evidence of the activities of the *ofenyas*. For example, there is a written request, dated 1705, from Palekh icon painters to issue them with a travel warrant for the Serbian and Wallachian lands with the aim of exporting several

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¹³ Тапачов 1995, p. 201.



◆ Fig. 20. a) *Nine-part Icon* (fig. 1) from Transylvania, and b) *Nine-part Icon* of the middle of the 18th century, private collection in Russia. As a hallmark of both icons, the image of Saint Modestus of Jerusalem, the patron saint of cattle breeding, is repeated. Copyright: Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery (fig. 20a). Courtesy of Northern Icon Gallery, Moscow (fig. 20b).



Notes

14 Тарасов 1995, p. 203.

15 “Bogomaz was a colloquial term for an icon painter. It comes from the noun Бог (Bog), meaning ‘God,’ and the verb мазать (mazat’), meaning ‘to daub or smear on something greasy or oily’. It is the word used, for example, for smearing butter on bread. The common English translation of *bogomaz* is ‘God-dauber’. Though sometimes used (rather slightly) of icon painters in general, it has come to be more specifically applied to painters without professional training, ‘self-taught’ artists. They were the kind we would refer to as ‘primitive’ artists, because they were generally untaught or unskilled or both.” (*Icons and their interpretation. Information for the objective student of Russian, Greek, and Balkan icons*, <https://russianicons.wordpress.com/2015/09/14/the-god-daubers/>, accessed in 02.08.2022).

thousand icons for sale. One of the earliest mentions of Kholuyans in written sources of this kind is a 1754 report by the Suzdal archpriest Anania Fedorov stating that “many residents of Kholuy and Palekh depart with holy icons to distant lands, by which he meant Poland, Austria, Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria etc.”¹⁴ There is no doubt that the icons that came to Transylvania in the middle – second half of the 18th century were brought by one of these routes.

The third group of icons in the Transylvanian collections remain a mystery. The unusual coloring and nature of their decoration exclude them from the circle of the Vladimir icon painting, but their close connection with the methods and traditions of Russian folk art and, in particular, the Russian inscriptions certainly preclude our seeing in them the products of masters of any other country. One can only suppose that these works were created by the “Suzdal Bogomazes,”¹⁵ but on territory that is now part of Romania. They could have been painted by natives of Kholuy, who organized a workshop in a new place and worked in traditional techniques, but with local painters and focusing on the particular tastes of the local consumer, which led to the slightly unusual character of these icons relative to normal Russian standards. Moreover, the deep interpenetration between the religious folk art traditions of Russia and Romania is evidenced in the clearest possible way by the two types of Christ and Saint Nicholas discussed above. On the whole, the group of Russian icon-paintings in the Transylvanian collections undoubtedly deserves more detailed research and thorough expert analysis.



◆ Fig. 21. a) the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*, late 18th–early 19th century, Kholuy, icon painter Ivan Gorbunov, from a private collection in Russia, and b) the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (fig. 11) from Transylvania. Courtesy of Northern Icon Gallery, Moscow (fig. 21a). Copyright: Museikon (fig. 21b).



◆ Fig. 22. a) the *Saint Sergius's Vision*, Kholuy, last third of the 18th century, from a private collection in Russia, and b) *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 10) from Transylvania. Courtesy of Northern Icon Gallery, Moscow (fig. 22a). Copyright: Sămbăta de Sus Monastery (fig. 22b).





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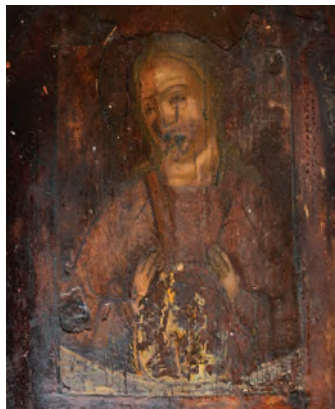
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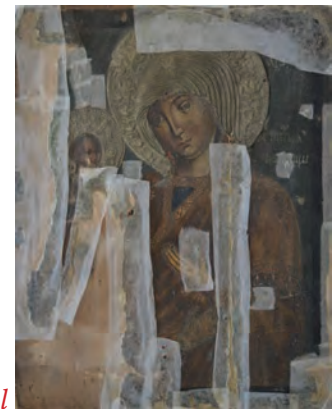
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New Insights into the Transfer and Reception of Russian Icons in Transylvania Based on the Interdisciplinary Research of the RICONTRANS Project

A Conservation-Restoration Perspective

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The National Museum of the Union Alba Iulia (NMUAI) owns twenty-four icons attributed to Russian icon painters. They were included in an interdisciplinary project aimed at investigating and restoring them, in an attempt to shed new light on numerous subjects of interest in the study of icon-painting, including their provenance and date, as well as materials and techniques that the artists employed in their creation. The present study has scientific and technical stakes as well: half of these icons have already been investigated thoroughly, using optical microscopy, elemental X-ray Fluorescence spectroscopy, Raman microscopy, and FTIR spectroscopy in both Attenuated Total Reflection (ATR) and transmission mode.

Therefore the goal of this study, from the standpoint of a conservator-restorer, is to contribute to an understanding of the process of transfer and reception of Russian religious art in Transylvania and to reveal the techniques and materials used by Russian icon painters. We hope that such an approach will help develop and adapt restoration methodologies, as well as address issues pertaining to conservation (and the peculiarities of Russian icons).

◀ Fig. 1. Images of some icons before the restoration process: (a) *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19), (b) *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a), (c) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48), (d) *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17), (e) *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion* (cat. 49), (f) *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion* (cat. 46), (g) *Mother of God Feodorovskaya* (cat. 7), (h) *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), (i) *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5), (j) *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8), (k) *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12), (l) *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3), (m) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27), (n) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts* (cat. 30), (o) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32).

Copyright: Museikon.

This research began with a set of questions: What kind of Russian icons do we have in our collection? How accurately can we date these icons? Are the icons themselves objects of transfer, or was there a transfer of technique and style across geopolitical and cultural boundaries? What is the best manner of approaching the task of developing a restoration methodology, especially with respect to objects of such spiritual, cultural, and historical significance? To answer such complex questions, an interdisciplinary collaboration was established in this RICONTRANS project, bringing the historian, the restorer, and a team of chemists together in a fruitful dialogue. The research outcomes and the issues raised by their findings became, for two years, the focus of the annual restoration workshops organized by the Museikon department of NMUAI with a view to sharing this wealth of experience on Russian icons with other experts in conservation, restoration, and art history. The topics chosen for the workshop were inspired by the project: *Approaches and challenges in the restoration of Russian icons* (4th edition, 2021) and *Varnishes: problems of preservation and restoration* (5th edition, 2022). Furthermore, a comparative study was conducted regarding the icons attributed to Russian and Transylvanian icon painters¹ in order to distinguish the respective features of each, but also to reveal their story and elucidate as many of the secrets of the traditional egg tempera on wooden panel technique, and its evolution from the Middle Ages to modern times.

The museum's icon collection has been enriched in several ways: donations, acquisitions, state-confiscated property, and the inclusion of part of the collection of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Alba Iulia in the museum. Thirteen icons are known to have been brought from Bucharest (in 1971 and 2019),² where they had been sent during the Second World War. One icon was confiscated from Szász Pál from Aiud (Alba County). It was part of his Russian wife's family inheritance. The other eleven icons belonged to the collection of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, and had originally been owned by different parish churches. The information regarding the provenance of the icons is extremely relevant to our research because we took into consideration two hypothesis: (i) the icons are objects of transfer (this means the icons were painted in Russia and brought to Transylvania in different historical contexts) and, (ii) there was a transfer of technique and style (this means the icons could have been painted by the Old Believers settled in the Romanian territories). Interesting records about the Russian icons donated in 2019 have been preserved, confirming that some of them were objects of transfer, or indicating for others clear ties with the Old Believers. Starting from these records, our research focused on the study of technique and materials used by the icon painters not only in order to elucidate the transfer and reception issues, but also so as to develop and adapt the current restoration methodology to the particular conservation issues of these icons.

CONSERVATION ISSUES AND THE RESTORATION PROCESS

Although the icons that were investigated and restored were painted at different times, had had different "adventures" throughout time and been preserved in different places, most of them had similar conservation issues (fig. 1).

Notes

1 The investigations into a group of 8 Transylvanian icons were jointly made by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip with the mobile ARCH-Lab of the INCDTP-ICPI, as part of her postdoctoral research project on *Materials and techniques of icon painting in Transylvania, 18th to early 19th centuries*, at '1 Decembrie 1918' University from Alba Iulia. This postdoctoral project has been made possible thanks to POCU 153770 *Accessibility of advanced research for sustainable economic development – ACADEMIKA* co-financed by European Social Fund under the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020. Another group of 5 Transylvanian icons were investigated by the same team for the RICONTRANS project.

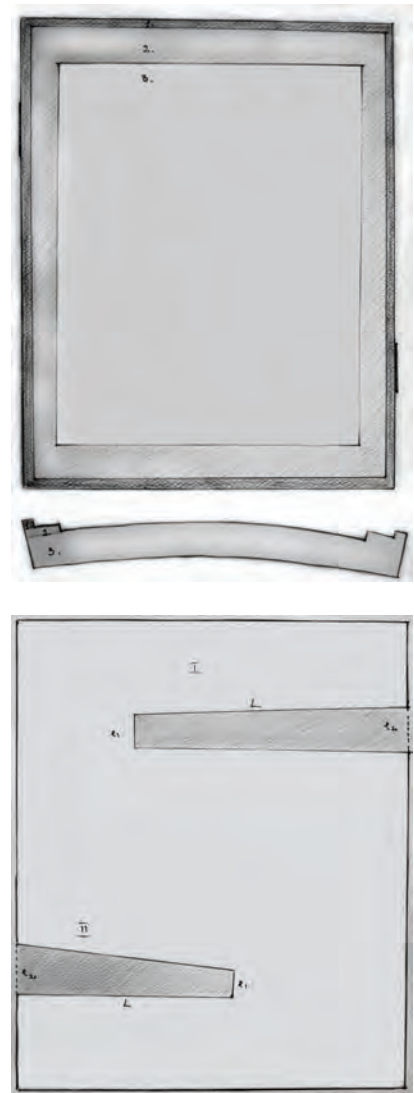
2 They were part of the private collections. The icons brought in 1971 belonged to Eliza Berlescu, while the ones brought in 2019 belonged to Zamfira Mihail.

The icons were painted on *wooden panels*, consisting of one or two pieces of different dimensions, with crossbars (slats or sliders) on the back. Only the icon of *Mother of God Rimskaya* (cat. 10) has two crossbars on the upper and lower parts of the panel, inserted in the width of the wood, and not on the back like the others. The icons are small to medium-sized (as can be seen in table 1). Their physical dimensions have been monitored during the project period to evaluate the impact of the microclimate, i.e. the relative humidity and temperature, on the objects. Since autumn 2019 the icons have been stored in the laboratory for investigation and restoration. Some of them were brought from Bucharest in the same year as donations, while the others were previously in the museum storerooms. During this period we observed variations of 1 cm maximum (both positive and negative) compared to the dimensions recorded a few years earlier in the analytical evidence on file relating to the icons. The wooden panels showed a very high sensitivity to temperature and humidity changes as a result of the technical defects in the making of the panels and in the wood processing combined with the unstable microclimate. This caused or accentuated various forms of cupping or bowing of the wood, cracks, detachments and lacunae in the ground and paint layers and other conservation issues. It is worth mentioning that the Transylvanian icons that had been stored together with the Russian icons, in the museum storerooms, with the same microclimate parameters, did not show such significant changes in the panels' dimensions / shape.

The first four icons in table 1 have an intended visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panel (double *kovcheg*), and almost identical dimensions (fig. 2). The other icons were painted on a simple wooden panel consisting of one or two pieces of different dimensions.

The icons had various conservation issues stemming from different causes, such as the use of unsuitable sawing patterns for icon painting; technical defects in the wood processing technique (the type of wood was not properly chosen or dried); in many cases, the pieces were joined without taking into consideration the position of the tree rings (growth rings); damage due to variations in temperature and humidity, insect attack etc.

The guidelines for selecting and preparing a wooden panel for icon painting concern: (i) type of wood (soft, non-resinous wood is the most suitable for icon painting, e.g. linden, poplar etc.); (ii) sawing (pieces cut near to the heart of the tree trunk are harder and more resistant to biological attack than those cut near the bark); (iii) wood drying (the wood must be naturally dried and after this, it is recommended that the panels should be boiled in water for about 2-5 hrs and then left to dry naturally for about six months to a year, stored horizontally in a room without sunlight or draughts.³ There are three approaches to sawing wood and extracting it from the tree trunk: tangential, radial and axial / longitudinal. Radial and axial sawing are recommended for preparing panels for painting which will not easily warp, e.g. expanding when the wood naturally absorbs the moisture in the air, or contracting when it releases it. However, these methods are not the most economical. Fewer pieces are obtained using these two cutting methods, while tangential sawing produces less wastage. However, the panels obtained by this method will easily cup and warp in time,⁴ causing splitting, cracking and detachments of the ground and paint layers leading to lacunae. Most of the Russian icons investigated were painted on panels that had been wrongly cut and assembled. Properly cut panels must be joined taking into consideration



▲ Fig. 2. a) front and edge of the wooden panel, with the dimensions of the intended visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panels (double *kovcheg*), with the variations identified on the icons investigated: 1=0.5-1.0 cm, 2=1.5-2.0 cm, 3=22.5/23.0 cm x 18.5/2.0 cm; width of the edge: 2.5-3.0 cm; b) back of the wooden panel, dimensions of the crossbars taken from icon cat. 37a: I. L=15.0 cm, l1=1.7 cm, l2=2.5 cm; II. L=13 cm, l1=1.5 cm, l2=2.0 cm. Drawings by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

Notes

³ Săndulescu-Verna 2000, p. 15.

⁴ For more details about the technique used in making the wooden supports see Uzzieli 1995, p. 115.

Table 1. The list of the icons restored and investigated

| No. | Icons restored for RICONTRANS project | Records about the icon's origin (whether it is Russian or not) |
|-----|--|--|
| 1 | Saint Nicholas of Myra, cat. 37a | - |
| 2 | Saint Nicholas of Myra, cat. 37b | - |
| 3 | Mother of God Akhtyrskaya, cat. 17 | - |
| 4 | Four-part Icon, cat. 48 | - |
| 5 | Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth, cat. 12 | - |
| 6 | Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion, cat. 49 | - |
| 7 | Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion, cat. 46 | - |
| 8 | The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah, cat. 41 | known to be Russian (clear connection to Old Believers) |
| 9 | Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts, cat. 27 | known to be Russian |
| 10 | Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts, cat. 32 | - |
| 11 | Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell with Passion and Feasts, cat. 30 | known to be Russian (clear connection to Old Believers) |
| 12 | Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts, cat. 31 | - |
| 13 | Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints, cat. 19 | known to be Russian |
| 14 | Christ Pantokrator, cat. 21 | - |
| 15 | Christ Pantokrator, cat. 20 | - |
| 16 | Dormition of the Mother of God, cat. 16 | known to be Russian (confirmed by the marked <i>oklad</i>) |
| 17 | Birth of the Mother of God, cat. 35 | - |
| 18 | Crucifixion, cat. 39 | - |
| 19 | Mother of God Seeker of the Lost, cat. 5 | - |
| 20 | Mother of God Vladimirskaya, cat. 6 | - |
| 21 | Mother of God Feodorovskaya, cat. 7 | known to be Russian, bought from Kyiv in 1869 |
| 22 | Three-Handed Mother of God, cat. 3 | - |
| 23 | Mother of God Rimskaya, cat. 10 | - |
| 24 | Mother of God Smolenskaya, cat. 8 | known to be Russian (clear connection Old Believers) |

Investigated**Dimensions**

| | |
|-----|--|
| - | 28 x 23 x 2,3 cm, the wooden panel has a double <i>kovcheg</i> |
| yes | 29 x 23,5 x 2,5 cm, the wooden panel has a double <i>kovcheg</i> |
| yes | 27 x 23 x 2,2 cm, the wooden panel has a double <i>kovcheg</i> |
| yes | 28 x 23 x 2,5 cm, the wooden has a double <i>kovcheg</i> |
| - | 27,5 x 21,5 x 2cm |
| yes | 28 x 23 x 1,5cm |
| yes | 30 x 22,5 x 1,5 cm |
| yes | 32 x 29 x 2 cm |
| yes | 31x 26 x 1,7 cm |
| yes | 36 x 30 x 1,7 cm |
| - | 53 x 42,5 x 2 cm |
| - | 53 x 42,5 x 2cm |
| yes | 53,5 x 45 x 2 cm |
| - | 37 x 30 x 1,7 cm |
| - | |
| yes | 31 x 27 x 2,3 cm |
| yes | 35 x 31 x 2,5 cm |
| yes | 36 x 31 x 2,5 cm |
| yes | 37,5 x 30,5 x 2 cm |
| yes | 38,5 x 31,5 x 2 cm |
| yes | 36 x 29,5 cm x 2 cm |
| yes | 48 x 38 x 2,5 cm |
| - | 42 x 30 x 3 cm |
| yes | 50 x 41,5 x 2 cm |

the position / orientation of the growth rings in the wood. This rule was also sometimes ignored to maximize the number of panels obtained from the same tree trunk. This economical method of sawing also involves less labor, being compatible with the mass production of icons that aimed to make icons available and affordable for everyone. This involved reducing the dimensions and using cheap materials, including cheap wood, as well as less refined techniques. Almost all of the icons included in our study that were thought to be Russian have these characteristics.

The damage to the wood panels in almost all the icons investigated was therefore mainly caused by unsuitable sawing methods and unskilled / careless assembly. The choice of wood species also had an impact on the resulting panel. Depending on their tendency to warp, the icons can be grouped into three categories:

1) Icons showing *bowed / cupped panels* (concave to the unpainted surface). This is the most common warp found on the icons investigated. Half of them (13 icons) show this conservation issue, namely: the *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19), the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8), the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts* (cat. 30), the *Mother of God Feodorovskaya* (cat. 7), the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20), the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17), a *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48), *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion* (cat. 46), the *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12), *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a), the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 31), the *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5) and the *Birth of the Mother of God* (cat. 35). In some cases, this very common warping type either caused longitudinal (partial or complete) fracture, or led to the disassembling of the panels and to the detachment of the wooden crossbars or forced them out (in the case of a panel formed of two pieces: e.g. the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8), or the *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19). Tangential sawing of the tree trunk is the main cause of this type of warping (fig. 4).

2) Icons with *twisted panels*. This type of warping appears when the wooden panel is made of two or more pieces improperly assembled (e.g. ignoring the position / orientation of the growth rings on each piece of wood) (fig. 3). There are four icons with this conservation issue: the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32), *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6), the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27). Twisting also caused fractures in or disassembling, detachments of the panels and, in many cases, the

crossbars from the back were forced out (expulsion of the crossbars). Hence, detachments of the ground and paint layers (visible or invisible on the surface) occurred, as well as flaking paint, gaps or losses, lacunae in the ground and paint layers.

3) Icons with *flat wooden support* showing either separation of individual panels or fractures if the support is made of a single panel (e.g. icon of the *Dormition of Mother of God*, cat. 16). Where panels separated this was mainly caused by the ageing of the adhesive, which loses its ability to stick (fig. 5). There are five icons with this conservation issue: *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37b), the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3), the *Dormition of Mother of God* (cat. 16), the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 21), the *Crucifixion* (cat. 39).

There are only two icons that do not have any fractures or cupping of the wooden panels: the *Four-part Icon with the Crucifixion* (cat. 49) and the icon of the *Mother of God Rimskaya* (cat. 10).

Previous attempts to join split panels were identified on some icons where a glue layer (a modern adhesive) had been lavishly applied to the edges of the joints and even on the back (fig. 6).

The modern adhesives, inappropriately applied, were removed mechanically. The separated panels were reassembled using animal-hide glue. In some cases, new crossbars were made to fit the empty space of the lost ones, to stabilize the panels and make the icon safe for future use (fig. 7a-c).

The voids were filled using either pieces of wood cut to fit exactly into the empty space, sawdust putty or balsite, depending on the conservation issues of each panel (fig. 7d-g).

In most of the cases, the longitudinal fractures and detachments of the panels corresponded to the axis of the figures depicted. Very often, figures were split in two (fig. 8).

For these icons, various procedures were adopted to rejoin the split panels and preserve their integrity (fig. 9).

The panels with simple (complete or partial) fractures required only realignment, the application of glue and uniaxial compression. In the case of panels with cupped or twisted shapes, the rejoining procedure was more challenging and technically demanding. For example, in reassembling the split icons of the *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19) and the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8), we found that the edges of the panels no longer aligned. They were fixed into the vices (trigger clamps) and a combined technique of joining pressure and alignment pressure was used as necessary.⁵ We opted for repeated application of moderate pressure. Before rejoining, the old glue was removed from the edges and from the fracture, and the paint and ground lay-

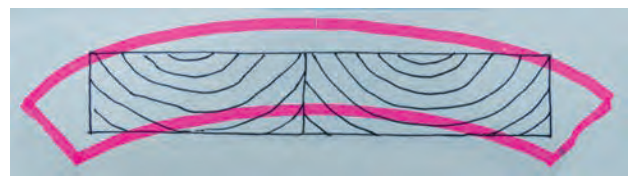
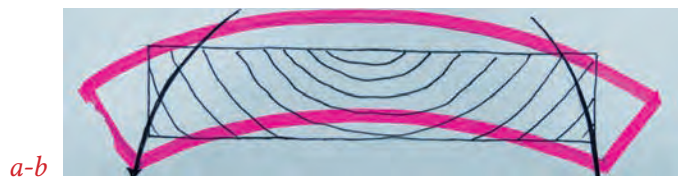


▲ Fig. 3. Icons with twisted panels: a) drawing by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, b) the wood panels of the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32), c) the *Birth of the Mother of God* (cat. 35), d) *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), e) the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6), and f) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27) icons.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

Notes

5 Brewer 1995, p. 418.



◆ Fig. 4. Icons showing bowed / cupped panels (concave to the unpainted surface): a-b) drawings by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, c) the wood panels of the *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19), d) *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8), e) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts* (cat. 30), f) *Mother of God Feodorovskaya* (cat. 7), g) *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20), h) *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17), i) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 31), j) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48), k) *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a), l) *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12), m) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46), and n) *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5) icons.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



i



j



k



l



m



n



a

ers were preventively consolidated using fish glue solution (4-6%) and Japanese tissue paper (fig. 10).

Then, the panels were fixed into vices, the animal-hide glue solution (16-20%) was applied with a brush to the inside of both joins and then injected into the gaps if the joints no longer perfectly aligned. After this, the necessary pressure was exerted to reassemble the panel. It was reported that a thinner glue layer is recommended because it is “more flexible and therefore able to

move with the surrounding wood.”⁶ It is worth mentioning that loss of wood in the lower part of the icon was filled using animal glue and a piece of wood cut to the precise dimensions to fill the void.

Another frequent conservation issue associated with wooden panels is insect attack. The severe effects of damage by insects was found on the following icons: *The Crucifixion* (cat. 25), *The Birth of the Mother of God* (cat. 35), the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 21), the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20), the *Mother*

◆ Fig. 5. Icons with flat wooden support showing either separation of individual panels or fractures in the wood where the support is made of a single panel: a) *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3), b) *The Crucifixion* (cat. 25), c) *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 21), d) *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37b), e) *The Dormition of Mother of God* (cat. 16).
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



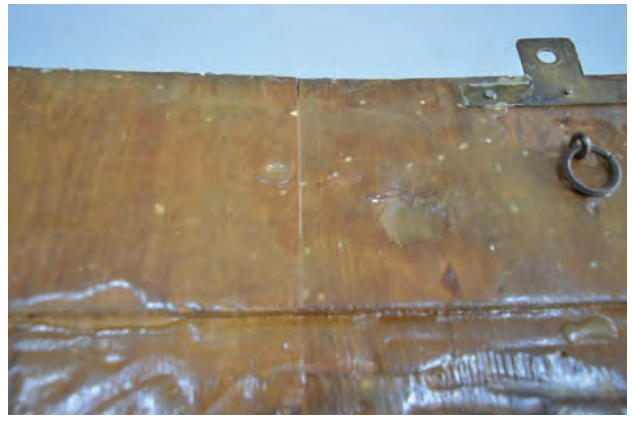
b-c



d-e

Notes

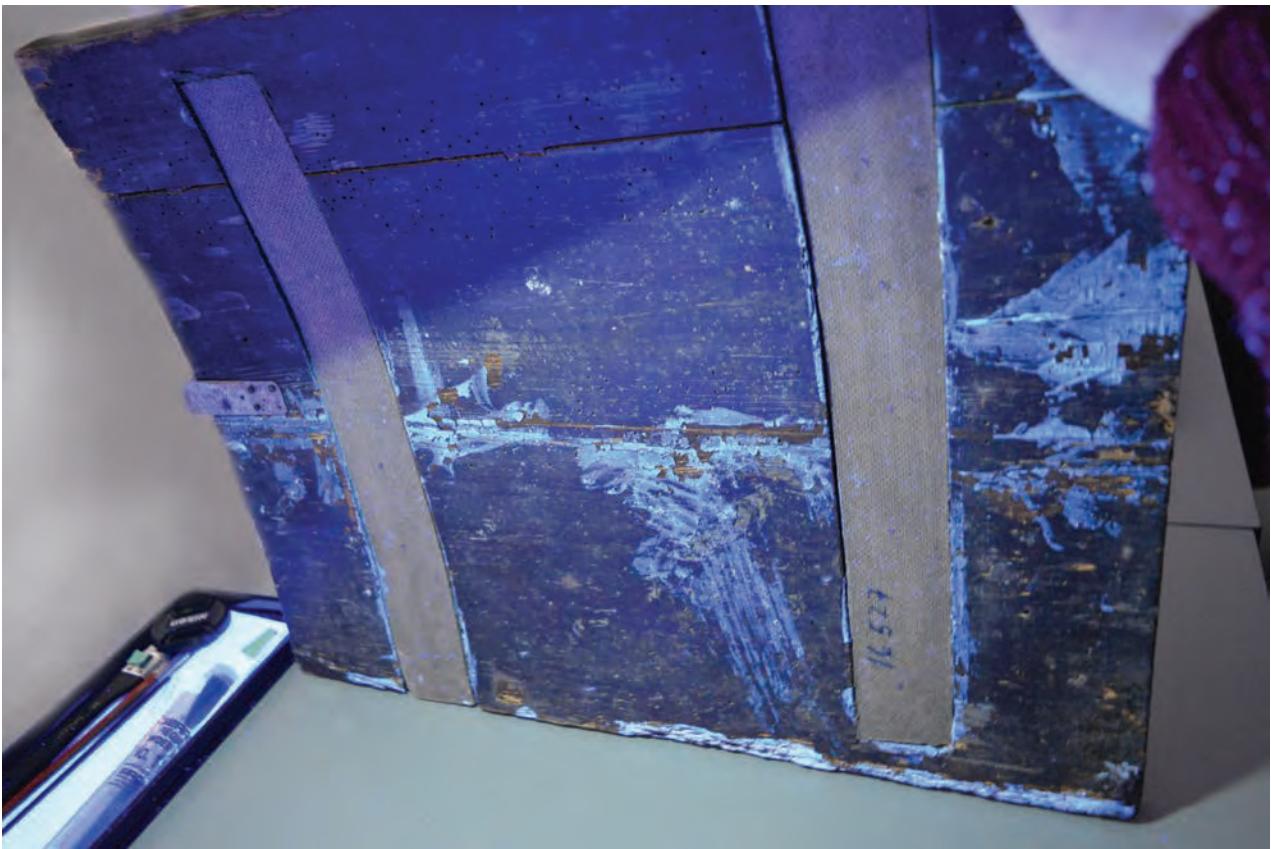
6 Brewer 1995, p. 420.



◆ Fig. 6. The modern adhesive lavishly applied to the edges of the joints and on the back.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

Notes

7 Schniewind 1995, p. 87-107.



of God Rimskaya (cat. 10), and the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3). A dead insect was found on the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32) although the wood was not badly damaged by the insect attack in this case (fig. 11). The other icons had only a few insect holes on small areas. The tunnels made by insect larvae in the wooden structure and fly holes have weakened the structural stability of the wooden panels (fig. 12).

Although no active infestation was detected, all the icons were preventively treated with biocide Per-xil 10, both applied with a brush and injected using a syringe (fig. 13).

The most fragile panels (that had become spongy due to extensive biomass loss) needed structural

consolidation. A mix of paraloid B72 and ethyl acetate consolidant⁷ was used to fill the pores ensuring mechanical strengthening of the wood and dimensional stability.

The ground and the paint layers of all icons were generally well preserved. Peeling, flaking and detaching of ground and paint layers were mainly caused by the wooden panels' warping. The change in wood dimensions caused detachments and / or cracks due to the contraction and expansion cycles. Different types of detachments and lacunae have been identified at this level: e.g. blind, partial or total detachments, two-ridged-roof-like detachments, lifted layers of ground and paint, small and large lacunae (fig. 14).



a-b



c



d

◆ Fig. 7. a-c) The new crossbars made. The voids were filled using: d) either pieces of wood cut to fit the empty space exactly, e-f) sawdust putty or g) balsite.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



e-f



g



▼ Fig. 8. Examples of fractures and detachments that caused splits in individual painted figures: a) **cat. 19**, b) **cat. 38**, c) **cat. 8**, d) **cat. 3**.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



a-b



c-d

▼ Fig. 9. Procedures for rejoining the split panels.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



▼ Fig. 10. Before rejoining, the old glue was cleaned (removed) from the edges and from the fracture, and the paint and ground layers were preventively consolidated. Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



► Fig. 11. Microscopic images of a dead insect found on the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* icon (cat. 32).





To solve these issues, we followed two methodological approaches. The first one was archeological restoration based on the principle of minimal intervention. The icon was stabilized, all detachments were consolidated using a combined technique of consolidation: a solution of fish glue (sturgeon glue) was applied over the Japanese tissue paper to stabilize the paint and ground layers, then sturgeon glue was injected into the detachments using a hydraulic device, such as a syringe; after it dried a little the areas were gently heated using a small tacking heated iron (spatula) alternated with cold pressure being exerted using small blocks of marble. This alternation of hot and cold pressure had the effect of helping the glue (adhesive) penetrate deeper into the structure of the ground layer and dry on the surface (fig. 15). No lacunae were filled.

The other approach was based on the filling of the lacunae after following the aforementioned consolidation treatment. The decision to fill the lacunae was determined by the icon's state of conservation and the types of losses. In the case of the *Saint Nicholas of Myra* icon (cat. 37a), a *Four-part Icon* (cat. 49), and the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3) the lacunae were not filled (fig. 16).

For the icons *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19), *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), a *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46) and others the lacunae were infilled with a putty (calcium carbonate mixed with 2-4% fish glue solution), followed

by leveling, drying and polishing, and chromatic integration (fig. 17).

There had been previous attempts to fill the lacunae on the icons of the *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5) and *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6), *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17) and a *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46). In the case of the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* icon (cat. 17), a *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46) and the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6), there were detachments of the non-original ground layer that was applied at a certain time in the attempt to fill the lacunae. This ground layer had therefore to be removed. On the *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5) the new ground was stable and its removal would have had adverse consequences for the stability and integrity of the icon. This is why it was preserved. On all the aforementioned icons attempts had been made to repaint the areas filled with the new ground. Attempts at repainting were also observed on the *Mother of God Rimskaya* (cat. 10), *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12), and *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20). The unprofessional (careless and rough) repainting was removed in all cases and chromatic integration was achieved in accordance with the principles of restoration (fig. 19).

At the level of the paint layer, surface observation based on naked eye examination identified a variety of damage: adherent or clogged deposits of smoke, dust, wax, smudge and other impurities trapped by the varnish layer, as well as cracks, gaps,



◆ Fig. 12. Details with the tunnels made by insect larvae in the wooden structure and fly holes that weakened the structural stability of the wooden panels, and microscopic details of the fly holes.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

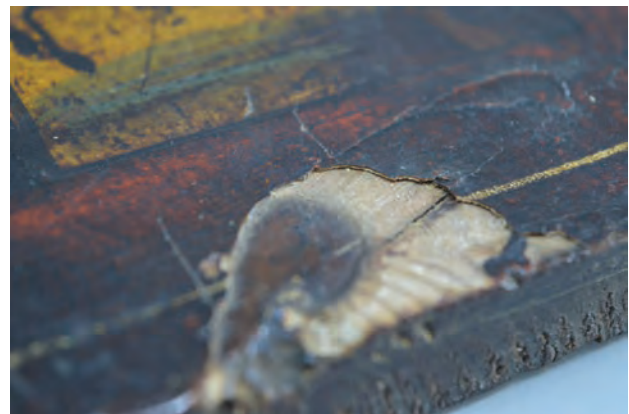
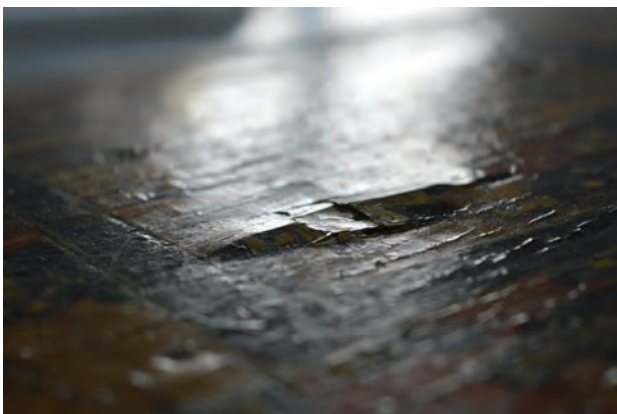
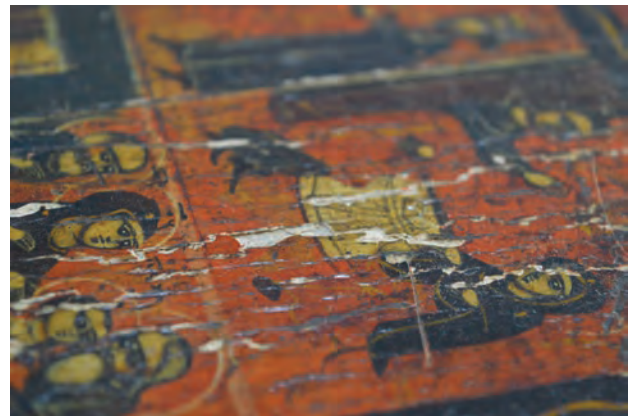


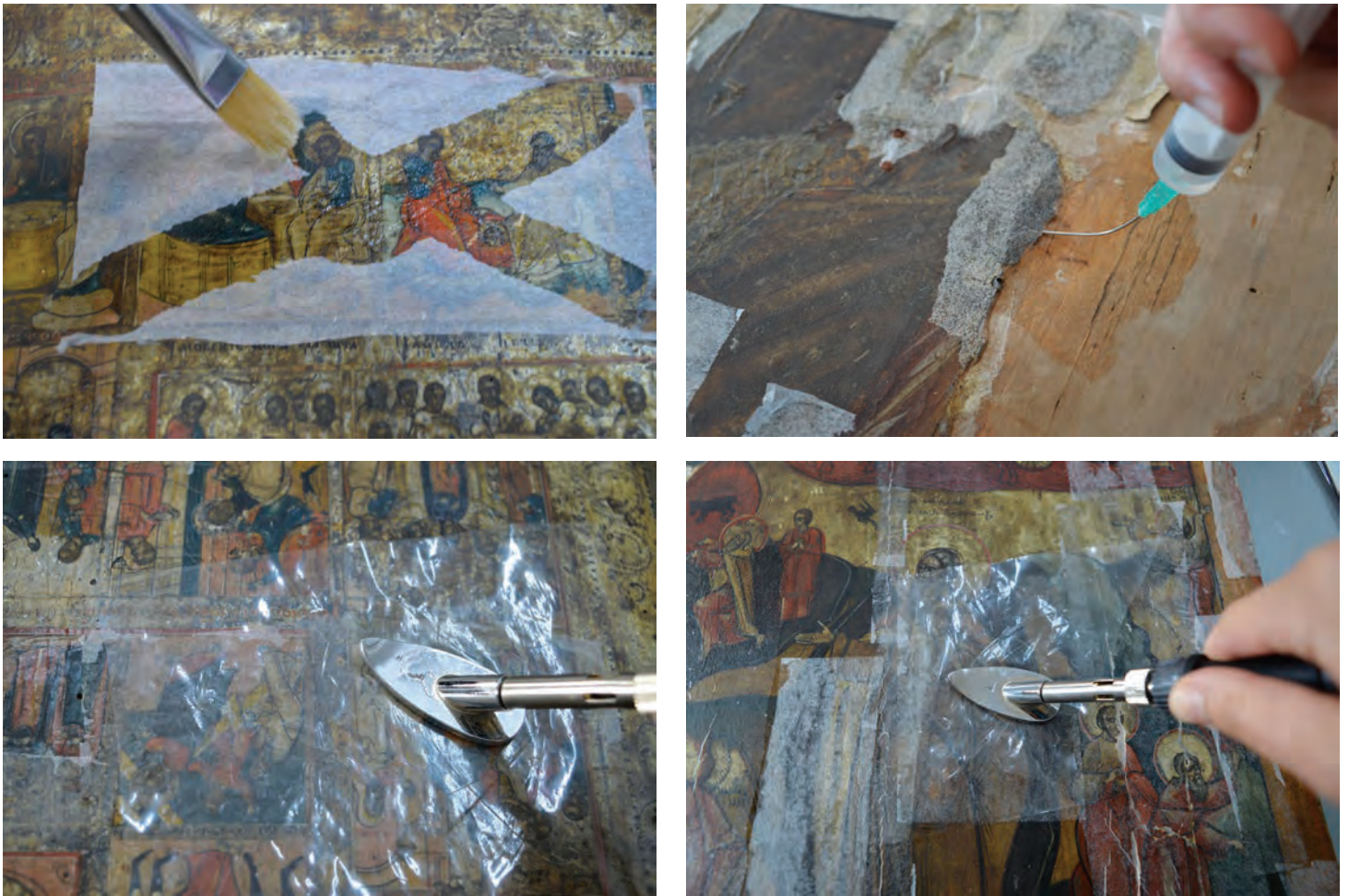


▲ Fig. 13. Treatment against insect attack.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



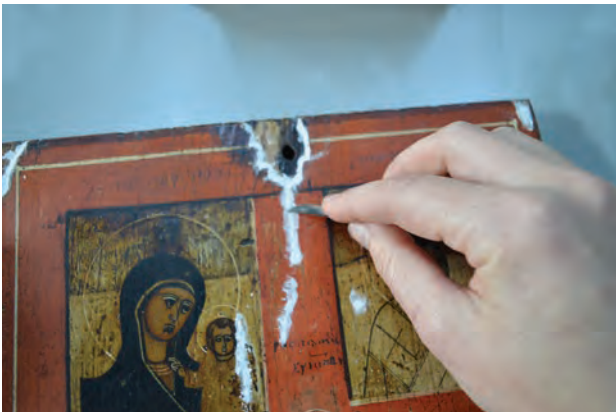
▼ Fig. 14. Different types of detachments and lacunae.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.





◆ Fig. 15. Combined techniques of consolidation.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.





▲ Fig. 16. The lacunae located on the edges of the paint layer were not filled in the icons of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a), the *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion* (cat. 49), or the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3). Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

▼ Fig. 17. Lacunae were filled with putty in the case of the icons *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19), *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion* (cat. 46) and others, followed by leveling, drying and polishing, and chromatic integration. Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

lacunae, flaking and detachments of the paint layer (especially on the areas painted over the metal leaf) (fig. 18).

Adherent and clogged deposits of smoke, dust and wax were mainly observed on the icons varnished with olifa. On the icons varnished with natural resin without linseed oil added, the smoke, dust and other impurities did not penetrate the ground and paint layers and could be easily cleaned either with alkaline (4-6%) potassium hydroxide solution or alcohol solution. On the icons varnished with olifa, a mix of dimethylformamide (DMF) and alcohol (1:1 ratio), or turpentine was needed to remove the olifa varnish. Thus, the cleaning was adapted to the specific conservation issues of the surface, varnish layer (type of varnish) and the pigments used. The surface cleaning approach took into consideration the preservation of the patina by avoiding complete removal of the varnish. The varnish layer was thinned using solvents (figs 20-21).

The large number of areas showing lacunae in the paint or ground layers represented the most conspicuous damage. In this case, they



◆ Fig. 18. Details showing deposits of dust and other impurities.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

- ▶▶ Fig. 19. Repainting attempts observed on the icons: a-b) *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5), c-d) *Mother of God Rimskaya* (cat. 10), e-f) *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6), g-i) *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17), j-k) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46), l) *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12), and m) *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20).

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



disturbed the perception of the image as a whole and its contemplation. Due to the multiple lacunae of different size, the rest of the paint layer, better conserved, tended to be perceived as a secondary element of the painting, while the lacunae became the center of interest. When lacunae are the main factors disturbing contemplation of the icon, filling of gaps / lacunae and chromatic integration are recommended.⁸ Consequently, we decided to fill the lacunae with ground (calcium carbonate based) and use the *ritocco* (pointiller) technique for the chromatic integration (fig. 22). This procedure allowed us to harmoniously restore the visual unity of the icons.

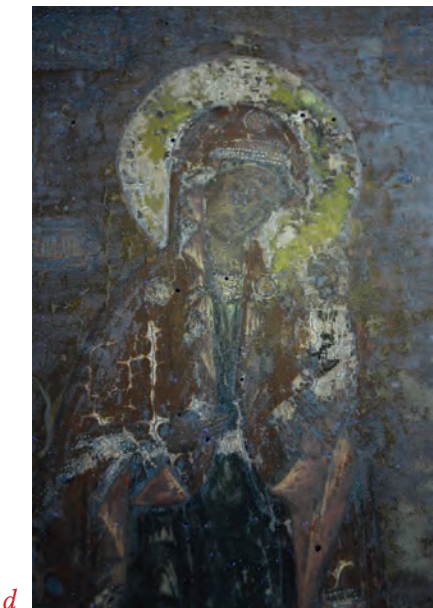
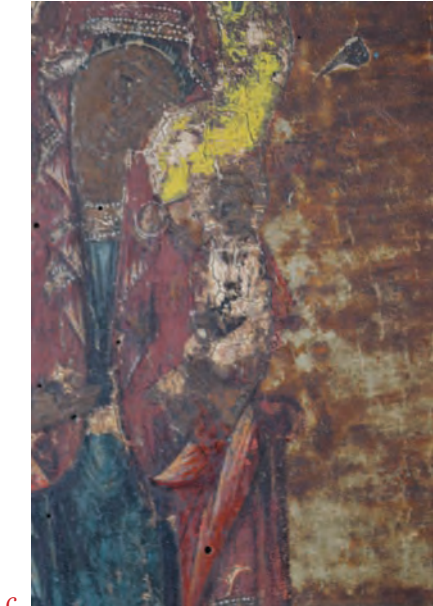
For example, the entire surface of the *Ressurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32) (see fig. 10) was prematurely cracked and many detachments, lacunae, and losses in the paint and ground layers were visible. The unity of the image was disrupted due to these small but numerous material losses. The overall subject depicted could barely be made out. Filling of the lacunae and chromatic integration was hence deemed necessary. Chromatic integration⁹ was performed using dots, i.e. the *ritocco* (pointiller) technique.¹⁰ In the case of the *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5) (see fig. 1 i), only the repainted layer was removed and chromatic integration was achieved using the aforementioned method. In the case of the *Four-part Icon* (cat. 49) (see fig. 1 f) the lacunae located close to the edges of the painted surface did not interfere with the main part of the image, allowing us to choose an archaeological restoration approach. With regard to the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3) (see fig. 1 l), whose

Notes

⁸ Brandi 1996, p. 102-108. Georgescu 2019, p. 60-61.

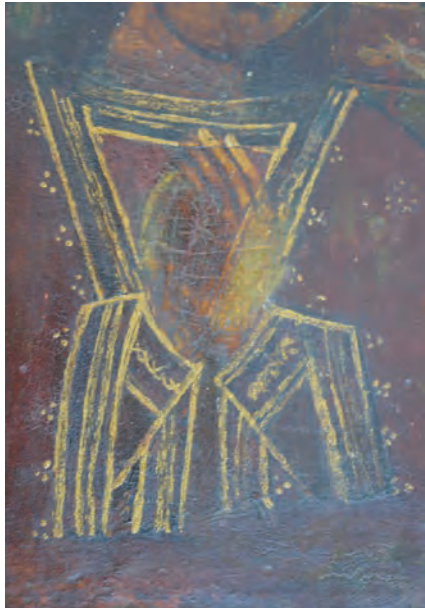
⁹ The term “chromatic integration” as defined in Baillão, Calvo 2015, p. 20, and Bailão 2013, p. 55-62.

¹⁰ Georgescu 2019, p. 60-65.

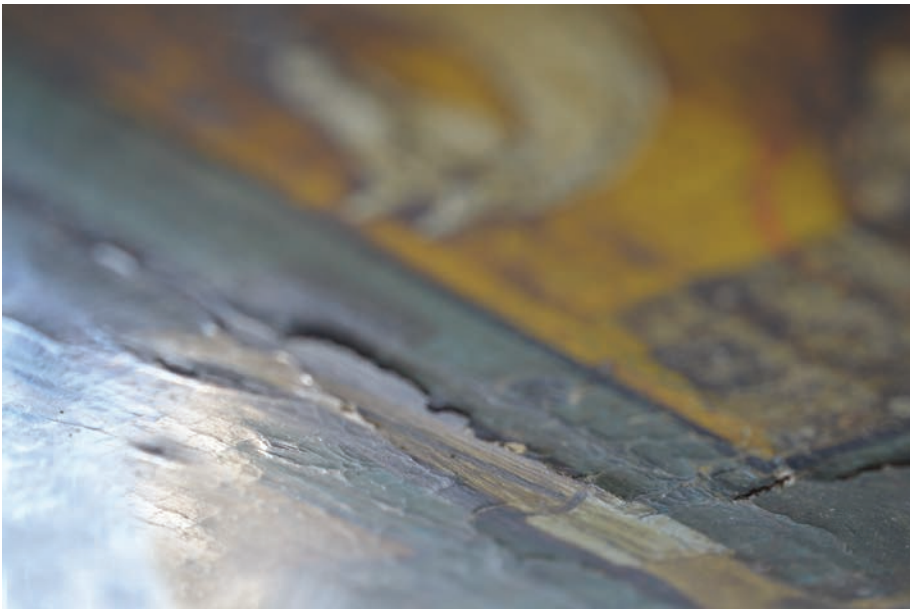




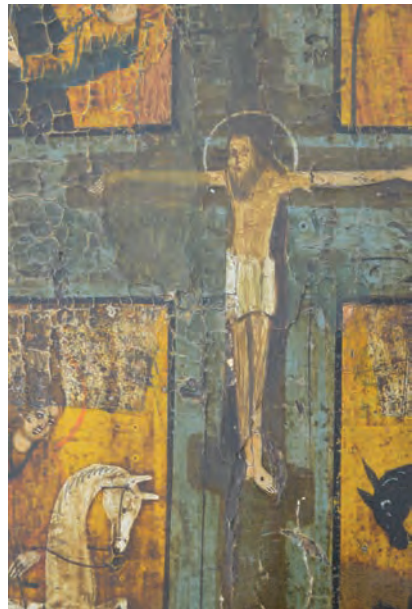
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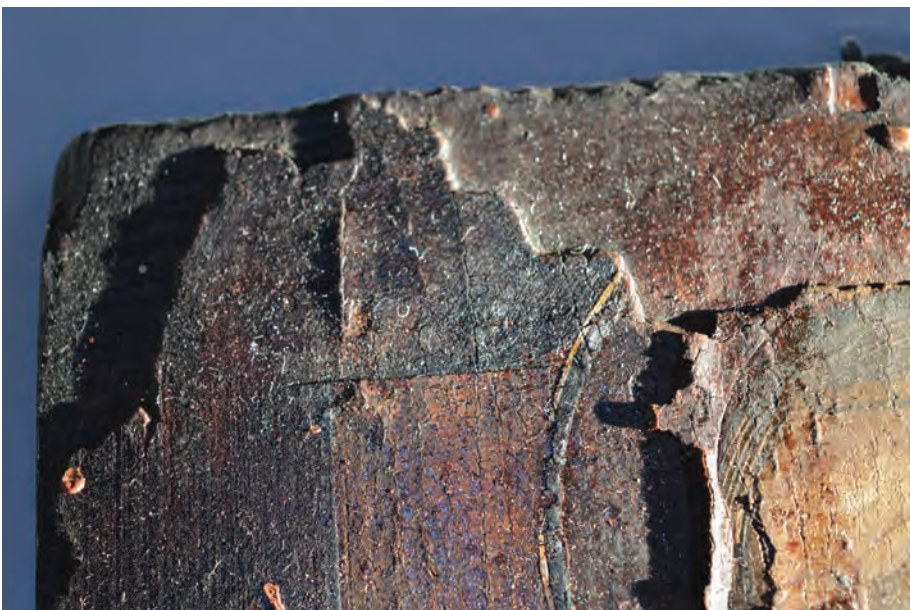
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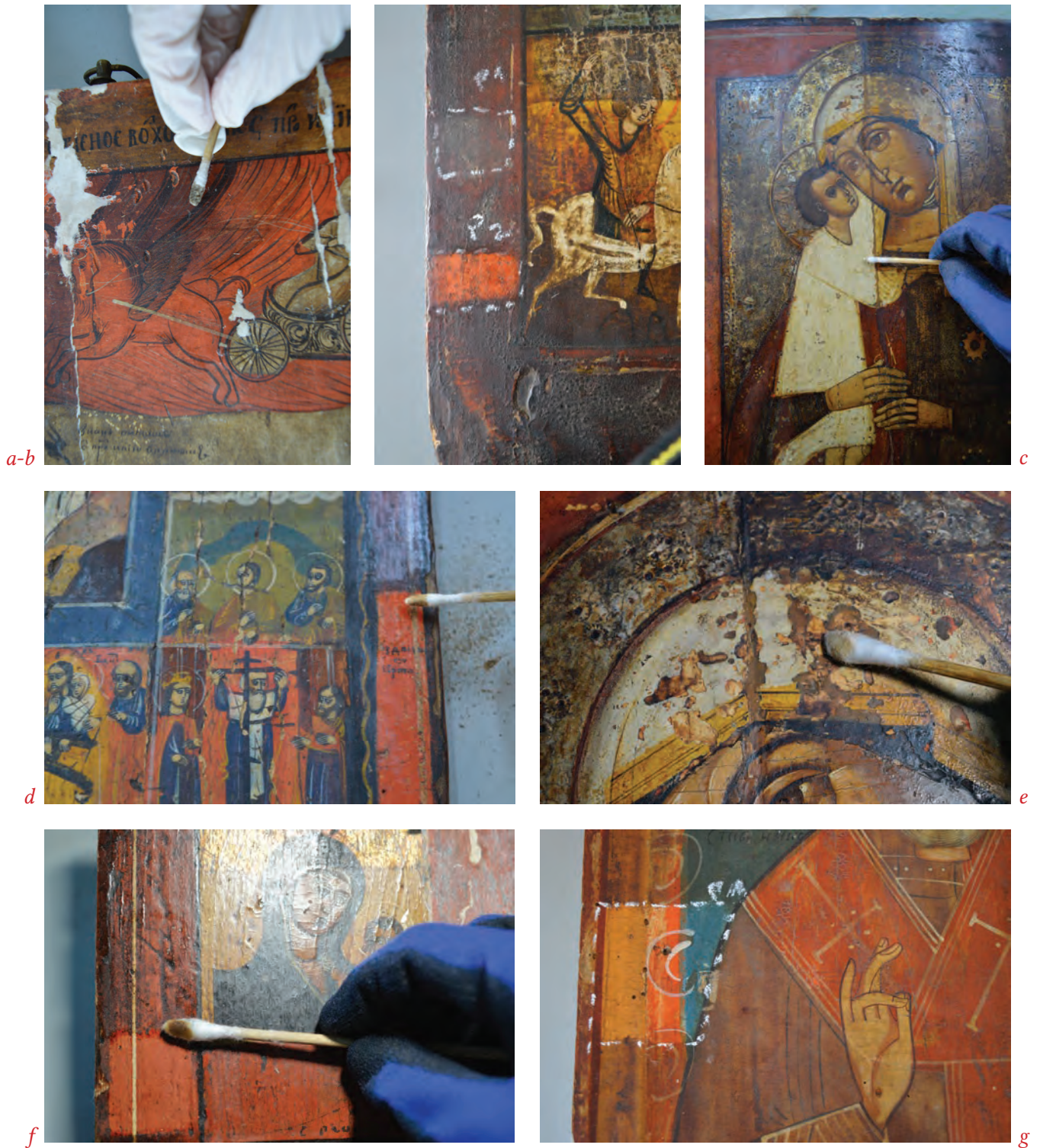


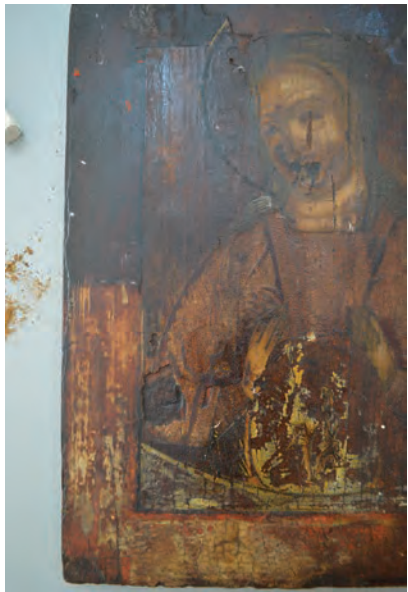
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m

◆ Fig. 20. Cleaning details: a) *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41); b) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46); c-d) *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost* (cat. 5); e) *Ressurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32); f) *Four-part Icon* (cat. 49); g) *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a); h-i) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts* (cat. 30); and j-l) *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17): before and during the cleaning process; m-o) *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth* (cat. 12).



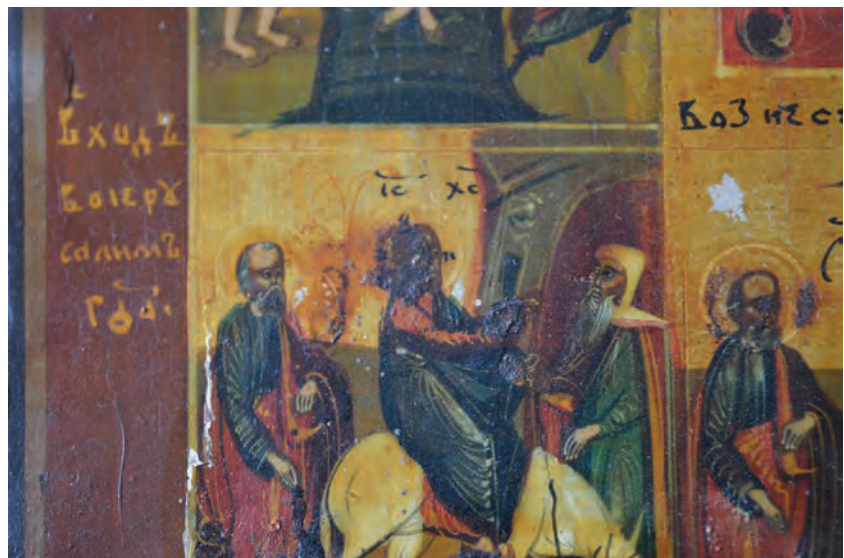


► Fig. 21. Cleaning details of the *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48): a) detail before cleaning; b) detail during the cleaning process; c) IR light photo.
Credits: Dumitrița Daniela Filip.



►► Fig. 22. The *ritocco* (pointiller) technique used for the chromatic integration.
Credits: Dumitrița Daniela Filip.

▼ Fig. 23. Details of the silver leaf covered by a colored varnish / glaze layer (microscopic and autoptic images).
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

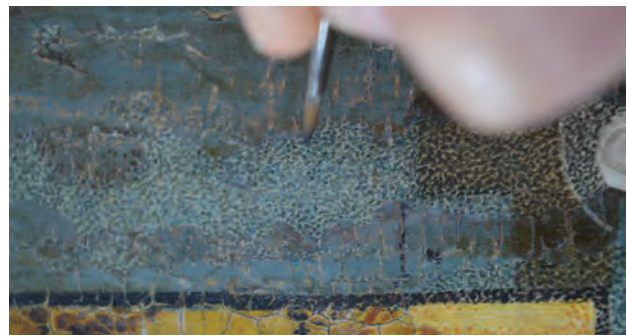
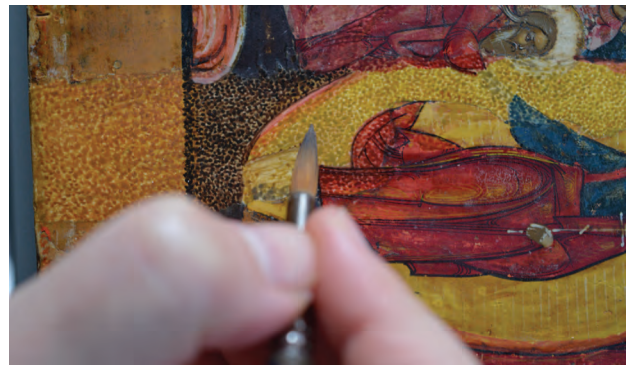


lacunae were too large to be filled, an aesthetic reconstruction was not considered in the absence of specific and historical objectives.¹¹

For a group of four icons, namely the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27), the *Mother of God Feodorovskaya* (cat. 7), the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 21) and the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 20) a similar type of varnish seems to have been used. All are covered by a layer of colored lake / glaze, which we assume to be shellac based. This colored lake applied over the silver-colored metal leaf creates an aesthetic effect that makes the metal leaf appear gold in color (fig. 23). The silver-colored metal leaf was visible on the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27) due to the lacunae in the colored varnish / glaze layer. These lacunae are mainly due to uneven application of the varnish.

The use of colored varnish was intended to change the appearance of the metal leaf, thus it represents historical evidence of the icon painting technique: an inventive solution substituting expensive materials, such as gold leaf, with cheaper and more easily available silver or silver-colored metal leaf covered by a colored glaze. We can say that, in this case, the colored varnish layer applied to the silver-colored metal leaf acts like a historical document, attesting one of the tricks of the trade that allowed large-scale production of icons. This original information was preserved for further research, investigation and analysis.¹² In another two icons made using silver leaf, *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41) (see fig. 1 k) and *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts* (cat. 30) (see fig. 1 n), the varnish layer was transparent, so not meant to change the aesthetic of the icon. Over time, this varnish turned yellow. In these cases it was reformed with a solvent to thin the layer and reinstate the initial transparency.

The group of four icons with an double *kovcheg* came to our attention due to some common features other than their similar dimensions (see table 1, first four icons). For example, three of them have iron nails located inside the intended visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panels (fig. 24 a-e). We presume the icons had a metal frame, now lost, fixed with these iron nails, because similar icons (with almost the same dimensions, and with metal frames fixed with iron nails) have been identified in Maramureș, in the wooden church from Călinești-Căeni (fig. 24 f-j). An analysis of the four aforementioned icons showed that in some cases the nails fixing the metal frame are still *in situ*, but in most cases they have been lost.



Notes

¹¹ Brandi 1996, p. 37.

¹² This is one of the principles of restoration first stated by Brandi 1996, and recently reconsidered and re-stated as a basis for the restoration of cultural heritage. Gavril 2019, p. 31.

◆ Fig. 24. a-b) microscopic images of the iron nails; c-e) details showing the voids and the iron nails still *in situ*; f-j) the icons found in Maramureș – details.

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.





f



g



h



i



j

▼ Fig. 25. The fabric / textile tissue used on an icon (cat. 16).

Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.



The placement (position) of the missing nails can be traced because they caused holes in and detachments of the ground layer and thus of the paint layer. Since the nails were part of the original object and they are evidence of the technique of production of this type of icon, we decided not to fill the holes. Interestingly, the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37b), which has a similar shape and dimensions, shows no traces of nails, suggesting it was not provided with a metal frame.

We have assumed that this kind of icons arrived in Transylvania at the end of the 18th century,¹³ bearing in mind the archival documents from that period that mention the presence of Russian icon merchants in Transylvania.¹⁴ Even though it is highly challenging to identify and trace the icons sold by these merchants, this group of icons stand out. They show similarities regarding the shape of the panels and their dimensions, and share conservation issues, but these factors are not enough to associate this group of icons specifically with Russian merchants trading in Transylvania at the end of the 18th century. It is almost certain that they are objects of transfer, but they could have arrived in different circumstances and the information we have should be correlated with other records. We expected that an investigation of the materials used in all the icons of this type found in Transylvania, especially identifying the pigments used, might be useful in establishing their dates and confirming their provenance. In fact, the *in-situ* analytical investigation brought to light similarities and some differences regarding the materials used, allowing us to group the icons according to their similarities and form a hypothesis regarding the period in which they were painted. Moreover, the typical characteristics of mass production have become even more obvious in most of the icons.

THE RESULTS OF THE ANALYTICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Notes

13 We first presented this hypothesis at the 2nd RICONTRANS workshop held in Belgrade, in 2021.

14 Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021.

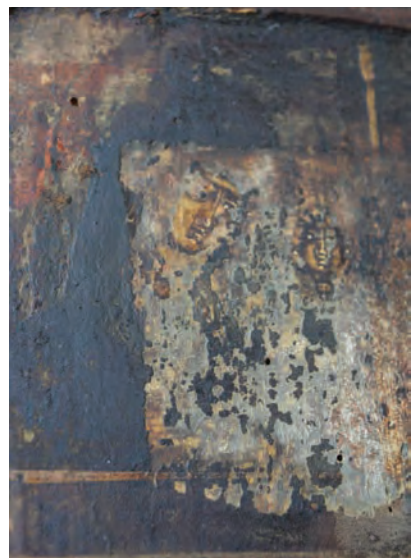
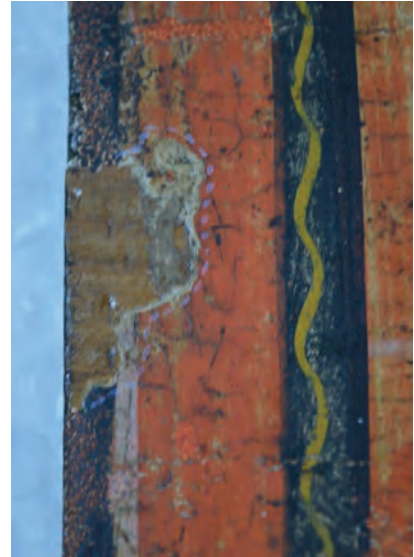
15 In 2021 and 2022, 12 Russian icons and 5 Transylvanian icons were examined for the RICONTRANS project and for another group of 8 Transylvanian icons, the investigations were jointly carried out by Dumitrița Daniela Filip with the mobile ARCH-Lab of the INCDTP-ICPI, as part of her postdoctoral research project *Materials and techniques of icon painting in Transylvania, 18th to early 19th centuries*, at “1 Decembrie 1918” University from Alba Iulia. This project has been made possible thanks to POCU 153770 *Accessibility of advanced research for sustainable economic development – ACADEMIKA*, co-financed by European Social Fund under the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020.

The analytical investigations¹⁵ aimed to identify the materials used by the Russian icon painters and discover the details of their technique. In parallel, eight icons painted in Transylvania during the same period, and analyzed in a different research context, were used in this project for a comparative analysis of the preferred materials and techniques of the Russian and Transylvanian painters respectively.

While it is known that linen / textile tissue has traditionally been used for sealing the panels, a distinctive feature of the icons regarded as Russian is the use of strips of paper for this purpose (fig. 26).

Only in the case of the Russian icon of the *Dormition of Mother of God* (cat. 16) did we observe a piece of fabric applied on the wooden panel. It became visible at the edges of the panel (fig. 25) due to a lacuna in the ground and paint layers. Interestingly, both the technique and materials used for this icon are closer to Eastern (post-Byzantine) tradition, as demonstrated by the results presented below.

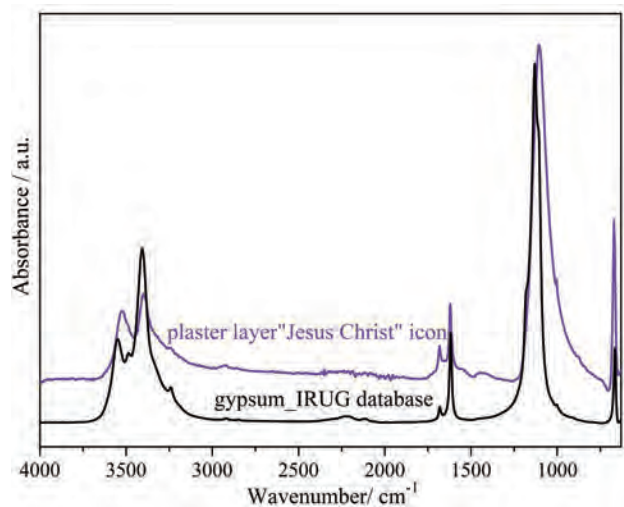
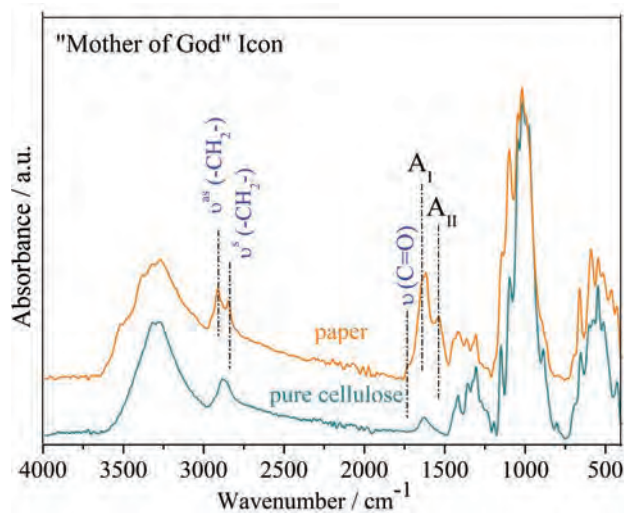
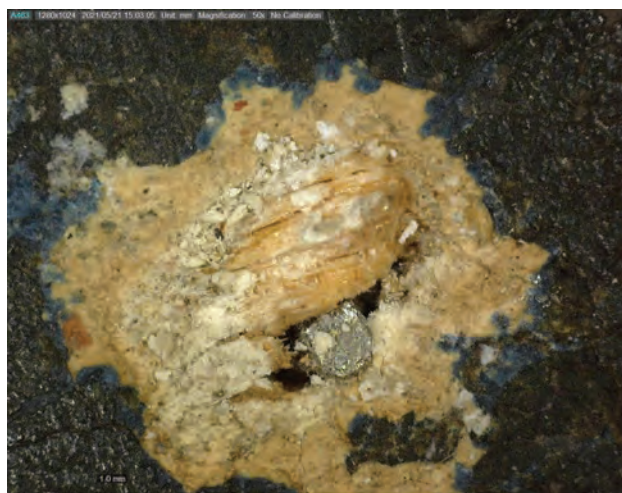
According to the ATR-FTIR results, the paper strips analyzed consist exclusively of cellulosic fibers, with no lignin content. Most probably, the paper was sized with gelatin, as suggested by the presence of the infrared absorption bands specific to proteic compounds, namely amide I (A_I) and amide II (A_{II}) (fig. 27). On the other hand, the amide bands could just as well originate from the animal glue used to stick the paper to the panel. The paper layer was preserved exposed as material evidence on a small section of the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32), the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat.



3), and the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* (cat. 6) and others, by not filling in the lacunae in the ground layer. The paper layer is historical evidence of this particular preparation technique in Russian icons and it must remain visible for further investigations.

▲ Fig. 26. The paper strips used to seal the wooden panels.
Credits: Dumitrița-Daniela Filip.

- ▶ Fig. 27. Comparison of FTIR spectra of the strips of paper sealing the panel of the *Three-Handed Mother of God* icon (cat. 3) and pure cellulose, whose superposition indicates the cellulosic content of the paper. The collagen bands A_I and A_{II} and lipid bands, most likely from the animal glue, are also highlighted.
- ▲ Fig. 28. Comparison of FTIR spectra of the ground layer of the *Christ Pantokrator* icon (cat. 19) and gypsum from the Infrared & Raman Users Group (IRUG) database, indicate the presence of calcium sulphate only.
- ▼ Fig. 29. Microscopic images of an iron nail, concealed by the ground and paper layers on the *Three-Handed Mother of God* icon (cat. 3): at magnification (a) 50x and (b) 200x.



Another distinctive feature of the Russian icons is how the ground was prepared. In fact, it was either done by overlapping calcium sulfate and calcium carbonate layers, or using only calcium sulfate in layers (fig. 28) while both calcium carbonate and sulfate were identified in the ground of most Transylvanian icons.

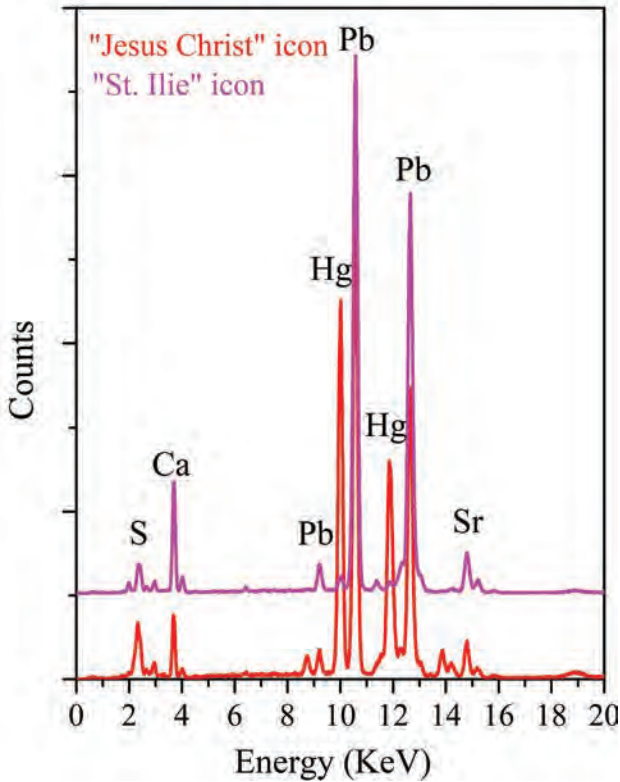
On the icon of the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3), the ground layers were easily visible under a microscope due to the presence of small iron nails concealed under tiny pieces of wood. Ground and paper layers could thus be observed, using a portable digital microscope Dino-Lite model AD7013mzt with a resolution of 1.3 Megapixels, at magnifications of 50x and 200x (fig. 29).

Interestingly, a final layer of lead white combined with barium sulfate seems to have been applied to the ground of the *Ressurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* icon (cat. 32) distinguishing it from the other Russian and Transylvanian icons. It is known that barium sulfate was developed as an artist pigment in the late 18th century as a non-poisonous alternative to lead white. Natural barium sulfate is widely distributed in nature and occurs as the mineral “barite”, which can be found

Notes

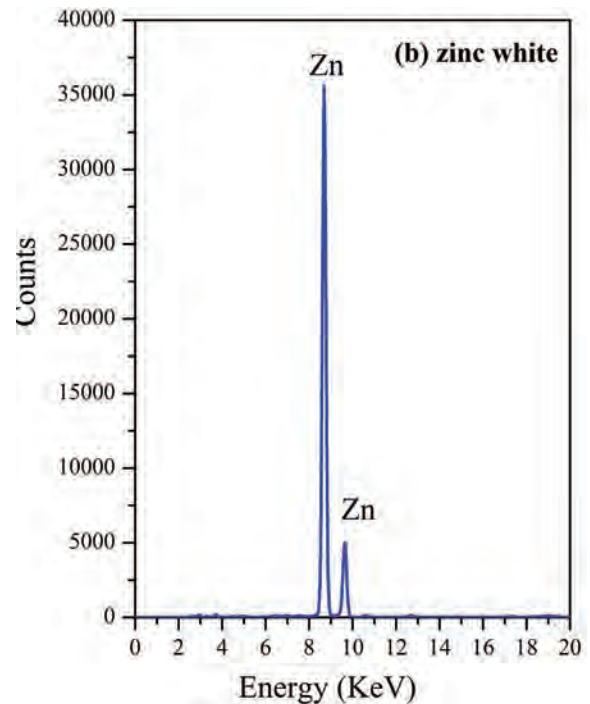
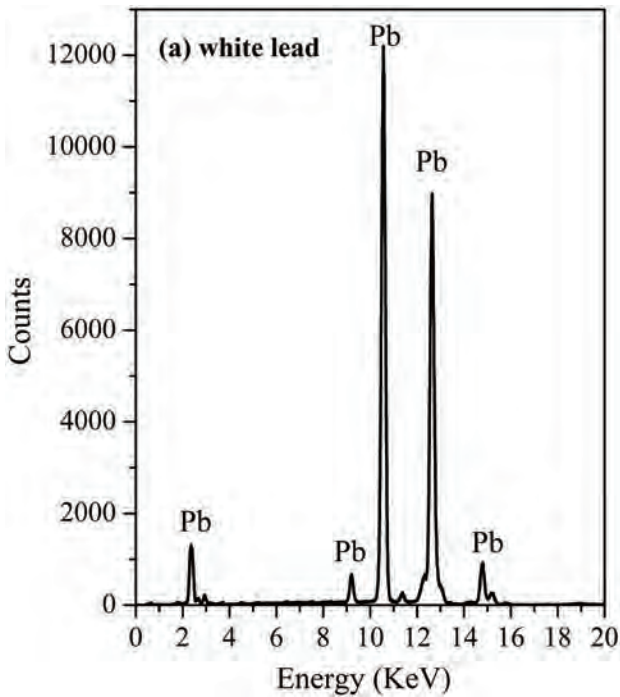
16 Haswell, Zeile, Mensch 2008, p. 363-369.

17 Pliny the Elder 1847, p. 120.



◀ Fig. 30. XRF spectra of red color made of vermilion mixed with red lead used for painting the *Christ Pantokrator* icon (cat. 19) and red color from lead oxide used for painting *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* icon (cat. 41).

▼ Fig. 31. XRF spectra of white pigments: a) white lead used for the *Christ Pantokrator* icon (cat. 19) and b) zinc white used for the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* icon (cat. 8).



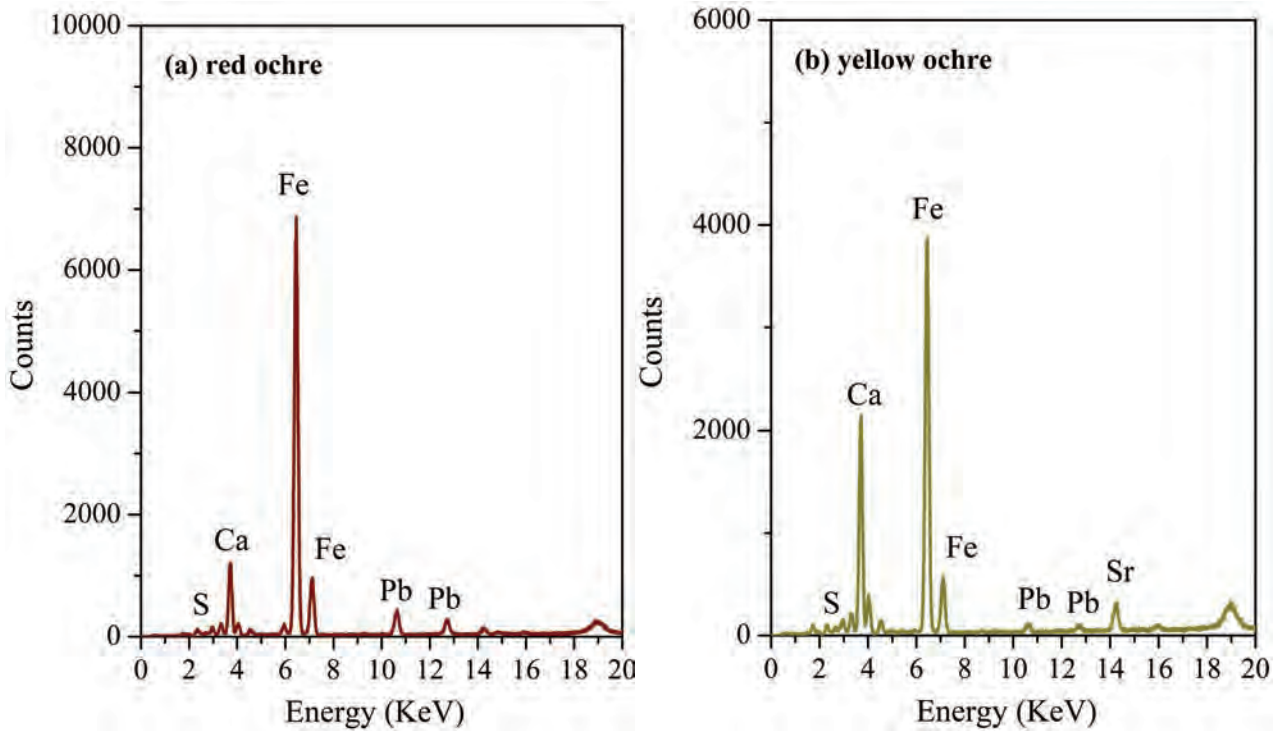
in many locations across Europe. For example, important deposits are found in Germany, Hungary, Romania, Austria, France, Spain and England. Prior to the Second World War, Germany provided 50% of the world supply of barite mainly from Meggen in Westphalia, a source discovered in 1845.¹⁶

The color palette

The color palette of the Russian icons is rather constrained, the nuances and tones being obtained by

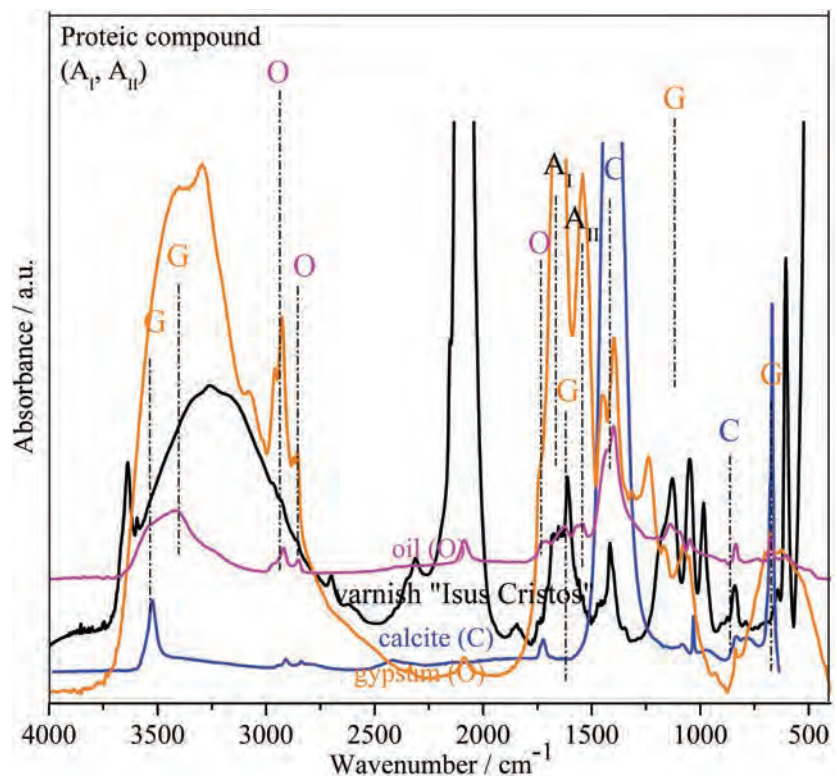
mixing pigments or adding white or black pigments.

Red, which constitutes part of the basic palette of colors for icon painting, was obtained mainly by using red lead oxide (6 icons) or combining it with either ochre (4 icons) or vermilion (2 icons) (fig. 30). By contrast, the Transylvanian icon painters mainly used combinations of vermilion with red lead (6 icons) and with red lead and ochre (5 icons), whereas vermilion or red lead alone were each found in one icon. It is well known that red lead was often used as a substitute for genuine cinnabar because



▲ Fig. 32. XRF spectra of ochre pigments: a) brown ochre used in *Saint Nicholas of Myra* icon (cat. 37a) and b) yellow ochre pigment used in the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* icon (cat. 17).

► Fig. 33. ATR-FTIR spectra of the blue pigment from *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41) and the *Three-Handed Mother of God* (cat. 3) icons compared to spectra of pure Prussian blue (P) and white lead (W) from Infrared & Raman Users Group (IRUG) database. The main absorption bands of a proteic compound (A_I , A_{II}), most probably from the egg yolk, are also highlighted.



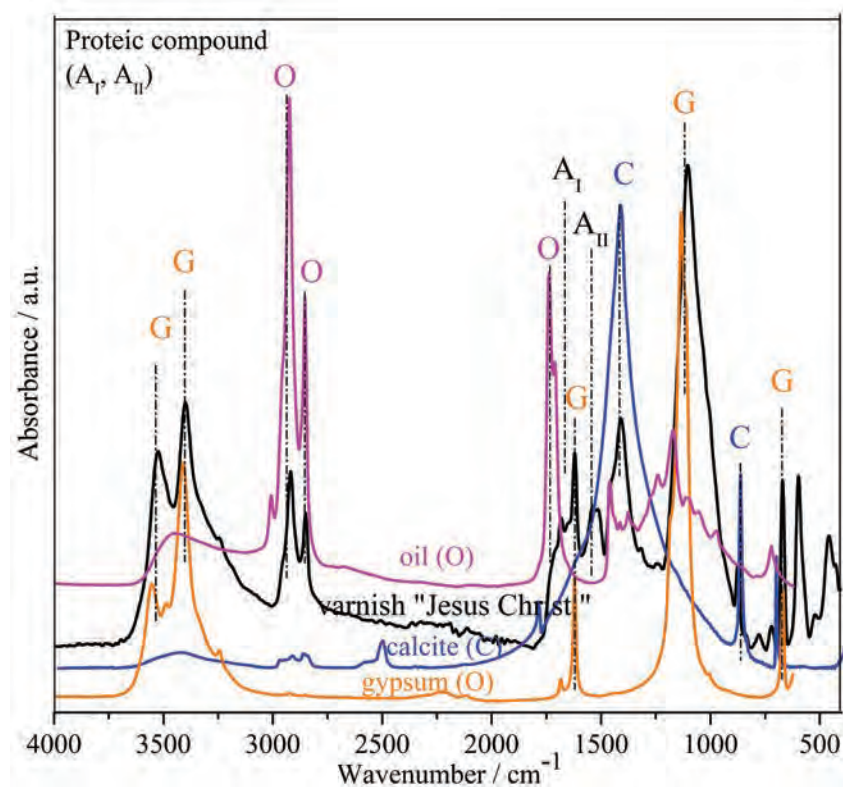
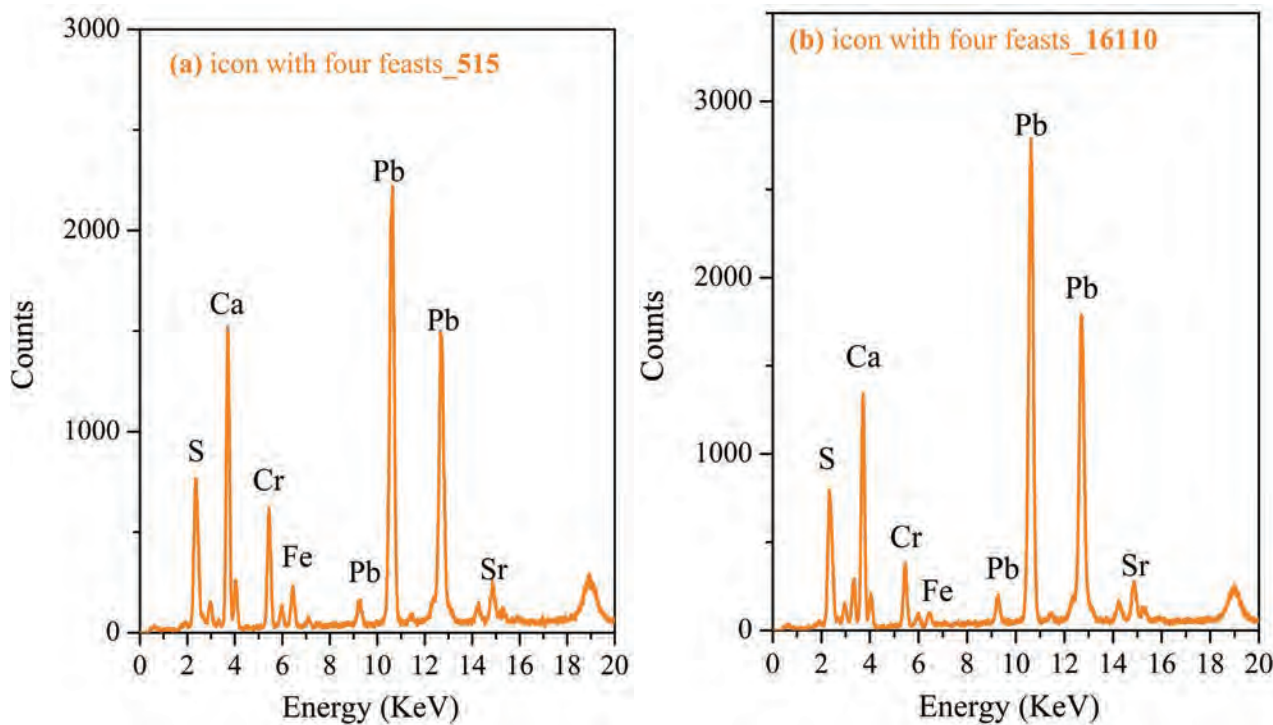
it was less expensive.¹⁷ In addition, red lead works well in oil and egg tempera. However, it must be said that it is very likely that the pigment used for the icons is vermilion (synthetic HgS) and not the very expensive mineral HgS (cinnabar). Until the discovery of cadmium red in the early 20th century, vermilion was the most commonly used red pigment around the globe, and gave the most vibrant red.

As regards *white*, lead white was identified in eleven Russian icons, apart from the icon of the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8) in which the painter used zinc white, most probably mixed with lead white.¹⁸ Zinc white has been known since ancient times, but it began to be

Notes

¹⁸ Osmond 2012, p. 20-29.

¹⁹ Kühn 2012, p. 169.



▲ Fig. 34. XRF spectra of yellow pigments: a) chrome yellow from the *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion* (cat. 49) and b) chrome yellow from the *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion* (cat. 46).

◀ Fig. 35. ATR-FTIR spectrum of the varnish of the *Christ Pantokrator icon* (cat. 19) compared to spectra of oil (O), calcite (C) and gypsum (G) from the Infrared & Raman Users Group (IRUG) database. Oil bands suggests the presence of olifa-linseed oil varnish. The main absorption bands of a proteic compound (A_r, A_{ii}) are also highlighted.

used in painting at the end of the 18th century.¹⁹ In Western Europe, the year 1780 is thought to have seen the first attempt to introduce zinc white pigment into painting²⁰ in France due to the concern surrounding the toxicity of lead-based pigments. Even though zinc white was extensively used during the late 18th and 19th centuries, it was expensive compared to lead white, which remained a favorite with low budget icon painters.²¹

Ochre pigments in a great variety of shades were used in all Russian icons to create a variety of hues, from yellow to red brown and dark brown, to reproduce the colors and shades of the earth / ground

Notes

²⁰ Kühn 2012, p. 178.

²¹ Kühn 2012, p. 178.

Table 2. Observations based on materials used, technique and conservation issues

| No. | Technical similarities | Particularities/ observations |
|-----|--|--|
| 1 | gold leaf, vermilion, chrome pigments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expensive materials were used - a different wood essence was used for the wooden panel - fabric stripes were used to seal the panel - has metal decorative elements (<i>riza</i>) |
| 2 | gilt-silver leaf, vermilion, chrome pigments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prussian blue identified - the panel severely cupped concave to the unpainted surface |
| 3 | gilt-silver leaf, vermilion used only for portraits (lips, cheeks), no chrome pigments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - paper stripes - has a metal revetment (<i>oklad</i>) |
| 4 | gilt-silver leaf, no vermilion, no chrome pigments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prussian blue identified - similarities with icons (cat. 17) and (cat. 48) regarding: dimensions, shape of the wooden panel and iron nails |
| 5 | silver leaf, vermilion, chrome (in yellow or green pigments) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prussian blue identified on icon (cat. 38), may also be present on icon (cat. 27) - colored glaze / varnish on icons: (cat. 27) and (cat. 49) |
| 6 | alterations, hard to identify the pigments, but has some similarities with icons (cat. 49) and (cat. 46) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - icons (cat. 49), (cat. 46) and (cat. 48) have this particularities: all the ochres contain hydrated alumino silicate: kaolinite $\text{Al}_2\text{Si}_2\text{O}_5(\text{OH})$ and illite $(\text{K},\text{H}_3\text{O})(\text{Al})_2(\text{Si},\text{Al})_4\text{O}_{10}[(\text{OH})_2,\text{H}_2\text{O}]$. Both minerals are very often associated in all red earth because illite is easily converted in kaolinite in acid and waterlogged soils. - icons (cat. 37a) and (cat. 17) show similaritis regarding dimensions, shape of the wooden panel and iron nails presence |
| 7 | brass leaf, vermilion used only for the carnation, no chrome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - similarities with (cat. 37a), (cat. 48) regarding: dimensions, shape of the wooden panel and iron nail. What differentiate icon of <i>Mother of God Achtyrskaya</i> (cat. 17) from the other two aforementioned is the use of vermilion for carnation and maybe ultramarine blue for the background. It also has a different kind of metallic leaf: brass and silver leaf, while for icon (cat. 37a) a gilt-silver leaf was used. |
| 8 | copper based metallic paint, no vermilion, zinc white, chrome pigments | the only icon with zinc white |

| Icon | A possible dating of Russian icons according to the pigments identified |
|--|---|
| <i>Dormition of Mother of God</i> (cat. 16) | - after 1810 (yellow & green chrome pigments identified). The period of time corresponds with the date marked on the metal revetment (1882). |
| <i>Jesus Christ Pantokrator</i> (cat. 19) | - after 1810 (yellow & green chrome pigments identified) |
| <i>Three-Handed Mother of God</i> (cat. 3) | - after 1724 (Prussian blue pigment ?) |
| <i>Saint Nicholas of Myra</i> (cat. 37a) | - after 1724 (Prussian blue pigment) |
| <i>Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts</i> (cat. 32) | - after 1810 (yellow & green chrome pigments) |
| <i>Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts</i> (cat. 27) | - 1826 (ultramarine may be present in <i>Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion</i> (cat. 46) |
| <i>The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah</i> (cat. 38) | |
| <i>Four-part Icon</i> (cat. 49) | |
| <i>Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion</i> (cat. 46) | |
| <i>Four-part Icon</i> (cat. 48) has some similarities with <i>Four-part Icon</i> (cat. 49) and <i>Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion</i> (cat. 46) | - could be the earliest as no synthetic pigments were identified |
| <i>Mother of God Akhtyrskaya</i> (cat. 17) | - after 1826 (ultramarine may be present) |
| <i>Mother of God Smolenskaya</i> (cat. 8) | - after 1850 (white zinc pigment, yellow and green chrome pigments). Modern iron nails (20 th century, industrially made) were found inside the wooden panel, introduced with the purpose to strenghten the rejoin of the pieces. It is possible that the owner was gifted with a new icon at that time. |

and landscapes, as well as for garments (fig. 32). In particular, ochres were used for obtaining the carnation and proplasma hues. Importantly, the way ochre pigments were used clearly differentiates the Russian icons from the Transylvanian ones. For example, the most frequent yellow pigment found in the Russian icons was chrome yellow, while ochre pigments were mainly used for orange and brown hues. By contrast, the Transylvanian painters used yellow ochre, orpiment (yellow arsenic sulfide) or a mix of yellow ochre and orpiment. Another distinctive feature of the Russian icons is the use of red ochre in combination with white pigments for carnation tones, while vermilion was used in all Transylvanian icons. Red ochre was also found in the bole of the *Christ Pantokrator* (cat. 19).

For both Russian and Transylvanian icons brown hues were obtained using either ochres or by combining ochre with black or white pigments.

The main blue pigments identified in the Russian icons were Prussian blue and ultramarine. For example, Prussian blue was precisely identified by ATR-FTIR analysis in three Russian icons: *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41), *the Dormition of the Mother of God* (cat. 16), and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a, fig. 33), while from the XRF analysis it appeared it could also have been used for the *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48) and *Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints* (cat. 19). It is possible that synthetic ultramarine was also used, as suggested by the high sulfur and silicon content observed by XRF spectroscopy in the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 32), *the Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* (cat. 27), and the *Four-part Icon* (cat. 46). However, the unequivocal identification of the ultramarine requires confirmation by further FTIR and / or Raman analysis.

Black pigments are among the most challenging to identify due to the variety of their sources (plants, animals, mineral) and manufacturing methods (flame carbons, chars and cokes).²² If the presence of non-carbon constituents in a black pigment could be considered a clue to its identification, we might posit the use of bone black in three Russian icons due to the presence of phosphorus (P) identified by XRF analysis. It is known that in bone black, the collagen forms a coke that is intimately mixed with hydroxyapatite $\text{Ca}_5(\text{OH})(\text{PO}_4)_3$.²³ Minor elements such as potassium (K) could derive from plant material suggesting the use of wood charcoal as the black pigment in some Russian icons, but more in-depth analysis is required to establish this beyond doubt. The presence of high quantities of iron, suggesting the use of black oxide (magnetite), was identified in four Russian icons. By contrast, black oxide was the main pigment used by the Transylvanian icon painters.

Interestingly, iron-gall ink was used for writing texts on most of the Russian icons, while black or red pigments were found in the Transylvanian icons. In the case of the *Saint Nicholas of Myra* icon (cat. 37a), iron gall ink was used for the inscription with the name of the saint, while vegetal black was preferred for painting.

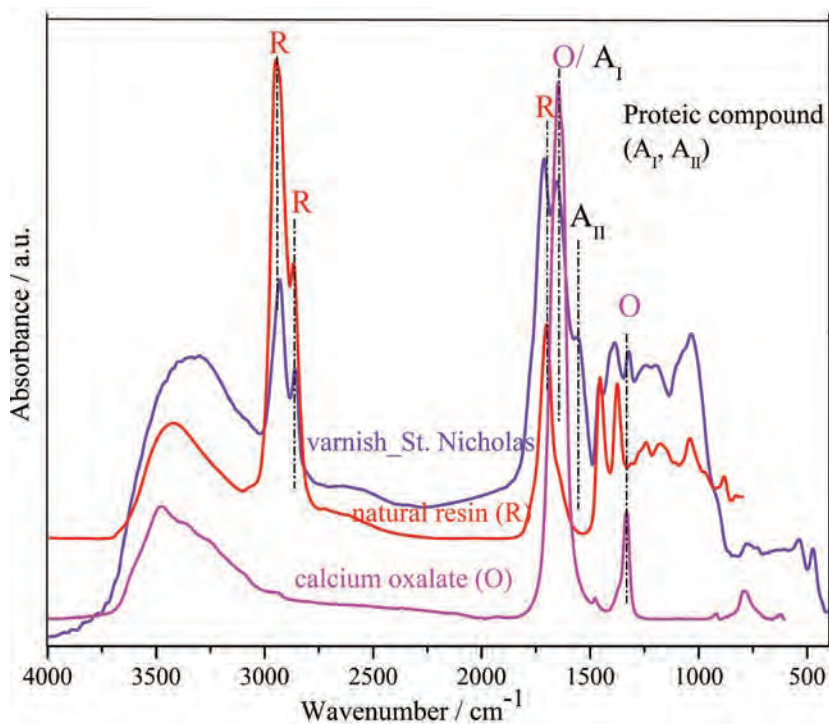
Yellow pigments in the Russian icons were mainly chrome-based as indicated by XRF analysis. In fact, the use of yellow chrome, most probably a mix of lead chromate and lead sulfate ($\text{PbCrO}_4 \cdot \text{PbSO}_4$) is suggested by the high chrome and sulfur content in the XRF spectra of yellow pigments. Yellow ochre alone was found only in the icons the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (cat. 17) and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a), while it was used in most of the Transylvanian icons investigated here, either by itself or mixed with orpiment.

In the Russian icons green was mainly obtained by mixing chrome yellow with a blue pigment, while the Transylvanian icons featured green copper-based pigments, except for one icon, where a mix of orpiment and blue pigment was identified. Microscopic analysis confirmed that in most cases green is a mixture of yellow chrome and blue pigment (e.g. Prussian blue or ultramarine). In fact, in most post-Byzantine icons, green hues were frequently obtained by mixing yellow and blue pigments.²⁴ This is consistent with the icon painters' preference for yellow chrome and blue mixtures.

The metal leaf used by the Russian icon painters for the saints' haloes or for the backgrounds was made of silver on 6 icons (the *Four-part Icon* – cat. 49, the *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion* – cat. 46, the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* – cat. 32, *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* – cat. 41, the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts* – cat. 27, *Saint Nicholas of Myra* – cat. 37a), silver-gilt on 2 icons (the *Christ Pantokrator* – cat. 19, and the *Three-Handed Mother of God* – cat. 3), gold on one icon (the *Dormition of the Mother of God* – cat. 16) and brass on one icon (the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* – cat. 17). Colloidal metal (copper-based paint) was used for the rays of the halo on the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (cat. 8).

Varnishes

Olifa-linseed oil varnish was identified on most of the Russian icons that we investigated (fig. 35), while natural resins were used for the Transylvanian ones. In addition, a layer of colored lake / glaze, which we assume to be shellac based, was identified in a few cases.



▼ Fig. 36. Soaps (aggregate structures protruding from the surface of the paint) have been identified in the red painted areas of the *Christ Pantokrator* icon (cat. 19) using digital light microscopy.

◀ Fig. 37. ATR-FTIR spectrum of the varnish of the *Saint Nicholas of Myra* icon (cat. 37a) compared to spectra of a natural resin (R) and calcium oxalate (O) from the Infrared & Raman Users Group (IRUG) database. The main absorption bands of a proteic compound (A_I, A_{II}) are also highlighted.



COMPOUNDS FORMED AS A RESULT OF AGEING AND DETERIORATION MECHANISMS

Other interesting aspects revealed by this study concern the formation of (i) metal soaps and (ii) metal oxalates.

Metal soaps are metal carboxylates that form in ongoing chemical reactions favored by the presence of high relative humidity. They may damage the integrity of the paint layer, and the appearance of a painting over time. Paints with zinc and lead pigments frequently form metal soaps. Soaps (aggregate structures protruding from the surface of the paint) have been identified using digital light microscopy in the red painted areas of the *Christ Pantokrator* icon (cat. 19, fig. 36).

It has already been reported that, from among the different lead-based pigments, red lead and litharge produce more carboxylates than lead white, Naples yellow and lead tin yellow pigments.²⁵

The formation of oxalates was identified by ATR-FTIR analysis on the *Four-part Icon* (cat. 48), as well as on the varnish layer of icons of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (cat. 37a) and *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah* (cat. 41, fig. 37).

Different theories explaining the chemistry underlying metal oxalate formation were reported and it seems that more than one mechanism can generate oxalates, either chemically or biologically, depending on the local ambient conditions and the nature of the painting materials. In fact, it is known that bacteria, fungi, and lichens produce and secrete oxalic acid as a metabolite. On the other hand, oxalic acid is a degradation product of organic materials. Oxalates were usually found on or within the organic surface coatings of the paint layer(s), including natural resin varnishes, but they have also been found within and between the paint layers themselves.

The conclusions of this study involve a relatively small number of Russian icons (twelve in total) and cannot be easily extrapolated to Russian icon production as a whole. It is not possible to draw complete and definitive conclusions as to the materials and techniques

Notes

²² Winter 1983, p. 49-66. Berrie 2004.

²³ Winter 1983, p. 49-66.

²⁴ Mastrotheodoros, Beltsios, Bas-siakos 2020, p. 74-79.

²⁵ Mazzeo et al. 2008, p. 65-76.

avored by icon painters in this historical and geographical space by analyzing such a small portion of their enormous output. However, even with this caveat in mind, the identification of the pigments has caused us to reconsider or confirm the dating of these Russian icons (see **table 2**). For example, the icons painted with chrome-based pigments (yellow or green chrome) can not be dated earlier than to the first half of the 19th century,²⁶ since the French chemist Louis Nicolas Vauquelin discovered yellow chrome in the mineral crocoite (lead chromate) in 1797 and published the full investigation of the color chemistry of chromium in 1809.²⁷ It should also be noted that in 1798 chromite ore deposits were discovered in the Ural Mountains that greatly increased the supplies of chromium to the growing paint industry.²⁸ This explains the availability of chrome yellow in Russia. Prussian blue pigment was made available to artists by 1724 and has been extremely popular throughout the three centuries since its discovery.²⁹ In 1826, a synthetic version of ultramarine was developed by the French chemist Jean-Baptiste Guimet by heating kaolinite, sodium carbonate and sulfur in a kiln to create a pigment which is chemically identical to *lapis lazuli*.³⁰ Zinc white was accepted as a watercolor paint by 1834, a better zinc white for oil paints was developed by Le-Claire in Paris in 1844 and, from 1850 onwards, zinc white has been manufactured throughout France.³¹ Analytical investigations made so far in the field of heritage science showed that zinc white started to be used extensively after the second quarter of the 19th century and in relatively recent painting we should expect to find it significantly.³²

Bearing in mind the numerous issues posed by the conservation status of these icons and in the light of the meticulous observations necessary to restore them faithfully and respectfully, seeking to discern the nuanced differences and similarities regarding the materials and the techniques employed by the artists, we can confidently divide the icons examined here into two categories: low-cost icons and expensive icons. The latter are distinguished by the more costly materials employed in their pro-

duction, such as gold leaf, gilt-silver leaf, silver leaf, vermilion etc, and more careful panel manufacturing technique. By contrast, the metal and metal-like leafs used for the icons with clear connections to Old Believers was made using either silver, a silver-brass alloy or copper-based metallic paint. In some cases, a colored glaze was applied over the silver-colored leaf to make it appear like gold, but this does not seem to be the rule for all icon painters.

When we compare the Russian and Transylvanian icons investigated so far, we can clearly say that each group of icons employed specific materials (strips of paper versus bands of linen or other textiles, synthetic pigments versus mineral or natural pigments, iron-gall ink versus black / red pigments, olifa-linseed oil varnishes versus natural resins), as well as specific techniques. We can therefore conclude that the Russian icons we have analyzed were objects of transfer, brought to Romania and then to Transylvania in different periods. For example, the Prussian blue, chrome yellow and green chrome mixtures (yellow chrome mixed with blue pigment) were identified only in the Russian icons, while the Transylvanian icon painters used fewer synthetic pigments. One of the materials that clearly differentiates the two sets of icons is the paper used by Russian painters for sealing the panels, whereas linen cloth was used in the making of the Transylvanian icons. The preference for using olifa-linseed oil varnish is another typical feature of the Russian painters' creations. The wooden panels of the Russian icons have medium to small dimensions, easy to transport and sell abroad, and show similar conservation issues due to poor preparation of the wooden panels.

The conservation issues were caused mainly by economising on the choice of wood and its preparation rather than going for quality, as well as by inadequate technical skill in assembling the panels. The restoration was challenging mainly due to the deformation and splitting of the panels. The methodological approach had to be adapted to the specific mechanical issues of each icon and efforts were made to preserve the historical evidence of the original techniques.

Notes

22 Winter 1983, p. 49-66. Berrie 2004.

23 Winter 1983, p. 49-66.

24 Mastrotheodoros, Beltsios, Bassiakos 2020, p. 74-79.

25 Mazzeo et al. 2008, p. 65-76.

26 Kühn, Curran 2012, p. 188 cited a quote from the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle appliquée aux arts*, vol. 27, Paris, Chez deterville, 1818, p. 71-72, referring to the use of lead chromate in painting by Russian artists "in preparation of a particular sort of color that increases the value of the devonational tableaux with

which every room is decorated."

27 Kühn, Curran 2012, p. 188.

28 Sueker 1964, p. 81-95.

29 Berrie 2012, p. 191-193.

30 Plesters 2012, p. 55. He was awarded the prize of the Sociéete d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale on February 1828 and in 1831 he published his work.

31 Kühn 2012, p. 172.

32 Kühn 2012, p. 171.

Russian Icons from Transylvania:

Exhibition Catalogue

CAT. 1. Mother of God Tolgskaya

Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania, Sibiu

inv. no. 1025

69.5x52 cm

Volga region

1779

The Hungarian inscription with the names of the two buyers supports the hypothesis that the icon had reached the village of Joseni (Harghita County) as early as 1794, the date of its purchase. The Romanian church in Joseni was built in 1796 and served a community of Greek-Catholic believers who, in the same year, acquired four royal icons, painted on glass in a workshop in Nicula. This Russian icon, purchased in 1794 and undoubtedly donated to the church (because otherwise it would not have ended up in the collection of the Archbishopric of Sibiu), was not placed on the iconostasis, despite its precious nature. Instead it must have been placed in the nave, on a special icon stand.

Restored by Maria Modi and Cristina Maria Dăneasă, 2022.

Inscription in Russian at the bottom:

Обра³ Прѣтыѧ Бѣы
Нарѣцаемыѧ Толскиѧ.
Напиисасѧ 1779 года

(Icon of the Most Holy Virgin called Tol[g]skaia, painted in year 1779)

Inscription in Hungarian on the back:

*Ficus Isák és Moszu Györg keten-
vetük 1794 esztendőben*

(Fițuș Isac and Mosu George bought the icon in 1794)

Credits: Ioan Ovidiu Abrudan.





CAT. 2. *Mother of God Kazanskaya*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

44.5x37 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region
second half of the 19th century

On the left, an angel with a cross and sword is described as a “guardian angel”. On the opposite side, the Martyr Tatiana is represented.

The icon was acquired from an Aromanian antiquarian from Bucharest, Tuşa Bedivan, in the early 2000s.

Restored by Neculai Grosu,
2004-2006.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 3. Three-Handed Mother of God (Troeruchitsa)

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran
Ilya Borovikov

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 104/L/61-104

48x38 cm

Kholuy workshop

late 18th century; the metal decorative elements were added in the 19th century

On the back of the panel, a text signed by priest Andrei Patachi, mentions that the icon was given to the Orthodox church in Mihalț (Alba County) by Paraschiva Vasilie, widow, of Bucharest. In accordance with the Heritage Law 63 of 1974, the icon was collected and stored at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, from where it was moved to Museikon in 2015.

Technical details: (i) strips of paper were used to line the wooden panel, (ii) small iron nails hidden by tiny pieces of wood underneath the ground and paper layers were observed using a portable digital microscope.

Conservation issues: (i) separation of the individual panels forming the wooden support, (ii) severe effects of damage caused by insect attack, (iii) lacunae, detachments of the paint layer.

Restoration: (i) structural consolidation, (ii) reassembling of the panels is considered, (iii) lacunae too large to be filled, (iv) an aesthetic reconstruction was not considered in the absence of specific and historical objectives.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2022-2023.

Inscription on the back:
Icoana aceasta au dăruit-o bis. noastre ortodoxă din Mihalț în anul 1922 Dna Văd. Paraschiva Vasilie din București. Mihalț, în 30 Dec. 1922. Andrei Patachi, paroch

(This icon was offered to our Orthodox church in Mihalț, in 1922, by Ms. Paraschiva Vasilie, widow, of Bucharest. Mihalț, Dec. 30, 1922. Andrei Patachi, parish priest)

Bibliography:
Dumitran 2012, p. 240.

Filip et al. 2021, p. 351.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.





CAT. 4. *Mother of God Kazanskaya*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

47x38.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon was obtained in
exchange for another painting
from an antiquarian on Victory
Avenue in Bucharest, in 1995.

Technical details: a colored
glaze / lake was applied on the
silver-colored metal leaf to create
the aesthetic effect of gilding.

Restored by Dinu Săvescu, 1996.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



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ОБРА КАЗАНСКИМ ПРѢСВѢТЪЛЪ БУЩЕ

CAT. 5. *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1577/L/635-E. 16529

38x31 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1972 by Eliza Berlescu from Bucharest. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Conservation issues: (i) the split panels had been rejoined, (ii) the lacunae had been filled and (iii) these areas had been unprofessionally repainted, (iv) clogged deposits of smoke, dust, smudge and other impurities were trapped by the varnish layer.

Restoration: (i) the ground of the repainted areas was preserved because it was stable and its removal would have had consequences for the stability and integrity of the icon; (ii) the non-professional repainting was removed and chromatic integration was carried out according to the principles of restoration.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2022-2023.



CAT. 6. *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1593/L/639-E. 16585

39x32 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1971 or 1972 by Eliza Berlescu from Bucharest. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: paper strips had been used to seal the wood panel.

Conservation issues: (i) the split panels had been rejoined, (ii) the lacunae had been filled and (iii) these areas had been unprofessionally repainted, (iv) clogged deposits of smoke, dust, smudge and other impurities were trapped by the varnish layer.

Restoration: (i) the ground from the repainted areas was removed; (ii) the original paint layer was consolidated.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2022-2023.



CAT. 7. Mother of God Feodorovskaya

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitan

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2020/L/688-M

36x29.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon was purchased in Kyiv around 1860 by Maria Boenco from Chișinău. Worried that, two years after her marriage to Mihail Boenco, she still had not become pregnant, Maria went on a pilgrimage on foot to Kyiv to receive a blessing to ensure the birth of a child. Maria bequeathed the icon to her granddaughter, Eugenia Chenih, married to priest Paul Mihail. The icon was kept in the family's home in Chișinău (Republic of Moldova) until the family emigrated to Romania, at the end of the Second World War. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail from Bucharest, an eminent philologist, daughter of Eugenia and Paul Mihail, donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: a colored glaze / lake was applied to the silver-like metal leaf to create the aesthetic effect of gilding.

Conservation issues: the wooden panel had cupped concave to the unpainted surface and the original crossbars had been lost.

Restoration: (i) new crossbars were made to stabilize the panel and secure the icon for future use; (ii) the original paint layer was consolidated, (ii) the varnish

layer was thinned using solvents (in this particular case, the colored varnish represents historical evidence of the icon painting technique and its preservation was deemed necessary).

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Artă și diversitate 2022, p. 77-78.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



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Богородица Пречистая

CAT. 8. *Mother of God Smolenskaya*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2015/L/683-M

50x41.5 cm

Old Believers workshop in
Transnistria

end of the 19th century or begin-
ning of the 20th century

The icon was offered to Fr. Paul Mihail, a native of Chișinău (Republic of Moldova), during his stay in Iași, by a member of the Old Believers community belonging to the *Skoptsy* sect, who thus saved the icon from being lost. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail, daughter of Fr. Paul Mihail, donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: instead of metal leaf colloidal metal (copper-based paint) was used to paint the rays of the halo.

Conservation issues: the wooden panel had cupped concave to the unpainted surface.

Restoration: (i) the split panels were rejoined, (ii) the original paint layer was consolidated, (iii) the varnish layer was cleaned and thinned using solvents.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2020-2021.

Bibliography:

Artă și diversitate 2022, p. 79-80.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 9. *Four-part Icon, with Miraculous Icons of the Mother of God and the Holy Trinity*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca
35.5x28 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region

19th century

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

The composition is organized around a depiction of the *Holy Trinity*, with God the Father blessing from a cloud-fringed arc of heaven, from which the dove of the Holy Spirit descends to hover above the cross on which the crucified Christ is represented. The arms of the cross divide the surface of the icon into four parts, which contain different images of the Mother and Child: the *Seeker of the Lost*, the *Galaktotrophousa* (or *Mother of God the Blessed Womb* or *Mother of God Bargradskaya / Barlovskaya / Barbarskaya*), the *Tikhvinskaya* and the *Feodorovskaya*. Three figures are depicted on each of the lateral frames: the Great Martyr Nikitas, the Archangel Michael, and the Martyr Simeon; and the Guardian Angel, the Great Martyr Artemius, and Saint Bishop Maruta (?).

The icon was acquired in 2011, from the painter Aurel Țigoan from Cluj-Napoca.

Restored by Cristian Dițoiu,
2012.



CAT. 10. *Mother of God Rimskaya*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 1514/L/618-E. 16010

42x30.5 cm

Novgorod region

beginning of the 19th century

The icon is described as the *Hodegetria of Rome* in the inscription on the left, above the Virgin's shoulder. The frame depicts, on the left, Saint Julitta with the infant Cyricus and, on the right, Saint Salomea. The prototype of this representation is the miracle-working icon in the Church of the Nativity from the Red Field in Novgorod. Known as *Mary, Mother of Christ of Nazareth*, this icon has a very interesting story. In 1643 two merchants from Novgorod set off for Sweden via the Baltic Sea. During a storm, they prayed to the Mother of God, who promised them salvation, but asked them to bring her icon, which they would find in Sweden, back to Novgorod. The ship docked on the island of Björke, where, in the house of a Lutheran pastor, they found a Russian icon used as a closet door. The two merchants bought the icon for 15 silver coins and brought it to Novgorod, where it became known as a miracle-working icon. However, not being as famous as some others, its reproductions are rare today.

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1971 by Eliza Berlescu from Bucharest. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection

until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

Conservation issues: (i) severe effects of damage caused by insect attack, (ii) repainted areas.

Restoration: structural consolidation needed.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.

A long text, today indecipherable, was written on all three sides of the frame in the lower half of the icon.



CAT. 11. *Praises of the Mother of God (Pokhvala Presvyatoy Bogoroditsy)*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 45 i

31.5x26.5 cm

Vyg (Karelia)

1790-1810

One of the most frequently reproduced icons in Eastern Christian art, this composition follows the Russian model, with full-length figures of the prophets, engaged in a 'chorus' or mystical dance, presenting both their specific attributes and their scrolls with the texts of their prophecies.

The icon comes from Iuriu de Câmpie (Mureş County). It was acquired by the Metropolitanate of Cluj, for its collection, prior to the issuing of Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Violeta Lupo, Paul Ovidiu Moldovan, Vasile Prundeanu, under the supervision of Associate Professor and Restorer Dr. Marin Coteşiu, 2019-2021.



CAT. 12. *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1563/L/631-E. 16349

27.5 x21.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon comes from the collection of Fr. Sabin Olea from Cib (Alba County), and was purchased by the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1971. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: paper strips had been used to seal the wooden panel.

Conservation issues: (i) previous interventions were observed (a colored lake had been applied), (ii) lacunae, (iii) detachments of paint and ground layers.

Restoration: (i) the inappropriately applied colored lake was removed, (ii) the paint layer was consolidated, (iii) the paper layer was preserved exposed in small sections where the lacunae were not filled, because the paper is historical proof of the use of this technique.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2021-2022.



CAT. 13. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

inv. no. 54 i

27.5x22.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

second half of the 18th century

The composition contains the
minimum amount of characters,
whose names – inscribed on
the side of the icon – are not all
legible.

The icon comes from Mogoş-Mi-
cleşti (Alba County). It was
acquired by the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, for its collection, prior to
the issuing of Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Ion-Sebastian
Trifina, under the supervision of
Associate Professor and Restorer
Dr. Marin Coteţiu, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann
2021, p. 185, fig. 3.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 14. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

38x32 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon belongs to the category
of mass-produced icons called
“reddened” (*krasnushki*).

The icon was acquired in 2018 in
Timișoara.

Restored by Serghei Pavlov, 2018.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 15. *The Pokrov*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2023/L/691-M

32x27 cm

Guslitsa workshop (?)

middle of the 19th century; silver
revetment from 1854

The composition features the vision of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ, organized in two overlapping registers. In the four corners of the frame the Evangelists write at desks. On the sides, four holy metropolitans of Moscow are depicted full length: Peter and Jonah on the left, and on the right, Alexei and Philip.

The revetment made of a thin silver-gilt sheet bears the indication 84 and the year 1854, and was made in a Muscovite workshop. It is worked in high relief, with gaps left for the faces. The Mother of God has an oversized halo; Saint Romanos had a similar halo, but it has been lost.

The icon was acquired by Fr. Paul Mihail from a family of Old Rite Believers in Iași, in the last decades of the 20th century. In 2019, his daughter, Zamfira Mihail, donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Restored by Daniela Burnete and Dan Anghel, 2020.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.





CAT. 16. *The Dormition of the Mother of God*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1137/L/587-E. 10781

31x27 cm

Vladimir region

middle – third quarter of the 19th
century

The revetment, made of a thin silver-gilt sheet, bears the indication 84 and the year 1882, and was made in a Muscovite workshop. It has been worked in high relief, with gaps left for the faces.

The icon was confiscated from the house of politician Szász Pál in Aiud, probably in 1951, after his arrest and conviction. Deposited together with other personal objects at the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, the icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: (i) a piece of fabric was used to seal the wooden support, (ii) gold leaf was used for the halos and background.

Conservation issues: (i) fracture of the panel, (ii) cracks and detachments of ground and paint layers caused by the fracture, (iii) lacunae.

Restoration: (i) consolidation of the wooden panel was needed, (ii) consolidation of the paint layer.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip and Dan Anghel, 2022-2023.



ЦЕРКВЬ УСПЕНІЕ ПЕТРА СЮВ



CAT. 17. *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 438/L/273-443

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela
Filip, 2021-2022.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

27x23 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

second half of the 18th century

The icon most probably belonged to the Greek-Catholic church in Teiuș (Alba County). Following the heritage Law 63 of 1974, it was collected and stored at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, from where, in 2015, it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: (i) icon with an indented visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panel (double *kovcheg*), (ii) and iron nails both near the inner and the outer frame, (iii) it is possible that synthetic ultramarine blue have been used for background, as suggested by the high sulfur and silicon content observed by XRF spectroscopy. In this case, the dating of the icon should be reconsidered after 1826. However, the unequivocal identification of the ultramarine requires confirmation by further FTIR and / or Raman analyses.

Conservation issues: (i) the lacunae had been filled, (ii) the icon had been unprofessionally repainted.

Restoration: (i) the repainting was removed, (ii) the lacunae were filled and chromatically integrated according to the principles of restoration.



CAT. 18. *The Lamentation, with Symbols of the Passion*

Natalia Komashko
Ana Dumitran

‘Saint Paraskeva’ Church from
Tălmăcel (Sibiu County)

69x53 cm

workshop from Central Russia

last quarter of the 18th century

The image is distinguished by the oversized figure of the Mother of God that towers over the other figures who mourn the death of the Savior, and even over the dead Christ himself. In the upper part, two windows open onto views of the Instruments of the Passion.

The icon was, most probably, acquired in the course of a trans-humant shepherd’s or farmer’s journey to Russia with his flocks.

Bibliography:

Abrudan 2022, p. 300.

Credits: Ioan Ovidiu Abrudan.



CAT. 19. Christ Pantokrator with Scenes and Saints

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2026/L/694-M

53x45 cm

workshop from Central Russia

19th century

Christ holds the Gospel open in his left hand. The upper corners of the icon depict the scenes of *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham* and the *Nativity of Christ*. The lower part is divided into three parts, in which the *Transfiguration*, the *Descent into Hell* and the *Ascension* are depicted. The sides depict Saint Charalambos and Saint Nicholas on the left, and Saint Antipas and Saint Niphon on the right in medallions.

The icon came into the possession of Fr. Paul Mihail after the Second World War. In 2019, his daughter, Zamfira Mihail, donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: (i) paper strips were used to seal the wooden panel, (ii) silver gilt was used for the halos.

Conservation issues: (i) the wooden panel had cupped concave to the unpainted surface and the original crossbars were lost, (ii) separation of the individual panels forming the wooden support, (iii) wood material loss, (iv) metal soaps (aggregate structures protruding from the surface of the paint) have been identified in the red painted areas using a

digital light microscope.

Restoration: (i) the split panels were rejoined, (ii) new crossbars were made to stabilize the icon and secure it for future use, (iii) the paint layer was consolidated, (iv) the lacunae were filled, (v) chromatic integration was carried out.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Museikon, 4, 2020, p. 212.

Artă și diversitate 2022, p. 73-74.

Filip et al. 2022, p. 331-349.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 20. *Christ Pantokrator*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 1575/L/633-E. 16527

48x39 cm

workshop from Central Russia (?)

end of the 19th century or beginning of the 20th century

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1972 by Maria Berlescu from Bucharest. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Conservation issues: (i) the wooden panel was cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (ii) the original crossbars were lost and had been replaced with cardboard, (iii) an earlier attempt to rejoin the split panels was observed, (iv) severe damage caused by insect attack, (v) previous attempts to fill the lacunae (vi) repainted areas.

Restoration: (i) structural consolidation needed, (ii) reassembling of the panels, (iii) the paint layer was consolidated, (iv) the repainting needed to be removed (v) chromatic integration in accordance with the principles of restoration is necessary.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 21. *Christ Pantokrator*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 2021/L/689-M

40x32.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The icon belonged to Maria Boenco from Chișinău, who bequeathed it to her granddaughter, Ana Chenih. In 1978 the latter gave the icon to her niece, Zamfira Mihail. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: (i) paper strips were used to seal the wood panel, (ii) a colored glaze / lake was applied on the silver-colored metal leaf to create the effect of gilding.

Conservation issues: (i) separation of the individual panels of the wooden support, (ii) previous attempts to rejoin the split panels, (iii) modern adhesive lavishly applied on the back of the icon, (iv) severe effects of damage caused by insect attack, (v) lacunae.

Restoration: (i) structural consolidation needed, (ii) rejoining of the split panels, (iii) consolidation of the paint layer.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.



CAT. 22. *The Savior Not Made by Human Hands (Mandylion)*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

52.5x42.5 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region
second half of the 19th century

The icon was acquired from
an Aromanian antiquarian in
Bucharest, Tușa Bedivan, in the
early 2000s.

Restored by Neculai Grosu,
2004-2006.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



ΑΥΤΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΟΝ

ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣΤΗΝ

ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣΤΗΝ

ΑΥΤΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΟΝ
ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣΤΗΝ
ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣΤΗΝ

CAT. 23. *Four-part Icon with Mandylion, Two Icons of the Mother of God and Child, with Martyrs and Holy Trinity*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Pr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

45x38 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region

19th century

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

The composition is organized vertically in a depiction of the *Holy Trinity*, with God the Father blessing from an arc of Heaven and the dove of the Holy Spirit descending through clouds above a Crucifixion. The Cross divides the surface of the icon into four parts, which depict: the *Mandylion*, the *Mother of God Assuage my Sorrows*, the *Mother of God Chenstohovskaya (Softening of Evil Hearts)*, and a group of 17 holy martyrs both male and female.

The icon was acquired from an Aromanian antiquarian in Bucharest, Tuşa Bedivan, in the early 2000s.

Restored by Neculai Grosu,
2004-2006.



CAT. 24. *Deesis with Archangels, Apostles and Saints (Week Icon or Sedmitsa)*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

inv. no. 50 i

28.5x22.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

early 19th century

The icon comes from Mogoş-Micleşti (Alba County). It was acquired by the Metropolitanate of Cluj, for its collection, prior to the issuing of Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Marian-Adrian Mureşan, under the supervision of Associate Professor and Restorer Dr. Marin Coteţiu, 2018-2019.

Bibliography:

Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann
2021, p. 185, fig. 2.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 25. *The Crucifixion*

Natalia Komasko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1513/L/617-E. 16009

36x31 cm

workshop from Central Russia (?)

19th century

The scene of the *Crucifixion* unfolds in the horizontal plane, while in the vertical plane the central part constitutes an image of the *Holy Trinity*, with the dove of the Holy Spirit resting on the upper arm of the cross, and above it a bust of God the Father emerges from the arc of heaven.

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1971 by Maria Berlescu from Bucharest. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Conservation issues: (i) fracture of the wooden panel, (ii) severe effects of damage caused by insect attack, (iii) lacunae and detachments of ground and paint layers, (iv) repainted areas were observed.

Restoration proposals: (i) structural consolidation needed, (ii) rejoining of the split pieces of wood, (iii) consolidation of the paint layer, (iv) removal of the unprofessional repainting. Another paint layer of historical and artistic value was discovered in some repainted areas.

Restoration in progress, by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.



CAT. 26. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*

Ana Dumitran
Marin Cotețiu

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 52 i

29x24.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

second half of the 18th century

White lines dividet the surface of the icon into 13 rectangles: a larger, central one, which also has a decorative border, and 12 others arranged around it. The main composition, the *Resurrection*, is rendered in the Russian version, combining *Christ Rising from the Tomb* with the *Descent into Hell*. Starting from the upper left corner, the following scenes are depicted: the *Birth of the Mother of God*, the *Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God*, the *Annunciation*, the *Circumcision*, *Christ Teaching the Doctors in the Temple*, the *Baptism*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Crucifixion*, *Mary and the angel at the tomb of the Lord*, the *Ascension of Christ*, the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham* and the *Dormition of the Mother of God*.

The icon comes from Mogoș-Miclești (Alba County). It was acquired by the Metropolitanate of Cluj, for its collection, prior to the issuing of the Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Veronica Matei,
under the supervision of Asso-
ciate Professor and Restorer Dr.
Marin Cotețiu, 2019-2020.



Ἡμερολόγιον τοῦ ἁγίου Γεωργίου τοῦ ἐπισημοῦ ἁγίου ἰατροῦ

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Ἡμερολόγιον τοῦ ἁγίου Γεωργίου τοῦ ἐπισημοῦ ἁγίου ἰατροῦ

CAT. 27. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 2024/L/692-M
31x26 cm
Kholuy workshop
19th century

A simplified version of the *Resurrection / Descent into Hell* is surrounded by the following 12 scenes, starting from the upper left corner: the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham*, the *Birth of the Mother of God*, the *Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God*, the *Annunciation*, the *Circumcision of Christ*, *Christ Teaching the Doctors in the Temple*, the *Baptism*, the *Transfiguration*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Ascension of Christ*, the *Dormition of the Mother of God* and the *Exaltation of the True Cross*.

The icon was donated in 2019 by Zamfira Mihail to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: a colored glaze / lake was applied to the silver-like metal leaf to create the aesthetic effect of gilding.

Conservation issues: cracks, detachments of the paint layer and lacunae caused by the warping of the wooden panel.

Restoration: (i) consolidation of the paint and ground layers; (ii) the numerous small lacunae were filled and chromatically integrated, (iii) the varnish layer was thinned using solvents (in this particular case, the colored

varnish represents historical evidence of the icon painting technique and its preservation was deemed necessary).

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Filip et al. 2021, p. 347-348.

Artă și diversitate 2022, p. 75-76.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

Πεσσετασ Τριμυρα Ρομωσιν Ησμε Κυρι Βυδατιν εο κτα Νρ. Γνω Λαγεκισανη νεσε τω



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Β. Γραβα
ΝΙΣ ΓΑΝ

Β. Χηδ
Κοιτη
απομω
Γ. Δ.

Ερμε
ΝΙΣ
ΓΑΝ

Προμ
ΜΕΝΙΣ
ΓΑΝ

Βοδκε
ΜΕΝΙΣ
ΚΡ. ΕΠΙ
ΓΑΝ

Βοεκρεσινδ Χριστοκο

Βοβ μεσινδ ΓΑΝ Υσαζινδ Αρετι

CAT. 28. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*

Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Râmeț Monastery (Alba County)

57x54 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region

19th century

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

The central scene of the *Resurrection*, combined with the *Descent into Hell* and the *Holy Trinity*, is surrounded by 12 scenes from the lives of the Mother of God and Christ: the *Birth of the Mother of God*, the *Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God*, the *Annunciation*, the *Nativity of Christ*, *Christ Teaching the Doctors in the Temple*, the *Baptism*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Transfiguration*, the *Pentecost*, the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham*, the *Dormition of the Mother of God* and the *Exaltation of the True Cross*.

The icon was collected in the 1960s by the monk Dometie Manolache and offered to the Râmeț Monastery. Neither the icon's previous owners, nor its earlier provenance are known.



CAT. 29. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell, with Evangelists and Scenes from the Passion Cycle*

Natalia Komashko
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca
53x44 cm

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

Vladimir region (Palekh)

19th century

The center of the icon depicts the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell*, and around it are 12 scenes from the Passion Cycle and around them 16 scenes illustrating the lives of the Mother of God and Christ. On the upper edge of the frame, in a composition ordered in two concentric circles, the *Ascension of Christ* is depicted, and in the corners of the frame, the four Evangelists, accompanied by their symbols, are writing at desks.

The icon was acquired sometime between 1995 and 2000 from Ritta Chiricuță-Marinovici, the wife of the illustrious Romanian doctor Ion Chiricuță, director of the Oncological Institute in Cluj-Napoca, but originally from Vaslui County, who was also a reputed art collector.



CAT. 30. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell, with Passion and Feasts*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

small lacunae in the support.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 2019/L/687-M

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela
Filip, 2021-2022.

53x42.5 cm

workshop from Central Russia

19th century

In the center of the icon there is a depiction of the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell*, and around it there are 10 scenes from the Passion cycle and 16 scenes from the lives of the Mother of God and Christ.

The icon was received by Fr. Paul Mihail before 1972 from the Smirnov sisters from Iași, refugees from Russia, belonging to the *Skoptsy* sect of the Old Rite Believers. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: paper strips had been used to seal the wooden panel.

Conservation issues: (i) the wooden panel was cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (ii) loss of wood caused by insect attack, (iii) numerous cracks in the wooden panel, (iv) cracks, detachments and lacunae of the paint layer, (v) modern adhesive had been lavishly applied to the back and edges of the icon.

Restoration: (i) removal of the improperly applied adhesive, (ii) consolidation of the wooden panel, (iii) consolidation of the paint layer, (iv) filling of the



CAT. 31. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2016/L/684-M

52x42.5 cm

Kholuy workshop (?)

19th century

In the center of the icon there is a depiction of the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell*, and around it there are 12 miniature scenes, illustrating the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham*, the *Birth of the Mother of God*, the *Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God*, the *Annunciation*, the *Circumcision of Christ*, *Christ Teaching the Doctors in the Temple*, the *Baptism*, the *Transfiguration*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Ascension of Christ*, the *Dormition of the Mother of God* and the *Exaltation of the True Cross*.

The icon was received by Fr. Paul Mihail before 1972 from the Smirnov sisters from Iași, refugees from Russia, belonging to the *Skoptsy* sect of the Old Rite Believers. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia, for the Museikon collection.

Conservation issues: (i) wooden panel cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (ii) damage from insect attack, (iii) previous attempts to consolidate the wooden panel, (iv) modern adhesive lavishly applied on the back of the icon (v) large areas of paint erosion, (vi) loss of the original varnish layer as a

consequence of erosion, (vii) carbonized areas caused by candle flames.

Restoration: (i) removal of the modern adhesive applied on the back, (ii) consolidation of the paint and ground layers.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 32. *The Resurrection of Christ / The Descent into Hell and Twelve Scenes*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 1021/L/554-Ar. 514

36.5x30 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

and chromatic integration were deemed necessary in order to restore the unity of the image.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2021-2022.

Bibliography:

Olea, Dumitran 2001, p. 303, 318.

Dumitran 2002, p. 75.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

A simplified version of the *Resurrection / Descent into Hell* is surrounded by the following 12 scenes, starting from the upper left corner: the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham*, the *Birth of the Mother of God*, the *Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God*, the *Annunciation*, the *Circumcision of Christ*, *Christ Teaching the Doctors in the Temple*, the *Baptism*, the *Transfiguration*, the *Entry into Jerusalem*, the *Ascension of Christ*, the *Dormition of the Mother of God* and the *Exaltation of the True Cross*.

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 2002 by Fr. Valer-Petru Olea, the son of the collector Fr. Sabin Olea from Cib (Alba County). The icon was part of the museum's Art Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: paper strips had been used to seal the wooden panel, silver leaf was used.

Conservation issues: (i) twisted wooden panel, (ii) damage due to insect attack, (iii) small but numerous lacunae, detachments of the paint layer caused by warping of the wooden panel.

Restoration: filling of the lacunae



CAT. 33. *The Resurrection of Christ and Twelve Scenes*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

‘Dormition of the Mother of God’
Church from Poiana Sibiului
(Sibiu County)

49.5x40 cm

Kholuy workshop

end of the 18th century

Rendered in this case only in the version depicting the triumphant rising from the tomb, the *Resurrection of Christ* is surrounded by 12 scenes from His life and from the life of the Mother of God. The image was duplicated on the back of the panel, the new work being signed by the painter Nicolae Oprea from Vale and dated 1833. In the same year, the Romanian icon painter made a copy of the icon on glass, which is now in the Carmen and Gheorghe Muşat collection in Bucharest (see p. 19, fig. 19).

Preservation by Dumitriţa
Daniela Filip, 2022-2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.





CAT. 34. *Saint John the Baptist*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca
48x38.5 cm

Kholuy workshop
second half of the 19th century

This work follows the Russian iconographic tradition, which emphasizes the sacrifice of the Eucharist through the presence of the body of Christ in the cup held by the Forerunner, and through the text from John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”, inscribed on the unfurled scroll. The paint layer was laid over an icon of the *Mother of God Bogolyubskaya of Moscow* belonging to the category of icons called “reddened” (*krasnushki*).

The icon was acquired from an Aromanian antiquarian in Bucharest, Tuşa Bedivan, in the early 2000s.

Investigated by Neculai Grosu in 2004-2006; restored by Cristian Diţoiu in 2008.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.





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покаитѣсѣ

CAT. 35. *The Birth of the Mother of God*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 2094/L/730-A

35x31.5 cm

unknown workshop

end of the 18th century

The composition is arranged in two overlapping registers, the narrative following the *Protoevangelium of James*. In the upper part, angels announce the birth of the Virgin to Joachim in the desert (left), and Ana in the garden (right). In the lower part, the scenes are delimited by architectural structures, the one in the middle being the most monumental, a sign that it frames the main event: the actual birth. To the left of the Virgin's birth there is the meeting of the two parents at the city gate, and to the right a domestic scene, with the two parents rejoicing in the child given by God in their old age. A concourse of clouds hides the top of the turret on the central aedicule, above which a bust of God the Father is shown blessing.

The icon entered the Museikon collection in 2015, together with several objects from Hodac, Jabeșița and Ibănești (Mureș County), with no provenance explicitly indicated.

Conservation issues: (i) twisted wooden panel, (ii) severe damage caused by insect attack, (iii) fracture of the wooden panel.

Restoration: (i) structural consolidation needed, (ii) reassembly of

the split pieces of wood, (iii) another paint layer of historical and artistic value was discovered in some areas and preserved visible.

Restoration in progress, by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 36. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*

Natalia Komashko
Ana Dumitran

‘Saint Paraskeva’ Church from
Tălmăcel (Sibiu County)

69x53 cm

Central Russia or Volga region

1760-1780

Wearing richly decorated priestly vestments, but without a mitre, Saint Nicholas is shown in bust form, holding in his left hand a closed book. No doubt it was deliberately depicted in this way, so that the Baroque splendor of its metalwork cover could be admired. In the upper corners, Christ and the Mother of God are standing on billowing clouds in aureoles filled with rays of light.

The icon was, most probably, acquired in the course of a transhumant shepherd’s or farmer’s journey to Russia with his flocks.

Bibliography:

Abrudan 2022, p. 300.

Credits: Ioan Ovidiu Abrudan.



CAT. 37a-b. Saint Nicholas of Myra

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

inv. no. 272/L/181-273

28x23 cm

Kholuy workshop

second half of the 18th century

The composition belongs to the most simplified version of the iconography, with the Saint rendered in bust form, in priestly vestments devoid of decorative elements and without a mitre, accompanied by the two small-scale depictions of Christ and His Mother in the upper corners.

The icon originally belonged to Sălciua de Sus parish (Alba County). Following the heritage Law 63 of 1974, the icon was collected and deposited at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, from where it was moved in 2015 to Museikon.

Technical details: icon with an indented visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panel (double *kovcheg*).

Conservation issues: (i) fracture of the wooden panel, (ii) large lacunae.

Restoration: (i) the lacunae were too large to be filled, (ii) an aesthetic reconstruction was not considered in the absence of specific historical objectives (the composition is not identical with that of cat. 37b, although the two show a high proportion of similarities).

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2023.

inv. no. 248/L/158-249

29x23.5 cm

The icon belonged to the filial church of Cioara de Sus part of the Baia de Arieș parish (Alba County). Following the heritage Law 63 of 1974, the icon was collected and deposited at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, from where it was moved in 2015 to Museikon.

Technical details: (i) icon with an indented visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panel (double *kovcheg*); (ii) iron nails are visible on the inside of the inner frame.

Conservation issues: (i) loss of wood caused by insect attack, (ii) the wooden panel was cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (iii) formation of oxalates was identified by ATR-FTIR analysis of the varnish layer.

Restoration: an archaeological restoration was performed based on the principle of minimal intervention.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2020-2021.

Bibliography:

Filip et al. 2021, p. 346, 349-350.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.





CAT. 38. *Saint Nicholas of Myra, head-and-shoulders portrait*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

40x31.5 cm

Starodubje – Vetka region

end of the 19th century

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

The composition is typically Russian, with the figure of Saint Nicholas reduced to a head-and-shoulders portrait in almost three-quarter profile with the head turned slightly to the right. On the left are depicted the Archangel Gabriel, Saint Theodore (the Studite?) and Saint Artemios the Great Martyr, and on the opposite side, Saints Paraskeva the Martyr, Empress Irene and Eustatius the Great Martyr.

The icon was acquired sometime between 1995 and 2000 from Ritta Chiricuță-Marinovici, the wife of the illustrious Romanian doctor Ion Chiricuță, director of the Oncological Institute in Cluj-Napoca, but originally from Vaslui County, who was also a reputed art collector.



CAT. 39. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*

Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca
35x30.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

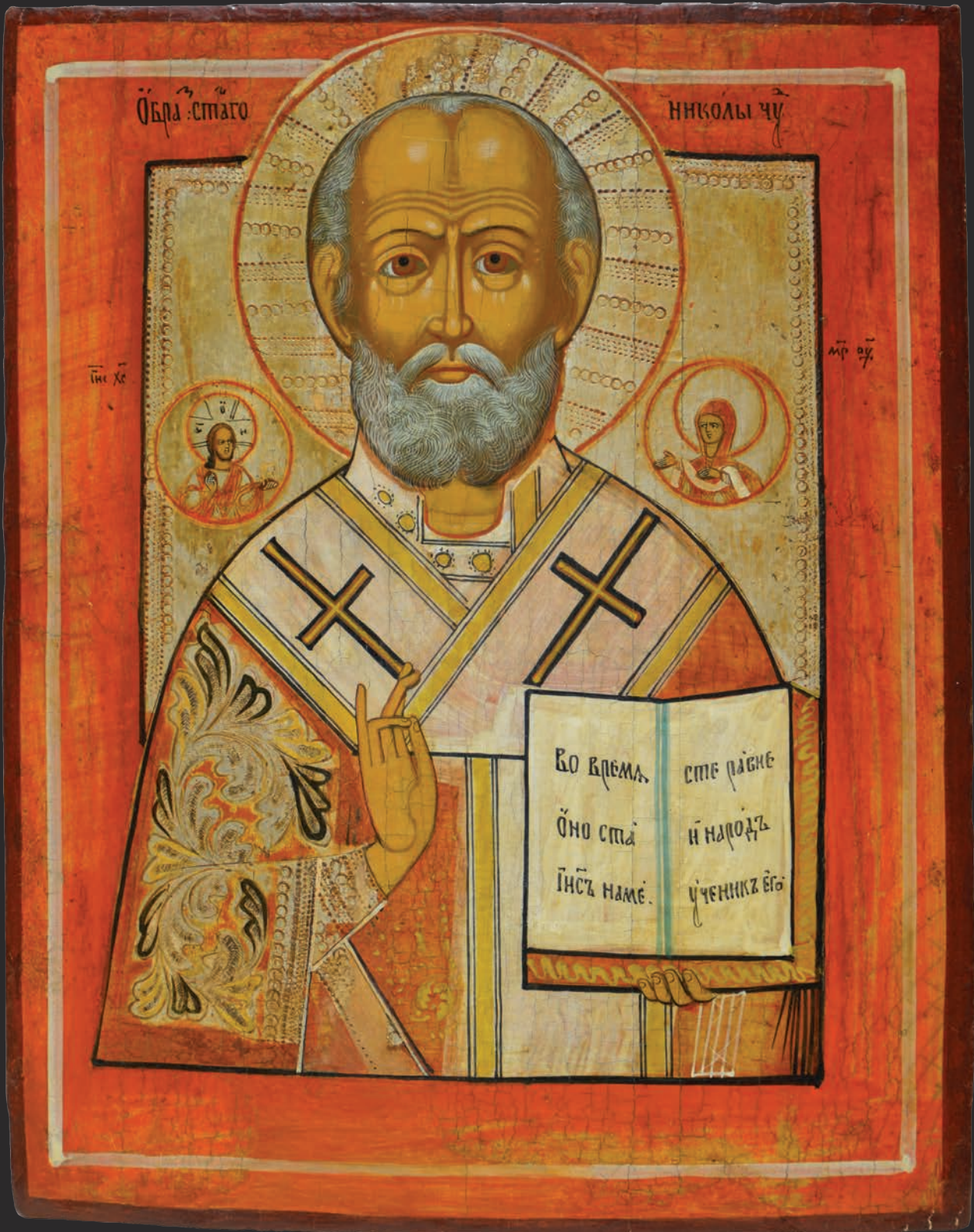
19th century

This work belongs to the category of mass-produced icons called “reddened” (*krasnushki*).

The icon was acquired from an Aromanian antiquarian in Bucharest, Tuşa Bedivan, in the early 2000s.

Restored by Neculai Grosu,
2004-2006.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



Обра́ :стаго

НИКОЛЫ ЧУ

Г҃И ХС

МР ОУ

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ѡно ста и нароуъ
Г҃нъ наме. ученикъ его

CAT. 40. *Prophet Elijah*

Natalia Komashko
Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

'Holy Prophet Elijah' Monastery
in Toplița (Harghita County)

26x22.5 cm

Northern Russian workshop

beginning of the 18th century

The icon illustrates the passage from 1 Kings 17:3-6, and shows the prophet, having withdrawn into the wilderness, being fed by ravens. The text on the scroll reads: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee" and comes from 2 Kings 2:2.

Although no information was preserved about the provenance of the icon, it must have been part of the endowments of the wooden church in Stânceni, which was moved in 1910 to Toplița by the first patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea, and around which in 1928 he founded the Monastery dedicated to the Prophet Elijah. In turn, the wooden church, dating from 1847 must have inherited the icon from an earlier place of worship and it is possible that the icon's silver frame with baroque decoration was added in 1847, the year when the church in Stânceni was rebuilt.

Apud:

Mănăstiri și biserici 2022, p. 386.

Credits: Daniel Constantinescu.



CAT. 41. *The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah*

Natalia Komashko
Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 2022/L/690-M

42x35.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

19th century

The composition has the prophet in the center, seated in the cave where a raven brings him food.

The sequence of the scenes around him start on the left with the sacrifice on Mount Carmel and below that the moment when, sleeping under a juniper tree, Elijah was awakened by an angel and told to eat. In the lower right corner, Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan, while above, on the other bank, Elisha – left alone – stretches out his hands for Elijah’s mantle, as the latter is being lifted up to heaven by the chariot of fire. The depiction of the chariot, pulled by three horses, occupies the upper third of the icon. In the upper left corner, a bust of God the Father wreathed in clouds blesses the whole train of events.

The icon was received before 1972 by Fr. Paul Mihail from the Smirnov sisters, refugees from Russia who found safe haven in Iași, and who belonged to the *Skoptsy* sect of the Old Rite Believers. In 2019, Zamfira Mihail donated the icon to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia for the Museikon collection.

Technical details: (i) paper strips had been used to seal the wooden panel, (ii) silver leaf was used.

Conservation issues: (i) the twisting of the wooden panel caused fractures, (ii) cracks, lacunae and detachments, (iii) in a previous attempt to rejoin the pieces of wood, a modern adhesive had been lavishly applied, (iv) the formation of oxalates was identified by ATR-FTIR analysis of the varnish layer.

Restoration: (i) reassembly of the panels, (ii) removal of the adhesive, (iii) consolidation of the paint layer, (iv) the lacunae caused by the fractures of the wooden panel were filled and chromatically integrated, (v) the paper layer was left exposed in a small section, where the lacuna in the ground layer was not filled, because it is historical evidence attesting to this particular preparation technique in Russian icons.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2020-2021.

Bibliography:

Filip et al. 2021, p. 348.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 42. *Saint Charalambos, Bishop of Magnesia*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

18.5x16 cm

Old Rite Believers workshop in
Transnistria (?)

end of the 19th century

The composition follows the bust
portrait type, with Christ depicted
in miniature in the upper left
corner.

Until around 2000, the icon
was part of the collection of Fr.
Gavrilă Pop from Gherla, one of
the greatest icon collectors in
Romania.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 43. *Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

inv. no. 56 i

28.5x24.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

second half of the 18th century

The miniature representation
of the *Mandyllion* in the upper
left corner may be a symbol of
the divine presence, certifying
the sanctity of the figure repre-
sented, a necessary measure in
the case of icons with frontally
rendered figures. Alternatively it
may be the mark of a workshop.

The icon comes from Sebeșu
Mare, close to Huedin (Cluj
County). It may be that the icon
was collected and deposited in
the collection of the Metropoli-
tanate of Cluj under Law 63 of
1974.

Restored by Hierodeacon Gavriil
Ioan Boga, Melania Diaconu,
Delia Horvat, and Ion Pântea,
under the supervision of Asso-
ciate Professor and Restorer Dr.
Marin Cotețiu, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann
2021, p. 185, fig. 5.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 44. *Four-part Icon with Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, and Saint George Slaying the Dragon*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

inv. no. 55 i

29x23.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

early 19th century

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide brown strips that intersect to form a cross. In the upper register there are representations of the *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, and *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, both rendered in bust form, and in the lower one, the *Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host* and *Saint George and the Dragon*.

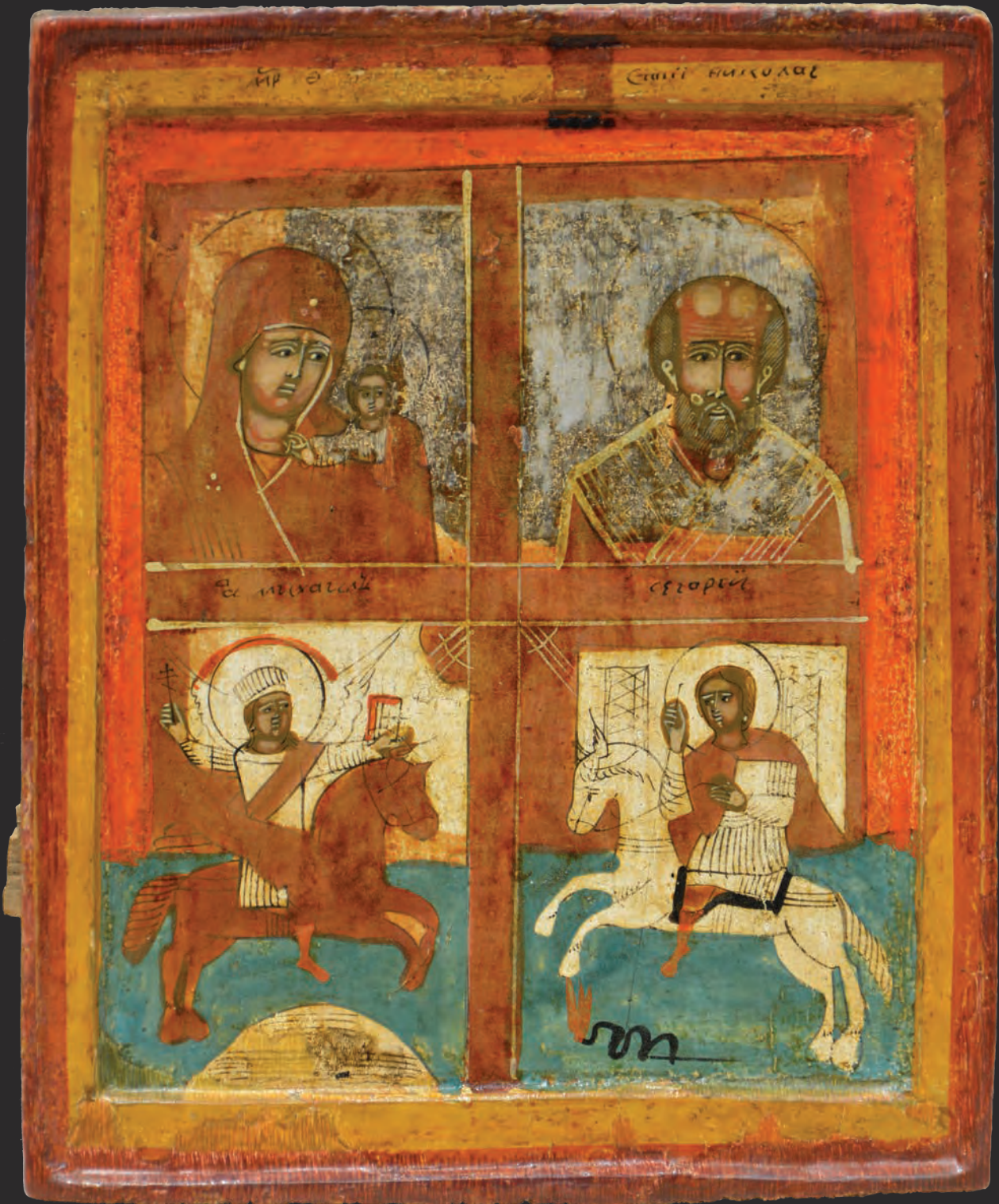
The icon comes from Geaca (Cluj County). The icon may have been collected and deposited in the collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj under Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Sevastița Ardeleanu, Gavril Costea, and Alexandra Șireag, under the supervision of Associate Professor and Restorer Dr. Marin Cotețiu, 2019-2020.

Bibliography:

Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann
2021, p. 185, fig. 4.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 45. *Four-part Icon with Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, and Saint George Slaying the Dragon*

Ilya Borovikov
Ana Dumitran

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 53 i

29x24.5 cm

icon painted in Transylvania
by a master from the Vladimir
region (?)

early 19th century

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide brown strips that intersect to form a cross. In the upper register are representations of the *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, and *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, both rendered in bust form, and in the lower one, the *Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host* and *Saint George and the Dragon*.

The icon comes from Vima Mare (Maramureş County).

Restored by Eliza Maşchin, under the supervision of Associate Professor and Restorer Dr. Marin Coteţiu, 2018-2019.



CAT. 46. *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, and Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 1530/L/626-E. 16110

30x22 cm

Kholuy workshop

second half of the 19th century

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide blue strips that intersect to form a cross, on which the *Crucifixion* is depicted. The four sections depict the *Mother of God Kazanskaya* and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* in bust forms and the equestrian *Saints George and Demetrius*.

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1971 by Florian Muntean from Alba Iulia. The icon was part of the museum's Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: use of silver leaf.

Conservation issues: (i) the wooden panel was cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (ii) a previous attempt to fill the lacunae, (iii) some repainted areas.

Restoration: (i) the paint layer was consolidated, (ii) the repainting was removed and (iii) chromatic integration was carried out in accordance with the principles of restoration.

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2021-2022.



CAT. 47. *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, and Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki*

Ana Dumitran
Marin Cotețiu

Collection of the Metropolitanate
of Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

inv. no. 57 i

28.5x21.5 cm

Kholuy workshop

middle of the 19^h century

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide blue strips within which the *Crucifixion* is depicted. In the upper register are representations of the *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, and *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, both rendered in bust form, and, in the lower part, *Saint George* and *Saint Demetrius* are depicted on horseback. Because of the reddish color of the frame, the icon can be classified in the category of icons called “reddened” (*krasnushki*).

The icon comes from Coronca (Mureș County), probably having entered the collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj prior to Law 63 of 1974.

Restored by Ionuț Vaidăș, under the supervision of Associate Professor and Restorer Dr. Marin Cotețiu, 2017-2018.



CAT. 48. *Four-part Icon with Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, and Saint Nikitas*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 1410/L/605-E. 13980

28.5x22 cm

Kholuy workshop

second half of the 18th century

ATR-FTIR analysis, (iv) chromatic alteration of some pigments.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

Restoration: an archaeological restoration, based on the principle of minimal intervention, is deemed necessary.

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide strips that intersect to form a cross on which the *Crucifixion* is depicted. The four scenes depict the *Mother of God Kazanskaya* and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* in bust form, *Saint George on horseback, slaying the dragon*, and *Saint Nikitas* in full-length figure. The reddish color visible under the soot layer allows us to place the icon in the category of mass-produced icons called “reddened” (*krasnushki*).

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2020-2023.

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 1969 by the collector Fr. Sabin Olea from Cib (Alba County). The icon was part of the museum’s Ethnographic Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: (i) icon with an indented visual field and raised frame from the surface of the panel (double *kovcheg*), (ii) iron nails are located by the inner frame, (iii) paper strips were used to seal the wooden panel.

Conservation issues: (i) the wooden panel was cupped concave to the unpainted surface, (ii) severe damage caused by heat, similar to fire damage, (iii) formation of oxalates was identified by



CAT. 49. *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion, Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, and Saints George and Demetrius Slaying Dragons*

Dumitrița-Daniela Filip
Ana Dumitran

Museikon collection, Alba Iulia
inv. no. 1022/L/555-Ar. 515

28x23 cm

Kholuy workshop

second half of the 19th century

The surface of the icon is divided into four parts by two wide red-orange strips that intersect to form a cross on which the *Crucifixion* is depicted. The four scenes depict the *Mother of God Kazanskaya* and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* in bust form and, on horseback, *Saints George and Saint Demetrius* slaying dragons. The color puts the icon in the category of mass-produced icons called “reddened” (*krasnushki*).

The icon was offered for purchase to the Great Union Museum of Alba Iulia in 2002 by Fr. Valer-Petru Olea, the son of the collector Fr. Sabin Olea from Cib (Alba County). The icon was part of the museum’s Art Collection until 2015, when it was moved to Museikon.

Technical details: a colored glaze / lake was applied to the silver leaf to make it appear gilded.

Conservation issues: lacunae and detachments of the paint layer.

Restoration: (i) consolidation of the paint layer; (ii) an archaeological restoration was carried out, (iii) the varnish layer was thinned using solvents (in this particular case, the colored varnish represents historical evidence of the icon painting

technique and its preservation was deemed necessary).

Restored by Dumitrița-Daniela Filip, 2021-2022.

Bibliography:

Olea, Dumitran 2001, p. 303.

Dumitran 2002, p. 74.

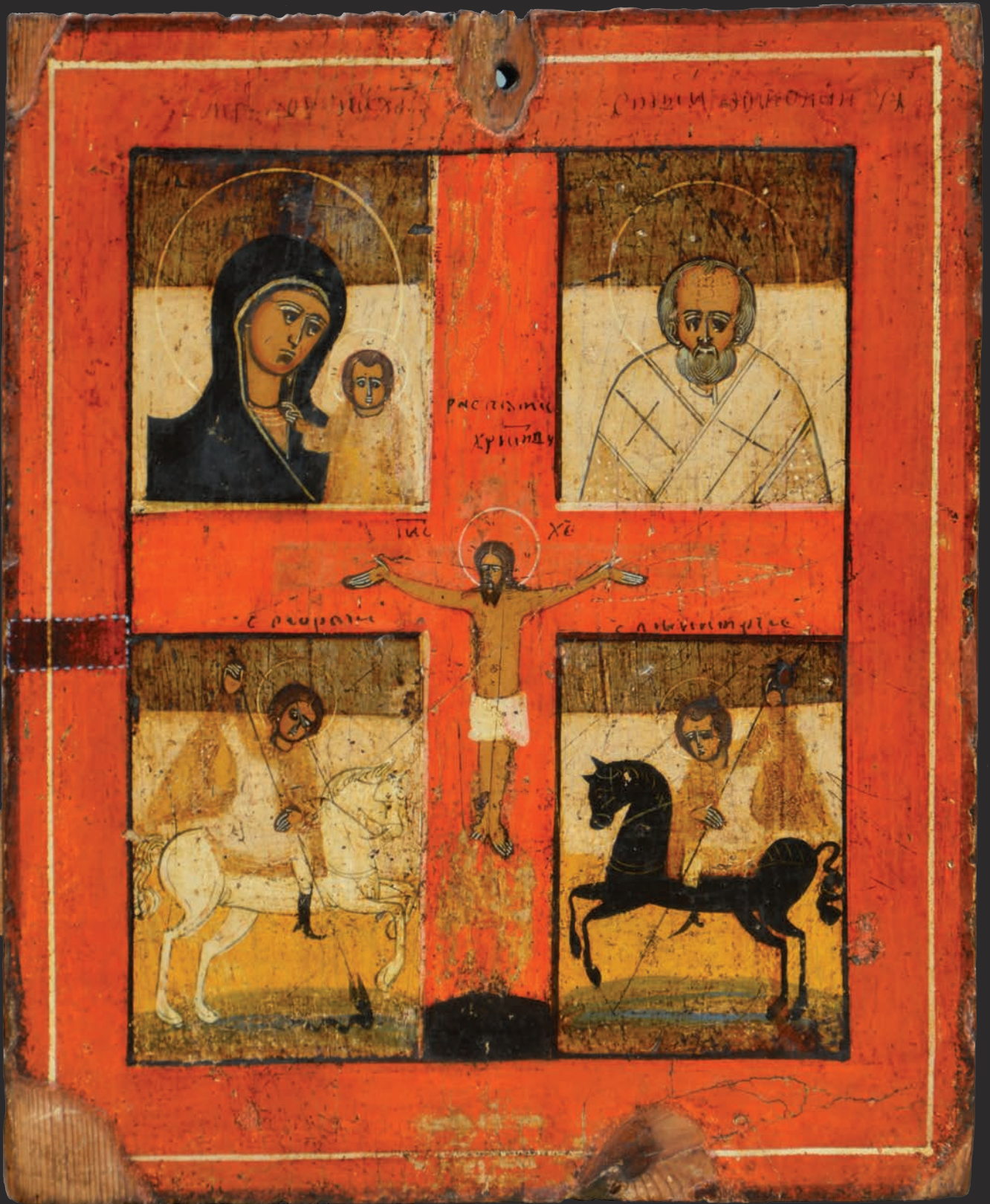
Artă și diversitate 2022, p. 73-74.

Filip et al. 2022, p. 331-349.

Exhibition:

Conservare și restaurare - Artă și diversitate, National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, November 2022 - February 2023.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



CAT. 50. *Four-part Icon with Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie), the Resurrection / Descent into Hell, the Pokrov, the Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham, and the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*

Natalia Komashko
Ana Dumitran

Private collection of
Fr. Ioan Bizău, Cluj-Napoca

35x30 cm

Central Russia workshop

19th century

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

The central field of the panel is divided into four parts by two intersecting thin golden strips. The two scenes in the upper part depict, on the left, the typical Russian version of the *Resurrection of Christ* (with the combination of the *Rising from the Tomb* and the *Descent into Hell*, completed, in the upper left corner, with the *Visit of the Myrrhophores to the Tomb*, and in the lower right corner, with the *Appearance of Jesus at Lake Tiberias*) and, on the right, the *Pokrov*. The scenes in the lower register depict the *Holy Trinity / Hospitality of Abraham* and the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*. The wide, ochre-yellow border that surrounds the composition has a semicircular niche cut out of the upper edge, in which the *Mother of God Znamenie* is depicted. A highly pronounced curvature of the panel made it necessary to place the icon in a box for protection.

The icon was acquired in 2008 from the painter Aurel Țigoan from Cluj-Napoca.

Restored by Cristian Dițoiu, 2008.



ТАКО НАДР
ПРЕПОДОБНА
ЛОВЬКА БЖІА,
КЪ АРХАНГЕЛЬСКО



ЕВНТЬ ОБРАЗЪ
ГШ АЛЕУІА ЧЕ
КЪ МОСКВѢ
СОБОРѢ .

ТАКО КЪ
КЕЛИКАГШ
НАСТѢХЪ
ГРЕЧЕСКАГШ ИРШ
СІЙСКАГШ ЖИВО
ПИБАНІА ИКОНАХЪ,
И НАСТѢНАХЪ, ОУ
ПРЕПОДОБНЫ И ПРАВЕДНЫХЪ,
И МОУЧЕНИКШ КЪ МОЛЕБНЫМ
РОУКИ .



СОБОРНОЙ ЦРКВІ
НОВА ГРАДА
ДРЕВНА



ТАКО НАПАПЕРТН ГШ
ЦРКОВНЫМ, НА ОБРАЗЪ
ЩЕНІА ВЛАДИМИРОВА, ОУСПСА ИЗЪ
ОБЛАКА БЛГОСЛОВАЦІАА ДЕСНИЦА.



ТАКШ КЪ ПЕЩЕ
ПРЕПО
БНАГШ
ОДШСІА ОУ ИЛИИ
МОУРОМЦА НАПЕРЬ
СТѢХЪ СОГБЕНЫ ПЕРШ

“Lipovan Icons”: Between Old Rite Russian Communities and Ecclesiastical Museum Collections

translated by Septimiu-Ovidiu Dumitran

Atanasia Văetiși

Stavropoleos Monastery Bucharest

Although it did not concern any related decision, at least not a direct one, the reform of the Russian Church in the middle of the 17th century, during the rule of Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich (1629-1676) and Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681), also concerned the matter of icons. The phenomenon of the so-called *Lipovan icons*, objects that soon reached and spread all over the Romanian lands, can be considered a consequence of this reform, due to the displacement of a large group of the population, considered schismatic by the majority Church. Through this confessional group, a category of mass-produced Russian icons entered the Romanian territory. At the same time, however, through Russian emigration, the displacement of ethnic Romanians after the annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire (1812), and the itinerant trade in icons in the 19th and 20th centuries, other Russian mass-produced icons, not related to the Old Believer communities, also arrived in Romania. In colloquial language, in restorers' files, in parish or monastery inventories or even in some art popularisation publications, the term used for all these artefacts from Russian mass-production workshops is the same: *Lipovan icons*. A misnomer without scientific basis, which still causes a lot of confusion.

As far as the icons of the Old Rite Russian communities are concerned, their spread on Romanian territory is linked to religious practices, forms of private devotion, ecclesial and visual culture developed within these ethnic and confessional groups that emigrated, following the schism in the Russian Church. The name *Lipovans* given to those who settled on Romanian territory does not justify the transfer of the terminology to their artefacts, and even less to other serial produced icons, sold or venerated in centres of official Orthodoxy. The Lipovans (if we agree to call the Russians of the Old Rite who settled in Romania by that name) brought icons with them, built churches in which they placed them, painted new ones in the same manner, but did not thereby define a particular style of the local community.

Starting from the observation of this terminological inaccuracy at a colloquium,¹ where it aroused various interests (from restorers, historians, heritage owners), the present study aims to open the debate



◀ Fig. 1. Page from Ms III.1, Holy Synod Library (f. 98^v), illustration with the position of the fingers as they should be represented in icons.

Copyright: Holy Synod Library.

▲ Fig. 2. Page from Ms III.1, Holy Synod Library (f. 97^v), illustration with the position of the fingers as they should be represented in icons.

Copyright: Holy Synod Library.

Notes

¹ *Cultural Transfer between Art and History*, 25th–26th November 2021, online conference of the Museikon department of the Alba Iulia National Museum of the Union.

► Fig. 3. *Mandylion*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: Vladimirești Monastery.

►► Fig. 4. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: Vladimirești Monastery.

Notes

² In Russia, their study began as early as the 19th century. See Jenks 2004, p. 6-63.

³ The interest of the international academic community increased after Oleg Tarasov published his essential monograph: Tarasov 2002. As regards Poland, the studies of Aleksanda Sulikowska-Belczowska (see the *Bibliographical abbreviations*) are very useful. Museums in Germany, such as those in Recklinghausen and Frankfurt am Main, which owned such icons, organized exhibitions and published the collections: Haustein Bartsch, Waechter 2010; Neubauer 2010. In general volumes dedicated to the history and culture of the Starovers, aspects related to the production and spread of icons are also touched upon. See among others: Crummev 1970, Robson 1995, Jenks 2004, Crummev 2011, Button 2015. See also, Бусева-Давыдова 2019.

⁴ In May 2021 and June 2022 I undertook two field researches, in Galați and Brăila, which allowed me to document photographically and to interview members of the Old Believer community (a clergyman, two singers and readers, who also paint icons). In July 2022, I continued my field research in Tulcea county, where I documented parish and monastery communities. I thank His Eminence Leontie, Metropolitan of Fântâna Albă of the Old Rite Orthodox Church, His Eminence Ghenadie, Vicar Bishop, for his support in studying the churches in the Pisc (Hutor) district of Brăila, the traditional district of the Old Rite Russians. Also I thank His Eminence Flavian, the Old Rite Orthodox Archbishop of Slava, and the diocesan secretary, Archdeacon Amfilohie Chioic, for their support and generosity in welcoming me to the Diocese of Slava.

⁵ The term is explained in several ways, in both popular versions (according to which it comes from the



on this type of serial icons in Romanian art historiography. In order to do so, it will first trace the religious identity and liturgical, visual and communal culture of the Old Believer communities, to which a large part of them are linked. Ignored by those who have dealt with the history of the Russian Lipovan communities or taken into account only as an identity mark, these icons that can be found in their churches remain until now unstudied. Being the object of devotion of closed and marginal communities, they have not been of interest beyond this framework, which is more appropriate for social, anthropological or ethnographic studies. There is, however, in Russia and in the countries where they have spread in greater numbers, a significant bibliography devoted to the subject.² Artistic centres have been studied, exhibitions have been held, catalogues have been published and, despite the reluctance of the religious communities from which they originated, the icons of the Old Believers are “a field” in international scientific research.³ In an attempt to make up for this absence in the bibliography on the subject, our analysis starts from a field research we have carried out in the Romanian Old Believers communities,⁴ without, however, claiming to be exhaustive; the difficulties of documentation and the fact that research on these communities is still in its infancy in the Romanian academic environment do not yet allow such an approach. However, we will try to highlight the status and place of these icons in the life of the Old Believers, in relation to the specifics of their religious practices and the visual culture to which they are indebted.

However, this unresearched subject, improperly called *Lipovan* icons, also includes a rich production of Russian serial icons, which can now be found in diocesan and monastery museum collections, in monastery chapels or in private collections. The fact that they come from the same centres as those of the Old Believers, their iconography and style, oscillating between the Byzantine tradition and the innovations that embraced ecclesiastical art in the 18th-19th centuries, the handcrafted manner in which they are painted, have made it possible to associate them with those of Old Rite religious communities. The presence and spread of these icons in such large numbers in Romania is, however, linked to their accessibility and to the phenomenon of itinerant trade, not to the Lipovan communities. They were part of the devotional practice of the Romanian Orthodox, who bought, donated and passed them on, thus ensuring their wide circulation. In the second part of this study, I will focus on this phenomenon of transfer and the ways in which it occurred, to the extent that in some cases it came to dominate the collections of monastery museums.



NIKONIAN REFORM AND ITS REVERBERATIONS. BRIEF CONTEXTUAL LOOK

Known by the name of Lipovans in Romania, these Old Rite Orthodox Christians (*Starovers*), established in the Romanian Principalities in the first half of the 18th century, migrated as a result of the persecution they were subjected to by the ecclesiastical and political authorities in Tsarist Russia. The opposition to the reform initiated by Tsar Aleksey and Patriarch Nikon in 1653, when the first church books with changes to the typikonial indications appeared, gradually became a mass phenomenon. The authoritarian measures, repression, and the anathema pronounced by the Moscow Synod in 1666 on those who did not accept the new regulations, determined the Starovers to migrate to isolated, uninhabited areas, on the edges of the empire, or beyond its borders, in neighboring states such as Poland, the Ottoman Empire, Austria, Sweden, the Romanian Principalities.

The *Starovers* from the south, many of them Cossacks from the River Don, but also others from the south-west of Russia, from Starodubje and Vetka, set off for neighboring countries, such as the Crimean Khanate, Moldavia, the Ottoman Empire, settling in the Caucasus region, in Kuban and then in Bukovina, Budjac, Bessarabia, at the mouth of the Danube and in Dobrudja. Numerous communities were formed, a strong ethno-denominational group, known especially in the Principalities and in Dobrudja, but not only there, under the name of Lipovans.⁵ They arrived in several waves of migration, following various routes, colonizing villages in northern and southern Moldavia and the territory of Dobrudja, settling with their families and households in counties such as Suceava, Botoșani, Neamț, Tulcea, Brăila to escape the persecutions to which the tsarist regime in Russia

▲ Fig. 5. The interior of the Birth of the Mother of God Church, Brăila.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

Notes

word *lipa* – linden and from the forests where their communities would have settled and where they got the wood on which the icons were painted) and academic ones. The latter can be of toponymic origin (the first locality where they settled in Bukovina is said to have been *Lipoveni*) or anthroponymic (from a certain Filipp, a wandering monk, who separated from the larger community from Starodubje (see Melchisedec 1871, p. 51), or, in another version, who had set out around 1710-1720 from his community at Vetka to find a bishop. The movement that came out of the search for a prelate to head up this new sect of the Russian Church became a mass movement whose its protagonists were called Philipovtsy or Filippians or of Philipp’s confession. Arriving in the territory of Moldavia, these companions of Filipp received the name *Lipovans*. The name is given to those who occupy a certain geographical area, which includes the present day territories of Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. The Lipovans have their own diaspora,



▲ Fig. 6. Processional flag in the Birth of the Mother of God Church, Brăila.
Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

▶▶ Fig. 7. *Saint Stephen the Archdeacon*, the deacon's door of the iconostasis in the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God, Brăila.
Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

Notes

formed over time by emigration from these regions, so now we can also find Starovers who call themselves Lipovans in the Far East of the Russian Federation, in the United States, and in the north of the Caucasus (Lazăr, Hossu 2020, p. 31-34).

⁶ The earliest work produced on Romanian territory about the Old Rite believers appears in a monastic environment, in the Neamț Monastery printing house in 1837. It is the work of Metropolitan Dimitry of Rostov (1629-1709), written in 1709, therefore contemporary with the *raskol* movements, and entitled *Summary for the Lipovan heresies*, a volume printed for the first time in 1745 in Kyiv. In 1837, when the Lipovans persecuted by the Russian

had subjected their communities since the early years of the schism.⁶ According to the official historiography, what followed the reform of the cult and the service books initiated by the Tsar and Patriarch from a desire to align Russian liturgical practice with the contemporary Greek one, marks a decisive moment in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Church historians consider it the most dramatic and cataclysmic event in the Russian Church, the effects of which continue to be felt even to this day.⁷ One of the areas touched by these changes was that of the art of icons.

Those who accepted the reforms supported by Patriarch Nikon, the so-called “Nikonians”, adopted the changes in liturgical practice, the content of the new service books and, implicitly, the trends of the time in art, iconography and icon painting and church decoration. The art of the official Church continued on a path, established in the 16th century, that saw influences coming from the West, a new language and new trends in iconography. The opponents of the reform refused to change the established ritual practices, resisted anything new, even in terms of the sacred image, considering themselves the successors of the Golden Age of the Russian icon, of the glorious times of Andrei Rublev, of the Novgorodian, Muscovite or Stroganov schools of the 14th–16th centuries.

Epifanij Slavinetki (1600-1675), one of the translators and editors of the reformed service books and a key figure of the reformation, called them “ignorant, blind, barely able to read syllable by syllable, without any understanding of grammar”⁸ and they were regarded as such by their contemporaries, their persecutors and the latter’s descendants. However, the modern historiography of the subject has shown that those who rejected the reforms belonged to all social classes and were not just ignorant peasants. They included boyars, merchants, priests, and monks, *Streltsy*,⁹ free peasants and serfs who, due to religious



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state had already settled in Moldavia, it was partially translated and published by the printing house of the Neamț Monastery. The work saw its second edition, twenty years later, in 1859, in Bucharest, under the supervision of Metropolitan Niphon of Ungrovlahia. A synthesis that retains its authority to this day from the point of view of the history of the Starovers in Russia and their settling in Romania, although written in a polemical spirit, is that of Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu (of the Lower Danube at that time): Melchisedec 1871. The polemical and apologetic tone is also present in later publications, generally originating from clerical circles, which were confronted with what they perceived to be "a sectarian danger". Danu 1894, Arbore 1920, Dumbravă 1929, Nistor 1947. Modern monographs, written from inside the community, useful from different points of view, include Munteanu 2015 and Procop 2021. Some academic works, which offer an overview or a detailed picture of the history, culture, and tradition of Lipovan Russians, are: Ipatiov 2001, Varona 2002, Vascenco 2003, Hrenciuc 2012, Tudose 2015. Collections of documents regarding the community of Lipovans were edited by Leonte Ivanov (Ivanov 2013) and Daniel Hrenciuc (Hrenciuc 2016). For a doctoral thesis that takes an ethnographic approach to the Dobrudja communities: Florea 2016. An important contribution to the literature on this subject is the publication by the Institute for the Study of National Minorities Problems in 2020: Lazăr, Hossu 2020.

convictions, opposed Patriarch Nikon, ultimately causing a schism in the Russian Church. There has also been a reductionist perspective in the interpretations of historians, according to which the opponents of the reform were only interested in form and ritual, and completely indifferent to doctrinal aspects. This was the prevailing opinion in the 1960s,¹⁰ but the studies of Professor Robert Crummey,¹¹ which explored the cultural richness and spiritual life of the Old Believers, changed this reading of the situation and today we no longer associate the Starover communities with ignorance or cultural backwardness.

It is true that the schism did not aim at a doctrinal controversy, but, as Robert Button has demonstrated, this does not mean that it had nothing to do with doctrine. The theory that ritual can be separated from the content and theological meaning of the liturgical has proven to be a false reading of the entire schism debate. Seen from the perspective of liturgical theology, ritual is not only an external element,

⁷ Meyendorff 2015, *passim*.

⁸ Meyendorff 2015, p. 138.

⁹ Special infantry units in Old Russia, with military, police, garrison or border duties. They were also a social class from which personnel for these troops were traditionally recruited.

¹⁰ Button 2015, p. 48.

¹¹ See especially Crummey's 2011 collection of studies, with its diverse methodologies, from approaches that see this movement as "folk religion" to those tracing the spirituality, culture and intellectual life of the Old Believers in various case studies.

► Fig. 8. Icon with a selection of thaumaturgical saints and miraculous icons, 19th century, Starover church in Tulcea County.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.



related to practice, to formal manifestation, but is the very expression of the content of faith and obviously has a dogmatic character.¹² The “form” of a ritual act, after all, expresses a “spiritual” meaning, content related to the teaching of the Church, and this meaning also informs the relationship with Church art, the way an iconographic program is structured in an Old Rite church, the iconography and the style.

We can assume, however, that a change related to the teaching of the faith or some aspect of theology or dogma would not have led to a phenomenon of such magnitude as was triggered by the simple modification of some typikon instructions. There was in the deeply religious Russian society of the time a preoccupation with ritualism, rule and canon, seen as a guarantee of the true life of the Christian; the

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¹² Button 2015, p. 80; Robson 1993, p. 3 and 87.



Typikon or *Ustav* regulated the Christian's life and home, the way he had to live his faith. At the same time, for a large part of the predominantly rural society, there was an opposition to the new, to that which was perceived as coming from the Catholic, Western world. Because they had a cult of tradition and a resistance to change, the vast majority of Russians felt the new measures imposed by the Muscovite ecclesiastical authority as something that affected their faith and ultimately their very salvation. Their deep conviction was that only by following the rule and tradition can they reach "deification," union with God.

Changes such as the sign of the cross (with three fingers, not with two as before), the number of prosphora used in proskomidy (five instead of the seven ordained until then), the shape of the cross (with

▲ Fig. 9. Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, surrounded by twelve feasts, with New Testament Trinity and evangelists on the frame, 19th century. Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

- Fig. 10. *New Testament Trinity glorified by angels*, 19th century, workshop from Starodubje-Vetka region; icon originating from a Starover community.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

- ▲ Fig. 11. *Saint John the Evangelist in silence*, 19th century, workshop from Starodubje-Vetka region, chapel of the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God, Brăila. Icons of the Vetka tradition.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

- Fig. 12. Detail from the iconostasis of the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God, Brăila.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.



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13 Heretz 2008, chap: “The Old Believers: modernization as apocalypse”, p. 14-42.

14 Moreover, a strictly regulated life was implicitly also a form of rejection of a more sophisticated, more original culture, in which the new and creativity have a place. Button 2015, p. 81.

15 According to an interview carried out in June 2022 with Fr. Lazăr Ignat and Petru Procop, both icon painters, in the Vovidenia Old Rite Church in Brăila, Pisc district. The icons I have mentioned, located in various museum collections, had all the necessary compositional, chromatic, and technical execution elements to identify them with the well-known series of Starover icons, but, though those with whom I spoke verified this detail, they rejected them as not belonging to their religious community. When I asked them why the icons I indicated were so similar to their icons, except for this detail, they answered, without further explanation, that the icons were imitating theirs, but they were not theirs. The neglect of such an important detail leads me to suppose that they were destined for sale to other communities, not in the Starover ones. They were



seven instead of eight-pointed as they knew it from time immemorial) were seen as fundamental, because these people lived the faith through symbols and ritual acts and in this universe of symbols, practice and liturgical paraphernalia, the icon had its well-defined place. Already threatened for more than a century, in the eyes of the keepers of tradition, by renewal and heresy, the icon

became, in the new struggle, one of the identity factors of the religious group that broke away from the official Church.

Already threatened for more than a century, in the eyes of the keepers of tradition, by renewal and heresy, the icon became, in the new struggle, one of the identity factors of the religious group that broke away from the official Church.

A medieval religiosity strictly structured on the dualism of good and evil, God and Antichrist, Heaven and Hell, easily appropriated an instrument that belonged to the imaginary of old Russia, the Orthodox tradition, which did not change. At the core of this conservative spirit was the belief that any change came from the Antichrist, because any influence of the West, in clerical garb or monastic habits, conduct or the art of painting icons, was an apostasy. Thus the preservation of the old



faith, the old icons, the ritual, as it had come down to them from their ancestors, was in the eyes of the traditionalists the only way that the penetration of evil into the world could be stopped.¹³ The reaction to the reform was linked to this type of resistance, but also to a certain disdain for everything sophisticated, intellectual, scholarly.¹⁴ Faith, not reflection, not pretentious metaphors or allegories in icons, connects people to God, said these keepers of tradition. An Old Rite believer immediately notices in an icon, in its miniature scenes, the way the saints hold the fingers of a hand when they bless, and by this criterion they recognize their icons; however similar the rest of the elements may be in style, composition, chromaticism and technical execution, if they do not see the two-finger blessing, they reject these icons saying: “they are not ours.”¹⁵

Their theological or catechetical works have whole pages devoted to explanations related to the positioning of the fingers when making the sign of the cross or blessing and their significance¹⁶ (figs 1-2).

The conservative mentality, that aimed at saving the spiritual values of Old Russia, found its support and was inspired by some religious movements started within the Church, which became more and more influential in society in the first decades of the 17th century. One such was the spiritual revival movement of Protopope Ivan Neronov (1591-1670), a famous preacher in Nizhny Novgorod and later in Moscow, and the millenarianist movement of the “forest abbots”. Neronov’s sermons and teachings, which were particularly concerned with the morals of Russian society, attracted primarily the clergy from the provinces, but also influential circles in Moscow, including from the Tsar’s Court, where around Archimandrite Stefan Vonifatiev (1590-1656) the so-called “circle of the zealous of piety” was created, of which

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1 painted and distributed by itinerant merchants, as the creations of [experienced] craftsmen; they reached Romanian villages and were bought by Romanian believers. In another interview, carried out in October 2021 in the Old Rite church of Saint Nicholas in Galați, cantor and sacristan Alexandru Trefil answered the same questions in a different way. He claimed that many icons, some of the artistically mediocre ones, mass produced, with a superficial approach to the drawing, physiognomy and anatomy of the figures, and made without attention to detail, are not related to them, but to the *Bezpopovtsy* (without priests) sect, who ended up “scribbling” such panels, “one after another”, just to sell them and make money.

16 See for this Ms. III.1 from the Library of the Holy Synod, *Adunare a stareșului Nicodim [Miscellany of Abbot Nicodim]*, 1808, 203 f., which has 22 pages illustrated with drawings indicating the correct position of the fingers in the gesture of worship and blessing when different saints are represented in the icons.

- Fig. 13. Lateral iconostasis in the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God, Brăila.
Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.



Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich himself became a member. In addition to concerns related to raising the moral level of the clergy, strengthening the discipline of believers and encouraging a more sustained spread of theological knowledge among them, the idea of aligning the Russian Church's practice with that of the other Orthodox Churches was born in this environment, and more precisely eliminating the differences between the Russian and Greek rites. At the same time there emerged a hypothetical and grandiose political project for a Pan-Orthodox Russian Empire, the only power that could ensure the continued existence of the Christian protectorate at a time when the Orthodox countries of the Balkans were under Ottoman rule.¹⁷

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¹⁷ For the Romanian literature on the subject, see Alexandr Varona's synthesis (Varona 2002, p. 63-71; 75-79); on Neronov's connection with the reform and other aspects of church politics, see Meyendorff 2015, *passim*.

The second movement, this time more emphatically spiritual, even radical, was that of the "forest abbots". Unlike that of Neronov, which operated mainly in the urban environment and to a lesser extent in the villages, this movement attracted its followers exclusively from the rural world, preaching salvation through renouncing earthly life and by retreating to places as far away from civilization as possible, free from the control of state authority, like the endless forests of the upper reaches of the Volga. Under the guidance of the monk Kapiton, these

radical ascetics organized themselves into small hermitages; they challenged the authority of the Church and its ministers, considering them unworthy of giving communion, as well as rejecting the veneration of icons painted under the influence of Western art.

It was from the ranks of these movements dedicated to spiritual improvement that many of those who followed the raskol or schism were recruited.¹⁸ The radicalism and eschatological vision of the forest abbots started to attract more and more believers, when they imagined the end of the world was upon them in the form of the betrayal of Russian Orthodoxy by the Church hierarchy who sought to align it with the Greek model and change the established cult. Then clerics such as Protopope Avvakum (1620-1682), leader of the conservative camp, and monks from the Solovetsky Monastery in Northern Russia, who had put up strong resistance, were excommunicated, anathematized and deported to Siberia. Followed by their adherents, they retreated to isolated forests and villages and began to practice their beliefs clandestinely. They organized themselves, created their own hierarchy and gradually became a powerful and influential religious movement.

The most vocal and radical of them (including Protopope Avvakum) were executed a few years later, in 1682. After 1685 a period of harsh persecution began, including torture and executions, and many Old Believers left Russia for good.

The monasteries were at the forefront of this struggle and from among the monks rose up the “martyrs of the old faith”; they refused to use the new liturgical books and practices, choosing “ephemeral death, rather than perish eternally.”¹⁹ There were also extreme practices, where opponents of synodal decisions chose to set themselves on fire and die,²⁰ rather than replace the old books. The most radical group was that of the *Bespopovtsy*, those who did not accept the priesthood, considering the hierarchy of the Church to have fallen from grace, nor accept a former hierarch of the Nikonian Church, who besides was of Greek origin, as was Ambrose (1791-1863), the first bishop of the Old Ritualists, as their spiritual leader.²¹

In 1905, Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) signed a *Document of Religious Freedom*, which put an end to the persecutions; the Old Rite believers obtained the right to build their churches, to organize themselves, to practice their worship in public (they could use the bells and organize processions), emerging from the clandestinity in which they had lived until then.

In 1971 the Moscow Patriarchate revoked the anathemas on the Old Rite believers, but this did not mean a return to the communion they had enjoyed before the rupture. Old Rite believers do not recognize the changes made in the cult during the time of Patriarch Nikon, which constitute the current practice of the Russian Orthodox Church, and believe that they cannot renounce the traditions handed down to them in exchange for traditions that emerged from a heretical environment. They are no longer a persecuted community, but they are conscious of their marginality.

THE ART OF A MARGINAL COMMUNITY

In order to analyze the icons of the Old Rite believers, we must take into account a number of aspects specific to this social, ethnic and denominational group. Beside their religious beliefs and practices, there are many other special factors that define this group and have consequences for their art. First of all, the fact that persecution and

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¹⁸ Varona 2002, p. 158.

¹⁹ From the creed of the monks of the Solovetsky Monastery, besieged by the Tsar’s army between 1668-1676.

²⁰ In their radicalism, they thought that this was how they would receive the “baptism of fire”. In this way, 800 fanatics from the group led by a former hetman of Siberia, Iacob Lepechin, died. This turned out to be one of the most radical groups. Melchisedec 1871, p. 23.

²¹ Ambrose of Fântâna Albă (Amvrosii Popovich) was a Greek cleric, Metropolitan of Bosnia (Patriarchy of Constantinople) from 1835. He retired in 1846, due to conflicts with the local authority, and became a bishop without a throne, resident in Constantinople. It was in this capacity that he was found by the representatives of the Old Rite Church who set out to find a hierarch in Orthodox countries. In 1846, he accepted the faith of the Old Rite and, by an imperial decree of Emperor Ferdinand of Austria, was made metropolitan of Fântâna Albă (Belaya Krinitsa), a metropolitan seat established within the Starover monastery of the same name, located in the territory of Bukovina at that time (now in Ukraine). He remained in the seat for only one year, being forced to retire in 1847. He was canonized by the Old Rite Church, his remains are in Brăila, in the Old Rite Metropolitan Cathedral in the Pisc district.



being deprived of their civil rights drove them to live in isolated, unpopulated areas, with land that was barely fertile, where they had to find a way to survive.²²

Producing art was one way; some of the locations where the Starovers settled are well-known artistic centers: Vyg (in the north, Pomorje region), Vetka (today in Belarus), Starodubje (in the west, in Bryansk region) and Nevyansk (in the east), and Guslitsy (near Moscow). True artistic colonies were established here, where icon painters worked, passing their craft from generation to generation.

Peasant painters and their art: somewhere between folk art and the preservation of the Russian icon painting tradition

The Russian art historian Oleg Tarasov, in his work *Icon and Devotion*, dedicates a sub-chapter, which he suggestively titled *The Burden of Numbers* to the mechanics of artistic creation in the world of the villages-artistic colonies.²³ Citing documentation from a government investigation related to the “painting business”, Tarasov says that in Kholuy, in 1752, around 350 people are mentioned as being engaged in icon painting, and that in 1812, according to other sources, 700 people were attested to be involved in the icon trade. A similar situation is known in Palekh, where 600 people were involved in the icon trade.²⁴ And because icon painting became over time a real industry, what has been called the “Suzdal icon business” was, says Tarasov, “a complicated labyrinth”, in which “the village prepared brushes, wooden boxes, caskets”, and he goes on: “old icons were collected”, with the painting erased or degraded, the panels being used to paint new icons.²⁵ Such an industry was also specific to the artistic colonies in which the Old Believers lived and worked; it was part of their way of life. At the same time, there were also commissions for the Old Believers in the Suzdalian artistic centres (Palekh, Kholuy and Mstyora). Icons made here spread throughout Russia and even crossed borders, along with icon dealers, a phenomenon specific to this folk community-based culture. The painters who worked in these workshops were assisted by the so-called *ofenyas*, itinerant icon vendors, and their agents who supplied them. Most of them belonged to the same rural world and trading in icons became their main source of income. There was a huge annual production of icons (according to some statistics, a small workshop with 5-6 workers could produce 100 mass-produced icons per day,²⁶ and in a single village, such as Kholuy, between 1.5 and 2 million icons were painted in a year.²⁷ And these *ofenyas* reached the most distant corners of Russia, where there was a demand for simple icons, accessible in terms of price, but also in terms of subject matter, suited to popular piety, agreeable in their archaism, stylistically unsophisticated, and easy to understand. From there they reached the Orthodox countries of the Balkans.²⁸ The icons produced in the workshops of Palekh and Mstyora at least corresponded equally to the norms and taste of the official Church and of the Old Rite Church.²⁹

Their widespread popularity is also due to the fact that they had this universal language that mixed popular devotion and accessibility,³⁰ the vernacular “beautiful” and sensitivity to certain types of themes with wonder-working saints performing miracles, healings and miraculous intercessions (figs 3-4).

This circuit of the popular icon, from its execution in the workshops

◀ Fig. 14. Detail from a lateral iconostasis from a church in Tulcea.
Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

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²² For more on the economic activity of Old Believers communities see: Бородкин 2009.

²³ Tarasov 2002, pp. 38-56.

²⁴ By comparison, according to Manolis Chatzidakis, in the 18th century, there were only around 350 icon painters active throughout the whole of Greece. Tarasov 2002, p. 53.

²⁵ In 1879, according to a press report, 28,000 old panels collected from all over Russia were deposited in Mstyora. Tarasov 2002, p. 54, note 37.

²⁶ Tarasov 2002, p. 55, note 41.

²⁷ Tarasov 2002, p. 30.

²⁸ There are sources documenting several such trade routes from an early period. In 1705, 10 peasants from Palekh applied for travel documents to Serbia, for an “exchange of icons”. In 1708, several people from Palekh are attested in the Turkish provinces as being forbidden to sell icons on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. In 1754, Anania Feodorov notes in his diary: “many inhabitants of Kholuy and Palekh travel with icons to distant countries like Austria, Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria and others and exchange them” (Tarasov 1990, p. 71). Recent research reveals new sources that attest to these practices in respect of the Macedonian hinterland (1869-1885), as well as for Transylvania (1784-1785). Kostopoulos 2021, p. 189-199 and Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, p. 145-187.

²⁹ An 1858 report by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs states that the painters of Palekh, Mstyora and Kholuy painted more than 2 million pictures annually and served a diverse clientele, peasants, Starovers, aristocrats, but also some belonging to the Church (official – n.n.). *Ikonopistsy, Zhurnal Ministerstva vnutrennikh del*, ch. 32, ot III (1859), 26-35. *Apud* Jenks 2004, p. 14, note 29.

³⁰ From this artistic production, rather cheap and of medium or low quality, came most of the icons that reached Romania and are found

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today in museum collections and monastery and diocesan repositories, which I discuss in the second part of the study.

31 Jenks 2004, p. 7.

32 *Apud* Jenks 2004, p. 13.

33 Rovinskii's position is that of the world from which he came. The educated Russians of that time did not really understand the Russian icon and its artistic language. For them, any traditional iconography that was not academic was rudimentary, lacking method. I thank Natalia Komashko, to whom this remark belongs, for nuancing the position of the 19th century scholars and for pointing out to me that the reference to their assessments (made during those expeditions) is methodologically invalid. According to Komashko, we cannot consider that these "experts" objectively assessed the art of peasant painters or understood it. I have, however, kept the reference to this episode of the "icon experts" because it remains a symptom of the reception of that artistic phenomenon – the mass icon produced by peasant painters – which is widely spread in Romania, and is the object of my research.

34 Jenks 2004, p. 22-24. In the interview I did with Petru Procop in the Old Rite community of Pisc district, Brăila, in June 2022, he spoke with great reluctance about these merchants from the past, considering them a class of people at the fringes of the law, whose communities rejected them. For Procop, a believer involved in community life, a lectern reader, author of a book about the Starovers of Hutor (Pisc) and an amateur icon painter, the icon should not be sold, it should not become a commodity, it is a sacred object. Hence his refusal to legitimize, even in retrospect, the activity of icon merchants, in reality one of the most important ways through which these icons entered the Romanian countries. When I asked if there are still such merchants, he answered that he knows an icon painter, "from somewhere in Constanța, who is a sailor". And when he is not on the ship, he paints icons, and he comes with them to patron saints' feasts (in Brăila – n.n.) and sells them at the church. In this case, known to Procop, the roles overlap: the painter is

or homes of the peasant painters, as they were called, to its acquisition by agents and vendors specialized in the icon trade, and finally its distribution to the far corners of Russia and beyond, was investigated by so-called "icon experts" in the 1860s. The field reports, articles, studies and books that these Russian specialists (historians, art historians, folklorists, archivists) produced as a result of their investigations were analyzed by an American researcher specializing in the culture and visual universe of the Old Rite Russians. The documents examined by Andrew Jenks are essential to an understanding of the process of creating and distributing the icons that were mass produced in the three Suzdal centers. The history of these field trips by Muscovite scholars to the rural communities, where icons were being made also for Old Believers, begins around 1860, when a group of enthusiastic academicians, professors and aristocrats, who called themselves "icon experts", successfully documented the artistic colonies of Suzdal region. They then published a series of articles and books, which begin to arouse the interest of an educated elite in the peasant painters of Palekh, Mstyora and Kholuy.³¹ These "experts" were researchers who studied Russian icons, but also collectors; they mainly concentrated on gathering documents related to icons in general, and with this data they also became better acquainted with the popular creations of these three villages. Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Rovinskii (1824-1895), a student of popular art, interested in the relationship between the Orthodox faith and state power, had a first public position and it turned out to be an extremely reserved one. Rovinskii arrived in Palekh and noted the art was "cheap, without style, without depth, casual, effortless, without any teaching, without connection with models", an art for people without resources and ignorant.³² Rovinskii says that these unschooled painters made "improper icons" and sold them cheaply to "random" buyers or used their talent to make fakes after the great masters.³³

In 1861, another scholar, Vladimir Pavlovich Bezobrazov (1828-1889), concerned with the culture and life of the peasants in relation to the emancipation brought about by modernity, arrived in the three villages. He published a series of articles in the press of the time, and his account became the starting point for a new official position that was already beginning to take shape at the level of state institutions. Bezobrazov's accounts are precise and full of details about the organization of the icon-making "industry": Palekh was the first center where icons were painted and the highest quality art came from there. The icon painters worked both as employees in workshops and in their houses, taking the orders directly. Kholuy offered the cheapest goods, of the worst quality, but it is the city that hosts the annual fair, a meeting point for itinerant vendors (*ofenyas*). The image of the latter among the community of painters was not a good one; they were suspected of operating at the fringes of the law (they were registered as peasants, but in fact they were merchants), they were considered immoral, their trade surrounded by secrets, having a special language, like that of fugitives. Bezobrazov presents them in some reports as exploiters of painters, and as a symbol of all that is corrupt.³⁴

However, Georgii Dmitrievich Filimonov (1828-1898), a specialist in Russian church art, would have a truer understanding of this artistic phenomenon. Interested in the actual state of the icon in the rural world, he visited Palekh in 1863, noting the high quality work produced in this center, the fact that the best painters there, although self-taught, showed a very good knowledge of tradition, and skill in artistic execution. Filimonov, in a romantic impulse, goes so far as to



▲ Fig. 15. Side wall in a church in Galați.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

say that he sees them as “embodying the ideal of 17th century art,” i.e. that synthesis between the Russian icon and the post-Renaissance art from the West, “the synthesis (fiaz’) style of the old and of the new.”³⁵

Well attuned to the art of Simon Ushakov, about whom he had written a study, Filimonov hailed the Palekh icon of the 1860s as an “infusion of Ushakov”, which he identifies “in the fresh technique and in the influence of Western art.”³⁶

The most influential “expert” of the era of the “Great Reforms”, the art historian and professor of the Moscow University, Fyodor Ivanovich Buslaev (1818-1898), now proposed the establishment of an association or brotherhood of all icon painters, in which the Starovers would be included, believing that this would help them develop their aesthetic level, while remaining faithful to their way of painting. Unlike the academic painters who broke away from their roots, said Buslaev, the peasant painters were now its keepers.³⁷

As a consequence of this academic interest, in 1863 an evaluation of the production of icons in Russian villages was begun, under the patronage of the Ministry of the Interior. Gradually, under pressure from the demands for mass production and greater efficiency, the quality of the icons in the workshops of the Suzdal region was decreasing. Increasingly indifferent to style, the painters mechanically plied their trade in such a manner that it seemed “that they printed the icons, not that they painted them,”³⁸ as some lamented at the time.

This type of icons, of inferior artistic quality, represents a significant quantity of what reaches the Romanian countries. And, like the icons produced for the Old Believers in the Suzdalian centres or those made in Old Believer artistic centres such as Vetka or Guslitsky, they come to be called, undifferentiated, “Lipovan icons”.

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also a merchant, an occupation that is not as distasteful as that of the icon merchant (*ofenya*), who earns by “exploiting” the painter’s work.

³⁵ *Apud* Jenks 2004, p. 27.

³⁶ *Apud* Jenks 2004, p. 27.

³⁷ Jenks 2004, p. 20. As was the case across Europe, there was in Russia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the twentieth, a movement to recover the medieval, and in this context, the Starovers come to be considered the keepers of the true tradition. The story of Nikolai Leescov also appears in this period, written, as the author confesses, while he was studying *Ikonopisniy podlinniki*. The short story *The Sealed Angel (Zapechatlenniy angel)* (1873) presents the Starovers as the authentic experts in Russian iconography, the keepers of the pre-Nikonian tradition, through which the true craft of painting survived. See Leescov 1913.

³⁸ Jenks 2004, p. 29.



▲ Fig. 16. *Entry into Jerusalem*, illustration in a volume of *Teachings and catechesis on the Passion of the Lord*, 20th century, Stavropoleos Monastery Library.

Copyright: Stavropoleos Monastery.

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39 In this corner, the icons of the Mother of God, the Savior, and Saint Nicholas of Myra are mandatory. The depiction of the Mother of God is one of the types mentioned in the two texts of the Starovers containing references to icons (*Дьяконовы Ответы* and *Поморские ответы*), namely the most popular ones: *Mother of God of Vladimir*, of *Tikvin*, of *Smolensk* and of *the Sign*.

40 Button 2015, p. 54.

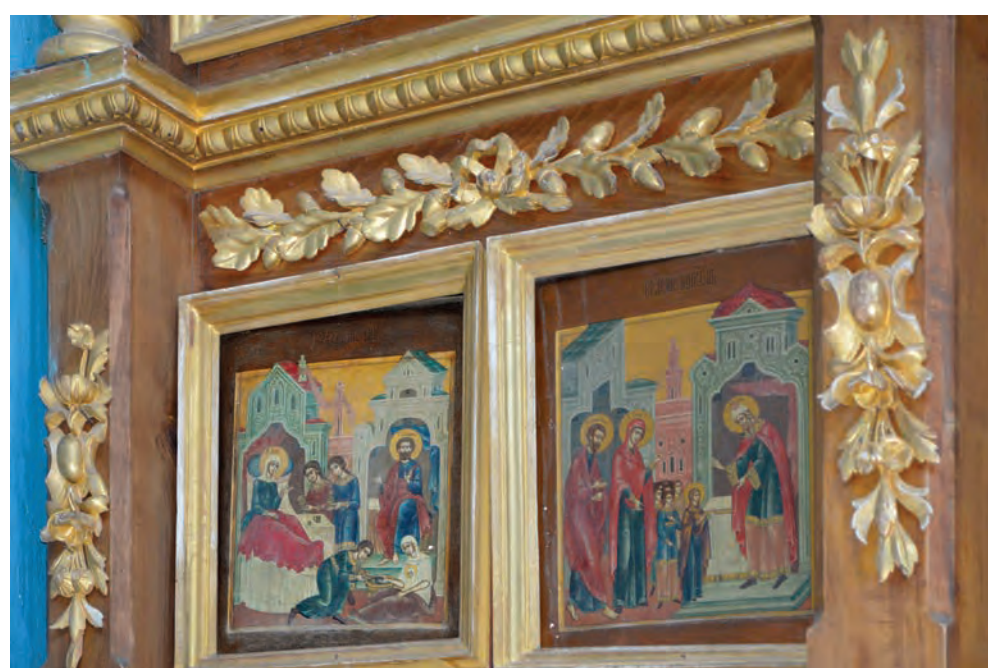
41 A similar set of guidelines concerning the Christian way of life in general is found in *Domostroi*, a work that regulated the way one should live the faith, keep fasts, pray, give alms, how the home should be arranged, how things should be kept, and how family members should behave towards each other (for example, Chapter 11 is entitled “How to decorate your home with icons and how to keep a clean house”), or the *Устав домашней молитвы* (*Rule of Domestic Prayer*), an ancient text from the pre-Nikon tradition (see Button 2015, p. 57). In the same way model books or *podlinniki* lay down the guidelines for iconography (from *Stroganov Podlinniki* to *Perm*, *Bolshakov* or *Svodniuy Podlinniki*, the versions by which these model books have been known since the 18th century). See *Stroganov Podlinniki*

Iconography and the canon

In the churches of the Old Rite believers, one can immediately notice the predilection for certain themes. This is to some extent due to the regulations regarding what had to be placed in the prayer corner in houses, on the large iconostasis of the church, on the small iconostases placed in between different parts of a church, and on processional icons. Because all these were decorated with icons, the absence or much smaller share of mural painting in the Old Rite churches made the icon dominate the worship place (fig. 5). The liturgical space of the Old Rite churches in Romania we visited had over 100 icons. They adorn the iconostasis (which has six, eight or ten registers) and the small iconostases in the spaces between the porch and the pronaos (the space intended for women), the pronaos and the naos (the space intended exclusively for men), the naos and the place in front of the altar (the space intended for the cantors, the two icon stands and the lecterns where the service books are kept). Each of these spaces has, on either side, to the north and to the south, a lateral iconostasis, an object that is part of the standard liturgical furniture of any Starover church. This has places specially for icons, where dozens of panels can be placed. Then, above each door (the main entrance to the church, considered “the women’s door”), and the side access directly into the nave (through which only men can enter), other icons are placed. Next to the lateral iconostases, in specially designed frames, stand two or four processional icons, which most of the time, when there are no processions, are in turn part of the decoration of a Starover church (fig. 6). They have two icons at the top, placed face to face. Four such processional icons, two on the north side, two on the south side, at each passing is the most frequently encountered formula and that in turn involves dozens of other icons. They are small icons with the *Mother of God*, *Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host*, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, i. e. a category of themes also frequently found in serial icons produced for Orthodox communities and which have found their way into private or public collections in various ways.

Last but not least, the altar is decorated with icons, the oldest and most valuable of the church’s endowment. We must also add the fact that most parishes have two churches, the big one and the chapel or “winter church”, as it is called, which also has this specific decoration with the whole set of icons.

The icon is an identity marker of these communities. The fact that their homes had what is called a prayer corner (or the “beautiful corner”) with a certain distribution of icons, small iconostases whose composition was ordained by the typikons,³⁹ was another factor that led to more widespread painting of some subjects. The practice of intense private veneration and transmission of icons from generation to generation, at the baptisms of children, at the weddings of young people – moments when each godparent gives an icon – are all factors that we must take into account when analyzing this liturgical and community culture, built around the icon. I understood many of these aspects during the investigations I carried out in the churches of the Starover communities in Brăila, Tulcea and Galați. It pertains to their theological formation, the theological formation of priests and chanters, which otherwise takes place within the Church, not in an education system, so that, in addition to the Slavonic language, the religious services from the worship books and the liturgical typicon,



◀ Fig. 17. Detail from an iconostasis from Slava Rusă, Tulcea County, 19th century.

Credits: Ana Dumitran.

they can learn to paint icons, acquiring some notions of technique and iconography, by using *podlinniki*, model books. It is also present here, in their relation to the icon, the way of creating the icon, of using it in worship or venerating it, the same feature that characterizes their communities, and which we can see as part of what Robert Button called “the typicon as a way of life,”⁴⁰ that type of organizing life in which the rules – at the heart of which lay liturgical practice – dictated everyday orthopraxy. It is a way of codifying and preserving tradition through catechisms, collections of canons, of edifying, pietistic stories, of ritual practices, of model books with guidelines for the representation of saints and religious scenes.⁴¹ Not only what every Christian denomination knows in the form of the liturgical typicon, every monastery in the form of its administrative and spiritual typikon, but a synthesis of all of them, which covers all aspects of the believer’s daily life. This is a feature characteristic of the Old Rite Christian culture, and it implies, in a deeper sense, that sacralization of all levels of society in the Russian world even before the schism. “The interior of a house is to a certain extent the symbol of Holy Russia”⁴² noted Tarasov, and the Starovers, as keepers of the tradition of Holy Russia, build their domestic universe following those guidelines of the good Christian, through which the house of the believer is managed,⁴³ in the same way as the *typika* manage the life of the monasteries. Moreover, for the Starovers, the distinction between lay, clergy and the monastic world is not so pronounced, the organization of their communities often taking the form of administrative-spiritual structures similar to those in the monastic world.⁴⁴

On the other hand, the *podlinniki* is the guarantee of authenticity (it literally means “authentic”) and that is why the state authorities, but also the Church,⁴⁵ wanted to have a definitive, printed edition, not various model books circulating in manuscript form. This was intended to be a definitive compilation of images and the correct ways of painting and restoring; the first *podlinniki* commissioned and financed by the state was printed in 1905. It has an illustrated part (*lisevoi*), with depictions of saints and feasts, and an explanatory part (*tolkovyi*), which describes the painting technique and the meaning of the images.

Notes

(ed. 1869), *Svodnuiy Podlinniki* (ed. 1873), for editions printed in Russian in the 19th century, and more recent editions in English by Grigorie Melnick: *Bolshakov Podlinniki* (ed. Melnick 1995), *Postnikov, Tyullin Podlinniki* (ed. Melnick 1998).

⁴² Tarasov 2002, p. 38.

⁴³ In the 16th century, Sylvester, a priest at the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow Kremlin, compiled the various manuscript versions of the *Domostroi* collection into an edition, adding his own text, in the form of a letter to his son. See *Domostroi*, ed. Pouncy 1994. This guide for the use of every Russian household saw the latter as a place that was to become “paradise itself, a small model of the universe”, as Sylvester noted. Tarasov 2002, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Even today, parish churches, such as the two in the Pisc district in Brăila where I undertook my research, had an enclosure in which “cells” were set up, inhabited by the elderly or single people, who carry out various activities connected with the church.

⁴⁵ In 1830, after Church representatives inspected the artistic colonies in the Suzdal region to identify and confiscate non-canonical icons, they concluded that a new *podlinniki* needed to be drawn up to control artistic production. Jenks 2004, p. 10.

Collectionism as a resource

Something else that we must keep in mind when analyzing the Starover icons is collecting. Considering themselves the preservers and saviors of the old culture that was threatened with extinction by the reform of the Church and the modernization of society, the Old Rite believers collected the icons and books of the pre-Nikon period, which they preserved, restored and reproduced. In the community of Vyg (Pomorje), which Robert Crummey studied in detail, there was a well-organized hierarchical structure among those involved in the “icon industry”, a structure in which a decisive role belonged to those who collected old icons.⁴⁶

Hundreds of icons were gathered in this way in the *Preobrazhenskoye* and *Rogozhskoye* cemeteries in Moscow, important spiritual and administrative centers of the Old Rite Orthodox Church, the former associated with the *Bespopovtsy*, and the latter with the *Popovtsy*.⁴⁷ Representatives of these communities were said to have come to regard pre-Nikonian Russian Orthodox practices and artifacts as exclusively their own, denying the Russian Orthodox Church any claim to the history before Patriarch Nikon. In this respect there are testimonies that they would have taken icons from the old churches, not only to decorate their own places of worship, but also because in this way they considered that they would free the altars of the hands of the “Nikonians”, whose domination was viewed, especially by the *Bespopovtsy*, as a sign of the coming of the Antichrist.

The preservation and reproduction of these icons ensured the continuity and spread of their tradition. As in other fields, they outlined their own process for making and reproducing icons, in which copying played an important role, but also what was called counterfeiting and stylization of old icons, from the 15th–17th centuries.⁴⁸ Especially among the Mstyora iconographers, some collected and restored old icons, in this way also acquiring a skill in reproducing the style and technique of the “old masters.”⁴⁹

Oleg Tarasov describes the way in which a Starover workshop used sources; the illustrated model book (*podlinniki*), various illuminated manuscripts and the collection of icons “painted in the ancient manner” were the main “building materials” for the creation of new icons.⁵⁰ These resources were taken over and stylistically processed in a rather popular, craft culture, in which the rule of quantity, but also the instruction or elementary artistic training of the painters, dictated the value of the works. Art historians have identified four main “manners” that painters in the Suzdalian centers followed, i.e. schools by which they were influenced. First, Muscovite art of the 15th–16th centuries, the true ideal of the “new” icon art, then the Novgorod school of the same period and the Yaroslav school of the 17th century, and fourthly, last but not least, the Stroganov school. There was indeed a real cult for the Stroganov manner, the high artistic quality of which was associated with the special admiration reserved for members of this family, who were seen as ideal representatives of pre-schismatic Russia, distinguished by their piety, passion for holy things and respect for craftsmanship in the execution of the icons. These qualities, as well as the fact that the Stroganovs belonged to the commercial and industrial class, made the Starovers look to them as a model to follow, including in the economic sphere and in the organization of their own religious life.⁵¹

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⁴⁶ Crummey 1970, p. 98-99.

⁴⁷ Юхименко, Лопатин 2009, p. 24-135.

⁴⁸ Преображенский 2012, p. 25 and the issue of forgery. Tarasov 2002, p. 327.

⁴⁹ Tarasov 1990, p. 73. It should be said, however, that the practice of repeating old models of some of the icons most typical of Russian medieval art, was not the exclusive preserve of the Old Believer painters; making copies was part of the Russian culture even before the reform. Famous iconographic types were always copied, they were perpetuated in the 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th centuries, and the monasteries had copies of the miracle-working icons, and of the famous icons of Andrei Rublev. The proliferation of monasteries, the reconstruction of churches in the 15th–17th centuries also meant a greater demand for icons; from elaborate copies, refined in execution, to simple replicas, produced by amateurs, the icons revered for centuries were reproduced continuously. The same familiar types of images were found in many places, from Suzdal and Moscow to Novgorod and Tver, operating on different artistic levels. The collection and copying of old icons by the Starovers was not in itself a new habit in Russian society, but the motivation was new: to conserve and preserve everything belonging to the pre-reformation Russian Church. Kondakov 2012, p. 149.

⁵⁰ Tarasov 2002, p. 310.

⁵¹ Tarasov 2002 p. 326; Kondakov 2012, p. 149.



◀ Fig. 18. *Christ the High Priest*, 19th century, lateral iconostasis in a church in Brăila.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

The style of the icons identified in the Romanian Old Believers churches includes various specific elements, taken from these schools: the flesh in dark tones, greenish or brown, without shadows, a serious and at the same time sad expression of the face, a way of creating the lines, circles and arches that form the buildings, not by hand, freely, but with the help of the ruler. And at the same time, an intense, multicolored chromatic of the garments, with ornamental details and rich floral patterns (fig. 7).

In addition to preserving the icons and ensuring the reproduction of old models, collecting helped to ensure the continuation of a spiritual and liturgical tradition from before the schism that had been preserved in old manuscripts. The Library of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Patriarchate preserves a corpus of 125 Slavonic manuscripts, from the collections of the Uspenia Monastery in Slava Rusă (Tulcea County), the largest and earliest Old Rite monastery in Romania.⁵² They were acquired in 1968, during the time of Patriarch Justinian, and date from the 15th–16th centuries; they are miscellanies of monastic spirituality, collections of saints' lives, theological writings, but also divine service books (one *Psalter* with liturgical annexes, one *Liturgy*,

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⁵² Constantinescu 1974, p. 1041. I thank Archimandrite Policarp Chițulescu, director of the Library and former colleague in the research of church culture, for pointing out this corpus to me and kindly offering me the support to study it.

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53 Chițulescu 2012, p. 87 and note 32 (p. 96).

54 Constantinescu 1974, p. 1941-1943.

55 Нечаева, Баженова 2012, p. 121.

56 *Bespopovtsy* communities, which, having no priests, have no sacraments and hierurgies, make special use of such icons. Нечаева, Баженова 2012, p. 95.

57 Icons with narrative scenes painted in miniature, placed in framed compartments around the central theme, appear in Russian art as early as the 16th century (Novgorod, Yaroslav) in hagiographic icons (so-called *vita icon*). The icon of the *Resurrection with feasts* developed from this compositional structure. For the Starover communities it is one of the most common themes.

58 In Galați, Saint Nicholas Church (1880, rebuilt in the second half of the 20th century), the icons on the iconostasis postdate the rebuilding, but a collection of old icons from the 19th century are placed on the walls. In Brăila / Pisc: Church of the Birth of the Mother of God (1857, destroyed by a fire in 1923, rebuilt in 1977), its iconostases postdate the rebuilding) and in the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God (1863, destroyed by a fire, re-built in 1905) the Russian painter Simeon painted the icons and the mural that can be seen today. This church has a rich heritage of ancient icons, inherited from the prayer house (*molenia*) of the Russian merchant Igor Andreev, on the site of which it was built. The chapel or “winter church” also preserves (on the lateral iconostases and on the walls) valuable icons from the 18th–19th centuries. In Tulcea, the Church of Saint John the Baptist, built in 1868, the Church of the Ascension of the Lord, built in 1921 and the Church of Saint Paraskeva, built in 1857 by the *Bezpopovts* faction, all with an important heritage of icons from the 18th–19th centuries.

one *Apostle*, various *Rules*). Among them, according to a report that Fr. Dumitru Fecioru, adviser to Patriarch Justinian, made in order to purchase them, there are two volumes that the monks from Uspenia bought in 1865 from the Neamț Monastery,⁵³ where the volumes had arrived thanks to some Russian monks before the schism. Also among them are a group of Slavonic-Romanian manuscripts, which belonged to the monasteries of Coșuna and Dragomirna, as well as the church of Saint Paraskeva in Rânduiești, before reaching Slava Rusă from where they were bought by the Library of the Holy Synod.⁵⁴ This suggests that the Old Rite priests and monks were buying books from the monasteries and churches in Moldavia whose monks and priests no longer used the books in worship, but which represented for the Old Rite priests and monks that pre-Nikon tradition which they claimed as their own and preserved.

The iconographic program of an Old Rite church based on the analysis of Romanian Old Believers churches

Just as they rejected all the changes and amendments in the liturgical texts introduced by the reform of Patriarch Nikon, continuing to use the old, “pre-Nikonian” books of the Russian Church, the Old Believers used and venerated icons that they considered to belong to Byzantine or Old Russian iconography. They do not depict saints canonized after 1666, but have their own hagiography, in which the martyrs for the faith of their Church appear, such as Protopope Avvakum or Metropolitan Ambrose. They cultivate Marian icons consecrated and venerated for centuries, such as the *Vladimirskaya*, *Smolenskaya*, *Iversakya*, *Feodorovskaya*, and the *Mother of God of the Sign*, but also compositions based on Western prototypes, such as the *Mother of God*, *Joy of all who Sorrow* or the *Mother of God, Seeker of the Lost*. They write the monogram of Jesus in the form “IC XC” and, perhaps most importantly, they acknowledge only the blessing gesture made with two joined fingers. There are also some iconographic themes and compositional schemes they prefer. For example, the icons with saints distributed over several registers, selected for their miraculous powers as healers of certain diseases and conditions⁵⁵ (fig. 8), sometimes with a small text next to the portrait of each saint, which indicates their particular thaumaturgical attributes.⁵⁶ Then there is the icon with the *Resurrection* in the center, rendered in the twin scenes of the *Descent into Hell* and *Rising from the Tomb*, surrounded by several small scenes,⁵⁷ feasts from the Christological cycle (sometimes also saints, when this “frame” is doubled) that cover the entire liturgical year (fig. 9), as well as certain icons with dogmatic or hymnographic themes (fig. 10).

As I discovered while documenting several Old Believers’ churches in Galați Brăila, and Tulcea Counties,⁵⁸ the iconographic program of the large iconostasis and the lateral iconostases that mark the passage between the liturgical spaces, tend to have a relatively stable set of icons. On the large iconostasis, in the register of the imperial icons, in addition to the icons of the Savior, the Mother of God and the patron saint, there must be the icons of Saints Nicholas of Myra, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, rendered in the iconographic type consecrated by the Old Ritualists, with two fingers raised to their lips, and an angel whispering in their ears with the lion as a symbol, placed



◀ Fig. 19. Four-part Icon, with Saint Nicholas of Myra, Christ the Blessed Silence, Mother of God Softening of Evil Hearts, Saint Vincent, selected saints and Paternity, 19th century, Vetka workshop.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

next to them⁵⁹ (fig. 11). Then there is the register of the Great Feasts, and other registers, more numerous than in the “Nikonian” churches, which present a selection of apostles, not just the twelve, to which are added some prophets, though there is no complete register dedicated to the latter (fig. 12). On the lateral iconostases of the nave, the icon of the Resurrection and the icon of Saint Nicholas of Myra⁶⁰ are the most frequent, each of them followed by sets of imperial icons. Among these, the icon of the Mother of God is always present, alongside icons of saints, but particular themes can also be selected, which in Orthodox churches we also find in mural painting, such as the Ladder of Saint John Climacus, icons from the cycle of the Passion (Descent from the Cross, Lamentation, Washing of the Feet) (fig. 13). The Mandylion, the Mother of God, the Holy Trinity (frequently in the western Paternity type), and the Pokrov appear in the upper register of these lateral iconostases, where the small icons are placed. There are many other icons, added later, most likely donations from the faithful, not part of the fixed structure of these lateral iconostases, but supported by their frames (fig. 14).

In turn, the processional flags placed next to each of these small iconostases join icons in the category of those that have been very popular and are found in our collections, with themes such as the Mandylion, the Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, the Saint Paraskeva, the Mother of God of the Sign and others Marian types.

On the walls of the church, especially at points of transition, but also on the side walls or on the western wall, there are small icons from the same thematic categories, but also sometimes with a dogmatic subject such as the Trinity (Paternity type), Christ Winged (Christ the blessed silence or Christ the angel of the great counsel / Spas Blagoe Molchanie), the Vision of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), the Lord of Hosts among the

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⁵⁹ The Starovers use the symbols of the evangelists differently from other Christian communities: Matthew is symbolized by an angel, Mark by an eagle, Luke by a calf and John by a lion, which is somewhat different from the iconography of the Orthodox Church where Matthew is symbolized by an angel, Mark by a lion, Luke by a calf and John by an eagle. The first variant was common to the Russian iconography of the pre-Nikonian Church, although it was not the only possible one, and goes back to the exegesis of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, while the second is based on the interpretation of Saint Jerome and was used in the West where the Synod of 1666 approved it as the only correct version. Tarasov 1990, p. 70.

⁶⁰ Sometimes in the form of the type “from Mozhaysk”, in which Saint Nicholas holds a sword in one hand and a miniature of a church in the other, a symbol of the fortress he defended from the Tatars.

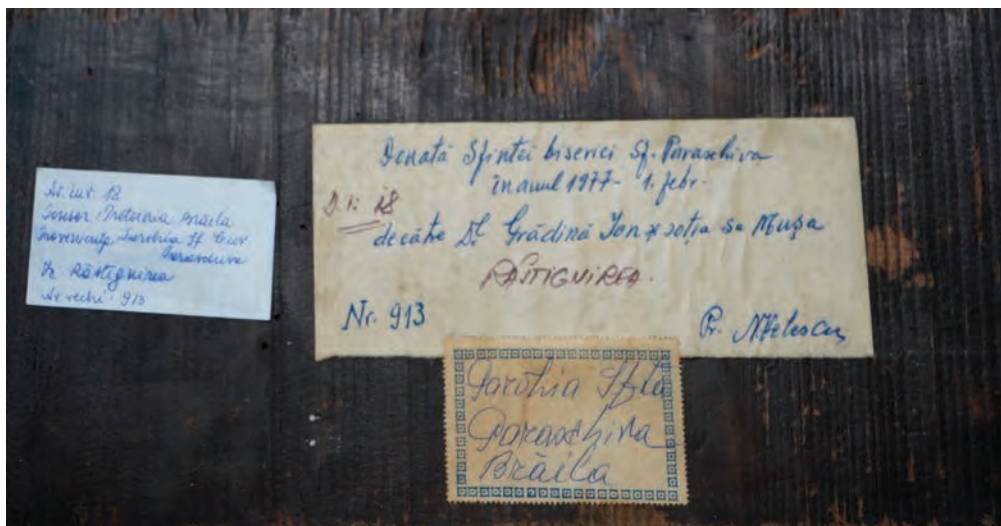


▲ Fig. 20. *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Saint Paraskeva Orthodox Church in Brăila.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

▼ Fig. 21. The reverse of the *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion* from Saint Paraskeva Church in Brăila. The labels certify the donation and the inclusion of the icon in the inventory of the Saint Paraskeva Orthodox Parish in Brăila.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.



Cherubim and Seraphim, and *Saint Sophia or Divine Wisdom*. Among these, many are old icons: on the lateral iconostases, on the processional banners and on the walls there is a mixture of contemporary icons, icons from the beginning of the 20th century (produced since these places of worship were built or rebuilt) and old icons, such as those we know from Romanian museum collections, brought by those who emigrated in the 18th–19th centuries and who subsequently gave them to the church (fig. 15). Iconographically and stylistically there is no difference, apart from the materials used, and a tendency in recent years for more vivid colors, bright varnishes and a stronger outline.

The icon of the Old Rite believers confronted with the “new style”

There is no explicit evidence in the “schism documents” about the artistic style of the reformation, which Tsar Aleksey and Patriarch Nikon would have promoted and which their opponents would have rejected, or about any liturgical practices considered heretical. And this is because, in reality, none of the parties that entered into the dispute was interested in church art and, consequently, did not formulate a position in relation to the style of the icons. Nikolai Andreyev, professor of Slavic studies at the University of Cambridge, says that those who try to use the dispute as an argument for either side adopting one style or another are wrong. For Patriarch Nikon, the reform was a matter of church policy (alignment with the Greek practice, considered to be that of the Byzantine tradition, preserved unaltered, and then imposing the supremacy of the Russian Church in the Pentarchy); it was a practical rather than a theoretical problem and it did not come from a desire to renew or modernize the Church. As an adept of the liturgical reform, it is not self-evident that Nikon wanted to see only icons painted in the new manner, the manner owed to the influences coming from the West, in the churches, but on the other hand we cannot deny that the reform movement promoted by him had an impact on the art of the icon. As a result of a more general change in devotional practice, Western influence, with its orientation towards individual piety and catechetical rhetoric, and associated with certain artistic practices promoted by the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the post-Tridentine period of the Baroque,⁶¹ had been present in the Russian space since the mid-16th century and this influence intensified over the course of the following century. To counter this progressive

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⁶¹ Graikos 2016, p. 177.

break with tradition in the iconography and style of painting sacred subjects, the adepts of the Old Rite felt obliged to take a position, even if that break had not been promoted by the people behind the Reform, whose interest lay in other aspects of cult.

There are two texts of the Old Rite believers (considered true "confessions of faith") in which references to icons appear. They are known as *Дьяконовы ответы / Diakonovy otvety* (1719), i.e. *Pastoral Answers or Deacon Alexander's Answers about Kerzhenets*⁶² (*Ответы Александра диакона на Керженце / Otvety Aleksandra diakona na Kerzhenets*) and *Поморские ответы / Pomorskiye otvety* (1723) or *Hermits' Answers to Hieromonk Neophyte' Questions* (*Ответы пустынножителей на вопросы иеромонаха Неофита / Otvety prustinnojiteley na voprosy ieromonakha Neofita*). Both contain references to icons and their veneration, but without specifying what either the Starover icon or the "Nikonian" icon was.⁶³ The first text contains only a few notes about icons, citing as an example those icons the Old Rite Church ought to venerate, namely: those "painted by the apostle Luke" (e.g. the *Mother of God of Vladimir, of Tikhvin* and others) and those where Christ's monogram is IC XC (*Ответы Александра* 1906, p. 86). The text condemns the "new types of icons" that stem from "Latin models" as being "sensual and indecent because they show holy women without a head covering and with dyed hair" (*Ответы Александра* 1906, p. 89). *Pomorskiye otvety* is a collective work by the fathers of the White Sea Monastery (Pomorje, Vyg), led by Andrei Denisov (1674-1730), the founder of their community; its chapter on icons contains a critique of the innovations introduced by Patriarch Nikon, seen as the source of all disregard for tradition. "Nikon changes icon painting" is the title of one text (*Pomorskiye otvety* 1911, p. 340), which contains a series of references to the decisions of the Stoglav Synod⁶⁴ and to earlier sources, such as the Acts of the Council in Trullo, the writings of Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, or more recent ones, such as the homilies of Patriarch Joachim (1674-1690), as arguments the text adopts to recommend painters to follow their "old and good models" (*Pomorskiye otvety*, 1911, p. 341-342).

In reality, Patriarch Nikon's position was not one of which it could be said that it "changes icon painting". On the contrary, his best-known public statement on this would suggest the opposite. On March 4, 1655, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy of that year (the second after the beginning of the Reform), Patriarch Nikon gave a speech after the liturgy in the Cathedral of the Assumption in Moscow Kremlin, in which he discussed several patristic texts related to the veneration of icons. He then demanded that icons painted in the "Frankish and Polish" styles, confiscated on his orders from the homes of some of the capital's residents, including government officials, be brought to him. He ordered the eyes of the figures painted on these "Western" icons to be gouged out and the icons carried through the streets of the city, announcing that this kind of icon painting was forbidden. Patriarch Macarius of Antioch and Metropolitan Gavril of Serbia, two supporters of the reform, were present and together they anathematized the "heresy of the new iconography."⁶⁵ Paul of Aleppo records the episode: "the patriarchs anathematized and excommunicated both those who painted such icons and those who kept them in their homes. Nikon took the images in his right hand, one by one, showed them to the people, and slammed them against the plates so that they broke into pieces, and then he ordered them to be burned."⁶⁶ These actions perplexed and shocked the crowd, especially since on August 2, 1654, there had been

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⁶² In the 17th-18th centuries, there were settlements of Old Rite believers (Kerzhenets hermitages or simply Kerzhenets) on the banks of the eponymous river. The Old Believers were sometimes called *Kerzhaks* after the name of the river.

⁶³ *Apud* Sulikowska-Belczowska 2019, p. 36. Quotations and references are made to the *Otvety Aleksandra* 1906 and *Pomorskiye otvety* 1911 editions, respectively.

⁶⁴ For the Starovers, the *Stoglav Synod* or *Hundred Chapter Synod* (1551, Moscow) was a landmark. It had approved the Russian Church's own ritual, to the detriment of the one adopted by the Greeks and other Orthodox countries. For Old Rite Christians this was an argument that the decisions of the Synod of 1653, which triggered the schism, deviated from the tradition of the Church, and of the Holy Fathers. Icon painting was also strictly regulated and placed under the authority of the Church as a result of the decisions of the Stoglav Synod, which decided that icons should be "painted according to the old models", in order to end the dispute between the deacon Viskovatii and Patriarch Macarie (1542-1563) over the icons painted by Pskov craftsmen in 1547 for the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow's Kremlin. The Synod of 1666 annulled the decisions of the Stoglav Synod. Uspensky 2005, p. 55-104; Kollmann 1980, p. 65-91.

⁶⁵ The episode is recounted by Sulikowska-Belczowska 2019, p. 5 and by Meyendorff 2015, p. 71-73.

⁶⁶ Paul of Aleppo in *Чтения в Императорском Обществе Истории и Древностей Российских* (ChOIRD), 1898, pt. 3, 131-137. *Apud* Meyendorff 2015, p. 72-73.

►► Fig. 22. Museum of Vladimirești Monastery (Galați County), former display, 1993-2020.
Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

a solar eclipse in Moscow, and the following year an epidemic had broken out, events which the faithful attributed to Nikon's actions related to the reformation of the service books. Patriarch Nikon's reaction at that time primarily targeted private icons, from homes, but the people perceived this moment of the icons' destruction, and of the hunt that followed through their homes, as a manifestation of iconoclasm, and a renunciation of the cult of icons.

For his part, Protopope Avvakum, in his writings, criticized the icons of the "new style", denouncing their sensuality, "the type painted with a full face, red lips, curly hair, fat arms and muscles" and all that makes Christ look "like a German, with a big belly and fat"⁶⁷ Avvakum considered such images heretical or pagan and said in a thomily that "it is better to pray to Heaven or to the East than in front of such an icon". Here Nikon and his opponents were in agreement, as the Patriarch too did not support the icon in the Western manner, or the "German tradition", as Avvakum called it. But, after Nikon authorized the destruction of the icons, many of the faithful, especially among the Starovers, began to perceive him as an iconoclast, and the icons as "martyrs of the faith". Perhaps Nikon's intention was completely different; perhaps he simply wanted a new artistic language for the icon, but the moment was perceived as a sign of the Patriarch's aversion to icons, which could even be destroyed. And this led to growing hostility towards Nikon and his reforms.⁶⁸ In fact, at that time the reformers and their opponents thought very much alike, but the differences between them increased over time.

The art of the Starover icon was defined and developed in conditions of seclusion, isolation and persecution, while the art of the majority Church continued down the path of adopting, on its own terms, the Western influence that introduced the Renaissance and the Baroque to Russia, a process that had begun much earlier. The paradox is that, although in principle they rejected Western-style icons, a series of innovative elements also penetrated the art of the Old Rite believers, even if these innovations were interpreted in a more simple, popular or naive manner than in the art of the established Church.

Beyond this, the aesthetics of the Old Ritualists is reduced to the fact that they do not accept the veneration of the realistic faces of Christ, the Mother of God, just as they do not accept printed icons. They use for the illustration of worship books a type of colored drawing, an illustration made in the typographic technique, which, however, imitates miniature painting (fig. 16). Such images that accompany the text actually derive their models from the *podlinniki*, and for the publishers of those books this is a sign of their authenticity and a guarantee that they do not deviate from tradition.

Their icons are always painted, even if the execution is sometimes sloppy or poor in terms of technique or artistic quality; the essential thing is that it is a painting on a wooden support. They follow certain principles: the faces should have brown, flattened, pure tones, not that full, bright complexion that they condemn in the "icons of heretics"; the posture of the saints should be as immobile as possible.

However, inside an Old Rite church, such as those in Pisc (Brăila) and Tulcea that I have observed in detail, the general impression is not of a space reflecting the old style of the Russian icons, untouched by the influence of European trends. On the contrary, a number of "innovations" are present in the compositions, the plastic treatment and the vivid chromaticism of their icons. The presence of something that could be called simplicity or primitivism (as regards the unsophisticat-

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⁶⁷ Andreyev 1961, p. 43, citing the *Послание к некоему Ионе*, published by A. K. Borozdin, *Protopop Avvakum*, Appendix 10, St. Petersburg, 1898.

⁶⁸ Sulikowska-Belczowska 2019, p. 6.



ed compositions, the drawing and anatomy) does not mean a return to Byzantium or the Russian icon painting of the 14th–16th centuries. Looking in detail at this entire universe created in icons, you notice a combination of old and new, icons that reproduce medieval Russian models, but also costumes and decoration that recall the icons from the Tsar’s workshops in the Kremlin and the vivid chromatic palette of Pskov and Yaroslav. You notice architecture treated in perspective, derived from Western engravings, as taken up by the Muscovite workshops of Ushakov’s time,⁶⁹ and related to the “Western” arches, columns and pediments of the Yaroslav type,⁷⁰ the draperies with golden “lamellas” on some vestments of the Armory and Yaroslav type,⁷¹ the floral ornamentation of others, the red cartouches for monograms and the special clouds that the Baroque brought to the Orthodox icon⁷² (figs 17-18). But they are found side by side with a flattened treatment, with a dark chromaticism of the faces, the gold grounds of the portrait icons, the Byzantinizing postures of the apostles, evangelists and hierarchs in the upper registers of the iconostasis, and the classic compositions of the feasts in the register dedicated to them.

There is a strong stylistic imprint in the Starover churches from Romania, which reflects even more meaningfully the influences of the “new style”, that is the one seen in the icons from Vetka, with their warm chromaticism, elaborate compositions, more naturalistic faces, and a multitude of decorative details.

Vetka is, since modern times, a well-studied centre.⁷³ According to Eberhard, stylistically, the art of this prolific artistic centre combines “the heritage of Nordic drawing and Yaroslav-type decorative effects, but also includes elements from the tsar’s workshops.”⁷⁴ For Komashko,

Notes

⁶⁹ Smirnova 1989, cat. 196, cat. 198.

⁷⁰ Maslenitsyn 1973, cat. 61, cat. 69.

⁷¹ Maslenitsyn 1973, cat. 53.

⁷² Which we encounter in the icons of Procopius Chirin or Kiril Ulanov, painters from the Tsar’s workshops (Smirnova 1989, cat. 190, 202), or in Semion Spiridonov from the Yaroslav school (Maslenitsyn 1973, cat. 53).

⁷³ According to Galina Nečaeva, who was in charge of this school, 73 names of painters from this centre are known, who worked in 20 different workshops, at least four of which were of large dimensions. Нецаева 2002, p. 224.

⁷⁴ Eberhardt 2010, p. 51.

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75 Нечаева, Баженова 2012, p. 121.

76 I first came into contact with the subject of the “Old Rite icon” more than a decade ago, during a research trip to the Old Rite Churches of Periprava and Sarichioi (Tulcea County) and to the Slava Russian and Slava Cercheză monasteries in the same county. At the Vladimirești Monastery (Galați County), we worked in 2020-2021 on the renovation of the museum collection, analyzing for this purpose the important collection of Russian serial icons (114 specimens) that the monastery owns, thanks to the invitation of the abbess, Nazaria Slabu. Through the RCONTRANS Project we have continued the investigation of more collections in 2021-2022. Deacon Dan Cozea, museographer at the Archdiocese of Bucharest, mediated my access to the funds of this diocese. My thanks go to all of them. A first presentation of the conclusions I reached in Văetiși, Cozea 2021.

77 Vivian Dragomir (Dragomir 2011, p. 454-480) and Malvine Mocenco (Mocenco 2020, *passim*) have made an important contribution to the knowledge of some of the specimens in different collections, by publishing the pieces whose conservation or restoration they have taken care of. For her part, Iulia-Lucia Gâță dedicated a dissertation to the graduation of a master’s degree in Conservation-Restoration at the Faculty of Socio-Human Sciences of the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu (Gâță 2014). Vivian Dragomir (Dragomir 2011, p. 454-480) and Malvine Mocenco (Mocenco 2020, *passim*) made an important contribution to our knowledge of some examples in different collections, by publishing the pieces they had conserved or restored. For her part, Iulia-Lucia Gâță dedicated a dissertation for a master’s degree in Conservation-Restoration at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the “Lucian Blaga” University in Sibiu (Gâță 2014) to the subject.

“the old faithful of Kaluga, who appreciated the style of the Armory masters of the late 17th century, had the most direct influence on Vetka”.

The hallmarks of the icons painted here are the warm and bright colors, the abundant use of gold leaf, sometimes stamped with patterns, and the rustic-looking floral ornamentation (fig. 19). In the 19th century the use of a bright green was identified, and after 1880 it was contrasted with a greenish yellow. In terms of iconography, the Vetka artistic center cultivates a specific Marian type called the *Virgin of Fire*, with the face of the Mother of God colored red.⁷⁵

Most of the icons of the Old Believers in Romania belong to this centre. But looking at the interiors of their churches as a whole we can notice a combination of thinking and traditional medieval style, on the one hand, and the simplicity and primitivism of peasant art, on the other, transposed a narrow chromatic range and using a schematic and mannered style of drawing, can be considered the general features of these icons. By adding to these a specific iconographic repertoire (hagiographic, but also dogmatic and eschatological), most often allied with simple, templated or rigorously structured compositions (when their component parts are numerous and diverse), we already have some of the tools with which we can approach this unique category of artifacts that are part of the identity of a particular ethnic and denominational community.

RUSSIAN MASS-PRODUCED ICON IN ROMANIAN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Ignorance of the art of the Romanian Old Believer communities, on the one hand, and the misunderstanding of the broader phenomenon of the Russian mass-produced icon, without an overall perspective of the Russian icon and its evolution, on the other hand, have meant that, at least at the level of general artistic discourse, popular Russian icons, regardless of their origin, have been assimilated to the Old Believer communities, receiving the name of Lipovan icons.

Undoubtedly, there is the possibility of a transfer of artefacts between the Old Believer communities and individuals or museum institutions holding collections of icons, the presence of icons worked in the Vetka art centre, both in Old Rite churches and in museums and repositories in regions where Russian Old Believers settled, but most of the Russian serial icons found today in private collections, monastery or diocesan museums, monastery chapels or bishops’ residences, which belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church, have no connection with the Old Rite religious community.

This confusion or undifferentiated treatment of the two categories of artifacts was something I also experienced at the beginning of the investigation I started several years ago.⁷⁶ Over time I discovered a significant quantity of icons preserved in ecclesiastical repositories and museums, which inventories or restoration publications catalogued with the term *Lipovan* and linked them to the Old Believer communities. This almost unstudied heritage⁷⁷ came from the Russian artistic milieu, and because the largest ethnic Russian community that could be associated with this type of accessible, popular artifact were the Old Rite believers, the overlap was easy to make. Known in Russian literature under the generic term *krasnushki*, these icons made in the 19th century in centres such as Kholuy, Mstyora, Palekh, in an artisanal manner and in family businesses, had reached the territory of Roma-

nian Principalities and could now be found in ecclesiastical collections, but in reality, they had no connection with the religious community of Old Rite Russians.⁷⁸ There are common themes and iconographic formulas and a stylistic approach that allows some analogies, but at this point we can distinguish the two major classes of Russian folk icons present in Romania: 1. icons worked for the Old Believer communities, in their own centres or in those of the Vladimir-Suzdal region who worked commissions both for “Nikonians” and for the Old Believers, and 2. Russian icons traded by merchants, most of them coming from Kholuy workshops, but which were part of the private or even public worship of the Orthodox faithful. The latter explains their presence in warehouses that collected icons from churches in the second half of the 20th century and their sale through auction houses. In relation to this second category, I will formulate some conclusions mainly following two aspects: 1. the circulation of the pieces or the ways in which these icons, mostly from the 19th century, arrived from those who produced them or held them in the respective collections⁷⁹ and 2. the level of value and the subject matter or predilection for certain categories of subjects.

Circulation: the forms of transfer between communities and museum

To determine how these icons ended up in the storerooms of state museums or bishopric, or in monastic and parish museums, we must start from the premise that, before being collected in these institutions, they belonged to people who either donated, sold or disposed of them for various reasons. In churches and monasteries, they come as donations, in state museums, but most frequently, they come through acquisitions.

In the 1960s and 70s, there were a series of measures to inventory, preserve and concentrate in warehouses the movable cultural goods located in religious institutions. This undertaking was supervised by the State Committee for Culture and Art, subordinated to the Council of Ministers.⁸⁰ As a result, in the period 1969-1970, an initial inventory was made of the goods belonging to religious institutions, after which, in the early 80s, work began to collect the old and valuable objects from the parishes. In this context, in which it was stipulated that “icons on wood, on glass and prints of republican and county value (*sic!*) should be urgently concentrated in museums, libraries and specialized preservation and restoration laboratories”, a series of icons that were either degraded or no longer used in worship⁸¹ were collected from parishes and put in storage repositories specially arranged in each bishopric (figs 20-21). While the collection was going on, where there were the proper conditions for preservation of these items, usually in the monasteries, it was proposed that the objects “remain in the collections of the monasteries or in their repositories”⁸² The icons had reached the monasteries either through donations from the faithful, or from the dowries of the monks who had brought the icons with them when they entered the monastery, or, as we will see in the two case studies presented below, through collections from the villages around the monasteries by some monks or abbots who wanted to set up collections in their monasteries. Today these icons can be seen in monastic or episcopal museums, in monks’ cells or perhaps stored in the repositories of these two types of institutions belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church.

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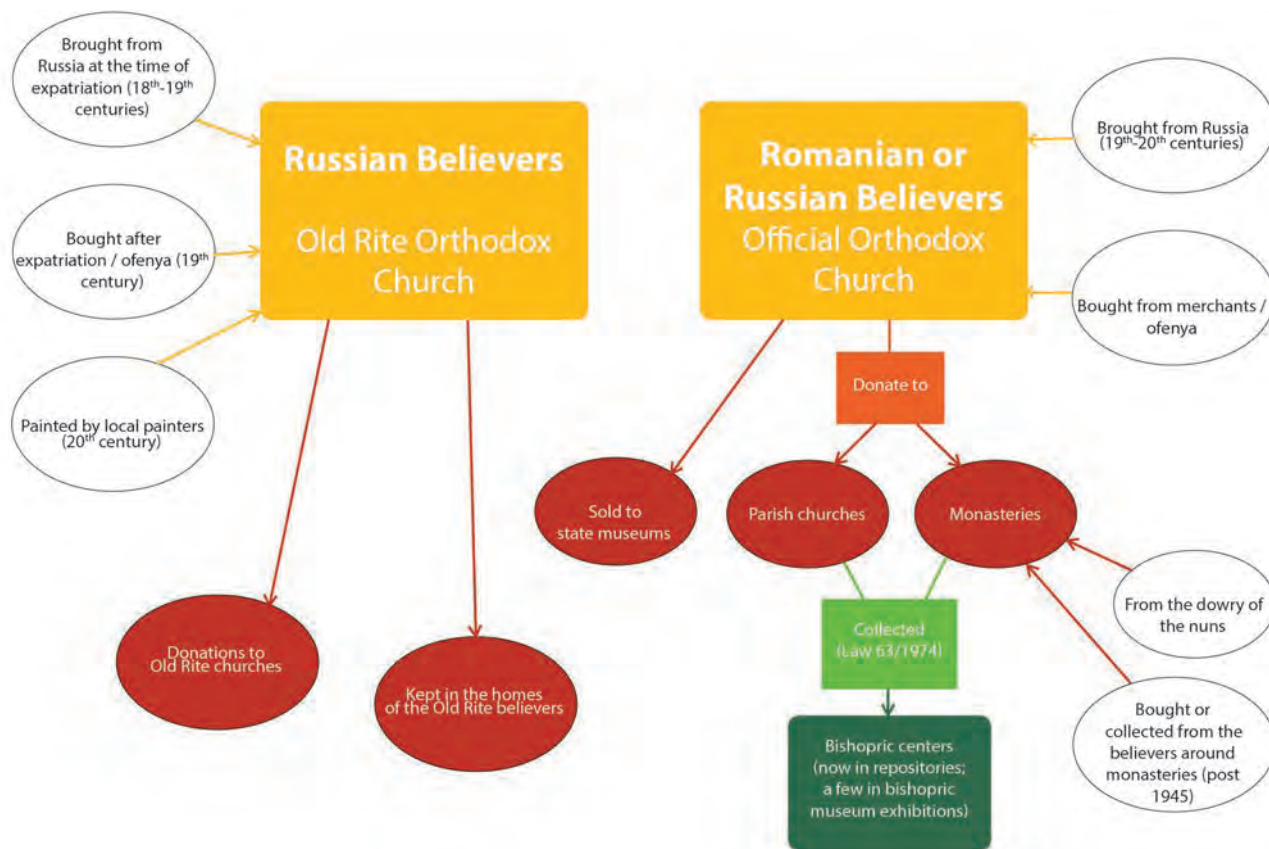
78 See also the chapter authored by Cristina Cojocaru in this volume. In this section of my contribution, I analyse those Russian serial icons that predominate in the monastery and diocesan museum collections that I have documented – simple icons, with several saints or scenes, with a modest, patterned artistic execution – and not more elaborate compositions, marked by Baroque aesthetics.

79 We have assessed the situation in the Archdiocese of Dunărea de Jos (covering the counties of Galați and Brăila), with a collection of 51 serial Russian icons, and in the Archdiocese of Buzău and Vrancea (Counties of Buzău and Vrancea), with 76 serial icons, and also in the collections of the monasteries of Vladimirești (County of Galați) and Pasărea (County of Ilfov), for which we had access to information on the collection of this type of icons.

80 The legislative framework of the action was provided by *Decree no. 724/1969, of the State Council, regarding the protection and preservation of assets of national interest that represent artistic, historical or documentary values* (published in the *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 115 of October 23, 1969) and by *Law no. 63/1974 on the protection of the national cultural heritage of the Socialist Republic of Romania*, issued by the Great National Assembly (published in the *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 137 of November 2, 1974.) For their content: www.lege5.ro.

81 Cozea 2022, p. 3. There were three categories of objects selected, from those that were no longer in use: e.g. “old books from the 16th–19th centuries, non-cult objects made of precious metals and cult objects (icons, metal and wood objects, textiles, etc.) (Archive of the Archbishopric of Bucharest, cf. Cozea 2022).

82 Archive of the Archbishopric of Bucharest. File *Application of Decree 724/1969 for the protection and preservation of goods of national interest*, f. 2.



▲ Fig. 23. Chart of Circulation.

Notes

⁸³ Dragomir 2011, p. 462, 468, 469, 480 (from the collections of the Art Museum in Tulcea and the National Village Museum).

⁸⁴ This is the case of the Cernica, Căldărușani, Pasărea and Țigănești Monasteries of the Archbishopric of Bucharest. The monographs of these monasteries record the Bessarabian presence in the 19th century and after 1940 in their monastic communities.

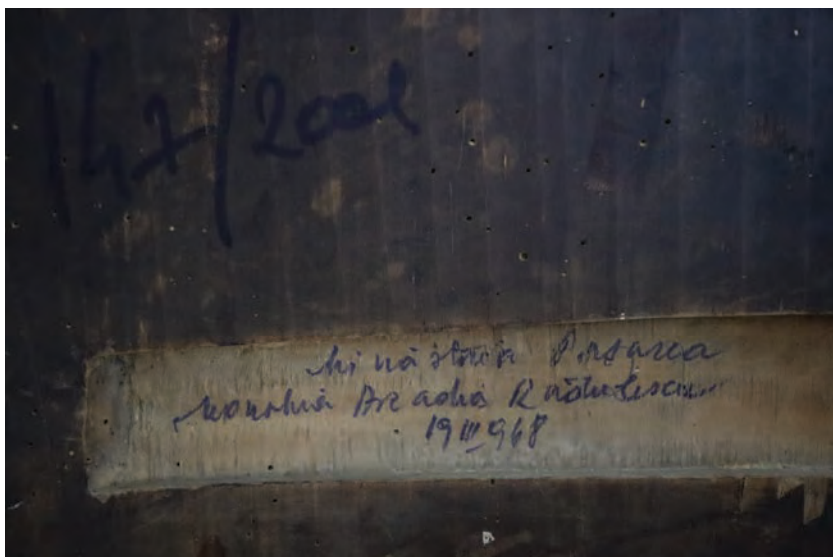
⁸⁵ Agachi 2008, *passim*.

⁸⁶ Tarasov 1990, p. 70; Jenks 2004, p. 14. According to a report of the Ministry of the Interior Affairs (1858) quoted by Jenks: “They serve a diverse clientele, peasants and Starovers, aristocrats and representatives of the Church (official – n. n.)” or, in another place: “they also produce for official orthodoxy and for Old Rite believers. Many maintain a mixed style, with Western and Byzantine elements (*Friaz*), which is very popular among merchants and nobility”. Kondakov, cited by Tara-

As for the other category of institutions that preserve Russian serial icons, the public museums, the icons got there through acquisitions and donations, but also through the redistribution by the General Inspectorate of the *Miliția* (later the General Inspectorate of Police) of some confiscated pieces; among the icons that fell under the jurisdiction of the heritage legislation in the Communist period.⁸³

This network that I have sketched here helps us understand that, in different ways, the Russian mass-produced icons had come to be integrated into the devotional practice of Orthodox congregations, a phenomenon of transfer due, on the one hand, to the owners living in the same geographical area and, on the other, to the availability of this type of icon. In addition, there were also migrations of ethnic Romanians after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Tsarist Empire (1812) and the Soviet Union (1940). These populations came from heavily Russified areas, and among the goods they brought with them were the icons they had in their households, and this included mass-produced icons. Also, from the monasteries there was an exodus of Bessarabian monks, who settled, after the occupation of Bessarabia, in the old monasteries around Bucharest. In turn, they brought with them the icons they had, which thus became part of the patrimony of the monasteries where these monks were received.⁸⁴ During the Russo-Turkish wars and during the period of Russian administration in the Romanian Principalities (1806-1812), many Russians arrived on the territory of Moldavia and Wallachia; some settled with their families, both temporarily or permanently⁸⁵ (fig. 23).

Each of these social categories – refugees, monks, members of the tsarist army or administration – could own this type of icon. We know that in the 19th century, the workshops of Palekh and Mstyora produced icons, ranging in value from the cheap and popular to the expensive, elaborate and precious, both for the Starovers and for the Orthodox



◀ Fig. 24. The reverse of an icon owned by nun Arcadia Rădulescu, Pasărea Monastery Collection.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

▶ Fig. 25. Icon in four registers, with Birth of the Mother of God, Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, a military saint slaying the dragon and Crucifixion, 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Vladimirești Collection.

Copyright: Vladimirești Monastery.

▼ Fig. 26. *Mother of God of the Sign*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Vladimirești Collection.

Copyright: Vladimirești Monastery.



congregations of the majority Church, of all social classes.⁸⁶ We find here, in this movement of Romanians coming from the annexed territories or Russians settling on Romanian soil, a multi-layered source of influence from the Russian world, and these icons, which arrive in Romania as gestures of piety, but also as symbols of power and political authority,⁸⁷ are an instrument of this transfer.

For two of the monasteries mentioned above, Vladimirești (with 114 icons) and Pasărea (with 30 icons), documents and oral history allow us to reconstruct the way in which the collection of icons related to Starover communities was constituted; this is why we propose them as case studies.

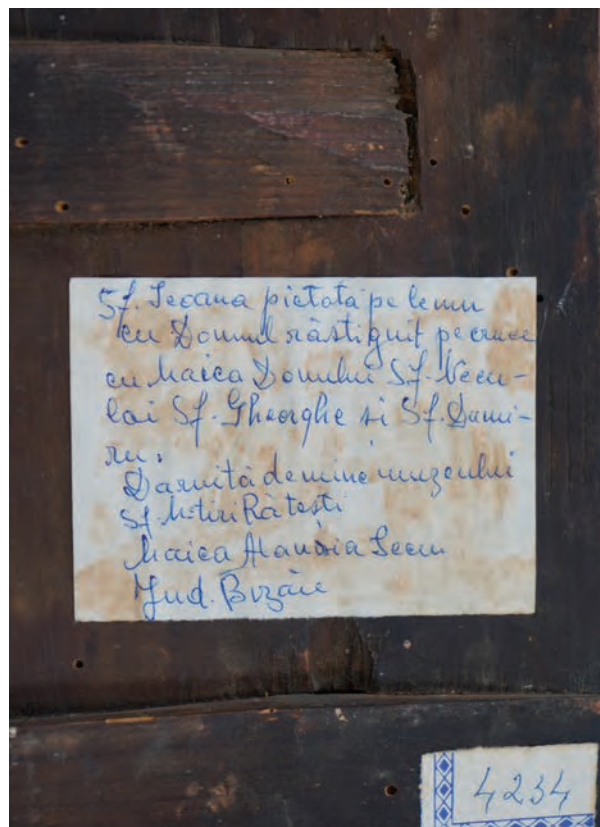
In the 1970s, the founder and abbess of the Vladimirești Monastery, Veronica Gurău (1920-2015), who at the time was living a lay life, as a result of the monastery having been closed and the community dispersed in 1956,⁸⁸ asked the former nuns, with whom she was in contact, to start a campaign to collect old icons from the villages and

Notes

sov 1990, p. 71: in the 19th century, the main sales centers of Suzdal painting are *south-eastern Russia*, Romania and the Balkan Peninsula (s. n.).

⁸⁷ Graikos 2016, p. 172.

⁸⁸ Vladimirești Monastery was founded in 1939 by a group of benefactors, after the young Vasilița Gurău had a vision. It experienced a period of great flourishing, between 1940-1955. The mystical and eucharistic piety it maintained among the believers of that time attracted the attention of the Communist



▲ Fig. 27-28. *Four-part Icon, with Crucifixion*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop. The label states that the icon was donated by a nun to the Rătești Monastery museum.
Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

Notes

authorities, who decided to close the monastery and disperse the monastic community. At the time of its closure, in 1956, the community consisted of 300 nuns; most of them continued after returning to secular life to lead a quasi monastic existence. This is the *extra muros* history of Vladimirești, which lasted until the reopening of the monastery in 1990, immediately after the fall of the Communist regime, when Veronica Gurău became abbess again. See Luchian 2020, p. 150-166.

⁸⁹ Cf. Archive of CNSAS, Informative corpus, file 160 128/6, f. 265. Onișor 2007, p. 164-165.

⁹⁰ Onișor 2007, p. 164-165.

⁹¹ Atanasiu, Palade 2013, p. 117-118; interview with Sister Emanuela Tăbăraș in March 2021.

towns where they lived.⁸⁹ Most had returned, after the dissolution of the monastery by the political authorities, to their places of origin: Brăila, Galați, Vaslui, Bacău, and Botoșani Counties. They found such icons in the houses of Romanian believers and either bought them or managed to obtain them in exchange for lithographs or cheap icons on paper. The icons reached Abbess Veronica in Bucharest where she was living at that time. After the reopening of the monastery in 1990, these icons found their place in the monastery museum, which was set up at that time (figs 22), but also in some official spaces, at the abbess's house, and in the cell of Abbess Veronica, who returned after 30 years to the monastery she had been forced to leave. This was a case of clandestine transfer, outside of any institutional framework, given that the monastery did not even exist in the 70s-80s, when the icons were collected. The icons passed from the houses of the faithful in the villages and towns of Moldavia, to the Bucharest apartment of Abbess Veronica (there are testimonies from those who visited her at that time according to which her walls were completely covered with icons and that in the 80s she came under the jurisdiction of the Law 18 regarding the possession of old objects⁹⁰) and then they reached the monastery once it was reopened in 1990, where they are to this day. It was a particular situation, where such a rich collection was fully saved and is for the most part on display.

Another case which developed in less hostile conditions is that of the Russian mass-produced icons collection from Pasărea Monastery. At least three names of nuns are recorded in the archive and retained in the oral history of the monastery in connection with the setting up of the collection of icons.⁹¹ Mother Agapia Brumă, former abbess of the Frumoasa Monastery in Bessarabia, took refuge after 1944 in Romania together with a group of nuns, taking with them the monastery's valuables, including icons. She arrived at Pasărea, bringing



◀ Fig. 29. *Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts*, 19th century, workshop from Vladimir region, Pasărea Monastery Collection.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

numerous Bessarabian metal covered icons, but also mass-produced Russian ones. The second revered name is that of Anchorite Mina Stoicescu (1898-1998); she also came from Bessarabia, but fled in 1944 to Romania as a refugee. On the way, she bought icons, or bartered other goods for them, from Bessarabian refugees, who were bringing their icons with them to Romania. Mother Arcadia Rădulescu (1885-1973), however, is the one who managed to preserve the most icons of this type; she was also a genuine collector. In a published dialogue, she describes how she collected the icons: “I rather found them occasionally, at relatives’ houses, in the attic of a house, from people who wanted to sell them or as an inheritance from the nuns who left me the house.”⁹² She wove carpets that she sold, and with the money she collected, she bought icons from the households in the villages neighboring the monastery. In 1967, when the Pasărea Monastery museum was set up, Mother Arcadia donated part of the icons she had collected (82 icons) and other objects to the monastery. Russian icons donated by Arcadia Rădulescu are exhibited in the museum, but most of them are kept in storage all with her name on the back (fig. 24).

Notes

⁹² Bălan 1984, p. 418.

- Fig. 30. *Mother of God Tikhvinskaya*, 19th century, Kholuy workshop, Pasărea Monastery Collection. Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.



Artistic quality and iconography

For those who bought or collected them, these Russian mass-production icons meant an affordable category of objects. They were cheap, could be purchased from itinerant merchants, and had a simple and unsophisticated level of depiction of saints or feasts.

Some of the icons that end up in monasteries after being collected in this way are devoid of artistic value; they have that primitive manner of treating subjects known to Byzantine or post-Byzantine iconography. They use clumsy, sketchy outlines drawn in black, with a restricted palette of just 3-4 colors. They are icons of saints, sometimes divided into four scenes or three registers.

Regarding the iconographic subjects, a quantitative evaluation shows us that the most common theme in the case of the Vladimirești Monastery is the *Four-part Icons with Crucifixion* (20 icons), while *Saint Nicholas of Myra* and the *Mother of God and Christ Child* (in different iconographic variants) are the next two most popular themes (figs 25-26). In the Lower Danube Archbishopric, where the icons mostly come from parish churches, the most common/most popular subject

is the Resurrection with Feasts, an icon that is most frequently found in churches, for public devotion. The icon of the Resurrection with Christological scenes around it, considered the “icon of the liturgical year,”⁹³ was assimilated in Orthodox churches; it most likely came from donations by the faithful.

Just like the Old Rite believers, for whom such an icon concentrated in one panel all the icons of the feasts, for the Orthodox the corresponding icon summarizes the entire Christological cycle on one panel.⁹⁴ Similarly there were also icons with popular saints (Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint Paraskeva, Prophet Elijah) or Marian themes from hymnography or hagiographic literature (*The Eulogy to the Mother of God, Mother of God, Joy of all Who Sorrow*). Although they came from a different liturgical and visual culture, they had become so familiar that they also found a place in the churches of the Romanian Christians.

In the Buzău and Vrancea Archbishopric, on the other hand, where in 2014 the collection of another monastery (Rătești) was taken over, the *Four-part Icon with Crucifixion* is the most popular theme (figs 27-28). At Pasărea Monastery, the *Mother of God and Christ Child*, in various iconographic variants, appears most frequently, followed by the *Resurrection with feasts* (figs 29-30). The simplest explanation for this would be that the nuns who collected the icons, chose them in accordance with their personal piety; we know that these icons, at least at Pasărea and Rătești, were part of the prayer corner in monastic cells.⁹⁵

The conclusion that can be drawn from this quantitative assessment of Russian mass-production icons in ecclesiastical collections is that they were, at least in the villages of northern and southern Moldavia and Bucharest, where there were large monastic communities, a category of artefacts purchased for personal piety. They then ended up in parish churches or monastery museums and from there in diocesan repositories, and today constitute a significant part of the collection of these institutions. But this phenomenon has nothing to do with the communities of the Russian Old Believers. The circulation of their icons remains, like their entire community culture, within a closed framework. The percentage of the Old Rite icons (most of which were made in the Vetka art centre) that end up in museums is very small and insignificant compared to that of the series icons, artificially and wrongly associated with the Lipovan Russians.

This so-called “folk” or “rural” visual culture from Russian craft workshops that we encountered in two different cultural and confessional milieus (the Old Rite Church and the ecclesiastical museum) must be read on two different levels. “Lipovan icon” is not an inclusive term, and the routes and circulation of the two categories of artifacts follow different paths. For the Old Believers they are their icons, their mark of identity, but they remain within their confessional group. For the majority Orthodox, they are an accessible category of icons, used in private worship, but which can also find their way into public collections through various ways, a phenomenon of cultural transfer due to the fact that they fulfil the needs of personal piety in a simple, popular manner.

Notes

⁹³ Graikos 2016, p. 171.

⁹⁴ In the episcopal museums, this is one of the themes selected to be part of the exhibition, a fact that also demonstrates its assimilation into the cultural discourse.

⁹⁵ In the collection taken over by the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea from the Rătești Monastery, which was at that time an idiorhythmic monastery, the icons that belonged to the nuns have their names inscribed on the reverse.



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Mass-Produced Russian Icons in Romania: A Critical Analysis of the “Lipovan Icon” Designation

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National University of Arts
Bucharest

In some recent Romanian academic publications,¹ as well as in the professional jargon used in restoration laboratories,² auction houses, and in the non-specialized museum environment,³ the use of the term “Lipovan icon” has been widely perpetuated to denote a rather homogeneous and widespread category of artifacts, i.e. a large series of icons produced in workshops on Russian territory during the late 18th and the 19th centuries. Although specialists in art history⁴ and academic publications⁵ never adopted this designation, it became very popular, generating confusion in the perception, classification, and research into these objects.

At the same time, the overwhelming amount of this kind of icons in almost all private and museum collections in Romania, as well as their obvious allogenic character, duly noticed by the public, collectors, and experts, brought about a wittingly reluctance to approach the subject over time. This led to the current scarcity of information and texts on Russian icons in the Romanian historiography. Thus, paradoxically, an enormous patrimonial corpus was simply ignored or avoided precisely because of the difficulty of collecting, systematizing, and analyzing such a huge amount of data, but also because the objects concerned were not deemed sufficiently “Romanian”⁶ to deserve the attention of researchers, museum curators, or decision-makers in this cultural field. They were often treated exclusively from the perspectives of Ethnographic Studies and Ecclesiastical History, being valued only in folk art museums or departments and in church or monastery museums. Although a significant number of such art objects can be found in the storerooms of most history and art museums, they have not been included in the museums’ permanent exhibitions nor published in catalogues. In some situations, even though these icons were at some point exhibited, new curatorial projects excluded them to make room for other items and themes thought to be of greater interest.⁷

◀ Fig. 1. *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Ciocile, Brăila County.

Copyright: Museum of Christian History, Culture and Spirituality from the Lower Danube in Galați.

Notes

1 Dragomir 2011, p. 103-114. Mocenco 2020.

2 See Geba, Vlad, Sălăjan 2011.

3 See the museum labels at the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

4 See Pârvulescu 2004, the records drawn up by Ioana Ene for the Râmnicu Vâlcea County Museum and the classification order no. 2699/28.10.2014 Corpus, Positions 4,5,6,7 from the National History Museum of Romania; classification order no. 3834/14.10.2016, Corpus, Positions 103, 112, 118, 124, 125, 129, 131, 133, and classification order no. 2707/03.11.2014 Corpus, Positions 10 and 11 from the National Museum of Art of Romania; classification order no. 2073/19.02.2009, Corpus, Positions 15, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28, 34, 37, 40 from the Golești Museum of Viticulture and Pomiculture, Argeș County.

5 Duicu 2014.



▲ Fig. 2. *Saint Nicholas of Myra, vita icon*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Caransebeș, Caraș-Severin County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

Notes

6 The nationalist orientation that characterized cultural policy in Romania, both in the first half of the 20th century and in the period 1965-1989, privileged the almost exclusive study and publication of icons created by indigenous painters or Romanian schools, all the artworks originating from foreign workshops (Greek, Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, etc.) being systematically excluded.

7 Chițulescu, Duicu, Văetiși 2016, p. 13.

8 On the settlement of Russian Old Believers in what is now Romanian territory, see the chapter authored by Atanasia Văetiși in this volume, and Procop 2021.

9 In certain periods during the 18th century, Vetka was not part of the Russian Empire.

10 Tarasov 2002. Tarasov 1990, p. 69-79.

11 Tarasov 1990, p. 70.

It is therefore imperative to put into historical perspective the presence of these icons on the current territory of Romania and to provide an analysis of their distribution and thematic. This will demonstrate that the expression “Lipovan icons” is an inadequate label because most of these art objects were not a direct result of the culture of the Russian Old Believers’ communities who had settled in certain areas of Moldavia and Dobrudja in the 18th and 19th centuries and were called Lipovans by the Romanian locals.⁸ On the contrary, they were rather intended from the beginning for the cult of the Romanian Orthodox population. I hope that this endeavour will also lead to a reevaluation of the status of mass-produced Russian icons in relation to the autochthonous culture, and to a revival of interest in them in the field of museum research.

This distinct category of Russian mass-produced icons was created in specialized workshops in the Vladimir-Suzdal area from the late 17th century until the present day. The peak of this production was in the 19th centuries, when this kind of icons were known by the generic term *krasnushki*. The most important production centers, Kholuy, Vetka,⁹ Mstyora, Palekh, were located in villages inhabited by craftsmen, both Nikonians and Old Believers (*raskolniki*), specialized in the artisanal production of icons and other decorative objects and organized in family workshops. According to the data provided by historian Oleg Tarasov,¹⁰ in the 19th century these workshops produced several million icons a year, an incredible performance if we relate to the size of the population in that period. According to the statistics of the Department of Economic Evaluation of the Vladimir Province Council, in the mid-19th century, the Kholuy center alone employed 720 local residents and produced between 1.5 and 2 million icons a year. Another 640 craftsmen were active in Palekh and 280 in Mstyora.¹¹



Production practices involved entire families, including women and children, and employed a division of labour, a strategy that was also common in the great painting centers of Russia and Mount Athos. In other words, one artisan made the panel, another prepared the support layer, another sketched the design / incisions, others applied the metal leaf, then the colors, followed by punched decoration carried out with punches of various patterns and shapes or with punching wheels, and finally someone else did the inscriptions. Another part of the community dealt with procuring materials, producing brushes and preparing paints. Thus, the work was carried out at high speed, which allowed the production of around 20-30 icons a day in each workshop. The icons were distributed locally, at fairs and markets in the Russian Empire, though an important part of the production was intended for export to areas inhabited by the Orthodox populations of central and southern Europe, such as Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, or the Habsburg Empire. A complex and well-established network of carriers and traders called *ofenyas* was used.¹² They were either family members of the painters who were specialized in transport and trade,

- ▼ Fig. 3. *Descent into the Hell and Various Saints*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop.
 Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.
- ▲ Fig. 4. *Mother of God, Joy of All who Sorrow*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop.
 Copyright: Hurezi Monastery.

Notes

¹² Tarasov 1990, p. 71-72.

► Fig. 5. *Four-part Icon, with the Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George Slaying the Dragon and the Archangel Michael Commander of the Fearsome Host*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Pasărea Monastery Museum, Ilfov County. Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

►► Fig. 6. a) *Resurrection / Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts*, second half of the 18th century, prior to 1771, Kholuy workshop; b) signature detail. Provenance: Feneș, Timiș County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.



or the painters themselves, who during the winter were active in the workshop, while in the summer they travelled through the fairs and markets of the aforementioned areas, selling their products, especially on the occasion of great feasts and celebrations of the patron saints of monasteries or other public holidays. They sold them directly from carts or displayed them on tall poles, as can be seen in the watercolour painting *Fair in Transylvania* by Franz Neuhauser the Younger, kept at the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu.¹³

Over and above their aesthetic value and artistic quality, these icons are primarily relevant from the perspective of social history, as they constitute a mass phenomenon, which marks the liberalization of access to worship and culture that characterized the Romanian Principalities in the 18th and 19th centuries. The phenomenon of democratization of the patronage,¹⁴ which marks a change in mentality specific to modern society, meant that after 1720 the involvement in the construction and decoration of places of worship was no longer a prevalent privilege of the ruler (*Voivode*) and the great nobility (*boyars*), but a broader right to which the middle classes also had access. Consequently, it became a form of social affirmation for certain categories of people whose economic and political role was becoming more important.¹⁵ The humble devotion that in the past had marked any donation or patronage in the symbolic order of the relationship with the spiritual world, now, on the threshold of modernity, acquires a new dimension that involves the historicity of the act.¹⁶ In this transitional period between medieval

Notes

¹³ On the travels of these craftsmen see: Dumitran, Dăné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, p. 145- 187 and Kostopoulos 2021, p. 189-199.

¹⁴ Pușcașu 2001, p. 190, 212.

¹⁵ Popa 2002, p. 9.

¹⁶ Vasiliu 1982, p. 19.



► Fig. 7. a) *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya*, 1776, Kholuy workshop; b) signature detail. Pasărea Monastery Museum, Ilfov County.

Credits: Atanasia Văetiși.

►► Fig. 8. a) *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop; b) signature detail. Cernica Monastery Museum, Ilfov County.

Credits: Cristina Cojocaru.

and modern times, in the context of the growing economic power of the lower and middle classes of the rural or urban society in the Romanian Principalities, more and more people could afford to build churches and acquire icons for their homes. All social categories are involved in the donation of icons to local churches, “from the bishop to the poor”, but the mass phenomenon is largely generated by the lower nobility,¹⁷ by army officers, by priests from local parish churches and simple monks, by city-dwellers, but especially by wealthy merchants and craftsmen, guildsmen led by their foremen and guild masters, and by free peasants and animal breeders and sellers, particularly shepherds (*mocani*) and horse sellers (*geambași*), many of them ethnic Aromanians (Vlachs, Macedo-Vlachs, Macedo-Romanians, Tsintsari),¹⁸ whose transhumant lifestyle meant that they had the chance to cross paths with the transport networks of the *ofenyas*. Thus, the possession of icons, which for many centuries had been the exclusive prerogative of the upper classes, became, at the dawn of the Modern Era, a desideratum for the emerging middle class, eager for emancipation by imitating the practices of the upper classes and the aulic status.

At the same time, this social phenomenon is also closely related to a spiritual transformation occurring in the pre-modern period, through the rise of private devotion (*devotio moderna*), expressed through the appearance of prayer corners in private homes, and through the growth of devoutness and pietism at all levels of society. Important religious movements, such as the Hesychast monastic revival, which Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului and Saint Paisius Velichkovsky¹⁹ initiated in Moldavia and Wallachia in the 18th and 19th centuries, represents yet another proof of this.

Thus, mass-produced Russian icons, cheap enough to be bought by peasants and yet sufficiently well-crafted and detailed to satisfy their need for emulation and social affirmation, became a highly accessible and desirable means of affirming these new aspirations. The possibility of owning such objects, considered up to that point a luxury, was attractive in particular to the Romanians from the south of Moldavia, Bărăgan and Dobruja, not only due to their immediate geographical proximity to the Russian Empire, which facilitated transport links, but also to the lack of local painting schools that could produce cheap icons of average or low quality. Contrariwise, in Oltenia, where prolific painting workshops, such as the one in Teiuș (Vâlcea County) or Bălești (Gorj County) still existed, there was no massive take-up of Russian icons, which explains the fact that there are not many of them in the area to this day. By contrast, in Muntenia, the workshops of the post-Brancovan painters,²⁰ who were still active in the late 18th century and at the beginning of the following century, channelled their production mainly to the churches founded by boyars and rich guilds, being unable to cover the increased demand for icons from the emerging categories, such as peasants and craftsmen. Thus, the Russian mass-produced icons became the real *best sellers* there.

Last but not least, the spread of Russian icons in the Orthodox territories under the authority or suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire must also be understood from a political perspective, an extremely important aspect for the circulation and assimilation of these objects, as will be shown below. The confrontation of the three great empires, which shared their spheres of influence in Central and South-Eastern Europe, also had significant consequences in the fields of art and spirituality, to the extent that these aspects were instrumentalized as vectors of propaganda and control on behalf of the policies of the respective states. The idea of national determination and

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17 Such as *culceri*, *slugeri*, *paharnici*, *pitari*, many of them appointed in exchange for a fee from amongst the purveyors and servants gathered at the courts of the Phanariot rulers.

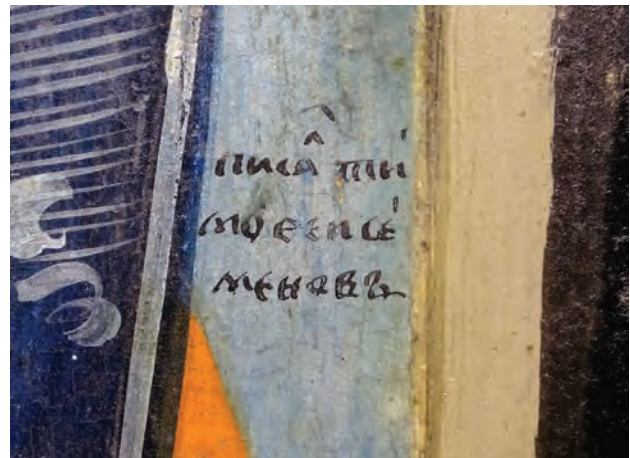
18 Identifiable by distinctive onomastics, i.e names such Mușa or Moscu, found on icons in votive inscriptions.

19 McGuckin 2009, p. 157-173. Zamfirescu 1996.

20 Among the most famous are Radu the Painter, son of Mihai the Painter, Gheorghe from Bucharest, Radu the Deacon, with the brothers Ion and Constantin, sons of Șerban the Deacon from Câmpulung, Ioan from Argeș and Râmnic, the brothers Ioan and Ilie from Teiuș, Pantelimon the Painter, etc. They are joined by some innovative painters, followers of the Westernizing style, such as Grigorie Popovici (Frujinescu).

21 Dancu, Dancu 1975; Dumitran 2018.

22 Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021.



emancipation, one of the most important paradigms that marked the history of the 18th and 19th centuries, was skilfully used by the Russian Empire, which consistently followed its policy as the Third Rome, and generously shared its financial support and cultural model with Orthodox populations under pressure from Catholic or Muslim authorities, in the name of defending the True Faith (Orthodoxy). In this context, the export of Russian icons to Transylvania and the Serbo-Croatian territories under Habsburg rule acquired the significance of a political strategy. The phenomenon of the Russian artisanal icons can legitimately be compared with that of the icons on glass from Transylvania, a subject that has been studied more comprehensively in our historiography,²¹

since I consider a juxtaposition of the two is fully justified at the social level. Following recent research, published in the study *Russian Icon Marketing in Transylvania as a Means of Political and Social Destabilization*,²² the contextualization of some archival documents suggests that the two are in a relationship of determination. Namely, the cessation of the trade of Russian icons in Transylvania created the need for a local production to replace the lack of very cheap icons intended for the common Orthodox population. Thus, very shortly after the establishment of the effects of the imperial decree against Russian icon pedlars in 1785, many Transylvanian icon painters began making glass icons on a large scale, a truly revealing move, not understood until recently.

- Fig. 9. *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop, Cernica Monastery Museum, Ilfov County. Credits: Cristina Cojocaru.

Notes

23 Alba, Argeş, Bacău, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Braşov, Brăila, Bucureşti, Buzău, Caraş-Severin, Călăraşi, Cluj, Constanţa, Dâmboviţa, Galaţi, Giurgiu, Gorj, Harghita, Ialomiţa, Ilfov, Iaşi, Neamţ, Prahova, Sibiu, Suceava, Teleorman, Timiş, Tulcea, Vaslui, Vâlcea, Vrancea.

24 Moldavia: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galaţi; Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău and its repository; Museum of the Bishopric of Huşi and its repository; the repository of icons from the Bogdana Monastery, Bacău County; ‘Ştefan cel Mare’ County Museum of Vaslui; Văratec Monastery Museum and its repository, Neamţ County; Valea Neagră Monastery Museum, Vrancea County; Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iaşi and its repository; ‘Moldova’ National Museum Complex, Iaşi; Cetăţuia Monastery Museum, Iaşi; Three Hierarchs Monastery Museum, Iaşi; Putna Monastery Museum, Suceava County; Rogozu Monastery Museum, Vrancea County; Vladimireşti Monastery Museum, Galaţi County; Saint George Church in Voroveşti village, Iaşi County; Saint John the Forrunner Church in Ciorteşti village, Iaşi County.

Muntenia: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea and its repository; Ciolanu Monastery Museum, Buzău County; ‘Carol I’ Museum of Brăila; Museum of the Archbishopric of Argeş and Muscel, Curtea de Argeş; ‘Curtea Domnească’ Museum Complex of Târgovişte; Brâncoveanu Palace, Potlogi; Bucharest Municipality Museum; Cernica Monastery Museum, Ilfov County; Pasărea Monastery Museum, Ilfov County; Ghighiu Monastery Museum, Prahova County; Collection of the Archbishopric of Giurgiu; Collection of the Bishopric of Slobozia and Călăraşi; National Museum of Agriculture in Slobozia; National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest; National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest; Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest; ‘Dimitrie Gusti’ National Village Museum, Bucharest; Romanian Aca-



In the context of this study, I have taken all the necessary measures to make a clear distinction between the icons fund used by the Orthodox Romanians and one that belonged to the Russian Old Believers' communities, to demonstrate that the term “Lipovan icon” is used arbitrarily and inappropriately. Therefore, from the vast material gathered during the extensive field research I have carried out as part of the RICONTRANS project, I have exclusively selected icons in public collections, both lay and ecclesiastical, whose provenance could be determined. As a matter of principle, I chose not to include any icons from private collections, precisely to avoid confusion regarding the origins of the pieces between the Romanian and Old Believers' milieu. Thus, I achieved a study sample amounting to 1000 icons, spread over 30 counties,²³ from all the major historical provinces of the country: Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania and Banat, coming from the collections of no less than 57 institutions (museums or other heritage management bodies).²⁴ Of these, 822 art objects can be classified as *krasnushki*, while 119 belong to the vernacular Baroque style.²⁵

The systematization of this material, unprecedented in Romania, has provided some surprising new data regarding the dating, distribution, and thematic of mass-produced Russian icons from the territory of the Romanian Principalities. A series of conclusions based on this analysis provides legitimate arguments for changing the perceptions of the so-called “Lipovan” icons.



◆ Fig. 10. a) *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop; b) signature detail. Provenance: Gherman, Timiș County.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

Notes

demy, Bucharest; Golești Museum of Viticulture and Pomiculture, Argeș County; Saint George Church in Pitești; Collection of the Bishopric of Alexandria and Teleorman; Lower Danube Museum, Călărași; Comana Monastery Museum, Giurgiu County.

Oltenia: ‘Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu’ County Museum, Râmnicu-Vâlcea; Hurezi Monastery Museum and its repository, Vâlcea County; Cozia Monastery Museum and its repository, Vâlcea County; Dintr-un Lemn Monastery Museum, Vâlcea County; Museum of the Archbishopric of Râmnic, Râmnicu-Vâlcea.

Transylvania: Alba Iulia National Museum of the Union – Museikon; Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography, Cluj-Napoca; Museum of the Cluj Metropolitanate, Cluj-Napoca; ‘Octavian Goga’ Museum, Ciucea, Cluj County; ‘First Romanian School in Brașov’ Museum; Collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania, Sibiu; Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean, Năsăud, Bistrița-Năsăud County; Toplița Monastery Museum, Harghita County; Transfiguration Church in Borsec, Harghita County; Râmeț Monastery Collection, Alba County.

Banat: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat, Timișoara; National Museum of Banat, Timișoara.

Dobruđja: Tulcea Art Museum.

²⁵ The remaining 59 icons could not be framed from a stylistic point of view.

²⁶ Dumitran, Dáné, Rus, Wollmann 2021, p. 145-187.

The first discovery is that the emergence of mass-produced Russian icons in the Romanian Principalities preceded the settlement of Russian Old Believers’ communities in this area. Furthermore, the oldest examples of such icons found today following the field research are located in areas where communities of Lipovans have never existed. As Ana Dumitran’s recent research shows,²⁶ a series of historical documents attest to the presence of Russian icon sellers in Transylvania in 1761 and around the time of the Peasant Uprising of 1784, as well as the ban of icon merchants from operating on the territory of the Habsburg Empire after the imperial decree of 1785, as a result of their being suspected of espionage and sedition. As the author shows, the decree expelling the Russian icon sellers clearly explains the low incidence of mass-produced Russian icons in Transylvania and the fact that most of the existing ones can be dated to the 18th century. Examples include the icon of *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* from Sebeșu Mare, near Huedin (cat. 43), the icons of *The Great Deisis* (cat. 24), the *Mother of God, Joy of All who Sorrow* (cat. 13), and the *Resurrection with Twelve Feasts* from Mogoș-Miclești, Alba County (cat. 26), or the *Four-part Icons* from Geaca, Cluj County (cat. 44), and Vima Mare, Maramureș County (cat. 45), all in the collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj, plus the five icons of the same type that were found at Năsăud Museum, Bistrița-Năsăud County (see above, p. 9, fig. 5-7, p. 12, fig. 11). Moreover, the same phenomenon is observed in the Banat area where a significant number of Russian mass-produced icons from the 18th century have been identified in Timișoara, at the



Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat (figs 2, 3). Also, three more icons approximately identical to the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* from Mogoş-Micleşti were discovered in the collection of Hurezi Monastery, Vâlcea County (fig. 4), in the collection of Pasărea Monastery, Ilfov County, where more icons from the same period are to be found (fig. 5), and in the collection of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania in Sibiu (see above, p. 28, fig. 3). Characterized by the extremely concise shapes and distinguished by the nature of the materials and wooden panels used, these icons, datable to the second half of the 18th century, are the work of itinerant Russian craftsmen from the Suzdal area.

A fact should be emphasized that all these places are located at a considerable distance from any settlement of Lipovan Russians. With regard to the settlement of communities of Russian Old Believers

in areas that are now part of Romania, which some authors directly connect with the appearance of mass-produced Russian icons in this area,²⁷ I believe that there is a need for further clarification and chronological contextualization. In this chapter, given that we are discussing the sensitive topic of an ethnic minority, the study of which has to critically assess any potential implicit bias on the part of the researchers, I have primarily cited the scholarship of ethnic Starover Russians (Old Believers),²⁸ in order to eliminate any suspicion of subjectivism and polemic that might be associated with Romanian authors.²⁹ The most recent work on this topic is by Petru Procop³⁰ and presents the chronology of this process of the Russian Old Believers' colonization in a territory that is now part of Romania, highlighting three initial milestones. Firstly, the establishment of the village of Hutor in the proximity and under the authority of the city of Brăila. The village was attested in 1764 on the map of the Austrian cartographer Johannes Tomas von Trattern, but is supposed to have been founded at the beginning of the 18th century. Secondly, the attestation of Socolinţi (today Lipoveni), a trading village (*târg*) near Mitocu Dragomirnei, Suceava County, in 1742, in a petition addressed to the Voivode of Moldavia, and the confirmation of the ethnic composition of this village through the 1779 census carried out by the Habsburg authorities. Thirdly, the Ottoman approval of the settlement of Russian Old Believers in the



Danube Delta in 1738, following the Nemirovo Conference. Regardless of whether these particular historical data are accurate or not, what is important as regards the dissemination of mass-produced Russian icons, crafted by Old Believer artisans, is that: the Raya of Brăila, including the village of Hutor, only came under the authority of Wallachia in 1829; Dobrudja was annexed to the Kingdom of Romania in 1878, and Bukovina with all its villages came under the authority of the Habsburg Empire – then Austrian (1804-1867) and Austro-Hungarian (1867-1918) – from 1775 until the end of the First World War. In addition, as I have shown above, in the Habsburg Empire the sale of Russian icons had been prohibited since 1785, and the current incidence of this type of art object in the area of Bukovina is minimal. In conclusion, no matter how early in the 18th century the Russian Old Believers’ communities may have settled in Brăila, Dobrudja, and Bukovina, they could not have had any direct effect on the Romanian populations in Transylvania, Moldavia or Wallachia for the simple reason that, at that time, these provinces were separated by state borders that were hard to cross. It is also implausible that the members of these Old Believer communities, who came from Russia with few belongings, including liturgical objects, would have been willing or able to dispose of their icons, as gifts or by selling them to the Romanian inhabitants in such large numbers. Undoubtedly, the majority of the icons brought by the Lipovan Russians from their places of origin have remained in their churches and houses to this day.

Yet, on the territory of Romania, in indigenous Romanian communities, there are still numerous mass-produced Russian icons dating back to the 18th century. Although the overwhelming majority of this type of objects are unsigned and undated, which is entirely understandable given the method of their production in a collaborative system by a team of craftsmen, there are also a few fortunate exceptions, especially in the category of 18th-century high-quality pieces showing Baroque features. The earliest example found up to now is the *Resurrection with Twelve Feasts* (fig. 6), originating from Feneș village in Timiș County, and preserved at the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat, which is signed by the painter Mitri Teplakov (Dmitry Teplyakov)³¹ and has the year 1771 inscribed on the reverse (hardly visible today). After that comes the icon of the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* from Pasărea Monastery, Ilfov County (fig. 7), signed by the painter Prokofiev (Kosma Prokofiev) in 1776.³² From about the same period there are a pair of undated icons of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 8) and *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* (fig. 9) from the Cernica Monastery in

◀ Fig. 11. a) *Four Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop; b) signature detail.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași.

▶ Fig. 12. a) *Crucifixion*, second half of the 18th century, prior to 1775, unidentified workshop.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.

▲ Fig. 12. b) signature detail.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.

Notes

²⁷ See Dragomir 2011, p. 103-104, note 92.

²⁸ See also Ivanov 2015.

²⁹ For the complete bibliography of the subject, see note 6 of the chapter authored by Sister Atanasia Văetiși, in this volume.

³⁰ Procop 2021.

³¹ In black ink, on the lower right corner: ПС Митреѣи // Тѣплаковѣ.

³² In black ink, on the center right side: Писалъ [...] // Прокофиевъ 1776 // годѣ.

► Fig. 13. a) *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, Kholuy workshop, second half of the 18th century, prior to 1786; b) signature detail. Provenance: Fălciu, Vaslui County.

Copyright: Museum of the Bishopric of Huși.



Ilfov County, signed by Timothei (Timofei) Semenov,³³ and the icon of *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* (fig. 10), from Gherman village in Timiș County, kept in the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat, that is signed by another Timothei (Timofei).³⁴ Other similar, not easily decipherable signatures are found on an icon representing *Jesus Christ Pantokrator (Salvator Mundi)* from the National History Museum of Romania³⁵ and on an icon with the *Four Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God* from the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași (fig. 11), signed by Kiryanov (?).³⁶ The use of illegible or hard-to-decipher signatures is not an accident, but a consequence of the fact that in the 18th century, due to the decree of Peter I regarding the supervision of icon painting, the craftsmen had to sign their icons as a guarantee of quality. Thus, those who painted icons for the Old Believers were afraid of being detected and excluded from the workshops. Painters did sometimes sign their works, often in a clumsy manner, because they were not quite literate, but most icons remained anonymous, which may also be taken as a subterfuge.

Other icons from the same period and stylistic family are dated by donor inscriptions, written on the back, such as *The Crucifixion* icon (fig. 12) from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău, with the text “1775 Feb 19 // Gr[igore] ... and Caterina” on the reverse,³⁷ the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 13) from the Museum

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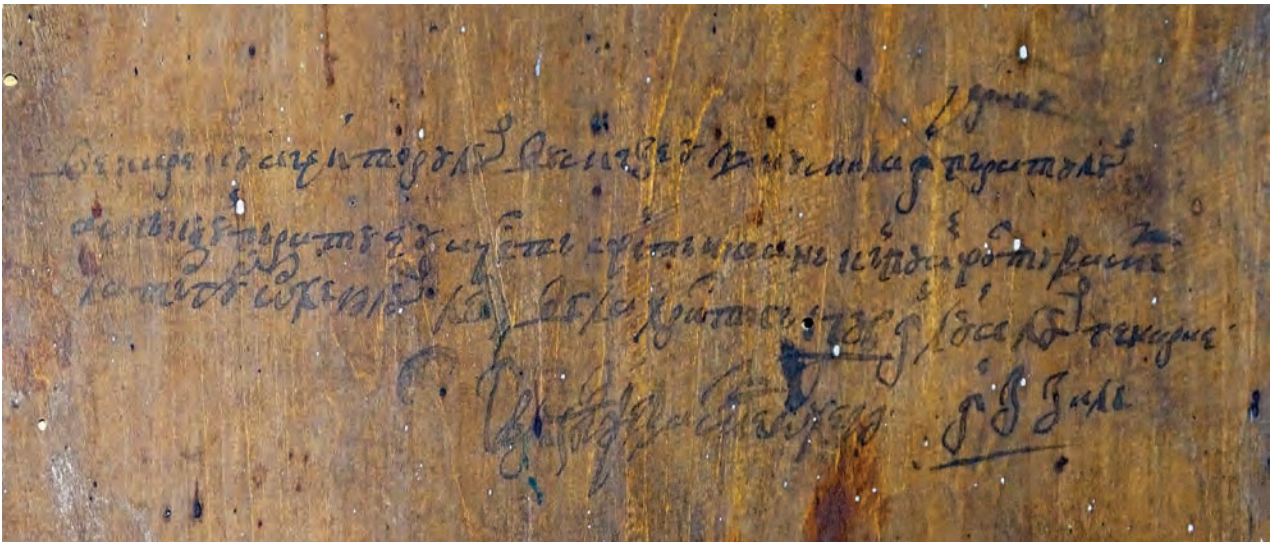
³³ On the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, in black ink, in the center of the right side: Писа(л) ти//мошеи се//меновъ.

³⁴ In black ink, in the center of the right side: Пѣ Тимо//шеи Б[...] и[...], identified by Natalia Komashko as Timofey Blinnichev.

³⁵ Classification order of the Ministry of Culture no. 2699/28.10.2014 Corpus, position 8.

³⁶ In black ink, lower right corner: Писалъ [...illegible]ртъ Ки//рѣновъ. Thanks to Ms. Natalia Komashko for the transcription.

³⁷ In black ink on the back, in the center: 1775 фев[р] 19 // Гр... и Катеринаъ.



of the Bishopric of Huși, brought from Fălciu village (Vaslui County), which bears the inscription: “That with the help of God and the mercy of the Heavenly King, I bought this holy icon when I was a customs officer at Târgu Orhei, the year of Christ 1786 in the month of January, on the 7th day. Gavril [indecipherable] customs officer at Orheiu” and “Let it be known since I gave it to the holy church in the month of January 8th,”³⁸ as well as the icon of the *Mother of God Kurskaya Korennaya* (fig. 14), from the Museum of the ‘First Romanian School in Brașov’, on the back of which is written: “Thine own of thine own [...] thine servants: A[...] // Mihăla[...]: Maria with their sons [...]man, 1813 June.”³⁹ These works attest once more to the presence of Russian folk icons all over Romania long before the Old Believers settled in Moldavia and in north-eastern Wallachia.

Moreover, the last two inscriptions mentioned above reveal another important argument in support of the idea that the icons were intended for pan-Orthodox devotion and not only for the Old Believers (*Lipovans*), namely the specifically Romanian names of the donors: e.g. Grigore and Caterina, Gavril, Mihălache and Maria, etc. Other inscriptions collected from the backs of more recent icons, dating to the mid-19th century, confirm this argument. Thus, the reverse of the icon of the *Resurrection with Twelve Feasts* from the Collection of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea bears the inscription “Pomeni Gospodi: Minea, Stana, Maria, Sanda, Dumitrița,”⁴⁰ and on the backside of the icon of the *Mother of God* from the *Deesis* tier (fig. 15) from the Ciolanu Monastery Museum, the following list of worshipers’ names is inscribed: “Vanghelie, Gheorghe, Elenuța, Mihail.”⁴¹ In addition, later records, from the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, testify to the transmission of these icons from generation to generation of Romanians. For example, the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into the Hell, with Twelve Feasts* (fig. 16), from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea, originating from the Sălcioara Parish, has the following inscription: “1845 [...] I served at this church [...] 1889 January, priest Luca;”⁴² on the 18th century icon *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into the Hell, with Various Saints* (fig. 17), from Remetea Mare (Timiș County), exhibited at the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat, there is a large inscription on the back, partially illegible today, next to the outline of a tree, mentioning the year 1863 and several names, including Nicolae;⁴² on the icon of *Archangel Michael the Commander of*

Notes

³⁸ In black ink, on the back, in the center of the panel: Пѣ карѣ кѣ ацисторѣ лѣи дѣмнезѣсѣ ши кѣ мила пѣратѣлѣи черескѣ // амѣ кѣспѣратѣсѣ еѣ ачасть сѣвѣнтѣ икоанѣ кѣндѣ ам фостѣ вамеш // ла Тѣргѣ Сѣрхенѣлѣи лѣат дѣ ла Христосѣ 1786 ѣи лѣна лѣи генарѣ // ѣи з зилѣ. Гаврил? [indecipherable] вамеш Сѣрхенѣсѣ // Сѣ съ щие дѣ кѣндѣ амѣ дат ла // сѣвѣнта висерикѣ ѣи лѣна лѣи генар ѣи.

³⁹ In black ink on the back, at the top: Ялѣ талѣ динтрѣсѣ алѣ талѣ шѣ? // [...] ровѣи тѣи А[...] // Михѣла[...]: Марѣна кѣ фѣи лор, [...]ман, 1813 ѣи.

⁴⁰ In black ink, on the back, in the center of the panel: Пѣмѣни Господѣи: Минѣ, Стана, Марѣна, Санда, Дѣсмитрица.

⁴¹ In black ink, on the back, in the center of the panel: † Вангѣлиѣ, Георгѣ, Еленѣца?, Михѣла.

⁴² On the back, in black ink, in Romanian in Cyrillic script.



▲ Fig. 14. *Mother of God Kurskaya Korennaya*, second half of the 18th century, workshop unidentified, ‘First Romanian School’ Museum in Braşov. Credits: Cristina Serendan.

the Fearsome Host, from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea, is the inscription: “This icon is donated by me to the school, [having it] from my own ancestors. Albu G. State, IIIrd grade;”⁴³ on the icon of the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea: “Icon brought by the student O[...] Vasile from the village of Buda, Lăpuşna county, after he finished school, in the summer of 1930 [...]”;⁴⁴ on the icon of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea: “Icon from Putreda, R. Sărat, from Anica V. Clinciu, aged 45, [from] grandmother, [and] grandmother’s mother-in-law, February. 1950;”⁴⁵ on the *Four-part Icon with the Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host, Saint George and the Crucifixion*, from the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galaţi, coming from the Saint Paraskeva Parish in Brăila: “Donated to the Holy Church of Saint Paraskeva in 1977 February 1st, by Mr. Grădină Ion and his wife Muşa,”⁴⁶ etc. Of course, the mass-produced Russian icons did not circulate only in Romania. They were also attested in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia⁴⁷ and Serbia. A special piece, the *Mother of God Kazanskaya* (fig. 18), located in the collection of the ‘Curtea Domneasă’ Museum Complex in Târgovişte, has a less common inscription in Greek which testifies that it was created by a Greek painter: “This holy icon was painted by Eugeniu Tapinis May 28: 1855”.⁴⁸ Another inscription, also written in Greek, is found on an icon of the *Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie)*, from the Greek Church of the Transfiguration in Constanţa, published by S. S. Duicu:⁴⁹ “Remember, Lord, your servant Moscu: 1856: August 17.”⁵⁰

The third argument in support of my thesis is provided by the style of the mass-produced Russian icons found in what is now Romania. As I mentioned above, the main reasons that determined their association with the expression “Lipovan icons” was the apparently homogeneous and very conservative way in which they were made, using models of Russian post-Byzantine painting before the Nikonian Reform, and the fact that they were manufactured by Old Believer craftsmen. A closer look, however, reveals that some of the Russian icons produced by the workshops in the Vladimir-Suzdal area have a diverse aesthetic, incongruous in many ways with the precepts of the Old Believers from Russia and the diaspora. After analyzing the sample of 1000 icons, I found that only 858 of them had the characteristics of the established style associated with the Russian Old Believers. The remaining⁵¹ 119, on the other hand, are imbued with an inappropriately Baroque aesthetic, quite unlike for the Old-Believer-style icons, which were specifically distinguished by their rigorous observance of traditional Byzantine models in an era of stylistic modernization in the Renaissance, Baroque and Academic fashion.

Thus, I identified 60 icons (6% of the total) that could be categorized as high-quality vernacular Baroque. Stylistically, these kinds of pieces are on the borderline between the works of the Muscovite workshops, influenced by the school of the Armoury Chamber in Kremlin, that of the Kyivan school, organized around Pechersk Lavra, and the established style of folk icons from the Vladimir area. Most of them were made in villages of central Russia and the Vladimir area (mainly Kholuy) in the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century. Usually imitating models of Western iconography, they are characterized by free and lively brushstrokes, a painterly approach and smooth

Notes

⁴³ On the back, in pencil, in Romanian, written in the Latin alphabet.

⁴⁴ On the back, in ink, in Romanian, written in the Latin alphabet.

⁴⁵ On the back, in chemical pencil, in Romanian, written in the Latin alphabet.

⁴⁶ On the back, in blue pen on a paper label, in Romanian, written in the Latin alphabet.

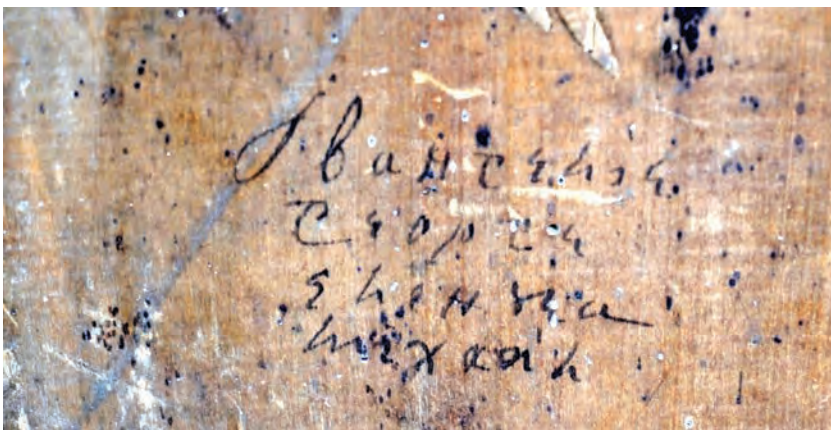
⁴⁷ See Kostopoulos 2021, p. 189-199.

⁴⁸ In black, on the base of the icon: *Αὕτη ἡ ἱερὰ ὀκονῶν ἱστορήθη ὑπο εὐγενίας ταπεινῆς μαίω: 28: 1855.*

⁴⁹ Duicu 2011, p. 56-57.

⁵⁰ In white, along the lower side: *Μνήσθητι κύριε τῆ δούλης σου Μοσχού: 1856: ἀυγουστοῦ. 17.*

⁵¹ A total of 2.5% (about 23 icons) of the icons studied could not be analyzed from a stylistic point of view due to their poor state of conservation.



◆ Fig. 15. a) *Mother of God* (from a *Deesis*), mid-19th century, Kholuy workshop; b) the icon with its metal revetment; c) signature detail. Ciolanu Monastery Museum, Buzău County.
Copyright: Ciolanu Monastery.

transitions from light to shade, showing the loss of Byzantine technique, as well as typical decorative details of the Baroque repertoire: volutes and counter-volutes, *rocaille* motifs, rose-strewn borders, cartouches, rays, clouds, etc. Some of these artworks can be associated with the production of the Gorbunov family workshop in Kholuy, such as the two icons of *Christ Pantokrator (Salvator Mundi)* one from the Bucharest Municipality Museum and the other from the collection of the Bogdana Monastery (Bacău County) (fig. 20). The most representative examples of high-quality Russian vernacular Baroque date from the 18th century and were identified in several ecclesiastical collections such as: the icons of *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* and *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (figs 8, 9) in the collection of the Cernica Monastery in Ilfov County; the icon of the *Mother of God Healer of Sorrows* (fig. 19) taken from Văratec Monastery, the icon with *Four Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God* (fig. 11), and the icon of the *Mandylyon* (fig. 21) from the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași; the *Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie)* (fig. 22) found in the repository of the Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău; the icon of *Saints Frolus, Nicholas of*

► Fig. 16. a) *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into the Hell, with Twelve Feasts*, early 19th century, Kholuy workshop; b) view of back. Provenance: Sălchioara, Buzău County. Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



*Myra, Blaise of Sebaste and Laurus, with the Archangel Michael and the Mandylion*⁵² (fig. 23) and the Archangel Michael Commander of the Fearful Host (fig. 24) in the Collection of the Archbishopric of Roman; the Mother of God Akhtyrskaya (fig. 7) in the collection of the Pasărea Monastery; Saint Nicholas of Myra (fig. 13) from the Museum of the Bishopric of Huși; and last but not least the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into hell with Twenty-Eight Scenes from the cycles of the Feasts and the Passion*, preserved at the 'Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu' Vâlcea County Museum, Râmnicu-Vâlcea (fig. 25).

Another 58 icons (5.8% of the total) belong to the category of lower quality vernacular Baroque, which, unlike the version described above, has only retained a few Baroque characteristics such as the liveliness of the lines and some specific motifs stylized in folk manner: garlands and bouquets of roses, leaves and volutes, applied to the classic iconographic types of *krasnushki* icons. Of course, among these icons we can distinguish several interesting subtypes, such as those decorated with *stucco* backgrounds, produced in partner workshops most likely in the area of Transnistria or Moldova, e.g. the icon of the Mother of God Smolenskaya (fig. 29) from the Valea Neagră Monastery (Vrancea County), or the icons with a border of rose garlands, characterized by a frame with roses stylized in the folk style, as in the case of the icon of the Mother of God Deliveress of Sufferers from Misfortunes (fig. 28) from the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube

Notes

⁵² A selection that brings together the most important saints from the pantheon of patron saints of the peasant economy, i.e. the patron saints of animal breeders, i.e. Saints Florus and Laurus were considered the patrons of horse breeders, while Saint Blaise was a healer of animals and a patron of veterinarians. See: Гладышева 2009, p. 383-414.



in Galați, that came from the Saint Paraskeva Church in Brăila.

In conclusion, approximately 12% of the Russian icons mass-produced in the artistic centers of the Vladimir area, especially in Kholuy, cannot be formally classified as *krasnushki*. Indeed, they are in a completely different style, thus invalidating the “Lipovan icon” label. The production of vernacular Baroque-style icons in the same Russian workshops that made icons in the conservative style clearly proves that their work was also intended for the followers of the official church in Russia and for the Western market, i.e. the Orthodox believers from Central European provinces, where Baroque was already in vogue at the end of the 18th century, and not for use in the Russian Old Believer communities, which would not have accepted such innovations. Outsourcing aspects of production to specialised workshops outside Russia, designed to satisfy contemporary market requirements, such as the application of *stucco*, constitutes further evidence that the Russian folk icon industry was a competitive business, developing independently of religious affiliations, and thus cannot be analyzed or labelled according to denominations or creeds.

Of course, apart from the lesser-known Baroque variants, the most well established and numerous type of mass-produced Russian icons, that of the 19th century, is also divided into several subcategories, based on the production center and the financial level of their clientele. Thus, among the objects that are in a sufficiently good state of preservation to be evaluated from a stylistic point of view,⁵³ there are more icons from Kholuy, approx. 715 (71.5% of the total), than any other center. The Kholuy icons are in turn divided into three groups, depending

Notes

⁵³ Approximately 2.1% of the counted icons could not be analyzed because they were not in a sufficiently good state of preservation or because of their revetments.



on the quality. The lower-quality icons, which are also the most numerous (approx. 43% of the total), represent the purest examples of folk art, with hasty brushwork, vivid colors and cheap materials. The faces of the saints are treated schematically, in a completely linear fashion, with only the underpainting (*proplasma*) and a few highlights. Most have red-orange borders, but yellow and terracotta-colored ones are also found; they are not decorated with incisions, and rarely have silver leaf inserts. From a thematic point of view, the most numerous in this category are the icons of the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Twelve Scenes* (fig. 34) and the four-part icon (fig. 35).

The average-quality icons at Kholuy, approx. 26% of the total, are defined by saints represented in bust form, with the faces treated in a Byzantine manner using a more elaborate technique, on a silver background. They have vestments richly decorated with incisions and punchwork, with occasional insertions of a range of metal leaves (gold, silver, copper). Almost without exception they have a red border, characteristic of the *krasnushki* icons, decorated with white or black lines. A few distinctive pieces have a black border, probably the mark of a particular workshop. Among the well-preserved and restored examples of this type, the following stand out: the icon of *Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 31) from the collection of the Metropolitanate of Cluj, the icon of *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* (fig. 32) from the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați, that came from Valea Lungă Parish (Brăila County), the *Mother of God* from the *Deesis* tier (fig. 33) from the Hurezi



Monastery Collection, the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* (fig. 38), the *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 39) and the *Christ Pantokrator* (fig. 40) exhibited in the Museum of the Bishopric of Slobozia and Călărași, or the *Mother of God of the Sign* (fig. 41) from the Cetățuia Monastery Museum, Iași.

The most precious mass-produced Russian icons are, without doubt, luxury products from the Kholuy workshops, found much more rarely on Romanian territory (only approx. 2.5% of the total sample analyzed). Their attribution and dating have raised many problems for museographers (museum curators) and restorers, as their elaborate style barely points to their being mass-produced icons. Made with great care and precision, in a manner faithful to the Byzantine models of Russia prior to the Nikonian Reform, they are notable for their large dimensions, the fine rendering of the portraits and the heavily decorated fabric of the vestments, which involves gold and silver leaf with punched or incised embroidery-like patterns. Some pieces from this category are highly revered and even famous, such as the icon of the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (fig. 42) from the Surpatele Monastery (Vâlcea County), a great miracle-working icon brought in the 1950s from the Brâncoveni Monastery. Others are exhibited in museums in important Bishoprics, for example the *Mother of God Kazanskaya* (fig. 44) from the Museum of the Archbishopric of Râmnic, the *Mother of God Vladimirskaia* (fig. 46) from the Art Museum in Râmnicu-Vâlcea, or the *Cross of the Crucifixion* (fig. 55) from the Museum of the Three Hierarchs Monastery in Iași. Most likely, this kind of artwork was part of a special division of the Russian icon



◀ Fig. 17. a) *Descent into the Hell with Various Saints*, second half of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop; b) backside view. Provenance: Remetea Mare, Timiș County.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

◀ Fig. 18. *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, 1855, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: ‘Curtea Domnească’ National Museum Complex in Târgoviște.

trade, and their buyers came from among the ecclesiastical elite or the small boyars.

Another distinct category of icons in terms of their provenance, is the production of the Vetka center, of which around 38 works have been identified (approx. 4.2% of the total), and of the Guslitsa center (figs 61, 62), situated in the eastern part of the Moscow Region, from where 5 icons were found. There are clearly fewer of them than the works from the Kholuy center and a concentration of them can be observed in the Moldavia region: most are found in the counties of Galați, Brăila, Vaslui, and Neamț. The quality of Vetka icons is significantly higher than that of the Kholuy icons, and they are quite easy to distinguish due to the massive use of gold backgrounds and the particular type of decoration, applied using the *sgraffito* technique into the still-wet paint layer laid over the gold leaf ground. Among the works that can be attributed to Vetka workshops, it is worth mentioning: the *Mother of God Smolenskaya* (fig. 45) kept at the ‘Carol I’ Museum of Brăila, the paired icons *Mother of God* from the *Deesis* tier and *Christ Pantokrator* (figs 49, 51) from the Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat⁵⁴ or the *Holy Martyr Theodotus, Bishop of Ancyra* (fig. 52) from the Museum of the Cetățuia Monastery, Iași, the icon of the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 53), from the Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

The fourth argument I would adduce against the designation “Lipovan icons”, also highlighted in the quantitative analysis, is related to the geographical distribution of these icons on the territory of Roma-

Notes

⁵⁴ The icons belonged to Queen Elizabeth of Greece, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Maria of Romania, see Ploșnea 2019, p. 28.



▲ Fig. 19. *Mother of God Healer of Sorrows*, second half of the 18th century, unknown workshop. Provenance: Văratec Monastery Collection, Neamț County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași.

▼ Fig. 20. *Christ Pantokrator (Salvator Mundi)*, early 19th century, Gorbunov family workshop, Kholuy. Copyright: Bogdana Monastery.

▼ Fig. 21. *Savior Not Made by Human Hands (Mandylion)*, last third of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Iași.



nia. Without being able to claim an exhaustive inventory of such an extensive family of artworks, many of which are still present in large numbers in private collections, I nevertheless believe that we can draw some valid conclusions based on the samples analyzed. As can be seen on the map of the distribution of mass-produced Russian icons, they are mainly concentrated in the counties of Vaslui (222 icons, 22% of the total), Buzău and Vrancea (107 icons, 11% of the total), Bucharest – Ilfov (99 icons, 10% of the total), Galați and Brăila (95 icons, 9.5% of the total), Vâlcea (79 icons, 8% of the total), Timiș and Caraș-Severin (70 icons, 7% of the total), Iași (59 icons, 6% of the total), Bacău (46 icons, 4.6% of the total), Dâmbovița (42 icons, 4.2% of the total), Giurgiu (33 icons, 3.3% of the total), Neamț (28 icons, 2.8% of the total), Argeș (23 icons, 2.3% of the total), Ialomița (20 icons, 2% of the total), and Prahova (7 icons, 0.7% of the total). It is very clear that approx. 50% of the total number of Russian icons studied is concentrated in Southern Moldavia, which can be considered the epicentre of their dissemination in Romania. At the other end of the scale, of course, is Transylvania, where only 63 icons were discovered through our research (6.3% of the total). It is not by chance that they were found in the counties of Cluj (26 icons), Alba (14 icons), Brașov (8 icons), Sibiu (7 icons), Bistrița-Năsăud (5 icons), and Harghita (2 icons).

The statistics also show that, in terms of the iconographic subjects, the icons dedicated to the Mother of God are the most numerous (295 icons, 29.5% of the total). These, in turn, are divided into various categories depending on the specific feast or the iconographic typology of the Virgin.⁵⁵ The various types of the *Mother of God and Christ Child* come out top, as might be expected, because they are the most traditional type in the Romanian area: the *Kazanskaya* (figs 18, 30, 44 – 31

Notes

⁵⁵ On the same topic see Chiroșca 2014.



icons, 10.5% of all Marian representations), the *Smolenskaya* (figs 29, 42, 45 – 29 icons, 9.8%), *Mother of God of the Sign* (figs 22, 41 – 28 icons, 9.5%), the *Tikhvinskaya* (fig. 43, 26 icons, 8.8%), the *Vladimirskaya* (fig. 46, 25 icons, 8.5%), the *Healer of Sorrows*⁵⁶ (fig. 19) (popularly known in Romanian as *The Quick-Listening*) (13 icons, 4.4%), the *Softening of Evil Hearts*⁵⁷ (fig. 47 – 10 icons, 3.38%), the *Seeker of the Lost*⁵⁸ (fig. 48 – 9 icons, 3%), the *Feodorovskaya* (cat. 7 – 7 icons, 2.37%), the *Three-Handed (Troeruchitsa)*⁵⁹ (cat. 3 – 5 icons, 1.69%), the *Assistant in Childbirth*⁶⁰ (fig. 54 – 4 icons, 1.35%), the *Deliveress of Sufferers from Misfortunes*⁶¹ (3 icons, 1%), the *Surety of Sinners*⁶² (fig. 50 – 3 icons, 1%), the *Arapetskaya*⁶³ (3 icons, 1%). Then comes the Virgin Praying types, of which the most popular is the *Akhtyrskaya* (figs 1, 7, 38) with 24 icons (8.1% of the total) and the *Mother of God from the Deesis tier* (figs 15, 33, 49), represented 10 times (3.38%).

I consider that the *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya* deserves a separate analysis, as it represents a rare iconographic theme, whose popularity in the Romanian space is directly linked to the authority of the monastic model promoted by Saint Paisius Velichkovsky. The history of this wonder-working icon is related to the miracle that took place in 1739 in the town of Akhtyrka, in the Kharkov Governorate, in Malorussia, which was then part of the Russian Empire (nowadays on the territory of Ukraine). While working in the fields, the parish priest of the local

Notes

56 The icon of the Mother of God with the title *Утоли моя печали / Utoli moya pechali (Soothe my Sorrows)*. From an iconographic point of view, the type is distinguished by the fact that the Mother of God holds one of her hands to her forehead or ear, a gesture that suggests attentive listening to the prayers of the faithful. It is also known under the alternative title *Heal my sickness and sorrows*.

57 Bearing the inscription: *Умягчение злых сердец / Umyagcheniye zlykh serdets*. There are two types of this theme, one based on the prophecy of Simeon from the *Presentation in the Temple* (see note 70) and this one, called *Chenstokhovskaya – Softening of Evil Hearts*. This is a copy after the *Rudenskaya Mother of God*. It's popular name was inspired by the verses dedicated to the icon by Saint Demetrius of Rostov, which speaks of softening the brutal ways of people who worship the icon. See: <https://russianicons.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/swords-and-softening-hearts-a-confusing-group-of-icons/>. This icon of the Virgin, much more common in Moldavia than the other one, is specific to the south of Russia. Cf. Chiroșca 2014, p. 155.

58 Bearing the inscription: *Взыскание погибших / Vzyskaniye pogibshikh*. The typology of this icon is easily identifiable by the appearance of the Infant Christ, dressed in a short white tunic, standing in his mother's lap, surrounded by her arms, on the left side of the composition.

59 The Russian version of the Greek type of the *Mother of God Troeruchitsa (With Three Hands)*, from Hilandar Monastery, on Mount Athos.

60 Bearing the inscription: *Поможение родам / Pomozheniye rodam*. The Mother of God is depicted with her head uncovered and her hair loose. The hands of the Theotokos are folded over her chest over the glory in which stands a full-length and frontal figure of the naked Infant Christ.

61 Bearing the inscription: *Избавление от бед страждущих / Izbavleniye ot bed strazhdushchikh*. The Mother of God the Deliveress



▼ Fig. 22. *Mother of God of the Sign*, end of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

►► Fig. 23. *Saints Florus, Nicholas of Myra, Blaise of Sebaste and Laurus, with the Archangel Michael and the Mandylion*, last third of the 18th century, Kholuy workshop. Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.

Notes

wears the imperial crown, over a veil, and the Child is turned towards his mother, putting his hand on her shoulder.

62 Bearing the inscription: *Споручница грешных / Sporuchnitsa greshnykh*.

63 The title *Arapetskaya* (also called *Arabskaya*) refers to its Arabian origin. In Russia, there are no known icons of this type before the 17th century. Characteristics of the type are the small fiery red angels' heads

painted in medallions, which replace the usual stars on the shoulders and forehead of the Virgin, and the maphorion decorated with stylized clouds as if it were the sky. The Christ Child, half covered with a veil, is reaching out with both hands to his mother while looking at the viewer. Later, a large crown on the head of the Virgin and the text of the *Akathist hymn* on the hem of her robe have been added to this type. <https://russianicons.wordpress.com/tag/arapetskaya/>.





▲ Fig. 24. *Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Host*, second half of the 18th century. Provenance: Cotu-Vameș, Neamț County. Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.

church of the Intercession of the Mother of God discovered an unusual icon of the Mother of God, which he took into his house and set in a place of honor. Following a wondrous dream, the Virgin asked him to wash the icon with clean water and then use that water to heal his daughter who was sick, and thus the icon proved to be a miracle worker.⁶⁴ The cult of the icon spread quickly in the area, and the new bishop of the Belgorod region at the time, Antonie Putneanul (Metropolitan Anthony from Putna Monastery),⁶⁵ metropolitan of Moldavia from 1731 to 1739,⁶⁶ undertook a series of investigations, completed only in 1751, when the Holy Synod of the Russian Church decided to



celebrate the *Mother of God of Akhtyrka* on July 2. Meanwhile, Bishop Antonie, who had stayed closely connected to the monastery where he had taken his vows, sent a copy of the *Akhtyrskaya* icon to his disciple and successor as hegumen (abbot) of Putna, Iacov Putneanul, which is kept to this day in the treasury of the Putna Monastery. This work, dating from 1743, is the oldest replica of the miracle-working icon preserved in Romania and one of the oldest in the world. Although the original icon was lost in the dramatic context of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, numerous copies survived, several dozen of which are preserved in the most important monasteries in Romania, e.g. in

▲ Fig. 25. *Descent into Hell, with Feasts and the Passion Cycle*, second half of the 18th century, unknown workshop. Copyright: ‘Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu’ Vâlcea County Museum.

Notes

64 Киселев 1976, p. 135-138.

65 Iorga 1930, p. 369.

66 See Cojocaru 2009, p. 171-194.



▲ Fig. 26. *Crucifixion and Lamentation*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.
Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



▲ Fig. 28. *Mother of God the Deliveress of Sufferers from Misfortunes*, first half of the 19th century, workshop in the Vladimir region. Provenance: Saint Paraskeva Church in Brăila.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

▼ Fig. 30. *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Cluj.



▲ Fig. 29. *Mother of God Smolenskaya*, first half of the 19th century, workshop in the Vladimir region.

Copyright: Valea Neagră Monastery Museum, Vrancea County.

▼ Fig. 31. *Saint John the Baptist*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Cluj.

▶ Fig. 32. *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Valea Lungă, Brăila County.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

▲ Fig. 33. *Mother of God (from a Deesis)*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Hurezi Monastery.

▼ Fig. 34. *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Twelve Feasts*, mid-19th century, Kholuy workshop. Provenance: Rătești Monastery, Buzău County.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

▶▶ Fig. 35. *Four-part Icon, with the Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, the Archangel Michael Commander of the Fearsome Host, Saint George and the Crucifixion*, mid-19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: 'Carol I' Museum, Brăila.





▲ Fig. 36. *Mother of God the Unexpected Joy*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.
Copyright: Bucharest Municipality Museum.



▲ Fig. 37. *Mother of God Ognevidnaya (Fiery Vision)*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.
Copyright: ‘Carol I’ Museum, Brăila.

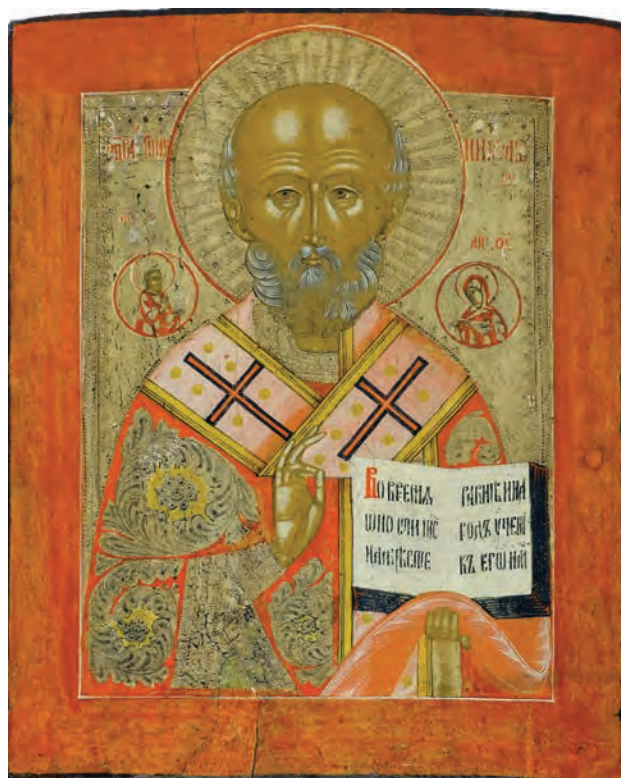


▲ Fig. 38. *Mother of God Akhtyrskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Bishopric of Slobozia and Călărași.

▼ Fig. 39. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Bishopric of Slobozia and Călărași.



Notes

⁶⁷ Cojocaru 2022, p. 105-108.

⁶⁸ Zamfirescu 1996.

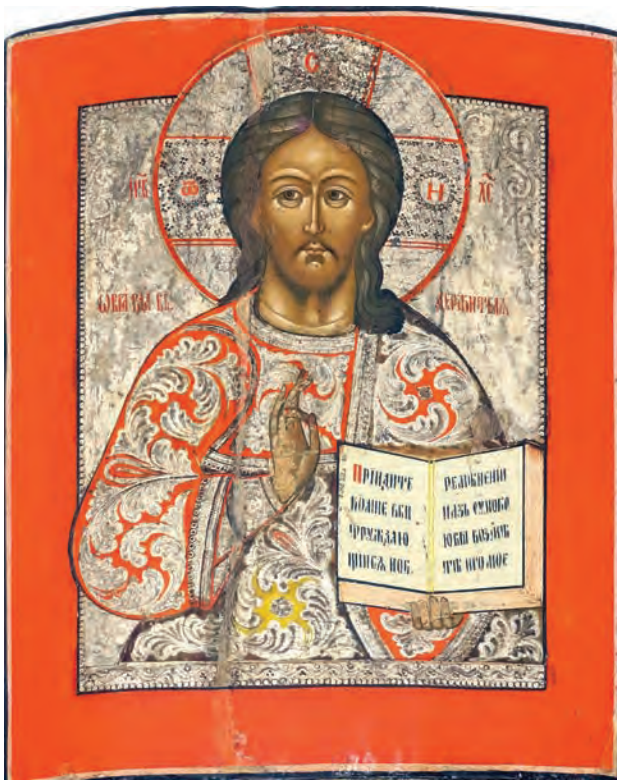
⁶⁹ Distinct from the *Mother of God of the Passion (Panagia tou Pathous)* or *Mother of God Threnousa* type.

⁷⁰ This is one of the two types of the theme, sometimes called *Seven Arrows*, *Seven Swords* or *Seven Sorrows of Mary* in the West, based on the prophecy made by Simeon to the Virgin on the occasion of the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*: “And a sword will pass through your heart” (Luke 2:35). It represents the Mother of God alone, in bust form, with seven swords piercing her chest. This type of icon is popular in the north of Russia. Cf. Chiroșca 2014, p. 155.

⁷¹ The ground upon these saints are selected is either the onomastic patronage, i.e. various saints whose names are borne by members of a family are brought together, or the

Neamț, Cernica, Pasărea, Ghighiu⁶⁷ and Dintr-un Lemn. They are also found, in folk style versions, in museum collections from Vaslui, Buzău, Galați, Huși, Iași and Ialomița. Their distribution across the country undoubtedly shows the close connections between the communities of the respective monasteries and the type of monasticism practiced by the highly devout monks at Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv in the 18th century. Among them were Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului or Saint Paisius of Neamț who were instructed on Mount Athos and then returned to Ukraine and Moldavia to establish new monasteries in the Hesychast spirit, thus laying the foundations for the real revival of monastic life and culture, which developed in the 18th and 19th century under the name of Paisianism.⁶⁸ The peculiarity of this iconographic type, which probably also made it so rich in meaning for Paisian monks, consists in the unusual appearance of the Mother of God depicted without a maphorion, with her hair untied as a sign of mourning, standing in prayer, bathed in tears, in front of the Saviour crucified on the cross. The composition is inspired by the representation of *Saint Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross* in Western art, especially in Flemish engravings, such as *Saint Mary Magdalene praying in front of crucifix* created by the engraver Schelte Adams à Bolswert after Peter Paul Rubens, but also by the Western type of the *Mater Dolorosa*, which entered Romanian iconography under the name of the *Sorrowful / Mourning / Bereaved Mother of God*.⁶⁹

Other representations of the Mother of God found in the Russian icons on Romanian territory are of an allegorical or symbolic type: some are specific to the Slav world, such as the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* (figs 4, 58, 59), with 23 icons (7.79%) or the *Pokrov* (fig. 60), with 13 images (4.4%), while others are pan-Orthodox themes such as the *Burning Bush* type (fig. 61 – 8 icons, 2.7%), and the *Life-Giving Spring* (fig. 57 – 5 icons, 1.69%). Counting only one or two examples in the sample I analyzed, there are also other rarer, specifically Russian typologies of the Mother of God, such as



the Mother of God Softener of Evil Hearts (*Simeon’s Prophecy*),⁷⁰ *Do not lament for me, oh, Mother (Pietà)* (2 icons), the Mother of God the Unexpected Joy (fig. 36), the Mother of God “Besednaya” (The Miracle of the Appearance of the Mother of God to the Sexton Yurysh), the Mother of God “Ognevidnaya” (Fiery Vision, fig. 37), the Mother of God Kasperovskaya, the Mother of God Pochayevskaya, the Mother of God Jerusalemkaya, and the Mother of God Rimskaya, etc.

Then, in order of frequency, come the four-part icons of which there are 215 (21.5% of the total), most of them with the typical composition of the *Crucifixion with the Mother of God Kazanskaya, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George and the Archangel Michael Commander of the Fearsome Host*, and then the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell with Feasts*, usually twelve in number, amounting to 102 examples altogether (10.2% of the total). After that, in terms of popularity, come the icons of *Saint Nicholas of Myra* (fig. 56 – 95 icons, 9.5% of the total), *Christ Pantokrator* (67 icons, 6.7% of the total), icons with multiple saints⁷¹ (59 icons, 5.9% of the total), *Saint John the Baptist* (21 icons, 2.1% of the total), various Great Feasts⁷² (21 icons, 2.1%), *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* (16 icons, 1.6%), *Archangel Michael* (13 icons, 1.3%), the scenes from the Passion Cycle, such as the *Crucifixion* and the *Lamentation* (fig. 26 – 12 icons, 1.2%), *Saint George* (9 icons, 1%), the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands / Mandylion* (8 icons, 0.8%), the *Three Hierarchs* (8 icons, 0.8%), the *Prophet Elijah* (7 icons, 0.7%), *Saint Barbara* (7 icons, 0.7%), the *Deesis* (6 icons, 0.6%), *Saint Mitrofan Bishop of Voronezh* (fig. 63, 5 icons, 0.5%), *Saint John the Theologian* (5 icons, 0.5%), the *Apostles Peter and Paul* (4 icons), *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki* (fig. 64 – 3 icons), *Saints Constantine and Helen* (2 icons), and the *Archangels Michael and Gabriel* (2 icons). There are also various other themes, identified in only one copy, some popular in the Romanian space, such as *Saint Spyridon Bishop of Tremithus*, *Saints Cosmas and Damian*, known as the *Anargyroi* in Greek, *Saint Simeon the God-receiver*, and others very rare, for example *Saint Mary Magdalene*, *Saint John the Warrior*, *Saint Martyr Eudokia*,

► Fig. 40. *Christ Pantokrator*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Bishopric of Slobozia and Călărași.

▲ Fig. 41. *Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie)*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.

Copyright: Cetățuia Monastery.

Notes

agricultural practices, in which case patron saints of certain guilds, crafts or activities are selected (e.g. the patron saints of animal breeder, the Holy Martyrs Florus and Laurus as protectors of horses, etc.). Of course, in the composition of these florilegia of saints, the criterion of the most revered is to be considered, so that among the most frequently encountered names there are: the Holy Fathers Nicholas, Basil, John Chrysostom, and Gregory the Theologian, the Archdeacon Saints Stephen and Lawrence, the Holy Empress Helena, the Archangel Michael, etc.

⁷² The *Dormition of the Mother of God* (fig. 27 – 5 icons), the *Resurrection of Christ* (4 icons), the *Annunciation* (3 icons), the *Nativity of Christ* as the *Adoration of the Magi* type (3 icons), the *Holy Trinity* as the *Hospitality of Abraham* (2 icons), the *Birth of the Mother of God* (2 icons), the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (1 icon) and the *Baptism* (1 icon).



▲ Fig. 42. *Mother of God Smolenskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: Surpatele Monastery.



▲ Fig. 43. *Mother of God Tikhvinskaya*, late 19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

▼ Fig. 44. *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Râmnic.

▼ Fig. 45. *Mother of God Smolenskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.
Copyright: 'Carol I' Museum, Brăila.





the *Holy Martyr Nikita*, the *Holy Martyr Theodotus the Bishop of An-cyra*, and the *Winged Christ*, etc.

The group of icons with several saints also deserves special dis-cussion, this category being divided in turn into three compositional sub-types: the most numerous (31 examples) is the one that broadly re-produces the layout of the four-part icons, which has a very consistent arrangement: on the top row there are the three images of the *Mother of God Kazanskaya*, the *Resurrection of Christ* and *Saint Nicholas of Myra*; in the middle row there are between three and eight variously selected

▲ Fig. 46. *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Copyright: ‘Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu’ Vâlcea County Museum.

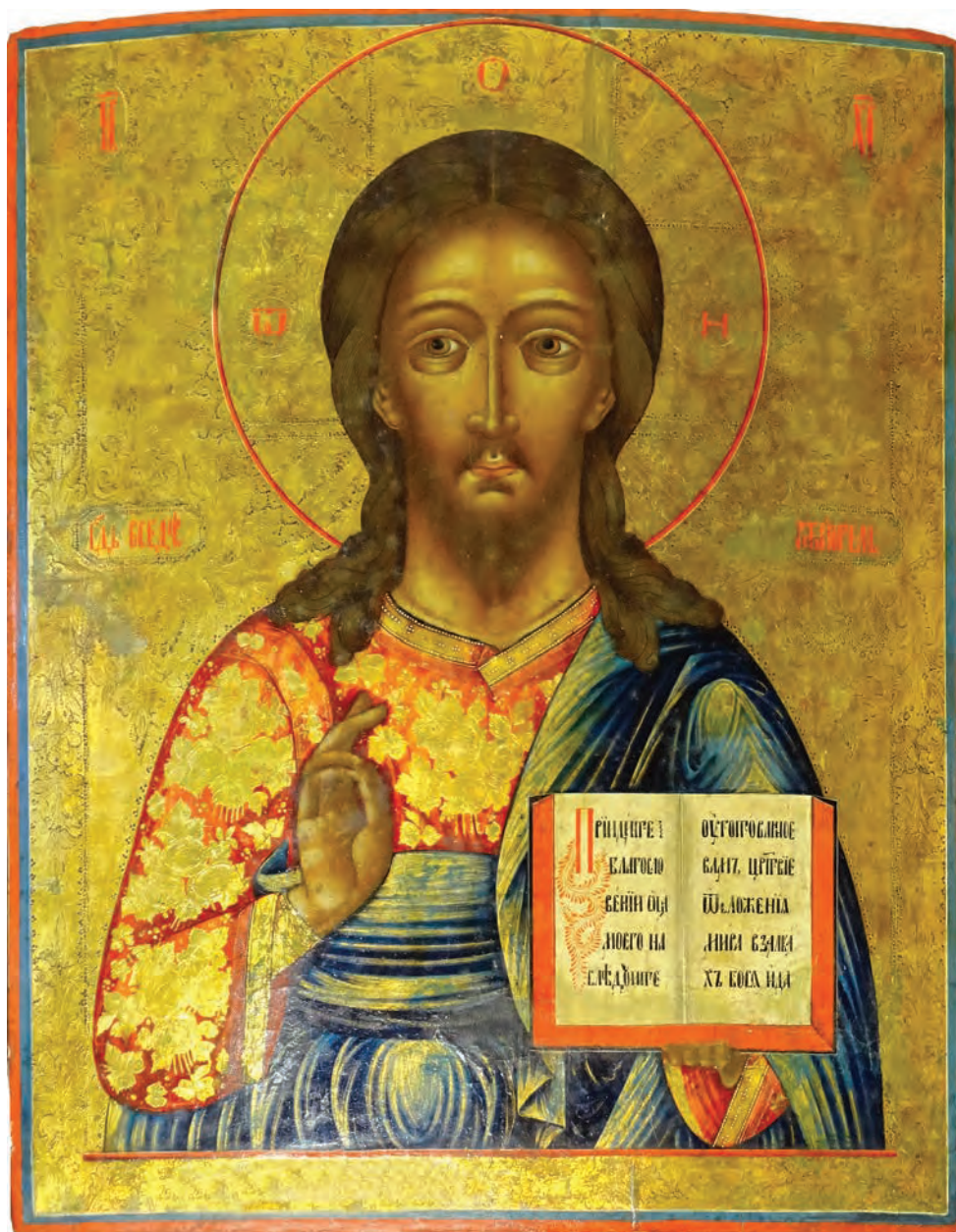


Fig. 47. *Mother of God Softening of Evil Hearts*, mid-19th century, Kholuy workshop.
Copyright: National Museum of Agriculture in Slobozia.

Fig. 48. *Mother of God Seeker of the Lost*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop, Vladimirești Monastery Museum, Galați County.
Source: Mocenco 2020.

Fig. 49. *Mother of God* (from a *Deesis*), second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop. Provenance: Banloc, Timiș County.
Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

Fig. 50. *Mother of God Surety of Sinners*, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop. Comana Monastery Museum, Giurgiu County.
Credits: Florentin Stoian.



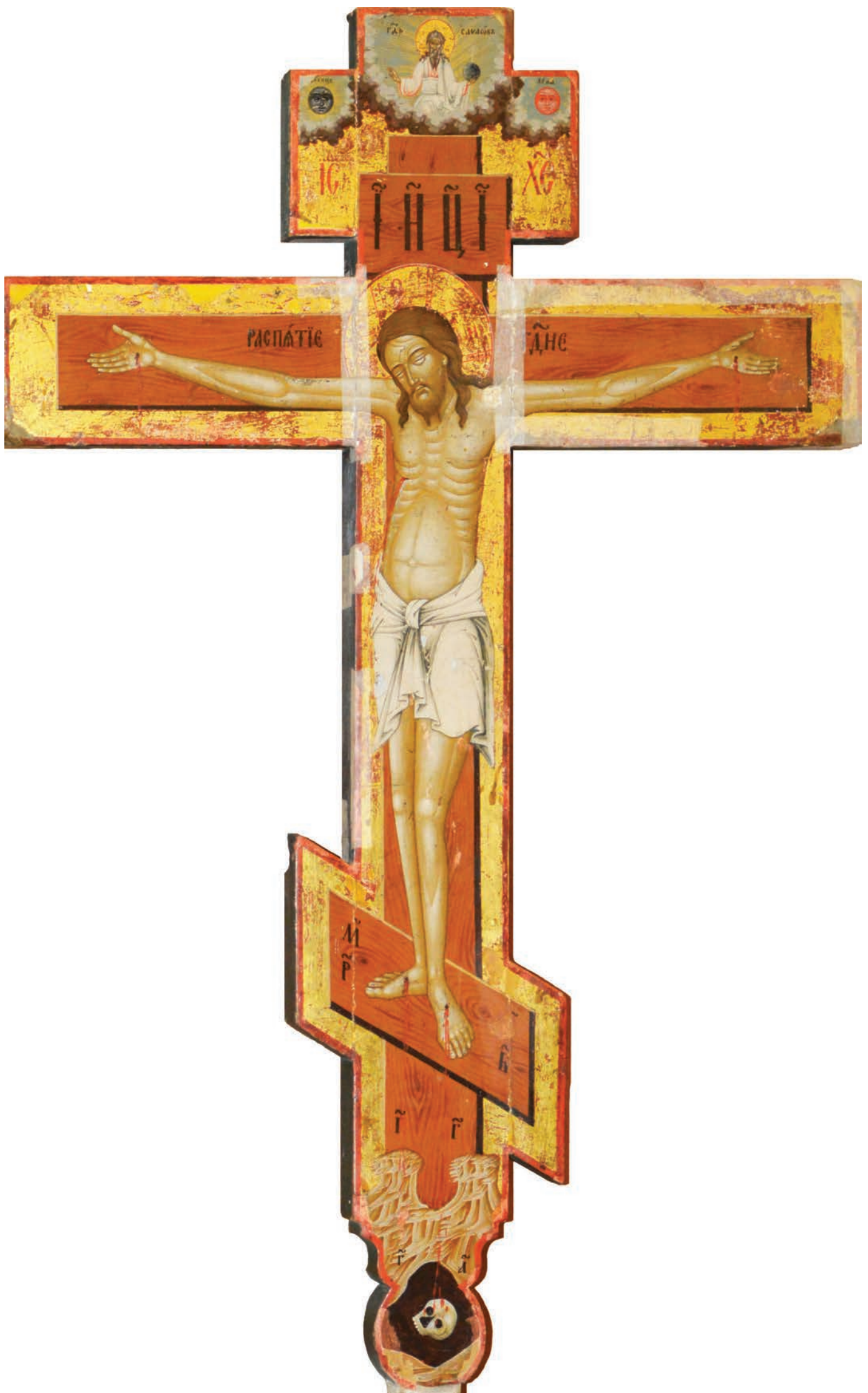
▲ Fig. 51. *Christ Pantokrator*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop. Provenance: Banloc, Timiș County. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.

▼ Fig. 52. *The Holy Martyr Theodotus, Bishop of Ancyra*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop. Copyright: Cetățuia Monastery.

▼ Fig. 53. *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop. Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

► Fig. 54. *Mother of God Assistant in Childbirth*, end of the 19th century, unknown workshop. Copyright: Museum of the Metropolitanate of Banat.







saints, lined up usually in full-length; finally, on the bottom row three other images, mirroring the ones above, of the three saints, among which *Saint George Slaying the Dragon* and *Saint Paraskeva of Iconium (Pyatnitsa)* are most often included. The second most popular type (12 icons) has an Archangel in the center of the composition holding the *Mandylion*, and on either side of him there are two to eight saints, full-length in an attitude of adoration (fig. 23). There are also variants of this type, with the *Savior Not Made by Human Hands* floating in the sky or with the *Trinity of the New Testament* enthroned in the clouds.

◀ Fig. 55. *Crucifixion* (cross), second half of the 19th century, Mstyora workshop.

Copyright: Three Hierarchs Monastery Museum, Iași.

▶ Fig. 56. *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.



▲ Fig. 57. *Mother of God the Life-Giving Spring*, end of the 18th century, Volga region workshop. Provenance: Stejaru, Neamț County.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Roman and Bacău.

▼ Fig. 58. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*, second half of the 19th century, Vetka workshop.

Copyright: Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality of the Lower Danube in Galați.

The third iconographic version for the icons with multiple saints is the *Extended Deesis* (5 icons), with Christ in the center, flanked by the Mother of God and John the Baptist, followed by the Archangels and other saints such as Peter and Paul, John the Theologian, Philip the Apostle, Saint Zosimas of Palestine and Saint Sava. Another special type in this category is the *Deesis to the Mother of God and Christ Child*, surrounded by various saints such as Archdeacons Stephen and Laurence, Romanus and Euplus, the Holy Fathers Gregory the Theologian and Ignatius Theophoros, John Chrysostom and Nicholas, Andrew the Fool for Christ, Maximus the Confessor, and the Guardian Angel, e.g. as seen on the icon kept at the 'Carol I' Museum of Brăila (fig. 62). This particular work seems to be a patchwork made by Old Believers using fragments of old icons, cut and stuck together with some new parts.

The make-up of the sample analyzed reveals at least one interesting occurrence, namely that the saints that were highly revered in the cult and tradition of the Orthodox Romanians and extremely important for the agrarian calendar or as patrons of the guilds in the Romanian Principalities, such as George, Demetrios, Elijah, Barbara, Constantine and Helena, or Charalambos etc., occupy an unusually low place in these statistics. This can only be explained by the fact that the Russian icon sellers did not bring such themes on the Romanian market, because they were not so popular in their place of origin. The best-selling icons were those with more scenes and more saints, four-part and feast icons, because they provided the highest return on the sellers' transport and distribution costs, being suitable for a very wide range of potential customers. It is not at all surprising that this kind of composition with several scenes / figures became very popular and was quickly taken over by local painters, especially by the craftsmen who painted on glass in



Transylvania, but also in Oltenia, where festal icons were extremely fashionable at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century, while the echoes of the post-Brancovan style were still being felt.

On the other hand, the import of Russian icons gave Romanian Christians access to new subjects and popularizes the cult of certain saints, such as the unusual case of *Saint Mitrofan Bishop of Voronezh* (†1703) who gained some popularity in the areas of Buzău (fig. 63) and Vaslui. The explanation for having there icons of a quasi-contemporary saint from Russia, in the same proportion (0.5% of the survey) as the representations of the Prophet Elijah or the Three Hierarchs, is probably also related to the influence that the monasticism of Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv had in the mountains of Buzău and Vrancea.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of the mass-produced icons made in the villages of the Vladimir region of Russia by folk craftsmen, both Old Believers and Nikonians, is one of regional importance that marked the history of the Orthodox provinces of central and southern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. A significant number of such pieces can be found in Romania today, as a result of the extensive trade that the Russian icon sellers carried on with the Orthodox populations of neighbouring empires and countries. Of course, it is true that the icons from Kholuy, Vetka, Mstyora, Palekh and Guslitsa equally belong to the communities of Russian Old Believers, later called *Lipovans*,⁷³ who settled on the territory of Romania in the 18th and 19th centuries, and, to this day, we still find some of these icons in their churches and homes.⁷⁴ However, documentary, epigraphic, stylistic, iconographic, and geographical arguments prove that the majority of these icons found in Romania were intended

► Fig. 59. *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*, end of the 19th century, Vladimir region workshop.

Copyright: ‘Curtea Domnească’ National Museum Complex in Târgoviște.

▲ Fig. 60. *Pokrov*, early 20th century, Vetka workshop. Provenance: Cotu-Ciorii, Buzău County.

Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

Notes

⁷³ This is a controversial term, disputed even by some of those who are referred to by it. For the history of the term “Lipovan”, the contradictory meanings and the poor coverage it has in relation to the Old Believer population in Romania, see Procop 2021, p. 226-286. It should be noted that this ethnonym also has a pejorative meaning, when translated as “bad faith” or “corrupt faith”, an interpretation favored by the ecclesiastical authorities of the Orthodox New Rite in the 19th century, including the Romanian ones.

⁷⁴ Stoica 1994, p. 305-328.



▲ Fig. 61. Mother of God and Christ Child in the Burning Bush type, second half of the 19th century, Guslitsa workshop, Moscow region. Copyright: 'Carol I' Museum, Brăila.



◀ Fig. 62. *Mother of God Pecherskaya flanked by Archdeacons Stephen and Laurence, Hierarchs Gregory the Theologian and Ignatius Theophoros, the Guardian Angel with Archdeacons Romanus and Euplus, Hierarchs John Chrysostom and Nicholas, Saints Andrew the Fool for Christ and Maximus the Confessor, early 19th century, Guslitsa workshop.*
Copyright: ‘Carol I’ Museum, Brăila.

▶ Fig. 63. *Saint Mitrofan, Bishop of Voronezh, second half of the 19th century, Kholuy workshop.*
Provenance: The Annunciation Church-‘Banu’, Buzău.
Copyright: Museum of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea.

▶ Fig. 64. *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki Slays Tsar Kalojan, second half of the 19th century, Vladimir region workshop.* Provenance: Saint George Church, Pitești.
Source: Mocenco 2020.



for the worship of the Romanian Orthodox and, from this point of view, the description “Lipovan icon” is not appropriate for them. Art historians recommend using the classification Russian icon, with precise indications as to their provenance (workshop), when this is possible. I believe that removing the false association with an ethnic minority community in Romania and understanding the true position these icons have occupied in the lives of Romanians over the last three centuries certainly represents an important step on the way to studying and cataloguing this substantial heritage of religious art unjustly avoided until now.

ΠΑΣΧΑΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΑΔΟΣ

ΕΠΙ ΤΗΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΑΔΟΣ



Other Experiences and Challenges in the Restoration of Russian Icons

translated by Septimiu-Ovidiu Dumitran

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1. Four-part Icon

At first glance, it might appear that the Russian mass-produced icons of the 19th-century show little variation. Indeed, within this tradition is preserved a generational knowledge of composition and technique. However, closer examination will reveal that there is considerable diversity in these icons, both with respect to their iconography and construction.

This chapter will describe my efforts to restore a Russian-made four-part icon from the Râmnicu-Vâlcea museum’s collection, an anonymous work with no known provenance¹ (fig. 1, 8).

The hard wood on the back of the icon showed primarily tangential deformations due to variations in the microclimate, deformations that forced the crossbars out of their original position. Over time, the icon has developed poorly adherent deposits, suffered from erosion, and stains of various origins, including wax deposits. Painted with a consistent but extremely fine paint-paste, the paint surface had numerous exfoliations due to the drying and tangential deformation of the wood. Microclimate fluctuations have contributed to the phenomenon of decohesion. Additionally, human factors, such as the use of the icon in worship and its storage conditions have led to the accumulation of wax deposits and a variety of stains of other origins² (figs 3-4).

Initially, the back of the icon was dusted.³ Its non-adherent deposits were removed, then a broad-spectrum permethrin-based biocide was applied to prevent any subsequent attack by xylophagous insects. After a preliminary cleaning of the relevant area with a solution of alcoholized water, the missing crossbars were replaced with new ones cut to size in birch wood, an operation performed by a wood restorer (figs 9-10). The cracks were sealed with a mixture of fish glue (9%) and sawdust. Adherent deposits were removed with a 20% solution of alcoholized water and the stains were removed. Various stain removal techniques were employed, each according to the nature of the stain itself. Chromatic integration was achieved using the *velatura* tech-



▲ Fig. 1. The icon before restoration.

◄ Fig. 2. The icon after restoration.

Notes

¹ Mirea 2019, p. 391-394.

² Dimensions: 31x26, 5x2 cm.

³ For a better understanding of the icon I recommend: Istudor 2011.



◀ Fig. 3. Details before restoration.

▶ Fig. 4. Details before restoration.

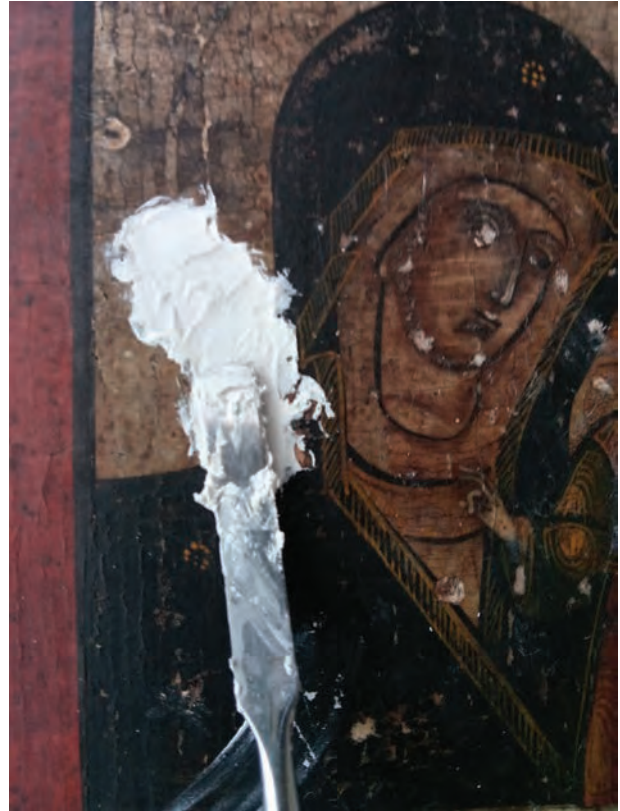
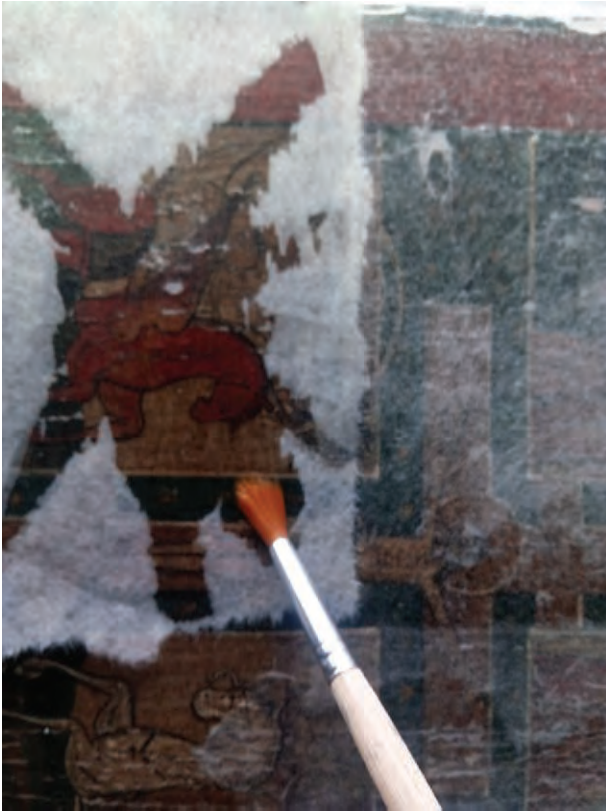
▶ Fig. 5. Application of Japanese paper.

▶▶ Fig. 6. Application of putty.

▶ Fig. 7. Cleaning the paint layer.

▼ Fig. 8-10. The back of the icon before and after restoration.





nique, with the help of brushes and colored lake in close shades closely to the original hues.

The painted surface was dusted with a wide brush. Afterwards, 3% fish glue was applied to the Japanese paper. This allowed for the restoration of the cohesion and adhesion of the paint layer to the support, a process that was carried out by applying a mixture of 9% fish glue and by letting the distilled water content evaporate through condensation, alternating the hot press with the cold press (fig. 5). The layered completion of the ground layer (a fairly thick plaster-based glue) initially meant sealing the fly holes with sawdust putty and the subsequent application of putty milk and putty (9% fish glue mixed with calcium carbonate) (fig. 6). The removal of the adherent deposits was also a challenge in itself, the painting having poorly adherent deposits and punctually adherent deposits in the form of agglomerations in various arrangements. In addition to these, we must mention the extremely sensitive metal leaf. Poorly adherent deposits were cleaned with a mixture of 4% potassium hydroxide and a surfactant emulsion consisting of 100 ml of alcohol and 150 ml of different solvents in equal proportions (fig. 7). The chromatic integration was done with watercolors in the *velatura* technique for erosions, the *ritocco* for small lacunae, and the *tratteggio* technique for larger lacunae, with a lighter tone and a cooler tint.⁴ 12% dammar varnish was added to 1% wax as a plasticizer and was applied in a lengthy brushing and levelling process.



Notes

⁴ For a better understanding of the restoration techniques, I recommend Knut 1999.



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2. Icon of the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow*

The photos that I took before the restoration of this icon reveal that, in the recent past, the boards of the wooden panel had been re-glued. The panel showed various degrees of deterioration, not uncommon in old, wooden icons. Such deterioration is not unique to Russian icons, but typical of all icons that have been kept in poor conditions or those that have been inadequately cleaned by their owners. First, I shall present some images that illustrate degradations of the panel: i.e. the rather pronounced curvature, the cracking of the panel along the line where it has been re-glued in the past, and the lack of crossbars. The wood of the panel is resinous and has many defects that make it unsuitable as a support for painting. We can observe knots, uneven wood fiber, and unequal spaces between the hard fibers. All of these defects have caused particular degradations of the ground layer and the paint layer. Some of these degradations that existed before the restoration are illustrated in a few of the images: splits of various types, craquelures and cracks, lacunae, altered, agglomerated, and darkened varnish, and deposits of impurities accumulated especially in the lacunae in the ground layer.

▼ Fig. 3. The curvature of the panel following the loss of the crossbars.



▼ Fig. 4. Crack in the central longitudinal area of the panel.



▲ Fig. 1. The icon before restoration.

◄ Fig. 2. The icon after restoration.

▼ Fig. 5. Wood knot.

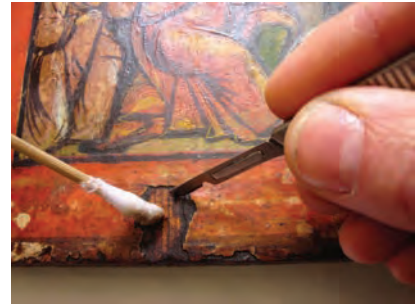




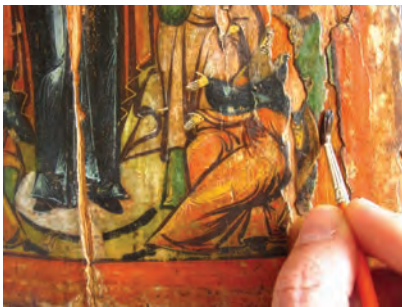
- ◀ Fig. 6-7. Lacunae in the paint layer filled with deposits of impurities.
- ▶ Fig. 8. Lacunae in the paint layer filled with deposits of impurities.
- ▶ Fig. 9. Consolidation of the paint layer.
- ▶ Fig. 10. Consolidation of the panel by regluing.



▶ Fig. 11. Cleaning the paint surface.



▶ Fig. 12. Cleaning and degreasing before filling the lacunae.



▶ Fig. 13. Applying glue for wood impregnation.



▶ Fig. 14. Applying the putty to the edges of the lacunae.



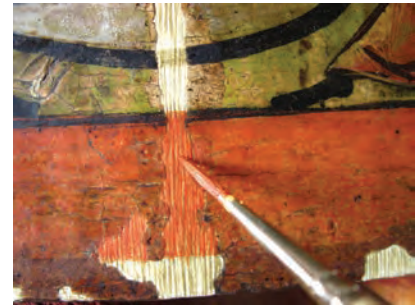
▶ Fig. 15. Applying the putty.



▶ Fig. 16. Applying the primer paste.



▶ Fig. 17. Integration using the *ritocco* method on abrasions.



▶ Fig. 18. Integration using the *tratteggio* method.



▶ Fig. 19. Detail before restoration.



▶ Fig. 20. Detail after the lacunae have been filled.



▶ Fig. 21. Detail after chromatic integration.



3. Icon of the *Mother of God, Seeker of the Lost*

The first images that I present in relation to this icon illustrate aspects of its state of degradation before I began its restoration. The panel had acquired a pronounced curvature over time. Despite this, the original crossbars had been preserved. The panel had suffered a medium-scale xylophagous attack, with the insects producing various holes and galleries. In addition to these degradations, there were cracks, small lacunae, and deposits of adherent impurities. The measuring tape that appears in the image gives us a sense of scale regarding the dimensions of these degradations. In these images we can observe lacunae, abrasions, cracks, craquelures, altered and dark varnish, and deposits of adhering impurities at the level of the paint layer. With respect to this icon, there were no serious splits in the ground layer or the paint layer. The icon was stabilized with respect to these specific degradations. In the images illustrating the face of the Mother of God and her hands, we notice small lacunae, and dark and agglomerated varnish. The problem of old and weathered varnish was, as the images show, one of the main challenges of this restoration.



▲ Fig. 1. The icon before restoration.

◄ Fig. 2. The icon after restoration.

▼ Fig. 7. Applying the insecticide on the back of the panel.

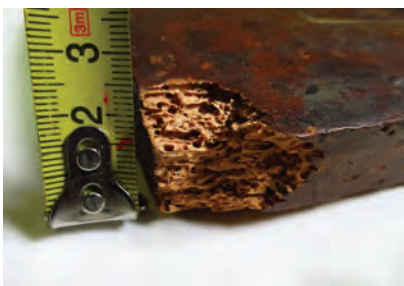
▼ Fig. 3. The curvature of the panel.



▼ Fig. 4. Lacuna in the crossbar produced as a result of the weakening of the wood due to xylophagous insects.



▼ Fig. 5. Lacuna in the panel.



▼ Fig. 6. Injecting the insecticide into the galleries created by xylophagous insects.





▲ Fig. 8-10. Cracks, splits, gradual abrasions and lacunae in the paint layer, altered varnish.



◀ Fig. 11. Cleaning the paint layer.

▼ Fig. 12. Filling the holes produced by xylophagous insects.

↘ Fig. 13. Chromatic integration in the *ritocco* method on the area filled with putty.

▶ Fig. 14-15. Applying varnish with a brush in criss-cross (diagonal) directions.

▲ Fig. 16. Chromatic integration using the *tratteggio* method on the lacunae filled with putty.



▲ Fig. 17. Cleaning the back of the panel.



▲ Fig. 18. Lacuna in the panel filled with new wood.



▲ Fig. 19. Crossbar lacuna filled with new wood.



▲ Fig. 20. Chromatic integration of new pieces of wood.



▲ Fig. 21. Overview after the chromatic integration of the new pieces of wood.



▲ Fig. 22. Applying the putty in the lacuna.



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“Some very turbulent fellow-citizens and laymen with entirely indolent souls are held here in the dungeons: the so-called icon peddlers, who have travelled throughout the country announcing to the more uncivilized people that the Muscovites are coming and will pierce with the sword all those who are found without icons in their houses, so that all those of the true faith would do well to buy the icons, if they want to be spared and live.”

(Letter of the future Greek-Catholic bishop Grigore Maior to General Adolph von Buccow, 22 May 1761)

As part of a transfer phenomenon with a remarkable history in the other territories inhabited by Orthodox populations, the Russian icons in Transylvania – a multi-ethnic and multid denominational space – never achieved more than peripheral status either in terms of quality or quantity. The explanations for this obvious failure of Russian propaganda among Transylvanian Orthodox Romanians are to be sought not so much in the prohibitive legislation adopted at any given moment, but more particularly in the legislation that allowed the Romanian community in Transylvania as a whole, whether of Orthodox or Greek-Catholic denominations, to progress socially, economically and culturally in such a way that it began to look for its models directly in the West, of which the Habsburg Empire that governed the territory was a part, and thus become, little by little, part of the social and political cohesion. This would have been the exact opposite of what the pan-Orthodoxy of the Russian Empire aimed to achieve. The history of the Russian icon in Transylvania thus turns out to be a late echo of medieval solidarities, inevitably doomed to fail in a society that, however gradually, was nonetheless moving towards modernization, under pressure from the Theresian-Josephine reforms and Enlightenment ideas.

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