Russian Religious Art at the Benaki Museum

Collecting Practices, Art, and Technology

Edited by Anastasia Drandaki

BENAKI MUSEUM

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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Instead of Introduction: Invisible Art—Russian Religious Art in Twentieth-Century Greece and the Benaki Museum

Anastasia Drandaki

The concept of invisible art, though at first sight just a contradiction in terms, is nevertheless nothing new. Experiments in contemporary art involving the concept of "invisible art" go back a number of decades, starting in the mid-twentieth century. Though few in number, these provocative experiments by twentieth-century artists were attempting to smash the bonds of artistic form, doing away with all the figurative means that go to make up its materiality (colour, materials, media, iconography, etc.), replacing them with empty space and the intangible form that only the viewer's imagination is invited to fill with content.[1] Among the best-known experiments of this kind is the Yves Klein exhibition *Le Vide* (The Void) at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris in 1958, with its untranslatable sub-title *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée* (Riout, 2004; Desmet, 2011). In 1992, working in the same vein as Klein, Thomas Friedman exhibited his work entitled *Untitled (A Curse)*, an empty white plinth, and in 1989 Gianni Motti exhibited his *Magic Ink* (to mention but a few notable examples).[2]

In all the above cases the visual and material dimensions of art were deliberately made to disappear, making the works invisible on the one hand, yet conceptually present in space, at least as far as the intentions of their creators were concerned. However, the case with Russian religious art in Greek museums and scholarship that I will briefly overview here represents precisely the opposite phenomenon: focusing, in other words, not on the visual absence of the work of art as a physical object, but on its almost total disappearance from the viewers' visual field, thanks to the conceptual processes that determine how the spectator's gaze works and which lead it to focus on only a part of the whole.[3] And this means they hone in on the part that corresponds to the expectations and ideological parameters that perennially determine the gaze, in the rather Lacanian sense of the gaze as a mirror (Lacan, 2006 [1949], 75–81; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). To put it simply, as viewers, but also as art historians and scholars, we see only that which reflects our own identity.

Only by invoking such a view can one interpret the surprisingly invisible existence of Russian religious works over many decades, particularly the Russian icons from private collections, museums, and the great shrines of the Greek Orthodox world, where –although these works are physically present– our gaze glides over them without truly registering their presence. Two typical examples suffice to illustrate this peculiar invisibility. The Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos, one of the largest Byzantine pilgrimage sites in the Aegean, has a large collection of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine icons, which was published in exemplary fashion by Manolis Chatzidakis in 1977 (1985 English edition). Chatzidakis gathered all the icons from the island's churches into one great collection, presenting an overview of mainly post-Byzantine painting that represented not only the huge variety in artistic expression among artists and workshops but above all the splendour and influence of the great Patmian shrine, which had garnered offerings from all over the Orthodox world. Yet there are no works from Russian workshops among the icons he published. A few years later in 1988, the de-luxe volume *Patmos: Treasures of the Monastery* was published as part of a series by the editorial house Ekdotike Athenon, in which the most important art works in the monastery, its various collections and sacred spaces were presented (architecture, wall paintings, icons, vestments, silverware, manuscripts, etc.). Once again, whereas the icons represent the work of some of the greatest Greek workshops, Russian works of art are included only in the section on silverware, written by Yota Ikonomaki-Papadoulos who has carefully documented the ties between the monastery and Muscovy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the surviving metalwork (Ikonomaki-Papadopoulos, 1988, cf. 231–34).

Fig. 1 *Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Patmos. The templon of the katholikon with three Russian despotic icons. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis.*

Yet the question regarding icons remains: were there any Russian icons in the Patmos Monastery, and if so, what led to their presence there, and what was their significance for the holy space? In fact, the sources document the close connections

between the Patmian monastic community and the mighty Orthodox empire of Russia, which gave not only financial aid, as a result of fundraising at parish level, but also political patronage to the great Orthodox centres of the East.[4] Of supreme importance in making this policy a reality, was not only the provision of funds but also the despatch of Russian works of art and icons, whose presence made the close links of patronage with Russia transparent and transformed the aesthetic of Greek Orthodox churches, suffusing them with the artistic trends prevailing in tsarist workshops (Boycheva and Drandaki 2017).

On Patmos especially, Russian icons play a leading role in the devotional practices in the holy space, with three large despotic icons on the templon of the katholikon having a prominent place in the liturgical life of the monastic community. (fig. 1) With reference to the cult icon of the titular saint, John the Theologian, the monastery's documents note: "In 1698, on 16th June the elderly Gideon came from Muscovy and brought the icon of the Great Theologian, which drew praise for the way it looked". A little later on, in 1702, as a result of the next church fundraising campaign organised by the priest-monk Isaiah Mazaris, the other two despotic icons for the templon arrived, an icon of the Virgin and a Christ Pantokrator in the type of Our Saviour of Smolensk for which the Patmian fraternity sent thanks to Peter the Great (Boycheva 2017 and forthcoming). The Russian templon icons from Patmos are numbered among the greatest creations of the imperial workshops of the Armoury Chamber, while more Russian works, offerings from Greek clergy are kept in the monastery's Treasury and Library. Despite all this, and despite their prominent position, and their evidently unique value in the history of the monastery, not one of the Russian icons was included in the corpus of Patmos icons.

A similar picture emerges from another great Orthodox pilgrimage centre, the Sinai Monastery, which by common accord has the largest and most important collection of icons in the world, with an uninterrupted sequence of works from the sixth century to the present day. As one of the great Christian loca sancta, with an uninterrupted international reputation, Sinai has collected offerings from all over the Christian world. Yet there was no room for the monastery's Russian icons alongside the other Byzantine and post-Byzantine works in the publication Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of St Catherine (1990, English edition 2005), and they remain largely unknown. Needless to say, in the valuable Princeton-Michigan-Alexandria photographic archive containing icons from Sinai, not a single Russian icon is included, nor are any found in Soterious's first systematic publication of Sinai icons (Soteriou 1956).

It is only rather recently that a comprehensive catalogue of the Russian works at Sinai was published, by a group of Russian colleagues, though this excellent publication has not yet gathered scholarly attention, even though the Sinai collection includes many important works by Russian workshops from the sixteenth century onwards (*Russian icons of Mount Sinai*, 2014). At that time, elaborate gifts and generous donations were part of Russia's official policy of protection and patronage in respect of the great Orthodox monasteries and pilgrimage centres. Moreover, it is not by chance that even St. Catherine's reliquary in the katholikon at Sinai, the most sacred place in the monastery after the Chapel of the Burning Bush, is a Russian artwork, made in Moscow in the seventeenth century, a gift from Tsars Peter and Ivan and the Tsarina Sophia. (fig. 2) And here too, as on Patmos, the presence of Russian works was instrumental. They transformed the devotional space, placing it under the artistic and symbolic hegemony of Russia.

***Fig. 2** Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai. The silver reliquary of St Catherine, a gift from Tsars Peter and Ivan and the Tsarina Sophia, Moscow 1687-1688. After* Mount Sinai, *2014, 107.*

So, how can we explain why Russian religious artworks were tacitly plunged into this bizarre oblivion? How is it that our gaze has skated over them for decades, failing to recognise them and ignoring the importance they held in these cult spaces and in their history? At what point do we discern the shift from admiration for the remarkable, imported Muscovite works to systematically rendering them invisible? The reasons are evidently ideological, and their roots can be traced back to the early twentieth century, a roughly contemporaneous development with the discovery of icons as collectable objects and their recognition as works of art inextricably interwoven with Byzantine culture.

To understand this phenomenon, we must take an overall look at the political and ideological climate of the period. In the second half of the nineteenth century, influenced by Romanticism, which fostered a new appreciation of medieval culture and spurred the development of medieval and Byzantine Studies in Europe, Byzantine art began to attract collectors' attention.

In late nineteenth-century Greece, in particular, historians like Paparrigopoulos and Zambelios incorporated Byzantium into the national historiography as the link that ensured the unbroken cohesion and continuity of Greek culture from antiquity to the present day. For Greece, as for the other Balkan states that emerged from the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, Byzantium was transformed into a disputed temporal, spatial and cultural entity (Drandaki 2022; Skopetea 1988; Stamatopoulos 2022; Tziovas 1989). This played a central role in the national historiography of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Albania, with each country creating its own divergent or positively conflicting Byzantine narrative, reflecting the rivalries and the realities in the Balkans in the early twentieth century and the subsequent turbulent relations between the patriarchate of Constantinople on the one hand and the emerging rival national church institutions on the other -the Bulgarian schism being the most notable case in point (Matalas 2003). Caught between ever-changing narratives of continuity, discontinuity, rivalries or rejection, Byzantium became the subject of claims and appropriation, being called alternately Greek or Slav in the attempt to trace ancestors or cultural roots, in order ultimately to form a contemporary national identity. And the Byzantine or Post-Byzantine antiquities were pressed into service in the cause of the same ideological objectives. I think a passing remark in the catalogue of the exhibition of icons from the collection of Alexios Kolyvas, the first icon collection in Greece, organised by Professor Adamantios Adamantiou for the 16th International Congress of the Orientalists held in Athens in 1912, is very telling with regard to this debate (*Exposition* 1912). Adamantiou notes (translation from the original French text): "These icons, which are all post-seventeenth century, nevertheless constitute a more precious collection than that of the Grottaferrata exhibition (1905), which included icons from Slavic countries. On the other hand these [icons] from our own collection, painted on Greek soil, faithfully copy earlier works and are of exceptional interest for the history of Byzantine art". The Grottaferrata exhibition was the first international icon exhibition and included mainly Russian icons, or "Slavic" [icons] as Adamantiou indiscriminately labels them (Muñoz, 1905), and which he rejected as inferior creations, departing from the Byzantine tradition per se, which only Greek icons faithfully followed, even though they themselves dated to a much later period, i.e. to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

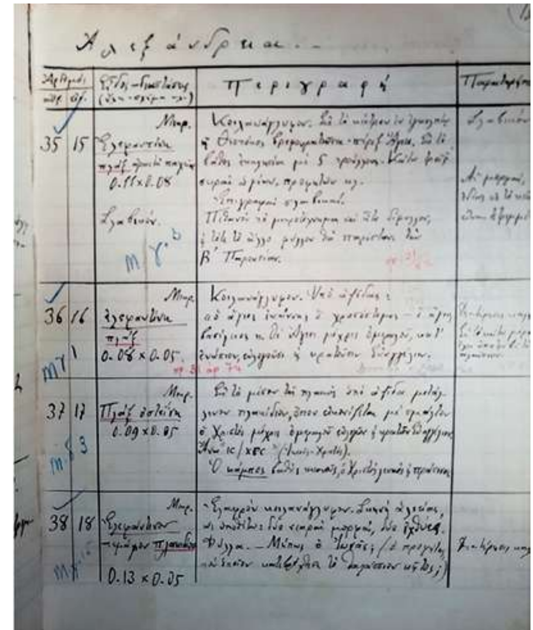

Fig. 3 A page from the handwritten catalogue of Antonis Benakis's Byzantine collection, compiled by Adamantios Adamantiou in Alexandria, 1920. Among other items, there is a description of the ivory plaque no. 10398, with a representation of the hymn "In Thee Rejoiceth," made in Moscow in the late 16th-early 17th century (cat. no. XXX).

Even more telling in the context of this debate is, in my opinion, the gradual about-turn in the attitude of Antonis Benakis, the founder of the eponymous museum in Athens, towards Russian religious art. Benakis began to collect Byzantine and Post-Byzantine works of art in the early twentieth century while still residing in Alexandria (Drandaki 2022). In May 1920, he invited Adamantiou to Alexandria to deliver lectures to the art-loving Alexandrian public on Byzantine Art. At the same time, Benakis commissioned him to make a systematic record of the Byzantine works in his collection. Adamantiou's detailed and systematic handwritten catalogue, preserved in the archive of the Benaki Museum's Byzantine collection, is the first piece of evidence of Benakis's collecting interests regarding Byzantium (Fig. 3). It contains 201 objects, including icons, vestments, and works of the minor arts, which fall into the category beloved by collectors of that period, of "objets d'art." What is interesting in this context is that the collection included a considerable number of Russian works of exceptional quality, which decorated Benakis's home cheek by jowl with Byzantine and other Post-Byzantine works (see, for example, the ivory plaque cat. no XX). The presence of Russian objects in his collections is no surprise. At that time, Antonis Benakis was in very close contact with the Russian émigré artist Ivan Bilibin, who drew inspiration from the Russian folk tradition and Russian religious art (fig. 4). Indeed, as the founder and president of the association of art lovers known as "Les amis de l'art d'Alexandrie," Benakis organised an exhibition of Bilibin's work for the Alexandrian public in 1925. (Moraitou 2015–2017).

Fig. 4 The Merchants visit Tsar Saltan, *illustration of Pushkin's poem by Ivan Bilibin (1876-1942). Photo: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bilibin3_saltan.jpg*

Things become even more interesting if we trace the subsequent direction of Benakis's collecting interests with respect to Russian works. As is well known, Antonis Benakis moved permanently to Athens in 1926 and, a little later, in 1929, began feverish preparations for turning his personal collection into the public museum that he bequeathed to the nation. The only Russian works that swelled his collections in subsequent years and that found a place among the additions to the museum were exclusively gifts of immense historical importance, such as the cross of Patriarch Ioakeim III, a gift from Tsar Nicholas II (cat. no XXX), or a priceless Virgin of Kazan, a gift from the Greeks of Russia to the hero of the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, Konstantinos Smolenski (cat. no. XXX). Or they were works that entered the museum from the Exchange Fund [the Fund for Exchangeable Community and Public Welfare Assets], as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne, after the Asia Minor disaster in 1922 and the ensuing expatriation of the Greek Communities from Anatolia (see the article by Mara Verykokou in the present volume). These objects, too, were seen as historical heirlooms rather than works of art. Other Russian works of art accepted by the Museum, even some very notable icons, were never included in the museum's displays.

What is even more interesting is the Hellenisation of some Russian works that ended up in the Benaki collection due to the removal of the original Russian inscriptions and their replacement with Greek ones. A typical example is offered by a beautiful triptych from the seventeenth-century Stroganoff workshops (cat. no. XXX). At some point before it entered the museum, the triptych's Russian inscriptions were effaced to allow for Greek versions to be added over them; and indeed, a counterfeit artist's signature, ΧΕΙΡ ΙΩ (by the hand of Ioannis), and the date 1626 were also added. Another similar example is the typically Russian Anastasis/Descent into Hell, to which Greek inscriptions have been added along with the fraudulent signature of a certain priest-monk Pegasios (cat. no. XXX).

Exactly when did this Hellenisation of the Benaki icons take place? Does it indicate an earlier stage in their devotional use within a Greek context that had already ceased valuing the Russian religious tradition and required adaptations to the Greek language and Greek religiosity in line with the ideological demands of the period? For example, this was the case with four late 17th to early 18th-century icons made in the Kremlin Armoury Chamber, which were transferred to the church of Saint George Politeias in Kastoria after being "Hellenised", with their original Russian inscriptions replaced by Greek ones to better suit the devotional needs and tastes of a Greek Orthodox audience (Boycheva and Drandaki 2017, 96–98 [N. Komashko]). Or was it a more reprehensible falsification of the history of these icons by antiquities dealers seeking to sell them to Greek collectors? Answering that question with any certainty is quite difficult. However, Antonis Benakis's unwavering devotion to Greek icons above all others, along with his policy of enhancing the museum with works by Greek icon painters, was clearly expressed by the Museum's first director, Theodore Makridy, in a letter dated 21st March 1936 addressed to Angela Whitfield, who had offered to sell the Museum some important Russian works. Makridy responded abruptly: "Madam, we are not interested in Russian icons. The only icons that interest us are Greek works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, artistically exceptional and in perfect condition with the signatures of the icon painters. Quite possibly, it was this clearly stated acquisition policy on behalf of the Benaki Museum that whetted the appetite of forgers who began adding fraudulent Greek signatures to otherwise excellent Russian icons, such as the Stroganoff triptych we discussed earlier. Even after the death of its founder, the Benaki Museum would not buy Russian works again until 1993, when at my instigation, a small icon of the Virgin and Child from Abkhazia was purchased for a negligible sum (cat. no. XXX).

Russian works maintained a very peripheral, almost invisible presence in the Benaki Museum's exhibition and displays policy up to 1992, when a few select works were put on show in a small exhibition organised by Anna Ballian and myself in the Athens Concert Hall (the *Megaro Mousikis*) entitled "Russia 1850–1910. Icons of an Era. Location and Style".[5] Yet the real rediscovery of the Benaki Museum's Russian works did not come about until 2017–2018 when we co-organised the exhibition "Religious Art from Russia in Greece" with Yuliana Boycheva, showing works from all over Greece alongside dozens of works from the Museum's own storerooms that had been identified and brought out of oblivion. (Fig. 5) The exhibition and the international conference that accompanied it, organised jointly by the Benaki Museum and the Institute for Mediterranean Studies, was the starting point for a wider, extremely productive, collaboration that led to *ERC RICONTRANS: Visual Culture, Piety and Propaganda: Transfer and Reception of Russian Religious Art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (16th–early 20th century)*.[6] This five-year interdisciplinary programme was led by Yuliana Boycheva as the principal investigator, with my contribution as the Head Researcher for the Second Beneficiary, the Benaki Museum. The project's primary aim has been to examine the transfer and reception of Russian religious works in the Balkans. Russian icons and liturgical furnishings, now dispersed across various museums, collections, and churches, have remained unrecognised, under-researched, and often unrecorded or misidentified.

RICONTRANS has provided us with the opportunity to focus on the one hand, on the overlooked historical and artistic dimensons of the transfer of Russian religious art to the Balkans and its reception there. On the other hand, it

has enabled us to acknowledge the twists and turns, as well as the pendulum swings, in the ways that the Greek public and art historians perceive Russian artworks. This presents a series of volte-faces inextricably linked with the ideological parameters that shape our perceptions and academic approaches. For the study of Russian artworks at the Benaki Museum, another main aim, alongside their documentation and art historical interpretation, has been the technical examination of both icons and metalwork. This was intended to identify the materials and techniques used by various Russian workshops that created them and to explore the range of innovations and technical solutions adopted by the artists, comparing them with contemporary practices employed by Greek and other Balkan workshops. Our aim was to better understand the diversity of the artistic production of Orthodox religious art in the early modern period, which would, in turn, deepen our understanding of the artistic and devotional networks connecting the fragmented Orthodox world, as well as the historical realities that intensified divergence and conflicts.

Fig. 5 *View of the exhibition* Religious Art from Russia to Greece, 16th-19th century, *Benaki Museum, Athens, 13 December 2017 – 11 February 2018. Photo: Dimitris Giavasis.*

Endnotes

1 On a literary approach of the complex relation of invisibility / imagination / structure-presence and absence, see Italo Calvino's brilliant *Invisible Cities*, especially the first Italian edition (1972: Giulio Einaudi Editore) with R. Magritte's painting 'The Castle in the Pyrenees' on the cover.

2 See also the retrospective exhibition *Vides, une rétrospective*, catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009.

3 The "gaze" has been at the epicentre of philosophical thought since Immanuel Kant. From Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan to Laura Mulvey, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, to name but a few, the literature on the gaze and its multiple readings and facets is vast. Most influential among them, one could cite the following: Kant, 1952 [1790]; Sartre, 1943; Plissart and Derrida, 1985; Derrida, 2008; Lacan, 1973; Licitra, Carmelo et al., 2021; Mulvey, 1975; Foucault, 1975.

4 See the forthcoming publication by Yuliana Boycheva, Daria Resh and Nikos Pissis. On the relations between Patmos Monastery and Russia, based on archival and art historical research under the ERC RICONTRANS initiative.

5 **https://www.megaron.gr/event/rosia-1850-1910-eikones-mias-epochis-xoros-kai-hthi/**

6 **https://ricontrans-project.eu**

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Russian artworks in the Benaki Museum: modes of acquisition and modes of display

Anastasia Drandaki

Antonis Benakis, the founder of the museum that bears his name, began collecting icons in the early 20th century while he was still living at his family estate in Alexandria, Egypt. His interest in these religious paintings developed alongside his love for weapons, rare books, and Islamic art, all of which constituted his early collecting pursuits—long before he decided to turn his eclectic private collection into a public museum. The images decorated the walls and display cases of his home and, most notably, his personal office, as documented by later photographs. The first systematic cataloguing of Benakis's Byzantine collection, carried out in Alexandria in 1920 by the esteemed Byzantinist Adamantios Adamantiou, also listed, as noted, a few Russian works of art (Drandaki 2022). However, this referred to a specific category of Russian works, all miniature in size, such as painted triptychs or luxurious miniature ivory carvings that fall under the distinctive category of objets d'art. Conversely, Benakis's collection did not include any medium- or large-sized portable painted icons. All the larger icons in Benakis's collection were exclusively from Greek workshops, with a clear preference for works from Crete and the Ionian Islands, often referred to in the literature as Cretan-Ionian works (Drandaki 2020).

It is not entirely clear—since the founder of the Benaki Museum left no diaries or notes—whether this preference for Greek religious works was mainly a matter of taste and aesthetic inclination or whether it was rooted in deeply ingrained devotional practices of the Greek Orthodox tradition, intertwined with the conservative atmosphere of the Greek community in Alexandria and notably with the community's leadership, such as the Benaki family. In any case, it is worth noting that this tendency in Benakis's collecting practices never changed, as no large Russian icon was ever purchased, nor was any correspondence indicating negotiations for such a purchase found in the museum's archives. In fact, any effort to acquire Russian artworks, of any form or size, was abandoned after Benakis's move to Athens and the systematic effort to purchase objects in anticipation of the new museum's opening in the late 1920s. This same policy persisted throughout nearly a hundred years of the museum's history. The museum's collecting strategy, especially regarding Christian religious art, consistently focused on the Byzantine world and its aftermath—the artistic output of Greek populations in the centuries following the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. This dedication is also demonstrated by the absence of Western medieval artworks in the collections, aside from a few pieces donated to, rather than purchased by, the museum.

Almost all Russian artworks that have enriched the Benaki Museum to this day come from donations by private collectors, who generously contributed their works, whether few or many, to enhance the museum's collection. Although the museum was gifted to the nation by its founder, it remained a prominent venue for private collectors. A notable exception is the case of Russian religious works that arrived at the Benaki Museum via the Exchange Fund, as refugee relics. These were incorporated into the museum's narrative, not as examples of Russian artistic production, but as testimonies to the historical paths of Greek Orthodox communities in Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and Pontus (see Verykokou here).

Returning to the donations from private collectors, it is worth noting that the profile of these donors is by no means homogeneous, although overall, the works they amassed display a remarkable unity of style. In many cases, the donors are private individuals who gifted one or two icons they had in their homes to the museum. In other words, they were not actually collectors but people continuing a centuries-old tradition by expressing their private devotion before family icons, typically hung in the private spaces of the home, usually in the bedroom. Among the icons in this category, three important 17th-century Russian icons stand out, donated to the Benaki Museum by the renowned émigré dancer from Georgia, Manon Renieri, who founded her ballet school in Athens in 1934 (Tsatsou-Symeonidou 1999, 124–125).[i] It is unknown through what adventures the icons, like their owner, arrived in Greece. However, the cultured Renieri, who left an indelible mark on the Greek dance scene, moved within Athenian artistic and intellectual circles that brought her close to the Benaki Museum. Since we are unaware of any other icons or collections she might have owned, it is highly likely that the three icons arrived in Greece with their owner as objects of private devotion as much as works of art.

Fig. 1. *Virgin of Passion, Moscow mid-17th century. Gift of Manon Renieri*

A different example concerns Russian icons that were part of larger collections assembled by wealthy and prominent collectors, who had the means to purchase works of their choice. Two notable examples are the brothers Stephen and Francis Vagliano and Rena Andreadi. The Vagliano brothers, descendants of the prominent shipping family from Kefalonia, based in Taiganrok on the Azov Sea and in London, donated some of the icons from their family collection to the Benaki Museum in 1988. The donation includes several significant Greek icons from Cretan workshops and three pieces of Russian art: two painted icons and a small, luxurious diptych adorned with high-quality cloisonné enamel.

Regarding Rena Andreadis, her icon collection ranks among the most important assembled in Greece during the mid- and second half of the 20th century. Although not particularly large (comprising about 80 works), it is notable for the high quality of its pieces, which is to be expected from a collector who, on one hand, had considerable financial means and, on the other, was

actively involved in promoting Byzantine museums in Greece (Drandaki 2002). Her collection consisted almost exclusively of Greek icons, which were studied and published in the collection's catalogue raisonné in 2002 (Drandaki 2002). However, Andreadis also purchased two small Russian icons depicting the Virgin and Child, representing the two most beloved and widespread types of the Virgin Mary among Russian workshops: one Vladimirskaya and one Kazanskaya. It is, however, revealing that although purchased, these two Russian icons never adorned the Andreadis mansion, nor were they included in the collection's publication. She believed that, although charming, they had no place in the catalogue as they disrupted rather than complemented the unity of her icon collection. Despite the beloved subject of the Virgin Mary with the Infant Christ — a theme familiar to a Greek collector — the Russian origin of these two works distinguished them from the rest of the icons, especially in the eyes of a cultured owner well-versed in Byzantine art. The Virgin of Vladimir from the Andreadi collection, which arrived at the Benaki Museum as a donation—along with most of her icon collection—from her children in memory of their mother, is the oldest Russian icon in the Museum's holdings.

Fig. 2. *Virgin Vladimirskaya. Moscow 16th c. Gift of Petros Andreadis in memory of Rena Andreadis*

The cases of the Vagliano and Andreadis collections, where Russian icons are notably scarce—featuring few but high-quality works—highlight a significant category of important Greek icon collectors in the 20th century. As their collections indicate, they remained predominantly focused on Greek icons—which were considerably more expensive than Russian ones—a fact that also underscores the fundamentally Hellenocentric character of these collections.

Although he certainly did not come from the same financial background as the Vagliano and Andreadis families, Tásos Valadóros was a notable collector of icons. The donation from siblings Maria and Tasos Valadoros, which arrived at the Benaki Museum in 2007, includes, among other items, over 300 icons and ecclesiastical objects, including the unique 14th-century Paleologian epitaph (Drandaki 2026). It is undoubtedly one of the most significant donations to the museum in recent decades. Among the numerous Greek icons dating from the 16th to 20th century, seven

examples of Russian art were also recorded. This number remains small within the context of such a vast collection of works. However, the high quality of the pieces stands out, particularly a late 16th-century Panagia of Vato from a Vologda workshop and an exceptionally well-executed Saint George the Dragon Slayer from a Moscow workshop of the first half of the 17th century. The works reflect the eclectic taste of a cultured bourgeois who possessed a deep knowledge of ecclesiastical art, not only due to his personal spiritual interests but also because of his professional status: Tassos and Maria Valadorou ran the most successful shop selling ecclesiastical textiles in Athens for several decades, and as documented by a study of their correspondence, they maintained close ties with ecclesiastical officials of the Orthodox Church.

Fig. 3. *Saint George the Dragon Slayer. Moscow, second half of the 17th c. Bequest of Tasos and Maria Valadoros*

In the vast majority of cases, however, the Russian icons in the Benaki Museum arrived at the museum either individually or in small groups, as donations from lesser-known collectors or as part of private family holdings that entered a public collection at the end of their owners' lives. In these instances, the situation is often reversed. That is, within small collections or private homes, the presence of Russian icons is quite prominent. These works mainly date to the 19th century and consist predominantly of pieces from Old Believer workshops that started circulating widely in the Balkans during this period through the 'ofeni,' itinerant merchants who traded in icons, books, and other popular, affordable commodities.

Fig. 4. Nikolay Koshelev, *Ofenya the Peddler*, oil on canvas, 1865. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The icons in this category, with their simple style and limited colour palette, reproduce traditional iconographic types, avoiding any Western-influenced updates to their visual language. Created mainly to support the doctrinal beliefs and devotional needs of the Old Believers, these icons transcended the boundaries of the religious community that produced them, a group persecuted by the official Russian authorities. With their conservative iconography and affordable prices, they attracted a wider Orthodox audience who valued artwork faithful to the principles and roots of the Byzantine tradition, even if the inscriptions on the works were in Russian and, therefore, mostly illegible to a Greek-speaking audience. Through donations, many ended up in museums, revealing an aspect of early modern religious painting that was never appreciated as a collector's item but rather responded to the tastes and needs of a diverse Orthodox community that welcomed and integrated them into places of worship. From this viewpoint, the presence of these works in museums—though rarely a deliberate curatorial choice—provides valuable historical insight, even though they usually stay in storage and seldom appear in museum galleries.

Fig. 5. *Saint Spyridon, Old Believers Workshop, Kholui, 19th c. Gift of Georgios Theotokas*

The exhibition history of Russian artworks at the Benaki Museum follows a similar pattern. As noted earlier, the museum's collection of icons and ecclesiastical works, primarily focused on narrating the history of medieval and modern Hellenism, had very few Russian pieces on display. In the new museum narrative developed with the renovation in 2000, the icons are mainly shown in a large ground-floor icon gallery (room 12) and in a first-floor hall (room 28). The large icon gallery features only two 17th-century Russian miniature triptychs, which were also exhibited alongside Greek works in the museum's original 1931 display. The museum's narrative emphasises the diverse Greek painting workshops active from the 15th to the 19th century, rather than the different types and origins of the icons that circulated and coexisted within the Greek Orthodox world. Two valuable icons of the Virgin Mary, one carved from walrus bone and the other from ivory, together with an ivory icon from the earliest items collected by Antonis Benakis, are also displayed among the ecclesiastical objects of the 16th-19th century on the first floor. Most of the Russian works remain in storage but have been brought to light through collaboration with Yuliana Boycheva and the research queries posed by the ERC RICONTRANS. The three exhibitions held consecutively in 2017, 2022, and 2024 in Athens and Drama have offered a broader audience opportunities to engage with these works, understand their origins, and explore the reasons for their presence in Greece, often recognising in the museum objects items of worship linked to their own family traditions.

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[i] Tsatsou-Symeonidou, Dora. 1999. "Ellinikos Choros, Endechnos [Greek Theatrical Dance]." In *Elliniki Ekpaideftiki Egkyklopaideia. Theatro, Kinimatografos. Mousiki. Choros* [Educational Greek Encyclopedia. Theatre, Film, Music, Dance], edited by D. Tsatsou-Symeonidou, 124–127. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon.

Russian art in the hands of Greek refugees from Asia Minor. A special case study from the Benaki Museum, Athens.

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The transfer and movement of Russian art in the Balkans is the key question of the ERC RICONTRANS research project. So far it has been proven that objects travelled as imperial gifts and private orders of high clergy and laymen from Russia to Greece, as well as a commodity for merchants and artists traversing through the Balkans. In this article we will observe a different journey. The journey of the people and the objects they carried with them from Asia Minor, Pontos and Eastern Thrace to Greece. Alongside, we will consequently explore an alternative route through which certain Russian artefacts found their way to Greek museums.

During the research for objects of Russian Art from the collections of the Benaki Museum, we were able to discover artefacts not only from the collection of icons, but also from the post-Byzantine collection. There are certain objects though that caught our attention, not because of their art and craftsmanship, but in view of the manner they found their way to the Benaki Museum. Specifically, the objects that we will examine in this paper are: 1) Two panels from a Triptych (cat no.) with the scene of Deisis adorned on one side with angels, and on the other side with the depiction of four Saints from the Armoury Chamber workshops, Kremlin, first half of the 18th c., originating from Ankara, 2) an Evangelion (cat. no.) decorated with enamel and strass carrying a dedicatory inscription including the date 1867 March 15, from a Russian silver gilt workshop, originating from the Greek Community of Gallipoli dated 1867 (Fig. 1), 3) a pair of silver Wedding Crowns in the form of Russian crowns made of silver with gold gilded elements and coloured stones, dated around the second half of the 19th century (cat. no.) from Asia Minor, 4) a Mitre of the Patriarch Cyril VI decorated with Russian enamel miniature icons with Saints dated in the 19th cen. (cat. no). We will also examine smaller objects such as 5) two communion spoons. The first one decorated with Muscovite buildings and niello at the back, and the second one with carved floral decoration, possibly from the Faberge workshop. Both spoons carry a stamp. The Evangelion and the wedding crowns were displayed at the exhibition *"Religious Art from Russia to Greece, 16th century to 19th century"*, hosted at the Benaki Museum Athens, curated by Youliana Boytcheva and Anastasia Drandaki in 2017 (Boytseva and Drandaki 2017). We will not discuss the art and techniques of the artefacts in the current article, since Anastasia Drandaki has taken on the task.

Fig. 1. *Gospel book cover, silver-gilt, decorated with enamels. Moscow 1867. It belonged to the Greek Orthodox community of Gallipolis*

The interest lies in their journey from Asia Minor to the Benaki Museum, Athens. How did the Greek Orthodox communities in Asia Minor acquire objects of Russian art? How did these ecclesiastical heirlooms travel from Asia Minor to Greece in 1923-24? What was the importance of the Lausanne Convention and the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey concerning the heirlooms of Asia Minor refugees? The above-mentioned artefacts from the Benaki Museum are not the only objects of ecclesiastical items of Russian Art that were acquired by Greeks in Asia Minor and after the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922, that found their way to museum collections and displays in Greece. The example of the Benaki Museum signified the beginning of research in other museums also. We tried to look in a variety of museums and collections that knowingly had objects from Asia Minor. For the purpose of this article and the limitations of the research we couldn't cover every museum which was created by Asia Minor refugees. We will present examples from the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, the Asia Minor Civilisation Museum in Neo Prokopi, the Ecclesiastical Museum of Drama, the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum of Mytilene and the Museum of Hellenic Refugees – AEK Football Club. We will also present two objects from the temporary exhibition titled *"Asia Minor Hellenism. Heyday. Catastrophe. Displacement. Rebirth"* that was presented at Peiraios 138, Benaki Museum and the A. G. Leventis Gallery in Nicosia (Asia Minor Hellenism 2022; From Asia Minor to Cyprus 2023).

In order to understand the connection of Asia Minor refugees and Russian ecclesiastical objects, we have to explore the presence of Orthodox Greeks in Asia Minor and the economic and diplomatic relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

Greeks were present in the area and have inhabited Asia Minor from antiquity. Even after the battle of Manzikert, in the 11th century, the Greeks remained and flourished in the area, under Ottoman rule. Despite the difficulties, the Greek communities thrived, mainly due to the commercial

relations they built with the European states and the Russian Empire and, secondly because of the growth in agriculture. The strategic site of Asia Minor helped towards the development of the region as well.

Moreover, the Greeks of Pontos, owing to the rich mines of the area, as well as to the proximity and trade relations with the Russian Empire during the 17th until the 19th century, were quite affluent. The Black Sea region in the 19th century, offered many trading opportunities, not only to the Russian and the Ottoman Empires, but also to the Greek communities of Pontos (Prousis 2003, 128). Trebizond was a large and busy port that had a considerable Greek population. It was also a city known for the creations of Greek goldsmiths (*Relics of the Past* 2011, 42). The Greeks who worked in the mines had special privileges from the Ottoman administration and thus were prominent members of their community, often acquiring the title of *archemetallourgoi* (master miners), appointed by the Sultan. From written sources we know that the capital of Pontos, Argyroupolis, had numerous gold and silver workshops where the Christians had the opportunity to place orders for liturgical vessels. From the mid-16th century until 1922, almost all the coppersmiths in Istanbul originated from Pontos (Relics of the Past 2011). The connection with the capital was more evident in the decoration of the objects, which were influenced by the floral baroque art of Istanbul. The artefacts resulting from the private orders of the affluent Greeks of Pontos, were then offered as gifts to the church, in their effort towards the perpetuation of their name as patrons and prominent members of the community.

The Greeks of Cappadocia were, more or less, isolated due to the mountainous characteristics of the land, a significant factor that led to slowly losing their language. Their spoken language was Turkish but written with the Greek alphabet, the Karamanli. Their isolation was also a determinant in the sustainability of their faith until the Population Exchange of 1923 (*Relics of the Past* 2011, 44). Since the mid-17th century, the Karamanlis were acquiring more wealth and status and thus obtaining high-ranking positions in the administration of the region. Because of their prosperity, they were able to place private orders in the workshops of the capital and subsequently offer them in their local churches, similarly to the Greeks of Pontos.

The case of the heirlooms from Eastern Thrace is quite interesting for the purpose of this article. The area in question was a busy trading and economic locale that connected Asia with Europe through the Sea of Marmara, with Adrianople/Edirne at its centre. The presence of organised guilts such as the furriers, the builders and the shipowners, indicate the status and wealth of the Greeks (*Relics of the Past* 2011, 40). In the course of the population exchange, the refugees took the route to Greece through the river Evros and found their new home in the northern parts of the country such as Macedonia, Drama, Xanthi, Komotini - all areas that Muslims abandoned for the opposite way, to migrate to Turkey. The heirlooms that they carried with them were either kept in their homes, as a memory of their lost lands, or were given to the Metropolis of their new region.

The connection between Asia Minor and Russia can be traced as early as the 17th century through economic and trade relations between the Russians and the Ottoman Empire. One can also argue for the existence of a spiritual connection between the Russian Tsar and the Patriarch in Istanbul, since the centre of Orthodox Christianity was then considered to be Moscow.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Turkey had commenced earlier than the period discussed here and were not always positive. It is well known that Russia and the Ottoman Empire

were into conflict between 1568 and 1918, while many efforts were made for peace treaties between the two empires during this period (Fursov 2018, 99-102). Each war between them hindered sea commerce with other European states in the bay of Smyrna and was followed by a new peace treaty effort to renew trading connections (Φραγκάκη-Syrett 2010, 66). The trading relations between Russian cities and the port of Smyrna continued until the early 20th century (*Η Σμύρνη πριν την Καταστροφή* 1992, 7).

With the end of the First World War and the signing of the Treaty of Sevres, the Greek state sided with the winners and received the mandate to safeguard the wide area of Smyrna and Aedine. In May 1919, under the instruction of the Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos, the Greek army disembarked at the port of Smyrna.

Smyrna in Asia Minor, nowadays the city of Izmir, was a well-known, busy and vital port. Smyrna is mentioned in bibliographical sources even from antiquity. The time period that we are interested here is around 1914-1922, before the expatriation of the Asian Minor Hellenism, which was an immediate result of the defeat of the Greek Army and its retreat. Smyrna was considered the Paris of the East. It was a cosmopolitan city with a mixed population of Turks, Greeks, Jews, Levantines, and Armenians. Commerce was prevalent with imported goods arriving from Britain, Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, Belgium, Sweden, Holland and Egypt, while the export of figs, resins, tobacco, cotton, oaks travelled to Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece and even the USA (*Η Σμύρνη πριν την Καταστροφή* 1992, 8-11). As a known port, Smyrna in 1913, according to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted as much as 1645 ships, while in 1914, 1705. In 1913, 206 Russian ships were registered, and in 1914 only 90 (*Η Σμύρνη πριν την Καταστροφή* 1992,12). Oostende, Odessa and Taganrog were the major Russian ports that traded with Smyrna from the early 17th century (Φραγκάκη-Syrett 2010, 231). Besides commerce, Smyrna had a thriving industry with factories that manufactured flour, soaps, figs and resins, wine, pastries, carpets, tannery, and cotton products. Smyrna was also a cosmopolitan city with a great number of schools, newspapers for every spoken language in the city, temples and churches for every religion, cinemas, theatres, museums, baths, banks and hospitals. To stress the importance of the city, the port's customs office was constructed by Gustav Eiffel, the architect of the well-known Tower in Paris.

In 1922 though disaster stroke Asia Minor with the burning of the city of Smyrna and the violent expatriation of the Greek community. The Greek army was forced to retreat from Asia Minor after its defeat from the forces of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk Pasha, founder of the Turkish Republic, and the Greek-speaking inhabitants were obliged to leave their homes and immigrate to the Greek mainland. The first wave of refugees in 1922 fled a city left in ruins after the big fire broke out in Smyrna. There are numerous reports from survivors running to the port in order to find a ship or a boat to leave the city. The second wave, following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, consisted of the population exchange between the Greek-speaking communities in Asia Minor and the Turkish-speaking communities in Northern Greece. At least 1.2 million Christians arrived in Greece while 350.000 Muslims travelled to Turkey from Greece. The Treaty of Lausanne acknowledged the right of the populations to transfer their property and consequently, many refugees were able to carry with them movable objects from their homes and churches. Ecclesiastical objects, icons and heirlooms traveled in this manner from the coasts of Turkey to Greece. This accommodation made a difference in the way that the Greek

refugees could leave their ancestral homes in Asia Minor, and corresponds to the number of heirlooms that were saved. In 1928 it was decided that any objects from Asia Minor that had artistic or archaeological value would be distributed to the state museums. At the beginning big crates with objects were accumulated in the building of the Academy of Athens before being divided between three large and well-established museums in Athens: the Byzantine and Christian Museum, the Benaki Museum, and the Museum of Modern Greek Culture.

In order to find more examples of Russian heirlooms from Asia Minor, we looked at our neighbourhood, in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens. One of the noteworthy, documented heirlooms, from the post-Byzantine collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, is a Russian gospel (cat. No.), decorated with silver and gold, 38x 25cm and dating to the 19th century. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2. *Silver gilt gospel decorated with enamels, from the Archangel Monastery of Caesarea. Moscow 1849. Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, no. BXM 17875*

On one side it bears the scene of the Resurrection and, on the other side the scene of the Crucifixion. Inside you can see an inscription in the Russian language by the Grand Duchess Eleni Pavlova who dedicates the gospel to the Archangel Monastery of Caesarea, December 25, 1849. The Gospel was presented at the special exhibition of the relics of the Asia Minor refugees in Athens in 1982. The first registration number was K. Pr. 226. The collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens has also six Russian icons from the Population Exchange Fund.

We also found Russian objects at the Asia Minor Civilisation Museum in Neo Prokopi Euboea, where the refugees of the community Prokopi of Cappadocia, found refuge after the Population Exchange, hence Neo Prokopi. Following the announcement of the population exchange, the Greek inhabitants of Prokopi gathered their belongings and travelled to Greece. Originally, 25 crates with all these items arrived in Piraeus, but only 6 of them reached Euboea (Παπαγεωργίου, Φέλερης 2001, 94). The longing for their lost way of life and the need not forget, urged them to name their new settlement Neo Prokopi. Furthermore, they named their new Monastery in Euboea St. John the Russian, after the Saint of their old Monastery in Cappadocia (Στελλάκου 1999, 120). In the museum

of Neo Prokopi, dedicated to Asia Minor Civilisation, there are four ecclesiastical objects, made in Russia in the 19th century. Two plates, one in gilt bronze (no exact date of manufacture), and the other in silver, dated 1869. A silver gilt chalice dated 1874 and finally a bread casket, silver gilt, dating from 1860. The museum is situated next to and associated with the Monastery of Saint John the Russian. The pilgrimage to the Monastery of Saint John the Russian in Prokopi, Cappadocia was often undertaken during the 19th cen. As Katerina Seraïdari has pointed (Seraïdari 2020, 8), the cult of the Russian saint begun even before his death, and since then the Russian objects offered by Russian pilgrims to the Monastery created close ties with Russia. The displacement of the population in 1924, was followed by a conscious and unfaltering effort of the Greek refugees from Prokopi to transport all their ecclesiastical objects including the shrine of the Saint to Euboea, Greece, where they remarkably managed to build a new monastery and pilgrimage, as well as a museum dedicated to the heirlooms from Asia Minor, all in an attempt to safeguard their cultural history and identity in their new home.

A similar case can be found at the Ecclesiastical Museum of Drama, Greece. Drama, as most northern cities of Greece, absorbed the majority of the refugee population, since the Muslim population of northern Greece was also forced to displacement under the Treaty of Lausanne. The Municipality of Drama was the final destination of almost 58.291 refugees from Asia Minor, Pontos and Eastern Thrace in 1924 (Μπακάλη 2007, 4). Analogous to the efforts of the people of from Prokopi, the displaced Greeks that found refuge in Drama brought with them the ecclesiastical heirlooms of their communities in Asia Minor. In 1925 the local newspaper "Tharros" published in two issues (January 20th 1925 and May 8th 1925) articles concerning the accumulation and salvage of the ecclesiastical objects that the Asia Minor, Pontos and Eastern Thrace refugees brought with them to Drama, with the aim to protect and promote the culture of Asia Minor. Among the ecclesiastical objects from Asia Minor in the museum of Drama, Magda Parcharidou- Anagnostou, during her effort to catalogue the objects of the museum(Παρχαρίδου- Αναγνώστου 2011, 521-528), has identified a Russian artefact that came from Eastern Thrace and is dated in 1894 as the dedicatory inscription in Cyrillic on the foot of the chalice indicates: *«Podarenooti Georgi Bogdanović naCer(kva) Sv(eti) Kostadinii Elena s(elo) Ferdinandevo 1894 g(odina)»* (Παρχαρίδου-Αναγνώστου 2014, 108). From her research, Parcharidou-Anagnostou has identified Ferinandevo as modern day Parvenets in Fillipoupolis. The research for ecclesiastical objects of Russian art at the museum in Drama cannot be concluded since the museum is currently closed for refurbishment. Moreover, when all the ecclesiastical objects of Asia Minor origin were accumulated at the Metropolitan Church of Drama in 1925, no effort was made to systematically catalogue their place of origin. As a result, it is difficult, amongst all the objects at the Ecclesiastical Museum of Drama, to single out the ones of Asia Minor origin to begin with.

In the island of Lesvos, in Mytilene, thousands of people took refuge from the very early days following the Asia Minor catastrophe until 1925. Some used the island as the first stop on their long journey, while others decided to stay and make Mytilene their new home. During that time the Metropolitan of Mytilene, Jacob, decided to gather icons and ecclesiastical objects that were not part of the liturgy or were worn off, with the intent to form a collection and later a museum.[1] He also gathered icons and liturgical vessels that arrived in Mytilene with the Population Exchange and stored them at the Metropolitan House. Nowadays the Metropolitan House is the Ecclesiastical and

Byzantine Museum of Mytilene.[2] The collection has three Russian icons (Fig. 3). There is a hypothesis that these objects have as a place of origin Asia Minor, but since no effort was made to catalogue them and, in addition, have not been studied, we do not know for certain.[3] One thing is definite though: Mytilene is a place where hundreds of the Asia Minor displaced choose to live and bring their personal and community belongings. Adding to that there are many icons and liturgical vessels of Russian art at the Churches and at the Museum of the city.[4]

Fig. 3. *Russian icons from the refugee heirlooms in the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum of Mytilene.*

So far, we have seen cases where Russian objects are stored and displayed in ecclesiastical museums. There is another example of Russian objects related to the collective memory of the Asia Minor refugees which is quite evident at the Museum of Hellenic Refugees – AEK Football Club. The Museum of AEK was inaugurated in December 2023 and, as the title explains, it is dedicated to the life and works of Asia Minor refugees before the population exchange and the forced displacement. The museum presents everyday life, church, professions, music, traditional costumes, the displacement, and the new land, as well as a unit dedicated to Asia Minor refugees that became important personalities in business, music, poetry, and literature. Most of the objects on display, if not all, come from private donations of the descendants of the refugees. From pots, jewellery and musical instruments to books. The section that interests us here is the one dedicated to Church life, where two Russian icons are on display. The first one is an icon of St Paraskevi and the second is an icon of St. Spiridon, both dated in the 19th century. These icons were donated by a refugee from Istanbul. A third Russian icon, depicting Christ is displayed in a showcase concerning the evacuation of the refugees, where objects and heirlooms are gathered in a trunk that was used to flee the homeland. The key to this particular case is the presence of ecclesiastical objects that, not long ago, were displayed at the donors' houses. Now, the same objects are displayed in a museum associated with an athletic team created by refugees from Asia Minor and Istanbul, and not an ecclesiastical or historical museum. The connection between an athletic association and the refugees of Asia Minor has proven quite important in the formation of a collective memory. We can recognise similar instances with other athletic clubs of Asia Minor, such as Panionios, Pelops and Apollonas, who after the population exchange continued to operate in Greece (Μπαλτάς 2021, 94-95, 115; Λινάρδος 1998, 242-244). The need to keep together,

to form a community, to continue to work towards creating a legacy, while honouring the lost compatriots, is very important to these athletic associations. The same can be said for athletic clubs that were created by refugees in Greece after the population exchange such as AEK and PAOK (Μπαλτάς 2021, 95-102).

Almost all the athletic associations that were formed in Greece by Asia Minor refugees, were interested not only in sports and gymnastics, but also occupied themselves with the problems of the community. Moreover, they aimed to elevate the spirit along with the body, by creating libraries and going on cultural field trips. In the case of the Museum of Hellenic Refugees, the administration of AEK issued a calling to all the fans through social media for heirlooms and objects from Asia Minor that could be part of the new museum, knowing that the fans and descendants of refugees would loan or donate their objects in the same spirit & for the same reason, the sense of community.

A final example of the presence of Russian art heirlooms from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace and Pontos comes from the recent major temporary exhibition of the Benaki Museum co-organized with the Centre of Asia Minor Studies. The exhibition titled *"Asia Minor Hellenism. Heyday. Catastrophe. Displacement. Rebirth"* was presented at Peiraios 138, Benaki Museum from September 15th, 2022, until February 12th, 2023, and was curated by Evita Arapoglou. The exhibition had three main sections: the first was dedicated to the Greek communities in Asia Minor, the second concerned the Asia Minor Campaign of the Greek Army leading to the tragic events of the catastrophe, and the third section was devoted to the settlement and the inclusion of the refugees in Greece. In that last section, the visitor had the opportunity to see some of the heirlooms that the descendants of the refugees still had in their possession, such as the Russian icon of St John the Russian (cat. no) from the private collection of the Kolyvas family from Chios Island (*Asia Minor Hellenism* 2022, 234). All the objects in that section came from temporary loans from families that wished to show their heirlooms and thus be part of the collective memory of the Asia Minor refugees. A few months later, the same exhibition traveled to Cyprus. With a few alterations, it was presented at the A.G. Leventis Gallery in Nicosia from the 11th of November 2023 to the 3rd of March 2024 (From Asia Minor to Cyprus 2023, 59). There, although the same three main sections were retained, heirlooms from Cypriot families, descendants of Asia Minor refugees, were added, such as a metal Russian art triptych with Dodekaorton scenes from Caesarea, dated in the 19th century, from the collection of Helen Mitsidou (Fig. 4). Again, as was the case in the instance of the Athens exhibition, the curator Evita Arapoglou addressed the communities of Asia Minor descendants to loan their heirlooms to the exhibition and in that way partake the collective memory of the lost ancestral homes.

Fig. 4. *Brass cast icon, decorated with enamel. 19th c. Private collection of Helen Mitsidou, Nicosia.*

The documented cases from the Benaki Museum, the Byzantine and Christian Museum, the Asia Minor Civilisation Museum in Neo Prokopi, the Ecclesiastical Museum of Drama, the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum of Mytilene, and the Museum of Hellenic Refugees – AEK Football Club, prove that Russian objects found their way to Greece in the hands of the refugees from Asia Minor. The journey of Russian Art cannot be confined only in the area of the Balkans, but it must include both sides of the Aegean Sea. The Orthodox Greek communities in Asia Minor and the objects they brought with them, may prove that the presence of Russian artefacts is associated with religion firstly and secondly, with the trade and economic relations between Russia and the Orthodox Christians wherever they were situated. Moreover, in our case these objects have an additional characteristic. They are part of the collective memory & cultural history of the Asia Minor refugees and are the medium that binds them together. As Renée Hirschon wrote, memory was an important factor and medium in order to form the new environment in Greece for the refugees (Hirshon 2008, 25). The place-names, churches, relics, heirlooms, athletic associations and even more personal objects, like the soil brought from Asia Minor, were used as the foundation upon the collective memory of the refugees was created. With these characteristics, they managed to recreate their role in the Greek society of the 20th century.

Endnotes

[1] http://www.ebmm.gr/museum.php (last visit 16/02/2024). Ι. Γ. Κλεομβρότου, Μητροπολίτου Μυτιλήνης, Mytilena Sacra, Τόμος Τρίτος, 308,344, Θεσσαλονίκη 1976.

[2] Special thanks to Father Eustratios Komnenos from the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum of Mytilene for the photographs of the three Russian icons.

[3] Μπαλάσκας 2023, Δημοσίευση στην εφημερίδα «Στο Νησί», 6/12/2023.

[4] http://www.ebmm.gr/museum.php (last visit 16/02/2024).

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Notes on the making of Russian icons. Materials and practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the large number of late Russian icons accumulated today in the great shrines of the Greek Orthodox world, in museums and private collections[1] the scarcity of available data on their technology and the materials used in their construction comes as a surprise.

Only a few old texts that contain relevant information seem to exist.[2] Due to the ancient form of their language, a complete correlation between the materials described and the terminology used today has yet to be achieved. The 19th-century passages from the Russian iconographic anthologies available to us[3] do not include interpretations that could facilitate this procedure.

Contemporary textbooks on Russian painting (Grenberg, 2000, 1982) and a modern manual on iconography (Sokolova, 2015) provide insights into issues relating to terminology, techniques and materials. The relevant publications from the State Tretyakov Gallery (Nersesyan and Sukhoverkov, 2017a, 2017b; Sayenkova and Sverdlova, 2015) and the GosNIIR online library[4] are, as a rule, invaluable sources on early Russian icons. But data on panels from the 16th century onwards still remain scarce.[5]

This paper aims to familiarize the reader with the technology of portable Russian religious paintings. Information on the materials and the techniques used in their making is presented in a concise and structured manner that follows the construction process. Data were collected from written sources in the framework of the RICONTRANS project[6] to support the conservation treatment of the Benaki icons. The reader, however, should be aware that the paper is not a review of the literature.[7]

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The production of icons in Russia began in the 10th century under the religious and cultural influence of Byzantium. Initially assimilating the artistic traditions of Constantinople, the medieval Russian painting of the first period, also known as *Old Russian art*,[8] is viewed as a continuation of Byzantine art and was, at least for a while, produced by Byzantine painters working in Russia. The differentiation of Russian Orthodox art in later years, with the appearance of local stylistic trends, has been related to the gradual isolation of the country from the Byzantine world following the sack of Constantinople by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade (1204) and the fall of that city to the Ottomans in 1453.

As, by the mid-17th century, the unified, strong and independent state that, under Ivan III (1462–1505), had formed around Moscow had greatly expanded, new trade routes became available. This had a huge impact on the arts due to the influx of new materials, books, engravings, paintings but also craftsmen familiar with European artistic traditions (Cormack, 1998, 21–22; Nersesyan, 2019, 40–41). Radical changes in the established painting tradition took place between the last decades of the 16th and the mid-17th century. Although primarily related to style and iconography, they also influenced the technology of the icons, which is evident when they are compared to panels produced in other regions.

The common standards on which the production of Russian and Greek icons had been founded were altered very slowly by Russian iconographers who, as a rule, remained strongly attached to the traditional practices. Compared to the West, experimentation and innovations in painting were slow to be implemented. Nevertheless, late Russian icons differ from earlier ones due to the techniques used for the rendering of specific areas, certain materials used and the type of interventions they have undergone in the course of time (Lelekova, 1998, 90).

Panels (*doska*)

Wood species

The study of Russian painters' handbooks has not to date provided any information on the types of wood used in the making of the panels. Relevant data, derived exclusively from the examination of surviving works, are included in Table 1. Further, invaluable information on the wood species used and on panel construction was kindly relayed to the Benaki team by Dr. Natalia Komashko during our meetings within the framework of the *RICONTRANS* project.[9]

Table 1. Wood species identified in Russian icons[10]

Collection		Tretyakov Gallery					Benaki Museum
Exhibition title			*Painting of the Great Rostov*	*Painting of Ancient Pskov*	*Painting of Ancient Novgorod*		
(Researcher)	(D. A. Rovinsky)	(E. Dombrovskaya)				(Dolgikh et al, 2017, Matskovsky et al, 2016)	(Kalliga–Alexopoulou, 2023)
Panel dating	16th-17th c.	12th–17th c.	14th–17th c.	13th-16th c.	12th-17th c.	15th-17th c.	17th-18th c.
Total number of works studied	127	507	89	74	202	6	5
Linden	94	317	79	40	172		
Beech	17						
Pine	9	176	10	33	28	6	
Spruce		5			1		
Alder	3				1		
Maple	1						
Cypress	1						3
Cedar	1						
Unknown / uncertain	1						1 / 1

In Old Russian icons, boards of linden (*Tilia*) and pine (*Pinus*) were the most commonly used, while spruce (*Picea*), beech (*Fagus*) and larch (*Larix*) employed less often. Up to the 17th century, painters showed a strong preference for the light-weight linden, a rather soft wood that was easy to work with, from which panels with a very smooth surface were produced. They would nevertheless often also make choices based on the locally available timber.[11] As linden was not native to Northern Russia, spruce (*Picea abies/Picea obovata*) or pine were extensively used there, especially in the smaller workshops, while those handling large commissions could also work with linden, specially purchased to cover their needs.

Following the development of trade relations with neighbouring countries and international trade in Europe, the types of wood available to Russian icon painters expanded and non-native species such as cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens L.*) could be found in 17th-century Russia (Grenberg, 2000, 13–14).[12] This valuable species seems to have also been used in the Armoury Chamber in the 18th and 19th centuries for commissions of the highest quality underwritten by the Tsar.[13]

The splitting of the logs was done in winter, when the wood contained the least possible moisture. Wedges and axes were used to this end in the early period, a technique resulting in wood of increased strength, as the cellulose fibres remained intact. Although the Slavs were familiar with the use of the saw as early as the 10th century, its use in the production of boards is mentioned only after the 17th century. Boards were left to dry out thoroughly for several years before being used in the making of icons (Bobrov, 2008; Sokolova, 2015, 14).

Panel construction

The thickness and the treatment of the surface of the panels vary depending on the time of construction. Old Russian icons were, as a rule, made on thin boards with a finely smoothed front surface. In later works, the thickness of the panels gradually increased, and on the front, hatched lines were often scored to provide tooth for the adhesion of the next layers in the composite construction (Grenberg, 2000, 13–14).

Panels were made of one or more boards, usually of the same wood type. Only rarely have different species of wood been identified in the same work.[14] Exceptions to this type of construction have been reported but they were undoubtedly not the norm. Some small or medium-sized icons with a flat front, produced at the end of the 17th century in the workshop of Simon Ushakov and the Kremlin Armoury, are examples of this rather special type of panel. It consists of two layers of wood of identical thickness but sometimes of different wood type. The wood grain of the top layer was vertically oriented while that of the lower layer ran horizontally. No battens were added to supports of this type, which continued to be used occasionally in later times. The Old Believers reverted to this type of construction in the 19th century. These panels nevertheless stand out, mainly due to the uneven thickness of the two layers (the top is thicker than the bottom, which was often made of cypress) and the addition of battens.[15]

Battens were used to strengthen and stabilize the construction of most panels following Byzantine norms up to about the 15th century. Usually of a rectangular cross-section, they were always placed perpendicular to the panel's wood grain.

They were fixed on the reverse of the panel with wooden dowels or wrought-iron nails in intermediate positions or close to the top and the lower edge. In the latter case, they were often decorated in red, a practice leading in later years to the addition along the upper and the lower edges of a red decorative band, known as the '*opush*' (Bobrov, 2008). Up to the 16th century, even icons of large dimensions were often fitted with a single batten placed midway up the [height of the] panel.[16]

From the 16th century battens that slid into grooves carved on the reverse of the panel began to be used (figs. 1a, 1b). Their cross-section was rectangular or trapezoidal, with the elongated sides only slightly inclined. Their length was, as a rule, shorter than the panel width. Wider close to the edge of the panel and narrower towards its centre, they were usually made of wood of the same species as the boards. They moved freely within the grooves and were usually placed on opposite sides.[17] Up to the end of the 17th century "sliding" battens were made level with the reverse of the panel. In later years their shape gradually evolved and they could also project (fig. 1c).[18] At the end of the 17th century, panels made of more than one board could be fitted with long, often protruding, battens that would cover their full width (fig. 1d). By the mid-18th century battens with two parallel, decorative grooves, carved lengthwise, came into use (i.e. Inv. No 25834). This style —often referred to in Russia as "Empire"—has been related to the era of Classicism and Historicism as well as to the Palekh school of painting.[19]

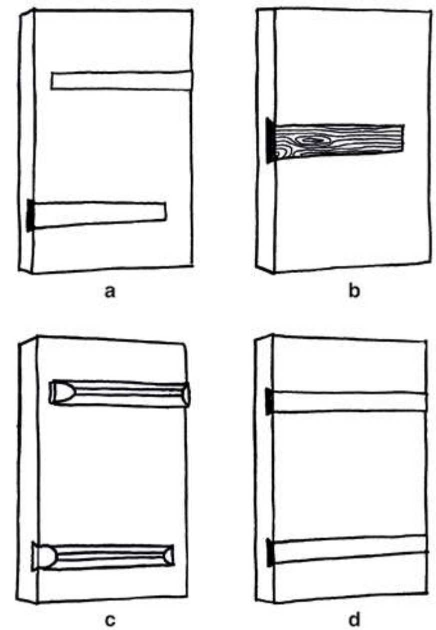

Fig. 1 *Drawings demonstrating various/ different types of sliding battens used on late Russian icons: (a) flat, placed on opposite sides (b) flat, single; (c) protruding, placed on opposite sides (d) transverse (drawings based on models by Sokolova, 2015).*

A natural result of drying out the wood was an alteration in the dimensions of the battens and of the grooves in which they slid, often leading to the detachment of the battens. Various "remedies" to solve this issue were improvised. In icons from Yaroslav and Vologda, dating from the end of the 17th century, a small wooden wedge was often placed at the edge of the groove and in 18th-century icons from Veliky Ustyug but also Vologda regions, wooden dowels were often inserted in the sides of a panel to hold the battens in place.[20] By the end of the 17th century a different type of batten had come into use. It fitted within the thickness of the panel, in rectangular grooves carved along the upper and the lower sides [App. A: Inv. Nos. 23758, 25828, 25829, 25952, 31409, 31437, 46269, 52489] (figs. 2a, 2b).[21]

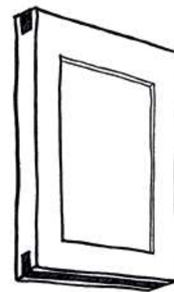

Fig. 2 *(a) Drawing demonstrating internally placed battens (based on a model by Sokolova, 2015); (b)* The Resurrection of Christ *(inv. No. 46269), top with internally fitted batten.*

The co-existence of more than one type of batten on the same work seems not to have been uncommon. Such a practice could be explained as a later intervention, aiming to reinforce a panel that had either lost its original battens or that, despite being intact, was considered unstable or warping. Benaki Inv. Nos. 23758, 31356 and 52489 constitute such examples where the sliding battens observed on the reverse co-exist with internally placed thin battens running along the top and the lower edges of the boards.

On the panel front a recessed area, known as a *kovcheg*,[22] was carved on one or two levels to define the position of the image to be depicted. It was separated from the integral frame, which is known as the polya, by a narrow, bevelled band, the *luzga* (fig. 3). Icons could have a single [Appendix A: Inv. nos. 3006, 14147, 25830, 30278, 32430, 46108] or a double *kovcheg* [App. A: Inv. nos. 25784, 29533, 29534, 29535, 38515, 40157, 46252 and the two Virgins of the Andreadis collection]. From the end of the 17th century the use of this type of construction gradually decreased and icons began to be produced on panels with fewer relief forms or none at all [App. A: Inv. Nos. 23758, 25828, 25829, 25831, 25832, 25833, 25834, 25952, 27467, 31356, 31409, 31436, 31437, 31441, 31445, 31449, 36386, 38430, 45338, 46262, 46269, 52489] (Bobrov, 2008; Sokolova, 2015, 12–17).

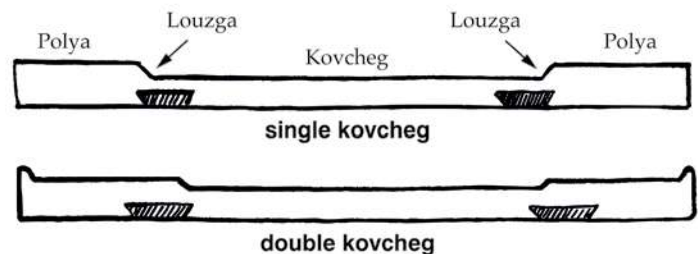

Fig. 3 *Drawings indicating the relief formations on the panel's front (based on models by Sokolova, 2015).*

Such typical features of panel construction found in the Benaki icons are recorded in Appendix A.

The Canvas (*pavoloka*)

In medieval Russian images the entire surface of the panel was covered with parchment or canvas, usually made of linen and more rarely of hemp. Two-sided icons had fabric attached on both sides.

After the 16th century the covering of the panel was gradually reduced. Canvas was often only attached over joints in the board, 'weak' areas, such as knots or other irregularities in the wood, and along the edges of the panel (fig. 4) (Sandu et al., 2009, 758; Grenberg, 2000, 14).

From the end of the 17th century icons began to be produced without canvas. It has been deduced that this may relate to modifications in the ingredients of the ground layer, mainly the addition of oils.

Although paper was available in Russia as early as the 14th century,[23] its use in place of canvas—which by some is considered characteristic of Russian icons— is not documented except in the case of some late19th-century works that were mass-produced in provincial cooperatives (Sokolova, 2015, 27).[24]

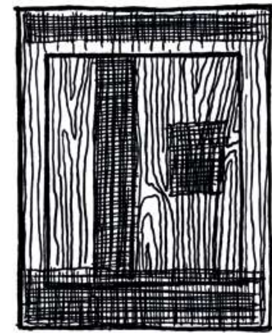

Fig. 4 *Drawing demonstrating areas of the panel typically covered by canvas (based on a model by Sokolova, 2015).*

The Ground (*levkas*)[25]

Up to the 17th century, anhydrous gypsum ($CaSO4$) and/or chalk ($CaCO3$), were used for the ground layer, which in Russian icons always remained white for symbolic and other reasons.[26] Animal glue, usually made from animal skin or parchment, was used as the binding medium while the use of fish glue is only mentioned in recipes after the end of the 17th century. The preparation was spread in overlapping layers and polished with horsehair after completely drying out (Sandu et al., 2009, 758; Grenberg, 2000, 18, 20; Filip et al., 2023, 80).

Design

In Old Russian icons the use of an incised design has been recorded, marking the perimeter of halos, demarcating long, straight lines in the composition, defining the boundaries of areas to be gilded and, more rarely, areas of different colours.

From the end of the 15th century, and especially in the 16th, a drawn design began to be used to mark out the entire composition on the smooth ground. From the 17th century on, the use of a drawn design, which gradually became more detailed became the norm (fig. 5) (Kalliga, 2023, 135–136; Kalliga and Alexopoulou, 2023, 1332–1334). Soot or charcoal were used for this purpose and the final outlines could be emphasized in ink. Specific details of the composition, such as the halos, which were usually first marked out with a compass, could sometimes be further highlighted with cinnabar.

The need to produce icons at an ever-increasing rate gradually led to the mechanical transfer of the most common depictions onto the preparatory layer. Pricked cartoons and gunpowder were used for this purpose but the design could also be imprinted on the ground using a blackened sheet of paper (a carbon) inserted face down between the original drawing and the ground layer. Direct darkening of the reverse of the original design is also mentioned as a means of transfer (Grenberg, 2000, 24–25).

Fig. 5 Triptych with the Hospitality of Abraham, the Last Supper, the Marriage at Cana and the Twelve Great Feasts, *(inv. no. 14126). Scene depicting the* Hospitality of Abraham. *Infrared-reflected imaging (SWIR) of the left wing, showing the detailed drawn design.*

Gilding and Metal Decorations

In most Old Russian icons gilding seems to have been applied exclusively in areas corresponding to the halos. Up to the end of the 17th century—while artists remained committed to the traditional practices—gilding was an integral part of Russian iconography. It was applied systematically over the background and the halos and occasionally to other areas. From the 17th century the use of silver leaf, which up to that time was rare, also began to spread (Grenberg, 2000, 28-29).

The application of gold leaf to large areas of the ground was often done over a thin layer of ochre using glair or liquid fish

Fig. 6 Two panels of triptych with Deesis and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and the three Hierarchs *(inv. no. 33775), detail of St. John Chrysostom. Shallow scoring, made during the burnishing process (*water gilding over poliment*), is evident in the area corresponding to the halo and gold striations (*shell gold*) were used to decorate the white garment.*

glue diluted in bread vodka. However, the most common practice to achieve a burnished gold surface involved the application of metal foil over a thicker, coloured layer known as "*poliment*", comprised mainly of red or orange-red pigments, a small amount of soap, wax, and egg protein.[27] Although different ways of preparing the poliment seem to have existed, the basic ingredients were invariably the same. Among the pigments mentioned are raw or burned ochre, red earths, red lead, and, in later times, Armenian bole. In 17th-century Moscow, dye merchants offered their customers a ready-made pigment mixture under the same name (Grenberg, 2000, 28). Applied either over a layer of ochre or of *poliment*, the gold leaf would finally be burnished using an agate or a tooth (fig. 6). [App. B: Inv. Nos.: 3009 (original gilding), 14126, 14147, 14460, 14461, 23758, 25784, 25828, 25830, 25831, 25832, 25833, 25952, 29533, 29534, 29535, 30250, 30278, 31356, 32430, 33775, 36386, 40157, 45338, 46084, 46085, 46108, 46262, 46269, 52489, and the Andreadis Virgin Kazanskaya].

Fig. 7 The Virgin of the Burning Bush *(inv.no 46108), detail. Gold leaf applied directly over the ground (*oil gilding*).*

After the 17th century, an alternative technique—commonly referred to as *oil gilding*—was also used. Under close inspection, no intermediate, warm-coloured layer is found under the metal foil, which was stuck onto the designated areas using a mixture of some drying oil, raw linseed oil, copper acetate and burned lead white. Although polished with cotton wool when dry, the final surface would not reflect light in the same way as the burnished gold (fig. 7) (Grenberg, 2000, 28). [App. B: Inv. Nos 14147, 25829, 25834, 31436, 31441, 31445, 31449 and 38460].

Fig. 8 *Areas decorated with metal leaf (*mordant gilding*): (a) detail from the left wing of* triptych with Deesis and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and the three Hierarchs *(inv. no. 33775) on which gold was used to embellish the purple cloak of St. Nicholas; (b) detail of* Saint John the Baptist, Angel of the Desert *(inv. no. 31409) on which the wing is decorated with silver striations.*

Gold leaf was also used to render drapery folds, to embellish clothing, for inscriptions and various other fine, decorative details of the compositions. The term 'assist' is used in Russian texts to describe this technique but also the actual mordant, the colourless organic material, applied to stick the gold leaf onto the dried paint surface. Boiled oil with lead white, copper acetates mixed with varnish, or a seasoned mixture of garlic juice and bolus were used for this purpose. The mordant was applied over the areas to be gilded with precision, using a fine brush, and was covered with gold, or other metal leaf, when it began to set. Any excess metal was mechanically removed after complete drying. The use of a mordant would deprive this type of decoration of the characteristic shine of burnished gold (fig. 8) [App. B: Inv. Nos. 23758, 25829, 25830, 25831, 29533, 31409, 32430, 33775, 38515, 40157, 46108, 46252 and the Andreadis Virgin Vladimirskaya].[28]

Gold was also used in powdered form, often also mixed with pigments, following a technique that, from the 17th century onwards, replaced mordant gilding in the delicate decoration on Russian icons (Sokolova, 2015, 66). The metal was ground with gum, honey, fish or other glue, sometimes with the addition of salts or ammonia. After washing and drying, the gold powder was mixed with gum and used in exactly the same way as the powdered pigments [App. B: Inv nos. 3006, 14126, 14147, 14460, 14461, 25832, 25833, 25834, 30250, 30278, 31356, 31437, 33775, 46085]. Silver, tin, and copper were also exploited in similar ways (figs. 9, 10) [App. B: Inv.nos. 14147, 25833].[29]

From the 17th century on cheaper metals were also used as a way of economizing by imitating more valuable materials. Tin foil was used to imitate silver and silver or tin foil to imitate gold.

Fig. 9 Triptych with the Hospitality of Abraham, the Last Supper, the Marriage at Cana and the Twelve Great Feasts, *(inv. no. 14126). Scene depicting the* Hospitality of Abraham. *Burnished gold of high purity was used in areas corresponding to haloes and wings and shell gold for all other fine decorations.*

Fig. 10 Triptych with the Presentation, the Annunciation, the Birth of the Virgin and eighteen Feasts, *(inv. no. 14147). Scene depicting* The Dormition of the Virgin *(actual size: 4.7 × 5.4 cm). Burnished gold leaf was applied over the background and [?the area corresponding to] Christ's draperies, which were further modelled using fine black lines and semitransparent tinted coatings. The shell gold technique was employed to render the gold decoration on the Virgin's purple cloak and the silver highlights of the mandorla.*

These less expensive materials were then covered with transparent, tinted coatings, mainly comprised of oil or terpene resins [App. B: Inv. nos. 25829, 25831, 25834, 31437, 31441, 31445, 40157]. Their colouring was achieved by adding extracts of crocus (*Crocus sativus*), buckthorn (*Rhamnus carthartica*) or birch bark (*Alnus glutinosa*) to the base material (Table 2) (Grenberg, 2000, 27–28, 48.).[30]

From the middle of the 15th century mixtures based on crocus (*Crocus sativus*) and fish bile[31] (European barracuda, Sphyraena sphyraena), or burnt mica ground with fish glue, were also used to imitate gold. This sort of 'gold' decoration was finally polished with an agate.

One particular decoration technique, using coloured coatings applied over burnished metal leaf, mainly came into use after the 17th century. Depending on the composition and the opacity of the coloured layer applied over the burnished metal, two variations seem to have existed. The gilded or silver coated surface to be decorated was first completely covered with either an opaque layer of tempera of the desired colour, or with a transparent coloured coating/glaze (usually green or red, tinted with coper acetate or *bakan* respectively) of appropriate tonality and made with oil or varnish as the binding medium. When dry, the top layer was selectively removed, following a chosen decorative pattern, to reveal the underlying metal sheet.[32] When transparent tinted coatings were used, as well as the incised decorative pattern, the metal sheet would also show through, giving quite an elaborate result (Grenberg, 2000, 28).

Combined use of such techniques was not uncommon in late Russian icons. The *Dormition of the Virgin* (Inv. No 25833) provides a good example. On the background and the halos gold leaf (Au: 80%, Zn: 18%, Ag: 1%, Cu: 1%) was burnished over a layer of *poliment* and further embellished with punch marks and incised floral patterns. Shell gold was applied to highlight the draperies. Almost pure gold (Au: 99,90%, Sn: <1%) was used for the garments and a silver alloy (Ag: 54%, Zn: 30%, Cu: 16%) for the bed cover's decorative fringe. The stars of the mandorla and the central inscription were formed using *sgraffito* (Boura, 2022, 91-100, 120).

Information on the gilding techniques of the Benaki icons is recorded in Appendix B.

The Medium

Egg tempera, the use of an emulsion with egg yolk, prevailed in portable Russian religious painting up to the middle of the 17th century.[33] As vinegar—the necessary additive to preserve the egg emulsion—was rare and expensive in Russia, it was replaced by *kvass*, a low-alcohol (0.05 - 1.44%) beverage produced by the fermentation of black rye or rye bread.

There is documentary evidence to suggest that the egg medium was considered unsuitable for some pigments containing sulphur, such as cinnabar and ultramarine, but also for other blue pigments, which are not specified. These were reportedly mixed with egg white, gum or animal glue, binders that were also commonly used in miniature painting on vellum or on paper. It is not clear if this was a common practice, or a technique only occasionally applied (Grenberg, 2000, 39).

Pigments and Colourants

As well as being dependent on the period and the geographical area in which the artworks were produced, the pigments used will also depend to some extent on the locally available natural raw materials, and the conditions of the local pigment production and trade. In more recent times, the availability of pigments was also affected by developments in chemistry.

Although only limited information on the use of pigments can be derived from the examination of works by modern means, it nevertheless demonstrates that from the 11th/12th centuries quite a large number of pigments, both natural and artificial, were available to Russian icon painters. Some were undoubtedly of very good quality and expensive while others were more "humble" and less impressive. The concern to economize on the more valuable ones is evident from the written sources, where particular reference is often made to alternative ways of mixing cheaper pigments, to avoid using the more expensive ones.

The data included in Tables 2 and 3, relating to pigments in use before and after the 18th century respectively, were drawn mainly from Grenberg's textbooks (Grenberg, 2000, 33–36, 1982, 65–69). He attempted to record them systematically but also to establish a connection between modern finds and information derived from historical sources. In the "Observations" column his comments are presented, supplemented with data relating to the trade and the use of pigments in Russia. Any information on the origin of the pigments and, where applicable, a comparison with similar techniques and/or materials used in European medieval painting, is recorded in the endnotes.

Additional information on artificial green copper pigments was drawn from specialized research carried out in this field (Naumova et al., 1990; Svarcova et al., 2009; Pisareva, 1998). Although the use of red dyes of animal origin is not mentioned in any of the Russian sources studied so far, they have been included in Table 2, as both their local production and their international trade have been demonstrated (Kampasakali and Varella, 2008, 78–79; Schweppe and Roosen-Runge, 1986, 258, 261).

Table 2. Pigments and colourants used in Russian icon painting, 11th–17th centuries

Colour	Name		Chemical composition	Observations/Notes
White	Lead white		$2PbCO_3 \cdot Pb(OH)_2$	Artificial
			$PbCO_3$	It is unclear whether lead carbonate was derived from cerussite or if it was artificially produced.[34]
Black	Carbon black		C	Soot was mostly used in icon painting and powdered charcoal for wall painting.[35]
Reds	Cinnabar		HgS	Artificial. A recipe is preserved in one of the oldest manuscripts, dating from the 15th century, now in the collection of the Holy Trinity and St Sergius Lavra, near Moscow.
				Natural[36]. Distinguished by its silica inclusions content.
	Red lead		Pb_3O_4	Artificially produced by the roasting of lead white.[37]
	Red and reddish brown earths		Anhydrous iron oxides	The use of ochres of different hues and origins is confirmed, but it is unclear if umber (containing 8-16%. MnO_2) is included in the above.
	Bakan[38]		Dye of plant origin	Produced from the wood of the plant *Varzion* whose name in the Tatar language is pronounced "*Bakan*"[39]. Also produced by soaking grated eggshells, chalk or lime with a solution obtained from the boiling of dyed fabrics.[40]
	Cochineal		Dye of animal origin	From Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Armenia[41]
Yellows	Yellow earths (Ochres)		Mixtures of clay, silica oxides (SiO_2 or $Al_2O_3 \cdot 2SiO_2 \cdot H_2O$ or $H_4Al_2Si_2O_9$), iron hydroxides (goethite, α-FeOOH) and / or iron oxides (haematite, α-Fe_2O_3)	
	Orpiment and realgar		As_2S_3 & AsS or As_4S_4	Their use is mentioned in Russian sources dating from the 15th c. They have also been identified in a number of *Old* Russian icons.[42] Unused quantities of the pigments were included among the finds of a 12th-c. icon painting workshop excavated in Novgorod.[43]
	Lead-tin yellow		I: Pb_2SnO_4 II: I, Sn, Si oxides	Was widely used up to the mid-18th c. Production began again after 1941.[44]
	Crocus (*Crocus sativus*) extract		Organic	A recipe for the preparation of a mixture suitable for the imitation of gold by mixing crocus extract with fish bile is included in a 17th-c. RussiZZZan manuscript.
	Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) extract		Organic	Due to its Emodin content it was used to tint transparent coatings to imitate gold. Yellow extracts were obtained from the fresh plant and brown from its dried bark.[45]
Greens	Green earth (glauconite)		$K[(Al,Fe^{3+}),(Fe^{2+},Mg)](AlSi_3,Si_4)O_{10}(OH)_2$	A basic pigment in Russian icon painting.[46] Glauconite from *Koporye* was available up to 1612 at which time this region was occupied by the Swedes and again, after the end of the 18th century, when it was reunited with Russia.
	Malachite		$CuCO_3 \cdot Cu(OH)_2$	Natural or artificial.[47] As it was valuable, substitute mixtures are described in the sources.
	Copper greens	Pseudo-malachite	$Cu_5(PO_4)_2(OH)_4$	Artificial
		Posniakite	$Cu_4SO_4(OH)_6 \cdot H_2O$	Artificial
		Atacamite	$Cu_2Cl(OH)_3$	Artificial
		Verdigris	$Cu(CH_3COO)_2 \cdot 2Cu(OH)_2$	Artificial. According to certain recipes lactic acid was used in the production, leading to a reduced brightness and the blue tint of the pigment.[48]
		Venetian		Imported. Although classified as a green, its hue was closer to the blues.
		Volkonskoite	$Ca_{0.3}(Cr,Mg,Fe)_2((Si,Al)_4O_{10})(OH)_2 \cdot 4H_2O$	No reference to this pigment has been found in Russian painters' manuals, but it is estimated that it was among those used, as green pigments with chrome have been identified in icons of the 11th, 15th and 17th c. and the mineral is found in abundance in many areas of Russia.

Colour	Name	Chemical composition	Observations/Notes
Blues	Natural ultramarine (*Lapis lazuli*)[49]	$3Na_2O{\cdot}3Al_2O_3 \cdot 6SiO_2{\cdot}2Na_2S$	
	Azurite	$2CuCO_3 \cdot Cu(OH)_2$	Among the basic pigments used in Russian icon painting.[50]
	Vivianite	$Fe_3(PO_4)_2 \cdot 8H_2O$	Despite references to the use of Vivianite in Russian works, it is thought to be rather difficult to identify this pigment [?with any certainty].[51]
	Indigo (referred to as *Krutik*)	$C_{16}H_{10}N_2O_2$ (Indigotin)	Imported. There is mention of its production from *woad*. Was also derived through treatment of blue fabrics.[52]
	Smalt	K, Co and Al silicate	

Table 3. Pigments and colourants used in Russian icon painting, 18th century[53]

Colour	Name	Origin	Observations/Notes
White	BlLead white[54]	Locally available	The pigments originating from *Kashi, Vologda* and *Moscow* were considered to be of the highest quality.
		Imported	From Germany, Belgium and possibly other countries.
Black	Carbon black		Had a slightly blueish hue when obtained from *Tilia* wood.
	Bone black		Produced a mild yellow hue when mixed with white.
	Black earths	Locally available and imported	The locally available pigments came from *Olonets*.
Reds	Cinnabar		Natural and artificial
	Red lead (*Meerkat*)	Locally available	From *Kashi*.
		Imported	From Germany.
	Red and reddish brown earths		
	Burned ochre		
	Bakan	Locally available	When from *Rzhevsky* was bright in colour.
		Imported	Dark in colour when from Venice; also from Turkey.
Yellows	Yellow earths (Ochres)		Use of ochres of different types and origins is mentioned, but they are not named.
	Orpiment		
	Naples yellow		
	Lead-tin yellow		
	Dyes of plant origin (Crocus and Buckthorn extracts)	Locally available and imported	That imported from Turkey produced an amber tint.
Browns	Umbers	Locally available	From *Ostanshkov*
		Imported	From Denmark, Siena and Spain.
Greens	Copper greens	Locally available	From Siberia
		Imported	From Venice
	Green earth (Glauconite)		
	Malachite		
Blues	Ultramarine		[55]
	Prussian blue		[56]
	Azurite		
	Indigo		
	Smalt		

In the first half of the 19th century, the local production of pigments developed alongside increased importation from countries such as England, France, Italy and China. Pigments used in Europe were now also available to Russian painters: lead white, Naples yellow, cadmium yellow, madder lake (also known in Russian as *kraplak* or *kumach*), cobalt blue, synthetic ultramarine, and green chromium oxide. Also, Indian yellow (Kampasakali and Varella, 2008, 78–79), barite white, chrome yellow, zinc oxides (usually mixed with lead white and in pure form only after 1880) and bitumen.

After the mid-19th century most pigments were imported and were thus available in many Russian cities. Direct ordering of materials from abroad is also reported (Grenberg, 2000, 34–35). Although document information on the use of "modern" pigments in Russian icon painting is scarce,[57] given that they were available on the market, their use by Russian painters cannot be ruled out'. On the other hand, Russian icon painters' obsession with the traditional techniques and the decline in quality of the production—at least of mass-produced works from the provincial workshops of the time—are factors inconsistent with artistic experimentation.

Coatings (*olifa*)

The term 'linseed oil' (*olifa*) was used indiscriminately by Russian hagiographers to describe the final protective coating applied to the icons. However, it would often be made of various ingredients: a boiled mixture of resin and linseed oil or hemp oil, or simply boiled oil. In the 16th and 17th centuries amber was usually added to the above, while in later icons the use of softer resins, such as mastic, is reported.

The application of this coating to the painting was a complicated and time-consuming process based on the right temperature difference between the oil and the surface of the icon. According to a 20th-century description (Sokolova, 2015, 72–73), after the colour layers had completely dried out, the icon was placed face up on a flat surface, and any dust was meticulously removed. To facilitate absorption by the paint layers, an appropriate amount of 'boiled' oil was heated. It was poured warm over the middle of the icon and spread evenly by hand, to cover the entire surface to a thickness of one millimeter. Every 15-20 minutes, and until the layer began to dry, the surface was 'swept' by hand to ensure an even coverage, as the oil tends to be repelled from certain areas. After about five hours, when the coating began to set, any excess was removed. The surface was then smoothed by hand every 5-10 minutes to remove any dust particles, a process repeated regularly until the coating was tacky. The surface of this film would dry out in two to three days while maximum hardness was reached in about a month.

The methods of preparing the dried / "boiled" oils were altered when drying agents such as the lead compounds were discovered. Unknown in previous years, they drastically changed the way oils were handled as coatings.

In the 18th century a variety in the composition of these coatings is recorded. Based on the surviving recipes, they can be classified as oil, alcohol and turpentine coatings.

Oil varnishes are comprised of: a drying agent, linseed oil (and more rarely hazelnut or poppy oil), turpentine, Chios mastic and often copal or amber. For the recoating of old icons, a varnish made of linseed and cedar oil was exclusively used. In the oil varnishes of the first half of the 19th century the use of poppy oil was limited. They were usually made of linseed oil, turpentine, mastic and amber, which, after the middle of the century, was gradually replaced by damar resin. The addition of wax dissolved in turpentine, when the intended effect was a matt surface, is also recorded at that time.

Alcohol varnishes contained mastic or sandarac.

The use of a mastic and turpentine varnish is also mentioned, which would sometimes also contain Venetian turpentine.

Egg white varnishes were also used during various periods, in intermediate stages of painting (Sokolova, 2015, 11; Grenberg, 2000, 47–48).

Based on the research carried out to date, what has become clear is that, although variations in the use of certain materials or particular techniques and the way the panels are constructed can be demonstrated, due to the limited and currently fragmentary nature of the information available, only the most tentative attempts can be made to date the icons.

The production of icons in Russia aimed to satisfy the requirements and the needs not only of different groups within Russian society but, in later years, also of Orthodox Christians settled in remote and foreign lands and originating from diverse social and economic backgrounds.

Not only the centrally directed and well-organized production of icons but also the common practice of transferring even well-established artists to specific project sites, where they would collaborate with other icon painters to handle large commissions, are among the factors that, to some extent, must have influenced the spread of new materials and the evolution of icon-painting techniques. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that, in a country that extended over such a vast territory, any innovations would have spread gradually and would undoubtedly not have eliminated the techniques previously used all at once. For some considerable time the new styles would have been used in parallel with what had hitherto been the norm. In this respect it is that no single feature (e.g. the form of the battens, the relief configurations of the front, the use of metal foils) can be relied upon to provide an accurate dating. Nevertheless certain technical features can provide valuable insights which, when considered in tandem with the painting style, give a better understanding of the works and allow a more accurate classification.

Endnotes

1 Boycheva, 2021, paras. 1–3, 7–15, 2015, 224–226; Chesnokova, 2020; Μπόιτσεβα, 2017; Τσεσνοκόβα, 2017.

2 A 16th-c. iconographic manual found in Novgorod is the oldest text preserved. Information is also included in book pages and loose sheets dating from the 17th c. (Sayenkova, 2019, 36).

3 Such as the *Typikon* of Bishop Nektarios (1599), the 17th-c. text of Nicodemus of *Siysk*, the *Stroganov*, *Bolshakov* and *Gourianov* anthologies (Sokolova 2015, 40; Pisareva, 1998, 35).

4 URL: http://**www.gosniir.ru/library/conferences/conservation-researches-2.aspx** .

5 On materials and technique: Ghervase et al., 2018; Herm et al., 2021; Kalliga, 2023; Kalliga and Alexopoulou, 2023; Sandu et al., 2009; Sayenkova and Sverdlova, 2015). On the wooden panels: Dolgikh et al., 2017, 706; Matskovsky et al., 2016, 63; Grenberg, 1982, 25.

6 On the international ERC research programme entitled RICONTRANS: Visual Culture, Piety, and Propaganda: Transfer and Reception of Russian Religious Art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (16th–early 20th century): **https://ricontrans-project.eu/**.

7 As most of the relevant publications are in Russian, making a thorough review of the available sources is problematic for anyone not familiar with the language.

8 This term has been adopted to describe the painting of the first period (10th–15th c.), which is considered part of the Byzantine tradition and which evolved gradually over those first five centuries (Borboudakis, 1994, 42–43).

9 I am deeply indebted to N. Komashko for her friendly cooperation and generous communication of information derived from years of experience.

10 Information included in Table 1 is based on research carried out on groups of icons studied on the occasion of various exhibitions (Grenberg, 1982, 25) with the addition of later finds. The reader should be aware that, in most cases, identification of the species was carried out via macroscopical and/or microscopical observation of the panels. Only Dolgikh and Matskovsky provide results based on the examination of samples.

11 Typical examples are icons from Pskov (Grenberg, 2000, 13) and from Moscow (N. Komashko, personal communication) where pine seems to have been used with greater frequency.

12 The 17th- century Muscovites' appreciation of cypress wood, especially for the construction of icons, is also reflected in the narrative in style but historically based text by Nikolaos Chrissidis (Chrissidis, 2011, 158).

13 N. Komashko (personal communication).

14 Examples include: the 13th-c. sanctuary door of the Cathedral of the Dormition in Krivoe Pogost, now in the State Tretyakov Gallery, made of pine and linden (Bobrov, 2008) and an early 14th-c. biographical icon of Saint Nicholas attributed to the Novgorod school made of three planks of fir and one of oak (Grenberg, 1982, 25).

15 N. Komashko (personal communication).

16 N. Komashko (personal communication).

17 Battens inserted into the panel from the same side although characteristic of icons made in Ukraine, are rarely encountered in Russian icons (N. Komashko, personal communication).

18 Icons made in 17th -c. Ukraine were often fitted with characteristic protruding battens with one end carved to a shape resembling what is known as "the beak of a goose" (N. Komashko, personal communication). The 19th-c. Benaki Inv. Nos. 25830 and 25832, are fitted with battens shaped like this at both ends.

19 N. Komashko (personal communication).

20 N. Komashko (personal communication).

21 Icons produced in the Gourianov and Chiricov workshops are typical examples (N. Komashko, personal communication).

22 The name means an ark, which has been interpreted as referring symbolically to Noah's Ark

23 Paper was imported from Italy in the 14th c. and by the 15th century it was also coming from France, Germany and Poland. In the 16th century Danish paper flooded the Russian market and the first attempts were made to produce it locally (Grenberg, 2000, 16).

24 Recently the use of paper strips over the boards has been reported in connection with several Russian icons of this type belonging to the Museikon collection in Alba Iulia (Filip et al., 2023, 78–79; Dumitran and Filip, 2023 Cat. nos. 3, 6, 19, 30, 32).

25 The name of the preparation layer is ancient and refers to the Greek island of *Lefkas* from where the best quality chalk was derived. However, the name of the raw material, which in Russian is pronounced 'mel', also associates chalk with a different, well established place of production, the island of *Milos* (Bobrov, 2008).

26 During the 19th c., in the circles of the *Old Believers*, a belief prevailed according to which "the deep theological significance of the icons gave a symbolic character to the very materials used in their construction". According to the philosopher Pavel Florensky the stages of creation of an icon could also be symbolically interpreted. On this issue with quotations to relevant passages from the sources: Maltseva, 1994, 35–36.

27 The technique is commonly referred to as *water gilding*, since the area to be gilded was first wetted to reactivate the glue covering or contained in the substrate (Dunkerton et al., 1991, 174).

28 Grenberg, 2000, 27. On mordant gilding in Northwest Europe and Italy from the 14th and 15th c., Dunkerton et al., 1991, 182.

29 Grenberg, 2000, 28. On the shell gold technique: Dunkerton et al., 1991, 182.

30 The method was known in Western Europe as early as the 15th c.. Relevant references are included in the regulations for the operation of guilds north and south of the Alps and in contracts drawn up for the commissioning of works, (Dunkerton et al., 1991, 175).

31 The colouring properties of fish bile relate to its Biliverdin and Bilrubin content (Cornelius, 1991). At that time in Russia fish bile was also used, dissolved in gum, for the decoration of miniatures (Гренберг, 2000, 28).

32 The technique is equivalent to the *sgraffito*, used in Italian works from the 14th c,, for rendering precious fabrics (Dunkerton et al., 1991, 176).

33 Although recipes for the use of oil are included in Russian manuscripts of the 16th c., it seems to have been used after the mid-17th. exclusively for painting on canvas (Grenberg, 2000, 43). What is a 'pictorial manuscript'?

34 References to the use of cerussite (normal lead carbonate) as a pigment are rare, but it is often found as an impurity in the basic carbonate (Gettens et al., 1986, 67).

35 Winter and West Fitzhugh, 2007, 9.

36 Deposits in Asia are found in the Altai Mountains and the Ferghana region of Russian Turkestan (Gettens et al., 1993, 160).

37 No reference to the use of the pigment in Russia during ancient times has yet been found, but Slav, Armenian and Azerbaijani recipes of the 15th–18th c. describe its production from lead white (West Fitzhugh, 1986, 111, 113).

38 Also referred to as *Chervlen* (Sokolova, 2015, 32; Viner, 1950, 249–250; Zamyatina 1997, 176–178).

39 Varzion, also called *Verzinio* by Venetian merchants of the 14th c., was known in Europe from the 11th c,, while many references to the import of sapwood (*Caesalpinia sappan* and *Haematoxylum brasiletto*) from Asia exist. Following the discovery of the Americas, the dye was produced from brazil wood (*Caesalpinia echinata*) in large quantities (Dapson and Bain, 2015). From the mid-16th c. it was imported into Russia from Germany, Holland and France and was used in the painting of icons (Kampasakali and Varella, 2008, 78).

40 The plant origin of the dye cannot be certified in this case, as it relates to the type of dye used for the colouring of the fabrics.

41 Cochineal from Belarus, Ukraine and Poland (from the Polish kermes, *Porphyrophora polonica* L.) but also from Armenia (*Porphyrophora hamelii* Brandt) was available in Russia. In the production of the dye, the insects Coccus *uvae-ursi* and *Coccus fragariae*, thriving on Arctostaphylos (*Arctostaphylos uvae-ursi*) and strawberry plants respectively, were also used. The export of lake from Russia was based in the port of Astrachan.

42 West Fitzhugh, 1997, 48–49.

43 The medieval city of Novgorod (9th–15th c.) is unique in Europe for its favourable subsoil conditions that ensured excellent preservation of the organic remains of human activity. The almost undisturbed succession of archaeological strata, the information derived from the dendrochronological dating of the excavated material and finds, such as coins and seals, whose dating is not disputed, provide a clear framework for dating. Pigments, a ready-made wooden panel and a bronze cover for an icon of Saint Nicholas, now in the Novgorod State Museum, are among the finds from the icon painting workshop belonging to a priest of Greek origin, who had learned his art in Byzantium (Musin, 2010, 11, 14).

44 Kuhn, 1993, 85–86.

45 The process for producing dyes from the plants of the Rhamnus family (*Rhamnus solutivus*) was different in 17th-c. England as, instead of the wood, the fruits of the plants were used. A yellow dye was produced by treating the unripe fruits, and a green from the ripened ones (Harley, 1982, 86–88).

46 This has also been identified in the wall paintings of the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin of the St Pherapont Monastery (Naumova et al., 1990, 82).

47 Although the source of the malachite and azurite is not mentioned, ancient copper mines existed in East Central Europe and in Hungary in the Middle Ages and large deposits exist in the Urals (Gettens and West Fitzhugh, 1993, 183–184). The identification of the natural pigments was made possible due to the presence of impurities—such as Cu-Zn salts—in the ore, which have remained unchanged over time. The artificially produced pigments do not contain such inclusions and crystallize in a rather characteristic way, producing spherulites (Naumova and Pisareva, 1994, 281–282; Svarcova et al., 2009, 2049).

48 Vinegar was used for the synthesis of copper pigments in Europe but, as it was scarce and expensive in Russia, it was replaced by lactic acid derived from dairy and milk fermentation products (Pisareva and Grenberg, 1990, 69–90). A different process, based on the use of yeast and honey is described in some recipes, leading to the production of pure copper acetate (Писарева, 1998, 74). Nevertheless the wide variety of copper pigments used indicates a discrepancy between the instructions provided in the manuscripts and the procedures followed in practice, which must have varied. The frescoes of the Cathedral of the St Pherapont Monastery present a good example as, in addition to the natural pseudo-malachite the use of synthetic malachite, posniakite and atakamite was confirmed (Naumova et al., 1990).

49 In the Middle Ages lapis lazuli originated almost exclusively from the inaccessible Badakhshan mines of the Kokcha valley in Afghanistan. Although in Europe it was distributed mainly through Venice, to which it was transported by traders from Aleppo (Harley, 1982, 43), the existence of a shorter trade route to Russia cannot be safely ruled out. The Siberian mines near Lake Baikal were not exploited before the 19th c. (Plesters, 1993, 38).

50 See n. 70.

51 Vivianite is mentioned among the pigments that may have been used by Dionysius, in the frescoes of the Cathedral of the Saint Pherapont Monastery (16th c.) (Pisareva, 1998, 62), in frescoes of the 16th-17th c., in the Sviyazhsk region of the Republic of Tatarstan (Khramchenkova et al., 2019) and also noted by Grenberg (Grenberg, 1982, 68). It is included in the table of blue pigments used for wall paintings compiled by P. Mora, L. Mora and P. Philippot (Mora et al., 1984, 61–62) and has also been identified in works by mainly 17th-c. Dutch painters. It is considered a pigment widely used in Europe from the 11th to the 18th c., but one which is difficult to identify microscopically, especially when it has been used in a mixture. Vivianite deposits are formed in moist, peaty soils by the reaction of iron-rich water with phosphates. Colourless when mined, the mineral oxidizes rapidly when exposed to the atmosphere, taking on a colour ranging from bright blue to gray (Spring and Keith, 2009, 77–78).

52 The dye was obtained from different plants depending on the place of production. From *Isatis tinctoria* L (woad) in Europe, but from *Indigotiferea tinctoria* L. in India from where it was imported after the 12th c. (Schweppe, 1997, 82–83). According to Grenberg the dye was

imported. Kampasakali and Varella argue that, in the Southwestern provinces of Russia, woad was indigenous. They also suggest that indigo was imported directly to Russia from central Asia but also through the mediation of British and French merchants, active in the Baltic and the White Seas. In Russian icons indigo mixed with orpiment, with verdigris or verdigris and saffron extract, was often used instead of a green pigment (Kampasakali and Varella, 2008, 79)

53 As mentioned in an order placed by the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. In addition to the pigments produced on a large scale, there are mentions of some being produced locally during that time, by provincial painters making use of available materials and means.

54 Different grades were acknowledged, depending on their chalk content.

55 From the 19th c. this rare pigment became available in larger quantities due to the discovery of new sources of lapis, namely in Russia close to the Persian border but also in Siberia, near Lake Baikal (Harley, 1982, 45).

56 Prussian blue was identified, by ATR-FTIR analysis, in three Russian icons from the Museikon collection, Iulia Alba, and it is also considered the most probable match in two more cases, based on their XRF analysis results, Filip et al., 2023, 86.

57 For the most recent relevant finds, Filip et al., 2023, 81–86.

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The Scientific Analysis of Russian Metal Icons and Crosses

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INTRODUCTION

There is a separate section of the collection of Russian icons in the Benaki Museum (hereafter BM) devoted to 'copper' icons, crosses, folding icons and parts of folding icons of unknown origin. Their history is connected with the Old Believers' movement that emerged in Russia in the latter part of the 17th century, after the split in the Russian Orthodox Church known as the 'Great Schism', and whose members lived under the threat of persecution up until the early 20th century (Blankoff, 2001, 63 -103; Espinola, 1991, 8-10; Vlasova, 2011, 115-123). The schism arose from the staunch opposition of many Russian believers—hereafter called Old Believers—to the reforms imposed on the Russian Church by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow (1652-1658), which adapted it to the traditions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Old Believers preserved and continued the ancient Russian tradition of copper casting and created their own special religious and spiritual culture in the vast expanses of Russia. This practice started in the south and later spread to the north, especially to the Pomorie sketes, the workshops of Moscow, the villages of Moscow and the Volga region, and to secret forges in the Urals and Siberia (Blankoff, 2001, 63 -103; Espinola, 1991, 8-10).

This paper focuses on the technological characteristics of the BM objects and is in three parts. The first part investigates the fabrication techniques and examines the surface decoration. The second part explores the chemical composition of the raw materials (alloys and enamels) used in terms of primary and secondary elements. The third part investigates the coatings and pigments on the objects.

This study will provide an insight into the evolution of techniques and materials during the period of the objects' creation, which may lead to a more precise dating. It will also offer insights into the methods applied and the religious traditions of the Old Believers. It will help to diagnose and explain problems of wear with a view to the objects' conservation. Finally, the study will provide researchers with the results of physicochemical analyses, not only to enable comparison with earlier publications (Espinola, 1991, 29-40; Savina, 1993, 48–55), but also as a reference for further studies of similar objects.

The study presented several challenges, beginning with the heterogeneous content of the BM collection, which is, however, representative of similar collections of Russian icons and crosses. Information regarding the objects' provenance is inadequate due to the constant relocation of the owners. Furthermore, it was not possible to conduct all necessary physicochemical analyses for such an extensive project. Lastly, many of these objects were treated repeatedly to keep them in a "functional state" or to enhance their aesthetics for religious and display purposes, leaving traces of these interventions.[11]

It should be noted that there have been few extensive technical studies of these objects and the amount of published material on the subject remains sparse. However, notwithstanding all the aforementioned considerations and the language barrier, we believe that this work will constitute a further step in the scientific exploration of Russian metal icons.

ANALYSIS METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Thirteen BM artefacts were examined both macroscopically and microscopically using a regular stereoscope in magnifications from 20x up to 40x,[2] to assess their condition state and technological characteristics and to study details not otherwise visible.

Non-invasive and non-destructive qualitative and quantitative chemical analysis using X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF) was carried out on seven of them for a better understanding of the technical evolution in the production of the BM artefacts. A portable XRF (μ-XRF) [3] system was applied to the metals and decorative enamels of seven and six icons respectively. The choice of areas for analysis was determined by their shape and form: mainly flat surfaces with no dust, cleaned of deposits and without significant signs of wear. The compositions given are the average of the analysis performed in scanning mode over an area of about 0.6 mm x 0.6 mm, with 0.2mm step and 50s/step, collecting in a total of 12 spectra under filtered excitation. Unfortunately, boron, sodium, magnesium, and aluminum were not analyzed – within

the detection limits of the system (Van der Linden et al., 2011, 63-103). However, it was possible to produce an approximate overall estimate of their percentages and make indirect comparisons with other data from the literature.

Scanning Electron Microscopy / Energy Dispersive X-ray[4] (SEM / EDX) method was used for the chemical analysis of the paint layers' components, contributing to the identification of the pigments used.

Detached tiny fragments and flakes from severely damaged areas (five from enamels and eight from overlays) were collected, embedded in a two-compound epoxy resin, [5] polished and used as cross-sectional samples for observation and analysis. Only two samples, a brass flake from BM52598 and a resin flake from 14466, were analyzed by SEM without being embedded.

Cross-sectional observation and photography were carried out through Optical Microscope[6] (OM), under Ultra-Violet illumination, reflected and polarized light to investigate the stratigraphy of the coatings, the paint and enamel layer, their structure as well as the colour, shape and size of the pigment grains.

Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy[7] (FTIR), was conducted primarily to identify the chemical nature of the organic materials, such as coatings and dyes, as well as inorganic pigments and extenders. The method offers information on the chemical bonding of molecules in the above materials. In selected cases, micro-samples were detached, ground into a fine powder and pressed into a KBr disc.[8]

I. FABRICATION AND DECORATION

Fabrication

1. Casting Techniques: Materials and Methods

Research into old notebooks and related publications indicates that the production method used for the copper alloy icons and crosses of the BM collection was casting, which encompasses both sand mould casting[9] and sand-clay cast mould casting.[10] Illustrations (Fig.1)[11] and descriptions found in the written sources depict the rural and impoverished conditions of the Old Believers' workshop, which significantly influenced the production procedures of the icons and crosses.

***Fig. 1**: Workshop of production of copper locks. The village of Pavlovo, Gorbatovsky district. 1896. (Nizhegorodskaja gubernija po issledovanijam gubernskogo zemstva - II/Selo Pavlovo i ego promysly — Vikiteka)*

The physical evidence of casting, especially in the context of sand moulding workshops, is inadequately preserved due to the degradation of the materials incorporated, such as clay and organic matter. Additionally, sand moulds were broken up after each casting process (Beentjes, 2019, 25), leaving minimal traces. However, the study of Russian publications has unearthed references and photographs (Fig. 2)[12] documenting the existence of flasks and metal patterns used in this moulding process. These findings shed light on the historical casting technique.

While the primary castings were of high quality and the popularity of religious artefacts grew, a variety of models that evolved from the originals allowed widespread icon production of varying levels of craftmanship with modified styles and techniques across many regions in Russia.[13]

The production of metal icons and crosses involved the following procedures: initially, a craftsman made a prototype in which the formation of the reliefs and details of the icons were created; this was known as the "model" made from materials like clay, wood, stone, bone, plaster, soft metal, or wax. Then the shape of the model was cast in metal, by creating a mould from the model and refined by a skilled craftsman to form what is termed the "master model." The master model served as the blueprint for further replication throughout the manufacturing process. This entire procedure was broken down into three main phases: the creation of the model, the development of the master model and the production casting (Fig. 3).[14]

1.1 Technological Observations

Technical examination and analysis of the collection show that sand casting played a dominant role in the production of these religious artefacts. Several key features observed, which substantiate this conclusion, are mentioned below:

- Distinct simple, flat shapes.
- Deliberate use of conical shaping for designs and inscriptions, aiding smooth pattern removal from the mould.
- Occasional traces of casting fins due to metal overflow between the two-parts of the mould.
- Irregular rough surface on the reverse.
- Defining small size, substantial weight, and metal thickness.
- Smooth cast surface on the relief sides, continuous even in the decorative grooves.
- Despite detailed designs, most pieces show no visible tool marks like engraving or chasing,[15] as decoration is shaped directly onto the template and within the mould.

Although the particulars described here apply to all objects of the collection, further examination revealed some distinctive traits.

2. Evolution of Russian Metal Icons and Crosses

2.1: From Single Icons to Polyptychs and Crosses

As mentioned above, the Collection of the Benaki Museum gives us a valuable insight into the evolution of Russian metal icons. Their transformation from single panels into diptychs, triptychs and tetraptychs as well as crosses is obvious. The process of reproduction was clearly influenced by the tenets and needs of the Old Believers. The design of icon tops progressed from square forms to arches, eventually integrating seraphim. Polyptychs are produced with each component cast separately and assembled following a matrix of templates. The model used in this process features an assembly of decorative strips, set within a smooth, raised, stepped frame, that assembles the icons into one, two or four panels with or without an arch shape on the top. In the process of creating inscriptions, the hallmarks of the foundries and the master craftsmen were applied.

It is obvious that a skilled caster could modify any model, changing frames, selecting icons and integrating suspension loops and hinges. Vasilyeva has published an archive photo of an assembled template (Vasilyeva, 2019), which when compared to the single panel BM14467 and diptych BM14466, clearly shows that they repeat the original matrix down to the smallest detail. The arched top appears to be an exact copy of the original template, to the extent that even a part of the right-hand curve of the engraved line is obscured by the frame (Vasilyeva, 2019). (Fig. 4) This "Pomerian form" became very popular in the following years.

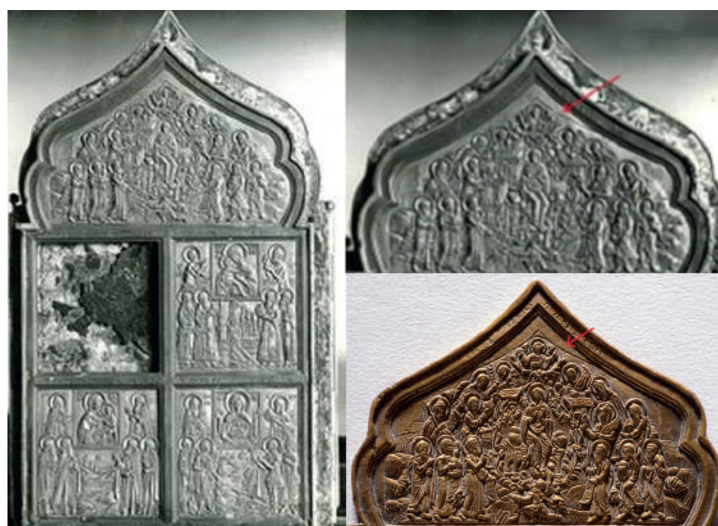


Fig. 4 *Left: model for casting an icon from Kodozero, Olonets province, mid-19th C. Vasilyeva, V.E.P. (2019) Pomorskie skladni «Dvunadesjatye prazdniki».* Rjabininskie čtenija. *Right: comparison of the model with icon BM11467, showing the identical engraved lines.*

The BM collection includes two distinctive eight-pointed altar crosses: BM52591 and BM31454. Notably, the front panels are decorated with colourful enamels, while the reverse sides feature engraved designs. Optical examination confirmed that these crosses were also sand mould cast. They either employed an initial model with relief on both sides, or the master craftsman shaped intricate decoration on the inner side of a two-sided mould.

In the complex process of assembling these icons and crosses in the mould, a clear difference is evident in the level of care and precision applied. Many items in the collection exhibit a somewhat rough approach to assembly, lacking the attention to detail one might expect. This is particularly evident in the way the components are joined; the seams and joints often display a certain crudeness, with visibly uneven alignments such as on BM14464 (Fig. 5). This characteristic suggests that although the master craftsmen and foundries were capable of detailed work, they exhibited a preference for functional assembly and symbolic significance was prioritized over flawless execution.

Fig.5*: BM14464 Detail depicting the uneven alignments of the components.*

An interesting finding emerged from XRF analysis of the two folds of icon BM14466. As regards their metal constituents, the two panels are made of a slightly different brass alloy.[16] This variation could stem from the workshop's use of scrap metal, perhaps without full awareness of its material composition. This practice aligns with historical recycling, where foundry workers melted various brass objects, resulting in a variety of alloys.[17] The difference in alloy composition can also suggest that the icons were made at different times, in different workshops with varying production methods, or possibly assembled later.

2.2 Composite Casting of Icons

The BM collection reveals an interesting technique: casting combined icons, plaques, crests, and seraphim as finials, as seen in BM14468 and BM31453. In this process we presume that a single metal icon was placed in the mould alongside the

Endnotes

1 On remote villages where they shared similar religious beliefs, as well as other countries including the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America where they settled, Espinola, 1991, 8–10.

2 Leica Wild M3Z stereoscope.

3 The μ-XRF spectrometer is a customized version of the Artax (Bruker Nano Analytics) spectrometer, Kantarelou and Karydas, 2016, 85–91.

4 SEM analysis was carried out using a Jeol JSM-6510LV (SEM-EDAX) scanning electron microscope with backscatter electron detector.

5 Epofix Struers two-compound epoxy resin was selected for embedding the samples. The resin blocks were then polished with silicon carbide paper and diamond paste to 1 mm. Struers Labopol-5 appliance was used for polishing. This produced a smooth surface on which the different layers could be well observed and identified.

6 Using an Olympus AX70 appliance with magnifications from 500x up to 1000x.

7 A Bruker Alpha II infrared spectrometer was used. Spectra were recorded in reflection mode by employing the Bruker reflection accessory (~1°incident angle) equipped with a camera and a visible spotting beam for directly visualizing the area of data collection. Spectral data were acquired by collecting 24 scans at 4000-350 cm-1 with 4 cm-1 resolution. The reflection mode was selected for this type of analysis, as it ensures that the organic or inorganic films and/or patinas on the metal substrate, which lie on the path of the reflected infrared beam, are recorded and analyzed.

8 Infrared spectra were recorded in transmission mode using the standard accessory.

9 In sand mould casting wooden or metal flasks hold a mould made from a mix of sand, clay and water. A model icon is pressed in the mould to form a cavity, divided into a cope(top) and drag(bottom). Sprues, runners and vents are carved into the mould and molten metal poured in. The fineness of the sand will determine the amount of detail on the final casting, Untracht, 1975, 325.

10 See the notebook of the Krasnoselsky foundry master A.P. Serov (1899–1974) available at **https://www.olevs.ru/novgorodskoe_litje/static/serov_krasnoe_kostromskoj_oblasti/**

11 Нижегородская губерния по исследованиям губернского земства - II/Село Павлово и его промыслы — Викитека. **https://tinyurl.com/3nd67zrs**

12 Zotova, 2022, available at **https://vk.com/doc52400347_639636333?hash=XuZY9wNl8ix3jgMCVvmGLChKyDktt4Kotjk6aGZUYNX**

13 Catalogue of Russian copper casting - a publicly available, free, online catalogue of items used in Russian copper casting. **http://mednolit.ru/photo**

14 **http://iznedr.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000023/st009.shtml# google_vignette**

15 Engraving involves incising lines in metal using a sharp instrument, Untracht, 1975, 105, 111. Chasing involves using tools and punches that shape/ deform the metal without cutting into it.

16 See table 1. in section II above: Chemical Analysis and Description of Metals and Enamels.

17 Ibid.

Small brass enamelled icon with the Virgin of the Burning Bush

19th century
10 x 8,9 cm
Brass cast, enamel
Condition: Parts of the enamel decoration are lost. Otherwise, good condition
Benaki Museum, inv. no. 52600. Contominas-Tziampiris Collection
Inscriptions cast in Church Slavonic

On the upper centre of the main surface: обзъ неопалимой кѹпины / [ob r(a)z neopalimoi kupi(ny)] (Icon of the most Holy Theotokos of the Burning Bush)
On the upper left corner: м҃р ѳ҃у (Mother of God); про мо҃и / pro(rok) moi(sei) (Prophet Moses)
On the upper right corner: иесе / iere ([Prophet] Jesse); і҃с х҃с (Jesus Christ)
On the lower right corner: і҃с х҃с (Jesus Christ); с҃ про҃ иак҃въ / s(vatyi) pro(rok) iak(o)v (Holy Prophet Jacob)
On the lower left corner: і҃с х҃с (Jesus Christ); с҃ пр҃ ие҃зекии̧ / s(vatyi) pr(orok) iezekiị (Holy Prophet Ezekiel)
Center left: матѳеі / matfei ([Apostle] Matthew)
Center right: иоаннъ б / ioann b(ogoslov) ([Apostle] John the Theologian); лѹка / Luka ([Apostle] Luke)
On Christ's halo: ѿ о н (Corrupted Slavic version of the Greek O ΩN "He who is")

At the centre of the icon, the Virgin Mary is depicted carrying the Christ Child on her left arm, inscribed within a circle formed by intertwined cherubim (bodiless angelic figures), which are hardly discernible due to the unrefined modelling of the cast metal icon. Surrounding the central figures is an eight-rayed star, an eight-pointed slava ("glory") formed by the intersection of two lozenges. The first lozenge is occupied by a Cherub (at the top) and three angels. The triangular rays of the second lozenge bear the winged symbols of the four Evangelists: an angel (Matthew), an eagle (John), a lion (Mark), and an ox (Luke).
The eight-rayed star is inscribed within a multilobed circumference, featuring various angelic figures depicted between the triangular rays.
Four Old Testament episodes with prophecies referring to the Theotokos and her role in the Incarnation of the Word and the salvation of mankind are illustrated in the corners of the icon: her appearance before Moses in the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2) in the upper left corner; the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11) on the upper right; Ezekiel's prophecy about the "outer gate facing east" (Ezekiel 44:12) in the lower left; and the ladder Jacob saw in his dream (Genesis 12:10–19) in the lower right.
Traces of white and dark blue opaque enamel filling the background lend a colourful effect to the metal surface of the icon. The portable metal icon, intended for private devotion, could also serve as an amulet, hung on furniture, or worn around the neck. The creation of such objects is linked to the religious rituals and artistic traditions of the Old Believers. The intricate iconography of the Virgin of the Bush, which has a long history in Russian religious art, is depicted in numerous painted and cast Russian icons of the nineteenth century. The small icon is an exact copy of the icon of the Virgin of the Burning Bush by Rodion Semenovich Khrustalev. The same type of enamel, opaque with fissures and in various colours, appears in many metal icons from the same period. In popular devotion to the Virgin Mary, icons depicting the Virgin of the Bush serve a specific protective purpose against fire, as documented in an 1891 painting by Nikolay Sergeevich Matveyev (1855-1939) titled "Fire," in which an elderly woman is shown outside her hut raising a painted icon of the Virgin Mary of the Bush. (Tarasov, 2014, 105–106, 187–189 and fig. 32)
Unpublished.
For this type of metal icons, Dešler, 2001, 315–322.

Virgin Kazanskaya
1897, Saint Petersburg
34 x 29.5 x 4 cm
Oil on wood, gilded brass, cloisonne enamel, pearls, velvet cloth,
Condition excellent, partial loss of the gilding
Benaki Museum, inv. no. 8441. Gift of Sofia Charitaki.

Inscriptions: м҃р ѳ҃у (Mother of God) and і҃с х҃с (Jesus Christ). On the lower part of the integral frame:҅Образъ Пр҃тыѧ Бц҃ы Казанскїѧ (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan)

The icon is a replica of the miraculous Virgin of Kazan, which was very popular in Russia and throughout the Orthodox world from the 17th century onwards. In its current condition, cleaned of the 19th-century oxidised varnishes, the Virgin with Christ in erect frontal pose at her left shines in vibrant earthy colours against a mint green background, with a darker green shade on the integral frame of the panel (polya). A thin orange-red band runs along the edges of the wood, the frame, and the halos of the two figures. Following a subtle incised preliminary sketch, the figures are modelled uniformly and softly, with a two-tone brown underlayer, ochre skin tones, and white highlights that emphasise protruding face features, blending into the overall modelling, consistent with earlier 16th-century models.

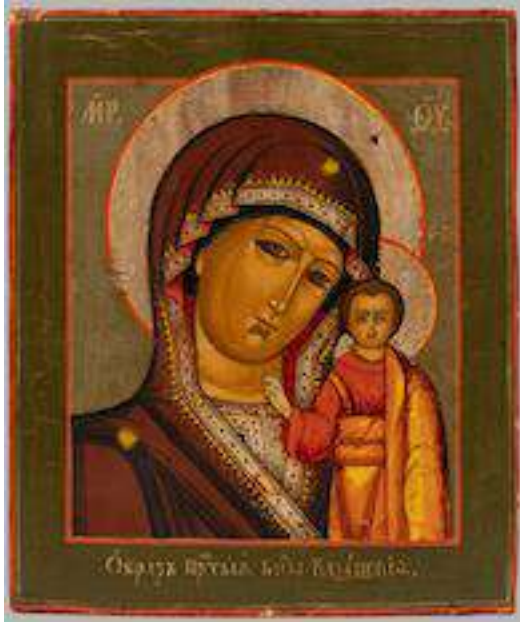
This observation is not surprising, as the study of the work has revealed that the current composition is a repainting of an earlier one, probably from the 16th century, whose theme and style the later repainting most likely follows. Christ's right hand, which is blessing, is in a different, light beige flesh tone, thus standing out from the deeper tone of his mother's neck. In this version of the Virgin Kazanskaya, his left hand is covered by the bright himation, as in icon XX. By contrast, in the Greek anthivolon with the Virgin Kazanskaya no. X, his hand is shown holding a closed scroll, an iconographic version more familiar to the Greek public. The figures' garments cover a range of red tones, from deep red, highlighted with dark brown linear folds on the Virgin Mary's maphorion, to the bright red tunic of Christ, and to his orange himation with dense yellow striations, which effectively imitate the colour impression and linear rendering of chrysography.

The Virgin's hair is covered by an almost black headkerchief with white stitching, which sharply contrasts with the vivid red lining of her maphorion. The edges of the maphorion are gem-studded against a silver background. Silver leaves also adorn the two halos. Two unusual yellow multi-pointed stars—resembling sea urchins—decorate the maphorion on her forehead and right shoulder. Originally, silver leaves covered the background of the icon. To the left of the Virgin's head, an older inscription with the appellation of the Virgin is barely visible beneath the new mint-coloured background. In the re-painted version, the inscription has been moved to the bottom of the frame. Despite its flat and somewhat summary modelling, the painted icon manages to convey the style of its older models. The colour scheme, favouring alternating green and warm red tones, with the use of gold pigment or yellow for the folds of the fabrics was widespread in Russian icon painting as early as the 17th century. Similar colour combinations, especially for the backgrounds of icons, were established in Russian religious icon painting by the highly influential Simon Ushakov (1626-1686) (Komashko 2015; Simon Ushakov 2015, 68-70, 82-85, 94-104), although the much later, conservative style of this icon bears no relation to the masterful soft modelling characteristic of Ushakov's icons.

Unpublished

Exhibitions

Athens 2017. Drama 2024.



Virgin Kazanskaya

19th century, painted over an earlier (16th century?) icon of the same subject

30.4 x 25.2 x 2.1 cm

Egg tempera on wood, silver leaf

Condition very good.

Benaki Museum, inv. no. 25831. Gift of Kyriazis and Angeliki Angelopoulos (1978)

Inscriptions: м҃р ѳ҃у (Mother of God) and і҃с х҃с (Jesus Christ). On the lower part of the integral frame:ʹОбразъ Пр҃тыѧ Бц҃ы Казанскїѧ (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan)

The icon is a replica of the miraculous Our Lady of Kazan, which has been very popular in Russia and throughout the Orthodox world from the 17th century onwards. In its current condition, cleaned of the most recent oxidised varnishes, the Virgin with the Christ in erect frontal pose at her left, shines in vibrant earthy colours against a mint green background, with a darker green shade on the integral frame of the panel (Rus. *polya*). A thin orange-red strip (Rus. *opush*) runs along the edges of the central painted surface (Rus. *kovcheg*), the frame, and the halos of the two figures. Following a subtle, incised preliminary sketch, the figures are modelled uniformly and softly, with a two-tone brown underlayer, ochre skin tones, and white highlights that emphasise protruding face features, blending into the overall modelling, consistent with earlier 16th- and 17th-century models.

This observation is not surprising, as the study of the work has revealed that the current composition is a total repainting of an earlier painting, probably from the 16th century, whose theme and style the later renovation most likely follows. Christ's right hand, raised in blessing, is in a different, light beige flesh tone, thus standing out against the deeper tone of his mother's neck. According to the typical representation of the Virgin Kazanskaya, Christ's left hand is covered by his bright himation (see nos). Conversely, in the Greek anthivolon with the Virgin Kazanskaya (no.), his left hand is shown holding a closed scroll, an iconographic variant that was perhaps preferred by the workshop for being more familiar to the Greek audience. This slight variation of the original

Russian models highlights a creative process of appropriation through the adaptation of iconographic types originating outside the Greek world, allowing the new icons to be seamlessly integrated into the devotional space of the new reception environment.

The figures' garments cover a range of red tones, from deep red, highlighted with dark brown linear folds on the Virgin's maphorion, to the bright red tunic of Christ, and to his orange himation with dense yellow striations, which effectively imitate the colour impression and linear rendering of chrysography. The Virgin's hair is covered by an almost black headkerchief with white stitching, which sharply contrasts with the vivid red lining of her maphorion. The edges of the maphorion are gem-studded against a silver background. Silver leaves also adorn the two halos. Two unusual yellow multi-pointed stars—resembling sea urchins—decorate the maphorion on her forehead and right shoulder. Originally, silver leaves covered the background of the icon. To the left of the Virgin's head, an older inscription with the appellation of the Virgin is barely visible beneath the new mint-coloured background. In the re-painted version, the inscription has been moved to the bottom of the frame. Despite its flat and somewhat summary modelling, the painted icon manages to convey the style of its older models. The colour scheme, favouring alternating green and warm red tones, with the use of gold pigment or yellow for the folds of the fabrics was widespread in Russian icon painting as early as the 17th century. Similar colour combinations, especially for the backgrounds of icons, were established in Russian religious icon painting by the highly influential Simon Ushakov (1626-1686) (Komashko 2015; Simon Ushakov 2015, 68-70, 82-85, 94-104), although the much later, conservative style of this icon bears no relation to the masterful soft modelling characteristic of Ushakov's icons.

Unpublished

Exhibitions

Athens 2017.

Virgin Kazanskaya
19th century
26.4 x 23.3 cm
Egg tempera on wood
Condition fair. Paint surface has damages. The panel has been affected by woodworms. The colours have partially flaked. There are losses of the painting on the lower part of the panel.
Rena Andreadis Collection, on permanent loan to the Benaki Museum

Inscriptions in Church Slavonic: м҃р ѳ҃у (Mother of God) and о н (a corrupted Slavic version of the Greek Ο ΩΝ “He who is”

An incised preliminary design was used to create the image. Dark brown outlines and warm brown underpainting shape the faces. The concise rendering of the flesh is most clearly visible in the better-preserved face of the Virgin. Over the underpainting, a few tonal gradations of lighter ochre have been added, against which intense white highlights stand out under the eyes, on the upper lip, above the eyebrows, and along the face's outline. The Virgin's maphorion is reddish-brown, with its edges accentuated by a broad gold band. The same reddish-brown colour has been used on the tunic of the standing Christ, who is blessing with his right hand raised, while his left hand is hidden beneath his himation. The himation is a vivid red with roughly painted linear folds in lighter beige pigment that mimic

gold striations. A decorative touch is visible in the halo around the Virgin's head, adorned with rays, white dot motifs, and multicoloured painted jewels, reminiscent of the pearl-encrusted silver-gilt revetments of luxurious icons. Despite the features being rendered with large, wide-open eyes and tight mouths, the expressions on the faces remain somewhat cold and distant from the viewer.

Generally, the icon's rendering is highly simplified with a very limited colour palette, suggesting that the icon, whose celebrated model was the miraculous icon of the Virgin Kazanskaya or one of its equally renowned replicas, is a mass-produced item. The theme of Our Lady of Kazan became especially popular in the workshops of the Old Believers. Besides the numerous surviving icons of the same subject, a large number of paper drawings (icon templates or *prorisi* in Russian) and pricked cartoons (Rus. *perevody*) from Russian and Greek workshops of the 17th to 19th century document the spread of this iconographic type (Manukian 2020. See also cat. no. XXX).

The icon, one of many similar examples that circulated widely throughout the Balkan region, provides a clear example of mass-produced Russian icons replicating miraculous Russian Marian icons, which appealed to the piety and devotional preferences of a broader Christian audience. Similarly, this icon, lacking particular artistic pretensions, attracted the attention of the well-known icon collector Rena Andreadi, who especially favoured icons of the Virgin Mary (Drandaki 2002).

Unpublished

Exhibitions

Athens 2017; Athens 2022.

Virgin Kazanskaya
End of 19th century
26 x 22 x 2.1 cm
Oil on wood, silver leaf, partially gilt
Condition excellent

Benaki Museum, inv. no. 31541. Gift of Christos and Moschoula Armaos (1992). The icon belonged to the family of Moschoula Armaos, the Theologos Plytas family from Odessa, originating from Tinos island.
Inscriptions: КАЗАНСКИЯ П.Б. (Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan)

The icon of Our Lady of Kazan is covered with a silver revetment, except for the two faces and Christ's right hand which is raised in blessing. It is set within a gilded wooden frame and is placed in a simple, box-shaped wooden case. The depiction is executed in a characteristic sweet academic style that has completely departed from Byzantine technique and style. This trend, inspired by European naturalistic painting, dominated official Russian religious art since the late 17th century and became prevalent in the religious art of the Neohellenic state in the 19th century. It remained prominent in Greek Orthodox church painting until the 1930s, when the influential presence of Fotis Kontoglou and his students led to a revival of the Byzantine style.

On the silver revetment, the garments are decorated with large floral scrolls produced by mechanical methods. The frame features a classic decoration of a band with continuous pelts surrounding palmettes. The halos of the figures are embellished with two additional silver-gilt leaves attached to the revetment. These leaves have a lacy finish, featuring perforated heart-shaped motifs, and punched patterns of zigzags and garlands. On the plain gold-plated ground of the Virgin's halo, two stamps are visible on the left. The first bears the manufacturer's initials (ИА), while a second stamp, an oval cartouche, bears the *kokoshnik*

mark, indicating the alloy's purity at 84 zolotniki (.875). This type of stamp, showing a numerical mark on the left, a female bust in the centre, and the assayer's initials on the right, was used in Russian silversmithing until 1908, thus providing a terminus ante quem for the icon's manufacture.

Unpublished

Pricked cartoon (anthivolon) with the Virgin Kazanskaya

17th-18th century
31 x 21.2 cm
Paper, brown ink
Condition: Good condition. There are some stains scattered on the paper surface
Benaki Museum, inv. no. 33312 (Ξ141). Gift of Andreas Xyngopoulos in 1979. Bought by Andreas Xyngopoulos from the art dealer Demosthenis Staikos
Inscriptions in Greek: On the reverse: ΕΓΟ Η(ΜΙ) [I Am]

Pricked cartoon (Gr. *Anthivolon*; Rus. *perevod*) with a drawing of the Virgin and Child in the iconographic type known as Virgin Kazanskaya, after the miracle-working icon discovered miraculously in 1579 in Kazan. The two figures are depicted in brown ink, reversed (left to right). Christ is shown at waist length, standing and blessing with his left hand, while holding a rolled scroll with his right hand. When applied to the painting surface, the iconography would have been reversed to its proper orientation, with the Virgin holding Christ with her left hand. The paper is perforated, indicating that the drawing has been lightly used for the production of painted icons of the Virgin Kazanskaya. On the back of the sheet, faint drawings in very light yellowish-brown ink can be seen. These include a blessing hand, a male figure wearing himation, geometric drawing, and a Greek inscription. The paper carries a watermark with the initials E and L (Vassilaki 2015, 272).

The pricked cartoon depicts the most revered Russian image of the Virgin and Child, the miracle-working Virgin of Kazan, which, since 1649, following a decree by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov, has been officially recognised and honoured as the palladium of Moscow and all of Russia. The adventurous biography of the Virgin Kazanskaya is intertwined with the most significant moments in Russian history from the 16th to the 19th century, and numerous replicas of the original were commissioned from Russian workshops. However, in the case of the Benaki drawing, the Greek inscription indicates that it was created by a Greek workshop or one catering to a Greek clientele.

The creation of a working drawing reproducing a renowned Russian iconographic type for use by a Greek icon workshop demonstrates the penetration and acceptance of the miraculous Russian icon by the Greek Orthodox public, fueling the demand for icons featuring this iconography (Boycheva 2015). Numerous icons depicting the Virgin Kazanskaya arrived in Greece through various routes, as the iconographic theme has its roots in well-known and recognisable Byzantine iconographic types familiar to Greek believers. Moreover, the different types of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus have always been among the most cherished icons for both public and private worship. The intercessory powers of the Virgin Mary, reinforced and validated by the miraculous action of renowned works such as the Virgin of Kazan, also constituted a common language of

communication and worship practices among diverse Christian communities, facilitating the transfer and adoption of iconographic types across different cultural spaces. Since it is unlikely that the Greek public who commissioned icons of this type were familiar with the stories and exploits of Our Lady of Kazan in Russia, one can safely assume that in their new host environment, the copies of the miraculous icon lose any connection to the biography and ideological connotations of the original. They gain a renewed identity, imbued with an iconographic type with deep roots and multiple interpretations for the Orthodox worshipping community.

Exhibition

Athens, Benaki Museum 2017.

Publications

Vassilaki 2015, 272, cat. no. 245.

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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)