



Ivanka Gergova (ed.)



**ETUDES
ON RUSSIAN
ORTHODOX ART
IN BULGARIA**

PUBLISHED BY



FORTH

INSTITUTE FOR MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

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Ivanka Gergova (ed.) 

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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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Table of contents

Ivanka Gergova.	6
Preface	
Lora Gerd.	10
Supporting Orthodoxy in the Bulgarian Lands: the Church Aid from Russia in the 19th century	
Ivanka Gergova.	32
The krasnushki Icons	
Ivanka Gergova.	74
Visual Representations of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Bulgaria	
Angel Nikolov.	104
Politics, piety and icons during the Russo-Turkish wars in the Bulgarian lands (18th – 19th centuries)	
Natalia Komashko.	176
Russian Icons of the 16th -18th centuries in Bulgaria	
Natalia Komashko.	198
Icons of Old Believer Settlements in Bulgaria	
Simeon Tonchev.	232
Applying Russian Style & Iconography: Bulgarians who Studied at Russian Art Schools in the 19th and early 20th centuries	
I. Gergova, N. Komashko, D. Resh.	267
Catalogue of Russian Icons in Bulgarian Collections	
Bibliography	518
List of contributors	540

The texts that follow in this book are the result of the work of the Bulgarian team of the international RICONTRANS¹ project in the period 2020-2025. The team included Professor Ivanka Gergova from the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Associate Professor Angel Nikolov from the Faculty of History at Sofia University Saint Kliment Ohridski, Romyana D echeva, restorer from the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Professor Ivan Dujčev” at Sofia University, and Simeon Tonchev, at the time a PhD candidate at the Institute of Art Studies. Later, the Bulgarian team was joined by our colleague, art historian Natalia Komashko, a long-time research fellow at the Andrey Rublev Museum of Ancient Russian Culture and Art in Moscow.

The original idea of the team was to carry out extensive field research on Bulgarian territory in order to collect material on the basis of which to conduct research on specific topics and provide a panoramic overview. Such an overview would be so necessary today, seventy years after the appearance of the only Bulgarian book that aimed to trace the links between Bulgarian and Russian art, but which, for reasons both objective and subjective in nature, offered only a limited and not always acceptable perspective on this issue.² However, ideas and intentions are one thing, opportunities for their implementation are another. After sending letters to all Bulgarian Metropolitans requesting permission to conduct research in their dioceses, we received approval only from Metropolitan Kiprian of Stara Zagora and the late Metropolitan Yoanikiy of Sliven, both of whom greatly facilitated our work in the churches of their respective dioceses. Permission was not granted in the remaining dioceses; consequently, the rich material preserved in Bulgarian churches and monasteries remained inaccessible and the prospect of achieving a comprehensive overview of the material was significantly diminished.

1 RICONTRANS – Visual Culture, Piety and Propaganda: Transfer and Reception of Russian Religious Art in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (16th – early 20th c.)

2 Mavrodinov 1955.

It is difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy the volume of Russian Orthodox art in Bulgaria today, as in the past it was not the object of special interest and documentation. The efforts of the Bulgarian team were concentrated on the Bulgarian museums and art galleries, where we found rich collections of Russian icons and antiquities. An extensive study was conducted on the collections of Russian artefacts housed in twenty-three Bulgarian museum institutions. These collections are of significant interest as they are often not accessible to the public, being stored in depots, and seldom exhibited in either permanent or temporary exhibitions. Furthermore, they are rarely published.³

Meanwhile, Ivanka Gergova was invited to join the team preparing the catalogue of icons of the National Museum of Church History and Archaeology at the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in order to present the Russian icons in the museum,⁴ which further enriched the collection of art works we studied. Alongside the fieldwork specifically carried out under the project, we explored the archives of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, regional archives in the country, and the personal archives of the participants in the project, where photographs and information on Russian artefacts were found.

As a cutoff point we set the year 1917, which marks the end of a historical era. Naturally, Russian icons continued to appear in Bulgaria after that, and the presence of Russian emigrants, several of whom were icon painters and worked in collaboration with the Bulgarian Synod, was very important. But this is a separate topic concerning the art of the modern times.

Following the publication of Nikola Mavrodinov’s book,⁵ the presence of Russian Orthodox artworks in Bulgaria has attracted minimal scholarly attention. Nevertheless, a plethora of publications has emerged on specific topics, including the publication of particular artefacts and subjects, such as the artistic contacts and the influence of Russian themes and iconographic types on Bulgarian art.⁶

The RICONTRANS project, led by Dr. Yuliana Boycheva (Institute for Mediterranean Studies – FORTH), brought together research teams from Greece, Romania and Serbia as well as individual

3 Gergova, Gatev, Vanev 2012; Vutova, Bankova (eds) 2023, 55–61.

4 Икони 2024.

5 Mavrodinov 1955.

6 The reader will find most of these publications in the bibliography at the end of the book; here we will point out only a few that are not there, without any claim to be exhaustive: Koeva 2006; Aleksandrov 1981; Asparuhova, Dicheva 2005; Grigorova 2020; Dobrev 2002; Kirilova 2014; Churakov 1960; Bosilkov 1989; Genova 2001, Genova 2002; Genova 2011; Gergova 2013; Gerov 1989; Gerov 1995; Ivanova 2013; Kuyumdzhieva 2010; Kuyumdzhieva 2020; Kuyumdzhiev 2015: 467–488; Lozanova 1998; Popova 2001; Ruseva 2020.

scholars from other countries. For the first time, the research findings published by the foreign participants,⁷ together with the conferences and exhibitions organised, as well as the database available on the project's website, provide a detailed and comprehensive picture of the presence and distribution of Russian Orthodox artworks in the Balkans, the channels through which they circulated, and their historical trajectories. This broader perspective has, for the first time, made it possible to situate the Bulgarian material within a wider Balkan context.

In the course of the project, members of the Bulgarian team published studies addressing both the objectives and methodological framework for the study of Russian art in Bulgaria,⁸ as well as research on specific case studies.⁹

We are indebted to Lora Gerd, who conducted extensive research in the Russian archives and generously consented to publish the result in our volume. We would also like to thank the numerous museum and gallery directors and museum curators who facilitated our work, and the priests, monks, and mayors who granted us access to churches and shared information and materials with us. We are indebted to Russian colleagues for their invaluable bibliographical assistance and their guidance on various issues.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Yuliana Boycheva for conceiving the RICON-TRANS project, for her excellent guidance, and for providing us with the opportunity to establish extensive contacts with colleagues, exchange ideas, and expand our own scholarly horizons.

7 Borisova, 2020; Chesnokova 2020; Gerd 2020; Serađdari 2020; Dumitran, Dane, Rus, Wollmann 2021; Kostopoulos 2021; Boycheva 2022a; Boycheva 2022b; Źenarju-Rajović 2022; Dumitran and Filip (eds.) 2023; Dumitran and Kruk (eds) 2023.

8 Gergova 2020.

9 Nikolov 2025, Gergova 2024; Komashko, Gergova 2025.

Supporting Orthodoxy in the Bulgarian Lands: the Church Aid from Russia in the Nineteenth Century

Summary

Sending money, books and church items (icons, vessels, garments) for the churches and monasteries of the Balkans was an important channel of ‘soft power’ in Russian policy during the long nineteenth century. In the Slavonic lands, especially in Bulgaria, the support of Orthodoxy became a tool in the competition against Catholic and Protestant propaganda, and is part of Panslavism as mainstream of the Russian Balkan policy. Based on sources from Russian archives, this article aims at defining the ways and methods of Russian support for the churches of the Bulgarian lands, and the motives behind providing this assistance. The article argues that piety and philanthropic reasons were prevalent in collecting contributions among Russian donors, while the distribution of aid was motivated by different reasons, mainly political.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy, church policy, Panslavism, Bulgarian church, Bulgarian Resurrection

The role of Russia in the Bulgarian national awakening and Russian-Bulgarian cultural relations of the nineteenth century have become the subject of a vast bibliography.¹ A number of works have explored Russian support for Bulgarian schools, the donation of Russian books, or the sponsorship of Bulgarian students to attend Russian universities and theological schools.² Special attention has been

1 *Русия и освобождението на България*. Sofia, 1981, 55–138; Z. Markova. *Българската екзархия 1870–1879*. Sofia, 1989; K. S. Liliashvili. *Национално-освободителна борба българского народа против фанариотского ига и Россия*. Tbilisi, 1979; Kiril, Patriarch Bylgarski. *Граф Н. П. Игнатиев и българският църковен въпрос. Изследване и документи*. Sofia, 1958; Vera Boneva. *Българското църковнонационално движение 1856–1870*. Sofia, Veliko Tŭrnovo: Za bukвите, 2010.

2 A. Anchev. “Участието на българи - руски възпитаници, в културно-националното ни възраждане през втората четвърт на XIX в.” *Istoricheski pregled* (1978) 1; Rumiana Radkova. *Българската интелигенция през Възраждането XVIII-първата половина на XX в.* Sofia, 1986; Eadem. *Неофит Рилски и новобългарската култура*. Sofia, 1980. Especially helpful are the editions of documents from Russian and Bulgarian archives:

paid to the Slavophile movement and the activities of the Slavonic committees for creating an educated Bulgarian nation, not dependent either on Greek or Western influences, and grateful to its benefactor, Russia.³ Two main trends are dominating in the literature. The first trend, shared by both Russian and Bulgarian traditional historiographies, highlights the deep cultural and religious links between the two peoples and the patronal role of the “big brother” towards the South Slavs. The works produced in the period 1950s–1990s follow on the whole the same trend, sometimes adapting it to Marxist theory of revolutionary movement, identifying it with the struggle for national and church independence. The second trend, most prominent in the works by Western authors, interprets Russian policy in the Balkans within the framework of its geopolitical aspirations and the Eastern question. Russian Panslavism, aimed at creating a “clientele” in the Balkans, has been viewed as an expression of soft power and cultural diplomacy. A number of studies have focused on Panslavism as a political ideology and its various manifestations throughout the twentieth and even in the twenty-first century⁴.

The present article explores the modes and methods of Russian support for the churches and monasteries of the Bulgarian lands in the long nineteenth century. It addresses three main questions: the type of aid (money, books, church objects); its provenance (state or private donations); its delivery and ways of distribution (the motives and preferences behind giving the donations, together with the geography of distribution). The rich and still mainly untapped documentary base allows us to trace the tendencies of Russian support for Orthodoxy, oscillating between humanitarian motives and political goals, and

Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение 1856/1876. Документи и материали. Vols. 1–2. Sofia: BAN, 1987, 1990; I. Todev (ed.). *Граф Н. П. Игнатиев, Дипломатически записки (1864–1874). Донесения (1865–1876)*. Sofia: Dyrzhavna agencia archivi, 2009. For more bibliography about the Bulgarians who studied in Russian art schools see the article by Symeon Tonchev in the present volume.

3 N. I. Tsimbaev. *Славянофильство. Из истории русской общественно-политической мысли XIX века*. Moscow, 2013; S. Rabow-Edling. *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2006; S.A. Nikitin. *Славянские комитеты в России в 1858–1876 годах*. Moscow: Nauka, 1960; A. Andreev. *Руските славянски комитети и българското възрожденско общество (1857–1878)*. Veliko Tŭrnovo: Abagar, 2014; A. Y. Gülseven. “Rethinking Russian Pan-Slavism in the Ottoman Balkans: N. P. Ignatiev and the Slavic Benevolent Committee (1856–77).” *Middle Eastern Studies* 53 (2017) 3: 332–348.

4 A. N. Pypin. *Панславизм в прошлом и настоящем*. Saint Petersburg, 1913; H. Kohn. *Panslavism. Its History and Ideology*. Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1953; M. B. Petrovich. *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism, 1856–1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1956; B. H. Sumner. *Russia and the Balkans, 1870–1880*. Hamden-London: Archon books, 1962, 56–79; Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric. *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans, 1830–1880: Images of the Self and Others*. New York: Boulder, 1994; Eadem. “The Balkan Crisis of 1875–1878 and Russia: Between Humanitarianism and Pragmatism.” In *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*, edited by Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015: 169–96; D. Vovchenko. *Containing Balkan Nationalism: Imperial Russian and Ottoman Christians, 1856–1914*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016; O. B. Pavlenko, *Панславизм: реальный и воображаемый: 1830–1860–е гг.* Moscow: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2023.

finally to draw a conclusion about the place and significance of material aid in Russian presence and Russian policy in the Balkans of the nineteenth century.

The Zograph Monastery and Russia

Mount Athos since the Middle Ages has always been a special place for Eastern Christianity. Every Orthodox nation had its monastery there, supported by donors and rulers; it was a model of the Orthodox world. Since the sixteenth century many of the Holy Mount monasteries were supported by the Russian tsars. The contacts of the Bulgarian Zograph monastery on Mount Athos with Russia were traditionally close: since the seventeenth century it received annual donations from Russia, which were continued after 1735 according to the Palestinian State.⁵ In 1802 the monastery addressed a request to the Holy Synod about delegating a monk to Moscow in order to collect Zograph's annual donation of many years past, starting with 1783. From the letter of Abbot Euthymii we know that in 1783 Archimandrite Ignatii visited Russia and brought the donations from 1765 to 1783, together with liturgical books and gifts⁶. The Synod asked the Patriarch of Constantinople for a confirmation that the monastery really existed and its papers were authentic. In 1805 the attestation of Patriarch Callinicus was sent to Petersburg, and the Zograph monks were satisfied with 35 rubles per year. The money was sent by a bill of exchange via the Russian ambassador in Constantinople⁷.

In 1819 the Zograph monks Anatolii and Vikentii were delegated to Russia as taxidiotes (alms collectors) also tasked with securing a confirmation of the rights of the Cyprian monastery (a Zograph dependency situated in Bessarabia, annexed by Russia in 1812.)⁸ In 1821 Anatolii arrived in Saint Petersburg, and

5 On the earlier history of Zograph Monastery see: Cyril Pavlikianov. *История на българския светогорски манастир Зограф от 980 до 1804 г.* Sofia: Saint Kliment Ohridski University Publishing House, 2005. The Palestinian State was a list of the Orthodox church institutions of the Ottoman Empire, receiving annual donations from the Russian government; it included the main Patriarchates and many monasteries. Most monasteries were given the sum of 35 rubles per year. The text of the "Palestinian states" exists in several archive copies. See: N. Chesnokova. "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам в контексте конфессионально - политических связей России и православного Востока в XVIII век." *Kaptereviskie Chteniia* 17 (2019): 201–202. See the bibliography on the contacts between Zographou and Russia in N. Mertzimekis, «Περὶ τῶν σχέσεων τῆς αἰθωνικῆς Μονῆς Ζωγράφου μετὰ τῆς Ρωσίας τῶν τσάρων (16ος–19ος αἰ.).» In "България, Земя на блажени...". *In memoriam professoris Iordani Andreevi*. Sofia: Ivis, 2010: 541–560.

6 Russian State Historical Archive (furtherafter RGIA), f. 797, op. 86, d. 675, f. 2–3.

7 Decision by the Holy Synod, October 4, 1805. *Ibid.*, f. 9–10.

8 S. Drakul. *Архимандрит Анатолиј Зографски*. Skorje, 1988; Ivan Radev. *Хаджи Викентий Зографски*. Veliko Turgovo: Pik, 1996. For more details on the participation of Anatolii in the edition of the "Bulgarian Acts" by Vasil Aprilov see Georgi Mitov, "Fontes Historiae Bulgarici", Приносът на Васил Априлов за проучването и издаването на исторически документи от Зографския манастир." In *Специалните исторически дисциплини в университетското архивно образование, архивната практика и изследванията по история, Conference Proceedings, April 18–19, 2018*. Sofia, 2019: 267–283.

enjoyed the protection of Ioannis Kapodistria, Dmitri Dashkov (the former *chargé d'affaires* of the Constantinople mission), Alexander Stourdza and Countess Anna Orlova-Chesmenskaia. Over the course of his many years in Russia, Anatolii managed to gather a large sum of money (400.000 rubles) which was deposited in a bank in Saint Petersburg. In addition, 50.000 rubles were deposited in a bank in Odessa, and the interest incurred financed the construction of a hospital, as well as book acquisitions at Zograph monastery.⁹ In 1837 a decree confirming the rights of Cyprian monastery was finally issued. Thanks to the requests of Anatolii and Vikentii, the first three bursaries for Bulgarians were awarded at the Kishinev seminary. Anatolii was awarded the orders of Saint Vladimir, third degree, and Saint Anna, second degree. In November 1837 he obtained Russian citizenship and was appointed priest to the Russian mission in Athens from 1838 to 1843. In 1847 returned to Zograph and died there the following year. Towards the end of his life he co-edited with Vikentii a Slavonic Grammar (1845-46). Anatolii was a believer in Russia's policy of Orthodox union and remained devoted to Russia until the end of his life. Several art objects connected with Anatolii's mission have been preserved at the Zograph monastery: three silver covers of the miracle-making icons of Saint George, produced in Russia in 1822, 1837 and 1838. His name also features on an engraving with the picture of Zograph monastery¹⁰.

During his stay in Athens Anatolii acquired a plot of land with a garden in the suburb of Illisia. After the Crimean war, in 1859, this land was bestowed as a gift to the Russian Emperor by the Zograph abbot Anthym.¹¹ The priest of the Russian church in Athens, Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, recommended Anthym to the Russian Synod, and on May 2, 1859 he was awarded a golden encolpion cross.¹² For some years Antonin put efforts into improving the garden and building a small church there. He dreamed of creating a Russian dependency and installing Russian monks there, but later the idea was abandoned.

Supplying Bulgarian churches with Russian liturgical and school books constituted a standard measure of support for both Orthodoxy and national consciousness. From the eighteenth century onwards, the Zograph monastery has been receiving printed books on multiple occasions. In 1851, for instance, the Synod sent books for the new school of Zographou.¹³ The following year, monk Natanail Stoianovich was delegated to Odessa to recover books and probably money for the Bulgarian schools from the

9 Porfiry Uspensky. *Первое путешествие в Афонские монастыри и скиты*. Vol. II. Moscow, 1881, 82–84.

10 N. Mertzimekis. «Περὶ τῶν σχέσεων τῆς αἰθωνικῆς Μονῆς Ζωγράφου μετὰ τῆς Ρωσίας τῶν τσάρων...», 544–545.

11 "A letter is received from the Zograph Father Anthym with the documents for ownership of the garden of blessed memory Archimandrite Anatolii," wrote Antonin in his Journals on February 11, 1859. L. A. Gerd, K. A. Vach (eds). *Архимандрит Антонин (Капустин). Дневник. Годы 1856–1860*. Moscow: Indrik, 2017, 354.

12 Archimandrite Antonin to the Holy Synod, December 30, 1858. RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 370, f. 3–4

13 RGIA, f., 797, op. 15 (II otd. 2 Saint), d. 46761.

Bulgarian merchant Stefan Toshkovich.¹⁴ The monastery was running schools in different Bulgarian provinces, mainly in Macedonia.

Another kind of cooperation between Zograph monastery and Russia developed in the 1850s.¹⁵ Zograph owned a skete on Mount Athos, called *Tserni Vir* (Black Lake). In 1747 it had received a donation of 1000 rubles from Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter I, for the construction of a church. Ruined during the Greek War of Independence in 1821, in the mid-nineteenth century it was inhabited by monks of Russian and Ukrainian origin. In 1845 Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich visited the skete, which encouraged the monks to ask for support from the Russian government. The idea was approved by the monastery and a petition signed by Abbot Ignatii was received at the Russian embassy (dated June 17, 1850), containing the terms of the future contract (omologia) between the skete and the monastery. Zograph could transfer the skete to the Russians and allow its rebuilding.¹⁶ However, Ambassador Vladimir Titov did not see any benefit in Russia's acquiring the skete and expressed the opinion that Zograph had enough income from its dependencies to restore it without any help from Russia.¹⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century the Russians made several attempts to acquire the skete, but the Zograph monks refused, fearing the increasing number of the Russians and their influence.

In cases of conflicts between Zographians and Russian monks on Athos, the Russian government could take a rather negative stand towards the monastery. At the end of the 1860s Russia's consul in Thessaloniki Alexander Lagovskii reported on the conflict between Zograph and the Serbian Chilandar monastery for the dependency Iovanitsa. The Zographians aimed at buying the ownership rights in Constantinople, and the poorer Chilandarians could not resist the offer. "The ungrateful Zographians," reported Lagovskii, expelled one Russian monk from the monastery and threatened to expel twenty others. The only way to stop them and to preserve Russian influence on Athos was, according to the diplomat, suspending Zograph's incomes from Russia.¹⁸ This resulted in a temporary block on incomes and a ban on collecting aids in Russia.

14 Decision by the Holy Synod, December 8/17, 1852. RGIA, f. 797, op. 22 (II otd. 2 Saint), d. 393.

15 Cyril Pavlikiyanov. "История Афонского Зографского скита „Мавровир“ (Черный вир) – неизвестные болгарские свидетельства из архива Зографского Святогорского монастыря." *Études Balkaniques* LV (2019) 2: 351–389; S. V. Shumilo. "Афонский скит «Черный Выр» и попытки воссоздания нового Русика в XVIII в. на Святой Горе." In *Afon i Slavianskii mir. Proceedings of the conference on the occasion of the 1000 years of Russian presence on Mount Athos*. Vol. 3. Kiev, 2016: 214–246.

16 RGIA, f. 797, op. 21, d. 46793, f. 4–5v.

17 L.G. Seniavin to N. A. Protasov, January 9, 1852. RGIA, f. 797, op. 21, d. 46793, f. 16–16v.

18 Copy from the report by A. Lagovskii, June 23, 1869. RGIA, f. 797, op. 35 (II otd.), d. 215, f. 43–44.

During the struggle for Bulgarian church and national independence Zograph steered clear of turbulent events, remained loyal to the Patriarch, and supported Russia's policy of the indivisibility of Orthodoxy. The main reason was economic: the monastery possessed a dependency (50.000 hectares of agricultural land) in Bessarabia, a house in Kishinev,¹⁹ and 400.000 rubles in a bank in Saint Petersburg.²⁰ In 1873, after the proclamation of the Bulgarian schism, Emperor Alexander II signed an act about the sequester of the properties of "the Eastern monasteries" in Russia. Since then the owners would receive 2/5 from the incomes, while the rest would have been used for the needs of administration and deposited in different places. The Athos monasteries petitioned the Emperor against this measure, but their petition was declined. Hoping to constitute an exception, the Zograph monks addressed Alexander II in a separate petition concerning the administration of their dependencies in Bessarabia, but the Synod was adamant.²¹ Nevertheless, Zograph preserved its estates in Bessarabia and continued to receive sizable incomes.

Support for Rila monastery

In 1848 Rila Monastery in Bulgaria addressed the Holy Synod with a request for collecting alms. This monastery also had a long-standing tradition of contacts with Russia and support from the Russian Tsars.²² In 1833 it was destroyed by fire and restored by abbot Josef. Josef served as the head of the monastery for many years (1822-1860) and founded a school; the Rila abbey became the main center of education in Bulgaria and kept close links with Russia and the Bulgarian diaspora there.²³ In the Spring

19 According to the report by the secretary of Kishinev consistory dated July 2, 1863, a one-story stone house with a yard was bought by Zograph monastery for 2700 silver rubles from Nedelkovich in 1847. It served as a residence for the monks who came for administration of the properties. RGIA, f. 797, op. 32, II otd., d. 241, f. 20–22v.

20 P. Mitev. "Зографският манастир и Българското възраждане." In *Светогорска обител Зограф*. Sofia: Saint Kliment Ohridski University Publishing House, 1995, Vol. 1: 41–46.

21 P. Vestman to D. Tolstoi, November 26, 1873. RGIA, f. 797, op. 43 (II otd. 3 Saint), d. 92.

22 The contacts of the 16th and 17th centuries resulted in material donations and supplying the Rila library with Russian printed books. See I. Duichev. *Рилският светец и неговата обител*. Sofia, 1947; P. Atanasov. "Руските старопечатни книги в Рилския манастир." *Starobylgarska Literatura* 12 (1982): 82–99; N. Dilevski. "Просително послание на Рилското манастирско братство до руския цар Михаил Федорович Романов от 1627 година." *Izvestiia na Instituta za bylgarski ezik XIX* (1970): 690–692; I. Snegarov. *Културни и политически връзки между България и Русия през XVI–XVII в.* Sofia 1953; A. Nikolov, T. Georgieva, J. Bencheva (eds). *Русия, Атон и Рилският манастир (XI - началото на XX в.)*. Sofia, 2016.

23 В. Попов. *Трима многозаслужили игумени на Рилския манастир от гр. Батак*. Sofia, 2001; P. Oreshkov. "Неизвестна преписка на манастирите Соколски и Рилски с Н. Хр. Палаузов 1845–1854." In *Sbornik na Bylgarskata Academia na Naukite*. Kn. XXXVI (19) Sofia, 1940–1942; R. Kamburova-Radkova. *Рилският манастир през Възраждането*. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1972. Of special importance is the recent book on the paintings in the Rila catholicon church: Alexander Kuyumdziev. *Стенописите в главната църква на Рилския манастир*. Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2015.

of 1845 a new building was constructed in the southern part of the monastery, which included cells for the monks, a hospital, a big library and a sacristy. The new catholicon church (built in 1834-37) needed decoration with frescoes – a process that was completed in 1860²⁴. In the 1840s a school was run by the famous teacher and writer Neofit Rilski.²⁵ Obviously these diverse activities put the monastery to great expense and the revenues from the numerous dependencies in Bulgaria, trade operations and donations from the pilgrims were obviously not sufficient.

In March 1848 Archimandrite Stefan Kovachevich was granted permission to travel to Russia for one year, accompanied by one monk.²⁶ In his recommendation letter Ambassador Vladimir Titov strongly defended the need for the trip:

[...] it would be very useful to satisfy the request of the monastery mentioned, which is considered the first in Bulgaria and has a big influence on the thoughts of the locals. The travel of Kovachevich gives a reason to receive from him detailed information about the state of the churches in Bulgaria and to confirm through him our good suggestions to the Bulgarian clergy.²⁷

During his stay in Russia Kovachevich received a pension from the Russian government. He also managed to extend the permission for collecting alms twice, which he successfully completed in May 1856. In 1851 the Russian consul in Adrianople Nikolai Mukhin visited Rila Monastery and wrote a detailed report highlighting the important role the monastery played in bolstering the education and national consciousness of the Bulgarians. He approved alms collecting in Russia as an essential measure for helping the monastery.²⁸ In addition, the Synod granted Stefan Kovachevich's request and sent Russian church books and textbooks for the school, as well as church chalices and utensils.²⁹ Kovachevich asked about the opening of a Bulgarian dependency in Kiev intended to supply the monastery with a constant

income in the future and allow it to start its own typography and seminary. Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev did not see any objections and even found a suitable church in the city, but the final decision of the Synod was negative, as the prospects of financing the dependency were uncertain.³⁰

On 29 July 1852, another couple of *taxidiotes* from Rila monastery, hieromonk Nikifor and hierodeacon Panteleimon, were allowed to collect alms in Russia and their permission was extended after the Crimean war. Over the course of five years until 1857, they travelled in 21 provinces of the European part of Russia and gathered 16.516 silver rubles, as well as garments, utensils and books.³¹ The idea of depositing the money in a Russian bank instead of using it immediately for the school was criticized already in the nineteenth century, and also by modern researchers of the history of the monastery.³² Indeed, the school was stopped already in 1869, and in 1870 there was an outburst of indignation among the younger monks against the older ones.

In 1858 Abbot Joseph inquired if he could send two monks to Russia for the purpose of studying church art and engraving. He envisioned that the monks could stay in one of the monasteries of Moscow and attend lessons at a secular art school.³³ In support of Joseph's request, the Russian ambassador Lobanov-Rostovskii reported that the Rila monastery received sizable income from selling engraved images and pictures of the monastery to pilgrims. While the Rila monks were running their own stamping enterprise, they had to buy expensive copper boards from Vienna; moreover, the images were Western style.³⁴ Abbot Joseph asserted that starting a local production of boards would contribute greatly to the monastery's revenues.³⁵ After consulting the Metropolitan of Moscow Filaret, the Synod proposed that the monks could either live in Bogoiavlenskii Monastery and study lithography instead of engraving; or

24 M. Bur-Markovska. "Към историята на стопанската и строителна дейност на Рилския манастир (1833 – 1848)." *Izvestia na instituta za istoria* 22 (1972), 227–261; G. Tsarev. "Хронология и етапи на строежите в Рилския манастир, 1816–1848." *Vekove* (1979) No. 4: 65–72; R. Radkova. *Българската интелигенция през Възраждането XVIII-първата половина на XX в.* Sofia, 1986.

25 R. Radkova. *Неофит Рилски и новобългарската култура*. Sofia, 1975, 170–188. See also: Ivan Snegarov. *Принос към Биографията на Неофит Рилски (Гръцки писма до него)*. Sofia, 1951; Arsenii, episkop Stobitski. *Принос към биографията на отец Неофит Рилски*. Sofia, 1984.

26 Decision by the Holy Synod, February 13/ March 18, 1848. RGIA, f. 797, op. 18, d. 41798. On Kovachevich and his mission see I. Rilski. "Откъслек от историята на Рилския манастир." *Bŭlgarski cĕrkoven pregled* (1895) 3: 14–19.

27 RGIA, f. 797, op. 18, d. 41798, f. 7–8.

28 Ibid., f. 44–53v.

29 See the list of books and objects: Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, July 5/August 14, 1850. RGIA, f. 797, op. 19, d. 48369, f. 6–13v.

30 Decision by the Holy Synod, November 28/December 31, 1851. RGIA, f. 797, op. 20, d. 45038, f. 11–12.

31 *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение. Documenti i materiali*. Sofia: BAN, 1987. Vol. I. part I: 46–48. See also a letter from the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign affairs to Ambassador Apolinarii Butenev (September 3, 1857). Ibid.: 164. Panteleimon left an itinerary of his travel to Russia: "Замечания за някои градове и села в Русия." In *Bŭlgarski cĕrkoven pregled* (1895) No. 10: 18–39; No. 11: 19–35. Later he was twice elected abbot of Rila (1864–68, 1874–81).

32 Rumiana Kamburova-Radkova. *Рилският манастир през Възраждането*, 141. Normally the Russian government encouraged depositing of the collected alms in Russian banks, as it could supply the monasteries with stable income from the interest of the capitals, and prevented abuses.

33 Translation of the letter from Abbot Joseph and his brotherhood, April 6, 1858. RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 360, f. 3–3v.

34 The Rila monastery stamping workshop was active since the early nineteenth century, with Fr. Sophroni, and later Isaia ahead. It was supported with an annual sum from the monastery budget. In 1846 new machines were ordered in Vienna, for a sum of 20.000 Ottoman piasters. M. Bur-Markovska. "Към историята на стопанската и строителна дейност на Рилския манастир", 253; Rumiana Radkova. *Щампите в Рилския манастир*. Sofia, 1975.

35 I. M. Tolstoi- to A.P. Tolstoi, August 28, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 360, f. 10–11.

they could reside in Saint Sergius Laura and study old Russian art.³⁶ On 15 August 1858 monk Teodosii left Constantinople for Odessa. The Russian mission paid him 120 silver rubles for travel expenses and provided him with recommendation letters. Upon his arrival in Moscow Teodosii was hosted at the Bogoiavlenskii Monastery and started attending art lessons at the private school of Sergei Zarianko,³⁷ with the prospect of studying lithography at the school of Dmitrii Gavrilov. The first month of his studies was paid by the Bogoiavlenskii Monastery³⁸.

In 1865 Rila Monastery was visited by Russia's consul in Adrianople M. I. Zolotarev and the consul in Plovdiv Naiden Gerov. Abbot Panteleimon placed a request for bursaries for the monks to study in Russian seminaries. In June 1866 two bursaries at the Moscow seminary for the Rila monks were issued by the Synod (200 silver rubles annually each).³⁹ In 1870-1871 together with hieromonk Onufrii, Panteleimon travelled to Russia for the second time for the purpose of collecting alms.⁴⁰

Apart from the two major Bulgarian monasteries and the schools run by them, already from the beginning of the 1840s the Russian government was supplying the poorer churches of the Bulgarian lands with books and church objects. Let us mention only one example from the numerous cases studied in the literature on the Bulgarian awakening. In 1853 the embassy received a request from Z. P. Kniazheski⁴¹ for sending books to the ten recently constructed churches of Chirpan and Eski-Zagr (modern Stara Zagora) districts. After the confirmation of the Russian consul in Adrianople, the Synod decided to provide these churches with liturgical books for a sum of 637 silver rubles; part of the books should be sent for free.⁴² By 1853 a large number of church objects for Bulgaria were collected and concentrated in Moscow, such as icons, crosses, garments and vessels. With the beginning of the Crimean war, the Synod issued an order for these items to be put in storage in Chudov monastery (May 7, 1854).

36 Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, February 6/24, 1859. Ibid., f. 5–8.

37 Sergei Konstantinovich Zarianko (1818–1870) was a well-known academic style artist and portraitist; professor at Moscow school of arts, sculpture and architecture in 1856–1865.

38 Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, October 14/26, 1860. RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 360, f. 16–19v.

39 N. Stremouhov to N.P. Ignatiev, November 5, 1866. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. II: 344.

40 Apart from collecting alms, Panteleimon managed to deposit the capital of the monastery in a Russian bank. I. Rilski. "Откъслек от историята на Рилският манастир." *Bŭlgarski cĕrkoven pregled* (1895) 4: 4.

41 A member of the Odessa Bulgarian communion, Zaharii Kniazheskii received one of the first Russian bursaries for studies in Russia; for many years he gathered books and journals from Russia for Bulgarian schools, churches and libraries. The Moscow Synod typography gave him a printing machine with Cyrillic letters. In 1851 he returned to Bulgaria and continued his activities. L. Minkova. "Възрожденският просветител Захари Княжески." *Literaturna misal* (1974): 3.

42 Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, July 29/August 11, 1853. RGIA, f. 797. Op. 23, d. 400, f. 5–6.

Support within the Framework of Panslavism: 1856-1877

In the two decades between the Crimean and the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, Russian support for the churches of Bulgaria peaked. After 1856 theoretical Slavophilism was replaced by practical Panslavism as the core doctrine of Russian foreign policy. Financing and supplying the churches of the Slavonic lands of the Balkans with books, garments and utensils became an essential measure for strengthening Russian political influence in South-Eastern Europe and a top government priority. The donations came from a variety of sources. One source was private persons, from members of the Tsar's family and high-rank nobility, to merchants, to peasants and poor craftsmen. A second source of donations was the treasury and state-owned reserves (different capitals left to the Holy Synod by wills of private persons etc.). The Synod distributed the money at its own discretion: for instance, sums donated for Serbia could be used for Bulgaria, and vice versa, or money for use inside of Russia could be given for the Balkans. Thirdly, there were donations gathered by churches, monasteries, Slavonic and other benevolent committees. The money could be either sent directly, or deposited in Russian banks, in which case the interest on the deposits was used.

Already during the Crimean War part of the church objects that were reserved for the churches of Serbia were given to the Commander-in Chief of the army in the Balkans for distribution among the churches in Bulgaria. In 1854, for example, 2340 liturgical books and Gospels worth 4965 rubles, and 60 priests' garments were marked for the Russian army in the Balkans to be dispensed to Bulgarian churches.⁴³ After the end of the war Emperor Alexander II ordered that the sum of 50.000 rubles that monasteries had collected for the needs of the war, should be allocated to the churches of Bulgaria.⁴⁴

From the second half of the 1850s, Russian church aid to the Balkans was administered on a regular basis. Between 1856 and 1860, several institutions started their activities in support of the Southern Slavs, and specially the Bulgarians. The first of them was the Moscow Slavonic Committee, which was founded in 1858. The reports of the Committee (dated January 1860)⁴⁵ and of the Noble Ladies' Committee (founded in December 1857)⁴⁶ give a picture of the sums gathered for Bulgarian churches

43 RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 414, f. 22–23.

44 In fact, the sum stayed in the Russian bank, and the interest from it began to be spent for the Slavonic churches of the Balkans. For the period between March 1854 and June 1858 a sum of 7844.5 rubles was received. RGIA, f. 797, op. 30, II otd., 2 Saint, d. 300, f. 9–9v.

45 *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 1: 350; More about the sums gathered by the Moscow committee see: A. N. Nikitin, *Славянские комитеты*, 40–45.

46 *Отчет княгини Т. В. Васильчиковой и графини Н. Д. Протасовой о получении и отправлении книг, вещей и денежных сумм на вспомоществование нуждающимся православным на Востоке*. Saint Petersburg, General Staff Typography, 1859.

and schools. The committees obviously received information about the needs of the churches from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In particular, the priest of the Russian Embassy in Vienna Mikhail Rayevsky, together with consul Alexander Gil'ferding were responsible for carefully gathering the data on the Western Balkans. The consuls in Adrianople and Vidin compiled similar lists for the Bulgarian lands. The collected money and church objects were delivered via the Synod and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Russian Embassy in Constantinople and there distributed either directly to the destination, or to the local consulates. Already in 1857 the Noble Ladies' Committee supplied the following Bulgarian churches: Saint Dimitryr in Adrianople (3000 rubles and another 1500 rubles for its construction), Saint Stefan in Constantinople (1000 rubles, icons, garments, utensils, and 152 rubles for its school), Saint Constantine and Elena in Galatz (300 rubles, garments, a cross, and a Gospel), Saint George in Demirdesh near Adrianople (750 rubles, garments, utensils). Many donors preferred to remain unknown, leaving only their first names for commemoration. However, some names were written down: for example, on 3 January 1858, the Petersburg merchant Kudriashov donated silver covered with gold utensils for the church in Sliven (sent on January 31); on 5 June 1858 Praskovia Gortalova from Kostroma district gave 48,5 rubles for Rila monastery.

In 1854 the Bulgarian Tutelage in Odessa started its work.⁴⁷ Founded by Bulgarian merchant Nikolai Palauzov, it aimed at securing aid for the Bulgarians of the Balkans from their compatriots and other benefactors in Russia. Innokentii Borisov, the Archbishop of Kherson headed the Bulgarian Tutelage. The institution continued its activities until February 1917 and was strongly supported by Russian officials. The Odessa Tutelage collected and sent enormous amounts of aid to Bulgarian churches, such as books, garments, icons, bells, and liturgical utensils. Its capital was 40.000 rubles, and over the course of 30 years it gathered 300.000 rubles⁴⁸.

Initially, the aims of the donations and the benevolent institutions were purely humanitarian in nature, without any political objectives attached. The inspiration to help the suffering "Slav brothers" in Russia was enormous, and found reflection in well-known novels by Turgenev and other classics of Russian literature. Supporting and inspiring this movement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Synod had nevertheless more practical goals. After the Crimean war the Russian government sought different ways

47 The official decree of Emperor Alexander II about the establishment of the institution dates 1858. Ideas about the organization were expressed in diplomatic correspondence as early as 1856. See E. P. Kovalevskii to A. M. Gorchakov, April 26, 1856. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I part 1: 40–41.

48 N. Varsov. *Тридцатилетие деятельности Одесского болгарского настоятельства (с 1854–1884 г.) и материалы для истории освобождения Болгарии*. Odessa, 1894; N. Genchev. "Одесското българско настоятелство." *Godishnik SU, FIF* 64 (1972) 3; I. D. Zabunov. *Болгары Юга России и национальное болгарское возрождение в 50–70-е гг. XIX в.* Kishinev, 1981.

of recovering and strengthening its positions in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. Most of the politicians, starting with Emperor Alexander II, shared the idea of helping the Southern Slavs with the prospect of their unification under Russian guidance. This trend however met with a lot of difficulties. With national consciousness steadily on the rise, Bulgarians aimed at church autonomy, with the eventual prospect of political independence. Russia at that time was not ready to support Bulgarian aspirations. Moreover, this threatened the integrity of the Orthodox church and Orthodoxy, and was thus against the main lever of Russian policy in the Ottoman Empire. Taking into account potential future complications, the conservative pro-Greek party in Russia (Ober-procurator Alexander Tolstoi, Tertii Filippov, Archimandrite Petr Troitskii, and diplomat Vasilii Nekliudov) opposed the extreme Panslavic tendency. Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov of Moscow, Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, and the main figure of Russian diplomacy Count Nikolai Ignatiev also remained reserved and cautious. The danger of splitting Orthodoxy was obvious to everybody, as it would open the doors to Western influences through the spreading of Uniatism and Protestantism. All this made the situation unresolvable, although enormous efforts were undertaken by Russian diplomatic and church representatives to calm down the Greek-Bulgarian confrontation of 1860-1870s, to preserve the status quo, and to keep Christians from rioting. Humanitarian aid provision remained the main peaceful and (more or less) effective way of exerting "soft power."

On 27 February 1857 the Russian ambassador in Constantinople Apolinarii Butenev pointed out the three main problems Bulgarians were facing: the Greek-Bulgarian confrontation, the danger of Catholic and Protestant proselytism, and the poverty of Orthodox churches.⁴⁹ Upon Butenev's request, the consul in Adrianople Nikolai Stupin made a list of the poorest churches and their needs.⁵⁰ The first task was to supply them with Slavonic books. Without waiting for further donations, Butenev sent two sets of liturgical books to the recently constructed church in the village Belitsa near Mustafa Pasha

49 RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 9–14. Many reports by the Russian consuls contain evidence about the poverty of the churches. Thus, in his letter dated August 27, 1857, K.A. Sokolov described the only Orthodox church in Vidin: "The art of the icons, the view of the tin chalices, the dirty wooden candlesticks, the old church books and, finally, the bars on the choir, occupied by the women, indicate the care taken by the parishioners and the clergy about the well looking of their church. The garments of the priests are so poor and untidy that they hardly differ from their everyday clothes." *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 1: 160.

50 Among the other tasks, in the instruction to Stupin on his appointment to Adrianople gathering information about the needs of the Bulgarian churches in garments, utensils and books was outlined. See: Proekt instrukcii upravliaiushemu imperatorskim general'nyum consul'stvom v Adrianopole, July 26, 1856. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 1: 62. Stupin received from Ambassador Butenev 2.000 Ottoman piasters for supporting the Bulgarian schools. See: Copy from the additional instruction to N. Stupin from October 3, 1856. Ibid.: 77. 500 piastres per month were received by him earlier for the same purpose from A. P. Ozerov.

(now Svilengrad), and one more to the Bulgarian church in Adrianople. The first batch of books and utensils was sent by Archbishop Innokentii of Kherson on behalf of the Bulgarian Tutelage in Odessa. Butenev stressed that the Bulgarians had great confidence in Russian printed books and if they were lacking them, they preferred to use old manuscripts.

The mass import of Russian books was surprisingly badly received by a Bulgarian activist in Constantinople, Exarch Alexander Stoilov.⁵¹ He reported to the Sublime Porte that the Russian books contained prayers offensive to the Ottoman government and the Sultan, and started printing himself the *Apostle* and the *Gospel* in Constantinople, without the prayer about the victory “over the Agar’an rule.” Butenev hoped that Stoilov’s books would not enjoy the same respect as the Russian ones, and proposed that the Synod revise the books for Bulgaria by excluding the anti-Muslim prayers.⁵²

As most Bulgarian churches were using tin or wooden chalices and could not acquire silver utensils, Butenev proposed to supply them with simple ones, and where possible for free. The garments received from Russia were mainly old and shabby, continued the ambassador. He found it necessary to donate archbishop’s garments to Bishop Policarp of the Bulgarian Saint Stefan Church in Constantinople, and also to the bishops of Lovech and Vratsa, who were Bulgarian by origin. In the ambassador’s opinion, this would both encourage them and create a favourable image of Russia among the Bulgarians.⁵³ In 1858, 65 circles (sets) of liturgical books, 100 volumes of the *Gospel*, 10 sets of utensils and 3 sets of Archbishop’s vestments were received in Constantinople.

According to an official report the Russian mission in Constantinople issued to the Holy Synod, in the period between 1 July 1857 and 10 January 1859, liturgical vestments were sent to the following Bulgarian churches: the town of Vrana (2), Novo Selo Sofia district (1), the town of Voden (2), Haskioi (2), Melnik Monastery (1), the village of Chucher (1), Batoshevski Monastery (4), the nunnery in Kazanlak (3), and the Bulgarian church in Constantinople (2). 13 more were sent to the villages of South-Eastern Bulgaria (Thrace), where the Uniate propaganda was especially active: Malko Tarnovo, Kavakli, Darkiuliu, Indzhii, Kodjazharli, Bunarhisar (modern Pinarhisar), Tatarlar and others⁵⁴.

51 Exarch Alexander Stoilovich (Baioglu) (1810–1891), a Bulgarian journalist, editor and political figure, active in Constantinople between 1843 and 1876. In 1848–62 editor of “*Tsarigradski vestnik*”, financed by the Russian government.

52 Report by A. Butenev, February 27, 1857. RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 9–14.

53 Report by A. P. Butenev, July 6, 1857. RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 31–33. Bishops Dorotei of Vratsa (1852–1860) and Ilarion of Lovech (1852–72) are well known for their struggle against the Greek high clergy. In 1872 Ilarion was elected Exarch of Bulgaria, but was not approved by the Sublime Porte.

54 RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 66–68v.

At the beginning of 1859, Archbishop Innokentii received a second delivery of church objects from Moscow to Odessa for further dissemination in Bulgaria: they were packed in 11 boxes and estimated in the amount of 5575 rubles⁵⁵.

Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin (the priest of the Russian Embassy Church in Constantinople) wrote in his *Journals* that the main hall of the embassy palace was full of garments, icons, and utensils waiting for dispatch to Bulgarian churches. Some of these objects were already assigned their destination, and others were given to arriving petitioners at Antonin’s discretion. Soon after his arrival in Constantinople in 1860, Antonin wrote: “I spent the whole day in the big, or theatre hall of the palace, sorting a huge amount of different church things, sent for donation to the poor churches.” He further remarked that “A horrible pile of petitions, addressed to the Ambassador, to Fr. Petr [Antonin’s predecessor at the church] threaten me with what may be daily torture. I am observing with curiosity the old icons, sent for distribution. I am thinking of making a collection of antiques at the church.”⁵⁶ He mentioned sending church objects to the village of Kovachishte, Kastoria district (3 November 1860), garments to the monastery Debrsko Trebishte and the villages of Janche and Bitumi (November 5), Silino of Drama, and Siastevo of Kastoria districts (November 15.)⁵⁷

The areas threatened by the Union with Rome movement were places of special concern for the Russian government. Already in the district of Adrianople this motive of countering Uniate influence was of primary importance. The second area of concern was Kukush (modern Kilkis in Greece) and the villages around, which became the centre of a local union in 1859 with Joseph Sokolski as the first Bulgarian Catholic prelate. The history of the Kukush Union and the radical measures Russian diplomacy took to counter it are well known.⁵⁸ The newly appointed Bishop Partenii of Poliana received 2719 rubles for the school in Kukush (from the 3.000 rubles assigned by the Moscow Slavonic Committee), and was allowed to use 2000 from this sum for the needs of his church. With this money Bishop Partenii was expected to open new churches and schools, and introduce liturgy in Church Slavonic.⁵⁹ Garments and utensils were additionally sent for the churches, as well as an Archbishop’s vestment for the bishop himself. Ambassador Lobanov’s request for a brand new garment, however, was refused, probably for

55 Report by the Holy Synod, August 24/ September 7, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 82–84.

56 L.A. Gerd, K. A. Vach (eds). *Архимандрит Антонин (Капустин). Дневник. Годы 1856–1860*. Moscow: Indrik, 2017: 527.

57 Ibid., 529–535.

58 Vera Boneva. *Българското църковнонационално движение*, 508–27.

59 Bishop Partenii to A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii, February 27, 1861. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 2: 59; A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii to E. P. Kovalevskii. March 1, 1860. RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f.

economic reasons.⁶⁰ After the Synod's rejection, a request was made to Empress Maria Alexandrovna, who was known for her generous donations for Orthodox churches. On 7 April 1860 the Empress's secretary P. Moritz asked Ober-Procurator Alexander Tolstoi, whether she could provide the bishop unofficially with the garment, along with a precious encolpion decorated with stones. Unlike Ambassador Lobanov-Rostovskii, Tolstoi was rather unfavourable to the Bulgarian movement for church independence. His answer was categorical: such an unprecedented gift would be badly received by the Greeks and would only worsen the turbulent situation in the Balkans.⁶¹

Meanwhile, on 18 September 1858, a strong earthquake occurred in Sofia. Most churches were ruined, and only two of them remained suitable for service. Two petitions were received in Russia: one from the Metropolitan and the citizens of Sofia, asking for support, especially for the construction of the church of Sveti Kral⁶²; and another from Savva Filaretov, the director of a Sofia school, who asked for books. Emperor Alexander II donated 300 rubles for the church and gave permission for collection of donations. Within a year, 1357 rubles was collected. The Synod added another 1000 out of the 5000-ruble will private individual Anastasiia Ponomareva left to the Synod for decoration of the poorest churches. Moreover, Russia sent books both for Sava Filaretov's school and for distribution for free among the inhabitants of Sofia.⁶³ On 9 December 1865, Russian consul in Adrianople Mihail Zolotarev reported that he transferred another 340, 71 rubles' worth of individual donations for the Sofia churches.⁶⁴

Many Bulgarian communities took the opportunity to address the local Russian consul, who in turn forwarded their petitions either to the ambassador in Constantinople or directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, in 1858 the Ministry received a report from the Russian consul in Galatz in favor of the need of the Bulgarians to build their own Orthodox church. Another reason for the Russian government to support the request of the Bulgarians was the tombs of the Russian soldiers situated in the same area. Emperor Alexander II approved the decision to support the petition, and on his part donated a bell and

60 RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 363.

61 A.P. Tolstoi to P. A. Moritz, April 12, 1860. f. 797, op. 30, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 325., f. 2–3v. See about the views of Ober-procurator Alexander Tolstoi on the Greek-Bulgarian question: "L.A. Gerd (ed.). "В делах Востока первой заботой нашей должна быть Святая Церковь" Две записки обер-прокурора Св. Синода А.П. Толстого по греко-болгарскому вопросу с комментариями императора Александра II. 1860 г." *Istoricheskii arkhiv* (2003): 49–61.

62 Dated June 15, 1859. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 1: 288–291.

63 Decision by the Holy Synod, November 27/ December 9, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 328, f. 14–15v. Published: *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. Part. 1: 333–334. Sava Filaretov graduated from Moscow University and was a teacher at Sofia Central school in 1857–1861; he later served at the Russian embassy in Constantinople.

64 M. Zolotarev to Naiden Gerov, Adrianople, December 9, 1865: Panchev, T. (ed.). *Из архивата на Найден Геров*. Vol. I. Sofia: BAN, 1911: 636–637.

church utensils.⁶⁵ The Synod assigned 1000 rubles from the fonds for reparation of church buildings in Russia (belonging to the "Dukhovnoe ведомство," i.e. "Ecclesiastical Department"). The rest of the donations for the Bulgarian church in Galatz (garments, a cross, a Gospel, also money) were gathered by the Noble Ladies' Committee.

Likewise, in 1858 the Synod decided to grant the request of the Panagyurishte community and send 5 complete sets of priests' garments taken from the donations for Serbian churches to the Church of Saint George, Panagyurishte, and to the churches of the villages of Bata, Bania, Petrich and Poibrene.⁶⁶

Apart from the money and objects gathered by the Slavonic committees and used for the needs of Bulgarian churches, there were sums collected by alms Russian collectors who returned from pilgrimage, or sums left to the Synod by individual wills. Thus, in September 1860 the village of Litakovo, Vratsa district, received 300 rubles for its church and another sum of 50 rubles was sent to Zheravna (Shumen district) from the money left by Belgorod merchant Sorokin for Orthodox churches abroad.⁶⁷ A similar case was recorded in 1859 when the Bulgarians from Bessarabia asked Count Stroganov for support of their compatriots, who returned to the village Karamia near Silistra, for the construction of Saint Nicolas Church. The Synod assisted them with 1000 rubles from the will of Anastasiia Ponomareva who had left 5000 rubles for the poorest churches⁶⁸.

Bulgarian Taxidiotes in Russia

Taxidiotes from the Bulgarian lands continued visiting Russia in the 1860s. Soon after the Easter events of April 1860, the heads of the Bulgarian church in Constantinople presented the ambassador with a petition requesting to send alms collectors to Russia. The Synod issued a permit for one year.⁶⁹ In a similar fashion, in 1864 the nuns of Kazanlak Monastery "Entrance of the Virgin" sent a petition for a permission to collect alms in Russia. In his recommendation letter Consul M. Zolotarev informed that at the time their debts reached 20 000 piastres and highlighted the diligence of the nuns and their plans to run a school.⁷⁰ In 1865 he wrote to Naiden Gerov: "Passing through Kazanlak, I visited the

65 I. Tolstoi to A.P. Tolstoi, RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd., 2 Saint, d. 374, f. 1–2.

66 Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, March 30/April 21, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 28, II otd., 2 Saint, d. 369, f. 3–5.

67 Decision by the Holy Synod, September 12/ October 21, 1860. RGIA, f. 797, op. 26, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 450, f. 117–120.

68 Extract from the decision by the Holy Synod, August 7, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 342, f. 3–4.

69 RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, II otd. 2 Saint, d. 316.

70 RGIA, f. 797, op. 35, II otd., d. 31. F. 4–5v (M. Zolotarev to P. Stremoukhov, November 24, 1864), f. 6–6v

Entrance of the Virgin nunnery, reconstructed with Russian money, and found that the nuns used the alms collected in the best way.⁷¹ First the Synod declined the request as already many foreign *taxi-dioties* were in Russia at that moment. However, thanks to the special recommendation of Empress Maria Alexandrovna, an exception was made and the permission was issued in 1865 for one year and was later extended.

In 1866 the Synod reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the 2498 rubles, collected by the hieromonk of the Bulgarian Saint Paraskeva Monastery near Stanimaka (modern Asenovgrad) for starting a Bulgarian school there.⁷²

A.V. Rachinskii and the Bulgarians of Varna

From the early 1860s the Russian government supported a church at the Russian vice-consulate in Varna. This important town became a playground of the Greek-Bulgarian confrontation in the second half of the 19th century. Consul A. Rachinskii (appointed in 1860) was already deeply involved in the Panslavic activities of the time.⁷³ He worked towards starting a Slavonic liturgy for the Bulgarians of Varna and the neighboring villages, and towards opening a Bulgarian school. Already upon his arrival in Varna, at the beginning of February 1860, Rachinskii demanded from the Greek Archbishop Parthenius certain days of Slavonic liturgy in the church. In order to please the diplomat, Parthenius initially allowed it once a week.⁷⁴ The discussions that followed were less favourable, however, and the Slavonic liturgy was permitted only on certain occasions. Rachinskii's original idea was to serve liturgy in Slavonic every Saturday in commemoration of the Russian soldiers who died in Varna in 1828, but he received instructions from Ambassador Lobanov to act with caution.⁷⁵ As the attempts to convince

(Original petition from the nuns), f. 15–16 (Decision by the Holy Synod).

71 M. Zolotarev to Naiden Gerov, Moscow, March 31, 1865. *Из архивата на Найден Геров*. Vol. 1: 632.

72 Letter from to the Asian Department of the Ministry, May 11, 1866. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. II: 286. Without knowing the details of this alms collecting, we should note that starting a Bulgarian school was especially important in that area, taking into account the mainly Greek population of Stanimaka.

73 See his petition for organization of a Bulgarian charitable institution in Odessa and supplying the schools of Rila monastery and Filippopolis with books (November 6, 1856): *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I, part 1: 83. Memoirs about A.V. Rachinskii see S. Kulesha, "Александр Викторевич Рачинский." *Russkaia Starina* XXIX (1880) 9–12: 433–436.

74 A. V. Rachinskii to A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii, Varna, February 18, 1860. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I, part 1: 352–353.

75 A. V. Rachinskii to A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii, Varna, February 26, 1860. *Ibid.*: 356–357. The first commemorative Slavonic liturgy was served on March 12, 1860, in Saint George's church. Report by A. Rachinskii, March 16, 1860. *Ibid.*: 363–364. The Slavonic liturgy in this church was allowed only by the next Varna metropolitan, Joachim, in 1865.

the Greek metropolitan failed, Rachinskii found a small monastery near Varna -- the Monastery of Saint Dimitri -- where only one Bulgarian monk lived, and attended the liturgy there every Sunday. At the end of 1862 the monk asked Rachinskii for Russian liturgical books for the church. His request was granted, and in February 1863 the box with books was delivered, though with certain complications from the Greek metropolitan.⁷⁶

After a series of unsuccessful attempts to introduce the Slavonic liturgy to the Greek Church of Varna, Rachinskii set up a church inside the building of the vice-consulate. Archimandrite Filaret -- a Bulgarian who was brought to Russia in 1828 and later studied at Chalki Theological school -- was appointed as priest of the new church. Rachinskii managed to attract donations from private persons in Russia, who sent church objects and provided annual contributions. Well-known noble ladies supplied the church with everything necessary: Countesses Antonina Bludova and Natalia Protasova donated garments and utensils, Tatiana Potemkina an iconostasis, and Princess Elizaveta Vorontsova an annual donation of 1500 rubles. By 1867 the Synod had also allocated an annual sum of 800 rubles for the church choir; after 1869 half of the amount was extended for three more years.⁷⁷ Upon the recommendation of the consul, the Russian Holy Synod presented Archimandrite Filaret with a cross in 1862.⁷⁸ The significance of this church for the Bulgarians was stressed by the next Russian vice-consul in Varna, Alexander Ol'hin, who arrived there at the beginning of August 1862. People from the region would travel for several hours to attend Archimandrite Filaret's sermons delivered in pure Bulgarian language.⁷⁹

As Princess Vorontsova discontinued her contributions in 1864, the church suffered from lack of financing and turned to Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow for support. Taking into account the importance of this church for supporting the Orthodoxy of the local Bulgarians and in order to avoid the spreading of the uniatism Metropolitan Filaret agreed to donate money over a period of three years: 1000 rubles the first year, and 800 the second and the third, respectively.⁸⁰ Before the opening of Bulgarian churches in Varna, it was attended by many parishioners from the Bulgarian villages neighboring the city. After the closing of the Russian vice-consulate in Varna, Archimandrite Filaret continued to serve as priest

76 A.A. Ol'hin to E. P. Novikov, March 27, 1863. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I, part 2.: 335–338. Rachinskii's zeal for supporting the Bulgarians created a lot of problems in his relations with the Greeks. From the same report we find out that certain utensils given by him to Saint George church in Varna were returned, because the donation was interpreted as Russian propaganda. The position of the next vice-consul, A. Ol'hin, was more reserved and cautious.

77 N. K. Giers to D.A. Tolstoi, January 30, 1876. RGIA, f. 797, op. 46, II otd., 3 Saint, d. 38, f. 1–2.

78 RGIA, f. 797, op. 32, II otd., d. 266.

79 A. A. Ol'hin to N. P. Ignatiev, August 20, 1862. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I, part 2: 255–256.

80 Metropolitan Filaret- to A. Akmatov, February 1, 1865. RGIA, f. 797, op. 35, II otd., d. 3, f. 4–5.

but the church moved to the house of his mother. After his death in 1876, the question arose again, whether it should be closed. Following some discussion, Emperor Alexander II ordered that the church be kept in commemoration of the Russian soldiers of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1829-30. In 1880 it was supplied with an annual financing of 2700 rubles by the State Council.⁸¹

In 1862, the famous benefactor of Varna, Odessa merchant Paraskevas Nicolaou (Gagauz by origin, born in Varna) passed away and left 50.000 rubles for the construction of Saint Nicolas church in his native town.⁸² A. Rachinskii reported about the donation of 28.000 rubles by Nicolaou for the building of a hospital (in 1856), and the 180.000 rubles left by him for Varna according to the will. He further commented: “The Varna Gagauz are waiting with impatience for the confirmation of the will to receive the money so as to build a church in the Bulgarian part of the city, with Greek liturgy in it. Meanwhile, they already have four churches, and justice requires that the Bulgarian community, which are now the majority of the inhabitants of Varna, would use the sum, left by Mr. Paraskeva, to build a Slavonic church.”⁸³ After a permission from the Patriarch of Constantinople was obtained, the construction of the church was planned under the supervision of the Russian vice-consul.⁸⁴

The support of the Russian vice-consulate in Varna was not limited to the city itself. In September 1864, A. Ol’hin requested a new shipment of “priests’ garments, utensils and church books” for distributing to the churches of the villages, because the 15 garments sent by Lobanov-Rostovskii on 28 September 1862, had been already given out.⁸⁵

Russian Support after 1872

The Bulgarian schism did not influence Russian support for Bulgarian churches. The donations in the 1870s were already not as generous as ten years earlier, but this was rather due to the fading of the first wave of enthusiasm than to political reasons. The regular support continued, permissions for alms collection kept being issued according to the official quota of four collectors who could stay in Russia at a given time.

81 RGIA, f. 797, op. 46, II otd., 3 Saint, d. 38, f. 10–12.

82 The full text of the testament: *Варненски общински вестник*, November 11, 1882, no. 23–24. About the money for the church, *ibid.*, p. 3.

83 A.V. Rachinski to A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii. August 6, 1862. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 2: 245–246.

84 Letter of S. Urusov, June 27, 1864. RGIA, f. 797, II otd., op. 34, d. 23, f. 5–5v.

85 A.A. Ol’hin to N.P. Ignatiev, September 7, 1864. *Русия и Българското национално-освободително движение*. Vol. I. part 2: 103.

The nuns of the Kalofer Monastery of the Entrance of Virgin Mary in the Temple received permissions for alms collecting multiple times. In 1860 the abbess of the monastery asked for permission to send two nuns to the regions of Bessarabia and Kherson to collect aid among the Bulgarians, who were mainly family of the nuns. With the money gathered she was planning to repair the church and found a school for young nuns and orphans. The permission was issued for one year, and was subsequently extended twice until 1864.⁸⁶ On the eve of the Russo-Ottoman war, in 1876, they were again allowed to collect alms in Russia, and the permission was also extended twice. The monastery was fully restored with this money, and the catholicon church was decorated with Russian icons and supplied with utensils.⁸⁷

In 1882 the Russian consul in Plovdiv commented on the consecration ceremony of the new church in the nearby village Myrzian (modern Benkovski). After the church service the village mayor and the church warden brought to the central square the Russian garments and church books previously donated to this church. Reportedly, all the inhabitants of the village listened to the speech of the Metropolitan, who expressed the warmest feelings towards Russia.⁸⁸

In 1886 the nuns of the Saint George Monastery near Sofia were allowed to collect alms in the course of one year.⁸⁹ In 1902 two Bulgarian monasteries, those of Saint Theodore Stoudites and Saint Trinity, received permissions for collecting donations.⁹⁰

Cases of rejections of a monastery’s requests were comparatively rare. In 1881 Dondukov-Korsakov transmitted the application of Archimandrite Nikefor, the abbot of Transfiguration Monastery near Tarnovo, for alms collecting in Kiev and other Russian cities in order to build a hospital and a church on the grave of the Russian soldiers buried there.⁹¹ In this case, the diplomatic representative in Bulgaria declined based on his conclusion that the request did not correspond to the real needs of the monastery. In a similar way, in 1896 the abbess of Batoshevskii monastery Magdalena was not allowed herself to send a letter asking for help. Prime-minister Constantine Stoilov asked the Russian diplomatic agency to take measures against such initiatives.

86 RGIA, f. 797, op. 30, II otd., 2 Saint, d. 349.

87 RGIA, f. 797, op. 46, II otd., 3 Saint, d. 28.

88 Report by Kregel’ to the Ambassador in Constantinople, June 2, 1882. RGIA, f. 797, op. 52, II otd, 3 Saint, d. 216, f. 2–3.

89 Note dated September 20, 1886. RGIA, f. 797, op. 56, II otd. 3 Saint, d. 115, f. 4–4v.

90 RGIA, f. 797, op. 72, II otd. 3 Saint, d. 12, f. 42–42v.

91 K. Pobedonostsev to I. Gurko, October 7, 1882. RGIA, f. 797, op. 51, d. 329, f. 5–6.

Conclusion

During the long nineteenth century Russia systematically supported the Orthodox churches in the Bulgarian lands. The motives behind this support were twofold: mainly philanthropic, but also political. Before the Crimean war the collecting of aids was less systematic and less focused on the Slavs as Russia still kept to the traditional way of supporting Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire regardless of ethnicity. In the period of 1856-1876, during the Panslavic policy of Alexander II, the support for the Slavs, and especially in the Bulgarian lands, became a mass practice. Instructed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian diplomats in the Balkans were gathering information about the needs of churches and monasteries and receiving petitions from local communities and monasteries. This data was transmitted to the benevolent charitable organizations (the Slavonic committees, the Noble Ladies' committee, the Odessa Bulgarian Guardianship) and to the Holy Synod. The collected alms were sent to the designated destinations via the Russian Embassy and consulates. Apart from this, the Synod could utilize sums left by individual wills or other resources to cater to the needs of the Orthodox churches in the EaSaint Most donations came from private persons from all social classes: noblemen, merchants, clergymen, and peasants. Many church objects, such as garments, utensils and icons, were donated by the abbots of the bigger monasteries. State resources were also used for establishing bursaries for Bulgarians to attend Russian universities and theological schools and for sending books. The distribution of the donations in most cases depended on the practical needs of the churches, monasteries and schools, conveyed by the Russian consuls or Bulgarian representatives in Russia. As in the issuing of permissions for alms collecting, the Russian authorities in general tried to maintain the formal principle of justice and equality. The donations without a certain address could be used according to the political situation, first of all to prevent the spreading of Uniatism or Protestantism.

Another way of support was permitting *taxidiotes* (alms collectors) from the Bulgarian lands to travel to Russia and gather donations, which was regularly practiced since the 1840s. Big monasteries and monasteries which were either running schools or had considerable influence over the population, held a higher priority (e.g. Zograph on Mount Athos or Rila Monastery). After 1878 the support for the churches of Bulgaria did not cease, but was reduced mostly to issuing permissions for alms collecting. Russian financial aid and donations of books and church objects contributed significantly to Bulgarians' sympathies towards Russia and had a strong influence on both education and the aesthetics of church culture in the country. This use of 'soft power' paved the way for a stable Russian presence in the country over a long period of time, far beyond the chronological boundaries of the Tsarist regime in Russia

The *Krasnushki* Icons

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Abstract:

The largest group of Russian icons preserved in Bulgaria are the so-called '*Krasnushki*'. Their abundance suggests that they were important or of interest to the local population. The faithful most often bought *krasnushki* for their homes, but they were also purchased for churches, and sometimes people donated their home icons to them. Some icons have inscriptions indicating the time of purchase, the price, and the names of the owners. Their iconography is diverse, particularly the replicas of Russian miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary.

Keywords: Nineteenth century, Russian icons, folk icons, Kholui, Bulgarian lands

The most numerous category of Russian icons preserved in Bulgaria is represented by the so-called *krasnushki*, which circulated widely in the Bulgarian lands during the nineteenth century. Their remarkable abundance indicates that they were of considerable importance or interest to Bulgarian society, and therefore merit careful and thorough examination. They have not been the subject of scholarly research or discussion in Bulgarian academic publications, and photographs of them have only been published in a few catalogues of icon collections.¹

In the Russian-language bibliography, '*krasnushki*' refers to a type of icon with wide orange-red frames that were crafted for the market. They were produced mainly in Kholui and Mstyora, two major icon-painting centres in Vladimir Province. Their characteristic execution is linked to the extensive use of a specific red pigment, known in Russian as "*bakan*", which was widely available to local workshops.²

1 Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II. 568, 582, 590; Gergova 2016, 135, 144; Vutova, Bankova (eds) 2023, 55–60.

2 Tarasov 1995:176.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the production of this pigment had begun in the village of Mstyora itself. In the villages of Palekh, Mstyora, and Kholui, icon painting had developed over the preceding centuries, but it reached a peak of prominence during the nineteenth century, when almost the entire population was engaged in it as a means of livelihood. The icons produced varied considerably in quality and were intended for different categories of patrons.³ Alongside more carefully executed works, there was also large-scale production of uniformly made icons intended for commercial circulation. These were sold by specialized itinerant peddlers known as *ofenya* and were therefore also classified as "*rashozhie*", or "*travelling*" icons. The available statistical data are striking: in the mid-nineteenth century, the village of Kholui alone is reported to have supplied the market with between million and a half and two million icons.⁴ Besides the *krasnushki*, there existed other icons with similar stylistic characteristics and iconographic formulae, which likely fulfilled comparable functions. These icons were produced in other centres and were intended primarily for audiences of peasant origin, sometimes even for illiterate believers. Collectively, such works are commonly designated by the general term "*folk icons*".⁵

In all likelihood, Russian folk icons reached the Bulgarian lands primarily through commercial channels. There was a substantial market for these inexpensive and unpretentious artworks within the villages of the Russian Empire, but evidence indicates that the *ofenya* of Vladimir District also expanded their business beyond Russia. As early as the late seventeenth century, they traveled westward to the Romanian principalities, as well as to territories within the Austrian and Ottoman Empires. In 1705, villagers from Palekh sought permission to travel to Wallachian and Serbian lands for the purpose of peddling icons⁶, a practice they repeated in subsequent years. A particularly informative testimony comes from Ananiy Fyodorov, a priest from Suzdal, who recorded in 1754 that many peasants from Kholui and Palekh journeyed abroad with icons to sell their wares to Poland, Cesaria,⁷ Slavonia, as well as to Serbian and Bulgarian communities⁸.

Some of the *krasnushki* documented during the RICONTRANS project bear dated inscriptions made by their new owners, which provide valuable information about when they arrived in the Bulgarian lands. The earliest such inscription is found on the icon with the Mother of God of the Sign (*Znamenie*) in the Regional Museum of History in Veliko Tarnovo, originating from Dolna Oryahovitsa (inv. 173):

3 Pechkin 2023, 52–64.

4 Tarasov 1995: 166.

5 Buseva-Davydova 2011.

6 Rogov 1976: 63.

7 A name used by Russian authors from the 1700s to designate the Holy Roman Empire or the Austrian empire.

8 Tarasov 1995: 203.

“this icon belongs to the church, 1834”. (Cat. ...) Most inscriptions, however, date from the 1860s and 1870s, with a smaller number from the final decades of the nineteenth century. (fig. 1)

The archive of Nayden Gerov, the Russian consul in Plovdiv, contains interesting information about Russian icons trade in the Bulgarian lands. On 1 February 1871, Nayden Gerov wrote to Count Nikolay Ignatyev about the detainment of four Russians in Stara Zagora who carried icons and *lubki* [popular prints] for selling. He mentioned that peasants from the Vladimir District used to come with this purpose for several years in a row. The detained persons who were set free through Gerov’s intervention, came from Vladimir District, Kovrov Uezd, Sennikovo Volost, from the villages of Filini and Rabinitis. Their merchandise included prints with the images of the Russian emperor, the empress, and Count Orlov, as well as images of the Russian army crossing the Danube. It is possible that these very prints were the reason for the detainment of the peddlers. After they were set free, the Russians departed for Sofia with their wares. The consul mentioned that other Russian peddlers from the same district had arrived recently.⁹

We can assume that the peddling of the *ofenya* continued much more freely in the Bulgarian lands after the Liberation in 1878. According to M. Gromiko, during the 1880s the Russian peasant peddlers from Vladimir District bought up icons in Mstyora and Kholui and sent them in caravans to the fairs “from Eastern Siberia to Turkey.”¹⁰ The scale of the icon trade of the Vladimir peddlers in Bulgaria during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is indicated by the following interesting fact. In the spring of 1881, the *ofenya* ordered 120 drays, from the village of Goryachevo in Vladimir Oblast whose people specialized in the manufacturing of all kinds of wagons. The drays were to be of a special design, specifically adapted for the transportation of icons. They were intended to carry Palekh, Kholui, and Mstyora’s icons throughout Bulgaria.

According to a document discovered by Angel Nikolov, the Russian icon peddler Kliment Zotkov died in 1885 in the town of Breznik. He originated from the small settlement Konstantinovka, near the village Ovsyannikovo, Kovrovsky District, Vladimir oblaSaint¹¹

It appears that there were also other channels through which a limited number of Russian folk icons reached the Bulgarian lands. Oleg Tarasov reported seeing an icon depicting the Resurrection / Descent into Hell with Feasts in the storage of the Crypt of the Saint Alexander Nevsky Church in Sofia. An inscription on its reverse states that it was brought back from a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy

9 Documenti 1932: 4, 5.

10 Gromyko 1991: 262.

11 State Archive–Pleven, f. 126 k (Archiepiscopal Vicariate – Pleven), op. 1, a.e. 24, f. 12a–15 a.

Sepulchre.¹² On the basis of this inscription, Tarasov concludes that the icon-peddling trade of the Suzdal *ofenya* extended as far as Jerusalem. That *krasnushki* icons were indeed sold in the Holy Lands is further suggested by a four-part icon preserved in the Regional Museum of History in Pleven. Its inscription records that it belonged to the merchant Khristo Boyadzhi from Pleven and that it had been brought from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, according to his family’s memoirs.¹³

In all likelihood, *krasnushki* folk icons were distributed throughout the Bulgarian territory, including regions that were not easily accessible, such as the interior of the Strandzha Mountains. Although there is currently no documented evidence for their presence in the interior of the Rhodope Mountains or in the southwestern part of the country, within the eparchy of Nevrokop, this absence of data should not be interpreted as evidence of their absence there.¹⁴ That type of icon had a wide distribution in the Balkans, and not only among Slavic-speaking populations, but also in the Romanian lands.¹⁵

Most often, believers purchased *krasnushki* for use in their homes. Some Bulgarian families still preserve such icons, inherited from their ancestors—for example, the icon with the Mother of God Kazanskaya kept by the Bachevi family in the city of Yambol. (fig. 2) It was bought in the village of Kubadin, then it was moved to Elhovo, and ended up in Yambol, following the migrations of the members of the family.¹⁶ These icons were bought also for churches, and sometimes people donated their home icons to churches. These Russian folk icons can be seen in many churches, in the upper tiers of the iconostases, filling in the places of missing icons. In some cases, they form a whole row. There are two Russian icons, one on each of the two tiers above the royal doors of the iconostasis in the nave of the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo. The iconostasis also incorporates elements and icons from earlier periods, with *krasnushki* occupying the upper icon row. In the iconostasis of the Church of Saint Athanasius in the village of Nikolaevka near Varna, the despotic icons were painted by an icon painter from Tryavna, while the upper tier and much of the church’s wall decoration are occupied by *krasnushki*. Similarly, the eastern wall of the narthex of the Church of Saint Paraskeva in the village of Draganitsa near Berkovitsa features a quasi-iconostasis composed of *krasnushki*. Additional examples of this practice can be identified elsewhere.

12 Tarasov 1995, 203.

13 Regional Historical Museum-Pleven, inv. BA – VII – 3.

14 The limited number of illustrations allowed or other reasons might be behind the lack of photos of *krasnushki* in the two monographs about the churches in those regions: Shukerov-Patev-Mihaylov 2015 and Pencheva; Markov; Kostadinova 2021.

15 Russian Icons from Transylvania. Alba Iulia - Cluj-Napoca, 2023.

16 I am grateful to my colleague Teresa Bacheva for providing this information and for the photographs of the icon.

Some inscriptions left by owners or donors of *krasnushki* provide valuable insights into how these icons functioned and were appreciated in the everyday lives of believers. Most frequently, such inscriptions record personal names and, in some cases, the year in which the icon was acquired. For example, an inscription on the frame of a four-part icon in the Historical Museum in Lom (inv. B 1975) reads: “Icon ... Ivanov from Kovachitsa, 26 January 1868.” Similarly, the icon with the Mother of God, “*Intercessor for the Sinners*”, preserved in the Metropolitan Residence in Vidin—likely acquired from the same peddlers—bears an inscription on its reverse: “12 February 1868, Iliya Parvanov.”¹⁷

According to its inscription, the icon with Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in Ivan Beshkov Art Gallery in Pleven (inv. 73) was donated to the church in the village of Koynare in 1864 by Mr. Nikola, a physician from Klisura. The icon with the Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with twelve scenes in the Museum of Lom has one inscription about the donation: “1874, January 22, this holy icon was donated by Krastyo, Parvan, Parvan, Petko.” (ill. 5) The inscription on the reverse side of the icon portraying Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker from the village of Odarne, part of the collection of the Art Gallery in Pleven (inv. 115) is also of interest to this study: “...the icon with Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker belongs to Nikola Ivanov from Yanina, I bequeath it to the church Saint Paraskeva in Odarne, September 1875.” The practice of donating such icons to churches continued well into the twentieth century. For example, a four-part icon in Saint Tsar Boris Church in Veliko Tarnovo (Regional Museum of History, inv. 158) was donated by the innkeeper Ivan Minchov in 1913. (fig. 4)

Information on the prices of these types of icons can be gleaned from an inscription on a four-part icon in the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo. In 1870, Dimo Dimov recorded that the icon was worth 32 groshes.

Sometimes these inscriptions provided wider information by mentioning facts that were regarded as important by the people and the community. The four-part icon from the village of Varbitsa, held at the City Art Gallery in Pleven (inv. 182) has an inscription stating: “*Haralampi Yankov brought this icon to the church to sanctify it on the 12th day of February, 1867. Priest Peno Zlatar wrote this. Remember that the flour cost 45 pari per oka, the wine was 4:20, and the meat was 4 groshes, and the fish was 12 groshes.*” A four-part icon from the church in Gorsko Novo Selo (Regional Museum of History-Veliko Tarnovo, inv. 163) contains the donor’s name and a traditional recipe for cleaning of icons: “*In Dryanovo. Donated by Ivan Milev from Elena to the church of Saint Archangel in Gorsko Novo Selo, November 17...cut an apple in half, then rub the icon with the apple very hard, finally wash it with cool*

17 Author’s own on-site observation.

water and (the icon) will be clean.” The inscription on the icon Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie) in the Church of Mother of God in Dolna Oryahovitsa contains an event that was important for the local people: “*Museum Saint Mother of God, 1940 /founded on August 25, 1940 by the brothers Todor S. Musev and Dimitar Philipov from Dolna Oryahovitsa/ August 25, 1940 (Dormition of the Mother of God) and visited by the wide Christian community in Dolna Oryahovitsa.*”¹⁸

The thematic range of the documented folk icons is rather extensive. The earliest specimens, which could be dated back to the end the 1600s and the 1700s according to their stylistic features, do not have red frames. The images they portray are often arranged in three rows and thus they are suitable for home icon stands. For example, an icon in the Regional Museum of History in Varna (inv. VII 194) portrays Mother of God Kazanskaya, the Resurrection and Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in its upper tier, while showing rows of holy men and women in full length in both of the bottom tiers. The Regional Museum of History in Veliko Tarnovo (inv. 83) houses a potentially earlier icon with two rows of images: the upper one being a large-scale portrayal of the Mother of God Eleusa and a bust of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, while beneath them are Saint George mounted on a horse and three other saints. Occasionally, we can encounter three-row icons among the *krasnushki* from later periods, too, as it is evidenced by an icon from the Museum of Folk Arts and Crafts in Troyan.¹⁹

According to the available statistical data, the most widespread type of *krasnushki* consisted of four-part icons with the Crucifixion at the center, surrounded by four additional images. These icons appear in several variants, ranging from relatively plain depictions to more elaborate compositions. Their standard design places the Crucifixion in the center; above the upper beam of the Cross is a half-length depiction of Lord Sabaoth, while on the left and right arms of the Cross, or slightly above them, appear the busts of the Mother of God and Saint John the Theologian, witnesses to the Crucifixion. In the more simplified versions, these latter figures are omitted. Surrounding the central scene, the upper register usually contains a replica of the miracle-working icon with the Mother of God Kazanskaya and a half-length image of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, while the lower register features Archangel Michael, Commander of the Fearsome Hosts, and Saint George mounted on horseback slaying the dragon. In some examples, the figure of Archangel Michael is replaced by Saint Demetrius, also depicted on horseback. Variations of this scheme are also attested. The icon brought from Jerusalem by Hristo Boyadzhi (Regional Museum of History in Pleven, inv. BA-VII-3) replaces Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker with the Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov), while an icon in the National Church Historical and

18 The icon has never been restored and is preserved in poor condition, which makes it evident that the paint layers of the background and the frame predate the inscription executed in 1940.

19 Obrazi 2023, 60

Archaeological Museum (inv. 3000) presents the unusual substitution of the Mother of God Kazanskaya with Saint Paraskeva. This iconographic formula was not limited to Russian folk production: among Old Believer communities, a comparable arrangement - with the Crucifixion at the center surrounded by miracle-working icons and saints²⁰ - was also popular, as evidenced by several examples in the collection of the Regional Museum of History in Varna. A simpler, though rarer, variant omits the Crucifixion altogether.

Nevertheless, these four-part icons functioned effectively as domestic icon-stands, as they incorporated the essential elements of home devotion: a revered image of the Mother of God, the Crucifixion, and principal patron saints. They were warmly received by Bulgarian believers and contributed to the dissemination of a particular Marian iconographic type, the miracle-working Mother of God Kazanskaya, which was especially venerated in Russia. Through calendars published by Pencho Radev in the 1860s, Bulgarians were also informed of the Kazan icon's miraculous "gift" of restoring sight to the blind.²¹

Second in terms of distribution are icons depicting the Resurrection of Christ and the Descent into Hell at the center, surrounded by scenes of the major feasts. In some sources, these icons are referred to as "full-cycle" icons (*polnitsa*). In addition to the Resurrection, the central composition often includes Christ's Descent into Hell and, in many cases, the scene of Christ Calling Peter. The surrounding scenes most commonly include: the Nativity of the Mother of God, the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, the Ascension, the Old Testament Trinity, the Dormition of the Mother of God, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. By presenting the most important feasts of the Eastern Orthodox calendar, these icons were also well suited for use as domestic icon-stands. Nevertheless, they appear to have been regarded as particularly appropriate for donation to churches, which may explain their relatively large numbers preserved to this day.

Replicas of the miracle-working icons of the Mother of God most widely venerated in the Russian lands²² are regularly encountered in Bulgaria. These include the Virgin of Vladimir, icon with the Mother of God Feodorovskaya (fig. 5), the Mother of God Smolenskaya (fig. 6), the Mother of God Kazanskaya, the Mother of God of the Sign (*Znamenie*) (fig. 8), the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya (fig. 9), and the Three-Handed Mother of God. Other types of the Virgin Mary appear far more rarely, such as the Virgin of Jerusalem (Museum in Valchedrun), the Mother of God "Do not lament me, O

20 Krasilin 2023, 252, 253, ill. 9–11; Russian Icons 2023, 106–107, cat. 9, 134, 135, cat. 23.

21 Gergova 2010, 35.

22 Gavrilova 2001.

Mother" (Regional Museum of History in Varna; City Art Gallery of Plovdiv) (fig. 24), the Mother of God "Deliverer of the Suffering from Distress" (Trojan Monastery; the village of Nikolaevka near Varna; City Art Gallery in Burgas), the Mother of God "The Surety of Sinners" (Vidin), the Mother of God "O All-Hymned Mother" (*O Vsepetaya Mati*), (Historical Museum in Samokov) (fig.11), the Mother of God "Helper in Childbirth" (the village of Kutovo near Vidin), and the Mother of God "Healer of Sorrows" (the village of Shishentsi near Vidin).

The icon with the Mother of God Akhtyrskaya was also widely reproduced. It is of particular interest to note a variant in which the figure of the Mother of God is replaced by Mary Magdalene, depicted in a state of mourning beside the figure of the Crucified Christ (as can be observed in the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Berkovitsa).²³ (fig. 12) This substitution, which is somewhat unconventional, may be attributed to a technical or workshop-related error.

Among the various iconographic types of the Virgin, the most widely venerated and readily recognized by Bulgarian believers was the icon with the Three-Handed Mother of God.²⁴ This image was the principal object of veneration at the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, which maintained a dense network of metochia throughout the Bulgarian lands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵ The *krasnushki* icons reproduce the Russian version of this miracle-working icon, in which the third hand belongs to the Mother of God herself. It is difficult to determine whether this iconographic detail and its theological implications were fully understood by those who acquired Russian icons of the Three-Handed Mother of God. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that two such icons are preserved in the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God in Berkovitsa.²⁶ (fig. 10)

In Bulgaria, one encounters not only *krasnushki* reproducing Russian miracle-working icons, but also works originating from different artistic centres and dating to various periods. Their impressive number raises questions about the nature and significance of their reception. One important factor was the circulation of imported Russian books, which expanded knowledge of the history of individual prototypes and promoted their liturgical veneration and specific devotional functions. The book "Legend of the Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God" (*Skazanie za chudotvornite ikoni na Bozhiyata mayka*)

23 Gergova 2016, 144.

24 Gergova 2022, 16–107.

25 Gergova 2022, 11–12

26 Gergova 2016, 144. There are also *krasnushki* portraying the Three-Handed Mother of God in the History Museum in Samokov, in Saint Nedelya Church in Yarlovo, near Samokov (personal notes from my work on terrain).

published in Moscow in 1864 and now preserved in the nunnery in Samokov, is a case in point.²⁷ Books like this were most likely present in the book repositories of monasteries, in churches, and possibly in private homes. The extent to which Russian miracle-working icons of the Mother of God were known among Bulgarians is further evidenced by a manuscript supplement added to an old printed book in the church of the village of Cherven Breg near Dupnitsa.²⁸ This is a troparion to the Mother of God, commemorating the icon that sanctified Great Russia.

The calendar published by Pencho Radev informed its readers that the Feodorovskaya icon with the Mother of God aided women in childbirth, that the Mother of God of Tikhvin preserved the health of young children, and that the icon with the Mother of God of the Burning Bush offered protection against fire and thunderstorms.²⁹ One may suppose that most of the people who venerated Russian folk icons were not closely familiar with Russian or Bulgarian texts detailing the histories of the individual miracle-working prototypes. They were perhaps drawn primarily to the inscriptions on the icons themselves, which conveyed expressive messages, such as “*Image of the Mother of God, helper in childbirth*” or “*Soothe of suffering people*.”

Icons with Christ Pantokrator, which are also widely found, are invariably depicted half-length, with the right hand raised in blessing and the left hand holding an open Gospel bearing the inscription: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). (figs. 13, 14) Occasionally, icons featuring the Mandylion, supported by two angels, are also encountered (fig. 15). An icon depicting a Deesis with saints, including Zosimas and Savvatiy of Solovki in proskinesis (Sedmitsa/Week), is preserved in the village church of Draganitsa near Berkovitsa. Another example, an icon with the Mother of God in Deesis holding a scroll with her prayer to Christ, forms part of a three-part Deesis preserved in the museum of Valchedrun.

Given the exceptional veneration of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in Russia, it is unsurprising that his icons are particularly numerous among the *krasnushki*. He is consistently depicted half-length, sometimes holding a closed Gospel and at other times an open one bearing the inscription: “He stood on a level place, and a great crowd of his disciples” (Luke 6:17). In the background, two medallions usually appear, containing the busts of Christ holding a Gospel and of the Mother of God holding an omophorion. (fig. 16)

27 Polimirova 2002, 198. The book contains thirty-four engravings of miracle-working icons. I have made numerous attempts to consult the volume in person, but all efforts have so far been unsuccessful.

28 Author's own on-site observation.

29 Gergova 2010: 35.

Saint John the Baptist is also a popular figure. He is depicted in various iconographic forms, including half-length representations holding a chalice with the child Jesus portrayed as the “Lamb of God”, and whole-length depictions featuring scenes from his life, such as his Nativity and his Beheading. Alternatively, he is portrayed as an icon with the Severed Head of the Forerunner on a platter. (fig. 17)

Among the most widespread *krasnushki* folk icons is Saint George mounted on horseback slaying the dragon. Rarer is the icon with Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki (fig. 18), likewise depicted on horseback striking an enemy, with one of his miracles shown in the background—the rescue of the two maidens holding an icon with Saint Demetrius (Church of Saint Athanasius, village of Nikolaevka near Varna).

Other saints appear more rarely in *krasnushki icons*, among them Saint Gerasimos of the Jordan (Regional Museum of History in Varna) (fig. 19), Saint Stylianos holding an infant (Medkovets),³⁰ Saint Spyridon (National Archaeological Museum; village of Nikolaevka), the Prophet Elijah with scenes from his life (Pleven; (fig. 20), Veliko Tarnovo), Saint Tikhon the Miracle-Worker (Regional Museum of History in Pleven) (fig. 21), and groups of saints such as Gurias, Samon, and Abibus (two examples in the City Art Gallery in Plovdiv).

Among female saints, the most frequently depicted are Saint Parasceve (Pyatnitsa) (fig. 22), Saint Varvara (fig. 25), Saint Catherine, and Saint Mary of Egypt, occasionally accompanied by scenes from their lives in the background. Some representations include noteworthy iconographic details. For example, the martyr Paraskeva is sometimes shown wearing a closed, mitre-like crown adorned with an image of the Mandylion. In an icon from the Church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in Vidin, both the nimbus and the crown of Saint Paraskeva are covered with repoussé metalwork executed by a local goldsmith; the image on the crown resembles a bust of Christ Emmanuel.

The thematic range of the *krasnushki* is complemented by icons with Saint Constantine and Helen, the Three Hierarchs, and the Synaxis of the Apostles. There are also some scenes like the Nativity of Christ (fig. 26), the Dormition of the Mother of God (fig. 27), the Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov) (fig. 28), and Virgin the life-giving spring (fig. 25).

Icons depicting the Mother of God, Christ Pantokrator, and individual saints in half-length are arranged in a highly uniform manner. Their nimbuses often overlap the upper frame, while inscriptions may appear on the lower frame, the upper frame, or directly within the background. This consistency suggests

30 Gergova 2017, 7.

that such icons may have been conceived as parts of a series and purchased as complete sets. It is also significant that they frequently share similar dimensions, approximately 30 × 40 cm, indicating that they were clearly intended for domestic use rather than for placement in the royal tier of an iconostasis, despite the appropriateness of their iconography for such a context.

Although these Russian folk icons were produced rapidly and in large batches, they nonetheless display a range of stylistic qualities. The majority are characterized by a simplified, unadorned manner, achieving their decorative effect through the contrast of a limited number of colors. The palette is generally restrained, consisting of ochre, yellow, orange, green, brown, and dark blue, and in some cases reduced to only two or three hues. Facial features are rendered schematically, formed by black and white outlines.

A noteworthy technique—found not only in *krasnushki* but also in other types of folk icons—is the use of white brushstrokes to highlight the palms of the hands and the bare feet of the figures. Landscape elements are presented without detail, with terrain indicated by a few patches of green in varying shades.

Icons of the Virgin and Child, Christ Pantokrator, and Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, however, often reveal a greater aspiration toward ornamentation. In these examples, silver backgrounds are employed (gold is not used in *krasnushki*), frequently embellished with engraved circles and other decorative motifs along the contours of the background, the nimbuses, and occasionally the garments themselves. The omophorion of the Mother of God and the chiton and himation of Christ are sometimes further enriched with engraved designs of large branches with curling leaves.

Finally, a small number of icons, likely executed by more skilled painters working from high-quality prototypes, display a more refined handling of form, with greater attention to the modeling of bodies and drapery, resulting in a heightened sense of volume.

The wooden panels of these icons were prepared in a largely uniform manner. They were made of coniferous wood, with the boards joined on the reverse by two carved-in braces positioned opposite one another. Most braces have a flat surface, although profiled examples are also encountered. Their shape varies, most commonly trapezoidal, though near-rectangular forms also occur. Over time, some of these braces have become detached. In several cases, a sheet of newspaper can be observed glued to the wooden support. Technical analysis of a group of Russian icons conducted in Alba Iulia in the context of the RICONTRANS project has identified the same feature, suggesting a shared workshop practice.³¹

Despite variations in date and quality, all *krasnushki* share a readily recognizable style developed by icon painters from the villages of the Vladimir region, a style that evidently enjoyed broad appeal among audiences with a particular aesthetic sensibility. The purchasers of these icons were predominantly peasants, as indicated by their frequent presence in rural churches. Nevertheless, inscriptions occasionally reveal that members of the educated strata were also drawn to them. This raises once again the question of what accounted for the widespread success of *krasnushki* among Bulgarian believers. Their affordability, an easily comprehensible visual language, and their direct distribution to villages all contributed to their popularity, together explaining the commercial success of the *ofenya*. A comparable phenomenon can be observed within the Bulgarian lands themselves: workshops in Tryavna, for example, produced large quantities of icons, diptychs, and triptychs for the market. These works shared similar stylistic and technical features, were sold at markets and fairs, and enjoyed a warm reception, as evidenced by their broad distribution across the Balkans.

At present, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether Russian and Bulgarian icon peddlers were in direct competition or to establish the pricing strategies they employed. Nor do existing sources clarify the motivations behind the choices of Bulgarian buyers. One may nevertheless hypothesize that the mythologized image of Russian Orthodoxy and the cultural prestige associated with Russia among the Bulgarian population played a role in shaping these preferences.

31 Filip, Casote & Badea 2023: 78.



FIGURES



Fig. 1. Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie), first half of 19th century, City Art Gallery, Pleven.
Photo: Angel Nikolov. © City Art Gallery, Pleven.



Fig. 2. Mother of God Kazanskaya, 19th century, Domestic icon of Bachevi family, Yambol.
Photo: Tereza Bacheva.



Fig. 3. Four-part icon, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Kyustendil. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Kyustendil.

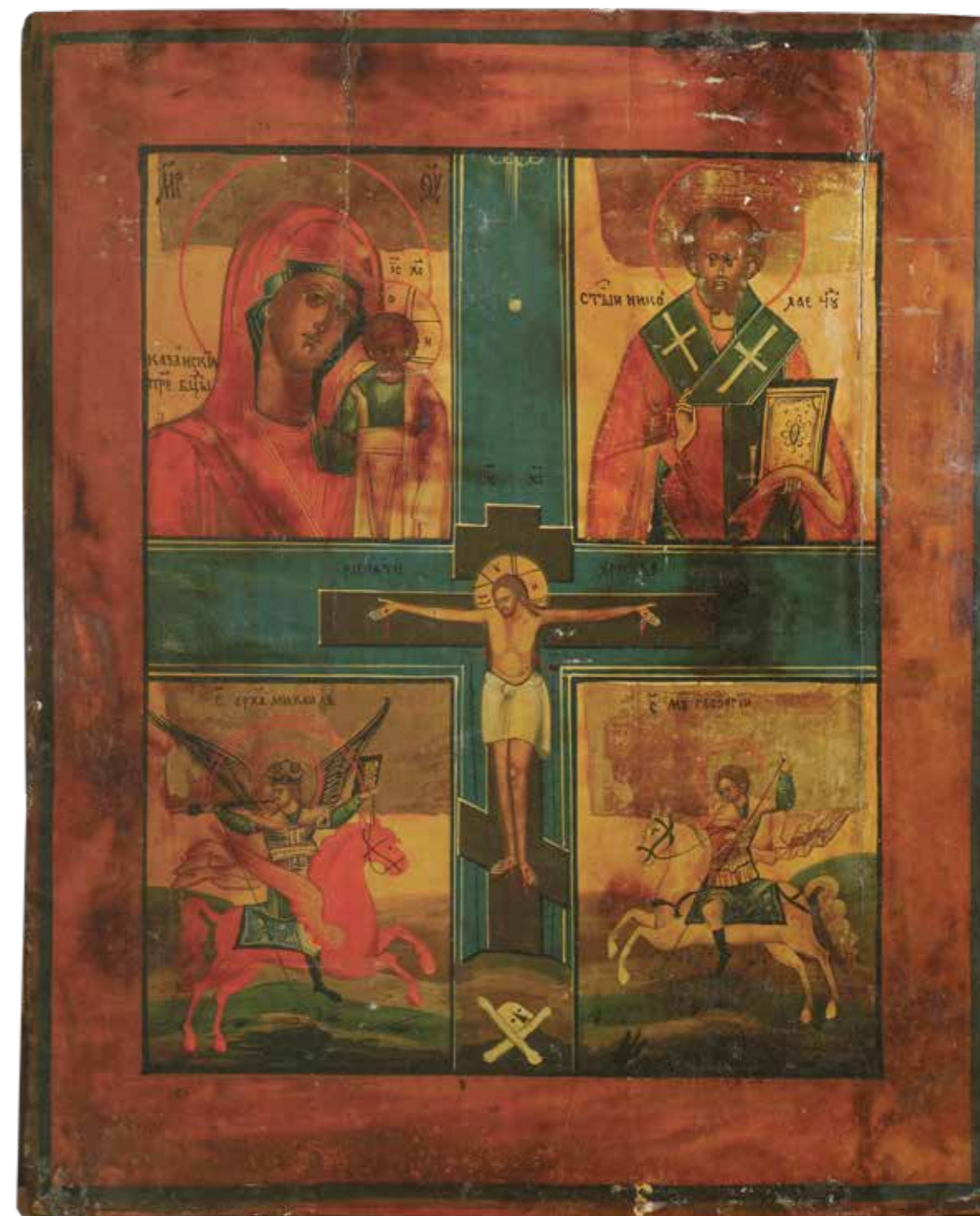


Fig. 4. Four-part icon, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum- Veliko Tarnovo. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Veliko Tarnovo.



Fig. 5. Resurrection of Christ and Descent into Hell, with twelve scenes, 1874, Historical Museum-Lom. Photo: Ivan Vanev. © Historical Museum-Lom.

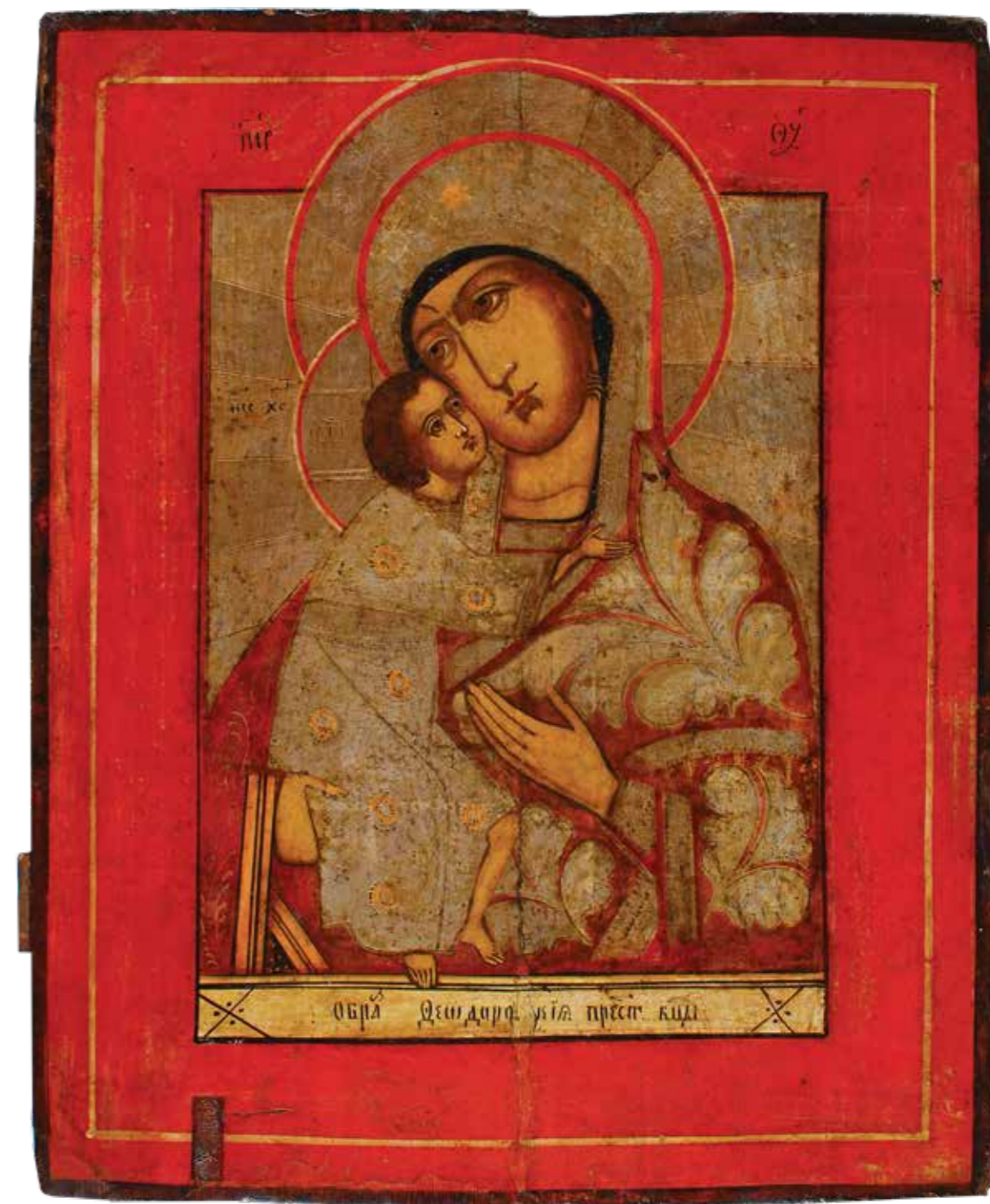


Fig. 6. Mother of God Feodorovskaya, City Art Gallery-Berkovitsa, 19th century. Photo: Ivan Vanev. © City Art Gallery-Berkovitsa.

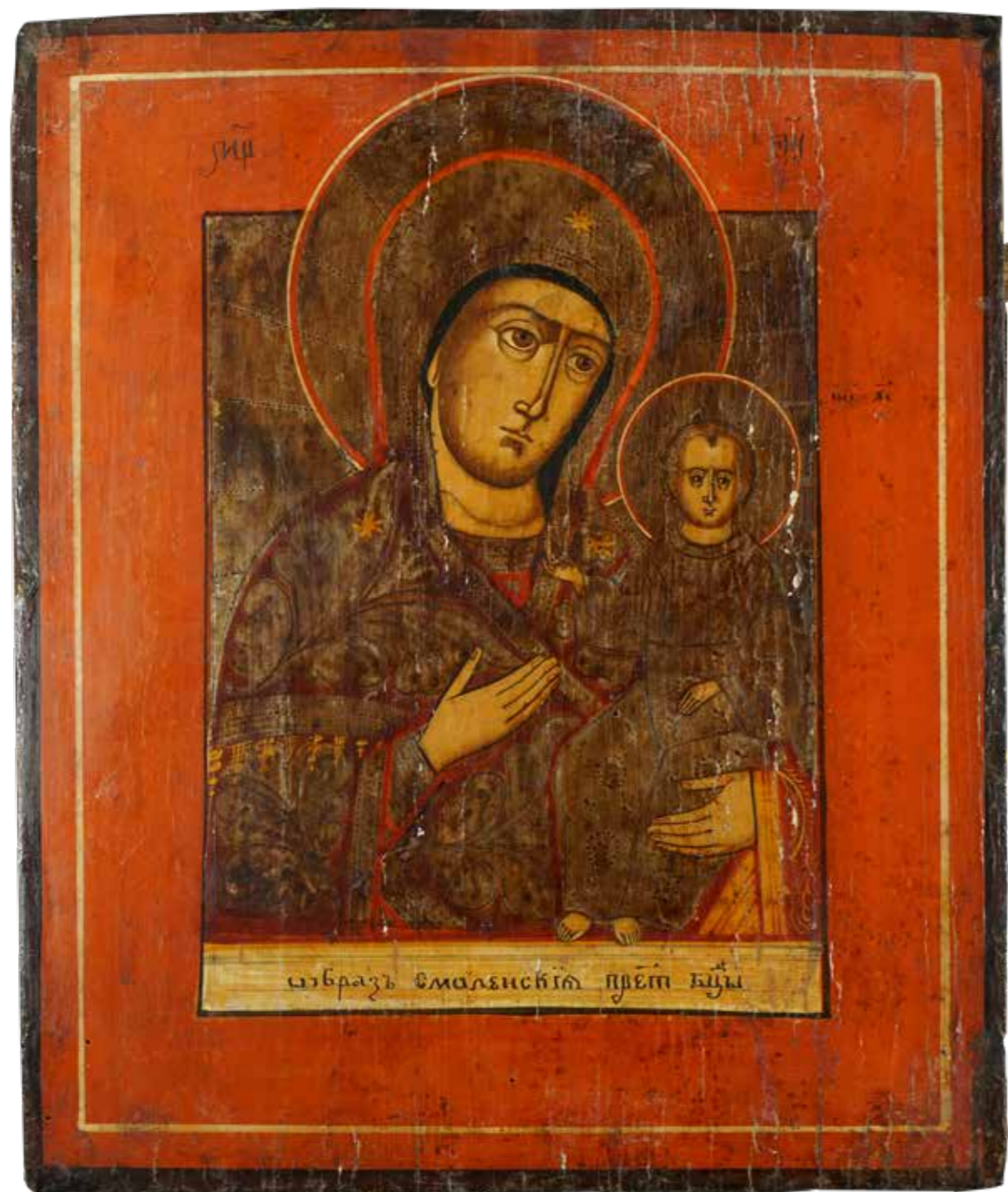


Fig. 7. Mother of God Smolenskaya, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Veliko Tarnovo.
Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Veliko Tarnovo.



Fig. 8. Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie), 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Varna.
Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.



Fig. 9. Mother of God Tikhvinskaya, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Veliko Tarnovo.
Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Veliko Tarnovo.



Fig. 10. Three-handed Virgin, 19th century, Church of the Nativity of Mother of God, Berkovitsa.
Photo: Ivan Vanev.



Fig. 11. "O All-Hymned Mother" (*O Vsepetaya Mati*), Historical Museum-Samokov. © Historical Museum-Samokov.



Fig. 12. Saint Maria Magdalena, 19th century, Church of the Nativity of Mother of God, Berkovitsa. Photo: Ivan Vanev.

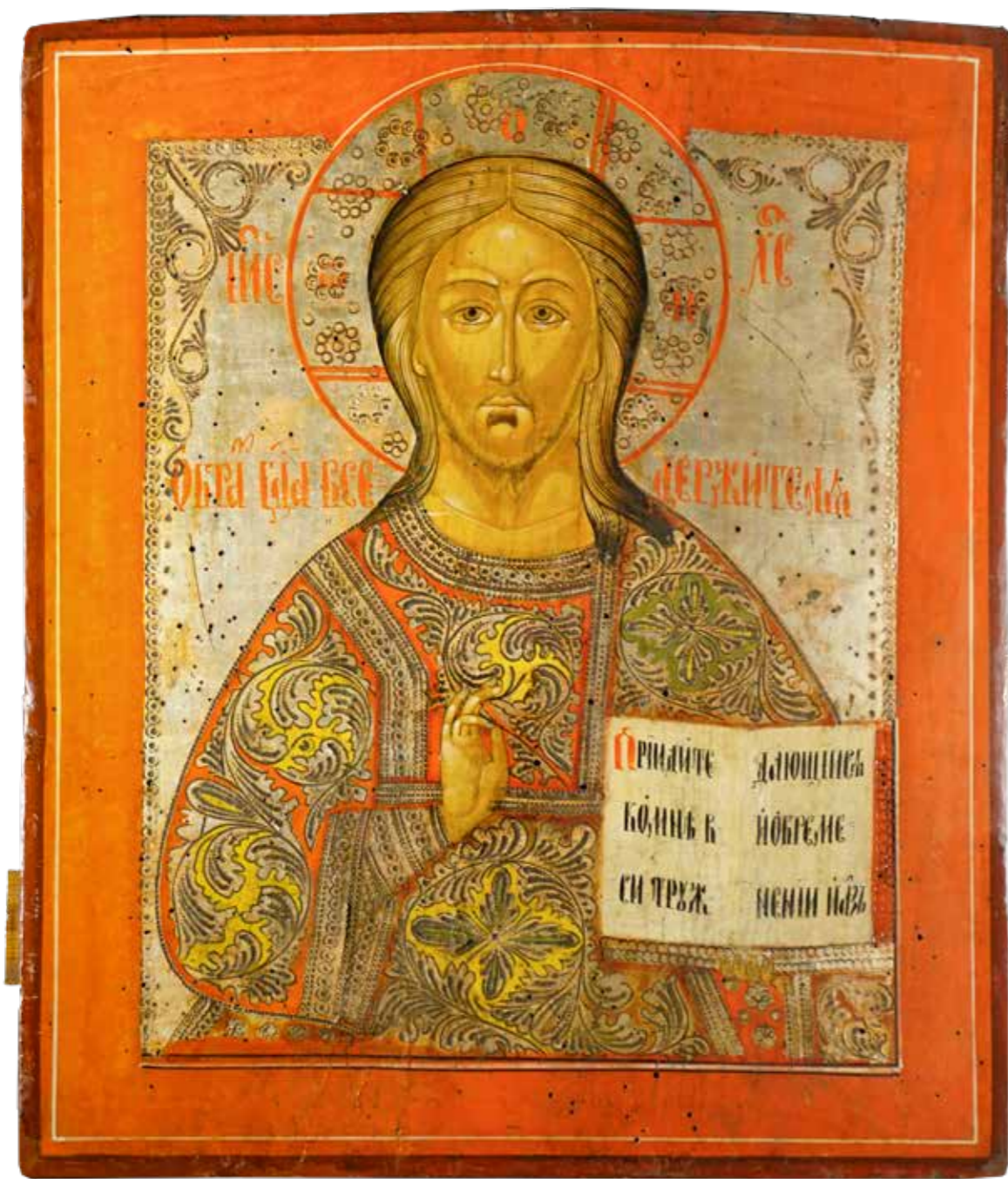


Fig. 13. Christ Pantokrator, 19th century, City Art Gallery-Pleven. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © City Art Gallery-Pleven.



Fig. 14. Christ Pantokrator, 19th century, Koprivshtitsa Museums. Photo: Ivan Vanev. © Koprivshtitsa Museums.

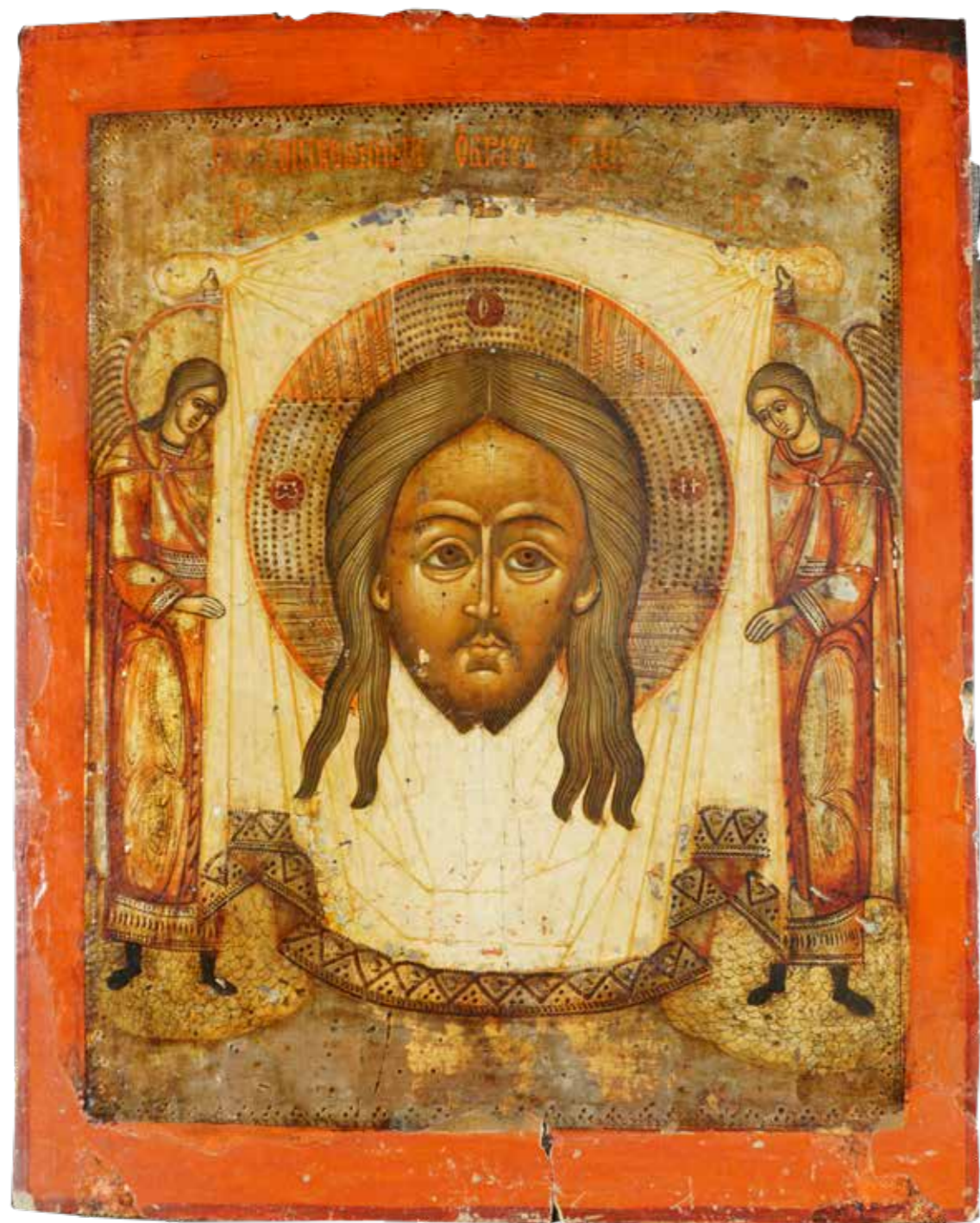


Fig. 15. The Savior Not Made by Human Hands (Mandylion), Regional Historical Museum-Varna.
 Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.

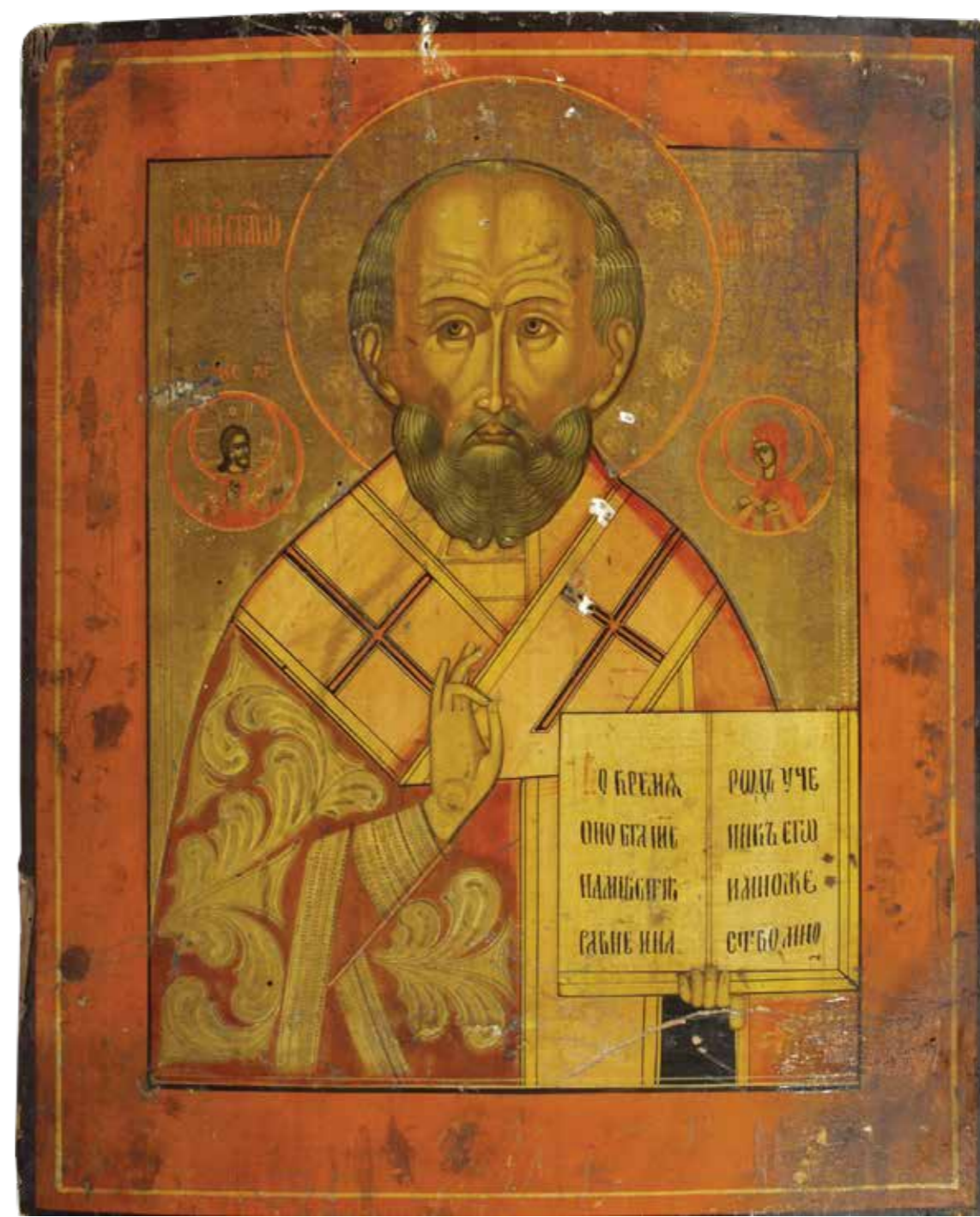


Fig. 16. Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, 19th century, National Archaeological Museum-Sofia.
 Photo: Georgi Linkov. © National Archaeological Museum-Sofia.



Fig. 17. Saint John the Baptist, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Varna. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.



Fig. 18. Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, 19th century, City Art Gallery-Plovdiv. © City Art Gallery-Plovdiv.



Fig. 19. Saint Gerasimus of Jordan, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Varna. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.



Fig. 20. The Fiery Ascent of Prophet Elijah, 19th century, City Art Gallery-Pleven. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © City Art Gallery-Pleven.

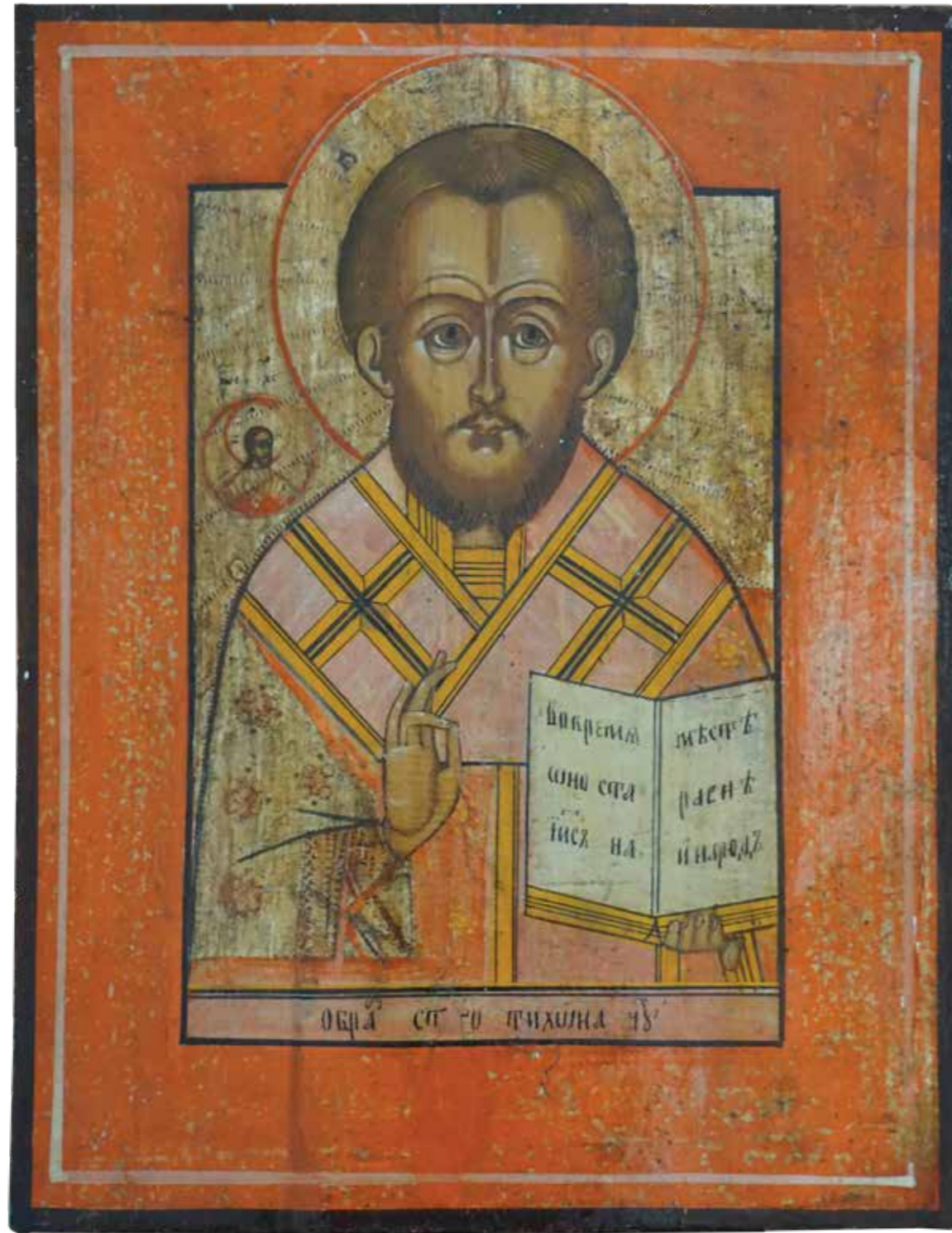


Fig. 21. Saint Tikhon the Miracle Worker, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Pleven. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Pleven.



Fig. 22. Saint Parasceve (Pyatnitsa), 19th century, City Art Gallery-Gabrovo. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © City Art Gallery-Gabrovo.



Fig. 23. Saint Varvara, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Varna. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.



Fig. 24. Mother of God "Do not lament me, O Mother", Regional Historical Museum-Varna. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Historical Museum-Varna.



Fig. 25. Mother of God Life-giving Fountain, 19th century, City Art Gallery-Burgas. © City Art Gallery-Burgas.



Fig. 26. Nativity of Christ, 19th century, City Art Gallery-Plovdiv. © City Art Gallery-Plovdiv.



Fig. 27. Dormition of the Mother of God, 19th century, Regional Historical Museum-Vidin. Photo: Ivan Vanev. © Regional Historical Museum-Vidin.

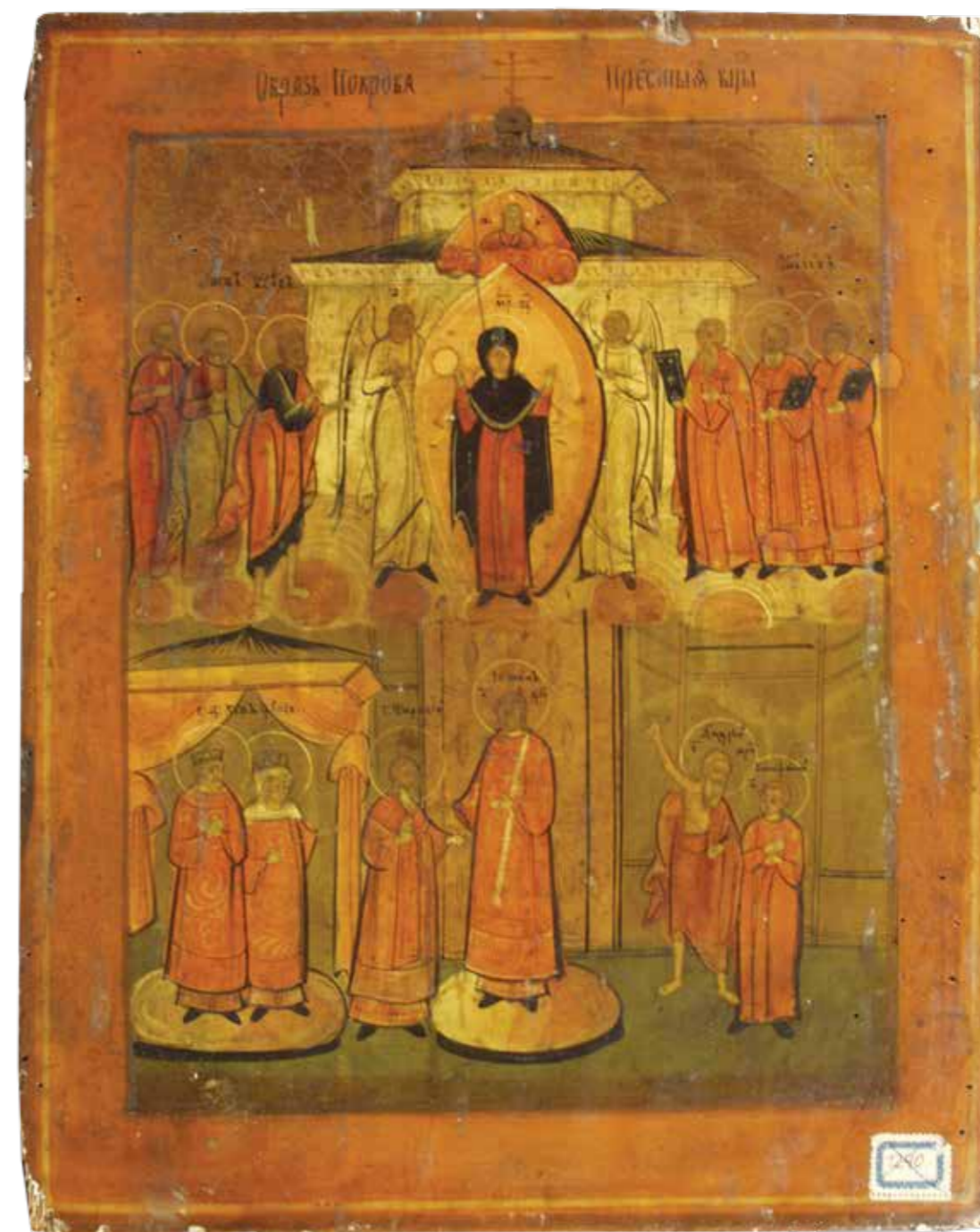


Fig. 28. Mother of God *Pokrov*, 19th century, National Archaeological Museum-Sofia. Photo: Georgi Linkov. © National Archaeological Museum-Sofia.

Visual Representations of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Bulgaria

Ivanka Gergova

Abstract:

Saint Alexander Nevsky (1221–1263), Prince of Vladimir and military commander, is venerated through a multifaceted cult that evolved over the centuries, with his popularity steadily increasing until it took on dynastic significance. Among Bulgarians, the saint became popular after the liberation from Ottoman rule (1878), as he was the patron of the Russian Emperor Alexander II. Gradually, a number of monastic and parish churches in Bulgaria were dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky, and icons of him, painted in Russia, began to appear. Some Bulgarian iconographers also included the saint in their repertoire, either following Russian models or creating their own versions. The popularity of Saint Alexander Nevsky gradually declined a few decades after the liberation, due to changes in the country's political landscape.

Keywords: Saint Alexander Nevsky, Nineteenth century, Saint-patron, Bulgarian Art, Russian icons

Saint Alexander Nevsky (1221-1263) served as Prince of Vladimir and military commander who achieved legendary status on account of his important victories over Swedish invaders in the 1240 Battle of the Neva, and over German crusaders at Lake Chud. From his canonization by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1547 onwards, a multidimensional cult for him developed over the centuries, with his popularity gradually growing to eventually acquire dynastic dimensions.¹ The Romanov dynasty embraced him as their patron saint from the beginning of the seventeenth century and thereafter three of the Russian emperors were named after him.²

1 For a basic overview Saint Alexander Nevsky's cult dimensions see Blagovernny 2021; Svyatoy blagovernny.

2 Ivannikova 2021, 12–14, 44.

Under the reign of Peter the Great, Saint Alexander Nevsky was officially proclaimed the heavenly patron of the empire and main protector of the monarchs in their battles against enemies. Subsequently, a large number of churches and chapels dedicated to him proliferated across the territory of the former Russian Empire and beyond.³ The representations of Saint Alexander Nevsky are extremely diverse and underwent evolution: in the early period he was depicted as a great schema-monk (a degree he attained shortly before his death), then as a ruler, whose military glory was conveyed through the image of a knight dressed in armor or chain mail, with the saint's poses, the details of his attire and his attributes of power changing over time.⁴

While sporadically depictions of other Russian and East Slavic saints featured in Bulgarian art of the Ottoman period (such as Saints Boris and Gleb,⁵ Saint Demetrius of Rostov, Saints Anthony and Theodosius of Pechersk,⁶ among others), up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century the figure of Saint Alexander Nevsky remained largely obscure. The tide changed decisively when Alexander II declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877, and since Saint Alexander Nevsky was the emperor's heavenly patron, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 constitutes a turning point for the popularity of the saint in the Bulgarian lands.

For Bulgarians, the image of the saint became associated with the struggle for liberation, particularly through its use on specific battle flags. The flags of two of the Bulgarian voluntary army units, in particular: the 1st Military Brigade and 5th Military Brigade, the First and Fifth, bear the image of the Russian saint. Made in the Russian Empire, the two battle flags carrying the image of Alexander Nevsky were in fact delivered to the Bulgarian battalions only after the end of the war.⁷ However, far from becoming just museum exhibits, the banners were transferred to regiments of the Bulgarian Land Army and were actively utilized in subsequent military operations. The flag of the 1st Military Brigade was inherited by the 1st Sofia Battalion, and that of the 5th Military Brigade after the war was appropriated by 23rd

3 Savel'ev 2021, 328–381.

4 Abramenko, 490–577; Belik 2021, 578–649; Ivannikova 2021, 6–67.

5 Some scholars have suggested that the 15th-century icons of Saint Boris and Gleb in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Veliko Tarnovo replicated older medieval icons underneath them. See Koseva 2015.

6 Dilevski 1956, 9–15; Chekova 2007; Chekova 2008; Chekova 2010; Chekova 2013.

7 According to an inscription on one side of the standard of the 1st Military Brigade, it was sponsored with funds from Bulgarian municipalities in Russia and Romania. The flag of the 5th Military Brigade bears an inscription above the pike: "Kiev 1877, October 18." See: Naydenova 1977, 116, 117. It was probably one of these flags that Russian consul in Plovdiv Nayden Gerov mentioned in a letter to I. S. Aksakov dated May 14, 1877, where Gerov announced that the Bulgarians in Romania wanted two flags to be made for the first two battalions of the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps. One of the flags was requested with the image of Saint Alexander Nevsky and the Bulgarian coat of arms, and the other – with the image of Saint Nicholas and the Bulgarian coat of arms. See: Iz arkhivata 1911, 9, No. 8.

Infantry Kazanlak Battalion of Bulgarian Land Army.⁸ The nephew of Emperor Alexander II, prince Alexander of Battenberg, who became Bulgaria's first post-liberation ruler, also manifested an image of Saint Alexander Nevsky on one side of his personal banner.⁹ Additionally, the Regional Museum of History-Silistra published the image of a flag with an embroidered depiction of Saint Alexander Nevsky in an album dedicated to Silistra during the Russo-Turkish wars.¹⁰ These banners and their representations of Saint Alexander Nevsky will be explored in greater detail in the second part of the chapter.

In 1887 the newly formed Bulgarian army introduced holidays for the individual military formations corresponding to a particular saint's feast date. The 5th Danube Infantry Regiment and the 4th Artillery Regiment were designated to celebrate Saint Alexander Nevsky's feast day.¹¹

Essentially, Saint Alexander Nevsky gained huge popularity in recognition of Alexander II's role in liberating Bulgarian lands from Ottoman rule. It was Bishop Meletius of Sofia who first proposed that Bulgarians express their gratitude to Alexander Nikolaevich by embracing the emperor's heavenly patron. On 19 February 1878 Meletius sent a thank you address on behalf of the citizens of Sofia and the surrounding areas to Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, commander-in-chief of the Russian army during the war of 1877-1878.¹² In his address the bishop proposed that one of the altars of the future Saint Stephen Church be dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky, accompanied by an inscription above the despotic icons of the iconostasis: "*Consecrated to the holy and faithful prince Alexander Nevsky in eternal memory and as a sign of our deepest gratitude for our deliverance by our liberator, the All-Russian autocrat Alexander Nikolaevich.*"¹³ Bishop Meletius's idea was not put into practice as there is no preserved church in Sofia dedicated to Saint Stephen.

In the Spring of 1879, deputies at the Bulgarian Constituent Assembly in Veliko Tarnovo proclaimed Bulgarians' gratitude to the Tsar-Liberator in a number of speeches and telegrams. Member of Parliament Lyuben Karavelov put forward a proposal for the erection of a memorial church dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky, which was adopted unanimously.¹⁴ The church would commemorate Bulgaria's liberation and as a symbolic gesture it was to be erected on Chanli tepe – that is the Hill of Tsarevets

8 Krasteva 1996, 144.

9 Krasteva 1996, 146.

10 Silistrenskiiat krai 1978, illustrations on p. 62, 63. The annotation unfortunately contains no specific information on the banner.

11 Nedev, 1999, 70.

12 Tsŭrkovno-istoricheski i arkhiven institut pri Bŭlgarskata patriarshiiia, inv. 9026.

13 Sabev 1981, 266.

14 Dnevniitsi 1890, 229 (Plenary session of 13 April 1879).

where the palaces of the Bulgarian kings of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom had been erected. The subsequent Second National Assembly, elected in 1880, voted for the memorial church to be built in the new state capital of Sofia instead. The construction of today's Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral started on 19 February 1882 when the foundation stone was laid with pomp and circumstance, but most of it was built between 1904 and 1912.¹⁵

Simultaneously but independently of the decision of the Constituent Assembly, in 1879 Gen. Mikhail Skobelev proposed to the residents of Yambol the construction of a monastery dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky to commemorate the Russian and Bulgarian victims of the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. (*III. I*) The failed assassination attempt on emperor Alexander II on 2 April 1879 facilitated the choice of the memorial's patron saint. The modest monastery church was built in the same year on the Bakadzhishki Heights in the vicinity of the town of Yambol, near the remains of the local monastery "Saint Spas" (Ascension of Christ), which was burned down during the April Uprising of 1876.¹⁶

During the sessions of the Constituent National Assembly another initiative for a memorial to commemorate the dead of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 was discussed.¹⁷ A proposal was put forward to erect a memorial church on the actual site of the war's most dramatic battles on Mount Saint Nikola at the foot of the Balkan Mountains, just above the town of Shipka.¹⁸ The initiative was the brainchild of General Mikhail Skobelev's mother Olga Skobeleva, who had been engaged in charity work in Plovdiv, together with the Russian ambassador to Constantinople Nikolay Ignatyev. The church was dedicated to the feast of the Nativity of Christ, because that was when the great battle between the Russians and the Bulgarian volunteers, on one side, and the Turkish army, on the other, took place at the Shipka Pass. The committee for the construction of the church decided that it should have two more altars, one of which should be dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky.

In addition, political references to the Russian empire and Alexander Nevsky were also prominent in relation to the cathedral of the port city of Varna. On 18 August 1880, the Commission for the construction of the new cathedral church in Varna issued the following decisions: "1. The church shall be christened in the name of the Holy Mother of God and in the name of the ever-memorable Bulgarian benefactor Her Majesty the Russian Empress Maria Alexandrovna. 2. The church shall have three altars. The main altar shall be in honor and memory of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the

15 Paskaleva 1986, 2; Radkova 1999.

16 Manastir 2018; Sveti Spas planina 2018; Nikolov 2021, 317–323.

17 Dnevniitsi 1890, 229.

18 Todorov 2021, 21–24.

other two – of Saint Alexander Nevsky and Saint Nicholas.¹⁹ Bulgaria’s first post-liberation prince, Alexander of Battenberg and Emperor Nicholas II were among the church donors, and the name of the Russian emperor was inscribed as the cathedral’s patron on the iconostasis. The church building act specifies that it was issued during Alexander’s stay in the city of Varna, that the prince himself turned the first sod, and that Empress Maria Alexandrovna was his aunt.²⁰

Shortly thereafter another important Bulgarian city followed suit in paying homage to the popular saint. In 1881, Bishop Grigori Nemtsov of Dorostol and Cherven undertook the expansion of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Ruse, which envisioned the addition of two new chapels: one to the north, dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky, and one to the south, dedicated to the saints Cyril and Methodius. To that end, Bishop Grigori commissioned the icons from the Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra. In a letter to the lavra’s abbot he explained the purpose of the new chapel: “In order to express our gratitude to our Lord the Provider for our liberation, the flock the city of Ruschuk consider it our most sacred responsibility to build a chapel in the city of Ruschuk together with an altar in the name of Saint Alexander Nevsky, the Angel of the late Sovereign, our Liberator, Alexander II, so that it reminds future generations of the High Christian self-affirmation of the Russian Tsar and the Russian people -- the liberation of our people from the Turkish yoke.”²¹ As evidenced by a preserved inscription, the two chapels were completed and ornamented in 1885.²²

On a similar note, Bishop Grigori had already written to prime minister Konstantin Stoilov that the villagers of Kazul Murat wanted to rename their village to “Batenberg,” to build a church in honor of Prince Alexander of Battenberg’s guardian angel, and to receive from the prince an icon with an inscription for the purpose. There is no information if the villagers received the requested icon, but what is known is that the church they built later was dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin, Saint George and Saint Paraskeva.²³

At the same time, the inhabitants of a Plovdiv neighborhood populated by settlers from the towns of Koprivshtitsa, Kalofer and neighboring villages, also undertook to erect a church co-dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky. Consequently, they founded an organizing committee to coincide with Saint Cyril and Methodius day on 11 May 1881 tasked with building a new church in honor of the two brothers,

19 Tomova 2006, 88.

20 Dryanovski, Rachev 2002, 6, 7.

21 Mutafov 2022, 24. The chapel has been converted into a museum attached to the church, and its iconostasis has been dismantled.

22 Ibidem, 26, ил на с. 183.

23 Mutafov 2021b, 22, 23.

but adding Saint Alexander Nevsky to the commemoration.²⁴ In all likelihood, the second dedication was introduced because of Alexander II’s recent assassination and the idea of the locals was not to just build a neighborhood church, but a memorial church to Bulgaria’s liberation from Ottoman rule.

The emergence of all these churches, chapels and altars dedicated to Alexander Nevsky naturally led to the proliferation of icons with his depictions. As his popularity grew in the decade after the liberation, not only were a number of Russian icons imported, but the Russian saint increasingly became part of the iconography of Bulgarian icon painters.

The earliest-dating icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Bulgaria has been discovered in the museum house of artist Stanislav Dospevski in the town of Pazardzhik.²⁵ (Cat. 14) According to Natalia Komashko’s attribution, the Pazardzhik icon was painted some time at the turn of the 19th century in either Palekh or Suzdal (in Russia). The lower half of the icon is composed of four full-size figures against a landscape background: those of Saint Alexander Nevsky, Saint Dimitry of Rostov,²⁶ Saint Peter Bishop of Moscow, and Saint Righteous Anna. The upper half features the New Testament Holy Trinity in clouds. Saint Alexander Nevsky himself is in a three-quarter frame, looking up towards the sky, bare-headed, and with his left hand held against his chest. He is dressed in armor, draped in a red cloak, and wears a sword at his waist. The image appears to have been influenced by the icon of Peter I in the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in Saint Petersburg, painted in 1727-1728 by Andrei Pospelov. Pospelov’s depiction of Peter I is baroque in spirit and style and it allegedly reproduces portraits of Peter I in which the emperor is dressed as a Western European knight.²⁷ Besides perceived traces of influence, no actual information exists about how Stanislav Dospevski came into possession of the Alexander Nevsky icon. Scholars have hypothesized that Stanislav Dospevski brought it to Pazardzhik from Russia in 1857 upon his return after graduating from the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts and that it was used as a home icon.²⁸

For the purposes of this study, I will first look at Saint Alexander Nevsky’s images in Bulgarian churches, iconostases and icons that were executed in Russia. One of the very first Russian iconostases sent to Bulgaria immediately after the liberation from Ottoman rule is located in the church of the village of

24 Pizhev, Linkov 2004, 105.

25 Inventory 6. Dimensions: 52x69x2,5 cm. Unpublished.

26 Judging by the iconography, the image most likely represents Saint Demetrius of Rostov, and during the restoration the Church Slavonic initial “P” (standing for R) was unintentionally changed to “B.”

27 Belik 2021, 580, 581.

28 On Stanislav Dospevski, his education in Russia, and the impact of this education on his later work, see Simeon Tonchev’s article in this collected volume.

Brestovitsa, Ruse Province. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, senior Russian military officials were stationed in Brestovitsa for five months. Since Prince Sergei Maximilianovich Romanovsky of Leuchtenberg lost his life in battle on 12 October 1877, his funeral service was held in Brestovitsa. Immediately after the war, Grand Dukes Vladimir Alexandrovich and Yevgeny Romanowsky sent an iconostasis to the village, which arrived in Brestovitsa in July 1879.²⁹ The first tier of the small modest iconostasis features an icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky, depicted knee-length, draped in a red cloak, with his right hand relaxed and his left hand resting on a sword. No information is available on where the iconostasis was produced.

The icons at the Varna Cathedral iconostasis were also commissioned in Russia, in 1886.³⁰ One of the icons depicts Saint Alexander Nevsky in full body, dressed in chain mail, red boots, draped in an ermine mantle, bareheaded. His right hand is held against the chest, and his left hand points to a table covered with a long, ornamented tablecloth, upon which, on a red cushion, lay his crown and scepter. This was a widely popular iconographic formula that we see replicated in other icons.

For example, similar iconography to the Varna icon can be observed on the iconostasis of Saint Alexander Nevsky chapel in the church of Saint Trinity in Ruse. Though the iconostasis was subsequently moved to the town of Loznitsa (Razgrad province) in 1979, we have a vague idea about its appearance from a photograph that captured it from a distance.³¹ The icons for both chapels in the Ruse cathedral were painted in the workshop of the Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra, and arrived in Ruse in 1884.

Further parallels can be observed in the Saint Nicholas church in the town of Tutrakan. The icon of Alexander Nevsky located in the Feasts tier of the iconostasis greatly resembles the Varna icon in terms of details, style and even handwriting. The iconographer is probably Hieromonk Simeon of the Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra who in 1889 painted some icons for the Saint George cemetery church in Tutrakan.³² Perhaps the icons in the Varna Cathedral were also made in the icon painting workshop of the same Russian monastery. Comparable iconography marks the patron icon of the iconostasis in the church at the Bakadzhik (Yambol) monastery (fig. 2). While the precise date of the making of this icon is unknown (it is some time before 1884, when the church was consecrated), it is known that the icons were made by Russian monks.³³ The monastery church also holds a small chromolithograph on a metal

29 Mutafov 2014a, 100, 101, illustration on p. 177.

30 Dryanovski, Rachev 2002, 10.

31 Mutafov 2022, 25; Mutafov 2014b, 84, Illustration on p. 366.

32 Mutafov 2014a, 287; Dürzjaven arkhiv – Ruse, F. 43K, Op. 1, a.e. 153.

33 Nikolov 2021, fig. 10.

base with identical iconography. The iconography resembles that of an icon kept in the sacristy of the Shipka Monastery, donated in 1901 with the following dedication: “*To the Russian Shipka Church on the Balkans, an offering from N. A. Smirnova.*”³⁴”

The image of Saint Alexander Nevsky on the personal standard of Prince Alexander of Battenberg bears the same iconography. The flag’s front side features the patron saint against white background, while the back side depicts Holy Mandylion with the inscription “God is with us.”³⁵ The Prince took the standard with him upon his abdication but his wife eventually donated it to the Sofia Central Military Museum in 1937.

A variation of this iconographic formula is similarly replicated vis-à-vis the Alexander Nevsky icon in the “Art Gallery Dimitar Dobrovich” in the city of Sliven, with the inscription: “*Painted in 1878 by the lower ranks of the 139th Morshan Infantry Regiment.*”³⁶ (Cat. 44) The unknown iconographer was perhaps a soldier from the icon-painting villages of Vladimir province, or in any case, someone experienced in icon painting. The holy prince is depicted in an interior with a column and a dropping red curtain, on his left side there is a table with the ruler’s insignia, and Christ blesses him from a heavenly segment.

Alexander Nevsky, standing by a table with his insignia of power, is depicted on an icon offered for sale by Auction House “Enakor” in Sofia,³⁷ as well as on the middle piece of a triptych with the archangels Michael and Gabriel on wings with a silver revetment (1879).³⁸

The iconographic model for all the above images was the hugely popular and widely reproduced icon originally painted by academician Timofei Andreyevich Neff circa 1867 for the chapel dedicated to Alexander Nevsky in the Summer Garden of Saint Petersburg.³⁹

Apparently this most popular nineteenth-century iconographic solution was very well known to the Bulgarians. Curiously, the iconographic schema of the warrior prince draped in an ermine mantle, next to the table with the royal insignia, was used by a Bulgarian icon painter for the image of Saint Tsar Boris Tarnovsky (sic) in an icon.⁴⁰

34 Inventory 90, Dimensions: 24x43x3,5 cm. Unpublished.

35 *Za chestta i slavata* 2009, Fig. on p. 120, 121.

36 Inventory 65, Dimensions: 35,5x35x2 cm. Unpublished.

37 Enakor 2020, Auction on December 10, 2020, Catalogue # 46. The icon is covered with silver revetment, and there are enamel ornaments on the halo. Dimensions 22.5x18x2.5 cm.

38 Enakor 2020, Auction on December 10, 2020, Catalogue # 22. Dimensions 50,5x71x4 cm.

39 Ivannikova 2021, 52, 167, Illustration 38, 39, Catalogue 14.

40 Enakor 2021, Catalogue 205. The icon is attributed to icon painter Racho Tiholov from Gabrovo. Dimensions 30x22 cm.

The icons on the iconostasis of the Shipka Memorial Church were completed in 1901 at the Russian Saint Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos.⁴¹ The patron icon portrays Saint Alexander Nevsky knee-length in identical clothing and pose as in the above-listed icons.⁴² (fig. 3) The one difference is that the table with the royal insignia is missing, although the ruler's left hand points in the same direction. This version is also very widespread.⁴³ It was used for the images on the flag in the Regional Museum of History-Silistra and on the flag of the 1st Bulgarian Volunteer Battalion (at The National Museum of Military History in Sofia.)⁴⁴

As can be deduced, the depiction of the pious prince, with one hand in front of his chest in an expression of humble faith, and the other hand holding a sword or scepter, was very popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A series of icons and one church banner depict him in this way, from the waist up.

On a metal church banner in the central nave of the Shipka Monastery church (fig. 4), the holy and pious prince is depicted in armor, draped in a red mantle lined with ermine, with his right hand against his chest and his left hand resting on his sword. In the same pose but with a scepter in his hand, he is portrayed on a chromolithography printed on metal plate, censored in 1898, which was donated to the Shipka Monastery on 29 January 1902 by the Saint Righteous Tsar Boris Society in the town of Stara Zagora.⁴⁵ (fig. 5) Saint Alexander Nevsky is portrayed in the same style on the two chromolithographs found in the collection of the Pleven Panorama,⁴⁶ which was built in 1908: on the iconostasis of the chapel Saints Cosmas and Damian in the courtyard of the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, Chirpan (1900),⁴⁷ and on the altar of Saint Nicholas Church in Cherven Breg, Dupnitsa district. The latter were probably printed in the Zhako and Bonaker factory in Moscow.

The image on the banner of the 5th Volunteer Battalion presents Saint Alexander Nevsky in a slightly different manner.⁴⁸ Depicted waist-length and against a gold background, the saint is clothed in scale armor with a large gold cross on the chest, draped in a cloak, and holding a large eight-pointed cross in his right hand, with his head and gaze turned to the sky. Both the pose and the cross in the prince's hand are perceived as representing a prayer for victory addressed to heaven.

41 For details see Gergova 2024.

42 Nikolov 2021, fig. 21.

43 Ivannikova 2021, 54.

44 Za chestta i slavata 2009, Fig. on p. 107.

45 Inventory 014, Dimensions: 27x31x2,5 cm. Unpublished.

46 Inventory. 222/Fig 120, Dimensions: 31,3x26,5x2,2 cm. Unpublished.

47 Dimensions: 31x27 cm.

48 Za chestta i slavata 2009, 93.

In terms of full-figure images, one representative icon showing the holy prince in full height, with one hand in front of his chest and the other holding a shield, was sold by Auction House "Enakor."⁴⁹ Judging by its size, the icon could have been part of an iconostasis. Since typically the warrior nature of the saint is symbolized by a sword in his hand, such representations are widespread. Perhaps there were other images in which Saint Alexander Nevsky leans against his shield, but I am aware of only one such icon, painted and consecrated at the Russian Saint Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos, most likely dating from the late 19th or early 20th century.⁵⁰

Another representative icon in which Saint Alexander Nevsky is depicted in full height is housed in the collection of the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.⁵¹ (fig. 6) The saint is turned slightly to the right, with hands crossed over his chest, and a helmet and shield thrown by his feet. The icon has an elegant silver frame that forms a pointed arch above the saint's head. The revetment bears the stamp of N. G. Vladimirov, a goldsmith from Saint Petersburg active in his craft between 1898 and 1917.⁵² The icon was originally presented as a gift to an unknown person probably named Alexander, and the inscription on the obverse side reads: "May God keep you safe, 23 May 1907" ("Да хранишь Васъ Господь, 23 мая 1907"). In 1960, Russian iconographer Nikolai Shelekhov gifted the icon to Patriarch Cyril of Bulgaria. This iconographic formula was also in circulation at the time: it was used, for example, in a drawing by a Palekh icon painter dated 1899 and in some other icons.⁵³

Finally, with regard to the Russian icons of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Bulgaria, I will focus on a small icon in the Bakadzhik Monastery, which has quite a distinct iconography.⁵⁴ (Cat. 121) The oil-painted icon was originally in possession of the marching chapel of the 118th Shuisky Infantry Regiment, but in 1879 it was donated to the Bakadzhik Monastery.

The saint is depicted waist-length in armor richly ornamented with gold, with a hoop crown on his head, draped in an ermine cloak, holding a sword and an open scroll placed on a table.

49 Enakor 2021, Catalogue 206. Dimensions 120x48, 5 cm.

50 Blagovernyy 2021, Fig. on p. 321.

51 Inventory 4095, Dimensions: 32,1x18,8x2,3 cm. See: Ikoni 2024, Catalogue 548 (Author of catalogue entry: Ivanka Gergova).

52 Ivanov 2002/1, 178, 179, No. 811. A small icon with Saint Alexander Nevsky in bust holding his helmet, with similar plating by the same goldsmith and the same assayer, dated 1904–1908, is kept in the Hermitage, Saint Petersburg. See: Svyatoy blagovernyy 2021, Catalogue 20.

53 Blagovernyy 2021, 80, 138.

54 Nikolov 2021, 321, fig. 9. Dimensions: 31x26 cm.

According to the expert opinion of Anna Ivannikova from Saint Petersburg, for which I thank her, the icon was painted by an academically trained artist of average abilities, sometime between the middle and third quarter of the 19th century in Central Russia. This iconographic variation enjoyed widespread popularity in Russia.⁵⁵ The earliest known example is an anonymous engraving (mezzotint) from the third quarter of the eighteenth century, printed at the factory of Mikhail Artemiev in Moscow.⁵⁶ In the middle of the nineteenth century, it was reproduced with minor modifications in a lithograph printed by Giuseppe Daziario in Paris.⁵⁷ In this version the saint is holding a sheet with a map of the area where the Battle of Neva took place. In the icon from the Bakadzhik Monastery, the map itself is not painted; instead the saint is holding a white rolled-up scroll in his hand.

One of the most prolific Samokov icon painters Nikola Obrazopisov, a prominent Slavophile and advocate of Pan-Slavism, depicted a whole series of Russian saints in his frescoes, and two of them – Saints Boris and Gleb – he even included in his Icon paintings manual. It is difficult to estimate how many images of Saint Alexander Nevsky he painted, since his prolific artwork has not been fully documented.

In Obrazopisov's accounting ledger for 1883, there are two entries on p. 97 where the name of Saint Alexander Nevsky is mentioned.⁵⁸ One entry refers to a side door for the iconostasis of Rila Monastery. The central iconostasis and the two iconostases in the chapels of the main church originally had side entrances with curtains instead of doors. Obrazopisov had agreed to decorate four such doors – two for the main iconostasis and one for each of the two chapels. He painted Saint Vladimir for the Church of the Assumption of Saint John of Rila, and Saint Alexander Nevsky for the Saint Nicholas Chapel.⁵⁹ Underneath the saints Obrazopisov painted coats of arms borrowed from Hristofor Žefarović's *Stemmatographia*, and on the southern door of the central iconostasis he included the coats of arms of Russia and Moscow.⁶⁰ Saint Alexander Nevsky's image features on the door of the northern chapel. Not necessarily seeking a historically accurate interpretation, Obrazopisov depicted the saint as a ruler wearing a crown, a short tunic, and a long red mantle, holding a scepter and a white flag on a long post in such a manner that it is not visible what is on the flag. According to one of the Rila Monastery's ledgers, the artist received a payment of 3600 *gros*h for four doors and four small icons for the Main

church.⁶¹ A different entry reveals that an additional 130 *gros*h were paid for two festive icons of Saint Vladimir and Saint Alexander Nevsky, which judging by the context were executed by the same Samokov master. The icon titled "Saint Vladimir of Kiev during his Holy Baptism as Basil" is preserved in the monastery depot. The other icon is in the second tier of the iconostasis at Saint Nicholas Chapel and depicts the saint knee-length, in royal robes, holding a banner.

It is not known whether the Rila monks proposed the combination of the two Russian saints for the iconostasis doors or the artist himself. What is known from Obrazopisov's ledger is that he received the same order in Vidin and this time the idea was clearly his for we do not find similar images in Vidin churches.

In 1895 Nikola Obrazopisov also painted an icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky in the Church of Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple in Panagyurishte. He placed the image "Saint Alexander Prince Nevsky (of Russia)" on the south wall of the church between Saint King Trivelius of Bulgaria and Saint Tsar David of Bulgaria within an extensive gallery of Slavic saints, including several Russian ones.⁶² Here the Russian saint wears a crown and a red cloak, holding a spear and a cross in his hands. In 1899, Obrazopisov painted and signed a panel with the image of Saint Alexander Nevsky (of Russia) at the Church of Saint Theodore Thyron in the village of Dragushinovo, Samokov Municipality. (fig. 7) "Saint Alexander Nevsky (of Russia)" represents a full-length figure of a warrior, in armor, with a helmet on his head, holding a spear and a scepter in his right hand, and a shield in his left hand.⁶³

The analysis of Nikola Obrazopisov's depictions of Saint Alexander Nevsky demonstrates that he neither adhered to a particular iconographic version, nor did he use any Russian models.

In 1886, brothers Ivan and Nikolay Dospevski from Samokov painted the despotic icons for the iconostasis in the restored church of the German Monastery of Saint John of Rila near Sofia.⁶⁴ Underneath the icon of Christ, there is an image of Saint Alexander Nevsky on a small medallion, which Iliana Chekova also attributes to the Dospevski brothers.⁶⁵ This attribution cannot be accepted without reservation, however, as the image seems to be overpainted and incongruous with the smooth texture of the despotic

55 Belik 2021, 606.

56 Svyatoy blagovernnyy 2021, Catalogue 52.

57 Belik 2021, 607.

58 Vasiliev 1965, 452.

59 Koleva 1979, Fig. on p. 24; Enev 1997, Fig. 270.

60 Hadzhidimiev 1935, 4; Obrazopisov 1935, 4.

61 Arkhiv Rilski Manastir, a.e. 3083, p. 41.

62 Gergova 2004, 240; Chekova 2013, 297.

63 The frescoes in this church have not been published. I took personal field notes and photographs during a 2014 expedition of the Association for Anthropological Research "Ongal" led by Rosen Malchev and Konstantin Rangochev.

64 Temelski (no publication date available), 8–11.

65 Chekova 2013, 299, Fig. 10.

icons and the idealized images in them. From the perspective of nineteenth-century Bulgarian art this is a typical warrior representation: a male figure depicted with a helmet on his head, dressed in armor and chlamys, armed with a spear and a shield, and carrying a sword at the waist.

In Samokov, there are two more icons of Saint Alexander Nevsky at the Museum of the Metropolitan Church. Judging by iconographic styles, they must have been painted by two different artists. One of them bears a donor inscription: “*This image was donated by priest Dimitri Iovanov from the village of Shiroki Dol in 1900.*” Shiroki Dol is a village in Samokov municipality, so the icon was probably at some point donated to the city’s Metropolitan Church. It is attributed to one of the last iconographers from the Samokov School of Icon-Painting – Mikhail Belstoynev.⁶⁶ The artist must have used a Russian icon as a model judging by the depiction of the saint as holding a banner with a Holy Mandylion with a crown placed on a table next to him.⁶⁷ However, it should be noted that if indeed such a model was used, it was somewhat Bulgarianized, at least as far as the saint’s attire and the type of table and tablecloth are concerned.

With regard to the other icon, it bears no inscriptions and displays a very different type of iconography. The saint is situated in an interior with drawn curtains, there is also a table next to him, but with a sphere placed on it. Saint Alexander Nevsky bears a crown on his head, dressed in armor with a cherub on his chest and the usual ermine cloak, and raising a sword in his right hand. The style suggests that the icon was painted by one of the Samokov primitivist icon painters of the later period. Both icons are placed in profile wooden frames at a later time and both were probably originally exhibited in the church, and subsequently moved to the museum.

In 1883, artists Milosh Yakovlev and Marko Minov from the village of Karakoy (Drama region in Eastern Macedonia) painted the Saint Nicholas Church in the village of Topolnitsa (Dupnitsa Municipality). On the western wall of the central nave they painted the images of Saint Vasa of Sofia, Saint George of Sofia, Saint Alexander Nevsky and Saint Tsar Ivan Shishman.⁶⁸ (fig. 8) Intended as a visual rendition of important historical events, this ensemble portrays two local martyrs (Saint Vasa of Thessaloniki is Bulgarianized here) and two rulers. The image of Tsar Ivan Shishman, the last ruler of Bulgaria in Tarnovo before it fell under Ottoman rule, is unique for Bulgarian art of the period. He is rendered

66 Mitreva, Nikolov 2018, no number of the illustration is provided.

67 An icon with similar iconography was produced by a Palekh master in Saint Petersburg in 1861. See: Belik 2021, 634.

68 Dimitrov 2012, 148, 149, 224.

as wearing an ermine cloak and crown and holding a tricolor flag with a heraldic lion in his hand.⁶⁹ Next to Tsar Ivan Shishman is Saint Alexander Nevsky, the patron saint of the emperor who liberated the region from Ottoman rule. The saint is dressed as a warrior and also holds a large white banner depicting the Russian imperial coat of arms – a double-headed eagle.

During the same year Milosh Yakovlev also painted the Church of Saint George in the Giurgevo neighborhood of Sapareva Banya, which, too, displays an image of Saint Alexander Nevsky, located on the balcony railing, in a framed field. In the inscription the saint is described as “king.” (fig. 9)

The saint is depicted knee-length, he wears armor and a helmet, holding a cross and a palm branch, and waving two-color flag with the Bulgarian coat of arms – a lion standing on hind legs, similar to the flag in the hands of Tsar Ivan Shishman from the frescoes in the village of Topolnitsa. As mentioned above, Milosh Yakovlev and Marko Minov come from the village of Karakoy, currently located in Northern Greece.⁷⁰ At the time when these frescoes were created, the birthplace of the masters was still part of the Ottoman Empire, while Topolnitsa and Sapareva Banya were already within the borders of the liberated Principality of Bulgaria. Consequently, the two icon painters were able to freely give expression to their patriotic sentiments and attitude towards the recent liberation from Ottoman rule. Like Nikola Obrazopisov, the Karakoy masters did not adhere to any popular iconographic formula in their depictions of Saint Alexander Nevsky. Rather, they freely combined elements of stereotypical images of warrior saints and rulers, giving preponderance to the historical personality of the saint and the political repercussions of his deeds.

The icons at Saint Saint Cyril and Methodius and Saint Alexander Nevsky Church in Plovdiv were painted by artist Georgi Danchov. The icon of co-patron Saint Alexander Nevsky (1886)⁷¹ depicts him in full height, dressed in the by now typical armor and red chlamys, with his hand in front of his chest, holding a banner with an image of Holy Mandylion and the inscription “God is with us.”⁷² Koprivshitsa notable Dusko Kesjakov donated the icon to the church. Most likely the iconographer modelled his image on a Russian icon. The images of Saint Alexander Nevsky holding a banner with Holy Man-

69 The colors on the flag are green, white, and red. The Bulgarian national flag, approved by the First Bulgarian Constitution of 1879, consists of white, green and red, in this sequence. The iconographers did not adhere to the official flag, but seem to have used the flag of the Bulgarian revolutionaries from before the Liberation instead. See: Ivanov 1996, 26–29.

70 Dimitrov 2007, 161–170, Fig. on p. 507; Dimitrov 2012, fig. on p. 125.

71 Moskova 2008, Fig. on p. 18.

72 We do not have evidence, though it is not improbable, that Georgi Danchov had seen the personal flag of Prince Alexander of Battenberg with the same image and inscription on one side. For the artist’s attitude towards the Bulgarian prince, whose portrait he painted in 1879, see: Moskova 2008, 14.

dylon seem to follow the mosaic iconostasis icon in Saint Isaac's Cathedral, executed in the mid-19th century according to T. A. Neff's design.⁷³ This model, too, eventually became widely reproduced,⁷⁴ sometimes combined with the version in which the saint is next to a table with his royal insignia.⁷⁵

Georgi Danchov turned once again to the image of the Russian saint in 1906 when he painted the icons for the Saint Nicholas Chapel in the Russian museum house in the town of Pordim.⁷⁶ The icon of Alexander Nevsky stands out iconographically, the face of the prince is personalized, and it is possible that a concrete person is portrayed. The image lacks the pomposity, heroism and majestic appearance with which Saint Alexander Nevsky is typically rendered. The attributes that point to the saint's warrior valor and piety are his sword and cross.

Georgi Danchov is one of the emblematic protagonists of the Bulgarian Revival: an artist, photographer, educator, revolutionary, and eventually politician in the post-liberation period.⁷⁷ His life trajectory took him to Russia during his revolutionary period, where as early as 1878 he painted an oil portrait of Emperor Alexander II (currently exhibited in the City Art Gallery of Plovdiv.)⁷⁸

In 1912, the Saint Charalambos Church in the village of Hrabrino (Plovdiv Province) was painted by an anonymous iconographer, most probably coming from Asenovgrad.⁷⁹ Although in a very poor condition and with an illegible signature, the lower southern part of the apse displays a full-length image of a warrior saint holding a banner with an image Holy Mandylion. In all likelihood this is a representation of Saint Alexander Nevsky. The position of the saint in the apse is atypical and inconsistent with canonical requirements so it was probably determined by special considerations.⁸⁰

The images of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Bulgaria were produced over the three decades immediately following the liberation from Ottoman rule. As such, they expressed Bulgarians' feelings of euphoria for their newly gained freedom and carried certain political content. They embodied both Bulgarian

73 Belik 2021, 608.

74 Svyatoy blagovernnyy 2021, Catalogue 12.

75 Belik 2021, 634.

76 Asparuhova 2007, 57, 58, Fig on p. 123.

77 Vasiliev 1965, 625–636; Dinova-Ruseva 1985, 39–42.

78 Moskova 2008, 13.

79 Personal field notes.

80 Adjacent to the church is the grave of priest Todor Georgiev. According to the inscription on the tombstone, Todor Georgiev was an advocate for peasants' participation in the April Uprising in 1876, who subsequently fled to Russia, and died in 1895. The question of whether his personality and fate have anything to do with the choice of the image of Saint Alexander Nevsky on the altar could be the subject of future research.

official policy and the sentiments of different strata of the Bulgarian people, even as some representations were the product of Russian initiatives. As the young Bulgarian state was going through turbulent periods, there was a frequent change of governments of different orientations, including Russophobic ones. The vicissitudes of official Bulgarian-Russian relations were also symbolically reflected in the veneration of Saint Alexander Nevsky. The construction of the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia offers the most striking example. The completion of the cathedral took decades between planning and consecration as it was closely related to the frequently changing Bulgarian governments, which either accelerated or conversely slowed down the construction.⁸¹ The lowest point in Bulgarian-Russian relations occurred in 1915 during the First World War, when a Russian battleship bombarded Varna. In retaliation, Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand proposed to the government to officially change the dedication of the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and to rename it as Saint Cyril and Methodius Cathedral. The Council of Ministers, headed by Vasil Radoslavov voted in favor of the decision so by 1919 the church had new patrons, while the icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky and the commemorative inscriptions were removed. It was not until 17 November 1919, that the National Assembly decided to repeal the patron-changing decision and the original dedication was restored.⁸²

In the twentieth century, Saint Alexander Nevsky - the heavenly patron of Russian “emperor-liberator” Alexander II - gradually lost its relevance and popularity among Bulgarians and continued to be depicted in rare cases and exclusively in Russian churches across the country.

81 Nachov 1924, 12.

82 Nachov 1924, 36, 37.





Fig. 1. Monastery of Saint Alexander Nevsky near Yambol, 1879. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 2. Iconostasis icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky, Monastery of Saint Alexander Nevsky near Yambol, Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 3. Iconostasis icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky, Shipka Monastery, 1901. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 4. Church Banner, Shipka Monastery. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 5. Saint Alexander Nevsky, 1902, Shipka Monastery. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 6. Saint Alexander Nevsky, National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Sofia. © National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.



Fig. 7. Saint Alexander Nevsky, 1899, Church of Saint Theodore Thyron in the village of Dragushinovo, Samokov Municipality. Photo: Ivanka Gergova.



Fig. 8. Saint Vasa of Sofia, Saint George of Sofia, Saint Alexander Nevsky and Saint Tsar Ivan Shishman, painters Milosh Yakovlev and Marko Minov, 1883, Saint Nicholas Church in the village of Topolnitsa (Dupnitsa Municipality). Photo: Vladimir Dimitrov.



Fig. 9. Saint Alexander Nevsky, painter Milosh Yakovlev, 1883, Church of Saint George in the Giurgevo neighborhood of Sapareva Banya. Photo: Vladimir Dimitrov.



Politics, Piety and Icons during the Russo-Turkish Wars in the Bulgarian Lands (18th – 19th centuries)^{1*}

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Abstract:

This article examines the circulation of Russian icons in the course of the Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with an emphasis on the conflicts that took place in the Bulgarian lands. It traces the religious motivation through which Russian rulers presented themselves as patrons and liberators of the Balkan Orthodox peoples under Ottoman rule, as well as the idealized view Bulgarians held of Russia and its monarchs. Various cases and situations in which Russians and Bulgarians gave each other icons during the wars are discussed in detail.

Keywords: Eighteenth century, Nineteenth century, Russo-Turkish wars, Russian icons, Bulgaria

Ever since the Middle Ages, Russian armies went to war with the blessing of the Church, which sent its priests along with the soldiers, “armed” with miraculous icons as a mighty defence against enemy weapons, and as a guarantee to win victories on the battlefield. The icon of the Mother of God Vladimirskaia, allegedly painted by the evangelist Luke, accompanied the Great Prince Andrej Bogoljubskij in his successful campaign against the Volga Bulgars (1164). In 1395, Moscow’s deliverance from the troops of Tamerlane was attributed to the same icon, which is why in the centuries that followed it became one of the most venerated relics of the Muscovite state.²

¹ *A note on the transliteration of personal and place names used by the author. Bulgarian names are rendered in accordance with the Bulgarian Transliteration Law of 2009. Russian names are rendered phonetically, with the exception of the names of some rulers such as Ivan IV the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine II, Alexander I, Nicholas I, Alexander II, the name of the often-mentioned commander-in-chief of the Russian army Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder, and the names of the popular saints Sergius of Radonezh and Alexander Nevsky. This is done solely to facilitate the English speaking readers.

² Vakhrina – Shchennikova 2005, 8–38.

The icon of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, brought from Thessaloniki to Vladimir in 1197, was transferred to Moscow in 1380, and with it, as well as with the blessing of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, is associated the victory of the Great Prince Dmitrij Donskoj over the troops of the Golden Horde under the command of Mamaj on the Kulikovo Field in 1380.³ Before the same battle, the prince also prayed before the icon of Holy Mother of God “Donskaja,” which later accompanied Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible in his campaigns to capture Kazan (1552) and Polotsk (1563); in a tent church in the vicinity of Moscow, Tsar Fjodor Ioannovich prayed before it for the salvation of the capital from Tatar invasion (1591).⁴

The icon of the Mother of God Blachernitissa, brought from Constantinople in 1653, travelled with Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich during his campaign against Smolensk in 1654.⁵

The icon “Apparition of the Holy Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh”, painted in 1587 on a board from the old coffin of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, was taken by Aleksej Mikhailovich in his campaign against Poland in 1657, and subsequently accompanied the Russian army in 1703 in the war against Sweden, in the Crimean War (1855), the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), the Russo-Japanese War (1905) and World War I (1914-1917).⁶ In Emperor Alexander I’s letter of thanks to Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, who sent the icon through the Emperor as a blessing for the Moscow militia on the eve of the battle against Emperor Napoleon I at Borodino in 1812, Saint Sergius is explicitly named “holy champion of the Russian military forces”.⁷

Key Motives in Russian Wars Manifestoes against the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth-Nineteenth Centuries

In order to understand the role of the Christian religion, piety and Orthodox art in the Russo-Turkish wars, we need to get a sense of the motives and goals that guided the Russian monarchs in their con-

³ Tolstaja 2000, 118–121 (№ 28). In the Regional Historical Museum – Veliko Tarnovo (Museum “Revival and Constituent Assembly”, Inventory № 358) there is an icon “Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki kills Mamaj” from the beginning of the eighteenth century, which reminds of the Battle of Kulikovo Field in 1380.

⁴ Shchennikova 2007, 664–667.

⁵ Sokolova 1997, 414.

⁶ The “travels” of the icon are evidenced by the inscriptions on it: Leonid 1881, 5–8 (№ 6a–b); Opis’ 1920, 18–19. A replica of this icon, donated around the middle of the 20th century, is kept in Shipka Monastery. A small icon (31.2/26.5 cm) with the same subject from the second half of the 17th century is now in the possession of the RHM-Veliko Tarnovo (Museum of Revival and Constituent Assembly, Inventory № 389). See on the subject: Ignat’ev 1960, 56–62; Komashko – Gergova 2025, 179–199.

⁷ Kirillin 2016, 211–212. See also: Kirillin 2014, 201–247.

flicts with the Ottoman sultans. In the manifestos declaring war on the Ottoman Empire the issue of defending Christianity and the Orthodox faith played an excessively prominent role, which constituted a clear anachronism in “a modern age that was imbued with enlightenment, rationality, and increasingly secular attitudes.”⁸ Contrary to the latter trends, Russia’s war declarations enshrined the idea of the historically conditioned and divinely inspired mission of the Russian rulers (as the “heirs” of the former Byzantine emperors) to protect the Orthodox Church, and hence the Orthodox Balkan peoples under Ottoman rule.

As an example of the stereotyped formulas employed, one can cite Catherine II’s manifesto of 18 November 1768, according to which the Empress entered into her first war with the Ottoman Empire relying “on the justice of Almighty God, that He, having protected Russia for so long and in so obvious a manner, will even now bless and crown with success Our righteous arms taken for the defence of His Holy Church and Our dear Fatherland.”⁹

The real aims of the war were described in much more detail in the Empress’s *Appeal* to all Slavic peoples under Turkish rule, issued on 19 January 1769, and secretly circulated in Ottoman Bulgaria by the former officer in the Russian army, Lieutenant-Colonel Nazar Karazin, a Bulgarian by birth.¹⁰ In this document Catherine II addressed “the Christians who live in Moldavia, Wallachia, Muntenia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania and other regions,” stating that it is “deplorable the situation of these peoples, famous for their antiquity and piety, in which they now find themselves under the yoke of the Ottoman Porte.”¹¹ The tone of the statement indicates that the Empress intended to accomplish the great purpose for which her predecessors Peter the Great and Anna Ioannovna fought Turkey – to liberate these peoples (characterized as “pious sons of the Church of God”), who in turn were expected “to avail themselves of the advantageous circumstances of the present war to throw off the yoke and become independent as before, opposing wherever and whenever convenient the common enemy of all Christendom, and endeavouring to do him all sorts of harm.”¹²

Although the great goal of liberating the Balkan Christian peoples remained unfulfilled, the subsequent peace treaty signed at Küçük Kaynarca on 10 July 1774 reflected the spirit of Catherine II’s original manifesto. Article 17 proclaimed an unprecedented obligation of the Ottoman Empire to Russia: “The

8 Parvev 2009, 69.
9 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. 18, 762 (№ 13198).
10 Doynov 1987, 13–17; Doynov 2005, 211–215.
11 Petrov 1866, 103.
12 Petrov 1866, 104–105.

Sublime Port promises to permanently protect the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows the Ministers of the Imperial Court of Russia to make, upon all occasions, representations, as well in favour of the new church at Constantinople, of which mention will be made in Article XIV., as on behalf of its officiating ministers, promising to take such representations into due consideration, as being made by a confidential functionary of a neighbouring and sincerely friendly Power.”¹³ This provision of the treaty provided the Russian Empire with a legal basis to present itself henceforth as a protector and defender of the Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule.

Emperor Alexander I abstained from issuing a special document declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in 1806. His successor, Nicholas I, however, continued the old tradition: his manifesto of 14 April 1828 ended with the assurance that “all Our faithful subjects will unite with Us their warm prayers to the Most High, that His almighty power may lead Our Christ-loving host, and that Our arms, raised in defence of the Holy Orthodox Church and Our dear Fatherland, may receive His heavenly blessing.”¹⁴

Similar argumentation is employed in the manifesto of Nicholas I of 20 October 1853 in Russia’s ambitious, yet unsuccessful campaign to take the Holy Places in Palestine under its tutelage: “Russia is provoked to war: it remains for her, having committed her hope to God, to have recourse to the force of arms to compel the Porte to observe the treaties and treatises, and to give satisfaction for those outrages with which she has answered Our most moderate demands, and Our legitimate anxiety for the defence of the orthodox faith in the East, professed also by the Russian people.”¹⁵

Given the disastrous end of the Crimean War for Russia and the tragic events in the Balkans in 1876, it is no wonder that Alexander II’s manifesto of 12 April 1877 defended the launch of another war against Turkey. Articulating a different, though still religiously-tinged motivation, it spoke only of the Russian emperor’s constant active sympathy for the fate of the oppressed Christian population of Turkey. The failure of Christian Europe’s attempts to peacefully protect the Christians of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria from the arbitrary rule of the local authorities, necessitated resorting to arms.¹⁶

13 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. 19, 960 (№ 14164); English translation: Fraser 1854, 485. About the treaty, see: Mitev 2015, 134.
14 PSZRI. Ser. II. T. 3, 384 (№ 1947).
15 PSZRI. Ser. II. T. 28.1, 490 (№ 27628).
16 PSZRI. Ser. II. T. 52.1, 371 (№ 57155).

The Image of the Russian Tsars in the Minds of the Bulgarians under Ottoman rule

Before turning to the question of the role of icons in the course of the Russo-Turkish wars that took place on the territory of present-day Bulgaria, it is perhaps appropriate to outline how Bulgarians under Ottoman rule perceived the powerful northern state and its rulers. In the sixteenth century, the increasingly intense charitable activity of the first Russian Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible towards the Orthodox ecclesiastical structures in the Balkans, his triumph over the Kazan Tatars and his wars against the Crimean Tatar Khanate (a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire), gave the southern Slavs hope that the distant Muscovite ruler would one day crush Turkish domination and bring them deliverance. Thus a vague collective image of the mighty saviour-king “Grandfather Ivan” (“the White Tsar”) was born among the Bulgarians.¹⁷

The belief in him began to be transformed and strengthened during the reign of Peter the Great. On 22 February 1711 he declared war on Turkey and addressed himself to the whole Christian world, and “especially to the numerous Christian nations moaning under the barbarian yoke, such as Greeks, Wallachians, Bulgarians, Serbs, and many others.” In his manifesto, Peter the Great condemned the barbarian Turks as hereditary enemies of the name of Christ, as predators and robbers, and accused them of having by perfidy and breaches of the peace conquered “so many glorious and ancient countries.”¹⁸

The enthusiastic attitude of the Bulgarians towards the first Russian emperor is reflected in an apocryphal story about him, where the anonymous author claims, among other things, that the Muscovites pray to God to deliver the Bulgarians from the Hagarenes, and summarizes that “no emperor or king can defeat and overcome the Muscovite tsar... To this Tsar Peter be glory and praise.”¹⁹

The attitude of the Serbs towards this Russian ruler was similar – a portrait of Peter the Great was kept in the monastery of Velika Remeta (northern Serbia) until 1880, and it was an object of veneration during major church festivals (fig. 1).²⁰ In addition, fantastic tales of gigantic churches in the old Russian capital circulated among the Serbian population. According to one of them, the church of Saint John had a bell almost 40 metres (18 sazhen) wide,²¹ and according to another, a man could walk upright

through the lock of the church, built by the fantastic King John the Wolf’s Head, and there was a lamp so large in front of the icon of Saint Sava that the servants went to light it by boat.²²

These stories were very popular among the Bulgarians, as well, as until the second half of the twentieth century different versions were preserved in the folklore traditions of various parts of the Bulgarian lands: the town of Ahtopol and the village of Terziysko (Burgas region), the village of Padesh (Blagoevgrad region), and the town of Strelcha (Pazardzhik region), to provide a few examples.²³

Later Russian rulers who fought successful wars against the Ottoman Empire on Bulgarian land, such as Catherine the Great, for instance, also enjoyed special respect among the Bulgarians. In 1808 Captain Aleksandr G. Krasnokutskij was sent on a special mission to Istanbul by the Commander-in-chief of the Danube Russian Army, Field Marshal Aleksandr A. Prozorovskij. On October 25th, Captain Krasnokutskij spent the night in a Bulgarian house in the village of Chatak (today the village of Ticha, in the Eastern Balkan Mountains) and reported the following exchange:

I gave my host’s children some Russian silver coins (fig. 2), explaining to them that they bore the image of Catherine the Great. The Bulgarian and all his family kissed the image of the immortal Catherine with excitement! ‘We have long heard,’ they said, ‘of this great Empress. She wanted to save us from the cruel yoke: God grant that we may soon see the Russian troops...!’ I replied that God alone knew this, and advised them to be more cautious until then.²⁴

Captain Krasnokutskij’s advice was entirely appropriate as in the following years the bloody campaigns of the Russian Danube army in the lands of present-day Northern Bulgaria were accompanied by great destruction and disaster for the civilian population. An eloquent example of this were the actions of Major-General Guillaume Emmanuel Guignard, Vicomte de Saint-Priest, soon after his troops captured Svishtov on 1 September 1810. On the orders of the Commander in Chief, Count Nikolai Kamenskij, the Major-General burned²⁵ this rich Danubian town, including some of its churches (such as Saint Elias, Saint Nicholas, and Saint Transfiguration)²⁶ forcing the local Bulgarians to temporarily resettle north of the river on the territory of Wallachia.

17 Trifonov 1908, 26–56; Makarova 2003, 28–29.

18 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. 4, 629 (№ 2322).

19 Petkanova 1990, 308. See also: Angelov 1958, 251–259; Bankov 1975, 112, 116; Makarova 2003, 29–30.

20 Kachanovskij 1879, 17–18. See also: Stasov 1882, 208–214; Sonina 2023, 9–20.

21 Kachanovskij 1879, 19; Sokolov 1902, Протоколы, 70.

22 Sokolov 1902, Протоколы, 33.

23 Valchev 1975, 298 (№ 164), 300 (№ 166); Daskalova-Perkovska et al. 1994, 603–605 (№ 1920A).

24 Krasnokutskij 1815, 9; Kozhuharova 1985, 71–72; Makarova 2003, 30.

25 Mikhajlovskij-Danilevskij 1843, 87–88 (with a claim that only the fortifications of the town were demolished); Pophristov 1936, 39; Manchev 1982, 18–19, 25–26.

26 Ganchev 1929, 51, 56; Pophristov 1936, 47.

There is a Russian icon of the Virgin Mary preserved in the Art Gallery of Svishtov, which seems to remind us of these sorrowful events: on its back is inscribed the date 25 December 1810 and the name of its owner or donor (fig. 3). It is possible that it was acquired in Wallachia and brought to Svishtov after the return of some of the refugees to their devastated town.

In the autumn of 1810, the advance of the Russian troops continued from Svishtov to Nikopol, where the commander-in-chief remained, and the Vicomte de Saint-Priest descended southwards to Pleven, Lovech and Sevlievo. This created good opportunities for crossing the Balkan mountain range via the Shipka Pass and for penetrating into the plains of Thrace. According to the official interpretation of events, Lovech was taken by a surprise storm on the night of 30-31 January 1811, but parts of the Turkish garrison closed themselves in the mosques and in people's houses and offered stubborn resistance. In the end the Russians prevailed at the cost of 480 killed and wounded and took with them 1,400 prisoners, 10 cannon and 50 flags.²⁷

A not very clear inscription on an icon of Christ, which at the end of the nineteenth century was kept in the Church of the Nativity of Christ in the village of Arbanasi near Veliko Tarnovo, alludes to events related to the capture of Lovech by the troops of the Vicomte de Saint-PrieSaint It is possible, however, that the text was not read correctly by its publisher, and nowadays the location of the icon is not known and we cannot confirm it. The inscription reads: "This icon was taken from the Muscovites. When the Russians were returning from Lovech, they had robbed the churches and houses of the Christians. Then they had 20 people captured (?) and great boldness they had."²⁸

The sufferings that the Bulgarians experienced during the Russo-Turkish wars on their land led some to regard with much scepticism the capabilities of the Russian Empire to liberate them from Ottoman rule.²⁹ On 5 July 1877, the officer in charge of the Bulgarian Volunteers, Stefan Kisov, asked an 84-year-old Bulgarian peasant who lived in the village of Yurtchii near the present-day town of Gurkovo in southern Bulgaria if he was happy that he had been liberated from the Turks. According to Kisov's

27 Mikhajlovskij-Danilevskij 1843, 143–144.

28 Georgiev 1903, 122.

29 The Bulgarian historian P. Mitev explains the strange reluctance of the Russian generals to launch a major offensive in the Balkans during the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812 and their desire to suppress the spontaneous rebellious actions of the Bulgarians against the Porte with Alexander I's doctrine of preserving Turkey as a weakened neighbor of the Russian Empire, and notes: "The plundering and burning of settlements like Silistra, Svishtov and Nikopol shows... the predetermined perception of Bulgarian lands as merely a manoeuvring ground for military action that, sooner or later, was to be given back to the Porte. The same applies to the disregard for Sofroniy Vrachanski's "Petition" (Molba) from May 1811, which suggests the creation of an autonomous Bulgarian province within Russia" (Mitev 2015, 134).

report, the peasant "said that he had lived to see a fourth war between Russia and Turkey, that 48 years ago the Russian troops had come again, when they had been told that they were liberated, but that the Russians had gone again, leaving the Bulgarians in the hands of the furious Turks."³⁰

Nicholas I and Alexander II on the Battlefields of Bulgaria and the Special reverence of the Bulgarians for Them

Despite everything, the sentiment of most Bulgarians towards the Russian Empire and its rulers remained very strong. In the summer of 1877 the Russian war correspondent Vsevolod V. Krestovskij (1839-1895) documented the widespread custom among Bulgarians of Svishtov to keep portraits of the Russian emperors Nicholas I and Alexander II, who were considered their true legitimate Orthodox tsars, in their home iconostases.³¹

Two specific examples suggest that Krestovskij has described a real phenomenon. In 1871, the Russian vice-consul in Plovdiv, Nayden Gerov (1823-1900), reported to his embassy in Istanbul that in Eski Zagra (now Stara Zagora) the Turkish authorities had detained four travelling icon dealers from Vladimir province who were selling engravings depicting the Russian imperial family and the crossing of the Danube by Russian troops.³²

An even more telling example comes from the archive of the artist of the Samokov school of painting, Nikola Obrazopisov (1828-1915), where an unsigned engraving by Leipzig artist Johann Friedrich Schröter (1770-1836) is preserved,³³ which depicts Nicholas I on horseback with the legend "Nicolaus I Kaiser von Russland" (fig. 4).³⁴ Based on this engraving, Obrazopisov painted a portrait of the Emperor on one of the walls of his house in Samokov (fig. 5).³⁵ This engraving of Nicholas I seems to have been quite popular among the Bulgarians as it was traded in Vienna right after the end of 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish war by the publisher and engraver Anton Paterno. Additionally, an ink copy of it was preserved in an album of drawings and engravings that belonged to the famous Bansko

30 Kisov 1902, 153–154.

31 Krestovskij 1879, T. I, 386–387; Kozuharova 1985, 374–375; Makarova 2003, 30.

32 Nayden Gerov to Count Ignatiev, Philippopolis, 1 February 1871, in: Popruzhenko 1932, T. II, 4–5. About similar cases in other parts of the Balkans: Kostopoulos 2021, 198–199.

33 Historical Museum – Samokov, Inv. Д № 688 – 39.

34 The identification of the engraving from Samokov was made indirectly. In the catalogue of prints that the publisher and engraver Anton Paterno offered in 1832 in his shop in Vienna, there is an engraving described as follows: "Nicolaus, Kaiser von Russland, zu Pferd, lithographiert von Schrötter, in klein Folio" (Paterno 1832, 15).

35 About Obrazopisov see: Vasiliev 1965, 445–463; Peteva-Filova 1994; Gergova 2004, 235–246.

artist Toma Vishanov-Molera (ca. 1750-ca. 1811) and his descendants. (fig. 6).³⁶

The Obrazopisov archive also holds a signed engraving by Anton Paterno, which depicts two groups of eight Russian soldiers each with musical instruments (fig. 7): in the 1832 catalogue they are referred to as “Trompeter der Linien-Kürassiere” and are part of a series of engravings depicting soldiers and officers of various branches of the Russian army.³⁷ Following Paterno’s engraving, the Bulgarian artist painted the soldiers of the Russian military orchestra on the fence of his home, which does not exist today.

It should be noted that Nicholas I (1825-1855), the father of Alexander II, was the first Russian ruler who spent several months in the lands of present-day northeastern Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, in order to raise the fighting spirit of the troops. Since he was not acting as Commander-in-Chief and his presence in the theatre of combat was of rather symbolic significance, he found it necessary to devote attention to public acts of piety which emphasized the humble gratitude of the emperor and his troops for the victories sent to them from above, and offered prayers for the souls of the dead.

According to the testimony of Count Alexander Benckendorff (1781-1844), immediately after the capture of Varna, on 29 September 29 1828, Nicholas I entered the ruined city on horseback and unexpectedly discovered among the ruins of the seaside quarters a church³⁸ that had survived the bombardment, which apparently aroused mystical feelings in him and his entourage:

“By some miracle a Greek church had survived, though the very part of the town in which it was situated had suffered most from the fire of our fleet and land batteries. The emperor, standing in front of this church – very small, gloomy, and built in [a] courtyard – ordered a thanksgiving service to be held in it. There was something unspeakably poignant in this sacred service amidst death and ruin, in Muslim lands, in a crescent-moon oppressed Orthodox church...”

36 Centre for Slavic-Byzantine Studies “Prof. Ivan Dujčev”, D slavo 48, f. 19. Edition: Vasiliev 1968, 28 (Fig. 12), 71–72. Another Bulgarian artist, Stanislav Dospevski, a graduate of the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, painted a portrait of Emperor Alexander II in 1862 for the Russian vice-consul in Plovdiv, Nayden Gerov: Vasiliev 1965, 416 (a letter of Dospevski to Gerov, 20 January 1863).

37 Paterno 1832, 21.

38 Probably this was the church of Saint Athanasius, where the metropolitans of Varna served in the nineteenth century. In 1836 it was burnt down and in 1838 an inscription in Greek was placed on the facade of the new church building, reminding that the church had survived the heavy bombardment in 1828: Pletn’ov – Rusev 2012, 487-490 (I. Rusev); Tenekedjiev 2023, 219-227.

*The next morning the emperor assembled all his free troops in front of Varna, and under the open sky, in the presence of the Turks, ordered a solemn prayer to be said, accompanied by a falling on bended knee. All the field artillery and all the guns of the ships roared in celebration of the conclusion of the long and bloody drama of the siege of Varna”.*³⁹

A couple of years after the end of the Crimean War, Russian diplomacy launched an initiative to build a Russian church and school for the Bulgarians in Varna, where until then worship had been conducted solely in Greek.⁴⁰ The professed purpose was to honor both the memory of Russian soldiers who had died in 1828 and were buried in a Varna cemetery, and the population’s living memory of the late Emperor Nicholas I. Eventually, Metropolitan Porphyrios allowed masses to be celebrated in Slavonic on Saturdays in Saint George’s Church for the Russian Vice-Consul Alexandr Vasil’evich Rachinskij. As a result of this decision, on 12 March 1860, Archimandrite Philaret, preacher of the Varna diocese and a former Russian graduate, celebrated a mass in memory of Nicholas I and the soldiers who died at the city walls. So many Bulgarians and Greeks gathered at this first Slavic liturgy in Saint George’s Church in Varna that some of the faithful had to remain in the churchyard for lack of room.⁴¹ Very soon, however, the Greek church authorities and the Ottoman administration made it impossible to hold these masses and they were terminated.⁴²

Nicholas’s son and successor, Alexander II, followed his father’s example and remained on Bulgarian land during the decisive months of his Russo-Turkish War (between 3 July and early December 1877). The presence of the tsar and his large retinue (the “Imperial Main Headquarters”) in the area of active hostilities in northern Bulgaria brought a sense of lack of clear subordination in the command of the

39 Shil’der 1896: 504–505. See also: Frolova 2014, 128.

40 [A. V. Rachinskij.] Arguments on the necessity to organise Slavonic church services in Varna [early 1860?], in: Russian State Historical Archive (Saint Petersburg). F. 797 (Office of the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod). Op. 30. 1860. Otd. 2. Saint 2. D. 367. ff. 19–20.

41 Prince Aleksey Lobanov-Rostovskij, Russian ambassador in Constantinople, to Egor Petrovich Kovalevskij, Head of the Asiatic Department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [Constantinople?] 28 March 1860, in: Russian State Historical Archive (Saint Petersburg). F. 797 (Office of the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod). Op. 30. 1860. Otd. 2. Saint 2. D. 367. ff. 24–25. See also: RBNOD T. I/2, 362–364 (№ 179); Dimitrova 2006, 79–80; Frolova 2014a, 48.

42 “The matter reached the point of the Greeks stealing church books belonging to the vice-consul, of denunciations to the Turks by the Greek clergy about the secret agreement of the Bulgarians with the Russians in the establishment of a separate church, and finally, a gang of scoundrels was sent to a secluded monastery to prevent the divine service taking place there” – Report by Alexander Vasilievich Rachinskij [to Count Alexander Petrovich Tolstoj, Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod. Varna?] 3 December 1860, in: Russian State Historical Archive (Saint Petersburg). F. 797 (Office of the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod). Op. 30. 1860. Otd. 2. Saint 2. D. 367. f. 4. Sincere thanks to my colleague L. A. Gerd for providing me with her transcripts of the archival materials cited here and in the previous two notes.

army. On the one hand, it somewhat undermined the prestige of the Commander-in-Chief Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder (1831-1891), Great Prince and brother of the Emperor.⁴³ On the other hand, the appearance of Alexander II anywhere in the Bulgarian lands caused great enthusiasm among both the army and the local population and was accompanied by church processions with crosses, icons, chants, and prayer services in churches or under the open sky near the battle positions.⁴⁴

One of the most impressive battlefield services was held on 7 November 1877 in the vicinity of besieged Plevna to celebrate the capture of the strategic fortress of Kars (Eastern Turkey), besieged for several months by Russian troops. The service, attended by Alexander II, King Carol of Romania, and the Commander-in-Chief Great Prince Nicholas Nikolaevich, was accompanied by rhythmic artillery volleys on the besieged city. The Emperor and all the officers and soldiers fell to their knees in honor of the dead. Following the Emperor's speech and the ceremonial march of the troops, celebratory music was played. Later in the evening, Lieutenant-General Mikhail Skobelev ordered a large banner to be erected over his positions with the inscription in Turkish "Kars was captured" to the sound of the Russian anthem.⁴⁵

On 15 January 1878, Commander-in-Chief Nicholas Nikolaevich attended mass at the Greek Cathedral Church in Adrianople, where he was solemnly welcomed and taken to stand alongside the metropolitan. He was placed in the same spot where the then Russian Commander-in-Chief Count Ivan I. Dibich had stood during a church service in the days around the conclusion of the Treaty of Adrianople with the Ottoman Empire, signed on 2 September 1829.⁴⁶ A few days later, on 22 January 1878, the future Prince of Bulgaria Alexander von Battenberg went to mass in the same church. Impressed by some stories about Count Dibich, the Prince noted in his diary that there "hangs a large silver chandelier, presented by the Russian army in 1829 as a memento of the capture of Adrianople."⁴⁷

43 For a general overview of the literature: Frolova 2019, 82–111.

44 The painter Vasilij Vereshchagin depicts in a very emotional way the prayer before the third assault on Plevna (30 August 1877): "Amid the sound of firing, the divine service in front of the camp church began... The Emperor stood in front; at a distance, the Commander-in-Chief and behind him, the men from the Emperor's retinue and the officers of the main headquarters. Soon everyone knelt down, and I remember that the priest's voice trembled a lot... The picture of a huge headquarters, kneeling, praying with lowered heads, against a background of dark clouds and white haze of gunfire was extremely interesting; I started to draw it, but because of other works I did not finish, about which I regret now" (Vereshchagin 2007, 113).

45 Krestovskij 1879, T. 2, 289–293.

46 Gazenkampf 1908, 382.

47 Batenberg 2022, 238.

At these local communities' solemn encounters with Russian emperors and commanders-in-chief during the Russo-Turkish wars one important ritual was the local metropolitan blessing the monarch or the military commander and presenting them with an icon.⁴⁸

Such a case is well-documented in the diary of Russian Foreign Ministry official Ivan Bot'janov, who in 1828-1829 served in the retinue of Admiral Alexei S. Greig and witnessed the stay of Nicholas I on board the liner "Paris" during the siege of Varna. According to Bot'janov's report, after the solemn service on 30 September 1828, the Greek metropolitan went on board the ship to greet the Emperor:

"...together with the most honourable citizens of the city, with bread and salt, congratulating the Emperor on the capture of Varna, and ready to offer up warm prayers to the Most High for the health and every welfare of the great Orthodox Tsar; at which the Metropolitan blessed the Monarch with an icon of the Holy Mother of God, and offered him this icon as a gift. The Emperor accepted them very graciously... At the same time he presented the Metropolitan with a richly ornate diamond cross, ordering that 500 golden rubles be given him immediately for the repair of the churches damaged during the siege".⁴⁹

Later, probably also on the Emperor's orders, the Russian occupation authorities made another gesture of generosity to the Christians of Varna. In November 1828 the cathedral church received a bell, which Metropolitan Philotheos gladly accepted, even as he did not dare to use it before the construction of the Russian church was completed on the site of a mosque, which in turn had been a former church.⁵⁰ Thus, "it was not until 6 December 1828, that the bell began to ring at the church of Saint Athanasius, for the first time since the conquest of Varna by the Turks."⁵¹

48 By the way, the deep reverence of the Russians for icons in peace and wartime was undoubtedly well known to the Turks. We will here take the liberty of adducing an interesting testimony to this. Immediately after the signing of the preliminary peace treaty with Russia at San Stefano on March 3, 1878, the Turkish authorities circulated among the Sultan's subjects a propaganda address in which Sultan Abdul Hamid II was represented as the victor of the Russians, called in the text not only "unclean dogs" but also "accursed icon-worshippers" (Bakhrevskij – Svistunova 2019, 97).

49 Bot'janov 1869, 29. See also: Frolova 2010, 223–224; Frolova 2014, 129. The icon depicts the Holy Mother of God Portaitissa and was painted in 1765 by an Athonite painter (probably Metrophanes of Chios). By the orders of the Emperor, a ribbon of the Order of Saint George was attached to it. It is kept in the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg: Pjatnitskij 2019, 180–182; Pjatnitskij 2019a, 49; Kuyumdzhiev 2021, 274; Gergova 2022, 117–118.

50 We have at least one other piece of information about the accommodation of a Russian marching church in an abandoned Turkish mosque in Varna, which is contained in issue 11 of the manuscript newspaper with news from Varna under Russian occupation, "A Leaf for the Motherland" (September 1829): "On the 25th of this month the marching church of the Duke of Wellington's regiment, which was in the camps on the west side of the fortress of Varna, was removed to the fortress and arranged in a mosque emptied for the purpose" (Listok 1830, 206).

51 Dolzhenkov 1829, 459.

The Icons and the War (1877-1878)

On the eve of the war against Turkey, when Alexander II was welcomed at the Ploiești station on 26 May 1877, the Emperor was greeted by representatives of the Bulgarian community in Romania. The head of the delegation, Panaret Rashev, Metropolitan of Pogoniana and a member of the Synod of the Bulgarian Exarchate, read an address of thanks and blessed the monarch with an icon of Saint Constantine and Saint Helena, which was kissed by the emperor.⁵²

A few weeks earlier, on 3 May 1877, Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder, visited Bucharest from Ploiești in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army and was received with honours by Prince Carol of Romania. On the same day, the Great Prince met with a delegation of the Bulgarians living in Romania on the premises of the Russian consulate. Metropolitan Panaret Rashev blessed Nicholas Nikolaevich with a large icon of Saint Nicholas and presented him with a welcoming address, which opened with the words:

*“The Bulgarian people, under the strong oppression of Turkish domination for centuries, entrusted all their hope for deliverance from the heavy slavery to the intercession of the Orthodox Russian Tsar. This hope, bequeathed to us by our forefathers, will now be realized with the help of the Almighty. The Bulgarians believe in it all the more since His Imperial Majesty has chosen His Brother as the executor of His high will for our deliverance”.*⁵³

The small Russian (or Romanian in Russian style) icon of Saint Nicholas that Metropolitan Panaret presented to Nicholas Nikolaevich is nowadays kept in the Regional Military History Museum in Pleven. It accompanied the large icon and bore an inscription on the back: “From the Bulgarians in the city of Bucharest, 3 May 1877” (figs. 8-9).

52 Krestovskij 1879, T. 1, 238–240; Chichagov 1887, 63–64.

53 Krestovskij 1879, T. 1, 139. On 15 May 1877 in Ploiești Nicholas Nikolaevich met with two representatives of the Bulgarian Central Charitable Society, who wished victory to the Russian army and presented him with an icon of Christ sent in 1876 by Prince Vladimir A. Dolgorukij, the governor of Moscow, as a gift for the Bulgarian volunteers in the Serbian-Turkish War (1876–1877). In response, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army declared that “with God’s help he himself will place this icon with his own hand in the cathedral church in the capital of Bulgaria as a pledge for the spiritual union of the Russians with the Bulgarians” (Anonymous 1878, 2). See also: OBTI I, 512 (№ 353), 525 (№ 360); II, 78 (№ 58). The fate of the icon is unknown.

Several more icons, presented to the Commander-in-Chief during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878, are kept in the fonds of the same museum:⁵⁴

- an icon of Saint Nicholas inscribed in Romanian, on the back of which it is indicated that it was presented by the Old Believers in the city of Bucharest in 1877 (figs. 10-11). The Great Prince received the delegation of this community (characterized in the press as part of the Russian sect of the eunuchs)⁵⁵ at the Russian consulate in the Romanian capital on 3 May 3 1877, just before meeting the delegation of Bulgarians in Romania;
- an icon of Saint Panteleimon (figs. 12-13), on the back of which is a factory inscription indicating that it was painted in the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, and another inscription which testifies that it was presented to Nicholas Nikolaevich on 17 July 1877 in Tarnovo by the Bulgarian Preobrazhenski (Transfiguration) Monastery located in the vicinity of the same town;
- an icon of Saint Panteleimon (figs. 14-15), on the back of which is placed the following inscription: “This icon was painted and consecrated on the Holy Mount of Mount Athos in the Russian Monastery of the Holy Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon, by the zeal of the brotherhood of the same monastery it is presented as a token of the brilliant victories of His Imperial Highness the Great Prince Nicholas Nikolaevich in 1878”;
- a small icon of Saint Nicholas the New of Sofia in a silver setting (fig. 16), on which is engraved the inscription: “To the glorious victor His Imperial Highness the Great Prince Nicholas Nikolaevich, Commander-in-Chief of the acting army. In memory and deepest gratitude for the liberation of the Bulgarian people. The humble Metropolitan of Sofia Meletiy. 4 April 1878”.

The last icon is connected with an interesting historical event. On 4 April 1878 Nicholas Nikolaevich was supposed to meet with a large official delegation, organized by Metropolitan Meletiy of Sofia and led by the Bulgarian Exarch Yosif, Metropolitan of Lovech, which was to express the deep gratitude of the Bulgarian people to the Commander-in-Chief. Afterwards, a special deputation was to go to Saint Peters-

54 All these icons were presented to Bulgaria by the son of the late Commander-in-Chief, Great Prince Nicholas Nikolaevich the Younger, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of this Russo-Turkish War, which was celebrated very solemnly in 1902.

55 Krestovskij 1879, T. 1, 139.

burg to present Emperor Alexander II with an address of thanks.⁵⁶ The Bulgarian representatives arrived in the Istanbul suburb of San Stefano on April 3, but in the end the meeting was postponed to April 10.⁵⁷

In the tense atmosphere of the weeks preceding the Berlin Congress, which took place between 1 June (13 June) and 1 July (13 July) 1878, the Russian ruling circles were no longer too triumphalist and preferred for diplomatic reasons to refrain from further pompous displays of closeness and fraternity with the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians, in contrast, blindly believed that Russia would succeed in defending before the European great powers the provisions of the preliminary peace treaty signed at San Stefano on 19 February (3 March) 1878. In turn, that would guarantee the existence of the future Bulgarian principality within the confines of some extremely extensive borders on the Balkan Peninsula.

It is in this context that the Chairman of the Moscow Slavic Charitable Society Ivan S. Aksakov sent a letter dated 25 June 1878 to Nikolay Hristoforovich Palauzov, chairman of the Odessa Bulgarian Trusteeship. Aksakov's commentary was indicative of the mood in Russia on the initiative of the Bulgarians to present Alexander II with a cross and an icon:

*“Care about the cross, if you attach importance to it, but in my opinion, there is no need to even start this costly game. Is it time to do it now, when the best lands with Bulgarian population are being taken away from the Bulgarians, and you can be sure that they will be taken away forever... In my opinion, there is no point to think now about a Bulgarian deputation. It was intended under other conditions. It cannot now take place on behalf of the whole Bulgarian people, but only on behalf of the inhabitants of the Principality. Besides, it is still in question, nothing bears the stamp of something final and firmly established. Let the icon remain a monument to a great historical moment of light, but to present it to the Emperor is only to embarrass His Majesty in vain.”*⁵⁸

Leaving aside the sphere of high politics, it should be noted that after the capture of certain towns and villages, senior Russian officers often presented local Bulgarian clergy, church institutions, civic communities and private individuals with icons to preserve the memory of the turbulent events and the bloodshed. For example, at the end of July 1877 the commander of the Forward Detachment of the Russian Army Adjutant General Iosif V. Gurko in the course of his retreat to the Balkan Mountains donated an icon to the church in the village of Dalboki, Stara Zagora municipality.⁵⁹ By the same to-

56 Text: Anonymous 1912, 343–352; OBTI II, 564–569 (№ 497).

57 Anonymous 1878, 2–3;

58 OBTI III, 163 (№ 85).

59 Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 583.

ken, immediately after the capture of Lovech on 22 August 22 1877 by the detachment of Lieutenant General Aleksandr K. Bagration-Imeretinskij, the Russian soldiers presented to the people of the town an icon of Saint Michael the Archangel, which has since been kept in the Holy Trinity Church and is considered miraculous.⁶⁰

60 Gergova 2016, 149–159; Pavlova 2017, 159.

Soon after the capture of Sofia on 11 January 1878, the 2nd Squadron of the 4th Uhlans Kharkov Regiment entered the town of Kyustendil.⁶¹ To commemorate this event, on 28 October 1878 the regiment presented the Kyustendil girl's school with an icon of its patron saint, Saint Victor the Martyr, which today is kept in the cathedral church of the Dormition of the Mother of God.⁶²

On 17 January 17 1878, the units of the Caucasus Cossack Brigade of Major General Pjotr A. Cherevin reached one of the southernmost points of the Russian offensive in the Balkans – the village of Gorno Derekiy (today Sokolovtsi, Smolyan municipality) in the heart of the Rhodope Mountains. A local wealthy Bulgarian, Sivko Chakara, invited several officers to his home: “His chatty little girl served the guests bread, cheese and yogurt. A Russian officer was stroking little Kalinka's hair and repeating: “Kalinka, Kalinka, my girl... I also have a daughter like her.” He sent a soldier to fetch his leather bag and from it he took out a shining icon of the Mother of God Kazanskaya and gave it to Kalina for her health and as a memento for his little daughter”.⁶³ (fig.17).⁶⁴

On 20 October 1878 the Metropolitan of Varna and Preslav Simeon received as a gift a Russian icon of the Slavic Enlighteners Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius (fig. 19), which was to be consecrated and kept in the Church of the Ascension in Shumen as a perpetual reminder of the liberation of the city from Ottoman rule on July 6 of that year by the troops of the Second Infantry Division under the command of Lieutenant General Sergej D. Belokopytov.⁶⁵

Similarly, a group of Russian officers, who by the autumn of 1878 were serving in the newly-founded Bulgarian army, gifted the citizens of Razgrad with an icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky with a commemorative inscription in memory of the liberation of the town by the troops of General Dondukov-Korsakov's 13th Army Corps on 18 January 1878.⁶⁶

61 SMRTV T. 7, 111; Al'bovskij 1897, 427.

62 Text of the inscription: “Кюстендилскому женскому училищу от 4^{го} уланского Харьковского полка, 28 октября 1878 г.”

63 Kanev 1975, 156.

64 Another interesting case is that of the small Russian icon of Christ Pantocrator (fig. 18), which had been kept and used as a home icon by the resident of Batak Toma Goranov and his family since the time of the Russian Interim Administration (1878–1879): in the inventory book of the Historical Museum in Batak it is noted that every Epiphany Goranov's wife took the icon to the river above the village and washed it with clean water.

65 Grigorova 2020, 29–30; Grigorova 2025 (in press). General Belokopytov's troops left Shumen on 25 September 1878: SMRTV T. 90/1, 52.

66 Inscription: “Сей образ сооружен пожертвованием чинов сформированной Разградской № 17 пешей дружины Болгарского земского войска в память годовщины занятия города Разграда отрядом русских войск 13-го армейского корпуса под начальством Его Сиятельства генерал-адъютанта Князя Дондукова-Корсакова 16-ого января 1878-го года” (Ivanova 2003, 42).

In the Historical Museum in Lom there is a Russian icon of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, presented in 1900 to the local citizens by Major General Pavel D. Nechaev, the first district chief after the liberation of the town from Turkish rule on 27 November 1877 (fig. 20).

Icons were also donated by close relatives of fallen officers. The Regional Historical Museum in Vratsa today features an icon of the Mother of God, in memory of its liberator, the commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Guards Cavalry Division, Major General Nikolaj S. Leonov (died 21 November 1877 in Bulgaria), presented to the town by his mother (fig. 21).⁶⁷ A similar case was registered in the village of Katselovo (municipality of Dve Mogili) in honor of Staff-Captain Janko Voevodich, senior adjutant of the Army General Staff, who died there in a battle with the Turks on 24 August 1877. In 1907 his sister visited Katselovo and donated an icon of the Mother of God to the local church.⁶⁸

Various military units of the Russian army that participated in the war with Turkey in 1877-1878, built chapels or sent icons to Bulgaria in memory of their fallen soldiers and officers. One of the earliest known examples dates to 18 April 1878, when near the village of Ezerche, Tsar Kaloyan municipality, soldiers of the 137th Nezhin Infantry Regiment built and consecrated a small chapel in which they placed a bullet-riddled icon of Christ in memory of 76 of their comrades and 178 soldiers of the 138th Bolkhov Infantry Regiment who died there on 14 July 1877.⁶⁹ Two gifted icons have been preserved in the church of Shipka Monastery, which was consecrated in 1902: an icon of the Holy Ascension of Christ by the artist M. I. Ljubavin⁷⁰, donated by the 35th Infantry Brjansk Regiment⁷¹ (fig. 22), and an icon of Saint Nicholas by the same artist, donated by the 36th Infantry Orjol (“Орловский”) Regiment (fig. 23).⁷² The Regional Historical Museum in Pleven contains an

67 Inscription: „Сия икона сооружена в память Российских войск Генерала Николая Стефановича Леонова, скончавшагося 21 Ноября 1877 года в Болгарии на поле брани за освобождение Славянских Христиан от Мусульманскаго поработителя”. Originally, the icon was kept in the Church of the Holy Ascension in Vratsa.

68 Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 472. See also the list of officers who died near Gorsko Ablanovo on August 24, 1877, compiled by Lieutenant-General Baron Alexander F. Driesen: SMRTV T. 38, 430.

69 Ivanova 2003, 27; Mutafov 2021, T. I, 58–59; Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 462.

70 Information about this artist is very scarce; it is known that in the second half of the nineteenth century he painted eight icons for the Cathedral Church of the Holy Resurrection (Narva Õigeusu Kirik, consecrated in 1896) in Narva, Estonia: Danchenko – Krasilin 1994, 23 (№ 87).

71 Inscription: „Во славу Божию сооружен образ сей иждивением офицеров 35-го пехотного БРЯНСКОГО полка ко Св. Храму на ШИПКЕ в молитвенную память чинов полка, павших при обороне ШИПКИНСКОГО перевала в 1877 году за Святое дело освобождения единоверной Болгарии”.

72 Inscription: „Во славу Божию сооружен образ сей иждивением офицеров 36-го пехотного ОРЛОВСКОГО полка ко Св. Храму на ШИПКЕ в молитвенную память чинов полка, павших при обороне ШИПКИНСКОГО перевала в 1877 году за Святое дело освобождения единоверной Болгарии”.

icon of Saint Nicholas from the beginning of the twentieth century with a commemorative inscription from the lower ranks of the 93rd Irkutsk Infantry Regiment (fig. 24).⁷³

Donations of Alexander II and Members of the Imperial Family to Bulgarian Churches

It has already been noted in historiography that the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 became “a kind of a Romanovs enterprise”: in an attempt to bolster the prestige of imperial power and the ruling family, Alexander II did something unprecedented in enlisting almost all the Great Princes in this military enterprise.⁷⁴ Driven by a desire to perpetuate the memory of this unique historical moment among the newly liberated Bulgarians, the emperor felt it necessary that he and the members of his family make generous donations to the churches of the towns and villages where their headquarters had been stationed for longer.

This idea was probably conceived when Alexander II was welcomed in Byala, where his General Headquarters was stationed from 8 July to 2 August 1877. At the entrance to the village the Emperor was welcomed by “the local clergy with a cross, icons and holy water,” but “the old church vestments, the poor quality of the church utensils and the beggarly clothes of the inhabitants were evidence of general poverty.”⁷⁵ After a procession through the streets, “the Emperor stopped outside the Orthodox Church, whose bell tower somewhat resembled a Chinese tower. For lack of a bell, an iron rod was tolled.”⁷⁶ Before leaving Byala, the emperor told the three priests to build a new, bigger church and promised to send them large bells,⁷⁷ vestments and utensils. This promise was kept and the bells were delivered and installed in July 1878.⁷⁸ One of them is on display today at the History Museum in Byala (fig. 25).

73 Inscription: „От нижних чинов 93го пех. Иркутского Его Императорского Высочества Великого Князя Михаила Александровича”.

74 Chernukha 2013, 32. See also: Frolova 2019, 92.

75 Chichagov 1887, 185.

76 Chichagov 1887, 186.

77 The prohibition of the use of bells by the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire (Todorova 1997, 63–64), especially as regards towns and villages with mixed populations, in the second half of the nineteenth century represented a deep-rooted atavism which the central authorities – even if they were willing – could hardly deal with. When, in December 1857, the Bulgarian community in the town of Svishtov installed a bell in the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Transfiguration and thus took advantage of the religious freedoms proclaimed in 1856 by Sultan Abdülmecid I with his famous Reform Act (*Hatt-ı Hümayun*), on the day before Christmas an angry mob of 1500 armed Turks, led by the local governor, seized the churchyard and destroyed the makeshift bell tower: Manchev 1982, 48–50.

78 Mutafov 2021, T. I, 116.

After the transfer of the General Headquarters from Byala to the village of Gorna Studena (fig. 26), where the Commander-in-Chief and his staff had been stationed since 30 July 1877, the Emperor and his entourage prayed for some time in the marching chapel, which constituted a small tent with icons.

The village church of Gorna Studena, dedicated to Saint Demetrius (fig. 27), had been built a few years earlier by the famous Bulgarian architect Gencho Kanev, but it was not furnished and was in a very poor condition. There were no windows, the icons were made of paper, there were no bells, and the priest had no liturgical vestments and was dressed in rags. Since the Emperor could not hear mass under these conditions, Major-General Mikhail P. Tuchkov took care to make the church more presentable. He brought icons and prepared the church for consecration, which was performed most solemnly by the priest of the General Headquarters on 19 August 1877 in the presence of the Emperor and local Bulgarians.⁷⁹ To commemorate this event, Alexander II donated an iconostasis to the church (fig. 28), and his retinue raised money to have church utensils, icons, and other accessories shipped from Russia. The church also received a set of six bells, which were hung on the bell tower in the churchyard (fig. 29).⁸⁰

At the height of the siege of Pleven, the Imperial General Headquarters moved closer to the theatre of the main hostilities, i.e. to the village of Pordim. And although he spent a relatively short time here, Alexander II made a donation to the local church of Saint Demetrius – six bells, four precious icons, a set of solemn priestly vestments, and a large candlestick. The text on the seventh bell for Pordim, which is now in Pleven, reads: “This bell was presented by Alexander II – Emperor of all Russia. It was cast in Yaroslavl with the care of the honourable civil guild of merchants by the hereditary bell-maker Porfirij Ivanovich Olovjannikov. It weighs 41 poods⁸¹ and 7 pounds, for the church in the village of Pordim – 28 November 1877.”⁸²

The last large donation we will present here was made by the heir to the throne, Great Prince Alexander Alexandrovich, for the church of Saint John of Rila in the village of Brestovitsa, about 50 km southwest of Ruse. While he was commander of the Eastern detachment of the Russian army, his headquarters was located in Brestovitsa for five months. In the summer and autumn of 1877, numerous clashes between the Russians and the Turks took place in the vicinity of Ruse. An interesting trace of these battles is the signature of a Russian soldier dated 31 July 1877 (fig. 30)⁸³ placed under the medieval frescoes in

79 Chichagov 1887, 266–267.

80 About the church in Gorna Studena, see also: Usta-Genchov, 1938: 149–152; Gergova 2020, 240; Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 109.

81 One Russian pood equals 16.38 kilograms.

82 Dilkov – Velichkov 2010, 111; Belchev 2017, 212–214.

83 Text: “Роман И. Волянский родом из России [меся]ца Июля 31 дня”.

one of the rock churches⁸⁴ of the monastery of Saint Michael the Archangel on the Rusenski Lom river near the village of Ivan Chiflik (today the village of Ivanovo) (fig. 31).

Near the same village, a member of the imperial family Prince Sergei Maksimilianovich Romanovsky, Duke of Leuchtenberg (a nephew of Alexander II) was killed on 12 October 1877. His body was initially taken to the church in Brestovitsa, and then sent for burial to the Peter and Paul Cathedral in Saint Petersburg.⁸⁵

Soon after the end of the war, in the summer of 1879, the church in Brestovitsa received as a donation six bells, as well as an icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky and Saint Vladimir for the Metropolitans' throne with a commemorative inscription: "In honour of the residence of the Heir to the Throne Alexander Alexandrovich and Great Prince Vladimir Alexandrovich in the Bulgarian village of Brestovitsa."⁸⁶ Separately, in memory of the fallen Duke of Leuchtenberg, the imperial court donated an iconostasis (fig. 32) with a set of icons, vestments, utensils, and various church paraphernalia.⁸⁷ This gift arrived from Russia to Ruse in July 1879 and on the 29th of the same month the church was consecrated by Metropolitan Gregory of Dorostol and Cherven.⁸⁸

Russian Military Priests, Field and Memorial Churches in Bulgaria

The important place of religion in the policy of the Russian Empire predetermined the gradual differentiation of military priests as a separate profession, which was eventually included in the staff of the army. The military statute of Peter the Great, issued in 1716, established the office of ober-priest under the field marshal or commanding general, who was to deliver sermons, perform masses and prayers. The ober-priest was in charge of all field priests, who performed, in accordance with his instructions, the extraordinary prayers and solemn thanksgivings ordered by the military authorities in the various

84 The so-called "Big Church", which is part of the complex of the "Buried Church". About it in brief: Yordanov 2009, 20–24.

85 Mutafov 2021, T. I, 100.

86 Nikolov 1998, 53–54. The largest bell depicts Emperor Alexander II and the inscription reads: "This and the following three bells are donated to commemorate the residence of the Heir to the throne Alexander Alexandrovich in Brestovitsa – by the Jaroslavl' merchant P. I. Olovjannikov 1877. Factory of Porfirij Ivanovich Olovjannikov from Jaroslavl'".

87 Nikolov 1998, 54–56.

88 Mutafov 2021, T. I, 101.

regiments.⁸⁹ A priest was to be assigned to each field infirmary.⁹⁰ All officers and soldiers were obliged to pray daily morning and evening, and at 9 a.m. the regimental priests were to celebrate mass, which might, depending on the circumstances, be replaced by prayer.⁹¹

The functions of the field ober-priest were also summed up in the Regulations for the Administration of the Grand Army in Action, issued on 27 January 1812. In particular, he was to ensure that the worship in the Headquarters church and in the regimental churches was conducted in accordance with the regulations, and that the priests gave the sick and wounded religious consolation and holy communion, preached the Word of God to the troops, inculcated love for the Faith, the Lord, and the Fatherland, and that before marching against the enemy or after achieving victories, a proper prayer service was to be performed in the army.⁹²

During the Russo-Turkish wars in the Bulgarian lands, some field priests distinguished themselves with particular heroism.⁹³ A striking example of this is the deed of the priest of the Tobolsk infantry regiment Iov Kaminskij. At the capture of Oryahovo on 28 May 1829 he blessed the soldiers, crossed the Danube with them, and led them with a cross in his hand to storm one of the Turkish batteries, where he received a severe head injury. For his sacrifice Nicholas I awarded him the Order of Saint George IV degree and a pension for life, and appointed him second priest in the palace church at the imperial residence Peterhof.⁹⁴

The same order, which in the nineteenth century was given to only four priests, was also awarded to archpriest Ioann Piatibokov, a graduate of Iov Kaminsky and senior priest of the Mogilev Infantry Regiment. On 11 March 1854, when the Russian army marched from Izmail to Silistra, Piatibokov stopped the retreat of his regiment, led the soldiers in an attack against the Turkish fortifications with a cross in his hand and was wounded in the chest.⁹⁵

89 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. V, 240 (№ 3006, Chapter XXIX).

90 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. V, 247 (№ 3006, Chapter XXXIV).

91 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. V, 306 (№ 3006, Chapter LXIV).

92 PSZRI. Ser. I. T. XXXII, 58–59 (№ 24975).

93 For some observations on the activities of regimental priests during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, see recently: Pashova – Vodenicharov 2015, 94–107.

94 Luk'janovich 1847, 104–105; Zhelbovskij 1902, 71; Poljakov 2002, 376–377.

95 Zhelbovskij 1902, 71–73; Poljakov 2002, 377–378. Many regimental priests were awarded a golden cross on a George's ribbon for their personal heroism during the wars against Turkey on Bulgarian soil: Pjotr Evlanov, the priest of the 31st Eger Regiment, wounded and captured in the battle of Eski Arnautlar (today the village of Staroslets, Provadia municipality) on 5 May 1829; Vasilij Matkovskij, the priest of the Okhotsk Infantry Regiment, for his participation in the battles of 5 and 31 May 1829; the priests of the Tomsk, Neva, Lifland and Irkutsk infantry regiments, the 11th Eger regiment, and the archpriest of the Kyiv military hospital – for valour

Many Russian regimental priests were killed or died for various reasons during military expeditions in Bulgaria. Only in the campaigns against the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century about 30 regimental priests died of wounds and diseases.⁹⁶ The graves of some of those who died in the 1877-1878 war have survived to the present day. In front of the Church of Saint Demetrius in the village of Gorna Studena, where Alexander II prayed in the summer and autumn of 1877, Ivan Krasovsky was buried. He was the priest of the 11th Riga Dragoon Regiment who died on 5 August of the same year (fig. 33). In the yard of Saint Demetrius Church in Lyaskovets Ivan Smirnov was buried. He was the priest of the 42nd Yakutsk Regiment, who died of typhus on 28 January 1878.⁹⁷

It should be noted that each regiment had its own marching church, which usually consisted of a tent with a portable iconostasis, but sometimes during a longer stay in one place the soldiers built small adobe churches. A case in point was the church in the village of Aydemir, a few kilometres from Silistra – a fortified town on the south bank of the Danube that was besieged twice (and eventually captured on 18 June 1829) by the Russian army during the campaigns of 1828 and 1829. During the period of the Russian occupation of Aydemir, a church of the Holy Trinity was built from interwoven rods plastered with mud (fig. 34). During renovations in recent years, it was revealed that the church was completed and consecrated in 1834. Then an epitaphios from 1828 with an inscription testifying that it originated in the city of Kazan was discovered, as well as an icon of the Mother of God “Quick to hear” (“Скоропослушница”, “Gorgoepikoos”) (fig. 35), which local people assumed (but without sufficient evidence) was brought from the Russians.⁹⁸

During the same period, with the assistance of the Russian occupation authorities, the Church of the Dormition of Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo was rebuilt (consecrated in 1830) (fig. 36).⁹⁹ There is no doubt that this was a special gesture to the local Bulgarians who rose up in arms against Ottoman rule in July 1829 and turned for help to Admiral Aleksei S. Greig, whose naval fleet was at that time in the nearby town of Sozopol on the Black Sea: “All of us, clergy, laity, elders, men and women, parents

and bravery in 1828–1829; the priest of the 3rd Company of the Greek Volunteers – for exploits at the siege of Silistra in 1854; the priests of the 56 Zhitomir, 36 Orjol, 54 Minsk infantry regiments – for the defence of Shipka in 1877; the priests of the 130th Kherson Infantry and 12th Starodub Dragoon Regiments – for the battles of Katselevo and Gorsko Ablanovo on 24 August 1877; the archpriest of the Izmail Leib-Guard Regiment – or exploits near Gorni Dabnik and at Telish in 1877, etc. (Zhelbovskij 1902, 77–90).

96 Poljakov 2002, 71.

97 Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 84, 110.

98 <https://bnr.bg/horizont/post/101428856/carkvata-sveta-troica-v-selo-aidemir-e-na-poveche-ot-180-godini> Visited on February 21, 2024. Based on local legends, older literature claims that the church in Aydemir was built after the capture of Silistra by General Bagration’s troops in 1810, when an unknown officer donated a Russian liturgical book: Iliev – Vaysilov 1966.

99 Ayanov 1939, 38; Keremidchiev 2013, 50.

and children, with tears in our eyes and with outstretched hands, dare to turn to you and most humbly ask that you prevent bloodshed and prevent our slaughter altogether, for we are in grave danger.”¹⁰⁰ Eventually, a Russian military contingent came to Malko Tarnovo and “was welcomed by the priests and elders of the town with crosses, icons and bread.”¹⁰¹

It is noteworthy that in the church of Malko Tarnovo many Russian icons are preserved to this day, most of which are cheap “krasnushki”. Some of them are embedded in the iconostasis constructed at the end of the nineteenth century (fig. 37), while others are leaning against the walls of the church and especially on the balcony.¹⁰² On the iconostasis of the small chapel of Saint Gregory Sinaiticus to the left of the church entrance, there are two imposing royal icons of Christ Pantocrator (fig. 38) and of the Holy Mother of God of Tikhvin (fig. 39), executed by one and the same Russian painter. A Russian metal cross hangs beside the royal doors of the iconostasis (fig. 40). The exact chronology of these works cannot be ascertained, but their presence here suggests that the complex historical fate of this region in the nineteenth century, re-liberated by the Russian army in February 1878 but ultimately remaining under Turkish rule until 1913, no doubt contributed to the popularity of Russian church art among the local Bulgarians.¹⁰³

In the course of hostilities there were situations when Russian regimental priests served in local Orthodox churches. On 26 January 26 1878, Colonel Fiodor Depreradovich, commander of the First Brigade of the Bulgarian Volunteers Corps, noted that in the old church of Kotel “*a Russian priest is officiating, and the singers are the amateur officers of the Volunteers, who sing quite well... Our service, with its quite good singers, has made a very good impression on the inhabitants of Kotel.*”¹⁰⁴

In Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery in Sliven there are two small Russian icons, which illustrate a curious phenomenon – the artistic work of unknown soldiers of the 139th Morshansk Regiment, which in 1878-1879 was stationed in the vicinity of present-day Simeonovgrad and Elhovo.¹⁰⁵ One

100 Konobeev 1972, 247.

101 Konobeev 1972, 247.

102 Probably some of these icons were brought to Malko Tarnovo later, in the second half of the 20th century, from the churches of the deserted surrounding villages and from the numerous chapels that abound in the Strandzha Mountains.

103 It is interesting to note that between 1857 and 1859 the Russian embassy in Istanbul sent liturgical vestments to Malko Tarnovo and several nearby villages and towns, which at that time were the object of Uniate propaganda by the Roman Church. See: Gerd 2025 (in press).

104 De-Preradovich 1884, 291.

105 On 23 October 1878 the regiment arrived from Varna to Mustapha Pasha (today Svilengrad), and on 8 November

of the icons depicts Saint Alexander Nevsky and bears the inscription “Painted in 1878 by lower ranks of the 139th Morshansk Infantry Regiment”¹⁰⁶ (fig. 41). The other one depicts the Holy Transfiguration of Lord and is inscribed in a similar manner: “Painted in 1879 by the lower ranks of the 139th Morshansk Infantry Regiment”¹⁰⁷ (fig. 42). The icons were probably created for the regiment’s mobile church, which was dedicated to the Sainly Martyrs Carpus and Papyrus. In 2022 an icon of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, painted by the same anonymous soldiers, was donated to the Saint Nicholas Cathedral Church in the town of Orenburg (Russia).¹⁰⁸

If we turn to the question of the state of the churches in Bulgaria during the war and the period of temporary Russian rule, it should be noted that the Russian authorities made efforts to repair and restore at least some of the churches damaged during the fighting. We shall content ourselves here with illustrating this process solely on the basis of a report by Petr Alabin, dated 28 October 1878, about his work in Bulgaria as an agent of the Moscow and Saint Petersburg Slavic Charitable Societies, beginning in October 1877. Meanwhile, Alabin became the first Russian governor of Sofia after the capture of the city on 23 December 1877, which concentrated great administrative power in his hands.

Within a year as governor, Alabin lent the sum of 15430 francs to a number of Bulgarian churches from the funds of the Moscow and Saint Petersburg societies. In addition, on behalf of both societies, he distributed church books, vestments, utensils, crosses and gospels sent to him from various places in Russia, mainly from Moscow, Samara, Kharkov and Kazan. Moreover, he incorporated Bulgarian saints, as he testified in his report:

“Finally, I ordered 8 large icons of the most revered saints in Bulgaria for the iconostases, for which 314 francs from the funds of the Moscow Society were spent. Six of these icons were distributed on behalf of the Slavic societies to churches that were being prepared for consecration, one icon was given to the chapel erected in the town of Radomir for the 3rd infantry battalion of the Bulgarian Land Army, and one icon was given to the chapel room of the cadet school for young Bulgarians that is opening in the city of Sofia”.¹⁰⁹

the 1st Battalion settled in the nearby village of Oflahanlı (probably present day village of Momkovo), and the 3rd Battalion and the regimental headquarters – in the village of Bunaklı (probably the village of Kirilovo, Elhovo municipality). On 7 February 1879 the regiment’s units left this area and were soon transported to Russia by ships from Burgas: Budnitskij 1894, 70–72.

106 “Писано въ 1879 мъ году Нижними чинами 139-го пѣхо Моршанского полка”

107 Писано въ 1878 мъ году Нижними чинами 139-го пѣхо Моршанского полка”

108 Majmakhova 2022.

109 ОБТИ III, 295 (№ 185).

The activity of the Russian military priests in Bulgaria extended to the construction of new churches, which were subsequently supplied with icons and utensils from Russia.¹¹⁰ In this context, we must explicitly mention the name of the monk from the Monastery of the Kyiv Caves (Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra) Parfeniy Pavlovich Getman, who in 1877-1878 was a priest in a military field hospital. On 1 August 1878 he wrote from Yambol to his correspondent in Kyiv:

“Did I write to you that I built a church? It is 22 arshins long [15.62 m], 7 arshins wide [4.97 m], 4 arshins high [2.84 m]. The chancel is of a whole piece of marble, the floor is also of marble, the iconostasis is planked, with proper decoration. There was a side donation, but I added 50 silver rubles from me, and the work is done. On the 4th of August the regional archpriest will consecrate this church in the name of Saint Nicholas. Some of the icons have been purchased, and others I am soliciting from the Monastery of the Kyiv Caves”.¹¹¹

The two Bulgarian churches in the town of Yambol at that time could not yet be used for their intended purpose, as they had been devastated by the Turks. Thus, the small chapel of Father Parfeniy Getman was for some time the only functioning Christian church in this large Bulgarian town. At the end of the nineteenth century a new imposing church was built on its site, which retained the dedication of Saint Nicholas (fig. 43). It is not improbable that two Russian icons that are today kept in the Art Gallery of Yambol, originated from the small church built in 1878 – Saint Nicholas (fig. 44) and the Crucifixion of Christ with selected saints.

A year later, Father Getman participated in the construction of a new church in the vicinity of Yambol, which soon grew into a monastery in memory of the fallen Russian soldiers and in gratitude to the Most High for the rescue of Emperor Alexander II in the failed assassination attempt against him on 2 April 1879. Soldiers of the 30th Infantry Division started construction on 12 May 1879 on the northern slope of one of the Bakadzhik hills, 14 km south-east of Yambol, near the ruins of the former Ascension Monastery, which was burned by the Turks during the 1876 April Uprising.

110 There are also known cases of decorating Bulgarian churches with the funds of Russian officers. On the tablets under the icons of the iconostasis of the church in the nunnery in Samokov, made by the local painter Hristo Iliev, there are inscriptions which testify that the funds for the gilding were donated by a Russian captain named Peter: “Позлаты го Петаръ, Капетанъ руск: = 1879го”; “Приложи. Г. Петаръ Капетанъ, руск = 1879го”. I thank my colleague Ivanka Gergova for providing me with information on this matter.

111 N. N. O. 1900, 934–935.

The church was dedicated to the Ascension of Christ and to Saint Alexander Nevsky, whose first patronal icon¹¹² was donated by the regimental church of the 118th Shuja Regiment, which was dedicated to the same Russian saint.¹¹³ The commander of the 30th Corps, Adjutant General Mikhail Skobelev, donated a silver cross,¹¹⁴ which is still kept there, and Empress Maria Aleksandrovna sent a golden chalice and a gospel from 1751 with solid silver fittings, which are missing today. The church iconostasis was made in the Monastery of the Kyiv Caves.¹¹⁵

The main church of the Yambol Monastery became the first Russian memorial church in Bulgaria, which along with more than 400 modest monuments¹¹⁶ to fallen officers and soldiers, was built during the Russian occupation of Bulgaria that ended in June 1879 in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin signed on 1 July 1878. At the same time, and again in the circle of General Skobelev and his mother, the project for the construction of a magnificent memorial church at the foot of the Shipka summit was born, where in the last months of 1877 some of the most dramatic battles of the war took place. Due to the complicated diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Russia after 1885, the construction of Shipka Monastery was delayed and it was consecrated only in 1902.¹¹⁷ However, the present article treats the period of the Russo-Turkish wars, and the Shipka Monastery remains outside of the scope of this study.



112 Nikolov 2021, 320–321 (Fig. 9).

113 The archpriest of the regiment, father Aleksej Kuznetsov, was awarded the Order of Saint Anne, second degree, for his participation in the war against Turkey in 1877: Poljakov 2002, 340, 398.

114 Nikolov 2021, 322 (Fig. 13).

115 About the Yambol monastery: Pashova – Vodenicharov 2014, 64–65; Baev 2018; Nikolov 2021, 319–323; Grigorov – Kazalarska 2024, 723–724.

116 Raychevski 2007, 6; Pashova – Vodenicharov 2014, 62.

117 About Shipka Monastery see most recently: Gergova 2024, 1–28 (with further literature).



Fig. 1. Portrait of Emperor Peter the Great by unknown Serbian author, 18th century. (Source: <https://rusmuseumvrm.ru>). © State Hermitage – Saint Petersburg.



Fig. 2. Catherine II, 1 ruble, silver, 1765. (Source: <https://zbior.com>).



Fig. 3. Icon of Virgin Mary "Comfort my sorrows", Art Gallery "Nikolay Pavlovich" – Svishtov, IV-10. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Art Gallery "Nikolay Pavlovich" – Svishtov.



Fig. 4. Nicholas I, Emperor of Russia, engraving by Johann Friedrich Schröter, ca. 1828-1829. Photo: Lyubomir Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Samokov.



Fig. 5. Nikola Obrazopisov, mural portrait of Nicholas I, second half of the 19th century. Photo: Lyubomir Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Samokov.

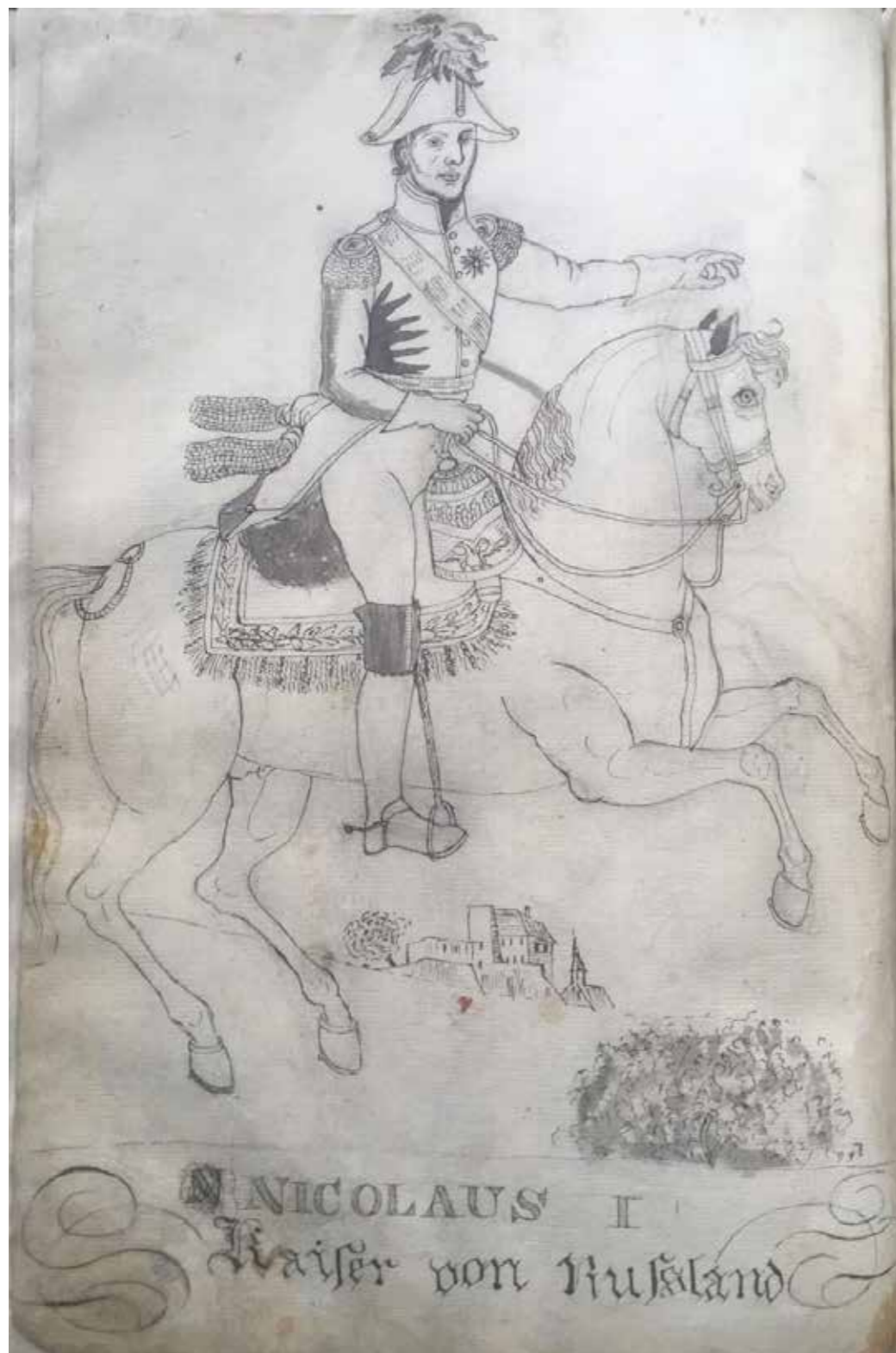


Fig. 6. Toma Vishanov-Molera or his descendants, Portrait of Nicholas I, after 1828-1829. Photo: Romyana Decheva. © Centre for Slavic-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev", Sofia.

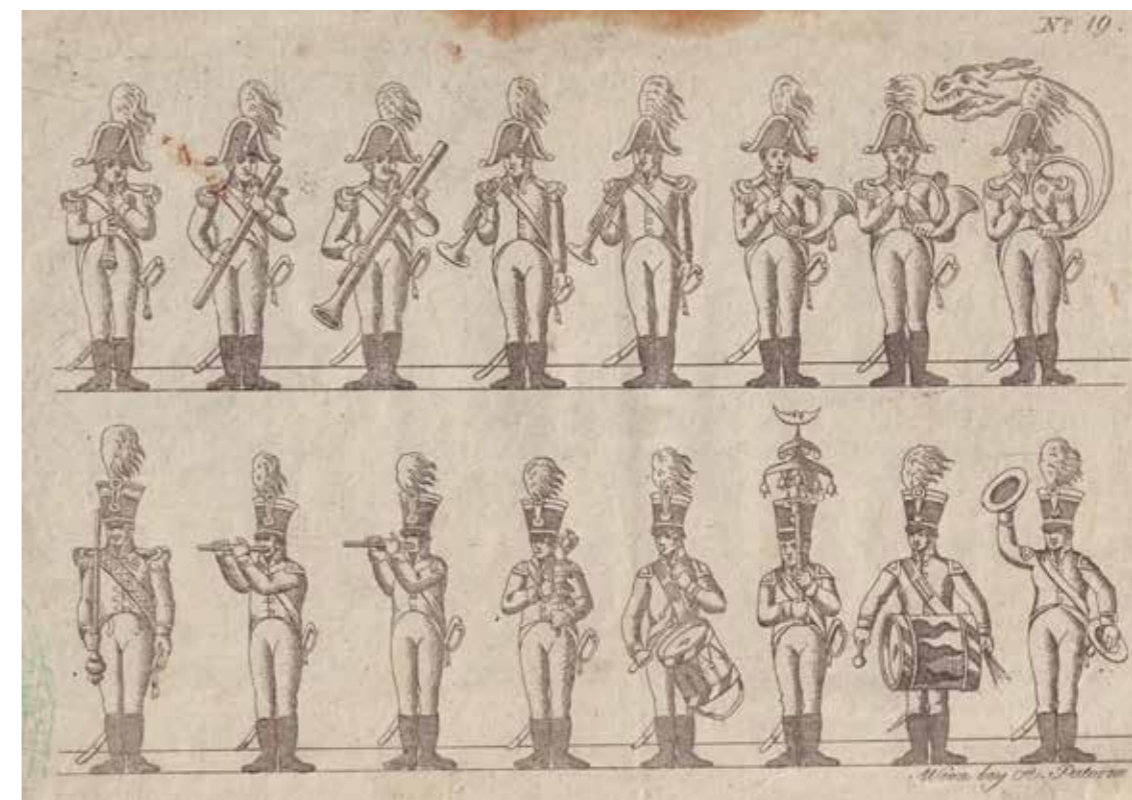


Fig. 7. Russian military orchestra, engraving by Johann Friedrich Schröter, ca. 1828-1829. Photo: Lyubomir Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Samokov.



Fig. 8. Icon of Saint Nicholas, second half of the 19th century, before May 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.
© Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 9. Icon of Saint Nicholas (back), second half of the 19th century, before May 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.
© Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 10. Icon of Saint Nicholas, second half of the 19th century, before May 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.
© Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 11. Icon of Saint Nicholas (back), second half of the 19th century, before May 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.
© Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 12. Icon of Saint Panteleimon, painted in the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, second half of the 19th century, before July 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 13. Icon of Saint Panteleimon (back), painted in the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, second half of the 19th century, before July 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 14. Icon of Saint Panteleimon, painted in the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, 1878. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 15. Icon of Saint Panteleimon (back), painted in the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos, 1878. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 16. Icon of Saint Nicholas the New of Sofia, the 19th century, before April 1878. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 17. Icon of the Holy Mother of God of Kazan, 19th century, before 1878, Private collection. Photo: Petar Radichev.



Fig. 18. Icon of Christ Pantocrator nineteenth century, before 1878. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Batak.



Fig. 19. Icon of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, 1878 Photo: Totka Grigorova. © Church of the Holy Ascension of Christ, Shumen.



Fig. 20. Icon of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, 1900. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Lom.



Fig. 21. Icon of the Mother of God, end of the 19th century, after 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Historical Museum – Vratsa.



Fig. 22. Icon of the Holy Ascension of Christ by M. I. Ljubavin, early 20th century, ca. 1902. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka monastery.

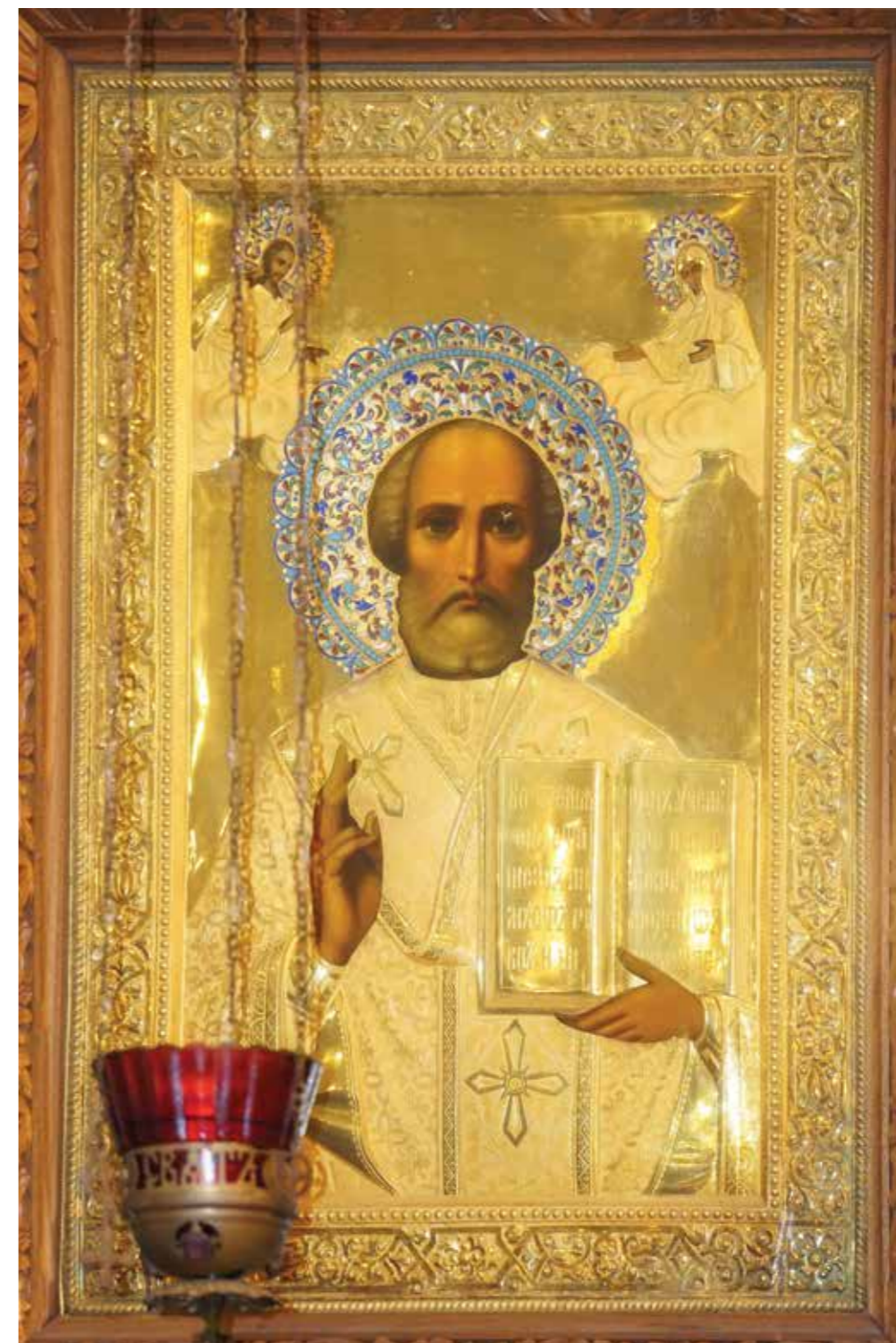


Fig. 23. Icon Saint Nicholas by M. I. Ljubavin, early 20th century, ca. 1902. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka monastery.

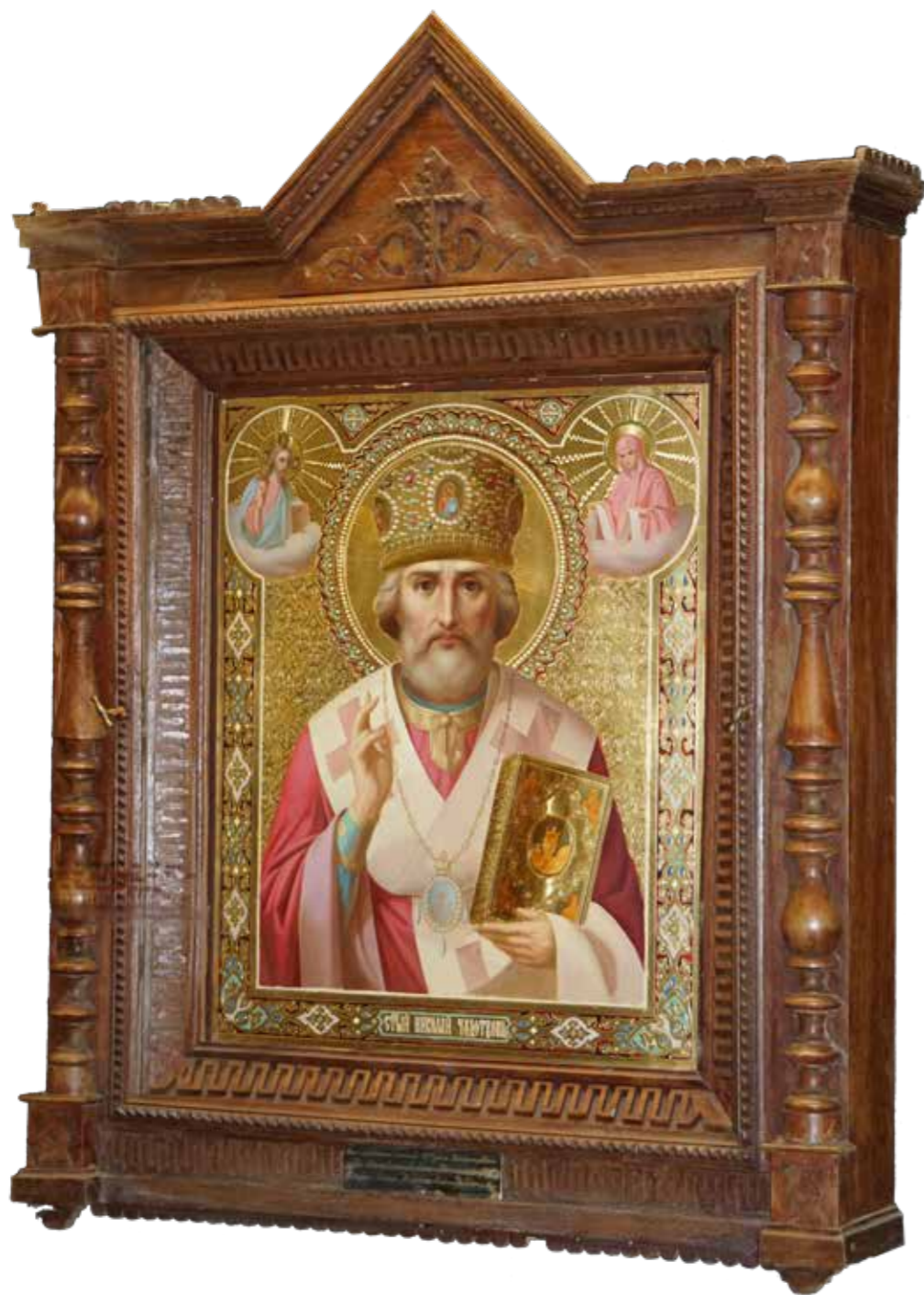


Fig. 24. Icon Saint Nicholas, early 20th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Regional Military History Museum – Pleven.



Fig. 25. A bell presented by Alexander II to the church of Saint Paraskeva in Byala in 1878 Photo: Ivo Zheynov. © Historical Museum – Byala.



Fig. 26. Emperor Alexander II with retinue in his camp in the village of Gorna Studena, 3 October 1877. (Source: www.lostbulgaria.com).



Fig. 27. The church of Saint Demetrius in the village of Gorna Studena. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 28. Iconostasis donated to the church of Saint Demetrius in Gorna Studena by Alexander II. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 29. The bell tower of the church of Saint Demetrius in Gorna Studena. Photo: Angel Nikolov.

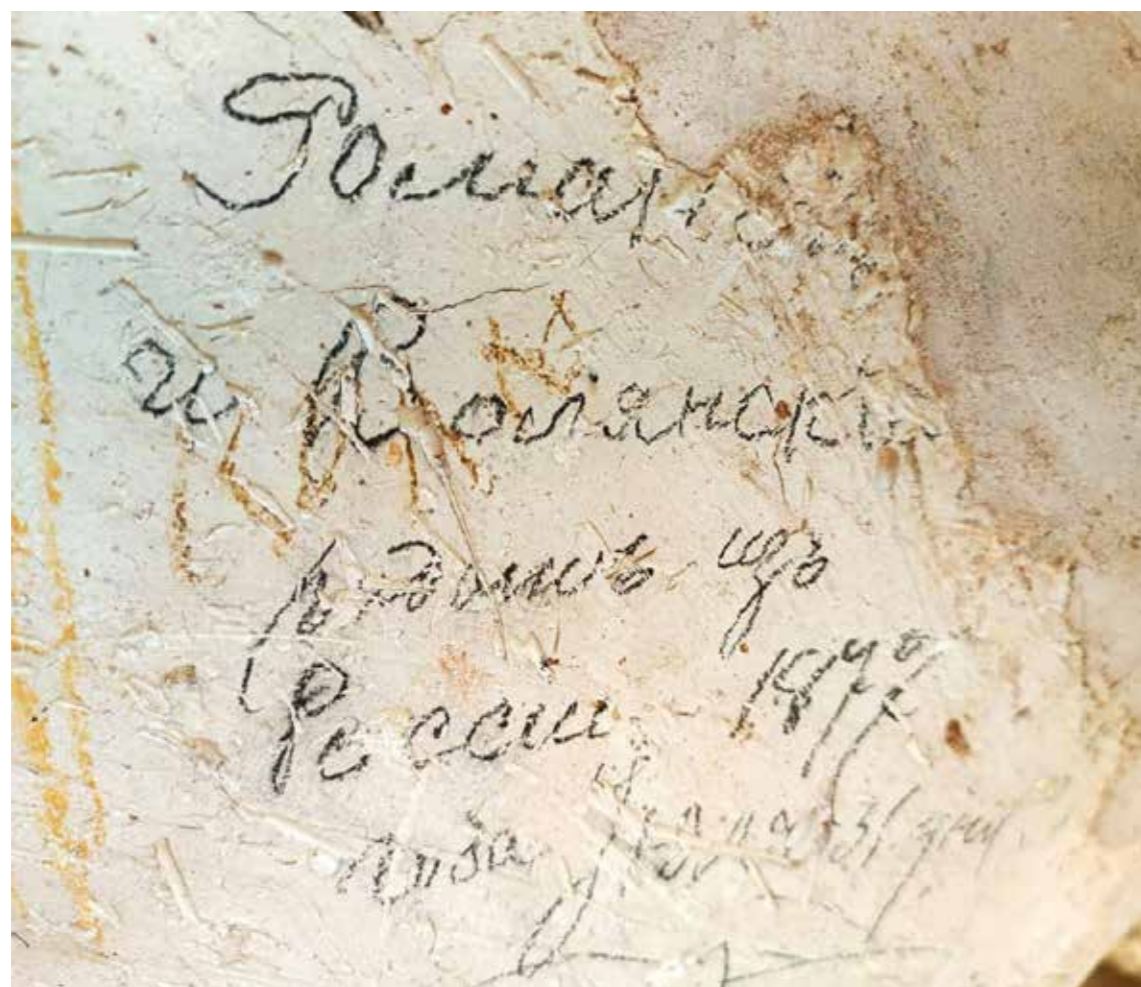


Fig. 30. Signature of a Russian soldier dated 31 July 1877 under the medieval frescoes in a rock church near Ivanovo on the river of Rusenski Lom. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 31. Medieval fresco from a rock church near Ivanovo. A circle marks the place of the signature of a Russian soldier from 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.

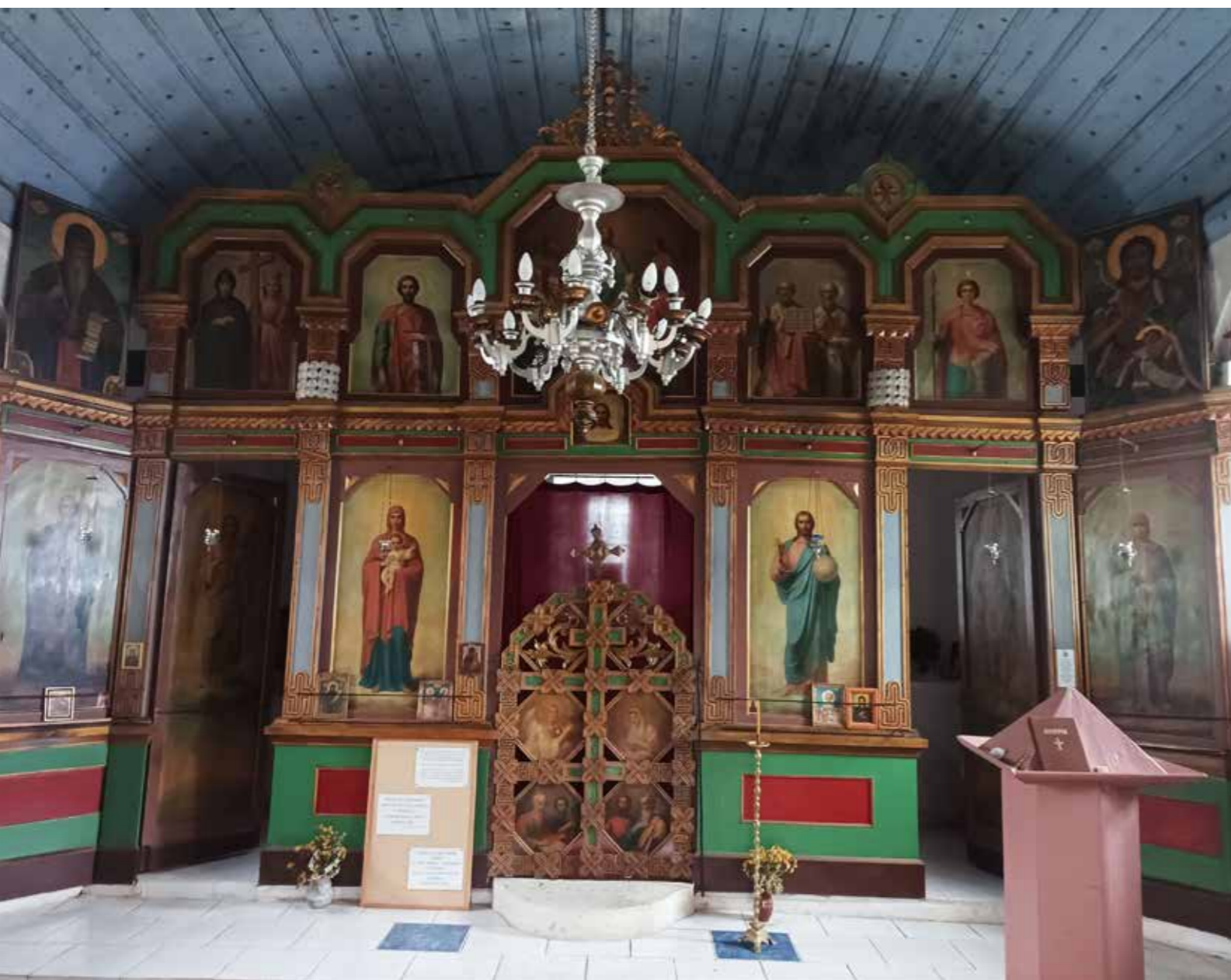


Fig. 32. Iconostasis donated by the heir to the throne, Grand Prince Alexander Alexandrovich to the church in the village of Brestovitsa. Photo: Svetla Georgieva



Fig. 33. The grave of the priest of the 11th Riga Dragoon Regiment, Ivan Krasovskij, in the yard of the church in Gorna Studena, 1877. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 34. The church of the Holy Trinity in Aydemir, near Ruse. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 35. Icon of the Mother of God “Quick to hear” (“Скоропослушница”), 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © The church of the Holy Trinity in Aydemir.



Fig. 36. The Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 37. Russian icons from the iconostasis of the church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo, 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov.

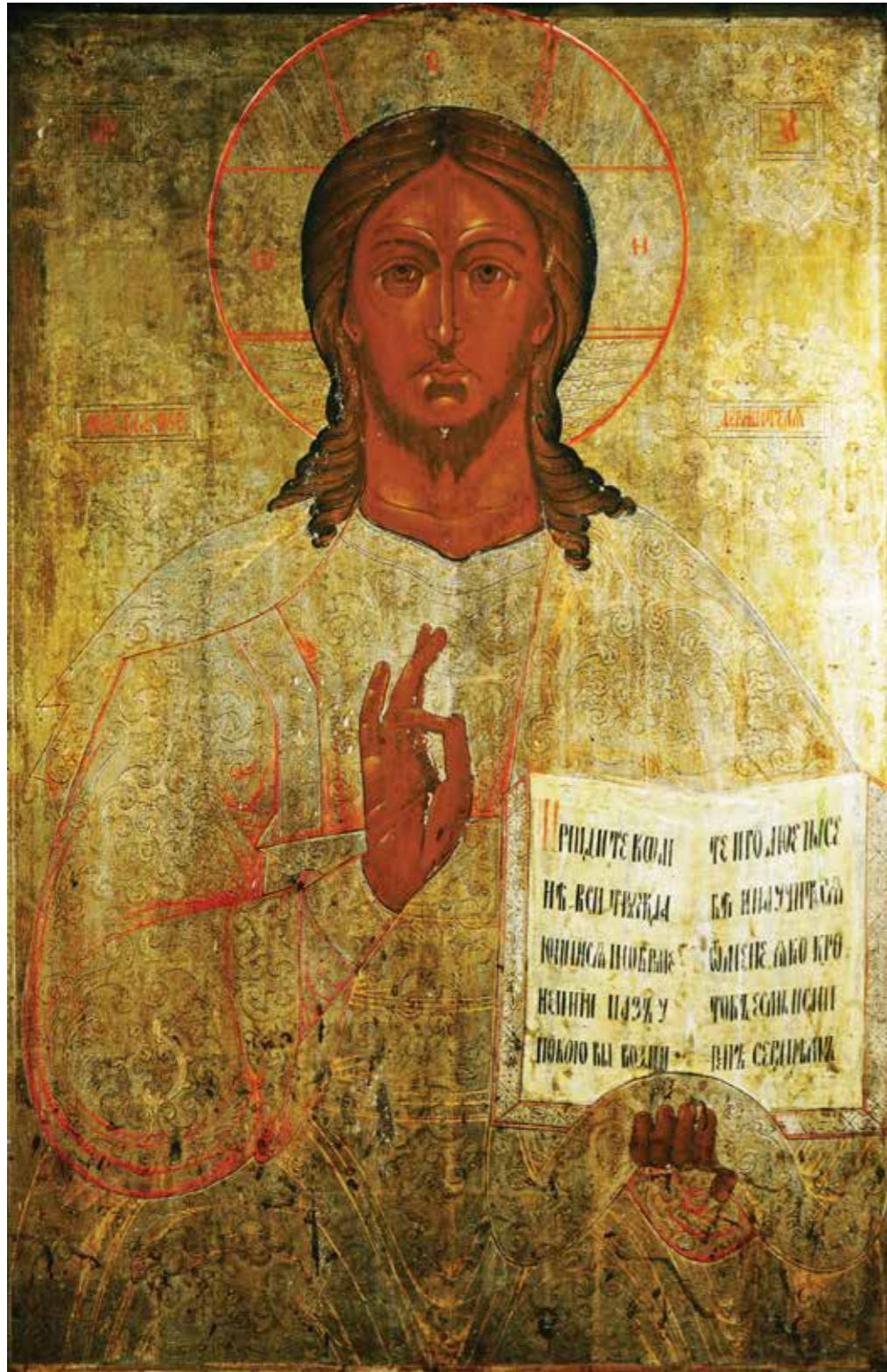


Fig. 38. Icon of Christ Pantocrator, 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo.



Fig. 39. Icon of the Holy Mother of God of Tikhvin, 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo.



Fig. 40. A Russian metal cross, 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God in Malko Tarnovo.



Fig. 41. Icon of Saint Alexander Nevsky, 1878. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Art Gallery "Dimitar Dobrovich" – Sliven.

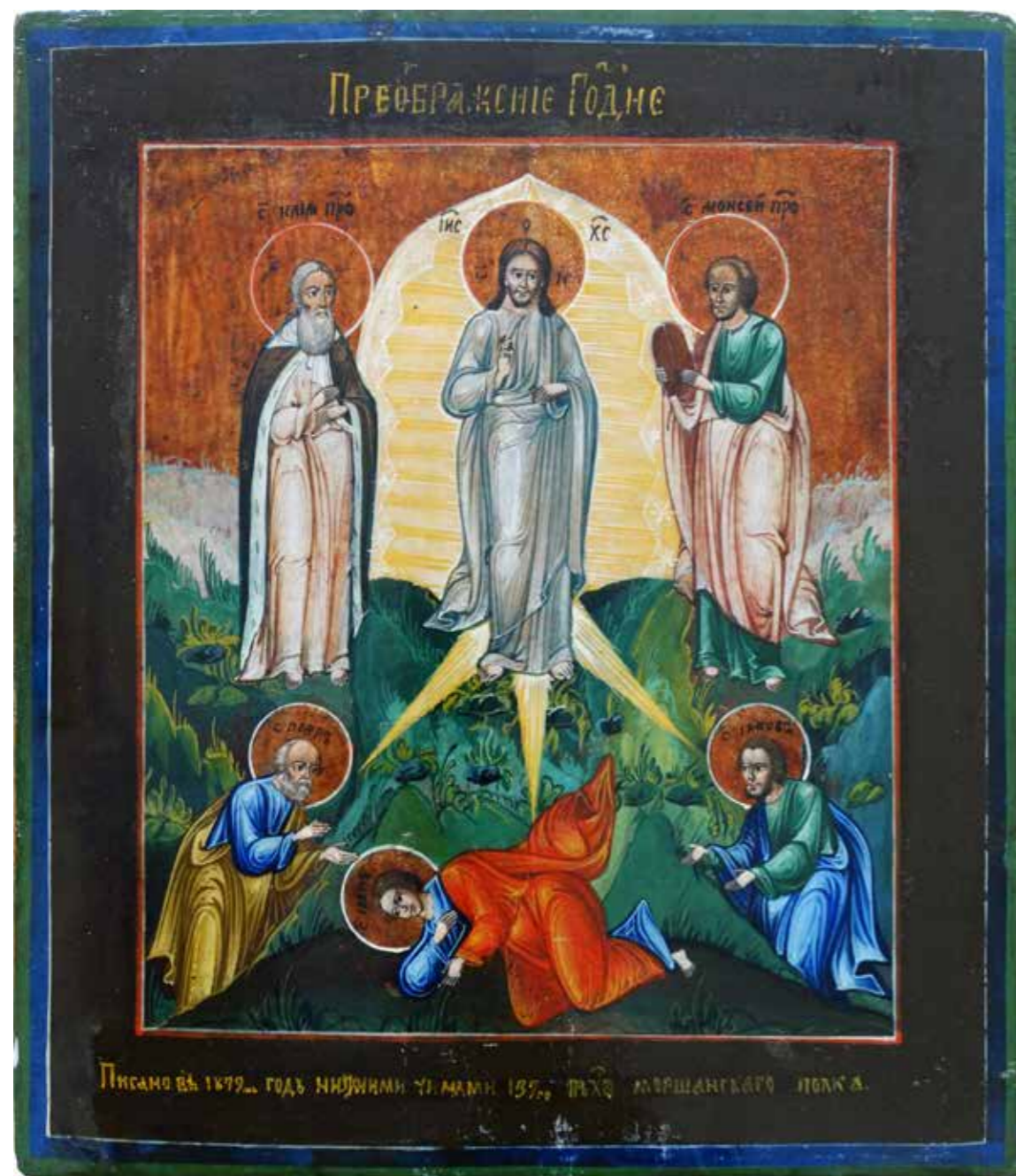


Fig. 42. Icon of the Holy Transfiguration of Lord, 1879. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Art Gallery “Dimitar Dobrovich” – Sliven.

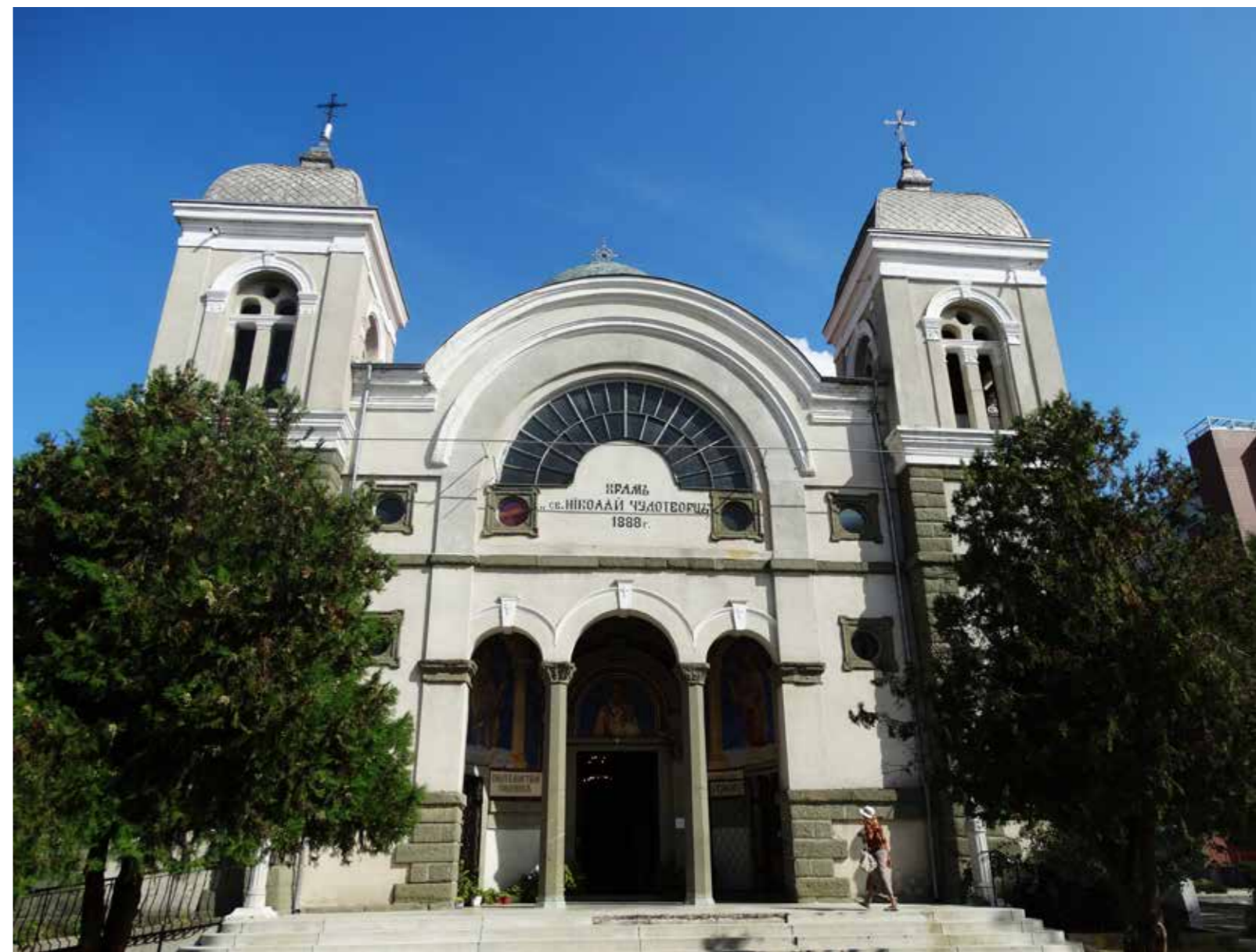


Fig. 43. The Church of Saint Nicholas in Yambol, late 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 44. Icon of Saint Nicholas, 19th century. Photo: Angel Nikolov. © Art Gallery – Yambol.

Russian icons of the 16th – 19th centuries in Bulgaria

Natalia Komashko

Abstract:

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, the first few Russian icons began to arrive at Bulgarian monasteries as gifts from the tsar and Russian monasteries. At the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, mass-produced icons, created in the village of Kholuy and tailored to peasant tastes, began to appear. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they constituted the absolute majority of icons brought from Russia. At the same time, individual works of high artistic level also arrived in Bulgaria.

Keywords: Russian icons, Bulgaria, Sixteenth – nineteenth centuries, tsarist court icon painters, monasteries, mass-produced icons; Kholuy.

Very few examples of early Russian icon painting from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been preserved in Bulgaria, unlike in neighboring Greece and Romania. Even taking into account the insufficient study of church collections and sacristies in Bulgarian monasteries, where new and interesting discoveries of Russian icons from this period are apparently still possible, their number remains significantly smaller than in the aforementioned countries. The main reasons for this situation were probably, firstly, that unlike the Danubian Principalities, which retained a certain degree of autonomy, Bulgaria at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire, which hindered direct contact between the local church hierarchy and monasteries, and the Muscovite state. In addition, there were fewer large, prestigious monasteries here than in Greece. There were, of course, other reasons as well, particularly those related to the routes from Moscow to the major Orthodox centers of the Christian East—such as the Holy Land, Sinai, Constantinople, and Mount Athos. Historical events of the nineteenth century, likewise, did little to promote the preservation of the Orthodox artistic heritage on Bulgarian territory.

As with the rest of the Eastern Christian world, Russian-Bulgarian relations gained renewed significance in the sixteenth century with the formation of the unified Russian state and the subsequent adoption of the tsarist title by the Grand Prince of Moscow. This situation obliged the Russian rulers to provide support for Orthodox Christians in territories under non-Orthodox rule. At that time, contacts were

established mainly through monasteries, whose representatives, primarily of the Greek ecclesiastical hierarchy and monasteries, traveled to Russia in search of financial support. Such visits, particularly in the sixteenth century, became a widespread phenomenon. Against this background, the influx of delegations from countries with Slavic populations was relatively moderate.

The first documented Russian-Bulgarian contact of this kind occurred in 1539, when a delegation from the Bulgarian Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos visited Novgorod. Apparently, the choice of Novgorod as a destination was related to personal ties between the inhabitants of Zograf and the Novgorod Metropolitan See, since the main flow of Orthodox monastics from the Christian East tended to go directly to the capital, where the tsar's court was located.

The next and subsequent visits of Bulgarian monks were made directly to Moscow. In late 1558, the first delegation from Rila Monastery—the largest Bulgarian monastery—arrived there, headed by its hegumen.¹ He spent just over a year in Muscovy, visiting numerous cities such as Yaroslavl, Rostov, Vladimir, Suzdal, Pereslavl-Zalessky, Yuryev-Polsky, among others. During such journeys, when visiting monasteries—18 of them in the case of the Rila Monastery delegation—guests were usually presented with icons depicting the monasteries' founders. At the Trinity-Sergius Monastery, the hegumen was customarily presented with a small icon, the *Appearance of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh*, to commemorate his visit to the monastery. Small icons depicting this subject were painted as gifts for important guests as early as the first half of the sixteenth century, and the monastery always maintained a stock for this purpose. Examples of such icons have been preserved in the sacristies of Orthodox monasteries throughout the Christian East. For Moscow, the icon *Mother of God of Vladimir* was the major example of such significant iconography. Dozens of small icons depicting this scene were kept in the Tsar's and Patriarch's Icon Chambers, specifically for presenting as gifts to guests. The *Mother of God of Vladimir* from the Sacristy of Rila Monastery² was apparently brought from Moscow by the delegation of 1558–1559 (fig. 1). It displays rather rare iconographic features characteristic of similar icons produced in the first half of the sixteenth century. Firstly, it is the position of the Christ Child's left hand. He embraces his Mother over the *maphorion*, so that the brown edge of his sleeve is visible in the space between the figures. In most Vladimir icons of the sixteenth century, the Christ Child's hand embraces Mary's neck beneath the *maphorion*, and consequently, his sleeve overlays her clothing in the space between them. Along with the slight distortion of the proportions of the inclined face of the Mother of God and her gaze directed above the Child, this feature is found in only a few surviving icons.³

1 Mourav'ev 1858, 94–95. Dylevskij 1946, 66–69.

2 Churakov 1960, 42–44.

3 See examples of such icons from the first half to the mid-sixteenth century in the collection of the Russian

Interestingly, another early copy of the Vladimir icon of Moscow origin, preserved in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia, also belongs to this rare iconographic variant (cat. 47). Although its original provenance remains unknown, the presence of later inscriptions on the background mentioning the year 1749 and the city of Kiev, indicates that the icon reached Bulgaria long after its creation.

Moscow's contacts with the Eastern Christian ecclesiastical world intensified significantly during the reign of Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich, who was renowned for his piety. Several visits by Bulgarian delegations took place during his brief reign. In 1584, a delegation of monks from Rila Monastery, led by Hegumen Kalist, arrived in Moscow once again. In 1586, Archbishop Gabriel of Ohrid, head of the Serbian and Bulgarian Church, visited the Russian capital and was lavishly rewarded.⁴ Although not mentioned in the documents, it is evident that icons were among the gifts. That same year, Metropolitan Vissarion of Kolosei (Kyustendil) from the Annunciation Monastery, the hegumen of Osogovo Monastery, the priest from the Bilin Monastery of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel near Sofia,⁵ and Elder Paisios from Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos all arrived in Moscow simultaneously.⁶ Due to the large number of church delegations in Moscow at the time, the latter was not permitted to proceed beyond Putivl.⁷ He brought relics of the Tsar's heavenly patron, the Great Martyr Theodore Stratelates, along with relics of Saint Michael of Synnada and the Martyr Pigasius, as well as icons of the Mother of God and the Great Martyr George, the latter incorporating a reliquary. In return, he received 130 rubles from the Tsar.

In 1587, Bishop Gregory of Sofia traveled to Moscow to solicit donations for the restoration of an ancient church.⁸ He brought the hand of Saint Gregory the Decapolite and petitioned the Tsar to become a *ktitor* of the Monastery of the Great Martyr George. In 1591, Metropolitan Dionysios of Tarnovo arrived as part of a large delegation. The purpose of the visit was the official confirmation by Constantinople of the status of the newly established Moscow Patriarchate.⁹ The delegation also included the hegumen of the Transfiguration Monastery near Veliko Tarnovo.¹⁰ During his stay in Moscow, Dionysius visited

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Museum (Russkiye monastyri 1997, 51), in a private collection (Sorokaty – Komashko 2004, 140, 227. No. 99), as well as the earliest known example preserved in the sacristy of the Sinai Monastery (Komashko - Buseva-Davydova 2015, 16).

4 Mourav'ev 1858, 167.

5 This is the first recorded mention of the Bilin Monastery in written sources (Korzh – Temelski 2002, 208).

6 Ibid, 182–183

7 Mourav'ev 1858, 183–184.

8 Ibid, 185–186.

9 Ibid, 232–264.

10 Tyutyundzhiev 2011, 5.

the Trinity-Sergius Monastery. It is known that he received gifts from Boris Godunov—a royal relative and future tsar—among which was an icon of the Mother of God. This is the first and only recorded mention of the donation of icons to representatives of the Bulgarian Church in Moscow. In general, references to such gifts are not uncommon; notably, there is much fuller documentation concerning the monks of the Sinai Monastery who visited Moscow at various times, with the sources precisely recording the number of icons they received.¹¹ Apparently, the Bulgarian hierarchs and monks limited themselves mainly to receiving monetary donations and avoided transporting large quantities of icons from Moscow back to their homeland.

Among the sixteenth-century Russian icons in Bulgarian collections — possibly imported from Russia — one notable example is the icon of *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker*, in shoulder-length type. Preserved at the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum in Sofia,¹² it closely resembles sixteenth-century Vologda works, especially in facial typology, graphic execution, and the way the head contour reaches the upper margin.¹³

Among the famous Russian icons of the sixteenth century preserved in Bulgaria, some were brought into the country much later. They were either brought by Old Believers, such as the icon Martyrs Guriy, Samon, and Aviv, created at the end of the sixteenth century in Veliky Ustyug (see the article “Icons of Old Believer Settlements in Bulgaria”), or were donated at the end of the nineteenth century. One such gift to the newly built Shipka Monastery was an embroidered burial shroud depicting Saint Sergius of Radonezh, apparently dating from the first half of the sixteenth century, sent from the Trinity-Sergius Lavra¹⁴ (fig. 2).

The events of the Time of Troubles (*Smuta*) in Russia led to the temporary suspension of visits to Moscow by church delegations from the Christian EaSaint Visits resumed only in the 1620s. Among the Bulgarian representatives, the hegumen and the archimandrite of Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos visited the capital of Muscovy in 1623 and 1627¹⁵.

At the end of 1628, Archimandrite Stefan of Rila Monastery arrived from Sofia, accompanied by his entourage.¹⁶ The documents state that he brought with him two charter letters issued by Tsars Ivan the

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11 Komashko - Buseva-Davydova 2015, 26, 29–30.

12 Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 390. No. 407.

13 Komashko 2007, 71, 179. No. 54; Nersesyan – Vladimirovna – Preobrazhensky 2007, 786. No. 143.

14 Dated by A.V. Silkin.

15 Mourav'ev 1860, 24, 48.

16 Dylevskij, 70.

Terrible and Fyodor Ioannovich, as well as relics of the Martyrs Sergius and Mocius.¹⁷ That same year, a priest from Cherepish Monastery near Vratsa visited Moscow.¹⁸

These visits can hypothetically be associated with a small diptych, preserved in the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum, depicting Marian feasts—the Intercession of the Virgin (Pokrov) and the Presentation in the temple of the Mother of God.¹⁹ The miniature scenes within the diptych are embellished along the borders with a silver basma setting. Although the painting has suffered numerous damages to the paint layer, the faces of the depicted figures have been well-preserved. They bear a striking resemblance to the works of the tsars' court masters from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, who also worked extensively on commission for the wealthy industrialist Stroganov family.²⁰ The faces are rendered in dark brownish tones, modeled with soft, lighter layers of paint, and finished with delicate white highlights. A very similar manner of depicting faces can be observed in the icons of the renowned masters Istoma Savin,²¹ Pervusha,²² Prokopii Chirin,²³ and Semyon Borozdin.²⁴ Given the high quality of the painting—undoubtedly executed by court artists—this folding icon was likely a gift from the Tsar to a person of some distinction.

Two more icons of the Stroganov school arrived in Bulgaria sometime after their creation. The *Mother of God of Vladimir*, dating from the early seventeenth century, was brought into the country no earlier than the first half of the nineteenth century by Old Believers, who held the works of the Stroganov masters in particularly high regard (see the article “Icons of Old Believer Settlements in Bulgaria”). The *Hodegetria Mother of God*,²⁵ dating from the second quarter of the seventeenth century, reached the Balkans by an unusual route. In the second half of the eighteenth century, it was restored in Kholuy:

17 The tradition of bringing Christian relics to Moscow by supplicants from the Christian East began in the sixteenth century and expanded significantly during the reign of the early tsars of the Romanov dynasty, for whom the collection of these sacred objects in the Assumption Cathedral of Moscow became a matter of state importance. Donors were usually rewarded generously.

18 Dylevskij 1946, 70.

19 Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 387. No. 404.

20 In this context, they are commonly referred to as the Stroganov masters.

21 Three-Part Folding Icon and *The Origin of the True Tree of the Life-Giving Cross of the Lord* in the Collection of the Tretyakov Gallery (Rybakov 1995, 424, 475. No. 288; Sofia 2000, 240–241. No. 84).

22 Icons of the *Sunday of the Holy Fathers* in the collection of the Russian Museum (Vilinbakhnova 2005, 68–69); *the Bringing of the Holy Mandylion to King Abgar* in the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery (Lidov – Evseeva – Chugreeva 2005, 254. No. 30).

23 Icon *Selected Saints* in the Tretyakov Gallery (Kamenskaya 1971, No. 22).

24 The *Bogolubovo icon of the Mother of God*, *The Nativity of John the Forerunner*, *the Indiction of the New Year*, and *the Seventh Ecumenical Council* in the collection of the Russian Museum (Vilinbakhnova 2005, 44–45, 48–53).

25 Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 388. No. 405.

the background was repainted in blue, in keeping with the Baroque fashion, while the margins were painted white and decorated with a simple floral pattern commonly used by Kholuy icon painters of that period. Reworked in this manner, the icon was brought to Bulgaria as part of a consignment of newly painted Kholuy icons. Iconographically, it can be traced back to a prototype attributed to the Stroganov master Istoma Savin.²⁶ The distinctly round eyes of the Mother of God are also found in icons of the same type from the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁷

Among the later visits of hierarchs of Bulgarian origin to Moscow, are the recorded stays of Paisios, Archimandrite of Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos, in 1639 and 1642.²⁸ He presented the Tsar with myrrh from the tomb of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki, for which he received a special gift. In response to Paisios's report on the looting of Bulgarian monasteries by the Ottomans, the Tsar ordered that silver liturgical vessels be sent to these monasteries. It is possible that icons were among the gifts, which like the vessels, eventually ended up in various places. In 1656, Daniel, Metropolitan of Varna, visited Moscow.

Representatives of Rila Monastery apparently visited Moscow once again around the mid-seventeenth century. One piece of evidence supporting this is the icon of the *Mother of God and Child Enthroned*, executed by masters of the tsar and originating from the Rila monastery's sacristy (fig. 3).²⁹ Iconographically, it is close to the *Mother of God of the Uncut Mount*, but differs in the inclusion of two angels standing behind the throne. This distinctive feature allows such icons to be associated with the enthroned image of *Mother of God of Cyprus*, which came to be venerated in Russia in the seventeenth century. The presence of angels is a defining feature of this iconographic type,³⁰ as described in texts that were popular in the early eighteenth century.³¹

The iconography of this icon is characteristic of Russian gifts to the Christian East

Several similar icons are preserved, notably in the sacristy of the Monastery of Sinai.³² One of them, inserted into a skladden-kuzov (складень-кузов), a special folding icon case, is remarkably close in its

26 Antonova 1966, 74–75. No. 70.

27 See the icon from a private collection (Shalina 2008, 70–71. No. 15).

28 Mourav'ev 1860, 205, 225.

29 It is exhibited in the icon gallery of Rila Monastery, inv. no. RCBOB. III. 127.

30 In Russian iconography, several distinct versions of the image of Mother of God known as the “Cypriot” type existed, each derived from different Marian icons venerated in Cyprus (Zimenko – Kobayak – Shulgina – Komashko 2021, 230–234).

31 Belobrova 2005, 317.

32 Komashko - Buseva-Davydova 2015, 250–257. No. 24; 262–267. No. 26.

painting style to the icon from Rila Monastery. The faces on both icons are very light, emphatically rounded, and modeled with subtly tinted white highlights over a reddish ochre base. Gold and colored varnishes have been generously used in the painting. In terms of workmanship and richness of decorative design, both works can be attributed to court painters and dated to the 1640s on the basis of direct analogies.³³

In the 1670s, a new lifelike style of painting developed by Simon Ushakov, became established in the icon-painting workshop of the Armory Chamber. Icons created in this style by court painters in the last third of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century can be found throughout the Orthodox world—in Greece, Constantinople, Mount Athos, Sinai, Romania, and Serbia. In Bulgaria, however, such icons are virtually absent, with the exception of the icon of *Christ Pantocrator* at Bachkovo Monastery, mentioned by Oleg Tarasov.³⁴ It should be noted that in the seventeenth century, the monastery was Greek-speaking, while other Bulgarian monasteries continued to conduct services in Church Slavonic.

Among the Russian icons of the second half of the seventeenth century preserved in Bulgaria, the majority were produced by artists who catered to a broad range of patrons. These icons exhibit competent workmanship, though their painterly execution remains relatively simple. By this time, large-scale icon production had been established in two villages of Vladimir Uyezd — Palekh and Kholuy. In Kholuy, part of which belonged to the Trinity-Sergius Monastery, icons depicting the *Apparition of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh* began to be produced in large quantities for visitors to the monastery. Two such icons are preserved in the collection of the Regional Historical Museum in Veliko Tarnovo. It is reasonable to assume that they were brought by representatives of Bulgarian monasteries who had visited Moscow. Although no records of such visits have yet been found, it is likely that these delegations were required to travel periodically in order to collect alms, in accordance with the time frames specified in the tsar's charters.

The first of the icons, the *Apparition of the Mother of God to Saint Sergius of Radonezh* (cat. 103), is painted on a gold background and is distinguished by the meticulous execution of the painting in the Stroganov tradition. It was apparently painted in the monastery's workshop around the mid-seventeenth century. On the second icon (cat. 104), the background is light green, gold is used sparingly, and the

33 It appears that the same master painted the Holy Doors donated by Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich to the Trinity Cathedral of the Trinity-Sergius Monastery in 1643 (Baldin – Manushina 1996, 80) and to the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery in 1645 (Petrova et al. 2005, 180–185. No. 60).

34 Tarasov 1990, 55. At present, no such icon is found in the monastery. It is possible that the author was mistaken in identifying a Bulgarian icon in the National Revival style as a work of the Armory Chamber, as the style of the Armory Chamber had not yet been sufficiently studied at the time of his survey and the writing of the article.

paint is applied unevenly in places, allowing the *levkas* (gesso ground) to show through. The drawing is fluid but imprecise, the figures are heavily proportioned, and the overall painting appears to have been executed hastily and carelessly. The thin white lines applied to the figures' fingers are particularly noticeable—a technique typical of folk and provincial icon painting. The work was created in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, possibly in Kholuy.

The following is a list of the simply executed and stylistically traditional icons from the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that are preserved in Bulgaria: the *Resurrection / Descent into Hell, with Feasts* (cat. 102); the *Resurrection / Descent into Hell* (cat. 42); *John the Baptist, Angel of the Desert, with Scenes from His Life* (cat. 105); the *Double Miracle of the Great Martyrs George and Demetrios of Thessaloniki* (cat. 106); the *Miracle of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki* (cat. 108); and *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker (Nicholas of Mozhaisk)* (cat. 48). These icons were created by iconographers from Central Russia and the Volga River region. Some of these works appear to have been created in Palekh—particularly the *Resurrection / Descent into Hell, with Feasts*, an iconographic type that would later become especially popular in Palekh. Although such seventeenth-century icons show no distinct regional features and bear no inscriptions indicating their place of origin, scholars tend to attribute them to Palekh and Kholuy. The mass-produced icon painting of these centers absorbed the iconographic and stylistic innovations of the capital's masters, but did so cautiously, adapting them to the conservative tastes of lower-income townspeople and peasants.

A precise understanding of their customers' tastes, combined with the ability to produce large batches of icons quickly, ensured a steady demand for the work of Vladimir icon painters. At the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these painters began to expand into foreign markets, particularly in Orthodox regions under Ottoman rule. The first documented evidence of icons being exported from Russia for commercial purposes dates to 1705,³⁵ although this practice had evidently existed earlier. During this period, a wide channel for the distribution of Russian icon paintings to the Balkan countries was established. By the mid-eighteenth century, the icon export trade had increased significantly.³⁶

35 That year, ten peasants from Palekh, with the permission of their landowner I. S. Buturlin, petitioned the Ambassadorial Office for a travel permit to the Wallachia and Serbia in order to sell icons. As a result, not ten but sixteen people entered Ottoman territory, including the *krestovoy dyak* (deacon of the tsar's household chapel) attached to Tsarina Praskovya Fyodorovna, widow of Tsar Ivan Alekseyevich. He was carrying letters and gifts for the Eastern Patriarchs. In 1708, the Palekh peasants again traveled into Ottoman lands, but were detained and expelled. Their landowner, Buturlin, was required to sign a written pledge that his peasants would no longer travel to Ottoman territory to sell icons. Nevertheless, despite the formal ban on icon trading by Russian merchants within the Ottoman Empire, this practice continued in the following years (Bogoyavlensky 1947, 243–244).

36 In 1754, Ananii Fedorov, sacristan of the Nativity Cathedral in Suzdal, wrote that many residents of Kholuy and Palekh traveled to Poland, Caesarea, Slavonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria to sell icons (Leont'ev 1903, 42).

Given the large number of icons from the icon-painting villages of the Vladimir region that were imported into the Balkans, this material provides a valuable basis for identifying the characteristic traits of eighteenth-century painting in these centers—an area that remains largely understudied. Considering that Kholuy was the leading center of mass icon production at the time, most of the imported icons likely originated there. As Palekh's icon painting soon began to cater to a more affluent clientele, its character changed significantly³⁷ in the second half of the eighteenth century. In Kholuy, however, the simplified techniques that had once been developed remained virtually unchanged for many decades, despite shifts in stylistic orientation.³⁸

Icons produced in Kholuy in the eighteenth century can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of works that follow the lifelike trend in metropolitan icon painting at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though in a highly simplified form, primarily at the level of facial typology. These icons were evidently created during a period when the lifelike style appealed to a broad audience, particularly in the first half of the century. These works display a number of distinctive features. Typically, the icon boards include a *kovcheg* (a recessed central area) and a relatively wide raised border around the perimeter, with noticeably narrower side margins compared to the top and bottom. However, board proportions may vary. The margins on these icons are most often ochre in color, and less frequently dark green. The color palette is very limited, dominated by warm, earthy tones. The modeling of form is minimal, and at times entirely absent; the image relies primarily on linear drawing in black and white paint. This is a fully vernacular icon, intended for a peasant audience. Such simplified techniques were traditionally characteristic of icons from remote border regions, particularly in the north. Nevertheless, the existence of a large and homogeneous group of similar icons preserved in the Balkan countries, combined with the well-documented production flows from the icon-painting villages of the Vladimir Uyezd beginning in the early eighteenth century, allows for the confident attribution of such works to Kholuy.

The first group includes the icons the *Savior Not-Made-By-Hands* (cat. 109), the *Miracle of Saint George and the Serpent* (cat. 23), and the *Miracle of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki* (cat. 107), all of which

37 The output of Palekh in the first half of the eighteenth century appears to include more carefully executed icons painted on flat boards without a *kovcheg*, and featuring dark green margins – a characteristic exemplified by a large group of works from the Uffizi Gallery collection in Florence (Conticelli – Gobbo - Parenti 2015).

38 This is confirmed by the extremely rare large-format Kholuy icons from the first half to the mid-eighteenth century, which bear inscriptions and were intended for church use. These works are more finely executed but remain stylistically consistent with the icons of the first group. See, for example, the icon *Saints Basil the Great, Arkhip, and Anastasia* (1729) by Timofey Danilov, in the collection of the Perm State Art Gallery (Komashko 2006, 100–101, 232. No. 78).

should be dated to the beginning of the century. Icons of a more sketch-like or freehand type appear to have been created somewhat later. These include the *Great Martyr Catherine* (cat. 18), *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (cat. 34), the *Mother of God of Kazan* (cat. 28), and an icon in two registers (cat. 110).³⁹ The works in which blue begins to appear in the color palette—without any corresponding shift in stylistic treatment—represent the latest examples within this group. They mark the onset of stylistic changes in Kholuy icon painting and the gradual assimilation of Baroque elements. At times, this blue takes on a distinctive shade not found in Russian icons preserved outside the Balkans. This led Ilya Borovikov to propose the hypothesis that mobile workshops of Kholuy icon painters operated in the Balkans, using locally available pigments.⁴⁰ One such icon is *Deesis* (cat. 113)⁴¹.

The icons of the second group date to the second half of the eighteenth century. Created by a new generation of artists, they reflect the influence of urban culture and the Baroque style on peasant icon painting. These icons do not have a *kovcheg*, and their color schemes are dominated by blue, especially in the backgrounds. The iconographic repertoire expands to include pictorial motifs borrowed from Western European engravings. The compositions become more dynamic, and simplified Baroque ornamentation is sometimes employed, particularly in decorative frames that replace the traditional margins. At the same time, simpler icons with traditional iconography continued to be produced, incorporating distinctive decorative techniques reminiscent of folk art.

Typical works from this group include the icons the *Resurrection of Christ / Descent into Hell, with Feasts* (cat. 73), *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (cat. 75), the *Coronation of the Virgin* (cat. 85), the *Nativity of the Virgin* (cat. 77), the *Apparition of the Virgin to the Sacristan Yurysh* (the *Mother of God Besednaya*) (cat. 74), and the *Seven Sleeping Youths of Ephesus* (cat. 6)⁴², as well as a miniature version of the *Resurrection of Christ — the Descent into Hell, with Feasts* featuring an oval composition and

39 This group also includes several works in the collection of the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum: the *Mother of God of the Sign* (inv. no. 3539) and *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (inv. no. 3574).

40 Borovikov 2023, 37.

41 Among them are the following icons in the collection of the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum: *Venerable Zosima and Savvaty of Solovki* (Ikoni 2024, 391. No. 409), the *Mother of God of Kazan* (inv. no. 3389), the *Apostle John the Theologian in Silence* (inv. no. 3095), and the *Mother of God of Tikhvin* (inv. no. 3648).

42 The collection of the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum includes the icons *John the Baptist, Angel of the Desert* (inv. no. 3003), *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (Ikoni 2024, 468. No. 534), the *Prophet Elias in the Desert* (ibid, 478. No. 549), the *Mother of God of Kursk (Kurskaya-Korennaya)* (ibid, 394. No. 412), among others. Rila Monastery houses the icon of the *Mother of God of Shuya-Smolensk*, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century. It features a blue background and is painted on a reused panel with a clearly defined shallow *kovcheg*. Such panels are entirely uncharacteristic for the icons produced by Vladimir-region icon painters during this period.

circular border scenes, based on a print source (cat. 58.)⁴³ The icon *Venerable Theodosius of Totma* (cat. 115), dating from the very end of the eighteenth century, introduced Bulgarian believers to a newly canonized Russian saint.⁴⁴ The image is set within a thin frame featuring shaped corner elements in a highly simplified Baroque style. A four-part icon (cat. 118), traditional in its painting but Baroque in its color scheme, exemplifies the use of a painted folk-style floral frame. Another type of frame appears on the icon of the *Mother of God of Vladimir* (cat. 117), which is highly archaic in its painting style but nonetheless dates to the second half of the eighteenth century. A similar but more carefully executed frame appears on the icon of the *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow* (cat. 114), which was likely created in the early nineteenth century, judging by the presence of yellow in its color palette.

Kholuy icons from the second half of the eighteenth century often bear the signatures of their icon painters, as a 1752 decree issued by the Suzdal Spiritual Consistory required them to sign their works. Although no such icons have been identified in Bulgaria, a significant number have been preserved in Romania, Greece, and other Orthodox countries. The painting styles of different masters are often so similar that unsigned icons cannot be attributed to a specific icon painter with any certainty. The only Kholuy workshop whose output displays individually recognizable features is the Gorbunov family workshop, which operated from the last quarter of the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. An icon of the *Mother of God of Vladimir*, created in this workshop in the first half of the nineteenth century, has been identified in Bulgaria (cat. 88).

In the nineteenth century, the painting techniques developed earlier in Kholuy were preserved in the most widely produced icons, known as *krasnushki*, which circulated throughout nearly all Balkan countries.

Of course, higher-quality examples of eighteenth-century Russian icon painting were also brought to Bulgaria, though they are incomparably fewer in number. While Kholuy icons were intended primarily for peasant households, icons of superior artistic quality were produced for churches and as gifts to members of upper social strata. These include a small icon of the *Savior Not-Made-By-Hands*, which was formerly housed with the vestry of Rila Monastery and is painted in a lifelike manner in imitation of the Armory Chamber masters (fig. 4), as well as a fragment of a diptych featuring the central image

43 A. V. Olsufiev's collection included three such engravings from the mid to late eighteenth century, now preserved in the Russian State Library (Rovinsky 1881, 384–385. No. 988). Images: <https://knpam.rusneb.ru/kp/item14250>; <https://knpam.rusneb.ru/kp/item13955>; <https://knpam.rusneb.ru/kp/item14299>. An icon by the Kholuy master Mikhey Kosobryukhov, based on the same engraving and dating from the second half of the eighteenth century is currently held in a private collection.

44 The tradition of sending icons of Russian saints from Russia to the Christian East can be traced back to the sixteenth century (Komashko - Buseva-Davydova 2015, 60).

of the *Resurrection of Christ* (cat. 51), both dating to the Petrine period. The icon with the *Three Hierarchs* (cat. 49) is a fine example of the adaptation of the Armory Chamber tradition in the Baroque period. The icon is executed with a high level of craftsmanship; it closely resembles the work of the finest Moscow icon painters of the mid-eighteenth century.⁴⁵

The icon of the *Mother of God of Kykkos*, whose composition can be traced back to a lost engraving by Christopher Zhefarovich (cat. 50), is of particular rarity. At the center, set against a backdrop featuring a mountain with a monastery at its summit and the sea in the foreground, is the miraculous icon, enclosed within a rocaille frame. In the corners are the Four Evangelists; flanking the central image are scenes of the Assumption of the Virgin and the Intercession. Above, the personified Holy Trinity appears in the clouds, while at the bottom, within cartouches, are Saint Nicholas and Saint Mary of Egypt. All the images are separated by rocaille-style borders. Several other icons derived from the same prototype are known, although they vary in certain details. In one such icon, the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple and the Dormition of the Mother of God flank the image of the Mother of God of Kykkos, while a group of saints appears below. The other two icons have no side images, with only the Evangelists depicted in the corners. These latter examples appear to reproduce the engraving most faithfully. One of them bears the signature of Mikhail Ivanov Funtusov,⁴⁶ icon painter to the Sheremetev Counts. All of these icons are executed in a similar manner, combining Rococo elements with certain features of Greek icon painting from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Although not widespread, this adherence to Greek models is evident in some Russian icons of the period, particularly in the treatment of facial types.⁴⁷ This stylistic orientation toward the Greek manner was undoubtedly connected to the foreign policy of Catherine II and her so-called “Greek Project.”

When discussing the arrival of icons from the Russian Empire to Bulgarian lands, it is necessary to mention the works of the Ukrainian artistic tradition as well. Ties between the Bulgarian Orthodox communities and Kyiv as a religious and artistic centre grew stronger during the final third of the sev-

45 See, for example, the icons by Egor Grek: *Saint Peter of Capitol with the Martyr Callistratus* (1741, Russian Museum; Religioznyi Petersburg 2004, 467); *Apostles Peter and Paul, the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles, and the Holy Blessed Prince Alexander Nevsky* (1742, Russian Museum; *ibid.*, 474); the *Praises of the Mother of God (Pokhvala Presvyatoy Bogoroditsy, 1744)*, private collection; Buseva-Davydova 2019, 73, among others.

46 It is held in a private collection in Moscow.

47 See Mikhail Funtusov's 1770s icon of the *Mother of God of Iver* from the collection of the Andrey Rublev Museum (Komashko 2006, 76, 321. No. 49), as well as the complex of local and festal iconostasis tiers donated by Catherine II to the Greek Church of the Holy Trinity in Livorno in 1764 (Passarelli 2001).

enteenth century.⁴⁸ In the eighteenth century, the icon of the *Great Martyr Barbara*⁴⁹ was brought to some Bulgarian monastery; at that time, the saint's relics were kept in the Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv. In terms of style and technique, the icon is fully consistent with Kyiv icon painting of that period.⁵⁰ As noted above, one of the early icons of the *Mother of God of Vladimir* (cat. 47)⁵¹ was also brought to Bulgaria via Kyiv.

The majority of icons arriving in Bulgaria during the nineteenth century are standardised examples of mass-produced icon painting from the Vladimir Province. Nevertheless, icons of higher artistic quality also emerged—among them the remarkable *Vita icon of Saint Mary of Egypt* (cat. 60), created in Palekh at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, a distinctive style of icon painting fully developed and flourished in Palekh, reinterpreting traditional iconography through the aesthetics of its time. The complexity of the composition, the miniature style with meticulously detailed rendering, and the use of gold in depicting grasses and trees, all suggest a prestigious commission.⁵²

During the nineteenth century, the practice of adorning icons with costly revetments became increasingly popular in Bulgaria. Moreover, there is documented evidence that such revetments were commissioned in Moscow for icons housed in Bulgarian monasteries.⁵³ During the nineteenth century, the practice of adorning icons with costly revetments became more prevalent in Bulgaria. Documented evidence exists that such revetments were commissioned in Moscow for icons housed in Bulgarian monasteries. For example, two revetments featuring Empire-style decoration, dated to the beginning of the century, were commissioned for two icons at Rila Monastery: *The Savior Not-Made-By-Hands* and the *Dormition of Saint John of Rila*. In addition to rhinestones, the latter was further embellished with several small enamel icons depicting various subjects. (figs. 5, 6.)

As Russian society gradually rediscovered the artistic language of the traditional icon at the close of the nineteenth century, the work of icon painters from the village of Mstera in Vladimir Province gained

48 Dylevskij 1946, 85–143.

49 Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 392. No. 410.

50 See, for example, the mid-eighteenth-century icon *Annunciation* from the collection of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra National Reserve (Sheredega – Shultz – Karpenko 2008, 112–113).

51 Also originating from the Church of Saint Saviour in Sofia is the icon *The Mother of God of Akhtyr*, painted in 1758 in Gadyach, Poltava Province. It was originally intended to be sent to the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos (Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 396. No. 414).

52 See the Palekh icon from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *The Appearance of the Archangel Michael to Joshua, the Son of Nun* (private collection; Komashko 2007, 55, 172. No. 39).

53 This practice is also attested in relation to other countries. For example, in 1872, a metal cover was produced in Moscow for a Byzantine icon of *The Mother of God of the Life-Giving Spring* belonging to the Sinai Monastery (Komashko - Buseva-Davydova 2015, 424–425. No. 9).

widespread popularity. These artists, who had traditionally worked for the Old Believers, adhered to conventional iconographic models. A distinguishing feature of their icons is the meticulous execution and highly decorative character of the works (cat. 96). The backgrounds and borders often imitate the appearance of metal covers embellished with enamel.⁵⁴

Among the works of Mstera masters preserved in Bulgarian collections is a signed icon by Vasily Pavlovich Guryanov—a distinguished icon painter and restorer, founder of Moscow's largest workshop, and official supplier to the imperial court. This icon, dated 1902 (cat. 101), depicts the Slavic enlighteners *Saints Cyril and Methodius*—a subject of particular significance in Bulgarian iconography. The veneration of these saints in Ancient Rus' came to an end in the late seventeenth century, when, as part of the correction of liturgical books according to the Greek model, their names were removed from the Menaion. Interest in them reemerged in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly among the Slavophiles.⁵⁵ Their liturgical veneration was officially reinstated in 1863 on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the creation of the Slavic alphabet. The 1000th anniversaries of the deaths of Saints Cyril (in 1869) and Methodius (in 1885) were also widely commemorated. After 1885, the veneration of the brothers, Saints Cyril and Methodius, Equal to the Apostles, assumed a distinctly official and state-supported character. They came to be regarded as patrons of public education.

The paired iconography of Saints Cyril and Methodius began to develop actively in the 1860s. Several variations of this iconographic type exist, differing in specific details that can be traced to various prototypes. In this case, the composition reproduces a lithograph based on a drawing by Mikhail Mikeshin, published in 1884.

It is evident that the icon depicting Prince Alexander Nevsky in a waist-length pose, now preserved in the sacristy of Shipka Monastery (cat. 40), was produced in the workshop of V. P. Guryanov. The icon is adorned with a chased silver cover made by one of the largest jewelry firms in Moscow—the company of N. V. Nemirov-Kolodkin's heirs, official suppliers to the imperial court. Executed in high relief, the cover's decoration incorporates original seventeenth-century ornamental motifs, reflecting the revivalist tendencies in jewelry art of the early twentieth century.⁵⁶

54 A similar Mstera icon, *the Mother of God of the Three Hands*, is held in the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum (Kuyumdzhiev – Vanev 2024, 477. No. 547).

55 Between 1848 and 1852, the artist I. K. Dorner painted a paired icon of *Saints Cyril and Methodius* for the iconostasis of the Alexander Nevsky Chapel in Saint Isaac's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg. An icon produced in the workshop of V. M. Peshekhonov in Saint Petersburg during the 1850s is currently housed in the Bulgarian Metochion Church in Istanbul.

56 Among the notable works of jewelry and decorative art are the covers of the icons *The Mother of God of Vlad-*



imir (Kuyumdzhev – Vanev 2024, p. 481, no. 556) and *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (bust-length) (inv. no. 4081) from the collection of the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum. These were made by the master Kuzma Konov and the jewelers of the First Moscow Artel. The second icon is set in a carved wooden kiot in the Neo-Russian style, apparently produced in the art workshops at Abramtsevo near Moscow. A label from the shop of Yevgeny Ivanovich Silin—which sold both antique and newly made icons—has been preserved on the reverse side of the kiot.



Fig. 1. Mother of God of Vladimir, Moscow workshop, first half to mid-16th century, Rila Monastery.

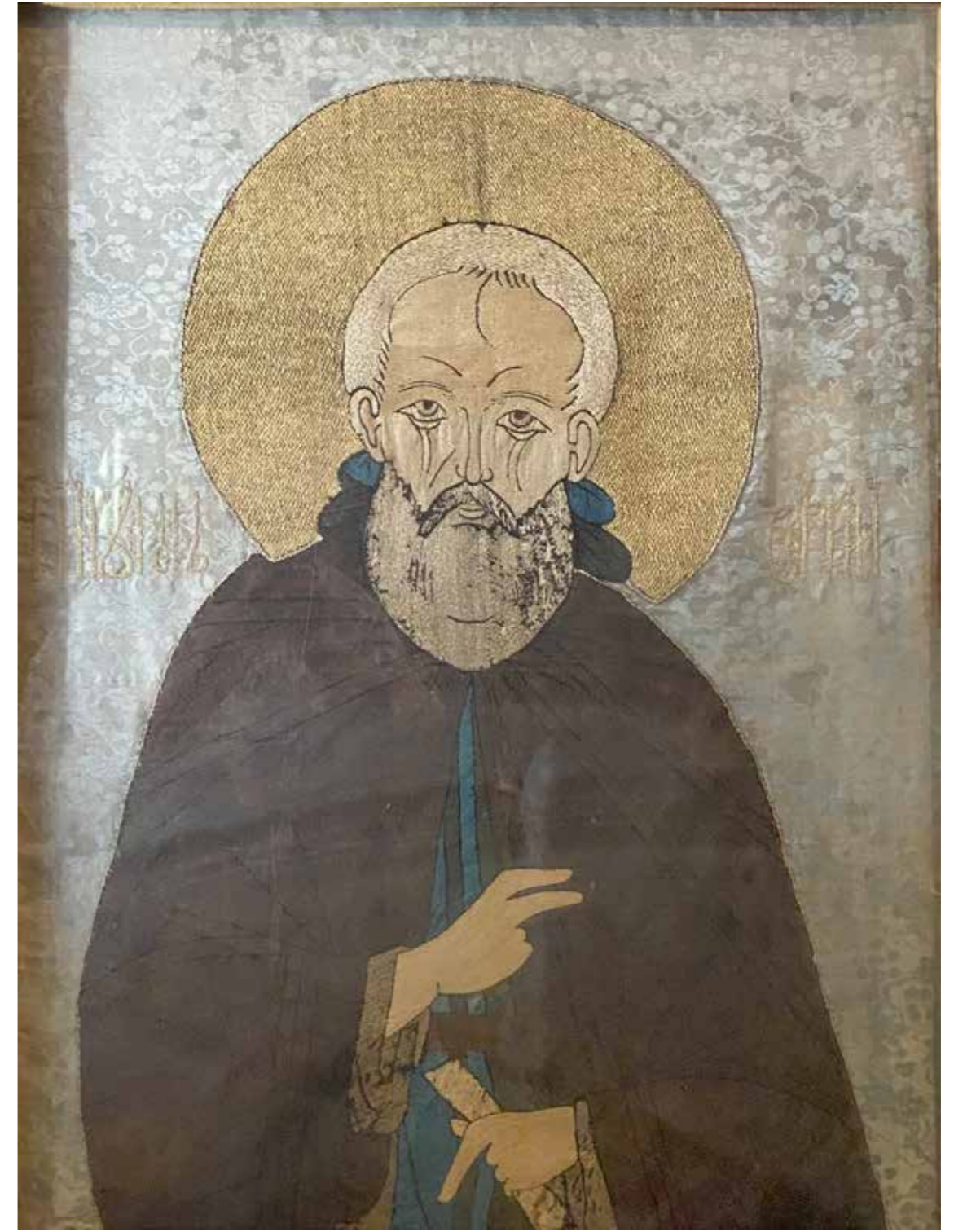


Fig. 2. Pall (coffin cloth) Saint Sergius of Radonezh, Fragment, Moscow workshop (?), first half of the 16th century, Shipka Monastery.



Fig. 3. Mother of God with the Christ Child on the Throne, Moscow workshop, 1640s, Rila Monastery.

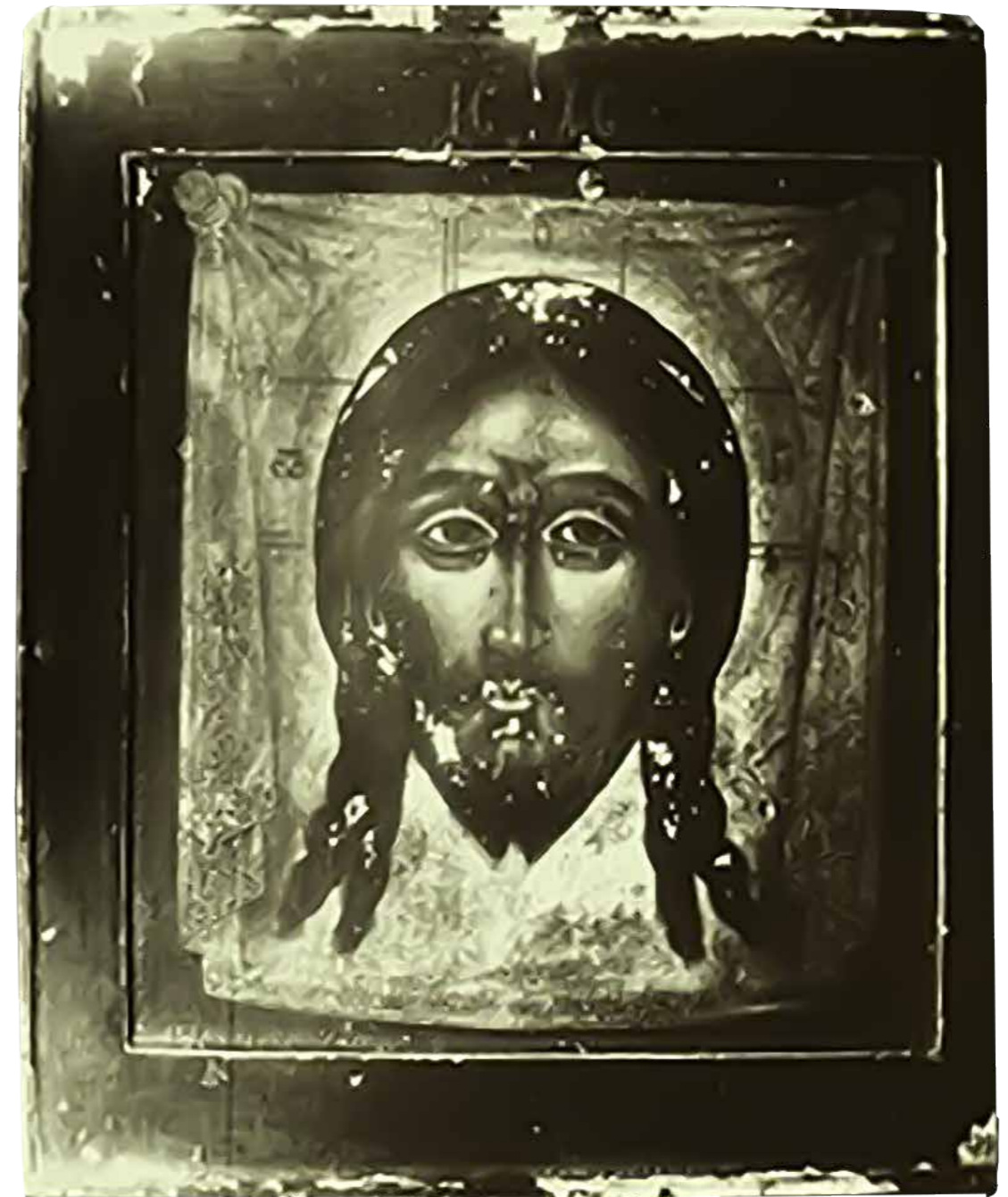


Fig. 4. The Savior Not-Made-by-Hands (Mandylion), Central Russia workshop, first quarter of the 18th century, Rila Monastery.

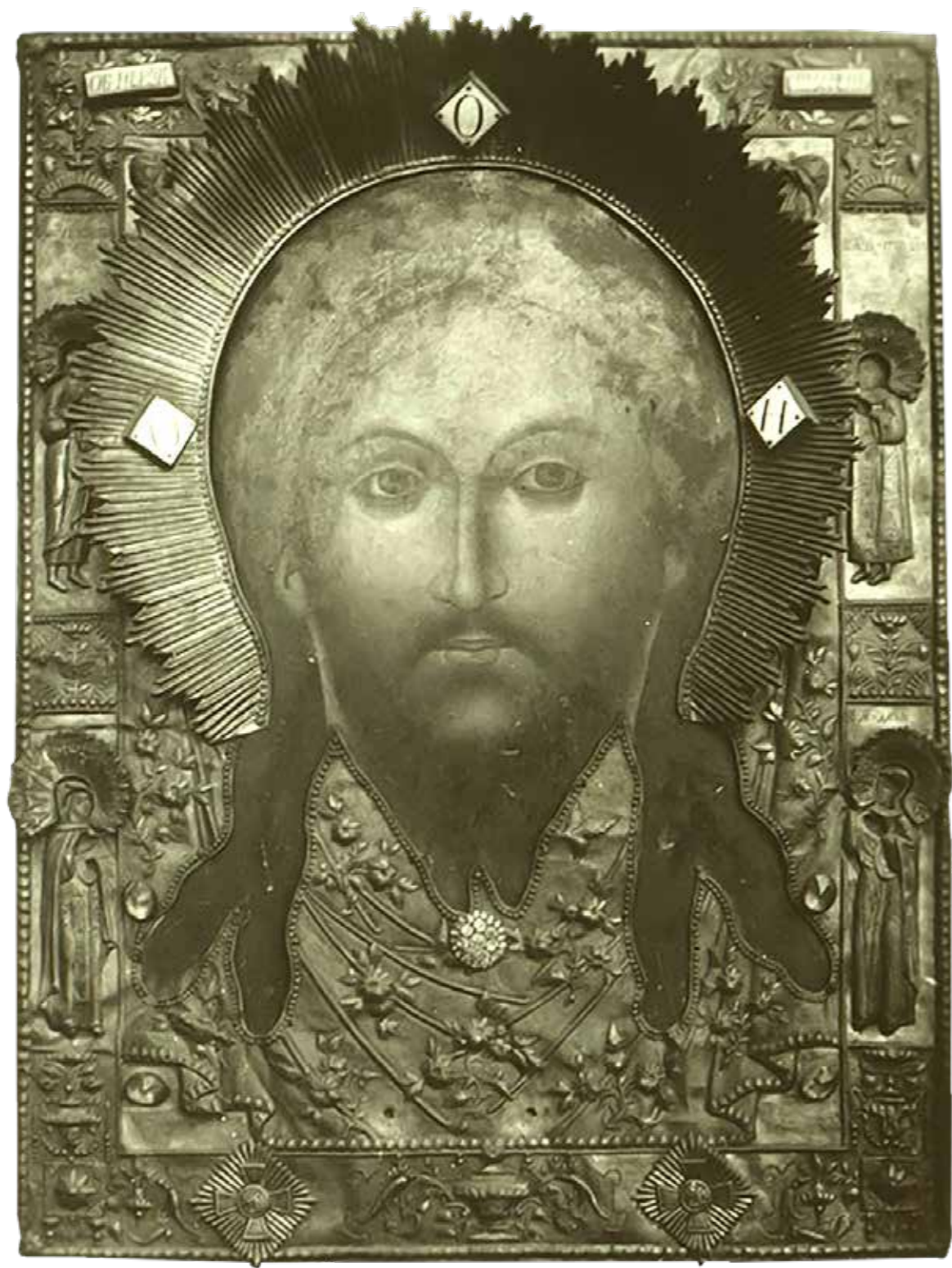


Fig. 5. Revetment of the icon the Savior Not-Made-by-Hands (Mandylik), Russia workshop, first quarter of the 19th century, Rila Monastery.



Fig. 6. Revetment of the icon Dormition of Saint John of Rila, Central Russia workshop, first quarter of the 19th century, Rila Monastery.

Icons of old believer settlements in Bulgaria

Natalia Komashko

Abstract:

There are two Old Believer settlements in Bulgaria — Tataritsa, and Kazashko. The churches in both villages house a significant number of icons from various periods. In Tataritsa there is an iconostasis made in Moscow in the 1840s. Both villages also preserve early icons from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, attributed to Old Believer icon painters from Palekh, Mstera, and Guslitsa. Most of the icons were produced in the artistic tradition of Vietka, which had a huge influence on the local Lipovan icon.

Keywords: Old Believer icon painting centers of the eighteenth–twentieth centuries, Old Believers in Bulgaria, Lipovan icon, Church of the Intercession in Tataritsa, Church of the Intercession in Kazashko.

Unlike neighboring Romania, where tens of thousands of Russian Old Believers inhabit a vast area stretching from Bukovina to the lower Danube, Bulgaria is home to only two Old Believer settlements—Tataritsa (near Silistra) and Kazashko (near Varna). Founded at different times and under divergent historical circumstances, and geographically distant from one another, these settlements belong to the unified cultural area of the Lipovan Old Believers,¹ whose main centres are located in Romania. A significant number of icons have been preserved both in the churches and in the homes of residents of these two villages. Their composition is diverse, encompassing icons of local origin produced in Lipovan icon-painting workshops, as well as works brought from other regions. Most of these icons date from the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, although earlier examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are occasionally encountered.

1 The term “Lipovans”, referring to Old Believers, was first recorded in the documents of the Moldavian Principality in 1724. It has a toponymic origin and is associated with the alternative name of the oldest Old Believer village in Bukovina — Sokolitsy—which local residents called Lipoveni due to its location in a linden forest (Gârlan 2011, 245).

Both villages — Tataritsa and Kazashko — have long attracted scholars interested in the history, textual culture, ethnography, and folklore of the Old Believers. While numerous publications have addressed these topics,² only a single study has been devoted specifically to the icons preserved within the local communities, and even that treatment remains limited³. At the same time, several articles and even a monograph have examined Lipovan icon painting,⁴ a, the tradition to which a substantial portion of the icons in Tataritsa and Kazashko belongs.

However, it should be noted that these publications do not encompass the full geographical extent of Lipovan icon production. The authors focus primarily on works identified in southwestern Ukraine, which precludes comprehensive conclusions about this artistic phenomenon, given that the majority of Lipovan settlements, churches, and icons are located in Romania. Moreover, the prevailing approach in these studies is largely ethnographic, leaving the stylistic characteristics of Lipovan icons insufficiently explored.

The Old Believer settlement in Tataritsa emerged in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Old Believers initially lived in the nearby village of Vetren, but over time, the Cossacks gradually displaced the Tatars who had been residing in the adjacent village.⁵ Historically, Tataritsa has been closely connected with other Old Believer settlements in the Danube region and Dobruja, as it is situated on the edge of the Lipovan enclave. The village was populated by peasants who had migrated from the northeast, as well as by Don Nekrasov Cossacks, who began settling along the Danube in the 1740s after coming from the Kuban region and the Taman Peninsula.⁶

The church in Tataritsa is dedicated to the Feast of the Intercession of the Mother of God, a dedication shared by many other Old Believer churches in the Danube region. The popularity of this dedication is rooted in the historical ties between the Lipovans and the Old Believers of Starodub and Vietka regions situated on both sides of the southwestern border of the Russian Empire. As early as 1690–1695, the Church of the Intercession was built and consecrated in Vietka, becoming the principal Old Believer church

2 Most of the relevant bibliography can be found in Ekaterina Anastasova’s study (Anastasova 1998). Among more recent publications, the following should be noted: Prigarin 2001, 131–140; 2004, 29–35; Subotnova 2006, 95–101; Uzeneva 2007, 24–26; Anastasova 2009, 14–19; Duminika 2011, 47–49; Belyankin 2017, 147–151; Uzeneva 2017, 103–109; Chunlei 2022, 139–155.

3 Gorbunov 2005, 85–98. This publication focuses exclusively on icons from the village of Kazashko. The second article on the icons of Tataritsa remained unpublished.

4 Gorbunov – Hersonskij 2000; Gorbunov 2001a, 89–96; 2001b, 221–226; 2010, 216–221; Inikova 2012, 373–397; Văetiși 2023, 191–223.

5 The village of Tataritsa is mentioned in documents from 1548 and 1620 (Stojkov 1959, 467).

6 Prigarin 2010, 114–115.

in the wider region. It was through Starodub and Vietka that opponents of the church reforms, fleeing persecution in Russia, made their way to the territories of present-day Romania, Moldova, and Bulgaria.

There is very little information concerning the church in Tataritsa. According to the church chronicle, the first church in the village was built in the 1770s under Ataman Gavril Koshevnikov, and its first priest was Pafnuty Kvashin.⁷ After the original church was destroyed by fire—at an undetermined date—the current building was constructed.⁸ The new church was consecrated in 1845; this date is inscribed on the altar of the church.⁹ The restoration took place on the eve of an important event in which the Old Believers of Dobruja played a significant role. In 1846, a metropolitan see was established in the village of Bila Krynytsia in Northern Bukovina, which at the time was part of the Austrian Empire.¹⁰ As a result, the Old Believers who accepted the priesthood and preserved the liturgical tradition gained their own independent ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹¹

Over time, the church building in Tataritsa underwent several reconstructions and expansions. The collection of icons housed within it was assembled over a long period and includes works of various origins and dates.

Inside the church, the upper part of the cubic base and the octagonal drum that supports the dome are covered with light blue wooden panelling. The surface is articulated by regularly affixed gilded stars, forming a stylised representation of the celestial firmament. According to local tradition, the centre of the dome is occupied by a monumental octagonal image of the Ancient of Days (Sabaoth) (fig. 1). Although positioned high above the viewer, the icon includes, in its lateral margins, small representations of four saints—the heavenly patrons of the members of the donor's family who commissioned the work. The inclusion of additional saints in the margins of icons is a characteristic feature of Old Believer visual culture, most frequently encountered in small domestic icons. Among the Lipovans, however, this practice also extends to large-scale church icons, including those integrated into the architectural structure of the building and thus falling within the category of monumental painting.

7 The above information is provided by Chudomir Chernev in his proposal to designate the church in Tataritsa as a monument of architecture and visual art (Chernev 1974, 2).

8 According to Chudomir Chernev, the reconstruction of the church took place in the 1830s.

9 This information was provided by Elena Matveeva, a parishioner of the church and a resident of Tataritsa. Following subsequent reconstructions and expansions, the church was re-consecrated in 1886 and again in 1920 (Subotina 2006, 96).

10 After this territory was annexed to the USSR in 1940, the ecclesiastical see was transferred to the city of Brăila in Romania.

11 Before establishing their own hierarchical structure of priests, they had to be ordained by the Synodal Church. After this, they converted as Old Believers while retaining their rank.

Below, on the four triangular pendentives marking the transition from the cubic base to the octagonal drum, the Four Evangelists are depicted in full accordance with the Old Russian tradition of church mural painting.

The image of Sabaoth stylistically closely resembles the works produced by the Old Believer iconographic centers of Vietka and Starodub. The images of the Evangelists have darkened significantly over time, making it impossible to assess the specific features of their painting. Given the large size of all five architectural elements, it is reasonable to assume that the painting was executed *in situ*. The artists may have been either local or invited from Vietka, with which the Lipovans maintained close and diverse ties.

Of particular interest is the church iconostasis, which consists of five tiers and a Crucifixion scene at the top (see figures 2–3). The icons are painted in a traditional manner, imitating an older style of icon painting. This stylistic trend, which emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, remained especially popular throughout the nineteenth century in the icon-painting villages of Palekh and Mstera in the Vladimir region, as well as in Moscow, where many artists from Palekh were active.

The icons on the iconostasis are distinguished by their restrained colour palette and muted backgrounds. They are executed in a graphic manner, contrasting with the brightly coloured, gold-backed icons elsewhere in the church. No documentary evidence concerning the origin of the iconostasis has been identified; nevertheless, it was most likely brought from Moscow and installed in the church at the time of its consecration. The stylistic features of the ensemble suggest a date shortly before 1845.

Due to the difficulty of transporting them to the Danube region, iconostases not produced locally are rarely encountered in Lipovan churches.¹² A similar iconostasis, painted around the same period, is preserved in the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin, located near the Romanian village of Slava Rusă. It was apparently brought there in 1847 from Bila Krynytsia, when the monastery became the center of the Slava Archdiocese.¹³ When a new cathedral church was built in the monastery in 1883, the iconostasis was modified to fit the building's new architecture. Four icons flanking the Prophets tier were trimmed at the bottom to fit the new structure, as they were too tall.

12 Several icons in a similar style, characteristic of the Palekh and Moscow workshops, have also been identified among the Lipovan communities. Notably, the *Intercession of the Mother of God* icon, which is decorated with a silver cover dating from 1854 and was formerly owned by an Old Believer family in Iași, is now part of the MUSEIKON collection in Alba Iulia. (Dumitran – Filip 2023, 118–119. No. 15).

13 A delegation from Dobruja, led by Arkadii who had been promoted to Archbishop of Slava, travelled from Bila Krynytsia to bring back icons, a complete iconostasis, church vestments, liturgical books, myrrh and five anti-memorial icons for the consecration of five churches in the newly established diocese. (URL: <https://www.psse.ro/>).

In Tataritsa, there is no architectural structure designed specifically to accommodate the iconostasis. Instead, the icons are placed on horizontal wooden beams. This is an unusual arrangement for Lipovan churches, where icons are usually set in dedicated compartments within a wooden iconostasis framed by decorative carvings. Several icons also display traces of later adjustments. These features suggest that the iconostasis was not originally intended for this church, but was installed there later. A close examination of the individual panels further reveals that the iconostasis lacks compositional uniformity and that its icon set is incomplete.

The Prophets tier includes only four icons, Adam, Abel, Seth and Enoch, which differ from the others in that their margins and backgrounds are both rendered in the same light green tone rather than ochre. The upper edges of these four icons are contoured, but in two cases this contour does not correspond to the outline of the “kovcheg”. The sequence of icons within the Prophets tier is also disordered: the traditionally paired images of the patriarchs Adam and Abel, which should flank a central icon depicting the anthropomorphic *Holy Trinity in the Paternitas type*, are not arranged in their customary position. Stylistically, the painting of the icons in the Forefathers tier is very similar to that of the other icons in the ensemble, suggesting that they were produced at around the same time.

Icons depicting the Forefathers are also present in the Prophets tier of the iconostasis. These icons differ in design from the others, lacking shaped upper edges and featuring ochre-colored margins. There are four icons in this category, depicting Abraham, Isaac, Enoch and Noah.

The Prophets tier includes only six icons in total. At its centre is a full-length icon of the Mother of God enthroned with the Christ Child, symbolising the Incarnation. This arrangement diverges from the local Lipovan tradition, which typically places at the center of the Prophets tier a waist-length image of the *Mother of God of the Sign (Znamenie)*, with figures rendered at a different scale.

The Deesis tier includes, in addition to the central figures of Christ, the Mother of God, and John the Baptist, images of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, as well as six Apostles. The presence of an Apostolic Deesis tier is uncharacteristic of the Old Russian tradition but became widespread among the Old Believers of Vietka and among the Lipovans.¹⁴ Nevertheless, such Deesis tiers became widespread among the Old Believers of Vietka and the Lipovans.

14 The Apostolic tier was introduced into Russian iconostases in the mid-seventeenth century, following the liturgical reform of Patriarch Nikon in 1653 (Buseva-Davydova – Vaneyan 2009, 68). The first example was the iconostasis of the Assumption Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin (Ostaschenko et al 2011).

Within the upward-tapering octagonal zone of the church, on either side of the Deesis and Prophets tiers, empty spaces were created and subsequently filled with icons that were specifically commissioned from local icon painters for this purpose. The upper icons, whose painted surfaces are no longer preserved, are triangular in shape. The icon on the right depicts the prophet Melchizedek, while the icon on the left is no longer legible. Below them, within the Deesis tier, rectangular icons depict the previously missing Apostles Philip and Thomas.

The Festal tier of the iconostasis is largely complete in terms of subject matter and comprises fifteen icons. Fourteen of these belong to the original ensemble, while the central icon of the tier, *The Last Supper*, painted in the Vietka tradition, was added in accordance with the established Lipovan practice of placing this scene above the Royal Doors. This icon is twice the width of the others in the tier. To accommodate *The Last Supper*, one of the original icons, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, was removed from the Festal tier. It was subsequently relocated to the main space of the church and placed on a shelf together with small icons brought by local residents from their homes. At a later date, the icon was restored by a local icon painter, who repainted its background in blue.

In the lower register, in the center and on both sides, are the central Royal Doors and two lateral iconostasis doors, which most likely also belong to the same iconostasis ensemble. These doors have undergone multiple restorations, as their continual liturgical use has not favored the preservation of their painted decoration. Currently, bronze paint covers the background of the icons on all three doors, although the original painting is still partially visible in the faces and figures.

The Royal Doors follow the characteristic Old Russian style, which is distinguished by the scalloped edges of the door leaves at the top. The iconography of the doors corresponds to the traditional programme: the standing figures of the Archangel Gabriel and the Mother of God form the Annunciation scene, and the four seated Evangelists are depicted writing their Gospels. The lateral doors leading to the Prothesis and Diaconicon bear images of the archdeacons Stephen and Lawrence. The practice of depicting archdeacons on lateral iconostasis doors emerged after the time of Patriarch Nikon in the late seventeenth century.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it was adopted by some Old Believers. The saints' figures are elongated with narrow faces, which are rendered in a flat, linear and stylised manner that is characteristic of Old Believer icon painting in Moscow and Central Russia.

15 Dyachenko 2008, 299.

The lower register of the iconostasis contains four Despotic icons that differ in date and stylistic features. However, none of them belong to the artistic tradition of the Old Believers in the Danube region. The icons of the *Mother of God Tikhvinskaya* and *Christ Pantokrator* are flanking the Royal Doors. The *Tikhvinskaya* icon is an exact replica “*mernyi spisok*”, of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God from the Tikhvin Monastery, reproduced in the same dimensions as the original venerated image.

This ancient icon was venerated and held a significant place in the devotional life of both the Synodal Church and the Old Believer communities. Exact copies of the miracle-working icon, reproducing its iconography and dimensions, were primarily produced in the icon-painting workshop of the Tikhvin Monastery. The icon in Tataritsa is painted in a style that differs significantly from the work of the monastery’s iconographers. Notably distinctive are its ornamental frame and the decorative design of the halo. Due to the high demand for copies of the miraculous icon, such images were created not only in Tikhvin, but also in other artistic centres.

The icon of *Christ Pantokrator* on the right of the Royal Doors is a reproduction of earlier medieval prototypes (see fig. 4). Its austere and restrained style of painting is characteristic of the Moscow Old Believer tradition. The panel has a shallow ‘*kovcheg*’, similar to the icons in the iconostasis. Of particular interest is the iconographic variant chosen by the painter. The Gospel held in Christ’s left hand is closed, as in the earliest known depictions of the Pantokrator. The proportions of the face and figure are elongated, the shoulders are narrow and sloping, and Christ’s body is almost entirely covered by a blue himation.

In the Despotic tier sequence, these icons are followed by those of the *Kazanskaya Mother of God* (fig. 5) and the Intercession of the *Intercession of Mother of God (Pokrov)* (fig. 6). Both are central themes in Russian Orthodox devotion. The *Kazanskaya* icon bears later overpainting, but fragments of the original painting remain clearly visible. The faces are painted differently here; they are rounder and slightly heavier, with individual features — particularly the eyes — carefully delineated. The icon was painted in a different stylistic tradition, rooted in the work of the late seventeenth-century Armoury Chamber masters, but the painter greatly simplified the painting techniques and compositional methods. The depiction of the faces, especially Christ’s with his slightly elongated strands of hair following the contours of his ears, along with the muted palette and dark carnation tone, suggest that the icon was created in Russia during the first half of the 18th century, most likely in the Volga region, and was renovated in the 19th century.

The icon of the Intercession of the *Mother of God (Pokrov)*, in honor of whose feast the church was consecrated, also precedes the main iconostasis ensemble. The icon has been completely and rather crudely repainted, probably on more than one occasion. Its iconography is atypical of late Old Believer icon painting. The composition reflects a variant that emerged in sixteenth-century Novgorod and is characteristic of the local interpretation of the feast in iconography (fig. 7). The defining feature of Novgorod’s Intercession iconography is that the veil is not held by the Mother of God herself, but is held out over her

by two angels. The scene is usually set against the backdrop of a church interior that is divided vertically into three sections by columns. In the upper register of the side sections, groups of saints and angels are depicted facing the Mother of God. Above her, Christ is shown blessing her. During the sixteenth century, the number of sections increased to five or seven, with the depicted saints being grouped according to their rank of holiness.¹⁶ This more elaborate version of the image remained popular in the 17th century, especially in northern regions formerly within Novgorod’s cultural sphere of influence.¹⁷ During this period, under the influence of Moscow iconography, the scene of the Appearance of the Mother of God to Romanos the Melodist was added to the composition in the bottom right-hand corner.

This scene is also included in the composition of the icon from Tataritsa. It also displays features characteristic of Intercession iconography in the post-Petrine period. In the background of the lower register, for example, an iconostasis with the Royal Doors and icons of Christ and the Mother of God is depicted. Furthermore, the veil is present twice in this icon: as well as the red veil held by the angels, the Mother of God is depicted holding an omophorion. This also reflects the influence of late iconography. The visible layer of paint is crudely and unprofessionally executed and dates to a late restoration. Based on the iconographic features, it can be assumed that an earlier layer dating to the seventeenth century, most likely originating in northern Russia, lies beneath the overpainting.

There are numerous standalone icons located in the main space of the church and in the western narthex. Originally intended for private devotion, small icons are placed on shelves and were brought to the church by local people. Larger icons are displayed on side partitions or mounted on special stands. Two pairs of double-sided, processional icon banners, mounted on poles, are attached to the partitions nearest the iconostasis. The larger icons are very similar in style to the icons in the iconostasis and appear to have been part of the same ensemble. One icon depicts *the Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov)* and the *Epiphany*, while the other shows the Miracle of the Great Martyr George and the Dragon (see fig. 8), along with the *Three Hierarchs*.

The church houses a highly diverse collection of icons, including works by local Lipovan masters and pieces produced in other Old Believer centres. Among the smaller icons are several of considerable age. Originally belonging to local villagers, these icons were kept in their homes. Some of them may have been brought to Tataritsa by the first settlers, who were looking for a safe place to live.

16 See the early sixteenth-century icon from the collection of N. P. Likhachev, now in the State Russian Museum (Drevlekhranilishche 2014, 178. No. 215).

17 See an icon from the second half of the seventeenth century from the Church of the Intercession in Lalsk, Andrei Rublev Museum (Nechaeva – Yasnova 2007, 86, 95. No. 18).

The earliest of these icons dates to the late sixteenth century and reflects the artistic tradition of the north. It depicts the martyrs *Gurias, Samon and Aviv*, who were venerated as patrons of marriage and women (fig. 9). The painting is in excellent condition and shows no later interventions apart from a two-tone red-and-blue border around the edge of the panel. Based on its stylistic features, the icon can be attributed to the Velikij Ustyug workshop. The painting is vigorous, with a colour palette that, while not particularly complex, is nonetheless varied. The slightly asymmetrical faces are carefully modelled, with thin noses featuring hook-shaped tips and closely set eyes with dark pupils. The flesh tints and techniques used to render the volume of the nearly monochromatic faces have direct analogies in the icon-painting tradition of Veliky Ustyug.¹⁸

The second icon, which is earlier in terms of its chronology, depicts the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* and dates to the early seventeenth century (fig. 10). It is attributed to the Stroganov school of painting, which was highly esteemed by the Old Believers.

The icon's artistic execution is characterised by the refined modelling of the Mother of God's face, with softly rounded features and large eyes directed toward the viewer. The restrained colour palette, combined with the pronounced use of gold and silver, situates the work within a broader group of closely related icons sharing similar stylistic and technical characteristics. According to Irina. L. Buseva-Davydova, these icons reproduce a now-lost icon of the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya* from the Moscow Kremlin. It was painted at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the behest of Tsar Boris Godunov, to mark his accession to the throne in 1598.¹⁹ The icon also has close stylistic parallels with Moscow works from the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁰

The icon was restored: the wooden battens on the back of the panel were replaced with two battens with typical profiled form of the early nineteenth century. The original painting was revealed by removing the darkened layers of varnish. This restoration could only have been carried out by Old Believer masters from the icon-painting villages of the Vladimir region. Consequently, this icon was brought to Tataritsa no earlier than the mid-nineteenth century.

18 See the icons of *Blessed Procopius of Ustyug* in the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery (Ryndina 1988, 99, 349. No. 121) and the Solvychevodsk Museum-Reserve (Trubacheva 2003, 37, 129. No. 18).

19 Buseva-Davydova 2006, 74–82.

20 See icons from the Tretyakov Gallery dating to the early seventeenth century (Guseva et al 1995, 112–113. No. 18); from a private collection (Tarnogradsky 2006, 53, 271, 370. No. 25); and from the Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve, dating to the second quarter of the seventeenth century (Bykova 2006, 330–339. No. 75).

Several other icons now preserved in the church were brought from Russia at a later date. They were produced in the major icon-painting centres of Vladimir Province, particularly Mstera and Palekh, where artists frequently worked on commission for Old Believer communities. Several of these works can also be attributed to another artistic center, Guslitsy, a region near Moscow traditionally inhabited by “Priested” (*Popovtsy*) Old Believers and known for its distinctive icon-painting production.

Of particular interest is a large-format icon depicting the *Severed Head of Saint John the Baptist in a chalice*, blessed from above by an Angel with a star-shaped halo representing Sophia, the Wisdom of God (fig. 11). Like many imported icons, it features a recessed central panel (*kovcheg*), a feature absent from locally produced icons. The painting lies beneath a layer of darkened varnish, yet its original palette is bright and luminous. The background is light green, a more saturated colour than that used for the icons in the tiers of the iconostasis. The angel, dressed in white, is depicted against a pink background and surrounded by blue clouds whose forms evoke sixteenth-century models. The image of John's dark face with vividly red lips is also rendered in the same tradition. The iconographer generously uses gold and coloured crimson varnish, a practice that was only introduced to Russian icon painting in the second half of the seventeenth century. The iconographer's familiarity with old models, their high level of craftsmanship and mastery of complex techniques make it possible to attribute the icon to the Mstera school of the first half of the nineteenth century, whose artists specialised in imitating old icon painting techniques. The icon is mounted on a barrier in front of the iconostasis, to the right of the ambon. The iconography of the *Severed Head of Saint John the Baptist* appeared in Russian icon painting only in the second half of the seventeenth century, under the influence of Western European models.²¹ Nevertheless, it became highly popular among the Old Believers, especially in Vietka and the Danube region. For them, it symbolized the true Church, which according to Old Believer interpretation, was beheaded by Patriarch Nikon, who deprived it of its “proper” hierarchy.²² Among the Lipovan Old Believers, such images were especially significant before the establishment of the metropolitan see in Bila Krynytsia.

Among the works of the Mstera icon painters is a small icon depicting *Saint Nicholas* in a waist-length pose. Set against a green-brown background, his garments are meticulously rendered in a golden pattern (fig. 12). Such icons can be traced back directly to the works of the early seventeenth-century Stroganov masters. Another small Palekh-painted icon depicts the seated *Prophet Elijah with scenes from his life*. The background and margins are decorated with a relatively simple chased ornament, which takes the form of a braided pattern along the borders. The background was once gilded and the margins were

21 See the 1666 icon from the Archangel Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin (Tsitsinova 2016, 409–412. No. 103).

22 Chernov 2017, 21.

painted over the gold. This style of icon decoration came into fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century and was particularly popular in Palekh. The painting is executed in a conventionalised manner and was intended for an Old Believer patron.

Developed by Palekh icon painters as early as the eighteenth century, this archaizing style became a model for imitation in other icon-painting centers. It was also adopted by the icon painters of Guslitsy, who introduced certain modifications.²³ They used a dark palette dominated by brown tones, accented by red, green, and gold. A representative example of this type is a four-part icon depicting *Christ Pantocrator, the Descent into Hell*, two images of the *Mother of God*, and four selected saints in the margins. Such icons were extremely popular in domestic devotional practice and are frequently encountered in Vietka and among the Lipovans.

All the other icons in the church belong to a different artistic tradition that emerged in Vietka and was subsequently embraced by the Lipovans. The term '*Vietka icon painting*' refers to icons produced in numerous workshops across a large geographical area. This includes the island of Vietka itself on the Sozh River and the surrounding area of the town of Starodub and the numerous villages in the region. Today, this area lies on the border between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In the 17th and 18th centuries, part of this territory belonged to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, while the rest was under the Russian Empire's governance.

The history of Old Believer icon painting in Vietka dates back to the late eighteenth century, but works from this period are extremely rare. Most of Vietka's artistic heritage dates from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Vietka was the only centre of Old Believer icon painting whose artists were influenced by the art of the Moscow Armoury Chamber. This influence was transmitted via the Old Believers of Kaluga, who had close ties with the Vietka community. Throughout the eighteenth century, icon painters in Kaluga — including the Old Believers — developed a style similar to that of the masters of the Armoury Chamber. This style was transmitted to Vietka through Kaluga, and the early icons produced there are remarkably similar to those of Kaluga.²⁴

The artistic production of Vietka had a big impact on icon painting in the Danube region. It is often difficult to distinguish between icons created in Vietka and those produced in Lipovan workshops. Several factors must be taken into consideration here. During their migration to Bukovina and the

Danube region via Vietka and Starodub, it was easiest for the settlers to bring icons from Vietka, where large-scale production had already been established. In the early period, entire iconostases for churches were probably commissioned there, too. Finally, given the growing demand for icons among the Lipovans in the nineteenth century and the need to establish local production, the masters who arrived from Vietka to fulfil commissions began training local icon painters and possibly settled there themselves. All of this makes the precise attribution of individual icons difficult. It should also be noted that Lipovan workshops started operating relatively late; these icons date from no earlier than the last third of the nineteenth century, with the majority belonging to the early twentieth century.

Since works of varying levels of craftsmanship were already being produced in Vietka, it would be inaccurate to describe the Lipovan icon as merely a simplified version of the Vietka icon. Undoubtedly, the Lipovan icon is more folkloric and closely linked to the everyday needs of the predominantly rural local population. These characteristics are reflected in the emergence of new subjects found exclusively among the Lipovans. Nevertheless, the local icon-painting tradition includes highly expressive and carefully conceived works, despite the rustic nature of their artistic style.

Among the exceptionally high-quality early works of the Vietka icon painters preserved in the church in Tataritsa is a large gold-ground icon of the *Resurrection of Christ with Feasts and scenes of the Passion of Christ* (fig. 13). It is unusual for a Vietka or Lipovan icon to feature a shallow kovcheg, but this example does. The icon's palette is bright and vibrant, yet harmonious and not overly variegated. The faces are rendered with a sense of volume in the tradition of the Armoury Chamber, but with a softness that avoids heaviness.

A more typical example of the Vietka icon-painters' style can be seen in the icon of the *Resurrection of Christ*, featuring numerous border scenes depicting the Feasts and the Passion of Christ. Its color palette is more variegated, a trait generally characteristic of Vietka icons.

The church houses two icons of *Saint Charalambos, Bishop of Magnesia with Vita* (fig. 14). Saint Charalambos is especially venerated by the Old Believers of Vietka and the Danube region. While in Vietka he was venerated as the patron saint of peasant labor, among the Lipovans he was regarded primarily as a healer. Both icons were most likely produced by Vietka masters.

The distinctive features of icons associated with the Vietka artistic tradition include the use of colored varnishes, delicate ornamental engraving on gilded surfaces, and a characteristic decorative technique applied to garments, whereby the gold ground is overpainted and then carefully incised with a needle to reveal ornamental patterns. Together with a bright color palette and the extensive use of gold on backgrounds and borders, these features define the Vietka artistic tradition. Many of these techniques are clearly evident in the icons preserved in Tataritsa.

23 For the features of Guslitsy icon painting, see: Nechaeva – Chernov 2006, 10.

24 The idea that the Kaluga icon influenced the Vietka workshops was first expressed by the author of the article (Komashko, 2006, 18) and then elaborated on in more detail by M. A. Chernov (Nechaeva-Chernov, 2010, 22).

Two other icons display iconographic features characteristic of the Vietka tradition. The first is a personified depiction of the *Holy Trinity in the Synthronoi* type, surrounded by the Nine Orders of Angels. The second represents the *Crucifixion, with the Four Evangelists* depicted in medallions in the corners, and can likewise be attributed to the Vietka tradition. The composition of this icon contains an unusually large amount of empty space, resulting from the reduced proportions of the figures.

Icons depicting the iconographic type of *Christ Pantokrator (Savior of Smolensk)* are rare in both Vietka and the Danube region. The figure is characterised by its heavy proportions and comparatively simplified painterly style. These features suggest that the icon may have been produced by a Lipovan master.

A number of small icons in the church cannot be securely attributed to a specific place of origin. Among them are icons depicting various types of *multi-figure Deesis* compositions, as well as a two-part icon with a group of saints in the upper register and, below, scenes from the life and miracles of one of them—Saint Modest, Archbishop of Jerusalem, who appears to have been venerated as the patron saint of livestock.

Gilding is used more sparingly in these icons than in others. Within the Vietka iconographic tradition, this stylistic tendency has been associated with the influence of Guslitsy. Icons of this type, which lack gold backgrounds and are characterized by muted colors, are markedly less decorative.

Comparable works were undoubtedly also produced by Lipovan icon painters. Accordingly, the large icon of the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*, placed on the right on a barrier in front of the iconostasis, to the right of the ambon alongside the icon of the *Severed Head of Saint John the Baptist in a chalice*, is likely to be a product of the local tradition. Its palette is subdued, with the *maphorion* of the Mother of God rendered in a faded orange tone. The modeling of faces and figures is only weakly articulated, while the strongly emphasized black contour drawing plays a prominent compositional role. It should be noted that the icon painting of the Lipovan Old Believers remains significantly under-researched. Undoubtedly, icon-painting workshops existed in areas of their mass settlement, both in Bukovina and in the Danube region. It is reasonable to assume that due to geographical proximity, the workshops in Bukovina were stylistically closer to the traditions of Vietka than those operating in the Danube region.

The Lipovan icons created in this region have a more folkloric and naïve character. They feature simple draftsmanship and a less vibrant colour palette. Artists often imitated the techniques of the masters from Vietka without fully understanding them. These icons are also not uniform in their artistic execution, reflecting the fact that they were produced in different workshops. Some of the icons in the church in Tataritsa can be identified as the work of a single workshop with its own distinctive stylistic features.

The colour palette of these icons is highly distinctive. Their backgrounds are usually silver rather than gold and have acquired a yellowish tint after the application of varnish. Rather than using pure

red, the icon painters used an orange-tinted variant. Green is either absent or appears in muted tones. Significant emphasis is placed on linework in black paint in the icons from this workshop. The border framing the icon is usually a double red-and-blue band, or a single band, and is rather crude. The clouds have a distinctive shape, composed of overlapping elements that progressively decrease in size. Black inscriptions are often used instead of the traditional red ones. Another distinctive feature of this group is the slanted ground line beneath the saints depicted in the margins. When these figures are placed at the bottom, it forms a trapezoidal incline towards the centre of the icon.

Among the works of this workshop is the aforementioned large icon of the *Mother of God Vladimirskaya*, notable for its lack of gilding. Other representative examples include a large *Vita icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker* (fig. 15), an icon of the *Mother of God Feodorovskaya*, and a second pair of smaller double-sided icon banners (*khorigva*). One of the banners depicts the *Baptism of Christ* and the *Procession of the Honorable Wood of the Life-Giving Cross* while the other shows the *Ascension of Christ* and the *Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov)*. The most remarkable piece in this group is one of the church's two icons-epitaphios depicting the *Entombment of Christ* (fig. 16)

The figures depicted on these icons often display heavy proportions, and the drawing departs noticeably from classical standards. Such features are evident in the large *Vita icon of Saints Zosimas and Mary of Egypt*, as well as in the domestic icon of *Saints Adrian and Natalia*. Icons displaying similar stylistic features can be found in private collections,²⁵ as well as in museums²⁶ and churches in Tulcea.²⁷ They were apparently painted in this major Old Believer settlement in Dobruja.²⁸

The second icon-epitaphios, and the two icons of the *Prophet Elijah* follow the typical Vietka iconographic type (fig. 17) and are the work of different Lipovan workshops. In both cases, however, a horizontal row of clouds separates the fiery chariot from the earthly realm. These works feature a more varied colour palette, including vibrant shades of red. Unlike the icons from the first workshop, here the colour green plays a significant role. The faces are rendered in a very flat manner, with the upper eyelids outlined in white.

25 See the icon *Great Martyr Theodore Tyron, the Beheaded Head of John the Baptist, the Crucifixion, and Various Saints* from the Manik collection (France) (Chernov 2023, 17, fig. 20).

26 Icon of *Saint Charalambos of Magnesia* and *the Apostles Peter and Paul* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Tulcea (URL: <https://www.icemtl.ro/museum-complex-of-northern-dobrudja-cultural-heritage/muzeul-de-arta-engleza/colectia-de-icoane-engleza/>).

27 The icon of the *Healer* in the Old Believers' Church in the Tulcea Region (Văetiși 2023, 196, fig. 8).

28 Undoubtedly, many Old Believer settlements in this region had their own icon-painting workshops, including Sarıköy, Brăila, Galați, and others.

Among the smaller icons are several depictions of Saint Nicholas in different iconographic types. One of these is the shoulder-length depiction of *Nicholas the Wonderworker 'Otvratnyj' (Averting Trouble)* (fig. 18). The faces on all these icons imitate the techniques of Vietka icon painting, but do not fully grasp the method of execution. Some of the smaller local icons feature engraved ornaments in the form of twisting plant shoots on the margins, halos and background.

Kazashko, the second Old Believer village in Bulgaria, was founded relatively late in the twentieth century on the shores of Lake Varna. The first settlers were the Nekrasov Cossacks, who came to Bulgaria from Anatolia in Turkey. Although local Old Believers historically belong to the group that accepts the priesthood, they do not have priests in practice because they do not recognise the church hierarchy centred in Bila Krynytsia.

Built in 1933, the church in Kazashko is dedicated to the Feast of the Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov). As the church has no altar, it does not possess a full iconostasis. The number of icons is considerably smaller than in the church at Tataritsa, and most are small domestic icons brought by parishioners from their homes. However, the church also preserves a genuine ancient icon: a small seventeenth-century depiction of *Saint John the Baptist, the Angel of the Desert*, dating from the first half of the century.²⁹ It is likely that the icon arrived in the village with its first settlers.

The church also preserves icons produced in Vietka, most notably the *Spiritual Labyrinth* icon. This work is of a high professional standard and is unusual in its large scale for this iconographic type. The majority of the icons, however, belong to the Lipovan tradition. Many of them are so similar in style that they were evidently produced in the same workshop; comparable icons can also be found in Tataritsa. All of them are characterized by the simplicity and expressiveness of their style.

Similar painting techniques have also been identified in Lipovan icons preserved in the homes of local residents. The demand for icons in Kazashko was apparently met by several workshops in Old Believer settlements along the lower Danube. Among these is a small icon depicting *Saint George slaying the dragon*. Painted around the mid-nineteenth century by an iconographer from Palekh, it belongs to the same icon-painting tradition as the iconostasis of the Intercession Church in Tataritsa.



29 ■ It is also mentioned by Y.E. Gorbunov (Gorbunov 2005, 89).



Fig. 1. Ancient of Days (Sabaoth) with Saints, Vietka workshop (?), ca. 1845.

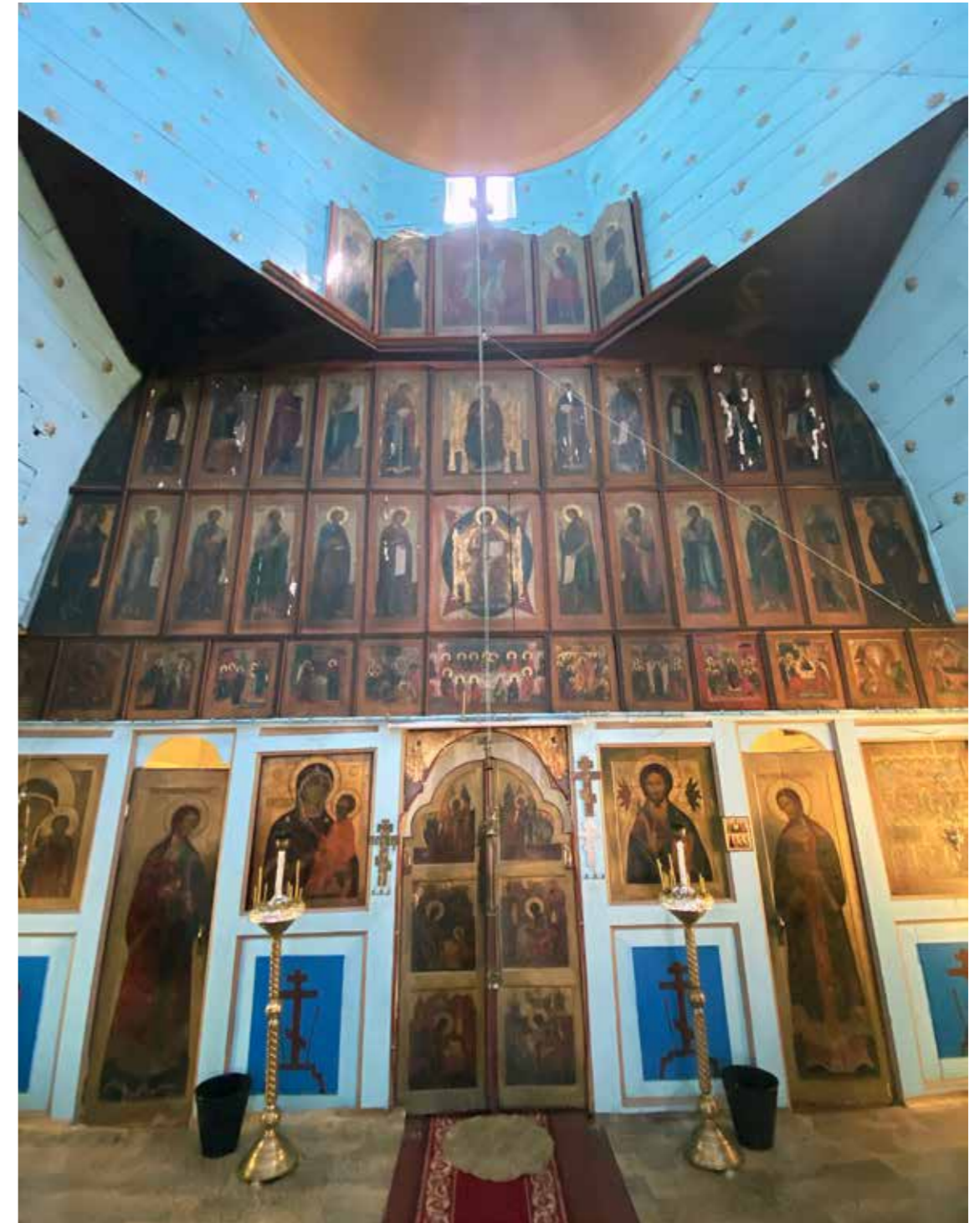


Fig. 2. Iconostasis, Moscow workshop, first half - to mid-19th century (before 1845).



Fig. 3. Three despoticon icons from the Deesis tier of the iconostasis.



Fig. 4. Christ Pantocrator, early 19th century, Moscow workshop



Fig. 5. Mother of God Kazanskaya, Central Russia workshop, first half of 18th century (partly repainted in the 20th century).



Fig. 6. Intercession of Mother of God (Pokrov), 17th century (?), repainted in the 20th century.



Fig. 7. Intercession of Mother of God (Pokrov), Novgorod workshop, early 16th century, State Russian Museum.



Fig. 8. Miracle of the Great Martyr George and the Dragon, part of the double-sided processional icon, Moscow workshop, mid-19th century.



Fig. 9. Saints Martyrs Gurias, Samonas and Aviv, late 16th century, Veliky Ustyug workshop



Fig. 10. Mother of God of Vladimirskaya, Moscow workshop, early 17th century.



Fig. 11. The Severed Head of Saint John the Baptist, Moscow workshop, first half of 19th century.



Fig. 12. Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Mstera workshop, mid-19th century.



Fig. 13. The Resurrection of Christ, with Crucifixion and Lamentation, Vietka workshop, first half of the 19th century.



Fig. 14. Saint Charalambos, Bishop of Magnesia with Vita, Vietka workshop, mid to second half of the 19th century.



Fig. 15. Vita icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Danube region workshops, early 20th century.



Fig. 16. Entombment of Christ, Danube region workshops, early 20th century.

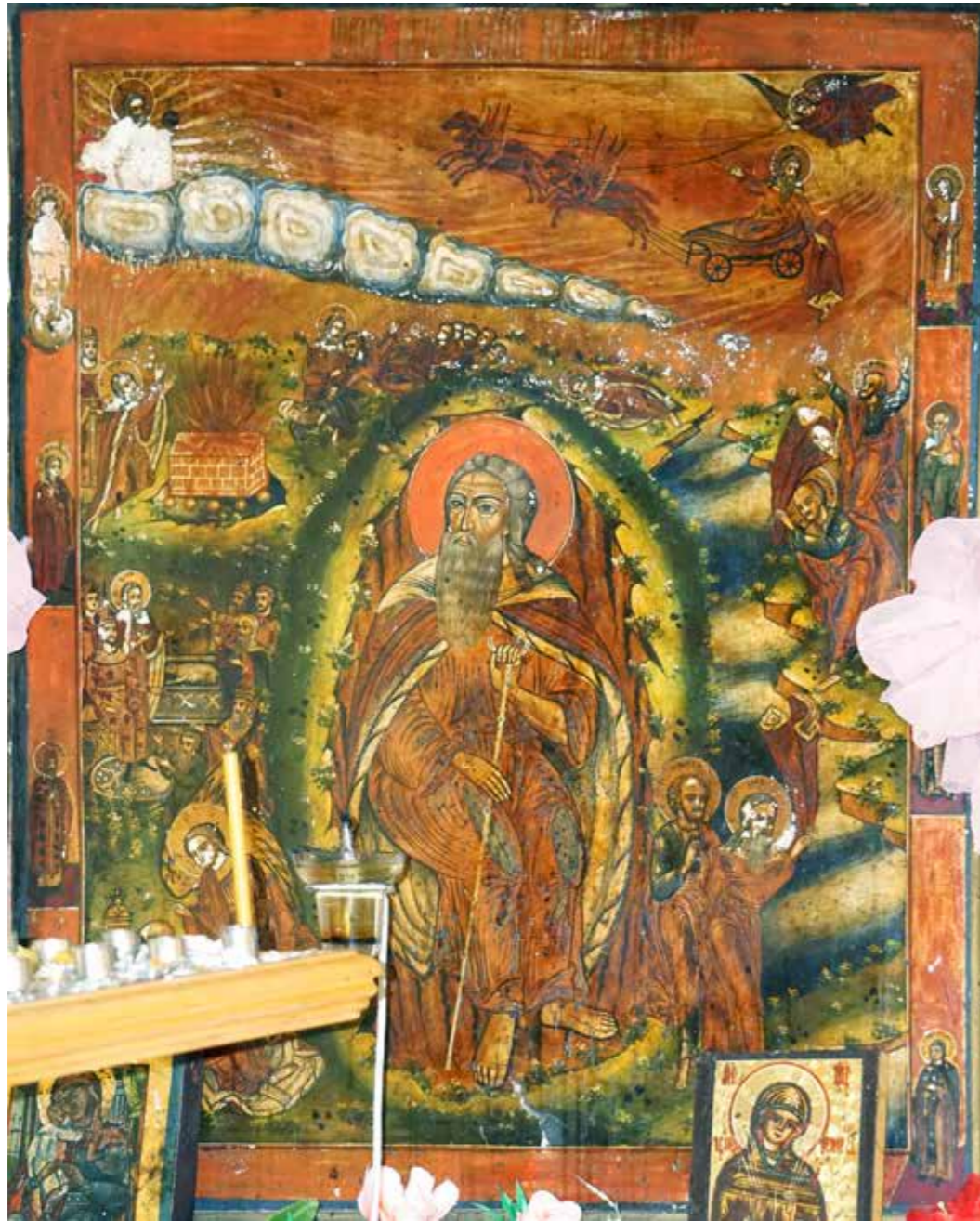


Fig. 17. The Fiery Ascent of the Prophet Elijah, Danube region workshops, late 19th century.

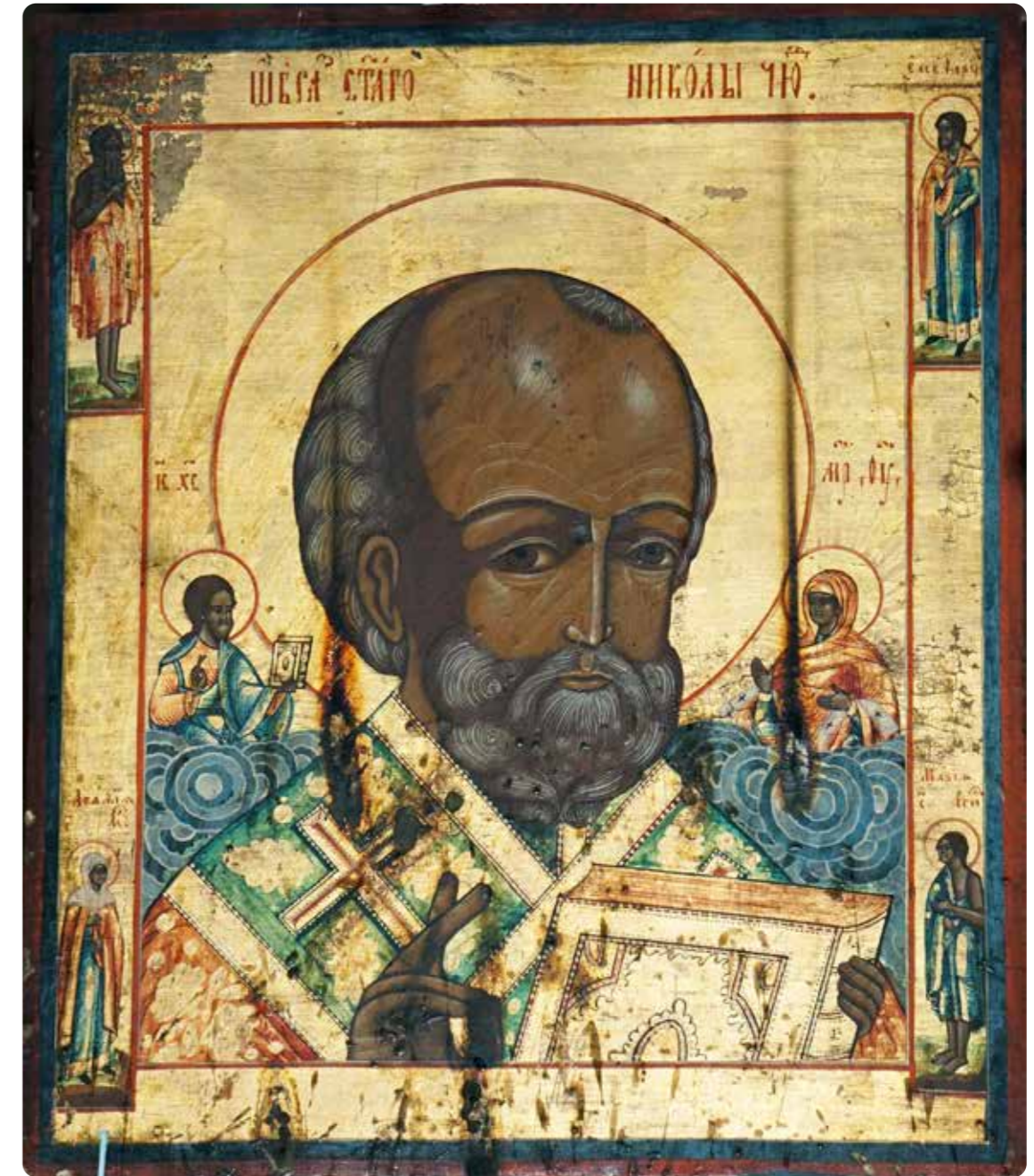


Fig. 18. Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker *Averting Trouble* (Otvratnyj), Danube region workshops, early 20th century.

Applying Russian Style and Iconography: Bulgarians who Studied at Russian Art Schools in the 19th and Early 20th centuries

Simeon Tonchev

Abstract:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several Bulgarians went to the Russian Empire in pursuit of an academic arts education. After their return, they applied the knowledge and experience gained in Russia to their artistic work in Bulgaria. This article summarizes existing information about Bulgarian academic painters' studies in Russia, presents new findings and analyzes concrete examples from their oeuvre, such as icons and drawings.

Keywords: Bulgarian National Revival, academic painters, Stanislav Dospevski, church painting, Russian models in art

The great dream of the famous icon-painter from the Bulgarian Revival Zahariy Hristovich Zograf (1810–1853) from Samokov was to study at the “Petropoulos Royal Academy,” as he referred to the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. In 1838, he drafted a special list of questions and asked the prominent monk and his teacher Neofit Rilski (1793–1881) to intercede on his behalf with the Bulgarians in Odessa, such as the national activists and educators Vasil Aprilov and Nikola Palauzov.¹ Zahariy Zograf's questionnaire shows the naive understanding of icon-painters from that time period regarding enrollment and studying at an academy. In addition to practical considerations related to admission, the educational process, means of living, and the prospect of returning to his homeland, Zahariy was also interested in chalcography and different types of production of artistically decorated objects. While Zahariy never got to study at the Academy, several other Bulgarians managed to graduate from Russian art schools.

1 Zakhariyev 1957, 37–38. The icon painter expressed this wish in several letters from the summer of 1838. The letters are completely published in Ogojska 2010: 137–141, 152–157.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Stanislav Dospevski (1823–1878), monk Theodosius of the Rila Monastery (1834–1912), Hristo Tsokev (1847–1883), Paskal Todorov and Atanas Petrov all travelled to Russia to study at prestigious icon-painting ateliers and specialized art schools.² At the turn of the twentieth century, Gospodin Zhelyazkov (1873–1937) also went to Russia. The names of other Bulgarians are also referenced in the literature. In 1837, Ivan Stoyanov, who signed as Stepanovich, painted a portrait of his brother Mihail Stepanovich, a merchant of furs and kaftans imported from Russia. According to one so far unconfirmed family story, Ivan Stoyanov studied painting in Kyiv around 1830.³ There are also no documents confirming the memory that the painter Alexander Pop Georgiev from Yambol went to Kyiv, probably to study at the Kyiv Theological Academy.⁴ It is likewise assumed that writer and critic Vasil Popovich (1832–1897), a graduate of Moscow University, also studied drawing or painting either in Kyiv or Moscow.⁵

Russian archives have long been searched for documents that reveal when and where Bulgarians studied in art institutions, who their teachers were, along with details regarding their interests and achievements.⁶ Another source of information is the school works from their education in Russia that have been preserved in Bulgaria. From a research perspective it is important to understand how, once back to their home country, these artists managed to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in Russia.⁷ With respect to church painting, this question remains unanswered.⁸ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new themes enter church painting in the Bulgarian lands, some of which come from Russia. One possible way for the arrival of new tendencies was through the direct impressions acquired by the icon-painters while traveling. The subject of the influence of Russian religious art on the works of Bulgarians who studied in Russia has not been properly explored. With the exception of Stanislav Dospevski, the oeuvre of other artists is either unknown or has not been studied in detail, which is why only few concrete examples can be presently discussed without any claims for comprehensiveness. Before

2 There is a rich body of literature on the subject: Lvova 1960a, 229–273; Lvova 1973, 44–52; Lvova 1978, 183–227; Mavrodinov 1955, 81–103; Stepovik 1975, 108–116, 128–130; Stepovik 1978, 288–291; Vasiliev 1951, 74–79.

3 Vasiliev 1965, 615–616.

4 Vasiliev 1965, 558.

5 His drawings and watercolors are kept in the CSA, f. 988k, inv. 1, a.u. 30–40. For them, Vasiliev 1965, 571, 573; Silyanovska 1958, 95–99; Lvova 1978, 273–277; Aretov 2000, 170–172.

6 They are most fully presented in the publications of E. Lvova mentioned in footnote 2. Documents from the time when Dospevski studied in Russia are presented and summarized in Zakhariyev 1971, 14–24; Vasiliev 1965, 409–412. The documents about Hristo Tsokev also in: Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 46–47, 66. Given some discrepancies in different publications, it would be useful to fully publish the documents in original, as well as to search for new sources on this topic in Russian archives.

7 About the influence of Russian painters in their secular painting: Lvova 1978, 212–225.

8 Gergova 2020, 244.

analyzing concrete influences and examples, this chapter will begin with a summary of the available information about the formal education prominent painters from the Bulgarian lands received in Russia.

As an experienced icon-painter who had taken part in the decoration of the catholicon of Rila Monastery in 1840s, the nephew of Zahariy Zograf, Stanislav Dospevski was enrolled at the Moscow School of Painting and Sculpture on 1 October 1851. A month later Dospevski was transferred from drawing original heads to drawing full figures. On 6 April 1852 Dospevski was issued a commendation certificate for the works he had completed for the course.⁹ A year later he was awarded another commendation certificate for his accomplishments in the gypsum figure drawing class. The Bulgarian painter studied at the Moscow School until 1 June 1853. He was issued a certificate stating that he had “advanced to the fourth class at the school and drawn gypsum figures for more than half a year.”¹⁰ Because Stanislav had completed the third class and wished to continue at the Academy of Saint Petersburg, his enrollment in the same course was duly recommended. In terms of evidence pertaining to that period, a series of drawings of statuary figural compositions has been connected to the last year of Dospevski at the Moscow School and his first year at the Academy.¹¹

In the autumn of 1853, Stanislav Dospevski was enrolled as an extra student at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. There he was taught by Prof. Pyotr V. Basin and Prof. Fedor A. Bruni who trained him in historical and portrait painting. Administrative documents of the Academy provide evidence of the progress and success of the Bulgarian painter, including two recorded instances of Dospevski receiving financial aid at the beginning of the Crimean War (1853–1854).¹² Dospevski’s works from Prof. Vasil Zahariev’s collection at the History Museum in Samokov are undoubtedly from the historical painting classes, and according to researchers, these are more associated with the instruction of Basin rather than of Bruni.¹³ Bruni held the position of rector and was known in the Academy for his supercilious behaviour and unapproachability, but he definitely demonstrated a positive attitude towards the Bulgarian student which was important for Dospevski’s gaining of self-esteem as a painter.¹⁴

In his last year of study Stanislav Dospevski participated in a competition for the Medal of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts. He presented a painted from life etude of a naked man sitting on a white

9 Zakhariiev 1971, 14–15.

10 The text of the document is published in Zakhariiev 1971, 15.

11 Sokolova 2001, 31. The author refers to them only to his time at the Saint Petersburg Academy.

12 Bljanova 1967, 32–34.

13 Sokolova 2001, 32–33.

14 This is what the artist told Nayden Gerov in a letter from 1857, Panchev 1911, 553, letter 899.

canvas-covered podium with his back turned.¹⁵ For his graduation work, which he later managed to bring to his home country, the Bulgarian was awarded a silver medal for second place in the Academy and received the title of painter. Upon his return to Bulgaria, he signed his icons as “Work of the Russian artist Mr. Stanislav Dospevski” („Произведение Росискаго художника Г. Станислава Доспевскаго.“)

In 1858, Rila Monastery sent a request to the Russian diplomatic mission in Constantinople to accept two monks to study religious painting and engraving.¹⁶ The reply stated that one of them can take painting lessons or study “icon-painting in the ancient style” at the Holy Trinity – Saint Sergius Lavra. The Russian officials attempted to dissuade the hegumen about engraving. The arguments were that there were no specialized schools in Moscow, and furthermore that “this art is costly, difficult to master and hardly applicable considering the current state of the Bulgarian church.”¹⁷ There was, however, another option, lithography: “If he wants to learn lithography, he can be housed at the Epiphany Monastery and take lessons in one of the institutions of this kind.”¹⁸

As a result of this recommendation, on 9 October 1859, monk Theodosius of Rila arrived in Moscow and was accommodated at the Epiphany Monastery (fig. 1).¹⁹ There he quickly found a lithographic atelier for his specialization, but first he opted to study painting, as required. He immediately enrolled in the painting course of Sergey K. Zaryanko at the School of Moscow and attended it for two years. In the list of Zaryanko’s students and auditors for 1861, a sequential fee of 15 rubles is noted from “Feodosius, a Bulgarian monk”²⁰ (fig. 2). Later, with the support of the Moscow Slavic Charity Committee, he started attending the iconographic workshop of the Holy Trinity – Saint Sergius Lavra and studied there until 1864.²¹ Lastly, in 1865, Theodosius enrolled at the private lithography atelier of the Muscovite Dimitriy

15 Bljanova 1967, 33.

16 Zakhariiev 1964, 175–176; Vasiliev 1965, 554. This matter is followed by letters to and from Nayden Gerov, Russian Vice Consul in Plovdiv: Popruzhenko 1931, 58–59, 61, 82–83, 89–90 (Letters 58, 62, 78, 90, 91). Documents are still preserved in the RSHA, f. 797, inv. 28, a.u. 360, p. 5–8, 10–11, 16–19. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Lora Gerd for providing them and allowing me to use them.

17 Popruzhevko 1931, 82–83.

18 RSHA, f. 797, inv. 28, a.u. 360, p. 5–8.

19 Theodosius was born in 1837 in the town of Chirpan, and at the age of 17 he became a monk in the Rila Monastery. We get this biographical information from N. Popov, Popov 1872, 26. It differs from those indicated by A. Vasiliev, Vasiliev 1951, 76–77. More information is provided by Kliment Rilets: Rilets 1959, 40. After returning to the monastery, Theodosius was ordained a hieromonk in 1870, after which he served as an ephemerion. Taxidiot in Breznik and Dupnitsa, a good church singer, also taught church singing in the monastery. His photographs have been preserved, one of which is from 25.05.1861, together with other Bulgarian students in Moscow: NLIV, BHA, Fund „Portraits and photos“, inv. no. Ф IV44.

20 Bljanova 1977, 113–114.

21 Popov 1872, 26. A photograph of him with a dedication is kept in the National Museum of Education (inv. no.1377B). It becomes clear by the inscription that in autumn 1864 Theodosius was still at the Lavra. Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 41, footnote 65.

Gavrilov, with the fee being paid by the Epiphany Monastery. On 28 October 1868, after nine years of study, he left Moscow and returned to Rila Monastery.²² According to the Bulgarian Board of Trustees in Odessa, he was qualified to lead an art class attached to the monastery.²³ The idea to establish a school of drawing and icon-painting within the monastery originated with the Moscow Slavic Charity Committee, initiated by the Bulgarian Board in Odessa.²⁴ However, the Russian government did not support the initiative at the time so it was not put into practice.²⁵

In the 1860s and 70s, three more Bulgarians studied at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture: Hristo Tsokev, Atanas Petrov and Paskal Todorov. While each of them followed a different educational path, in 1871 they attended the painting course together. The Moscow Slavic Charity Committee financed their education as extra students. It is precisely from the correspondence between the Committee and the School Council that we derive information regarding their art training.²⁶

In 1860, Hristo Tsokev from Gabrovo, previously a novice at the Hilandar Monastery in Mount Athos, entered the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. In 1864, he became a monk and accepted the name Charalambos. He was a friend of monk Theodosius of Rila Monastery, who sent him his photograph with a dedication for the occasion²⁷ (fig. 3). Tsokev spent seven years at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra studying at its art workshop. Two etudes from his training are preserved, signed with the abbreviation of his monastic name.²⁸ In 1867, Tsokev left the Lavra to enroll in the Moscow School.²⁹ This transition was marked by three oil portraits, one of which depicts the hegumen Arseniy Moskvín.³⁰

On 2 December 1867, the Moscow School accepted the other Bulgarian, Atanas Petrov. From the school

22 Rilets 1959, 40.

23 Lvova 1960b, 44.

24 Otchet 1871.

25 Dojnov 2005, 327.

26 In the Moscow committee's reports, compiled in 1864 and 1868, the secretary Nil Popov gave lists of Bulgarian scholarships, including those sent to art schools and ateliers. Therefore, the name of Hristo Tsokev is absent in both, and Atanas Petrov is missing in the first. Both lists include monk Theodosius and Paskal Todorov. The first list revealed the name of another Bulgarian, who studied in the early 1860s at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the Moscow School – Doycho Georgiev Perfanov from the town of Panagyurishte. Popov 1868, 26–27; Popov 1872, 24–26.

27 The dedication reads: "In memory of Charalambos Iv. Tsokev from Theodosius M. Riletsa. 27 October 1864. Sergievskaya Lavra."

28 Lavrenov 1956a, 99.

29 In the documents he is recorded as Dimitar Ivanov (Ioanov). The name was not chosen by chance, Dimitar is the name of his younger brother, born shortly before he left Gabrovo, Ivanov is their middle name. The change is because Hristo as a personal name is not accepted in Russia.

30 Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 35–37.

records, it is known that he came from a poor family in Lozengrad. Also, his fragile health was noted, due to which he often fell ill.³¹ Based on his origin, he can be identified as iconographer Anastas (Atanas) Krakklisiyski from Lozengrad. His icons from the period 1863–1866 are documented in the churches in the Shumen and Varna regions, and so is his departure for Russia.³² According to existing records, Russian Vice Consul Nikola Daskalov in Varna made a request before the Bulgarian Board of Trustees in Odessa, seeking assistance for his artistic education.³³ The School Council informed the secretary of the Moscow Committee, Nil Popov, in response to his inquiry from 1868: "The mentioned young people, Atanasiy Petrov and Dimitriy Ivanov, show not outstanding but good success in drawing and painting. As for Paskal Todorov, he has only recently started to engage again in the School and received the first number for the last drawing exam."³⁴ Indeed, etudes of ancient sculptures from the first years of Tsokev's education have been preserved. The numbers he received on the monthly exams do not confirm the observation³⁵. From the known drawings, it is evident that the lowest grade awarded to him by his teacher Vasil V. Pukiryov was 21, while the highest were one, two, five, six, seven, nine.³⁶

Until now, no attention has been paid to the information provided by Nil Popov about the third student, Paskal Todorov. He was from Yambol, and first studied with a local icon-painter,³⁷ then worked for a year in Edirne, and from there went to Varna, from where he departed for Russia. His artistic path is very reminiscent of that of Atanas Petrov's. In 1861, Todorov settled in Kyiv, where he enrolled at the icon-painting workshop of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. After that, he moved to Moscow and continued his studies at the atelier of the Holy Trinity – Saint Sergius Lavra.³⁸ Paskal Todorov entered the Moscow School earlier than the other two Bulgarians, but it is not known when precisely, and he had reached the fourth year of drawing when he had to interrupt his studies. In 1868, he continued his education and three years later – in 1871, the three Bulgarians Tsokev, Petrov, and Todorov attended the painting course together. In response to an inquiry, a representative of the Moscow School informed the Slavic

31 Lvova 1960a, 252; Lvova 1978, 212–213.

32 Todorova 2017, 589–608.

33 Tonev – Bljanova, 1975, 6.

34 Lvova 1960a, 265; Lvova 1978, 211.

35 Students in drawing and painting classes of the Moscow School and the Saint Petersburg Academy didn't receive grades, but a different method of assessment was applied. Students were evaluated by having their works ranked by the respective teacher. The student with the best etude received the first number, and the last number, which corresponded to the total number of students in the class, was for the one with the worst drawing. Documents have also been preserved that comprise the numbers awarded to Stanislav Dospevsky at the Saint Petersburg Academy. See Zakhariyev 1971, 17; Bljanova 1967, 33.

36 Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 53–62.

37 In the church of Saint Demetrios, the village of Irechekovo, Yambol region, there are two of his signed icons dating from 1859.

38 Popov 1872, 25–26.

Charity Committee: “Regarding the success and classes in the School, I can report that the Bulgarians Fedorov, Petrov, and Ioanov have already entered the course in drawing from life and are studying well, particularly Fedorov and Ioanov. Petrov, due to illness, is weaker than the other two. Among them, Fedorov is primarily engaged in icon-painting under the guidance of (Evgraf S. – note by S.T.) Sorokin.”³⁹ In 1872, Paskal Todorov was admitted to the Saint Petersburg Academy⁴⁰ but in 1873 he left unexpectedly, while preparing for the competition to earn the Academy’s medal.⁴¹

Hristo Tsokev completed his education at the Moscow School of Arts in 1873. In a preserved application to the council, he recounted that he had completed six years of study, and the previous year he had been awarded two silver medals for painting and drawing. He asked to be granted the title of free artist, in order to return to his homeland, where he was already expected as a teacher at the Gabrovo Gymnasium.⁴² In the following years, Atanas Petrov caught up with his studies and advanced to the next class with honors.⁴³ Over the last year and a half, he was supported by the Bulgarian Board of Trustees in Odessa, which had helped him upon his arrival, as evidenced by the statements sent to the School Board.⁴⁴ In May 1875, he submitted an application to obtain his diploma. His request was approved, and together with the title “painter,” he was also granted the rights of “a hereditary honorary citizen.”⁴⁵ His graduation work “Kitchen” earned him a small silver medal and was included in the fourth exhibition of the Russian Peredvizhniki (or The Itinerants).⁴⁶ It has been commented on and reproduced in the journal *Vsemirnaya Illyustratsiya* (World Illustrated), while Petrov was acknowledged as one of the best alumni of the school.⁴⁷ (fig. 4).

The Bulgarian graduates were fully aware that it was impossible to sustain themselves as academic artists producing secular paintings and therefore also paid special attention to the trends in icon-painting in Russia in the nineteenth century. Dospevski said to his friend and Russian Vice-Consul in Plovdiv Naiden Gerov (1823–1900) that his greatest desire is to work on portraits and historical paintings, while painting icons is “necessary to provide his daily bread.”⁴⁸ He perceived this activity as neces-

39 Lvova 1960a, 251, 267.

40 Lvova 1960a, 253, 268–269.

41 Immediately after his return, he painted icons for the churches in the Veliko Tarnovo region, where he settled for a short period of time. Vasiliev 1965, 600; Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 81, 90.

42 Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 52, 66.

43 Lvova 1960a, 251, 267–268.

44 Lvova 1973, 50. The documents in Lvova 1960a, 266–267.

45 Tonev – Bljanova 1975, 7.

46 Lvova 1978, 213–214.

47 Vystavka 1875, 121–122.

48 Panchev 1911, 555–556.

sary, although to some extent it burdened his creative impulses. The comparison with Atanas Petrov is indicative. He motivated his departure with the desire “to master the art of church painting,” but made no further mention of this interest in any of the subsequent documents. After his graduation, he returned to Bulgaria for a short period but it seems that he did not succeed as a secular painter. He then emigrated to Russia, where in 1876 he became a teacher at the town of Ananiev, one of the centers of the Bulgarian settlers.⁴⁹

In one of his letters to his fellow citizen Hrisant Doychinov, Archimandrite of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Stanislav Dospevski wrote: “this summer I completed the course in Art, meaning I took the exam in Historical Church Painting.”⁵⁰ Although brief, this letter made it possible for scholars to assert that the artist stayed at Saint Petersburg Academy for the special class in icon-painting.⁵¹ The letter is dated 15 August 1856, the date of evaluation of Dospevski’s diploma work was May 4, and he returned to Bulgaria at the beginning of 1857. The visit of this class would fill up his stay in Saint Petersburg during the summer and autumn of 1856 – a period about which nothing is known about Dospevski to date. In 1856, a special course in “Orthodox Icon-painting” in “Russo-Byzantine style” was introduced to the Academy’s curriculum. While for the next four years no student was trained in this class,⁵² Fyodor G. Solntsev was continuously teaching his icon-painting class at the Saint Petersburg Theological Seminary from 1844 to 1867.⁵³

The fact that Stanislav Dospevski was very popular after his return from Russia and won several competitions for the decoration of churches, testifies to the preference of Bulgarians for Russian religious painting at the time. In this respect, Theodosius was also sent to Russia by the Rila monks, specifically to study engraving and icon-painting. His modest work remains unknown since following criticism from Neofit Rilski regarding his icon-painting, he abandoned art.⁵⁴ Drawings from his studies and notes important for our subject have been preserved, but unfortunately, the archive remains inaccessible.⁵⁵ (fig. 5) When it comes to the studies of Paskal Todorov, our research revealed that Paskal Todorov was actually engaged in icon-painting at four different schools in the Russian Empire. The Russo-Turkish

49 Tonev – Bljanova 1975, 6, 8.

50 Published in Zakhariev 1971, 24–25.

51 Sokolova 2001: 34.

52 Evtushenko 2008, 196–202; Harlova 2011: 263–268.

53 Evtushenko 2007, 298–305.

54 Vasiliev 1965, 554.

55 Gergova 2020, 244. His archive is kept at Rila Monastery. Kliment Rilets quotes letters of monk Theodosius and other documents about him from the monastery’s archive: Rilets 1959, 40. We were also unable to find any of his engravings in the collection of the National Gallery, as V. Dinova-Ruseva wrote: Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 41, 67, footnote 3.

War of 1877–1878 delayed his work for the Holy Trinity Church in Kotel, as the residents were reluctant to pay for the icons. But he found a livelihood by painting portraits of Russian soldiers.⁵⁶

In the archival documents about Hristo Tsokev, there is no information about formal studies of icon-painting in Russia. Over the years, he painted individual icons, and in 1874, he received a large commission for the iconostasis of the church of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the town of Svishtov⁵⁷ (fig. 6). His icons, the Descent of the Holy Spirit (1874) from the church of the Holy Trinity⁵⁸ (fig. 7) and the Entombment of Christ (1875) for the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Gabrovo, were modelled on engravings by the German representative of the Nazarene movement in painting Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. In 1860, von Carolsfeld completed and published *The Holy Bible in 240 Engravings*, which actually became more popular in places outside of Germany, including in the Russian Empire.⁵⁹ It was issued in full color by the Russian-German publisher Wilhelm Henckel (Russian: Vasily Genkel) in 1867. The third Russian edition was published by priest Konstantin Stratilatov, and accompanied by his explanatory texts in 1873 – the year when Tsokev graduated. He probably owned a copy of this Bible, or at least examined it, and created drawings which he used as designs for his own works. Another engraving from that Bible served as a model for his icon with Ascension of Christ (1880) in the Church of the Holy Trinity in the town of Gorna Oryahovitsa.

A sketchbook of drawings by Stanislav Dospevski, which he started in 1854 during his education in Saint Petersburg, has been preserved.⁶⁰ Even as its contents are quite diverse, male figures at difficult angles and in motion, including Apollo Belvedere, Discobolus of Myron, two écorchés, mythological and historical scenes—the religious scenes and images are prevalent. The drawings are purely linear, done in pencil, some accented with ink. We cannot confirm the opinion of D. Sokolova that all the works in the album show corrections by his professor, F. Bruni.⁶¹ The drawings were not study assignments, as they were produced outside of the Academy's classes. Dospevski carried the sketchbook with him on his various visits, and on its pages he reproduced works of European and Russian authors. On p. 234 there is a barely readable handwritten note with a reference to the murals of the Saint Isaac's Cathedral or Isaakiyevskiy Sobor in Saint Petersburg.⁶² The Cathedral's murals can be linked to the multi-figural Biblical compositions and the figures of the evangelists in the sketchbook, which are either copies or

56 Uzunov – Staykov 1884, 300–301.

57 Dinova-Ruseva 1973, 81–82, 107–109; Sokolova 2018, 92.

58 The icon is in Art Gallery – Gabrovo.

59 Buseva-Davydova 2019, 212–213.

60 House Museum Stanislav Dospevski, Pazardzhik, inv. no. AG (Art Galery), Pazardzhik 6.

61 Sokolova 2001, 32.

62 About this monument: See Klimov 2004, 236–253; Golovanova 2007; Tolmacheva 2018.

variations of the original works.⁶³ The drawing published as *The God of Sabaoth*⁶⁴ replicates the image of Apostle Philip from the drum of the dome (fig. 8). During Dospevski's studies at the Academy, his professor Fyodor Antonovich Bruni, as well as other teachers, were working on decorating the Cathedral, so the Bulgarian was certainly familiar with their works.

Dospevski's sketchbook contains many drawings of Madonnas by Russian and Western European painters from the Renaissance and Baroque periods drawn from engravings or painted reproductions. For example, one of these drawings of Virgin Mary Stanislav copied from a painting by Alexey E. Egorov. In addition, he has copied the drawing of Saint Ekaterina from the icon of Vladimir Borovikovski in the Kazan Cathedral in Saint Petersburg.⁶⁵ His drawing of Saint John the Theologian depicts a popular iconographic variant of the apostle in Russian visual and applied art of the nineteenth century, but with a Western European model: the painting of Domenichino Zampieri from 1625–1628.⁶⁶ Among Dospevski's drawings is a variant of the “Three Joys” icon of the Mother of God, a name used in the Russian tradition to denote compositions featuring the Holy Family.⁶⁷

The drawing of an angel with a censer and a candle in the sketchbook has already been identified as a preliminary sketch for Stanislav Dospevski's oil painting at the National Gallery in Sofia⁶⁸ (fig. 9), which Tsanko Lavrenov has misinterpreted as a replica of a work by Vasilii Surikov.⁶⁹ In fact, it is a very accurate copy of a painting titled *Angel* by T. A. Neff. Upon its creation this painting became extremely popular and copies of it were commissioned in Russia.⁷⁰ Therefore, we should date the work from the time of Dospevski's education in the Russian capital and update the list of his works brought from there. The painting was kept at the home of Naiden Gerov and in 1862 a guest of his placed an order with Dospevski for a reproduction copy.⁷¹

In 1864, Dospevski was commissioned to paint the icons for the Chapel of Holy Annunciation at the Transfiguration Monastery near the town of Veliko Tarnovo. The archangel on the side door of the

63 Bljanova 1967, 32.

64 Sokolova 2001, 30, 31.

65 Photograph in Ibid., 32. Klimov 2004, 186, il. 293.

66 Bjakova 2021, 195–207. Dospevski has made the drawing using one of the painted copies in Saint Petersburg, since in the engravings (at least the published ones) the composition mirrors the seventeenth-century original.

67 Buseva-Davydova 2019, 215–217.

68 Sokolova 2001, 34.

69 Lavrenov 1956b, 70.

70 The painting owes its popularity to the fact that it is a portrait of Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna as an angel. T. A. Neff himself produced two such paintings in the 1830s which are now kept at the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg and the Museum of Fine Arts in Tbilisi. V. Surikov painted a copy in 1866.

71 Panchev 1911, 561, letter 915.

iconostasis is holding a scepter in one hand and a fiery sword pointing downward in the other hand. Below the sword is the defeated Satan depicted as a grotesque mask (fig. 10). In this work by Dospevski, distant echoes of late nineteenth-century Russian classicism are evident. The Archangel Michael was developed with notable interest by the renowned artist of the Russian capital, Vladimir Borovikovski. The Bulgarian likely had a particular model, as evidenced by a mirror-reversed drawing in his sketchbook (fig. 11). This model was iconographically close to Borovikovski's icon from the chapel of the Church of the Holy Trinity at the Smolensk Cemetery in Saint Petersburg. Another variation on the same theme, but more traditional, is the icon of Archangel Michael (ca. 1874) by Hristo Tsokev, kept in the National Gallery in Sofia.⁷²

In 1868, Dospevski painted the central icons for the iconostasis at the Metropolitan Church of Saint Marina in Plovdiv.⁷³ On the icon the Mother of God is sitting on a marble throne whose back ends with cherubim on both sides. The right hand of the Mother of God is slightly shifted to the side, holding a blossoming lily (fig. 12). The finishing detail with the cherubim on Virgin Mary's throne may have been borrowed from the painting of Mary and Infant Jesus by Alexey T. Markov from 1849,⁷⁴ which Dospevski had copied in his sketchbook in Saint Petersburg (fig. 13).

Jesus Christ is depicted as a High Priest, in his left hand he is holding a globus cruciger, and in the right – a scepter. Here, his throne has a more complex design as it includes the symbols of the four evangelists: the lion (Mark), the bull (Luke), the angel (Mathew), and the eagle (John) (fig. 14). Two closed codices are placed on a brown (wooden) base, with a lying red lion to the left, and a lying white bull to the right, their large heads visible. Further up, the throne is crafted from marble, with an eagle and a small atlas (instead of the angel) sculpted in front. Each of them supports a closed book and the chalice and plates are placed on top of the books. In the scattered archive of the artist, three preparatory sketches for these two icons have been preserved.⁷⁵

72 Sokolova 2018, 92.

73 Pandurski 1959, 57. The icons were published in Svintila 1979, 92–93, with a date in the mid-1860s and an incorrect provenance.

74 Klimov 2004, 79–87, il. 100.

75 National Gallery, Archive “Stanislav Dospevski”, inv. no. II rp. 1018, Double-sided drawing “Mother of God with the Child on a Throne/Monks”, 25x36.5 cm, published in Zakhariev 1971, ill. 13 with an inaccurate dating of 1839–1840. National Gallery, Archive “Stanislav Dospevski”, inv. no. II rp. 1084, Double-sided drawing “Mother of God with the Child on a Throne/Christ on a Throne with the Symbols of the Evangelists,” unpublished. Historical Museum Samikov Collection “Vasil Zakhariev”, inv. no. доп. 93д, Double-sided drawing “Annunciation/ Mother of God with the Child on a Throne”, 44x32,5 cm, unpublished. Virgin Mary holds a lily branch. The drawings must date from the late 1860s.

The academic painter first crafted a similar icon of Christ the High Priest for the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Pazardzhik in 1860 (fig. 15).⁷⁶ This work bears the closest resemblance to the early Russian examples from Saint Petersburg which Dospevski has likely seen. One example is an icon from the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, painted by Moscow artist Vasilij Vasilevski in 1727; and another is from the Grand Church of the Winter Palace, painted in 1764 by Ivan Belski.⁷⁷ In Dospevski's icon the throne is massive, gold-plated and decorated with splendid baroque ornaments. The symbols are painted as applications in the four corners: a lion and a bull at the bottom, an eagle in the upper right-hand corner, and opposite to it, instead of an angel, John the Evangelist himself holding a closed Gospel. A chalice and the tablets with the ten commandments are placed on the throne.

In 1955, Nikola Mavrodinov wrote: “The influence of the Russian religious painting of the age is evident in all icons by Stanislav Dospevski. In his works Christ is depicted as the regular Russian type of Christ seen in the works of A. P. Bryulov, P. V. Basin and F. A. Bruni. (...) In his icons, Mary is also kind and beautiful, a very young mother. She often holds a branch of lilies, like the Virgin Mary of A. P. Bryulov.”⁷⁸ For his icons at the Metropolitan Church of Saint Marina in Plovdiv, Dospevski used models that were well-established and popular in Russia. The same designs were applied by the other graduate of the Petersburg Academy, Paskal Todorov, for his icons (ca. 1883) in the church of Saint Marina in the village of Medven, Kotel.⁷⁹ The central icons of the iconostasis at the Cathedral Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Varna, which were brought from Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, have very similar models.⁸⁰ The models are reproduced in two Russian lithographs of Christ Pantocrator and of Mother of God Queen of Heaven (figs. 16, 17).⁸¹ An explanatory inscription below the images states that these are copies of the icons that Karl Bryulov painted in 1844 for the church of the Transfiguration of Christ on Apothecary Island in Saint Petersburg.⁸² The lithographs were printed by F. A. Brockhaus in Leipzig and were published in 1865 in the fourth volume of *Northern Lights: Russian Art Album*, issued by Wilhelm Henckel. The comparison between the icons from the church in Plovdiv and the two lithographs shows that Stanislav Dospevsky copied them precisely. It is unclear whether he acquired the whole edition or only copies of the engravings upon his return to Bulgaria, or if he made drawings of the icons by Bryulov on-site in the Russian capital, as he had such a practice of doing, judging by the drawings in his sketchbook.

76 Genova 2007, 20.

77 About the iconostases and the icons: See Buseva-Davydova 1999, 510–529; Klimov 2004, 79–87, il. 100.

78 Mavrodinov 1955, 94–95.

79 Vasiliev 1965, 599.

80 Drjanovski – Rachev 2002, 9–10, il. 17–18, 23.

81 I would like to express my gratitude to Natalia Komashko for her help identifying the models and for the provided information.

82 Ispolitov 1878: 89. It is said that a lot of artists painted copies of these icons for different churches.

Russian influence is also evident in the attributes held by Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary. The Mother of God holds a blooming lily. This flower is a direct allusion to, and a symbolic image of, the purity of the Mother of God, among other symbols which, starting from the late sixteenth – early seventeenth century, have been painted in the composition of the “*Conceptio Immaculata*” where she stands on a crescent moon. The examples from Bulgaria regarding this iconography are incidental and date from the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸³ The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is highlighted in most cases by the presence of the crescent moon or a long blossoming branch. We need to mention that the lily in the iconography of Virgin Mary in Bulgarian art was introduced by Stanislav Dospevski. The earliest identified example is a home icon of Virgin Mary Eleousa with saints from 1858.⁸⁴

After the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule (1878), and especially in the first half of the twentieth century, Bulgarians continued to study at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts.⁸⁵ Among them was Gospodin Zhelyazkov. He was a student from the first cohort of the State Drawing School in Sofia. In 1899, when he graduated, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church announced a competition for gifted young painters. The winners were offered grants for specialization in Orthodox painting in Russia.⁸⁶ Having won the competition, Zhelyazkov embarked for Russia. The diploma from the Drawing School in Sofia, however, proved to be insufficient for the young painter to be admitted as a student in Saint Petersburg without additional qualifications. So, in the course of one year he completed the whole programme of the Kazan Art School, graduating in 1900.⁸⁷ The same year he was admitted with excellent marks as a full-time student at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. Gospodin Zhelyazkov ended up in the class of Iliya E. Repin. The professor was so impressed with his talent, that he admitted him to his personal master class, a privilege granted to few students.⁸⁸ In 1908 the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church gave Gospodin Zhelyazkov a special letter of recommendation, granting him permission to handle work on icon and mural painting in all eparchies in the country.⁸⁹ The contest and the special permit are, once again, indicative of the way Russian religious painting was perceived in the Bulgarian lands. The fact that they were issued by the Holy Synod gave the religious art created in Russia the aesthetic and artistic status of a model to be followed.

83 Genova 2014, 318–347.

84 Sokolova 2018, 60–61.

85 Shalaganova – Ganeva – Garnizov 2017, but where some alumni are not included.

86 Markov 1988, 4.

87 Yoncheva 2021, 262.

88 Markov 1988, 5.

89 Markov 1988, 5–6.

One of the earliest church commissions of Gospodin Zhelyazkov was for the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia (fig. 18).⁹⁰ The icons and murals of the largest Bulgarian church were created by Bulgarian and Russian artists between 1906 and 1912.⁹¹ The works of Russian painters who worked at the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral had left a noticeable mark in Zhelyazkov’s oeuvre. For example, he based the design of the thrones of the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ with inlays of precious stones on the icons of the central iconostasis,⁹² painted by Viktor Vasnetsov, who was one of his teachers in Saint Petersburg.⁹³

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several Bulgarians resided in the Russian Empire pursuing academic studies in the field of art. Stanislav Dospevski, Atanas Petrov, and Paskal Todorov were icon-painters who continued their study there as academic artists. Without previous experience, Hristo Tsokev and monk Theodosius were formed as painters entirely in Russia. The artist Gospodin Zhelyazkov was sent for long-term specialization. It is typical for Bulgarians to study in more than one place. They studied both in prestigious icon-painting ateliers with long traditions, such as the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the Holy Trinity – Saint Sergius Lavra, and in academic art institutions, such as Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and the Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. Paskal Todorov, for instance, studied in all four places. In this manner, they received a diverse and broad artistic training, both in secular art and in icon-painting. In the nineteenth century, various trends in church painting emerged in Russia, combining academic pictorial rules with features of old icon-painting, both Russian and Greco-Byzantine. Bulgarian artists in Russia were not only interested in what was new to them and so they did not study secular genres only. Documents show that they also had a great interest and specialized in religious painting.

In the history of Bulgarian art, Stanislav Dospevski and Hristo Tsokev are duly recognized for their undoubted contribution to the development of secular art in the nineteenth century. But their icons also testify to innovations regarding style and iconography. The icons by Dospevski, Tsokev, and Todorov, presented in this text, show that they used popular and new models that had entered Russian icon-painting at the time they were studying. As the first academic artist, Stanislav Dospevski had a great influence on the icon painters, who copied his icons. It is worth searching and studying the works of monk Theodosius, Hristo Tsokev, and Paskal Todorov, in order to more fully assess the contribution of the graduates of Russian art schools to the development of icon-painting in the Bulgarian lands in the second half of the nineteenth century.

90 Yoncheva 2021, 263–264; Markov 1988, 7.

91 Radkova 1999, 58–94.

92 Yoncheva 2021, 274.

93 Markov 1988, 5.



FIGURES

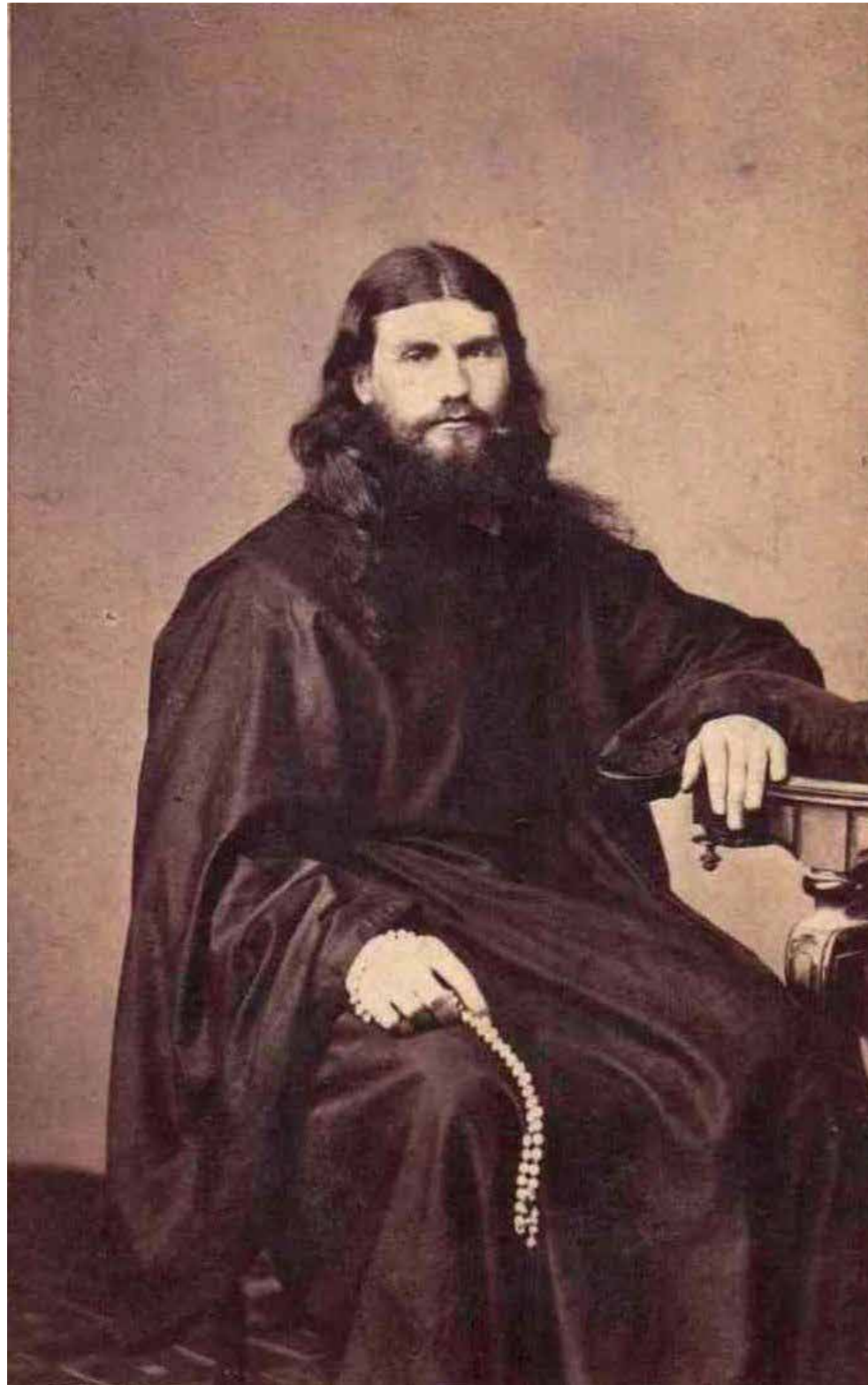


Fig. 1. Monk Theodosius, photograph from the Rila Monastery, 1864 © National Museum of Education.



Fig. 2. Monk Theodosius among Bulgarian Students in Moscow (the second seated from the left), 5th of May 1861 © National Library Ivan Vazov, Plovdiv.

Теодосію М. Руневу
На наглядъ.
Карамзинско
Уб. М. Зюкеву.
Дмб.
Теодосію М. Руневу.
1864.
Октябрь 27.
Сергиевское Лавра.

Fig. 3. Dedication from 27th of October 1864 on the back of the photograph of monk Theodosius. © National Museum of Education.



Fig. 4. Reproduction of Atanas Petrov's graduation painting in Vsemirnaya ilustratsiya journal, no. 345, 1875. (Source: <http://lib.sptl.spb.ru/ru/nodes/14072-vsemirnaya-illyustratsiya-1875-tom-xiv-locale-nil-7>).



Fig. 5. Saint Saint Cyril and Methodius, Drawing of monk Theodosius. Photo: Ivanka Gergova.

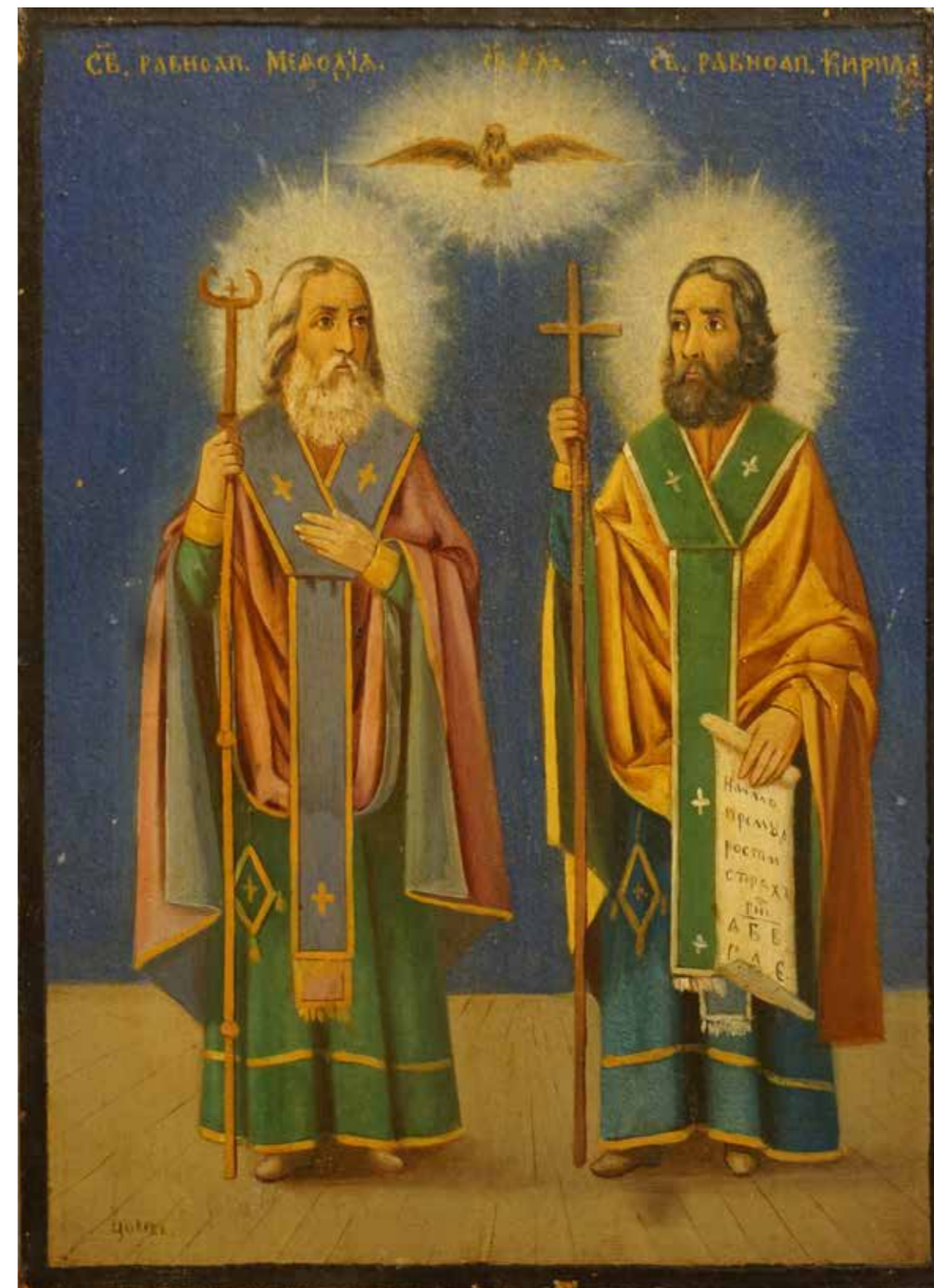


Fig. 6. Saint Saint Cyril and Methodius, Icon of Hristo Tsokev, 1874, Church of Saint Saint Cyril and Methodius, Art Gallery Svishtov. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 7. Descent of the Holy Spirit, Icon of Hristo Tsokev 1874, Church of Saint Saint Cyril and Methodius, Art Gallery Gabrovo. Photo: Angel Nikolov.

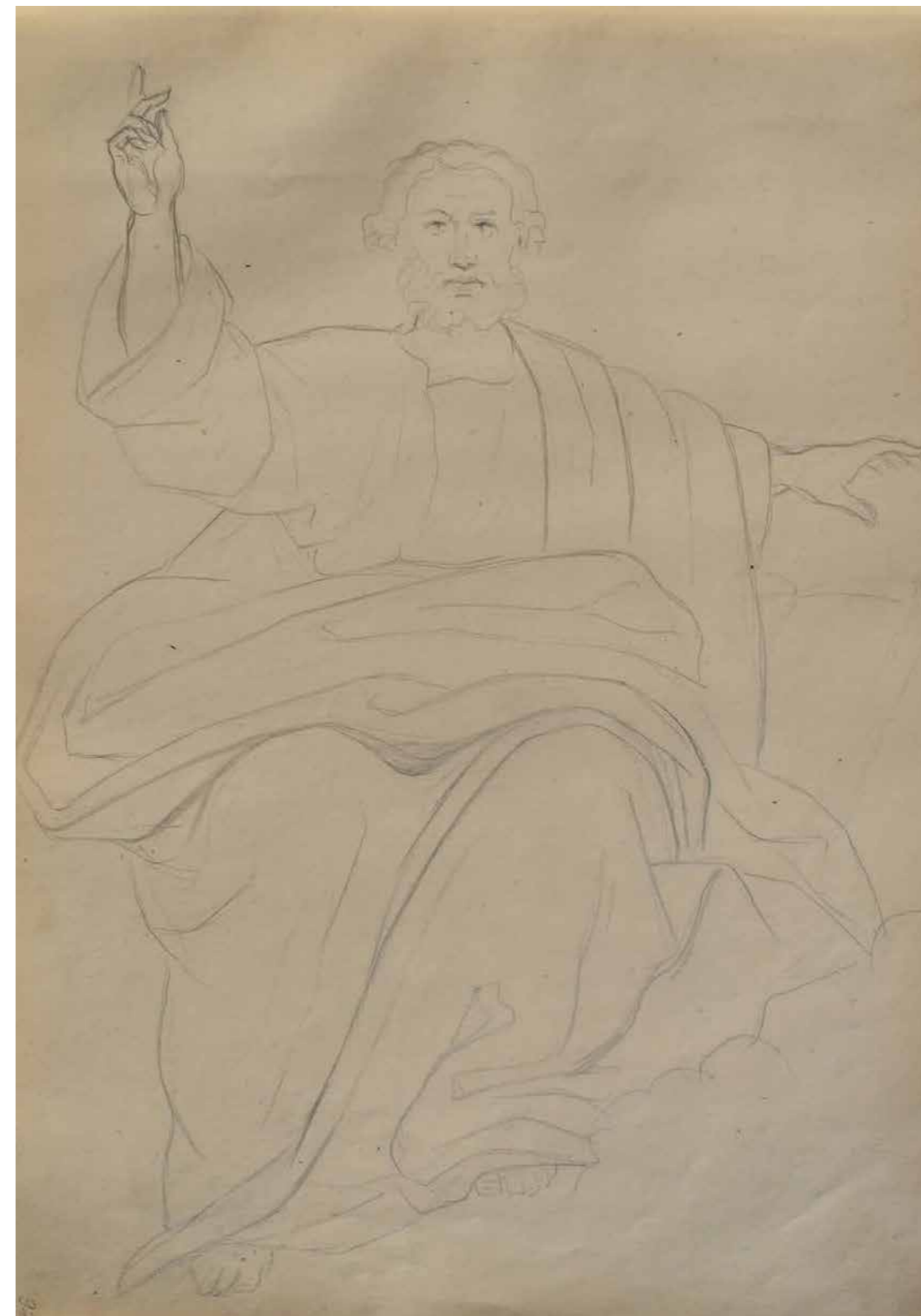


Fig. 8. Apostle, Drawing of Stanislav Dospevski from his sketchbook, ca. 1854–1856. Photo: Angel Nikolov.

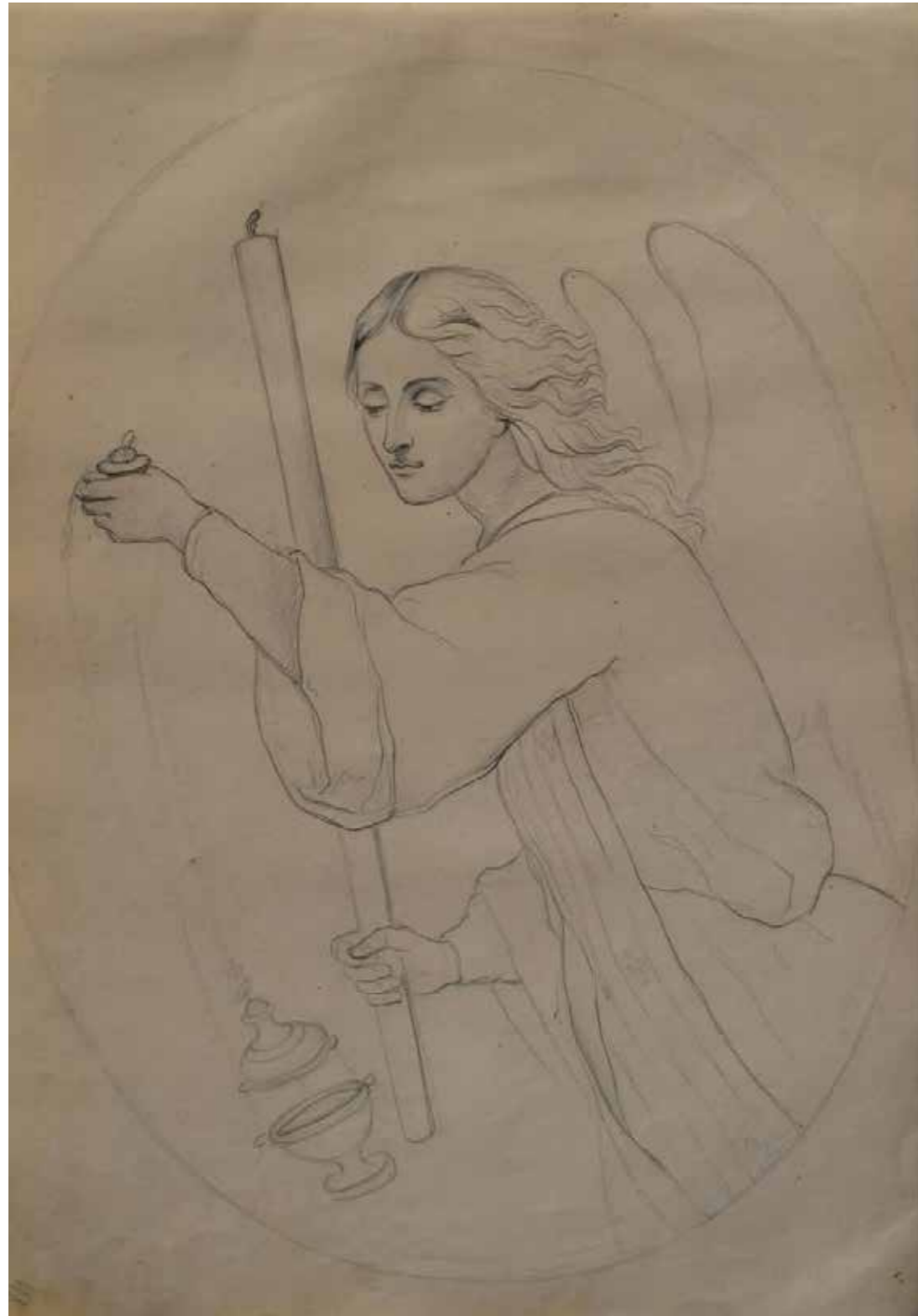


Fig. 9. An Angel with censer and candle, Drawing of Stanislav Dospevski from his sketchbook, ca. 1854–1856. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 10. Archangel Michael, Icon of Stanislav Dospevski 1864, Chapel of Holy Annunciation, Regional Historical Museum – Veliko Tarnovo. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 11. Archangel Michael, Drawing of Stanislav Dospevski from his sketchbook, ca. 1854–1856. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 12. The Mother of God with the Christ Child, Icon of Stanislav Dospevski, 1868, Metropolitan Church in Plovdiv. (Source: Svintila, V. Икони от Самоковската школа. Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Septemvri”, 1979, 92).



Fig. 13. The Mother of God on a throne, Drawing of Stanislav Dospevski from his sketchbook, ca. 1854–1856. Photo: Angel Nikolov.



Fig. 14. Jesus Christ Great Priest, Icon of Stanislav Dospevski from the Metropolitan Church in Plovdiv, 1868. (Source: *Svintila, V. Икони от Самоковската школа*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Septemvri”, 1979, 93).



Fig. 15. Jesus Christ Great Priest, Icon of Stanislav Dospevski, 1860, Cathedral Church in Pazardzhik.
Photo: Darina Boykina.



Fig. 16. The Mother of God Queen of Heaven, lithograph, 1865. (Source: *Съверное сияние, Русскій художественный альбомъ*, Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg: Izdavaemŭj Vasilem Genkelem v pechatnĕ V. Golovina, u Vladimĭrskoj tserkvi, 1865, ill. 148)



Fig. 17. Christ Pantocrator, lithograph, 1865. (Source: *Съверное сияние, Русскій художественный альбомъ*, Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg: Izdavaemŭj Vasilem Genkelem v pechatnĕ V. Golovina, u Vladimĭrskoj tserkvi, 1865, ill. 139)



Fig. 18. Jesus Christ, Icon of Gospodin Zhelyazkov above the door to the nave of the Cathedral, ca. 1914–1916. Photo: Milena Doncheva.

 CATALOGUE

**RUSSIAN
ICONS IN
BULGARIAN
COLLECTIONS**

1

The Mandylion

Collection: Batak History Museum, on display

Inventory No.: 5

Dimensions: 44 × 54 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia, Old Believers' workshop

Condition: Good

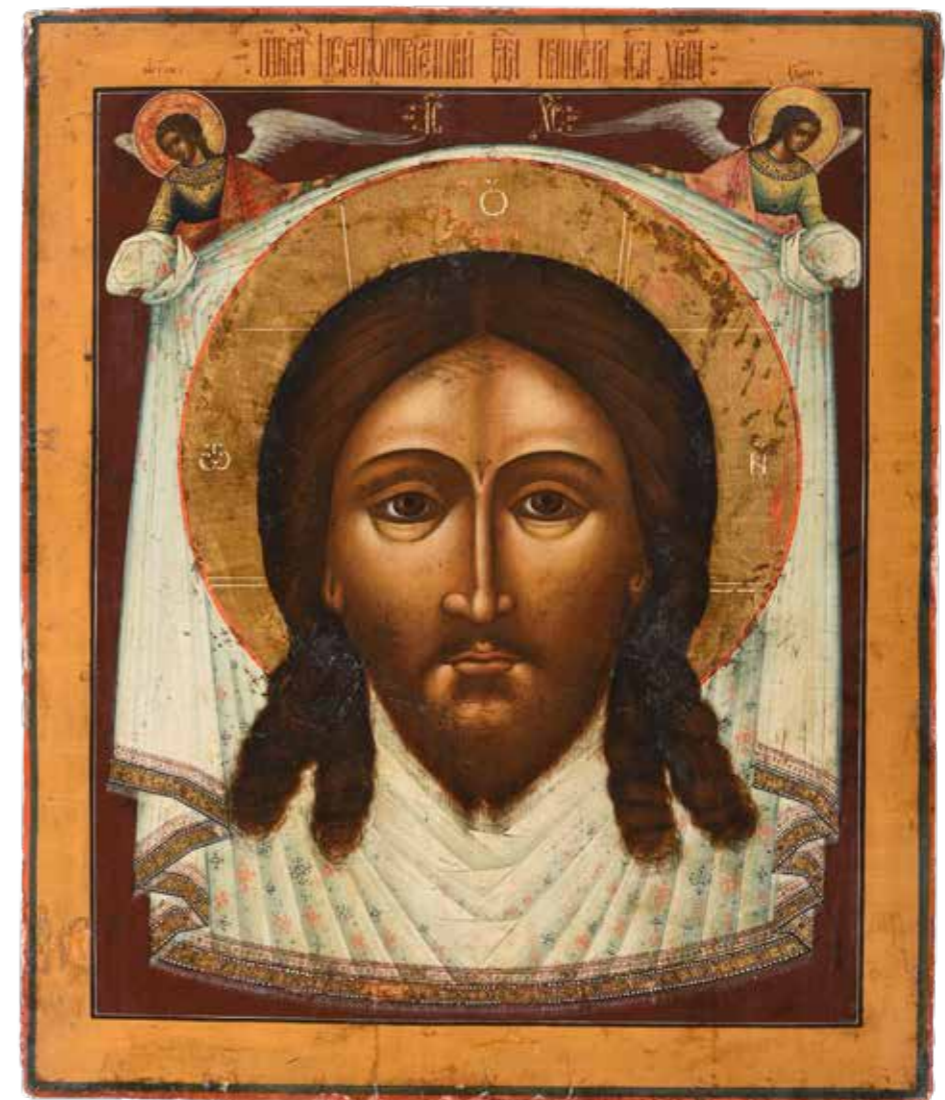
Inscriptions: ѠБРА́ НЕРЪКОТВОРЕННЫЙ ГѢ́ДА НАШЕГО ЇСА ХРТА (The Icon not made by hands of Our Lord Jesus Christ); аггли Гдни (Angels of the Lord); ІС ХС (Jesus Christ).

Description: Single wooden panel reinforced with two battens inserted into channels along the top and bottom edges. A suspension ring is attached to the back for hanging. The composition depicts a white ornamented cloth, its upper corners tied and held by two angels, covering the entire pictorial field. On the cloth appears the face of Christ. The background is brown, and the frame is painted yellow.

Provenance: The icon survived the destruction of Saint Nedelya Church in Batak during the April Uprising of 1876. In 1966, it was donated to the History Museum in Batak by the local priest, Stoyan Ginchev. The icon has undergone restoration. A short historical note on paper is affixed to the back of the panel.

Bibliography: Gergova 2022, pp. 26–27, ill. 24–26, cat. 7.

Photo Credits: History Museum in Batak (photography: Ivan Vanev)



Church Banner (*Khorugv*) with the Resurrection of Christ and Saint Nicholas

Collection: Batak History Museum, storage

Inventory No.: 1387 HCΦ

Dimensions: 68 × 145 cm

Material: Oil on canvas

Date: Late 19th century

Condition: Good. The banner has been restored

Inscriptions: Illegible

Description: On one side of the *khorugv*, within an oval medallion framed in Baroque style, is depicted the Risen Christ accompanied by a kneeling angel. The reverse features a representation of Saint Nicholas within a similar medallion, with Christ and the Virgin Mary shown in the background. The lower edge terminates in three vertical bands, each bordered with a fringed galloon. The sides are decorated with motifs of the Instruments of Christ's Passion and liturgical vessels.

Provenance: The banner is part of a set (*Inv. No. 1390 HCΦ*) originating from the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Batak. It was donated to the History Museum in 1966.

Bibliography: Gergova 2022, p. 30, ill. 29–32, cat. 10.

Photo Credits: History Museum in Batak (photography: Ivan Vanev)



**Church Banner (*Khorugv*)
with the Baptism of Christ and the Mother of God *Kazanskaya***

Collection: Batak History Museum, storage

Inventory No.: 1390 HCΦ

Dimensions: 64 × 145 cm

Material: Oil on canvas

Date: Late 19th century

Condition: Good. The banner has been restored

Inscriptions: Illegible

Description: On one side, within an oval medallion with a Baroque ornamental frame, is the Baptism of Christ. On the reverse, within a medallion of the same form, appears an image of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God *Kazanskaya*. Along the edges are painted the Instruments of Christ's Passion and church vessels. The *khorugv* terminates in three vertical bands edged with a fringed galloon.

Provenance: The banner forms part of a set with another *khorugv* (Inv. No. 1387 HCΦ). From the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Batak; donated to the museum in 1966.

Bibliography: Gergova 2022, pp. 32–33, ill. 33–36, cat. 11.

Photo Credits: History Museum in Batak (photography: Ivan Vanev)



**Church Banner (*Khorugv*)
with the Baptism of Christ and the Mother of God *Vladimirskaya***

Collection: Batak History Museum, storage

Inventory No.: 1378 НСФ

Dimensions: 63 × 144 cm

Material: Oil on canvas

Date: Early 20th century

Condition: Good. The banner has been restored

Inscriptions: *Богоявленіе Господне* (The Epiphany of Lord); *а. г.* (*Angel of the Lord*); *с. Іоаннъ Пре.* (*Saint John the Forerunner*); *ІИѢ ХРѢ*. (Jesus Christ);

Владимирскія. Прѣ. Бдѣцы ([The icon] of the Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir); *ІИѢ ХРѢ*. (Jesus Christ); *МР МЪ* (Mother of God).

Description: On one side of the *khorugv* is shown the Baptism of Christ within a rectangular field; on the other, a replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God *Vladimirskaya*. The banner terminates in three vertically rounded bands. The background and borders are filled with ornamental motifs.

Provenance: The object forms part of a set with a companion banner (Inv. No. 1389 НСФ). From the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Batak; donated to the museum in 1966.

Bibliography: Gergova 2022, pp. 34–36, ill. 37–40, cat. 12.

Photo Credits: History Museum in Batak (photography: Ivan Vanev)



**Church Banner (*Khorugv*)
with the Resurrection of Christ and Saint Olga of Kiev**

Collection: Batak History Museum, storage

Inventory No.: 1389 HCΦ

Dimensions: 62 × 144 cm

Material: Oil on canvas

Date: Early 20th century

Condition: Good. The banner has been restored.

Inscriptions: *Воскресение Христово* (The Resurrection of Christ); *ІИС ХРІС*. (Jesus Christ); *a.z.* (Angel of the Lord); On the reverse: *Св. Кн. Ольга* (Saint Princess Olga).

Description: On one side, in a rectangular field, is the Resurrection of Christ with the Risen Lord and a kneeling angel. On the reverse, Saint Princess Olga is depicted half-length. The *khorugv* terminates in three vertical bands with rounded ends; the background is ornamentally painted.

Provenance: The object forms part of a set with another banner (Inv. No. 1378 HCΦ). From the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Batak; donated to the museum in 1966.

Bibliography: Gergova 2022, pp. 36–37, ill. 41–44, cat. 13.

Photo Credits: History Museum in Batak (photography: Ivan Vanev)



6

The Seven Sleepers

Collection: Art Gallery Kazanlak, storage

Inventory No.: 2

Dimensions: 26 × 30 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: The wooden panel is insect-damaged and warped, with losses in the paint layer; the surface is soiled and darkened. Not restored.

Inscriptions: *образъ сѣрыхъ седми* [im.] *отроквъ иже въ эфесе* (*Icon of the Seven Holy Youths of Ephesus*); *иисъ христъ* (Jesus Christ); *господь все* [im.] *держитель* (Lord Pantokrator).

The saints' names on the halos: [с м а]мблихъ (Saint Martyr Iamblich); [с] м діонисій (Saint Martyr Dionysios); [с] м маѣиміанъ (Saint Martyr Maximianos); с м марті(нианъ) (Saint Martyr Maximianos); с м антонинъ (Saint Martyr Antoninos); с м іванъ (Saint Martyr John); [с м] маркель (Saint Martyr Markellos).

Description: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus are depicted sleeping against a neutral background, brown below and blue above. In the upper part, Christ Pantokrator blesses them. Single wooden panel reinforced with two battens fitted into channels along the upper and lower edges.

Provenance: Donated to the Kazanlak museum by one of its founders, the artist Ivan Enchev–Vidyu.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Art Gallery – Kazanlak (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Resurrection of Christ with Descent into Hell and Twelve Feasts

Collection: Art Gallery Kazanlak, storage

Inventory No.: 3

Dimensions: 39 × 49 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood; silver; copper alloy, silver plating

Date: Icon: second half of the 18th century

Revetment: first quart of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Traces of burning; losses in the paint layer. Restored in 1983 when the revetment was removed at the museum

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: The panel consists of two joined boards reinforced with two battens on the reverse. The icon is covered with a metal revetment (silver?). Within the central field, the composition is arranged in two registers: above, the Resurrection of Christ; below, the Descent into Hell, showing Christ calling the Apostle Peter. Surrounding the central field are twelve feasts: The Nativity of the Virgin, the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Ascension, the Old Testament Trinity, the Dormition of the Mother of God, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The outer frame and borders are decorated with painted vegetal ornaments. The silver revetment, hallmarked, replicates the painted composition, leaving apertures for the faces and hands of the figures.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Art Gallery – Kazanlak (photography: Angel Nikolov)



8

Mother of God Tikhvinskaya

Collection: Historical Museum in Lom, Section “Bulgaria XV–XIX Centuries,” storage

Inventory No.: ИМЛ, В, 1986

Dimensions: 57 × 71 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia (Kholoui?)

Condition: The panel is worm-eaten; the paint layer is in excellent condition. Restored.

Inscriptions: *MP ΘΥ* (Mother of God); *ΙΙΣ ΧΣ* (Jesus Christ); *ОБРАЗ ПРСТЫА БЦЫ ТИХВИНСКІЯ* (The Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin).

Description: The Mother of God is depicted half-length, holding the Child on her left arm, against a gilded background engraved with vegetal ornament. The Child, dressed in an orange-gold garment, blesses with His right hand and holds a rolled scroll in His left.

Provenance: This icon formed part of the *Great Deesis* tier of the iconostasis, together with the icons *Christ Pantokrator* (Inv. No. 1987) and *Saint John the Forerunner* (Inv. No. 1958). Originating from the village of Kovachitsa, Lom Municipality.

Bibliography: Gergova, I. “Russian Orthodox Art in the Bulgarian Lands from the 16th until the Late 19th Century: The Current State of Investigation and Avenues for Further Research”, *Museikon* 4 (2020), fig. 1.

Photo Credits: Historical Museum in Lom (photography: Ivan Vanev)



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: Historical Museum in Lom, Section “Bulgaria XV–XIX Centuries,” storage

Inventory No.: ИМЛ, В, 1987

Dimensions: 56 × 71 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia (Kholoui?)

Condition: The panel is worm-eaten; the painted surface is in excellent condition. Restored.

Inscriptions: ІИС ХС (Jesus Christ); ОБРА³ ГДА ВСЕ|ДЕРЖИТЕЛА (The Image of the Lord Pantokrator). In the open Gospel: ПРІИДИТЕ КО | МНЪ ВСИ ТРУЖ=|ДАЮЩІИ СА И | ОБРЕМЕНЕНІИ | И АЗЪ ПОКОЮ || ВЫ ВОЗМЕТЕ | ИГО МОЕ НА СЕ=|БЕ И НАУЧИТЕ|СА | МЕНЕ | АКО КРОТОКЪ (Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek—Matthew 11:28–29).

Description: Christ Pantokrator is depicted against a gold background, blessing with His right hand and holding an open Gospel in His left. He wears a red *chiton* and a dark blue *himation*. The background bears engraved floral motifs.

Provenance: This icon formed part of the *Great Deesis* tier on the iconostasis with the icons of the Mother of God *Tikhvinskaya* (Inv. No. 1986) and *Saint John the Forerunner* (Inv. No. 1958). From the village of Kovachitsa, Lom Municipality.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Historical Museum in Lom (photography: Ivan Vanev)



Saint John the Forerunner

Collection: Historical Museum in Lom, Section “Bulgaria XV–XIX Centuries,” storage

Inventory No.: ИМЛ, В, 1958

Dimensions: 53 × 70 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia (Kholui?)

Condition: The left side of the panel is trimmed; the wood is insect-damaged. The paint layer is in good condition. Restored.

Inscriptions ОБРА³ СѢТА(ГО) |им.| ІОАННА КРСТИТ[---] (The Icon of Saint John the Baptist);

On the scroll: ВИДѢ ІОАННѢ ІИСА | ГРАДЪЩА КЪ СЕБѢ | И ГЛАГОЛА: (John saw Jesus coming to him and said—John 1:29)

Description: Saint John the Forerunner is depicted against a gold background, holding a chalice containing the Infant Christ as the Sacrifice and pointing towards Him. In his left hand he holds an open scroll. He is dressed in a brown sheepskin tunic and a green *himation*.

Provenance: This icon formed part of the *Great Deesis* tier with the icons of the Mother of God *Tikhvinskaya* (Inv. No. 1986) and *Christ Pantokrator* (Inv. No. 1987), in the same church. From the village of Kovachitsa, Lom Municipality.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Historical Museum in Lom (photography: Ivan Vanev)



11

Mother of God *Tikhvinskaya*

Collection: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo, north chapel, iconostasis, royal tier

Dimensions: 72 × 107 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir province icon-painting workshops (Kholoui?)

Condition: Good; small traces of burning; varnish worn in places.

Inscriptions: мр̄ ѿу (Mother of God); їис̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); обра̄ тихфинскіа пресватыа бцы (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin).

Description: The icon is painted on a single wooden panel with two opposing profiled battens attached. It was later mounted within a profiled wooden frame and set in the iconostasis.

The Virgin is shown half-length, holding the Christ Child on her left arm. The faces and hands are rendered in a brownish tone with white highlights. The garments and background are silvered, covered with yellow varnish, and ornamented with engraved floral patterns; the folds are outlined in orange.

Provenance: The icon formed part of the *Great Deesis* tier on the iconostasis together with *Christ Pantokrator*.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo, north chapel, iconostasis, royal tier

Dimensions: 69 × 104.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir province icon-painting workshops (Kholoui?)

Condition: Good; varnish worn in places.

Inscriptions: обра́да вседержителя (Icon of the Lord Pantokrator); ии́сусъ хри́стъ (Jesus Christ).

In the open Gospel: Приидите къ мнѣ вси труждающіиса и вбременніи и азъ упокою вы возми́те иго мое на себѣ и научитеса | ѿ мене яко кро́токъ есмь и смиренъ сердцемъ (Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart—Matthew 11:28–29).

Description: The icon is painted on a single panel with two opposing profiled battens attached. It was later framed in wood and mounted on the iconostasis. Christ is represented half-length, blessing with His right hand and holding an open Gospel with His left. The flesh tones are brown, highlighted with white. The silvered garments and background are coated with yellow varnish and decorated with engraved ornaments, the folds outlined in orange.

Provenance: The icon formed part of the *Great Deesis* tier together with the *Mother of God Tikhvinskaya*.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Brass Cross with the Crucifixion of Christ and Scenes

Collection: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo, north chapel, iconostasis, royal tier

Dimensions: 22 × 25 cm

Material: Brass, later bronzed

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Guslitsy workshop

Condition: Excellent

Inscriptions:

гдѣ са|им.|вау|фѣ (Lord Sabaoth); дѣхъ |им.| сѣт (Holy Spirit); анѣгли |им.| гдни (Angels of the Lord); цѣрь |им.| слѣвы (King of Glory); ІИЦѢИ (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews); распатіе гда |им.| нѣшего ісѣа хрта (Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ); ісѣ |им.| хсѣ (Jesus Christ); *крстѣ твоємѣ покланѣемса влко |им.| и сѣтое вокресеніе твое слѣвимъ* (Before thy Cross we bow down in worship, o Master, and thy holy Resurrection we glorify); ни |им.| ка (He conquers); сѣтаа |маріа (Saint Mary); мѣрѣ ѣѣ (Mother of God); сѣѣий |иуанъ (Saint John); сѣѣий |логинъ (Saint Longinus); мѣлѣрѣѣ (м)есто (л)обное (р)ай (б)ысть (Place of execution became Paradise). Inscription on the reverse side: крѣтъ хранитель | всеи вселѣнеи | крѣтъ красота церковнаа крѣтъ | цѣремѣ держава крѣтъ вернымѣ | оутверженіе крѣтъ агѣломѣ | слава крѣтъ [бесовѣ] ѣзѣва (The Cross is the protector of the whole world, the beauty of the Church, the strength of kings, the firmness of the faithful, the glory of the angels, the cross is the wound of demons).

Description: Suspended from the wooden frame of the iconostasis at the level of the royal icons, the cross presents the Crucifixion of Christ at its centre. To the left stand the Mother of God and Mary Magdalene; to the right, Saint John the Theologian and Saint Longinus. Above, Lord Sabaoth appears among clouds, blessing with both hands, and beneath Him the Holy Spirit descends, flanked by two flying angels. Around the central scene, five rectangular fields depict the Circumcision of Christ, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Descent into Hell, the Ascension, and the Old Testament Trinity. Six seraphim crown the composition. The reverse bears a long engraved prayer text in Church Slavonic.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Malko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



14

**Saint Alexander Nevsky, Saint Demetrius of Rostov,
Saint Metropolitan Peter, Saint Righteous Anna**

Collection: House-Museum Stanislav Dospevski, Pazardzhik

Inventory No.: 6

Dimensions: 52 × 69 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: End of the 18th- early 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir province icon-painting workshops

Condition: – Good. The icon has been restored

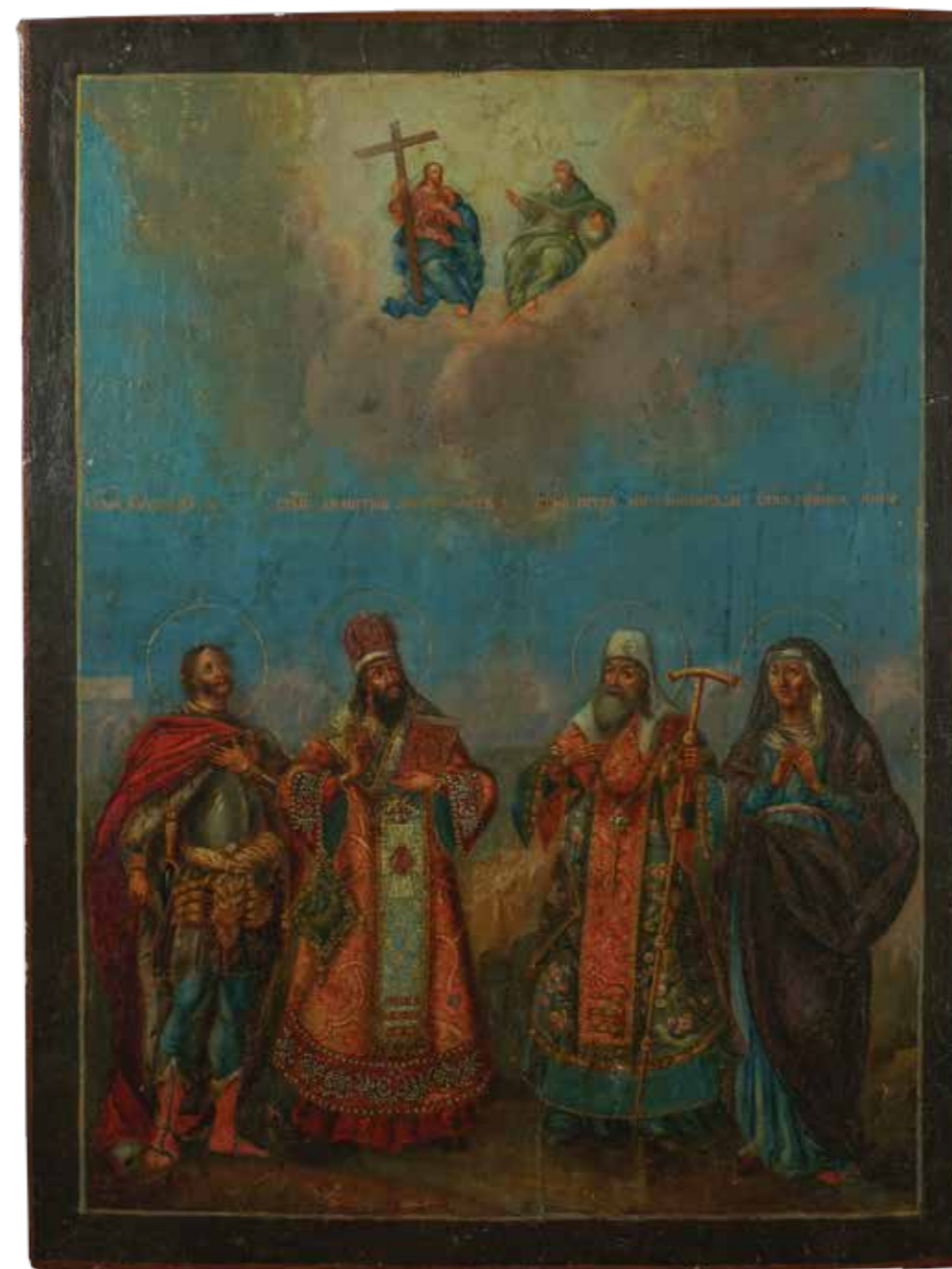
Inscriptions: ииꙋ хꙋꙋ (Jesus Christ); гдѣ саваоѡѡ (Lord Sabaoth); стѣй Алѣꙋандрѣ не (Saint Alexander Nevsky); стѣй димитрій митрополитѣ р (Saint Dimitry, Metropolitan of Rostov); стѣй петръ митрополитѣ мꙋ (Saint Peter, Metropolitan of Moscow); стѣа прѣнаа Анна (Saint righteous Anna)

Description: A group icon depicting Saint Alexander Nevsky, Saint Demetrius of Rostov, Saint Metropolitan Peter, and Saint Righteous Anna. The four saints are depicted full-length against a generalized landscape background. Above them, in the clouds, is the New Testament Holy Trinity. The signature of Saint Demetrius of Rostov was probably changed during restoration from “P” to “B”.

Provenance: The icon belonged to the artist Stanislav Dospevski, who brought it from Russia, where he studied.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: House-Museum Stanislav Dospevski, Pazardzhik (photography: Angel Nikolov)



15

Saint John the Forerunner

Collection: Ilia Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven (storage)

Inventory No.: 23A

Dimensions: 36 × 43.1 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui workshop

Condition: The panel is decayed; the paint layer is lost in the lower part, and the varnish has darkened. Restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible

Description: Single wooden panel reinforced with two battens fitted into channels along the top and bottom edges. Saint John the Forerunner is shown at half-length, facing left, holding a chalice with the recumbent figure of the sacrificial Christ, to whom he points with his right hand. Below the chalice, he holds an open scroll. The background features engraved ornaments.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Ilia Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: Ilia Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven (storage)

Inventory No.: 198

Dimensions: 25.8 × 39 × 2.3 cm

Material: Oil on wooden panel, silver revetment

Date: before 1863

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good

Inscriptions: on the lower part of the revetment: казанскіа прѣ Боро ([Icon] of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan). Hallmarks on the revetement: 1) Maker's mark "A•V" — A. Vasiliev, owner of a goldsmith's workshop in Moscow, active ca. 1858–1863; 2) Assayer's mark "A•S / 1865" - Andrey Svechin, with date of hallmarking (1865); 3) Fineness mark "84" (silver); 4) Moscow city mark - a horseman galloping to the right.

Description: The icon reproduces the miraculous image of the Virgin of Kazan. It is covered with a silver revetment, leaving visible only the faces of the Virgin and Christ. The oval frame is decorated with high-relief vegetal and floral ornaments; the haloes are adorned and the Virgin's garments are engraved. The inscription of the Mother of God Kazanskaya appears on the lower frame. The revetment bears the stamp "A. B.", likely referring to A. Vasiliev, a Moscow goldsmith active between 1858 and 1863.¹ The back of the icon is covered with red velvet.

Provenance: From the Church of Saint Nicholas, Pleven; entered the gallery in 1980.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Ilia Beshkov Art Gallery, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



¹ Ivanov, 2002, vol. 1, p. 161, no. 667.

17

St Eudokia, Archangel Michael, and Saint Martyr John

Collection: Regional Historical Museum, Pleven (on display)

Inventory No.: Г-131/ж34; former ВИМП инв. 657/ж 135

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Dimensions: 17.7 x 22.3 x 2 cm

Date: Third quarter of the 19th century (before 1876)

Artistic Center / Workshop: Smolensk

Condition: Darkened; cracks in the paint layer. Not restored.

Inscriptions: с. преподобнаа евдокеа (Saint Venerable Eudokia); архан. михаиль (Archangel Michael); с. мѣч. юаннъ (Saint Martyr John).

A donor inscription on the reverse: Въ даръ и благословение сыну моему Ивану Михайловичу Фокину. Твоя мать Авдотья Фокина. 1876 года февраля 12 д. Г. Рославль Смоленск. Губ. (As a gift and blessing to my son Ivan Mikhaylovich Fokin. Your mother Avdot'ia Fokina. February 12, 1876, town of Roslavl, Smolensk Province).

Description: Saint Eudokia is depicted full-length, her arms crossed over her chest, holding a rosary. Next to her stands Archangel Michael, full-length, with flaming sword and shield. To the right stands Martyr John, holding a box of medicines. Above them, Christ blesses from the clouds.

Provenance: As indicated in the donor inscription

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Historical Museum, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



18

Saint Catherine

Collection: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection”, Pleven (on display)

Inventory No.: 13

Dimensions: 25 × 30 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Mid-18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Losses of paint; traces of burning

Inscriptions: not preserved.

Description: The saint is shown in three-quarter view, kneeling and crowned. The background is ornamented. The icon has a shallow double kovcheg.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection”, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Saint John the Forerunner

Collection: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection,” Pleven (exhibition)

Inventory No.: 14

Dimensions: 27 × 35 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: First half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Darkened paint layer with losses; overpainted frame.

Inscriptions: сты иванъ [---] (Saint John..)

Description: The saint is depicted full-length, with wings. In his right hand he holds a long cross, in his left a chalice containing the figure of Christ the Sacrifice and an open scroll (text not preserved). Above his head, on the frame, is a bust of Christ Emmanuel. The lower background is brown, the upper gold, within an ornamented frame. The icon has a shallow double kovcheg.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection”, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Resurrection of Christ with Scenes

Collection: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection,” Pleven (storage)

Inventory No.: 18

Dimensions: 45 × 53 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir province icon-painting workshops

Condition: Darkened paint layer with losses; the wood is insect-damaged and warped.

Inscriptions: образъ Воскресенїа христова (Icon of the Resurrection of Christ); і̄с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); С̄т̄ Мирноносицы (Holy Myrrh-bearing Women); Рож̄ство Хр̄тово (Nativity of Christ); Сретеніе г̄дне (The Presentation of the Lord); Богоавленіе г̄дне (Eiphanu); Преображеніе г̄дне (Transfiguration of the Lord); Входъ г̄день во Іерѡсалимъ (Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem); Вознесеніе г̄дне (the Ascension of the Lord); успеніе прес̄тыа Бцы (the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos); Воздвиженіе к[р]ста (Elevation of the Cross). Other inscriptions, such as the names of the holy figures in the scenes, are illegible.

Description: Single wooden panel; the two original battens are missing. The central field depicts: at the top, the Visit of the Myrrhophores to the Tomb and the Resurrection; at the bottom, the Descent into Hell and Christ calling the Apostle Peter. Surrounding scenes include: Old Testament Trinity, Nativity of the Mother of God, Entry into the Temple, Annunciation, Nativity of Christ, Presentation, Baptism, Transfiguration, Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension, Dormition, and Exaltation of the Cross.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Art Gallery “Svetlin Rusev Donation Collection”, Pleven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



21

Virgin of the Sign (Znamenie)

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 184

Dimensions: 26.5 × 31 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Second half of the 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: The paint layer is damaged; the panel is decayed; traces of overpainting.

Inscriptions: Not preserved.

Description: The icon has a shallow kovcheg. The Mother of God is shown from the waist up, her hands raised in prayer. In a circular medallion before her chest is the bust of the Christ Child giving a blessing.

Provenance: Unknown; entered the collection in 1977.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 355

Dimensions: 27.7 × 31.2 × 3.3 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Late 17th – early 18th century (museum documentation: 18th century)

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Paint layer abraded with multiple losses. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: The icon has a shallow double kovcheg. Christ is shown waist-length, blessing and holding an open Gospel.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



The Miracle of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 616

Dimensions: 25 × 29 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: First half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Significant losses of the paint layer. Restored.

Inscriptions: СѢМЧ [---] (Saint Martyr [Demetrius]).

Description: The icon has a shallow double kovcheg. Saint Demetrius on horseback spears a fallen warrior. An angel descends from heaven to crown him, while the hand of God blesses from the upper left. To the right, two maidens within a church hold an icon of Saint Demetrius; behind them stands an angel.

Provenance: Unknown; entered the collection in 1977.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 85 (491)

Dimensions: 28.2 × 38.5 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: End of the 18th-early 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Southern Russia

Condition: Darkened varnish; damaged paint layer. Not restored.

Inscriptions: СѢБРАЗОМЪ ѡБРѢТЕСА ЯКО ЖЕ ЧЕЛОВѢКЪ. (In appearance he was found as a man—
Philippians 2:7–8).

Description: Christ is depicted knee-length, blessing and holding a sphere; four cherubim appear in the background.

Provenance: Unknown; entered the collection in 1977.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 37

Dimensions: 26.3 × 33 × 1.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Early 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui, Gorbunov family workshop

Condition: Darkened varnish (olifa); damaged painting. Not restored.

Inscriptions: иис хс̄ (Jesus Christ); о ѿ|им.|н (He who is); Образъ гда |им.| вседержителя (Icon of the Lord Pantokrator)

Description: Christ is shown knee-length, blessing and holding a sphere, with clouds below.

Provenance: According to the inscription on the back, from the Church of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (Plovdiv?). Received from the Department of Education and Culture in 1952

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



The Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (exhibition)

Inventory No.: 465

Dimensions: 25.5 × 30 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First third of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Old Believer icon Central Russia (Palekh?)

Condition: Losses of the paint layer, especially along the borders; burn mark in the lower part. Restored.

Inscriptions: [MP] ΘΥ ([Mother] of God); ἰ̅ϗ̅ x̅ϗ̅ (Jesus Christ).

Description: The icon has a wide *kovcheg*. The Mother of God is shown from the waist up, holding the Child on her left arm.

Provenance: Acquired from Lyudmila Goteva, Plovdiv.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



Saint Nicholas

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (on display)

Inventory No.: 555

Dimensions: 13 × 10 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: First half-mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Minor damage to the paint layer on frame and background. Restored.

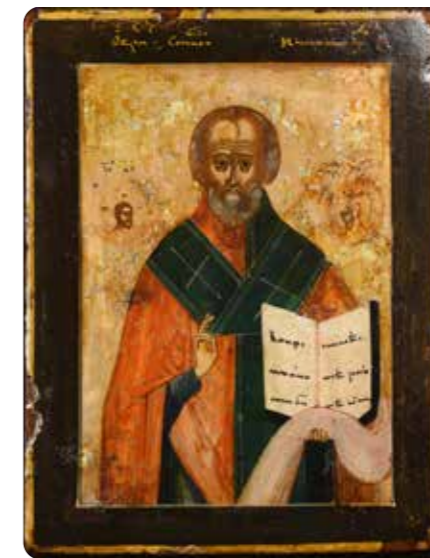
Inscriptions: обра̑ ст̑го николаа чу̑ (Icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); *і̑с х̑с* (Jesus Christ); *MP Θ̑* (Mother of God); The inscription on the Gospel: во вре|ма̑ хто | ста і̑с на || м̑с. | г̑ р̑в|н̑ і̑ на (At that time Jesus stood on the plain, and the [company]—Luke 6:17).

Description: The saint is shown waist-length, blessing with one hand and holding an open Gospel with the other. On either side of his head are medallions with the busts of Christ and the Mother of God. Two wax seals are preserved on the reverse.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



The Mother of God Tikhvinskaya

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 556

Dimensions: 24 × 27 × 2 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: South Russia **Condition:** Surface soiled; slight damage to the paint layer. Not restored.

Inscriptions: обра престыа | бѣды тихвинскіа (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin); м̄р. ѿ ѿ. (Mother of God); ии ѿ. хр̄ѿ. (Jesus Christ); о вн (He who is).

Description: Replica of the wonderworking icon Mother of God of Tikhvin. The Virgin is depicted knee-length against a gold background.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 204

Dimensions: 25 × 33 × 1.8 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: South Russia

Condition: Surface darkened and soiled. Not restored.

Inscriptions: иисус христ (Jesus Christ).

Description: Christ is shown standing, waist-length, blessing with one hand and holding a sphere in the other.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



The Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 311

Dimensions: 32.2 × 27.3 × 1.3 cm

Material: Oil paints on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: South Russia

Condition: Darkened surface; minor damage to the paint layer. Not restored.

Inscriptions: образъ пресветыя Богоро Казанскія (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan); мр. оу. (Mother of God).

Description: Replica of the wonderworking Mother of God of Kazan. The haloes of the Mother of God and the Infant Jesus are painted in a manner that imitates a metal revetment.

Provenance: Unknown **Bibliography:** Unpublished

Photo Credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



The Appearance of the Mother of God on Mount Pochaev

Collection: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv (storage)

Inventory No.: 358

Dimensions: 22.1 × 26.5 × 2.6 cm

Material: Oil paints on wood

Date: Early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: ЖВЛЕНІЕ Б. М. НА ГОРЪ ПОЧ. (Appearance of the Mother of God on Mount Pochaev);
МѢ. |им.| МѢ. (Mother of God).

Description: At the top, the Mother of God stands full-length in an aureole. Below, on a hill, is the imprint of her step from which a stream flows. Before the hill kneel a monk and a shepherd with a flock of sheep, looking up to the Mother of God. The icon has an engraved ornate frame; the back is covered with plush fabric.

Provenance: Gifted to the gallery by a private individual.

Bibliography: Gergova 2021, p. 40, ill. 16.

Photo credit: City Art Gallery – Plovdiv



32

The Three Hierarchs

Collection: Ruse Art Gallery, exhibition

Inventory No.: 1249/948ж

Dimensions: 27.5 × 31 × 1.8 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: First quart of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Yaroslavl workshop (?)

Condition: Excellent. Restored.

Inscriptions: иӣс̄х̄с̄. (Jesus Christ); С̄. вас̄ліӣв̄ѣ. (Saint Basil the Great); ваннѣ з̄ѣа (John Chrysostom); григоріӣ б̄го (Gregory the Theologian).

Description: Saint Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Gregory the Theologian are depicted full-length, celebrating the Divine Liturgy. Saint Basil holds a chalice covered with a veil; Saint John Chrysostom holds two trikiria; Saint Gregory holds a paten (diskos) with the consecrated bread (prosphora) covered by an asteriskos. Above them, Christ blesses from the clouds. The wooden panel is reinforced with two beveled crossbars at opposite ends.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: *Иконата преди и сега*. Ruse, 2020, ill. 23

Photo Credits: Ruse Art Gallery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Portaitissa of Iveron

Collection: Ruse Regional Museum of History, storage

Inventory No.: ОФ 1133

Dimensions: 7.4 × 9 × 1.1 cm; case: 13.5 × 12 × 4 cm

Material: Oil on wood, silver revetment

Date: End of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good; paint layer cracked.

Inscriptions: on the revetment: иверскѣа. пр богород ([Icon] of the Most Holy Theotokos of Iveron); on the back on a piece of paper: Подарена от Г. В. Плеханов на Людмила Д. Анастасова (Gifted by G. V. Plekhanov to Lyudmila D. Anastasova)

Description: A small domestic icon replicating the wonderworking Athonite icon *Mother of God Portaitissa* of Iveron Monastery, or its venerated Moscow copy. The metal revetment leaves only the faces and hands of the Mother of God and Christ visible. The back is covered in faded raspberry velvet. The icon is set in a box with a gilded frame.

Provenance: Gifted in Geneva by the Russian Marxist philosopher G. V. Plekhanov to his goddaughter Lyudmila D. Anastasova on the occasion of her birth.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Ruse Regional Museum of History (photography: Angel Nikolov)



34

St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Samokov Museum of History, storage

Inventory No.: X 747 (Art Collection)

Dimensions: 24.8 × 29.3 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half-mid of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages, Kholoui

Condition: Soiled and blackened surface; flaking paint in several areas; traces of burning. No restoration carried out.

Inscriptions: On the back: Подар(ък) отъ общината 7. XI. 1938 (Gift from the Municipality, 7 November 1938).

Description: The panel has a shallow double kovcheg and originally two opposed battens (now lost). A suspension hole remains on the reverse. The frame is painted red. Saint Nicholas of Myra is shown waist-length, blessing and holding a closed Gospel, with a throne behind him. Flanking his head are the busts of Christ (holding a Gospel) and the Mother of God (in Orans posture). The reverse bears an inscription noting its presentation by the Municipality on 7 November 1938.

Provenance: Donated to the Samokov Municipality on 7 November 1938, as confirmed by the inscription on the reverse.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credit: Samokov Museum of History



35

Mother of God Hodegetria

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: 114

Dimensions: 27.5 × 33.3 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood; silver revetment

Date: Icon – early 18th century, repainted; revetment – 18th century; halos – first half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Mechanical damage to the painted surface; cracked varnish; overpainted background. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Original inscriptions not visible.

Description: The Virgin is depicted to the knees, holding the Christ Child on her left arm and pointing toward Him. The Infant is shown frontally, blessing with one hand and holding a closed scroll in the other. The icon has a silver revetment engraved with floral motifs (18th century) and double silver-gilt halos with radiating rays (19th century). Two hallmarks are visible on Christ's nimbus: "84" and "3. B.", together with a third, now illegible stamp. The latter may tentatively be associated with a Moscow silversmith active in the mid-nineteenth century, possibly Zakhar Nestorovich Volkov, although the attribution cannot be confirmed with certainty.²

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



² Ivanov 2002, vol. 1, p. 181, no. 834.

Kyiv Caves Icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: NMSHB116

Dimensions: 36 × 35 × 2 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kiev

Condition: Minor damage to the paint layer. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Изображеніе и мѣра чудотворнаго вобраза оуспеніа пресѣтыа Бцы, яже вбрѣтаетса в Лаврѣ киевопечѣрс: (Image and exact dimensions of the miraculous icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, which is kept in the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra).

Description: The icon reproduces the miraculous image of the Virgin's Dormition from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra. Around the bier of the Mother of God stand the Apostles; behind it, Christ holds her soul, flanked by two angels in flight. Two buildings rise in the background. A small door motif decorates the bier's drapery. The panel is reinforced with two slightly beveled inserted battens.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Mother of God Feodorovskaya with Saints

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: 264

Dimensions: 12.9 × 16 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Ural workshops

Condition: Severely cracked varnish and paint layer; areas of paint loss.

Inscriptions: м̄р̄ ѿ̄ѣ (Mother of God); і̄с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); ф̄е̄о̄д̄о̄р̄о̄в̄ск̄і̄а (Feodorovskaya [Icon of the Mother of God]); [---ари] (Unknown, perhaps Saint Macarius?); д̄ар̄[і̄а] (Daria).

Description: A small replica of the wonderworking Feodorovskaya icon of the Mother of God. On the wide yellow frame, in separate fields, are depicted a hierarch saint with a white beard (right) and an unidentified female saint (left). The icon is painted on a single wooden panel. It has been restored, with losses filled and retouched.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Appears to Saint Sergius of Radonezh

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: 106/1

Dimensions: 26.7 × 31.7 × 2.4 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: 1850s

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Sergiev Posad (Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius)

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions:

1 Списокъ | съ иконы явленїа Пресв. Бѣы съ Апостолами преп. оцѹ Сергію, написанной на дскѣ | изъ древней раки преп. Сергіа, и стоащей противъ мошей его, надъ южными дверьми | иконостаса въ Троицкомъ Соборѣ Сергіевы Лавры. Copy of the icon depicting the Most Holy Theotokos in the presence of the Apostles appearing to Saint Father Sergius. The original is painted on a panel made from the ancient coffin of Saint Sergius, and now stands opposite his relics, above the southern doors of the iconostasis, in the Trinity Cathedral of the Trinity–Sergius Lavra).

2 Бжїею милостїю | гдрь цѣрь и великій | князь Феодоръ | Ивановичь всеа | Росїи съ своею | благовѣрною | цѣрцею и великою | княгинею Ирїною | и зъ болариноу | своимъ и коню-шимуъ Борисомъ Феодорычемъ Годуновым, велелъ сделать | раку сребреню | чюдотворицѹ Се-ргїю на москве | и принесенїе бысть | въ домъ живоначальныа Трцы | чудотво. Сергіа | въ лете 7093 <7093> годѹ | авгѹс. въ ДІ <14>. того | годѹ и месца въ ЕІ <15> дѣ | въ празникъ пре-чистыа Бцы че-снаго ея усп-енїа гдрь цѣрь и | великій кнѣзь | и со своею бла-говѣрною цѣрцею | повеле молебен | пети и преложити | мощи чюдотв. | Сергіа (sic!) изъ дре-вныа раки | въ сребреню, | а лежали мощи | чюдотворцовъ | въ древаной раке | РЖЕ <165> лет. и сию | древаню раку | повелъ госѹ-дарь цѣрь ро-знати на об-разы на чдо-творове (sic!) раке | виденїе Сергіево | а писалъ и вклядывалъ обра³ | сей и положилъ | начало у живо-начальныа | Троицы, ке-ларь Евстаѣй | Головкинъ. | о госѹдареве | здравїи и ве-го царице и | о ихъ чадоро-дїи Богомолїи | всемъ христ-їаномъ при-ходящимъ | сверою на ис-цѣленїе лѣта | 7096 <7096>. годѹ. By the grace of God, Sovereign Tsar and Grand Prince Feodor Ivanovich of All Russia, together

with his right-believing Tsarina and great princess Irina, and his boyar and Master of the Horse Boris Fedorovich Godunov, ordered that a silver reliquary be made for the Wonderworker Sergius in Moscow. It was brought to the House of the Life-Giving Trinity of the Wonderworker Sergius in the year 7093 <1585> on the 14th day of August. On the 15th day of the same month and year, on the Feast of the Honorable Dormition of the Most Pure Theotokos, the Sovereign Tsar and Grand Prince, together with his right-believing Tsarina, ordered a prayer service to be chanted and transferred the relics of Sergius the Wonderworker from a wooden reliquary to a silver one. The relics of the Wonderworker had rested in the wooden reliquary for 165 years, and it was this wooden reliquary that the Sovereign Tsar ordered to be dismantled for the making of icons. The cellarer Evstafii Golovkin painted the Vision of Sergius on the wonderworking reliquary, covered it with a revetment, and inaugurated it at the <Church of> the Life-Giving Trinity for the health of the Sovereign and his Tsarina, for the fulfillment of their prayers to God for the birth of a child, <and> for all Christians who came in faith seeking healing. In the year 7096 <1588>.

3 РЖБ <7162> годѹ какъ ходилъ великій | гдрь цѣрь и великій | кнѣзь Алезей Михаѣловичь всеа великіа и малыа Рос-їи самодержецъ | на недрѹга своего | на польскаго королѣ | и взалъ изъ домѹ | живоначальныа | Троицы Сергіева | монастыря три | иконы, вобразъ | живоначальныа | Троицы да образъ | чудотвор. Сергіа | да образъ Виденїе | чюдотвор. Сергіа и | по ево Госѹдаревой | теплоу вѣре видя | ево Гдреву во-всемъ правдѹ въ | Трце славимы Бгѣ | наши за молитвѹ | преславныа и пре-чистыа Бцы, и по-моцїю и застѹ-пленїемъ великих | чюдотворцовъ | Сергіа и Никона | польскаго Корола | побилъ и все вой-ско его сокрушии | и безвести сотвори | и вильнѹ и иныа | преславїцїа | многїа грады | польскїа и лито-вскїа и немецкїа | и пригородки | подъ свою высо-кѹ рѹкѹ покори, | и наки сїи три иконы въ домѹ | живоначальныа | Трцы постави | РЖС <7166> годѹ. сентя/бра въ КЕ <25>. День | какъ былъ онъ | великій Гдрь | въ монастыре | на празникъ чдо. | Сергіа, и повеле | на сих иконах | написать. In the year 7162 <1654>, when the Great Sovereign Tsar and Grand Prince Aleksei Mikhailovich, Autocrat of all Great and Little Russia, campaigned against his enemy, the king of Poland, he took three icons from the Church of the Life-Giving Trinity at the Monastery of Saint Sergius: the icon of the Life-Giving Trinity, the icon of Sergius the Wonderworker, and the icon of the Vision of Sergius the Wonderworker. And because of the Sovereign's fervent faith, our God— glorified in the Trinity—seeing his Sovereign righteousness in all things, through the prayers of the most glorious and most pure Mother of God and through the help and intercession of the great wonderworkers Sergius and Nikon, defeated the king of Poland, utterly crushing his entire army and putting it to flight without a trace. He also subdued under his lofty hand Vilna and many other renowned towns, Polish, Lithuanian, and German, as well as their lesser subject towns. He replaced these three icons in the Church of the Life-Giving Trinity in the year 7166 <1657>, on the 25th day of September, when he, our Great Sovereign, was at the monastery for the feast of Sergius the Wonderworker, and ordered this inscription to be placed on the icons.

4 На задней сребреной дѣске начертано, что сей Образ, в АУГ <1703> годѹ, по повеленїю царя Петра Алезѣевича снова посланъ былъ въ стень Роскїй къ фельдмаршалѹ Графѹ | Борисѹ Петровичѹ

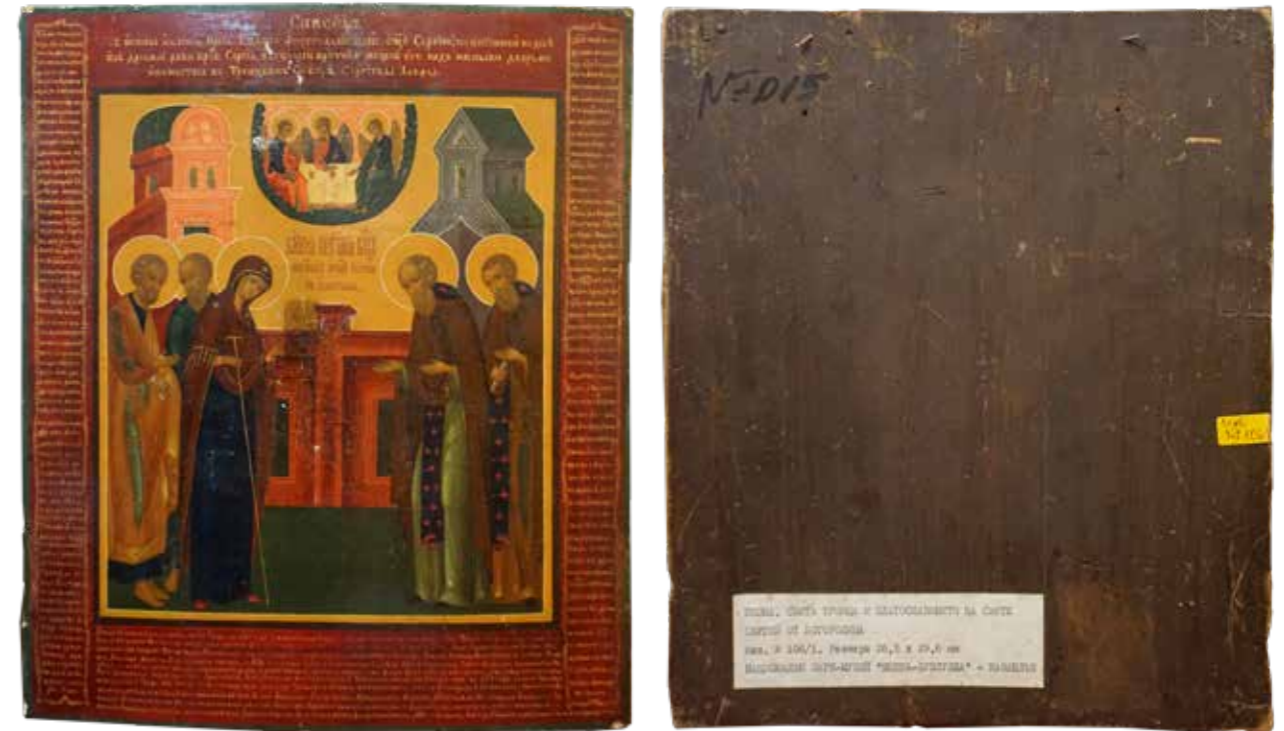
Шереметевъ и находилса при немъ во всех походахъ войны со шведскимъ Королемъ Карломъ VI <XII>. что под охраненіем сего Образа, яко | крѣпчайшаго забрала. Полководецъ Рѣсскій взалъ многіе шведскіе города, а именно. Маріембѣргъ, Вольмаръ, Алысть, Канцы, Шлютельбѣргъ, Капорье, Ям|бѣргъ, Ракоборъ, Вилернъ, Паидѣ и Дерптъ; потомъ, въ #АУѠ <1709> го(дѣ), помощію б(о)жіею и застѣпленіемъ Пречѣстѣа Бцы и Чѣдотворца Сергіа. одержана знаменитаа По-|лтавскаа побѣда, войско шведское совершенно разбито, многіе Генералы взаты въ плѣнъ, самъ Карлъ едва спасса бѣгствомъ, и въ слѣдствіе сей побѣды | Рига, Динаминде, Перновъ, Ревель, Арнсбургъ, Эзель и воопще вса Лифландіа и Эстландіа покорены. Сверхъ чего в #АУѠ <1706> годѣ симъ же Образомъ | ограждаемый Графъ Шереметевъ в низовыхъ приволжскихъ Городахъ разсѣалъ матежниковъ, взалъ Астрахань и востановилъ спокойствіе. Во-|звративъ сей образъ в Лаврѣ, онъ приложилъ къ немѣ Сѣ себа украшеніе. Сею же иконою митрополитъ Платонъ #АѠVI <1812> годѣ, напутствовалъ Императора Але-|ѣандра А^{го} <I> на войнѣ противъ (sic!) Наполеона, и московское ополченіе имело онѣю охранениемъ все время войны съ французами до распущенія своего пораспущенія же | ополченія Генералом Стальпинымъ привезена она в Обитель обратно. Сею же иконою Митроп. Филаретъ^б напутствовалъ #АѠNE <1855>. го(дѣ). Императора Алеѣандра В^{го} <II> на войнѣ противъ союзныѣ войскъ Англіи, Франціи и Тѣрціи. The reverse of the silver plate bears an inscription stating that in 1703 this icon was again sent to the Russian military camp by order of Tsar Peter Alekseevich to Field Marshal Count Boris Petrovich Sheremetev, and that it remained with him throughout all the campaigns of the war against Charles XII, King of Sweden; that under the protection of this icon, as under the strongest shield, the Russian commander captured many Swedish cities, namely: Marienburg, Wolmar, Alūksne, Kantsy, Shlisselburg, Koporye, Yamburg, Rakobor, Viljandi, Paide, and Dorpat. Later, in 1709, with the help of God and the intercessions of the Most Pure Mother of God and Sergius the Wonderworker, the famous Victory of Poltava was won: the Swedish army was utterly defeated, many generals were taken captive, and Charles himself barely managed to escape. As a consequence of this victory, Riga, Dünamünde, Pernau, Reval, Arensburg, Ösel, and, in general, all of Livonia and Estonia were subdued. Furthermore, in 1706, Count Sheremetev defeated the rebels in the lower Volga towns, captured Astrakhan, and restored order, all under the protection of this same icon. Upon returning the icon to the Lavra, he adorned it with a gift of his own. In 1812, Metropolitan Platon blessed Emperor Alexander I with this same icon before the war against Napoleon, and the Moscow militia bore it as their protection throughout the entire war against the French, until its disbandment; after the militia was disbanded, General Stalypin returned it to the monastery. In 1855, Metropolitan Filaret blessed Emperor Alexander II with this same icon before the war against the allied forces of England, France, and Turkey.

Description: On the left, the Mother of God stands holding an abbatial staff, with the Apostles Peter and John behind her. On the right are Saint Sergius of Radonezh and another monk holding a scroll. A wall with buildings at both ends extends behind the figures. Above, within a heavenly segment, appears the Old Testament Trinity. The wide red frame bears the four lengthy inscriptions described above. These inscriptions indicate that the icon is a copy of the miraculous prototype painted on a

board taken from Saint Sergius's old coffin, preserved opposite his relics in the Trinity Cathedral of the Trinity–Sergius Lavra. Historical notes record its association with Tsars Fyodor Ivanovich, Alexei Mikhailovich, and Peter the Great, and its presence during the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars. Painted on a single wooden panel. Gift from the Superior of the Trinity Lavra, Sergii, dating to the mid-20th century.³ These prototype of the inscriptions is edited in Kavelin, Leonid (archimandrite)⁴.

Bibliography: Komashko, Gergova 2025.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



3 Ignatiev 1960, p. ?
 4 Kavelin, L. (archimandrite). Надписи Троицкой Сергиевой лавры, Saint Petersburg: Printing House of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1881, pp. 5–8.

St Alexander Nevsky

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: 90

Dimensions: 24 × 43 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Late 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Saint-Petersburg

Condition: Good. Restored.

Inscriptions: С.КН. Александръ Н. (Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky).

On the back: Въ Русскій Шипкинскій храмъ | на Балканахъ приношение отъ | Н. А. Смирнова. | 1901 г. (Offered to the Russian Church at Shipka in the Balkans by N. A. Smirnov, 1901).

Description: Saint Alexander Nevsky is depicted full-length, his right hand before his chest and his left indicating a table with a crown and scepter on a cushion. He wears armor and a fur-lined cloak. The background and frame are richly engraved with ornamentation, and the nimbus features radiating rays. The panel is reinforced with two inserted battens.

Provenance: Donated to the Shipka Monastery by N. A. Smirnov, who may have been the son of architect A. N. Smirnov, director of the construction of the Shipka Church, as confirmed by the inscription on the reverse.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Alexander Nevsky

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: 323

Dimensions: 26.6 × 31 × 3.7 cm

Material: Tempera on wood, silver revetment

Date: Early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow. Revetment: Jewellery company “Partnership of successors of N.V. Nemirov-Kolodkin”

Condition: Excellent. The back is covered with pink velvet.

Inscriptions: Св. благ. кн. | им. | Алеѣандръ нев (Saint Right-Believing Prince Alexander Nevsky).

Hallmarks on the revetment:

- 1) “НЕМИРОВЪ КОЛОДКИН” (Nemirov-Kolodkin) — mark of the factory of silver and gold products of the Partnership of the Heirs of N. V. Nemirov-Kolodkin;
- 2) Fineness mark “84” (silver), together with the Moscow Assay Office city mark — a woman’s head in a kokoshnik facing left — and the assay inspector’s mark “И. Л.” (I. L.), identifying Ivan Sergeevich Lebedkin, head of the Moscow Assay Office (1899–1908).

Description: The saint is depicted waist-length, wearing a richly ornamented undergarment and a fur-lined, decorated cape. His right hand is raised before his chest, and in his left he holds a sword. The silver revetment features repoussé floral ornament and a dotted background. Produced by the Manufacturing and Trading Association of Nikolai Vasilyevich Nemirov and Ivan Ivanovich Kolodkin, one of Moscow’s most renowned jewelry firms.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Seraphim of Sarov

Collection: Memorial Church of the Birth of Christ, Shipka Monastery, sacristy

Inventory No.: NMSHB112

Dimensions: 26 × 31.1 × 2.2 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: Early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Scratches and a burn mark. Not restored.

Inscriptions: *Св. преп. Серафимъ Сар. чуд.* (Saint Venerable Seraphim of Sarov the Miracle Worker).

Description: The saint is depicted waist-length, with his right hand raised before his chest. He wears a black cassock and an *epitrachelion*. The light-blue background is filled with clouds. The wooden panel is reinforced with two inserted battens; a suspension ring remains on the reverse.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Shipka Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



42

Resurrection of Christ

Collection: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven, storage

Inventory No.: 134

Dimensions: 23 × 27.5 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wooden panel

Date: Mid-second half of the 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Volga region workshops (?)

Condition: Traces of burning, especially in the upper right corner and at the center of the lower frame. The paint layer has been cleaned and consolidated in the restoration process.

Inscriptions: воскресение гда ншго їса [христа] (Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ); іс хс (Jesus Christ); On the back: “H” and “B.”

Description: The icon is painted on a wooden panel that was originally reinforced with a batten, now missing. The reverse is painted black. The central field, within an ochre border, depicts the Descent into Hell. In the center, Christ stands in a round mandorla, seizing Adam’s hand as Eve rises from her sarcophagus; to either side, groups of the righteous and the damned. The title of the icon is inscribed on the upper frame in vyaz script.

Provenance: Acquired from a private individual.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Transfiguration

Collection: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven

Inventory No.: 9

Dimensions: 30.5 × 35.5 × 2 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wooden panel

Date: 1879

Condition: Good.

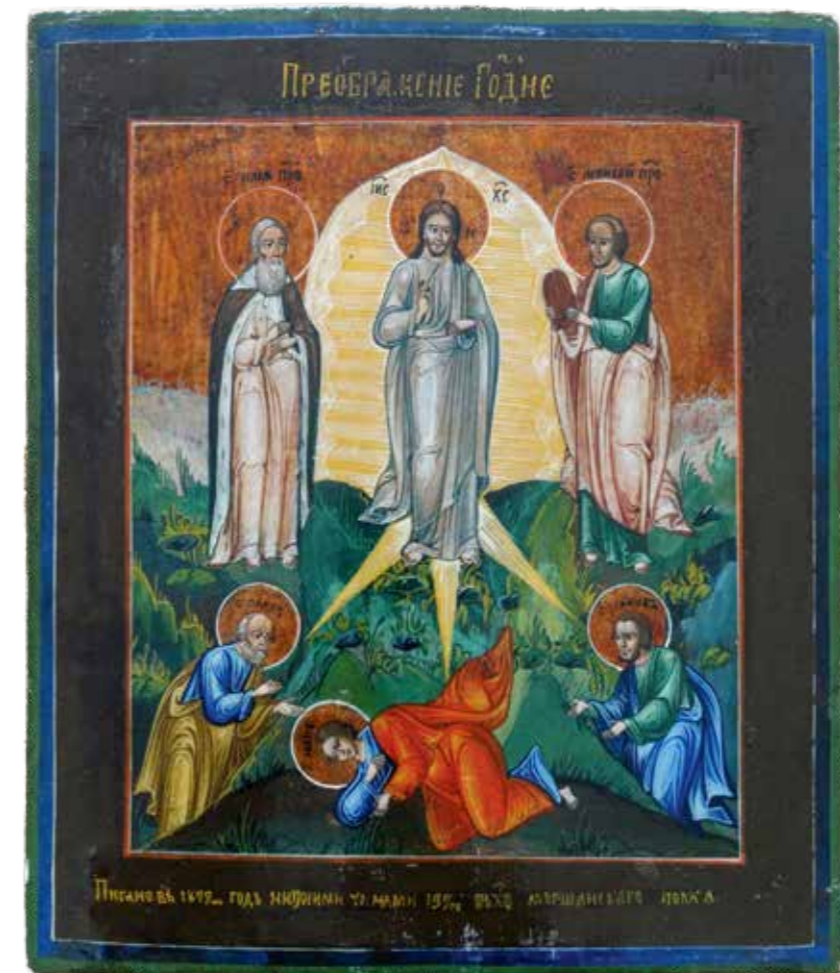
Inscriptions: Преображеніе Го́дне (Transfiguration of the Lord); ꙗ́иꙗ прѣ́о (Saint Prophet Elijah); и́иꙗ хꙗ́с (Jesus Christ); ꙗ́иꙗ моисей прѣ́о (Saint Prophet Moses); ꙗ́иꙗ петръ (Saint Peter); ꙗ́иꙗ іоанъ (Saint John); ꙗ́иꙗ іаковъ (Saint James). On the lower frame: “Писано въ 1879мъ году нижними чинами 139го пѣхѣ моршанскаго полка” (Painted in 1879 by commission of the lower ranks of the 139th Morshansk Infantry Regiment).

Description: Christ stands at the center in a mandorla, three rays extending beneath his feet. To his left is Prophet Elijah; to his right — Prophet Moses holding the Tablets. Below are the Apostles Peter, John, and James. The icon’s frame is black, bordered inside with a red line and outside with blue and green stripes. The scene title is on the upper frame; the dedicatory inscription is on the lower frame.

Provenance: Acquired from a private individual.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Alexander Nevsky

Collection: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven, storage

Inventory No.: 65

Dimensions: 30.5 × 35.5 × 2 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wooden panel

Date: 1878

Condition: The wooden panel is reinforced with two battens, possibly added during restoration. Crack across panel and paint layer; small losses near damaged area.

Inscriptions: Upper frame: СѢТИ КНАЗЪ АЛЕКСАНДРЪ НЕВСКІИ (Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky); ІИС ХС (Jesus Christ); Lower frame: Писано въ 1878мъ году нижними чинами 139го пѣхѣ моршанскаго полка (Painted in 1878 by commission of the lower ranks of 139th Morshansk Infantry Regiment).

Description: Saint Alexander Nevsky is depicted in an interior, standing by a table with princely regalia. He wears armor and a himation. In the upper left corner, Christ in clouds holds a sphere and blesses the saint. The frame is black, bordered in red, white, and blue lines. A dedicatory inscription is written along the lower frame.

Provenance: From the Church of Saint Demetrius, Sliven.

Bibliography: Nikolov 2025, p. 173, fig. 11.

Photo Credits: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Brass Triptych with Saint Nicholas and Scenes

Collection: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven, exhibition

Inventory No.: 171

Dimensions: 17.2 x 9 cm (open)

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Guslitsy

Condition: Details of relief worn.

Inscriptions: сѣтаѣ троица (Holy Trinity); сѣтии николае (Saint Nicholas); мѣр ѿ ѿ (Mother of God);
ісхс (Jesus Christ); The remaining inscriptions are illegible.

Description: The central panel shows Saint Nicholas flanked by Christ and the Virgin. Side wings depict feasts including the Entry into Jerusalem, Presentation, Resurrection, and Ascension. A cross finial bears the Old Testament Trinity and the Mandylion.

Provenance: Found near Sozopol.

Bibliography: Milev 2010, p. 127.

Photo Credits: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Central Panel of a Brass Triptych with Saint George

Collection: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven, exhibition

Inventory No.: 213

Dimensions: 4.6 × 6.4 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Guslitsy

Condition: Good; wings missing.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: Saint George is depicted on horseback spearing the dragon; God's hand blesses from the upper right corner. In a square field at the top is the Holy Mandylion (Ubrus).

Provenance: Acquired 2002 from Georgi Mikhailov Penchev, Sofia.

Bibliography: Milev 2010, p. 127.

Photo Credits: Dimitar Dobrovich Art Gallery, Sliven (photography: Angel Nikolov)



47

Mother of God Vladimirskaya

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

Inventory No.: 2815

Dimensions: 25 × 30 × 2.5 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Mid-16th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Burn marks, scratches, cracked and abraded paint. Not restored

Inscriptions: *матерь* [im.] *божия* (Mother of God); *Киевъ* [im.] 1749 (Kyiv 1749).

Description: Made from a single panel with ‘kovcheg’. The central field depicts the Virgin and Child, following the type of the miraculous icon Mother of God Vladimirskaya. The painted background of the icon and the ‘kovcheg’ are gilded. The Virgin’s maphorion is dark red and Christ’s himation is ochre, decorated with a dark blue clavus (band) with gold highlights. The icon bears no original inscriptions. At a later time, the following were carved into the surface: ‘Матерь Божия’ and, below, ‘Киев 1749’. The icon originally had a metal revetment, which has now been lost.

Provenance: Collected in Boyana, neighborhood of Sofia, 1932.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.53; Gergova, 2016, pp 157, fig. 8.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



St Nicholas of Mozhaysk

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 199

Dimensions: 27.8 × 32 × 3.5 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Late 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Volga workshops

Condition: Poor. Not restored.

Inscriptions: None preserved.

Description: Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker is depicted full-length, holding a sword in his right hand and a model of a fortified city with a church in its center in his left hand. Above his head, in two medallions, are Christ and the Virgin. The central field is framed by a graphic vegetal ornament; the wide outer frame is slightly convex (kovcheg) and painted green.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, 106, cat. II. 582.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



The Three Hierarchs

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

Inventory No.: 3179

Dimensions: 27.8 × 32 × 3.5 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Mid-18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: о агїѡсъ григорїѡсъ. (Saint Gregory); о агїѡсъ |им.| васїлиѡсъ (Saint Basil); о агїѡсъ иѡансъ (sic) (Saint John).

Description: The three Holy hierarchs, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom, are depicted in full-length, wearing liturgical vestments and holding closed gospel books. They are standing on a landscape background. The background is light up to their shoulders, turning to deep blue sky above. In the central upper section, Christ is depicted in clouds, blessing and holding a globe. The frame is brown-green.

Provenance: The icon was purchased for the National Archaeological Museum–Sofia (formerly Naroden muzey) from M. Milanov, an antiquarian from Gorna Oryahovitsa.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, 106, cat. II. 582.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Mother of God of Cyprus (Kykkos)

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

Inventory No.: 3153

Dimensions: 30 × 37 × 2.5 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: 1760s–1770s

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Very good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: *Изображе|нїе Прес̄ ты|а бцы | кїпр|скїа* (Image of the Most Holy Theotokos of Cyprus); On the scroll of the Infant: *Дхъ Господен | на мнѣ | его же ради по|маза [ма] | благо[свѣ]стїи[u]* (The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me to bring the good news—Luke 4:18); In the medallion below: *ГД всепѣтаа мѣти ро|ждшаа всѣхъ Стѣхъ | Свѣтѣишее Слово, нынѣшнее Прїемши Прїно|шенїе, ѿ всакїа избави | напастїи всѣхъ, и бѣ|дѣцїа изми мѣки те|бѣ вопїюущїхъ: алли ||луїа;* (Oh Most Glorified in Hymns Mother, who gave birth to the Most Holy of all Words, having received this offering, deliver from every affliction and free from future torments all those who cry out to you: Hallelujah). Other inscriptions: *їс̄с̄ х̄с̄* (Jesus Christ); *Гдѣ сав|им.|аωθ* (Lord Sabaoth); *МР ΘΥ* (Mother of God); *с̄ є̄ їваннѣ* (Saint Evangelist Saint John); *с̄ є̄ матѣї* (Saint Evangelist Matthew); *с̄ є̄ марко* (Saint Evangelist Mark); *с̄ є̄ лѣка* (Saint Evangelist Luke); *с̄ ник|им.|олай ч̄* (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); *н̄р ма|им.|рїа є̄;* (Saint Mary of Egypt); *аг̄ли гднї* (Apostles of the Lord); *с̄ романъ* (Saint Romanos); *с̄ тарасїй* (Saint Tarasios); *с̄ андрей* (Saint Andrew).

Description: The icon represents a copy of the wonderworking Kykkos icon of the Mother of God with extensive narrative and decorative borders. At the centre is the Virgin Mary of Kykkos holding the Christ Child, enclosed within a gilded Baroque frame that creates the effect of an “icon within an icon.” Surrounding this central image is a pictorial field depicting a landscape. In the upper section appears the Kykkos Monastery; in front of it, within a small circular medallion, Saint Luke is shown painting the icon. The lower section features a seascape, while the lateral zones are occupied by a mountainous, wooded landscape. To the right, a monk is depicted holding an icon. Positioned centrally in front of the sea is a heraldic blazon with a double-headed eagle crowned and holding a sceptre and orb. The composition is further articulated by two additional gold-painted frames decorated with Baroque ornamental motifs. The outermost field is subdivided into compartments by Baroque ornament. At the top centre is the New Testament Trinity; on the left vertical side is the Dormition of the Mother of God, and on the right the Intercession of the Mother of God (Pokrov). The four Evangelists are shown in the corners, seated in interior settings and engaged in writing their Gospels, accompanied by their symbols. In the lower register are busts of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker and Saint Mary of Egypt,

with a medallion bearing an inscription placed between them.

Provenance: Purchased for the National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (formerly Narodен музеѣ), from L. Dimitrov.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.522.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Alexander Kuyumdzhiev)



Central Panel of a Triptych with Resurrection of Christ

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 3272

Dimensions: 10.8 × 17.3 × 0.7 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: First quart 18th century **Artistic Center / Workshop:** Moscow

Condition: Darkened varnish; paint losses. Not restored.

Inscriptions: воскресеніе гдне (Resurrection of the Lord); ἸϞ χς (Jesus Christ); архистрати Гавріи (Archangel Gabriel); Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΜΑΡΤΗΣ ΝΕΟΦΥΤΟΣ (Saint Martyr Neophytos).

Description: The panel of the triptych with flame shaped arche are framed by metal slats. In the upper flame shaped arch of the panel two scenes - the Old Testament Trinity (left) and the Dormition of the Mother of God (right) are depicted. The central panel depicts the Resurrection of Christ, inscribed in a Baroque medallion. To the left of the medallion are: The Archangel Gabriel is shown in full length holding a sword, and the young warrior saint Neophytus is depicted holding a cross against a landscape background. The inscription is a later addition.

Provenance: Drama, Greece.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.594.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 3670

Dimensions: 29 × 32.5 × 4 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Late 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: [мр] [ѳу] (Mother of God); їс хс [ѡ о н] (Jesus Christ [He who is]); ѡбра прѣна бѣа знамение кѣрскаа со свѣтими пророкама (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of the Sign with holy prophets); свѣти іѡаннѣ прѣча (Saint John the Forerunner); гдѣ сававфѣ прѣн іѡаннѣ многѣ (Lord Sabaoth, Venerable John the Long-Suffering of the Lavra of the Kyiv Caves); свѣти николае ч[...] (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); сѣ м параскоми (Saint Martyr Paraskomī); сѣ пѣ моисеи (Saint Prophet Moses); сѣ пѣ [...] (Saint Prophet [...]); сѣ пѣ цѣ солломонѣ (Saint Prophet King Solomon); сѣ пѣ данїилѣ (Saint Prophet Daniel); сѣ пѣ исаиа (Saint Prophet Isaiah); сѣ пѣ [...] (Saint Prophet ...); сѣ пѣ гедеонѣ (Saint Prophet Gideon); сѣ пѣ іеремїа (Saint Prophet Jeremiah); сѣ пѣ аввакумѣ (Saint Prophet Habakkuk); сѣ пѣ захарїа (Saint Prophet Zachariah); The inscriptions on the scrolls could not be deciphered due to the limited resolution of the digital image.

Description: The central field depicts the iconographic type known as the Mother of God of Kursk (the Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God). The Virgin of the Sign is shown full-length, her hands raised in orans gesture, surrounded by a winding plant stem adorned with flowers. Encircling her are the busts of twelve prophets—Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, an unidentifiable prophet, Zephaniah, Gideon, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and Elijah—each holding unrolled scrolls bearing texts. Above them, in the upper central portion of the icon, God Sabaoth appears amidst the clouds. On the frame, in separate vertical fields flanking the central scene, stand full-length saints. To the left are John the Forerunner and Venerable John the Long-Suffering of the the Lavra of Kiev Caves, while to the right are Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker above and Saint Paraskevi below. All figures except Venerable John the Long-Suffering are depicted full-length. The composition emphasizes the intercessory role of the Virgin, framed by prophetic testimony and the presence of saints, creating a layered narrative that combines celestial, prophetic, and local hagiographic elements.

Provenance: The icon was purchased for the National Archaeological Museum–Sofia (formerly Narodn den muzey) from M. Yasenova.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.589; Gergova 2020: Gergova 2020, p. 35.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Alexander Kuyumdzhev)



Sts Chionia (?), Natalia, Adrian, Irene, and an Unidentified Saint

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 2392

Dimensions: 12.2 × 16.3 × 1.7 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Late 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Dirty surface; damaged paint layer. Numerous holes on the frame Not restored.

Inscriptions: с м ѿ[...]онїи (Saint Martyr <Unidentified>), с нагалиа (Saint Natalia); с андреаъ (Saint Adrian); с м ирины (of Saint Martyr Irene); с[...]та (untranslatable).

Description: Five saints in full-length are arranged in two registers against a sky-blue background. Above them, God the Father blesses with both hands from the clouds. The numerous holes in the frame and around the haloes suggest that metal revetments have been looted.

Provenance: The icon was purchased for the National Archaeological Museum–Sofia (formerly Narodni muzei) in 1926 from N. Supryunyn.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.556.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



St Constantine of Murom with Saints

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 3671

Dimensions: 9.4 × 12.5 × 0.7 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Good. Not restored

Inscriptions: и̅с̅ х̅с̅ (Jesus Christ); с̅: бл: к: константинъ; и чады его | михаилъ и феодоръ; с̅: бл: к: петръ; с̅: [февр]онїа (Saint Right-Believing Prince Constantine and his children: Michael and Theodore; Saint Right-Believing Prince Peter; Saint [Fevr]onia).

Description: The five saints are depicted in full-length against neutral background. Sts. Constantine, Michael, and Theodore wear secular garments with tall hats; Saint Peter and Saint Fevronia are dressed in monastic attire. The upper part of the icon depicts the Mandylion. A note on the back reads “Asen Velkovski/Yasen” possibly a former owner and likely M. Yasenova’s father. (Asen Belkovski, painter and restorer educated in Peterburg?)

Provenance: The icon was purchased for the National Archaeological Museum–Sofia (formerly Narodен музеј) from M. Yasenova. **Bibliography:** Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.548. **Photo Credits:** National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Ivan Vanev)



Mother of God Kievo-Pechersk

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** Op. 23, no. 273

Dimensions: 13.5 × 18 × 1 cm

Material: Egg tempera on wood

Date: Late 18th–early 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kyiv Pechersk Lavra

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: *МР ΘΥ* (Mother of God); *нпн. антониу печерскиу* (Venerable Anthony of the Kyiv Caves); *нпн. теодосиу печерскиу* (Venerable Theodosius of the Kyiv Caves).

Description: The upper part depicts the Virgin seated in clouds holding the Child on her right hand and a sphere in her left. The Child blesses with both hands. Below the Virgin are Sts. Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky (of the Kyiv Caves): Anthony is dressed in the vestments of a schema-monk, while Theodosius is dressed as a hieromonk. Both saints are life-size and are holding scrolls with text. The Kiev Pechersk Lavra features in the foreground with its main church and caves on both sides. Gilded carved wood frame. The provenance is unknown.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.588.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Christ Pantocrator

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

Inventory No.: Оп. 77, no. 9

Dimensions: 68.5 × 94 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera, silver revetment

Date: 1854

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: In the enamel medallions: “IC XC” (Jesus Christ)

Within the cartouche: Риза: сия на Икону Исуса Христа Спасителя Устроена Благочестивою | Заботливостию И попечением о благолюбии Святых Храмовъ Генераль Лейтенанта И | Кавалера Соимонова и усерднымъ Пожертвованіемъ Гг. штабъ и оберъ оѣцеровъ Его Отряда чающаго | Свыше Благословенія Своему оружію поднятому на защиту Угнетенной Турками Восточной Церкви | Такъ какъ исамый Храмъ Воимя Святителя и Чудотворца Николая Сооруженъ изъ турецкой Мечети | Въ счастливое Царствованіе Государя Императора Николая Павловича Христолюбивыми побѣдоносными русскими Войсками Благодарными Богу Спасителю запобеды дарованыя имъ надъ Турками въ 1828 и 1829 годахъ 1854 года месяца января 22 дня”

This revetment for the icon of Jesus Christ the Saviour was commissioned through the pious diligence and concern for the adornment of holy churches of Lieutenant-General and Knight Soimonov, together with the zealous contributions of the staff and senior officers of his detachment, who sought the the divine blessing upon their arms raised in defence of the Eastern Church oppressed by the Turks, and since the church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker itself had been converted from a Turkish mosque during the auspicious reign of Emperor Nicholai Pavlovich by the Christ-loving and victorious Russian troops, in thanksgiving to God the Saviour for the victories granted over the Turks in the campaigns of 1828 and 1829, on 22 January 1854.

On the revetment: Въ ризѣ серебра | вѣсу 7 ф. 56 зал. (The revetment contains 7 pounds 56 spoons of silver weight).

Hallmarks:

- 1) Assayer’s mark “А•К/185.” — Andrey Antonovich Kovalsky; date mark illegible; based on the votive inscription, the revetment may be dated terminus ante quem 1854;
- 2) Fineness mark “84” (silver);
- 3) Maker’s mark: illegible;
- 4) Moscow city mark — a horseman galloping to the right.

Description: Christ waist-length, blessing and holding a globe; silver revetment with rays. Christ is depicted waist-length, blessing, holding a sphere. The silver revetment leaves only the face and hands visible. The frame is decorated with high-relief Baroque ornaments, the robes are embellished with

fine vegetal ornament, with rays in the nimbus. An oval cartouche, containing a votive inscription, is placed beneath the image of Christ.

Provenance: The icon was gifted to Saint Nicholas Church, Giurgiu, Romania.

Bibliography: Gergova, I., Y. Gatev and I. Vanev. Християнско изкуство в националния археологически музей (Каталог). Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo Prof. Marin Drinov, 2012, cat. II.291; Gergova, I. “Russian Icons in Bulgaria.” In *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16th–early 20th Centuries)*, edited by Yuliana Boycheva. Seyssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016, pp. 152-154, fig. 4; Nikolov, Angel. “‘Saints and Soldiers’. Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): p. 317, fig. 2..

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Mother of God with Infant Christ

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

Inventory No.: Op. 23, no. 331

Dimensions: 70 × 93 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera, silver, gilding, enamel

Date: 1854

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: In the enamel medallions: **MP ΘΥ** (Mother of God).

Within the cartouche: Риза: Сія на икону Божіей Матери Устроена Христіанскимъ | О красотѣ жилища Божія попеченіемъ Генераль Лейтена"та и | кавалера Соимонова И усерднымъ Пожертваніемъ Г. штабъ и оберъ овицеровъ его | отряда всецело предающихъ себя подь святыи покровъ и заступленіе Царицы | Небесной отъ Нея единныя ожидающихъ помощи оружею поднятому для защиты | Церкви Восточной угнетенной Агарянами, съ вѣрой чающихъ скорого изба|вленія Страждущихъ христіанъ отъ гоненія воздвигнутаю противъ нихъ | на Востокѣ Турками 1854 года ^{года} ^{дня} ^{дня} Января 22

This revetment for the icon of the Mother of God was commissioned through the Christian concern for the adornment of house of God by Lieutenant-General and Knight Soimonov, together with the zealous contributions of the staff and senior officers of his detachment, who wholly entrusted themselves to the holy protection and intercession of the Queen of Heaven, from whom alone they sought assistance for the arms raised in defence of the Eastern Church oppressed by the Hagarenes. In faith they await the imminent deliverance of the suffering Christians from the persecution stirred against them in the East by the Turks. Year 1854, January 22.

On the revetment: Въ ризѣ серебра | Вѣсу 7 ф. 55 з (This revetment contains 7 pounds 855 spoils of silver weight).

Hallmarks:

- 1) Assayer's mark "А•К/185.." — Andrey Antonovich Kovalsky; date mark: illegible; based on the votive inscription, the revetment may be dated terminus ante quem 1854;
- 2) Fineness mark "84" (silver);
- 3) Maker's mark: illegible;
- 4) Moscow city mark — a horseman galloping to the right.

Description: The Virgin is depicted knee-length, holding the Child with both hands, slightly turned leftward. The Child reaches toward her with both hands but looks at the viewer. The Virgin's initials are inscribed in round enamel medallions. An oval cartouche, containing a votive inscription, is placed beneath the image of the Virgin.

Provenance: The icon has been gifted to Saint Nicholas Church, Giurgiu, Romania.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.290; Gergova 2016, p. 153, 154; Nikolov 2021, 317, fig. 1.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Resurrection of Christ with Feast Days

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 1776

Dimensions: 42.5 × 51.5 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Cracks; minor losses. Not restored.

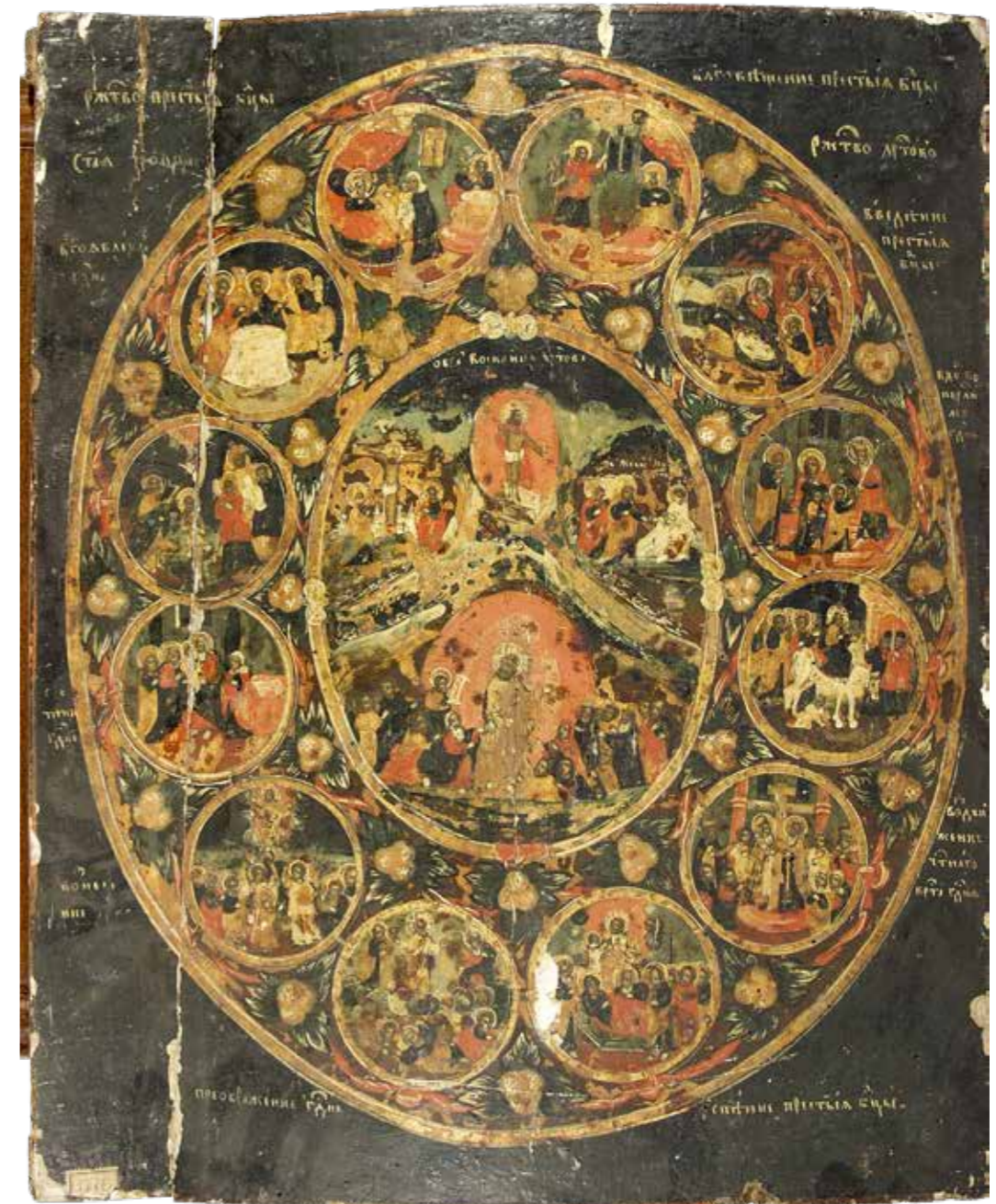
Inscriptions: обра³ воскрннн хртова (Icon of the the Resurrection of Christ); жены миро|носицы (Myrrh-Bearing Women); а̄ г̄ (Angels of the Lord); рожтво пре̄с̄тыа б̄ц̄ы (Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God); б̄л̄говѣщение пре̄с̄тыа б̄ц̄ы (Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God); ржтво хртово (Nativity of Christ); введѣние | пре̄с̄тыа | б̄ц̄ы (Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God (in the Temple)); вхо̄ во | иерли//мь | гднь (Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem); водви|жение | чтнаго | крта гдна (Elevation of the Precious Cross of the Lord); успѣние пре̄с̄тыа б̄ц̄ы (Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God); преображение гдне (Transfiguration of the Lord); вонесе|ние гдне (Ascension); сре|гѣние | гдне (Presentation of the Lord); б̄гоавление | г̄сдне; (Epiphany of the Lord); с̄таа троица (Holy Trinity).

Description: Composed of concentric elliptical scenes: Resurrection and Feasts. Against a black background, the scenes are arranged in two concentric ellipses. Inner ellipse, upper part: The Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Myrrh-bearing women at the empty tomb. Underneath these is the Descent into Hades. Outer ellipse: Twelve scenes in round medallions: The Nativity of the Mother of God, the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation of the Virgin, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Exaltation of the Cross, the Dormition of the Virgin, the Transfiguration, the Ascension, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism and the Old Testament Trinity.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.570.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)



Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow”

Collection: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia **Inventory No.:** 4008

Dimensions: 37 × 45 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second quart of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vyetka

Condition: Good condition of conservation with minor paint losses. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Вбра пртыа бцы всѣ |im.| скорбаци радостъ (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos ‘Joy of All Who Sorrow’);

On the scroll held by the angel on the left: всѣмъ скорбацимъ в нѣжде [---] | и в напастехъ в гоненїи возд[анїе] (to all who sorrow in need and in misfortunes, in persecution there is a reward); On the scroll held by the angel on the right: всѣм вамъ скорбацимъ и вбидимы|мъ і алчюцимъ и жаждущимъ ст (to all of you who sorrow and are wronged, who hunger and thirst); лѣна (Moon).

From top to bottom, the the left group of saints are identified as: доміанъ бе (Domian the Unmercenary); с̄ му козма (Saint Martyr Cosmas); [с] антипа (Saint Antipas); с̄ ар̄ха оурииль (Saint Archangel Uriel); с̄ власїи (Saint Blaise); с̄ с̄ще м̄ѣ харалампїи (Saint Hieromartyr Charalampus); с̄ ар̄ха селѣииль (Saint Archangel Selaphiel) марко ѡра (Saint Mark of Trache); пр̄п анѡрїи вѣ (Saint Onuphrius the Great); ар̄ха михаиль (Archangel Michael); с̄ а҃по андереи пе (Saint Apostle Andrew the First-Called); с̄ а҃по павель (Saint Apostle Paul); с̄ а҃по петръ (Saint Apostle Peter).

On the scroll held by Ap. Peter: велико | има с|тыа | тройцы | прта (Great is the name of the Holy Trinity, the Most Holy).

From top to bottom, the the right group of saints figures are identified as: арх е҃гудїиль (Archangel Jegudiel); с̄ м̄ѣ їваннъ вѣо (Saint Martyr John the Warrior); с̄ м̄ѣ вниѡнтїи (Saint Martyr Boniface); прѣ марѡа (Righteous Martha); варахїиль (Barachiel); пр̄п але҃зїи чѣ бѣо (Venerable Alexius, the Man of God); пр̄п же҃нїа (Venerable Xenia); с̄ ар̄ха гаврїиль (Archangel Gabriel); пр̄п антонїи вѣ (Venerable Anthony the Great); пр̄п ѡевдосїи (Venerable Theodosius); с̄ пр̄а їувъ мнѣо бѣо (Saint Righteous Job the Long-Suffering); херѡ|ви|ми (Cherubims)

On the scroll held by Saint John the Evangelist: аще б |лгаа | прїахо|мъ ѡрѡ|ки гди (If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord—Job 2:10); пр̄п пимень мнѣо бѣо (Venerable Pimen the Long-Suffering); пр̄п ївсиѡъ мнѣо бѣо (Venerable Joseph the Long-Suffering).

Description: At the centre of the icon stands the Virgin Mary, depicted full-length as the Queen of Heaven. She wears a crown and is shown frontally, with her arms extended. In one variant of the composition

she holds palm branches, while in another she bears royal insignia, emphasizing her intercessory and sovereign roles. The Christ Child appears as Christ Emmanuel, dressed as a king and surrounded by a halo, borne upon clouds or cherubim. Above, God the Father is shown blessing from the clouds, and the Holy Spirit is represented in the form of a dove within a medallion, completing the Trinitarian imagery. Surrounding the central figure are groups of saints and supplicants, arranged symmetrically in several horizontal registers. Among them are archangels, apostles, martyrs, monks, and righteous figures, all turned toward the Virgin in attitudes of prayer and supplication. In the lowest register, Saint Peter and the Righteous Job the Much-Suffering are depicted holding open scrolls inscribed with biblical and supplicatory texts. The composition is grounded by a narrow landscape strip at the bottom, rendered with flowers and shrubs, which visually anchors the heavenly vision.

Provenance: The icon was purchased for the National Archaeological Museum–Sofia (formerly Narodен музеј) from V. Katsarov from Sofia.

Bibliography: Gergova-Gatev-Vanev 2012, cat. II.567; Gergova 2010.

Photo Credits: National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (photography: Georgi Linkov)





1740 д.г.

ХУДОЖЕСТВЕНА ГАЛЕРИЯ СТАРА ЗАГОРА

ИЗДАТЕЛСТВО ИКОНИ	Неизвестен автор
	МАРИЯ ЕГИПЕТСКА /образно житие/, 19в.
Техника: темпера, дърво	размер: 35 x 30 см.

071

61

Brass Icon with Saint Nicholas

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C34010

Dimensions: 9.5 × 11 × 0.5 cm

Material: Lead, casting

Date: 20th century

Condition: Good; Not restored.

Inscriptions: сѣи нико[-] (Saint Nich[olas]); ꙗѣ хѣ (Jesus Christ); мѣ ѿѣ (Mother of God).

Description: Small rectangular pectoral icon of Saint Nicholas. The saint is shown half-length, wearing a cross-patterned *phelonion* and *omophorion*, holding the Gospel and blessing. Christ and the Mother of God appear at right and left, presenting him with the Gospel and omophorion (symbols of his episcopal authority). On the hanging segment is an image of the Holy Mandilion. Vegetal ornaments fill the frame and background. Good condition of conservation.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Central Panel of a Brass Triptych with the Mother of God of Kazan

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3848

Dimensions: 5.5 × 7.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Zagarye (Perm)

Condition: Good; relief details worn; Not restored.

Inscriptions: ⲙⲣ̅ ⲑⲗ̅ (Mother of God); ⲓⲥ̅ ⲭⲥ̅ (Jesus Christ).

Description: Small rectangular pectoral icon of a faithful reproduction of the Mother of God Kazanskaya iconographic type. Attachment rings are present at each of the four corners, suggesting the icon was intended to be worn or suspended. In the four corners there are rings for fastening. Above the central field is a rectangular panel with the image of the Mandyliion. Good condition of conservation, some of the details on the relief worn off.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Central Panel of a Brass Triptych with the Mother of God Hodegetria

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3741

Dimensions: 7.5 × 5.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Zagarye (Perm)

Condition: Good; relief details worn; Not restored.

Inscriptions: ⲙⲣ̅ ⲑⲗ̅ (Mother of God); ⲓⲥ̅ ⲭⲥ̅ (Jesus Christ)

A prayer text, now largely illegible, is inscribed along the frame.

Description: Small rectangular pectoral icon depicting the Virgin half-length in the type of Hodegetria. The Virgin is shown holding the Christ Child on her left arm and gesturing toward Him with her right hand. A rectangular field above contains the image of the Mandylion. Attachment rings are present at each of the four corners, suggesting the icon was intended to be worn or suspended.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow”

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3849

Dimensions: 5.5 × 6 cm

Material: Brass, casting, enamel (white, blue)

Date: 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Ural (?)

Condition: Good; Not restored.

Inscriptions: м̃ѣ ѿ̃ѣ (Mother of God).

Description: Small rectangular pectoral icon depicting the Virgin full-length in the center of the composition, holding a scepter and facing to the left. On each side stands an angel and two seated male figures. Above her head, within a heavenly segment, God the Father is shown in benediction. The background is filled with blue enamel of poor quality. A small suspension ring is fixed at the top of the icon.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Panel of a Brass Triptych with Saints

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3746

Dimensions: 5.5 × 5.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good; Not restored.

Inscriptions: сѣѣ фѣлѣпъ | мѣтрополѣтъ (Saint Philip the Metropolitan); сѣѣ никола чудово (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); сѣѣ апѣ ѣванѣнъ бѣсловъ (Saint Apostle John the Theologian);

On the reverse: ісѣ | хсѣ (Jesus Christ); црѣ | слѣвы (King of Glory); ни|ка (He conquers);

м л р б [=м(есто) л(обное) р(ай) б(ысть), Place of Execution became Paradise];

г | а [=г(лава) а(дамова), Adam's skull].

Description: Small rectangular pectoral triptych panel featuring three saints in prayer. Shown full-length and facing to the right, Saint Philip the Metropolitan, Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker and Saint John the Theologian are depicted side by side. On the reverse side of the panel, within a round medallion, is the Cross of Golgotha with the instruments of the Passion and a skull (Adam's head) at its base, set against the background of the walls of Jerusalem. On one side of the panel there hinges for attachment to another wing. Good condition of conservation.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Brass Icon with Saint Nicholas

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3529

Dimensions: 4 × 6 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: 19th century

Condition: Good; details worn; Not restored.

Inscriptions: стѣи нѣиколаѣ (Saint Nicholas); ꙗѣ хсѣ (Jesus Christ); мѣ ѿѣ (Mother of God)

Description: Small rectangular pectoral icon of Saint Nicolas. Saint Nicholas is depicted at waist-length. In his left hand, he holds the Gospel, while his right arm is raised in a gesture of blessing. The waist-length images of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God are positioned to the right and left, respectively. In this iconographic composition, they are depicted offering to Saint Nicholas a Gospel and an ‘omophorion’, which signified his status as a bishop. On the hanging segment is an image of the Holy Mandilion.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Left brass Triptych Panel with the Mother of God Deësis

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3850

Dimensions: 4.5 × 4.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting, enamel (white, blue)

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Pomorie

Condition: Excellent; Not restored.

Inscriptions: Front: м̄р̄ ѿ̄л̄. (Mother of God); Reverse: і̄с̄ | х̄с̄; ц̄р̄ь | сл̄в̄ы (King of Glory); ни|ка (He conquers); м л р б [=м(есто) л(обное) р(ай) б(ысть), Place of Execution became Paradise]; г | а [=г(лава) а(дамова), Adam's skull].

Description: The Virgin is depicted half-length, turned to the right and shown in prayer. This panel originally formed part of a Deësis composition. The frame bears an ornament of concentric circles; the background is filled with white and blue enamel of poor quality. On the reverse side, within a circular medallion, is the Cross of Golgotha with the instruments of the Passion and a skull (Adam's head) at its base, set against the walls of Jerusalem. The background of the icon is decorated with white and blue enamel.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Brass Triptych with the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow” and Saints

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C3518

Dimensions: 5 × 6 cm; side panels 2.5 × 4.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Guslitsy

Condition: The metal surface is covered with patina, and the relief details are significantly worn. Not restored.

Inscriptions: illegible.

Description: A small brass triptych Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow” and saints. In the central field appears the scene The Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow.” The Virgin stands full-length, holding a scepter and turned to the left; above her in clouds Christ blesses. Above the scene, within a small rectangular field, is the image of the Mandylicon. Each side panel bears three registers with busts of saints, two per row; the uppermost rows include archangels. The outer surfaces of the side panels are unadorned.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Altar Gospel with Metal Revetment

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora, storage

Inventory No.: 5C31801/E.13

Dimensions: 23 × 31 × 4.5 cm

Material: Brass, casting and engraving

Date: Year of publication of the book: 1868. Moscow, Synodal Printing House.

Gospel cover: last third of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Excellent; Not restored. **Inscriptions:** No inscriptions.

Description: The front cover features the Resurrection of Christ in an oval medallion at the centre, with busts of the Four Evangelists in the corners. The back cover depicts the Annunciation. Both covers have highly ornamented frames. The book was printed in Moscow in 1868. The gospel cover has not been restored.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Stara Zagora (photography: Angel Nikolov)



70

Mother of God Healer of Sorrows (*Utolimaya*)**Collection:** Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov, storage**Inventory No.:** XI IV-10**Dimensions:** 29 × 36 × 3 cm**Material:** Tempera on wood**Date:** Late 18th – early 19th century**Artistic Center / Workshop:** Kholui**Condition:** Losses in lower paint layer; abraded varnish; Not restored.**Inscriptions:** мр ѿу (Mother of God); утолѣмыа | прѣтыа^ацы ([Icon] of the Most Holy Theotokos “Healer of my Sorrows”); їс хс (Jesus Christ); On the scroll: сѣдь | праведенъ | сѣдѣте (Judge with righteous judgment). On the reverse: 1810 декемрѣу 25 | сѣмѣну анггѣлу (December 25, 1810 / to Symeon Angelov); On the reverse, on the upper batten: 1810 г. (Year 1810).**Description:** The Virgin is depicted half-length, her right hand touches her head while with the left she holds the reclining Child, who holds an open scroll. The background is silver; the frame is decorated with black vegetal motifs painted over the silver**Provenance:** Unknown.**Bibliography:** Unpublished.**Photo Credits:** Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov (photography: Angel Nikolov)

Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov, storage

Inventory No.: XГ IV-16

Dimensions: 22 × 27 × 2 cm

Material: Oil on wood, brass revetment

Date: 19th – early 20th century

Condition: Soiled surface; losses on frame; missing metal nimb coverings; Not restored.

Inscriptions: On the revetment: “казанския п. б.” ([Icon] of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan);
On the reverse: “майсторъ казанский” (Kazan Master); ink stamp: “мастерская живописи[...].”
(Painting Workshop[...]).

Description: A replica of the Mother of God of Kazan. The icon was intended to be fully covered with a metal revetment. Only the faces and the blessing hand of the Christ Child are modelled, while the figures and garments are merely indicated by outline. The icon is covered with a brass revetment.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov, storage

Inventory No.: XI IV-15 **Dimensions:** 28 × 34 × 3 cm

Material: Oil on wood

Date: Late 19th – early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir province icon-painting workshops

Condition: Good; paint layer slightly cracked; The revetment is missing, and the paint on the frame is worn, showing minor losses. Not restored.

Inscriptions: ἸϞ ΧϞ (Jesus Christ).

Description: Christ is shown half-length, blessing and holding a sphere. Only the head and hands are modelled; the garments are only indicated by outline. The icon is set in a simple profiled wooden frame. It originally had a revetment, traces of small nails are still visible. It belonged to Dimitar Shishmanov of Svishtov (c. 1830–1875), merchant and writer.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Nikolai Pavlovich Art Gallery – Svishtov (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Resurrection of Christ with Feasts

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 264

Dimensions: 43 × 53.3 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Last quart of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Good; restored in 1982 at the Regional Conservation Workshop in Varna.

Inscriptions: In the background of the narrative scenes:

вбра̑ воскрн е гда нашего и ца хр̑ста (Icon of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ); *и̑ х̑* (Jesus Christ);

Рж̑тво прс̑тыла бц̑ы (Nativity of the Virgin); *с̑: іоаким̑; с̑: анна* (Saint Joachim, Saint Anna,); *м̑р̑ ѳ̑* (Mother of God);

Введеніе прс̑тыла бц̑ы (Presentation of the Virgin); *с̑: захаріи; с̑: оаким; с̑: анна; м̑р̑ ѳ̑*; (Saint Zacharias; Saint Joachim; Saint Anna; Mother of God);

Бл̑говѣщеніе Прс̑тыла бц̑ы (Annunciation of the Holy Theotokos); *а̑рх. гавр̑ и̑; м̑р̑ ѳ̑*;

Рж̑тво Хрс̑тово (Nativity of Christ); *с̑: іосифъ; м̑р̑ ѳ̑; и̑ х̑* (Saint Joseph, Mother of God, Jesus Christ);

Сретеніе гд̑не (Presentation of the Lord); *с̑: іосифъ; м̑р̑ ѳ̑; и̑ х̑; с̑: анна; с̑: свмеонъ; Бг̑д̑вленіе е господне* (Baptism of Christ); *с̑: іоаннъ пре̑д; и̑ х̑; аг̑з̑ли г̑дни;*

Входъ гд̑нъ во ер̑л̑мъ; (Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem); *а̑п̑ли гд̑ни;*

Преображеніе е господне; (Apostles of the Lord; Transfiguration of Christ); *и̑ х̑* (Jesus Christ); *с̑: моисеи* (Saint Moses); *с̑: ил̑а* (Elijah); *а̑п̑ли гд̑ни* (Apostles of the Lord);

Вознесене господне (Ascension of Christ); *а̑п̑ли гд̑ни* (Apostles of the Lord); *и̑ х̑* (Jesus Christ); *м̑р̑ ѳ̑* (Mother of God);

ст̑ла тр̑ца (Holy Trinity); *с̑: сарра* (Saint Sarrah); *с̑: авра̑м* (Saint Abraham);

Успеніе е прс̑тыла бц̑ы; м̑р̑ ѳ̑; и̑ х̑; д̑ша; а̑п̑ли гд̑ни (Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, Mother of God, Jesus Christ, Soul, Apostles of the Lord);

Воздвиженіе креста гд̑на (Elevation of the Cross of the Lord); *с̑: макариу; с̑: ц̑: Констан; с̑: ц̑: елена* (Saint Macarius; Saint Emperor Constantine; Saint Empress Helena).

Description: In the center of the icon is presented the Resurrection of Christ in two versions: at the top of the field is the resurrected Christ from the tomb, below is the Descent into Hell. Around the central field in 12 rectangular frames are presented scenes. Chronologically, starting from the top left, these are the Birth of the Virgin, Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Annunciation to Virgin Mary, Nativity of Christ, Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Baptism of Christ, Transfiguration of Christ, Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension of Christ, Old Testament Saint Trinity, Dormition of the Virgin, Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The icon is framed by a narrow black border. Made of a single wooden panel with two inserted battens on the reverse.

Provenance: Unknown; entered the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Mother of God Besednaya (The Miracle of the Appearance of the Mother of God to the Sexton Yurysh)

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 186

Dimensions: 29 × 34.2 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: The panel is decayed; the lower part of the icon is missing, with losses in the paint and ground layers; restored.

Inscriptions: *вбра̃ пресѣтыа [бѣы тихъвин]скіа;* (Image of the Most Holy [Theotokos of Tikhvin]); *ѱ̃с̃ х̃с̃* (*Jesus Christ*); *с̃. николае чюд̃* (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); *м̃п̃ ѿ̃ѱ̃* (Mother of God); *гевргіи* (George).

Description: The icon depicts the Apparition of the Virgin and Saint Nicholas to the sexton Yurish (George). On the left stands Saint Nicholas, the Wonderworker, full-length in bishop's clothing, against the background of a church. On the right, the Mother of God is seated beneath a tree; in front of her is the kneeling figure of a man, the sexton Yurish (George), whose name is inscribed above him. In the upper part of the composition, the now-lost figure of Christ Pantokrator was originally depicted in the clouds. Made of a single wooden panel.

Provenance: Entered the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 2

Dimensions: 24,5 × 30 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: second half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Worm-eaten wooden panel with damages to the painted surface; restored at the Regional Conservation Workshop in Varna in 1983.

Inscriptions: обра́ стѣго |им.| николая (image of Saint Nicholas); ии́с х́с (Jesus Christ); м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God).

Description: The saint is depicted half-length, blessing and holding a closed Gospel. On either side of his head, in the clouds, Christ presents a Gospel book while the Mother of God offers an omophorion. The icon originally had a silver-plated copper revetment, now removed (Inventory No. ВИИ 516). Made of a single wooden panel.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 9

Dimensions: 26 × 34.5 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-to-late 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia Old Believers' workshop

Condition: Worm-eaten wooden board with losses to the paint layer and later retouching in the areas of loss; restored at the Regional Conservation Workshop in Varna by Robert Popov.

Inscriptions: *Обра́ сѣтаго Николы чѹ* (Icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); *і̄с̄ х̄с̄* (Jesus Christ); *м̄ѣ ѿ̄ѹ* (Mother of God)

On the Gospel: *во время | вно ста іс | на местѣ | равнѣ и | народѣ ученикъ е|го* (At that time Jesus stood on the plain, and a multitude of His disciples—Luke 6:17).

Description: The saint is shown half-length, blessing and holding an open Gospel. In the background, on either side, busts of Christ holding a gospel and the Mother of God holding an omophorion are depicted in the clouds. The icon is decorated with two painted frames, an interior gold frame and an exterior orange-red frame. The background is silver. A metal pectoral cross was attached to one side of the omophorion, which is kept separately. There are also traces of other revetment fittings. Made of a single wooden panel with two inserted, slightly bevelled battens on the reverse.

Provenance: From the village of Trastikovo, Provadia Province.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Nativity of the Virgin

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 32

Dimensions: 25,6 × 30,3 × 2,6 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Damaged paint layer; worm-eaten wooden panel; restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: In the central section of a three-winged architectural setting is depicted the Nativity of the Mother of God. In the left wing appears Saint Joachim, and in the right, the Conception of the Mother of God. Above the side wings appear the figures of the Virgin's parents. The frame is black. Made of a single wooden panel.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 106

Dimensions: 29.5 × 24.3 × 2.8 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half - mid-18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Worm-eaten wooden panel with losses to the paint and traces of burning; given emergency conservation treatment at the Regional Conservation Workshop in Varna in 1978; restored by the Department of Restoration at the National Academy of Arts, Sofia, in 1982.

Description: A replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God Kazanskaya. The background is adorned with floral motifs. The frame is brownish-red. Made of a single wooden panel with a shallow *kovcheg* and reinforced with two large, nearly rectangular bevelled battens on the reverse.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Dormition of the Mother of God

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 18

Dimensions: 42.8 × 34 × 2.4 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: A crack runs through the panel and paint layer; varnish degraded; wood insect-damaged; given emergency conservation treatment at the Regional Conservation Workshop in Varna in 1978; restored by the Department of Restoration at the National Academy of Arts in 1982.

Inscriptions: *Обрѣ оуспеніе Претыла Бѣы* (Icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos); *і̄с̄х̄с̄* (Jesus Christ); *м̄р̄ѳ̄ѵ* (Mother of God); *ап̄лӣ з̄д̄ни* (Holy Apostles).

Description: The composition follows the standard Dormition iconography, omitting the female mourners and the episode of the angel cutting off the hands of Jephonias. In the background, behind the Apostles, are four hierarchs—Antipas (?) and Blasius among them. Made of two wooden panels once reinforced with two battens, now missing.

Provenance: Acquired from Nikolay Ivanov Nikolov, Varna, 10 March 1973.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Mother of God Tikhvinskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna (Collection of the Varna Metropolitan Church), storage

Inventory No.: M 425

Dimensions: 44 × 36.8 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Minor losses to the paint layer on the garment of the Mother of God; restored at the Regional Conservation Workshop of the National Institute for the Monuments of Culture – Varna Region, 1975.

Inscriptions: *Гдѣра̑ пре бѣѣы | Тихъфенскія* (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin); *м̄р̄ ѿ ѿ* (Mother of God).

Description: Replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya. The background is silver; the inner frame bears engraved ornaments, and the outer frame is black. The halo of the Virgin is engraved with rays. Made of a single wooden panel reinforced with narrow inset battens along the short sides.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Mother of God Tikhvinskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna (Collection of the Varna Metropolitan Church), storage

Inventory No.: M 30

Dimensions: 89 × 70 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood panel

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Cracking and partial loss of varnish; Restored

Inscriptions: Обра́ Тѣхвинскѣа | пресѣтыя бѣѣы; (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin); ѿиѣ хѣ (Jesus Christ); мѣрѣу (Mother of God).

Description: A replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Tikhvin. The garments of the Virgin and Child, the nimbi, the background, and the frame are decorated with engraved ornamentation. Owing to its dimensions, the icon likely belonged to the royal tier of an iconostasis. Panel reinforced with two profiled crossbars.

Provenance: From the village of Neofit Rilski; collected on 11 June 1964

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna (Collection of the Varna Metropolitan Church), storage

Inventory No.: M 29

Dimensions: 69 × 89 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood panel

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Good. Restored by Robert Popov in 1991

Inscriptions: иӣс̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); м̄р̄ ѿ̄ӯ (Mother of God); обра̄с̄ та̄го̄ [им.] никола[а] (Icon of Saint Nicholas); In the open Gospel: Во время | вно ста | ӣис̄съ наме|стѣ равнѣ | и народѣ | ученикъ его | и намножест|во много лю|деи ѿ вса|и|удеи їер̄усали|ма (At that time Jesus stood on a level place and the people his disciples and a multitude many people from all Judea <and> Jerusalem—Luke 6:17-21).

Description: Saint Nicholas is depicted half-length, wearing richly ornamented liturgical vestments and a mitre, blessing and holding an open Gospel. On either side of his head, Christ (holding a closed Gospel) and the Mother of God (holding an omophorion) appear seated on clouds within mandorlas. The background is imitation gold, with a layer of varnish over silver, and is decorated with engraved ornaments. The ornamentation of the halo and frame is polychrome, and the outermost frame is painted red. The icon is most likely to have belonged to the royal tier of an iconostasis. It should be noted that it forms a set with No. 81 (Mother of God Tikhvinskaya).

Provenance: From the village of Neofit Rilski; collected on 11 June 1964

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna (Collection of the Varna Metropolitan Church), storage

Inventory No.: M 517

Dimensions: 33.5 × 39.5 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood panel

Date: 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Cracked panel; painted surface in good condition; restoration: Robert Popov, 1983

Inscriptions: обра́ сѣаго |им. | Нико́лы чѣ; (Icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); і̄с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God); In the open Gospel: *Во время | вно ста і̄с̄ | на мѣсте ра|внѣ и народѣ | ученикъ его | и множество | много людей | ѿ всѣа удеи* (At that time Jesus stood on a level place and the people, his disciples, and a multitude of many people from all Judea—Luke 6:17-21).

Description: The saint is shown half-length, blessing and holding an open Gospel. In the background, within round medallions on either side of his head, appear the busts of Christ (holding the Gospel) and the Virgin (holding the omophorion). The dark-blue ground is filled with gold ornamentation. The saint's vestments and nimbus bear engraved decorative motifs. Construction: Single board reinforced with narrow inset battens along the short sides.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 12

Dimensions: 24.4 × 33.4 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Third quart of the 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Abraded varnish; deep burn mark; Restored in Varna, 1982

Inscriptions: м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God); [і̄с̄] х̄с̄. (Jesus Christ)

On the reverse, there are two wax seals : 1. Печ: благочиния симферопольскаго. Г. М. Р. (Seal of the Simferopol Deanery. G. M. R.) 2. Градской полиціи (of the Municipal Police)

Description: This is a replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God Kazanskaya. The nimbus, crown, maphorion and inner frame are decorated with engraved ornamentation. The icon was once set in a gilded frame with carved ornamentation which is now missing. Two red wax seals are preserved on the back. Two boards. Reinforced with two bevelled crossbars.

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The New Testament Trinity with the Coronation of the Virgin

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 5

Dimensions: 45 × 50 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half 18th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Good; a large loss of paint in the lower part has been filled and retouched; restoration: restored in Varna in 1990 by Petar Branев

Inscriptions: In the background field of the scene, aligned with the heads of the figures : в[---]ъ[---] дѣхъ стѣи [---] осеняетъ (The Father... the Daughter... the Holy Spirit... overshadows); ииѣ хѣ (Jesus Christ); гдѣ сававфѣ (Lord Sabaoth); мѣ ѿѣ (Mother of God).

Description: Christ, draped in a purple mantle and holding a large cross, and God Sabaoth, both seated upon clouds, place a crown on the head of the Virgin, who kneels before them with folded hands. Beneath the Virgin appears a crescent moon; under God Sabaoth's feet is a dark-blue sphere. Above Christ and God Sabaoth is the Holy Spirit, surrounded by cherubim. Single board reinforced with inset battens along the narrow sides

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God of Tikhvin

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 697

Dimensions: 25.5 × 32 × 2.4 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Losses to the paint layer; panel worm-eaten

Inscriptions: In the background field of the scene, aligned with the heads of the figures: обра³ прѣ³тыа
| бѣ³ы тѣфенскі; (Image of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tikhvin); мѣ³ ѿ³у (Mother of God).

Description: A replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Tikhvin. The background is green; the nimbi are red. The frame is brown, bordered with red and blue lines. Icon's construction: A single board reinforced with inset battens along its narrow sides.

Provenance: Purchased in 1998 from Antoniy Lyubenov Kostov, Varna

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Nicholas the Wonderworker

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 680

Dimensions: 31.5 × 26.5 × 1.7 cm

Material: Tempera, wood, brass, gilding

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Varnish cracked; gilding on the revetment worn. Not restored.

Description: The saint is shown half-length, blessing and holding a closed Gospel. On either side of his head, within round medallions on a red ground, are Christ holding a Gospel and the Virgin holding an omophorion. The icon is covered with a brass revetment decorated with engraved ornamentation showing traces of gilding. Icon's construction: A single board reinforced with two wide bevelled crossbars, one missing.

Provenance: Unknown; Deposited at the museum by the Ministry of the Interior's Department of Investigation, Varna.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Vladimirskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: M 290

Dimensions: 30 × 37 × 1.8 cm

Material: Tempera on wood panel

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Kholui, Gorbunov family workshop

Condition: Losses in the paint layer; not restored

Inscriptions: Обра́ Владимирскіа | прѣ́тыа Бѣ́ы (Image of the Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir);
їи́с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God).

Description: A replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Vladimir. The nimbi are rendered as radiant haloes rather than outlined. The background is dark, nearly black; the border is narrow and red. Originally reinforced with two wide bevelled crossbars, now missing

Provenance: From the village of Cherventsi (collected in 1964)

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



St Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna (Metropolitan Collection), storage

Inventory No.: M 73

Dimensions: 24.5 × 31.5 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood panel

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Damage to paint layer and varnish; Restored in 1982 by the Department of Conservation of the National Academy of Arts in Sofia. **Inscriptions:** Образ ст̃аго | Митрофана | еп̃и Воронѣ|скаго (?) чю̃^а (Icon of Saint Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh the Wonderworker).

Description: The saint is depicted half-length, wearing episcopal vestments, blessing, and holding a bishop's staff. Near his head is a miniature representation of the Mandylion. The background is silver, and the frame wide and ochre-coloured. Construction: Reinforced with two wide bevelled crossbars

Provenance: From the village of Kazashka Reka

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Icon of Crucifixion with Saint Sergius of Radonezh and an Unknown Saint

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 262

Dimensions: 31 × 35.7 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera, wood, brass, enamels

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Moscow

Condition: Good; Icon restored in 1982; metal cross in 1979, both in Varna

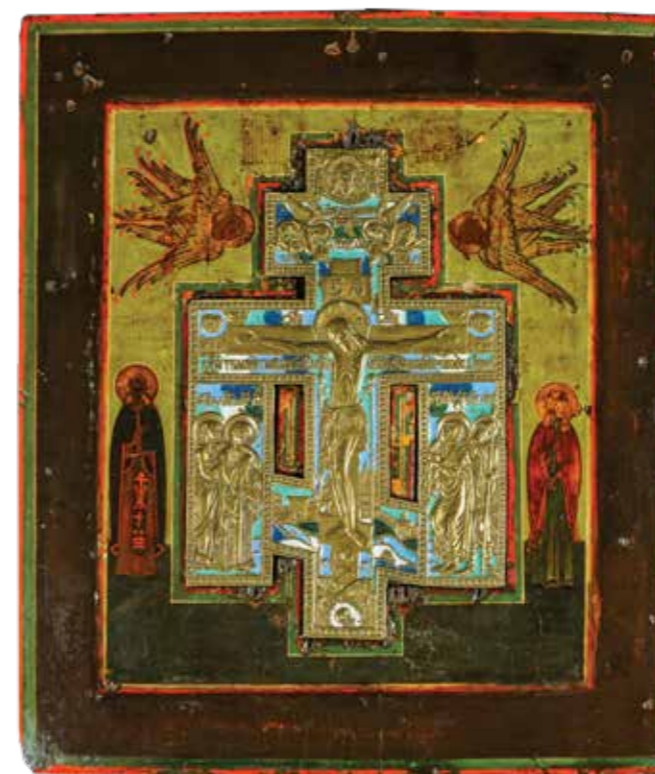
Inscriptions: In the background field of the painted scene, aligned with the figures: п. сергіи радонежскіи (Saint Sergius of Radonezh); [---] (illegible name of the saint). On the brass cross: вобразъ неруко|творенн[ий] (Icon Not-made-by-hands); аг̃ли г̃дни (Angels of the Lord); і̃с̃ х̃с̃; ц̃р̃ь | сл̃вы (Jesus Christ, King of Glory); с̃н̃ь | б̃ж̃іи (Son of God); слнце; л̃на (Sun, Moon); крет̃л̃ твоєм̃л̃ покланяе̃с̃а вл̃ко | и с̃т̃ое вокресеніе твое славим (Before thy Cross we bow down in worship, o Master, and thy holy Resurrection we glorify); с̃таа м̃а (Saint Martha); м̃р̃ о̃у (Mother of God); с̃т̃ыи і̃ван (Saint John the Theologian); с̃т̃ыи логин (Saint Longinus). Cryptograms around the cross: к | т; [=к(опіе) т(рость), Spear and Cane]; ни | ка (He conquers); м | л | р | б [=м(есто) л(обное) р(ай) б(ысть), Place of Execution became Paradise]; г | г [=г(ора) г(олгофа), Golgotha Mountain]; г | а [=г(лава) а(дамова), Adam's skull].

Description: A cast brass cross is held in a recessed compartment in the centre of the icon. Flanking it are full-length figures of Saint Sergius of Radonezh and an unidentified monastic saint. Above are two six-winged seraphim. The background is two-toned: dark below, golden above. The frame is dark brown, bordered with green and red lines. The brass cross on the front side is decorated with white, light blue, and dark blue enamel. On its upper arm is the image of the Mandylion; below it, two flying angels with veiled hands. At the center is the Christ crucified on an eight-pointed cross. Below the cross, to the left, are the Mother of God and Martha; to the right, Saint John the Theologian and the centurion Longinus. Behind the cross is a panoramic view of Jerusalem, and beneath it is the skull of Adam. The reverse side of the cross is engraved with vegetal ornaments.

Provenance: Acquired in 1978; earlier provenance unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Feodorovskaya Mother of God

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 702

Dimensions: 26 × 31 × 2.3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Last quart of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Mstera, Old Believers' icon

Condition: Surface abraded; flaking along upper and lower borders; Not restored

Inscriptions: Illegible; pencil inscriptions on the reverse also illegible

Description: A replica of the wonderworking Feodorovskaya Mother of God. The frame is engraved with geometric ornaments; the background is silvered. Made from a single panel with two inserted battens on the reverse.

Provenance: Purchased in 2005 from Stefan Poliekhtev Ivanov, village of Kazashko

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Four-part icon with Crucifixion with Icons of the Mother of God and Saints

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 698

Dimensions: 45 × 36.8 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Lipovan workshop (Old Believers' domestic icon)

Condition: Cracked paint layer and varnish; flaking; not restored

Inscriptions:

1. Scene of the Crucifixion: *распятие | гдне* (Crucifixion of the Christ); црь | славы (King of Glory); снь | бжи (Son of God); гдь са|ваофъ (Lord Sabaoth); Скрыптограммы: ни | ка (He conquers); к | т; [=к(опие) т(рость), Spear and Cane]; р | б | м | л [=р(ай) б(ысть) м(есто) л(обное), Place of Execution became Paradise]; г | г [=г(ора) г(олгофа), Golgotha Mountain]; г | а [=г(лава) а(дамова), Adam's skull].
2. "Joy to all who Sorrow": *скорбацимъ ра п б* (Joy of All Who Sorrow, Most Holy Theotokos); слнце лѣна (Sun, Moon); с м вниѡант[и]и (Saint Martyr Boniface); с марѸфъ (Saint Maruthas); с николае (Saint Nicholas), п нифонтъ (Venerable Niphont); с а павель (Saint Apostle Paul), с а петръ (Saint Apostle Peter); п ѳовъ (Saint Job), п пимен (Saint Pimen);
On the scroll of apostle Peter: *Велико имя | с тьма* (Great is the name);
3. Virgin Feodorovskaya: *Ѳеодоровскїа п б* (Most Holy Theotokos Feodorovskaya); м р ѳ ѳ (Mother of God); і с х с (Jesus Christ).
4. Saint Nicholas: *стыи никлае чю* (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); in the open book of Saint Nicholas: *Во время | вно | ста | іс на | местъ | равне | і народъ | ученик* (At that time Jesus stood in a level place, and a crowd of His disciples—Luke 6:17-21);
5. Saint Charalambos: *с тьи с м харалампїи* (Saint Charalambos); п евдокїа (Saint Eudokia); с м ирина (Saint Irina); с п анна (Saint Righteous Anna).

Description: The icon field is divided into four by the Crucifixion of Christ, which is depicted in the middle. Above Christ are the God Sabaoth and Holy Spirit, to the left and right are the sun and the moon, and below the cross is the skull of Adam. In the upper left field is represented the Virgin Mary "Joy to all who Suffer" (the Virgin as Queen with in full-length the Christ child in her arms, surrounded

by various saints), on the right is the Virgin Feodorovskaya. In the lower left field is Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker to the waist, to the right is Saint Charalambos to the waist. The frames are quite wide and golden. Saint Eudokia and Saint Irene are represented in full length on the left frame, on the right frame is Saint Anna. The icon is made from two wooden panels with two profiled battens inserted on the reverse.

Provenance: Purchased from Katya Larionova Raleva, Varna

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Four-part icon with Crucifixion with the Prophet Elijah, the Three-Handed Mother of God, Saint George, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 259

Material: Tempera, wood

Dimensions: 26 × 31.5 × 2 cm

Date: Early 20th century

Artistic center / Workshops: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Good; not restored.

Inscriptions:

1. Scene of Crucifixion: распятие [im.] христово (Crucifixion of Christ);
Cryptograms: м̄ | л̄ | р̄ | б̄ [=м(есто) л(обное р(ай) б(ысть), Place of Execution became Paradise];
г | г [=г(ора) г(олгофа), Golgotha Mountain]; г | а [=г(лава) а(дамова), Adam's skull].
2. Prophet Elijah: С̄т̄ый [im.] пр̄б̄. илӣа (Saint Prophet Elijah); м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God); і̄с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ);
3. Virgin of Three Hands: троер̄чцы п̄рс̄ б̄ц̄ы (the Most Holy Theotokos of the Three Hands).
4. Saint George: С̄т̄ый великом̄ь. Георгі̄й (Saint Great Martyr George).
5. Saint Seraphim of Sarov: ст̄ый препод. [im.] серафим̄ь (Saint Venerable Seraphim).
6. On the back, in pencil: *Др. Мам (?) Осповь (?) Иванъ Степановичъ в честь Троеручицы, Георгия, Ильи пророка, Серафима, распятия... гр. 500.* (Dr. Mam (?) Ospov (?) Ivan Stepanovich, in honour of the Virgin of Three Hands, George, Prophet Elijah, Seraphim, the Crucifixion [---] price 500).

The composition is structured around the Crucifixion of Christ, which divides the icon into four fields. In the two upper fields are depicted the Prophet Elijah, shown half-length, and a replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God “Three-Handed” (Troeruchitsa). The two lower fields contain full-length figures of Saint George and Saint Seraphim of Sarov. The icon is painted on a single wooden panel reinforced with two battens inserted into channels along the upper and lower edges. The background is silver, covered with a tinted varnish that gives it a golden appearance. The frame is decorated with engraved geometric ornament.

Provenance: Provenance unknown. Acquired by the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Mother of God Vladimirskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 22

Dimensions: 30.3 × 36.5 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Cracked paint layer; split wooden panel; Emergency stabilisation, Varna, 1978

Inscriptions: обра́ Владимирскіа прѣтѣ Бѣы (Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir); іѣ хѣ (Jesus Christ); мѣ ѿ ѿ (Mother of God).

Description: A replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Vladimir. The background is dark red, the frame brown. The icon has a metal suspension ring. Construction: Reinforced with two crossbars, likely later replacements

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Christ Pantokrator

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 78

Dimensions: 22.5 × 26.7 × 1.9 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: 19th century

Artistic Centre / Workshop: Central Russia

Old Believers' icon

Condition: Significant losses to paint and ground layers in the lower part; emergency stabilisation in 1978; restored by Petar Branев in 1982 and again in 1991–1992

Inscriptions: і̄с̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); г̄д̄ь вседер̄|ім̄| житель (Lord Pantokrator); In the open Gospel: Прїидите | ко мне. | вси тру|ждаючи|іс̄а и обре|мененнїи (Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden—Math. 11:28-30).

Reverse: отъ инже–[.]ую Теодоръ Стефановъ 15 септември (donated by Eng(ineer) Teodor Stefanov on 15 September.)

Description: Christ is shown half-length, blessing and holding an open Gospel. The background and garments are ornamented. Made from a single panel with two inserted Two broad, slightly bevelled battens on the reverse (one replaced during restoration).

Provenance: Unknown

Bibliography: Unpublished

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Kazanskaya

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 377

Dimensions: 26.5 × 31.3 × 2.3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Late 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Mstera

Condition: Loss of paint layer in the lower part. Restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible

Description: Replica of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Kazan. The frames, background, and nimbi are engraved with ornamental patterns imitating polychrome enamel. The wood panel is backed by a secondary wooden frame covering the reverse and fitted with two broad crossbars.

Provenance: Following its confiscation by the customs authorities, the icon was transferred to the museum in 1981.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



The Virgin Appears to Saint Sergius of Radonezh

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 265

Dimensions: 10.5 × 13.3 × 1.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Late 19th – early 20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Flaking of the painted layer.

Inscriptions: Явление Прѣтѣ Бѣѣ Пр. Сергію (Appearance of the Most Holy Theotokos to Saint Sergius); Св Аѣ Петръ; Св ап и[оанъ]; (Saint Apostles Peter, Saint John the Theologian); [м]ѣ ѣѣ (Mother of God); Пѣ Серг и чѣ; пѣ міхеи (Venerable Sergius the Wonderworker; Venerable Mikhei).

Description: At the center of the composition, the Mother of God, with the Apostles Peter and John the Theologian standing behind her, hands an abbatial staff to Saint Sergius of Radonezh, who kneels before her. Behind Saint Sergius kneels his disciple, Mikhei. In the upper register is depicted the New Testament Trinity. The frame is decorated with polychrome floral ornament. The icon is painted on a panel composed of two wooden boards joined and reinforced with battens inserted into channels along the narrow sides.

Provenance: Unknown; entered the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Kazanskaya with scenes from the legend of the icon

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 260

Dimensions: 33 × 40 × 2.7 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Volga region (?) – according to the collection record: Kostroma.

Condition: Good.

Restoration: Restored in 1982 at the workshop of the Cultural and Historical Heritage Department.

Inscriptions:

1. In the center: МР ΘΥ ΚΑΖΑΝΣΚΑΑ (Mother of God of Kazan'); Ι̅ς̅ χ̅ρ̅ς̅ (Jesus Christ).

2. On the frame:

Явиса икона прѣа бѣа некоего | воина дщери именѣ матроне во сне

The icon of Most Holy Theotokos appeared in a dream to a warrior's daughter named Matrona.

Повременем сказа матери [свое]и | матери же е[а глаголы] ни во что же о семь | [виденіи

After some time, she told her mother [about it]; but her mother did not take her words about this seriously.

Во единъ день слѣчиса дѣце | онои спати в полѣденое время | и ависа прѣа бѣа во сне

Once the maiden fell asleep at midday, and the Most Holy Mother of God appeared to her in a dream.

И вземши дщерь свою иде ко архие[пископу] | теже прѣреченныа ему поведѣ | глаголы

[The mother] went to the Archbishop with her daughter, and recounted to him what was said above.

Вземши | жена мо|тыкѣ и | пришедши сама | к показо|нномо ме|стѣ нача | копати | и не обре|те
иско|мого

The woman took a hoe and went herself to the indicated place and began digging, but did not find what she was looking for.

Предрече|ннаа же | девица на|ча копѣ | и прочіа | с нею и я|виса имъ | чудотво|рнаа | икона

Then the aforementioned maiden began digging, and other people joined her, and the miraculous icon came forth.

Архиепи|скопъ же | с воеводы | с плачемъ | молахѣ | припада|юще чю|дотвор|ной ико|ны;

The Archbishop, together with the military commanders, venerated the miraculous icon with weeping and praying.

И повеле | архиепи | с тѣю ико|нѣ нести | в церковь | с̅ никола | чю

The Archbishop ordered the icon to be brought to the Church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

И прине|шею пос|тавишиа | в соборней | церкви

It was brought and placed in the cathedral church.

И в то | время чю̅ ис|цели чл̅ка | убога и|мене о|сива сле|па очима | прозре;

At that time, she also miraculously healed a poor man named Osip, who was blind, and he recovered his sight.

Ц̅рь повеле на томъ месте пос|тавити ц̅рковь во имя прѣа | бѣы и монастырь девичь

The Tsar ordered a church to be built at that place in the name of the Most Holy Mother of God, and a female convent.

Якоже прѣа бѣа некоего чл̅ка | именѣ никитѣ очима болаца | исцели

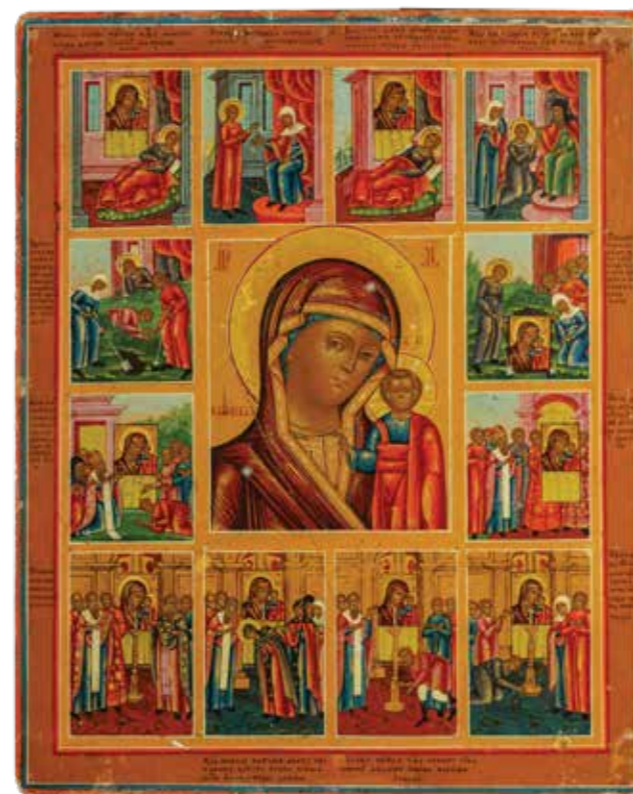
Similarly, the Most Holy Mother of God healed a man, named Nikita, who suffered from an eye disease.

Description: In the centre is the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of Kazan, surrounded by twelve scenes illustrating its discovery and miracles: the apparition to Matrona, the informing of her mother, the revelation in a dream, the digging for the icon, its discovery, the procession to the Church of Saint Nicholas, the prayers of the archbishop and nobles, the building of the church and convent, and miraculous healings of Nikita and the blind Joseph. The panel consists of a single board reinforced with two battens inserted into the thickness of the narrow sides. The icon once had a metal revetment, traces of which remain in the form of nail holes.

Provenance: Entered the museum collection in 1978; provenance unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photographs: Angel Nikolov).



St Nicholas

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 258

Dimensions: 20 × 22 × 3.8 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half – mid-19th century (?)

Artistic Center / Workshop: South Ural, Old Believers' icon

Condition: The panel is reinforced with two broad battens. Cracked paint layer; overpainting. Restored in 1982.

Inscriptions: *Сѣ. Николае чюд.* (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); *ӣс̄ х̄с̄* (Jesus Christ); *м̄р̄ ѿ̄ ѱ̄* (Mother of God).

Description: Saint Nicholas is shown half-length, blessing and holding an open Gospel. The icon has a shallow *kovcheg*. The frame is wide and light brown. On the back, in ink: *18th c.* (in Russian).

Provenance: Entered the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Archangel Michael with Saints Florus, Laurus, Modestus, and Blasius

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: ВИИ 256

Dimensions: 22.8 × 26.5 × 2–2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: End-19th – early-20th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages

Condition: Good. The panel is reinforced with two battens, one of which is missing.

Inscriptions: с архист михаиль (Saint Archangel Michael); іс хс (Jesus Christ); с флоръ (Saint Florus); с лавръ (Saint Laurus); с modestъ (Saint Modestus); с власїи (sic) (Saint Blasius).

On the back there are later inscriptions, scratched with a sharp instrument: [–]ризу[–]; Афонасово 770 [–] Михаила, С. Фрола ми икона ми по золоту секаному. Федору. Роцику (?) Кюескало (?) му. (...the revetment...; from Afonasofo, 770 [Arhangel] Mikhail, S. Frol; an icon ...chased on gold. To Fyodor. Roshchik (?) of Kieskalo (?).

Description: In the centre, Archangel Michael holds an *ubrus* (mandylion). At his sides stand Saint Florus and Saint Laurus; in front of them are Saint Modestus and Saint Blasius, shown in episcopal vestments holding a closed Gospel. The background is gold in the upper part, with a schematic ground below. The frame is decorated with engraved geometric ornaments.

Provenance: Acquired by the museum in 1978.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



Saints Cyril and Methodius

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Varna, storage

Inventory No.: 20

Dimensions: 18 × 14.7 × 2.1 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: 1902

Artistic Center / Workshop: Icon-painter V. P. Guryanov, Moscow

Condition: The panel is reinforced with two oppositely placed battens. Restored in 1991 by Robert Popov.

Inscriptions: *Свѣтъ Кирилъ. Свѣтъ Методій. Изографъ В. П. Гурьяновъ. 1902 г.* (Saint Cyril Equal-to-the-Apostles; Saint Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles; Icon painter V. P. Gurianov, 1902).

Description: The holy brothers are depicted in full length against a landscape background. Saint Cyril, dressed in the robes of a great schema monk, holds a scroll bearing the Cyrillic alphabet. Saint Methodius, dressed in episcopal vestments, holds a tall processional cross and a chalice. The icon has a wide brown frame. In the lower left corner, the painter's signature, V. P. Gurianov, an icon painter from the village of Mstera who was active in Moscow, appears.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Grigорова, Totka. “Иконографски особености на три руски икони с образите на свети Кирил и свети Методий от България”. Пловдивски исторически форум IV (2020), No 1, 26-41 (31–34, fig. 4).

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Varna (photography: Angel Nikolov).



102

The Resurrection of Christ with Twelve Scenes

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 390

Dimensions: 27 × 31.3 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Severely damaged paint layer; traces of burning on the reverse. The panel was originally reinforced with two crossbars, now missing.

Inscriptions: Worn or illegible. On the reverse, an indecipherable ink inscription is preserved.

Description: In the centre appears the Resurrection of Christ in the Descent into Hell variant. Twelve narrative scenes frame the composition. Upper frame: Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, and Baptism of Christ; Left frame: Entry into Jerusalem and Crucifixion; Right frame: Raising of Lazarus and Transfiguration; Lower frame: Lamentation, Ascension, Old Testament Trinity, and Dormition of the Virgin. The panel features a shallow, double kovcheg and a broad ochre-coloured frame. Small holes along the edges indicate the former presence of a metal revetment, now lost.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Apparition of the Virgin to Saint Sergius of Radonezh

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 389

Dimensions: 26.5 × 31.2 × 2.8 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Trinity–Sergius Lavra or Kholuy (?).

Condition: Paint losses along borders. The panel is reinforced with two crossbars, one missing; the board is slightly warped. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: On the left, the Virgin is standing, holding a red abbatial staff. She is flanked by the Apostles Peter and John the Theologian. Before her kneels Saint Sergius, while behind him, one monk covers his eyes and another stands and watches. Above, within a circular medallion, appears the Old Testament Trinity. The icon has a shallow double 'kovcheg' and a suspension ring on the reverse.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Appearance of the Virgin to Saint Sergius of Radonezh

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 391

Dimensions: 23.1 × 28 × 3.1 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Early Last quart of the 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Paint losses; insect damage. Restored.

Inscriptions: Overpainted: я[ви]сѧ сѣтаѧ бѣа преподобномꙋ сергию (The Holy Theotokos Appeared to Venerable Sergius the Wonderworker); п сергїи (Venerable Sergius); нѣконъ (Nikon).

Description: The Virgin holds an abbatial staff; behind her stand the Apostles Peter and John. Saint Sergius kneels before her, with Saint Nikon behind him. At the upper centre appears the Old Testament Trinity in a semicircle. The icon has a shallow double *kovcheg* and an ochre-brown frame.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Saint John the Forerunner

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 71

Dimensions: 31 × 27.4 × 3.2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: End of the 17th – early 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Paint losses, especially along borders. Not restored.

Inscriptions: агѣ иванъ [im.] предотеча (Saint John the Forerunner); On the scroll: се | агнецъ | бѣжиі в|земля|и грѣхѣ | всего |мира | пока [итеся] (Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, repent—John 1:29).

Description: The saint is depicted full-length, winged, blessing and holding a chalice with the image of Christ as the Lamb, and an open scroll. Below are two scenes: The Baptism of Christ and the Nativity of Saint John. The icon has a shallow double *kovcheg* and an olive-green frame; God the Father appears in the upper border.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Double Miracle of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki and Saint George

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 178

Dimensions: 27.2 × 31.7 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Late 17th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Damaged paint layer; losses in lower part; cracked panel. Consolidated and cleaned.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: Saint Demetrius rides a grey horse, trampling a fallen warrior; Saint George rides a white horse slaying the dragon before a maiden. Two angels crown the saints; Christ Emmanuel appears above in a heavenly segment. The icon has a wide double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Miracle of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 84

Dimensions: 18.2 × 24.3 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Paint losses; insect damage. Restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: Saint Demetrius rides a horse spearing a fallen crowned rider. In the background appears a church with two maidens holding an icon of the saint, an angel behind them, and Christ blessing from the clouds above. An angel crowns the saint. The icon has a shallow double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Miracle of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 385

Dimensions: 26.8 × 31.1 × 3.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Early 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Abraded paint along frame. Not restored..

Inscriptions: [о]бра́ сѣтаго вѣ. мѣка. димитріа сѣлѣ; (Icon of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki); ии́с хрѣ (Jesus Christ); с. м. димитріи победѣи цѣрѣ мамаѣ (Saint Martyr Demetrius defeated Tsar Mamai).

Description: Saint Demetrius spears a fallen crowned rider. Behind a colonnaded church two maidens hold an icon of the saint; Christ blesses from the clouds above; an angel crowns the saint. The icon has a shallow double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



109

The Mandylion

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 102

Dimensions: 28 × 31.5 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Late 17th – early 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Lower right corner missing; panel decayed and worm-eaten; painted surface relatively well preserved. Missing section reconstructed.

Inscriptions: неꙋкотворенны ѡбра³ (Icon not made by Hands).

Description: The face of Christ appears on a red ornamented cloth tied at the upper corners. Background olive green; nimbus silver. Shallow double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Two-tier Icon

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 177

Dimensions: 23.2 × 27.8 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Paint losses; traces of burning on right frame; decayed and worm-eaten. Restored, with losses filled and retouched.

Inscriptions: иѡси^о (Joseph); їѣ хѣ (Jesus Christ); мѣ ѡѣ (Mother of God); иѡанѣ (John); сѣ [ніколай?] (Saint Nicholas?); сѣ тихѡн (Saint Tikhon); сѣ флѡрѣ (Saint Florus); сѣ лавѣрѣ (Saint Laurus); сѣ аніси[а] (Saint Anysi[a]).

Description: Upper register: Nativity of Christ and Descent into Hell.

Lower register: full-length saints – an unidentified hierarch, Saint Tikhon, Sts. Florus and Laurus, and Saint Anysia. Shallow double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photographs: Angel Nikolov)



111

Two-tier Icon

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 83

Dimensions: 18 × 22.7 × 2.9 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Paint and ground losses; cracked panel; consolidated.

Inscriptions: None preserved.

Description: Upper register: Mother of God Eleousa and bust of Saint Nicholas.

Lower register: Saint George on horseback and three half-length saints.

Double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photographs: Angel Nikolov)



The Apparition of the Virgin to Saint Sergius of Radonezh

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 180

Dimensions: 32 × 36.5 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Last quart of the 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholui

Condition: Paint losses; insect damage. Restored.

Inscriptions: Illegible.

Description: The Virgin stands with the Apostles Peter and John behind her; Saint Sergius kneels before her, another monk shielding his eyes. In the background: a monastic cell with books, an *epitachelion*, and icons of the Virgin and Saint Nicholas; above appears the New Testament Trinity in clouds. Baroque painted frame.

Provenance: Unknown.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photographs: Angel Nikolov)



Deësis

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 171

Dimensions: 25 × 30 × 2.6 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half- mid 18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Filled paint losses; possibly overpainted on a reused panel.

Inscriptions: ἰη̅ς χ̅ς (Jesus Christ); м̅р̅ ѿ̅ѣ (Mother of God); стои̅ ѿ̅ан̅ъ̅ пр̅ѣ̅те̅ча̅ (Saint John the Forerunner).

Description: Christ Pantokrator seated with closed Gospel; the Mother of God and Saint John stand in supplication. Stylized architectural background; shallow double *kovcheg*.

Provenance: Village of Gabrovtsi. It was acquired in 1983.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow”

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 164

Dimensions: 27.5 × 33.5 × 3 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Relatively good. Not restored.

Inscriptions: Сѡбра прѣтиѡ бѣи всемѣ скорбѡщи Радость (The Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos “Joy of All Who Sorrow”); мѣр ѡу (Mother of God); и ѣ х ѣ (Jesus Christ).

Description: The Virgin stands full-length with outstretched arms; above appears the Mandylion; four angels and several supplicants surround her. Silvered background with ornamental frame.

Provenance: Church of the Transfiguration, Svishtov. It was acquired by the museum in 1983.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Saint Theodosius of Totma

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 241

Dimensions: 25,4 × 31 × 2.6 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: End of the 18th-early 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Minor paint losses. Not restored.

Inscriptions: вбра³ прпгнаго феодосия | тотёскаго новоявлёнаго (Icon of Venerable Theodosius of Totma the Newly Revealed);

On the scroll: покаи|те ся | при бл|и жи б|о ся ц|р|свие (Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand—Matthew 3:2)

Description: The saint stands full-length at right, gesturing toward a monastery; Christ blesses from clouds above left.

Provenance: Church of the Transfiguration, Svishtov. It was acquired by the museum in 1983.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photographs: Angel Nikolov)



Saint Nicholas

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, storage

Inventory No.: 165

Dimensions: 26 × 31 × 2.5 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-third quart of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Palekh

Condition: Overpainted frame; minor paint losses.

Restoration: Not restored.

Inscriptions: Сѣѣи Нїколае чѣл (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); мѣр. ѿѣ. (Mother of God); їсѣ. хсѣ. (Jesus Christ).

In the open gospel: во время ѡно ста їсѣ на | месте равне ї народъ | ученикъ | его и множество мнѡго людеи ѡ всеа иудеи їерѣ (At that time Jesus stood on the plain and a multitude of His disciples from all Judea <and> Jerusalem—Luke 6:17).

Description: Half-length Saint Nicholas blesses and holds an open Gospel; medallions of Christ and the Virgin appear at his shoulders. Wide ochre-brown frame.

Provenance: Church of the Holy Trinity, Veliko Tarnovo. It was acquired by the museum in 1983.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo (photography: Angel Nikolov)



117

The Mother of God of Vladimir

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Vidin, on display

Inventory No: BG. VIDIN. 4.1

Dimensions: 20 × 28 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: First half – mid-18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Kholoui

Condition: Worm-eaten; paint losses. Not restored..

Inscriptions: Владимірскіа | Пресѣтиа Бцы (Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir).

Description: Replica of the wonderworking icon of the Vladimir Mother of God. Ornamented frame.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Vidin (photography: Ivan Vanev)



Four-Part Icon

Collection: Regional Museum of History – Vidin, storage

Inventory No.: ВДМ II 122

Dimensions: 20.5 × 27.5 × 2 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-18th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Vladimir icon-painting villages (Kholoui)

Condition: Good; Not restored.

Inscriptions: м̄р̄ ѿ̄у (Mother of God); ӣс̄ х̄с̄ (Jesus Christ); с̄. николае ч̄у (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker); с̄. Георги (Saint George); ар̄. міхайль (Archangel Michael).

Description: Divided into four fields: upper – Mother of God of Kazan and Saint Nicholas; lower – Saint George slaying the dragon and Archangel Michael the Commander of the Fearsome Hosts. Ornamental floral frame.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Regional Museum of History – Vidin (photography: Ivan Vanev)



119

Four-Part Icon

Collection: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Yambol region

Dimensions: 47 × 49 × 9 cm (with frame)

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: Central Russia

Condition: Excellent. Not restored.

Inscriptions: С. велик. м. Георгій (Saint Great Martyr George); С. архистр. Михаилъ (Saint Archangel Michael); С. благ. к. Борисъ (Saint Right-Believing Prince Boris); С. благ. Глебъ (Saint Right-Believing Prince Gleb); С. м. [И]лита; (Saint Martyr Julitta); С. м. Сапфѣра (Saint Martyr Sapphira); С. Маріа Магдалина (Saint Mary Magdalene); С. м. Матрона (Saint Martyr Matrona).

Description: The icon is divided into four compartments, each containing paired full-length figures set against a landscape background. Upper register: Saint George and the Archangel Michael; Saints Boris and Gleb. Lower register: Saint (unidentified) and Saint Sapphira; Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Matrona. The icon is set in a gilded wooden frame.

Provenance: Brought from Russia to the Yambol monastery.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



The Mother of God Eleousa (Korsun type)

Collection: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Yambol region

Dimensions: 45 × 51 × 6 cm

Material: Tempera on wood

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Artistic Center / Workshop: South Russia

Condition: Excellent.

Inscriptions: МП ΘΥ (Mother of God); ИИС ХС (Jesus Christ).

Description: The Mother of God and the Christ Child are depicted half-length; the Virgin tenderly presses the Child to her cheek. The icon has a narrow gilded ornamental inner frame and is set in a wooden, partially gilded outer frame.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Photo Credits: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov)



Saint Alexander Nevsky

Collection: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Yambol region

Icon from the small (upper) iconostasis tier

Dimensions: 26 × 31 cm

Material: Oil paints, wooden panel

Date: Mid-19th century

Artistic centre / workshop: Moscow or Saint-Petersburg

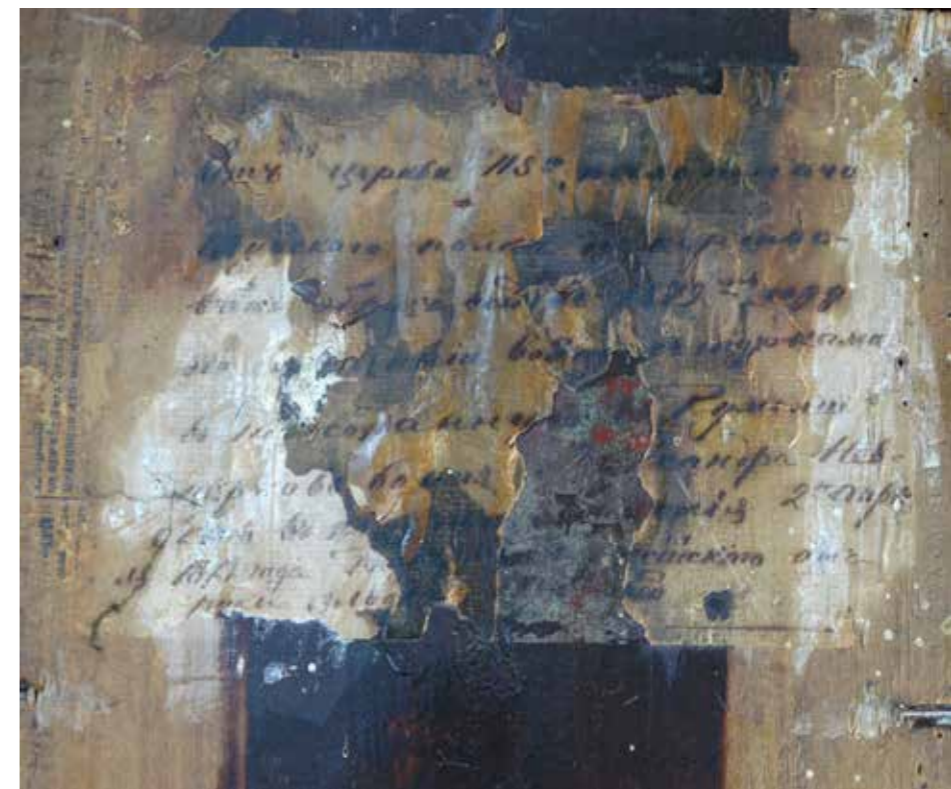
Condition: Good

Inscriptions: On the back, a partly legible inscription on a glued paper label states that the icon was donated in the spring of 1879 to the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky by the marching chapel of the 118th Shuisky Infantry Regiment, dedicated to the same saint.

Description: The saint is depicted half-length, wearing armour and a fur-lined cloak, crowned, and holding a sword and a scroll.

Bibliography: Nikolov, Angel. “Saints and Soldiers’ Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 317-328 (321, ill. 9)

Photo Credits: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov).



Saint Juvenaly

Collection: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Yambol region

Free-standing

Material: Tempera, wood, embroidered riza, velvet

Dimensions: 17.5 × 21 × 5 cm (with box)

Date: End of the 19th century

Condition: Good

Inscriptions : *Святитель [im.] Ювеналій* (Saint Juvenaly);

Reverse: *Въ день Ангела іеродіак. Ювеналію Донскому 1899 го. 2. Іюля отъ А. Д.* (Gift to Hierodeacon Juvenaly Donskoy on his name day, 2 July 1899, from A.D.).

Description: The saint is depicted half-length, blessing and holding a closed Gospel. Only the face and hands are painted; the remainder is covered with an embroidered silver-thread *riza* set with glass “stones” on the crown and Gospel, three of which are missing. The saint’s medallion has been loSaint The icon is housed in a carved box painted to imitate metal. The back is covered with velvet embroidered with a dedicatory inscription.

The icon belonged to Hieromonk Juvenaly (secular name Yulian Danilovich Zagorulko), abbot of Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery near Yambol from 1900.

Bibliography: Nikolov, Angel. “Saints and Soldiers’ Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 317-328 (323, ill. 14–15)

Photo Credits: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov).



*Въ день Ангела
іеродіак. Ювеналію
Донскому
1899 го. 2. Іюля
отъ А. Д.*

123

Altar Cross

Material: Silver

Dimensions: 23 × 36 × 1 cm

Date: 1879

Maker: Master Sergey Verkhovtsev

Artistic centre / workshop: Saint Petersburg

Condition: Excellent

Inscriptions and Hallmarks:

On the Crucifix (upper part): IHCI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews);

Hallmarks:

- 1). Double-headed eagle / C. B. – owner of the silverware factory S. F. Verkhovtsev;
- 2) И. I /1879 – unknown assayer and year of hallmarking;
- 3) 84 – silver fineness mark; 4) crossed anchors – coat of arms of Saint Petersburg.

Description: The three upper arms of the cross terminate in trefoils; the lower arm is rounded. The Crucified Christ is cast in high relief. The cross and the Jerusalem landscape below are engraved. On the upper arm appear God the Sabaoth and the Holy Spirit in relief; on the sides, in circular medallions, are high-relief busts of the Mother of God and Saint John the Theologian. Hallmarks are engraved on the lower arm and along the sides.

The cross is preserved in a wooden case with a fitted recess.

Bibliography: Nikolov, Angel. “Saints and Soldiers’ Nineteenth-Century Russian Religious Art in Southern Bulgaria.” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 317-328 (321–322, ill. 13).

Photo Credits: Saint Alexander Nevsky Monastery (photography: Angel Nikolov).



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οι εσωτερικές σελίδες

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(34x16=**544**σελίδες)

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VISUAL CULTURE, PIETY
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(16TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY)



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