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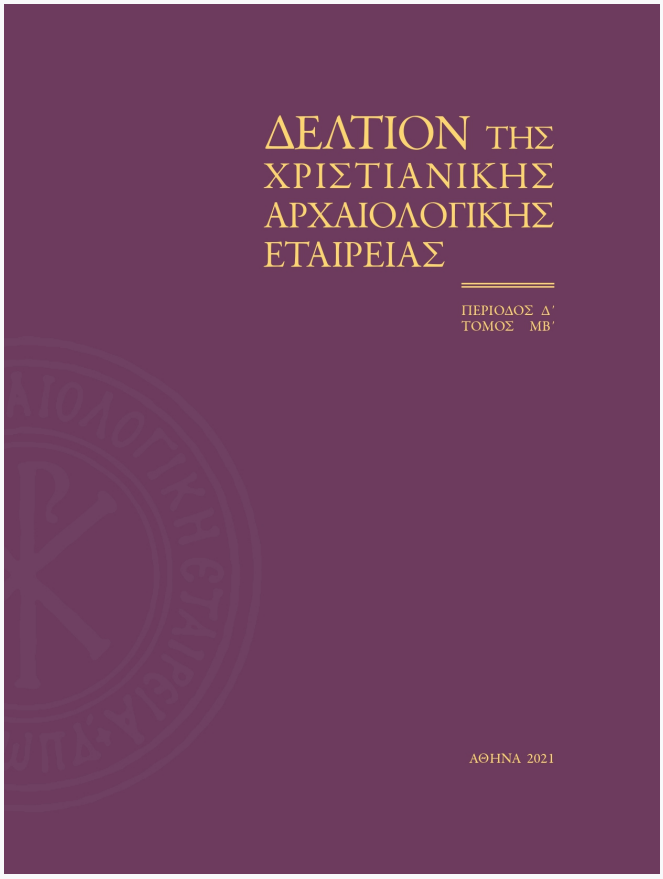

Αμφίγραπτη εικόνα από το Νόβγκοροντ με την «Παναγία του Ση¬μείου και την αγία Ιουλιανή» του πρώτου τρίτου του 13ου αιώνα: όψεις του εικονο¬γραφικού προγράμματος

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Elena Saenkova

A TWO-SIDED NOVGORODIAN ICON "OUR LADY OF THE SIGN AND MARTYR JULIANA" OF THE FIRST THIRD OF THE 13TH CENTURY: ASPECTS OF THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMME

Στο άρθρο εξετάζεται από εικονογραφική και ιστορική άποψη μία αμφίγραπτη εικόνα της Πινακοθήκης Τρετιακόφ, στην οποία απεικονίζεται η Παναγία του Σημείου (Βλαχερνίτισσα) και η αγία Ιουλιανή με άγιες στα περιθώρια. Το πρότυπο της παράστασης της Θεοτόκου ίσως είναι η λατρευτική εικόνα της εκκλησίας των Βλαχερνών στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Πιθανότατα πρόκειται για έργο που παρήγγειλε ο αρχιεπίσκοπος Νόβγκοροντ Αντώνιος, ο οποίος είχε επισκεφθεί την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Το 1218 έκτισε μια πέτρινη εκκλησία στη μονή της Αγίας Βαρβάρας, για την οποία φαίνεται ότι προοριζόταν η εικόνα.

A two-sided icon, now in the Tretyakov Gallery, depicting the Virgin of the Sign (Blachernitissa) and St Juliana, with the representations of saint women on the margins is examined on iconographic and historical grounds. The model for the image of the Mother of God could have been the icon venerated in the Constantinopolitan church of Blachernae. It was probably commissioned by the archbishop of Novgorod Anthony, who had visited Constantinople. In 1218 he built a stone church in the convent of Saint Barbara, for which this icon was presumably intended.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

13ος αιώνας, πρώιμη ρωσική ζωγραφική, αμφίγραπτες εικόνες, Παναγία Βλαχερνίτισσα, αγία Ιουλιανή η μάρτυς, μητροπολίτης Νόβγκοροντ Αντώνιος, Νόβγκοροντ.

Keywords

13th century; early Russian painting; two-sided icons; Our Lady of the Sign; Virgin Blachernitissa; St Juliana the martyr; Anthony, archbishop of Novgorod; Novgorod.

In the collections of the State Tretyakov Gallery there is a two-sided icon "Our Lady of the Sign and Martyr Juliana" (Figs 1, 2), which was bequeathed to the museum by the artist Pavel Korin along with his collection of icons and paintings[1]. P. Korin had purchased this icon from the famous art historian Alexander Anisimov, who reportedly acquired it from Zverin Convent in Novgorod[2]. The icon was restored by I. Baranov in the 1940s. In 2015 it underwent technical and technological analysis by S. Sverdlova and D. Pershin at the State Tretyakov Gallery[3].

On the front side of the icon, on gold ground is depicted the image of the Mother of God orans with the Christ Child on her chest, set also agianst the gold ground within a medallion (Fig. 1). The Virgin Mary (Theotokos) wears a green tunic and a cerise maphorion. Her garments and those of the Christ Child are lavishly decorated not only with painted motifs but also with other techniques. The embroidered cuffs (*epimanikia*) and the golden border of the maphorion of the Virgin, as well as

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[1] The icon came into the museum collection in 1967. Registration number: 2440. Dimensions: 75,5x64x2,8 cm.

[2] K. Onasch, *Ikonen*, Berlin 1961, 352-353. V. I. Antonova, *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo v sobranii Pavla Korina*, Moscow 1966, 25.

[3] *Drevnerusskaya zhivopis' XII – XIII vekov: Gosudarstvennaya Tretyakovskaja galereya. Katalog sobrania* (*Early Russian painting of the 12th to 13th centuries: State Tretyakov gallery, catalogue of the collection*) (in Russian), 3, Moscow 2020, no. 11 on p. 332-336.

Fig. 1. Moscow, The State Tretyakov Gallery. Front side of the two-sided icon. Our Lady of the Sign, first third of the 13th century.

Fig. 2. Moscow, The State Tretyakov Gallery. Reverse side of the two-sided icon. Martyr Juliana, first third of the 13th century.

Fig. 3. Saint Alexandra on the upper margin of the icon's front side, detail (see Fig. 1).

Christ's attire are adorned with the chased ornament, consisting of dots on intersecting lines[4]. The nimbus of the Mother of God is flanked by two medallions. In the left one is the monogram "M[P] ΘY"; no inscription is preserved in the right one. Christ is represented against the gold ground, holding a red scroll in his hand. Medallions on either side of his image display the letters "IC XC".

On the upper margin of the front side of the icon there are three half-length figures of female saints. The central image of a saint in a green maphorion is that of St Alexandra, according to the partially preserved inscription: [*ΑΛΕΞΑ*]*ΝΔΡΑ* [*ΑΓΙ*]*Α* (Alexandra Hagia) (Fig. 3). This image is in better condition than the other two half-length figures, as most of the details have survived. To her left is the image of a saint martyr in a red maphorion, without an inscribed name, and to her right only a fragment of the figure survives. In the space between St Alexandra and the saint martyr in red is a section of a green circle; possibly it was a pictorial imitation of decorative circles represented on gold and silver grounds of Byzantine icons. On the right margin, two full-length figures remain: a saint hierarch and a young warrior or one of the Russian princes, St Boris or St Gleb[5].

[4] A. S. Preobrazhenskii, "Chekannyi ornamental'nyi dekor novgorodskikh icon XV veka", *Trudy Central'nogo muzeya drevnerusskoj kul'tury i iskusstva imeni Andreya Rubleva*, 7: *Putem ornamenta: issledovania po iskusstvu vizantiyskogo mira* ("Punched Ornamental Decoration of 15th Century Icons of Novgorod") (in Russian, abstracts in English), ed. A. L. Saminskii, Moscow 2013, 100.

[5] Sts Boris and Gleb (990s (?) – 1015), Prince Vladimir's sons, became the first martyrs to be canonized in Kievan Rus after being assassinated by their elder brother Sviatopolk who struggled for power. It is noteworthy that Anthony the Archbishop of Novgorod who visited Constantinople in the early 13th century, saw an icon of Sts Boris and Gleb in Saint Sophia. See: A. Jouravel, *Die Kniga palomnik des Antonij von Novgorod. Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Imagines Medii Aevi. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung 47), Wiesbaden 2019, 200, 328.

Fig. 4. Saint Barbara on the left margin of the icon's reverse side, detail (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 5. Saint Barbara, detail (see Fig. 2). Photograph in the infrared spectrum (1100 nm).

Depicted on the back of the icon is Saint Juliana the martyr with the cross in her hand, set against the red ground (Fig. 2). On either side of her figure are medallions with the inscriptions "*УЛЕАНА*" ("Uleana") to her right, and "*М(у)ЦЕНИЦА*" ("Martyr") to her left. The inscriptions below the medallions read "*МУЦЕНИЦА Х(с)ВА*" ("Martyr of Christ") and "*АГИА*" ("Hagia") respectively. These inscriptions are contemporaneous with those of the medallions above and, in a way, duplicate their meaning, which is quite rare, if not unique, for Early Russian icon painting. The martyr is represented wearing richly decorated garments. Her veil is embellished with three ornamented and pearl-embroidered circles; the one on the front with a rosette and in the two others with a cruciform (x) design and little circles; two larger rosettes are sewn on the shoulders of the mantle.

Fig. 6. The State Tretyakov Gallery. Face of the Holy Virgin (detail of the Fig. 1).

Fig. 7. The State Tretyakov Gallery. Face of St. Martyr Juliana (detail of the Fig. 2).

The sleeves of the blue tunic have cuffs (*epimanikia*) decorated with embroidery, red jewels and pearls, each *epimanikion* with its own pattern.

On the side margins, which were initially white, there are three pairs of full-length figures. The upper pair (inscriptions are lost) is traditionally identified as the Saint Healers, because the objects in their hands bring to mind small medicine chests. The middle pair is identified by the fragmentary inscriptions as St Barbara the Great Martyr ("*ВРОВАРА*") to the left (Figs 4, 5), and St Timothy the Apostle ("*Т*[*И*]*МО*[*ФЕЇ*]") to the right. The lower pair of figures are St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker ("[*НИ*]*КОЛА*") on the left and an unidentified saint on the right (with no inscription).

Iconography and iconographic programme

The technical and technological analysis confirmed that both sides of the icon, including the margins with the images of the saints, were painted at the same time by the same master, although the painting's state of preservation gives us a slightly different impression. The image on the front side, with the gold ground, is more majestic and solemn in appearance (Fig. 6). The one on the back side is no less expressive (Fig. 7), but the design is somewhat simpler and the gold is replaced with vermillion on the background and with orpiment in the decoration of the martyr's robes. The images of the Mother of God and of the Martyr Juliana have been painted with the use of identical materials and techniques.

According to the hypothesis proposed in earlier articles about the icon, the image on the front side might have been the first copy of the miraculous Novgorod icon of Our Lady of the Sign, dated in 1130-1140 (Fig. 8)[6]. However, these two depictions have several essential differences which lead us to conclude that the master used another model. First and foremost is the size of the medallion with the Christ Child, which in the icon under discussion is much smaller and outlined with a wide dark band, which differentiates it from the traditional iconography of Our Lady of the Incarnation. Moreover, the monogram of Christ is inscribed in two small circles on either side of his nimbus, and not on the ground of the medallion. The garments of Christ are also different: he wears a royal dalmatic with a scapular and two *clavi*, whereas in the miraculous image he is dressed in the traditional *chiton* and *himation*. However, the most notable peculiarity of the icon from the collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery is the original system of the drapery on the garments of the Virgin.

There is substantial literature on the iconography of the orant Mother of God with the Infant Christ on her chest (at the centre of her bosom), conventionally called "Our Lady of the Incarnation"[7]. Accurately dated images of this type appeared on Byzantine seals and coins, starting from the mid-11th century – the seal of Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa of 1059-1067[8], the nomisma (gold histamenon) of the co-empresses Zoe and Theodora of 1042[9], etc. Later, this iconographic type became widespread in both half- and full-length variants on coins and seals, and then in monumental painting and icon-painting.

Art historians, such as N. P. Kondakov, M. Tatić-Djurić, and E. S. Smirnova, are almost unanimous in their opinion that the aforesaid iconography can be traced back to the sacred images of Constantinople's Blachernae church

[6] *Iconi Velikogo Novgoroda XI – nachala XVI veka* (*Novgorod the Great Icons of 11th – early 16th centuries*) (in Russian), Moscow 2008, no. 3 on p. 89-99.

[7] N. P. Kondakov, *Iconografiya Bogomateri*, 2, Moscow 1915, 108-113. M. Tatić-Djurić, "Vrata slova: Ka liku i znachenju Vlahernitise", *ZLU* 8 (1972), 63-89. M. Tatić-Djurić, "L'icône de la Vierge du Signe", *ZLU* 13 (1977), 3-26. H. Hunger, "Heimsuchung und Schirmherrschaft über Welt und Menschheit: Μήτηρ Θεοῦ ἡ Ἐπίσκεψις", *Studies in Byzantine sigillography*, 4, ed. N. Oikonomides, Washington, D. C. 1995, 33-42. E. S. Smirnova, "Novgorodskaya icona 'Bogomater Znamenie': nekotorye voprosy bogorodichnoji iconografii XII veka" ("The Novgorodian Icon of the 'Znamenie': Some Problems of the Iconography of the Virgin in 12th Century"), *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Balkani, Rus'*, Saint Petersburg 1995, 290, 292, 296 (in Russian, abstracts in English). E. S. Smirnova, "Some Contributions to the Iconography of the Blachernitissa (The Study of the Two Russian Icons of the 12th-13th Centuries)", *Λαμπηδών. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη*, 2, Αθήνα 2003, 203-210, etc.

[8] G. Zacos – A. Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1, Basel 1972, nos 89, 80.

[9] *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine era. A.D. 843-1261* (exhibition catalogue), eds H. C. Evans – W. D. Wixom, New York 1997, no. 147G on p. 213-217. V. Penna, "The Mother of God on Coins and Lead Seals", *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (exhibition catalogue), ed. M. Vassilaki, Athens – Milan 2000, 211, fig. 146.

but they fail to agree on its prototype or prototypes. Bearing in mind that such depictions of the Theotokos on coins and seals were often accompanied by the epithet "Episkepsis", some historians presume that a now-lost revered image of that name might have served as a model to emulate[10].

According to another version, the new iconography was elaborated not earlier than the middle of the 11th century and was based on specific venerated images of the Blachernae church: a marble relief representing the Virgin Orans, with special holes in the palms for the holy water of the miracle-working spring, and an ancient icon of the Virgin Nikopoia, found in the Blachernae in 1030-1031[11]. The iconography of Our Lady of the Incarnation preserved semantic ties with both prototypes: the hands raised in prayer allude to the intercession of the Theotokos for all Mankind before the Righteous Judge at the Last Judgement, while the triumphal image of the incarnated Saviour on her chest implied the possibility of praying before this image for victory over enemies, since even before Iconoclasm the Nikopoia icon was taken on military campaigns. However, all these nuances only enriched the meaning of the new iconographic type, which was intended to give a visual expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Logos (Word) from the Virgin Mary[12].

One of the most concise yet comprehensive wordings of this dogma already appeared in the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14), quoted in the Gospel of Matthew (1:23): "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel". This text was cited by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and other Holy Fathers in their discussions of the birth of the Saviour and his redemptive mission, as well as by the authors of liturgical hymns praising the Logos which descended "into the womb of the Virgin" for the Salvation of Mankind, and the Virgin herself: "Since it was Thy will, O Saviour, to bestow upon us salvation, Thou didst take up Thy dwelling within the Virgin's womb, and didst show her to be the protectress of the world...": Theotokion of the 7th ode of the canon (the 8th echos) composed by St John of Damascus. There is an inscription with similar meaning on the Sinai icon "Our Lady of Blachernae (Blachernitissa) with the Prophet Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem", painted by the master Peter in around 1223[13].

Since the late 11th – early 12th century, the iconographic type of Our Lady of the Incarnation has been used in the decoration of the sanctuary apses, the subject of which is the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Such examples are encountered on Cyprus, in the Panagia Theotokos church at Trikomo[14], dated to the early 12th century, and the church of the Holy Apostles at Pera Chorio, of 1160-1180[15]. In Russian art it is found in the main apse and the prothesis of the church of the Saviour on Nereditsa, of 1199 (both full- and half-length images)[16]. The presence of two images of Our Lady of the Incarnation in the altar-space of the Nereditsa church clearly demonstrates the variety of additional meanings that this iconographic type could acquire in various contexts (Fig. 9). Thus, according to N. Pivovarova, the half-length image in the sanctuary corresponded to the office of Proskomide, as a reminder of the removal of the Lamb from the Prosphora[17].

Depictions of Our Lady of the Sign, introduced into new iconographic programmes, also corresponded to the composition of the Liturgy of the Church Fathers in the lower zone of wall-paintings in the sanctuary, where the holy hierarchs sacrificed the Infant Christ, incarnated from the Virgin Mary. The meaning of this iconography in the decoration programme of the sanctuary apse

[10] I. Zervou Tognazzi, "L'iconografia e la 'Vita' delle miracolose icone della Theotokos Brefokratoussa: Blachernitissa e Odighitria", *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 40 (1986), 274-275. H. Hunger, "Μήτηρ Θεοῦ ἡ Ἐπίσκεψις", op.cit. (n. 7), 33-42. O. E. Etinhof, *Vizantiyskie icony VI – pervoi poloviny XIII veka v Rossii* (*Byzantine icons of 6th – first half of 11th century in Russia*), Moscow 2000, 138-139.

[11] Smirnova, "The Novgorodian Icon of the 'Znamenie'", op.cit. (n. 7), 290.

[12] Tatić-Djurić, "L'icône de la Vierge du Signe", op.cit. (n. 7), 3.

[13] *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (exhibition catalogue), eds R. S. Nelson – K. M. Collins, Los Angeles [3]2007, no. 53 on p. 258-261 (G. R. Parpulov).

[14] K. Kalokyris, *Ἡ Θεοτόκος εἰς τὴν εἰκονογραφίαν Ἀνατολῆς καὶ Δύσεως*, Thessaloniki 1972, pl. 23.

[15] A. H. S. Megaw – E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Church of the Holy Apostles at Perachorio, Cyprus, and its Frescoes", *DOP* 16 (1962), 287-288, fig. 12.

[16] N. Pivovarova, *Freski tserkvi Spasa na Nereditse v Novgorode: iconograficheskaya programma rospisi*, Saint Petersburg 2002, 28, pls 11, 15.

[17] Ibid., 28.

Fig. 8. Novgorod, Saint Sophia Cathedral. Front side of the two-sided icon. Our Lady of the Sign. 1130s-1140s, with later over-painting.

Fig. 9. Nereditsa, the church of the Saviour. The Mother of God of the Incarnation, 1199.

was proved by the fact that in the course of renovating the wall-paintings iconographers sometimes replaced the earlier image with the depiction of Our Lady of the Incarnation. Such a replacement was made, for example, in the church of Saint George Diasoritis on Naxos, painted in the mid-11th century. The image of the Mother of God Hodegetria was substituted for the depiction of Our Lady of the Incarnation in the 12th century[18].

Such images of the Theotokos were also placed above the church entrance, demonstrating their protective function, as in the church of the Panagia Forviotissa, Cyprus, painted in 1105/6[19]. Obviously, the relief images of Our Lady of the Sign, decorating the church walls, had the same function. Among them is an early 13th-century marble panel, brought from Constantinople to Venice and incorporated into the wall of the church of Santa Maria Mater Domini[20], as well as the relief in the exterior

[18] M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Άγιος Γεώργιος ο Διασορίτης της Νάξου. Οι τοιχογραφίες του 11ου αιώνα*, Athens 2016, 24, 32, pl. 4.

[19] Ch. Hadjichristodoulou – D. Myrianthefs, *The Church of Our Lady of Asinou*, Nicosia 2002, 7.

[20] K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, "The Mother of God in Sculpture", *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (exhibition

Fig. 10. Yuryev-Polsky, Saint George cathedral. The Mother of God of the Incarnation, relief, ca. 1230-1234.

sculptural decoration of Saint George Cathedral in Yuryev-Polsky, built ca. 1230-1234 (Fig. 10)[21].

The Eucharistic interpretation of the new iconography is confirmed by the use of such images for decorating *panagiaria* in the Athonite monasteries of Chilandar and Xeropotamou. The panagiarion from Chilandar monastery, dated to between the 10th and the 12th century, presents the half-length image of the Theotokos with the Infant Christ on her chest without a medallion, and the panagiarion known as "the Pulcheria Paten" from the Xeropotamou monastery, dated to the 14th century, carries the full-length image of Our Lady of the Sign. Inscriptions on the panagiaria, which were also used as patens during the Liturgy, reveal the role of the Theotokos in the Salvation of Mankind. The Mother of God depicted on the Chilandar panagiarion is symbolically associated with the altar, which became a place for the Divine Bread: *ΓΕΓΟΝΕΝ Η ΚΟΙΛΙΑ ΣΟΥ ΑΓΙΑ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΑ ΕΧΟΥΣΑ ΤΩΝ ΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΝ ΑΡΤ(Ο)Ν...* (Thy womb is become a holy table which holdeth the Heavenly Bread)[22].

catalogue), ed. M. Vassilaki, Athens – Milan 2000, 241, fig. 189.

[21] G. K. Vagner, *Mastera drevnerusskoj ckul'ptury. Rel'efy Jurieva-Pol'ckogo*, Moscow 1966, pl. 49.

[22] *Treasures of Mount Athos* (exhibition catalogue), managing ed.

Moreover, there is a rare example of the full-length image of Our Lady of the Incarnation on the aër (1216) from the church of Saint Sophia in Sofia, with a dedicatory inscription: *Ο CΑΡΚΑ ΛΑΒΩΝ ΕΞ ΑΠΕΙΡΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΚΟΡΗC + ΤΡΟΠΟΙC ΑΦΡΑCΤΟΙC Ω Θ(ΕΟ)Υ Π(Α) ΤΡ(Ο)C ΛΟΓΕ / + ΗΝ ΝΥΝ ΟΡΩΜΕ[Ν ΑΝΘΡΟ-ΠΟΙC Π]ΡΟΚΕΙΜΕΝΗΝ + ΕΙC ΕCΤΙΑCΙΝ ΚΑΝ ΠΑCΙ ΠΑΡ ΑΞΙΑΝ...* (Oh Thou, Logos of God the Father, Who tookest the Heavenly Flesh from the Holy Virgin, so now we see this Divine Body prepared for eating by all of men, though nobody [of us] is worthy of receiving It...) (The National History Museum in Sofia)[23].

The icon-painting tradition also included images of Our Lady of the Incarnation in the full- and half-length variants. The two earliest surviving examples of the full-length type are the Sinai icon "Our Lady of Blachernae (Blachernitissa) with the Prophet Moses and Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem", painted by the master Peter (ca. 1223/24), and "The Virgin Mary Great Panagia" from the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Yaroslavl in around 1224 (Tretyakov Gallery, Fig. 11)[24]. The half-length depictions, used as the orant images, were more common; for example, there is the miraculous Novgorod icon "Our Lady of the Sign" dated to the third or fourth decade of the 12th century[25], "The Virgin Blachernitissa" from the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Sinai, dated by D. Mouriki to the last quarter of the 13th century[26], the icon from the Phaneromeni church in Nicosia[27] and the icon from the church of the Holy Cross in Aska, Cyprus, probably painted in the 13th century (Museum of the Metropolis of Tamasou and Orinis)[28].

Slight differences between these earliest images, both in full- and half-length variants, concern predominantly the position of the medallion with Christ in the folds of the garments of the Holy Virgin, the design of her maphorion, the type of attire and attributes of the Christ Child. On the basis of the position of the medallion, these depictions can be divided into two groups. One group comprises mainly full-length images that maintain their genetic relation to the Orans iconography, where the medallion with the Christ Child on the chest of the Virgin Mary is represented as a flat disc placed on top of the draped garments, as can be seen, for example, in the wall-paintings in Nereditsa, in Trikomo, Pera Chorio, Asinou and the church of Saint Themonianos in Lysi, Cyprus, dated to the middle of the 13th century[29], as well as in the Sinai icons and reliefs. The other group includes images in which the maphorion seems to be adapted to accommodate the medallion with the Infant Christ: the wide folds of the maphorion are draped in such a way that the medallion appears to stand on its horizontal bordered edge, as in the Novgorod miraculous icon and in the panagiarion of Xeropotamou monastery. The icon discussed here belongs to this group. The Infant Christ is traditionally depicted wearing a chiton and himation, the edge of which hangs over the right shoulder; less frequently the Child is robed in a chiton or dalmatic, decorated with the scapular and two *clavi*, as in the mural painting at Trikomo on Cyprus and in the icons of Sinai Monastery and the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour at Yaroslavl. In the Yaroslavl icon Christ blesses with both hands, a gesture presumably connected with the particular liturgical programme.

The described iconographic type is known in the academic literature by several names: "Blachernitissa" ("Our Lady of Blachernae"), "The Virgin Mary Great Panagia", "Our Lady of the Sign", "Our Lady of the Incarnation", etc.[30]. The same image in the Byzantine tradition is predominantly named as "Blachernitissa" (*Βλαχερνίτισσα*)[31], known from the seals of the Byzantine

A. A. Karakatsanis, Thessaloniki 1997, cat. no. and fig. 9.8 on p. 329-330 (K. Loverdou-Tsigarida); the Poulcheria paten: ibid., cat. no. and fig. 9.5 on p. 317, 324-325 (K. Loverdou-Tsigarida).

[23] *Hristianskoe ikusstvo Bolgarii* (exhibition catalogue), Moscow 2018, no. 11 on p. 44-45.

[24] *Drevnerusskaya zhivopis' XII – XIII vekov*, op.cit. (n. 3), no. 15 on p. 430-459.

[25] *Iconi Velikogo Novgoroda*, op.cit. (n. 6), no. 3 on p. 89-99.

[26] *Σινᾶ: Οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Ἁγίας Αἰκατερίνης*, gen. ed. C. Manafis, Athens 1990, 117-118, fig. 61.

[27] *Maniera Cypria. The Cypriot painting of the 13th century between two worlds* (exhibition catalogue), ed. I. A. Eliades, Nicosia 2017, 92, fig. 36.

[28] Ibid., 88, fig. 23.

[29] A. Weyl Carr – L. J. Morrocco, *A Byzantine Masterpiece Recovered, the Thirteenth-Century Murals of Lysi, Cyprus*, Austin, TX 1991, 43-47, pl. 1.4, fig. 14.

[30] Tatić-Djurić, "L'icône de la Vierge du Signe", op.cit. (n. 7), 3-27.

[31] On the basis of the surviving works of art, the name "Blachernitissa" seems to have accompanied images of the Mother of God belonging to various iconographic types, which were connected

Fig. 11. Moscow, the State Tretyakov Gallery. Icon from the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Yaroslavl. The Mother of God of the Incarnation or the Great Panagia, ca. 1224.

emperors[32], "The Virgin Mary Great Panagia" (*Η Μεγάλη Παναγία* or *Η Παναγία*). In mural painting such images are sometimes accompanied by epithets borrowed from the liturgical texts (for example, in the sanctuary apse of the Panagia church at Trikomo, Cyprus, there is a whole line which paraphrases the verses of Stanza 2 from the Akathistos Hymn to the Theotokos[33]), as well as by

with the veneration of several images of the Virgin Mary in the Blachernae church. See: Zervou Tognazzi, "L'iconografia", op.cit. (n. 10), 270-271. Etinhof, *Vizantiyskie icony*, op.cit. (n. 10), 132.

[32] V. S. Shandrovskaya, "Pechati i monety vizantiyskikh imperatorov s izobrazheniem Bogomateri", *Vizantiyskij vremennik* 58 (1999), 94-211.

[33] A. Stylianou – J. A. Stylianou, *The painted churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine art*, Nicosia [2]1997, 488.

toponymic epithets (e.g., "Forviotissa" in the fresco with a half-length figure of the Virgin Mary from the church of Panagia Forviotissa at Asinou, Cyprus).

The earliest icons of Our Lady of the Incarnation, both full- and half-length types, have no inscriptions – perhaps there were inscriptions originally, but were later lost. However, the iconographic affinity with works in decorative and applied arts, sphragistics and numismatics, enabled historians to publish some of them with borrowed names: for example, the icon from the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour at Yaroslavl – with the epithet "Great Panagia" (Fig. 11), two icons from the Sinai collection – as "Blachernitissa", while the Russian icons with the half-length images were given the name "Our Lady of the Sign", which they inherited from the venerated Novgorod icon.

Unfortunately, we do not know the original name of the icon which was glorified in Novgorod in about 1170, during the military conflict with Suzdal, and went down in history as "Our Lady of the Sign"[34]. Although historians tend to consider that the cult of this icon as the palladium of Novgorod had already existed by the 13th century, its name appeared in menologia, the Narration of the icon, and other written sources from the 14th century onward[35], and in icons since the 15th century. Subsequently, this name was given not only to copies of the miraculous icon, but also to practically all half-length images of Our Lady of the Incarnation. Such a wide use of the name "Our Lady of the Sign"[36] bespeaks the meaningfulness of this concept, which reflects both the theological content of the iconography and the very history of the venerated image, which revealed a miracle or a "sign" in 1170.

The miraculous Novgorod icon "Our Lady of the Sign" might have had a direct relation to the relics in the possession of the Blachernae church. According to I. A. Sterligova, the icon, apart from its main function, was used also as a reliquary for relics of the Holy Virgin –it might have contained parts of her Blessed Robe and the Holy Girdle[37]. The presence of the Blachernae relics could explain the earliest setting of the icon's feast day in Russian liturgical practice, recorded in menologia in the first half of the 14th century, which included a rather short list of feasts dedicated to Byzantine icons[38]. Possibly, such a celebration held in honour of the icon on the 27th of November, was not only a reminder of the miracle that happened in 1170, it also followed the liturgical tradition of the Blachernae church, where the 2nd of July was set to commemorate the deposition there of the most venerable relic –the Robe of the Most Holy Theotokos–, and the 31st of July to commemorate the consecration of the church itself.

The icon in the collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery is traditionally called "Our Lady of the Sign", although it might well have had a name of its own. This assumption is confirmed by the position of the monogram of the Mother of God (*MP ΘY*) entirely in the left circle on the gold ground. The inscription in the right

[34] The name "Our Lady of the Sign", traditionally given to Russian icons depicting the Virgin in a half-length orans type with Christ in a medallion on her bosom, should be briefly explained here. According to the legend, during the course of the siege of Novgorod by Andrey Bogolubsky, the prince of Vladimir and Suzdal, in 1170, Elias, the archbishop of Novgorod, asked that the icon of the Mother of God was brought and placed on the town walls. During the battle, one of prince Andrey's arrows struck the icon and the Virgin turned her face to the Novgorod people – that was interpreted as a sign ("Znamenie" in Russian) of the Mother of God's protection. This legend was recorded in the 14th century, and the liturgical service for the feast of the icon of Our Lady of the Sign was composed in the early 15th century.

[35] O. V. Loseva, *Russkie mesiatseslovy XI-XIV vekov* (=*Russian Menologia of 11th-14th centuries*) (in Russian), Moscow 2001, 109-110, 212.

[36] The meaning of this concept in Christian culture is revealed in John Chrysostom's Homilies on Isaiah 7:14: "Τὸ γὰρ σημεῖον ἐκβαίνειν δεῖ τὴν κοινὴν ἀκολουθίαν καὶ τὴν τῆς φύσεως ὑπερβαίνειν συνήθειαν καὶ ξένον εἶναι καὶ παράδοξον, ὥστε ἕκαστον ἐπισημαίνεσθαι τῶν ὁρώντων καὶ ἀκουόντων. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ σημεῖον λέγεται, διὰ τὸ ἐπίσημον. Ἐπίσημον δὲ οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο, εἰ μέλλοι κρύπτεσθαι τῇ κοινωνίᾳ τῶν ἄλλων πραγμάτων." Jean Chrysostome, *Commentaire sur Isaïe*, introd., texte critique et notes par J. Dumontier (Sources chrétiennes 304), Paris 1983, 314, lines 55-59. "For a sign must come out of the usual order of things, from the ordinary course of nature, to have something strange, be wondrous and extraordinary to be noticed by everyone who sees and hears it. That is why it is called a sign, because it signifies. But it would not signify, if it remained hidden in the usual order of things" (English trans. by A. Tarlykova).

[37] I. A. Sterligova, "Relics of the Dormition of the Virgin in Old Russian art from the 12th to14th century", *Eastern Christian relics*, ed. A. M. Lidov, Moscow 2003, 555-556.

[38] The Invention of the Miasinskaya icon of the Mother of God in 864 was commemorated on the 1st of September, the Translation of the Holy Mandylion from Edessa to Constantinople on the 16th of August, see Loseva, *Russkie mesiatseslovy*, op.cit. (n. 35), 143, 408.

circle is lost, but it might have contained some epithet of the Theotokos, very brief, since only a few letters fit in the space of the medallion. Examples of such laconic inscriptions are known on seals, where the full-length image of Our Lady of the Sign is accompanied by the word *ἡ ἱερὰ* (i.e. holy, sacred), as on the seal of Cyril Metropolitan of Kiev, dated to 1225-1233[39]. The right medallion might have contained the Greek word *ἁγία*.

As mentioned above, the reverse side of the icon under consideration represents St Juliana. This image is the only example known in Russian art where St Juliana is shown with a veil worn over her mantle, whereas from the 13th century onwards this detail became widespread in the iconography of other martyrs. Jewels on the robes of St Juliana possibly point to her noble origin.

The Early Russian menologia mention feasts of St Juliana of Heliopolis, who was martyred together with the Great Martyr Barbara (their feasts are celebrated on the same day –the 4th of December), and St Juliana of Nicomedia, who was venerated in Kievan Rus –just like the Great Martyr Marina was venerated in Byzantium and in the West– for overcoming the devil who tempted her in prison (her feast is celebrated on the 21st of December). The image of St Juliana on our icon might represent a sort of a generic character derived from the veneration of several homonymous martyrs, each of whom has an individual memorial feast in the Church calendar, as it happened to the images of some other martyrs bearing the same name, e.g., Paraskeva, Anastasia, etc. In Russian art, the process of the personalization and the elaboration of the iconographic particularities of some female saints took place in the 16th century, due to the spread of the Vita icons. Thus, for example, the representations of St Anastasia the Pharmakolytria, St Anastasia the Roman, and Venerable Martyr Anastasia were individualized[40].

The images of St Juliana and St Barbara were closely intertwined: they were often portrayed together, for example, in the church of the Saviour on Nereditsa[41], in a two-sided icon "St Martyr Juliana. St Great Martyr Barbara", with the image on the front side dating to the late 12th-early 13th century, and the one on the back to the 15th century, in the Byzantine Museum of Kastoria[42], and elsewhere.

The depiction of St Juliana on the icon here, as well as in the fresco in the church of the Saviour on Nereditsa (1199), are among the earliest images of the saint in Russian Medieval art.

The margins of both sides of the icon contain full- and half-length figures of the saints. The holy woman in the middle of the front side upper margin is labeled Alexandra in the accompanying inscription. The Early Russian menologia include only two feasts in honour of holy women named Alexandra: on the 21st of April in commemoration of St Alexandra the Empress and on the 18th of May in commemoration of the St Martyr Alexandra of Ankyra, who was martyred with the Martyr Theodotus and six virgin martyrs[43]. Judging by the absence of royal regalia, we may assume that the icon depicts the Martyr Alexandra of Ankyra. Her image in such a significant place, as the center of the upper margin, suggests that she might have been a patron saint of the donor who commissioned the icon. The inscription next to her is rather unusual: the name on her left is followed by the word "hagia" on her right and not vice versa. Such a disposition can be observed on the seals with the images of the Great Martyrs, which belonged to some Russian princes, e.g., to prince Mstislav the Great (1076-1132). On his seal, the figure of St Theodore the Martyr, who was the prince's patron, is inscribed "Феодор Агиос" (Theodor Hagios)[44].

The margins of the reverse side are in better condition. There are three pairs of full-length figures, but only the inscriptions near the figures of St Barbara, St Timothy, and St Nicholas are preserved. Nonetheless, we could make

[39] V. L. Janin – P. G. Gajdukov, *Actovie petchati Drevnei Rusi X-XII veka* (=*Act seals of Ancient Russia of the X-XII centuries*), Moscow 1998, no. 53.

[40] *Sviataya velikomuchenitsa Anastasia. Sviashchennyi obraz i khramy v Evrope s VI po XXI vek* (=*Holy Great Martyr Anastasia. Sacred image and churches in Europe from VI to XXI century*), ed. P. Chakhotin, Saint Petersburg 2010, nos 246-276, 159-190.

[41] Pivovarova, *Freski tserkvi Spasa na Nereditse*, op.cit. (n. 16), 144-145, figs 158, 159.

[42] E. N. Tsigaridas, *Εἰκόνες τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Μουσείου καὶ ναῶν τῆς Καστοριᾶς (12ος-16ος αἰώνας)*, Athens 2018, no. 9 on p. 78-82, figs 26-28.

[43] Loseva, *Russkie mesiatseslovy*, op.cit. (n. 35), 322, 342.

[44] Janin – Gajdukov, *Actovie petchati Drevnei Rusi X-XII* veka, op.cit. (n. 39), no. 82a, 133.

a suggestion about the other saints' names. The upper pair (inscriptions are lost) is identified as Sts Healers because the objects in their hands bear a resemblance to small medicine chests. Due to the damages of the paint layers and the fact that the iconographic features are not explicit enough, art historians have different views on the identification of the saints supposed to be Sts Cyrus and John or Sts Cosmas and Damian, as well as Sts Florus and Laurus[45].

The pair in the middle is identified by the fragmentary inscriptions as St Great Martyr Barbara to the left (Fig. 4) and St Timothy the Apostle to the right. The image of the great martyr wearing a dark-blue dress, a red mantle with a decorative band around the neck and a cloth cap covering her red hair, has some analogies in Byzantine and Russian Medieval painting of the 12th – early 13th century, such as in the 12th-century icon "St Nicholas, the Venerable Sabbas and the Great Martyrs Barbara and Irene", from the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Sinai[46], in the mural paintings of the church of Saint Nicholas *tou Kasnitzi* in Kastoria[47], the church of Saint George near Kurbinovo, of 1191[48], the church of the Saviour on Nereditsa, the Old Metropolitan Cathedral of Veroia, etc. One of the earliest images of St Barbara in Early Russian art can be seen on the liturgical chalice made by the craftsman Bratila in around 1131-1134[49].

The lower pair of figures are St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker on the left and an unidentified saint on the right (with no inscription). However, it is highly likely that the Saint Archbishop of Myra is accompanied by the St Hieromartyr Clement, Pope of Rome. As T. Tsarevskaya has observed, such paired images of the two most revered saint bishops were quite common in Early Rus[50]. St Clement, whose relics were kept in the Church of the Tithes (Desyatinnaya tserkov'), was venerated as one of the forerunners of Christianity in the Russian land. As early as 1147, the bishops of the Russian Church, striving for independence from the Patriarch of Constantinople, tried to appoint Klim Smolyatich as Metropolitan, having blessed him with the head of St Clement, on their own authority[51]. Probably, both saints were depicted on the margins of the back side of the venerated Novgorod icon "Our Lady of the Sign. Saints Joachim and Anna (?)" of 1130-1140 (the original figures of these saints have not survived; they were repainted in the 16th century)[52].

The introduction of a large number of holy women into the iconographic programme of the icon and the presence of three female martyrs on the upper margin of the front side, directly above the image of the Mother of God, lead us to conclude that the theme of female sanctity had a special significance in this programme. The veneration of female saints-holy martyrs and venerable nuns, knowledge of their lives, including relatively rare ones, are attested in many monuments of the 12th century: liturgical chalices wrought by Bratila and Costa with the images of the Great Martyrs Anastasia and Barbara, the revetment of the icon "Peter and Paul the Apostles" with depictions of St Thekla Equal to the Apostles and the Great Martyr Barbara[53], the reverse of the miraculous icon "Our Lady of the Sign" with the images of the Sts Martyrs Catherine and Euphemia, and the wall-paintings in the diakonikon of the church of the Saviour on Nereditsa with twelve saints including deaconesses, nuns and tsarinas[54]. These images might have

[45] For the identification of the saints as Sts Cyros and John, see Antonova, *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo*, op.cit. (n. 2), 27; *Drevnerusskoye iskusstvo X – nachala XV vekov: Gosudarstvennaya Tretiakovskaya galerea* (Katalog sobrania) (*Early Russian painting of the 10th to the early 15th century, State Tretyakov gallery* (catalogue of the collection) (in Russian), 1, Moscow 1995, 63; as Sts Cosmas and Damian or Sts Florus and Laurus, see L. I. Lifshits – V. D. Sarabianov – T. Y. Tsarevskaya, *Monumentalnaya zhivopis' Velikogo Novgoroda. Konets 11 – pervaja chetvert' 12 veka* (*Wall-painting of Novgorod the Great. Late 11th – first quarter of the 12th century*) (in Russian), Saint Petersburg 2004, 677 note 439.

[46] *Holy Image*, op.cit. (n. 13), no. 54 on p. 262-263.

[47] St. Pelekanidis, *Καστορία. Βυζαντιναὶ τοιχογραφίαι*, 1, Thessaloniki 1953, pl. 55b.

[48] C. Grozdanov – L. Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo*, Skopje 1992, pl. 28.

[49] *Decorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Velikogo Novgoroda* (catalogue), Moscow 1996, no. 2 on p. 115-116.

[50] T. Y. Tsarevskaya, "Obraz sviatogo Klimenta Pimskogo v novgorodskom iskusstve XIII veka" (The Image of St Clement of Rome in Novgorodian art of the 13th Century) (in Russian, abstracts in English), *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo*, Moscow 1999, 260-273.

[51] «Ipat'evsaja letopis'», *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej*, 2, Moscow 1998, 341.

[52] *Iconi Velikogo Novgoroda*, op.cit. (n. 6), no. 3 on p. 89-99.

[53] *Decorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo*, op.cit. (n. 49), no. 56 on p. 236-242.

[54] N. V. Pivovarova, "*K istolkovaniyu programmy rospisi diakonika tserkvi Spasa na na Nereditse*" (*On the interpretation of the wall-*

been consistent with the theme of the resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgement, where the holy women, like the wise virgins with lamps from the Gospel parable, appeared on the right hand of Christ (Matthew 25:1-13).

Conclusion

The concept of the iconographic programme of the two-sided icon of the Theotokos with the Martyr Juliana on the reverse has multiple meanings. The main theme –the visual expression of the doctrine of the Divine Incarnation– acquired an additional triumphal meaning, as the very coming of Christ into the world was believed to bring victory over death. This meaning could be further enhanced by the presence of the Martyr Juliana, who defeated the devil, particularly as her feast day is celebrated just before Christmas. However, we should admit that the choice of saints might have depended on the will of the donor who ordered the church's construction, or of the patron who commissioned the icon: the martyr depicted on the back of the icon might have been a patron saint. The combination of the images of Our Lady of the Incarnation and the Martyr Juliana is a unique example of an individual iconographic programme, despite the prevalence of two-sided icons in Byzantine and Early Russian art.

One of the surviving icons of this type is the miraculous Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God (13th century), with the image of the Theotokos on the front and an unnamed woman martyr on the back; the female saint cannot be identified for want of inscriptions and specific iconographic attributes[55].

It is logical to assume that the two-sided icon with the iconographic programme replete with images of holy women was intended for a convent. Since we have no reliable information about the origin of the icon, we may suppose that it came to Zverin Convent later. It was possibly was painted for a church with a side-altar dedicated to St Juliana. Such a side-altar was constructed in the Convent of Saint Barbara (Varvarinsky Convent). This convent is mentioned repeatedly in the Novgorod Chronicles in connection with various political events since the 12th century[56]. In the so-called Pilgrim's Book[57], Archbishop Anthony (whose secular name was Dobrynya Yadreykovich) wrote about his pilgrimage to Constantinople just before the city's Sack by the Crusaders in 1204 and described numerous sacred objects in the Byzantine capital.

It is highly likely that it was Archbishop Anthony who contributed significantly to the development of the iconographic programme of the icon now in the Tretyakov Gallery collections, which has so much in common with Constantinopolitan sacred objects. The saint archbishop, who repeatedly prayed in the Blachernae church and had profound knowledge of its relics, might have brought a copy of a venerated image from this church to Novgorod, to serve as a model for the icon discussed here. Like the main Novgorod icon, the specified image may have been designed for use as a reliquary for holy relics of the saints depicted on the icon's margins (we may assume that the circle, traces of which are preserved between the figures of the saints, were intended to mark the places for keeping the relics). The image of the Mother of God on the front was certainly inspired by a Byzantine model and reproduces its composition and proportions. This model could have been an icon, a piece of small statuary, or a pilgrim relic that was associated with the Blachernae church.

painting programme of the diakonikon of the Saviour church on Nereditsa) (in Russian, abstracts in French), *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo*, Moscow 1999, 216-224.

[55] E. S. Smirnova, *Iconi Severo-Vostochnoj Rusi. Rostov, Vladimir, Kostroma, Murom, Ryazan', Moskva, Vologodskij kraj, Dvina. Seredina XIII – seredina XIV veka* (*Icons of Northeastern Rus'. Rostov, Vladimir, Kostroma, Murom, Ryazan, Moscow, Vologda Region, Dvina. Mid-Thirteenth to Mid-Fourteenth Century*), Moscow 2004, no. 1 on p. 179-186.

[56] The chronicles contain information about the appointment of abbesses and the laying of the foundation stone of the convent's church by Archbishop Anthony in 1218. The stone church built by the archbishop replaced the former wooden building. "Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis' starshego i mladshego izvodov", *Polnoe sobranie russkih letopisej*, 3, Moscow 2000, 57.

[57] Jouravel, *Die Kniga palomnik*, op.cit (n. 5).

Illustration credits

Figs 1, 2-7, 11: © Moscow, The State Tretyakov Gallery. Fig. 9: N. Pivovarova, *Freski tserkvi Spasa na Nereditse v Novgorode: iconograficheskaya programma rospisi*, Saint-Petersburg 2002, pl. 199 on p. 227 (photo by L. A. Matsulevich). Figs 8, 10: Author's archives.

Elena Saenkova

ΑΜΦΙΓΡΑΠΤΗ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΟ ΝΟΒΓΚΟΡΟΝΤ ΜΕ ΤΗΝ «ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΣΗΜΕΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΑΓΙΑ ΙΟΥΛΙΑΝΗ» ΤΟΥ ΠΡΩΤΟΥ ΤΡΙΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ 13ου ΑΙΩΝΑ: ΟΨΕΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟΥ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ

Στη συλλογή της Πινακοθήκης Τρετιακόφ υπάρχει μία αμφίγραπτη εικόνα με την «Παναγία του Σημείου και την αγία Ιουλιανή», την οποία δώρισε στο μουσείο ο καλλιτέχνης Pavel Korin, μαζί με τη συλλογή εικόνων του. Ο Korin είχε αγοράσει αυτήν την εικόνα από τον διάσημο ιστορικό τέχνης Alexander Anisimov, ο οποίος φέρεται ότι την απέκτησε από τη μονή Ζβέριν στο Νόβγκοροντ.

Στην κύρια όψη της εικόνας εικονίζεται επάνω σε χρυσό βάθος η Παναγία δεόμενη με το θείο Βρέφος σε μετάλλιο (Εικ. 1). Σύμφωνα με την παράδοση, η εικόνα αποκαλείται «Η Παναγία του Σημείου», αν και αρχικά μπορεί να είχε δικό της θεοτοκωνύμιο. Αυτή η υπόθεση επιβεβαιώνεται από τη θέση του συμπιλήματος της Παναγίας (*ΜΡ ΘΥ*) που βρίσκεται ολόκληρο πάνω σε χρυσό βάθος στο αριστερό μετάλλιο. Η επιγραφή στο δεξιό μετάλλιο δεν σώζεται, αλλά ίσως περιείχε κάποιο επιθετικό προσδιορισμό της Θεοτόκου, ολιγοσύλλαβο, καθώς ο χώρος εντός του μεταλλίου επαρκεί μόνο για λίγα γράμματα. Στο άνω περιθώριο της κύριας όψης της εικόνας εικονίζονται τρεις ημίσωμες γυναικείες μορφές αγίων. Στο δεξί περιθώριο σώζονται δύο ολόσωμες μορφές –ένας ιεράρχης και ένας νεαρός στρατιωτικός ή αρχοντικός άγιος. Η κεντρική μορφή είναι η μάρτυρας αγία Αλεξάνδρα (Εικ. 2).

Στην πίσω όψη εικονίζεται η μάρτυρας αγία Ιουλιανή με τον σταυρό του μάρτυρος στο δεξί της χέρι (Εικ. 3). Εκατέρωθεν της μορφής της βρίσκονται μετάλλια με τη λέξη «Μάρτυς», στα αριστερά της, και το όνομα «Uleana», στα δεξιά της. Οι επιγραφές κάτω από τα μετάλλια διαβάζονται ως «Μάρτυς Χριστού» και «Αγία» αντίστοιχα. Αυτή η εικόνα είναι το μοναδικό γνωστό παράδειγμα στη ρωσική τέχνη, στο οποίο φορεί πέπλο πάνω από τον μανδύα της, ενώ από τον 13ο αιώνα και εξής αυτή η λεπτομέρεια καθιερώθηκε στην εικονογραφία των μαρτύρων. Στα περιθώρια, που αρχικά ήταν λευκά, βρίσκονται τρία ζεύγη ολόσωμων μορφών. Οι δύο επάνω άγιοι ταυτίζονται συνήθως με τους ιαματικούς Κύρο και Ιωάννη. Οι δύο κεντρικοί άγιοι ταυτίζονται, χάρη στις αποσπασματικά σωζόμενες επιγραφές, με την αγία μεγαλομάρτυρα Βαρβάρα (Εικ. 4, 5), στα αριστερά, και με τον απόστολο Τιμόθεο, στα δεξιά. Οι κάτω δύο μορφές είναι ο άγιος Νικόλαος ο θαυματουργός, στα αριστερά, και ένας αταύτιστος άγιος, στα δεξιά.

Οι εργαστηριακές αναλύσεις κατέληξαν ότι και οι δύο όψεις της εικόνας, συμπεριλαμβανομένων των μορφών των αγίων, είναι σύγχρονες και είναι έργο του ίδιου καλλιτέχνη, αν και η κατάσταση της εικόνας δίνει λίγο διαφορετική εντύπωση (Εικ. 6, 7). Συγκεκριμένα, οι μορφές της Παναγίας και της αγίας Ιουλιανής έχουν αποδοθεί με τη χρήση των ίδιων υλικών και τεχνικής.

Οι ιστορικοί της βυζαντινής τέχνης σχεδόν ομόφωνα συνδέουν την εικονογραφία της εικόνας του Νόβγκοροντ με εικόνες του ναού της Παναγίας των Βλαχερνών στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, αλλά δεν συμφωνούν ως προς το πρότυπο ή τα πρότυπά της. Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη ότι τέτοιες απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας σε νομίσματα και σφραγίδες συχνά συνοδεύονταν από το θεοτοκωνύμιο «Επίσκεψις», κάποιοι ερευνητές θεωρούν ότι μια χαμένη σήμερα εικόνα με αυτό το όνομα μπορεί να χρησίμευσε ως πρότυπο. Σύμφωνα με μια άλλη εκδοχή, η νέα εικονογραφία δεν διαμορφώθηκε πριν από τα μέσα του 11ου αιώνα και βασίστηκε σε συγκεκριμένες λατρευτικές εικόνες της Παναγίας των Βλαχερνών: ένα μαρμάρινο ανάγλυφο με παράσταση δεόμενης Θεοτόκου, που έφερε ειδικές οπές στις παλάμες για το αγιασμένο νερό της θαυματουργής πηγής, και μια παλαιά εικόνα της Θεοτόκου Νικοποιού, η οποία βρέθηκε στις Βλαχέρνες το 1030/31. Ο εικονογραφικός τύπος που περιγράφεται, είναι γνωστός στη βιβλιογραφία με διάφορα ονόματα: «Βλαχερνίτισσα», «Θεοτόκος Μεγάλη Παναγία», «Παναγία του Σημείου», «Παναγία της Ενσάρκωσης». Οι ρωσικές εικόνες με την ημίσωμη Βρεφοκρατούσα ονομάστηκαν «Θεοτόκος του Σημείου», όνομα το οποίο κληρονόμησαν από τη λατρευτική εικόνα του Νόβγκοροντ. Δυστυχώς, δεν γνωρίζουμε την αρχική ονομασία της εικόνας που τιμήθηκε

στο Νόβγκοροντ, γύρω στο 1170, κατά τη διάρκεια της πολεμικής σύγκρουσης με το Σούζνταλ, και έμεινε γνωστή στην ιστορία ως «Θεοτόκος του Σημείου».

Η σύνθεση του εικονογραφικού προγράμματος της αμφίγραπτης εικόνας με την Παναγία και την αγία Ιουλιανή έχει πολλαπλό περιεχόμενο. Το κύριο θέμα –η εικαστική απόδοση του δόγματος της Ενσάρκωσης– προσλαμβάνει και θριαμβευτικό περιεχόμενο, καθώς η ίδια η Έλευση του Χριστού στον κόσμο έφερε τον θρίαμβο επί του θανάτου. Αυτό το νόημα ενισχύεται με την παρουσία της αγίας Ιουλιανής, η οποία νίκησε τον διάβολο, ειδικά αφού η μνήμη της εορτάζεται ακριβώς πριν από τα Χριστούγεννα. Ωστόσο, θα πρέπει να παραδεχτούμε ότι η επιλογή των αγίων ίσως επηρεάστηκε από τις επιθυμίες του κτήτορα που ήταν υπεύθυνος για την ίδρυση του ναού ή του δωρητή που παρήγγειλε την εικόνα: η μάρτυρας στην πίσω όψη ίσως ήταν η προστάτιδα αγία του. Ο συνδυασμός των παραστάσεων της Παναγίας της Ενσάρκωσης και της αγίας Ιουλιανής αποτελεί μοναδικό παράδειγμα ενός ιδιαίτερου εικονογραφικού προγράμματος μεταξύ των πολλών αμφίγραπτων εικόνων που καταγράφονται στη βυζαντινή και την πρώιμη ρωσική τέχνη.

Είναι λογικό να υποθέσουμε ότι η αμφίγραπτη εικόνα με τις πολλές μορφές αγίων γυναικών προοριζόταν για γυναικείο μοναστήρι. Καθώς δεν υπάρχουν αξιόπιστες πληροφορίες σχετικά με την προέλευση της εικόνας, μπορούμε να θεωρήσουμε ότι έφτασε στη μονή Ζβέριν αργότερα. Πιθανώς φιλοτεχνήθηκε για έναν ναό που διέθετε ένα παράπλευρο ιερό, αφιερωμένο στην αγία Ιουλιανή. Ένα τέτοιο παρεκκλήσι-ιερό κτίστηκε στη μονή της Αγίας Βαρβάρας. Αυτή η μονή αναφέρεται επανειλημμένα στα Χρονικά του Νόβγκοροντ, σε σχέση με διάφορα πολιτικά γεγονότα, από τον 12ο αιώνα. Στο λεγόμενο «βιβλίο του Προσκυνητή» ο αρχιεπίσκοπος Αντώνιος (του οποίου το κοσμικό όνομα ήταν Dobryna Yadreykovich) έγραψε για το ταξίδι του στην Κωνσταντινούπολη πριν από την Άλωσή της από τους Σταυροφόρους, το 1204, στο οποίο περιέγραψε πολλά ιερά αντικείμενα στη βυζαντινή πρωτεύουσα.

Είναι εξαιρετικά πιθανό ο αρχιεπίσκοπος Αντώνιος να ήταν εκείνος που συνέβαλε αποφασιστικά στη σύνθεση του εικονογραφικού προγράμματος της εικόνας, η οποία έχει τόσα πολλά κοινά με έργα από την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ο άγιος αρχιεπίσκοπος, ο οποίος επανειλημμένα προσευχήθηκε στην Παναγία των Βλαχερνών και γνώριζε πολύ καλά τα ιερά λείψανά της, θα μπορούσε να είχε φέρει μαζί του ένα αντίγραφο της λατρευτικής εικόνας από τις Βλαχέρνες στο Νόβγκοροντ, προκειμένου να χρησιμοποιηθεί ως πρότυπο για την εικόνα που παρουσιάσαμε εδώ.

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