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REVISITING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS ON RUSSIAN ICONS IN THE MATICA SRPSKA GALLERY (NOVI SAD)

The collection of the Matica Srpska Gallery (Novi Sad) preserves three icons of Russian provenance: John the Baptist, Nicholas the Wonderworker and the Three Hierarchs, while in the Velika Remeta monastery there is an image of the Mother of God. All of them date from 1687 and are signed by various zoographers. These pieces of art are well known to specialists and are often mentioned as an example of Russian icons beyond the borders of the Moscow Tsardom. Scholars explain the appearance of these images in the Serbian lands by Russian-Serbian contacts of the early 18th century. As follows from the published archival evidence, it was the abbot of the monastery of Archangel Michael in Rakovica Gregory who brought the icons. In 1698 and 1699, Father Gregory contributed to the contacts of the Russian envoy in Constantinople with the Turkish authorities. In the summer of 1701, Gregory arrived in Moscow, where Tsar Peter praised his works. The abbot was granted a charter for his monastery, whose monks were entitled to arrive in Russia for alms every seven years, as well as the above four icons. According to archival documents, they were intended for the Athonite Vatopedi monastery, but for some reason remained in Moscow. The author of this paper demonstrates that there are no documents about the icons ordered by Vatopedi, and the history of the creation of the Russian icons that are now in Serbia should be connected with the order of the Patriarch of Constantinople Dionysius IV.

Keywords: Russia, the Christian East, Serbia, Russian art, icons, archival documents.

В собрании Галереи Матицы Србской (Новый Сад) хранятся три иконы русской работы: Иоанна Предтечи, Николая Чудотворца, Трех иерархов, а в монастыре Великая Ремета находится образ Богородицы. Все они датированы 1687 г. и подписаны мастерами-изографами. Эти памятники хорошо известны специалистам и часто упоминаются в качестве примера русских икон за пределами Московского царства. В историографии появление названных св. образов в сербских землях объясняется русско-сербскими контактами начала XVIII в. Как следует из опубликованных архивных данных, иконы были привезены игуменом монастыря Архангела Михаила в Раковице Григорием, который в 1698–1699 гг. содействовал контактам русского посланника в Константинополе с турецким правительством. Летом 1701 г. Григорий прибыл в Москву, где его труды высоко оценил царь Петр

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Алексеевич. Игумен получил жалованную грамоту в монастырь с правом приезда в Россию за милостыней каждые семь лет, а также четыре вышеназванные иконы. Согласно архивным материалам, они предназначались афонскому Ватопедскому монастырю, но по какой-то причине остались в Москве. Автор статьи показывает, что какие-либо документы о заказанных Ватопедом иконах отсутствуют, а историю создания русских икон, которые находятся сейчас в Сербии, следует связать с заказом Константинопольского патриарха Дионисия IV.

Ключевые слова: Россия, христианский восток, Сербия, российское искусство, иконы, архивные документы.

From the 16th century through to the early 18th century, a large number of Russian pieces of art appeared in the Orthodox East, but only a small part of them is recorded in synchronous written sources. However, there is an example when the signatures on the icons reveal their authors and date of creation, and the documents of the Russian Foreign Office seem to confirm the origin of the artefacts. Nevertheless, reexamining of archival materials allows us to take a new look at the origin and existence of these works of art.

In the Matica Srpska Gallery (Novi Sad) there are three icons by the masters of the Armoury dated 1687 with signatures of their authors. They show that the image of Nicholas the Wonderworker was painted by Spiridon Grigoriev, that of the Three Hierarchs by Tikhon Ivanov (Filatiev), and that of John the Baptist by Ivan Maximov (Словарь русских иконописцев: 805, 829, 862). The icon of the Mother of God by Leontiy Stepanov (Словарь русских иконописцев: 853) with the same date is now in the monastery of Velika Remeta. They are familiar to art historians and often mentioned as an example of Russian icons beyond the borders of the Moscow Tsardom. Scholars generally attribute their appearance in the Serbian lands to the Russian-Serbian contacts of the early 18th century.

When studying these artefacts, Zoran Rakić (Ракић 1986: 127–145)¹ used all the published sources available to him, i.e. biographies of Russian icon painters according to the dictionary of A. I. Uspensky (Успенский 1910), in which, incidentally, the work on the icons of 1687 is not listed in, as well as the article by N. F. Kapterev on the links between the Moscow State and the Serbian monasteries according to the archives of the Russian Foreign Office (Каптерев

1 For recent publications on these Russian icons see: Zenarju Rajovic 2022: 147–156; Fig. 2–5; Женарију Рајовић 2023: 193–210. Z. Rakić (Ракић 1986: 133) and I. Ženariju Rajović (Женарију Рајовић 2023: 198–199) misunderstood the information about Ivan Maximov's work in 1687. The 'zogographer' painted icons for the chambers of Tsarevna (Princess) Catherine Alexeevna (1658–1718), Peter the Great's half-sister, not Tsarina Catherine Alexeevna (1684–1727), much less Catherine the Great (1729–1796).



1891: 462–576). The respective documents testify to the icons having got to Serbia through the abbot (hegoumen) of the monastery of Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Rakovica)² Gregory, who in 1698 and 1699 assisted Russian envoys to Constantinople in their contacts with the Turkish government during peace negotiations (RGADA³. F. 52/1. 1701 № 9). In the summer of 1701, Gregory arrived in Moscow where his efforts were highly appreciated by the sovereign. He was granted a charter authorizing his monks to come to Russia every seven years to collect alms (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1701 № 9. F. 62 – 64v).⁴

Under Peter the Great, unlike in the reign of his grandfather, his father and his brother Feodor, similar charters were granted to eastern Orthodox monasteries very rarely. In Moscow Gregory told of the poverty of his monastery, asking for liturgical books in Slavonic, priestly vestments and church vessels. There was no mention of any icons. In the repeated statements about the royal alms to Gregory, icons were not mentioned either, and only the last record with the date of July, 11 1701 evidenced the granting of the above mentioned four images on large boards. Made as early as 1687 for the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi, they had not been sent to Mount Athos but were kept instead in the Foreign Office (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1701 № 9. F. 58v). There are no other details as to the original destination of the icons or the reasons why they remained in Moscow. It seems that the very idea of sending the holy images to the Serbian monastery arose spontaneously and at the last moment.

To analyze this information, let us turn to the history of Russia's relations with the Athonite Vatopedi Monastery, which from the middle of the 17th century can be characterised as problematic. We know that in 1655, at the request of Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich, there were brought from Athos the head of John Chrysostom and the Life-Giving Cross of Christ. The latter had been made in the image that appeared to Emperor Constantine the Great on the eve of the battle with Emperor Maxentius (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1683 № 3. F. 60). Alexey Mikhailovich's father, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich, called the relic the Life-Giving Cross of Christ with which Constantine the Great and other pious Greek tsars fought their enemies (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1629 № 16. F. 23).⁵

At Vatopedi it was believed that the sacred objects had only been sent to Russia pro tempore for worship, but Alexey Mikhailovich detained them at his place reasoning that it was unworthy for such a great shrine to be under Muslim rule. All attempts of the Athonites to return the relics to the monastery were in vain. Later successors of Alexey Mikhailovich, the tsars Ivan, Peter and Tsarev-

2 The documents name the monastery by its dedication, the location of the monastery is not specified. For more details about the monastery see: Женарију Рајовић 2023.

3 RGADA – Russian State Archives of the Ancient Acts (Moscow)

4 See: Женарију Рајовић 2023, Fig. 1.

5 For details see: Фонкич 2001: 89–97.

na Sofya, declared that the Cross of Tsar Constantine and the head of St. John Chrysostom had initially been brought to Moscow to save them from Moslems (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1687 № 7. F. 57 v. – 58.)

In the last third of the 17th century one came from the monastery to Moscow twice, in 1683 and 1687. In 1683, the Athonites were granted a chart that finally confirmed that the relics brought from Vatopedi were to remain in Moscow, and the monastery was allowed instead to come to Russia for alms every four years and receive 500 roubles in sables per visit (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1683 № 3. F. 55), a considerable sum at that time. At the same time was released to his own land the Vatopedi abbot Cyril. On his arrival in 1665 for the monastery's relics he did not agree to accept the tsar's alms instead of them and for such an "outrage" was exiled to the Solovki, to be transferred in 1675 to the Moscow Chudov monastery (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1683 № 3. F. 55.).

During their next stay in Moscow in November 1687, the elders of Vatopedi asked to replace the alms in sables with a monetary salary, since with the long travel and the many borders, customs duties negated the amount of the tsar's alms. In Moscow, they met their needs and replaced the payment in sables with gold coins. This was fixed in the new tsar's charter of 1688 (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1687 № 7. F. 58 v), the previous one being left in Moscow. The icons requested to Vatopedi are not mentioned in the documents.

In 1686 the Patriarch of Constantinople Dionysius IV asked Tsars Ivan and Peter and Tsarevna Sophya to send icons and church utensils. The list of images and silver utensils necessary for the Great Church is known from a separate letter attached to the patriarch's message. In it, the patriarch asked to paint images of the Mother of God, John the Baptist, the three saint archpriests (Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian) and Nicholas the Miracle-Worker. The patriarchal charter itself contained a confirmation of the transfer of the Kiev metropolis under the administration of the Moscow patriarch (RGADA. F. 52/1. Lib. 25. F. 422 v).⁶ It is clear that, in order to fulfil the request of the Ecumenical Primate, in December of the same year the sovereigns gave an ukase to paint icons according to the patterns brought from Constantinople, which have not survived to our days. After the fulfilment of the work, the images were ordered to be sent to the Foreign Office (RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F.1).

As can be seen from the documents, this order stipulated specific sizes of icons, as well as the style of their painting. The patriarch wanted to have the images painted not in the "painterly" manner,⁷ very popular in Moscow during the reign of Tsarevna Sophya Alexeevna, but in the manner in which the royal 'zographers' of the Armoury Chamber worked.

6 For the publication of the document see: *Воссоединение Киевской митрополии* 2019: 701.

7 For details see: Голиков, Комашко 2003: 272–284.



The archive of the Armoury Chamber has also preserved a document dated January 1687 with a decree to have those icons painted urgently by the best ‘zographers’ (RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F.4). At the same time, boards were made measuring 1 arshin 12.5 vershoks in length and 1 arshin 1 vershok in width (RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F.6), by modern standards it is approximately 125 cm in length and 74 cm in width. This almost coincides with the size of the icons now in Serbia: 118 x 71 cm, 125 x 77 cm, 125 x 76.5 cm, 121 x 72.5 cm.

The icon painter Georgiy Terentiev Zinoviev (Словарь русских иконописцев: 229–234) and his companions compiled a list of materials needed for the work (RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F.6-7). In March of the same year, as is stated in another document, there were allocated paints for the “Constantinople order” (RGADA. F. 396/1. № 25021. F.1).

The first of the mentioned documents, taken out of historical context, led the authors of the *Dictionary of Russian Icon Painters from the 11th to the 17th Centuries* (Словарь русских иконописцев: 231) to the incorrect conclusion that in January 1687 the icons were already finished. In addition, Georgiy Zinoviev, named among the icon painters, did not take part in the work at all.

There is no answer yet to the question of why the ‘zographer’ Zinoviev was absent among the masters who carried out the Constantinople order. But why the icons were in the Foreign Office before being sent to Serbia is quite clear. As already mentioned, the icons made for Constantinople were ordered to be sent to the Office, which was done. They did not go to the Patriarch of Constantinople for whom they were destined, but pending any specific instructions as to their fate remained in the Foreign Office. Likewise, sacred objects brought from the Orthodox East were not transferred from the Office anywhere without a special order from the tsar. For example, in 1696 the Metropolitan of Laodicea Parthenios brought relics of saints as a gift to Tsar Peter I. They remained in the Foreign Office up to 1721, when Peter ordered the relics to be transferred to the Annunciation Cathedral of the Kremlin (Бибииков, Родионов, Чеснокова 2023: 121). In the same way the icon of John the Theologian, brought to Moscow from the Patmos monastery of John the Theologian in 1696, was left in the Office with the instruction to keep that icon together with other relics until a special tsar’s order (RGADA. F. 52/1. 1697 № 2. F. 33).

As to why the images ordered by the Ecumenical Patriarch were not sent to Constantinople, one can also make quite reasoned assumptions. Dionysius IV occupied the patriarchal throne five times in the 1670s, 1680s and 1690s. In 1686 he signed a charter transferring the administration of the Kiev metropolis to the Moscow patriarchate, in 1687 he lost his cathedra again and only recovered it for a single year in 1693. Obviously in connection with the resignation of the patriarch, it was decided in Moscow to postpone sending him icons until a suitable

moment. In 1689 there was a Streltsy revolt in Moscow, the Foreign Office was too engaged to care about the patriarch's icons and they were gradually forgotten. Thus, the patriarch's order executed urgently by Moscow 'zographers' was not sent to the addressee.

Apparently, in 1701, after almost 15 years since the icons were painted, the Office did not remember for whom they were originally created. Yet the visits to Moscow of envoys from the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi demanding the return of the Cross of Tsar Constantine, the replacement of alms in sables with a payment in gold, which was quite a rare phenomenon for that time, could remain in the memory of the old employees of the Office. Probably, this circumstance allowed them to connect the date on the icons of 1687 with the arrival of Vatopedi monks in the same year.

Of course, the origin of the icons could have been clarified in the documents. But, firstly, it was very difficult to use the roll records, which were kept in scrolls, and secondly, the transfer of the images from the Office only required a formal record of who they were originally intended for. Thus, the four icons not having been claimed and kept in the Foreign Office were given to Father Superior Gregory.

An analysis of archival documents from the collection of the Russian State Archives of the Ancient Acts from 1686 and 1687 has shown that there is a single royal decree on the painting of holy images to be sent abroad, and it is related to the wish of Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius. The high artistic level of the works of the royal masters, which are now in Serbia, their size, dedication and the date of creation fully correspond to the icons made for Dionysius IV and undoubtedly represent the patriarch's order in issue.

Appendix

Summaries of Documents

1.

1686 Dec. 28.

Decree of Tsars Ivan and Peter Alexeevich and Tsarevna Sophia Alexeevna on the painting of four icons for Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople.

The great sovereigns Ivan and Peter Alexeevich and Tsarevna Sofia ordered to paint four icons for Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople: of the Mother of God, John the Baptist, the Three Saint Archpriests and Nicholas the Miracle-Worker, according to the patterns dispatched from Constantinople with Nikita Alexeev.⁸

⁸ Nikita Alekseev was a scrivener of the Foreign Office who negotiated the re-subordination of the Kiev Metropolis to the Moscow Patriarch.



These patterns have been sent from the Foreign Office to the Armoury Chamber. The finished icons are ordered to be sent from the Armoury Chamber to the Foreign Office to Princes V.V. and A.V. Golitsyn.

RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F. 1 – 2.

2.

1687 Jan. 5.

Decree of Tsars Ivan and Peter Alexeevich and Tsarevna Sofia Alexeevna on the allocation of money to purchase expendable materials for the painting of four icons for Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople.

The great sovereigns Ivan and Peter Alexeevich and Tsarevna Sofia ordered to paint four icons for Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople. To pay for paints, gold leaf, silver and other materials, as well as the work of icon painters, carpenters and other craftsmen, it was ordered to take ten roubles twenty-six altyns four dengas and transfer the money to the Armoury Chamber.

RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F. 5.

3.

1687 Jan. 13.

List of materials necessary for the painting of the icons commissioned by Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople.

A list of materials needed to paint the icons commissioned by Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople, among them: gold leaf, silver, bakan, Russian white-wash, blue cinnabar, German and Greek ochre, squirrel brushes, etc.

RGADA. F. 396/1. № 24878. F. 6 – 7.

4.

1687 March 1.

Document (pam'at') on the issuance of paints to iconographers for painting the icons commissioned by the Patriarch of Constantinople Dionysius.

A record of the issuance of paints to iconographers for painting the icons commissioned by Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople.

RGADA. F. 396/1. № 25021. F. 1.

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ПОНОВО О АРХИВСКИМ ДОКУМЕНТИМА О РУСКИМ ИКОНАМА У ГАЛЕРИЈИ МАТИЦЕ СРПСКЕ (НОВИ САД)

Резиме

У колекцији Галерије Матице српске (Нови Сад) чувају се три иконе руске израде – Јована Претече, Николаја Чудотворца и Три Јерарха, а у манастиру Велика Ремета налази се икона Божије Мајке. Све су датиране 1687. годином и имају потпис мајстора-иконописаца. Ти споменици добро су познати стручњацима и често се помињу као пример руских икона ван граница Московског царства. У историографији се појава ових светих икона у српским земљама објашњава руско-српским контактима с почетка XVIII века. Као што проистиче из објављених архивских података, иконе је донео игуман манастира Архангела Михаила у Раковици Григорије, који је 1698–1699. године помагао руском амбасадору у Константинопољу да успостави контакт с турском владом. У лето 1701. године Григорије долази у Москву, где је цар Петар Алексејевич високо оценио његово залагање. Игуман је добио даровницу за манастир која је давала право доласка у Русију по милостињу на сваких седам година, као и поменуте четири иконе. Према архивским документима, оне су биле намењене светогорском манастиру Ватопеду, али су из неког разлога остале у Москви. У чланку се показује да не постоје документи који би потврдили да је Ватопед наручио те иконе, а историју настанка руских икона које се сада налазе у Србији треба повезати с наруџбином цариградског патријарха Дионисија IV.

Кључне речи: Русија, хришћански Исток, Србија, руска уметност, иконе, архивски документи.