Windows into Heaven: Russian Icons of the Brown Collection

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Abstract: In North America, Russian icons are not often seen as distinct from other religious artefacts. Yet, while the art of the Byzantine Empire and its affiliation with the Orthodox Church did influence the look of Russian icons, and Russian artists initially followed Byzantine icon guidelines in their production, they focused on optimistic rather than tragic images. By examining the crucifixion scene on three Russian icons from the Brown Collection at the University of Victoria Art Collections, this article explores the distinct use and importance of icons to the Russian people.

Key Terms: Icons, Russian icons, Byzantine Empire, Old Believers, Eastern Orthodox Church, Hodegetria, Brown Collection, crucifixion, twelve festival scenes, Christ, Virgin Mary, veneration.

Introduction

In 1990, Bruce and Dorothy Brown donated a set of fourteen Russian icons to the University of Victoria's Maltwood Gallery. Although the Browns bequeathed the collection in order to "expose students to documents of historic interest or beauty," the public has not seen these acquisitions for over 30 years (University of Victoria Units and Collection, n.d.). This paper focuses on three Russian brass icons with crucifixion scenes from the Brown Collection. Analyzing these icons' imagery and their historical context reveals how they differ from other icon traditions and provides the reader with a glimpse into how these objects may have been used and valued by the Russian people. In this paper, icons are described as a representation of a sacred figure customarily painted on a wooden surface, although cast metal icons are also common.

Russian icons are influenced by Byzantine art. From 988 to 1453 Russia was connected to the Byzantine Empire through their shared affiliation to the Orthodox Church, and this association includes a respect for icons. Russian icons can be considered a continuation of Byzantine art since the medieval Rus attempted to link themselves with Byzantium through the creation of a theory that Moscow was the Third Rome. However, I argue that in post-medieval Russian art the crucifixion scene is fashioned in a slightly different way compared to the earlier examples from Byzantium. By focusing on the crucifixion in these three icons, I examine how

Russia began to adapt Byzantine traditions as their own. This comparison between Russian and Byzantine icons allows us to consider both the connection and separation between the two states in order to highlight the development and significance of icons in Russia.

Historical Context

Foundations of Orthodox Russia

From 988, when Prince Vladimir I of Kiev (c. 958- 1015) officially adopted Orthodox Christianity as the religion of the Kievan Rus (a group of Vikings who would one day become the Russian people), the influence of Byzantine civilization became essential to Russian culture. At this time, the only Byzantine official in Russia who held power was the metropolitan, or archbishop, of Kiev (Meyendorff, 1981). Between 988 and 1453, the metropolitan was responsible for managing the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Rus as the Byzantine officials wanted it to be ruled. In 1453, the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottomans. The Russians continued to adhere to the texts of the Christian Orthodox church even though the documents were written in Greek, making it difficult for the Rus to read. While the Rus accepted the doctrines of the Christian Orthodox Church as law, they emphasized a part of the Orthodox faith that did not need to be read – the art.

The Byzantine Empire had been sending artists and artworks to Russia ever since the Rus had changed their faith in 988; however, as the Byzantine Empire's control over Russia declined, so increased the veneration of icons in Russia. Soon, icon-making and venerating became the most popular ritual of the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Rus, who glorified the icon for its beauty, connection to God, and its content of faith (Tarasov, 2002). When the Rus were under attack, for example by the Mongols in the 13th century, they healed the empire's trauma by re-establishing its connection to Byzantine heritage. They thus developed the theory of Moscow as the "Third Rome" and revived traditional icons (2002). A famous example of a Russian icon that protected the nation is known as the Virgin of Vladimir (Figure 1). The people of Moscow believed that it caused the defeat of the Turko-Mongols in 1395 (Hamilton, 1983). Because of this belief, Moscow troops would often bring this icon into battle.

Icons

Icons form an integral part of the Orthodox liturgy. Legend explains that the first icon, called the Hodegetria, was painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist, and blessed by the Virgin Mary. The icon eventually travelled to Russia, where it became one of the most venerated icons in the country because of its association with a number of

miracles. The Hodegetria is not the only icon that is revered as miraculous to the Russians. After the phase of Iconoclasm in the 8th and 9th centuries, the Byzantines began to venerate icons openly and this tradition vigorously continued with Russia (Tarasov, 2002). In Russia, the icon effectively came to represent the supreme communal authority before one swore oaths, resolved disputes, and marched into battles (Billington, 1970). The icons established a way for a religious person to communicate with the spiritual world. The environment of a church or home altar would be full of candles, incense, and rituals, all of which would transport the observer to an ecstatic state. In fact, some icons were made with a 'reverse perspective,' where a vanishing point is projected forward from the picture, drawing the spectator into a transcendental realm (Tarasov, 2002). Icons deliberately avoided a naturalistic look, but instead symbolized the bodies of the saints since, as Saint Paul explains, "the glorified body is not like the earthly body" (Bell, 1994, 64). According to Eastern Orthodox theology, icons are not merely depictions of a saintly person, but instead are believed to convey the presence of the figure depicted (Shevzov, 2002).

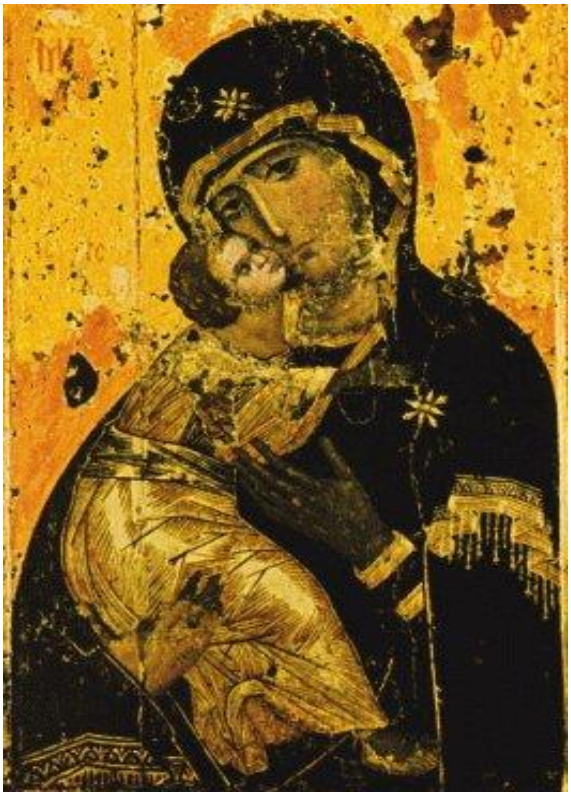

Figure 1: Virgin of Vladimir. 11th century, painted icon. Source: Onasch, K. (1977). Russian Icons. Oxford: Phaidon.

Traditionally, icons could only be made by the extremely faithful, such as monks, and would have to be blessed before being sold. The artists would fast before beginning an icon, and the artists' tools were customarily blessed prior to the beginning of the work (Bell, 1994). Often copies of famous icons were replicated, as artists hoped that the miracles from the original image would continue into the duplicate image. Generally, iconography and its symbolism did not change much in Russian icons between the 10th and 20th centuries; most artists used the same manuals, such as the Stroganov or the Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna, which describe what imagery should be in each sacred scene (Dionysius, transl. Hetherington 1974). Therefore, colours, poses, and inscriptions were often dictated by tradition and conform to original icons (Bell, 1994). Icons not only hung in churches, but every Eastern Orthodox family, even the poor, owned icons and placed them in their homes (Bell, 1994). When an icon, especially a metal one, became worn down, the item was ritually disposed of through burial in the ground or at sea (Ahlborn and Espinola, 1991). This burial process emphasizes how much the Russian people glorified icons.

Copper alloy, or brass, icons were a less expensive substitute for painted wooden icons, and were cast through a mass production process, resulting in hundreds of duplicates of the same image (Odom, 1996). Even the three metal icons from the Brown Collection are mass-produced, and similar icons can be found in other collections (McKenzie, 1986). Often metal icons, commonly displayed in wealthier homes, were decorated with enamel. Unlike their wooden counterparts, metal icons were smaller in size and, of course, sturdier; therefore, they were more often transported.

Old Believers

Brass icons, such as those in the Brown Collection, were usually made by and for "Old Believers." This group was a division within the Eastern Orthodox Church that followed strict religious traditions. In 1652, the newly established Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681) made a controversial decision by changing the texts used by the Eastern Orthodox Church (French, 1961). The Slavonic books used by the Russian Church had been translated from Greek and, through this process, many minor errors had occurred. There was also the question of whether the 'Sign of the Cross' should be made with two fingers in the customary Russian manner, or with three, as in the Greek manner (French, 1961). To a minority of the people, who later became the group known as the Old Believers, even the slightest change would rupture the fibre of Orthodoxy. The Old Believers, who felt as if their Church had abandoned them, suffered from persecution because they were excommunicated in 1667.

Figure 2: Church Festivals Quadriptych. 18th century, brass icon, Russian. Use of image is by permission of the University of Victoria Art Collections, Gift of Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Dorothy Brown.

Although many of them moved to remote villages where they shared similar religious beliefs, some travelled to other countries, including the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991). This period in Russian history has become known as the "Great Schism."

In 1723, the Holy Governing Synod of the Eastern Orthodox Church, under Peter the Great (1672-1725), forbade the casting and selling of any holy images made from copper alloy (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991). This led to the confiscation of all copper alloy icons produced prior to the decree. To protect their relics, many Russians sent their copper alloy icons across the border. The law may have been directed particularly against the Old Believers, who made the most use of copper alloy icons in their religious observations (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991). Although there are records of raids on artists' studios, generally the Old Believers ignored the law, and soon the casting of copper-alloy icons and crosses became a specialty in an isolated Old Believers community near the river Vyg. By the 18th and 19th centuries, metal icons were still being produced on a mass-scale, so they could be shipped over to the Old Believers who had emigrated outside of Russia. The three icons from the Brown Collection were all mass-produced in the 18th or 19th centuries.

Description of Artifacts

Church Festivals Quadriptych

One of the Brown Collection's metal icons is a Church festivals quadriptych (Figure 2). This brass icon from the 18th century consists of four panels, which can fold into

each other, allowing the piece to become more portable. The three panels from the left depict the twelve major festival scenes. These include the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, Nativity of Christ, Birth of the Virgin, Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, Baptism of Christ, Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, Transfiguration of Christ, Anastasis (meaning Resurrection), Ascension of Christ, Dormition of the Virgin, and the Crucifixion of Christ. The identification of each scene came from careful observation with manuals, such as The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna. The same images would be on the church iconostasis, the screen which separates the nave from the sanctuary in a church. The last panel on the right is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and includes figures worshipping four famous icons: the Hodegetria, Vladimir, Znamenie, and Theodorovskaya icons (Figure 3). Because this right panel illustrates the veneration of icons, this quadriptych also demonstrates the importance of icons in Russian society. Additional scenes appear in the onion-shaped areas at the top of each panel, which reflect similar domed shapes commonly used in the structures of Russian Orthodox churches (French, 1961). The scenes include the New Testament Trinity, the Old Testament Trinity, the Elevation of the Cross, and the illustration of a hymn praising the Mother of God.

Figure 3: Fourth Panel of the Church Festivals Quadriptych. 18th century, brass icon. Use of image is by permission of the University of Victoria Art Collections, Gift of Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Dorothy Brown.

Figure 4: Outer Panel of the Church Festivals Quadriptych. 18th century, brass icon. Use of image is by permission of the University of Victoria Art Collections, Gift of Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Dorothy Brown.

The outer scene on the exterior panel (Figure 4) consists of an empty cross, which has the typical Russian slanted footrest (the suppedaneum) tilting up on Christ's right side. The slant is believed to symbolize the repentant thief on Christ's right and the condemned thief on his left (McKenzie, 1986). By extension, it shows the condemnation of all repudiators and the justification of all believers (McKenzie, 1986). Next to the cross there are images of a sword and a vinegar-soaked sponge; these are instruments that were used to torture Christ. The skull of Adam appears at the base of the cross and directly behind this scene are the depictions of the towers and walls of Jerusalem. Since Christ is absent from the image, the cross becomes the symbol of Him.

It is not a unique feature that there are other icons shown within the quadriptych, since such representations are found on Byzantine icons. For example, the famous Triumph of Orthodoxy icon (Figure 5), from the late 14th century, depicts a group of people worshipping an icon of Mary and Child. The Triumph of Orthodoxy represents the collapse of Iconoclasm for the Byzantine Empire, which

was celebrated in 843 when both the Byzantine empress Theodora and church officials declared that icons were an integral part of maintaining the faith of the Christian Orthodox Church (Cormack and Vassilaki, 2008). The Triumph of Orthodoxy icon focuses on the Hodegetria icon, as figures from the upper row face the latter. Figures that turn towards icons are also visible in all four veneration scenes on the quadriptych. A red veil has been unfurled and below the icon is a cloth that covers a holy altar. Such a display gives the icon a liturgical characteristic (Cormack and Vassilaki, 2008). Below the Hodegetria is another row of people, who were iconophile advocators. To show their political beliefs, the figures carry additional art pieces. By emphasizing images within the icon, the artist is stressing how important icons are. In addition, by depicting the Hodegetria specifically, the artist of the Triumph of Orthodoxy icon is granting the inherent power of the famous icon and transferring it into the 14th century panel. By including four older, miraculous, famous icons, the Brown Collection quadriptych enlists their powers to provide manifold protection to its owner.

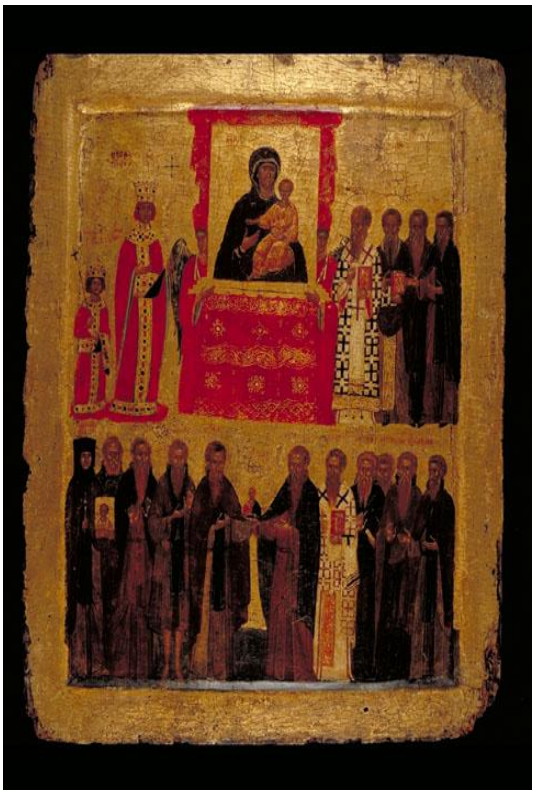

Figure 5: Triumph of Orthodoxy. 14th century, painted icon, Byzantine. Source: Cormack, R., & Vassilaki, M. (Eds.). (2008). Byzantium: 330-1453. London: Royal Academy of Arts.

Figure 6: Diptych Showing Twelve Festive Scenes. 10th century, ivory diptych, Byzantine. Source: Evans, H., & Wixom, W. (Eds.). (2000). The Glory of Byzantium: Arts and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The rest of the three panels on the quadriptych show the twelve major festival scenes, which is also traditional in Byzantine art. For example, in the 11th century, a Byzantine artist created an ivory diptych (Figure 6) that represents twelve scenes from the life of Christ. Although not all of the scenes are from the twelve festivals, the diptych as a whole is thought to be associated with the festivals of the Orthodox Church (Evans and Wixom, 2000). Even the Russian quadriptych includes some scenes, such as the New Testament Trinity, which are not a part of the major twelve scenes, but are only seen in Russian icons. In fact, the Byzantine diptych includes one infrequent image in both Byzantine and Russian art: the Incredulity of Thomas (Evans & Wixom, 2000). The discrepancy between the scenes on the diptych and the festival scenes has a possible explanation: since the diptych is for personal contemplation, the scenes depicted would be of special significance to the patron or the artists. This could also be the reason why the Russian quadriptych has additional scenes with Mary; perhaps the artist felt that by creating icons within an icon, the quadriptych would become more extraordinary to the people venerating them. Even though these metal icons were mass-produced, the artists would believe

in the Russian tradition of miraculous icons passing on powers into reproductions. Nonetheless, by means of both the Byzantine diptych and the Russian quadriptych, spectators realize how connected icons are to prayer and the Orthodox Church.

Processional Crucifix

Figure 7: Processional Crucifix. 19th century, brass icon, Russian. Use of image is by permission of the University of Victoria Art Collections, Gift of Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Dorothy Brown.

Rather than being honoured in a home, the processional crucifix from the Brown Collection (Figure 7) would have been used in ceremonies in churches. This can be identified as a processional crucifix due to its size and extended vertical bar, which would attach to a pole so it could be carried during ceremonies. This brass crucifix was made during the 19th century and was adorned with blue and white enamel decorations. At the top, there is a series of seraphim, members of the highest order of angels. The seraphim are represented as the head of a child surrounded by wings. The vertical bars, which begin at the tip of the bottom wing on each seraph, extend

down into the main images on the crucifix. There are then six rows of images on the crucifix, most of which are from the twelve festival scenes. There are also representations that are usually found by themselves, such as Saint Nicholas or the Znamenie Icon of Mary and Child. Christ on the cross is at the very centre and, in keeping with all Russian crucifixes, this one has a lower crosspiece (the suppedaneum), which tilts up on Christ's right side. The suppedaneum also displays the walls of Jerusalem, since the crucifixion took place outside the main city, in a location called Golgotha. The walled city is detailed with doorways and several windows for each tower. The skull under Christ is Adam's, who is said to be buried in the same location as where Christ died. While Adam brought the downfall of humankind, Christ is believed to have brought the reconciliation of humanity. On either side of the cross of Christ, there are sets of two saints; Lazarus'

Figure 8: Monastery of Daphni. 11th century, cupola mosaic, Byzantine. Source: Cormack, R. (2000). Byzantine Art. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

sister, Martha, and the Virgin Mary on the right; John the Evangelist and Saint Longinus, the Roman centurion who tradition says recognized that Christ was truly the Son of God, are on the left.

The layout of the processional crucifix, with rows of various religious scenes, may be reminiscent of similar arrangements on an iconostasis, a screen that separates the nave from the sanctuary in a church. However, the iconostasis also divides the spiritual world, as represented by the sanctuary, from the physical world of man, as expressed through the nave (McKenzie, 1986). The importance of this icon-filled screen within the Orthodox Church can hardly be overestimated. In church liturgies, the priest swings the censer first in the direction of the iconostasis, and then at the congregation, thus uniting the heavenly saints represented in the icons with the faithful (McKenzie, 1986). The layout of the iconostasis is always the same within the Eastern Orthodox Church, with each row representing a certain scene. However, there are various sizes of images, with the more important icons receiving larger spaces. With time, the Eastern Orthodox Church made the iconostasis into a large physical barrier. The history of the iconostasis can be traced back to the iconographic programs of Byzantine churches.

Beginning in the Middle Byzantine period, Byzantine churches introduced the iconographic program. This occurred after Iconoclasm because Church officials wanted a visual unity that would emphasize the mosaic icons. Mosaic decorations often had a large repertoire, which included many local saints. However, by having more narrative scenes, churches could focus on the life of Christ and The Virgin rather than restricting themselves to the local faith. This 11th century pattern continued in Russian icons; more icons depict the lives of Christ and the Virgin, while local saints are usually positioned in the background of the icon. For example, local saints are depicted in the Daphni monastery with these figures placed lower to the ground, while the narrative scenes appear in the squinches (Figure 8). This placement creates a hierarchy of scenes in the monastery church.

An iconographic program can also be found in miniature within the processional crucifix of the Brown Collection. The order of this crucifix is arranged by chronological order of the feast days, which are represented by a narrative scene. The ordering starts from the lower left and continues up the left side; it then carries on from top to bottom on the right-hand side with the Dormition of the Virgin being the last scene. Such an order would be noticeable to a faithful viewer, just as the hierarchy in the church would also be apparent to the faithful. One reason for the new iconographic program in churches, such as Daphni, is that as the demand for icons increased in the Byzantine world, icons continued to give an emotional and intellectual experience to the spectators (Cormack, 2000). Perhaps the Russian

artists, continuing a century-old tradition, chose the festival placement for the biblical images because they also believed that it would give a greater emotional impact for their prayers.

Composite Icon

The final Brown Collection artifact included in this paper is the composite icon with two brass triptychs and a brass crucifix (Figure 9). This icon is unique because it comprises of brass icons set into a painted wooden icon. Compared to the other painted icons from the collection, this one is on a curved piece of wood, commonly used in Russian icons. This feature would allow the viewers to feel even closer to the saints since the curving creates a three-dimensional feel. The curve also symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant, a box that held the holy objects of the Ten Commandments (Tarasov, 2002). The Ark of the Covenant, just like an icon, was supposed to manifest the presence of God (Shevzov, 2002). On either side of the brass crucifix, there are two sets of saints; the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene on the right, and Saint Evgenia and Saint Basil on the left. The brass crucifix, meanwhile, has exaggerated Christ's hands and feet and has an unusual shape depicting the Holy Spirit. At the top of the icon are two brass triptychs. The left triptych has a center figure of Saint Antip, while six busts of saints and angels are represented on either side of the center. The right triptych has a center figure of the Kazan Mother of God (representing another famous icon), and this figure is flanked with a set of six saints on each side. Both triptychs also have the head of Christ above the centre panel.

Figure 9: Composite Icon. 19th century, brass and painted icon, Russian. Use of image is by permission of the University of Victoria Art Collections, Gift of Dr. Bruce and Mrs. Dorothy Brown.

Figure 10: Limburg Staurotheke. 10th century, enamelled reliquary, Byzantine.
Source: Cormack, R. (2000). Byzantine Art. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

The idea of placing the brass artefacts into icons would have originated from Byzantine reliquaries. A reliquary is a container for the preservation of relics, which are the remains of a holy person or object that the faithful believe should be worshipped. Common relics include bones of saints, pieces of wood from the True Cross, and holy (blessed) water from Jerusalem. Since the relics were so valuable to the faithful, the reliquary containers were commissioned to be made out of precious materials such as enamel, gold leaf, and gems. By virtue of their contact with an authentic relic, the reliquaries took on miraculous powers, similar to icons. In fact, reliquaries were so powerful they were often set directly on the altar in a Byzantine church (Szczepkowska-Naliwajek, Grove Art Online). Reliquaries were more than simple mementos from travel; they provided a physical and spiritual link between the faithful and the saints, similar to how icons in Russia acted as windows into the spiritual world.

The Byzantine reliquary known as the Limburg Staurotheke (Figure 10) from the 10th century shows the connection between the composite icon and reliquaries. This reliquary is a rectangular flat box with a lid decorated with nine rectangular panels, each of which contains a saint. The middle row of the panels forms a Deesis (meaning supplication), with Christ in the center, while the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist flank either side. When the Limburg Staurotheke is opened, the inside reveals a wooden cross set into the box which, when also removed and opened, contains the relic of the True Cross surrounded by enamel angels and seraphim (Cormack, 2000). The Limburg Staurotheke and the composite icon share an emphasis on the cross and both reference the blood of Christ through red borders. The Limburg Staurotheke has a cluster of rubies surrounding its edge that conjure up the image of Christ's blood, which holds miraculous powers and would have touched the wood of the True Cross. Instead of red rubies, the composite icon symbolizes the blood of Christ by outlining the brass crucifix in red paint. Comparable to the Byzantine reliquary, the painted figures in the icon, like in many Crucifixion scenes, all look towards the cross rather than at the viewers, to emphasize the importance of Christ. The Russian icon figures have a gentle quality, with their heads held high. There is also a similar disfigurement on the figures of Christ in both objects from the Brown Collection discussed so far, almost to articulate Christ's supra-human characteristics.

Crucifixion Scene Analysis

Common Features of The Brown Collection Icons

Although all three Brown Collection icons share features with Byzantine art, they can also be visually associated with one another. One feature that connects all three

of the icons is that they display a crucifixion scene. Russian artists used manuals when creating icons, allowing each scene, from the Annunciation to the Dormition of the Virgin and much more, to have standardized symbols so that viewers would instantly recognize the image. In the Orthodox tradition, the crucifixion is celebrated as the victory of Christ, who became incarnate for human's salvation (Baggley, 1987). Common features for all Russian crucifixion scenes would include a slanting suppedaneum, the skull of Adam at the base of the cross, and the city of Jerusalem portrayed in the background. Although these images were incorporated on all crucifixion scenes, there nevertheless was diversity within the features.

Visual and Stylistic Comparison of Crucifixion Scenes

An example of this diversity is the unique style and shape of Adam's skull. The skull on the brass processional crucifix is the most realistic of the three. This skull includes an indented nasal area and teeth, but displays enlarged eye sockets, making the representation seem otherworldly. The skull on the composite icon is more simplified and rounded, rather than having depressions for the jaw and cheekbones. Meanwhile, the eyes, nose, and mouth are all indicated by the same-sized round holes. Although the head on the composite icon looks like a skull, it is not very realistic. On the other hand, the skull on the quadriptych does not look like a skull at all, but rather like a rock due to its inorganic shape. However, because the eyes are represented by two holes, and the object is placed under the cross, it can be identified as Adam's skull.

There are other noticeable distinctions, such as the images of Christ. The composite icon contains a representation of the torso of God with his arms raised above the clouds. Below him, the Holy Spirit would typically be shown, but instead there is a figure of the Lamb of God, referring to Christ's role as a sacrificial offering for humanity. An Old Believer would not have made this crucifix because their doctrine pertained that humans had never seen God, and therefore he should never be represented by an image. The quadriptych, on the other hand, has the common Old Believer feature of having a representation of Christ's head at the top of the scene. The Old Believer community, Vyg, was famous for making brass icons, and its members were known as the bezpopovtsy. This type of Old Believer rejected hierarchy within their denomination because they felt that the changes instituted by the established Church had broken traditions through heretical practices (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991). Due to their beliefs, their crucifix replaced the image of God with the head of Christ. This is a popular theme in Orthodox art because of the story of King Abgar of Edessa, who suffered from an incurable disease. Christ was unable to visit the king, but instead produced a miraculous

image of his face by pressing it onto a cloth which, with its curative properties, made the king healthy. By including an image of the head of Christ, the artists hoped that the miracles derived from the original image would continue into this artifact. The processional crucifix, however, combines the scenes of the composite icon with the quadriptych by having the torso of Christ blessing, while clouds are below him. Such an image is unique to brass icons, and is not often seen in icons found in catalogues or museums (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991).

Another difference between the three crucifixion scenes is the style of the images. The cross of the composite icon, for example, exaggerates lines and shapes. In particular, this crucifix seems to enhance the indentions of Christ's rib cage, while also enlarging the figure's hands and feet. Christ becomes more of a caricature than a realistic human. Instead of depicting the hill of Golgotha, there are mounds displayed on the icon, forming a geometric pattern. This geometric theme continues at the top of the scene, where the hair and clothing of the angels simply become rows of lines. The crucifixion on the processional crucifix is a little more refined, where Christ's hands and feet are in proportion with his body (apart from very long arms). The rest of his body looks more naturalistic, with indented cheekbones and thin lines separating the various parts of his abdomen. More details are given to the city of Jerusalem on the suppedaneum, using castle-like buildings with featured windows and doors. Fine details continue with the addition of ornate floral patterns that surround the edge of the scene. The quadriptych crucifix provides the most detail by having a large landscape scene. Jerusalem is not confined to the suppedaneum, but instead is spread out across the background, making it possible to have detailed elements. In fact, the buildings in the background seem to create a whole village with variously sized constructions made of diverse architectural designs. While some buildings have crow-stepped roofs, other structures have domes. The fact that these buildings overlap each other is an attempt to emphasize the scale of Jerusalem, and perhaps to associate Moscow with the ancient city. Also evident on the onion-shaped panel of the crucifixion is embellishment within the clouds. At the top of the scene spread out on either side of Christ, the natural elements turn into anthropomorphic, angel-like figures displaying heads, arms, and wings. This is also the only crucifixion scene that includes vegetation in the landscape, a detail that is unnecessary in the narrative, yet adds another dimension of realism.

Optimistic Icons

In two out of the three icons, the Crucifixion scene is in the centre with other biblical images surrounding it. This is common in Byzantine art, which barely

depicted this narrative scene initially, but by the 11th century, the Crucifixion had entered decorations in churches as part of a larger program. Often the Byzantine crucifixion was simplified to its basic elements, similar to the 11th century mosaic in the narthex of Hosios Loukas (Figure 11), where only Christ on the cross, Mary, and Saint John are shown. This pattern continued to later centuries in Byzantine art. The simple background is of plain gold, which exemplifies the isolation of Christ's suffering by the absence of other symbolic elements. With all three of the Brown Collection icons, on the contrary, the crucifixions are artistically detailed and decorated with embellished backgrounds and numerous attendant saints. Perhaps this shift to the addition of many details within one object comes from the fact that the Russians emphasized that icons were miraculous. By adding as many elements as possible, the artists may be attempting to maximize the miraculous nature of their own icons.

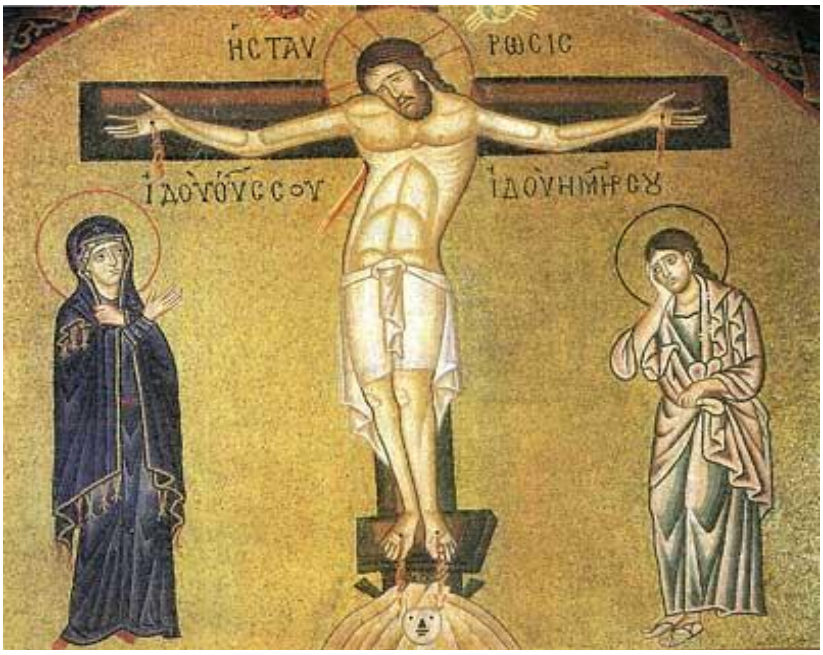

Figure 11: Crucifixion scene in the katholikon of Hosios Loukas. 11th century, mosaic, Byzantine. Source: Cormack, R. (2000). Byzantine Art. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

I suggest that unlike Byzantine crucifixions, Russian crucifixions, display greater optimism, with Christ standing in an open-arm gesture of embrace and self-offering. Instead of a face of sorrow, often pictured in Byzantine crucifixions, the three icons from the Brown Collection have a gentleness to them; therefore, rather than the sorrow of despair, the Russian icons contain a consoling hope in triumph

over death. Even those figures surrounding Christ in all three icons have their head held up high, as if they are restrained and calm rather than expressing utter grief. For Russian icons, the darkness of the hour of crucifixion has, in fact, become the hour of triumph (Baggley, 1987). In fact, in Russia the skull of Adam is not placed in the crucifixion as a reminder of the sin of man. Instead, next to the skull on all three Russian icons from the Brown Collection is the inscription, 'MAPE." This stands for the words: "the place of the skull became Paradise," which reinforces the image of bliss that is to come to the religious followers (Ahlborn & Espinola, 1991, 24). This is evidence that there was a change in crucifixions from the Byzantine icons, which stressed Christ's suffering for humanity's sins, to the Russian icons, which emphasized the positive features of Christ and his closeness to the faithful.

This change could have occurred because the Russians had suffered from many terrible situations throughout the 16th to 20th centuries. For example, in the 19th century when the Brown Collection icons were made, nine out of ten people in the population of Russia were peasants; out of this number, over half were serfs of either the nobles or the state (Brown, 1994). Even once serfdom was banished in 1861, the peasants still had to pay "redemption dues" (annual cash payments to the state) as the tsarist government kept the top "glittering, and the bottom rotting" (Brown, 1994, 90). In addition to this conflict between classes in Russia, there was the persistent threat of famine, national financial disarray, and constant conflicts with Sweden and the Turks. From the defeats by the hand of powerful empires to skirmishes within Russia itself, perhaps the Russian people, and particularly the Eastern Orthodox Church, needed icons as a positive place to convey their culture. Icons had both projected and represented Russia in the past as a form of religious identity. Believers understood that icons were involved in the life of the Russian nation as a whole. For example, during times of national distress, icons played key roles in securing God's aid to Russia, such as during World War I when the Virgin of Vladimir icon was taken to the General Headquarters at the war front (Shevzov, 2002). By focusing on icons, Russians could enter a spiritual ecstasy while ignoring the plight of their times.

Conclusion

Following Vladimir I's conversion, the prince imported Byzantine architects and artists who, assisted by local artists, built new Russian churches and created icons. Although Byzantine artists laid the framework for Russian icons, Russian artists eventually created their own style of icons, especially painted ones. Russian icons focused on the heavenly and blissful, instead of suffering, as was common during the Byzantine Empire. Icons were important to the Russian people; there are

countless accounts of conflicts where Russia was doomed until the divine presence of an icon. The existence of these accounts emphasizes how the nation was united by an optimistic view of religion (Shevzov, 2002). In fact, many Russian traditions of icons, from the iconostasis to the accentuation of icons within icons, reveal how these artifacts were seen as the windows that would guide the faithful to the spiritual world beyond.

By examining these three Russian icons from the Brown Collection, much can and should be written. Researching these Russian icons ensures that they are not lost amongst other artifacts in the University of Victoria Art Collections. As well, their study can help future scholars by detecting the importance of icons for Russian religion, history, and society. Currently, due to a lack of information on Russian icons, there is a lack of recognition of these items, which can cause a cycle of public and academic disinterest. Further research into this field would provide an opportunity to contribute to the development of, and interest in, this exciting area of art history.

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