

**“SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER WITH ANGELS AND MIRACLES”
A NEW IMAGE OF SAINT NICHOLAS OF MYRA IN
RUSSIAN ART OF THE 16TH CENTURY
(ICON FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION IN LONDON)**

Engelina S. Smirnova

Professor of Art History at Moscow State Lomonosov University,
and Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Art Studies in Moscow, Russia



Figure 1. Antique shop in Moscow (?) with icons for sale, 1930s.

In recent years, since the lifting of the tacit ban on the study of many pages in Soviet history, including the circumstances surrounding the sale of artworks from the USSR to the West in the 1920s and early 1930s, Russian publications have frequently reproduced a photograph of a certain antique shop situated either in Moscow (most likely) or Leningrad (Figure 1).¹ On it you can see a large number of icons intended for sale. Some of them, but by no means all, have subsequently been located. Thus, the icon of “Saint George and the Dragon”, which is clearly visible in the left-hand lower section of the photograph, appeared, after many changes of ownership, in the collection of G. and T. Tatintzian (USA) and was displayed at an exhibition of icons from private collections at the Pushkin

State Museum of Fine Art in Moscow in 2009.² The large icon of the “Last Judgement” was acquired in 1936 for the George R. Hann collection,³ entered the collection of Serafim Dritsoulas in Munich, after it was sold in 1980, and in 2004 was presented by Patriarch Aleksiy II of Moscow and All Russia to the reopened Novodevichy Convent of the Resurrection in Saint Petersburg.⁴

On the same photograph at the top, under the archway and next to the “Trinity” we can make out an icon of Saint Nicholas, partly obscured by a rod from which the light is hanging. This icon, with its memorable composition, where the small central representation seems to be in a wreath of supplementary figures and scenes, disappeared from the orbit of specialists and its fate remained unknown.⁵ Only in 2009 did it resurface on the art market, when it appeared at an auction in the USA, consigned by the heirs of

1 See, for example: G.I. Vzdornov, *Реставрация и наука: Очерки по истории открытия и изучения древнерусской живописи*. (Moscow, 2006), p. 319.

2 Pushkin Museum Catalogue, *Шедевры русской иконописи XIV-XVI веков из частных собраний*, (Moscow, 2009), Cat. 36.

3 The George R. Hann Collection. Part 1: Russian Icons, Ecclesiastical and Secular Works of Art, Embroidery, Silver, Porcelain and Malachite. (New York: Christie’s, 17-18/04/1980), lot. 90, pp. 188–189.

4 N.V. Pivovarova, “Икона XVI века «Страшный суд»: дар Воскресенскому Новодевичьему монастырю в Санкт-Петербурге. Вопросы иконографии и стиля”, *Лазаревские чтения. Искусство Византии, Древней Руси, Западной Европы. Материалы научной конференции 2009*, (Moscow 2009), pp. 197-211.

5 Its presence on the photograph in question was pointed out by Maria Makhanko (Moscow), author of several works on hagiographical icons of Saint Nicholas.



Figure 2. Saint Nicholas with Angels and Miracles, Novgorod, 16th century. Private collection, London. 54 x 42 cm

the woman who had bought it.⁶ It transpired that the icon had been purchased in Moscow in the 1930s by the American diplomat Norris Shipman and his wife Theophane (Fanny) Shipman, who was French by birth, the niece of the celebrated sculptor Antoine Bourdelle and well-known in political and cultural circles in France and the USA. In Moscow she had visited antique shops with two friends, one of whom was Francis Russell, the wife of the Italian ambassador Augusto Rosso, and the other Marjorie Merriweather Post, then married to the American diplomat Joe Davies, and founder of the delightful Hillwood Museum in Washington, DC. The events described constitute one of the most vivid episodes in the entertaining history of the collecting of Orthodox art, and Russian icons in particular, in the West.⁷

Now in London, the icon is known only to a small number of specialists. It is clearly a work of the 16th century produced in Novgorod. This is immediately obvious from the features of the style: the characteristic angularity and expressiveness of the contours, the large forms, the color contrasts, and the special shades of red and green. At the same time the icon is remarkable for its unusual subject and iconography, and the unique composition which emphasizes the majesty of the saintly image (Figure 2). In spite of the intense study of the veneration of Saint Nicholas of Myra in the Orthodox world which has been carried out in recent years,⁸ the numerous publications of newly discovered and little known works depicting the saint that have appeared, and the commentaries on long celebrated ones, there still exist unexplored areas in this sphere.



Figure 3. Back of the icon.

General information about the icon. State of preservation of the painting.

The work is relatively small—54 x 42 cm. Most likely it was not on an iconostasis, but was fixed to a separate base for veneration. The panel is made of comparatively soft and light limewood and consists of two boards fastened together with two wooden traverses (*shponki*), new ones in old grooves (Figure 3). On the front is a relatively shallow, hollowed out central section (*kovcheg*) for the representation, surrounded by raised borders that, following the old, early Russian tradition, are slightly narrower at the

6 Ken Farmer Auctions, Radford, Virginia, 2-3/05/2009, lot 290, described laconically as: “Russian Icon”.

7 See: E.S Smirnova, “Об истории собирания русских икон на Западе” [“On the history of Russian icon collecting in the West”], n.d.

8 M.S. Krutova, *Святитель Николай Чудотворец в древнерусской письменности*. (Moscow 1997); N.V Pak., (ed). “Образ св. Николая Чудотворца в культуре Древней Руси”, *Материалы научной конференции 22 мая 2000 года* (St. Petersburg: Российская академия наук. Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский дом), 2001); Catalogue of Vologda Exhibition, April-May 2004, *Образ святителя Николая Чудотворца в живописи, рукописной и старопечатной книге, графике, мелкой пластике, деревянной скульптуре и декоративно-прикладном искусстве XIII-XXI веков из собраний музеев и частных коллекций Северо-Западного региона России*, (Moscow, 2004); A.V. Bugayevsky, (ed). *Правило веры и образ кротости... Образ святителя Николая, архиепископа Мирликийского, в византийской и славянской агиографии, гимнографии и иконографии* (Moscow: Православный Свято-Тихоновский богословский институт, 2004); G.S. Klokoва, M.S. Krutova, (eds) *Святитель Николай Мирликийский в памятниках письменности и иконографии* (Moscow: Православный Свято-Тихоновский гуманитарный университет, 2006); I.D. Soloviova, (ed). *Святой Николай Мирликийский в произведениях XII-XIX столетий из собрания Русского музея*, (St. Petersburg, 2006); M. Bacci, (ed). *San Nicola. Splendori d'arte d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, (Milan, 2006); A.V., Bugayevsky, A.A. Rybakov. (eds). *Почитание святителя Николая Чудотворца и его отражение в фольклоре, письменности и искусстве*, (Moscow : Skanrus, 2007); A.V. Bugayevsky, (ed.). *Добрый кормчий. Почитание святителя Николая в христианском мире*. Moscow : Skinia, 2011).



Figure 4. Handwritten Soviet museum label (detail of back).

sides than at the top and bottom. Here and there under the layer of priming you can see the canvas (in the lower margin and the upper part of the right-hand margin), but it is not clear whether it covers the whole surface of the board.

On the reverse of the panel are two scraps from a paper label, with a penciled inscription with the words “Музей изя... куств” (Figure 4), i.e., probably the “Museum of Fine Art named after A.S. Pushkin”, as the Pushkin Museum in Moscow was called at that time. The inscription is in Soviet orthography and probably indicated the place where the icon was kept temporarily prior to entering an antique shop for sale. It would be a miracle if anyone managed to find archival documents about the icon’s provenance. Most likely it went up for sale not from a church or large museum, but from a private collection.

The two boards forming the icon panel have come slightly apart, forming a vertical crack, along which are traces of minor repair work—touches of priming and later painting. There are small inserts of paint in the lower part of the icon, where, as we know, there is always more damage than on the rest of the surface. The paint on the icon is rather thin and transparent in places suggesting that the paint layer may have been slightly washed off during restoration. However, the upper paint layers—the white strokes and fine hatching, and the outlines of the folds, are well preserved. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly some touching up of the painting in places where it has been lost. These are clearly visible in the inscriptions: all the original inscriptions are executed in dark red paint, but the inserts are in bright red. Judging from the character of the restoration, during which the layers of darkened varnish were probably removed, perhaps later over-painting as well, and the necessary repairs done, this was the work of restorers who had been trained in the old Russian tradition going back to Russian Old Believer icon painters of the early 20th century. As we know, masters of this type held leading positions in the restoration workshops of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, which is when our icon was most probably cleaned.

Figure 5. Detail: The center of the composition.



In the raised borders, on Nicholas’ halo and above his shoulders there are small holes from the nails which fastened the precious metal ornaments—the cover on the raised borders, the halo and the tsata, a semi-circular collar in the shape of a crescent moon on the chest, under the saint’s face. These ornaments show that the icon was specially venerated in the church where it was kept.



Figure 6 (left). Detail: The Savior with Gospel Book and the Archangel Michael.



Figure 7 (right). Detail: The Virgin with omophorion and the Archangel Gabriel.

Subject, iconography, purpose

The center of the icon is the traditional half-length representation of Saint Nicholas of Myra in a *phelonion*, and a white episcopal *omophorion* with large black crosses (Figure 5). The saint's right hand is raised in blessing and his left hand holds a closed Gospel. In the upper corners are the Savior and the Virgin Mary depicted down to the knee against the greenish background of the heavens surrounded by pink clouds (Figures 6, 7). They are turned towards Saint Nicholas, holding out the episcopal attributes, the Gospel and omophorion. Lower down, against a gold background, on a level with Nicholas' shoulders, are angels bearing the gifts of Christ and the Virgin Mary to the saint. Their names are inscribed: “АРХА[нге]Л[ъ] МИХАИЛ[ъ],

АРХА[нге]Л[ъ] ГАВРИИЛЪ”. Their robes follow the traditional iconography for the two archangels: Michael is in a red himation and a green chiton, and Gabriel in a green himation with a red chiton.

The holy hierarch himself is depicted with the attributes already presented to him. The representation of Christ and the Virgin Mary handing Nicholas the attributes was well known in Byzantine and early Russian art.⁹ This iconography was intended to emphasize the special role of Saint Nicholas among the Christian Fathers of the Church and became very popular in Russia, where the story of the so-called Nicene Miracle of the saint's struggle against the Aryan heresy at the First Nicene Council, after which he was deprived of the rank of bishop and cast into prison, where he was visited by Christ and the Virgin Mary who gave him back the episcopal insignia.¹⁰ It is perhaps in Russia, to be more precise, in Novgorod, where the most expressive early representation of Christ and the Virgin Mary handing Saint Nicholas the episcopal attributes has survived—on the 1294 icon of Saint Nicholas from the church dedicated to the saint on the island of Lipno (Novgorod Museum),¹¹ with large figures of the Savior and the Virgin Mary, who are each standing on a red cloud with their gifts touching the saint's colored halo.

In the newly discovered icon the theme of the highest patronage of the saint is presented with new details and a different intonation. New nuances of meaning are created by the inclined figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary, their turning towards the saint, the gold radiance of the background around Nicholas and, most importantly, the

9 N.P. Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art*. (Torino 1983), p. 79, note 9.

10 G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos. Der heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Bd. II, (Leipzig-Berlin 1917), p. 393; V.O Klyuchevskiy, *Древнерусские жития святых как исторический источник*, (Moscow 1871), p. 457.

11 V. Lazarev, *Русская иконопись от истоков до начала XVI века*, (Moscow : Iskusstvo, 1983), Cat. 17; L. Nersessian, (ed). *Иконы Великого Новгорода XI – начала XVI века*, (Moscow: Severniy palomnik, 2008), Cat. 4.



Figure 8. Detail (left): The rescue of the drowning Dimitri.



Figure 9. Detail (right): The healing of the possessed boy.

himself is not depicted there. The miraculous events are taking place through the agency of the angels who bear grace to those in trouble. The significance of the angels' figures is revealed by the inscriptions:

АГГЛЪ Г[осподе]НЬ ИЗБАВИ ДМИТРИЯ ОТ ПОТОПА
МОЛИТВАМИ СТОГО НИКОЛЫ (*The angel of the Lord saves
Demetrios from the flood through the prayers of Saint Nicholas*)

АГГЛЪ Г[оспо]Д[ен]Ь ИЗГНА БИСА ОТ ЧОЛОВИКА
МОЛИТВАМИ СТОГО НИКОЛЫ (*The angel of the Lord drives a
demon from a man through the prayers of Saint Nicholas*).

Figure 10. Detail from icon of the Dormition. Novgorod, beginning of the 13th century. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Thanks to these inscriptions the role of the saint as a miracle-worker is not only revealed by the representation but also stressed in verbal form. The actual content of both inscriptions points to the role of the word, the saint's prayers, through the agency of which his miraculous acts take place. But the saint's role as miracle-worker is also revealed visually, as the angels are flying to the suffering in this world from the gold background where Saint Nicholas is. They are perceived as his messengers.

images of the angels, the heavenly messengers bearing the bishop his episcopal insignia.

It is significant that the one named Michael is depicted under the figure of the Savior, which suggests certain associations with this archangel as the leader of Christ's heavenly host, while the angel under the figure of the Virgin Mary is identified by the inscription as the Archangel Gabriel, which in turn recalls the theme of the Annunciation.

The lower corners of the icon are taken up with two scenes of miracles by the saint (Figures 8, 9). On the left is the saving of the young Demetrios, whose boat has overturned in the sea and on the right, the healing of the youth possessed by an evil spirit. The unusual feature of each scene is that Nicholas

The icon's composition clearly expresses the theme of the glorification of the saint. This theme is expressed more clearly here than in any other representation of Saint Nicholas, even the most solemn: more strongly than in



Figure 11. The Virgin of the Passion. Crete second half of the 15th century, Private collection London

the strikingly large and splendid icon of 1294 or in any of the big Russian hagiographical icons of the bishop of Myra produced in the 16th or 17th century with their sumptuous frames of marginal scenes. The Savior and the Virgin Mary are inclined towards Saint Nicholas, the four angels form a wreath around the central image, and the compositional lines of both lower scenes seem to form a pedestal for the central figure.

As we can see, the idea of the glorification of Saint Nicholas, one of the most revered saints in Russia, is embodied in this newly discovered icon in new, special ways. Moreover a considerable role in achieving this is allotted to the angels who create a sense of heavenly grace and great spirituality not only by their actions, but also by their very figures, their splendid unfurled wings. The role of additional representations in this newly discovered icon is so great and so original that we make so bold as to call this variant of the iconography of the saint, which has never been named in surviving early icons of this type, “Saint Nicholas with Angels and Miracles”.

The device of association and allusion

The theme of the glorification of Saint Nicholas is expressed not only by introducing the images of the flying angels and including the two scenes of miracles, but also by other devices, namely, the association of this or that representational motif with other widely-known motifs and forms. This applies above all to the figures of angels who are bringing Saint Nicholas the episcopal insignia. Their poses, the outlines of their figures recall unambiguously many other well known compositions in the art of the Orthodox world: for example, the angels in the “Dormition of the Virgin” who are flying with veiled hands towards Christ to receive the soul of the sleeping Virgin Mary (Figure 10)¹², and also the angels carrying the instruments of the Passion in the composition of “Our Lady of the Passion” (Figure 11)¹³. Similar analogies going back to scenes where the main figures are Christ and the Virgin Mary elevate the new iconography of Saint Nicholas with Angels to the sphere of exceptionally high associations to glorify the great bishop.

The figures of the angels flying down to rescue Demetrios from drowning and healing the possessed man arouse other associations. One cannot fail to notice the resemblance of these flying angels to similar figures in compositions of the *protoevangelium* cycle—the “Annunciation by the Well” (Figure 12) and the scene of the angel bringing food to Mary in the “Presentation in the Temple” (Figure 13). The purpose of such parallels is obvious: both here and there we find heavenly succor, heavenly tidings sent down into the earthly world.

There is also a comparison, not immediately obvious, in the icon’s overall compositional design. Thanks to the separation of the corner compositions by wavy contours (clear at the top, but only sketchy at the bottom), the central part acquires cruciform outlines. We see the same pattern that is characteristic for the covers of altar Gospels, where it was customary to place the image of Christ in the middle (in the composition of the Crucifixion or enthroned) and representations of the four Evangelists in the corners. In the 15th century this old arrangement of the images on Gospel covers (which was already



Figure 12. The Annunciation to Saint Anne at the Well. Mosaic from the Monastery of Chora in Constantinople, circa 1315-1320.

12 See, for example, the 1105-1106 fresco in the Church of Our Lady in Asinou, Cyprus (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Greek Art. Byzantine Wall-Paintings* (Athens 1994), pls. 56-57).

13 Representations that are well known in Byzantine and post-Byzantine art and in mediaeval Russia. See: M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών*, (Athens 1998), Cat. 48, 68; Chr. Baltoyanni, *Icons Mother of God*, (Athens 1994), Cat. 50-53, pp. 171-177, pls. 87-93.



Figure 13. An Angel brings food to the Virgin. Detail from icon of the “Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple”. Novgorod, end of 15th - beginning of 16th century. M.E. Elizavetin collection, Moscow.

known in the pre-Mongol period) acquired figured contours separating the images of the Evangelists in the corners.¹⁴ In the 16th and 17th centuries the cruciform shape of the central panel became more obvious, and these compositions on covers grew widespread—both in Novgorod and in Moscow. Of the extant 16th and 17th-century covers some stand out for their rarefied composition,¹⁵ while others are very close in design and proportions to the treatment of our icon of Saint Nicholas (Figure 14). The latter include the Gospel covers from the Novgorod monasteries of Khutyn, 1620s to 1630s (Figure 15),¹⁶ and the Holy Spirit, 1639, with later additions.¹⁷ In the last two cases, as in many other covers not mentioned by us, the cruciform outlines of the central field are clearly evident, and in the cover from the Monastery of the Holy Spirit the resemblance to our icon is strengthened by the figures of angels, cherubim and seraphim around the central quadrifoil.

The association of the icon’s compositional scheme with the structure of a Gospel cover elevates the meaning of the icon’s representation to an exceptionally high level, recalling Saint Nicholas’ role in promoting Christ’s teachings.

The method of associating a representation with another image in order to demonstrate the symbolical resemblance between them is fairly well known in Byzantine art. It was often used in the art of the Comnenian period which was rich in refined associations. For example, representations of the Virgin and Child could be given outlines reminiscent of the poetic images with which Mary was compared in hymnological texts, and which, in their turn, were full of liturgical allusions. An instructive example is the figure of the Virgin and Child from an 1192 fresco in the church of the Panagia Arakiotissa in Lagoudera, Cyprus,¹⁸ which due to the special outline of the arms holding the Infant Christ resembles a sacred chalice or liturgical spoon (λαβίς) in keeping with the metaphor in the patrological *acta* (Figure 16).¹⁹ A similar device is also found in a Russian icon of the “Virgin Orans” c. 1224 from Yaroslavl (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery), where Mary’s silhouette resembles a holy chalice (Figure 17).²⁰ The same set of phenomena include the well known association between the mosaic of the Virgin in the conch of the central apse of the Hagia Sophia cathedral in Kiev and her long established epithet of the “Indestructible Wall” (which is in part associated with the text of Psalm 44 placed

- 14 Such as, for example, the cover on the Moscow Gospel from the beginning of the 15th century from the Trinity-Saint Sergius monastery in the Russian State Library, Inv.no. M. 8655 (G.I. Vzdornov. *Искусство книги в Древней Руси. Рукописная книга Северо-Восточной Руси XII – начала XV веков.* (Moscow 1980), Cat. 64)
- 15 For example, the cover from the Trinity-Saint Sergius monastery in the Russian State Library, ф. 304, Троицк., III, № 10, 1521 or 1527 гг., by the master Ivan Novgorodets; the 1530-1531 cover in the Novgorod Museum; and the 16th-century cover in the State Russian Museum (I.A. Sterligova (ed). *Декоративно-прикладное искусство Великого Новгорода. Художественный металл XVI-XVII веков.* (Moscow 2008), Cat. 57 & 58, pp. 327-330).
- 16 I.A. Sterligova, 2008, Cat. 73, pp. 353-354.
- 17 *Ibid.* Cat. 74, p. 355.
- 18 A. Nicolaïdès, “L’église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre. Étude iconographique des fresques de 1992”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 50, Washington D.C. 1996, pp. 110-111, fig. 3; repr. In color: M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Greek Art. Byzantine Wall-Paintings.* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1994), pl.70.
- 19 *Patrologia Graeca.* vol. 18. Col. 364 (сочинения Псевдо-Мефодия). See also: H. Belting “An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vols. 34/35, (Washington D.C. 1980/1981), p. 10.
- 20 E.S. Smirnova, “Литургические образы в произведениях живописи (на примере иконы начала XIII в.)”, *Византийский временник*, vol. 55 (80) (Moscow 1994), pp. 197-202.



Figure 14. Gospel Cover. End of the 16th century with later additions. From the Cathedral of Saint Sophia, Novgorod.



Figure 15. Gospel Cover. The central and corner plaques, Moscow 1639; the background, Novgorod 1660s. Novgorod Museum (from the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Novgorod).

under the figure and connected with the theme of the indestructible Christian city).²¹

There is, however, a considerable difference between comparisons in art of the Byzantine period and the devices of the post-Byzantine age when our icon was produced. Whereas in early monuments the images reproduced are “basic”, primary, tangible ones (cup, chalice), later ones, our icon among them, reproduce not the objects themselves, but representational motifs which have grown up in Christian art. What is repeated in our icon of Saint Nicholas is a long established structure with flying angels, and also the composition of the front cover of altar Gospels, which in turn contains an allusion to the outlines of the Cross. Identical features are found in other compositions that appeared in

Russian art of the 16th century and contain allusions to other images. Examples are representations of “Our Lady of the Burning Bush” (Figure 18), which include the symbolism of the star and halos with eight rays associated with the creative power of the Divine Wisdom.

The quoting of an old representational motif—its insertion in a new context with the aim of enriching the meaning of the new composition with additional allusions—which we find in the newly discovered icon of Saint Nicholas, is in keeping with the tradition of inventive iconographical production which appeared in 16th-century Russian icon painting and variations of the old Byzantine devices. What we have here is a case of orientation towards a “paradigm”, which A.M. Lidov pointed out using other examples.²²

The central representation

Let us now turn to the focus of the icon. We are struck by the apparent contrast between the central representation and what surrounds it. The figure of Saint Nicholas is serene, static, and relatively flat. The saint’s face is inspired and contemplative, yet at the same time aloof, his *phelonion* a dull flesh shade (Figure 4). Yet all the figures and scenes around the central image stand out in sharp relief and are full of movement and energy, shining with vivid, lively colors. As an explanation of this contrast we would advance the cautious hypothesis that the focal image of the icon contains an allusion to a specially revered image of Saint Nicholas. Its apparent abstraction and the devices for representing the figure differ from the rest of the painting and were intended to convey the specific nature of the central representation, to recall its prototype.

One unobtrusive detail, the rounded contour of the figure along the lower edge, suggests that in producing this new work the 16th-century master had in mind the so-called “round image” of Saint Nicholas, the wonder-working icon (“round board”) that, legend has it, floated to Novgorod from Kiev and healed Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich of Novgorod

21 S.S. Averintsev, “К уяснению смысла надписи над конхой центральной апсиды Софии Киевской”, *Древнерусское искусство. Художественная культура домонгольской Руси*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), pp. 25-49

22 A. Lidov, «Образы-параdigмы» как категория визуальной культуры, in: A Lidov, *Иеротопия. Пространственные иконы и образы-параdigмы в византийской культуре*. (Moscow, 2009), pp. 293-303.



Figure 16. (Top Left) Standing Virgin and Child. Fresco in the church of the Virgin Arakiotissa, Lagoudera, Cyprus, 1192.



Figure 17. (Above) The Virgin of the Sign (Virgin Orans). Yaroslavl, circa 1124. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 18. (Left) The Virgin of the Burning Bush. End of the 16th century. Kolomonskoe Museum, Moscow (from the Monastery in Solovki).

in 1113, to commemorate which the stone cathedral of Saint Nicholas was erected in the Novgorod Dvorishche.²³ In the 16th century, however, when our icon was executed, the wonder-working round image of Saint Nicholas was no longer in Novgorod. Its fate is described by late Novgorodian chronicles compiled in the 17th century on the basis of extremely valuable information not reflected in other documents. From the chronicle text we learn that in 1502 the Moscow Grand Prince Ivan Vasilievich (Ivan III) gave orders for the “wonder-working icon round panel of Nicholas the great miracle-worker” to be taken from Novgorod to Moscow, where it was placed in the Kremlin, in the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in the grand prince’s palace, which, it should be noted, contained other rare and valuable icons as well. Unfortunately there was a fire in the Kremlin in 1626 and the wonder-working icon of Saint Nicholas was burnt together with other valuables in the church.²⁴

We can assume that, in accordance with tradition, copies were made of the wonder-working icon for Novgorodian churches while it was still in Novgorod, and also after it was taken to Moscow. From these copies, in turn, new copies could have been made, with changes in individual elements of the composition. Our icon is unlike the earliest of the surviving replicas, a 16th-century icon in the Novgorod Museum, in the type of face, the drawing of the robes, the contours of the hand raised in blessing and the form of the Gospel book.²⁵ Another icon, however, probably executed later than the one just mentioned, in the second half of the 16th century and renewed in the late 17th - early

23 S. E. Smirnova, “Круглая икона св. Николая Мирликийского из новгородского Николо-Дворищенского собора. Происхождение древнего образа и его место в контексте русской культуры XVI в.,” *Древнерусское искусство. Русское искусство Позднего Средневековья. XVI век.*, (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin, 2003), pp. 314-340; E.A Gordienko, “Икона святителя Николая на круглой доске из Никольского собора в Новгороде”, *Почитание святителя Николая Чудотворца и его отражение в фольклоре, письменности и искусстве*, (Moscow, 2007), pp. 111-116.

24 Уваровская летопись. Рукопись XVII в. БАН (Library of the Academy of Sciences of Russia, in S. Petersburg), 34.4. 1. Л. 488 об. – 489; Забелинская летопись. ГИМ (State Historical museum, Moscow), Забел. 261. Л. 408 об.; V.V. Yakovlev “Сказание об иконе Николая Чудотворца «круглая доска» и поздняя летописная традиция”, *Опыты по источниковедению. Древнерусская книжность. Сборник статей в честь В.К. Зиборова*, (St. Petersburg, 1997), pp. 139-140.

25 L. Nersessian, (ed). *Иконы Великого Новгорода XI – начала XVI века*, (Moscow: Severniy palomnik, 2008), Cat. 5.



Figure 19. The "Round Image" of Saint Nicholas. Replica of the second half of the 16th century with 17th and 18th century restorations. Novgorod Museum.

18th century (Figure 19), has several features in common with the image of the saint in our icon. These are the fine drawing of the hand raised in blessing, and the quite unusual form of the book, which is three-dimensional, with a protuberant round spine. These similarities can serve as indirect evidence that our newly discovered icon really does contain an allusion to the wonder-working Novgorodian "round image", or rather to one of its copies.

Another special feature of our icon is the facial typology of Saint Nicholas of Myra. The bishop is depicted not as an elder, but almost middle-aged, with rare flecks of grey in his hair. The forehead is large, but not bulging, and the face is not round, as is usually the case, but slightly elongated. These features indicate the originality of the newly discovered icon and find a certain parallel in the aforementioned late copies of the wonder-working icon in the Novgorod Museum.

Representations around the central panel

Unlike the central panel, regarding which we have voiced only cautious hypotheses, the representations around the central part of the icon allow us to offer a more confident explanation of their function. There can be no doubt that these figures and scenes are intended to emphasise the exceptionally high status of Saint Nicholas and the significance of his acts and miracles. Precisely this idea is revealed by the figures in the icon's upper and middle zones and the scenes in its lower zone. The presentation of the episcopal insignia here by Christ and the Virgin Mary is duplicated by the insertion of the figures of angels carrying the insignia. It is interesting that, whereas the *omophorion* in the Virgin's hands resembles the one carried by the angel and the one on the saint's shoulders, the appearance of the Gospel varies: in Christ's hands it has a red edge, in the angel's a green edge, and in Saint Nicholas' a white edge and a spine with an unusual pattern. The accentuation of the handing over of the insignia motif (the Nicene miracle) again suggests a Novgorodian context: the same motif is emphasised in the above-mentioned 1294 icon of Saint Nicholas from the church of Saint Nicholas on Lipno, although with different devices.

The choice of subjects from the saint's numerous miracles and acts for the representations in the lower zone is noteworthy. They are rescuing and healing, one on water and the other on dry land. Both scenes recall the main direction of the saint's activity, his assistance to people on the earth and on the sea. At the same time we would suggest cautiously that both miracles are indirectly and allegorically related to the history of the "round image" with its legendary journey by water from Kiev to Novgorod, its discovery on Lake Ilmen by the island of Lipno and the miraculous healing of Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich through the agency of this image. The considerable area allotted to the figures of the angels and the representations of the miracles (including the presentation of the insignia), the dynamism and vividness of these images surrounding the central figure, clearly reveal the icon's special ideological intention: to present Saint Nicholas not only as a leading figure in the Christian Church, bishop of Myra in Lycia, but also as a worker of miracles.

Certain features permit us to hazard yet another, very cautious suggestion/hypothesis, namely that what we see in the newly discovered icon is "an icon within an icon." The arrangement of angels' figures, which seem to form an imaginary circle joined by



Figure 20. The Savior “Not Made By Hands”; Christ in the Tomb. Stroganov master Stephan Arefiev, beginning of the 17th century. Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg (from the Annunciation Cathedral in Solvytchegodsk).

the upper edge of the halo, and also the accentuated pattern of the angels’ wings, all reinforce the allusion to the “round image” of Saint Nicholas and introduce into the composition the motif of the triumph and glorification not only of the saint himself, but also of his wonder-working Novgorodian icon, or rather of the prelate through the agency of his icon.

In this respect there is a certain similarity here to the iconography of the icon of Christ *Acheiropoietos*, “Not Made By Hands,” where angels are depicted along the sides of the cloth or tile with the miraculous imprint of Christ’s face. The earliest Russian composition of this kind is a miniature in the Novgorod manuscript of a 1262 (?) Prologue in the State Historical Museum, Хлуд. 187. This iconography became widespread in Russia. (Figure 20).

Impulses encouraging the development of the new image. The veneration of wonder-working icons of Saint Nicholas in the 16th century. The role of the struggle against Protestant tendencies

The main and largest inscription on the icon, above Nicholas’ halo, reads: НИКОЛАЕ ЧЮ[до]ТВОРЕЦЪ [Nicolas the Miracle worker] (Figure 21). The significance of this inscription can be appreciated only if we turn to the history of inscriptions on representations of the saint. Whereas hagiological and prayer texts originally denote the saint as a great miracle-worker, inscriptions on representations give the quite different definition of “Агиос” [agios], “Святой” [saint]. In Russian works up to and including the 15th century these two words are used in art with very rare exceptions. One such exception is the Novgorodian hagiographical icon of the late 14th century from the church of Saints Boris and Gleb in Plotniki (Novgorod Museum),²⁶ with the characteristic Novgorodian replacement of “ч” by “ц”: НИКОЛАЕ ЦЮДОТВОРЕЦЪ [Nicholas the Miracle worker].

Figure 21. Inscription above the central image: НИКОЛАЕ ЧЮ[до]ТВОРЕЦЪ [Nicholas the Miracle Worker].

Such inscriptions did not begin to spread until the beginning of the 16th century and became prevalent roughly from the middle of the century, which was most evident in hagiographical icons, possibly because they contain numerous miracles by the saint.



Why did this new description of Nicholas (as a Wonderworker), previously used so rarely, become established in art? And why did so many hagiographical icons of him abound in scenes of miracles? What was behind the desire to create a new iconography of the saint emphasising his role as a wonder-worker sent from above?

Obviously the basic deep-rooted factors behind these changes lie in the development of religious feeling, in the desire to express new nuances in the veneration of the saint. The history of Russia in the 16th century was marked not only by the intensity of political life, with its dramatic collisions, its cruelty, executions, destruction and the break with the old order, but also by the country’s growth,

26 L. Nersessian, (ed). *Иконы Великого Новгорода XI – начала XVI века*, (Moscow: Severniy palomnik, 2008), Cat. 17.

the unprecedented development of the provinces, particularly the North and the area along the Volga. Similarly, in the sphere of culture this period is known not only for the forceful spreading of state ideology and the new iconographical variants produced in the workshops of the metropolitans and tsars, but also for the significance of local traditions, the absorbing of broad, popular ideas into church art.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we can assume that the general Russian glorification of local miracle-working icons of Saint Nicholas in the 16th century (for example, the image of Saint Nicholas of Velikoretsk in 1555), is explained not only by the initiative of Moscow, but also by the scale of the traditional veneration of this icon in the village near Vyatka.²⁷

Alongside the increased veneration of icons of Saint Nicholas in the provinces there was the activity of the Moscow authorities, on whose orders certain early and specially revered icons of Saint Nicolas were removed to Moscow. They included the above-mentioned transfer of the “round icon” from Novgorod to a church in the grand prince’s palace in the Moscow Kremlin in 1502 and of the celebrated icon of the late 12th century often called “Nikola Novodevichy” (now in the State Tretyakov Gallery) from a church in Novgorod to the newly founded Novodevichy Convent in Moscow.²⁸ There is every reason to suppose that the hagiographical icon from the late 14th - early 15th century in the Assumption Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin known from old inventories as “Nikola Vezhitsky” is the Novgorodian wonder-working icon from the Vyazhishsky Monastery brought to Moscow with many other sacred relics from Novgorod in the 16th century.²⁹ The saint’s designation as wonder-worker naturally became increasingly popular, and the hagiographical cycle was enriched with more and more new scenes and details.

Yet to our mind there was another reason for the above-mentioned innovations in representations of Saint Nicholas, which lies in the intensification of the theological disputes that manifested themselves with special force in the middle of the 16th century. The group of heretics opposed by the official Russian Church was led by a certain Matfey Bashkin, who was a boyar. In his views historians detect the influence of the ideology of the West European Reformation, while Bashkin himself said that he had got his ideas from the “Latins” in Lithuania.³⁰

The struggle against these heretics grew more active in 1553 when supporters of the heresy, the former hegumen of the Trinity-Saint Sergius Monastery Artemiy, and also Perfir (Porfiriy) Maloy and Sava Shakh, were invited to meet Tsar Ivan the Terrible and Metropolitan Macarius. In expounding their views, the heretics “blasphemed against all wonder-workers who believed in Christ and performed miracles, and mocked all rules and church councils” (i.e., viewed church rules and decisions of Church councils as empty

27 Makhanko, M.A. “Икона св. Николы Великорецкого в коллекции Амброзиано Венето и почитание чудотворного образа в XVI в.”, *Памятники культуры. Новые открытия*. 1997, (Moscow, 1998), pp. 240-251.

28 Государственная Третьяковская галерея. Каталог собрания, том 1. Древнерусское искусство X-- начала XV века. Moscow 1995, cat. 9.

29 E.S. Smirnova, V.K. Laurina, E.A Gordienko. *Живопись Великого Новгорода. XV век.*, (Moscow, 1982), Cat. 5.

30 See, for example: A.I. Klivanov *Реформационные движения в России в XIV – первой половине XVI в.*, (Moscow, 1960). pp. 265-274; Archimandrite Makariy (Veretennikov). “Башкин Матвей Семенович”, *Православная энциклопедия*, vol. IV (*Афанасий – Бессмертие*), (Moscow, 2002), pp. 401-403.

babble).³¹ The condemnation of heretics was assisted not only by verbal arguments, but also by an event that happened just when the discussion was at its height: “And while they were disputing about miracle-workers with Perfir, who swore that Nikola was an ordinary man, at that very time Nikola the Miracle-Worker of Gostun in his church by his image did forgive a boyar from Tula Grigoriy Sukhotin, who had not the use of his arms or legs; and at the prayer service he was straightway restored to health, whole and hearty”.³² This miracle took place in the Moscow Kremlin in the Church of Saint Nicholas of Gostun (no longer extant) built in 1506 for an image of Saint Nicholas which had become famous shortly before this in the village of Gostun in former Kaluga province.³³

From the chronicle text we learn that one of the most important points of dispute with the heretics was the veneration of Saint Nicholas. Denying miracles and miracle-workers as the Lutherans did, the heretics regarded Saint Nicholas as an ordinary mortal, but their delusion was straightway disproved by the miracle of the healing of the boyar.

The above-mentioned discussion has been used by historians of art to explain the remarkable enrichment of the hagiographical cycle of Nicholas in Russian icon painting of the second half of the 16th century, in particular the incredibly detailed representation of the “Miracle of the Patriarch Athanasius.” The latter had refused to consecrate an icon triptych commissioned by a devout townsman, which depicted Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas, because he regarded the bishop of Myra as an ordinary mortal unworthy of such company; subsequently, however, the patriarch was rescued at sea during a storm thanks to a prayer to Saint Nicholas, after which he recognized him as a saint and miracle-worker.³⁴ However the struggle against echoes of Lutheran views which had penetrated into Russia also explains other innovations in representations of Saint Nicholas, first and foremost, the spread of inscriptions with the word “miracle-worker.”

Russian documents of the 16th century also refer to other conflicts with Lutherans over the veneration of icons, in which again, a considerable role was played by the image of Saint Nicholas. In 1558 during the Livonian War waged by Ivan the Terrible, the town of Rugodiv (Narva) was captured by the Germans, but Muscovite troops managed to take it back. Their success was assisted by a fire for which the impious Germans were responsible: a certain *nemchin* (a European foreigner with no respect for Orthodox images) who was brewing beer cut up an icon of Saint Nicholas and cast it into the flames. This caused a fire to break out. The Moscow commanders broke into the town

31 “Никоновская летопись под 7061 (1553) г.” *Полное собрание русских летописей vol. XIII*, (Moscow 2000), p. 233.

32 *Ibid.* In all probability the miraculously healed Grigoriy Sukhotin was from the same branch of the Tula noble family of Sukhotins as the future husband of Tatyana Lvovna Tolstaya-Sukhotina, the elder daughter of Lev Tolstoy, whose estate of Yasnaya Polyana was also in Tula province.

33 “Воскресенская летопись под 1506 (7015) г.”, *Полное собрание русских летописей, vol. 8*, (Moscow, 2001), p. 247.

34 E.S Smirnova. “Икона Николы из Боровичей”, *Сообщения Государственного Русского музея. Issue no. 7*, (Leningrad, 1961), pp. 52-59.



Figure 22. A nemchin (German) in Narva (Rugodiva) throwing an icon of Saint Nicholas into the fire in order to brew beer. Fresco in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Yaroslavl, 1640.



Figure 23. Reception in Moscow of the holy icons saved in Narva (Rugodiva). The icon of Saint Nicholas is on the left among the representations of saints. Fresco in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Yaroslavl, 1640.

and discovered the icon of Saint Nicolas, as well as some other images, miraculously unharmed in the flames (Figures 22, 23).³⁵

Mention must also be made of a charter sent in 1561 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Joasaph to Metropolitan Macarius. The text, which denounces the “sacrilegious Lutheran heresy,” is quoted in full in the official Nikon Chronicle. The charter, which was regarded in Russia as indisputable spiritual guidance, denounced the Lutheran denial of the veneration of holy icons, recalls the veneration of the earliest images of Christ (“the sacred sudarium, the image not made by hands acquired by King Abgar”) and the

Virgin Mary (“painted by Luke, preacher of the Word”), and the yearly feast day of the victory over the iconoclasts and the restoration of icon veneration in 843 (the “Triumph of Orthodoxy”), celebrated each year on the first Sunday in Lent.³⁶

In this charter the Lutheran denial of the veneration of saints and their relics is rejected.³⁷ This motif in the polemics with the Protestants is related directly to the glorification of the most revered of saints, the Myra bishop and Wonder-worker Nicholas. The charter recalls that saints are prayerful intercessors before the Lord for devout Christians and that the Lord performs many miracles through their agency. With respect to our icon it is important that the charter also mentions angels who “through the grace of God... carry out holy wonders.” It is significant that in the composition of our icon we see the saintly miracle-worker, the Savior and the Virgin Mary who help him—through the agency of the angels, and the angels who “perform sacred wonders,” that is, take part in their performance. This is not to say that these religious polemics were reflected directly in Russian icon painting: the relationship between ideology and art was subtle, indirect.

The religious life of Western Europe, the teaching of Martin Luther and the ideas of the Counter Reformation would appear to be far removed from Muscovite Russia of the 16th

35 Никоновская летопись под 7066 (1558) г., *Полное собрание русских летописей*, vol. XIII, (Moscow, 2000), p. 295. This story found artistic reflection in the frescoes of the church of Nadein’s Saint Nicholas in Yaroslavl, 1640 (see: E.A. Fedorycheva, *Церковь Николы Надеина в Ярославле*. (Moscow, 2003), p. 50. pl. 23, fig. IX (nos. 14-16). See reproductions in E.S. Smirnova, “Смотря на образ древних живописцев...”. *Тема почитания икон в искусстве Средневековой Руси*. (Moscow, 2007), pp. 212, 213.

36 The Nikon Chronicle under 7069 (1561) г., *Полное собрание русских летописей*, vol. XIII, (Moscow, 2000), pp. 337-338.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 338.

century. Nevertheless these conflicts were reflected in Russian iconography, not just in representations of Saint Nicholas, but in other subjects.³⁸

It is quite likely that not only the inscription on our icon, but also its new iconography with a wreath of representations celebrating the image of the great miracle-worker, was determined by the religious atmosphere that developed in Russia in the 16th century, by the urge to glorify the revered saint, and thus to resist the attacks of the heterodox.

Artistic features. Time and place of execution.

The icon's precise structure, compositional symmetry and accentuation of the corners depend not only on the symbolical intention of the compilers of the iconographical program, who, as we have seen, made the composition resemble the cover of an altar Gospel and introduced other important associations, but also on the style of the 16th century, the time when it was executed. In Russian painting of the 16th century, unlike the art of the earlier period, one often finds a strictly regulated structure, very different from unrestricted spontaneity. Yet in many other respects the icon is remarkably close to earlier Russian icon painting. The concentrated face of the central image reflects the great tradition of representing the wise Church Fathers in Byzantine and Russian art. The plastic form, expressive movements, rich colors and large figures in the corner representations, particularly the angels, three-dimensional, plastic, almost sculptural, recall vividly the images of 15th-century Novgorodian icons and through them even earlier ones, from the Byzantine classicism of the Paleologan age.

The very presence of the four angels, their significant role in the composition, the silhouettes of their unfurled, pointed wings also reflect the special features of 16th-century Russian painting, where the "angel theme" is often found. A good example is the mid-16th-century icon "Blessed be the Host of the King of Heaven" ("The Church Triumphant") from the Assumption Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery),³⁹ where multitudes of angels, the Virgin's messengers, are flying above the procession of holy warriors.

The most likely time when our icon was painted is the second quarter or middle of the 16th century. The master who executed it was still far removed from the schematism that began to be found increasingly in Russian icon painting of the second half of the 16th century. It is enough to look at the gradations of movement and the inner state of the figures. The Savior and Virgin Mary, serene in the heavenly heights, incline only slightly to lift the insignia, which seem incredibly light in their hands (Figures 5, 6 above). Their faces are finely drawn, their figures surrounded by pink festoons of clouds, and the

38 They made themselves felt, in particular, in Byzantine and later in Russian iconography of Saint Luke the Icon-painter. According to Byzantine tradition, in early times he was depicted in a serene pose, bent over like a scribe, a compiler of the Gospel. Under the influence of the Catholic world, however, which strove to reinforce the case for the holiness of the religious image, including the depiction of the Madonna posing and an angel helping the artist, new treatments also arose in Orthodox art. In Russian art the composition of Domenikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco) was reflected in an icon of 1560-1567, where Luke is depicted in the casual pose of the "artist" with an angel at the top in the clouds. Another new Russian version is also known—with the figure of the Virgin Mary from which Luke is painting his icon (E.S. Smirnova, "К вопросу об изображениях евангелиста Луки, пишущего икону Богородицы. Русские реплики поствизантийских образов", *Искусство христианского мир, Issue no. XI*, (Moscow, 2009), pp. 320-335).

39 V.I. Antonova, N.E. Mniova, *Государственная Третьяковская Галерея. Каталог древнерусской живописи. Опыт историко-художественной классификации, Vol. 2*, (Moscow, 1963), Cat. 521, pls. 37-41.

background of the heavens is decorated with gold stars and rosettes. The angels in the middle zone are heavy, with large facial features, their poses mobile and their knees bent. The same *omophorion* is held by the Virgin thoughtfully and by the angel below her, hands clasped, with a tense expression on its face.

The lower scenes (Figures 7, 8 above) are characterised even more sharply and expressively. On the left the sea swirls in spiral-shaped waves, the banks are cleaved by wedge-shaped fractures, the overturned boat is vertical, the white oars forming a cross and the drowning Demetrios stretches towards his angelic rescuer as if trying to walk up some invisible steps. In the right-hand scene we see the almost swaying figure of the youth possessed by an evil spirit, who is supported by his servant, friend, or a member of his household. The bushes stretch out their sharp leaves, as if in tense expectation. Yet grace is already descending on the sick man, and the black figure of the exorcised demon is fleeing towards a black cave.

The most expressive and striking feature of the lower scenes are the gestures of the angels, their contact with those they are saving. In both cases their agile figures are full of life, inspiration, while the figures of their “protagonists” are paralysed, awkward and stiff. According to the tradition of medieval (and not only medieval) Christian art, the motif of saving, helping, the flowing over of grace, was often depicted by hands touching. The angel in the left-hand scene is holding Demetrios firmly by the wrist, but the one in the scene on the right is only stretching out the fingers of its blessing hand to the sick man’s hand, so that if they do meet it is only the fingertips. By making use of this motif, the icon painter is, in effect, drawing on the same tradition that was used in the celebrated representation of the hands of the Creator and Adam stretched out towards each other in the painting in the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo.

The fact that the icon belongs to the artistic tradition of Novgorod the Great is evident at once: from the compressed composition, the decisive generalised contours and the heavy proportions of the angels’ bulky figures. There is also another sign of drawing on Novgorodian heritage, one that indicates knowledge of the archaic, popular, artistic layer in local icon painting of the 14th century. This is the specifically stiff poses of the figures being saved—Demetrios and the youth possessed, the angular drawing of their figures, particularly their enlarged hands, and above all the gesture of the youth possessed, his raised hand with the palm facing the spectator. The unusual characterisation of these personages is intended to show that they belong to a different world, a sinful, sick, unenlightened world void of beauty and harmony. They have yet to pass into the world of grace, in accordance with the prayers of Saint Nicholas, as the inscriptions say. The raised palm of the youth possessed recalls vividly the gesture of “acclamation” which goes back to the art of late Antiquity and the early Christian period and denotes the receipt of information, its approval. A similar gesture is found in a marginal scene on the 14th century Novgorodian icon of “Saint Nicholas with Scenes from his Life” from the country church of Ozeryovo (Saint Petersburg, Russian Museum) depicting the “Cutting of the Tree” (or “Exorcism of the Demon from the Well”) (Figure 24).⁴⁰ The youth in this scene personifies all the inhabitants of the village, from which Saint Nicholas exorcised the evil spirit. He still has to enter the world of harmony and grace, hence his angular contours and stiff pose. He approves the coming changes, hence his gesture of approval.

Figure 24. The expulsion of the Devil from a Tree. Border detail from “Saint Nicholas of Myra with scenes from his life”. First half of the 15th century. Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg (from the hamlet of Ozeriovo).



40 I.D. Soloviova, (ed.). *Святой Николай Мирликийский в произведениях XII-XIX столетий из собрания Русского музея*, (St. Petersburg, 2006)



Figure 25. Detail of icon of the Apostles Peter and Paul with scenes from their lives. Middle of the 16th century. Novgorod Museum (from the Church of Peter and Paul in Kozhevniky in Novgorod).

Novgorodian tastes can also be seen in the icon's coloristic treatment. It is based on a combination of three main elements: red, green and gold, which dominated Novgorodian painting from the 13th to the 15th century. These are supplemented by white (the thrice depicted *omophorion*, the robes of the youth possessed, and the highlights on the terraces of the hills), and a few mixed shades: for example, Nicholas' yellowish-green *phelonion*, Mary's purple-lilac robes and the grey rocky mounds. The use of gold is excellent and diverse: it is on the background, Nicholas' halo with the diamond-shaped ornament characteristic of Novgorod, and the exquisitely fine lines of gold hatching "*assist*" on Christ's robes, the Gospel binding (all three cases) and the angels' wings.

Reliable evidence of the icon's Novgorodian provenance is provided by the inscriptions. The one by the scene of the Healing of the Youth Possessed reads that the angel drove the «биса от чоловика», instead of the «бѣса от челоуѣка». The use of "и" instead of "ѣ" in the words "бес" and "человек" is a characteristic sign of Novgorodian pronunciation in the mediaeval period. Similar pronunciation is also found in the Russian North in the 16th century,⁴¹ but taking into account the icon's Novgorodian artistic features, the dialectical indications suggest that it was produced in Novgorod.

A relatively large number of Novgorodian icons have come down to us from the 16th century, but they have not yet been properly studied or classified and very few have a precise or even an approximate date. Hence the difficulty in determining the circle of works to which the icon of Saint Nicholas belongs and the time when it was executed.

There is also a certain similarity with icons from the iconostasis of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Kozhevniky (Novgorod Museum), which were executed either in the second quarter of the 16th century or, according to a different opinion, after the fire of 1558. If we take for means of comparison the icon of the "Apostles Peter and Paul with Scenes from their Lives" (Novgorod Museum) (Figure 25), it is painted with more refinement, elegance and care, with tracing of the details and small forms.⁴² One cannot fail to see, however, the similarity between Saint Nicholas in our icon and the dignified and wise images of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Our icon cannot be classified as a product of Novgorod's main workshop, which was in the archbishop's court. Many such 16th-century Novgorodian paintings have survived, including the large, multipartite iconostases from the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Kozhevniky and the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in the Saint Anthony monastery (displayed in the Novgorod Museum). The colors used in these icons are bright and pure, always with an intense, rich tone. In the workshop where our icon was produced, however, the choice of pigments was more limited. The colors have a different tonality. The red is not vermillion, but a rather warm, pinkish tone. There are two

41 Anatoly Turilov (private communication).

42 E.V. Ignashina, Yu.B. Komarova, *Русская икона XI-XIX веков в собрании Новгородского музея. Путеводитель по экспозиции*, (Moscow, 2004), p. 85.



Figure 26. Saint Nicholas with angels and miracles. Second half of the 16th century. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (from the collection of A.V. Morozov).

Figure 27. Saint Nicholas with angels and miracles. Old Believer icon of the 19th century (?). Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg (from the collection of F.M. Plyushkin).



shades of green, warm (slightly yellowish) and cold (slightly bluish), which is obtained by mixing various components. Moreover, these paints, particularly the two shades of green, are thin and form an uneven layer that looks transparent in places. The artist's originality can be seen in the facial types, particularly those of the angels: they are large and full, with exaggeratedly round cheeks. The best example is the face of the angel from the middle zone of the composition (the Archangel Gabriel) who is bringing the saint his *omophorion* (Figure 7). The striking, powerful forms combined with the simplified technique of the painting reflect the popular taste and adherence to the old traditions evident in the hands of this outstanding and very individual icon-painter.

The theme of the veneration of saints, and Nicholas of Myra in particular, whose patronage of Novgorod manifested itself through his wonder-working “round image,” was just as relevant in the 16th century as it was in early times. Iconoclastic tendencies often appeared in Novgorod and had to be firmly resisted whether this was at Novgorod's main workshop, or, as is probably the case with our icon, in a less courtly and wealthy milieu, perhaps in the periphery of the city. It reflected in its taste a more popular but no less potent faith in images and their meaning.

Hence, whether our icon is a copy of a no longer extant metropolitan Novgorodian work in which this new iconography of Saint Nicholas was manifested for the first time, we cannot say. And while it would be too speculative to claim this icon as the very archetype itself for this imagery of the saint, what we can say is that, at the present state of our knowledge, this newly discovered panel appears to be its earliest surviving representation.

Some later examples of “Saint Nicholas with Angels and Miracles” have survived but they are very few in number. One is an icon of the second half of the 16th century probably painted in the provinces of Novgorod, from the collection of A.V. Morozov (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery) (Figure 26).⁴³ At 51 x 43 cm, its dimensions are very similar to our icon (54 x 42 cm), but there are changes in the painting, including a different configuration of the central part. A smaller icon in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg (30.7 x 25.2 cm) looks like a work of the 19th century, possibly an “Old Believer” work.⁴⁴ It is quite possible that under the existing painting there may be traces of an earlier layer (Figure 27). This icon comes from the collection of F.M. Plyushkin, which was founded mainly in Pskov. It should be noted that both the above-mentioned icons retain an important feature: the rounded contour of the lower edge of the figure of Saint Nicholas.

A third icon⁴⁵, measuring 49.5 x 38.5 cm belongs to the community of Old Believers in Samara (Figure 28).⁴⁶ The painting is under a darkened varnish and a later metal oklad and has been dated only approximately to the 17th-18th century. Finally, a cartoon

43 V.I. Antonova, N.E. Mniova, *Государственная Третьяковская Галерея. Каталог древнерусской живописи. Опыт историко-художественной классификации*, Vol. 2, (Moscow, 1963), Cat. 534, (not reproduced, Inv. no.13491). Established as a work from the middle of the 16th century produced in the tsar's workshop.

44 See: I.D. Soloviova, (ed). *Святой Николай Мирликийский в произведениях XII-XIX столетий из собрания Русского музея*, St. Petersburg 2006, Cat. 64, Inv.no. држ-514. In the Russian Museum, as the catalogue quoted says, there is another 19th-century icon, also from the collection of F.M. Plyushkin, with the same iconography, except that the angels are bringing the saint not the episcopal insignia, but the instruments of the Passion.

45 Alexander Preobrazhenskiy (personal communication).

46 P.V. Polovinkin, M.V. Kozhevnikova, (eds), *Старообрядчество Самарского края. История и культура*. (Samara, 2007), cat. 20, p. 19.



Figure 28. Saint Nicholas with angels and miracles. Old Believer icon of the 17th-18th century. Church of the Society of the Pomorskie Old Believers, Samara.



Figure 29. Saint Nicholas with angels and miracles. Cartoon from an icon. From the collection of the icon painter V.P. Gurianov.

from an icon (executed probably also in Old Believer circles) has survived. It is similar to ours, but with some differences and simplifications (there is no *omophorion* in the hands of the Mother of God, the contours of the mountains are slightly different and there is no accompanying figure by the possessed man) (Figure 29).⁴⁷ Other replicas of this iconographic type may exist in other collections, but there are unlikely to be many.

The high degree to which the saint's veneration was held in Russia is testified by the many iconographic types of Saint Nicholas in medieval Russian painting.

Some of these depictions which had come from Byzantium and were modified on Russian soil did not have special names (e.g., icons showing the saint half or full length and those surrounded with scenes from his life). Other variations were replicas of specific miracle-working icons venerated on Russian soil: Saint Nicholas of Zaraisk (full-length figure with raised and outstretched arms, blessing with his right hand and holding the gospel with his left hand), Saint Nicholas of Mozhaik (with a sword and a model of a fortified town) and Saint Nicholas Velikoretsky (as a rule with eight scenes from his life). There were also certain miracle-working images about whose veneration we know only from written sources and whose iconography remains unknown to us (e.g., Saint Nicholas of Gostun, Saint Nicholas Lnyanoi).

Our icon, therefore, stands as an example of a rare and so far unidentified Russian iconographic type, unrecorded in scholarly literature and whose special characteristics have not been described until now.

In Novgorod a great many urban and monastic churches were dedicated to St. Nicholas, and consequently many of their most venerated and miracle-working icons depict the bishop of Myra. Thus, in a description of Novgorod compiled in 1860 by a great enthusiast of Novgorod ecclesiastical archaeology, a number of images of St. Nicholas are listed but there is no mention of an icon with the iconography "Saint Nicholas with Angels and Miracles."⁴⁸

What is the reason for such a relatively small number of copies of this composition? Here we must bear in mind the distinguishing features of Novgorodian iconography.

47 A.I. Uspenskiy, *Переводы с древних икон, собранные и исполненные иконописцем и реставратором В. П. Гурьяновым*. (Moscow, 1902), pl. 80; G.V. Markelov, *Книга иконных образцов. 500 подлинных прорисей и переводов с русских икон XV–XIX веков*. 2nd ed. (Moscow, 2006), Vol. II, No. 372, pp. 280–281, 569.

48 The miracle-working "round" icon in the Saint Nicholas Dvorishensky cathedral, and also its replicas in the monastery of Saint Nicholas Biely, in the church of Saint Dimitriy Na Torgovoy Storone and in the Skovorodsky monastery (Arkhimandrit Makariy. *Археологическое описание описание церковных древностей в Новгороде и его окрестностях*, (Moscow, 1860), vol. 2, pp. 55-57, 114.); the previously mentioned biographical icon from the church of Saint Nicholas of the Vyazhishsky (*Ibid.*, p. 75.); the large icon of 1294 from the Saint Nicholas monastery on the island of Lipno; a more ancient version of this icon which used to be in the Mihailovsky Skovorodsky monastery which has not survived (*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.); a half-length icon in the monastery of the Holy Spirit, which on a layer of later restoration has an inscription dated 1500 (*Ibid.*, p. 80.); a biographical icon of 1543 from the Saint Nicholas Rozvazhsky monastery and another five biographical icons in other churches (*Ibid.*, p. 81); the icon "amongst miracles" in the Novgorod Kremlin, in the Church of Saint John attached to the archbishop's palace, above the entrance in an oklad of 1665 (*Ibid.*, p. 86-87).



Figure 30. Saint Nicholas: the "Round Image" and scenes from its story. Second half of the 19th century. Recklinghausen Icon Museum (illustration taken from the article by E. Hausteин-Bartsch)

popularisation was cut short by the events of 1570, when Novgorod was devastated once more, this time with special ruthlessness, by the troops of Ivan the Terrible.⁵⁰ This is perhaps the reason why the spread of this recently-developed iconographical type ceased and our icon remained one of its extremely rare examples.

In conclusion we would reiterate that some 19th-century icons depict the "round image" of Saint Nicholas from the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Yaroslav's Court and the story of its wondrous discovery and the miraculous healing of Prince Mstislav in the corners of the square board (Figure 30).⁵¹ Do these compositions perhaps reflect memories of our icon "Saint Nicholas with Angels and Miracles"?

49 Other examples are the icon commissioned in 1337 by Archbishop Moisey of Novgorod (now in the Annunciation Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin with new painting but the same iconography); the icon of 1362 in the Nativity of the Virgin chapel of Novgorod's Hagia Sophia, commissioned either by Archbishop Moisey or, just as likely, by his successor Archbishop Alexiy; and a late 14th-century icon which is now in the iconostasis of the Assumption Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin.

50 E.A. Gordienko, *Новгород в XVI веке и его духовная жизнь*, (St. Petersburg, 2001), pp. 300-305.

51 M. Bacci, (ed). *San Nicola. Splendori d'arte d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, (Milan, 2006), cat. III. 2, p. 229, illustrated on p. 215 (author of the description Eva Hausteин-Bartsch).

Engelina S. Smirnova