

Iconography
Cretan school of
painting
Virgin of Passion
Cultural communication

The Icon of the Virgin of Passion in Post-Byzantine and Russian Art.

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*1. The Virgin of the Passion. Second half
of XV ct.
Attributed to Andreas Ritzos. State
Hermitage,
Saint-Petersburg.*

Introduction

The article is devoted to the history of iconography of Virgin of the Passion in Post-Byzantine and its appearance in Russian art. Icons of Virgin of the Passion appear in Russian art only in the XVII century while in Greek art such iconography was formed in the middle of the XV century. In spite of that iconographical and stylistic source of them is not a matter of concern. It is the Cretan school of painting.

The theme of Cretan school is very relevant now in Russia. We can say that it goes through a new birth. After N. Kondakov¹, who was very fond of Cretan painters and rated high the Cretan school of painting, began a “soviet” period of complete negation of any advantages of Post-Byzantine art. It was considered that with the end of Byzantine Empire ended the history of Byzantine art. Only in the end of the XX century situation had changed. Exhibitions were organized, catalogues were published. But there are a lot to do. In spite of the fact that collection of Post-Byzantine icons in the State Hermitage in Russia is very good; there is not a monograph of Russian scientist, dedicated to the Post-Byzantine art, yet. It is known that cultural contacts between Greece and

Russia promoted Post-Byzantine art in Russia.

So, works of masters of the Cretan school of painting became the source for copying for Russian icon painters. Also they created many new iconographical motives that were very popular in Russia afterwards. For example, Virgin of the Passion, Virgin Galaktotrophusa, etc.

The modern icon painters have a big interest to the Cretan school too. They want to know more about the models for the late Middle Ages Russian art, to make copies of them. Especially that the art level of Cretan painters was highly competitive with the classical Byzantine art.

Moreover, carrying out a chronological line of composing of iconography may support the work of restorer. If undamaged state of

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icon is not good, the knowledge of iconography and nearest works can help to keep the first form of the icon.

So, importance of studying Post-Byzantine art and iconography is beyond questions.



2. *The Virgin Galaktotrophousa "Panymnnetos". Last quarter of the XV ct.*
Attributed to Andreas Ritzos or his workshop. Rena Andreadis collection. Athens.

Among Post-Byzantine icons the Virgin of the Passion stand out for the beauty of composition and original theological idea.

Composition is always the same on all the icons of Virgin of the Passion. The Virgin is turned to the left; in her left arm she cradles Christ. The Christ holds big finger of the Virgin in His arms. The iconographic details, which refer to the Passion to the Christ, are repeated in all icons. These are: angels with the symbols of the martyrdom of the Christ and the loose sandal of the Christ which hangs from His upturned left foot. The Christ looks on the angels with fair.

The iconography appears in XV centuries in Cretan school of painting. Andreas Ritzos (1421 – before 1503), one of the most famous and astonishing painters of the Cretan school is known as a founder of this iconography.ⁱⁱ There are several interesting icons of XV century devoted to the theme of Passion by Andreas Ritzos. We know icons of the Virgin of the Passion now in Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, in the National Gallery, Parma, in St. Nicolas Church, Bari, in the State Hermitage, St.-Petersburg. In the icons of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa

now in Rena Andreadis collection, Athens and the Virgin Glykophilousa in Chiesa di Ognissanti in Trani, attributed to Andreas Ritzos or his school, we can also see the element of the iconography of the Passion. It is the loose sandal of the Christ. This may show us that the painter experimented with the subject which had not yet been crystallized in its definitive form.ⁱⁱⁱ

Iconography had evidently formed by the middle of XV century, perhaps because of influence of the Sorrows of the Virgin Memory Day established in 1423 by Catholic Church. The confirmation of that is the image Virgin of the Passion in St. Nicolas Church, Bari accurate dated 1451. It represents a complete object of iconography of the Passion.

The image of the Virgin of the Passion reflects the theme of the Incarnation and the future Passion of the Christ. The meaning of the theme is also underlined by the Greek or Latin text, which we can see on the icons. Representation of the nude foot of the Christ is

symbolical too. The word “foot” in the text of the Bible is used to express submission and resignation. So we can understand the nude foot of the Christ as his submission to the future Passion.^{iv}

The icons of the Virgin of the Passion were widely enlarged in the second part of the XV and in XVI centuries. This may be explained by glorification of the miracle-working image of the Virgin called “Madonna de perpetuo succursu”. The icon is close to the icons of Andreas Ritzos. It was imported in Rome from Crete in 1480 and was brought in the Church of st. Matthew.



3. *Madonna de perpetuo succursu. XV ct.*
Church of st. Alfonse. Rome.

The appearance of the Virgin of Passion in Russia is connected with the marvelous image from the village Palets in the Nizhni Novgorod region. “The Legend of the Palets icon”^v tell us about

miraculous healing from the icon of the Virgin of the Passion the Palets villager Ekaterina in 1641. This icon was kept by icon painter Gregory, but he was not mentioned as an author of the icon. That is why we can suppose that the icon was not Russian.

After that tsar Mikhail Romanov brought the icon of the Virgin of the Passion to Moscow. A church, devoted to the Virgin, and few years later, in 1645 a Strastnoy monastery was built on the place of the meeting of the Palets icon. It was made a copy of Palets icon and this copy was placed in the monastery church in Moscow. The icon was decorated with jewel framework; it was situated in the monastery church up to 1937, when the monastery was closed. The black and white image of the icon from Strastnoy monastery we can see on the woodcut of the end of XIX century in the book of I. Tokmakov.^{vi} On this woodcut we can see half-length image of the Virgin with the Infant on Her left arm. The iconography is the same as we can see on the Cretan icons of the Virgin of the Passion. Modern Moscow legend tells us that after 1937 miraculous icon was brought to the church of Resurrection in Sokolniki. The icon is too big, condition of it is very good. The type is the same as we can see on the Cretan icons of the Virgin of the Passion. The style of the painting is Greek. But there are two details on the Russian icon – the feet of the Infant Christ are nude and the head of the Virgin is covered with a short green scarf.

Besides there is one more legend about the icon of the Virgin of the Passion. It tells us about the miraculous icon from the church in Kitai-Gorod.^{vii} The location of this icon and any image of it are unknown.



The Virgin of the Passion. XVIII ct. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

It's a pity but we can say nothing about Palets icon because location of it is unknown too. So we can't say for sure what Greek icon was a photograph for Russian icons. But influence of the Greek art and Cretan school of painting is without discussion. All of Russian icons repeat the same iconographic scheme, that was prevalent in the circle of Andreas Ritzos. The inscription on the icon of the Virgin of the Passion (beginning of XVIII ct.), now in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, repeat the text on the Cretan icons. This also point out Russian painters knew Greek icons.

ⁱ Н. П. Кондаков. Иконография Богоматери. Связи греческой и русской иконописи с итальянской живописью раннего Возрождения. СПб., 1911.

ⁱⁱ Chatzidakis M. Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting. Athens, 1985.

ⁱⁱⁱ Drandaki A. Greek Icons. 14th – 18th century. The Rena Andreadis Collection. Athens, 2003. P. 44.

^{iv} Сидоренко Г.В. «Пята Спасителя». Об иконографической особенности некоторых чудотворных икон//Чудотворная икона в Византии и Древней Руси. М., 1996. С. 321-336.

^v Нечаева Т.В. Два малоизвестных видения в нижегородской литературе XVII века.//Герменевтика древнерусской литературы XVII – начала XVIII века. Сборник 4. М., 1992. С. 65-72.

^{vi} Токмаков И. Ф. Историко-статистическое описание Московского Страстного монастыря. М., 1897.

^{vii} Поселянин Е. Сказания о чудотворных иконах Богоматери. М., 1919.