

*Paulina Zielińska*

POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

## The Icons of Military Saints in Rus'. An Attempt at Classifying Iconographic Types from before the Beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

The present article attempts to classify a number of depictions, in relevant literature referred to as “images of military saints”, into types. It pertains exclusively to the art of Rus', mainly the regions of Veliky Novgorod and Muscovy. As far as Byzantine art is concerned, the issue has been discussed in numerous detailed monographs; yet publications on Russian art (from catalogues to prints of icons and purely devotional literature) are scattered and regard certain depictions as to some extent obvious, categorising them *a priori*, partially based on pure intuition and not detailed on analysis.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, works dating from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and after are yet to be

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1 The most important monographs on this iconography in Byzantine art are still Ch. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Oxford 2003, M. White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200*, Oxford 2013; in Polish: P. Ł. Grotowski, *Święci wojownicy w sztuce bizantyńskiej (843–1261)* [Holy warriors in Byzantine art (843–1261)], Cracow 2011; publications on Russian art which mention these images include: В. Н. Лазарев, *История византийской живописи*, Москва 1986; idem, *Русская иконопись от истоков до начала XVI века*, Москва 2000, idem, *Искусство Древней Руси. Мозаики и фрески*, Москва 2000, А. И. Кирпичников, *Св. Георгий и Егорий Храбрый: Исследование литературной истории христианской легенды*, Санкт Петербург 1879, М. В. Алпатов, “Образ Георгия-воина в искусстве Византии и древней Руси”, *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы*, 12, 1956, В. И. Антонова, Н. Е. Мнева, *Каталог древнерусской живописи XI – начала XVIII в.в. Опыт историко-художественной классификации. В 2-х томах*, Москва 1963, Л. М. Евсеева, “Московские житийные иконы Георгия Великомученика и их литературные источники”, *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы*, 38, 1985, В. П. Степаненко, “Образ святого Георгия-всадника в византийской и древнерусской сфрагистике домонгольского периода”, in: *Новгородская Русь: историческое пространство и культурное наследие*, Екатеринбург 2000, pp. 106–117, *Святой Георгий Победоносец – небесный покровитель Москвы. 10-летию восстановления исторического герба Москвы посвящается: Каталог выставки*, Москва 2003, Э. С. Смирнова, *Русские изображения чуда от образа св. Георгия в контексте тематики иконопочитания*, in: *Искусство христианского мира*, Москва 2003, pp. 108–118, О. В. Губарева, Н. М. Турцова, *Великомученик Георгий Победоносец*, Санкт Петербург 2013, В. В. Филатов, “Икона св. Димитрия Солунского – война-всадника”, in: *Искусство христианского мира*, Москва 2003, pp. 295–300,

described in the context of historical and cultural transformations. This task is all the more worthwhile given that new items, including icons from northern Russia, continue to appear in museums and private collections. There is also a need for a more systematic and classifying approach which would lead to a synthesis. The present article is to serve as an introduction thereto.

The proposed classification considers primarily panel paintings (icons) and is based on existing artefacts. Its goal is to gather and organise the scattered source material and present previously unpublished works in the context of known artefacts. It is also intended to shed light on the principal directions of changes and constitutes a part of an in-depth analysis of the cult and iconography of the saints, which I intend to publish in a more detailed study. In addition, the present article aims to demonstrate the dynamics of changes in iconography and to list the impulses that induced them.

To classify images on the basis of iconographic types seems to be a natural tendency in Orthodox art, if we refer to the features which describe this art most aptly, i.e. its canonicity (adherence to the theology of icons) and hierarchic structure.<sup>2</sup> Both these features were adopted from Byzantine culture; it may be assumed that they were present, to the varying degree, in Russian culture until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Canonicity manifested itself, above all, in the iconographic canon intended to ensure that icons stayed faithful to their prototype (i.e. the figure of the saint).<sup>4</sup> Through it, icons were to fulfil their basic role of making the depicted person present and allowing the believers praying before the image to come into direct contact with the saint. Adherence to a given canon also emphasised the timelessness of the depiction and its lack of spatial connections.<sup>5</sup>

The hierarchic structure as evident in art, clearly noticeable also in the iconographic canon, emphasised not only the obvious references to the structure of the imperial court, the army and specific social groups, but also the rank of saints, which constituted the source of their power, i.e. their effectiveness in passing the believers' pleas and supplications to God.<sup>6</sup> The hierarchical division of saints appeared as early

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Н. В. Герасименко, *Великомученик Димитрий Солунский*, Sankt Petersburg 2014, А. Г. Векслер, В. А. Беркович, "Находки нательных крестов с изображением святого Никиты-бесогона из раскопок на улице Б. Дмитровка в Москве", in: *Ставрографический сборник. Книга третья: Крест как личная святыня*, Москва 2005, pp. 223–230, D. Likhachov, *Novgorod Icons 12th–17th Century*, Leningrad 1980, Э. С. Смирнова, *Живопись Великого Новгорода. Середина XIII – начало XV века*, Москва 1976, И. А. Иванова, *Музей древнерусского искусства имени Андрея Рублева*, Москва 1968, *Искусство строгановских мастеров*, Ленинград 1987, В. Г. Брюсова, *Русская живопись 17 века*, Москва 1974, О. В. Куликова, *Древние лики Русского Севера. Из музейного собрания икон XIV – XIX веков города Череповца*, Москва 2009.

2 В. В. Бычков, *Византийская эстетика*, Москва 1977, p. 145.

3 Ibid., p. 153.

4 Cf. Г. К. Вагнер, *Канон и стиль в древнерусском искусстве*, Москва 1987, pp. 48–52.

5 Ibid.

6 A. Sulikowska, *Ciała, groby i ikony. Kult świętych w ruskiej tradycji literackiej i ikonograficznej* [Bodies, graves and icons. The cult of saints in the Russian literary and iconographic tradition], Warsaw 2013, pp. 56–57.

as in the first centuries of Christianity;<sup>7</sup> the development of forms of devotion and the addition of new holy persons did not influence the presence of cults regarded as ubiquitous (i.e. known in the entire Orthodox world). This being said, different periods and regions did, however, add their own layers of meaning, stemming from local conditions, pre-Christian beliefs, as well as political affairs. In extreme cases, these processes resulted in the contamination of certain figures: some features, or 'attributes', became interchangeable (depending on the place, a given saint could be a contamination of several persons, or one saint's attributes could be associated with a different person; such details were reflected in relevant icons).

Since the very beginning, all attempts at creating a hierarchy of saints granted a very high status to martyrs, the "group of the elect" who conquered death through their perseverance until the end. The cult of these persons usually developed around their earthly remains and contributed to the profound shift from the pagan world of Antiquity towards Christianity.<sup>8</sup> This group of saints was also divided into "sub-groups" in accordance with their function in life. Thus, there existed cults of lay martyrs, currently referred to as *великомученики* (English: Great-Martyrs), which included knights/military men, e.g. George, Theodore Tyro, Demetrius of Thessaloniki, Theodore Stratelates and Nicetas the Goth.<sup>9</sup> These saints have been venerated in Kievan Rus' and Novgorod Rus' since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Their cult has undergone constant development, as indicated by both the number and the quality of extant artefacts dating from between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from monumental works such as wall paintings and icons to smaller ones, e.g. encolpia, talismans, amulets, small stone icons.

The "military" character of this group of martyrs was emphasised in Byzantium ca. the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, a fact which may be regarded as resulting from the changes taking place within the society at the time.<sup>10</sup> Scholars state that the Church's acceptance of military campaigns may have been a factor in facilitating this shift; yet the main impulse is supposed to have come from imperial propaganda and from customs upheld within the army.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that Eastern Orthodox

7 This classification is derived from the practice of listing the names of the saints during liturgy. As the cult of the saints developed, specific groups were defined and named and "categories of sainthood" ("categories of saints") introduced, culminating in the emergence of catalogues and records of saints. Another justification for such hierarchic structure is found in the Epistles of St. Paul: Eph 2, 19-22 and 1 Cor 12, 28, cf. J. Charkiewicz, *Kult świętych w Kościele prawosławnym. Teologia, historia, formy, typologia* [The cult of saints in the Orthodox Church. Theology, history, forms, typology], Warsaw 2015, pp. 328–330.

8 Cf. P. Brown, *Kult świętych. Narodziny i rola w chrześcijaństwie łacińskim*, Cracow 2007, pp. 4–7 and pp. 59–72.

9 These included lay martyrs, hierarchs/priests, monks/nuns and sufferers, cf. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

10 Grotowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–112. Cf. also earlier depictions, such as the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Sinai icon depicting the Virgin and Child between saints Theodore and George, which are shown in opulent courtly robes holding crosses of martyrdom in their hands. The imagery makes no reference to the "military" role of these saints; Лазарев, *История византийской...*, pp. 51–52.

11 Grotowski, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

art was sensitive to changes and could be influenced by factors originating outside the Church.

The development of the cult and the end of iconoclastic conflicts were conducive to the solidification of depiction types, which became “sanctioned” when an iconographic canon emerged, i.e. ultimately around the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

This canon included two variants of representation. The first one involved depicting the military saint on horseback, trampling a demon, dragon or devil and piercing it with his spear. The second type, functioning concurrently with the equestrian one, showed the saint as a foot soldier. He would be depicted *en face*, standing, clad in armour and a mantle, armed with a sword and a spear. The functions which military saints fulfilled in Byzantium included, above all, being “Christ’s warriors”, symbols of spiritual fight, protectors of the army (along with the Virgin Mary Mother of God and Archangel Michael), patrons of military aristocracy and the imperial family. The latter role was also apparent in iconography, namely in the details referring to courtly fashions and ceremonial robes worn by rulers in the periods to which the works are dated.<sup>13</sup> To some extent, all of these functions were brought to Rus’ with the arrival of Christianity.

The earliest known, and still extant, depictions of military saints from Russian lands come from Kiev and Novgorod. Dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, they may be regarded as fully adherent to the Byzantine canon. The first of them is the mosaic from the monastery of St. Michael the Archangel in Kiev, depicting St. Demetrius (dated to ca. 1113)<sup>14</sup> and the icon of St. George from the monastery in Novgorod (1130), currently in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.<sup>15</sup> The Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Kiev houses images of saints Demetrius, George and Theodore dated to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The image of Saint Demetrius is situated in the main nave, on the south-western pillar beneath the dome. He is depicted as a warrior,<sup>16</sup> whereas Saint George is presented as a martyr with no military attributes.<sup>17</sup> The fact that the northern side altar of the church is devoted to Saint George is interpreted as a manifestation of the saint’s spiritual patronage over the building’s donor, Yaroslav the Wise (whose baptismal name was George).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, seven scenes from the

12 According to some scholars, the final establishment of the iconographic canon occurred in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They see it as emerging on the basis of artistic practice and in a certain sense reflecting the religious and political situation. It could also have been more flexible than one could assume; more than a fixed set of rules, the canon could have allowed for some changes; cf. Бычков, *Византийская...*, pp. 150–151.

13 Grotowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–174.

14 Антонова, Мнева, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 49–51.

15 Inv. no. 28711, the icon of St. George from the St. George monastery in Novgorod, dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Likhachov, *Novgorod...*, p. 278.

16 *Собор Святої Софії в Києві*, Київ 2001, Fig. 194.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 121, Н. А. Демина, *Отражение поэтической образности в древнерусской живописи (на примере иконы «Георгий-воин» XI–XII веков)*, in: *Древнерусское искусство. Художественная культура домонгольской Руси*, vol. 6, Москва 1972, pp. 7–24.

18 А. Ф. Литвина, ф. Б. Успенский, *Выбор имени у русских князей в X–XVI вв.*, Москва 2006, table no 2.

saint's life used to depicted on the dome above and in front of the altar; only "The inquisition of St. George by Emperor Diocletian" has survived.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that the image of the prince's patron saint appeared in a liturgical space testifies to be his importance as the chosen holy intercessor, as does the prince's seal with a depiction of St. George found in Novgorod in 1994.<sup>20</sup> The silver coins minted by Yaroslav also bore the image of the saint.<sup>21</sup> To complete the picture, Russian chronicles mention that in 1030 the prince established a *gorod* named Yuryev (presently Tartu).<sup>22</sup> In fact, this refers to the conquest of a settlement at the borders of his principality and the erection of a fortified town in its vicinity; subsequently, the name of the entire settlement was changed in order to honour St. George, who also became the patron of the church built in the town.<sup>23</sup> This practice of renaming the settlement after a patron saint (as a votive offering in gratitude for victory) and erecting a church devoted to that saint was adopted from Byzantium.<sup>24</sup> It took root during the reign of successive rulers, such as Yuriy Dolgorukiy (Long-Handed), who is reported to have founded a *gorod* named after his patron St. George, i.e. Yuryev Polsky, in 1152 and paid for the construction of a church bearing his name.<sup>25</sup>

During Yaroslav the Wise's reign over Novgorod, the cult of St. George achieved a special status in northern Rus'. The practice continued in the following centuries, in time influencing other centres, for instance Moscow, which, in search of its own identity, began to adopt earlier cults in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup>

The monastery of St. George in Novgorod was established as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was subsequently expanded.<sup>27</sup> It is most probably the place of origin of the two icons of St. George currently held in Moscow – the full-length depiction from the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery<sup>28</sup> and the half-length one now housed in the Cathedral of the Dormition at the Kremlin in Moscow.<sup>29</sup> The former is considered to be a patronal (temple) icon, whereas the latter, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is thought to have been commissioned by one of Prince Andrey Bogolubsky's sons, whose name was Yuriy (George). Although differing in terms of style, both

19 В. Н. Лазарев, *История византийской живописи*, Москва 1986, p. 78.

20 <http://www.museum.ru/C605> [accessed 15 December 2016].

21 Cf. М. П. Сотникова, *Древнейшие русские монеты X–XI веков*, Москва 1995, pp. 115–117.

22 *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей*, vol. 1, Ленинград 1926, p. 78.

23 В. К. Труммал, *Археологические раскопки в Тарту и поход князя Ярослава в 1030 г.*, in: *Советская Археология*, vol. 2, Москва 1971, pp. 265–267.

24 E.g. Dorostolon, renamed Theodoropolis by John Tzimiskes in 971, etc., cf.: Grotowski, op. cit., pp. 152–154.

25 *Полное собрание русских летописей*, vol. 21, Санкт Петербург 1908, p. 273.

26 A. Sulikowska-Gąska, *Spory o ikony na Rusi w XV i XVI wieku* [Debates on icons in Rus' in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century], Warsaw 2007, p. 154.

27 П. П. Сойкинъ, *Православныя русскія обители*, Санкт Петербург 1910, pp. 138–146.

28 Inv. no. 28711, cf. Алпатов, *Образ Георгия-воина в искусстве...*, pp. 292–310, В. Н. Лазарев, *Новый памятник станковой живописи XII в. и образ Георгия-воина в византийском и древнерусском искусстве*, in: *Русская средневековая живопись: Статьи и исследования*, Москва 1970, p. 55–102.

29 Inv. no. 966 соб/ж-135, cf. Лазарев, *Русская иконопись...*, p. 34, 164.

icons have been preserved almost in their original form; both represent a canonical iconographic model common in Byzantium and Rus’.

Other known depictions demonstrate that the same iconographic type was used in the region in the following centuries. St. George appears in the Novgorod icon of St. John Climacus dated to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (The State Russian Museum in Petersburg).<sup>30</sup> The full-length depiction includes military attributes, as does his image in the icon of St. Nicholas from Lipno (currently in the Novgorod State Museum),<sup>31</sup> the icon with Christ Enthroned from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>32</sup> and the “Pokrov” icon from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

The inclusion of St. George (or St. George and St. Demetrius) in the above-mentioned icons was most probably related to the men who commissioned them. This may be inferred from the fact that later variants of the “Pokrov” icon follow an iconographic model that does not include figures with the attributes of these saints (or any other saints depicted in a representative manner).<sup>34</sup>

In the period when the above-mentioned depictions were created, Novgorod also experienced the development of the cult of St. George as the slayer of a dragon/serpent (Russian: *змея*) and the evolution of that motif in icon painting. Depictions of equestrian warriors were known since Antiquity, yet they never became a dominant type in Byzantine portrayals of military saints.<sup>35</sup> As regards the Novgorod region, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century equestrian depictions seem to become over-represented, which may in a sense signal a departure from Byzantine traditions and should be considered a unique phenomenon.

Surviving Novgorod icons showing a mounted St. George slaying a reptile include “St. George and the Dragon, with the Saint’s Life” dated to the beginning or the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, held in the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg;<sup>36</sup> the icon of “St. George Slaying the Dragon” dated to mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, in the Tretyakov

30 Inv. no. 2774, cf. Likhachov, *Novgorod icons...*, p. 282.

31 Inv. no. 2147, originally from the Orthodox church of St. George in Lipno, *Ibid.*, p. 283.

32 St. George appears alongside other saints, yet the composition of the icon suggests his depiction should be regarded as a pair to St. Demetrius. Both saints are shown *en face* as infantrymen (wearing armour and carrying swords), with crosses of martyrdom in their hands (i.e. also as holy martyrs). Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

33 The lower right-hand corner of the icon features a depiction of two military martyrs, presumably saints Demetrius and George. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

34 Cf. “Pokrov”, a Novgorod icon from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, inv. no. 12009, Антонова, Мнева, *op. cit.*, p. 109, ‘Pokrov’, a Pskov icon from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Hermitage, Petersburg, inv. no. ДРЖ 1557, А. С. Косцова, *Древнерусская живопись в собрании Эрмитажа. Иконопись, книжная миниатюра и орнаментика. XIII – начало XVII века*, Санкт Петербург 1992, pp. 322–324, “Pokrov”, a Novgorod icon from the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century, the State Russian Museum in Petersburg, inv. no. ДРЖ 1557, «Пречистому образу Твоему поклоняемся...»: *Образ Богоматери в произведениях из собрания Русского музея*, Санкт Петербург 1995, pp. 132–113 ff.

35 Grotowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–137.

36 Inv. no. 2118; Смирнова, *Живопись Великого Новгорода...*, p. 188.

Gallery;<sup>37</sup> “St. George and the Dragon” dated to the late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg (Fig. 1);<sup>38</sup> “Saint George and the Dragon” dated to the first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the Tretyakov Gallery;<sup>39</sup> two more icons in the same museum: “St. George Slaying the Dragon” dated to the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>40</sup> and “St. George Slaying the Dragon” featuring a depiction of St. Nicholas (Fig. 2)<sup>41</sup> and “St. George Vanquishing the Dragon” dated to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, housed in the State Russian Museum in Petersburg.<sup>42</sup> The same iconographic model also appeared on liturgical vestments<sup>43</sup> and on small metal ornaments, e.g. pendants that could have been used as talismans<sup>44</sup> and fulfilled an apotropaic role, or on small-scale stone sculptures.<sup>45</sup> It could be found on icons originating from other regions of northern Rus', such as Vologda (an extant 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon),<sup>46</sup> Yaroslavl (a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon),<sup>47</sup> Rostov-Suzdal (two 16<sup>th</sup>-century icons, in the Tretyakov Gallery).<sup>48</sup> The only work that does not conform to this model is the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon of “Saint George with the Saint's Life”, now in the collection of the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow, where the saint is shown as a foot soldier.<sup>49</sup>

Three basic models can be singled out. The first of them involves St. George on horseback, slaying a dragon, with the Hand of God (*Manus Dei*) in the left or right upper corner. The saint and the horse may be presented in more or less sophisticated poses, from very simple depictions to highly complex ones with the bodies of both the horse and the rider bent and the entire composition dynamic. The saint

37 Inv. no. 12868; Антонова, Мнева, op. cit., p. 88.

38 Inv. no. 2123; Likhachov, *Novgorod...*, p. 305.

39 Inv. no. 12015; Антонова, Мнева, op. cit., p. 109.

40 Inv. no. 12036; Ibid., pp. 108–109.

41 Inv. no. 168, mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Likhachov, *Novgorod...*, p. 315.

42 Inv. no. 2088, Ibid., p. 320.

43 E.g. the early-16<sup>th</sup>-century podesa from Novgorod, now in the State Russian Museum in Petersburg, inv. no. ДРТ-41, cf. *Русские монастыри: искусство и традиции*, Sankt Petersburg 1997, p. 136.

44 E.g. items held in the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow: a plaque depicting the miracle of St. George, cf. С. В. Гнутова, Е. Я. Зотова, *Кресты, иконы, складни. Медное художественное литье XI – начала XX века. Из собрания Центрального музея древнерусской культуры и искусства имени Андрея Рублева*, Москва 2000, p. 63, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *zmeevik* depicting two warriors on horseback, identified as St. George and Theodore (Stratelates or Tyro); the reverse of the pendant features a mask encircled by 12 serpents, inv. no. КП 4580, cf. Т. В. Николаева, А. В. Чернецов, *Древнерусские амулеты-змеевики*, Москва 1991, pp. 72–73, the copper plaque depicting the miracle of St. George, cf. Гнутова, Зотова, op. cit., p. 60, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century pendant from Rostov, cf. Т. В. Николаева *Древнерусская мелкая пластика XI–XVI веков*, Москва 1968, Fig. 43.

45 The State Historical Museum in Moscow, no inv. no. *Государственный исторический музей*, Москва 2006, p. 86.

46 Антонова, Мнева, op. cit., p. 479.

47 Ibid., pp. 191–192.

48 Inv. no. 7306, cf. Ibid., p. 183, inv. no. Др. 49, cf. Ibid, p. 231.

49 Inv. no. КП 3482, Евсеева, *Московские житийные иконы...*, pp. 86–100.



**Fig. 1.** *Saint George and the Dragon*, tempera on wood, 58 cm × 41.5 cm, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century, the State Russian Museum in Petersburg



**Fig. 2.** *Saint George Slaying the Dragon, with St. Nicholas*, tempera on wood, 89 cm × 67 cm, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow

is shown holding a sword or piercing the dragon with a spear. In some cases, a narrative element – that of saving the princess<sup>50</sup> – is added to this depiction, as is the image of an angel placing the crown of victory on the knight's head. In time, the preference for more narrative depictions became more pronounced.

It is unclear why this iconographic variant gained such popularity. The three most popular hypotheses do not seem mutually exclusive. The first one, proposed by Boris Uspensky, connects the cult of saints with pre-Christian beliefs. According to this theory, St. George would replace and take over the functions of Perun, the principal deity of the Slavs; this would explain the popularity of his cult. Uspensky also points to George as the “princely saint” in folk beliefs, as juxtaposed with St. Nicholas, who was dubbed the “peasant god”.<sup>51</sup> If this analogy is to be accepted, one should also note St. George's image as a dragon/serpent slayer, which could also explain the popularity of such depictions in Rus' (as opposed to Byzantium). The second hypothesis refers to folk tradition related to agriculture and animal husbandry, according to which on the feast day of St. George (23 April), the saint

50 On the literary sources of the legend: Иванович, *Св. Георгий и Егорий Храбрый...*, p. 176.

51 B. A. Uspieński, *Kult św. Mikołaja na Rusi* [The cult of St. Nicholas in Rus'], Lublin 1985, pp. 63–67.



would ride out on a white steed to protect the cattle grazing on the pastures.<sup>52</sup> The last of the three theories stipulates that George was a saint who achieved a special status in Novgorod and was considered the patron of the region, offering support to its inhabitants in battle and in times of war.<sup>53</sup> The first two hypotheses are still questioned and do not fully explain the popularity of the specific iconographic type, especially since very often no direct analogy can be found. The issue of chronology is equally problematic, as the pre-Christian art to which 15<sup>th</sup>- or 16<sup>th</sup>-century works allegedly refer remains in the realm of hypothetical reconstruction, which in turn implies the need for a new comprehensive analysis of the question.

Another noteworthy iconographic type portrays St. George as an archer. It is a rare one; only two examples are known to have survived, namely the 15<sup>th</sup>-century icon with St. George<sup>54</sup> and "Saint George as an Archer"<sup>55</sup> attributed to the painter Danil Mozhaitsky, dated to the same century and originating from Moscow. Holy warriors were not presented in this manner in Byzantine art and a bow was even used as a devil's attribute;<sup>56</sup> yet from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards deviations from this iconographic standard began to appear.<sup>57</sup> The above-mentioned icons could have been modelled on Balkan ones. The work attributed to Danil Mozhaitsky bears the most pronounced resemblance to the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Belgrade, depicting St. Demetrius as an archer.<sup>58</sup> The similarity is, however, slight, and given the difference in artistic level, any conjectures regarding shared inspirations might be questioned due to the lack of extant analogous icons. What is more, these icons depict two different saints. The shift in iconography may have also been influenced by the forms of weaponry used in the period in question: bows were still a part of basic equipment<sup>59</sup> and decorative quivers were popular.<sup>60</sup>

The variant with the saint depicted as a foot soldier still appeared in later periods, outside of Novgorod. Extant examples include three Moscow icons (now in the Andrey Rublev Museum) showing St. George as an infantryman, with scenes from his life in the kleyma.<sup>61</sup> Two of them, both entitled "Saint George the Martyr, with

52 Лазарев, *Русская иконопись...*, pp. 56–57.

53 Ibid.

54 From the State Museum in Novgorod, inv. no. 10921, cf. М. В. Алпатов, *Древнерусская иконопись*, Москва 1978, p. 178.

55 Tretyakov Gallery, inv. no. 15025, Danil Mozhaitsky, Ibid., p. 48, *Словарь Русских иконописцев XI – XVII веков*, [http://rusico.indrik.ru/artists/m/mojaysky\\_daniil/index.shtml?adm=ad568d aa22c43e551d5bf08466c9aef2](http://rusico.indrik.ru/artists/m/mojaysky_daniil/index.shtml?adm=ad568d aa22c43e551d5bf08466c9aef2) [accessed 15 December 2016].

56 Grotowski, op. cit., p. 421; he notes that in Byzantium the practice was mainly influenced by war experience and stories from the Bible.

57 Cf. e.g. frescoes by Manuel Panselinos in the Protaton church in Karyes on Mount Athos, dated to 1290–1310. Saints Demetrius and Mercurius are depicted with bows.

58 Алпатов, *Древнерусская...*, p. 12.

59 Cf. С. Герберштейн, *Записки о Московии*, Москва 1988, pp. 114, 721.

60 Ibid., pp. 722, 742.

61 Евсеева, *Московские житийные...*, pp. 86–100.

the Saint's Life"<sup>62</sup> are dated to the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>63</sup> the third was made at the beginning of the century.<sup>64</sup>

The context and a natural analogy for the above depictions of St. George is provided by the cults and images of other military saints in Rus'. More prominent figures include Demetrius of Thessaloniki. The cult of this saint was developing in Rus' from the very beginning of its Christian history. The earliest depiction of Demetrius comes from Kiev; it is the already-mentioned mosaic dated to ca. 1113, now housed in the Tretyakov Gallery.<sup>65</sup> Demetrius was the baptismal patron of Vsevolod the Big Nest, who brought his relics from Thessaloniki; he was also particularly venerated by all descendants of the prince.<sup>66</sup> Sources also mention him alongside saints George, Boris and Gleb as one of the great allies invoked before the battle at Kulikovo Field.<sup>67</sup>

Five general iconographic variants of his image may be distinguished in the art of Rus'. The first of them involves depicting Demetrius as an enthroned warrior positioned in the centre of the icon and surrounded by kleyma with hagiographic scenes. Extant examples include the icon from Vladimir, dated to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 4)<sup>68</sup> and the Novgorod icon of "Saint Demetrius, with the Saint's Life" from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>69</sup> The second type presents the saint as a military martyr. It is represented by the late 15<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Pskov (Fig. 3).<sup>70</sup> The third type, showing Demetrius as a martyr, encompasses a heterogeneous group; icons classified in this category have fulfilled different roles. Examples include the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century icon originating from Novgorod, now held in the Museum in Recklinghausen,<sup>71</sup> and the depiction from the Deesis row of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, attributed to Andrei Rublev.<sup>72</sup>

Since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki began to be depicted in the orant pose, facing Christ or the Virgin with Emmanuel

62 Inv. no. КП 828; Ibid.

63 Inv. no. КП 824.

64 Inv. no. КП 152; Ibid.

65 Currently in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, inv. no. 25532, cf. Антонова, Мнева, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

66 А. Ф. Литвина, Ф. Б. Успенский, *Выбор имени у русских князей в X–XVI вв.: Династическая история сквозь призму антропоники*, Москва 2006, pp. 183–184.

67 *Летописная Повесть о Куликовской битве*, quoted after <http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4981> [15 Dec. 2016].

68 Cf. *Государственная Третьяковская галерея. Каталог собрания. Древнерусское искусство X – начала XV века*, vol. 1, Москва 1995, pp. 66–67.

69 The Hermitage, without inv. no., Алпатов, *Древнерусская...*, p. 309. Also, one example of a sculpture in stone has survived: it is a small stone icon with St. Demetrius enthroned on the obverse side and St. Nicholas with seven sleeping youths, the State Historical Museum in Moscow, inv. no. 74467, after: *Государственный исторический музей: Альбом*, Москва 2006, p. 86.

70 The State Russian Museum in Petersburg, inv. no. 2096; Лазарев, *Русская иконопись...*, p. 78.

71 Inv. no. 176, И. Бенчев, *Иконы святых покровителей*, Москва 2007, p. 344.

72 Inv. no. 3048; Лазарев, *Русская иконопись...*, pp. 108–109.



**Fig. 3.** *Demetrius of Thessaloniki*, tempera on wood, 67 cm × 57 cm, second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the State Russian Museum in Petersburg



**Fig. 4.** *Demetrius of Thessaloniki Enthroned*, tempera on wood, 156 cm × 108 cm, 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow

(i.e. depicted in side view), sometimes alongside Tsarevich Dmitry (canonised in 1606; the cult of that saint was intensely promoted, especially in the Moscow circles and by the artisan workshops of the Stroganov family). Examples include the Stroganov school icon from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>73</sup>

The last iconographic type only appears from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards and illustrates "the Miracle of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki". The saint is presented on a black or bay horse, spearing the Bulgarian tsar, Kaloyan, who is fleeing on a white steed. This is a reference to the legend about the siege of Thessaloniki in 1207.<sup>74</sup> At least three such representations have survived: two late 15<sup>th</sup>- or early 16<sup>th</sup>-century icons kept in the museum in Cherepovets (near Vologda)<sup>75</sup> and a Stroganov icon, most probably made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, now in the collection of the State Russian Museum in Petersburg.<sup>76</sup> The composition loosely resembles that of St. George slaying the dragon and it can be assumed that it was based thereon. It is all the more probable given the fact that the motif has already been appearing in 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century kleyma of the above-mentioned icons with scenes from the

73 В. И. Антонова, *Древнерусское искусство в собрании Павла Корина*, Москва 1966, pp. 98–100.

74 George Akropolites, *The History*, Oxford 2007, pp. 140.

75 Inv. no. № 658/1 oraz № 1003/1. Куликова, *Древние лики...*, p. 36 and p. 68.

76 Inv. no. 1037; *Искусство строгановских мастеров*, Ленинград 1987, p. 49.

life of the saint, where St. Demetrius is also presented as a rider on a white steed, similarly to St. George.<sup>77</sup>

The group of military saints also includes Theodore Stratelates and Theodore Tyro. In Russian art, the former is depicted exclusively as a foot soldier; the scene referring to his fight with a dragon appears occasionally in the kleyma of icons with scenes from his life. Among extant works showing this saint there is a Novgorod icon from the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century, now kept in the Tretyakov Gallery. Saints Theodore Tyro and Stratelates appear on it together, presented frontally, in military attire.<sup>78</sup> Another example is provided by a late 15<sup>th</sup>-century Novgorod icon (in the Novgorod Museum), with a full-length image of the saint.<sup>79</sup> The depiction is surrounded with border scenes presenting scenes from Theodore's life; the cycle begins with the slaying of the dragon, followed by Theodore's martyrdom, death and the transmission of his body. Another icon, originating from Yaroslavl (now in the Yaroslavl Museum) is dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> Fifteen out of its sixteen border scenes refer to the life of the saint. The cycle starts with the depiction of his birth. The scene of slaying the dragon is absent, substituted with an image of Christ enthroned, placed in the middle kleymo in the upper row. The same model can be found on the Pskov icon of St. Thodore Stratelates with His Life, dated to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> The saint (depicted as a foot soldier) also appears on metalwork<sup>82</sup> and miniatures.<sup>83</sup>

Depictions of Theodore Tyro are different. The earliest surviving Russian image of that saint is the icon "The Annunciation with St. Theodore Tyro", kept in the Novgorod Museum.<sup>84</sup> Dated to the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it shows Theodore as a knight on foot. The addition of the saint is unanimously interpreted as requested by the patron who commissioned the icon.<sup>85</sup> A different iconographic type,

77 The Tretyakov Gallery has one more icon depicting St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki as an archer, inv. no. 22946. It used to be dated to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, but currently it is believed to have been painted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. Т. М. Мосунова, *Иконы-врезки. Экспертиза и атрибуция произведений изобразительного искусства*, Москва 2007, pp. 38–39.

78 Inv. no. 22034, Антонова, Мнева, op. cit., pp. 163–164.

79 Inv. no. 11159, cf. Лазарев, *Русская иконопись...*, pp. 64, 244.

80 Inv. no. КП 53403/1026, cf. *Ярославский художественный музей. 101 икона из Ярославля*, Москва 2007, p. 35.

81 Saints Mary and Christopher Orthodox church in Kalbeinsteinberg, cf. В. М. Сорокатый, *Икона св. Феодора Стратилата XVI в. в церкви св. Марии и Христофора в Кальбеништайнберге (Бавария)*, in: *Древнерусское искусство. Художественная жизнь Пскова и искусство позднелизантийской эпохи. К 1100-летию Пскова*, vol. 28, Москва 2008, pp. 261–284.

82 E.g. the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *zmeevik*, on which the saint is depicted as a foot soldier; the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow, cf. Николаева, Чернецов, op. cit., pp. 74–75.

83 E.g. the 14<sup>th</sup>-century miniature from Yaroslavl, cf. С. И. Масленицын, *Ярославская иконопись*, Москва 1983, p. 17.

84 Inv. no. 2178, cf. Likhachov, *Novgorod...* p. 228, Э. А. Гордиенко, *Новгородское «Благовещение» с Феодором Тироном*, in: *Древнерусское искусство. Зарубежные связи*, Москва 1975, pp. 215–222.

85 The basic iconography of this work is very simple and is sometimes interpreted as a copy of an even earlier (i.e. 12<sup>th</sup>-century) painting. The supposed original would be the patronal icon commissioned by Prince Mstislav for the church of the Annunciation in Gorodishche

depicting the saint as a dragon-slayer, is represented by an icon of the Stroganov school painted in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Savin Nikifor Istomin, now in the collection of the State Russian Museum.<sup>86</sup> The type is based on apocryphal literary sources, in which the saint is portrayed mainly as a serpent-slayer (Russian: Змееборец).<sup>87</sup>

The last saint that must be mentioned here is Nikita, or, more accurately, Nicetas. The cult originated in Byzantium, where Nicetas the Goth was venerated as a saint. In Rus', the canonical original functioned alongside an apocryphal version of the saint's life. The earliest surviving example of the latter dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In this version, the life of the Byzantine military martyr merges with a legend about a slayer of a mythical beast.<sup>88</sup> The enriched story is reflected in iconography – in Rus', Nicetas was either depicted as the slayer of a beast (in this case portrayed not as a dragon, but as a winged spirit) or as a martyr (in the attire of a foot soldier). The latter type is represented by two extant works. The first of them is the Yaroslavl icon (now in the Yaroslavl Museum) from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, where Nicetas appears in full armour, with a shield and an unsheathed sword. The central image is surrounded by kleyma with scenes from his life.<sup>89</sup> The other work is a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Novgorod (now in the Hermitage), whose surviving kleyma depict scenes from the lives of three saints: Nicholas the Wonderworker, Alexander Svirsky and Nicetas the Martyr.<sup>90</sup>

The type with Nicetas as a devil-slayer (Russian: бегогон) appeared as early as in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, mainly on small items, such as the *zmeevik* amuletic medallions<sup>91</sup> and small double-sided icons.<sup>92</sup> Their reverse sides feature serpents or sometimes St. Nicholas or St. George, which emphasises the apotropaic role of these objects and demonstrates the significance of this function of St. Nicetas. Extant works include e.g. "St. Nicetas the Exorcist", now in the Tretyakov Gallery (Fig. 5) and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Tver (now in the State Russian Museum in Petersburg).<sup>93</sup> The latter work consists of three parts (from the bottom): St. Nicetas killing a beast,

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in 1103 (commemorating the birth and christening of his son Vsevolod, whose baptismal patron was St. Gabriel; Mstislav's own patron was Theodore Tyro). Гордиенко, *Новгородское «Благовещение»...*, p. 220.

86 Inv. no. ДРЖ2146; *Искусство строгановских...*, p. 50.

87 *Апокрифы Древней Руси*, Санкт-Петербург, 2008, p. 310.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 311.

89 Inv.no. 40964, *op. cit.*, p. 27-28.

90 Inv. no. ЭРИ-442; А. С. Косцова, А. Г. Побединская, *Русские иконы XVI – начала XX века с надписями, подписями и датами: Каталог выставки*, Ленинград 1990, pp. 14–15, 79–80.

91 *Zmeevik* from the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow, inv. no. КП 4476/165 Novgorod, 15<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Гнутова, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

92 The 17<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Novgorod, now in the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow, inv. no. КП 4872, obverse side: St. Nicholas; reverse side: St. Nicetas vanquishing a devil, cf. Гнутова, Зотова, *op. cit.*, p. 55, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century pendant from Rostov depicting saints Nicetas and George: Николаева, *op. cit.*, Fig. 43.

93 Cf. Е. Ф. Каменская, *Шедевры древнерусской живописи. Альбом*, Москва 1971, no. 20.



**Fig. 5.** *Nicetas the Exorcist*, tempera on wood, 34 cm × 27 cm, first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow

St. George slaying a dragon and a depiction of Deesis. The icon was placed on the side door of the iconostas.<sup>94</sup>

The icons of the Stroganov school made in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century may be considered a separate group. The majority is now in the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery and the State Russian Museum in Petersburg; very many of them feature a depiction of St. Nicetas.<sup>95</sup> The saint is depicted as a military martyr in the orant pose, turning towards Christ who appears in a cloud in one of the upper corners of the icon. The choice of this type indicates that the donor's individual prayer offered through the intercession of the patron saint was so important that it influenced the form of the work. The saint appears in a similar role in the following works: "Acheiropoieton, Do Not Weep for Me Mother, selected saints: Gregory of Naziansus, Nicetas the Martyr, martyrs Mavra and Eupraxia" painted by Stefan Arefiev;<sup>96</sup> the

94 The icon was displayed at the 2006 exhibition in the State Russian Museum in Petersburg entitled "Святой Николай Мирликийский", cf. [http://work18.peterlink.ru/exhibitions/ex\\_463/#foto](http://work18.peterlink.ru/exhibitions/ex_463/#foto) [accessed 15 December 2016].

95 Prokopy Chirin: *Nicetas the Warrior*, 1593, the Tretyakov Gallery, inv. no. DR1190, 29 × 22cm; *Nicetas the Warrior*, late 16<sup>th</sup>–early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the museum in Solvychegodsk, inv. no. 6930, 35 × 28 cm; *Nicetas the Warrior*, late 16<sup>th</sup>–early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery, inv. no. 12109, 38 × 30 cm; Alexis: *Nicetas the Martyr with Scenes from his Life in 16 kleyma* (no longer extant); Grigoriy: *Nicetas the Warrior*, 1602, the museum in Perm, inv. no. I54.

96 Stefan Arefiev: *Acheiropoieton, Do Not Weep for Me Mother, selected saints: Gregory of Nazianzus, Nicetas the Martyr, martyrs Mavra and Eupraxia*, early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the State Russian

late 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon of "The Virgin as Inviolable Mountain",<sup>97</sup> featuring a depiction of St. Nicetas and St. Eupraxia; the late 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon of "Saint Nicetas with Scenes from his Life", the icon from the Church of the Annunciation in Solvychevodsk commissioned by Nikita Grigorevich Stroganov,<sup>98</sup> the icon of the Pechersk Virgin with saints Nicetas and Anastasia, early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>99</sup> Nicetas was the baptismal patron of Nikita Grigorevich Stroganov, while Eupraxia was the patroness of Evpraksiya Fedorovna, his wife.<sup>100</sup> There is reason to argue that the choice of the subject matter was an expression of individual religiosity and deliberate selection. Changes in the iconographic type of the saint indicate that his role as an intercessor (and not only as a patron saint) was of paramount importance.

The cult of military martyr saints was developing in Rus' from the beginning of its Christianisation. For the first few centuries the local population adopted Byzantine models which may be described as canonical both in terms of iconography and religious practice in general. New iconographic forms appeared between the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These were often quite local in scope; such was the nature of the cult of St. George in the north, especially in Novgorod, where the variant with the saint presented as a horse-rider slaying the dragon, known since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was gradually expanded to include successive layers of narration. Icons painted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the trend culminated, were very elaborate and strayed far from their initial form, and indirectly also from their function. Changes in iconography can also be linked to the transformations that took place in Rus' between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first of those involved the emergence of a new state – the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which incorporated old cults, particularly those characteristic for the families of dukes and boyars, such as the veneration of St. George or St. Demetrius. Other changes included territorial expansion to pagan lands. Conquered with sword, these regions also became the field of a spiritual fight; Orthodox churches were built, monasteries founded and populations incorporated into the Holy Rus'.

Characteristic features of popular religiosity in Rus' included the clearly apotropaic character of the cult of military saints. It is apparent from the sheer number of works showing saints vanquishing dragons, devils, serpents or heathens (symbolising Satan) as opposed to images with the saints in their representative form. The "courtly" aspect of the cult added a layer of exclusivity related to the saint's

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Museum in Petersburg, inv. no. 1016; Istoma Savin: *Selected saints: St. Nicetas the Warrior, Gregory of Naziansus, martyrs Mavra and Eupraxia*, late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Tretyakov Gallery, inv. no. 14220; Posnik: *Our lady of Vladimir with saints in polya*, before 1589; the saints depicted include Gregory the Great and Nicetas the Warrior (standing) and Mavra and Eupraxia (kneeling), Pavel Korin's, Moscow.

97 *The Virgin as Inviolable Mountain*, late 16<sup>th</sup> century, currently in the museum in Solvychevodsk, inv. no. CM547Ж.

98 *Иконы строгановских вотчин XVI–XVII веков: По материалам реставрационных работ ВХНРЦ имени академика И. Э. Грабар. Каталог-альбом*, Москва 2003, pp. 40–41.

99 Cf. Антонова, op. cit., p. 97.

100 *Русский биографический словарь*, vol. 25, Санкт-Петербург 1913, pp. 507–512.

guardianship over a given person or family. This was the third significant phenomenon developing in Rus' from the 1550s onward with regard to forms of individual piety, manifested e.g. by the above-mentioned Stroganov-school icons with St. Nicetas. The patron saint is always presented in the orant pose, facing the figure of Christ or the Virgin with Child depicted in one of the icon's corners. The saint has an inseparable connection to the donor who places him or herself closer to Christ indirectly, through the image of the patron saint.

It may therefore be argued that Russian iconography of military saints underwent many changes throughout the centuries, reflecting changes in the forms of local religiosity. Its diversity and transformations show a certain feature characteristic of Russian art: the fact that iconographic types are mixed and complex (in terms of the saint's function and the manner of depiction) makes Russian works ambiguous and difficult to study. The popularity of certain dominant iconographic types has not yet been thoroughly explained and merits a new analysis. References to folk religiosity and the presence of pagan beliefs – which are often used to explain the apotropaic features and deviations from canon – are a separate issue for further study. The final question that leaves room for scholarly debate is the development of narrative elements in icons, related to formal changes that led to the development of entirely autonomous forms of religious art.

*Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz*

## Abstract

Depictions of military martyrs were among the most popular subjects in icon painting in Rus'. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century local workshops adopted canonical Byzantine models and gradually developed and changed them depending on local factors and conditions. The present article attempts to classify the most common iconographic types and to describe the dynamic of the changes in the iconographic canon on the basis of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of extant and known works.