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THE DEVELOPMENT OF G.N. ZHURAVLYOV'S UNIQUE STYLE DURING HIS WORK ON THE ICON *THE IMAGE OF THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR GEORGE THE VICTORIOUS*

This study focuses on some special features of the style of the image of St. George the Victorious in G.N. Zhuravlyov's iconography. As a result of this analysis, some fundamental iconographic reference points of the distinctive painter, undoubtedly influenced by the artworks of the renowned craftsmen of the Syzran iconography centre, have been identified. The image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious is special not only in Zhuravlyov's series of iconographic works featuring such revered warriors as St. Alexandre Nevsky and St. Michael the Archangel but also in his oeuvre in general. The images illustrating this article are published for the first time.

Keywords: icon painting, Grigory Zhuravlyov, St. George the Victorious, Syzran icon painting centre, saint warriors.

The iconographic heritage of Grigory Nikolaevich Zhuravlyov (1858–1916), an extraordinary phenomenal artist without arms and legs hailing from the village of Utevka in the Buzuluk district of the Samara province (now Neftegorsky district, Samara region), holds a special esteemed position in the museum and private collections. Zhuravlyov's signature phrases, "Painted by the peasant Grigory Zhuravlyov of Samara province, Buzuluk district, village Utevka, with his teeth" adorns the icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, a masterpiece created by him at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, is currently housed in the Hermitage (St. Petersburg). Iconographic and graphic works by G. N. Zhuravlyov are also included in the collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion (St. Petersburg), the Museum of the Moscow Spiritual Academy "Church and Archaeological Cabinet" (Sergiev Posad), the Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts, and the Collection of Russian Icons supported by the St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation. However, most of his

works are in museums of the Samara region, and temples, monasteries, and private collections. Many surviving works by G. N. Zhuravlyov feature a consistent style of lettering, providing details such as the master's name, surname, social class, place of residence, and the unconventional method of painting ("painted with teeth"). Despite being born into a family of peasant farmers, Zhuravlyov faced the challenges of lacking a formal artistic education. However, this limitation did not prevent him from evolving into an accomplished icon painter, demonstrating a skill level comparable to his provincial counterparts. Zhuravlyov, recognizing the absence of formal training, saw divine providence in his life. This is evidenced in his letter to the future Emperor Nicholas II, where he expressed that he created the icon "...according to the understanding of the Almighty God who allowed me into the world. And he gave me a gift" [1, p. 33].

This work is focused on the icon "Image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious" painted by G. N. Zhuravlyov.

The image of St. George the Victorious holds a special place in the creative activity of the Utevka icon painter, within a series of images of the holy warrior St. Michael the Archangel and the Faithful Saint Prince Alexandre Nevsky [1, p. 45].



Fig. 1. G.N. Zhuravlyov. Image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious. May 19, 1889. Wood, oil. 70 × 56 cm. Pukhtitskiy Monastery of the Dormition, Estonia. Inscription in the lower left corner: "The icon was painted by peasant Grigory Zhuravlyov with his teeth," the inscription in the lower right corner: "Samara province, Buzuluk district, village Utevka of the same volost May 19, 1889."

Among the numerous miracles of St. George the Victorious is evidenced in hagiographic literature, "St. George and the Dragon" is one of the most popular works of ancient Russian painting, and the image of the saint from this iconography is the most recognizable¹. The plot is based on a legend concerning how to quell the Dragon that appeared near a small town, residents sacrificed young people and girls by lot. During the meet-

ing between the princess and the Dragon, a savior appears, a rider on a white horse, who, having overthrown the Dragon (with a prayer in one version, with a spear in another version), saves the girl from death. This is a version of one of the plots of the widespread theme of the battle between the horseman and the Dragon that is deeply rooted in the culture of ancient civilizations.

In the extensive historiography dedicated to the image of the dragon slayer motif, modern research stands out, emphasizing its profound cultural and historical continuity. Notably, researcher K. F. Karlova proposed a hypothesis suggesting that "the iconographic type of St. George the Dragon Slayer took shape under the influence of images of the ancient Egyptian god Seth thrusting a spear into a serpent" [2, pp. 1214–1215]. The emergence of the first sculptural images of Heros Equitans marked the inception of the iconography of the veneration of the horseman during the "dark ages" of antiquity. Researcher B.L. Shapiro pointed out an external resemblance to Troyan and highlighted the perception of the valiant horseman's image by the ancient Romans [3, pp. 28–30]. Subsequently, the iconographic image of the holy warrior can be traced to the late antique cult of martyrs and further developed within the context of the theme of holy warriors in Byzantium [4, p. 296].

Subsequently, the image is visible in Slavic and Old Russian traditions. The surviving monuments of Russian art indicate that in Rus', this theme has become widespread since the latter half of the 11th century [5, pp. 665–692] just when professional equestrian warriors appeared in Rus' and a horseman culture took shape [3].

Modern art historians have identified several iconographic types of images of the equestrian warrior St. George the Victorious, namely, the image of a horseman associated with the life of St. George, the miracle of George freeing

¹ Image of St. George the Victorious is depicted on the coat of arms of Moscow and is also in the center of the Great State Emblem of the Russian Empire.

the tsarevna from the dragon, and finally, the image of Saint George the Dragon Slayer [6].

The depiction of St. George the Victorious by G. N. Zhuravlyov aligns with the second type, where the iconographic version is derived from an original recording, incorporating established iconographic images. However, within this theme, a notable degree of variability emerges, as indicated by the accompanying text within this topic: "The miracle of St. George, who saved the maiden from the dragon, is as follows: the holy martyr George sat on a white horse, having a spear in his hand, and he stabbed the dragon in the throat with it. The dragon emerged from the lake, great and terrible; the lake was large, with a mountain on one side and another on the opposite side. A tsar's daughter stood on the edge of the lake, adorned with magnificent royal clothes. She held the dragon with a belt and led it by the belt into the city. Another maiden promptly closed the city gates; the city itself was surrounded by a fence with a tower. From the tower, the tsar, characterized by brown hair and a small beard, was observed. The tsaritsa stood by him, and behind them were the nobility, warriors, and people armed with axes and spears" [7, p. 230].

Early iconography portraying the miracle of the dragon, including three images, St. George, the Dragon, and Elisava (a version of the fresco in the diaconicum; last quarter of the 12th century, Church of St. George, Staraya Ladoga), gradually becomes more complicated. As noted, "the initial laconic image of a rider on a white horse is complemented with numerous details" [8, p. 51]. An illustrative example is the angel with a crown is added to the image of the blessing right hand in the heavenly segment¹, and the city inhabitants and

the tsar throwing the keys from the tower to St. George, as well as other heroes, are added to the elements of urban architecture². Thus, at the end of the 19th century, both brief and very detailed iconographic images were becoming widespread.

"Image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious" by G.N. Zhuravlyov is created in the artist's favorite academic manner using the principles of direct perspective. While the representation is devoid of tactility and materiality, there are no detailed psychological nuances, vivid emotions, or excessive decorativeness. The coloring of the icon and the movement of the heroes are imbued with psychologism. Notably, the author's rich pictorial imagination does not go beyond the boundaries of the iconographic canon. The image is saturated with the inner spiritual power inherent in a traditional icon, representing, according to archpriest S. Bulgakov, "a combination of religious insight and artistic inspiration, and such a combination is an extremely rare gift" [9, p. 157].

The composition of Zhuravlyov's icon is not overloaded with details; St. George the Victorious is depicted riding a white horse, moving toward the city (tower) on the right side of the work. The image of the balance between the figures of the rider and the horse is a subject of research interest, as the icon painter deliberately depicted the horse's head turned frontally, pressed to the rider's

and presently house in the State Russian Museum, adds another layer to the historical tapestry.

² A specific work titled "St. George and the Dragon, with a Life," dating from the late 16th to early 17th centuries and originating from the Church of George on the Square in Kostroma, now resides in the State Tretyakov Gallery. Another noteworthy piece, "The Double Miracle of St. George," latter half of the 19th century, Spassky Monastery, Sidon (Saida), Lebanon; "St. George and the Dragon," late 15th–early 16th century, Vologda; The miraculous image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious, painting of Novgorod of the 15th century, icon from the Vysotsky Serpukhov Monastery, Serpukhov. The second variant "St. George and the Dragon with Saints Modestus and Blasius and the Martyrs Florus and Laurus in the Fields" (mid-19th century, Andrei Rublev Museum), is close to the option under consideration, but the contact between the heads of the rider and horse is mutual.

¹ The icons spanning from the mid-14th to early 15th centuries, curated in the collection of A.V. Morozov and I.S. Ostroukhov at the State Tretyakov Gallery, provide valuable insights into the evolution of St. George iconography. Additionally, an icon from the latter half of the 15th century, originating from the church of Manikhino village in the Leningrad region

body with its right side. This angle of view is relatively uncommon in the iconography of St. George on horseback.¹

Their gazes exclude unwavering determination, both fixed upon the serpent writhing below. St. George, the central character, appears before the viewer as a young man with wavy dark brown hair, neatly combed in the middle, framing the oval of his face with a voluminous cap. The halo, rather than a conventional ring, forms a solid golden circle akin to a solar disk.

St. George's visage boasts regular and delicate features – a straight, pointed nose, a neat mouth with thin lips, and a gaze that exudes calm confidence directed toward his adversary. The icon painter carefully attends to every detail of the martyr's military armor. A red cloak, symbolizing martyrdom, billows in voluminous folds, slightly revealing a blue tunic adorned with metal armor (lorica). The cloak is fastened with a clasp on the warrior's chest, while the lower part of the tunic gracefully drapes onto the red horse blanket. Bright cuffs accentuate the sleeves, and the hero's high brown boots, along with the loose reins of the horse, add to the visual attraction. The icon painter places careful emphasis on the spear tightly gripped by St. George, its pommel taking the form of a cross. In the early Russian iconography of this holy image, the horseman's spear symbolized the power of faith and prayer, showcasing the warrior's ability to pacify the villain without resorting to explicit acts of reprisal. For example, in the fresco of the diaconicum of the Church of St. George in Staraya Ladoga, dating back to the last quarter of the 12th century, the Great Martyr is depicted with a spear that he raises over the dragon.

However, G.N. Zhuravlyov arranges this scenario differently, adhering to a

later iconographic tradition, with a sharp spear piercing the mouth of the dragon, symbolizing the fearlessness and righteousness of St. George the Victorious. The dark ocher dragon, looking more like a winged dog with an arrow-shaped curved tongue and a double-curved tail, wriggles under the decisive blow of the warrior. Leaning on its front paws, the dragon looks at the rider, and its membranous wings are pressed to the body and pointed upwards. It is also interesting that the same image of the dragon appears on the icon of G.N. Zhuravlyov is typical of Western European art of the Renaissance [10].

Tsarevna Elisava, as portrayed on Zhuravlyov's icon, embodies an image of modesty and submission. Positioned against the background of a dark semi-circular arch of the city tower, her arms folded on her chest. Adorned with a crown, a light cape, and a golden ocher dress. Her image is symbolically illuminated by the rays of the rising sun, dispersing the darkness of the night. The natural motifs meticulously depicted by the master serve to underscore and emphasize the significance of the Holy Great Martyr George's heroic feat. The smooth and calm landscape of the green field within the iconographic plot further enhances the visual narrative. Notably, on Zhuravlyov's icon, there are no images of a cave or lake as the dragon's habitation. This omission aligns with the earlier idea expressed in this article, emphasizing the icon painter's preference for a laconic composition devoid of excessive narrative elements. A similar iconographic scheme, albeit with minor discrepancies in details, is observed in an icon from the collection of the Temple of the Kazan Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, affiliated with the Old Believer community of the Ancient Orthodox Pomeranian Church in Samara.

¹ From the vast layer of iconography of St. George on horseback (the article author reviewed over 100 samples), while only one option repeats a similar arrangement of the figures of St. George and the horse, namely "St. George and the Dragon" (first half of the 17th century, Crete, State Historical Museum, Moscow).



Fig. 2. Image of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious, at the end of the 19th century. Wood, gesso, tempera. 35.5 × 30.5 cm. Temple of the Kazan Icon of the Virgin Mary of the Old Believer community of the Ancient Orthodox Pomeranian Church, Samara.

At its core, the icon by G.N. Zhuravlyov represents the second type of iconographic plot, focusing on the rescue of Tsarevna Elisava by Saint George. The masterful execution reveals the influence of the Syzran icon-painting workshop, evident in characteristic ornamental decorative element on a wide black bevel, alternating image in gold of a chamomile flower, a petal, and a trefoil [11, p. 10]. Positioned at the pommel, amidst the clouds, is a waist-length depiction of Christ the Pantocrator, blessing with both hands. The upper field of the icon carries the inscription “Image of the Holy Great Martyr George” in an elongated half-uncial. Along the side margins, there are images of patron saints (though the inscription is illegible, likely depicting St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and St. Martyr John the Warrior). In the center, inscriptions above the characters read: “Angel of the Lord,” “Holy Great Martyr George,” and

“Daughter of the Tsar.” The color scheme is distinctive, blending warm brown and ochre tones with a green scheme. The general background, as well as the faces of St. George and Elisava, is in the darkened tonality, with contrasting dark brown under paint and areas sharply lightened with white on the forehead, cheeks, and neck. The central composition features Saint George riding on a white horse, accentuating its luminosity through the white mane, tail, and hooves. Saint George’s calm, confident gaze is directed at the viewer. He is adorned in military regalia, a dark green tunic (kamizia) with golden cuffs, a metallic golden lorica, and a scallop-like flowing end of a red cloak, marked by sinuous lines of whitewash. He holds the reins with his left hand, and raises a spear with a cross-shaped pommel with his right hand, barely touching the dragon’s mouth. Notably, the traditional helmet of a Byzantine warrior is rarely found in the iconography of St. George the Victorious. In the upper right corner, an atypical image emerges, an angel holding a crown for St. George, a detail absent in the G.N. Zhuravlyov icon. Such atypical images, like the fall of the helmet (seen in an icon from the late 15th to early 16th centuries in the National Museum “Kiev Art Gallery”) or its replacement with a heavenly martyr’s crown (seen in an embroidered shroud from the Konevetsky Monastery on Lake Ladoga, early 16th century, State Russian Museum) [7], were common in the iconography of the 15th–early 16th centuries, enriching the narratives with intricate details.

On the icon by the Syzran icon painter, a green dragon is portrayed against a blue-green background of a lake, occupying the entire lower field of the central part. The dragon exhibits a distinctive two-pointed tail, one end bent inward and the other upward, a departure from Zhuravlyov’s icon where the tail wraps around the horse’s hind leg. Notably, this composition features a rare detail specified earlier and repeated by Zhuravlyov, the mutual positioning of the horse and rider. The rider’s body is in a three-quarter turn, with a slight tilt of

the head downward, synchronized with the horse's forward movement. The horse's head is turned back and pressed against the rider's torso. An intriguing conclusion can be drawn from this detail—that the peasant artist may have replicated the image from the Syzran icon painters. The parallel echoes a similar peculiarity observed in the copying of G.N. Zhuravlyov's "Milkgiver" icon from a lithograph, as noted by researcher I.L. Buseva-Davydova, who remarked, "The artist reproduced only the Mother of God and the Child, even without the angels holding the crown" [12, p. 52]. Another instance involves the examination of the icon of Saints Cyril and Methodius, where the Utevka icon painter used a lithograph with a composition reminiscent of Mikeshe's but noticeably different in detail [12, p. 52]. This supports the hypothesis of the Utevka icon painter's creative adaptation of the original when copying, avoiding irrelevant details. The depiction of the tsarevna on both icons shares similarities—she wears a crown, and her arms are folded on her chest, set against the backdrop of a dark arch from the city tower. However, differences emerge in some architectural features of the city building. It consists of two rectangular towers of different levels with jagged edges—the lower one is green with a window opening, while the upper one is terracotta. Figures of the tsar and tsaritsa are positioned between them, and a roof cone with golden tiles completes the structure.

The Syzran icon dedicated to the image of St. George the Victorious adheres to a traditional canonical style, characterized by detailing and the inclusion of small plot details. Grigory Zhuravlyov's icon, with its "life-like" style of painting, also exhibits laconicism and a certain restraint in rendering the images. A comparative analysis of the two works, both centered around the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious, reveals an apparent similarity in their iconographic schemes, despite minor discrepancies in details. Moreover, the authors of the catalog "Contrary to the Impossible. Icons not-Made-by-Hands by Grigory

Zhuravlyov," released for the exhibition of icons by G.N. Zhuravlyov, I.V. Kramareva, and T.Yu. Konyakina, emphasized that Zhuravlyov contemporaries testified to his practice of copying rather than composing his works from various samples [13, p. 36]. Researcher I.L. Buseva-Davydova highlights that the originals Zhuravlyov used were "very heterogeneous," and copying, a method practiced since ancient times, played "an important role in the creative process of the master" [12, p. 51]. However, the Utevka icon painter did not work "on flow," the self-taught master primarily created works upon order and relied on icon-painting guidelines for their creation.

In this context, it is acceptable for artists to use albums of color lithographs on religious themes, published in the 1880s, as practical guides¹. Moreover, in Samara churches, there are instances of artists referring to these popular models. For instance, in the interior of the church dedicated to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, several works by the famous Samara figure, rector, and archpriest Ioann Fomichev can be found. The "Pochaev icon of the Mother of God" is a notable example created in close conformity with the lithographic original. However, this practice differs when considering the iconographic subjects of "Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious" from the album and the icon by Grigory Zhuravlyov. Despite the external similarity of the compositions, significant differences in details are observed. Particularly noteworthy is the position of the horse's head concerning the rider. In the album, unlike the icon by G. Zhuravlyov, the prevalent option presents the horse looking forward as it moves, and the city tower consists of a single level. The blue sky with small clouds on the horizon in the lithography lacks the tragic undertones emphasized by the Utevka icon painter through the landscape. Simultaneously, it is conceivable that the general compositional structure and the landscape theme were creatively reinter-

¹ Album of images of holy icons, chromolithograph edition by E.I. Fesenko in Odessa, Chromolite. E.I. Fesenko, Odessa (1894). [L. 86].

preted by the artist in his work, contributing to the distinctiveness of his rendition.

With a high degree of likelihood, it can be inferred that G.N. Zhuravlyov was familiar with the images from the lithograph album. However, in the creation of the icon “Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious,”

considering the shared details, the work of the Syzran workshop likely took precedence. This is particularly plausible given the widespread influence of this icon-painting center both within the Samara province and beyond.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ АВТОРСКОГО СТИЛЯ Г.Н. ЖУРАВЛЁВА В РАБОТЕ НАД ИКОНОЙ «ОБРАЗ СВЯТОГО ВЕЛИКОМУЧЕНИКА ГЕОРГИЯ ПОБЕДОНОСЦА»

Данное исследование посвящено изучению стилевых особенностей образа Георгия Победоносца в иконописи Г.Н. Журавлева. В результате искусствоведческого анализа автором статьи были определены ключевые иконописные ориентиры самобытного художника, на которые, бесспорно, повлияли работы известных мастеров сызранского иконописного центра. Образ святого великомученика Георгия Победоносца зани-

мает особое место не только в цикле авторских работ с изображением святых воинов (Александра Невского и Архангела Михаила), но и в творчестве мастера в целом. Изображения, иллюстрирующие данную статью, публикуются впервые.

Ключевые слова: иконопись, Григорий Журавлев, Георгий Победоносец, сызранский иконописный центр, святые воины.

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