

The Contribution of Theophanes the Greek in the History of Russian Iconography - His works in Novgorod

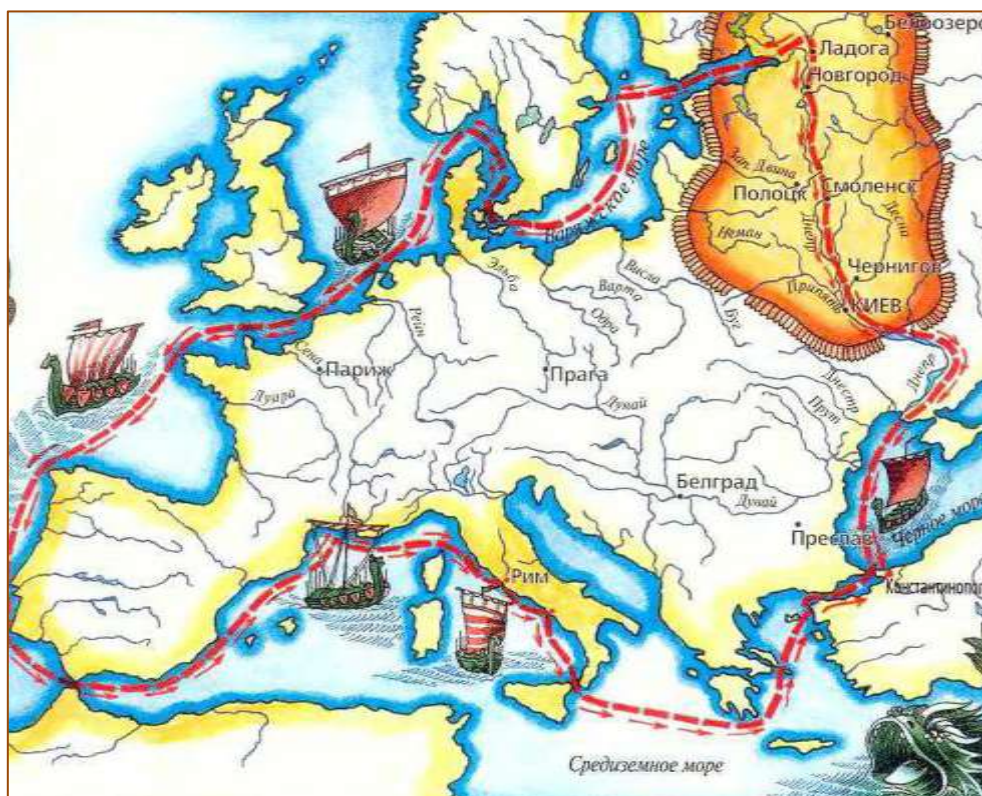
The history of Russian iconography began approximately 1000 years ago when Grand Prince Vladimir (952 - 1015 ad) led the Kievan Rus into the cultural orbit of Byzantium. The relations between Russian and Byzantium and later between Greece and Orthodox Russia have been close, brotherly and continuous up until the present day because they have been 'kneaded' with a common spiritual legacy.



Mosaic of the Monastery of Vlachernes in Constantinople.

According to the ancient Primary Chronicle, which has been ascribed to the monk Nestor, the Christianization of the Russians in 988 – 989 ad and the Byzantine influence helped to create the first independent potentates and the first Russian religious traditions. As has been written in the Chronicle, various Slavic tribes established themselves politically in the area. The Scandinavian Varangians, more commonly known as Vikings, and the Rus created the first strong principalities: Prince Rurik in Novgorod and Askold and Dior in Kiev. Prince Rurik made himself master of Novgorod, the most northwesterly Slav settlement, and within three years of his death in 879, his successors, who came to be known as Varangians, had extended their rule to include Smolensk and Kiev. Kiev was the most valuable strategically. It was accordingly declared “the mother of Russian cities”. As controllers of the trade routes along the rivers Volga and Dnieper (Dnipro) – central part of the “water

road from the Varangians to the Greeks” -, the Rus came into contact with Byzantium and often conducted raids in the area.



Map showing the water road “From the Varangians to the Greeks”.

After the conquest of Kiev by Oleg and Igor between 880 and 883 ad, the continual Byzantine-Russian trade relations allowed the spreading of Christianity. This was further precipitated by the baptism of Igor’s wife, Olga Princess of Kiev in 967 in Constantinople, an event which is considered by many to be the precursor of Christianization in the country.

Yaroslav the Wise is associated with the Golden Era of Culture in Kiev. He shaped the city into a Christian capital. The cathedral of St. Sophia was built by Greeks who had been invited to work there from Constantinople. The artworks contained in that famous monument are among the greatest monumental works from the first half of 11th century: Saint Luke Phocis, the New Monastery of Chios, St. Sophia of Ohrid etc.«The mosaics in St. Michael’s Golden Domed Monastery near Kiev, built 1108, represent the early Komnenian art whereas the frescos in the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, built 1189, and the Church of St. Demetrius in Kiev, built 1195, are works by artists from Constantinople and are from the later period of Komnenian art [1].»

1. Greek Newspaper «Daily», The gates of mystery, 7 Days, 08.05.1994, p.5

Portable icons are brought in from Constantinople; for example the icon of the Virgin Mary of Eleousa, also known as 'The Virgin Mary of Vladimir'. «In the other principality the valley of Rurik, Novgorod (today's Great Novgorod), we see frescos from the beginning of 12th century such as St. Nicholas of the Court and in the naves of the monasteries of St. George, built in 1119, and of St. Andrew, built in 1125, which are thought to be works by Greek artists [2]».

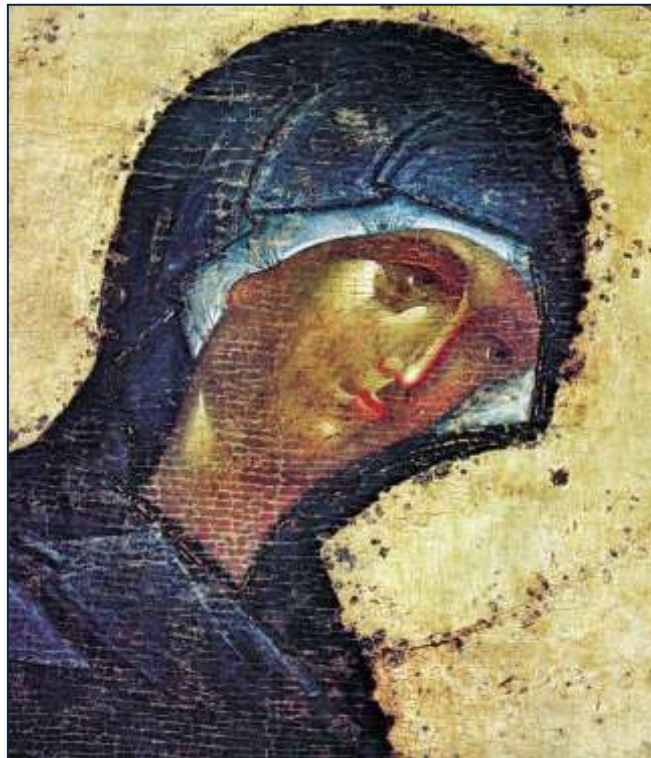
«In Russian churches the beauty of the decoration is in absolute harmony with the characteristics of the architecture. The eye of the believer is captivated by the number of scenes from the Bible and by the figures of the saints with which the walls and the cupola are decorated [3]». «The Russian icon is one of the most vivid proclamations of national spiritualism. It reaches out through the centuries and reflects the experience of spiritual life, of the parishioners and suggests a vision by means of the artist's brush...» [4]

«It is characteristic that the first saints of Russian Orthodoxy were the iconographers Alipios (d.1114) and Gregory (11th century), both monks of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves (Kievo – Pecherskaya Lavra) – Complex of churches, caves and museums founded in 1051. Other iconographical saints were the Metropolitan Bishop of Russia, Peter (d.1326), the Bishop of Rostov, Theodore (d.1394) and the Saint Dionysius from Gusitsk (1450 – 1508), the Saint Antonius of Seya (near Ivanovo) (d.1556) and the most notable of all the Saint Andrey Rublev (d.1430) [5].» The murals of the 12th century in Nereditsa in Novgorod, in Pskov, in Staraya Ladoga and in St. Demetrius of Vladimir are reiterations of masterpieces from Constantinople, whereas many examples of mosaics are saved in St. Sophia Cathedral of Kiev (Sofiysky Sobor). «The art of portable icons was especially nurtured and was strengthened by the presence in Russia of miraculous Byzantine icons of the Mother of our Lord such as the Virgin Mary of Vladimir, the Virgin Mary of Smolensk – Odigitria [6]». At the time when the Mongols were in power, iconography was at its peak, mainly due to the presence of the great iconographer Theophanes the Greek (1327 – 1410). «Theophanes was the artist who, with his works, brought beauty, dramatic tone and passion with a breath of spiritualism from Byzantium to Russia [7]».

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2. Greek Newspaper «Daily» , The gates of mystery , 7 Days , 08.05.1994 , p.5
 3. Greek Newspaper «Daily» as over p.6
 4. Delikostopoulos Ath. «The trumpets of Jericho» , p.74
 5. As above p.77
 6. Markou Ant. «The calendar of Saints» , Generaly
 7. Magazine «Orthodox Evidence», Russian icons of the Virgin Mary, issue .56 , 1998.

«He painted the walls of churches such as St. Sophia and 'The Transfiguration of the Saviour' in Novgorod, 'The Assumption of the Virgin

Mary' in Vladimir, 'The Nativity of the Virgin Mary' in Volotovo, and the "Archangel Michael" and 'The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary' in Moscow[8],[9]».



Theophanes the Greek "The Virgin Mary".

Theophanes the Greek taught the greatest Russian iconographer Andrey Rublev (1369 – 1439), a monk of Trinity - Sergius Lavra in Zagorsk, near Moscow – spiritual centre of Russian Orthodoxy. The most famous work of the Venerable Father Andrey is an icon of the Holy Trinity – The hospitality of Abraham, which today is kept in the Tretyakov State Gallery in Moscow. «Andrei Rublev was the unparalleled representative of ancient Russian art and became the example not only for almost all later Russian artists but also by a decision of the Council of the Hundred Chapters (1551) [10]».

8. Alpatov M. V. Theophanes the Greek, Moscow 1990.

9. Sardelis K.. «Theophanes the Greek» , magazine «Missal» , issue 28 , 1998 , p.61-64

10. Feidas I. Vlasios«History of the Russian Church from its inception until today», Version : Apostolic Ministry, Athens 2005, p. 182-183.

In the year 1405 Saint Andrey Rublev mentioned third, after Theophanes the Greek and Prochoros on the painting of the Church of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin, while the year 1408 Saint Andrey paints, with his partner Daniel, the temple of the Assumption in Vladimir. «Andrei Rublev's main contribution is in the balanced structure of the different and at times opposite

current traditions of his era, in an art which was more interested in expressing the catholic ecclesiastical experiences and thoughts rather than those of personal or national nature [11]».

«Rublev, thanks to the purity of his monastic life and correct theological thought became the most renowned representative of Byzantine artistic tradition [12]».

«Theophanes the Greek, with the vivid expressionistic and mystical style, drove the Palaiological tradition of the art of Constantinople to an extreme form [21]». Information regarding the artistic work of Theophanes in Constantinople before his establishment in Novgorod comes from the modern Russian artist, the monk Brother Epiphanius. Of the 5 churches that he painted there, only the decorative mural in the Church of the Transfiguration, painted in 1378, is saved. After his long stay in Great Novgorod (Velikiy Novgorod), where he decorated private mansions with murals of panoramic views of Moscow and also manuscripts, he transferred his workshop to Moscow. The icons of Prayer that Ivan the Terrible (Ivan Grozny) brought to the Church of the Annunciation in the Kremlin are thought to be from Kolomna where Theophanes worked and are ascribed to him. The Cathedral of the Annunciation (Blagoveshchensky Sobor) is generally regarded as superior to the other early cathedrals. Built on the site of a wooden structure of the same name, it inherited the original church's iconostasis, painted by two of the greatest names in Russian Iconography: Theophanes the Greek and Andrey Rublev. «Theophanes the Greek worked in Serpuchov, Nizny Novgorod and probably also at Kolomna and Pereslavl Zaleshky[13],[26]. «Other than the icons of the Prayer in the Church of the Annunciation in the Kremlin, the following icons are also ascribed to him: The Saviour, The Mother of the Lord, John the Baptist, The Archangel Gabriel, Paul the Apostle and John Chrysostom. Traces of his technique are also observed in the figures of the Archangel Michael and St. Vasily the Great [14]».

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11. Skliris St. «Andrey Rublev, the Saint of Russian Iconography», magazine «Missal», issue 28 , 1988 , p.57.
 12. Delikostopoulos Ath., as above p.81.
 13. Лазарев В.Н. «Феофан Грек и его школа», Москва 1961.
 14. Голеизовский Н.К. «Заметки о творчестве Феофана Грека, в сборнике : Византийский временник гл. 24 ,Москва.
 21. Попов Г.В. «Образ сущия церкви во Цареграде» , Святая София Феофана Грека и церковь соборная Святых Апостолов . Москва , Северный паломник 2005 , стр.443-450.
 26. Антонова В.И. «О Феофане Греке в Коломне, Переславле Залесском и Серпухове» Материалы и исследования Гос. Третьяковской Галереи, Москва 1958, стр.10-22.

«The icons Our Lady of the Don,“The Dormition of the Virgin Mary”(1380 or 1392), and “The Transfiguration” in Pereslavl Zaleshky (today found in the

State Gallery Tretyakov) and the hand-written manuscript of the Bible for the nobleman Boyar (the lesser nobles) Feodor Koshky (circa 1392) (found in the National Library of Moscow) are also believed to be by Theophanes or to his workshop [15]».

Passion for the spiritual figures, the dynamism of drama, the originality of the message, the bold painting, together with the art of cornice sculpting, and the clarity of the lines and drawing are also characteristic of Theophanes' techniques. «The creativity and the character of Theophanes' art held great value in Ancient Russia where he was called 'Philosopher'. After Great Novgorod, he founded a workshop in Moscow where he boosted the productivity of the local artists, especially that of Andrei Rublev, who imposed his own style [16], [17]».

«The first part of the work of Theophanes the Greek in Russia, as was mentioned before, was the frescos of a church in Great Novgorod, the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Ilina Street, which was built in 1374. There, Theophanes completed the frescoes in the summer of 1378 [18]». In the same street he also painted frescos in residences, the most characteristic being that of the nobleman Vasily Danilovich Maskov. The frescos in the church are preserved in part. On the cupola he depicts the Pantocrator as the Judge who is surrounded by four Seraphs. The figures of the Early Church Fathers Adam, Abel, Noah, Syrah, Melchisedek, Enoch Elias and John the Baptist are depicted on the arch. On both sides of the arch there are prayers or quotations from the Bible which have been donated by parishioners and this leads into a small chapel with 5 columns and a Triad, and the arch is complemented with the icons of John Climacus, Agathon, Akakion and Makarios.

15. Алпатов М. В. «Феофан Грек» Москва, 1979.

16. Каргер М.К. «К вопросу об источниках летописных записей о деятельности зодчего Петра и Феофана Грека в Новгороде», Москва, Ленинград АН СССР, 1958, стр. 565-568.

17. Малков Ю.Г. «О роли балканской художественной традиции в древнерусской живописи XIV в. Некоторые аспекты творчества Феофана Грека.» т. 11, Москва, Наука 1980, стр. 135-160.

18. Вздорнов Г.И. «Феофан Грек – Творческое наследие.» Москва, Искусство 1983.

«To each saint Theophanes lends deep personal and complex psychological characteristics. At the same time, the wise Noah and the Prophet Elias with a threatening look have something in common which unites them. They are men with a strong spirit, a stubborn nature, men who are tortured by contradictions and who find themselves drowning in a difficult struggle with human passions.

The figure of the angel in the centre is especially expressive and is emphasized by internal dilemmas [19],[23]».

«The icons of Theophanes are characterized by an enormous strength with emotional repercussions where the tragic passion echoes. The religious paintings (iconography) were created based on the knowledge of life and the psychology of man. In them one can detect a deep philosophical meaning, a clear sense of intellect, the passion and the manifestation of the idiosyncrasy of the creator [20],[28]».

The murals in the Church of the Transfiguration are valuable works of monumental art in Novgorod which have influenced the works of many artists. Close to those are religious paintings in the churches of St. Theodore Stratelates (Theodore the General) and The Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Volotovo, probably works of Theophanes' pupils.

«The two poles of Byzantine spiritual life are expressed totally and find their perfect incarnation in the work of Theophanes; the classic principle with the basic rule of earthly beauty as the creation of God and the attempt at spiritual thought [24]».

The Byzantine iconographer found a second home in Russia.«His passion for inspired art was in line with the spiritual aesthetic of the Russian people and had an immediate effect on Theophanes' peers as on the following generations of Russian artists[22]».

«After the fierce tragedy by means of ascetic renunciation of the multiformity and multicoloured world which penetrated and characterizes Theophanes the Greek's art, Andrei Rublev introduces a serene simplicity that is closer to the Russian idiosyncrasy [25]».

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19. Плугин В.А. «Боярин Василий Данилович Машков и Феофан Грек. Древний Новгород – История , Искусство , Археология , Новые исследования – Сб. Статей – Москва, 1983, стр. 248-270.
 20. Яковлева А.И. «Ерминия» Дионисия из Фурны и техника икон Феофана Грека. Москва Наука 1984, стр. 7-25.
 22. Грабарь И.Е. «О древнерусском искусстве» Исследования, реставрация и охрана памятников. Москва, 1966.
 23. Корнилович А.В. «Окно в минувшее» Москва, 1968, стр.58-87.
 24. Лазарев В.Н. «Русская иконопись от истоков до начала XVI века», Москва, 1983, стр.93.
 25. Ильин М.А. «Искусство Московской Руси. Эпохи Феофана Грека и Андрея Рублёва», Москва 1976.
 28. <http://www.feofan-grek.ru/novgorod-21.php>



Theophanes the Greek "Forefathers Adam, Abel and Joseph", Novgorod 1378, Church of the Transfiguration.

Here are cited short quotes from the addresses of the Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronimos during the latter's visit to Moscow (23 - 30.05.2012). "We welcome you as a representative of glorious Greece, where on Areopagus Paul the Apostle preached to the pagans the true worship of the Unknown God (Acts 17, 23) and from where the Salonikan Saints, Brothers Kirill and Methodius, set out in order that the Slav peoples could receive the alphabet and writings followed by the Holy Scriptures along with the highest examples of thought from the Fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church. Their stamp was indelible; St. Fotios and other Greek Archbishops of Russia, founder of the School of Agiography. Theophanes the Greek, Brothers Lichoudi, founders of the Theological Academy of Moscow, Archbishop Ellassona Arsenios, Archbishop Eugene Vulgaris and Nikiforos Theotokis.....The Orthodox Church of Russia adopted and creatively re-examined the rich spiritual and cultural tradition of Byzantium". In response, the Archbishop of Athens commented, "... The historic Sacred Monastery of Danilovsky where we have just finished the doxology to the Trinitarian God and where lies the eminent Bishop Nikiforos Theotokis, who together with Saint Maxim the Greek, forged the brotherly bonds in Christ of our two, peoples..."

As an epilogue to our essay, we quote the poem written by Ekaterina Koltsova-Tsareva "Hymn to Great Novgorod" March, 2008 [29] which glorifies the history and the traditions of this mighty city in the Russian Orthodox North.

29. <http://www.stihi.ru/2010/11/24/8082>
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Hymn to Great Novgorod

Great were you baptized unquestionably over the centuries
Beloved of traditions, legends and myths
Path of ships from the Varags* to the Greeks
You have become the symbol of peaceful feats of trade.

Glorious homeland of sweet Russia,
Of the ancient city of Ilmen* – museum,
And whoever comes to us without a sword – the dove of Sophia*
Under her roof she welcomes as a friend.

You have always seen the wisdom of God.
You lit the way with the flame of enlightenment,
From the parchment of Berioza*
To today's great victories of science.

Glorious homeland of sweet Russia
Of the ancient city of Ilmen – museum,
And whoever comes to us without a sword – the dove of Sophia
Under her roof she welcomes as a friend.

Your imposing fortress* above the waves of the Volchovo,*
Glory of peaceful and polemic times
In the wake of centuries like a warning signal,
Requests the fulfillment of new victories.

Glorious homeland of sweet Russia
Of the ancient city of Ilmen – museum,
And whoever comes to us without a sword – the dove of Sophia
Under her roof she welcomes as a friend.

(Translation : Ms. Deidre Betty Smallridge – Kokosi © 2014)



The Great Novgorod as it today.

*Great Novgorod : Novgorod has a rich past. In 1570, Ivan the Terrible (Ivan Grozny) (1530 – 1584) butchered some 60,000 of Novgorod's citizens, when they rebelled

against his rule. Despite all the wars, the city has numerous monuments. The Kremlin built on the bank of the river Volkhov is at the heart of the old city. It is dominated by the magnificent 11th- century Sofisky Sobor (Cathedral of St. Sophia). Inside are 12th- century frescoes, including a portrait of Constantine and Helen, and the remains of 11th- century mosaics. «South of Great Novgorod, on the other side of Ilmen ozero (Lake Ilmen) at the confluence of two rivers, is Staraya Russa. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and his family spent their summers in Staraya Russa from 1872, and part of “The Brothers Karamazov” is set here. Outside the old town are yet more religious buildings. The magnificent Spaso – Preobrazhensky Sobor (Cathedral of Transfiguration) in the Mirozhsky Monastery, decorated in the 12th – century by Greek iconographers and their Russian apprentices, is a world in itself. The frescoes definitely merit a visit.

*Varangians : More commonly known as Vikings

*Ilmen : The largest fresh water lake in the area of Novgorod. Great and beautiful. It is shallow but extensive. Besides the River Volchovo, 50 streams and rivers flow into the lake. The city of Novgorod is built on this site. In ancient times the lake was called the Slovenic Sea.

*The Cathedral of St. Sophia : In 1045 Prince Vladimir began the construction of the Church of St. Sophia in the Kremlin, the main church of the city of Great Novgorod. It took 7 years to complete the construction of the church. The Prince was ordained there in 1052. He lived less than a month following his ordainment and was buried in the newly-built church.

*Berioza : A species of deciduous trees and bushes similar to the poplar and widely found in Russia. In ancient Novgorod its bark was called Berioza parchment and was used as a primary writing material.

*Fortress : The Fortress of Great Novgorod. It is found on the left bank of the River Volchovo. It is first mentioned in the year 1044.

*Volchovo : The river which flows through the city of Novgorod and runs into Lake Ilmen. According to ancient tradition, the river took its name from Volcha, wise man and eldest son of Prince Sloven.

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