

Sacred Icons of Kyiv and Chernihiv and Their Cult in Ukraine: Exhibition at the Archdiocesan Museum of Warsaw, January 28 - April 5, 2023

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Cults of holy icons from the time of Kyivan Rus attest to cultural continuity in Ukraine over centuries. Subsequent repetition of painted icons and graphic replications including engravings and printed pamphlets show how closely tied the country was to the capital Kyiv. These works united the nation living between the Dnieper and the Bug religiously and historically. The exhibition mounted by the Museum of the Archdiocese of Warsaw is intended to recall the most important icons created in the Byzantine tradition and those that manifest connections between Eastern and Western civilisations.¹

The historical turmoil of warfare in Ukraine with damaging looting and fires has contributed to the impoverishment of monuments throughout the country. The twentieth century has been the most devastating, and populations of towns and villages have repeatedly protected their valuables, including sacred icons, paintings, and other works of art. The exhibition in Warsaw presents icons and engravings from Polish collections related to the religious centres of Kyiv and Chernihiv. They are accompanied by photographic reproductions of icons from the collection of the Treasures of Ukraine Museum. A separate section consists of period photographs showing lost monuments that document the destruction in the Stalinist period and during the German occupation as well as colour photographs showing the destruction of churches, monasteries, and houses during the Russian invasion.

Totalitarian regimes planning the annihilation of religious spirituality in Ukraine instigated the demolition of churches Kyiv and Chernihiv (fig. 1). The apogee of destruction came in

¹ Święte ikony Kijowa i Czernichowa, https://maw.art.pl/exhibition/swiete-ikony-kijowa-i-czernichowa/?fbclid=IwAR27TCFgT94Pkg_APFxTL5x7i2Z9hrgPJ0AFVBnrgPYTubEF16TT5sbAFo0

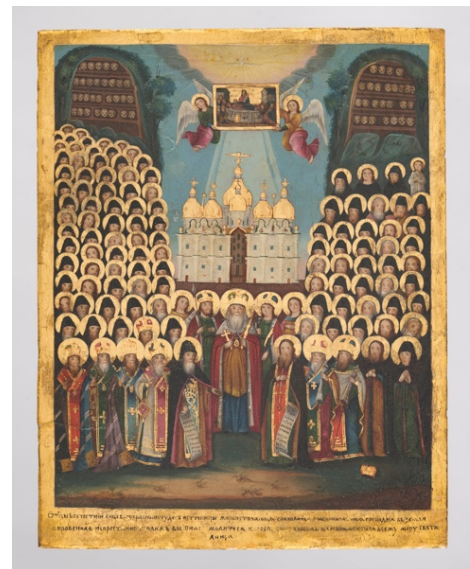
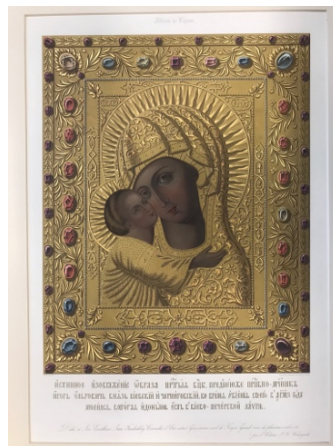
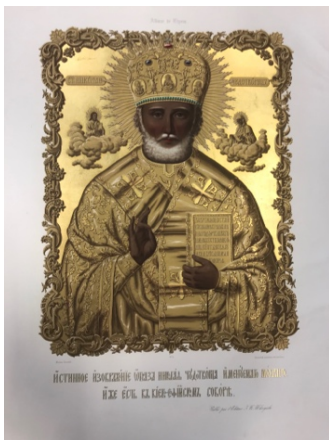
the 1930s when in Kyiv the Mihailovsky Cathedral was blown up on August 14, 1937 and replaced with the buildings of the Communist Party of Ukraine. This barbaric act was accompanied by looting and the dismantling of the mosaic decoration, parts of which were taken to Moscow and Novgorod. The former Dominican church, later St. Peter and Paul, was destroyed by the Soviets in 1936. The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Catherine in the Padol district was demolished in 1929 and a factory of agricultural machinery was built on the site. During the greatest repression by Stalin, more than 60 churches were destroyed in Kyiv alone between 1934 and 1937. Destruction continued under the rule of Hitler's Germany. In 1941, the Dormition of the Mother of God Cathedral in the Pechersk Lavra was blown up and the wall paintings, the iconostasis, and the furnishings were lost forever with only fragments remaining. After 1991 many churches have been reconstructed or renovated as an act of religiosity and attachment to tradition.



1. Photographies from: Archives of the Lavra Pecherska National Historical and Cultural Reserve; Archive of the National Architectural and Historical Reserve "Ancient Chernihiv"; Serhij Bielinskyj; Vitalina Pavlenko-Zazul; Vladyslav Savenok

Lavra Pecherska, the spiritual and intellectual centre of Ukraine

The most important place of spiritual and intellectual development in Ukraine has become the Kyivan Caves Monastery, called Lavra Pecherska, located in the southwestern part of today's Kyiv, a complex of Orthodox churches, monastery buildings, and caves, one of the largest monastic complexes in Europe. The first community was founded at the beginning of the 11th century, and rich written sources describe the history of this place from the beginning of the Middle Ages.



One of the most important sources of monastic life in Kyiv is *Patryk Pecherskyi*. This literary work, which evolved over the centuries, included many texts. Originally, it was a correspondence from 1226 of the bishop of Vladimir and Suzdal, Symon, with Polykarp, a monk from the Piechersk monastery, to which stories about the monks of the oldest monastery in Kyivan Rus were attached. In 1635, *Paterikon abo Żywoty Ojców Pieczarskich* was published in Polish, translated by Sylvester Kossov (Sylwester Kossów). The cycle of woodcuts included in the edition shows the history of the monastery, and their author was mostly the master Ilya. In the 17th century, the Lavra printing house became the most important printing centre in eastern Ukraine.

Kyiv icons

In *Patryk*, we find stories of byzantine miraculous icons. There are the first mentions of painters from the 11th century, who were brought from Constantinople to decorate the Dormition church (fig. 3). There is also a description telling the story of the image of the Mother of God, painted by an "icon artist" who came from the capital of Byzantium and, according to tradition, stayed in Kyiv. The icon depicting the Assumption of Virgin Mary (fig. 8) was located in the Dormition church and surrounded by a great cult. The work was probably created in the 11th century; unfortunately, the icon has not survived to our times; it was lost during the Bolshevik revolution. The second miraculous icon venerated in the Lavra was the image of the Mother of God with the Child, called Igorievskia (Fig. 5). We do not know her fate in the twentieth century. Another miraculous icon venerated in Kyivan caves monastery is that of St. Nicholas the so-called Wet (fig. 4), whose cult in Ruthenia dates back to the 12th century. The icon of St. Nicholas was very popular in Kyiv and it was hidden in Soviet times before it went to Warsaw in 1943 from where it was taken to Germany, probably after the Warsaw Uprising, and then transported to the United States, where it is now in the Orthodox Church in New York.



7-9.

Back in Kyiv, the Cathedral of St. Sofia housed a miraculous image of Our Lady of Kupiatyczze (fig. 7-8) venerated in a village located in Belarus where, according to tradition, in the year 1182 Anna found an encolpion hanging on a tree. In the 17th century, the miraculous relic was transported to Kyiv. It was a small-format encolpion, consisting of a capsule containing relics and quotes from the Holy Bible in the shape of a cross. We do not know the fate of this icon, but a record of the image is known from a woodcut dating from 1638 accompanying the first account of the miracles of the reliquary written by Afanasi Kalnofojski. It is probably the same image that was carried by St. Atanazy Filipowicz (called Brzeski) to Moscow.

Icons from Padol

The city, founded outside the defensive walls of Kyiv near the Dnipro river, escaped destruction by the Tatars in 1240 and during the 13th and 14th centuries, many residents moved from there from the centre of the capital. Alongside them was a Catholic community including a Dominican fraternity which built churches continuously. The city was also settled during the 17th century by Greeks who built the church of St. Catherine. According to records, in 1662 an icon depicting the image of the Mother of God and Child was fished out of the Dnieper River and the Orthodox brotherhood adopted the Mother of God as their patron saint, commemorating this discovery of the icon annually on 10 May. Images of the miraculous icon depicting the *Umilenie* appeared not only in painted versions (as in the collection of the Historical Museum in Kyiv), but also in graphic form.

The icon of Our Lady also appears in a philosophical treatise by Ivan Migura, the author of panegyrics in honour of Odorski dating from 1704. This image of the Mother of God reappears in an engraving, probably by Innocenty Szczyrski, currently kept in the collection of the National Library in Warsaw. In the scene showing the baptism of Christ in the Jordan surrounded by St. John the Baptist and St. Andrew, we notice a small boat and in it the icon of the Mother of God with the Child. The work was done on the occasion of the consecration of the new church in Padol, founded by hetman Ivan Mazepa, whose coat of arms is visible below.

Chernihiv Madonna's

Chernihiv has become an important centre for the development of Ukrainian culture since the times of Kyivan Rus. In modern times, archbishop Lazar Baranovych (Łazarz Baranowicz) founded a printing house which attracted several engravers from the Piecherska Lavra for whom conditions were developed for making engravings for illustrating mass-produced books as well as for making ephemeral prints.

The image of Our Lady of Yelets, also known as the icon of Our Lady of Pine, enjoyed a great cult in Chernihiv. Traditionally derived from the 11th century miraculous image, which appeared to one of the Ruthenian princes on a pine tree, the icon did not survive destruction during the Polish-Russian war in 1611 and the icon located in Chernihiv was subsequently created in the 17th century. Another miraculous image that was venerated in Chernihiv is the icon of the Mother of God Ilinska (fig. 10, 11, 13), which was painted by the monk Gennadi Konstantinovich from Dubno in 1658. It was located in a small Orthodox church dedicated to the Prophet Elijah, within the Troitsko-Ilinski Monastery in Chernihiv. Several literary works published in Chernihiv in the 1680s by Lazar Baranovych were devoted to the image. The miraculous icon became the patron saint of Ivan Mazepa and the entire Cossacks.



10-11.



12-13.

Icons from Liubech

An important place associated with the cult of the Mother of God is Liubech, located near Chernihiv, where there were miraculous icons of the Mother of God and Christ. In the 17th century, they were moved by Sylvester Kosiv (Sylwester Kossów) to the Sophia Cathedral of Kyiv and installed in the iconostasis. In Liubech itself, probably at the time when the well-known engraver Innocenty Szczyrski was the head of the monastery, new versions of the icons were created; one of them has been preserved and is now stored in the Historical Museum in Kyiv. Painted by the hehumen himself in 1698, it shows in the middle an icon supported by St. Anna and St. John Chrysostom. Szczyrski also developed a graphic variant of the representation (fig. 12). The engraving from the collection of the National Library in Warsaw shows the icon of the Mother of God with a dedication to Ioan Mirovich.

Ivan Mazepa, patron of the arts

Among the promoters of science, literature, and art, an important place is occupied by the national hero of Ukraine, Jan Mazepa, a controversial figure to this day. He was one of the greatest patrons of the arts and the founder of many Orthodox churches. Many of his contemporaries dedicated their literary works to him and engravers made large-format composite prints to mark various occasions, consisting of dense iconographic programs often alluding to mythology and incorporating emblems and heraldic symbols derived from ancient traditions as interpreted by Christian conventions and adopted mutually by writers, theologians and Kyivan artists.

The miraculous image of Our Lady Ilinska, which features on the largest panegyric leaflet known in Ukraine became the patron saint of Mazepa and the graphic composition in the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Gdańsk (fig. 13) is dedicated to him. Engraved by Innocenty Szczyrski, the image depicts the saints and the battle scene according to the account written by Laurenty Kszczonowicz. The text in verse alludes to historical events related to the origins of the Ukrainian Cossacks in both Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.



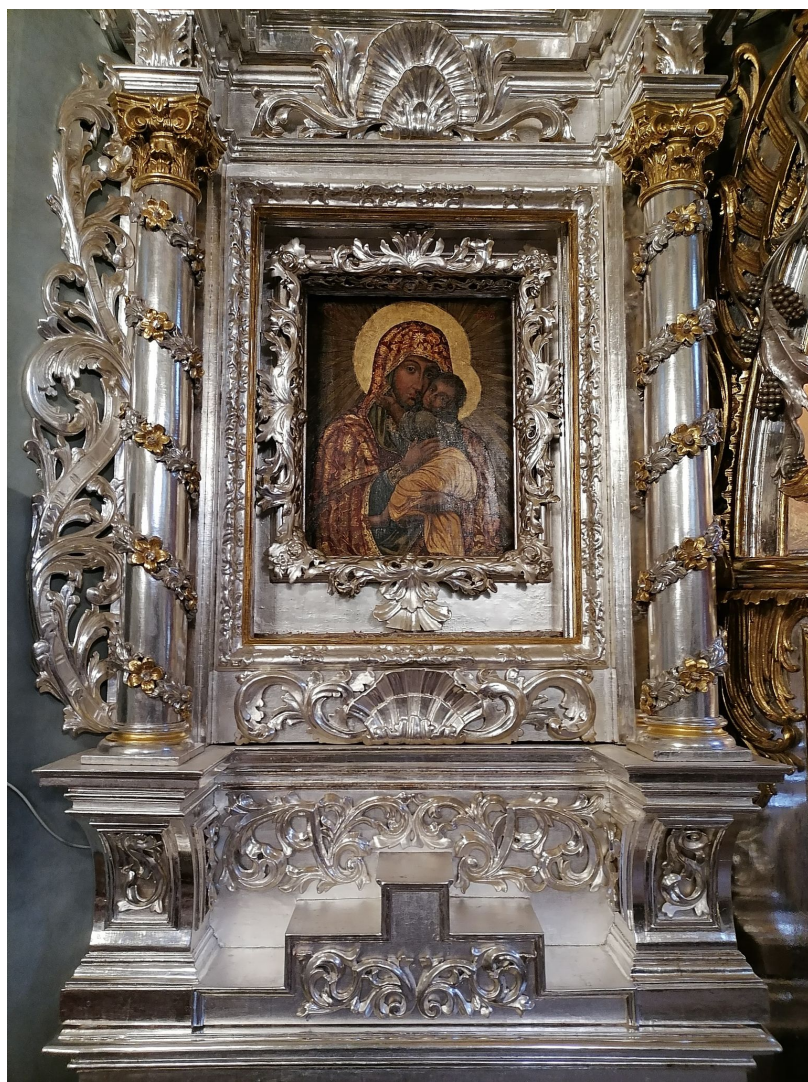
14.



15.

Cossack Baroque

The turn of the 17th and 18th centuries was not only a time of building the military and intellectual ambitions of Cossack circles led by Jan Mazepa, but also a period of impressive Baroque architectural building and decoration of Orthodox churches and palaces. Local artists drew on the patterns of the Western Baroque tradition, fostering thriving artistic centres on the territory of left-bank Ukraine.



16. Eleusa from the church in Hanna, Poland

The largest painting centre was Peczerska Lavra in Kyiv, from where artists left for other monastic centres. Dozens of painters studying in the capital created a method and style of

painting that emanated not only in Eastern and Central Ukraine but also throughout the Russian Empire. A collection of over one hundred albums containing sketches and drawings by draftsmen and engravers has been preserved, together with collections of foreign drawings, copperplate prints and woodcuts (currently in the collection of the Vladimir Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine). These were materials for icon painters, sculptors and goldsmiths, who as in the West acquired integral roles in the creation of a work of art, popularising low-relief ornament on iconostases. Many icons were exported from Kiev outside Ukraine. We find them in many countries (fig. 16).



17.

The exhibition displays fragments of iconostasis from the National Museum in Krakow (fig. 14, 15) acquired at the beginning of the twentieth century. Icons from the mid-eighteenth century have their analogies in church painting associated with the Pechersk Lavra school, which is the reason for the inclusion of reproductions of Hryhoryj Kryshstofovych icons (fig. 17) from the collection of the Museum "Spiritual Treasures of Ukraine".



18-19.



20.

Icons in Western Ukraine

Icon painting developed slightly differently in the western territory of Ukraine, on the border with Poland, but a number of works nevertheless refer to the Kyivan tradition. These are either works showing iconographic patterns developed in Kyiv, such as St. Anthony and Theodosius Pecherski, or icons referring to graphic models with origins in the Pechersk Lavra. Some of them are simply imitations of Polish or Dutch engravings, but the details of the composition evidence the use of Ukrainian prototypes. The icon depicting the scene of the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 18) from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw is ultimately derived from Dutch sources which were copied in prints (fig. 19) at the Pechersk Lavra serving as templates for later icons. Such is the case of the icon showing *Christ of the Grape vine in the Mystic Press* (fig. 20). The iconography presented here is an echo of Eucharistic images popular in Western European art since the Middle Ages, which were supposed to explain the mystery of liturgical sacrifice in the context of Christ's passion and death. Paul of Aleppo, to whom we owe, among others, descriptions of Kyiv churches around the middle of the 17th century, reports that a similar representation was at that time also in the Kyiv Brotherhood Monastery. It can be assumed that these images were promoted in Orthodox art during that century, probably due to Orthodox graphic patterns.



The myth of the fall of Kyivan Rus, cultivated by totalitarian historiographies, was aimed at eliminating Ukraine's heritage. The persistence of the Byzantine and Ruthenian traditions from the times of the first principalities of Kyiv and then of Halych-Vladimir continued in the culture and art of modern times. The exhibition in Warsaw attempts to demonstrate this continuity in a special part of the Polish capital city located in the old town in the Museum of the Archdiocese of Warsaw adjoining the cathedral, which, having been rebuilt after its destruction in World War II, stands as a monument of victory. Just like almost all of Warsaw, it is hoped that cities in Ukraine will be rebuilt and monuments restored.

Revised by Claire Brisby, London

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