

Extended Catalogue Entry

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M.2002.47

Mother of God Bogolyubskaya

Russian 17th Century (likely 18th or 19th century)

Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood

W.26.5 x H.31.5 x D. 3 cm.

The image is bounded with several borders. The outermost edge is ringed in red, followed by a thin border of green. The image is set on a wide border of ochre, the top of which bears the icon's title "Bogolyubskaya Mother of God." The top right-hand corner of the image pushes into the border, drawing the viewer to the scene.

The left foreground of the icon depicts Mary floating on a blue cloud, symbolizing her heavenly provenance.¹ Mary wears a blue dress with gold embroidery on her wrists. A golden *mahphorion* embellished with pearls covers her head and shoulders. Three stars adorn her head and shoulders, symbolizing her holiness and virgin nature.² In her left hand she holds a scroll which reads, "Oh, Ruler, full of mercy, Lord Jesus Christ my son and my god, listen..." She speaks to an assembly of believers made up of apostles, saints, monastics, and church officials. Several of the figures hold out their hands in supplication. Jesus blesses the scene from a top-right areola bounded by blue clouds. He wears a red robe, which symbolizes salvation, and a blue *himation* which flutters behind him.³ Golden beams radiate in the background as Jesus receives the scroll from Mary with his left hand.⁴ The interplay between Jesus and Mary highlight the Virgin's theological significance as the mother of the earthly god and salvation for humanity.⁵ This icon may have been part of a portable screen for domestic use or donated by a patron for church use.⁶

This icon is a reproduction of a 12th century icon which depicted a dreamtime apparition of the Virgin Mary to Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky, who sacked Kiev and established the Rostov-Suzdal-Vladimir region as the centre of Northern Rus'.⁷ The original Bogolyubskaya Mother of God icon was frequently copied in the 17th and 18th centuries, likely because the original was reported to work miracles.⁸ Versions of the icon vary in the number and personages of supplicant depicted as well as their location.⁹ Although such locative icons were often used to express the theological authority of a particular church or region, the location depicted in the Malcove icon is unclear.¹⁰ This story of this icon is connected to two icons in our collection, *Arrival of the Virgin of Vladimir in Moscow* [M82.117], which depicts the icon which was being transported by Prince Bogolyubsky when he had his vision of the Virgin Mary,¹¹ and *Virgin Appearing to Prince Bogolubski* [M82.092], which depicts the revelation of the Virgin Mary to Prince Bogolyubsky.

¹ "The Icon, History, Symbolism and Meaning."

² Gerhard 7-8; Scheinfurth 14

³ Evseyeva et al. 2005, 87

⁴ Tradigo 372

⁵ Ouspensky and Lossky 76

⁶ Scheinfurth 40; Evseyeva et al. 2006, 175

⁷ Evseyeva et al. 2006, xx; Pelensky 26-31; Ericsson 104

⁸ Kondakov 60, 181; Orthodox Church in America "Icon of the Mother of God 'The God Loving'"

⁹ Evseyeva et al. 2006, 174

¹⁰ Della Dora 86, 108

¹¹ Gaspar-Hulvat 176; Pelensky 22-23

The theme and style of the icon—notably the wide ochre border, delicate attention to detail, and use of bright colours—is suggestive of those produced by Russian “Old Believers,” possibly the Palekh school in Northern Russia.¹² The identifying inscription above Jesus’ head, IC, (rather than the three-letter IHC used in “state icons”) also supports this view, as does the two-fingered gesture with which he gives the benediction.¹³ The Old Believer schools of icon painting reflected an adherence to traditional orthodoxy in the face of church reforms implemented in the 17th century by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. As such, traditional Russian themes pioneered by the earlier Moscow school were often depicted on Old Believer icons, which later became used to promote Russian national and cultural identity.¹⁴

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¹² Neubauer 35;

¹³ Gatrall and Greenfield 11

¹⁴ Neubauer 18, 35;Gatrall and Greenfield 11-12

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