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## Communicative value of the Russian orthodox icon

Elena A. Avdyusheva\*, Irina V. Egorova

*National Research Nuclear University MEPhI (Moscow Engineering Physics Institute), Kashirskoe shosse 31, Moscow 115409, Russian Federation*

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### Abstract

The presence of icons is the most striking feature first noticed upon entering an Orthodox church. An icon being a combination of art and faith is unique. Early Russian Icon Painting had its own unforgettable artistic language reflecting its complexity, spiritual deepness, grace and fineness. This study aimed to comprehend the art of communication through the icon – a new approach to the understanding of art as a means of communication. A unique XVII-century Yaroslavl icon “Sergius of Radonezh” was chosen as an object for the investigation. Historical-typological and semiotic methods allowed to identify its communicative value.

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*Keywords:* Russian culture; icon painting; communication; Sergius of Radonezh; Mamai Battle

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### 1. Introduction

Modern lifestyle is constantly changing our worldview that is why appealing to national spiritual traditions is so important nowadays. The art being one of the means of communication is able to represent, store and transmit spiritual processes which later become available to the public worldwide. A special wedding of art and faith realized in Russian icons is being investigated in the article. People came to church to be somehow transformed, and the art became their means of communication with the divine (Evans & Wixom, 1997). To understand the icon painting art using this new communicative approach, a notable XVII-century icon “Sergius of Radonezh with scenes from his life” from an old town Yaroslavl was chosen [A]. What communicative values can be revealed in Russian Orthodox

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-910-425-5647.

E-mail address: [el.avdyusheva@yandex.ru](mailto:el.avdyusheva@yandex.ru)

icons? Did historical events influence the spiritual background of Russian people? These are the main questions to be answered in this article.

Icons have always attracted attention of art specialists, artists, historians as well as church members. Many scientists A.A. Zaliznyak, I.B. Levontina, A.D. Shmelyov (Zaliznyak, Levontina, and Shmelyov, 2005), L.A. Uspensky (Uspensky, 1997), V.G. Bryusova (Bryusova, 1984), I.P. Bolottseva (Bolottseva, 1980,1981), A.S. Preobrazhenskiy (Preobrazhenskiy, 2015), V.V. Filatov (Filatov, 1960), N.I. Komashko, E.M. Sayenkova (Komashko and Sayenkova, 2007), V.V. Bychkov (Bychkov, 1995), E. Yu. Makarova (Makarova, 2015) studied this icon but did not use communicative approach. Each of them drew attention to certain features they were interested in. For example, V.G. Bryusova (Bryusova, 1984) was interested in the historical aspect, as historical events influenced greatly the artist's worldview. In her work "Russian painting of the VII century" she did not analyze the combination of all aspects which is typical for the semiotic method. Other authors like N.I. Komashko and E.M. Sayenkova (Komashko and Sayenkova, 2007) wrote about iconography and artistic value of the icon. Some scientists (I.P. Bolottseva (Bolottseva, 1980, 1981), A.S. Preobrazhenskiy (Preobrazhenskiy, 2015), V.V. Filatov (Filatov, 1960)) argue about the time period when this icon was created. A.A. Zaliznyak, I.B. Levontina, A.D. Shmelyov (Zaliznyak, Levontina, and Shmelyov, 2005) in their work "The main ideas of the Russian painting" focused their attention on the peculiarities of the artistic language. But none of them used communicative approach in combination with historical-typological and semiotic methods in order to investigate this unique icon. Working further in this direction, one will be able deeper understand the historical environment and background for the creation of this work of art, as well as Russian spiritual tradition and its contribution to the world culture.

The problem of communication in Russian Orthodox icons has not been thoroughly studied yet. An appeal to this XVII-century Yaroslavl icon and to the image of St. Sergius of Radonezh made it possible to trace certain patterns in the development of Russian icon painting, its influence on people, the role of the artist, which is closely connected to the worldview of a medieval man. Further study of this problem will allow to identify the development of intercultural communication in general.

The analysis of the Yaroslavl icon "Sergius of Radonezh" with border scenes from his life and "The legend about Mamai Battle" can become the basis for the following works dedicated to the related topics on the Russian art and history of the XVII century.

## 2. Data and methods

Every nation has its own communicative values expressed in national culture but in Russian culture they are of special importance compared to other cultural values. The demand of communication has always been great in Russian mentality. Soul, truth, justice, sincerity are the key concepts of Russian culture. They are fundamental principles for every Russian, for his life, artistic language, Orthodox traditions. These main concepts are reflected in artistic images – icons. Russian icon has become one of the artistic objects which had its own unforgettable language showing its complexity and spiritual deepness as well as grace and fineness (Zaliznyak, Levontina, and Shmelyov, 2005). One can say that Byzantium's theology was mainly by word but Russian theology was through an image (Uspensky, 1997).

For our investigation we chose a unique image - XVII-century icon "Sergius of Radonezh" with border scenes from his life and a large bottom marginal plate with scenes from "The legend about Mamai Battle". This icon is one of the most prominent among many other icons of that time. Here one can find a lot of historical and edifying pieces along with traditional holy scenes.

Semiotic and historical – typological methods allowed to analyze this work of art in accordance with its characteristics, formal and stylistic qualities; to understand iconographic features in the context of historical environment; to analyze the worldview of the painter; to identify spiritual processes stored and transmitted through this iconographic image; to show the importance of further study of the communicative values of Russian icons in order to preserve and develop Russian spiritual culture.

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