

Peter I's Icon from the St Nicholas Church in Tallinn: Iconography and Ideology

JELENA POGOSJAN, MARIA SMORZHEVSKIHH-SMIRNOVA

In 1711, the Governor of 'Ingria, Korelia and Estlandia', Prince Aleksandr Menshikov, commissioned an icon for the Church of St Nicholas of Myra, the oldest Russian Orthodox church in Tallinn (Reval). The icon was presented to Peter I at the time of the tsar's first visit to Reval, the newly acquired Lutheran city. This article will focus on the historical and ideological meaning of *The Liturgy of the Lord*, the icon's connection to the Russian imperial ideology of the period, and the strategies which were chosen by the icon painter to represent this ideology in the context of a newly conquered Lutheran city. The article also attempts to decipher the hidden message of the icon, which reflects the tsar's very personal worries and anxieties regarding his relationship with Prince Menshikov and Peter's upcoming marriage to his long-time mistress and the mother of his children, Catherine (Ekaterina) Alekseevna.

The Church of St Nicholas of Myra is the oldest Russian Orthodox church in Tallinn (Reval). It is situated in Vene Street (Russian Street), and has existed on this spot at least from the 15th century.¹ The current building was constructed at the beginning of the 19th century, and consecrated in 1827. The old iconostasis² was moved from the old church to this new building. Today, it is still kept in the northern chapel of the St Nicholas Church, together with a number of remarkable icons representing Russian spiritual art of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

1. М. Т. Иконников, Православная церковь Святителя и Чудотворца Николая Мирликийского в г. Ревеле. Ревель, 1889, p. 7; A. Panteleyev, Historical Notes on St Nicholas Church. – St Nicholas Church in Tallinn. Tallinn: K&O Offset, 2002, p. 13.

2. This iconostasis was presented to the St Nicholas Church by the Tsars Ivan and Peter and their sister Sofia in 1686. This gesture reflects a bold move on the part of the Russian government in 1685, when a new Karelia and Ladoga eparchy was established. This new eparchy included both Russian territories and those which belonged to Sweden, such as Reval (including St Nicholas Church). The construction of the new iconostasis for this church was aimed at reinforcing the ties between the Russian Church and Orthodox believers living in the Swedish territories.

One of the icons of St Nicholas Church was recently restored, and the restoration specialists called it *The Liturgy of the Lord* (fig. 1).³ The iconography in *The Liturgy of the Lord* contains specific details indicating that this icon is a very dramatic example of Russian baroque church art. The Baroque icon addresses its viewer using the visual language of allegory and emblems posing riddles and puzzles, forcing the viewer to follow one hint after another referring to different layers of meaning. Oleg Tarasov characterises this type of icon as built on the 'Baroque principle of play and enigma': 'The aesthetic principles proclaimed in the Baroque – 'poetry is spoken painting', while 'painting is silent poetry' – spurred on this game of the mind and oriented the devotional consciousness towards the apprehension of a text of an esoteric kind.' Each detail of such an icon should be recognised and deciphered, leading the viewer step by step to the central Baroque concept of the icon. Though all icons depict events of sacral history, Baroque icons also include necessary references to a wide range of earthly events, in some instances by exploding heraldic signs. 'The inclusion of heraldic emblematics in a sacral image,' writes Tarasov, 'on the one hand ideologized it, responding to the spirit of absolutism, and on the other served the task of glorifying the imperial person and with it the Russian state. Bringing a panegyric content into the icon, the two-headed eagle, as it were, united in people's consciousness the traditional values of Orthodoxy with ... ideology of absolutism.'⁴ This article focuses on the historical and ideological meaning of *The Liturgy of the Lord*, on the icon's connection to the Russian imperial ideology of the period, and on the strategies which were chosen by the icon painter to represent this ideology in the context of a newly conquered Lutheran city.

Beginning in the mid-17th century, icon painters usually signed their works. There is a painter's inscription on the icon from the St Nicholas Church as well; unfortunately, it is partially damaged. According to the inscription, the icon was painted 'in the city of Reval', 'in the month of December'. Based on the choice of the saints standing next to St Peter and representing, together with the head apostle, the members of the Russian royal family, it is possible also to conclude that the icon was painted in 1711. This corresponds to the tsar's first visit to Reval in December of 1711, together with his future wife Catherine (Ekaterina) Alekseevna and the new Governor of the provinces of 'Ingria, Korelia and Estlandia', Prince Aleksandr Menshikov.⁵ It is also stated in the inscription that the icon was 'blessed by Archbishop Peter of Arkhangelsk'. The Arkhangelsk Episcopate did not yet exist in 1711 and was established only in 1731⁶; before that, the title of Archbishop of Arkhangelsk was given to bishops who conducted services in the Archangel Cathedral in the Kremlin, and also its head priest. Between

3 Г. Балашова, Раскрыта тайна иконы "Литургия Господня". – Таллинн 2007, no. 2/3, p. 66. We would like to express our gratitude to the prior of the St Nicholas Church, Father Oleg Vrona, for giving his permission to work with the icon and to photograph it, to Igor Korneev for assisting in our work, and to the restorers Nikolai and Orest Kormashovs for providing photographs of the icon that reflect the process of restoration.

4 O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*. London: Reaktion, 2002, pp. 252, 278.

5 Detailed argumentation regarding the dating of the icon can be found in: Е. Погосян, М. Сморгжевских-Смирнова, "Яко аз на раны готов": Петр I на иконе Таллиннского Никольского храма. – Активные процессы в русском языке диаспоры и метрополии. Ред. Ю. С. Кудрявцев, И. П. Кюльмоя. (Humaniora: Lingua russica 12.) Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2009, pp. 11–37. Mikhail Krasilin, who dedicated a couple of paragraphs to this icon in his work 'Iconization of the State', also dates the icon as being painted in 1711 (М. М. Красилин, "Иконизация" государственности. – Русская поздняя икона от XVII до начала XX столетия. Москва, 2001, pp. 50–54).

6 В. Шереметевский, Герман (в мире Григорий) Капцевич. – Русский биографический словарь. Том 5. Санкт-Петербург: Императорское Русское историческое общество, 1916, pp. 39–40.

1691 and 1723, the only person bearing this title was the head priest Peter Vasiliev, the confessor of Peter I.⁷ It is evident that the icon of St Nicholas Church was painted specifically with his blessing.

The icon itself depicts Christ standing in a chalice, resting against a large cross. On his hands, feet and the side of his chest are five wounds, and holy blood is gushing from these wounds into the chalice. Christ's body is placed in a way that the wound in the side of his chest is situated on the central vertical axis of the icon. This axis starts with the image of the Father, continues with His breath evolving into the Holy Ghost, and is finally followed by Christ's chest wound and the stream of blood flowing into the chalice. On the side of the chalice, there are three fountain masks in the form of cherubs, and Christ's blood is pouring out of their mouths. On the left of the Saviour is St Peter and a group of saints and martyrs, and on the right St Catherine with a group of holy women behind her. Above them, there are two groups of angels bearing crowns and wreaths made of precious stones and flowers. The upper level of the icon is occupied by the Mother of God, with St Michael the Archangel on the left, and St John the Baptist with St Gabriel the Archangel on the right. The three-level layout and the strong vertical of the icon form the traditional and well-defined composition of the icon.

This compositional unity of the icon is reinforced by the gazes of the figures, and by how these gazes are organised in the inner space of the icon. The Mother of God, St John the Baptist and two archangels on the upper level, as well as all the saints on the lower level, are looking at the Saviour. Because of this, the composition has a centripetal and even more enclosed nature. This hard structure is undermined by the direction of two gazes: those of St Dmitri and St Catherine. Dmitri is looking at Catherine, and her face is also turned to him. Her eyes, however, are focused on the viewer, and her gaze opens up the space of the icon and creates an additional compositional and ideological layer of meaning. There are a number of inscriptions, quotations from the Scripture and liturgical texts. The inscriptions in the icon appear in a form found rarely in the Russian icon painting tradition: they are situated on white ribbons, stretching out from the lips of the saints and martyrs. These inscriptions also serve to define both the compositional space of the icon and its message.

The iconography of this work can be traced to Counter-Reformation art. Such iconography in many cases 'refers to the redemptive benefits of the sacrament of the Eucharist, celebrated daily at the altar ..., and confirmed by the Council of Trent as the most sacred of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church'.⁸ Christ's own self-sacrifice in the Sacrament of Eucharist was chosen as a subject '...to reinforce the Catholic doctrine that participation in the benefits of Christ's self-sacrifice, and hence the attainment of salvation, was accessible only through the Church and its sacraments. This doctrine had been contested by Luther.'⁹ Altars dedicated to the Passion, as well as other subjects that involved 'the spilling of Christ's blood ... with obvious Eucharistic

7 А. В. Маштафаров, Архангельский собор Московского Кремля. – Православная энциклопедия. Том 3. Москва: Православная энциклопедия, 2001, pp. 493–494.

8 P. Humfrey, *Altarpieces and Altar Dedications in Counter-Reformation Venice and the Veneto*. – *Renaissance Studies* 1996, vol. 10 (3), pp. 372–373.

9 P. Humfrey, *Altarpieces and Altar Dedications in Counter-Reformation Venice and the Veneto*, pp. 375–376.

implications', had in this context an obvious Counter-Reformation nature.¹⁰ Russians first came into contact with Protestants on the fringes of the country, first of all in the newly acquired Ukrainian lands. Here, diverse Counter-Reformation iconography representing the Sacrament of the Eucharist was adopted in order to protect and reinforce the Russian Orthodox tradition. One Ukrainian icon, *Christ in the Wine Press* (the late 17th century, The National Art Museum of Ukraine), is particularly similar to the icon from the St Nicholas Church in Reval. The wine press and the pressed grape on this icon are transformed into the depiction of the Passion, where Christ's blood flows from his wounds under the pressure of the cross, and fills a chalice held by two angels. This iconography originates, in turn, from the well-known engraving from Catholic Europe *Christ in the Wine Press* by Hieronymus Wierix (1553–1619)¹¹, a Jesuit engraving that represents 'an entire theology of Redemption and the Eucharist'.¹²

This iconography potentially served as a perfect image for defining non-Lutheran space in Lutheran Reval, using existing Counter-Reformation strategies. In reality, however, the whole situation was much less defined. '[A]ccording to the Lutheran concept,' writes Krista Kodres, 'the use of Catholic Church buildings was tolerated' and the Lutheran Church in Estonia 'relied on Luther's own views, and allowed the old altars to remain'.¹³ A number of perfectly Catholic altarpieces were still in use in Reval in 1711. It is not surprising, therefore, that another parallel to *The Liturgy of the Lord* can be found in very close geographical proximity, literally around the corner, in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Tallinn. One of the panels of Bernt Notke's altar retable (1483)¹⁴ in this church depicts Christ, together with the coat of arms of the city of Reval (a white cross on a red shield). On the top of the armorial cross, the chalice and the wafer are placed, and Christ's blood pours directly onto the wafer and into the chalice (fig. 2). Carla Gottlieb, who specifically studied this Notke's panel, connects it to the iconographical type *The Living Host*, a derivation from *The Mass of St Gregory*, which signifies *Salvation through the Eucharist*.¹⁵ Being united visually with *The Living Host* and pouring blood, the coat of arms in this composition presents Reval as a city protected by the Saviour. In *The Liturgy of the Lord*, Christ's blood is pouring onto the Russian coat of arms, and it is Russia, the conqueror of Reval, that is protected by God. In this way, the icon from St Nicholas Church is negotiating political realities rather than theological dogma. As Peter I put it a decade later, while editing the text of a newly composed liturgy dedicated to the battle of Poltava, and cutting out anti-Protestant passages, 'it was not about the faith, but about the [territorial] measure' (*не о вере, а о мере*).¹⁶

10 P. Humfrey, *Altarpieces and Altar Dedications in Counter-Reformation Venice and the Veneto*, pp. 379.

11 A. Мельник, Український іконопис XII–XIX ст. з колекції НХМУ / *The Ukrainian Icon XII–XIX centuries, from the Collection NAMU. Хмельницький: Галерея, 2005*, p. 83.

12 G. Finaldi, N. MacGregor, S. Avery-Quash et al., *The Image of Christ*. London: National Gallery, 2000, p. 188.

13 K. Kodres, *Church and Art in the First Century of the Reformation in Estonia: Towards Lutheran Orthodoxy*. – *Scandinavian Journal of History* 2003, vol. 28 (3/4), pp. 191, 194. Today, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Tallinn still houses Bent Notke's altar retable.

14 This retable was commissioned by the city of Reval and completed in 1483 (A. Mänd, *Bernt Notke – Between Innovation and Tradition*. Tallinn: Eesti Kunstmuuseum, 2010, pp. 62–73).

15 C. Gottlieb, *The Living Host*. – *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 1971, vol. 40 (1–4), pp. 43–46.

16 П. П. Пекарский, *Наука и литература в России при Петре Великом*. Том 2. Санкт-Петербург: Общественная польза, 1862, pp. 200–201.

The Eucharist theme, central to *The Liturgy of the Lord*, is employed by the creator of its program much more intensively in addressing the Russian political situation of 1711 than the events of 1710, when Reval was taken. The year 1711 was one of the most dramatic years of the Great Northern War, comparable only to 1700, when the Russian army was practically destroyed by Charles XII, the king of Sweden, near Narva. The year 1711 began for Peter with the dissolving of the peace treaty with Turkey, which forced him into a two-front war. In April, the tsar also developed a serious illness. He wrote to Menshikov: 'I have been overcome with such a horrid illness as I have never before experienced. For two weeks, I was overpowered with severe spasms, one of which lasted 36 hours, during which I gave up hope of survival ... thank God I have finally recovered and am learning how to walk again.'¹⁷ This illness, however, did not end Peter's misfortunes in 1711. The summer brought him tragic events with the Prut River Campaign. The entire Russian army and the tsar himself miraculously avoided destruction, death and disgraceful captivity by the Turks. The tsar's correspondence with his chancellor Peter Shafirov depicts very vividly his condition in those days: 'Do not be surprised that yesterday I replied to you only briefly. This was the first free night in a week when I could get some sleep.'¹⁸ Only in October did things start to get better for the tsar, and his mood changed. Directly from Prut, Peter I departed for Karlsbad, where he was negotiating his son's wedding to Princess Charlotte Christine of Brunswick-Lüneburg. However, the entire diplomatic situation was still very tense, and the British ambassador at the Russian court, Charles Whitworth, defined the common mood as intermittent fever.¹⁹ With the same 'feverish' interest, every European court followed the tsar's every move. In mid-October, Peter moved to Torgau, and from there to Elbing and to Riga. On 7 December, he arrived in Reval.²⁰ We do not know very much about Peter's stay in this city: unfortunately, the talkative British ambassador Whitworth did not go to Reval; he got tired of the pace of the tsar's movements, noting in his dispatch: 'for us, mere mortals, it's too difficult to chase such eccentric travels'²¹. According to existing documents, Peter attended a Christmas celebration at the Lutheran Church of St Nicholas (Niguliste), on the same day he, together with Catherine and Menshikov, had dinner in the Knighthood House. The next day, he dined at the Burgomaster's House, and visited the Brotherhood of the Black Heads.²²

In 1711 there was only one Russian Orthodox church in Reval, St Nicholas'. In the time of the city's siege in 1710, this church housed the temporary infirmary. As soon as the Russian army took Reval, services were resumed in the church.²³ No doubt, Peter I visited this church in 1711, and it is very probable that he attended it on the day of his arrival. The tsar's visit to Reval, and to the St Nicholas Russian church there confirmed

17 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (1). Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, 1962, p. 167.

18 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (2), p. 9.

19 Донесения и другие бумаги английских послов, посланников и резидентов при русском дворе с 1711 по 1719 г. Сборник Императорского Русского исторического общества. Том 61. Санкт-Петербург, 1888, p. 177.

20 Походный журнал 1711 года. Санкт-Петербург, 1854, pp. 29–41.

21 Донесения и другие бумаги английских послов..., p. 11.

22 J. Kuuskemaa, Peeter I ja Katarina I Tallinnas. Tallinn: Valgus, 2004, pp. 13–14; С. Г. Исаков, Т. Шор, Российские императоры и императрицы на эстонской земле. – Таллинн 2005, no. 1, p. 190.

23 М. Т. Иконников, Православная церковь Святителя..., pp. 66–67; N. Kormashov, The Ioann and Pyotr Iconostasis in St Nicholas Church. – St Nicholas Church in Tallinn, p. 46.

symbolically Peter's possession of the city and the recommencement of the church's activities. Such an event, of course, was important enough to be commemorated in a specially painted icon. Emblematic details, placed at the bottom of the composition, point to this 'celebratory' meaning: a church standing on a cross and a rock, and two keys next to it (fig. 3). These details refer to the Gospel: 'And I say also unto thee ... Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...' (Mt 16: 18–19.) This verse had become closely associated with all of Peter I's military achievements after the Azov Campaign in 1696 and had often appeared in ideological statements.²⁴ Based on this history of use, the images of the church and the keys, of course, refer to the St Nicholas Church in Reval and the keys of the city (or, probably, of Riga and Reval, two major fortresses conquered in 1710). The Russian state's coat of arms, a double-headed eagle under three crowns, was also a part of this group of triumphal elements on the icon (fig. 4). In his right claw, the eagle holds a scepter and a sword, and in the left an orb. On the eagle's chest, a heart is placed instead of a traditional shield. In this heart there is a horseman in Roman attire, on a white horse with a spear, defeating a lion, which represents Sweden. The lion is inscribed as 'a lion', and the horseman 'Tsar Peter'. To the left of Peter appear words that refer to the biblical verse: 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord' (Pr 21: 1). Therefore, it can be seen that the heart represented in the icon is the heart of the tsar. At the same time, an eagle with a heart on his chest also represents Prince Menshikov's personal coat of arms. The eagle, therefore, shows that Reval was not only included in one of Russia's provinces, but also that Menshikov governed it at that time.²⁵ This, however, is only the most common and obvious layer of meaning.

Let us return to the central image of the icon: Christ in a chalice with blood fountaining from his wounds. On both sides of the chalice, two Gospel citations are placed: 'Take, eat; this is my body' and 'Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood' (Mt 26: 26–28). The inscriptions unmistakably point to the Eucharist ritual and the communion chalice, which symbolises the Cup in the Last Supper, a cup of suffering, sacrifice and salvation. Usually, the communion chalice is supported by a stand decorated with a spherical apple, surrounded by vines, grape leaves and fruits, as well as inscriptions of the above-mentioned Gospel verse. The stand on the icon is depicted in the form of a double-headed eagle. This eagle has three instead of two necks, and the central additional neck supports the chalice. The chalice is placed in an octagonal basin, and the eagle is standing in it. The basin has three small ships in it and is inscribed as 'see' (Baltic Sea). The icon painter depicted in the smallest details the blood and water running from the wound on the chest of Christ (communion wine dissolved in water): the stream divides into three smaller ones, enters the central crown and the beaks of two eagle heads, and then comes out of the eagle's stigmata on its chest, wings and claws. From these wounds, the blood drips onto 'Tsar Peter' and his white horse, onto the

24 E. Погосян, М. Смержевских, "Я деву в солнце зрю стоящу...": апокалиптический сюжет и формы исторической рефлексии (1695–1742 гг.). – История и историософия в литературном преломлении. Ред. Р. Лейбов. (Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia 8.) Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2002, pp. 9–36.

25 This also points out that Prince Menshikov commissioned the icon.

ships in the basin, and into the sea. The Russian state double-headed eagle is depicted on the icon as if it were being crucified in imitation of Christ.

At the beginning of 1711, even before the Prut Campaign, in a letter 'to the people of Montenegro' and in letters to other Christian people living under the rule of Turkey, Peter called upon them to join Russia in its fight against the Turks. He wrote: 'Let your heart be averted from fear, and start a war for your faith and for your Churches. For this I will fight till the last drop of my blood is spilled.'²⁶ In these letters, the tsar also referred to his heart: 'in person I advance against our enemy, because this is only proper for any kind, pure and chivalrous Christian heart ... and for the sake of your freedom I endure torments'.²⁷ Peter I, as we can see, likens his heart to the heart of the Saviour, and is ready to follow Christ, to shed his blood and to accept torments in order to save the Christians from the Turks. This theme can also be traced in the tsar's correspondence from Prut, where Peter repeatedly referred to bloodshed and the deadly feast.²⁸ In the same terms, Peter I reported on the events of the Prut Campaign to the Senate. The Senate, however, decided to exclude 'deadly feast' from the official report published in the newspaper *Ведомости*.²⁹ This is logical: the report was not about bloodshed and sacrifice, but about the recently gained victory over the Turks³⁰, and was addressed to the tsar's subjects and foreign observers. The icon, to the contrary, was addressed to the Saviour, and it reflected Peter's thoughts about the events of 1711. This concept of the tsar's torments is directly reflected in the icon: next to the horseman ("Tsar Peter") there is a citation from a psalm: 'For I am ready for the wounds' (Ps 37: 18 in the Slavonic Bible). The icon, therefore, not only celebrates the conquest of the city of Reval, but also refers to the tsar's duty and obligation to suffer for his subjects in order to achieve such conquests.

Another clue pointing to the theme of imitating Christ's Crucifixion can be found in the acrostic hidden in the syllabic verses at the bottom of the icon, from the poem by Leontii Magnitskii.³¹ Some of the letters are written in red paint, and together make up 'CROSS N' (*КРЕСТ Н*). The letter 'N' in the Russian alphabet is called *наши*, translated as 'our', and the whole acrostic reads 'our cross', which once again emphasises the theme represented by the words 'for I am ready for the wounds'. This is a cross to bear, not only for the tsar, but also for the state eagle and, therefore, for the whole of Russia in 1711.

The heart on the chest of the eagle also connects the composition to another tradition: the tradition of the emblematic culture. For instance, such a heart appears in one of the most popular emblem books in the 17th century, *Pia desideria*³². On the title page

26 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (1), p. 153.

27 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (1), p. 153.

28 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (1), pp. 117–118, 151–153, 571; Том 11 (2), pp. 16, 12, 15.

29 Ведомости. Москва: Печатный двор, 1711, № 14, p. 4.

30 Доклады и приговоры, состоявшиеся в Правительствующем сенате в царствование Петра Великого. Том 1. Ред. Н. В. Калачов. Санкт-Петербург: Императорская Академия наук, 1880, p. 294.

31 Арифметика Магницкого. Точное воспроизведение подлинника. С приложением статьи П. Баранова (биографические сведения о Магницком и историческое значение его Арифметики). Москва: Издание П. Баранова, 1914, pp. 1–2.

32 This book was well known in Russia. For instance, Stefan Yavorskii, the head of the Russian Church beginning in 1700, owned a copy of this book (Ю. Н. Звезда, Книга из библиотеки Стефана Яворского – "Pia desideria" Германа Гуго. – Иностранцы-специалисты в России XV–XVII веков. Тезисы научных чтений 24–25 сентября 2002 г. Музеи Московского Кремля. Москва: 2002, pp. 11–13).

of this emblem book, Christ is depicted as a doctor examining a human heart. The owner of this heart lies down by Christ's feet, collecting the Lord's blood into a chalice like medicine. The whole book is dedicated to the topic of the human heart's spiritual illnesses and cures. Cupid, in this book, represents Celestial Love, or earthly love, depending on the interpretation. On one of the emblems, he is depicted in the form of a fountain statue standing in a basin. Into this basin, blood is gushing from his five wounds. A hart with a lady sitting on its back is rushing to the basin. A citation from Psalm 42 serves as a motto for this emblem: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.'³³ On the icon from the St Nicholas Church, there is also a hart depicted standing next to the basin (fig. 5). The hart has already quenched its thirst: there are very visible traces of blood on his snout. Above it, in the book in St Peter's hands, there is an inscription with the same citation from Psalm 42 (Psalm 41 in the Slavonic Bible). *Schola cordis* is another emblem book which was popular in the 17th century. It also tells the story of a human heart, which, on its way to the true love, follows Cupid's advice. A heart following a path to perfection goes through these stages: contamination by malice, darkening of a heart, its hardening, and then, in reverse, softening of the heart, its trimming, cleansing, renewing, enlightening, flourishing, etc. Among the emblems in this book there is one that is very similar to the icon. On the emblem *Cleansing of the Heart*, Cupid is again depicted on a pedestal in the middle of a fountain basin, with blood coming out of his five wounds. A lady is standing next to the basin and washing a heart in it.³⁴ This iconographical context creates the possibility of reading the icon as an emblematic composition, which represents the cleansing and healing of a human heart by love, Celestial and earthly. The outflow of Christ's love and cleansing of mankind from its sins is presented in this type of compositions as an example to be imitated in earthly love. In the icon, this theme of human love represented by a human heart has a direct connection to St Catherine (who was engaged to the baby Christ), as well as to Catherine Alekseevna, who is represented by her holy patroness.

St Catherine is depicted in royal attire, with a crown on her head. This, first of all, reflects the royal status of the martyr, but this appearance cannot be separated from Catherine Alekseevna, Peter's mistress from at least 1704, and the mother of the tsar's children. On St Catherine's nimbus there is an inscription: 'Saint Martyr Catherine', and in smaller font – 'RS' – 'Russian Sovereign' (*PT, Российская Государыня*). According to existing source documents, Catherine was proclaimed tsarina on March 7th, 1711. In the tsar's journal, there is an entry under this date: 'His Tsar's Majesty undertook His way to Poland and departed from Preobrazhenskoe [palace]. At this time, it was proclaimed publicly to everyone, regarding Sovereign Catherine Alekseevna, that she is a true Sovereign.'³⁵ From this moment on, the way Peter I and others addressed Catherine in letters also changed: she became 'Tsarina Catherine Alekseevna'.³⁶ Though the wedding took place only in 1712, the patron saints of Peter and Catherine were placed on the

33 H. Hugo, *Pia desideria emblematis, elegiis et affectibus ss. patrum illustrata*. Antverpiae, 1624, p. 41.

34 B. van Haeften, *Schola cordis siue Aversi à deo cordis ad eumdem reductio, et instructio*. Antverpiae, 1629, p. 17.

35 Походный журнал 1711 года, p. 4.

36 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 11 (2), pp. 119, 129; Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 10. Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, 1956, pp. 120, 193.

icon symmetrically on the two sides of the state eagle, emphasising the royal status of both of them.

It was widely known among contemporaries that Catherine played a remarkable role in saving the tsar and his army from the Turks in the Prut Campaign. For instance, according to the memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, a participant in the Prut Campaign, at the most critical moment, Catherine 'collected all the money, plate, and jewels which were in the army, for which she gave her own receipt and obligation to pay the respective owners, and with this valuable present she had the address to prevail on the grand vizier to conclude a peace, and the transaction was immediately finished in the name of the field-marshal, without the czar's knowledge'.³⁷ In commemoration of this event, Peter I instituted the order of St Catherine in 1714: the sash of this order was embroidered with the inscription 'For Love and the Fatherland'; the badge had the initials D. S. F. R. (*Domine Salvum Fac Regem*, 'God Save the Tsar'), and the motto *Aequant Munia Comparis* ('By her works she is to her husband compared'). Taking into account her role in the Prut Campaign, it was only appropriate to place Catherine in the icon next to the tsar. This icon was presented to the tsar ten months after Catherine was proclaimed 'the true Sovereign', and two months prior to Peter and Catherine's wedding. This upcoming royal wedding is also referred to in the icon. For Peter I, however, it was not just another celebratory event at the court; it was a result of a very difficult decision. By 1711 he was finally ready to take this step in order to preserve the future of his children born from his union with Catherine.

A second marriage was not unusual for a tsar in 17th century Russia. Peter I's grandfather Mikhail Fedorovich, his father tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, and his older brother Fedor Alekseevich were married twice. All of them, though, married after their first spouses died. Peter I's first wife, Evdokiya Lopukhina, was still alive. She had taken monastic vows back in 1698, and formally Peter I was a 'widower', a husband whose wife had died to the worldly life. Evdokiya, however, was forced to become a nun. There was no apparent reason for her to take the veil: she was not barren. The tsar simply detested her. In addition, Catherine was not the best candidate to replace Evdokiya, since she was a commoner born somewhere in Livonia and captured in the course of one of the military operations there.

From 1705 on Catherine lived in Moscow, under the patronage of the tsar's sister Natalya Alekseevna. At this time, Catherine belonged to a circle of 'damsels' who lived at the court of Natalya, together with the sisters of Prince Menshikov, as well as Darya and Varvara Arseneva. The 'damsels' entertained Peter and Menshikov in Moscow, and often followed them on their trips. The historian Grigorii Esipov was the first to take notice of a strange series of hints in Peter's letters to Menshikov, which started to appear in 1705. In the letter from 23 December 1705, the tsar wrote: 'Also I beg you: for nothing else, only for God and my soul, keep your parole of honor'.³⁸ Soon Peter reminded Menshikov about it anew: 'I am very, very grateful that you are kindly keeping your parole of honor'.³⁹ 'To what circumstance has belonged this parole of honor,

37 Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq. New York: Da Capo Press, 1970, p. 44.

38 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 3. Санкт-Петербург: Государственная типография, 1893, p. 540.

39 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 4. Санкт-Петербург: Государственная типография, 1900, p. 12.

established between Peter and Menshikov?', wrote Esipov. 'From Peter's phrasing 'for God and my soul' it is clear that it was a situation concerning the tsar's happiness directly and personally, and Peter had doubts that Menshikov would follow some kind of agreement. Was Peter afraid that a relationship between Menshikov and Catherine would be resumed, and did he make him promise to marry Darya Arseneva instead, and did he himself promise to marry Catherine?'⁴⁰

In 1702, Peter published a decree mandating the church rituals of engagement and marriage be separated (before that they constituted one ritual), and a marriage was allowed no earlier than six weeks after an engagement.⁴¹ It is possible that 'parole of honor' in the letters meant an engagement, and the tsar was writing about his own and Menshikov's engagements to marry, which took place sometime before December 1705. Menshikov got married in 1706. On 27 July Peter wrote to him from Kiev: 'It is imperative for you to be here ... in order to finally define the business about which we spoke enough.'⁴² This business was 'finally defined' on 18 August 1706, when Menshikov married Darya Arseneva. From this point on, the situation changed completely, Menshikov kept his parole of honor, and now it was he who was reminding the tsar about his promise. On 11 September 1706, Peter wrote to him: 'Everything is good by God's grace. ...there is one thing, however, [you yourself know about it] which always prevents my happiness.'⁴³ We do not know what exactly Menshikov replied to the tsar, but Peter wrote in his next letter on 22 September: 'As you requested in your letter, and as I committed myself by my word, I will carry it out.'⁴⁴ The topic of the tsar's promise surfaced again in 1711. After Catherine was proclaimed a 'Russian Sovereign', Peter received congratulations from Menshikov and replied: 'Thank you for the greeting on the occasion of my parole of honor. I undertook this because of the uncertainty of this campaign, so if there are orphans, they will have a better life. If God would finish this [military] business for our benefit, we will fulfill [the parole] in Saint-Petersburg.'⁴⁵

On the icon, between the left group of saints and the angels, there is an inscription: 'The Lord gave to those who love him incorruptible crowns made of gold, silver, precious stones.' This inscription is a combination of two Gospel verses (1Co 3: 12; 9: 25) referring to the crowns of saints and martyrs. This reference, however, also leads to the theme of marriage and to the question of the second marriage in particular. In his Epistle, St Paul commented on the second marriage in more detail than did other sources, in particular in the case of widowers: it is the best for them to choose chastity, 'but if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn' (1Co 7: 9). This statement served in the Russian Orthodox tradition as a basis for the treatment of the second marriage.⁴⁶ Another inscription on the icon placed right above St Catherine also refers to the incorruptible crowns: 'And to this Christ's bride whom God loves, He gave them crowns of paradise flowers and of pearls of great price.' Here

40 Г. В. Есипов, Князь Александр Данилович Меншиков. – Русский архив 1875, № 7, р. 244.

41 Полное собрание законов Российской империи. (Собрание первое.) Том 4, 1700–1712. Санкт-Петербург, 1830, р. 191.

42 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 4, р. 314.

43 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 4, р. 368

44 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 4, р. 377.

45 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 4, р. 230.

46 J. Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975, pp. 15–16.



1.

Ikoon „Issanda liturgia”. Tallinna Nikolai Õnnistaja ja Imetegija kirik.
Foto Orest Kormašov. Tallinna Kultuuriväärtuste Amet.
Icon *The Liturgy of the Lord*. The Church of St Nicholas of Myra, Tallinn.
Photo by Orest Kormashov. Tallinn Cultural Heritage Department.



2.
Bernt Notke altar. Detail.
Tallinna Püha Vaimu kirik.
Foto Jaanus Heinla.
Muinsuskaitse Amet.
Bernt Notke's altar. Detail.
The Church of Holy Spirit,
Tallinn.
Photo by Jaanus Heinla.
The National Heritage Board
of Estonia.



3. Icoon „Issanda liturgia”. Detail.
Foto Maria Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova.
Icon *The Liturgy of the Lord*. Detail.
Photo by Maria Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova.



4. Icoon „Issanda liturgia”. Detail.
Foto Orest Kormašov.
Icon *The Liturgy of the Lord*. Detail.
Photo by Orest Kormashov.



5. Icoon „Issanda liturgia”. Detail.
Foto Orest Kormašov.
Icon *The Liturgy of the Lord*. Detail.
Photo by Orest Kormashov.



6. Icoon „Issanda liturgia”. Detail.
Foto Maria Smorževskihh-Smirnova.
Icon *The Liturgy of the Lord*. Detail.
Photo by Maria Smorzhevskihh-Smirnova.

again, the crowns are first of all meant for the Holy Virgins depicted on the icon (e.g. in Mt 13: 45–46). St Catherine, however, stands out in this group of holy virgins as Christ's bride who was given His engagement ring. This narrative was first introduced to the Slavic version of her life in a *Collection of Saints' Lives*, compiled by Dmitrii Rostovskii (1689).⁴⁷ The inscription 'And to this Christ's bride whom God loves' has one inconsistency: it mentions one bride, but 'them' (plural) as recipients. It is very probable that the 'bride' here is Catherine Alekseevna, and 'them' refers to her and her bridegroom, the tsar. In the Russian Orthodox wedding ritual, the bridegroom, with a wedding crown on his head, is compared to the King of Heaven, and his bride to a virgin engaged to Christ. The 'precious stones' from the inscription can also be found in the ritual.⁴⁸ There are fourteen crowns and wreaths in the hands of angels on the icon. Some of them are decorated with flowers, and some with pearls and precious stones. Four of them are very similar to those used in the wedding ritual (which is placed on the heads of the bride and groom). The number of the wedding crowns on the icon, as well as how they are situated, may refer to the story of the tsar's 'parole of honor'. Two of the wedding crowns on the icon are joined together by an angel. They probably represent the happy marriage of Menshikov and Darya Arseneva. The other two are not yet joined; one is situated above St Catherine, the other above St Peter. The icon, therefore, was once again reminding Peter of his promise. This time, however, it was an attempt by Menshikov to resolve the issue once and for all.

On the ribbon stretching out from Christ to Peter, there is an inscription: 'That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' (Mt 16: 18.) This inscription is repeated practically word for word in the emblematic composition under St Peter's feet: there is a rock, a church standing on it, and next to it two keys (fig. 6). In the Gospel, the Lord's promise to Peter continues: 'And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' (Mt 16: 19.) The keys in the icon are tied together with a red ribbon, and the ribbon shows clearly that they are 'bound' by blood. In addition, each key is a combination of two symbols: the keys themselves represent the Apostle Peter, and their upper parts are depicted as a traditional symbol of St Catherine, the wheel on which she was tortured. The keys, therefore, demonstrate that Peter and Catherine are already bound by the blood of the Prut Campaign and now they have to be united in sacral marriage. It is most important, however, that in Christ's promise Peter received the authority not only to bind, but also to loose: 'thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'. Therefore the tsar is not only allowed to join Catherine in holy marriage, but also to loose himself from his previous wife.

Peter announced his decision to marry Catherine to the members of royal family on 7 March 1711; by this time he had to have received the formal blessing for this marriage from his confessor, and had had his communion for the last time before the wedding. The inscription on the icon referring to Father Peter Arkhangel'skii's blessing makes

47 Св. Димитрий Ростовский, Книга житий святых... На Три Месяцы Первья, септемврий, октоврий и новемврий. Киев, 1711, pp. 547–548.

48 Требник. Москва, 1708, p. 45 reversed, pp. 86, 39.

the icon a very important step in the preparation for the tsar's wedding. Peter I's confessor was supposed to also impose penance on him for his second marriage. According to the Book of Needs from 1708, a person entering a second marriage was kept from communion for two years. After this rule, however, there is a comment in the book explaining that 'according to custom' communion can be allowed again even in one year. The period and the form of penance depended on the decision of a confessor.⁴⁹ Lent started in 1711 on 12 February. The first Sunday of Lent was on 19 February, and on this day the tsar was supposed to have his last communion. It is not by chance, therefore, that the wedding was set for 19 February 1712, exactly one year after Peter's last communion. In 1711, however, it was impossible for the tsar to do his penance. Due to his deadly illness and the events in Prut, Peter, of course, could not get through this year without communion. As a result, Peter was not able to keep his word, and the wedding day had to be changed again. Menshikov exerted every effort to save the wedding. The confessor, apparently, shortened the period of remaining without communion to 50 days, and gave the tsar an additional penance. The new period of penance is reflected, probably, in the acrostic at the bottom of the icon. The letter N in the Slavonic alphabet also has the numeric meaning '50' and, therefore, the message which is hidden here, 'cross N', can be understood not only as 'our cross', but also as 'cross 50'. In addition, Peter had to make with his own hands a church chandelier by the day of the wedding. According to the tsar's journal, 'on the first days of January, His Tsar's Majesty started to work on a chandelier made from ivory, which he finished by His Majesty's wedding, by 19 February'. On the day of his wedding, after the church ceremony and before the banquet, 'His Tsar's Majesty, before he sat at the table, fixed this ivory chandelier in the middle of the room in front of canopies'.⁵⁰ The period between 1 January and 19 February is exactly 50 days. Peter kept his parole of honour after all.

The Liturgy of the Lord was painted in 1711, only one year after Reval was conquered. When Peter I first visited the newly-acquired city, he did not regard the city as being strategically or symbolically important to Russia. He saw Reval as the last step in conquering Livonia, and commented in his letter upon the city's capitulation: 'the Swedes on this side of the Baltic Sea do not have even a foot of land'.⁵¹ At this time, an attempt to reinforce the Russian Orthodox presence in the city by exploiting a traditional anti-Protestant iconography was overshadowed by more opportune tasks. Menshikov, who as governor at the time hosted Peter's visit to Reval, strove above all to frame Prut's 'victory' in a way the tsar would appreciate, as well as to secure the tsar's matrimonial plans. The situation changed dramatically five years later, when Reval was chosen as a major Russian naval port in the Baltic area and became the site of frequent visits by the tsar. New Russian churches appeared in Reval, and new artifacts which focused more on the dialog with the city were commissioned. In 1711, though, this process was only just emerging.

49 Требник, p. 45 reversed; Д. Стефанович, О Стоглаве. Его происхождение, редакции и состав. К истории памятников древнерусского церковного права. Санкт-Петербург, 1909, pp. 222–224, 283–286.

50 Походный журнал 1712 года. Санкт-Петербург, 1854, pp. 1, 2; see also: Донесения и другие бумаги английских послов, pp. 144–145.

51 Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого. Том 10, p. 361.