



9. Christ Pantocrator, 19th (donation of Margaritis Pothitos)



10. St. Demetrius, early 19th century, Zoodochos Pigi monastery, Patmos

PIETY, IDEOLOGY, AND ORTHODOXY: RUSSIAN ICONS IN SERBIAN CHURCH CULTURE (17TH–19TH CENTURIES)

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One of the characteristics of early modern Serbian church culture is its close connection with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian empire. The beginnings of a Serbo–Russian ecclesiastical collaboration, and the first artistic and cultural interchange, can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages,¹ but intensive cooperation began toward the end of the seventeenth century.² This was a time of hardship for the Serbian and other Orthodox peoples of the Balkans who found themselves in the Ottoman empire, which was established as a Muslim state. Russia was the only free Orthodox Christian state at the time as well as the most powerful protector of the Balkan Christians.

Russian liturgical books, vessels, and icons are very common in Serbian parish churches and monasteries, from Dalmatia to Mt. Athos. In most of the cases concerning icons, there is no precise data on when and how they arrived in Serbian churches and the Russian icons have not been catalogued. Field research and catalogues from certain churches and monasteries reveal that there are at least around a thousand Russian icons in Serbian churches. Among them are the Russian icons from Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as icons from

¹ S. Radojčić, "Veze između srpske i ruske umetnosti u srednjem veku," *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 1 (1948), 241–258.

² M. Jovanović, "Rusko-srpske umetničke veze u XVIII veku," *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 7/1 (1963), 379–410; U. Rajčević, "Mitropolit Mihailo i školovanje srpskih slikara u Rusiji," *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice srpske* 19 (1983), 263–274; N. Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost u Kraljevini Srbiji (1882–1914)* (Belgrade, 2007), 51–57; 159–181.

the collections of the Old Serbian church in Sarajevo and Episcopal palace in Tuzla,³ and Hilandar monastery on Mt. Athos,⁴ as well as several iconostases brought from Russia.⁵ It can also be said that every Serbian church houses at least one Russian icon that can be dated to before the 1917 October Revolution.

Here we shall expound only on some examples to show the manner of arrival, the significance, and the function of Russian icons in the Serbian church and in national culture. The process of bringing Russian icons to Serbia was very complex, its reasons were manifold, and it was connected to piety, ideology, and the ideals of Orthodoxy.

I

The presentation of Russian icons to Serbian churches most likely began during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Representatives of Serbian monasteries, such as Hilandar, Studenica, and Mileševa, are known to have made appeals to Russian rulers during that particular period. Appeal letters were taken to Russia by numerous monks, who sometimes also took saints' relics with them. The appeals always stated the difficulties the monasteries faced, such as highlighting the state of decrepit churches or noting those which had been demolished, which is why they were seeking financial help, liturgical books and icons.⁶

According to Svetozar Radojčić, Russian icons were not a common feature in Serbian churches before the eighteenth century.⁷ He believes that their arrival intensified during the eighteenth century. Although one should always address an issue such as the one to hand with caution, Radojčić's opinion is also confirmed by existing records on Russian icons. Among the earliest artistic works to have been given by Russia to Serbian monasteries include a katapetasma dating to 1555, which was presented in 1557 to Hilandar monastery

³ S. Rakić, *Ikone Bosne i Hercegovine (16–19. vijek)* (Belgrade, 1998), 303–340.

⁴ S. Petković, *Chilandar* (Belgrade, 1999), 54–55.

⁵ Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost*, 181.

⁶ See S. Dimitrijević, "Gradja za srpsku istoriju iz ruskih arhiva i biblioteka," *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije*, knj. 53, Drugi razred 45 (1922); S. Dolgova, ed., *Moskva-Srbija, Beograd-Rusija, Dokumenta i materijali* (Belgrade/Moscow, 2013).

⁷ Radojčić, "Veze," 241–258.

by Tsar Ivan IV Vasiljevich (The Terrible).⁸ It was both an expression of patronage and the piety of Russian rulers. It appears that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also saw the rise of the cult of the Theotokos of Vladimir among Serbs. The oldest examples of this wonderworking icon in Serbian churches, such as the example from the Old Serbian church of Sarajevo, date back to this period.⁹

One of the most significant examples that demonstrate how the connection between Serbian monks and the Russian state worked comes from the turn from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Monk Grigorije from Rakovica monastery in Belgrade was an intermediary in Russo–Ottoman communications. He assisted in the negotiations on the concluding of a treaty between Russia and the Ottoman empire in 1698 and 1699 (during the drafting of the treaty of Karlowitz), in which the Russian state emissaries P. B. Vosnitsin and E. I. Ukrainev were involved. In 1701, Grigorije went to Moscow, with the aim of seeking help for Rakovica. Tsar Peter the Great issued a charter to Rakovica on 30 June 1701, and the monastery received numerous gifts, including icons.¹⁰ On this occasion, Grigorije also received four icons that were originally intended for Vatopedi monastery on Mt. Athos. The icons were the work of the iconographers of the Kremlin Armory. All dated to 1687, the icons in question were of John the Baptist by Ivan Maximov (Fig. 1), St. Nicholas by Spiridon Grigoryev, the Three Holy Hierarchs by Tikhon Ivanov Filatyev, and the Virgin with Christ and the Prophets by Leontiy Stefanov.¹¹ The fact that Rakovica monastery was gifted with these representative and large icons – this is the first example of a Serbian monastery being presented with high quality Russian icons – testifies to the Russian connections of Serbian church representatives. Later, during the flight from the Turks, the Rakovica icons were transferred to Velika Remeta monastery,¹² which was within Habsburg territory. This is clearly indicative of how much they were revered by Serbian monks.

⁸ E. Smirnova, "Katapetasma 1555 g. K ikonografičeskoj programme okaimlenija," in *Osam vekova Hilandara, istorija, duhovni život, književnost, umetnost i arhitektura*, ed. V. Korać (Belgrade, 2000), 495–502.

⁹ Rakić, *Ikone*, 303–304.

¹⁰ Z. Rakić, "Velikorenetske ikone iz 1687 godine i njihovi autori," *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti* 22 (1986), 128.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130–145.

¹² *Ibid.*, 129.

In the eighteenth century, a special phase in Serbo-Russian church relations began.¹³ After 1690, a part of the Serbian people found themselves within the confines of the Habsburg empire, where they were exposed to enormous pressure from the Catholic church. For that reason, the Serbs appealed to Russian Orthodox circles, which had had much experience in fighting religious conversion. Icon-painting held a significant place in the defense of Orthodoxy as it expressed the dogma of faith in visual form and addressed topical Catholic themes. In this period, relations between the Serbian metropolitanate of Karlovci and Russian churches and monasteries were intensified. Representatives of the Serbian Church, as well as certain Serbian icon-painters, begin their schooling in Kiev and Moscow, from where both icons and icon-painters returned.¹⁴

In the middle of the eighteenth century, icon-painters Jov Vasilijević and Vasilije Romanović arrived in the territory of the metropolitanate of Karlovci, where they began working. Even though these painters came from Ukraine and brought the Kievan style of icon-painting, the representatives of the Serbian Church presented them as Russian painters to the Serbs. Vasilijević was thus nicknamed Moscovite Jov, which meant Jov the Russian. He became the church's court painter. The significance of these icon-painters lies in the fact that they introduced the style of Ukrainian icons to the territory of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, and they received important commissions. Vasilijević created the iconostasis of Bodjani monastery, as well as the wall painting in Krušedol monastery. In 1743, the metropolitan even sent word that all Serbian painters should be educated by Moscovite Jov. With the arrival of icon-painters such as Vasilijević and Romanović, the "poetics" of Serbian church painting was reformed and the Kiev style of icons came to be used in the defence of the Orthodox faith within the Habsburg Monarchy.

During the eighteenth century, engravings of certain Serbian monasteries were produced in Russia. As part of the effort to raise help for Studenica monastery, an engraving of this Serbian monastery was produced in Moscow (Fig. 2).¹⁵ Prints of Hilandar monastery were

¹³ Jovanović, "Ruško-srpske," 379-410.

¹⁴ M. Timotijević, *Srpsko barokno slikarstvo* (Novi Sad, 1996), 75-82.

¹⁵ M. Šakota, *Studenička riznica* (Belgrade, 1988), 224-226.

made in Moscow, too.¹⁶ The production of these prints demonstrates the connection these monasteries had forged with their Russian donors. It is obvious that during fundraising trips, vedute of the monasteries were also made.

II

The influence of Russian icon-painting on Serbian church culture increased during the nineteenth century, the beginning of which saw Serbian uprisings against the Ottoman empire. Protector The patron of the Serbian uprising was Russian Tsar Alexander I. One of the means of his protection was presenting Serbian churches with gifts, such as a Gospel to Studenica monastery in 1813.¹⁷ The tsar's gift had enormous significance. It was material testimony of his support for the Serbs, which was also highlighted by the records on donors. Thus, this form of bestowal surpassed the Gospel's liturgical function and carried a strong political message.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russo-Serbian relations became extremely complex in nature, as a result of political circumstances and the church program. Significant help was provided by Russia to Serbian churches that had been burned down during the 1848 revolution within the territory of Habsburg Monarchy, but there is little data on the presentation of icons.

The Russian influence was completed under Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanović, whose activities conditioned a great change in Serbian church art.¹⁸ The most important Orthodox prelate in the Principality of Serbia, he ran the Serbian church during the whole latter half of the nineteenth century. Metropolitan Mihailo was educated in Russia and his program entailed the Serbian church taking its lead completely from the Russian church in terms of its organization. The Russian model of Orthodoxy was the ideal toward which he strove. Mihailo also devoted serious attention to icon-painting. Wishing to bring Catholic influences to a halt, he considered Russian icon-painting to be the ideal model. He sent a significant number of Serbian painters to Russia for educational

¹⁶ D. Davidov, "Hilandarske Hartines Eikones," in *Manastir Hilandar*, ed. G. Subotić (Belgrade, 1998), 324-325.

¹⁷ Šakota, *Studenička*, 142-143.

¹⁸ Rajčević, "Mitropolit Mihailo," 263-274; Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost*, 51-57.

purposes, and he also advocated buying Russian icons and iconostases.¹⁹ Due to him, many iconostases in the Principality of Serbia were fitted with Russian icons. Icons were obtained from Russia through the company of Vitomir Marković and Ivan Pavlović, who enjoyed the metropolitan's blessing. Thanks to this import company and Mihailo's support, icons for iconostases in Paraćin, Radljevo, Dobrinja, Petnica, Boževac and Zenica in Bosnia were obtained.²⁰

Mihailo also donated Russian icons, such as the icon of St. Andrew the Apostle, George and Gleb, as well as the icon depicting St. Arsenius of Tver, which he gave to Koporin monastery.²¹ In 1885, during celebrations devoted to St. Cyril and Methodius, Mihailo received five thousand icons from the St. Petersburg Slavic Benevolent Society (Санкт-Петербургское Славянское благотворительное общество), which were obviously printed on paper, and distributed them to every school and church in the Kingdom of Serbia.²²

The metropolitan also helped Serbo-Russian relations, so a group of Russian volunteer soldiers, under the auspices of General Mikhail Chernyaev, arrived to fight during the Serbo-Turkish wars in 1876. The Russian volunteers brought a mobile military church dedicated to St. Alexander Nevsky. After the war, the church remained in Belgrade, where it served as a parish church.²³ The establishment of the parish church in the saint's name clearly highlighted the ecclesiastical and political affinity between Serbia and Russia. The church became not only a venue for celebrating the Russian saint, but also a memorial to the Russian volunteers' participation in the Balkan wars of liberation.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian Slavic committees greatly assisted in the equipping of Serbian churches and monasteries that were still within the Ottoman empire. With the help of Russian donors, books, icons and iconostases were sent to

¹⁹ Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost*, 51–57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²² *Ibid.*, 54.

²³ J. Mežinski Milovanović, *Hram Svetog Aleksandra Nevskog u Beogradu, Spomenica povodom stogodišnjice postojanja hrama 1912–2012* (Belgrade, 2013), 24–42.

numerous Serbian churches, such as those in Andrijevac.²⁴ Russian help was also forthcoming for the new Serbian cathedral church in Sarajevo (Figs. 3 and 4). The new church was built between 1863 and 1874. Metropolitan Sava Kosanović travelled to Russia from 1872 to 1874 to seek help. With the help of Russian historian and Slavist Nil Popov, Kosanović's mission was a success and the metropolitan brought the relics of St. Thecla from Russia, as well as books, vestments, church vessels, the iconostasis, and all the icons for the new church.²⁵

Russian gifts to Serbian churches in the Ottoman Empire were of profound political and ideological significance. Directed at Orthodox Christians, this help showed that they were under the protection of the Russian empire.

Russian icons that arrived from Mt. Athos to Serbian churches and monasteries also occupy an important place. Hilandar monastery was extensively furnished with Russian icons. Thanks to the help of the monks from the St. John Chrysostom fraternity, Hilandar received new altar icons.²⁶ In this monastery, Russian contributors contributed to the decoration of the Bogorodica Trojeručica (Three-handed Theotokos), the most significant Serbian wonderworking icon. With the help of the state counselor Sevastijanov, the Bogorodica Trojeručica icon received a new chasuble.²⁷

In 1913, to mark the 1,600th anniversary of the Edict of Milan, Tsar Nicholas II made a donation to the cathedral church in Niš, Emperor Constantine's birthplace, of church vessels made of precious metals.²⁸ This was the last gift to a Serbian church from a Russian tsar before World War I and the Russian Revolution.

²⁴ N. Makuljević, "Održavanje i obova vere: pravoslavni hramovi u Gornjem Polimlju tokom novog veka," *Mileševski zapisi* 7 (2007), 162–163.

²⁵ V. Maksimović, *Mitropolit Sava Kosanović 1839–1903* (Dobrun/Sarajevo, 2003), 19–20.

²⁶ N. Makuljević, "Unutrašnjost katolikona manastira Hilandara u novom veku," in *Osmo kazivanje o Svetoj gori*, ed. Z. Rakic (Belgrade, 2013), 184–185.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁸ P. Gagulić, *Veliki niški Saborni hram. Prilog istoriji Niša i eparhije niške* (Niš, 1961), 64–66.

III

After the October Revolution, Russian immigrants came to Serbia, marking a new significant phase in the arrival of Russian icons. Not only did Russian immigrants bring numerous icons, but Russian church painters, such as Andrej Bicenکو, Ivan Justin Meljnikov and Vladimir Predojević, gained significant influence in Serbian church culture, particularly in the interwar period.²⁹

Certain icon-painters received extremely important commissions. Vladimir Predojević, an icon-painter who emphasized his Serbian ancestry, was entrusted with some of the most important church tasks. He painted the interior of the cathedral church in Niš and St. Simeon's chapel in the patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church.³⁰ Russian icon-painters also took part in the creation of the most important memorial church of the ruling Karađorđević dynasty – Oplenac church in Topola. Regarding the mosaics for Oplenac, it was decided that they should be based on a selection of frescoes from old Serbian wall-paintings. To this end, a research team comprising scientists and artists was formed. The entire team consisted of Russian emigrants, among them engineer Sergei Smirnov and scientist Nikolai Okunev, as well as the painters Predojević and Podčertko, photographer Borovskih and draughtsman Colonel Turkilj. Based on the results of the team's fieldwork, the iconographic styles for the Oplenac mosaics were decided on.³¹

This short survey on Russian icons in Serbian church culture clearly shows their significance. By virtue of Russian icons, be they gifted or bought, the spiritual life of Orthodox Christians in the Balkans was maintained, as were the ideals of Orthodox culture. They clearly demonstrated the help and protection of the Russian empire.

Piety, ideology, and the ideals of the Russian Orthodox faith had a bearing on the presence of a great number of Russian icons among Serbs, in the period between the seventeenth and the twentieth

²⁹ M. Jovanović, *Srpsko crkveno graditeljstvo i slikarstvo novijeg doba* (Belgrade/Kragujevac, 1987), 234–235.

³⁰ Gagulić, *Veliki*, 56–61.

³¹ M. Jovanović, *Oplenac* (Topola, 1989), 135.

centuries. By accepting and buying Russian icons, the local dearth of icon-painters was overcome. At the same time, the connection to the most important Slavic centre of Orthodox culture was emphasized, which had religious and political significance. As the Russian model of the Orthodox faith was the ideal to which the Serbian church strove during the nineteenth century, icon-painting was also in compliance with the Russian practice. The contributions from Russian donors confirmed the protection and support of the Russian empire. Russian rulers, Slavic charitable committees, and numerous donors gave icons, books and vestments to Serbian churches.



Figure 1. Ivan Maksimov, St. John the Baptist, 1687. (Gallery of Matica srpska)

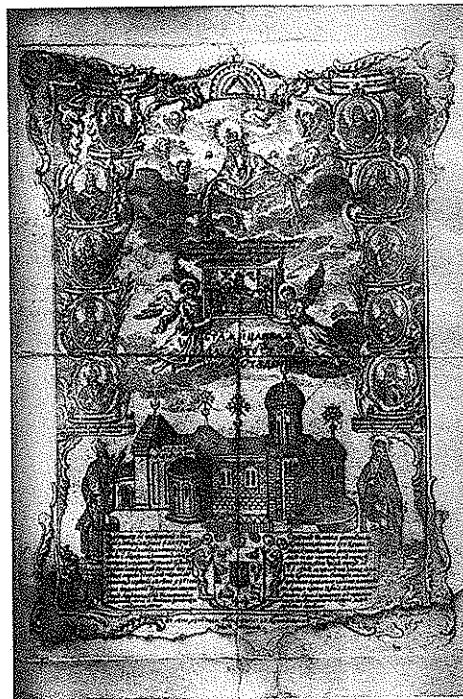


Figure 2. Monastery Studenica, Engraving, Moscow, 1758.

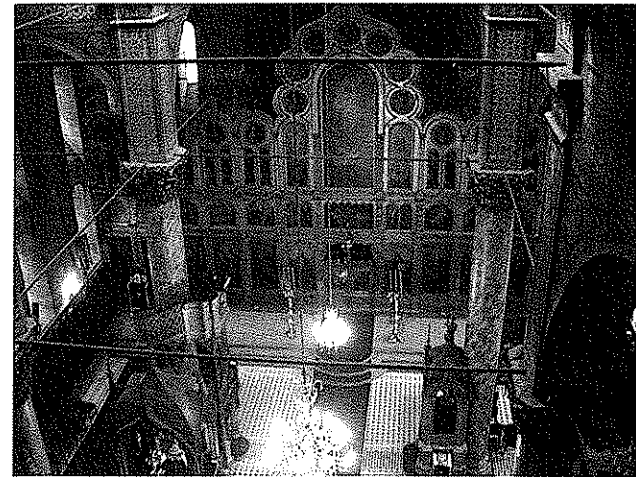


Figure 3. Iconostasis, Sarajevo Cathedral Church, 1872-1874

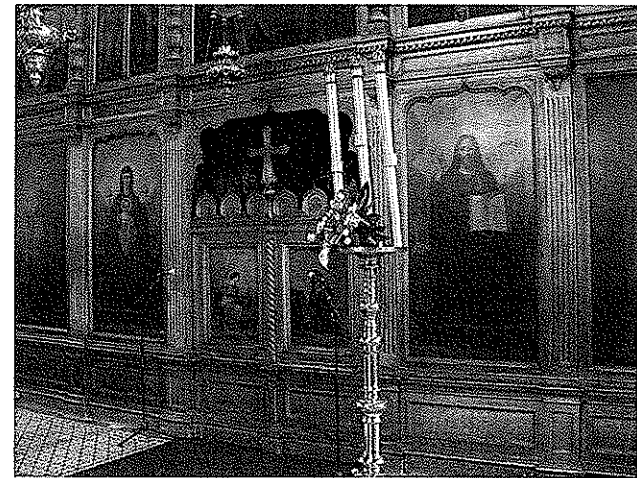


Figure 4. Iconostasis, Throne Icons, Sarajevo Cathedral Church, 1872-1874



Figure 5. Iconostasis, Sjenica, around 1900

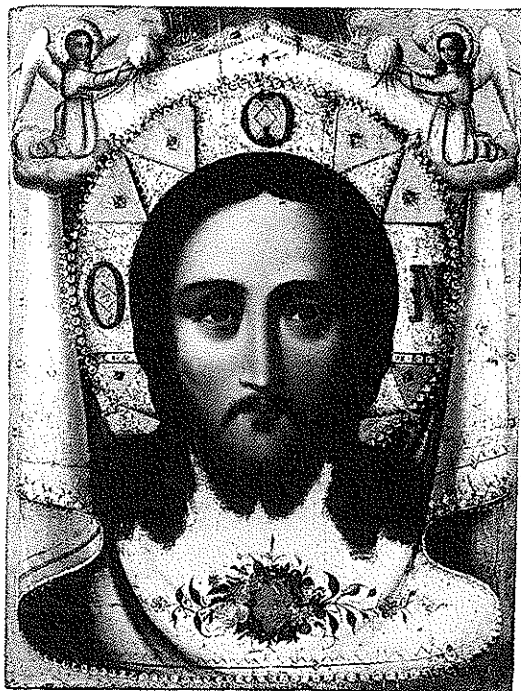


Figure 6. The Holy Face, painted on Mount Athos, 1900.
Church of the St. John the Theologian in Šaince

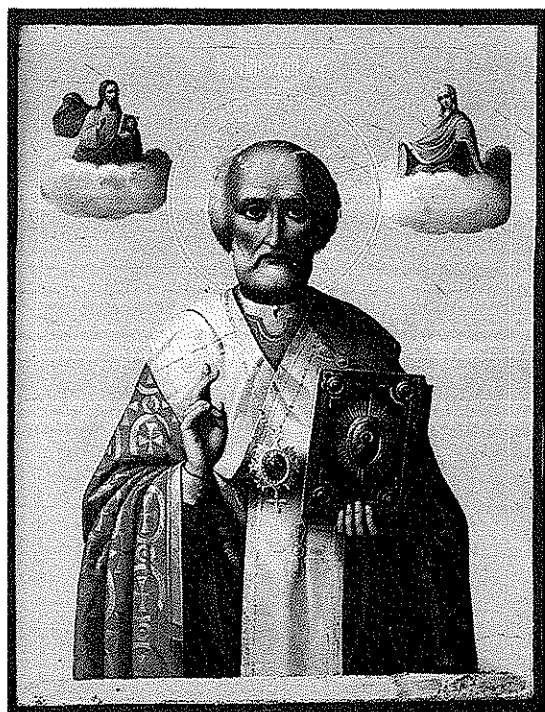


Figure 7. St. Nicholas, painted on Mount Athos, 1907.
Church of St. Nicholas in Klinovac

RUSSIAN ICONS IN BULGARIA

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The broad issue of the presence and function of Russian icons in the Bulgarian lands remains to be explored.¹ Neither the works themselves nor the sources have been collected and systemized despite the interest in the past in the issue of Bulgarian–Russian cultural and art relations. While it is not yet possible to make any generalizations regarding the Russian icons in Bulgaria, some observations may be made on the basis of the explored material.

The ways in which Russian icons spread across the Bulgarian lands were probably typical of the Balkans in general. First of all,

¹ In Nikola Mavrodinov's book on Bulgarian–Russian art relations, the issue of icon-painting remains in the background. See N. Mavrodinov, *Връзките между Българското и Руското изкуство* (Sofia, 1955), 54–55, 66, 70. Russian researcher Evgenia Lvova deals with Bulgarian–Russian art relations in her "Из истории русско-болгарских связей в изобразительном искусстве 50-70 годов 19-го века," *Известия на Института за изобразителни изкуства* 3 (1960), 229–270; *idem*, *К проблеме русско-болгарских культурных связей. Сравнительное изучение славянских литератур* (Moscow, 1973), 359–365, as well as in her later works on the subject. Lvova focuses on the genres of secular art rather than on icon painting. While an article by I. Gergova, "Реплики на руски чудотворни икони в България," *Проблеми на изкуството* 1 (2010), 35–39, is devoted especially to Russian icons in Bulgaria, it is to those of the Mother of God alone.