

Two Little-Known Pre-Mongolian *Cloisonné* Enamel Medallions in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Collection: On the Peculiarities of Denominative Inscriptions of the Virgin in the Art of Pre-Mongolian Rus'

The Moscow Kremlin Armoury Chamber houses a small round gold icon with the bust of the Virgin in *cloisonné* enamel dated to the late 12th or early 13th century (inv. no. MP-980; dm 4cm)¹ (fig. 1). This round enamel icon belongs to the complex of Russo-Byzantine artworks of the so-called Old Ryazan' treasure-trove found in 1822 on the place of the city of Old Ryazan' (fig. 2). On the round enamel icon, we see the frontal half-figure of the Virgin with palms open in front of her chest in the gesture of praying. The long, thin fingers are filled with enamel, which is thought to have been milky in colour originally, although now much darkened by corrosion. The same goes for all the other enamel colours: the enamel layer is corroded and partly crumbled because these archaeological finds had been buried in the earth and also because of the manufacturing techniques used. As we know, Russian craftsmen had some difficulties with certain stages of enamel production.

On the both sides of the Virgin's depiction, there is a vertically arranged Greco-Cyrillic inscription. It is a denominative inscription A/M//PH/A and can be read either: as ἀ(γία) Μ(α)ρ<ι>α («St Mary»), if read in column from left to the right, with two abbreviation signs – shifted A and PH; or as Μαρ<ι>α («Mary»), if read in a circular direction. The original red enamel on the letters is practically lost. The Greek letters of the denominative inscription have a characteristic itacistic misspelling – η instead of an iota (ι) – and a Cyrillic shape. The letters' palaeography allows dating of the inscription to the last quarter of the 12th or early 13th century².

Such an inscription is not typical for the Russian tradition of the time (which would be ΜΡ ΘΥ, Μῆτῆρ Θεοῦ, «Mother of God»), so it was considered to be a copy of an archaic inscription. This point of view was based on the observations of Nikodim Kondakov, who wrote about the tradition of the Virgin's denomination MARA (MARIA) in early Christian catacombs³. Examples are the 6th-century bottom of a cup with



Fig. 1 Gold icon with the depiction of the Virgin, 12th-early 13th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-980. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

the depiction of Our Lady from the Christian Museum of the Vatican and the bottom of the 4th-century glass cup from the collection of the Vatican's Apostolic Library in Rome⁴.

However, this inscription appears in variations on many Western European monuments of the 8th-12th centuries with the same denominative inscription of the Virgin in Latin. Here is a series of examples:

- SCA MARIA in the depiction of the Virgin in the Chapel of SS Quiricus and Julitta, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, 8th century (fig. 3)⁵

1 Shashina, *Osobennosti nadpisi* 43-52.

2 Rybakov, *Nadpisi pl. III-IV*.

3 Kondakov, *Ikonografija* 1, 77-79.

4 Kondakov, *Ikonografija* 1, 77-79.

5 Webb, *Churches and Catacombs* 112-123.



Fig. 2 The necklace («barmas») from the 1822 Old-Ryazan' treasure-trove, 12th-early 13th centuries, Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no MP-971, MP-972, MP-973. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

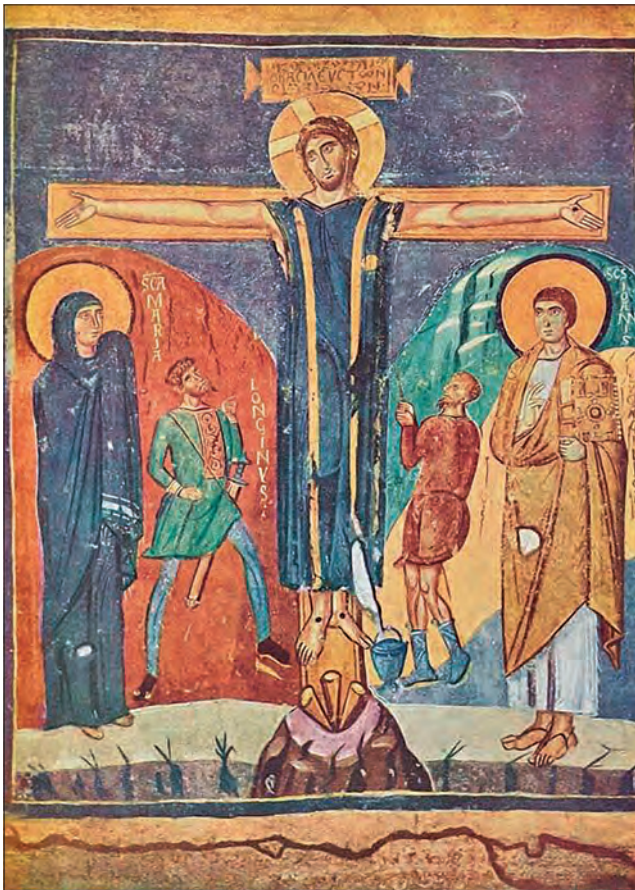


Fig. 3 Depiction (fresco) of the Virgin in the Chapel of Sts Quiricus and Julitta of Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, c. 750. – (From Webb, Churches and Catacombs 112).

- Latin inscription +MARIA+ and Greek denomination MP ΘΥ on a gold solidus of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI, the Wise (886-908), Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.⁶
- S(ancta) MA/RI/A on the portable altar of St Foy from the vestry of Conques Abbey, France, c. 1100⁷
- Inscription MA/RIA on the bust of the Virgin on the Chasse of Champagnat from Saint-Martial Cathedral in Champagnat, Limoges, Metropolitan Museum, New York, c. 1150⁸
- Inscription SCA MARIA on a mosaic depiction of the Virgin Orans, Archiepiscopal Museum of Ravenna, 12th century⁹
- Inscription S(ancta) MARIA in the Crucifixion scene on an enamel medallion from Conques, France, Metropolitan Museum New York, c. 1100¹⁰
- S(ancta) MAR/IA on a *champlevé* medallion from the Meuse Valley, Metropolitan Museum New York, c. 1150¹¹
- SCA/MARIA in the Crucifixion scene on *champlevé* enamel from the Meuse Valley, Metropolitan Museum New York, c. 1150-1175¹²
- Two denominative inscriptions MARIA on the St Calminius reliquary in the Abbey of St Pierre Mozac, c. 1185-1197¹³

6 Cat. New York 1997, 213-214 no. 147C (William E. Metcalf).

7 Cat. New York 1996 no. 1 (E. Taburet-Delahaye).

8 Cat. New York 1996 no. 10 (B. Drake Boehm).

9 Bovini, Ravenna pl. 91.

10 Houghton, Metropolitan Museum 24-25 fig. 35.

11 Nigel, Twelfth-Century Mosan Enamels 272 no. 41.

12 Wixom, Medieval Art 42.

13 Gauthier/Gaborit/Antoine, Corpus cat. B1 no. 32.



Fig. 4 Mosaic of the Virgin Mary in the apse of the Church of the Panagia Angeloktisti in Kiti, Cyprus, 6th-7th centuries. – (From Étingof/Sarab'janov, Angeloktisty Panagii 299).



Fig. 5 Double monogram «ἡ ἁγία Μαρία» («Hagia Maria») from the nave of Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, c. 750. – (From Kondakov, Ikonografija 1, 273).

There are only three monuments with Greek denominative inscriptions of Our Lady as Maria:

- +Η ΑΓΙΑ+ΜΑΡΙΑ+ on the mosaic depiction of the Virgin standing with archangels in the apse of the Church of the Panagia Angeloktisti in Kiti on Cyprus, 6th-7th centuries¹⁴ (fig. 4)
- A half-length depiction of the Virgin with Child in the niche of the right pillar of the main nave of Santa Maria Antiqua Church in Rome (751-752), showing the double monogram »ἡ ἁγία Μαρία«¹⁵ (fig. 5)
- A fragment of a fresco in the bottom of the left wall of presbytery of Santa Maria Antiqua with a fragment of the inscription »(Η) ΑΓΙΑ (ΜΑΡΙΑ)«¹⁶

It is known that the usual denomination of the Virgin on icons as **MP ΘΥ** (μ(ήτηρ) θ(εο)ῦ, «Mother of God») became obligatory in Byzantine art after the Third Oecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus (431). The Council decreed that the Virgin should be named Θεοτόκος («Θεοτόκον τὴν Μαρίαν λέγειν») and condemned the teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, proposing the denomination Χριστοτόκος as «Christ was God in the moment of conception». Socrates' «Historia ecclesiastica» (VII, 32) says: «Θεοτόκον τὴν Μαρίαν καλεῖτω μηδεὶς. Μαρία γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἦν: ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπου δὲ θεὸν τεχθῆναι ἀδύνατον»¹⁷ («Nobody shall call Maria Theotokos, because Maria was human, and a human cannot give birth to God»). Needless to say that the tradition of calling Maria «Θεοτόκος» became stronger after Iconoclasm, which ended in 843, and the schism of



Fig. 6 Plaque with the depiction of Our Lady, executed in *cloisonné* enamel, decorating the epitrachelion of Alexis the Metropolitan, Moscow Kremlin Museums, Armoury Collection, inv. no. TK-3. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

1054 between the Western and Eastern Christian churches. Thus, the denomination of the Virgin by her human name Maria was not traditional for the art of the Byzantine world but closes to Western traditions. Noteworthy is the absence of the epithet «saint» (ΑΓΙΑ) in the inscription on the Krem-

14 Étingof/Sarab'janov, Angeloktisty Panagii.

15 Kondakov, Ikonografija 1, 273.

16 Kondakov, Ikonografija 1, 273.

17 Sokrates, Historia ecclesiastica col. 897-808.

Fig. 7 Epitachelion of Alexis the Metropolitan of the late 14th century, Moscow Kremlin Museums, Armoury Collection, inv. no. TK-3. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).



lin medallion. Most likely, the inscription on the sample the maker was copying was the Latin SCA MARIA, the maker did not copy the letters SCA (Sancta); the combination of letters RI being written in the more usual and customary Greek way as PH. Thus, I consider the denominative inscription on our medallion to be the Greco-Cyrillic copy of a Latin inscription.

This might prove that Pre-Mongolian Rus' was much closer to the Western world as has been thought. Due to archaeological data and written sources, we certainly know that Russian princes and clergy received many gifts, such as relics, icons, church utensils, from both Constantinople and West-European countries, from the very moment of the Christianisation

of Rus' in the 10th century¹⁸. In the 11th century, many Latin codices and luxurious artworks were in use at the Russian court, because the nobility had been Latinised through the great number of dynastic marriages with representatives of Western European dynasties. By the 13th century, the House of Rurikovich had 65 marriages with foreigners: 58 with representatives of Western Europe (Poland, Scandinavia, Germany, Hungary) and only five with representatives of Byzantium.

There is evidence of a late 11th to early 12th-century Russian cult of eminent European saints, such as St Vitus, St Apollinaris of Ravenna and St Anastasia the Martyr¹⁹.

The iconographic type of the Virgin with palms in front of the chest is linked with a Byzantine type that appeared after the Iconoclastic period and is often met on Middle Byzantine coins, seals, cameos and medals. Examples include the serpentine relief of the Virgin Mary, the inscription of which mentions Emperor of Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078-1081) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London²⁰, and the mosaic depiction of Our Lady in the central dome of San Marco, Venice (12th century)²¹. Nikodim Kondakov connected this iconography of the Virgin with the compositions of the Ascension of Christ and the Pentecoste²². He also linked it with Western iconography of the Assumption of the Virgin (in the sense of both the spiritual and corporal assumption of the Mother of God), the type of »Assunta« established in Western iconography by the 12th century.

In summary, the gold *cloisonné* icon with the depiction of Our Lady and the inscription »Maria« is an interesting example of a synthesis of Russo-Byzantine and West-European artistic traditions in Pre-Mongolian Rus'.

The other silver gilt round plate discussed here shows a half-figure of Our Lady executed in *cloisonné* enamel (inv. no. TK-3, dm 2.2 cm)²³ (figs 6-7). It is one of the Pre-Mongolian enamel plaques that decorate the epitachelion of Alexis the Metropolitan (1354-1378) of the late 14th century, displayed in the Kremlin's Armoury collection. The epitachelion was brought to the Armoury in 1920 from the Patriarchal Vestry. The round plaques are remnants of two Deesis medallion sets (five plaques have practically lost the enamel layer).

The bust depiction of the Virgin is a pair to the depiction of St John the Baptist. The quality of the enamelled piece is definitely worse than that of the other one from the Ryazan' trove. It belongs to the time of the decline of Pre-Mongolian *cloisonné* craftsmanship. The Virgin's depiction is modelled with thick compartments shaped as oval and angular lines. The palms of the Virgin (with four fingers!) are placed in front of her chest in the gesture of praying, modelled with enamel of dark reddish and not clear colour. The left palm is de-



Fig. 8 Inscription A/TIA M/AP/OA in the 12th-century Deesis scene in the apse of the Saviour Church on Neredica, Novgorod. – (© Sarabianov/Smirnova, Istorija fig. 152).

pictured on the reddish background (this peculiarity of Old Russian *cloisonné* is called »mitten« in the Russian literature)²⁴. On both sides of the depiction we see the horizontal denominative Greco-Cyrillic inscription ΜΡ/ΦΑ (M[ά]ρφα) with abbreviation signs. The shape of the letters is Cyrillic, but they were cut by an inexperienced hand. Their palaeography allows us to date the inscription to not before the late 12th century, more likely the 13th century²⁵. Taking into consideration the signs of the titles, I believe that the maker must have made a mistake and copied the monogram of the Virgin ΜΡ/ΘΥ as ΜΡ/ΦΑ. St Maximus the Greek, who lived in Rus' for many years in the first half of the 16th century, wrote about multiple cases of corruption and misspelling of abbreviations of the Mother of God as »Μαρθα« or »Μιρθη« by Russian makers due to their ignorance of Greek. In his writings, he explained the meaning of Greek abbreviations of Christ and the Mother of God to those who did not know their meaning²⁶. Analogous to the denominative inscription of the Virgin

18 Nazarenko, *Meždunarodnyh putjach* 451. 505. 559.

19 Kostromin, *Cerkovnye svjazi* 6-19.

20 *Cat. New York 1997* cat. no. 130 (R. G. Ousterhout).

21 Demus, *Mosaic Decoration* 5-6.

22 Kondakov, *Ikonografija* 1, 357-358. 364-365.

23 Rybakov, *Russkoe prikladnoe* tab. 118.

24 Makarova, *Peregodčatye emali* cat. no. 127.

25 Medynceva, *Gramotnost'* pl. 1.

26 Avdeev, *Iz istorii drevnerusskoj epigrafiki i stavrografii* 273-276.

in the Deesis on the epitrachelion of Alexis the Metropolitan is the inscription Α/Γ/Ι/Α Μ/ΑΡ/Θ/Α of the Deesis scene (1199) in the apse of the Saviour Church on Neredica in Novgorod (fig. 8, after the church was destroyed during the Second World War, only archive photographs exist). To the right of the Saviour, there is the half-figure of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa with a column inscription Α/Γ/Ι/Α Μ/ΑΡ/Θ/Α. Nikodim Kondakov wrote that the name Μάρθα must have appeared because the maker did not understand the traditional Greek or Bulgarian Deesis inscription ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ²⁷. Kondakov considered such a »Maria« inscription to be an archaism. Modern scholar Lev Livshits has developed another theory: he believed that the depiction of St John the Baptist was dedicated to the heavenly patron of the church donator Prince Jaroslav, and the depiction of St Martha was dedicated to his spouse (whose name could have been Martha)²⁸. The scholar based this on the Medieval worship of the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Maria, and their likening to the Vir-

gin. However, this version does not seem to be convincing. A much easier explanation for the appearance of the denomination Α/Γ/Ι/Α Μ/ΑΡ/Θ/Α on the depiction of the Mother of God is that, in the Neredica Church, it is the idea that the words are the Virgin's monogram ΜΗΡ ΘΥ erroneously written as ΜΑΡΘΑ and put together with the Greek epithet ΑΓΙΑ (ἁγία, »saint«). The maker of the medallion on the epitrachelion of Alexis the Metropolitan must have made the same mistake; however, he did not add epithets to the misspelled monogram of the Virgin. The very original inscription copied by the enamelist may have been incorrect.

The words of St Maximus the Greek about the ignorance of Greek among Russian makers may be the key to such »mysterious« cases of denomination such as of the Virgin as St Martha. Such examples in the art of Pre-Mongolian Rus' bring us to understand that poor knowledge or ignorance of the Greek language was common for makers at this time when they worked in the field of Byzantine traditions.

Conclusion

The two enamel medallions presented here exemplify misunderstandings in the denominations of the Virgin Mary in Pre-Mongolian art. The first example suggests a stronger Latin

influence on Pre-Mongolian art than hitherto thought. The second demonstrates that Greek was not widely known in Pre-Mongolian Rus'.

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²⁷ Kondakov, *Ikonografija 2*, 310-311.

²⁸ Lifšic, *Neredicy 188-196*.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Two Little-Known Pre-Mongolian *Cloisonné* Enamel Medallions in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury Collection: On the Peculiarities of Denominative Inscriptions of the Virgin in the Art of Pre-Mongolian Rus'

The Moscow Kremlin Armoury collection houses two Pre-Mongolian Russian *cloisonné* medallions with the bust of the Virgin Mary. A small 12th-century gold medallion from the 1822 Ryazan' treasure-trove bears the denominative inscription is A/M//PH/A – ά(γία) M(α)ρ<ί>α (or Mαρ<ί>α, depending on the reading order) as opposed to MP ΘΥ, Mētēr Theou, »Mother of God«. The maker of the Ryazan' medallion with the Virgin may have copied a Latin inscription »SCA MARIA« from a Western artwork.

On the second enamel on the epitachelion of St Alexis the Metropolitan, the inscription reads MP/ΦΑ – M(ά)ρφα, most likely an erroneous copy of the Greek letters MP/ΘΥ. The closest analogy is in the Saviour Church on Neredica, Novgorod (Deesis fresco in the apse, 1199), reading A/ΓΙ/A M/AP/ΘA, perhaps a misspelling of MHP ΘΥ as MAPΘA in combination with the Cyrillic spelling of »ΑΓΙΑ« (»άγία«).

St Maximus the Greek (1475-1556) noted that the misspelling of MP ΘΥ as »Μαρθα« or »Μιρθυ« by Russian makers was common due to their poor knowledge of Greek. The two denominative inscriptions of the Mother of God discussed here seem to prove this, but also hint at close relations of Pre-Mongolian Rus' with Western culture.

Zwei wenig bekannte vormongolische Medallions aus *Cloisonné*-Email in der Rüstkammer des Moskauer Kremls: Zu den Besonderheiten der denominativen Inschriften von Mariendarstellungen in der Kunst der vormongolischen Rus'

Die Rüstkammer im Moskauer Kreml beherbergt zwei russische Medallions des 12. Jhs. in *Cloisonné*-Email aus der Zeit vor dem Mongolensturm. Bei dem einen handelt es sich um ein goldenes Medaillon aus dem Schatzfund von Rjazan', das die Inschrift A/M//PH/A – ά(γία) M(α)ρ<ί>α trägt (oder Mαρ<ί>α, je nach Leserichtung), im Gegensatz zu MP ΘΥ, Mētēr Theou, »Mutter Gottes«. Der Handwerker hat hier möglicherweise die lateinische Inschrift »SCA MARIA« von einem Stück westlichen Ursprungs kopiert.

Auf dem zweiten Email, das sich auf dem Epitachelion des hl. Metropoliten Alexej befindet, ist die Inschrift MP/ΦΑ – M(ά)ρφα zu lesen, höchstwahrscheinlich ein Schreibfehler der griechischen Buchstaben MP/ΘΥ. Die beste Analogie findet sich in der in der Erlöser-Kirche in Neredica, Novgorod (A/ΓΙ/A M/AP/ΘA), vielleicht eine fehlerhafte Wiedergabe von MHP ΘΥ als MAPΘA, in Kombination kyrillischen Schreibweise von »ΑΓΙΑ« (»άγία«).

Der hl. Maxim der Grieche (1475-1556) bemerkte bereits die oft fehlerhafte Schreibweise von MP ΘΥ als »Μαρθα« oder »Μιρθυ«, die er auf die dürftigen Griechischkenntnisse der russischen Handwerker zurückführte. Die beiden hier besprochenen Emails scheinen dies zu bestätigen, weisen aber auch auf enge Beziehungen der Rus' mit dem Westen in der Zeit vor dem Mongolensturm.