

14th-Century Gold Pendilia on a Byzantine Icon of the Hodegetria from the Moscow Kremlin Museums

The gold ornaments that survive from the Late Byzantine period are unique items. Among them are the pendilia that adorn the Byzantine icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria (fig. 1). This icon in the Cathedral of the Annunciation, the domestic church of the rulers of Moscow, was painted in the first third of the 14th century. It is still covered with the silver revetments made at the same time as it was painted in Constantinople or Thessaloniki, and various gold ornaments from the 14th to 16th centuries »added« to it by the grand princesses of Moscow¹. The pair of pendilia attached to Mary's crown were published with the attribution »Byzantium or the Balkans, 15th century«²; however, reasons to revise this have since come to light.

Pendant elements made of precious materials, attached to the headdress and derived from Byzantine pendilia, were an essential part of the ceremonial dress of Russian noblewomen and were known as *rjasy*³. Their artistic peculiarities and typology⁴ are known from archaeological finds of the Pre-Mongolian period (i. e., before the Tatar invasion in the 1230s). We know almost nothing about *rjasy* from the second half of the 13th century to the 15th century, and the *rjasy* of the 16th and 17th centuries belong to a completely different tradition, both in their construction and in the materials used.

An important link, allowing us to bridge the gap in the history of these ornaments, is provided by the *rjasy* of the Kremlin icon, which, judging by repairs to its cover and an exact Russian copy from the last quarter of the 15th century, was already venerated by the princes of Moscow in the 15th century. The gold *rjasy* (fig. 2) are an even earlier witness to this veneration. They are 9.5 cm long⁵, and their upper parts are formed of openwork figures of eagles, the sides of these being formed of broad ribbons, with very fine twisted wires welded onto the outlines, and the details of the figures made of similar wire. In the middle of the birds, there are openwork hemispheres made of segments of dou-

bled twisted wire, which are surmounted by tiny gold balls and each surrounded by a row of pearls. Attached to three loops at the bottom of the eagles' wings and tails are strings of pearls interspersed with rings made of gold balls welded together, and long openwork tubes; the *rjasy* end in tassels of complex strings of pearls.

There is nothing analogous to the luxurious *rjasy* of the Kremlin icon in Byzantine art, only partial parallels to the hemispheres in the middle of them, found in adornments of the Middle Byzantine period⁶, and likewise in Old Russian ones from the 13th century⁷ and those from the Golden Horde from the 14th century⁸.

There are no tubular elements in the Old Russian gold and silver tassel-shaped *rjasy* of the Pre-Mongolian period; in them the pendant chains alternated with beads in the form of spheres, teardrops, crescents, rosettes and circles (fig. 3). Both the upper parts and the beads of these *rjasy* were decorated with very fine wire, but there were no three-dimensional details made only of wire, and pearls are known to have been used only in one gold pendant found in 1958 in Černihiv⁹. There were no zoomorphic elements in the composition of these *rjasy*, which were typical of the *rjasy* of the 16th and 17th centuries, which often have their upper part in the form of a bird (a »little eagle«), and also little birds in their strings of pearls, as a result of which *rjasy* or earrings of this type came to be known as *orlički* or *orliki* (»little eagles«). There has been no research on the origin of this type of jewellery. Depictions of birds are among the most ancient motifs for earrings and pendilia, and we find such depictions in Byzantine earrings. However, three-dimensional openwork figures of birds are typical of the jewellery of the Middle East and Mongol Empire, as are other openwork three-dimensional elements of very fine twisted wire.

There are exact parallels to the details of the *rjasy* of the Kremlin icon in archaeological finds. Two gold openwork

1 Moscow Kremlin Museum, inv. no. Ж-1759/1-2. Dimensions 38 cm × 29.52 cm. For the description and bibliography of the icon and its adornments see: Sterligova, Kremlin Museums 340-346 no. 82.

2 Ibidem 340.

3 In the literature they are often called *rjasny*, but in Medieval documents only *rjasy*.

4 Rjabceva, Drevnerusskie ženskie 207.

5 The *rjasy* are slightly damaged, and the right-hand one has a hole with a loss of metal; the pearls were re-threaded in 1980.

6 Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Byzantinischer Schmuck cat. no. 217, 220. – Albani, Elegance 207 pl. 24.

7 The golden headband from the first third of the 13th c. found in 1988 in the grounds of St Michael's Monastery in Kiev: Pekarska, Jewellery Kiev 213 pl. 8.3.

8 Dated to the first half of the 14th c. See Sokrovišča Zolotoj Ordji: Katalog vystavji 309 no. 403-409.

9 Zolota skarbničja Ukraini 157 no. 105 (dated »12th-early 13th century«).



Fig. 1 Mother of God Hodegetria, icon with chased cover, Byzantium, first third of the 14th century, Moscow Kremlin Museums. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

beads in the form of tubes of fine twisted wire (fig. 4) were found in Novgorod in a 14th-century stratum¹⁰. Each consists of six loops radiating from the rings at the ends and forming a sort of rosette, between which there are four rows of tiny rings, which, on the larger bead, are further separated by horizontal rows of wire. The carefulness of the work and the high quality of the welding, which allowed the artistic effect to be achieved with little expense of metal, show them to be the work of a highly skilled jeweller. The tubes of the Kremlin *rjasy* are analogous in form to those from Novgorod, but the »rosettes« at the end are formed of eight loops and between them there are three rows of figures of eight separated by horizontal rows of filigree. The similarity of technique and style leaves no doubt that the Novgorod tubes were part of a similar ornament, made at the same centre as the Kremlin *rjasy*.

Very similar to the *rjasy* of the Kremlin icon is a gold pendant in the form of a bird (fig. 5) and an openwork tube (fig. 6) found in the Volga region, in the territory of the Volga Bulgar *ulus* of the Golden Horde, from the 2010 Bulgar hoard, which is firmly dated to 1310-1380¹¹. They are also made of fine wire, but smooth, not twisted, and of gold ribbons, like the ribbons on the sides of the »little eagles« of the Kremlin, though executed less carefully than the latter, and they also have loops for attaching strings of pearls. Like the two tubes from Novgorod, the Bulgar gold details have no parallels among the products of local jewellers and were imported from the East: unregulated trade and the absence of borders within the Golden Horde stimulated the flow of Eastern jewellery into Volga Bulgar territories. It is not clear where these imports came from, but the Mongol viceroys at Bulgar acquired much jewellery from Central Asia and Iran. All that is clear is that the Kremlin icon *rjasy* make it possible to reconstruct the original appearance of the ornaments of which the pieces found at Bulgar formed a part.

The unique and fragmentary character of all these finds leaves open the question of the precise origin of the *rjasy* of the Kremlin icon. The typology of later Russia pearl pendilia quite definitely indicates a fashion that appeared and became widespread in Rus' while it was subject to the Golden Horde. Here, as in other countries conquered by the Juchids, there was quite a swift change in the leading elements of elite fashion. In the 14th century, the princes of Rus' became part of the elite of the Golden Horde and spent long periods at the Khan's encampment. Belonging to the aristocracy of the Horde clearly defined their external attributes: a tributary ruler was issued with a charter, which was confirmed by the Khan's grant, expressed in the gift of a quiver, sword or sabre, headdress, robe or kaftan, and belt¹². Female ornaments were also included in these gifts. High-status Old Russian



Fig. 2 Mother of God Hodegetria icon. Detail: gold *rjasy*, Middle East or Central Asia, 14th century. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

jewellery from as early as the second half of the 13th century has been discovered among archaeological finds from the territory of the Volga Bulgars, conquered by the Mongols. Researchers connect its appearance there with the visits of Russian princes to the encampment of Batu Khan¹³. Similarly, jewellery from the Horde found its way to Russian territories. The sources record 69 journeys to the Horde by 26 princes in the first half of the 14th century; six marriages between Russian princes and noblewomen from the Horde are also known¹⁴. Pearl pendilia may have been part of the Khans' gifts.

At this time, the fashion for earrings and pendilia abundantly decorated with pearls, which had been introduced

10 Novgorod Museum and Heritage Site, no. КП 40618-19 and no. КП 45652-172, measuring 2.2 cm × 0.6 cm and 1.6 cm × 0.5 cm.

11 Rudenko, *Bulgarskoe srebro* 110 fig. 209; 222 fig. 366. I am very grateful to Konstantin Rudenko for providing me with photographs.

12 Seleznev, *Russkie knjaz'ja* 178.

13 Makarova, *Drevnej Rusi* 109-110 no. 299-307.

14 Seleznev, *Russkie knjaz'ja* 153.



Fig. 3 Centre: reconstruction of pendilia from beads. Left and right: 11th- and 12th-century gold *rjasy* found in Novgorod, Novgorod Museum, inv. no. КП. 25295-268, КП 26518-532, КП 33174/15, КП 33174/16, КП 25293-160 (© I. A. Sterligova).

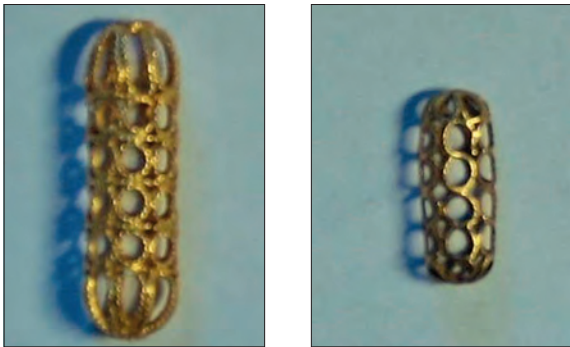


Fig. 4 Gold tubiform beads found at Novgorod, 14th century, Novgorod Museum and Heritage Site, inv. nos КП 40618-19, КП 45652-172. – (© Novgorod Museum and Heritage Site).



Fig. 6 Gold filigree bead found in 2010 at Bulgar, Bilär State Historical and Art Museum and Heritage Site, inv. no. 1342/412 apx. – (Photo K. A. Rudenko).



Fig. 5 Details of gold pendant ornaments found in 2010 at Bulgar, Bilär State Historical and Art Museum and Heritage Site, inv. no. 1341/412 apx. – (Photo K. A. Rudenko).



Fig. 7 A Mongol empress. Miniature from 14th-century China, Yuan Dynasty. National Palace Museum Taipei, Taiwan. – (From Cat. Bonn cat. no. 348).



Fig. 8 Gold *rjasy* from an unknown icon of the Mother of God, 14th century, Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-2643/1-2. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).



Fig. 10 Gold *rjasy* from an Old Russian icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria, 14th century, Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-9026/1-2. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).



Fig. 9 Gold *rjasy* from an Old Russian icon of the Mother of God Bogoljubskaja, 14th-15th century, Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-6200/1-2. – (© Moscow Kremlin Museums).

from China, was becoming widespread in the Golden Horde. They are believed to be derived from the symbolically significant ornaments of the Chinese empresses. The wearing of earrings and of pendilia on their headdresses of the empresses of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) is reflected in the miniatures painted by Chinese artists at that time (fig. 7)¹⁵. Small golden *rjasy*, like those depicted in the miniature, adorned one of the icons in the Cathedral of the Annunciation¹⁶, the domestic church of the princes and tsars of Moscow, for several centuries (fig. 8). Regarding the technique, their openwork beads are close to the beads of the *rjasy* of the Hodegetria, and to the beads from Novgorod and from the Bulgar hoard. There are similar ones taken from the small 14th-century Kremlin icon (no longer extant) of the Mother of God Bogoljubskaja¹⁷ (fig. 9). A few extremely similar tubular beads are preserved as part of the small gold *rjasy* that used

to adorn a no longer extant icon of the Mother of God from the Cathedral of the Annunciation¹⁸ (fig. 10). Judging by the description of the adornments of this revered icon¹⁹, they may have been made in the 14th century. Both the beads and the heads of the *rjasy* from this icon, like the beads of the *rjasy* from the Byzantine icon, are decorated with »figures of eight« made of fine wire. All these *rjasy* were adornments added to a votive icon of the Mother of God belonging to the Muscovite princely family, which had been transferred to the church from their chambers, and had originally served as pendilia on the princesses' crown, indicative of their status.

The pendilia of the Kremlin icon are thus a surviving example of the 14th-century gold ornaments that were in fashion from Iran or Central Asia. They were imported into Rus' in the Mongol period and were the starting-point for the distribution of pearl *rjasy* in Muscovy.

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15 Cat. Bonn 2005, cat. no. 348.

16 Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-2643/1-2, length 11 cm; MP-6200/1-2, length 9 cm.

17 Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-6200/1-2, length 9 cm. See Carskij chram: Svatyni Blagoveščenskogo sobora v Kremle 104 no. 12.

18 Moscow Kremlin Museums, inv. no. MP-9026/1-2, length 10.5 cm; see ibidem 126-127 no. 23.

19 The inventory books of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow, 17th c., published in Archiv, second pagination, 12.

Summary / Zusammenfassung

14th-Century Gold Pendilia on a Byzantine Icon of the Hodegetria from the Moscow Kremlin Museums

This chapter concerns the attribution of golden pendants (*rjasy*) fixed on the crown of a Byzantine Hodegetria icon formerly belonging to a Muscovite Great Princess. Analogous details of gold decorations were found in Bilär (Volga Bulgaria) and Novgorod the Great that are dated to the 14th century from the archaeological context. This allowed a change in the dating of the pendants and connects this type of decoration with an oriental fashion spread in Rus' in the period of the Golden Horde. Furthermore, it fills the gap in the history of the development of ancient pendilia (*rjasy*) as a ceremonial headdress and changes the dating of several pearl pendants in the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums.

Goldanhänger des 14. Jahrhunderts an einer byzantinischen Hodegetria-Ikone im Moskauer Kremlin Museum

Dieser Aufsatz ist der Einordnung goldener Anhänger (*rjasy*) gewidmet, die an der Haube einer byzantinischen Hodegetria-Ikone befestigt sind, welche sich ursprünglich im Besitz einer Moskauer Großfürstin befand. Analoge Golddekorationen sind in Bilar (Wolgabulgarien) und Nowgorod gefunden worden und können aufgrund ihres archäologischen Kontexts in das 14. Jahrhundert datiert werden. Diese Funde erlauben eine Neudatierung der Anhänger und verbinden sie mit einer orientalischen Mode, die sich in der Rus' zur Zeit der Goldenen Horde verbreitete. Weiterhin füllen sie die Lücke in der Entwicklung der alten Pendilien (*rjasy*) als zeremoniellem Kopfschmuck und ändern die Datierung einiger Perlenanhänger in der Sammlung der Moskauer Kremlin Museen.