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ATTRIBUTION
OF K&IV ICONOGRAPHIC MILITAR& BANNERS
FROM THE COLLECTION
OF THE SWEDISH ARM& MUSEUM

Attribution of Kyiv Iconographic Military Banners from the Collection of the Swedish Army Museum

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Abstract

The article analyses the captured iconographic military banners from the collection of the Swedish Army Museum (Armémuseum, Stockholm), that are currently identified as “Russian”. More than 52 specimens were attributed to Ukrainian artists. . These works were divided into 15 iconographic types. Our comparative analysis reveals that the icons have commonalities with the works of the Zhovkva and Kyiv icon schools. The artistic style suggests that the authors belonged to a group of three masters, one of whom was recognised through his signature - “Tykhovets Petro Kyrylovych, the painter of Kyiv”. Given that most works bear no vexillological signs of belonging to specific military formations or units, it is proposed to consider these works as masterpieces of the Ukrainian Baroque. Their classification as “Russian” is justified solely by a financial transaction – the purchase – and the factual use.

Keywords: Attribution, Swedish Army Museum, Great Northern War, Ukrainian icon painting, Zhovkva school of icon painting, Lavra Icon Painting Workshop, Petro Tykhovets, Cossack banners, Ukrainian philately, horuhva (gonfalon), Battle of Saločiai, Battle of Narva, Aleksei Obukhov, Cossack Baroque.

Introduction

In the cultural and artistic dimension of the Great Northern War (1700–1721), the originality and continuity of Ukrainian traditions remain clearly traceable despite the colonizing influence of the Russian Empire. Vexillological monuments represent one such manifestation. To date, a significant number of Cossack banners dated the 17th-18th centuries have been preserved, both created by Ukrainian masters and provided by foreign rulers.

The banners in the collection of the Swedish Army Museum in Stockholm, captured during the Great Northern War as war trophies, are of particular scientific interest. The artifacts identified as Cossack pieces were thoroughly researched by Yu. Savchuk in his study titled *The Odyssey of Cossack Flags*. The museum also houses a collection of banners captured by the Swedish Army in the battles of Narva (1700) and Saločiai (1703), where Russian troops suffered defeats. Currently, these exhibits are identified and attributed to Russia. Our study discovered that a number of these iconographic military banners is attributable to the Kyiv master Petro Tykhovets. An in-depth analysis of these works reveals that 17th-century Ukrainian icon painting and its role in the formation of Ukrainian vexillology remain significantly understudied.

Research objectives. To investigate the iconographic military banners that are identified as Russian but possess distinct features of Ukrainian paintings. To classify and attribute the available works by tracing them to specific painters.

Materials and Methods. The work references the digital reproductions from the collection of the Swedish Army Museum accessible through the DigitaltMuseum.org portal and the images of Ukrainian icons from the Icon.org.ua online gallery. This research is based on comparative, formal-stylistic, iconographic, and cultural-historical methods of analysis.

Results and discussion

We conducted a comparative analysis of the captured banners from the battles of Saločiai and Narva. As a result, over 52 specimens were identified as works of Ukrainian icon painters. We classified the banners thematically and by inventory numbers:

“Mother of God of Tenderness”: AM.082482.

“Mother of God of the Sign”: AM.082109.

“Mother of God of the Sign of Novgorod”: AM.082483.

“The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army”: AM.082480.

“The Coronation of the Virgin” / “The Tree of Jesse”: AM.082133.

“St. Michael the Archangel”: AM.082122.

“St. Michael the Archangel Overcoming the Devil”: AM.083099.

“St. Michael the Archangel, the Commander of the Heavenly Forces”: AM.083092.

“The Crucifixion of Christ”: AM.082486, AM.082485.

“St. Theodore Stratelates”: AM.083230, AM.083219, AM.083221, AM.083213, AM.083222, AM.083232, AM.083223, AM.083224, AM.083225, AM.083217, AM.083216, AM.083228.

“St. Nicholas of Mohyliv”: AM.083203, AM.083194, AM.083196, AM.083193, AM.083186, AM.083198, AM.083201, AM.083199, AM.083184, AM.083188, AM.083202, AM.09331, AM.093314.

“St. Demetrius of Thessalonica”: AM.083209, AM.083204, AM.083207, AM.083210, AM.083206, AM.083208, AM.083211.

“The Vision of Constantine”: AM.083235, AM.083245, AM.083242, AM.083236, AM.083243, AM.083240, AM.083244, AM.083241, AM.083246.

“St. John the Warrior”: AM.082121.

Most of the selected banners contain purely iconographic and decorative elements without vexillological signs of belonging to specific military formations or states. In fact, they can be regarded as Russian only by the circumstances of purchase and situational use. We propose that these and similar banners were likely used by the Ukrainian Cossacks.

The banner “The Coronation of the Virgin” / “The Tree of Jesse” (AM.082133) is author-signed and dated 1693. The piece was signed by “Tykhovets Petro Kyrylovych, painter of Kyiv” (Fig. 1) and made for the Moscow cavalry regiment of Aleksei Lavrentiyevich Obukhov, then stationed in Kyiv. In total, three banners with signatures confirming affiliation with the Obukhov regiment were found in the collection. Considering the prominent role of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra workshops and the extended presence of Obukhov’s regiment in Kyiv, we maintain that the listed specimens were most likely produced in Kyiv. It is also likely that ethnic Ukrainians were part of the regiment.

A comparative analysis of the banners “The Coronation of the Virgin”, “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army”, “St. Michael the Archangel Overcoming the Devil”, “Mother of God of Tenderness”, and “The Crucifixion of Christ” demonstrates that the composition, proportions of figures, and specific characteristics of drapery, architecture, and floral decor are analogous to Western Ukrainian painting tradition of the second half of the 17th century. The carnation (flesh tones) sections are particularly expressive. The faces of the angels are close to the images on such icons as “The Holy Face” (Lubaczów Iconostasis, Przemyśl), “The Holy Face” by Ivan Rutkovych (Lviv National Art Gallery named after B. Voznytskyi), “The Synaxis of the St. Michael the Archangel” of 1655 in the village of Volia Vysotska (Fig. 2), and “The Synaxis of the St. Michael the Archangel” by Ivan Rutkovych from circa 1685–1687 from the Church of the St. Michael the Archangel in the village of Stara Skvariava. The modeling of the faces of Emmanuel and the Mother of God, as well as the floral decor on the banner “Mother of God of Tenderness”, are similar to the icon “Mother of God of the Unfading Bloom” from the late 17th century (private collection, Poland) (Fig. 3). The composition and iconography of the banner “The Crucifixion of Christ” echo the 1683 wall paintings in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Lviv (Fig. 5).

Iconographic military pennants captured during the Narva Battle with depictions of Saints Theodore, Nicholas, Demetrius, and The Vision of Constantine also have a number of common traits. They share similar composition, execution techniques, and approaches to facial rendering. It is worth noting that the basis of the figures is silvered, over which colored varnishes or oil were applied. Facial depictions of Saint Nicholas resemble those found in Western Ukrainian art of the second half of the 17th century, specifically the icons “Saint Nicholas” by the Ostroh Master (State Historical and Cultural Reserve of Ostroh) and by Yov Kondzelevych from the Bohorodchany Iconostasis (National Museum in Lviv). The painting style of the researched works combines features of both the Kyiv and Zhovkva schools. That can be explained by painters’ intense migration and the workshop (artel) system of labor in Kyiv at that time.

The examined specimens have a number of distinctive traits that consistently suggest they were made within one and the same icon-painting workshop. However, determining authorship is not without complications. If one is to assume that the customer received all the banners in 1693, it may possibly lead to a conclusion that some of them were created much earlier. Furthermore, the faces vary in sizes quite substantially. Given the amount of work, we may also conclude that a few banners were made in haste. We thus classified the faces, the most expressive and distinctive element of icon painting, into three groups.

The first group includes the most visually elaborate faces featuring Baroque-style round-cheeked and flushed faces. This group includes the icons “The Coronation of the Virgin and the Tree of Jesse”, “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army”, “St. Michael the Archangel Overcoming the Devil”, as well as side “A” of the “Mother of God of Tenderness”, and the “Crucifixion of Christ” AM.082486. We attribute these to P. Tykhovets.

The second group includes the faces that are almost identical but somewhat more elongated, ascetic, and pale, examples being the “Crucifixion of Christ” AM.082485 and side “B” of the “Mother of God of Tenderness”. These differences lead us to conclude that those could have been executed by a different master.

Somewhat naive, graphic faces, which bear similarities in certain ways to the works of the Rybotychi school of icon painting make up the third group. It is worth noting that most elements on the pennants (such as garments, horse, armor etc.) are executed in the same manner. Given that some of them feature quite professionally rendered faces, it can be assumed that these specific works were executed by a group of masters. Notably, a number of specimens have significant losses of original authorial paint on the faces, so their attribution can only be established through the drapery and related elements. The “Mother of God of the Sign of Novgorod” lost nearly all faces, but the vestments suggest one and the same workshop origin.

The images of Nicholas of Mohyliv on a number of pennants, particularly AM.093314 and AM.083188, are very close in color palette, proportions, and modeling to the image of the Lord Sabaoth on the signed banner “The Coronation of the Virgin” and the image of the old Egyptian on the drowning horse in “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army” (Fig. 6). We thus hypothesize that the author of the cited works is Petro Tykhovets, who was assisted by one or two masters. In all evidence, all the works could have been manufactured within a single order for the Obukhov regiment. Serial productions of iconographic military banners were common during this period, maintaining a certain level of artistic individuality.

A number of banners with an apocalyptic depiction of the Mother of God against the background of the Moscow Kremlin deserves a separate mention (10 such exhibits were

found). Most of them were created following Russian icon painting, typical of the time. However, the specimen AM.082103 depicts the face of the Mother of God in an emphasized painterly manner, bearing a semblance to P. Tykhovets (Fig. 7). This invites the assumption that the banner, initially created by Russian masters, could have been subsequently reworked by a Ukrainian artist.

The banners “St. Michael the Archangel” AM.082122 and “St. John the Warrior” AM.082121 stand out for their high Baroque craftsmanship. Their style is characteristic of the Kyiv Pechersk school of icon painting, which is confirmed by the 1740s icon “St. George” from the Church of the Ascension in the village of Berezny (National Art Museum of Ukraine) and by educational drawings from the Lavra model books (*kuzhbushki*) of the early 18th century. This allows us to assume that they are latest-dated among the examined specimens. The banner “Mother of God of the Sign” AM.082109, taken in the Battle of Saločiai, is also attributed to this period, despite the greater asceticism of its style. The icons on these three banners are integrated into the vexillological scheme inherent to the Moscow musketeers (*streltsy*), notably the border with an upright St. George’s cross dividing the plane into four parts (Fig. 8). However, the banner “Mother of God of the Sign” has a unique feature - the sun depicted to the left of the Mother of God, and the moon with “steppe” crosses to the right. Both are the characteristic symbols of the Zaporozhian Sich.

The banners “John the Warrior” AM.082448 and “Saint Michael the Archangel, the Commander of the Heavenly Forces” AM.083092 stand out prominently. The first one was created by Stanislav Loputskyi, an artist of the Armoury Chamber, who might have been of Western Ukrainian origin. The similarities of these works lead to conclude that they were created either within the same workshop or by the same artist in Moscow. It is also worth noting that several banners devoid of iconographic features nevertheless display stylistic characteristics typical of the Kyiv Pechersk workshop.

For example, the pennants with inscriptions and a star-shaped cross, analogous to AM.083316, refer to the legend of Emperor Constantine.

Conclusions

The researched iconographic military banners from the collection of the Swedish Army Museum are attributable to the Kyiv painters. They are divided into 15 iconographic types, namely “Mother of God of Tenderness”, “Mother of God of the Sign”, “Mother of God of the Sign of Novgorod”, “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army”, “The Coronation of the Virgin”, “The Tree of Jesse”, “St. Michael the Archangel”, “St. Michael the Archangel Overcoming the Devil”, “St. Michael the Archangel, the Commander of the Heavenly Forces”, “The Crucifixion of Christ”, “St. Theodore Stratelates”, “St. Nicholas of Mohyliv”, “St. Demetrius of Thessalonica”, “The Vision of Constantine”, and “St. John the Warrior”.

The analysis of the artistic style leads to the assumption that the icons were painted by three masters, whose works show the influence of Western Ukrainian icon painting. The only artist to sign his works was Petro Kyrylovych Tykhovets. The works under study date to circa 1693.

The vast majority of specimens are devoid of military emblems. However, a few specific symbols characteristic of the Cossacks and the later specimens of Cossack iconographic military banners suggest that similar banners may have been used by Russian troops as well as by Ukrainian Cossacks.

Furthermore, ethnic Ukrainians could have been part of the musketeer (streltsy) detachments. Within the broader context of the decolonization of Ukrainian history and art, these specimens of Ukrainian Baroque warrant further study. They help form Ukrainian cultural identity in today’s complex historical circumstances.

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Figure sources

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Fig. 5. Comparison of iconography: “The Crucifixion of Christ” (fragment), 1690s. Swedish Army Museum, AM.082486. Photo: Swedish Army Museum [12]; “The Crucifixion of Christ” (fragment), Church of the Holy Trinity, Lviv, 1683 [23].

Fig. 6. Comparison of faces on banners from the Swedish Army Museum. Photo: Swedish Army Museum: “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army” (fragment), 1693, AM.082480 [9]; “St. Michael the Archangel Overcoming the Devil” (fragment), AM.083099 [15]; “The Crucifixion of Christ” (fragment), AM.082485 [11]; “St. Theodore Stratelates” (fragment), AM.083222 [20]; “St. Demetrius of Thessalonica” (fragment), AM.083206 [17]; “St. Theodore Stratelates” (fragment), AM.083213 [18]; “St. Nicholas of Mohyliv” (fragment), AM.093314 [14]; “The Drowning of Pharaoh’s Army” (fragment), 1693, AM.082480 [9]; P. Tykhovets, “The Coronation of the Virgin” (fragment), 1693, Swedish Army Museum, AM.082133 [8].

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Figures



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