

AN EVALUATION OF THE SKLADEN ICONS IN THE AKŞEHİR NASREDDİN HODJA ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM IN TERMS OF ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE

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Abstract

Metalwork is one of the significant handicrafts reflecting the social, cultural, and artistic characteristics of societies. This study aims to introduce two metal icons from the collection of the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum, which have not been previously included in any scientific study. Although the provenances of these two metal artifacts—acquired by the museum through purchase—are unknown, it is understood that they belonged to the Don (Russian) Cossacks who settled in Akşehir and its surroundings. In this study, the artifacts are analyzed in terms of iconography and style, compared with similar examples, and dating suggestions are proposed. Scenes containing important themes of Orthodox iconography on the icons are evaluated alongside Byzantine examples, and the influence of Byzantine icons on Russian icons is discussed through these specimens. By examining the stylistic and iconographic features of skladen icons, of which only a few examples are known in Anatolia, this study aims to contribute to the literature regarding the cultural heritage of the Don (Russian) Cossacks living in Akşehir and its vicinity.

Keywords: Don (Russian) Cossacks, Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum, Russian Icons, Skladen Icons, Christian Iconography.

Introduction

In this study, two metal icons from the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum², whose provenances are unknown, are analyzed in detail regarding their technical, decorative, and compositional characteristics. Skladen icons³, which consist of three or four folding metal panels and are characterized by their small, portable nature, are known to have been used as travel icons⁴ in homes, private chapels⁵, or during pilgrimages. The skladen icons examined in our study feature significant scenes from Christian doctrine.

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³ The term icon (Greek *eikon*), meaning "picture" or "image," has been used in a broad sense for all sacred images venerated by Christians in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Thus, icons could consist of various materials such as mosaics, frescoes, marble, metal engravings, or prints on paper. Today, the term icon describes portable sacred images painted on wood, canvas, or glass (Virgil Candea, "Icons," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, (USA, 2005) 7: 4352).

⁴ Portable icons are known to have emerged in Egypt in the 3rd century (Candea, "Icons," 4352).

⁵ "The iconostasis in Orthodox Churches began to take a symbolic place in homes over time. The northeast, southeast, or especially the eastern corner of homes was designated for icons and named the 'icon corner,' 'beautiful corner,' or 'home altar.' This section, located in the most visible part of the house, could also contain a cabinet with icons inside" Alfredo Tradigo. "Icons and saints of the eastern orthodox Church. Translate Stephen Sartarelli, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 33-36).

The study primarily provides information on Russian icons and evaluates the iconographic characteristics of the scenes depicted on these artifacts, while also addressing the influence of Byzantine icon art on Russian icon art. The metal artifacts identified as two distinct skladen icons were compared with similar examples from literature, domestic and international museums, and private collections to propose insights regarding their production centers and periods. This study aims to reveal both the stylistic features of Russian icons and the Byzantine influence inherent in them.

Akşehir, one of the significant settlements in Anatolia, is located on a pilgrimage route extending from Istanbul to Mecca⁶. It is known that the city maintained this importance during the Ottoman period in the 19th century⁷. No data is available regarding the production or find spots of the skladen icons in the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum. According to the history of Akşehir and the census records of the period, Armenians of the Gregorian denomination and Orthodox Greeks⁸ lived in the city alongside Muslims⁹. The Don (Russian) Cossacks¹⁰, who are known to have settled in the Gürsü Village of Akşehir in the 19th century, gain particular importance regarding the specimens that constitute the subject of our study.

Although the exact dates of the arrival of the Don (Russian) Cossacks in Anatolia are not known for certain, archive documents suggest they arrived in 1740¹¹. While some of the Don (Russian) Cossacks—who established the villages of Kocagöl and Bereketli on the shores of Lake Manyas—later settled on Mada Island in Lake Beyşehir, another group coming from Romania, referred to as the Dunaki (those from the Danube) Cossacks, settled in the Gürsü

⁶ Due to pilgrimages, the burial sites and churches of holy figures in Anatolia, Syria, Egypt and Greece, outside the Holy Land, also became major centers of visitation (Ceren Ünal and Zeynep Çakmakçı, "Haluk Perk Müzesi'nden Örnekler Eşliğinde Bizans İmparatorluğu Döneminde İnanç, Münzevi Yaşam, Hac ve Hacılık Kavramları," *Art-Sanat*, 14: (2020): 502. <https://doi.org/10.26650/artsanat.2020.14.0019>).

⁷ Muhittin Tuş, "XIX. yüzyılın ve Anadolu'nun ortasında Akşehir," *Manas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 9 (17), (2007): 117-119.

⁸ Although it is known that the Greeks living in and around Akşehir were settled around Thessaloniki after the population exchange, historical sources indicate that while some Greeks who left for abroad or other cities returned occasionally, they did not return after 1950 (Hüseyin Muşmal, Elif Gündoğdu, "Nüfus Ve Temettuat Defterlerine Göre XIX. yüzyılın Ortalarında Akşehir Kazası Bermende Köyü'nde Yaşayan Rumların Sosyal, Ekonomik ve Demografik Özellikleri," *History Studies*, 13/1, (2021): 131).

⁹ In the general census of 1831, it was determined that out of a total of 797 households in Akşehir, 404 belonged to Muslims and 393 to Christians (Tuş, "XIX. yüzyılın ve Anadolu'nun ortasında Akşehir," 110). At the end of the 19th century, the city's population was around 8,500, and it is known that only two percent of this population consisted of Christians (Elif Gündoğdu, "Nüfus ve Temettuat Defterlerine Göre Akşehir Kaza Merkezi," (master's thesis, Selçuk University, 2021), 26, 32-33).

¹⁰ "These are the Russian Cossacks, referred to as "Kossak, Kosak, and Kozak," and should not be confused with the Turkic Kazakhs (Servet Somuncuoğlu, *Don Kazakları*, (Istanbul: Matbuat Yayın Grubu, 2018), 54). Russian Cossacks are divided into three groups: those settled on the Dnieper are called Zaporozhian Cossacks, those around the Don River are Don Cossacks, and those living around the Terek River are Terek Cossacks. Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks migrated to Turkey. Don Cossacks in Turkey have also been called Manyas and Akşehir Cossacks (Hüseyin Muşmal, Kübra Benli, "Osmanlı Dönemi'nde Beyşehir Mada Adası'na Yerleştirilen Rus Kazakları," in *Geçmişten Günümüze Göçler*, Konya Kitabı XVII, Vol. 2, eds. Alaattin Aköz, Doğan Yörük, and Haşim Karpuz, (Konya Konya Ticaret Odası Yayınları, 2019) 108-109.)

¹¹ Tsar Peter I's pressure on religious matters and the increase in taxes levied on the public led the people to revolt; the Cossacks first fled to the Don region to seek refuge with the Cossacks living there. After Peter I sent an army there and plundered the settlement, the Don Cossacks fled the state's pressures in 1709 and took refuge in the Ottoman Empire. After 1737, the Don (Russian) Cossacks arrived in Bandırma by sea and established a village named Kocagöl in Manyas (Muşmal and Benli, 108-113; Feride İmrana Altun, "Bandırma Müzesi'nde Bulunan Don (Rus) Kazakları'na ait iki İkona," in *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimlerde Teori ve Araştırmalar II*, ed. Serdar Öztürk, Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, (2020): 79).

village of Akşehir. According to Ottoman archival documents, the Öcal locality of Akşehir, where the Don (Russian) Cossacks from Romania, Bandırma, and Beyşehir arrived in 1883, was named "Kazak Köyü" (Cossack Village). It is known that some of the Cossacks settled in Akşehir were those previously relocated to the Danube region and those from Manyas who wished to migrate there voluntarily, and this community lived on Anatolian lands until 1963¹². Based on the material, technical, and iconographic characteristics of the icons examined, it is understood that they belonged to the Don (Russian) Cossacks who settled in Akşehir and adopted the Orthodox faith.

Icons, which adopt divine reality as a principle in life and are considered a means of communication reminding one of the spiritual realms, have become an inseparable and complementary element of worship in the Christian religion. As a religious educational tool for the illiterate, icons serve as the visual reflection of the Holy Scripture¹³. Orthodox icons are evaluated in two distinct groups: "Devotional Icons"¹⁴ and "Complementary and Didactic Icons"¹⁵. The idea that one can reach the truth behind the image by integrating with the depictions of Orthodox icons has bestowed a distinct quality upon devotional icons. In these icons, which reflect the essence and spirit of the Orthodox faith, only depictions of sacred persons are featured¹⁶.

It is thought that the emergence of sacred images in the Christian church during the 2nd and 3rd centuries was influenced by the Greek tradition. It is known that initially, churches used only symbols such as the cross and the lamb. However, with the development of Christian icon painting in the Byzantine Empire after the 4th century, icon veneration became quite widespread by the 6th century, a period when scenes from the miracles and life of Christ, the lives of saints, and themes related to the history of the Christian church emerged. Nevertheless, the miraculous powers attributed to certain icons and the identification of icons with the characters they represented in the minds of believers led to reactions from some church fathers. This situation resulted in the destruction of a large number of icons in places under the rule of Byzantine Emperors during the Iconoclasm period that began in the 8th century. Following the official acceptance of the veneration of icons in 843, icons became widespread not only in the Byzantine Empire but also in regions where the Eastern Orthodox Church was active, such as the Balkan Peninsula and Russia¹⁷.

Orthodox iconography continued its influence after the fall of the Byzantine State, strengthening particularly after the Orthodox Church gained its independence and affecting a

¹² Sinan Kıyaç, "Uluslararası Boyutu ile Don Kazaklarının Türkiye'den Göçü," *Bandırma Onyediy Eylül Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4 (2021): 135-138.

¹³ M. Alparşlan Küçük, "İkonografiden İnanca İsa Mesih'in Dirilişi/Paskalya Süreci," *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Special Issue, (2016): 233; M. Alparşlan Küçük and Emin Arslan, "Ortodoks İkonalarında Bir Ölüm Motifi: 'Meryem Ana'nın Ölümü'," *Mukaddime*, 9 (1), (2018): 58. <https://doi.org/10.19059/mukaddime.377216>

¹⁴ Among such icons, those of Jesus, Mary, and Saint John the Baptist hold great importance as elements of worship in the iconostasis of Orthodox Churches (Tayfun Akkaya, *Ortodoks İkonaları Genel Bir Bakış*, (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2000) 11.

¹⁵ In these icons, which take their subjects from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the lives of Mary, saints, and martyrs, the "Twelve Great Feasts" (Dodekaorton)—dogmatically accepted by Byzantine theologians from the events in the Gospels—are among the most commonly depicted subjects. These are: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Raising of Lazarus, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Dormition of the Mother of God. As these themes involve more than one figure, they are also referred to as multi-figured icons (Akkaya, *Ortodoks İkonaları*, 10-11).

¹⁶ Tayfun Akkaya, *Ortodoks İkonaları Genel Bir Bakış*, (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2000), 10.

¹⁷ Candea, "Icons", 4352.

very wide geography. In Russia, Slavic art came under the powerful influence of Byzantium at the end of the 10th century, which would last for five hundred years. Byzantine icons served as a model for Russian icon art¹⁸.

It is known that after the Russians adopted Christianity in 988, artists and artworks were sent from the Byzantine Empire to Russia¹⁹. Among the earliest icons imported to Russia, only works of Byzantine origin from the 11th century have been preserved. In the same century, the first local icon-making centers began to emerge, initially in Kiev and subsequently in Novgorod and Vladimir-Suzdal. It is known that the first masters were Byzantine, but soon after, a distinct Russian style began to take shape; this style evolved from a spiritualist and ascetic attitude toward naturalism in search of artistic and didactic effects. The Council of the Hundred Chapters (Stoglavny Sobor), which convened in Moscow in 1551, reacted against the penetration of Western elements into the art of icon painting and established strict, mandatory rules that painters had to follow. This led to a proliferation of manuscripts providing authorized versions of sacred images²⁰. In the 16th and 17th centuries, old traditions were on the verge of extinction due to a decline in the quality of Russian metal icon production. In 1723, during the reign of Peter the 1st (1672-1725), the Holy Synod of the Eastern Orthodox Church prohibited the use of icons made of copper alloy in churches and homes²¹. This situation led to the confiscation of all copper-alloy icons produced before the decree; to protect their sacred relics, many Russians sent their copper-alloy icons across the border²². Furthermore, with this decree, it was decided that icons other than pectoral crosses would be collected for church needs, and the production and sale of such icons were prohibited. However, despite the ban, metal crosses and folding icons, which were revered among the people, continued to be produced. In the early 18th century, Russian metal icon production experienced its golden age once again²³.

18th and 19th century icons moved away from their original characteristics under the influence of Western painting. In 19th century Russian icons, the influences of Persian and Buddhist painting can also be traced. However, within the same century, a new style emerged in Russia that sought to keep the commitment to traditional elements alive. In Russian Orthodox icons, an effort was made to adhere to traditional iconography particularly until the 20th century²⁴. It is known that along with wood, metal icons were also widely produced in Russian icon art. Among the metal icons, skladden icons were used alongside single-piece icons in square or rectangular forms. Since skladden icons, generally made of bronze and brass, were cheaper than wooden icons and could be mass-produced, it was possible for masters to create hundreds of copies of the same scene²⁵. It is known that folding Russian skladden icons were produced in large quantities between the 18th century and the early 20th century and were widely used in Russia²⁶.

¹⁸ Tayfun Akkaya, "Ortodoks İkonografyasının Özü ve Bizans İkonalarının Rus İkonalarına Etkisi," in Uluslararası "Sanatta Etkileşim" Sempozyumu, Bildiriler, ed. Zeynep Yasa Yaman (Ankara: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2000), 28.

¹⁹ Regan D. Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven: Russian Icons of the Brown Collection," *The Arbutus Review*, 3/1, (2012): 92.

²⁰ Candeia, "Icons", 4354.

²¹ S. V Gnutova. E.YZotova. КРЕСТЫ, ИКОНЫ, СКЛАДНИ: МЕДНОЕ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЕ ЛИТЬЕ XI - НАЧАЛА XX ВЕКА (Crosses, icons, folding icons: Artistic copper casting of the 11th - early 20th centuries)", (Словения: Гореньски Тиск, 2000); Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 95.

²² Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 95.

²³ Gnutova and Zotova. " КРЕСТЫ, ИКОНЫ, СКЛАДНИ"; Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 95.

²⁴ Akkaya, *Ortodoks İkonaları*, 18.

²⁵ Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 94.

²⁶ Gnutova ve Zotova. *КРЕСТЫ, ИКОНЫ, СКЛАДНИ*, (no page number).

METAL ARTIFACTS IN THE AKŞEHİR NASREDDIN HODJA ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM

Plaque/Skladen Icon Fragment with Inventory Number 72-84

The front side of the plaque (height: 5 cm, width: 4.4 cm, thickness: 0.3 cm) with inventory number 72-84 in the museum collection features the scene of the "Presentation of Christ in the Temple," while the back side depicts the City of Jerusalem (Figure 1-4). On the front side, the composition is presented within a rectangular frame. At the center stands the figure of the Virgin Mary, followed by Joseph holding turtle doves to be sacrificed and another figure depicted with a halo. The composition is divided into two by a decorated column located above the Virgin Mary's head. Opposite the Virgin Mary, Priest Simeon and the Christ Child are positioned on the steps of the temple. While Priest Simeon carries the Christ Child in his arms next to a ciborium altar, Joseph and Mary extend their hands forward, presenting Jesus to the temple official.

The architectural elements in the background of the scene impart a spatial atmosphere to the composition; it is understood that Simeon and the infant Christ are depicted in front of the temple steps, while Mary, Joseph, and the other figure are portrayed outside the temple. A curtain motif is situated between the Child Christ and Mary. Behind Simeon, there is another figure who cannot be clearly discerned due to corrosion, but who is understood to be Anna according to the traditional narrative.



Figure 1: Front side of the metal plaque with inventory number 72-84.

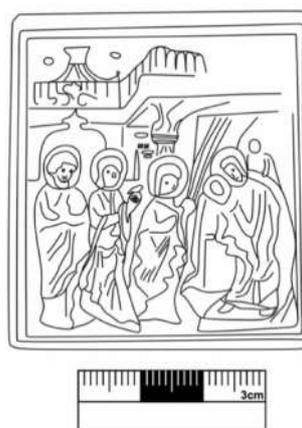


Figure 2: Drawing back side of the metal plaque with inventory number 72-84.

On the back surface of the plaque, the walls and towers of the city of Jerusalem are depicted. The composition is vertically divided by a frame that appears to belong to an elliptical medallion. In the lower-left corner of the plate, an arched design extends diagonally upward, connecting to a domed structure above. The architectural arrangement is vertically bisected by a rod tipped with a sponge soaked in vinegar, which was used to torment Christ on the cross. The monogram "XC" (Χριστός), meaning Christ, is located in the upper-right corner, while the letter T is positioned below. Another architectural element in the composition concludes with a conical roof in the style of a bell tower.



Figure 3: Back side of the metal plaque with inventory number 72-84.



Figure 4: Drawing of the artifact with inventory number 72-84.

Skladen Icon with Inventory Number 73-18

The dimensions (height: 6.9 cm, width: 3.2 cm, thickness: 0.1 cm) and the hinge marks located on the upper and lower sections of the left corner of the rectangular brass artifact (Inv. No. 73-18) in the museum collection indicate that it is the right wing of a foldable skladden icon (Fig. 5, 6). The back surface of the plate is left undecorated. The front surface is divided into two separate horizontal rectangular frames, featuring the scene of the "Anastasis" (Resurrection/Harrowing of Hell) at the top and the "Ascension of Christ" at the bottom.

The upper section of the plate features the Anastasis scene, which depicts the acts of Christ after His death on the cross and His descent into Hell. Christ is portrayed in the center within a mandorla, pulling Adam out of hell with His right hand. To the left of Christ, Eve is shown in a kneeling position, while above Adam, the Prophets David and Solomon are depicted in half-length frontal views, appearing as emperors with crowns on their heads. The details of the figures behind David and Solomon cannot be discerned due to surface corrosion. There are four figures behind Eve. According to the traditional composition, the first figure in the back is understood to be Abel. The other figures, whose facial features are indistinct, are depicted in clerical tunics. Under the feet of Christ are the broken gates representing the entrance to hell. Within Hades, depicted in the form of a cave, the figures other than Adam and Eve are shown either standing or as busts. At the very top, the letters "ОСКРНИЕ" are legible on the left, and "ХРО..." on the right. It is thought that this inscription, which cannot be read as a meaningful whole, consists of incomplete letters of the phrase "ВОСКРЕСЕНИЕ ХРИСТОВО" (Voskreseniye Khristovo), which means "Resurrection of Christ" in Cyrillic.



Figure 5: Front side of the metal skladden icon with inventory number 73-18.



Figure 6: Drawing of the artifact with inventory number 73-18.

In the center of the Ascension of Christ scene in the lower section of the plate, there is a figure of the Virgin Mary in the orans position, flanked by three figures on each side. Mary is depicted in a prayer position, wearing a tunic extending to her ankles and a mantle wrapped around her upper body with ends hanging down from her arms. The two angels on the right and left of Mary are positioned with their heads turned toward the other figures. The hair of the figures and the drapery of their garments are emphasized with linear details. The facial details are largely destroyed. In the upper part of this scene, there is a depiction of Christ ascending to heaven within a mandorla carried by two angels. The inscription "...ХЭНЕСН" is legible on the left and "...МЕ...ИЕ" on the right. Due to corrosion, the text, which contains missing letters, cannot be read meaningfully.

EVALUATION

Icons, which are the visualized forms of Orthodox belief and worship used to perceive the divine power of the depicted entity²⁷, consist of various materials such as metal, wood, or ivory plaques. The specimens examined in our study are Orthodox Russian icons, and both artifacts have been identified as panels belonging to skladden icons. Following the Byzantine icon tradition and bearing the general characteristics of Russian metal icons, these examples were widely produced from the 18th century to the early 20th century.

The artifacts in the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum feature significant scenes of Christian iconography, including the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Hypapante), the Anastasis (Descent into Hell), and the Ascension. Due to the small size of these liturgically and theologically significant works, it is understood that they were personal icons used in homes or private family chapels. Although the find spots of the artifacts—acquired by the museum through purchase—are unknown, information regarding

²⁷ Küçük, "İkonografiden İnanca İsa Mesih'in Dirilişi", 233.

the 18th and 19th century Christian population of the city and the iconographic features of the works shed light on this issue.

In the plaque thought to belong to a skladden icon (Inv. No. 72-84), the scene of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple depicts Joseph and Mary taking the child to Jerusalem to dedicate Him to the Lord²⁸. The scene of the presentation in the temple focuses on the meeting of the Holy Family and Priest Simeon at the temple. The scene of the presentation in the temple focuses on the meeting of the Holy Family and Priest Simeon at the temple. Simeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognized the child as the savior sent by God²⁹, and his hymn of praise was followed by the testimony of the elderly Prophetess Anna³⁰. In the scene, a curtain is generally featured within the temple; according to the account of Isaiah³¹, this motif symbolizes the train of the Lord's robe³².

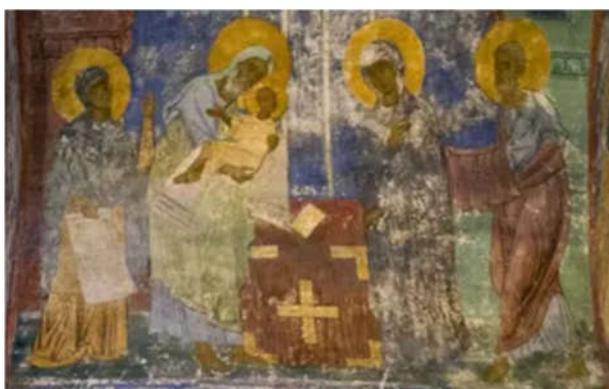


Figure 7: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Pskov Mirozhsky Monastery, 12th century (accessed Nov 01, 2025). (<https://www.dreamstime.com/editorial-image-frescoes-th-century-cathedral-transfiguration-january-transfiguration-monastery-mirozhskkogo-pskov-image84562140>).

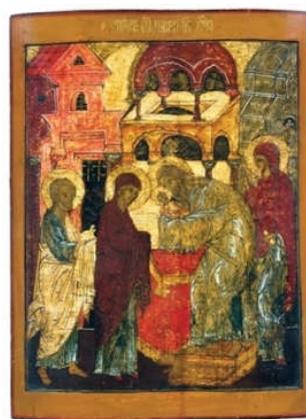


Figure 8: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Tempera, 16th century, Inv. No., Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton (accessed Nov 17, 2025). (https://www.iconmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/R2013_37-1-scaled.webp).

²⁸ According to the narrative in the Gospel of Luke: “When the days of their purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be called holy to the Lord,’ they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2:22-24).

²⁹ This situation is described in Luke as follows: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the Law, Simeon took him in his arms... Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, the child’s mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too’” (Luke 2:22-35).

³⁰ Regarding Anna, the Gospel of Luke states: “There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel; she was very old and never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:36-38).

³¹ It is described here as follows: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1).

³² Tradigo. “Icons and saints of the eastern orthodox Church”, 107-108.

In the Middle Byzantine period, the primary figures in the scene of the presentation in the temple included Joseph with the sacrificial pigeons, Mary holding the child Jesus, and Priest Simeon. From the 11th century onwards, a symmetrical composition was established with an altar at the center of the scene, flanked by the parents of Jesus on one side and Priest Simeon and the Prophetess Anna on the other. The most innovative feature of the 12th century is the depiction of the infant Jesus in the hands of Simeon rather than in Mary's arms, accompanied by Mary's sorrowful facial expression. The central position of the altar, the depiction of Christ in Simeon's arms, and Mary's mournful stance emphasize the dramatic impact of the event by associating the revelation of Christ's divinity with His sacrifice³³. The iconography of Simeon holding Jesus became a widespread theme in the second half of the 12th century. While the earliest example is seen in the Mirozhsky Monastery in Pskov (1156) (Figure 7), the same schema was repeated in many works from the 12th and 13th centuries³⁴. In the plaque depicting the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Inv. No. 72-84) examined in our study, it is observed that the Byzantine tradition of depiction post-dating the 12th century was followed.

It is well known that with the adoption of the Orthodox faith in Russia in the 11th century, Russian icons were established upon the foundations of Byzantine icon art. The icon tradition, which began with specimens brought from Byzantium, gained widespread popularity after the 12th century, continued its development between the 12th and 15th centuries, and reached its zenith in the 15th century³⁵. A 16th century wooden icon executed in the tempera technique (Figure 8), currently held in the Museum of Russian Icons, exhibits characteristics very similar to the artifact in the Akşehir Museum collection ; it features the figure of Simeon at the entrance of the temple holding the infant Jesus, opposite the Virgin Mary, with the Prophet Joseph immediately behind her carrying turtle doves, and Anna witnessing the event behind Simeon. In terms of the architectural arrangement in the background and the positioning of the figures, this scene is remarkably similar to the later-dated metal artifact examined in our study.



Figure 9: Front side of a bronze skladden icon; top right of the left panel depicts the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Bandırma Museum, Inv. No. 848/2003 (İmrana Altun 2020, 86, Photo 3).

³³ Sinkević. *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi*, 49.

³⁴ Zeliha Şenel, "Makedonya'da Komnenos Dönemi Resim Sanatı: Kurbinovo Aziz Georgios Kilisesi", (PhD Dissertation, Anadolu University, 2019), 256.

³⁵ Akkaya, *Ortodoks İkonları*, 10.

A very close example in terms of material, technique, and decorative features is found on the front surface of a skladden (diptych) icon in the Bandırma Museum. The scene of the Presentation in the Temple located at the top right of the left panel of the Bandırma skladden (Figure 8) demonstrates that the Akşehir specimen is a fragment of a skladden icon with similar, or even identical, characteristics. In the center, while Mary presents Jesus to the temple priest Simeon, the figures of Joseph and Anna are positioned behind her. In both examples, the style shows similar features regarding the background and the rendering of the figures.



Figure 10: Back side of the metal plaque with inventory number 72-84.



Figure 11: Back side of a Skladen Icon, 18th -19th Century, Bronze, Bandırma Museum, Inv. No. 848/2003 (İmrana Altun 2020, 86, Photo 4).



Figure 12: Back side of a Skladen icon, 18th century, Brass, Andrey Rublev Museum, Moscow (Gnutova and Zotova, 2000; Cat. No. 236).

The depiction of the city on the back surface of the artifact in the Bandırma Museum (Figure 11) supports the idea that the plaque in the Akşehir specimen could similarly belong to a skladden icon. In the Bandırma Museum example, an empty cross is situated at the center of the composition. Next to the cross, tools used to torment Jesus—a spear and a rod tipped with a sponge soaked in vinegar—are placed vertically, with the Skull of Adam located at the bottom. Depictions of the towers and walls of Jerusalem are found in the background of the scene. The walled city is detailed with gates for each tower and several windows. The skull beneath Jesus belongs to Adam, who is said to be buried in the same place where Jesus died. This narrates the belief that while Adam brought the destruction of humanity, Jesus brought humanity's reconciliation³⁶.

The skladden icons with similar city depictions on the back surface in the collections of the Bandırma Museum³⁷, the University of Victoria Art Collection³⁸, the Kunz Collection³⁹

³⁶ Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 101.

³⁷ İmrana Altun, "Bandırma Müzesi'nde Bulunan Don (Rus) Kazakları'na ait iki İkona" 86, Photo 4.

³⁸ Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 95.

³⁹ R. E. Ahlborn ve V. B. B. Espinola. *Russian Copper Icons and Crosses From the Kunz Collection: Castings of Faith*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 47, Cat. No. 9.

and the Andrey Rublev Museum⁴⁰ (Figure 12) show similarities in terms of technique and decorative features.

In the final stage of our evaluation, we examine the second artifact (Inv. No. 73-18), a brass plaque identified as a foldable wing of a skladden icon. This plaque features the scene of the Anastasis⁴¹ in the upper section and the Ascension of Christ in the lower section.

In the Anastasis scene, while Christ's descent into the underworld and his subsequent exit from Hades by breaking its gates symbolize his resurrection, his chaining of Satan symbolizes his victory over evil and his bringing of salvation to the living as well as the dead⁴². In Christian literature, the event of the anastasis does not appear directly in the Gospels⁴³. The story⁴⁴, of which some clues are found in the apostolic literature of the New Testament, is narrated as a complete story in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus⁴⁵.

In Anastasis depictions, Christ is generally portrayed stepping upon the fallen Satan and the broken gate wings over Hades, which is presented as a dark cave, within a mandorla. The figure of Satan is not included in all compositions. The depiction of Christ within a mandorla symbolizes both his holiness and the light he brings to Hades in the underworld. In this iconography, Adam represents all humanity. Eve is not present in some compositions. Eve stands behind Christ, extending her hands in prayer. It is thought that this status of Eve is due to her significant role in mankind becoming mortal by being expelled from paradise⁴⁶.

The depiction of the Prophets David and Solomon next to Adam in Anastasis scenes as two kings in crowns and imperial garments symbolically represents Christ's ancestors and the people of the Old Testament⁴⁷. These figures, which were included in the composition in

⁴⁰ Gnutova ve Zotova, *КРЕСТЫ, ИКОНЫ, СКЛАДНИ*, (no page number).Cat. Nos. 206, 207, 209, 211, 212, 215.

⁴¹Although Anastasis is a Greek word, it expresses "resurrection" in a general sense. *"In the grammar of Medieval Greek, it is used in the active sense (anistemi) to mean 'to raise someone, to resurrect,' while in the middle sense (anistemai), it is used as 'to stand up' or 'to be raised.'"* For this reason, the word anastasis has been used to describe both Christ raising the dead and Christ's own resurrection (Engin Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu: Bir Mesa Şapeli Olarak İkonografik Programın Yorumlanması ve İşlevi," (PhD Dissertation, Istanbul University, 1995), 98, 100).

⁴² Zeliha Şenel, "Bizans Sanatı'nda Anastasis Sahnesinin Teolojik Temelleri", *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*,101, (2020): 298, 304.

⁴³ In the Gospel of Matthew, the events occurring before and after Christ's descent into Hell are described as follows: *"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs were opened; and many of the saints who were sleeping arose and came out of their tombs after his resurrection, and entered the holy city and appeared to many"* (Matthew 27: 51-53).

⁴⁴ Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu", 98-100.

⁴⁵ In the first part of the three-part Gospel of Nicodemus (4th century), the passion and crucifixion of Jesus are found; in the second part, the resurrection of Jesus; and in the third part, the story of the descent into Hell (Anastasis). The story of the Anastasis begins to be told in the second part. This is a preparation for Jesus' descent into Hades. (For detailed information, see Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu" 102-103). In the Gospel, the story is summarized as follows: *"All the dead are prisoners of Satan in Hades, in darkness. Suddenly, a light flashes. The Old Testament prophets rejoice. John the Baptist appears and heralds that this light comes from the great enlightenment that will save them, and that Jesus will come to Hades and save the righteous people here from the clutches of death"* (Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu" 101-103).

⁴⁶ Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu", 103-104.

⁴⁷ Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: the Making of an Image*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986): 13, 188; Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu", 104.

the first quarter of the 9th century⁴⁸, became an indispensable element of Anastasis scenes from the 10th century onwards⁴⁹. Over time, the composition was enriched by adding different sacred persons. John the Baptist, depicted behind the two kings, and generally Abel, behind Eve, have taken their place in the scene⁵⁰. The figure of John the Baptist, known to have been included in the scene since the 10th century, is situated in front of or behind the Prophets David and Solomon with his long, messy hair and the animal fur on him. The figure is sometimes shown holding a scroll and sometimes making a sign of blessing with his hand. The figure of Abel, who was not present in early examples, was depicted in some examples after the 11th century. Abel, presented with a youthful appearance in shepherd's clothing, is depicted with his staff⁵¹. Abel, the shepherd son of Adam and Eve who died as the victim of the first murder unjustly, is the precursor to the event of Christ's being killed. Particularly after the 10th century, a split rocky hill appears in the background landscape of the scene. This depiction represents *"the earth shaking and becoming bare by being purified from the ground cover after Christ died and was buried"*⁵².

The earliest known depictions of the Anastasis in small-scale minor arts are found on a group of reliquaries⁵³ known as the "Pliska Cross" (Figure 13). In the 11th century Anastasis scene at the Daphni Monastery, Christ, positioned at the center of the composition, holds Adam by the hand to pull him upward while triumphantly stepping upon the figure of Satan lying on the ground and the broken wings of the gates. Eve is situated behind Adam, while John the Baptist is located on the other side (Figure 14)⁵⁴.

In Orthodox art, the Christ figure at the center of Anastasis scenes is often depicted holding Adam's hand with one hand and a cross in the other. In these depictions, Eve is situated behind Adam. To the right of the scene, a series of figures stand lined up side-by-side and one after another. In the traditional narrative, these figures are known to be Old Testament prophets and saints. However, in the specimen at the Akşehir Museum, contrary to the traditional composition, the figure of Adam is depicted on the right side of Christ, while the figure of Eve is on the left. There are examples of Russian icons where the scene is presented in this manner, differing from the Byzantine tradition. In the Anastasis scene on the wooden icon dated to the 17th–18th centuries in the Museum of Russian Icons, Adam and the Old Testament Prophets are similarly located on the right side of Christ, while Eve and other figures are on the left.

⁴⁸ The first example is seen in the Anastasis scene located on the left wall of the St. Zeno Chapel of the Church of S. Maria Parassede in Rome (817-824) (Kartsonis, *Anastasis* 13, fig.23).

⁴⁹ Kartsonis, *Anastasis* 13, 188.

⁵⁰ Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu", 104.

⁵¹ Kartsonis, *Anastasis* 209-210.

⁵² Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu", 104-105.

⁵³ See: A. Cutler and J.M. Spieser, *Byzance Médiévale: 700-1204*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

⁵⁴ Engin Akyürek, "Kariye Parekklesionu: Bir Mesa Şapeli Olarak İkonografik Programın Yorumlanması ve İşlevi," (PhD Dissertation, Istanbul University, 1995), 103-104, 106.



Figure 13: Pliska Cross, Byzantine, 9th Century, Bulgaria

<https://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/treasuresofheaven/relics/Pectoral-Reliquary-Cross> Accessed: Nov 10, 2025.

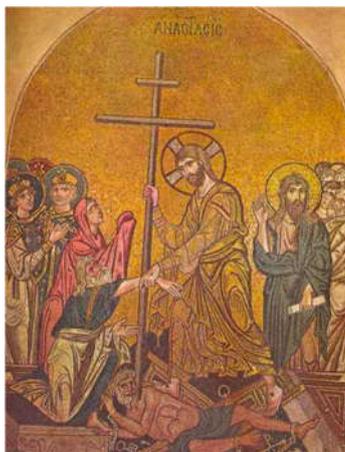


Figure 14: Daphni Monastery Church, Anastasis, mosaic, 11th Century (Şenel 2020: 300, 1b)



Figure 15: Anastasis, Tempera, Inv. No. R2008.10, 17th-18th Century. Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, <https://www.iconmuseum.org/collection/the-anastasis-with-the-eulogy-to-the-mother-of-god/> Accessed: Nov 1, 2025.

In the composition located beneath the Anastasis scene on the skladden icon, there is the Ascension scene, which depicts Christ being taken up to heaven by angels. The scene is divided into two parts: Christ within a mandorla and angels on either side in the upper section, and Mary and other figures in the lower section. The iconography of the Ascension developed in Byzantine art based on the Gospel of Mark (16:15–20)⁵⁵, the Gospel of Luke (24:44–52)⁵⁶, and the Acts of the Apostles (1:3–9)⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ And he said unto them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere (Mark 16:15-20).

⁵⁶ Jesus tells his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the coming: "And he said unto them, 'These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.' Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.' And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:44-52).

⁵⁷ To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, "ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:3-9).



Figure 15: The Ascension of Christ, Rabbula Gospels, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Ms. cod. Plut. I, 56, fol. 13v. Accessed: Nov 14, 2025 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbula_Gospels#/media/File:Vangeli_di_Rabbula._Biblioteca_Medicea_Laurenziana._Cod._Plut._I._56._fol._13v.jpg

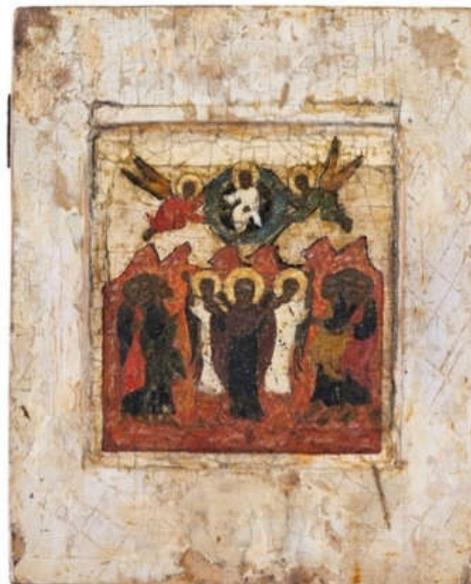


Figure 16: The Ascension of Christ, Icon Museum, Inv. no. R2013.12, early 17th century, Russia. Accessed: Oct 11, 2025 <https://www.iconmuseum.org/collection/the-ascension-of-christ-2/>

One of the earliest examples of Ascension scenes is the miniature in the Rabbula Gospels (586) (Image 15). In the upper part of the composition, there are four angels flanking Christ within a mandorla. Christ, making a sign of blessing with his right hand, holds a parchment in his left hand. The two angels surrounding the mandorla are depicted as if offering crowns to Christ. Beneath the mandorla are four wings, and a hand located under the wings extends toward Mary, who is in a prayer position. The hands of the two angels around Mary, who is in the orans position, point upward toward the disciples. Peter, carrying a cross, stands in front of the group on the right, while the figure of Paul, holding a book, stands in front of the group on the left⁵⁸.

In Ascension scenes, while traditionally four angels are situated around the mandorla containing Christ, it is noteworthy that the Akşehir specimen features only two angels; furthermore, Christ is depicted sitting rather than standing. Similarly to the Akşehir example, it is observed in a 17th century wooden icon in the Museum of Russian Icons that Christ, shown in a seated position, is carried to heaven by two angels (Figure 16). Nevertheless, in the Ascension scene on a skladden icon wing from the 18th century in the University of Victoria Art Collections (Figure 17) and in the Ascension scene on a skladden icon wing from the 19th century in the Andrey Rublev Museum, the figure of Christ is depicted sitting, but with four angels surrounding the mandorla (Figure 18).

⁵⁸ Şenel, “Makedonya’da Komnenos Dönemi Resim Sanatı”, 294.



Figure 17: Third Panel of the Church Festivals Quadriptych Anastasis (top left), Ascension Scenes (top right), 18th century, brass icon, cast, Russian. University of Victoria Art Collections (Shrumm, 2012, 95, fig. 2).



Figure 18: Skladen Icon, Anastasis (top right), Ascension scene (top left), 19th century, Andrey Rublev Museum, Moscow, Copper alloy, enamel, cast (Gnutova and Zotova, 2000; Cat. No. 189).

An example very similar in terms of dimensions, material, technique, and iconographic features to the brass artifact in the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum—which features the Anastasis and Ascension scenes—is located on the right wing of a three-winged foldable skladden icon in the Moscow Andrey Rublev Museum (Figure 19). In the icon, which features the Koimesis (Dormition of the Virgin) scene at the center, the side panels depict the Entry into Jerusalem at the top left, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple at the bottom left, the Descent into Hell at the top right, and the Ascension of Christ at the bottom right. The icon in the Andrey Rublev Museum, which shows close similarities in subject and composition to the Presentation in the Temple, Anastasis, and Ascension scenes in the skladden icons we examined, exhibits more detailed craftsmanship compared to the Akşehir specimen.



Figure 19: Triptych, late 18th – early 19th century, Andrey Rublyov Museum of Medieval Russian Culture and Art, Copper alloy, cast. Right wing: Anastasis (top), Ascension (bottom); Left wing: Presentation in the Temple (bottom) (Gnutova and Zotova, 2000; Cat. No. 236).



Figure 20: Composite Icon. 19th century, brass and painted icon, Russian. University of Victoria Art Collections (Shrumm, 2012: 104, fig. 9).

Russian skladden icons, produced as foldable objects with three or four wings and reproduced through copies, were widely used during pilgrimages because their size and materials made them easily portable sacred objects. Among the most important reasons for pilgrimages made for different purposes were to pay penance for sins or to seek counsel. Pilgrims would acquire objects made of various materials for different functions from the sacred sites they reached or visited along the way, such as crosses, icons, holy water or oil, pollen, dried flowers, and sand. Believers wanted to feel that spiritual support was by their side by keeping these sacred objects—thought to protect the person from evil and demonic forces and to possess healing and curative powers—in worship areas within their homes or by carrying them on their persons⁵⁹.

In Russia, brass icons were generally made by the Old Believers. This group followed strict religious traditions within the Eastern Orthodox Church. Artists frequently reproduced copies of famous icons because they believed that the miracles present in the original painting would continue in the copy as well. Generally, between the 10th and 20th centuries, iconography in Russian icons did not change significantly; most artists used the same manuals, such as the Stroganov or Dionysius of Fournas's Painter's Manual, which explained which images should be present in each sacred scene. Therefore, colors, scenes, and inscriptions were generally determined by tradition and designed in accordance with the original icons⁶⁰. Although rare, beyond their standalone use, there are examples where skladden icons were used by being appliquéd into a wooden icon, as seen in the composite wooden icon example in the Victoria Art Collection (Figure 20).

⁵⁹ Ünal ve Çakmakçı, "Haluk Perk Müzesi'nden Örnekler", 502-504

⁶⁰ Shrumm, "Windows into Heaven", 94.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, it is known that metal icons were mass-produced in Russia and sent to Old Believers who had emigrated outside of Russia⁶¹. It can be considered that the skladden icons belonging to the Don (Russian) Cossacks examined in our study might have been produced in Akşehir during the period they lived there, brought with them by their owners when they came to Akşehir, or were sacred objects produced in Russia and sent to Anatolia.

CONCLUSION

In Christian art, metal artifacts exhibit a wide variety in terms of material, form, and ornamentation. The two metal icons in the Akşehir Nasreddin Hodja Archaeology and Ethnography Museum reveal the strong links between Russian Orthodox art and Byzantine iconography. Due to their small dimensions and foldable structures, the examined skladden icons are significant as portable sacred objects used both in domestic worship and during pilgrimages. The scenes of the “Presentation of Christ in the Temple,” “Anastasis,” and the “Ascension” featured on the artifacts demonstrate that the iconographic arrangements of Byzantine art were maintained in Russian icons. These icons, which are indispensable elements of Orthodox worship, are rare examples that either reached Anatolia from the mass-produced metal icon tradition in 18th–20th century Russia or were among the few produced locally within Anatolia. Consequently, the artifacts in the museum are of great importance not only from an artistic perspective but also in the context of migration, cultural transfer, and religious practices.

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⁶¹ Shrumm, “Windows into Heaven”, 95.

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