

## The Evolution of the Image Iconography of James Borovichsky

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**Abstract:** *The question of the evolution of the iconographic image of St. James of Borovichi is considered in the time interval: the miraculous appearance of the saint in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the preparation of the memorial service between the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the formation of variants of local iconography between the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We are talking about the formation of a local iconographic performance, characteristic to "Borovichi" and "Valdai" types, the focus being the image of the fool (in a robe and with a scarf on his loins). The description and analysis of the composition of the copper icon with the image of St. James of Borovichi from the personal collection of V. V. Babiyak bears the character of attribution and it is introduced into a wide scientific context.*

**Keywords:** the image of Jacob Borovichi, copper casting, relic, the evolution of iconography.

The history of the study of the phenomenon of Orthodox foolishness originates in Russian religious literature (if we refer to it in connection to the main genres of Old Russian literature: homiletics, hagiography, chronicles, canonical and Liturgical literature), it continues in the church bookwriting of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries and finds itself in the scientific literature of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. There are a lot of works devoted to the topic of foolishness. The main problems are generally covered in the monograph of S. A. Ivanov, in the works of D. S. Likhachev and A.M. Panchenko . A significant range of literary sources on the iconography of Orthodox foolishness includes the iconographic originals of G. V. Filimonov and A. I. Uspensky, as well as a monograph by V. D. Fartusov, these are the only works intended for the practical use of icon painters. A two-volume collection of materials on the iconography of G. V. Markelov is of great value for researchers. Important historical and hagiographic information is contained in the books of E. E. Golubinsky, N. P. Barsukov, Count M. V. Tolstoy and other authors.

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However, despite the listed sources, the number of published images of Orthodox fools remains far from complete. That is why information of a visual, literary and legendary nature that contributes to scientific research is of particular value.

Foolishness in Christ is a responsible and hard work, to which the Orthodox Church rarely directs a believer. The phenomenon of foolishness in Russia is covered mainly by church literature, which contains a description of an apologetic nature. One of the few scientific monographs relevant for the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the book by S. A. Ivanov, in which foolishness is analyzed from a cultural and historical point of view. Agreeing with the author that Orthodox foolishness is a concrete historical phenomenon, we will designate the chronological framework of our own research.

The first mention of this kind of Christian ascetics is contained in the Kiev-Pechersk Paterik (the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century); the heyday of this phenomenon falls on the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The veneration of the iconographic image of the blessed one began with the fact of the miraculous appearance of Jacob on the Msta River. After that, the relics were placed in the chapel, and in 1544 they were transferred to the Holy Spirit Monastery. In the same year, a celebration was established in honor of St. James of Borovichi (since 1572, a polyeleic celebration has been established). In 1657, Patriarch Nikon transferred the relics of St. James to Lake Valdai, to the Iversky Monastery, therefore the icons began to be painted some time after the death of the fool. The iconographic image could play the role of a reliable witness in the process of the saint's canonization. Such a process can be carried out by the church authorities on the basis of the appeals from parishioners and clergy of local churches, taking into account the fact that the relics are incorruptible and the miraculous healings performed from these relics for a hundred years after the official date of death. The iconographic image contributes to the beatification of saints.

The feat of Old Russian foolishness occupies a separate place in the list of asceticism due to its dissimilarity to the Christian path of other saints. Having emerged from the Byzantine "riot", in Old Slavonic there is a mention of "fool" and "obscenity"), foolishness could spread in Russia only after the adoption of Christianity, because this phenomenon in the Old Russian version was originally associated with the church. Apparently, there was no secular foolishness in the Old Russian state, or there is no information about it.

The Orthodox Church distinguishes the peculiarities of the origin of the fools, calling some "reverend", others – "righteous" or "blessed" fools. The monks who leave the monastery for the world are venerable. This is an early kind of foolishness. A later and more common type is foolishness in the world. Lay people who have assumed the guise of madness and who fool

around among people, but in the name of the church, are called "righteous". Both received the name "the fool in Christ". The assimilation of the earthly path of Christ and, most importantly, the experience of the difficulties of people's contempt and misunderstanding of Jesus is one of the reasons for the antisocial and immoral behavior of the blessed ones.

In Byzantium, foolishness was also born in the monastic environment, but by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, it "broke out of the monastery walls", thus becoming the property of the cities and, therefore, being part of the secular, secular way of life. A similar process took place in Russia: the first fools (Isakiy, a monk of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, the 12<sup>th</sup> century; Avraamiy Smolensky, abbot of the monastery of the Holy Mother of God, the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century) were representatives of the church world, but by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this feat of holy faith had already gone beyond the church and was spread by believers outside the monastery walls. For example, Prokopy Ustyuzhsky, a former merchant who was baptized (died in 1303), or Isidor Tverdislov, a native of Prussia, an educated man who consciously converted to Orthodoxy, and spread this faith already on Russian soil, in the city of Rostov (he died in 1474).

*The image of James of Borovichi* represents the type of lay saints. Quite often, Jacob is represented in a frontal pose with his arms crossed on his chest. The composition of this type of iconography was influenced by the already developed tradition of representing the holy fools and the blessed of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is indicated by the sewn covers of Blessed Isidore of Rostov (1571-1585, GMZRK) and St. Basil the Blessed (1589, GIM). However, there are reasons to associate this feature of iconography with the vision of Patriarch Nikon: "you are alive, and your hands are folded on your fingers according to your rank." The worship of James of Borovichi was carried out not only in the parishes of the Novgorod diocese, but also in St. Petersburg and Siberia. It is known that a particle of the relics of St. James of Borovichi, along with other relics, was brought to Yekaterinburg from Novgorod Sofia by the first abbess of the Novo-Tikhvin Monastery, Mother Taisiya, in 1811. In the Trinity Cathedral of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra, among others, an ark was kept with the relics of St. James of Borovichi, Christ being the fool. There is no information whether this is the ark that now forms the exhibition part of the collection of the historical museum of Moscow, Collection Borovichi, but this possibility cannot be excluded.

Art monuments with the image of Jacob Borovichi primarily position the skill of artists of Novgorod, Novgorod provinces and Borovichi, and then-Moscow and other regions. His image is represented as part of personal (Fig. 1, 2, 7), cathedral (Fig. 4) and paired compositions (Fig. 8) of "easel" icons and in wall paintings (Fig. 9). The image of Jacob Borovichsky is decorated with a cross-moshevik (Fig. 5), therefore, it represents a monument of decorative art used in cult practice. Special attention should be paid to the

works of decorative and applied art: the ark (1756) and the cast icon of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The dissertation student thanks V. V. Babiyak for the opportunity to introduce an image with the image of St. James of Borovichi into scientific circulation. The Ark of Jacob Borovichsky (1756), the museum of Borovichi (Fig. 3) is a monument of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, made in the traditions of local Novgorod (Borovichsky) foundry masters and presented as a contribution item. One of the vertical walls shows the moment of a miracle: fishermen pull the body of Jacob out of the stormy waters of the river Msts. The rectangle of the outer wall of the ark is repeated in the small rectangle of the coffin, where the saint is represented with his arms crossed on his chest, i.e. as in the dream of Patriarch Nikon. Stormy waves and swirling clouds give the scene dynamism. Witnesses of the miracle-peasants in Armenian coats and hats, making efforts, pull the deck with the body of Jacob to the shore with a rope. They are helped by fishermen on a boat. The drawing a realistic looks, and reinforcing the hagiographic and legendary beginning in the work of art, the ark can be considered in three hypostases: as a religious relic, as a historical evidence and as a pictorial monument.



Fig. 1. Saint James of Borovichi. The 19<sup>th</sup> century. Borovich version.

Fig. 2. Saint James of Borovichi. The 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Valdai version.



Fig. 3. The Ark of Jacob Borovichsky of the 18th century.

Above: Jacob in an oak deck

Below: The miraculous appearance of Jacob to the peasants  
on the Msta River

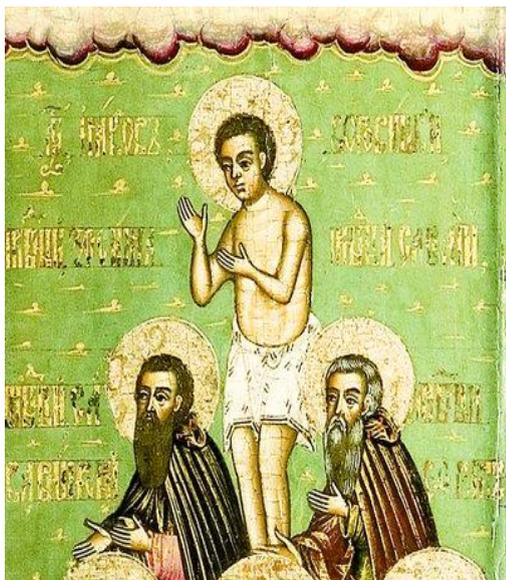


Fig. 4. Icon of the Novgorod Cathedral of Saints. The 18<sup>th</sup> century.

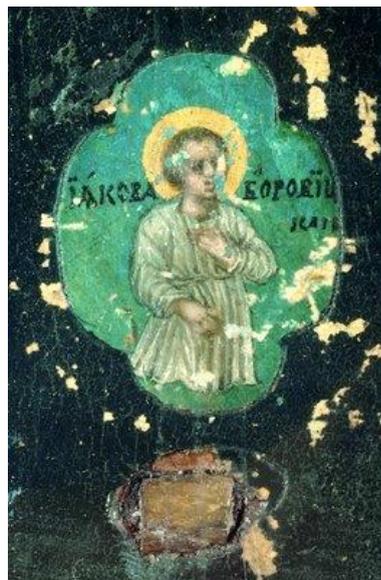


Fig. 5. A fragment of a cross-reliquary. The end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 6. The holy righteous James of Borovichi is a miracle worker. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hanging icon. Private collection of V. V. Babiya (enlarged).



Fig. 7. Icon of St. James of Borovichi on the background Iversky Bogoroditsky Monastery, the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 8. Icon of the Apostle James, the brother of the Lord and the faithful James of Borovichi. Palekh. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A private collection

Fig. 9. The facade icon. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (?). Valdai Iversky Bogoroditsky monastery

*Hanging icon "The Holy righteous James of Borovichi the Wonderworker".* The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Copper casting. Private collection of V. V. Babiyak (Fig. 6). The obverse side of the icon represents the image of the saint in an oval. The semi-figure of the holy righteous man with a loincloth organically fills the space of the oval plane of the image. The composition is based on rounded outlines: the outer oval of the icon, the circle of the halo, the inscription [ST. JACOB B. Ch.] arched above it, the soft oval of the face, the smooth line of the shoulders, the rounded folds of the sling, the double circle of relief belts. The image is detailed by the fine "cutting" of hair, earlobes, eyelids, nose and lip lines, scrupulously worked out finger phalanges. Thanks to the possibilities of copper casting, an oval edging on the front side is given with a beaded dotted line, which texturally echoes the small scattering of background points on the reverse side. The cross and the spears are cast smoothly, and the fine drawing of the blades of grass on the rounded surface of Golgotha echoes the drops of the Sky.

The reverse side is a four-pointed double-sided cross with rectangular ends, a right angle and volutes in the middle cross. Volutes have rays in the form of balls with a bump at the top. There are no gaps between the volutes and the corners of the middle cross, the casting is solid. An eight-pointed

Calvary cross has a spear and a cane. Golgotha in the form of a slide. The spear and the cane depart diagonally from Golgotha. According to the outlines of the cross, this type was formed in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and according to the classification of

E.P. Vinokurova, it belongs to the type of body crosses-images of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the reverse side of the oval icon there is a full Orthodox cross, which is similar in shape to the Ancient Orthodox one. If the executed cross is such, then the thesis of the dissertation about the production of this monument in the Old Believers' copper-cast workshops is legitimate. The subtlety of the study of the form, together with the conciseness of filling the space, refer the image of the "Holy Righteous Jacob of Borovichi the Wonderworker" of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the workshops of Karelia and the Baltic States. It was in these places, somewhat remote from Novgorod and Moscow, which were influenced by theological disputes, that the restoration of the pictorial tradition of Jacob Borovichsky could take place. The rejection of the Nikon reforms by the Old Believers did not allow the Valdai version of the iconography of St. Righteous James to spread among them. A unique example of the combination of the Valdai semi-naked type of drawing a figure on the front side with the image of an Orthodox cross on the back legitimizes the veneration of Jacob Borovichi and indicates the continuing attention to his image among Orthodox artists of the Late Middle Ages and Modern Times.

The body image should not be attributed to the rare types of individual order, rather, there was a circulation in its casting, but judging by the careful manner of execution and harmonious composition, the analyzed sample represents a variable type of classification, in which the creative efforts of the master are traced. Unlike the crosses, which were produced in huge editions, small (20-25 mm) oval "incense" were made much less often, their compositions were creatively comprehended and cast in small editions for a specific holiday or in commemoration of a particular saint—because today, they are a rare rarity.

In conclusion, the history of the veneration of the image of James of Borovichi reveals the main concepts of the formation of the memory of the saint and the emergence of the iconographic image: faith in the righteous boy; a miraculous phenomenon; the construction of a chapel on the site of the phenomenon at the rapids of the Msta River, and then the monastery of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in Borovichi; the development of a new place—the Holy Lake and the Valdai lands, which turned into a sacred topos — the Valdai Iversky Bogoroditsky monastery.

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