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Stalin Prize Medal, 3rd class, 1942 issue.

In brass and silver (Stalin's bas-relief); medallion measures 26.1 mm wide; weighs 9.8 g not including the suspension device; the weight of the medal with suspension (without screw plate) is 14.4 g. The suspension is in brass, 24.8 mm wide.

The medal is in very fine overall condition. The bas-relief shows modest, even wear to the high points, apparently from routine cleaning; nevertheless, most of its details are still nicely defined. Likewise, there is wear to the high points of the wreath on the obverse and lettering on the reverse, while their background details are nice and crisp. The medallion is completely free of the edge knocks, noticeable scratches or significant dings; its background stippling is practically pristine. The brass shows very attractive even toning on both sides of the medal, no significant blemishes or oxidation spots.

The medal comes on original suspension device, complete with the rectangular back plate, hexagon retaining nut and screw nut. The suspension is sound and generally intact, although the lower portion of it is slightly bent. The connecting link which is a part of the suspension appears to be original but shows evidence of having been reattached or strengthened (the fragile connection of the link to the lower bar of the suspension, similar to the Type 1 suspension on the Hero Star, was a weak point of the design; unlike the Hero Star however, the suspension of the Stalin Prize Medal was never redesigned to address this issue.) To reiterate, the suspension is intact overall and will display nicely. All of its parts exhibit attractive patina to the brass, while some the original gold finish is present, especially under the ribbon. The screw post is of full length, over 8 mm measured from the rectangular back plate, and comes with original screw nut which fits the screw perfectly. The ribbon is old, probably original to the medal. Its ends are sewn together, as often observed on original ribbons of the period.

To fully appreciate the importance and rarity of the 1942 Stalin Prize Medal one must review the history of this award. When Stalin Prize was conceived in 1939 to celebrate Stalin's 60th birthday, it was supposed to be a purely monetary reward paid for by the proceeds from published works of Stalin. The first series of awards were bestowed in 1941 for achievements of all the previous years starting from 1935, whereas in the following years they were given only for the results attained in the year preceding the award (e.g. the 1942 prize was for achievements of 1941 etc.) In the last two years of WW2, 1944-45, there was a hiatus when no Stalin prizes were awarded at all.

The medal of a Stalin Prize winner came up only after the war, in late 1945, and starting from 1946 it was retroactively issued to the Prize winners of the previous years. This retroactive awarding explains why each medal has only the date without the serial number: the early recipients already had their award documents, and adding the serial numbers to the existing award documentation would've created a bureaucratic nightmare. The medals however do differ by the year of award which is shown in raised numerals on the reverse, a part of the die unique for each year of issue. Here lies an important distinction making some of the medals far scarcer than others.

The main reason for that is that areas of recognition for the Stalin Prize gradually expanded from year to year, as did the number of awards issued yearly in each category. According to Anatoly Kutsenko's *Cavaliers* in 1941, the first year of its issue, there were 389 people awarded Stalin Prizes of all three classes combined. By comparison, the number increased to 710 recipients in the year of 1948, 1605 in 1950, and 2691 in 1951. The difference in the number of medals of early vs late issue is clearly immense.

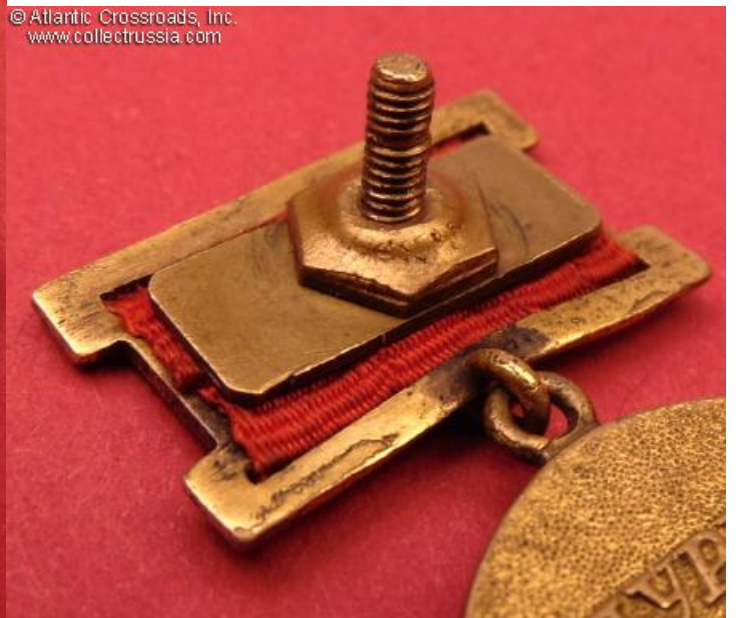
It is also noteworthy that during the Khurshev's "de-Stalinization", the Stalin Prize was replaced with a newly coined State Prize. The surviving winners of the Stalin Prize - at least those still in the public eye - were expected to exchange the "politically incorrect" medals with Stalin's image for the State Prize Medals of the corresponding classes. The returned original awards were then invariably melted down. Therefore, the availability of the Stalin Prize Medals on today's collectors market is far less than the number of issues alone would suggest

Considering the "de-Stalinization" factor and given the small number of the early Stalin Prize issues in comparison to the post-war ones, it is clear why any 1942 Stalin Prize Medal is extremely rare. Moreover, it is especially so for the third, lowest class of the award - however counter-intuitively this may sound. The reason for that is a curious quirk in requirements for the award. The first issues of the prize in March 1941 came mainly in two classes. The third class was almost an afterthought, and it was initially awarded only in a single category, for "inventions and radical improvements in technology" - whereas the other two classes were bestowed in this as well as various other fields: science, arts, literature etc. This would change later, after the war, when the categories of eligibility for the third class gradually expanded, but at least during the initial years, it was offered far more sparingly than the other two. Just like the other two classes, the third class was often shared between two or more recipients who contributed to the same achievement - each of whom would receive a Large Certificate and after 1946, a medal (if they were still alive at the time.) The number of shares appears not to have differed drastically between the various classes of the award. Hence the number of recipients of the third class of Stalin Prize for 1942 was definitely smaller than the second or even first class! Based on Soviet records recently published on the Internet, only 29 third class prizes were awarded in 1942. They were shared by 70 recipients. This leads to conclusion that no more than 70 of the third class medals of 1942 were ever struck at the mint (the actual number may be even smaller accounting for the almost inevitable attrition in the number of living laureates during the war years.) In terms rarity, this puts the 1942 Stalin Prize Medal, 3rd cl. on par with the Order of Nakhimov, 1st cl.

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