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## Russian Orthodox Icon of Mother of God of Smolensk, aka Virgin Hodegetria of Smolensk (Икона Богородицы Одигитрия Смоленская), circa late XVI C.

In bronze, measures 26 cm in height x 23 cm in width (10.5" x 9.2"); weighs over 3 lb. To our knowledge, the icon of the Mother of God of Smolensk is pretty much the only kind of bronze icon to be found in such a massive size.

The icon depicts the Mother of God with Christ Emanuel in her arms. The style of inscription of the Virgin Mary's title points out that the icon is probably from XVI C. Note also that the head of the Theotokos is perfectly straight thus following the Greek original (in later versions of the same icon, her head tends to be inclined toward Christ). The abbreviated title begins on the left with two letters, the first and last letters of her name, and on the right the title "Mother of God" abbreviated. On her forehead is a star, and on each shoulder a matching star. The three stars represent her virginity before and after the birth of Christ.

Christ sits in His mother's embrace facing the worshippers as He is presented to them by His mother. They appear emotionless as was the style of presenting rulers. The King and his Mother are reigning over the earth. Her right hand is in a gesture of presentation. He sits upright with a scroll in His hand, not swaddled as an infant here. He is the Christ Emanuel, the Son of God come into the world to reign as sovereign. He looks straight ahead in the ancient pose of a ruler. His halo is an interesting variation of the three letters which stand for "I am, who I am." A phrase from Exodus 3:14 but their order is not standard. Usually, the omicron is on the left and the omega top center. Here the two are reversed. The old-rite Church in Russia gave a new meaning to the image by this change. From heaven He came, they who did not conceive Me, and crucified on the Cross.

This gives the icon an interesting place in the history of the Church for it copies a most sacred presentation of the Virgin and Child copied faithfully from the original Greek icon, but makes it uniquely Russian by altering the inscriptions without challenging the theology.

The icon was inspired by the much-revered icon of Smolensk Mother of God (aka Virgin of Smolensk or Smolensk Hodegetria), which was according to the Orthodox tradition painted by the Evangelist Luke. It was brought to Russia by a Constantinople princess Anna when she married Prince Vsevolod, the heir of Kiev Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise. After the death of Grand Prince Vsevolod, the icon was given to his son, Vladimir II Monomakh, and then permanently installed in the Smolensk Cathedral. During the great Mongol invasion in 1240, the icon was credited with saving the city from being sacked and burned down. It also played a role in inspiring Russian troops during the Napoleonic invasion in 1812. The original icon was lost after 1941, when the city of Smolensk was occupied by the Germans.

The icon is in very good condition. The raised parts of the bas-relief portraits are extremely well preserved, especially considering the age of the icon. There is some wear visible to the ornamental scrolls to the left of Mary's right shoulder (left one to the viewer), but the details of the faces, hands, and clothes are remarkably well-preserved. In general, the upper half of the icon shows very little wear. There are holes in the lower portion under the left hand of the Virgin that are factory casting flaws - not a result of external damage or corrosion. Interestingly, there are apparently similar flaws to the left (to the viewer) side of her halo and near her right arm pointing to Christ that have been filled with some sort of metal compound, probably to make the flaws less conspicuous. These "touch-ups" appear very old, although it is impossible for us to tell if they were made by the original manufacturer or added at some point later on. The toning to the bronze is even and attractive; there are only some minor spots of darker oxidation along the edges that do not detract from the overall impression. Overall, a stunning and magnificent piece!

Please note, medal in our photo is for size reference.

Item# 37250

**\$1,200.00**







