

Russian Orthodox Icon of Jesus Pantacrator, by the Bochkarev workshop, late XIX - early XX CC.

Tempera, ochre pigment, gilding on a convex-shaped slab of cypress wood, measuring 27 cm x 31 cm and weighing 2 lbs. 13 oz. The icon is an example of the ancient Byzantium (Greek) iconographic canonical image of Jesus Pantacrator ("Вседержитель") rendered by the famous master A. Bochkarev from the city of Syzran on the Volga. Alexander Bochkarev was born in 1866 into a family dynasty of icon painters of the Old Believer Pomorye denomination, famous for their fervent devotion to the Old Orthodox (pre-reform) faith and tradition. They were the masters who brought together the ancient Byzantium style of tempera and ochre pigment painting and the Syzran iconography traditions.

Tempera painting uses pigments mixed with a water-soluble binder, i.e., egg yolk, to create a smooth paint for durable and vibrant artwork. Bochkarev's works are done with tempera paints and gilding on slabs of "arched" (convex) cypress wood. Among Russian iconographers, this convex profile was known as "ковчег" ("ark", as in Noah's Ark). It provided several advantages. Cypress wood is resistant to wood-boring insects as well as to moisture, thus cypress boards do not warp as much as boards made of other kinds of wood. The combination of cypress boards and gold ensures additional durability and brilliance of icons. The paint is typically applied in thin transparent layers onto a primed surface. The primer was traditionally a chalky powder mixed with animal or fish glue. The technique allows for precise detailing and fine brushwork. Multiple layers can be built up to achieve a rich and luminous effect. Tempera is a high-quality paint which demands a high level of mastery from the painter because it dries quickly and permanently. The famous Syzran icon-painting Bochkarev dynasty found recognition all over the Russian Empire and abroad.

The iconography of Alexander Bochkarev exhibits some distinctive features that set it apart from other traditional Russian iconography styles. Some of them are:

1. Double frames. There is an outer frame that surrounds the main icon, and then there is a second, inner, frame painted directly on the icon's surface. The inner frame and the gentle central bulge of the "arched" wood serve to emphasize the center and focal point of the imagery, separating the sacred from the profane. On a practical level, the convex shape also saves the board from deformation. The use of the biblical term "ark" ("ковчег") suggest that the icon painters attributed a higher spiritual context to this shape. However, in the absence of clear and generally accepted theories about the reasons for the appearance of the "ark", only aesthetic and technological assumptions remain.
2. Olive brownish color tones. Syzran icons are characterized by a unique color palette with prominent use of olive brownish hues. Syzran artists were famous for their mastery in using organic tempera paint mixed with egg yolk as a base, and ochre (ferrous oxide sand) as pigment. These colors give their icons a distinct mysterious appearance, setting them apart from the more commonly seen bright colors in other iconography styles.
3. Unusual element of décor. Syzran icons feature a particular type of decorative motif that includes interleaved images of flowers, petals, and vignettes. This decorative element can be seen in various parts of the icon. In this case, it is used to adorn the collar of Christ's tunic.

All these features are present in this icon. Jesus Pantacrator, Ruler of All ("Вседержитель"), is the main icon of traditional iconostases of Eastern Orthodox Church. Jesus' use of two fingers making the sign of the cross is indicative of the Old Believers' ancient tradition. The halo, symbolizing the divine eternal light, is embossed with four Greek letters which stand for "Existing One" (Book of Exodus 3:14). The four Greek letters on the sides, JC and XS, mean Jesus Christ and Xristos (the Anointed One, Messiah). The ornament of the collar, soft folds of the tunic and mantle (maforij) make this painting very special.

In the icon, the New Testament is open on the page of Mathew 11-28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." ("Придите ко мне труждающиеся и обремененные, и я успокою вас"). The word "Вседержитель" is split in two, with "Вседе" to the left of the head right above the shoulders and "ржитель" to the right. Above that inscription we see, somewhat similarly, "JC" on the left side and "XS" on the right. An interesting detail of the painting is that the halo extends up out of the inner frame. This element is typical for medieval European art but is a very rare phenomenon in iconography. Such subtle variations along with strong spiritual expressivity and diverse range of ornamentation make this icon a real masterpiece.

In very good condition, with vibrant colors and legible text and inscriptions. The halo shows some wear to the gold and ochre pigment. The carmine-painted protective layer around the board is partially missing, mostly on the bottom. The brownish paint inside the inner frame shows slight craquelure. The olive paint between the frames shows minor wear, mostly scuffing and a few hairlines. The lower crossbar is missing. However, in a properly maintained environment, the icon will remain unchanged for a very long time. The maker mark at the lower right-hand corner in the back says "Icon painter A.A. Bochkarev in Syzran", leaving no doubts about the age and authorship of this masterpiece.

Please note that the pen in our photos is for size reference only.

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\$6,500.00









