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Comprehensive Conservation and Restoration of Two Frames for the Temple Icons of the Sampson Cathedral in St. Petersburg

Abstract: The article is devoted to the restoration of two carved gilded frames to the temple icons of the 1760s in the Rococo style, during the work on which the techniques of conservation, restoration, reconstruction and recreation associated with the severe physical condition of the objects of church decorative and applied art received in the restoration were comprehensively applied. The study purpose was to return the expositional appearance of church objects of decorative applied art as monuments of the cultural heritage of our country. Thanks to the well-coordinated and consistent conservation and restoration processes carried out on the monuments, professional craftsmen managed to turn the shapeless, heavily polluted fragments of two frames to the temple icons back into frames. After a comprehensive restoration of two frames, it was possible to return them to their former expositional and aesthetic appearance, prolong their life and preserve these monuments of church art for contemporaries and descendants, and then place them in the temple in their former historical places, i.e., to fulfil the main task of professional restorers to preserve the cultural heritage of Russia.

Keywords: conservation, restoration, reconstruction, recreation, carved wooden ornamental and sculptural decor, gilding, frames for temple icons, rococo style, church decorative and applied art, silvering, gilding tinting.

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Комплексная консервация и реставрация двух рам к храмовым иконам Сампсониевского собора в Санкт-Петербурге

Аннотация: Статья посвящена реставрации двух резных золочёных рам к храмовым иконам 1760-х годов в стиле рококо, в ходе работ над которыми были комплексно применены приёмы консервации, реставрации, реконструкции и воссоздания, связанные с тяжёлым физическим состоянием поступивших в реставрацию предметов церковного декоративно-прикладного искусства. Цель исследования заключается в возвращении экспозиционного вида церковным предметам декоративно-прикладного искусства, как памятников культурного наследия нашей страны. Благодаря слаженным и последовательно проведённым на памятниках процессам консервации и реставрации, мастерам-профессионалам удалось превратить бесформенные

сильно загрязнённые обломки фрагментов двух рам к храмовым иконам снова в рамы. После комплексной реставрации двух рам удалось вернуть им прежний экспозиционный и эстетический вид, продлить их жизнь и сохранить эти памятники церковного искусства для современников и потомков, а затем разместить их в храме на прежних исторических местах, то есть выполнить главную задачу профессиональных реставраторов – сохранять культурное наследие России.

Ключевые слова: консервация, реставрация, реконструкция, воссоздание, резной деревянный орнаментальный и скульптурный декор, золочение, рамы к храмовым иконам, стиль рококо, церковное декоративно-прикладное искусство, серебрение, тонирование позолоты.

Introduction

The topic relevance lies in the fact that nowadays a huge number of monuments of church decorative and applied art, which lost their original appearance in the years of timelessness and persecution of religion, need competent, scientifically based conservation and restoration, which will prolong the life of these monuments and revive them for contemporaries and descendants.

The study's purpose was to return the expositional appearance of church objects of decorative and applied art as monuments of the cultural heritage of our country.

Based on the purpose of the study, the following tasks were set:

- conduct scientific research on monuments;
- pick up archival documents on the history of the creation and restoration of the monument in previous years;
- choose the most appropriate methods of conservation and restoration, as well as the sequence of restoration processes;
- realize all planned restoration measures and return the monuments to their exposition appearance.

In the study course, a comparative analytical method was applied in combination with a historical approach, both in terms of identifying the techniques, technologies and methods of work of masters of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries used in the creation of the subject, and in terms of the use of finishing materials characteristic of such works of decorative and applied art, which restorers of different professions have to work on.

When researching the history of two frames received by restoration workshops, technologies of their manufacture and finishing in previous periods, as well as documents containing information about their restorations, the researcher had to turn to two main historical documents: the “Jubilee album” of A.P. Aplaksin 1909 ([Aplaksin, 1909](#)) and the historical reference of Yu.V. Trubinov 1976 [8] that most fully reflect the most important aspects of the upcoming work.

In addition to text sources, photographs from 1908-1909, made by the famous St Petersburg photographer K.K. Bull, played a huge role. Technological aspects and the formulation of the old masters' compositions were studied in the books of V.A. Antsov ([1911](#)), K.A. Kaznacheev ([1890](#)), M.K. Nikitin and E.P. Melnikova ([1994](#)), P.P. Sumarokov ([1799](#)), V.V. Filatov ([1986](#)), A.S. Nikolaev ([Lavras, monasteries, and temples..., 1908](#)), and also in the scientific works of the author of this article when developing methodological recommendations on similar monuments

of St. Petersburg of the 18th century ([Fomicheva, 2014a](#); [Fomicheva, 2014b](#); [Fomicheva, 2014c](#); [Fomicheva, 2005](#); [Fomicheva, 1999](#); [Fomicheva, 1990](#); [Fomicheva & Rayersky, 2013](#)).

Results

Two frames for the temple icons “Nicholas the Wonderworker in the Life” and “Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior” were brought to the restoration workshops from the Sampson Cathedral alternately with an interval of one year.

It was simply impossible to call the wreckage brought in bags frames. They were dirty, shapeless pieces of old wood, decrepit from time and lack of storage conditions. By the way, these fragments were listed as fragments of once gilded frames, but under the thickness of the dirt layer, no traces of the former gilding were even visible.

It would occur to an ignorant person to throw it all away and not waste time, but restorers, fortunately, are not such people. They understand the value of antiques and bring back to life even the most seemingly hopeless in technical condition monuments of decorative and applied art.

The restoration task received from the Inspection for the Monuments Protection read, “To restore the base of the frames, make up for the loss of sculptural and ornamental decor, as well as their decoration in the form of decorative gilding.”

The restorers’ team needed to understand and understand what exactly was meant by the points of this Task. To begin with, it was necessary to figure out what kind of “inheritance” the masters got and what could be done with it.

The creative team of restorers who performed this large and complex work: woodcarvers Vyacheslav Gennadievich Karabanov, Vadim Sazonov, Fufaev Yuri Ivanovich, Valery Sergeevich Antonov, Alexey Valeryevich Antonov, sculptor and woodcarver Viktor Vasilyevich Larionov, sculptor Elena Viktorovna Stepanenko, restorers of gilding Margarita Alexandrovna Zavgorodnaya and Tatiana Nikolaevna Kozhukhar, gilder Irina Yuryevna Rybalko. The head of the group was Natalia Fomicheva, an artist-restorer of gilding of the highest category, chief specialist of the company, head of the project of frames restoration for temple icons, author of Methodological Recommendations.

Historical background

The chief specialist of the restoration company, an artist-restorer of gilding of the highest category (familiar with this monument from other works at an earlier time), first turned to the “Jubilee Album,” published in 1909, and written in the form of a detailed scientific and technical report of the period of the previous restoration in 1908–1909 in the Sampson Cathedral of St. Petersburg by the architect, author of the restoration project, Andrey Petrovich Aplaksin ([Figure 1](#)).

This is a serious scientific work, one of the early 20th century documents, in which the temple restoration project author described in detail the technical condition of the monument before the restoration, explained the causes of its destruction in the absence of proper operation, heating, ventilation, stable microclimate, and even pointed out the role of the human factor and its importance for the preservation of the monument associated with the history of Russia, its

victories in the Northern War, in honour of one of which, the Poltava Battle of 1709, and this temple-monument of military glory was built.

1908–1909 large-scale restoration works were timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of an important historical event and the construction of the church in the name of St. Sampsonius, the Pilgrim, built-in 1709 by the personal Decree of Emperor Peter I.

In the report “Anniversary Album”, the architect described in detail all the restoration work carried out with justification to use various restoration methods for each type of work. The album also contained information concerning the restoration of works of church art made of wood with gilding and their restoration methods, including two frames for temple icons ([Figure 3](#)).

In the archive of the scientific department of the SNPO “Restorer,” there was a “Historical reference” written by researcher Yu.V. Trubinov in 1984 on the eve of the cathedral restoration by the specialists of this scientific and restoration association. The “historical reference” was compiled based on rare archival materials and supplemented the “Jubilee Album” by A.P. Aplaksin with earlier historical information very significant for the restorers of the 21st century too. This information was necessary to understand the periodicity of restoration processes in the temple, to identify the causes of destroying wooden carved and sculptural gilded decor and its decoration in the form of combined gilding. Unfortunately, the earlier archive of the temple was only partially preserved, many important documents for the restorers were missing, since some of them died in a fire, and most of them were lost during the years of iconoclasm.

From the “Historical Reference” by Yu.V. Trubinov and the text of the report in the “Anniversary Album” by A.P. Aplaksin, restorers learned that the first wooden church, laid in honour of the victory of Russian weapons during the Battle of Poltava, held on June 27, 1709, quickly deteriorated. A new stone temple was later erected next to it, retaining its name and part of the decoration in the form of two small iconostases. The main chapel, erected later, was decorated with an iconostasis created by Russian craftsmen from traditional linden wood, possibly under the guidance of a foreign architect, whose name has still been disputed by art historians. This iconostasis was illuminated in 1740 and dates back to the reign of Anna Ioannovna, i.e., the Anninsky Baroque style.

The temple icons frames, which would be discussed, were created later, only in 1761. They were made in the Rococo style. The icons for them were painted by Yaroslavl icon painters.

These two framed icons were ordered specially for the temple by the nephew of the cathedral’s curator Mikhail Yakovlevich Lapshin-Gryaznovsky, who was engaged in the “landscaping” of the cathedral after his uncle, Ivan Andreevich Lapshin, a Yaroslavl merchant, whose efforts built and decorated this stone temple for many years. The icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* was dedicated to him, the first ktitor, and was presented to the temple. It is signed, which is rare in this genre of painting. On the reverse side of the icon, it is written, “The great icon painter Trofim Bazhenov painted this holy image of the Kostroma province of Salt Posad in 1761 on the 13th day of July.”

On the eve of the restoration, in 1908, a Jubilee Committee was created, which in turn entrusted the restoration of the temple to a member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, diocesan architect, archaeologist, writer, civil engineer, Andrei Petrovich Aplaksin, and control

over the restoration processes was entrusted to the architect-restorer, archpriest, P.P. Pokryshkin, who was also a member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission.

For these purposes, a local Scientific and Restoration Council was established on the monument, which supervised the restoration work, set specific tasks for the masters, monitored their implementation and gave its recommendations. In addition to A.P. Aplaksin and P.P. Pokryshkin, the Council included well-known specialists in various fields of restoration, architects, and historians in St. Petersburg. The clergy and the entire clergy of the temple are ([Figure 1](#); [Figure 2](#)).

To this day, the Minutes of the meetings of these Councils, in which the tasks and the persons responsible for their execution were spelt out, have been preserved in the archive. P.P. Pokryshkin, as the curator of the temple restoration project, was at the facility every day, kept his short notes, which were also miraculously preserved in his notebook. They are written with abbreviations, and not every person will be able to decipher them if he is not connected with the restoration of monuments of such a plan. These documents are carefully kept in the fund of the Imperial Archaeological Commission of the St Petersburg branch of the Institute of World Culture, which before the revolution of 1917 was engaged in the construction and restoration of temples in Russia, including St. Petersburg.

It became known from the album of A.P. Aplaksin that the work on the restoration of the main iconostasis was carried out by the master gilder Alexey Kalmykov, and the restoration of gilding on the frames to the temple icons was carried out by the French master Antonio Jessel, who had his workshop in St. Petersburg at 45 Gorokhovaya Street. He was a supplier to the Imperial Court and had his trademark, which he pasted on the back of his works.

The restoration of three iconostases and all the frames to the icons in 1908–1909 was realized by thirty masters who coped with the difficult work in just seven months.

After studying the sources of information and obtaining information about what work was realized on these two frames by predecessors, masters of the early twentieth century, restorers needed high-quality illustrative material, which was revealed even earlier in the archive of film and phono-photo documents (SPBFAKFFD) in the Flour Lane of St. Petersburg.

These were genuine negatives of the period of the last restoration of the Sampson Cathedral, made by the famous photographer of the early twentieth century, Karl Karlovich Bulla (1855–1929). He was a portrait painter and a well-known master of documentary photography in St. Petersburg, a hereditary St. Petersburg honorary citizen. He opened his studio in 1875. In 1886, he received permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the right to produce photographs outside the home, which allowed him in 1894 to establish the printing production of postcards in the standard of the Universal Postal Union. Since 1897, K.K. Bulla published his photographs in the popular mass magazine “Niva”, and since 1908—in the magazine “Ogonyok.” At the same time, he opened his workshop at Nevsky, 54. K. Bulla’s talent is multifaceted: he shot architectural facades, interiors, factories, shops, cars, monuments, etc. I went out to shoot anniversary celebrations ([Figure 4](#)).

So, in 1908, at the invitation of the Jubilee Committee in honour of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava and the construction of the monument church of Sampson Cathedral, he performed a photo-fixation of the decoration of the temple, in particular its three iconostases and other church utensils, taking pictures on large-sized glass negatives,

which today allowed them to get prints with the greatest accuracy, so necessary for restorers of carving and gilding. For his active participation in the restoration of the famous temple on May 25, 1910, Karl Karlovich received the jubilee medal “In memory of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava.” Photographic materials on this historical and cultural monument are invaluable both for art historians and especially for restorers ([Figure 6](#); [Figure 7](#)).

One of the photos from 1908 shows a workshop of gilders who restored two frames for temple icons. It clearly shows the frames in disassembled condition and details of the carved Altar Canopy of the main altar of the cathedral. After the restoration carried out in the workshop of A. Jessel, both of the aforementioned frames to the temple icons returned to their rightful places in 1909. Photos of these two frames to the temple icons after their restoration were placed in the anniversary album of A.P. Aplaksin. They have served their service for the restorers of the 21st century as invaluable iconographic material. 95 years after that historical restoration in an extremely disrepair, the terrible and shapeless fragments of these frames were brought to the restoration workshop. It was impossible to say that these were once gilded frames because of the layer of thick dust and dirt caked over decades, which had become ingrained in the surface of the once gilded frames to the icons ([Figure 5](#)).

Conservation and Restoration of Icon Frames

In parallel with scientific research and the selection of iconographic material, experimental work was carried out on the fragments of the monument on the selection of compositions, their concentration, and the technology of applying them to the surface. The masters had to decide on the sequence of work by profession, analyze all the results of the experiments, then choose the optimal solution and make “Methodological recommendations for the conservation and restoration of the foundation and decorative gilding in the form of a combined finish of two frames for temple icons.” After a short time, the studies were completed, the Methods were written and approved by the GIOP and the Customer.

The work began to boil. In the woodcarvers’ workshop, all the furniture, that is, workbenches were placed along the walls to make room on the floor for the upcoming painstaking work. Woodcarvers received enlarged copies of photographs of frames from 1909 for work. They enlarged the drawings of the frames even more with millimetre paper, then reshaped the contours of the drawings on tracing paper, on which they made the contour borders of the frame in full size, and began to disassemble the fragments like puzzles, laying out the author's fragments on historical sites to determine the exact number and size of the losses of the base of the frames ([Figure 8](#); [Figure 9](#); [Figure 20](#)).

To recreate the losses of carved and sculptural decor in linden wood, it was first necessary to perform models of specific losses in a soft material—plasticine. The carvers performed modelling of the loss of sculptural and ornamental decor together with the sculptors ([Figure 27](#); [Figure 36](#); [Figure 37](#); [Figure 38](#); [Figure 42](#); [Figure 43](#)).

After presenting the soft models to the commission, the missing fragments of the frames were transferred through moulding into gypsum, and then the losses in the authentic material of the monument, the wood of the linden tree traditional for this type of work, were glued together using natural fish glue ([Figure 10](#); [Figure 14](#); [Figure 17](#); [Figure 25](#); [Figure 26](#); [Figure 27](#); [Figure 28](#); [Figure 29](#); [Figure 35](#); [Figure 45](#)).

The work on the most difficult detail of the frame composition—the upper leaflet consisted in duplicating the base with new wood due to the dilapidation of the historical foundation and a large number of losses. There were a lot of foundation losses, they were shapeless pieces with oblique chips and the loss of connecting fragments of the foundation wood. It was not possible to simply glue them together because of the loss of numerous small connecting fragments. Quite a lot of fragments of carved decor were deformed because they lost contact with each other, and many fragments from the influence of dampness and temperature changes over a long period received deformations and structural destruction of the wood base such as uneven looseness and shrinkage along with the fibre.

The wood of the historical fragments was dilapidated and weak from time and lack of operating conditions, having lost all its strength characteristics, for further exposure in the walls of the temple, complete with icons painted on boards of large size and weight, it required duplication on a new basis. In connection with this circumstance, it was decided to duplicate all the frame sheets on a new basis.

The carvers prepared a veneer of linden wood of the required thickness (about 3 cm) to perform this technological operation. On a new basis, gradually complementing the missing recreated fragments of the frame to the preserved historical elements, all the leaves of the frame were collected dry, the fragments were fitted tightly to each other at the glueing sites, and only after that, the elements were glued to the new base and to each other to give the composition mechanical strength. So, all the sheets of the two frames were duplicated ([Figure 39](#); [Figure 44](#)).

The frames had huge dimensions: (3.5 x 2.4) meters and considerable weight along with icons written on the boards. They consisted of four parts sheets each, which were fastened together with forged iron corners from the back of the frame at the corners. For the frames' suspension on the cathedral walls, special plates with forged rings were previously attached to the vertical panels, which would withstand heavyweight. All these fittings were also lost. According to the trace prints on the back of the frames, the necessary fittings were calculated and made of black metal and later installed in place during the assembly of the frames.

The restorers did not do without discoveries and finds. On the backside of a fragment of one of the frames, namely on the frame to the icon "Nicholas the Wonderworker in life," during the restoration of the carving of the right vertical listel, a branded paper label of the A. Jessel's company was found in a very good state of preservation. We first learned about A. Jessel's participation in the restoration of these frames from the Anniversary Album of A.P. Aplaksin and the same fact was later confirmed by the company label discovered during the restoration during the work at the beginning of the 21st century. Not every job was branded, but this one—he was! ([Figure 19](#))

After the restoration of the carving and the fitting of the listels dry to each other in the disassembled state of the listels, the frames alternately entered the gilding restoration workshop to realize the conservation of the partially preserved historical ground-levkas with traces of gilding from 1909.

The gilding restorers had a difficult job to preserve the historical and make up for local losses of the ground-levkas (it was very thin and fragile), like to make up for the losses of decorative gilding associated with the loss of fragments of the base and its decorative combined

gilding with glossy and matte areas combination according to the 18th-century technology, as the restorers thought before starting work on the frames.

In 1909, combined gilding was performed on both frames, which combined traditional high-gloss gilding on a polymer and matte, but this time the masters had lacquer, and not traditional glue, as in the 18th century.

Restorers were also alarmed by the fact that on the historical ground-levkas of the fragments of the front side of these frames there was no lining at all, i.e., the carving on the ground-levkas, adopted in the 18th-century decoration, and the soil, which did not allow technically to flatten the lining on it, was very thin; a thicker layer of soil was needed. The reason for its absence was unclear: was it lost in 1909 during the next restoration? Or the restorers of this period repeated the finishing of the frame that appeared before them before its restoration in 1908 when the masters removed the old levkas and replaced it with a new one due to the extremely emergency state of preservation. In the early 20th century, there was no such thing as the conservation of leucas. In case of poor preservation, it was simply removed from the parts along with the remaining gilding and applied a new primer and then new gilding was. So, the restorers of gilding had to restore the historical gilded levkas of the early 20th century, and not the author's 18th century ([Figure 9](#); [Figure 10](#); [Figure 11](#); [Figure 12](#); [Figure 14](#); [Figure 15](#); [Figure 17](#); [Figure 21](#); [Figure 23](#); [Figure 25](#); [Figure 26](#)).

The technique of conservation and restoration of both frames was similar and justified by the technical condition of the base and its finish, the presence of strong persistent surface contamination that covered both the exposed wood of the originals and the decorative finish of the ruined frame panels.

The differences in the upper listels of the frames consisted in the loss of small sculptures of angels in the upper part of the listel of the frame to the icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior*, attached to the part with the help of small hanging consoles.

However, the preservation of historical gilding on the vertical listels of this frame was better than on the frame for the icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life*.

After removing some of the light surface contaminants in the form of dust and dirt, the preservation of the historical soil with the remains of gilding was realized using a weak solution of natural mezdra¹ glue of the Extra brand, which in strength characteristics exceeds similar characteristics of sturgeon glue, and at a much cheaper price, which is important when performing a large amount of restoration work. The restoration glue was prepared according to traditional technology added the antiseptic Katamin group A–B, used in the modern restoration of levkas and gilding.

An aqueous solution of warm glue, used in the conservation process, the excess of which was removed from the surface with moistened in distilled water and well-pressed cotton swabs of medium size and density, making it possible to remove most of the strong persistent surface contaminants from the surface of the historical gilding. Additional sampling of contaminants in individual recesses of the relief was realized using enzymes that slightly moistened micro-tampons on toothpicks.

¹ Mezdra is a layer of subcutaneous tissue on untreated skin, animal skin.

All the frame panels were not the same in their technical state of preservation. This is seen by the amount of historical gold on them after clearing the surface of the listels from persistent contamination and by the amount of replenished soil. Historical gold, after the soil conservation and removal of surface persistent contaminants, came to life and sparkled with a new lustre, as if its masters of the early last century performed only yesterday ([Figure 35](#); [Figure 40](#); [Figure 42](#); [Figure 43](#); [Figure 45](#)).

Simultaneously with the historical soil preservation, a three-time sequential impregnation of the bare author's base and newly performed restoration inserts of the lost wood of the frame base was realized with the same aqueous glue solution of different concentrations.

At the junctions of the old and new wood, the joints were pasted with a cotton cloth (calico) to strengthen the joints of the multi-time base and prevent further destruction of the gilt-plated levkas during operation.

A traditional levkas was prepared from the ground chalk and an aqueous solution of the same mezdra glue "Extra." The soil in a warm form was applied layer by layer to the areas of the restoration wood with bristle brushes at intervals for drying layers. Levkas was applied to the surface of the plots just above the author's layer in height, and then almost dry, only slightly moistened with distilled water, was cut with scalpels and steel hooks to the level of the historical layer.

Shikhtanovka (skinning-grinding) of the surface of the restoration levkas was realized dry with the help of a water-resistant emery cloth of medium and fine grain. To control this operation quality, the areas of the restoration levkas were previously covered with a suspension of the pigment "ochre light" on the water in one layer. The working area surface during the mixing was constantly thoroughly dusted with a vacuum cleaner and a small medium-hardness brush ([Figure 11](#); [Figure 12](#); [Figure 15](#); [Figure 21](#); [Figure 23](#); [Figure 40](#)).

The trace remains of the historical poliment on the preserved historical fragments, knowledge of the laws of the 18th-century style, the technologies of the old masters helped modern masters to determine the traditional areas of glossy gilding. After applying several layers of new polymer to the replenished restoration and historical levkas areas, glossy gilding with gold leaf, weighing 2.5 g in a book, polished, according to tradition, with agate teeth to the shine of cast metal, was made.

All other sections of the restoration levkas were successively coated with alcohol shellac varnish three times with drying of each layer, and then a gulfarba was applied to them. It is a multicomponent oil composition applied to areas of matte gilding before applying gold in one layer. After the appearance of the "working impression" on the lacquer layer, matte gilding with gold leaf was performed, but with the book weight already 1.25 g.

All the historical gold of the frames during the preservation of the historical soil was preserved and served as a colour standard for subsequent tinting in areas of recreated matte (lacquer) gilding. This tinting was performed on the areas of the new gold coating to match the colour of the preserved history by applying a tinted matte protective solution, which included alcohol extracts of their bark, plant roots and exotic resins ([Figure 13](#); [Figure 16](#); [Figure 22](#); [Figure 24](#); [Figure 26](#); [Figure 32](#); [Figure 34](#); [Figure 41](#); [Figure 46](#)).

The matte solution was applied to the areas of new gilding on a well-dried surface, 21 days after gilding in a warm form with a squirrel flat brush-a large shovel without levelling. It is very

significant to pay special attention to this operation since repeated exposure to the tinted surface can lead to the loss of the cover protective film of the matte solution and distort the colour scheme.

To protect the wood from contamination and fluctuations in air humidity, the frame backside was glued with mezdra glue and painted with a composition of the pigment “ochre light” on the same aqueous solution of mezdra glue.

Painted on wooden boards, both icons originally had niches in which small icons were previously inserted. In the hagiographic icon of St. Nicholas, there was his image of the 17th century in a small frame, which was lost during the oblivion of the temple, but the image itself miraculously survived. It was decided to recreate the frame to the preserved icon, which was done by master woodcarvers, who first made a life-size model of soft material based on a photograph of K.K. Bulla, then after its adoption by the commission, transferred this model to plaster and executed it in the authentic material of the monument ([Figure 27](#); [Figure 28](#); [Figure 29](#); [Figure 30](#); [Figure 31](#); [Figure 32](#); [Figure 33](#)).

The gilding restorers, in turn, recreated the ground-levkas on natural mezdras glue and performed combined gilding with a combination of glossy and matte gilding, as it should be according to the technology of the large original frame for the icon. For the new frame not to differ in colour from the historical preserved, albeit partially, gilding of the early twentieth century, it was tinted with a coloured coating matte solution, sampled with vegetable dyes.

There was also a niche on the icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior*, but, unfortunately, the original objects were not preserved: neither the image of the *Vladimir Mother of God* nor the frame to it. In this situation, the commission decided not to restore this fragment due to the lack of historical artefacts. In such an unfinished version, the icon with a frame was hung in the main chapel of the temple opposite the icon of Nicholas the Wonderworker in the Life.

All types of work were constantly monitored and accepted by the customer and the representative of the GIOP with a high assessment of the performance of works on conservation, restoration and recreation of individual elements, about which the relevant documents were drawn up. The assembly of frames and their hanging on historical sites was realized already in the cathedral.

Conclusion

The sculptures and wood carvings handed over to the restorers, as well as the gilding restorers of the frames for temple icons have gone through a difficult technological path: all the missing fragments of the base were modeled in soft material and filled in the authentic material of the monument made of linden wood, the base of the frames was duplicated on new wood; the historical ground with gilding was strengthened, that is, preserved, persistent multilayer surface contamination was removed, areas of local preservation of historical gilding were identified and preserved; it was also revealed local silvering under gilding on the ribbon in the lower part of the lower leaflet, this type of finish was repeated by the masters of the 21st century on this part of the frame; locally the ground-levkas was filled and locally made on it, corresponding to the historical variant, the type of decorative gilding on the polymer and the codpiece; restoration gilding was tinted to match the color preserved on the frames using a reversible matte solution with natural dyes.

The success in this work is due not only to their professional experience and skill but also to the wonderful informative iconographic material that helped the restorers to bring back to life and preserve two beautiful monuments of the history of church art of the 18th century, created by the hands of Russian serfs, preserved by the hands of restorers of the early twentieth century and almost died irretrievably in the dashing years of timelessness.

All tasks assigned to the team of restorers of various professions were carried out in full. The step-by-step photo fixation of the restoration processes shows how modern masters of restoration artists brought two monuments of church decorative and applied art back to life from the dirty wreckage.

To the delight of the restorers, justice to these two unique 18th-century works triumphed. So, two frames, together with the icons, returned to their rightful places to delight their contemporaries and descendants with their beauty and uniqueness, to teach them a careful attitude to the work of, often nameless, masters of the past, to remember the need to preserve cultural heritage ([Figure 41](#); [Figure 46](#)).

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Appendix



Figure 1. Diocesan architect-restorer, civil engineer, artist, archaeologist, historian of Russian architecture, writer, member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, author of the restoration project of the Sampson Cathedral in 1908-1909—Andrey Petrovich Aplaksin (1879-1931)



Figure 2. Architect-curator of the restoration of the Sampson Cathedral in 1908-1909, teacher, archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church, member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission – Pyotr Petrovich Pokryshkin (1870-1922)



Figure 3. Anniversary album about the restoration of the Sampson Cathedral in 1908–1909, published for the 200th anniversary of the Victory in the Battle of Poltava in 1709



Figure 4. Karl Karlovich Bulla - portrait painter and master of documentary photography, hereditary honorary citizen of St Petersburg (1855–1929)



Figure 5. Details of the frames for the temple icons and the altar Canopy of the Sampson Cathedral in the process of restoration in the workshop of A. Zheselya. 1908.



Figure 6. The frame and the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in the Life* of the Sampson Cathedral after the restoration of 1909. Photo by K.K. Bulla



Figure 7. The frame and the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* of the Sampson Cathedral before the restoration of 1909. Photo by K.K. Bulla



Figure 8. The frame for the icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* before the restoration of the foundation in the process of disassembling the disparate elements of the frame and identifying their historical places in the composition in the restoration workshop of wood carvers



Figure 9. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* before the restoration of the foundation was lost in the process of identifying their historical places in the composition of the upper leaflet of the frame



Figure 10. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after recreating the loss of sculptural and ornamental decor in the authentic material of the monument—linden wood



Figure 11. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon "Nicholas the Wonderworker in life" during restoration: local reconstruction of the loss of levkas and removal of persistent surface contamination with preservation and preservation of the historical gilding of 1909



Figure 12. The back side of the upper leaf of the frame of the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the process of dubbing historical fragments on a new basis and the process of recreating the lost ground-levkas



Figure 13. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after performing a full range of conservation and restoration work



Figure 14. The lower listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after the preservation of the historical runt before the removal of persistent surface contamination, after the restoration of the loss of carved sculptural and ornamental decor in linden wood



Figure 15. The lower listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after the preservation of the historical runt, local replenishment of its losses and removal of persistent surface contamination



Figure 16. The lower listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after a full complex of conservation and restoration work



Figure 17. The fragment is the center of the lower listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after the preservation of historical levkas and gilding, after the restoration of the loss of ornamental and sculptural wood carving



Figure 18. The fragment is the center of the lower listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the process of recreating the decorative decoration with a silver gilt lining on the ribbon, as an analogue of the historical decoration



Figure 19. The label of the company A. Jessel, discovered during the restoration of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in 2004



Figure 20. The left listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* before the restoration of the base loss with characteristic strong persistent surface contamination of the base and historical gilding when identifying the loss of the composition



Figure 21. The left listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the process of preserving the historical levkas and local reconstruction of its losses with the control clearing of the surface from intense persistent contamination (in the center) from the historical gilding of 1909



Figure 22. The left listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after the preservation of the historical levkas, the local reconstruction of its losses and the local reconstruction of decorative gilding of two types



Figure 23. The right listel of the frame to the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the process of preserving the historical levkas and local reconstruction of its losses, with clearing the surface of persistent contamination of historical gilding



Figure 24. The right leaflet of the frame to the temple icon *St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* after the preservation of the historical gilt frame, local soil replenishment, the restoration of two types of gilding and tinting of the restoration gilding to match the color of the preserved historical



Figure 25. General view of the frame for the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the assembly after a comprehensive restoration of the foundation and the reconstruction of ornamental and sculptural decor. preservation of historical levkas with gilding and partial clearing of the surface of historical gilding from strong persistent surface contamination



Figure 26. General view of the frame for the temple icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* in the assembly after a comprehensive restoration of the base and decorative decoration in the form of gilding



Figure 27. Reconstruction of the lost small frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century based on the photograph of K.K. Bulla in 1909. Execution of the model in a soft material



Figure 28. The transfer of the model from soft material to plaster to continue working in the authentic material of the monument – the wood of the linden tree



Figure 29. Execution of the frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century according to the model in the authentic material of the monument—the wood of the linden tree



Figure 30. Reconstruction of the ground-levkas on the recreated frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century. Application of primer-polymer to the places of glossy gilding



Figure 31. The execution of glossy gilding on a polymer on a recreated frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century and the coating of areas of future matte gilding with alcohol shellac varnish



Figure 32. The execution of glossy gilding on the polymer and matte on the codpiece, followed by toning of the restoration gilding on the recreated frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century to match the color of the icon *Nicholas the Wonderworker in Life* preserved on the large frame



Figure 33. The image of *St. Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century in a recreated frame inserted into a niche on the icon of “*Life*”, based on a photograph by K.K. Bulla in 1909



Figure 34. The frame for the temple icon after a comprehensive restoration of the base and decoration in the form of decorative combined gilding and reconstruction of the lost frame to the image of *Nicholas the Wonderworker* of the 17th century



Figure 35. General view of the frontside of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the process of assembly after conservation and reconstruction of sculptural and ornamental decor



Figure 36. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* before the restoration of the losses of carved and sculptural decor with losses made up in soft material-plasticine



Figure 37–38. Reconstruction based on a photograph of two sculptures of angels made in a soft material-plasticine for the upper listel of the frame for the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior*



Figure 39. The backside of the upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* after duplicating the original carving of the 18th century on a new foundation



Figure 40. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* after the restoration of the loss of carved and sculptural decoration, preservation of the historical ground with gilding, local reconstruction of the lost ground-levkas



Figure 41. The upper listel of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* after the restoration of the loss of carved and sculptural decoration, local recreation of the levkas and locally decorative gilding: glossy on a polymer and matte, with tinted restoration gilding to match the color of the preserved historical



Figure 42. The left listel of the frame to the icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the process of modeling the loss of carved and ornamental decor



Figure 43. The left listel of the frame to the icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the process of modeling the loss of carved and ornamental decor



Figure 44. General view of the backside of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the process of duplicating the base and dry assembly of the frame



Figure 45. General view of the frontside of the frame to the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the process of restoration - restoration of carved and sculptural decor and preservation of the historical levkas with gilding in 1909



Figure 46. General view of the temple icon *Mikhail Malein and John the Warrior* in the frame after a comprehensive restoration of carved ornamental and sculptural decor with restored gilding of two types