

The Last Judgment Icon of Mshanets

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On permanent display in the National Museum in Lviv is a Last Judgment icon from the village of Mshanets.¹ It is an imposing work, 190 by 136 centimeters.² Moreover, it is one of the oldest surviving Ukrainian icons of the Last Judgment. It is impossible at present to date the icon with precision. Estimates range from the first half of the fifteenth century³ to some time in the sixteenth.⁴

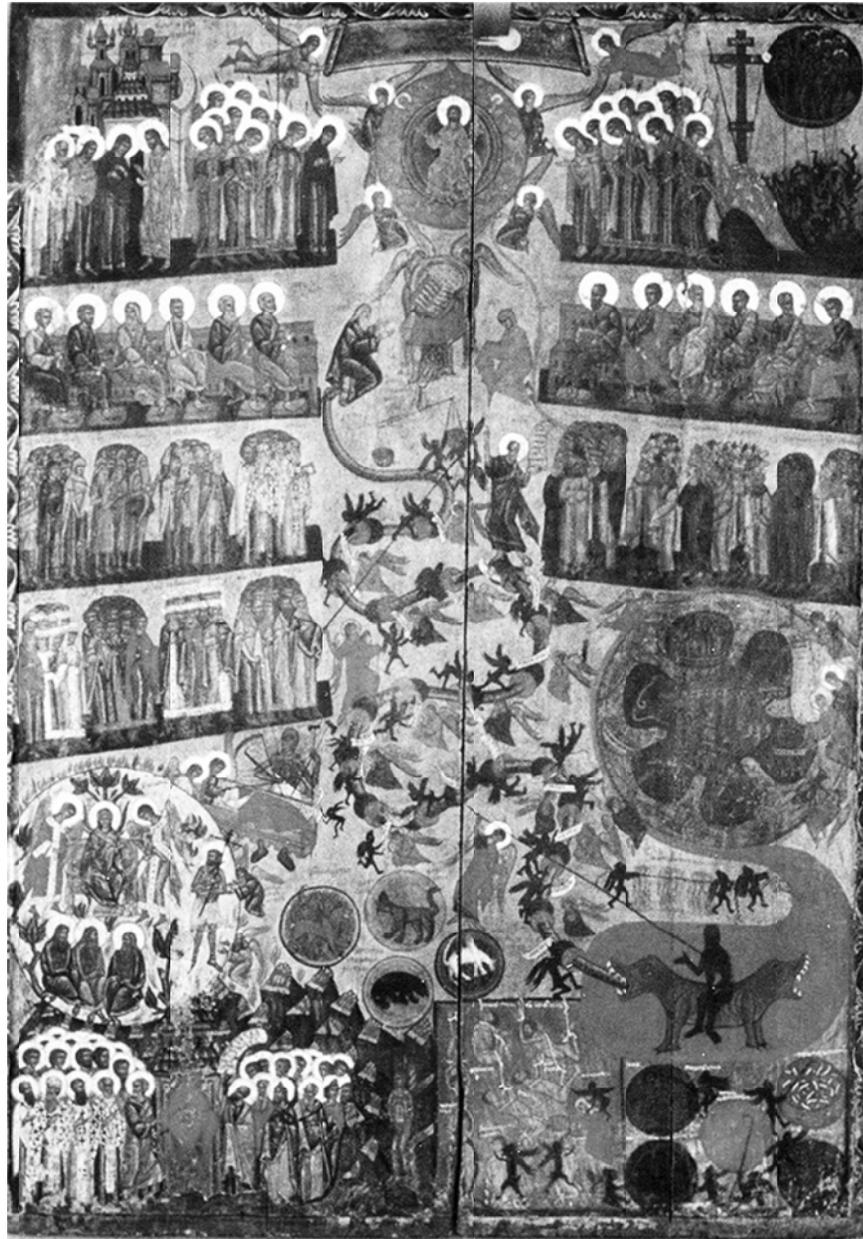
The Mshanets icon is the third oldest of the extant Last Judgment icons. The oldest is generally called the Vanivka icon, after the Ukrainian name of a village (Węglówka) now in Poland. It is also held by the National

¹ Inventory number 34505/I–1181. In the literature, this same icon is sometimes mislabeled Mshana. The Mshanets icon has been frequently reproduced: I. Svientsitsky, *Ikonopys halytskoi Ukrainy XV–XVI. vikiv* (Lviv, 1928), plate 51, p. 43, and plate 74, p. 60; Ilarion Svientsitsky-Sviatytsky, *Ikony halytskoi Ukrainy XV–XVI vikiv* (Lviv, 1929), plate 126, p. 85; *Istoriia ukrainskoho mystetstva v shesty tomakh*, vol. 2, *Mystetstvo XIV–pershoi polovyny XVII stolittia* (Kyiv: Akademiia nauk Ukrainskoi RSR, Holovna redaktsiia “Ukrainskoi radianskoi entsyklopedii,” 1967), p. 230, il. 156; Sviatoslav Hordynsky, *Ukrainska ikona 12–18 storichchia* (Philadelphia: Provydinnia, 1973), plate 46; Hryhorii Lohvyn, Lada Miliaieva, and Vira Svientsitska, *Ukrainskyi serednovichnyi zhyvopys* (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1976), plates XLVIII–XLIX; V. I. Svientsitska and O. F. Sydor, *Spadshchyna vikiv: Ukrainske maliarstvo XIV–XVIII stolit u muzeinykh kolektsiakh Lvova* (Lviv: Kameniar, 1990), plates 18–20; David M. Goldfrank, “Who Put the Snake on the Icon and the Tollbooths on the Snake?—A Problem of Last Judgment Iconography,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 19 (1995), plate 6; Dmytro Stepovyk, *Istoriia ukrainskoi ikony, X–XX st.* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1996), plate 52; Vasyl Otkovych and Vasyl Pylypiuk, *Ukrainska ikona XIV–XVIII st.: Iz zbirky Natsionalnoho muzeiu u Lvovi* (Lviv: Svitlo i tin, 1999), 32–33; and Patriarch Dymytrii (Yarema), *Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy XII–XV st.* (Lviv: Drukarski kunshty, 2005), p. 245, il. 298, and p. 250, il. 306.

² Oleh Sydor, “Reiestr ikon Strashnoho Sudu v kolektsii NML,” *Litopys Natsionalnoho muzeiu u Lvovi*, no. 2 (7) (2001): 90.

³ Dymytrii, *Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy*, 245. The best-informed estimate seems to be that of Oleh Sydor, who places it in the second half of the fifteenth century (*ibid.*, 90).

⁴ Heinz Skrobucha, “Zur Ikonographie des ‘Jüngsten Gerichts’ in der russischen Ikonmalerei,” *Kirche im Osten: Studien zur osteuropäischen Kirchengeschichte und Kirchenkunde* 5 (1962): 61.



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Museum in Lviv, but it has rarely been exhibited.⁵ Sequentially between the Vanivka and Mshanets icons is an icon owned by the National Museum in Cracow, usually referred to as the Polana icon (after the Polish name of Poliana, a village in Ukraine).⁶ The Vanivka and Mshanets icons are the most similar to each other; the Polana icon differs from the others stylistically, especially in its color scheme.

The Vanivka and Mshanets icons both come from the Staryi Sambir region, and it is likely that they were painted in one of the nearby monasteries, perhaps in Lavriv or Spas. Probably villagers commissioned the icons from the monks and then carted them to their villages. Although the icons were large, they were composed of several boards and could be dismantled for the journey. The Mshanets icon was painted on two linden boards.

The Mshanets icon, like the other two older icons, has much in common with Byzantine icons of the Last Judgment⁷ and particularly with Novgorod icons.⁸ The Last Judgment icons of the Ukrainian Carpathians also have distinctive features.

Like most depictions of the Last Judgment in the Byzantine tradition, the Mshanets icon shows two angels rolling up the scroll of the heavens at its very top center (Is 34:4 and Rv 6:14). The scroll is adorned with a red sun and a white moon. Directly below the scroll is the Son of Man sitting in a mandorla ringed by cherubim and borne aloft by four angels. From the left of the mandorla flows a stream of fire that gains in size until finally it forms the lake of Gehenna near the icon's bottom left. (The left and right in Last Judgment iconography is not the viewer's left and right, but left and right from the perspective of the Son of Man. The right side, generally speaking, is the side of salvation, and the left, that of damnation.) The mandorla is flanked by the Mother of God on the right and John the Baptist on the left. The three figures together constitute the

⁵ The best and most accessible reproduction is in Dymytrii, *Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy*, 241–42.

⁶ Reproduced in Romuald Biskupski, *Ikony w zbiorach polskich* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1991), plate 22 (color); and Janina Kłosińska, *Ikony* (Cracow: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 1973), 155.

⁷ See especially the Mt. Sinai icon from the second half of the twelfth century reproduced in G. Sotiriou and M. Sotiriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai: Collection de l'Institut Français d'Athènes*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1968), plate 151. A better reproduction is in Kurt Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), plate 23.

⁸ Especially the fifteenth-century icon held by the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, reproduced in color in Kurt Weitzmann et al., *The Icon* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), 281 (detail p. 280).

deesis or trimorphion. This element appears in all Byzantine-inspired iconography of the Last Judgment. Standing behind the Mother of God and John the Baptist are angels.

In the upper right corner is the heavenly Jerusalem (Dn 7:22, 27; Gal 4:25; Heb 12:22) depicted as a city, among whose structures are turrets and a wall. Before the city stand Jesus, his mother, John the Baptist, and St. Peter. Balancing it in the upper left corner is the defeat of the rebel angels (Rv 12:7–9): angels in a sphere spear devils and drive them toward hell. To the right is Golgotha surmounted by a three-barred cross (with the inscription “King of Glory”) and instruments of the Passion (the lance, reed, sponge, and crown of thorns). These scenes are on all three of the old Carpathian Last Judgment icons and on those of Novgorod.

In the next register down sit the twelve apostles in two groups. On the right sit (from right to left) Philip, Luke, Andrew, Mark, Matthew, and Peter. On the left are Paul, John, James, Bartholomew, Simon, and Thomas. Christ had promised the apostles that they would be present to judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30), and they appear in Last Judgment iconography throughout the Eastern Christian world.

The apostles are divided by the throne of judgment, also known as the *hetoimasia* (place prepared). The throne is in the center of the second register. On it is a book open to Mt 11:28: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” It is much more common for the book to be open to Mt 25:34, as it is in both the Vanivka and the Polana icon. Kneeling to the right of the throne is Adam, and to the left, Eve, interceding for their progeny. The throne with Adam and Eve already appeared in Byzantine iconography. But from the bottom of the throne in the Carpathian icons extends the hand of God, which is an innovation developed originally in northern Rus'. The Mshanets icon has the inscription: “the souls of the righteous in the hand of God” (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1). Indeed, the hand of God is depicted as filled with heads representing souls. The hand of God also holds scales. Some souls gather near the right pan of the scales, while devils swarm the left pan.

In the third and fourth registers on the right, below the first group of apostles, are choirs of saints: female anchorites, male anchorites, monks, and holy hierarchs; below them are saintly women, martyrs, Orthodox kings, and prophets. In the third register on the left stands Moses holding a scroll with the inscription “Moses said: wretched Jews, see whom you have crucified.” To his left stand Jews in costumes from the biblical era. This scene has its origins in the gospel of John (5:45–46), but it was elaborated in “The Life of St. Basil the New,” a text that greatly influ-

enced Last Judgment iconography in Rus'.⁹ Standing near the Jews are other peoples, who are not condemned but represent the universality of judgment. Both scripture (Dn 7:13–14; Mt 25:31–32) and “The Life of St. Basil the New” stipulated that humans would come to judgment organized into groups of peoples. Aside from the Jews, the peoples in the third register are, from right to left, Greeks, Turks, Tatars, Armenians, Moors, Rus', and Germans. In later centuries the peoples in the Carpathian Last Judgment icons became more plentiful and exotic. The motif of the choirs of saints appears already in Byzantine iconography, but the ensemble of Moses and the Jews and the peoples was an innovation of Novgorod.

The middle two-thirds of the icon are taken up by a serpent with rings on its body. The serpent's head is near Adam, biting his heel. The serpent's tail is not visible because it is being swallowed by the two-headed beast of the apocalypse in Gehenna at the icon's far left near the bottom. The serpent is evidently the tempter from Genesis. The rings on his body are tollbooths.¹⁰ In Orthodox tradition, dating back at least to the fifth century,¹¹ the soul is imagined as traveling after death through various tollbooths, where devils and angels examine its record with respect to specific sins. The idea received its greatest elaboration in the vision of Theodora included in “The Life of St. Basil the New,” and it is from there that the motif entered the iconography of northern Rus' and then the Ukrainian Carpathians. In the Mshanets icon there are twenty-one tollbooth rings on the serpent, and at each a devil and an angel are present. Each tollbooth is inscribed with a particular sin, closely modeled on the list of sins in “The Life of St. Basil the New.” The tollbooths in the icon, some barely legible, are slander, mockery, envy(?), hatred, rage and anger(?), acquisitiveness(?), empty talk, usury and deceit, vain talk (or perhaps vainglory), love of silver, drunkenness, harboring grudges, gluttony, incantation and poisoning and magic, idolatry and all kinds of heresies, lying with men and infanticide, adultery, thievery, murder, mercilessness, and robbery/assault.¹²

On the left side of the icon, below Moses and the Jews and the peoples, is the resurrection of the dead, a motif common in all Orthodox ico-

⁹ S. G. Vilinsky, *Zhitie sv. Vasiliia Novago v russkoi literature*, 2 pts., vols. 6–7 (1911–13) of *Zapiski Imperatorskago Novorossiiskago universiteta: Istoriko-filologicheskii fakultet* (Odesa).

¹⁰ See Goldfrank, “Who Put the Snake on the Icon.”

¹¹ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, “De exitu animi, et de secundo adventu,” in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca* [*Patrologia Graeca*] (Paris, 1844–66), 77: 1071–90.

¹² Some of these readings come from Dymytrii, *Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy*, 246.

nography of the Last Judgment. In the Mshanets icon the world is represented as a circle. Four angels are trumpeting at different parts of the circle. Within the circle is land, shaped something like a six-leaved clover, and the remainder is water. In the water are fish, crustaceans, a ship, and an enigmatic man and woman. The earth contains a building in the upper left “leaf” of the clover. Most of the other leaves show various animals, including a bear, a wolf, and a serpent, vomiting up body parts. These scenes are meant to depict bodies being made whole again for the judgment. The land also shows heads rising from a grave. A man in the center is perhaps a personification of the earth.

At the far left of the resurrection circle is the prophet Daniel, accompanied by an angel. The presence of Daniel is motivated by the importance of his vision in chapter 7 for the theology and iconography of the Last Judgment. Here Daniel holds a scroll, the inscription on which is only partly legible: “I, Daniel, saw a vision....” Daniel seeing his vision is illustrated in both Novgorodian and Carpathian iconography, but does not have Byzantine precedents. The same is true of the four beasts representing evil kingdoms (Dn 7:3–7, 17; and 8:3–6, 20–24). In the Mshanets icon the beasts are placed on medallions just below the serpent and represent the kingdoms of Rome, the Antichrist, Babylon, and Macedonia.

Just below the resurrection scene is a group of sinners whose necks are chained together. There is a demon behind them, and two demons in front. The inscription reads: “They lead sinners to torment.” The scene is known in Byzantine iconography. Below them is the lake of Gehenna. Satan sits inside it, astride the beast of the Apocalypse. He holds the soul of Judas on his lap. This, too, has Byzantine origins.

Just below Gehenna are traditional torments, similar to those found in Byzantine and other Orthodox images of the Last Judgment. Here they are depicted as five circles within a square. A few demons help torment the sinners. The circles represent the unheatable winter, a dark and smelly place, everlasting fire (Mt 25:41), the worm that dieth not (Mk 9:44, 48), and gnashing of teeth (Mt 25:30).

To the right of the traditional torments is another hell modeled on Gothic Last Judgments.¹³ This new hell is unique to the icons of the Ukrainian Carpathian region. It also appears on the Vanivka and Polana icons, as well as on most later Last Judgment icons of the region. Inside are naked sinners, mostly hanging and enveloped by flames. Hanging upside down from the top of the new hell is a robber. Below him is a sorceress, her breasts attacked by serpents. Also hanging from the top of the

¹³ See, for example, Vlasta Dvořáková et al., *Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku*, photographs by Alexandr Paul st. (Prague and Bratislava: Odeon, Tatran, 1978), plate 40.

new hell is an “accuser and slanderer”; appropriately, he is hanging by his tongue. To his left, hanging from the top, is a person identified as “a thief and a fornicator.” In the middle of hell are an envious man and a murderer. At the bottom next to the sorceress is “a usurer and silver lover.” To his left is a drunkard; a devil is pouring drink into his mouth. A similar set of sinners can be found in the Vanivka and Polana icons. Over time Carpathian iconographers made this new hell more populous and diversified.

The most interesting figure in the new hell is the tavern maid. She is always clothed, even though all the other figures in hell are naked. Moreover, she is depicted almost identically and in almost exactly the same posture in all three of the oldest Last Judgment icons. At her back is a devil. The origin of the tavern maid is also to be found in Gothic Last Judgments. In fact, the figure of the tavern maid in the Mshanets icon and the two other oldest icons is almost identical to a tavern maid in a fourteenth-century Silesian fresco of the Last Judgment.¹⁴ The tavern maid is not found in Orthodox iconography outside the Carpathians.

On the extreme right of the new hell and to the left of paradise is the almsgiving fornicator, a figure out of a Byzantine tale that was often included in Slavonic miscellanies in the Carpathians in the sixteenth century. The basic story is told in the inscription on the Mshanets icon: “This man gave alms, but he did not give up his fornication.” Because of his sin, he feels the torments of hell, but for his almsgiving he sees the delights of paradise. Hence his placement in this and other Carpathian (and Novgorodian) icons—tied to a pillar on the border of heaven and hell, facing paradise.

Paradise occupies the bottom right of the icon. It is represented by a circle containing the Mother of God flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel, the good thief bearing a small crucifix, and the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with souls on their bosoms. There are also trees within the circle. Below are the gates of paradise, which are being entered by saints. The gate is guarded by a fiery cherub. St. Peter opens the gate with his keys, while across the gate from him St. Paul holds a scroll with the text of Mt 25:34: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.” Except for Paul’s scroll, this depiction of paradise is typical for Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography. Some monks flying into paradise are an innovation introduced in Rus’.

¹⁴ Klára Benešková, ed., *King John of Luxembourg (1296–1346) and the Art of His Era* (Prague: KLP, 1998), plate 166.

The most unusual feature of the Mshanets icon is a deathbed scene tucked into the space between paradise, the choirs of saints, and the serpent. Standing beside the dying man is the personification of death. The Mshanets icon is the first of the Carpathian Last Judgments to include the figure of death. Afterwards it was in almost every one of them; but it almost never occurs in Byzantine and Russian iconography. Death in the Mshanets icon has multiple faces on his body and carries a lance, a saw, a scythe, two axes, and an hourglass. This is clearly modeled on Gothic prototypes. The death scene is unique in that it bears an inscription in verse: “Smert vsikh muk okrutniishaia, / vsikh strakhov naistrashniishaia, / kozhdomu sia ia tak iavliaiu / koly ieho zhyvota izbavliaiu.” (Death is the cruelest of all torments, / the most frightful of all fears, / to each person I so appear /when I deprive him of life.). Also unique to the icon is the little demon holding a sign at the foot of the deathbed. It reads: “Because he did my works.”

Having surveyed all the motifs in the Mshanets icon, I have been led to conclude that not all truisms are false. This icon, with its combination of Byzantine-Novgorodian and Gothic elements, confirms the old observation that Ukraine and its culture lie between East and West.

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