

**The Holy Archangel Michael and Scenes of His Deeds
A Contemporary Icon (2010) by Alyona Knyazeva**

Raoul N. Smith, PhD

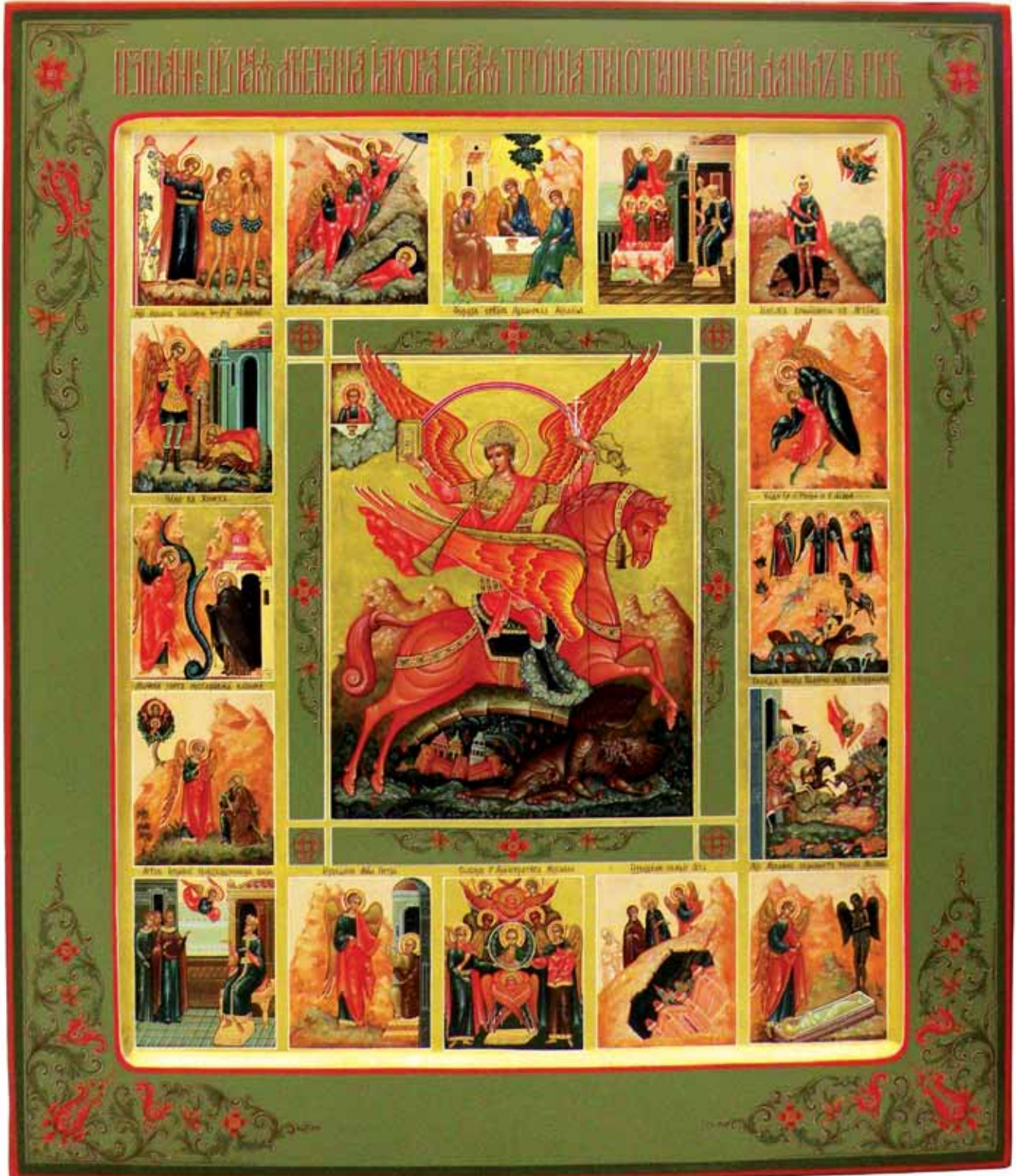


Figure 1 Archangel Michael and Scenes of his Deeds

The Holy Archangel Michael and Scenes of His Deeds A Contemporary Icon (2010) by Alyona Knyazeva

Raoul N. Smith, PhD

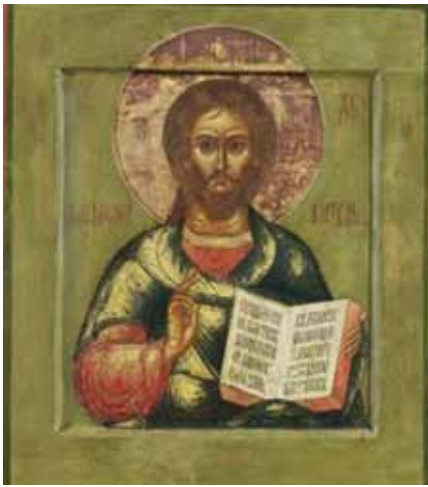


Figure 2 MRI Icon #55 Pantocrator



Figure 3 Icon border



Figure 4 Central image—the Archistratig

The purpose of this paper is to describe a new, contemporary icon that has recently been acquired by the Museum of Russian Icons (hereinafter MRI). The Moscow iconographer Alyona Knyazeva, of whose work the Museum of Russian Icons now has eleven examples¹, has depicted various scenes from biblical and later literature of the exploits of the Archangel Michael. This icon is of the type known as *Archangel Michael with Scenes of his Deeds*. The central image, Archangel Michael, is surrounded by sixteen such scenes, a typical arrangement for such icons. Five of the scenes appear at the top and the bottom of the icon and there are also three images running vertically on each side of the central image.

But first, who is the Archangel Michael? His name in Hebrew means “He who is like God.” He is the chief archangel, the Archistratig, the head of the Lord’s heavenly warriors, the guard and protector of God’s honor. Under his leadership the heavenly forces defeated the devil in battle. He is therefore the patron saint of chivalry and warriors and that is why he is often portrayed as a warrior saint. He is also the patron saint of Kiev, in the Ukraine, and there are churches dedicated to Michael in almost every city in Russia. The Archangel Michael is frequently represented in Western Christian art and music, for example, Respighi’s composition *Church Windows* has a segment devoted to him.

Iconographically, Michael is often portrayed trampling the devil with his feet, with a palm branch or shield in his left hand and a spear in the right. However, this iconography does not appear in any scenes of this icon.

Let us begin the analysis of this icon briefly with the borders. Both the outside border and the inner border are colored in a pea green, typical of many early icons² (Figure 2). They are adorned with very baroque foliate ornamentation with red flowers (Figure 3). But more importantly, all of the images are painted in exquisite detail as in miniatures appearing in books or on Palekh, Mstera, Fedoskino, and Kholuj boxes (шкатулка), small lacquered boxes or panels with scenes from mythology, folk tales, etc.

Archangel Michael and the Apocalypse

The most important image in this icon is Michael in his battle finery:

It is the central image of this icon (Figure 4) and it best captures the Archangel Michael’s³ position in Russian Orthodox hagiography—the Archistratig, or Commander of the Heavenly Armies, Saint Michael who battles the antichrist.

1 The other ten paintings are MRI Icon #28 Minyeda (c. 1995/acc. # 1996.1); #54 St. George (1996/1997.17); #58 St. George (1997/1998.4); #107 Mother of God, Pokrov (1997/2000.3); #174 St. Paraskeva (2002/2003.1); #290 Andrey Rublev (2003/2007.7); #283 The Nativity of Christ (c. 2006/2006.25); #309 St. John the Baptist (1998/2007.27); #356 The Crucifixion of Christ (2008/2008.24); and #379 Old Testament Trinity (2009/2009.9).

2 See *The Decorative Art of Russia* New York: Portland House, 1990 and *Medieval Russian Ornament* in full color from *Illuminated Manuscripts* New York: Dover Publications, 1994.

3 St. Michael’s feast day is November 8.



Figure 5a Archangel Michael Overwhelms the Demon

This particular part of the icon is similar to the images in Figure 5 of the mid-twentieth century Archangel Michael icon in the Collection of the Museum (MRI Icon # 404), entitled *Archangel Michael Overwhelms the Demon* (5a), and two recent ones from Google images (5b, 5c), variously called *The Archangel Michael and the Apocalypse*, *The Triumph of the Archangel Michael over the Antichrist*, and *Archangel Michael slaying the Antichrist*.

And the devil, with a duplicate face in his groin or belly, is a common form of representation as seen in Figure 6 of MRI Icon # 322 *Saint Nikitas Vanquishes the Devil*.

In other icon types Michael is represented either as the Commander of the Heavenly hosts holding a sword in one hand and in the other either a shield, a branch, or a spear, as in Figure 7, or as an angel holding an orb in one hand and a staff in the other, as in Figure 8.

Other examples of the *Michael with Scenes of his Deeds* are shown in Figures 10, 11 and 12, all of which have the archangel in battle gear instead of on a horse.



Figure 5b Another example of Michael Archangel Overwhelms the Devil

In many instances, Michael tramples the devil under his feet, which may be depicted as a dragon. This emanates from the tradition that Michael was the main opponent of Satan in the battle for Heaven. In the end, Satan attempted to drag Michael down in his fall from the heights, but Michael was rescued by God. In addition Satan was always looking to discredit Israel, while Michael was its main protector, so the image can also be interpreted as Michael defeating the enemies of Israel.

This image of Michael as a warrior retells (refigures) the passage from Revelation 12:7-9 "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—and he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels thrown down with him."

Michael is portrayed with wings, the typical attribute of angels in Western art. And, in this image, so is his horse. Gold on the figures and in the background represents divine light, as it does in early mosaics. And both



Figure 5c Another example of Michael Archangel Overwhelms the Devil



Figure 6 MRI Icon # 322 Saint Nikitas Vanquishing a Demon



Figure 7 Michael as soldier



Figure 8 Tver School. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

are painted in red, a color often used to represent courage. For example, in Roman times a triumphant general would have his body painted red to celebrate during his victory parade.⁴ In this portrait Michael is depicted with an elaborate gold breastplate, as in Figures 5 above and pantaloons and boots, the boots, surrounded by clouds as those surrounding Christ in the upper-left corner of this panel. The clouds represent heaven in both instances.

In this panel Michael is wearing a crown within his nimbus/halo, representing his princely stature among the celestial hierarchy. And above his head is a rainbow. The rainbow appears twice in the Bible, once in Genesis (9:12-17) after the Flood, symbolizing the promise God made to Noah not to destroy the world again, and again in Revelation (4:3; 10:1-7), the more relevant in the context of this panel. In his right hand he holds a book representing Holy Scripture and in his left hand a censer⁵ and spear. In his mouth is the trumpet of judgment.⁶ The spear is the spear from the Passion with its sponge on one point and its sharp point on the other.

Below the horse is the underworld with an image of burning cities, such as Babylon and Sodom and Gomorrah, referred to in another image on this icon, and, of course, the devil.

The whole complex of symbols captures an anthropomorphized supernatural being which can hold a book in one hand, hold a censer, and a spear and cross in the other, blow a trumpet, and conquer the devil all at one time, unlike a human, who cannot do this. The archangel Michael is also known as the Archistratig (Архистратиг), the chief heavenly warrior. This image of Michael with his battle finery riding a triumphant warrior's horse truly captures this invincibility.



Figure 9 From the Archangel Cathedral of the Kremlin, Moscow

4 Smith, William, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, London: John Murray, 1875, p 1166.

5 A censer is a vasiform liturgical implement for dispensing the smoke of burning incense.

The white of the cross may represent the divine world. It is a color often used to represent angels. The black, appearing just below the hand, contrasts with the red of the horse and clearly points the way to the killing of the demon. But, whereas in many other icons, the cross and the spear are one and the same, that is, the cross is the top part of the spear, here these are distinct. Nicholas Roumas (personal communication).

6 The trumpet in the mid-20th c. representation of this scene floats in front of Michael's face.



Figure 10 From the Andrey Rublev Museum of Early Russian Art, Moscow



Figure 11 Trinity Cathedral, Trinity-Sergius Lavra, Sergiev Posad



Figure 12 Holy Wisdom, also called Saint Sophia.

Nowhere in the Bible is Michael described this way, however. But, these characteristics sum up some of the many characteristics of angels appearing in Revelations. Rev. 8:3-5, for example, reads “And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer...Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth.”

Similarly, white, black, and red horses appear in Revelations. And Rev. 6:4 reads “And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.”

An interesting aspect of this image is the similarity of the iconographic representation of Michael and that of *Holy Wisdom* in, for example, Museum MRI Icon#365, dated 1625 (Figure 12). In those icons, referred to as *Sofia* (Сфия), Wisdom is represented with a crown on her head and with wings and dressed in red, symbolizing the fire of the spirit. Whether there was an influence of one on the other and which representation in iconography came first is not clear.

Deeds of the Archangel Michael

Beginning with the scenes of the top row, each image is labeled above the images in a seventeenth century vyaz⁷ script. In left-to-right order, these scenes describe tales from the Old Testament: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (Genesis 3:22-24) , Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:11-19), The Old Testament Holy Trinity (also known as *Hospitality of Abraham* from Genesis 18:1-8), The story of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Ananias, Azarias, and Misail or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively, in Daniel 3:22-25) , and Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 6:1-23).

1 The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise

Genesis 3:22-24 reads “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’— therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”



Scene 1 The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise

Many actions in the Bible are attributed to the Archangel Michael such as this one. It is not cherubim, however, that are guarding the tree of life in this image, as is described in the Bible passage, but the Archangel Michael.

In this scene and in most of the rest of the scenes, Michael wears the same garb—a dark blue dalmatic⁸ (далматика) with a belt called in Russian a lor or lorum (лор, лорум) at the waist and repeated in the neck, sleeves, and hem in precious stones, and a red himation⁹ (гиматий). In this representation he is menacing with a red (flame-shaped) sword. The arch representing the entrance to the Garden of Eden delimits the entrance to the site and focuses the eye on the iconographer’s imaginative structure of the tree of life with its bright red fruit making it truly other-worldly.

⁷ Vyaz is a form of adhering two or more letters together, a ligature.

⁸ A dalmatic is an ecclesiastical outer vestment worn in religious ceremonies.

⁹ A himation is a loose outer garment with one end pulled over the left shoulder from the rear, the remainder going around the back across the front and draped over the left arm.



Scene 2 Jacob's Ladder

2 Jacob's Ladder

Genesis 28:11-12 recounts "And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!"

In this case the iconographer has placed the youthful Jacob in a cave, eyes closed, and arm raised to the left of his head and supporting it. The angels are all dressed as Michael is in Scene 1—dark blue dalmatic with gold trim at the neck and a red cloak. Each has the same youthful face, curly hair, gold nimbus and wings. So even in this scene he makes an appearance.

3 The Old Testament Trinity (The Hospitality of Abraham)



Scene 3 The Old Testament Trinity

Genesis 18:1-8 relates "And the Lord appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, 'My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.' And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate."

The iconographer in this case has chosen to take what has become the classic interpretation of this story, namely the icon by Andrey Rublev, a facsimile of which, as stated earlier, is in the collection of the Museum (MRI Icon # 379), also painted by Knyazeva, which portrays the "three men" as angels. Since the Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and since Michael has been interpreted in other circumstances as Jesus, the Son, it must be the case that one of them is Michael. However, none of these three angels is dressed as in the other representations of Michael in this icon. But this representation of the Holy Trinity as angels is so iconic because of the Rublev painting that the colors are irrelevant to the viewer. Although the colors of the robes are the same as those in the Rublev, the major difference between the two is the intensity of the colors. The colors in the Rublev are lighter pastels rather than the darker more intense ones here. Also, there is just a single cup on the table, which represents a chalice on an altar as in the Rublev. In addition, the tree of life (the oak of Mamre) in the background is the same as in the Rublev.



Scene 4 The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace

4 The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace¹⁰

Daniel (3:4-30) is a rather lengthy text but it is worth summarizing the story so that the reader will know and understand the context and the imagery: When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem in 597 BCE, he brought back with him the Israelites Daniel and his three handsome royal

¹⁰ Feast day 17 December.

companions—Ananius (Анания), Misael (Мисаил), and Azarius (Азария). The chief eunuch then gave them all new names more fitting in Babylonia—Ananias became known as Shadrach (Шадрах), Misael became Meshach (Мешах), and Azarius became Abednego (Абденаго). The three young men followed strict dietary laws inconsistent with that of the rest of the court—vegetables and water—and became more healthy and handsome.

Three years after their arrival Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream that his wise men could not interpret. He therefore ordered them all killed, including Daniel and his three companions. But God revealed the meaning of the dream to Daniel. It was to be interpreted as an allegory of the future of Babylon, including the rise of Christ. Because of this interpretation the King forgave Daniel and made him the chief wise man.

Years later, in the eighteenth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue of himself made and commanded everyone to worship it whenever they heard musical instruments start to play. The three young men refused to obey the command. Some of the courtiers, jealous of the three young men, denounced them to the King. Nebuchadnezzar, in a rage, ordered them burned to death. At the time of this event, the servants who were building the fire were burnt by the flames (the person prostrate in the scene). But the angel of God, Michael, descended into the fire and protected the three young men by a cool, damp breeze. Nebuchadnezzar, seeing this, ordered them released and ordered that anyone who blasphemed against the God of Israel was to be put to death.

In this scene the Archangel has come down to protect the youths from the flames while the clothing of one of the workers has started to burn. Daniel is standing behind the King pointing to his three compatriots, who have been preserved from extinction by the Angel, and the King is leaning forward preparing to release them.

5 Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel chapter 6 tells the story of Daniel's confinement with lions. There are actually two such stories. The first one occurs in the Bible a few years after the story of the three youths in the furnace, after Darius the Mede had become king (539 BCE).



Scene 5 Daniel in the Lions' Den

Darius, seeing Daniel as the wisest and most illustrious of all the men in the kingdom, appointed him the first of three men to whom all lower functionaries had to report. These others were jealous of Daniel so they started to plan his downfall. They persuaded the king to decree that whoever petitioned any god or man, except the king, for thirty days would be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel, who followed the letter of the Jewish law, continued to pray three times a day. The other functionaries took this opportunity to go to complain to the king. Since Daniel disobeyed the law, Darius felt compelled to put Daniel in the lions' den. But God sent his angel to calm the lions. The next morning the king arrived, had the stone covering the opening to the den removed, and was shocked to see Daniel alive and well and playing with the lions. So the king had Daniel removed from the den and replaced him with all the bureaucrats who had reported him and they were eaten by the lions.

It is the second time that Daniel was thrown to the lions that is captured in this scene. Daniel had angered many of the functionaries another time for explaining away and divulging the tricks of the temple priests. For this

he was again placed in the lions' den. This time the Prophet Habakkuk¹¹ (АВБАКУМ) was transported in an instant from Judea with food with which to feed Daniel.

This explains the mysterious figures in the upper right-hand corner of this scene—an angel carrying a holy person through the sky, approaching Daniel. This is Michael¹² carrying Habakkuk to Daniel's prison.¹³

This image is of a youthful Daniel dressed in similar colors as Michael but in a shorter version of his garb and with the stereotypical cap that prophets wear in icons. Daniel raises his hands in prayer and thanksgiving as the lions lie quietly nearby.

6 Archangel Michael Appears to Jesus Navin (Joshua)

Who is Jesus Navin? He was Moses' second in command and was originally called Hosea, but Moses renamed him Joshua, that is, Jesus. To distinguish him from Jesus Christ, the Orthodox Church refers to him as Jesus Navin, in Hebrew Jesus ben Nun or Jesus son of Navin.¹⁴ He is considered as pre-figuring Jesus Christ, as with many Old Testament figures pre-figuring New Testament ones.



Scene 6 Archangel Michael Appears to Jesus Navin (Joshua)

In Joshua 5:13-14 "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? "And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so."

Joshua was the commander of the army of Israel after the death of Moses. So it is appropriate to show Michael, in military garb with a raised sword and its sheath, as the Archistratig of God as represented here.

7 Jacob Wrestling with the Angel

Genesis 32:24-32 reads "And a Man wrestled with him until dawn. And when the Man saw that he couldn't win the match, he struck Jacob's hip, and knocked it out of joint at the socket. Then the Man said 'Let me go, for it is dawn.' But Jacob panted, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.' 'What is your name?' the Man asked. 'Jacob,' was the reply. 'It isn't anymore!' the Man told him. 'It is Israel—one who has power with God. Because you have been strong with God, you shall prevail with men.' 'What is your name?' Jacob asked him. 'No, you mustn't ask,' the Man told him. And he blessed him there."



Scene 7 Jacob Wrestling with the Angel

¹¹ This is celebrated on December 2.

¹² In some icons it is actually labeled *Michael*, as in Tradigo p. 77. See also Kondak of Akathist, 8.

¹³ This is celebrated on December 2.

¹⁴ Joshua lived in the Late Bronze Age, 1450-1370 BCE. His feast is celebrated on 1 September, Julian.

A 13th c. icon of Michael appearing to Jesus Navin is in the Assumption Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin.

Modest Mussorgsky wrote a cantata entitled *Jesus Navin* in 1877, part of which is based on a Jewish theme.



Scene 8 The Miracle at Chonae

This image has the Archangel stripped to his dalmatic for the match and appears to be winning at this point in the struggle.¹⁵

8 The Miracle at Chonae (Χονεχ)¹⁶

This image relates the story of the intercession of the Archangel Michael in the 4th c. CE in saving a church in Chonae, a town in Turkey near the road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Known in Turkish as Honaz, it is near the town of Colossae (as in St. Paul's epistles to the Colossians). In the town was a church dedicated to the holy Archistratig Michael. It had been built in thanks for its many healings from a source of water created by the angel.

A young man by the name of Arxip had been named sexton at the church. He lived a very ascetic life, wearing hair shirts and sleeping on stones. Many of the local pagans were offended by him and beat him. They then decided to destroy the church and kill Arxip.

There were two rivers that flowed near the church and these pagans decided to destroy the church. They planned on doing it by changing the course of one of the rivers and flooding the church. So they dug a ditch from the church to where the rivers flowed. Saint Arxip saw what they had in mind to do and prayed to Michael to keep the church safe. The pagans were getting ready to send the water toward the church and were standing on a hill in order to witness the demise of both the church and Arxip. Suddenly Arxip heard a voice telling him to leave the church. He went out of the church and saw Michael who told him to watch how God would save the church. The water from the rivers began to flow but Michael raised his right hand and stopped the flow, ordering it to go into a cleft of a large rock located near the church. He then disappeared, the church was saved, and Arxip lived to a ripe old age.

The painting shows the merging of the two rivers and the creation of a vortex by the waters rushing into the cleft of the rock. It also shows Arxip as an old man. It is a classic representation of the story. (See Figure 13 from the Museum's collection.)



Figure 13 MRI Icon #305

9 Florus and Laurus

Florus (Φλωρ) and Laurus (Λαυρ)¹⁷ were twin brothers who lived in the first half of the 2nd c. CE. They were stonemasons who had learned their trade from Saints Patroclus and Maximus in Byzantium. After the martyrdom of their mentors, the brothers moved north to the town of Ulpania in Illyria, an area covered by today's western Balkans. Having become known for the quality of their work, they were commissioned by Licinius, Emperor Hadrian's son, to build a temple in honor of the gods he worshipped and according to his plans.

The brothers accepted the commission and were paid but gave the money away to the poor. They built the temple very quickly with the help of an angel and by a pagan priest Merentius (or Alexander), whose son had been healed from an injury to his eye.



Scene 9 Florus and Laurus

¹⁵ Joshua is also a Muslim saint, as many others from the old and new testaments. He is supposedly buried in Istanbul in Yusha's (Joshua in Turkish) Tomb.

¹⁶ This feast is celebrated on September 6. See Жития всех святых Москва: Спасское братство, 2010.

¹⁷ They are distinguished in iconography by Florus being represented with a beard.



Figure 14 MRI icon # 330 c.

When the temple was completed, the statues of the gods were installed. One night all the poor who had been converted to Christianity by the two brothers tied ropes around the statues and pulled them down. They then turned the temple into a Christian church.

When Licinius heard about this, he ordered all of the brothers' accomplices burned alive and had the two saints tied to a cartwheel and flogged. They were then dropped into a deep well where they perished.

These two saints are the patron saints of horsemen, the theme of this scene, yet their story has nothing to do with horses. Why? No one seems to know¹⁸ but, taking the traditional route, this is how Ms. Knyazeva has chosen to represent them—among horse. The angel is holding the reins of two of the horses and is flanked by Florus on the left and Laurus on the right. This is the liveliest scene on the icon with three young men dressed in the same colors as the three young men from the fiery furnace (red, green, and maroon) whipping horses and forcing them to scatter. (Note the similarities of this scene with Figure 14 reproducing the Museum's icon on the same subject.)



Scene 10 Moses Looks at the Unburnt Bush

10 Moses Looks at the Unburnt Bush

Exodus 3:1-10 relates how one day Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock. The angel of God appeared to him as a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw that the bush was not consumed by the fire, he went closer to it but God/Jehovah/Yahweh told him to stop and take off his shoes because he was on holy ground.

Then God told Moses to take the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, etc.

But how does this passage relate to the Archangel Michael? In many interpretations of this passage the "Angel of the Lord" is interpreted as Christ before his birth. In the Bible story it literally is the Angel of the Lord who appears before Moses. In Eastern Orthodoxy the church views this passage as prefiguring the birth of Jesus. So as God announces through the angel that Moses will lead his people out of captivity, Knyazeva uses the image of the Archangel Michael as an interlocutor and not as the being in the bush. Why is it that the Virgin and Child are in the bush, however? In this scene the iconographer is linking the Old Testament story of the angel of God speaking to Moses with the angel of the Annunciation of the New Testament speaking to Mary. Just as the bush in the Old Testament is burnt without being consumed,¹⁹ Mary, the *Theotokos* or "God bearer," will give birth to Incarnate God without suffering any harm, or loss to her virginity

It is interesting that the iconographer chose the Virgin Orans/Orant, also called the Virgin of the Sign,²⁰ for the image portrayed in the bush. This particular representation, relating to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 and dating back to Byzantine times, has Mary with hands raised in prayer and the Emmanuel positioned at her breast in the form of a Communion wafer. It represents Mary as the mediator between heaven and earth.

¹⁸ Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra *The Synaxarion, The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, Vol.6, pp. 522-24. Athens: Indiktos Publishing Co., 2008.

¹⁹ There is an icon called the *Virgin of the Unburning Bush* (Неопалимая Купина see Museum acc. #2000.8 112 for an example) which portrays Mary as God bearer; the icon's feast day is the 4th of September.

²⁰ The Museum has twenty-two icons of this type.



Scene 11 Joshua's Conquest Over the Amorities

11 Joshua's Conquest Over the Amorites

The Amorites were a nomadic Semitic people living in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE. At the time of Joshua they lived in southern Canaan, and in particular not far from Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. The story comes from Joshua chapter 10. The people of Gibeon had allied themselves with Israel under Joshua for fear that Israel would attack and destroy them as it had Jericho. In order to regain Gibeon, a large city with a well-trained army, the Amorites decided to attack it and recapture it as part of its coalition. Before the battle Joshua prayed to the Lord to help him, asking God to stop the sun and moon from moving so that he would have more time to achieve victory over his enemies.

Joshua is on the left leading the Israelites against the Amorites on the right. Again the iconographer represents God's actions as being executed by the Archangel Michael who oversees the winning of this battle. This is a very active scenario which copies the icon which represents the battle between the troops of Novgorod and Suzdal (Figure 15). Not only are the two battle groups arranged in the same manner but the three forward horses on the left are red, white, and black just as its archetype but the angel above is in exactly the same pose.



Figure 15 MRI icon # 23

12 The Angel Banishes King Nebuchadnezzar (Навуходоносор)

The story behind this scene is from the book of Daniel chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had had a dream that he wanted Daniel to interpret. The King had dreamed of a tree that grew to reach the sky and was visible from all over the earth. It was a beautiful tree, filled with fruit which provided food and shelter for man and beast. But an angel descended from the heavens and said to cut down the tree and scatter its fruits, to send the animals away, and to leave only the stump of the tree in the ground, encircled with a chain of iron and copper.

Daniel was shocked by the dream and remained silent for an hour but then gave his interpretation—the king was the tree. The king's greatness had grown to heaven and his rule was across the world. But now God had decreed that the people would chase him from his palace so that he would have to eat grass, like a cow, for seven years so that he learned that God is the head of all kingdoms. The stump was left in the ground, however, so that if the king learned his place and did good deeds, he would regain his kingdom. A year later Daniel's interpretation came true, but seven years after that, the king reformed and was re-established as king.

As the writing (надпись) above the scene says, the image captures the announcement of his banishment, indicated by the breath of the Angel, aimed at the King.



Scene 12 The Angel Banishes King Nebuchadnezzar



Scene 13 Rescuing Apostle Peter

13 Rescuing Apostle Peter

This story appears in Acts 12. Here the 'Angel of the Lord,' a phrase often interpreted as the Archangel Michael, approached Peter in his cell where he had been imprisoned by Herod. It was the night before his trial and Peter was asleep, chained between two guards. Michael nudged him awake and the chains fell off. He then told him to get dressed and follow him. They walked right past the guards at the door of the cell and when they approached the iron gates to the prison, these opened, Peter walked out, the angel disappeared, and Peter was free.

In this scene Michael is shown helping Peter past the prison gates.

14 The Assembly of the Holy Archistratig Michael

The Assembly (собор/Synaxis) of the Holy Archistratig Michael is an icon theme that goes back to Byzantine times.²¹ A very old traditional composition shows the archangels Michael and Gabriel together with an image of Christ Emmanuel positioned between the two of them. According to Gusakova 214-5²² "In an 18th c. icon template book [подлинник иконописный] it says that Michael is the leader of the highest powers. He is depicted with young features, curly hair, a blissful countenance, and great beauty...holding the Almighty Savior, Emmanuel in a wafer, under a vermillion colored Saving Cherubim, another Seraphim in an azure color,... all the angels winged and with scepter,... the angels of the Lord, young and painted in red."

Knyazeva's representation of the assembly is, given the amount of space available, a minimalist interpretation. Michael is on the left and probably Gabriel on the right. Emmanuel is in the center in stylized clouds surrounded by angels and seraphim. The seraphim are given the standard representation as six-winged beings in red.



Scene 14 The Assembly of the Holy Archistratig Michael

15 Leading Out Lot's Family

The story of Lot and his family is the well-known story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that is recorded in Genesis 19. Two angels are taken in by Lot as guests for the night. The men of Sodom then come and demand to have the angels turned over to them so that they can have sex with angels. Lot refuses but offers up his two virgin daughters for the mob's pleasure. The crowd persists so the angels close and bolt the door to the house and blind the crowd so that they go away.²³

What Knyazeva has captured in her painting is the angel Michael leading Lot, his wife, and one of his two virgin daughters (her virginity being indicated by her white garb) out of the city of Sodom. The cities being destroyed are again depicted by placing them in a cave.



Scene 15 Leading Out Lot's Family

21 There is also one of Gabriel and one that shows them jointly. The feast day of the Synaxis is March 26th.

22 Гусакова В О Словарь религиозного искусства, Санкт-петербург: Аврора.

23 The two daughters later get Lot drunk and have sex with him so that his line can continue.



Scene 16 Archangel Michael Protects Moses' Body

16 Archangel Michael Protects Moses' Body

The reference to this event occurs in a very short text in the Epistle of Jude verse 9 which reads "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" The devil in this scene is depicted as a black angel, an angel of evil.

Summary and Conclusions

The icon *The Holy Archangel Michael and Scenes of his Deeds*, captures the stories of Michael's exploits explicitly described in the Bible, and many ascribed to him. There are actually only five instances in the Bible when the Archangel Michael is mentioned by name: Daniel 10:13 and 20-21 and 12:1, Revelation 12:7, and Jude 1:9 and only the last two of these are represented in this icon (out of thirteen Biblical images, eleven from the Old Testament and two from the New. Of the other three scenes two are from old CE tales and the sixteenth scene is an old iconic representation of the Synaxis of Michael.) In the other biblical references in the scenes the identification of Michael as the referent of an angel mentioned in the text is traditionally only supposed.

There is no chronological arrangement to the scenes. They range from Bronze Age tales to the 4th c. CE—from Genesis 3 to 28 to 18, then to Daniel 3, Daniel 6, Joshua 5, back to Genesis 32, the Miracle of Chonae (4th c. CE), Florus and Laurus (2nd c. CE), Exodus 3, Joshua 10, Daniel 4, Acts 12, Genesis 19, Jude 9. But this is to be expected since in Orthodoxy "the individual events of religious history are not to be understood as mere occurrences, but as happening mystically and as being active events even today. This means that the one who worships does not merely remember, but lives and actually partakes himself of the life of the Saviour and of His saints."²⁴In some sense Orthodoxy was a precursor of M-theory²⁵, the *au courant* unified theory of physics, the ultimate theory of everything, which has come to replace or at least integrate string theory—time does not exist or, to look at it in a different way, everything happens in the present.

The overall semiotics that support the iconography of the icon is that of the Archangel Michael serving as God's warrior in a variety of roles.

24 Kalokyris, Constantine *The Essence of Orthodox Iconography* Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985.

25 Hawking, Stephen and Leonard Mlodinow *The Grand Design* New York: Bantam Books/Random House, 2010.

~~~

Professor Raoul N. Smith, Ph.D., Research Fellow



MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS  
203 Union Street, Clinton, MA, 01510, USA