

A 19thC Russian icon of St Barbara (the Great Martyr Barbara)

Information provided by the owner:

To the best of my knowledge this icon has always been in the same family since its purchase in Russia in the early 1900's.

Adonis (Anton) Patellis was a very wealthy and successful trader working in the Odessa region of Imperial Russia in the late 1800's, early 1900's and it was he who brought the icon back to Greece in 1918 when it was no longer possible to be a foreign trader in the new Soviet Russia.

Anton passed the icon on to his sister Kalotina who married into the wealthy sponge dealing Kalymnos family of Gregor Kouremetis. The icon stayed with her until 1973 when she passed it to her son George Kouremetis and his New Zealand wife. The icon has been in their possession ever since April 1973. The glass in the icon case was broken during the flight back to Auckland from Athens and when the case was opened, to repair the glass, there was a small amount of crumpled newspaper being used as packing in the icon case. Not being able to read Russian a photocopy of the newspaper was sent to the Russian embassy in Wellington in 1989 to try and establish a more precise date for the icon. (See correspondence between and the Russian Embassy and the photocopy of the newspaper below). The glass was broken again (grandchild) and has since been replaced with museum quality UV glass.

The subject of the icon is St Barbara (who died c. 200CE; feast day December 4), legendary virgin martyr of the early church. Venerated as one of the 14 Holy Helpers, she is invoked in thunderstorms and is the patron saint of artillerymen and miners. According to legend, which dates only to the 7th century, she was the beautiful daughter of a pagan, Dioscorus, who kept her guarded in a tower to protect her from harm. When she professed Christianity and refused marriage, he became enraged and took her to the provincial prefect, who ordered her to be tortured and beheaded. Dioscorus himself performed the execution and, upon his return home, was struck by lightning and reduced to ashes.



March 15, 1989

The Embassy of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
57 Messines Road
Karori
Wellington.

Dear Sirs:

The enclosed photocopies of pieces of newspaper were found in the back of an icon. The icon, of St Barbara, belonged to my husband's family in Greece and is purported to have come into their possession from family members who originally lived in Russia but left during the time of the revolution, around 1917 we believe.

My husband and I were wondering if there is anything in these pieces of newspapers that would give us some clue as to the date of publication. Unfortunately neither of us read the Russian language and would appreciate any help you could give.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

Encls.



EMBASSY OF THE
UNION OF SOVIET
SOCIALIST REPUBLICS
57 MESSINES ROAD
KARORI, WELLINGTON
PHONE 766-113

17 March 1989

Dear

I carefully examined the text of the two pieces of newspaper, sent by you. I am not in a position to tell you the exact day of publication. But I am quite sure about a number of things. This was a local newspaper of the town of Odessa, situated on the bank of the Black Sea in the southern part of our country. During the period of 1918-1919 this town was under foreign troops occupation, french in particular. Taking into account the intention of french military authorities to expand the zone of occupation, mentioned in one of the articles of this newspaper, I may presume with great extant of confidence that the year of publication was end of 1918, beginning of 1919.

I will be pleased if this information can be of help for you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'V. Shaposhnikov'.

V. SHAPOSHNIKOV,
Secretary of the USSR Embassy