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## FLORENTINE MURALS OF P. S. SHARVAROK IN THE CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

*Zherdiev V. Florentine murals of P. S. Sharvarok in the context of documentary sources.*

**The purpose of the research** is to reconstruct the Florentine period of creativity of Ilya Repin's disciple, an Ukrainian artist Petr Stepanovich Sharvarok (1870–1903) and to analyze his murals for the church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence (1899–1903). **The methodological basis** is made up of the principles of historicism and art criticism based on empirical field research and the study of archival and iconographic materials which in a complex allow to reconstruct the stages of work, mural program and features of P. Sharvarok's artistic manner. **The scientific novelty** of the results obtained is in the fact that for the first time P. Sharvarok's religious works are introduced and placed into scientific circulation. His works are the most original in the general program of the murals made by famous masters. Reconstruction of P. Sharvarok's Florentine period is based on the archival "Journal of the construction of the Russian Orthodox church in Florence, 1897–1912" of the first Prior of the church Archpriest V. I. Levitsky. The author of the article worked with the materials of the "Journal" in Florence in October 2016. For the first time Sharvarok's oeuvre was systematized from his studying at the Academy of Arts to his last paintings in the church of Florence. **Conclusions:** the cycle of murals made by P. Sharvarok in Florence is the most significant work not only in the artist's oeuvre but also one of the significant in the Orthodox ecclesiastical art

in Western Europe of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. The work in the Florentine church not only fully revealed the Ukrainian artist's talent, but also, thanks to the notes of a contemporary, showed the master's human side: his responsibility and self-devotion.

**Keywords:** Petr Stepanovich Sharvarok, Church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence, architect M. T. Preobrazhensky, archpriest V. I. Levitsky, A. N. Novoskoltsev, A. P. Blaznov, D. I. Kirpik, M. M. Vasiliev, Art Nouveau.

**Жердев В. В. Флорентійський стінопис П. С. Шарварока в контексті документальних джерел.**

**Мета роботи.** Реконструювати флорентійський період творчості учня І. Ю. Рєпіна, українського художника Петра Степановича Шарварока (1870–1903). Проаналізувати його стінописи, виконані в церкві Різдва Христового і свт. Миколи Чудотворця у Флоренції (1899–1903). **Методологічну основу** складають принципи історизму, системного підходу та мистецтвознавчого аналізу на основі емпіричних польових досліджень і дослідження архівного, іконографічного матеріалу, які дозволяють вибудувати програму поліхромії храму і особливості авторського стилю П. С. Шарварока. **Наукова новизна** полягає в тому, що вперше в науковий обіг вводяться релігійні твори П. С. Шарварока, які є найбільш самотніми в загальній програмі поліхромії церкви. Реконструкція флорентійського періоду творчості П. Шарварока ґрунтується на архівному «Журналі будівництва російської православної церкви у Флоренції, 1897–1912» першого настоятеля храму протоієрея В. І. Левицького, з матеріалами якого автор статті працював у Флоренції в жовтні 2016 року. Уперше систематизовано творчий шлях Шарварока від навчання в Академії мистецтв до стінописів у флорентійській церкві. **Висновки.** Цикл стінописів, виконаний П. С. Шарвароком у Флоренції, є найзначнішим твором у доробку цього майстра і одним із значущих у православному церковному мистецтві Західної Європи кінця ХІХ — початку ХХ століття. Робота у флорентійській церкві не тільки повною мірою виявила талант українського художника, а й завдяки нотаткам сучасника показала людську сторону майстра: його відповідальність і самопожертву.

**Ключові слова:** Петро Степанович Шарварок, церква Різдва Христового і свт. Миколи Чудотворця у Флоренції, М. Т. Преображенський, протоієрей В. І. Левицький, О. Н. Новоскольцев, О. П. Блазнов, Д. І. Кирпик, М. М. Васильєв, модерн.

**Жердев В. В. Флорентийские росписи П. С. Шарварока в контексте документальных источников.**

**Цель работы.** Реконструировать флорентийский период творчества ученика И. Е. Репина, украинского художника Петра Степановича Шарварока (1870–1903). Проанализировать его росписи в церкви Рождества Христова и свт. Николая Чудотворца во Флоренции (1899–1903). **Методологическую основу** составляют принципы историзма, системного подхода и искусствоведческого анализа на основе эмпирических полевых исследований, исследования архивных и иконографических материалов, которые в комплексе позволяют восстановить этапы ведения работ, выстроить живописную программу росписей храма и особенности авторского почерка П. С. Шарварока. **Научная новизна** заключается в том, что

впервые в научный оборот вводятся религиозные произведения П. С. Шарварока во флорентийском храме, которые являются наиболее самобытными в общей программе росписей. Реконструкция флорентийского периода творчества Шарварока основывается на хранящемся в архиве церкви «Журнале сооружения русской православной церкви во Флоренции, 1897–1912» первого настоятеля храма протоиерея В. И. Левицкого, с материалами которого автор статьи работал во Флоренции в октябре 2016 года. Впервые систематизирован творческий путь Шарварока от обучения в Академии художеств до его последней работы во Флоренции. **Выводы.** Цикл росписей, выполненный П. С. Шарвароком во Флоренции, является самым значимым произведением в творчестве этого мастера и одним из значимых в православном церковном искусстве Западной Европы конца XIX — начала XX века. Работа во флорентийской церкви не только в полной мере выявила талант украинского художника, но и благодаря запискам современника показала человеческую сторону мастера: его ответственность и самопожертвование.

**Ключевые слова:** Петр Степанович Шарварок, церковь Рождества Христова и свт. Николая Чудотворца во Флоренции, М. Т. Преображенский, протоиерей В. И. Левицкий, А. Н. Новоскольцев, А. П. Блазнов, Д. И. Киплик, М. М. Васильев, модерн.

**Problem.** The names of Ukrainian artists of the early twentieth century in the context of European art are not yet open not only to European researchers, but also to Ukrainian History of Arts. Church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence is not only one of the vivid examples of Orthodox ecclesiastical architecture in Europe, but also in the metropolis itself, where many examples of the period of Art Nouveau were lost after the revolution of 1917. One of the main artists who created the most interesting paintings for the Russian church in Florence was a Ukrainian-born artist, a student of the outstanding painter Ilya Repin, Petr Stepanovich Sharvarok (1870–1903). His name will still take a worthy place in Ukrainian art history. The author of this study researched P. S. Sharvarok's murals in Florence in October 2016.

**Analysis of the previous studies.** P. Sharvarok's oeuvre and biography have not been studied in detail. An important source of information is S. Kondakov's *Jubilee Reference Book*, which lists the stages of Sharvarok's training at the Academy of Arts. Some data on the I. Repin's students, incl. P. Sharvarok, who developed the theme of the Ukrainian Cossacks can be found in the *Encyclopedia of History of Ukraine*. The historian M. G. Talalay's works devoted to Orthodox heritage in Italy are a valuable source of information on the construction and decoration of this church. For the first time the "Journal of the construction of the Russian Orthodox church in Florence, 1897–1912" was published in M. Talalay's book "Russian Church

Life and temple construction in Italy" in 2010. Therefore, the author of the article will refer specifically to the published "Journal" in the corresponding section of M. Talalay's book [3, pp. 191–285]. This fact, together with the fact that Sharvarok's name is mentioned in scattered publications, allowed approximately to reconstruct the main stages of his oeuvre.

**The purpose of the article** is to reconstruct P. S. Sharvarok's stages of work in Florence using the data of the "Journal of the construction of the Russian Orthodox church in Florence, 1897–1912"; to analyze Sharvarok's manner in the cycle of paintings in the Orthodox Church in Florence in the context of the general program of the murals of the temple.

**Main part.** Although the scattered data about P. S. Sharvarok are very concise, but still allow us to present his academic and creative path. Sharvarok was born in Poltava. He studied at the Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts in the period 1891–1895. In 1894 he received a small silver medal. April 11, 1895 he received the title of a class artist of the third degree [2, p. 221]. He had an honor to work in I. Repin's workshop, in which other young artists from Ukraine also studied: A. Murashko, F. Krasisky, S. Prokhorov, S. Chuprinenko, and others [1, p. 413]. An undoubted influence on young artists was rendered by the epoch-making Repin's *Zaporizhian Cossacks writing a letter to the Turkish sultan* (1880–1891). Many of them turned to the subject of the Cossacks in program works: A. Murashko's *Funeral of a Koshevoi* (1900), S. Chuprinenko's *Going to the campaign* (1900), F. Krasisky's *A guest from Zaporizhia* (1901), I. Shulga's *Cossacks coming* (1909), etc. [2, p. 221]. But one of the first Repin's disciples, who developed the theme of the Cossacks, was Petr Sharvarok, who received the title of an artist on November 2, 1899 for the *Mazepa caught by the Cossacks in the steppe* [2, p. 221]. Also, Sharvarok and the group of Ukrainian artists M. Tkachenko, G. Krushevsky, M. Zinoviev and others popularized the Cossack and Ukrainian themes in the St. Petersburg illustrated editions, incl. the journal *Niva* [1, p. 413]. Sharvarok designed covers for several books on Ukrainian subjects: *Ukrainian essays* by Ye. Grebinka, the first volume of the three-volume anthology *Vik (The Century)* and *Coryphaeus of the Ukrainian scene* [4, p. 15].

However the murals in the new Russian church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence (1899–1903) became the main Sharvarok's work. This church was built according to the design of an academician M. T. Preobrazhensky (1854–1930). After the completion of construction of the church in Florence, M. T. Preobrazhensky recommended to Archpriest Vladimir Levitsky to invite artists already familiar to the architect for

the work in St. Petersburg [8, p. 69]. Such artists were the painters who worked on decoration of the church at St. Vladimir school for which the architect designed the room and the iconostasis. Thus, artists from St. Petersburg – A. N. Novoskoltsev (1853–1919), M. M. Vasiliev (?–?), P. S. Sharvarok, A. P. Blaznov (1865–1939), D. I. Kiplik (1865–1942), E. M. Cheptsov (1874–1950) were involved in creation a pictorial program in the Florentine church [5, p. 161].

The fact was that Preobrazhensky presupposed also the pictorial decoration in the spirit of the Byzantine iconography, developing a general concept of the architectural and artistic appearance of the temple in the forms of Moscow–Yaroslavl architecture of the 17th century. However, father Vladimir categorically opposed this idea, considering this painting style as an “archaic” [3, p. 259]. M. T. Preobrazhensky, Archpriest V. Levitsky and the Russian artists developed a new program of paintings in the “Vasnetsov style”, consulting with the historian of ancient Christian art N. V. Pokrovsky (1848–1917) [7, p. 213].

The following program of murals was developed. The first tier of murals is dedicated to the earthly life of Christ: *Nativity of Christ* (P. Sharvarok) is on the east wall to the right of the altar; *Baptism of the Lord* (A. Blaznov) is on the southern wall; *Transfiguration of the Lord* (P. Sharvarok) – western wall to the left of the entrance; *Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane* (P. Sharvarok) – the western wall to the right of the entrance; *Crucifixion* (A. Blaznov) – the northern wall; *Resurrection of Christ* (P. Sharvarok) – eastern wall to the left of the altar. On the pylons of the western wall: to the left of the entrance – *St. Sergius of Radonezh* and *St. Antony of the Caves* (P. Sharvarok); right of the entrance – *St. Theodosius of the Caves* and *St. Jonah, Metropolitan of Moscow* (P. Sharvarok). On the pylons of the eastern wall: to the left of the altar – *St. Prince Boris* (A. Blaznov); to the right of the altar – *St. Prince Gleb* (D. Kiplik). Altar: *New Testament Trinity – Lord Sabaoth and the Holy Spirit*, below – *the Savior with the symbols of the Eucharist* (P. Sharvarok).

Medallions with saints on the arches can conventionally be called the second tier. The eastern (altar) arch: *St. Aaron*; *St. Melchizedek*; *St. righteous Abel*. The southern arch: *St. righteous Joseph the Betrothed*; *St. King and Prophet David*; *St. righteous forefather Abraham*. The western arch: *St. Popes – Clement the Martyr, Leo I and Gregory I the Great (the Dialogist)*. The northern arch: *St. Myrrh-Bearing Wives: Mary, the wife of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene and Salome*. All twelve images in medallions belong to P. Sharvarok.

The third tier represents the composition of *Deesis: Mother of God and John the Baptist* with angels

are on the vaults of the eastern wall (A. Blaznov). The figures are facing the window with the stained-glass image of *Christ the Great Bishop*. The apostles facing the altar are on the vaults of the northern and southern walls. Three apostles on the north wall were painted by a Serbian artist A. S. Dukhovich on D. Kiplik’s sketches, the other nine apostles were painted by A. Blaznov [9, p. 28]. On the western wall: frontal figures of the *St. Cyril and Patriarch Photius* (left) and *St. Methodius and Mark of Ephesus* (D. Kiplik). The images of the evangelists above the windows also belong to D. Kiplik, who worked with his Italian assistant Amadeo [3, p. 260].

The temple was decorated during one winter season from October 1902 to the spring of 1903. But it should be noted that ornamental works and murals of vaults were created by Italian artists on the sketches of M. Vasiliev, D. Kiplik and A. Blaznov, with the exception of the cherubim faces, which, at the insistence of Preobrazhensky, was entrusted to E. Cheptsov [9, p. 27]. Vasiliev arrived in Florence only for two days [3, p. 259]. Kiplik and Blaznov with his assistant Kuzminsky left Florence in early January 1903 [3, p. 262].

The main burden of the work fell on P. Sharvarok and his assistant E. Cheptsov. And, actually, from the program of murals, as we see, most of the main paintings were created by Sharvarok: *Nativity of Christ*, *Transfiguration of the Lord*, *Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane*, *Resurrection of Christ*, *St. Sergius of Radonezh*, *Anthony and Theodosius of the Caves*, *Jonah, the Metropolitan of Moscow*, paintings of the altar, twelve images of saints in medallions. Also at the main entrance there are *Annunciation* and *St. Queen Helena and the Holy Cross* – P. Sharvarok’s latest works, which was already finished by E. Cheptsov, because of Sharvarok’s illness [9, p. 22]. Moreover, Sharvarok had to re-develop the cardboards of the three parts of the ceiling with Russian ornament. This task was not carefully thought out by Preobrazhensky [3, p. 262].

As noted above, Preobrazhensky originally assumed the style of the paintings in the spirit of 17th century, while father V. Levitsky considered this style “archaic”, preferring a more academic “Vasnetsov” approach. One can only guess at the urgency of their polemics. Images for the iconostasis and kiots, created by A. Novoskoltsev and M. Vasiliev, are solved in an academic manner. But the murals of the interior in the end turned out to be very far from academic “Vasnetsov” manner. Although P. Sharvarok had took part in the decoration of the St. Vladimir cathedral in Kiev,<sup>1</sup> a team of masters who worked in the Florentine church, created a completely independent

<sup>1</sup> From the interview with the Prior of the Russian church in Florence, Archpriest George Blatinsky, October 2016.



Fig. 1. The interior of the church. The iconostasis by G. Novi. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016

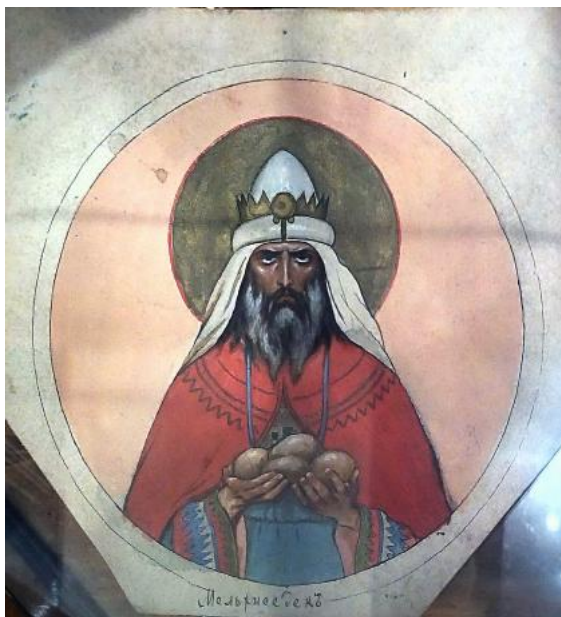


Fig. 2. St. Melchizedek. P. S. Sharvarok's sketch for a medallion on the altar arch from the museum of the church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016. The photo is published for the first time



Fig. 3. P. Sharvarok. St. Sergius of Radonezh. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016

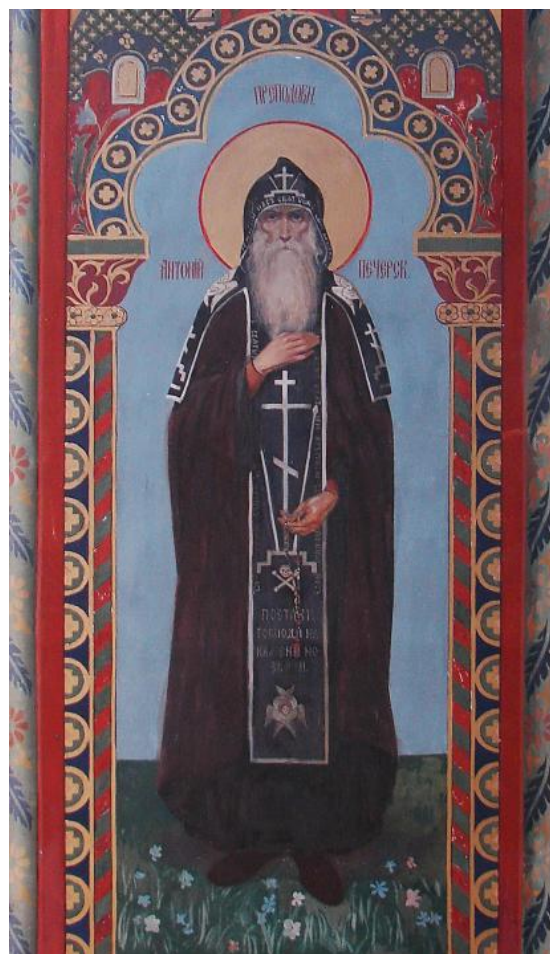


Fig. 4. P. Sharvarok. St. Antony of the Caves. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 5. E. Cheptsov after P. Sharvarok's sketch. Annunciation. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 6. P. Sharvarok. Nativity of Christ. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 7. P. Sharvarok. Transfiguration. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 8. P. Sharvarok. Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 9. P. Sharvarok. Jesus Christ from the Eucharist in the apse. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016



Fig. 10. P. Sharvarok. Angel from the Eucharist in the apse. Photo by V. Zherdiev, October 2016

work, synthesizing a realistic approach and iconographic techniques in the spirit of Art Nouveau. Still, P. Sharvarok's paintings and some of A. Blaznov's paintings (*Baptism of Christ*, *Crucifixion*, the central part of the *Deesis*) are closest to iconographic patterns in both the composition and character interpretation: stylization of draperies of chitons and himations, angels with iridescent wings, etc. Although the compositions made by A. Blaznov are formally corresponded to iconographic samples, the Sharvarok's images are full of a deep psychological individuality which distinguishes them in the general program of the paintings.

So there are no worshipping magi and shepherds in the composition of the *Nativity of Christ*. Only the angels are witnessing the miracle of Nativity, thereby making the scene chamber, as if hidden from prying eyes. Moreover, the southern kiot becomes an additional obstacle for the viewer and makes the Nativity scene even more intimate. Sharvarok used the symbolism of the Heavenly Powers in the form of a circle with golden rays and seraphims, which echoes the iconography "Council of the Mother of God". In this iconographic plot, the Mother of God and the Child are depicted on the throne on the background of a blue circle (meaning the heavenly sphere, the world of incorporeal forces or angelic ranks), surrounded by the Magi, angels and shepherds, etc. From this iconography Sharvarok used only a circle with seraphims and golden rays – the symbol of the presence of the Divine Light, giving solemnity to the hidden event. The same golden rays find its continuation in the scene of the *Transfiguration* on the opposite wall. One of the first images of the *Transfiguration* is in the conch of the apse of the basilica of the St. Catherine monastery in Sinai (6th century): the Lord is depicted in snow-white robes on a background of a blue mandorla with outgoing rays. Sharvarok used the classical composition of this plot: the lower part with the fallen apostles, the upper one – with the Lord on a background of the mandorla, Elijah and Moses, separated from the apostles by the line of clouds. Sharvarok stylized the very place of the event in the miracle of Transfiguration on the Mount Tabor: the steps of the mountain are close to the iconographic "leschadka". The figure of Christ in a snow-white himation and chiton with outgoing golden rays is almost weightless on the background of the glow of the mandorla. The master used the same iconographic detail also in the composition of the *Resurrection of Christ* on the wall near the northern choir.

Sharvarok's *Eucharist* in the apse of the temple is especially noteworthy. The general organization of the murals has already formed the composition of *Deesis* at the top of the church (A. Blaznov). But in this way the apostles on the southern and north-

ern walls of the upper part of the church, facing the stained-glass image of Christ in the window of the eastern wall, become participants in the *Eucharist* in the apse. This made it possible to "unload" compositionally the space of the apse wall. Thus, there is the figure of Christ in a red chiton draped with a white himation in the central part under the canopy in the form of a temple, surrounded by seraphims. There are the symbols of the Eucharist – bread and a chalice with wine – in the hands of the Lord. God the Father and the Holy Spirit are on the one axis with Christ, forming the image of the *New Testament Trinity* in the conch. The angels in courtly attire with rhipidates as part of the composition of the *Eucharist* are in the southern and northern parts of the apse. The figure of Christ is slightly refined and elongated, His face is very subtly painted. The absence of the figures of the apostles, the large planes of the firmament, made it possible to create a sensation of the Sacrament created over the earth expanse. By the way, the plot of the mystical Eucharist was proposed precisely by rev. Vladimir Levitsky. Preobrazhensky proposed to place in the space between two windows the image of Our Lady "The Unbreakable Wall" [3, p. 246].

However, work without days off undermined the already weak health of the stubborn artist, despite the fact that the building of the church was heated. In the beginning of spring he finally got sick. Even the urgent arrival of his wife Zinaida Ivanovna from St. Petersburg and her care did not return the strength to the master. At the end of May, his wife took Sharvarok home. They had a long journey through the seaside Viareggio to Livorno, then to Naples, Bari, Constantinople, from there to Odessa, and then – to Sharvarok's native place, to his father. However, the artist's well-being only worsened. At the end of June they reached the country cottage in Luga with great difficulty. A month later, on July 21, 1903, the artist died. He passed away in a symbolic thirty-three years... In his notes father Vladimir Levitsky wrote that Petr Sharvarok's name was commemorated in the church along with the benefactors of the temple, because his works were the best of the whole painting, the ornamental part belonged to him entirely and he put so much zeal and effort into the whole matter that one could say – he laid his soul for the cause [3, p. 267]. P. S. Sharvarok's previous artistic heritage has yet to be studied, but the Church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence has already become a kind of monument to this talented Ukrainian artist.

**Conclusions.** In the work on the painting cycle for the Florentine church P. Sharvarok managed to preserve his own manner even after passing through such a school as the work in the St. Vladimir cathe-

dral in Kiev and being under the powerful influence of such masters as V. Vasnetsov, W. Kotarbinsky, and others. Sharvarok's paintings are the most significant as the performance and expressiveness of the author's manner in the program of murals of the church. He managed to combine the realistic principle and techniques of traditional iconography in the spirit of the epoch of Art Nouveau. The murals in the Florentine church are the most significant pieces not only in P. S. Sharvarok's works, but also as one of the most striking examples of Russian ecclesiastical art of the period of Art Nouveau that have survived to this day.

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