

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia

Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART ONE

*The Art of the
Medieval Church*

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia
Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic
Excerpt
[More information](#)

CHAPTER ONE

Aural Icons of Orthodoxy *The Sonic Typology of Russian Bells*

Edward V. Williams

BECAUSE Russians had lived for centuries beneath a mantle of ringing bronze, the nineteenth-century sculptor Mikhail Mikeshin tacitly acknowledged the bell as the dominant symbol of Russia. He chose the form of a great bell for his monument in the Novgorod kremlin to commemorate an earlier Russian millennium in 1862 (Plate 1).¹ The observance of the millennium of the baptism of Rus is an appropriate occasion for considering the aural typology ascribed to the bronze voices of Russian Orthodoxy, which once called the faithful to services and were omnipresent in their daily lives. Studies in the typology of Eastern Orthodoxy have focused principally on the visual iconography of panel paintings, frescoes, mosaics, and architecture and generally have overlooked the transmission of symbols through sound. Beyond the official function of Russian bells for calls to services, their voices also have been perceived by the Orthodox as aural icons of past and future trumpeting. The sources for this typology can be traced back to the Sinai Peninsula in the middle of the thirteenth century B.C. and forward to events that, according to prophecy and Orthodox belief, have been foretold for two sites east of Jerusalem at the end of history.

Before trumpets had assumed their office as instruments of convocation in the wilderness of Sinai following the Exodus, the continuous voice of a trumpet was among the aural and visual phenomena reported during the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.² The two silver trumpets (*hazazerot*) that Yahweh commanded Moses to make were first blown over burnt and peace offerings in the Tabernacle on Sinai, and later, priests sounded similar instruments during sacrificial rites in the Jerusalem Temple.³ If, as Percival Kirby has suggested, the trumpet calls blown on Sinai were taken from the Pharaonic military code, then these signals could have had their roots in even earlier Egyptian practices.⁴

Trumpets were also the first instruments to issue calls to services at Christian foundations in the Egyptian Thebaid during the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵ But by the beginning of the sixth century, the striking of a mallet on a wooden beam that the Greeks called *semantron* had replaced the trumpet as the agent

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia

Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

EDWARD V. WILLIAMS

of convocation in the monasteries of Egypt, Palestine, and Sinai.⁶ The rhythms struck on the wood were soon vested with the aural memory of rhythmic blasts from earlier trumpets. At the end of the sixth century John Climacus (579–649) may have been alluding to trumpet rhythms that had been applied to the semantron when he spoke of signals from “the spiritual trumpet” (*tes pneumatikes salpingos*).⁷ Others have drawn analogies between trumpet signals sounded during battle and the semantron’s rhythmic speech. Theodore, bishop of Petra, wrote that “just as the battle trumpet has been accustomed to rouse ranks of soldiers against the enemy, similarly, the sacred sound of the wood [semantron] calls forth the soldiers of Christ to battle against invisible enemies. . . .”⁸ Thus, by the middle of the first millennium in the Christian East, the aural image of trumpeting had been symbolically imposed on the more practical office of the semantron as an instrument of convocation.

Lines on an inscription plaque from 1060 on the structure where a large wooden semantron was struck at the Great Laura on Mount Athos carried this metaphor into the beginning of the second millennium. The semantron is compared to

. . . a trumpet, which utters a great battle cry,
Which awakens soldiers of the Word for hymns
At the time of psalmody [the daily offices],
Which destroys the serried ranks of demons,
Which sings its intense and unwavering song.⁹

Earlier, Theodore, abbot of Studion Monastery in Constantinople during the first quarter of the ninth century, had compared blows on the semantron to trumpet calls that preceded singing. In his epigraph to the *kanonarches*, who struck the semantron at the Studion Monastery, he enjoins him to “sound the wood like a trumpet at the proper time as needed / Then set your tongue in motion, using it like the striking instrument.”¹⁰ Though Byzantine semantra had been introduced to churches and monasteries in Kievan Russia by the end of the tenth century, where they were called *bila*, the bronze bell rather than the wooden beam eventually became the principal instrument of convocation for services in the Greeks’ newly won spiritual territory. Even so, the semantron’s iconography of trumpeting was transferred to the *zvon* of Russian bells. This nexus between trumpet and bell was affirmed during the blessing or consecration of a newly cast Russian bell (*chin blagosloveniiia kampana*), a ceremony that was performed until the bell foundries of Russia ceased production after 1917. Following the priest’s sprinkling of a new bell and his reading of Psalm 69, he quoted from Num. 10:1–10, including the following passages:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying “Make for yourself two trumpets of forged silver. . . . And on the days of your rejoicing, and on your holidays, and on your new moon festivals, blow the trumpets for burnt offerings and for the sacrifices for your salvation. . . .”¹¹

AURAL ICONS OF ORTHODOXY

Before a new Russian bell began its service to a cathedral, church, or monastery, those present at its consecration were reminded of the instrument's aural ancestry in the pair of silver trumpets that had been forged and blown in the Sinai wilderness.

During the last three centuries of the Byzantine Empire, the trumpeting symbolically conveyed through the *semantron* acquired a significant new iconographical dimension. In the second half of the twelfth century Theodore Balsamon declared that the metal *semantron* is struck "to remind Christians of that final day" and, further, that "God's angels will sound trumpets and the dead will rise. . . ." ¹² This sonic metaphor, also transmitted in the so-called *Logos* of Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem, a document not earlier than the twelfth century, ¹³ is further elaborated in a catechism from a fourteenth-century manuscript that poses the question of what the *semantron* signifies. The response discloses that

it is like the trumpet of the Second Coming; for thus the angel at that time is destined to sound the trumpet and to awaken those sleeping from ages past: so the *semantron* also awakens sleepers for the glorification of God. ¹⁴

Similar statements from fifteenth-century Byzantine prelates indicate that the aural symbolism of the final trumpet continued to be attributed to the *semantron* until the conquest of Constantinople. ¹⁵

In the mid-nineteenth century Russian Archimandrite Leonid (Lev Aleksandrovich Kavelin) noted that

in Russia our motherland . . . the variety of our calls to church, at first with wooden, and then with cast iron, beams and finally with the ringing of bells, has its own significance and deep meaning, even an acoustical one between our time and that more distant – the past and future. . . . The weak sounds of the wood and iron remind us of the prophets' vague, cryptic language, but the clamor and harmonious ringing of bells is a proclamation of the Gospel, its exultation to the ends of the universe, and reminds us of the angel's trumpet on the final day. ¹⁶

In this passage Archimandrite Leonid indicates that the iconography of the archangel's trumpet had been transferred, in his mind at least, from the rhythms struck on Byzantine *semantra* to the ringing of Russian bells. ¹⁷

The transmission of this typology from Byzantine *semantra* to Russian bells is not possible to trace in Kievan Russia but may have begun during the century following the conversion. ¹⁸ In comparing paganism in Rus to the new faith, Ilarion, Metropolitan of Kiev in the mid-eleventh century, evokes visual, aural, and even olfactory images to convey the impact of Christianity. "They adorned all the sanctuary and vested holy churches with beauty. Angel's trumpet and Gospel's thunder sounded through all the towns. The incense rising toward God sanctified the air." ¹⁹ The expressions "angel's trumpet and Gospel's thun-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia

Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

EDWARD V. WILLIAMS

der” can be interpreted as Ilarion’s metaphorical allusions to the rhythms struck on semantra or bila, possibly on bells, in the towns of Kievan Rus.

Visual juxtapositions of trumpets and church bells in a sixteenth-century depiction of *The Vision of the Sacristan (Ponomar) Tarasii*²⁰ are aurally fused in a chronicler’s perception of trumpeting in the voices of three large bells founded at Novgorod in the early 1530s. The first of these, cast in 1530 for St. Sophia Cathedral, was a bell whose molten bronze allegedly was poured in the very hour when the future Ivan IV was born. The chronicle reports that “. . . in Novgorod and in the entire Novgorod region, there is no bell that [rings] with such majesty, as though speaking like an awesome trumpet.”²¹ An entry for 1535 describes two large bells at Khutynskii Monastery near Novgorod, which ring, according to the chronicle, “as though with the voice of awesome trumpets.”²² These two entries apply the adjective *strashnyi* (awesome, terrible) to the voice of the three bells. Because the name for the Last Judgment in Russian is *Strashnyi sud* (the terrible or awesome judgment), the ringing of the three Novgorod bells may have evoked in the chronicler’s mind the trumpeting that he and others imagined for that event.

At no time during the church year was bell ringing in Russia, especially in Moscow, so intense as it was on Easter Sunday and throughout Easter week. One earwitness in the nineteenth century has described the traditional manner of announcing Easter from the Kremlin, a practice maintained until the last Easter celebrated there in the spring of 1918:

In the midst of the profound silence on this night about which much has been said, suddenly from the height of the Ivan Velikii [Bell Tower] as though from the depths of the sky, the first sound of *blagovest* boomed forth – prophetic, as though it were the summons of the Archangel’s trumpet proclaiming the general resurrection.²³

Similar trumpet imagery is applied to bell ringing in Russian literature and music. Nowhere, however, is the *zvon* of Russia’s bells as the voice of the angel’s trumpet stated more emphatically than on the bell tower that once served Dormition (Uspenskii) Cathedral in Riazan. Under construction between 1789 and 1840, this 273-foot tower of four graduated tiers is carried into space by a thin spire (Plate 2). Distributed around its third tier are four statues of angels, each facing outward in a different direction and each blowing or holding a long, golden trumpet.²⁴ The *zvon* formerly rung in the Riazan tower enveloped these four figures, sculptural representations of a sonic image, with the aural expression of that image.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and a crescendo of apocalyptic angst in Muscovy during the second half of the fifteenth century preceded the turn from the seventh- to the eighth-millennium *anno mundi* in A.D. 1492. Russians’ presentiments of the end may have led in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the creation of ceremonial, architectural, and aural expressions of the two Jerusalems, the old and the New. A manifestation of this iconography in Moscow was the reenactment on Palm Sunday of the entry of Jesus Christ

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia

Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AURAL ICONS OF ORTHODOXY

into Jerusalem, a procession that was associated with the Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed in Red Square. In the seventeenth century the patriarch of Moscow on horseback was led by the tsar on foot through Spasskii Gate (analogous to the Golden Gate in the eastern wall of Jerusalem) from the Kremlin into Red Square to the church called "Jerusalem," the name that foreign visitors had given to St. Basil's Cathedral.²⁵ The chapel in St. Basil's that faced Red Square was named for the entry into Jerusalem (Plate 3).²⁶

In the final years of the sixteenth century Tsar Boris Godunov announced plans to create an icon of Jerusalem within the Kremlin, ostensibly as an expression of his piety but also to lend architectural and aural strength to his claim for what promised to be a Godunov dynasty. The focal point of the tsar's project was an imposing Cathedral of the Resurrection on the plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This new sanctuary was to be constructed on the site of Dormition (Uspenskii) Cathedral, which Boris Godunov reportedly was prepared to raze. Architects and builders were engaged, a model of the Jerusalem church was prepared, and construction materials were assembled, but plans for the new cathedral were forgotten amid the social unrest and political crises in the short reign of Tsar Boris.²⁷

The only extant evidence of this "Jerusalem" project is thought to be Boris Godunov's addition to the earlier column (1505–8) by Bon Friazin, part of the Ivan Velikii Bell Tower complex. The soaring 270-foot tower with its bells and golden crown, once the loftiest structure in Moscow, remains the Kremlin's architectural dominant (Plates 4, 5). This tower was built, as James Billington has observed, "in partial imitation of the old Jerusalem, and with enough embellishment to suggest the New."²⁸ Another Kremlin monument from Boris Godunov's reign may also have been commissioned as a sonic expression of "Jerusalem": the thirty-nine-ton bell that Andrei Chokhov cast in 1599 for the Kremlin.²⁹ Though this bell was destroyed in the early seventeenth century, its metal was incorporated in three subsequent recastings.³⁰ Not until the mid-seventeenth century, however, would an icon of the two Jerusalems reach fruition in Muscovy.

By the time Nikon had gained the patriarchal throne of Moscow in 1652, he was aware of Ottoman threats to Christians and Christian shrines in the Holy Land. He sent a mission to Jerusalem to assess the severity of this situation and to determine whether reproductions of churches on sacred sites in Palestine should be built in Muscovy. The leader of this mission, Arsenii Sukhanov, was instructed to make models of important churches and to bring them back to Moscow.³¹ In 1656 Nikon broke ground on a sharp bend in the Istra River thirty miles west of Moscow for what was to be the most ambitious effort to create an architectural and aural icon of the Holy City on Russian soil. Officially named the Voskresenskii (Resurrection) Monastery, it is better known as the New Jerusalem Monastery.

Nikon's foundation, its church, and the *zvon* of its bells became manifestos in masonry and ringing bronze of Moscow's identification with the two Jerusalems. Certain structures in and around the monastery as well as natural features inside and outside its walls were named for buildings and sites in or

EDWARD V. WILLIAMS

near Jerusalem.³² On a hill called Golgotha stood the Church of the Resurrection with its enormous “tent-roof” rotunda and its bell tower, a reproduction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre seen through Russian eyes.³³

If there is a specific place where the typology of past and future trumpets can be said to converge in Russian bells, it was in the three-and-a-half-ton “Vsesviatskoi” (All Saints) Bell, which formerly hung and was rung in the bell tower of New Jerusalem Monastery. One of the inscriptions on this bell, cast in 1664, quoted a passage from the tenth chapter of Numbers, which enumerates occasions for sounding the two silver trumpets.³⁴ A second inscription looked toward the future with its reference to “spiritual trumpets for a new Israel, splendid-sounding cymbals, or called by the usual word – bells.”³⁵

The final chapter in tsarist Russia’s pursuit of its identity with the two Jerusalems took place during the last decades of the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth, not in Moscow but in Jerusalem itself and on the nearby Mount of Olives. Though a Russian presence had been maintained in Palestine unofficially from the mid-eleventh century through pilgrimages, only during the reign of Peter the Great did Russia begin to develop a policy in this region. With the signing of the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardjein in 1774, Catherine II gained protection of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire, including pilgrims in Palestine.³⁶ Thus began a Russian movement of religious piety with strong political resonance.³⁷ The Russian quest for influence in the Holy Land culminated at the end of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem and the founding in St. Petersburg of the Russian Orthodox Palestine Society, to which the designation “Imperial” was added a few years later.³⁸

As though prophetic of Russia’s future advancement in Palestine, the Turks rescinded their ban on the ringing of church bells in Jerusalem after the end of the Crimean War in 1856, a proscription that had been in effect since Saladin’s occupation of the city in 1187.³⁹ The activities of the Russian church in the Holy Land were administered by the Russian Spiritual Mission, whose most energetic director was Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin. For more than a quarter of a century, until his death in 1894, Archimandrite Kapustin pursued a policy, as he expressed it, of “confirming and strengthening Russia’s name in the Holy Land so that we should not be merely guests there but to a certain extent rightful owners. . . .”⁴⁰ The motto of the Russian Orthodox Palestine Society from Isa. 62:1 was equally zealous: “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest.”⁴¹ To these ends Archimandrite Kapustin purchased land, especially on hilltops near Jerusalem, and launched an ambitious program for the construction on these properties of schools, churches, hospices, and bell towers.⁴²

The monumental, freestanding Russian bell tower, which rises 197 feet on the al-Tur summit of the Mount of Olives, was built between 1877 and 1886.⁴³ Still one of the landmarks in Israel, it is visible on a clear day from the Mountains of Gilead east of the Jordan Valley.⁴⁴ The tower and the larger

AURAL ICONS OF ORTHODOXY

social and religious goals of the Russian Spiritual Mission were read by one observer at the beginning of this century as evidence of “the half-religious, half-political movement which presses Russia ever southwards to the holy places. . . .”⁴⁵

This *Drang nach Süden* was accompanied by emphatic aural affirmations of the Russian presence. From the 1860s bells reached Palestine from foundries in Russia for the towers that Archimandrite Kapustin had built and for other Orthodox foundations as well. Two of these instruments, the two largest in the region, were cast in the 1880s for the bell tower of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and for the Russian Tower of the Ascension across the Valley of Jehoshaphat on the Mount of Olives.

One of the objectives of the Russian Spiritual Mission was to guarantee the rights of Russian clergy to perform services in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre without obtaining permission from Greek authorities and without being observed by a Greek representative. During their sixty years in Jerusalem before World War I, the Russians never gained the proprietary rights that they sought in this shrine.⁴⁶ But Russian voices still call out from its Crusader bell tower, where five castings from Imperial Russia comprise part of the *zvon*. One of these, an instrument of six-and-a-half tons, founded in 1886 at Samgin Foundry in Moscow, is the largest church bell in the Levant.⁴⁷

The great bell in the Russian Tower of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives weighs a ton less than the Samgin bell, but at five-and-a-half tons it, too, is a monumental instrument.⁴⁸ Cast in 1883 at Moscow’s Finliandskii Foundry and covered with inscription bands and an elaborate and finely executed decorative program, this bell was the gift of a Perm merchant to the Russian Spiritual Mission and reached Jaffa by ship.⁴⁹ After the bell had been unloaded, no draymen, animals, or vehicles were available to transport it to its destination on the Mount of Olives.⁵⁰ The bell was finally pushed and pulled to Jerusalem by a group of Russian women who had landed at Jaffa on a pilgrimage. Somehow they managed to move this bell the 40 miles and 2,600 feet of ascent to Jerusalem. They carried it down into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, across the Brook Kidron, and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives to the foot of the Russian Tower, where it was hoisted and installed in 1885.⁵¹

Reminders of Archimandrite Kapustin’s commitment to the advancement of Russian Orthodoxy in the Holy Land at the end of the nineteenth century are still heard from bell towers in Israel and the occupied West Bank. Two bronze sentinels founded in Moscow boom out across Jerusalem from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre within the city and from the Russian Tower on the Mount of Olives, the traditional site of the Ascension and of the Second Coming.⁵² Their voices meet and merge over Mount Zion, where silver trumpets, like those first created on Sinai, were once blown in the Temple, and over the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where, according to Scripture, the archangel’s trumpet will proclaim the Last Judgment.⁵³ For fourteen centuries the iconography of trumpeting ascribed to Byzantine semantia and Russian bells has been moving further from those instruments that had been forged and blown

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41310-7 - Christianity and the Arts in Russia

Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

EDWARD V. WILLIAMS

in the encampments on Sinai and, presumably, ever closer to that trumpet call, foretold in prophecy but unspecified in time, that will announce the culmination of history and the descent of the New Jerusalem.

Notes

1. E. N. Maslova, *Pamiatnik Tysiacheletiiu Rossii* (Leningrad, 1972), 55; and idem, *Pamiatnik "Tysiacheletie Rossii"* (Moscow, 1974), 8. Mikeshein's monument, dedicated to the millennial anniversary of the founding of the first Russian state, was unveiled on September 8, 1862, in the presence of Alexander II (M. Karger, *Novgorod the Great* [Moscow, 1973]), 104.
2. Exod. 19:16–19 and 20:18. See Alfred Sendrey, *Bibliography of Jewish Music* (New York, 1951), 341 (no. 10,009).
3. Num. 10:1–10. On trumpets blown in Jerusalem during King David's reign, see 1 Chron. 15:24 and 16:5–6, 42. When the Ark of the Covenant was carried into the Temple of Solomon, the choir of Levites was accompanied by cymbals, harps, and 120 priests blowing trumpets (2 Chron. 5:11–14).
4. "Ancient Egyptian Trumpets," *Music Book*, vol. 7 of Max Hinrichsen, ed., *Musical Year Book*, (London, 1952), 255.
5. Amand Boon, ed., *Pachomiana latina, Regle et epîtres de S. Pachome, épître de S. Theodore et "Liber" de S. Orsiesius (texte latin de S. Jerome)*, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, ed. L. Th. Lefort, no. 7 (Louvain, 1932), 14 and 15; see also 18, 18–19, 19, 21, 31, 33, 39, 40, 44, and 170; L. Th. Lefort, "La Regle de S. Pachome (2 étude d'approche)," *Museon* 37 (1924), 10. See also Heinrich Otte, *Glockenkunde*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Leipzig, 1884), 7–8; George Stuhlfauth, "Glocke und Schallbrett," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 41, ed. Karl Koetschau (Berlin, 1919), 166; and George Stuhlfauth, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Kirchenglocke," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 25 (1926), 263–4.
6. Hermann Usener, ed., *Der heilige Theodosios: Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos* (Leipzig, 1890), 82, 178–9; and Karl Krumbacher, "Studien zu den Legenden des hl. Theodosios," *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-philologischen und der historischen Klasse der K. b. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München: Jahrgang 1892* (Munich, 1893), 355–8.
7. *Klimax tou paradeisou* (*Scala paradisi*), PG 88, col. 937. "Let us observe and we shall find that the spiritual trumpet that summons the brethren together visibly is also the signal for the invisible assembly of our foes" (John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell [New York, 1982], 194 [step 19]).
8. Usener. *Der heilige Theodosios*, 86 (my translation). On the typology of the semantron, see Gabriel Millet, "Recherches au Mont-Athos," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 29 (1905), 132–7.
9. G. Millet, J. Pargoire, and L. Petit, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l'Athos* (Paris, 1904), 107, no. 333 (my translation).
10. *Iamboi eis diaphorous hypotheseis*, PG 99, col. 1784 (my translation). In Greek, "sound the wood like a trumpet" is expressed *salpize . . . to xylon* (trumpetize . . . the wood).
11. Konstantin Timofeevich Nikol'skii, *Posobie k izucheniiu ustava bogosluzheniia pravoslavnoi tserkvi*, 5th ed., rev. and enl. (St. Petersburg, 1894), 782 (my translation).
12. *Meletai etoi apokriseis*, PG 138, col. 1076 (my translation).