

Nataliia Brei Наталія Брей

senior lecturer, Department of Art Expertise, Institute
of Practical Cultural Studies and Art Management of the
National Academy of Cultural Managementстарший викладач кафедри мистецтвознавчої експертизи
Інституту практичної культурології та арт-менеджменту
Національної академії керівних кадрів культуриe-mail: nataliia.brei@gmail.com | orcid.org/0000-0002-5371-7609

Monumental Art of Ivan Izhakevich

The Church of Sts. Borys and Hlib in Kyiv's Podil

Монументальне мистецтво Івана Їжакевича

Борисоглібська церква на Подолі

Abstract. The paper attempts to highlight the little-known facts of Ivan Yizhakevych's legacy of sacred art, in particular, his monumental paintings at the Borysohlib Church in Kyiv's Podil area. This ensemble had historical and cultural value, and if this monument survived, it would have had a significant place in the history of Ukrainian sacred painting.

The difficulty of the research lies in the fact that there are no known photographs or works of art that would record the interior of this church and, in particular, the monumental paintings. Information on them is found, mostly, in pre-revolutionary publications that describe the church at the end of the 19th century. Only isolated mentions in later publications testify rather indirectly to the role of Yizhakevych in the history of this temple. Valuable are the memories of Fr. Mykhailo Yedlinskyi, who was the parson of this church and provides the most reliable information about Yizhakevych's participation in the church's paintings, as well as K. Sherotskyi's remarks about how the wall painting of the church looked at the beginning of the 20th century.

The paper aims to collect and organize all the available information about the lost monumental art piece.

Keywords: Ivan Yizhakevych, church, murals, destroyed cultural heritage, culture.

Introduction. The paper attempts to collect all known facts about the destroyed monument and, in particular, to highlight the role of the famous painter Ivan Yizhakevych in the decoration of the temple. Available written sources were analyzed; in addition, an assumption was made regarding the creation of the paintings. The history of the temple is fairly well-known until the end of the 19th century from the works of M. Zakrevskyi, M. Petrov, K. Sherotsky, etc. However, the lack of sources since the beginning of the 20th century hampers a thorough study. The church is mentioned in all the sources on the monuments destroyed by the Soviet authorities but the facts and their nature are not sufficient for making credible conclusions.

Due to the lack of illustrative material, the archival materials and all available graphic and painting works of Yizhakevych on this church were examined. It is possible to hypothesize with a high degree of probability that one of the drawings by Ivan Yizhakevych existing today may be attributed to be a sketch for the paintings of the Borysohlib church. At the same time, the examination of another sketch, which is considered to belong to this temple, raises certain doubts. These assumptions are not final but are an attempt to understand what exactly the ensemble of murals created by Ivan Yizhakevych in the Borysohlib Church in Kyiv looked like.

Literature review. The historians of the second half of the 19th century, in particular M. Zakrevskyi and M. Petrov, supply some information about the Borysohlib Church, as well as the guides to old Kyiv of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries by M. Zakharchenko, F. Ernst, and K. Sherotskyi, which, in turn, are based on the evidence of that by M. Zakrevskyi and supplemented with modern information. All sources provide a fairly thorough overview of the history of the temple and its reconstructions, but no evidence about its wall paintings from the turn of the 20th century. More precisely, there are mentions that the temple was renovated in the 1900s and newly decorated but for some reason, there are no indications of the author or the exact dates of new paintings. In fact, the first and most accurate reference to the fact that Ivan Yizhakevych was engaged in the decoration of the church may be found in the memoirs of Fr. M. Yedlinskyi, which was published in 2004. There are also sources from the 1980s, where the Borysohlib church is mentioned in the context of Ukrainian art, architecture, and culture, namely the book by P. Zholtoovsky *Artistic Life in Ukraine in the 16th–18th centuries*, V. Kovalinskyi's works on Kyiv, and T. Hevryk's album about the lost sights of Kyiv (published abroad).

The aim of the paper is to study and systematize all known facts about the Borysohlib Church in Podil



1. The Borysohlub Church, early twentieth century

and to discover the facts that prove the participation of Ivan Yizhakevych in creating the paintings of this church.

Results and Discussion. The ancient area of Podil in Kyiv is well-known for its rich history, cozy streets, and numerous churches that have adorned it for centuries. Unfortunately, not all monuments of sacred architecture have survived, as many were destroyed or severely damaged.

One of the tragic pages of Ukrainian sacred architecture was the small and peaceful church of Sts. Borys and Hlib. According to one of the versions, the temple stood in this place since the times of Kyivan Rus. M. Zakrevskiy, M. Zakharchenko, K. Sherotskiy, and F. Ernst in their works suggest that the site of the Borysohlub church was the place of baptism of the people of Kyiv, located along the course of the Pochaina River. In particular, M. Zakrevsky supported the opinion that the Turova Bozhnytsia (a church built after the baptism by a certain Tur) was located there. This “tourist attraction” for pilgrimage was also mentioned in historical sources as the place of the original St. Peter’s Church. Perhaps, the St. Peter’s Church was there, and after the canonization of St. Borys and Hlib, it was renamed to Borysohlubska, thus, rededicated. It is likely that this temple was under the patronage of the Kyiv princes, because both saints—Borys and Hlib—quickly became very popular in Kyivan Rus and were considered patrons of the ruling princely dynasty. Indeed, the iconographic and fresco images of Sts. Borys and Hlib were extremely common during the times of Kyivan Rus.

As K. Sherotskiy writes in his guidebook of 1918, “The church in Podil was ‘heavenly’, it had a special architecture and luxurious decoration. In 1482, this church, preserved from the time of St. Volodymyr, or built anew in the twelfth century, was destroyed by the Tatars... In its place, the church

attributed to the Nativity of John the Baptist, which existed since 1602, remained” (Sherotskiy, 1918, p. 136). It should be noted the preceding church was definitely a wooden one, as the first stone temple in Kyiv was the Church of the Tithes.

In a neglected state, the wooden church of Sts. Borys and Hlib existed until the 1790s. Interestingly, that for such a long period there is practically no information about the temple. The next mention of the church is of 1602, when a small wooden church was built next to it in honor of the Nativity of John the Baptist, at the expense of the Kyiv burgher Onesym Khodkevich (Zakrevskiy, 1868, p. 203). This new church was “attributed” as Borysohlubska. Apparently, the old church gradually dilapidated, and it was not restored. In 1692, the Kyiv colonel Hryhoriy Karpovich Korovka-Volsky rebuilt the church of the Nativity of John the Baptist in stone and it became the main temple.

The new stone church was constructed in accordance with the Baroque style of the time. It was a small three-part, one-story temple. The western facade was decorated with a triangular pediment, the walls were divided by pilasters, and a pear-shaped dome topped the structure. Such expressive baroque forms were a sharp contrast to the architecture of Kyivan Rus. The old wooden Borysohlub temple existed until the end of the 18th century, and after years of neglect, it was dismantled in 1791. In order to perpetuate the memory of the holy princes of Kyiv in the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist, in 1799, a side altar was added and consecrated in honor of Sts. Borys and Hlib. All church utensils of the old church were transferred to the new church. Because of that, the church was often called Borysohlubska, Gleboboryska, Khlibobormska, and Predtechenska; such a variety of names would cause considerable confusion for historians in the future.

In the 18th century, the Church of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist continued to change and grow. In 1737–1741, it was painted by the then-famous Kyiv artists Vasiliy Romanovych and Fyodor Kaminsky. The subjects of their paintings were the plots from the Apocalypse and various symbols. Subsequently, in 1802, with the funds of Kyiv burgher Klyment Ternovsky, a separate full-scale altar was built on the north side in honor of Sts. Borys and Hlib. Since that time, the whole structure was no longer named the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist, but the Borysohlub Church.

In 1811, a large fire occurred in Podil. It started near the Zhytniy market, near the St. Nicholas Prytyska church. The narrow streets of Podil and wooden buildings contributed to the rapid spread of the fire, and it soon covered the entire area. Then, in three days, more than two thousand houses, including stone ones, were destroyed and 12 Podil churches were damaged. The Borysohlub Church survived with its baroque architecture, decoration, and 18th century paintings (Fig. 1).

After the fire, the question of rebuilding Podil arose, and A. Melenskiy, the chief architect of Kyiv at the time, was entrusted with managing the district’s recovery plan. It is assumed that it was according to his project that a three-tier bell tower in the Empire style was added to the Borysohlub

church. In this form, the church lasted until the beginning of the 20th century, when in 1902–1904 a decision was made to reconstruct it. It is unclear, what were the reasons for the reconstruction of the entire ensemble but the building finally received a symmetrical, balanced shape: it became three-nave, with a central dome, and the results of gradual additions at different times were no longer noticeable. The early-20th century reconstruction was performed according to the project of the famous Kyiv architect, M. Kazanskyi.

This period in the history of the Borysohlib church is associated with the name of another famous person, the holy martyr archpriest Mykhailo Yedlinskyi. He became the parson of this church in 1893 and for over 40 years, until its closure in 1933, he was a real pillar, light, and spiritual authority for his Podil congregation and the pilgrims. A prominent saint of his time, John of Kronstadt, when pilgrims from Kyiv came to see him in St. Petersburg, exclaimed, “Why did you come all the way from Kyiv? You have your wonderful mentor there—Father Mykhailo! Go to him.” Therefore, the figure of Mykhailo Yedlinskyi was outstanding not only within Kyiv. In 1901, on the basis of the church, he created the Boriso-Hlib brotherhood, which was engaged in various charities, managed a school, a shelter, a church printing house, etc.

In 1902, Fr. Mykhailo invited the already well-known artist Ivan Yizhakevych to do monumental paintings in the restored church. At that time, the master had already managed to take part in the restoration and renewal of the frescoes of the St. Cyril's church in Kyiv and the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, decorated the St. George's Church, and worked on the paintings of the Refectory Church of St. Anthony and Theodosius of the Pechersk and the Refectory Chambers. The parson of the Borysohlib church certainly examined Yizhakevych's church works and came to the conclusion that this artist would succeed in decorating the renovated church. Ivan Yizhakevych worked together with the architect M. Kazansky in this church; the latter would build the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God and the Peter and Paul Cathedral in Kurenivka few years later and invite Yizhakevych to create monumental cycles there. It is likely that the works of the master in the Borysohlib church made a good impression on M. Kazansky. During the decoration of the church, camaraderie developed between Yizhakevych and Fr. Mykhailo. Their families remained friends even after the arrest and execution of Mykhailo Yedlinskyi in 1937. Many years later, his son, Fr. Georgy Yedlinskyi, will invite Ivan Yizhakevych to decorate the St. Macarius Church in Tatarka, where he was the parson, and the artist, naturally, happily responded to this invitation, in memory of his dear friend. There is evidence that when creating icons for the St. Macarius Church, in particular, the images of St. Macarius and St. Theodore the Blessed, Yizhakevych presumably gave them features of similarity with Fr. Michael, using a photograph of the holy martyr.

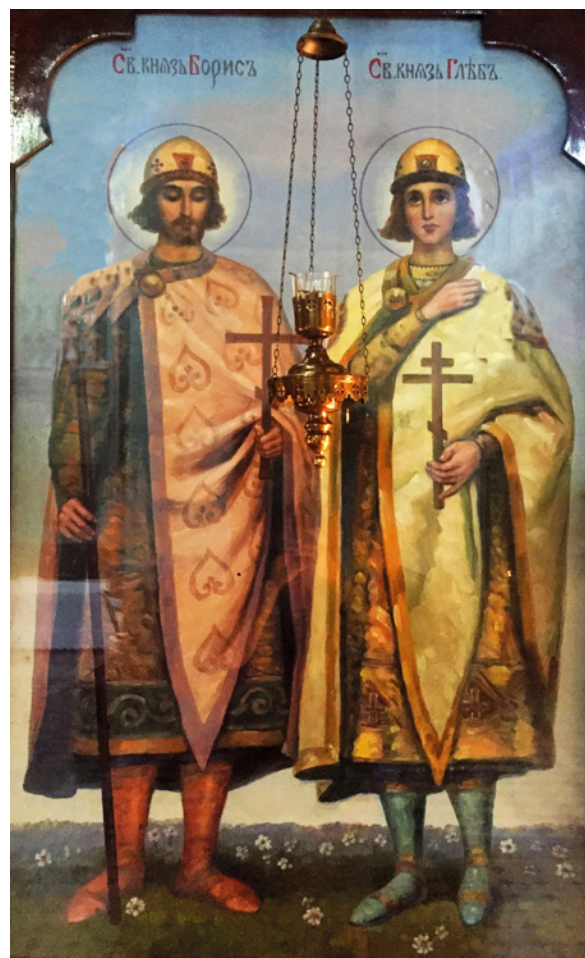
Unfortunately, at present, it is impossible to see and appreciate the work of Ivan Yizhakevych in the Borysohlib church. In the Soviet times, many Kyiv temples suffered

from the new regime—they were destroyed or closed. The Borysohlib church was open until 1934. Since there were no direct “prerequisites” for the demolition of the church (as in the case, for example, with the St. Michael's Golden Dome Cathedral, which was demolished in order to clear the site for the construction of the government quarter), the authorities resorted to tricks. On June 29, 1934, the employees of the communal power plant on Andriivska Street in Podil appealed to the Kyiv City Council with a demand to demolish the Church of Sts. Borys and Hlib, as “obstructing” the construction of the power plant: “... at the request of the workers of the May 1st State Power Plant, the resolution of the Presidium of the Kyiv City Council: the church does not allow the normal operation of the power plant and the school adjacent to the church, because church officials are trying to conduct anti-communist work among the power plant workers and students.” After this decision, in 1934 the Borysohlib church was closed. At first, it was used as a warehouse for a power plant, and after two years it was demolished. To this day, of all the structures of the Borysohlib Brotherhood, only the building (rebuilt) of the parish school attached to the church at Andriivska Street, 15 has survived.

Few photos of the exterior of the Borysohlib church from the beginning of the 20th century are preserved, but not of the interior. There is neither a list nor a description of the compositions and plots that Yizhakevych placed on the walls of the church. This is slightly surprising because until the 1930s, several guides to Kyiv were published, and none of them mentioned the interior decoration of this temple. Only in K. Sherotskyi's guide there is a rare and all the more valuable comment about the frescoes of this church. He regrets the fact that during the reconstruction of the church at the beginning of the 20th century, the murals of the 18th-century Kyiv masters Fyodor Kaminsky and Vasyl Romanovych were destroyed, but he immediately notes that the new wall paintings stand out favorably from among the latest fashionable, but stereotyped murals in many Kyiv buildings and churches of the time: “... in the paintings, the essence of local art is captured; the artist openly approaches the people's life, depicts the Ukrainian landscape, Ukrainianizes the clothes and types of saints, he looks at Byzantium, but also sees the surrounding environment well; the painting is quite decorative; ornamentation in the Ukrainian spirit” (Sherotskyi, 1918, p. 137). It was Yizhakevych who began to introduce into church compositions the elements of Ukrainian folk culture, certain everyday details, to depict the Ukrainian landscape instead of traditional biblical landscapes, etc. Such a testimony of K. Sherotskyi is invaluable, because it allows to imagine at least a little of the pictorial ensemble that the artist created on the walls of the Borysohlib temple. In favor of Yizhakevych's expressive manner, it should be mentioned that the reviews about his wall painting in St. George's Church are very similar. There, too, he received acclaim for the skillful introduction of the Ukrainian folk ornamental motifs into the overall composition. Therefore, love to Ukrainian culture gradually became a special feature of Ivan Yizhakevych's sacred works.



2. Sts. Borys and Hlib, sketch, the 1900s



3. Icon of Sts. Borys and Hlib, the Church of the Intercession of Holy Virgin in Priorka

In search for any factual evidence or information about Yzhakevych's work in the Borys-Hlib church, we discovered a sketch in the Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine in Kyiv. With a certain degree of probability, it may be attributed as one of Yzhakevych's preparatory sketches for the wall painting of this temple. The pencil drawing depicts two figures of saints resembling the images of Sts. Borys and Hlib. The figures are surprisingly refined. The saints are dressed in ancient Rus' costumes—cloaks and tunics, with princely hats decorated with fur, holding swords and crosses (Fig. 2). Presumably, they are the canonized Slavic princes. The faces have expressive dark eyes, characteristic of Yzhakevych's manner. At present, only this sketch was discovered. It does not have equivalents in any preserved Yzhakevych's church paintings. I hypothesize that this sketch with a characteristic plot created specifically for the church of Sts. Borys and Hlib in Podil.

One of the icons of Sts. Borys and Hlib decorates the Church of the Intercession of Holy Virgin in Priorka (Kurenivka) (Fig. 3). Ivan Yzhakevych worked in the church both at the beginning of the 20th century and in the post-war years. This icon is unattributed; still, it does not evoke any associations with the sketch of Yzhakevych. One of his assistants simply wrote the same plot, but without any reference to the sketch I found.

Another drawing, found by chance in Internet sources, is a version of the composition "Baptism". On the reverse side of this small pencil sketch is the inscription: "Sketch by the artist Yzhakevych for the Borisoglebsk church, 1909." It is not known who made that inscription and whether it is true. In addition, the date 1909 is surprising. At that time, the works in the Borys-Hlib Church had long been completed, and Yzhakevych was already working on the paintings of the Refectory Chambers at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. Moreover, in the Refectory Chambers, there is an image of the composition "Baptism", which is almost identical to this sketch. Considering all of the above, I argue that the "Baptism" sketch refers to the period of work in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, and not in the Borys-Hlib Church, so the inscription on the reverse side could have been made later and is false. On the other hand, numerous studies of Ivan Yzhakevych's work prove that the master used the same sketches several times in different churches. Therefore, a similar composition could decorate both the All Saints Church of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the Borys-Hlib Church. Unfortunately, at present, there are no credible facts to prove this assumption.

During my search, I turned to one more interesting source linked to another significant chapter in the life of Ivan Yzhakevych, i.e. his illustrations for the *Niva* magazine (their collaboration lasted for 25 years). The study of this part

of the creative heritage of the master showed that in this magazine *Yizhakevych* quite often, especially since the 1900s, published drawings that reproduced the compositions of his monumental church paintings, for example, the sketches of paintings of the All Saints Church of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, metropolitan chambers in Belgorod, and some others. A careful study of the published drawings revealed one interesting illustration printed in the 1917 edition: “Vision of the warrior Pelgusius. Sts. Borys and Hlib appear to the night guard of Alexander Nevsky” (Fig. 4). This is the plot of one of the miracles of Sts. Borys and Hlib. It would be reasonable to assume that a similar composition could have been depicted on the walls of the Borysohlib church in Kyiv. It is quite likely that the wall painting of the temple in honor of the holy princes was dedicated, to some extent, to the life of the holy brothers (perhaps not the central part but the side naves or altar parts).

Yizhakevych always meticulously and attentively conceiving the creation of his murals: he made preparatory sketches, used special church literature, and tried to “feel” what and how he should depict on the walls. For example, in the case of the Refectory Chambers of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, he thoroughly studied *The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery* in order to understand the characters of the Pechersk saints.

As for the paintings of the Borysohlib church, After researching the history of the first Slavic canonized princes, it may be suggested that most likely Yizhakevych used the *Tale of Borys and Hlib*. It is believed that this literary work was created in the 11th century during the time of Yaroslav the Wise. In the twelfth century, an addition to the text appeared, in the form of a description of miracles associated with Sts. Borys and Hlib. The full version is dated 1089–1115. About 170 copies of this story are known and it is considered one of the most popular works of literature of ancient Rus. Ivan Yizhakevych could well have studied this literary

source for his work on the paintings. Surprisingly, at present the churches dedicated to Sts. Borys and Hlib, especially with a full cycle of paintings, are rare. Therefore, the source that enables to form an understanding, which stories from the lives of the holy brothers were popular in art at the time, are the book miniatures of the 13th–16th centuries, e. g. the compositions “Volodymyr sends Borys to the Pechenegs,” “Borys prays to the Holy Savior in a tent,” “The murder of St. Borys in the tent,” “Svyatopolk sends the assassins to St. Borys,” “Hlib sails to Smydyn,” “Christ presents wreaths to Saints Borys and Hlib,” etc. I assume that at least some of these plots were depicted by Ivan Yizhakevych on the walls of the Borysohlib temple.

Conclusions. Without any reliable evidence and images of the interiors and wall paintings of the Borysohlib church, it is impossible to thoroughly study and analyze the paintings by Ivan Yizhakevych. The study of the entire sacral heritage of the master enabled us to make a number of assumptions about the nature and subjects of his wall painting. In all churches where Yizhakevych worked, he followed similar compositional decisions, which differed only in the regard to the saint, in honor of whom a particular church was dedicated to. Compositions such as “Baptism,” “Holy Communion,” “Nativity,” “Crucifixion,” figures of evangelists, Christ on the throne surrounded by archangels, etc. are found in most of the churches decorated by the master. Therefore, it can thus be suggested that similar images were painted in the Borysohlib church. Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to assert that the study of this temple is yet to come, because all known and available historical evidence about this monument has already been studied by historians. One can only imagine how elegant that wall painting looked and suggest that if the Borysohlib Church had not been destroyed, Ivan Yizhakevych’s paintings would have taken an honorable place in the history of the monumental sacred art of Ukraine.



4. “Vision of the warrior Pelgusius. Sts. Borys and Hlib appear to the night guards of Alexander Nevsky,” an illustration from the *Niva* journal, 1917

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Брей Н.

Монументальне мистецтво Івана Їжакевича. Борисоглібська церква на Подолі

Анотація. Узагальнено маловідомі факти творчості Івана Їжакевича як майстра сакрального живопису на прикладі його роботи в Борисоглібській церкві на Подолі в Києві. Створений ним ансамбль розписів мав історико-культурну цінність, і якщо б ця пам'ятка не було знищено, вона б посідала значне місце в історії українського сакрального живопису.

Складність дослідження полягає в тому, що не існує жодних світлих або художніх творів, які б зафіксували, як виглядав інтер'єр цієї церкви, і зокрема — самі розписи. Відомості про них знаходимо, здебільшого, в дореволюційних публікаціях, які описують церкву наприкінці XIX століття. Лише поодинокі згадки в пізніших публікаціях доволі опосередковано свідчать про роль Їжакевича в історії цього храму. Цінними є спогади о. Михаїла Єдлинського, який був настоятелем цього храму і, безумовно, надає найбільш достовірну інформацію щодо участі Їжакевича в розписах храму та зауваження К. Шероцького стосовно того, як виглядав стінопис церкви на початку XX століття. Зроблено спробу віднайти та зібрати будь-які відомості про втрачену пам'ятку та впорядкувати всі відомі факти.

Ключові слова: Іван Їжакевич, церква, розписи, знищені пам'ятки, культура.

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