

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

ANNA YAROSLAVNA - QUEEN OF FRANCE

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

Recently we learned that Eparch Bishop Boris Gudziak and the Eparchy of St. Volodymyr the Great of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in France together with the Ukrainian community in France had purchased the church of St. Vincent Abbey in Senlis (45 km. from Paris). This Abbey was founded in 1060 by Anna Yaroslavna, daughter of Prince Yaroslav the Wise and wife of King Henry I of France.

The wedding of Princess Anna and Henry took place in 1051 in the Cathedral of Reims. As part of her dowry, Princess Anna brought with her a Slavonic Gospel which she later bequeathed to the Cathedral of Reims. Subsequently many kings of France pledged allegiance on this Gospel during coronation ceremonies. Part of this Gospel, the Menalogion has been preserved in the Reims Public Library. Recently, the library's director provided a digital copy of the original manuscript to Ukrainian scholars and gave permission for it to be published. This publication was done in Ukraine in 2010.

At the time of the death of Queen Anna's husband, their son, crown prince Philip, was only eight years old, and although he was crowned king at the age of eight, Anna became the regent for her son along with Count Baldwin V of Flanders as co-regent. This continued until Philip was fourteen. Anna was thus the first Queen of France to serve as a regent for her son.

Growing up in the culturally and intellectually sophisticated court of Yaroslav the Wise, Anna became a highly educated woman for her times. She could read and write and was fluent in 5 languages including Latin and Greek. According to French historians, she was shocked at the fact that most of the members of the French court could neither read nor write. She had a brilliant mind, was well versed in politics, and actively participated in government af-

airs. There are quite a few French documents which bear her signature which she had signed in Old Slavonic (Anna Regina). Apparently King Henry I had profound respect for the superb intellectual and political talents of his wife—so much so that decrees which he issued had an added inscription “With the consent of my wife Anna” and “In the presence of Queen Anna”.

The town of Senlis was once the French royal residence where Anna had spent much time, and where, while awaiting the birth of her first child, she had promised God to build an Abbey Church in honor of St. Vincent. And it is precisely this Abbey Church that was purchased by the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of France and the Ukrainian community and given the new name of the martyrs SS. Boris and Hlib, who were actually uncles of Anna Yaroslavna. According to the press release of the Religious Information Service of Ukraine, this Abbey church will also house the Anna Yaroslavna Cultural Center “whose purpose is to promote Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian-European cooperation”.

In the fine art collection of our Museum we have four paintings depicting important historical moments in the life of Anna Yaroslavna. These paintings are the works of the artist Wasyl (Stanislaw) Konarz-Konarzewski, 1914-1999. He was born in Warsaw and studied art at the Cracow Academy of Art as well as in Munich and Paris. He also taught at the Lviv Institute of Fine Arts. For his excellent works he received 5 “Grand Prix” and 5 Gold Medals in France and Poland. But, in the 1930s for making a patriotic speech, he was jailed for a few months at the infamous Bereza-Kartuska prison. In 1947 he was arrested by the Soviets and sentenced to 10 years in a labor camp. After his release in 1956 he emigrated and lived in Munich, Paris, and finally in Montreal where he died.

His art output consists of both monumental and miniature works using various techniques — oil, watercolors, tempera, graphics, mosaic, and carving. The themes he covered in his works were of historical,

patriotic, and religious nature, some of which he produced in series. For example, he produced a series on biblical themes, on the history of Jews in Poland, on the Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine, on Anna Yaroslavna, etc.

The four paintings which we have depicting Anna Yaroslavna are in the form of large illuminations in the style of miniature illuminations in ancient manuscript books. They are done on paper using the tempera technique. The first painting depicts Anna Yaroslavna outside the city gates de-

parting from Kyiv for France with her entourage of soldiers and ladies in waiting. In the second painting the wedding ceremony of King Henry and Anna and the crowning of Anna as Queen of France take place in the Cathedral of Reims. In the third painting we see Anna kneeling before the Bishop of Reims and presenting him with the Slavonic Gospel. The fourth painting shows us Queen Anna seated on the French throne as regent for her son and welcoming foreign dignitaries.

The word *miniature* is originally de-



rived from the Latin *minium*, meaning red lead which as a pigment was used profusely in the dec-

oration of manuscripts. The meaning minute—small when applied to the term miniature was a result of confusion, because manuscript decorations were small. So, the artist Konarz-Konarzewski, in keeping with the miniature style, uses red color extensively in the three paintings which depict historical moments in Anna's life.

The life of Anna Yaroslavna reads more like a fairy tale than true history; yet she was a fascinating historical figure and played an important role in French history. At the end of the 19th century Count Monpensier, the son of the last king of France Louis-Philip, traveled to Russia to be present at the coronation of Alexander III. On his return home he purposely came to Kyiv, to St. Sophia Cathedral to pray at the tomb of Yaroslav the Wise, because, as he said, Anna, Yaroslav's daughter, was the wife of Henry I of France, the mother of King Philip and the great, great, great grandmother of the French ruling dynasties to which Count Monpensier belonged.

The purchase of the Abbey church



by the Ukrainian Eparchy and the Ukrainian community of France (an edifice which Anna Yaroslavna had founded in Senlis) is an important step in the preservation of historical heritage for generations to come. Our Museum is proud to have paintings by a renowned artist which depicts memorable aspects of this precious heritage.



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