

ARTICLES OF CRAFTSMEN – UNOFFICIAL SYMBOLS OF RUSSIA

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The question about unofficial symbols of Russia is considered here. The idea that by no means all the handiworks mentioned in popular literature can be referred to “symbols” is declared. A brief description of the most relevant handiworks is given proceeding from the history of their origin. Some judgements of the author can seem to be disputable.

Not all tourists are aware of official symbols of the states, which they visit in their unquieted thirst for world cognition. And hardly anybody has the state flag or coat of arms for a keepsake to remember the visited country by. But as for unofficial symbols or, as it is common to say, “brands” of the countries, which they are going to visit, they are known to the majority of travelers. Let us put aside the “eatable” symbols such as Italian pizza, Swiss cheese, Russian pancakes, French croissants and other not less attractive pleasures of the table. The food will leave only vivid gustatory sensations in the memory. But our attention is attracted by the material traces remaining for long in hearth and home. It is unofficial symbols of Russia that will be discussed in the present article. Unofficial symbols picturesquely remind of some natural, cultural and other peculiarities of a visited country. They are, usually, souvenirs – articles of craftsmen, or job shop-type production, the tourist goods. Many souvenirs and articles of craftwork haven’t been used for their intended purpose for a long time, but are still being in steady demand in tourists. First of all, it is connected with the fact that the majority of souvenirs has a pronounced national (folk) flavour.

Perhaps, there will no one, who would know nothing about Russian symbols, found. As per the List quoted in one of authoritative Russian editions, our country’s unofficial world famous and popular symbols are – the Khokhloma painting, crystal from Guskhrustalny, Palekh lacquered miniature, Pavlov Posad shawls, Gzhel porcelain, Uralian malachite, Vologda lacework, Tula samovars, Orenburg woolen shawls, Dymkovo toys and Rostov enamel [4]. According to

our reckoning not all of them are equally noteworthy. This list can (and even should) include Matryoshka nest-dolls, lapy (bast shoes), valenky (felt boots) and Semenov spoons. And vice versa, exclude Uralian malachite. Now in Russia mani malachite articles are made of imported material. Malachite has long since ranked first among ornamental stones of the Urals. The Uralian malachite is considered to be the most valuable one in the world market. But its deposits (Mednorudnyanskoye, Gumishevskoye) have been already depleted. There are large-scale deposits of malachite in Australia and the USA. In color and beauty of patterns there is nothing to be compared to the Uralian malachite.

When speaking about the other unofficial symbols, each of them has its own history.

The **Matryoshka** doll is one of the most popular and traditional Russia souvenirs. However, contrary to the established opinion, a Matryoshka is not an original Russian toy. Probably, one of the present-day Matryoshka’s prototypes was a Japanese figurine of a Buddhist wise man named Fukurumu, inside of which there was a set of smaller figurines in order of size [10]. Another prototype of the Matryoshka was the “pisanka” – a hollow wooden hand-painted Easter egg made in Russia at all times. A bigger egg contained a smaller one, then a still smaller one, etc. [3]. The first Matryoshka appeared in Russia at the end of XIX century in Abramtsevo, near Sergiyev Posad in the Moscow area. Nobody knows a firm date of creating the Matryoshka. But in 1900 the Russian (Sergiyev Posad) Matryoshka was successfully exhibited in the World Fair in Paris. In the 20-30-s of XX century the

production of Matryoshkas was developed in other Russian regions, which became later traditional centers of their manufacture – Vyatka (Kirov), Semenov and Polkhovsky Maidan (Nizhny Novgorod Region). Later on Matryoshkas became manufactured in Voronezh, Tver and Novokuznetsk. Traditional Matryoshkas produced on the shop floors of the national artistic trades have their artistic features and hallmarks. Matryoshaks' names depend on the place of their production.

In parallel with the output of traditional Matryoshkas in many regions of Russia there appeared authors' Matryoshkas. They are different variants of a Russian peasant girl in the folk clothing, Russian heroes, representatives of pre-revolutionary nobility and merchantry. There are Matryoshkas “a la Gzhel”, “a la Zhostovo”, “a la Palekh”; Matryoshkas – characters of tales - “Kolobok” (“Dough-boy”), “Repka” (“Turnip”), “Tere-mok” (“Palace”) and others. A new event in the Russian Matryoshka painting is a “political” Matryoshka, which depicts Russian Tsars, Russian and foreign political and public figures, popular actors, etc.

Lapty, also being considered a “symbol” of Russia, figure in a multitude of sayings and proverbs. In Russian folklore the word “lapot” denotes a simpleton, an uneducated person. At the beginning of XX century Russia was often called a “lapot” country. And it was not by incident. All Russian countryside exclusive of the Siberia and Cossack areas wore lapty all the year round. Lapty were traditionally considered to be the shoes of the underprivileged – the poorest part of population [5].

Making lapty was a winter occupation of peasants being free from the field works. Lapty were weaved from the bark of many foliage trees: linden, birch, elm, oak, etc. The bast lapty, weaved from the linden bast, were thought to be the most durable and soft. For durability and warmth the prosperous peasants sewed on a leather sole to their lapty. Lapty were fixed on the foot with the help of long strings or leather laces. Lapty were made on one shoetree and there was no dif-

ference between the left and the right one (like valenky). Lapty were not a long-lasting footwear. In winter a peasant wore one pair of lapty not longer than 10 days, and in summer he treaded them down for 4 days.

Nowadays, the lapty lessened up to the size of a palm are weaved in many regions of Russia. Coins and banknotes are put inside such souvenir lapty by exotic lovers – “for luck”.

Valenky – is a unique know-how of the Russian people. The advantage of valenky is that they are made without a single stitch, and therefore they are soft and comfortable. For this ingenious plainness a naïve-to-foolishness person is called a “valenok” in the popular folklore. The first records about Russian valenky occur in the chronicle of “The Lay of Igor’s Warfare”, XII century [9]. Originally valenky were short with cloth boot-tops. And only in XVIII century they acquired a customary look for us. The countrymen found valenky to be to their liking. Before that, as it is known, people in the country wore lapty summer and winter alike, they being frayed soon. Valenky were expensive. They were passed from one generation to another. The rural family, where all the members wore valenky was thought to be a prosperous one. In other families there could be only one pair of valenky for all.

Today there are factories to produce valenky in Russia and three CIS countries – Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Byelorussia. Usually valenky are made of sheep hair. But there can be goat, camel and even dog valenky. To make a pair of valenky (depending on the size) takes from 4 to 7 kg of wool. The souvenir and “glamour” valenky are made of any wool. There are orange, green, violet, burgundy valenky; embroidered valenky; valenky decorated with fur, strasses and tapestry [9]. There are Valenky Museums in Moscow, the city of Myshkin (Yaroslavl Region) and village of Urusovo (Mordovia). A specialized store “Russian Valenky”, the main visitors of which are for-

eigners, was opened in Moscow in winter, 2005.

The **Semenov spoon** – is a souvenir having become a world famous brand [8]. In olden times the spoons, which peasants used in Russia, were solely made of wood. The center of spoon production was the city of Semenov, which was called the “Spoon capital” of Russia. The spoons were made by thousands of handicraftsmen-peasants living in the city and neighboring villages. Each of them had his own speciality: spoon-carvers, painters engaged in painting the “cloth” and lacquerers engaged in surfacing [2]. The availability of wood, closeness of trade centers, entrepreneurial spirit and virtuosity of local handymen promoted the craft development. Nowadays there are various painting motives on Semenov spoons: rowan-berries, raspberries, cherries and golden leaves of fanciful forms. The traditional motive – is a twig with a bunch of berries in the midst of herbs or fantastic flowers.

The **Khokhloma**. The name of the painting comes from the village of Khokhloma in the Nizhny Novgorod Region. The origin of the Khokhloma painting is referred to 1659 – the time of the first records about painted dishware [1]. The craft began from the spoon business. In XVII century there were fairs held, where they traded with spoons and painted wooden dishware. The closeness of navigable rivers and trade routes helped the development of the craft. The modern Kokhloma painting excels with the combination of gold with red and black (sometimes green) colors. The painting pattern includes herbs, berries, fruits and birds. The floral pattern with red and black elements against the golden background is considered to be invented in the second part of XVIII century [8]. After the exhibition of 1889 held in Paris the turned dishware and Semenov spoons became known to the whole world. In Germany a plant on the imitation of Khokhloma cups, which only vaguely resembled the Khokhloma [6], was even built. The secret of the Khokhloma “gold” – is in using the aluminum coating, which under the

action of temperature becomes golden in color. Sometimes, instead of the aluminum powder the tin one is uses, and then a “silver” article is obtained. The Khokhloma today – is wooden dishware, furniture, various souvenirs.

The **crystal from Gus-Khrustalny**. The Gus Crystal Plant was founded in 1756 by a merchant from Oryol Akim Maltsov. Crystal and glass were founded at the plant. It worked on domestic raw materials. The articles of the plant were awarded the highest premium “Grand Prix” at the World Fair in Paris in 1900. The well-known Gus flagons with roosters and bouquets brought the world fame to the plant. The best articles made by the plant craftsmen are exhibited at both domestic and foreign fairs. Nowadays the plant keeps the status of an artistic production and is famous for its glass. The assortment of products is as follows: jugs, flagons (the eminent ones with roosters and bouquets among them), tumblers, stemware, vases, etc. Excursions are organized to the plant. During an excursion one can get acquainted with the production of colorless crystal and see the entire technological process – from blowing-out to packing. In the city of Gus-Khrustalny there is a museum of crystal. The collection of the museum contains the Gus Crystal Plant’s specimen products beginning with the second part of XVIII century and up to the present-day production specimens.

The **Palekh lacquered miniature**. Palekh – is a village in the Ivanovo Region. It appeared, according to the chronicles, before XV century. Since XVII century the citizens of Palekh used to be famous as icon painters. By the beginning of XX century the development of icon painting in Russia practically passed away. In 1924 on the basis of ancient Russian icon painting traditions the “Workmen’s cooperative association of ancient painting” was organized. In the association people occupied themselves with lacquered miniature painting on papier-mâché articles. This art has retained up to our time. The painting is performed by tempera colors against the black (sometimes red) back-

ground. The shading – “incision” by gold or whites is applied. The ornament is painted in gold or silver and is the finishing element of the miniature. The Palekh miniature is called “fairy”. Caskets, powder-boxes, brooches, wall boards are painted on the topics of fairytales, Russian folk tales and songs. The most popular motive is the Firebird – a favorite character of Russian folk tales. In Palekh there is the Museum of Palekh Art, which contains a collection of lacquered miniature.

The **Pavlov Posad shawls**. From ancient times the shawl in Russia was a part of ladies’ wear. Peasant women weaved shawls, decorated them with embroideries, stained patterns on them. Pavlov Posad is one of the oldest Russian textile centers. The first allusions about the shawls and wraps with bright floral prints are referred to 1795. A real fame came to the shawls in the second part of XIX century. In 1854 in Pavlov Posad a shawl-print factory was opened. Originally, the patterns were hand printed onto the *shawl* fabric using wooden blocks. The design and color of the shawl depended on the carved picture of print boards, where the pattern was printed onto the cloth from. Every color was printed from a separate board. The number of boards achieved several tens. Since the end of 1950-s the handicraft techniques had been gradually substituted by printing machines. Nowadays at the Pavlov Posad Shawl Manufactory more than 200 kinds of shawls, wraps and scarves have been produced. Luxurious floral bouquets with leaves prevail in the patterns. In the corners of the shawl there are big flowers, and the center contains small ones in the black, champagne, green, red, navy blue and wine-colored ground. Natural fabrics – silk, wool, cotton, are used for the shawls production. On the shop floor there is a museum with a collection of Pavlov Posad shawls and wraps.

The **Gzhel porcelain**. The origin of the word “gzhel” is connected with the verb “zhech” (“burn”-“burn clay”). The first official allusion about Gzhel as the center of pottery industry was recorded in the clerical document of Ivan Kalita, the Grand Duke, in 1339 [7]. Since that time Gzhel, the center

rich in clays and craftsmen, had become the supplier of the Tsar Yard. Peasants “zhgly” (“burned”) the dishware, toys and ceramic tiles. In the middle of XVIII century the fame of a big ceramic region producing artistic majolica with multicolored painting in the white ground came to Gzhel. Five colors were used in the painting – yellow, green, brown, wine-colored and blue. Fantastic plants, cities and animals were depicted in the articles. Often the painting was complemented with stucco figures of humans, animals and birds. At the beginning of XIX century majolica gave the way to semifaience. The Gzhel porcelain with a traditional painting – cobalt blue in the white ground, was created in the 50-s of XX century. In 1980-s the majolica renaissance started. Nowadays the Gzhel craft unites the big and small villages located near Moscow and producing both majolica and porcelain (the “Gzhel Company”). A floral pattern is considered to be the Gzhel “trademark” one. Every article is hand painted. Only cobalt paint is applied, it becoming blue in color, when burnt. In some articles the “incision” by gold is used. The assortment is as follows: tea and coffee sets, vases, bottles of 1,23 liter, caskets, timepieces, lamps, etc. Excursions are organized to the shop floor. During the excursions one can get acquainted with the production traditions of the famous craft. Tourists are offered not only to see the artists’ studios, visit the museum and the company shop, but also to drink tea from the Gzhel dishware.

The **Vologda lacework**. The Vologda lace craft was formed at the turn of XVIII-XIX centuries. Before XIX century tatting was a home art. In the 20-s of XIX century there was a lace manufactory, where bondmaids worked, was founded in the neighborhood of Vologda. The lace craft of the Vologda Province achieved its prosperity in the second part of XIX century. Thousands of craftswomen were already occupied with tatting. The art of Vologda craftswomen was marked out at many domestic and international exhibitions again and again. The Vologda Lace Company was awarded the high-

est premium “Grand Prix” at the World Fair in Paris in 1937, the gold medal – at the Brussels Exhibition in 1958. The Vologda lacework peculiarity (“Vologda manner”) is a clear division into a large expressive pattern and a sheer airy background (grid). The patterns consist of openwork rhombs, quadrates, fans, ovals. Nowadays the Vologda lace (overlays, doilies, table-cloths, panels, etc.) is tatted by both folk lacemakers and professional craftswomen of the “Snezhinka” (“Snowflake”) factory.

The **Tula samovars**. Among water-heating devices a special place is taken by the samovar – a Russian tea machine, as it was called in Europe. Earlier not only water was boiled in samovars, but also food was cooked. In Tula the first samovar was made by Nazar Lisitsyn in 1778. Soon Lisitsyn had followers. The closeness to Moscow, the availability of rich mineral deposits and skilled metal craftsmen aided Tula, the city of gunsmiths, to become the center of samovar production in XIX century. Samovars were made of brass, copper, cupronickel, sometimes they were gold- or silver-plated. The samovar production proved to be remunerative. The handicraftsmen soon turned into manufacturers, workshops – into plants. The Tula samovar-makers excelled with boundless invention. It is not for nothing that a proverb was shaped about them: “Give a Tulavite a piece of metal and he will make a miracle”. Since the second part of XIX century none of the exhibitions in Russia and abroad dispensed with samovars [11]. The samovar was used not only at home, but was taken on journeys. For this purpose traveling samovars were used. They were odd in shape (cubical, cylindrical) and convenient in transportation (demountable stems were screwed on, handles fitted to the wall). At the end of XIX-beginning of XX century there were various samovars different in their intended purpose (coffeepot-samovars, traveling samovars) and arrangement (coal-burning, with kerosene furnace, demountable jug) produced. By the beginning of XX century the samovar had become an inseparable

attribute of every Russian family. In 1956 the production of electric samovars (tea-urns) started in Tula. Since 1977 combined samovars uniting the operating principles of both coal-burning and electric samovars have been produced. And in 1964-1987 souvenir-samovars “Yasnaya Polyana” were being made. It is a 56 times reduced copy of the samovar in the memorial-estate of Lev Tolstoy. Today coal and electric samovars are produced in Tula. The business has no serial production. Usual nickel-plated samovars and painted ones (floral, natural, fairy motives) are made. The “Tula Samovars” Museum opened in 1990 is located in Tula. The exposition of the museum puts up to the history of the origin and development of the samovar craft. The museum can boast the oldest samovar of the Lisitsyns.

The **Orenburg woolen shawls**. The first information about goat wool articles appeared in XVIII century. The Uralian Cossack women took on knitting from Kazakhs and Kalmyks using Russian lacy ornaments. In 1862 an Orenburg craftswoman Maria Uskova was awarded a medal “For goat wool shawls” and a diploma at the World Fair in London. The Fair guests admired the white open-worked gossamers, which found room in a goose-egg shell, easily got through a wedding ring, weighed 250-300 g and warmed well. After closing of the Exhibition an English firm “Lipner” organized the enterprise “Imitation a la Orenburg” [7]. Little by little the goat underwool shawls became very popular all over Europe.

The Orenburg woolen shawl is so famous not only due to the knitters’ skill, but the goat wool quality as well. In the 300 km distance eastwards of Orenburg the Gurerlin mountains are situated. The wool goats are grazed there. There is a supposition that the wool goat got to the Orenburg neighborhood from the Himalaya through Kirghiz steppes and found its place with the local population. In true Orenburg shawls the woolen thread is spun separately. Then backwards it is winded up with a silk or very thin cotton thread. Such a shawl gets fluffy in the course of

wearing little by little and the wool doesn't spill. The shawls can be of two kinds – the “Orenburg” ones (made of gray wool with a plain middle and open-worked fringe) and “gossamers” (fine, open-worked, made of white or gray wool). To make one shawl it takes a handicraftswoman about 250 hours. In the Orenburg Museum of Fine Arts one can get acquainted with a collection of Orenburg shawls.

The **Dymkovo toy** – is a traditional Russian folk craft known from the end of XVIII century. The craft originated in the Dymkovo suburb (sloboda) at the edge of an old Russian city named Khlynov (Kirov now). The origin of the toy is connected with a folk festival called “whistler”. In spring Yarila – the god of sun and fertility – was met with a gay whistle. The warbles and whistle of clay pennywhistles specially prepared for the festival were heard all over the whole suburb. The Dymkovo toy is molded out of the local red clay, burned and covered with a layer of chalk mixed in milk. On the whitening the painting in gouache mixed with an egg is performed [7]. The main colors are blue, yellow, orange, crimson red, green and black. The traditional characters are riders, mistresses, nurses, turkey cocks, roosters. Every toy is an authorship work existing in a single copy. The craft has no serial production.

The **Rostov enamel**. The Rostov enamel origin is not known for sure. Some researchers connect its appearance with the work of Jonah Sysoyevich the Metropolitan who was busy with the Rostov Pontifical House improvement at the end of XVII century. Others – with the rule of Joachim the Archbishop who established a Greek-Latin school in Rostov according to the edict of Anna Ioanovna. Since 1760-s the first references about the enamel workshop, which existed up to the end of 1780-s, had been mentioned in the Rostov Pontifical House inventories. Church orders from the most diverse cities of Russia were executed in the workshop. The icon frames, crosses and covers of manuscript books were decorated with the

enamel [7]. In the second part of XIX the Rostov craftsmen pictured portraits, Rostov panoramas temples' and monasteries' views in the enamel. After 1917 together with the workmen's cooperative association creation the Rostov artists developed the floral painting. The present-day craftsmen of the “Rostov enamel” plant decorate icon frames, caskets, breastpins, bracelets, etc. with the enamel. The enamel is often combined with gold, gems and chasing. You can identify the Rostov enamel by ornamental floral compositions and landscapes. The “Rostov enamel” plant product's quality and genuineness warranty is its corporative trademark and a special coating of the base backside with a spotted blue color.

The enumerated unofficial symbols do not comprise all the diversity of the folk crafts' production, which takes an important place in the export of Russia. In the territory of our country there are also other symbols, which are though not that popular abroad. Every region of the Russian Federation possesses a potential for the production of folk crafts' articles and souvenirs reflecting the region's “identity”. They are the symbols of not only Russian folk art and native culture, but also a contribution of Russia to the world cultural heritage.

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