



NICHOLAS II ON THE THRONE

Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, Russia
Early 20th century

Wood, carving, painting

About the project

[https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/
events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/](https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/)





SELECTED BY

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*Curator of the Archaeology Collection,
Museum Objects Made of Birch Bark,
Straw and Papier-Mâché*



I started working at the Tsaritsyno Museum 20 years ago, in 2004. The next year, I accepted the collection of works made of wood, birch bark, straw and papier-mâché for custody. I started studying it with a collection of toys. Among the triangular ‘nannies’ and ‘fools’, Chinese trifles and papier-mâché figurines, the wooden sculpture of Tsar Nicholas II on the throne stood out.

The portrait resemblance to the last Russian Tsar was very clear. It later turned out that the carved figure was created by an unknown folk artist in the early 20th century based on a postcard issued by the Saint Eugenia community in Saint Petersburg. This toy, a rare depiction of Nicholas II in terms of its technique, was from the collection of Nikolay Tseretelli, collector and connoisseur of Russian folk art. His book ‘Russian Peasant Toy’ describes the history of the acquisition of an item from our collection: ‘Last summer, in the former Novgorod Governorate, I managed to get a wooden image of the last Russian Tsar, sitting on a throne, dressed in the Monomakh cap, barma, etc., with a scepter and orb in his hands’. Unfortunately, the scepter has not survived, there is no cross on the orb, and the top of the cap has some small chips.

Exciting details about this item were revealed when researchers and toy collectors Marianna Oboeva and Ilya Kolker began working on the project for the publication ‘Nikolay Tseretelli: Life, Scene, Collection’. The project authors worked in the archives, where they discovered the memoirs of Nikolay Tseretelli's wife, Tatyana Kolli (Muratova in her first marriage). Some minor inaccuracies aside, they present an amazing and touching life story of my favorite item. ‘In 1916, he (Tseretelli. — A. Kh.) first bought a wooden carved figurine of some kind of king, either Vladimir Monomakh or Ivan the Terrible, in Petrograd. It is a wonderful example of folk art — wood carving — with a very modest colouring (before the restoration the colouring was

modest. — *A. Kh.*) For some reason, he called this 'king' 'Pythagoras', and this Pythagoras became a kind of the house curator. The 'game' with 'Pytha' was as follows. Every year, on its birthday (the day the toy was purchased) — June 18 — Pythagoras invited guests and gave a treat (as a 'king' it treated only champagne). He 'collected' money for this treat throughout the year as follows. Everyone who visited N.T. had to put a coin in the box on which Pythagoras stood, if they had one in their pocket. People could borrow money from this box, for a tram ticket or something, but they had to leave a receipt and always repay the debt, even with another kind of coin. This was called 'Pytha's coins'. On its birthday, Pythagoras stood on the table, on a hill, with 'ladies' all around and a glass of wine in front of him. The rest of the food was brought by the guests, and this tradition of celebrating Pythagoras's birthday has never been canceled'.

My favorite item is always visible in the museum's depository, in a cabinet, behind glass. It is not 'Pythagoras', but Emperor Nicholas II. Its birthday, May 18, coincides with International Museum Day. It became something of a curator of the collection.