

Title: The Damned Trinity: Hell, the Devil and Judas in Old-Russian Iconography and Narrative Sources

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In Russian iconography of the Last Judgment the right bottom corner of an icon, fresco or miniature is the place for representing Hell. A chained Devil, most often astride the two-headed Hell-Beast, is depicted there. The Devil is holding a small figure that can be dressed or naked, often with a small bag. This is the principal sinner of mankind, Judas, the Betrayer.

The visual model of this “anti-Trinity” (Hell – Devil – Judas) was borrowed from Byzantine iconography. Later the image left the narrow borders of Judgment Day iconography and was included in other compositions. For example, we find it on the icons of Anastasis / Descent into Hell, the Fruit of Christ’s Passion and many miniatures of the XVII-XIX cc. representing different scenes of Hell. The figure of Hell varied dramatically: it was presented as a Beast – Devil’s throne; a Mouth – Devil’s jail; or a Giant –the Devil’s “father.” Still the visual representation of Judas and the Devil remained the same – a small man on his father’s lap.

Judas was really believed to sit on the Devil’s lap in Hell. We can find some Russian texts of the XVII c. testifying to this belief. They are likely to have been based on this visual tradition. The idea was widespread – it belonged not only to medieval icon-painters, illuminators, and literate authors. Folklorists of the XX c. recorded many stories told by people in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, who described and explained why the sinner occupies the Devil’s lap and who can be placed near him.

In my presentation I will speak about this medieval visual tradition, trace its roots, and show the narrative sources it was linked to.