



OBJECT ID	2013.5.125
OBJECT NAME	Icon
OBJECT ENTITIES	Poulos, Peter (is related to) Peter, St. (is related to)
ACCESS POINTS	blue cross fish halo icon orange Otter Purple Water wave

#### OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Wooden icon of St. Peter. It has a wooden backing that has been painted red with a paper image attached to the front. The background of the image is a dark gold color, slightly metallic. In the center of the picture is St. Peter, he is standing up straight, tanned skin and about shoulder length, dark hair. Around his head is a very large halo, with two different sections to it. The outer portion of the halo has a blue background to it and has four otters looking as if they are swimming around his head. There are also two sets of three fish swimming with each other, one set at the top left of the halo and the other lower and to the right, but set in between the otters. The next section of the halo is all gold and has a wavy pattern at the edges, waves cresting in the right direction. He is wearing an orange coat with what looks like wool/fur around the neckline and at the ends of the sleeves. The are in a light cream color. He has a long sleeved white shirt underneath. Both hands are brought towards the center of his body. His left hand is holding a cross, but this cross has a horizontal piece interesting in more than one spot: the first is at the bottom, a little higher than his grip, another much longer one that is in the usual spot for a cross, and the

other a little it about that is much shorter. His right hand has a gesture where his ring finger and thumb are touching.

Under St. Peter there is two panels of images. The one on the left side is a small section of a map that shows Alaska and the Aleutain Islands. The panel to the right shows three men, each holding a weapon in hand beating a fallen man with a halo circling his head. Each man is wearing a different color cloak, the one on the left has a light pink, almost skin color one, the middle man green and the one to the right in red. The man on the floor is in the same clothing as St. Peter as described above. At the bottom of the images and also moving upward and around the picture is a border. The bottom half is made to look like water, it is multi-colored with green, blue and purple. Once this portion begins to move up it twists together like a braid. There are also images of grey and blue fish, three on each side. There is also orange coral twisted into the side border as well. The top border of the image is still twisted/braided water pieces but the fish and coral are not seen on this side.

To the left of St. Peter's head is his name which is done in a dark red color and to the right of his head, in the same color is "The Aleut".

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## ORIGIN

In the late 18th century, many Aleuts became Christians by joining the Russian Orthodox Church. One of the earliest Christian martyrs in North America was St. Peter, the Aleut, who was killed in San Francisco, in 1815 because he would not abandon his Orthodox faith. St. Peter was from Kodiak Island in Alaska. *Cungagnau* (his Aleutian name), a fur hunter, was baptized by the monks of St. Herman's missionary party and received the Christian name Peter. Spain was in possession of California in 1815. The Russian-American Trading Company has established Fort Ross, 50 miles north of San Francisco, as a trading post and as a place to raise crops and cattle to support the communities in Alaska. When the Spanish governor ordered an immediate halt to Russian trading and trapping in the region, St. Peter was arrested with nearly one hundred Russian and Aleuts. St. Peter and his party or young fur trappers were taken to San Francisco for a mock trial. Roman Catholic priests tried to force Aleut hunters to embrace Roman Catholicism, but the Aleuts would not agree, saying, "We are Christians" and showed them their crosses. The Spanish priests-inquisitors ordered a group of California Indians to torture St. Peter. They cut off his fingers, one joint at a time, and then his hands, but St. Peter continued to say, "I am a Christian; I will not betray my faith." His toes and feet were also cut off; and St. Peter died as a result of his torture. Before they were ready to start on the next Aleut, the Spaniards received orders to stop. When the witnesses to St. Peter's murder reported the incident to St. Herman back on Kodiak Island, the monk turned to an icon, crossed himself, and exclaimed, "Holy New Martyr, Peter, pray to God for us." In 1980, St. Peter, the Aleut, was formally glorified as a saint and as the "Martyr of San Francisco." His feast day is commemorated on September 24th.

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## CITATION

Icon, *National Hellenic Museum*, <https://collections.nationalhellenicmuseum.org/Detail/objects/>. Accessed 04/26/24.

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