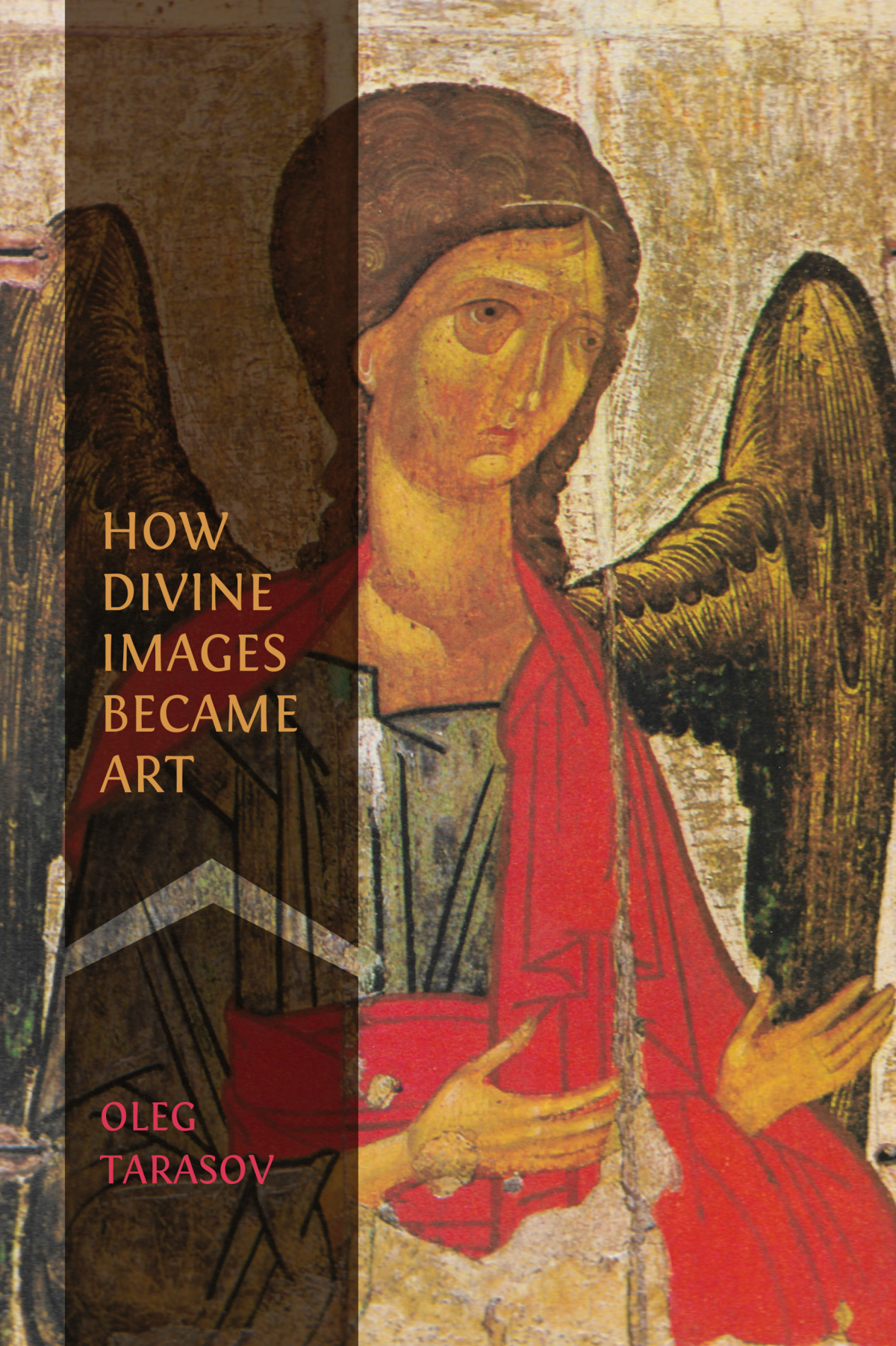
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Cover image: Icon of Archangel Michael (fourteenth century). Novgorod School. Tempera on wood, 86 x 63 cm. From the collection of Stepan Riabushinskii in Moscow. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_archangle_Michael_(Novgorod).jpg

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# 1. Fashion, Taste and Form

> Seeing as such has its own history, and uncovering these 'optical strata' has to be considered the most elementary task of art history.
>
> —Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945)[17]

## At the Intersection of Cultural Movements

Researchers and admirers of art long ago turned their attention to the discovery in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century of the early icon's aesthetic significance. We are well aware of the key players involved in this discovery – the young art critics Pavel Muratov (1881–1950), Nikolai Shchekotov (1884–1945), Nikolai Punin (1888–1953) and the artist Aleksei Grishchenko (1883–1977). Details of the main icons of collections belonging to the artist Ilya Ostroukhov (1858–1929), the Old Believer banker-collector Stepan Riabushinskii (1874–1942), the scholar Nikolai Likhachev (1862–1936) and the major entrepreneurs Aleksei Morozov (1867–1934) and Pavel Kharitonenko (1852–1914) have come to light and been published in part. Much, too, has been written on the new restoration techniques which revealed the original layer of paint on early icons. This discovery, meanwhile, unfolded amidst the European genesis of new aesthetic theories, the development of novel approaches to the study of artworks, and ultimately within the glittering atmosphere of artistic life in the *Belle Époque* (c. 1871–1914). Our focus will therefore be on this context, with the aim of delineating the aesthetics of the early Russian icon against this backdrop of academic and artistic life unfolding in Russia and Western Europe at the end of the nineteenth

17 H. Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. E. A. Levy and T. Weddigen (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2015), p. 93.

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and first decades of the twentieth centuries. 'The discovery of early Russian art was not, of course, happenstance', Muratov wrote in 1923,

> The spirit of the age brought to fruition recognition of its elevated artistic value. It could not have happened earlier than the first years of the current century precisely because of this. A European at the beginning of the twentieth century has access to immeasurably more artistic interests to aid comprehension than were available to people in the [18]60s and even the [18]80s. That we are indebted in this also to the painters of our recent and glittering past is not always acknowledged. Monet, the Impressionists, Cézanne were not only masters of their art but also great civilizers, in the sense of strengthening European humanity's connections, great reeducators of our sensibility. It is no coincidence that those who seemed to their contemporaries to be simply mad innovators, are for our generation the great traditionalists who revealed Velazquez, Poussin, Magnasco, Greek Antiquity, medieval sculpture, and Chinese painting.[18]

Indeed, the re-evaluation of early icons was furthered, one way or another, by German art criticism and formal-psychological aesthetics, a new wave of interest in Byzantine painting, the unprecedented discovery of the aesthetic significance of Italian and Flemish 'primitives', the work of English essayists and the famous Moscow collections of Impressionist and Modernist art owned by Russian industrialists Sergei Shchukin (1854–1936) and Ivan Morozov (1871–1921) (which will be further explored below). All this facilitated the discovery of the icon's aesthetic significance and its conception as an outstanding manifestation of art, heir to the traditions of Hellenistic and Byzantine culture.

It is significant that the early Russian icon's aesthetic importance was also discovered in the context of the Romantic *cult of art*, the development of that special 'aesthetic piety' which originated in the culture of the Enlightenment. We therefore find distinct internal interconnections in the academic and artistic life of Russia and Western Europe of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is no coincidence that the pioneers (including representatives of the Russian avant-garde) who revealed the aesthetic beauty of early icons sought to present the icon's history as connected to the history of Western European art, locating its

18 P. P. Muratov, 'Otkrytiia drevnego russkogo iskusstva', in P. P. Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka. Istoriia otkrytiia i issledovaniia*, ed. A. M. Khitrov (St Petersburg: Bibliopolis, 2008), pp. 323–24.

origins in the intersection of cultural movements of the East and West. The enamoured gaze of scholars and collectors in Moscow, Rome and London upon Sienese Madonnas of the Trecento and Quattrocento and Novgorodian icons of the same period clearly took shape in parallel. If we look at the attitudes of connoisseurs and researchers to early icons and to the works of early Italian artists, this becomes obvious. Before these works were understood as artistic masterpieces, part of the highest levels of culture, their paths in the history of academia, fashion and taste were rather similar.

For the entire duration of the eighteenth century and for most of the nineteenth century, neither the Italian 'primitives' nor medieval Russian icons were regarded as works of *pure art* distinguished by the individuality of the artist. The lack of deep picture space and the two dimensionality of the image were entirely incomprehensible – viewed as curiosities and, when compared with Antique models, considered retrogressive. The culture of classicism excluded religious images on boards from the sphere of high art, and only Romanticism generated a little more interest in them, in its search for national identity and folk culture. It is for this reason that the first collectors of 'primitives' and icons in Italy were from the ranks of the clergy, and in Russia the first collectors were Old Believers,[19] who saw early icons as holy objects. The beauty of early icons and 'primitives' was perceived as integral to the ecclesiastical cult and a Christian worldview. Interest was accompanied by their renovation (often also their repainting), copying and placement in museums of Christian antiquities or private Catholic chapels.

Thus, Cardinal Stefano Borgia (1731–1804) was collecting Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons in the second half of the eighteenth century. His Museo Sacro, set up in Rome's Palazzo Altemps, was clearly based on the same model as the Museum of Christian Antiquities established in Rome by Abbé Giuseppe Lelli, Agostino Mariotti (1724–1806), a lawyer of the Sacra Congregazione, and Francesco Saverio de Zelada (1717–1801), who also served in the Vatican. Among the 'primitives' housed in this latter museum was Carlo Crivelli's (c. 1435–95) famous

19 The term 'Old Believers' refers to those who continued to follow the liturgical and ritual practices of the Russian Orthodox Church after the mid-seventeenth-century reforms of Patriarch Nikon – the so-called *raskol* [schism] which created a division that endures to the present day.

*Saint Dominic* (1476) polyptych, known in academia as the *Pala Demidov*, in reference to its later owner, Russian Anatole Demidov, Prince of San Donato (1813–70) (see Fig. 1.1).[20]

Fig. 1.1 Carlo Crivelli (c. 1435–95), *Poliptych of San Domenico* (*Pala Demidov*) (1476), tempera on wood. From the collection of Prince Anatole Demidov. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carlo_Crivelli_005.jpg

The Vatican Library's Museum of Religious Art (Museo Sacro della Biblioteca Vaticana) took shape in the same period, with librarian Guiseppe Simone's (1687–1768) acquisition of Italian 'primitives' and icons. Francesco Vettori (1692–1770) presented Pope Clement XIII

20 Prince Demidov sold *Polittico di San Domenico* (*Pala Demidov*) in 1868 in Paris; it is currently housed in London's National Gallery. See G. Tormen, *Dipinti 'sull'asse d'oro': I primitivi nelle collezioni italiane tra Sette e Ottocento. Un itinerario, in Tesori d'arte dalle collezioni italiane fra Sette e Ottocento, Firenze, Galleria dell'Academia, 24 giugno–8 dicembre 2014* (Florence: Giunti, 2014), pp. 20–21.

(1693–1769) with a wonderful Russian icon of *Saint Nicholas with Scenes from his Life* (from the second half of the sixteenth century) in 1763, on the occasion of his first visit to the museum. On the reverse of the icon, he inscribed a dedication in Latin, supplementing an earlier donor inscription in Old Slavonic.[21] The Tuscan priest Angelo Maria Bandini (1726–1803) and the Jesuit Luigi Lanzi (1732–1810) began collecting paintings 'on golden backgrounds' in 1752. Bandini bought the old Oratorio di Sant'Ansano in Fiesole near Florence in 1795 and founded the first private museum of religious art in Tuscany there (*Museo Sacro di Sant'Ansano*), which still exists to this day. As well as appreciating the religious significance of the 'primitives', Abbé Lanzi – who features in every textbook on Italian painting – viewed them as works of art. Lanzi served as keeper of the Uffizi Galleries in Florence and, instructed to refurbish the display by the museum's director Giuseppe Bencivenni Pelli (1729–1808), began to purchase 'primitives' from local antiquarians in the second half of the 1770s. The resulting Cabinet of Early Paintings (*Gabinetto delle pitture antiche*) appeared in the Uffizi Galleries sometime around 1780, which included Russian icons as well as Byzantine and Italo-Greek exhibits displayed alongside the works of Cimabue (c. 1240–1302), Duccio (c. 1255/60–c. 1318/19) and Fra Angelico (c. 1395–1455). Since some of these works – in particular the *Beheading of John the Baptist*, an icon of the Stroganov School dating from the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century – came to the Uffizi from the Palazzo Pitti, they had evidently entered the Medici collection earlier. Icons and 'primitives' were viewed through the prism of Giorgio Vasari's (1511–74) evolutionary model, which was based on understandings of 'progress' and 'decline' in the history of art. This seems to have been the very first public display of Russian icons in Western Europe, which were then recognized as being on par with the examples of Byzantine and early Italian painting. Russian icons were fitted into the concept of *maniera bizantina* [Byzantine style] and ascribed to a period earlier

21 According to the Old Slavonic inscription, Princess Evdokiia, the daughter of Mikhail Andreevich Godunov, gave the icon to a Russian monastery in 1571 for the commemoration of the soul of her brother Ioann. The Latin inscription indicates that the first director of the Museo Sacro, Vettori, presented the icon to Pope Clement XIII on 2 April 1763, the occasion of his first visit to the museum. See M. F. Fiorin, *Catalogo della Pinacoteca Vaticana. Vol. 4: Icone della Pinacoteca Vaticana* (Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1995), pp. 67–68, fig. 115.

than when they were actually painted.[22] Lanzi published the famous book *A History of Painting in Italy*, which distinguished the Florentine, Sienese, Neapolitan and other Schools for the first time and thus set a new direction in the history of painting. His Cabinet of Early Paintings aimed to show the stage that preceded the Florentine Renaissance in the development of art. Contributing his own perspective to the rehabilitation of the 'primitives', Lanzi also intended to distinguish the style and manner of each era and School.

Interestingly, famous artists also contributed to the discovery of Italian 'primitives' in the context of Romantic aesthetics. Proponents of the Nazarene movement and the Pre-Raphaelites, influenced by the ideas of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–98) and John Ruskin (1819–1900), perceived a spiritual loftiness and original character of form in the 'naïve' representations of Sienese Madonnas and Tuscan Gothic art. Lord Alexander Lindsay (1812–80) also wrote on this in his famous *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* (1847). Lindsay, hailing from a famous aristocratic family, travelled extensively in Italy, collected 'primitives' and wrote on a wide range of topics. Byzantine and early Italian art, which he considered an important foundation for the revival and renewal of eastern culture, occupied a special place in his writings. In his day this was an unmistakeably novel point of view. In the section entitled 'Byzantine Art', he wrote:

> I can hardly doubt that the respect with which I have spoken of the arts of Byzantium, in the preceding pages, must have appeared rather strange to you. We are apt to think of the Byzantines as a race of dastards, effete and worn out in body and mind [...] But the fact is, that the influence of Christianity on Byzantium, and of Byzantium on modern Europe, has been much underrated.[23]

22 See V. Conticelli and D. Parenti, eds., *Icone russe in mostra alla Galleria degli Uffizi. Catalogo*. *Galleria degli Uffizzi* (Florence: Sillabe, 2014). These were mainly mass-produced Russian icons, reminiscent of the output by Italo-Cretan 'madonneri'. Cf. O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion. Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, trans. R. Milner-Gulland (London: Reaktion, 2002), pp. 50–57; M. Chatzidakis, 'Le peintures des madonneri ou Veneto cretoise et sa destination', in *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. H.-G. Beck, M. Manoussacs and A. Pertusi, 2 vols. (Florence: 1977), II, 675–90.

23 A. W. C. Lindsay, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1847), I, 59. see also J. Steegman, 'Lord Lindsay's "History of Christian Art"', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10 (1947), 123–31.

Around the same time, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford exhibited painting 'on gold backgrounds' to the broader public for the very first time. However, for almost the entire second half of the nineteenth century, the Italian 'primitives', and Byzantine and Italo-Greek icons, were more often viewed as religious objects or as handicrafts fashioned in the context of religious practice, attributed to an early stage in the development of painting, before the 'epoch of art'. English museums had no desire to exhibit the works of Giotto (c. 1267–1337) and Cimabue in the 1830s.[24] When it was suggested in the mid-nineteenth century that London's National Gallery might purchase a collection of early Italian paintings procured by a British antiquarian, the influential British magazine *Art Journal* made a characteristic comment: 'We do not need antiquities and curiosities of early Italian painters: they would only infect our school with a retrograding mania of disfiguring art'.[25] At the beginning of the 1870s, almost all American museums also rejected the 'primitives'. Art historian James Jackson Jarves (1818–88), the first American collector of early Italian painting, had lived in Florence in the 1850s and had there acquired a collection of 'primitives'; he was only able to sell his collection in the States to the Yale University Art Gallery in 1871, and, even then, only for a meagre sum. Other museums displayed no interest in his collection at all.

## Old Believers and Their Oratories

The entire history of the collection of early Russian icons and Italian 'primitives' in Russia also testifies to the fact that they began to be perceived as works of *pure art* chiefly at the beginning of the twentieth century. Until then, their cultural role was entirely different. In Russia, early icons began to be collected and preserved within Old Believer communities as early as the second half of the seventeenth century, and this practice was flourishing in the middle and second half of the nineteenth century. In the genuinely religious gaze of the Old Believers,

24 E. Camporeale, 'On the Early Collections of Italian Primitives', in *Le stanze dei tesori. Collezionisti e antiquari a Firenze tra Ottocento e Novecento*, ed. L. Mannini (Florence: Polistampa, 2011), pp. 29–43 (p. 43).

25 Cited in F. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art. Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 53.

however, the icon was not *pure art* but something infinitely higher. Its artistic aspect was valued to the extent to which it evoked religious sentiments and proximity to God. The artistic value of the devotional image was determined, above all, by its conformity with the medieval canon, as a visual form of the reality of the other world. From the point of view of the Old Believers, a purely aesthetic perception of the medieval icon was, in some ways, even blasphemous.

As almost all researchers have observed, Russian Old Believer collections were exclusively placed in prayer houses (*domovye molennye* [domestic oratories]), within a sacred space which had its own distinct characteristics. This space had largely inherited the furnishings of the 'home churches' that were built in the houses of the Russian nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The famous Russian historian Ivan Zabelin (1820–1908) provides us with a detailed description of a seventeenth-century prayer house: 'One of the walls', he writes, 'was entirely covered by an iconostasis of several rows, in which the icons were arranged as in a church iconostasis, beginning with the Deesis row or icons of the Saviour, Mother of God and John the Baptist'.[26] In other words, the space of the prayer house followed an ecclesiastical model of decoration, in which the iconostasis was the main feature. However, what distinguished this space was the personal devotional images, which reflected an individual's life path from birth to death. Especially venerated images (proskynetaria) – which hark back to the images decorating the tombs of early Christian saints – usually occupied the lower row of the iconostasis in a church. In prayer houses, this row was replaced by ancestral icons, those which blessed weddings, rewarded zealous service or were carried on feast days. *Votive icons* and crosses were ordered on the occasion of miraculous intervention in daily life. The *family icon*, which answered the family's collective prayers, was also located in the prayer house. This icon had Christ or the Mother of God at the centre, with the saints that family members were named after depicted nearby or around the icon's borders.

*Pilgrim icons* and reliquaries, brought back from monasteries and holy places, also occupied an important place in Old Believer prayer houses. It is worth recalling here Constantinople's Church of the Theotokos of

26 I. Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh*, 2 vols. (Moscow: V. Grachev and Komp., 1862), I, 193–94.

the Pharos, a church-reliquary that belonged to the Byzantine emperor. This provided the model for founding the design of the sacred space in both Orthodox churches and prayer houses on reliquaries. Saints' relics were, of course, always seen as vitally important sources of grace, highly valued in both the Catholic West and the Orthodox East. Relics therefore 'authenticated', as it were, the structure of sacred space in a prayer house. Moreover, for a believer, the saint was truly present on earth in both their relics and their icons, which made reliquaries and images closely aligned within the religious system. Consequently, those miracle-working icons which were especially venerated, all manner of reliquaries in the form of caskets and folding triptychs, enkolpion reliquary crosses and icons containing embedded relics, invariably took pride of place in a prayer house.

*Stroganov icons*, distinguished by their exquisite painting in miniature, began to appear in the chapels of the Russian nobility at the end of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. One of these Stroganov icons, as already noted, ended up in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. 'Distinguished' members of the Stroganov family, of course, had their own icon workshops, but the Sovereign's iconographers also worked for them – Prokopii Chirin (d. c. 1627), Nikifor Savin (first half of the seventeenth century), Stefan Aref'ev (end of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century) and several others. Their signed works were considered precious cult items, as well as highly valued investments and offerings.[27] In the future, it was precisely these 'Stroganov icons' that would take pride of place in the famous Old Believer icon collections of the Rakhmanovs, Riabushinskiis, Morozovs and other wealthy Russian families of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their sumptuous prayer houses, then, were often collections of medieval Russian and Greek icons (copies of wonderworking icons of the Mother of God, for example), or collections of all manner of reliquaries. However, the primary motivation for collecting and carefully preserving these icons stemmed from their symbolic significance within the rites of the Russian Church, until Patriarch Nikon's (1605–81) reforms and the decisions made at the Moscow Council of 1667. Thereafter, the primary artistic value of these early icons inhered in their canonicity;

27 For a general overview in English of Stroganov School icons, see J. Stuart, *Ikons* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 119–27.

in other words, the specific semiotic system articulated by the sign of the cross made with two fingers, and by the abbreviated name of Christ (IC XC). To pray before icons with the abbreviation 'ИИС ХС' (i.e., those conventional after Patriarch Nikon's reforms and painted in a Western European style) was deemed blasphemous and associated with the veneration of the Antichrist.[28] The early image therefore became far more significant in the conception of salvation and in ritual practice. In preserving the medieval canon over centuries, Russian Old Believers not only followed the patristic tradition of icon veneration, but significantly enriched it, in their artistic practice and applied aesthetic outlooks.

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a unique system of expert folk knowledge concerning the stylistic manner of early Russian masters also developed within the Old Believer community. This was most fully formulated in an 1856 publication, *Obozrenie ikonopisaniia v Rossii do kontsa XVII veka* [*A Survey of Icon-Painting in Russia to the End of the Seventeenth century*], by the famous collector and expert on Russian folk art Dmitrii Rovinskii (1924–1895). On the basis of the Old Believer records, Rovinskii distinguished three main Schools of Russian icon-painting – the Moscow, Novgorod and Stroganov Schools, within which might be found multiple local styles of execution ('Romanov', 'Ustiug', 'Baronovskii' etc.).[29] The famous academic archaeologist Fyodor Buslaev (1818–97) observed in the mid-nineteenth century that Old Believers 'know the best masters of the Stroganov and Novgorod Schools by name and spare no expense in acquiring the icon of some renowned master or other and, while venerating it as a holy object, are also able to explain it and its artistic worth in such a way that their technical and archaeological observations may furnish useful material for the historiography of Russian ecclesiastical art'. Moreover, 'I have been able to visit many of the Moscow prayer houses and always come away with the most pleasing impression, full of the fresh artistic enthusiasm with which their pious owners relate to the treasures they have collected. They lift the icons from their places on the walls in order to better see all the detail of

28 See Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, trans. Milner-Gulland, pp. 144–67.

29 D. A. Rovinskii, *Obozrenie ikonopisaniia v Rossii do kontsa XVII veka* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo A. S. Suvorina, 1856 [1903]).

execution or to discern an ancient inscription'.[30] One may also include the particularities of Old Believer restoration work on medieval icons in the aforementioned 'detail of execution'. Since the canonicity of a prayer house's image was paramount (that is, its conformity with the medieval canonical requirement that an icon be ordered according to reverse perspective and contain Christ's earlier title, 'IC XC'), after cleaning, Old Believers might repaint an icon according to their understanding of a particular School of early Russian painting.

## Objects of Folk Religiosity or Artistic Antiquities?

Similarly, the museums and private individuals that began collecting icons in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century did not accord the icon the status of a work of *pure art*; instead, the icon was regarded as an object of folk religiosity. Moreover, in the mid-nineteenth century, an emotional connection to the past took precedence over a structured approach to the study of the icon, and this characterized the nature of exhibitions of private repositories of rarities. The objects of such collections were united by the passion of the collector of antiquities, who had created an 'archaeological museum' with its roots in the European *Kunstkammer* [cabinets of curiosity] of the sixteenth century. This, in turn, had grown out of the Tuscan Duke Francesco de' Medici's (1541–87) famous *Cabinet of Rarities* in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, brought to fruition by Vasari in 1570–75. Cabinets of curiosity were inspired by Renaissance thought, and, in the era of Renaissance-Baroque Humanism and the Enlightenment, they reflected not only universal abilities of human understanding but also the very order of the surrounding world. These all-encompassing displays, organized like academic compendiums, would later be broken up and divided into collections of the natural sciences, picture galleries and also *cabinets of art* (comprehensive collections of artistic antiquities). In mid-nineteenth century Russia, one such cabinet belonged to Count Sergei Grigor'evich Stroganov (1794–1882). Among Russian aristocratic families (the Yusupovs, Galitsyns, Shuvalovs), the Stroganovs, of course, played

30 F. I. Buslaev, 'Moskovskie molel'ni', in F. I. Buslaev, *Sochineniia F. I. Buslaeva*, 3 vols. (St Petersburg: V Tipografii Tovarishchestva 'Obschestvennaia pol'za', 1908), I, 252–53.

a leading role in generating interest in early Russian and early Italian art. According to Buslaev's memoirs, the Count's Moscow 'cabinet' was a long room with walls entirely covered by bookcases and 'various rarities in pull-out drawers' that housed collections of Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins. A golden vase by Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71) stood out amidst cases full of valuable decorative sculptures, and above these hung paintings by Old Italian and Flemish masters. The Italian 'primitives' also found a home in this environment, as did Stroganov School icons from the end of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Count had acquired these as early as the 1840s, and aside from their belonging to the history of Christian antiquities, they evoked his famous ancestors who were proprietors of icon-painting workshops.[31] The collection included genuine masterpieces by the Russian iconographers Chirin, Nikifor and Nazarii Savin, Aref'ev and several others. The Count later donated nearly the entire collection of icons to the Russian Museum and the Theological Academy in St Petersburg.

Early Russian icons were viewed differently in state and private collections of national rarities, where they conveyed an image of an 'ancient' civilization and culture. The collection of the famous historian and Slavophile Mikhail Pogodin (1800–75) stands out amongst the wealth of private collections of the mid- to late nineteenth century. The special halls of Pogodin's famous 'Antiquities repository' in Moscow, visited by members of the imperial family, were literally crammed full of Russian antiquities. One might encounter here 'Scythian' jewellery and embroidery, portraits and wooden sculpture, and also genuine masterpieces of Russian painting, for example the famous fourteenth-century *vita* icon of St George, which today graces the Russian Museum in St Petersburg. These were all hung on the walls, stood on the floors, or kept in cupboards and in chests of drawers.[32] In 1852, Pogodin's entire collection was acquired by Emperor Nicholas I (1796–1855) for

31 F. I. Buslaev, *Moi vospominaniia* (Moscow: Tipografiia G. Lessnera i A. Geshel'ia, 1897), pp. 168–70.

32 For further detail on the history of Russian collections of medieval icons in the nineteenth century see G. I. Vzdornov, *The History of the Discovery and Study of Russian Medieval Painting*, ed. M. Sollins, trans. V. G. Dereviagin (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 52–100, 251–320.

150,000 rubles; the collection, in almost its entirety, entered the Imperial Academy of Arts' Museum of Christian Antiquities in St Petersburg.

## Italian 'Primitives' Arrive in Russia

The president of the Imperial Academy of Arts, Grand Princess Maria Nikolaevna (1819–70), was one of the first in Russia to show interest in the Italian 'primitives'. Maria Nikolaevna was captivated by the artists of the Nazarene School, particularly Peter von Cornelius (1783–1867) and Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869), who evidently opened her eyes to the value of this kind of art during her visit to Rome in the winter of 1842.[33] With her support, the Imperial Academy's Museum of Christian Antiquities was swiftly founded in St Petersburg, and included amongst its exhibits both Italian 'primitives' and Byzantine, Italo-Greek and Russian icons. Some of these were acquired and donated by the museum's *de facto* founder, Prince Grigorii Gagarin (1810–93), Vice-President of the Academy of Arts (1859–72). The *Madonna and Child Enthroned, with Attendant Angels* (1365–70, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), painted by Giovanni di Bartolomeo Cristiani (1340–96), entered the collection around 1860, having been acquired in Italy – probably in Florence – by Karl-August Beine (1815–58), a professor of architecture in the Academy of Arts. Notably, this work is the central panel of a folding composition, the side panels of which are the images of *Saint Bartholomew* and *Saint Dominic* in the Bandini Museum in Fiesole.

The Russian government also acquired Fra Angelico's fresco the *Madonna and Child with Saint Dominic and Saint Thomas Aquinas* (State Hermitage, St Petersburg), which once graced the monastery of St Dominic near Fiesole, from Florentine antiquarians in 1882. However, until the start of the twentieth century, Italian 'primitives' barely featured in the Hermitage's collection, as may be gauged from an article

33 Italian 'primitives' were to be found in Maria Nikolaevna's private collection and at her Villa Quatro near Florence; these included, notably, a work by Filippo Lippi (*The Vision of St Augustine* (c. 1465)). See T. K. Kustodieva, ed., *Sobranie zapadnoevropeiskoi zhivopisi. Katalog. Ital'ianskaia zhivopis' XIII–XVI vv* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh, 1994), pp. 234–35. On Princess Maria Nikolaevna's collection of paintings, see also E. Lipgart, 'Kak kollektsiionirovala Velikaia kniaginia Mariia Nikolaevna', in *Nasledie Velikoi Kniagini Marii Nikolaevny*, ed. Baron N. N. Vrangel (St Petersburg: n.p., 1913), pp. 8–11.

by the director of drawings and prints at the Hermitage, Baron Ernst von Liphart (1847–1932), which broaches the subject of the re-evaluation of early Italian painting. Addressing these new additions, the author underlined the significance of the 'primitives' for the Hermitage's collection and particularly for the teaching of art history, which would now start, he wrote, 'not with Fra Angelico but with the very genesis of Italian painting'.[34] In 1908 this Hermitage collection was further enlarged by works which had previously belonged to the Imperial Academy of Arts' Museum of Christian Antiquities, including the *Madonna and Child* by the circle of Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1285/90–1348), and Cristiani's *Saint Romuald and Saint Andrew* (1365–70). According to Federico Zeri's (1921–98) reconstruction, these were the wings of the aforementioned folding work, the central panel of which is now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. The two side panels (*Saint Bartholomew* and *Saint Dominic*), however, are in the Bandini Museum in Fiesole.[35]

Early Italian paintings also became better known among private art enthusiasts in Russia from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. This was due to visits to Italy, publications and personal connections with Italian collectors and antiquarians. It was the religiosity and historical-cultural value of the Italian 'primitives' that first attracted attention. Thus the Russian archaeologist Pyotr Sevast'ianov (1811–67) acquired the now famous icon *Madonna and Child Enthroned, with Scenes from the Life of Mary* (1275–80, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), from the circle of Coppo di Marcovaldo (1225–76), in Rome in 1863 (see Fig. 1.2).[36] In this same period, the writer Prince Pyotr Viazemskii (1820–88) brought the *Madonna and Child Enthroned, with Saints and Angels* (1370s, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) home from Italy to his Ostafyevo estate in the Moscow countryside. It was in Italy, too, that Dmitrii Khomiakov (1841–1919), son of the eminent Russian Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov (1804–60), accumulated between 1886 and 1898 his small but extremely

34 E. Lipgart, 'Imperatorskii Ermitazh. Priobreteniia i pereveski', *Starye gody* (January 1910), 19.

35 C. Mavarelli, ed., *Museo Bandini di Fiesole. Guida* (Florence: Polistampa, 2011), pp. 50–51.

36 V. Lazarev, 'Un nuovo capolavoro della pittura fiorentina duecentesca', *Rivista d'arte*, 30 (1953), 3–63; A. Tartuferi, *La pittura a Firenze nel Duecento* (Florence: Alberto Bruschi, 1990), pp. 26–27, 77 (pp. 59–62); V. E. Markova, *Italiia VIII–XVI vekov. Sobranie zhivopisi Gos. Muzeia izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv im. A. S. Pushkina. Katalog*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Galart, 2002), I, 36–39.

valuable collection. This collection was donated to the Rumiantsev Museum in Moscow in 1901. Notably, it included Simone di Filippo Benvenuti's (c. 1300–99) 'per devozione privata' *Annunciation* icon (early 1380s, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) and Matteo di Giovanni's (1430–95) *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1490s, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow). Finally, one of the most interesting collections of Italian 'primitives' in Russia was assembled by the Russian Consul General in Trieste, Mikhail Sergeevich Shchekin (1871–1920), who, while in Italy, managed to acquire the rarest works of Simone Martini (c. 1284–1344), Segna di Bonaventura (c. 1280–1331), Sano di Pietro (1405–81) and other artists. In 1909, these were all donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, which will be discussed further below.

Fig. 1.2 Coppo di Marcovaldo (1225–76), *Madonna and Child Enthroned, with Scenes from the Life of Mary* (*Maestà*) (1275–80), tempera on wood, 246 x 138 cm. From the collection of Pyotr Sevast'anov. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Wikimedia, photograph by Sailko (2020), CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cerchia_di_coppo_di_marcovaldo,_maest%C3%A0.JPG

The creation of private house-museums in Russia, open to the public, also became fashionable in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. One may assume that Florence, with the special air of enthusiasm for early Italian art and the Renaissance era it generated in this period, was a particular influence here. The house-museums of amateur art enthusiasts Frederick Stibbert (1838–1906) and Herbert Percy Horne (1864–1916) appeared in precisely the last quarter of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century, as did the showrooms in the elegant palaces of Stefano Bardini (1836–1922) and Elia Volpi (1858–1938), important dealers in Italian late medieval and Renaissance art. These supplied foreigners with valuable cult items procured from aristocratic collections and from Tuscany and Umbria's churches and monasteries. Florence, of course, becomes Europe's biggest antiquarian art market in the years of the *Belle Époque*, intrinsically linked with the new scholarship and cultural tourism of high society in England, Russia, Germany and America. We should not forget, too, that the grandiose collection of Western European painting owned by the Russian aristocratic family of the Demidovs was assembled and located on their estates near Florence. Part of the collection of Nikolai Demidov (1773–1828) was taken to Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but representatives of the Demidov family in Tuscany continued to collect works of art in the second half of the nineteenth century, thus maintaining in Italy the tradition of creating large aristocratic collections.[37] Many items from the collection of the prominent Russian artist, philanthropist and wealthy collector Mikhail Botkin (1839–1914) also originated in Florence and Rome. Botkin set up an Italian Renaissance Hall in his St Petersburg house-museum, where Italian 'primitives', Greek and early Russian icons were to be found amidst the Renaissance pictures, furniture and maiolica (see Figs. 1.3 and 1.4).

37 For more information about the Demidov collections, see F. Haskell, ed., *Anatole Demidoff. Prince of San Donato (1812–1870)* (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1994); L. Tonini, *I Demidoff a Firenze e in Toscana, Atti del convegno* (Florence: Olschki, 1996); L. Tonini, 'Nicola Demidoff collezionista russo a Firenze all'inizio del XIX secolo', in *Il collezionismo in Russia da Pietro I all'Unione Sovietica*, ed. L. Tonini (Napoli: Artistic and Publishing Company, 2009), pp. 67–88.

Fig. 1.3 The Italian Renaissance Hall: Italian 'primitives', medieval Greek and Russian Icons in the house-museum of Mikhail Botkin in St Petersburg. From the catalogue *Collection of M. P. Botkin* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike and A. Vilborg, 1911). Photograph by the author (2017), public domain.

Fig. 1.4 Novgorod School, *The Trinity of the New Testament, With the Chosen Saints* (the second half of the fourteenth century), tempera on wood, 113 x 88 cm. From the collection of Mikhail Botkin in St Petersburg. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Wikimedia, public domain.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Otechestvo_ikona_Novgorod.jpg

In 1875, the Russian collector acquired one of the rare Greek icons of the first half of the sixteenth century, the triptych *Deesis and the Twelve Great Feasts* (c. 1540–49) with the coat of arms of Pope Paul III (1534–49), from the collection of Cardinal Andrea Altieri in Rome (see Fig. 1.5). This triptych was kept in Botkin's house-museum until 1914, and can be clearly seen in old photographs. The Soviet authorities sold it to Joseph Davies, the American ambassador in Moscow, in 1937. Davies later gave his collection to the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Fig. 1.5 Cretan School, *Deesis and the Twelve Great Feasts* (c. 1540–49), tempera on wood, 50 x 80 ¾ in. From the collection of Mikhail Botkin in St Petersburg. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison, United States of America. Wikimedia, photograph by Daderot (2014), CC0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Deesis_with_the_Twelve_Feasts_of_the_Church,_Greco-Byzantine,_c._1540-1549,_tempera_and_gilt_on_panel_-_Chazen_Museum_of_Art_-_DSC01943.JPG

Finally, the tradition of collecting Western European art by one of the richest Russian noble families, the Stroganovs, should once again be noted. Count Pavel Sergeevich Stroganov (1823–1911, son of the aforementioned Sergei Grigor'evich Stroganov), who served in the Russian Embassy in Rome from 1847 to 1862, stands out amid collectors of Italian 'primitives'. Intending to continue the family tradition of popularizing Western European painting in Russia, the Count focused especially on early Italian paintings 'on golden backgrounds'. According to contemporaries, the collection was arranged in Louis XV-style interiors, and his palace

on Sergiev Street in St Petersburg was conceived as a collector's house, designed and built specially to house his unique collection.[38] The Count's study was decorated by, amongst other things, a favourite painting which his father had acquired back in 1856 for 20,000 francs; the *Lamentation over Christ with a Carmelite Monk* (c. 1510, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) by the brush of Cima da Conegliano (c. 1459–1517).

In Italy itself, individual masterpieces of early Italian art were to be found at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in the collection of Pavel Sergeevich's brother, Count Grigorii Stroganov (1823–1910). The collection was housed in the Palazzo Stroganov, his personal palazzo in Rome, via Sistina 59. Most notably it included a painted tabernacle by Fra Angelico (the so-called *Stroganov Tabernacle*) (1425–30, State Hermitage, St Petersburg); the exceedingly rare *Madonna with the Christ Child Reading* (c. 1494–98, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh), by Pinturicchio (1454–1513); the *Madonna and Child* (the so-called *Madonna Stroganov*) by Duccio (c. 1300, Metropolitan Museum, New York) (see Fig. 1.6), and the *Madonna from the Annunciation Scene* by Simone Martini (c. 1340–44, State Hermitage, St Petersburg) (see Fig. 1.7). Fra Angelico's tabernacle and the *Madonna* by Martini were purchased by the Count from the aforementioned antiquarian Bardini, whose house-museum in Florence had opened to the public back in 1883.[39] 'The Italian school of the Trecento and Quattrocento is very

38 D. V. Grigorovich, 'Dom P. S. Stroganov na Sergievskoi ulitse', *Pchela*, 1 (1875), 9. See also E. Lipgart, 'Dar grafa P. S. Stroganova Imperatorskomu Ermitazhu', *Starye gody* (April 1912), 33–45.

39 Stefano Bardini's *casa museo* in Florence was more a gallery-showroom, where clients were able to imagine pieces of art in their own urban residences and reconstructed villas in the neo-Renaissance style. Bardini's innovative installation had a considerable influence on museums and private exhibitions in Western Europe and the USA – in particular, in Berlin (Bode-Museum and Gemäldegalerie), Paris (Jacquemart-André Museum) and Boston (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum). Bardini's main clients were British and American collectors. At the same time, research shows that 'a Bardini provenance' characterized countless objects in public and private collections throughout Europe, including imperial Russia. Bardini had a close business relationship with Wilhelm von Bode in particular. Initially, it was Bode who planned to acquire the tabernacle by Fra Angelico, but later it went to Count Stroganov and was transferred to the Hermitage by his daughter and heir Princess Maria Shcherbatova (Stroganov) (1857–1920) in 1912. See A. F. Moscowitz, *Stefano Bardini 'Principe degli Antiquari'. Prolegomenon to a Biography* (Florence: Centro Di, 2015), pp. 5–27, 49–53. See also V. Niemeyer Chini, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode: mercanti e connaisseur fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Florence: Polistampa, 20090, pp. 109–18. For information about the

interesting', wrote Baron Nikolai Vrangel (1880–1915) and Aleksandr Trubnikov (1882–1966), the first to review this collection: 'the early Sienese works are especially worthy of note, including the works of rare masters such as Duccio, Simone Martini, Sano di Pietro. The earliest work in the collection is the fragment of fresco depicting the Madonna, painted by Margaritone (1236–1313), a master from Arezzo'. The authors highlighted a masterpiece by the hand of Duccio, in particular, in their article: 'A small Madonna represents [the work of] this rare master in the collection. She was exhibited in Siena and evoked rapture in art historians and lovers of the old masters'.[40]

Fig. 1.6 Duccio (c. 1255/60–c. 1318/19), *Madonna and Child* (*'Madonna Stroganov'*) (c. 1300), tempera on wood, 23.8 x 16.5 cm. From the collection of Count Grigorii Stroganov in Rome. The Metropolitan Museum, New York. Wikimedia, public domain. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio_Di_Buoninsegna_-_Madonna_col_Bambino.jpg

acquisition of Simone Martini's *Madonna* by Bardini, see the catalogue of Count Stroganov's collection: A. Muñoz and L. Pollak, *Pièces de choix de la collection du Comte Gregoire Stroganoff à Rome*, 2 vols. (Rome: Impr. de l'Unione editrice, 1912), II, 10. On the fate of the *Madonna* by Duccio and Grigorii Stroganov's Rome collection, see V. Chalpachcjan, 'Il destino della collezione romana del Conte Grigorij S. Stroganoff (1829–1910) dopo la scomparsa del collezionista', *Rivista d'arte*, 5.2 (2012), 446–73.

40 See N. N. Vrangel and A. Trubnikov, 'Kartiny sobraniia grafa G. S. Stroganova v Rime', *Starye gody* (March 1909), 115–17. See also Muñoz and Pollak, *Pièces de choix*, II, p. vii; A. Muñoz, 'La collezione Stroganoff', *Rassegna contemporanea*, 3.10 (1910), 9.

Fig. 1.7 Simone Martini (c. 1284–1344), *Madonna from the Annunciation Scene* (c. 1340–44), tempera on wood, 30.5 x 21.5 cm. From the collection of Count Grigorii Stroganov in Rome. State Hermitage, St Petersburg. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simone_Martini_076.jpg

Judging by the sumptuous catalogue of his collection of masterpieces, and by the artist Fyodor Reiman's (1842–1920) surviving watercolour interiors (c. 1905–10), the Count selected his favourite objects to decorate his 'art study'. It was here that he kept individual Italian 'primitives', a Quentin Matsys (1466–1530) portrait of *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1517, Palazzo Barberini, Rome) brought from St Petersburg; a valuable tapestry, manufactured in Brussels in the sixteenth century; and decorated vases, antiques and Byzantine artefacts. Highlights among the Byzantine objects were the icons in enamel and inscribed on ivory, and especially an extremely rare enamel-inlaid icon-reliquary of *Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker*, dating from the sixth century and now located in the Hermitage collection in St Petersburg.[41] Moreover, there were individual Byzantine and Russian icons in the palace bedchamber,

41 For further details, see S. Moretti, *Roma bizantina. Opere d'arte dall'impero di Costantinopoli nelle collezioni romane* (Rome: Campisano, 2014), pp. 123–29, 134–52.

and the medieval and ancient sculptures that graced the galleries were accompanied by the works of Agnolo Gaddi (c. 1350–96), Matteo di Pacino (d. 1394) and Neri di Bicci (1419–91).

The Count was not seeking to replicate the Renaissance house-museum ambiance of the likes of Herbert Horne (1864–1916) in Florence, or Botkin in St Petersburg. His interiors were more reminiscent of the Roman nobility's palace-museums, and were permeated with that *Belle Époque* atmosphere of luxury and aestheticism reflected in famous literary works by Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) and Henry James (1843–1916). Count Grigorii Stroganov even features in D'Annunzio's *Child of Pleasure* (1889), buying various works of art in an antiquarian shop on Rome's via Sistina. The novel's literary hero resides on the Palazzo Zuccari, which was near the collector's house. Part of the Stroganov collection was also located in a specially constructed two-storey building on the via Gregoriana, the Villino Stroganov. The view over Rome and the *genius loci*, as described by Vernon Lee (1856–1935), functioned as a sort of 'frame' for the Russian Count's collecting activities. 'To house his gigantic collection', recalled Buslaev, 'he built himself a house on the via Gregoriana in Rome, near Monte Pincio. There you will also find massive marble sarcophagi from the catacombs, and sepulchres, and heavy bas-relief marble slabs from recently dissolved Italian monasteries, and statues and statuettes, silver chalices, patens and cups, dishes, vases and covers, and diptychs of elephant ivory and metal, and all sorts of other vessels'.[42] Although the Count accumulated his collection of pictures under the guidance of Karl von Liphart (1808–91) (who lived in Florence from 1864 onwards), he was himself considered a prominent art expert; for example, he correctly identified Martini as the creator of the *Madonna from the Annunciation Scene*. According to contemporaries, many scholars and art enthusiasts frequented the Palazzo Stroganoff – Giovanni Cavalcaselle (1819–97), Giovanni Morelli (1816–91), Franz von Lenbach (1836–1904), Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), Bernard Berenson (1865–1959), Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and others.

42 F. I. Buslaev, 'Moi vospominaniia', *Vestnik Evropy*, 5 (1891), 171. Today, the Bibliotheca Hertziana–Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome is housed at the Palazzo and Villino Stroganov. On the history of this building, see E. Kieven, ed., *100 Jahre Bibliotheca Hertziana. Der Palazzo Zuccari und die Institutsgebäude 1590–2013* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2013), pp. 276–91.

Throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, Italian 'primitives' and Russian icons were evaluated primarily according to the norms of Classical art and Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717–68) aesthetics. However, the Romantic aesthetic which superseded it increasingly began to shape the curiosity of the first icon collectors in Russia, just as it began to shape interest in early Italian painting in Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. The icon collections of Count Sergei Stroganov and Pogodin in Moscow appeared right on the wave of Romantic interest in national history and the religiosity of the folk. And Lord Lindsay's impassioned writings about the merits of the 'primitives' has clear connections with evaluations of the Russian icon by, for example, Russian litterateur and poet Nikolai Ivanchin-Pisarev (1790–1849), the archaeologist Ivan Sakharov (1807–63) and the famous connoisseur and collector Dmitrii Rovinskii (1824–95), who owned a huge collection of Russian folk religious prints (*lubki*). Moreover, in the mid-nineteenth century, this Romantic interest in medieval and folk life influenced the Russian imperial court, just as it influenced the British and Austrian courts, for example. Prince Albert's (1819–61) purchases of Italian 'primitives' (the works of Duccio, Bernardo Daddi (c. 1280–1348) and Fra Angelico), donated to London's National Gallery by Queen Victoria (1819–1901) after his death, belonged entirely to the spirit of the times. Early icons – long forgotten in the upper echelons of Russian culture, and preserved only in Old Believer collections and by a few admirers of Russian antiquities – became positively fashionable in Russia for the first time in many years, thanks to Nikolai Leskov's (1831–95) *The Sealed Angel* (1873), which was highly spoken of by the Emperor Alexander II (1818–81) himself.[43]

## Artistic Form and the Idea of Pure Visibility

By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, there was every indication that tastes had changed. Suddenly, it was clear that Byzantine, early Italian and early Russian art not only represented a harmonious way of seeing the world, but also possessed aesthetic value.

43 See K. A. Lantz, ed., *The Sealed Angel and Other Stories by Nikolay Leskov* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

The new fashion for Italian 'primitives', the proliferation of exhibitions, the development of great collections and their increasing presence in the antiquarian-art market inevitably had an impact on the emerging culture of 'new collecting' and the growing interest in early icons in Russia. That the young Russian critics Muratov, Shchekotov and Punin cited and drew on the works of Wölfflin, Berenson, Charles Diehl (1859–1944) and Gabriel Millet (1867–1953) in their publications testifies to the fact that Russian authors were well acquainted with both the latest research in the field of art theory, and with new publications in English and French Byzantine studies. 'Henceforth it became clear', noted Shchekotov in one of his articles, 'that the changes and transformations of artistic form in the art of Byzantium give us the right to consider its monuments with the help of those same methods that we use, for example, to study the art of the early Italian Renaissance'.[44] In other words, the *idea of pure visibility* and the basic theses of the Formalist School of German art studies arrived in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. English essays on art attracted no less interest, particularly the works of Walter Pater (1839–94), John Symonds (1840–93) and Vernon Lee. Together with Ruskin and William Morris (1834–96), Pater was recognized in Russia as a proponent of Victorian aesthetics and as responsible for laying the foundations for the theory of 'aesthetic criticism', the aim of which was to prepare the viewer for education in taste and to be able to perceive beauty.[45] It is therefore no coincidence that it was precisely *art critics*, not academics, who became the main new interpreters of medieval Russian icons. Their evaluations were based exclusively on visual criteria, and their observations and conclusions on early Russian painting were

44 N. M. Shchekotov, 'Ikonopis' kak iskusstvo. Po povodu sobraniia ikon I. S. Ostroukhov i S. P. Riabushinskogo', *Russkaia ikona*, 2 (1914), 115–42.

45 See W. Pater, *Renessans. Ocherki iskusstva i poezii*, trans. S. G. Zaimovskii (Moscow: Problemy estetiki, 1912); W. Pater, *Voobrazhaemye portrety. Rebenok v dome*, trans. P. P. Muratov (Moscow: V. M. Sablin, 1908); V. Lee, *Italiia. Volume 1: Genius loci. Vol. 2: Teatr i muzyka*, ed. P. P. Muratov, trans. E. S. Urenius (Moscow: n.p., 1914–15). Symonds' travel writings were published under the title *Obrazy Italii* (J. A. Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece*, 3 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1907–14)). In the foreword to Vernon Lee's sketch, Muratov noted: 'The historic enthusiasm of the English for Italy is a wonderful phenomenon, not to be found in any other nation. All English literature went under the motto of Italy…' And, furthermore: 'No nation has done as much for knowledge of the Italian genius in all his manifestations from Giotto to Tiepolo and from Dante to Carlo Gozzi, as the English did in the period from the 1860s to 1880s' (*Italiia: Genius loci*, pp. 7–8).

shaped by the Western European academic works that popularized the Italian 'primitives' and the works of French Impressionists. Essentially, the texts discussing the early Russian icon address the same problems of artistic form as studies of Trecento artists or emerging trends in Russian and Western European art. This is particularly evident in the numerous comparisons drawn in Russian books and journals between Italian 'primitives', medieval Russian icons and the works of French and Russian Impressionism and Modernism.

The Formalist School of German art studies acquired particular significance for the re-evaluation of early Russian painting. This School raised the question of the content of artistic form inherent in the fine arts. The Formalist School endeavoured to prove that universal and objective laws of development are manifested in art: a timely advancement in the history of the discipline. New discoveries in the sphere of psycho-physiological vision provided ammunition in the formation of these theses; the works of Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94) and Ernst Mach's (1838–1916) optical theory, which helped determine the very nature of the object perceived by sight, became exceptionally popular. According to the new aesthetical theories, the nature of the artistic form of a work of art derived not from the ideological backdrop of the era, but was determined by a special *visual intelligence*, the contents of which were declared unique and had nothing in common with other forms of cultural activity, be they religious, philosophical or literary. This *correct vision* was presumed to have one vital characteristic – it was able to reveal ideal forms, which reflect harmony and stability, in other words the permanent universal values of human activity by which the monuments of Classical art declare themselves.

These ideas first emerged in the intellectual community that coalesced in Florence in the 1880s, which included the philosopher Konrad Fiedler (1841–1895), the artist Hans von Marées (1837–87) and the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921). The infatuation with Italy and Classical art resulted in the articulation of new aims: to apprehend the secrets of Classical form and define the very mechanisms of spiritual activity. It was Fiedler's idea of *Reine Sichtbarkeit* [pure visibility] that Hildebrand developed in his famous book *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst* [*The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts*] (1893), translated from German and published in Russia in 1914. This

notion influenced the way the issue of *artistic vision* was addressed in the works of Russian researchers in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[46] Moreover this *artistic vision*, which would be mentioned so often in the works of Muratov, Shchekotov and Igor Grabar (1871–1960), was understood not as a mechanical reflection of reality but as a product of intensive spiritual activity. More than that, according to Fiedler and Hildebrand, visual perception led to autonomous cognition, which should be distinguished from cognition conveyed in language. Thus, the content particular to the fine arts automatically corresponded with the physiology of visual perception. The Head of the Viennese School of Art History, Alois Riegl (1858–1905), for example, drew the essence of fine arts out of the laws of vision. His concept of *Kunstwollen* [artistic volition] is nothing other than objective visual conformity with regularity, which allows the history of art to be understood as a process of the changing of artistic forms and their objective development. Riegl set out his theory in *Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* [*Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*] (1893) and in his renowned monograph *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* [*The Late Roman Art Industry*] (1901). It was precisely in ornamentation, Riegl suggested, that humankind's genuine artistic abilities were most clearly manifested, and this was true even at the dawn of human history. In ornament, too, those 'inner' artistic forms that began to be considered as the outward projection of the artist's subjective style were also laid bare. It is no coincidence that the development of this concept by Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965) in his work *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* [*Abstraction and Empathy*] (1908) significantly shaped the art of the European avant-garde. Worringer traced the transformation from early eastern (abstract) art to the art of the ancient world (the 'art of empathy') by focusing on ornament, and became one of those first critics of Eurocentrism who defended the idea of multiple viewpoints on the world.

This new conception of visual arts led to more concentrated attention on medieval European art, and to a new consideration of Renaissance and Baroque art. The work of Wölfflin and Berenson, which so influenced the new research on the history of medieval Russian painting, is key here. Wölfflin was the first scholar to develop the

46 A. Hildebrand, *Problema formy v iobrazitel'nom iskusstve*, trans. N. B. Rozenfel'd and V. A. Favorskii (Moscow: Musaget, 1914).

conception of *a priori* forms, which was grounded in the visual analysis of artworks. A huge number of scholars – in Russia as elsewhere – began to consider artworks as optical phenomena following the publication of his eminent books *Renaissance und Barock* [*Renaissance and Baroque*] (1888), *Die Klassische Kunst* [*Classic Art*] (1899) and *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [*The Principles of Art History*] (1915). Henceforth, even renowned Russian icon specialists like academicians Kondakov and Likhachev had to begin their analysis with visual impressions. That *The Principles of Art History* can be seen as a precursor to Structuralism is supported by the fact that it transformed into a dogma of artistic forms. The preface to the book shows that the author was striving to provide a sort of 'auxiliary framework', allowing the specificities of any artistic style to be more easily configured. Wölfflin never abandoned the idea of *pure visibility* discussed in Fiedler and Hildebrand's circle, to which Wölfflin was always connected via mutual interests.[47] Wilhelm Dilthey's (1833–1911) psychology was also immensely important for Wölfflin. He had attended Dilthey's lectures at the University of Berlin, and we can gain some idea of what Wölfflin studied in Berlin by reading Dilthey's seminal work *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* [*An Introduction to the Human Sciences*] (1883).

Echoes of those formal-psychological aesthetics – which many of those then writing about early Russian painting, particularly Muratov, had grasped precisely via the works of Wölfflin and Berenson – may be clearly traced in the workings out of the German Formalist School. According to the theories developed by Dilthey and Theodor Lipps (1833–1911), beauty is not an objective property of an artefact, but generated by the perceiving subject's feelings being inserted into the artwork. In his theory of *Einfühlung* [empathy], Lipps intended, amongst other things, to demonstrate that penetration of a painting is a special, spiritual practice which allows the viewer to be aware of themselves as a complete person. Lipps considered the artistic value and beauty of a work to be linked less with the content of an artwork than with subjective, intimate experience, the viewer's capacity and skill in revealing the hidden beauty of the contemplated object through special emotional effort. These ideas appeared especially clearly in the

47 See Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. Levy and Weddigen.

works of Muratov and Shchekotov, for example, which will be discussed further below. But they were picked up earlier by the famous American art historian, dealer and collector Berenson, who – following Wölfflin and Hildebrand – began to develop the idea that painting possesses its own *intrinsic quality* which remains unchanged in essence while being modified across the centuries.[48] It was Berenson's work which most seriously influenced Muratov, as it did other young researchers of medieval Russian icons.

Berenson was born within the territory of the Russian Empire, in a small Lithuanian town not far from Vilnius. His family emigrated to the United States when he was ten, and, between 1884 and 1887, Berenson studied at Boston University and Harvard University. His acquaintance with Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924), who inherited an enormous fortune and married one of the richest men in America, played a significant role in his career. Berenson was a key advisor in the formation of her famous Museum of Western European Art over many years, alongside artists James Whistler (1834–1903) and John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), and French writer Paul Bourget (1852–1935). The collection included genuine masterpieces by early Italian artists such as Giotto, Martini, Lippo Memmi (c. 1291–1356), and Fra Angelico. The private Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum was opened to the public in 1903, and included a special hall – the Early Italian Room – with works by Italian 'primitives'. The fifteenth-century Russian icon the *Ascension of Christ* remains in the museum to this day, creating that refined aura of high art so characteristic of private house-museums of the *Belle Époque*. The icon reflected the era's particular taste for mysticism, simplicity and the decorative qualities of medieval art. The connoisseur's celebrated conceptual approach as an advisor to collectors developed first in the ground of Berenson's collaboration with the extravagant Isabella, to whom he wrote in January 1895, 'If you will permit me to advise you in art matters as you have for a year past it will not be many years before you possess a collection almost unrivaled of masterpieces and masterpieces only…'.[49]

48 B. Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1959), pp. 84–85.

49 As cited in E. Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 240.

At the end of the 1880s, Berenson was already captivated by Italian painting. As he discovered for himself the creations of Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico, he ultimately emerged as one of the leading specialists in this field. Berenson's collecting, and his interrogation of style and artistic quality, was effectively combined with diligent research in his academic work, as is already clearly demonstrated in his first major work focused on Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480–1556/57).[50]

It is important to register that finding a new way of attributing authorship to the vast number of dirty and repainted fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian paintings became art history's most important goal in this last quarter of the nineteenth century. Indeed, if a 'genuine' icon 'painted by Andrei Rublev' might be found in practically every wealthy Old Believer collector's oratory in nineteenth-century Russia (while today only one genuine Rublev icon – the *Trinity* (1411, or 1425–27, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) – is known), practically every large collection in Western Europe had acquired a 'genuine' Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445–1510) or Giorgione Barbarelli da Castelfranco (1477/78–1510). The exhibition of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Venetian painting held in London in 1895, assembled from private collections, is a telling example of this. Berenson ruled out thirty-two of the thirty-three paintings attributed to Titian (c. 1488/90–1576) in the catalogue, while all eighteen of the paintings attributed to Giorgione turned out to be the work of other artists.[51] 'It became fashionable for wealthy lovers of art, with no critical standard of authenticity, to collect so-called works of Giorgione, and a multitude of imitations came into circulation', Pater observed, 'Yet enough remains to explain why the legend grew up, above the name, why the name attached itself, in many instances, to the bravest work of other men'.[52] It was indeed precisely in this period that a huge number of fakes circulated, mostly under the names of Botticelli, Giorgione, Raphael (1483–1520) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). Private collections in Western Europe and Russia were absolutely flooded with works from various periods and by various masters that

50 See B. Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto* (Milan: Electa, 1955).

51 N. A. Belousova, 'Bernard Bernson i ego kniga', in B. Berenson, *Zhivopistsy ital'ianskogo Vozrozhdeniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), p. 19.

52 W. Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies of Art and Poetry* (n.p.: The Floating Press, 2010 [1873]), p. 137.

had been ascribed to Botticelli or Giorgione on the basis of random features, although there were a few exceptions in the form of famous, genuine paintings.

As a special sphere of art studies, connoisseurship was in an entirely fluid state for the duration of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The expert of the eighteenth century was an art lover without the ability to judge a work of literature or painting. Evaluation of a painting was based on taste and the outward similarity of the artist's style. Jonathan Richardson (1667–1745) endeavoured to make sense of all the complexities of such expertise as early as 1719, in the section *Whether 'tis an Original, or a Copy* of his book on connoisseurship.[53] The connoisseur of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also based their evaluation on a visual reading of the painting. But this judgement was now primarily built on the experience of psychological aesthetics (aesthetic empathy), and also on formal analysis grounded in the comparative anatomy method of Morelli.[54] The importance of Berenson's work in attribution lies wholly in his success at bridging the

53 See J. Richardson, *Two Discourses. I. an Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting… II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of Connoisseur* (London: W. Churchill, 1719), https://archive.org/details/twodiscoursesia00conggoog

54 The concept of a connoisseur (*conoscitore*) first emerged in Italy and was used in contrast to *professore*, that is, to someone who engages with art as a professional and/or as a teacher. In other words, connoisseurs are enthusiasts and collectors first, scholars and researchers second. The essence of connoisseurship was most clearly expressed in this period by Max Friedländer (1867–1958), who counterposed historians and connoisseurs in his book *Der Kunstkenner* [*The Art Connoisseur*] (Berlin: Cassirer, 1919): connoisseurs favour collecting and the pure enjoyment of art, and they see in this the goal of artistic creativity. Historians pay greater attention to context: 'A work of art', Friedländer explained, 'should be viewed without a conscious, cognitive aim, and if at some moment or other inspiration suddenly strikes and some of our knowledge is confirmed or even enriched, then fine; one must never approach a work of art with a firm intention to resolve some question or other. We must allow [the work of art] to speak for itself, we must converse with rather than interrogate it'. See M. Friedländer, *Ob iskusstve i znatochestve*, trans. M. I. Korenev, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Andrey Naslednikov, 2013), p. 135. The theoretical grounds and criticism of connoisseurship are considered in detail in the section 'Art Forgery as the Connoisseur's Nightmare', in F. Lenain, *Art Forgery. A History of a Modern Obsession* (London: Reaktion, 2012), pp. 234–310. Researchers have also considered the special significance of the works of Pater and Hildebrand for Berenson: see P. Barolskii, 'Walter Pater and Bernard Berenson', *New Criterion*, 2 (1984), 47–57; M. A. Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), p. 8.

divide between German Formalism and Italian connoisseurship at the end of the nineteenth century; furthermore his concept of *tactile values* without doubt rested on enormous erudition, visual memory and, it would seem, clear ability to intuitively penetrate a painting. It is hard now to imagine just how authoritative Berenson was in the global art and antiquities market in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In the formation of the largest American collections, including the painting collections of Isabella Stewart Gardner, John G. Johnson (1841–1917) and Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), who opened their private collections to the public, Berenson's word was final. Contemporaries recalled how, as well as captivating specialists, the mania for attribution based on Berenson's method of *tactile values* gripped even American tourists, who anticipated 'tactile imagination' in their fingertips as they stood before the masterpieces of Italian painting in the Florentine Academy of Arts.[55]

Between 1894 and 1907 Berenson published four volumes of his history of Italian Renaissance painting, and finally formulated the principles of scholarly connoisseurship, foregrounding visual perception, the artistic quality of a painting and innate taste. 'We must look and look and look till we live the painting and for a fleeting moment become identified with it', Berenson wrote in the spirit of the aesthetic ideas fashionable at the time.[56] It is also necessary to note that the American researcher constructed his concrete descriptions on the analysis of concepts like movement, space and colouring, as well as the notion of *tactile values*. For him, this concept of *tactile values* was not simply the tactile modelling of artistic form (as, for example, in the work of Giotto) but also 'the essence' of the image, which delights us and is apprehended swiftly and clearly. But how, and when, does a sensation and understanding of an artwork's essence manifest in the beholder? Berenson explained that it comes 'when we unconsciously translate our retinal impressions into ideated sensations of touch, pressure and

55 H. Hannay, *Roger Fry and Other Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), pp. 54, 71–72. 'It follows that the essential in the art of painting [...] is somehow to stimulate our consciousness of tactile values, so that the picture shall have at least as much power as the object represented, to appeal to our tactile imagination' (Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, p. 40).

56 Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, p. xiii.

grasp'. This was the meaning of his concept of 'tactile values'.[57] In other words, in revealing the concept of the artistic form, Berenson had two aims: on the one hand, to penetrate the essence of the influence of the work of art on the psycho-physical nature of a person, and, on the other hand, to bring out 'the intrinsic quality' of a painting, which, soon after, young art critics in Russia began to seek in the early Russian icon. In Berenson's terminology, 'the Decorative' was opposed to 'Illustration' reflecting the ideological context of the epoch: 'Illustration is everything which in a work of art appeals to us, not for any intrinsic quality, as for colour or form or composition, contained in the work of art itself, but for the value the thing represented has elsewhere, whether in the world outside, or in the mind within'.[58] Scrutinizing the works of the Florentine and Sienese 'primitives' (Giotto, Duccio, Martini and others), Berenson therefore detected that they possessed 'decorative' worth as well as 'illustrative qualities' – in other words, these artists handled the construction of space beautifully, and created visually pleasing effects of masses and lines. On the basis of this methodology, Berenson determined both the stylistic characteristics of the Italian Renaissance's Schools of painting (Venetian, Florentine, Central Italian and North Italian) and the individual hand of many Italian artists.

In the long-term, Berenson's subjective-psychological ideas would be criticized by proponents of the avant-garde; he refused to accept their critiques through the course of his lifetime. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, his ideas directly influenced the challenges identified and posed to a new generation of Russian researchers of early Russian icons. These challenges were brilliantly resolved, above

57 B. Berenson, *The Italian Painters in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 94. 'We remember that to realize form we must give tactile values to retinal sensations. Ordinarily we have considerable difficult in skimming off these tactile values, and by the time they have reached our consciousness, they have lost much of their strength. Obviously, the artist who gives us these values more rapidly than the object itself gives them, gives us the pleasures consequent upon a more vivid realization of the object, and the further pleasures that come from the sense of greater psychical capacity' (Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, p. 43).

58 Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, pp. 84–85. That said, Berenson's understanding of the 'intrinsic quality' of an artwork evoked fundamental doubts amongst his contemporaries. Bertrand Russell also pointed out the error of these views to Berenson. See Calo, *Bernard Berenson*, p. 13; and M. Schapiro, 'Mr. Berenson's Values', *Encounter*, 16 (1961), 57–65.

all, by an archetypal representative of Silver Age Russian culture, the famous art historian and critic Muratov. It was precisely in his works on the history of early Russian painting that the issue of the origin of the medieval Russian icon was first addressed in the context of artistic culture worldwide, distinguishing between different Schools and their respective stylistic characteristics.