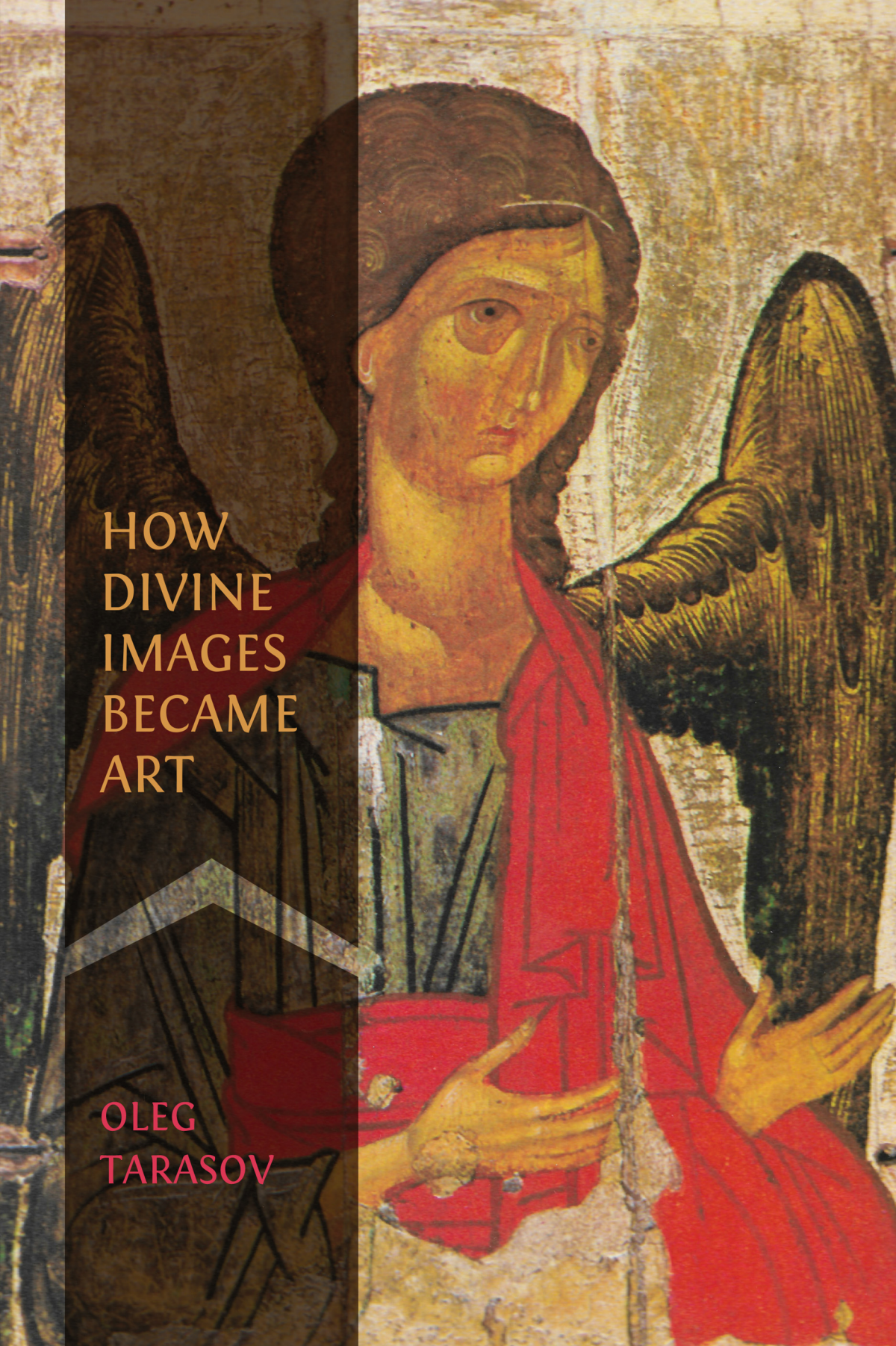
HOW
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Cover image: Icon of Archangel Michael (fourteenth century). Novgorod School. Tempera on wood, 86 x 63 cm. From the collection of Stepan Riabushinskii in Moscow. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_archangle_Michael_(Novgorod).jpg

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2. From Images of Italy to Early Russian Art

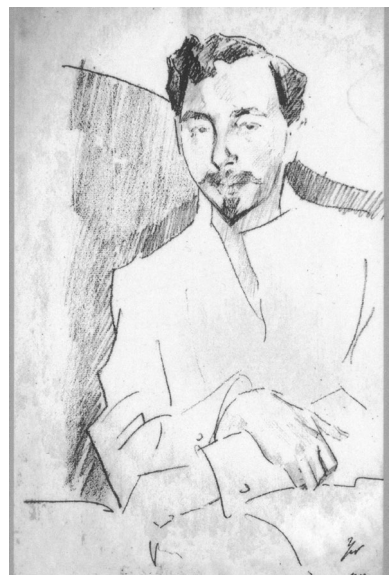


Fig. 2.1 Nikolai Pavlovich Ulyanov (1877–1949), *Portrait of Pavel Muratov* (1911), graphite pencil on paper, 24 x 18 cm. Private collection. Reprinted by permission of the owner. All rights reserved.

Pavel Muratov (1881–1950) came from the hereditary nobility and was educated as an engineer, but his love of art took him to Italy (see Fig. 2.1). His principal work, *Obrazy Italii* [*Images of Italy*], written in the genre of intellectual travel writing, was dedicated to the art and culture of Italy. It was this book that made Muratov famous and secured his place in history.[59] His multifaceted activity in the period from 1905 to 1914,

59 The fact that reprints of *Images of Italy* were made during the 1910s testifies to its popularity. See P. P. Muratov, *Obrazy Italii*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Izdanie Nauchnogo

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0378.02

however, cannot but evoke admiration. He visits Italy and travels widely in Western Europe, writing about Italian, French and Russian art; his is the foreword to Vernon Lee's (1856–1935) famous book *Italy*, which was published in Russian by the Sabashnikovs in two volumes in 1914–15.[60] He also prepared a translation of Italian Renaissance-era novels, with detailed commentaries.[61] Finally, it is in these years that Muratov laid the foundations of new scholarship in early Russian painting, publishing two highly significant works: the essay *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka* [*Russian Painting to the Mid-Seventeenth Century*] and *Drevnerusskaia zhivopis' v sobranii I. S. Ostroukhova* [*Medieval Russian Icon-Painting in the Collection of I. S. Ostroukhov*]. The former was published in the sixth volume of artist and historian Igor Grabar's (1871–1960) luxurious 1914 edition, and is, in essence, the first history of early Russian painting to draw on the restored and genuine masterpieces of Russian icon-painting from the fourteenth to the first half of the seventeenth century.[62] The latter book focuses on the practice of new collecting. Here, early Russian icons are subject to brilliant formal analysis as masterpieces; in other words, as artefacts exclusively of high artistic quality, which is what distinguishes Ilya Ostroukhov's (1858–1929) collection from others. The new type of collector is also discussed in this work.[63] Muratov finally leaves Russia in 1922, and lives in Berlin, Rome, Paris and London.[64] It is in the 1920s and 1930s that he does a great deal to popularize early Russian icons in the West. His book *Medieval Russian Painting* was published in Italian, as we have already noted, in 1925, and may be rightfully considered the first western publication on the aesthetic significance of early Russian icons.[65]

Slova, 1911–12). See also P. P. Muratov, *Immagini dell'Italia*, ed. R. Giuliani, trans. A. Romano, 2 vols. (Milan: Adelphi, 2019–21).

60 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).

61 P. P. Muratov, ed. and trans., *Novelly ital'ianskogo Vozrozhdeniia*, 2 vols. (Moscow: n.p., 1913).

62 P. P. Muratov, 'Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka', in *Istoriia Russkogo iskusstva*, ed. I. Grabar, 6 vols. (Moscow: Knebel, 1914–16), IV, 18–21.

63 P. P. Muratov, *Drevnerusskaia zhivopis' v sobranii I. S. Ostroukhova* (Moscow: K. F. Nekrasov, 1914).

64 On this period in P. P. Muratov's life, see in particular: 'Pis'ma P. P. Muratova (1923–1926). Publikatsiia P. Deotto i E. Garetto' (n.a.), in *Archivio russo-italiano 9: Olga Resnevic Signorelli e l'emigrazione russa: corripondenze*, ed. E. Garetto, A. d'Amelia, K. Kumpan and D. Rizzi (Salerno: Europa Orientalis, 2012), pp. 81–108.

65 P. P. Muratov, *La pittura russa antica*, trans. E. Lo Gatto (Rome: A. Stock, 1925). Two major works in German and English on the history of Russian icon-painting were

Two years later Muratov published *Les icones russes* [*The Russian Icons*] (1927) in French, the frontmatter of which was decorated with a colour reproduction of Ostroukhov's icon *Descent from the Cross* (from the late fifteenth century). One of the copies of this book would be printed especially for Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) and his wife Mary Smith (1864–1954) (see Figs. 2.2a and 2.2b).[66] At the same time, Muratov was also writing about Byzantine painting and Western European art. From 1928 to 1931, he was actively collaborating with Mario Broglio (1891–1948) and his publishers Valori plastici [Plastic Values] in Rome, where his monograph *La pittura bizantina* [*Byzantine Painting*] was published in Italian, as was a book on Fra Angelico (c. 1395–1455) (in Italian, French and English), and on Gothic sculpture (in French).[67] In this same period, Muratov played a key role in the foundation and work of the Icon Society in Paris, which aimed to promote the heritage of early Russian art.[68] Finally, Muratov summarized his observations and research in the field of Russian medieval painting in three essays: 'Otkrytiia drevnego russkogo iskusstva' ['Discoveries in Russian Medieval Art'], 'Puti russkoi ikony' ['Ways of the Russian Icon'] and 'Vokrug ikony' ['Around the Icon'], published in 1923, 1928 and 1933.[69] In 1933, Muratov read three lectures

soon published in the West: O. Wulff and M. Alpatov, *Denkmaler der Ikonenmalerei* (Dresden: Avalun-Verlag, 1925); N. P. Kondakov, *The Russian Icon*, trans. E. Minns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927). In contrast to these, Muratov's work is the first attempt to comment on the art of the Russian icon in terms of the development of style.

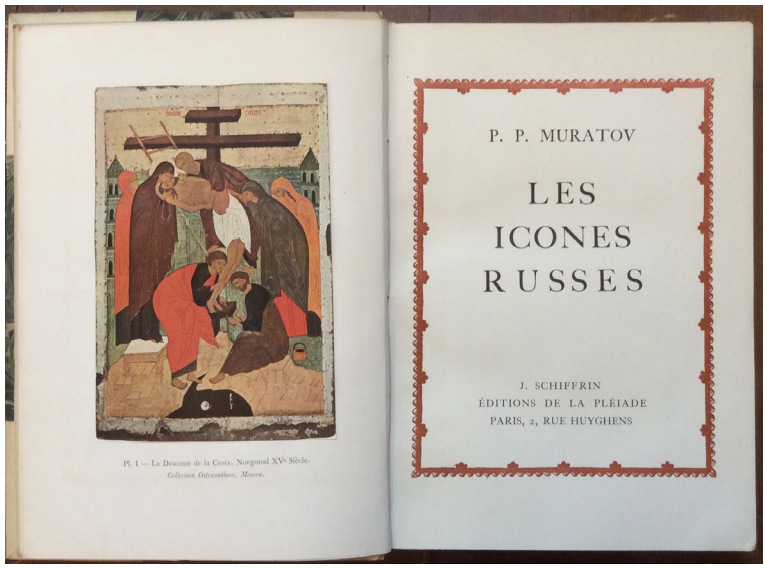
66 P. P. Muratov, *Les icones russes* (Paris: Schiffrin, 1927). The book was released by Pléiade, the publisher of the French translation of Berenson's seminal work, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*. I found this copy of the book at the *Berenson Library Archive*, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence.

67 See P. P. Muratov, *La pittura bizantina* (Rome: Valori Plastici, 1928); P. P. Muratov, *Frate Angelico* (Rome: Valori Plastici, 1929); P. P. Muratov, *Fra Angelico. His Life and Work*, trans. E. Law-Gisiko (New York: F. Warne and Co., 1930); P. P. Muratov, *La sculpture gothique* (Rome: Valori Plastici, 1931).

68 The Icon Society was founded in Paris by V. P. Riabushinskii with the aim of studying early Russian painting. The society's founders were Riabushinskii (chairman), S. K. Makovskii, Prince S. A. Shcherbatov, B. K. Zaitsev, P. P. Muratov, the artists I. I. Bilibin and D. S. Stelletskii. Some of the major western specialists on Byzantine art, such as C. Diehl, G. Millet, O. M. Dalton and J. Strzygowski, were nominated as honorary members.

69 P. P. Muratov, 'Otkrytiia drevnego russkogo iskusstva', *Sovremennye zapiski*, 14 (1923), 197–218; P. P. Muratov, 'Puti russkoi ikony', *Perezvony*, 43 (1928), 1360–67; P. P. Muratov, 'Vokrug ikony', *Vozrozhdenie* (January 1933), 2787, 2799, 2803, 2809. These resources are included in P. P. Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII*

on the 'Origin and Development of Russian Medieval Painting' at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and also one lecture (2 November 1933) at the University of Cambridge, effectively summarizing the studies on early Russian art so dear to his heart.



EXEMPLAIRE

IMPRIMÉ POUR

Mr & Mme B. BERENSON

Figs. 2.2a–2.2b. Title page and dedication of a special copy of Pavel Muratov's book *Les icones russes*, printed for Bernard Berenson and Mary Smith (Paris: J. Schiffrin éditions de la Plèide, 1927). Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence. Photograph by the author (2018), Public domain.

The Art Critic as a Connoisseur

It would be a mistake to think that Muratov was the first or the only person writing about the artistic characteristics of early Russian icons in this period. He was, however, the first to apply the latest aesthetic theories to this subject, and managed to draw attention to the topic brilliant literary language. It was the spontaneous nature of Muratov's

veka. Istoriia otkrytiia i issledovaniia, ed. A. M. Khitrov (St Petersburg: Bibliopolis, 2008). Hereafter, I refer to this edition unless otherwise specified.

historiography of medieval Russian painting that revealed him as both a supreme stylist and consummate expert in the new methods of formal analysis. He was not only well versed in Berenson's works on the history of Italian Renaissance art but in the latest research by the Western European Byzantinists Charles Diehl (1859–1944), Ormonde Maddock Dalton (1866–1945) and Gabriel Millet (1867–1953).[70] His methodology draws on the work of founders of the Viennese School of Formalist analysis, such as Alois Riegl (1858–1905), Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) and Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921). And, naturally, he demonstrates a brilliant grasp of the tradition of English literary and art historical essay writing, setting out his material in an elegant and artistic fashion reminiscent of the prose of Walter Pater (1839–94) and Vernon Lee. Moreover, he is interested in the very latest trends in Russian and Western European painting as well as in Italian Trecento and Quattrocento artists. He pens articles on the Sienese Madonna painted by Matteo di Giovanni (1430–95) (*Madonna and Child with Saints* (1490s, Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow)) and an unknown tondo from the School of Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445–1510), as well as essays on Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Mikhail Nesterov (1862–1942) and Valentin Serov (1865–1919), which are published in the journals *Starye gody* [*Bygone Years*], *Vesy* [*The Scales*] and *Sofiia* [*Sophia*]. He also insightfully surveys Sergei Shchukin's (1854–1936) Moscow collection of French Impressionist and Modernist masterpieces, correctly anticipating the influence of this collection on the Russian avant-garde.[71]

70 In *Images of Italy*, alone, Muratov mentions Berenson forty times, Wölfflin twelve times. According to archival documents, Muratov was personally acquainted with Berenson (*Berenson Library Archive*, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence: letters from P. Muratov to B. Berenson, 4 January 1927 and 23 January 1928). See also *Bernard Berenson and Byzantine Art. Correspondence, 1920–1957*, ed. G. Bernardi, with a contribution by S. Koulouris and preface by M. Bernabó (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 363–65. Gabriel Millet's work, in particular, appealed to Muratov, as seen in his letter to I. S. Ostroukhov: 'Believe me, Ilya Semenovich, this book is what they call *indispensable* [in English in the original] for Old Russian painting. You will be convinced of this from your very first glance at it. Here is its proper title: Gabriel Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* Paris, 1910'. Letter from P. P. Muratov to I. S. Ostroukhov, 15 June 1912, in *Otdel rukopisei Gosudarstvennoi Tretiakovskoi Gellerei* [*State Tretiakov Gallery, Manuscript Division, Moscow*] (henceforth OR GTG), f. 10, ed. khr. 4391, https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/collection/item/16247-monuments-byzantins-de-mistra

71 P. P. Muratov, 'Pol' Sezann', *Vesy*, 12 (1906), 32–42; P. P. Muratov, 'Tvorchestvo M. V. Nesterova', *Russkaia mysl'*, 4 (1907), 151–58; P. P. Muratov, 'Shchukinskaia

The young critic was commissioned to contribute to the multivolume *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva* [*History of Russian Art*], edited by Grabar, under interesting circumstances. Muratov had not focused on early Russian painting until then, but he was well acquainted with the painting of the early Italian masters from Giotto (c. 1267–1337) and Duccio (c. 1255/60–c. 1318/19) onwards, as his 'Siena' chapter in *Images of Italy* testifies, as does his Sienese Madonna article in *Starye gody*, in which he substantiated a new authorship for the Rumiantsev Museum's altarpiece *Madonna and Child*.[72] 'If you want a beautiful and scholarly pre-Petrine era [volume], don't ask the "learned men", ask Pavel Muratov', wrote Baron Nikolai Vrangel (1880–1915) insisted in a letter to Grabar in August 1911. 'He has a thorough knowledge of the Italian primitives, as you are well aware, and would easily master, comprehend and even investigate their "cousins" – our iconographers. I discussed this topic with him this year, since I wanted to dedicate an issue of "Apollon" to the early icons, to an aesthetic rather than a scholarly evaluation of them, and Muratov was very interested and expressed his accord'.[73] Indeed, in Russia little was known about the early Italian masters prior to Muratov and his *Images of Italy*.[74] His journey from the Italian Trecento to early Russian art was entirely in keeping with the latest trends in European and Russian art criticism.

Commissioned by Grabar in January 1912 to write an essay on early Russian painting for the *History of Russian Art*, Muratov visited a

galereiia. Ocherki iz istorii noveishei zhivopisi', *Russkaia mysl'*, 8 (1908), 116–38; P. P. Muratov, 'Novoe tondo shkoly Botticelli', *Starye gody* (May 1911), 29–34; see also Muratov's article on Serov (*Sofiia*, 3 (1914), 93–95).

72 Muratov worked for the curator of the Fine Arts and Classical Antiquities Department of the Moscow Public Museum and Rumiantsev Museum from 1910 to 1913. The Sienese Madonna was acquired by the Rumiantsev Museum from Dmitrii Khomiakov's (1841–1919) collection and was considered the work of Sano di Pietro (1405–81). Muratov attributes it to Matteo di Giovanni in his article, when publishing his essay on other works of Italian artists of the fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries in the museum's collection (Guidoccio Cozzarelli's (1450–1517) *The Baptism of Christ* (after 1486) and Matteo Balducci's (1509–54) tondo *Madonna and Child with St Joseph and Angels* (c. 1517)). See P. P. Muratov, 'Ocherki ital'ianskoi zhivopisi v Moskovskom Rumiantsevskom muzee. I: Sienskaia Madonna', *Starye gody* (November 1910), 605–11 and 'Ocherki ital'ianskoi zhivopisi v Moskovskom Rumiantsevskom muzee. II: Kvatrochento', *Starye gody* (October 1910), 3–11.

73 I. E. Grabar, *Pis'ma 1891–1917* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), p. 426, fn 27.

74 Piecemeal information on the 'primitives' could be found, in particular, in slim illustrated publications (see *Dzhotto I dzhotisty* (n.a.) (Moscow: n.p., 1881); V. T. Khvoshchinskii, *Toskanskie khudozhniki. I. Primitivy* (St Petersburg: n.p., 1912).

series of medieval Russian towns and monasteries (Novgorod, Pskov, Yaroslavl, Vologda, Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery, Ferapontovo and several others). He also investigated Moscow's most interesting and oldest churches, including the renowned Old Believer churches housing valuable collections of Antique icons, and the similarly famous private collections of early Russian painting owned by the artist Ostroukhov and the banker Stepan Riabushinskii (1874–1942). However, these were not the only sources Muratov relied on. He also incorporated into his analysis early Russian frescos from Novgorod's churches and from Moscow's cathedrals, as well as miniatures and embroidery. In this regard, the edition's selection of illustrations – luxurious, colour reproductions published on grey-toned, expensive paper – is remarkable. It comprised icons from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries from the collections of Ostroukhov, Riabushinskii, Aleksei Morozov (1867–1934), Alexander Anisimov (1877–1937) and others – icons that were, at that time, seen as most vividly embodying the national characteristics of early Russian painting. These were supplemented by photographs of Byzantine mosaics and Italo-Greek icons, and also works by the renowned Greek master Theophanes the Greek (c. 1340–c. 1410) and the lauded medieval Russian iconographers Andrei Rublev (1360–1428) and Dionisii (1444–1502). The description of these key works testified not only to the broad historical and cultural context within which the history of early Russian iconography was scrutinized, but also to the author's endeavour to change the way in which the medieval image was perceived: Muratov presented an anonymous artisan's creation like an authored work of art. As a result, the semiotic nature of the early icon changed in the reader's consciousness: since it was being examined aesthetically, rather than from the point of view of religious history, it began to be perceived as a unique work of *pure art*.

The Icon Painter as an Artist

This theoretical perspective generated a whole series of new questions – on the early Russian icon's origin, the specifics of its artistic language, the Hellenistic foundation of Byzantine and early Russian art, the formation of Schools, the relationship between iconographic forms and national psychology and various other issues, including how the language of the icon differed from that of Western European pictures.

Also discussed was the necessity of discerning, in the icon's artistic form, those original elements of painting and pure artistic values that were objective and universal (according to proponents of the Formalist School), in order to view the medieval Russian icon in the context of world culture. Outwardly the Old Russian master was contained by the framework of the canon, but – and it was vital to demonstrate this – he possessed a free, inner creativity. The source of this creative activity was 'divine inspiration', 'innate artistry' and 'a sense of style'. And if, for the famous Russian philosopher and theologian Pavel Florenskii (1882–1937), the artistic form of the icon constantly speaks in accord with the metaphysical dimension (about which we shall say more below), then, for Muratov, the early icon reflects *pure artistry*: it opens the eyes by a combination of elements ordered entirely according to the laws of *pure art*. The icon, then, serves as a pathway to the visual realm, where one could encounter those 'ideal types' of beauty, the starting point of which Muratov – following Wölfflin and Berenson – always considered to be the canons of *Classical* art. Moreover, rendering stylistic analysis absolute compelled him to consider the discovery of a new order of artistic form (whether it be an icon, picture or sculpture) as an event of equal – if not greater – magnitude to spiritual attainment. This prompted the endeavour to construct the history of early Russian painting exclusively on the basis of *masterpieces*, amongst the ranks of which Rublev's *Trinity* (1411, or 1425–27, Tretyakov Gallery) occupied a special place. 'Whatever school "Trinity" may belong to', Muratov explained in this regard, 'it [...] conveys the distinct impression of a first-class masterpiece'.[75] In other words, according to Muratov, the contribution a particular nation had made to global artistic culture could only be discussed through masterpieces. In particular, only masterpieces allowed the early Russian icon to be fairly juxtaposed with Italo-Byzantine artworks, and Trecento and Quattrocento painting – the works of Duccio, Simone Martini (c. 1284–1344), Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1285/90–1348), Pietro Lorenzetti (c. 1280–1348), Fra Angelico and other renowned early Italian artists.[76]

75 Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, p. 105.

76 P. P. Muratov, 'Vizantiiskoe mifotvorichesto', *Sofiia*, 2 (1914), 3–4. That sort of comparison may be found especially in the work of N. Sychev, who observed in Rublev's famous *Trinity* a combination of Martini's 'Sienese grace' and Duccio's inspired faces. See N. Sychev, 'Ikona sv. Troitsy v Troitse-Sergievoi lavre', *Zapiski*

This theoretical position is clearly in evidence in a brief note entitled 'Pereotsenki' ['Reappraisal'], that Muratov published in 1914 in the journal *Sofiia*, of which he served as editor-in-chief. In this note, he asserted that the criteria for evaluating the quality of an artwork are no less solidly established than the 'laws of light and gravity'. As an example, he used the paintings of Botticelli: 'I am free to assert that I don't like Botticelli', Muratov explained, 'but I am not obliged to first prove that Botticelli is bad'.[77] The reappraisal of a masterpiece, then, must exclude the sphere of individual preferences and remain within the framework of established norms. Muratov's position – like Berenson's – would later be challenged by supporters of the avant-garde, who demonstrated that the subjectivity of an interpretation of an artwork on the grounds of visual impressions is the main barrier to revealing the 'intrinsic quality' of artistic forms. However, when the study of medieval Russian painting was in its infancy, this position decidedly influenced the development of new analytical methods and the interpretation of the early Russian icon's stylistic characteristics.

Byzantine Tradition and Folk Culture

As with Italian Renaissance painting, Muratov presented the entire history of early Russian art in chronological order, divided into separate Schools according to both the nearest major administrative centre and the main named artists who central to entire eras and directions in the history of early Russian painting – Theophanes the Greek, Rublev and Dionisii. Since each School was distinguished by style, Muratov focused on formal indications of the painterly language of early Russian art, such as colour, line and silhouette.[78] He was one

otdeleniia russkoi i slavianskoi arkhitektury Russkogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva, 10 (1913), 1. The Russian artist Grishchenko compares the artistic characteristics of Fra Angelico's and Rublev's work in terms of 'the elements of painting' in his book *Russkaia ikona kak iskusstvo zhivopisi* (Moscow: Izdanie Avtora, 1917).

77 P. P. Muratov, 'Pereotsenki', *Sofiia*, 2 (1914), 3–4.

78 It is important to note that the search for the specifics of this pictorial language depended to a great extent also on Walter Pater's aesthetics. Pater had observed 'that true pictorial quality which lies between (unique pledge of the possession of the pictorial gift) the inventive or creative handling of pure line and colour, which [...] is quite independent of anything definitely poetical in the subject it

of the very first who endeavoured to provide stylistic characteristics for the Schools of medieval Russian iconography, and he grouped his data within the political and geographical framework represented by the specific state formations of Kievan Rus', the republic of Novgorod and the Muscovite principality. According to his model, three main 'Schools' of iconography may be distinguished in the history of Russian medieval painting – the Novgorod, Moscow and Stroganov Schools. That said, the Novgorod School of the fifteenth century was accorded special weight, comparable in significance with Florentine art of the same period. In Muratov's work, the Romantic aggrandizing of Trecento- and Quattrocento-era Siena and Florence clearly transferred to the art of medieval Pskov and Novgorod. A special creative impulse was detected in the Novgorodian icon, both a stylistic individuality and that very 'spirit' of national tradition that would be later noted in the example of a large icon made for church use – a hagiographical (or *vita*) icon of *St Theodore Stratelates* (late fifteenth century, Novgorod) – 'one of the finest creations in Russia's art of the icon' (see Fig. 2.3).[79] Elaborating this thought in his 1928 essay 'Ways of the Russian Icon', Muratov pondered in particular how:

> The Italian and Flemish primitives surmounted the Byzantine-Hellenistic graphic system and created their own graphic system, which also became the graphic system of European painting. Something entirely different happened in Russia [...] The Russian primitive was not in any way primitive in the western sense of the word. His foray into history's arena tells us that, over several centuries of effort, he brought the figurative, monumental, pictorial, aristocratic painting of Byzantium to the peasant art of the people, to the level of folkloric and decorative art. The history of Russian icon-painting reveals the interconnectedness of these two sources – Byzantine tradition on the one hand, and the influence of the village art of the people on the other.[80]

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accompanies'. See W. Pater, *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1888), p. 137, https://archive.org/details/renaissancestu00pate

79 P. P. Muratov, 'V Novgorodskikh tserkvakh', in P. P. Muratov and A. I. Anisimov, *Novgorodskaia ikona Sv. Feodora Stratilata* (Moscow: K. F. Nekrasov, 1916), pp. 3–8.

80 P. P. Muratov, 'Puti russkoi ikony', in Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, p. 352.

Fig. 2.3 Novgorod School, *St Theodore Stratelates* (late fifteenth century), tempera on wood, 136.5 x 109 cm. Novgorod State Museum-Reserve. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodore_Stratelates_-_hagiography_icon.jpg

But how, and by which paths, were the Russian icon's features formed? What was novel about Muratov's contribution was that he scrutinized the crystallization of national artistic language of medieval Russian painting in the context of its historical origin and the evolution of form. It was precisely this aspect of Muratov's work which had the greatest value at the time. Muratov was one of the first to apply the so-called theory of the Palaiologan Renaissance (the Hellenistic foundations of Byzantine art) in his interpretation of medieval Russian painting of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and he saw the Russian icon's originality in its ability to combine elements from both Byzantine and local folk traditions. Today, it seems obvious that high culture always draws additional resources from folk art (in other words, from uncanonical works which surpass or transgress established norms) to take innovative steps. The conceptual frame of the masterpiece could not accommodate the development of this idea in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, it was at the beginning of the twentieth century that the distinguishing features of the Russian icon, which Muratov later expanded upon in his emigration, were first discovered precisely through this approach. Early Russian art

found its defining characteristics in the *poetry of folk art*: the early Russian (and especially the Novgorodian) icon introduced 'a natural folk taste for pattern' into the inherited tradition of Byzantine painting.[81]

Italy or Byzantium?

An interesting academic debate unfolds at the beginning of the twentieth century around the question of the early Russian icon's origins, which incorporates both the Italian 'primitives' and the Italo-Greek icon. A few scholars, working independently, saw these as the main sources of influence on Byzantine and medieval Russian art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Here, Italy – the land of art and standards of beauty – continued to provide the models by which the art of other countries and peoples was interpreted. The question of the relationship between Byzantine, early Italian and early Russian painting of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was broached in the theory of the abovementioned Russian archaeologists, Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and Nikolai Likhachev (1862–1936), and in the concept of the Palaiologan Renaissance developed by French Byzantinists Millet and Diehl, and also by the University of Oxford professor Dalton. Seminal monographs by the Russian scholars came out in 1911: Kondakov published *Ikonografiia Bogomateri. Sviazi grecheskoi I russkoi ikonopisi s ital'ianskoi zhivopis'iu rannego Vozrozhdeniia* [*Iconography of the Mother of God. Greek and Russian Icons and Their Connections with Early Italian Renaissance Painting*], and Likhachev published *Istoricheskoe znachenie italo-grecheskoi ikonopisi. Izobrazhenie Bogomateri v proizvedeniiakh italo-grecheskikh ikonopistsev I ikh vliianie na kompozitsii nekotorykh proslavlennykh russkikh ikon* [*The Historical Significance of Italo-Greek Icon-Painting. Images of the Mother of God in the Works of Italo-Greek Iconographers and Their Influence on the Composition of Some Renowned Russian Icons*].[82]

81 It is notable that V. N. Lazarev also developed the very same idea towards the end of his creative career. See K. M. Muratova, 'Ital'ianskoe iskusstvo XIII I XIV vekov v russkoe kritike: sviazi, vzaimovliianiia, sud'by', in *In Christo. Vo Khriste. Obmen khudozhestvennymi i dukhovnymi shedevrami mezhdu Rossiei i Italiei*, ed. A. Melloni (Rome: Treccani, 2011), 521–68 (p. 556).

82 N. P. Kondakov, *Ikonografiia Bogomateri. Sviazi grecheskoi i russkoi ikonopisi s ital'ianskoi zhivopis'iu rannego Vozrozhdeniia* (St Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1911); N. P. Likhachev, *Istoricheskoe znachenie italo-grecheskoi ikonopisi. Izobrazhenie Bogomateri v proizvedeniiakh italo-grecheskikh*

In the thinking of Kondakov and Likhachev, Italian models furnished those iconographic types of the Mother of God which conveyed maternal feeling and love – particularly images of the *Mother of God of Tenderness* (*Umilenie*), the *Virgo Lactans* or *Mother of God Nursing* (*Mlekopitatel'nitsa*), the *Konevskaia Mother of God* and the *Mother of God of the Passion* (*Strastnaia*) and several others. These ideal types are contrasted with compositions developed on Byzantine soil, for example the *Hodegetria*, the *Mother of God of the Sign* (*Znamenie*), and the *Pecherskaia Mother of God*. According to Kondakov and Likhachev, although the 'Tenderness' type appeared in Byzantium, it nevertheless ended up in early Russian painting via Italy (see Fig. 2.4).

Fig. 2.4 Italo-Greek School, *Mother of God of Tenderness* (fifteenth century). Plate from Nikolai Likhachev, *Materialy dlia istorii russkogo ikonopisaniia: Atlas* (St Petersburg: Ekspedisiia zagotovleniia gosudarstvennykh bumag, 1906). Photograph by the author (2016), public domain.

ikonopistsev i ikh vliianie na kompozitsii nekotorykh proslavlennykh russkikh ikon (St Petersburg: Izdanie Russkago arkheologicheskogo obva, 1911). On the discovery and study of Byzantine and early Russian art in nineteenth-century scholarship, 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); G. I. Vzdornov, 'Nikodim Kondakov v zerkale sovremennoi vizantinistiki', in *Nauka i restavratsiia. Ocherki po istorii i izucheniia drevnerusskoi zhivopisi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006); I. Foletti, *From Byzantium to Holy Russia. Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and the Invention of the Icon*, trans. S. Melker (Rome: Viella, 2011).

Kondakov also associated individual distinctive features of the early Russian icon's artistic form – in particular, the bicoloured highlights (*bliki*) on the clothing of saints, and the elongated proportions of the figures – with Italian sources. In sum, Kondakov and Likhachev erroneously made the formation of the national characteristics of early Russian painting contingent upon the development of the so-called Italo-Cretan School which, in their opinion, was itself the result of the influence of Italian thirteenth- and fourteenth-century 'primitives' on the art of Byzantium.

Meanwhile, in the works of Millet, Diehl and Dalton, a 'living creativity' distinguished the art of Byzantium: it had its own evolution just as all other art did.[83] In this regard, the Palaiologan Renaissance of the fourteenth century had no need for Italian models. The relative illusionism in Byzantine icons and frescos of the Palaiologan era was based on a return to the models of Antiquity. The wall paintings of Mistra, the mosaics of Kahrie Djami and the churches of Old Serbia (in which scenes and figures brimming with observations from life were detected) testified to a self-contained manifestation of art, independent of early Italian painting of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Moreover, in the opinion of the western specialists, a more plausible case could be made for Byzantium's influence on Italy in the Trecento era. Duccio's painting, and that of the artists in his circle, had already proved convincing in this regard (see Fig. 2.5). Given the strength of the Byzantine resonances in Duccio's Sienese Madonnas, Berenson even suggested that Duccio might have studied in Constantinople.[84] Indeed, the Byzantine tradition was firmly established in Siena not only in the fourteenth century, but right up until the very end of the fifteenth

83 G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/collection/item/16247-monuments-byzantins-de-mistra; C. Diehl, *Manuel d'art Byzantin* (Paris: A. Picard, 1910); O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

84 B. Berenson, *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York and London: Putnam, 1897), p. 41. In commenting on Berenson's supposition, and once again comparing Duccio's work with the icons of Novgorod, Muratov suggested that 'one should seek the roots of Duccio's art, just like the roots of Novgorodian icon-painting, in the Palaiologan Renaissance'. See Muratov, *Obrazy Italii*, I, 258. See also B. Berenson, 'Two Twelfth-Century Paintings from Constantinople', in B. Berenson, *Studies in Medieval Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 1–16.

century. Throughout this period, Sienese artists continued to reproduce the very same type of Madonna, passed down to them by Duccio and Martini. It is fair to say, moreover, that this 'Byzantine' type of Madonna appeared in fifteenth-century Russian painting too, as demonstrated by an icon from the former collection of Riabushinskii.[85]

Fig. 2.5 Duccio (c. 1255/60–c. 1318/19), *Madonna Rucellai* (1285), tempera and gold on wood, 450 x 290 cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio_di_Buoninsegna_-_Rucellai_Madonna_-_WGA6822.jpg

Using this wealth of western and Russian scholarship on Byzantine and early Italian art, Muratov's own inclination was to draw out the entire history of Old Russian painting from Byzantine art of the Palaiologan era. He would later reject this approach, in part because of discoveries made by Grabar's Central Restoration Workshop between 1918 and 1929. The frescos of Vladimir's Cathedral of St Demetrius, the earliest Byzantine

85 See M. Alpatov's article on the influence of Sienese Madonna iconography from the School of Duccio on the composition of the fifteenth-century Novgorodian icon 'The Mother of God Enthroned', from Riabushinskii's collection. See M. Alpatov, 'K voprosu o zapadnom vliianii na drevnerusskoe iskusstvo', *Slavia*, 3 (1924), 94–113 (p. 94).

icons and early Russian icons of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries all convincingly demonstrated that the sources of medieval Russian painting should be sought in Byzantine culture at least as early as the Komnenian era (the eleventh and twelfth centuries) – in other words, considerably earlier than had seemed probable at the start of the 1910s. Nonetheless, the working hypothesis of the Palaiologan Renaissance was important in terms of broad historical-cultural understanding of the characteristics of the early Russian icon's artistic form, which Muratov set out so clearly. The researcher's taste for Antiquity and Classical art brought him, via the Palaiologan Renaissance, to a highly important thesis demanding thorough elaboration: the Byzantine and early Russian icon could not be understood in isolation, without attention to their Hellenistic origins.

In this regard, Muratov once again raised the question of the interconnections between Italian 'primitives' of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the Italo-Cretan School and early Russian icons. Engaging in a detailed analysis of the development of the Italo-Cretan School in light of new discoveries in Byzantine painting of the Palaiologan era, Muratov convincingly demonstrated that 'in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was Novgorod and Moscow that became metropolises of Byzantine-based art – not Crete or the southern Italian cities, nor even Athos'. Russian icons of the Mother of God drew on Byzantine monuments, rather than (as Kondakov and Likhachev had suggested) being dependent on Italian models. Most probably, Italian Trecento Madonnas revealed a dependence on Byzantine models.[86]

Italian influence can indeed be found in Greek iconography, but considerably later – from the second half of the fifteenth century to the sixteenth century. Icon workshops, producing works for the Orthodox East, were established in Italy in precisely this period. Greek workshops were also in operation in the territory of Greece itself (particularly in Crete, Cyprus and Corfu), which often incorporated Italian models to cater to the tastes of their Catholic clientele. This influence is felt, above all, in the scenery and draped figures of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italo-Greek icons. In sum, then, Muratov viewed Italo-Cretan icons

86 P. P. Muratov, 'Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka', in Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, ed. Grabar, IV, 55. G. G. Pavlutskii, in particular, developed this line of thought. See G. G. Pavlutskii, 'K voprosu o vzaimnom vliianii vizantiiskogo i ital'ianskogo iskusstva', *Iskusstvo*, 5–6 (1912), 208–20.

as provincial artisan reflections of the models of Italian high art. The activity of these workshops had little in common with Byzantine art of the Palaiologan era.[87]

'Hellenistic Impressionism'

Muratov's approach to the problem of Hellenistic traditions evident in medieval art proved to be particularly fruitful. When elaborating on the question of its genesis, Muratov was consistently inspired by the idea of the unity of the Hellenic-Christian world, of which early Rus' was a part. He continuously stressed that Christianity came to Russia in Hellenistic forms, and that 'the entire history of Russian icon-painting is a history of the dissolving of Hellenistic forms'. Russian researcher Dmitrii Ainalov (1862–1939) and Polish-Austrian art historian Jòzef Strzygowski (1862–1941) had already convincingly demonstrated that the Hellenistic aesthetic never disappeared from the artistic consciousness of Byzantine culture.[88] Muratov, however, was among the first to identify the echoes of Antiquity in the artistic form of early Russian icons itself. Russia was introduced to Hellenist civilization through the Byzantine icon: the world of Hellenized Christianity became, for Russians, their 'national' world. This is why no Russian features may be discerned in Christ and the Mother of God on Russian icons, and the figures of Christian saints resemble the personages in Fayum portraits, dressed in Hellenistic himatia and chitons. In turn, winged angels, their heads decorated with ribbons, reiterate the genii from some ancient altars of victory.

The coloured highlights on the garments and cloths of the saints were also inherited from the ancient world. Comparing the architectural

87 Muratov, 'Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka', in Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, ed. Grabar, IV, 70. In the context of this polemic, it is notable that Italo-Greek icons were reproduced on the first pages of the first issue of the *Russian Icon* collection (which included Muratov's flagship article), for comparison with early Russian examples. See *Russkaia ikona,* 1 (1914), illustrations on pp. 7, 10, 11, 13.

88 D. V. Ainalov, *Ellinisticheskie osnovy vizantiiskogo iskusstva* (St Petersburg: n.p., 1900); J. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom: Beitrag zur Geschichte der spätantiken und früchristlichen Kunst* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901). For a long time, in fact, Ainalov's research was unknown in Western academia. His book was translated into English only in 1961. See D. V. Ainalov, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, ed. C. Mango, trans. E. Sobolevitch and S. Sobolevitch (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1961).

forms on Russian icons with the architecture depicted in the frescos of Pompei and Roman plaster reliefs also delivered surprising results. Muratov observed similar columns and porticos in both cases, and also the shape of a four-cornered atrium, covered by a tent-shaped awning, in addition to the *velum* motif – a cloth draped between the roof of the house and a tree or column standing alone. The rocky scenery of Antiquity also appears in Russian icons, as well as in Byzantine mosaics and Italian Trecento painting. A Russian-American historian of Antiquity, Mikhail Rostovtsev (1870–1952), and art historian Wolfgang Kallab (1875–1906), writing at this time about Hellenistic landscapes, located the origins of these rocky landscapes in the ancient world and pointed out the influence of such scenery on fourteenth-century Italian art.[89] According to Muratov, this scenery was retained in an original purity in the Russian icon: 'One cannot conceive of the Russian icon of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century', the researcher stressed, 'without Hellenist mountains, without fantastic and picturesque "Alexandrian" architecture'.[90]

Finally, this deep connection between the art of Antiquity and the Russian icon may be discerned in iconography which depicts Hellenistic personifications of the sea, rivers, land and deserts. The god of the river Jordan features in scenes of the Baptism of the Lord, and figures personifying the Earth and the Desert may be seen in compositions of the Synaxis of the Mother of God. Russian icons thus made it possible to experience a shared visual impression that, for Muratov, evoked the lost easel paintings of Ancient Greece. Muratov communicated this unexpected discovery to Moscow collector Ostroukhov in a letter: 'One may see something like the visual impression conveyed by Greek easel painting of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. only in the Russian icon of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries [...] I am positively certain that you will discover traces of the style traditional in the Hellenistic world as you discover ancient Novgorod'.[91]

89 M. Rostovtsev, *Ellinisticheski-rimskii arkhitekturnyi peizazh* (St Petersburg: n.p., 1908); W. Kallab, *Die toskanische Landschaftsmalerei in XIV und XV Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Vienna Holzhausen, 1900).

90 Muratov, 'Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka', in *Istoriia Russkogo iskusstva*, ed. Grabar, IV, 101.

91 OR GTG, f. 10, ed. khr. 4394, ll. 1–4 (Letter from P. P. Muratov to I. S. Ostroukhov, 10 September 1912). Influenced by Muratov, Ostroukhov himself later wrote about

Muratov employed the concept of 'Hellenistic Impressionism', which conveyed real life observations and impressions, in discussing Byzantine and early Russian art's foundations in Antiquity. Viewed through this lens, the bicoloured highlights on saints' clothing might echo real, coloured overtones in Greek textiles, and the icon's red and pink hills might reflect the reality of mountainous terrain lit by the setting sun. Muratov also discerned these features in Daphni's eleventh-century mosaics and in the fifteenth-century mosaics of Kahrie Djami, as well as in Byzantine icons of the same period. They were revealed, too, in the frescos of Vladimir's churches, and in early Russian icons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Aided by this understanding of 'Hellenistic Impressionism', Muratov also developed a series of identifiable contrasts between the stylistic traits of Western European and Eastern Christian art, and also of differences between the Italian 'primitives' and early Russian icons. And if the illusionism of Byzantium was preserved in Russia's fourteenth-century art, then early Russian painting of the fifteenth century (especially that of the Novgorodian School) found its own formula for iconography. Fifteenth-century Novgorodian icons, therefore, may be easily distinguished from both Byzantine and Balkan artworks by the way their symbolic language constantly draws on the rhythms of liturgy and prayer. In this regard, an early Russian icon's composition is always distinguished by a particular *musical rhythm* (see Fig. 2.6).[92] In contrast, western masters in the age of Charlemagne (747–814) and in the era of Romanesque art in Italy and Flanders intensified the traits of realism in their pictorial systems, and, as a result, the Italian and Flemish 'primitives' went beyond the Byzantine-Hellenistic canon

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the 'Greco-Roman roots' of the early Russian icon. See *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva* [*Russian State Archive of Literature and Art*] (henceforth RGALI), f. 822, ed. khr. 128.

92 Muratov, 'Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka', in Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, ed. Grabar, IV, 313. Grabar also observed that 'This rhythmic nature and stamp of melody basically distinguishes the way all Russian icons are painted' (I. E. Grabar, 'Vvedenie v istoriiu russkogo iskusstva', in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, I, ed. Grabar, p. 48). Later, Nikolai Tarabukin's (1889–1956) paper 'Ritm i kompozitsiia v drevnerusskoi zhivopisi', delivered on 22 December 1923 at the Institute of Art History in Petrograd, would focus in on the special rhythm of early Russian icons. See N. M. Tarabukin, *Smysl ikony* (Moscow: Pravoslavnogo bratstva Sviatitelia Filareta, 1999), pp. 204–06.

and thereby established the groundwork for the pictorial system upon which European Renaissance painting was built.

Fig. 2.6 *St John Theologian with Scenes from His Life* (c. 1500). Icon detail, reproduced in Pavel Muratov, *La pittura russa antica* (Rome: A. Stock, 1925), as a characteristic example of the musical and rhythmic composition of medieval Russian icon. Photograph by the author (2020), public domain.

Muratov's broad historical-cultural approach to understanding the early Russian icon found an interesting interpretation in the programme of the journal *Sofiia*, founded in 1914 by Muratov in collaboration with the publisher Konstantin Nekrasov (1873–1940). Since the new journal strove to set the early Russian icon in the context of the development of art globally, articles on early Russian painting appear in parallel with materials on the history of Hellenistic portraits, Italian Trecento painting, the art of ancient China and also notes and essays by famous researchers and philosophers on the aesthetics and theories of contemporary avant-garde movements. The medieval Russian icon was therefore presented as heir to the traditions of Byzantium and Antiquity. It was also compared to the schematic nature of Buddhist art and even of Pablo Picasso's (1881–1973) Cubist painting, the arrival of which promoted an aesthetic re-evaluation of 'the primitive'. In order to facilitate the comparison of the characteristics of Russian icons with the characteristics of ancient

paintings, Baron Vladimir von Gruneizen's (1868–1932) extensive research article 'Illiuzionisticheskii portret' ['The Illusionistic Portrait'] was published in the fourth number of *Sofiia*: the public juxtaposition of illustrations of ancient images with reproductions of early Russian icons graphically convinced the reader that Byzantine and medieval Russian painting was grounded specifically in the Hellenistic portrait.[93] Publications on the theory of art, and, in particular, certain articles by Berenson and Waldemar Deonna (1880–1959), also had particular significance for Muratov.[94] Muratov's identification of the Schools of medieval Russian painting was undoubtedly grounded in the famous – and Berenson was, at that time, one of the most important specialists on Italian 'primitives' – American researcher's argument for the significance of formal elements in discerning an artist's individual style.[95] The intention behind employing methods of stylistic analysis and contemporary theories in interpreting early Russian artworks was to demonstrate that the icon occupied a worthy place in the history of European art and could be readily compared with the finest examples of early Italian and Flemish painting. This explains the multiple comparisons of early Russian icons with the paintings and altarpieces of the Trecento and Quattrocento. Comparisons were necessary, in some cases, to reveal the 'shared artistic spirit' in the beauty of Novgorodian icons and Sienese Madonnas. In other cases, comparisons brought unique elements in the construction of the icon to light, clarifying their connection with the Palaiologan Renaissance of the fourteenth

93 W. de Gruneizen, 'Illiuzionisticheskii portret', *Sofiia*, 4 (1914), 5–59. Russian researcher Baron Vladimir Gruneizen (Wladimir de Grüneisen) was also the author of a work dedicated to the Roman Church of Santa Maria Antiqua. See W. de Grüneisen, *Sainte Marie Antique* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1911).

94 B. Berenson, 'Osnovy khudozhestvennogo raspoznavaniia', *Sofiia*, 1 (1914), 40–69; W. Deonna, 'Iskusstvo i deistvitel'nost'. Voprosy arkheologicheskogo metoda', *Sofiia*, 5 (1914), 22–48.

95 It seems that especial interest was garnered by the section on 'Artistic Morphology', in which the Berenson developed Giovanni Morelli's (1816–91) formal-anatomical method. Berenson divided all the formal elements of a picture into three classes according to their suitability for identifying the artist's style. According to his theory, the most suitable elements are the hands, folds in clothing and scenery; hair, eyes and mouth are less useful; and, finally, the most difficult to apply are the skull and chin, the structure and movement of a figure. See Berenson, 'Osnovy khudozhestvennogo raspoznavaniia', 66–68; see also B. Berenson, 'The Rudiments of Connoisseurship (A Fragment)', in B. Berenson, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1902), pp. 111–48.

century. And if (in accordance with these approaches) the Trecento era proved to be a turning point in the history of Italian painting in terms of the gradual overriding of Byzantine tradition, then, in the history of Russian icon-painting, this period was viewed as generating creative reinterpretations of Byzantine models and as crystallizing national traits in the language of art.

Muratov's wide circle of interests as an art critic and a gifted art historian, as a connoisseur and a fine judge of Italian culture, thus directly influenced his aesthetic evaluation of the early Russian icon. The methodology of new European studies of art helped him not only to set out the historical evolution of medieval Russian icon-painting in relation to the periodization of Byzantine painting, but also to insightfully outline the Russian icon's original stylistic features, to clarify that decorative and musical-rhythmic principle of its composition that has always distinguished it from Greek and Eastern Slavic works of art.