

## **‘Russian Icons of 18<sup>th</sup> century of Yaroslavl Region in Collections Abroad’**

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Yaroslavl, one of the ancient cultural centers in Russia (240 km to the north east of Moscow) is famous for its icon painting, but the chronicle of developing this unique land of art does not give a complete picture of every of its periods.

The ancient period is represented by a very small number of icons, among them the “Virgin Great Panagia” (“Orans of Yaroslavl”) 1220s, which is kept in the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The 17<sup>th</sup> century is richer in preserved examples of Yaroslavl school of icon painting, which had its own typical features. That was the heyday of Yaroslavl as a merchant town and the local icon painters competed with Moscow artists working for the Armory Palace. The research is complicated by the fact that not so many icons dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century have been preserved. There are some in museum collections and only fragments of iconostasis of this period can be found. So we have to find an opportunity to work with icons from private collections or from churches in Russia and abroad.

In a private collection in Germany we happened to find the icon “The Selected Saints” (1772) painted by Andrey Denisov (about 1750 – after 1813). In 1868 Ephim Mukchin renovated it. This icon lets us generalize the collected material. We arranged all the icons of this artist and even found his frescoes. So we managed to restore the biography of Andrey Denisov, the famous Yaroslavl icon painter.

It was also a rare luck that we found the archive of Ephim Mukchin. Unfortunately another example of his work has not yet been found.

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Our cooperation with some Finnish colleagues helped us get to know the heritage of the Valaam monastery, which is kept in Finland. Another amazing discovery in our research was finding the icon “Assumption”, which, we believe, belongs to the talented Yaroslavl icon painter Kliment Mokrousov (about 1766 - 1800) and thus there is an opportunity to restore his biography and learn more about his creative work.

The cultural heritage of the 18<sup>th</sup> century gives us a better understanding of the phenomenon of rooting the Russian art into European culture. Great changes took place in Russia at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: St. Petersburg, a new Russian capital, was founded by Peter the Great, the court art acquired secular features, but on the rest of the vast territory of Russia the process of acquiring European standards in the sphere of art was going very slowly.

So the specificity of Yaroslavl school of icon painting of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by the combination of Eastern Orthodox traditions with new ideas from the art of Counterreformation and decorative forms of the Western Barocco style, which gave the artists new creative possibilities. This process is interesting for scientists, which research the balance between the canonical traditions of Post Byzantine time and the usage of Barocco forms.