

Four icons from a late 16th c. Deisis (Novgorod Museum) – early works of the Stroganovs’ atelier

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The paper is dedicated to the problem of attribution of the four icons from a late 16th c. Deisis (Novgorod Museum) depicting the Virgin, Archangel Gabriel, St. Peter and St. Paul. In 2005-2006 these icons have been treated at the Grabar Center.

My purpose is to try to solve the problem of dating and attribution of these icons. I would like to argue that some specific traits of the painting style of these icons allow to attribute them to a painter active at the Stroganovs’ atelier in Solvychevodsk.

The icons were brought to the Novgorod Museum from the Old Believers’ church of Dormition of the Virgin in the village Korostyn. As soon as the boards of the icons were somewhat squared on the back and cut shorter along the lower margins, one can conclude that the icons were reused for the already existing iconostasis of the church of Dormition. Therefore, these icons were probably not created for the decoration of this church.

The painting style on the whole and certain individual traits in particular allow us to attribute these icons to one of the painters who worked on the iconostasis of the Annunciation Cathedral of Solvychevodsk upon the commission of Nikita Grigorievich Stroganov. As soon as the painting technique and the choice of pigments are concerned, the icons from the Novgorod Museum are identical with another group of icons dated to the last third of the 16th century and produced in the Stroganovs’ atelier, namely *The Trinity*,

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Our Lady of Vladimir, The Mountain Not Cut By The Human Hand,
and some others.

It is probable that the Novgorod Museum Deisis had decorated one of the churches in Solvychevodsk, until it was sold in the 1820ies and dispersed through different collections of the Old Believers, as were some 1350 other icons from Solvychevodsk. Unfortunately, there are no inscriptions or surviving documents that could confirm our hypothesis concerning the origin of these icons in the Stroganovs' atelier.

Other icons connected with this atelier have been treated at our department during the last 20 years, including the icons from the Annunciation Cathedral of Solvychevodsk. This is a rather large and heterogeneous group. The research aiming at classification and attribution of these monuments has allowed our specialists to single out smaller groups of icons linked by some peculiarities of the painting style and technique (such as the selection of pigments, colour compositions, particular use of covering etc.).

This large experience has formed the basis for the attribution of the newly uncovered icons from the Novgorod Museum. Some particular traits of style which prove the connection of these icons with the Stroganovs' atelier can be singled out and demonstrated with the aid of photographs: the facial types, the technique of shading, the use of colour and line in the treatment of the draperies, some characteristic details etc. The comparison of the Novgorod Museum Deisis and the icons from the Solvychevodsk Cathedral reveals a very close resemblance. It enables us to attribute them not only to the same workshop, but also to the same painter, whose individual painting style can be easily detected. This attribution can be further useful for a more accurate reconstruction of the original decoration of the Solvychevodsk Cathedral, which served as the main family church of the Stroganovs throughout the 16th and the 17th centuries.

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