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## ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО

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### The Demidoff Church in the San Donato Estate in Florence

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The article is about the decoration of the former Demidoffs' house church in the villa of San Donato. A part of it is now located in the church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence (architect M. T. Preobrazhensky). The author has suggested the probable appearance of the house church in the villa of San Donato based on notes of contemporaries, analysis of the palace's blueprints and the remaining elements of the decoration. The ecclesiastical purpose of the surviving building of the “Demidoffs ex-chapel” has been questioned and analyzed, based on D. Silvestri's original sketches, from which it follows that this is the building of the Odeon — a concert and theater hall. Particular attention is paid to the carved decoration of the church, made in A. Barbetti's workshop, to the iconostasis and the gallery of local and small icons. Local icons of the iconostasis and icons of the apostles executed in an academic manner by famous religious painter V. V. Vasilyev. However, the gallery of small icons of the second tier of the iconostasis and the doors-kiots is stylistically close to the icon-painting of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Also, based on historical analysis and analysis of style, the author sets up a hypothesis that the gallery of small icons from Demidoffs' church belong to “Nevyansk” or “Peshekhonovsk” icon-painting schools.

*Keywords:* Demidoff the Prince of San Donato, Church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge in Florence, M. T. Preobrazhensky, D. Silvestri, A. Barbetti, V. V. Vasilyev, “Nevyansk” icon-painting, “Peshekhonovsk” icon-painting.

**Introduction.** The heritage of a short yet brilliant residence of the Demidoffs in Florence can be traced even today. It is not only the monument to N. N. Demidoff on the embankment of the Arno, Demidoff Institute on Via di San Niccolo or the emblem of P. P. Demidoff on the façade of the cathedral Santa Maria del Fiore. It is also the vast charitable work of an Italian branch of the Demidoffs that, even two centuries later, makes Florentines hold this Russian name in esteem. A unique carved wooden decoration in the Russian Church of Nativity and St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus in Florence is also a part of

the Demidoffs' heritage. The massive carved gates to the upper temple immediately draw attention of the visitors but the main part of the masterpiece by Italian woodcarvers is in the lower temple. A marvellous iconostasis and icon-cases of full height icons of the apostles, utensils and a big number of icons were given to the Florentine parish in 1879 from a liquidated Demidoffs' family chapel.

Suprisingly, inspite of the keen interest of the local public to this incredibly rich Russian family, no visual documents have survived of the appearance of this church with the marvellous carvings by Italian masters that inspired not only wonder but also annoyance with its luxury. A lot of evidence of the Demidoffs' activities in Florence left by their contemporaries and later researchers has remained until today, however the family chapel in the estate of San Donato is only mentioned very superficially. The "Magazine of edification of the Russian orthodox church in Florence 1897–1912" of the archpriest V. Levitsky (first completely published in the book by a historian M. Talalay) is an invaluable source of information on how the temple of Nativity and St. Nicholas the Wondermaker was created.

Apart from all the details of the construction itself, the "Magazine" also chronicled all the decisions concerning the use of particular elements of the Demidoffs' church in the new temple. Despite there being enough scattered information, no complex analysis of the Demidoffs' church has been conducted. The work with primary sources as well as field studies by the author of the current paper in Florence in 2016 allowed to make a hypothesis on the origin of some icons of the Demidoff chapel and the actual interior of this temple in the estate of San Donato look.

**Palace complex and chapel.** The wooden decorations — a gem of the Russian church of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus in Florence (1899–1903, arch. M. T. Preobrazhensky) — are part of an ensemble that was designed for a particular interior of the chapel in the Demidoff estate of San Donato in Polverosa near Florence (fig. 1). The land for the estate was acquired by the Russian ambassador to Tuscany, Nikolay Nikitich Demidoff (1773–1828) between 1825 and 1827, from the monks of the Santa Croce cloister, despoiled during the desecularization (1809) under Napoleon [1, p. 58]. Located there was an ancient church of San Donato (12<sup>th</sup> century), which gave the place its name. The palace building absorbed the remains of the cloister facilities but the San Donato church, which was integrated into the palace complex and converted into a library, remained. After the death of N. N. Demidoff the estate went to his sons: Pavel Nikolaevich (1798–1840) and Anatoly Nikolaevich (1812–1870). But the main contribution to housing unique collections of artworks and converting the villa into "the second duke's palace" was made by Anatoly Demidoff, who not long before his marriage to Napoleon's niece Mathilda Buonaparte (1820–1904) had been granted the title of the prince of San Donato (after the name of the estate) by the grand duke — although it had not been recognized in Russia.

The former Demidoff palace in San Donato, now in the modern district of Novoli in Florence, has survived until nowadays. However, nothing reminds of its former magnificence, although, after a long time of neglect, the building was reconstructed into residential quarters (fig. 2). Constructed in 1827–1831 upon the project of a Siennese architect Giovan Battista Silvestri (1796–1873) [1, p. 394], the building is of neoclassical design. The palace is H-shaped in plan with two inner yards and a main yard flanked by side wings. The main part was preceded by a roofed double colonnade, the inner yards were closed by the building of the church of San Donato that has survived. A peculiar feature of the building is its extended two-level facades.



*Fig. 1.* The central building of Demidoffs' palace at villa San Donato. Photograph. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century (<http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer16/cooper-on-prince-demidoff-the-greek-slave>)



*Fig. 2.* The central building of the former Demidoffs' palace at San Donato after the reconstruction in 2017 ([https://www.remax.it/Ufficio-In-vendita-Firenze\\_31451004-94?lang=it-IT](https://www.remax.it/Ufficio-In-vendita-Firenze_31451004-94?lang=it-IT))

The central part of the main building was marked by the dome of the ball-room and an open marble terrace above the main entrance. The villa was considerably damaged during the Second World War and was in neglect. The dome of the ball-room with frescoes by



Fig. 3. Jean-Baptiste Fortuné de Fournier. The Ballroom of the Demidoffs' Palace (Galleria d'arte moderna di Palazzo Pitti, Firenze) (<http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer16/cooper-on-prince-demidoff-the-greek-slave>)

Carlo Morelli (?–1855) [2] depicting the myth of Amour and Psyche was completely destroyed. The two gouache paintings by Jean-Baptiste Fortuné de Fournier (Galleria d'arte moderna di Palazzo Pitti, Firenze) (fig. 3) and a booklet with descriptions of the frescoes by Morelli on the plafond of the ballroom dome [3] are the remaining evidence of the lost luxury of the ball-room.

The interior the family chapel, for which A. N. Demidoff ordered new carved decorations the in 1850s, was, probably, equally lavish. An elegant two-level iconostasis, as

well as all the wooden decoration of the chapel, was carved in Angiolo Barbetti's (1805–1873) workshop [4]. The woodwork was done by A. Barbetti's sons: the design was made by Egisto Barbetti, the ornaments by Ottavio and Raffaello Barbetti [4]. Besides, the silversmith Verhovtsev made a silver tabernacle for the Demidoff chapel<sup>1</sup> in the shape of a shelter crowned by a cupola and a cross after a sketch by an architect A. M. Gornostaev [5]. The Demidoff family chapel inspired awe with the luxury of its décor. According to the contemporaries, the chapel had a marvellous carved decoration in the “Byzantine style”: an outstanding plafond and walls, elegant carved panels with bas-reliefs decorated the altar space [6, p. 52].

Many visitors' attention was attracted by the inlaid encrusted floor and the carved coffered ceiling (Il pavimento della Cappella è lucido di legno intarsiato, il soffitto similmente di legno a ricco intaglio, distribuito a cassettoni) [1, p. 424]. Some were overwhelmed by the abundance of gold (Questa mostra abbagliante d'oro) [7, p. 313]. According to the palace plan of 1860, the chapel was in the ground floor in the right wing of the main building [8, p. 11]. Guests could enter the temple through the main hall with a model of a monument to Nikolay Demidoff by the sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini (1777–1850) on the Piazza Demidoff [1, p. 424].

However, in the early 1860s Anatoly Demidoff leaves Florence, apparently unable to accept the integration of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany into the Kingdom of Sardinia. The services in the chapel were suspended for years to come. Nevertheless, hoping for changes in the political situation, prince Anatoly continued to send new artworks to San Donato from time to time. But starting from 1863, seriously ill and expecting the end, he gradually started to sell out his collections, the auction having its peak in 1867–1870 [8, p. 26–27].

In 1870, after A. P. Demidoff's death, the villa was inherited by his nephew Pavel, who tried to revive the estate and reinstated the services in the chapel. However, in 1879 the chapel of San Donato was abolished for good by a decree of the Spiritual Consistory of St. Petersburg because of the supposed return of the Demidoff couple to Russia [6, p. 58]. Whatever wooden decorations of the chapel could be dismantled were given to the Orthodox parish in Florence. The property was accepted by the archpriest Vladimir Levitsky, the prior of the Florentine parish.

In 1880 it is P. P. Demidoff's turn to start selling out his collections. Due to the upcoming auctions, in which not only European but also the New World collectors were going to take part, two catalogues were issued listing the items put up for sale [9]. It is noteworthy that the building of the former church was described as a concert hall, which can be seen in an updated building plan published in the auction catalogue of the artworks of the palace [10] (fig. 4).

It was only the semicircular structure of the Eastern part of the room that revealed the original design of the hall. Besides, according to a contemporary, the altar window was decorated with a stained glass that refracted light and amplified the “coup de theatre” in the altar (lume da finestra interiore, a traverso i cristalli colorati della quale penetrano raggi come di sole che tramonti; onde ai pomposi riti che vi si compiono posa intorno un'aureola che ne aumenta l'effetto teatrale) [7, p. 313]. Interestingly, reminiscent of the former owners and their family ties to Buonaparte were the large paintings in the main hall by

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<sup>1</sup> A sketch of the tabernacle can be found in G. W. Timm's “Russian Art Gazette”, issue 17, 1860, in the “Russian Orthodox Churches Abroad” section, which features the churches in Potsdam (1829), Wiesbaden (1855), etc.

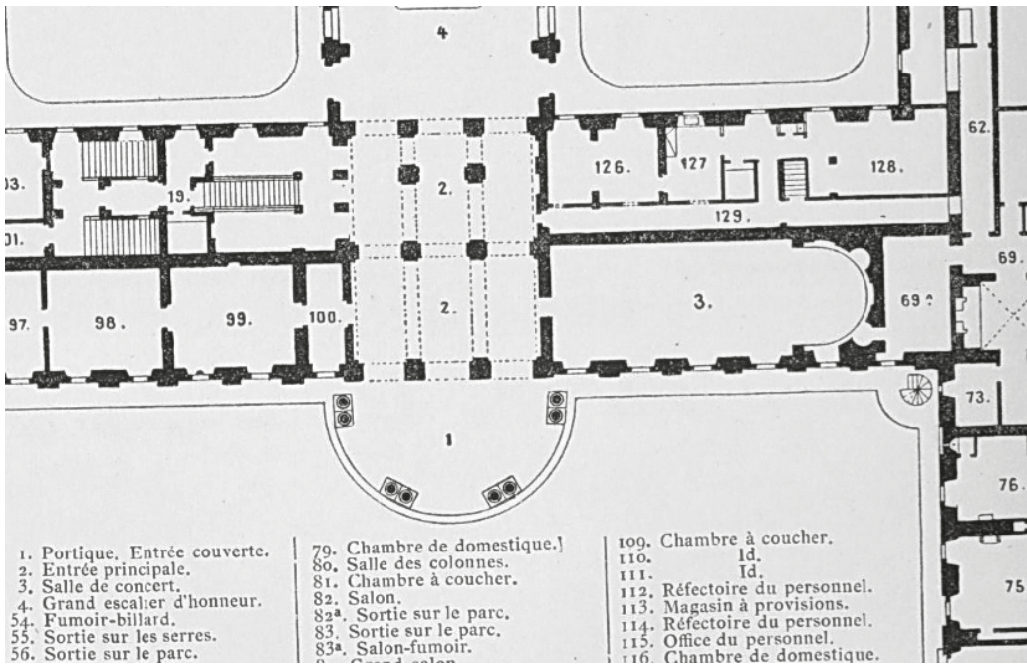


Fig. 4. Plan of the ground floor of the Demidoff's palace including the church (number 3) — a detail. *Palais de San Donato. Catalogue des objets d'art ...* [10]

C. Morelli, depicting St. Peter and St. Paul against a background of gold, St. Anatolius the Martyr wearing a chainmail shirt and a red cloak, St. Napoleon bearing a martyr's branch, and St. Nicholas with two books in his hands (each 105 × 195 cm) [10, p. 5].

A few blocks away from the Villa Demidoff in Via San Donato there is the so called “former Demidoff chapel” (in 1966 the building was acquired by the protestant community of the Church of Christ) (fig. 5). The building was constructed after a design by D. Silvestri at the beginning of the 1830s in the spirit of the Palladian architecture (it resembles A. Palladio's Villa Capra near Vicenza). The cubical shape of the building is elaborated with a four-column Corinthian portico and crowned with a coffered dome. Inside the angles are rounded to the diameter of the dome thus forming a rotund. The round hall is supplemented by a semicircular space that is divided from the hall by two Corinthian columns. The walls are regularly ornamented with Corinthian pilasters. The architecture of the interior of San Donato Chapel is meant to resemble that of the mausoleum of the grand princess Ekaterina Pavlovna on the Rothenberg mountain in Stuttgart (1820–1824) [11].

Indeed, the inner apsis, which could have housed an iconostasis, indicates the sacral purpose of the building. Presumably, it is here that Anatoly Demidoff and princess Mathilda Buonaparte got married in 1841. But was this building the Demidoff chapel? Disseminated across numerous publications, the brief information that it is the “Ex-Cappella Demidoff” looks questionable judging by the sketches of Silvestri himself, which indicate that it is the building of Odeon (l'Odeon) — a theater and concert hall [12, p. 28].

Thus, the semicircular space behind the columns is nothing but the scene and the place for orchestra. It is also certain that the place never housed the wooden decoration and iconostasis of Barbetti. The description from the same auction catalogue of 1880 that



Fig. 5. The Odeon («Former Demidoff Church»). Architect G.B. Silvestri (<http://umanesimi.blogspot.com/2017/09/15-marzo-1880-san-donato-capitale-del.html>)

says that the ceiling of the “concert hall” (the room of the former church) is decorated by a wooden coffered ceiling made by chevalier Barbetti (Le plafond de cette salle, divisé en caissons, est entièrement en bois très richement sculpté par le chevalier Barbetti) confirms that the wooden decoration was in the palace building [10, p. 6].

Moreover, count T. Dandolo in his description of the chapel in the Demidoff palace mentions, apart from the carved décor of the temple, the gallery of saints painted in full height by “Moscovian artists” (...lungo le pareti si succedono immagini di Santi pinti ad olio da artisti moscoviti con grande vivacità di colori, figurati un per uno ritti in piè, grandi al naturale, separati da cornici...) [7, p. 313] However, it can be suggested that the building of Odeon might have been used as a temple for some time, otherwise the building would not be consistently referred to as a “chapel”. The purpose of the villa building has changed three times [13, p. 112]. It used to house a silk mill (!) for some time, then prince Anatoly had it fully rebuilt (architects L. del Moro, N. Matas, G. Martelli) [13, p. 113], converting it again into a princely residence in 1844 [12, p. 27].

Concerning the church services in the Odeon building, the iconostasis from Nikolay Demidoff’s former family chapel that had been lodged on the bridge delle Grazie may have very likely been put behind the columns separating the apsis the same way as in the Rothenberg mausoleum [6, p. 51]. The iconostasis probably had a single tier and was in classical style with Empire elements, which was typical of the early 19th century, with several local icons.

*The iconostasis and decor of the lower chapel.* In the iconostasis, carved at Barbetti’s workshop at the commission of A. Demidoff and currently housed in the lower chapel



Fig. 6. The Demidoff iconostasis, lower Church, the Church of the Nativity of Christ and St Nicholas the Thaumaturge, Florence. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



Fig. 7. The icon of Jesus Christ. Iconostasis of the lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



Fig. 8. The icon of Our Lady. Iconostasis of the lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



of the Nativity of Christ and St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus, special attention was given to the decoration of the matched columns resembling the architectural elements of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the sculptures framing the small icons in the second tier (fig. 6). The images of Christ (fig. 7) and Virgin Mary (fig. 8) along with the images of archangels on the deacon's doors are installed in the first tier. On the left side there is an icon case with an icon of St. Anatolius the Martyr (the patron of Anatoliy Nikolaevich Demidoff) and an icon case with an icon of St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus (the partron of his father, Nikolay Niki-tich Demidoff) on the right side. An arched "Last Supper" crowns the arch of the Royal doors — a jewel by Florentine carvers.

The interwoven floral ornament and the crown of rays emanating from the cross in the upper part of the Doors form an open-work (fig. 9). The cross arms become the axes



Fig. 9. The Royal doors. Iconostasis of the lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



*Fig. 10.* Paul the Apostle. Icon case in the lower Church.  
Photograph by V. V. Zherdev

for the Annunciation (the horizontal axis) and the pairs of the Evangelists (the vertical axis). The body of the golden Doors becomes a compositional and tonal centre of the entire ensemble. The gold of the Doors corresponds to the background of the icons, whose gold is counterbalanced by the dark background of natural wood of the icon cases and the solid figures of the saints. The gallery of full-length apostles and local icons for the iconostasis were created by a master of religious painting V. V. Vasilyev (1828–1894) in St. Petersburg in 1855–1856.

He was also the author of the altarpiece of the New Testament Trinity (in the service room of the upper temple) and the icon of the God the Father (in the temple's museum). The icons in the iconostasis and in the Trinity are painted by Vasilyev in a more subtle “Western” style and combined with the iconographical elements and rich engravings of the backgrounds and décor.

In the Trinity, Christ is in a way reminiscent of Van Eyck. The icons of apostles are painted in a freer manner with stronger light and shade modelling to represent realistic characters. The icon cases with apostles are arranged in the lower temple in the following order: to the south of the iconostasis — St. ap. Paul (fig. 10), Thomas, Thaddeus, Peter; to the north — St. ap. Andrew, Batholomeus, John; to the west — St. ap. Simon, Matthew,



Fig. 11. Western part of the lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev

Jacob (fig. 11). St. ap. Philipp is by the staircase to the lower temple. St. ap. Jacob, son of Alphaeus, is in the temple's museum.

However, particular attention is drawn to a gallery of small icons in the style of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The icons are painted on a smooth golden background with marginal engravings imitating cloisonne enamel. Scattered patches of color represented by the clothes of holy patriarchs and royalty are rich with golden details, the curves are stylized in the icon-painting tradition. Some faces are painted quite realistically, combining iconic features with light-and-shade three-dimensional effects. The icon gallery counts 27 images.

Some of them were integrated into the iconostasis along with the academic paintings by V. Vasilyev. In the second tier of the iconostasis one can see the icons of St. Abanoub (Onuphrius) the Great (presumably, the patron of the family of Antufyievs' (Demidoffs), St. Mary Magdalene, St. Queen Alexandra (fig. 12) and St. Hyacinth the Martyr (a dedication to Akinfiy Demidoff, the founder of the mining industry in the Ural and Siberia). On the right of the iconostasis: St. ap. Paul and Peter, St. Anatolius, patriarch of Constantinople (fig. 13–15). On the left: St. metropolitan Alexius, St. Gregory Nazianzus, St. Elisabeth. There were also carved twin icon-cases in the Demidoff chapel, which were later altered to serve as doors (according to point 4 of the report on the temple building № 61 of 11 (24), 12 (25), 13 (26) 1901) [14, p. 249] and placed into the northern and southern service rooms of the upper church narthex.



Fig. 12. St. Empress Alexandra. Second tier of the iconostasis. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev

The following icons were installed into the said doors / icon-cases. The northern ones: St. Catherine of Alexandria in the cartouche above the door leaf, St. Ev. Matthew and Mark in the upper part of the leaf, St. Prince Alexander Nevsky, St. Emperor Constantine in the lower part, with St. Princes Vladimir and Olga equal-to-apostles on the back. The southern doors: St. Anatolius, patriarch of Constantinople in the cartouche, St. Ev. Luke and John the Apostle in the upper part of the leaf, St. Andrew of Crete and St. Dmitry of Rostov in the lower part. On the back: St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Anna the Prophetess. Also, three smaller icons are installed above the icon-cases of apostles Thomas, Matthew and Bartholomew in the lower temple.

*The gallery of small icons.* As there is still no reliable information on the origin of the small icons, we can talk about the following hypotheses that require further documental and stylistic analysis. The first hypothesis to be discussed despite its being somewhat “extravagant” is as follows.

Since the distinctive icon-painting schools of Yaroslavl, Palekh, Mstera, etc. still existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the prince’s order could be completed by the masters of these schools. However, the small icons from the Demidoff chapel are also very close in style to later examples of Nevyansk icon-painting. The fact that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the distinctive icon-painting oriented to ancient examples still existed among Old believers, who had once concentrated in the Ural properties of the Demidoffs, also counts in favour of the idea that the entire gallery of the small “Demidoff” icons was made by the Nevyansk masters.



Fig. 13. Peter the Apostle. Lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



Fig. 14. Paul the Apostle. Lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev



Fig. 15. St. Anatolius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. Lower Church. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev

It is in the Urals, where the Russian mining industry takes its origin and where the adepts of the old order and the keepers of the old old faith had fled from Peter's reforms, that the original school of icon-painting began to develop. The town of Nevyansk that

grew around the Demidoffs' iron mill became central to the Old believers community in the Urals.

It was Akinfiy Demidoff who built an Old believers' monastery in the outskirts of Nevyansk at his own expense [15, p.94]. The Demidoffs invited masters from Tula and Olonets factories where Old belief flourished, they established close contacts with Old believers' circles from Kerzhenets and Vygovsky hermitage, and provided work to fugitive schismatics without interfering into their religious practices. According to the census of 1747, the Old believers constituted almost half of the population of the Demidoffs' towns-factories [15, p.94]. This gave a start to the distinctive Nevyansk icon painting school, which enjoyed its best days during the peak of economic and industrial development of the region from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The concept of "Nevyansk icon" is somewhat conventional and cannot be tied to one city, yet Nevyansk masters carried out orders throughout the region, and thus their style spread up to the Southern Ural. Nevyansk school relies on the traditions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century icon painting, which became a protograph for all of the later iconography, and tends to resemble Yaroslavl, Rostov and Kostroma iconography.

The Nevyansk Icon is characterized by refinement and elegance of poses, fine modelling of faces, detailing and abundance of graphic decor [16]. But the Old Believer milieu gradually absorbed both the influence of the official church and the external secular influence, which affected the style of the late Nevyansk icon painting, — the "archaic" features began to disappear and the realistic approach became more and more apparent. The icons from St. Nicholas Church in the village of Bynghi near Nevyansk are a vivid example of this. The church itself was built in 1789–1797 in a mixed style of the fading Baroque and Classicism. The icons that were created around the same period are nevertheless mostly made by Nevyansk masters in the spirit of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The sophistication of the painting manner, the "refinement" of certain images (for example, the archangels on the deacon's doors of the central iconostasis, the icons from the iconostasis of the southern chapel) are stylistically close to the images from the Demidoff Chapel.

As the wealth of the Old Believer merchants and industrialists increased, the Nevyansk icon began to evolve towards decorative art, becoming an item of luxury to embody the wealth of the Ural breeders and gold miners [17]. Therefore, ordering from the Nevyansk icon painters a gallery of icons of saints, some of which bear the names of the founders of the Demidoff dynasty, becomes a very symbolic and independent gesture. Indeed, the Nevyansk factories were owned by the Demidoffs for a relatively short time<sup>2</sup> — from 1702 to 1769 — and were sold by P. A. Demidoff — the grandson of Nikita Demidovich Antufiev — to the industrialist S. Y. Yakovlev (Sobakin) [1, p. 28].

However, by ordering icons from the masters of the Nevyansk school, Anatoly Demidoff could stress his connection with the former Ural patrimony that originated from the great founder of the dynasty. Besides that, the Nevyansk icon becoming more and more of a luxury item, it put emphasis on the customer's high status as one of the richest people in Europe. The order being made by none else but Anatoly Nikolayevich is indicated by the fact that the gallery of small icons contains two images of St. Anatolius, the patriarch

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<sup>2</sup> After the death of Akinfiy Demidoff (1678–1745) the factories were divided among his sons, while the factories in the Altai region became property of the state treasury. Later on, some of the factories, including the one in Nevyansk, were sold.

of Constantinople. Most likely, the time of this order coincided with the creation of the iconostasis and full-length images of the evangelists.

The other hypothesis is more probable. Since V. V. Vasilyev's training as an artist began in the workshop of M. S. Peshekhonov [18], he certainly knew the basics of icon painting. This is evidenced by the icon of the Mother of God "Joy of All Who Sorrow" painted by Vasilyev in 1891, now in the collection of Yaroslavl Art Museum [19, p. 73–5]. This is an exact copy of an earlier icon with an interesting history, yet it shows that the artist possessed excellent technique and knowledge of the style.

In 1858, Vasilyev received the title of Academician "in Byzantine style painting" [20], so it is interesting that the inscription — most likely made by the customer — on the back of the icon stated: "... the icon ... was made by the icon-painting art of the artist of the Academy of Byzantine painting Vasily Vasilyev..." [19, p. 75]. By employing Vasilyev, the customer got in touch with a certain painting community, to which belonged the Peshekhonovs — by the way, a well-known Old Believer family. In 1856, the son of the workshop founder, V. M. Peshekhonov, was granted the title of Icon Painter of the Court of His Imperial Majesty [21].

The high rank could be achieved through executing works for the court for at least eight to ten years — in person by the one claiming the title and, of course, at an exceptional level. The icons made by the Peshekhonov workshop were known, in addition to the virtuosity of the execution, for their high cost. But ordering the icons from Peshekhonov was also a matter of prestige, which could be A. N. Demidoff's motivation.

The Peshekhonov icon is characterized by its emphasis on the use of gold: golden backgrounds, golden ornaments, spaces superimposed by gold. Gold embossing was used, particularly, the framing (margins) was minted, the paint put on certain parts of the frame imitated the cloisonne enamel. Clothes were painted over gold, which allowed "scraping" to form various patterns on the fabric. Then, the diverging pattern was used to imitate the texture of rich embroidery. Face (*lic'noe pis'mo*) and dress (*dolic'noe pis'mo*) painting was performed by a multi-layer technique of tempera painting or mixed technique, in which oil and egg media were applied layer by layer.

It is of note that V. Vasilyev also used the techniques of Peshekhonov's style, in particular, rich engravings on nimbi and details.

Both of the hypotheses outline the avenues for future research and attribution of the small icons from the gallery of the Demidoff Chapel.

**Decision on the location in the lower temple.** It was decided to place the iconostasis with the choirs and the icon-cases with the full-length icons of the apostles in the lower temple after a significant alteration (according to point 4 of the session report no. 61 of 11 (24), 12 (25), 13 (26) 1901) [14, p. 249]. The lower temple was consecrated on October 8 (O. S.) in 1902 in the name of St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus, thus preserving the original dedication of the church in the honour of Nikolay Demidoff. In the lower temple, it was planned to install unique carved entrance doors created by the son of Angiolo Barbetti — Rinaldo Barbetti (1830–1904) — in 1855 after the doors by L. Ghiberti for the Florentine baptistery of San Giovanni (fig. 17). These doors were awarded a prize at the national exhibition in Florence in 1861 [22]. On the door leaf there are 24 scenes from the Old Testament, just like on the gates by Ghiberti, except for his work featured the scenes from the New Testament.

However, the doors being too large for the doorway of the lower temple and their splendor fading in too small a room, it was decided to place them in the main entrance



*Fig. 16.* Icon-case door in the upper Church. Photograph by V.V.Zherdev

of the upper temple [14, p. 214]. Surprisingly, the colossal door was initially a single leaf, so it was cut into two, as is clearly indicated in paragraph 3 of the session report of March 12 (25) and March 13 (26), 1900: “On the Demidoff entrance door. Following the picture of Academician Preobrazhensky, it is proposed to alter it from a single-leaf door to a double-leaf one for the main entrance to the upper temple; its icon-case is to be placed in the lower temple” (entry no. 36 of the “Journal”) [14, p. 227].

Also, twin doors with the small icons from the Demidoff Church were installed in the side offices of the upper temple. The church decorations from San Donato being a unified and complex work of art, they should have never been broken into several pieces and, with





Fig. 17. The doors of the upper Church (by R. Barbetti) — a detail. Photograph by V. V. Zherdev

their scale and splendour, could have fit into the interior of the upper temple to enhance its grandeur. But why were not the wooden decorations originally considered in the design of the upper temple? The most likely answer is that the iconostasis apparently had a solely “family” dedication to the Demidoff Church. After all, a church of national importance was supposed to express a certain level of piety to the reigning family, hence it had certain icons. In addition, the rector originally intended to install a marble iconostasis in the upper temple.

In addition, the style of paintings by V. V. Vasilyev in the Demidoff church probably did not suit Preobrazhensky, who intended them to be in the spirit of the 17th century, resonating with the architecture of the temple. Therefore, presumably, the rector, the architect and other responsible figures unanimously accepted such a decision. Although for the lower temple it was quite possible to use the family chapel of Novitsky, which was kept in the church warehouse. It is worth noting that this church was used during the restoration and repair works of the Demidoff chapel and during the small consecration of the lower temple on August 15 (28), 1901. The installation of this, without exaggeration, priceless donation of P. P. Demidoff, the second prince of San Donato (1839–1885), was associated with the need to saw the wide iconostasis for a trapezoidal installation in the altar arch of the lower temple (which would probably have been necessary be it installed in the upper temple too). It was also necessary to saw the high icon-cases, adapting them to a small room. Some of the icon-cases (the holy apostles James and Simon) were skillfully turned into doors to the service rooms in the western part of the lower temple, while part

of the decoration, namely the carved wooden altar arch, the apsis conch and other items that either had become dilapidated or did not fit into the new building, came to be “legally” disposed of by burning in the church oven [14, p. 247]. The large altarpiece of the New Testament Trinity was placed in the service room of the upper temple. Indeed, there is very little room for the full-length life-sized images of the apostles in the low and gloomy lower temple, with hardly any natural light coming from its tiny windows under the ceiling. The painting qualities are not revealed in full measure and the finest engraved decor of the works executed by a most skillful master fails to be fully appreciated. Unfortunately, it was not possible to create an adequate counterpart in easel works for the upper church.

*Possible arrangement of the chapel in the palace of San Donato.* The study of the plan of the villa and the features of its church hall, of the evidence by contemporaries, as well as the preserved fragmented decoration of the Demidoff church, allows for a rough approximation of its arrangement in the palace in San Donato. On the right hand side of the main lobby, the entrance to the temple was preceded by the grandiose gates of Barbetti with the scenes from the Old Testament. Through them, visitors were taken to the spacious premises of the church, which occupied the entire right wing of the first floor of the main building. To the right and to the left of the gates inside the room were paired icon-cases with small icons (as follows from the records of the Journal, the icon-cases were converted into the doors of the offices of the upper temple of the Nativity of Christ). The semicircular altar part was separated from the hall by an iconostasis and a wooden balustrade in front of the choirs. To the right and to the left of the iconostasis, pylons supported the icon-cases with icons of St. Anatolius the Martyr and St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus. The apsis and conch were decorated with carved panels with bas-reliefs. The hall was crowned with a carved coffered ceiling, which was echoed by a refined inlaid floor. The church hall was well lit through five tall arched windows, one of which cast light onto the altar part, with the sixth window illuminating the sacristy connected to the altar by a doorway. The opposite wall of the church hall was blind, which made room for the icon-cases with the full-length images of the apostles. The icon-cases were connected to each other with carved panels. Most of the icon-cases have a semi-circular completion, but three icon-cases repeat the stepped top of the central part of the iconostasis, which allows us to conclude that they were located separately from the main gallery, namely between the windows (three piers to the altar). In addition, the tops of these three icon-cases also had small icons in the cartouches. But in the lower church of St. Nicholas the six small icons of the same cycle without any decor hang by the iconostasis, which takes them out of the context of the carved decor of the Demidoff Church. It would be quite logical to assume that the rest of the icon-cases had stepped tops, forming the same stepped rhythm along the entire perimeter of the hall. And the above mentioned six icons might have crowned the tops of the remaining apostolic icon-cases and the icon-case of the Sts. Anatolius the Martyr and Nicholas Thaumaturgus (the small icons on the inner sides of the doors / icon-cases of the upper church can be added to them).

Such an arrangement would demonstrate a single principle. The bottom row contained the paintings by V. Vasilyev, namely the evangelists, Sts. Anatolius and Nicholas Thaumaturgus, Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, the Archangels. The upper tier was formed by the small icons. The wooden elements most likely covered every wall of the church, forming a kind of a carved wooden “casket” (a contemporary noted among other things the plafond and the walls of “exceptional mastery”) [6, p. 52].

It is quite likely that the stepped tops of some of the icon-cases were modified due to the dilapidated structure or particular qualities of the new building. So, for example, St. Anatolius the Martyr and St. Nicholas Thaumaturgus were installed at the base of the arches and could be specially cropped to fit the level of the curvature. The same could have been made to other icon-cases, following the expediency of the overall composition, the height of the room and the safety of the structures. The tops of the “decapitated” icon-cases could have been altered in accordance with the general style of the wooden decorations.

Even separated, the decorations of the Demidoff family chapel in San Donato is marvellous. The preserved part of them alone speaks of the grandeur of the concept implemented by Florentine masters on commission from Anatoly Demidov, thus leaving another bright record of Russian in the history of Florence.

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## Церковь Демидовых в имении Сан-Донатто во Флоренции

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Статья посвящена убранству бывшей домово́й церкви Демидовых в Сан-Донатто, большая часть которого сейчас находится в построенной по проекту М. Т. Преображенского церкви Рождества Христова и свт. Николая Чудотворца во Флоренции. Автор статьи на основе записок современников, анализа планов дворца и сохранившихся элементов убранства реконструировал наиболее вероятный целостный облик домово́й церкви Демидовых на вилле в Сан-Донатто. Автор ставит под сомнение церковное назначение сохранившегося здания «капеллы Демидовых», основываясь на оригинальных эскизах Д. Силвестри, из которых следует, что это здание Одеона — концертно-театрального зала. Особое внимание уделено резному убранству церкви, выполненному в мастерской А. Барбетти, иконостасу и галерее местных и малых икон. Местные иконы иконостаса и ростовые иконы апостолов, выполненные в академической манере, принадлежат кисти В. В. Васильева. Однако галерея малых икон второго яруса иконостаса

и дверей-киотов стилистически близка к иконописи XVII века. Основываясь на стилевом анализе галереи малых икон и исторических фактах, автор выдвигает гипотезы о возможной принадлежности икон к невянской или пешехоновской иконописным школам. Первая гипотеза базируется на связях Демидовых со старообрядческой средой в Невьянске, где находились демидовские металлургические заводы и где сформировалась самобытная школа иконописи. Впоследствии иконы невянской школы, все больше тяготея к изысканности и декоративности, стали предметом роскоши. Более того, заказ у невянских мастеров не только подчеркивал высокий статус А. П. Демидова, но и демонстрировал связь заказчика с бывшими вотчинами на Урале. В пользу «пешехоновской» гипотезы говорит и то, что В. Васильев в свое время проходил учебу у Пешехонова и через Васильева заказчик мог выйти на эту престижную иконописную мастерскую. Изложенные гипотезы задают новые направления в исследовании и атрибуции галереи малых икон Демидовской церкви.

*Ключевые слова:* Демидов, князь Сан-Донато, церковь Рождества Христова и свт. Николая Чудотворца во Флоренции, М. Т. Преображенский, Д. Силвестри, А. Барбетти, В. В. Васильев, невянская иконопись, пешехоновская иконопись.

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