



SELLING RUSSIA'S TREASURES

Edited by Natalya Semyonova and Nicolas V. Iljine

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**The Soviet Trade in Nationalized Art
1917–1938**


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Introduction

More than 10 years have passed since the first publication of *Selling Russia's Treasures*, the story of the crude bartering of Russia's art. No study or scholarly conference since then on the subject of the "Stalin sales" has failed to cite it. The book itself has become a bibliographic rarity.

As in the foreword to the first edition, we wish to salute those who pioneered the study of this long forbidden topic. First of all, we salute Prof. Robert C. Williams, the American scholar whose 1980 book, *Russian Art and American Money, 1900–1940*, ended the silence that for more than 50 years shrouded this tragic page of Russian history. Then, in the 1990s, with the stamp of secrecy gone and the Soviet archives open, the first articles and books on the subject by researchers in Russia appeared. Under the headline, "Sale," journalist Aleksander Mosiakin weighed in on the pages of the then fantastically widely read weekly *Ogonek*. In *Krasnye konquistadory* (Red Conquistadors), historians Olga Vasileva and Pavel Knyshevskii detailed the devastating losses that the "sales" had brought to the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1993 Moscow historian Iurii Zhukov published *Operatsiia Ermitazh* (Operation Hermitage), which compiled all the then known relevant archival materials. In the revised second edition of the book, published in 2005, Zhukov slightly revised the title to *Stalin: Operation Hermitage*, and acknowledged, at least in part, the economic motivation felt by the Soviet leadership in ordering the sales: the cost of developing Soviet industry.

Meanwhile, work continued in the archives, and additional documents came to light. Early in 1999, with work on the first edition of this book nearing completion, Petersburg archivist Natalya Serapina published, in the journal *Neva*, material from the supposedly lost secret files of the Hermitage. Her book, published in 2001, *The Hermitage That We Lost, Documents 1920–1930*, was based on the new material. In 2006 came publication by the Hermitage of *Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh. Muzeinye rasprodazhi. 1928–1929* (The State Hermitage. Museum Sales. 1928–1929), a fundamental work that caps the line of archival research. The editor, Elena Solomakha, is part of the team that prepared the present volume.

Nor have European and American scholars lost interest in the "Stalin sales." An international conference on the topic was held in Vienna in 2000, yielding the volume *Verkaufte Kultur: Die sowjetischen Kunst- und antiquitätenexporte, 1919–1938*. Edited by Austrian scholar Waltraud Bayer, one of the most active researchers in the field, the book included contributions from Elena Solomakha, Rifat Gafifullin and Natalya Semyonova, all of whom are represented here as well. They also were part of the group that produced *Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Treasure*, published in Washington, D.C., in 2009 under the editorship of Wendy R. Salmond and the late Anne Odom, formerly the chief curator of the Hillwood Museum and all-too-untimely deceased.

The unslackening interest in the "Stalin sales" confirmed us in our long-discussed hope of publishing *Selling Russia's Treasures* in English to make it more widely accessible. At the same time, the newly discovered materials that have become part of the scholarly discourse on the subject in the past decade made necessary a substantial reworking of our book. New essays written especially for this volume have been added.

Over the past few centuries many a country has lost important pieces of its cultural heritage which have mostly turned up in museum or private collections, but it was a unique phenomenon that the Soviet Union officially sold off thousands of valuable artworks, icons and jewelry. As far as we know it was the only state to have cynically discarded such treasures, which the aristocracy and enlightened philanthropists had lovingly collected in pre-revolutionary times. It is little consolation that some of these masterpieces have found their way back into Western museums and are thus accessible to the public, as is the case, for example, with 31 major works from the Hermitage which are now in the Washington National Gallery.

Elena Solomakha, deputy chief of the manuscript division of the State Hermitage, has written a chapter on the “The Destruction of the Hermitage.” Elena Emelianova, senior scholarly associate for research in rare books (Museum of Books) of the Russian State Library, has reworked her chapter, “Books for Sale,” with substantial assistance from Edward Kasinec, curator emeritus of the Slavic and East European Collections of the New York Public Library and Research Scholar at the Harriman Institute at Columbia University. For the new edition, Yury Pyatnitsky, senior curator of the Byzantine Collection of the State Hermitage, has given us a fundamental study of the sale of icons as part of the “Stalin sales” as well as a detailed analysis of the Western markets in Russian icons (which, because of space limitations, is presented in shortened form). Alexey Petukhov, senior curator of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, has produced a chapter detailing the tragic story of the decimation of the great and unique State Museum of Modern Western Art.

Can it really be true that we lost more than 70 masterpieces of the new French art of Cézanne, Renoir, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso acquired by Moscow collectors, principally Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov? The fact is unbelievable, but the documents speak for themselves. The leaders of the Soviet Union were little concerned about the citizens that they sent in the hundreds of thousands to prison camps. They were no less unfeeling in their treatment of the invaluable paintings and icons that they sold by the thousands. They even sold people, it turns out: For a brief time in 1930–1931, relatives could buy the freedom of family members who had failed to emigrate in time and remained in Soviet captivity. The less proletarian the captive’s origin, the higher the price.

If the millions who died in the years of repression could be returned to life, one might not so grieve the lost canvases. Alas, the dead cannot be brought back. But historical memory can, and that is the task that we set before ourselves in this book. While this volume is more comprehensive and thorough than the first one, it is written with the widest possible audience in mind. Our objective is to make what is known generally only to scholars available to the widest circle of readers.

Once again we wish to express our gratitude to those who worked with us in the late 1990s: to Viktor Nikitin, who devoted decades to the painstaking collection of information on the history of *Gokhran* (the State Depository of Valuables of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) and the sale of the *Almaznyi* (Diamond) Collection of the USSR; to art historian Elena Smirnova; to historian Alexey Anikin; to Rifat Gafifullin, senior fellow at the State Museum-Preserve of Pavlovsk, and to Natalya Sheredega, head of the Department of Old Russian Art at the State Tretyakov Gallery. We are grateful, too, to art historian Andrei Sarabianov, one of the editors of the first edition of this volume; to Andrew Bromfield, of London, who 10 years ago prepared the English translation (only now seeing the light of day) of *Selling Russia’s Treasures*, and to Antonina W. Bouis and Jean-Claude Bouis, of New York, who read the manuscript. We also thank Peter L. Schaffer, President of the US Hermitage Museum foundation for his continuous support.

We are enormously grateful for the support of the M.T. Abraham Center for Visual Arts Foundation and its president, Amir G. Kabiri, which made this edition possible.

Our politics have not changed. We still do not consider it necessary to blame and judge. New facts are more eloquent than accusations when it comes to the events of the first third of the 20th century that led Russia to the edge of cultural catastrophe.

Natalya Semyonova, Nicolas V. Iljine

The Lessons of the Museum Sales

The sale of Russia's art collections by the Soviet government dealt a specially heavy blow to the Hermitage, yet the Hermitage was the first museum to comment on this sad page in the history of our country in a calm and scholarly manner, eschewing populist hysteria.

The events narrated in this book were part of a general Russian tragedy. We can only marvel at the fact that our great cultural heritage, including our museum collections, has not only survived but has continued to fulfil its mission of enlightenment in the national and international contexts.

For all their massive extent, the sales of the 1920s and 1930s still represent one specific instance of the problem of the different attitudes taken by succeeding generations towards the cultural heritage, the question of whether or not later generations have an absolute right to deal with that heritage in any way they please, as their own unconditional property. This same problem is discussed in far more moderate terms in American museums in connection with the question of whether it is permissible to sell exhibits to provide for a museum's own needs, an expedient which often constitutes a violation of the terms of the wills of individuals whose bequests make up the museums themselves.

Speaking in global terms, we are concerned with the "bequest" of humanity. Like nature, the cultural heritage is given to us not to do with as we like, but to be used, with the concomitant obligation to augment and preserve it for the generations to come. Russia has suffered from flagrant examples of the violation of this principle on more than one occasion. To this day the Hermitage is still trying to locate pictures which were sold at the command of the emperor Nicholas I, who purged the museum of "second-rate" items. The items, in fact, were not second-rate, but mercifully the auctions took place in Russia.

We have already forgotten or attempt to forget the atmosphere in which post-revolutionary Russia was forced to live. This atmosphere affected the whole of society without exception – from politicians to cultural workers, including museum staff. In a country isolated from the world and excluded from the ranks of the victors in the world war, famine and ruin were the order of the day. Yet at the same time everybody lived in fervent anticipation of changes for the better, as though once a few immediate trials had been endured the bright future would dawn. And for that it was possible to sacrifice a great deal (far too much, indeed, as subsequently became clear).

Following the mass confiscations and nationalisations Russia had accumulated a multitude of "third-rate" and "fourth-rate" antiques, and this naturally prompted the question of whether all these items should be sold to the West so that the money could be used for the good of the country, including the development of the museums. Many believed this was the case, because they wanted to believe it.

Once the first step was taken, there was no turning back. The Soviet dealers were hungry for money, real money, big money. The authorities were demanding "the hard currency that the country needs." The museum workers were obliged to take part in the selection of items for sale, quite simply because they could not refuse (let us remember what the consequences of refusing could have been). In any case, the museums had no legal right to refuse: state property could be freely disposed of by the government.

But that was by no means the whole problem. Many thought that if they sacrificed some works in order to set the museums' affairs to rights, they could use these trifling sacrifices to protect their basic collections. Some among them could still recall the old days when cultural artefacts traveled freely round the world. As a matter of fact, that was how many of the works concerned came to be in Russia.

The general cultural atmosphere was intensely hostile to the museums. The political authorities saw the staff of the museums as remnants of the old regime, nobles and functionaries they had not yet got around to dealing with. The avant-garde artists preached

hatred of the museums and called them the “graveyards of art.” It was no easier to resist revolutionary euphoria than it was to resist revolutionary violence.

The buyers pursued a policy of their own. Refusing to purchase items of average quality, they demanded masterpieces. The towering figures of secret buyers appeared at the shoulders of the auctioneers, buyers offering not only money, but influence as well. Big money set the stage for big politics. The museum curators were no longer consulted about anything. Crude and slipshod telegrams simply demanded that they “hand over” works. This absolutely had to be resisted, but resistance was difficult. The archives at the Hermitage contain letters written by outstanding cultural figures in defence of the museum’s collections. Endless reports and protests were written by directors of the Hermitage and major art historians, but no replies were forthcoming.

Other means were brought into play. Stories are told of how several masterpieces were hidden and in some cases the originals were replaced by fakes and copies. As yet no proof of this has been discovered. The archive materials do, however, testify to incessant delaying of the work of selection. There are no few examples of noble acts of sabotage. Art-historical experts argued convincingly in their detailed notes that the entire system of trade was organized wrongly, that all of the Western specialists’ assessments were inaccurate, that there was a wide and spreading conspiracy aimed at swindling the Russian museums out of their major treasures at give-away prices.

The language of figures was sometimes helpful. It could well be that the arguments about incorrect prices helped the Hermitage to hold on to Lorenzo Lotto’s *Family Portrait*, which was supposedly sold off in secret. The curators exploited every slip of the pen made by *Antikvariat* in order to delay the handing over of masterpieces. Most of the time it didn’t help, but on one occasion by playing on confusion in the text of telegrams, the Hermitage was able to retain Ter Borch’s *Glass of Lemonade* and hand over for sale to Gulbenkian (and from him to Wildenstein) another painting by the same artist. It was a fine work, but quite incomparable with Ter Borch’s masterpiece.

The curators sought to exploit every possible avenue to the heights of power. A classical example of this was the letter from Iosif A. Orbeli which was transmitted through personal channels to Stalin, but which only defended the Hermitage’s collections of eastern art. Stalin promised to halt sales from the Eastern Department. Soon, in fact, all sales were halted. Of course, the changed situation on the world art markets played an important part in this, but things could easily have continued as they were through sheer inertia.

The history of the sales has been very little studied. It is therefore gratifying to note the gradual beginnings of serious research into the problem. A series of journalistic articles and politicised publications have already created an over-simplified impression of this highly complex process. Extreme caution and close attention are required when using the documents. Even today a number of articles plaintively lament Lorenzo Lotto’s *Family Portrait* or the famous Chesma inkwell which, despite the existence of documents concerning preparations for their sale, are still in the Hermitage.

I hope that the present volume will be of assistance in making this most complex of themes the subject of scholarly debate and preparing the ground for subsequent research. For its part, the Hermitage is preparing a detailed publication about the sales based on materials from our own internal archive.

I think it is important to clarify one further detail. The rulers of the Soviet Union were far from being clumsy oafs who gave away museum collections for a song. They achieved what they were aiming for. Entry was gained to the Western markets, with access to Western technology, including defence technologies. The sales helped to some extent with preparations for the future war. This has to be stated openly, for the crime lay not in the fact that they sold

off works of art too cheaply. The crime lay in the fact that they dealt with the cultural heritage, and with the museums, as though they were goods stacked in a warehouse: the state exploited cultural artefacts for purposes bearing absolutely no relation to culture. This question of principle is still the problem today.

Of course, we could regard what occurred as “historical retribution” for the mass buying of the finest collections in Europe by Catherine the Great, Alexander I and many other Russian collectors of various ranks. We could take comfort in the fact that our works are for the most part in good hands and accessible to the public, that as a result of this the Hermitage has been able to establish close relations with many other museums around the world (and via simple transfers with many museums in Russia), that despite the sales, new acquisitions from the national museum fund and the fruits of archaeological work have helped the Hermitage to maintain and strengthen its position in the international family of museums. But these arguments are poor consolation in comparison with what was lost.

The losses inflicted on our culture were truly immense. They were deliberately inflicted in the practical application of the false idea of the state’s absolute right to deal as it wishes with a country’s cultural heritage. In every case the fact of ownership of a cultural heritage imposes on the owner – be it the state, an institution or an individual – definite obligations and restrictions. This extremely important principle, while it does not conform comfortably with the sacred right of property, derives from the general conditions which are essential for the survival of nations and national cultures.

What we must do today is learn from the events of the past and seek for ways to prevent any possible repetition. There is no doubt in my mind that the popular idea of a country’s art treasures as a means of filling out the state budget, while museums are not regarded as priority candidates for nurture by the state, but merely as sources of budget revenue, leads by direct logic to the practice of selling valuable cultural artefacts in the interests of the state.

In this area, as in so many others Russia provides extreme examples of general processes and possibilities. Nobody learns from their own mistakes, but mistakes made by others are sometimes taken into account. I hope very much that such events will never again take place either here or anywhere else in the world.

Museums must remain inviolable.

Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director of the State Hermitage

The Temple of Fine Arts

From an early age, I was intrigued by the history and fascinating stories that lay behind the numerous works of art that surrounded me during my early years. As a young man, I realized how important it was for me to have been nurtured in such a rich cultural environment, a fact that was to influence my adolescence and adulthood. When the M.T. Abraham Foundation was first established, in memory of my late grandfather, Mansur Tamir Abraham, its main concern was to create a collection that would provide scholars, students and curators with a comprehensive survey of an artist's body of work. At the same time another purpose was to benefit other institutions with resources so that in-depth presentations could be offered to their audiences.

When it came to my attention that a second edition of *Selling Russia's Treasures* was to be published, I decided that it was vital for the M.T. Abraham Foundation to become associated with this important publication. Especially so, since cultural heritage worldwide is one of our Center's greatest concerns.

While reviewing the subjects to be covered in the coming revised edition of *Selling Russia's Treasures*, two issues caught my attention: the first was a chapter considering the Hermitage State Museum, the second title dealt with Germany's leading role in the Soviet art exports in the years 1919–1936. It has become common knowledge that despite its poor economic situation, there were other important factors that drove Soviet Russia to undertake the sale of many of the Hermitage's treasures, together with items from other museums' and former aristocrats' private art collections.

I refer to the lack of connoisseurship in the fine arts that was widespread among political leaders and their lack of first-hand knowledge of the European art market. A disregard of cultural heritage was evidenced by the anti-museum declarations by eminent artistic figures such as Kazimir Malevich among others. Masterpieces by Chardin, Murillo, Raphael, Rembrandt, Rubens, van Eyck, Velasquez, Titian and Watteau, as well as others, found their way to museums worldwide. Needless to mention the numerous archaeological treasures that have become an integral part of ancient art collections in many European and American museums.

While discussing the above issue it is important to mention the efforts made by the Hermitage's curators and administrative staff, who did their best to prevent these sales. They undertook numerous risks by writing letters of protest to influential persons and organizations that warned them against the loss to be suffered by the Soviet Union if such sales took place. Besides mentioning the absurdly low prices Soviet Russia was asking for these unique works of art, they lamented on the loss of the country's cultural heritage. By putting their careers at risk, these devoted professionals attempted to hide masterpieces in obscure places and refused to hand them over for sale. As a result of their opposition many were fired or transferred to remote provinces.

The second chapter, dealing with Germany's role in the purchase of Soviet art in the early decades of the 20th century, brought to mind landmark events and stories behind specific works of art. As early as autumn 1922, following the signing of the Rapallo Peace Treaty, the first sale of Soviet art was organized in Berlin at the Diemen Gallery.

Via a network of established, well-heeled businessmen, valuable works of art were sold back to their countries of origin: French works to France, Dutch Old Masters back to the Netherlands, and Italian art back to Italy. After 1933 with the National Socialist Party's rise to power, Germany lost its status as major dealer in the buying and selling of Soviet art treasures. Other countries began to deal directly with Soviet Russia, especially the United States whose important art collectors and patrons were active in pre-war Europe.

We, at the M.T. Abraham Foundation, consider supporting art events and cultural enterprises our social responsibility. We are proud, as well as delighted, to be an active participant in the publication of *Selling Russia's Treasures*.

Amir G. Kabiri, President the M.T. Abraham Center for the Visual Arts Foundation

Inspired by the Past

I am happy to support the publication of *Selling Russia's Treasures*. This decision was a natural one for me.

I have been building the Gourji jewelry brand in Russia for over a decade. Our goal is to revive the traditions of Russian jewelry and applied art and to create a contemporary Russian style in jewelry and accessories based on these traditions. We offer present-day interpretations of the best specimens created by the artisans of the past and seek out cutting-edge Russian trends that make our work relevant worldwide.

In our work we often draw our inspiration from the permanent collections of the great Russian museums, such as the State Hermitage and the Kremlin Armory, and we are painfully aware of the grave loss our museums suffered as a result on the infamous art sales that are the subject of the present volume. Despite the loss, we make every effort to promote our exquisite heritage in Russia and beyond.

Gourji has recently produced several women's collections based on museum artifacts. The basis of our Orders Brooch Collection is a series of imperial state and military decorations dating back to the time of Catherine II. Our Tsar's Cufflinks Collection is based on careful research into the jewelry that belonged to Nicholas II. The Scythian Collection is based on the Scythian Gold Repository of the State Hermitage. In fact, some Gourji brooches are closely related to the original artifacts featured in this book.

I am certain that every significant event in the history of our country deserves artistic reflection and response. Over its many centuries Russia rose in prominence and fell again. The vast land that borders both Europe and Asia expanded into new territories, changed rulers and social systems. One thing seems constant: in every century the talented artisans of this land produced masterpieces that could be considered true hallmarks of their times. The Gourji philosophy is closely connected to Russian history, and the brand refers constantly to these varied masterpieces in its products.

In our collections, we are always seeking insight into the phenomenon of Russian culture, which is comprised of so many regional ethnic cultures. Our main goal is to highlight the most significant aspects of our cultural heritage and to make them relevant in today's world.

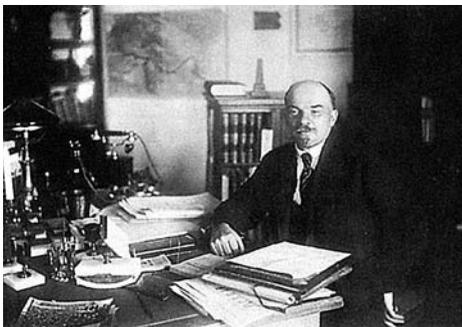
Dmitry Gourji, Founder of Gourji, Russian Jewelry Brand





СВЕТАЯ
ПРАВДА И СЛАВА
ПОПЕРЕД





Red Square on 1 May 1918
Photograph
Private collection, Moscow

Lenin in his study in the Kremlin
Photograph, 1920
Private collection, Moscow

The February revolution of 1917 was a turning-point in the history of Russia. The disbandment of the State Duma and the formation of the Soviet Republic fired society with romantic expectations of genuine freedom and democracy. However, these hopes could not obscure the threat of chaos and anarchy, the reality of which had already been confirmed by actual events. Despoliation and ruin were everywhere and nothing was left untouched, including palaces abandoned by the royal family, private mansions and public buildings, parks and gardens.

Various public commissions, committees and unions established in Moscow and Petrograd during the spring and summer of 1917 attempted to stave off or at least minimise the threat that hung over Russian culture.

In Petrograd Maxim Gorky, concerned at the course of events, took the initiative in the establishment of the Commission for Artistic Affairs, which was very soon transformed into the “Special Conference on Artistic Affairs of the Commissar of the Provisional Government” with jurisdiction over the former Ministry of the Imperial Court. The members of the Provisional Government listened carefully to what the cultural workers from the “Special Conference” had to say: they realised that the discord which had gripped Russia could easily spill over into the implacable “Russian rebellion,” and then any appeals to preserve and protect the national heritage would simply be meaningless.

The royal palaces were taken under observation by the Provisional Government and in summer 1917, when the German forces came close enough to threaten Petrograd, some of the valuables, including some of the Hermitage collections, the royal Diamond Room and many others were evacuated to Moscow.¹

The October coup and the disbandment of the Provisional Government confirmed the most gloomy of forebodings. During the night of 25–26 October several valuable items were stolen from the Winter Palace. Moisei Lazerson, who was in the Palace five days later, described the scene that met his eyes as follows: “In the large oil-pictures ... the eyes had been pierced through. The seats of the leather-covered arm-chairs and chairs in the drawing-rooms and halls had been slashed with knives ... Under our feet lay valuable miniatures, picture-frames, holy images, china, books and broken pieces of furniture.”² The Patriarchate’s Chamber in the Moscow Kremlin was plundered by drunken Red Army soldiers, an event that was repeated in a number of the palaces on the outskirts of the city. In his report for 1918, Count V.P. Zubov, the curator of the Gatchina palace-museum, wrote

“Citizens, preserve monuments of art”
 A poster of the Department of Museum Affairs
 and the Conservation of Works of Art
 and Antiques of the People’s Commissariat
 of Enlightenment
 Designed by Nikolai I. Kupreyanov, 1919



1

In early September 1917 Alexander F. Kerensky gave instructions to expedite the evacuation of the palace property and Hermitage collections to Moscow. They were subsequently stored in the History Museum and the Great Kremlin Palace. The work begun by representatives of the Provisional Government was completed by the Bolsheviks, with the result that an emergency measure dictated by concern for the fate of the cultural heritage paved the way for the scattering of Russia’s national treasures.

2

Larsons, p. 8.

3

“The portrait of Elizaveta Petrovna was slashed and the Rubens sketch ‘Susanna and the Elders’ was stolen; in all three pictures and three miniatures and several late 18th century embroideries were stolen, together with Alexander II’s gold watch and cigar case and several other items. In general, however, the movable property of the palaces was maintained intact.” RGALI, SPb f. 36, op. 2, d. 3, l. 67–68.

4

The Commissariat of Enlightenment was established the day after the deposition of the Provisional Government by a decree of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of 26 October 1917. On the same day the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee appointed B.D. Mandelbaum and Georgy Yatmanov as Commissars for the Protection of Artistic and Historical Monuments and Private Collections. The Artistic and Historical Commissions in the Winter Palace, Peterhof, Tsarskoe Selo and Gatchina, which had been established by the Provisional Government, continued to operate under their direction.

5

The People’s Commissariat of State Properties was established on the basis of the former Ministry of the Imperial Court.

that “during the night of 1–2 November, following the disappearance of Alexander Kerensky, about 400 sailors arrived in the Kitchen Square and soon they were joined by soldiers and Red Army men and immediately the pillaging of the palace began, lasting for more than a week; valuable furniture was smashed, curtains were cut down, carpets were stained, doors were stove in.”³ Noble estate houses were ablaze right across Russia.

These robberies frightened not only the cultural elite, but also the new authorities. The artistic intelligentsia, which had still not fully grasped the irreversible nature of the changes taking place, agreed to co-operate with the Bolsheviks and many well-known cultural figures found themselves occupying various official posts in the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*), which was headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky.⁴

The “great redistribution” of artistic wealth began immediately after the October revolution, undertaken jointly by the People’s Commissariat of State Properties⁵ and *Narkompros*. However, the competition between the two departments was short-lived. Six months later, when the seat of government was moved from Petrograd to Moscow, the People’s Commissariat of State Properties was abolished.

The decree “On Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Association” paved the way for the total nationalisation of all property and real estate belonging not only to the Orthodox Church, but also of the houses of worship of all religious confessions. In April 1918 the right of inheritance was abrogated. This was followed immediately by the nationalisation of private art collections. First of all the palaces belonging to Russian aristocratic

Decree on the Confiscation of the Property of the Deposed Emperor and Members of the Imperial Household

1. All property belonging to the Russian Emperor Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov, deposed by the revolution, and to the former empresses Alexandra Fedorovna Romanova and Maria Fedorovna Romanova and to all members of the former Russian imperial house, of whatsoever it may consist and wheresoever it may be located, not excepting deposits with credit institutions both in Russia and abroad, is hereby declared to be the property of the Russian Socialist Soviet Federal Republic.

2. The term members of the former Russian imperial house is taken to mean all Persons entered in the family register of the former Russian imperial house: the former heir to the throne, the former grand dukes, grand duchesses and princesses and former princes and princesses of imperial blood.

3. All persons and institutions knowing of the whereabouts of the property indicated in Article 1 of the present decree are obliged within a period of two weeks from the date of promulgation of the present decree to submit the relevant information to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. For deliberate failure to communicate the information indicated in the present article culprits shall be held responsible for the misappropriation of state property.

4. The plenipotentiary representatives of the Russian Socialist Soviet Federal Republic abroad are obliged immediately upon the publication of the present decree to make every possible effort to obtain information concerning the whereabouts of the property of the persons indicated in Article 1 of this decree. Russian citizens abroad are obliged to report information known to them concerning the whereabouts of the property indicated in Article 1 of the decree to the appropriate plenipotentiary representatives of the Russian Socialist Soviet Federal Republic.

5. Items of property as indicated in Article 1, which are located in the Russian Socialist Soviet Federal Republic, with the exception of monetary valuables, shall come under the authority of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Monetary valuables are to be contributed to treasury revenue and handed in to treasuries or institutions of the People's Bank, and those which are located outside the Republic, including those in foreign banks, shall come under the authority of the appropriate plenipotentiary representatives of the Russian Socialist Soviet Federal Republic.

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families, together with all of their countless art treasures, were declared the property of the people. In mid-July, just several days before the royal family was shot, the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) announced the confiscation and nationalisation of the property of the deposed Emperor of Russia and members of the imperial house.

This was followed by the abolition of private property rights in real estate in towns and cities.

Nationalisation, which was carried through successfully, and most importantly, in an extremely short period of time, allowed the state to concentrate in its own hands wealth on a scale which the Bolsheviks could never have imagined. The Russian Empire may have been regarded as the "backyard" of Europe as far as politics was concerned, but the Russian aristocrats were unrivalled when it came to surrounding themselves with luxury.

In Petrograd and its suburban palaces the experts from the Art Historical Commission were dealing in general with articles of museum quality. The situation was quite different during the period of "mass nationalisation": the warehouses and depositories of both



Checking documents during the days immediately following the declaration of the "red terror" in September 1918
Photograph. Private collection, Moscow



Moscow streets on 25 October 1917
Photograph. Private collection, Moscow

On the Registration, Inventorisation and Protection of Works of Art and Antiques

1. Carry out the first state registration of all monumental and material works of art and antiques both in the form of entire collections and of separate articles, no matter in whose possession they may happen to be ...
5. Monumental works of art, collections and individual articles which have been inventorised may be compulsorily expropriated or transferred for keeping to the authority of the state security agencies if their safe keeping is threatened as a result of negligent treatment by their owners or because their owners are unable to take the necessary measures to protect them, or if the owners fail to observe the regulations for keeping them ...
8. The owners of monumental works of art, collections or individual articles of art and antiques (private individuals, associations and institutions) are obliged within one month from the date of publication of the present decree to submit general information on the works of art and antiques belonging to them and also complete listings to the Commission for the Protection and Registration in Petrograd and Moscow and in the provinces to the departments of people's enlightenment of the regional soviets of deputies ...
11. Those guilty of failing to observe the provisions of this decree shall bear responsibility in accordance with the full severity of the laws of the revolution, up to and including the confiscation of all their property and imprisonment ...

RGALI, SPb f. 36, op. 1, d. 227

Russian capitals were flooded with items of varied quality, from historical relics to banal mass-produced goods, and it became necessary to set up two funds with different contents – the “museum fund”⁶ and the “state fund.”

The Bolshevik idea of eliminating the non-proletarian estates of society applied to the aristocracy, the merchant class, the clergy and the intelligentsia. One form in which it was expressed was the mass nationalisation of private property. But expropriating a palace or factory was easier than confiscating a picture or an icon, possession of which was still the inalienable right of every citizen. From the palaces, estates and private mansions abandoned by their former owners,

the authorities turned their attention to the contents of the trunks and boxes of ordinary Soviet citizens. Nationalisation had entered its next phase.

With the members of the more well-off strata of society leaving the country *en masse*, the authorities were faced with the task of preventing “the property of the people” from being taken abroad. In the spring of 1919 a decree was issued entitled “On the Prohibition of the Export and Sale Abroad of Items of Special Artistic and Historical Value.” Far more important, however, for the government’s subsequent actions was the decree “On the Registration, Inventorisation and Protection of Works of Art and Antiques.” From now on, everything owned by every inhabitant of Soviet Russia came under total control, justified by the noble purpose of “acquainting the broad masses of the population as fully as possible with the treasures of art and antiquity.”⁷

From that moment on, all information about works of art owned by individuals began to be concentrated in the Museum Department of *Narkompros*, which was headed by Natalya Trotskaya, the wife of the revolution’s “second man,” Leon Trotsky. This was also the time when the organisation known as the National (subsequently “State”) Museum Fund first made its appearance.

The Museum Department of *Narkompros* was granted unlimited authority: if it so wished, any item from any museum collection could now be confiscated without hindrance. This attitude to the museums reflected in a remarkably accurate manner the mood of radically-minded cultural activists. With the “world revolution” expected in the near future, the sale of a dozen paintings by Rembrandt seemed a mere trifle in comparison with the great goals set by the epoch itself. Rembrandt would not become less valuable “if he hangs somewhere in Europe, but this step will allow us to build socialism in a brief period of time” declared one of the participants in a museum conference held in Petrograd in 1920. He was sure that after the world revolution “all our things will be returned to us.”⁸ “The protection of antiquity, of the relics of our forefathers, is the protection of capital, and these Diamonds, Rembrandts, Raphaels, Tapestries and rare historical stamps are that same capital, which concentrates within itself the colossal energy of the masses of the proletariat ... They will say to us: what will we do if we lose our valuable collections – they are the only means we have for verifying and deepening our knowledge and consciousness! We shall answer: why should we collect and preserve the meters of the past, when we have so many of them in the future?” exclaimed Pyotr Miturich⁹. His sentiments were echoed by Kazimir Malevich: “Our business is constantly to push on towards the new. We cannot live in museums. Our path lies in space, not in the suitcase of

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It was decided, following an idea proposed by Igor Grabar, to include in the reserves of the Museum Fund not only expropriated valuables, but also existing museums and their contents, as “material for regrouping.” OPI, GIM, f. 54, d. 17, l. 19.

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The occasion for the promulgation of this decree was the expropriation from Princess S.A. Mescherskaya of paintings by the Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli.

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Art of the Commune. A publication of the Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, Petrograd, 12 January 1919.

9

Ibid.

On the Expropriation of Noble Metals, Money and Various Valuables

1. Recognise as subject to confiscation ... the following valuables without regard to the number thereof:
 - a) platinum, gold and silver coins;
 - b) gold and platinum in ingots and in unrefined form;
 - c) interest-bearing and dividend-bearing securities, except those which under the terms of special decrees have been approved for circulation on the same terms as banknotes;
 - d) cash in the form of banknotes in cases where a people's court recognises that they were acquired for purposes of speculation.
2. Recognise as subject to confiscation ... articles made of noble metals, with the exception of silver, in cases where their quantity exceeds the norms as stated hereunder permitted for keeping by private individuals for purposes of personal consumption and domestic use:
 - a) gold and platinum articles with a total weight exceeding 18 zolotniks per individual;
 - b) articles made of silver with a total weight exceeding three pounds per individual;
 - c) diamonds and other precious stones exceeding three carats in total and pearls exceeding 5 zolotniks per individual.
3. All sums of money kept by individuals in the form of cash with a total value exceeding twenty times the minimum rate of tariff in the area concerned for a single individual (without regard to the denominations of the notes), shall be subject to arrest and compulsory deposition in the current accounts of the owners in the state savings banks.
4. A deed of arrest shall be drawn up concerning all cases of items, valuables and money discovered in accordance with the provisions of the present decree (Articles 1, 2 and 3), in which shall be entered a detailed inventory of all that has been discovered, and in the case of banknotes the sum of money shall be indicated as well as the denominations of the notes, and in the case of noble metals and precious stones their weight ... Confiscated items shall be transferred within three days from the date of the inventory to the nearest office of the People's Commissariat of Finance, and in the capital to the State Valuables Depository.

05.10.1918

the obsolete... If we do not have collections, it will be all the easier to be borne away on the whirlwind of life.”¹⁰

In the minds of Soviet state functionaries this fundamentally artistic idea of abandoning the old reactionary art began gradually to be transformed into a practical goal.¹¹

Meanwhile the rate of nationalisation grew faster and faster. The third post-revolutionary year, 1920, proved especially fruitful. It was inaugurated by the founding of the State Valuables Depository (*Gokhran*) of the RSFSR, to which Soviet institutions and officials undertook to transfer in the space of three months all the valuables “in their keeping, under their superintendance, undergoing alteration or inventorisation” which consisted “of gold, platinum or silver in ingots or articles made of them, diamonds, coloured precious stones and pearls.” The only exceptions were items of value located in museums and scientific institutions or “transferred to the use of religious communities” (these were simply inventorised by *Gokhran*).¹²

The establishment of *Gokhran* was a new and significant step in the process of gathering more valuables and concentrating them in the hands of the state. Now any item that had found its way into the store-rooms of the depository could at any moment be transformed into scrap, sold or given away and, moreover, without any approval from *Narkompros*. The harshness of these measures was not difficult to explain. By the spring of 1920, despite the successes of the Civil War, the position of the Soviet authorities had been seriously undermined. War Communism, which put into practice the ideas of the Marxist utopia – the abolition of property, of money, of the bourgeois family and other relics of the past – could not possibly survive much longer. The onset of the “world revolution” was being postponed, and it was obvious that no support could be expected from the proletarians of the world. By a cruel irony of history, the Soviets could only survive among the ruins with the help of the international bourgeoisie, and for that they required a lot of gold – merely restoring the system of railway transport cost at least three hundred million gold roubles.

New decrees on confiscation were promulgated one after another: “On Requisitions and Confiscations,” “On the Expropriation of Noble Metals, Money and Various Valuables,” “On the Confiscation and Requisitioning of the Property of Individuals in Areas Liberated from the Enemy,” “On the Confiscation of all the Goods and Chattels of Citizens who have Fled from the Republic or Remain in Hiding Until the Present Time”.

A commission of experts headed by Alexei Peshkov (Maxim Gorky figured in all of its documents under his real name) had been at work in Petrograd from as early as the winter of 1919. Its assignment was to gather and evaluate the most various kinds of items possessing artistic value, from furniture to paintings, and the final goal was to send them abroad to be sold. This was why Gorky insistently demanded the promulgation of a decree on the confiscation of the property of emigrants and other individuals classed with them; the passing

Maxim Gorky (fourth from the right) in a group of senior staff at the Central House of Culture; in the front row from left to right – F. Kon, A.S. Bubnov, K.E. Voroshilov, I.S. Unshlicht Photograph 1930, RGAKFD



of such a decree left the Soviet dealers free to operate openly on the European antiques market. The property of all of those who had naively supposed they were only leaving Russia for a short while was also transformed into state property, which could henceforth be disposed of in any way entirely without restriction. “Gorky’s commission” attempted to establish links with the biggest Western antique dealers. It was preparing to send its experts to Europe in order to ascertain prices and sound out the possibility of holding auctions of “items of artistic value which the Republic finds necessary to export to other countries.”¹³

In early March 1920 Lenin demanded the introduction of “especially urgent measures for expediting the sorting of valuables,” and so when the following autumn he received a letter from Gorky detailing the work of the commission, the reaction of the chairman of *Sovnarkom* was immediate: “I insist that this work be expedited as a matter of emergency and a draft decree submitted to *Sovnarkom* on Tuesday:

1) the sale of these items abroad must be decided as soon as possible;

2) an official reply must be required from *Narkompros* as to whether it objects (it is said to have *already* selected the pieces for our museums: I agree to give them [the museums] only the *strictly* necessary minimum);

3) a special commission consisting of experts and dealers must be sent abroad immediately, with promises of a good bonus for a rapid and profitable sale;

4) since I find the work is going excessively slowly ... I regard it as absolutely essential to reinforce the staff of the expert commission (Gorky indicates a figure of 200) and provide them with *rations* on the condition that they complete their work quickly.”¹⁴

Lenin’s directive met with no objections and the work on selling off Russian art treasures was taken up in earnest. *Narkompros* was in complete agreement with all of the government’s decisions and only requested that representatives of the Museum Department should take part in the assessments. The People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade (*Narkomvneshtorg*) had no objections either, and *Sovnarkom* recommended that it should rapidly establish in Moscow a commission similar to the one operating in Petrograd.

The initial development of the Antiques Export Fund coincided with the establishment of the State Museum Fund. Initially, before the Kremlin took any serious interest in the activities of the Museum Department’s representatives, their involvement was more than a mere formality, but as time passed, relations between the emissaries of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade and the *Narkompros* staff became more and more strained. Lenin’s resolution on giving the museums “only the strictly necessary minimum” was rigorously applied, and neither Lunacharsky’s resourcefulness nor Madam Trotskaya’s family connections were of any avail.

Although the Antiques Export Fund, of which the authorities had such high hopes, was

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Kazimir Malevich. “On the Museum.” – in *Art of the Commune*, 23 February 1919. In avant-garde artistic circles slogans of this type possessed symbolic rather than practical meaning. In fact, cases are known in which left-wing artists were involved in preserving works which had been nationalised. “Like Koschei the deathless, Moscow has been gathering together treasure for many years ... And we shall rise, organise a museum, organise Moscow, divide out the treasure hoards among the towns, organise museums there,” Malevich wrote in the newspaper *Anarchy* (quoted from Kazimir Malevich. *Collected Works in Five Volumes*. Vol. 1. Moscow, 1995, pp. 67–68).

11

The trade in works of art had never been an item of revenue for Russia. There is only one well-known sale, which was more of a rash act committed by the Emperor Nicholas I on the eve of the Crimean War than a serious commercial undertaking: in 1854 the monarch sanctioned the sale of pictures from the Hermitage. He justified his action by the idea of purging the collection and removing second-rate works from the museum. One thousand two hundred and nineteen canvases were dumped on the market. The net revenue from the sale amounted to only sixteen thousand five hundred roubles.

12

Decrees of Soviet Power. Vol. VII. Moscow, 1974, pp. 193–194.

13

Maxim Gorky wrote to *Sovnarkom* about this. His letter is dated October 1920. See: *Lenin and Gorky. Letters, Reminiscences, Documents*. Moscow, 1961, pp. 164–165.

14

V.I. Lenin. *Complete Collected Works*. Vol. 51, pp. 153–154.



The first People's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky remained in his post until 1929, although in later years his influence on cultural policy was purely nominal. Photograph, 1920s

already growing not by the day, but by the hour, the desire to expand it further knew no limits. In late January 1921, "in order to develop a state reserve of articles of artistic value, luxury items and antiques which may serve as export items" the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade was granted the right to set up Expert Commissions in the regions. A week later *Sovnarkom* decreed the establishment of a State Fund of Valuables for Foreign Trade¹⁵ and literally the next day Special Commissions for the Supervision of Exports began operating at the customs in Moscow and Petrograd.

Maria Andreeva was dispatched to Berlin to organise the sales of antiques. Until recently an actress at the Moscow Arts Theatre and a devoted supporter of the Bolsheviks for many years, she was first appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Sale of Items of Artistic Value, and subsequently Commissar of the Expert Commission.

However, the contents of the abandoned flats and pawnshops and closed antique shops which made up the commission's reserves could not satisfy the demand for antiques, which grew incessantly. Before long a *Narkomvneshtorg* commission began acquiring antiques and items of artistic value from the general public for sale abroad. Following his success in Petrograd, Gorky was nominally appointed chairman of the commission, but in practice it was headed by his deputy, Mstislav F. Khodasevich.¹⁶ Of course, the items that were sold abroad represented only a small part of the works of art that were confiscated, but the important aspect of this case is the actual precedent set by *Narkomvneshtorg*, and although the Museum Department's representatives continued to participate in the selection of works, the attempts to sideline them grew ever more insistent.

Even so, if we consider the full scale of the damage which the actions of the Bolsheviks inflicted on the historical and cultural heritage of Russia, we can state with absolute certainty that real catastrophe only struck in the spring of 1922. None of the earlier nationalisations, requisitions and sales can bear any comparison with that orgy of theft and cruelty which used to be referred to in Soviet history as "the expropriation of church property." The true scale of this tragedy is only beginning to be understood today.¹⁷ The famine which had afflicted areas of Russia with a population of more than twenty million provided the authorities with the grounds for pillaging the Russian Orthodox Church, and thus effectively settling accounts with her.

On the Establishment of the State Fund of Valuables for Foreign Trade

1. For purposes of the development of a state reserve of valuable items of art, luxury items and antiques which may serve as export items, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade is hereby granted the right to establish in those places in which it considers it necessary expert commissions acting on the basis of decrees approved by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade by agreement with the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment and the People's Commissariat of Finance.
2. The expert commissions shall be responsible for the selection, classification, evaluation and inventurisation of luxury items which may serve as export items. The membership of the expert commissions shall include representatives of the appropriate departments of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Glavmuzei* and Fine Arts).
3. All emptyings of warehouses, shops and depositories of any kind whatsoever where the items indicated might be discovered shall be carried out in places where expert commissions have been set up and only on the compulsory condition that the local expert commission is informed in advance of the the proposed emptying.
4. All institutions and individuals with authority over warehouses, shops, premises and in general depositories of any kind whatsoever, with the exception of museums of the Republic and depositories of the state museum fund coming under the authority of *Glavmuzei*, are obliged to allow the representatives of a commission access without hindrance for the viewing, selection and inventurisation of all items which come within the jurisdiction of the commission.
5. The People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade is hereby granted the right to expropriate and keep for purposes of foreign trade items selected by the commission.

07.02.1921

¹⁵ On this matter, see Lenin's letter to Deputy People's Commissars for Foreign Trade and Enlightenment Andrei Lezhava and Mikhail Pokrovsky in: V.I. Lenin, op. cit., p. 312.

¹⁶ Minutes of the commission. See: RGAE, f. 413, op. 3, d. 884.

¹⁷ Many documents were not published in full until the 1990s. See: Kremlin Archives.

¹⁸ Quoted from: L. Regelson. *The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917–1945*. Paris, 1977, p. 228.



Sorting through expropriated church valuables at *Gokhran*
Photograph, 1921–1922. RGAKFD

Lenin at the installation of a memorial plaque
“To the memory of those who fell in the struggle for
peace and the brotherhood of peoples”
on the Spassky Tower of the Kremlin
Photograph, 1918. Private collection, Moscow

Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia
from 1917 to 1925
Photograph. Private collection, Moscow

The treasures of the church had long been an object of interest to the Bolsheviks. As early as January 1918, under the terms of the decree “On the Separation of Church and State”, the church’s property was declared “the property of the people.” As a proclamation from the Bolsheviks to the people of Moscow expressed it: “The church possessed not only human souls, but also great capital ... The people’s commissars have now taken all of this away from the churchmen and returned it to the people. Let the church property belong to those who created it ... What the people gave, it has now taken away.”¹⁸

Soon after the government moved to Moscow work began on an inventory of the property of all the monasteries and cathedrals in the Kremlin. After Moscow’s sacred places the Bolsheviks turned their gaze to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity which was founded in the 14th century by St. Sergius of Radonezh and renamed the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius in 1744. It took the commission which was dispatched to the nearby village of Sergiev Posad a whole year to compile an inventory of all the monastery’s property. When it became clear what incalculable wealth the monastery possessed, *Sovnarkom* ordered it to be closed. This was a terrible blow to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarch Tikhon attempted to obtain a meeting with Lenin, but he was refused an audience. Five months later



A religious procession on Red Square
20 May 1918.
Photograph, RGAKFD

Sovnarkom adopted a decree prepared by *Narkompros* under which the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius was transformed into a museum.¹⁹ This was followed by a decree “On the Confiscation of the Property of Monasteries and Churches Which is of Museum Quality,” and the appointment by *Sovnarkom* of Leon Trotsky as Special Commissioner for the Registration and Concentration of Valuables.

This anti-church campaign was conducted under the guise of efforts to help the hungry and was implemented with astonishing cruelty. The state achieved the result which it required only at the cost of incredible sacrifices.²⁰ Although the confiscation of the church’s valuables was carried out under the supervision of officials of *Glavmuzei* (the Central Museums Authority), who set aside the most valuable pieces and dispatched the remainder to be scrapped, the scope of their authority was increasingly curtailed with every month that passed, and relations between the Central Commission for the Confiscation of Church Property and *Glavmuzei* became strained. “Who decides whether items are of museum quality or historical significance? In its resolution *Glavmuzei*’s interpretation of the situation is that *Glavmuzei*’s expert assessment is the final assessment. Naturally, we simply can not allow this,” Trotsky wrote. “If an agreement is not reached on the spot, the item goes to *Gokhran*. The protest concerning it is forwarded to *Glavmuzei* and a second assessment can be held in the centre at *Glavmuzei*’s request ... Undoubtedly, among the archaeologists who work in *Glavmuzei*, simply by virtue of their profession there are quite a number of individuals with extremely close connections in church circles who harbour counter-revolutionary attitudes and are attempting to frustrate the work on the expropriation of valuables. Such tendencies must be rigorously rebuffed.”²¹

For *Glavmuzei* – an “inconvenient department” in the eyes of the authorities – the work on filling *Gokhran*’s coffers was in a sense a way of rehabilitating itself. In a summary of the years 1917–1923, the Museum Department reported as follows:

“As a result of the *Sovnarkom* resolution the Museum Department of the People’s

19

The *Narkompros* commission, specially established in 1922, was set the task of identifying all the property and buildings, working out the regulations for their protection and “compiling an inventory of all property which has artistic and archaeological value, as well as a general list of all the Monastery’s property” within the space of one month.

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This is confirmed by the summary report of the Central Committee for Combating the Consequences of the Famine of the All Russian Executive Committee. See: Kremlin Archives, Vol. 1, pp. 183–184.

21

Letter from Leon Trotsky to member of the Bureau of the Central Commission for the Expropriation of Church Valuables, T.V. Saprionov, Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Mikhail Kalinin, and the head of *Glavmuzei* at *Narkompros*, Natalya Trotskaya, with the stamp “top secret” and dated 22 March 1922 (Kremlin Archives, Vol. 2, pp. 90–91). A group of *Glavmuzei* staff were put on trial for resisting the expropriation of church valuables. See: Central Archive of the Federal Security Services. Special Archive, d. 1780.



Leon Trotsky (right) was appointed *Sovnarkom's* Special Commissioner for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables in 1922
 Photograph, early 1920s
 Private collection, Moscow

Commissariat of Enlightenment provided valuables from palaces and museums (gold, silver, diamonds and precious stones) which were not of museum quality and were located in institutions under the jurisdiction of the Museum Department, as follows:

- tsarist regalia and crown diamonds from the Armoury worth 750,000,000 gold roubles;
- from the Winter Palace more than 3,000 carats of diamonds, 31/2 poods of gold, 300 poods of silver, 21 pounds of platinum;
- from the Holy Trinity Monastery - 500 diamonds, 150 poods of silver;
- from the Solovetsky Monastery - 384 diamonds, about 10 pounds of gold, 84 poods of silver;
- from the Historical Museum about 4 pounds of gold, 116 p[oods] of silver;
- from the Rumyantsev Museum 366 silver items and from the Armoury 40 p[oods] of gold and silver scrap.”²²

However, the astronomical figures – hundreds of poods, thousands of carats, millions of roubles – in which the success of the anti-church crusade was expressed seemed inadequate to the state authorities. As the confiscations of church property drew to a close *Sovnarkom* decided to set up a commission “for the expropriation” of items of high material value – this time from the museums. If any disputes should arise concerning items confiscated from the repositories of museums and gathered together at *Gokhran*, the commission would be responsible for making the final decision.²³

This act effectively summed up the achievement of the “redivision of valuables.” For all the declarations about preserving the historical and cultural heritage, in the fifth year of Soviet power the greatest state collections of Russia, from the Hermitage, the Armoury, the Russian, Rumyantsev and Historical Museums to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius, all became “subject to expropriations.” This list came as such a shock to museum workers (who were for the most part representatives of the old regime), that for the first time they took the risk of entering into negotiations with the government. It was decided to

²²
 Summary Report of the Museum Department for 1917–1923.
 GARF, f.A-2307, op.3, d. 12, l. 35–36.

²³
 RTsKhIDNI, f. 5, op.1, d. 341, l. 12.



Moscovites at the Church of St. George on Mokhovaya Street during the expropriation of church valuables
Photograph, 1922. RGAKFD

²⁴
The report from the delegation was accepted in July 1922 by the deputy business manager of *Sovnarkom*, S.I. Smolyaninov, who passed it on to Alexei Rykov with the following comments: "I personally believe that they are absolutely right, and we will not be able to clear a sufficient amount of money to provide even minimally for our financial burden. The experience of sales of church valuables must be taken into account, although selling valuable museum items is significantly easier, since they are concentrated in a small number of places and will not be concealed, nonetheless I do not think we can manage in this way to raise sums which are in any way significant. The sale of art treasures from museums is an extreme measure, which in my view, bearing in mind the possible results, is not absolutely essential. When you have thought about the problem and acquainted yourself with the materials, I request you to act so as to prevent the sale of these valuables."

Quoted from *Conquistadors*, p. 203.

²⁵
RTsKhIDNI, f. 1, d. 341, l. 15. The commission was composed of Georgy Bazilievich as Trotsky's representative, F. Weis from *Gokhran*, Igor Grabar from *Narkompros* and the director of the Hermitage, Sergei Troitskiy.

²⁶
Kremlin Archives, Vol. 2, p. 94.

²⁷
"Minute No. 9 of the meeting of the Commission for the Sale of Valuables" of 23 March 1922. Kremlin Archives, Vol. 2, p. 95.

arrange an extraordinary museum conference and invite the deputy chairman of *Sovnarkom*, Alexei Rykov, to participate. However, the highly-placed Soviet functionary ignored the conference and the organising committee was obliged to limit itself to sending him a report.²⁴

And so, despite the feeble protests of the museums, the commission "for expropriation" was set up.²⁵ Its function was to be the selection of items which "are not of museum quality." One month of intensive work in 1922 left the collections of the very richest museums seriously depleted.

Church plate which by some miracle had escaped being melted down soon began appearing on the antique markets of Europe. The tragic paradox of Soviet history was expressed in the fact that during those years being sold abroad offered the only avenue to salvation for vast numbers of priceless relics. When the Museum Department attempted with every means at

its disposal to save the items that found their way to *Gokhran* from being scrapped, it was not saving them for its own museums, but for sale abroad. In March 1922 Leon Trotsky began demanding that expropriated valuables should be sold as rapidly as possible:

"1. For us it is more important to receive 50 million for a certain weight of valuables in 1922–23 than to hope to receive 75 mil[lion] in 1923–24.

2. The onset of the proletarian revolution in Europe, in just one of the large countries, will shut off the market in valuables completely: the bourgeoisie will begin exporting and selling, the workers will begin confiscating, and so on and so forth.

The conclusion: we must make haste in the highest degree."²⁶

It may be thanks to Trotsky that members of the government first began talking about setting up a special "syndicate for selling valuables" which could be granted monopoly rights to handle sales "provided the interests of the republic are assured in full."²⁷ It must be assumed that it was this idea which was ultimately realised in the establishment in 1925 of the "State Import and Export Trading Office of *Gostorg* of the RSFSR" for the purchase and sale of antiques – the woefully infamous *Antikvariat*. But although the control established over all valuable museum exhibits seemed already absolute, it was still considered inadequate.

In March 1923 the All-Union Central Executive Committee and *Sovnarkom* adopted a joint decree "On the Re-Registration of Collections and Individual Works of Art and Antiques Currently Registered with *Glavnauka* and the Museum Department of *Narkompros*." This directive provided an opportunity for one more purge of the national museum holdings to the benefit of *Gokhran*. It was admirably complemented by a decree published in October of the same year: "On the Registration and Inventorisation and Protection of Works of Art and Antiques in the Possession of Private Individuals and Institutions".

The final barriers preventing the authorities from realising their plans to sell off Russia's cultural treasures had been removed.



Sorting through church valuables
 Photograph, 1921
 RGAKFD

A group of members of the commission
 for reporting on the work of
Narkomvneshtorg during the period
 when it was headed by Leonid B.
 Krasin. Seated in the second row –
 Andrei M. Lezhava (second from left),
 Alexander D. Tsiurupa, M.I. Frumkin
 Moscow, Photograph, 1925
 RGAKFD



НОМЕНКЛАТУРА-СПЕЦИФИКАЦИЯ

ПО ЭКСПОРТНЫМ ТОВАРАМ

Н. К. В.

69v1

— 38 —

№ по бухгалтерской номенкл.	Название: а) Главных групп товаров. б) Бухгалтерской номенклатуры. в) С о р т.				
	I. Лесные товары.				
1	Бревна: а) для распиловки на русск. заводе б) пиловочные для экспорта: 1) сосновые 2) еловые в) подтоварник	814	Деревян. изделия хохломской окраски: а) ложки б) чашки в) ковши, солонки	штука.	— 05 — 50 —
2	Телеграфные столбы	815	Игрушки (токарные и разные): а) песочные приборы б) яйца в) катки г) матрешки д) бирюльки е) полирован. изделия ж) токарная мелочь з) звери и птицы и) разные группы к) лавры л) разная мелочь м) кузнецы н) куклы		— 60 1 — 20 — 50 — 50 1 — 10 — 50 3 — 50 1 — — 20 — 06 5 —
3	Мачтовый лес				
4	Кряжи: а) ольховые б) липовые в) березовые г) дубовые д) ясневые е) кленовые ж) каштановые з) буковые п) др. пород	816	Ковры восточные		140 —
5	Осина для спичечн. соломки	817	" русские разные	кр. арш.	15 —
6	Пропсы	818	Кино-картины: а) в негативах б) в позитивах	1 метр.	2 — — 50
7	Балансы				
8	Ценные породы леса: а) красное дерево б) кавказская пальма в) самшит г) бакаут д) орехов. наплыв е) черешня ж) груша з) бук и) тис к) кизилов. палки	901	X. Художественные ценности. Картины и живописные произведения. а) картины русской школы. б) акварели и рисунки русской школы. в) картины иностранной школы. г) акварели и рисунки иностранной школы. д) миниатюры.		
		902	Эстампы. а) гравюра на дереве, меди и стали б) литографии и фотомеханические произведения.		
		903	Керамические изделия. 1) Саксонский. 2) Вена и Берлин. 3) Французский. 4) Иностранный вообще. 5) Бывш. Импер. Зав.		

- 6) Гарднера.
 - 7) Попова.
 - 8) Других русских фирм.
 - 9) Без марочный.
 - 10) Восточный.
 - 11) Майолика.
 - 12) Терракотовые изделия и глиняные.
904. Мебель и изделия из дерева.
- а) Гарнитуры, столы, стулья, шкафы и витрины.
 - б) Часы и хрупкие предметы отделанные деревом.
905. Хрусталь и стекло.
- а) Хрусталь и стекло.
 - б) Тоже оправленное в серебро и др. металлы.
906. Бронза, медь и др. металлические изделия.
- а) Фигуры, барельефы, медали и монеты.
 - б) Часы.
 - в) Разные вещи, чернильницы, подставки для часов, блюда и проч.
907. Ювелирные изделия.
- а) Изделия из золота и серебра.
 - б) Ордена, знаки отличия, медали и монеты из драгоценных металлов.
 - в) Разные вещи, монтированные драгоценными металлами и камнями.
908. Кружева и ткани.
- а) кружева.
 - б) ткани, парча, платки, шалигобелены и др.
 - в) бисерные вышивки.
909. Оружие и воинские доспехи.
- а) холодное оружие: сабли, шпаги, рапиры, кинжалы, кортики.
 - б) огнестрельное оружие.
 - в) доспехи: латы, кольчуги, шлемы и конские уборы.
910. Книги и рукописи.
- а) рукописи отдельные и архивы.
 - б) книги русские и иностранные.
911. Изделия из камня.
- а) мрамор-гранит (скульптура, барельефы, постаменты).
 - б) прочие камни (Уральские и проч.).
912. Археологические древности.
913. Иконы и образа.

914. Восточный отдел.
- а) мебель.
 - б) клуазоне (бронза и др. изд. из металла).
 - в) разные вещи включая финифть восточн.
915. Эротические коллекции.
- а) мебель.
 - б) бронза.
 - в) картины и рисунки.
 - г) бивутри и разные предметы.
916. Филателистические запасы.
- а) марки советские изъяты из обращения.
 - б) " царские " " "
 - в) " деникинск. " " "
 - г) " украинские " " "
917. Разные вещи.
- а) Разная кость, раковины, резьба по дереву, ларцы.
 - б) предметы домашней утвари русск. финифтив и эмали.

The export goods specifications list of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade included nine hundred and seventeen items. Beside such traditional Russian exports as timber, furs, caviar, leather and handicrafts it had a unusual new section, "Items of artistic value" (GARF, f. A-2307, op. 3, d. 13)

The Russian Court had long been considered one of the richest in Europe. Court ceremonial customarily required that the emperor and his retinue sport certain badges of rank taking the form of quite incredible costumes of almost oriental splendour, while foreign visitors were astounded at the abundance of jewels in which the court decked itself. In the 18th century a diamond workshop employing an entire brigade of famous foreign jewellers was established to meet the requirements of the court. In addition to the alterations that had to be made to ceremonial crowns, nuptial crowns, regalia and jewellery as fashions changed, the court craftsmen produced an immense number of articles which were used to decorate dress uniforms or to expand the special imperial gift fund.

From the beginning of the 18th century the so-called “crown jewels” had been the property of the state. The earliest references to them are to be found in documents concerning the organisation of the Collegium of the Bedchamber by Peter the Great in 1719. Paragraph 20 of the Regulations “Concerning items belonging to the state” listed all of the regalia which existed at the time and specified the manner in which they were to be kept.¹ In later times, in addition to the sceptre, orb and other attributes of the tsar’s authority, state ownership was extended to include “secular” items of jewellery which court etiquette decreed could only be worn by the empress. These valuables were kept separately in a special storage chamber. As the property of the state, these articles subsequently became the Chamber Department, which was one of the divisions of the Cabinet of His Imperial Highness.

With each new reign the charter and the staff of the Chamber Department underwent changes and the actual location of the depository in the apartments of the Winter Palace was also changed. Under Catherine the Great the formal bedchamber was altered to become the Diamond Chamber, also known simply as the Diamond Room. As one contemporary wrote, it was considered to be “the very richest of jewellery cabinets. The state regalia stand there on a table under a large crystal cover, through which everything is quite clearly visible... Around the walls of this room there are several cupboards with glass panels containing a multitude of decorations made of diamonds and other precious stones; from these the monarchy selects what it requires for the gifts which it presents.”² However, access to the tsarist jewels was closed even to those closest to the empress, not to mention the rank-and-file members of the royal retinue. “All of this is admired by no one but the mice and myself,” Catherine the Great wrote ironically about the collection of treasures in a letter to her European agent and constant correspondent Baron Melchior Grimm.

The interest in the applied arts that developed in the mid-19th century brought an increase in the number of people who wished to see the treasures of the court. In April 1850 tickets were produced for visits to the Jewellery Gallery erected in 1848, which included some of the items from the Diamond Room. The tickets were valid “for one occasion only”, but they admitted “not one person, but entire families and parties.”

Hidden away from curious eyes, the constantly expanding collection of treasures was not at first subjected to scholarly description. All that was done was to keep an inventory, in which all the various contributions to the Diamond Chamber were entered from 1789. The first catalogue of the Jewellery Gallery, including attempts to attribute the articles and establish their history, was compiled in 1849 when the treasures were moved to the newly constructed Hermitage.

In 1913 the St. Petersburg jeweller Agafon Fabergé, a great connoisseur of precious stones and the son of the famous Karl Fabergé, suggested compiling a new catalogue of the crown jewels for the Chamber Department. Nicholas II gave his consent to the proposal. By the summer of 1914 the Order of St. Andrew, the orb and the sceptre had been described. It was to be the turn of the crowns next. But the very day after Russia’s entry into the First World War the head of the Chamber Department ordered the work to be halted and the jewels to be sent under guard to Moscow. Everything was done in such great haste that not even the most approximate inventory was made of the contents of the trunks.



¹ “Items belonging to the state, namely: the orb of state, the crown, the sceptre, the key and the sword are kept in the tsar’s rentery [treasury] in a large trunk secured by three locks to ensure their safekeeping, to which there belong three keys held one apiece by the President of the Bed-Chamber, one Counsellor of the Bed-Chamber and the tsar’s rentmaster, and when any festive act does take place, then the President, together with the two Counsellors of the Bed-Chamber do go to the rentery and unlock this trunk and extract such things as are appropriate for the state and dispatch them with two Chamber Counsellors to the court of the tsar. And when the festivities are over they do order them to be taken back to the rentery for keeping.” Quoted from: D.V. Yuferov. *A History of the Crown Diamonds* – in: *The Diamond Fund of the USSR*. People’s Commissariat of Finance of the USSR, third edition, Moscow 1925, p. 15.

² Quoted from: O.G. Kostiuk: *The Jewellery Collection in the First Half of the 19th Century* – in: *A history of the Hermitage and its Collections*. A collection of scholarly articles, Leningrad, 1989, pp. 49–59.



The Russian crown jewels from the famous Diamond Room on show in the premises of *Gokhran* in Moscow. This photograph was the frontispiece in the first volume of the album *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones*. The overall management of the four-volume publication was the responsibility of the Currency Office of the People's Commissariat of Finance of the USSR.

Of the eighteen original diadems and crowns the Diamond Fund today only contains two crowns and two diadems which once belonged to the house of Romanov.

Photograph, 1923

3

They included two trunks of crown jewels which were not numbered: Nos. 4 and 5 contained family registers and documents; No. 9 contained items from the store-room of the Chamber Department or belonging to the grand duchesses; Nos. 12, 13 and 14 contained items belonging to the ladies of the bed-chamber and the document "ark."

Moscow Kremlin Museum Preserve, Department of Manuscript, Printed and Graphic Funds, f. 20, inventory of 1917, d. 4, l. 138.

The eight trunks that arrived from the Winter Palace packed with the crown jewels were received on 24 July 1914 by the keeper of the Armoury Vladimir Trutovsky³ and placed in the Armoury together with other crates containing valuables evacuated from the Chamber Department which had come into the possession of the Moscow Palace Administration. Following the emperor's abdication in March 1917, responsibility for valuable jewels belonging to the state was taken up by the Provisional Government, unaware that its solicitous concern for the treasure sent to Moscow would render an invaluable service to the Bolsheviks. All that the *Narkompros* commissions for the conservation of museums and artistic valuables had to do was simply check the contents of the trunks and crates.

In November 1917 the senior curator at the Hermitage, Yakov I. Smirnov, who was sent to Moscow to check that the crown jewels were all in place, telegraphed Smolny on his way home: "Nothing is missing." The palace property which was still in Petrograd was immediately packed up and dispatched to Moscow. Operations "for the gathering together in the Kremlin of valuables from the palaces of Petrograd" were managed by the civil commissar of the Kremlin Pavel Malinovsky, whom his colleagues described as a man with an iron grasp of his work, endowed with ebullient energy and "proletarian flair." The reason for the haste with which the valuables were evacuated lay not only in the anticipated move to Moscow of the Soviet government which was so concerned for the treasure's safety, but also in the Bolsheviks' desperate desire to be rid of everything that symbolised the brilliance and magnificence of the old, deposed regime.

4

On their departure for Tobolsk the members of the royal family took with them a large quantity of jewellery, which were later removed from their dead bodies and subsequently disappeared without trace.

5

The work in the Kremlin was substantially simplified by the fact that the head keeper of the Armoury, Vladimir Trutovsky, acting under the vigilant supervision of Pavel Malinovsky, who has already been mentioned, had earlier listed all the property located in the churches, cathedrals and palaces of the Kremlin, thereby effectively preparing a “handbook” for Trotsky’s commission.

6

The commission came to the conclusion that the regalia and crown jewels were national property and could not be sold or otherwise disposed of.

During the revolutionary years Agafon Fabergé was twice arrested and imprisoned. Following his release Trotsky twice invited the jeweller to come to Moscow and head the commission for the valuation of the jewels, regalia and crowns. It was not until Trotsky wrote a third, personal, letter in a friendly tone which was delivered by two red guards that Fabergé consented.

Thanks to the efforts of Malinovsky and his Petrograd colleagues by mid-November a large quantity of the most various property which previously belonged to the imperial family and the families of the grand dukes had been gathered together in the Kremlin Palace. Fortunately, all of the Romanovs’ personal possessions remained intact: since the abdication of Nicholas II the private residence of the last tsarist royal family, the Alexandrovsky Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, had been under the supervision of the Provisional Government. On the Bolsheviks’ orders, the store-rooms of the palace were first emptied of table silver and other items made of precious metals. Later, however, during the first days of March 1918, on instructions from the Deputy Commissar of Enlightenment, Yu. Flaxerman, table decorations of gold, silver and stone, Easter eggs by the firm of Fabergé and ingots cast, according to Romanov family tradition, from old silver shoulder-straps, all made the journey from the apartments of Nicholas II to the Winter Palace.

Four days before the tsarist royal family was murdered in Ekaterinburg a decree was promulgated “On the Confiscation of the Property of the Deposed Russian Emperor and Members of the Imperial House.” The executioners fulfilled the decree’s every last requirement: on 15 July, on the eve of their execution, almost all items of value were confiscated from Nicholas II, Alexandra Fedorovna, their children and their retainers.⁴ There was no need, of course, to “nationalise” the coronation regalia, attributes of authority, nuptial crowns, diadems and other treasures of the Romanovs that were now securely secreted in the Armoury. Under the laws of the Russian Empire they were already state property.

Once the treasures of the tsarist royal family were safe in the hands of the Bolsheviks, for a while they were forgotten. At the time the nationalisation of other imperial property and the confiscation of the property of the noble and merchant classes seemed to be more urgent.

Only after almost four years had elapsed, on 14 January 1922, did a specially created Commission for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables headed by Trotsky’s deputy, Georgy Bazilievich, set about the expert assessment and selection of valuables held

in the Armoury Chamber,⁵ including the crates which held the contents of the Diamond Room. “The work began at 5 minutes after 11 in the morning at a temperature of – 4 degrees C. The seals of *Sovnarkom*’s special commissioner and the Armoury on the doors were found to be intact.”⁶

“Moscow. The cold days of early April 1922. The national economy is only just gradually beginning to get going. After an exhausting journey from Petrograd I am in cold, frozen Moscow. Today in the Kremlin in the Armoury they will open the crates with the jewels which have lain for several years deep in the bowels of the Armoury, buried under thousands of crates packed with silver and gold, porcelain and crystal hastily evacuated in fear of a German invasion,” recalled academician Alexander Fersman, one of the most important members of the commission, who was present at the opening of two especially valuable trunks of royal regalia. “We gather in the only little room in the Armoury which is

On the establishment of the State Valuables Depository

1. In order to centralise the storage and inventorisation of all articles of value belonging to the Socialist Federal Soviet Republic which consist of gold, platinum and silver in ingots and articles made of them, diamonds, coloured precious stones and pearls, a State Valuables Depository of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (*Gokhran*) is hereby established at the Central Budget and Settlements Office in Moscow.
2. The State Valuables Depository is guided in its activity by special statutes and instructions issued by the People’s Commissariat of Finance in agreement with the Supreme Council of the National Economy, the People’s Commissars of Trade and Industry and the [agencies of] state control.
- 3.I. As of the promulgation of the present decree all Soviet institutions and officials are obliged within a period of three months to surrender to *Gokhran* all of the above-named valuables which are in their keeping, under their jurisdiction, undergoing alteration or listed in inventories.
- 3.II. All new valuables coming into the possession of institutions are to be handed over to *Gokhran* without delay. The surrender of valuables by institutions and individuals located outside Moscow is effected via the nearest cash offices of the People’s Commissariat of Finance ...
4. The following valuables are not subject to surrender to *Gokhran*:
 - a) those located in museums or scientific institutions;
 - b) those transferred to religious communities for use as items of worship;
 - c) valuables in the possession of the distributive agencies, the definition of valuables remaining in their possession being performed by the People’s Commissariat of Finance in agreement with the Supreme Council of the National Economy and the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade.
5. The valuables indicated in points a) and b) of article 4 are to be inventorised by *Gokhran*, for which purpose the institutions and communities where they are located are obliged within one month to submit a detailed inventory of them to the state depository.
6. For purposes of the goal stated in point 1 of the present decree *Gokhran* is granted the right to make use of: the estate land, store-rooms and buildings of the former Moscow Loan Treasury (Moscow, Tverskaya St., Nastasinsky Lane, House 3).

03.02.1921



The Communist Party cell of *Gokhran* in 1922. Fourth from the left in the second row is the head of *Gokhran*, Gromadsky; fourth from the right in the second row is the Deputy Special Commissioner for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables, Georgy Bazilievich.

heated: the *Sovnarkom* commissioner G.D. Bazilievich, the Rabkrin representative V.A. Nikol'sky, the curator of the Armoury M.S. Sergeev, the *Glavnauka* representative D.D. Ivanov, the Historical Museum's representative A.V. Oreshnikov. I am also included as a specialist on precious stones ... The keys jangle. In warm fur coats with upturned collars we walk through the frozen rooms of the Armoury. They bring in the crates. There are five of them. One of them is an iron crate, stoutly bound, with large wax seals. We inspect the seals, everything is intact. An experienced smith easily opens the miserable, uncomplicated lock without a key. Inside, hastily wrapped in tissue paper, lie the treasures of the Russian tsar. With hands turning to ice in the cold we lift out one gleaming semi-precious stone after another. There is no inventory anywhere and no particular order that can be seen. Evidently the stones, the necklaces, the diadems and brooches were packed away in haste at the command of the tsar, or perhaps even the tsarina, in the famous Diamond Storeroom of the Winter Palace and shipped to Moscow on an ordinary train without arousing anybody's curiosity."⁷

The most valuable of the trunks, made of leather with a crown on the lid, had to be broken open on 8 April at 25 minutes past 12 in the presence of Trotsky's deputy Georgy Bazilievich – not one of the keys brought from the Political Office would fit.⁸ It was like a scene from an adventure novel when the gleaming diamonds of the Great Crown and both Lesser Crowns, the Wedding Crown, the imperial orb and sceptre were revealed to the eyes of the gathered company. In addition to the regalia the trunk contained all of the crown jewels: seven chains, twenty three decorations (stars and crosses), twelve diadems, sixteen necklaces, including six composed of diamonds, fifty-six brooches, ten clasps, a hundred and five hair-pins, earrings, buttons, rings, bracelets, medallions, seven unset stones, nineteen gold snuff boxes and sixty gold bracelet charms.⁹

The conclusion of the experts was that the crown jewels included 25,300 carats of diamonds, 1,000 carats of emeralds, 1,700 carats of sapphires and 6,000 carats of pearls, as well

⁷ *Science and Life (Nauka i Zizn)*, 1975, No. 10, p. 36. The same occasion was described by the curator of the Armoury, Dmitry Ivanov: "The work of sorting was carried out in incredibly difficult conditions, at a temperature of about minus 5 degrees, with the ink constantly freezing despite ceaseless efforts to thaw it out on a brazier, working from morning to evening at an exceptionally rapid rate, more often than not sorting in a single day through several hundred items of the most varied quality: from the finest examples in the world to the most worthless, irrevocably determining their fate and significance in the space of a few moments and suffering over a long period of time in the most oppressive of forms the irksome yoke of *Gokhran's* extremely harsh pretensions."

⁸ These details are listed by Moisei Lazerson (Larsons) in his book.

⁹ Larsons, p. 61.





A viewing of the Russian crown jewels by a foreign delegation in the premises of *Gokhran* on Nastasinsky Lane. Fourth from the right is the director of the Armoury, Dmitry Ivanov. Photograph, 1923 Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford University

“In June 1923 all the jewels were taken out of their boxes and cases and laid out on a big table to be photographed. In the sunlight the diamonds sparkled and gleamed with incredible brilliance, creating a sight of incredible beauty. At that time the representatives of a French jewellery firm were in Moscow wishing to acquire diamonds, and since there was nothing ready for sale as yet, we decided to show them the crown jewels”, Moisei Lazerson recalled.

In the photograph: behind the Large Imperial Crown are a nuptial crown, now in the Hillwood Museum (No. 6) and a pearl diadem now owned by the dowager Countess Marlborough. Laid out on the table are thirteen Easter eggs from the firm of Fabergé: four eggs from the collection of the “Moscow Kremlin” Museum Preserve, including: *The Moscow Kremlin Egg*, 1906 (No. 2), *Egg with a Model of the Trans-Siberian Railway*, 1900 (No. 3), *Egg with a Model of the Yacht “Standard”*, 1909 (No. 8) and *Steel Egg with a Miniature on an Easel*, 1916 (No. 13). The rest of the Easter eggs on display here were sold: *Orange-Tree*, 1911 (No. 1) and *Egg for the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Coronation*, 1911 (No. 5), The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow; *Mosaic Egg*, 1914 (No. 7) is in the collection of Elizabeth II, Queen of England; *Winter Egg*, 1913 (No. 9) is in a private collection; *Pelican*, 1898 (No. 10) and *Revolving Miniatures Egg*, 1896 (No. 12) are in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; *Peacock Egg*, 1908 (No. 11) is in the Sandoz Foundation, Switzerland.





Gokhran employees in one of the depository rooms on Nastasinsky Lane, where the Russian crown jewels were displayed. Hanging on the walls are sketches for the first Soviet coins, which were minted from the metal of bells expropriated from the church, and items of copper church plate. On the right is the Saltykov silver chalice, below it is a box containing diamond dress jewellery. Photograph, 1923. RGAKFD

On 29 June 1921 the Labour and Defence Council passed a resolution recognising the urgent importance of the work of *Gokhran* and making it compulsory for all institutions and people's commissariats to comply with its demands and requests as a matter of priority within 24 hours. On 8 June 1921 the Labour and Defence Council issued the following decree:

"... 2) Propose that the People's Commissariat of Labour provide *Gokhran* with the necessary number of jewellers and diamond-workers who have been in charge of large firms... even if necessary by removing them from other departments, wherever they may be working, in accordance with the lists drawn up by the People's Commissariat of Labour jointly with the People's Commissariat of Finance and the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission... 4) Instruct the Moscow *Komgossor* in the shortest possible space of time to construct at *Gokhran* melting furnaces for gold and silver and to equip all the buildings in accordance with the instructions of the People's Commissariat of Finance. 5) Instruct the All-Russian Council of the National Economy for the chemical sector to construct an oxygen room at *Gokhran* for the extraction of diamonds and the analysis of noble metals. 6) Instruct the *Komvoisk* of the Moscow Military District to provide *Gokhran* with a fully effective and reliable guard ..."





A viewing of the Russian crown jewels
in the premises of *Gokhran* on Nastasinsky
Lane
Photograph, 1923. RGAKFD

Despite the difficulties of the first post-revolutionary years, the treasures of the Diamond Fund were maintained intact. The director of the Armoury Chamber, Dmitry Ivanov, recalled that: "Under circumstances of the most impossible, indescribable and unprecedented tribulations, when the jewels were guarded by people who had nothing to eat and no food for their families, when salaries were delayed for months at a time and their size was an insult to common sense, when emaciated people guarded mountains of diamonds, hurrying to take up their posts in the mornings dressed in rags with their toes sticking out of their shoes, to start breaking bricks and lugging heavy weights with the dawn, in order somehow to be able to feed themselves, in the Armoury, in distinct contrast with *Gokhran*, matters never went as far as mass executions for systematic theft or trials for occasional losses. Taking no account of the cultural goals of science, art and industry, the representatives of *Gokhran* relentlessly demanded the rendering down and rapidest possible use of precious metals and stones, thereby provoking acute conflicts and altercations."

Ivan A. Vladimirov

Requisitioning safes. December 1917

Watercolour. Museum of the Revolution, Moscow
Gokhran took an active part in the work of the “safe commissions” which expropriated and valued bank deposits. In April 1920 when all the deadlines on preferential terms for the return of gold and bank deposits to their owners had expired, a decree was issued under which all valuables still unclaimed were declared the property of the state.



as a multitude of rubies, topazes, tourmalines, alexandrites, aquamarines, chrysopters, beryls, chrysolites, turquoises, amethysts, agates, labradors, almandines, etc.¹⁰

Two days later the crown diamonds and regalia were handed over by special deed to the representatives of *Sovnarkom's* Special Commissioner for the Registration and Concentration of Valuables, that is, to Trotsky's commission. From the Armoury the valuables were dispatched to *Gokhran*.

The abundance of confiscated property which had accumulated at *Gokhran* in just two years astounded everyone who found himself there. “I walked through immense halls piled up to the ceiling on both sides with the most various of baggage containers: trunks, baskets, boxes, bags and so on. Tags with numbers had been hung on all of them. No one had even attempted to open and sort huge numbers of these packages,” recalled the deputy head of the Currency Department of the People's Commissariat of Finance, Moisei Lazerson, who wrote in his memoirs that such an incredible amount of treasure gathered in one place would have been impossible for anyone in Western Europe even to imagine.¹¹

Located as it was in the building of the Loan Treasury, which used to issue loans against interest, the State Valuables Depository, *Gokhran*, inherited not only the contents of the bank safes, but also an extremely beautiful house on Nastasinsky Lane off Tverskaya Street, equipped with special store-rooms and underground galleries, which in emergencies were supposed to be flooded with water. In addition to gathering and keeping all manner of valuables, one of the main functions of *Gokhran* was to assist with the subsequent sale of the items acquired. The first steps in this direction were taken a few months after *Gokhran's* establishment. In the autumn of 1920 Leonid Krasin set out for London in order to sound out the prospects for sales of Russian valuables. At the same time *Vneshtorg* had already found a reliable representative for selling Russian diamonds abroad.¹² In four years twenty million roubles' worth of valuables were sold, with half of the entire sum brought in by a sale of diamonds in Paris in March 1924, when the amount of stones disposed of totalled more than two hundred and seventy thousand carats.

Initially this active trade in precious stones had no impact on the treasures of the Russian crown, and for the time being they remained inviolate. A check on the most valuable hold-

The cover of the catalogue for an auction of Russian crown jewels which was held on 16 March 1927 in London in the building of Christie's auction house at 8 King Street. This auction was the occasion of the first sale of valuables from the Diamond Fund of the USSR.



ings of *Gokhran*, carried out by Moisei Lazerson in 1923, confirmed that all of the jewels and regalia which had been declared to constitute the state fund of precious metals were in perfect condition. The Diamond Fund – such was the semi-official title given to the former Diamond Room treasures – became an immense “currency reserve” for the Bolshevik government. The commission which made a scholarly study of the fund described and entered in the inventory two hundred and seventy-one items, including four hundred and six items of artistic value.¹³

The collection of the Diamond Fund was more than simply a reflection of the history of the art of jewellery in Russia and Europe, it was also an expression of the high prestige of the Russian throne. Fifty-two of the items came from the time of Peter the Great and his daughter Elizabeth, when the Russian Empire was only just gathering power and strength. The most luxurious of the jewels – a hundred and ten items – dated back to the reigns of Catherine the Great and Paul I, under whom Russia became a fully-fledged European power. The items of jewellery from the 18th century were distinguished not only by their high artistic quality and inimitable beauty, but also the great monetary value of such historical stones as the Orlov diamond, weighing 189.62 carats, and a pendant in the form of a bunch of grapes made of pink tourmalines and weighing 260.86 carats, which was presented to Catherine the Great by the Swedish king Gustav III. Later reigns had bequeathed smaller volumes of jewellery: from the time of Alexander I and Nicholas I there were fifty-five items, which, however, included the world-famous “Shah” diamond, weighing 88.7 carats, which was presented to Alexander I “in exculpation” of the murder in Teheran of Russia’s diplomatic representative Alexander Griboedov, the author of the immortal comedy *Woe from Wit*. From the reigns of Alexander II, Alexander III and Nicholas II there were thirty-eight items.

The idea of selling the Diamond Fund was raised on several occasions, beginning as early as 1923, but either there were no buyers for the treasures of the Russian court, or when prospective buyers were identified, they were only willing to pay amounts which the authorities found far from satisfactory. As time went by, however, the proposals received from those interested in the Romanov diamonds became more interesting. In the autumn of 1924

10

Ibid.

11

Larsons, p. 58.

12

Conquistadors, p. 118.

“We must take especially urgent measures to expedite the sorting of valuable. If we are too late, then they will not give us anything for them in Europe and America. In Moscow we could (and must) mobilise for this a thousand party members and so forth under special supervision.

“You are clearly making extremely feeble progress with this task. Write and tell me what emergency measures you are taking to expedite it. Lenin.” (V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, fifth edition, vol. 51, p. 151).

13

The divergence in the figures was explained by the fact that certain items consisted of entire sets which included several valuable articles.

From 6 April to 30 November 1920 the employees of Gokhran disassembled, sorted, valued and inventorised the following amounts of valuables

diamonds	51,479.38 carats with a value of	327,477,500 roubles
pearls	39,839.85	84,831,000 roubles
emeralds	2,627.20	10,891,000 roubles
rubies	536.50	1,337,000 roubles
sapphires	1,925.50	3,295,000 roubles
gold scrap	45 poods 29 pounds 16 zolotniks	2,417,712 roubles
platinum scrap	23 pounds 36.5 zolotniks	130,275 roubles
gold articles	16,271 items	23,013,714 roubles
platinum articles	111 items	2,384,345 roubles
gold watches	4,056 items	9,026,005 roubles
silver watches	1,975 items	829,593 roubles
gold items of mixed character	15 poods 28 pounds 60 zolotniks	8,360,025 roubles
gold leaf	36 pounds 72 zolotniks	75,000 roubles
gold coins	40,882 items	272,980 roubles
silver	2,780 poods 11 pounds 42 zol.	10,832,618 roubles
silver coins	352 poods 37 pounds 87 zol.	1,355,319 roubles
copper coins	430 poods 8 pounds 69 zol.	16,520 roubles
items of cupro-nickel	395 poods 28 pounds 7 zolotniks	14,066 roubles
In total		493, 273, 124 roubles

13.03.1919

a certain English financial group contacted the Russian trade mission in London to declare its readiness to allocate several million pounds for the purchase of Russian jewels. However, *Gokhran* proved to be unprepared for such an offer and the jewels remained intact and unharmed.

Only a year later did the government begin actively discussing possible ways in which the valuables could be sold abroad. In the autumn of 1925 it was decided to send a special commission to America and Europe, but then this idea was abandoned in favour of conducting operations from Moscow.

The most important step taken was a well-planned promotional campaign intended to demonstrate the incalculable riches of the Diamond Fund, which were extolled in a special illustrated album published by the treasury, *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones*, as well as in various brochures which were translated into English, French and German.¹⁴ The

promotional campaign also included lectures and private showings of the Diamond Fund to foreign entrepreneurs and the diplomatic corps. The grand finale was an exhibition of the Diamond Fund, supposedly organised in order to demonstrate the solicitous attitude of the new authorities to the historical heritage of Russia, but actually arranged exclusively in order to attract rich buyers.

The exhibition began on 18 December 1925 and was open from ten in the morning till ten in the evening. The newspapers were full of announcements claiming that all who wished could come and see “the fantastic wealth of jewellery accumulated over the centuries by the ruling dynasty of the Romanovs, which has become the property of the workers since October 1917.”¹⁵

The exhibition and the furore it created in the press produced the desired effect. A year later, in November 1926, part of the Diamond Fund, measured not in items of jewellery, but by its weight, which amounted to almost nine kilogrammes, and assessed by *Gokhran* at a value of more than one and a half million roubles, was sold to the English antiques dealer Norman Weis for fifty thousand pounds sterling.¹⁶

Weis specialised in buying wholesale. He was very successful in buying up the contents of the palaces of St. Petersburg (his most successful acquisition was the palace of the morganatic wife of the brother of Emperor Alexander III, the Princess Palei). The palace contents were sold on to auction houses, and Weis behaved in exactly the same way with the part of the Diamond Fund which came into his hands. He sold it to Christie's auction house, which divided up the jewellery into a hundred and twenty lots and put them up for auction in London in March 1927. In this almost certainly unique public sale of Russian crown jewels the most valuable lot was the nuptial crown of the last empress of Russia, Alexandra Fedorovna, which was decorated with one thousand five hundred and thirty-five old faceted diamonds.¹⁷

The committee of experts which prepared the illustrated album on the crown jewels for printing had no idea of the genuine purpose of the publication and was guided in its assess-

14

The unique illustrated catalogue *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones* was the fruit of work carried out by a commission under the supervision of Alexander Fersman. Published in four parts, it was prepared under extremely difficult circumstances in an exceptionally short time. The government allocated more than five thousand roubles in gold to its production (TsGaNKh USSR, f. 7733, op. 37, d. 967, l. 39). Published by the People's Commissariat of Finance in Moscow in 1924–1926, it contained a detailed description of the crown jewels with a large number of superb illustrations. With an edition of only three hundred and fifty copies, it is now a bibliographical rarity and still the only full catalogue of the Russian imperial treasure.

15

Alexander Fersman. *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones*. Vol. 1. Moscow, 1924, p.17. An entrance ticket to the exhibition cost two roubles, for trade union members the price was fifty kopecks, and holders of second-issue peasant loan bonds were admitted free of charge.

16

One and a half million roubles or fifty thousand pounds — two years later Gulbenkian paid the same amount for a single canvas by Rembrandt, and Mellon paid ten times as much for pictures.

17

Now in the collection of the Hillwood Museum, Washington.



A group of visitors viewing the Russian crown jewels on display at *Gokhran*. The academician Alexander Fersman is at the extreme left. Photograph, 1923. RGAKFD

ment of the value of the treasures primarily by their historical significance, since they were state property. Their valuation was naturally, therefore, well in excess of the nominal market value of the items. This became clear during a further valuation of the treasures of the Diamond Fund which was carried out on the next occasion when the administrative arrangements for keeping the crown jewels were changed. The membership of the commission which worked in *Gokhran* in 1928 differed little from the one which preceded it: academician Fersman was still there, and so was Troinitsky (although he had been removed from his post as director of the Hermitage), together with other specialists with a competent understanding of the art of jewellery and history who had managed to hold on to their positions. In all probability the goal set before the commission on this occasion was a different one: to facilitate the implementation of the authorities' express aim of "expediting the export of antiques." The crown jewels were divided into four categories in accordance with their historical and artistic significance, with the tsarist royal regalia allotted to the first, most valuable category.

The measures undertaken during the second wave of the promotional campaign for the Diamond Fund were more closely focused, and only a selected public was offered the opportunity to visit *Gokhran*: in 1928 only about a dozen foreign jewellers and dealers found their way into the storehouse on Nastasinsky Lane. Fortunately, only an insignificant number of items were actually sold this time around. The reduced valuation of the crown jewels (once the coefficient for historical significance had been removed) on the one hand, and

Easter Egg with Lilies of the Valley

**St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin,
miniaturist Johann Zeingraf, 1898**

Gold, enamel, diamonds, rubies, pearls, rock crystal; ivory, watercolour.

Height 20 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin about 1927 to Emmanuel Snowman for the Wartski Gallery, London; acquired in 1979 for the Forbes Magazine Collection, together with the “Coronation” egg for two million one hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow

This Easter egg, which was presented by Nicholas II to his wife for Easter 1898, is one of a small number executed in the art nouveau style. The body of the egg is covered in pink enamel and surrounded by lilies of the valley, Alexandra Fedorovna’s favourite flowers. The surprise, which consists of three oval portraits of Nicholas II and his older daughters, Olga and Tatyana, surmounted by the imperial crown, appears on top of the egg when a pearl button is pressed.

18

Antikvariat stipulated a fee of three per cent for itself in the case of a sale.

19

In 1922 the administration of *Glavmuzei*, in the person of the director of the Armoury, Mikhail Sergeev, transferred the valuables which were in its temporary keeping to *Gokhran*. In June–July 1927 *Gokhran* returned a number of valuable works to the Kremlin museum, including twenty-three Easter eggs, sixteen from the Currency Office of the People’s Commissariat of Finance and seven from the Moscow Jewellers’ Association. They remained at the Armoury until 30 April 1930, when representatives of *Antikvariat*’s brigades of shock-workers arrived and expropriated eleven eggs for sale abroad. The Armoury transferred them to *Antikvariat* in June; they included *Easter Egg With a Pelican*, 1897; *Lapis Lazuli Egg with a Portrait of the Tsarevich Alexei*, 1912; a Revolving Miniatures Egg from 1896 and the Easter Egg “*Red Cross*” (all now in Richmond, Virginia); *The Resurrection of Christ*, 1915 (collection of I. Minshall, Cleveland Art Museum); the Easter Egg “*Catherine the Great*”, 1914 (collection of Marjorie Post, Hillwood Museum); the *Napoleon Egg*, 1912; the *Caucasus Egg*, 1893; *Egg With Danish Palaces and Yachts*, 1895 (all in the collection of M. Gray, New Orleans Art Museum); the *Renaissance Egg*, 1894 (The Link of Times Collection, Moscow) and *Egg With Pansies*, 1899 (private collection, USA). Another four eggs were taken by *Antikvariat* in 1933. Two of them were recovered, but the *Mosaic Egg* (now in the collection of Queen Elizabeth II of England) and the *Egg in Memory of the 200th Anniversary of the Founding of St. Petersburg* (now in Richmond, Virginia, L. Pratt collection) were sold abroad (see: T.N. Muntyan, “New Facts on the Kremlin’s Fabergé Collection” in *The Brilliant Age of Fabergé*, St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 65–68).

a general slump in prices on the international jewellery market on the other, made selling so unprofitable for the Soviet authorities that they simply had to act accordingly. However, the authorities’ desire to obtain as much hard currency as possible by any means was unrelenting. In late 1913 a new attack was launched on the already seriously depleted treasure reserves. *Gokhran* concluded a contract with *Antikvariat* for the latter to take valuables from the Diamond Fund allotted to the fourth category (“of little value”) for sale on commission for foreign currency.¹⁸

Under the terms of this agreement on 26 December seven Easter eggs made by the firm of Fabergé and allotted to the category “of little value” were removed from the Armoury, together with another one hundred and forty-five items “of low value.”¹⁹ All of these “goods” were shipped to St. Petersburg and sold abroad by *Antikvariat* for foreign currency, most likely at an auction which took place in Berlin in January 1932 (other sources suggest the sale took place in February the same year in New York).

It was widely known in the West that by the beginning of 1932 a significant part of the Diamond Fund had been sold, and gradually rumours of the sales began to reach the Soviet Union. Naturally enough, the national leadership sought any means to rehabilitate itself in the eyes of Russian and international public opinion. The only way to “refute the systematically surfacing rumours” was to grant foreign correspondents working in Moscow, especially the Americans, access to the ever more inaccessible Diamond Fund, and this was done.

In the meantime the export campaign to sell works of art had reached its apogee. In spring 1932 there was yet another re-appraisal of the Diamond Fund by a commission of experts headed by the ever-present academician Fersman and Troinitsky. Having been reduced by two hundred items the Diamond Fund now numbered only seventy-one pieces of jewellery. Once again it was divided into four categories. The first category included the tsarist royal regalia “which have great historical significance” – the crown, the sceptre, the orb and fourteen other items. The second category included thirty-eight items possessing “great material value and



Easter Egg “Basket of Wild Flowers”
St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, 1901
Silver, gilding, enamel, diamonds. Height 23 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1933 for 2,000 roubles
Collection of Her Majesty Elizabeth II, Queen of England

This Easter egg in the form of a basket of wild flowers was recently acknowledged as the work of craftsmen from the firm of Fabergé. For a long time the somewhat unusual form and the absence of hall-marks meant that researchers could not be certain of its provenance. Only the discovery of the original bill made it possible to prove that this was the souvenir which the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna received for Easter in 1901. In 1917 the egg was confiscated by the Provisional Government together with other treasures and shipped to the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin. A “Basket of wild flowers” was listed among the possessions of Queen Mary of England in 1933. Since no invoices or records of payment have been discovered in the archives, it may be assumed that the queen received the egg as a gift.





One of *Gokhran's* foreign guests tries on the crown of the emperors of Russia: he is holding the orb and sceptre which symbolised the authority of the tsar. Photograph, 1923. RGAKFD

artistic significance.” Twelve items possessing “neither historical nor artistic significance,” but only material value, were assigned to the third category, and the fourth category contained seven items which were “not antiques and do not possess great value.”²⁰

This time, however, the commission went much further and allowed the possibility of selling items from all categories except the first (“especially valuable”). Once again items were taken out of the Diamond Fund with the intention of selling them at an auction scheduled for the autumn of 1932 in Leningrad. Since the matter concerned “the state fund of valuables”, the chairman of the State Bank in person requested Stalin’s permission for the sale of thirty-seven items “at newly established prices.”²¹

The head of the State Bank reported to Stalin, the General Secretary of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), as follows: “The Diamond Fund in keeping at the State Bank in 1923 was valued at 318 million roubles by a special commission consisting of academician Fersman, State Hermitage Director Troinitsky, the stone specialist Kotler, the diamond-valuer Dmitriev, the *Gokhran* jeweller and valuer Krivtsov and inspector Rozenberg. The material value (value of the stones) of the entire Diamond Fund was determined as only 2.9 million roubles, while the remaining sum of 315.1 million roubles is made up of additional percentages and a coefficient which were included by the commission for the historical and artistic significance of the items... For purposes of the possible sale on the foreign markets of items from the Diamond Fund extensive access was arranged for foreign representatives to visit and view the Diamond Fund and an illustrated album was published in Russian and foreign languages, which was distributed abroad. However, this advertising of the Diamond Fund has not so far produced any serious results in terms of the sale of individual items.”²²

It is not known whether official permission was received for the sale, but fortunately, for whatever reason, the items selected for disposal were not sold. This was already too little too late, however, to alter the fate of the Russian crown jewels, the greater part of which had long since departed from Russia. All of the exalted assurances that the unique, inimitable Diamond Fund must be preserved “in the ownership of the Russian state” and “exhibited for all the people to view and study, as is done with the crown jewels in France and England” were merely empty words, not worth the paper on which they were printed.

20

While in 1923 all the items were divided into two categories: “X” (items of great historical interest) and “Y” (articles of purely artistic value), in 1928 a new classification was introduced. In addition to “X” and “Y” there were two new categories designated by the letter “M” (items of little value), which made it possible to reduce the valuations of items even further.

21

The result of the “reduction in the percentage increments and the coefficient for historical and artistic significance” was that the entire Diamond Fund was valued at only twenty-one million nine thousand million roubles. The valuation of some items was much lower in 1932 than in 1923.

22

RGAE, f. 7733, op. 36, d. 18, l. 46–47.

The Imperial Nuptial Crown

St. Petersburg, the firm of Karl E. Bolin (?), 1884

Silver, diamonds, velvet. Height 14.5 cm; diameter 10.2 cm

Sold from *Gokhran* in November 1926 to the antiques dealer Norman Weis; sold at auction at Christie's in London on 26 March 1927 to the antiques dealer Founes; Wartski Gallery; acquired in 1966 at auction at Sotheby's by M. Post Hillwood Museum, Washington, D.C.

This relatively modest crown which was worn by Alexandra Fedorovna at her wedding ceremony in 1894 formed part of the Russian empresses' traditional "wedding set" of jewellery. In addition to a diamond-studded *kokoshnik* that was worn together with the crown, the set included long diamond earrings, an elegant clasp for a dress and heavy bracelets. By tradition a new nuptial crown was prepared for each occasion on which female members of the imperial family were married. In 1856 the Lady of the Bedchamber Ellis "issued to the court jeweller Bolin diamond settings for decorating the nuptial crown of Grand Duchess Alexandra Petrovna, adding to this that on completion of the wedding ceremony the stones would be removed from the crown and returned to the crown diamonds."

This tradition was broken in 1884 and the crown prepared for the wedding day of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich and the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna was not subsequently dismantled. The crown was made using part of the "diamond lapel" of the sleeveless jacket and kaftan of the Emperor Paul I, produced in Leopold Pfisterer's workshop in 1767; the cross consists of stones removed from an early 19th-century diamond epaulette. The last of the female representatives of the house of Romanov to wear the crown was the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, at her wedding to Prince Wilhelm of Sweden on 3 May 1908.





Easter Egg in Memory of the 200th Anniversary of the Founding of St. Petersburg with a Model of the Monument to Peter the Great
 St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin,
 model by Georgy Malyshev (?), 1903
 Platinum, coloured gold, enamel, diamonds, rubies, sapphires,
 rock crystal; ivory, watercolour. Height 11.1 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1933 for four thousand roubles; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Bequest of Lillian T. Pratt

The master-craftsmen at the firm of Fabergé attempted to base the design of each Easter egg on some event from the life of the imperial family. The festivities in honour of the 200th anniversary of St. Petersburg prompted the idea for the souvenir which Nicholas II presented to his wife for Easter in 1903. The upper section of the egg is hinged to open, revealing the inner surface of the lid covered with golden-yellow enamel in imitation of the rays of the rising sun, providing the background for a miniature copy of the famous *Bronze Horseman* set on a sapphire pedestal. The *Peter the Great* egg is known to have been exhibited in Alexander Schaffer's gallery in February 1942.

Lazurite Easter Egg with a Portrait of the Tsarevich Alexey
 St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Henrik Wigström, 1912
 Lazurite, lapis lazuli, gold, platinum or silver, diamonds;
 ivory, watercolour. Height 12.5 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1930 for 8,000 roubles; acquired in 1933–1934 by Lillian T. Pratt at a sale organised by Armand Hammer in the New York department store Lord & Taylor; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Bequest of Lillian T. Pratt

In 1911 the seven year-old Tsarevich Alexey was discovered to be displaying symptoms of the terrible illness of haemophilia. The situation was so serious that an official announcement of his death was prepared. However, the tragedy was averted by the intervention of Grigory Rasputin. The miraculous recovery of the emperor's son prompted the theme of this Easter souvenir, which was presented by the emperor to Alexandra Fedorovna in 1912. The lazurite egg decorated with gold applique work in the baroque style contains a diamond studded frame in the form of a double-headed eagle which holds a portrait of the heir to the throne.





Aigrette in the Form of a Branch of Blossom. 1760s–1770s
Silver, diamonds

Sold at auction by Christie's on 16 March 1927 (possibly lot 96)
Collection of S.J. Phillips, London

This aigrette, listed in the catalogue *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones* as item No. 186 (Table XCIII, photo. 214) has been called "one of the most beautiful works of the 18th century." The distinctly abstract stylisation of the design led the catalogue's compilers to compare it with the early works of the famous jeweller Duval: "Especially interesting is the bud motif, well known from his [Duval's] pieces and also the slanting arrangement of the square stones."

Two Pins with Emeralds. Early 18th century
Gold, emeralds

Sold from the Diamond Fund in 1927–1936
Collection of S.J. Phillips, London

Published in the catalogue *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones* as item No. 179 (Table XCII, photo. 207)

Easter Egg with Rose-Bud

St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin, 1895

Coloured gold, diamonds, velvet. Height 6.8 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin; Wartski Gallery, London;
The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow

This relatively modest Easter souvenir was the first of several received by the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna as presents from her husband. The tradition of commissioning presents for the Easter festival from the master-craftsmen at the firm of Fabergé was established by the Emperor Alexander III in 1885.

The golden-yellow rose-bud concealed within the egg contained a special surprise, which has now been lost – a minute copy of the Imperial Crown. The precise date of the egg's sale is not known. It first appeared outside Soviet Russia in the Wartski Gallery in London.





“Mosaic” Easter Egg

St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, from a sketch by Alma Teresia Pil, workshop of August Holmström, 1914

Platinum, gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, topazes, sapphires, demantoids, pearls. Height 9.2 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1933 for five thousand roubles; acquired in 1933 for the royal collection of Her Majesty Elizabeth II, Queen of England
Collection of Her Majesty Elizabeth II, Queen of England

The “Mosaic” Easter Egg, acknowledged by many experts to be one of the most beautiful, is the final reminder of the imperial couple’s peaceful married life. It was presented to the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna on 6 April 1914, several months before the outbreak of the First World War. Inside the egg, which is “embroidered” with a glittering pattern of precious stones with extremely complex faceting, there is an oval enamel medallion surmounted by the imperial crown. One side of the medallion bears profile portraits of the children of Nicholas II and Alexandra Fedorovna; on the other side is a basket of flowers with the children’s names and the date “1914”.

“Coronation” Easter Egg

St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin, model carriage made by the master-craftsman George Stein, 1897

Platinum, coloured gold, enamel, diamonds, rubies, rock crystal, velvet.

Height 12.7 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin about 1927 to Emmanuel Snowman for the Wartski Gallery, London; acquired in August 1979 together with the “Lilies of the Valley” egg for the Forbes Magazine Collection for two million one hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow

On 9 May 1896 Nicholas II and Alexandra Fedorovna were married as rulers of the realm in the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Moscow Kremlin. This event provided the theme for the next Easter egg, produced in the following year, 1897. The festive combination of golden-yellow and black enamel reproduces the colours of the imperial mantle. Inside the egg is a miniature copy of the carriage in which the empress drove to her coronation. In order to complete the model in time, the master-craftsman George Stein had to work sixteen hours each day for fifteen months.

The carriage is covered in red enamel in imitation of velvet upholstery, and tiny rock crystals are set in the windows. The doors of the carriage open, and the two steps can be folded out; the front wheels turn easily, allowing the carriage to manoeuvre. The interior of the carriage, which is 9.3 cm long, originally contained an emerald egg pendant.



Easter Egg with Revolving Miniatures
St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin,
miniaturist Johann Zeingraf, 1896
Rock crystal, gold, enamel, diamonds, emeralds; ivory, watercolour
Height 24.7 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1930 for eight thousand roubles;
until the early 1940s in the Hammer brothers' gallery in New York
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Bequest of Lillian T. Pratt

This egg is the second of a number of eggs which were presented by Karl Fabergé to the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna as a gift from the emperor for Easter 1896. Inside the rock crystal egg the master-craftsman has installed a revolving gold rod with six double-sided miniatures painted on ivory representing palaces in Germany, Great Britain and Russia, which were intended to remind the former German Princess Alice of Hessen of the events of her life.



Renaissance Egg

St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Mikhail Perkhin, 1894

Gold, rose-cut diamonds, rubines, agate. Height 13.3 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin

The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow

The egg was made for Alexander III of Russia, who presented it to his wife, the Empress Maria Fedorovna. It was the last egg that Alexander presented to Maria.

Bay Tree Egg (also known as the Orange tree egg)

St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, 1911

Gold, rose-cut diamonds, rubines, amethysts, citrines, nephrite, quartz, pearls, feathers. Height 29.8 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin

The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York; The Link of Times Collection, Moscow

A jewelled carved nephrite and enameled Easter egg made under the supervision of the Russian jeweller Peter Carl Fabergé in 1911, for Nicholas II of Russia, who presented the egg to his mother, the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna.





**“Red Cross” Easter Egg with Miniature Portraits of Members
of the Imperial Family Dressed as Nurses**
St. Petersburg, firm of Fabergé, workshop of Henrik Wigström, 1915
Gold, silver, enamel, mother of pearl; ivory, watercolour. Height 7.7 cm

Sold from the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin in 1930 for five hundred roubles to Edgar Philip Everhard; acquired in 1933 by Lillian T. Pratt at a sale organised by Armand Hammer in the New York department store Lord & Taylor Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Bequest of Lillian T. Pratt

In his memoirs the senior master-craftsman at the firm of Fabergé, Franz Bierbaum, writes that “during the war eggs were either not made at all or were very modest in design and low in cost.” This explains the emphatic simplicity of the design of the “Red Cross” egg which the Emperor Nicholas II presented to his mother for Easter 1915. The surface of the egg, covered in white opalescent enamel, bears a gold cursive inscription of a verse from the gospels: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15, 13) and two red enamel crosses with the date “1914”. Inside the egg is a folding screen with five sections supporting miniature portraits of female members of the imperial family dressed as nurses; Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna, the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna, Grand Duchess Tatyana Nikolaevna and Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the younger.

The Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna was actively involved in the work of the Red Cross. Her daughters, Ksenia and Olga, as well as other members of the imperial family, helped to care for the wounded in hospitals, a circumstance which provided the theme for this souvenir. Until 1917 the egg was in the Anichkov Palace, the official residence of the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna.



Chapter three

The Pillage of the Russian Church

Mounted police and believers outside the walls of the Simonov Monastery in Moscow during the expropriation of church valuables Photograph, 1922. RGAKFD



The new authorities dealt with the property of the church, which had been declared the property of the people in 1918, no less ruthlessly than they did with the property of the royal household.

The Russian monasteries and churches, transformed by offerings and donations from rich donors – notable amongst them tsars and princes – into repositories of the very finest and most valuable works of art, were like national museums filled with treasures of historical and artistic significance which far transcended their mere material value.

The attack on church property began in 1921, when it was publicly acknowledged for the first time that famine had destroyed millions of lives.¹ In October of that year a decree was passed on the expropriation of valuables located in churches and monasteries. Under the terms of the decree all church property was divided into three parts. Items which possessed historical and artistic significance – church plate, antique furniture, pictures – were handed over into the keeping of the Museum Department. Items of material value were seized by the recently established *Gokhran*, while property “of an everyday nature” went into the State Fund.

1

During the famine grain was exported, on the pretext of “economic necessity.” The number of deaths from the famine, which amounted to six million, was almost double the number of people killed during the Civil War.

2

By February 1922, in response to an appeal from Patriarch Tikhon, Russian believers had collected more than eight million nine hundred and twenty-six thousand roubles, not including jewellery, gold coins and assistance in kind for the starving.

A report by Georgy Bazilievich of 13 March 1922

TOP SECRET

To the chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council comrade Trotsky.

... I beg to report that according to information from the People's Commissariat of Finance concerning the state of the gold fund as of 13/III the amount of liquid reserves in the Republic amounts to 177,760,439 roubles 60 kopecks. Including in this the cash resources of *Gokhran* up to 1/II. In addition *Gokhran* has other valuables not included in the People's Commissariat of Finance summary, amounting to 13,136,600 roubles. In total the accurately accounted sums representing the liquid reserves of the Republic amount on 13/III to 190,897,039 roubles 60 kopecks.

At the present moment valuables from Nizhny Novgorod in the sum of about 5,000,000 roubles are being unloaded from a special train.

The valuables in the Armoury... amount to a sum of at least 197 1/2 million and at most of 373 1/2 million roubles if there are no “unlisted” surprises in the 1,367 crates still to be dismantled.

President of Russia Archive (AP RF), f. 3, op. 60, d. 23



Red Army men expropriating valuables at the Simonov Monastery in Moscow Photograph, 1923. RGAKFD

The authorities did not want to leave the church anything. During the first days of January 1922 an even harsher decree was promulgated, under which all property of museum quality without exception was expropriated from the churches and monasteries. But even this was not enough for the authorities, and very soon they obliged the church to hand over all valuable items made of gold, silver and precious stones (exceptions were only made for those items the disappearance of which might “substantially affect the interests of worship itself”). All valuables were transferred to the People’s Commissariat of Finance and from there to the fund of *Pomgol* (the Central Commission for Aid to the Hungry).

During 1922 the Russian Orthodox Church, which had made generous sacrifices of valuable church decorations and plate to meet the needs of the starving,² was plundered in a barbarous fashion, which Patriarch Tikhon characterised as sacrilege. In one of his missives the head of the Russian Orthodox Church stated that the church could not “approve the expro-



Dismantling icons
Photograph, 1921. RGAKFD

propration from churches, even through voluntary donation, of holy items the use of which for purposes other than worship is forbidden by the canons of the Universal Church and punished by Her.”³

Patriarch Tikhon, who in autumn 1918 had accused the Bolsheviks of secretly sending gold to Germany, declared openly that the valuables expropriated from churches, cathedrals and monasteries would not go to help the hungry, but would be used to meet the requirements of the army and the world revolution. Statements of this kind could only have certain consequences – the patriarch was sent for trial by military tribunal and only escaped execution by a miracle.⁴

The liquidation of church property was executed with military precision. It was supervised by Leon Trotsky, who was nominated for the position by Lenin. The legendary chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic was appointed Special Commissioner of the Council of People’s Commissars for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables and his deputy was the former commander of the Kharkov military district Georgy Bazilievich. However, Trotsky’s appointment was kept a strict secret and formal responsibility for the expropriation of church valuables was regarded as lying with the chairman of *Pomgol*, the people’s favourite Mikhail Kalinin.⁵

The astonishing savagery with which church relics and monuments were pillaged very soon obliged *Narkompros* to interfere in the process. The wife of the Special Commissioner

³
Kremlin Archives, Vol. 1, p. 114.

⁴
For more than a year – from mid-March 1922 to the end of April 1932 – Tikhon was under house arrest at his residence in the Donskoi Monastery in Moscow, and for the last two months before his liberty was restored – from 21 April to 27 June – in the internal jail of the *OGPU*. Only the pressure of international public opinion saved the patriarch from being executed by firing squad as the Politbureau of the Central Committee was planning.

⁵
The role of intermediary between the Politbureau and Trotsky’s commission was played by Vyacheslav Molotov. In order to “expedite the sale of valuables to the maximum extent” in May 1922 a new commission was established by decree of the Plenum of the Central Committee. As well as Trotsky, the commission included the Deputy People’s Commissar for Finance, Grigory Sokolnikov, and the People’s Commissar for Foreign Trade, Leonid Krasin.

From a letter from Maxim Litvinov to Leonid Krasin

Currency brings profits, and we are holding immense volumes of idle capital, losing millions in interest. Let me remind you once again that I sold the jewels that were at Reveiller for 15% above the Moscow valuation, which many thought was too high. The price can now be increased even further.

27.08.1921

6

In a letter addressed to Alexander Vinokurov at the central *Pomgol* commission Natalya Trotskaya wrote: “*Glavmuzei* has several times drawn attention to the irrational use made of beautiful examples of 18th-century Russian art ... *Glavmuzei* requests you to be so good as to keep it informed as a matter of urgency, bearing in mind the possibility at *Gokhran* of the destruction by melting down of articles which could be used on the foreign market”. (Quoted from: *Conquistadors*, p. 190).

7

L. Matsulevich. “An exhibition of church antiquities in the Hermitage”. *Among Collectors (Sredi kollektzionerov)*. A Monthly Journal of the Arts and Artistic Antiquity, January-February, 1923, p. 46.

8

P.N. Savitsky, *Destroyers of their Homeland (The demolition of artistic monuments and the selling of museums in the USSR)*, Berlin, undated, p. 12. “The Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of the History of Material Culture, having formed an absolutely clear impression of the means employed in the expropriation of items of church property of material value for the collection in aid of the hungry without a sufficiently cautious attitude with regard to their artistic and historical value, make haste to warn of the need to take urgent measures to ensure the protection of works of unique significance for the history of human culture in general. Failure to comply with the instructions of the central authorities threatens with damage or even destruction both individual outstanding works of art from the 18th century and works from the first half of the 19th century, the most brilliant examples of which are located precisely in Petrograd, the creations of the very finest Russian and foreign artists, and also remarkable ensembles of their works. The anti-cultural treatment of works of exceptional artistic value at the same time serves only to hinder the achievement of the goal pursued by *Pomgol*, since it is clear that the purchase of these articles will provide significantly more money than the sale of broken and damaged articles by weight.” (Taken from a letter of 6 May 1922 from the President of the Russian Academy of Sciences, A.P. Karpinsky, and the Chairman of the Academy of the History of Material Culture, A.N. Vasiliev, to the Chairman of the All-Union Central Executive Committee, Mikhail Kalinin, the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky and *Narkompros* department head, Natalya Trotskaya. Quoted from: Mosyakin, chap. 3, p. 45.)

9

The reference is to the Conference of Genoa, which opened on 10 April 1922 and was devoted to the recognition of Soviet Russia by the countries of Europe and also, most importantly, to obtaining loans.

10

Proceedings of the Central Committee of the CPSU (KPSS), 1990, No. 4, pp. 191–193. This letter was first published in 1970 in the Paris monthly *Herald of the Russian Student Christian Movement* (No. 98), when the USSR declared it to be a forgery.

and head of the Museum Department, Natalya Trotskaya, signed an instruction elucidating the actions to be taken “for the liquidation of church property.” Above all, works created before 1725 were not to be destroyed – the year in which Peter the Great died was thus chosen as the dividing line. It was not permitted to “damage the integrity of items and ensembles possessing historical and artistic significance.” It was forbidden “to tear the ancient settings and crowns from icons, crosses, holy gates and mountings; to extract the stones and pearls from ancient articles.” The liquidation of items dating from between 1725 and 1835 was only permitted by way of an exception. The destruction of items from later periods was permitted without penalty, with the exception of those “possessing high artistic and cultural significance.”⁶

The items to be liquidated were handed over as scrap to the *Pomgol* fund and everything which was to be preserved was sent either to *Gokhran* or the Museum Fund, whichever was appropriate. In every town where *Narkompros* had museum departments, warehouses were set up to store the expropriated valuables. In Petrograd, for instance, everything confiscated from the church was stored temporarily in the Hermitage, where it was even possible in 1923 to hold an exhibition of church antiquities. But since the struggle against religion as a relic of the past was in full swing, the richly worked metal icon covers were exhibited without the icons: as the journal *Among Collectors (Sredi kollektzionerov)* noted, the place of the images familiar since childhood “was taken by the brown painted tones of a layer of packing material.”⁷

In the provinces the Museum Department’s instructions were often not followed, which led to the destruction of church murals and icons. Thousands of unique works perished. For instance, in 1922 in Tomsk the contents of a famous Patriarchate’s Chamber evacuated from Tobolsk were partly destroyed: the richly decorated priestly robes were cut up to make theatrical costumes.⁸

The believers used every possible means to save the sacred possessions of the church. In Shuya the local authorities’ attempt to expropriate valuables provoked bloody resistance. Four days after the shooting of a crowd of parishioners in Shuya Lenin sent a special letter to the Politbureau in which he spoke of the Bolsheviks having a unique opportunity “to rout the enemy utterly and secure the positions... required for many decades to come.”

“Precisely now and only now, when in the famine regions they are eating people and the roads are littered with hundreds, if not thousands, of corpses, we can (and therefore must) carry out the expropriation of church valuables with the most furious and ruthless energy, without halting under pressure from any resistance whatsoever... to secure for ourselves a fund of several hundred million gold roubles (let us recall the immense wealth of several of the monasteries). Without this fund no state work of any kind, in particular no economic construction, and especially no holding firm to our positions in Genoa⁹ is conceivable. We must lay our hands on this fund of several hundred million gold roubles (or perhaps several billion) no matter what... And we can only be successful in this now... for no other moment except the despair of famine will offer us such a mood among the broad peasant masses. A certain clever writer on matters of state [Machiavelli] asserted correctly that if, in order to achieve a certain political goal it is necessary to resort to a series of cruelties, then they should be committed in the most energetic manner and within the shortest time possible, for the masses of the people will not tolerate the prolonged use of cruel measures.”¹⁰

Lenin’s letters to the members of the Politbureau set the merciless tone for the anti-church campaign. In a secret letter written on the eve of the Eleventh Party Congress he suggested arranging “a secret conference of all or almost all the delegates... with senior workers from the GPU [State Political Administration], NKYu [the People’s Commissariat of Justice] and the Revolutionary Tribunal... at which a secret congress resolution should be passed stating that the expropriation of church valuables, especially from the very richest of the monaster-

Quoted from: Mosyakin, chap. 3, pp. 44–45. According to the central organs of the press, during the period of expropriation of valuables there were one thousand four hundred and fourteen clashes between representatives of the authorities and church parishioners (see: *Conquistadors*, p. 174). Apart from the bloody reprisals in Shuya, from mid-March to early June 1922 believers were involved in disturbances in the provinces of Smolensk and Tver, in Olonets, Vologda, Yaroslavl and Vladimir. Two well-known instances of repression are “the trial of the 54” in Moscow, involving eleven death sentences and the arrest of the Patriarch Tikhon, the opening of a shrine and public desecration of the holy relics of Prince Alexander Nevsky, and “the case of Veniamin, Metropolitan of Petrograd,” which ended in the trial in Petrograd and execution by firing squad during the night of 12 to 13 August of the metropolitan himself and three other individuals. By the end of 1922 the number of members of the clergy who had been repressed exceeded six thousand, in addition to numerous ordinary parishioners. (See: *For the Canonisation of the New Russian Martyrs. Materials of the Commission of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church for the Canonisation of Saints*. Moscow, 1991, p. 30).

12

The *Gokhran* fund received: 17 poods of gold, 11,145 poods of silver, 13,581 diamonds with a weight of 1,165 carats, 3,835 pearls and 9 strings of pearls with a weight of 2 poods and 11 pounds, 31,282 other precious stones with a weight of 1 pood 19 pounds, silver coins with a face value of 7,116 roubles and gold coins with a face value of 772 roubles. (*On the Eve*, Berlin, 7 June 1922. Quoted from *Conquistadors*, p. 188).

13

According to Lazerson, who monitored the activities of *Gokhran*, as of 1 July 1923 it contained 17,319 packages, the contents of which had been checked and 2,887 bundles which had been provisionally sorted and were awaiting detailed inspection, as well as 8,996 packages of securities, documents and paper money. In all, 20,156 packages. (Larsons, p. 59).

14

Larsons, p. 68.

15

In response to this demand the head of *Gokhran*, comrade Gromadsky, declared that as an old Bolshevik he had no intention of carrying out counter-revolutionary instructions, especially from a non-party member. On being informed by Lazerson that a shop had opened on Nikitskaya Street in Moscow for the official sale of church vestments and religious items, Gromadsky gave a distinctive response: “I see. You mean to say that rituals and service books once torn out of their bindings are absolutely worthless? Now that is all right. Henceforth I will have all the service books torn out of their bindings, the silver bindings immediately melted down and the service books destroyed.” (*Ibid.*, p. 70).

16

Ibid., p. 72.

17

In the Armoury, which was famed for its first-class collection of silver, a Church Silver Section was set up, the most interesting elements of which came from the sacristy of the Solovetsky Monastery; the section also received items from the the Kremlin cathedrals and monasteries, as well as from Moscow’s Simonov Monastery.



ies and churches, must be carried out with ruthless determination, without balking at absolutely anything and in the shortest possible time. The greater the number of representatives of the reactionary bourgeoisie and the reactionary clergy we manage to shoot on these grounds the better. Now is precisely the time when we must teach this public such a lesson that they won’t dare even to think of any kind of resistance for several decades.”¹¹

The authorities’ main goal in selling off church valuables in 1922 was to improve the financial state of the Republic. The plan for the sale of these valuables, which was entrusted to the deputy chairman of *Sovnarkom*, Alexei Rykov, was three-pronged: the industrial processing of church silver and gold for *Narkomfin* (the People’s Commissariat of Finance), the selection of valuable works of art for *Vneshtorg*’s export operations and the establishment of a Diamond Fund at *Gokhran*.¹² As several researchers have pointed out, the first church valuables were exported to France with the mediation of the Norwegian Fritjof Nansen, whose name later became the word used for the passport so passionately desired by all would-be Russian emigrants.

Even before the attack on the church the *Gokhran* coffers were continuously supplemented by requisitions and confiscations of private property, from which *Narkompros* received only “the items which possess special artistic value.” In the first instance private individuals were relieved of their jewellery, the greater and better part of which was concentrated at Nastasinsky Lane.

If we are to judge from the reminiscences of Moisei Lazerson, who was appointed deputy head of the Currency Department at the People’s Commissariat of Finance, by the summer



Members of *Gokhran's* Commission for the Classification of Antique Silver. Seated from left to right: head of *Gokhran* Nikolai Gromadsky, Doctor Ernst Cohn-Wiener, director of the Hermitage Professor Sergei Troinitsky, head of the commission Moisei Lazerson, director of the

Armoury Dmitry Ivanov, old Russian silver specialist Felix F. Vishnevsky, member of the Commission for the Sale of State Valuables Dobrovitsky. Standing at the rear are employees of *Gokhran*. Photograph, 1923. Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford University

of 1923 more than twenty thousand packages had accumulated at *Gokhran* with the most varied of contents: gold (five hundred and thirty-six packages), silver (one thousand four hundred and five packages), securities, paper money, the personal effects of Nicholas II and members of the royal family, the contents of the Crimean palaces, and so on.¹³

The attitude taken to the treasures accumulated at *Gokhran* was frankly barbarous: the management destroyed valuable items in order to obtain the metal and the gems. A special staff of workers was employed in extracting precious stones and pearls from the silver mountings of church books and icons. The new curator of *Gokhran* was shocked and astounded when he saw the way in which a 17th-century silver church book-mounting decorated with enamel miniatures was destroyed. The women workers mindlessly wheedled out the river pearls from the mountings and sorted them by size. "In this manner hundreds of ikons were destroyed, very many dating from the eighteenth century, and a number of them even from the seventeenth. There is no doubt that the majority of the pearl-embroidered icon-coverings were of slight artistic value, but they were in any case objects of a touching piety and always of careful, in most cases even of superior workmanship. The destruction of these icons was, from every point of view, absolutely unjustified... the sale of the cheap river pearls, after deducting the expenses incurred by the work, would yield only ridiculous sums for the Budget..."¹⁴

Any attempt to prove anything to the commissars was pointless, since their main purpose was to destroy items of religious worship. Nonetheless, the head of the Currency Department did demand a halt to the destruction of the silver mountings of church service books.¹⁵

From all parts of Russia the confiscated property of the church flowed into Moscow and *Gokhran*: vessels, valuable books, icons and vestments. For the most part the items were made of silver, with a total weight amounting to five hundred thousand kilogrammes.¹⁶ Naturally, in such incredible volumes a large number of the items were of low artistic quality, but there were also quite exceptional items of museum quality. The Armoury Chamber took delivery of six and a half thousand kilogrammes of silver, which took several weeks to transfer from *Gokhran*.¹⁷

As far as commercial gain was concerned, the sale of 17th- and 18th-century Russian church silver really made no sense: it was only slightly more valuable than the remelted metal and there was virtually no demand for it on the Western market. Church and private silver tableware was sent to be melted down at the Mint in Petrograd,¹⁸ where they also melted down the old Russian and foreign coins sent on from *Gokhran*.¹⁹ On Lazerson's initiative, an attempt was made to prevent the destruction of foreign silver items, and in November 1923 the German art historian Ernst Cohn-Wiener came to Moscow and took responsibility for their classification.

A significant proportion of the French, English²⁰ and German silver gathered at *Gokhran* was destined for sale. Following a study of the state of the antiques market it was decided that the best place for the sales would be Berlin. In late 1924 an agreement was signed with one of the German auction houses,²¹ but arrangements for an auction in spring the following year were disrupted by the threat of complaints from Russian émigrés living in Berlin. For several years afterwards, however, silver was brought to Berlin in small lots and sold to private dealers.

The selling of the gold, silver, platinum, coins and precious stones gathered at *Gokhran* began from the moment the state depository was organised. As early as March 1920 Lenin demanded the mobilisation of a thousand party members in order to accelerate the work of sorting through the valuables. Lenin's formulation of *Gokhran's* goals and objectives was simple and clear: "collect, keep, sell." The chairman of *Sovnarkom* was particularly concerned with the final stage, since what he feared above all was that the selling might be

18

Before silver tableware and other personal items of silver were sent for sale, the initials and monograms of previous owners were removed. In summer 1923 the Mint in Petrograd produced silver coins with a face value of one rouble and fifty kopecks.

19

Two numismatic specialists were employed at *Gokhran* to make sure that rare coins were not melted down (see: Larsons, p. 75).

20

The amount of English silver at *Gokhran* was extremely small. In addition to which, as Lazerson said, selling in England was hindered by immensely complicated insurance provisions, since English law required special hallmarks on all silver articles made after 1800 which were imported into the country.

21

The overall value of the old silver exhibited for sale (including snuff boxes) was estimated in Moscow at one million four hundred and fifty-six thousand eight hundred and forty-eight roubles and twenty-five kopecks (one hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling). The Russian court silver was valued at two hundred and ninety-two thousand one hundred and fifty-four roubles, the English, French and German court silver at five hundred and forty-eight thousand four hundred and forty-six roubles (see: Larsons, p. 159).

Gokhran employees extracting precious stones from items of jewellery. The specialist Dmitriev is on the right. RGAKFD



22

In a letter to *Narkomfin* of 20 March 1922 Krasin wrote that "*Gokhran* has more than enough on its hands with the identification, sorting, valuing and storing of jewels, without also having to take on the dispatch of lots abroad and their sale there" (the reference was to the dispatch to Sweden of a shipment of diamonds from two to ten carats in size with a total value of a hundred thousand gold roubles. "All casual petty sales to acquaintances and so forth must be stopped. A contract must be concluded with one of the major firms (De Beers has been proposed, and so has Watburg) on the formation of a syndicate for the joint sale of diamonds. This syndicate must be granted monopoly rights, for only in that way will it be possible to create calm on the diamond market and begin gradually to raise the price. The syndicate must provide us with loans at the bank interest rate against the deposit of our diamonds... We must reserve the right of accepting the price proposed for each separate lot of valuables or leaving the lot in place to guarantee the interest paid on it and waiting for market prices to improve.

An essential condition for this, the only rational means of selling the goods we have which have not yet been stolen or squandered, is the establishment of a certain substantial fund of such valuables worth at least 50 million, since no one will be willing to talk to us about small change.

I have raised the question of such a syndicate on several occasions, but I halted all negotiations after the comrades from *Narkomfin* and *Gokhran* informed me last autumn that we no longer possess any significant fund of valuables.

Now, to my pleasant surprise, I learn that valuables can still be accumulated to the value of 100 million. It would be desirable to achieve at least approximate clarity in this aspect of the matter. It is scarcely a normal state of events when in August and September 1921 *Narkomfin* believes that it does not even have enough valuables for the Polish payment, and in March 1922 it turns out that it has a million or two's worth." (RTsKhDNI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 127, l. 144).

23

At the same time the commission studied the French, Dutch and English markets in precious stones, pearls, gold articles and old silver. Moisei Lazerson was appointed head of the commission, his deputy was the young communist Dobrovitsky and the experts were two jewellers working in *Gokhran*, Kotler and T. (we have not been able to identify the name).

24

Larsons, p. 103.

25

N.L. Zubova. "Materials for a biography of Alexei Oreshnikov." *Numismatic Miscellany* 5. Moscow Numismatic Society, Moscow, 1997, p. 38.

delayed. The trading was not a great success. In early 1922 in a secret letter to *Narkomfin* Leonid Krasin expressed his indignation at the fact that "we are still not ready for the organised sale of valuables and the fall in prices on the diamond market occasioned by the less than successful trading in diamonds by Comintern and other institutions is well-founded."²²

The dealing became especially active from 1923 onwards. In April the Currency Department concluded an agreement with Holland for the sale of jewels and pearls with a total value of about twelve million Dutch florins. Soon afterwards a commission was set up to sell state valuables, with one of its tasks being the monitoring of this agreement.²³ The items earmarked for sale were sent to Berlin, but they were handed over to the Dutch in Stockholm, in the premises of the Soviet Trade Delegation. Only after a thorough-going inspection of every package bearing the seals of the currency office and the Dutch side was the load dispatched to Amsterdam.²⁴ At the very same time Moisei Lazerson arrived in London, where he was charged with producing a precise description of the precious stones and pearls brought there by the Soviet Trade Delegation: as soon as his work was finished all the jewels were sent back to Moscow (it was intended to sell them together with the main bulk of *Gokhran's* valuables).

Trading was brisk and the museums' turn soon arrived. Many of the valuables which they had managed to acquire in the early 1920s were taken away from them again after only a few years. The selection of valuable items for export from museum collections became the business of special brigades consisting of representatives of *Glavnauka* and the finance department of *Antikvariat*. They removed valuables worth three hundred thousand roubles from the Historical Museum, including the Uvarov gold snuff box. Even as items were being selected for sale, silver pieces were being noted and listed for melting down. The selection of items in the Historical Museum went on for ten days. During the same period silver icon mountings from the War Historical Museum were also sent to be melted down.

"Since in the West they don't have a single grain of faith in us, and the Bolsheviks need tractors, it has been decided to sell up the museums, with the artistic pieces being sold through *Antikvariat*, and the non-artistic pieces through the finance department. In all, I think about 43 poods of silver were set aside for melting down and, as I recall, about fifty poods of copper," recalled Alexei Oreshnikov.²⁵

Lenin and Trotsky's expectations of receiving hundreds of millions and even several billions of roubles for expropriated church valuables were not justified. The actual result was a mere thousandth part of what had been anticipated. The official figure is four million six hundred and fifty thousand roubles. One million roubles were spent on buying bread for the hungry. The remainder was expended on the campaign itself. To judge from provisional estimates, in April 1922 alone the operational costs of the Moscow, Petrograd and provincial commissions for expropriation amounted to one million five thousand and fifty-nine thousand five hundred and ninety-two gold roubles. The estimate for provisions for the Moscow Province commission alone included provisions for two weeks for three thousand five hundred men (and this in famine conditions). In reality the campaign for the expropriation of church valuables became a campaign to crush the Orthodox Church. There was no discernible economic or humanitarian effect. The politically motivated ruination and pillaging of thousands of churches was the single most serious blow struck at Russian national culture. From October 1917 to 1 February 1922 the Soviet treasury received from the nationalisation, confiscation and requisitioning of gold the sum of eighty-four million three hundred and fifty-six thousand two hundred and thirty-five roubles.



Members of *Gokhran's* Commission for the Classification of Antique Silver. Seated from left to right: Sergei Troinitsky, who is holding an extremely rare 3rd-century Scythian silver dish, Dr. E. Cohn-Wiener, Moisei Lazerson, F.F. Vishnevsky, Nikolai Gromadsky. Standing at the rear: Dobrovitsky (extreme left) and four employees of *Gokhran*. Photograph, 1923. Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford University

Thanks to the work of the commission, not only were the funds of Soviet museums augmented, but at least eleven thousand works of art were saved from being melted down.

“The items taken from the packages filled the entire room: there was silver standing on shelves and on the floor. On the shelves the items were arranged by countries. Every day they brought ten or twelve boxes full of silver articles to the room where the scholars were working from the store-rooms of *Gokhran*. Often among the incalculable numbers of coffee-pots, dishes and other everyday items of silverware a genuinely unique item would suddenly appear,” recalled Lazerson. Each item described was given

a label with the name of a town: Nuremberg, Augsburg, Leipzig, Danzig, Breslau, and also the name of a master-craftsman. Russian aristocrats and rich merchants were particularly fond of German silver and it was often used as gifts offered to the church. There was also quite a lot of 18th-century French silver and items from the Empire period. The largest of the silver services that found their way to *Gokhran* was the Orlov Service, commissioned during the reign of Catherine the Great and presented by the empress to her favourite Grigory Orlov. It included eight hundred and forty-two items of French silver and several hundred pieces of Russian work.





The exhibition halls of *Antikvariat* in Moscow

The photograph was made before the 1934 and shows one of the rooms containing works of religious art in the *Antikvariat* warehouse in Moscow.

GTG photo archive

The works are primarily icons and items of church plate. The photograph provides a fairly accurate impression of “articles” exhibited in preparation for sale.

In the centre of the hall is a table covered with an old cloth, an “inditiya” (in orthodox churches an “inditiya” was the upper covering of the altar; it symbolised the Glory of God and served as a reminder of the garments of the Saviour; it was used to cover the communion-table and the altar of offerings and was kept in the church’s sanctus sanctorum, the chancel).

Standing on the table covered with the “inditiya” is a large early 19th-century vase from the Imperial Porcelain Factory, surrounded by items produced in private porcelain factories of the same period. Clearly visible in the left section of the photograph is a silver offering-case containing a jumble of chalices, altar crosses and other articles used during services in Russian Orthodox churches. Below it stands a large icon of St. George and the Dragon. Further to the left, arranged “stepwise” is a display of numerous icons of the traditional “lectern” format (31 × 24 cm), which could have come from churches or from private chapels. Icons prepared for sale are clearly visible amongst them. Below the top row of icons (all the subjects are distinctly visible) icon lamps have been hung. The right-hand section of the display is completed by fragments of an iconostasis: elements of the various ranks are clearly visible. Beside them are two church icons: The Assumption of the Virgin (17th century) and an Odigitriya Virgin.

It is noteworthy that most of the icons shown in the photograph subsequently found their way into the collections of George P. Hann: St. Paraskeva (1), St. George and the Dragon (2), The Transfiguration (3), Ss. Vasily the Great and Gregory the Divine (?) (4), The Odigitriya Virgin of Smolensk (5), St. Paraskeva (6), St. George and the Dragon (7), The Archangels Michael and Gabriel (8–9), John the Baptist, Angel of the Wilderness, with a Life (10), The Last Judgement (11), St. Nicholas the Wonder Worker (12), The Mother of God (13) and The Archangel Michael (14); Icon with St. Nicholas the Wonder Worker with angels and Miracles (15) was bought by the American diplomat Norris Shipman and his wife, Theophane Shipman; it is now in a private collection in London.

Russian Icons and Art Market

Yuri Pyatnitsky

Russian Icons in the West before 1917

An interesting thing happened on Dec. 11, 1866, at a meeting of the Moscow Public Museum's Society for Ancient Russian Art. It was decided "to send to the Christian Museum in Berlin several icons with unusual subjects. Twelve icons from the collections of S.T. Bolshakov and F. I. Buslayev were [to be?] sent with Prof. Dmitriev."¹ Just a few years later, on Dec. 20, 1870, the noted scholar Fedor Ivanovich Buslaev addressed the Society to suggest that it donate ancient Russian icons "to the museums of Berlin, Basel and others."² The next year, at a meeting on March 14, Buslaev, a founding member, "gave the Society a gift of five icons for the Society to give to one of Europe's museums devoted to Christian antiquities."³ These facts are quite suggestive. On the one hand, they are evidence of the desire of Russian scholars to see examples of this national art represented in museums outside Russia. On the other hand, they attest to the almost total absence in European museums (let alone in American museums) of examples of the ancient Russian art of icon painting.

The situation was hardly new: not only ancient Russian but Byzantine and post-Byzantine icon painting were largely ignored by foreign scholars and foreign museums,⁴ which sometimes even sold examples they happened to own. Interest in the art of icon painting among foreign specialists and collectors emerged only in the early 20th century as part of a generally widening interest in the cultural legacy of Byzantium and ancient Rus'. This interest coincided with the so-called "discovery of the true beauty of ancient Russian icon paintings" by restorers, whose removal of layers of oil and grime had at long last uncovered the flaming colors of the originals.⁵ In addition, the ancient Russian icon with its use of local combinations of sharply contrasting colors in a generally expressive color scheme, its mystically gleaming gold background and its symbolic treatment of composition and figure meshed well with strong trends in 20th-century art. Nonetheless, the general Western market was not yet ready to accept ancient Russian icons as truly artistic phenomena worthy of the consideration of collectors and museums.

Russian Icons and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917

A new stage in the history of public response to ancient Russian icon painting came with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The sale of antiquities by private shops, galleries and government agencies was virtually proscribed in March 1920 under the fine-sounding cover of a "struggle against the speculative sale of museum-worthy objects of art-historical value."⁶ The measure was intended to give the state control of the antiquarian market. Instead, however, it triggered a busy and prosperous black market and the spread of corruption among Soviet officials. From the first, of course, the newly established Soviet regime, which had been quick to issue decrees on preserving the nation's artistic heritage, had followed a path of planned and methodical looting of Russia, especially with respect to Russia's art and other valuable cultural objects. "Church treasures" – in other words religious art – figured as a special point in the plan.

The situation of the Russian Orthodox Church was particularly complicated, as it happens, at the time of the Bolshevik revolution. The church was in the midst of reorganizing itself, the Patriarchate had been re-established and a Church Congress (*Pomestnyi Sobor*) was at work in Moscow. Still, the church, with its moral authority and significant material resources, put itself forward as a consolidating force capable of uniting Russians, including uniting them against Bolshevism. For its part, the new Soviet power had no use for the Orthodox Church or any other religious group in any form and no intention of working with them. The Church Congress, after its bank accounts were frozen and its funds taken, ceased to function. The elected patriarch, Tikhon, was placed under arrest for a time and thereafter virtually isolated from public affairs.⁷

¹ Charter and Minutes of the Society for Ancient Russian Art at the Moscow Public Museum. Moscow, 1876, p. 73.

² Op. cit., p. 110.

³ Ibid., pp. 112–113.

⁴ According to the memoirs of art historian Pavel Muratov, the distinguished English collector, Sir Herbert Cook, who devoted a lifetime to the collection of Italian primitives, was astounded at the unexpected appearance, "in God's world, of the Russian primitives" in the 1910s. P.P. Muratov, "About Icons," in O. Lelekova, G. Vzdornov, Z. Zalessky, *L'Association 'L'icône' à Paris*. Paris-Moscow, 2002, p. 132.

⁵ I have deliberately used the expression "the so-called discovery" because in fact as early as the 1860s the museums and private collections of St. Petersburg held examples of cleaned Byzantine and ancient Russian icons, gleaming in their original colors. The scholarship of Dmitrii Analov, Nikodim Kondakov, Nikolai Likhachev and other St. Petersburg scholars of the so-called "academic school" was based on the analysis of paintings properly cleaned by restorers. However, it is to the methods of the art historians and other icon devotees of the early 20th century in Moscow that we owe the wide awareness of ancient Russian icon painting and its elevation to a kind of "national brand."

⁶ *The Hermitage That We Lost [Ermitazh, kotoryi my poteriali]*, pp. 32–37.

⁷ In June 1923 Patriarch Tikhon "repented before the Soviet authorities" about the extremely negative impression made by the church on the old Russian intelligentsia. Alexander Benois commented on this in his *Diary*: "The 'declaration' by Patriarch Tikhon of his repentance before the Soviet authorities makes a disgusting impression. ... What light this throws on this soul (however, it had always seemed to me a poor, gray thing) of official Orthodoxy. What a trump card in the hands of the anti-clericalists!" Alexander Benois, *Diary. 1918–1924*. Moscow, 2010, p. 547.



The Last Judgement. 16th century
Tempera on wood panel. 210 × 147 cm

Sold through *Antikvariat*

Until 1980 in the collection of G. Hann. Collection of Serafim Druzilas, Munich.

In 2004 was presented by Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia to the reopened Novodevichy Convent of the Resurrection in Saint Petersburg.



Mother of God Tenderness (central part of icon)

Novgorod school, 15th century

Wood and egg tempera on canvas. 66 × 45.5 cm

Riabushinsky collection, Moscow; Otto O'Meara collection, Brussels, until 1928;

Alexander Popoff collection, Paris

Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany

“Those who came took everything possible from the monastery; they took all the valuable things, many things of historical importance, pulled the metal frames away from the icons. . . .” the provincial bishop wrote to Patriarch Tikhon, as cited in: *Krasnye konkistatory*, p. 55.

M. Shkarovsky, *Gorod na vse vremena*. St. Petersburg, 2010, pp. 124–153, 183–225, 369–376; M. Shkarovsky, *Peterburgskaia eparkhiia v gody goneniia i utrat 1917–1945*. St. Petersburg, 1995; V. F. Zybkovets, *Natsionalizatsiia monastyrskikh imushchestv v Sovetskoi Rossii (1917–1921)*. Moscow, 1975.

As cited in: *Krasnye konkistatory*, pp. 127–129.

On April 12, 1922, the Hermitage began receiving for temporary storage valuables taken from the churches and monasteries of Petrograd and the Petrograd region. Despite the violence of the expropriation, which caused significant damage to some things, museum specialists were able to save the most valuable objects. A curator, Leonid Matsulevich, used them to create a temporary “exhibition of the ancient church,” which filled seven rooms on the third floor of the Old Hermitage. The show ran from Nov. 5, 1922, through June 1924. The exhibition was so popular that the Hermitage administration had to devise special controls for the crowds of visitors. The exhibition took place at the height of the period of anti-religious propaganda – the so-called “revelatory exhumation of the bones,” legal trials of priests, mass arrests of clergy and the physical pillaging of Russian Orthodox churches. See: E. Iu. Solomakha, “Preface,” in: *Zhurnaly zasedanii Soveta Ermitazha. Part II: 1920–1926*. St. Petersburg, 2009, pp. 10–12; L. A. Matsulevich, *Vremennaia vystavka tserkovnoi stariny: Kratkii putevoditel’*. Petrograd, 1922.

Paradoxically, it was members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of businesses who created the icon collections that today are the principal such collections in the museums of Europe and the United States.

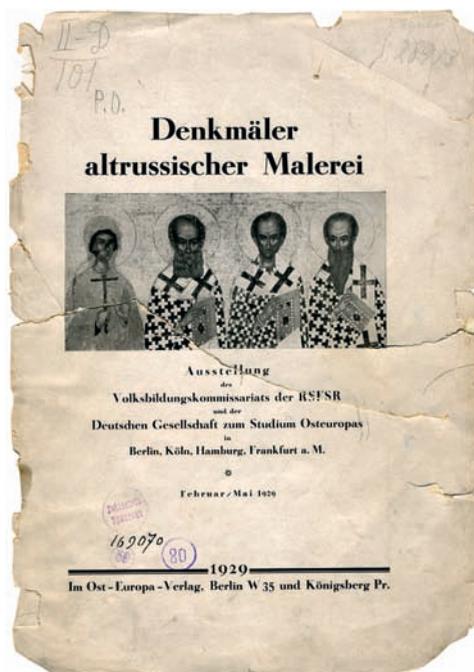
Extremely indicative in this regard is the view expressed by a member of the Hermitage staff, Stepan Petrovich Yaremich, who was obliged to cooperate with *Antikvariat*. In reply to a question from the Commission for the Selection of Works of Art for Export dated April 4, 1929, he wrote: “At the present time the dealers in antiquities ignore even our highest-quality selections, and there is an evident tendency in their actions to dictate their own conditions. Is this not the result of a grandiose ‘cabal’? It is possible that foreign antiquarian dealers have banded together to exploit our difficulties and force us into all kinds of concessions. It looks like it.” *State Hermitage. Museum Sales*, p. 152.

Russian émigrés wrote feelingly on this matter. See, for example, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna: *Maria Pavlovna, Memoirs*. Moscow: Zakharov, 2004, pp. 373–376.

The expropriation of things of value from Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, mosques, synagogues and other houses of worship began immediately after the revolution. Church fittings and objects used during services were particularly attractive as commodities with which to replenish stocks of hard currency and precious metals. Countless churches were inspected in the first months of Bolshevik power, and the most valuable things seized or made note of. In preparation for future expropriations, all religious communities were required to hand over their records, including inventories of possessions.⁸ These were used in the subsequent looting of church properties. The attack on the Patriarchate’s chamber of properties (*Patriarshaia Riznitsa*) on Feb. 12, 1918 (the actual story of this raid remains unclear), became the basis for alleging that the Russian Orthodox Church was unable to protect its valuables and thus justified the Bolsheviks in seizing control of them and the later massive expropriations. As early as 1918, the property chambers of the cathedrals and churches of the Moscow Kremlin were nationalized and valuables removed. In October 1918 Bolshevik commissars raided and looted the Alexandro-Svirsky Monastery in the Petrograd area.⁹

The Holy Trinity – St. Sergius Monastery (*Troitsa-Sergieva Lavra*) was closed in November 1919, and the seizure of valuables began at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra and the churches of Petrograd.¹⁰ This was the beginning of the State Museum Fund, *Gokhran* (the State Depository of Valuables of the RSFSR) and other such institutions. In 1921 the expropriations became more precisely defined and centrally controlled. Represented as a kind of philanthropy – primarily, to aid the hungry – the removal of church valuables was, at bottom, a campaign to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church. Coincidentally, it dealt a serious and irremediable blow to Russia’s national culture. Many thousands of important objects from the past were callously destroyed. Many thousands of objects were sold, with a variety of long-term outcomes, including destruction. Only an insignificant portion of the expropriated objects remained safe in the hands of Soviet museums or private persons, the scanty remainings of a colossal, truly uncountable, expropriation of church properties. In a report dated Aug. 29, 1921, the vice chairman of the Central Expert Commission (*TsEK*) in Moscow, I. I. Lazarevsky, stated: “Member of the *TsEK* Presidium Ivanov is given the task of continuing the work of determining the contents of the storehouses of church properties in Moscow, which contain things that may be of significant interest to the State Export Fund. The situation of approximately 200 such storage places connected to various organizations, non-functioning churches, etc., has already been determined. . . . [or is it that 200 such storage places are known to exist and that Ivanov is expected to look into them?] Information has been received that in the former Andronovskiy Monastery, now a concentration camp of the VChK [Cheka], there is a significant amount of church property. *TsEK* Presidium member Sergeev is to determine the nature of this property.”¹¹ Anything that held the slightest possibility of “realization” (of being sold) was expropriated, collected and held in special reserves.

As a result, the warehouses of the State Museum Fund and *Antikvariat* filled to overflowing with icons and other objects connected to religious ritual and worship. Specialists did rescue some pieces from these massive heaps of things for museums,¹² but a significant portion were earmarked for sale. With the domestic market weak in the 1920s – it was made up of the diplomatic corps and foreign specialists working in the USSR on contract – demand could not absorb the supply.¹³ Access to the wide spaces of Europe and America was needed, and that was not easily achieved. Europe and America had their own well-entrenched antiquarian markets, and establishing good working relations with them was not without difficulty. The foreign antiquarians “circled the wagons,” conspiring to keep prices down for Russian goods.¹⁴ The worst situation involved jewellery.¹⁵ The Soviets sold by weight at “throwaway” prices pearls and precious stones, for the sake of which hundreds of thousands of works of Russian church art were destroyed or defaced.



German catalogue for traveling exhibition of Russian icons February–August 1929

Because it was Russian émigrés who were at first the chief sources of icons in foreign galleries, the available icons were relatively few and varied widely in artistic quality and historic importance. It is still often said that, because the émigrés carried family heirlooms out of the country, the icons they brought with them must have been “of great antiquity and rarity.” This was hardly the case. It was the exception. In leaving or fleeing Soviet Russia, people took along the things that meant the most to them, and a family’s icons were most likely to be 19th- or early 20th-century products. Thus, the émigrés’ icons could hardly satisfy a market whose leaders were determined to widen the range of their offerings and increase their profitability. Still, as we have seen, the Western market was far from ready for a broad expansion of trade in this ancient Russian art.

The Bolsheviks were not the first to consider using icons and other religious objects to raise income for the state. The question of how much of Russia’s gold reserve ended up in Czechoslovakia in 1920 continues to be actively studied by historians, but in addition to the gold and silver ingots and coins (so-called “Kolchak’s gold” or “Siberian gold”), the Czech legionnaires moved out of Russia either 600 wagonloads (according to the information of Gen. (Baron) A.P. Budberg) or 2,000 wagonloads (according to information from S. Vitoldov-Liutik) of a variety of objects: paintings, furniture, carriages, icons and other valuable church things.¹⁶ The gold went into the vaults of the Legiobank, which was established in 1920 and became one of the largest banks of pre-war Czechoslovakia. It was also the repository of money earned from the sale of art, including icons and other religious objects. Czechoslovakia was Russia’s model for the “wise use” of church treasures.

The International Exhibition of Icons of 1929–1930

Throughout the 1920s Soviet Russia was engaged in intensive and eventually successful negotiations with the nations of Europe to win diplomatic recognition and economic credits. Meanwhile, to build up its own “hard-currency sources,” the Soviet state took to the sale of art and other cultural artifacts with a will. As Western antiquarian specialists understood – as did their counterparts, the Soviet “art businessmen,” to a lesser degree – the Western market was not yet ready for a flood of such a narrow range of antiquarian goods as icons and other objects associated with the Orthodox Church. For this market to become healthy, a special promotional campaign was needed, and this would take the form of a traveling exhibition of ancient Russian icons in Europe and America in the period 1929–1932. As early as the mid-1920s the idea of exhibiting icons and other examples of Russian religious art as a preliminary to sales had occurred to enterprising Soviet individuals of various ranks and stations.

A crucial factor in the development of the idea was an exhibition held in May–June 1928 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and called “Art Russe: Ancien et Moderne.” It was the creation of a number of Russian émigrés living in France led by Alexander Benois, Alexander Polovtsov, Jacques Zolotnitsky and Leon Grinberg (the latter two owned a famed Paris antiquarian gallery, *A La Vieille Russie*). The show of 1928 itself was a kind of descendant of an exhibition staged in 1923 by the World of Art group. The 1928 exhibition included a section of ancient Russian art: its 103 objects included icons, manuscripts, crosses and small church-related paraphernalia.¹⁷

All the pieces in this part of the show belonged to *A La Vieille Russie* with the exception of two pieces – the *Bogomater’ Tikhvinskaia* icon (from the Vidal Collection, Paris) and the famous Church Slavonic Four Gospel, known as *Reimskii Evangelii* (from the City of Rheims). At the same time, art owned by many separate individuals was represented in the section of the show on the 18th and 19th centuries. This detail is of interest because the owners of *A La Vieille Russie* (as is now well known) were very active in the illegal and semi-legal trade in antiquarian goods from Soviet Russia.¹⁸ Of interest, too, is that almost immediately after

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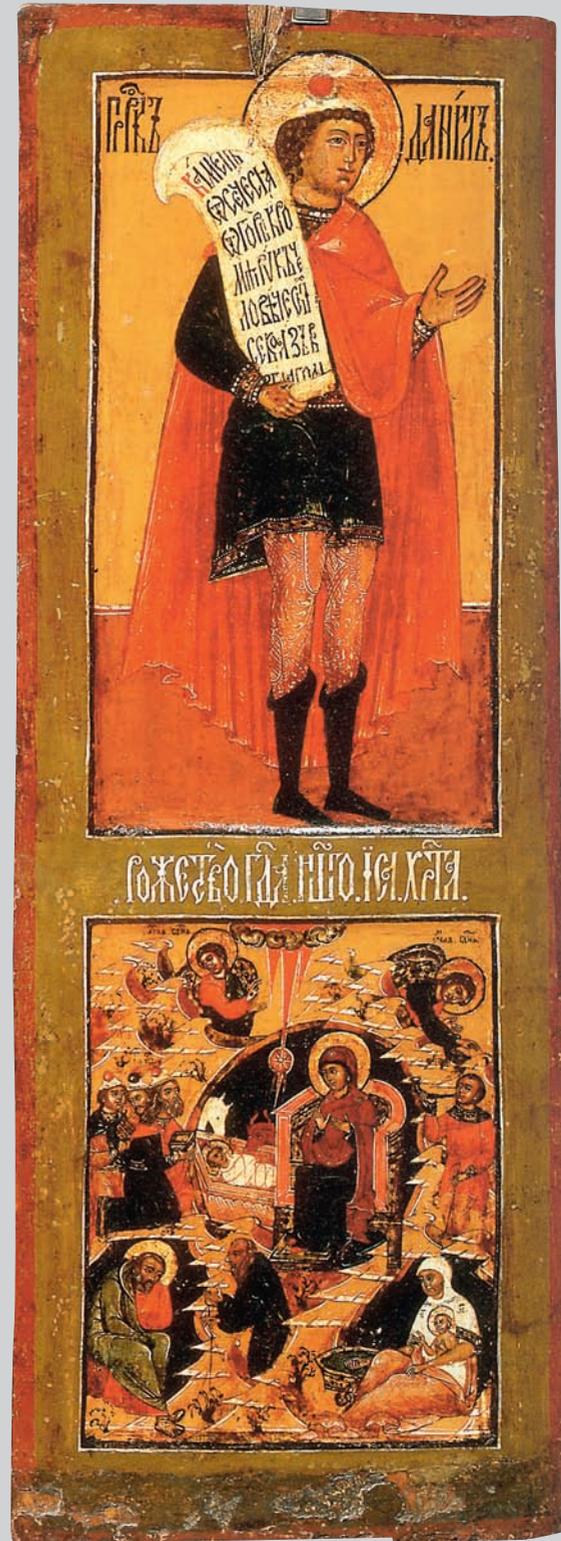
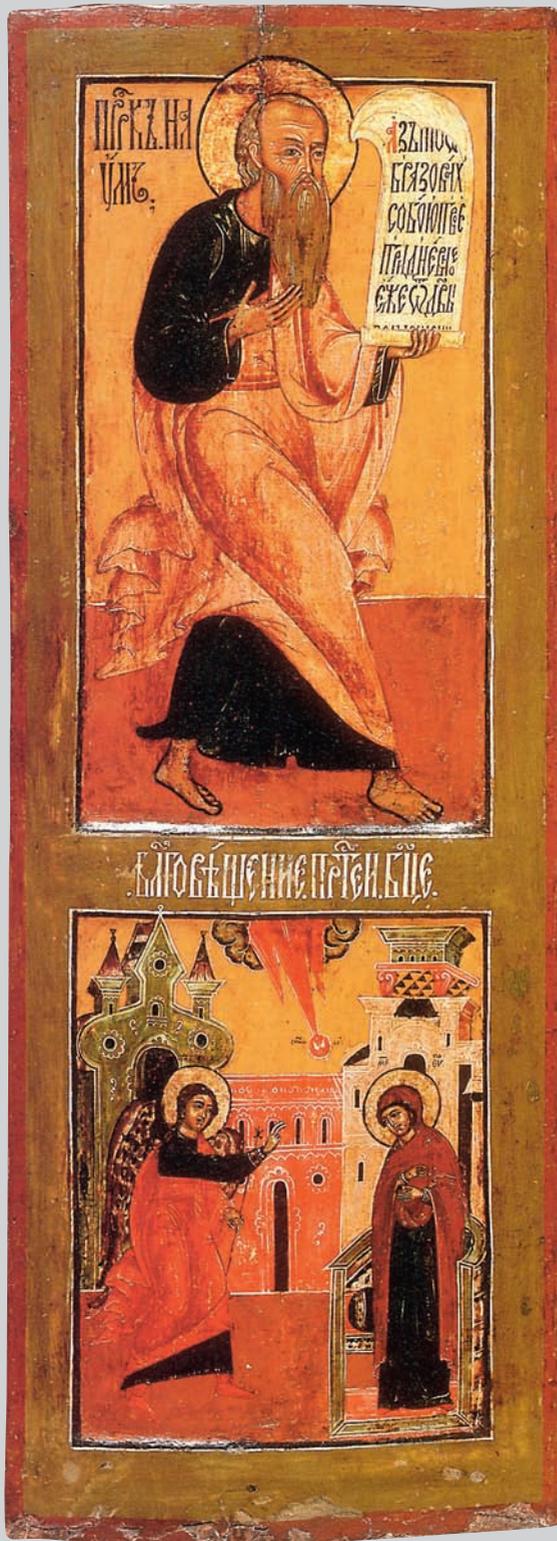
V. Sirotkin, *Zarubezhnoe zoloto Rossii*. Moscow: Olma-Press, 2000, pp. 70–71, 76–77. While the Czechoslovak Legion was in Russia and during its exodus via Vladivostok, it actively collected valuables in various ways. The Czech Soviet and Legion command had secret instructions on the matter from Foreign Minister E. Benes, who “recommended ‘obtaining’ for the new republic as much gold and precious metals as possible.”

17

Art Russe: Ancien et Moderne. Mai–Juin 1928. Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles. Catalogue. Brussels, 1928, pp. 23–34. Icons Nos. 1–50, manuscripts Nos. 51–54, images portatives Nos. 55–78, crosses Nos. 79–99, ornament en or No. 100, bois sculpte Nos. 101–103. The exhibition was designed by a team led by M. F. Gillet working from sketches provided by Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and Dmitrii Stelletsy.

18

The catalogue for the Brussels exhibition of 1928 omits the dimensions of the works shown and thus makes identification significantly more difficult. Some of the icons have been identified, thanks to the publication in 1931 of Pavel Muratov’s book, *Trente-cinq primitifs Russes*, which describes the icons collected by J. Zolotnitsky and himself. *Trente-cinq primitifs Russes. A La Vieille Russie*, Paris, 1931.



Prophet Nahum and the Annunciation, Prophet Daniel and Nativity
 From Prophets and Festivals tiers of iconostasis
 Kargopol (?), Onega district, Novgorod region, late 17th century
 Poplar wood and egg tempera on canvas. 97 × 36 × 2.5 cm and 96.5 × 36 × 3 cm

According to tradition was in Grand Duke Paul collection, St. Petersburg and bought
 by Olof Aschberg in Moscow in 1928 through Igor Grabar Gift of Olof Aschberg to
 Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1933, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden



Sainted Emperor Constantine and his mother Elena and Ste. Agata
Moscow school, c. 1500
Wood and egg tempera. 116 × 89 cm
Alexander Popoff collection, Paris
Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany

19

State Hermitage. Museum Sales, pp. 64–65.

20

Vystavka drevnerusskogo iskusstva, ustroennaia v 1913 v oznaimenovanie chestvovania 300-letia Doma Romanovykh. Moscow, 1913.

21

The 16th-century Northern School icon of the Apostle Matthew (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Otto O'Meara [nee Mosellij], Brussels, 1928, No. 289) went to the collection of Pierre Mussard, Paris (*Les Icones Russes du XIVe au XVIIe siècles. Exposition 1954–1955. Galerie Paul Ambroise* (Paris, 1954), No. 26 bis). The 15th-century Novgorod school icon, *Bogomater' Umilenie*, and the 16th-century Moscow School *Prorok* went to the collection of Alexander Popoff in Paris and then to the Recklinghausen Museum in Germany (Kunstsammlungen der Stadt Recklinghausen. Sammlung Popoff. 50 russische Ikonen vom 15.–19. Jahrhundert. 1967. S. 12–13, 24–25).

22

Sotheby's autumn 1990 auction in London included the altar gates with Annunciation and Sts. Vasilii Velikii and Ioann Zlatoust in full figure from the O'Meara collection (formerly the Mikhailov collection). They were dated as 15th century in 1928, but as 17th century at the 1990 auction. Sotheby's. *Icons, Russian Pictures and Works of Art*. London, Nov. 30, 1990, lot 464. These altar gates, already dated as late 17th century, also figured in 1992 at a Sotheby's auction in London. Sotheby's. *Icons, Russian Pictures and Works of Art*. London, Nov. 24, 1992, lot 217.

In 2003 the Jan Morsink Ikonen gallery in Amsterdam put up for auction three large icons (each 123 × 44 cm) from the Deisus with full figures (*Deisusnyi Chin*) of the 17th century – *Arkhangel Mikhail*, *Ioann Predtecha* and *Varlaam Khutynskii*, all from the former O'Meara collection and, before that, the N. P. Romanchenko collection in Petrograd-Leningrad (*Jan Morsink Ikonen*. Catalogue 2003 [Amsterdam, 2003], pp. 6–7, No. 2).

In 2004 the Jan Morsink Ikonen gallery sold two early 18th-century icons of the *Praotecheskii* series from the O'Meara collection (in all, the collection had four icons of this series). They came from the Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg (*Jan Morsink Ikonen, Highlights Collection 2004* [Amsterdam, 2004], p. 29, No. 17).

23

Zhukov, 2005, pp. 169–172.

24

As cited in: Zhukov, 2005, p. 171.

25

Ulf Abel, "The National Museum Icon Collection," in: Ulf Abel with Vera Moore, *Icons*. Stockholm, 2002, pp. 9–10.

26

Op. cit., p. 11.

the 1928 exhibition closed, a successful auction was held of the Otto O'Meara collection of Russian and Western art. This took place Oct. 15–17, 1928, in the Galerie Georges Giroux in Brussels, and its success further "heated up" the interest of the Soviets in the sale of icons. A member of the Hermitage staff, Stepan Petrovich Yaremich, saw the auction as a model of its kind. In a letter dated Nov. 18, 1928, he wrote: ". . . the price of one and the same thing varies, depending on what it is set beside, and the difference can be unbelievable. As an illustration, take the much ballyhooed auction sale this year of the O'Meara collection in Brussels, which, obviously, was made up largely of a selection of Russian icons, not especially ancient or of very high quality. And, nonetheless, the sale was tremendously profitable. But the very same things, presented without plan and set out for sale like so much accidental stuff would not have sold for a tenth as much."¹⁹

The ancient Russian portion of the Otto O'Meara collection included icons and objects of applied art with a particularly strong showing of bronze crosses (nos. 273–768 in the auction catalogue). In terms of quantity and quality for 1928, the O'Meara was one of the outstanding foreign collections of ancient Russian art. The catalogue stated that many of the items derived from private Russian collections: the Romanchenko, I. M. Mikhailov, Makarov, that of the antiquities expert Bol'shakov, of Bogdan and Vera Khanenko, Stepan Riabushinsky and Alexei Uvarov. A relatively few of the items were marked as having been shown at the Moscow exhibition of 1913 held on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the house of Romanov.²⁰ Items from the O'Meara collection that were sold at the auction of 1928 went to private collectors and antiquarian dealers.²¹ Icons from the sale still turn up at auction.²²

Soviet trade representatives in Europe were among those especially active in promoting the idea of organizing exhibition-sales of icons and other religious art and artifacts in the West. S. V. Popper, for example, did so in Germany, Georgy Pyatakov in France and Nikolai Semyonovich Angarsky (Klestov), who arrived in Paris in 1928 to represent *Antikvariat* of Moscow.²³ In a letter from Paris in this connection, Angarsky wrote to P. O. Shleifer, chief of foreign operations for the People's Commissariat for Trade: "... Through c[omrade] Pyatakov, I was able to establish an excellent connection with a very powerful merchant, a Swede, who deals in icons. This gentleman has a fine collection of Russian icons at his villa outside Paris, has ties to America and is almost the only person who knows what's what and might help. He will be in Moscow in July. We must show him our reserves..."²⁴

The reference in the letter was to the extraordinarily wealthy Swedish financier Olof Aschberg (1877–1960), who worked with Soviet Russia after the revolution and served as a link between the Soviets and financial circles in Sweden and the United States. Olof Aschberg did indeed put together a collection of Russian icons in the 1920s. Aschberg's base of operations was in Paris, where he settled with his family on a palatial property not far from Versailles. Most of his Russian icon collection was kept there.²⁵

Olof Aschberg made no mention of his journey to Russia in 1928 in his *Memoirs* or in his notes, nor did he mention his role in the sale of Russian icons on the Western market. However, there is a letter from him to Helge Kjellin, dated Oct. 12, 1928, in the Archive of the National Museum in Stockholm that states: "... I returned home yesterday from my journey to Russia by way of Stockholm. I was in touch with Igor Grabar about the icon exhibition and believe in [the possibility of] co-operation with the Russians. They want to start a mixed company with me for the whole world, but I didn't yet wish to commit myself to this. However, I did manage to purchase 52 icons of the very finest quality, nearly all large ones, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th century. The ones which are to be cleaned will be cleaned there and I am expecting them all to arrive here in about 6 weeks. . . . The committee approving the exportation were quite hesitant but consented on orders from higher authority. . . ."²⁶ Aschberg reported in a letter to the same person on Jan. 7, 1929, that the 52 icons had arrived.



The painter and art critic Igor Grabar
Photograph, 1920s. RGAKFD

Olof Aschberg is nowhere mentioned as among those who helped organize the Soviet exhibition of Russian icons. This does not mean, however, that he did not act on the proposal of Soviet officials to help organize Russian icon sales in Europe and America. It can hardly be doubted that the 52 icons restored at the TsGRM (the Central State Restoration Workshops) and shipped from Moscow without incident were a kind of assurance on the part of the Soviets that they were looking forward to serious cooperation with the Swedish financier. A newspaper interview given by Aschberg indicated that some of the 52 icons had belonged to Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich.²⁷ In the same interview, Aschberg revealed his plan to open a public museum of Russian icons in Paris, using his own collection as the foundation of the museum. It would be a place, he said, “where Russian experts could meet curators, collectors and artists from the West.”²⁸ The proposed museum project never materialized, possibly because its actual purpose – to serve as a center for the sale of icons from Soviet Russia – was too obvious to the public, including the French authorities.

A very important role in organizing the sale of icons and other church objects in the West was played by a group of Russian scholars and restorers generally associated with the TsGRM in Moscow. These are the people who put flesh and bones on the idea hatched by the Soviet “bureaucrat-businessmen.” Their leader was Igor Grabar, a Soviet artist and art historian who ran the Workshops, whose supposedly benign aim was to show the West what Soviet restorers could do. Grabar, in a letter to Georgy Vladimirovich Vernadsky, dated Dec. 12, 1926, wrote: “... *I am presently holding negotiations with various institutions and individuals in Berlin, Frankfurt, Vienna, Paris and London about the organisation of a large exhibition of icons (originals) from the 12th to the 17th century. The idea for the exhibition comes from Germany and it arose simultaneously in modern art circles and archaeological and art-historical circles ...*” Perhaps with an eye on “the judgment of future generations,” Grabar made no reference here to *Antikvariat* in the organization of the exhibition, citing as the initiators of the idea three German experts who had visited Soviet Russia – Profs. Teodor Wiegand and Otto Hotzsch and architect Peter Behrens.²⁹ Grabar went on: “*Despite all the insistence and the proposals, I was decidedly against the idea because shipping the icons under prevailing conditions could in no sense be considered safe. Moreover, no one was ready to provide money. Now the situation is much improved, and the Frankfurt Stadtelsches Institut has offered funds to cover the organization of this very costly show, with its especially expensive and complicated packing arrangements, insurance, shipping and the cost of the personnel that would go along for the lecture series and to demonstrate our methods of restoration.*” Again, not a word or hint of *Antikvariat* involvement. Finally, Grabar declared that the exhibit could not possibly include the principal examples of the ancient Russian art, since these were in churches and museums. Then, suddenly, perhaps unconsciously, he rather openly describes the commercial notion at the heart of the show and the selection of displays: “... *I propose nonetheless to move quite remarkable material found in various junk piles and in belfries, which is not part of any museum collection, and then material which is of first-class significance and value from private collections. Some of the owners are prepared to sell the pieces that belong to them, some will provide them for the exhibition – but under no circumstances for sale. These icons include some which are unique, from the very earliest periods. Material from the State Museum Fund will not be sold but is intended for exchange with Western museums for pictures by old and recent masters which we need. ... I am thinking of adding to all this several copies of our most important monuments of art (the Vladimirskaia, Rublev’s Troitsa, etc., up to 5 or 6 works). These copies have been made with all the faults and marks of old restorations and are so close to the originals that when they are set side by side at a distance of 3 paces they cannot be told apart.*”³⁰

In discussing the choice of icons for the exhibition, Grabar here emphasized the formal side of the matter – whether an icon was part of a museum collection – and not its

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Several of these icons are mentioned in the Stockholm museum catalogue: *Icon Collection*, Nos. 99, 130–145, 181. However, as far as is known, Grand Duke Pavel did not collect ancient Russian icons. However, his daughter, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, had a collection of ancient Russian icons. Icons belonging to Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich and his daughter, Maria, occasionally turn up at auction, but these as a rule are icons of the 19th and 20th centuries presented to the parties on various formal occasions. See, for example, Sotheby’s, *Russian Art: Russian Works of Art, Faberge and Icons*, London, Dec. 1, 2010. Lots 701, 704.

28

Ulf Abel, “The National Museum Icon Collection,” p. 12.

29

To a certain extent, the assertion was true. Alexander Benois’ *Diary* has an interesting entry for July 19, 1923, about his visit, along with Hermitage Director Sergei Troitskiy, to the German consul, Kessler, who “spoke quite excitedly about the undertaking, thanks to the enthusiast Behrens, icon exhibit in Berlin, ... who now, however, is strongly disillusioned because the matter has run into reality (Behrens is now hiding) and, as it turns out, would require vast sums. At the same time, Kessler in pure Guards fashion called the holiest of the pieces, ‘diese Biester!’” Benois, *Diary*, p. 593.

30

As cited in: Grabar. *Pis’ma*, pp. 158–159.



Mother of God and St. John the Baptist from Deisus tier, iconostasis
Moscow school, second half of 17th century; repainted in 19th century
Linden wood and egg tempera on canvas, silver gilt cover
177 × 65 × 3.5 cm and 177 × 65 × 3 cm
Olof Aschberg collection, Stockholm
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden



Apostle Peter, Deisus tier, iconostasis
Novgorod school, end of 15th century
Wood and egg tempera. 89 x 44 cm
Alexander Popoff collection, Paris
Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany

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The situation with respect to icons at the *TsGRM* was rather irregular. The icons' legal status was never quite defined: on the one hand, they had been taken temporarily from churches and given to the Workshops to be restored. On the other hand, once they were at the Workshops, they were state property because of their museum significance.

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As cited in: I Grabar. *Pis'ma*, p. 162.

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Op. cit., pp. 179–180.

34

The exhibition was to have visited Frankfurt, as the catalogue stated. It did not. See: G. I. Vzdornov, "Tsentral'nye Gosudarstvennye restavratsionnye masterskie," in G. I. Vzdornov, *Restavratsiia i nauka. Ocherki po istorii otkrytiia i izucheniiia drevnerusskoi zhivopisi*. Moscow, 2006, pp. 111–112.

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The American Russian Institute was the official sponsor of the US tour. In New York, the exhibition was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Jan. 12–Feb. 23, 1931. Of the 122 icons shown, two *Bogomater's mladentsem* were accompanied by no indications of origin, owners, date of composition or school; 13 icons belonged to *Antikvariat* (Nos. 12, 13, 15, 41–43, 71, 72, 80, 81, 103–105); 6 were copies of ancient icons (Nos. 1–5, 19) and belonged to *TsGRM*, as did 26 of the original icons; the rest were presented by various Russian museums. See: Metropolitan Museum of Art, *A Catalogue of Russian Icons Received from the American Russian Institute for Exhibition*. New York, 1931.

36

G.I. Vzdornov, "Tsentral'nye Gosudarstvennye restavratsionnye masterskie," pp. 112–113. The English catalogue listed approximately 13 icons as designated for sale. See: *Ancient Russian Icons. From the XIIIth to the XIXth Centuries*. London, 1929.

art-historical significance.³¹ But whether an icon belonged to a museum or came from the State Museum Fund did not mean it was not available for "a commercial deal." And again Grabar seems indifferent to the artistic quality of the material, when he says they will not be *sold* but rather *exchanged* for paintings by old and new artists. Yet he wrote this after sales of Russian art had begun, which he, from his vantage at the very center of the Russian museum world, could not but know. His remark about copies barely distinguishable from the originals is highly revealing. It is crucial testimony on the matter of the authenticity of some of the Russian icons sold by *Antikvariat* in the 1920s and 1930s.

Grabar wrote to various colleagues about the successful preparation of the icon exhibit for Germany. His observation in a letter to a curator at the Russian Museum, Peter Neradovsky, is especially interesting. "As to my trip abroad, it looks as if I will have to go: just days ago Lunacharsky told me that the trip had been decided on, that it was being insisted on in France and especially in Germany and that the idea is to make clear there what we did to save the legacy of art during the revolution."³² It should be remembered that the Soviet trade representatives in Germany and France were the chief "promoters" of the idea of a commercial exhibition of icons and, in general, of the organization of a massive sale of church valuables at Western auctions.

The actual role of Grabar in transforming icons into a "source of hard currency" is quite clear in his famous Service Note, dated Sept. 20, 1928, to Abram Moiseevich Ginzburg, head of *Antikvariat*: "[We] need to take all measures for the creation of market conditions that will be favorable for the sale of Russian icons... . If the Commissariat of Trade wishes to do really well with icons, we must quickly begin to talk up 'Russian icons' and create a fashion for them. ... [T]he only reliable means for this is to publish appropriate books and organise exhibitions.... In this case, therefore, exhibitions must be organised in Berlin, Paris, London and New York and at the same time a well-produced book must be published, with abundant illustrations... . The exhibition must be held under the banner of our achievements in the field of restoration, and not be simply an exhibition of icons... . The exhibition must consist both of exhibits of fine museum quality which are to be sent back and of works which are also of high museum quality but which may, after the exhibition has closed... be sold."³³ Without the slightest doubt, Igor Grabar fully understood from the first the purpose of the enterprise in which he was playing the part of "scholarly cover."

Green shoots quickly sprouted from the idea outlined in the Service Note. The exhibit of icons opened in Berlin (February–March 1929), moving on to Cologne (March–April), Hamburg (April–May), Munich (May), again coming to Cologne (June–August),³⁴ Vienna (September–October) and finally to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London from Nov. 18 through Dec. 14. In 1930 it traveled to the United States for shows in the several towns, among them Boston, New York and Chicago in 1930–1932.³⁵ The heart of the exhibit remained unchanged, although there were marginal alterations along the way. The catalogue for Berlin listed 132 icons, the London catalogue 148, the Chicago and Boston catalogues 100 and the New York catalogue 122. As Gerold Vzdornov presumed, there were sales of icons during the tour.³⁶ Indeed, for all the apparently benign purposes of the show – to show off the achievements of Soviet restorers – its real purposes were obvious to all: to the Russian museum people, the foreign dealers and, very clearly, to the Bolshevik functionaries accompanying it. While the scholarly aspects of the exhibition were handled by Igor Grabar and Alexander Anisimov (both of the *TsGRM*), representatives of *Gostorg* were responsible for the organizational aspects of the tour and chose the icons for the tour in visits to provincial museums in Novgorod, Pskov, Yaroslavl, Tver, Alexandrov, Vologda, Arkhangelsk and so on. Moreover, they made additional purchases of icons in the provinces for later sale in countries that the exhibition would visit.



Restorer Alexander Anisimov
 Photograph, 1928–1929
 From Irina Kyzlasova archive

Sometimes quite revealing, rather curious situations become apparent. For example, two icons of the *Prazdnichnyi Chin – Rozhdestvo Khristovo* and *Preobrazhenie* – that were borrowed from the museum at Tver were shown at the London exhibition in 1929. Reproductions of both were included in the catalogue for the London show and in the art-book accompanying it, *Shedevry Drevnerusskogo Iskusstva* (Masterpieces of Ancient Russian Art).³⁷ Remarkably, eight icons from that same series are now in various collections throughout the world. Both of the exhibition-featured icons returned in good condition to Russia, where they were later sold through the Moscow branch of *Gostorg* and ended up in the Rybakovs' collection in Leningrad, from which they were purchased in the 1950s by the Hermitage. In addition to the two icons now at the Hermitage, *Sreteniye* and *Vkhod v Iyerusalim* are in the National Gallery in Oslo (they were formerly in the collection of R. Zeiner-Henriksen), *Voskresenie Lazaria* is in the Menil Collection, Houston (the former collection of Helena Rubenstein), *Raspiatie*, *Soshestvie v Ad* and *Voznesenie* are in the State Russian Museum (to which they were given in 1934 by the *TsGRM*). As this shows, icons from the exhibitions of 1929–1932 were sold. The sale of icons to foreigners also took place directly from the Central State Restoration Workshops in Moscow.

The publication of documents from the archives is making ever more obvious the negative role played by the “scholar-leaders” of the exhibition, Igor Grabar and Alexander Anisimov, as well as by several restoration specialists at the Central State Restoration Workshops. In addition to the already cited Service Note sent by Grabar to Abram Ginzburg, one finds quite interesting material about Grabar in the *Diary* of the numismatist Alexei Vasilevich Oreshnikov, who was on the staff of the State Historical Museum in Moscow. His diary entry for Sept. 25 (12), 1928, reads: “G.O. Chirikov turned up at the Museum along with a Communist whose name was probably Feit (he was English), an architect by training; they were to inspect the icons selected for sale abroad; Grabar came in; we were sitting in the Religious Section, and Grabar told us that the government, primarily Stalin and Mikoyan, had given orders to send the very best icons abroad, and if the museums sent second or third-rate works, then they would go directly to the museums and repositories of icons – the churches and monasteries – and remove all that was best; that would be the end of icons like the *Vladimirskaia Bogomater'*, *Donskaia Bogomater'*, *Oranta* and so forth. These harsh instructions produced a painful impression on Evgeny Ivanovich [Silin] and myself: when Grabar and the others had left, Silin burst into tears. On Grabar's advice, it was decided not to send icons from the collections of persons living abroad: Zubalov, Yusupov et al.”³⁸

Despite the obvious services of Igor Grabar to the exhibition of icons and its seemingly successful tour in Europe, despite his outward “apolitical” position that in fact was full cooperation with the Soviet authorities, in July 1930 he was forced to quit his post as director of the Central State Restoration Workshops. It is very likely that Grabar's departure was a response to the commercial failure of the icon show of 1929 in Germany and Great Britain. Outwardly, the show certainly appeared to have been successful, enjoying a fine press reception and winning the attention of the scholarly world for the achievements of Soviet restorers. It is true that the press reaction was to a significant extent organized by Soviet representatives, but the lectures and banquets were well attended. Still, however, the show did not alter the attitude of the German museums, nor that of most academic art historians, nor that of antiquarian dealers toward Russian icons. They remained “junk.” The expected strong demand for icons from German museums and dealers in antiquities in the wake of the show did not materialize. Igor Grabar was allowed to leave in a “face-saving” way. He would not be subjected to incarceration or worse. However, as several contemporary scholars quite well disposed to Grabar noted, he endured a great human and professional drama.

The other organizer of the exhibition – the art historian Alexander Anisimov – also did not oppose the sale of icons from museum collections for hard currency and energetically

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Ancient Russian Icons. From the XIIth to the XIXth Centuries, cat. 42, 43 plate III; *Masterpieces of Russian Art*. London, 1930, plates XXIV, XLI. However, for the American exhibition both icons were marked as property of *Antikvariat*, that is, they were in principle put up for sale. Both icons, as many signs indicate, belonged to the *Prazdnichnyi Chin* and were produced by one and the same workshop.

38

As cited in: Alexei Vasilevich Oreshnikov. *Diary. 1915–1933. Book 2 (1925–1933)*. Moscow, 2011, p. 302.



Deisus with St. Nicholas and unknown male saint
Novgorod school, late 14th – early 15th century
Linden wood and egg tempera on canvas. 93.5 × 103.5 × 3 cm

Bought by Vilhelm Assarsson in Russia, 1930s;
gift of Ake Wiberg, 1959, to Nationalmuseum, Stockholm
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden



Tablet, Raising of Lazarus
Novgorod school, 16th century
Egg tempera on linen. 24.5 × 21.5 cm
Alexander Popoff collection, Paris
Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany



Tablet showing Entry into Jerusalem
Novgorod school, 16th century
Egg tempera on linen
24.5 × 21.5 cm
Alexander Popoff collection, Paris
Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany

cooperated with *Antikvariat*. In this regard, we cite extracts from the correspondence of Ivan Vasilevich Fedyshin, the director of the museum in Vologda: “Today Briagin [Alexander Ivanovich, a restorer – P. Yu.] let slip that Anisimov is coming in September to select icons for *Antikvariat*. But, to me, the scoundrel had said he wasn’t going to help them or put himself out for them. Of course, if it’s a trip just for the purpose, that’s something else. Then you have to serve Truth and Justice,” Fedyshin wrote to his wife on Aug. 5, 1930.³⁹ He picked up the theme in a letter dated Aug. 12 of that year: “. . . You write that Anisimov is not being so terrible. . . . No, in my view, you haven’t seen through him. First of all, one has to say that he needs no soap to squeeze in anywhere. He is that clever. Since he’s seen all our collections, that’s quite enough for him to cause trouble at the drop of a hat. All that he needs to do is create a piece of paper and send it to the museum bearing the Glavnauka stamp. And who would then know who singled the best icons for showing abroad?”⁴⁰

In one of his letters to Ivan Fedyshin, Anisimov rather clearly described *Antikvariat*’s way of working with provincial museums: “Tikhon Ivanovich Sorokin [on the Moscow staff of *Antikvariat*, a relative of the writer Ilya Ehrenburg – P. Yu.] asked me to ask you if you wouldn’t prefer that the Vologda museum sell Gostorg’s *Antikvariat* some unimportant things out of your reserves. If so, he could come to Vologda to choose the things with you and even travel with you (naturally, at *Antikvariat*’s expense, not the museum’s) about the province, from village to village. This would have been quite profitable from the standpoint of the museum: It would get rid of some unnecessary, relatively weak, things from the reserves and make up for them with better pieces.”⁴¹ According to information compiled by Gerold Vzdornov, who made a special study of the inventory books of the Vologda museum, *Antikvariat* received 33 icons, of vintage 16th through 18th centuries, from the museum. *Antikvariat* also paid for special trips to villages to collect icons that then were put up for sale. It was he [Anisimov] who hired the restorers who cleaned these pieces so that they might be sold to foreigners at higher prices.⁴²

This kind of practice was widespread and was often implemented with greater ferocity and cynicism than as just described by Anisimov, who, as we shall see, paid dearly for his work. On Feb. 28, 1929, Anisimov wrote to Nikolai Mikhailovich Beliaev in Prague: “A few words about the exhibition that is currently in Berlin. It cost me dearly, for, first, in quantitative and qualitative terms I put together its base, but Grabar traveled with it, never, of course, dreaming of making for himself a ‘world reputation’ from it, and, second, it stirred up against me here a whole gang of crooks and screamers who joined in one voice to sing about me selling out the pride of Russia, helping the Bolsheviks to make money on this. . . . It took great effort to stand up to all this and, faithfully and honestly, finish my job: it was my thought that it was time to show the world this great Russian art, to acquaint the world with the Russian soul, enriching its soul with new streams of human goodness, and that it was necessary to give all of you who are cut off from the homeland but who have as much right to it as other Russians a chance to see what is yours and to immerse yourselves in the native source.”⁴³ The patriotic-self-pitying tone of Anisimov’s complaint notwithstanding, the attitude of the academic and museum world toward him was quite unanimous. For the publication of a monograph on the icon of the *Vladimirskiaia Bogomater’* in the Prague-based “bourgeois” journal *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, he was cut off from all gainful employment in 1929–1930 and on the night of Oct. 6–7 arrested by the OGPU and sentenced to 10 years in the camps. On Sept. 2, 1937, he was executed in a Karelian concentration camp as an inveterate monarchist and enemy of Soviet power.⁴⁴

In the note quoted from Alexei Oreshnikov’s *Diary*, the restoration specialist Grigory Chirikov (1882–1936) was described as taking part in the selection of icons for the foreign exhibition. In March 1931 he also was arrested, along with several other members of the staff of the Central State Restoration Workshops, and exiled to the north, his property confiscated and his collections given to the Historical Museum. It was Chirikov who in the autumn of 1928

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As cited in: *Iz istorii restavratsii drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. Peregovory I. V. Fedyshin (1924–1936)*. Prepared for printing by G. I. Vzdornov. Moscow, 1975, pp. 108–109.

40

Op. cit., pp. 110–111.

41

Ibid., pp. 88–89.

42

Ibid., pp. 88–91.

43

As cited in: I. L. Kyzlasova, *Alexander Ivanovich Anisimov (1877–1937)*. Moscow, 2000, pp. 52–53.

44

It is clear from the records of the case, in part published by the Moscow researcher Irina Kyzlasova in 2000, that one of the charges against Alexander Anisimov involved his active role in organizing the foreign exhibition of icons.



Restorer Grigory Chirikov
Taken at Mother of God Memorial Church
(*Uspenie Bogoroditsy*) in Kondopoga during
First Northern Expedition
Photograph, September 1920
From Irina Kyzlasova archive

was seen selecting items at the Historical Museum for the exhibition. Now in 1932 Alexei Oreshnikov notes in his *Diary* that he has been asked to have a look at Chirikov's icon collection at the Historical Museum. "There an agent of the GPU was waiting for me with a list of 80 some icons, completed an arrest form and left; I glanced at the many impressive icons and saw ancient ones and fine ones."⁴⁵ Later other "experts" selected icons from the former collection of Grigory Chirikov for sale to foreign collectors. By an irony of fate, Grigory Chirikov's Novgorod school icon, *Prepolovenie*, which dates from the first half of the 15th century, was bought from *Antikvariat* by the Swiss representative of the Red Cross Voldemar Wehrlin and became part of his collection. It was purchased in 1955 by the Louvre.⁴⁶

Another TsGRM restorer, Pavel Ivanovich Iukin (1885–1945), was tried and found guilty in 1931. Iukin was close to Alexander Anisimov, and thus his quite open statements about the sale of icons from Russian museums are very interesting. In an interrogation dated March 9, 1931, after his arrest, he stated: "State *Antikvariat* gave me the assignment of finding out about the prices for icons and primitives abroad. To handle commercial matters connected to the exhibition, Samuel, Grigory Alexandrovich [Ludvigovich], came to London. General Consul Shostak, his aide Pikman and Fardmen, Mikhail Semenovich, as the exhibition committee, categorically forbid me to hold or even start conversations about the sale of items in the exhibition. Things developed quite oddly with respect to the sale of icons. There were no Russian icons in the English museums or on the English market, which alone should have meant that our ancient icons would meet with success, but not a single item from the exhibition was sold. The exhibition itself enjoyed an enormous success. All the newspapers – 94 of them – wrote about our exhibition. About 30,000 people visited the exhibition in one month. . . . On orders from *Antikvariat*, copies of ancient icons were produced for the exhibition, the copies were made by myself, Chirikov, Briagin and Kirikov. Although the copies were done very well, they did not sell. The exhibition went from London to America in February 1930, where it is at this time; before departure, it was insured for approximately two million roubles. Except for three Rublev icons,⁴⁷ which were truly rare things, the rest of the icons might have been sold with a perfectly easy conscience. Currently, there are large collections of ancient icons in Novgorod, Vologda, Yaroslavl, Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow; a portion of these collections might long ago have been sold for hard currency."⁴⁸ Despite such "good news" about the USSR's hard-currency prospects, Pavel Iukin was sentenced to three years of exile in the north and sent off to Kotlas.

Mikhail Sergeevich Lagovskoi (1898–after 1981) was involved in the same case. Lagovskoi was the secretary of the ancient Russian painting section of TsGRM and played an important part in organizing the foreign exhibition. He collaborated with Iurii Alexandrovich Olsufiev on the tables for the artbook, *Masterpieces of Russian Painting* (London, 1930), published in connection with the London exhibition. Lagovskoi was also sentenced to three years' exile in the north.⁴⁹ Olsufiev (1878–1938), who had been with the Restoration Workshops since 1928, was also later arrested. He helped write the catalogue for the foreign exhibition of icons in addition to his work on the exhibition artbook. Thus, all those most actively involved in preparing the icon exhibition of 1929–1932, with the exception of Igor Grabar, were arrested.

Let us return to 1928 and the preparations in Moscow for the icon exhibition. What we find may seem impossible for Soviet Russia at the end of the 1920s, but the museum people, art historians and cultural intelligentsia stood as a solid front against the feared sale of icons and so firmly insisted on guarantees that the icons be returned to their home museums after the exhibition that *Gostorg* was shaken. Restoration specialist Alexander Briagin, in Moscow to copy the *Vladimirskaiia Bogomater'* icon for the foreign exhibition, wrote on Dec. 8, 1928, to Ivan Fedyshein: "A representative of *Gostorg* is going to come to you in Vologda. He is preparing to leave in a few days on a special trip for icons. Try to keep your good things with you in the museum and offer what you and I looked at in the 'northern letters' [does this need

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As cited in: Alexei Vasilevich Oreshnikov, *Diary. 1915–1933*, p. 537.

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Les Icones Russes du XIVe au XVIIe siècles. Exposition 1954–1955. Galerie Paul Ambroise. Paris, 1954, p. 15, No. 5, plate IV; the icon was taken from the iconostasis of Nikolskii Church of the village of Gostinopof'e on the Volkhov River.

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The reference is to the *Prazdnichnyi* icons from Vladimir and Zvenigorod by V. I. Antonova, N. E. Mneva. See: State Tretyakov Gallery. *Katalog drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. Vol. 1* (11th–beginning of the 16th century). Moscow, 1963, pp. 275, 290–292.

48

As cited in: I. L. Kyzlasova, *Istoriia otechestvennoi nauki ob iskusstve Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi 1920–1930s. Po materialam arkhivov. Moscow, 2000, pp. 350–352.*

49

Op. cit., pp. 346–364.

Exhibition of Russian icons in London
Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
Nov. 18–Dec. 14, 1929
Photograph, 1929
From Gerold Vzdornov archive

Prepolovenie (Christ's Conversation with Bookmen). From Festivals tier, iconostasis, Church of St. Nikolai, village of Gostinopol'e on Volkhov River. Late 15th–early 16th century
Wood, tempera

Louvre, Paris, France

From Grigory Chirikov collection, Moscow, sold in 1930s by *Antikvariat* to Voldemar Wehrlin, from whom it was exhibited in the Louvre in the 1990s
Rocheller III collection, Paris, France



explanation?] collection, and they will do the cleanup at their own expense.”⁵⁰ The Vologda museum used the suggestion to protect itself. In late 1928 architect Peter Dmitrievich Baranovsky wrote to Fedyshein: “A rumor is circulating here in Moscow that your museum had the nerve to refuse to give away the best icons in its collection for the exhibition abroad that Gostorg is organizing with the invited help of Grabar and Anisimov. There are very unpleasant conversations going on here that Gostorg’s object isn’t to bring glory to Russian art but sales and, of course, of the best things. . . . The academic council of the architectural section . . . registered its protest with Glavnauka, pointing to the impermissibility for a variety of reasons of shipping out of the country, even for an exhibition, unique memorials of the past. There has developed an unpleasant split with the leaders of our work at the Restoration Workshops [Grabar and Anisimov. – P. Yu.] because they are sticking to their line firmly. I do not know whether anything will come of this protest, but at least we are doing our duty before our consciences.”⁵¹

As stated, opposition to the way the exhibition was being put together went beyond the specialists of *TsGRM*. In early January 1929 their stand was seconded by Ilia Semenovitch Ostroukhov, Peter Ivanovich Neradovsky, Nikolai Petrovich Sychev, Nikolai Mikhailovich Shchekotov, Nikolai Georgievich Mashkovetsev and other scholars. The protests did not stop the preparations for the show, but they forced *Gostorg*, unlikely as this may seem, to take public opinion into account and give written guarantees that the exhibition pieces would be returned.⁵² Of course, any such guarantee might well be set aside, and it appears that *Gostorg* did not take them seriously.

On the commercial side, the exhibition of icons did not bring quick results. The hopes of Soviet officials for an immediate spurt in orders for icons from Western museums and antiquarian dealers were frustrated. The results in Germany were particularly disappointing, where neither the major museums nor the major figures in art history showed interest.⁵³ In London the exhibition took place almost immediately after the resumption of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Great Britain, which certainly served to encourage the response of the British public. The exhibition was well attended.⁵⁴ The catalogue for the London show was more lavish and more richly illustrated than the German catalogue, and there was the separate publication of the book about Russian icons. From a scholarly stand-

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Iz istorii restavratsii drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. Perepiska I.V. Fedysheina, p. 83.

51

Op. cit., p. 85.

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Wary of the guarantees, State Russian Museum Director Nikolai Sychev significantly reduced the number of icons from his museum that would go to the exhibition. He did so at the eleventh hour, and there wasn’t time to find replacement icons. Instead of the planned 200 icons going to Germany, the number was reduced to 132.

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The journal articles and the positive press reviews did not change the situation, for those who wrote about the icons were those already deeply interested in them, as, for example, the German Slavist Martin Winkler.

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Diplomatic relations resumed on Oct. 3, 1929, and the exhibition opened on Nov. 18, 1929.



Pavel Iukin, Ivan Suslov, Vassily Kirikov
at Central State Restoration Workshops (*TsGRM*)
Photograph, 1920s
From Irina Kyzlasova archive

point, the London exhibition undoubtedly was more effective in winning respect for ancient Russian art. Yet in 1929 and through the 1930s the British Museum and the National Gallery held to their positions and were in no hurry to add to their collections of Russian icons. From the point of view of the leaders of *Antikvariat*, the exhibition prepared by Igor Grabar had failed.

The opinion is widespread in the scholarly literature of Russia that the possible large-scale sale of icons after the exhibition was forestalled by the positive response to the show in a foreign press thrilled by the achievements of Russian scholarship and art restoration. In fact, however, the actual reason is more likely to have been the absence of decent offers. Indeed, a good number of the press notices were inspired by and even paid for by Soviet commercial and diplomatic representatives. Whatever the case may have been, the show moved on after Europe to the three largest cities of the United States (1931–1932) before returning to Moscow.⁵⁵

Even so, it was because of the stimulus provided by this exhibition and all that was written and said about it that *Antikvariat* and *Gostorg* were able to come to agreements that did involve massive deliveries of icons to the European and American antiquarian markets, only some of which abided by the law. Among other things, the origins of these icons were falsified (collections were broken up, remixed, the elements shipped to various cities, the reverse sides marked with numbers from temporary lists and with the names of major museums and, not infrequently, with entirely mythical inventory numbers). Sadder yet was the fact that *Gostorg* brought along second-rate restorers whose incompetent and barely professional work ruined the originals or altered them to appear older and rarer.⁵⁶ Admittedly, too, sometimes qualified, professional employees of *TsGRM* were not above “market” restorations of this kind. Looked at objectively, then, the icon exhibition of 1929–1932 achieved its main goal: it had prepared the Western antiquarian market for a new “commodity” – Russian icons. It had laid the groundwork for the establishment of close ties between Soviet functionaries and numerous antiquarian specialists and dealers (often quite shrewd and shady ones). The Russian icon joined vodka and caviar as a signal Russian commodity.

To broaden the supply side of the market, the Soviet authorities had undertaken a specific series of steps. A new period of widespread attacks on the Orthodox Church and religious art began in 1929. Many large churches were not only closed but completely and purposefully ransacked, with church properties transferred to various warehouses, though sometimes directly to distribution points for sale. The financing of museums, especially the provincial museums, was sharply reduced. Museum displays of icons were closed or converted into anti-religious displays. In 1929 the Department of Religious Daily Life at the Historical Museum was eliminated, and part of the icon collection of that museum was transferred to the Tretyakov Gallery and the State Russian Museum.

Antikvariat stepped up its demands on the museums to give up their religious holdings for “*realizatsiya*,” for sale. In his *Diary*, Alexei Oreshnikov wrote for Oct. 3 (Sept. 20), 1928: “. . . went on to the Religion Section, where, along with E. I. Silin, took note of 30 or more icons for sale abroad.”⁵⁷ An entry in the *Diary* for April 21 (April 8), 1932: “At 11 o’clock went to the Armoury, where we checked over four boxes of church silver taken at the start of the revolution from monastery churches: laid something aside for the Historical Museum; the remainder goes to the Armoury and to *Antikvariat*.”⁵⁸

In these circumstances, the only hope for these museum pieces was for them to be sent to the great museums of Moscow and Leningrad. It was to them that, beginning in the 1920s, icons, sewn materials and church applied art from the provinces began to be shifted. Although the safety of the things could not be guaranteed even in the central museums, the objects were kept in relatively acceptable conditions under the watchful eyes of specialists.

By the 1930s the attitude of Soviet officials to icons had changed: icons had become an important export and a no less important source in the corruption of all who became

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However, when they returned from the US in 1932, the icons were not sent back to the museums that supplied them for the show. For a time, they were kept at the Historical Museum in Moscow. Later, on the decision of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, the Historical Museum’s icon collection was largely given to the Tretyakov Gallery and the Russian Museum. Among these icons were those temporarily stored at the Historical Museum after the foreign tour. The fears of the museum community that the icons would not return to their original museum homes after the exhibition turned out to be justified, although the icons were not sold abroad. See: G. I. Vzdornov, *Tsentral’nye Gosudarstvennye restavratsionnaia masterskie*, pp. 112, 118.

56

G. Vzdornov mentions restorer-damaged Novgorod icons that *Gostorg* sold during the London show.

57

Alexei Vasilievich Oreshnikov. *Diary. 1915–1933*, p. 305.

58

Op. cit., p. 538.



Icon showing St. Demetrios
Byzantium (Constantinople), first half of 11th century
Gold and cloisonné enamel. 14.5 × 8.6 cm

Plaque from Gospel book cover, held at Gelati Monastery, Georgia, until middle of 19th century; Ivan Balashov collection, St. Petersburg, until 1918; Balashov willed it to the Hermitage but it went to State Museum Reserve and was sold at auction in Berlin, 1921 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin, Germany



Armilla (epauliere) showing Resurrection of Christ

Art mosan, c. 1170–1180

Copper, gilding, enamel champlevé, enamel cloisonné

11.8 × 14.7 cm

Sacristy, Dormition Cathedral, Vladimir; transferred to Vladimir museum, 1919;

Armoury Chamber, Moscow, 1932; sold by *Antikvariat*, 1933; purchased by

Friends of the Louvre, 1934

Louvre, Paris, France

The outstanding art historian Nikolai Pokrovsky wrote in 1910: "Restoration involves the exact re-creation of lost or damaged parts of icons as they had looked when they first left the painter's studio." N. V. Pokrovsky, *Pamiatniki khristianskogo iskusstva i ikonografiia* (St. Petersburg, 1910), p. 334.

involved in their "*realizatsiya*." The authorities now did all they could to encourage the interest of diplomats and businessmen working in the USSR in ancient Russian art, assisting them in procuring and shipping icon collections out of the country. In Leningrad and Moscow it was possible to obtain works of ancient Russian art through the specialized warehouses of *Antikvariat* and the State Museum Fund, which also provided special certificates guaranteeing the authenticity and legality of the provenance of the objects. With Europe's recognition of Soviet Russia, the question regarding the claims of former owners had lost some of its edge. Now knowledge that an icon once belonged to a famous private, pre-revolutionary collection in Moscow, Petersburg or Kiev raised its price. One of the chief centers for the sale of icons to foreigners was the Tretyakov Gallery, which, beginning in 1929 (after the closing of the Department of Religious Daily Life at the Historical Museum), became the chief preserve for ancient Russian painting. For those purchasing ancient Russian art, the Tretyakov name was the mark to look for, just as Petersburg's Hermitage was the name to look for on works of Western European art. Tretyakov or Hermitage provenance, even when it was "dubious," served as a kind of guarantee of the quality and authenticity of the sold art. In order to make such "provenances" look authentic, a quite tangled system of records and marks was developed. Items amassed for sale were not entered in the basic museum inventory but were accounted for in various tallies, lists and partial catalogues. Records on icons designated for sale from the basic collections of the Historical Museum, Tretyakov Gallery, Armoury, the Kremlin churches and other museums were kept this way. Thus, it is impossible to offer a count at this time of the number of works of ancient Russian art that were shipped abroad or sold while abroad. However, the figure was certainly enormous.

The Question of Authenticity

One of the most disputed aspects of the trade in icons from the Soviet Union during the Stalin era remains the question of authenticity. That these icons are still traded in the West and shown by museums underlines the importance and sensitivity of the matter. Complicating the problem is the absence of any clear understanding of what constitutes a forgery or an icon of questionable authenticity. From the formal standpoint, an icon is authentic if the board, ground, and color layer are original, and the surface cracking has not been imposed as part of a restoration. But what if a restorer, working diligently in the technique of the original, fills in missing fragments using modern pigments and deliberately creates cracks? Is the result forgery, falsification, imitation or "free restoration"?

In all fairness, one should point out that in the late 19th and early 20th century academic specialists and antiquities professionals alike were agreed in thinking that icon restoration was a matter of restoring an icon to what was presumed – sometimes mistakenly, sometimes with an eye on the market – to be its original look.⁵⁹ It follows that descent from a pre-revolutionary collection is no guarantee of an icon's authenticity or artistic merit. Indications that an icon is from a collection of the 1900–1917 period should instead signal the need for very careful analysis.

What happened to these pre-revolutionary collections of art? Many went to Russia's major museums in whole or in part. A significant portion, however, went to the State Museum Reserve (*Gosudarstvennyi Muzeinyi Fond*) because the quantity of nationalized art was too much for the museums to handle. They found themselves rejecting fine pieces, including pieces of museum quality, and accepted only things of great rarity. The museums also held art that fearful owners during the years of revolution had turned over for temporary safekeeping. The Soviet government rejected the idea of returning it. It was this art that was the first to be marked "for sale," especially the less valuable pieces and pieces known to have been "restored." Yet genuinely valuable, authentic works of ancient Russian painting



Plaque from iconostasis gate,
St. Jean the Theologian
Novgorod, mid-14th century
Copper, gilding
33 × 20.3 cm

Part of Iliya Ostroukhov collection, Moscow,
until 1929; sold by *Antikvariat* in 1933;
Waldemar Wehrlin collection, Paris; purchased
by Louvre, 1955
Louvre, Paris, France

were among those offered for sale. The actual situation was complex, as I am trying to suggest, and the quality of the goods sold highly variable.

With the Soviet government engaged from the first in furious struggle with the church, a struggle that included expropriation of icons, “antiquities-restorers,” in whose skill such pride had been taken by pre-revolutionary Russia, found themselves in demand. In 1918 the best of them worked at the Commission for the Preservation and Restoration of Ancient Russian Painting (later the Central State Restoration Workshops, or *TsGRM*) “under the wing” of Igor Emmanuilovich Grabar. It is certainly to Grabar’s credit that the Russian school of restoration was preserved, if only in the variant of the “antiquities” professionals. Although *TsGRM* would declare new, scientific principles of restoration, the work was often done in the old way and in haste. When work began in earnest in 1928 on the planned overseas exhibition of icons, problems of restoration were central.

Many restorers, at *TsGRM* and in the scholarly circles of Moscow and Leningrad, regretted the methods being used and the haste. Restorer Nikolai Briagin, summoned to Moscow from Yaroslavl, wrote to Peter Neradovsky, a curator at the Russian Museum: “... the way the [*TsGRM*] craftsmen do things has made a very bad impression on me. My soul grieves not only for the icons they are working on but because this way of doing things doesn’t advance our understanding but, on the contrary, throws away what our predecessors achieved.”⁶⁰ If the level of the restorations for the state exhibition left something to be desired (at the time of the letter, *TsGRM* was hurriedly preparing icons for the exhibition abroad and for later sale), it can be imagined how restorers in the employ of private, usually foreign clients, or *Antikvariat*, did their work. That such jobs were undertaken is documented in materials compiled by the Commission for the Purge of *TsGRM*. For example, among the “crimes” of which Grigory Chirikov and Pavel Iukin were accused in 1931 was “filling orders for restorations from foreigners and selecting for them art-properties for export” and “giving foreigners information about the more valuable examples of past art without notifying or obtaining approval from the Commissariat of Enlightenment, *VOKS* [All-Union Society for Foreign Cultural Ties] or other appropriate organs.”⁶¹ In fact, such activities could not have taken place without the knowledge of the appropriate Soviet agencies.

Another important aspect of the situation at *TsGRM* involves allegations of icons copied for sale abroad as originals. Rumors have persisted about this but without supporting documentary evidence. In this regard, however, we know that full-size copies of five famous icons were made for the foreign exhibition of 1929–1932, and these clearly were made to be sold: Alexander Briagin produced a copy of the *Bogomater’ Vladimirskaia*, Pavel Iukin a copy of the *Bogomater’ Velikaia Panagiia*, Evgeny Briagin a two-sided copy of the *Proslavlenie Kresta – Spas Nerukotvornyi* (all 12th-century), and Grigory Chirikov copied the *Troitsa* of Andrei Rublev. All the copies, as can be seen from a letter of Igor Grabar to Georgy Vernadsky dated Dec. 12, 1926, were prepared long before the exhibition: “These copies are done with all their flaws and traces of old restorations and are so close to the originals that, placed side by side, they cannot be distinguished from three steps away.”⁶² “The copies make virtually as strong an impression as the originals, and so on. The *Troitsa* was accepted as the original, as indeed were all the other copies...,” Grabar wrote to his wife from Berlin on Feb. 14, 1929, where he was accompanying the exhibition.⁶³ While these particular copies were not sold and returned to Russia, they were far from the only copies made of these icons. In 1929, for example, the Icon Society of Paris discussed the question of acquiring a Chirikov copy of the miracle-working icon *Bogomater’ Vladimirskaia* for the Saint-Serge de Radonege house of worship (the Russian Orthodox church in Paris’ 19th *arrondissement*). The price for the copy, which was then in Prague, was extremely high at \$7,000, and it was not purchased.⁶⁴

In the early 1930s when the sale of art for hard currency was booming, the authorities remembered the many icons taken into custody in connection with the closing of churches.

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As cited in: G.I. Vzdornov, *Restavratsiia i nauka. Ocherki po istorii otkrytiia i izucheniia drevnerusskoi zhivopisi*, p. 111.

⁶¹

About Chirikov, there is this remark, for example: “In order to raise his standing as a connoisseur, he offered himself as an expert in judging the value and dating of what were forgeries.” A similar point is made in the accusations against Iukin: “Together with Chirikov he was active in producing forgeries in order to give himself standing as an expert.” Quotations as cited in: I.L. Kyzlasova, *Istoriia otechestvennoi nauki ob iskusstve Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi 1920–1930s*, pp. 354; 346–365.



From Prophet tier, iconostasis
Moscow school, c. 1600
Wood and egg tempera on canvas
40 × 34.5 cm

Alexander Popoff collection, Paris, until 1928
Collection de Mr. Otto O'Méara in Brussels
Ikonen-Museums Recklinghausen, Germany

Getting these “commodities” into “sellable condition” required a major restoration effort at “shock-brigade” speed. At this point there was no question of doing scientific restorations. Documents show that the restorers of *TsGRM* were deeply involved in these restorations, including their chief, Igor Grabar, and Chirikov, now returned from exile. In 1934, after the dissolution of *TsGRM* and the transfer of its restorers to the Tretyakov Gallery, the now officially retired Grabar was appointed to a special Commission for the Restoration of the Moscow Kremlin. Also in 1934 the Kremlin contracted with 12 icon painters from Mstera, Palekh and Kholui to come to Moscow, where they constituted a special workshop. Their job was to bring icons “into sellable condition” and prepare “forgeries for sale to foreigners”.

In the collection of icons given by the onetime US ambassador to the Soviet Union, Joseph E. Davies, to the University of Wisconsin, are several icons with provenances “from the Chudov Monastery in the Kremlin” that had been commercially restored. It is hardly unreasonable to infer that they were the work of the icon painters hired to work at the Moscow Kremlin in 1934.

Instead of an Afterword

It might seem that the Second World War and the close of the Stalin era ended forever the problem of the sale of Russian art treasures. However, under Khrushchev, active persecution of the church resumed: thousands of churches were closed, church valuables were moved to special warehouses and icons were burned in bonfires. Again, as in the Lenin-Stalin period, church valuables were used to obtain hard currency. And the channels through which church antiquities moved to the West were the same as before. From the mid-1960s antiquities from the USSR were regularly sold at international auctions in various countries. For example: On March 23–24, 1971, an auction of Russian art was held in New York at the Parke-Bernet Galleries, 980 Madison Ave. Ownership of items offered at the auction included such listings as: “Property of Novoexport, Moscow, U.S.S.R.,” whose goods were Russian icons of the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶⁵ Another large batch of Russian icons was offered as “Property of the Satra Corporation, New York, officially acquired in Moscow, U.S.S.R.”⁶⁶ Many of the offered icons had highly valuable surrounds embellished with filigree and enamels. In 1975 and 1977, a mere two Christie’s auctions in Geneva sold 471 high-quality works of Russian art.⁶⁷ In December 2007 the Bruun Rasmussen auction house in Denmark put up for sale several icons that carried the following attestation: “Export certificate from the Ministry of Culture of the USSR,” dated 1979 and 1982.⁶⁸ That same auction also saw the sale of icons from the collection of Lars Severinsson, a development researcher, which he had brought home from Moscow and Leningrad over the years 1968–1975.⁶⁹

In 1989 the USSR Ministry of Culture organized an auction of Russian icons in Athens, Greece. Three hundred icons were sold, as were items of church paraphernalia.

In an interview with the newspaper *Soviet Culture*, S. M. Popov, representing the ministry, declared: “Such deals help our government. Thanks to them, we receive hard currency, which at the present time is badly needed... . We now have too many icons that no one is going to restore, and they are going to be ruined. So selling icons abroad means that they will be saved from destruction and, at the same time, will earn dollars for the government.”⁷⁰ The Soviet regime had not changed through all its years of existence: “expropriate and sell!”

62

Grabar, *Pis'ma*, pp. 158–159.

63

Op. cit., p. 180.

64

I. V. Shneider, “Russkie ikony: Khronika Obshchestva ‘Ikona’ v Parizhe,” in: G. I. Vzdornov, Z. E. Zaleskaia, O. V. Lelekova, *Obshchestvo ‘Ikona’ v Parizhe*, Vol. 1 (Moscow, Paris, 2002), pp. 508–509.

65

Russian Works of Art. Public Auction. Tuesday and Wednesday, March 23 and 24, 1971. Parke-Bernet Galleries, auction catalogue (New York), pp. 96–113, lots 273–323.

66

Op. cit., pp. 128–151, lots 369–475.

67

Fine Russian Works of Art by Carl Fabergé. Russian Silver, Niello and Enamels. Auction Christie. Geneva, April 29, 1975, auction catalogue; *Important Russian Works of Art. Russian Icons, Enamels, Silver, Niello. Auction Christie. Geneva, November 9, 1977*, auction catalogue; S. Mosiakin, p. 45.

68

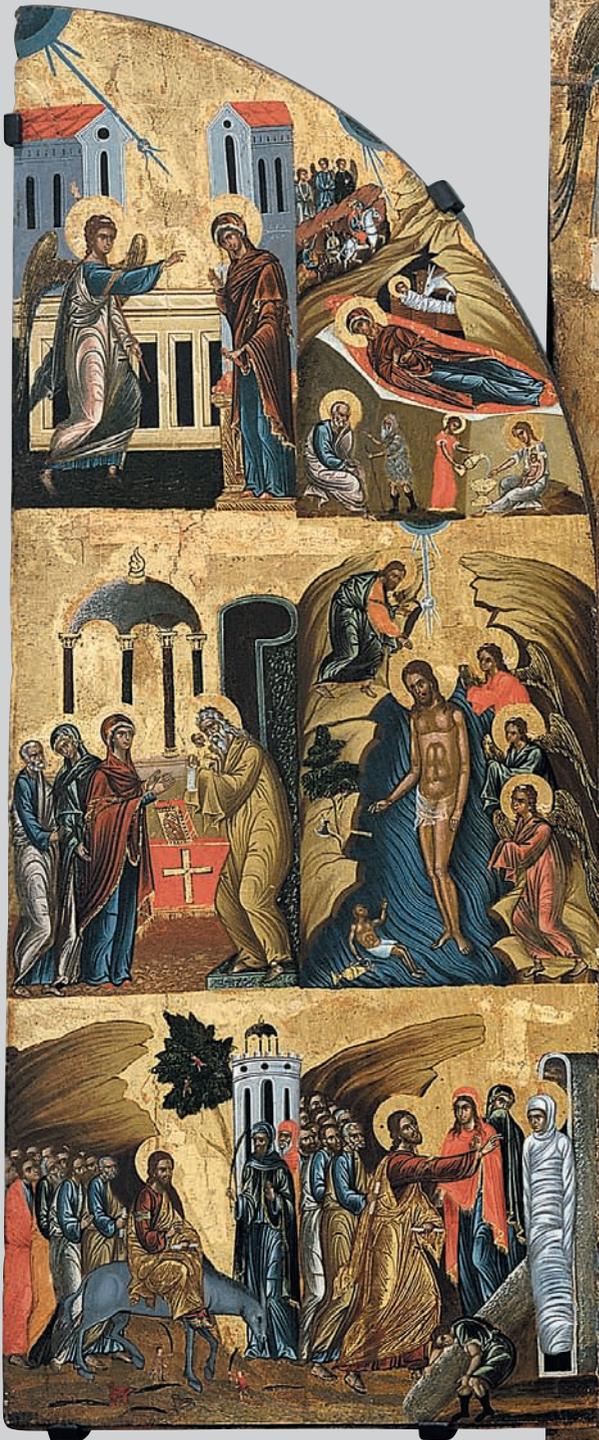
Bruun Rasmussen. Auctioneers of Fine Art. 3–4 December, 2007, auction catalogue, lots 1490, 1500, 1501, 1503.

69

Op. cit., lots 1495, 1496, 1498, 1502.

70

“Ikony na prodazhu,” in: *Sovetskaia kultura*, No. 19 (Feb. 14, 1989); S. Mosiakin, p. 45; E. A. Sikorsky, *Den'gi na revoliutsiiu: 1903–1920. Fakty, versii, rashmyshleniia* (Smolensk, 2004), p. 423.





**Triptych with the seal of Pope Paul III (1534–1549)
and scenes Deisus and the Twelve Festivals
Cretan artist in Italy, between 1534–1549
Mixed technique on wood.
Central panel: 127 × 106.2 cm;
side panels: each 119.4 × 49.5 cm**

Gift of Joseph Davies to University of Wisconsin,
Madison, USA
Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin,
Madison, USA

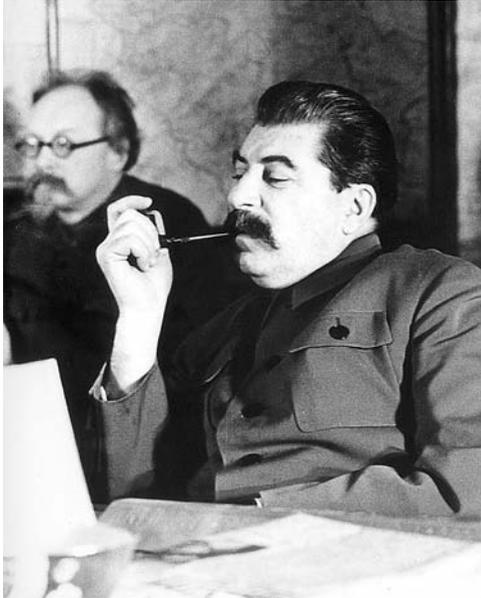
The triptych was acquired by the Russian collector Mikhail Petrovich Botkin in 1875 in Rome from the collection of Cardinal Andrea Altieri. It was in Botkin's townhouse in St. Petersburg until his death in 1914. Sometime during the revolutionary period and most likely in 1916 or 1917, it was evacuated to Moscow by Botkin's widow and daughters. It was confiscated after the Bolshevik revolution by Soviet authorities and turned over to the State Museum Fund. In 1930 it was in the possession of *Antikvariat* in Moscow. It was sold to US Ambassador Joseph Davies in the summer of 1937.

The central panel shows the Deisus with Christ wearing bishop's robes and a crown (Christ as the King of kings and the Great High Priest) on his right and his left are the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. The side panels of the triptych depict church festivals. On the left panel: the Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Resurrection of Lazarus. On the right panel: the Descent of the Holy Ghost, the Ascension, the Crucifixion, the Assumption of the Virgin, the Resurrection and Descent into Hell, the Transfiguration

Chapter four

The Palace-Museums

Rifat Gafifullin



Stalin and Georgy Pyatakov at a reception in the Kremlin for metal industry workers in 1936
Photograph. RGAKFD

The formal bedroom at the Gatchina Palace
Photograph from the journal *Old Times (Starye gody)*, 1914

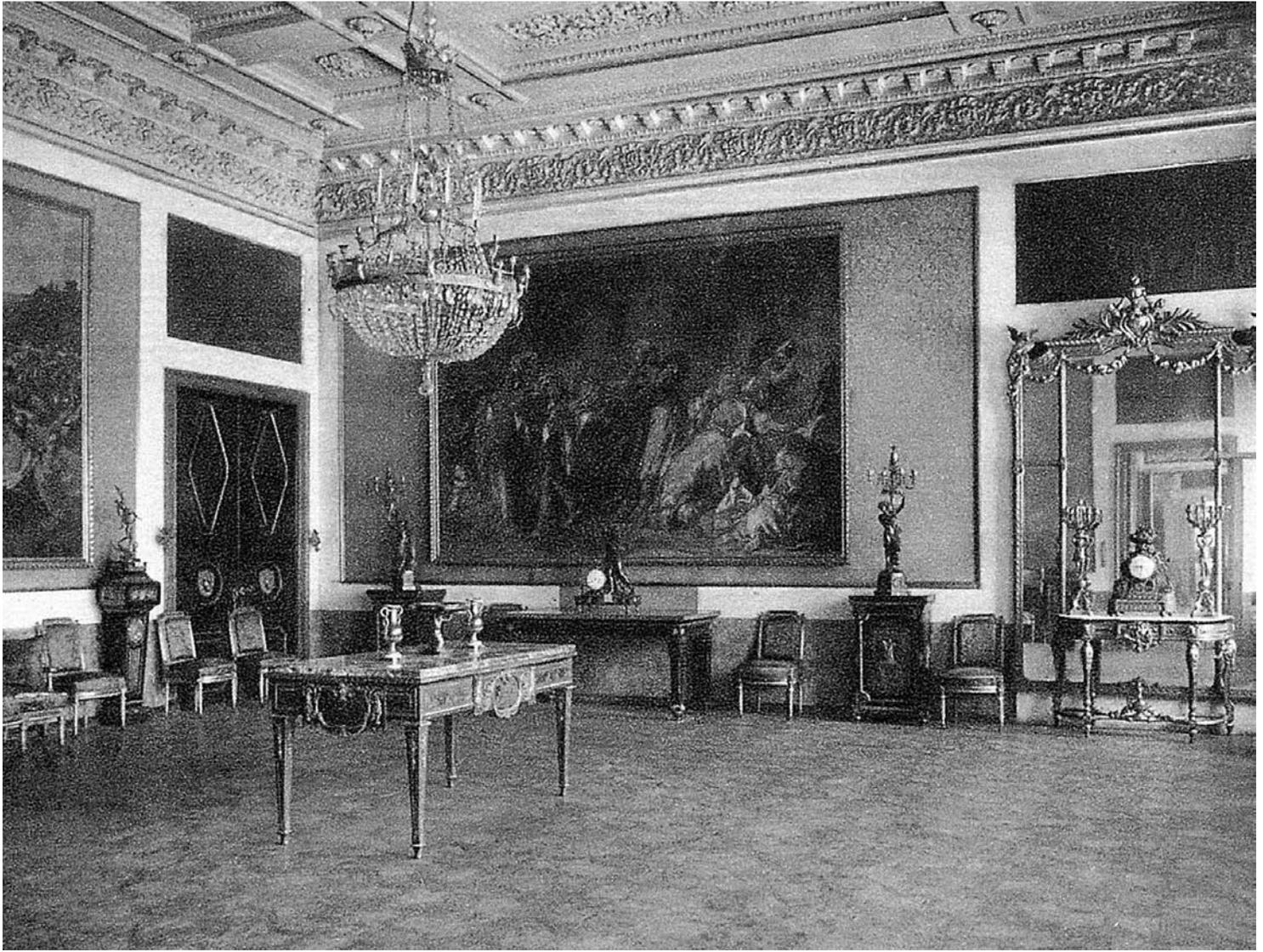
The first three post-revolutionary years brought a museum boom in Russia. Never before or afterwards has such an incredible number of museums been opened in the country. Hundreds of palaces, mansions and estates were nationalised. Art historians and scholars formulated the most incredible plans for the transformation and use of unique monuments of culture. Virtually all the palaces which had previously belonged to the Romanovs in St. Petersburg and its suburbs were transformed into historical and cultural museums. But the functioning of the state machine required money and the many millions of roubles which had been brought in by the confiscation of church valuables were no longer enough to satisfy the authorities.

From January 1922 expert commissions of art scholars set to work in all of the museums themselves. Their brief was to identify the items in their own collections “which are not of museum quality” and to contribute the funds received from their sale to the campaign against famine.¹ The previous instructions from *Narkompros* were forgotten, and as early as June 1922 *Sovnarkom* decided on the expropriation of “exhibits of high material value.”

This was the first serious blow struck against the museum collections, even though it was proposed to hand over some of the funds from the future sales directly to the museums. One of the first to appreciate the danger of the newly created situation was the director of the Hermitage, Sergei Troinitsky. “While fully aware of the need during this difficult period to make use of all the means which the state has at its disposal, I feel myself obliged ... to state my opinion concerning the irrationality of applying to the museums the same methods of investigation which are applied to churches and other repositories which are not museums ... If the state at the present time finds itself faced with the sad necessity of making use of the valuable items in museums, then it should and can use them to the greatest possible profit precisely as museum exhibits,” he wrote.²

However, the money was required urgently. Seeing that the museums were now under genuine threat, Troinitsky attempted to cushion the blow. He wrote to the head of the Leningrad Department of *Glavnauka* [the Central Scientific Administration], Mikhail Kristi, with the following suggestion: “In the Hermitage, the store-rooms of the Winter Palace and other museums there are a very considerable number of duplicates of items of applied art which, if exploited in a planned manner, could provide sums of money sufficient





The large drawing-room at the Stroganov Palace
 Photograph from a catalogue of Lepke
 Auction House
Sammlung Stroganoff Leningrad, 1931

1

As a result the following amounts of gold and silver were confiscated from the suburban palaces: from Gatchina – one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four items (twenty-two poods, thirty-three pounds and fifteen zolotniks of silver, seventeen pounds and fifty-six zolotniks of gold); from Detskoe Selo – fifty-five poods, twenty-four pounds and seventy-four zolotniks of silver and five pounds of gold.

2

Sergei Troinitsky. Report "On the Duplicate Fund" to Leon Trotsky, 17 June 1922 (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 487, l. 440).

3

Sergei Troinitsky. Report to the head of the Leningrad branch of *Glavnauka*, Mikhail Kristi (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op.1, d. 487, l. 439).

4

On 11 April 1923, in order to provide material support for the state protection of the RSFSR's cultural valuables — museums, monuments of art and antiquity, etc., the Council of People's Commissars decided to grant *Narkompros* the right to hold for the Museum Department and the institutions subordinate to it, special funds derived from income: from charging for entry, selling publications and the rights to publications, exploiting plots of land, buildings and other forms of property of no historical and artistic significance, but linked with the museums and the palaces. (*Muzei*, 1923, No. 1, p. 78)

for the maintenance and support of the most important of our museums. In terms of quality these reserves fall into two categories: the first, items of first-class importance, should be sold abroad, the second should be used on the home market. Of great importance for the first category is the fact that, on the one hand, items of this kind are almost completely absent in most foreign museums, and on the other, we are the exclusive owners of a very significant number of them, which means we can control the sales, since there is nowhere they can be obtained outside Russia...³

But no one was prepared to pay any heed to reasonable advice from specialists and connoisseurs. The museum conference held in late June 1922 had failed to protect the museums' collections. For all the declarations about preserving the historical and cultural heritage, in the fifth year of Soviet power the largest state collections of Russia became "subject to confiscations."

A particularly difficult year was 1922. Funds paid to the museums from the state budget were reduced several times over. There was not enough money for guards or firewood or for mending the roof. The palaces and estates, which had previously been maintained by huge staffs of servants, suffered particularly badly. In December 1922 the 10th All-Russian Congress of Soviets decided "in view of the general impoverishment of the country ... to reduce the scope of educational work." A new division, *Glavnauka*, was set up and henceforth all museum institutions came under its jurisdiction. It was decided to transfer a number of museums to different departments, to turn several into branches of central museums and to liquidate some altogether. In April 1923 it became necessary to grant institutions coming under the jurisdiction of *Narkompros* the right to have "special funds" for providing "state security for the cultural treasures of the RSFSR."⁴ At the same time the obvious "overloading" of both of the Russian capitals with artistic treasures served to intensify the desire



Andrei Lezhava, Chairman of *Gosplan* RSFSR
Photograph, 1927. RGAKFD

Anastas Mikoyan reading a report at the All-Union
Export Conference in the *Gostorg* building in
Moscow. Seated in the presidium: Ilya Schleifer, Lev
Khinchuk, Nikolai Eismont and others
Photograph, 1927. RGAKFD

“due to the state’s straitened financial position, to resort to the utilisation [i.e. sale – author’s note] of items which are not of museum quality and make use of the available... empty premises.”⁵

The leading role in the division of museum property which now began was played by the Bureau (or Commission) for Accounting and Sales of the State Funds.⁶ Its basic function was to maintain accounts and manage the sale on the domestic market – and in 1928 and 1929 on the foreign market (through the firm *Antikvariat*) – of items located in the palace-museums, estates, churches, monasteries and other historical sites, that is, of items of property which were not of museum quality and did not form part of the collections of the institutions concerned or of their museum equipment.

The first event arranged by the newly established structure was a sale held in 1924–1925 in the Winter Palace of items obtained by *Gosfond* [the State Fund] from palaces and mansions. Due to the lack of any properly tested procedure for selling works of art the Commission’s workers were at first obliged to request “comradely instruction” from their bosses, for example concerning “the permissibility from the political point of view of organising a sale” in the palace itself, which might provide the foreign press with “material for all sorts of insinuations concerning the USSR.”⁷ However, this problem was quickly resolved, and the sale of the contents of the Winter Palace’s store-rooms helped to develop the most efficient methods for the sale of “State Funds not of true museum quality.”

The demand for antiquities stimulated the supply. In 1925 a mighty attack was launched on the museums, in the first place on those in Leningrad: it was the northern capital which contained the major artistic treasures of the country and the outcome of this campaign was a massive flood of museum exhibits into the State Fund; they included items from the Hermitage and the Yusupov and Shuvalov palaces, which had been liquidated by that time. But the main brunt of the blow was borne by the suburban palaces, which were in general regarded merely as the country’s “currency reserves”: in 1926 alone they were forced to give up almost a hundred and fifty thousand of their exhibits for sale.⁸ However, the State Funds Commission did not stop there and it also sanctioned the handing-over of the collections of most of the museums in the province of Moscow and provincial Russia.⁹ No exception was made even for the State Museum Fund, which had as its main function the inventorisation, storage and distribution among museums of the nationalised collections of art: a large pro-

5

This idea was expressed by Mikhail Kristi on 30 April 1923 at a session of the Council for Museum Affairs (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op.1, d. 488, l. 48).

6

The Bureau for Accounting and Sales of the State Funds, later renamed a Commission, controlled items “not of museum quality.” The central storehouses of the State Funds Commission were located in the Winter Palace. Branch storehouses were organised at the State Museum Fund (Novomikhailovsky Palace), Peterhof, Tsarskoe Selo, Pavlovsk and Gatchina.

7

An appeal by the Commission to the Leningrad District Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 15 March 1924. In summer 1924 the Leningrad newspapers carried the following announcement: “The Commission for the Realisation of State Funds of the Leningrad District of Glavnauka announces that on Friday 27 June at 12 noon there will take place an oral competition for the sale of lots of table linen (new and used), porcelain, crystal, old liveries, frock-coats, kaftans and so on. Each lot from 1 to 4 thou[sand]. roubles. Those wishing to take part in the trading are invited to acquaint themselves with the conditions of sale and the goods in the Chancellery of the Central Store-Rooms (former Winter Palace, entrance from Uritsky Square, main gates opposite the Alexander Column) daily from 10 to 22 h.” (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 687, l. 8, 109).



The Crimson Drawing Room
of the Gatchina Palace

Photograph from the journal *Old Times* (*Starye gody*), 1914

The palace at Gatchina was the Emperor Paul I's favourite spot. Faced with limestone, this unusual building with an underground entrance was reminiscent of English castles. It was the most magnificent of the suburban royal residences and contained five hundred and forty-seven rooms.

portion of the items which had become part of the Fund was also sent for sale.¹⁰

By autumn 1926 there was already discussion of the possibility of selling museum exhibits on the Western European antiques market. The Soviet bureaucrats attempted to establish direct contacts with the most influential Western art dealers, testing the waters in Berlin, London and Paris.

In France the greatest hopes were placed in Germain Seligman, the son of Jacques Seligman, who had close ties with Russia since before the First World War. However, when he learned that the Soviets seriously intended to sell part of their artistic treasures, this owner of a luxurious gallery on the Place Vendôme, with an army of powerful clients like Morgan and Hearst, thought twice before rushing into a dangerous journey to Soviet Russia. He regarded the mission that had fallen to his lot as a matter of almost state importance, and therefore he informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of his negotiations. On the quai d'Orsay they knew perfectly well that Russia had one of the best collections of 18th-century French art outside France and the decision was taken almost instantly to send Seligman on a journey that now assumed an almost official state character.

The hopes placed in his mission were not justified at first: attempts were made to fob off Seligman and his assistant with writing sets and toiletry sets, silver and gilt snuff boxes, as well as various other items "of a personal character." The "genuine works of art" from the so-called "reserves" were only shown to them when the French declared that they could see no point in staying in Moscow any longer. To judge from the description left by Seligman, they were allowed into the *Gokhran* depository, and spent several days in those cavernous halls. "One room was an extraordinary sight – a vast hall which gave the impression of being a great cave of ormolu and gilt bronze, with stalactites and stalagmites of gold and crystal. Hanging from the ceiling, standing on the floor or on tables, was an incredible array of chandeliers and candelabra, small, large or huge, all glittering, for they seemed to have been well cared for, with gilded ornament and glass or crystal pendants. Nor were the tables they stood on less resplendent, with ormolu ornaments and tops of marble, onyx, agate or that vivid green malachite of which the Russians are so fond."¹¹

Seligman left Moscow in the autumn of 1927, declaring that there was no point in hoping for any continuation of their business dealings if none of what they had seen was going to be offered for sale. Although the Soviet Trade Delegation pretended to have forgotten

8

The precise figure was one hundred and forty thousand four hundred and nineteen items.

9

The listing includes museums in Vologda, Kostroma, Vladimir, Tver, Novgorod, Smolensk, Yaroslavl, Saratov, Oryol, Kaluga, Ryazan, Perm, Nizhny Novgorod, Tula and the Urals and Don districts. See: Kuzina, p. 152.

10

From 1925 to 1929 the museums received one hundred and twenty-four thousand one hundred and ninety-two items from the Leningrad branch of the State Museum Fund, as well as fifty-one thousand two hundred and seventy-one items from the State Funds Commission and *Antikvariat*.

11

Germain Seligman, *Merchants of Art. Eighty Years of Professional Collecting, 1880–1960*, New York, 1961, p. 172.





The *Antikvariat* exhibition halls in the Novomikhailovsky Palace in Leningrad Photograph, 1933. GTG photolibrary

Fortunately, most of the items shown in the photograph were not sold and were returned to museums.

Standing at the left are a divan and two armchairs from a suite in birchwood, produced in 1817 in the St. Petersburg workshop of Ivan Bauman from a design by Carlo Rossi and intended for the New Study at the Pavlovsk Palace. The suite was transferred to *Antikvariat* in April 1930, then found its way into the Hermitage. In 1956 it was returned to Pavlovsk, where it is now displayed in the Corner Drawing Room.

The lower of the two pictures directly above the divan is *Antique Bathhouses* by Hubert Robert, which was moved from the Sheremetiev collection to the Hermitage in 1919, from where it was transferred to *Antikvariat* in 1933 (at the present time it is in a private collection in St. Petersburg).

On the wall to the right is *Landscape with Waterfall* by Hubert Robert and its pair *Landscape with River Bank*, which were acquired for the Hermitage by Catherine the Great from the St. Petersburg merchant Herman Klosterman. From 1799 they were in the Pavlovsk Palace, after which in 1928 they were transferred to *Antikvariat*. In 1937 the pictures were moved to the Hermitage and in 1958 they were returned to Pavlovsk.

Standing on the cabinet at the right is an 18th-century French clock which was transferred to *Antikvariat* (present whereabouts unknown). The clock is flanked by 18th-century French gilt bronze braziers from the Gatchina palace-museum, which were transferred to *Antikvariat*. They are now in the Hermitage.



Book-case in the regency style

France. Master-craftsman Charles Cressent. 1685–1758

Sold from the Hermitage to Calouste Gulbenkian
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

12

The closure of several palaces was followed by the division of their exhibits between the museums of Moscow and Leningrad. A significant proportion of the exhibits went into the State Fund and the depositories of the State Museum Fund, and after the latter was liquidated, to *Antikvariat*. Some of these items were included in Lepke's first auction in Berlin. Bidding for the paintings realised three hundred and thirty-six thousand four hundred German marks. Almost all the furniture was sold, and the applied art went very well; in most cases, however, the reserve price had to be reduced due to "the general state of the antiques market."

13

Family Portrait, which was moved to the Hermitage from Gatchina in 1924, was selected for export, according to the minutes of the Export Commission, in a group of four works, and was valued at two hundred thousand roubles. It was reported in the press that the picture, which was the most expensive lot at the June auction, was sold for three hundred and ten thousand German marks. According to some sources, it was bought by a French dealer, according to others by the auction house itself.

However, the contents of the fifty-six crates of *Antikvariat's* property that were returned to Russia on 14 December 1931 included the *Family Portrait*, as well as Rembrandt's *Portrait of Old Woman With a Book*.

Following the next auction the Hermitage also received back several works which to this day some people believe were sold, including van Dyck's portraits of Nicholas Rococks and Balthazarina van Linnik, with an estimated joint value of six hundred and sixty thousand German marks.

See: M.B. Piotrovsky, "How Lorenzo Lotto Returned to the Hermitage." In: Hermitage Readings. In Honor of B.B. Piotrovsky. St. Petersburg, 1999, pp. 80–86.

14

"*Glavnauka* has no objections... if the sale of antique items to foreigners for export takes place here for hard currency and this method of selling antique items for export must be retained even when exports are organised through North-West *Gostorg*" (RGALI SPb, f. 305, op.1, d. 4, l. 34–36). The session of 26 October 1926, which reviewed the question of exporting items not of museum quality, decided to instruct North-West *Gostorg* to enter into a contractual arrangement with the State Funds Commission for purposes of exporting antique items and recognised as permissible in addition the sale of antique items to foreigners for hard currency in Leningrad, provided the antique nature of the items had been appropriately assessed.

15

Letter of 7 September 1926 (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 1295, l. 179).

16

Letter of 3 November 1926 (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 1318, l. 40).

17

E.P. Ivanov. *Antique Works of Art – For the Masses*, *Izvestiya*, 16 September 1928 (quoted from: Kuzina, p. 277).

about the French antique dealer's visit, in actual fact the problem of selling antiques was now more urgent than ever. The budget deficit had assumed catastrophic proportions, and at the very beginning of 1928 *Sovnarkom* was obliged to pass a secret decree on the intensification of exports of antiquities and works of art.

Negotiations with Seligman were renewed in the spring. Works offered for sale to France included items from the Hermitage collections and the Leningrad palace-museums, not to mention the *Gokhran* treasure hoards. Moscow agreed to all of the antique dealer's conditions, and the parties moved on to discussions of how the goods should be transported. All that remained was to obtain the approval of the French government.

But in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs they explained to Seligman that the pre-auction exhibition, which was certain to be a sensation, would attract thousands of visitors. This would naturally stir into action the former owners, who refused to recognise the legality of nationalisation. A great number of those who had left Soviet Russia had settled in France and by the end of the 1920s the number of Russian emigrants there was approaching half a million. The huge number of court cases which would inevitably be taken out against the Soviet government meant that serious diplomatic and legal problems could be expected. And therefore, for the sake of peace in France, the French government had decided to abandon the idea of the auction.

While France preferred to avoid an awkward situation, Germany took a quite different attitude to collaboration with the Soviets. The first public auction took place in late 1928 in Berlin, in the premises of Rudolf Lepke's auction house at 122 Potsdamer Strasse.¹² The second auction, entitled "Leningrad Museums and Palaces" was held in June 1929. In order to ensure its success the Hermitage was forced to part with several masterpieces. The "main prize" of the auction was to have been Lorenzo Lotto's *Family Portrait*, one of the famous 16th-century Italian artist's finest works, which was absolutely beyond compare with anything else on the market at the time.¹³

The massive scale of exports of antiques did not, moreover, bring an end to sales made "on the spot to foreigners for foreign currency".¹⁴ Letters similar to the following regularly arrived at the Leningrad department of *Glavnauka*: "... *Glavnauka* grants permission for Mr. Partridge to be allowed entry to the depository of the Museum Fund and the Depositories of the museums and palaces in order to select items which are not of museum quality. If he should select a large number of items, inform us by telegraph so that a representative of *Glavnauka* can be commandeered to Leningrad for purposes of a final expert assessment and evaluation of the items selected."¹⁵ Or: "*Glavnauka* of *Narkompros* requires you to provide assistance to the representatives of the Vienna State Company Dorotheum, comrades Oskar Bam and Dr. Leo Lederer, in their inspection of the State Funds which are at your disposal."¹⁶

Works of art were sold off in such vast quantities that the prices of antiques fell to absolutely minimal levels. While a new porcelain cup cost about four roubles in a Soviet shop, an antique cup with a painted design was valued at no more than two. "A superficially sketched landscape by some minor modern master" cost about thirty roubles, but an old picture "decently painted" cost from eight to ten.¹⁷

The pace of the sales was significantly influenced by political events within the country. Following the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), which declared the need to extend and deepen the mass forms of communist education, art began to be viewed as a reflection of the class struggle. From the perspective of the "vulgar sociological method" the historical ensembles of the palaces, together with their contents, were no longer of any interest; the need to preserve "relics of bourgeois consciousness" had disappeared, and after a while the palaces began systematically to be closed down.

The exhibitions on display in those palace-museums which were not adapted to become rest homes or sanatoria had to be fundamentally re-organised. The groups of tourists



Porcelain from the former St. Petersburg palaces on display at an auction held by the Children's Commission of the All-Union Central Executive Committee
 Photograph, 1920s. RGAKFD

dreaming of a better life and passionately eager to find out how the tsars lived were shown “the hard life of the serfs.” Any departure from the ideological programme was censured. For instance, the organisers of an exhibition in Pavlovsk were accused by the *Glavnauka* Commission of an excessive enthusiasm for historicism and paying inadequate attention to the requirements of the present day. “We people of the present day have about as much use for the Empress Maria Fedorovna as such as we have for last year’s snow. It would be incomparably more valuable for us to see in Pavlovsk how the palace menials, servants and guards lived... Everyday life must be the corner-stone. ‘But where did they flog the serfs?’ is a question which rises quite naturally to the lips of tourists and visitors.”¹⁸ It was evidently in order to satisfy the curiosity of the latter that a hut was erected on the former Ostankino estate specially in order to display instruments of torture – as well as to house a genuine tractor.

Soviet museums had to convince their visitors that “the monarchs were extras on the stage of history” and not tell stories about individuals, whether they were the founders of the palaces or their owners, and especially they must not inculcate “the cult of the emperor”. This was the purpose, for instance, behind the proposal to turn Peterhof into “one big sociological Museum, which in the setting of palace architecture must gather together and reflect the history of the class struggle in Russia over a period of 200 years.”¹⁹

Any attempt by the keepers to use the artistic funds to expand their exhibitions was cut short. Most tragic of all was the determination of the Commission of State Funds to regard all works of art kept in the suburban palaces as belonging to the general State Museum Fund.

¹⁸
 From a report of the Leningrad branch of *Glavnauka* (TsGA SPb, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 19, l. 41).

¹⁹
 Archive of the Peterhof State Museum Preserve, d. 487, l. 71.



**Two plates and a glass-stand from the Study Service with views of Italy
Porcelain, overglaze painting, gilding
Imperial Porcelain Factory. 1796–1801**

Private collection, Paris

All items still bear labels with the words “Museum of Porcelain”

Under a tradition established in the 19th-century palace dinner services were kept in abundance at each imperial residence. The store-rooms usually contained at least twenty porcelain, faience and crystal services, for everyday and formal use. When the mass expropriations of works of art from museums began, the keepers of the suburban palace-museums decided to sacrifice the services from their funds before anything else. As a result virtually all the everyday services and more than fifty per cent of the services for formal occasions were expropriated from the palaces. The Museum of Porcelain, which included the Study Service, was founded by Alexander II and located in the Winter Palace. In 1910 it was transformed into the Imperial Hermitage.





The *Antikvariat* exhibition halls in the Novomikhailovsky Palace in Leningrad Photograph, 1933. GTG photolibrary

Standing in the centre right of the picture is a gilt bronze table decoration made by Pierre Philippe Thomire, which has been kept in the Hermitage since 1938. Standing on the left between the two chairs from a suite made to Carlo Rossi's design, is a unique marquetry table of composite wood made by the Russian craftsman Nikifor Vasiliev in the 1770s, which was transferred to *Antikvariat* in 1932 from the empress's Dressing Room in the Large Peterhof Palace; in 1975 it was returned to Peterhof.

Standing between the secretaire and the chair there is a late 18th-century Russian side-table which was brought here from the Gatchina Palace (current whereabouts unknown): its twin stands in the "Little Lantern" study at Pavlovsk.

At the far left is a corner cupboard with an inlaid wood design made by Christian Meier (present whereabouts unknown).





The *Antikvariat* exhibition halls in the Novomikhailovsky Palace in Leningrad Photograph, 1933. GTG photolibrary

Standing to the left of the arch is a secretaire made by the French craftsman Guillaume Beneman, which was transferred to *Antikvariat* from the Pavlovsk Palace (now at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts); on the secretaire there are two late 18th-century French bronze censers from the Tower Study of Paul I in the Gatchina Palace, which were transferred to *Antikvariat* in 1932 and later kept at the State Museum of Fine Arts before being returned to Gatchina. Hanging above the secretaire is a painting by François Lemoine, *Allegory of Painting*, from the collection of I.P. Balashov (its pair, *Allegory of Music*, is now in the Hermitage). In 1923 *Allegory of Painting* was moved to the Hermitage, from where it was transferred to *Antikvariat*. Since 1936 it has been in the State Museum of Fine Arts (Pushkin Museum).

In all probability the picture in the upper left, beyond the secretaire, is *Head of a Girl* from the school of Rubens, which came from the Walpole collection at the Hermitage. To the right of the arch is a mahogany bureau made by G. Gamba in the 1800s. In 1930 the bureau was transferred to *Antikvariat* from Paul I's New Study at the Pavlovsk Palace. It was valued at four thousand roubles. Later it was moved to the Hermitage, and in 1958 it was returned to the Pavlovsk palace-museum, where it is now displayed in the Entrance Hall.

Hanging above the bureau is Hubert Robert's painting, *Obelisk and Aqueduct*, which arrived in the Hermitage in 1866 as one of a series of four pictures from the collection of prince Sergei M. Golitsin. In 1929 it was transferred to *Antikvariat*, in 1936 to the State Museum of Fine Arts, and subsequently to the National Museum of Belorussia.



Until they were handed over to *Antikvariat* on 17 September 1931 the four tapestries from the series “Love of the Gods,” decorated the Carpet Study and Maria Fedorovna’s Library at the Pavlovsk Palace.
Photograph, 1900s

**Tapestry “Diana and Callisto. Vertumnus and Pomona”
from the series “Love of the Gods”**

Paris, the Gobelins Manufactory, c. 1775–1778. From a cartoon by François Boucher (1703–1770), ornament by Maurice Jacques, flowers by Louis Tessier. Wool, silk. 383.5 × 624.8 cm

Sold from the Pavlovsk palace-museum in 1932 to Joseph Duveen
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

The numerous works of art which decorated the Pavlovsk Palace following the return from Europe of the Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich and the Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna (the future Emperor Paul I and his wife) included four magnificent carpets created from original works by Boucher in the workshop of the Scot Jacques Nielson (c. 1718–1788) at the famed Paris Tapestry Manufactory. They were among the gifts presented to the “Count and Countess Severny” by Louis XVI during their visit to Paris in 1782. In a missive addressed to Catherine the Great the Russian ambassador to France, Ivan S. Baryatinsky, informed her as follows: “19 July... Yesterday in the morning their highnesses deigned to visit the king and the queen before their departure from Versailles. They dined in Paris... upon returning they discovered gifts sent by the king together with a register, of which I enclose a copy herewith.”

Tapestry “Venus and Vulcan” from the series “Love of the Gods”

Paris, the Gobelins Manufactory. c. 1775–1778. From a cartoon by François Boucher. Wool, silk. 381 × 487.7 cm

Sold from the Pavlovsk palace-museum in 1932 to Joseph Duveen
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

20

The Palei Palace at Tsarskoe Selo belonged to the Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich and his second (morganatic) wife Olga Valerianovna Palei. In 1914, after the beginning of the First World War, she changed her German surname to Palei (the name of a Cossack ataman related to her ancestors) and was granted the title of princess by the emperor. Her husband, the Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich, was shot in the Peter and Paul Fortress in January 1919, together with three other grand Dukes. His son, Prince Vladimir Pavlovich Palei, was thrown alive into a mineshaft at Alapaevsk in July 1918. The princess and her two daughters managed to escape to France.

21

The first attempt to liquidate the Palei Palace as a museum was made in 1923, when it was resolutely opposed by Alexander Benois at a meeting of the Council for Museum Affairs. However, in view of a lack of funds to maintain the museum it was decided to transfer the artistic property of the palace to the State Museum Fund, in order to distribute it at a later date “in the prescribed manner” between various museums.

On 17 September 1926 Georgy Yatmanov, head of the Leningrad museums, informed *Glavnauka* that during an inspection of the palace by the head of *Glavnauka*, F.N. Petrov, and his deputy, Mikhail P. Kristi, with the head of the Museum Department Natalya I. Trotskaya, it had been suggested that the palace should be liquidated. Although People’s Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky spoke in favour of preserving the Palei palace-museum during his final visit to Leningrad, on 26 October 1927 all of the palace’s artistic decorations were handed over to the State Funds Commission.

Such a policy required that items which reminded people of the imperial dynasty should be removed from the museums as soon as possible. Only chance circumstance provided any opportunity to preserve unique works of art. When a massive bedroom suite by Henri Jacob could not be carried out of the palace at Pavlovsk it was decided to save it up. However, during loading the massive cable broke under the weight of the furniture and so the historical relic resumed its rightful position: items to be sent for sale had to be perfectly intact.

As more of the accumulated valuables were sold, the state came to regard the museums more and more as “a mighty lever for the support of industrialisation.” In the new circumstances the very existence of the State Museum Fund became meaningless and in late 1927 it was decided to liquidate it and finally distribute all the works of art in its depositories between the museums and the Commission of State Funds. As early as January 1928 it was proposed that “in connection with the change in policy in the matter of the allocation of goods for export” the entire State Museum Fund should be transferred to *Antikvariat*. The Fund was finally and completely liquidated by April 1929.

The role of chief salesman was played by *Gostorg* and its head office for the purchase and sale of works of art, *Antikvariat*. But although the museums unprotestingly presented lists of the items in their possession, the selection of works for export proved to be a time-consuming business. It was far easier to sell complete existing ensembles just as they were. As an experiment it was decided to sell the contents of one of the palaces “for a fixed price”. The choice fell on the palace of the Princess Palei in Detskoe Selo.²⁰ The question of its “liquidation,” which had been repeatedly raised since 1923, was settled in October 1927, when all of the artistic decorations and furnishings of the mansion, comprising eleven thousand six hundred and six items, were sold to Norman Weis.²¹

The operatives of *Antikvariat* found this experiment exceptionally inspiring. The machine was set in motion. In the suburban palaces there was an immense number of items which could be “allocated” by the museums with some “pressure from higher organs.”





Tapestry "Venus on the Waters" from the series "Love of the Gods"
Paris, the Gobelins Manufactory, c. 1776-1778
From a cartoon by François Boucher
Wool, silk. 383.5 × 317.5 cm

Sold from the Pavlovsk palace-museum in 1932 to Joseph Duveen
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Tapestry "Aurora and Cephalus" from the series "Love of the Gods"
Paris, the Gobelins Manufactory, c. 1775–1778
From a cartoon by François Boucher
Wool, silk. 381 × 322.5 cm

Sold from the Pavlovsk palace-museum in 1932 to Joseph Duveen
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Two jugs with bronze trimming in the Louis XVI style
France, master-craftsman Pierre Gouthiere (1732–1813), c. 1767
Porphyry, bronze, gilding

Confiscated from the main exhibition at the Large Peterhof Palace in 1932
by the Leningrad branch of *Antikvariat*
Private collection, London

These two dark-red jugs of Italian porphyry framed in bronze by Pierre Gouthiere once belonged to Madam Dubarry. They were acquired by Paul I in 1799 to decorate the Mikhailovsky Palace and stood on the mantel-shelf in his bedchamber, decorating the surround of the fireplace in which Paul attempted to hide when the conspirators broke into his chambers. After the emperor's death the jugs found their way into the Hermitage and in 1823 they were transferred to Peterhof, where they were used to decorate the palace's Portrait Hall.

On 26 October 1944 the jugs were sold at auction by Christie's in New York for an approximate price of one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand dollars.

Writing table in the Louis XVI style
France, master-craftsman Jean Henri Riesener (1734–1806)

Part of the Hermitage collection, originally from the apartments
of the French Queen Marie Antoinette
Sold from the Hermitage in the summer of 1929 to Calouste Gulbenkian
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

22

Sergei Troinitsky was appointed Commissioner for the identification of "goods" at the Hermitage and S.K. Isakov was appointed Commissioner for all the other Leningrad museums. The suburban museums were to be handled by a Commission appointed at the meeting of 29 November 1927. Taking on responsibility was very much a way of life at that time: the director of the Peterhof palace-museums promised to clarify the possibility of providing goods for export within a week! The curator B.K. Makarov stated that about a hundred pictures for export had already been provided from the Gatchina Palace and up to twenty-five oriental carpets and a rather large amount of fine crystal could also be provided as a matter of urgency. The director of the Detskoe Selo and Pavlovsk palace-museums, V.I. Yakovlev, promised to provide a shipment of large oriental carpets from Detskoe Selo and also porcelain and furniture from the Pavlovsk Palace (TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 1, d. 10, l. 6–7).

23

Letter of 10 October 1928 from A.M. Ginzburg, Commissioner of the Labour and Defence Council, to the *Narkompros* Commissioner for Leningrad, B.P. Pozern (TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 7, d. 75, l. reverse of 234).

24

Quoted from: Norman, p. 187. The diaries of E.G. Oldenburg are in the St. Petersburg Department of the Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation (f. 208, op. 2, d. 57).

This had to be done as a matter of urgency and managed so that the first lot of export goods could be shipped to Europe no later than 15 February and the final lot no later 15 March 1928, in order not to miss the spring auction season.²² "During the next two months we must dispatch for auctioning to Germany items worth approximately 1 million roubles, to France items worth 1 million 200 thousand roubles, to England items worth approximately 1 million roubles. Of course, we have not yet reached full agreement with France and England, but we expect that comrade Troinitsky's visit to London and Paris will significantly expedite the organisation of the auctions in these two cities... We do not wish to take anything from Gatchina and the Stroganov Museum since... *we may be able to sell these two museums just as they stand* [our italics – authors], in any case we will have to send almost the entire set of things from Gatchina to America."²³

In fulfilment of instructions from *Narkomtorg* the directors of the Leningrad museums drew up lists of the most valuable exhibits liable for sale. Experience had taught them that resistance was futile, but not all the museum workers accepted their bosses' orders calmly.

One of those who attempted to intercede for the museums was the Secretary of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Sergei Oldenburg. "Worst of all is the question of the sale of museum objects. Literally an orgy of selling, at the head of it all the Commissar for Trade Mikoyan. On the first day he arrived in Moscow, Sergei had a phone call from Vladimir Ivanovich Nevsky, who asked Sergei and Marr to come and see him in the Lenin Library," recalled Oldenburg's wife. "He told them of the catastrophic state of affairs with the sale of valuables from the Hermitage, showing them in confidence a list of items intended for sale: five Rembrandts, Raphael, Correggio and various other objects which Sergei could not remember. We must make urgent efforts to save them from being plundered... From Nevsky Sergei went with Marr to Litvinov... He is upset by the sales, but says that he can do nothing. From him Sergei went on the same matter to Enukidze, then to Kalinin. Kalinin is terribly against it, he knew nothing, this was done in his absence. He told Sergei roughly this: 'People who have wormed their way in are trying to make money out of this. We will get only kopecks from all these millions, compared to what we need.' He promised to do everything which depended on him. Lunacharsky is also against, although, of course he has far too little influence."²⁴



Marie Antoinette's harpsichord
France, master-craftsman of the court Pascal
Tasquin, 1788

The small study in the Palei Palace
Photograph, 1922



The HARPSICHORD

*Marquise, do you recall
The minuet which we once danced?*

*Upon these keys in daydreams wreathed
Reposed the hand of Marie Antoinette,
Rondos were sung in barely audible duets
And through the air a golden-naive weeping breathed...*

*The hand of regal power, charmingly white,
Rehearsed delightful Rameau's minuets...
Oh you dreamers, you the young poets,
To you, like me, does She appear before your sight?*

*The reverie of the strings lived in those times now gone
Disturbing the tranquility of the Grand Trianon
And trembling, fading like a dying age's final groan.*

*As melancholy Lully's mournful lilting cadence,
Like flower-petals or the muse's silence,
Fled from the window, crossed the park in aerial dance*

Vladimir Palei
Tsarskoe Selo. 1 May 1914

The most interesting items in the palace's collection of furniture were two chairs and two armchairs which came from the collection of Napoleon's general Maréchal Davout, and some 17th-century Chinese lacquered screens. Also of significant artistic value was a collection of Western European, Russian and Eastern porcelain, including one of the finest collections of miniature bottles in Russia. The Palei Palace belonged to the Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich, uncle of the Emperor Nicholas II, and his wife Olga Valerianovna. For marrying a well-known society beauty the grand duke was stripped of all his regalia and forbidden to return to Russia. In 1910–1914 the architect Karl Schmidt built a mansion for them in the style of Louis XVI, with the style of the interiors modelled as closely as possible on the palaces of the French aristocracy. Much of the furniture was supplied by the French firm of Boulanger, and the bronzes were specially ordered by the owners from the Parisian firm of Delisle. In May 1914 almost the entire decor of a mansion at Boulogne-sur-Seine was brought to Tsarskoe Selo.

The collection of art works and unique museum of

French art, which Alexander Benois called "the only elegant fragment of Paris in the whole of Russia" were transferred to the jurisdiction of the State Funds Commission. A group of French antique dealers – Dehaene, Weis, Helft and Frankel – selected a large lot of items for purchase from the palace, offering to pay forty-six thousand pounds sterling, but no deal was struck because *Antikvariat* wanted an additional four thousand pounds. One member of the group, Norman Weis, came to an arrangement with *Antikvariat* to buy the items selected by his colleagues for forty-eight pounds. In July 1929 the firm "Weis and Diane" exhibited the Palei collection at an auction in London, at which the items sold included not only pictures and porcelain but also silver and the princess's jewellery and furs, despite the former owners' ineffectual attempts to protest. Those items which were not selected by Weis were sold on the domestic market and the documentary evidence indicates that the proceeds from the sale were used to pay for repairs carried out in the Public Library and a number of museums and other municipal institutions in Leningrad.

Secrétaire with Sèvres porcelain inlay work in the Louis XVI style from the boudoir of the Pavlovsk Palace
Master-craftsman A. Weisweiler
 c. 1780
 Private collection

Sold from the Pavlovsk palace-museum in 1932 to Joseph Duveen
 Offered for sale at auction by Christie's in New York on 21 October 1997



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In 1925 the Shuvalov and Yusupov palace-museums were liquidated; in 1927–1928 they were followed by the Historical Rooms of the Anichkov Palace (the City Museum Department), the inventory for which listed about twenty thousand exhibits (the items intended for sale on the foreign market were valued at one hundred and five thousand and sixty-eight roubles); in 1926–1927 the Historical Rooms at the Winter Palace were liquidated, and in 1928 the mansion of N.F. Karlova. In 1929–1932 a large part of the museum premises of the Alexandrovsky palace-museum was closed down, including the apartments of Alexander III and Maria Fedorovna and the now superfluous museum exhibits were sold off by the State Funds Commission to the Leningrad branch of the joint stock company “Hotel.” As a result two thirds of the exhibits from the palace were disposed of and the empty premises were occupied by a rest home for the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). In 1931 the Elagin Island palace-museum was closed (the museum was re-established after the war). In 1932–1934 the personal dacha of Alexander II was liquidated (transformed into a special dacha for the Leningrad Municipal Committee of the Party), together with the Fermer and Nizhny palaces (the latter also became an NKVD rest home).

Directives concerning the export of valuable antiques (to a value which was defined by *Narkomtorg* in 1928 as eight million roubles) were carried out unquestioningly. And since in each financial year the planned volume of sales of antiques was increased, many of the palace-museums had to be liquidated. The Palei Palace in Detskoe Selo had been sold up, the Historical Rooms in the Winter Palace were closed. Next came the turn of the Stroganov, Elagin Island, Alexandrovsky and Gatchina palace-museums, which were closed on the formal pretext of a decision by *Sovnarkom* to transfer the premises of the palaces to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences.²⁵

The buildings of the Elagin Island and Stroganov palaces went to the Academy, but the palace collections went to *Antikvariat*, which was still hoping to sell them off wholesale, an idea which caused shudders even among the staff at *Narkompros*, who stood “so wholeheartedly and completely on the platform of Soviet power.”

The management of the main exporting firm eyed with special envy the completely intact contents of the Stroganov Palace. When there was talk of moving the collections from the embankment of the Moika in Leningrad, *Antikvariat* was categorically opposed. “The (approximate) valuation of the palace at 4.5 million roubles assumes the sale of the full set of items directly from within the house, where their location provides them with a certain authentication. The experience of the sales from the Anichkov Palace has shown how catastrophic is the effect of removing items which are located in a historical building as part of a specific combination set in appropriate surroundings. Such methods usually result only in the sale of a small number of highly valuable items, and even so at well below their true value. The other items, which make up the great bulk, become dead weight and have to be sold off for several times less than could have been taken for them if the full set had been

26 27

Глубокоуважаемый Амель Софронович.

*Микояну.
16/X-28.
С. Ольденбург*

Пишу Вам и одновременно Алексею Ивановичу, Михаилу Ивановичу и Николаю Ивановичу Бухарину. Пишу о деле, о котором мы с Вами говорили и по которому не могу молчать как человек искренне преданный Советскому строю.

*92 no
1928*

Опять появились антиквары и т.п. люди и, видимо, спешно готовят распродажу редчайших картин и других художественных ценностей. Готовятся сделать непоправимую ошибку, которая ляжет неизгладимым пятном на нашей революции. Эти продажи основаны на непонимании и необдуманности одних и на желании нажиться других. Около этого дела наживутся многие, а государство получит жалкие по масштабу его потребностей суммы. Между тем, отрицательное впечатление, которое произведут эти продажи во всем мире, будет крайне вредно для нас: скажут, что безхозяйственностью мы разорили страну, а теперь распродаем ее последние ценности.

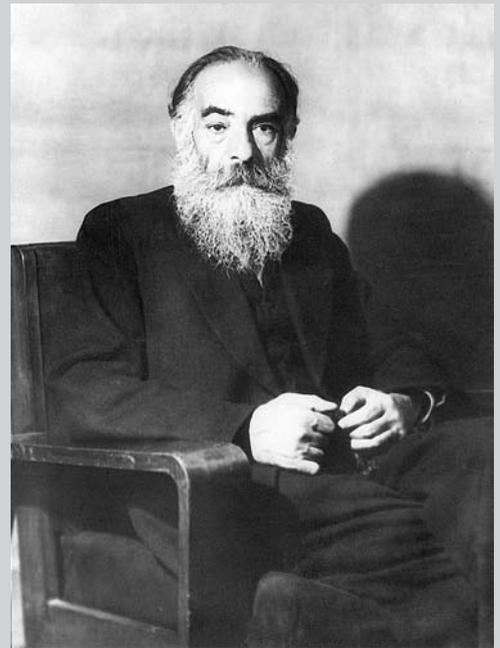
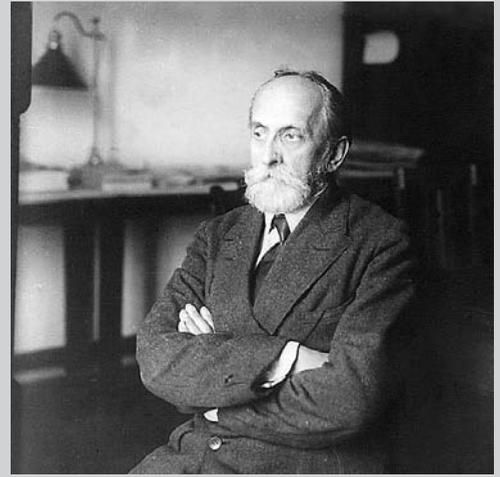
Не знаю, кто у нас стоит за эти продажи, ясно одно: или это крайне недальновидные или недобросовестные люди, потому что, ясно, что ни о каких крупных суммах и речи быть не может.

Не может быть сомнения, что дело это кончится в пролетарском суде. Но тогда уже будет поздно - вред нашему строительству будет уже нанесен громадный. Надо остановить эти бессмысленные, вреднейшие продажи теперь же.

Знаю, как дорого Вам дело нашей революции - сделайте все от Вас зависящее, чтобы не было этого позора и вреда советскому строю.

Искренно Вас уважающий
Сергей Ольденбург.

11/X-28г.
Ленинград.



Secretary of the Academy of Sciences
Sergei Oldenburg
Photograph. RGAKFD

Orientalist and academician Iosif Orbeli
Photograph. RGAKFD

A letter from Sergei Oldenburg and Avel Enukidze
The inscription in the left margin reads: "to com.
Mikoyan" and the note is: "Read by Mikoyan.
16.X.28"
RGAE, f. 5240, op. 9, d. 234

26

Letter from the chairman of the Expert Evaluation Committee of *Antikvariat*, T.L. Lilovaya, to B.P. Pozern (TsGIA SPb, f. 2556, op. 11, d. 57, l. 3).

27

By 1928 a plan had been drawn up for the radical restructuring of the museum, under which the "Stroganov House" was to be transformed into a typical cultural museum-house of the period 1750–1815. By the end of September 1928 five hundred and sixty-two articles had been transferred to the Hermitage and the State Fund received four hundred and fifty-two articles which were supposedly not of museum quality. This left the museum with eighteen thousand eight hundred and eighty articles. But on 21 September 1929 when the work on a new exhibition at the palace was in full swing, the Council of People's Commissars passed a resolution transferring the Stroganov Palace to the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (which intended to adapt it for use as a club). In January 1930 the liquidation commission began work, headed by Natalya Trotskaya, and in May the same year the former director of the palace, T.V. Sapozhnikova, reported to the director of the State Hermitage, L.L. Obolensky, that the liquidation of the Stroganov Palace was complete.

On 12–13 May 1931 at the Stroganov Palace auction organised in Berlin by Lepke the lots offered for sale included one hundred and eight pictures by Western European masters, fifty articles of furniture, twenty sculptures, four Gobelin tapestries, four family icons, Chinese porcelain, lamps, vases and clocks. Fortunately many items were not sold and were returned. The results of the auction failed to meet expectations, but the Stroganov Palace sale still yielded about four and a half million roubles for the Soviet treasury.

28

Archive of the Gatchina State Museum Preserve, d. 583, l. 30–42.

29

A.A. Mosolov. *At the Court of the Last Emperor of Russia*, Moscow, 1993, pp. 68–69.

30

Letter of 10 May 1928 from B.P. Pozern to Anastas Mikoyan. A copy was sent to the deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, A.M. Lezhava (TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 11, d. 32, l. 88)

31

Letter of 1 December 1928 (TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 11, d. 32, l. 88).

sold in situ."²⁶ The famous collection which had been created over more than a hundred years by several generations of the noble Stroganov family was removed from the palace in 1931 and put up for auction in Berlin.²⁷

A similar fate was being prepared for the Gatchina palace, the favourite residence of the Emperor Paul I. In the spring of 1928 the curator Serafima N. Balaeva noted the following in his diary: "... Rapid work on the composition of lists for export. 14 and 15 March – State Funds Commission... Revaluing exports. Disagreements with evaluation of Troinitsky and Yaremich's commission insignificant... 27 March. At home in bed, my heart is bad. T.M. and P.E. are receiving the exports commission... 30 March. Saw Yatmanov this morning. Outwardly a very sympathetic reception... 14 and 15 March – State Funds Commission... revaluing exports... saw Yatmanov on Thursday: have to create 18th-century palace interior decors!.. The new slogan is equivalence: if the Hermitage or any other museum picks out a thing for itself, then it must contribute the equivalent of its value. Such an arrangement is hardly likely to save first class pieces from export."²⁸

The director of the Gatchina palace-museum drew up a list of particularly valuable items. However, his comment that "their removal from the palace would inflict serious damage on the palace as an integral whole and reduce its artistic, historical and general cultural value" was of no interest to the bureaucrats from *Gosfond*. In 1929 it was decided to transfer "export property" with a value of three and a half million roubles from Gatchina to *Gosfond*.

The sale of the unique Pavlovsk Palace would have been the most terrible loss for Russian culture. "Nowhere in the world was there a single comparable ensemble from the time of the Directory in France. The palace, built in the late 18th century, was packed with marble, fabrics, chandeliers, porcelain and bronze from that period... When the upholstery of its furniture was repaired it was covered with fabric from the same time, so great were its reserves... During their journey to France the Count and Countess Severny (the name used by Pavel Petrovich, later the Emperor Paul, and Maria Fedorovna when they travelled incognito) ordered such an inexhaustible wealth of materials for their palace that it was still full of them when the 1917 revolution came."²⁹

The idea of selling off the contents of the palace was terrifying even to the employees of *Narkompros*, who by now had grown used to anything. "Dear Anastasy Ivanovich! As I have been officially informed... by comrade Ilyin... comrade Ginzburg has informed a representative of the foreign firm of Weis that the price for the sale of the large Pavlovsk Palace (close to Leningrad) is 40 million roubles," Boris P. Pozern, the *Narkompros* commissioner in Leningrad, wrote to the Commissar for Foreign Trade, Mikoyan. "I implore you to ascertain whether anything of the kind has really occurred. Such an act would after all testify to extreme and inexcusable thoughtlessness (no one has ever attempted to value the Pavlovsk Palace and its entire collection), and by eye it could with equal justification be valued at 10 or 80 million. The use of such 'communist' methods can only, in the first place, totally compromise us in the eyes of foreigners who know their business, creating intense speculation and the impression abroad, extremely unfavourable for the credit of the USSR, that we are obliged to sell off entire palaces together with their immense collections of art."³⁰

"Having studied the minutes of the secret session... I can under no circumstances agree with the allocation for auction of the Pavlovsk Palace [our italics – the authors], and as far as I recall, at the actual meeting it was not Pavlovsk that was discussed, but the Gatchina Palace," Pozern wrote to Lev Khinchuk and Anatoly Lunacharsky. "Perhaps a mistake has slipped through here, since so far in full agreement with comrade Ginzburg we have been working on the preparations for the Gatchina Palace, which is of less value from both the artistic and and historical points of view."³¹

But it was not possible to halt the selling machine once it had been set in motion, and although the Pavlovsk palace-museum was saved from total liquidation, its collections



Count Alexander S. Stroganov (1733–1811)
Engraving by an unknown craftsman from
an original by Pietro Rotari
Count Stroganov, director of the St. Petersburg
Public Library and president of the Academy
of Sciences, set up a library open to the public
in his own palace, which also contained the famous
Stroganov Picture Gallery, housed in premises
specially designed for the purpose by
Andrei N. Voronikhin, which became one of
the first museums in Russia.

The Mineral Study in the Stroganov Palace
Photograph from the catalogue “*Sammlung
Stroganoff Leningrad*,” 1931



suffered more badly than others. During the years 1928–1932 *Antikvariat* took half of the collection of paintings, about three hundred canvases in all, as well as two hundred and ninety pieces of furniture and bronzes, one thousand one hundred and sixty-eight items from the palace dinner services and one hundred and fifty drawings by the Empress Maria Fedorovna, her children and members of her retinue. Just as in other cases, no one gave the slightest credence to the traditional claims that “pictures and certain individual items of furniture may by straining the interpretation to a certain degree be removed and replaced by others”, since “the ensemble at the Pavlovsk palace-museum makes it the prize jewel of the Soviet Union” and “the greatest caution should be exercised in relation to it.”

Anatoly Kuchumov, the future curator of Pavlovsk, one of the eye-witnesses to what took place in the museums, recalled shortly before his death that “usually the museum workers did not know what would be taken. The *Gosfond* people took the list, walked around in a group, listened, looked and made notes, talking to each other in half-whispers. But we already knew it meant that soon a document would arrive ordering us to hand things over, as had already happened more than once at the Ekaterininsky and Alexandrovsky palaces. At the Alexandrovsky Palace... they took the marble relief of Catherine the Great by Marie Collot and a large number of presents from the Emir of Bukhara to Nicholas II – oriental silver and gold. Afterwards I saw them for a long time in the shop window of the Europa Hotel, in the same window, in fact, as the display cases from the study of the Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich in the New Mikhailovsky Palace, filled with his collection of miniatures. The main *Gosfond* shop was in the Gostiny Dvor. In 1931–1932, when the liquidation of the children’s section of the Alexandrovsky Palace began, the costumes, icons and furniture were taken away in crates and trunks. From time to time decrees from the government arrived concerning the expropriation of exhibits: for example, they took Alexander III’s billiard table and the Meltzer billiard table from Nicholas II’s Formal Study, saying that it was going to the Kremlin.”³²

Although the reserves of the suburban palace-museums might have seemed inexhaustible, the authorities had an even more attractive source of “currency reserves” in the Hermitage, one of the largest collections of art in the world. By the summer of 1929 two thousand canvases from its Picture Gallery and large numbers of gold articles from the Special Store-Room had been earmarked for sale.

Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1741–1828

Bust of Diderot, 1773

Marble. Height 40 cm

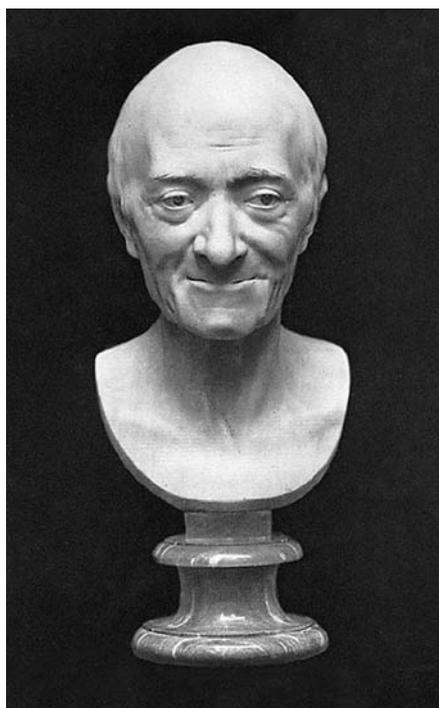
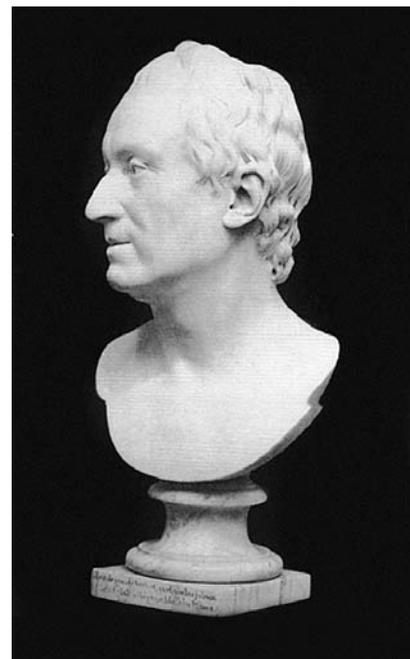
Sold at a Lepke auction in Berlin on 12–13 May 1931

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman

All of Houdon's works which were in Russian collections prior to the revolution were brought to Russia during the sculptor's lifetime. Most of them were commissioned directly and not bought as finished items. This bust of Diderot, which was carved for Count A.S. Stroganov, was no exception to the general rule. When he lived in Paris in 1771–1778 Stroganov visited Houdon's studio on several occasions.

It was probably during one of those visits that the count commissioned a reproduction in marble of a terracotta bust of the famous encyclopedist which had been shown at the Salon of 1771. On its completion in 1773 the sculptural portrait was brought to St. Petersburg, where it was kept in the Stroganov Palace with a bust of Voltaire. In the spring of 1931 the two sculptures were sold in Berlin by the firm of Lepke at the Stroganov Palace auction for prices of ten thousand seven hundred and ten dollars and six thousand one hundred and eighty-eight dollars respectively.



Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1741–1828

Bust of Voltaire, 1775

Marble. Height 48 cm

Sold at a Lepke auction in Berlin
on 12–13 May 1931

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1741–1828 >

Diana, 1760

Marble. Height 210 cm

Sold from the Hermitage to Calouste Gulbenkian in May 1930
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

Like most of the works acquired by Catherine the Great, Houdon's *Diana* owed its appearance in Russia to Baron Grimm, who acted as consultant on artistic matters not only to the Russian empress, but also to the Duke of Saxon-Goth. Documentary evidence indicates that this *Diana* was commissioned by the duke and was due to be shipped to him from Houdon's workshop in 1783. The idea of transporting the sculpture made Grimm nervous. On 27 January 1783 he wrote to Catherine: "... This figure has a wonderful reputation: it is still in the sculptor's workshop because of the war. At the present time, insofar as the moment of its dispatch is approaching, I am in a state of fearful trance. Both of her arms and her right leg, which is extended to the rear, are entirely without support, and unfortunately Goth has no access to the sea." The fact that *Diana* could be sent to St. Petersburg by sea explains Grimm's persistence in offering the sculpture to the Russian empress. Eventually Catherine consented, but with undisguised reluctance. On 10 May 1784 she wrote to Paris: "If it is absolutely essential that Houdon's *Diana* must be mine, then send her to me." In the spring of 1786 the statue of the ancient goddess was installed in the Inner Hall (Grotto) at Tsarskoe Selo: in the early 19th century it was transferred to the Hermitage, and from there in late May 1930 *Diana*, together with five paintings on canvas, was sold to the oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian. The cautious buyer had worked out a cunning code so that a specialist sent to Leningrad could send a telegramme from which the statue's state of preservation would be clear: "I'm feeling just fine." "I'm a little tired" or "I arrived tired out". Following the complicated procedure of packing the statue, which took place at night by candlelight, the sculpture was sent to London, where after inspection and a second expert assessment of its condition, it was packed once again and sent by steamer to Paris.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1472–1553

Adam and Eve, c. 1530

Oil on panel. 190 × 70 cm (each panel)

Sold from the Hermitage on 12–13 May 1931 at auction in Berlin by Lepke
The Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California

These works were acquired by the Dutch collector Jacques Goudstikker, the owner of a unique collection of over one thousand pictures and about a hundred sculptures by old masters. Nazi policy in relation to Jews led to almost the entire collection, which was located in Amsterdam, being taken over by the fascists and in 1939 it was shipped to Germany by Fieldmarshal Hermann Goering. In 1945 part of the collection was returned to Holland and declared the property of the Dutch state.*

The last remaining heir to the Stroganov Collection, Georgy Stroganov-Shcherbatov of New York, claimed rights of ownership in the Cranach pictures in 1966.

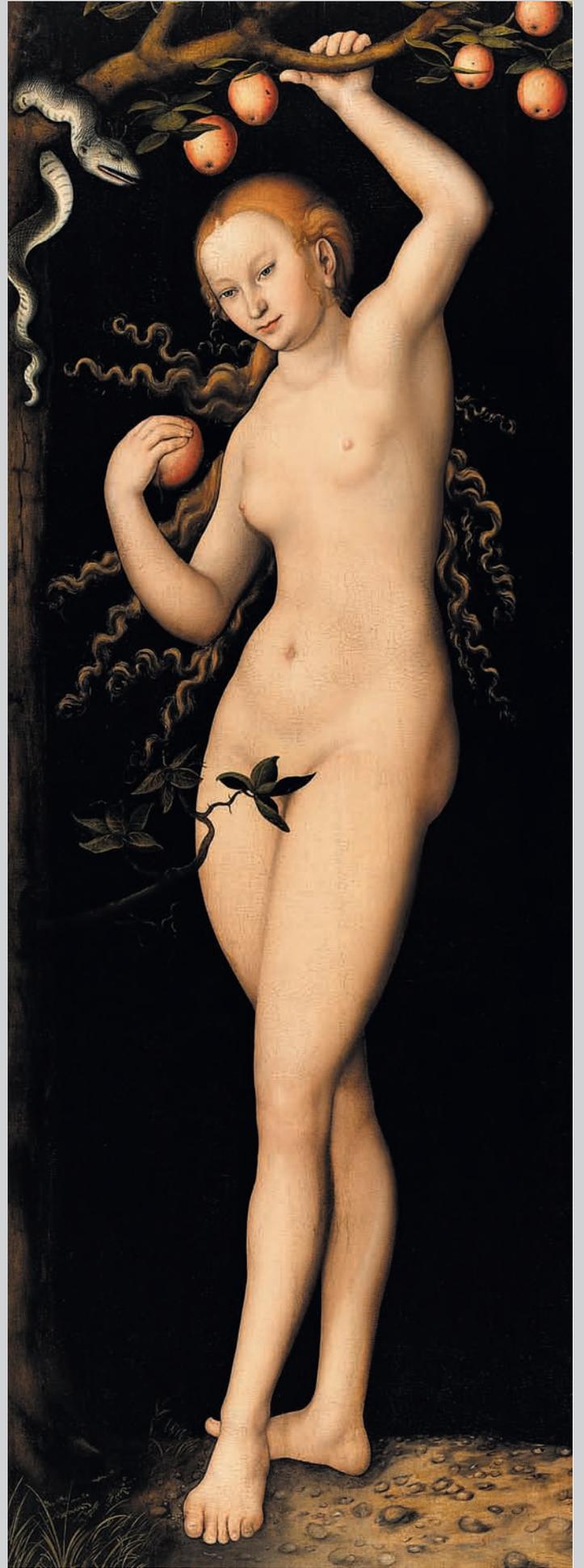
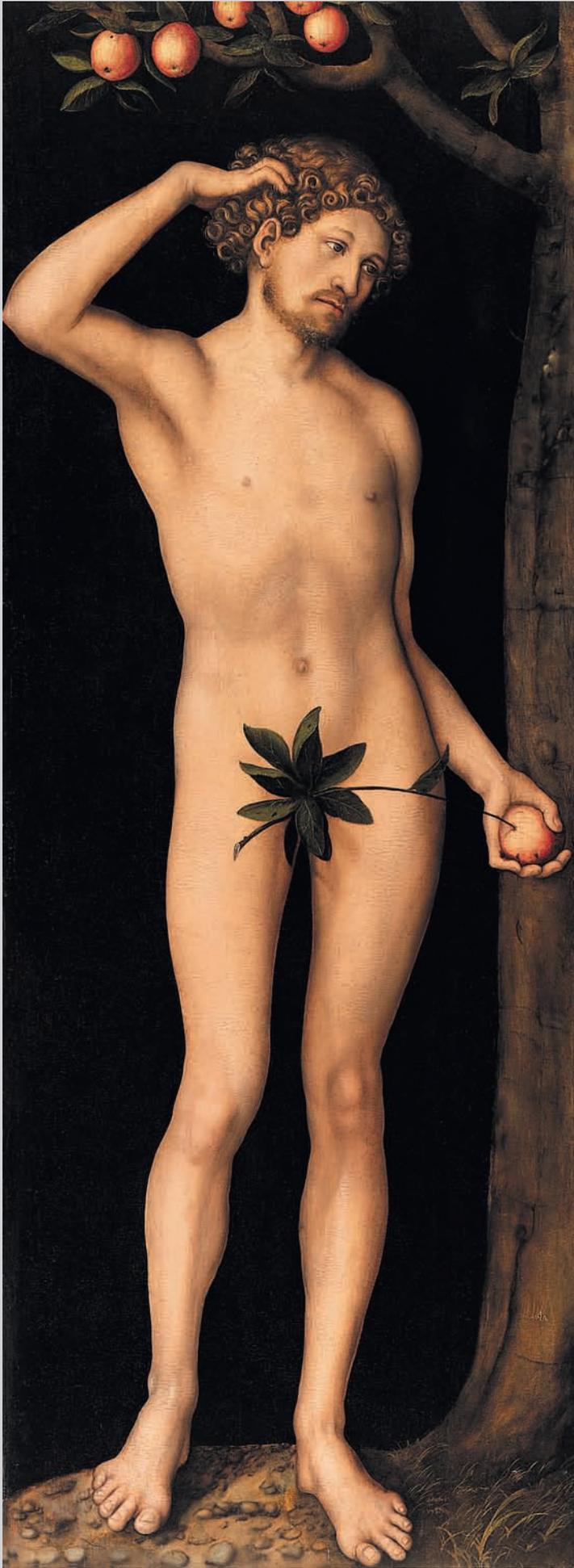
In addition to paintings from the Stroganov collection, the Lepke auction of May 12–13, 1931, featured two Lucas Cranach paired canvases, *Adam* and *Eve*, from the Art Museum of the Ukraine Academy of Sciences in Kiev.

Cranach paintings often included Adam and Eve, but the existence of the canvases put up for the 1931 auction was unknown well into the late 1920s. The paintings had been found under a staircase in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Kiev in 1927, then moved to the museum of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (monastery); in 1928, on the initiative of Prof. S. O. Gilyarov, the paintings were given to the Academy museum in Kiev (in 1929 Gilyarov published an article in Ukrainian about the paintings; it included a brief synopsis in French). The newly discovered *Adam* and *Eve*, were sold in 1931 to the Dutch collector Jacques Goudstikker, whose remarkable personal collection numbered more than a thousand old master paintings and about a hundred old master sculptures.

Because of the Nazi policy toward Jews, almost the entire Goudstikker collection, based in Amsterdam, came into Nazi hands, and, in 1939, Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering had it shipped to Germany. In 1945 only a portion of the collection was repatriated and declared state property by the Dutch government.

Because the catalogue for the Lepke auction made no mention of the provenance of the paintings, it was thought that all of them came from the Stroganov collection. Thus, Stroganov heirs long contested the rights to the Cranach canvases until, having clarified the history of the matter in the Hermitage, they dropped their claims.

*This information was kindly provided by Janine H. Jager (Naarden, the Netherlands).



Sauce dish from the Saltykov Service (The Myatlev silver), 1768–1769
Paris, master-craftsman Robert Joseph Auguste, 1723–1805
Silver

Bottle-Stands and Salt dishes from the Saltykov Service (The Myatlev silver)
Paris, master-craftsman Robert Joseph Auguste, 1723–1805
Silver

Sold from the Hermitage to Calouste Gulbenkian in 1929–1930
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

The “Saltykov Service”, purchased from the chamberlain V.I. Myatlev on the instructions of Alexander II in August 1882 (for twenty items Myatlev was paid one hundred and fifty thousand roubles) was made by the finest craftsmen in Paris – François-Thomas Germain, Robert Joseph Auguste and A. Boulier – and in the words of the director of the hermitage Sergei Troinitsky, it was an item “of absolutely unique artistic interest”. V.I. Myatlev inherited it from his great grandmother, the Countess D.P. Saltykova, nee countess Chernysheva, whose crest is used to decorate several of the items in the service, which she received in her dowry.

Before the revolution the Myatlev silver was kept in the Gatchina Palace and considered to have been the property of the Empress Maria Fedorovna.



Chapter five

The Destruction of the Hermitage

Yelena Solomakha



Edward Hau.
Italian schools gallery, the New Hermitage.
Watercolor, 1853. State Hermitage Museum

Nicholas I opened the Hermitage to the public
in 1852.

After 1917 and the nationalization of a vast number of private collections of art, the Hermitage grew significantly. By 1922–1923, in addition to its basic collection, the Hermitage embraced several well-stocked affiliates: the Konyushenny, or Stable, Museum, which along with court carriages and wagons held tapestries and Gobelins, and the Baron Shtiglitz Museum of Applied Art with its extraordinarily rich collection of West European decorative and applied art. In addition, from 1922, the Hermitage began to take under its wing the Winter Palace as well as objects returned from Moscow that had belonged to the Chief Chamberlain's Chancellery, formerly property of the Winter Palace.¹ Finally, in 1924, the Stroganov Palace and its unique collection of paintings built up by the counts Stroganov in the 18th century became yet another Heritage arm.

Meanwhile, there was the steady influx of materials from the palaces of the surrounding area and from private collections, which Hermitage staff kept under watch in hopes of finding desirable works of art. There were, as well, regular purchases from private persons and antiquities shops.²



May 1, 1917, celebration in Palace Square, Petrograd. Photograph. State Hermitage Archive

By 1929 the number of objects in the museum stood at more than a million – 1,104,469, in fact. These were classified in three general groups: objects on display, objects kept in reserve for research purposes (*Studiensammlung*) and works unsuitable for the Hermitage (this group of materials, stored in the museum’s reserves and special collections, derived from nationalized private collections).³

The vast complex of the Hermitage had to be maintained: repairs were needed for the exhibit spaces seriously damaged in 1918–1919 by the failure of the heating system; the Winter Palace galleries had to be re-equipped as display spaces; there were works of art in need of restoration, exhibits to be mounted, catalogues to be published and a guard staff and a very much increased general staff to be supported. So vast a museum required vast resources, and the government was unable to provide them. And so in the early 1920s museum budgets began to mention so-called “special resources” – a broad term to cover income arising from the rental of buildings, sale of catalogues, general admission fees, admission fees for lectures and so on. In 1924 the Council of People’s Commissars yielded on yet another point and allowed museums “to set aside for domestic sale by auction” (in plain terms, to sell) properties “not of museum quality.”

This meant that the Hermitage now had the right independently to select and sell not only office furniture and the like but art objects of all kinds that had come to it via nationalization. Basically, applied-art objects from the late 19th to early 20th centuries were to be its stock-in-trade: furniture, silver, sets of china from the imperial palaces (the objects were selected for sale by museum curators, it should be noted). The first such off-loading of museum excess took place in July 1925. Twenty-seven boxes filled with china, crystal and glass (291 pieces in all) from the Stroganov Palace, a Hermitage affiliate, were shipped to *Glavnauka’s* antiquities shop in Moscow. The first selection of pieces directly from the Hermitage itself took place on March 15, 1926.

The Hermitage received only a portion of the income from sales. By a rule of the Commissariat of Enlightenment issued on Jan. 13, 1926, “On the Inventorying and Sale by Museums of Unneeded and Unserviceable Properties as well as Non-Museum-Quality Properties in State Collections”, such income was divided as follows: 60% to the museum (except for sale expenses, figured as 10% of the total value of the items), 15% to the Commission for the Improvement of the Life of Children, with the remainder going to the treasury.

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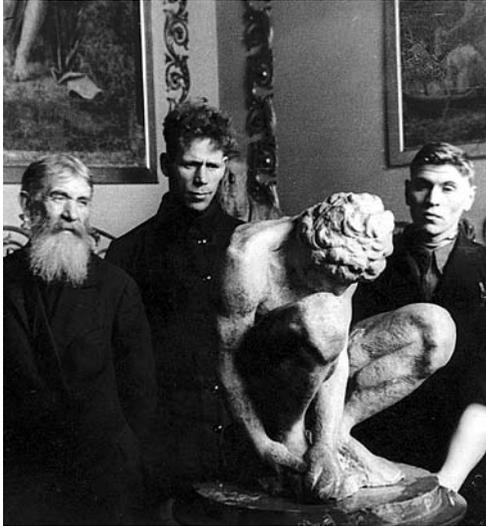
In 1922 *Gosplan* adopted a resolution giving the Hermitage the Winter Palace, which was then placed entirely on the books of the former, although other organizations were housed in the Winter Palace, including the State Museum Fund and the Museum of the Revolution (the latter remaining there until 1949).

2

There were 2,500 such acquisitions in 1918 and 41,500 in 1925. Thus, in the 10 years since the revolution – 1917–1928 – the Hermitage came into: (for the Picture Gallery Department) 5,480 paintings, 69,657 engravings, 18,648 drawings; (for the Department of Applied Arts) 79,089 pieces; (for the Numismatics Department) 233,551 pieces; (for the Department of Antiquities) 19,251 pieces and so on. See: State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, pp. 311–312.

3

The division was introduced under Emperor Nicholas I, who transformed the Hermitage from a private palace collection into a public museum.



Collective farmers tour the Hermitage.
Photograph, 1930s. State Hermitage Archive

While the museum could find customers on its own, all sales were subject to the approval of the Leningrad office of *Glavnauka*. Sales themselves were handled by the Commission for the State Reserve Fund (*Gosfond*), working out of the former Winter-Palace apartment of Count Pavel K. Benkendorf, the Palace's chief chamberlain,⁴ specially made over for storage. On certain days the public was allowed to enter through the main gates of the Winter Palace to inspect the goods in the holding area. The actual auction room was at the Komendantsky entrance of the Winter Palace. Those in attendance included private persons (including many foreigners) and representatives of organizations. Social clubs, for example, eagerly sought Chinese porcelain vases as decorations, and at one auction the Cooperative of Associates and Troops of the OGPU (the State political police) bought a painting – “Sofiya, Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov and Christ.”⁵ Some items also went to *Sevzapgostorg* for sale abroad, but the lion's share went to *Glavnauka*'s shop at 10, Petrovka St. in Moscow and to the auction room of the Commission for the Improvement of the Life of Children at the corner of Moskvoretskaya Embankment and Red Square (No. 1/13).

It was assumed that the income from sales would make it possible for the Hermitage to resolve most of its financial problems, but the proceeds amounted to no more than half of what had been projected. Late in 1927, with the museum's financial situation at a catastrophic low, the sales, or operations (i.e. the sale of non-museum-quality pieces), were halted altogether as the government prepared a project called “On Organizing the Export and Sale Abroad of Antiquities and Art, Including Those of Museum Quality.”

In September 1927 Sergei N. Troinitsky, the director of the Hermitage, was called hurriedly to Moscow to report on what actual resources the museum might apply “on the subject of exports.” Troinitsky had a plan: he would rely on a selection of duplicates of Western European and Russian applied art from the reserves of the Hermitage and the bins of the Winter Palace and other museums (it should be noted that Russian applied art was virtually unrepresented in Western European collections). To facilitate the plan, Troinitsky proposed a strong effort to interest the press in getting the word out on the impending sales to the museums of Europe and America (the buyers he had in mind were museums) by printing and distributing catalogues.

Troinitsky believed that such an approach could provide substantial earnings. But the plan was an old one from 1922 and the period of extreme famine in the Volga region, when the Hermitage had turned over to *Gokhran* (the State Committee for Precious Metals and Gems) a great many objects of silver and gold.⁶ In the new circumstances, which looked to sales continuing over a long period, not a one-time action, the proposal made little sense.

Toward the end of 1927, L.F. Pechersky, deputy director for foreign operations of the Ministry for Foreign Trade (*Narkomtorg*), visited Leningrad for a personal inspection of the museum. “The Hermitage's storage areas are holding an enormous amount of property transferred to it for safekeeping after the October Revolution. . .,” he would state later in a secret report. “[These include] Many items of non-museum quality that are valuable from the standpoint of export sale - for example, medieval armor, a multitude of porcelain objects, valuable weapons. . .”⁷ The Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, assuming the museum people would make every effort to keep their collections intact, adopted a number of resolutions to force museums and the Hermitage, in particular, to agree to give up antiquities for sale abroad.⁸

The government “contribution” to Hermitage maintenance was cut in half. Henceforth, the museum would have to support itself on the basis of the so-called “export sums,” the income from sales of art abroad.⁹ Revenue from the sales would be divided as before, with the Hermitage keeping 60%. These earnings were expected to cover the largest items in the museum's budget: capital repairs, maintenance of the guard and docent staff, electricity and heat. In addition, they would cover part of the cost of curatorial wages and catalogue preparation. The system meant that the larger the number of works of art that the Hermitage set

⁴ Count Pavel (Leopold-logann-Stefan) Konstantinovich Benkendorf (1853–1921), active in military and state affairs, a cavalry general and the chief chamberlain of the Imperial Court, was part of Nicholas II's inner circle. He was granted permission in 1921 to leave Soviet Russia and emigrate to Estonia but fell sick on the way and died in Narva.

⁵ Prices were quite low. The price of a dish from an imperial dinner service, for example, cost on average 2.5 roubles.

⁶ *Gokhran* took from the Hermitage's Department of Jewelry and Precious Stones four items of gold and precious stones given as diplomatic gifts to Russian emperors as well as gold and silver objects from the housekeeping section of the Winter Palace and from the Golitsin, Vorontsov, Paskevich, Bobrinsky, Khudekov, Dolgorukov, Yusupov and Kuriakin collections and from the repository of ancient objects at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery (Lavra). In all, 1,847 objects with a total weight of approximately 1,100 kilograms were taken (State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 5, d. 231, 255).



One of the first foreign delegations to Soviet Russia. The Winter Palace is in the background. Photograph, 1927. State Hermitage Archive

aside for export sale, the larger its potential income to meet budgetary needs. It had, however, become directly dependent on the export of art.

Selection began in February 1928. At first it was done by a commission of Hermitage curators under the leadership of Troinitsky on appointment by the Commissariat of Enlightenment with the power "to select Hermitage works of art for export."¹⁰ It was assumed that the sales would leave unfringed the museum's principal collections (and certainly all works on permanent exhibit) and that the selections would be of pieces of the museum collection kept in storage. This was entirely consistent with the instructions given to the Hermitage on the "ear-marking of works of art and antiquity for export," which stressed that "the basic museum collections, whether on display or in special reserve areas, remain untouched."¹¹

Still, the valuation of works of art remained problematical. While the experts had at their disposal the latest auction catalogues and sales reports from London, Berlin and Paris, setting market prices was extremely difficult. Moreover, the experts' distance from and unfamiliarity with the Western market in antiquities made it impossible to anticipate possible market situations and left them unfamiliar with price fluctuations affecting particular types of antiquities. But the commission did the job assigned to it, and as of April 1928 the Hermitage had released to *Antikvariat* works of art estimated to be worth around 1,300,000 roubles (the annual budget of the Hermitage then standing at about 1,150,000 roubles).¹²

Although the museum received only a third of the funds it should have, these were, even so, life-saving. Over the course of 1928–1929 this income paid for the construction of the passageway between the Winter Palace and the Hermitage, repairs to the façade, restoration of the sculptured figures and vases on the roof of the Winter Palace and quite a number of other vital jobs.¹³

For the sake of the continued existence of one of the richest and most powerful museums in the world, the museum's professional staff was ready to accept that a price had to be paid. By the summer of 1928, however, events were beginning to move in an altogether unexpected direction: Georgy L. Pyatakov, the Soviet trade representative in Paris, in violation of all instructions, offered to sell Calouste Gulbenkian, head of the Iraq Petroleum Co., paintings from the Hermitage collection. With the Soviet government under heavy pressure to win access to the world oil market, a secret session of *Antikvariat*'s price-setting commission met at the Hermitage. The discussion concerned a single topic: the possible sale to Gulbenkian of 20 masterpieces from the Picture Gallery. It was decided to limit the sale to five paintings, for the time being.

7

RGAE, f. 5240, op. 19, d. 840, l. 45–48.

8

GARF, f. 5446, op. 1, d. 453.

9

The Hermitage's state budget for 1928–1929 was 349,110 roubles; the so-called special funds came to 765,988 roubles.

10

S. N. Troinitsky was removed as director of the Hermitage in 1927. Thereafter throughout the period of the sales of art, party workers with no experience in museum administration held the directorship.

11

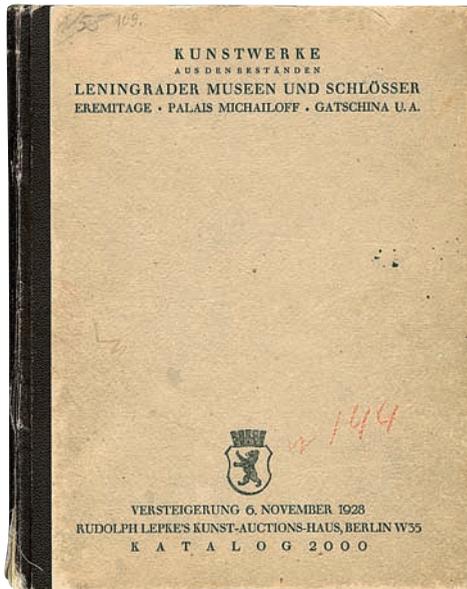
State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, pp. 35–36.

12

For purposes of comparison: 516,000 roubles were allocated for construction of the Lenin Mausoleum in 1929–1930 (GARF, f. 5446, op. 1, d. 546; resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 31/318 dated Oct. 14, 1929).

13

By circular No. 370 of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, dated Sept. 30, 1930, and effective Oct. 1, 1930, no revenue from sales of art would any longer go to the museums. All revenue would go to the State Budget.



Title page of *Iubileinyi katalog 2000. Proizvedeniia iskusstva iz sobranii Leningradskii muzeev i dvortsov. Ermitazh – Mikhailovskii Dvoretz – Gatchina*. The catalogue was prepared for the 2,000th auction by the Rudolf Lepke auction house held Nov. 6–7, 1928, in Berlin. The auction featured works from the Hermitage and other Leningrad museums and palaces.

News of the impending sale of Hermitage masterworks thoroughly alarmed academic circles. Sergei F. Oldenburg and Nikolai Ya. Marr, both members of the USSR Academy of Sciences, headed immediately to Moscow to confer on the problem with the director of the Lenin Library, Vladimir I. Nevsky. Oldenburg then wrote to Avel S. Yenukidze, Mikhail I. Kalinin, Aleksei I. Rykov and Nikolai I. Bukharin to emphasize the irreparable damage the sale would do to the nation's standing in the world. Other cultural figures echoed this concern in letters, but the top party leadership remained deaf to the clamor. The Soviet government had decided that the massive sales of works of art was correct and had begun establishing contacts with potential partners and clients.

In short order, a contract was signed with Rudolf Lepke, a German auction house that had been active in the Soviet antiquities market since 1923. A representative of the Berlin-based company, Hans Carl Krueger, arrived at the Hermitage in February 1928. The German antiquities expert was given access to the storage areas of the Hermitage as well as to the New-Mikhailovsky Palace, which *Antikvariat* used as a storehouse. Given the widest possible authority, Krueger was empowered personally to choose items for the auction that Rudolf Lepke was preparing.

The first auction, made up of works from the Hermitage and other Leningrad museums, took place Nov. 6–7, 1928, in Berlin. It was the Lepke company's 2,000th auction, a grand event. Reaction in Germany varied. Wilhelm von Bode, the general director of the museums of Berlin, in his preface to the auction catalogue said the decision of the Soviet government to sell excess works of art in Berlin could only be welcomed. "This auction not only gives all friends of art the opportunity to see extremely valuable and significant works but, more importantly, may renew the connection sundered by world war and thus serve the bringing together of peoples."¹⁴ In reply to this, the Munich newspaper *Muenchener Nachrichten* said it saw no coming together of peoples in the fact that "in Germany, where private property is protected by law, there will be put up for auction works of art expropriated from private collections."¹⁵ Nor did the auction itself proceed without scandal. Ten Russian émigrés filed suit after recognizing their own things among the auction's lots.¹⁶ Count Felix Yusupov recalled: "Yet in Berlin at the Lepke Gallery, the Soviets organized a sale of works of art. In the illustrated catalogue, I recognized several of our things. I sought the help of the outstanding lawyer Vangemann and asked him to alert the judicial authorities in order to prevent the sale until the matter might be handled in court. Other Russian émigrés in the same position came to Berlin and made common cause with me. When I confronted furniture, paintings and rare little objects from my mother's sitting room in our home in St. Petersburg, I felt actual shock. On the day of the auction, police entered the hall and confiscated all the pieces we had pointed out as ours, which occasioned some panic among buyers and sellers. We never doubted that our property would be returned to us."¹⁷ The German court also revoked sales of such property as had already been made (sales totaling 863,700 marks).

In turn, the Soviet government protested and demanded compensation in the amount of 2 million marks from the German government. The European press, except for several right-wing newspapers, did not support the émigrés. "But who will pay these 2 million marks if the Soviets win the case? Of course, it will be, not the émigrés, but German taxpayers, who are disturbed by what they see as untimely meddling by Berlin's judicial system that has only created unnecessary difficulties for itself," the French newspaper *Paris Midi* wrote on Nov. 8. In the end, the German court declined the émigrés' petitions, and the scandal only heightened interest in the sales.¹⁸

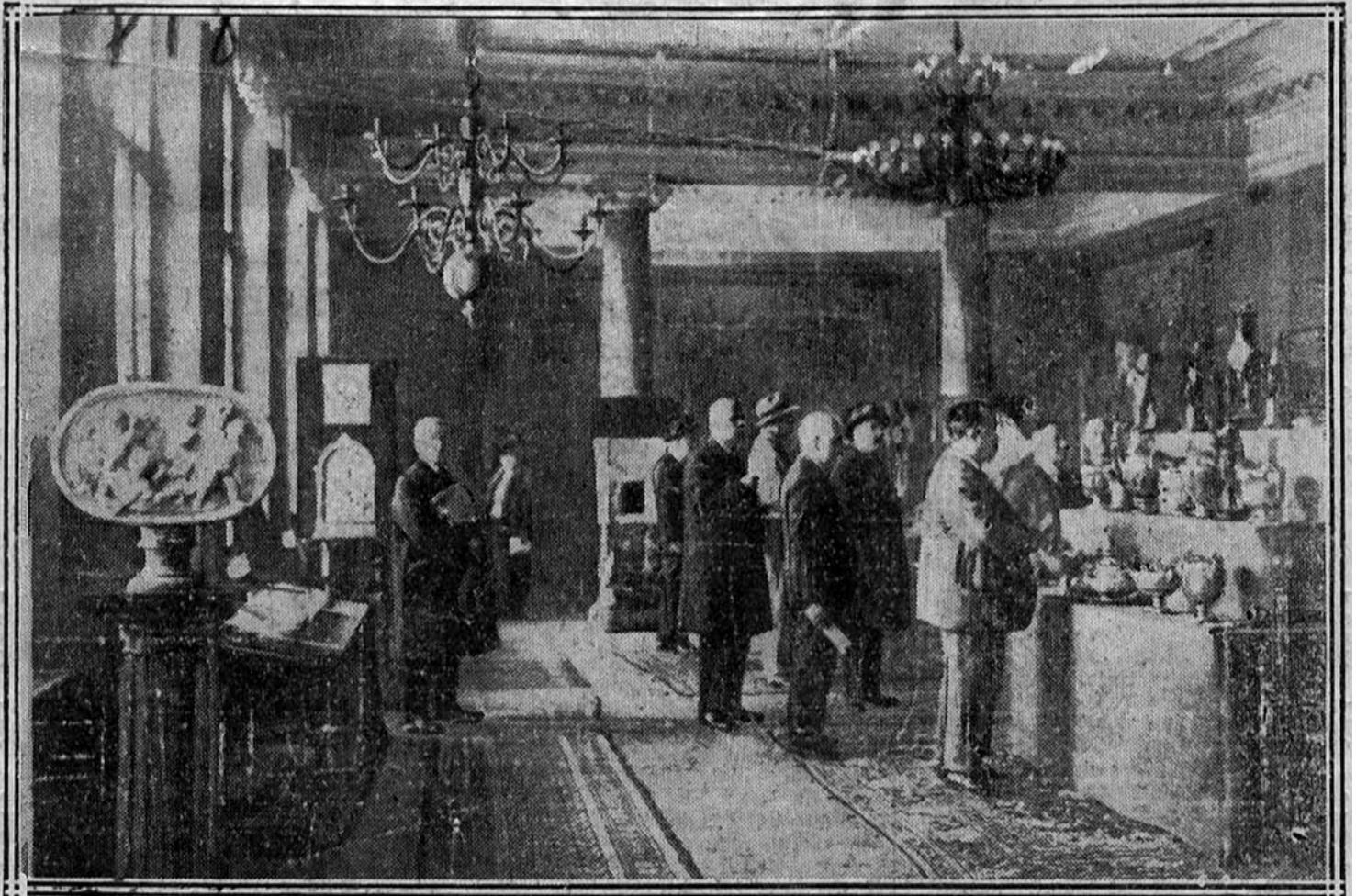
Despite the scandal, however, the auction earned the Soviet government only 2,056,000 marks, far less than what had been expected. According to the leading experts from the Hermitage – the curator of paintings Vladimir F. Levinson-Lessing and the curator for engravings and drawings Stepan P. Yaremich, both of whom were present at the auction as

¹⁴ Bode v. Wilhelm. Die 2000-ste Versteigerung von Rudolf Lepke's Kunst-Auktionenhaus./Kunstwerke aus den beständen Leningrader Museen und Schlosser/Ermitage, Palais Michailoff, Gatschina. 6 Novembre 1928 Rudolf Lepke's Kunst-Auktionen-Haus, Berlin W35 Katalog 2000. Seit 13–19t.

¹⁵ *Muenchener Nachrichten*, Oct. 29, 1928. State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, pp. 70–71.

¹⁶ Prince D. Obolensky, Princess Olga Palei, Countess Kochubei, Countess Shuvalova, Prince Yusupov, A. Polovtsov, Countess Stroganova, Prince A. Dabisha-Kostromanits. In the case, Materials on Placing under Arrest by a German Court USSR Valuables Designated for Sale, it is noted that Prince Felix Yusupov also made claims to the painting, *Mary with the Child and Anna*, of the French School, two paintings by Greuze, *Head of a Child*, two paintings by Hubert Robert, *Laundresses and Stairway in a Park*, and that Maria Chernicheva-Bezobrazova claimed two small landscapes by Hubert Robert, *Fountain and Obelisk*, and that Citizen Sologub made claim to a painting by Masse, *Titus*. RGAE, f. 5240, op. 19, d. 210, l. 2.

LES SOVIETS FONT VENDRE A BERLIN DES OBJETS D'ART "NATIONALISES"



L'EXPOSITION DES POTERIES DANS LES SALLES DE VENTE DE BERLIN

"The Soviets Sell 'Nationalized Works of Art' in Berlin." Photograph of page from Paris newspaper *Excelsior*, Nov. 5, 1928. State Hermitage Archive

observers – the auction was premised on attracting rich collectors but did not live up to these expectations. "Almost all the significant pieces went to intermediaries, that is to antiquities dealers. For this reason, many works that were both of high quality and extremely rare often sold for significantly less than their usual value."¹⁹ Buyers, too, were disillusioned. *Paris Midi* wrote: "Many collectors and dealers did not hide their disillusionment at the quality of works put up for auction. Undoubtedly, aficionados and professionals expected more, even much more. ... Either the Soviets left the very best things in the palaces of Leningrad or the taste of Russia's prewar elite was not as faultless as had been thought."²⁰

Nineteen-twenty-nine began with preparations for another auction. By December 1928 the Russian trade office in Berlin had reached agreement with Lepke on the sale of the contents of the Stroganov Palace-Museum (the deal was arranged by *Antikvariat* without consulting the Commissariat of Enlightenment). The contract, worth 4 million marks, was signed, and Lepke had already paid an advance of a million marks when the deal was set aside because of a suit filed in France regarding the Stroganov legacy and the fear of possible complications with the former owners. To avoid having to pay Lepke a huge penalty for the aborted auction, the Hermitage agreed to ready without delay a new group of paintings valued at 4 million marks. This time the paintings – by Lotto, Bassano, Bordone and Cranach – were chosen directly from the Hermitage Gallery. In addition, Krueger won a guarantee from *Antikvariat* that, if the sale of the contents of the Stroganov Palace-Museum did, nonetheless, take place, it would be handled by Lepke.

Meanwhile, the Western financial situation was becoming increasingly shaky, and prices for antiquities plummeted. Under these circumstances, the Commissariat of Enlightenment and the Commissariat of Trade lowered the prices of the art to be sold. The consequences of

17

Yossouppoff, Prince Felix: "Avan l'Exil," Plon, Paris 1952; Yossouppoff, Prince Felix: "Lost Splendor," Jonathan Cape, London 1953.

18

In the future, such claims would not be considered in that, by decision of the German Supreme Court, the Appeals Court in London and the appellate court in Rome, nationalized Russian collections of art were recognized even outside the borders of Russia as the unquestionable property of the Russian state. *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 7, 1929.

19

The auction saw the sale of 122 objects from the Hermitage for a total of 847,155 marks. State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, pp. 60–64.

20

Paris Midi, Nov. 8, 1928. State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, p. 77.

На последнем аукционѣ русскихъ музейныхъ цѣнностей въ Берлинѣ большевики продали всѣ картины ниже стоимости. Среди проданныхъ — известная картина Лоренцо Лотто «Супруги». За всѣ картины выручено 1.200.000 марокъ.



Новый вариантъ картины Лоренцо Лотто.

Сталинъ: — Мало платите!...

Антикваръ: — За краденное всегда платить половину.

Каррикатура Civis'a.

An updated version of the Lorenzo Lotto painting. A Civis'a caricature from the Paris newspaper *Segodnia*, June (No. 157) 1929. State Hermitage Archive

Stalin: – *You will pay almost nothing!*
Antiquities dealer: – *For stolen goods, one always pays half.*

this decision were tragic: the museums were forced to increase steeply the number of pieces designated for export.²¹ It was hardly accidental that the participants in the meeting on this subject at the Hermitage included representatives of the top political leadership.

By March 1929 Hermitage art valued at 2,199,085 roubles was designated for export sale. The wife of Academician Sergei F. Oldenburg, Elena G. Oldenburg, a member of the staff of the museum's Eastern Department, noted in her diary: "A commission searching for items to sell is currently working in the Hermitage. All objects are divided into one of three categories: museum pieces, that is Hermitage pieces; then pieces that have come in for the *Gosfond* [State Reserve Fund]; then pieces for *Gostorg*. Oh, you cannot imagine what is going on in the Painting Department! Poor gallery attendants. Their faces show the pain. All the reserve paintings, all, are for sale! B. P. Pozern is acting despicably and then there is Ginzburg. In the silver department everyone wants to know the whereabouts of the secret bins, the location of hidden treasures. They've pulled the floor up and are searching under the floor. They're looking in the chimneys."²²

The second Lepke auction in June 1929 essentially did not really come off. The sale took place only four months before Black Thursday, Oct. 24, 1929. Because of the vast quantity of antiquities from the USSR thrown on the market, starting prices were incredibly low. The

Soviet trade group, led by Maria F. Andreeva, even pulled a number of pieces out of the sale.

The timing of the auction could not have been worse: practically simultaneously in Berlin, auctions were being held by two celebrated dealers in antiquities – Kremer and Spiridon (both of whose auctions, incidentally, were successful). And if for the preceding Lepke auction, the big hall couldn't accommodate all those who wanted to be there, this time the hall was filled with ordinary resellers. Even though the paintings offered in June 1929 were unquestionably of better quality than those shown in November 1928, the public was quite cool to the auction. "This was an auction of big names and – relatively – low prices," the German newspaper *Der Tag* wrote on June 5.

Despite the sharply lowered asking prices, most of the pieces went unsold and were returned, unharmed, to the Hermitage. Most fortunately, this was true of the finest lot in the auction, Lorenzo Lotto's "Portrait of Spouses," a painting that, in the view of the Lepke expert and art historian German Foss, was "unmatched by anything on the market."²³ The German newspapers had reported that the painting was purchased for 310,000 marks by Popoff, a Paris firm. Happily, the information was false.²⁴

Most unpleasant of all was the fact that the Soviet government failed to cover the advance from Lepke. It now owed the firm 600,000 marks, which meant that the museum's earnings from sales were cut by a third.²⁵ Meanwhile, the Soviet government had reduced its financing of the Hermitage, and the museum had called a halt to all capital repairs and reduced some staff.

But despite the failure of the second auction, the Soviet government would not slow down and, in May 1931, the once postponed sale of the Stroganov Palace collection took place. Because of the uniqueness of this living incarnation of 18th-century culture, all of it in

²¹ In 1928, 858 pieces were transferred for export; in 1929, the number was 17,335. State Hermitage. *Museum Sales*, pp. 326–327.

²² Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, f. 208, op. 2, d. 57, l. 191.

²³ State Hermitage Archive, f. 7, op.1, d. 523, l. 5.

²⁴ Piotrovsky, M. B. «How Lorenzo Lotto Returned to the Hermitage» // *Hermitage Readings. In Honor of B.B. Piotrovsky*. St. Petersburg, 1999, pp. 80–86.

²⁵ State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1033, l. 2.



Fort mit Erinnerungen an alte Zeiten . . .

Der Schreibsekretär des Zaren Paul I. wird auf der Auktion russischer Museumsschätze bei dem Berliner Kunstauktion Haus Lepke im Auftrage der Sowjetregierung versteigert und erzielt 38500 Mark.

Rudolf Lepke auction hall. Photograph of a page of the *Hannoverscher Kurier*, June 5, 1929. State Hermitage Archive

The price goes up at the Lepke auction house for Paul I's scepter – it goes for 38,500 marks.

virtually pristine condition, it was decided to sell the collection intact and in place. “The (approximate) valuation of the palace collection at 4.5 million roubles presupposed both the sale of the collection in its entirety and a sale from the home itself that gave it its special character. The experience of selling the Anichkov Palace collection had demonstrated the disastrous effects on sale prices when things are removed from their historical context. What tends to happen is that only a small number of the most costly pieces are sold and at prices very much below the set prices. The remainder of the pieces, which constitute the bulk of the collection, are so much dead weight and have to be disposed of at prices several times less than might have been realized if the whole complex had been sold in place.”²⁶

Not surprisingly, *Antikvariat* categorically opposed moving the collection from the banks of the Moika. When, however, Lepke was unable to find a buyer for the entire palace collection by the agreed-upon deadline (by that time the palace building itself had been given over to the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences), *Antikvariat* was forced to open negotiations with other German firms – Matthiesen, Glueckselig and Cassirer. Cassirer's representatives found “the proposed material” extremely interesting but were unable, because of the very unpropitious market, to set a specific date for an auction.

Antikvariat did not wish to wait and again turned to Lepke. Now, because the idea of conducting the sale “in place,” in Leningrad, had to be abandoned, agreement was reached to sell separate pieces from the famed collection. It was also decided to boost the “strength” of the latter by the addition to the sale of paintings from the Hermitage and other Soviet museums, including the paired paintings by Lucas Cranach, *Adam* and *Eve*, from the Art Museum of the Ukraine Academy of Sciences in Kiev. Two paintings by François Boucher – *Toilet of Venus* and *Triumph of Venus* from the Yusupov Gallery – also were added to the auction. From the Stroganov collection itself there were canvases by Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Hubert Robert and Greuze as well as the portrait-masterpieces of Nicholas Rococks and Baltazarina van Linick by van Dyck. Once again, despite the supremely high artistic level of the work, the prices were extremely low. For this reason, to the unutterable joy of the Hermitage staff, 37 paintings, including the canvases of Hubert Robert and van Dyck, returned to Leningrad.²⁷

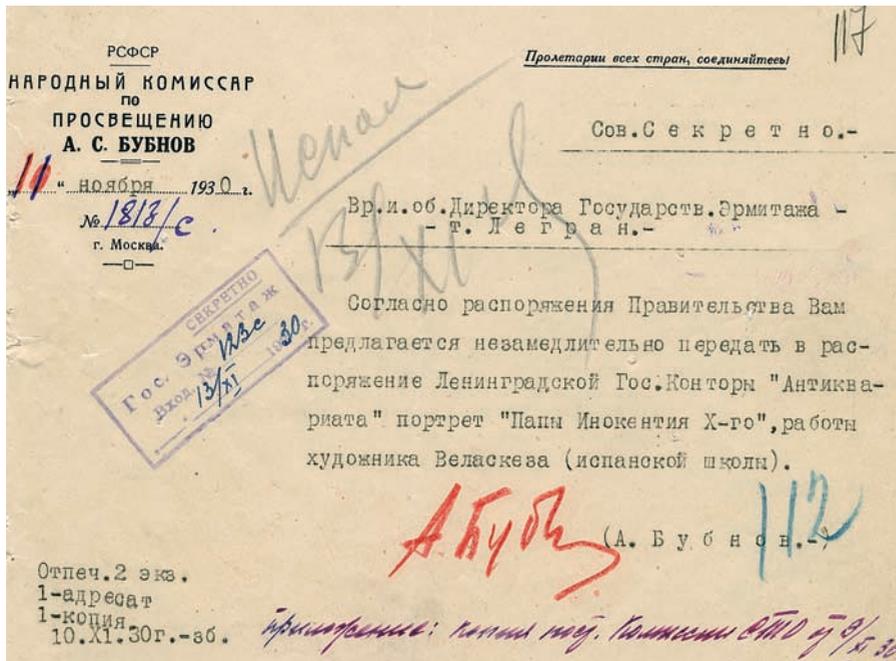
In addition to Lepke, other firms took a hand in the sale of Hermitage art. In May 1930, the Boerner auction house of Leipzig sold duplicate engravings from the Hermitage and,

26

As of June 1925 the Stroganov Museum held 2,454 works of art. Even before the decision in 1928 to sell the collection, it had undergone serious changes: 562 pieces had been given to the Hermitage, and 452 pieces “without museum significance” were put up for sale. Thus, at the time of the sale, the Stroganov collection was to a large extent concentrated in various departments of the Hermitage. The collection was reviewed again later by Hermitage curators, and a portion of the material was distributed to other Leningrad museums.

27

At this auction the Dutch collector Jacques Gudstikker acquired the *Adam and Eve* of Lucas Cranach, two portraits by P. Rotari, the *Madonna* by Petrus Christus, which became part of the collection of Hermann Goering during the war. J. Jager. *Sowjetische Kunst- und Antiquitätenexporte in den Westen, 1919–1938*. In: Waltaud Bayer. *Verkaufte Kultur. Die Kunst- und antiquitäten exporte 1919–1938*. Frankfurt am Main, 2001.



Commissar of Education A. Bubnov's order dated Nov. 11, 1930, authorizing the sale of Velasquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. State Hermitage Archive

in April 1931 and May 1932, it sold old-master drawings. In March 1932 the Max Perl firm sold Hermitage paintings at auction in Berlin, and that November the Berlin firm of Internationales auctioned books from the Hermitage. Other books from the Hermitage were auctioned by Gilhofer & Ranschburg in Lucerne.

In 1931 Sotheby's in London auctioned off antique gold accessories and unique Scythian gold pieces, the likes of which no other museum but the Hermitage had ever owned. The museum made every effort to save the rare collection, several times refusing to let it out of its hands, but in the end 166 pieces were sold. For these rarest of antiquities, a total of 2,280 pounds sterling was paid.²⁸

Of all the European states, only France kept its distance from the sales of works of art from the USSR, although there had been talk of staging auctions in Paris. In October 1928 Sergei Troinitsky was sent to France on a secret *Gostorg* commission to sound out the attitude of Russian émigrés to the

Berlin auctions and the possibility of auctions in Paris. Troinitsky met with former Hermitage colleagues Alexander N. Benois and Vladimir N. Argutinsky-Dolgoruky as well as with the collectors, A.A. Polovtsev, A.K. Rudanovsky and M.N. Bezobrazova.²⁹ All sharply opposed the auctions. That, too, was the position of the French government, which forbid the purchase of art from the USSR. This did not, however, preclude French museums turning up with a whole range of Hermitage art acquired through unofficial representatives in Germany.

The decisive shift in the system of selling art abroad came in January 1930. S.N. Troinitsky was relieved of his duties as the Hermitage representative chosen by the Commissar of Enlightenment to select art for export. These duties and powers were now given entirely to the Commissar of Enlightenment or his deputy. The work of the experts from the Hermitage was also dropped. Henceforth, the choice of art and the setting of prices were to be done by "shock brigades" from the Commissariat of Enlightenment. And the art to be selected would come not only from the museum's reserves but from its displays. The chief criterion for the "shock brigades" now was quality (insofar as quality directly affected price). The display pieces chosen for sale were placed on "lists not open to questioning," and the only legal option remaining to the Hermitage to defend its collections was to compile a counterweight of "lists open to questioning" made up of arguably equivalent substitutions from art already in the possession of *Antikvariat*.

A resurgence of Hermitage transfers to Calouste Gulbenkian occurred in early 1930. This collector was now seeking 15 pieces of jewelry, commissioned by the Empresses Elizabeth Petrovna and Catherine II from famous French makers of the 18th century, as well as Rubens' *Portrait of Hélène Fourment* from the Walpole Collection, which Catherine II had purchased in 1779. Gulbenkian promptly got everything he asked for. The magnificent trove cost the collector 155,000 pounds.

But Gulbenkian was not finished. In short order, he added to his purchases Rembrandt's *Pallas Athene*, *Portrait of an Old Man* and *Portrait of Titus*, Lancret's *The Bathers*, Watteau's *Le Mezzetin*, Ter Borch's *Music Lesson*³⁰ and Houdon's *Diana*. The pieces were surreptitiously readied for shipment at night by candlelight. The paintings went by rail through Berlin to Paris, and the *Diana* to the vessel "Feliks Dzerzhinsky" bound for London, whence

A SOVIET SALE IN LONDON

Ancient gold-work of rare beauty
from a former Imperial Museum
to come under Sotheby's hammer



WITH EROS
Gold earrings from Geste—at top, in the form of a female head and, below, in the figure of Eros. The stone is a garnet



DARKLING DEATH IN GOLD
A death mask (5½ in. high) of a woman or child. It came from Sidon and dates from the fifth or sixth century B.C.



WITH DIONYSUS
More earrings—at top, the rod of wine with pendant bunch of grapes; below, a dove ornamented with filigree



MIGHT AND WISDOM
Pallas Athene in a gold circular boss surrounded by palmette ornaments and a circle of ivy leaves in filigree (300 B.C.)

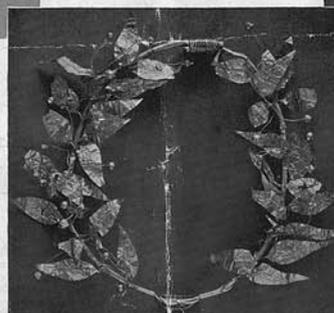
THE treasures of Imperial Russia have come under the hammer at various times since the Revolution. The latest collection (mainly ancient gold jewellery—some of which is illustrated here) comes from the Hermitage Museum in Petrograd. The museum was built by Catherine the Second in 1765 (it was enlarged later) and called Hermitage after a cottage near Paris belonging to Rousseau, of whom she was a great admirer. The jewellery, which will be on sale at Sotheby's on November 9, is mainly of Hellenistic date, but there is also a number of earlier pieces from the fourth century to the eighth century B.C.



BREASTPLATE
An archaic Lydian necklace and pectoral consisting of a disc ornamented with swastikas and inset with amber beads



GOLDEN STAG
A gold repoussé (hammered into relief) ornament—a recumbent stag with stylised horns, from a collection of Scythian jewellery



KNOT OF HERACLES
A gold wreath of olive leaves and berries from Mytilene (circa 400 B.C.). It is nearly twenty-six inches in circumference, and the gold wire joins at the back in a so-called knot of Hercules



CROUCHING GRIFFIN
Another ornament from the Scythian collection—one of four open-work plaques (about 1½ in. long) of recumbent griffins

Scythian and Greek gold ornaments sold at auction by Sotheby's on Nov. 9, 1931. Photograph from the journal *The Graphic*, Oct. 10, 1931. State Hermitage Archive

the marble statue went on to Paris by French steamer. The whole order cost Gulbenkian a bit less than 35,000 pounds sterling.

In 1930 *Antikvariat* began negotiations with a new partner, Knoedler & Co., whose most active client by far was Andrew Mellon. "The acquisition of works of art by the American secretary of the Treasury Mellon during his last stay in Europe again gave rise to the fear of an American specter haunting the European art market. This specter had for a long time not been seen. During the war and the period of inflation, not a word was heard about it. . . ." the newspaper *Hamburgische Correspondent* stated on Sept. 20, 1931. "But against the background of Germany's recent impoverishment, the question again arises as to preserving the old collections of art, fears again arise about the American danger. Without doubt, these fears have some basis. America is today capable of buying virtually anything that it wants in Europe. First and foremost under threat is Germany. That is perfectly clear." What, in fact, was in danger were not German but Soviet collections.

To penetrate the Russian market, Knoedler & Co. used the services of another German firm, Matthiesen, which kept a permanent representative in Moscow, and the English firm,

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On Nov. 10, *The Times* wrote that the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden had paid 285 pounds for 28 pieces of Scythian gold; a few pieces were acquired by the Fitzwilliam Museum (the museum of art and history associated with Cambridge University) and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology of Oxford University. State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1213a.

29

Case No. 2/116 concerning the Accusation against Troinitsky, Sergei Nikolayevich. — *Nashe Naslediye*, 2001. No. 57, p. 29.

30

Gulbenkian had to return the *Glass of Lemonade* by the same artist. The Hermitage was able, at the last minute, to save this painting by substituting *The Music Lesson* for it. See: Piotrovsky B.B. "How the 'Glass of Lemonade' Remained in the Hermitage". In: *Hermitage Readings. In Honor of B. B. Piotrovsky*. St. Petersburg, 1998, pp. 73–76.

Большевики распродают картины знаменитых мастеровъ

Безсмертные полотна Рембрандта, ванъ-Дейка, Рубенса вывезены за-границу



Bolsheviks Sell Paintings by Famous Artists. A page from *Illustrirovannaia Rossiia*, Paris, Oct. 4, 1930. Private collection

Colnaghi & Co. Charles Henschel, who headed Knoedler, personally traveled to the Soviet Union for the negotiations. The pictures that Mellon selected were taken from an illustrated catalogue of the Hermitage's painting galleries prepared by P. P. Veiner and published in 1923 in Munich: the telegrams ordering one or another painting referred directly to the inventory numbers given in the Veiner catalogue. Telegrams with orders "to hand over without delay" one or another artwork, "taking all possible measures to maintain the utmost secrecy," came to the Hermitage from Andrei Bubnov, the Commissar of Enlightenment. No discussion would be brooked.

In 1930–1931 Mellon procured 19 paintings from the Hermitage: *Portrait of a Young Man* and *Portrait of an Officer* by Frans Hals; *Girl With a Broom*, *Jan Sobieski*, *The Turk* and *Woman Holding a Pink* by Rembrandt; *Portrait of Isabella Brandt* by Rubens; *Annunciation* by van Eyck; *Portrait of Lord Philip Wharton*, *Portrait of Susanna Fourment* and *Portrait of a Young Girl* by van Dyck; *Portrait of William II of Nassau and Orange* by Hanneman; *Saint George and the Dragon* and *The Alba Madonna* by Raphael; *Adoration of the Magi* by Botticelli; *Discovery of Moses* by Veronese; *The Crucifixion* by Perugino; *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* by Velasquez, and *House of Cards* by Chardin. Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* and Rembrandt's *Joseph Accused by Potiphar's Wife*, which had been loaned in 1930 for an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, were also sold to Mellon when the show closed. For the 21 masterpieces, Mellon paid \$6.6 million.

The services of these same firms were instrumental in the Hermitage's loss of Tiepolo's *Cleopatra's Feast*, which eventually went to The National Gallery in Melbourne, the *Triumph of Neptune and Amphitryon*, by Poussin, which went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, van Eyck's *Last Judgment* and *Crucifixion*, which went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and *St. Peter's Denial*, by Rembrandt, now at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. All these canvases, since reproduced repeatedly in catalogues, guidebooks and on postcards, were the glory of the Hermitage. This sale of the museum's most valuable paintings did irreparable harm to the institution.

31

Chernavina, T. *Escape from the Gulag*. Moscow: Klassika Plyus, 1996, pp. 137–138.

32

State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 17, d. 205, l. 63.

33

On receipt of a telegram from the Commissariat of Enlightenment on the transfer for export of the *Annunciation* by van Dyck, not van Eyck, the Hermitage replied that it did not have the painting. But after a further telegram from the Commissariat, the painting was turned over. State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 17, d. 157, l. 62.

The curator of the Stroganov Palace, Tatyana V. Sapozhnikova (Chernavina) recalled the sight on entering the Hermitage in 1931. “The first step out of the lavish vestibule, faced with gold stone and with its massive gray columns – no *Diana* by Houdon, which had been a kind of greeting card and invitation. There were so many empty spaces in the Italian halls that they were barely recognizable: no *Adoration of the Magi* of Botticelli, Raphael’s *The Alba Madonna*, Titian’s *Venus with Mirror* – all the basic things that had served as landmarks in the study of the Italians. From the formerly first-rate collection of Rembrandts, less than half remained of the sure attributions: there was no portrait of Jan Sobeski, the *Athena*, the portrait of Rembrandt’s son, Titus, the *Girl with a Broom*, the famous *Old Woman, Flowers*, and now, possibly, many more. Some art-lover from abroad had taken a fancy not only to the best of the van Eyck but even to the small and intimate *The Annunciation* of Dirk Bouts. All the most finished and attractive work by the ‘little Hollanders’ was gone: Ter Borch, Metsu, Ruisdael and the others. Of Rubens only the large canvases remained; of van Dyck, only the official portraits. The French halls were missing Watteau’s *Guitarist*, Boucher; from the Yusupov collection almost all the silver was gone. If you ask about quantity, the Hermitage still has hundreds and hundreds of pictures, but it is hardly what things were before the revolution. The museum was now like a shop, the ‘proprietors’ of which were happy to sell anything. At one time, I was in agony but now I was tempted by the thought whether it was not worse to trade in people than things, even world-class masterworks?”³¹ The Hermitage took every opportunity to oppose the ransacking. Every excuse was used to bar the entry of representatives of *Antikvariat* to the storage areas; sometimes works of art were simply hidden. When rumors spread in the museum about an impending deal with Mellon in 1930, some of the masterpieces earmarked for sale (paintings by van Eyck, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Botticelli), were shifted to the Eastern Department’s storage area, supposedly “for temporary safekeeping until the completion of the electrification of the Hermitage gallery.” Unfortunately, the deception failed, and the works were sold.

But sometimes the Hermitage succeeded in defending its treasures, as in the instance of the silver casket of Alexander Nevsky – a unique work of historical and artistic interest from the first half of the 18th century, which *Antikvariat* intended to sell for melting and reuse. The Hermitage was able to demonstrate that the weight of the silver was rather less than had been assumed in that it was applied in a very thin layer over its oak base. The casket stayed in the museum.³² In rare cases, even paintings were successfully withheld (only, however, when *Antikvariat* was persuaded to take a substitute considered of equal worth).³³ Thus, after a protest to the Commissariat of Enlightenment from Director of the Hermitage Boris V. Legran, the museum was able to save its two last portraits by Frans Hals, the *Shrovetide Revellers* by Jan Steen, *Winter Landscape* by Goyen, *Forest Stream* by Ruisdael, *Village Musicians* by Ostade and a number of other works.

It should not be forgotten that at the same time the Hermitage was also handing over works of art to newly created museums in various cities of the Soviet Union. These transfers were occurring in tandem with a thorough rethinking along class lines of Hermitage displays and the addition to the staff of inexperienced workers and party workers. These were the years of campaigning to find “socially alien elements” among the museum staff, most of whose veterans were of gentry background. This was a time of meetings to root out “enemies of the people,” which were required of every Soviet institution. Finally, there were arrests of colleagues. All these measures were earnestly supported by the press, which encouraged the view that the Hermitage was a remnant of the culture of an alien class and its staff – without exception – reactionary representatives of the “former regime” unwilling to support the new order. Difficult conditions, constant shortages, fear and psychological weariness only deepened the grim picture.

Despite an eight-fold decline in the prices of art in the year 1932 alone, *Antikvariat* continued to insist that the Hermitage give up its most precious possessions. When talk turned



Collective farmers tour the Hermitage.
Photograph, 1930s. State Hermitage Archive

to the collection of Sassanian silver (which in 1931 created a sensation in London at the 2nd International Congress for Iranian Art and Archeology), the head of the museum's Eastern Department, Iosif A. Orbeli, wrote to Stalin. His appeal to the leader himself was met with a quick response from the Kremlin: "Respected Comrade Orbeli! Your letter of the 25th has been received. Review has shown that *Antikvariat's* requests are groundless. In this connection, the appropriate organ of government is required to forbid the export organs to touch the Oriental Sector of the Hermitage. I believe that the question may be considered exhausted. With profound respect. I. Stalin. 5-XI-32."

In January 1933 the head of the museum's Western European Art Department, Tatyana L. Lilovaya, told Hermitage Director Boris V. Legran that she had seen a list, in the hands of Nikolai N. Ilyin, a representative of

Antikvariat, of Hermitage paintings designated for sale. She recalled that it had included the *Madonna* by Simone Martini (valued at 45,000 roubles), *Obeisance to the Young Christ* by Filippo Lippi (valued at 45,000 roubles), *Judith* by Giorgione (valued at 325,000 roubles), *Madonna Conestabile* by Raphael (valued at 325,000 roubles) as well as *Landscape with Polyphemus* by Poussin, two landscapes from the *Times of the Day* series by Claude Lorrain, *The Boy with a Dog* by Murillo and *The Mistress and her Maid*, by Pieter de Hooch.³⁴

Boris Legran now sent his own letter to Stalin, again through the secret section of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b). That October Lilovaya and Legran were called to the Central Committee to clarify the questions they had raised, and in November the Politburo adopted a resolution barring further sales. Nonetheless, certain individual transfers of art from the Hermitage to *Antikvariat* continued into 1934, but they were episodic in character and involved no major artwork.

It would be naïve to think that these letters of protest played a decisive part in the shutting down of the sales abroad. The main reasons for the end of the sales were the sharp decline in prices for art as a result of the world economic crisis and the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933, which cut off the USSR from its principal market. Moreover, 1933 saw the start of a legal case against one of the principal purchasers of Soviet masterpieces, Andrew Mellon (accused of non-payment of taxes, the former Treasury secretary quickly turned over his art collection to the Washington National Gallery). Moreover, the majority of Soviet officials who had taken direct roles in the sales were no longer active: virtually every one of them was accused of belonging to the Trotskyist opposition and executed.

Even before the sales ended, a process in the other direction had started: the return from *Antikvariat* to the Hermitage of unsold works of art (the returns began in 1931 and, according to the records, continued until 1937).

Some things came back from the auction rooms of Europe, but most of the pieces, it seems, had never left *Antikvariat's* warehouses, which were merged in 1935 with those of International Book (*Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga*) and later eliminated altogether. In all, the Hermitage retrieved more than 1,600 paintings, 1,640 engravings, 580 drawings, approxi-

34

In this connection and probably with Legran's support, Lilovaya wrote to Stalin: "Dear Iosif Vissarionovich, I am turning to you because you alone can help in this matter. For five years *Antikvariat* has been selling art objects from the Western European art section and, for the past three years, has been largely selling first-rate things and masterpieces. . . . When not a single masterpiece is left in the Hermitage, the Hermitage will have become a vast collection of mediocre art, a huge body without soul or eyes. Yet, if the sale of masterworks is even at this point forbidden, we can save the museum." Later, in the spirit of the time, she added: "After all, it would occur to no one to study the philosophy or history of the class struggle without Marx or Engels. Everyone understands that if these names are wrenched out of the 19th century or Your name and Comrade Lenin's out of the 20th century, there can be no history or philosophy of any use to the proletariat, but when it comes to the matter of cultural heritage, they think that they can do without such giants as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Rembrandt, Rubens and Titian and, without a twinge of conscience, sell them." State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1521a, l. 9.

35

The number of returned paintings is given on the basis of the official documents of return up to 1937; the rest of the information is based on: State Hermitage Archive, f. 1, op. 17, d. 234, l. 1.

Убавиоу т-у Орбелу!
 Писмо даде от 25/х ниспол.
 Проберна новазана, еја задку
 Антабамата не обочовано.
 Дебна с тун саостебвронан
 инегавној одржаа Хармон —
 Пленотој и ео тнеонд нал
 ограно не Тронест Сенор
 Воцова Трмн ама.
 Думан, еја номно еубад
 бонро е неперанном.
 С мрдомин ухамелу
 — И. Г. Гумк.
 5/хт — 32

Letter from I. V. Stalin to I. A. Orbeli on barring
 the removal for export purposes of works from
 the Hermitage's Eastern Division. Nov. 5, 1932.
 Russian Academy of Sciences, Petersburg branch
 f. 909, op. 3, d. 163, l. 36

Published for the first time.

mately 940 examples of applied art and so on.³⁵ At the same time, the return was done with-
 out regard to where the pieces had been when taken. Thus, the Hermitage found itself with
 works from the suburban palaces of Leningrad, the museums of Moscow and so on, includ-
 ing paintings by Monet, Matisse, Renoir and Picasso that had been transferred out of the
 State Museum of Modern Western Art in Moscow for “export purposes.”

In the slightly less than five years of export operations, the Hermitage lost more than
 24,000 museum-class pieces. In that short space, much that had been accumulated by
 Russia's emperors and collectors and that had stood as the glory of the nation's culture was
 lost. The great wounds experienced by Russia's greatest museum can never be healed. The
 systematic sales of 1928–1933 removed from the Hermitage a significant share of the mas-
 terpieces that had defined it as one of the greatest museums in the world. Not even the
 returned pieces could fill the deliberately created emptiness.

Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
(and Workshop of; probably Govaert Flink, 1615–1660)
A Man in Oriental Costume, c. 1635
Oil on canvas. 98.5 × 74.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in June 1930 – April 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Originally from the collection of Johann Gotzkowski



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
(Workshop of)
Joseph Accused by Potiphar's Wife, 1655
Oil on canvas. 105.7 × 97.8 cm

Sold from the Museum of Fine Arts in January 1931 (after transfer to the museum from the Hermitage in 1930) to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Originally from the collection of Johann Gotzkowski



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, 1696–1770

The Banquet of Cleopatra, 1743–1744

Oil on canvas. 248.2 × 357.8 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1932 via the gallery of Colnaghi & Co.

The National Gallery of Art of Victoria, Melbourne

Felton Bequest, 1932

Count Francesco Algarotti, an agent of the king of Poland Augustus III managed to buy this canvas, although it had been commissioned by another influential individual. Until 1750 the picture (which was at one time believed to be the largest easel painting in the world) was located in the Royal Gallery in Dresden. Subsequently it was kept in the royal hunting lodge at Hubertsburg.

On 22 May 1765 the picture was bought by Catherine the Great at an auction of the king's collection in Amsterdam. During Paul I's reign *The Banquet of Cleopatra* was used as a ceiling decoration for the Adjutants' Room in the emperor's personal chambers in the Mikhailovsky Palace and it was not transferred to the Hermitage until much later.

No. 520/s of 23 February 1932

To: Director of the Hermitage com. Legran.

On the further assignation of mus[eum] articles to *Antikvariat*.

In connection with the fulfilment of the hard currency financial plan the All-Union Association *Antikvariat* has been set urgent goals for the 1st and 2nd quarters of this year. In order to meet the government's goals it is essential to hold a review of all the valuable museum exhibits stored in the reserves of the museums for purposes of assigning to *Antikvariat* an additional group of antiquarian goods of first-class and average quality. On the basis of the above and in accordance with a directive from People's Commissar of Enlightenment com. Bubnov concerning the provision to *Antikvariat* of the necessary assortment of goods for the fulfillment of the hard currency financial plan, the Science Sector suggests that you proceed immediately to the examination and assignation of museum exhibits from the reserves of funds of various kinds, avoiding as far as possible disturbing the displays currently in the museum ... In drawing up lists it is essential to divide all of the selected property into groups: metal, fabrics, carpets, tapestries, furniture, pictures, sculptures, engravings, drawings, miniatures, books, manuscripts...*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 146.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Jean Antoine Watteau, 1684–1721
Le Mezzetin, c. 1718
Oil on canvas. 55.2 × 43.2 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in May 1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian,
who bought the painting for George Wildenstein
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Munsey Fund, 1934

Le Mezzetin was evidently bought during Watteau's lifetime by the artist's patron, the well-known Paris art-lover Jean de Jullienne. It must be assumed that the picture became part of the collection of the Empress of Russia after Jullienne's collection was sold in 1767. In 1934 it was acquired by the Munsey Fund for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In September 1928 the Hermitage was sent a "Special List" of pictures earmarked for sale, including Watteau's *Jester Playing a Lute*. The reply given by the acting head of the picture gallery, James A. Schmidt, was laconic: "But without setting our limits too narrowly, we can sum up the situation by saying that the departure of these pictures will have a serious effect on the entire incomparable picture of the evolution of world art which is currently presented in the Hermitage following the reforms of revolutionary times. Before that the Hermitage gallery was an accidental set of highly valuable art works which the revolution transformed into a mighty and imposing historical organism. But on the basis of a purely aesthetic assessment of the treasures of the Hermitage, one can say in advance that following the assignation of the lists of pictures drawn up and presented with this report, the picture gallery of the Hermitage as such will no longer exist."*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 141.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Nicolas Lancret, 1690–1743

Les Gentilles Baigneuses

Oil on canvas. 21.3 × 25.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in May 1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian, who immediately resold the painting to George Wildenstein

Private collection

This picture was bought by Catherine II, the Great in Dresden in 1769 from the heirs of Baron Heinrich von Brühl. From October 1799 it hung in the Oval Study of Emperor Paul I in the Gatchina Palace. In 1920 it was transferred to the Hermitage. During the Second World War the painting was confiscated from Wildenstein by agents of Hermann Goering in Paris. At the end of the war it was returned to its owner.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Adriaen Hanneman, c. 1603/1604–1671
Henry, Duke of Gloucester, c. 1653
Oil on canvas. 104.8 × 87 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in November 1930 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

While in the collection of Count von Brühl this canvas was regarded as a portrait of William II, Prince of Orange by Adriaen Hanneman, but in the Hermitage it was long attributed to Anthony van Dyck. When the picture was sold to Andrew Mellon the question of authorship assumed such acute importance that Knoedler and his associates were obliged to spend substantial sums of money in obtaining the support of connoisseurs willing to confirm that the work was by van Dyck. It has now been established that this work is a portrait of the Duke of Gloucester from the Stuart dynasty, painted by Adriaen Hanneman, the favourite artist of the Princess of Orange, sister of the Duke. Hanneman was one of the most famous portraitists of the Hague in the 17th century.

Following double page:

This pair of portraits from the collection of the Count von Brühl was bought from his heirs by Catherine the Great in 1769. They represent Sir Thomas Gresham, the financial agent of the English crown in the Netherlands, founder of the Royal Bank and Gresham College in London, and his wife. The paintings were included in the “second list” of Hermitage paintings compiled in September 1928 by James A. Schmidt. The list also included works the assignation of which for sale was described as “fatal for the standing and the character of the gallery.” Each of the portraits was provisionally valued at one hundred and fifty thousand roubles.

The pictures were bought through the mediation of the Rembrandt Society for 156,000 Dutch guilders.*

*This information was kindly supplied by Janine H. Jager (Naarden, The Netherlands).





Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Mor, Anthonis van Dashorst, c. 1519 – c. 1576/1577
Portrait of Sir Thomas Gresham
Oil on panel. 90 × 75.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1931 to the Rijksmuseum with the support
of the Rembrandt Society
The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Mor, Anthonis van Dashorst, c. 1519 – c. 1576/1577
Portrait of Anne Fernely, Wife of Sir Thomas Gresham
Oil on canvas (transferred from wood). 88 × 75.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1931 to the Rijksmuseum with the support
of the Rembrandt Society
The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Paulo Veronese, 1528–1588
The Finding of Moses, probably 1570/1575
Oil on canvas. 58 × 44.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in November 1930 to Andrew Mellon through the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

The picture was acquired for Catherine the Great through the mediation of Denis Diderot at an auction of works from the collection of Louis Michel van Loo which was held in Paris on 14–17 December 1772

In 1934 the director of the Hermitage, Boris V. Legran, wrote: “The Commissariat for Foreign Trade, in its former manner regarding the Hermitage as its hard currency reserve, is trying to find buyers in advance for items from its price list, Veiner’s Hermitage catalogue, so that when the moment comes it can face us with a *fait accompli* and obtain sanction to sell. Such a state of affairs is alarming.”*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 154.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
(Workshop of)
A Woman Holding a Pink, 1656
Oil on canvas. 102.6 × 85.7 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Originally from the collection of Pierre Crozat



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Nicolas Poussin, 1594–1665
The Birth of Venus (The Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite), 1638–1640
Oil on canvas. 97.1 × 107.9 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1932 to the George Elkins Foundation
The Philadelphia Museum of Art
The George W. Elkins Collection

This painting is one of four “triumphs” painted specially for Richelieu and was intended to adorn the Royal Study in the cardinal’s chateau. Subsequently, after several changes of ownership, the picture found its way into the collection of Pierre Crozat. In 1772, together with other pieces from this celebrated collection, it was bought by Catherine the Great for the Hermitage through the mediation of Diderot.

From the Minutes of a Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee
of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
23 July 1932

66/32. – *Antikvariat* proposal
Suggest that com. Bubnov immediately assign *Antikvariat* the picture
The Triumph of Amphitrite by the artist Poussin from the Hermitage
for export sale.
Copies forwarded to: coms. Bubnov, Boev”*

*RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 43.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641
Izabella Brant, 1621
Oil on canvas. 153 × 1200 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in August 1930 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait of Rubens' first wife from the Crozat collection was long considered to be the work of Rubens himself, but the attribution has been changed in the light of the most recent research. The experts are inclined to identify this painting with the one which Philibien claims was presented by van Dyck to his master as an expression of gratitude when he left his studio.

The regular appearance at European and American auctions of pictures from the Hermitage, most of which had been catalogued at international exhibitions, naturally attracted the attention of the Western press. One firm in Paris published a letter about the sale of pictures from the State Hermitage. In response on 28 February 1930 *Narkompros* suggested that Hermitage director Obolensky should "... consider it essential to make a vigorous protest against the remarks which have appeared in the Paris press about the sale of pictures. It is essential that you inform the firm GAR that these remarks, which have given the wrong impression, do not correspond to reality and are quite clearly irresponsible. Dep. *Narkompros* Commissioner Nikich"*

* *The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 145.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Raphael, Santi, 1483–1520
Saint George and the Dragon, c. 1506
Oil on panel. 28.5 × 21.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in July 1930 – February 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York, for seven hundred and forty-five thousand five hundred dollars
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This image of St. George, the patron saint of the Order of the Garter, was painted by Raphael in 1506 for a commission from Guidobaldo d'Urbino and intended as a gift for the English king Henry VII, who had honoured the Italian duke by making him a knight of the order. More than a hundred years later the picture was in the possession of the Count of Pembroke, who exchanged it with King Charles I for a collection of Holbein drawings in 1639. (Most of Raphael's paintings were copied, and a copy of a smaller size was immediately made of the St. George). Ten years later the painting was included in the sale of the king's property arranged on the instructions of Cromwell. In 1651 one of Charles I's former creditors, Edward Bass, bought it for one hundred and fifty pounds sterling. During the following century the Raphael passed from one French aristocrat to another until it came into the possession of Pierre Crozat, whose heirs sold the picture to Catherine the Great in 1772.

At the end of the reign of Emperor Alexander I, *Saint George* was hung in place of an icon in the 1812 Military Gallery in the Winter Palace, where it remained for a long time in the corner long with an icon lamp glowing below it.

This painting was one of the greatest masterpieces in the Hermitage. It was the only picture to be reproduced in colour in the guide-book to the picture gallery compiled by Alexander Benois.

From the Minutes of a Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee
of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)

25 April 1931

9. On the sale of pictures.

(coms. Bubnov, Rozengolts)

- a) Do not sell the picture by Leonardo da Vinci.
- b) Permit the sale of the pictures by Raphael and Titian.
- c) For the review of questions related to further sales of pictures and the determination of a list of unique works which are not to be sold, establish a commission consisting of coms. Rudzutak, Rozengolts and Bubnov.

The commission to be convened by com. Rozengolts.

Copies forwarded to: coms. Rudzutak, Rozengolts, Bubnov”*

*RTsIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 12.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641
Portrait of a Flemish Lady, 1618 (?)
Oil on canvas. 122.9 × 90.2 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in June 1930 – April 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Portrait of a Flemish Lady was painted as a pendant to *Portrait of a Young Man* (c. 1618) which is in the Hermitage. The painting came originally from the collection of Pierre Crozat. It was bought by Catherine the Great in 1772 and in the old catalogues is attributed to Rubens.

“The Imperial Hermitage cannot be regarded ... as a systematic handbook for the study of the history of art. Rather, the character of the collection reflects the personal tastes of Russian rulers or those collectors whose collections were absorbed complete into the Hermitage. Crozat, Brühl, Walpole, Catherine the Great and Nicholas I all made their own contribution to the creation of the major museum of the Russian empire. However, their collecting was not guided by the goal of providing a complete picture of the history of painting, they only sought to surround themselves with superb works. Nonetheless, the sum of two centuries of collecting did embrace significant areas of the artistic past.”

Alexander Benois. Guide-Book to the Picture Gallery of the Hermitage.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
Portrait of an Old Man, c. 1645
Oil on canvas. 128 × 112 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in the autumn of 1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

This portrait, which Catherine the Great bought in 1772 from the heirs of Pierre Crozat, was previously erroneously regarded as a portrait of a friend of the artist, a learned rabbi from Amsterdam by the name of Manassii ben-Israel. The Russian museum curator Andrei I. Somov regarded this portrait as one of Rembrandt's very finest paintings.

From a note by Hermitage director Boris V. Legran:

“ ... in addition I must draw attention to the valuation of items as performed by *Antikvariat*: the so-called ‘basic’ prices shown in the list are not only incredibly low, but at times extremely strange ... Ivory vases by Gouthiere were previously assessed at 100,000 roubles, but in the order from *Antikvariat* of summer 1932 a ‘basic’ price of 3,000 roubles was stated ... The Hermitage has suffered so badly from the expropriation of items of the first rank that it can no longer bear such losses and remain a first-class museum.”*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 149.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
(Workshop of; possibly Carel Fabritius, 1622–1654)
Girl With a Broom. 1646/1648, and completed 1651
Oil on canvas. 107.3 × 91.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in February 1831 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This picture, which until very recently was regarded as the work of Rembrandt himself, is now attributed to Carel Fabritius. It came originally from the collection of Pierre Crozat.

In September 1928 the acting head of the picture gallery at the Hermitage was sent a “Special List” of pictures to be handed over to *Antikvariat*. It consisted entirely of acknowledged masterpieces of the first rank:

Secret. Special List

- 1) Botticelli – *Adoration of the Magi*
- 2) Raphael – *Madonna Alba*
- 3) Correggio – *Madonna*
- 4) Giorgione – *Judith*
- 5) Tiepolo – *Cleopatra’s Feast*
- 6) Rogier van der Weyden – *The Evangelist Luke Drawing the Virgin*
- 7) Dirk Bouts – *Annunciation*
- 8) Rembrandt – *Young Woman With Flowers*
- 9-10) Rembrandt – *Pallas Athene, Girl With a Broom*
- 11-12) Rembrandt – *Portrait of an Old Woman, Portrait of Titus*
- 13) Rubens – *Portrait of an Elderly Woman*
- 14-15) Rubens – *Perseus and Andromeda, Portrait of Hélène Fourment*
- 16) Rubens – *Landscape With Rainbow*
- 17) Rubens – *Landscape With Stone-Carters*
- 18) Watteau – *Jester Playing a Lute*
- 19) Watteau – *A Difficult Situation*
- 20) Jan van Eyck – *Annunciation*
- 21) Fragonard – *Stolen Kiss*

James A. Schmidt’s report on this list concluded in a highly unambiguous manner: “... From all of the above it follows, therefore, that the Hermitage cannot give up any of the pictures listed.”*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 140–141.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641
Susanna Fourment and Her Daughter, c. 1621
Oil on canvas. 172.7 × 117.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March 1930 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait was bought for Catherine the Great by Prince A.M. Golitsin at the sale of the Duc de Choiseul's collection in April 1772.

It was included in the “second list” of pictures the loss of which would have been “fatal for the gallery's standing and character,” and its value was assessed at two hundred thousand roubles. James A. Schmidt, who drew up the list, added a warning: “... in the majority of cases the prices presented here have had to be obtained with the help of various comparisons and combinations, as a result of which they may be regarded as merely approximate and conditional or more or less as guesses. Their real worth is reduced still further by my total ignorance of current conditions on the international art market ... The selection of pictures for both lists was oriented almost exclusively to the American market.”*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 140.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Frans Hals, c. 1582/1583–1666
Portrait of a Member of the Haarlem Civic Guard, c. 1636/1638
Oil on canvas. 87.5 × 68.6 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait was bought by Catherine the Great for the Hermitage in about 1774. Works by Hals were rare in Russian collections and even the Hermitage had only four paintings by this great Dutch portraitist.

A note from the head of the sector of Western European Art, T.L. Lilovaya to the director of the Hermitage:

“During the last 4 years the activities of *Antikvariat* have inflicted immense damage on the collection of Western European Art, which in the Hermitage is the most important section of the entire museum. During this period *Antikvariat*, which for the most part sells unique works, has sold about 60 unique pieces, striking a heavy blow at the collection of paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, van Dyck, Watteau, Chardin and van Eyck (both of the works by this famous 15th-century Netherlands painter which were in the Hermitage have been sold), Raphael (the two finest pictures, the *Madonna Alba* and *St. George* have been sold), Titian (*Venus Before the Mirror*), Houdon (the famous *Diana*), Frans Hals (the two finest portraits), Poussin, Ter Borch, Perugino, Botticelli, Tiepolo.

At the present time *Antikvariat* is selling almost exclusively unique works, and yet the sums raised are so insignificant that they cannot even begin to play any serious part in the state budget. But all the time the significance of the Hermitage is being reduced as it is deprived of its finest specimens.

Bearing the tremendous urge to learn about works of art among the wide masses, whose cultural level is growing by the day, and the requirements which the Hermitage is called upon to satisfy, it should be said at this stage that the moment has come when the standing of the museum as a collection of treasures of world significance has been seriously compromised and the line has been reached beyond which it will be forced into becoming an ordinary European museum of average quality. It should be remembered that on the basis of average-quality works we will not be able to give a correct impression of the history of art and the class struggle in this area, or to teach our artists skills worthy of our great epoch...”*

* *The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 152.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Jean-Baptiste Simeon Chardin, 1699–1779
The House of Cards, c. 1735
Oil on canvas. 82.2 × 66 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This picture, together with its pair *Portrait of a Girl With a Shuttlecock*, was probably exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1737 and found its way into Catherine the Great's collection in about 1777. The Hermitage was deprived of *Portrait of a Girl...* by a sale organised in 1854 during the reign of Nicholas I. The picture was bought by the Baron Rothschild in 1905.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641
Philip, Lord Wharton, 1632
Oil on canvas. 133.4 × 106.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March 1930 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait of Philip Wharton was bought by Robert Walpole together with other pictures from the Wharton family gallery. Catherine the Great acquired the Walpole collection in 1779.



Philip Lord Wharton
1632. about y^e age
of 19.

A. S. Ant. Vandike

Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Diego Velasquez, c. 1599–1660
(circle of)
Pope Innocent X, c. 1650
Oil on canvas. 49.2 × 41.3 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in July 1930 – February 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait was part of the collection of Sir Robert Walpole and was bought for the Hermitage from his grandson in 1779.

A NOTE

When any picture is taken for an exhibition, a note is always left (in its place): where it has gone, what for, why it has gone ... Velasquez's *Pope Innocent X* has gone. Where is it, what has happened to it? Nobody knows (some picture or other is hanging in its place). The consultants don't answer this question. Some of the public say it has been sold!

Address: Tuchkov Lane 12, apt. 8. Worker B. Golovanov. 22/11 1931

3rd Department of EKO. P.P.O.G.P.U and to LB*

To: Com. Tsirbitsky.

On the instructions of the director of the State Hermitage I am forwarding for your attention the enclosed note from worker B. Golovanov taken from the visitors' suggestions box and at the same time I wish to inform you that the picture referred to in the note, *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* by the artist Velasquez, has been removed from display on the instructions of the Government and transferred to the State Firm *Antikvariat*.

Head of Secretarial Services, State Hermitage, Kulimanin*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 145.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Frans Hals, c. 1582/1583–1666
Portrait of a Young Man, 1646/1648
Oil on canvas. 68.3 × 55.6 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in February 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This portrait originally came from the collection of Sir Robert Walpole.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640
Portrait of Hélène Fourment, c. 1630–1635
Oil on panel. 186 × 85 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in the winter of 1929–1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

This picture entered the Hermitage collection as part of the collection of Sir Robert Walpole. Hélène Fourment, whom Rubens married in 1630 when she was only 16 years old, was the artist's second wife. She inspired Rubens to create many works and frequently posed for them.

REPORT

From the head of the Picture Gallery department T.L. Lilovaya
to *Narkompros* Commissioner B.P. Pozern, dated 22 August 1929:

Secret. Com. Pozern.

I beg to inform you that the matter of the assignation by the Hermitage of 20 valuable paintings is well known in the Hermitage gallery ... on 19 August two non-party members of the Hermitage staff, Semenov and his wife, stopped me in the street and voiced their protest against any such assignation and informed me that the entire picture department was outraged by it.

T.L. Lilovaya.

Above a resolution by Pozern:

I suggest that acting director com. Velikoseltsev immediately explain how the Semenovs came to find out about my secret instructions.

Pozern. 21. VIII-29*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 144.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
Portrait of Titus, Son of the Artist, c. 1660–1662
Oil on canvas. 72 × 56 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in May 1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian, who immediately resold the painting to George Wildenstein
The Louvre, Paris

The history of this painting is quite extraordinary. Initially the portrait (like many works by Dutch masters in the Hermitage) was part of the renowned Paris collection of Count Baudouin. In May 1930 it was one of six masterpieces bought by Gulbenkian, of which he resold five, including *Portrait of Titus*, to George Wildenstein under a pre-existent arrangement.

The painting did not hang in Wildenstein's gallery for very long, however. In 1934 or 1935 it was bought from him by the rich Parisian wine-dealer Etienne Nicolas who sold it in 1942 to the German Marshal Haberstock. As with most deals made on Hitler's instructions in occupied territory, it is not clear whether the owner parted with his valuable possessions willingly or under pressure from the Nazis. Most of the works which were confiscated or bought in this way went to a museum which was set up in Hitler's home town of Linz. *Portrait of Titus* was also hung there in 1943 and remained in Linz until it was discovered at the end of the war by the Commission for the Return of Valuable Works of Art. The sale was declared invalid and the portrait was returned to its former owner, who donated it to the Louvre in 1948. The painting only finally took its place there, however, in 1979, after being displayed for a quarter of a century at a temporary exhibition of Rembrandt's works in Amsterdam.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
St. Peter's Denial, 1660
Oil on canvas. 154 × 169 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1933 to the Rijksmuseum via the gallery of Colnaghi & Co. with the support of the Rembrandt Society
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

This painting was acquired by Catherine the Great in 1783 as part of the collection of the Paris gallery of Count Baudouin.

The sale of this picture was regarded in the Hermitage as a catastrophe. On 6 July 1932 in reply to the order from *Antikvariat* the director of the museum, B.V. Legran, wrote that *St. Peter's Denial* "belongs to that small number of items on which the worldwide fame of the Hermitage Rembrandt collection is founded. It is one of the fundamental works of the late period of the artist's career, exemplifying with particular clarity his search for a monumental style, and the only picture in the Hermitage with Rembrandt's typical use of artificial lighting. The loss of this piece ... will have an extremely damaging effect on the collection's systematic coverage of Rembrandt's paintings...".

From the Minutes of a Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee
of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
14 June 1932

73/15. – On the Rembrandt pictures

Oblige *Narkompros* to hand over immediately the three pictures by Rembrandt which have been sold by the All-Union Association *Antikvariat*:

- a) *The Monk* (in the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow);
- b) *Landscape* and
- c) *Peter's Denial* (in the State Hermitage in Leningrad).

Copies sent to:

com. Rozengolts
com. Bubnov*

* RTsKhIDIN, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 183.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
Pallas Athene (Alexander the Great)
Oil on canvas. 118 × 91 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in May 1930 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

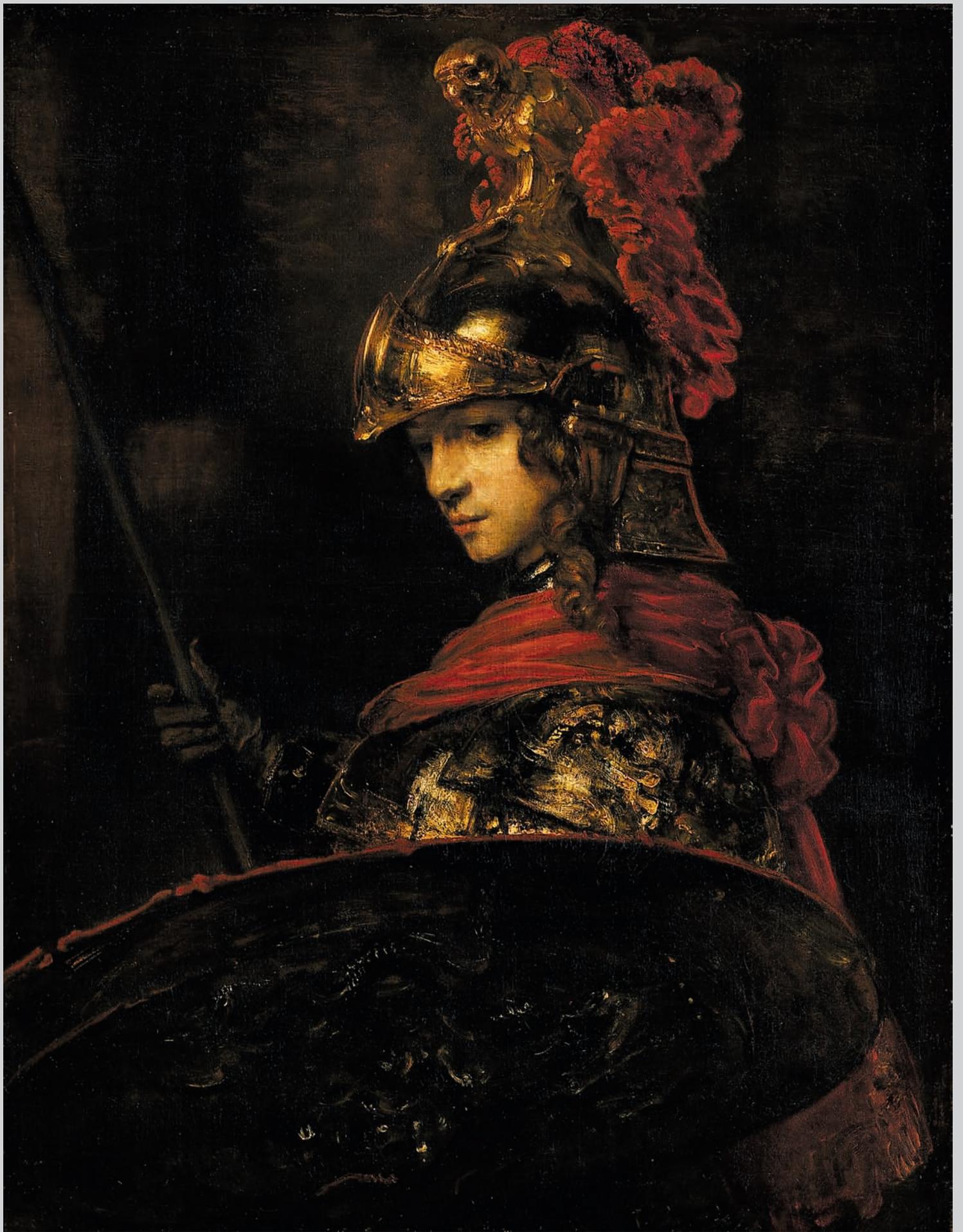
While in the gallery of Count Baudouin, from whom this portrait was acquired by Catherine the Great in 1783, it was regarded as representing Alexander the Great. In the Hermitage catalogues the painting was first listed as *Pallas Athene* and later as *Study of a Young Soldier*. In his guide-book to the gallery Alexander Benois calls it *A Portrait of Titus as Mars*: “Perhaps poor Rembrandt arrayed his son in this way on the eve of those days when he had to bid farewell to all his precious possessions and he wished to keep a souvenir in the form of an image of one of the wonderful items from his collection of weapons”.

From a report by the director of the Hermitage, Sergey N. Troinitsky,
to Anastas I. Mikoyan dated 11 October 1928:

On the question of the assignation and sale on the foreign market of valuable antiques to the value of 30 million roubles, I regard it as my duty to say the following...

4) Within the sum of 30 mill[ion] roubles it is proposed to assign 100 items for 25 mill[ion], with a value of at least 100 thousand each, i.e. an average of 250 thousand per item. There are in general very few items of such high value. In the Moscow and provincial museums there are only isolated items to be found and therefore the entire burden of this operation will be borne by the Hermitage, and for the main part by its picture gallery. In the meantime, an accurate count has shown that there are only 115 pictures with a value greater than 100 thousand roubles in the Hermitage, and 25 to 30 other items of that value. Consequently, the sale of 100 items of such quality would result in the annihilation of the Hermitage and its downgrading from the position of the first museum of the world to that of a warehouse of second-grade and third-grade pieces, fit only for the supplementation of the provincial museums. To this it should be added that these 115 pictures include about 30 Rembrandts which, of course, cannot be sold within a year, or even within 10 years...*

*RGAE, f. 5240, op. 9. d. 243.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Dirk Bouts, c. 1420–1475

The Annunciation

Tempera and oil (?) on canvas (transferred from panel). 27.3 × 34.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in summer 1929 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

For a long time in the Hermitage this picture was considered to be the work of an unknown artist from the school of Rogier van der Weyden. In 1928 *The Annunciation*, already with its new and final attribution, was included in the “Special List” of pictures earmarked for removal from the Hermitage. The acting director of the Picture Gallery Department, James A. Schmidt, provided detailed notes in elucidation of this list. Concerning the picture by Dirk Bouts he wrote as follows: “After the pictures of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden this picture represents the third stage of the first flowering of painting in the Netherlands, a stage of the synthesis of achievements and the development of a pure pictorial quality. With the loss of this painting, distinguished by a great subtlety of perception and execution, the picture of old Netherlands realism presented by the Hermitage gallery will be left without its logical conclusion.”

Top Secret. Minutes of a meeting in the State Hermitage on 17 September 1928 concerning the assignation of five pictures from the list presented by the Centre for transfer to *Narkomtorg* for sale on the foreign market...

It was decided...

b) While believing that the assignation of any five pictures from the list mentioned does immense damage to the main collections of the Hermitage, to accept at the same time that in fulfillment of the instructions from the Centre it is necessary to assign the five pictures the expropriation of which will be least catastrophic

c) To recognise as those pictures the following:

1. Dirk Bouts – *Annunciation*
2. Rembrandt – *Girl With Flowers*
3. Rembrandt – *Portrait of an Elderly Woman*
4. Rubens – *Portrait of an Elderly Woman*
5. Watteau – *A Difficult Situation*.

Proposed:

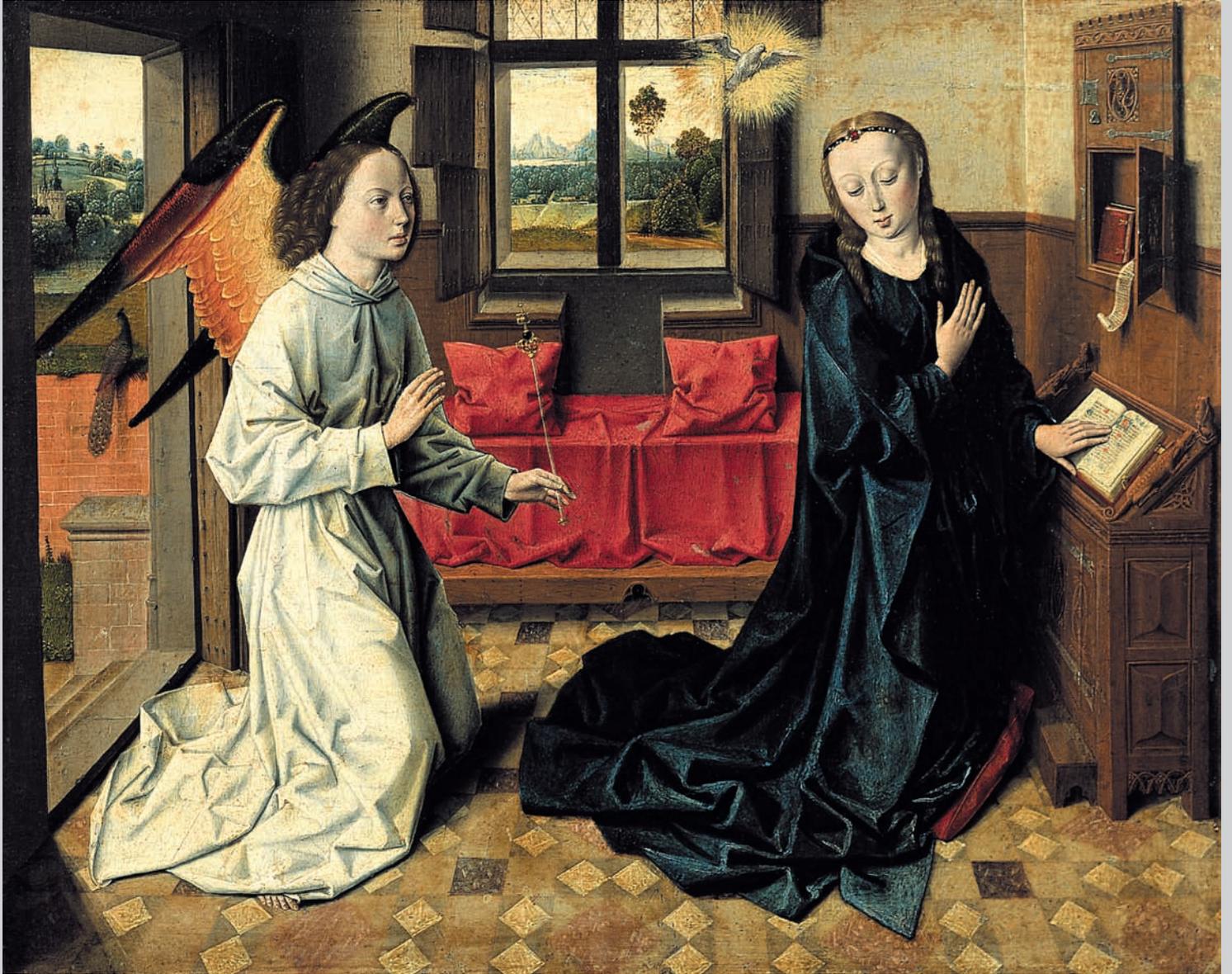
By M.P. Kristi, that we set at least an approximate valuation of these five pictures.

Resolved:

B. Consider that the assessment for sale of these pieces as masterpieces of painting is exceptionally complicated, since in recent years cases of the sale of such masterpieces have been extremely rare, for which reason it is impossible to determine even an approximate selling price; but taking into account the need to set guidelines for such an assessment, regard them as the following:

- 1) D. Bouts – £ 50,000
- 2) Rembrandt – *Girl* – £ 250,000
- 3) Rembrandt – *Portrait* – £ 150,000
- 4) Rubens – £ 100,000
- 5) Watteau – £ 100,000 *

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 142.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669
A Polish Nobleman, 1637
Oil on panel. 96.8 × 66 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in February 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Scholars believe this work by Rembrandt is first mentioned in connection with an auction held in Amsterdam in April 1707. The individual shown in the portrait has at various times been called “an Ambassador from Moscow,” Jan III of Sobess, Stefan Batory and even Andrei Rei, an aristocrat and representative of the Polish King Wladislaw, who was sent on a special mission to England and the Netherlands in 1637.

From a report by Iosif A. Orbeli to Boris V. Legran:

... The ever increasing determination of *Antikvariat* to use for the justification of its production plan and targets the very finest, the most valuable, the most well-known treasures of the Hermitage testifies to the fact that *Antikvariat* is following the line of least resistance by forcibly exporting those treasures of the USSR capable of enriching foreign antiquaries in order to raise relatively insignificant sums of money, which in fact by no means match the requirements experienced by our Union...*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 149.



Acquired
during the reign
Catherine II, the Great,
1762–1796

Johann Georg Platzer, 1704–1761
The Concert
Oil on copper. 58.3 × 84.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg

This picture, which was bought for the Hermitage during the reign of Catherine the Great, is one of the best known works of the southern Tyrolean rococo painter, Johann Georg Platzer. It forms a pair with the painting *The Orgy*. *The Concert* was acquired for the German National Museum from the Berlin gallery of Van Diemen & Co. in 1934.



Acquired
during the reign
Alexander I,
1801–1825

Sandro Botticelli, 1444/1445–1510
The Adoration of the Magi, early 1480s
Tempera and oil on panel. 70.2 × 104.2 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in July 1930–February 1931 to Andrew Mellon
via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London;
Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

It is believed that the engraver Peralli who brought this painting to France
had bought it from one of the finest collections in Rome. In 1808 on the
instructions of Alexander I *The Adoration of the Magi* was acquired for the
Hermitage through the mediation of the curator of the French Imperial
Museums, Baron Dominique Vivant Denon. This picture and *The*
Annunciation from the Stroganov collection are the only works by this great
master of Renaissance painting ever to have formed part of Russian
collections.





Acquired
during the reign
Nicholas I,
1825–1855

Titian Vecellio, c. 1490–1576
Venus with a Mirror, c. 1555
Oil on canvas. 124.5 × 105.5 cm

Sold from the Museum of the Fine Arts in April 1931 (after being transferred the from the Hermitage in 1930) to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Of all his numerous works devoted to the goddess of love, Titian kept this one for himself. After Titian's death his house in Venice was inherited by the artist's son Pomponio Vecellio, who sold the Casa Grande with all its contents to Christoforo Barbarigo in 1581. Three centuries later, in 1850, on the instructions of Nicholas I and thanks to the efforts of the Russian consul-general in Venice, A. Khvostov, the collection was acquired from the heir of the Barbarigo family, Andrea. The price paid was five hundred and twenty-five thousand francs. Together with a large number of mediocre works in the Barbarigo collection, the Hermitage acquired a number of undoubted masterpieces, including almost all of the Titians in the gallery's collection of paintings. In his guide-book to the picture gallery of the Hermitage Alexander Benois called *Venus with a Mirror* "the apotheosis of worship of the splendour of the female body".



Acquired
during the reign
Nicholas I,
1825–1855

Raphael, Santi, 1483–1520
The Alba Madonna, c. 1510
Oil on panel (transferred to canvas). Diameter 94.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in April 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This picture, painted while Raphael was in Rome, where he moved in 1508, was kept for a long time at the Monte-Oliveto Monastery not far from Naples. It is believed to have been donated to the monastery church by Paolo Giovio to mark his consecration as a bishop by Pope Clement VII in 1528. The Madonna remained in the small town of Nocera dei Pagani until the Spanish governor of Naples, the Marquis del Carpio became enchanted by Raphael's work and persuaded the monks to sell it for 1,000 escudos. Following the death of the marquis the painting passed by inheritance to his daughter, who married the tenth Duke of Alba. Following the move to the Dukes' castle in Madrid the picture became known by the name of its owners there, but it was not destined to remain in the house of Alba for ever. According to legend, Donna Maria Teresa Caetano de Silva, the Duchess of Alba, bequeathed the *Madonna* and a first-class copy of it in her will to the doctor who cured her of a serious illness. Ironically enough, the duchess died suddenly in 1802 and the inheritor of the *Madonna* was accused of poisoning her and arrested. The all-powerful favourite of the king, Duke Manuel Godoy saved the unfortunate doctor's skin, and when the court acquitted him he gave his benefactor the copy of the *Madonna* and sold the original to the Danish ambassador in Madrid Count Edmund von Burcke. (According to another version of the story, after the Duchess of Alba died the *Madonna* was sold by her heirs on the king's orders to Godoy, and after Godoy's property was confiscated in 1808, to von Burcke.) When he moved from London to Paris in 1820 the Danish diplomat in turn sold the picture for four thousand pounds sterling to the banker Coesvelt. The *Madonna* was among the pictures bought by Franz I. Labensky in 1836, when it cost Nicholas I fourteen thousand pounds sterling. Once in the Hermitage it remained there for almost a hundred years.

In his annotations to the "Special List" sent to the Hermitage in 1928, acting head of the picture gallery James A. Schmidt described Raphael's tondo *The Alba Madonna* as the most important, the biggest, the most mature and the most famous of the four pictures by Raphael in the Hermitage. "Without *The Alba Madonna* his [Raphael's] most memorable period, the Roman period, remains unrepresented in the Hermitage and the truncated picture of his evolution loses all historical meaning. But since the evolution of Raphael from a Florentine to a Roman painter signifies a fundamental turning-point in the history of Italian painting in general, the general picture of the latter, which is so richly represented in the Hermitage, will be deprived of its most important pivot if *The Madonna Alba* is lost."*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 141.



Acquired
during the reign
Nicholas I,
1825–1855

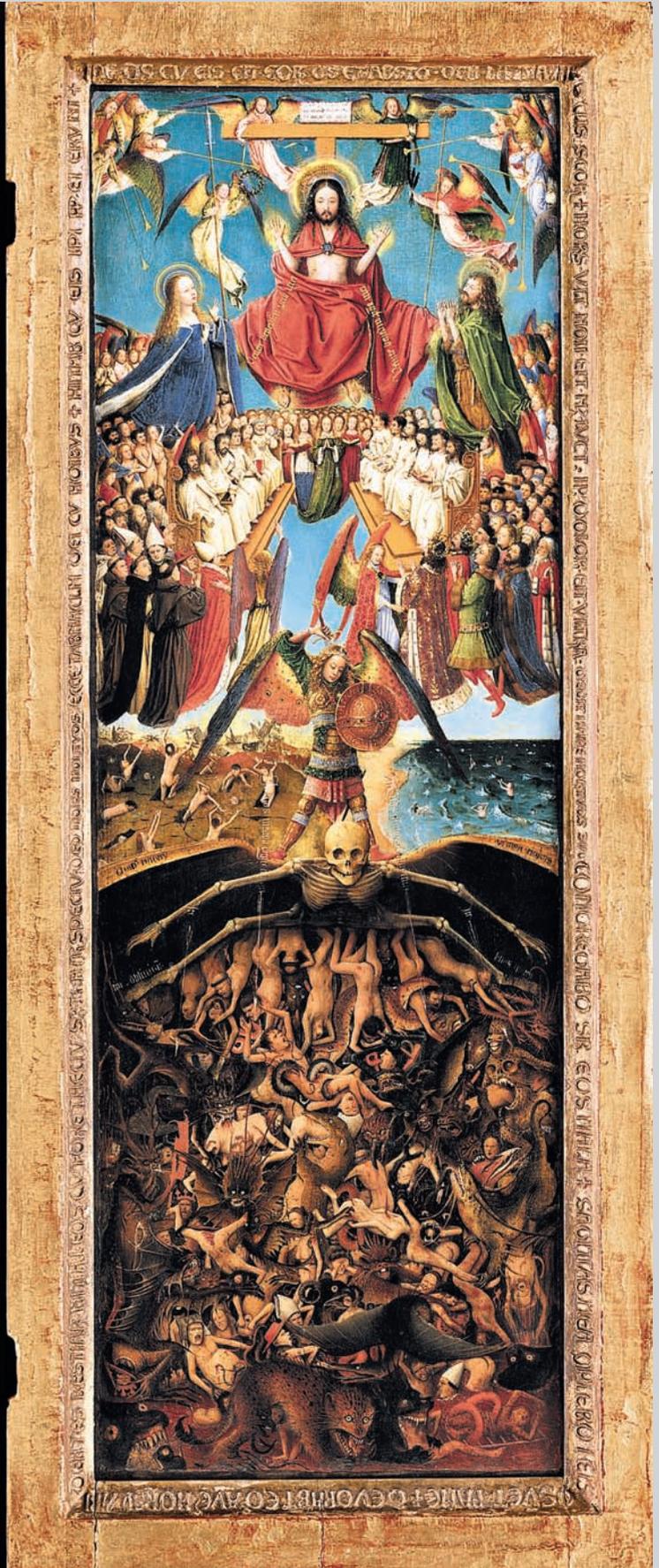
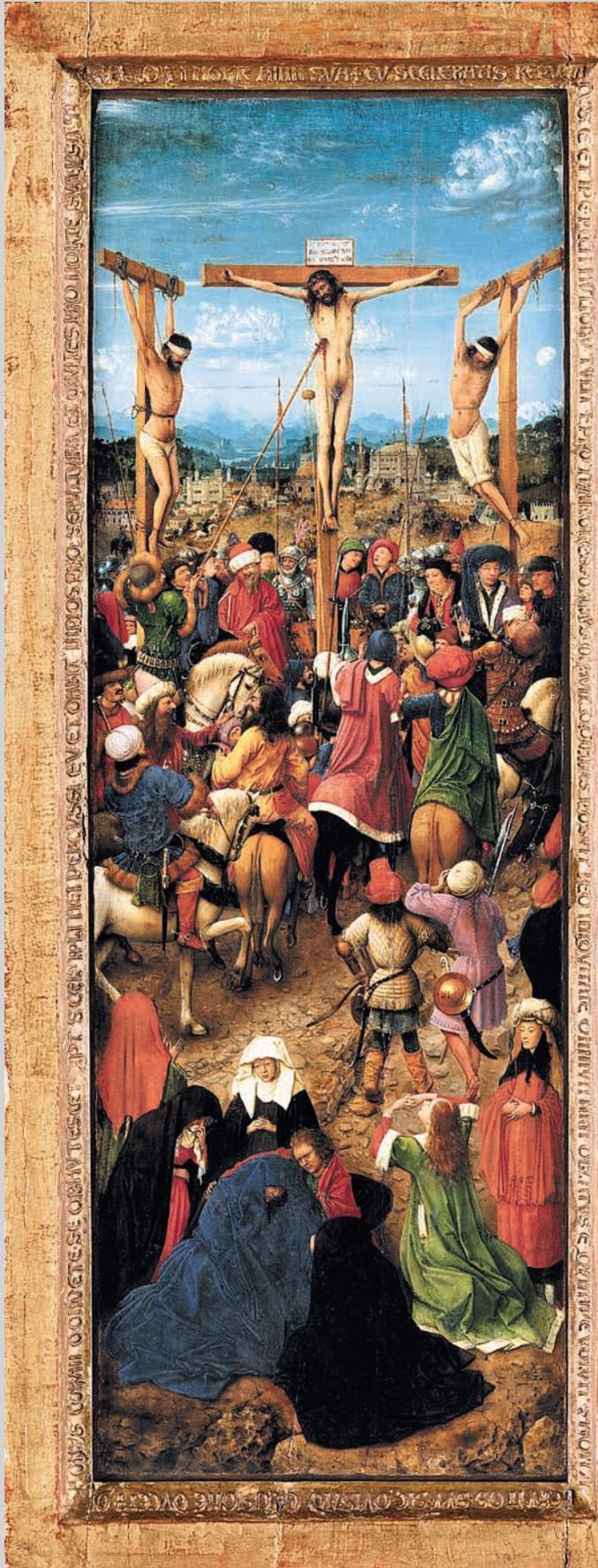
Jan van Eyck, c. 1390–1441
(and Assistant)

The Crucifixion and The Last Judgement, c. 1430

Oil on canvas, transferred from panels. 56.5 × 19.7 cm (each panel)

Sold from the Hermitage in 1933 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Fletcher Fund, 1933

These famous paintings are the side panels of the “Tatishchev Altarpiece”, the central panel of which (now lost) represented the Adoration of the Magi. They were acquired by the Russian ambassador Dmitry P. Tatishchev in Spain. The altarpiece is an early piece by van Eyck, who was one of the pioneers of painting in oils in European art. After the sale of *The Annunciation* (p. 206) and the two panels there was not a single work by the painter left in Russia.



Acquired
during the reign
Nicholas I,
1825–1855

Jan van Eyck, c. 1390–1441
The Annunciation, c. 1434/1436
Oil on canvas, transferred from panel. 92.7 × 36.7 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in June 1930 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries:
Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Painted for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, *The Annunciation* (the surviving panel of an altarpiece) was kept in his private chapel. In 1819 this masterpiece became one of the gems in the collection of works by old masters belonging to King William II of the Netherlands. The royal family suffered financial difficulties in 1848 and the king was forced to appeal to the Russian emperor for help. William II borrowed one million guilders (five hundred and forty-two thousand seven hundred and twenty-nine roubles and fifty kopecks) from Nicholas I against the security of his art collection. When the King of the Netherlands died suddenly, his family was forced to part with the paintings. William II's widow (Nicholas' sister, the Grand Duchess Anna Pavlovna) asked her brother to accept them in payment of the debt and he agreed, but the plan foundered due to the heirs' hopes of receiving a better price for the pictures at auction. Nicholas I's offer to buy several of the works, including the famous *Annunciation*, before bidding began was also rejected. In late summer 1850 Feodor A. Bruni, the curator of the Hermitage picture gallery, arrived in the Hague.

At the auction held on 12 August he bought thirteen pictures, including the unique work by van Eyck, which the Russian collection acquired for a much cheaper price than had originally been agreed to pay for it.





Acquired
during the reign
Alexander III,
1881–1894

Hubert Robert, 1733–1808
Tree-Felling at Versailles (Le Tapis Vert), c. 1775
Oil on canvas. 67 × 101.7 cm

Sold from the Anichkov Palace in spring-summer 1929 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

The collection assembled in the Anichkov Palace by Emperor Alexander III included three landscapes by Robert, two of which were views of the park at Versailles, bought in 1879 from the collection of Count Tolstoy for two thousand roubles.



Hubert Robert, 1733–1808

Tree-Felling at Versailles (Le Bosquet des Bains d'Apollon), c. 1775

Oil on canvas. 67 × 101.7 cm

Sold from the Anichkov Palace in spring-summer 1929 to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

Acquired
during the reign
Alexander III,
1881–1894

Hubert Robert, 1733–1808
The Fountain (Scene in a Park)
Oil on canvas. 191.5 × 105.4 cm

Sold from the Hermitage to Calouste Gulbenkian
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

In the autumn of 1912 the Hermitage collection of works by Hubert Robert, as yet rather limited, was supplemented by two “garden” landscapes from the spare rooms of the Winter Palace. One contemporary regarded *The Fountain* as particularly beautiful: “The garden positively murmurs with living water, the green bushes are spangled with pearl dust and the curly-leaved trees lean trembling over the white marble Ceres.” The picture came to the Hermitage from the Count Golitsin collection when it was bought on the instructions of Alexander III in 1886.



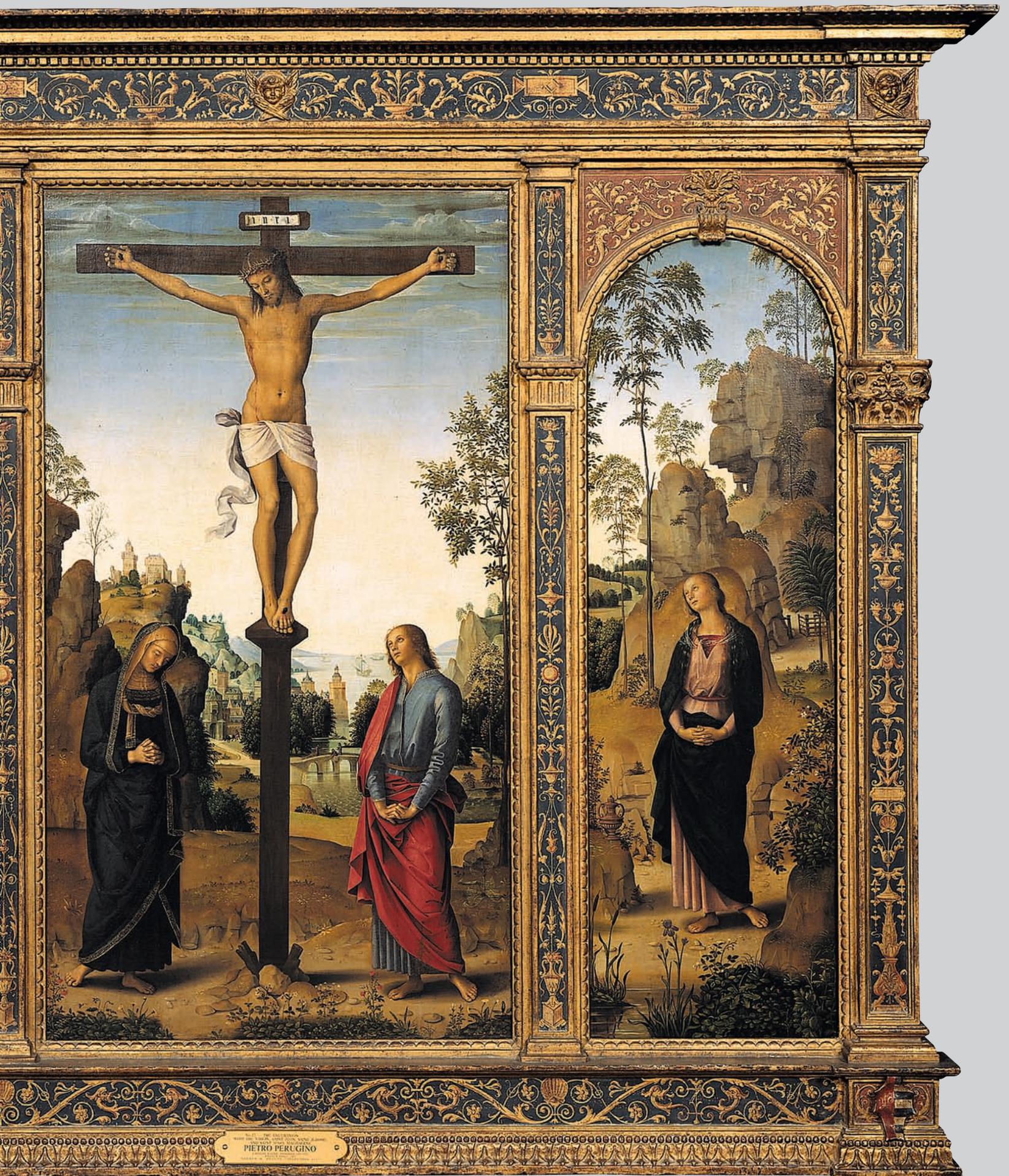
Acquired
during the reign
Alexander III,
1881–1894

Perugino, 1445(?)–1523
**The Crucifixion with the Virgin, Saint John, Saint Jerome,
and Saint Mary Magdalene, c. 1485**
Oil on panel transferred to canvas
Central panel: 101.3 × 56.5 cm; side panels: 95.2 × 30.5 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in March-April 1931 to Andrew Mellon via the following galleries: Matthiesen, Berlin; Colnaghi & Co., London; Knoedler & Co., New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

This triptych was formerly attributed to Raphael, but is now unanimously acknowledged to be the work of his pupil Perugino. It hung in the Church of San Domenico in San Gimignano, having been donated by the bishop Bartolomeo Bartoli, the confessor of Pope Alexander VI. In 1797 *The Crucifixion* was bought by Dr. Buzzi, who shortly thereafter sold it to a member of the Russian mission to Rome, Prince A.M. Golitsin. When the prince died *The Crucifixion* was transported to Moscow together with the rest of the collection. The triptych remained the property of the Golitsin family for some time, and from 1865 it could be seen in the Golitsin Museum in Moscow. It was subsequently purchased for the Hermitage.





PIETRO PERUGINO

Purchased
by the Prince
Vladimir Baryatinsky,
1874–1941

Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640
An Allegory of Eternity, c. 1625–1630
Oil on wooden panel. 66 × 34.3 cm

Sold at a Lepke auction in Berlin on 12–13 May 1931
The San Diego Museum of Art
Gift of Anne R. and Amy Putnam

The subject of this picture was for a many years a matter of dispute. At the present time many researchers incline to the opinion that it is one of the sketches for a large series of tapestries on the theme of the Holy Eucharist commissioned from Rubens by the Infanta Isabella, daughter of Philip II of Spain for the Carmelite Convent in Madrid, where she spend her childhood years and to which she retreated shortly after the death of her husband, the Duke Albert. Rubens created a design for this project consisting of more than two hundred tapestries of various sizes, producing both sketches and full-size cartoons. Several tapestries were woven in Flanders and then forwarded to Madrid. In about 1864 *An Allegory of Eternity* was in the collection of Prince Vladimir Baryatinsky in St. Petersburg. Following Lepke's "Stroganov" auction it went to the Berlin gallery of "Van Diemen & Co." and then to New York, where it was bought in 1947 by Anne and Amy Putnam of San Diego.





Purchased
by the Counts
Stroganov

Hans Burkair the Elder, 1473–1531
Portrait of Barbara Schellenberger, 1505–1507
Oil on panel. 41.5 × 28 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1933
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

Before the revolution this painting was in the collection
of the Counts Stroganov.



Hans Burkmaier the Elder, 1473–1531
Portrait of Hans Schellenberger, 1505–1507
Oil on panel. 41.5 × 28 cm

Sold from the Hermitage in 1933
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

Before the revolution this painting was in the collection
of the Counts Stroganov.

Purchased
by the Counts
Stroganov

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669

Portrait of Titus in a Monk's Habit, 1660

Oil on canvas. 79.5 × 67.7 cm

Sold from the Museum of Fine Arts in 1933 (after being transferred to the museum from the Hermitage in 1927) to the Rijksmuseum via the gallery of Colnaghi & Co. with the assistance of the Rembrandt Society

The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Before the revolution this painting was in the collection of the Counts Stroganov. This painting was bought together with *St. Peter's Denial* for eight hundred thousand Dutch guilders. The purchase was largely funded by a state loan from the Pension Fund of the Dutch Colonial Employees. The deal was completed on 25 April 1933 but kept secret until 10 July: on that day the Rembrandt Society for the Preservation and Accumulation of Treasures of Art in the Netherlands marked its fiftieth anniversary by unveiling the pictures bought in the USSR.*

*This information was kindly provided by Janine H. Jager (Naarden, the Netherlands).

From a report by Hermitage director P.I. Clark to the inspector of museums in Leningrad, Georgy S. Yatmanov:

“Comrades from *Leningradgostorg* (S.K. Isakov and F.E. Krimmer) have requested as a matter of emergency the allocation of 4–5 Italian portraits for the well-known antiques dealer Kruger, who some time ago paid a large deposit on the Stroganov House, which had been sold to him, and has now come to Leningrad to complete the deal for his purchase of the former Stroganov house. But *Leningradgostorg* has now changed its mind about selling him the Stroganov House and has offered him instead other art works and antiques in its possession. Kruger was obstinate for a while, but then he agreed, but only if the goods he was offered were livened up with 4 or 5 good Italian portraits from the Hermitage”.

The pictures were immediately “allocated” as follows:

Lorenzo Lotto. *Portrait of a Husband and Wife* – 200,000 roubles

Paris Bordone. *Portrait of a Young Man* – 35,000 roubles

Bassano. *Portrait of Kontorini* – 40,000 roubles

L. Cranach. *Portrait of Frederick the Wise* – 40,000 roubles

Total: 315,000 roubles*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 144.



Purchased
by the Counts
Stroganov

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn, 1606–1669

Landscape With a Castle

Oil on panel. 44 × 60 cm

Sold from the Hermitage post-1932

The Louvre, Paris

In 1925 this picture was moved to the Hermitage as part of the collection of the Counts Stroganov.

The result of the sales was that the Hermitage, which formerly possessed one of the finest collections of Rembrandt's pictures in the world, consisting of forty works, was deprived of twelve canvases by the great Dutch master. Three of these were acquired by Gulbenkian and five by Mellon. In 1932 a plenary session of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) passed a resolution approving the sale of *Peter's Denial* and *Landscape With a Castle* from the Hermitage and the Museum of the Fine Arts in Moscow was also obliged to part with two pictures recently transferred there from the Hermitage, *Joseph Accused by Potiphar's Wife* and *Portrait of Titus in a Monk's Habit*.

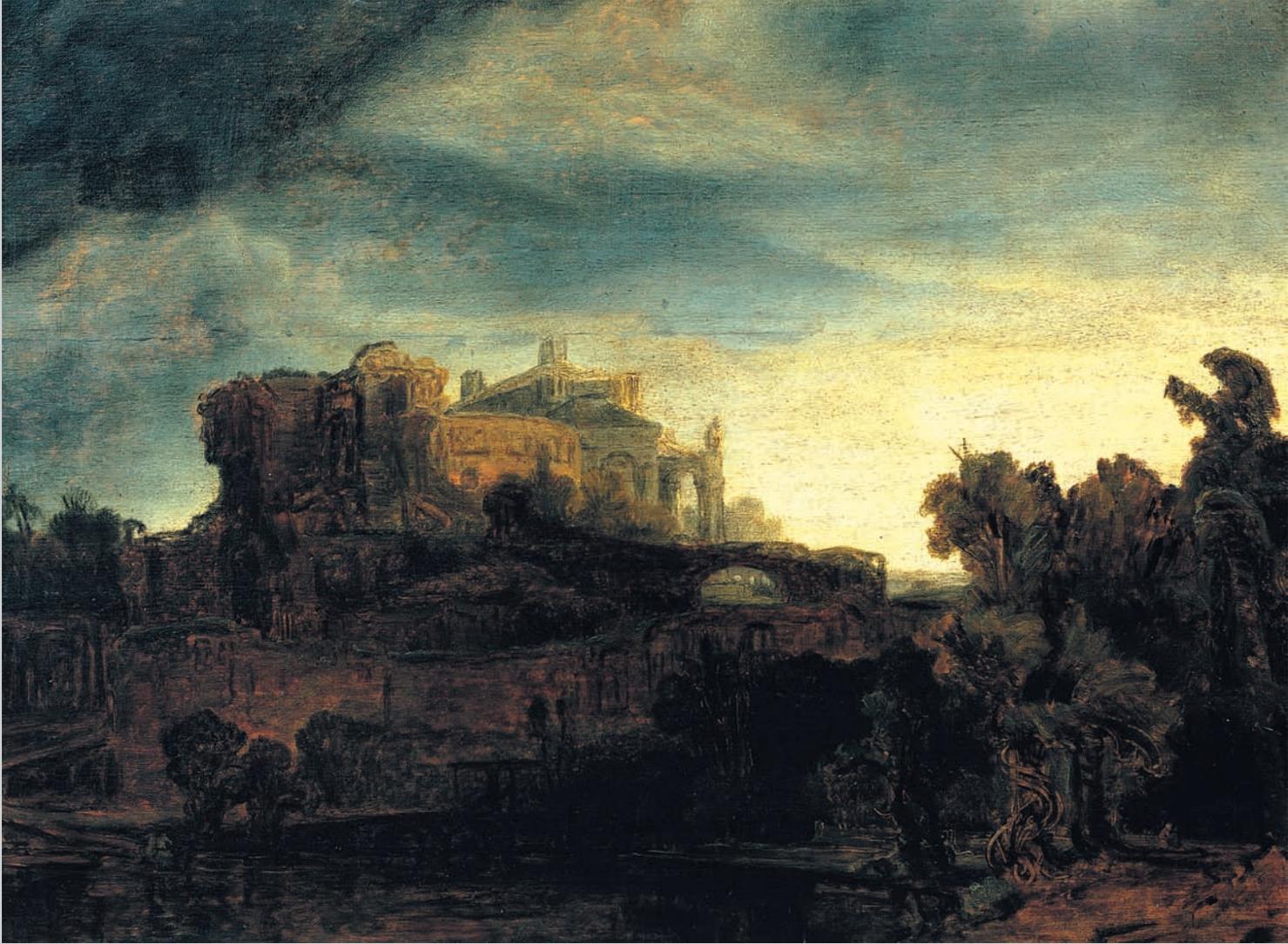
In 1932 Hermitage director Boris V. Legran wrote as follows in reply to a request from *Antikvariat* for the allocation for sale of Rembrandt's paintings *Peter's Denial* and *Landscape With a Castle*:

“Secret.

... As for the Rembrandt *Landscape* it is the only landscape by the artist in the collection, which determines its importance for the Hermitage. Rembrandt landscapes are a very great rarity. Out of a total of about seven hundred works by Rembrandt which have survived, only fifteen landscapes are known. The absence of any landscapes by the artist in the Hermitage was one of the serious gaps in its collection in the pre-revolutionary period, which was only filled during the revolutionary years, when the picture concerned was discovered in the Stroganov collection (in 1911) ... But catastrophic as the loss of this picture would be for the Hermitage, it would be less catastrophic than the loss of *Peter's Denial*.

Note: in recent years the State Hermitage has handed over ten pictures by Rembrandt to *Antikvariat* and 2 pictures to Moscow.”*

**The Hermitage That We Lost*, 1999, p. 147.



Purchased
by the Counts
Stroganov

Jacob van Ruisdael, 1628/1629–1682

A View of Haarlem, c. 1670

Oil on canvas. 77.5 × 59.7 cm

Sold at a Lepke auction in Berlin on 12–13 May 1931

The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego

The Putnam Foundation

Before the revolution this landscape was in the collection of the Counts Stroganov. After being sold at auction by Lepke the picture changed hands several times and in June 1954 it was acquired by Anne and Amy Putnam.

From the Minutes No. 149 of a Session of the Politburo
of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
15 November 1933

15. – Concerning the Hermitage
(coms. Stetsky, Rozengolts).

Halt the export of pictures from the Hermitage and other museums without the
consent of a commission consisting of coms. Bubnov, Stetsky and Voroshilov.

Commission to be convened by com. Bubnov.

Copies sent to: coms. Bubnov, Rozengolts, Stetsky, Voroshilov*

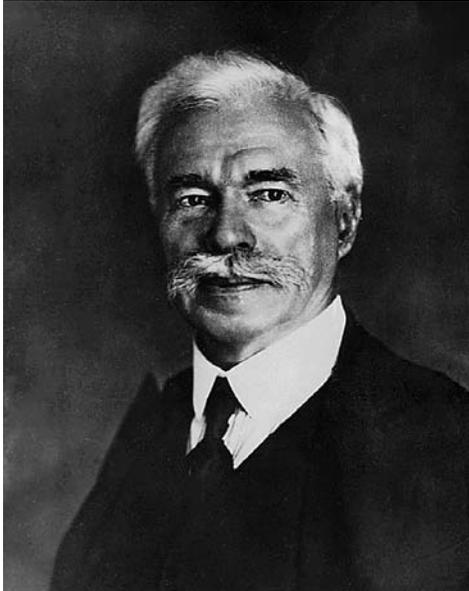
*RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 129.



Chapter six

Museum of Modern Western Art. Bargain Sales of the 1920s–1930s

Alexey Petukhov



Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin
1854, Moscow – 1936, Paris
Outstanding collector of Modern Western
painting. His collection was nationalized
by decree on Nov. 18, 1918.
Photograph, late 1920s

It was more than the treasures of the imperial palaces and traditional museums that came into the hands of the Soviet government after the revolution. In late 1918 two incomparable collections of modern art, the fruit of the separate collecting efforts in recent decades of Moscow tycoons Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov, were nationalized. The totally unforeseen was now fact: paintings that had been the subject of scandal or the target of criticism, many of them not yet out of their first decade, now had the imprimatur of government as they came to constitute the world's first museum of Modern Western painting. Actually, they became two museums: Shchukin's home was the "First," and Morozov's the "Second."

The State Museum of Modern Western Art (or GMNZI, the Soviet abbreviation), as it was formally named in 1922, was from the first an avant-garde institution in the fullest sense of the word. Its special mission went beyond mere physical preservation of valuable objects to embrace the creation of a special kind of curatorial culture and scholarship, heretofore unknown in Russia, for working with and understanding, literally, new art. Young, dynamic, ambitious and "genetically" connected to Europe, GMNZI stood out among the other museums of the USSR, and its staff, too, seemed almost "foreign" within the world of other museum professionals. It had the best, though: art historian Boris Ternovets, a pupil of Bourdelle, as director; Sergei Lobanov, the artist and widely known dandy, as scientific secretary, and Yakob Tugendkhold, the distinguished critic and essayist, as consultant.

Here were brilliant collections teamed with brilliant scholars – the only element that might be considered extraneous in the mix was the former owners. There is no greater impediment to curators than the stamp of another's personal taste on what they have to exhibit. But Shchukin had fled Russia even before the expropriation, and Morozov stayed on only briefly, as an aide to the collection, disappearing from Moscow in May 1919 and dying in Carlsbad not long after. Although mention of the collectors would be made in all GMNZI publications until the museums closed, the former home-galleries were now run on a strictly scientific basis, with no place for personal passions or for the ordinary objects of domestic life. Throughout the 1920s, the two branches of the museum were important scholarly strongholds, with "new art" from other collections flooding in to them and with the mounting of one extraordinary exhibition after another, with the paintings arranged and hung in new ways. The scholarship quickly yielded new attributions and publications.

As regards the policy regarding the sale and removal of holdings, the position accorded GMNZI was again, at first, special. The institution was anything but a mere passive "storehouse": whatever it needed from other collections, it got, and it was free to deal with materials as it chose. The initiative for the first sale from the Morozov house in late 1925 came from GMNZI itself. Taking advantage of the relative economic freedom of the NEP era and "with the aim of increasing the publications budget,"¹ a decision was made to sell off some of the home's furnishings – carpets, decorative vases and a Schroeder piano from the famed musical salon adorned with a Maurice Denis panel. To proceed with the sale, all that was required was permission from the museum's scientific council and the Science Section (*Glavnauka*) of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, which oversaw this general area of activity. Natalya Trotskaya, who headed the museum-affairs section of *Glavnauka*, made no objection,² and in January 1926 the rugs and piano were in *Glavnauka's* shop for the sale of antiques; nor was it long before there was a buyer. In fact, however, the museum realized nothing from the sale, which in any case involved terms altogether too favorable to the purchaser (a thousand roubles, of which GMNZI was to get 600). The store refused to pay the 600. A year later the museum sent a furious complaint to *Glavnauka*,³ but the conflict remained unresolved, and soon the store was out of business. By 1927, too, the wife of Lev Trotsky had other concerns. Still, the experience of the sale of "non-museum" items was not forgotten; a few years later, the rugs and piano were followed by the Morozovs' elegant lighting fixtures and furniture.

¹ Manuscript department, State Museum of Fine Arts, f. 13, op. 1, d. 140, l. 3.

² Op. cit., l. 2.

³ Ibid, l. 3.

⁴ Op. cit., d. 200, l. 1.

⁵ Ibid, l. 1.

⁶ Ibid, l. 5.

⁷ Ibid, l. 12.



Ivan Abramovich Morozov
1871, Moscow – 1921, Carlsbad
Outstanding collector of Modern Western painting.
His collection was nationalized by decree
on Dec. 19, 1918. Photograph, early 1910s

Ivan A. Morozov's mansion on Prechistenka Street was transformed into the Second Museum of Modern Western Art. When the museum was merged with the Sergei I. Shchukin collection in 1928 it became known simply as the Museum of Modern Western Art. Photograph, c. 1936



Meanwhile, a serious narrowing of the relative freedom with which Soviet museums were allowed to deal with their holdings was impending. On Jan. 28, 1928, the Council of People's Commissars adopted the sadly notorious resolution, "On Stepping up the Exportation of Works of Art and Antiquities, including Items of Museum Quality." Less than a month later, on Feb. 15, GMNZI received Order No. 50002 from *Glavnauka*, mandating "an immediate halt to all removals, reassignments and sales of works of art and antiquities, without exception."⁴

The government had not decided to halt sales abroad. Rather it was preparing to step up sales while bringing the process under central authority and giving itself first choice in the selection of items for sale. The contract that *Glavnauka*, representing the museums, signed with the Moscow branch of the Soviet trading organization (*Gostorg*), was also dated Feb. 15, 1928. Under it, the Moscow branch of *Gostorg* obtained the right "to sell in foreign markets all works of art and antiquities deemed appropriate for export . . . from . . . state . . . museums."⁵ The primary emphasis of the document was on export operations [sales], for which *Gostorg's* Moscow branch and later the Main Office of *Gostorg* of the RSFSR for the Purchase and Sale of Antiquities (*Antikvariat*) was given the monopoly. Then on Feb. 24 *Glavnauka* "proposed [that GMNZI] begin without delay to review its holdings and select objects of export significance."⁶ Vladimir Eifert, an art historian and artist, was put in charge of "choosing works of art and antiquity appropriate for export purposes."

For the moment, the museum had been spared. Eifert, a true expert and judge of the "new" art, approached his task with respect, punctiliously following the standard "instructions for selection." Under him and GMNZI staff, what might have been the "shock" work of choosing items for sale became a professional culling of works deemed "not related" to the museum's basic collections. The list, which was ready by March 9, 1928, was titled at first quite literally, "List of Artworks . . . Unrelated to the Museum's Collections."⁷ The list held ample proof of the many sides of Sergei Shchukin's interests that now seemed "unrelated": the family collection of 42 old believer icons (Matisse, who was deeply affected by ancient Russian art, may have seen them in 1911),⁸ miscellaneous mementos of travel in the East, items of applied art and a variety of other items, including an "object of unknown function" made of turtle shell.⁹ By late April, the title was "List of Items Designated for Export,"¹⁰ and it "had been thinned down": GMNZI (exercising its rights as a collegial institution) had offered the Historical Museum the chance to select from its holdings a number of icons for a new exhibit,¹¹ and a number of other items were rejected by *Gostorg* (it was not just art historians and museum staff that found them "unrelated" and of low quality). The overall valuation of the items came to little more than 10,000 roubles, and this must surely have dismayed the top leadership. Apparently in response to the leadership's surprise, the director of GMNZI, Boris Ternovets, on Nov. 29, 1929, again carefully went over the work of the spe-

8

The literature on the matter usually mentions only Matisse's ecstatic reactions to the icon collections of Ilia Ostroukhov, the Kharitonovs and the Tretyakov Gallery. The presence of icons at the home of S.I. Shchukin was for long not a matter of public information.

9

Op. cit., d. 200, l. 15.

10

Mistakes in typing led to absurd formulations in the document – "God Almighty" ("vsederzhitel") became "vsedrozhitel," which is something like "making everybody tremble."

11

The 1929 exhibit was canceled (for understandable reasons), and GMNZI soon offered the icons to *Antikvariat*.



Permanent exposition in one of the most beautiful rooms in the former townhouse of Ivan Morozov – the Hall of the Impressionists. Photograph, 1932. State Pushkin Museum Archive

To the right of Renoir's *Portrait of Jeanne Samary* (which went to the Hermitage in 1948) is his *Waitress at Duval's Restaurant*. It would be sold in less than a year.

cial commission, droning on about the items rejected by *Gostorg* as proof of the good work that had been done and offering (with a touch of irony) to add to the list another three vases, a pair of porcelain statuettes and . . . a group of *Galloping Cherkeshians* by sculptor Eugene Lanceret.¹²

Obviously, the organizers of the campaign had expected quite another result. After all, the selection was being made from the enormously rich, masterpiece-filled GMNZI collections. Despite the pressure from above, the "Soviet curators" invariably gave the impression of being unaware of the actual goals and appetites of *Antikvariat*. Not even the "most reliable" argument of the era – *uplotneniye*, the need to double up on space – worked. In the late autumn of 1928 GMNZI's first branch (the Shchukin home) was forced to turn over its building to the People's Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs and move to the Morozov home on Kropotkin St. Despite the extreme crowding that resulted, the museum's specialists would not consider parting with anything from their basic collections. It became clear that no direct attempt to get control of any Monets, Gauguins and Picassos for sale abroad would succeed and that it was time for other, more dire methods. GMNZI's resistance would now be broken by blow after blow against it in the period 1930–1933, when dozens of canvases disappeared from its walls. Now, besides *Antikvariat* and *Glavnauka*, a new participant had entered the fray, the Leningrad Hermitage.

This former imperial collection, the Hermitage, was being used as a source of art to "bolster" the museums of the capital, especially the Museum of Fine Arts, which from 1924 to 1930 received more than 500 old master paintings this way. By decision of *Glavnauka* and *Glaviskusstvo* [the Art Section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment], the reciprocal gesture in this "planned redistribution of museum valuables" was to be made by GMNZI. Discussion of the impending transfer, for which the Hermitage had begun pushing in 1922, started at GMNZI in October 1928. More than 70 paintings were selected for the purpose by GMNZI's curators after very careful consideration.¹³ From the first, however, the discussion was mired in an unhealthy atmosphere of claims and counterclaims by the two sides. What

12

Manuscript department, State Museum of Fine Arts, f. 13, op. I, d. 262, reverse of l. 61.

13

Op. cit., d. 186, l. 78–82 ("List of Works Designated for the Hermitage").

14

Manuscript department, State Museum of Fine Arts, f. 63, d. 20, l. 32–33, 131–133. The manuscript of N. V. Yavorskaya's "History of GMNZI" is being prepared for publication.



Mme. Cézanne in the Conservatory, which was purchased by Stephen Clark, stood at the center of the permanent exhibit in the Cézanne room. Photograph, 1932. State Pushkin Museum Archive

seemed even worse than GMNZI being expected to pay the debts of others was that the Hermitage seemed intent on exploiting the situation. A commission of Leningrad artists, including Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Lebedev and Nikolai Tyrsa, rejected GMNZI's original list, forcing a new selection, which was announced in September 1930.¹⁴

The protracted review continued into January 1931. Finally, on Feb. 11, 43 first-class paintings were shipped from Moscow to the Hermitage.¹⁵ Still unsatisfied, the Leningrad side in April 1931 wrote to accuse the Moscow side of providing art of "low quality." GMNZI attempts at justification then escalated into accusation, the museum asserting that the Hermitage did not have the expertise to work with new art, was simply greedy for masterpieces and lacked taste.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in 1931 GMNZI sent two shipments of paintings to Leningrad, the Hermitage receiving, in all, another 35 paintings.¹⁷

In the welter of recriminations and verbal jousting, the Moscow institution's people missed the key point, which was that the formerly untouchable GMNZI, which in the 1920s had grown by nearly a fourth, was losing its special status. It was no longer untouchable. The loss of large numbers of paintings to other institutions set a precedent from which it could easily be inferred that this museum, despite its uniqueness, was just another museum to supply *Antikvariat* with quantities of art for sale abroad.

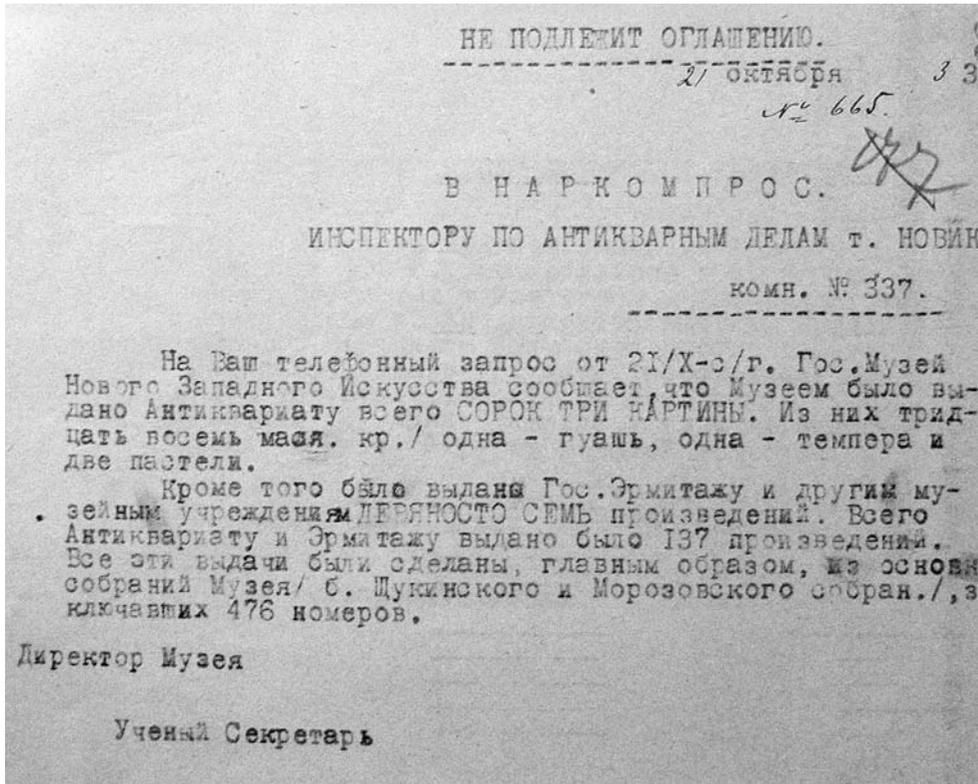
It was apt that GMNZI's first substantial loss of holdings was associated with both the winding-up of its curatorial work and the Hermitage. As the 1920s moved into the 1930s, the museum was in the midst of a fruitful exchange of art with Italian artists (the Mussolini regime offered no interference). GMNZI would acquire works by Soviet artists for shipment to Italy in exchange for paintings and drawings that would come to fill an entire gallery in the museum. But in 1931 the work dispatched to Italy was not by Deineka or Pakhomov. It was by the Italian Symbolist master Giovanni Segantini.¹⁸ GMNZI had, after much effort, obtained the celebrated painting, *Love at the Fount of Life*, from the Hermitage on Dec. 4, 1930. It remained in Moscow less than a year, however. *Antikvariat* demanded and got it. The Italians were not displeased, and the hopes of the Soviet traders for future sales seemed

¹⁵ Manuscript department, State Museum of Fine Arts, f. 13, op. 1, d. 262, l. 9.

¹⁶ Op. cit., l. 8, reverse of 8, 9, reverse of 9.

¹⁷ Op. cit., d. 262, l. 204; d. 300, l. 19.

¹⁸ Op. cit., d. 606. Inventory Card No. 902.



Brief question, short answer: a terse note on a scrap of paper sets out GMNZI's loss in three years of nearly 100 works of art. State Pushkin Museum Archive

justified. Currently, *Love at the Source of Life* is part of the collection of the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Milan. From one hand, it was connected with the previous creative contacts between GMNZI and Italy, from the other – this was the first case of “confiscation” of a Modern painting from the museum.

Matters soon took an ominous turn. At the end of 1931, virtually on the heels of the shipment of dozens of canvases to the Hermitage, GMNZI received a secret and unprecedented order from *Glavnauka* – not from *Antikvariat* – instructing it to prepare forthwith to give up nine paintings from its basic collection, not from the museum's unrelated holdings. This was a new approach and most likely originated with Nikolai Ilyin, *Antikvariat's* new director, a hard and uncompromising personality. Ilyin's “great achievements” still lay ahead, but he was here clearly testing a new gambit. Henceforth, orders for particular paintings intended for sale abroad by *Antikvariat* would go to the museum directly from the

top of the hierarchy, from *Glavnauka*, and GMNZI would have no choice but to obey. The system worked. Moreover, the new approach made it possible to achieve the desired result while concealing the name of the actual “beneficiary.” On all related museum documents, paintings designated for sale are described as turned over to *Narkompros*, the Commissariat of Enlightenment (for the enlightenment of comrades abroad, presumably).

The list of paintings in the first shipment, which took place on Dec. 2, 1931,¹⁹ likewise had the look of a trial balloon. It included a pair of small works by the *Nabis*, Bonnard and Vuillard, a single Gauguin (*Tahiti Landscape*, from the former collection of a Morozov brother Mikhail Morozov), a landscape by the Norwegian artist Thaulow, a small marine painting by Whistler (possibly because of an American buyer), and, the chief things, two paintings apiece by Matisse (*Dish and Fruits* and *Still-life*) and Picasso (*Nude* and *Green Dish and Black Bottle*) from the Sergei Shchukin collection.

As might be expected, *Antikvariat* did not stop at this. Hardly were the new year celebrations for 1932 over, when the GMNZI was ordered (again via *Glavnauka*) to prepare a new shipment of 19 paintings, a shipment more than twice the size of its predecessor. *Glavnauka's* secret order, No. 233, was dated Jan. 21.²⁰ Ilyin clearly was riding high, and now, it would appear, he had decided to lay before his potential customers an opulent hand made up of Shchukin and Morozov masterpieces, including items for virtually every taste and pocketbook.

Aside from the almost salon-level and inexpensive Guerin (two paintings), second-rank Fauvist paintings by Valtat (also two), Puy and Maglin, the new shipment was almost entirely made up of world-famous paintings. The paintings were taken directly from displays at the museum where they had at times been featured. On Jan. 24, 1932, the museum permanently gave up the majestic Degas pastel, *After the Bath*, Monet's *Meadow in Giverny*, Renoir's *Head of a Woman*, Cézanne's *Plain at Mount St. Victoire*, and another Gauguin, *Three Women against a Yellow Background*, plus two still-lives and the *Moroccan Amido*, by



GMNZI's central exhibit space was dealt two major blows in 1933: Renoir's *Waitress* and Edgar Degas' *Singer in Green* (at bottom left of the wall at right) disappeared.

Photograph, 1932. State Pushkin Museum Archive

Matisse, Picasso's *Boy with a Dog*, from his rose period, and *After the Ball* and *Dryad*, cubist pieces, Derain's *Lake*, and the touching *Luxembourg Garden*, by Henri Rousseau.

In addition to actual canvases, *Antikvariat* circulated photographs of paintings to encourage offers and even allowed customers to visit the museums directly. History knows of few actual instances when government museums served as private galleries, primed to accept offers to buy paintings directly off the wall. However, in early 1932 GMNZI was visited by a representative of the Matthiesen Gallery. He had been sent by O.G. Kolodny of *Antikvariat*. The visitor carefully studied the exhibits and requested, as the records rather obliquely put it, "two copies apiece of photos of a whole series of paintings in the museum."²¹ The photos were dutifully provided, the museum asking in turn, as might be expected, only for a year's free subscriptions to the French journals, *Cahiers d'art* and *Formes*. Negligible as the request was, there was no rush to meet it. On June 1, the head of the museum library, Tatyana Borovaya, reminded Kolodny that the journals had not yet shown up.²²

While the Matthiesen representative got prints, *Antikvariat* itself got the negatives of the paintings from GMNZI. With them, it could produce copies in any quantity and for any purpose. There would be no delay in putting this "valuable" idea to work. *Antikvariat* probably received in that same year of 1932 from GMNZI's darkroom facility a shipment of 70 24 × 30 mm. glass photocopies of the highest possible quality.²³ The list of the subjects of the negatives takes the breath away. Obviously, *Antikvariat* now felt it could do as it pleased. All barriers were down. The negatives included five works by Degas (including *Female Dancer at the Photographer's* and *Blue Dancers*), 10 Monets (including *Luncheon on the Grass*, *Boulevard des Capucines*, and both versions of *Rouen Cathedral*), nine Renoirs (including *La Grenouillère* or *Bathing at the Seine*, *Nude*, *Portrait of Jeanne Samary*), six van Goghs (including *Arles Ladies*, *Red Vineyard in Arles*, *Landscape in Auvers*), 12 Cézannes (including *Pierrot* and *Harlequin*, *Smoker*, *Banks of the Marne*, *Peaches and Pears*), 22 Gauguins (including

19

Op. cit., Inventory Card Nos. 110, 120, 229, 253, 553, 574, 599, 602, 820.

20

Op. cit., Inventory Card Nos. 13, 80, 119, 128, 143, 163, 173, 181, 200, 237, 274, 277, 299, 358, 384, 390, 530, 571.

21

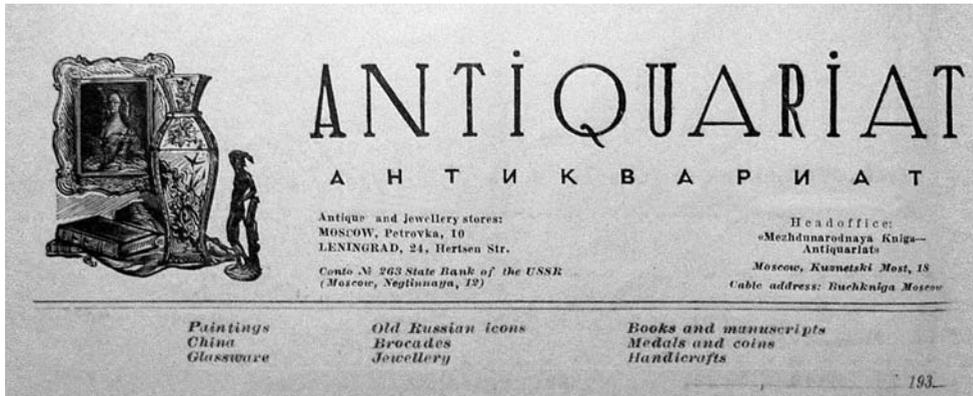
Op. cit., d. 140, l. 5.

22

Ibid.

23

GMNZI's record of the photographic negatives is preserved in the Department of Visual Information of the State Museum of Fine Arts (Pushkin Museum). The author is grateful for the help of the staff of the department and its chief, Ye. A. Zinicheva.



Antikvariat did things with panache – its fancy Western-style letterheads were intended to encourage the trust and whet the interest of English-speaking clients.

included four famous paintings whose fate will soon be recounted. It is probably best not to imagine what might have happened to the collection of the now badly clawed-over GMNZI had even half the sales intended by the “catalogue” taken place: the collection would no longer exist. By an irony of fate, the massive losses experienced by GMNZI came just at the moment of GMNZI’s greatest international fame. Intourist, the Soviet travel agency, was doing its job, and the unique museum was a major “attraction” for it, drawing hundreds of thousands of curious foreigners – French, English, American – to the USSR in the first half of the 1930s. The excited reactions of these tourists fill the guestbook at GMNZI and virtually every “report” – and they were many – on travels in the Land of the Soviets that appeared abroad. From as early as the mid-1920s, the museum was stirring the excitement of Western art specialists (no other museum could boast such a collection) and offering an occasion to criticize their own governments for dillydallying over the creation of like institutions. “In order to make the acquaintance of contemporary French art, one must journey to Moscow,”²⁴ the Paris journal *Cahiers d’art* (the very journal that was soon to be “exchanged” for photos of the masterpieces) angrily declared in an editorial in 1930. To meet growing public interest, articles about GMNZI appeared in English, French and American publications in the early 1930s. What the foreigners did not even suspect, however, was that, with the magical aid of *Antikvariat* and middlemen-galleries, the photos illustrating these articles could easily double as a catalogue of items for sale.

That is exactly what appears to have been the case with the American publication, *Creative Art*, which included in two spring issues for 1932 a detailed analysis of the GMNZI collection together with a great many photographic illustrations.²⁵ Among the breathtaking reproductions were those of several paintings whose fate would soon be radically affected: *Night Café in Arles* by Vincent van Gogh, from the Morozov collection, Cézanne’s *Portrait of Mme. Cézanne*, and Dega’s *Singer in a Café-Concert (Singer in Green)* from the former collection of Mikhail Riabushinsky. It may well be that Albert Barnes, the reclusive collector, and millionaire Stephen Carlton Clark, both of them determined to acquire masterpieces from the USSR, saw these issues of *Creative Art*. While Barnes backed away from what must have seemed a questionable deal²⁶ Clark, a grandson of the founder of I. M. Singer & Co. and a widely known philanthropist, could not, like his countryman, Andrew Mellon, resist the temptation of a profitable transaction. To these three paintings, a fourth was soon added, Renoir’s *Waitress at Duval’s Restaurant*, from the former collection of Prince Sergei Shcherbatov.

However it had happened, Nikolai Ilyin now had a major new client, whom he would certainly wish to satisfy. The negotiations, which were as usual pursued through Berlin, came to a crucial point in early 1933, when Ilyin sought approval of the shipment of the four paintings from the Politburo. There was no thought there of objecting. The fate of the paintings was sealed. Meanwhile, as was typical, GMNZI staff were among the last to learn of the

Arles Cafe, You Are Jealous?, The King’s Wife, Gathering the Fruit, Woman Holding Fruit, The Great Buddha), and, finally, as a kind of special treat, five works by Picasso (including *Les saltimbanques* or *Harlequin and His Companion, Old Jew with Boy*) and, finally, one Matisse. It is clear that *Antikvariat* wanted the negatives for reasons other than selfless love of beauty. The most likely reason is that prints from the negatives were intended to serve as a kind of catalogue of world-famous masterpieces to tempt particularly demanding buyers. The negatives

ВСЕСОЮЗНЫЙ КОМИТЕТ
ПО ДЕЛАМ ИСКУССТВ
П Р И
СОВЕТЕ НАРОДНЫХ КОМИССАРОВ
Союза ССР
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ МУЗЕЙ
НОВОГО ЗАПАДНОГО ИСКУССТВА

ВО ВСЕСОЮЗНЫЙ КОМИТЕТ ПО ДЕЛАМ ИСКУССТВ
ГЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНЫХ
ИСКУССТВ.

3 .. августа 1933 г.

т. У Г А Р О В У.

№ _____

Москва, ул. Кропоткина, 21
Телефоны: { Г-6-71-17 (Дарекция)
Г-6-71-21 (Науки, соотр.)

Гос. Музей Нового Западного Искусства кроме выдач, о которых сообщалось в отношении Музея НЗИ за № 652 от 3/УШ, неоднократно выдавалось по секретным распоряжениям Наркомпроса отдельные произведения или группы их Антиквариату. Списки выданных по секретным распоряжениям Наркомпроса работ при сем прилагаются.

Характеризуя эти выдачи Музей НЗИ сообщает, что в число их вошел ряд исключительных по ценности картин, на что в свое время указывал Музей, как напр. "Ночное кафе" Ван-Гога, "Служанка" Ренуара, "Портрет жены" Сезанна, "Певница из кафе-концерта" Дега, "Любовь у источника жизни" Сегантини и др., в общем количестве 43 работ. Известная часть этих работ, в том числе все только что перечисленные, были проданы Антиквариатом в западные коллекции и вопрос об их возвращении является платоническим. Однако, большая часть переданных картин осталась не проданной и была впоследствии передана Антиквариатом Эрмитажу, а некоторые картины остались, возможно, в обладании Антиквариата/ напр. по сведениям Музея "Равнина у горы св. Виктории" Сезанна и возможно еще другие/.

Музей возбуждает ходатайство, чтобы из числа полученных этим путем Эрмитажем от Антиквариата картин были переданы обратно Музею НЗИ следующие картины:

1. ВЮИАР. Дети.
2. ДЕГА - Туалет.
3. ЗУЛОАГА - Карлик Грегорио.
4. РЕНУАР - Голова женщины.
5. РУССО - Люксембургский сад.
6. ПИКАССО - Мальчик с собакой.
7. К.МОНЕ - Луга в Живерни.
8. МАТИСС - Натюрморт.

ТЕКУЩИЙ СЧЕТ № 120 в Московский Конгресс Госбанка.

The final chord in the saga of the looting of the GMNZI: in 1936 Boris Ternovets, the museum director, sends a belated request to the Committee on Art Affairs to return at least some of the lost paintings. State Pushkin Museum Archive

impending loss. As late as March 18, 1933, staff of the museum's photographic unit, totally unsuspecting, went ahead and sent a photo of *Night Café* to a representative of *Soviet Travel*, an Intourist publication²⁷ for a new article, naturally enough, about the sights to be seen in Moscow! By the time the issue of *Soviet Travel* came out, all four paintings were gone. The intermediary in the deal was the New York firm of Knoedler & Co. According to documents in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to which three of the four paintings would be bequeathed by Clark,²⁸ the sale date was May 9, 1933. The relevant resolution of the Council of Ministers was signed 10 days later by Valerian Kuibyshev, Politburo member. A task of the greatest sensitivity had again been handled in the name of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, on whose secret order GMNZI meekly parted with the four masterworks. Helpless to do anything, museum staff grieved. "The shipment was a great trauma for the staff. Ye. K. Rylova more than once spoke of the unforgettable look on the face of B.N. Ternovets, embittered and sad to the point of tragedy, as he escorted these works from the museum,"²⁹ Nina Yavorskaya, a colleague of the director and later a celebrated Soviet art historian, recalled.

The high point of the sale of "new art" had now been reached. More likely for reasons of quantity rather than considerations of quality, because *Antikvariat* wanting to make the

²⁴ Cahiers d'art, 1930, No. 7, p. 338.

²⁵ Creative Art, March-April 1932, pp. 191-200.

²⁶ For more details, see: Semyonova, N.Yu. *Moskovskiye Kollektionery* [Moscow Collectors], Moscow, 2010, pp. 238-239.

²⁷ Manuscript department, State Museum of Fine Arts, f. 13, op. 1, d. 349, l. 49.

²⁸ Clark, a graduate of Yale University, left the fourth work, Van Gogh's *Night Café*, to the Museum of Fine Arts in New Haven, Conn.

²⁹ Op. cit., f. 63, d. 20, l. 144.

30
 Op. cit., f. 13, op. I, d. 606. Inventory Card Nos. 53,
 86, 257, 278, 287, 308, 425, 622.
 31
 Op. cit., d. 140, l. 8.
 32
 Ibid, l. 7.
 33
 Ibid.
 34
 Op. cit., f. 5, op. XII, d. 23, l. 71.
 35
 Ibid, l. 73.
 36
 Ibid, l. 72.
 37
 Op. cit., f. 13, op. I, d. 140, l. 10.
 38
 Op. cit., f. 5, op. XII, d. 23, l. 85.
 39
 Op. cit., f. 13, op. I, d. 140, l. 9.
 40
 Op. cit., f. 63, d. 20, l. 144.

number of its sales more impressive, *Antikvariat* demanded one more batch of paintings from GMNZI. The secret order, No. 2169/c, was issued by the complaisant Commissariat of Enlightenment on Sept. 20, 1933.³⁰ The eight paintings of this selection were from the reserve stocks of the museum and included paintings by Guerin, Bonnard, Denis, Valtat, Friesz, Marquet, an early landscape by Matisse and a Derain. About a month later, one Novik, the inspector for antiquities affairs of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, called GMNZI to demand to know how many paintings had gone to *Antikvariat* and other organizations. He wanted a quick answer. The museum replied the same day that “FORTY-THREE paintings had been turned over to *Antikvariat*.”³¹

The time had come to look at results, and they brought comfort to none of the participants. Not a single painting from the three shipments sent by GMNZI to *Antikvariat* had been sold – apparently reflecting the ticklish status of these semi-legal propositions, the financial shock of the Great Depression, the unpredictable approach to pricing by the “sellers” and the very nature of this “contemporary” material. Fortunately, too, the “photo-catalogues” of masterpieces had not brought in the harvest that *Antikvariat* anticipated, although four paintings were sold. For GMNZI, nonetheless, the lost paintings amounted to an irremediable disaster, the loss of almost a tenth of the museum’s brilliant pre-war collections.

What had happened, however, to the paintings handed over to *Antikvariat* remained unknown to GMNZI. After the Nazis came to power in late 1933 and Berlin ceased to be a comfortable place for negotiations and deals, *Antikvariat* apparently had decided to wrap up its “work” with “new art.” But the paintings in storage at *Antikvariat*’s facilities were not returned from whence they came – to GMNZI. They did go back to a museum but not to the one in Moscow. In October 1934 they had been transferred to Leningrad. Whether it was because of the greater eloquence and persuasiveness of the Hermitage’s representatives or because of some secret arrangements, the Hermitage received nearly 40 GMNZI paintings (order No. 278) in addition to those earlier shipped to it in 1930–1931. It was the Hermitage, oddly, that emerged as the sole winner in this whole story. For GMNZI, there were only the 70 glass negatives of the “cream” of its collection, of which the four paintings already mentioned had been sold, which it received by an order dated March 27, 1934.

At the end of 1935 GMNZI finally did learn the fate of one other of the paintings handed over to *Antikvariat*. The loyal Eifert informed Ternovets that Cézanne’s *Landscape at Mount St. Victoria* . . . was in the possession of *Antikvariat* in Moscow, on Petrovka.”³² The painting had left GMNZI in January 1932, and apparently had been forgotten at the time of the transfer to the Hermitage! Having abandoned all hope for this painting, GMNZI was determined now to reclaim it – and fast. On Aug. 28 Denisov, GMNZI’s deputy director, presented the museum department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment a succinct request that it “do all it could to get the painting back from the Commissariat of External Trade,” noting that the painting “has been in the hands of the *Antikvariat* three years already, and they are offering it at a third of its appraised worth.”³³ Despite the request for quick action, the situation languished for almost a year, as all works of art held by *Antikvariat* had to go through a centrally controlled process before being returned to the originating museums. The process was handled by a commission representing the Commissariat of External Trade and the Committee for Artistic Affairs of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Its work was completed in early July 1936.³⁴ The list of paintings, printed on the reverse side of the still-unused fancy forms of v/o *Mezhkniga-Antkvariat*, included the Cézanne as No. 16 and described it as “in a damaged gilt frame”³⁵ and in Moscow, happily. Its value was listed as 43,800 roubles, a quarter of the valuation given for a pair of small canvases by Hubert Robert on the same list.³⁶

But all the paintings on the commission’s list went to the Museum of Fine Arts [later also known as the Pushkin Museum]. Still ignorant of what had transpired, GMNZI’s Boris Ternovets sent a detailed letter, marked confidential, on Aug. 3, 1936, to I. N. Ugarov of the



A show of Vincent van Gogh paintings in the Second (Morozov) unit of the GMNZI in 1928. The legendary *Night Café* was featured. Photograph, 1928. State Pushkin Museum Archive

Main Administration for Fine Arts of the Committee for Artistic Affairs. Less than a year and a half later, Ugarov would become director of GMNZI. In his letter, Ternovets again recounted the history of the paintings taken by *Antikvariat*, noting that “in that total there were a whole series of extraordinarily valuable paintings” that have “been sold . . . to Western collections and the question of their return has been rendered moot.”³⁷ The letter makes clear that Ternovets already knew that most of the lost paintings had gone to the Hermitage but had no idea of the exact number, assuming that “a few of the paintings, possibly, remain in the possession of *Antikvariat*.” The letter concluded with Ternovets arguing for the return of the nine most significant of the paintings to GMNZI by the Hermitage as well as Cézanne’s *Plain*, although Ternovets was not absolutely sure whether the latter work “is now in the Hermitage or with the *Antikvariat*.” Only the last point of the request was met. Ugarov headed a commission that quickly reviewed the paintings given to the Museum of Fine Arts and, finding the Cézanne among them, ordered it, on Aug. 14, returned to GMNZI.³⁸ The painting reached the museum in early September 1936,³⁹ the only painting returned to the museum of the 43 designated for sale by *Antikvariat*.

“All in all, despite the losses, the museum’s collection grew in the 1930s,”⁴⁰ Nina Yavorskaya remarked in a low-key way toward the end of the 1980s. Indeed, the basic efforts of GMNZI beginning in the early 1930s had been redirected toward the rapid creation and outfitting of a “revolutionary art” department made up primarily of a vast number of prints and posters, most of them of doubtful quality (the chief criteria for selection were political, not artistic). Innumerable meetings, exhibitions, discussions and scholarly colloquiums were devoted to the purpose. But all the fiery talk could not erase the memory of the forced giveaways and sales that had made of the proud curators of the world’s first museum of contemporary art mere mute warehouse attendants acting with all speed on orders from above. The memory did not fade: even after the dissolution of GMNZI and the redistribution of its holdings in 1948, GMNZI staff carefully guarded the card files, the negatives and the records of the museum’s holdings. They remain carefully sorted in separate piles by date of their exodus from the museum, bespeaking a secret hope to reverse the tragic history.

Purchased
by Ivan Morozov,
1871–1921

Vincent van Gogh, 1853–1890
Night Café, 1888
Oil on canvas. 72.4 × 92.1 cm

Sold from the State Museum of Modern Western Art in 1933 to Stephen Clark via the gallery of Knoedler & Co., New York
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
Bequest of Stephen C. Clark

Night Café was bought by Ivan A. Morozov in 1908 in the Paris gallery of Bernheim Jeune. It is one of the most interesting of van Gogh's interiors. While the artist was painting the railway station café in Arles he came across an article on Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* which had a profoundly disturbing effect on him. "In my picture I have tried to show that a café is a place where you can go mad or commit a crime. In short ...
to reproduce the atmosphere of the flames of hell ... to convey the demonic power of the tavern-snare." Morozov's collection also contained *A Café in Arles* by Paul Gauguin, a work which formed a pair with van Gogh's *Night Café*. Pictures of the same subject by different artists were a distinctive feature of Morozov's collection, which he assembled as consistently as though he were developing a museum.



Purchased
by Ivan Morozov,
1871–1921

Paul Cézanne, 1839–1906
Madam Cézanne in the Conservatory, c. 1891
Oil on canvas. 92.1 × 73 cm

Sold from the State Museum of Modern Western Art in 1933
to Stephen Clark via the gallery of Knoedler & Co., New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960

Paul Cézanne was one of Ivan Morozov's favourite painters. The eighteen works by Cézanne owned by Morozov were regarded as the jewel of his collection. Even though it remained unfinished, this portrait of Cézanne's wife is one of the artist's finest works. Morozov bought it in Vollard's gallery in Paris in 1911.

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ МУЗЕЙ НОВОГО ЗАПАДНОГО ИСКУССТВА		
ГЕН. ИНВ. № 402	Род памятника Живопись.	№ Стар. Инв. 445/II
	Книга поступлений №	№ по каталогу 1928 г. 560.
Автор Сезанн, Поль - Cézanne, Paul		
Название Портрет г-жи Сезанн. - Portrait de Mme Cézanne		
Датировка		
Материал и техника: холст, масло		
Размер в см. 90,5 × 71,5 Формат прямоугольник		
Подписи и надписи на лицевой стороне		
Время поступления и основания 24 декабря 1918 года		
Из рук с. и в. Морозова (Москва) при национализации		
Местонахождение в музее (карандашом) Музей в. и. м. 1922		
НЕГАТИВ № 59		
Ф. А. 5-148 x 210, зак. 788.		

Inventory card of the GMNZI. Beginning of the 1930s



**Purchased
by Mikhail Riabushinsky,
1880–1960**

**Edgar Degas, 1834–1917
The Singer in Green, c. 1885
Pastel on paper. 58.4 × 45.7 cm**

Sold from the State Museum of Modern Western Art in 1933
to Stephen Clark via the gallery of Knoedler & Co., New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960

This pastel by Degas was bought by Mikhail Riabushinsky
in the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris in 1909 for twenty thousand francs.



Purchased
by Sergei Shcherbatov,
1875–1962

Auguste Renoir, 1841–1919
A Waitress at Duval's Restaurant, c. 1875
Oil on canvas. 100.3 × 71.4 cm

Sold from the State Museum of Modern Western Art in 1933
to Stephen Clark via the gallery of Knoedler & Co., New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960

This portrait by Renoir was bought from the artist by the famous dealer Durand-Ruel
and passed from one Paris gallery to another until in 1912 it was acquired by Prince
Sergei A. Shcherbatov.

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ МУЗЕЙ НОВОГО ЗАПАДНОГО ИСКУССТВА		
ГЕН. ИНВ. № 569	Род памятника живопись	№ Стар. Инв.
	Книга поступлений № —	№ по каталогу 1928 г. 508
Автор Ренуар, Огюст. — Renoir, Auguste 1841-1919		
Название Служанка. — Une servante de Duval.		
Датировка		
Материал и техника: холст, масло		
Размер в см. 100 × 72		
Формат прямоугольник		
Подписи и надписи на лицевой стороне погуще слева внизу —		
Время поступления и основания 1924 из Г.М.И.И., переходит из собр. ма		
Место нахождения в музее (карандашом) Джен. Замит 3		
Музей имени имп. Александра II. 1933		
		НЕГАТИВ № 247
Ф. А.5—148 х 210, зак. 788.		

Inventory card of the GMNZI. Beginning of the 1930s



Purchased
by the Princes Yusupov

Giovanni Segantini, 1858–1899
Love at the Fount of Life. L'amore alla fonte della vita, 1896
Oil on canvas. 71 × 99.5

Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan

The Hermitage acquired the painting on Sept. 22, 1925, as one of 257 paintings from the Yusupov Collection. It went to the GMNZI – the State Museum of Modern Western Art – along with works by Felix Vallotton and Carl Rasmussen. The transfer, made up of six works from formerly private Petersburg collections, was the result of a protracted battle between the two museums, which saw the GMNZI lose more than 40 paintings in exchange for 546 paintings from the Hermitage.

The painting was in Moscow less than a year before it was sold through the Commissariat of Enlightenment and *Antikvariat* and sent abroad. It was the first such sale of a GMNZI holding.

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ МУЗЕЙ НОВОГО ЗАПАДНОГО ИСКУССТВА		
ГЕН. ИНВ. № 902	Род памятника живопись	№ Стар. Инв.
	Книга поступлений № 289	№ по каталогу 1928 г.
Автор	Сегантини, Джованни. Segantini, Giovanni	
Название	Любовь у источника жизни	
Датировка		
Материал и техника:	холст, масло	
Размер в см.	71 × 99	Формат: прямоугольник
Подписи и надписи на лицевой стороне		
Время поступления и основания	4 декабря 1930 года	
Местонахождение в музее (карандашем)	по акту № 198 из Ленинграда Ленинграда-Гос. Эрмитажа	
Выдана в Наркомпросе	1930	НЕГАТИВ № 849
Ф. А.5–148 х 210, зак. 788.		

Inventory card of the GMNZI. Beginning of the 1930s



Chapter seven Books for Sale

Elena Emelianova

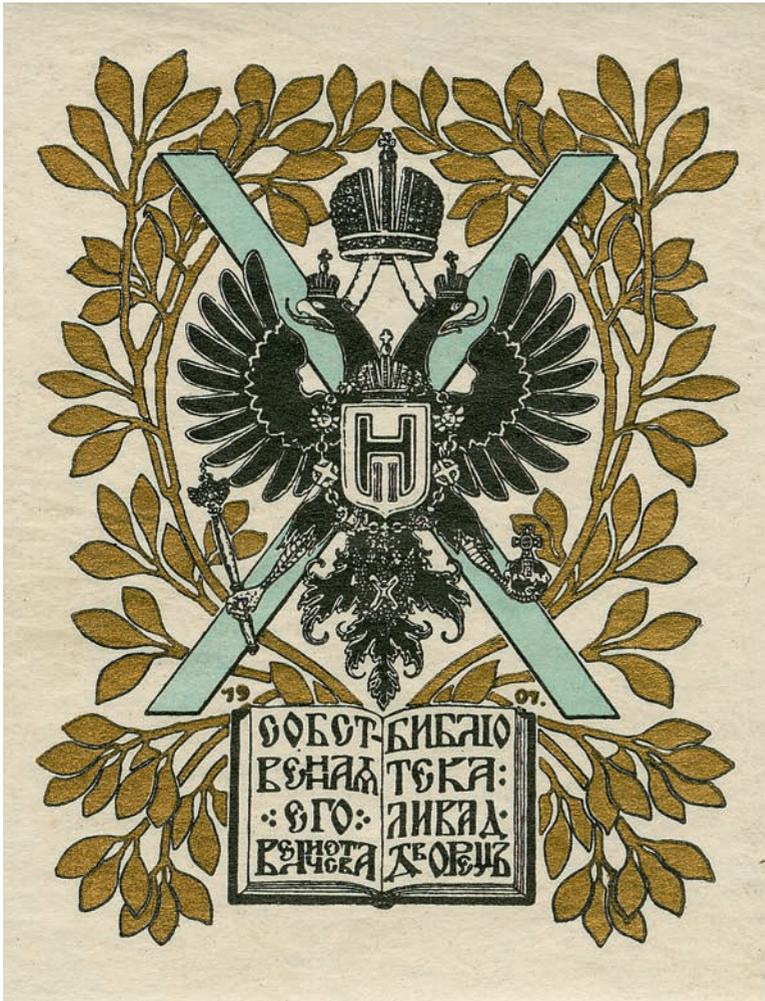


Employees of one of Russia's largest public libraries, the Romyantsev Museum Library in Moscow, which was located in the famous Pashkov House on Mokhovaya Street.
Photograph, early 1900s

In Russia books have always been regarded with special respect. From the end of the 18th century, no aristocratic palace or noble estate was ever without its private library, which explains the immense number of collections of books which were nationalized after the revolution. The massive numbers of books, which quickly filled the state depositories to overflowing, had to be catalogued before they could be distributed to the newly organized state libraries, a truly titanic task requiring many years of work by bibliographers. In these circumstances, selling the books seemed to the state bureaucrats the simplest possible solution to the problem. They did not give much thought to the commercial aspects of the matter: it was far more important to get these hundreds of thousands of volumes of literature “alien to the proletariat” off their hands as quickly as possible.

Fine libraries which had been lovingly collected by several generations of owners were doomed, paradoxically, at a time when societies of bibliophiles were very active, special shops for book-lovers and collectors were opening and new publishing houses were being established. The available information indicates that the sale of books began as early as 1921, but sales of whole collections of books, including extremely rare illuminated manuscripts, were particularly intense from 1926 to 1936.

It might seem that it should have been far easier to conceal and protect books than paintings and other valuables. In fact, however, there were no organizations capable of preventing the monstrous purging of Russia's book collections, not even the specially created



Ex libris of Emperor Nicholas II. Produced in 1907 from a design by A.E. Felkerzam

Cultural and Educational Inspectorate, which did divert some books to the Leningrad Public Library (the former Imperial Public Library and now the Russian National Library) from among books designated for export.

It should be mentioned that the conditions in the former palace libraries were sometimes quite appalling, with the result that an incredible number of books perished or were misappropriated. “The bookshelves were more or less empty, the volumes they should have held lay in ungainly heaps on the floor,” the English antiquarian book dealer Percy Muir recalled of his visit to the Stroganov Palace. “...On the floor in the middle of the vast room was an enormous heap of books piled as though ready for a bonfire. It was one of the most dreadful sights of its kind I have ever seen.”¹ The collections of extremely rare volumes which Muir inspected included the library of the Pavlovsk palace. The Soviet authorities valued this library at 190,000 roubles, an amount equal at the official exchange rate to 19,000 pounds sterling.²

All the specialists who had a hand in these events spoke of the indecently low prices that Western dealers were able to obtain from the Soviets and of the crude maneuvers of the Westerners.

The question of the disposition of the books was in the hands of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*), whose library and museum departments by 1922 had done an

enormous amount of work registering and describing the collections of books. On the basis of the information compiled, the ministry leadership prepared an Explanatory Note for the government. It suggested nationalizing all seized “properties” (“properties” referred to works of art, books and libraries, among other things) and went on: “The New Economic Policy, which has made particularly acute the need to find assets of whatever kind for the government, makes it necessary to declare this property to be, without any equivocation, property of the state. The Commissariat of Enlightenment will exclude from nationalization that portion of the property needed by national and local museums, but the remainder will be turned over to *Vneshtorg*, the Foreign Trade organization, for sale in the foreign market.”³

Meanwhile, a resolution adopted in 1922 by the Council of Ministers gave *Glavnauka* (the Central Administration for Scientific, Scholarly-Artistic, and Museum Institutions), a subdivision of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, the task of examining artistic “property,” ascertaining its value and supervising trade in such “antiquities.”

Requisitioned books were taken into the possession of various state organizations in Leningrad and Moscow, primarily the State Book and Museum Funds (collections). The State Book Fund (SBF), incidentally, was an outgrowth of the former Book Fund of the Central Committee of State Libraries, which had been created in 1918 in Leningrad (then Petrograd). The SBF was the primary destination for the rivers of books.

A Moscow branch of the SBF was created a year later, in 1919, by the Library Unit of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. While requisitioned books from nationalized and requisitioned libraries, public and private, went to both agencies, the SBF warehouses in Leningrad, which were scattered about that city – at the Peter and Paul Fortress, at 20 Fontanka St. and on Vasiliievsky Island – got far more books than Moscow. The job of the depositories was to examine and sort the books.

Records of the Leningrad SBF show that the total number of books in its warehouses for 1923 was in the range of 220,000–230,000 volumes.⁴ Because of the frequency of arrivals and transfers, the number was always changing. It is clear, however, that in the 15 years from 1918

¹ The reminiscences of Percy Muir are quoted from Robert H. Davis Jr. and Edward Kasinec, *A Dark Mirror: Romanov and Imperial Palace Library Materials in the Holdings of The New York Public Library*, compiled by Robert H. Davis Jr., preface by Marc Raeff, introduction by Robert H. Davis Jr. and Edward Kasinec. New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1999. According to the data for 1922, the library of the Stroganov Palace consisted of 29,670 volumes. It is known that from May 1928 to February 1929 about 900 volumes were selected from the library for *Gostorg*. See *A Modern Guide to the Stroganov Palace*. St. Petersburg, 1995, pp. 46, 51.

² Davis and Kasinec, pp. xv–xvi. This truly remarkable library was collected by the Emperor Paul I and his wife, the Empress Maria Fedorovna I.

³ The State Archive Russian Federation [hereafter: GARF]. A-2306, op. 1, d. 777, l. 11. The document is signed by A.V. Lunacharsky.

⁴ GARF, A-2307, op. 2, d. 452, l. 31–33.

through the mid-1930s several million books passed through the facilities of the Leningrad SBF.

The principal tasks of the Leningrad and Moscow SBF branches, as has been said, were storage, redistribution of books to other state institutions and – but only after 1923 – the sale of books on the domestic and foreign markets. This explains why, at first, amassing a stockpile of books “with some market value but without important scholarly or scientific value” was not a matter of priority.⁵ In the spring of 1923, staff of the Petrograd Book Fund selected and sold 670 individual volumes (the books did not constitute a single original collection) to the historian and noted collector Frank A. Golder (d. 1929) for the Hoover Institution Archives Stanford University. The price was 5,810 roubles.⁶ A representative of the American Relief Administration facilitated the transaction.

Sales of books by organizations other than the SBF also occurred in Moscow and Leningrad in 1923–1925. State libraries and museums had the right to earn money by selling duplicate copies of their books, and the State Rumyantsev Museum, the principal destination in Moscow for nationalized and requisitioned books, decided to sell books that it found it did not need.⁷ In 1922–1924, working with Georgy Bogdanov, a person active in the book trade and the owner of a firm called *Samoobrazovanie* (Self-Education), the museum opened a bookstore.⁸ At the same time, Yuri V. Gotye,⁹ the prominent historian and head of the Rumyantsev Museum Library (later the Lenin State Library and now the Russian State Library), compiled detailed instructions for the sales of books, stipulating that only third copies might be sold. The Gotye instructions also barred the sale of any book considered of high value or otherwise indispensable. The guidelines helped preserve the library’s collection.¹⁰

Sales of books in the 1923–1926 period were essentially domestic transactions and relatively few. An unappeasable appetite to turn books into money had not yet made its appearance. For the most part, the books sold were not considered to have significant scholarly or scientific value. This changed in 1927. In addition to the odd manuscript volume or printed book, whole collections now began to be sent abroad. The critical economic situation and fearful hunger of the years 1927–1930 compelled the leadership of the USSR to unprecedented steps, including a secret decision to step up the export sale of antiquities and art, including books. Well aware of the dire situation, many workers at cultural institutions willingly joined in the drive to select books for sale abroad. No one, at first, imagined the terrible consequences of this alteration in Soviet policy.

Sales of books abroad were handled by two organizations, International Book, which represented the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and had offices in Leningrad, Rostov-on-Don, Kiev, Berlin and Paris, with headquarters in Moscow at 18 Kuznetsky Most, and *Antikvariat*, the arm of *Gostorg* responsible for amassing and selling antiquities, with offices at 26 Tverskaia St. in Moscow.

Both International Book and *Antikvariat* sold books in the foreign market, but they worked quite differently. International Book, in its capacity as representative of the Academy of Sciences, was largely oriented to serving the interests of scholarly-scientific and museum libraries and thus principally to the sale or exchange of books from the State Book Fund and major state libraries specially selected for academic purposes. Created in 1924, International Book, headed by the distinguished bookman P.P. Shibanov (d. 1935), remained very active in the sale and exchange of books up to 1935. Despite some criticism from representatives of the State Book Fund and libraries, the work of International Book was generally approved by these institutions.

Under its 1927 agreement with *Glavnauka*, International Book had complete access to SBF depositories for the selection of books for sale or exchange. For its part, International Book was to send lists of all selected books to the country’s six major libraries, which then had the option of choosing any of the listed books for their own collections. The procedure, in effect throughout the period of sales, helped save many rare and valuable books.

5
Op. cit., l. 33.

6
Op. cit., l. 49, reverse of 49.

7
The Moscow Public and Rumyantsev Museum was organized in Moscow in 1862 on the basis of the Museum of Count N. P. Rumyantsev in St. Petersburg. It became the State Rumyantsev Museum in 1917. As part of a reorganization in 1921–1924, it became the V. I. Lenin All-Union Public Library of the USSR. In 1945 it became the V.I. Lenin State Library and, in 1992, the Russian State Library.

8
Archive Russian State Library (ARGB), op. 14, d. 91, l. 39–41.

9
Yuri V. Gotye (1873–1943), historian, archeologist, member of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Gotye was on the staff of the Rumyantsev Museum from 1898 to 1930 and then headed the V.I. Lenin All-Union Public Library of the USSR.

10
GARF, op. 14, d. 111. l. 30–31. The value of books was determined by a commission of five persons headed by the chief librarian.

11
Another catalogue appeared in 1935. It included descriptions of 147 handwritten Slavonic and Eastern books. The Slavonic-Russian manuscripts of the 15th century included three volumes: *Dioptra*, *Dionisius the Areopagite* and *Glavizna o nebesnom sviashchenonnachalii, Ustav* (*Tserkovnoie Oko*). The 16th-century section included a description of eight manuscripts, including *The Book of Paradise* from 1511 written by Gennadii, an elder of the Ferapontov Monastery, a psalter illustrated with miniatures and a psalter in a translation by Maxim the Greek dedicated to Grand Duke Dmitrii Ivanovich. The 17th-century section included 24 volumes; the section for the 19th century included 19 manuscripts. There was also a listing of 76 Orientalia (Persian, Arab and Turkish manuscripts) from the 16th–19th centuries.

Catalogue No. 29 for 1933 featured early printed books in Cyrillic. Details on 202 16th–19th century volumes are given. The catalogue included a prefatory essay by P.P. Shibanov with further details on the rarest and most valuable of the books, including the *Ostrog Bible* printed in 1581 by Ivan Fedorov, the founder of book printing in Russia and the Ukraine; the Moscow edition of the *Lenten Triodion* by Fedorov’s successor, Andronik Timofeevich Nevezha, from 1589, and many others. Other sections offered descriptions of 17th-century books (122 in all) and 18th-century books. In 1926 two catalogues were issued on Russian illustrated editions, again including books of the 17th and 18th centuries. The number of rare and highly valuable early printed books in the vernacular from the 18th through the first quarter of the 19th century came to, approximately, 2,500 volumes.



The palace apartment of chamberlain A.V. Dolgorukov after the storming of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks in October 1917. Photograph. State Hermitage Archive

As a seller of books to foreign dealers, International Book prepared catalogues with detailed bibliographic descriptions. The catalogues were divided by subjects, for example: rare books (Russian); folk life, legends and language (folklore); Russian illustrated publications of the 16th-19th centuries; manuscripts (Persian, Arab, Turkish); theology; ancient Russian manuscripts (Slavonic-Russian, Eastern and the like).¹¹ In all, International Book published 78 catalogues with descriptions of approximately 100,000 publications.¹² For the most part, these were books printed in the late 19th through the early 20th century but also included rare and especially valuable manuscript volumes and printed books. The bibliographic descriptions did not mention, it should be noted, possible indications of ownership (e.g., *ex libri*) or their link to the particular libraries from which they had been expropriated.

In addition to sales, International Book was active as a middleman in the international exchange of books between Soviet cultural institutions and Western museums and libraries. Indeed, any study of the sales of rare and valuable books by the Soviets must take into account the many transactions that did not go through *Antikvariat*. The state libraries, working with International Book, regularly conducted exchanges with foreign partners. The Lenin Library, which found itself with a large number of duplicate volumes eligible for exchange, was quite active in filling the gaps in its own collections by exchanges. Thus, in 1928, the deputy director of the library, D.N. Egorov (d. 1931), explained in a letter to International Book the library's decision to sell abroad for 300 roubles a New Testament from 1564. The volume in question was the first dated publication printed in Moscow by Russia's pioneer printer, Ivan Fedorov. Egorov wrote: "In view of the fact that the New Testament of 1564 is not being sold but is being exchanged for an extremely rare Calendar of Saints from 1571 for the V.I. Lenin Public Library, the library considers it possible to send this copy of the New Testament, specifically acquired for this purpose, abroad."¹³

Formally, *Antikvariat* was also required to coordinate its selection of books for sale with *Glavnauka*. To make its selections, museum and library personnel as well as experts on

¹²

In fact, the number was so large that they filled several catalogues: Nos. 6 (1925), 11 (1932), 21 (1933), 33 (1933), 39 (1934) and 58 (1935). The catalogues included advertising in Russian, French and English with contact information about representatives of *Antikvariat* in Germany, England, France, Czechoslovakia and the US. The books offered for sale covered virtually all fields of knowledge.

¹³

ARGB, op. 14, d. 29 (1928-1929), l. 29.



The cover of a catalogue of rare books, published in 1925 by *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga*

books in manuscript and early printed books were brought in by invitation and divided into “brigades.” Each brigade’s responsibility was the selection of books from particular depositories. The brigade-selected books were then transferred to *Antikvariat* for sale together with works of art.

The volume of objects and books selected was so enormous that the widely known art historian Viktor N. Lazarev (d. 1978) declared in a letter to the director of the Lenin Library, Vladimir I. Nevsky (d. 1937): “In consequence of the selection made by brigade, *Antikvariat* is now one of the most powerful organizations in the world in the area of antiquities. . . .”¹⁴

Despite the quality of the selected items, the first auctions of books, organized in 1927 and 1928 by *Antikvariat*, hardly earned much for the Soviet side. Most of the experts involved in the selection of books blamed the failure largely on the “incompetence and ignorance” of *Antikvariat*, arguing that the books might have been sold very much more profitably. For its part, *Antikvariat* pointed to the allegedly poor quality of the selections and thus on the brigades. *Antikvariat*, Lazarev wrote, was shouting “right and left about the impossibility of selling the goods it was given, which it described as ‘junk’ and ‘garbage.’”¹⁵

After secret instructions from above to increase the volume of sales, *Antikvariat* changed how it worked with its partners (cultural institutions, foreign trading companies, individual buyers). It now sometimes ignored the terms of the state resolutions on the matter and no longer coordinated its work with *Glavnauka*. *Antikvariat*’s Moscow and Leningrad branches began independently selecting the most valuable books and whole libraries with a view to interesting foreign antiquities firms that might be on the hunt for rare books.

But with prices on the international book market declining, *Antikvariat* really had little choice but to select the rarest and most valuable books for sale if substantial profits were to be realized. A letter from *Antikvariat*’s vice chairman, Georgy Samueli,¹⁶ to the USSR Commissariat of Trade and *Glavnauka* called for a thorough revision of *Glavnauka*’s rules on the export of antiquarian books and sought permission to sell incunabula (books printed in Europe prior to 1501). “A review without delay of the indicated circular is all the more necessary because its mechanical application threatens to hurt *Antikvariat*’s efforts to sell non-Russian old books,” the letter stated. Copies of the letter were distributed to various cultural institutions, including the V.I. Lenin All-Union Public Library.¹⁷ The first result of this thrust by *Antikvariat* was the selection of 30 incunabula, valued at 25,000 roubles, from the Science Library of First Moscow State University.¹⁸

The years 1928–1929 were a period of massive sales of valuables from the palaces of the Leningrad area, including books, by *Antikvariat*. In Berlin in May 1931, with *Antikvariat*’s Deputy Director Samueli himself present and participating, the entire contents of the Stroganov Palace was put up for auction at the Lepke auction house, and some 3,000 volumes from the extraordinarily valuable Stroganov library went to the West. Lazarev attested that “the valuation of the library was carried out in the most chaotic way, the rarest of rare books were valued in the pennies, and then, after consultations with outsiders about the low prices, the prices were arbitrarily changed by adding one or two zeroes to the original figure.”¹⁹

The selection of extraordinarily valuable books from the Arkhangelskoe Palace was done in similarly crude fashion. In short order at the start of the 1930s, 1,709 rare books and other publications were lost to the Moscow-area estate-museum. Since *Antikvariat* was allowed to choose books from the libraries of all the former owners of the estate as well as from the books transferred to Arkhangelskoe since 1917,²⁰ materials from the Yusupov, Dubrovitsky and Urupinsky libraries were among those sold.²¹

Thanks to *Antikvariat*, representatives of foreign book and antiquities dealers were now a constant presence at the State Book Fund depositories and at exhibits staged for potential customers in the palaces of Petersburg. Essentially, the agents could do as they liked and soon were making direct inspections and selections of books. M.M. Saranchin (d. 1937),

14
ARGB, op. 17, d. 101a, l. 29.

15

Op. cit.

16

Georgy L. Samueli (1899–1937?), was deputy director of *Antikvariat* from the spring of 1929 until the winter of 1931.

17

ARGB, op. 14, d. 15, 1928/1929, l. 20.

18

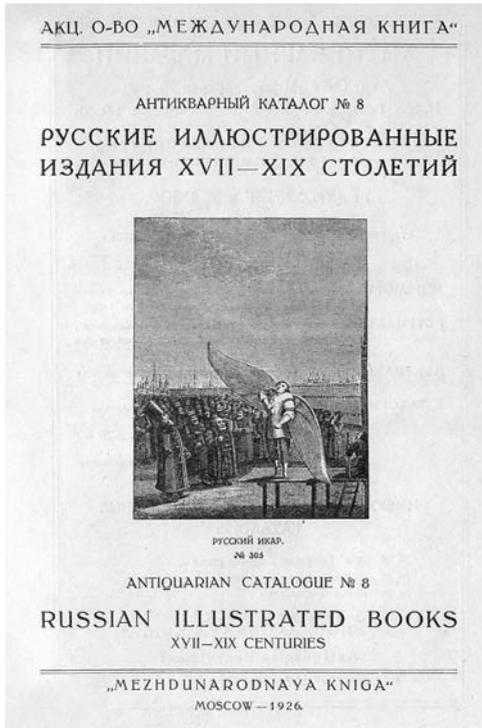
ARGB, op. 17, d. 101a, l. 12.

19

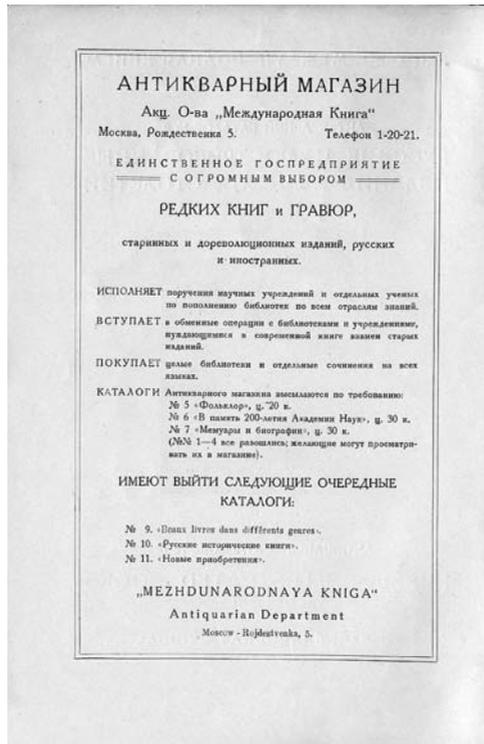
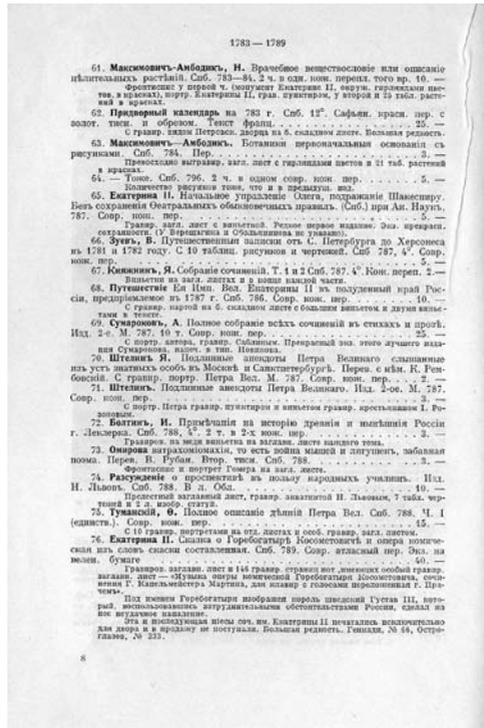
Op. cit., l. 22.

20

E.V. Druzhinina, *Manor Library of N. P. Yusupov at Arkhangelskoye* (From the History of a Collection of Rare Books on the Theater). – *Book. Studies and Materials*. Moscow, 1994, p. 322.



Pages from catalogues of rare books and engravings, published from 1924 to 1937 by *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga*



21
The Yusupov Library was part of the Arkhangelskoe Palace library. The palace had had several owners over the years, and so its holdings included books that had belonged to the families of the Princes Golitsyn and Yusupov. The Dubrovitskaia and Uriupinskaia libraries are so referred to only after 1917. The Arkhangelskoe Palace was made into a museum after the revolution, and to it went art and books from surrounding estates. The manor-house estates of the villages of Dubrovitsa and Nikolo-Uriupino had excellent libraries, and their books went to Arkhangelskoe. They are noted in the records by the name of the originating village.

22
Abram M. Ginzburg (1878–1936/7) was the first chairman of *Antikvariat*. Fridrikh E. Krimmer (1888–1936) headed the Leningrad section of *Antikvariat*.

who headed the Leningrad branch of the State Book Fund, wrote gloomily to V.I. Nevsky, the director of the Lenin Library: "... at present there are in Leningrad, at the invitation of *Gostorg*, representatives of an English book firm. I, in my capacity as a *Gostorg* consultant, am to show the Englishmen: a) the Karlov library, b) the Stroganov library, c) a small batch of books from the Winter Palace, d) the stock of the [State] Book Fund, e) books from the Pavlovsk palace, followed by the books of the palace at Gatchina, the Sheremetov home and the headquarters of the Detskosl palaces. Ginzburg and Krimmer²² tell me that the question of the sale of these books has not as yet been finally decided but that the Englishmen are to be shown the books: on the other hand, if agreements are reached with the Englishmen, it is most likely that all the books will be sold to them or given to them on consignment or, perhaps, the English would help organize an auction of our books abroad. Let me add that all this was told me in confidence and must not be made public. The Hermitage

23

ARGB, op. 14, d. 1. 1928, l. 333–334. Letter dated Oct. 8, 1928.

24

In the 1930s a large antiquarian bookshop was opened in the trading premises of International Book at 53a (now 57) Liteiny Prospect. The shops in Moscow were at 5 Rozhdestvenka Street and at 12 Kuznetsky Most.

25

The Personal Library of Nicholas II was acquired by the US Library of Congress. By an irony of fate, many documents of great importance for the history of Russian statehood ended up in America. Harvard University acquired the Code of Laws of 1649 and a decree with the signature of Alexander I; a Decree of Catherine the Great was bought in 1928 for \$30 and an edition of the letters of Peter the Great for \$2.50.

26

Two thousand two hundred books from the library of the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich (he inherited 10,000 volumes from his father, the Emperor Alexander II), which had been at his residence (now the House of Scholars) on Palace Embankment, were acquired by the New York Public Library.

27

Quoted from Davis and Kasinec, pp. XIII–XIV.

28

Archibald Cary Coolidge (d. 1928) of Harvard bought about 3,500 volumes devoted to jurisprudence, the fine arts, history and the theater. The university library at Harvard managed to acquire about 5,000 volumes, most of them from the collections of the Romanov family and the grand dukes. The Library of Congress' first purchase of books from the Winter Palace included 2,600 volumes, and the second slightly fewer than 2,000 (see Davis and Kasinec, p. xxxix).

29

The Hammers represented the interests of the Plaza Book Auction Corp. One of their most significant acquisitions was a Torah presented to Emperor Nicholas II during his coronation in 1896. It was exhibited for sale at the Lord & Taylor department store (see Davis and Kasinec, p. xx).

30

Following successful negotiations with International Book in 1926, Israel Perlstein became one of the most important suppliers of books from Russia to the US. In particular, he purchased a series of 21 prints by Piranesi, a gift from the Pope to the imperial court (see Davis and Kasinec, p. xxviii). In 1941 Perlstein's assistant, Simeon Bolan, sold about 10,000 books exported from the USSR to the famous collector of Slavonic manuscripts and religious service books P. M. Fekula.

31

At present almost 80% of the holdings of the rare books department of the US Library of Congress consist of books bought in Russia. These include such outstanding works as one of the first printed books in Russia, the *Apostle* of 1564, which was produced at the printing shop of Ivan Fedorov and Peter Mstislavets. From the Petrine period there is Ia. V. Brius' *Lexicon of 1717* from the collection of Catherine the Great with notes by her librarian, A.I. Luzhkov (only three copies of this are known to exist, one of which, from the Synodal archive, was also bought by Perlstein). See Zh. Pavlova, *The Fate of the Russian Imperial Book Collections*, in *The Libraries of St. Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad*. St. Petersburg, 1993, p. 127. Perlstein was responsible for extending the library's department of ethnography and costume by the addition of unique illustrated books that were formerly the property of the imperial family and had been published for the most part in only one copy to mark various festivities and anniversaries (Zh. Pavlova, p. 125).

32

Perlstein was able to buy 2,300 volumes from the last emperor's library alone.

33

Quoted from Davis and Kasinec, pp. xv–xvi.

and Public Library are planning to protest the sale, but the Englishmen are looking the books over and *Gostorg* is talking of some kind of an agreement with them. As for myself, I am unable to do anything because, as the head of the B[ook] F[und], I have no grounds to impede the sale of books. ... I don't plan either to raise a fuss or attempt to nullify all that *Gostorg* has done, but something must be done so that we don't end up 'crying over our lost tresses after our head has been cut off.'²³

The sale of books from the libraries of the tsar and grand dukes was regarded by the Bolsheviks as a top priority. The palaces in the suburbs of Petrograd formerly owned by 30 members of the imperial house had been given over for use by various state institutions, and their libraries handed over to International Book.²⁴ Undoubtedly, the books from the Winter Palace were the most valuable. Before the revolution they numbered almost 35,000 volumes. Almost the same number were in the personal library of Nicholas II, also housed in the palace.²⁵ In addition, for several years books from other palaces had been transferred to the Winter Palace. For instance, the 65,000 volumes of the library of the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich (d. 1909) were now at the Winter Palace.²⁶ Then, in 1930, soon after the closing of the so-called "private rooms," books were shipped out of the Winter Palace in the hundreds of thousands. Bearing in mind that Soviet libraries received only a small proportion of them, it is only possible to guess at how many fell into the hands of International Book and *Antikvariat*.

To judge by the reminiscences of foreign book dealers, the Soviet officials involved in the book trade were out of their element. Unlike traditional Russian hemp and fur, books were strange and complicated goods for them. Percy Muir recalled how during the negotiations that he had in 1928 with Soviet officials in one of the hotels in Berlin, "a shabby, simian little man" from the Soviet delegation opened "a thick-cardboard-bound wad of typewritten foolscap sheets, . . . placed his finger on a point marked with three blue pencil crosses in the margin and asked 'What's that worth?' The typescript was in fact an elaborate list of books and the one to which he was pointing was . . . the *Fables of La Fontaine* published in four folio volumes by Desaint & Saillant in 1755–1759 and illustrated by Oudry."²⁷ These were books that the Empress Catherine the Great herself had undoubtedly held in her hands. As a matter of fact, the lion's share of the rare antiquarian editions offered for sale consisted precisely of 18th-century French books.

It might seem, then, that the main buyers for this type of goods should have been the French, but the Great Depression had effectively paralyzed France's antiquarian book trade. In fact, the economic crisis had so widely undermined the international trade in antiquarian books that very few parties were able to take advantage of the unique opportunities offered by the Soviet book bonanza. The most successful were the American dealers Israel Perlstein and Simeon A. Bolan, who were responsible for numerous Russian libraries finding their way across the Atlantic.²⁸ Subsequent calculations showed that they paid almost nothing, relatively speaking, for the books they purchased: the average price for a single volume was \$2. The example most often cited is Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich's Code of Laws, published in 1720. It was acquired by the Library of Congress for \$45.

Buyers of books from the Soviet Union included Victor (d. 1985) and Armand Hammer (d. 1990), but the Hammers' preferences lay with more expensive works of applied art.²⁹ Perlstein, however, was particularly active on the Soviet book market. Every year for an entire decade he made regular trips to Russia and bought library after library.³⁰ Not a connoisseur of books, he was guided rather by intuition and an ability to sense when a masterpiece had fallen into his hands. To a certain extent his actions can be regarded as noble: he sought to avoid breaking up the Russian collections and to sell them complete, doing everything he could to ensure that they went to libraries and not private collectors. During the 1930s, Perlstein sold more than 9,000 volumes to the Library of Congress alone, including 2,000 books that came from royal palaces.³¹



The Winter Palace library of Emperor Nicholas II.
 Photograph, early 1920s.
 State Hermitage Archive

Soviet culture's most tragic years – 1931 and 1932 – when the sales of valuable items of art reached unprecedented proportions, were Perlstein's most successful. The American dealer was fortunate enough to acquire books from the libraries of the Emperor Nicholas II in the Winter Palace, from the palace of the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich and the library at Tsarskoe Selo.³² He later recalled that at the beginning of his career as an antiquarian book dealer he had almost no idea of the true value of the rare editions he was buying in Soviet Russia and paid for books according to their size – \$2 for an eighth folio, \$4–\$5 for a quarter folio and \$10–\$20 for a demy-folio. He wrote: "Incredible as it seems, no one even attempted to inspect the books closely. But even people who knew nothing about the business could easily tell that the books must be worth substantially more, if not as works of art, then at least as elements of a library's 'décor'. Even without knowing the language or the history or the culture of the country, it was still possible to guess that these book collections that were so little known in the West must be full of European rarities."³³

"His imperial majesty's own libraries" were collections of books made by the imperial family of Romanovs over the course of several generations. The word "own" conveys very well the special nature of these collections, underlining the private, personal character of the libraries. The concept of "own" first appeared in the 1840s as a coinage by the capable imperial librarian, Florian A. Zhile, to distinguish books belonging to the imperial family from the other collections of books in the Winter Palace. In the course of the 18th and the greater part of the 19th centuries, these Personal Libraries (as they will be called here) often were moved, combined or separated and thus constantly in flux. Nicholas II, however, imposed greater order on the collections. Under the last Russian tsar, the libraries were divided into 12 sections, the greater portion of which were memorial collections. In the view of many

34

The original information about the quantity is found in V.V. Shcheglov's book, *The Personal Libraries and Armories of His Imperial Majesty. A Brief Historical Essay: 1715–1915*. Petrograd, 1917. Shcheglov headed the library under Nicholas II. When Shcheglov's information is compared with that in archival documents of the 1920s, the figures agree. That was the view, too, of I.I. Zaitsev, who headed the library at the Tsarskoe Selo Palace-Museum. For more details, see E.A. Emelianova, *Book Collections of the Winter Palace (Toward a History of the Personal Libraries of His Imperial Majesty)*, in *A Book in the Field of Culture*. No. 1 (4), 2008 [Moscow, 2008], pp. 146–158.

35

A.N. Benois, *My Diary: 1916–1917–1918*. Moscow, 2003, p. 236.

36

Vasily V. Gelmersen (1873–1937) began working at the royal library in 1899. He was also secretary of the general department of the Academy of Sciences and a translator of German poetry and a silhouettist. Before the revolution, he assisted the chief of Nicholas II's personal library, holding the court rank of chamberlain. He was fired from the Academy of Sciences after investigation by the so-called "Fignater Commission" in July 1929 and arrested on Jan. 12, 1930, as a participant in the "All-People's Union of Struggle for the Rebirth of a Free Russia" ("The Academy Case"). He served his sentence in the Solovetsk Islands and at Bear Mountain (Belbaltlag). While in the camps, he was again tried, found guilty and executed (rehabilitated in 1989).

37

Archive of the State Hermitage (AGE), f. II, op. XIV A. 1918, d. 1, l. 3–5. By order of A.V. Lunacharsky, the library of the Anichkov Palace was moved to the Winter Palace in May 1918 "for safe-keeping on the same basis as the other elements of the Personal Libraries in the general collection until the question of their fate is decided."

38

Op. cit., l. 3–5.

39

Op. cit., l. 40, reverse.

40

AGE, f. I, op. 13 I/c, No. 187, l. 11. Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich's collection of books included much of the library of his father, Emperor Alexander III, who bequeathed them to him.

scholars, the Personal Libraries, which were housed not only in various residences in Petersburg but also in the Livadia Palace in the Crimea and on the imperial yacht "Shtandart," held in all approximately 70,000 volumes.³⁴

The formation of the Personal Libraries reflected the varied interests and tastes of the imperial family over a period of many years. Books related to military concerns, reflecting the traditional duty of all male members of the family, were the primary interest of the masters of these libraries. The most valuable of these – the secret military library – was always directly controlled by the head of the house, the emperor. It went intact to the next emperor. The contents included printed or handwritten documents specially prepared for the emperor, including secret military information regarding the wars of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

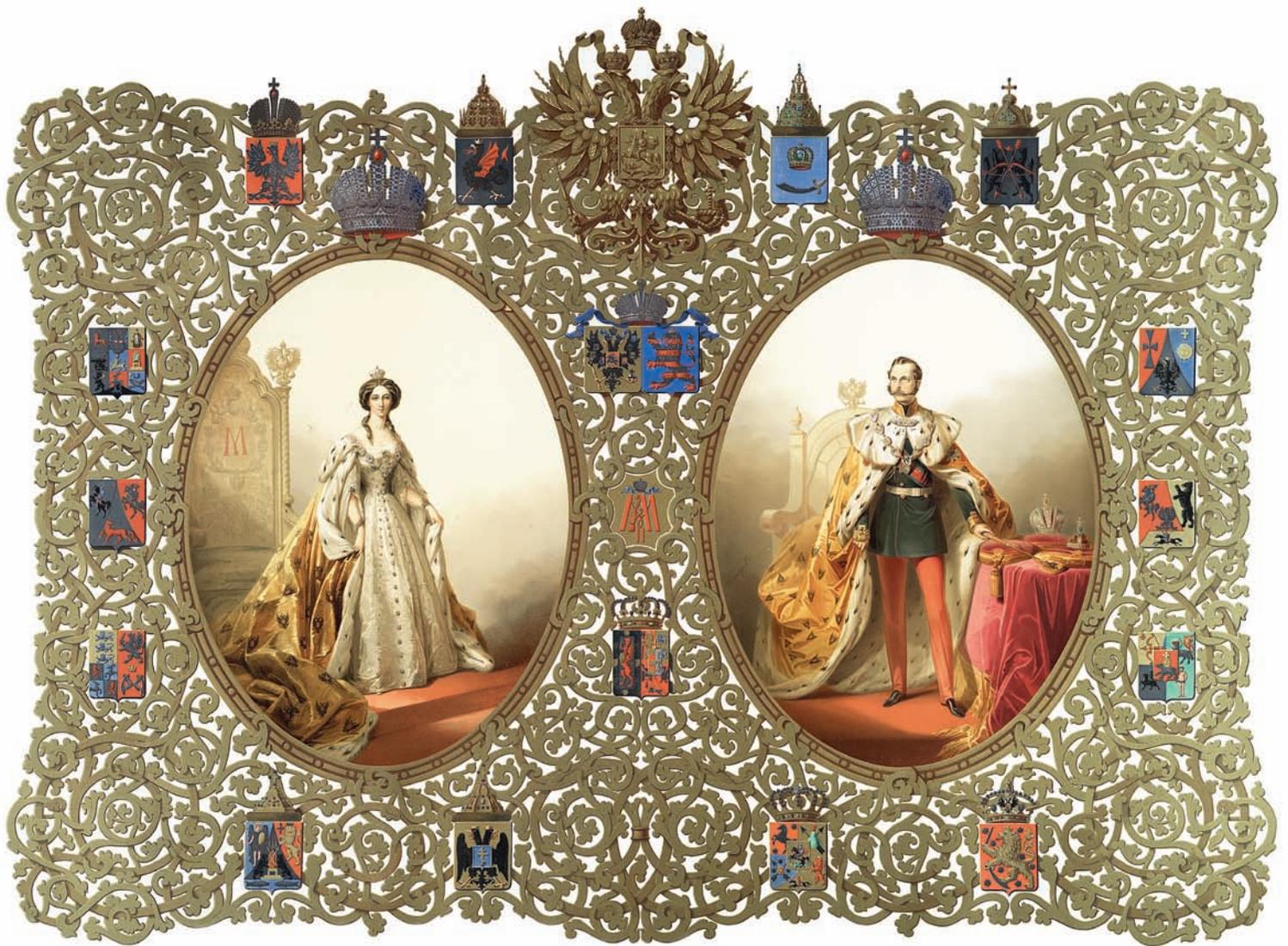
Under Alexander II and Alexander III, many volumes of history and archeology were added to the Personal Libraries and, during the latter's reign, there was an active attempt to bolster the collection of literature as such, including belles-lettres and periodicals. Many of the "personal" books were presentation copies from authors and publishers.

Despite their private character, the Personal Libraries, like every aspect of the lives of the imperial family, followed strict rules. Overall, however, "His Imperial Majesty's Personal Libraries" were household collections reflecting the personal tastes as readers of their owners as well as reflecting the literary fashions of the time. Their love of reading notwithstanding, none of the members of the large imperial family can be thought of as a bibliophile (with the exception of Grand Duke Konstantin, who was a passionate book collector). The collections rarely include any books in manuscript or any examples of early printed books: Slavonic manuscripts that came as gifts to the imperial family were, as a rule, turned over to the Imperial Public and other libraries.

Among the most valuable of the books in the Personal Libraries were albums of watercolors, engravings and lithographs. These were to be found in all 12 sections of the imperial libraries. Their subjects reflected a number of the collecting interests of the tsars. Portraits of Romanovs ranked first. The military section included a splendid selection of publications on the history of military uniforms from ancient times to the second half of the 19th century. Alexander II's albums with views of Russian cities and the countries of Western Europe are particularly notable.

Most of the books in the imperial libraries contain indications of ownership in the form of ex libris, or personal stamps. They also generally have special bindings with monograms or exterior personal stamps (a form of ex libris), devised and produced by the great binderies of the capital.

After the revolution of 1917 the new government declared the Winter Palace and everything in it, including books, the property of the government. Alexander N. Benois, the former Keeper of Paintings at the Hermitage, personally witnessed the tragic events of the takeover and recorded his impressions in his diary. Asked by A.V. Lunacharsky to take part, Benois was active in the inspection of the Winter Palace and Hermitage after the October takeover. Benois and the other members of the art-historical commission concluded that the attack had involved no great destruction or theft of property (some thefts did occur, of course, and these were noted in detail in the commission report). As regards damage to the personal collections of books, which were then held in various buildings of the Winter Palace, Benois noted: "In the library that served as the office of A.F. Kerensky, a cabinet had been broken into... papers and books had been pulled out and the floors were covered with the torn and crumpled records of the Provisional Government.... The rooms of the large library of Alexander III, which held 10 boxes of historical albums prepared for evacuation, was, as it happened, completely untouched.... Alexander III's bedroom, which had been taken over for Kerensky's bedroom, was littered with shredded pages of great official significance and a great quantity of books lay about..."³⁵



Portraits of their Imperial Majesties, 1856, from: "Coronation Banquet at Palace of Facets," in *Opisaniie sviashchiennieishago koronovaniia ikh Imperatorskikh Velichestv Gosudaria Imperatora Aleksandra Vtorago i Gosudaryni Imperatritsy Marii Aleksandrovny Vseia Rossii*. (St. Petersburg, 1856). From the library of Emperor Alexander II. New York Public Library

Soon, by order of the Petrograd branch of the People's Commissariat of Properties of the Republic, the Personal Libraries of the members of the imperial family were merged and collected in one place. The archives of the Hermitage still hold several reports made by the last chief of the Personal Libraries, Vasily Gelmersen.³⁶ According to these documents, the Personal Libraries of His Imperial Majesty in the Winter Palace comprised in 1918: the libraries of Alexander II (military section), Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra Fedorovna I, A.V. Lobanov-Rostovsky, plus "a multitude of little objects and paintings from the private quarters of Emperor Alexander II [and] Empress Maria Fedorovna II taken from the Anichkov Palace."³⁷ Gelmersen also described the condition of the Personal Libraries at the time: "During the upheavals experienced by the Winter Palace beginning with the day on which the Kerensky government moved into it and, in part, during the October coup, the book and album portions of the libraries suffered, most fortunately, minimally. At that time, the materials then in the other living quarters of Alexandra II were subjected to very severe pillaging and theft, but the rooms of her spouse – in particular, the libraries – were not even entered by any outsiders. The library of Nicholas II suffered damage to only a few random books, and thefts were also insignificant in the Lobanov's library and affected only new albums; similarly, in the library of Alexandra Fedorovna only albums of no special importance suffered, along with gifts to the Tsarevich, which were of less historical than material value."³⁸

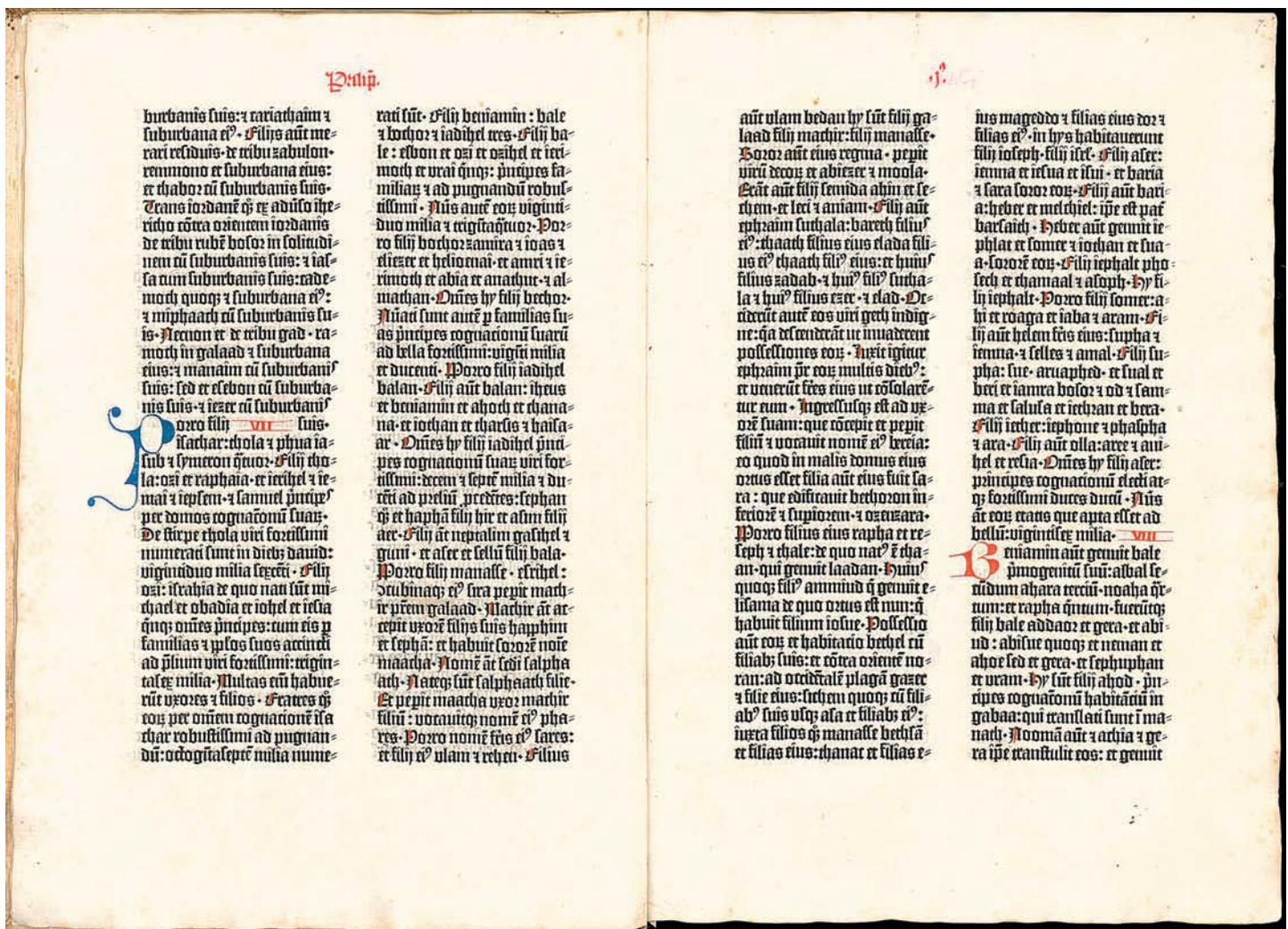
Added to the tsars' libraries in the Winter Palace were books transferred there from two grand ducal palaces. In his report dated Oct. 3, 1918, Gelmersen, who personally managed the transfer of books from the Anichkov Palace, stated that up to 15,000 volumes from that library were carried to the Winter Palace in a matter of 17 days.³⁹ In addition, the books of Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich were moved from his residence on the Palace Embankment, not far from the Winter Palace, to the latter in 1922.⁴⁰

Gutenberg Bible, from the early 1450s, now owned by the Martin Bodmer Foundation, Switzerland. The volume formerly belonged to Rottenbuch Abbey, an Augustinian monastery, and later to the Royal Library, Munich, after the seizure of monastic property in 1803. The Royal Library let it go as a duplicate. It was sold by the Soviet government for 30,000 Swiss pounds to Martin Bodmer.

Because of a shortage of shelf space, the books of royal libraries shifted from other places in the Winter Palace as well as those brought in from other residences were stored on the floor near the library of Emperor Nicholas II.

In the first years after the revolution, the question of what to do with the imperial libraries remained open. Relevant documents in the Archive of the Personal Libraries, now held at the State Hermitage, bear no dates later than 1922.⁴¹ A proposal to distribute the books of the Personal Libraries of His Imperial Majesty to other organizations was discussed at meetings of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Some of those present, including, prominently, People's Commissar A.V. Lunacharsky, opposed breaking up the collections. Later, when the audit and description of the books had been completed, those who had done the work were dismissed, and the rooms themselves were placed under seal pending a decision on the ultimate fate of the libraries and other royal property.

That came in 1925, when *Glavnauka* ordered a restructuring of the Personal Libraries. In effect, this meant breaking up the collections. With the Hermitage accorded the right of first selection, its library now grew substantially. Of the 48,000 volumes in the Personal Libraries stored in the Winter Palace, some 17,000 were taken by the Hermitage. Selections by the Hermitage were completed by the summer of 1927.⁴²



Cover of the volume, *Vidy Valaamskago monastyria* (1890), from the library of Emperor Nicholas II. New York Public Library



Also in the summer of 1927 the Lenin Library in Moscow turned seriously to the question of the disposition of the Personal Libraries. Led by its chief, V.I. Nevsky,⁴³ the library asked the Commissariat of Enlightenment to be allowed to select for itself books from the Personal Libraries and was granted such permission in an order signed by Fedor N. Petrov. Two members of the library staff, Lev E. Bukhgeim and Gerbert A. Prib, then went rapidly through the more than 30,000 remaining books, choosing more than half.⁴⁴ Even after the selection of books by the Hermitage and Lenin libraries, approximately 20,000 volumes remained in the Winter Palace.

Meanwhile, books from the Winter Palace were being transferred for sale abroad. A document authorizing such a transfer to *Gostorg* is to be found in the Hermitage archives. It dates from late 1927 and lists 127 books that had belonged to various members of the imperial family with detailed bibliographic information (author, title, place and year of publication and, in a separate paragraph, indication of the particular library from which the book came). Fortunately, not all the books listed were sold. Some would be returned to the Hermitage and are in the museum's Library.

From 1929 through the early 1930s the Hermitage, very much concerned with freeing its rooms of the imperial book collections, acted decisively and offered various Leningrad organizations the chance to take such volumes as they might choose. Between May 1928 and summer 1930, books from the Personal Libraries were transferred to the State Russian Museum, the Kremlin Armoury, the Academy of the History of Material Culture, the Maritime Technicum, the Railroad Museum, the Palace-Museums of Peterhof and others.

All this notwithstanding, as late as the summer of 1930 the halls of the Winter Palace still held a vast number of books in which no one had shown interest. At the direction of *Glavnauka*, the Hermitage then transferred the remaining books of the Personal Libraries to the State Book Fund. The actual physical transfer took place on March 12, 1930, and is recorded in two official documents. They show that the State Book Fund received a total of 18,336 volumes.⁴⁵

Books from the Personal Libraries that were sold to American and Western European libraries and individuals were largely books from the State Book Fund. The selection of books from the Personal Libraries was done in two ways. Some books were inspected and selected on the spot by representatives of antiquarian dealers (no firm names appear in any documents known to us), as a result of which the most valuable and rarest of the books were soon to be found in America and Western Europe. Selection was also done by representatives of International Book and *Antikvariat*.

By the end of the 1920s the scale of the book sales had become frightening. Rare editions no longer satisfied the buyers and sellers, and slowly but surely they began to turn their

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AGE, f. I, op. 5, d. 563, 1925/26, l. 163.

42

Order for the transfer of 127 books to *Gostorg*. Op. cit., l. 178–190.

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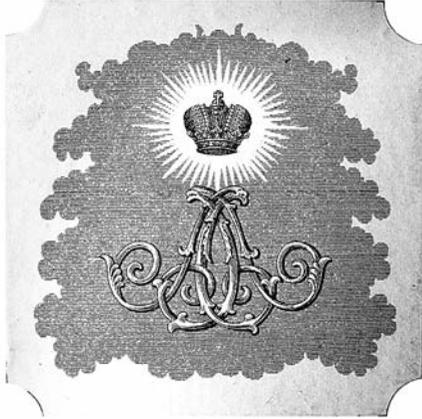
Vladimir I. Nevsky (1856–1937) was director of the V.I. Lenin All-Union Public Library from 1924 until his arrest in 1935 (he was accused of taking a leading part in an anti-party group and exiled to Suzdal; in 1937 he was again found guilty as “an active participant in an anti-Soviet terrorist organization of rightists” and executed. With his authority and prestige, he had been able to protect rare books and whole collections from sale abroad; his help was sought by museum directors and library chiefs. The V.I. Nevsky collection in the Russian State Library holds letters to him from S.N. Troinitsky (d. 1948), the director of the Hermitage; V.N. Lazarev, the art historian; M.M. Saranchin, chief of the Leningrad State Book Fund; and Academician S. N. Oldenburg (d. 1934).

44

Fedor N. Petrov (1876–1973) was active as a party member and scholar. He headed *Glavnauka* in 1923–1927. Lev E. Bukhgeim (d. after 1942) was born in Moscow to a German family and was one of the leading bibliographers at the Lenin Library in 1927. Gerbert A. Prib (after 1930) was secretary of the library administration and worked at the Lenin Library in the period 1926–1930.

45

AGE, f. I, op. 5, 1929/30, d. 1042, l. 11–12.



Ex libris of Emperor Alexander III.
Produced after 1881



Ex libris of the Library of Tsarskoe Selo.
Produced sometime in the late 19th
or early 20th century.

attention to unique individual items: the libraries and archives were forced to put their manuscript books in Church Slavonic up for sale. The director of the Lenin Library, Vladimir Nevsky, wrote despairingly in a letter to Anatoly Lunacharsky (d. 1933): “Rumours have reached me that the foreign antique book dealers involved in buying up works of art located in Russian museums, have just recently begun to take an interest in ancient manuscripts as well, in Latin manuscripts including old Byzantine manuscripts kept in Russian book depositories, for instance at the USSR Academy of Sciences. As I was informed, an agent for the antique dealers Lepke-Krieger has ordered a catalogue of just such manuscripts. It should be clear from this why I have taken it upon myself to appeal to you in the present note, since the national disaster which has already struck works of art, that is their being sold, now evidently threatens the collections of manuscripts as well. I have used the term ‘national disaster’ and I insist on that very definition, for I cannot use any other for those measures, which, if they are implemented, will do nothing to further the cause of augmenting the currency fund but will finally undermine our credit abroad.... *Gostorg* is already proposing to open shops for the sale of valuable museum pieces in New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Leningrad, Moscow and Kharkov.... Once embarked on the route of selling, it is impossible to stop: today we sold Raphael, tomorrow we’ll sell Correggio and then we’ll start selling the manuscripts of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky.... The unsuccessful sales of those valuables that have been shipped to the West have already become a source of concern in wide circles of Soviet public opinion: this selling creates the impression of some kind of *terrible state catastrophe* [our italics – the authors].”⁴⁶

Along with the sales of books that had belonged to the Russian imperial family, the greatest damage done by the sales was to the collection of the Public Library (now the Russian National Library in Petersburg) in Leningrad. The activities of the Soviet traders especially affected early books.

The Russian National Library’s collection of rare books and manuscripts is one of the richest in Russia. Since the 19th century, the collection has been housed in a space specially designed for it in the style of a gothic library and known as “Faust’s Office.” According to Aleksandr Gorfunkel, former Curator of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, the card catalogue of incunabula in Faust’s Office includes contemporaneous notes by library staff on the transfer of rare editions to International Book for sale abroad.⁴⁷

The most famous book from the State Book Fund sold at auction was a Gutenberg Bible that had been in the collection of the Public Library for some 70 years. Until the middle of the 19th century no Russian library, private or public, had owned a Gutenberg Bible (48 copies of the famous 42-line Bible are known to exist). The Imperial Public Library in Petersburg was determined to acquire a Gutenberg Bible, and, in 1858, when the library learned that a copy was to be auctioned in Augsburg, Kingdom of Bavaria, the head of the Russian manuscript section of the library, Afanasy F. Bychkov (d. 1899), made a major effort and found the means for the purchase. In the end, a splendid Gutenberg Bible was obtained for a price of 4,000 German marks. The volume had formerly belonged to Rottenbuch Abbey, an Augustinian monastery, and later to the Royal Library in Munich after the seizure of monastic property in 1803. The Royal Library let it go as a duplicate. The exact date of the Soviet government’s sale of the Gutenberg is not known. Several authors have argued for 1928, and others for 1931. This much is certain, however. The sale price was 30,000 Swiss pounds, and the buyer was the bibliophile Martin Bodmer (d. 1970). The Bible is now part of the 160,000-volume Bodmer Library in Cologny, Switzerland, just outside Geneva.

Like all remarkable finds, the Sinai Codex was discovered entirely by chance. It was found by the German theologian and biblical scholar Konstantin von Tischendorf (d. 1874) in the Greek Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai during a journey to Egypt that was financed by the Russian Emperor Alexander II. One day, following their evening prayers, the



Ex libris of Emperor Alexander II. Approximately 20 variants have been tallied dating from various years.



Ex libris of Empress Alexandra Fedorovna the Younger. Produced from a sketch by A.E. Felkerzam.

monks presented Tischendorf with an ancient Greek copy of the Gospel consisting of 346 parchment pages. The scholar realized that he was holding a manuscript of the New Testament that was entirely unknown to scholars. Subsequently the manuscript became known as the Sinaitic Codex. The manuscript was much older than the famous codices from the Vatican and Alexandria and represented the very earliest and most complete text of the Gospel, including even the Epistle of Barnabas, which was believed to have been lost in the Greek original. A copy of the manuscript was made in two months, but Tischendorf wanted to obtain the original, no matter the cost. After attempting unsuccessfully to persuade the monks to present the Codex to the tsar, who was regarded as the patron of the Eastern churches and the entire Orthodox world, Tischendorf gained the support of the Russian ambassador in Turkey, Count Nikolai Ignatyev and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Their admonitions proved effective: while the monastery refused to present the Codex as a gift, it agreed to lend it for a month and a half so that a facsimile copy could be prepared.

In 1862, in honor of the 250th anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty, the Sinaitic Codex was published in an edition of 1,232 copies. One of the copies was sent to the Monastery of St. Catherine. The original, however, remained in Russia, which did everything in its power to retain it. Russian diplomats and church authorities in Constantinople managed to reach an agreement with the monastery, under the terms of which the latter received 9,000 roubles (1,350 English pounds sterling), of which 2,000 roubles were transmitted to the church authorities in Cairo, as indicated by a receipt that the Russian government received in late 1907. On May 7, 1869, the precious manuscript was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Imperial Public Library, and in late November it was exhibited for viewing in the library's halls.

In 1931 the English antiquarian book dealer Maurice Leon Ettinghausen arrived in Soviet Russia with a group of dealers. Like many other antiquarians, he was given an opportunity to look round the Soviet museums and libraries. In the course of a tour, arranged especially for him, of the Public Library, Ettinghausen's interest was caught by a square old leather box bearing the words "Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus" on its cover. The deputy commissar of foreign trade accompanying the Englishman confessed without embarrassment that the title meant absolutely nothing to him. The astonished Ettinghausen could only joke that, if Moscow was ever short of money, "he should tie Sinaiticus in a brown-paper parcel and send it to [him] in London".

Strangely enough, the book-dealer's joke was taken extremely seriously. Two years later, in the autumn of 1933 Ettinghausen had a meeting in London with the head of International Book, who was interested in whether the Sinaitic Codex might be worth a million pounds. Several weeks later, when the head of *Antikvariat*, Nikolai Ilyin, was in Paris, he announced that the Soviet government was prepared to sell the Codex for 200,000 pounds (about a million dollars). Informed of the possibility of the acquisition, the British Museum offered 40,000 pounds. Ilyin then offered to reduce the price to 100,000 pounds. Since it was a matter of the purchase of one of the most remarkable historical documents of Christianity, the British government felt compelled to become involved in the affair. After consultations with Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the museum first increased its offer to 60,000 pounds and then agreed to the Soviet side's demands. The British government promised to provide half of the sum demanded by the Soviets, with the remainder to be collected by subscription. The deal was completed with astonishing speed and the manuscript was actually dispatched to London two weeks before the money was transferred to Russia. Maurice Ettinghausen, two detectives and a journalist from *The Daily Express* took the treasure to the British Museum in a taxi. Ettinghausen recalled that they were met by a huge crowd on the square in front of the museum. When he emerged from the taxi holding the Bible, all the men removed their hats.⁴⁸

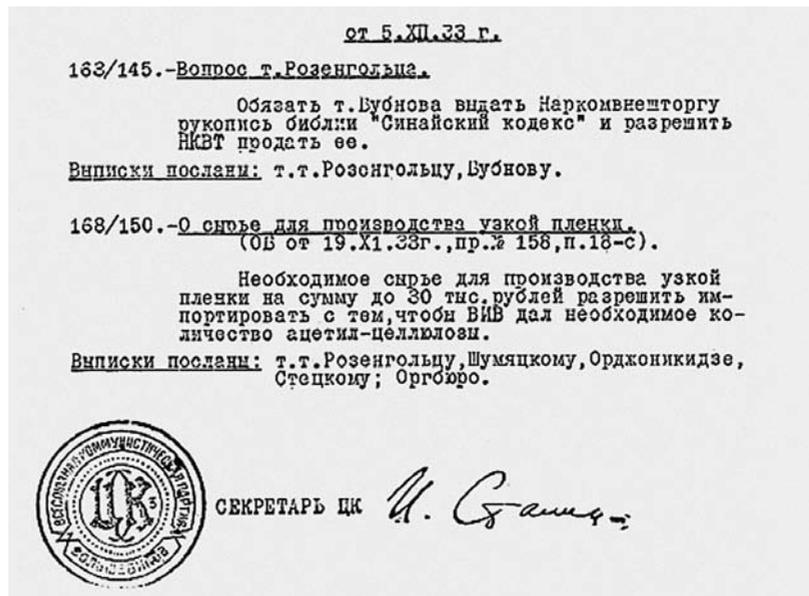
⁴⁶ Quoted from G. Vzdornov, "The Slavonic Manuscripts of Fekula," in *Nashe Nasledie* (Our Heritage), 1991, No. 6, pp. 139–144.

⁴⁷ A.Kh. Gorfunkel, "The Gutenberg Bible in Russia," in *Western European Culture in the Manuscripts and Books of the Russian National Library*. St. Petersburg, 2001, p. 199.

⁴⁸ These details of the sale of a holy relic of the Christian world are described in J. Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible – Codex Sinaiticus*. New York, 1986.

The Sinai Bible (Codex Sinaiticus)
The first page of the Gospel according to St. John.
4th century

Presented to the Russian Emperor Alexander II by the Greek Monastery of St. Catherine in 1859. Sold in December 1933 from the State Public Library to the British Museum for one hundred thousand pounds sterling
The British Library, London



A copy of the minutes of a closed session of the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on 5 December 1933, at which the fate of the Sinai Bible was decided. RTSKIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 148

Dated 5.XII.33

168/145 Question of Com. Rozengolts

Require Com. Bubnov to give the Commissariat of Foreign Trade the manuscript of the Bible "Sinai Codex" and allow VKVT [the commissariat] to sell it.

Copies to: Coms. Rozengolts, Bubnov

168/150 On raw material for production of narrow film.

Permission must be granted to export 30,000 roubles' worth of raw material for production of narrow film. . . .

Sec'y CC I. Stalin

Α ΕΝΔΡΥΗΗΝΟΛΟΙ
 ΚΑΙ ΟΛΟΓΟΙ ΗΝ
 ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΝ ΚΑΙ
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58 PASA

Calouste Gulbenkian



Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1864–1955) was born in the town of Skutari on the outskirts of Constantinople, in a family of Armenian carpet traders. He was educated in France and England, graduating from Kings College in 1887 as an engineer. In 1902 he was granted British citizenship. He lived in Paris, spoke six languages and was regarded as a brilliant analyst and manager of relations between the East and the West. His most successful undertaking was the establishment in 1912–1914 of “Iraq Petroleum”: the partners in the company were France, England, the USA and Persia, and Gulbenkian received five per cent of its profits out of the dividends, hence his sobriquet in business circles, “Mr. Five Per Cent.” Gulbenkian began collecting works of art at the age of fourteen, when he bought several old coins with money given to him by his father. The immense collection which he subsequently amassed embraced an astounding variety of artists and schools. His contemporaries were unable to understand how, even with his money and connections, one man could have outstripped all his competitors, both dealers and collectors.

Photograph, 1890s
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

In the summer of 1928 the Hermitage learned that *Antikvariat* was intending to force the museum into making a huge number of items available for sale. “Mr. Gulbenkian... has offered to buy pictures for a sum of 10 million roubles and has presented a list of 18 of the finest works in the Hermitage, which at a modest estimate are worth at least 25–30 mill[ion] roubles,” Sergei Troinitsky wrote in a brief report addressed to Anastas Mikoyan in October 1928. “However, the sale on the open market of several of them, such as Raphael’s *Madonna Alba*, Giorgione’s *Judith* and Rembrandt’s *Prodigal Son* would undoubtedly result in national subscriptions being raised in several countries in order to acquire them, which would cover the sum of 10 mill[ion] roubles.”¹ Gulbenkian did not manage to get his hands on the masterpieces listed by the director of the Hermitage, but he did acquire several equally distinguished works, in the process establishing a highly important precedent as the first buyer to select items directly from the Hermitage collection.

Oil magnate Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian was a man of the world: an ethnic Armenian born in Turkey who was a citizen of Great Britain, he possessed a brilliant talent for developing contacts and his ability to conclude highly profitable contracts amazed everyone. A knowledge of people and the ability to win their confidence were the business skills which made him one of the richest men of his time.

Gulbenkian’s main business was oil. The foundations of his successful career were laid in 1895, thanks to his relatives the Mantashevs, Armenian bankers who controlled the oilfields of Baku and facilitated his dealings with Russia even before the October Revolution. His interests and those of Russia crossed for a second time in 1928, when he was involved in developing the richest oilfields in the Middle East.

Through a fellow-Armenian, Moisei Adjemov, Gulbenkian met Georgy Leonidovich Pyatakov, the Soviet trade representative in Paris. Pyatakov had been dispatched to France shortly after surviving a temporary exclusion from the ranks of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). His role in Paris was to develop contacts with business and financial circles in the West. Gulbenkian offered to help Soviet Russia, which was experiencing rather serious difficulties in trading in oil. As president of the Iraq Oil Company he was able to persuade his long-term partner Henry Detterding of Shell Oil to deal in Soviet oil, which was sold, like everything else from the USSR, at dumping prices. The result was that the companies controlled by Gulbenkian combined forces to export extremely cheap unrefined crude oil, which allowed the Soviet organisation *Nefteindikat* to maintain a foothold on the world oil market. This successful operation produced huge financial dividends for one of the most talented businessmen of the 20th century as well as earning him the absolute confidence of the Soviet authorities. Gulbenkian’s services as an intermediary were highly appreciated, and his dream of acquiring masterpieces from the Hermitage which the Soviets were planning to sell in order to resolve their economic difficulties during the first year of the five-year plan moved a step closer to reality.

In the course of his business contacts with Soviet functionaries in Paris Gulbenkian earned a reputation as a reliable partner. The struggle over the retention of valuable art works had important consequences for the ideological programme underpinning national prestige, and national prestige could not be allowed to suffer – at the beginning of the process it was just as important to the Soviet authorities to maintain the confidentiality of sales of works from their museums as it was to earn money. This suited Gulbenkian’s character very well – his pathological secrecy had already earned him the reputation of “the most mysterious man of his time.”²

Like many other fantastically wealthy men, the aging Calouste Gulbenkian sought repose from the incessant physical and emotional demands of his business routine in collecting works of art. Gulbenkian made it his goal to obtain possession of items which had once belonged to the Russian tsars. Through Pyatakov he established contact with functionaries

One of the rare photographs of Calouste Gulbenkian, showing him at the airport in Lisbon. Gulbenkian is in the centre; on the right is the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the owner of its rich oil reserves, Amir Saud; on the left is Gulbenkian's son Nubar. In 1936, in view of the deteriorating political situation in Europe, Gulbenkian sent his collection of paintings to the National Gallery in Washington, and his collection of Egyptian sculpture to the British Museum. In the spring of 1942, when the French authorities accused him of being a collaborator, he moved from Vichy to Lisbon. Several months before his death, after the British had refused to house his collection in a separate museum, he decided to bequeath all of his art collections to Portugal.

Photograph. Bilderdienst Suddeutschen Verlag, München



1

RGAE, f. 5240, op. 9, d. 243, l. 10–12. The letter bears the instruction: "For the personal attention of A.I. Mikoyan."

2

On the matter of confidentiality there were no grounds for concern. Gulbenkian's personal and business history, like the methods he used to build up his collection, are shrouded in mystery. There are almost no photographs of him, and many of the facts of his biography remain unclear or uncertain, while the catalogue of his collection is entirely devoid of any indication of the provenance of the works. Not a single journalist was ever granted an interview with "the most mysterious man of his time."



The statue of Diana by the renowned sculptor Houdon, which was once bought by the empress Catherine the Great, now became the main ornament of the formal staircase in Gulbenkian's Paris mansion.

from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade and *Antikvariat*, with whom, as he himself later complained, he was obliged to spend two years in a process of continuous and exhausting negotiation in Paris. The outcome was determined by Gulbenkian's persistence in combination with exceptional good luck or, as Gulbenkian put it, the ability "to hold his cards." His "confidant" Pyatakov was rewarded on his return to Moscow with a high governmental post, first as deputy director and then director of the State Bank of the USSR, exercising direct authority over *Antikvariat*. Although Pyatakov himself took no part in the negotiations, translations of notes to the People's Commissariat of Finance, which Gulbenkian referred to as "memoranda," regularly found their way to his desk.

In the course of the two years from 1928 to 1930, Calouste Gulbenkian held four rounds of highly complex negotiations with the Soviet government. The first round began at the very end of 1928 and was concluded in April 1929. "You probably already know that we have arranged for a first transaction of 54,000," Gulbenkian wrote to Pyatakov. For this relatively modest sum he was able to buy twenty-four articles from silver gilt table services produced for the Russian court by French jewellers in the time of Louis XVI. These were not merely extremely beautiful examples of the jeweller's art, they were items so extremely rare that they were practically never to be found on the antiques market. He also bought *The Annunciation* by the 15th-century Dutch painter Dirk Bouts, two views of Versailles by the virtuoso landscape artist Hubert Robert and a Louis XVI writing desk by the renowned furniture-maker Jean-Henri Riesener.

"I am very interested in concluding other [deals], particularly because I am convinced that the prices I have already paid can be considered to be the highest obtainable. I am thinking of purchasing other more valuable works, but the difficulty is that your people do not want to submit them to an independent valuer, which would certainly be the most efficient, the most practical and the most logical way of doing it."³

The second round of negotiations began in the autumn of 1929. Gulbenkian made every possible effort to persuade the Soviet authorities to take bolder action, assuring them that his prices were at least twenty-five per cent higher than those his competitors could offer, that the financial crisis had all but put an end to the antiquarian trade, that prices had fallen and it was impossible to find buyers, even in wealthy America. He had no intention of increasing his prices and offered a hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling for fifteen items of silverware from French dinner services (including seven items from the "Paris Service" commissioned by the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna from the master silversmith François-Thomas Germain) and *Portrait of Hélène Fourment* by Rubens. Both sides demonstrated extreme stubbornness during the negotiations for the second deal. The sellers insisted that the price was too low, while the buyer assured them that, led on by his own passion, he was making them an excellent offer. Brilliant financier that he was, Gulbenkian made a cunning move at the very height of the negotiations: he agreed to pay a hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling, but only on condition that in addition to the items mentioned above they would also sell him nothing less than *Judith* by Giorgione (the works of this short-lived pupil of Titian were worth much more on the market than those of his master). If they would do that, then he would be willing to pay an additional forty thousand pounds sterling each for the Rubens and the Giorgione.

Only after four months of constant discussion, in January 1930, did Gulbenkian and Georgy Samuéli, the *Antikvariat* representative in Paris, finally reach agreement: one hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling for the silver and the Rubens painting (*Judith*, fortunately, remained in the Hermitage). The director of the Hermitage, Boris B. Piotrovsky, later recalled that the secrecy surrounding this deal was so strict that a letter from *Antikvariat* to *Narkompros* giving instructions for the Rubens portrait to be sold did not even mention the name of the picture.⁴

³ Letter from Gulbenkian to Georgy Pyatakov dated 15 June 1929. Quoted from: Williams, p. 159.

⁴ There was nothing unusual in this. Decisions to sell masterpieces from the Hermitage were taken at meetings of the Politburo, the minutes of which are kept in the so-called "Special Files." The titles of pictures are mentioned only rarely and for the most part the instructions to "allow the sale" or "issue" a work specified only the artists' names.

5

This picture was sold by mistake. Boris B. Piotrovsky recalled that *Antikvariat* had requested the finest of Ter Borch's works in the Hermitage, *A Glass of Lemonade*, but since the title of the work was so distorted as to be incomprehensible in the telegramme sent to the museum, the museum's employees substituted another (see: Piotrovsky, p. 61). It is sometimes mistakenly believed that the picture eventually found its way into the Cincinnati Museum, but the work in that collection is actually one of several versions of *The Music Lesson*, and the canvas from the Hermitage is in the Toledo City Museum (USA).

6

Most likely it followed the standard route for Soviet antiquarian exports, going by sea from Leningrad to Stettin or Hamburg and from there by train to Berlin.

7

Calouste Gulbenkian Museum. Catalogue. Lisbon, 1982, p. 113.



The terrace of Calouste Gulbenkian's mansion on the Avenue d'Iéna near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Gulbenkian bought the mansion in the 1920s and used it to house the gems of his collection, in line with his motto: "only the best".

Gulbenkian could afford to feel triumphant. Every new contract with *Antikvariat* reinforced the unique prestige of his collection, already regarded as one of the most valuable in the world. The outcome of the third round of negotiations was even more successful for him: a marble *Diana* by Jean-Antoine Houdon and five canvases – Rembrandt's *Portrait of Titus* and *Pallas Athene*, Gerard Ter Borch's *Music Lesson*⁵, *Le Mezzetin* by the elegant rococo master Antoine Watteau and *Les Gentilles Baigneuses* by the master of courtly gallantry Nicolas Lancret. Gulbenkian paid one hundred and forty thousand pounds sterling for the five pictures and twenty thousand pounds sterling for the statue.

The procedure followed for the sales was always the same. All negotiations were held in Paris, but the contract, in which the items being sold were identified, was drawn up in Leningrad in order to lend the deal legal validity. The articles were packed by *Antikvariat*, but always with Gulbenkian's agents present, following which the load was dispatched to Germany.⁶ In Berlin it was exchanged, together with all the documentation, for bank drafts issued in pounds sterling to the Soviet trade delegation in France. At this point a second expert evaluation was carried out to confirm the authenticity of the "goods," following which they were dispatched to their destination at 51, Avenue d'Iéna, in Paris. In this huge mansion, which only rarely opened its doors to visitors, Gulbenkian kept his priceless treasures: pictures, antique Persian carpets, medieval illuminated manuscripts, even ancient Egyptian sculpture.

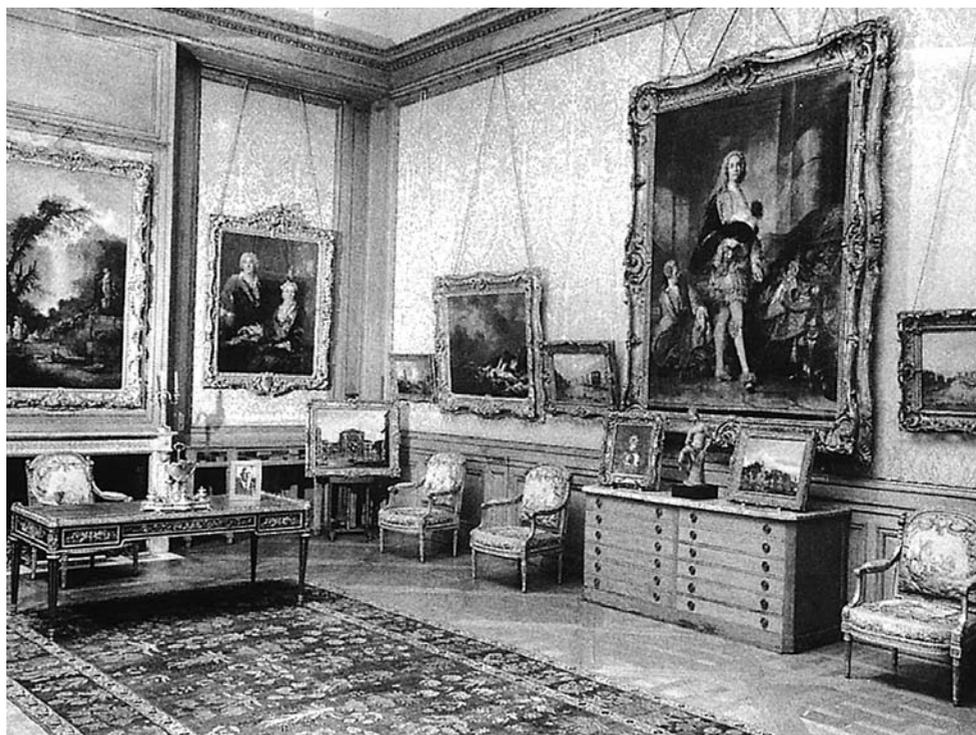
Where the attribution of his works was concerned, even those included in the catalogue of such a world-famous institution as the Hermitage, Gulbenkian was absolutely meticulous. Before a deal was completed he sent an experienced specialist to Leningrad via Riga with instructions that included obtaining information on the places and conditions in which the works had been stored previously. Together with all the other participants in this "operation," the specialist was furnished with strict written instructions drafted by Gulbenkian himself. The instructions concerning packing, for instance, read as follows: "Ensure that you observe my recommendations concerning the use of an adequate number of boxes, since as far as possible in order to minimize transport risks only a small number of items should be put into each of them."⁷

The route of the third batch of "goods" in the series differed somewhat from that followed by the first two in that four of the five pictures concerned were dispatched directly to George Wildenstein, for whom Gulbenkian had actually bought them (a purchase which cost Wildenstein one hundred thousand two hundred and fifty pounds sterling). The only piece Gulbenkian kept for himself was Rembrandt's *Pallas Athene*, also known as *Portrait of Titus as Mars*.

Much as Gulbenkian may have wished to maintain his monopoly on the Soviet antiques market, it was becoming ever more difficult. In the spring of 1930, in the course of his third round of negotiations with *Antikvariat*, his American competitors were already developing their operations. Gulbenkian did not possess any definite information on what was happening, but the fact that the hand-over of the pictures was delayed without any explanations being offered and his representative who was monitoring the the packing of *Diana* in Leningrad had to extend his stay in the fashionable Europa Hotel to almost two weeks while he waited for the works naturally gave him cause for suspicion. Gulbenkian was so alarmed that he even complained about the "sloppy organisation of the work" in an indignant telegramme to Pyatakov.

Calouste Gulbenkian was perfectly well aware that he was far from being the only buyer interested in the Soviet antiquarian market, which was why one of the points in his contract with *Antikvariat* specified that the buyer was to be released from contractual obligations if the goods failed to arrive within a month. Gulbenkian attempted to provide for every possible contingency: his specialists authenticated the works first in Russia and then again in

The picture gallery in Gulbenkian's mansion on the Avenue d'Iéna in Paris. On the wall to the left: Hubert Robert's *Fountain*, sold by *Antikvariat* in 1929.



Berlin. But while the question of authentication was relatively easy to resolve, it was virtually impossible to protect himself completely against losing the works and his money. Once a load had been handed over in Berlin, the government of the USSR and *Antikvariat* refused all further responsibility for it, and from the moment a load crossed the Soviet border, the buyer bore all potential risks. In buying works from the Hermitage Gulbenkian effectively took the same kind of risk as someone playing the stock market: if the goods were arrested on the territory of some third state they could quite easily be confiscated, and Gulbenkian could not claim compensation for his losses.

“You say I have acquired things... at ludicrously low prices. Bearing in mind the mutual and friendly trust which exists between us and also our past relations, I could never even think of deceiving you or your friends in such a manner,” Gulbenkian wrote to Pyatakov. “The problem is that several employees of your department, who regard these works of art from the point of view of connoisseurs or curators, are extremely displeased that the items have to be sold. I sincerely approve of their feelings and have no doubt that most of them are attached to these items, for which the price, from a commercial point of view, is completely absurd... When you were in Paris, your friends asked incredible prices. But later they realised that for most of the works they could not get even a quarter of what they were asking.”⁸

In some way which is not clear, Gulbenkian managed to convince Pyatakov that he was paying the “right price” and in the autumn of 1930 he finalised his fourth and most “modest” agreement, which was to be his last. Following another exchange of letters with Pyatakov he struck a deal for Rembrandt’s *Portrait of an Old Man*, which he obtained for thirty thousand pounds sterling. The deal confirmed yet again Gulbenkian’s phenomenal talent as a trader: even though his competitors were already buying works from the Hermitage at prices ten or twenty times higher, he was able to persuade the money-hungry state authorities to sell more cheaply to him. But “Mr. Five Per Cent’s” excessive parsimony eventually forced him to make way for more generous buyers. Gulbenkian’s mission was over, and the road to the Hermitage was now left open.

8

Ibid., pp. 110, 111.

In July 1930, when Andrew Mellon had already bought a number of outstanding canvases, Georgy Pyatakov received from Gulbenkian the most extensive of all the memoranda that were sent to him during these years (see p. 215).

Not to be made public

Translation of a memorandum sent to Mr. Pyatakov from Paris on 17 July 1930

I know that you do not take an interest in questions concerning objets d'art and that you declare that you are absolutely incompetent in this matter and it is only in order to please me that you have been so exceedingly kind as to put me in contact with your departments which take an appropriate interest in this. You know equally well that I have always maintained the thesis that items which have been in your museums for many years should not be sold, since not only do they represent the national heritage, but they are also an extensive educational resource and at the same time an object of great national pride, and if the news of their sale were to leak out, it would damage the credibility of your government.

In actual fact, one might conclude from this that your situation is extreme, since you are obliged to part with items the value of which will not in effect provide any significant income for an entire state. You possess the information to judge the psychology and way of thought of those who allocate credit abroad, and I can assure you that the sales made by your museums produce a bad impression and that they cannot fail to affect the way the financiers think and to damage your prestige abroad. After all this you will ask me why I am writing to you about this, when I myself aspire to acquire these objects.

You probably recall that I always advised you and continue to advise your representatives not to sell your valuable museum exhibits, but if you do intend to sell them, then to give preference to me subject to the price being equal, and I have asked them to keep me informed of which items you may wish to sell.

In the present memorandum I wish to draw your attention to the fact that your representatives are ignoring our cordial and friendly relations, and evidently in a desire to be cunning, are not only failing to inform me of the items which they wish to sell, but also arranging surreptitiously for the sale of works from your museums, several of which are already in America at the present time. There is a lot of talk among the public about these sales, which in my opinion are doing a great deal of harm to your prestige (especially the sale to Mr. Mellon, who is very visible). Perhaps in certain instances you do receive higher prices for particular items than from me, but the disadvantageous aspects of sales carried out in this manner are so significant from the point of view of prestige, propaganda and publicity that I am surprised that you can allow such sales...

I will tell you frankly that you should not have sold even to me, perhaps to me even less than to the others. I say this so that you will not think that my only concern is that your sales should be restricted to me.

And so, I return to the second purpose of this memorandum, which is, that if, despite my advice and urgent request not to sell valued museum exhibits, you should nonetheless wish to part with them, I should be most grateful if you would give instructions for this not to be concealed from me and for me to be notified in advance of the sale of the more valuable items, in particular those which are included in a list I communicated to Mr. Birenzweig...

I should also like to know whether any decision has been taken concerning the sale of valuable museum exhibits (what a misfortune for your prestige) and if the decision is positive, then let the catalogue and photographs be sent to me so that I can choose. I shall make every possible effort to offer the maximum price. But you are not obliged to submit to my influence if, in exceptional instances, you should obtain a higher price than mine in other places. Objets d'art are not everyday goods and their value changes from one art-lover to another. My conscience is clear, since I have always dealt with your representatives as generously as possible, while they have constantly played out a comedy with me; and I hope that with the help of your influence this will soon be stopped.

Up to the present time all the deals which I have made have been kept secret, but I now see that I have surrounded them with excessive caution, whereas your Departments have allowed themselves to be influenced by intermediaries and employed methods which are by no means in the interest of your Government.

If, despite my criticisms, you have nonetheless decided to sell the valuable exhibits of your museums (and I stubbornly persist in advising you not to do so), then instead of selling them to intermediaries, offer these items openly for sale on the market, since the naive game of hide-and-seek which is being played at present only causes a great deal of harm. Those who have been entrusted with these operations are not sufficiently aware of this and completely disregard the immense indirect damage caused by their activities. I laughed when one of them declared to me that during the French Revolution they sold Versailles too. What naive simplicity and what ignorance of the period and the circumstances.

[Calouste Gulbenkian]

Armand Hammer



Armand Hammer (1900–1990) returned from his second visit to the USSR in June 1922 as a prosperous businessman.

No other Western businessman could even dare to dream of being so popular in the USSR as Armand Hammer. For seventy years he adapted to all the changes taking place in the Soviet Union, shifting between the twin roles of good and evil genius. In the 60s he was as well known as in the 20s and in the course of his long life he had talks with both Lenin and Mikhail Gorbachev.

No matter how many generations may have passed, the descendants of Russian émigrés always find it hard to rid themselves of their ties to the land of their ancestors, and Hammer had special feelings for Russia. His great grandfather built the naval fleet for Nicholas I, becoming a millionaire in the process, and his grandfather was a successful salt trader on the shores of the Caspian. The first American in the family was Armand's father, Julius Hammer, whose parents left their native town of Kherson in 1875 to settle on the other side of the Atlantic.

Julius Hammer studied medicine and then practised in the Bronx and ran his own pharmaceuticals firm. During the First World War, when the company was on the brink of bankruptcy, his eldest son became involved in the business. He made his first million in 1921, the year he graduated from Columbia University medical school. In the summer of the same year the newly qualified American doctor set out for the Urals with his own field hospital to help the victims of a typhoid epidemic.

This mission of mercy was the brainchild of Armand's father, a communist sympathiser (he is sometimes included among the founders of the Communist Party of the USA) who worked with the Soviet Trade Bureau in New York. This unofficial Bolshevik diplomatic mission, headed by the former political émigré and Bolshevik engineer, Ludwig Martens, worked to develop trade relations between Russia and America.¹ Pharmaceutical company director Julius Hammer was the first American brave enough to have dealings with the Bolsheviks and in 1921 he equipped a medical aid mission for the Soviet Union and sent the twenty-three-year old Armand along with it.²

When he arrived in Russia the "humanitarian doctor" Armand Hammer was astounded by the hunger and the general disorder. His practical mind immediately calculated that there was profit to be made here. The first deal which he concluded in the Soviet Union was the purchase of one million tonnes of American wheat for his own money, in exchange for which *Narkomvneshtorg* promised to prepare for the "United American Medications and Chemicals Company" a load of caviar, furs and valuable artistic artifacts.³

The period of the New Economic Policy, which opened up the foreign market for the Soviet Union and introduced economic freedom, provided Hammer's golden opportunity. Lenin became interested in the projects of the young "hero of the Urals" and invited him to the Kremlin. In October 1921 Armand received two concessions: one for the development of the asbestos mines in Alapaevsk and the other for the conduct of foreign trade. His close acquaintance with Ludwig Martens, who soon left New York to become the head of *Glavmetall* (the administrative structure of the Soviet metallurgical industry) as well as a member of the All-Union Council of the National Economy and economic adviser to the first Soviet government, was a decisive factor in the shaping of Armand Hammer's career. In spring 1922 he was already the Ford company's authorised representative in Soviet Russia.

The American Joint Stock Corporation, with Hammer at its head, represented thirty-eight American firms and monopolised the Soviet market. In 1924 Hammer earned six million dollars from the asbestos mines and his export-import operations, and he was already thinking through a new line of business, a factory for producing pencils and office goods for which he took out a loan of eight hundred thousand dollars. The famous "Faber" pencils were due to make their appearance in Russia: the equipment was bought from Faber in Nuremburg, specialists were brought in from Germany and the factory in Moscow went into production. In 1925 it was already turning out seventy-two million pencils a year, some of which were even

¹
It has been claimed that Martens' bureau was financed by illegal sales of smuggled Soviet diamonds.

²
Armand Hammer was named in honour of the symbols of the Socialist Labour Party, "arm and hammer." In 1921 he obtained rights to the production of asbestos in the Urals for twenty years, the first concession granted to the Americans by the Soviets, and in 1923 he built up his own imports and exports empire. In 1924 the value of Hammer's export-import operations fell to six million roubles, and in 1925 it slumped to one and a half million. In 1927 his pencil factories, opened in 1925, generated profits of eight and a half million roubles. In 1930 all of Hammer's companies were taken over by the Soviet state.

³
The humanitarian nature of Hammer's mission was merely a cover, an opportunity for the young entrepreneur to sound out the chances of doing profitable business in Soviet Russia. He needed money, since his father had been found guilty of medical negligence (an abortion with fatal consequences). It is now claimed that Hammer senior took the blame for an unsuccessful operation carried out by Armand.

⁴
In his most recent book Robert Williams goes as far as to state that in the 1920s Armand Hammer was an agent of the OGPU, the precursor of the KGB, and that his company was a cover for its European agents.

⁵
The Brown House, as Hammer's Moscow residence was known in the 1920s, became a kind of unofficial American embassy. All the foreigners who visited the Russian capital, including politicians, performers and other celebrities, attended the receptions held here by Hammer. It seems, however, that the Soviet authorities had a vested interest in Hammer's generous hospitality.

⁶
A. Hammer, *My Century [Moi Vek] – The Twentieth. Journeys and Encounters*, Moscow, 1988, p. 118.

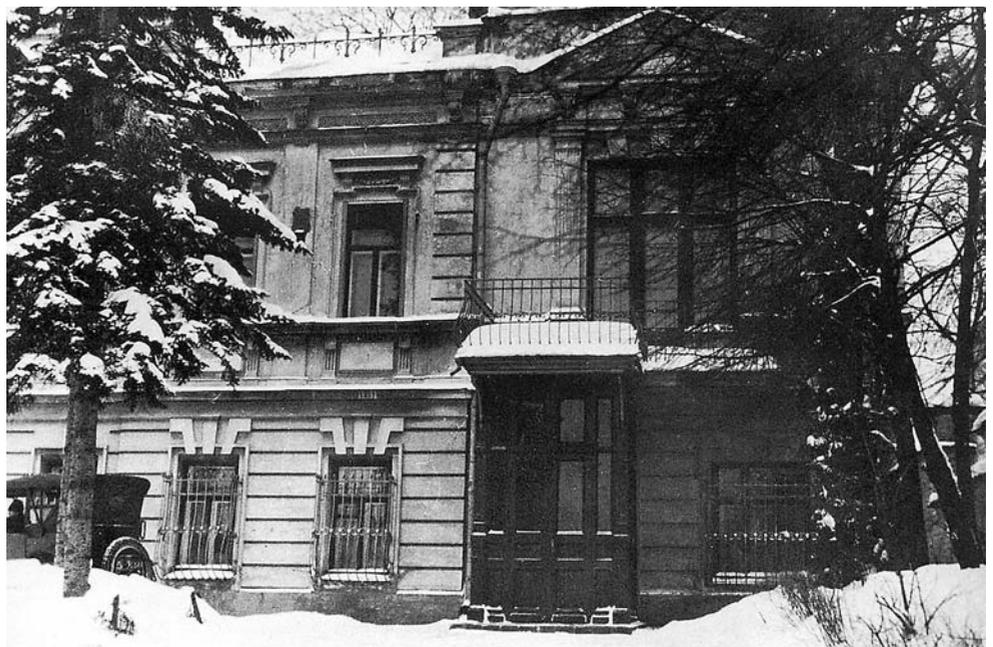
The Hammer residence in Moscow in the 1920s, the legendary Brown House at 14, Sadovo-Samotechnaya Street. The building is now home to the Lebanese embassy.
Photograph, 1920s

exported, as well as ninety-five million steel pen-nibs. Soviet Russia's weapons in the defeat of illiteracy were Hammer's pencils, which earned the firm millions in profit.

Hammer effectively acted as the main intermediary in the efforts made by the Soviet government to "export the world revolution," a role which proved quite profitable. In 1925–1926, according to Robert Williams, who has researched the Western archives, the Comintern's cash flow was handled by the Hammers: the money was sent to Julius in Berlin, who forwarded it from there to New York. Armand Hammer in person apparently brought thirty-six thousand dollars into the United States to meet the needs of the Communist Party there⁴.

The very fact that Hammer's office in Moscow was located in a mansion on Kuznetsky Most Street which had belonged in pre-revolutionary times to the firm of Fabergé, proved highly significant. Until his very final days Armand Hammer would tell the same story of how he began collecting and how collecting became more than just a hobby for his brother and himself, developing into a profitable way to invest the money they earned in Russia; how in 1928 he met the American antiques dealer Emery Sakho, who was very interested in developing the export of works of art from Russia but was unable to break through the bureaucratic barriers involved; how, when he visited Hammer's residence, the Brown House,⁵ Sakho's jaw literally dropped in amazement at the sight of the icons, carpets, 18th-century furniture, old Russian paintings, dinner services of Meissen and Sèvres porcelain and ecclesiastical robes embroidered in gold and silver. "Sakho told me that if I found a way to ship home these treasures, he'd be able to sell them at a handsome profit," Hammer recalled. "He had the expertise and I had the merchandise, so we became partners."⁶ Hammer very quickly managed to obtain permission for his exports, paying only fifteen per cent in customs duty: at the very worst period of the Great Depression three huge containers holding the Hammer Collection arrived in New York.

Due to the intractability of Joseph Duveen, Hammer had missed out on the prospect of large earnings in the role of mediator for the sale of paintings from the Hermitage, which had been offered to him by Anastas Mikoyan. Now he was trying to make up lost ground. In 1926 a change in foreign policy forced Armand Hammer to sell his asbestos concessions to the Soviet government. Subsequently, by way of compensation for the loss of his pencil



7

The dollars from the sales were sent to a Swiss bank and converted into French francs (with the French bankers taking their percentage). Moscow only received its money when these operations had been completed. See: Robert Williams, *Russia Imagined. Art, Culture and National Identity, 1840–1995*, p. 223.

8

A. Hammer, *My Century — The Twentieth*, p. 118.

9

Professional footballer Alexander Schaffer left Hungary in the 1920s and settled first in Paris, then in New York. During the 1920s and 1930s he made frequent visits to Moscow and worked in close collaboration with the Paris gallery "A La Vieille Russie," through which both émigrés and the Soviet government sold jewellery and works of art. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Hammer and Schaffer worked together. In 1927 Emmanuel Snowman of the Wartski Gallery in London anticipated Hammer and Schaffer's success by completing several purchases from the Soviet government.

10

C. Blumay, H. Edwards, *The Dark Side of Power. The Real Armand Hammer*. New York, 1992, p. 102.

factory, Mikoyan offered him the opportunity to sell antiques, which he successfully passed off as treasures formerly owned by the Russian royal family. The Hammer brothers continued to export antiques until 1938, and the Soviet treasury continued to receive money from the sales until the 1950s.⁷

The first part of the collection was sold in January 1931 at an auction arranged in New York. Bidding did not go well, and net profits barely amounted to seventy thousand dollars. The auction was not even saved by the fact that the lots on offer actually did include some items that had belonged to the Russian imperial family, such as the Emperor Paul I's writing desk, which went for a mere two hundred dollars. Despite "lively dealing among twenty or so female buyers," the prices were low: a tapestry belonging to Karl XII of Sweden was sold for fifty-seven dollars and fifty cents, a 17th-century Russian icon went for seventy-five dollars, and twelve plates from the dinner service of Nicholas I for two hundred. This was the period of the Great Depression. Harry and Victor telegraphed in annoyance and frustration to Armand in Paris, asking how they could be expected to sell tsarist trinkets when stock-brokers were throwing themselves out of windows and ex-presidents of corporations were selling apples on the street.⁸

Armand, however, refused to share his brothers' defeatist mood and decided to use unorthodox methods. He had the idea of bypassing the galleries and selling the items in shops, and not small shops, but the huge luxurious department stores of the American cities. This was an idea which could only be made to work in the land of the American dream. Letters offering the chance to sell the treasures of the Romanovs at prices forty per cent below retail were sent simultaneously to several firms. In the spring of 1931 only one firm in St. Louis responded to the offer, but by the autumn of 1932 the business was successfully launched. A six-month tour of American universities was under way, starting in St. Louis and following the route Chicago – Cleveland – Pittsburg – Buffalo – Detroit – Richmond – Denver – Seattle – San Francisco – Minneapolis. There was an extensive advertising campaign in the press. Armand and Victor Hammer read lectures by turns and Armand tried his hand at literature and published a book, *The Quest of the Romanoff Treasures*. The coincidence with the appearance of the memoirs of the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna and the Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich served to heighten interest in events in Russia. Taken together, this all produced a strong impression on romantically inclined rich American women who dreamed of buying things that had once been the property of members of the Russian royal family, and the Hammer Collection did contain at least some items which had belonged to the last emperor – in 1930 eleven Fabergé Easter eggs had been issued to him from the Armoury.

The 1933 sale in the New York department store Lord & Taylor was the culminating point of the Hammers' campaign: in six months the brothers had sold half a million dollars' worth of goods, a quite incredible sum for a country still battling the consequences of economic crisis. In that same year, after the USA officially recognised the Soviet Union, Hammer signed a three-year contract with Lord & Taylor for the sale of Russian antiques. At the same time, to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, he arranged a showing for President Roosevelt of a silver model of a ship by Fabergé which had been a gift to the Tsarevich Alexey from Russia's shipbuilders.

Despite the appearance of competition in the shape of Russian Imperial Treasures Inc., a firm set up by Alexander Schaffer and his wife, Ray, which organised an exhibition called *A Collection of Genuine Imperial Art Treasures* in New York in 1933,⁹ the Hammers' business continued to do well. The Hammer Gallery was opened in New York and shortly afterwards it acquired a branch in Palm Beach. Not many people were aware that the brocade, fabrics, ecclesiastical robes, silver, porcelain, glass and Fabergé jewellery were provided to Hammer by the Soviet authorities and had no connection at all with the family property of the Romanovs.



Armand Hammer
Photograph, 1970s
Ullstein Bilderdienst, Berlin

Throughout his life, Hammer was always on the look-out for a profitable line of business: he sold cattle, built America's first factory for producing alcohol from potatoes, and in 1954, when he moved to California, he invested his capital in Occidental Petroleum. Following the triumph of his first exhibition in the Soviet Union in 1972, Hammer presented to the Soviet government a portrait by Goya (by no means one of the great Spaniard's major masterpieces). In a reciprocal gesture Minister of Culture Ekaterina A. Furtseva gave instructions for him to be given a canvas by Kazimir Malevich from the reserves of the Tretyakov Gallery. Soon afterwards Hammer sold the painting to the well-known Cologne collector Peter Ludwig for one million marks.

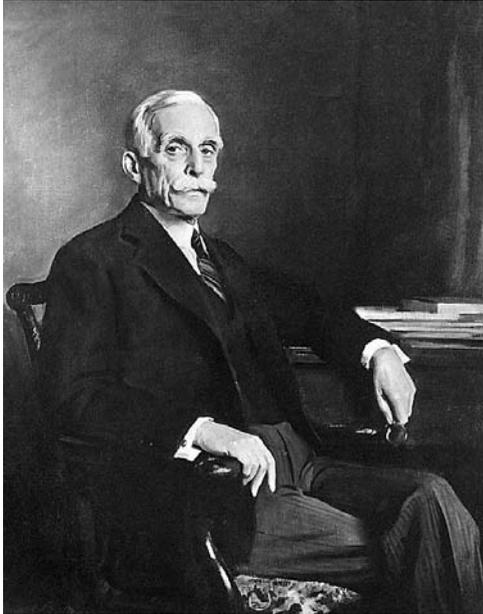
The fact that the items Armand Hammer managed to export from Moscow in 1931 were not actually his own property was carefully concealed for more than half a century. It never occurred to anyone that the brothers, as Robert Williams succinctly puts it, were not so much buyers as salesmen. In the 1920s Armand Hammer was one of the Soviet Union's main commercial agents, working for a fixed commission. Victor Hammer only confessed shortly before he died that almost all the valuable items from the "Hammer Collection" belonged to the Soviet authorities, who had put them in the Brown House as an advertising ploy.¹⁰ Previously Victor had claimed that each new acquisition had to be registered with the Museum Department and that from time to time the house was visited "for inventurisation" by members of the department's staff authorised to remove any item they chose, but now it turned out that the regular inspections had been to make sure that all those items which never belonged to the brothers were being kept safe and intact.

In 1935 the enterprising brothers organised a selling exhibition entitled *150 Years of Russian Paintings*, and in 1937 they held a huge exhibition of icons from a "private collection" in Moscow. Their 1939 exhibition, *The Cellini of the North*, consisted of three hundred and fifty articles produced in the famous Fabergé workshops. The profit from the sale of Easter eggs, clocks, toys and jewellery to King Farouk of Egypt amounted to two million dollars.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War the Hammers had sold most of the collection they had exported from Russia – all that French furniture and Sèvres porcelain, all those carpets, pictures and icons. The company's potential was exhausted and the market was saturated. Moreover, a law had been passed in the USSR forbidding the export of objets d'art and closing off a source of substantial income for both parties.

All his life Armand Hammer was first and foremost a businessman. He was not particularly concerned about the area in which he made his money – oil, pencils or icons. In 1962 he came to Moscow as the president of a major oil company and met with an aged Anastas Mikoyan, and in 1972 he exhibited his collection of art works in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. During the 1980s Hammer continued to send exhibitions and donate pictures. Every one of his visits, which included receptions in the Kremlin, was reported on Russian television, but virtually no information leaked out about the deals he made or the contracts he signed. Hammer had a flat in Lavrushinsky Lane and his own representative office which handled his firm's affairs and took an interest in Russian oil, gas and other mineral resources. Hammer himself had become a living monument to friendship and co-operation between the USA and the USSR.

Andrew Mellon



Andrew William Mellon, the son of a Pittsburgh banker who extended credit to the extremely rich American industrialists Carnegie, Ford and Frick. When he joined the family business in 1874 he displayed an exceptional talent for banking and finance. In 1882 he became head of the family's Mellon National Bank and by 1900 he held a controlling interest in his own bank and in large companies in oil, automobile manufacture, ship-building and iron and steel. By 1930 the capital of the Mellon clan had increased to two billion dollars. In 1921 Mellon was appointed Secretary of the US Treasury and held the post under three presidents. He was a fervent advocate of high duties, minimal state involvement in the economy and the protection of the national interest abroad. During his time in office the US national debt was reduced, the Federal budget was kept to a minimum and a tax reform was implemented. Mellon's policies underlay the prosperity of the USA in the 1920s and also the subsequent crisis.

Photo Bilderdienst Sddeutschen Verlag, München

The United States of America was the last country to establish official diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Whether by coincidence or not, less than two weeks before this historical event, which occurred on 16 November 1933, the front page of *The New York Times* carried an article with the sensational headline “Two Famous Paintings Are Sold By Soviet to the Metropolitan.” The story concerned the purchase of two panels – *The Crucifixion* and *The Last Judgement* – constituting the so-called *Tatishchev Altarpiece*, attributed to van Eyck. The article claimed that the acquisition of these small altar paintings was more important for the museum than any other purchase made in its entire history.

The museum owed its fortunate acquisition of this masterpiece of early Netherlands painting to the New York gallery of Knoedler & Co. The head of the company, Charles Henschel, told the paper's correspondent how he had acted as intermediary for the sale over a period of less than one and a half years of a number of “gems” from the picture gallery at the Hermitage – canvases by the greatest masters of European painting which had been reproduced over and over again in catalogues and guide books.

“Four years ago... we received confidential information that the Soviets had concluded to dispose of a number of their great masterpieces to raise funds, as part of their Five-Year Plan. As soon as the possibility of the sale of such world famous pictures became known to us, we took steps to establish contacts with the proper authorities, for we realized that any delay in acting would mean the loss of this exceptional opportunity, it being obvious that the greatest and most powerful competition in the art world would ensue.

“We started negotiations and over a period of four years acquired many of the masterpieces that were first brought to Russia by Catherine the Great.”¹

In his interview Charles Henschel chose not to expand on how the biggest art deal of the 20th century was put through with the money of the US Treasury Secretary and one of the richest men in the country, Andrew Mellon, the Knoedler Gallery's main client.

Of course, from the point of view of confidentiality and “keeping face,” collaboration with Gulbenkian had suited *Antikvariat* very well. But on the other hand, letting masterpieces go at his prices made absolutely no financial sense. “Mr. Five Per Cent” paid ludicrously low prices, citing the risk and the absence of any guarantees, and yet he seemed willing to buy up all of the Soviets' finest reserves. It was only natural that when a new client appeared, prepared to pay out much larger amounts of cash, *Antikvariat* severed all contacts with Gulbenkian.

The Soviet government had begun looking for intermediaries in the West during the winter of 1928–1929. Among the first to discover that the Soviet authorities had decided to sell objects from the galleries of the Hermitage were Armand and Victor Hammer. Armand was informed by the People's Commissar for Trade, Anastas Mikoyan, whom he knew quite well.² The information was immediately forwarded to his brother Harry, who lived in New York. In turn Harry instantly communicated the news to the “antiques king” Joseph Duveen. Both the prices and the historical significance of the Hermitage masterpieces made them the right kind of goods for him to handle. Duveen, who shortly thereafter became Lord Milbank, acknowledged no art except the works of the old masters. He dealt exclusively in unique items, which he bought all around the world for the very richest of American buyers – Ford, Frick, Rockefeller and the like. Duveen, who had begun his brilliant career twenty years earlier with the purchase of a collection of pictures in Berlin for two and a half million dollars, was the only worthy choice as a partner for the Kremlin.³

Participation in the deal also promised to yield rich dividends for the Hammers. The commission fees for services as intermediaries were set at ten per cent (from buyer and seller alike) of the cost of each picture sold. Thanks to their long-standing connections at the highest levels of the Soviet government, they were able quite quickly to obtain a meeting with the head of *Antikvariat*, who naturally pretended that he did not understand what they

Andrew Mellon in his apartments on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington
Photo from the archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington

In the 1920s Mellon bought masterpieces by European masters primarily through the New York gallery of Knoedler & Co. His collection of art works, valued at approximately thirty-five million dollars, was donated to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in 1937.



1

The New York Times, Saturday, November 4, 1933.

2

C. Blumay, H. Edwards, *The Dark Side of Power. The Real Armand Hammer*. New York, 1992, p.104.

3

Joseph Duveen's mission of enlightenment was dual in nature. He taught American millionaire collectors what were the greatest works of art, while at the same time explaining that such masterpieces could only be obtained from him.

4
Williams, pp. 157–158.

5
Ibid., p. 158.

6
Ibid., p. 158. Bernard Berenson (1865–1959), the major American historian of Italian Renaissance painting, was Duveen's senior expert and valuer. It was the efforts of this outstanding connoisseur which made Italian painting fashionable so that prices for it rose steeply in the late 1920s. Victor Hammer many years later acknowledged that selling at the prices offered was like giving away a Rembrandt for ten dollars.

7
Francis Matthiesen studied the history of art in Munich. Before the revolution the city had a small Russian colony and Matthiesen was acquainted with many artists from Russia, which later helped him in developing contacts with the Soviet authorities. See: Norman, pp. 195–196.

8
Henri Mercillon, *Quand l'URSS bradait sa patrimoine* *Connaissance des Arts*, June 1990, p. 143.

During his years as a student in Munich the German antiquary Francis Matthiesen still used his own name, Franz Satzenstein (he took his wife's surname in the 1920s). The information presented by the author of the article was obtained directly from Matthiesen's son, Patrick. According to other sources, Matthiesen did not change his name until the 1940s, when he moved to London.

9
See: Norman, p. 195.

10
The pictures in the Hermitage collection were reproduced in catalogues and guides which were published in several languages in the early 1920s. The negotiations between *Antikvariat* and the firm of Knoedler & Co., which bought pictures for Andrew Mellon, went slowly, since Mellon insisted on the right to make his own choice of pictures from N.N. Wrangel's book, *Masterpieces of the Hermitage Picture Gallery*, published in French in 1909 by Hanfstengl (see: Piotrovsky, p. 60).

11
Burton Hersh, *The Mellon Family*, New York, 1978, p. 284.

were talking about. But then “he archly suggested that ‘if your friends in America want to make offers, we are obligated to submit them to the proper authorities, and then whatever happens, happens.’”⁴

Two days later the Hammers received from Duveen a list of forty masterpieces for which he wanted to offer five million dollars. The indignant head of *Antikvariat* took this as an insult: “‘What do they think we are? Children? Don't they realize we know what is being sold in Paris, London and New York? If they want to deal with us seriously, let them make serious offers.’ To emphasize this point, Shapiro pounded his fist on a conveniently nearby Hermitage catalogue and argued that Leonardo da Vinci's *Benois Madonna* alone was worth at least \$2.5 million.”⁵

The response from New York to this “chance remark” was instantaneous: “Concrete offer on Leonardo da Vinci \$2,000,000. If offer accepted we will arrange irrevocable letter of credit and ask Bernard Berenson to go to Leningrad to seal up picture.”⁶ However, an exception was made only for the *Benois Madonna*, which Duveen had already once allowed to slip through his fingers. The New York antiquarian was not used to working with the kind of prices Moscow was asking, and he was not prepared to give any ground. In any case, he knew for certain that there was only one man in America to whom he could offer the Hermitage masterpieces – Andrew Mellon. But for many years now Mellon's exclusive dealer had been Duveen's competitor, Charles Henschel.

Henschel's gallery Knoedler & Co. had a partnership arrangement with the Colnaghi Gallery of London, which was linked in turn with the Matthiesen Gallery in Berlin, which was in direct contact with *Antikvariat* and even had an office in Moscow. All the business of the Berlin gallery was handled by the young antiquarian Francis Matthiesen.⁷ The graphics specialist Karl Meison, who had an office in the same building on Victoria Strasse, worked with the Soviets, selecting drawings to be put up for sale by the Hermitage. According to one version of events, it was Meison who informed Matthiesen about the forthcoming Hermitage sales.⁸ Another version has it that Matthiesen found out himself in November 1929 when the Soviet government asked him to come to Leningrad to value one hundred of the finest paintings in the Hermitage.⁹ Armed with this kind of information, he had to act without delay, but the sums of money required were colossal, far more than Matthiesen possessed, so he had to look for partners. The next to come into possession of this important information was Otto Gatekunst of the Colnaghi Gallery, located on Bond Street in London. Charles Henschel was the last to hear the news. Henschel did not have that kind of money either – but he had a client who did.

Andrew Mellon wasted little time in agreeing to finance Henschel's purchases. Under the terms of the agreement which they concluded, Mellon was obliged to pay Henschel a twenty-five per cent commission on those paintings which he selected for himself. If Mellon did not take any of the works which he had selected from the reproductions he was shown, the dealer guaranteed not only to return his money, but also to pay him a quarter of the profit he made on the sale of each canvas.¹⁰ Henschel wrote to inform Mellon that they were buying the pictures for prices which meant they had nothing to worry about, since they were guaranteed a profit of at least fifty per cent.¹¹

The Soviet authorities proved quite remarkably accommodating. As Henschel had anticipated, the huge sum of almost one million dollars offered for the first lot of pictures from the Hermitage proved an effective temptation. With things going so well the acquisition of the other masterpieces was now only a matter of time. But even though the tactics used were clearly successful, Henschel, afraid that the deal might fall through, decided to participate personally in the signing of the next contract. In his *New York Times* interview, the head of Knoedler & Co. related how he was *en route* across the Atlantic on the liner “Olympic” when he was called to the telephone by his “London office” with the good news that Nikolai Ilyin,

12

The New York Times, Saturday, November 4, 1933.

13

Andrew Mellon, whose fortune was estimated at two billion dollars, paid five hundred and fifty-nine thousand one hundred and ninety dollars for the first three pictures. The next nine cost him three million fifty nine thousand nine hundred and eight dollars.

14

From the mid-1920s the United States was the Soviet Union's biggest supplier of industrial goods and raw materials. Automobiles, tractors, non-ferrous metals, cotton and rubber were bought using long-term credits extended by American companies (General Electric, General Motors, Standard Oil and International Harvester) to *Amorg*, the main Soviet trade agency in America. In 1929 orders placed by *Amorg* with American companies tripled and the USA replaced Germany as the leading exporter to the USSR, providing up to 25 per cent of all its imports.

15

The only decision in which any concession to the USSR could be detected was the permit to import manganese into the US at dumping prices which was signed by Mellon in February 1931. However, this decision favouring the USSR was not taken for the sake of a new set of pictures, but because the steel mills which Mellon controlled needed manganese. (This fact did not escape the attention of the senator for Nevada, who immediately demanded an investigation into the affair.) See: Williams, pp. 167–169.

The Soviet Union needed American capital, technology and the latest inventions. Following the collapse of the stock market in late 1929, which closed down banks and caused mass unemployment, trade with the USSR became more important for the USA. In 1930 the volume of Soviet-American trade reached one hundred and fourteen million three hundred and ninety-nine thousand dollars, but in 1931 the overall figure fell back to only a little above one hundred million dollars, and in 1932 it failed even to reach that level.

16

Giorgione's *Judith*, a picture coveted by many buyers, was the only authenticated work by the Italian master in the Hermitage collection. The difficulties with the sale arose not only because of the Soviet authorities' intractable attitude, but because the painting had been transferred from wood to canvas, a process which Western art dealers regarded with great suspicion.

a senior *Antikvariat* functionary, had arrived in Berlin and informed them that the Soviets had finally agreed to sell the van Eyck *Annunciation* that Mellon had been dreaming about for half a million dollars.¹²

When the delighted Henschel arrived in Leningrad, he found Gusemeyer from the Colnaghi Gallery and Mansfeld, representing the Matthiesen Gallery already there, (Mansfeld being the only one who spoke Russian). The outcome of the negotiations between the international triumvirate of antiquarians was a decision for all sides to continue mutually beneficial co-operation. The Soviet authorities would be able to supplement their budget significantly, and the antique dealers would gain control of twenty-five masterpieces from the picture gallery at the Hermitage.

The seventy year-old billionaire Andrew Mellon assigned more than six million dollars for the purchase of the pictures.¹³ It is worth noting that Mellon's purchases were entirely unconnected with his public activities in the post of Secretary of the US Treasury which he occupied at that time. Far from facilitating the development of US-Soviet trade relations, as many assumed, he actually did everything in his power to prevent their establishment¹⁴. His personal contribution to Soviet-American trade went no further than the money received by the Soviet government for the Hermitage pictures, which, however represented a significant proportion of the official Soviet export figures.

Under his first agreement with the international consortium of dealers in the spring of 1930 Mellon received three pictures for which he paid slightly more than half a million dollars. In summer of the same year Mellon bought a fourth picture, van Dyck's *Portrait of Isabella Brant*. At the same time, on his initiative, the American government introduced an embargo on imports of Soviet matches. The fifth masterpiece from Russia which went to grace the Mellon collection was Jan van Eyck's perfectly preserved *Annunciation*.

From July 1930 to February 1931 Mellon selected another nine pictures, which cost him three million dollars, including three Rembrandts, but even more importantly Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* and Raphael's *Saint George*. The loss of the Raphael masterpiece was a particularly heavy blow for the Hermitage. *Saint George* was regarded as one of the gems of the gallery's collection. It was the only picture to be reproduced in colour in the last guide to the Hermitage collection published before the revolution, which was edited by Alexander Benois.

Strange to say, the acquisition of pictures which once belonged to the emperors of Russia only seemed to harden Andrew Mellon's implacable attitude to the Bolsheviks. In July 1930, on the basis of article 307 of the new import tariff, the Treasury Secretary decided to introduce an embargo on imports of timber from the USSR if it could be shown that it had been cut using the forced labour of inmates of the prison camps located in the area of the White Sea.¹⁵

In March-April 1931 Mellon made his final and most expensive purchase from the Hermitage. For seven works, including *Portrait of an Officer* by Frans Hals, *The House of Cards* by Jean-Baptiste Simeon Chardin, *The Crucifixion* by Perugino, *Venus with a Mirror* by Titian and the *Alba Madonna* by Raphael, he paid two million three hundred thousand dollars. The Raphael tondo alone cost Mellon one million one hundred and sixty-six thousand four hundred dollars, setting a world record price for a work of art which stood for a long time. Perhaps it was the great expense which fuelled the Treasury Secretary's fury: in April 1931 Mellon imposed a temporary embargo on imports of asbestos from the Soviet Union (in May 1933 it was repealed by the Roosevelt administration, which could find no justification for the decision).

The buying came to a halt in the spring of 1931, even though Henschel and his partners were convinced that Mellon would definitely finance the acquisition of another two pictures – the *Madonna Litta* by Leonardo da Vinci and Giorgione's *Judith*.¹⁶ This, however, did not happen, and probably the buyer was not to blame: it seems clear from the documents that

17

The telegrams and letters which have survived are terse, but not always precise, and they required further elucidation, for instance the following telegramme: "Convey support disposal *Antikvariat* Rembrandt picture *Pallas* Rembrandt *Tatus* Watteau *Musician* picture *Glass lemonade* Vamdondiana." *Tatus* may be quite easily recognisable as an error for "Titus," but who could guess that "Vamdoidiana" should be "Houdon Diana"? (Piotrovsky, p. 61).

18

Negotiations concerning the sale of the panels began as early as 1931, when the Soviet authorities were asking six hundred thousand dollars for van Eyck's work. The dealing lasted for almost two years until eventually the Metropolitan Museum managed to acquire this rare example of Netherlands painting from the Knoedler Gallery for one hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars. See Robert C. Williams, *Russia Imagined. Art, Culture and National identity, 1840–1995*, New York, 1999, p. 227.

19

See: *The New York Times*, November 1, 1930.

20

The income which Mellon failed to declare in 1931 amounted to three million dollars.

the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) had issued instructions that *Antikvariat* was not to be allowed to make the sale, a rare occurrence. The strongest opposition had come from within the museum. *Antikvariat* was constantly obliged to demand that instructions be carried out more promptly and make threats of reprisals against the employees of the Hermitage who took their time over the dispatch of pictures. The functionaries in the central office for purchases and sales had almost no understanding of the nature of the goods they were dealing in and they confused the artists' names. Some of the messages received by the museum were almost laughable: "Confirm previous telegramme instead of van Dyck read van Eyck."¹⁷

Andrew Mellon preferred not to talk too much about his purchases from the Hermitage. He was in any case exceptionally taciturn by nature, and in America he was known as "the apostle of silence." Mellon himself always stayed out of the limelight, although he was no less passionate a collector than his friends Henry Ford and Henry Frick. In 1930, when he began buying pictures from the Hermitage, he was thinking of founding an art gallery in Washington, an idea which first occurred to him in 1927. He had his future museum in mind all the time as he went about acquiring major works by the European masters with such extreme caution. According to Mellon's biographer Joseph Duveen, who knew his subject's caprices only too well, the Secretary of the Treasury couldn't bring himself to hang most of the pictures he bought in his own home. This strange individual persistently avoided depictions of the female nude – Titian's *Venus With a Mirror* was the only picture of the kind in his collection. His hostility was also aroused by pictures with dark backgrounds and tragic subjects. He thought it inappropriate to hang works on religious themes in halls where he might hold parties at which his guests could smoke and drink. All of which helps to explain why Mellon never showed any interest in the van Eyck dyptich or *Tatishchev Altarpiece* panels, which were probably bought on his money.¹⁸

Biographers have claimed that Mellon did not make any public announcement concerning his purchases because he was waiting for the right moment. He felt that with the country in the grip of depression the Secretary of the Treasury simply had no right to announce he had spent more than six million dollars on works of art. It would make no difference to public opinion whether he had acquired them for his personal collection or for donation to a museum.

Even though by November 1930 the journalists already knew the final destination of the pictures that were disappearing from the halls of the Hermitage, the few reports that appeared in the American newspapers¹⁹ did not highlight his involvement. The name of Andrew Mellon only attracted attention in 1934, when he was publicly accused of failing to pay his taxes.²⁰ For the Democrats, who had won power from the Republicans for the first time in twelve years, Mellon was the living embodiment of all the errors committed by their opponents (above all he was associated with the Great Depression that had paralysed the USA). Finding financial improprieties in his bank account was not too difficult. In the end Mellon was forced to apologise and announce that in 1931, the fatal year, he had donated three million dollars to a fund for the establishment of an art gallery in Washington. Despite the unpleasantness of the legal proceedings, Andrew Mellon continued to collect and he acquired another twenty-six pictures, including works by the Italian masters Cimabue and Masaccio, canvases by Thomas Gainsborough and many other masterpieces.

Shortly before his death, in December 1936, he wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that he wished to make his collection of one hundred and thirty-two works of art, including one hundred and fifteen pictures he had collected for an art gallery, accessible to the public. Andrew Mellon added to this gift the sum of one and a half million dollars for the development of a new museum which was duly established in the capital of the United States with significant input from the museums of the Soviet Union.

The New York Times

Payment has been made to the Copyright Clearance Center for this article.

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

LATE CITY EDITION
WEATHER—Fair, colder today;
tomorrow cloudy, probably rain.
Temperature today—Max. 60, min. 44.

VOL. LXXXIII, No. 27,874. PUBLISHED AT 215 NASSAU ST., N. Y. NEW YORK, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1933. P TWO CENTS

LAYOR IN BROOKLYN RALLY ASKS VOTERS OF BOROUGH TO CARRY CITY FOR PARTY

BRIEN URGES LOYALTY

Brooklyn layor, in a speech before a large gathering of party workers, urged the voters of the borough to carry the city for the party.

CONFIDENCE GROWS

Confidence in the party is growing, according to the layor, as the campaign progresses.

URLEY TO AID McKEE

Urley is expected to support McKee in the upcoming election.

Five City Advisers Quit Over Budget

Five city advisers have resigned in protest over the city budget.

Men Named by Undermyer Find Political Motives, With 'No Will to Save' Have Ruled.

The men named by Undermyer have been found to have political motives and no will to save.

PROPOSED CUTS IGNORED

The proposed cuts have been ignored by the city administration.

Mayor's Fiscal Adviser, Also Criticizing Inaction, Asks Committee to Carry On.

The mayor's fiscal adviser is criticizing the city's inaction and asking the committee to continue its work.

REICH CULTURE PUT ON NATIONAL BASIS; CHAMBER IS SET UP

Artists, Writers, Scientists and Actors Are Organized in Governmental Body.

A new cultural chamber has been established, bringing together artists, writers, scientists, and actors under a governmental body.

GOEBBELS GUIDES PROJECT

Goebbels is guiding the project, ensuring it aligns with the government's goals.

Seven Subdivisions Created With Membership Likely to Be Compulsory.

Seven subdivisions have been created, and membership is likely to be compulsory.

FLEET TO RETURN TO ATLANTIC COAST

The fleet is expected to return to the Atlantic coast soon.

Roosevelt Orders Armada East in Spring After Three Years on Pacific.

Roosevelt has ordered the armada to return east in the spring after three years on the Pacific.

SHIFF TO COST \$1,000,000

The ship is estimated to cost \$1,000,000.

While Tactical Reasons Are Assigned, Move Is Held Friendly Toward Japan.

While tactical reasons are assigned, the move is held to be friendly toward Japan.

Two Famous Paintings Are Sold By Soviet to the Metropolitan

Diptych by Robert von Eyck Includes 'The Crucifixion' and 'The Last Judgment'—Art Treasures, Transferred From Leningrad, on Exhibition Here Today.

Two famous paintings, a diptych by Robert von Eyck, have been sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

By THOMAS O. LINN

The diptych was attributed to John van Eyck, equally famous younger brother of Hubert. In this piece, however, scholars have pronounced it the work of Hubert, a conclusion to which the Metropolitan concurs.

CHAMBER DEMANDS A RETURN TO GOLD TO AID IN RECOVERY

The chamber demands a return to gold to aid in the country's recovery.

CONFIDENCE IN MONEY IS HELD VITAL—ROOSEVELT POLICY HAS FEW DEFENDERS.

Confidence in money is held vital, and Roosevelt's policy has few defenders.

LAUGHS AT 'NEW WORLD'

There is much laughter at the 'new world' proposals.

ROOSEVELT STANDS BY NRA'S PROGRAM

Roosevelt stands by the NRA's program, despite opposition.

Will Give It a Chance to Prove Itself Before Taking Up a Swoop or Other Plan.

The government will give the NRA a chance to prove itself before taking any other plan.

GOVERNORS DRAFT A PLAN FOR DRASTIC PRICE FIXING; PRESIDENT MAY MODIFY IT

Confidence Restored Here By Roosevelt, Horne Says

Confidence has been restored here by Roosevelt, according to Horne.

AAA OFFICIALS DISSENT

AAA officials dissent from the price fixing plan.

GOVERNORS ARE HOPEFUL

The governors are hopeful about the plan.

Count on President's Acceptance of Formula as 'Feasible and Workable.'

Count on the president's acceptance of the formula as 'feasible and workable.'

WILL PRESENT IT TODAY

The plan will be presented today.

ROOSEVELT STANDS BY NRA'S PROGRAM

Roosevelt stands by the NRA's program.

Will Give It a Chance to Prove Itself Before Taking Up a Swoop or Other Plan.

The government will give the NRA a chance to prove itself before taking any other plan.

The front page of the Saturday edition of The New York Times for 4 November 1933, containing the article "Two Famous Paintings Are Sold By Soviet to the Metropolitan"

Joseph Davies and Marjorie Post

The foundation for Joseph E. Davies' brilliant career was laid in 1910, when he became leader of the Democratic Party of the State of Wisconsin and joined his friend Franklin D. Roosevelt in supporting Woodrow Wilson.

In 1913, when Wilson was president, Davies moved to Washington and joined the presidential staff. However, he soon withdrew from full-time politics in order to develop his own law practice.

Davies' victory in the 1925 Ford Motor trial made his name as a lawyer and consolidated his financial position – the fee he received was an unprecedented one million dollars.

In 1937 Joseph Davies was appointed US ambassador to the Soviet Union, and on 19 January of that year the new envoy and his wife arrived in the Soviet capital. The Davies brought with them to hungry Moscow fourteen refrigerators, two tonnes of frozen food and two thousand packages of fresh cream. These reserves were all kept in the cellar of the ambassadorial residence in Spasopeskovsky Lane.

The second US ambassador to the USSR, Joseph Davies, arrives in Moscow with his wife Marjorie and daughter Emlyn.

Photograph, 1937. Associated Press



On 19 January 1937 the new American ambassador Joseph Davies arrived in Moscow to take up his post. After he and his wife had been accorded all the appropriate honours, the new envoy's family set out for their residence in Spasopeskovsky Lane, where the embassy staff had been preparing for the ambassador's arrival for more than two months. An interior designer and two assistants had been specially brought in from the States in order to refurbish and fit out the mansion, and they had been supported in their endeavours by a group of six drawn from the Davies' numerous body of domestic servants, headed by the butler. Their efforts, however, did not meet with the approval of the new emissary and his wife. According to eye-witness accounts they actually felt the residence presented a rather sorry spectacle. Most seriously disappointed of all was Madam Davies. To her mind the elegant neoclassical mansion which had been selected in 1933 by the first American ambassador, William Bullitt, was not luxurious enough. The requirements of Marjorie Merriweather Post, who took the name Davies following her third marriage, far exceeded those of the Siberian merchant Vtorov, the original owner of this house in one of the lanes around Moscow's central Arbat Street. But then, Madam Davies had good reason to trust her own ideas on how an ambassador's residence ought to look. At forty-eight years of age Marjorie Davies was one of the richest women in America,¹ and she could very well afford to indulge her passion for elegance. She first began buying antiques during the First World War, after marrying for the first of four times. She collected tapestries, Sèvres porcelain, oriental carpets, English ceramics, silver, crystal and furniture. Not content to remain a dilettante, she enrolled for courses at the Metropolitan Museum, where she made the acquaintance of the legendary art dealer Joseph Duveen, who became her consultant. At first she quite often purchased items for the numerous residences and estates which she owned from Duveen, but she rapidly developed her own critical appreciation of the applied arts, especially where French furniture was concerned. Before her arrival in Moscow she had only the most general idea of Russian art, gleaned from items produced by the firm of Fabergé (which had become fashionable in America in the late 1920s following the impor-

¹
In 1936 Davies married Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887–1973), the richest woman in America, who in 1914 had inherited the massive food products company “General Foods,” which generated annual net profits of more than fifty million dollars.

²
The small Fabergé box was bought in 1926 at Cartier’s of New York, who had acquired it from Felix Yusupov. The *Catherine the Great* Easter egg was commissioned by Nicholas II as a present for his mother for Easter 1914. Produced in the workshop of Henrik Wigström, it is decorated in the Louis 16th style with enamel miniatures in imitation of cameos, painted by Vasily Zuev. It was kept in the Anichkov Palace, from where it was transferred in 1914 to the Armoury. From 1922 to 1927 it was at *Gokhran*, then in 1927 it suddenly turned up in the Armoury again. In 1930 it was expropriated from the museum, transferred to *Antikvariat* and handed over to Armand Hammer, who had been entrusted by the Soviet government with the sale of articles of jewellery. In 1931 it was bought from Hammer by Marjorie Post’s daughter as a present for her mother.

³
Anne Odom and Arend Liana Paredes. *A Taste for Splendor. Russian Imperial and European Treasures from the Hillwood Museum*. Alexandria, 1998, p. 27.

⁴
Following her divorce from Davies in 1955, Marjorie Post bought one of the most valuable estates in Washington, a Georgian-style house set on twenty-five acres of land. In 1968 she transferred the rights to her collection and estate in Hillwood to the Smithsonian Institution. Marjorie Post’s final and most significant philanthropic gesture was to open a public museum named after herself “for the pleasure and enlightenment of the public.” In very few places outside the boundaries of Russia itself are its decorative and applied arts displayed in such impressive variety.

⁵
Williams, p. 239.

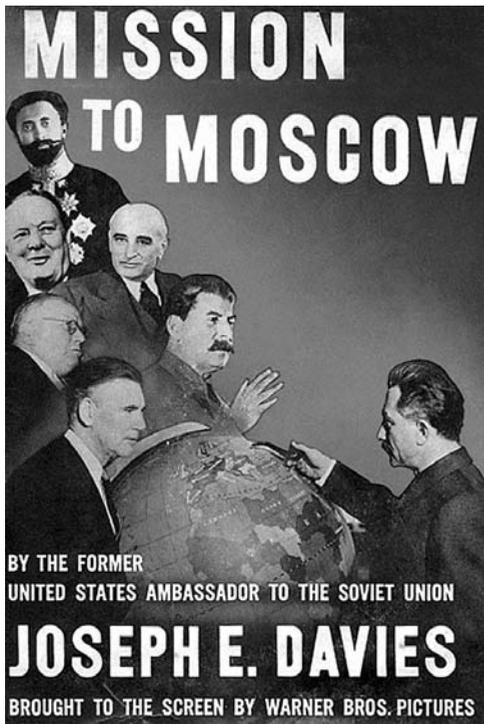
⁶
The *Torgsins* are brilliantly described in Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel, *The Master and Margarita*.

tation of several articles from Russia). She had an amethyst box with a lion on the lid from the Yusupov family collection and the Easter egg *Catherine the Great*, which was a present from the Emperor Nicholas II to his mother.²

The ambassador’s own ideas about Russia were no less vague. He found himself in Moscow thanks to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who “made a calculated decision to send to the USSR an American with cunning negotiation skills accompanied by a wife who symbolized the essence of capitalism.”³ As his memoirs, *Mission to Moscow*, testify, Davies, who did not know Russian and never fully understood the political cataclysms which shook Soviet Russia to its foundations in the tragic year of 1937, did at least attempt to gain some insight into what was going on around him. The Soviet authorities, who regarded him with especial esteem as Roosevelt’s man, allowed him access to places which were closed to many others. But the responsibility of being the ambassador of a great power to the country of the first socialist experiment proved too onerous for Joseph Davies. He was insufficiently prepared for such intensive work, and the State Department decided it would be best to transfer him to a quieter spot. Even so, the year and a half Davies spent in Russia remained the high point of his brief diplomatic career. As for the ambassador’s wife, upset as she was initially by her husband’s posting in distant Russia, she very soon discovered the positive aspects of the situation. Marjorie Post became a genuine devotee of Russian art. From this time on her artistic tastes changed, and twenty years later her Washington estate became the home of America’s only museum of Russian antiquities.⁴

Mr. and Mrs. Davies were genuinely flabbergasted by the abundance of art works and antiques of the very highest quality which were offered for sale at quite incredibly low prices, and they were quick to spot an easy opportunity to make a fortune. However, since they were not short of money and did not have to worry about their wealth being tied up in investments, they began collecting with ecstatic enthusiasm; as the ambassador subsequently admitted, for them collecting became almost a sickness. Since the Soviet authorities deliberately created exceptionally favourable conditions in order to encourage their enthusiasm, it is hardly surprising that Russia became a feverish obsession for the Davies. They were intoxicated and excited by the palaces and museums, the excursions to Leningrad with visits to the Hermitage, the regular rounds of the antique shops and commission shops. Blissfully unaware of the extensive inroads made in Moscow and Leningrad before them by Hammer, Snowman and Schaffer, who had exported antiques almost by the wagonload in the 1920s, the Davies felt as though they were exploring unknown territory. All the more so since the bottomless reserves of the state funds ensured that the shops remained well stocked even at the end of the 1930s. Buyers with money could very easily find something to interest them among the “dreary piles” of silver and gilt tableware, chandeliers, furniture and carpets which defied the comprehension of foreigners, especially Americans, who found it hard to believe “that there should be so much gold and silver plate in the world, so many miles of imported painting, such mountains of malachite and agate and lapis lazuli.”⁵

In the 1930s in the Soviet Union there were two types of institution that traded in works of art. The very choicest items were always to be found in the *Torgsins*, special shops for selling to foreigners and to Soviet citizens with foreign currency,⁶ but these were abolished in February 1936. Antiquarian artifacts flowed in an equally voluminous torrent through the shops belonging to *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga* (“International Book”) and *Antikvariat*, which both sold property supplied from the State Fund, but for roubles rather than for hard currency. For foreign diplomats, however, the most attractive places to buy were not the special institutions which sold off state property, but the ordinary commission shops. As well as second-hand items these also offered old paintings, rare porcelain and glass, bronze and furniture. It was in these *komissionki* that Mr. and Mrs. Davies sought out the rare items from which they gradually built up a collection.



The cover of Joseph Davies' book *Mission to Moscow*, on which the Warner Brothers studio based its film of the same title

Mrs. Davies was interested above all in Russian porcelain, icons and church plate as well, of course, as the elegant products of the firm of Fabergé, for which, as a true lover of splendour, she harboured a special passion. The ambassadorial couple had no need to worry about exporting their purchases. Although the 1918 decree forbidding the export of works of art had not been repealed, foreign tourists, and especially diplomats, were officially permitted to ignore its provisions.

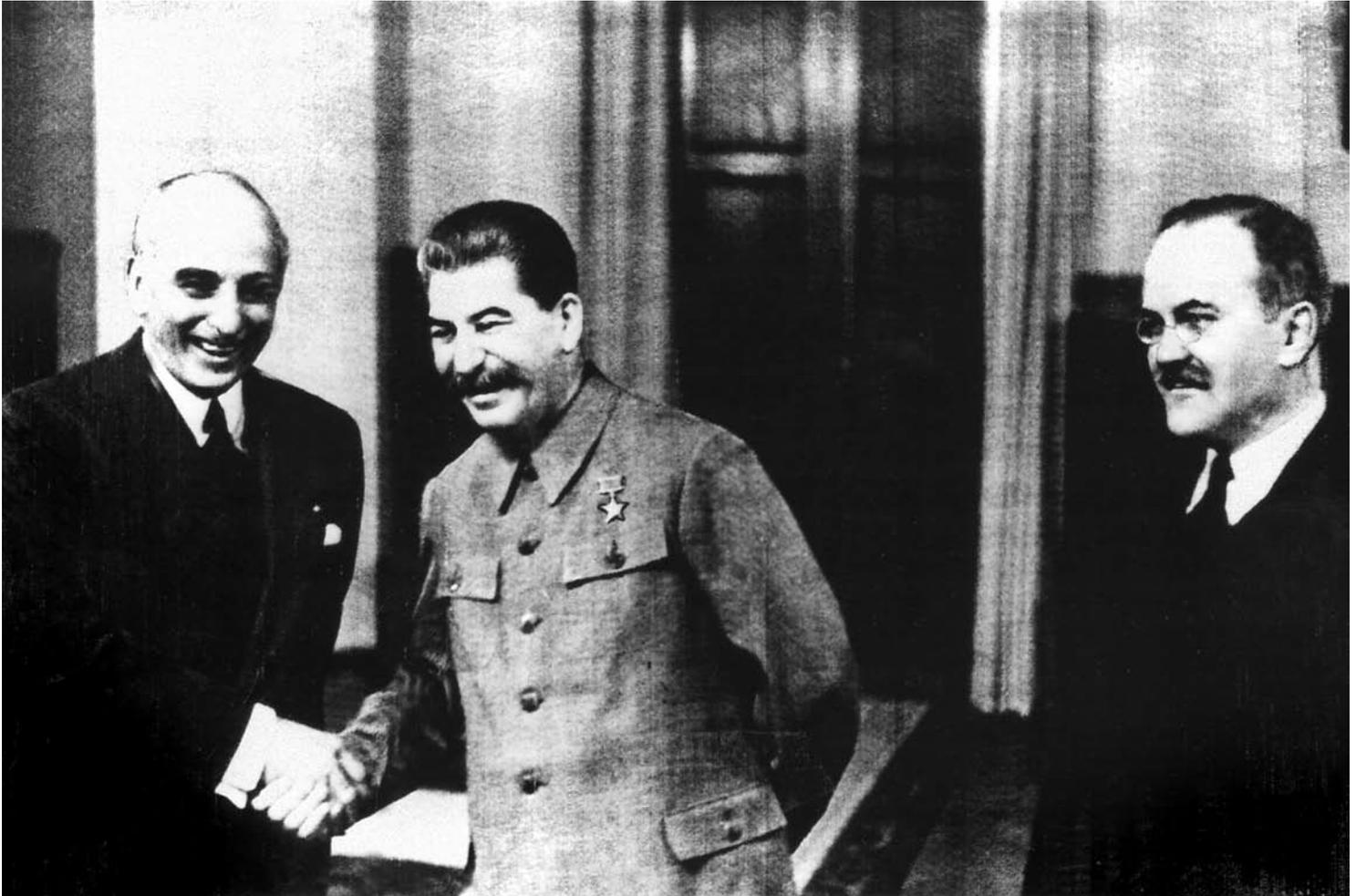
Well aware of the enthusiasm of the ambassadorial couple, the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly arranged all manner of excursions for the Davies. The ambassador methodically recorded his impressions of them in his diary, from which extracts were later published in his book. In the Kremlin, for instance, he was literally overwhelmed by the abundance of precious stones decorating the icons, the ecclesiastical and secular works of art – crown jewels, saddles, harnesses and even carriages; in the Hermitage he was enraptured by a miniature copy of the tsarist regalia made by Fabergé. Every visit to a museum fueled the Davies' passion for collecting. Their daughter Emlyn visited the commission shops almost on a daily basis, while the ambassador's wife was always finding interesting things for her collection in the shops. On one occasion, for instance, she discovered an ebony cabinet in the neo-renaissance style with bronze appliqué work and inlays of lazurite. Produced to a design by the court architect Hippolyte Monigetti, it was a gift from the imperial couple to the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich and his wife for their silver wedding anniversary. When Mrs. Davies first spotted the cabinet it still bore oval medallions with portraits of the emperor Alexander II, his brother and their wives, but when the cabinet was delivered to Spasso House, the images of the Romanovs were missing, and the "liquidated" portraits had to be replaced by medallions of lazurite. An equally rare discovery was a serving dish from a dinner service produced at the Imperial Porcelain Factory in the 1860s for the governor-general of the Caucasus, Field Marshal Prince Alexander I. Baryatinsky.⁷ From the *Antikvariat* shop in Leningrad Mrs. Davies also sent home a pair of late-1830s gilded vases from the Imperial Porcelain Factory, decorated with a frieze depicting doves.

Working her way through the jumbled heaps of lumber in the store-rooms of Moscow's commission shops, the indefatigable Marjorie Post-Davies unearthed genuine buried treasure: tarnished bronze candelabras and dust-covered pieces of porcelain turned out on closer inspection to be first-class works of art. The 17th-century communion cups which she discovered were initially covered with such a thick coating of patina and dirt that at first glance it was impossible to tell what material they were made of (sacred vessels were sold by weight, at a price of approximately five cents per gram of silver). On another occasion in a tangled heap of vestments she came across a chasuble embroidered in gold and silver which proved to be the very garment worn by the bishop during the coronation of Nicholas II in 1896.⁸

Knowing how extremely enthusiastic the Davies were about the commission shops, Soviet officials followed the American couple's collecting activity closely. On the personal instructions of Stalin, who had plans of his own for the American ambassador, the government afforded the Davies the kind of support and assistance of which any collector could only dream. In the autumn of 1937 it was suggested that they might acquire articles directly from the state's own reserves. The intermediary in this deal was the ambassador's assistant and translator Phillip Bender, who enjoyed the complete trust of his patron. We know from letters that Bender travelled to Leningrad in order to collect plates which had been set aside for the Americans from the Order of St. Vladimir dinner service, a portrait by Jean-Baptiste Greuze and articles from the firm of Fabergé of which the ambassador's wife was so fond. The trip, however, was not a complete success: Bender bought only six plates from the Order Service (paying 200 roubles for each of them), since he was not satisfied with the quality of the other specimens.⁹ Moreover, to the great chagrin of the Americans, the works by Greuze and Fabergé were taken by the Hermitage.

⁷ The service was kept in a special cabinet at Maryino, the Baryatinsky family's estate outside Moscow. It was decorated with unique compositions depicting the complete regalia of a field marshal; it can be compared with the Order Services of Catherine the Great's time.

⁸ A significant part of the ambassadorial couple's collection consisted of religious art: vestments, icons, silver church plate (they had twenty-three communion chalices alone). Following their divorce the Davies divided up their Russian collection between them. Joseph donated the chalices and chasubles belonging to him to the cathedral in Washington, which was obliged to sell them in 1980 in order to obtain the funds needed for the construction of a bell tower. In 1937 the collection of icons was donated to Wisconsin State University and is now in the Chazen Museum of Art, which was founded in 1970. There are two outstanding chalices in the collection at Hillwood. One of them, which originally came from the Alexander Nevsky Monastery and had been given to the Holy Trinity Cathedral by Catherine the Great in 1790, was bought by Emmanuel Snowman; the other came from the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, which had received it as a donation from Count Nikolay P. Rumyantsev. The collection also includes four articles of the priest's vestments made specially for the coronation of the last Russian tsar, all of which still bear *Torgsin* labels.



Davies and Stalin shake hands. USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov is on the right. Photograph. Associated Press Radiophoto

Husband and wife each demonstrated autonomy and independence in their collecting. Joseph Davies, for instance, initially bought Soviet painting and later donated his collection to his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin. His second collection, also assembled for the university, consisted entirely of icons. In late February 1937 Joseph Davies and his daughter made a six-day tour of inspection of the south of Russia. Well aware of the ambassador's interests, the organisers extended the formal programme to include not only strictly official events, but also visits to the commission shops in Kharkov, Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk. In their enthusiasm for old Russian art, the Americans also visited every one of the churches which were still working. According to Emlyn Davies, it was during this trip, while strolling around Dnepropetrovsk, that she found herself by chance in an old church which had been transformed into a museum of atheism and was enchanted by the icons, which were immediately presented to the ambassador's daughter as a gift. As Davies wrote in his Diary in 1937, the Party was particularly energetic in destroying everything to do with religion, with the exception of icons possessing purely artistic value, priestly vestments, chalices and other attributes of worship. Davies put in a request to be allowed to acquire some of these holy relics, so that he would be able "to save for ultimate sacred purposes some at least of these beautiful objects."¹⁰

Davies' request was granted. In October 1937 several museum specialists were entrusted with the task of selecting a collection of icons for him and equipping it with a complete

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Williams, pp. 251–252. About eighty items from four different Order Services, bought in eleven different countries, were brought together at Hillwood to provide table settings for a party of twelve.

¹⁰

Williams, p. 242.



A shop for selling to foreigners, or *Torgsin* on Smolenskaya Square in Moscow Photograph, 1930s. RGAKFD

catalogue raisonne. Shortly thereafter about twenty icons from the recently ruined Chudov Monastery in the Moscow Kremlin, the Tretyakov Gallery and Kiev's Monastery of the Caves were dispatched from Moscow to America. Also prepared for export was "a collection of old church relics and priests' vestments, of no intrinsic value, but of interest as souvenirs." Davies did not wish to exploit any special diplomatic privileges and insisted on paying the full export duty of twenty-eight thousand roubles. The ambassador's prolonged absences from Moscow – he was constantly either making "an inspection tour" of the Baltic on his wife's luxury yacht "Sea Cloud" or taking "unpaid leave" in order to accompany her to the spa at Vichy (in 1937 the ambassador was away from Moscow for more than half of the year) – had driven the officials of the State Department to despair. In late November 1937 the Senate approved Davies' transfer to Brussels as ambassador, but although his "Mission to Moscow" was now formally at an end, he actually remained in Spasso House until June 1938.

Special homage was paid to the Davies on the occasion of their departure: in honour of their stay in the USSR, the envoy's wife was allowed to choose her own present. Knowing Mrs. Davies' particular enthusiasm for Russian porcelain, Polina Zhemchuzhina, the wife of deputy prime minister Vyacheslav Molotov, took her to the Sheremetiev family's estate at Kuskovo, which had been transformed into a museum, and since 1928 was home to the State Museum of Ceramics. There Marjorie Davies selected two massive vases produced by the Imperial Porcelain Factory in the time of Nicholas I and decorated with landscapes executed in virtuoso style.¹¹

In the spring of 1938, while Joseph Davies, having received his new appointment, was preparing the collection he had accumulated in Russia for export, a letter arrived at the embassy from the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, with the news that from now on

11

These vases came from the collection of the Moscow factory-owner Vladimir O. Girshman, which was nationalised in 1918. Their bases are engraved with the inscription: "Presented by Madam Molotov, Moscow. 1938." Shortly afterwards Mrs. Post sent the museum a reciprocal present of six plates by Lenox with views of New York, followed by twenty-five items of American glass.

12

The holdings of the Hillwood Museum include the collection of the widow of Italian ambassador to the USSR, Augusto Rosso, who was in Moscow at the same time as Davies. Mrs. Rosso collected Russian icons and decorative art. In order to maintain the distinction between this collection and her own, in 1969 Marjorie Post built a house in the style of a Russian dacha at Hillwood to accommodate the Rosso collection. It is still there, continuing to serve as a poignant reminder to visitors of what could be bought in Soviet commission shops in the late 1930s.

all antiques exported by diplomats would be subject to tax. The only exception made was for diplomats with the rank of ambassador, but all other members of the diplomatic corps would henceforth be obliged to pay export duty. As he left Moscow Davies was therefore one of the final few who were lucky enough to profit from the opportunity for the unhindered export of museum-quality works of art from Russia.

Of course, in comparison with the purchases made by Mellon and the amount of material exported by Hammer, the modest collections of Marjorie Post and Joseph Davies may seem quite insignificant. During a period of less than two years spent in the Soviet Union, the Davies spent no more than a hundred thousand dollars on buying objets d'art. But it was this collection, supplemented in later years by Marjorie Post's acquisitions in numerous different countries of Europe and America, where the riches exported from Russia and scattered around the globe were offered for sale, which became the core of the future Hillwood Museum.¹²

The departure from Moscow of the American ambassador and his wife coincided almost precisely with the end of Soviet efforts to sell off the cultural heritage of Russia. The sales came to an abrupt end when the Iron Curtain descended to isolate the Soviet Union from the rest of the world for decades.



The interior of a *Torgsin* shop in Moscow
Photograph, 1931. RGAKFD

The interior of a *Torgsin* shop in Moscow
Photograph, 1932. RGAKFD





The last customer at the *Torgsin* department store, Moscow
Photograph, 1936. RGAKFD

In Place of an Epilogue

All of the arguments have been cited. All the materials that could be tracked down in the archives have been found and are now available to those who wish to read them. Everyone now has the capacity to draw his own conclusions and vote “for” or “against,” to acquit or condemn the “salesmen of culture.”

The events of those distant years have long since sunk beneath the dark waters of the river of history and the wound inflicted on the Russian cultural heritage has almost healed over. It has not even been reopened by the tragic instances of contemptuous neglect for monuments of old Russian culture which, together with Khrushchev’s legendary “thaw,” marked the watershed of the late fifties and sixties.

Almost no one recalled the so called “clearance sales” during the first years of the *perestroika* reforms either, perhaps because certain reckless hotheads wished to exploit the tried and tested Leninist formula according to which “art belongs to the people” in yet another attempt to plunder the country’s artistic heritage. Fortunately it was decided that the idea of “mortgaging” a couple of hundred masterpieces with European banks for the general economic good was simply too utopian.

The euphoria of power is a dangerous thing. The urge to dominate and rule drives those ambitious for power to suppress and annihilate everything that stands in their way. In October 1917 the Bolsheviks clearly defined for themselves the basic principles of the new state. They resolutely rejected the idea of continuity and tore away all the symbols and attributes of the old regime. But even this was not enough for them: they had to condemn to annihilation and total oblivion the historical memory of the nation, obliterate its very foundations.

First, in the space of only one month, the Bolsheviks closed the accounts of monarchic rule. In January 1918 the foreign and domestic debts of the Russian state were cancelled, the merchant fleet was nationalised and the land was socialised. The church, which represented the very foundations of the Russian Empire, was separated from state and school. Even the hands of the historical clocks now counted out time in a new way: no longer according to the Julian calendar by which the old Russia had lived, but according to the Western, Gregorian calendar. While the authorities were methodically destroying the fundamental bases of statehood, the mob inspired by their example was settling its accounts with a past which had instantly become hateful by killing, pillaging, burning libraries, chopping up grand pianos with axes, ripping and tearing pictures.

Valuable works of culture kept in the museums or integrated into the decor of royal residences and aristocratic palaces were all of a sudden relegated to the categories of either the “historical” or the “everyday.” Artistic masterpieces were reduced to the status of symbols of depravity which embodied the former extravagant luxury. Works of art were transformed into no more than “illustrations” to stories about the old life of oppressive gloom. The actively aggressive attitude that was deliberately cultivated towards this former life was based on clearly stated class positions. Maxim Gorky, frightened and shaken by “the senseless and merciless Russian rebellion,” was the first to sense the imminent threat: “It seems to me that the cry ‘The fatherland is in danger!’ is not so terrible as the cry: ‘Citizens, culture is in danger!’ I cannot regard as ‘inevitable’ such facts as the plundering of national property in the Winter Palace, Gatchina and the other palaces. I don’t understand – what connection with ‘the breaking down of a thousand years-old state structure’ has the devastation of the Maly Theatre in Moscow and pilfering in the dressing-room of our famous actress Maria N. Ermolova?”

Since museums, private collections, works of art and any articles that were simply old fell into the category of “the accursed past,” the question arose of how to exploit valuable cultural items in the cause of the reconstruction of life – in the foundation of the new order or as “utility waste”? No final answer was found, but the specter of mass looting haunted the country from the earliest days, constantly expanding into new territory. What had been

gathered and collected over the centuries was ruthlessly destroyed. “As is well known, one of the most resounding and passionately adopted slogans of our original revolution was ‘Steal back what was stolen!’” Gorky wrote in 1918. “They steal wonderfully, artistically; there is no doubt that history will recount this process of the self-pillage of Rus with supreme pathos. They pillage and sell churches and military museums... they pillage the palaces of former grand dukes, they plunder everything that can be plundered, everything is sold that can be sold...”

The elemental force of the Russian revolution undermined the feeling of respect for the property of others, a sentiment in which, even in peaceful times, Russia had lagged well behind European standards. Everything that was confiscated and nationalised was declared the property of the people, without any gradations whatsoever. It was only at the next stage that the division into “especially” and “not especially” valuable was introduced and the “Museum Fund” and “State Fund” were set up in accordance with the significance of the “goods” concerned. The authorities successfully whitewashed their own transgressions by violating public freedoms: first they passed a law to prevent the export of “national property” and then another on the registration and inventorisation of all works of art and ancient monuments in the country. The outcome was that the state acquired, in an entirely legal manner, the right to own and dispose of historical and cultural monuments which by virtue of their special status could be singled out from the general mass of private property as such.

It was only worthwhile maintaining a minimal number of specimens of the old reactionary art for purposes of comparison and for the edification of subsequent generations. All the rest had to be abandoned without any regrets: in the process of building communism the liberated proletariat was creating its own progressive culture. It was far from being a coincidence that the Soviet authorities seized on the idea of “moving Rembrandts to Europe” and using the money this brought in to build socialism in the shortest possible time. While promising that everything lost and sold would be returned after the imminent victory of the world revolution, they understand very clearly just how important it was to implement this incredible project. They had to win more time, no matter at what cost, so that they could inculcate the Bolshevik ideology and construct a new way of life, and in the process create their own culture, subject to a brutal censorship.

The impetus for taking extreme and rapid measures for the sale of cultural artifacts was provided by the campaign against the church. First there was the famine in the Volga region and then the need for reserve funds to secure foreign loans and credits, and after that the first five-year plans with American tractors and the Dnieper hydroelectric station. And so on to the ultimate victory of communism. Driven by the logic of political survival, the authorities succumbed to the temptation of converting works of art into the metal that was as essential in practice as it was despised in Marxist theory. The history and culture of Russia were sold by the kilogram; the memory of a great power was assessed in dollars, marks and pounds sterling, in tractors and political expediency. The “historical coefficient” kept disappearing and reappearing, but not in connection with the genuine value of the art works, only in relation to the fluctuations of the Western antique market and according to the price of a single carat, gram or item.

The antiquarian exports campaign went through several phases; the first in 1920, the second in 1922–1923 and the third and final phase in 1928–1933. This final wave proved to be the most powerful. Scholars, museum workers and other members of the community of the Arts could no longer offer any resistance. Decisions on specific expropriations or sales were more and more often taken by the highest Party organs, and certainly not by the government, a situation that reflected real changes in the political structure of the state. But the most important thing remained unchanged: from the very first day the top levels of the Party, led at first by Lenin and later by Stalin, were absolutely indifferent as to what was sold –

the crown of the emperors of Russia, an ancient manuscript, a Persian carpet or a Raphael canvas. The demand determined the supply. Probably the only innovation introduced during the first five-year plan was the “shock brigades” which appeared in 1930, consisting of representatives of *Narkompros*, *Narkomtorg* and the OGPU (the precursor of the KGB). They fought to expand the export fund through the expropriation of unique exhibits from museums. In practical terms they differed little from the thuggish teams at work under the direction of Trotsky during the period of expropriation of church property.

The refinement of the methods employed by the “dealers” was sometimes dumbfounding. The greatest authorities on old Russian art spoke in all seriousness of “setting the enterprise on a correct commercial basis” and “creating a fashion” for the Russian icon. In order to maintain the appearance of respectability in the eyes of foreign colleagues and the public, it was proposed to organize pre-sale exhibitions “under the banner of achievements in the area of restoration” and include in the exhibitions works which were not destined for “emigration for money.” Meanwhile museum workers who attempted to conceal the finest pieces were intimidated with threats of the sale of sacred objects such as the icons of the Virgins of Vladimir and the Don.

The pillage was not halted as a result of desperate protests to the highest levels of the cultural administration, nor even due to a desire to preserve a supremely valuable stratum of world culture. The “red merchants” in search of a quick profit were intimidated by countless lawsuits taken out by former owners, which meant the sales had to be conducted in an atmosphere of absolute secrecy, while the potential buyers were even more alarmed by the possible legal consequences.

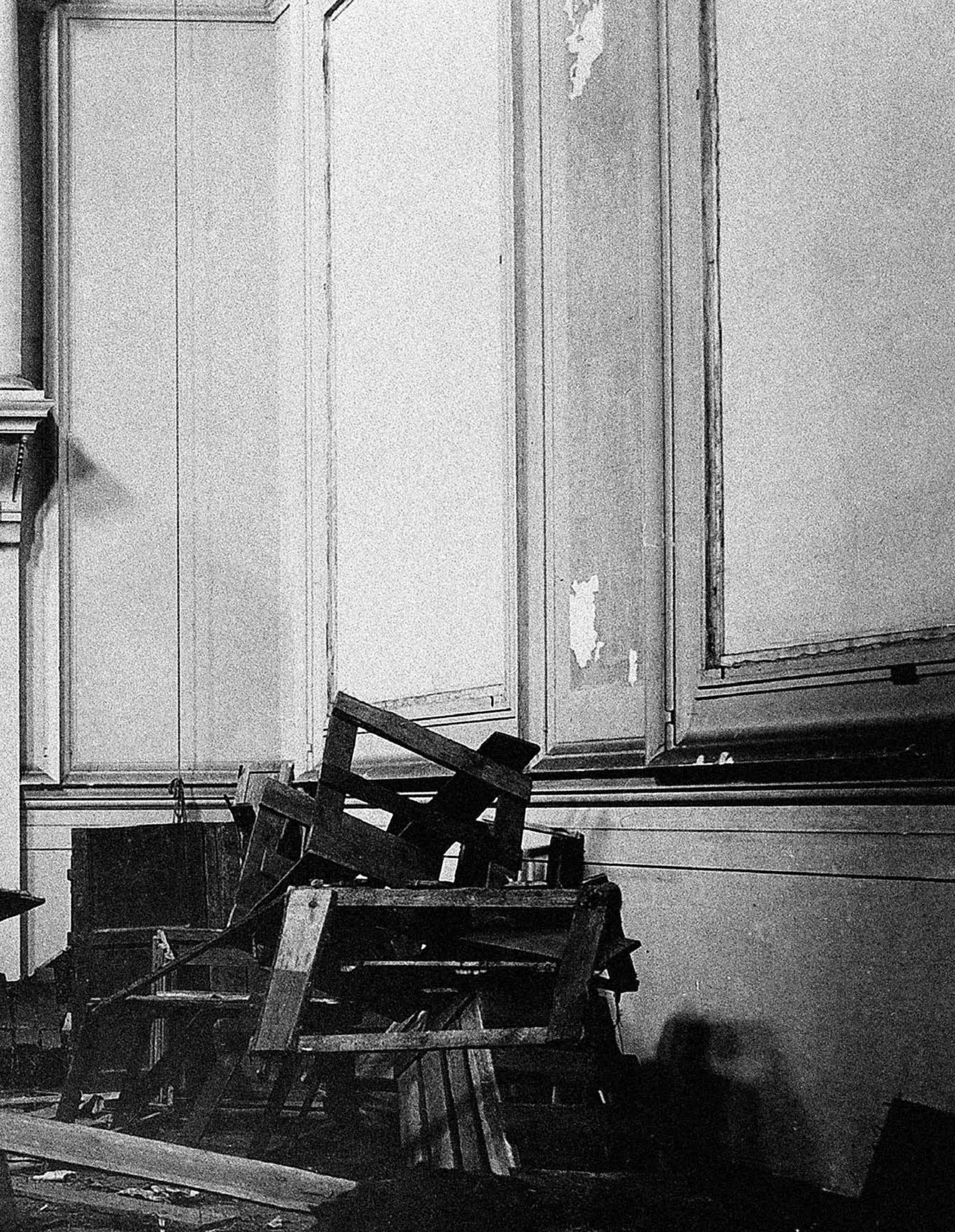
It is a sad fact that no significant economic effect resulted from the mass sales that lasted for almost ten years: measured against the scale of a huge country, the impact was negligible. On the other hand, the damage inflicted on the national culture was irreparable. In the words of Academician Dmitry S. Likhachev, works of art and artistic monuments create a specific cultural aura. Their absence or disappearance can mean only one thing – the decline of a country’s culture.

Without the slightest doubt, the country would have survived even if everything marked down for sale, or even more, had been sold. But then we would not be who we are.

This is a sad lesson that must not be forgotten.

Deputy Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation in 1997–2012
Pavel Khoroshilov





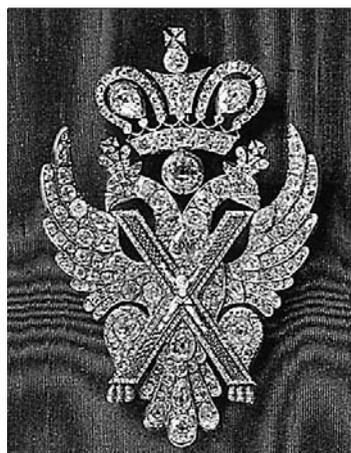


RUSSIA'S TREASURE
OF
DIAMONDS
AND
PRECIOUS STONES

PART I

THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF FINANCES
MOSCOW-1925

The following table by Victor Nikitin has been based on a major publication produced in 1923–1925 under the supervision of Academician A.E. Fersman. *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones* consisted of four illustrated volumes with descriptions of jewellery which belonged to the house of Romanov. The present table includes only those items which were sold by the Soviet government in the period 1927–1936. When *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones* appeared, the fund itself consisted of seven hundred and seventy three articles, of which only one hundred and fourteen remain today. By contrast with Fersman's "tables," the articles have here been arranged systematically according to type. The serial numbers given at the end of each description correspond to the numbers in *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones*. In most cases the present whereabouts of the items is unknown, but where possible it is given and is set in boldface.



Orders, Badges and Crosses

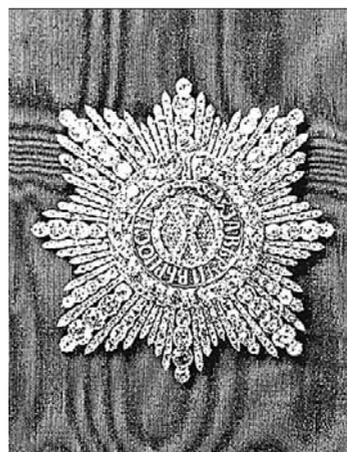
A Cross of the Order of St. Andrew
A cross from a group of seven old orders which are of undoubted historical importance due to their old labels: "Conferred at christening 5.05.1818 by Emp. Alexander First".
Early 19th century
No. 155 (Table LXXXII, photo. 180 – see No. 7 [6])



A Star of the Order of St. Andrew
"Conferred at christening 5/V – 1818 by Emp. Alexander First." A star with blue enamel. Openwork mounting in silver with gold soldering.
No. 155 (Table LXXXII, photo. 180–183 – see No. 7 [7])



A Cross of the Order of St. Andrew
A diamond-studded cross in gold and silver with engraving on the left side. One very fine diamond above, an entirely clear stone.
Early 19th century
No. 171 (Table LXXXVIII, photo. 199)



A Star of the Order of St. Andrew
A cross from a group of seven old orders of undoubted historical importance due to their old labels with inscriptions. Openwork mounting in silver with gold soldering.
1805–1815
No. 172 (Table LXXXVIII, photo. 200)



A Star and a Cross of the Order of St. Andrew
An eight-pointed star studded with diamonds. The motto "For labours and the fatherland" is set in diamond "roses" on red enamel. The diamonds are old, set in solid silver. Probably dates from the reign of Catherine the Great.
Photo. shows the star.
No. 173 (Table LXXXVIII, photo. 201)



A Maid of Honour's Pendant Badge with the Monogram of Catherine the Great
A pendant maid of honour's badge with an attached openwork crown. The monogram is studded with seventy diamonds.
No. 94 (Table LIV, photo. 110)



A Portrait Order with an Image of Peter the Great

An order with a portrait on enamel, possibly by Ch. Boist. The portrait is surrounded by twelve diamonds. Above is a large square yellow diamond, surrounded by diamond "roses" in gold. The mounting dates from c. 1840. No. 101 (Table LVI, photo. 117)

A Star for the Order of St. Catherine (First Class)

A star for sewing on to clothing, possibly once belonging to Maria Fedorovna, the wife of Paul I. The centre of the circle consists of large diamonds. The inner circle and points of the star consist of small diamonds. The inscription is in diamond "roses" on a red enamel background. Dates from the reign of Catherine the Great. No. 206 (no photo)

A Cross of the Order of St. Andrew

A diamond cross in gold and silver with engraving on the left side. Early 19th century. No. 209 (no photo)



A Gold Cross with Four Diamonds and a Spinel

Very fine large old stones in *chatons* with engraved inscriptions: "I July Olga 1846," "31 Apr. 1840." Mid 19th century No. 160 (Table LXXXVI, photo. 188)

A Gold Chain with a Cross

An old Georgian gold chain of thirty links with a light cross decorated with a ruby, an emerald, a pearl and diamonds. The reverse of the cross is coated with enamel. No. 207 (no photo)

A Silver Cross

A small filigree cross of gilded silver, probably dating from the 18th century. The cross is decorated with a turquoise, amandines and a pearl. No. 208 (no photo)



Crowns, Diadems and Bandeaux

The Imperial Nuptial Crown
The catalogue of the Diamond Fund stated that this crown was made of "old sewn decorations from the time of Catherine." Kept in a case from the firm of "Nicols and Plinke" (c. 1840). [For the history of the crown and its current attribution, see pp. 36–37]. No. 37 (Table XXVI, photo. 35)

Sold in 1927 at auction by Christie's (lot 62) for £6,100. Hillwood Museum, Washington



A Large Diadem with Pearls
A diadem-crown with a fine set of pearls and old diamonds. Openwork mounting in silver with gold soldering. First quarter of the 19th century No. 9 (Table XII, photo. 16)



A Diamond Diadem (Crown) with Eighteen Pear-Shaped Pearls
Formed part of a *parure* with a quite exceptional set of diamonds and an especially beautiful pearl. Second half of the 19th century, from old reserves of pearls and new diamonds. Gold openwork mounting. No. 137 (Table LXVIII, photo. 158)



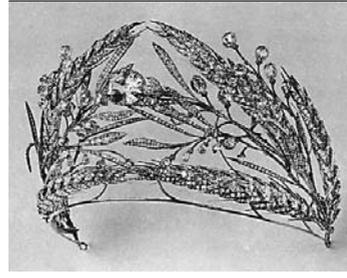
A Diadem with Large Sapphires
Decorated with large sapphires and an elegantly curved stripe of blue enamel below. The mounting of the sapphires is in gold, the diamonds are set in openwork silver with a gold rim, c. 1805 No. 178 (Table XCI, photo. 206)



A Diamond Diadem with Pearl Pendants

A diadem with a quite exceptional set of matching stones and pearls, c. 1815. Was listed in "the apartments of Maria Fedorovna."
No. 10 (Table XIII, photo. 17)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 117) for £310. Sold at auction in 1978 by Sotheby's as part of the collection of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough for £67, 320. Bought by Emelda Marcos, wife of the president of the Philippines, who later dismantled the diadem



A Diadem with Diamond Wheat-Ears and a Leucosapphire

Decorated with diamonds of quite exceptional beauty in silver and gold openwork with golden stems and tendrils and a large transparent leucosapphire. First quarter of the 19th century. Became part of the fund in 1829 following the death of the Empress Maria Fedorovna.
No. 45 (Table XXXI, photo. 45)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 116) for £240



A Diamond Diadem with Diamond Pendeloques

An article of miraculous beauty from fine old Brazilian stones of the 1820s to 1830s. Openwork silver mounting with gold soldering.
No. 51 (Table XXXIV, photo. 51)



A Brocade Kokoshnik with Large Diamonds and Pearls

Made in the early 20th century, probably for a Russian costume ball, and decorated with magnificent diamonds and pearl pendants removed from old articles. Trimmed with artificial pearls.
No. 72 (Table XLII, photo 72)



A Diadem from a Matching Diamond Set with Emerald Cabochons

Ordered by the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna, c. 1900. Produced in parallel by Bolin (the diadem and the necklace) and the Moscow branch of the firm of Fabergé (the plastron), the latter apparently at the request of Elizaveta Fedorovna.
No. 139 (Table LXXII, photo. 162)



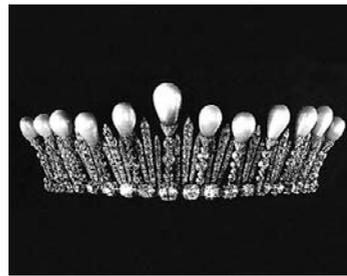
A Diadem from a Matching Diamond Set with Sapphires

The set consists of a diadem, a necklace, brooches and a bracelet, all decorated with large sapphires from Siam and Burma. Made for the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna c. 1900 by the jeweller Kekhli.
No. 140 (Table LXXXIV, photo. 164)



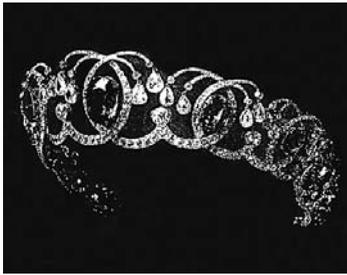
A Diamond Diadem

Part of a *parure* with a beautiful oriental turquoise and small gold leaves. All parts of the solid gold mounting can be dismantled. Made by the firm of Fabergé, c. 1895.
No. 154 (Table LXXIV, photo. 179)



A Pearl Diadem

A very fine 19th century piece.
No. 194 (Table XCV, photo. 222)



A Diamond Diadem with Sapphires
A dress piece with large dark stones and free-hanging pendeloques in a gold setting. Made in the second half of the 19th century, evidently with old stones.
No. 204

A Bandeau of Blue Forget-Me-Nots
A small bandeau with forget-me-nots in blue enamel and diamonds in a closed silver setting with gold soldering, c. 1760.
No. 245 (no photo)

Aigrettes

A Small Aigrette with Pearls
A small aigrette with two pearl pendants, one of which is baroque. Diamonds set in solid silver on foil. Dates from the reign of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 232 (no photo)



An Aigrette Brooch with Diamond Branches and Pearl Pendants
An arrangement of diamond flowers and feathery palm leaves described in old inventories as "ostrich feathers." This brooch is distinguished by a beautifully varied and heterogeneous set of stones and the light movement of the freely hanging pearls. Probably dates from the early part of Catherine the Great's reign.
No. 146 (Table LXXVII, photo. 171)



A Diamond Aigrette with Pearl Pendeloques
A light, freely composed aigrette in the form of a branch. In movement the ornament swings, the stones sway and everything gleams with the beauty that was imparted by the craft of jewellery to materials of all kinds during the reign of Elizabeth. Mounting in silver with gold soldering.
No. 145 (Table LXXVII, photo. 170)



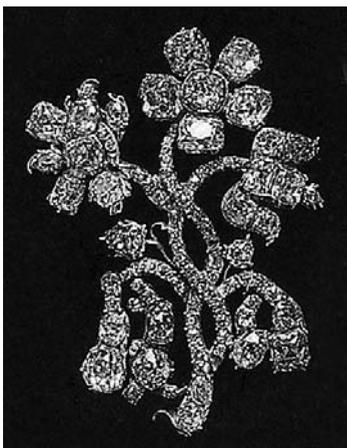
A Diamond Aigrette Brooch
A beautiful piece of jewellery in the form of a branch bound round with a diamond ribbon, with two freely hanging pendeloque flowers. Mounting in silver with gold soldering, c. 1750.
No. 185 (Table XCIII, photo. 213)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 95)



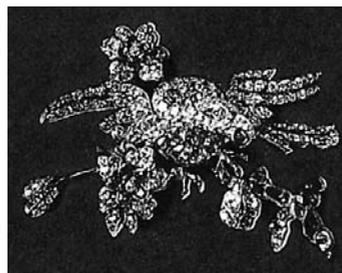
A Small Bouquet with Enamelled Leaves and Ruby Flowers
A quite marvellous piece, somewhat similar in technique to the large bouquets with diamonds on coloured foil. The silver stems are covered with green enamel, c. 1750–1760.
No. 157 (Table LXXXIII, photo. 185)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 83) for £370.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London



An Aigrette in the Form of a Branch with Flowers
An interesting piece of jewellery which exhibits a certain degree of conventional stylisation typical of the early works of Duval. The bud motif, which is familiar from his signed pieces, is especially interesting, as is the distinctive oblique setting of the square stones. Probably dates from the 1760s or 1770s.
No. 186 (Table XCIII, photo. 214)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 54 [?]).
S.J. Phillips, London



An Aigrette
An aigrette in the form of a bird, the body and tail of which are made of small sapphires, the wings of diamonds, the flowers of diamonds and rubies. The diamonds are mounted in silver on foil, the coloured stone in gold, the bird's claws are made of chased gold and in its beak it is grasping an eyelet which evidently held some kind of pendant. Dates from the reign of Elizabeth.
No. 190 (Table XCIV, photo. 218)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 56)

A Solid Aigrette with Pearl Pendants
A solid *aigrette* in the form of a flower with pendants of drilled oval pearls. Diamonds set in silver on foil. Two diamonds are decorated with white and green enamel.
No. 233 (no photo)

An Aigrette with two Large Emeralds
A beautiful piece of jewellery from the reign of Catherine the Great with a light design typical of the late 18th century. Listed in the inventory of 1898 as belonging to Alexandra Fedorovna.
No. 234 (no photo)

An Aigrette and Necklace with Amethysts
No. 231 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 80) for £470

Necklaces, Rivieres and Esclavages

Two Diamond Rivieres
Two diamond *riviere* necklaces with a beautiful set of old Indian and Brazilian stones. For the most part the stones are from the 18th century, while the *chats* are from the first half of the 19th century.
No. 205 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 94) for £4,300



A Necklace
A necklace of exceptionally large and very old pearls, interesting for their fine match as well as their size.
No. 11 (Table XIV, photo. 18)

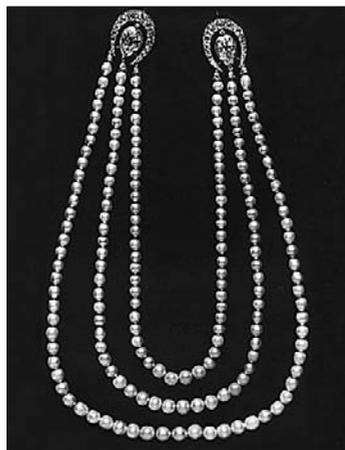


A Diamond Riviere (outer item)
A magnificent diamond *riviere* of 45 stones with a total weight of almost 294 carats. Old Indian stones are here combined with unique stones of a slightly bluish water.
No. 28 (Table XX, photo. 27)

A Diamond Necklace
A *riviere* of 23 large Indian diamonds interspersed with blue Golconda stones. The setting dates from the reign of Nicholas I.
No. 29 (Table XX, photo. 28)



A Diamond French-Necklace
A beautiful and simply conceived French-necklace of the type of decoration which was sewn on to the dress. Probably dates from the early 18th century during the reign of Paul I.
No. 33 (Table XXI, photo. 30)



A Pearl Necklace of Three Strings with Diamond Clasps
Dates from the first half of the 19th century. Listed in the inventory of 1898 as belonging to the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna.
No. 34 (Table XXII, photo. 31)



A Diamond Necklace with Sapphires
Dates from the second half of the 19th century. Listed in the inventory of 1898 as belonging to the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna.
No. 35 (Table XXIII, photo. 32)



A Necklace of Strings of Diamonds and Pearls with Clasps with An Emerald and a Ruby
A dress necklace of good quality expensive stones with two clasps, allowing the necklace to be worn with either a red or a green stone. Dates from the first half of the 19th century. [Concerning the clasps, see p. 274]
No. 43 (Table XXIX, photo. 43)



A Diamond Necklace with Emerald Pendants
A dress necklace from the second half of the 19th century. According to A. Fabergé it was acquired from Alexandra Iosifovna (the wife of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich). Dates from the reign of Alexander II. No. 69 (Table XXXIX, photo. 69)



A Diamond Necklace with Pearl Pendants
Together with a brooch this necklace forms a *parure* made with very valuable stones and pearls which is typical of the jewellery which continued the old traditions into the second half of the 19th century. Dates from the reign of Alexander II. No. 70 (Table XL, photo 70)



A Diamond Necklace with Pearl Pendants
A dress necklace which forms a *parure* with a brooch and a diadem. Old pearls from the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. Dates from the second half of the 19th century. No. 71 (Table XLI, photo. 71)



A Diamond Necklace with Rubies and Spinels
Twenty-one openwork *chatons* with red stones: pink and red rubies, a red chertle from Burma and a spinel. In the style of the 19th century. The bottom surfaces of all the stones were painted with red lacquer. No. 89 (Table LIII, photo. 104)



A Diamond Necklace with Sapphires
A large necklace of complex design with large dark sapphires. Intertwined diamond branches frame nine large dark sapphires decorated with diamond *pendeloques*. Dates from the reign of Alexander II. No. 138 (Table LXIX, photo. 159)



A Necklace from a Set in Brilliants with Emeralds
An extremely sumptuous set with large emerald *cabochons*, consisting of a diadem, a necklace and a plastron. Ordered by Alexandra Fedorovna in about 1900 and made, due to the order's urgency, in parallel by Bolin (the diadem and necklace) and the Moscow branch of the firm of Fabergé (the plastron); the latter evidently at the order of Elizaveta Fedorovna. No. 139 (Table LXXI, photo. 161)



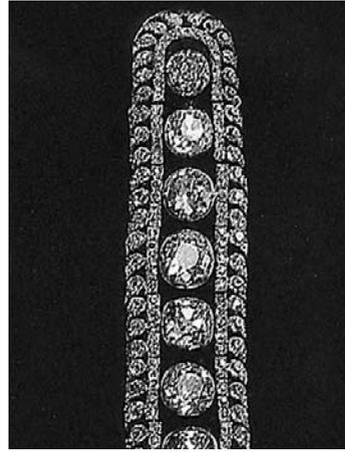
A Necklace from a Diamond Set with Sapphires
The set consists of a diadem, a necklace, brooches and a bracelet with large, good-quality sapphires from Siam or Burma. Made for Alexandra Fedorovna by the jeweller Kekhli, c. 1900. No. 140 (Table LXXIII, photo. 163)



A Diamond Riviere
A unique *esclavage* of thirty-six large diamonds of quite exceptional beauty. The stones include some of a bluish or pale-pink water and have been superbly cut. No. 44 (Table XXX, photo. 44)

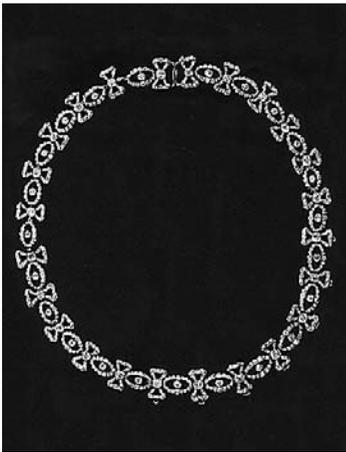


A Diamond Esclavage Necklace with Pearls and Emeralds
Assembled in 1897–1898 by the firm of Fabergé from beautiful old stones for a court ball in Russian costumes. The incomplete *esclavage* was sewn on to the dress. A *sevigne* brooch was made to go with it. Listed in the inventory of 1898 as belonging to the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna.
No. 73 (Table XLIII, photo. 73)



A Diamond Riviere (detail)
A *riviere* of twenty-five large diamonds with a total weight of about 60 carats and small ornaments consisting of 598 stones. An extremely rare and beautiful set of old stones.
No. 195 (Table XCV, photo. 223)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 71) for £2,700.
S.J. Phillips Collection, London



A Chain of Bows Encrusted with Diamonds
A chain necklace of forty-seven links. Silver setting with gold soldering decorated with diamonds in the Louis 16th style. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 149 (Table LXXVIII, photo. 174)



A Fillet in the Louis 16th Style
An elegant *fillet* of delicate design decorated with small diamonds set in openwork silver and diamond "roses" in sold gold mounting. Dates from c. 1800.
No. 148 (Table LXXVIII, photo. 173)



A Fillet of Large Pearls
Indian pearls of good quality and quite exceptional size. At the ends of the string there are small clasps with two diamonds.
No. 142 (Table LXXVI, photo. 167)



Earrings

A Pair of Diamond Earrings with Pearls
The upper parts of two pendant earrings evidently made from beautiful old pieces from the period of Catherine the Great which were reused several times.
No. 24 (Table XVII, photo. 23)

At the Christie's auction of 1927 (lot 55) it is possible that they were combined with a pair of diamond earrings (see No. 25, table XVII, photo. 24) and sold for £240.



A Pair of Amethyst Earrings
A pair of earrings in the form of *girandoles* with freely hanging light-coloured amethysts from the Urals. Above there are two light-coloured amethysts and in the pendants on foil there are pink amethyst doublets set in silver, c. 1760
No. 110 (Table LIX, photo. 128)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 23) for £295.



A Pair of Amethyst Earrings with Pendants
A wonderful piece of work dating from about 1760.
No. 111 (Table LIX, photo. 129)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 27) for £135.
S.J. Phillips, London



A Pair of Gold Earrings with Aquamarines
 Aquamarines of a distinctive blue-green hue with a clear crystalline structure, evidently from the first finds in the Transbaikal region (about 1780). Dating from c. 1780.
 No. 112 (Table XL, photo. 130)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 72) for £135.



A Pair of Silver and Gold Earrings with Aquamarines
 Two pairs of earrings with aquamarines, one in a solid gold setting with diamonds, the other in an identical setting, silvered. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great. In the inventory of 1898 they are listed as being held by Alexandra Fedorovna.
 No. 113 (Table LX, photo. 131)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 73) for £135.



A Pair of Silver Earrings with Aquamarines
 A beautifully designed and executed pair of pendant earrings, with a highly successful combination of tones. The Aquamarines are clearly from the first finds in the Nerchinsk region (c. 1775–1785). The mounting dates from c. 1789.
 No. 114 (Table LX, photo. 132)



A Pair of Pendant Earrings with Diamonds
 An exceptionally beautiful piece of jewellery work dating from the second half of the 18th century.
 No. 116 (Table LX, photo. 134)



A Pair of Diamond Earrings with Pearl Pendants
 A beautiful piece of work from the time of Catherine the Great with four missing pendants. Silver setting with gold soldering.
 No. 25 (Table XVII, photo. 24)



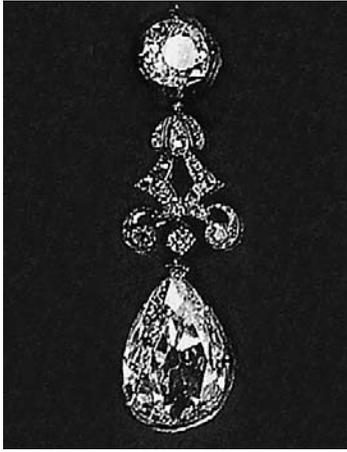
A Pair of Earrings with Large Pearl Pendants
 An item of extremely great value and historical significance.
 No. 142 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 168)



An Earring with an Extremely Rare Indian Briolet
 A pendant earring made with a large, superb briolet. An old stone.
 No. 144 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 169)



A Pair of Earrings with Emerald Pendants
 A beautiful pair of earrings with Russian emeralds from the earliest finds. Dating from c. 1840.
 No. 166 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 194)



A Pair of Diamond Earrings
A pair of new (according to Fersman's tables) earrings with a large diamond.
No. 192 (Table XCIV, photo. 220)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 74) for £270

A Pair of Earrings with an Ivory Turquoise

A pair of small earrings with an ivory turquoise of beautiful tone with "roses" in a gold setting. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 249 (no photo)

A Pair of Earrings with Diamond Roses
Silver leaves encrusted with diamonds with two small tightly closed gold buds and a large blossoming rose with a large stone at its centre, surrounded by small petals. Dating from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 251 (no photo)

A Pair of Earrings with Diamonds and Blue Glass

A pair of small square earrings, each with a diamond at its centre, surrounded by pieces of blue-green glass on foil set in silver.
Dates from c. 1760.
No. 254 (no photo)

A Pair of Earrings with Tall Roses

A pair of earrings with beautiful tall roses of pure water with fine pointed faceting, set on foil in solid silver. Dating from the period of the Catherine the Great.
No. 255 (no photo)

A Pair of Earrings with Pink Granite

Five pairs of earrings of quite exceptional beauty and elegance of a design reminiscent of other earrings with aquamarines from the same period. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 257 (no photo)

Hair-Pins, Scarf-Pins and Hat-Pins

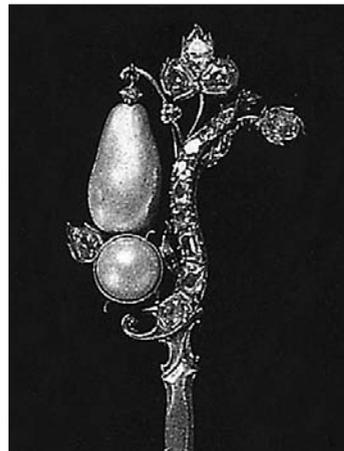
Three Scarf-Pins with Sapphires

Three oval scarf-pins with sapphires and diamonds in solid silver. From the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 269 (no photo)



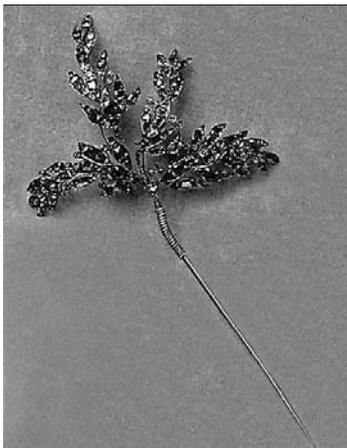
A Scarf-Pin with a Diamond Briolet

A superb stone of quite exceptional elegance and great age.
No. 76 (Table XLIV, photo. 76)



A Scarf-Pin in the Louis XV Style with Pearls and Diamonds

A small scarf-pin described in the inventory as "in the form of a dagger" with four leaves of green enamel. Dates from c. 1750.
No. 147 (Table LXXXVIII, photo. 172)



A Hair-Pin in the Form of a Laurel Branch with Emeralds

An elegant ornament in the form of a light openwork laurel branch with mobile leaves set on thin flexible plates. Dates from the first quarter of the 19th century.
No. 175 (Table LXXXIX, photo. 203)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 84) for £240 (?).



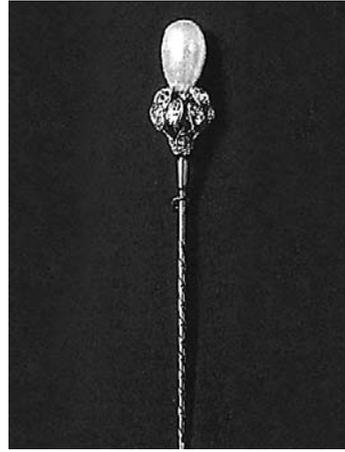
Three Silver Hair-Pins with Diamonds

Three fantastically shaped hair-pins from the period of the Empress Elizabeth with pearls set in silver with gold soldering.
No. 187 (Table XCIII, photo. 215)



A Hair-Pin in the Form of a Flower with Diamonds and a Pearl Pendant
An elegant hair-pin from the period of the Empress Elizabeth with a fine selection of stones.
No. 183 (Table XCIII, photo. 211)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 30) for £300.



Two Hat-Pins
Two elegantly worked pearl hat-pins from the late 18th century.
No. 139 (Table XCIV, photo. 221)

Three Old Scarf-Pins with Emeralds
Three old scarf-pins probably dating from the early 18th century with emeralds on foil in solid gold mountings.
No. 179 (Table XCII, photo. 207)

Five Silver Hair-Pins with Sapphires
Five hair-pins in the form of four-pointed stars, c. 1750.
No. 180 (Table XCII, photo. 208)

Four Scarf-Pin with Sapphires and Diamonds
Four old scarf-pins with emeralds mounted in solid pure gold with old diamonds with Indian faceting. The gilded lower parts of the pins bear engraving typical of the period of Peter the Great. Late 17th – early 18th century.
No. 181 (Table XCII, photo. 209)

Five Scarf-Pins with Emeralds
Five pins, one of which dates from the mid-18th century and the others possibly from the late 17th century.
No. 182 (Table XCII, photo. 210)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lots 76, 77) (?).

A Hair-Pin with a Large Emerald
Decorated with a Russian emerald, probably from the first finds of the 1830s–1840s, in a gold openwork setting. Dates from the middle of the 19th century.
No. 258 (no photo)

A Scarf-Pin
A scarf-pin with a diamond rose with a rock-crystal doublet in a silver setting. Dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 259 (no photo)

A Scarf-Pin with Two Scottish Pearls
A scarf-pin with two drilled matte pearls.
No. 260 (no photo)

A Scarf-Pin in the Form of an Water-Nymph with A Large Pearl
An old piece from Renaissance times, badly damaged with missing parts. The pin has the form of a siren, with a pearl trunk and retouched white-enamelled head and arms.
No. 261 (no photo)

Five Scarf-Pins
Decorated with freely hanging sapphire pendants, evidently with very old stones.
No. 262 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 97) for £380 (?).

Two Tie-Pins with Russian Diamonds
Two tie-pins in silver openwork with a gold gallery engraved with the words: "1838 on the river Kushaika". Both diamonds were among the first Russian diamonds found in the Urals state territories, in the Goroblagodatsky District. Archival sources indicate that they were cut at the Peterhof Lapidary Works.
No. 264 (no photo)

A Scarf-Pin in the Form of a Star with Roses
A scarf-pin shaped like a star in silver with eight roses faceted in a old style and one similar but larger rose in the centre. Dates from the early 18th century.
No. 265 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 7) for £18.

Three Scarf-Pins with Enamel Leaves
Three scarf-pins with gold leaves covered in green enamel with diamonds. Probably dating from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 266 (no photo)

A Hair-Pin in the Form of a Dragonfly with Rubies and Diamonds
A small hair-pin from the period of the Empress Elizabeth in the form of a dragonfly with gold wings covered with blue enamel and ten diamonds.
No. 270 (no photo)

Three Silver Hair-Pins with Diamonds
Three hair-pins from the period of the Empress Elizabeth in silver with gold soldering.
No. 271 (no photo)

A Hair-Pin with Pearl Pear
Evidently part of some large ornament.
No. 272 (no photo)

A Hair-Pin with a Sapphire
A hair-pin with a drilled pear-shape Ceylonese sapphire and twelve old diamonds. Silver mounting with a gold base. Dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 274 (no photo)

A Hair-Pin with a Sapphire
A pendant with a freely hanging sapphire. Dates from the mid-18th century.
No. 276 (no photo)

Two Scarf-Pins with Emeralds
Two old scarf-pins from the early 18th century with Egyptian emeralds set on foil and decorated with Brazilian diamonds in a solid silver mounting.
No. 277 (no photo)

Six Scarf-Pins with Emerald Pendants
Six scarf-pins with light-coloured emeralds, primarily Egyptian. Three of the stones have an interesting old style of faceting. The setting dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 278 (no photo)

Scarf-Pins in the Form of Stars
Three scarf-pins with four pear-shaped pearls and Brazilian diamonds set in solid silver, dating from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 279 (no photo)

Three Diamond and Silver Hair-Pins
Openwork silver and diamond hair-pins in the form of bows with pendants, dating from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 280 (no photo)

Two Scarf-Pins in the Form of Flies
Two scarf-pins in the form of flies with diamonds and chrysolites. An elegant piece of fine quality work from the 1730s–1750s.
No. 281 (no photo)

Scarf-Pins with Emeralds
Three distinctive pins with emeralds, probably dating from the time of Catherine the Great.
No. 282 (no photo)

Scarf-Pins with Emeralds
An old scarf-pin, probably dating from the period of the Empress Elizabeth, in the form of a volute with diamonds set on foil in silver.
No. 283 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 7) for £18.

Silver Scarf-Pins with Rubies and a Spinel
Ten scarf-pins of solid silver, mostly with rubies set in a solid mounting with a ring of Brazilian diamonds, probably dating from the early period of the reign of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 284 (no photo)

Brooches, Medallions and Clasps

Two Round Brooches with Sapphires and Diamonds
Two clasp brooches with Ceylonese sapphires in a gold openwork setting. Initially used as decorations for sewing to the dress, they were adapted for use as brooches. They probably date from the mid-19th century.
No. 238 (no photo)



A Single Indian Diamond Brooch
A brooch with a beautiful rose-tinted glittering stone of ideal clarity and first class quality. The stone is set in openwork silver with a gold gallery.
No. 85 (Table LII, photo. 94)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 100) for £11,800.



A Brooch
A brooch with the famous French “Regent” diamond, a beautifully shaped white stone of pure water but with several black spots. The stone is set in openwork silver with a gold gallery. No. 85 (Table LII, photo. 95)



A Brooch
An interesting piece with an old stone, possibly Indian. The silver setting is engraved with the words: “16 Apr. 1841” the gold lower down bears the inscription: “22 cr. 16/32.” The stone is an interesting pale-green tone with black flecks. The diamond is set in openwork silver and the brooch itself in openwork gold. No. 87 (Table LII, photo. 100)



A Diamond Pendant Brooch
Decorated with fine stones and pearls, which have been very carefully selected, with a rose diamond set between the pure white diamonds of the upper section of the brooch and the lower pendant with its slightly yellowish stones. Dates from the first half of the 19th century. Set in gold and silver openwork. No. 96 (Table LV, photo. 112)



A Diamond Brooch with Pearls
This brooch forms a *parure* with a diadem and a necklace. A very well-balanced piece with rare old pearls, which dates from the second half of the 19th century. The pearls were taken from old pieces in the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. No. 97 (Table LV, photo. 113)



A Diamond Medallion with a Portrait of Nicholas I
A pendant medallion dating from about 1840 with a large diadem above and a miniature covered with a large portrait diamond. Set in silver with a gold gallery and gold soldering. No. 99 (Table LVI, photo. 115)



A Diamond Brooch with a Large Ruby and a Diamond Pendant with a Portrait
A beautiful old brooch with a blood-red stone clearly dating from the first half of the 19th century. The miniature portrait of Alexander II and its pearls and diamonds were clearly attached at a later date. The setting of the upper section is gold with silver openwork; the setting of the lower section is crudely worked gold. No. 100 (Table LVI, photo. 116)



A Diamond Bow with Rays
An exquisite bow through which a ribbon is passed with good Brazilian diamonds in massive silver. At the top, a table diamond with Indian facets. Work of the Catherine period. No. 118 (Table LXI, photo. 137)



A Double-Ribbon Diamond Bow with a Pearl
A bow with two ribbons of solid silver encrusted with diamonds, with a large *bouton* pearl of 8 carats. It evidently represents only part of some ornament from the period of Catherine the Great. No. 127 (Table LXVI, photo. 146)



A Diamond Bow Brooch
A beautiful piece from the second half of the 18th century, used as a pin and a clasp and a brooch. Its elegance and simplicity qualify it for display as a museum exhibit. The setting is silver. No. 128 (Table LXVI, photo. 147)

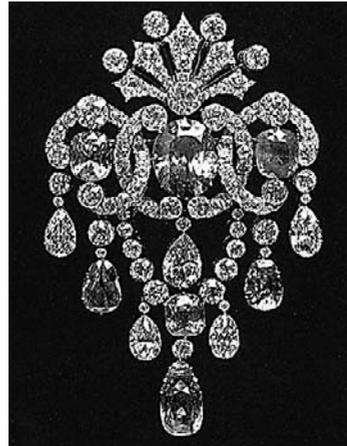
Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 59) for £300.
S.J. Phillips Collection, London



A Brooch
A large brooch with diamonds and freely hanging diamond pendants. It has a magnificent old Indian diamond set in its upper section. The stones are set in silver with gold soldering and several small gold stalks and leaves with diamond roses. Clearly dates from the mid-19th century. No. 133 (Table LXXVII, photo. 154)



A Plastron from a Diamond Set with Large Emeralds
A large triangular plastron from a set which was apparently commissioned by Elizaveta Fedorovna and made in the Moscow branch of the firm of Fabergé by the craftsman Oskar Pil, as indicated by the letters "O.P." stamped into the gold. The diadem and necklace for the set were ordered by Alexandra Fedorovna from Bolin because the work was very urgent. No. 139 (Table LXX, photo. 160)



A Brooch from a Diamond Set with a Sapphire
The formal dress diamond set includes a diadem, a necklace, a brooch and a bracelet with large Siamese or Burmese sapphires of good quality. It was made for Alexandra Fedorovna by the jeweller Kekhli in about 1900. The sapphires are set in gold with a gold gallery, the diamonds are in silver openwork with gold soldering. No. 140 (Table LXXXV, photo. 165)



A Clasp Brooch with Diamonds and Semi-Precious Stones
A beautiful piece with a rich combination of brightly coloured stones framed in glittering diamonds. An emerald, a sapphire and rose topazes impart lightness to the design despite the large size of the brooch as a whole and its generally massive proportions. The setting is in silver and gold. Dates from about 1830. No. 141 (Table LXXXV, photo. 166)



A Sevigne Brooch with Emeralds
This rich and beautiful brooch belongs to the same *parure* as the unfinished necklace. Made in about 1898 for a costume party by the firm of Fabergé from old stones in the Imperial Cabinet. No. 165 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 193)



A Diamond Brooch with Oriental Turquoise
This brooch forms a *parure* with a *kokoshnik*. Seven flat turquoise cabochons, very large with a number of defects at the edges. The diamonds are of good quality from Brazil. The mounting is by the firm of Fabergé from about 1895. No. 153 (Table LXXXI, photo. 178)



A Pendant Brooch with Large Emeralds
This clasp brooch with a large, freely hanging emerald "pear" dates from about 1850. It is an elegant design, harmoniously balancing the various parts. The pendant may have been added later, since the type of gold is different. No. 136 (Table LXXVII, photo. 157)



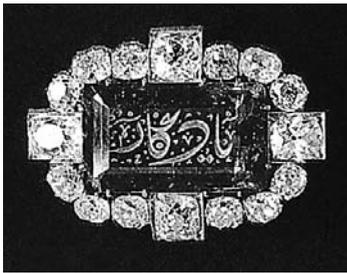
A Brooch with a Large Emerald Cabochon

An oval dress brooch with a large dark emerald cabochon framed by twenty very fine old Brazilian diamonds. The central section with the emerald can be removed and worn separately. Dates from the first half of the 19th century, probably from the reign of Alexander I. Acquired by the Imperial Cabinet in 1913 with the jewels of Alexandra Iosifovna.
No. 135 (Table LXXVII, photo. 156)



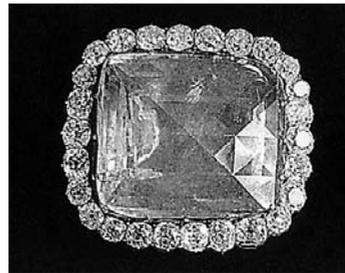
A Diamond Clasp

A beautiful sinuous clasp for a ribbon in the Louis XV style (early period), described in the inventory as an "epaulette-tie." A very interesting piece from the early 18th century.
No. 150 (Table LXXVIII, photo. 175)



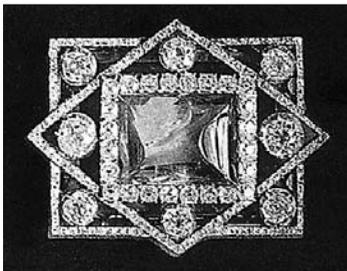
A Brooch with a Large Emerald with an Inscription in Arabic

A superb Colombian stone with an old inscription in Arabic surrounded by a ring of large diamonds in a light open-work setting.
No. 163 (Table LXXXVI, photo. 191)



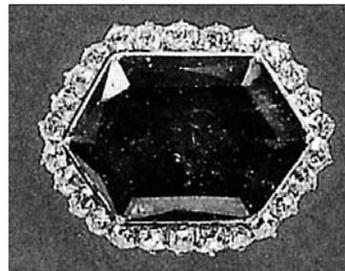
Two Brooches with Ceylonese Sapphires

Two clasp brooches with old Ceylonese sapphires with old-style Indian faceting set on foil in a mounting by the firm of Fabergé.
No. 161 (Table LXXXVI, photo. 189)



A Diamond Brooch with a Large Sapphire and Diamonds

A "new" (according to Fersman's tables) brooch with a rich selection of precious and semi-precious stones.
No. 162 (Table LXXXVI, photo. 190)



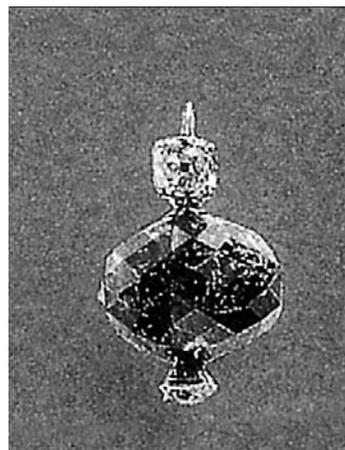
A Brooch with a Hexagonal Emerald

A small brooch with a good quality dark emerald set on foil in pure gold. The setting dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.
No. 168 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 196)



A Diamond Brooch with a Large Ruby

An exceptional fine formal dress piece with large expensive stones from old workings and a ruby of rare size. Dates from the second half of the 19th century.
No. 164 (Table LXXXVI, photo. 192)



Two Pendants with Spherical Emeralds

Two spherical emerald pendants covered in fine rhomboid facets dating from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 167 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 195)



A Diamond Ornament
A dress ornament of diamonds with a large stone at the centre.
No. 191 (Table XCIV, photo. 219)



A Diamond Clasp Brooch with a Rose Diamond
A beautiful piece from the 1830s with old Indian stones. The setting is in silver with a gold gallery. Archive sources indicate that the stone, weighing 28 1/4 carats was bought in 1834 from the Viennese merchant Biterman.
No. 77 (Table XLIV, photo. 77)

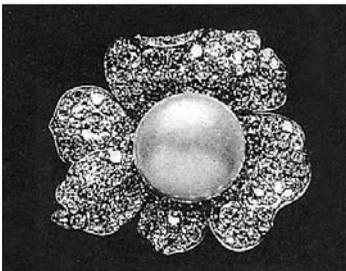


A Diamond Brooch of Precious Stones with Pearl Pendants
A beautiful dress piece with diamonds, adorned with an emerald, a spinel and pearls. The brooch consists of several parts and has been extensively restored. Individual parts date from the late 18th century.
No. 78 (Table XLIV, photo. 78)

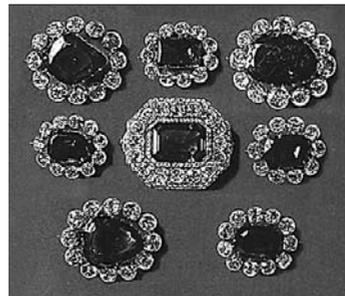
Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 10) for £175



A Medallion with a Labrador
A small elegant medallion with a light-grey American Labrador in an openwork setting and surrounded by diamonds. Dates from the second half of the 19th century.
No. 169 (Table LXXXVII, photo. 197)



A Rose Brooch with a Large Pearl and Diamond Petals
A dress brooch with an excellent pearl beautifully set off by glittering petals. The pearl can be removed and worn separately as a brooch.
No. 12 (Table XIV, photo. 18)



Seven Brooches with Large Spinels and Diamonds (the piece in the centre is a Large Brooch with a Topaz)
Seven similar brooches with fine gemstones (six with spinels and one with a ruby), painted on their undersides with red lacquer in the fashion of the first half of the 19th century. All seven brooches were listed as belonging to Maria Fedorovna. The setting is openwork in silver and gold, probably dating from the period of Nicholas I.
Nos. 14-20 (Table XV, photo. 19)
No. 13 – the clasp brooch



A Brooch in the Form of a Diamond Branch with a Large Rose
A rich piece dating from the 1820s-1830s with a beautiful diamond representing the flower.
No. 21 (Table XVI, photo. 21)



A Diamond Brooch in the Form of a Rose
A beautiful formal dress ornament made in the early 20th century by the firm of Fabergé in imitation of an old original of the early 19th century. The setting is gold openwork.
No. 49 (Table XXXIII, photo. 49)



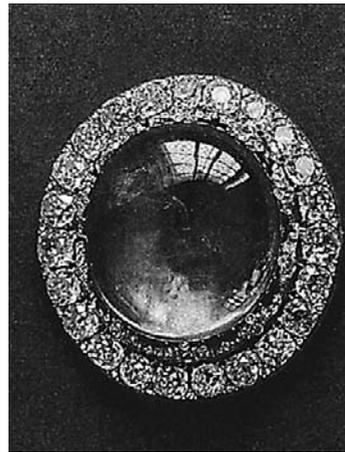
A Medallion with an Almandine
A beautiful almandine cut to form a flat *cabochon*. The Indian stone has a lustre of quite incomparable water and purity, which is intensified by the diamonds. The medallion is silver lined with gold and dates from the first half of the 19th century.
No. 68 (Table XXXVIII, photo. 68)



A Diamond Clasp Brooch with a Sapphire
This clasp is decorated with a quite exceptionally beautiful sapphire of a clear cornflower-blue tone. The inventory of 1898 lists the clasp brooch as belonging to the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna (the wife of Alexander II). The sapphire could well have been bought for her at the London Exhibition of 1862.
No. 134 (Table LXXVII, photo. 155)



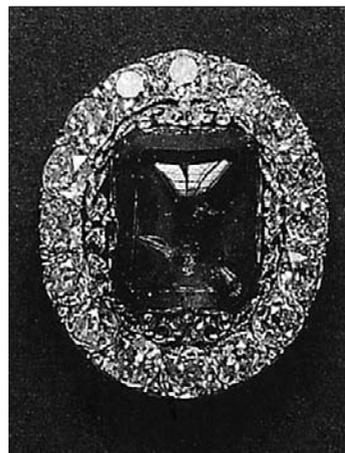
Diamond Brooch with a Square Emerald
A large emerald, of exceptional purity and size, probably of the 16th or 17th century, surrounded by first-class diamonds, creates the special beauty of this ornament. Work of the mid-19th century. The setting is gold à jour.
No. 57 (Table XXXVI, photo. 57)



A Diamond Brooch
A magnificent piece of great value and beauty with an old oriental sapphire. The setting is openwork, the diamonds in silver, the sapphire on foil in gold, the gallery is gold. The clasp is engraved: "Sap. Cab' (evidently "Sapphire Cabinet"). Dates from about 1850. Acquired by the Imperial Cabinet in 1913 from several jewels belonging to the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Iosifovna.
No. 58 (Table XXXVI, photo. 58)



Diamond Clasp Brooch with a Topaz (in the centre)
A magnificent item, probably from the reign of Paul I or Alexander I with first-class diamonds and a cherry-red topaz from Brazil of quite exceptional beauty. According to the inventory of 1898 the stone was acquired under the terms of the will of Maria Fedorovna (the wife of Paul I).
No. 13 (Table XV, photo. 19)



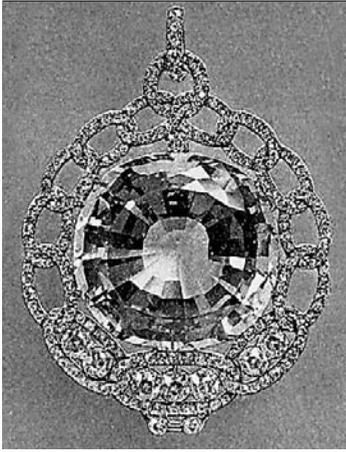
A Clasp Brooch with a Large Emerald and Diamonds
A clasp with a very fine old square *cabochon* from the finest old workings of Colombia. There is a matching gold bracelet in the form of a chain. Dates from the mid-19th century.
No. 60 (Table XXXVI, photo. 60)



A Diamond Brooch with a Sapphire
A clasp brooch with a beautiful large stone. The setting is openwork silver with a gold gallery. Dates from the 1850s–1860s.
No. 61 (Table XXXVI, photo. 61)



A Brooch with a Beryl
A beautiful brooch with a yellowish-green beryl in a light diamond setting. The beryl is probably from the Nerchinsk region and dates from the late 18th century. The balanced design of the brooch is a great success. It dates from 1800–1815 and was listed as belonging to the Empress Maria Fedorovna, with a note to the effect that it was acquired under the terms of her will (1829).
No. 64 (Table XXXVIII, photo. 64)



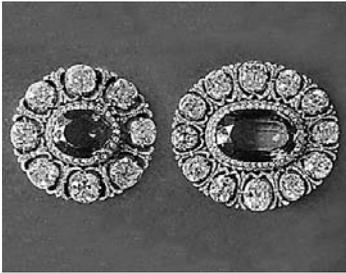
A Medallion

In the centre of this medallion is a large blue Brazilian aquamarine of rare beauty and brilliance, surrounded by seven large diamonds. The setting is in gold and silver openwork. Dates from the time of Alexander I.
No. 63 (Table XXXVIII, photo. 63)



A Small Bouquet of Diamonds on Coloured Foil

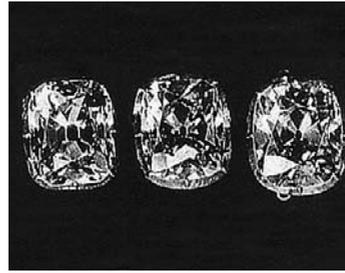
An elegant work of the jeweller's art from the first half of the 18th century (possibly from about 1745) with beautifully curled leaves with gold veins encrusted with diamonds and tulips with gold petals.
No. 184 (Table XCIII, photo. 212)



Clasps with an Emerald and a Ruby for a Necklace with Strings of Diamonds and Pearls

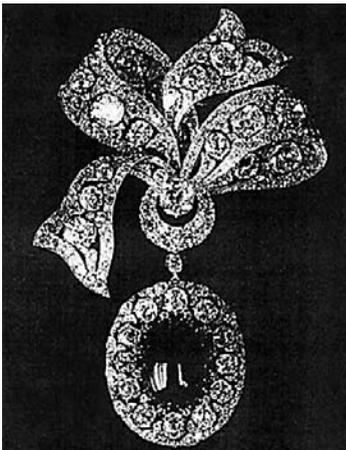
The ruby is of great value with a pleasant purple-red tone and Indian faceting. The Emerald is of good quality, not very dark, evidently from the Urals. Dating from the first half of the 19th century.

[For the necklace, see p. 262]
No. 43 (Table XXIX, photo. 43)



Diamond Earrings and a Brooch

Three old Indian diamonds of widely varying quality, one of which is a first-class stone of quite outstanding merit. The setting is openwork silver with a gold gallery.
No. 30-32 (Table XX, photo. 29)



A Ribbon Brooch with a Large Sapphire in a Medallion

A formal dress item with rich stones, typical of the mid-19th century. The medallion was made from an existing clasp. Dates from the 1850s-1860s.
No. 240

A Medallion

A fine and elegant piece with a bow in its upper section. Instead of a flat portrait diamond it has a very flat diamond *rose*. The reverse side of the medallion is made of glass. Dates from the first quarter of the 19th century.
No. 246 (no photo)

A Medallion with a Flat Brazilian Aquamarine

An oval gold medallion dating from the mid-18th century.
No. 247 (no photo)

An Oval Medallion

A small gold medallion, probably dating from the 1840s, with an emerald cameo and diamonds. A light-coloured emerald with an elegant profile of a woman subtly carved in high relief.
No. 248 (no photo)

A Pendant with a Large Diamond

A beautiful and simple pendant in silver with a gold ring (on the reverse), with a small diamond above and a large trapeziform stone.
No. 250 (no photo)

A Gold Brooch with a Square Emerald

A piece from modern times with fine stones. The setting is speckled gold.
No. 235 (no photo)

A Clasp Brooch with a Large Sapphire

A beautiful brooch dating from the second half of the 19th century. The setting is openwork silver with a gold gallery.
No. 236 (no photo)

A Diamond Clasp Brooch with a Large Indian Sapphire

A formal dress brooch with a beautiful setting decorated with diamonds. Dates from the mid-19th century. No. 237 (no photo)

A Gold Brooch in the Form of a Crown with a Miniature

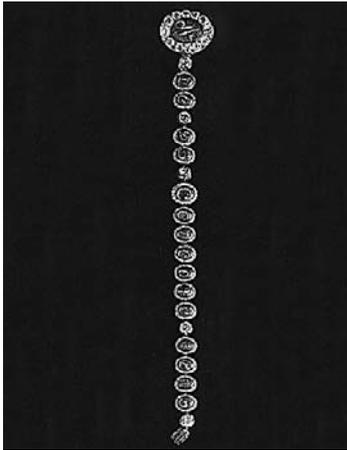
A gold brooch in the form of a crown with a lining, dating from the second half of the 19th century, with miniature portraits of the children of Alexander III. No. 239 (no photo)

A Ribbon Brooch with a Large Sapphire in a Medallion

A formal dress item with rich stones. The design is massive and the treatment is heavy. The medallion was made from an existing clasp. Dates from the 1850s–1860s. No. 240 (no photo)

Six Pendants of Black Agate in a Diamond Surround

The stones are set in silver, the hooks and eye are gold. Dates from about 1800. No. 256 (no photo)

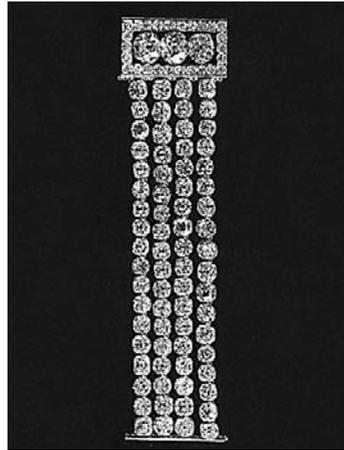


Bracelets

An Enamel Bracelet with Diamonds

The bracelet consists of separate medallions, some of which are separated by *chatons* with diamonds, and a clasp with blue enamel. Each medallion and the clasp bears one letter of the phrase “N 23 October 1815.” No. 196 (Table XCV, photo. 224)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie’s (lot 14) for £270



A Bracelet of Four Rows of Chatons with Diamonds

An brilliantly conceived and highly impressive bracelet of rather large diamonds with a diamond clasp with three large stones. The piece was probably made by the firm of Keibel in the mid-19th century. No. 52 (Table XXXIV, photo. 52)



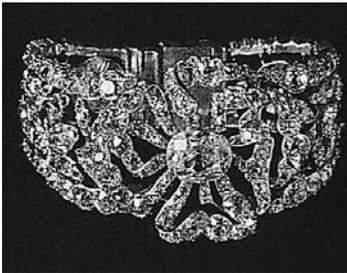
A Bracelet of Large Pearls with a Diamond Clasp, Decorated with Blue Enamel

A beautiful piece with three formal strings of fine old pearls. A beautiful clasp with a large oblong sapphire surrounded by diamonds. No. 98 (Table LV, photo. 114)



A Bracelet of Large Diamonds

A bracelet of three rows of first-class large diamonds in *chatons*, the clasp bears a portrait of Nikolai Alexandrovich, the brother of Alexander III, covered by a fine portrait diamond. Dates from the third quarter of the 19th century. No. 102 (Table LVI, photo. 118)



Two Gold Bracelets with Diamonds

Diamond bracelets in solid metal with an elegant design in the Louis XVI style. A beautiful piece of jewellery work dating from about 1780. No. 48 (Table XXII, photo. 48)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie’s (lot 44) for £3,400

Two Bracelets with Various Stones

Together the two bracelets form a necklace. Presumably the first letters in the names of the amethysts, chrysolites, chrysoptases, topazes, aquamarines, chalcedons, hyacinths, sapphires, emeralds and agates with which the bracelet is decorated form some word or name. Probably dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth. No. 226 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie’s (lot 18) for £.310

A Bracelet of Black Agate

A bracelet of twenty-four oval *chatons* of black glass and agate set in silver gilt. Probably dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth. No.- 227 (no photo)

Two Bracelets with Pearls and Plates of Reindeer Hoof

The two bracelets use eighteen polished plates of reindeer hoof separated by pearls. An original and interesting work, evidently dating from the period of the Empress Elizabeth.

No. 228 (no photo)

Two Bracelets

Two old bracelets of varicolored stones set in silver. The gemstones are separated by diamonds. On the clasp is a large round chrysolite surrounded by diamonds. The first letters of the names of the stones probably form some word. Dates from about 1820.

No. 229 (no photo)

Two Gold Bracelets

1. A gold bracelet with a cross made of four flowers covered in white enamel with gold leaves and a small turquoise. The clasp is engraved with the letters: "d. 18 April 1818" (the date is the birthday of Alexander I).

2. A gold bracelet engraved with the inscription: "Du 3 Sept. 1840 jusqu'au 16 April 1841."

No. 230 (no photo)

Sets of Jewellery

Chrysoptase Ornaments

A set of earrings, pins and a necklace made of high quality Silesian chrysoptases set in frames of Brazilian diamonds. Dates from the period of the Empress Elizabeth, about 1770.

No. 220 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1827 by Christie's (lot 5) for £265

Ornaments of Reindeer Hoof with Diamonds

A highly distinctive set of ornaments (pendants and earrings), the historical significance of which remains unclear. It is highly probable that the reindeer hoof has connections with some special impressions or historical memories.

No. 217 (no photo)

Ornaments of Smoky Topaz

A series of highly distinctive ornaments (three gold bracelets, earrings and twenty-three pins) of flat faceted light-coloured opal set on black in solid gold.

No. 218 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1827 by Christie's (lots 2 and 3) for £58 and £27

Diamond ornaments with Bohemian Garnets

Element ornaments with diamond bands, interwoven with strings of garnets. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 219 (no photo)

Small Ornaments

The set includes two pins, a clasp with the gold (mirror image) monogram S.M.E. (possible the monogram of Elizaveta Petrovna) a frame with a small miniature portrait of a woman. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 221 (no photo)

Ornaments of Bohemian Garnets

High-quality Bohemian garnets of great beauty and size used in two bracelets, a cross suspended from two points and separate *chatons* in gold. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 222 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1827 by Christie's (lot 1) for £58

Ornaments of Bohemian Garnets

Two bracelets, twenty-three ornaments for sewing to the dress and a necklace of Bohemian garnets set on silver. Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 223 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1827 by Christie's (lot 4) for £37

Dress Ornaments

Diamond Buttons

Eighteen spindle-shaped silver buttons for sewing to the dress of various forms and sizes with old square stone of various tones. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 210 (no photo)



Diamond Buttons

Buttons with diamonds set on silver for sewing to the dress from the early period of Catherine the Great, with old Brazilian stones of good quality on Indian ink. Beautiful items dating from the mid-18th century. Listed in the old inventories as belonging to Maria Fedorovna.

No. 105 (Table LXIII, photo. 121)

S.J. Phillips, London

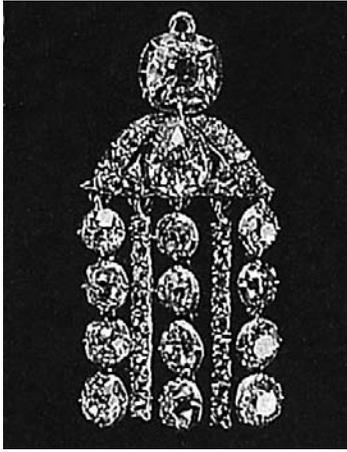


Six Silver Clasps with Diamonds

Several curved clasps for sewing to the dress of silver openwork design, with the kind of flowers and buds which can be seen in pieces from the period of Catherine the Great attributed to the jeweller Duval. The setting is solid silver. Dates from about 1780.

No. 118 (Table LVI photo. 136)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 25) for £6,100



Diamond Ornaments for Sewing to the Dress

Sixty-five ornaments for sewing to the dress of various design, reminiscent in style and treatment of signed pieces by the famous jeweller Duval who produced articles of precisely this type in the 1780s. The diamonds are set in solid silver.

No. 106 (Table LVIII, photo. 122)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's S.J. Phillips, London

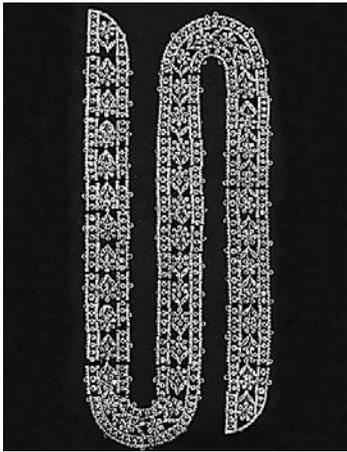


Diamond Ornaments in the Form of Bows

Ornaments for sewing to the dress of solid silver, four of which are in the form of bows. Evidently only parts of some other decoration. The stones are set in solid silver. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great, with the form of the bows suggesting the work of Duval.

No. 115 (Table LX, photo. 133)

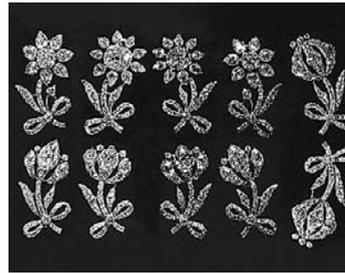
Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 45) for £135



Diamond and Silver Ornaments for Sewing to the Dress

One hundred and twenty-three ornaments of an original asymmetrical design for a man's sleeveless jacket. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 152 (Table LXXX, photo. 177)



Diamond Ornaments in the Form of Flowers for Sewing to the Dress

These items belong to a set of sixty-five ornaments of various design. The style and treatment of the forms is reminiscent of several signed works by Duval, who produced diamond articles of precisely this type in 1780.

No. 188 (photo. 216)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 54)

S.J. Phillips, London

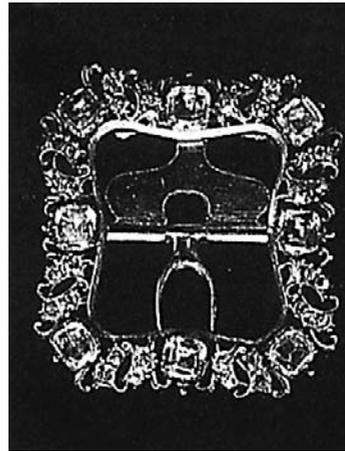


Ornaments for Sewing to the Dress in the Form of Branches of Blossom

Twenty ornaments in solid gold for sewing to the edges of a *kaftan*. The beauty of these items captures the elegance of the age of the Empress Elizabeth, when miraculous works of the jeweller's art were created from a limited selection of stones. Dating from about 1750.

No. 53 (Table XXXV, photo. 53)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 10) for £175



Buckles for Shoes

Two pairs of silver buckles (men's and women's) decorated with finely cut sapphires and diamonds, dating from about 1750 with a steel fastening stamped with the word "Clover."

No. 107 (Table LVIII, photos. 123, 124)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 9) for £175

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Emeralds in Gold Chatons

Twenty-seven old emeralds set on foil on solid gold as buttons or ornaments for sewing to the dress. The stones are of varying quality, size and shape.

No. 275 (no photo)

Emerald Leaves

Two connected emerald leaves with *cabochons*. Each leaf in solid gold on foil.

No. 263 (no photo)

Diamond Buttons

Ten buttons for sewing to the dress encrusted with diamonds with beautiful engraving on the reverse, evidently dating from the 1810s–1820s. Five of the buttons are slightly larger with very beautiful Brazilian diamonds.

No. 212 (no photo)

Buttons with Spinels

Two pairs of buttons with light-coloured spinels on foil surrounded by Brazilian diamonds set in silver. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great.

No. 213 (no photo)

Diamond Buttons with Emeralds

Emeralds of various sizes and shapes surrounded by diamonds set in silver of average quality. The mounting of several of the buttons has an interesting clip patterned in the Louis XV style. Evidently dating from about 1730. No. 214 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 52) for £170

Gold Buttons with Diamonds

Two gold cuff buttons with two diamonds of blunt oval form. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great. No. 215 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 24) for £300

Diamond Ornaments For Sewing to the Dress

Forty-five small diamond ornaments for sewing to the dress with branches at their centre connected by a small flower. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great. No. 216 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 92) for £1,150
The Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Diamond Ornaments (Buttons) for Sewing to the Dress with Square Emeralds

Sixteen old buttons from the time of Catherine the Great, three of which have been made into pins. Each of them has a small but very clear square-shaped emerald cut with stepped faceting and each emerald is surrounded by sixteen small diamonds. Dating from the period of Catherine the Great. No. 224 (no photo)

A Gold Buckle

A solid gold carved buckle with four diamond roses from the time of Peter the Great. A subtle piece of jewellery work in the Louis XVI style, dating from about 1700. No. 244 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 6) for £26

Gold Chatons with Sapphires

Sixteen sapphires of various sizes, shapes and colours set on foil in solid gold. Used as ornaments sewn to a man's sleeveless jacket. The settings date from the 18th century. No. 252 (no photo)

Cufflinks of Agate with Small Gemstones

Double cufflinks each with a round pale-grey agate set in gold with applied ornamentation in the form of a flower in a pot with small emeralds, rubies and sapphires. Probably dating from the late reign of the Empress Elizabeth. No. 267 (no photo)

Chatons with Red Stones

Thirty-five chatons set in silver with red stones on foil (spinel, topaz, rock crystal). The settings date from the period of the Empress Elizabeth. No. 268 (no photo)

Chatons with Spinels

Six openwork chatons in gold with spinels and a rose topaz covered with lacquer on the underside. No. 273 (no photo)

Rings

Wedding Rings

1. A gold ring with a cross, inscribed with the words "Thy will be done," with a small ruby.
2. A pair of rings (a man's and a woman's) of gold and silver inscribed with the words "le juillet 1817 - 1 juillet 1842." Obviously connected with the silver wedding anniversary of Nicholas I. No. 241 (no photo)

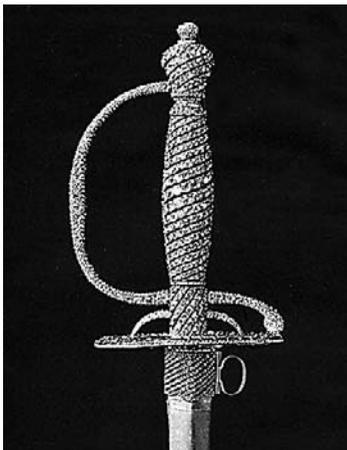
A Ring with a Large Diamond

A chased work ring of light gold with a large diamond surrounded by diamond roses on blue enamel. Probably dates from the early period of the reign of Catherine the Great. No. 242 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 82) for £260

A Ring with A Large Emerald and Diamonds

A ring of rare beauty dating from the second half of the 18th century with superb stones. The junction of the decorations with the ring itself has finely worked small leaves with diamond roses. Dates from the early reign of Catherine the Great. No. 234 (no photo)



A Sword and a Sabre

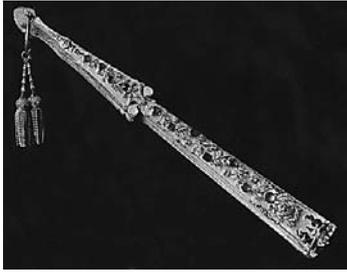
A Sword with a Diamond Hilt

An openwork gold hilt 7.5 cm in length very finely worked and encrusted with diamonds. A steel blade with gilded tracery work. Evidently dates from the early 19th century. It could possibly be the famous sword of Paul I. No. 203 (Table C, photo. 232)



A Diamond-Studded Sabre

The scabbard is polished silver. The blade is steel with applique gold work. The hilt is in chased gold decorated with small diamonds set in silver. The cockade on the hilt consists of a first-class diamond surrounded by two rows of medium-sized diamonds. Dates from the first half of the 19th century. It has been suggested that the sabre belonged to Alexander I. No. 202 (Table XCIX, photos. 230, 231)



Other Articles

A Fan with a Coronation Scene

A French fan dating from about 1890 in carved mother of pearl covered in gold and decorated with precious stones and tassels with small crowns. On one side of the artificial parchment there are several fantastically combined coronations against the background of Moscow, and on the other a view of St. Petersburg with large ships on the river Neva and Kronstadt.

No. 200 (Table XCVII, photo. 228)

A Fan with a View of Fredenborg Castle

A beautiful fan made in Paris with a Mingart watercolour of the castle of Fredenborg. Both plates have representations of female figures and roses chased in gold and covered with pink-tinted opalescent enamel. At the top of the fan is a double-headed eagle with a gold crown.

Made in Paris in about 1900.

No. 295 (no photo)

A Large Magnifying Glass

A large magnifying glass with a gold rim covered in white enamel with green leaves and a handle of Sayan nephrite. Inscribed with the initials "N.P.A.," indicating that the glass belonged to Nicholas II. Made by the jeweller Petrov for the shops of the firm of Fabergé.

No. 297 (no photo)

A Gold Carnet in the Louis 16th Style
A beautiful French *carnet* dating from the late 1770s.

No. 298 (no photo)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 122)



The Saltykov Gold Cup

A solid chased gold cup with a lid and a stand on three feet. The cup bears the following inscription; "To General-in-Chief Count Ivan Petrovich Saltykov from the Capital and Provincial City of Saint Peter and from the entire province in gratitude for his preventing the enemy from reaching these parts in 1790."

No. 201 (Table XCVIII, photo. 229)

Snuff Boxes

An Oval Snuff Box with a Medal of Catherine the Great

An old Russian silver snuff box with a medal of Catherine the Great bearing the imprint "1774".

No. 285 (no photo)

A Flat Snuff Box

An very fine octagonal gold snuff box made in Geneva with an enamel landscape. Presumed to date from the 1820s.

No. 290 (no photo)

An Oval Snuff Box with Brightly-Coloured Enamel and a Miniature

An oval gold snuff box covered in brightly coloured enamel in the oriental style with a miniature of Alexander II when he was heir to the throne. In the opinion of A.K. Fabergé the snuff box was made in Geneva. Engraved on its side are the words: "God Save the Tsar 23 December 1833."

No. 287 (no photo)



A Jasper Snuff Box in the Louis XV Style

A fanciful snuff box in two parts with an opening for the finger made of English jasper with a chased gold mounting of fine English work. Presumed to date from the mid-18th century.

No. 197 (photo. 225)

Sold at auction in 1827 by Christie's (lot 91) for £2,600



A Snuff Box with Seven Emeralds

A chased gold snuff box with an inscription on the lid in diamond "roses": "Alexandra to Charlotte July the 1st 1842" (the name Charlotte is in English). On the bottom of the snuff box is a mosaic by Wekler depicting the Fermersky Palace in St. Petersburg. The label inside the box bears the inscription: "after the deceased King of Prussia Frederick II."

No. 198 (photo. 226)

Sold at auction in 1927 by Christie's (lot 123)



A Snuff Box with a Portrait of Catherine the Great

A round gold snuff box with blue enamel and a portrait of Catherine the Great. Probably dates from the mid-19th century.

No. 199 (Table XCVI, photo. 227)

The Hillwood Museum, Washington



A Snuff Box with Diamonds
A magnificent snuff box of heliotrope in a gold mounting with diamonds on coloured foil in the Louis XV style. One of the very rarest pieces of its kind by French craftsmen of about 1750.
No. 80 (Table XLVI, photos. 80, 81)

Two Snuff Boxes
Two damaged gold snuff boxes, one in the form of a double-sided book made in Geneva in about 1820, the other with a secret lid, but without a miniature, probably made by Keibel (1830).
No. 286 (no photo)

An Oval Snuff Box of Blue Enamel
A small French oval snuff box of blue enamel with a cupid. Dates from the early 19th century.
No. 288 (no photo)

Six Assorted Snuffboxes

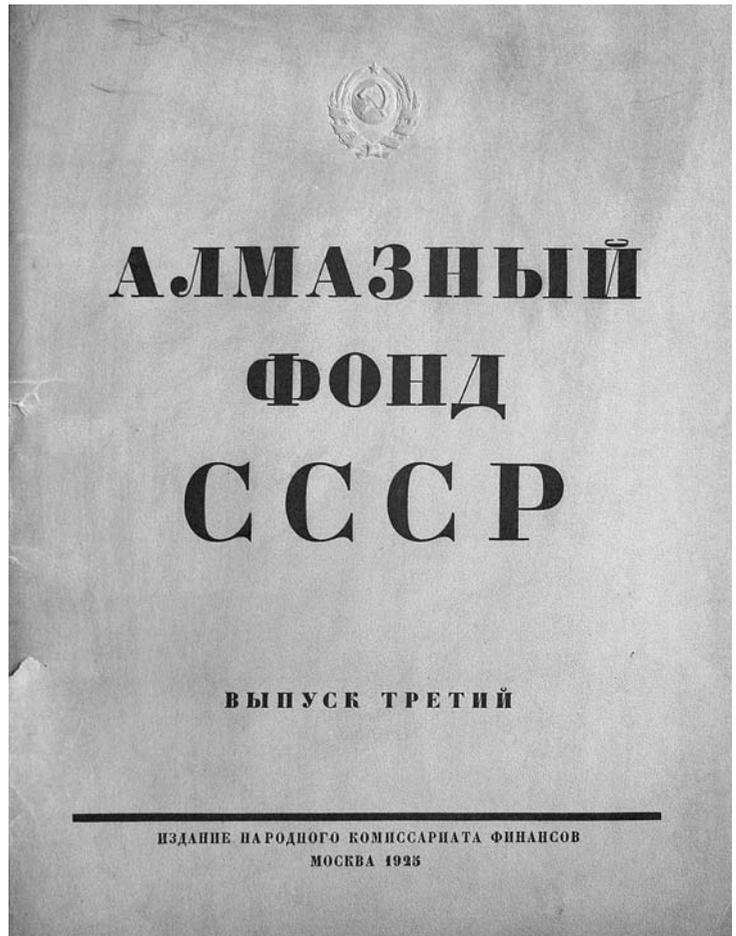
1. A small blue snuff box made in Geneva in the early 19th century.
2. A flat snuff box of chased gold probably made by Keibel.
3. A large solid gold snuff box with a medal of the Empress Elizabeth which serves as the lid. Made in England in the 1820s.
4. An oval silver snuff box in the Louis XVI style dating from the 1880s.
5. A gilt bronze snuff box in the Louis XV style with a hunting scene, made in Germany in the 18th century.
6. A small flat gilt bronze snuff box with a profile of Alexander I.
No. 289 (no photo)

A Gold Snuff Box with a Miniature
A flat gold snuff box with red enamel and a miniature of the heir to the throne Alexei, surrounded by small diamonds. The lock has a small *cabochon* emerald. Made in Germany in the early 19th century.
No. 291 (no photo)

A White Opal Snuff Box with a Medallion
A fine gold snuff box with white enamel made in Paris. A medallion with five dancing women in imitation of antique cameos. Dates from the 1770s.
No. 292 (no photo)

A Snuff Box with the Monument to Peter the Great
A round gold snuff box of blue enamel made in St. Petersburg by the craftsman O. Budde showing the statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg. The enamel imitates lapis lazuli with gold flecks. Written below the monument are the words: "Summer 1782 August the 6th." Dates from the period of Catherine the Great.
No. 293 (no photo)

A Snuff Box from Geneva
A flat octagonal gold snuff box made in Geneva with turquoise, white and blue enamel. The picture on the lid depicts a scene from ancient history. Dates from the early 19th century.
No. 294 (no photo)



Fersman A.E. *Russia's Treasure of Diamonds and Precious Stones*, Moscow, The People's Commissariat of Finances, 1924–1925. Vol. I-IV

Yuri Pyatnitsky

France

¹ Specifically, the Seligman firm handled the sale of Aleksander Zvenigorodsky's distinguished collection of Byzantine cloisonné enamels, the basic part of which collection is now owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. See: *Iu. Piatnitsky, Istorii prodazhi kolleksii A. Zvenigorodskogo* (in press). There are assertions in the literature (based on Seligman's memoirs) that Seligman purchased these outstanding pieces of Byzantine and ancient Russian cloisonné enamels from the collection of Mikhail Botkin in St. Petersburg. Botkin was, in fact, the intermediary between the Zvenigorodsky heirs and Seligman in the transaction.

² *Art Russe: Exposition d'icônes et d'orfèvreries Russes* (Brussels and Paris, 1931), pp. 21–35.

³ *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Russian Art. 1 Belgrave Square London S.W. 1: 4th June to 13th July 1935* (London, 1935), pp. 11–25, 92–96, 115–117.

⁴ Alexander Schaffer's relations with Soviet authorities, the NKVD and *Antikvariat* as well as his role in the sale of Russian antiquities are well known. See: *Treasures into Tractors*, pp. 25–26, 245, 247, 261, 293, 396.

⁵ Dr. Lilian Malcove Ormos, born in 1902 in a small Russian town near Mogilev, emigrated with her parents to North America in 1905. After graduation from the University of Manitoba, she moved to New York and pursued an interest in art collecting. See: Sheila D. Campbell, *The Malcove Collection. A Catalogue of the Objects in the Lilian Malcove Collection of the University of Toronto* (Toronto and Buffalo, N.Y., 1985), pp. vi–x.

⁶ Campbell, *Malcove Collection*, pp. 273–275, Nos. 371, 372.

⁷ *Exposition d'art russe ancien et moderne, organisée par le Palais des Beaux Arts de Bruxelles, 1928* (Brussels, 1928).

⁸ *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Russian Art: 1 Belgrave Square. London, Oliver Burridge, 1935.*

⁹ After the death of Alexander Popoff in 1964, his widow and heirs began the gradual sale of the Popoff collection. See: *Treasures into Tractors*, pp. 279, 293.

¹⁰ *Treasures into Tractors*, pp. 22–23.

¹¹ *Kunstsammlungen der Stadt Recklinghausen. Sammlung Popoff: 50 russische Ikonen vom 15.–19. Jahrhundert* (Recklinghausen, 1967).

¹² Eva Hausteine-Bartsch, *Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen* (Munich, 1995), pp. 65, 93, 112.

¹³ *Sainte Russie. L'Art Russe des origines à Pierre le Grand. Sous la direction de Jannic Durand, Dorota Giovannoni et Ioanna Rapti*, exhibit catalogue (Paris, 2010), pp. 192–193, No. 81.

The formation of markets for Russian icons varied from country to country. Although French antiquities dealers, led by Germain Seligman, who had worked in the Russian antiquities market in the years before the First World War,¹ were interested in acquiring art treasures from Russia in the years 1927–1929, the French government barred the auction of such goods in fear of possible lawsuits from former owners. As a result, *Antikvariat* found itself laboring in France on the edge of legality and often on the wrong side of it, working mostly through particular galleries and shops. The principal conduit for sales in France was A. [later his first name is given as Jacques] Zolotnitsky's shop, *A La Vieille Russie*, through which thousands of objects were sold. It was the Zolotnitsky shop that supplied virtually all the religious art displayed at *Art Russe: Ancien et Moderne*, the exhibition held in Brussels in May–June 1928. Zolotnitsky also took part in the December 1931 exhibition in Brussels, *Art Russe: Exposition d'icônes et d'orfèvreries Russe*, organized by *Les amis Belges de l'art Russe*. The icon section of the show was put together by art historian Pavel Muratov, from whom Zolotnitsky had commissioned a book about his shop's Russian icons in 1931. The exhibition's section of religious applied art was supervised by Leon Grinberg, Zolotnitsky's nephew and the co-owner of *A La Vieille Russie*.² Zolotnitsky and the shop were also significantly involved in the 1935 London exhibition, *A La Vieille Russie*, which included icon-paintings, valuable crosses and the smaller, very precious icons worn by bishops and archbishops, enameled goblets, cups, crosses and icon surrounds.³

Alexander Schaffer (1900–1972), an Austrian émigré employed at *A La Vieille Russie*, was one of Zolotnitsky's main collaborators. Schaffer moved to New York in 1932, where he worked for the Hammer brothers and then opened his own antiquities shop in Rockefeller Center. In 1935 Jacques Zolotnitsky and Leon Grinberg emigrated to the United States and formed a partnership with Schaffer. The New York salon, renamed in 1941 *A La Vieille Russie*, remains active at 781 Fifth Ave. in Manhattan.⁴

Several of the Zolotnitsky icons shown in the exhibitions of the period 1928–1935 and featured in Pavel Muratov's 1931 book are now owned by the University of Toronto in Canada. The university got them in 1982 when it acquired the collection of the New York-based psychoanalyst, Lilian Malcove.⁵ These icons are *Holy Week* (Stroganov school, 17th century) and a unique symbolic grouping of four icons from the same period.⁶ Several of the icons were purchased in the 1960s from *A La Vieille Russie*, including *Troitsa* (17th century), a Greek *Ioann Predtecha-Angel Pustyni* (16th century), *Neopalimaia kupina* (Moscow school, late 16th century), *Sviatoi Nikita, pobivaiushchii besa* (formerly of the V. Erickson collection, Oslo) and a portable miniature iconostasis (Stroganov school, 17th century).

Alexander Alexandrovich Popoff (1880–1964), another Paris dealer in antiquities, is often mentioned, along with Jacques Zolotnitsky, in connection with sales of Russian antiquities. Popoff's gallery at 86 rue de Faubourg Saint Honoré stood opposite the Elysée Palace. The son of a Russian general and himself a military specialist who worked in France during the First World War, Popoff settled in Paris in 1919, where he was active in the antiquities trade and amassed a private collection of Russian art. Popoff helped organize several major exhibitions of Russian art, including the Brussels show of 1928⁷ and the 1935 show in London.⁸ The Popoff home was itself a kind of museum, full of rare art selected with great care and remarkable understanding.⁹

The Popoff gallery is believed to have been one of the firms through which legal and quasi-legal antiquities from the Soviet Union were sold.¹⁰ In 1966, fifty icons (15th–19th centuries) from the Alexander Popoff collection were acquired by the Recklinghausen Museum in Germany and shown in a special show.¹¹ The most important of these pieces were of the Novgorod school: a two-sided tablet showing Lazarus rising and Jesus entering Jerusalem; a full-figure depiction of the Apostle Peter from the second half of the 15th century and *Sviatye Konstantin, Elena i Agata* (second half of the 16th century).¹²



Antiquities dealer Alexander Popoff
in his apartment in Paris
Photograph taken before 1965
From the archive of Ikonen-Museums
Recklinghausen

To conceal the true source of the goods, a rather tangled system involving several countries and various intermediaries was used to get the art to Paris. The art so smuggled in from the Soviet Union did not just go to private collections. In 1933 the Friends of the Louvre Society purchased an armilla (*epauliere*) decorated with a scene of Christ's ascension. Since 1934 this unique example of Mosan art (from approximately 1170–1180) has been in the Louvre, France's principal museum. It came, however, from Russia: according to legend, in the 12th century the armilla belonged to Prince Andrei Bogolubsky. Until 1919, this rare example of medieval art was kept in the *sacristy*, or dress chamber, of the Uspensky Cathedral in Vladimir and then, until 1932, in the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin, when it was taken by *Antikvariat* and thus came into the hands of the dealers in Paris.¹³

The Louvre also has a no less rare copper plaque with a depiction in gold of John the Evangelist done in a gilding technique known as “*zolotaia navodka*” or “*zolotoe pis'mo*.” The plaque, similar to those at the Russian Museum, was part of a 14th-century altar gate. It came from the collection of Ilia Ostroukhov, whose Moscow home and collection became an affiliate of the Tretyakov Gallery in 1918. After Ostroukhov's death in 1929 – he had helped manage what was then called the Ostroukhov Museum of Painting and Icon Art in his former townhouse – prospective foreign buyers were invited to the museum to consider the purchase of materials from its displays. When the museum was shut down, the Russian portion of the holdings was moved to the Tretyakov. The plaque – *Sviatoi Evangelist Ioann* – was purchased in 1933 through the All-Union Association for Trade with Foreigners (*Torgsin*) by Voldemar Wehrin, a Swiss who represented the Red Cross in Moscow. Wehrin then sold it in 1955 to the Louvre.¹⁴ The Louvre also acquired another icon that had followed much the same path through the Wehrin collection. This was the *Prepolovenie iz Gostinopol'ia* that had once belonged to the restorer Grigory Chirikov. After Chirikov's arrest, the icon was in the collection of the Historical Museum in Moscow.

Among private French collections of ancient Russian art, one of the most important was that of Jean Herbette, the French ambassador to the Soviet Union (1924–1930). During his six years in Moscow, Herbette, a devoted student of Russian art and culture, collected icons under the guidance of Russian art historians, principally Alexander Anisimov, and the experts of the Central State Restoration Workshops (*TsGRM*). The Herbette collection was put up for auction in Dusseldorf by Christie's in 1973. Its icons were distinguished by their undoubted authenticity, which set them apart from the icons of other “diplomatic collections” from the second half of the 1930s, whose icons were predominantly of doubtful authenticity or had undergone significant restoration.¹⁵

The icon collection of Pierre Mussard, a Swiss engineer who lived in Paris on the rue du Pont de Lodi, was also well known in the city. Like other collectors of icons, Mussard did not generally give much information about the sources of the icons he put up for auction, but, based on relevant exhibit catalogues, his icons were 14th–17th century works of the Novgorod and Moscow schools.¹⁶

The collection of Baron Eugene de Savitsch, a Russian émigré, included a number of important icons. De Savitsch, a surgeon, art collector and writer, described himself as a collector who began in the 1920s and continued busily in the field for the next 30 years.¹⁷ The sources for his icons were, for the most part, other émigrés and antiques dealers in France, where de Savitsch lived until 1951. In that year, the de Savitsch collection numbered 142 pieces, including icons in tempera on wood, portable icons of metal, stone, walrus bone and ivory, intricately carved wooden objects, cast metal diptychs and triptychs, amulets, a variety of crosses, reliquaries and a variety of vessels used in religious ceremonies.

By far the most important objects in the collection were two 13th- to 14th-century silver reliquaries from the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Novgorod. De Savitsch had bought them in Paris, where he found and purchased other interesting examples of ancient Russian art

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Les Icones Russes du XIVe au XVIIe siècles. Exposition 1954–1955. Galerie Paul Ambroise (Paris, 1954), p. 13, No. 1, plate I; Iurii Piatnitskii, *Zolotaia navodka*: katalog, in: *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Velikogo Novgoroda. Khudozhestvennyi metall XI-XV vekov* (Moscow, 1996), pp. 329–330.

15

The best things shown of the Jean Herbette collection were 17th, 18th and 19th century icon paintings. From time to time, icons from the Jean Herbette collection turn up in exhibitions and auctions. For example, the rare icon *Bogomater' Tikhvinskaia so stsenami chudes* (Yaroslavl school, 17th century) was shown in 1976–1977 at an exhibition in Amsterdam. See: *Important Icons from Private Collections*, edited by Edouard Dergazarian and Michel van Rijn (Amsterdam, 1976), No. 19.

16

Ikony izvestny nam po vystavochnym katalogam, in: *Les Icones Russes du XIVe au XVIIe siècles. Exposition 1954–1955. Galerie Paul Ambroise* (Paris, 1954), Nos. 7, 9–11, 15, 22, 24, 26, 26b, 34, 35, 38–43, 45–50, 52–59, 63, 67, 68, 71, 72.

17

De Savitsch Collection of Rare Russian Icons and Other Objects of Ecclesiastical Art (XI to XVIII centuries). Auction in Zurich, October 1, 1956, auction catalogue (Zurich, 1956). The preface to the catalogue is by de Savitsch. After the Second World War, de Savitsch moved to the United States, settling in Washington, D.C., where the first catalogue of his collection was published in 1951. It was compiled by Nathalie Scheffer, a pupil of A. Anisimov and a specialist in the Slavic Division of Dumbarton Oaks Library and Collection.

Virgin with Child, Jerusalemskaya
Novgorod school, 15th century
Tempera on wood panel. 34 × 27 cm
 Former Collection Jacques Zolotnitsky, Paris
 Unknown location



Archangel Mikhail
Stroganov school, 17th century
Tempera on wood with linen. 28 × 25 cm
 Former Collection Pierre Mussard, Paris
 Unknown location



from the Zolotnitsky shop. The sources of several pieces of applied art in the collection included: the Museum of the St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy, a museum in Tver, the Khanenko collection in Kiev and the Postnikov collection in Moscow.¹⁸ The de Savitsch collection is notable for the unusual quality and character of the pieces, almost all of which are of elite museum quality.

The collection was put up for auction in 1956 at the Savoy Hotel in Zurich after showings at Frankfurt in Germany and Neuchatel and Zurich in Switzerland. The preceding five years had seen the collection grow, and the auction comprised 177 lots. In his introduction to the auction catalogue, de Savitsch wrote: “I should be very happy and proud if the sale of my collection and the distribution of the illustrated catalogue were to give collectors of the Western world a taste of this Russian art, so profound in its appeal and as yet so little known.”¹⁹ The auction saw the collection dispersed. Two 17th-century icons – *Khristos v rost* and *Sviatoi Nikolai s zhitiem* – went to the collection of Mr. and Mrs. L.K. Dreissen in Cape Town, South Africa,²⁰ and a 15th-century icon, *Khristos Vsederzhitel'*, was in the possession of the Temple Gallery in 1974.²¹ Several icons went to the Recklinghausen Museum in Germany (the 17th-century *Sofiia Premudrost' Bozhiia, Otsechenie glavy Sviatogo Ioanna Predtechi* and *Deisus* and the 15th-century *Iliia prorok v pustyne*),²² and other pieces from the sale still turn up at auctions (London's AXIA Gallery offered for auction in 1987 a cross reliquary of niello-engraved silver from about 1600),²³ and in 2004 the Jan Morsink Ikonen gallery in Amsterdam put up for sale a 17th-century icon painted in miniature style, *Pokrov Bogomateri*, in a silver surround.²⁴ The whereabouts of a number of items from the collection are now unknown to specialists and others in the field of ancient Russian art.

The Icon Society, based in Paris and founded in 1927 on the initiative of Vladimir Riabushinskii,²⁵ played an important role in making the case for ancient Russian icons in the West. The group actively opposed the indiscriminate sale of Russian art treasures by the Soviet government and the auctioning in the West of items taken from Russian museums and “nationalized” private collections. The group's protests proved their effectiveness in 1928–1929, when France barred the planned auctions of Russian art treasures and turned away Grabar's touring exhibition of icons. Later, the idealism of the group would find itself somewhat at odds with the realities of the situation, specifically the realities of the antiquities market. Sales of antiquities by Russia had become an inescapable fact, and galleries and collections in the West were replete with them. The truly pressing task of the moment was to collect and preserve the priceless objects and get them into the hands of knowledgeable persons concerned about Russia's artistic heritage.²⁶ In this regard, the Icon Society performed admirably: thanks to its exhibitions, the Louvre acquired several remarkable examples of ancient Russian art in the 1950s, including: the already mentioned plaque of John the Evangelist; the icon paintings, *Bogomater' Umilenie* and *Prepolovenie*, from the Valdemar Wehrlein collection, in Berlin, in 1955; the Novgorod icons, *Bogomater'* and *Raspiatie* from the collection of R. Zeiner-Henriksen, Oslo, in 1957; *Strashnyi Sud*, from the first half of the

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Nathalie Scheffer, *Russian Ecclesiastical Art: A Descriptive Catalogue of the de Savitsch Collection* (Washington, D.C., 1951), Nos. 38, 39, 43, 52, 56, 59, 78, 85, 87, 90, 91, 98, 100, 119, 127 (Museum of the Spiritual Academy of St. Petersburg), 36, 77, 102, 103, 106, 110, 115, 128, 140 (Tver museum), 37, 44, 46, 55, 96, 97, 101, 104, 107, 114, 122–124, 132, 135–137 (Khanenko collection), 125 (church museum in Kiev), 71 (Postnikov collection, Moscow).

19

De Savitsch Collection. Auction in Zurich, auction catalogue (Zurich, 1956).

20

Christmas Exhibition 1969: Icons. South Africa National Gallery, catalogue (Cape Town, 1969), Nos. 10, 11.

21

Masterpieces of Byzantine and Russian Icon Painting 12th–16th Century. Exhibition 30 April to 29 June 1974: Temple Gallery, catalogue (London, 1974), p. 70, No. 27.

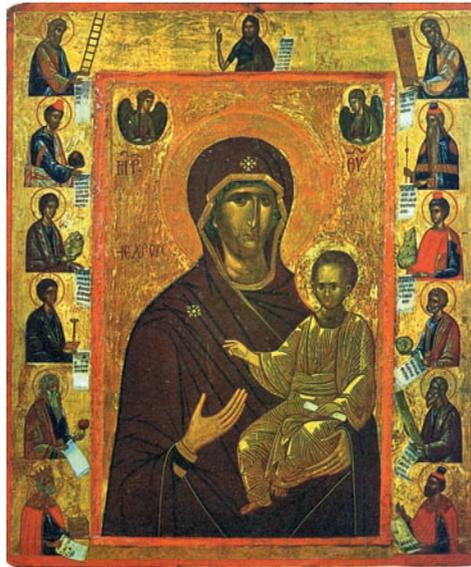
22

Haustein-Bartsch, *Ikonen-Museum* (Munich, 1995), pp. 32–33, 91; *Kunstsammlungen der Stadt Recklinghausen. Ikonen-museum. 4.erweiterte Ausgabe 1968*, catalogue (Recklinghausen, 1968), Nos. 78, 279.

23

Yanni Petsopoulos, *East Christian Art. AXIA. A 12th anniversary exhibition*, catalogue (London, 1987), p. 131, No. 100.

**Virgin with Child Hodegitria
with the prophets on margins**
Byzantine, end of the first quarter of the 14th
century
Tempera on wood panel. 133 × 109 cm
Former Collection Natasha and W.E.D. Allen,
Great Britain
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin



Virgin with Child Hodegitria
Byzantine, early 15th century
Tempera on wood panel with linen
82 × 63 cm
Former Collection Natasha and W.E.D. Allen,
Great Britain
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin



17th century, through the Zolotnitsky shop in 1956 (that year Leon Grinberg, nephew of Jacques Zolotnitsky, gave the museum the 16th-century icon, *Sviatoi Simeon Stilit*) and *Zosima i Mariia Egipetskaia* (Stroganov school, 17th century) from the collection of Valdemar Ebbesen in Oslo in 1960.²⁷

England

Great Britain and Germany did not share France's reluctance and immediately warmed to the trade in Russian antiquities. London was the site, for example, of the 1927 Christie's auction of rare treasures from the *The Diamond Fund of the USSR* and of items from the palace of Princess Palei in Tsarskoe Selo (bought by the firm of Weis and Dian). In 1933 the British government participated in the purchase of the famed 4th-century Sinai Codex from the Public Library in Leningrad. Still, English collectors and museums were showing little interest in Russian icons. Only diplomats, following in the centuries-old tradition of acquiring examples of the national art of the countries in which they were stationed, seemed interested. Sir William and Lady Hayter, for example, had Russian icons (including a 19th-century *Bogomater' Vladimirskaia*, done in the style of a 17th-century painting) in their collection. William Hayter was Britain's ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1957.²⁸ Although his example may seem to go beyond the framework of "Stalin sales," it shows that the Stalin-era tradition of "ambassadorial collections" persisted. In 1987 the AXIA Gallery in London offered at auction an extremely interesting, clearly museum-quality icon, *Anastasis*, from the second quarter of the 16th century. It had been acquired through *Mosgostorg* in 1935 and was in the collection of Wilfred Blunt, Esq.²⁹

W. E. D. Allen's interest in icons stands as the rare exception of that of a non-diplomat. In 1968 he donated 24 Greek and Russian icons to the National Gallery of Ireland, in Dublin, in memory of his late wife, Natasha Allen. He also sponsored the publication of a catalogue on the icons. Its foreword, written by Allen himself, offers some information on the origins of the collection. "The genesis of this collection dates back to the 1920s. During those years I visited Istanbul and Black Sea countries on several occasions. It was a period of upheaval and change. Thousands of fugitives from the Russian Revolution came to Istanbul with any treasures they could save. And in 1923, after the failure of the Greek invasion of Turkey, an exchange of 'minority' populations between Greece and Turkey caused the removal of the Greek communities in Asia Minor and the dispersion of many of the treasures in their churches. For several years the great bazaar of Istanbul was full of the debris of those times including many icons, lecterns, carved gates, and other church furniture. In the 1920's the beauty and aesthetic significance of icons were not yet understood in Western Europe. . . . It was Stanley Casson, a Fellow of New College Oxford and sometime director of the British Institute of Archaeology in Athens, a scholar of rare perception, who first interested me in icons. From time to time I acquired about a hundred examples – of varying quality. A few were displayed – and the rest stored – in my mother's house in Hertfordshire. . . . Over the years a few had been added to the

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Jan Morsink *Ikonen – Highlights Collection 2004*, catalogue (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 28, No 16.

25

Vladimir Pavlovich Riabushinskii (1873–1955) was one of the widely known Riabushinskii brothers. In emigration, he put aside politics and devoted himself to the preservation of Russian culture abroad. He founded the Icon Society in 1927 and was its chairman until 1951 and thereafter its honorary chairman.

26

G.I. Vzdornov, Z.E. Zalesskaia, O.V. Lelekova, *Obshchestvo Ikona v Parizhe* (Moscow and Paris, 2002), Vols. 1–2.

27

Visages de l'icône, catalogue (Paris, 1995), Nos. 48, 50, 53, 57; *Catalogue sommaire illustré des peintures du musée du Louvre. Part II. Italie, Espagne, Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne et divers* (Paris, 1981), pp. 351–353.

28

The Temple Gallery. Russian Icons. London, 4th June to 9th July 2007, exhibit catalogue (lot 18).

29

Petsopoulos, *East Christian Art*, pp. 114–115, No. 86.



Portrait of Vilhelm Assarsson by Norwegian artist Reidar Aulie, 1939
Villa Bergsgården, Stockholm
Photo from Nationalmuseum,
Stockholm, Sweden

original collection: notably two early Russian icons acquired through Professor Muratoff [Pavel Muratov, ed.] from the sect of the Old Believers during a visit to the Baltic States in 1938; and two or three in Istanbul during our long sojourn in Turkey (1944–1949). Finally the collection was reduced to some thirty examples – of which I have retained only half a dozen for intimate reasons.³⁰ Allen's interest in icons was spurred in no small way by the exhibition of icons from Russia held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1929, by his acquaintanceship there with the restoration specialist Pavel Iukin, by his friendship with art historian Pavel Muratov as well as by the Russian background of his wife, Natasha, who shared her husband's interest in ancient icons.

Of the 24 icons that Allen gave to the National Gallery of Ireland, 14 were Byzantine or post-Byzantine, 1 was an altar piece of carved wood from a local workshop, perhaps in Austria or Bohemia, 4 were cast metal folding icons and 8 were early Russian painting-icons from the 15th–17th centuries.³¹ The Allens' deep interest in icons was a happy exception in the world of English collectors.

Somewhat later – in the 1960s and 1970s – Eric Bradley put together his remarkable collection of icons, which he kept at his home, Keats Grove, Hampstead. Over the course of 20 years, Bradley amassed a remarkably fine collection of Byzantine and Russian examples that was unrivaled in its time. For more than a year, Bradley held talks with the British Museum on its possibly acquiring his collection of 61 icons, but the museum rejected his offer in 1984 in what was surely a major mistake. In the end, 55 pieces from the collection were purchased by the Menil Foundation of the United States through the good offices of the London antiquities dealer and connoisseur Yanni Petsopoulos.³²

In the course of building his collection, Bradley sold several of his icons and acquired others that he thought better suited. For example, he sold the *Khristos Oplechnii* from Cargopol (second half of the 16th century).³³ He also sold another fine icon, *Sviatoi Sergii* (Moscow school, 15th century).³⁴ One can firmly state that both these icons originated in the “Stalin sales.”

The Scandinavian Countries

The countries of the North played a major role in the development of Soviet Russia. The close financial and economic ties that developed between Russia and the Scandinavian states before the revolution remained intact, although cooperation now sometimes verged on the quasi-legal. For many years, a stream of legal and illegal émigrés from Russia made their way out through Finland.

One of the leaders of Finland's Communist Party, Otto Kuusinen (1881–1964), helped organize the illegal sale in Scandinavia of diamonds, precious stones and antiquities from Russia.³⁵ For many years, too, Scandinavian banks and commercial representatives were active in Soviet Russia, providing credits and serving as intermediaries (a kind of “cover”) for commercial and financial operations. For example, the Swedish trade and economic association Assa specialized in forest products and other natural resources from Russia, while at the same time representatives of the company were equally active in the purchase and exportation of antiquities and objects from museums.³⁶

The flood of cultural and artistic valuables sweeping from Russia to Scandinavia after the revolution of 1917 was such that Maxim Gorky took note of it, writing in the Petrograd daily *Novaia Zhizn'* for 23 May 1918: “Some 60 antiquities shops in Stockholm now deal in paintings, china, bronzes, silver, rugs and, generally, in goods from Russia. There are 12 such shops . . . in Christiana, a great many in Gothenburg and other cities of Sweden, Norway, Denmark. Some display signs that read: ‘Antiquities and art from Russia,’ ‘Russian antiquities.’ One often finds announcements like this in the newspapers: ‘Offered for sale rugs and other things from Russia's imperial palaces.’”³⁷

The role of Fritjof Nansen, the Norwegian scientist and polar explorer, in facilitating sales

30

D. Talbot Rice and T. Talbot Rice, *Icons the Natasha Allen Collection. Catalogue. The National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin, 1968), pp. 11–12.

31

Rice and Rice, p. 43. Unfortunately, the descriptions of the icons give no information on provenance. However, for No. 17, *Our Lady's Protection or Stole (pokrov)* there is this notation: “a stamped mark on the back reads ‘Douane. Paris.’”

32

In June 1987 the Houston (Texas) foundation opened the Menil Collection to the public. It is one of the best icon collections in the United States. See: Clare Elliott, “A History of Icons in The Menil Collection,” in: Annemarie Weyl Carr (ed.), *Imprinting the Divine: Byzantine and Russian Icons from the Menil Collection* (Houston, 2011), pp. 12–13.

33

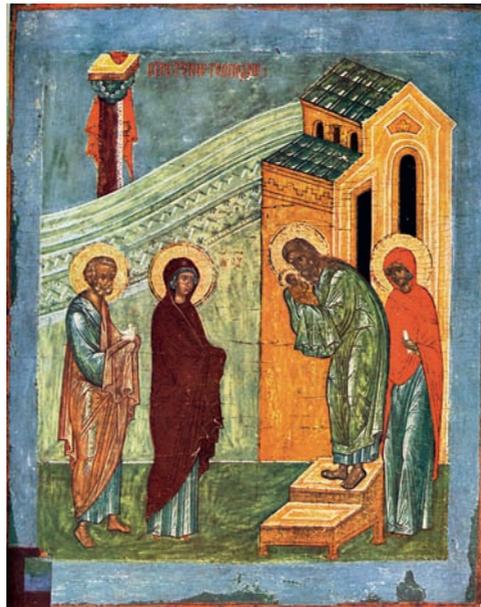
Russian Works of Art. Sotheby Parke-Bernet Inc. New York, 11 and 12 December 1979, auction catalogue (lot 501).

Presentation in the Temple

Tver school (?), 16th century

Tempera on wood. 56.5 × 45 cm

R. Zeiner-Henriksen Collection, Stockholm, purchased by Nasjonalgalleriets Venner, 1957 and donated to National Gallery, Oslo National Gallery, Oslo, Norway



Entry into Jerusalem

Tver school (?), 16th century

Tempera on wood. 57 × 44 cm

R. Zeiner-Henriksen Collection, Stockholm Private collection, Oslo, Norway



of art and other cultural valuables from Russia should not be underestimated. He headed the Mission, an international committee representing the League of Nations and Red Cross for the repatriation of former war prisoners and to aid the hungry in famine-stricken Soviet Russia. As part of his efforts, Nansen brought to France – the action was illegal – and sold the first shipment of church valuables from Russia.³⁸ It was through his efforts and those of other intermediaries that a mighty flood of antiquities moved through Stockholm to the rest of Scandinavia, Germany and other countries from Soviet Russia.³⁹

A great many of these arrangements were kept secret, as were the details of the movement of “cultural” goods to Revel (Tallinn), Helsingfors (Helsinki), Stockholm and beyond. The valuables would be carefully concealed among ordinary cargo and ship’s equipment. Sometimes the secret cargo might be discovered, and then the Soviets would rebut the accusations as provocations and slander. They took this tack in the fall of 1920, for example, when a vessel headed to Stockholm from Petrograd with a shipment of flax was found on inspection to be carrying sacks of museum-quality gold, platinum and silver objects. The art was intended for sale in the United States and was to have been sent on to the US by the American mission in Stockholm. The English newspaper *Matin* reported the incident in its issue for Sept. 23, 1920. English experts speculated that the artifacts originated in the Hermitage and the Patriarch’s *sacristy*.⁴⁰ A major sale of a shipment of Gobelins, porcelain, paintings, icons and silver from nationalized private collections took place in Stockholm in 1922.

Not surprisingly, Scandinavia, particularly Sweden and Norway, is home to the most interesting and comprehensive collections of ancient Russian painting. Indeed, for many years private Scandinavian collections were the source of Russian icons for the world’s major museums and the antiquities market.

By far the fullest account of these Scandinavian collections is given in Helge Kjellin’s (1885–1984) remarkable book about Russian icons in Swedish and Norwegian collections.⁴¹ For our purposes, it is important to note that almost all the icons mentioned by Kjellin were obtained in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, that is, in the period when Russia’s national cultural legacy was most actively being sold.

Sweden

Sweden’s National Museum in Stockholm has one of the world’s most important and largest collections of Russian icons. It largely consists of gifts, first of all from the enormously wealthy Swedish financier, Olof Aschberg. Hardly less significant were the gifts from the Swedish diplomat Vilhelm Assarsson.

Aschberg (1877–1960) was one of the most colorful figures in the financial and collecting world of his time (he founded The New Bank Ltd., better known as “the workers’ bank,” in 1912). After the revolution in Russia, Aschberg established close financial contacts with the Soviet authorities and frequently served as intermediary for financial operations between

34

R. Temple. *Icons: A Sacred Art. 30th Anniversary Exhibition Catalogue* (London, 1989), pp. 52–54, No. 11.

35

Krasnye konkistatory, p. 145.

36

Op. cit., p. 248.

37

Op. cit., pp. 70–71.

38

Op. cit., p. 193.

39

Iu. M. Gogolitsyn, *Velichaishie poddelki, grabezhi i khishcheniia proizvedenii iskusstva* (St. Petersburg, 1997), pp. 324–325.

40

Krasnye konkistatory, p. 113.

41

Helge Kjellin, *Ryska Ikoner I svensk och norsk ägo* (Stockholm, 1956).



The Apostle Peter and Martyred Woman Saint
Novgorod school, late 13th-early 14th century
Linden wood and egg tempera

72 × 24 × 2.5 cm; 72.5 × 24 × 2 cm

Bought in Russia in 1930s by Vilhelm Assarsson,
acquired by Nationalmuseum, 1965, from Anders
Wiberg

Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden

the Bolsheviks and world – especially American – interests. He was one of the founders in 1921 of the Russian Commercial Bank, which had powerful branches in Moscow and Petrograd. Aschberg himself lived in Russia until 1925 and thus throughout the period of the New Economic Policy. It was during the NEP years that he became interested in Russian icons, attracted by their beauty and the virtually unlimited market that then existed in Russia. “When it became known that I was collecting icons, people of the Old Russian aristocracy came offering me icons which had been in their families for hundreds of years and which they were now compelled to sell,” he wrote in his memoir, *My Russian Icons*.⁴²

Unfortunately, however, we have no hard information, in the form of documents or memoirs, about how Aschberg built his collection. We know only that, when he left Russia, he was granted permission directly from Leonid Krasin to take along the collection of more than 200 icons. That followed the work of a team of four Russian experts, who had carefully examined the collection and certified it for export. But the experts also ruled that 15 of the icons were unique and of museum quality and recommended that Aschberg donate them to Russian museums. He did so.

During the later 1920s, Aschberg made Paris the principal base of his operations. He purchased a townhouse in the Bois du Rocher, not far from Versailles, and he kept his icons there. In 1928 he was in contact with

Soviet authorities regarding the trade in icons and visited Moscow. There Igor Grabar helped him obtain 52 icons that had been restored at the Central State Restorations Workshops (*TsGRM*).⁴³ In his memoir, Aschberg claimed to have always planned to give the collection to Sweden, but the papers of his friend, Helge Kjellin, indicate that he negotiated with the Louvre about a possible sale, but that, on Kjellin’s insistence, decided to give the collection to the National Museum in Stockholm.⁴⁴

Before the gift from Aschberg, the National Museum owned only two Russian and two Greek icons. With the gift, the museum immediately became the home of the most significant collection of Russian icons outside of Russia. The icons range over an enormous swath of time, from the 15th to the 20th centuries, and represent various schools of the art of icon making. Most of them carry a stamp on their reverse sides: “*Soviet State Export Comity*” [committee]. The reverse sides of a number of the icons state that they were purchased from the Paris gallery, *A La Vieille Russie*.⁴⁵

The splendid gift was not the end of Aschberg’s icon collecting. In 1952 he made a donation to the National Museum of more than 30 Russian icons, which he described as of “outstanding quality.” The tireless Ulf Abel has found and published a certified bill for 33 icons purchased by Olof Aschberg in August 1935 through *Antikvariat* that includes the icons of the second gift.⁴⁶ In all likelihood, they were purchased without Aschberg’s personal presence. At very nearly the same time, the American businessman George R. Hann arranged the long-distance acquisition of a collection of icons through *Antikvariat*.

Another important figure in the story of the Swedish National Museum’s icon collection is Swedish diplomat Vilhelm Assarsson (1889–1974). Fourteen icons are associated with him, 13

42

Ulf Abel, "The National Museum Icon Collection," in: Ulf Abel with Vera Moore, *Icons* (Stockholm, 2002), p. 9.

43

It is true that this fact is not reflected in his memoirs, but it is indicated in his correspondence and in several archival documents uncovered by the Swedish scholar Ulf Abel. See Abel, "National Museum Icon Collection," pp. 11–12.

44

Aschberg made his gift in connection with the 13th International Congress of Art Historians, which took place in early September 1933 in Stockholm. The 241 icons, already in the possession of the National Museum, were shown at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

45

Abel with Moore, Nos. 89, 164, 263, 265, 290.

46

Aschberg paid 6,000 roubles, or 20,777 Swedish kronor, for the 33 icons. Despite *Antikvariat's* certificates stipulating the origin of the works as the State Historical Museum and the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the formerly private collections of Pavel Kharitonenko, Alexei Morozov and Lev Zubalov, these claims still stand to be carefully checked against the documents and inventories that still survive in Russia.

47

Abel with Moore, p. 49, No. 42. The diplomat gave the icon of St. Nikolai to Prince Eugen in 1947; it is Novgorod school of the late 15th-early 16th centuries.

48

Abel with Moore, p. 15.

49

Abel with Moore, pp. 45–46, No. 38; E. S. Smirnova, "Novgorodian Icons of the 14th and Early 15th Centuries in the Collection of the National Museum," in: *National Museum Bulletin*. Vol. 8 (1984), pp. 70–82.

50

Abel with Moore, Nos. 3, 41, 46, 67, 71.

51

Abel with Moore, Nos. 66, 36, 37, 39, 54, 74, 77.

52

Kjellin, *Ryska Ikoner*, pp. 8, 42, 108, 118, 144, 161–163, 199, 203, 221–228, 237–238, 241, 245, 252, 262–263, 269–273, 285, 290–295, 312, 316; plates III, XXXVI, XLI; figs. 4–11, 60, 78, 94, 99, 102, 105–106, 111–114, 117–119, 129, 137, 168, 175, 194.

of them at the museum and one at the Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde museum.⁴⁷ The National Museum's Assarsson icons are its most ancient and artistically most distinguished. Assarsson, who was in Sweden's foreign service, was stationed in Moscow and Leningrad in the 1930s and became Sweden's ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1940. His home in Stockholm, the Villa Bergsgården, on the island of Djurgården, was filled with his collections of art and included a fine library. The home and its contents, though no longer including the Russian icons, were bequeathed to the Swedish Academy. While the Villa Bergsgården no longer has any Russian icons, an album in the library contains 80 much-annotated photographs of icons. The annotations make clear that at one time Assarsson owned a very fine collection of ancient Russian icons. The correspondence between Assarsson and his friend Bertel Hintze, an art historian and for many years the director of the Helsinki Konsthall, makes clear that both men were deeply committed collectors of Russian icons. In a letter dated Nov. 9, 1935, Hintze told Assarsson that he was planning a visit to Moscow and Leningrad and regretted that his diplomat-friend would not be with him. Hintze wrote that he "planned to visit the museums, but neither *Torgsin*, the *Antikvariat* nor commission shops. . . . For the charm of the former visits to the warehouses consisted in our sharing of the quest and the discoveries – and I suppose they will have to wait until you come to Moscow. . . . Instead I shall cultivate icons at the Tretyakov." It was in the state antique shops and warehouses referred to that the two friends pursued their collecting.⁴⁸ Assarsson sold his collection of icons for 210,000 Swedish kronor to his friend Ake Wiberg (1902–1963), a businessman and collector. In 1959 Wiberg gave the National Museum one of the finest icons in his collection, *Deisus so sviatim Nikolaem i neizvestnym sviatym*, a product of the Novgorod school of the late 14th or early 15th centuries.⁴⁹ He gave the museum another five icons a year later,⁵⁰ and in 1965 the museum acquired six more icons from the collection from the collector's son.⁵¹ The fate of the remaining icons is unclear, but they appear to have been dispersed to various private collections in Sweden, Europe and America. Two of the collection's icons – *Uspenie Bogomateri* and *Sviatoi Nikolai s zhitiem* – were purchased on the antiquities market and are at the Recklinghausen Museum in Germany.

Another large and interesting collection of Russian icons was that of Einar Krane, of Stockholm, who was secretary of the Norwegian embassy in Moscow from 1905 until 1946. His collection included a remarkable Novgorod icon with a red background and a half-figure *en face* depiction of *St. Clement*, a no less interesting *en face* of *Ilia Prorok*, a splendid half-figure *Deisusnyi* from the 15th century (five icons of this series [*chin*] are now in the National Gallery in Oslo), several two-sided tablets from various periods, a rare *Bogomater' Smolenskaia* and many other outstanding pieces.⁵² Several icons from the collection have been acquired over the years by the National Gallery in Oslo. Other pieces have gone to various private European collections. Icons from the collection still turn up at auctions of antiquities.

Norway

The National Gallery in Oslo has an interesting collection of Russian icons. Almost all are connected with the name Rudolf Zeinner-Henriksen (1878–1965), a Norwegian businessman and collector. He arrived in St. Petersburg in 1903, and his life and work were linked to Russia for the next 30 years. After the Bolshevik revolution, he represented Norway as a commercial counselor. In his brief autobiography, Zeinner-Henriksen wrote that he began buying icons in the 1920s: "I was the foreigner who reacted positively to the offers and in doing so achieved this unique result." Among the specialists who helped him, he mentions the restoration specialist Pavel Iukin and art historian Nikolai Repnikov.

In 1927–1928 Zeinner-Henriksen showed his Russian icons widely in Scandinavia: Bergen Picture Gallery, in Oslo, Gothenburg and Lund. He also took part in the great exhibit of private-collection icons at the National Museum in Stockholm.

53

Nasjonalgalleriet. Katalog over utenlandsk malerkunst (Oslo, 1973), Nos. 956, 957, 963–965, 967. There were also later additions of Zeinner-Henriksen icons to the National Gallery. Several notable icons of his were acquired for the museum in 1934 and 1957 through the efforts of the Society of Friends of the National Gallery. These included paired icons of the prophets David and Isaiah from about 1500, *Sviatoi Nikolai Chudotvorets s zhitiem* (Novgorod school, 16th century), a signed Greek icon *Dionisii Areopagit* by Emmanuil Tzanes (17th century) and *Rozhdestvo Bogoroditsy* and *Vvedenie vo khram* (Tver school [?], 16th century). *Nasjonallgalleriet*. Nos. 958, 959, 961, 968, 985, 961, 962.

54

Kjellin, *Ryska Ikoner*, pp. 52–53.

55

Marja Supinen (ed.), *Ikonit/Ikoner. Suomen taideakatemia* (Helsinki, 1963), pp. 8–9; E. S. Smirnova, V. K. Laurina, E. A. Gordienko, *Zhivopis' Velikhogo Novgoroda. XV vek* (Moscow, 1982), pp. 266–267, N. 41.

56

For a detailed study of Russian Orthodox icons in Finland, see: K. Kotkavaara, *Progeny of the Icon* (Abo, 1999).

57

Interestingly, Germany was a transfer point for illegal and quasi-legal shipments (through the Ministry of Culture and other ministries) of Russian antiquities, especially icons, in the 1970s and 1980s. The icons, in considerable numbers, went from Germany to France, Italy and Britain. In Germany itself, in particular in the Federal Republic, a quite active antiquities trade in Russian icons of unknown provenance thrived. An unprecedented spurt in the trade occurred after Perestroika and German unification.

58

W. Bayer, *Soviet Art Sales to Europe, 1919–1936*, in: *Treasures into Tractors*, p. 196.

59

They were shown at a Berlin exhibition of copies of frescoes in 1926. See: *Byzantinisch-russische Monumentalmalerei. Ausstellung der Faksimilekopien in Berlin vom 3. November bis 5. Dezember 1926*. (Berlin, 1926).

60

Alexander Anisimov mentioned one of the icons given to him during his interrogation by the OGPU in October 1930. See: I. L. Kyzlasova, *Istoriia otechestvennoi nauki ob iskusstve Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi 1920–1930. Po materialam arkhivov* (Moscow, 2000), p. 341.

By far the most interesting and valuable icons of his collection were acquired by the National Gallery in Oslo in 1928. These were paired icons of Ioann Zlatoust and Vasilii Kesariiskii (of *Deisusnyi* set, from about 1500), *Rozhdestvo* and *Voznesenie* from the early 16th century (to these were added a *Voskresenie Lazaria* of the same set in 1958) and a *Bogomater' Ierusalimskaia* of the 16th-century Novgorod school.⁵³ In 1930 Zeinner-Henriksen donated a huge (132 × 94 cm) and splendid Novgorod icon, *Mandilion*, from the late 15th century to Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim in connection with celebrations for the 900th birthday of St. Olav.⁵⁴

Finland

After the revolution of 1917 and the granting of full independence, Finland was one of the principal routes to the West for Russian émigrés and art. Soviet authorities used Finland as a place for conducting financial operations and for the quasi-legal exportation of valuables. Along with émigrés, a great many Russian icons came into Finland, though few remained there. They tended to go on, via Sweden, to Germany, France, Britain and the United States.

Bertel Hintze, the art historian and director of the Helsinki Konsthall, amassed a remarkable collection of icons during his travels in Russia. Unfortunately, they did not become the basis for the creation of a major museum collection of ancient Russian art in Finland. The best of the Hintze icons were sold at auction. At present, the Russian-icon collection of the Sinebrychoff Museum of Foreign Art in Helsinki is by far the country's most significant. Its best icon – a Novgorod school half-figure *Sviatoi Nikolai* from the second half of the 15th century – came to the museum in 1965 from the collection of Laura Turunen of Tampere, Finland.⁵⁵ Indications suggest that most of the Russian icons to be found in Finland entered the antiquities market through the “Stalin sales.”⁵⁶

Germany

The sale of art from the Hermitage through the firms of R. Lepke in Berlin and Boerner in Leipzig has been studied in detail. Still, there remains much to be uncovered. For the rest of Europe, Germany was the chief transfer point for icons from Soviet Russia. With altered “provenances,” they were shipped from Germany to France and other countries.⁵⁷ Within Germany, in addition to Lepke, a substantial number of auction houses, galleries and private individuals actively took part in the sale of Russian art, including icons.

In 1927 the People's Commissariat of Trade signed a contract with Stepan Mikhailovich Mussuri, who held dual German and Greek citizenship, to serve as intermediary for Soviet trade representatives working with Western clients. Mussuri's example was followed by many other small and medium antiquities dealers in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, who preferred making personal visits to Russia rather than relying on the services of firms like Lepke, which for a time monopolized all contacts with the Soviets. The names of many firms that worked with Moscow in the late 1920s and into the 1930s have recently become known. They include: Hugo Helbich in Munich, Hase, Paul Graupe, Karl Maison, German Art Syndicat (Import Antique Company), the Matthiesen Gallery on Berlin's Viktoriastrasse.⁵⁸ Church-related items made up only a very small portion of the Russian antiquities imported to and through Germany. Moreover, of such goods, demand was greatest for silver liturgical vessels, jeweled Gospel frames, enameled plaques taken from sacred objects, embroidered items and ritual clothing. Buyers and dealers were less interested in ancient Russian icons. The little demand that existed was for icons with precious surrounds and those with some connection to the royal family and famous palaces. The German market changed very little, even after Grabar's icon exhibition of 1929.

The rare exception was the collector Martin Winkler (1893–1982), an Egyptologist and philosopher. Winkler's first visit to Russia was in 1924. From then until 1933 he regularly



**Armilla (epauliere) showing
Crucifixion of Christ**
Copper, gilding, enamel champlevé,
enamel cloisonné
11.5 × 11.7 cm

Found in 19th century at Pereiaslavl'-Zalesskii Monastery; taken to Moscow prior to showing at Russian Historical Pavilion, Paris World Exposition, 1867; during the later 19th century at Rumyantsev Museum, Moscow, then part of Mikhail Botkin collection in Petersburg.

Sold in 1920s or 1930s, probably through German antiquities dealers; collection of Robert von Hirsch, Basel, sold at auction, Sotheby's, June 1978; purchased by German National Museum for \$2,034,450
German National Museum, Nuremberg, Germany

traveled across Russia, visiting the cities of Vladimir-Suzdal, Yaroslavl and other cities on the Volga as well as the cities and monasteries of the North, including Ferapontov and Kirillo-Belozersk. In Yaroslavl he watched as Grigory Chirikov and Mikhail Tiulin restored the famous icon, *Bogomater' Oranta* (first third of the 13th century), which had been discovered at Spasskii Monastery in 1919. In Moscow, Winkler was a friend of Alexander Anisimov and Igor Grabar, the latter of whom painted his portrait in 1931. He was also friendly with Anatoly Lunacharsky, who helped him obtain the documents (entry passes) needed for his inspections of churches, monasteries and museums. It was hardly surprising, then, that Winkler began to collect ancient Russian icons. By his own account, he bought his first icon at the Sukharev Tower flea market in Moscow for 20 roubles. The icon was “. . . good looking late 17th century, not a bad work, but in a miserable state.” In view of his ties to Anisimov and Grabar and the restoration specialists of *TsGRM* as well as Lunacharsky, this fairy-tale account seems somewhat doubtful. In view of the quality of the icons that he had in his possession as early as 1926,⁵⁹ it is clear that he already had access to icons through quite professional intermediaries and from very good sources, possibly even from the warehouses of the Museum Fund.⁶⁰

An exhibition of icons and church-related objects from private collections was held in the Kunsthalle in Recklinghausen in 1955. The private collections included Martin Winkler's, who then lived in Feldafing on Starnberger Lake. The exhibition led to the creation in Recklinghausen of a museum of icons, with Winkler responding positively to a proposal that

he sell his icons to the new museum, and 48 icons from the Winkler collection were thus acquired by the Recklinghausen. They include such remarkable works as: a red-background *Sviatoi Dimitrii* and a *Blagoveshchenie* (both Novgorod school, 15th century); a *Sviatoi Nikolai* (Moscow school, 16th century, bust); *Khristos Nedremannoe Oko* and *Ognennoe voskhozhdenie Il'i Proroka* (16th century); *Sviatoi Georgii*, full-figure (third quarter of the 16th century).⁶¹

Martin Winkler played a considerable role in encouraging Western interest in Russian icons, but few know that he actively sought to bring order to the German trade in icons from Russia as early as 1924. His efforts did not succeed, however, for conservative museum and academic circles in Germany did not share the enthusiasm of the young scholar, the revered Max Friedlander declaring: "Icons are not art."

Another major collector whose icons served as part of the foundation of the museum in Recklinghausen was Heinrich Wendt (1901–1956). A physician, Wendt was a foreign-language enthusiast and knew Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Greek and even Arabic, besides the languages of Western Europe. It is said that he acquired his first icon for 25 marks from a dealer in Frankfurt. This was a Greek icon from Athos. In 1952 Wendt organized the first post-war exhibition of icons in Germany. It was held at the Kestner Museum in Hannover and included 211 icons from private collections, including the collection of Wendt himself. Like Martin Winkler, Wendt also participated in the Recklinghausen exhibition of icons, later selling the new museum 42 of his icons. The 42 included such remarkable works as the *Vladimirskaia Bogomater'* in a precious surround with enamels (17th century; it had belonged to the Moscow collector Nikolai Postnikov in the 19th century); *Prazdniki i izbranie sviatie* (Novgorod school, 16th century); *Ioannn i Prokopii Ustniuzhskie* (from about 1660).⁶² How Wendt came into the possession of his Russian icons remains cloaked in secrecy. In 1947 he stated in a letter to the restoration specialist and painter Evgeny Klimov that he owned approximately 70 icons, including a Novgorod *Uspenie* from the 15th century. Wendt also told Klimov: "Most of the icons come from the Balkans, where I have strong connections to Bulgaria (my wife is Bulgarian) and to Romania (I lived in Bucharest for a year). A portion of the icons come from the art trade."⁶³

The museum in Recklinghausen, which for many years was the only museum in Europe dedicated solely to icons, owes much to Martin Winkler and Heinrich Wendt. There have been suggestions, not thoroughly checked, that icons brought back from Russia by the Nazis were given to Recklinghausen by the American occupation authorities in the early 1950s, rather than return them to Russia. This continues to be a concern with regard to the Byzantine miniature on parchment *Apostol Pavel*, an 11th-century work that had been in the possession of the Kiev Museum (once part of the Andrei Murav'ev collection, it is now at the Recklinghausen museum).⁶⁴ Was it sold by the Soviets in the 1930s or carried off by the Nazis in the early 1940s? In any case, the Recklinghausen museum has been growing steadily over the years, adding outstanding icons to its collection, including icons from collections formed during the period of the "Stalin sales" of works sold by the Bolsheviks.

There are works of art whose absence from their national museums is especially grievous. One such work is the gold cloisonné *plastina* that is now in the Berlin Museum. It is one of the best examples of Byzantine cloisonné in the world – a gold *plastina* with a depiction of St. Dimitry-Orant, from the first half of the 11th century.⁶⁵

At least two thefts figure in the story of this plaque. At one time it was part of the embellishment on the cover holding a *Chetveroevangeliia* (Four Gospels) rendered in Georgian at the Iviron Monastery in Athos in Byzantium. The volume has been considered one of the national relics of medieval Georgia since the 12th century and once belonged to the famous Tsarina Tamara. Until the 16th century the volume was at the cave monastery of Vardziia. After Persian "captivity" and the historic disruptions of the 16th–18th centuries, the volume

61

Eva Haustein-Bartsch, *Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen* (Munich, 1995), pp. 28–29, 52–53, 57, 66, 82–83, 88–89, 101, 105, 108.

62

Haustein-Bartsch, pp. 36–37, 42–47, 85, 126–127.

63

Eva Haustein-Bartsch, “The Icon Collectors Dr. Heinrich Wendt and Professor Dr. Martin Winkler and the Foundation of the Ikonen Museum Recklinghausen,” in: Simon Morsink, *Collecting Old Icons. Russian and Greek Icons, 15th–19th century* (Amsterdam, 2011), p. 15.

64

Haustein-Bartsch, *Ikonen-Museum*, p. 94.

65

H.C. Evans and W. D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261* (New York, 1997), pp. 160–161, No. 107.

66

Splendeur de Byzance. Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire Bruxelles, exhibition catalogue (Bruxelles, 1982), pp. 192–193.

67

W. Bayer, “Soviet Art Sales to Europe, 1919–1936,” in: *Treasures into Tractors*, pp. 192–193.

68

Zhukov. 2005, p. 196.

69

Op. cit., p. 229.

70

In May 1935 the distinguished Byzantinist Nikolai Okunev, a student of Nikodim Kondakov, gave as his expert opinion that the icon was from the Moscow cathedral. In 2009 the son of the owner put the icon up for sale at a Sotheby’s auction in London. See: *Russian Art. Russian Works of Art, Faberge and Icons. Auction in London, 1 December, 2009*, auction catalogue, lot 709.

came into the possession in the mid-19th century of the Gelati Monastery, the repository for most relics of the Georgian church. In 1859 Ivan Balashov, a high-ranking representative of the Russian Imperial Court, won the agreement of the leaders of the Gelati Monastery to an exchange: Balashov got the invaluable manuscript cover, with its enamels, and the monastery received a beautiful new silver cover made by the Sazikov firm of Moscow. This was the first theft. Thereafter the enamels – a Byzantine *Sviatoi Dimitrii* and the 12th-century Georgian *Bogomater’ na trone* – were kept in St. Petersburg. By the terms of Balashov’s will, they were to go the Hermitage. However, in 1919, “on the way to the museum,” the valuables fell into the hands of *Antikvariat* (the second theft) and, in 1921, were sold in Germany. The Berlin Museum got the Byzantine enamel,⁶⁶ and the Georgian went to Belgian collector Alfred Stokle (in all likelihood it is now in Switzerland). About the same time, several items from the former collection of Mikhail Botkin, taken from bank safes in Moscow and Petrograd and from the apartment of Botkin relatives in Petrograd, were sold, the Berlin Museum obtaining some of Mikhail Botkin’s medieval and Sassanian treasures.

Austria

The Vienna auction house Dorotheum was one of the most important sites for the sale of Russian art in Austria. Contacts were established as early as 1926, thanks to visits to Moscow and Leningrad of Leo Lederer, who spoke Russian well. In early 1928 there was an auction at Dorotheum of Russian art, including icons and church-related paraphernalia. Quite a significant number of small Austrian dealers and galleries, many of them Jewish or Jewish-owned, took part in the trade in antiquities with the Soviet Union. These included Elkan Silberman, Sanct Lucas, Fritz Mondschein (later Fred Mont), Pollak & Winternitz, Gluckselig & Co. and A. Kende.⁶⁷ The Grabar-led exhibition of icons in Vienna that took place in 1929 did better in Austria than in Germany. The reviews in the press and the reaction within “educated” circles were better. “Commercial” circles showed more interest as well. The exhibition certainly boosted interest in Russian icons among collectors and auction houses, and as early as 1930 Vienna’s Hagenbund firm found buyers for 82 ancient Russian icons.⁶⁸

Czechoslovakia

The situation in Czechoslovakia was rather different. The Czechoslovak Legion, which returned home from Russia in 1920, brought back as “trophies” a rather significant number of art objects, including church-related things. This was the first wave of Russian antiquities, but hardly the last, to pass through the country. In 1930 in Moscow *Antikvariat* provided a Prague firm, Iakubovich, with Russian icons to be sold in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁹ At that time Prague was one of the chief centers of Russian émigré life. As a result, Prague, like Paris, was hardly the place for openly declared “Russian auctions.” But it was a place for the sale of icons from Russia. The remarkable icon, *Sviataia Pelageia i Sviatoi Ioann*, attributed to Vasily Petrovich Vereshchagin, from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, was purchased in Prague in the 1930s.⁷⁰ And Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s was a relatively important link in the transit out of Russia of illegal and quasi-legal antiquities.

Archival Documents

A secret letter from Krasin, sent to the People's Commissariat of Finance on 20 March 1922

Dear comrades, in reply to your letter No. 78/s of 14 March I wish to inform you as follows.

I decisively object to the proposal of the head of *Gokhran*, com. Arkus, to send to Switzerland a lot of diamonds with a value of up to 100 thou. gold roubles for disposition by some Swede called Karel Feld.

It is entirely natural that Karel Feld is "awaiting the diamonds impatiently, the bigger the better, from 2 to 10 carats, of good quality."

It seems no less incomprehensible that the head of *Gokhran* proposes sending diamonds worth a rather large sum for disposition by this Swede without having bound the Swede with any definite contractual obligations and without having clarified the terms on which the sale of these stones will be managed.

I assume that *Gokhran* has more than enough to occupy itself in identifying, sorting, valuing and storing jewels, without taking on itself the bother of dispatching a lot of goods abroad and selling them there.

I would in general regard the sale of a lot worth 100 thousand gold roubles as an error, in that way we would only demonstrate abroad that we are still not advanced enough to sell jewels in an organised manner and that the fall in prices induced on the diamond market by the highly unsuccessful trading of the Comintern and other institutions has and will continue to have adequate justification.

We must have done once and for all with this way of proceeding, or lack of any procedure, which means that the sale of our diamonds continues to be carried out with losses of tens of percent of their value.

All petty chance sales to acquaintances etc. must be halted. We have to conclude a contract with some major firm (De Beers has been suggested, as well as Watburg) for the establishment of a syndicate for the joint sale of diamonds. This syndicate must be granted monopoly rights, for only in that way will it be possible to create calm on the diamond market and begin gradually to raise the price. The syndicate must provide us with loans on bank interest terms against our deposit...

We must retain the right of accepting the price offered for each separate lot of valuables or leaving the lot as security for the interest paid and

waiting for an improvement in market prices.

An essential condition of this sole rational means of selling that part of our property which has not yet been plundered or frittered away is the establishment of a substantial fund of such valuables worth at least 50 million, since nobody will be willing to talk to us about trifles.

I have raised the question of such a syndicate on several occasions, but I halted all negotiations when in the autumn of last year comrades from the Commissariat of Finance and *Gokhran* informed me that in effect we did not have any valuables fund of any real size.

Now, to my pleasant surprise, I learn that valuables can still be gathered to a value of 100 million. It would be desirable to seek at least approximate clarification of this aspect of the matter.

It is hardly a normal situation when in August and September 1921 the Commissariat of Finance assumes that it does not even have enough valuables for the Polish payment and then in March 1922 it turns out that it has a hundred or two million.

(RTsKhIDNI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 127, l. 144)

A report to the chairman of the Temporary Committee for Science and deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars A.I. Rykov, composed by members of the Organisation Bureau of the Conference of Central State Museums. June 1922

To sell off items from museums is to deprive the country of the most valuable part of everything that has been selected and accumulated in its culture over the centuries.

Cultural values possess the quality of creating new, even more precious values.

The books in the Public Library have given rise to many thoughts and found expression in numerous other precious books.

The pictures of Granet, which found their way into the St. Petersburg repository, opened the eyes of Venetsianov and created the entire supremely valuable school of Venetsianov.

The sculpture of Falconet has justified itself a hundred times over by calling into being half a century later a phenomenon of world significance in Russian literature – Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman."

Fedotov modelled himself on the Dutch paintings in the Hermitage and thanks to them he brought about a sudden change in Russian paint-

ing, transforming it from an art of the court into an art for wide sections of the population.

The Moscow picture collections changed the artistic level of Moscow beyond all recognition, transforming it from a mid-19th century artistic backwater to a major artistic centre.

French furniture, copied by the peasant craftsmen of Prince Meshchersky in local materials, brought into being the supremely valuable Russian industry of furniture made of Karelian birch.

A collection of foreign porcelain in the 18th century created the artistic industry of Russian porcelain, highly valued abroad and constituting a substantial chapter in the history of Russian art. In industry Russian craftsmen were successful abroad when they exploited the opportunity to draw on models from their own museums, both for concept and for technique; thus, for instance Russian silver articles by Sazikov and the Grachevs, Russian enamels, brocades, embroideries etc. were all highly appreciated.

In contrast, the stone faceting industry, which in the Urals was presented with an incomparable opportunity, wasted and withered precisely because of the lack of a good museum of models. One can say that the museums contain the entire future of Russian art and Russian industry not only as a reserve of images created by the finest minds and the best hands over several centuries, but as the irreplaceable foundation for future independent inspiration and expression.

Museums are vitally important not only for the fine arts, but also for the artistic industries. An area such as the theatre, for instance, cannot manage without abundant use of museum materials: how is it possible to recreate in a stage spectacle the spirit of an age, the spirit of an author, the spirit of a work, without reference to genuine works?

Without museum models the science of history is depleted and impoverished and all the other sciences which draw arguments and data from the lessons of history are deprived of the ground of facts on which they stand.

The scattering of the museums represents a terrible threat for such a great matter as the artistic education of the coming generations. Every tour leader knows that it is better not to hold a tour at all than to show copies and acquaint people with third-rate works. And precisely now, it would seem, the age is beginning when the entire basis of education is at last long last moving from a system of learning by rote to a system of the

visual impression of images. In the future society the role of repositories of art seems to be all-embracing. Clara Zetkin, speaking recently of the spread of social ulcers in modern states (illnesses, a decline in morality, and so forth) and indicating the beneficial influence on the growing generation of nature and art, appeals to a single goal: the development of the coming generation, the endowment of life with meaning, training in the ability to enjoy nature and art. But how can people be given a taste for art if all that will be left in the museums are the things for which a buyer could not be found!

All this is so obvious and clear that it is hard to say why in our time the question should be raised of cutting back the museum wealth, that is the highest and finest artistic wealth of the country. Can the Republic really be in such a hopeless situation that it has to sacrifice the future for the sake of the current year's budgetary considerations and is it not taking too narrow a view to pose the question in this way?

It is impossible not to notice here the fact that at the present time the situation of the Republic evidently does not oblige it to liquidate many undertakings with broad goals, calculated to provide a hundred-fold return, but by no means in the most immediate future such as, for instance, the study of magnetic anomaly, electrification, nursery schools, the preparatory work for new railways and canals, etc.

But in that case, why is it precisely the museums which are condemned to be sacrificed and not only not receive the means for a better organisation in the future, but directly marked down for liquidation, at least in part? This partial plan of liquidation is fraught with the most serious consequences, for it is only too clear that once the wrong position has been adopted, it is difficult thereafter to halt the movement down the steep slope. And museum work, which at the present time in Russia is so brilliant, possessing undoubted world significance and arousing the envy and praise of foreigners, in the future is doomed inevitably to go tumbling down from step to step. It is not possible to conceal from oneself that in the eyes of the foreign capitalist world the resort to selling from Russian museums will produce an impression which is extremely disadvantageous for Russia. In countries where they fully appreciate the added value which is represented by the artistic heritage of production, the sale of high quality museum articles will be assessed as an act which is irrational in the highest degree. The eco-

nomical miscalculation will be glaringly obvious, as well as the logical contradiction with the entire system of politics of the Soviet Republic.

Indeed, as early as 1918 Soviet legislation, in the relevant decree of *Sovnarkom*, imposed a ban on the export by private individuals of art works of museum quality and it will appear incongruous in the extreme that at the present time the state is lightheartedly disposing of works of art and antiques of high museum quality while at the same time jealously guarding the art works and antiques of lower value which are in private hands.

Stranger still is the situation arising in connection with the provision of the Riga Peace Accord with Poland which guarantees Russia the right to hold inviolate those valuable cultural items in Russian repositories which are of world significance.

Since items of world importance in the collections of Russia are going to be assigned for sale, they will thereby forfeit their status as repositories of world importance and acquire the significance of a trading fund, and under these circumstances defending items of cultural value against the Polish pretensions will naturally be impossible.

It is perfectly allowable to assume that the income from the first sale of museum exhibits will turn out to be lower than the value of the items which will have to be ceded to Poland as a result of such a sale. What kind of rational economic policy is this?

If an expedient state point of view is to be maintained at all in this matter, then the question must immediately be raised in all its acuity that as far as income is concerned, the entire carefully planned undertaking is doomed to serious reverses, if not absolute failure.

Dealing in works of art is an extremely difficult business. It requires knowledge, flair and a very special talent, prices are very changeable. The moment is of immense importance. Colossal restraint and skilful preparation are required. Even a comparably small, incomplete collection (for instance the Kahn collection) had in times gone by, which had free money in greater abundance, to be sold over a period of several years in order not to force down prices artificially. Art works and antiques are not household items to be sold at markets. Big millions and free millions are by no means that plentiful. The circle of buyers is extremely limited. Great restraint and a very slow pace are required. It is not by chance that the big antiques dealers usually hold on to valuable items

for years or decades. The overheads are very high and honest agents are very rare. It is possible, certainly, just to throw away valuable museum items for a quarter of their value, but this will lead to nothing but the enrichment of the intermediary speculators and will not, of course, be in the interests of the Republic.

But worst of all is the fact that the mere rumour of the possibility of museum sales has a demoralising effect on the entire murky world of the antiques dealers, rousing and exciting their predatory instincts. In the pursuit of their own personal gain they will, of course promote this business in the hopes of doing well out of it and they will not disdain to use any means at all in this matter. In this regard Russian and foreign antiquarians represent an immense danger for Russian culture.

The degree of caution required in this case may be judged from the story of the French Revolution: Fouchet, who was a Jacobin at the time, took a zealous interest in French art works and earned gratitude for his activities in this area, but as it subsequently emerged, he made several millions on this business and when he became minister of police in the government of the Empire, he could be regarded as one of the largest capitalists in France.

In the past sales of valuable art works have never proved an effective means for restoring a country's finances. In the period of the English Revolution the treasures of King Charles I were sold off literally for pennies.

During the French Revolution the intermediary, not the state, made a huge fortune on the sale of the furnishings of the royal palaces.

And so in the present case it is possible to state with absolute certainty that the sale of museum exhibits will have absolutely no noticeable effect on the condition of the state finances. The value of museum treasures is conventional and only appears significant at first glance. It is in any case incommensurable with the requirements of the state. Selling the museums in order to restore the budget is the same as rushing out into the fields during a drought and watering them from a watering can.

Other means are required to restore the finances of the country. Nor should it be forgotten that the expropriation of church valuables by no means justified the hopes placed in it in terms of income, especially if one adds up the cost of the campaign itself and awaits the precise results of the sales.

It is appropriate here to mention that even Austria, when it was in a desperate financial position did not, as far as is known, resort to the liquidation of its museums, but limited itself to mortgaging tapestries.

There is no need even to mention Germany. There they know how to love and value their museums, there they correctly see the museums as the warranty of a better future.

In addition to all of this, the sale of exhibits from Russian museums will be understood as an undertaking dictated by ultimate extremity. The enemies of the republic will be as delighted as they possibly can be by such a clear proof that the country's final resource is being gambled away. By contrast, nothing could so facilitate an increase in the credit and the prestige of the Soviet Republic as the brilliant organisation of museums.

Since 1851 the scholarly literature has established with absolute precision the immense cultural significance of museums. In that year the International Exhibition took place in London and English industry confessed itself defeated by the French. The cause of this defeat proved to be the lack of models in England due to a shortage of well arranged and widely accessible museums. Since then strong competition has arisen between cultured countries and towns in the arrangement and development of art museums. It has become clear to everyone that museums are not only useful and important in the cultural sense, but are profitable to the highest degree in the economic sense.

If a Museum attracts so many visitors in the course of the year that millions of roubles flood into the country annually, then of course it is unreasonable to sell its contents for two million and then discover that the liquidation cost a million.

The Russian museums in the very near future will attract visitors from abroad, enriching the country with a golden rain.

This will not be, of course, if the museums are scattered and liquidated, as many in the country have already been liquidated. There will be nothing left for the Russian museum-workers to do then but follow the example of Nozdrev in the work of the immortal chronicler of life N.V. Gogol, and show the visitors the empty stalls "where the fine horses used to stand."

It is scarcely possible to hope that with the onset of the world revolution our valuable art works will be returned to us. At least in Russia even now certain towns and museums are constantly bickering as a result of disputed items and in this area it is clearly not easy for museum workers to reach agreement. The fact is that there are many towns but works of high quality are rare and there are clearly not enough of them for all the towns and museums.

At the present time the Soviet authorities, despite the country's difficult economic position, must strive to clarify the meaning for the country's future of the valuable artistic and cultural arte-

facts which are kept in the country's museums, clearly illuminating its own national creative tradition, and must stoutly defend this national heritage created by the age-long work of several generations of the Russian people and collected in museums and crystallised there into collections of world importance.

(RTsKhIDNI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 341, l. 20–22)

A report by the director of the Armoury, D.D. Ivanov

In summing up the work of the Armoury Chamber museum for the five years 1918–1923, above all one has to subdivide this period into two periods:

The first is the four-year period when the Chamber's museum activities were essentially halted by the overloading of its premises by two thousand crates of valuables concentrated in it for keeping during the war, and the second lasts one year, when with the gradual recall of others' property it became possible to restore some small part of the Chamber's museum appearance. This division coincides with the change in the director of the Chamber, in which post I succeeded M.S. Sergeev following his death on 21 April last year. In listing the main tasks achieved by the Armoury Chamber during the four years of 1918–1922, for the most part with the intimate involvement and mainly under the guidance of M.S. Sergeev, one may note the following:

1. The Armoury Chamber preserved safe and intact the innumerable valuables from the Palace Department, the Chamber Section and the Marshal of the Court section, the Cabinet of His Majesty, the Chapter of Orders, the Hermitage, the Russian Museum, the Peter and Paul Cathedral, the Stables Department, the Warsaw Palaces, etc. and it has kept all of the crates without damage or loss during those moments of the revolution which were exceptionally crucial.

2. Great work was carried out urgently in October 1920 with the return to their rightful places of crates with valuables from the Hermitage and the Russian Museum, and the work on sorting out entire stacks of crates and their urgent issue to the Petrograd Museum Representative Office went on by day and by night.

3. From 14 January 1922 in the Armoury Chamber a Commission of the Special Commissioner for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables in the person of *Gokhran* representatives Bazilievich, Weis and Chinarev, representative of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate Nikolsky, representatives of the Museum Department and the Armoury Chamber Oreshnikov, Sergeev and myself began the sorting of the colossal amount of property of various institutions (of the court) stored in the Chamber, and this sorting was carried out in immensely difficult conditions, at a temperature of about minus five degrees, with the inkwells

constantly freezing despite our constant efforts to thaw them out on a brazier, working from morning till night at an exceptionally rapid rate, more often than not sorting in a day up to several hundreds items of the most varied quality: from the very finest in the world to the most worthless, determining their fate irrevocably in a few moments and experiencing over a long period in the most difficult form the oppressive yoke of *Gokhran's* harsh pretensions.

The representatives of *Gokhran* took no note of the cultural goals of science, art and industry, demanding without a second thought the rendering down and most rapid possible use of the precious metal and stones and provoking constant sharp clashes, altercations, and arguments, a clear example of which is the argument that arose at the first session of the Commission on 14 January 1922 and my own opinion, noted immediately in the minute-book, concerning the inadmissibility of such treatment of the famous goblets of the Orlov service.

At first many museum articles, without doubt, were taken by *Gokhran* and rendered down, that is destroyed, despite all the forms of struggle and insistent arguments from the representatives of the museums and in particular the special note which I handed to com. Bazilievich and which was considered in the Collegium of *Narkomfin* concerning the extreme wastefulness for the state of such attempts ... the financial gaps at the expense of the country's cultural wealth, with reference to historical examples, the irreparable damage done in this regard by Louis XIV, in England by Cromwell, in Russia by Peter the Great.

Under the pressure of an unceasing and selfless struggle gradually *Gokhran* began to retreat from its irreconcilable attitude and as a result with the support of com. Weis modes of action which were more or less rational began to be identified, more or less acceptable for both sides of the agreements.

M. Sergeev's health failed to stand up to this intense and heroic labour, but the sorting of the largest valuables was carried out still in his presence, that is, the crown diamonds and the empress's jewels, with the opening and sorting of the cases which were in the literal sense full from top to bottom of precious stones of the very rarest value and quality, while all of the items sorted proved to be intact and unharmed.

The more prolonged part of this work at that time still lay ahead. Gradually in this connection and after long arguments and altercations there began accumulating in the Armoury Chamber a selection of articles of outstanding artistic significance.

4. In addition to the extremely valuable augmentation of the Museum produced by the commission's work in inventorising and concentrating valuables and which consisted primarily of items from the 18th century, an even more valuable

augmentation of the Museum proved to be the inclusion in it of the remains of the Patriarchate's Chamber stolen by the brothers Polezhaev in 1917 while the officials in charge of it demonstrated criminal indifference and negligence.

5. From the Kremlin cathedrals, monasteries and churches, and also from the Simonov Monastery and other places several items brought to the Armoury Chamber were of especial importance from the museum's point of view and almost inaccessible for study under their previous circumstances of keeping.

6. The collection was significantly supplemented by articles of relatively secondary importance but valuable for comparison, study and reference, some of these came to the museum from the sixth Stroganov College and part came from the fund or else were purchased and at the same time the library was significantly expanded through the efforts of D.I. Uspensky.

7. While the Museum was greatly expanded in terms of the contents of the collection, its premises were also expanded by means of including in it the adjoining so-called "apartments" of the heir to the throne, the tsarevich, which represent an entire museum in themselves, thanks to the items of first-class quality which they contain.

8. In addition to the extension of the premises for the first time serious attention was paid to their security.

9. Despite the paucity of means as compared with the pre-war period measures were taken to improve the neglected condition of the Museum's premises.

10. Inevitably accompanying the increase in the Museum's size was a decrease resulting from the delivery to Poland under the terms of the Riga Treaty of museum exhibits brought here from Polish territory. This painstaking, responsible and extremely difficult work, with the checking of items and inventories in the finest detail, with the seeking out of articles in premises piled high with crates, with the removal in certain instances of articles located up under the vaults of the ceilings in bitter cold and the constant distraction of other urgent matters had as its outcome the transfer to Poland of 226 museum exhibits, including the aquamarine sceptre of Stanislas Poniatowski, the precious chain of the White Eagle, the casket of the Polish constitution, a whole collection of sculptures, portraits, pictures, three cameos etc., in general almost the entire contents of two halls, the Trophy Hall and the Portrait Hall and a number of items from other halls and premises.

11. With such significant changes to the Museum, when on one hand entire train-loads of articles were infused into it and on the other hand extracted from it, the idea arose of bringing all of its collection into a more harmonious and complete form. Furthermore, of the palace property sorted out in the Chamber 1,048 items which were recognised as not of museum quality

and at the same time most suitable for sale on the instructions of N.I. Trotskaya were donated to aid for the hungry and on 4 April and until 24 June 1922, transferred to the EOS auction hall, where according to the available reports they realised something over two million roubles, at the prices of that time about 1,000 gold roubles.

12. A matter of the very greatest importance was the removal of all the tapestries, their inspection and cleaning, which was carried out by Sergeev with his typical exuberant energy despite the apparently insurmountable obstacles. This immense work was registered in a number of highly detailed reports.

13. The tireless activity of M.S. Sergeev, which led him to an early grave, caused him to organise two extremely important exhibitions: an exhibition of enamel and an exhibition of 18th-century fabrics.

14. I regard as one of the inconspicuous but most important services of M.S. Sergeev the fact that he managed to preserve in the Chamber a precious core of employees devoted to the work, skilful, experienced and trustworthy. In the face of the most impossible, indescribable and unprecedented trials, when valuables were watched over by people who had nothing to eat and nothing to feed their families, when salaries were delayed for months at a time and their size was an insult to common sense, when emaciated people guarded mountains of diamonds, dressed in rags with their toes sticking out of their shoes, hurrying to their posts in the morning, to set about breaking bricks and carrying heavy weights from the break of dawn in order to feed themselves somehow, in the Armoury Chamber, by notable contrast with *Gokhran*, matters never went as far as mass shootings for systematic pilfering or court cases for the disappearance of single items.

Driven on by *Gokhran* from morning till night, the staff of the Chamber carried through the task of the rapid sorting and delivery to *Gokhran* of valuables for sale at the cost of profound disturbance to the Museum itself.

When death took M.S. Sergeev at a moment of extreme aggravation of the crisis through which the Museum was passing, the question had to be faced of whether ... [*illegible*].

It was decided to choose the path of saving the Museum and on that path the following has been achieved:

1. From 21 April 1922 to April 1923 the Statute of the Armoury Chamber museum was developed and confirmed.

2. In accordance with the Statute the Museum's Academic Council was formed and has held 14 sessions.

3. In the work of the Commission of the Special Commissioner for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables there has been placed on the agenda the highly responsible task of reviewing the entire collection of the Museum for the selection of such items as do not possess

any museum value, but only material value. Under the management of the newly established authoritative body the Academic Council, 2 categories of items have been withdrawn from the Museum as not being of museum quality and therefore handed over to *Gokhran*: firstly serving items of the last ruling [*illegible*], primarily dishes and salt-cellar which cluttered up the collection, and secondly items known to be copies, which found their way into the Museum for the most part in the collections of the highly credulous collector Karabanov and have long since been removed from display as copies and put away in the store-room.

4. In the form of the commission the staff of the Armoury Chamber have also discussed the sorting of church valuables by way of resolving disputes concerning the valuables of the Kremlin cathedrals, churches and monasteries, the valuables of the Monastery of St. Sergius, the valuables of the Vyatka province and others.

5. In the work of the Commission for the Inventorisation of Valuables a Special Department of Church Metal has been set up in the Chamber under the management of Pomerantsev. The main addition to the department have been the valuables of the Vestry of the Solovetsky Monastery, which N.I. Pomerantsev received from *Gokhran* almost complete.

6. In fulfilment of the corresponding decree of *Sovnarkom*, exhibits of high material value have been handed over to *Gokhran*, specifically clasps from a mantle with emeralds of exclusive quality and value and also in one Osten-Sacken sword and in one mitre and one panagia from the Monastery of St. Sergius, the diamonds have been replaced at *Gokhran* by glass, however these items have, following a long correspondence and stubborn door-knocking, eventually been received back from *Gokhran* by the Armoury Chamber.

7. The first task was the inventorisation of new acquisitions. In this regard the work ahead which has been carried out gradually, was of the utmost importance.

8. The timely implementation of inventorisation was of significant assistance in the question with which the Chamber was unexpectedly faced in an acute form of the distribution of its new acquisitions among the Petrograd museums. The Armoury Chamber transferred to the Hermitage 366 articles of gold and silver, 26 articles of ivory, fabrics and other materials, 77 crates of porcelain, 33 crates of bronze, 5 crates with albums, photographs and small items. The silver articles transferred to the Hermitage include the famous Myatlev silver, which the Armoury Chamber managed to save from *Gokhran* in its entirety by dint of extreme effort and concern.

9. In addition to this task a number of other tasks have also been addressed. Pictures from the apartments have been given to Poland as well as property brought from the Skwernewitski Palace.

Following lengthy negotiations and examinations 10 items have been handed over to the Georgian Republic, including a gold crown and other items.

10. Alongside the items handed over there have been new acquisitions. For the augmenting of the Chamber all possible measures were taken for the return from *Gokhran* of at least a part of the valuable museum items which went there in error during the period of its greatest pressure on the work of the Commission for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables. Following representations which began on 5 August 1922, we managed with the support of com. Svanidze to get back 59 especially interesting items on 4 April 1923.

As a result of the now concluded sorting of the palace valuables it is possible to say that museum staff have managed by virtue of an incredible effort to retain for museums all of the first-class items, but from the second category, not to mention the third, a very great deal has gone to *Gokhran*, for example from the famous Ekaterinsky table services alone 1,698 items have stayed with *Gokhran*, for the most part, certainly, uninteresting dishes and plates, but in addition also 13 soup bowls (including 2 French, 1 Italian and 10 German), 134 French chased dish lids and 45 German, 18 French “glass stands” and 20 German, 89 French candlesticks and 41 German, etc...

Just how profitably for the State these valuable artistic and historical items have been used remains unknown.

11. At the very height of the work on inventori- sation and issuing and the arrival of new items at the Armoury Chamber it was necessary to take up the difficult task of creating a new display in the museum to replace the old one. The constant inspirer and executor of this work was a member of the Academic Council, V.A. Nikolsky. The Armoury Chamber owes its new display to his energy and his incalculably valuable work for which not a single kopeck was paid. He is responsible for the persistent implementation of the principle of displaying items on fabric. Nikolsky's closest assistant was M.M. Loseva.

12. Constant work on the cleaning and drying of fabrics. Shelves were installed on meagre resources.

13. From the point of housekeeping the past year has seen a significant improvement, specifically due to the energy of N.I. Trotskaya with the support of com. Enukidze the heating of the Chamber has been resumed following a long break. Electrical lighting has been reconnected in the apartments of the museum supervisors of the Armoury Chamber located in the wing of house number No. 6, former on Romanov's Boyar.

14. The administration may be said to have been created anew by V.T. Baranova, an accounting system has been introduced and books, registers, documents etc. have been acquired.

15. Despite all the work going on, great and small, over the past year the Armoury Chamber has not remained tight shut, as it had the formal right to do.

In spite of everything, for the sake of the general good the Armoury Chamber has admitted a number of specialists to look around and work on questions which interest them: the director of the Hermitage Troinitsky, Anisin, the researchers from the Historical Museum Tarabarin, Kafka, Voronov, Alpatov and others. [The Chamber] has been viewed by delegates to the 12th Congress of the RCP and at least 20 times [viewings] have been arranged for Kremlin students and a number of outstanding foreign specialists.

With a great effort, emerging from an extremely difficult and dangerous situation, the forthcoming opening of the Armoury Chamber should, if circumstances permit, justify the opinion of the luminaries of learned Europe who treated Lenin, when they enthusiastically described it as one of the leading museums of the world.

Head of the Armoury Chamber

This report has been approved by the Academic Council of the Armoury Chamber in session on 14 April 1923

(Moscow Kremlin Museum Preserve, f. 20, d. 25)

**Submitted to M.P. Kristi, acting manager
of *Glavnauka*, in response to his demands,
10 September 1928**

Director of the Armoury D. Ivanov

The antiques trade is full of surprises. It is a business where the risks are great. Without looking too far for examples, all we have to remember is that one and the same article appearing at auctions separated by comparatively short periods of time can sometimes be valued at a price several times lower and sometimes several times higher than the preceding valuation. The reasons for these fluctuations are hard to explain and anticipating them is even harder. Prices are determined by the passionate enthusiasm of collectors and the scholarly interests of specialists. For the most part they increase for areas new to research, where major discoveries are still possible.

For instance, at present the greatest demand is for Chinese ceramics. In most other areas, not excepting the Italian quattrocento and the French 18th century, the market's response is cool and interest is only stimulated by chance events such as anniversaries. It goes without saying that every large-scale offer to sell has a depressing effect on prices. On the other hand, prices rise strongly under the influence of skillful advertising, especially disguised advertising. A substantial influence on prices may be attributed to the hypnosis of names and the opinions of authoritative connoisseurs. In the final analysis items of the very greatest importance and irreproachable quality may go for a song, in a disastrously futile and

vexingly pointless waste of the administration's costs for the sale. On the other hand, it is impossible to foresee what bauble may through capricious circumstances yield a felicitous return. Under these circumstances the selection of museum items for sale is an attempt to solve an equation with multiple unknowns.

But the worst thing of all is that the entire enterprise fails to inspire confidence in its own advisability. It is only too clear that the holdings of the museums are insignificant in comparison with the needs of the state. All the attempts known to history to use works of art to raise finance have proved thoroughgoing failures. The result has always been the same as going out into a field during a drought and watering it from a watering-can. It does no good at all, but the damage from the loss of valuable cultural items will make itself felt soon enough. It is no problem to cut the throat of the goose that lays the golden eggs, but there is no point in expecting any more golden eggs afterwards. The damage caused by the loss of cultural factors is particularly ill-starred precisely at this time, when all possible energies must be harnessed for the industrialisation of the country. Industrialisation and the level of museum culture are closely interlinked. This became perfectly obvious at the first World Fair in 1851 in London. Since that time the immense growth in museums in all the industrial countries has emphasized this simple truth even more powerfully.

One only has to compare the grandiose expansion of the museums of the North American United States with the museums of the Balkan countries in order to judge the difference in the level of industrial development. The point is that the industrialisation of any country primarily requires, in addition to improved machinery, the improvement of the basic machine which sets all the others in motion, that is, of man. But for the development of the human brain and nervous system the art museums, with their selections and systematisations of the highest achievements of the most complex form of labour – artistic creation – are an irreplaceable means. Just as a carpenter who has iron tools is incapable of competing with a carpenter who has steel tools, so a country in which the population possesses an undeveloped insensitive nervous system, a coarse eye, weak concentration and unresponsive organisation, which is uninventive and unaccustomed to the higher achievements of the brain, will lag hopelessly behind a country which possesses more effective means for improving the qualitative performance of the human apparatus. It is no accident that some of the museums in America are now growing faster than all the museums of Europe taken together. This phenomenon corresponds precisely to the relative rates of industrialisation. The whole world is consciously or instinctively obliged to acknowledge that the highest achievements of art are one of the most powerful factors in international

competition. They are the cause of a struggle no less desperate than the struggle for oil, cotton and rubber. In our industrially backward Union, impoverishment in the quantity and especially in the quality of artistic perceptions will inevitably result in a fatal inadequacy in numerous respects. For many reasons we shall be forced to appeal to the centres of real artistic culture shining somewhere in the distance. And this is all the more annoying at this time because the first results of the massive rapprochement of the museums and the masses have only just begun to make themselves felt. During the years immediately after the revolution the popular mass of visitors still had difficulty in making sense of the most elementary impressions received in museums. How much they have advanced since those times, how much their criticism has improved, how much their demands have increased!

The museums play an equally important part in the cause of the struggle against religious prejudices. The museums are called to take the place of temples, as can be seen from a multitude of signs, especially by the example of the fabulous development of the museums of America. For the broad masses the most attractive aspect in the majority of religions has always been the artistic aspect. The servants of religion have always taken this into account. But the museums satisfy these requirements more directly and more effectively. As it becomes more and more involved in exhibitions, concerts, lectures, courses and the cinema, in generally enlivening and activating artistic impressions, the museum of the near future is the normal content of the morning hours of holidays and leisure time, as the theatre is for the evening hours. In comparison with a vital and vivid museum the artistic staging of religious practice becomes uninteresting and unattractive. But for the struggle with an opponent like the church the museums must be adequately equipped and above all they must not be glaringly empty of the finest works because they have been exported.

Without delving further into the details of these too fundamental questions, it must be said that the entire responsibility for the abasement of museum culture, a responsibility of which the extent, form and degree cannot yet be foreseen, but the reality of which is impossible to doubt, must not at least be laid at the door of the museum staff, who are forced to participate in this because they are duty-bound to do so. For these builders of museum culture the sale of valuable art works is equivalent to being deprived of their means of production. It costs them a great effort to force themselves to obey a directive which is obligatory for them but incomprehensible and in their opinion pernicious. But while not taking any responsibility for the success of this hopeless enterprise, the museum workers are not able to answer for the accuracy of the valuations which they give. This side of the business is as yet so chaotically unclear we do not even know which

prices we are required to indicate, those which correspond to the genuine value of the article or those which are determined by the attendant circumstances of the sale (take the Diamond Fund as an example) and moreover, we don't know exactly what those are. The question is further complicated by the fact that so far... we have not been able to promote the art works being sold directly to the buyer, i.e. to the foreign museum or big collector. The end buyer is always hidden behind a dealer, and on the art market dealers are accustomed to brokerage fees of monstrous proportions. A conspiracy between antiques dealers usually controls prices at auctions too. And the more the supply increases, the more unceremoniously the prices offered will fall, in the secure certainty that if things have got to the state of sales from museums, then money must be required desperately and in such circumstances no one expects to pay the genuine price. The sale of museum exhibits will inevitably be interpreted abroad in an extremely unfavourable light for the financial situation of the Union, especially after the powerful impression which was produced by the initial concern for their preservation. The more world-famous items there are to be found on the market, the more hopeless the financial situation of the country will be accounted. For a comparison of the degree of financial embarrassment it will not be hard to recall that during the years of crippling economic crisis following the world war Germany and Austria managed to preserve their museums.

In this sea of difficulties, manoeuvring between the demands actually expressed and the threat of inevitable future accusations of aiding and abetting the squandering of the state's heritage, the museum workers cannot provide anything more than valuations which are approximate guidelines, that is, to put the matter somewhat more clearly, valuations which are guesses.

But even if one errs in the direction of a certain exaggeration of prices as against the actual possibilities, it is easy to foresee that the sum of returns will be very small in relative terms. In actual fact, just how much can be apportioned by a museum like the Armoury Chamber, a museum which occupies only nine halls, including in that number the storage halls, which has no other warehouses or store-rooms apart from a basement with all sorts of junk, a museum which was devastated and stripped by the Poles during the Time of Troubles, which burned down in 1737, suffered under the Napoleonic invasion, which was neglected and left to decay under the tsars as provincial and best not noticed, which has only begun to develop and become systematised since the Revolution?

The question automatically arises of why, if hard currency is needed, has attention been focused on a museum, where it has to be wrung out drop by drop at the cost of the decline of an institution of high culture while there is an obvious, incom-

parably more abundant source long-since earmarked for sale which has been going to waste for a number of years? That source is the Diamond Fund. Lying in a steel store-room in the State Bank are sealed articles which even after a number of partial sales and major reductions in valuations, represent a reserve of currency equal to approximately 400 millions, and in items of such clear, precise and obvious value that they can even be traded at a distance, by radio or by telephone. If a picture by a great master is torn from its setting and removed from the cultural circulation of the country, while a string of large pearls of the same value continues to lie on the bottom of the State Bank's dark safe, how are we to account for such inconsistency, or rather, such wild absurdity?

In recommending the establishment of at least some kind of planned graduation in the sale of articles of value depending on their importance for the cultural development of the country, we can be certain that the turn of the Armoury Chamber will come very far from the beginning of this flight of steps. The Armoury Chamber, after all, is located in the capital of the Union, at the centre of its centre, in immediate proximity and contact with the focus of all the major events, all the congresses from all round the world. It is this museum more than all the others which falls squarely into the field of vision of all the notable foreigners, all the innumerable workers' and peasants' delegations. It is this museum above all which shapes the impressions of those who seek in the centre of the Union reasons for malicious condemnations and those who come to the centre with the freshest, broadest and most insatiable of requests. The Armoury Chamber has every right to assert that so far it has been equal to such especially responsible demands and has not once damaged the prestige of new Soviet construction. But following the vivisection of the collection it goes without saying that results can not be so favourable.

If, however, misfortune must come to pass, although one would not wish to believe in the possibility, then the brunt of the sales will be borne by the French 18th-century tapestries. They are worth about eight hundred thousand, but their provenance cannot be guaranteed: they appeared among the Tsar's property after 1831 and it must be assumed they were Polish booty. As long as they have been hanging on their usual walls the question of their provenance has not been raised, but once they find their way into the thick of the international market there could be complications.

After the tapestries the most valuable items for selling are two formal saddles which belonged to Catherine the Great. They long ago acquired the reputation of the Chamber's most important items of value. From an artistic point of view they are extremely revealing as two very different and yet clear examples of the combination of oriental

and European styles, and this problem is currently on the agenda. The provenance of these saddles raises no doubts: they were presents from the Sultan of Turkey in the 18th century. Their value is probably about half a million, but due to the large number of different stones, its determination requires a special jewellery commission, and the actual organisation of the sale requires the same conditions as the sale of the Diamond Fund. Once again it goes without saying that these items, as museum exhibits, can be put up for sale after the Diamond Fund, not ahead of it. At the same time in exchange for them an enamelled bronze shoulder-plate which has found its way into the Fund, believed to have belonged to Andrei Bogoliubsky and valued at 35,000, which is uniquely important not for its material value but for its supreme scientific significance, should be removed from the Diamond Fund for museum use.

After Catherine the Great's saddles all of the other exhibits in the Armoury Chamber present a picture of rapidly reducing material value, but for the most part with an equally rapid increase in value as museum exhibits. These items of less condensed and lower currency value include a number which were earmarked for exchange with other museums in order to improve the systematic coverage and completeness of the collection, in particular to fill in huge gaps for the 14th and 15th centuries. In this connection extremely important exchanges have been planned with a number of provincial museums and even more important exchanges with foreign museums were being born in mind. These exchanges would be very useful and fruitful for both sides, and the matter has not been progressed only in view of the great difficulties involved in the conditions of the present time. If we are immediately to bury all hopes for any improvement in the quality of the collection and its maintenance at the same level as museums in the countries of advanced industrialisation, then it is possible to draw a certain amount of material for purposes of sale from among these items. The current year is precisely a turning-point when the influx of new acquisitions has clearly come to an end. To the present time all of the energies of the Armoury Chamber have been directed to the expert assessment of acquisitions.

In the immediate future, according to *Glavnauka* directives (*Narkompros Weekly*, No. 32) in the first place their inventorisation must be completed. Following its completion it is possible in the near future to select French and other silver, primarily 18th century, icons and items of other categories. Their evaluation is highly problematical, but we cannot really expect that more than three thousand such items could be collected.

8 September 1928

(Moscow Kremlin Museum Preserve, f. 20)

Berlin, 11 October 1928

Not to be made public!

A report from S.N. Troinitsky

On the matter of the assignation and sale on the foreign market of valuable antiques to a value of 30 million roubles, I regard it as my duty to state the following:

1) The peculiarities of the antiques market and its limitations give cause to doubt the possibility of a normal sale of items for such a large sum and over a short period (one year) we will have to give the items away for a song, i.e. in order to raise the sum of 30 million we will have to assign and sell items worth 50, 80 or even perhaps 100 million roubles. Goods which do not conform to the requirements of the market are for a certain period dead weight and they will be acquired at the very lowest possible prices by dealers who will take into account that a large proportion of them may lie for several years without being sold.

2) The presumed first-class quality and high currency value of the items subject to assignation and sale will not alter the situation as stated, since:

a) No matter how first-class the items assigned may be, with such a massive total value there will be among them many similar items, which will therefore be to a significant degree non-liquid;

b) The very fact of a mass sale of exclusively first-class works will create the impression that the situation in the country is catastrophic and give rise to the desire to take account of it and exploit it.

3) That this really is the case is proved by the proposal from Mr. Gulbenkian, who has offered to buy pictures to a value of 10 million roubles and submitted a list of the 18 best paintings in the Hermitage, which are worth at the most modest calculation no less than 25-30 million roubles. The open sale of several of them, such as Raphael's *Madonna Alba*, Giorgione's *Judith* and Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son* would undoubtedly lead in some countries to the raising of a national subscription for their acquisition, which would cover the sum of 10 million.

4) Of the sum of 30 million roubles it is assumed that 25 million will be covered by 100 items assigned with a value of at least 100 thousand each, i.e. an average of 250 thousand per item. There are in general very few items of such a high value. In the Moscow and provincial museums there are only isolated items to be found, and therefore the entire burden of this operation will be borne by the Hermitage and in the main by its picture gallery.

In the meantime the most accurate count possible has shown that there are only about 115 pictures with a value of over 100 thousand roubles in the Hermitage, and 25 or 30 other items of a similar value.

Consequently, the sale of 100 items of this quality would result in the annihilation of the Hermitage and its downgrading from the posi-

tion of the leading museum in the world to the status of a warehouse of second-grade and third-grade items good for nothing but supplementing the collections of the provincial museums. To this it should be added that these 115 pictures include about 30 Rembrandts which, of course, cannot be sold even in 10 years, let alone in 1.

5) Not only the destruction of the Hermitage, but even the removal of individual items which have graced its walls for a century and a half will cause a major international scandal, since the significance of the Hermitage extends far beyond the bounds of the USSR: it is a factor of global cultural significance, as even our enemies have acknowledged. Thus when the Riga peace accord was concluded, the Polish government left in the Hermitage a number of first-class works that Poland had the right to take, but the extraction of which from the Hermitage would have disrupted the integrity of its collection. The significance of the Hermitage and museum construction in the USSR in general is also confirmed by the fact that in autumn 1926 the English member of parliament Martin Conway travelled to America to read a number of lectures on this topic, for which he was provided with the necessary material in accordance with a proposal from the deceased Political Representative in France L. B. Krasin. There is, of course, no need even to mention the immense amount of literature which has been devoted to Soviet museums in recent years.

There can therefore be no doubt that any damage inflicted on the Hermitage and other museums will have a very negative effect on public opinion and will be painfully reflected in a number of practical areas, since it will give rise to the false impression that the country is in a catastrophic situation and provide an opportunity for the enemies of the USSR who have long been claiming that any cultural work is impossible in a Soviet country to celebrate the fulfilment of at least some of their prophecies.

6) An operation of this kind will cause equally serious suffering within the country. For 11 years, at the cost of colossal labour and immense sacrifices, we have saved and preserved the artistic heritage of the state, for 11 years we have impressed on the broad masses that museums are one of the most important elements of cultural construction and the most democratic of schools, comprehensible and accessible even to the illiterate – and all for the destruction in the 12th year of our immense achievements in this area, for the problematical goal of raising of a sum which is insignificant from the point [of view] of the state budget.

Nor should we forget the depressing impression produced by the thought that the finest works of art, with which hundreds of thousands of people are educated and trained each year, will leave the halls of the museums for the private collections of bourgeois collectors and be excluded from public use for a long time, if not for ever.

7) But the significance of our museums for the country is huge not only in the cultural sense, they are indisputably a real fund which guarantees our credit-worthiness and will serve as a source of immense income. If little Switzerland, which does not possess a single outstanding museum, earns millions of crowns in hard currency from tourism every year, then what can we expect when we have a unique artistic and historical complex the like of which exists nowhere else in the Hermitage surrounded by the suburban palaces. They should not be destroyed but supported in every possible way, and in the near future when international relations are regularised they will repay the sacrifices made for them a hundredfold.

In summing up all that has been said we can state quite definitely that in order to raise the fund of 30 million in accordance with the current plan, a fund which barely covers 3-4 days of the state budget, it will inevitably be necessary:

- 1) To allocate items worth substantially more and sell them off cheap;
- 2) To destroy the Hermitage and a number of other museums, which will signify the abandonment of one of the most important factors of cultural construction;
- 3) To produce an extremely negative public response, both within the country and in every other country;
- 4) To create the false impression that the country is in a catastrophic situation.

(Troinitzky)

(RGAE, f. 5240, op. 9. d. 243)

FROM THE MINUTES OF A MEETING

The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

Trade Delegation in Germany

Export Directorate

To Deputy People's Commissar of Trade com.

Khinchuk. To Member of the Collegium of

People's Commissariat of Trade com. Shleifer.

Office of the Western Department of the

People's Commissariat of Trade

Moscow. Day 23/XI-28

Concerning: the auction of valuable antiques and art works held in Berlin on 6 and 7 November 1928

The auction was attended by an international public. There were representatives of museums and collectors from every country of Europe and America. All the big antiques traders were represented either by their owners or by their deputies. The auction began with the sale of the furniture. The small French furniture attracted especial interest. Small tables and chests of drawers in the Louis XV and Louis XVI styles were in great demand and very high prices were paid for them. Bid followed bid, sometimes exceeding our reserve prices by 3, 4 or 5 times. Furniture which had been valued at several hundred roubles was sold for several thousand.

Russian card tables in the French style raised from 4 to 6 thousand marks apiece. Good prices were also raised for solid bronze pieces, primarily French 18th and 19th century. Chandeliers were sold for from 4 to 6 thousand marks, candelabras for up to 11 thousand marks, vases for up to 15 thousand marks apiece. Two tapestry arm-chairs with a reserve price of 4,000 roubles were sold for 15,200 marks. The total reserve price for the furniture and bronze was approximately 500,000 marks, and the sum raised from these two categories of items offered for sale was 880,000 marks.

At 4 o'clock on 6 November the auction began with the sale of tapestries. Of the 16 tapestries offered for sale 8 remained unsold, including one series which had been valued at 100,000 marks. The reserve prices for the tapestries were only exceeded in a few cases.

Record prices were paid, however, for 18th-century French snuff-boxes. One French snuff-box for which a reserve of 8,000 marks had been set was sold for 28,000 marks, another with a miniature painting of Blarenberg, had a reserve of 15,000 marks and was sold for 36,000 marks. The snuff-boxes were all sold without exception for a total of 217,000 marks, whereas their total reserve price was set at 136,000 marks.

On the eve of the second day we learned that the German court had impounded several items and as a result at the beginning of the auction bidding was very weak. But when the picture sale began the lively interest was clear once again.

The Canaletto landscapes brought brilliant prices – from 5 to 8 thousand marks. Cima's *Madonna* was sold for 55,000 marks. An unexpectedly high price was realised for three French supra-portes by an unknown French artist; the reserve was 1,800 marks, but they were sold for 23,000 marks. Two small pictures by Robert were sold for 40,000 marks (their reserve was 10,000). The portraits by Rubens (?) and Tintoretto each raised 26,000 marks. Wouwerman's pictures were sold for 11,500 and 11,000 marks.

Even though many items were impounded and certain items, including the 8 tapestries, remained unsold, the result of the auction is highly satisfactory. The total reserve set for all of the items offered for sale was 1,700,000 marks, and the sum raised was 2,056,660 marks. The items left unsold had a reserve price of 270 thousand marks. Furthermore, items to the value of about 150,000 marks were impounded and not sold. Consequently a sum of 2,056,660 marks was raised at the auction for items with a reserve price of 1,280,000 marks.

Of the 447 items offered for sale 61 items with a reserve price of 495,750 marks were impounded. However, the valuation of these items at the auction was 863,700 marks. Among these items to the value of 225,000 marks had already been sold and handed over to the buyer. The remaining items are at present in the keeping of the bailiff until the

court reaches a decision. The court will sit to decide this matter on 27th November this year.

The interest in the auction was immense. It was reported in all the newspapers and magazines. All the illustrated magazines published reproductions of the items offered for sale. Apart from the far right press all the German newspapers noted that this auction will improve the level of the German antiques market and welcomed the decision of the Soviet government to sell items not needed for our museums here in Germany. The buyers were not disturbed by the hue and cry raised by the émigrés and the claims of several of them that the things were "stolen." But beyond the slightest doubt the result of the second day of the auction would have been even better if it had not been necessary to announce that several items had been withdrawn from the auction due to being impounded by the German court.

As far as we are aware at this stage, most of the items were bought by German collectors directly or through their agents. The French only bought a few things. One tapestry was bought by the Leipzig Museum and in general several German museums acquired several items. It is rather hard in general to determine which things were acquired by collectors of which country, since they did not bid directly but bought, in the majority of cases, through the representatives of firms of antique dealers or through German agents.

It has now become absolutely clear that the most profitable way to sell antiques and art works is at large auctions. At a small auction it is far from being possible to raise the prices which were raised at this auction. For instance, we have previously sold chandeliers and small French furniture at auctions. For card tables of the same quality as were offered for sale at this auction we have previously received 1,500 marks, whereas at this auction we received up to 6,000 marks.

In addition, beyond all shadow of a doubt, evaluations and sales should be carried out exclusively abroad. Our specialists have pointed out absolutely objectively and correctly that many of the pictures offered for sale are not the works indicated in the catalogue of artists, but nonetheless someone here accepted them as genuine and paid corresponding prices at the auction. For instance:

	Exp. Comm. price	price paid
Picture No. 355		
Canaletto	400 roubles	6,000 marks
Picture No. 356	400 roubles	6,200 marks
No. 362	500 roubles	7,500 marks
Picture No. 427		
Rubens	150 roubles	2,600 marks

Most of the local experts agreed with the opinion of our experts, so there is no way they can be accused of inaccurate assessment. The point is that the selling conditions at an auction like this, which attracted an international audience, are entirely different from those at a small auction.

On 20th November this year about 80 of our pictures were put up for sale at a mixed auction of modern masters. The result of this auction was satisfactory for us: 68 pictures were sold, raising a total sum of 50,000 marks. Brilliant prices were achieved by the following pictures:

I. Von-Brand – 8,500 marks

Kowalsky – 6,800 marks (reserve 900 roubles)

Knauss – 5,100 marks (reserve 1,500 roubles)

If necessary we will send you additional information on matters which interest you.

Member of the Export Directorate (Nikolaev)

Dep. Head Art and Industry Dept. (Popov)

(RGAE, f. 5240, op. 9, d. 243)

Not for publication

Berlin, Dec. 13, 1929

To Deputy Commissar Citizen Khinchuk

On the basis of our many years of experience with the Art Department of the Berlin Trade Representation, we take the liberty of communicating the following to you.

For several years, as you surely know, we have been selling art-objects for the government of the USSR. Along with great successes, we have recently encountered difficulties that have not been worth the time wasted on them or the results achieved: they arise, in the main, because of the difference in valuation given by the Leningrad experts and experts here, as well as because of the steadily worsening quality of the art. The difference in valuation has several causes: the sometimes changing fashion in the field of collecting (an important circumstance, which experts in Leningrad are less able to gauge than we are) and, mainly, the fact that prices throughout the world for art have significantly declined because the middle class in America, France, Britain and Germany is no longer able to buy luxury items. In all these countries, there remains only a small circle of very wealthy collectors, and these buy only the most significant works of major artists. This circumstance indicates the road ahead that we will take the liberty of describing in the following.

Russian museums hold a large quantity of art-objects with enormous bearing on the cultural and art-historical significance of the country [of origin-ed.], that is to say that Russian museums surpass other European galleries of paintings not only in quantity but in quality as well. As an example, one may state that for any artist it is necessary to have a series of works from various periods of his career but not necessary to have 10 or more works from each period. The same can be said for Gobelins, furniture and so on.

A number of major international collectors who know of our direct relationships with you have requested us to ask if they might buy, through us, truly outstanding works.

We would purchase such art-objects directly

from you and would come to Leningrad with several experts in order to oversee the transaction on the spot. In this fashion, a truly high price would be achieved without a middleman, but we would seek the usual 7.5% commission. However, the matter would be out of the question if the sales prices are so irrationally high that no one would ever pay them.

A model list of works that might be considered would be important in the selection of experts. Not every expert is familiar with every epoch and style. Thus, for example, an expert on primitives is not able to judge 18th-century works, just as a connoisseur of paintings is unable to judge French furniture or Gobelins, in any case not with the kind of authority to set very high prices. With hope to receive an answer from you, we sign with great respect

Rudolf Lepke

(RGAE, f. 5240, op. 19, d. 846)

Politburo Central Committee All-Union

Communist Party (Bolshevik)

37/13. – On preliminary agreements for sales by *Antikvariat*

Propose that Comrade Bubnov immediately hand over the rug that *Antikvariat* has agreed to sell for 110,000 marks.

Copies to:

Comrades Rozengolts, Bubnov, Rudzutak

(RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 116)

Protocol No. 89

Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), Feb. 23, 1932

1. – About the Mosolov engravings (Comrades Kuibyshev, Rozengolts, Bubnov).

Require Comm. of Enlight[ment]. to hand over to *Antikvariat* within five days 150 Rembrandt engravings from the Mosolov collection for export. Selection to be made by Comrades Bubnov and Belenkii Z. Require Comm[issar] of Enlight. to transport the indicated engravings, as per contract, for auction in Germany with the understanding that if they are not sold at a price significantly higher than the preliminary price established by agreement with the firm that they not be sold but remain with *Antikvariat*.

Copies to:

Comrades Bubnov, Belenky – p. “a”;

Rozengolts – all.

(RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 187)

From the transcript

of Politburo session, Dec. 7, 1932

27/21. – About the collections of antiquarian valuables. Accept the following proposal of the Molotov commission. Affirm transfer of anti-

quarian valuables worth 2,804,533 roubles.

In view of the fact that the collections of antiquarian valuables earmarked for sale have not fully met the plan for the end of 1932 and for 1933, – it is proposed that *Antikvariat* quickly enter into negotiations for the sale of unique objects that were not listed, with the final decision to remain in each instance with the commission for questions of external trade.

Allow *Antikvariat* to conduct sales of antiquarian valuables on credit if guaranteed by first-class banks for terms of no more than one year and with down-payments in cash of 20%–30%.

In the plan for *Torgsin*, include a separate article on the sale of antiquarian valuables that gives responsibility and management to *Antikvariat*. Broaden and improve the range of antiquarian objects available to *Torgsin*. Organize there the sale of paintings by contemporary Russian artists, in such cases permitting payment in cash up to 20% of the sale price to the owners of the paintings and issue export premiums, the size of which the Commissariat for External Trade will arrange in consultation with the Commissariat of Finance. Allow *Torgsin* to accept antiquarian items from institutions and private parties for sale to foreigners on a commission basis. Special instructions from the Commissariat for External Trade will stipulate how these items will be paid for after their sale.

Remove numismatics for export from the SFA of the TsIK of the USSR and give it to V/O *Antikvariat*, with SFA to transfer to *Antikvariat* without delay all numismatic collections in its possession.

Assign Comrade Rudzutak to decide in the name of the *Politburo* all disputes between the Commissariat for External Trade and other agencies concerning antiquarian valuables.

Copies to: Comrades Rozengolts, Bubnov, Rudzutak

(RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 15, l. 25)

Trade Representation of the USSR in Germany

Diplomatic mail – Not for publication

Copies: *Antikvariat, Moscow, Comrade Samuelli*

Commissariat for Trade – Foreign trade management. Moscow, Comrade Rabinovich

Leningrad

Embankment of January 9. N 18

May 8, 1930

The USSR Commissariat of Trade in setting its quarterly plan assigns to *Antikvariat* 3,000,000 roubles for the third quarter.

The plan specifies 1,000,000 roubles for the month of May.

The plan as stated can be realized only if we receive without delay the first-class goods recently earmarked from *Gosfond* reserves to meet obligations to *Antikvariat*.

At the present time, we are living on the leftovers

from previous auctions that were not sold because of high-price rules. These leftovers are extremely difficult to sell under present conditions. For our part, enormous efforts have recently been made to liquidate these remainders.

However, most of the major firms to which we have offered these things want to hear nothing further about them and declare they are quite familiar with these things from earlier Lepke auctions.

There is no basis for any great hopes to sell these remainders at provincial resorts, for the purchasing power of the German provinces is very weak and, moreover, these remainders include quite major pieces, such as, for example, paintings from the auctions 2000 and 2013. Only small and medium things from our remainders can be used for the provinces and resorts, and we are doing this, giving such things for 200,000 marks, for example, to the International Art Auction House in Berlin for the organization of several provincial and resort auctions.

As to major pieces, as, for example, paintings whose minimum sale price is approximately 800,000 marks, we hope to try to sell them in England, where in all likelihood [words missing]. We have already decided the question of sending these paintings to the USSR because the valuation limits on these paintings, confirmed by the minutes of the valuation commission from Jan. 1, we consider extremely high and unrealizable.

As goes without saying, we will telegraph to you the prices that we propose for these paintings.

Silver.

We have 600 kilos of silver at the Lepke firm that we have already offered to various buyers, but we have found only a single actual buyer, a Mr. Yakubovich in Prague, with whom we have as yet been unable to reach agreement in that all of his proposals have been unacceptable.

In addition, we have silver recently received from the Commissariat of Finance and remainders of *Mostorg's* silver. Because we do not have a specialist in this field, we decided to invite one of the local specialists who would at least have the recommendation of Fuks or someone else. We are liquidating this question as quickly as possible in that we are in no condition to deal with it ourselves and try to fit it in somehow. We will invite someone in on a commission basis.

The Trade Representation is requiring the sale of all the silver within two months. We will make every effort, of course, but we must advise you that the market situation for silver is extremely difficult and that prices for silver have fallen catastrophically.

Icons.

During March and April we conducted negotiations relative to the sale of icons, but the whole question is stuck on the matter of prices, which are really extremely high and delaying sales at

least for those that we have. Prices offered by the market are about 70% lower than the valuations of *Antikvariat*. We have information, first, that a large number of icons at ridiculously low prices are coming from Latvia and, second, that your commissioner in Paris, Mussuri, is selling icons and parchment for much lower prices than we. As a result, all of our buyers declare that they can get icons for much lower prices elsewhere.

Archaeological gold.

We have already at the proper time informed you that the archaeological gold was evaluated by expert Marvorgardat with help from Profs. Tsan and Valdgauer at an overall sum of about 300,000 marks. We have conducted negotiations with a great many major firms regarding the sale of this gold. However, the firms have rejected our proposals, arguing, first, that this commodity is very hard to sell at this time in that far more valuable and better things than our mined gold sold weakly at recent auctions or did not sell at all and, second, all our clients believe that the evaluation is extremely high.

Our effort to sell the archaeological gold in small batches has come to a dead-end because of the high valuations. All those interested in taking such batches tell us the prices are too high.

Porcelain.

We will very soon, after the final valuations and establishment of limits, turn over the porcelain to the Lepke firm for the preparation of an auction, which looks like it will take place no sooner than October because all the major collectors that might be interested in this collection of ours are currently away. Therefore, we consider it inappropriate to arrange the auction at this time and will restrict ourselves to the transfer of goods as per our limits and receipt of the related advance. This is also the case with respect to the tobacco boxes.

Furniture and paintings listed in documents Nos. 164, 165 (seven crates) earmarked for Lepke's last auction but late for it carry extremely high valuations.

Our expert examination, done by Dr. Klar, assistant at the Schloss Museum, gave a value for the watches and candelabra of 4,000 marks. Your valuation is 20,000 marks.

Klar's maximum estimate for the Delorme commode is 8,000 marks. Your estimate is 70,000 marks.

Your estimate of somewhere in the neighborhood of 52,000 marks for the paintings is very high. Thus, for example, the Wouwerman painting, *Puteshestvenniki* (*Travelers*), has been evaluated by Sh.M. Rozental and offered to the firm Malpede and Geissendorfer in Cologne for 13,000 marks and the firm refused to take it even at this price, but you have valued the painting at 40,000 marks.

The situation is the same for the paintings on document 151 [paintings by German artists].

Specifically, we wish to tell you that the Matthiessen firm, which for a time took the Brueghel painting, considers it inauthentic; you have valued this painting at 50,000 marks, and it is clear that the price will have to be much lower.

Concerning all goods, including newly arrived: we have Commissariat of Finance's silver and tobacco boxes, the tobacco boxes of *Antikvariat* and porcelain valued realistically at approximately 1,650,000 marks, and this is not taking into consideration the 800,000-mark value of the major paintings from auction 2000 and 2013, which have been given too high values. The pricing of these paintings should be significantly reduced and they should be sold or returned to the USSR.

Thus, in order to meet the May and June plan we must quickly receive first-class goods worth no less than 1,000,000 roubles. . . .

Trade Representation USSR

Special-Section Antikvariat

[illegible signature]

(RGAE, f. 5240, op. 19, d. 846)

Note signed by T.L. Lilovaya on the liquidation of the Alexandrovsky Palace (August 1929)

Liquidation of the Alexandrovsky Palace is an operation almost without precedent in the Western European art market, and therefore the usual antiquarian-market approach is not applicable. In the 40 years before the revolution there was not a single instance of the sale of an entire palace or any very large property belonging to a European dynasty, except perhaps for the sale in America by Leopold II of his Belgian paintings. In the period since the world war, the following sensational sales are known to have taken place:

The Hapsburg inheritance was liquidated in 1919–1920 – a number of palaces of such major artistic, historical and material value as to make necessary formation of a powerful consortium of American and European antiquarian dealers to handle the sale. The material results were colossal: the property went almost entirely to the most highly regarded American private collections and museums. Notably, all items of daily use were bought up.

The palace of the king of Saxony was sold last year. While of lesser artistic and historical value, it was again sold through the good offices of a powerful group of antiquarian dealers and also went to America. The degree to which the prices exceeded the usual can be seen, for example, in the fact that silver sold for twice as much per gram as the top prices quoted on the Paris antiquarian exchange.

Several months ago the possessions of former Empress Eugenie were auctioned in London. These were of considerably lower quality and much fewer than the Hapsburg or Saxony legacies. However, the total taken in by the three-day

auction was a very impressive number.

The higher prices in all these sales as compared with prices for analogous and equally fine objects from less famous collections must be traced to the fact that the purely artistic interest of the buyers was bolstered by the "historical" and pathological "possession-by-royalty" interest – "royal" possessions, obviously, acting like an elegant advertisement, heighten interest to the limit.

In liquidating the Alexandrovsky Palace we cannot base our plan on the artistic quality of the property. With few exceptions, the objects have virtually no antiquarian significance. Thus, no full parallel can be made between its sale and the sales referred to earlier. We will, therefore, be unable to make use of the same clients or intermediaries. As we will see below, the possibilities of wide advertising are small. Nevertheless, we ought to and can fully use the pathological interest, that special buyers' vanity.

Because the Alexandrovsky Palace holds no paintings by major artists or items of applied art from the 18th century, it will not interest collectors from the American financial dynasties with significant artistic experience. With them goes our chance to use a whole series of their artistic advisers, promoters and suppliers.

Antiquarians are extremely unwilling to put much stock in material with which they are not familiar. However, we still have at our disposal a quite good number of buyers from among the postwar American rich who have risen from the "lower depths" of the American financial world. These people *n'ont pas de goût* to high art, but a desire to follow America's aristocratic homes makes them buy old or famous objects and works of art, using advisers. This costs them certain well-known psychological strains in view of the absence of even minimal artistic culture and therefore they come to possess things about which they understand absolutely nothing and that do not provide them full satisfaction. Moreover, full ensembles rarely are for sale and so to mimic the Morgans et al. takes, in addition, significant time. Vanity is impatient. In view of all these circumstances, the possibility of acquiring at one time the furnishings of a palace and, what is more, the palace of a former emperor, should be extremely attractive for these people. Its "quality" is entirely accessible to the understanding of the average bourgeois, completely meets his tastes and understanding of luxury ("uncomfortable" old furniture), eliminates the annoying feeling of not understanding one's possessions and satisfies the broadest vanity.

The Alexandrovsky Palace, that is the furnishings of Nicholas II and Alexandra III, are typical high-bourgeois home furnishings, distinguished only by the grandiosity of the execution and the unusual number of portraits of crowned relatives from several generations. Convenience, comfort and, of course, a particular carefulness in the work. We have no doubt that buyers of this type

can easily be found but only by following a strictly worked-out plan.

It should be purchased by a person who wishes to re-create for himself in detail "the conditions of the palace of the Russian emperor." There have been such instances. We mention as an example the American woman who built a copy of the Doge's palace in Philadelphia. It then follows that essential to the sale must be not only the furniture of the palace but also the wall coverings and so on, absence of which would entail a skewed reproduction of the architectural profile of the building. First of all, this means that the sale of the palace must take place onsite. Furnishings removed from the palace immediately become an odd warehouse of furniture and nothing more, and imagining the contents as some sort of ensemble becomes impossible.

In moving on to planning the liquidation, it is necessary to realize, first of all, that in selling directly or through an intermediary who is not from antiquarian circles we deprive the major dealers of a client capable of spending 2,000,000–3,000,000 million roubles on their goods, not to mention that such a client is likely to be followed by imitators.

If the strictest conspiratorial rules are not followed, if a single antiquarian specialist or middleman in Europe learns about the impending sale of the Alexandrovsky Palace or if a potential buyer is poorly chosen, there is no maybe about it – the sale would be ruined.

There will be wild agitation against the sale (even relatives of Nicholas will surely take part), just as there was before our first auction in Berlin. All sorts of methods of disrupting the sale will be put in play, including certainly our catalogue about the palace with the intention of exposing our words that describe it as the product of a failure of taste and so on.

It is therefore necessary to announce through the press without delay that the liquidation of the palace has been canceled and to withdraw the catalogue from sale.

Next it is necessary immediately to decide the basic question of whether to sell the palace as a whole to one buyer or in parts.

We believe that only the first variant is correct. The palace is not huge. The sale by rooms would take much time, and each succeeding customer would likely think that the customer before him had got something better. Moreover, if there are several owners of the furnishings of a Russian emperor, that annuls the main point of interest – the rarity. In the most extreme case, it is possible to sell the public spaces separately from the personal rooms. But it would be better not to. Further breaking-up of the property would be commercially unwise.

To achieve quick and good results in the liquidation of the Alexandrovsky Palace, we believe it necessary to set it up as an independent operation under the leadership of a specially chosen

individual. Preferably, this would be a person fluent in languages, with a name in the field of art and with a more or less notable position in the museum world and, thus, familiar, at least theoretically, with the life of the court or knowledgeable in genealogy and other such details of interest to a buyer. He should be assigned the task of finding an intermediary with a wide range of ties to the appropriate circles in America with the help of whom (appropriately paid) he would make the necessary acquaintances and with great circumspection find the one or, at most, two buyers. More are not needed; this is a point on which no mistake can be allowed.

The buyer must be psychologically prepared even before he travels to the Soviet. The person chosen to carry out this operation, in addition to having discretion, must personally impress a certain type of person. Therefore, we are obliged to see that he is impressively "presented." In our view, such a responsibility might be taken on by S.N. Troinitsky, the former director of the State Hermitage. Intermediaries for our accredited person in this transaction might be from financial circles interested in trade with the Soviet; 3–4 persons from the recently departed American delegation (who bought paintings here) could provide the first acquaintances.

All random negotiations, the unorganized searching around for a buyer, without prior evaluation of the buyer, without prior study of the circumstances – are dangerous; poor selection of a customer will expose the whole operation.

Our accredited representative must leave quickly after a preliminary suggestion of price.

At the same time, he will gather needed information about methods for and possibilities of liquidating our art reserves in America.

It would be wrong to embroil the staff given the task of liquidation with very tight deadlines: with strict conformance to the plan, with full observance of the need for keeping things quiet, the time will be as short as possible.

Any pressure on the sale will be reflected most severely in the amount realized in the sale. The preferred and most correct way of liquidating the palace is under conditions of strict conspiracy: it is always pleasant for a buyer to think of himself as the only one thought suitable when it comes to something so highly priced as in the offer that he buy a palace.

"Used" goods won't interest him. Thus, we must do all that we can to fully use the advantage of this method. Only in case of its failure for one or another reason, we could change our advertising policy. We consider it necessary to point out that liquidation of the so-called upper children's rooms separately from the whole ensemble is out of the question: it would not result in the most minimal material gain.

(TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 11, d. 24, l. 96–98)

**B.V. Legran, director of the Hermitage,
to I.V. Stalin,**

Jan. 21, 1934

Iosif Vissarionovich.

Only two months ago the Politburo took up the question of export sales involving the art holdings of the Hermitage and made a decision that should have ended any further depreciation of the value of the Hermitage's collections and the ruination of its exhibition work.

I have only recently been given information, however, about new operations being readied by the *NKVT* [Commissariat for External Trade], despite the resolution, involving the Hermitage's finest art [see *Appendix 1*]. Obviously, the *NKVT* leadership understands the Politburo resolution to have no bearing on its established ways of doing business and is continuing to work along the old lines. Instead of issuing a directive based on the resolution requiring *NKVT* agencies to find objects other than Hermitage art for sale abroad – such art no longer being subject to sale abroad – the *NKVT* still acts as if the Hermitage were its personal hard-currency reserve and seeks quick buyers for objects listed on its price-list – the Hermitage catalogue prepared by Veiner – so as at the opportune moment to present the sales as accomplished facts and thus have them approved.

The situation is alarming. What it comes down to, in the last analysis, is that a clear decision must be made about the Hermitage's role. Does it now exist for the purpose of export sales or has it some other reason for being? As the very fact of the Politburo resolution clearly suggests, the matter admits of no delay. Despite the severity of its losses, the Hermitage is still the Hermitage. Those, like Comrade Sergo [Ordzonikidze], who think otherwise and believe the Hermitage has already lost its significance are mistaken. They do not realize how great or how rich the Hermitage was before it was bled, nor do they understand the significance it has taken on in recent years. It is not too late. But the Politburo must act to cut off at the root all meddling by [*NKVT*] agencies and put an end to the distorted understanding of its directive.

With some three and a half years behind me in my post at the Hermitage, I can declare to you without reservation, Iosif Vissarionovich, and to the Central Committee that the Hermitage is an enormous and irreplaceable asset of the USSR and, even beyond that, of the Comintern.

As you know, Iosif Vissarionovich, there are still people who think questions regarding the world of art can be put off as lacking in urgency, especially when viewed in historical perspective – that is, where everything is seen as having its moment and that moment is still to come for art. This sort of backwardness is hardly worrisome in and of itself, but, when it becomes the view of the *NKVT*, that is extremely dangerous and dama-

ging to the Hermitage and the country. Perhaps Comrade Ilyin at *Antikvariat*, who has been in the business of selling cultural treasures for all of two years, is entirely sincere in believing that he has learned how to trade in the world of culture, but it is clear to us that he doesn't know the first thing about the matter, which properly understood involves more than the exchange of equivalents, and that he is being duped every step of the way by the "hungry sharks of pawnbroker capitalism" and doesn't even know the real value to the USSR of the "goods" in which he deals.

Despite the hard-currency operations to which the Hermitage has been subject, despite the meagerness of the budget that has been allotted the Hermitage by the Commissariat of Enlightenment all these years, despite the lack of heating and electric lighting in the museum's new Winter Palace halls that house new exhibits of Eastern and French art, the Hermitage has proven its significance and viability to public opinion within our country and has won increasing attention abroad, which has been especially difficult. If the Hermitage formerly chiefly attracted foreign attention because of the hard-currency sales, it is now its innovations in the meaningful exhibition of art that the world notices.

Foreigners are surprised and somewhat apprehensive at the mobilization of the Hermitage's enormously valuable cultural heritage for the cultivation of the proletariat's independent aesthetic tastes and for understanding the ideology of art expressed in the works of the old masters. Every initiative taken by the Hermitage – every new exhibition, new publication, this or that new way of doing things as, for example, the Hermitage's "musical exhibit" – attracts intense interest and response abroad. This is perfectly well known, by the way, both to *VOKS* and to *Mezhdumarknig*...

...To what extent can the good that the *NKVT* expects to gain for the Soviet Union from the sale of Hermitage art adequately compensate the harm done to the Soviet Union if the Hermitage ends its work? Indeed, this is the real question, for every retreat from the Politburo's directive on ending foreign sales clearly and inescapably suggests that the Hermitage has no hope for further growth – in which case it hardly matters whether one or two masterpieces are sold or if everything goes at auction, as the *NKVT* sought to do a year ago. In either case the Hermitage, as we now know it, would be doomed.

Such a picture of the future may well frighten no one at *NKVT*. "What can you do?" it might be said. "The good of the revolution demanded it, and the sales were made." And the world proletariat will certainly not rise to condemn us on this account, even as it is the enemy that speaks the class truth when he pronounces the Hermitage a world treasure and says the Soviet Government has no right to dispose of it as it chooses or to treat it as a national possession. But who would argue that it would not be better by far if we

could, when the time comes, show the entire world proletariat our Hermitage as the museum that was able, during the intense years of socialist construction, when every kopeck came hard, so to restructure its work that the greatest works of the greatest masters of bourgeois culture, rather than serving as a means of ideologically confusing the enslaved masses, became a weapon in the proletariat's cultural revolution in the first country of the dictatorship of the proletariat?

If in the 1920s Lenin saw the possibility of the USSR coming to be a backward country (in the Soviet and Socialist sense) after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the leading countries of Europe or America, then it follows that now, Iosif Vissarionovich, as a result of the successes on the path followed after the death of Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin], it is absolutely clear that even after the triumph of socialism in any other country, the leading role will remain with the USSR, including, of course, in the sphere of cultural work. But the comrades of the *NKVT* who are working on their plans for sales abroad obviously do not understand this.

And so it happens that there are those who don't understand and others who have no time to be bothered and should it come down to a matter, say, of the Oriental treasures, if you had not personally found time to attend to the matter, the Oriental collection would have been liquidated.

The recent decision of the Politburo shows that the Central Committee also understands the necessity of preserving the Hermitage's Western European collections. But the decision now apparently needs to be underlined in order to end all further attempts on the collections by the *NKVT* and to stand as final confirmation of the All-Union significance of the Hermitage's treasures.

(TsGA SPb, f. 2556, op. 11, d. 24, l. 6–7)

Chronology

1917

July–August

The Provisional Government organises the Petrograd Artistic and Historical Commission in the Winter Palace, headed by V.A. Vereshchagin; the Gatchina commission is headed by V.P. Zubov, the Tsarskoe Selo commission by G.K. Lukomsky and the Peterhof commission by V.K. Makarov. On the instructions of the Provisional Government palace property, part of the Hermitage collection, and the picture galleries of the Academy of Arts, N.A. Kushelev-Bezborodko and the Dukes of Leichtenberg are evacuated from Petrograd to Moscow.

September

Crates containing the Petrograd collections are stored in the Historical Museum and the Large Kremlin Palace.

26 October

The Petrograd Military Revolutionary Council appoints B.D. Mandelbaum and G.S. Yatmanov Commissars for the Protection of Museums and Art Collections. The People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*) is established by decree of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

2 November

The All-Russian Church and Estates Council of the Russian Orthodox Church calls for the Kremlin not to be subjected to artillery bombardment “in the name of the salvation of the Kremlin and the salvation of the sacred objects dear to all of Russia within it, the destruction and desecration of which the Russian people will never forgive to anyone...”

3 November

The Commission for the Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity is organised at *Narkompros* in Moscow.

9 December

The People's Commissariat of State Properties is established on the basis of the former Ministry of the Court (on 11 July 1918 it is transformed into the Property Department of *Narkompros*).

1918

20 January

The decree “On Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Association” is promulgated. All of the movable property and real estate

of the Russian Orthodox Church is nationalised and declared “the property of the people”.

21 January

The decree “On the Annulment of State Loans” is promulgated by the All-Russian Executive Committee.

26 February

In closed session the Council of People's Commissars approves a draft resolution to transfer the government to Moscow. It is decided to begin “unloading Moscow's valuables”.

March

Narkompros establishes the All-Russian Collegium for the Preservation of Monuments of Antiquity and Museum Affairs.

3 March

The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty is signed with Germany.

31 March

The Petrograd Extraordinary Commission passes a resolution establishing “a reward for informers equal to five per cent of the total value for the provision of information concerning the whereabouts of noble metals”.

22 April

The decree “On the Introduction of a Monopoly in Foreign Trade” is adopted.

27 April

The Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) adopts the decree “On the Abrogation of the Right of Inheritance”.

18 May

Palace-museums are opened at Pavlovsk, Peterhof and Gatchina.

28 May

The Department for Museum Affairs and the Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity is opened in *Narkompros*.

30 May

Sovnarkom passes a resolution “On the Prohibition of the Export of Botticelli's Picture *Madonna and Child*”.

Summer

The decree “On the Abolition of the Right of Private Property in Real Estate in Towns” is adopted. Buildings of a certain value are compulsorily transferred to the ownership of the Soviet authorities.

The Sheremetiev and Anichkov Palaces are opened in Petrograd, the Anichkov Palace as the Municipal Museum.

June

The Artistic and Historical Commissions are transformed into the Commission for the Preservation and Registration of Monuments of Art and Antiquity.

9 June

The official opening of the Ekaterininsky Palace is held at Tsarskoe Selo.

18 June

The official opening of the Alexandrovsky Palace is held at Tsarskoe Selo.

13 July

The decree “On the Confiscation of the Property of the Deposed Emperor of Russia and Members of the Imperial House” is passed. All property of the royal family is nationalised without exception “wheresoever it may be located and of whatsoever it may consist”.

15 July

The royal family is shot in Ekaterinburg.

30 August

Narkompros issues an instruction forbidding charity work by all church organisations.

19 September

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Prohibition of the Export and Sale Abroad of Items of Special Artistic and Historical Significance”.

22 September

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Declaration of all who have not returned from their Dachas as Fugitives and their Property as Subject to Confiscation”.

5 October

A resolution is passed “On the Registration, Inventorisation and Keeping of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in the Possession of Private Individuals, Associations and Institutions”.

26 October

In a Missive to *Sovnarkom*, Patriarch Tikhon accuses the Bolsheviks of spilling rivers of blood, committing acts of plunder, dismembering Russia and persecuting the church. “Instead of annexations and contributions our great Motherland is conquered, diminished, dismembered and in payment for the tribute imposed on her you are secretly shipping to Germany gold which you did not accumulate,” said the Missive.

November

The Commission for the Reception of Church Property in the Moscow Kremlin is formed.

Work begins on compiling an inventory of church property in all the Kremlin monasteries and cathedrals.

The Petrograd Commission for the Preservation of Monuments is transformed into the Department for the Preservation, Inventorisation and Registration of Monuments of Antiquity and Art.

18 November

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Nationalisation of the Art Gallery of Sergei I. Shchukin”.

December

Provincial Sub-Departments for Museum Affairs and the Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity are established by decree of *Narkompros*.

19 December

The Museum Department of *Narkompros* adopts a decree establishing a Unified Museum Fund: “all existing museums must be regarded as a national museum fund, i.e. their entire holdings serve as material for regrouping between museums.”

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Nationalisation of the Art Collections of Ivan A. Morozov, Ilya S. Ostroukhov and Alexei V. Morozov”.

1919

11 January

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Appropriation of Surplus Foodstuffs”.

15 January

The National Museum Fund Statute is adopted.

16 January

Instructions are confirmed for the work of the Distribution Commission (Commission for the Redistribution of Museum Collections).

February

Maxim Gorky (Alexei M. Peshkov) is appointed chairman of the Antiques Valuation Commission (located at 3, Khalturin Street) which is organized in Petrograd on the suggestion of People’s Commissar of Foreign Trade Leonid B. Krasin for the selection and valuation of articles for the establishment of an Antiques Export Fund (name changed in July to the Petrograd Expert Commission and in November to the Petrograd Department of Artistic Valuables, which existed until 1928).

The first All-Russian Museum conference is held in Petrograd.

The journal *Art of the Commune* suggests exchanging “Rembrandts for tractors”.

19 November

The Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius is closed.

Patriarch Tikhon is refused an audience with Lenin.

1920

11 January

The Museum of the Revolution opens in the Winter Palace in Petrograd.

3 February

Gokhran (the State Depository of Valuables of the RSFSR) is established in Moscow.

5 March

Lenin sends a note to Deputy People’s Commissar of Finance of the RSFSR S.E. Chutskaev ordering him “to take especially urgent measures to expedite the selection of valuables... Mobilise a thousand members of the party for this”.

15 April

Sovnarkom issues a decree “On Halting the Issue of Funds from Loan Offices”.

16 April

Sovnarkom issues a decree “On Requisitions and Confiscations” concerning property abandoned during the withdrawal of White army units. The coercive expropriation of the property of individuals, including jewellery, begins.

20 April

A decree is passed “On the Transformation of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius into a Museum”.

14 May

The Labour and Defence Council passes a resolution on combating illegal trading in smuggled goods. Its implementation is made the responsibility of the Customs Office of *Narkomvneshtorg* and the Special Department of the All-Russian Special Commission.

8 June

Sovnarkom passes a degree “On the Renaming of the People’s Commissariat of Trade and Industry as the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade of the RSFSR”.

July

Narkompros is granted the right to distribute

at its own discretion works of art and antiques abandoned by their owners or discovered while being exported illegally.

13 July

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On the Expropriation of Noble Metals, Money and Various Valuables”.

16 September

Sovnarkom adopts a decree “On Confiscations and Requisitions of the Property of Individuals in Areas Liberated from the Enemy.” The items subject to confiscation include costumes, sets, theatre sketches, musical instruments and religious articles.

1 October

An expert commission of eighty people, led by Maxim Gorky (A.M. Peshkov), sets up two storehouses in which one hundred and twenty thousand articles confiscated by its staff are stored.

23 October

Deputy People’s Commissar of Enlightenment M.N. Pokrovsky replies to a letter from Maxim Gorky, who has suggested beginning to sell valuable works of art abroad, and says that “*Narkompros* has no objections” but believes it desirable that representatives of the Museum Fund should take part in the expert valuations.

26 October

Sovnarkom adopts a resolution “To propose that the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade should organise the collection of antique articles selected by the Petrograd Expert Commission and establish a reward for the most rapid and profitable sale of them abroad; the question of establishing a similar Commission in Moscow to be considered”.

19 November

A decree is promulgated “On the Confiscation of all moveable property of citizens who have fled beyond the borders of the republic or are concealing themselves until the present time – émigrés and others classed with them”.

23 November

A degree is promulgated “On Concessions”.

1921

31 January

For purposes of establishing a state reserve of artistic valuables, luxury items and antiques capable of serving as items of export, the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade is

granted the right to set up Expert Commissions in the provinces, operating on the basis of statutes approved by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade.

February

M.F. Andreeva is appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Sale of Artistic Valuables and later Commissar of the Expert Commission. The Moscow Expert Commission is granted the status of an Export Office of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade.

7 February

Sovnarkom passes a resolution "On the Creation of a State Fund of Valuables for Foreign Trade".

8 February

Special Export Control Commissions are set up at the Moscow and Petrograd Customs. A Scholarly Institutions Office is set up within the Academic Centre.

8–16 March

The 10th Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) is held. The transition is made to the New Economic Policy (NEP).

April

M.F. Andreeva is sent abroad to organise the sale of funds of items established by the Expert Commissions.

May

The *Narkompros* Museum Department is transformed into *Glavmuzei* (Central Museum Administration).

1 June

The People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade establishes a Commission for the Acquisition of Valuable Antiques and Works of Art for Sale Abroad in Moscow. The commission existed until 19 December 1921, when its functions were taken over by the Purchasing Sub-Department of the Commissariat. The All-Union Committee for Aid to the Hungry (*Pomgol*) is established.

18 June

The All-Russian Executive Committee adopts a resolution "On the Establishment of the Committee for Aid to the Hungry".

10 August

Sovnarkom adopts a resolution "On the Establishment of a Special Commission for Exports at the Labour and Defence Council". (The Commission was disbanded in 1922.)

24 October

A meeting of *Glavmuzei* defines the museums' articles of income and the percentage payable for granting permission to export items to individuals leaving the country; a tax on private collections is introduced, proportional to a collection's value. The Inventorisation and Registration Department of the Museum Fund is instructed to draft a decree permitting the sale of private

collections, to draft a statute on the establishment of auction halls and to introduce supervision over the new antique shops that are appearing.

It is proposed that certain articles of artistic value in museums should be earmarked for sale.

27 October

A contract is signed between the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade and the Allied Drug & Chemical Co, represented by Armand Hammer, under which wheat supplied is to be paid for in kind, including valuable *objets d'art*.

November

The People's Commissariat of Finance involves the finest Russian jewellers in the sorting and valuing of jewels.

13 December

The Presidium of the All-Russian Executive Committee adopts a resolution "On the Establishment of *Glavnauka* (the Central Administration for Scientific and Scholarly Artistic Institutions)".

27 December

The All-Russian Central Executive Committee issues a decree "On Valuables Located in Churches and Monasteries".

30 December

Sovnarkom issues a decree "On the State Philately Export Fund." *Vneshtorg* is granted the exclusive right to establish a state philately fund for foreign trade.

End of the year

Leon Trotsky is appointed *Sovnarkom* Special Commissioner for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables.

1922

2 January

Glavnauka is established as a scientific, ideological and administrative organ of *Narkompros*. *Glavmuzei* is transformed into the Museum Department of *Glavnauka* and becomes the only body supervising all Soviet museums and implementing their ideological management.

A resolution is passed "On the Expropriation of Property of Museum Quality Which is Located in Churches and Monasteries".

February

The Commission of Special Commissioners for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables is established with Leon Trotsky as its chairman.

16 February

The Presidium of the All-Russian Executive Committee adopts a resolution "To Initiate Immediately the Expropriation of Valuables from Churches of All Confessions".

19 February

Anatoly Lunacharsky publishes an article in the newspaper *Izvestiya* proposing not to

return to their former owners the art collections which were handed over by them for keeping by the state in 1914–1917.

23 February

The decree "On Valuables Located in Churches and Monasteries" is supplemented by a resolution on the expropriation of valuable articles made of gold, silver and precious stones for transfer to the Central Commission for Aid to the Hungry.

Late February

The church has collected eight million nine hundred and twenty-six thousand roubles for the famine aid fund, not counting items of jewellery and donations in kind.

4 March

The instruction to liquidate church property is issued over Natalya Trotskaya's signature. It emphasises the impermissibility of "liquidating valuables of an antiquity antecedent to the year 1725".

6 March

In the Armoury six crates containing the crown jewels and tsarist regalia are opened. The valuables were previously kept in the Diamond Room in the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, from where they arrived in Moscow in August 1914.

10 March

Lenin makes inquiries of Lev B. Krasin concerning the status of negotiations with the English and the Germans for the establishment of a joint company for the sale of precious stones. Krasin suggests establishing a "syndicate" with some foreign firm for this purpose.

12 March

Lenin telegrams V.M. Molotov, instructing him to send a coded telegramme on behalf of the Central Committee to all provincial party committees so that "delegates to the Party Congress can bring with them detailed information and materials about valuables located in churches and monasteries and progress in the work of expropriating them".

13 March

G.D. Bazilievich reports to Trotsky on the status of the country's gold fund.

15 March

Izvestiya publishes the fact that twenty-three million two hundred thousand people are starving in the country. In Shuya a crowd of believers protesting against the church expropriations is shot.

19 March

Lenin sends a secret letter to members of the Politburo concerning the events in Shuya and policy with regard to the church.

20–30 March

The expropriation of property from churches begins in Moscow and Moscow Province.

23 March

Valuables are expropriated from the Cathedral of the Assumption in Vladimir. A session of the Commission for the Sale of Valuables recognises the need to set up a “syndicate” and take “the most energetic measures for the actual sale of valuables on the foreign market”.

10 April

The Genoa Conference is opened. The crown jewels are handed over to *Gokhran*. The commission charged with describing and cataloguing them starts work under A.E. Fersman.

16 April

The Soviet-German agreement on the restoration of diplomatic and economic relations is signed in Rapallo.

May

Valuables are expropriated from the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, the Kazan and St. Isaac cathedrals in Petrograd.

16 May

A resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) establishes a commission “to expedite the sale of valuables to the maximum possible degree.” The members of the commission are Leon Trotsky, G.Ya. Sokolnikov and L.B. Krasin.

6 June

A decision of *Sovnarkom* establishes a commission “for the expropriation of exhibits of high material value from museums and also to decide questions relating to disputed articles expropriated from the repositories of museums and concentrated at *Gokhran*.” The People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunarcharsky, states in a letter to A.I. Rykov and A.D. Tsiurupa: “I dispute in the most energetic manner possible the very slightest possibility of expropriation for sale of purely museum exhibits” (Lunarcharsky is officially reproved or disagreement with the party line).

15 June

The international conference at the Hague opens.

Late June

In an attempt to put an end to the pillaging of the museums, a group of museum curators and art historians decides to hold an extraordinary conference of the Central State Museums and invite members of the government. In a report to the Central Commission of *Pomgol* addressed to the deputy chairman of *Sovnarkom*, A.I. Rykov, and signed by Natalya Trotskaya, *Glavmuzei* requests “to be informed as a matter of urgency, bearing in mind the possibility of destruction in *Gokhran*” of items being sent to be melted down, “which could be used on the foreign market”.

22 July

Kh.G. Rakovsky writes to Leon Trotsky proposing to mortgage the valuables expropriated from the churches in order “to obtain a dedicated loan to provide aid to the hungry or to restore agriculture.” Ukraine offers valuables primarily from the Monastery of the Caves (*Kievo-Pechersk Lavra*) in Kiev.

The response from the Central Commission of *Pomgol* and A.N. Vinokurov in person is a proposal to sell abroad the valuable art works and antiques which are not liable to be handed over to *Glavmuzei* and to hand over the remainder of the valuables shipped to *Gokhran* to the People’s Commissariat of Finance.

9 August

A resolution is issued over A.I. Rykov’s signature on the appointment of a commission for the expropriation of exhibits of high material value from museums.

The members of the commission are: *Sovnarkom* Deputy Special Commissioner G.D. Bazilievich, F.A. Weis for *Gokhran* and the People’s Commissariat of Finance, I.E. Grabar and S.N. Troinitsky from *Narkompros* and *Glavmuzei*.

13 August

Veniamin, Metropolitan of Petrograd, is executed by shooting.

16 September

The Expropriation Commission starts work. The valuables transported to the Armoury from the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius (*Troitse-Sergiev Lavra*) are “purged”.

19 September

The Expropriation Commission “purges” the repositories of the Hermitage, the Russian Museum and the museum of Baron Stieglitz college in Petrograd. Through the mediation of F. Nansen’s mission a first load of church valuables for which the licence is held by the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Trade is shipped to France.

25 September

Sovnarkom establishes a special commission headed by F.E. Dzerzhinsky for the concentration and expropriation of items of material value. All commissions for the inventorisation and concentration of valuables, as well as the museums, are subordinated to the new commission. The Petrograd Council for Museum Affairs accepts the possibility of selling duplicate items.

A reduction in expenditure on the maintenance of monuments of art and antiquity is acknowledged as desirable.

October

The sale takes place in London of one thou-

sand nine hundred and forty-five carats of emeralds for eleven thousand seven hundred and six pounds, valued by *Gokhran* at ninety-three thousand two hundred and seventy-five roubles and seventy-two kopecks.

The gold *chervonets* (ten-rouble piece) is put into circulation.

23–27 December

The 10th All-Russian Congress of Soviets meets and decides to reduce the scope of educational work “due to the general impoverishment of the country”.

1923

Beginning of the year

The State Museum Fund Depositories contain one hundred and eleven thousand articles in Moscow and one hundred and forty-four thousand two hundred articles in Petrograd. The state budget and *Glavnauka* are responsible for financing two hundred and twenty of the RSFSR’s three hundred and ninety-six museums. Of these forty-nine are in Moscow, twenty-three in Petrograd and one hundred and forty-eight in the provinces.

8 March

The Central Executive Committee of the USSR and *Sovnarkom* adopt a resolution “On the Re-Registration of Collections and Individual Works of Art Listed in *Glavnauka*’s Inventories for the Museum Department of *Narkompros*”.

April

The sale takes place in Amsterdam of 180,088.15 carats of diamonds and pearls for 8,883,751.34 Dutch guilders, valued by *Gokhran* at seven million sixty-nine thousand, nine hundred and twenty-nine roubles and twenty-four kopecks. The Soviet trade delegation sells a large lot of tapestries, porcelain and church valuables through the antique shops of Stockholm.

19 April

Sovnarkom passes a resolution “On Special Means for Ensuring the State Protection of Cultural Valuables”; the museums are allowed to earn income from property without any historical or cultural significance.

12 September

The All-Union Central Executive Committee’s Commission for the Concentration of Museum Property starts work under the chairmanship of P.I. Kutuzov. Work begins on the liquidation of the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow.

19 September

Sovnarkom passes a resolution “On the Removal of Bells in Closed Churches and Monasteries”.

October

An agreement is reached with the Berlin firm *Kunstauktionhaus Rudolf Lepke*, which has

advanced funds for the purpose of sales of antiques (the firm put up half of the purchase price, sent specialists at its own expense and handled packing and transport, receiving for this 7.5 per cent of the value of the items and twenty-five per cent of the profit).

The All-Union Association *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga* (International Book) is established to organise the export of books.

The First and Second Museums of Modern Western Art are reorganised to form the State Museum of Modern Western Art.

5 October

A decree is passed "On the Registration, Inventorisation and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in the Possession of Private Individuals and Institutions".

1924

21 January

Lenin dies.

The Collegium of *Narkompros* passes a resolution on the organisation at the Leningrad department of *Glavnauka* of a Central Bureau for the Inventorisation and Valuation of State Funds (subsequently the Commission for the Inventorisation and Sale of State Funds or simply the State Funds Commission).

1 February

Diplomatic relations are established between the USSR and Great Britain.

Gold coins are minted with values of one, three and five roubles, and also a silver ten-kopeck piece.

4 February

The Labour and Defence Council issues instructions concerning the organisation of the State Funds Commission.

March

The sale takes place in Paris of precious stones with a total weight of 158,534.13 carats for four hundred and twenty thousand pounds, valued by *Gokhran* at four million seven hundred and thirty-eight thousand three hundred and ninety-nine roubles and fifty-eight kopecks.

The sale takes place in Paris of precious stones with a weight of 116,845.1 carats for four hundred and forty thousand pounds, valued by *Gokhran* at five million, five hundred and seventy-six thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight roubles.

6 March

The Labour and Defence Council of the USSR adopts a resolution on the distribution of funds raised by the sale of State Fund property in the ratio sixty per cent to *Narkompros* and forty per cent to the State. The State Funds Commission is instructed to inventorise and sell State Funds on the domestic market.

May

The People's Commissariat of Domestic Trade is established.

24 October

Diplomatic relations are established between the USSR and France.

A report of a Commission of the All-Union Central Executive Committee "On Measures for the Concentration of State Museums" announces the principle of transforming small museums into branches of large ones with the same specialist profile.

10 November

The Museum of Fine Arts (from 1937 – Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts) opens in its new format. The Museum of Casts now has a picture gallery based on the collection of Western European art from the disbanded Rumyantsev Museum.

1925

Beginning of the year

At the People's Commissariat of Trade of the USSR the State Import-Export Trade Office of *Gostorg* of the RSFSR is established. In 1928 – the Central Office of *Gostorg* of the RSFSR for the Purchase and Sale of Antique Items *Antikvariat*; in the beginning of 1930 – the All-Union State Trading Office *Antikvariat*.

Maria F. Andreeva is appointed head of the Art and Industry Department of the USSR Trade Delegation in Berlin.

February

The sale takes place in Paris of precious stones with a weight of 600,357.06 carats (valued by *Gokhran* at four million fifty-two thousand three hundred and fifty-four roubles and thirty-two kopecks) and other articles with a weight of nine million six hundred and twenty-one thousand four hundred and sixty-seven grammes for six hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds (two million seven hundred and ninety thousand two hundred and seventy-four roubles and fourteen kopecks).

March

The Yusupov palace-museum in Leningrad is closed.

14 April–20 July

The Shuvalov palace-museum in Leningrad is liquidated.

14 September

The All-Union Central Executive Committee and *Sovnarkom* pass a resolution "On the Transfer to the Management of Local Executive Committees of Museum and Artistic Institutions of Local Significance".

October

The People's Commissariats of Foreign and Domestic Trade are merged to form The People's Commissariat of Trade of the USSR. Minting of the silver rouble is halted.

November

The exhibition of the crown jewels is opened in the Hall of Columns of Trade Union House in Moscow.

18–31 December

The 14th Conference of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) takes place. The drive towards industrialisation is announced.

1926

26 January

Instructions are issued for museum institutions to sell unnecessary and decrepit property and State Funds not of museum quality.

Spring

The State Funds Commission offers for sale items from the table service store-room of the Winter Palace, including six hundred articles of pink crystal produced for an order from Alexander I. The contents of the Gatchina and Ropshinsky Palaces are shipped to the State Funds store-rooms for subsequent sale. Religious items of pure gold are expropriated from the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Leningrad (they were donated to the cathedral by Catherine the Great to commemorate the victory of the Russian Fleet at the battle of Chesma). Some items were melted down, others were sold.

October

Jewels from the Diamond Fund are sold to the antique dealer Norman Weis (total weight nine million six hundred and forty-four thousand five hundred and seventy-one grammes). The jewels, assessed by *Gokhran* at one million five hundred and fifty-nine thousand six hundred and thirty-one roubles and forty-five kopecks, were bought for fifty thousand pounds.

26 October

The question of exporting items "not of museum quality" from the suburban palace-museums is raised for the first time during a meeting at the Export-Import Department of the North-West District Office of the People's Commissariat of Trade.

The export of Soviet banknotes is prohibited. The American book dealer Israel Perlstein holds successful negotiations with *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga*.

End of the year

People's Commissar of Trade Anastas I. Mikoyan suggests that Armand Hammer act as intermediary for the sale of Russian art works abroad (for ten per cent commission). The Hammer brothers, representing a syndicate headed by George Duveen, meet with the head of *Antikvariat* and make the Soviet government an offer on prices. For the forty masterpieces from the Hermitage collection included in Duveen's list the syndicate offers five million dollars

(including two million for Leonardo's *Madonna*). The deal falls through because prices cannot be agreed on.

1927

16 March

Items of jewellery bought from the Diamond Fund by Norman Weis are sold at auction in London by Christie's. The one hundred and twenty-four lots include the imperial nuptial crown, a diamond diadem with a sapphire, a diamond diadem with pearls and other crown jewels from the Russian Imperial Court.

25 May

At the State Museum Fund in Moscow the Sub-Department for the Inventorisation of Private Collections is liquidated.

S.N. Troinitsky is relieved of his duties as director of the State Hermitage.

Autumn

People's Commissar of Trade Anastas

I. Mikoyan suggests that the French antiquary Germain Seligman act as intermediary for the sale in Paris of valuables in the keeping of *Gokhran*.

The Berlin firm *Kunstauktionhaus Rudolf Lepke* is prepared to start selling paintings, furniture and works of applied art from Soviet collections. One hundred and thirty-nine thousand six hundred and fifteen items are transferred to the State Funds Commission from the suburban palace-museums of Leningrad.

October

For the first time the People's Commissariat of Trade of the USSR sets a plan for the export of antiques (half a million roubles for the period from October to December 1927).

25 November

At the State Museum Fund in Leningrad the Sub-Department for the Inventorisation of Private Collections is abolished (the process continues until 10 May 1929).

On the instructions of *Glavnauka* the store-rooms of the State Museum Fund in Moscow and Leningrad are liquidated and their collections are distributed between the museums of the USSR, the State Funds Commission and *Antikvariat*.

December

The Collegium of *Narkompros* passes a resolution on the organisation of the export and sale abroad of antiques and works of art, including those of museum quality.

The 15th Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) approves the directives for the first five-year plan.

1928

2 January

Instructions are issued "On Procedures for the Export by Foreigners of Art Works and Antiques".

23 January

A closed session of *Sovnarkom* adopts a secret resolution "On Measures for the Intensification of the Export and Sale Abroad of Art Works and Antiques" in connection with the catastrophic budget deficit.

Museum exhibits begin to be handed over for sale abroad (previous sales abroad were for the most part of antiques from private collections and from *Gokhran*). The State Funds Commission undertakes to manage their sale on the foreign market via the State Trading Office *Antikvariat*.

Natalya Trotskaya is removed from her post as head of the Museum Department of *Glavnauka* and exiled to Alma-Ata with her husband. L.Ya. Vainer is appointed to replace her.

Minting of the silver fifty-kopec piece is halted.

16 February

The Collegium of *Narkompros* approves instructions for the identification and selection from museums of works of art and antiques for purposes of export.

The Hermitage and the Russian Museum are obliged to hand over items for export with a value of two million roubles before 1 March. The Anichkov and Sheremetiev palaces are obliged to hand over items worth one million and the Museum Fund items worth three hundred thousand roubles.

April

A Commission for the Selection of Items for Sale Abroad is set up in the Historical Museum. It includes representatives of the Armoury, *Gostorg* and the State Historical Museum. The Historical Museum is required to make available for sale abroad a total of a hundred thousand roubles in museum holdings. Reluctant to touch its extraordinarily valuable collection of icons, the museum puts together a package of objects valued at 51,000 roubles. By the end of the year the sum has increased by a further three hundred thousand roubles.

Summer

Letter from A.V. Lunacharsky to A.I. Rykov on the impermissibility of any further removal of museum treasures. Selection of icons from the Historical Museum's collection begins.

Norman Weis purchases 80% of the furnishings from the Palei palace at Detskoe (Tsarskoe) Selo for 48,000 pounds.

20 September

Igor E. Grabar reports to the Office for the Purchase and Sale of Antiques, offering recommendations on the correct organisation of commercial sales from the icon funds.

Late September

A commission consisting of I.E. Grabar and G.O. Chirikov is sent to the Historical

Museum to select icons for sale abroad.

Calouste Gulbenkian, head of the firm *Iraq Petroleum*, meets the USSR trade representative in France, G.L. Pyatakov.

October

The first five-year plan for the development of the economy of the USSR is launched (it is completed by December 1932).

A conference is held on valuable antiques for export. Demands are made for the contents of the Stroganov and Pavlovsk palaces to be designated for sale.

6-7 November

Lepke holds the first of its auctions in Berlin, "Leningrad Museums and Palaces", which includes items from the collections of the Hermitage and the Gatchina Palace.

December

The Shchukin branch of the State Museum of Modern Western Art (GMNZI) is closed and its collection transferred to the former mansion of Ivan A. Morozov on Prechistenka Street. G.L. Pyatakov is appointed deputy chairman and then chairman of the State Bank. *Antikvariat* is renamed the All-Union Association for the Export and Import of Antiques.

1929

The Elagin, Stroganov and Menshikov palaces are closed.

April

Calouste Gulbenkian closes his first deal with *Antikvariat* for fifty-four thousand dollars.

30 May

Lepke holds its second auction in Berlin. Bidding takes place on 1-5 June.

1 June

A country-wide purge begins in state, public and co-operative institutions, intended to identify "individuals incapable of carrying out the tasks set by government agencies".

11 July

The People's Commissariat of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate of the USSR and RSFSR adopts a resolution "On the liquidation of the State Funds Commission and the transfer of its functions to the Special Unit for State Funds of the Leningrad District Finance Department, subordinate to the Special Unit for State Funds of the People's Commissariat of Finance of the RSFSR".

21-23 July

The contents of the Palei Palace are auctioned in London.

12 August

The People's Commissariat of Trade of the USSR approves a listing of export goods. Items worth five million roubles are handed over to the State Fund.

Summer-autumn

An exhibition of Russian icons is held in towns in Germany.

Autumn

The international financial crisis begins.

24 October

Anatoly Lunacharsky is dismissed from his post as People's Commissar of Enlightenment and appointed chairman of the Science Committee at the Central Executive Committee of the USSR.

In exchange for handing over their pencil factory to the Soviet government Victor and Armand Hammer are granted permission to export the works of art they have accumulated in the USSR.

11–16 November

The central office of *Antikvariat* is moved from Moscow to Leningrad. The Leningrad branch of the State Museum Fund is liquidated. *Glavnauka* is liquidated and its functions transferred to the *Narkompros* Science Section.

The Museum of Icons and Painting (the former Ostroukhov collection) is closed. Rationing cards are introduced.

1930

2 January

Sovnarkom adopts a resolution "On Procedures for the Export by Foreigners of Works of Art and Antiques".

5 January

The Hermitage is requested to admit a representative of *Antikvariat* for the selection of two hundred and fifty pictures with a value of at least five thousand roubles each, duplicate engravings, weapons from the Arsenal to a value of five hundred thousand roubles and Scythian gold from the Special Storerooms.

The Chudov Monastery in the Moscow Kremlin is totally demolished and its contents sold.

The Elagin, Stroganov, Shuvalov and Sheremetiev palace-museums in Leningrad are liquidated.

Calouste Gulbenkian closes his second deal with *Antikvariat* for a sum of one hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds.

March

The international syndicate of antiquaries buys *Portrait of Hélène Fourment* and *Portrait of Lord Wharton* by van Dyck for Andrew Mellon.

April

Special Brigades are assembled from employees of *Glavnauka* and the Finance Department for the selection of "material values" for export from the museums. Gold and silver articles with a total value of three hundred thousand roubles are collected from the Historical Museum.

May

An auction of valuable works of art from the USSR is held in Leipzig.

Gulbenkian does his third deal with *Antikvariat* for a sum of one hundred and forty thousand pounds. He immediately sells all but one of the works bought from the Hermitage (Rembrandt's *Portrait of Titus*, Watteau's *Le Mezzetin*, Ter Borch's *Music Lesson* and Nicolas Lancret's *Bathers*) to Wildenstein, keeping for himself Rembrandt's *Pallas Athene*.

June

The syndicate of antiquaries buys Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation* for Andrew Mellon for five hundred and two thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine dollars.

26 June

The 14th Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) is held – the congress "of the full-scale advance of socialism across the entire front".

August

The syndicate of antiquaries buys van Dyck's *Portrait of Isabella Brant* for Andrew Mellon for a price of two hundred and twenty-three thousand five hundred and sixty-two dollars.

3 August

The major treasures of the icon collection at the Historical Museum are transferred to the Tretyakov Gallery.

October

A fourth deal is concluded with Calouste Gulbenkian, who buys Rembrandt's *Portrait of an Old Man* from the Hermitage for thirty thousand pounds.

21–22 October

Lepke holds its third auction in Berlin.

November

The syndicate of antiquaries buys Veronese's *The Finding of Moses* and Hanneman's *Portrait of Henry of Gloucester* from the Hermitage for Andrew Mellon.

25 November

The "Industrial Party" trial is held.

December

The People's Commissariat of Trade is divided into two commissariats: Foreign Trade is headed by Arkady P. Rozengolts and Supply by Anastas Mikoyan.

1931

January

The German syndicate *Import Antique Company* begins selling antiques from the USSR via the Wallace H. Day Gallery in New York. The sales are halted as a result of intervention by the Grand Duchesses Olga and Kseniya.

Sales begin in the USA of jewellery, icons, Easter eggs and libraries which formerly belonged to the Romanovs.

The Office for Trade with Foreigners is transformed into the All-Union Association for Trade with Foreigners *Torgsin*.

The syndicate of antiquaries buys

Rembrandt's picture *Joseph Accused by Potiphar's Wife* from the Hermitage for Andrew Mellon.

February

The syndicate of antiquaries buys Frans Hals' *Portrait of a Young Man* and Rembrandt's *Girl with a Broom* and *Portrait of a Polish Aristocrat* from the Hermitage for Andrew Mellon. Negotiations begun in 1930 are concluded for the purchase of Raphael's *Saint George*, Velasquez' *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* and Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*. The Mensheviks are put on trial.

Spring

An auction held in Leipzig of drawings and engravings from Soviet collections brings in less than one million dollars.

March

The syndicate of antiquaries buys Hals' *Portrait of an Officer*, Rembrandt's *Woman With a Rose* and Chardin's *House of Cards* from the Hermitage for Andrew Mellon.

April

The syndicate of antiquarians concludes negotiations on the acquisition for Andrew Mellon of Rembrandt's *Turk*, van Dyck's *Portrait of a Flemish Lady*, Perugini's *Crucifixion*, Raphael's *Alba Madonna* and Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*.

The price of one million one hundred and sixty-six thousand four hundred dollars paid for the *Alba Madonna* was a record at the time.

6–13 May

An auction of items from the Stroganov Palace organised in Berlin by Lepke brings in six hundred and thirteen thousand dollars.

Summer

The famous art dealer Joseph Duveen, who has personally acquired many items from the Leningrad palaces, including tapestries produced from drawings by François Boucher from the Carpet Study and the library of Maria Fedorovna at Pavlovsk, arrives in the USSR.

25 September

The New York Times reports the sales of pictures from the Hermitage to Andrew Mellon. The Hammer brothers begin selling the antiques they have brought from the USSR in American department stores. A delegation of European antique book dealers arrives in the USSR to request a halt to the dumping of antiquarian books on the international market.

November

Mezhdunarodnaya kniga sells two thousand two hundred books from the library of the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, including *The Apostle*, printed by Ivan Fedorov in 1574.

26 December

On the instructions of deputy chairman of

the State Bank Gorbunov the cabinets holding the valuables of the Diamond Fund are opened and seven Easter eggs with a value of one hundred and eighteen thousand five hundred and seventy-four roubles and sixty kopecks are extracted, together with one hundred and fifty-five other valuable items.

Mezhdunarodnaya kniga sells one thousand seven hundred and thirty-three volumes from the personal library of Nicholas II. They are subsequently acquired for the Library of Congress.

1932

January

Genuine items once possessed by the Romanov family appear on the Western antiques market.

In Berlin the firm *Ball & Graup* begins selling jewellery which belonged to the Romanovs.

A six-day working week is introduced in the USSR.

20 February

Leon Trotsky is deprived of Soviet citizenship. In New York an exhibition opens with the title: "Russian Imperial Art Treasures from the Winter Palace, Tsarskoe Selo and other Tsarist palaces from the Hammer Collection".

23 April

The Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopts a resolution on the restructuring of artistic organisations.

Lepke holds an art auction in Berlin.

Anti-government demonstrations begin in Soviet cities in response to reduced rationing allowances.

28 June

Works from the Hermitage and the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow are sold at an auction of 16th- to 17th-century Dutch Art held in Berlin by the firm of Herman Ball & Paul Graup.

Autumn

Famine grips Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Northern Caucasus and the mid-Volga region. It continues until the summer of 1933. During the famine more than five million people die of hunger.

November

A passport system is introduced in the USSR.

5 December

In response to a letter from I.A. Orbeli, the curator of the Hermitage, Stalin forces the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade to halt its expropriations of museum exhibits from the Oriental Art Section of the Hermitage.

Antikvariat asks a price of four hundred and fifty thousand German marks for Paul Cézanne's *Pierrot and Harlequin* in the State Museum of Modern Western Art (GMNZI).

1933

The Central Executive Committee and *Sovnarkom* pass a resolution "On the Introduction of a Passport System."

Hammer signs a three-year contract with the department store *Lord & Taylor* in New York. Adolph Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany.

Antikvariat offers to sell nine pictures by van Gogh, Renoir, Gauguin and Cézanne for a price of two hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

Summer

The Burlington Magazine reports on the sales of works of art from the Hermitage.

10 August

The All-Union Central Executive Committee and *Sovnarkom* adopt a resolution "On the Procedure for the Inventorisation and Use of Historical Monuments".

October

Germany withdraws from the League of Nations.

November

Charles Henschel, the head of the antiques firm *Knoedler & Co.* announces in the press for the first time that the pictures purchased were intended for the collection of A. Mellon.

16 November

Diplomatic relations are established between the USSR and the USA.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York buys Jan van Eyck's *The Crucifixion* and *The Last Judgement* which were sold from the Hermitage.

The Politburo adopts a resolution on sales from the Hermitage.

5 December

The British Museum in London buys the *Codex Sinaiticus*, which was in the Public Library in Leningrad, for two hundred thousand pounds.

1934

21 January

B.V. Legran, director of the Hermitage, writes to Stalin requesting a halt to the pillage of the country's biggest museum.

January-February

The Hammer brothers open a gallery in New York.

The 17th Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party takes place. The "Congress of Victors" proclaims the victory of socialism in the USSR.

17 August

The First Congress of Soviet Writers is held.

1935

January

The Special Unit for State Funds of the Leningrad District Finance Department ceases operations.

August

The decision is taken to transform Leningrad into an exemplary socialist city.

25 September

Rationing cards are abolished for meat, fish, sugar, fats and potatoes.

14 November

The *Torgsin* Association is disbanded.

7 December

Rationing cards are abolished for bread, flour and grains.

1936

18 February

The *Torgsin* shops are closed.

19 August

The trial begins in the case of the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre".

5 December

A new Constitution of the USSR is adopted.

1937

23 January

The trial begins in the case of the "Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre." Joseph Davies is appointed US ambassador to the USSR (a post he holds for eighteen months). Two weeks after arriving in Moscow Davies and his wife Marjorie Post begin building up a collection of art works.

Summer

The Hammer brothers hold an exhibition of Russian icons in New York, the largest ever shown in America. The Hammers also organise the exhibition *The Cellini of the North*, including three hundred and fifty items of jewellery from Fabergé. The exhibition earns them two million dollars.

October

Experts at the Tretyakov Gallery make a selection of twenty-three icons for Joseph Davies. The All-Union State Trading Office *Antikvariat* of the People's Commissariat of the USSR is liquidated.

1938

3 March

The trial begins in the case of the "Anti-Soviet Right-Trotskyite Bloc".

11 April

The duty-free export of works of art by members of the diplomatic corps is abolished. The export of works of art is prohibited.

Main participants

Andreeva (Yurkovskaya), Maria Fedorovna (surname by marriage Zhelyabuzhskaya), 1868–1953. Actress, for many years the common law wife of Maxim Gorky. Began working in the theatre in 1894; member of the RSDRP (Russian Social-Democratic Revolutionary Party) from 1904; from 1919 head of the Petrograd Theatre Section of the Sub-Department of Arts; from February 1921 Deputy Commissioner for the Sale of Artistic Valuables; 1922 appointed head of Cinema Section in RSFSR Trade Mission in Berlin and from 1925 head of Art and Industry Section at Trade Mission; supervised long-term agreement with Berlin firm *Kunstauktionhaus Rudolf Lepke* which advanced funds for the purchase of antiques (from 1923 to 1927); removed from her post for failure of 1929 auction; 1931–1948 director of Moscow House of Scientists

Angarsky (Klestov), Nikolai Semenovich, 1873–1941. Member of Russian RSDRP from 1902. From February 1917 to late 1922, member Moscow Soviet. From 1922 chairman of Moscow Central Workers' Cooperative, member of presidium of Moscow Union of Consumers. From 1923 active in foreign trade as manager and representative, heading *Mosgostorg* (Moscow State Trading Company) and representing *Antikvariat* in Moscow. From 1935 chairman of *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga* (International Book), an all-union conglomerate. Executed

Anisimov, Alexander Ivanovich, 1877–1937 Historian, organized safekeeping and restoration of old Russian art. Head of Church Department of State Historical Museum; department eliminated in 1929. Repressed

Bazilievich, Georgy Dmitrievich, 1889–1939 Lieutenant-colonel in Soviet Army. From 1918 in Workers and Peasants Red Army; member of Revolutionary Military Council; fought in the Civil War; after the war military commissar and commander of North Caucasus military district and later Kharkov military district; 1921–1922 functionary responsible for especially important assignments at Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic; Deputy Special Commissioner of Council of People's Commissars for the Inventorisation and Concentration of

Valuables; from 1924 in Red Army, commanded several military districts; from 1931 secretary of Defence Committee of Council of People's Commissars. Executed

Benois, Alexander Nikolaevich, 1870–1960 Painter, graphic artist, stage designer, art critic, art historian. Author of guide to Picture Gallery of Imperial Hermitage (1911). From 1918 in charge of State Hermitage Picture Gallery. In 1926 traveled to France on official duties, did not return.

Bubnov, Andrei Sergeevich, 1884–1940 Member of RSDRP from 1903. Member of Politburo of Central Committee of Russian Social-Democratic Revolutionary Party (Bolshevik) from 1917; 1917–1918, 1924–1938 member Central Committee; 1922–1924 head of Agitation and Propaganda Department of Central Committee of Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik); 1924–1929 head of Political Office of Red Army and member Revolutionary Military Council of USSR; in 1925 secretary of Central Committee. From 1929 education minister of RSFSR. Executed

Chicherin, Georgy Vasilievich, 1872–1936 Member of RSDRP from 1905; from 1918 member of Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1925–1930 member of Central Committee; 1918–1930 People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of RSFSR/USSR; member of All-Russian Central Executive Committee/Central Executive Committee of USSR

Chirikov, Grigory Osipovich, 1882–1936 Artist and restorer of old Russian art, technical director and restorer of Commission for Preservation and Discovery of Monuments. Helped forge icons for sale abroad. Repressed

Chutskaev, Sergei Yegorovich, 1876–1946 Member of RSDRP from 1903. In 1922–1923 member of the Collegium of People's Commissariat of Finance, carried through a monetary reform; from 1923 member of Presidium of Central Control Commission of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1923–1927 member of Collegium, Deputy People's Commissar of Workers and Peasants Inspectorate. Repressed

Clark Stephen, 1882–1960

The heir to a great fortune earned from sewing machines and sewing accessories, Stephen Clark collected primarily French painting from the period 1880–1910, preferring to acquire only the very best works. Under the terms of Clark's will his small but extremely fine collection was divided between Yale University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Cohn-Wiener, Ernst, 1882 – post–1923 German art historian and doctor of philosophy; expert in silver

Davies, Joseph Edward, 1876–1958 Lawyer. US ambassador to the USSR (1937–1938); while in this post he and his wife Marjorie Post built up a collection of antiques.

Duveen, Joseph Lord Milbank, 1869–1939 American antique dealer, one of the most successful traders in art works in the world

Egorov, Dmitry Nikolaevich, 1878–1931 Medievalist, bibliographer. Corresponding member of USSR Academy of Sciences from 1928. Deputy director of Lenin State Library of the USSR. Arrested 1930, exiled to Tashkent

Eifert, Vladimir Alexandrovich, 1884–1960 Painter, art historian. Antiquities specialist for Soviet trade groups in Germany, Sweden, Austria, France 1931–1953. In 1936–1939 director of State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Exiled from Moscow to Kazakhstan in 1941 because of German nationality

Eismont, Nikolai Boleslavovich, 1891–1935 From 1926 People's Commissar of Trade of RSFSR and Deputy People's Commissar of Domestic Trade of USSR; 1933 excluded from the Party and arrested

Enukidze, Avel Safronovich, 1877–1937 Member of RSDRP from 1898. In 1927–1934 member of Presidium of Central Control Commission of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1934–1935 member of Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1918–1922 member of Presidium and secretary of All-Russian Central Executive

- Committee; 1922–1935 member of Presidium and Secretary of Central Executive Committee of USSR. Executed
- Fersman, Alexander Evgenievich**, 1883–1945
Chemist, mineralogist. From 1919 member of Russian Academy of Sciences; 1919–1930 director of Mineralogical Museum of Academy of Sciences; 1922–1926 head of Diamond Fund of USSR Commission for Analysis and Description of Crown Jewels; head of group for preparation of four-volume catalogue of Diamond Fund valuables
- Gelmersen, Vasily Vasil'evich**, 1873–1937
Palace aide, worked in Royal Library from 1899. Until 1917 assistant to chief of Nicholas II's personal library. Administrator at Academy of Sciences. Discharged from post 1929, arrested 1930. Executed
- Ginzburg, Abram Moiseevich**, 1878–1937
Headed antiquities office of *Gostorg* (State Import-Export Trade Office), authorized to sell valuables. First managing chairman of *Antikvariat*
- Gorky, Maxim (Peshkov, Alexei Maximovich)**
1868–1936. Writer. In 1919–1921 chairman of Petrograd Expert Commission for the Development of the Valuables Export Fund; 1921 chairman of Moscow Commission for the Acquisition of Antiques and Works of Art for Sale Abroad; 1921–1928 lived abroad
- Grabar (Khrabrov), Igor Emmanuilovich**
1871–1960. Painter, art historian, art critic, museum curator. In 1913–1917 warden and 1918–1925 director of Tretyakov Gallery; from 1918 senior member of Museum Department of Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*); from 1918 director of Central State Restoration Workshops (until 1930; after 1944 scientific chief), which were named for him after his death. Full member of Academy of Sciences of USSR (1943) and USSR Academy of Arts
- Gromadsky, Nikolai**
Worker, member of RSDRP; prime minister of Far Eastern Republic; head of Revolutionary Tribunal; 1923 became head of *Gokhran*
- Gulbenkian, Calouste Sarkis**, 1864–1955
One of the founders of the company Iraq Petroleum. In 1929–1930 acquired works from the State Hermitage at a cost of 374,000 pounds sterling
- Hammer, Armand**, 1898–1990
American entrepreneur. In 1921–1928 was one of main commercial partners of Soviet government; 1930–1938 handled the sale of valuables nationalised by the Bolsheviks
- Henschel, Charles**
Head of New York antiques firm M. Knoelder & Co.; head of international antiquaries' syndicate which bought works of art in USSR in 1929–1934
- Ilyin, Nikolai Nikolaevich**, 1887–1939?
Member of RSDRP from 1904. Professional revolutionary, active in smuggling weapons and literature into Russia; arrested several times; imprisoned at Shlisselburg, exiled to Irkutsk and Enisei provinces. During exile managed mines for private company. An organizer of Worker-Peasant Inspectorate (RKI). Until 1920 headed RKI in Leningrad, later creating RKI commissariat in Turkestan with Lazar Kaganovich. Returned to Petrograd 1921 as deputy chairman of Commission for Improvement of Conditions [Byt] of Workers. From 1927 worked for *Lengostorg* (Leningrad branch of State Import-Export Trade Office). From 1930 until 1935 chairman of *Antikvariat*. In 1930–1933 traveled abroad on assignment frequently (Germany, France, Britain, US, Holland, Austria, elsewhere). In 1935 relieved of duties; trading agent in Romania 1935–1937. Repressed
- Ivanov, Dmitry Dmitrievich**, 1870–1930
Director of a department in the Ministry of Justice in 1917. After October Revolution worked in People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*); from 1922 first Soviet director of the Armoury; in 1929, unable to bear the ruin of the collection, submitted his resignation and became a curator. Committed suicide
- Kalinin, Mikhail Ivanovich**, 1875–1946
Member of RSDRP from 1898; 1919–1946 member of Central Committee, 1926–1946 member of Politburo of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); from 1919 chairman of All-Russian Central Executive Committee and from 1922 chairman of the Central Executive Committee of USSR; from 1938 chairman of Presidium of Supreme Soviet of USSR
- Kameneva (Bronstein), Olga Davydovna**
1883–1941. Sister of Leon Trotsky and wife of Lev Kamenev, member of Russian Social-Democratic Revolutionary Party from 1902. From July 1921 to September 1922 member of Central Committee of *Pomgol* (Famine Aid) of All-Russian Central Executive Committee; from August 1923 chairman of Commission for Foreign Aid of Presidium of All-Russian Central Executive Committee; head of All-Union Society for Foreign Cultural Relations. October 1941 executed by shooting in Orel jail
- Kerensky, Alexander Fedorovich**, 1881–1970
Lawyer. In 1917 minister of Justice, minister of the Army and Navy, chairman and supreme commander of the Provisional Government; from 1918 lived in emigration in France; from 1940 lived in USA
- Khinchuk, Lev Mikhailovich**, 1868–1944
Member of RSDRP from 1898. Until 1919 a Menshevik; from 1921 chairman of Central Union of Consumers' Societies; from 1926 chairman of Council of Central Union of Consumers' Societies, chairman of All-Union Central Cooperative Council and member of presidium of Central Executive Committee of USSR; from 1926 trade representative in Great Britain; from 1927 Deputy People's Commissar of Domestic Trade of USSR; 1930–1934 political representative in Germany; 1934–1937 People's Commissar of Domestic Trade of RSFSR; 1938 senior arbiter at Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR. Repressed
- Krasin, Leonid Borisovich**, 1870–1926
Member of RSDRP from 1890. From 1924 member of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1918–1920 People's Commissar for Trade and Industry; 1920–1923 People's Commissar for Foreign Trade; 1920–1926 political and trade representative in Great Britain and from 1924 also in France

Krestinsky, Nikolai Nikolaievich, 1883–1938
Member of RSDRP from 1903. In 1917–1921 member of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1921–1930 Soviet political representative in Germany; 1918–1922 People's Commissar of Finance of RSFSR; from 1930 Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of USSR; executed by shooting

Krimmer, Fridrikh Eduardovich, 1888–1936
Until 1917 worked at bank. Through Lev Krasin aligned with Social Democrats. Friend of Maxim Gorky; helped Gorky with financing of Gorky's publishing company. In 1917, with Gorky, joined group, *Novaia Zhizn'* (New Life), opposing October Revolution. Later active in Commission to Improve Daily Life of Academics, created on Gorky's initiative; member of Gorky-led Petrograd section of All-Russian Committee to Aid the Hungry. Worked at Commissariat of External Trade. Headed Leningrad section of *Antikvariat*

Kristi, Mikhail Petrovich, 1875–1956
Narkompros representative in Petrograd 1918–1926. From 1926 deputy head of *Glavnauka*; 1927–1937 director of State Tretyakov Gallery

Kruger, Hans Carl
Specialist buyer at the Lepke auction house in Berlin

Kuchumov, Anatoly Mikhailovich, 1912–1993
In 1932 senior compiler of inventories at the Pavlovsk Palace; 1934–1937 keeper of the Ekaterinsky palace-museum at Detskoe (Tsarskoe) Selo; 1941–1944 director of Central Repository of the Leningrad palaces; 1944–1951 director of Central Repository of Museum Funds; 1956–1958 senior curator of Pavlovsk Palace; after Second World War located and retrieved about 2,400 items stolen by Nazi forces from Leningrad's suburban palace-museums

Kuibyshev, Valerian Vladimirovich, 1888–1925
Member of RSDRP from 1904. In 1922–1923 and 1927–1935 member of Party Central Committee; 1921–1924 member of Presidium of All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions; 1921–1922 member of

Presidium of All-Russian Council of the National Economy; 1923–1926 chairman of Central Control Commission of the Party and People's Commissar for Workers and Peasants Inspectorate

Lazerson, Moisei Yakovlevich (Morris or Max Larsons), 1887–1951
Graduate of law faculty of St. Petersburg University. In 1914 manager of St. Petersburg branch of Russian-English joint stock company The Urals Factories (from 1916 to March 1918 The Shuvalov Company); 1917 member of Central St. Petersburg City Council; employed in Department of Nationalities of Provisional Government; 1923–1925 head of Currency Department of People's Commissariat of Finance

Lederer, Leo, 1883–1946
Austrian lawyer, journalist and correspondent in St. Petersburg, Berlin and Istanbul. In 1920s published economics journal *Der Weg zum Osten* (The Road to the East) in Vienna in German and Russian editions; member of the board of Viennese firm BUKUM AG, which traded in valuable art works until 1933; in 1920s represented auction house Dorotheum in negotiations with Soviet trade delegation in Vienna; visited USSR on several occasions, becoming familiar with museum collections; member of French resistance movement during Second World War. Imprisoned in concentration camp

Legran, Boris Vladimirovich, 1884–1936
Member of RSDRP from 1901. In 1917–1922 Commissar of Petrograd District Court; member of Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front and 10th Army; chairman of Revolutionary Tribunal of RSFSR; political representative in Armenia and Azerbaijan; 1922–1929 head of Leningrad Region department of *Glavlit* (the censorship); general consul of USSR in Harbin; 1930–1934 director of State Hermitage; from 1934 prorector of Academy of Arts

Lenin (Ulyanov), Vladimir Ilich, 1870–1924
Member of Russian Social Democratic Revolutionary Party (RSDRP) from 1893. In 1905–1906 and 1912–1924 member of Central Committee of RSDRP-SRDP (Bolsheviks) and RSDRP; 1907–1912

candidate member of Central Committee of RSDRP; 1917 member of Politburo of Central Committee of All-Russian Social Democratic Revolutionary Party (Bolsheviks); 1917–1924 chairman of Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR/USSR; 1918–1924 chairman of Labour and Defence Council of RSFSR/USSR

Levinson-Lessing, Vladimir Frantsevich, 1893–1972. Art historian. From 1921 worked at Hermitage, heading Department of Western European Art from 1936. Member of expert purchasing commission of *Antikvariat* (1928–1933). From 1941 through 1945 director of Hermitage affiliate in Sverdlovsk. Deputy director of State Hermitage 1956–1972

Lezhava, Andrei Matveevich, 1870–1937
Member of RSDRP from 1904. In 1920–1923 Deputy People's Commissar and in 1923–1924 People's Commissar for Foreign Trade of USSR; chairman of Commission on Domestic Trade of Labour and Defence Council; later deputy chairman of Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR and chairman of *Gosplan* of RSFSR; executed by shooting

Lilovaya, Tatiana Lvovna, 1899–after 1936
Sculptor. Chairman of expert commission for Commissariat of Enlightenment. From 1930 headed Hermitage's Department of Western European Art. Deputy director of State Hermitage 1934–1936

Litvinov (Vallakh), Maxim Maximovich, 1876–1951. Member of RSDRP from 1898. In 1934 to 1941 member of Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); from 1921 political representative of RSFSR in Estonia; 1921–1930 and 1941–1943 Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs; 1930–1939 People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of USSR

Lunacharsky, Anatoly Vasilievich, 1875–1933
Member of RSDRP from 1895. From October 1917 Commissar of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*); removed from his post in September 1929 and appointed chairman of the Science Committee of the Central

- Executive Committee of the USSR; in 1933 political representative in Spain; member of Academy of Sciences of USSR (1930)
- Luppol, Ivan Kapitonovich**, 1896–1943
Philosopher, literary scholar, full member of USSR Academy of Sciences. Headed Department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy at Institute of Red Professors 1925–1938. In 1929–1933 headed *Glavnauka* (from 1930 head of Science Sector of RSFSR Commissariat of Enlightenment), managing editor of journal *Soviet Museum*. Repressed
- Malinovsky, Pavel Petrovich**, 1869–1943
Architect, member of the RSDRP from 1904. In 1917 member of Moscow Central HQ of the Red Guard; from November 1917 member of the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet and chairman of Commission for the Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity, later Commissar of the Moscow Palaces Department; Civil Commissar of the Kremlin and head of the Sub-Department of Fine Art in Moscow Soviet's Department of Public Education; from March 1918 acting People's Commissar for State Property
- Marr, Nikolai Yakovlevich**, 1864–1934
Philologist, archaeologist, scholar of Caucasus-area languages; academician, founder and chairman of All-Russian Academy of History of Material Culture (1919–1934). Director State Public Library in Leningrad 1924–1930; vice president of USSR Academy of Sciences (from 1930); member Hermitage Research Council
- Matthiesen, Francis (Zattsenshtein, Frants)**
German, antiquities specialist, worked for Matthiesen Gallery in Berlin. Major figure in international syndicate of antiquities specialists that bought art from USSR 1929–1934
- Mellon, Andrew William**, 1855–1937
US Treasury Secretary 1921–1933. In (1930–1931 through the mediation of an international syndicate purchased twenty-five pictures from the Hermitage
- Mikoyan, Anastas Ivanovich**, 1895–1978
Member of the RSDRP from 1915. In 1922–1923 candidate member of RSDRP (Bolsheviks); 1923–1976 member of Central Committee; 1935–1966 member of the Politburo (Presidium) of the Central Committee; from 1930 People's Commissar of Supply; 1924–1938 People's Commissar of the Food Industry of the USSR; 1937–1946 deputy chairman of Council of People's Commissars; 1938 People's Commissar for Foreign Trade of USSR; 1946–1955 deputy chairman and 1955–1964 first deputy chairman of Council of Ministers; also 1946–1949 Minister of Foreign Trade; 1953–1955 Minister of Trade of USSR
- Molotov (Skryabin), Vyacheslav Mikhailovich**
1890–1986. Member of RSDRP from 1906. From 1921 candidate member of Politburo of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1921–1930 secretary of Central Committee of the Party; 1930–1941 chairman of Council of People's Commissars; 1941–1957 first deputy chairman of Council of People's Commissars (Council of Ministers) of USSR; 1939–1949 and 1953–1956 People's Commissar, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Nansen, Fritjof**, 1861–1930
Norwegian polar explorer. In 1914–1918 League of Nations High Commissioner for War Prisoners; from August 1921 leader of International Red Cross campaign for aid to the starving in the Volga region (the Nansen mission); in 1922 valuables expropriated from churches in the Soviet Union were sold in Europe with Nansen's mediation; Nobel Peace Prize winner (1922)
- Nevsky, Vladimir Ivanovich (Krivobokov, Feodosy Ivanovich)**, 1876–1937
Member of RSDRP from 1898. In 1918–1919 People's Commissar of Railways of RSFSR and member of Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic; 1919–1920 member of Presidium and deputy chairman of All-Russian Central Executive Committee, rector of Ya. M. Sverdlov Communist University; from 1924 director of Lenin State Library of the USSR; executed by shooting
- Oldenburg (Klements), Elena Grigorievna**
1875–1953. Philologist. Assistant curator of Eastern Department, State Hermitage 1924–1930. Scientific associate, Eastern Department, 1944–1950. Wife of Academician Sergei Oldenburg
- Oldenburg, Sergei Fedorovich**, 1863–1934
Oriental scholar, academician. From 1934 to 1951 director of State Hermitage
- Orbeli, Iosif Abgarovich**, 1887–1961
Asian specialist, academician. From 1920 curator, head of Department of Islamic Art, State Hermitage; director of State Hermitage 1934–1951
- Oreshnikov, Alexei Vasilievich**, 1855–1933
Numismatist. From 1885 employed at Historical Museum and from 1903 senior curator; 1918–1933 head of Numismatic Department; Corresponding Member of Academy of Sciences of USSR (1928); member of Expert Commission for the Analysis and Description of Valuables at the Armoury
- Palei, Olga Valerianovna**, 1865–1929
Princess, surname at birth Karnovich. First married to Major-General E. Ya Pstolkors; 1902 entered into morganatic marriage with Grand Duke Pavel Alexandrovich by whom she had three children; 1905 received from King of Bavaria the title Countess Hohenfelsen; 1914 changed title to Princess Palei; 1919 emigrated from Russia with daughters Irina (born 1903, from 1923 married to Prince F. A. Romanov) and Natalya (1905–1981, fashion model and actress); 1927 contents of her palace in Tsarskoe Selo sold; 1924 memoirs published in London
- Pavel Alexandrovich**, 1860–1919
Grand Duke, youngest son of Emperor Alexander II. From 1889 to 1901 married to Greek princess Alexandra Georgievna; 1902 entered into morganatic marriage with Olga Pstolkors; 27 January 1919 executed by shooting in Peter and Paul fortress
- Petrov, Fedor Nikolaevich**, 1876–1973
Soviet party and scientific worker. Headed *Glavnauka* in Commissariat of Enlightenment 1923–1927
- Pokrovsky, Mikhail Nikolaevich**, 1868–1932
Historian, active in state and Party structures, member of RSDRP from 1905; 1907 candidate member of Central Committee of RSDRP; from 1930 member of Central Control Commission of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks);

1918–1932 Deputy People's Commissar of Enlightenment of RSFSR; member of Academy of Sciences of USSR (1929)

Post, Marjorie Merriweather, 1887–1973

One of the richest women in America. From 1936 to 1955 wife of US ambassador to USSR Joseph Davies; founder of museum at Hillwood in Washington consisting primarily of works from churches, collections and museums in Russia

Pyatakov, Georgy Leonidovich, 1890–1937

Member of RSDRP from 1910. In 1923 to 1925 and 1930–1936 member of Central Committee; 1923–1926 deputy chairman of All-Union Council of the National Economy; from 1923 deputy chairman of Central Concessions Committee; 1927 trade representative in Paris; 1928 appointed deputy and 1929 chairman of the board of State Bank of USSR; from 1932 Deputy People's Commissar for Heavy Industry; executed by shooting in connection with case of The Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre

Rakovsky, Khristian Georgievich, 1873–1941

Member of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1917–1927 and 1935–1937. In 1919 to 1927 member of Central Committee; 1919–1923 chairman of *Sovnarkom* (Council of People's Commissars) and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, also member of Politburo of Central Committee of Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine; 1921–1922 member of Presidium of All-Russian Executive Committee/Central Executive Committee of USSR; 1923–1935 political representative in Great Britain; 1925–1927 political representative in France; October 1941 executed by shooting

Rosso Frances, née Frances Wilkinson Bunker

1898–1976. Wife of Augusto Rosso, Italian ambassador to USSR (1936–1941). Collected Russian art, some of which later given to Hillwood Museum

Rozengolts, Arkady Pavlovich, 1889–1938

Member All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In 1920 member of Revolutionary Military Council of Western Front, 15th Army; member of Collegium of

People's Commissariat of Railways of RSFSR. Adviser, then full representative in Great Britain (1925–1927). Headed Commissariat of External and Internal Trade (October–November 1930), then USSR commissar for external trade (until 1937). Executed

Rudzutak, Jan Ernestovich, 1870–1938

Member of RSDRP from 1905. In 1920–1937 member of Central Committee; 1926–1937 member of Politburo of Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1926–1928 member of Presidium of All-Union Central Executive Committee/Central Executive Committee of USSR; 1920–1922 General Secretary of All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions; 1931–1934 People's Commissar of Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate of USSR and chairman of Central Control Commission of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Executed by shooting

Rykov, Alexei Ivanovich, 1881–1938

Member of RSDRP from 1899. In 1905–1907 and 1917–1934 member of Central Committee; 1920–1924 member of Organisational Bureau of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1920–1930 member of Politburo of Central Committee; 1918–1924 member of Presidium of All-Russian Central Executive Committee/Central Executive Committee of USSR; 1918–1921 and 1923–1924 chairman of All-Russian Council of the National Economy and also from 1921 deputy chairman of Council of People's Commissars and Labour and Defence Council; 1924–1930 chairman of Council of People's Commissars of USSR; 1924–1929 chairman of Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR; also from 1926 Chairman of Labour and Defence Council; executed by shooting

Samueli (Samuel), Georgy Liudvigovich,

1899–1937. Born in Hungary. From 1918 member of Communist Party of Hungary. After victory of socialist revolution in Hungary, deputy chief of Political Department of Commissariat of Internal Affairs. After defeat of Soviet power in Hungary in September 1919 arrested and sentenced to hard labor. In 1922 exchanged by Soviet government "for bourgeois held for ransom." In

1924 worked at Commissariat for External Trade. From 1929 worked for All-Union Society of *Antikvariat*. From May 1929 to February 1931 headed *Antikvariat* in fact but without title. Arranged all sales to Calouste Gulbenkian and some sales to Andrew W. Mellon. Deputy chief, export sector of *Vneshtorg*, member of Soviet trade group in Berlin and later in London; chairman of *Kniga* (Book) organization. Consultant to Moscow Soviet 1935–1936. Repressed

Sapozhnikova (Chernavina), Tatiana

Vasilievna, 1887–after 1934

Art historian. Scientific associate, Pavlovsk Palace-Museum, 1919–1923. In 1924–1926 curator and senior scientific associate at Peterhof Palace-Museum and aide to curator of Oranienbaum Palace-Museum. In 1928–1931 on staff of State Hermitage and curator, Stroganov Palace-Museum. In 1932, with son, visited husband in prison camp at Kandalaksha, from where family escaped to Finland and then to England

Sergeev, Mikhail Sergeevich, 1882–1922

In 1919–1920 curator of Armory Chamber. From 1920 to April 1922 headed Armory Chamber museum

Shibanov, Pavel Petrovich, 1864–1935

An expert on old and rare Russian books, son of the antiquarian book-dealer P. V. Shibanov. From 1892 owner of a shop; published 168 catalogues entitled Shibanov's Antique Book Trade; after the revolution his shop was nationalised and the collection of books and manuscripts transferred to the Rumyantsev Museum library; from 1918 a specialist at the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, managing the listing and distribution of nationalised book collections; from 1923 head of Antiquarian Department at *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga*

Silin, Evgenii Ivanovich, 1872–1928

Head of Church Department of State Historical Museum from 1921

Snowman, Emmanuel, ? – 1970

Thanks to marriage to Harriet Wartski joined the famous English firm of jewellers Wartski (founded in 1865); in 1925–1930 travelled to Russia and bought works by the firm of Fabergé through *Antikvariat*; acquired several

- Fabergé Easter eggs, the Empress Anna Fedorovna's tiara and Catherine the Great's gold communion chalices
- Sokolnikov (Brilliant), Grigory Yakovlevich**, 1888–1939. Member of RSDRP from 1905; in 1917–1919 and 1922–1930 member of Central Committee; 1930–1936 candidate member of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1924–1925 candidate member of Politburo of Central Committee of Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1922–1924 candidate member of Presidium of Central Executive Committee of USSR; 1921–1922 Deputy People's Commissar and 1922–1926 People's Commissar of Finance of RSFSR/USSR. Executed
- Stalin (Djugashvili) Iosif Vissarionovich** 1879–1953. Member of RSDRP from 1898. In 1912–1953 member of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Communist Party of Soviet Union; 1919–1952 member of Organisational Bureau of Central Committee; 1922–1953 General Secretary of Central Committee
- Ternovits, Boris Nikolaevich**, 1884–1941 Sculptor, art historian, critic, museum worker. In 1918 worked in Museum Department of Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*). One of few specialists on Modern Western art, curator and later head of Second Museum of Modern Western Painting; from 1922 director of First and Second sections of State Museum of Modern Western Art (GMNZI). From 1928 until Jan. 1, 1938, director of combined GMNZI
- Tikhon, Patriarch (Bellavin, Vasily Ivanovich)** 1865–1925. From 1917 to 1925 Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, chairman of all higher church administrative bodies; 1918–1923 held under arrest three times; 1989 canonized as a saint by Council of Bishops of Russian Orthodox Church
- Troinitsky, Sergei Nikolaevich**, 1882–1948 Doctor of art history, specialist in applied art. From 1908 to 1932 employed at the Hermitage; 1918–1927 director of Hermitage; 1927–1931 head of department of applied art; 1935 arrested and exiled from Leningrad to Ufa; till 1938 remained in exile; 1939–1941 worked in Museum of Ceramics at Kuskovo, from 1943 as a consultant; from 1945 head of Decorative Art Sector of Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts
- Trotskaya (Sedova), Natalya Ivanovna** 1882–1962. Professional revolutionary, second wife of Leon Trotsky. From 1918 head of Department of Museums and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity at People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*); 1929 exiled from USSR with her husband; died in a suburb of Paris; buried in Mexico beside Leon Trotsky
- Trotsky (Bronstein), Lev Davidovich (Leon)** 1879–1940. Member of RSDRP; 1917–1927 member of Central Committee; 1923–1924 member of Organisational Bureau; 1919–1926 member of Polibureau of Central Committee of All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); 1917–1918 People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs; 1918–1925 People's Commissar of the Army and Navy of RSFSR/USSR and chairman of Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic; from 1922 Special Commissioner of Council of People's Commissars for the Inventorisation and Concentration of Valuables; 1929 accused of anti-Soviet activity and exiled from USSR. Murdered in Mexico
- Trutovsky, Vladimir Konstantinovich**, 1862–1932. Archaeologist and art historian, son of the artist K.A. Trutovsky. Secretary of the Moscow Archaeological Society, worked at Moscow Central Archive, curator of the Armoury
- Vinokurov, Alexander Nikolaevich**, 1869–1944. One of the founders of the Moscow Social-Democratic Revolutionary Organisation (1893). In 1918–1921 People's Commissar for Social Security and Deputy People's Commissar for Labour; 1921–1922 deputy chairman of Central Committee of *Pomgol-Posledgol* (Famine Aid and Struggle Against Consequences of the Famine) of All-Russian Central Executive Committee; 1924–1938 chairman of Supreme Court of USSR; member of All-Russian Executive Committee and Central Executive Committee of USSR
- Vladimir Alexandrovich**, 1847–1909 Grand Duke, third son of emperor Alexander III, adjutant-general, president of the Academy of Arts
- Voroshilov, Kliment Yefremovich**, 1881–1969. From 1925 People's Commissar for the Army and Navy and chairman of Revolutionary Military Council of USSR; from 1934 People's Commissar of Defence of USSR; from 1940 deputy chairman of Council of People's Commissars of USSR and chairman of Defence Committee of Council of People's Commissars of USSR
- Weis, Norman** English antique dealer. In 1926 bought part of the Diamond Fund and in 1928 the contents of the Palei palace at Tsarskoe Selo
- Yaremich, Stepan Petrovich**, 1869–1939. Painter, art historian, collector of drawings; 1918–1939 employed at State Hermitage. In 1930–1937 headed restoration workshop for paintings, engravings, drawings
- Yatmanov, Georgy Stepanovich**, 1876–1944. Artist. Chosen to head Commissariat for Preservation of Art Treasures and Museums under Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee on Oct. 26, 1917; commissar of Hermitage and Winter Palace. Commissar of Kremlin 1918. Headed Museum Department and chairman All-Russia Collegium for Museum Affairs and Protection of Treasures of Art and Ancient Times, 1919–1926; headed Leningrad section of State Museum Fund from 1925; headed Leningrad section of *Glavnauka*, 1925; director City of Moscow Museum from 1929

Collectors

Alexander I, 1777–1825

During the reign of Alexander I all of the truly major acquisitions for the Hermitage were made by the Emperor himself. The rapprochement with Napoleon during the early years of his reign resulted in the involvement of Baron Dominique Vivant Denon, the curator of the French Imperial Museums, in the expansion of the Hermitage collection. Following the entry of Russian forces into Paris, Alexander I acquired thirty-eight pictures from the Malmaison Gallery which had belonged to the Empress Josephine in 1815. A year earlier he had bought the collection of Coesvelt.

Alexander III, 1845–1894

The Emperor Alexander III was a passionate collector who preferred 19th-century paintings, especially works by Russian, French and Danish artists. His main advisor in the purchase of pictures was the seascape painter Alexey P. Bogoliubov, the emperor's mentor in painting and restoration work when he was the tsarevich. Alexander III himself possessed a brilliant knowledge of the applied arts, especially of furniture. The works of art which he collected were not included in the inventory of the Hermitage collection, but were considered his own personal property. The imperial collection of French painting consisted of more than fifty paintings, which hung in the Gatchina, Anichkov and Winter Palaces.

Baudouin, Sylvain Raphael de, 1715–1797

The negotiations for the sale of the collection of Count Baudouin, a brigadier in the Royal French Army, dragged on for almost four years and almost failed due to a lack of funds. Nonetheless, Catherine the Great followed the recommendation of Baron Grimm and acquired the entire collection in 1783. This purchase of one hundred and nineteen first-class paintings was the final major addition made to the Hermitage picture gallery in the 18th century.

Botkin, Mikhail Petrovich, 1839–1914

Came from a famous merchant family in Russia. Entered the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg in 1856, but left without finishing his studies. Went to Italy, using his own means; visited Germany, France, and

Spain, studying the techniques of the artists in these countries. Was known as an artist of the academic school. One of the most aggressive and grasping art collectors in fin de siècle St. Petersburg. Collection was confiscated by Soviet authorities and turned over to the State Museum Fund. The greatest part of his collections (monuments of the Old Russian art and the monuments of the foreign culture that were found on the territory of Russia) was received by the State Russian Museum.

Brühl, Heinrich von, 1700–1763

The art collection of the all-powerful Saxon minister Count von Brühl, who benefitted from the advice of the agents of King Augustus III of Saxony (and quite frequently also from the state treasury), was in no way inferior to the collection of the monarch himself. Following Brühl's death because of his immense debts his property was inventoried and distrained and the Count's heirs were only able to sell off his collection in 1768. Catherine the Great immediately expressed her interest. On the dispatch from her emissary at the court of Saxony, A.M. Beloselsky, she noted in her own hand: "The pictures, the nature cabinet, and the weapons, I wish to have a catalogue and also would like to know whether they will sell wholesale and what it will cost." The price she offered for the picture gallery, consisting of one hundred and nineteen paintings from the Dutch and Flemish schools, was one hundred and five thousand thalers "provided only that the pictures are by those artists under whose names they are listed in the catalogue." The Russian ambassador closed the deal at one hundred and eighty thousand Dutch guilders. In 1769 the pictures were dispatched on a specially chartered ship for Hamburg, from where they were taken to St. Petersburg.

Catherine II, the Great, 1729–1796

During the reign of Catherine the Great Russia joined the broad European cultural mainstream, and from then on the development of artistic life in Russia ran parallel to developments in the West.

The rapid pace at which the state developed was also reflected in the way works of art were collected. In this area Russia proved able in a very short time not only to match,

but actually outdo its Western neighbours. Thanks to the activities of Catherine the Great, who lavished funds on the splendour of her court without restraint, immense artistic wealth became concentrated in the state of Russia. For a country in the process of transforming itself into a mighty empire, this was one of the most effective ways of increasing its authority in the eyes of Europe. Catherine II of Russia was able so rapidly to match the level of the collections of the monarchs of Europe because she bought major art collections which had been decades in the making. The intermediaries and advisers of the enlightened empress, in whom she placed her absolute trust, were the intellectual luminaries of her age: Voltaire, D'Alembert, Denis Diderot and Melchior Grimm.

Choiseul, Etienne François de, 1719–1785

The Duc de Choiseul was a minister at the court of Louis XV. His collection, consisting of one hundred and forty-seven pictures, primarily from the Flemish and Dutch schools, was sold in 1772 at public auction. The Russian vice-chancellor A.M. Golitsin was dispatched to Paris to view the collection and he selected eleven paintings, for which he paid one hundred and seven thousand nine hundred and four livres, almost a quarter of the entire sum realised by the sale.

Coesvelt, William

The English banker Coesvelt, an associate of the banking house Hope & Co. (through which the Russian government also managed certain financial operations) was one of the greatest English collectors. In 1814 sixty-seven pictures from his collection, located at that time in Amsterdam, were personally bought by Alexander I for one hundred thousand guilders. In 1836 Franz I. Labensky was sent to London, where he selected seven paintings from the Italian school from Coesvelt's second collection, paying twenty three thousand four hundred pounds for them. The Coesvelt collection was later auctioned in London.

Crozat, Pierre, 1665–1740

The collection of Pierre Crozat was quite outstanding among all the collections assembled in Paris during the first half of the 18th century. Crozat began his career as a collec-

tor of taxes and duties in the province of Languedoc and rapidly became a millionaire. After moving to Paris in 1704 he devoted himself entirely to collecting and built a magnificent mansion to house his collection. His house, which was open for artists and lovers of art contained four hundred pictures, nineteen thousand drawings, about one and a half thousand stone carvings and many other rare items.

Following Crozat's death his entire estate was inherited by his nephew, the Marquis Duchatel, with the exception of the collections of drawings, engravings and stone carvings, which Crozat had intended to put up for auction. Following the death of the marquis in 1751, the greater part of the picture gallery passed to his younger brother Baron Thiers, and the remainder to his daughter, who married the Duc de Choiseul, and it formed the core of the duke's collection. The Baron Thiers died in 1770, leaving three heirs who were keen to realise the value of the pictures they had inherited as quickly as possible. The Geneva collector Francois Tronchin suggested to Catherine the Great's agent Melchior Grimm and the Russian ambassador in the Hague Dmitry A. Golitsin that the entire collection might be bought complete. Negotiations for a sale lasted for almost a year and a half, with Tronchin acting as senior expert while his friend Denis Diderot played the role of chief negotiator. In 1772 the illustrious Crozat collection was acquired for four hundred and sixty thousand livres. This was one of the most valuable of Catherine the Great's acquisitions for the Hermitage, setting its collections of Flemish, Dutch and Netherlands painting on a par with any in the world.

Golitsin, Mikhail Alexandrovich, 1804–1860

The collection of which Prince Alexander M. Golitsin and Dmitry M. Golitsin laid the foundations in Europe was expanded by Prince Mikhail Alexandrovich Golitsin during his period of diplomatic service in Italy and Spain. Under the provisions of the Prince's will in 1865 a public art gallery was opened in the family's Moscow mansion on Volkhonka Street. The exhibition, which was of uneven quality, included several antique sculptures, marble busts by Houdon, paintings, works of applied art and a magnificent

library. In 1886, when Prince Sergei M. Golitsin decided to sell the collection, interested French antique dealers came to Moscow, but following the intervention of certain highly placed individuals the entire museum was acquired for the Hermitage by Alexander III at a price of eight hundred thousand roubles.

Gotzkowski, Johann Ernst, 1710–1775

The founder of a silk factory and the Berlin Porcelain Factory, Johann Ernst Gotzkowski was one of the agents of the Prussian king Frederick II. In 1755 the king, for whom Gotzkowski had previously assembled a first-class collection of contemporary French painting, instructed him to purchase works by the Italian and Flemish masters. Gotzkowski's own agents, who operated throughout the length and breadth of Europe, were able to gather a large collection together quite rapidly, but the outbreak of the Seven-Year War in 1756 prevented Frederick II from actually buying more than four of the pictures in the course of a year.

In 1761 the king decided to abandon any further purchases, leaving Gotzkowski in a difficult situation, which was only exacerbated following the conclusion of peace in 1763 and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Prussia, when Gotzkowski was almost ruined by the cost of the company he founded to buy bread shops from the Russian government. Gotzkowski had no other choice but to contact the Russian ambassador V.S. Dolgoruky with an offer to pay his debts with the collection of pictures.

Although the Russian treasury was no less drained by the war than the Prussian, Catherine's desire to prick Frederick's vanity was so great that the empress accepted the offer immediately. In the summer of 1764, during the third year of her reign, the Gotzkowski collection, consisting of two hundred and twenty-five paintings primarily from the Dutch and Flemish schools, arrived in St. Petersburg

Morozov, Ivan Abramovich, 1871–1921

Morozov began collecting Western European painting in 1903 and built up a collection of two hundred and fifty works including pictures by French artists of the previous three decades, from Claude Monet to Maurice

Vlaminck, Othon Friesz and Andre Derain. On 19 December 1918 the collection was nationalised and on 11 April 1919 it was transformed into the Second Museum of Modern Western Art. In 1928 the collection of Sergei I. Shchukin was also moved into Morozov's mansion on Prechistenka Street. The combined collections became the State Museum of Modern Western Art (GMNZI) and were exhibited in the mansion until the museum was disbanded in 1948.

Nicholas I, 1796–1855

The collections which supplemented the collection of paintings in the Hermitage during the reign of Nicholas I included thirty pictures from the Malmaison Gallery and the Barbarigo Gallery and a number of works from the collection of King William II of the Netherlands.

The history of the picture gallery during this period is inseparably linked with the name of its curator, Franz Ivanovich Labensky, who was directly involved in all acquisitions.

Riabushinsky, Mikhail Pavlovich, 1880–1960

Mikhail Riabushinsky was a member of the board of the Riabushinsky banking house and one of five brothers who were all collectors. He collected works by Russian and foreign artists, intending to make a gift of them to the city of Moscow. His collection consisted of about a hundred pictures, including works by Degas, Monet and Pissarro, and it was housed in Savva Morozov's famous mansion on Spiridonovka Street, which Riabushinsky bought from Morozov's widow. The collection was handed over to the Tretyakov Gallery for safe keeping in 1917 and subsequently nationalised.

Shcherbatov, Sergei Alexandrovich, 1875–1962

Prince Shcherbatov took up collecting modern Russian art with the intention of donating his collection to Moscow. For the most part he bought works by Russian artists, but as he recalled later, he also "once paid a handsome tribute to modern French painting in buying for my gallery a first-class piece by Renoir."

Prince Shcherbatov nurtured the idea of a museum of private collections, for which he built a six-storey mansion on Novinsky Boulevard. In 1917 his collection, which

included icons, bronze, porcelain and books as well paintings, was handed over for safe keeping to the Historical and Rumyantsev Museums and subsequently nationalised.

Stroganovs

The most valuable part of the collection housed in the Stroganov Palace at the crossroads of Nevsky Prospect and the Moika Embankment was a collection of Western European paintings (more than a hundred pictures) assembled by Count Alexander Sergeevich Stroganov (1733–1811), a connoisseur of painting and director of the St. Petersburg Public Library, during his time in Italy and France. He acquired the pictures from the most famous collections in Europe, from Choiseul, Prince Conti, and Blondel de Gagny. Following his return to Russia, the Count bought pictures from collectors and dealers in St. Petersburg. In the late 19th century some further acquisitions were made in Italy by Georgi S. Stroganov. After 1917 the palace also became home to the collection of Pavel S. Stroganov. By 1922 the Stroganov palace represented a repository of two thousand and six works (including pictures, icons, bronze, sculpture in marble and wood, crystal, clocks, porcelain, light fittings, stone vases and furniture) in addition to a magnificent library.

Tatishchev, Dmitry Petrovich, 1767–1845

In his will Dmitry P. Tatishchev wrote: “During ... the thirty-six years I spent abroad I found myself in places where various political events had a powerful influence on the fortunes of many noble houses obliged to sell off their property.” This circumstance was decisive in determining his interests. “The low prices for which it is possible to buy pictures here,” V.F. Bogoliubov wrote to A.B. Kurakin on 20 November 1805 from Naples, “have given rise in him to a desire for painting so extreme that in four months he has managed to gather himself a gallery of them for 800 ducats, which is 1,200 roubles in our money.”

Following many years of service in Europe, Tatishchev was appointed a member of the Council of State and moved to St. Petersburg, where, according to Modest A. Korff, he had “a magnificently furnished house on Fontanka Street and later constructed another

building with some sort of unusual facade (on Karavannaya Street), for the housing of his rich and varied collections, an entire museum, collected by him in foreign parts at the cost of great labour and expense.” The Tatishchev collection, consisting of one hundred and eighty-two pictures, primarily from the Italian school, was bequeathed to Nicholas I and in 1845 it became part of the Hermitage collection.

Walpole Robert, Earl of Orford, 1676–1745

Lord Walpole occupied the post of prime minister for twenty years under King George I and King George II and was one of the greatest English collectors of the first half of the 18th century. His collection, which was “worthy to form part of the finest gallery in Europe,” included first-class canvases by Rubens, van Dyck, Rembrandt and Poussin. It was kept at the hereditary home of the Earls of Orford, Houghton Hall in Norfolk. In December 1778, through the Russian ambassador in London, A.S. Musin-Pushkin, Walpole’s grandson offered to sell the entire collection to Catherine the Great. Two months later the Empress of Russia bought one hundred and ninety-eight pictures from the collection for forty thousand pounds. The purchase went ahead even though, in the words of Catherine’s ambassador, “the greater part of the nobility here expresses displeasure and regret that these pictures are being allowed to leave this state and various projects are being set in motion to retain them here.” Musin-Pushkin was concerned for the pictures’ safety and demanded that they should be dispatched “in nothing less than a frigate of the line not only because of the present war, but because many of these pictures by virtue of their size cannot be fitted conveniently on merchant ships”.

Abbreviations

Organizations and Museums

Amtorg – American Trading Organization in New York

Antikvariat – Central Office of *Gostorg* of the RSFSR for the Purchase and Sale of Antique Items; in the beginning of 1930 – the All-Union State Trading Office *Antikvariat*.

ARA – American Relief Administration

Cheka – All-Russian Special Committee to Combat Counterrevolution and Sabotage (soviet police, 1917–1922)

GE – State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

GIM – State Historical Museum

Glavmuzei – Central Museum Administration

Glavnauka – the Central Administration for Scientific and Scholarly Artistic Institutions

Glaviskusstvo – Central Administration for Literature and Art

GMII – State Museum of Fine Arts; after 1937 State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

GMNZI – The State Museum of Modern Western Art

Gokhran – State Depository of Valuables of the RSFSR

Gosfond – State Reserve (with branches in Moscow, *Mosgosfond*, and Leningrad, *Lengosfond*)

Gostorg – State Import-Export Trading Office of the RSFSR

Gosmuzeifond – National Museum Reserve

GPB – State Public Library, St. Petersburg

GRM – State Russian Museum

GPU – see also OGPU

GRM – State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Kommintern – Communist International

Mostorg – Moscow Import-Export Trading Office

Narkomfin – People's Commissariat for Finance

Narkompros – People's Commissariat of Enlightenment

Narkomtorg – People's Commissariat for Trade (see also *Narcomvnechtorg*)

Narkomvnechtorg – People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade (until 1926 and from November 1930 on; the People's Commissariat for Foreign and Domestic Trade, also called *Vneshtorg*)

NEP – New Economic Policy (1921–1928)

NMF – National Museum Fund National Museum Reserve, or *Gosmuzeifond*

OGPU – Obyedynennoye Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye – Joint State Political Directorate (the political/secret police)

Pomgol – The All-Union Committee for Aid to the Hungry

RPB – Russian Public Library, Leningrad

RSDRP Russian Social-Democratic Revolutionary Party

RSFSR – Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic

Sovnarkom – Council of People's Commissars, SNK

SBF (GKF) – State Book Fund.

Torgsin – All-Union Association for Trade with Foreigners

TsGRM (the Central State Restoration Workshops)

Vneshtorg – Commissariat for Foreign Trade, NKVT (see also *Narkomtorg*, *Narcomvnechtorg*)

VOKS – All-Union Society for Cultural Ties (Abroad)

VTsIK, TsIK – All-Russian Central Executive Committee

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Archives

AGE (АГЭ) – Archive of the State Hermitage Museum

AP RF (АП РФ) – Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. Fund 3.

GARF (ГАРФ) – State Archive of the Russian Federation. Funds 5263, 1064 and R-410 A-2306 and A-2307

GTG (ГТГ) – State Tretyakov Gallery
OPI GIM (ОПИ ГИМ) – Department of Manuscript Sources of the State Historical Museum. Fund 54

RGAE (РГАЭ) – Russian State Archive of the Economy. Until 1992 – Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR, TsGANKh USSR (ЦГАНХ СССР). Funds 413, 520

RGAKFD (РГАКФД) – Russian State Archive of Film and Photographic Documents (Krasnogorsk)

RGALI SPb. (РГАЛИ СПб.) – Russian State Archive of Literature and Art of St. Petersburg. Fund 309

RTsKhIDNI (РЦХИДНИ) – Russian Centre for the Storage and Study of Documents of Contemporary History (until 1991 – Central Party Archive)

RAN RF (РАН РФ) – Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg Branch

TsPA IML (ЦПА ИМЛ)
Funds 5 and 17

TsA FSB (ЦА ФСБ) – Central Archive of the Federal Security Service. “Special Archive” Fund

TsGA SPb. (ЦГА СПб.) – Central State Archive of St. Petersburg. Fund 2556

TsGIA SPb. (ЦГИА СПб.) – Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg

Archive of the Peterhof State Museum Preserve. Museum Affairs Fund

Archive of the Gatchina State Museum Preserve. Museum Affairs Fund

The Moscow Kremlin Museum Preserve, Department of Manuscript, Printed and Graphic Funds of the State Museums of the Moscow Kremlin

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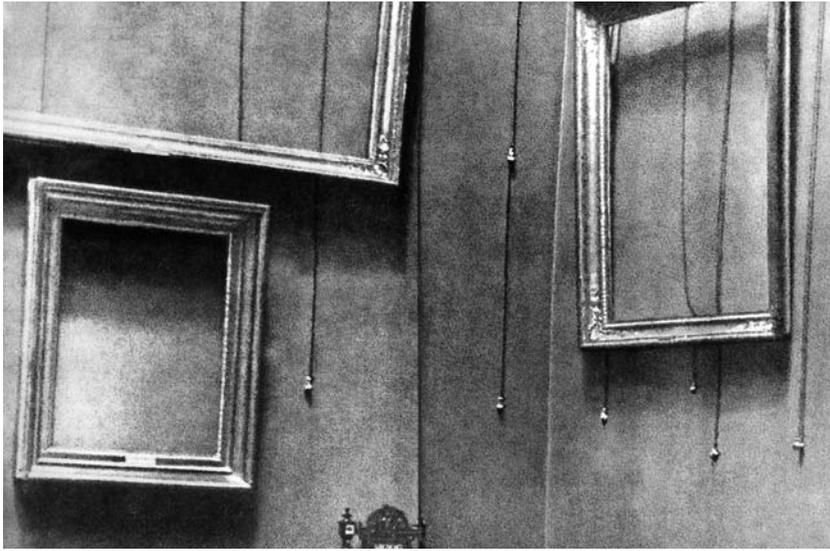
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