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**How to educate iconographers? The Iconographic Schools of the Committee for Caring of Russian Iconic Painting (1901 – 1918) in Palekh, Mstyora, Kholuy and Borisovka.**

The activities of the Committee for Caring of Iconic Russian Painting (in Russian: Комитет попечительства о русской иконописи, 1901 – 1918), founded on the initiative of Tsar Nicholas II Romanov, aimed at the "reviving" of Russian icon painting, which, it was believed, was in a deep crisis. From the very beginning of the Committee's existence, its activities were conducted in two ways – on the one hand, didactics were put forward in the modeling of Iconographic Schools, and on the other hand, a new iconographic canon was created by publishing a manual for icon painters, the so-called „podlinnik”.

The issue of the need to provide adequate education to young iconographers, who in the near future could lead to an improvement in the bad situation of Russian iconic painting, was held especially by the administrator of the Committee, Nikodim Kondakov. In March, 1902 was approved the Interim Act on Iconographic Schools (in Russian: Временное положение об учебных иконописных мастерских) and in the summer of the same year opened three such schools in the province of Volodymyr – in Palekh, Mstyora and Kholuy and the one in Borisovka in the province of Kursk.

Schools for icon painters were soon organized thanks to the efforts of Kondakov and Vassily Georgyevsky, and Orthodox boys older than ten years were admitted. The students had classes for academic drawing, theology, iconography, and of course icon painting. As noted by the Russian historian, Irina Sosnovtseva, the most difficult and challenging task was to choose a director for each workshop. Apparently, the Committee immediately chose an advantageous way of cooperation with icon painting masters, giving them a chance to choose for themselves. A general assembly of craftsmen, consisting of villagers, whose children were to be trained in a new school, proposed to the Committee a respectable and skillful icon painter as a candidate, whom they would like to see as a mentor for new masters. The Committee always considered the decision of the assembly when appointing a teacher for icon painting in each school. These teachers were well acquainted with the local icon tradition, such as the manufacture of complicated, multifaceted compositions with detailed landscapes and rich ornamental decoration, and passed them on to their students.

In the first year of the Committee's schools' existence, a total of 151 students were enrolled in all of the four icon painting workshops. Afterwards, the number of students recruited decreased. Nevertheless, during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century a significant part of the youth of the Vladimir icon painting villages passed the training in the iconographic schools of the Committee.

A series of political upheavals, which began with the Russian-Japanese war and the revolution of 1905–7, destroyed Nicolas II's intentions to support icon painting, but schools for icon painters founded by the Committee for Caring of Russian Icon Painting were still functioning and receiving substantial subsidies from the state's budget. The Committee also helped icon painters from Palekh, Mstera and Kholuy to get orders and mediated in their negotiations with clients, such as representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church or private individuals.

Due to the long-term dependence on the state's support, the situation of the icon painters from Palekh, Mstera and Kholuy was not enviable after the 1917 October Revolution. The artists lost the patronage of Tsar Nicholas II and of the members of the Committee for Caring of Russian Icon Painting, which was redefined as the Committee for the Studies of Old-Russian Icon Painting of the People's Commissariat for Education (in Russian: Комитет по изучению древнерусской иконописи Народного комиссариата просвещения) in 1918, but the activities of the Committee's schools were of great importance for the development of Russian art. Also, the great majority of later painters of miniatures from Palech left the iconographic schools of the Committee.