Ivan Foletti
From Byzantium to Holy Russia
Nikodim Kondakov (1844-1925) and the Invention of the Icon
Translated by Sarah Melker

Tracing the life and work of Nikodim Kondakov, a pioneer in the field of late Antiquity and Byzantium in eastern Europe, this biography is a true tale of adventure. It follows the complicated and challenging events in Kondakov’s life before and after the Russian Revolution, from his humble beginnings to his university studies and analyzes his inspired creation of an innovative and precocious study of art history in Russia. From a brilliant and successful career to the trauma endured during the Russian Revolution, the story becomes one of wandering and dependence; nevertheless, and in spite of the shift in history and in his own life, Kondakov’s studies sketch a vast geography of Late Antique and medieval culture from the Mediterranean to the Urals. The work approaches distant horizons, giving a glimpse of the migrations from Asia and the inception of medieval Europe with its Christian values; and it travels the paths of history along trails marked by artifacts and monuments. Reconstructing the personal and existential events in Nikodim Kondakov’s life contributes to the understanding of a critical phase in the founding of art history and, more broadly, the histories of Russia and of the countries the scholar traversed during a long life filled with tribulations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface to the English edition
Acknowledgements
Introduction and Status quaestionis
1. Biographical sketch
   1. Youth and education
   2. The Moscow period and secondary education
   3. Odessa. The New Russian University
   4. Saint Petersburg: inside Russian history (1888-1900)
   5. Saint Petersburg, Italy, Yalta: the scholarly work of a wealthy pensioner (1900-1914)
   6. Revolution and flight
   7. The emigration years
2. Nikodim Kondakov and the Icon
   1. The Russian icon and the nineteenth century
   2. The icon before the icon: Kondakov’s studies prior to 1904
3. The Icon, a work of art
4. Liturgical image, holy image: Kondakov’s last studies
5. The rediscovery of the icon: Nikodim Kondakov and the silence of history
3. Kondakov, the West, and questions of method
   1. Westernist, Slavophile, émigré: a complex view of the Western world
   2. History of art: a Western science ‘conquers’ the East
   3. An Orthodox view of Italian Renaissance painting
Conclusions
Bibliography
Index of Names
Index of Places