

THE KUNALEY ICON — THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVEN AMONG THE SEMEISKIE

An icon in the style of “old painting” is one of the symbols of Old Believers’ culture. It reproduces the pre-schism iconography, but has its own logic of evolution driven both by the general change in society and its world view and by the regional specificity. Although this specificity has always existed, in the post-schism period it began to be influenced by the development of various Old Believer enclaves. While in some regions, due to their location and proximity to labor and commodity markets, powerful icon-painting schools developed, in the Transbaikal region, the local Old Believers used imported icons for a long time. However, the evolution of their culture led them to develop their own tradition at the end of the XIX century — first third of the XX century, which was still being implemented as a kind of “naive” village painting. Our field research in recent years in the Semeiskie’s settlements in the Western Transbaikal region has allowed us to identify, localize, and begin to describe a bright hearth of local icon painting. At this stage, several dozen icons have been identified, which, according to our informants, were painted in the Semeiskie’s village of Bolshoy Kunaley. Apparently, several icon painters worked here, one of whom reached a high level and developed his own recognizable style. The icons of Kunaley depict various Christian motifs in a simplified, but at the same time expressive and understandable way, which reflects not only the high level of the local icon painters, but also the nature of the culture and world view of their group.

Keywords: *Old Believers religion, Old Believers, Semeiskie Old Believers, Transbaikal region, Buryatia, icon, icon painting, icon painter, Kunaley painting*

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