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# Vasilii Vereshchagin (1842-1904) : Orientalism and colonialism in the work of a 19th century Russian artist

Louise Jacqueline Shalev  
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**Vasilii Vereshchagin (1842–1904): Orientalism and colonialism in  
the work of a 19th century Russian artist**

Shalev, Louise Jacqueline, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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VASILII VERESHCHAGIN (1842-1904):  
ORIENTALISM AND COLONIALISM IN THE WORK OF  
A 19TH CENTURY RUSSIAN ARTIST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Art and Design  
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By

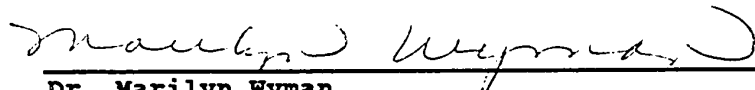
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ABSTRACT

VASILII VERESHCHAGIN (1842-1904)  
ORIENTALISM AND COLONIALISM IN THE WORK OF  
A NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIAN ART

by Louise J. Shalev

This thesis addresses the work of a relatively unknown nineteenth century Russian artist, Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin. The focus of research on Vereshchagin is the series he painted in Central Asia in response to Russia's conquest of Turkestan. This work is examined within the context of Orientalism in nineteenth century art, an area largely ignored in Russian art history.

Vereshchagin's Central Asian paintings are contrasted with examples of French nineteenth century Orientalism, especially of Jean-Leon Gérôme, under whom he studied in Paris in 1864-66. The methodology used to examine Orientalist devices is based on the critical perspective developed by Edward Said. This methodology is applied to the works of art in a way which reveals the use of colonial stereotypes to reinforce European Orientalist ideas about the East.



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## PREFACE

This thesis will examine the work of a relatively unknown nineteenth century Russian artist, Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin (1842-1904),<sup>1</sup> within the context of Orientalism in Russian art, an area which has been largely ignored in the study of modern Russian art history. The methodology which will be applied to Vereshchagin's works is a critical perspective on Orientalism developed by Edward Said, and applied by Linda Nochlin to the visual arts.

The artist and writer Vereshchagin is of major interest to the student of Orientalism in nineteenth century Russian art, since his portrayal of Oriental motifs coincided precisely with Russia's colonial expansion into the territories of Central Asia. While Vereshchagin is most famous as a war painter who reformed the genre of battle painting in Russian art by dispensing with traditional conventions for glorifying war, a large part of his work, which will provide the focus for this thesis, was devoted to Orientalist genre scenes in which he portrayed what he

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<sup>1</sup>Known also as Basil Verestchagin in English, Wassili Wereschtschagin in German, Vassili Verestchaguine in French, as well as other variations.

believed were the barbarism and feudalism of Muslim Central Asia.

To some extent his focus on social issues, particularly the portrayal of poverty, neglect and disease among the poor, is typical of the progressive and socially concerned art of the 1860's and 1870's in Russia.<sup>2</sup> Despite these concerns, however, it will be shown that Vereshchagin represents the East as an alien culture and sets himself apart from his subjects, carrying on a tradition of Orientalist discourse transmitted through Western European, especially French channels.

In his own time he was thought of as a "scientifically objective" Realist, whose works had the value of historical documents. It will be shown however, that this Realist or "authenticating" style involves the use of devices for representing the degradation of the East, conforming with what Linda Nochlin has demonstrated as a "Standard topos for commenting on the corruption of contemporary Islamic society,"<sup>3</sup> a western Orientalist discourse about the inferiority of the Orient.

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<sup>2</sup>For further reading see, Elizabeth Valkenier, Russian Realist Art: The State and Society, The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition (New York; Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society, Icon Editions (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

Critical examination of Vereshchagin's autobiographical writings and paintings point to a complex attitude toward Russia's colonial policy. Vereshchagin seems to have been torn between his patriotic desire to defend Russian interests and his universal condemnation of war and chauvinism. It will be shown that his Central Asian works demonstrate both these tendencies, raising the question of whether the artist used the Orient for veiled criticism against Tsarist as well as Muslim autocracy. The major aim of this thesis will be to link the Orientalism of Vereshchagin's Central Asian works and autobiographical writings to Russian colonial expansion into Central Asia.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND ON VASILII VERESHCHAGIN (1842-1904) AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO RUSSIAN REALIST ART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE FRENCH REALIST ORIENTALISTS, IN PARTICULAR JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME

The name Vasilii Vereshchagin means very little in western Europe. It is probably only familiar to a few specialists in Russian art. During his own lifetime, however, Vereshchagin was a well known artist and a personality of legendary proportions in Russia, Europe and the United States. Famous throughout the major cities of Europe for his controversial exhibitions, his works were thought to depict the horrors and realities of war rather than the pomp and glory.

His reputation varied in different circles: in Russia the Tsarist authorities considered him a Nihilist for a large part of his career; while in many parts of Europe and the United States, he gained the reputation of pacifist, at one time earning himself the title "apostle of peace."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>He was greeted as the "apostle of peace and humanity" in Vienna while exhibiting there in October 1881. Bryan's



Contemporary criticism confirms his reputation as one of the most progressive and controversial artists of the late nineteenth century. His exhibitions, with their special sound and light effects, drew hundreds of thousands of visitors, and there is a large body of contemporary criticism to attest to his popularity.<sup>5</sup>

In Russia, Vereshchagin's standing as a major figure of nineteenth century art has endured since his death in 1904. The majority of his artistic oeuvre is to be found in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, and the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, as well as other provincial museums.<sup>6</sup> In spite of his comparative obscurity in the United States, there are quite a few of Vereshchagin's paintings in the basements of American collections. These works were exhibited in a one-man show on Vereshchagin sponsored by the American Art Association in New York, from November

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Dictionary Of Painters And Engravers, 1905 ed., s.v. "Vereshchagin, Vasili Vasilievich," 283.

<sup>5</sup>According to one critic, an exhibition in Vienna in the early 1880's was such a success that placards had to be constantly hung up to announce the gallery was overflowing. Helen Zimmern, "An Eastern Painter," The Art Journal (January; February, 1885): 9-12; 38-42.

<sup>6</sup>There is a large collection in the Museum of Russian Art, Kiev.

1888 until November 1889.<sup>7</sup> The show ended with an auction in November 1891, and some of the paintings found their way into American collections.<sup>8</sup> At the time, Vereshchagin was the most famous Russian artist in America. The chronology of his biography as outlined below is based on

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<sup>7</sup>Exhibition of the Works of Vassili Verestchagin: Illustrated Descriptive Catalogue, (New York: American Art Association, 1889-1890).

<sup>8</sup>There are three paintings in the Brooklyn Museum, New York: A Resting Place of Prisoners, 1878-79, The Road of the War Prisoners (n.d), and A Crucifixion in the Time of the Romans, 1887. Two paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Monks at the Door of the Mosque, Turkestan and Pearl Mosque, Delhi, 1876-79. The latter has been rolled for many years and has probably not been exhibited since 1889-90. The painting, The Golden Cloud (n.d.) was formerly in the collection of the Toledo Art Museum, Ohio, it entered the collection in 1906 as one of eleven Russian pictures which had been exhibited at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. In 1939, it was withdrawn and relinquished to U.S. Customs to release a bond on these paintings. The present whereabouts of the painting is unknown. The painting Solomon's Wall is on long term loan to the Judah Magnes Museum, Berkeley from the University Art Museum, Berkeley. This was a gift from the Hearst family in 1920. According to an article written in 1893, this as well as two other paintings, Russian Soldiers in the Snow, 1878-81, and the famous Blowing From Guns in British India, 1884, were in the possession of Mrs. Phoebe Hearst in 1908. (See "Solomon's Wall: Famous paintings owned on the West Coast," Overland Monthly Vol. 22, Aug. 1893, 135-137.) The whereabouts of these works is unknown to Soviet scholarship as well as to the most recent work on Vereshchagin in English, Vahan Barooshian, V.V. Vereshchagin: Artist At War, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993). Since there were 110 works auctioned in 1891, it seems likely that there are more works by Vereshchagin in American collections.

Vereshchagin's numerous autobiographical writings and on published biographies.<sup>9</sup>

Vasilii Vereshchagin was born October 26, 1842 in the village of Lioubets, district of Cherepovets in the northern province of Novgorod, to a well-established military family of noble landowners. On his father's side he was descended from one of Russia's oldest aristocratic families, while his mother's family was of Tartar origin from the Caucasus. He was one of twelve children, five of whom died in childhood. He grew up in a rural environment on the estate where his father owned three hundred and fifty serfs. Vereshchagin later recalled the harsh treatment by his father and great uncle Aleksei Vasilevich of the serfs on the estate. This included premature forced conscription for boys and forced marriages of young girls.<sup>10</sup> Vereshchagin seems to have been quite indifferent to his father and overpowered by his mother. From his memoirs of his childhood, we learn that he was most attached to his childhood nurse Anna, an old widow who lavished care and love on him that was apparently lacking

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<sup>9</sup>See Chapter Two, page 46, for a review of these biographies.

<sup>10</sup>Vassili Vereschagin, Souvenirs: Enfance: Voyages de Guerre, (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Parisienne, 1888), 17.

from his parents.<sup>11</sup> He was Anna's favorite of all the children and he remembers fondly going to the woods with her to pick mushrooms and berries.

At five years old, he began to draw by copying pictures in his house, he particularly recalls copying the picture of a "troika" (carriage) imprinted on his nurse's handkerchief. He did this so quickly that all his family praised him, but it did not occur to anyone to let him pursue an artistic education. His principal occupation at this young age was reading, especially picture books, such as the illustrated Bible, and the journal The Little Star, with its short histories of Tchistiakov during the period of Tartar ascendancy.<sup>12</sup>

Following in the family tradition, he was sent at the age of eight years old to the Naval cadet corps at Tsarskoe Selo, near St. Petersburg. Vereshchagin later recalled with bitterness this cruel separation from his nurse and family and the difficulty of shifting from the ease of country life to military discipline at the school. Part of the curriculum involved military drills and ceremonies, and the teaching of reverence to Tsar Nicholas I. In academic subjects, Vereshchagin proved to be an excellent student.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 37.

He particularly excelled in drawing class, where his portraits would gain everyone's admiration, but, as before, nobody recognized that his talent warranted any special encouragement. In late nineteenth century Russia, the career of artist was not thought to be a suitable profession for the nobility.<sup>13</sup>

In 1853, at the age of eleven, he continued his education at the Naval Cadet School in St. Petersburg. The discipline at the new school was much stricter and harsher than at Tsarskoe Selo, and Vereshchagin suffered from several illnesses including typhus and a nervous fever, neurasthenia.<sup>14</sup> While visiting his cousin at Peterhof, he would often see from afar, Tsar Nicholas I, whose grave expression was said to be caused by Russia's losses in the Crimean War. So disturbed was the young Vereshchagin by the Tsar's severe countenance, he once believed it was directed

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<sup>13</sup>The profession of painter was unthinkable to the landed gentry in Russia at this time. Sons of nobility like Vereshchagin were sent to Naval academies to become officers in the military. Most artists in the 1850's and 1860's came from the petty bourgeoisie, (*meshchane*). According to the critic Vladimir Stasov, the overwhelming majority of good Russian painters came from the lower classes. For further reading on the social status of painters in Russia in the late nineteenth century, see Elizabeth Valkenier, Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 10-17.

<sup>14</sup>Barooshian, 6.

at him purposely, as punishment, for not saluting the Tsar correctly.<sup>15</sup>

In 1858 and 1859 he was selected with eleven of the best students to travel abroad by paddle steamer to England, France and possibly Germany.<sup>16</sup> It was while in London that he first started to read works by the émigré writer Alexander Herzen, whose revolutionary books were banned from Russia.<sup>17</sup> Herzen, like Lenin much later, exercised a tremendous influence on the Russian intelligentsia from afar. He was the leader of the anti-Tsarist Liberation movement which became known as *Populism* in the 1860's.

Vereshchagin continued to enjoy drawing, and in 1858, while still at the Naval Academy, he enrolled in drawing classes at the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, he also began to visit the art collections in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Eventually, in the face of strong opposition from his parents, Vereshchagin made a decision

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<sup>15</sup>Eugene Zabel, Wereschtschagin, (Bielefeld u. Leipzig: Verlag von Velhagen & Klasing, 1900) 7.

<sup>16</sup>In 1857, Tsar Nicholas I's ban on foreign travel was lifted by the new, more liberal Tsar Alexander II. Nicholas I died in 1855.

<sup>17</sup>Vereshchagin is also said to have read Buckle's History of Civilisation [sic] in England, a book which was considered radically dangerous during the 1860's, Newmarch, 1916, 162.

to renounce his naval career to pursue a career in art. His mother became quite distraught, accusing him of being insane and his father threatened to withdraw all financial support. Despite this, in 1860 he left the Navy, and having obtained a modest scholarship, enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. At the Academy Vereshchagin became the protégé of a Professor A. B. Biedermann, who took him to France, to help in the painting of a Russian church there. On his return to the Academy in 1862, he won a silver medal for a drawing, Ulysses' Slaughter of Penelope's Suitors, which he later burned as an act of protest, having been caught up in the atmosphere of rebellion which existed at that time at the Academy.

The period from the death of the reactionary Tsar Nicholas I in 1855 until the Emancipation of the Serfs by the more liberal Tsar Alexander II in 1861, was one of considerable social unrest in Russia. It was a period of intellectual enlightenment which Alexander Herzen referred to as "the awakening of Russian society."<sup>18</sup> The repressive reign of the former Tsar led to a desire for change, focusing, in particular, on the issue of the Emancipation

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Barooshian, 9.

of Serfs, an event which finally took place in 1861.<sup>19</sup> There is probably a close connection between the Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia and the issue of slavery surrounding the American Civil War.

The social unrest in the 1860's around these issues was reflected in the growing antagonism of young artists to the Academy.<sup>20</sup> For the first time in Russian art history, artists began to realize Herzen's ideals of an active role

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<sup>19</sup>For a more complete discussion of these issues, see Abbott Gleason, Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860's, (New York: Viking Press, 1980).

<sup>20</sup>In the mid-nineteenth century, the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg was the only official art school in Russia, and patronage was linked to the State, through a system of official commissions. The Academy had control over all art exhibitions. There was no private art market, and artists had little chance of making a living outside the official system, apart from in rural Russia, where Icons and portraits of the landed gentry were made by serf artists, or by the local Icon painter. Privatization of the art market changed somewhat as a response to the changed market conditions created by the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861. Students at the Academy were civil servants and to graduate they had to complete a six-year program, and be awarded the Gold medal, upon which they were promoted to "artist, first grade" and the equivalent of 14th civil service rank. A silver medalist gained the title, "artist, second grade," with a "right" to claim 14th civil service rank, after obtaining a position in a government office or in a public school. During the reign of Nicholas I, the Tsar personally promoted students, and proscribed subject matter at the Academy, which conformed with French Neoclassical and Rococo norms. For a more detailed account see Valkenier, 3-10. The Russian artist most cited as conforming with these norms is Karl Briullov (1799-1852).



for art in the cause of liberty.<sup>21</sup> The influential writer, Nicholas Chernyshevsky, called on artists to combine an awareness of national traditions with moral and social accountability.<sup>22</sup> He stated that art should pass moral judgment on the reality it represented. Both Herzen's and Chernyshevsky's views were extremely influential among progressive young artists, resulting in a growing alienation of the students from the rigid constraints of the Academy with its narrowly proscribed Neoclassicism and strict hierarchy. The principles of instruction were based on the French Academic taste for Neoclassical, Rococo and mythological subjects, and originality was strictly discouraged.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Herzen's Free Russian Press, printed in London and smuggled into Russia, included the first comments on the role of art in society. During 1858, at the time of Vereshchagin's visit to London, Herzen's famous journal The Bell, (Kolokol) began to expound on the role of art in the campaign to abolish serfdom in Russia. The power of the Academy and the servile position of painters as "court functionaries" were sighted as examples of Tsarist autocracy. Vereshchagin's increasing rebelliousness was probably influenced by extensive reading of Herzen. Valkenier, 19-20, 38.

<sup>22</sup>Vereshchagin later acknowledged the influence of Chernyshevsky in shaping his aesthetic views, and his views on Realism. Barooshian, 10.

<sup>23</sup>The Russian artist most cited as conforming to this taste is Karl Briullov (1799-1852), whose painting The Last Days of Pompeii, is frequently quoted in the literature as the most famous example of Russian Neoclassical art of the mid nineteenth century.

The young dissidents felt that this strict Neoclassical Idealism prevented the creation of a Russian national art which would better reflect the realities of Russian life. In addition, the growth of capitalism in Russia in the late nineteenth century, led to a demand for a private art market, free from state patronage, which would reflect the values of the expanding middle class. Eventually, in this atmosphere of rebellion, fourteen students led a revolt against the Academy by refusing to paint the set annual history subject.<sup>24</sup> They broke away from the Academy in 1863, eventually forming a group of traveling artists known as the *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers or Itinerants), whose motto "art into life," they took to the people.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>According to Valkenier, 1989, 34, the set subject in 1863 was from Scandinavian Mythology, *The Festival of the Gods in Valhalla*. Interestingly, similar reforms were being undertaken in the French Academy in 1863, which was being criticized for "narrow specialization encouraged by the Academic system which resulted in the incoherence of the national style." Quoted in Albert Boime, "The Teaching of Fine Arts and the Avant-Garde in France During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," Arts Magazine 60, no. 4 (Dec 1985).

<sup>25</sup>For a detailed study of this movement, consult Valkenier, 1989; A.K. Lebedev, The Itinerants: Society for Circulating Art Exhibitions (1870-1923), (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1982). See also the Catalog of the Exhibition, The Wanderers: Masters of 19th-Century Russian Painting, An Exhibition from the Soviet Union, held at the Dallas Museum of Art, October 28, 1990 to January 6, 1991.

In the summer of 1863, some months before this incident, Vereshchagin left the Academy abruptly to go and travel in the region of the Caucasus. Although, he had not yet tried his hand at the technique of oil painting, he felt he had gained enough experience in drawing to leave the Academy and work directly from nature. His sudden departure raises the question of Vereshchagin's connection to the student revolt and to the *Peredvizhniki* in general. It is clear that he shared the views of his fellow dissenters, the following comment reinforces this view: "I had read and heard quite a deal, my mind had developed, and the stupidity of conventional forms and framework had become clear."<sup>26</sup> In addition, rebellious acts such as burning the silver medal drawing, already pointed to a radical inclination.

It is possible that at this point in time, the difference in social status between Vereshchagin and the fourteen artists kept them at a distance. Already noted is the predominantly lower-class background of the *Peredvizhniki*, who were drawn mainly from the petty bourgeoisie (*meshchane*) and peasantry (*krest'iane*), in contrast to Vereshchagin, a member of the gentry

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<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Barooshian, 13.

(*dvorianstvo*).<sup>27</sup> A lower-class background was a handicap in the Academy, since it legally prevented artists from attaining the necessary titles to proceed in their careers. Vereshchagin's superior social status, on the other hand, allowed him the luxury to be able to refuse titles as a form of protest. The *Peredvizhniki* later admired him greatly for his "courage and character" in publishing a refusal of a Professorship in the St. Petersburg Press in 1874, an act which caused a great scandal at the time. They also came to his defense when a scandal broke out concerning the authorship of his Munich paintings. The artist Ivan Kramskoy, leader of the *Peredvizhniki* observed: "He did what we all think about, know about and maybe even dream about, but we lack the courage, the character and at times even the honesty to act like that."<sup>28</sup> It is possible that at this time Vereshchagin still felt strong ties to

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<sup>27</sup>The two interceding estates were clergy (*dukhoventstvo*) and distinguished or honorable citizens (*pochetnye grazhdane*). These class distinctions were extremely rigid, being observed in social relations as well as by law. Valkenier, 11.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

the authorities because of his family connections with the military.<sup>29</sup>

In any event, sometime in the summer of 1863, Vereshchagin was invited by the well-known landscape and marine artist, Lev F. Lagorio (1827-1905), to accompany him to the Caucasus.<sup>30</sup> Since Vereshchagin was almost penniless at the time, Lagorio used his contacts to obtain him positions as drawing tutor to local military families.<sup>31</sup> The Caucasus was a region which had finally yielded to Russia in 1859, making it more attractive as a place of travel for Russian writers, painters and musicians. In the early nineteenth Century, the Romantic writer Pushkin traveled to the Caucasus and laid the foundations for a body of literature using Eastern motifs from Caucasian culture and music.<sup>32</sup> The Caucasus became a place of Romantic escapism in the Russian arts, a wild and

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<sup>29</sup>This may explain why Vereshchagin never actually joined the Peredvizhniki association, although in 1874 he participated in one of their exhibitions and applied for membership. Barooshian, 52.

<sup>30</sup>Lagorio was known for his paintings of Finnish forests and Black Sea views.

<sup>31</sup>Lagorio obtained for him the position of drawing master to the family of General Kartsiev, military governor of the district.

<sup>32</sup>Pushkin's Fountain at Bakhchisarai; Journey to Arzrum, 1835 and Lermontov's A Hero of Our Times, 1840 are examples of Romantic Orientalist literature.

"unconventional" locale of primitive and diverse nationalities, ruins of fictitious castles, and the remains of past civilizations.<sup>33</sup>

At this early stage in his career, Vereshchagin's artistic interests seem to have been strictly "ethnographic." He traveled first through Transcaucasia southward toward Tiflis, Georgia, observing, drawing and classifying "types" of different races as if they were scientific specimens. He made pencil sketches and wrote about various groups including, Kalmyk nomads, whom he criticized for their primitive "superstition and ignorance," Nogais, Cossacks, Greeks, Bohemians, Ossetians, Armenians, and a host of other races.<sup>34</sup> His sketches and drawings in this series have the distinct quality of caricatures, some of them are quite uncompromising in their "dehumanizing" exaggeration of racial characteristics, the sketches of Nogais and Bohemians, in particular, display a strong hint of racial prejudice.

While in the Caucasus, Vereshchagin executed two known works in the Romantic style, probably in homage to the poet

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<sup>33</sup>For a further discussion on Russian Orientalism in the arts, see Chapter Three on the connection between Orientalism in Russian art and Russian Colonial expansion.

<sup>34</sup>Vereshchagin published an account of his travels to the Caucasus in Paris under the title, "Voyage dans les Provinces du Caucase," Le Tour du Monde 17 (1868): 162-208.

Lermontov, these are: Ruins of Queen Tamara's Castle in the Daryal Gorge (n.d), based on the legend of the Caucasian princess Tamara, from Lermontov's poem "The Demon" and The Golden Cloud, formerly in the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio. This painting was described by a nineteenth century critic as an illustration of a passage from the poem "The Cliff" by Lermontov,<sup>35</sup> is remarkably different in style from the bulk of Vereshchagin's work, raising questions as to it's authorship.<sup>36</sup>

In the winter of 1864, Vereshchagin inherited one thousand rubles from the estate of his uncle Aleksei

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<sup>35</sup>Wells, "American and Russian Paintings in The Toledo Museum of Art," Scribner's Magazine 43, no. 6 (May 1908): 382.

<sup>36</sup>The painting, an illustration of which was supplied to me by the Toledo Museum of Art, is an allegorical treatment of the subject, and as such differs remarkably from the bulk of Vereshchagin's work. It is possible that it is a work by the artist Vasilii Petrovich Vereshchagin (1835-1909), a contemporary of V.V. Vereshchagin at the Academy in St. Petersburg. His paintings such as Orpheus and Eurydice, (n.d), Die Einfuhrung des Christentums in Russland, (n.d) are more similar in style to The Golden Cloud. (See Russische Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert: Realismus, Impressionismus, Symbolismus, (Zürich: Das Kunsthaus, 1989), 38-39. According to Robert Williams, Vereshchagin sent two of his small works to the 1904 St. Louis exposition, Monk and The Golden Cloud. In a table of the works auctioned after this exposition, Monk is listed as by V.P. Vereshchagin. R. Williams, Russian Art and American Money, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 44. The work could alternatively be an early work which Vereshchagin did while at the Academy in St. Petersburg.

Vasilevich, which he used to travel to Paris to study at the École des Beaux Arts. Vereshchagin was determined to study under the painter Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), one of the most popular Realist Orientalists of the 1850's and 1860's, and he immediately sought him out.<sup>37</sup> In the period between the end of 1864 and the end of 1866, Vereshchagin studied in Paris under Gérôme and the Orientalist Alexandre Bida, traveling frequently to the Caucasus to sketch from "nature."<sup>38</sup>

Vereshchagin's choice of Gérôme for teacher raises the question of whether he had decided to model himself on Gérôme at this point, as an ethnographic painter of primitive tribes.<sup>39</sup> If so, Gérôme's growing reputation in this field would have impressed him.<sup>40</sup> It is also possible

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<sup>37</sup>According to nineteenth century accounts, Vereshchagin went straight up to Gérôme in Paris. Gérôme is said to have asked the Russian, "who sent you to me?" the reply was: "your paintings. I will learn of you or nobody." Quoted in R. Whiteing, "A Russian Artist (Basil Wereschagin)," Scribner's Monthly (September 1881): 674.

<sup>38</sup>Alexander Bida (1813-1895) was a first generation Romantic Orientalist who had studied under Délacroix. He made several trips to the Near East in 1844, 1850 and 1855. He painted numerous works in the harem genre, especially Odalisques.

<sup>39</sup>The chief source on the work of Gérôme is Gerald M. Ackerman, Jean-Léon Gérôme: With a Catalogue Raisonné (New York: Sotheby's Publications, 1989).

<sup>40</sup>According to Gerald Ackerman, (1989, 150), of all Gérôme's students, Vereshchagin, and an American, George de Forrest Brush, followed the master closest in style; both



that he had developed a taste for French Orientalist art in Russia, where it was popular with the nobility. He was probably already familiar with the Kouchelev-Bezborodko Collection, which was bequeathed to the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg in 1862. This was the first public collection of French art in Russia, boasting two Orientalist paintings by Delacroix: La Chasse au lion, 1854 and l'Arabe sellant un cheval, 1855; Decamp's Femme en costume Oriental, and Fromentin's Une Caravane passant un gué.<sup>41</sup> Three works by Gérôme were in the private collection of Tsar Alexander III. However, only one of these, a replica of Duel After the Ball (1857), (not an Orientalist painting) was owned by the Tsar prior to Vereshchagin's arrival in Paris in 1864.<sup>42</sup>

It is likely that Vereshchagin, who traveled a lot, would have come across photogravure prints of Gérôme's

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became "ethnographic painters," Brush recording the life of the Native American Indians, and Vereshchagin that of the tribes of the Central Steppes of Asia.

<sup>41</sup>Louis Réau, Histoire de l'expansion de l'art français en Russie 1700-1900, (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1913), 351.

<sup>42</sup>Of the two other Orientalist paintings by Gérôme in the Hermitage, an oil sketch for the painting Napoleon and his General Staff in Egypt, 1867, was bought by the Tsar at auction in Vienna in 1872, and Turkish Women at the Bath was exhibited in Paris at the Salon of 1876 and bought by the Tsar at the same time. Ackerman, 222; 238.

works, made by Goupil's in Paris in large quantities. At the time Goupil was flooding Europe with photogravure reproductions of Orientalist works, the most popular genre at the Paris Salons.<sup>43</sup> It is also possible that Vereshchagin saw Gérôme's paintings at the Salon, on his visits to France as a Naval student in 1859, and with Professor Biedermann in 1861-2. The following are some early Orientalist paintings by Gérôme that may have been influential on Vereshchagin at the outset of his career: Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert (1857), an example of Orientalist desert genre, was admired for its ethnographic diversity and scientific portrayal of light; the two paintings Memnon & Sesostris (1857), and The Plain of Thebes (1857), portray ruins of past civilizations in the desert, a genre that proved popular with Vereshchagin in his Central Asian works. A highly detailed work, Prayer in the House of the Arnaut Chief (1857, see Fig. 11), is an example of Gérôme's painstaking attention to ethnographic details and costume. The Prisoner (1861), a popular and widely reproduced painting, is an example of a work which creates a discourse of the Orient as a place of cruel and savage oppression. Heads of the Rebel Beys at the Mosque El Assaneyn, (1866, see Fig. 18), had a direct influence on

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 52.

the composition of Vereshchagin's Presenting the Trophies (1872, see Fig. 17).<sup>44</sup> At the Salon of 1864, in the year of Vereshchagin's arrival in Paris, the harem scene Dance of the Almeh (1863), was being exhibited at the Salon.<sup>45</sup>

Gérôme had been appointed head of one of the three ateliers at the École des Beaux-Arts on 22 February, 1864, shortly before Vereshchagin's arrival. This consisted of sixteen students, most of whom were drawn from his independent studio, which he had set up sometime between 1860-62. At this time, Gérôme was at the peak of his career, and as a "peinture ethnographique," he was considered the most "modern" and therefore desirable of the three instructors. Since his first trip to Egypt in 1857, Gérôme had begun to move away from his former Neo-Grèc style towards Realism; not the radical Realism of Courbet and Manet, but a move toward archeological and ethnographic accuracy in the portrayal of Near Eastern scenes and "types." Careful observation through travel played an important role in his work, so that he was considered a "descriptive scientist."

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<sup>44</sup>This painting, from the series which he called The Barbarians will be discussed in the Chapter Four on the works in Turkestan.

<sup>45</sup>For a detailed analysis of these paintings see Ackerman, 1989.

The ease by which Vereshchagin was accepted into Gérôme's atelier is probably due to the latter's known liberal attitude to admitting foreign students, even though as a rule they were not allowed to attend the Academy. Gérôme frequently admitted foreign students as "élèves libres," those students not working to qualify for the prestigious Prix de Rome.<sup>46</sup> According to contemporary accounts, Gérôme's impact on Vereshchagin was minimal due to friction which developed between them. Gérôme's advice to copy antique subjects from Classical prototypes, probably had a stifling effect on Vereshchagin, who had just left the St. Petersburg Academy for the same reasons, as Vereshchagin's comment about his second departure for the Caucasus reveals:

I escaped from Paris as from a dungeon and started drawing with a kind of frenzy. Proof of that was my album filled with the finest drawings I ever made.<sup>47</sup>

Although Gérôme had a reputation for being very severe, most of his former pupils agreed that, despite his rigid beliefs, he allowed his pupils a certain freedom of

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>47</sup>Feodor Bulgatov, Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin i ego proizvedeniia, 2-oe izd. (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorina, 1905), 33-34.

individual expression as long as their work was sincere. This explains perhaps why Vereshchagin decided to resume his studies in Paris after his second trip to the Caucasus. It was only after this trip that Gérôme suggested he try painting in oil colors.<sup>48</sup> Despite their differences the relationship between Gérôme and Vereshchagin remained cordial, and continued into the 1890's. For Gérôme's 1898 sculpture Tamerlane, he requested his former pupil's aid. By this time Vereshchagin was considered an "expert" on Mongol affairs in art and he supplied his former teacher with sketches of Mongol garb, and native costumes for the model to wear, including sketches of how they should be worn. He also sent Gérôme photographs of steppe horses.<sup>49</sup> Vereshchagin clearly shared Gérôme's delight in the "scientific accuracy" of ethnographic details, and the importance of accessories and costumes, indispensable to the Orientalist. From this source we learn that

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<sup>48</sup>At the time, all three ateliers at the École were dedicated to drawing. Only the oldest, most experienced students were allowed to try their hand at color. As an unknown Russian "entity," it is most unlikely that Vereshchagin would previously have been included in this category. This explains Vereshchagin's hesitancy until much later to paint in oils.

<sup>49</sup>Gérôme Correspondence, letters of Vereshchagin to Gérôme, Moscow, 2nd and 8 March, 1897., collection of Madame Georges Masson, Paris. Quoted in Gerald Ackermann, 150.

Vereshchagin, like Gérôme, used photography to help him achieve this goal.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear that at this stage, Gérôme's influence was beginning to shape Vereshchagin's artistic development in a number of areas. Firstly, Vereshchagin began to model himself on Gérôme's reputation as a man of action, undertaking massive expeditions requiring great physical fortitude to unknown Eastern territories, in search of the primitive and the exotic. In addition, both artists were to some extent, apologists for their respective countries' colonial policies, traveling to regions where their countries had imperial interests.<sup>51</sup> Vereshchagin shared Gérôme's belief that art should progress through a scientific approach to the careful observation of nature. In his article entitled "On Progress in Art," he states:

The young school will make it a strict rule to bring every event into harmony with the time, place, and light, selected, in order to benefit by all the modern acquisitions of science, in relation

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<sup>50</sup>Most of Gérôme's expeditions to the Near East were accompanied by photographers, and he himself took many pictures.

<sup>51</sup>Albert Boime points out that Gérôme made five visits to the Near East during the period of the Second Empire, during the critical events of French involvement, "thus serving the government in both a diplomatic and an information-gathering role." Albert Boime, "Gérôme and the Bourgeois Artist's Burden," Arts Magazine 57, no. 5 (January 1983): 68.

to the characteristics, costumes, and every psychological and ethnographic detail.<sup>52</sup>

Gerald Ackerman's observation regarding Gérôme's ability to "generalize," much as a botanist "sees the universal traits of a race or species, ignoring the accidental characteristics of individuals,"<sup>53</sup> can be equally applied to the early work of Vereshchagin, especially his ethnographic sketches of Caucasian and Central Asian "types." This "generalizing" tendency, results in a lack of psychological depth in their work; their interests lay in external "textures," in the relationship of figures to costumes, floors, walls and accessories. Gérôme taught Vereshchagin the technique of making numerous preparatory studies prior to executing a final painting in the studio.<sup>54</sup> The result is that the formal composition of works such as By the Fortress Wall. They Have Entered! (1871, see Fig. 15), is closer to that of Théodore Géricault and Ernest Meissonier than Realists such as Manet or Degas.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, "On Progress in Art," in "1812" Napoleon I In Russia, (London: William Heinemann & Co., 1899), 22.

<sup>53</sup>Ackermann, 58.

<sup>54</sup>Vereshchagin's studios alternated between Paris and Munich at this time.

<sup>55</sup>Compare They Have Entered! with Ernest Meissonier's The Barricade, rue de la Mortellerie (June 1848), 1848.

This style is reminiscent of the methods taught in the Academies at St. Petersburg and Paris. Although Vereshchagin attempted to be "modern" by incorporating notions of scientific progress and contemporaneity into his work,<sup>56</sup> it lacks, as does Gérôme's, the casual and "instantaneous" characteristics of the Modernists, creating instead an imagery of a static and unchanging world, that of the timeless Orient.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of Gérôme's influence, Vereshchagin's work began to develop independently in a number of significant ways. His style emerged as far more painterly, displaying less photographic clarity than that of Gérôme, as can be seen in a detail of The Wounded Soldier (1873, see Fig. 24). Even in the works where Vereshchagin pays detailed

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Meissonier (1815-1891) is best known for his paintings of military scenes.

<sup>56</sup>Vereshchagin equated scientific progress in art, with "plein-air" painting and the unity of time, place and light selected for the representation of an event. See Vasilii Vereshchagin, "On Progress in Art," 17-23.

<sup>57</sup>According to Baudelaire, "modernity" meant the transitory and the fugitive. For a detailed analysis of this distinction as it pertains to Realism see Linda Nochlin's Realism, (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 28-33. In comparing Goya's Third of May (1808), with Manet's Execution of Emperor Maximilian (1867), Nochlin makes the point that the former displays a temporal continuity, which creates a generalized commentary about the inhumanity of man to man implicit in its traditional schemata, whereas Manet's *flash of vision* is a temporal fragment divorced from traditional moral views.



attention to the intricacy of Islamic architecture, such as The Doors of Tamerlane (1872-73, see Fig. 12), his brushwork and outline remain softer than Gérôme's.

The most important difference between the two, however, is in their vision of the Orient; Vereshchagin's imagery is far less idealized and more savage than Gérôme's, which demonstrates the idealizing tendencies of the Neo-Grèc Academic tradition. A painting such as Gérôme's Turkish Butcher Boy in Jerusalem (1863, see Fig. 9), is "ennobling" in style, incorporating the idea of Rousseau's "noble savage." In contrast, Vereshchagin created an imagery of Oriental despotism, fanaticism and social oppression; there is nothing "noble" about his Orientals. It is here, that the Realist Orientalism of Vereshchagin diverges from that of Gérôme. Vereshchagin's Realism is less "decadent" and "art for art's sake," more typically Russian in its "moralistic" desire to expose social oppression.

Vereshchagin's development as an Orientalist began in earnest on his second trip to the Caucasus in 1865, where he aimed to record and sketch the religious processions of the Shiite Moslems. He traveled to Shusha to observe the Moslem festival of Moharrem, celebrated annually in commemoration of the suffering and martyrdom of Shiite Imams. Vereshchagin was extremely impressed by this

"exotic" event, as a passage from his autobiography reveals:

I passed through the narrow gates of the fortress, and a wild and unique picture, such as I had never seen before, presented itself to my eyes. The whole market-place was literally filled with people, some shouting as if they were mad, others merely looking on. Tartars, in groups of perhaps a hundred, formed lines and danced hither and thither in the market-place with wild cries, holding each other by the girdle with the left hand, while, with the right they brandished a stick above their heads at every leap.<sup>58</sup>

Fascinated in particular, by the procession of self-tormentors, he later made a series of paintings on this theme including A Self-Tormentor (1865), The Young Imam (1865), and A Religious Procession of the Moharrem Celebration at Shusha (1865), all of which fall into the genre of Oriental violence, reflecting European myths of Muslim fanaticism and religious superstition. Vereshchagin described this procession with awe:

I waited for the beginning of this performance, which for fanaticism and wildness is probably unequalled. Protracted cries of "Hussein! Hussein!" announced the approach of the procession. At its head are men who gash their bodies as they move quietly on. Several hundred men march in two rows, holding one another by the left hand, and each grasping in his right a sword with the edge turned

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<sup>58</sup>v. Vereshchagin, Vassili Verestchagin, Painter, Soldier, Traveller: Autobiographical Sketches (London: R. Bentley, 1887) 1:38.

towards his face. The skins of the heads of these fanatics is covered with sword-cuts, and from the wounds the blood flows literally in streams, and forms as it does a dark red crust which completely covers their faces...<sup>59</sup>

In 1867, in the wake of the Russian colonial conquest of Central Asia, Vereshchagin was invited by General Kaufman, the new governor-general of Turkestan (currently Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Kirgizia, and Kazakhstan) to accompany an expedition to Central Asia as an "art volunteer."<sup>60</sup> Kaufman's mission was to establish "order" in the new region, and to encourage the population's acceptance of Russian rule, which was being resisted by the Khanates. He wished to attach a young painter to his expedition to record Russia's invasion, as well as to acquaint Russians with the ethnic diversity of the new colonies. Vereshchagin, with his artistic and military background, seemed to be an ideal choice. The terms Kaufman and Vereshchagin agreed to, included the artist's individual freedom of movement, the salary of an ensign, and a non-military rank, with no uniform.<sup>61</sup>

One by one, the ancient cities and holy shrines of Central Asia, fell into Kaufman's hands. A bloody conflict

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>60</sup>Barooshian, 20.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 20.

erupted between the inhabitants of the old capital of Tamerlane, Samarkand, and the Russian troops, which ended in the surrender of Samarkand, and the immediate liberation of some ten thousand slaves of the ruling Muslim hierarchy. Vereshchagin arrived one day after the Russian victory, and was disappointed in his desire to see a real war, "The action which our expedition so ardently longed for slipped through our fingers, and with it all the rewards, distinctions and promotions--it was most provoking."<sup>62</sup>

In Samarkand he wandered around observing the everyday life of the people as well as ancient monuments. He was always accompanied by an armed servant, because of the genuine danger of surprise attack from the enemy. He was impressed by the novel sights:

I rode about town and outside of it every day, inspecting the mosques, bazaars and schools, especially the older mosques, among which are some remarkable specimens still remained. There was so much material for study and sketching that it was difficult to decide which I should begin with; the scenery, buildings, costumes, faces and manners, were all new, original and interesting.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, Vassili Verestchagin, Painter, Soldier, Traveller: Autobiographical Sketches, trans. F.H. Peters (New York: American Art Association, 1888), 2.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1-2.

After taking Samarkand, General Kaufman, confident that the local population was willing to yield to Russian rule, left to face the Emir's army, leaving a token force in place to defend the garrison. Vereshchagin's wish to see a battle soon came true, because an uprising against the Russians was stirring up among the local population. Taking advantage of Kaufman's absence, some 60,000 men loyal to the Emir of Bukhara, moved in on the city and began to lay siege to the undefended fortress. For nine days, one assault followed another, and it became clear that the few hundred besieged soldiers would not be able to hold out for long. Vereshchagin, realizing the desperate situation, ran to aid the defense of the fortress; setting an example of bravery, he participated in hand to hand combat, repulsing assaults and at the same time encouraging his hard pressed compatriots to hang on. The garrison held out until Kaufman returned, whereupon Vereshchagin was awarded the George Cross for his bravery, a medal which he wore at later battles.<sup>64</sup>

General Kaufman retaliated by killing, plundering and burning part of the city, including the market-place and some old mosques. Vereshchagin took part in this

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<sup>64</sup>The chief source for an account of Vereshchagin's participation in the siege of Samarkand, is Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1888, 1-40. See also, Barooshian, 20-55.

retaliatory raid by helping to hunt out victims to kill. If the first sight of a battlefield had given rise to horror, his recent experiences led him to kill and burn down buildings without hesitation, demonstrating an eager participation in the war:

Nazaroff and his entire force disposed themselves in the shade of the huts; but I, with a few volunteers, kept on the ramparts, and found relaxation in sharp-shooting. Every now and again we spotted a man. It was like having the satisfaction of knocking over a rabbit or a hare.<sup>65</sup>

Vereshchagin resumed his exploration of the region, recording his unfavorable impressions of the conditions in Central Asia, the following passage reveals his contemptuous attitude toward what he saw in the East:

the gorgeous, incomparable, divine Samarcand--a city, the glories of which have been sung by the ancient and modern poets of the East, whose metaphors must of course be taken *cum grano salis*, for Samarcand itself, like all Asiatic countries, is foul and malodorous.<sup>66</sup>

He was particularly outraged at slavery, the position of women in Central Asia, the Opium dens and beggars, making many sketches which would later be made into paintings. On his return to St. Petersburg, in 1868, he opened his first

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 2.

exhibition which included four paintings from Central Asia, After Victory (1868, see Fig. 16), After Defeat (1868), The Opium Eaters (1868, see Fig. 2), and Batsha and His Worshippers (1868, see Fig. 1. Destroyed by the artist due to sharp criticism of its homosexual implications.) At this stage, it is clear that Vereshchagin was a propagandist and apologist for Kaufman's campaign, the principal purpose of the exhibition being to justify the conquest of Central Asia and familiarize the Russian people with its rich ethnic diversity.

In 1869, Vereshchagin made a second trip to Central Asia, crossing the Kirghiz steppes to the Semireche region on the borders of China. This time he was placed under the jurisdiction of General Kolpakovsky, Governor-general of the Semireche colony. Once more, he avoided serving directly under the military, and was given the civilian rank of "Collegiate registrar."<sup>67</sup> He chose Tashkent as a base, making long trips as far as the Chinese border, to sketch and paint impressive ruins of border towns such as Chuguchak; this involved considerable danger due to raids by the Mongol Sultan Kulja.<sup>68</sup> It was probably in this

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<sup>67</sup>Barooshian, 30.

<sup>68</sup>A. K. Lebedev, Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin: Zhizn i tvorchestvo 1842-1904, (Moscow: Isskustvo, 1958), 89.

region that he conceived his most famous work, The Apotheosis of War, 1871.<sup>69</sup>

In 1871, Vereshchagin left Central Asia, and made his home in Munich where he intended to execute a series of paintings based on his Central Asian experiences and impressions.<sup>70</sup> In Munich he met Elisabeth Marie Fischer, whom he married shortly after, avoiding any traditional religious ceremony in a typical act of protest.<sup>71</sup> By this time he had come into his inheritance and was financially independent, so that he could afford to build a studio, which became famous as a novel curiosity. Declaring that the Realist artist should paint outdoors, so as to truthfully reproduce the colors and light of Central Asia,<sup>72</sup> Vereshchagin built a special studio in the suburbs, which is described as follows by a contemporary:

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<sup>69</sup>For a detailed analysis of this work see Chapter Five.

<sup>70</sup>According to Barooshian, he received a letter from Kaufman offering him a three-year subsidy to settle in Munich to paint his experiences of Turkestan. Implicit in the letter is Kaufman's expectations that Vereshchagin's art would be used to justify the conquest of Central Asia. Barooshian, 33.

<sup>71</sup>His first wife served as his aid, and accompanied him on his more adventurous expeditions like scaling the Himalayas. They were divorced, however, in the late 1880's.

<sup>72</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, "On Progress in Art," 1899, 18.



a movable room on wheels running on a circular tramway, and open to sun and air on the side nearest the center of the circle where the model stood. The artist worked in a huge box with one side out, while the thing he saw was in full glare of day; and by means of a simple mechanical contrivance he made his room follow the shifting light.<sup>73</sup>

The Munich period was very important for Vereshchagin in terms of summarizing his impressions of and thoughts about the events in Central Asia. It was perhaps here, in the company of other European artists, that his ideas for anti-war paintings started to germinate. It was here that he started to paint in brilliant color, incorporating the influence of Gérôme. His first international exhibition took place in London in 1873, in the Russian section of the World Fair at the Crystal Palace. Given the friction between Russia and Britain over Russian expansion into Central Asia, it is probable that Vereshchagin, still somewhat an apologist for Russian colonial policy, chose London as a deliberate venue in which appease British fears, as the following introductory statement to the Catalog of his exhibition demonstrates:

The barbarism of the inhabitants of Central Asia is so terrible, the economic and social situation in such decay, that the sooner European civilization

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<sup>73</sup>Richard Whiteing, introduction to Vassili Verestchagin, "1812" Napoleon I In Russia, (London: William Heinemann, 1899), 3.

can penetrate there the better. If my sketches shall serve to dissipate the suspicions of the English towards their natural friends and neighbors in Central Asia, I shall be more than rewarded for the fatigues of my journey and the labor of exhibition.<sup>74</sup>

If in London the exhibition became caught up in international political tensions, the same exhibition provoked a storm of protest in St. Petersburg in 1874, as well as acclaim from progressive quarters. It is clear that Vereshchagin was enjoying the limelight, by placing himself at the forefront of political scandal, since he must have foreseen the effect of such a painting as The Forgotten Soldier (1871), on the Russian authorities.<sup>75</sup> Predictably, the exhibition incited a scandal among generals and other official visitors, who started a campaign against him, by accusing him of shaming the national pride. A private audience was requested by the Tsar to be accompanied by General Kaufman, who was secretly concerned about the implications of several of the works, especially The Forgotten Soldier (1871). Kaufman publicly denounced Vereshchagin in front of Tsar for "fantastic inventions:" it was impossible that any Russian soldier could be

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<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Helen Zimmern, (1885): 12.

<sup>75</sup>This painting is known by the title Left Behind in Soviet sources. It represents a dead soldier left behind on the battlefield to be ravaged by ravens.

forgotten on the field; or be surrounded by the enemy; or prove incapable of emotion at the sight of heaps of dead. He forced Vereshchagin to admit publicly that he had not actually seen such incidents, and in addition, the Russian censor forbade publication of the work for the next twenty years.<sup>76</sup>

The result of all this stress was that Vereshchagin quickly removed the picture from the exhibition, and destroyed it along with two other "offending" canvases: By The Wall of a Fortress. They have Entered! (1871, see Fig. 15), and Encircled! They're Pursuing (1872). The remaining pictures in the exhibition were bought by the private collector Tretyakov for 92,000 rubles on the condition that it be left intact, since Vereshchagin conceived of his works in series.

Despite the notoriety of this exhibition, he was soon offered the Title of Professor at the Academy.<sup>77</sup> At that time, Vereshchagin was visiting Bombay, and he enlisted Stasov's help to publish a public refusal of the title in the St. Petersburg press, explaining that in art, he considered all appointments harmful, and that he renounced

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<sup>76</sup>Barooshian, 49.

<sup>77</sup>Barooshian suggests that he was offered this title to bring him into fold and prevent him from exhibiting the Turkestan series abroad. *Ibid.*, 50.

all honors awarded him.<sup>78</sup> In reactionary circles at the Academy, this was the final bait, and they set about a retaliatory attack to discredit his name, by accusing him of hiring other artists to paint his Turkestan paintings. The author of this attack, an insignificant artist by the name of Tyutryumov, was not able to supply proof for this accusation, and Vereshchagin was finally exonerated of the charges with the help of Vladimir Stasov and progressive artists such as Ilya Repin, Nicholas Ge and Mark Antokolsky, who came to his defense in a combined public statement.<sup>79</sup> The Artist's Association of Munich, issued a declaration in support of Vereshchagin's authorship, after an investigation was held by them into the matter.

In 1874 Vereshchagin departed with his wife for two years to India.<sup>80</sup> Once more the Orient provided him an escape from scandal and persecution in Russia. They toured Buddhist monasteries, which he sketched for three months. Then they journeyed through the Eastern Himalayas, where they attempted to ascend the second highest mountain known

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<sup>78</sup>Letter to V.V. Stasov, 1/13 August, 1874 from Bombay in Vasilii Vereshchagin, Izbrannye pisma Vasilii V. Vereshchagin, (Moskow: Izo. Iskusstvo, 1981), 34-36.

<sup>79</sup>Barooshian, 141-142.

<sup>80</sup>The details of his trips to India are covered in Sunil Kar, Realistic Art of Vereschagin, (Calcutta, India: Nava Yug Publishers, 1981) and in V. Vereshchagin, 1887: 2.

as Djongri, 28,000 feet above sea level. Since it was January and the mountain was covered with ice and snow, they only managed to climb 15,000 feet, almost freezing to death in the process. Local English officers tried to dissuade him from this adventure, considering him highly eccentric and suspecting him of being a Russian spy on military reconnaissance. He was subsequently followed everywhere by British agents. An article written in the local paper the "Pioneer," congratulated him on his artistic talent, but expressed the common suspicion that he was a spy: "not for nothing he paints every creek, and mountain, because it is known that Russia intends to penetrate into China and Tibet."<sup>81</sup> Eventually, a Russian friend in London, obtained for him special passes from General Walker, Director of the Topography Department, which prevented his subsequent arrest.

While in India, Vereshchagin traveled to Bombay, Delhi and Agra, where he painted the Taj Mahal, among other monuments. He became seriously ill in Agra, and in 1876 left for Paris, where he intended to execute a series of paintings entitled "Indian poems." In Paris, he chose a suburb known as Maison Lafitte for the construction of a house with two studios, one for working during the winter,

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<sup>81</sup>Quoted in Ibid., 30.

and one for summer. These included dressing rooms for models and an art wardrobe, "rich in the sartorial spoils of the East. The studio walls are hung with weapons, shields, suits of chain-armor, masks worn in the religious festivals of India."<sup>82</sup> No sooner had Vereshchagin started to work on this cycle when in 1877, news of the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in the Balkans sent him off once more to observe war, this time a European war.<sup>83</sup>

Vereshchagin strongly supported Russia in its aim to liberate Bulgaria from the Turks, and although he volunteered, as before, as a civilian without military rank, he participated actively in the war, almost paying with his life when he was injured by a bullet. After two and a half months hospitalization, he returned to the war and handed over all the studies he had made to a companion for safekeeping. Unfortunately, all forty sketches, executed on the battle field under enemy fire, were lost, necessitating his return after the war to recall the setting. At the same time he was deeply affected by the notification that one of his brothers was killed during the campaign, later recalling:

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<sup>82</sup>R. Whiteing, (1881): 679-680.

<sup>83</sup>This was a war against the decaying Ottoman empire to liberate Russia's fellow Christian Slavs, the Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, from Turkish Moslem rule.

It is difficult to describe in words the meanings of a battle, as every moment something unexpected occurs....I was accused for having portrayed only the negative aspects of the war, the horrible scenes. I answered that there have been many dramatic situations from which I had to escape, not being able to reproduce them on canvas. My brother was killed during the third attack on Plevna. I could not rescue his body, because the place was occupied by the enemy. Three months later I went to the place and found it covered with corpses. As much as I searched, I was unable to recognize my brother. Despite the tears and deep sorrow, I sat down and made a sketch of the situation, which reminds one in the full sense of the word "The Hell" by Dante.<sup>84</sup>

The paintings from this battle are among Vereshchagin's most famous. They are arranged in chronological cycles of unfolding drama, since it was not his purpose to fix an event in a unity of time and place in the Realist sense, but rather to show his attitude to war in general, i.e. in a universal sense. This included highlighting class distinctions in the Russian military, and the incompetence of Russian commanders, which resulted in the needless suffering of simple soldiers. He depicted the hardships of winter in the Balkans, which caused thousands of victims to freeze to death. His most famous

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<sup>84</sup>From an article by Vereshchagin called "Down with the Weapons," quoted in Eugene Zabel, 34.

painting on this theme is the lost, All Is Quiet On The Shipka, 1878-79.<sup>85</sup>

Vereshchagin attacked the callousness of the upper echelons of the military toward the simple Russian soldier who bore the brunt of the war, while the Commanders-in-chief, including Tsar Alexander II, stood aside on a hilltop, viewing the event through binoculars. This particular work, Alexander II at Plevna on August 30, 1877, 1878-79, revolutionized European battle painting, by placing the Tsar in a corner, rather than as the focal point. Predictably, Vereshchagin was accused of undermining the Tsar's prestige in the eyes of the Russian people.

Vereshchagin completed this cycle in two years, during which time he kept away from all contacts with the world. In 1879 it was exhibited along with his Indian paintings in Paris, an exhibition which proved highly successful, thanks to Vereshchagin's friendship with the writer Turgenev who helped organize it and muster support. In 1880, the Russo-Turkish paintings were exhibited in St. Petersburg, filling not less than seven rooms, which he lit up with electric lights. Rumors of the controversial nature of the works reached the Tsar immediately, and he ordered that they be

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<sup>85</sup>For an analysis of this and other paintings from the Balkan War series, see Barooshian, 56-93.



brought to the Winter Palace and there hung in the white Nikolai room, closing the exhibition for several days. The Tsar examined the paintings in the company of Vereshchagin's brother Alexander, because Vereshchagin refused the honor, and the Tsar in turn refused to meet with him afterwards at all. The Grand Duke Alexander (later to become Tsar Alexander III) exclaimed, on seeing the catalog:

In reading Vereshchagin's catalogue of paintings, and especially the texts to them, I cannot conceal that it was repugnant for me to read his customary biases that are offensive to our national pride, and one may draw one conclusion from them: either Vereshchagin is a swine or absolutely crazy!<sup>86</sup>

When the general exhibition was reopened the public came in large crowds. Progressive circles supported Vereshchagin, but reactionary opinion accused him of being a traitor, taking the Turkish point of view in his pictures. They failed to realize that works such as The Conquerors (1878-79), a typical example of military Orientalism, authenticated Turkish atrocities. Eventually tensions heightened and a guard was placed outside Vereshchagin's door, since he was suspected of being the head of the Nihilist movement in Russia. Consequently,

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<sup>86</sup>Letter of Grand Duke Alexander to A.P. Bogoliubov, December 21st, 1879. Quoted in Lebedev, 1987, 65.

after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, a wave of political repression set in under the new Tsar Alexander III, and Vereshchagin found it expedient to leave Russia for many years.

In Europe, meanwhile his reputation grew to legendary proportions and he exhibited all over Europe with tremendous success: in Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Brussels and Pest. Critics in Berlin were negative, declaring his anti-heroic conception of war to be a falsehood. The German Field Marshal Moltke, actually banned German military personnel and children from attending the exhibition.<sup>87</sup> The exhibition went on to tour the United States at New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia. In 1882, almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown from all the scandal, Vereshchagin escaped once more to travel to India. His mental state is revealed in the following passage from a contemporary source:

I regret to state, on the assurance of a reliable correspondent in Europe, that Verestchagin's condition is such as to cause grave alarm. Always under a strong mental and nervous strain, stimulated by a temperament, which, as in all geniuses, led him close to the border line of eccentricity, if not positive madness, he has,

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<sup>87</sup>Vereshchagin accused the same Field Marshal Moltke of advising the Tsar to burn his paintings as "objects of a most pernicious kind". Verestchagin, "Realism," In "1812" Napoleon I In Russia, 1899, 33.

since his return to Europe, developed an aggravation of his nervous tension, which, as I am told, defied even the skill of Dr. Charcot, who has had him under treatment.<sup>88</sup>

In 1884, Vereshchagin undertook a voyage to Syria and Palestine in order to tour the holy sites and sketch ethnographic "types" for biblical subjects. This trip furnished Vereshchagin with a set of subjects from the New Testament which, true to form, he treated rather unconventionally. In his article "On Realism" in which he defended these and other works,<sup>89</sup> Vereshchagin echoed Courbet's declaration that he could not paint an angel because he had never seen one:<sup>90</sup>

At the threshold of the twentieth century, we can no longer admit that the skies above are peopled by saints and angels; that the interior of the earth is occupied by devils engaged in their task of roasting the sinners of the world.<sup>91</sup>

The paintings on religious subjects such as Holy Family (1884-85), Christ on the Sea of Tiberias (n.d) and The Resurrection of Christ (1884-85; destroyed), were

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<sup>88</sup>"Verestchagin and His Art," The Collector (October 1, 1890): 158.

<sup>89</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, "On Realism," 1888.

<sup>90</sup>Nochlin, 1971, 83.

<sup>91</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, "Realism" in "1812" Napoleon I In Russia, (London: William Heinemann, 1899) 29.

severely censured in Catholic countries and banned in Russia. In 1885, his rationalist painting Holy Family (whereabouts unknown) was declared blasphemous by the archbishop of Vienna. The painting Resurrection of Christ, was destroyed by a fanatic monk who threw a bottle of vitriol at it while it was being exhibited in the Kunstler Haus in Vienna.<sup>92</sup> In 1889-90, he exhibited in New York, where he hoped to raise money to continue another series of paintings. At the time America's growing affluence and aspiring cultural élan, helped to create a profitable market for art.

It was not until the early 1890's that Vereshchagin was able to return to Russia and settle in Moscow, where he built himself a studio similar to that of Munich and Paris, and settled down to raise his children by his second wife, Lidia Andreievskaja. During the last fifteen years of his life he worked on a series of paintings devoted to Napoleon's Russian campaign in the war of 1812. In 1900 he exhibited in competition for the Nobel prize, which he expected to gain as an "apostle of peace," but he and his pictures were coldly received.<sup>93</sup> In the early 1900's he

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<sup>92</sup>Sunil Kar, 58.

<sup>93</sup>Bryan's Dictionary Of Painters And Engravers, 1905 ed., s.v. "Vereshchagin, Vasili Vasilievich."

continued traveling, in 1901 to the Philippines and to Cuba, and in 1903 to Japan, where he made many painterly sketches of Japanese "types" including beggars. It was in 1904, during the Russo-Japanese war, that he perished with Admiral Makarov at Port Arthur on board the *Petropavlovsk*. The news of Vereshchagin's death appeared in many major newspapers worldwide and memorial services were held for him in many countries.

## CHAPTER TWO

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## BY AND ABOUT VASILII VASILEVICH VERESHCHAGIN

Vereshchagin was a prolific writer as well as painter and the author of numerous autobiographical writings, articles and books, a few of which will be mentioned here.<sup>94</sup>

Vassili Verestchagin: Painter, Soldier, Traveler: Autobiographical Sketches, is a somewhat romanticized account of his adventures during the siege of Samarkand, and the Russo-Turkish war in the Balkans.<sup>95</sup> This work is invaluable not only as an historical document, but also as a document of the artist's participation in these wars. There are very few references to art in it, apart from the odd comment about the local architecture and mosques in Samarkand. This work was published in conjunction with his exhibition at the American Art Galleries in New York in 1888-9, perhaps as a form of public relations.

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<sup>94</sup>Vereshchagin also wrote a novel, The War Correspondent: A Story of the Russo-Turkish War, (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1894).

<sup>95</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, Vassili Verestchagin: Painter, Soldier, Traveler: Autobiographical Sketches, trans. F H. Peters (New York: American Art Association, 1888).

Another autobiographical work published under the same title, in London is the travelogue, Vassili Verestchagin: Painter, Soldier, Traveler: Autobiographical Sketches.<sup>96</sup> Volume I consists of impressions and ethnological studies of the artist's travels through Transcaucasia and Central Asia and is invaluable for its commentary on the social conditions there and for providing a critical context for his paintings. The second volume covers the trip to Northern India and an account, written by his first wife, of their adventure scaling the Himalayas. Due to Vereshchagin's enormous popularity in the late nineteenth century, these works were translated into German, French and English.

Two of the artist's more theoretical positions on art are outlined in the articles, "On Progress in Art" and "Realism," both of which are appended to the Exhibition catalog "1812" Napoleon I In Russia.<sup>97</sup> The article "Realism" was published by Vereshchagin in defense of sharp criticism associated with some of his more controversial

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<sup>96</sup>V. Vereshchagin, Vassili Verestchagin: Painter, Soldier, Traveller: Autobiographical Sketches, 2 vols (London: R. Bentley, 1887).

<sup>97</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, "1812" Napoleon I In Russia, with an introduction by R. Whiteing (London: William Heinemann, 1899).

paintings, in particular the Russo-Turkish war series, the biblical paintings.

Vereshchagin's fame throughout Europe as one of the "most remarkable figures in the whole world of art, the greatest of war-painters"<sup>98</sup> came to an abrupt end with his sudden death in 1904 while aboard the ship *Petropavlovsk* which sank during the Russo-Japanese war. After his death, the artist was forgotten in western Europe, so that the bulk of literature in the west dates from the nineteenth century. Much of this nineteenth-century criticism tends to be "laudatory" in style; it is judgmental rather than art historical in the modern sense. Therefore, subsequent studies of the artist have tended to be filtered through nineteenth century perceptions.

The predominant perception of the artist in the critical literature of the nineteenth century, and in recent works, is that of a pacifist, an anti-war artist who "dedicated his art and life to the struggle against war, despotism, barbarism, backwardness, and ignorance"<sup>99</sup> and who

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<sup>98</sup>Rosa Newmarch, "Vassily Verestchagin: War-Painter," Fortnightly Review, 81 (June 1904): 1011-1020.

<sup>99</sup>Vahan D. Barooshian, V.V. Vereshchagin: Artist At War, (Gainesville, Fl: University of Florida Press, 1993), xvii.



hated to see the death, often senseless of soldiers, be they Russians or Turks....never letting his patriotic feelings slide to mere nationalism or chauvinism."<sup>100</sup>

There was general consensus, especially in the literature of the nineteenth century, that Vereshchagin was a scientific realist, that he depicted war as he saw it with his own eyes. Contemporary critic Nicholas Sobko wrote:

The facts he had seen were faithfully and vigorously reported in his works;....Battle pictures and portraits, landscape and ethnographic studies alike, all he does has the attribute of perfect accuracy, of hard literal truth. You find in it none of the unnatural and impossible decorum of the conventional representation of war, his fights are not theatrical but real, it is war, and war caught in the act.<sup>101</sup>

It is true that Vereshchagin did transform the genre of battle painting in Russian art, by disposing with traditional conventions for portraying war as a series of pompous military parades and victories. His war paintings were executed in chronological cycles reminiscent in their epic form of Francisco de Goya's Los Desastres de la Guerre, 1808-20. Upon closer inspection, however, much of

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<sup>100</sup>A. K. Lebedev & A. Solodovnikov, Vasily Vasil'evich Vereshchagin, (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1987), 172.

<sup>101</sup>Nicholas Sobko, "Battle and Travel," The Magazine Of Art 7 (1884): 187.

Vereshchagin's work appears anecdotal in comparison with Goya's work; After Victory, (1868, see Fig. 16), has more of the quality of a caricature than the harsh realism associated with war. Even in his more brutal portrayals of war such as The Forgotten Soldier (1871),<sup>102</sup> there is a poetic and symbolic quality to Vereshchagin's work, a search for the universal. A contemporary critic noted, "the great charm of all of Verestchagin's work will ever lie in it's happy combination of realism and poetry."<sup>103</sup>

The critic Rosa Newmarch attributed Vereshchagin's hatred of war to his Russian nationality, to what she regarded as an absence of military ardor in the Russian temperament,<sup>104</sup> and she emphasized his absence of false patriotism, comparing him with Tolstoy, an analogy frequently made in the literature, in that "he accepted no traditions of art, no social conventions, no respect of

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<sup>102</sup>This painting was one of several destroyed by the artist after its exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1869, earned him the reputation of an anti-patriotic Nihilist. It is possible that he destroyed it in order to avoid forced exile to Siberia.

<sup>103</sup>Valerian Gribayedoff, "A Russian Apostle of Art," The Cosmopolitan 6 (February 1889): 316.

<sup>104</sup>Rosa Newmarch, The Russian Arts, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1916), 103. See also, Newmarch, (1904): 1011-1020.

nationality."<sup>105</sup> Echoing the Realist motto, "il faut être de son temps," she praised Vereshchagin's treatment of contemporary subjects.<sup>105</sup>

The American critic Richard Whiteing concurred with the view of Vereshchagin as a Realist, adding that the artist's "moralist" stance cast him in a superior light to former French artists who worked in the genre of battle painting such as: Horace Vernet, Auguste Raffet, Alphonse Marie Adolphe de Neuville and Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet. Whiteing compared him instead with Ernest Meissonier, Théodore Géricault and Gustave Courbet. The French critic Jules Claretie commended the realism of Vereshchagin's Central Asian paintings, "Tout cela a été vu, pris sur nature, et ces toiles qui ne sortiront plus de Moscou, ont la valeur de documents historiques."<sup>107</sup> The Indian series which was being exhibited in Paris at the time, struck Claretie as the first truthful, rather than fantastic, rendering of Indian palaces.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 1020.

<sup>106</sup>An authenticated pronouncement of Daumier, quoted in Linda Nochlin, 1971, 103.

<sup>107</sup>"All of this was seen, taken from nature, and his works, which no longer leave Moscow, have the value of historic documents." Jules Claretie, "Exposition des Oeuvres de M. Basile Vereschagin," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 21, no. 2 (1 February 1880): 164.

The paintings representing Oriental savagery such as After Victory, (1868, Fig. 16), Presenting the Trophies (1872, Fig. 17), and Rejoicing (1872, Fig. 19), among others, struck a chord of sympathy with nineteenth century critics, who praised them for "standing alone in their beauty and barbarism."<sup>108</sup> Such critics used Vereshchagin's pictures to commend Russia's expansion into Central Asia as a Christian mission:

By the victory of the Russian eagles in Central Asia, Islam has received a most terrible wound... Central Asia alone had remained the sanctuary of Mohamedanism. The evil there had not been changed...The ascetic, the member of a religious order, the theologian, sighed for this sacred city, [Bukhara] and the most zealous Mussulmans of the Ottoman empire, of Egypt, of Fez, and of Morocco, came to cherish their fanaticism in its schools and in its mosques.<sup>109</sup>

This tendency was taken to extremes in the same critic's discussion of the painting, Politicians of the Opium Den, Tashkent (1870, Fig. 3):

In central Asia...they [the politicians] wear rags as the uniforms of order. While the balance of power in Turkestan is in question, how should a man find time to mend his clothes? They are stupid, dirty, ignorant, and lazy, ready to be made the slaves of any man--and they are the stuff of the

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<sup>108</sup>"Khiva On Canvas," The Spectator (London), 12 April, 1873, 470-71.

<sup>109</sup>R. Whiteing, 1899, 12.

civic population of Turkestan. One glance at them shows how a handful of Russians hold Central Asia down.<sup>110</sup>

Other critics praised Vereshchagin as an Orientalist "par excellence," by revealing the splendors and mysteries of "the extreme East," delighting in his representations of novel "types": Mongolians, Uzbeks, Afghan riders and dervishes.<sup>111</sup> It is important to point out that events such as the Russian conquest of Central Asia were historically recent for these critics, so that they tended to treat his works as documents of pictorial journalism.

Despite his fame, Vereshchagin was criticized in the 1880's and 1890's, for his ostentatious exhibitions.<sup>112</sup> He was accused of using exotic materials to cover up a lack of artistic proficiency. G. Loukomski, in his History of Modern Russian Painting 1840-1940, suggests that Vereshchagin was engaged in publicity stunts.<sup>113</sup> He regarded him as a propagandist and a slave to "ideological Realism,"

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<sup>110</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, (1881): 675-676.

<sup>111</sup>Helen Zimmern, "An Eastern Painter," The Art Journal (January 1885): 9-12; (February 1885): 38-42.

<sup>112</sup>His exhibitions were accompanied by special affects, dimmed electric lighting; Russian songs played on piano and sumptuous Indian and Oriental hangings and carpets. "The Fine Arts," The Critic (17 November, 1888): 246-247.

<sup>113</sup>G. Loukomski, History of Modern Russian Painting 1840-1940, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1943).

rather than art. The question was framed thus by an American critic: "Is it art, morality, sermonism, painting or prayer?--[or] The prayer of the despairing Russian pessimist?"<sup>114</sup>

In Russia, one of the earliest pre-revolutionary monographs on the artist was Feodor Bulgatov's (1852-1908) Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin i ego proizvedeni (V. V. Vereshchagin and His Works), 1905.<sup>115</sup> This is a very thorough and detailed work written within one year of the artist's death. It includes much original material, but remains largely biographical rather than interpretive in its approach.

Soviet scholarship generally focused on Vereshchagin's sympathy with the common people, the rank and file as the chief motion force behind war. The principal Soviet scholar on Vereshchagin is Andrei Lebedev who has written a number of works on the artist including revised editions of his original work V.V. Vereshchagin, 1938. The most recent edition, written in 1987, includes a summary article and

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<sup>114</sup>"The Vereshchagin Exhibition at the American Art Galleries," The Critic (17 November, 1888): 246.

<sup>115</sup>Feodor Bulgatov, Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin i ego proizvedeniia, 2-oe izd. (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorina, 1905).

list of illustrations in English, reflecting the growing interest in Russian art in the West.<sup>116</sup>

Lebedev concentrates on the artist's ideas of liberty and democracy as the motto of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century and his drive to expose social oppression: "One cannot fail to notice Vereshchagin's preoccupation with the life of common people. In his oeuvre there are a good number of portraits of paupers he saw in his travels..."<sup>117</sup> He views Vereshchagin's Trilogy of Executions as the artist's denouncement of the cruel suppression of those who rise up to change social systems based on injustice.<sup>118</sup>

The same author compiled Vereshchagin's correspondence, Izbrannye pisma Vasilii V. Vereshchagin, 1981 and V.V. Vereshchagin i V.V. Stasov, 1953, letters to the art critic Vladimir Stasov, who handled Vereshchagin's affairs

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<sup>116</sup>A K. Lebedev, Vasilii Vasil'evich Vereshchagin (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1987).

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>118</sup>Vereshchagin painted a series of three public executions, A Crucifixion at the Time of the Romans (1887), Blowing from Guns in British India (Ca. 1884), [known in Soviet scholarship by the title, Suppression of a Rebellion in India by the British,] and Execution of Nihilists in Russia (1884-85). In the catalog to the New York Exhibition in 1889-90, Vereshchagin listed these as a series with the caption, "Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth."

at home during his frequent travels abroad.<sup>119</sup> Since Vereshchagin's autobiographies tend to be fictionalized, the correspondence with Stasov is useful for an insight into his difficulties with the Russian authorities. A recent work by E. V. Zavadskaia, Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin, has very good color illustrations of the artist's paintings including close up details of his technique.<sup>120</sup>

V. Sadoven in his work V.V. Vereshchagin, comes closest to commenting on the artist's subjective portrayal of the Orient.<sup>121</sup> He states that the series known as Barbarians (part of the Turkestan series) is not a documentary serial, but rather "an expression of the painter's creative fantasy about the Turkestan war and the customs of the feudal East."<sup>122</sup> He bases his observation on the fact that Vereshchagin called this series a "poem,"

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<sup>119</sup>V.V. Stasov (1824-1906) was a leading Russian art historian and critic of art and music. He believed that contemporary progressive art should be based on a combination of Realism with Slavic themes. Stasov provided invaluable aid and support to Vereshchagin during his difficulties with the Russian authorities.

<sup>120</sup>Evgeniia Vladimirovna Zavadskaia, Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin (Moskow: Iskusstvo, 1986).

<sup>121</sup>V. Sadoven, V.V. Vereshchagin (Moskow: Izdat. Tretiakovskoi galerei, 1950).

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 22.



however, rather than on a critical discussion of Orientalism in the artist's work.

The most recent critical work on the artist in English is V.V. Vereshchagin: Artist at War, 1993, by Vahan Barooshian, a work which introduces the artist to the western reader while concentrating primarily on the controversial war paintings.<sup>123</sup> The author addresses the enigma of Vereshchagin's lack of recognition in the western world since 1904. Although this study focuses on the artist within the social, political and military context, it fails to analyze his work within an Orientalist framework. A far less thorough and extensive work, concentrating on the Indian period, is Realistic Art of Vereschagin by Sunil Kar, 1981.<sup>124</sup> The approach of this study is reminiscent of the Marxist tone of Soviet works, emphasizing Vereshchagin's position against what is referred to as "predatory war and colonial oppression."<sup>125</sup> The author fails, however, to address the question of Vereshchagin's contradictory participation in wars and his defense of Russian colonial policy.

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<sup>123</sup>Barooshian, 1993.

<sup>124</sup>Sunil Kar, Realistic Art of Vereschagin, (Calcutta, India: Nava Yug Publishers, 1981)

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 9.

It is ironic that Vereshchagin should have been most famous for his war paintings, since it is probably his reputation as an anti-war artist that ran counter to Bolshevik ideology during the Soviet period, and accounted for his lack of recognition in the west in an era of World Wars. While Vereshchagin is most famous as a war painter who reformed the genre of battle painting in Russian art, a large part of his work was devoted to Orientalist genre scenes including the portrayal of what he believed to be the barbaric and feudal social conditions in Muslim Central Asia.

Although there have been many recent critical works on Orientalism in nineteenth century art, the whole question of Orientalism in Russian art has been largely ignored. It will be shown that Vereshchagin was not simply an artist "at war," but an artist in whom Realist concerns overlap with Orientalism. But what is Orientalism? Chapter Three will discuss definitions of Orientalism in nineteenth century art, and the different methodologies for the study of Orientalism in art history. Chapter Four will consider Russian Orientalism as a discourse of Russian colonial expansion into Central Asia. Finally, in Chapter Five Vereshchagin's Central Asian works, will be examined within an Orientalist context, demonstrating how he created an

Orientalist discourse coinciding with the apogee of Russian colonial expansion into Central Asia.

## CHAPTER THREE

## DISCUSSION OF ORIENTALISM AS A DISCOURSE IN ART

What is Orientalism and why research Orientalism in art? An Orientalist is frequently referred to as a student of Oriental languages, religions and history. The term Orientalism as it is used in this study, however, may be defined as a European construction of the Orient in literature and the visual arts, which had its roots in the travel of Europeans to the far-off lands of the Middle East during the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>126</sup> Orientalism as a body of subject matter in art belongs to the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century Orientalism differs from previous encounters between East and West, in its emphasis on documentation, made possible by increasing ease of

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<sup>126</sup>Contacts between East and West in the arts were by no means limited to the 18th and 19th centuries. The Napoleonic campaigns of 1798-99, and political and territorial aspirations of Britain and France, led to an increased European interest in Islamic lands. For a detailed study of Oriental influences on western art covering a more extensive time period, see Europa und der Orient, 800-1900, Exhibition Catalog, (Berlin: Bertelsmann Lexikon Verlag, 1989). See also, Donald A. Rosenthal, "Before the Romantics," chapter in The Near East in French Painting 1800-1880, Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester (Rochester, New York: 1982), 13-25.

travel to the Orient, which brought the Orient into the realm of possibility.<sup>127</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, Orientalist painters were preceded by writers, whose travel to the Orient can be seen as an extension of the European Grand Tour of Italy in the late eighteenth century. These writers provided a ready travel itinerary, as well as a rich source of Oriental motifs for painters throughout the nineteenth century. The Romantic artists of the early nineteenth century, such as Eugène Delacroix, were strongly influenced by the English poet Lord Byron's Oriental romances, such as The Gaiour, 1824, The Bride of Abydos, and Sardanapalus, 1821.<sup>128</sup> Delacroix's painting on this last theme, The Death of Sardanapalus, 1844, illustrates the "Byronic" or Dionysian themes of eroticism, sadism and the cruelty of the Orient, within an historical context.

The novelist François-René de Chateaubriand was one of the first French writers to visit the Holy Land in 1806-07, and his work Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem, 1811, layed

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<sup>127</sup>For a study of nineteenth century travel to the Middle East, see Caroline Bugler, "Innocents Abroad: Nineteenth-Century Artists and Travellers in the Near East and North Africa," in Mary Anne Stevens, ed., The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse: European Painters in North Africa and the Near East, (London: Royal Academy of Arts and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984).

<sup>128</sup>Rosenthal, 32.

the foundation for a succession of writers, to retrace his footsteps in the Orient. These include Alphonse de Lamartine's Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages pendant un voyage en Orient, 1835, Théophile Gautier's Voyage pittoresque en Algérie et Constantinople, 1853,<sup>129</sup> and Gérard de Nerval's Voyage en Orient, 1851.<sup>130</sup>

The phrase "Orient" as used in the nineteenth century, referred to the geographical area of the Islamic Middle East, north Africa, India, Asia Minor and Central Asia. Orientalism, however, is not about the art forms in these areas; it is not to be confused with Oriental Art. Orientalism in the nineteenth century was rather an encounter between East and West, which may be characterized as a European search for the "exotic" in remote lands. This exoticism is generally viewed as a facet of Romantic escapism from the Industrial Revolution, as the introduction of color, splendor and fantasy into the Salon. The focus of this search for the "exotic" onto the Islamic Orient, was due to the belief it could satisfy the west's

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<sup>129</sup>The Romantic poet Théophile Gautier was a strong supporter of the Orientalists and an important critic at the Paris Salons.

<sup>130</sup>Philippe Jullian, The Orientalists: European Painters of Eastern Scenes, (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977), 31-44. For a critical discussion of Orientalism in literature see Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

urge for a wide range of exotic experience, and act as a backdrop for an artist's wildest imaginings, all of which lay outside the rigid norms of nineteenth century social behavior.<sup>131</sup>

The range of "exoticism" sought by the Orientalists encompasses a diversity of subject matter which may be loosely classified into genres in Orientalist painting. Romantic artists of the early nineteenth century favored historical, Byronic themes such as Delacroix's Massacre of Chios (1824), or Death of Sardanapalus (1844). This genre had less appeal towards the middle of the century, when a Realist approach to everyday subject matter took its place. The genre of military Orientalism, such as Horace Vernet's Battle of Somah (1839), illustrates the heroic and patriotic aspects of French territorial expansion into North Africa.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>The focus of the "exotic" on the Islamic world, can be partly explained by a fascination with the fantasy tales of The Thousand and One Nights, and the old religious rivalry between Christianity and Islam going back to the Crusades.

<sup>132</sup>Russian painters who worked in this genre are: Vassili Timm (1820-1895), studied under Horace Vernet and accompanied him to Algeria, and later traveled to the Caucasus; Joseph Desarnod (1788-1840) born in Russia of French descent, studied under Antoine Gros in Paris. He painted a battle painting for the Tsar's Winter Palace entitled, Borodino. Thieme-Becker Künstler Lexikon 1932 edition. (Leipzig: verlag von E.A. Seemann, 1932), 178; 104. Later examples of this genre are Vasily Surikov's Ermak's Conquest of Siberia (1880's), and Ilya Repin's The

A new genre of ethnographic biblical painting, incorporating the newfound knowledge of Oriental "types" became popular toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Examples are Horace Vernet's Judah and Tamar (1840), and Alexander Ivanov's Christ Appearing to the People (ca. 1840). Ivanov's work was based on sketches of Arabs which he made on a trip to Palestine. This genre was controversial at the time, because of the Realist, and non-idealized treatment of biblical subject matter.<sup>133</sup>

The most popular genres of Orientalist painting at the Paris salons, were the harems, Turkish baths and dancing Almehs. Jean-Léon Gérôme, as well others, produced an endless variety on this theme. In these works erotic fantasies were projected onto Oriental women, such as those in slave markets, a genre which allowed for the free representation of nudes, and which illustrates erotic fantasies of male dominance and female submission, and the cruelty of Oriental life. The predominance of Orientalist works in these genres, demonstrates the European painter-

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Zaporozhian Cossaks Writing a Reply to the Turkish Sultan (1891).

<sup>133</sup>Like his predecessor Ivanov, Vasilii Vereshchagin traveled to Palestine in the 1880's, touring and sketching the holy sites and a diversity of ethnic "types" for later use in biblical paintings, which he interpreted in a Realist, or non-traditional approach. See Chapter One, page 44.



traveler's prurient fascination for the veiled and unobtainable women of the East and a desire to penetrate the most secret and intimate domains of Oriental life.

Other popular genres at the Orientalist salons included deserts and caravansarei, a genre which could be both picturesque and melancholic. Gérôme's Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert (1857), illustrates the Realist Orientalist concerns with ethnography and the treatment of light, while at the same time exploiting the "picturesque." Eugène Fromentin's Land of Thirst (1869) is an example of the genre of the despairing desert in which men die of thirst. Ruins of past civilizations in the desert may be classified as a separate genre, an imagery which creates contrasts between the vast and timeless desert and the impermanence of past civilizations. This genre may be linked to the Romantic taste for picturesque ruins in the late eighteenth century.<sup>134</sup>

Religious manifestations of Islam were also popular, Gérôme painted many works of Muezzins calling to prayer, and the interior of mosques which provided a rich diet of exotic detail. A fanatic and superstitious imagery of mystical dervishes and Islamic religious processions was

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<sup>134</sup>For example, the sham gothic ruins in English gardens built in the eighteenth century, such as at Hagley Park, Worcestershire, England.

also represented, such as Delacroix's The Fanatics of Tangier (1838), which portrays the wild antics of a Sufi sect.

Finally, scenes of Oriental violence include many genres, including Lion Hunts, a subject favored by Delacroix and Horace Vernet, but also treated by Gérôme. This genre represents the Dionysian characteristics of the Orient, and perhaps illustrates Rousseau's call for man to be closer to nature. Violence was a genre in itself in Orientalist art, evoking an imagery of the cruel and barbaric East. This is illustrated by the theme of decapitation in Henri Regnault's Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Granada, a painting in which splendid and intricate architectural detail contrasts with the bloody nature of the execution, so that violence in itself becomes an aspect of the "exotic."

Who then should be classified as an Orientalist in nineteenth century art? A distinction should be drawn between an artist whose work was fundamentally influenced by the experience of at least one visit to the Near East, and those artists who incorporated Orientalist genres into the broad range of their work. The French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, as well as Horace Vernet, Gustave Guillaumet, and the British artist John Frederick Lewis may be defined as

Orientalists, since they chose to return frequently to the Orient, in fact and in subject matter.<sup>135</sup>

Other artists, such as Eugène Delacroix visited the Orient only once in their careers; and although the Orient exerted an influence on his works such as The Death of Sardanapalus (1844), The Women of Algiers (1834) and The Lion Hunt (1855), among others, illustrating a wide range of genres, the Oriental influence does not account for the totality of his oeuvre.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, the French artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres was fascinated throughout his career with the Orientalist genres of Turkish baths and Odalisques, despite the fact that he had never set foot in the Orient. Ingres used these genres to enrich and broaden his range of subject matter, which he treated in a Neoclassical style, rather than as a dominant factor in his oeuvre.

According to this distinction, Vasilii Vereshchagin should not be considered as an *Orientalist* in the same sense as his master Gérôme. Although he had many contacts

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<sup>135</sup>Mary Anne Stevens, "Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914," in Mary Anne Stevens, ed., 1984, 15-23.

<sup>136</sup>Delacroix visited North Africa in 1832, relatively late in his career, and although this trip provided a rich source of Oriental motifs for his work, his repertoire included portraits, animal paintings, still lifes, literary and mythological subject matter.

with the East throughout his career, traveling to Central Asia, India, Palestine, Syria and Japan, he devoted a large part of his career to other issues, namely exposing negligence and corruption in the Russian military, showing how war causes apathy to death and brutality, and exposing the means by which establishments put down social uprisings by public executions.

It is his early work in Central Asia, namely the Turkestan paintings, and the work from his Indian trip in 1874-76, that should be examined within the context of Orientalism. Vereshchagin's involvement in a war of Russian expansion into Central Asia, produced in a body of work, which can be defined as Orientalist, nineteenth century Russian attitudes of cultural superiority, were projected onto his encounter with the east, consciously or subconsciously. This work incorporates Orientalist genres, overlaid with deeper meanings, referred to in this study as a "mode of discourse" about the Orient.<sup>137</sup> Vereshchagin's contradictory attitudes, and rich complexity make it more appropriate to view him as an artist in whom a particular brand of Russian Critical Realism overlaps with Orientalism.

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<sup>137</sup>Edward Said uses this term in his work Orientalism, and acknowledges that it is based on Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse. Edward Said, 1979, 3.

The methodology which will be used to examine Orientalism as a "mode of discourse" in the work of Vasilii Vereshchagin, is a critical perspective developed by Edward Said in his book Orientalism.<sup>138</sup> Said's book deals with Orientalism in literature and travel writings, rather than the visual arts, but Linda Nochlin provides an effective example of how his critical methodology may be applied to painting in her article, "The Imaginary Orient."<sup>139</sup>

Orientalism has been defined by Edward Said as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient."<sup>140</sup> He sees Orientalism not as an "airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment....a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient."<sup>141</sup>

In this view Orientalism cannot be perceived as a dialogue of equality between cultures, since the westerner's superior standing allows him to enter into a "whole series of possible relationships with the Orient

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<sup>138</sup>Edward Said, 1979.

<sup>139</sup>Linda Nochlin, 1989.

<sup>140</sup>Edward Said, 3.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 6.

without ever losing the upper hand."<sup>142</sup> In other words, Orientalism in art is a textual encounter between East and West in which the Western artist imposes his (often prejudicial) viewpoint on the Orient.

Orientalism, therefore, tells us about eurocentric ways of thinking; it is concerned with a European way of seeing the "other," the non-European, at a time when Europe was expanding and creating empires in the East: the French in North Africa, the British in Egypt and the Russians in Central Asia. It is a language of "cultural otherness" or marginalization, in which the European traveler, writer or artist is at the "center," and the "other" that he inscribes is always at the periphery. Orientalism is a way of "constructing" myths and stereotypes about this "cultural other," which reinforces the European's essential feelings of superiority and therefore justifies his "civilizing mission" in the colonial context. As stated by Homi K. Bhabha:

The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>143</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Out

Examples of this can be found not only in literature and travelogues, but also in the visual arts, which, if we accept Said's theory, must be examined using the same criteria. Linda Nochlin suggests that Orientalism is a "strategy of concealment" in art that should be interpreted from a "critical" rather than a "celebratory" point of view. She proposes in addition that this task can best be undertaken by "analysts of visual propaganda, rather than analysts of mainstream art history."<sup>144</sup>

In contrast, Donald Rosenthal, an art historian whom Nochlin considers to be "celebratory" and therefore not "critical" in his approach, questions whether the coincidence of Orientalism in nineteenth century art with "the apogee of European Colonialist expansion" should invalidate its appreciation at a time when colonialism has been discredited.<sup>145</sup> Rosenthal grudgingly admits that the Orientalists projected their fantasies of eroticism and violence onto the Oriental "other;" he commends them however for their genuine admiration (in most cases) of the

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There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russell Ferguson et al., The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Documentary sources in Contemporary Art (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992) 75.

<sup>144</sup>Nochlin, 1989, 57.

<sup>145</sup>Rosenthal, 9.

Near East and for their belief that the Arab was "closer to nature" and therefore more "noble" in the sense of Rousseau. Ultimately for Rosenthal, only "aesthetic and historical" criteria are what really count in an art historical study of Orientalism.

The different methodologies for studying Orientalism in art range from what Mary Anne Stevens refers to as

The strictly art historical issues, through the study of art within its cultural context, to the analysis of art as an aspect of politics, whereby the encounter (of East and West) is seen as the domination of one culture by another.<sup>146</sup>

But what are these "strictly art historical issues" referred to by Stevens and Rosenthal, and how should they be formulated? As we have seen, they involve the formalist grouping of Orientalist works of art into different genres. Does it suffice simply to describe the genres of Orientalist art without considering what we may refer to as the colonial stereotype? An Orientalist painting such as Jean-Leon Gérôme's Slave Market (1866, see Fig. 6), is more than a genre, it is what Said refers to as a "textual enterprise." Such texts with their stereotypic imagery of lust, cruelty, and feudalism, act as what Homi Bhabha

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<sup>146</sup>Mary Anne Stevens, "Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914," in Mary Anne Stevens, ed., 1984, 23.



refers to as the "signal points of identification and alienation....scenes of fear and desire [in Orientalist art],"<sup>147</sup> accounting for the Orientalists' delight in taboo subjects such as slave markets, bath scenes, cruel tortures, executions and fanatic religious processions.

Using Said's critical perspective, therefore, Orientalist paintings, may be "read" in a contextual manner which goes beyond mere formalist considerations. A harem scene, for example, can be classified as a specific genre of Orientalist art, labeled Romantic or Realist based on stylistic and historical considerations, and the formal characteristics may be analyzed in terms of color, composition, light, etc. Orientalism as a critical perspective, however, enables the art historian to use these very characteristics, to explain the Orientalist discourse created in the work: its social significance and political uses, in this case as a sign of power of Russian conquerors over Central Asian Muslims, in the work of Vasilii Vereshchagin. It is this critical methodology which enables us to read the pictorial "devices" used in Orientalism to create the colonial stereotype.

The colonial stereotype brings forth the voyeuristic "colonial gaze," which is in itself a sign of the power

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<sup>147</sup>Homi Bhabha, 78.

differential in the encounter between East and West within the Imperialist context. One of the principal themes expressed by the colonial stereotype in "post-conquest" Orientalist art,<sup>148</sup> and one that is central to the work of Vasilii Vereshchagin, is the device of idleness, an imagery of neglect and decay, often equated by Orientalists with barbarism.

The barbarism associated with Muslim culture is expressed by such devices as the use of decaying architecture, broken tiles and peeling plaster, evident in the work of Gérôme and Vereshchagin. Many of these paintings portray an idle crumbling Orient, perceived by Europeans to be a life of pleasure where Arabs gossip outside decaying buildings, smoking suspicious substances while voluptuous beauties loll in harems, bathing, playing cards, gossiping--in short the very antithesis of the Western idea of progress. This perception, perhaps should be seen as an aspect of Romantic escapism from the ever faster turning wheels of the Industrial Revolution. By creating this view of the Orient, the West emphasizes its move forward through scientific progress, while it watches the stagnant East decay. In addition, the Realist style of

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<sup>148</sup>Art which was produced after 1850, the date of the final subjugation of Algeria by the French, and 1867, the date of the Russian conquest of Turkestan.

these paintings serves to authenticate this imagery of decay. It acts as a smoke screen of objectivity, thereby portraying a camouflaged documentary record of the East.

As outlined above, Orientalism as a form of the "exotic," incorporates the picturesque, mystical Orient. This very "exoticism," however, is frequently overlaid with other meanings: empire, authority, colonial superiority, and sexual fantasy, all of which act as contexts for the generation of power relations between East and West. The study of Orientalism in nineteenth century European art, should be examined both in terms of art historical genres of the "exotic," and on a deeper level, as a critical perspective for revealing the hidden strategies of concealment in the European painter-traveler's construction of the Orient.

## CHAPTER FOUR

RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM AS A DISCOURSE ON RUSSIAN COLONIAL  
EXPANSION INTO CENTRAL ASIA.

"What for? What future? What is the need of the future seizure of Asia? What's our business there? This is necessary because Russia is not only in Europe, but also in Asia; because the Russian is not only a European, but also an Asiatic. Not only that: in our coming destiny, perhaps it is precisely Asia that represents our main way out...In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, whereas in Asia we shall go as masters. In Europe we were Asiatic, whereas in Asia we, too, are Europeans. Our civilizing mission in Asia will bribe our spirit and drive us thither.  
Feodor M. Dostoevsky, 1881<sup>149</sup>

If Orientalism is to be interpreted as a Western European discourse on "the other," then (from the above passage,) which is typical of a wide literature, we see that Russian Orientalism is as much a discourse on the "self" as the "other." Russian writers were continually defining and redefining themselves vis-à-vis the East, and the Orientalist discourse became, to some extent, a

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<sup>149</sup>Feodor M. Dostoevsky, "The Diary of a Writer." Quoted in Wayne Vucinich, ed., Russia and Asia: Essays on The Influence of Russia on The Asian Peoples, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 324.

dialogue on Russian national identity. The duality of East and West in Russian culture posed a very unique problem to Russian thinkers: were Russians fundamentally European or Asiatic? Unsure whether they belonged to East or West, Russians in the 19th century wrote without the secure identity of Westerners. Unlike Europeans for whom "the Orient" was a far-off distant place, Russians looked out at the vast horizons of Asia; the borders between Russia and Asia seemed to be blurred and unfixed. The Orient was used by Russian writers and artists to find their "self," to work out their attitudes about their place in the world. It was a way of throwing into relief certain assumptions that Russians made about their identity, their army, and cultural superiority. "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."<sup>150</sup> The experience of the Orient, caused a certain displacement among these artists and writers, so that they no longer felt completely at home in Russian society.<sup>151</sup> This perhaps explains the complexity of

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<sup>150</sup>Edward Said, 1-2.

<sup>151</sup>For an analysis of how the Orient changes Russian perceptions about the East, particularly in the work of Pushkin and Lermontov, see Katya Hokanson, "Russian Orientalism" (Masters thesis, Stanford University, 1987), 56-77.

Vasilii Vereshchagin's attitudes to Russia, which haunted him all his life.<sup>152</sup>

Although Peter the Great attempted to resolve this question in the seventeenth century in favor of Europe, creating the new capital city of St. Petersburg as a "window on the West," doubts as to Russia's position regarding Europe persisted into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century the debate took the form of Slavophiles versus Westerners. Slavophilism was a movement of growing Russian nationalism which, while rejecting Europe, still looked toward the East from a "superior," European viewpoint.<sup>153</sup> The West of the Sea and the East of the Steppe became symbols of two very different outlooks. This paradoxical attitude toward the East in Russian thought is sometimes referred to as "Aziatchina" (Asiatism) and has been described by Wayne Vucinich as

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<sup>152</sup>Throughout his life Vereshchagin was torn between his ties to the military, his patriotic participation in wars, and his anti-war stance and reputation as "the apostle of peace."

<sup>153</sup>For an account of the Slavophile Movement see T. G. Stavrou, Art and Culture in Nineteenth Century Russia, (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1983) and Abbot Gleason, Young Russia: the Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860's, (New York: Viking Press) 1980.

an ambivalent Russian term meaning the almost unlimited capacity among Russians to identify themselves with Asia while showing their contempt for the Asian peoples and civilizations as utterly barbaric.<sup>154</sup>

Russia saw herself as the last Christian bastion facing her hereditary enemies: Turks and Muslims. Russians shared a resentment to the Mongol rule which they experienced for two and a half centuries from 1238 to 1480. Similarly, it was Russia, who in the name of Pan-Slavic unity, went to defend the Slavs in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. Radical elements in mid-nineteenth century Russian thought, known as Populists, came to blame Russian autocracy on the "Tartar yoke." In the 1860's, the influence of revolutionary thinkers such as the émigré Alexander Herzen on progressive artists at the Academy, directed them to equate Tartar despotism with Tsarism and serfdom. It was believed that the true "Russian soul" was free from tyranny; in other words the Mongol (Oriental) elements in the Russian makeup were to blame for this

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<sup>154</sup>Wayne Vucinich, ed., Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on The Asian Peoples, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 2.

despotism.<sup>155</sup> When Vereshchagin painted his famous Apotheosis of War, in 1871, and dedicated it to "all great conquerors past and present," he was similarly equating Tsarism with despotism.<sup>156</sup>

What is referred to as the "Russian National Idea"<sup>157</sup> in nineteenth-century Russian philosophy is the messianic view of Russia as the redeemer of the West: that only Russia as the "Christian part of Asia," has a unique historical mission to redeem mankind through herself. The Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev referred to this when he said, "Russia's future word is the word which, in tune with God's eternal truth and with human freedom will proclaim the reconciliation of East and West."<sup>158</sup>

Although Russians were less secure in their identity vis-à-vis the East, in the early nineteenth century Russia

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<sup>155</sup>Interestingly, the early twentieth century movement known as the Eurasians, turned toward the East, the Mongol elements in the Russian makeup, as a self-destructive force to clear out dead western culture and make way for the new. The Symbolist poet, Valery Brysuov, illustrates this tendency in his poem Coming of the Huns, (1903).

<sup>156</sup>For an analysis of this painting see Chapter 4, the Turkestan series.

<sup>157</sup>This is a canonical idea in Nineteenth century Russian philosophy.

<sup>158</sup>For a complete discussion of this topic see Walter Schubart, Russia and Western Man, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1950), 32.



was becoming more and more powerful in the Caucasus and Black Sea regions.<sup>159</sup> Since Europeans came to regard themselves as a truly superior race only when they had established very secure colonial power bases, certain Russian writers began to consider themselves crucial to the Orientalist cause. Russia's unique geographical position on the borders of Asia led to the belief that Russia should be the special "Vermittlerin" (mediator/interpreter) between Europe and Asia. In 1811, Goethe wrote to the Russian Orientalist scholar, S. S. Uvarov:

Was Ägypten einst für die Volker im Horizonte des Mittelländischen Meeres war: die Brücke, über welche ostasiatische Cultur zu ihnen gelangte, kann Russland in einen höheren Potenz für Europa und Asien zugleich werden.<sup>160</sup>

This special geographical and privileged position toward the East has somehow justified Russia's colonial expansion in its own eyes as being less "oppressive" than

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<sup>159</sup>For an account of Russia's expansion into the Caucasus and its protracted struggle against Muslim mountain peoples led by the imam Shamil see Taras Hunczak, ed., Russian Imperialism: From Ivan the Great to the Revolution, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1932) and Dietrich Geyer Russian Imperialism, 1987.

<sup>160</sup>"What Egypt once was for the peoples in the horizon of the Mediterranean, the bridge over which East Asian culture reached them, Russia can be in a higher capacity for both Europe and Asia." Goethe, Goethe und Uwarow und ihr Briefwechsel, (St. Petersburg, 1888), 10, quoted in Hokanson, 43.

that of the Europeans. The Russian believed that he was a "conqueror" in the name of the higher purpose of Pan-Slavism. Russian writings have created the perception that colonized peoples were peacefully and voluntarily assimilated, and in addition that Russia's expansion over land rather than over sea is somehow "less imperialistic" than that of the European empires.<sup>161</sup>

This special role as "mediator" between Europe and Asia designated Russia as the "procurer" of knowledge about the East for Europe. Goethe in his letter to Uvarov goes on to state:

Den Bewohnern Europas kann Russland, sobald es will, alles das aus Asien zuführen und verschaffen, was ihnen zur vollständigen Kenntniss dieses Wiegenlandes ihrer selbst und aller ihrer Bildung noch mangelt".<sup>162</sup>

Vasilii Vereshchagin seems to have seen himself in this special role of "procurer,"<sup>163</sup> for he was as famous

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<sup>161</sup>This idea is to some extent a creation of Soviet historiography.

<sup>162</sup>"Russia can supply and procure for the inhabitants of Europe all the things from Asia that are lacking for their complete knowledge of this cradle land of their self and all their education." Quoted in Hokanson, 44.

<sup>163</sup>The Orientalist scholar Sergei Uvarov was immensely influential on the growth of Orientalism as a scholarly discipline, and on Russia's growing interest in the East. He was President of the Academy of Sciences (1818-1855) where he promoted scholarly investigation of the East, and Minister of National Enlightenment (1833-1849), a position

for his collections of "Oriental memorabilia" as he was for his paintings. Richard Muther in his History of Modern Painting, 1894, gives us this account of one of his exhibitions:

The exhibition of his pictures will be remembered ....the hall was decorated with Indian and Tibetan carpets, embroideries and housings, weapons of every description, images and sacred pictures, musical instruments, antlers, bear-skins, and stuffed Indian vultures.<sup>164</sup>

Although most of the Orientalists collected curios and exotic props on their trips, Vereshchagin seems to have been a particularly prolific collector. His exhibition at the American Art Galleries in New York, in 1888-89 lists no less than seventy one such objects d'art.<sup>165</sup> It is as if his collection of exotica allowed him to recreate the "essence" of the East, automatically conferring on him the title of "expert."<sup>166</sup> His reputation as "procurer"

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which he used to direct Russian culture to study the East. Vereshchagin would have been familiar with this growing interest in the East among the Russian intelligentsia.

<sup>164</sup>Richard Muther, The History of Modern Painting, (London: J. M. Dent and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1894), 261-262.

<sup>165</sup>Exhibition of the Works of Vassili Verestchagin: Illustrated Descriptive Catalogue, (New York: American Art Association, 1889-1890), 72-75.

<sup>166</sup>Collecting of Eastern artifacts ties in with the contemporary interest in ethnography.

reinforces this view of the privileged geographical position of Russia towards Asia.

In this role of "mediator" between East and West, Russians saw themselves as superior to other Europeans, and as having a "civilizing mission." It must be emphasized, however, that Russia's interest in Asia and the Middle East was inspired by Western European models of Orientalist discourse. Russian Orientalism in the nineteenth century was a Western mode of thinking. In spite of Russia's geographical links with Asia, "the Orient" was viewed through European eyes. Western literary models such as Chateaubriand, Goethe and Byron inspired the popularity of Oriental tales and fables and acted as the initial "foundation" from which the great Russian writer Pushkin was able to create an Orientalist canon in his tales of the Caucasus.<sup>167</sup>

In the Orientalist tradition each artist or writer felt a need to retrace the footsteps of a previous Orientalist.<sup>168</sup> Russian Orientalism in the arts built upon the canon of Pushkin and the poet Lermontov. Russian artists and musicians drew directly on these original

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<sup>167</sup>For a detailed account of the development of Orientalism in Russian literature see Hokanson, 1987.

<sup>168</sup>See Edward Said, "Orientalist Structures and Restructures" in Orientalism, 1979, 111-197.

models, as well as on foreign sources for their inspiration.<sup>169</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that Vereshchagin's first trip to the "Orient" was to the "South," to the Caucasus of Pushkin and Lermontov.<sup>170</sup> In much of his later work and writings Vereshchagin recreates Pushkin's imagery, and in a sense, is like Pushkin in that he is was the first Russian artists to explore the Central Asian steppe.<sup>171</sup> In Pushkin's 1835 work Journey to Arzrum, the writer reacts with disdain to a Kalmyk girl who smokes tobacco in a pipe and offers him some horrible tasting tea. Vereshchagin recreates this "Orientalist" stereotype when he writes about visiting the Kalmyks on the borders

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<sup>169</sup>Orientalism in modern Russian music is a huge topic on its own. It is sufficient to point out here the prolific use of Oriental motifs originating with Glinka's Ruslan and Ludmilla, 1847 and most noticeable in the work of the composer Rimsky-Korsakoff. His opera Le Coq D'Or was inspired by Pushkin's Tale of the Golden Cockerel, which Russianized Washington Irving's 1832 Tales of the Alhambra. Like Vereshchagin's work, the "Orient" for Pushkin and Korsakoff was a place where political satire directed at the Tsarist regime could be subtly elaborated and played out. For an analysis of Orientalism in Le Coq D'Or, see Peter Cook, The Golden Cockerel, (London: Peter Cook Ltd., 1985).

<sup>170</sup>The Orient for Russia conflates "south" (the Caucasus, Transcaucasia and Central Asia) with "East" as a place to escape to, a place of freedom, away from censorship and the suspicious eyes of the authorities.

<sup>171</sup>Pushkin's writings were of major influence on all aspects of nineteenth century Russian culture, and would have been familiar to artists.

with China on his second trip to Asia. He, like Pushkin, was attracted by the Oriental beauty of the "handsome women," their "pitch-black hair and splendid heads" and, like Pushkin, he made a great deal out of the women smoking pipes:

I was struck by the expression of the faces of these women, which is halfway between anxiety and melancholy, especially in the case of the younger ones. This may be in part due to the tobacco and opium, which they take in large quantities. Opium, being so costly, is out of the reach of some of them; but tobacco is smoked by all alike, great and small, men and women: the young coquette has her pipe in her mouth as she does her hair; the mistress of the house has her pipe in her mouth as she goes about her domestic duties-sewing, cooking, gossiping, and what not; and the old grandmother, as she sits with great spectacles on her nose and her little grandson on her lap, has her pipe in her mouth.<sup>172</sup>

While Pushkin became disgusted with the pipe, and the horrible tasting tea the Kalmyk girl offered him, Vereshchagin experienced the same feeling, "I must confess that, when I was asked to sit down, it was not without a shudder that I seated myself on the little carpet."<sup>173</sup>

In Journey to Arzrum, Pushkin created a narrative including a traditional voyeuristic Turkish bath scene in

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<sup>172</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 180-184.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 184.

which he described Oriental women in various stages of undress.<sup>174</sup> Like Pushkin, Vereshchagin wrote about the "erotic" characteristics of the East: slave markets, seductive dancing boys called "batshi" and "handsome" Oriental women.<sup>175</sup> Unlike Western European Orientalists, however, Vereshchagin did not paint within this genre, except for: Selling of the Child Slave (1872, see Fig. 5) and Batsha and his Worshippers (1868, see Fig. 1), both of which will be discussed in Chapter Five.<sup>176</sup> It seems that this genre was problematic in the Russian visual arts because of its sensual overtones until the last two decades of the nineteenth century. It is associated in particular

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<sup>174</sup>Hokanson, 68.

<sup>175</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 99-110.

<sup>176</sup>The painting Batsha and His Worshippers, (1868) is reproduced in Bulgatov, 1905, 36. According to A. K. Lebedev, 1958, Vereshchagin destroyed the painting because of scandal aroused by its homosexual implications. The painting is mentioned in an article written by Nicholas Sobko, "Battle and Travel," The Magazine of Art 7 (1884): 184-191. According to this article the painting was exhibited in Paris in 1869. Barooshian, 1993, confirms that in late 1868 Vereshchagin brought all of his Turkestan works to Paris with the view to creating an exhibition, but that due to lack of interest he was only able to publish some of his sketches in French journals. I have found no further reference to this work in any of the major studies on Vereshchagin. In all likelihood this is one of the several paintings which Vereshchagin destroyed while in St. Petersburg due to severe criticism and scandal.

with the artistic production of the later St. Petersburg group of artists known as the "World of Art."<sup>177</sup>

One exception is the Academic painter of historical scenes Karl Briullov (1799-1853) who journeyed through Constantinople in 1835 collecting exotic props which he used in what Phillippe Julian refers to as "several, delightful conventional bath scenes."<sup>178</sup> One of these paintings is the Fountain at Bakhchisaray (1849, Pushkin Museum), a harem scene in Rococo style. For the main part, however, the lack of eroticism, whether overt or covert in Russian art of the nineteenth century, poses an interesting question, which can merely be raised in this thesis. It is possible that because of censorship, sexuality could be expressed openly in literature, which in a largely

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<sup>177</sup>"The World of Art" was a group of artists in St. Petersburg at the turn of the century. It is also the title of a journal published by the same group from 1898 to 1904. Their leader was the impresario Serge Diaghilev who organized the debut of the Ballets russes in Paris in 1910. To some extent the group's Art Nouveau aesthetic was a reaction to the "moralistic" art of the Wanderers, and they were criticized as being "decadent" and committed to the Western aesthetic of "art for art's sake." The costume and set designs created by the group, especially the artist Leon Bakst, were openly erotic within an "Orientalist" context; for example, the ballet Sheherazade based on the Thousand and One Arabian Nights took Paris by storm in 1910.

<sup>178</sup>Phillippe Julian, The Orientalists: European Painters of Eastern Scenes, (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977) 152.



illiterate society would have been read by a select élite, but not in painting, which could be "seen" by a much wider audience at the frequent exhibitions held in St. Petersburg.<sup>179</sup>

One of the reasons for the lack of openly erotic art in the 1860's and 1870's was the growing popularity of Russian genre painting with a "moralistic" outlook. The supporters of the critical Realist style with its emphasis on exposing social problems and corruption in Russian society had little patience for what they termed "decadent" art. Vasilii Vereshchagin was more interested in exposing what he criticized as the "degraded position of women in the East" than in projecting an image of the East as a place of "desire."<sup>180</sup>

The definition of the Orient as a place of fear and desire points to the suppression and striking absence of

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<sup>179</sup>This conservative attitude persisted into the Stalinist era, for example, a catalog of the Russian Museum, Leningrad written in 1935, describes a special room of such works as "old Academic art of the nobility that now [sic] became more intimate," State Russian Art Museum: Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings And Collections of Applied Art, ("n.p." 1935). These works, extremely controversial in the late-nineteenth century, include the Polish-Russian artist Semiradsky's Christ visits Martha and Konstantin Makovsky's Ceremony of the Kissing, based on the life of the former Boyars. According to the Catalog this painting had been banned from exhibition for fifteen years.

<sup>180</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 104-5.

this desire in Vereshchagin's work. In Orientalist art, sexual fantasy is superimposed onto the subjected culture as an indication of conquest and desire. We have only to look at the contemporary conflict in Bosnia Herzegovina to see the role of sex (in this case rape) and military plunder. In the work of Vereshchagin, the Orient is projected predominantly as a place of fear in which the genres of neglect, cruelty and barbarism play a primary role.<sup>181</sup>

With Russia's expansion into Central Asia artists such as Vereshchagin redefined the framework of the "Orient" in Russian art, within the context of its own territorial acquisitions. Vereshchagin, of course, did not confine himself to the boundaries of Russia's empire. He undertook an extended trip into British India, as well as Palestine, Syria and Japan at later dates. His trip to British India, cannot be divorced from Russia's larger imperial concerns,<sup>182</sup> because Russia's expansion into Central Asia was seen by the British as a threat to their empire in India, and the two nations became engaged in a constant

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<sup>181</sup>Some examples are Beggars in Samarkand, 1870, Presenting the Trophies, 1872 and Opium Eaters, 1868. These and other examples will be discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>182</sup>For an outline of Vereshchagin's travels see Chapter One above.

state of mutual suspicion and colonial maneuvers.<sup>183</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze the reasons for Russia's colonial expansion into Central Asia other than to provide some background for what Russia considered its "mission civilatrice," for this is the key to the particular Orientalist discourse which is reflected in Vereshchagin's early work.

Russia's expansion south into the Khanates of Central Asia, which border on Iran and Afghanistan, has been linked by many Western historians to its confrontation with European powers, especially the antagonism between England and Russia.<sup>184</sup> In this view, Russia's defeat in the Crimean War of 1854-6, in which the Western powers had allied themselves with Turkey against Russia, required some "compensation" for humiliation, especially in the eyes of the Slavophiles. Russia's colonial expansion into Central Asia, therefore, had a lot to do with Pan-Slavic ideology

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<sup>183</sup>See also Dietrich Geyer, Russian Imperialism, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 86-100.

<sup>184</sup>Soviet historiography before "Glasnost" prefers to analyze it within an economic "materialist" framework. For detailed studies on Russian colonial expansion, see Dietrich Geyer, 1987.; Wayne Vucinich, ed. Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972) and The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

and Russia's feeling of insecurity regarding its position vis-à-vis Europe.

Central Asia was a place where Russia could "flex its muscles," a place to play out the colonial game at little or no risk, since it involved relatively easy military victories over the local tribes. Russian conquests in Central Asia during the 1860's and 1870's were similar in many ways to the colonial expansion of Western powers at the same time. Military expeditions were undertaken by ambitious generals into a huge expanse of territory, where alien populations untouched by "modern culture" were brought under military control. The ideological justification was offered that "semi-barbaric tribes" were being civilized, and that Russia's behavior was no different from "all other civilized states" which found themselves in contact with wild, nomadic populations. There were, of course, additional economic factors; it was hoped that the expansion would open up trade routes with Asia and that these colonies would provide raw materials for the cotton and textile industries in the Russian heartland.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Vereshchagin frequently refers to the presence of merchants at the siege of Samarkand, "Russian merchants who had come to Samarcand [sic] with a view to opening commercial relations" Vereshchagin, 1888, 1. The fact that these merchants were on the very heels of the invasion seems to point to their important role.

Russia's expansion into Central Asia was a "southern" expansion toward Afghanistan, Persia and India. Eastern expansion was across the Kazakh steppe. During the period from 1864 to 1873 Russian armies conquered the Uzbek oasis states of Khokand, Bukhara and Khiva.<sup>186</sup> Bukhara and Khiva were made Russian protectorates. Without express order from St. Petersburg, General Cherniaev advanced into Bukhara in 1866, and in reaction a holy war was declared by the Emir against the Russians.<sup>187</sup> The population of Samarkand besieged the Russian garrison for eight days,<sup>188</sup> but the Russians prevailed and Samarkand ceded to Russian Turkestan under General Kaufman. In 1868 the Bukharan forces were defeated completely and the Emir of Bukhara, who sought British and outside help in vein, became a vassal of the Tsar. Bukhara was made to abolish slavery immediately by Russian order.

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<sup>186</sup>The Uzbek rulers emerged from the Mongol empire of the golden horde during its dissolution in the 15th century; they were strongly Muslim. From the Uzbek conquest of the heritage of Tamerlane originated the Uzbek-ruled states of Bukhara, Khiva and Khokand. For a more detailed account, consult Vucinich, 1972.

<sup>187</sup>Orientalist descriptions of a "holy war" always refer to the Muslim view of the Europeans as "infidels."

<sup>188</sup>For an account of Vereshchagin's participation in this siege see "Samarcand" in Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1888, 1-40.

Khiva to the west of the Amu Daria (the "Oxus" river) was notorious as a "bandit state where captives were sold into slavery."<sup>189</sup> It became a satellite of Russia in 1873, but not all the slaves were actually freed. Khokand, whose capital Tashkent was stormed in 1865, was a Russian satellite for eight years, but in 1873 became annexed to Russian Turkestan. Khokand was the more commercial of the two emirates and the practice of slavery less common there. It showed the strongest resistance to Russian rule. Khokand's region of Ferghana became the empire's main cotton-producing area. The introduction of cotton as a cash crop in Muslim Khokand, however, made the inhabitants of Russian Turkestan dependent on food imports from Russia and on world markets. Local artisans were wiped out because they were unable to compete with imported industrial goods. Western histories claim that the local inhabitants at first voluntarily accepted Russian rule, because their taxes were less than under the Emir of Khokand; however, there were a number of dervish-led uprisings or "holy wars" against the Russians.

Descriptions of the physical and social conditions in the Khanates at the time of conquest are shaped by Western

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<sup>189</sup>Manuel Sarkisyanz, "Russian Conquest in Central Asia" in Vucinich, ed., 1972, 249-288.

perceptions. These unanimously claim that the Khanates were cruelly and arbitrarily ruled by despotic emirs backed by the Muslim clergy. The area was at the mercy of disease and epidemics largely due to a bad water supply and unsanitary conditions, and worst of all Muslim scholastic traditions persisted as the only form of education. In nineteenth century eyes, all these factors were seen as a hindrance to "progress." Despite these accounts the Khanates had a flourishing economy, trading in silk, dyes, fruit, raw cotton and textiles with the outside world.

The question of "reform" under Russian colonial rule is a complex one and should be evaluated within the context of Russia's "civilizing mission." Surprisingly, despite this mission, Russian cultural policy avoided modernization, apart from the nominal abolishment of slavery in Bukhara. It is important to emphasize that in the 1860's Russia itself was undergoing significant, if painful, social reforms under Alexander II's rule, which hardly provided an efficient model. It was by no means a comparable situation to British India. These reforms included the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861; limited forms of local self-government in 1864; the reform of secondary schools; the abolishment of the hereditary caste

of clergy and trial by jury.<sup>190</sup> Reform of the judicial system was not transferred to the Khanates and it remained a mixture of Muslim "Shariat," nomadic traditions and military administrative procedure.

Vereshchagin's perceptions of the conditions in Central Asia, especially slavery, poverty and pauperism, and the position of women in society, cannot be isolated from the process of social reform in Russia.<sup>191</sup> The socially concerned art of the 1860's in Russia, called for artists to become actively involved in the problems of the day and to place art at the service of the "truth" by bringing out social suffering and passing moral judgment on the reality it represented.<sup>192</sup> Vereshchagin chose to extend his focus for what has been coined "Critical Realism" to the inhabitants of Central Asia, perhaps in the belief that they provided a better example on which to "moralize."

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<sup>190</sup>Otto Hoetzsch, The Evolution of Russia, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), 144-149.

<sup>191</sup>See "Notes From a Journey Through Central Asia," in Vassili Vereshchagin, 1887, 1: 97-205.

<sup>192</sup>Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky is credited with creating this tendency which came to be associated with the movement known as the Peredvizhniki (Wanderers), a troupe of fourteen artists who broke away from the Academy in 1863. It should be noted that Vereshchagin, although not a member of the original fourteen artists, did share their views, and in 1863 he left the Academy abruptly to travel to the Caucasus. For further reading on the subject of the Wanderers see Valkenier, 1989.



Vereshchagin's Central Asian series combines the artist's desire to expose the most extreme kinds of social suffering together with his belief in Russia's civilizing mission and the "great superiority of European civilization to the semi-barbarism of the peoples of Central Asia."<sup>193</sup> The following statement by the artist quoted in Vahan Barooshian's recent book on Vereshchagin is revealing in this respect:

I was convinced that any firsthand experience of Asiatic barbarism would change the minds of myopic politicians whose views of it were shaped by the fictional works of sentimental travelers.<sup>194</sup>

This distinction between the barbaric and sentimental Orient, highlights the way in which Vereshchagin's Central Asian works act as a colonial discourse on Central Asia in the late nineteenth century. They reflect the way in which Orientalism acts as "the control mechanism of Colonialism." The paintings in which the artist incorporates the Critical Realist approach are not examples of the Romantic discourse of the "mystical" Orient; neither can they be classified as a category of the "picturesque" in nineteenth century Russian art. They do not create an image of the "Oriental

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<sup>193</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 143.

<sup>194</sup>Quoted in Barooshian, 1993, 20.

other" as "noble savage" as in the work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, but rather as "savage." The East of Central Asia is portrayed as the desolate, neglected East of deserts, ruined civilizations and fatalism. Patricia Sanders shows how these two perceptions often overlap in Orientalist art:

What appeared attractive to a Romantic might be seen as abhorrent to the *cultural imperialist*. The latter sometimes interpreted sexuality as immorality, antiquated conditions as backwardness, caftans as barbarous and exoticism as only a colorful veneer. Statements by artists and others in the nineteenth century indicate that the two viewpoints could even co-exist in an unresolved ambivalence.<sup>195</sup>

This unresolved ambivalence of the two viewpoints strikes us when we consider the totality of Vereshchagin's Orientalist works. Many of the works, from the Turkestan series and the Indian series, do fall within the "picturesque" category of the "exotic," demonstrating the artist's complex and contradictory attitudes to the East.

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<sup>195</sup>Patricia Sanders, Impressions of the Near East: Orientalist Art of the 19th century, Catalog of an exhibition held at the Haggin Museum, Stockton, CA, November 8, 1987 to January 3, 1988.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE TURKESTAN SERIES AND THE CONQUEST OF CENTRAL ASIA

The paintings from Turkestan can be very loosely grouped into different categories. The first category deals with those works which Sadoven terms "moral-accusatory,"<sup>196</sup> representing "the darker corners of Central Asian life,"<sup>197</sup> a dark, mysterious and underground world of opium dens, dancing boys, slave-markets and other negative Oriental "vices." The second category deals with the military aspects of the conquest of Turkestan. The third category deals with "picturesque" scenes of everyday life in Central Asia. These range from the purely ethnographic, such as the portrayal of Kirghiz nomads and "exotic" dervishes, to desert genres and ruins of past civilizations. Both the "moral-accusatory" category and the "ethnographic" category overlap with aspects of the "exotic" in Orientalist art.

In 1869, Vereshchagin held his first exhibition of Turkestan works in St. Petersburg, where according to Barooshian, only three paintings were exhibited, After Victory (1868, see Fig. 16), After Defeat (1868), and The Opium Eaters (1868, see Fig. 2). A fourth painting, Batsha

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<sup>196</sup>Sadoven, 16.

<sup>197</sup>Barooshian, 37.

and His Worshippers (1868? see Fig. 1), was also exhibited, however,<sup>198</sup> this is also reproduced in Bulgatov, 1905.<sup>199</sup>

Nicholas Sobko notes the similarity in style of Batsha and His Worshippers (Fig. 1) to Gérôme's Phyrné Before the Areopagus (1861).<sup>200</sup> Both paintings use a circular composition to surround the object of desire, whether Phyrné or Batsha. Whereas in Gérôme's painting, the humiliation of the naked female is emphasized, Vereshchagin focuses on Batsha's sexual power over his "worshippers" by exaggerating their physical proximity to the boy, and by creating an extremely restricted space, a device which Vereshchagin often uses to symbolize the "narrowness" and "close-mindedness" of Asiatics. In addition, the boy's expression is deliberately calm and provocative, and his eyes are painted with black kohl, suggesting his sexual magnetism.

Vereshchagin painted this scene after witnessing a *Tamasha*, a display of dancing boys, (*Batshi*), in Samarkand; he described the *Tamasha* thus:

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<sup>198</sup>Batsha is the term Vereshchagin uses to refer to dancing boys in his autobiography, *Vasilii Vereshchagin*, 1887, 1: 106.

<sup>199</sup>Bulgatov, 36.

<sup>200</sup>Sobko (1884): 184-191.

In a room opening on to the court by a door now shut, some of the chief personages of the place were standing in respectful attitudes round the batsha, a very beautiful boy, who was being dressed up as a girl....A mirror was held before him in which he looked all the time with coquettish glances. A stout thick-set Sart held the light; others watched the operations, scarcely daring to breathe in their devotion (I am not exaggerating), and counted it an honor to be allowed to lend a hand or to make any little improvement. Last of all the eyebrows and eyelashes were painted black; one or two patches fixed on the face; and then the boy in the guise of a girl appeared before the spectators, who greeted him with loud cries of approval.<sup>201</sup>

The painting is probably based on the following passage from Vereshchagin's description:

The most interesting part of the business....is the entertainment of the batsha, which lasts a long time, and seems very strange to any one who is not acquainted with the customs of the natives....The little batsha is seated with great solemnity and importance against the wall; turning up his nose and blinking his eyes, he looks arrogantly round, conscious of his dignity. All along the room, with their feet tucked under them sit Sarts of every age and appearance....packed closed together. All lean on their elbows, and look in the most abject and pathetic manner at the batsha, following all his movements, trying to catch a glance from him, and listening intently to every syllable that falls from his lips. Happy the man whom the lad deigns to honour with a look, or even a word!<sup>202</sup>

Clearly this painting reinforces Orientalist myths and assumptions about uncontrolled homosexuality and the

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<sup>201</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 1: 107.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 110.

freedom of licentious sex in the East. In this genre, the European associates the Orient as a place for sexual escapism and fantasy. Although allusions to lesbianism were common among Orientalist paintings at the Salons, for example Ingre's Turkish Bath, (1862) Gérôme's Moorish Bath (1870), and more overtly in Jules-Robert Auguste's The Girlfriends (1820), male homosexual explicitness was a subject that was strictly forbidden at the Salons, while frequently written about in Orientalist literature.<sup>203</sup> It is probably for the former reason that Vereshchagin destroyed the painting due to sharp criticism after its exhibit in St. Petersburg in 1869.<sup>204</sup>

Vereshchagin wrote at some length about the widespread use of opium in Central Asia, especially among a poor Dervish sect known as Divanas, whom he refers to as "licensed beggars."<sup>205</sup> He painted two pictures on this theme, The Opium Eaters (1868, see Fig. 2), exhibited in St. Petersburg in 1869, and Politicians of the Opium Den,

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<sup>203</sup>The Orientalists Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Nerval, Gide and Richard Burton wrote on this theme. See Rosenthal, 1982, 99. For a more complete discussion of Orientalism and sexuality see Edward Said, Orientalism, 1979.

<sup>204</sup>A K. Lebedev, V.V. Vereshchagin, (Moskow: Iskusstvo, 1939), 5.

<sup>205</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 1: 112.

Tashkent (1870, see Fig. 3). The Opium Eaters is probably based on the following passage:

On entering a Kalendarkhan [asylum for beggars] once on a cold day a picture presented itself to me which is deeply impressed on my memory. A whole company of beggars sat against the wall, packed closely together. Probably they had recently taken a strong dose of opium, for their faces wore a dull look; some had their mouths open and moved their lips without a sound; many, with their heads sunk upon their knees, breathed with difficulty, and a shiver passed through them from time to time.<sup>206</sup>

Once again Vereshchagin has used an extremely confined and oppressive space in which to pack the figures closely together, giving the impression of prisoners in a dungeon, and thereby linking opium addiction to the idea of bondage. He accentuates the ethnographic features of the figures, in a style reminiscent of his earlier sketches in the Caucasus. He uses the compositional device of placing accessories, tools of opium use and old shoes, in the foreground, thereby creating a physical and psychological barrier between the viewer and the figures. Clearly such spectacles appealed to the Orientalist search for the "exotic," since Vereshchagin describes the use and affects of the drug in great detail:

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 120.

Like tobacco it banishes natural and refreshing sleep, and gives in its place, they say, waking dreams-restless, quickly changing dreams and hallucinations, alternating with a sense of weakness and languor, but a pleasant kind of languor.<sup>207</sup>

The Opium Eaters, does not create an impression of pleasant languor among its users; rather, it leaves an impression of stupor and addiction, reinforcing the perception of the Oriental as "out of control." Vereshchagin's exaggeration of Asiatic features and the use of recognizable "exotic" accessories, demonstrates that he was not merely concerned with the social problem of opium addiction in itself, but opium addiction as an Oriental way of life; he warned his European readers:

One can hardly doubt but that sooner or later opium will come into use in Europe; from tobacco and the other narcotics which we already take the step to opium is natural and inevitable.<sup>208</sup>

These paintings, like French Orientalist harem scenes, create a voyeuristic view of the Orient; they presume to invade the privacy of private "domains." There is almost a sense of secrecy about the portrayal of these domains, as when Vereshchagin describes the performance of the dancing

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<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 121.



boy, "Come this way," whispered a Sart to me, winking as a man does when he offers you something forbidden."<sup>209</sup>

The second work that he painted in this genre, Politicians of the Opium Den, Tashkent (1870, see Fig. 3), was painted on Vereshchagin's second visit to Central Asia. It depicts a group of men, once more in a dark, mysterious and dungeon-like setting, who appear to be in deep consultation on some matter. Vereshchagin describes these politicians:

Ragged, half drunk with opium, they are nevertheless among the keenest of politicians. They know and discuss not only what the *Ak Padishah*, i.e., White Tsar, does and says, but what he thinks and is meditating.<sup>210</sup>

This work creates an Orientalist discourse of neglect, decay and fear on a number of levels. Firstly, the tattered state of the politicians' garments is rendered in precise, almost photographic detail, a pictorial device which, like representations of decaying architecture, records the stagnant neglect of the East. Authenticating details such as boils on the bloated legs of one of the figures, reinforces assumptions about rampant disease in Central

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<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>210</sup>Exhibition of the Works of Vassili Verestchagin: Illustrated Descriptive Catalogue, (New York: American Art Association, 1889-90), 71.

Asia. In addition, the mysterious nature of the "politicians'" conference plays on European fears, by insinuating secret plots and possible uprisings against Russian rule. The feudalism of the Orient is represented by two figures in the foreground, who kneel in submission to their obvious "superiors," thus strengthening the notion of a rigid Oriental hierarchy. Vereshchagin's assertion that they are "half-drunk with opium" only serves to heighten western fears that in Asia, power is in the hands of irrational beings.

Underground Prison in Samarkand (1873, see Fig. 4) is perhaps the most extreme example of Vereshchagin's series on the "underground world" of Central Asia. In this painting, he portrays an appalling view of the Emir's subterranean prisons in Samarkand which reinforces associations with Oriental cruelty. Vereshchagin claimed to have descended into one of these prisons in order to sketch it, describing the experience in the Catalog of his 1888-89 New York Exhibition:

Built of brick, with a narrow funnel-shaped mouth, the only means of ingress and egress being by a rope with loops. When I descended into this gloomy dungeon I almost fainted from the stench and foul air, and could with difficulty make my sketch. And here prisoners remained for more than ten years in succession without ever breathing pure air. This infernal den was called the bug-hole, and I believe a certain kind of bug or other insect was purposely bred to stock it, and prey day and night upon the

unfortunate victims. Let me add, however, that I found no bugs in it.<sup>211</sup>

In this painting, Vereshchagin uses a dramatic outside light source to heighten the drama of the scene, in which a figure lies dying in the left foreground, while in the darkened dungeon, we can barely make out a line of crouching prisoners, whose aura of resignation to their fate and to that of the dying prisoner, is emphasized by their passive poses and placement in shadow. Vereshchagin's treatment of the painting goes well beyond documentary realism, using light in an almost Caravaggist manner to dramatize the scene. His treatment of the dead or dying figure realizes the Realists' concern for starkly factual and unidealized portrayals of death, recalling Géricault's studies of corpses and Daumier's treatment of the subject in Rue Transnonain le 15 Avril, 1834 (1834).

Vereshchagin was concerned with the practice of slavery in Central Asia, an issue full of implications regarding the situation of former serfs in Russia. The painting Selling A Child Slave (1872, see Fig. 5), was painted during his stay in Munich, where it is possible that, with hindsight, the artist saw a correlation between the already freed serfs in Russia, and the ongoing practice

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<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 71.

of slavery in Central Asia. In his writings, he uses this fact to justify Russia's "civilizing mission" in the colony; referring to its role in abolishing slavery in Central Asia, he comments:

That the cleansing of this foul cesspool has begun, thanks to the interference of Russia, is at any rate a matter of congratulation. The wholesome influence of Russia in the matter of the slave-trade is clearly indicated in these three conspicuous and remarkable facts: (1) the total number of slaves generally has decreased, owing to the liberation of slaves in the territories annexed by Russia; (2) the demand for fresh slaves has diminished, since they can no longer be disposed of in the annexed districts....(3) there has also been a considerable decline in the slave-trade in all the neighbouring uncivilized countries of Central Asia, because the inhabitants believe, not without reason, that the Russians may come any day and pay them a visit and mercilessly free the slaves, as they always do wherever they go. This belief introduces an element of uncertainty into all purchases and contracts which has a very discouraging effect upon the whole trade.<sup>212</sup>

The painting Selling of a Child Slave is based on Vereshchagin's claim that a large part of the slave trade in Central Asia was in young boys.<sup>213</sup> Vereshchagin chose the following aspect of this practice to paint:

The buyer informs himself about the chattels--what they can do, what handicraft they understand, etc. Then he is taken into one of the cells, and there

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<sup>212</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 103.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 102.

in presence of the owner examines the slave to see if he has any physical defects or is in bad health.<sup>214</sup>

Examining Vereshchagin's painting, we can see that the artist has clearly embellished this subject with erotic overtones. Using a dramatic outside light source, he creates a spectacle of a dark and mysterious slave market, where a naked boy, his back toward the viewer, is lustfully inspected for purchase by a turbaned old man. There is a sharp contrast between the nudity of the innocent boy and the rich fabrics of the old man's costume, accentuating the social gulf between them. The slave-dealer is in the process of bargaining the price of the boy, while at the same time grasping tightly onto the boy's wrist, as if to safeguard his treasure. The ethnic characteristics of the Oriental merchants are exaggerated to the point of caricature in this work.

The portrayal of slave markets was a common genre in Orientalist painting, for the idea of owning slaves was both sexually fascinating to Europeans, and at the same time morally offensive. The physical inspection of the slave boy recalls Gérôme's Slave Market (1866, see Fig. 6), a painting which emphasizes the cruelty of the ordeal of tooth inspection for the slave. Both Vereshchagin and

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 100.

Gérôme chose to represent the nakedness of the slave, thus heightening the sexual fantasy implied by such scenes, and the impression of Oriental cruelty and barbarism.

Vereshchagin equated what he believed to be the degraded status of women in Central Asia, with the practice of slavery. He referred to the women as:

....that other class of slaves, who are not called slaves in any text-book, but whose slavery is yet the most terrible of all--the mothers, wives and daughters of the barbarians of Central Asia....Sold to a man from the cradle, taken from her parents' house while still an undeveloped thoughtless child, she has even as a breeding animal an incomplete life; for she begins to age almost before she is grown up, disfigured morally by the brutal part assigned to her, and physically by the labour of a beast of burden.<sup>215</sup>

The painting Uzbek Woman in Tashkent (1873, see Fig. 7), portrays a Central Asian woman, entirely veiled in dark robes from head to foot, not even her eyes visible. The coarse state of the woman's attire, her shuffling gait and ungainly form, and her forced concealment behind the veil, create the impression of a "beast of burden" rather than a human being. This is one of the works that Vereshchagin painted in his outdoor studio in Munich, where it is clear that he was concerned with reproducing the effects of the harsh sunlight in Central Asia. The sharp contrast between

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<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 104-5.

the dark robes of the woman and the sand colored wall, creates a strong shadow, and also serves to make the woman stand out more starkly against the wall.

Beggars in Samarkand (1870, see Fig. 8), is one of a number of works Vereshchagin made on the theme of pauperism, which he believed to be institutionalized in Central Asia; he describes the proliferation of beggars in the following passage:

Along the highways leading to the chief places of resort they may be seen by the dozen, sometimes sitting on the ground, and importunately begging alms.<sup>216</sup>

In this painting, Vereshchagin uses the line of a massive stone wall, perhaps of a fortress or "a chief place of resort" such as the Gur-I-Emir complex in Samarkand, as a compositional device to highlight the autocracy of Muslim society. The wall serves to shut out the beggars from the source of power, i.e. the Emir, and therefore the source of sustenance. The beggars are subordinated to the massive wall which appears to be symbolic of this autocracy. In addition, the space in which the beggars sit or lean is deliberately narrow and confined like their lives. The despair of the beggars is illustrated by their closed eyes,

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 71.

downward turned faces and folded arms, a device which denotes Oriental submission and passivity.

It is interesting to contrast this picture with Gérôme's Turkish Butcher Boy in Jerusalem (1863, see Fig. 9). Both the beggar and the butcher boy are genre scenes depicting common Oriental "types," both are open-mouthed, and about to speak, the butcher boy to sell his wares, the beggar to beg for alms. In addition, both figures lean against a wall, but how different is their bearing, how much more noble the butcher boy with his polished, Neoclassical arm and contrapposto pose, to Vereshchagin's beggar, who displays not a hint of classicism. Eugène Fromentin's The Street of Bab-el-Ghardi (1859), a genre scene of everyday life in Algeria after the French conquest, is closer to Vereshchagin's Beggars in Samarkand (1870, see Fig. 8) in the undignified poses of Arabs, and in its narrow composition, which reflects the European view of the Orient.

Beggars in Samarkand and Vereshchagin's other works which use Orientalist devices in a "moralistic" or critical realist style, are perhaps best compared with examples of Russian critical Realist art of the sixties, such as N. Petrov's Two Hungry Ones (1867), in which a starving peasant and dog are juxtaposed against a crumbling wall, and Grigori Miasoedov's Zemstvo at Lunch (1872), a painting



which highlights the gulf between the peasantry and the nobility by using a wall to shut the peasantry out. Here, the despair of the peasants is also emphasized by their undignified poses and downturned heads. Although this painting was executed two years later than Vereshchagin's, it illustrates the typical use of "moralistic" devices for social commentary, reflecting Chernyshevsky's demand for art to be placed in the service of morality.<sup>217</sup>

Vereshchagin's fascination with dervishes is demonstrated in Dervishes in Festive Clothes Tashkent (1870, see Fig. 10), a work which fits into the category of the "ethnographic." This painting demonstrates the influence of Gérôme, in its photographic attention to the ethnographic details of the Dervish costumes, and in its exotic use of color. It was perhaps influenced by Gérôme's Prayer in the House of the Arnaut Chief (1857, see Fig. 11), a painting which demonstrated Gérôme's newfound commitment to ethnographic painting and objective realism.

Although the Dervishes hold gourds for collecting alms, reminding the viewer of their status as beggars, it is clear that the artist's primary interest here is in exploiting the picturesque possibilities of the subject,

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<sup>217</sup>See above, Chapter One, page 10.

especially of the costumes. Vereshchagin describes these costumes in some detail in his autobiography:

Each new member on entering the brotherhood [of Divanas] receives a special uniform--a red cap of peculiar shape embroidered with wool and trimmed at bottom with sheepskin, a broad girdle....The rest of the clothing has to be made in a prescribed fashion. The robe must be covered all over with patches, and there are people among these beggars who are quite masters in the art of making up a motley dress of startling colours.<sup>218</sup>

This particular painting is based on the following description of the Divana's festive clothes:

Besides the old dress which he wears every day, a mass of rags in which there is not one sound spot, every divana has a holiday suit, composed of a number of scraps of new stuff of various colours, begged in the bazaar and put together in picturesque confusion. Sometimes you may see among these scraps a piece of silk or cloth, but they are mostly cotton stuffs, some of which compete with one another on the divana's person in colour and durability.<sup>219</sup>

Two paintings which the artist probably conceived of as a pair are The Doors of Tamerlane (1872-73, see Fig. 12), and At the Door of a Mosque, Turkestan (1873, see Fig. 13), These paintings both highlight feudal divisions in Central Asian society, while expressing two opposing views

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<sup>218</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 112.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 113.

of the East, the exotic and colorful Orient, and the neglected and decaying Orient. These works display an overlapping of categories, the moral-accusatory with the picturesque "ethnographic." The earlier of the pair, The Doors of Tamerlane (Fig. 12) represents the Orient at its most picturesque, and is certainly one of Vereshchagin's most impressive and "Gérômesque" examples of this genre.<sup>220</sup>

The painting recalls the splendor and legend of Tamerlane (1336-1405), also known also as Timur, "the Iron Turk," a Muslim conqueror who attempted to restore the Mongol empire of Genghis Khan in the latter part of the fourteenth century. His rule was characterized by plunder and massacre, but also by ostentatious architectural grandeur, known in Islamic art history as the Timurid style. The focus of Tamerlane's splendor was the city of Samarkand.

In this painting, two armed warriors in richly embroidered robes, flank a set of ornately carved doors.

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<sup>220</sup>Both Barooshian, 1993, and Lebedev, 1987, give the title of this painting as The Doors of Tamerlane. The painting belongs to the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, which lists it as The Doors of Tamerlane's Mausoleum and dates it one year earlier, ca. 1871-72. The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow: Russian Painting, (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1979) 120. Vereshchagin did paint one picture of the interior of the Mausoleum called Tamerlane's tomb, which is reproduced in his autobiographical account of the siege of Samarkand, Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1888, 35.

Barooshian suggests that they are guarding the doors to the ruler's palace:

They are not so much guarding the entrance as they are absurdly and tensely staring at it, prepared and eager at any moment to commit destruction at Tamerlane's bidding should he emerge.<sup>221</sup>

According to this interpretation, Vereshchagin created an historical picture which refers back to the actual time of Tamerlane. The nineteenth century Russian artist Ivan Kramskoy is also said to have written about this work: "The technical excellence of the painting is amazing in the full sense of the word; a hair's breadth less and there would have been no historical picture."<sup>222</sup> Vereshchagin's catalog entry for his New York Exhibition lists the picture simply as "Gate of Tamerlane--In the palace at Samarkand," suggesting a contemporary portrayal of the Emir's guards at the time of the Russian conquest of Samarkand, rather than any historical reconstruction. The painting is ambiguous, since the style of the costumes and the architecture are late nineteenth century Timurid, while the calligraphy

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<sup>221</sup>Barooshian, 39.

<sup>222</sup>Quoted in The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow: Russian Painting, 1979, 120.

above the door is an example of fifteenth century Bannai script.<sup>223</sup>

It is possible that Vereshchagin treated the subject symbolically, referring to the gorgeous splendor of Tamerlane, as his work Apotheosis of War (1871, see Fig. 20), discussed below, refers to Tamerlane's cruelty and despotism. Vereshchagin seems to have experienced contradictory reactions toward Samarkand, both as a place of Oriental decay, and as a center of legendary architectural splendor, as the following quote reveals:

Samarcand [sic] was occupied by the Russians. Our armies had taken it without assault, after having routed the troops of the Emir. On reaching the summit of the hill I stopped there, dazzled, and, so to speak, awed by astonishment and admiration. Samarcand was there under my eyes, bathed in verdure. Above its gardens and its houses were reared ancient and gigantic mosques, and I who had come from so far was going to enter the city, once so splendid, which was the capital of Tamerlane.<sup>224</sup>

The idea for the composition of this painting may initially have been suggested by Gérôme's Heads of the Rebel Beys (1866, see Fig. 18). Vereshchagin's composition is far more symmetrical, however. He uses two watchful guards to flank the doors; in addition, where Gérôme leaves

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<sup>223</sup>Barbara Brend, Islamic Art, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 156.

<sup>224</sup>Unknown source, quoted in Whiteing, 1899, 11.

a door open, revealing the architectural splendor of an inner courtyard, Vereshchagin's doors are firmly shut, a device which illustrates the closed mind of the Oriental, and the feudal hierarchy of the East.

The second painting of the pair, At the Door of a Mosque, Turkestan (1873, see Fig. 13), uses a similar compositional device to represent neglect, decay and pauperism in Central Asia. At first glance, the doors seem to be the same as the in the first painting. On closer inspection, however, we see that they are a different set of doors with the addition of bolts, emphasizing exclusion even more. Here the splendid guards of the first painting are replaced by two poor Divanas who wait despairingly outside the doors of the mosque in the hope of receiving alms. The exclusion symbolized by the doors in this picture makes a critical statement on what the artist perceives as the insensitivity of Muslim religious institutions.

In both paintings, an inverted pyramid is created by poles, which frame the doors. In the first painting, they are tall, splendid muskets, richly ornamented, and in the second, they are much shorter, more like beggars' sticks. In contrast to the "exotic" nature of the setting of The Doors of Tamerlane (Fig. 12), in this painting Vereshchagin portrays peeling and broken tiles and plaster, a device

which emphasizes again the stagnant decay and inferiority of the East.

Vereshchagin's painstaking treatment of the intricate details of the doors in these pictures, can be compared with Gérôme's Young Greeks at the Mosque (1865), and with The Cairene Horse Dealer (1867). A passage from a nineteenth century critic, praising this painting, reveals prejudicial contemporary reactions to Islamic ornamentation, thereby reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes:

The Door of a Mosque, evinces with what mastery Vereshchagin can treat and animate large surfaces. Eastern architecture, with its grotesque and massive piles, its *finikin* ornamentation, its marvelous detailed general effects, are presented by him in a manner that is unique. He often reproduces their plastic effects by laying on his colours in thick impasto, and thus seems literally to mould the fantastic *Indian confusion* of ornament.<sup>225</sup>

Two examples of the category of war paintings, which illustrate Vereshchagin's military experience in Central Asia are, By The Fortress Wall. Let Them Enter! (1871, see Fig. 14), and its sequel, By The Fortress Wall. They Have Entered! (1871, see Fig. 15). The second painting in particular is interesting since it highlights Vereshchagin's growing confusion toward the Russian role in

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<sup>225</sup>Helen Zimmern, (1885): 42.

the war. The paintings were executed in 1871, after he had left Central Asia for Munich, perhaps accounting for his more cynical attitude to an event, for which he had previously coveted a reward and promotion!

The paintings are based on an incident during the siege of Samarkand in which Vereshchagin participated; he described this below:

During the defense of Samarkand by the Russians, an assault was momentarily expected through one of the breaches made by the enemy in the walls. The shouts of the approaching multitude were audible, and I begged Colonel N. [Nazaroff], then in command of the garrison, to sally out to meet them but his answer was, "Hush! Let them Enter."<sup>226</sup>

This autobiographical passage, suggests Vereshchagin's presence in the painting. It is possible that he is the figure to the left of Colonel Nazaroff, despite the puzzling fact that he is in uniform.<sup>227</sup> Compositionally, the soldiers' march toward the breach in the fortress is accentuated by the horizontal and ordered procession, balanced by a vertical formation of sabres and rifles. On close inspection, we see the anxiety of the moment

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<sup>226</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1889-90, 69.

<sup>227</sup>According to Barooshian, 21, Vereshchagin is supposed to have negotiated with General Kaufman a non-military rank with no uniform. This inconsistency is perhaps due to artistic license. See also page 35 above.



reflected in the expressions of the soldiers in the foreground.

The sequel By The Fortress Wall. They Have Entered! (1871, see Fig. 15), which portrays the Russian victory after this assault, contrasts sharply in composition to the first painting. This work has a vertical, rather than horizontal, composition, which is used to emphasize the brutal drop of the Muslims to the ground. The painting accentuates the confusion which occurs after a battle, and also contrasts the neat row of dead Russian soldiers, being carted off for burial in the background, with the disorder of the dead Uzbek soldiers in the foreground. The Uzbeks appear barbaric in their undignified disorder.

In composition, the picture recalls Géricault's Raft of the Medusa (1818-19), in its pyramidal formation of dead bodies, which act as a supporting base for the triumphant Russians on top. Two Russian soldiers sit casually on top of the ramparts smoking pipes, indifferent to the dead bodies below them, or their compatriots' bodies to the side. They appear relaxed, satisfied and victorious. Vereshchagin referred to this in the catalog of his New York exhibition "The assault has been repulsed, and the tired soldiers are calmly smoking their pipes, whilst a few

remove the dead bodies."<sup>228</sup> Although there is nothing in this particular description to indicate Vereshchagin's disapproval of the soldiers' act of pipe-smoking, the picture created a sensation at his exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1874, and was one of the three paintings which he destroyed.<sup>229</sup>

The three paintings which emphasize Vereshchagin's imagery of the barbarism of the Muslim East are After Victory (1868, see Fig. 16), Presenting the Trophies (1872, see Fig. 17), and its sequel Rejoicing! (1872, see Fig. 19). All three of these were painted in reaction to Vereshchagin's horror at what he claims was the Muslim practice of decapitating dead Russian soldiers, in order to present the heads as trophies to the Emir. After Victory (Fig. 16), is based on the following passage from his description of the siege of Samarkand:

The bodies of those soldiers who had pursued the enemy too far, and whose heads had been cut off, were fearful to look at; their heads had been cut down to the shoulders, so as not to miss, probably, any portion of the trophy...It is known that a reward is given for every head of an enemy, generally in the form of clothes, and this custom is not only peculiar to Central Asians, but to Turks, Albanians, Montenegrins, and others as well.

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<sup>228</sup>Vereshchagin exhibited photographs of this painting, because he had destroyed the original. Ibid., 69.

<sup>229</sup>See above, page 41.

This ghastly circumstance suggested a small picture in which I have represented the collection of these severed heads in a sack.<sup>230</sup>

In this painting, two Muslim soldiers tour the battlefield, collecting heads in a sack. Their ethnic features are emphasized to the point of caricature, while the features of the head of a Russian soldier could almost be a portrait of one of Vereshchagin's fellow soldiers. Vereshchagin's treatment of this "cameo piece" recalls a newspaper cartoon, rather than a horrific portrait of Oriental brutality. This is one of his earlier pieces from the first exhibition in 1869, and it is possible that he intended it for a series of engravings, or for publication in a journal.

A logical sequel to this painting, dealing with the subject of decapitation, is Presenting the Trophies (1872, see Fig. 17), a far more effective Orientalist genre painting of cruelty and violence. This painting is part of Vereshchagin's Barbarians series, known also as Poèmes Barbares.<sup>231</sup> This series was painted while the artist lived in Munich and consists of seven works about the fate of a small Russian detachment: Surprise Attack (1871); Surrounded! They're Pursuing (1872, destroyed); They Spy

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<sup>230</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1888, 24.

<sup>231</sup>Newmarch, (1904): 1016.

Out (1873); Presenting the Trophies (1872, Fig. 17); Rejoicing! (1872, see Fig. 19); Thanksgiving at the Tomb (1873) and The Apotheosis of War (1871).<sup>232</sup>

In Presenting the Trophies, (Fig. 17), the Emir of Bukhara is lost in contemplation of a heap of decapitated Russians' heads, which have been brought to him as "trophies" of war. Vereshchagin describes the picture thus:

In the background is the celebrated 'Kok-tash'--the throne of Tamerlane. The heads of the slaughtered Russians are brought to the Emir, who rewards the bearers of these trophies with the customary robes of honor, each individual receiving according to the number of heads he brings.<sup>233</sup>

The scene is a courtyard of a palace, supposedly the palace at Samarkand, although there is only one example of this type of column documented in the sources on Timurid architecture.<sup>234</sup> The so-called throne of Tamerlane is

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<sup>232</sup>According to Sadoven, two paintings which Vereshchagin intended to use to connect the two parts of this series were never painted. Sadoven, 1950, 22.

<sup>233</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1889-90, 68.

<sup>234</sup>Vereshchagin refers to this as the throne of Tamerlane, in a courtyard of the palace at Samarkand. The only documented example sharing the same stylistic characteristics is that of the Kurnish Khaneh, in the Kuhneh-Arg, the old citadel at Khiva, built in the early nineteenth century. There is a similarity in the style of the columned porticoes, the unusual bases of the columns, and in the decoration of the columns. Since there were many "thrones of Tamerlane" in Central Asia, it is possible that Vereshchagin was referring to the palace at Khiva, or that

barely visible in the harsh sunlight between the columns. This painting, unfortunately only reproduced in black and white in available sources, uses a variety of pictorial devices to create Orientalist stereotypes of morbid Central Asian barbarism. The gruesome decapitated heads, stand out starkly as a visual focus in the harsh sunlight, and the contrast between the tall vertical columns and the horizontal shadows they cast, serves to create an extremely integrated composition. It is clear that Vereshchagin took full advantage of his outdoor studio in Munich, to reproduce extraordinary contrasting and dramatic effects of light and shadow.

The artist produced a wealth of contrasting textures, from the richly embroidered robes of the Emir and his followers, to the ornate columns and architectural details of the courtyard, all of which create a pattern into which the figures themselves are integrated, de-emphasizing their humanity. The pictorial device of integrating figures into the overall pattern of Islamic architecture is one which Vereshchagin develops fully in his Indian series.

The figures fold their arms in a traditional sign of Oriental passivity, both at the morbid scene before them,

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another palace existed at the time in Samarkand. Barbara Brend, 103; 150.

and in submission to the Emir, highlighting the feudalism of Muslim society. The stiffness of their poses recalls Gérôme's Prayer in the House of the Arnaut Chief (1857, see Fig. 11). It seems probable that this picture was influenced by Gérôme's Heads of The Rebel Beys (1866, see Fig. 18), a work which was executed while Vereshchagin was a student in Gérôme's atelier. Vereshchagin's grisly portrayal of the pile of heads is similar to that of Gérôme's, while both recall Géricault's naturalistic treatment of dead corpses.

The sequel to Presenting The Trophies, is Rejoicing! (1872, see Fig. 19), a scene of public thanksgiving which takes place outside the Shir-dar Mosque in the Registan, the central square of Samarkand. A public fête seems to be taking place around the victory associated with the decapitated heads of the Russians, which are displayed on tall poles as "trophies" for the whole populace to see. Vereshchagin's description of the painting emphasizes the religious fanaticism of the event:

The Emir presents his people with the heads of their foes. These are then stuck upon high poles in the principal square in Samarkand, in front of the mosques. A mullah preaches on the text: "Thus God ordains that infidels should perish; there is only one God!"<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1889-90, 68.

The artist uses a circular composition, resembling an amphitheater to surround the central spectacle, a religious figure, one arm raised toward the heads, who appears to be inciting a holy war against the Russian "infidels." The shape of the Iwan is mirrored in the center foreground of the painting, creating a natural break in the crowd, in which to view the scene, a device which reinforces the voyeuristic nature of the colonial gaze. All the different ranks of Central Asian society are represented at this event, from poor Divanas to rich merchants and mounted warriors, suggesting wide support in the community for religious fanaticism, superstition, and outdated forms of feudal punishment. In this painting, Vereshchagin shows off his skills of draughtsmanship and rich ethnographic knowledge of the local scene.<sup>236</sup> The decaying architecture of the Shir-Dar Mosque is naturalistically portrayed, a metaphor for the decay of Eastern civilizations, and the Oriental's neglect of his rich cultural heritage.

Vereshchagin's famous painting in the Tretyakov gallery, Apotheosis of War (1871, see Fig. 20), one of the seven paintings in the Barbarians Series, is a good example

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<sup>236</sup>Vereshchagin made a careful reconstruction of the the decoration of the mosque, which includes the portrayal of the lion and the sun, ancient Iranian symbols. The word "Shir" (Shir-dar mosque) means tiger rather than lion.

of Russian Orientalist painting as a mode of discourse of the "self" as well as the "other." This painting, one of the few Vereshchagin works illustrated in Western histories of Russian art, is one of his most powerful condemnations of Oriental despotism.<sup>237</sup>

The painting consists of a huge pyramid of skulls in a stark desert landscape. On closer inspection some of the skulls reveal deep head wounds. Ravens, traditional symbols of death, circle above and around the skulls and some feed off them. Ravens often appear as symbols of death in Vereshchagin's war paintings, especially in such works as After Victory (1868, see Fig. 16), and The Forgotten Soldier (1871). The raven perched on a skull on the far left of the picture acts as a *memento mori*, calling one to moral behavior, and the dead trees traditionally symbolize man's fall from grace. In the far right background are the hazy remains of a Central Asian walled city, now in ruins.<sup>238</sup> The city simultaneously refers to the past glory of Tamerlane's civilization, and also the downfall of

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<sup>237</sup>The painting's universal condemnation of war makes it appealing to the modern perspective. It can be related to the aftermath of all wars.

<sup>238</sup>See below for Vereshchagin's description of this painting, in which he refers to the battlefields of Tamerlane, i.e. Central Asia, as the context for this painting.



Tamerlane and the decay of Central Asia, accentuated by the barren landscape.

In Orientalist genre painting, the vast and timeless desert was often associated with the impermanence of human life and the ruins of past civilizations. This was frequently represented as an historical genre as in the British artist John Frederick Lewis' Edfou, Upper Egypt (1860), Gérôme's Plain of Thebes (1857, see Fig. 21.) or Prosper Marilhat's Ruins of the El Hakem Mosque, Cairo (1840).<sup>239</sup> In these paintings the link between the vast and barren wilderness and the monuments of past civilizations sparked associations with lost civilizations and the downfall of the ancient Eastern empires, and perhaps was particularly thought provoking at a time of expansion for Western powers. The French writer and critic Théophile Gautier wrote of Gérôme's concern to record the collapse of empires and the passage of time.<sup>240</sup>

The desert setting for Apotheosis of War fits into the genre of the accursed desert as well as the historical; it is reminiscent of Gustave Guillaumet's The Desert (The Sahara) (1867), a vast, barren expanse of desert in which a single skeleton of a camel stands out, perhaps as a symbol

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<sup>239</sup>Reproduced in Rosenthal, 38.

<sup>240</sup>Mary Anne Stevens, ed., 1984, 137.

of the struggle between man and nature.<sup>241</sup> Vereshchagin's pile of skulls, a monument to death and destruction, goes beyond mere allusions to past civilizations, in this case that of Tamerlane; it is a symbol of Oriental feudalism and cruelty, a device for representing both the corruption and decline of the East.

Barooshian attributes the subject of The Apotheosis of War to an ancient legend of Tamerlane, in which he is said to have left a pile of seventy thousand skulls as a monument to his crushing defeat of the 1387 revolt in Isfahan. He adds that the ruling Khanates continued this practice during Vereshchagin's times and that the artist would have observed such scenes in reality.<sup>242</sup> This is reinforced by Count Pahlen, a traveler to the area in 1908-09, who relates in his book Mission to Turkestan, that the sight of piles of human skulls was common:

On reaching the ancient route we simply followed the long line of skeletons of camels, donkeys and horses that had perished while crossing the desert. Human skulls and bones too, remains of the prey of jackal and vultures, lie unburied with the bones of beasts under a grayish yellow dust all along this

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<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>242</sup>Barooshian, 44.

route, followed by caravans for thousands of years, and presenting an endless vista of death.<sup>243</sup>

Vereshchagin himself claims historical accuracy for this picture. In the catalog entry for this painting from his exhibition at the American Art Association in New York, 1889-90, he states:

This picture is not the creation of the artist's imagination--it is historically correct. Tamerlane and many other heroes raised such monuments on their battle-fields, leaving the bones to be cleansed and whitened by the sun and rain, by wolves, jackals and birds of prey. Not very long ago, about 1860, the German scientist, Schlagintweit was murdered by Valikhan-tiure, despot of Jetyshar in Kashgaria, and his head was thrown on a similar, though smaller pyramid, which it was the Khan's amusement to watch growing daily bigger.<sup>244</sup>

Although such claims as Count Pahlen's bear witness to the possible historical accuracy of these scenes, Vereshchagin's painting is far more poetic and symbolic than the mere recording of objective data. The painting is more Surrealistic in style than Realistic. The artist uses many visual metaphors to create a universal rather than specific message denouncing war, despotism and feudal cruelty.

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<sup>243</sup>Count K. K. Pahlen, Mission to Turkestan 1908-1909, (London: Oxford University Press 1964), 23.

<sup>244</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1889-90, 114.

Vereshchagin dedicated the painting in an inscription on the frame to "all great conquerors, past, present and future." By referring to present conquerors, i.e. the Russians in 1867, he is criticizing what many radicals since Herzen believed to be the Tartar spirit of autocracy in Tsarist Russia, so that criticism of Mongol despotism in Central Asia can be equated with criticism of self. As a result of censorship and condemnation surrounding his 1869 St. Petersburg Exhibition, it is possible that he was making a veiled attack against the Tsar in an act of protest.<sup>245</sup>

This points to Vereshchagin's continuing dilemma in relation to Russian colonial policy and the military authorities, for while denouncing the barbarism which he saw in Central Asia, we must not forget that Vereshchagin ultimately believed in the messianic view of Russia as the civilizing mission which was to eradicate it. Vereshchagin's autobiographical writings on his trip to Central Asia state his position on this "mission" and

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<sup>245</sup>According to Bulgatov, 1905, 64, the painting was originally named "Tamerlane's Apotheosis," but later Vereshchagin changed the name in reaction to the "butchery" of the Franco-Prussian war, coming to the conclusion that all wars were the same. Bulgatov's observation can be equally applied to Russian colonial policy in Central Asia or other military events.

perhaps his contradictory feelings to the effectiveness of Russian rule there:

The colonization of Central Asia by Russia no doubt presents serious difficulties; in the first place land must be acquired, taken from the natives and assigned to the Russians; and this is no easy matter. Nevertheless this problem must be solved, with due regard of course to the requirements of justice, and that as quickly as possible. On its solution depends the future of Russian supremacy in Asia, and the welfare of the peoples who have already submitted to us, who, when all is said, have much more to gain from the establishment of Russian rule in Central Asia than from a return to their former slavery.<sup>246</sup>

Vereshchagin's second trip to Central Asia, to the outposts of the Russian-held territories on the Chinese border "still devastated by the great rising of the Mussulmans or Dunghans"<sup>247</sup> resulted in other paintings of ruins, including Ruins of the Theater at Chuguchak (1869-70, see Fig. 22), a painting which uses the same visual metaphors as Apotheosis of War (Fig. 20), to denounce the destruction waged by Muslims, while at the same time demonstrating the artist's search for the unusual and the exotic.

The focus of the painting is the ruined remains of a spectacular Buddhist style structure, supposedly a theater.

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<sup>246</sup>Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 1: 144

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 176.

The foreground is strewn with human skulls and other debris. A flock of ravens descends on the ruins from out of a stark tree in the top left hand corner, a motif Vereshchagin often uses to indicate recent battle. It seems to have been very important to Vereshchagin to make the long and dangerous journey to this frontier town, Chuguchak. Both his guide and interpreter tried to convince him to abandon his purpose, because the place was completely destroyed.<sup>248</sup> The following passage describes his reaction on approaching this abandoned city:

As you approach the town it is hard to believe that it is empty....The houses are for the most part uninjured, and also the paintings on the walls and on the wooden lattice-work of the windows. Potsherds and fragments of articles of every conceivable kind were lying all about....the clumsy shoes of Dunghans and Kalmucks side by side with the miniature slippers of Chinese women. I put a pair of extraordinary small slippers in my pocket as a memento. But above all, skulls are to be seen lying everywhere. The town is like a vast tomb, and the whole impression it produces is terrible.

I had enough to occupy me: from the governor's palace to the simple little houses of the common people, all were painted, all decorated with paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, flowers, dragons etc. Theatres of an original construction, Buddhist temples in which some colossal idols were still intact (though the Mahomedans evidently showed great zeal in over-throwing these and breaking them in pieces), seemed almost to be waiting for the people to throng in their prayers and their amusements. For three weeks I lived with

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<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 192.

one Cossack and one Tartar in a wretched cabin outside the walls of the fortress, and every day from morning till evening I roamed about, looking at everything, drawing and painting.<sup>249</sup>

This passage clearly reveals Vereshchagin's fascination with the exotic and picturesque style of the Buddhist architecture and temples; it was a fascination which would later lead him to tour Tibet and Northern India in search of Buddhist monuments.<sup>250</sup>

The final painting which will be discussed in the Turkestan series is a work which reflects Vereshchagin's association of the East as a place of escape and artistic freedom. This painting, Kirghiz Tents on the Chu River (1869-70, see Fig. 23), fits into the category of "ethnographic realism," describing the way of life of the Kirghiz, an "exotic" tribe of nomads. Vereshchagin describes the characteristics of this tribe:

They wander with their tents (yurts) over a huge tract which lies partly among the steppes of Siberia, partly in Russian Turkestan....The Kirghiz are Mahomedans, but they follow the maxims of the Prophet only in so far as they agree with their wild love of freedom and their passion for a nomad life. In fact the principle which they observe most religiously is the principle of robbery. Their ceaseless plundering and their constant change of abode make not only luxury but even comfort

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>250</sup>Examples of these works are reproduced in black and white in his autobiography: Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887.

impossible for them. The tent of the Khirgiz is as unpretentious a dwelling as it is possible to conceive; the same may be said of his clothing, and his food is miserable.<sup>251</sup>

Despite these comments, the handling of the painting reveals Vereshchagin's relief at escaping from the bloody conflicts of war, and the ability to simply indulge in "plein-air" painting. His style in this picture is painterly with loose brushwork, applied in thick impasto. The details of the riders and Kirghiz women are barely suggested with a few brush strokes. This loose treatment reflects the artist's delight in his newfound artistic freedom, from the constraints of Paris and censorship of St. Petersburg.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>252</sup>Referring to the stifling atmosphere in Russia, Vereshchagin once wrote, "I put the question seriously to myself whether unshackled activity was possible in a country where the loss of a scrap of paper [travel document] could entail such unpleasant consequences, and preferred another journey to Central Asia, where one certainly is exposed to danger, but yet can breathe and paint freely." Vassili Verestchagin, "Travelling in Russia," in Vasilii Vereshchagin, 1887, 1: 327.



## CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters have been an attempt to resurrect a nineteenth century Russian artist, once very famous but now hardly known in the west, Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin. My major interest in this artist has been to examine a body of his work, dealing with Russian expansion into Central Asia in the eighteen sixties, within the context of Orientalism. Since the whole question of Orientalism in Russian art has been largely ignored, I have found it useful to contrast Vereshchagin's work with examples of French nineteenth century Orientalism, in the belief that Russian Orientalist art, especially in an age of colonial expansion, was inspired by western European models of Orientalist discourse.

Vereshchagin's position with respect to Russian Orientalism and Russian colonial expansion into central Asia was examined. In the process, I became aware of the complex nature of the East/West question in Russian intellectual thought, and how it relates to questions of Russian national identity. The Orientalist discourse has been used by Russians, including Vereshchagin, to test certain assumptions about their "Russianness:" their

feelings of cultural superiority toward the East, attitude to the army and to the political situation in Russia itself.

My approach has been to outline the genres in nineteenth century Orientalist art, and then to read the works as "texts," revealing deeper meanings of colonial discourse, using a critical methodology based on the work of Edward Said and Linda Nochlin. This critical methodology was applied to an analysis of Vereshchagin's Central Asian paintings.

Vereshchagin's early encounters with the East, during Russia's conquest of Turkestan, were not perceived by him as opportunities of bridging any cultural divide between East and West. He turned toward the west and away from what he considered the cruelty of the East, believing that Russia was more progressive in its civilizing mission to abolish the barbaric customs of the East, such as slavery, and the low status of women in society. In this sense, he shared nineteenth century European attitudes of contempt for Asia, revealed in stereotypic images of the East, both in his paintings and in writings which complement them.

One of the puzzling aspects of Vereshchagin's career is the question of why he went to the East, at a crucial period in the development of Russian national art. An early attempt, even before Ilya Repin's, to paint the politically

loaded subject of the Volga Boathaulers, was abandoned quite early on in his career. The Orient seems to have provided Vereshchagin with a place of escape, and a certain freedom, at a safe distance from the Tsar, to criticize the Russian political and military situation. The extent to which he used the Orient for veiled criticism of Tsarist autocracy and social conditions in Russia, has yet to be explored.

Vereshchagin's extreme complexity as an artist could not be demonstrated within the specific scope of this thesis. Looking at the total picture of his life and work, one would have to conclude that at different times, he was soldier and pacifist, anti-imperialist, and yet defender of Russian colonial expansion and wars. A patriot who received the George Cross for bravery in war, and yet a sharp critic of Russia's military establishment. It seems that Vereshchagin spent a large part of his life challenging authority, whether in Russia, where many of his works were considered an affront to the national pride or in Catholic countries where he exhibited "materialist" interpretations of biblical subjects.

Vereshchagin's conflicts of loyalty, to his class, to the military, to his country, were to hound him all his life. Certain actions, like refusing titles and professorships, were made, perhaps, in order to disentangle

himself from the web of state patronage and ideology. Vereshchagin tried to shake free, but could not, because he was always drawn to defend his country to the very end, when he perished in the Russo-Japanese war. These conflicts are linked to the insecurity of the Russian, who was not sure of his identity in the international arena.

A project which would follow naturally from this one, would be a wider study of Orientalism in Russian art, not only in the nineteenth century, but beyond, addressing the question of the duality of East and West in Russian culture, and the extent to which Russian artists used the Orient to define their own identity.

In the process of resurrecting this artist, I discovered that many of his paintings, considered lost by scholars, are possibly in private collections in America, long forgotten. An interesting project would be to trace these "lost paintings" if they still exist, and to resurrect this artist, so that the paintings known to be in museum basements, are finally displayed to the public. The burgeoning interest in Russian art, since Glasnost, has focused almost exclusively on the art of the Avant-Garde, and with the exception of certain artists of the "Peredvizhniki," has tended to by-pass major figures of Russian nineteenth century art, such as Vasilii Vereshchagin.

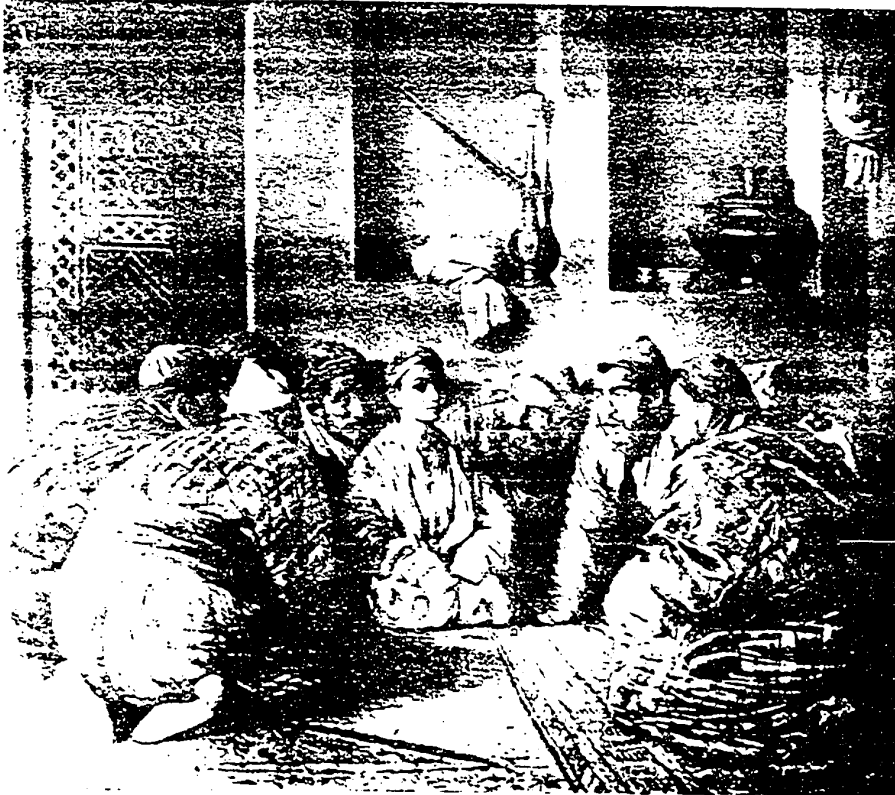


Fig 1. Batsha and His Worshippers, 1868.



Fig. 2. The Opium Eaters, 1868.



Fig. 3. Politicians of the Opium Den, 1870.

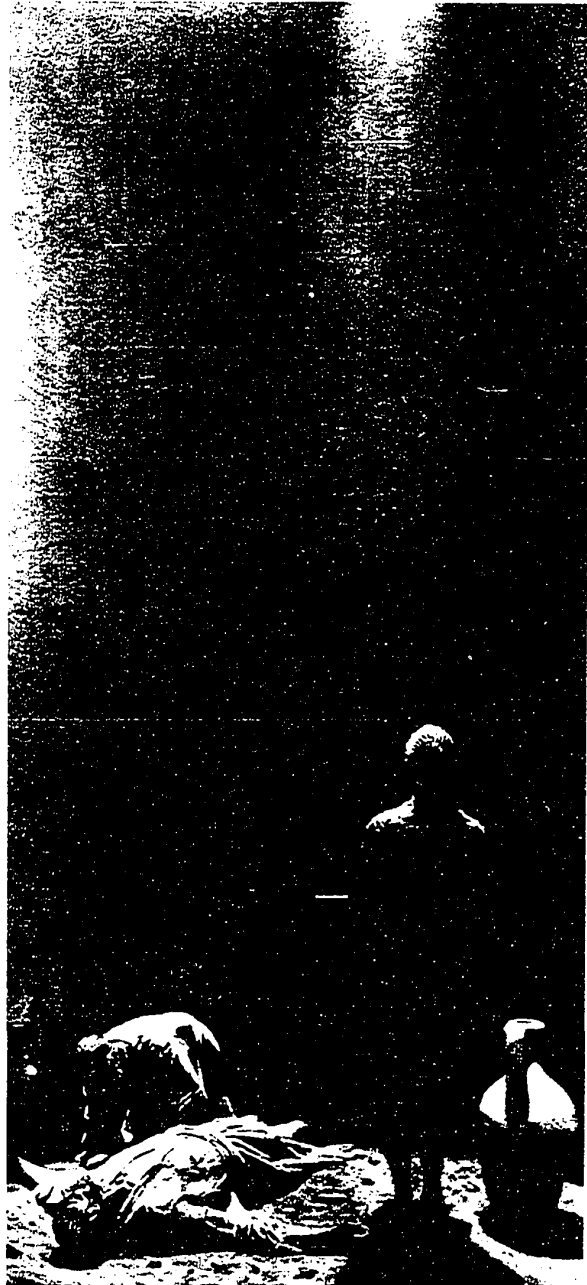


Fig. 4. Underground Prison in Samarkand, 1873.





Fig. 5. Selling a Child Slave, 1872.



Fig. 6. Jean-Léon Gérôme, Slave Market, 1866.



Fig. 7. Uzbek Woman in Tashkent, 1873.



Fig. 8. Beggars in Samarkand, 1870.



Fig. 9. Jean-Léon Gérôme,  
Turkish Butcher Boy in Jerusalem, 1863.



Fig. 10. Dervishes in Festive Clothes, 1870.



Fig. 11. Jean-Léon Gérôme, Prayer in the House of the Arnaut Chief, 1857.

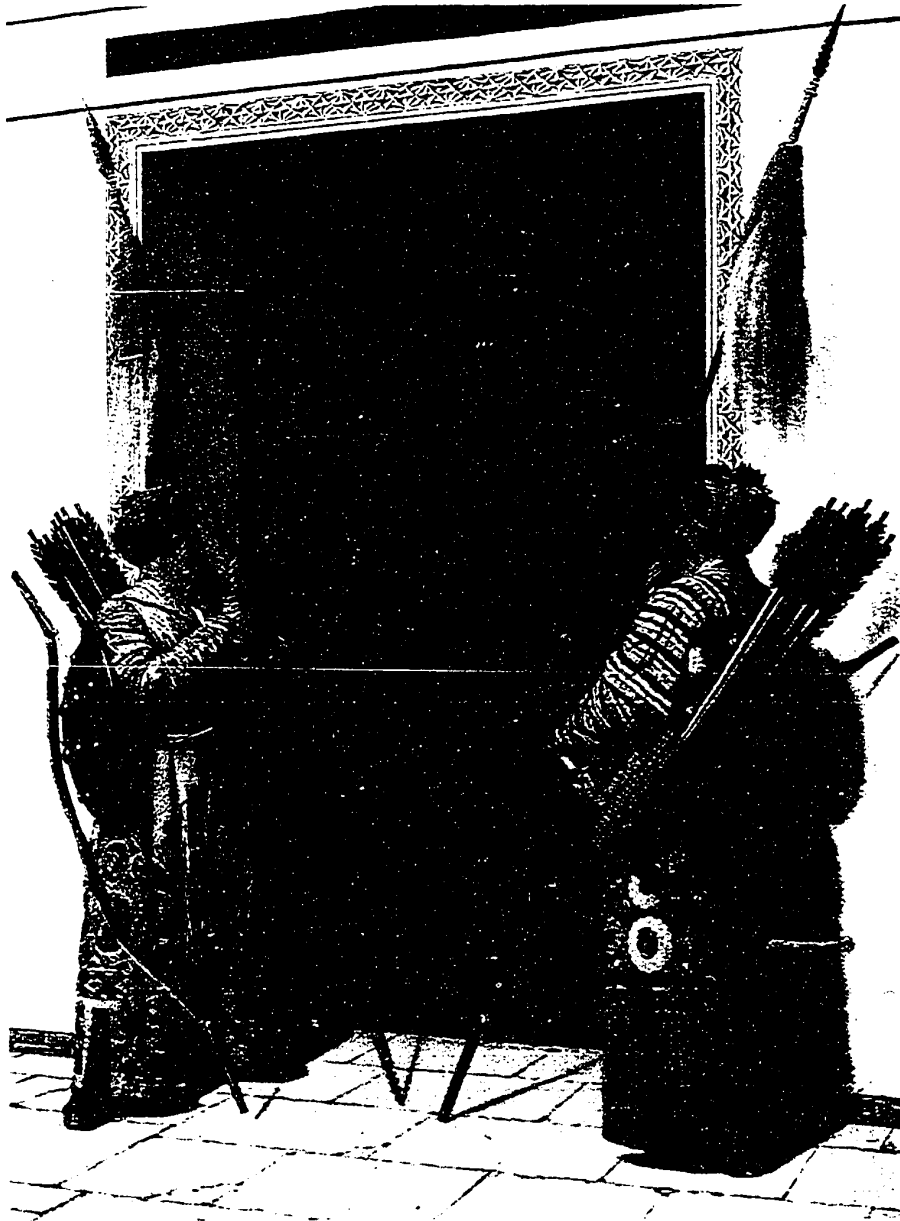


Fig. 12. The Doors of Tamerlane, 1872-73.



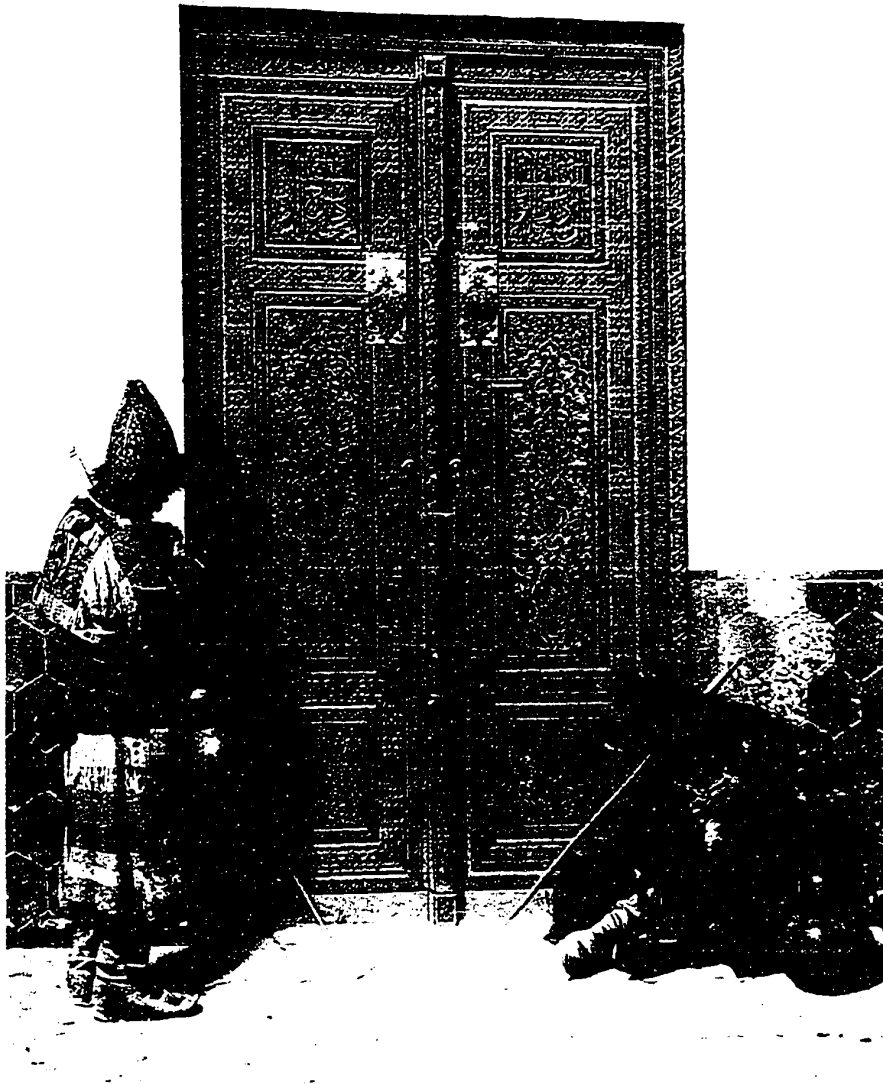


Fig. 13. At The Door of a Mosque, 1873.



Fig. 14. By the Fortress Wall. Let Them Enter!, 1871.



Fig. 15. By the Fortress Wall. They Have Entered!, 1871.



Fig. 16. After Victory, 1868.

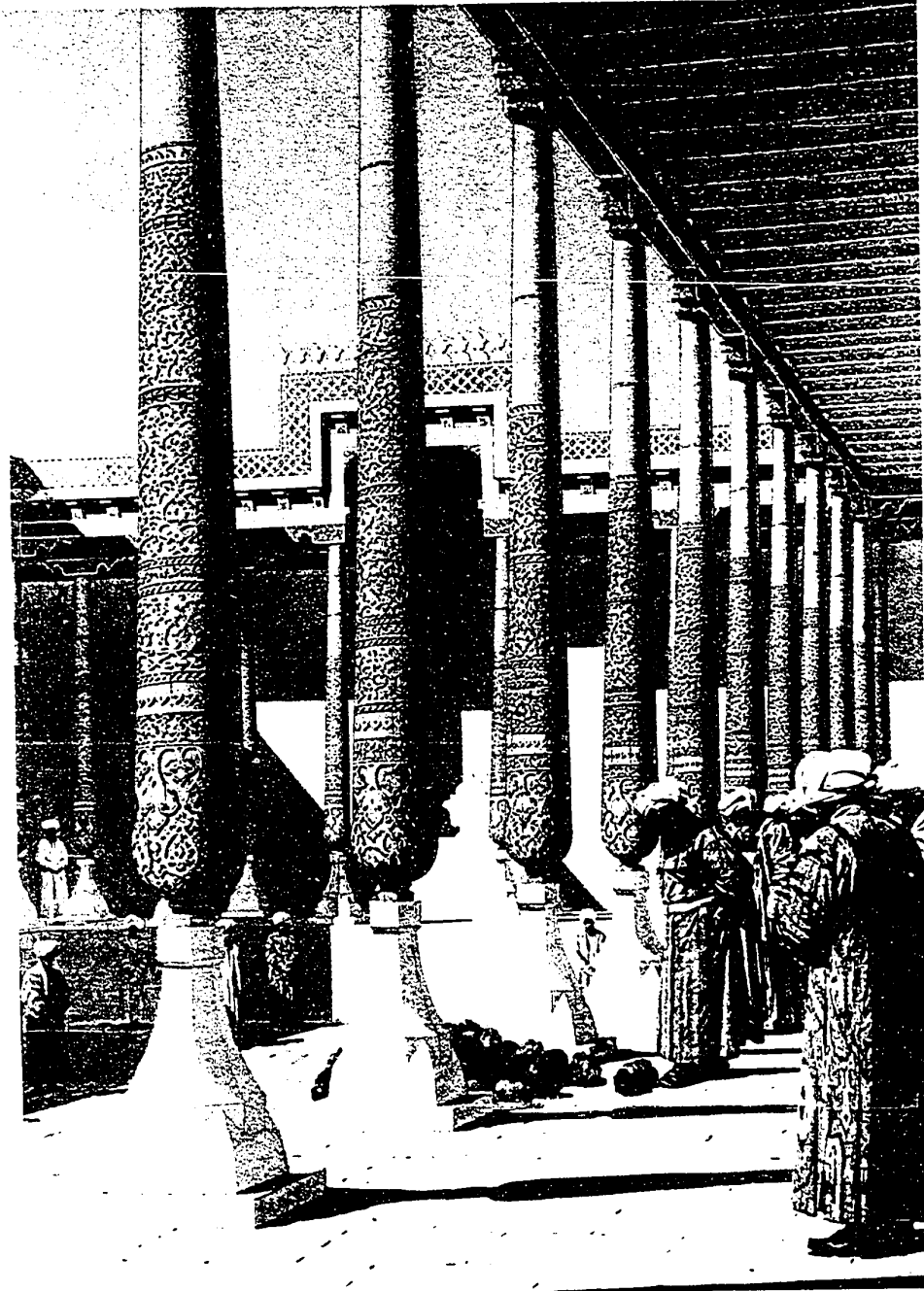


Fig. 17. Presenting the Trophies, 1872.



Fig. 18. Jean-Léon Gérôme, Heads of the Rebel Beys, 1866.

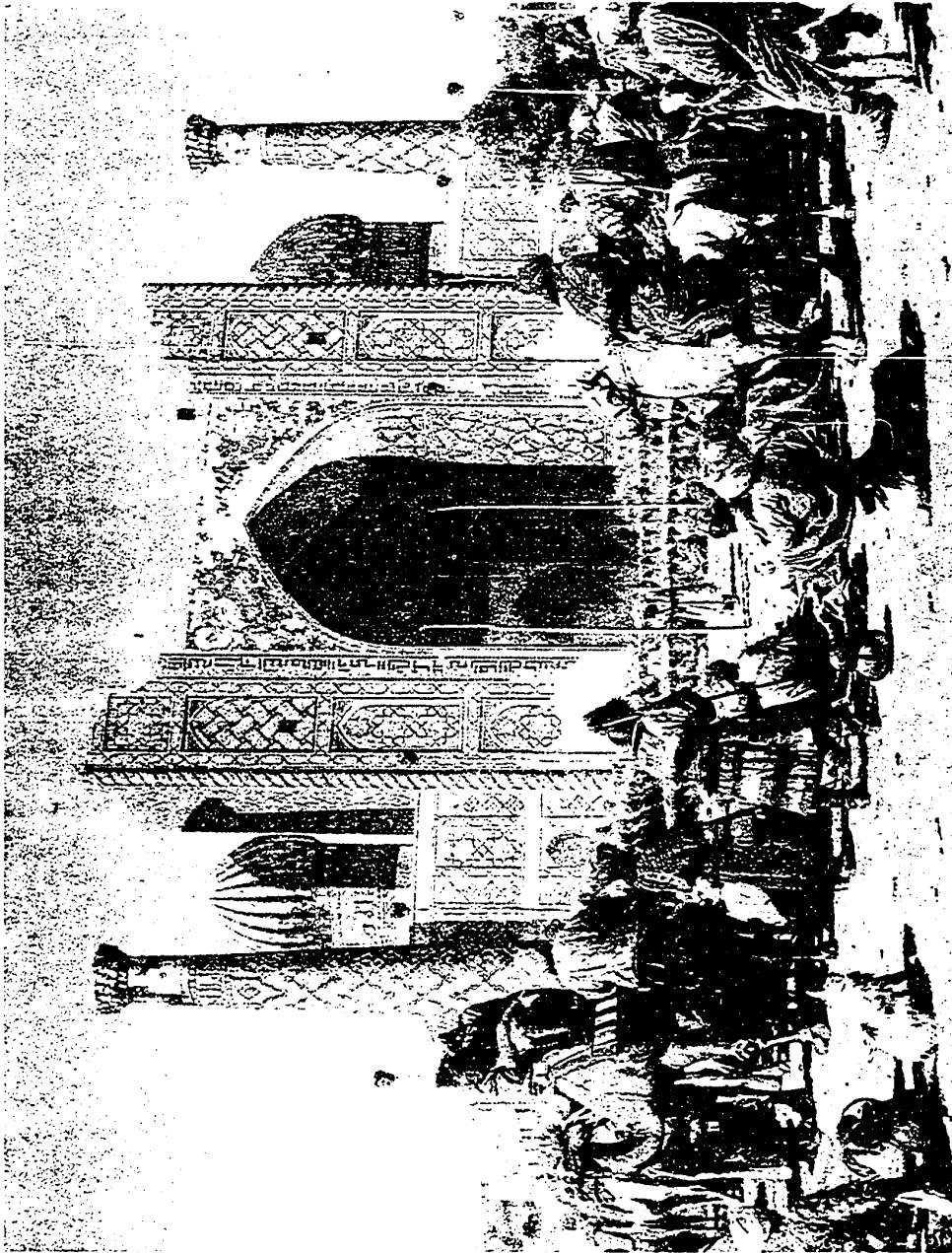


Fig. 19. Rejoicing!, 1872.



Fig. 20. Apotheosis of War, 1872.





Fig. 21. Jean-Léon Gérôme, Plain of Thebes, 1857.



Fig. 22. Ruins of the Theater at Chuguchak, 869(70?).

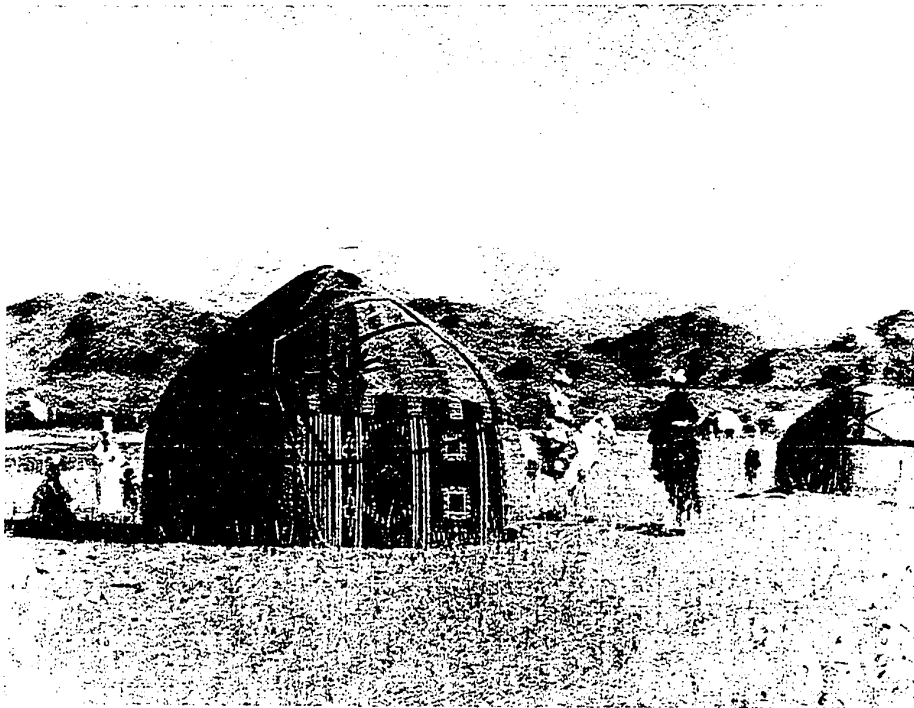


Fig. 23. Kirghiz Tents on the Chu River, 1869-70.



Fig. 24. The Wounded Soldier, 1873.

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