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The Images of the National Past in Russian Art and Historical Culture in the Second Half in the 19th Century Russia

This research project deals with the interrelation between history painting, historical studies and historical fiction in Russia in the second half of the 19th century. It aims both to understand on the one hand how historical knowledges circulated in Russian artistic milieu and on the other hand how Russian society interpreted the images of the national past visualized by Russian artists in the second half in the 19th century. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate what role played visual arts in the formation of a national identity as well as visions of the national past in Russian society from the 1860s to 1890s.

The primary research methods for this study are an interdisciplinary analysis of word and image and a historical-cultural approach. As the study is closely related to the concept of historical culture, it employs the instruments of intellectual history and the history of ideas. In addition, some parts of this study is connected with the social and institutional history of art.

During the so-called period of Alexander II's "Great Reforms" of the 1850s and 1870s, that came to a climax with the liberation of the serfs the formation of the national consciousness was heightened in Russia. In this period, Russian society established the request that artists turn their attention to subjects from the national past – predominantly from pre-Petrine times, when a more "authentic" Russia, not yet affected by the westernizing reforms of Peter the Great, was still in existence. Furthermore, during the second half of the nineteenth century, it was believed that tsar and people were a single entity in pre-Petrine Russia.

At the same time, a new, more critical historical view of the national past was formed in Russian historical studies, which has been made possible by the declassification and publishing of archive materials. Russian historians came to pay very close attention to everyday life in early Russian history. They suggested drawing attention not only to the stories of extraordinary person, but also to the history of society in general. This new outlook on Russian history had an impact on Russian cultural life. In particular, a new type of historical novel emerged in Russian literature (notably Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*). Gradually, subjects from national history had become dominate the repertoire of the theatre and opera. In the creation of costumes and decorations [sets], artists drew more attention to "archaeological" details. For this reason, theatre administrators and directors consulted famous Russian historians and antiquarians.

In contrast to the other arts, Russian painting was left behind in this nation-building process. From the end of the 1850s, Russian academic history painting – usually on Biblical or Ancient topics – was in decline, while painting based on episodes from modern life blossomed. Russian critics suggested that artists turn their face to the national past in order to “rescue” history painting. Nonetheless, there were a small number of history paintings on subjects from the national past at the art exhibitions of the 1860s. Only in the 1870s did Russian artists come to create and present pictures based on Russian history that forced a rethinking of the national past and prompted a wide response in Russian society (notably, N. N. Ge *Peter I interrogates his son at Peterhof*, 1871).

Genre historique that developed in Russia from the 1860s, having first spread across Europe during the middle of the 19th century, laid claim to a scholarly approach to the depiction of historical events. For this reason, Russian artists started to pay attention to and study historical documents and national antiquities more than they had before. In addition, in the second half of the 19th century, artists’ circle of reading of historical writings was significantly expanded beyond Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State*, to include works by S. M. Soloviev, N. I. Kostomarov, I. E. Zabelin, D. I. Ilovaisky, etc.