

EAST AND WEST IN THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

Original article

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Portraits of Circassians in 19th-Century Russian Graphic Art: On the Issue of Representing the Ethnomenality of the Circassian People in Art

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Abstract. Portraits of Circassians in Russian graphic art remain insufficiently studied, with only a few authors addressing them in their articles and no fundamental monographs on the subject currently available. Until the early 19th century, visual representations of Circassians could be found in engravings by European artists. It was only after the first Russian ‘academic expeditions’ and ‘military-strategic surveys’ during the Russo-Caucasian War that graphic images of the inhabitants of Circassia by Russian artists began to appear. The article examines images of Circassians in portrait graphics by Russian artists of the 19th century. It raises issues of authenticity based on ethnographic, historical and cultural materials by European and Russian authors. The attitude of the Circassian people towards sitting for foreign and Russian artists is found in a variety of memoirs. Possible reasons for this behaviour include pagan superstitions, the absence of a ‘guest-host’ relationship, and the increasing Islamisation of the region. The work applies a comprehensive method based on formal-stylistic and cultural-historical analysis. The authors have established that both well-known artists and those who remain in the background turn to depicting the Circassians; the works under study play an important role, but at the same time, they are insufficiently accentuated in art history. For the first time, a historical interpretation of Circassian images in the portraits ‘Fatma, a Kabardian woman from Babukovsky Aul’ by A. V. and A. S. Vysheslavitsev and ‘Prince Nauruzov Tyu-Sultan’ by I. E. Repin is presented. The researchers prove that Russian artists have been interested not only in the general appearance of the Circassian people, but also in individual representatives of this ethnic group since the 1840s; it requires more detailed and lengthy research.

Keywords: ethnography, graphic art, portrait graphics, Circassians, Russo-Caucasian War, Vysheslavitsevs, I. E. Repin

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Портреты черкесов в отечественной графике XIX века: к вопросу отражения этноментальности черкесского народа в искусстве

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Резюме. Портреты черкесов в отечественной графике и ныне остаются недостаточно изученными, лишь немногие авторы обращаются в статьях к их исследованию, фундаментальные монографии подобной тематики на настоящий момент отсутствуют. До начала XIX века визуальное представление о них можно было получить через гравюры европейских авторов. Лишь после первых российских "академических экспедиций" и "военно-стратегических осмотров" в период Русско-Кавказской войны появляются графические изображения жителей Черкесии, выполненные отечественными авторами. В статье исследуются образы черкесов в портретной графике отечественных художников XIX века. Поднимаются проблемы натурной достоверности с опорой на этнографические, исторические и культурологические материалы европейских и отечественных авторов. Исследуется отношение черкесского народа к позированию зарубежным и российским художникам на основе мемуарной литературы. В качестве причин подобного поведения выделяются военное противостояние между Российской империей и Черкесией, возможные языческие суеверия, отсутствие связи "гость-хозяин" и усиливающаяся исламизация региона. В работе применен комплексный метод, основанный на формально-стилистическом и культурно-историческом анализе. Автором установлено, что к изображению черкесов обращаются как известные художники, так и оставшиеся на дальнем плане; в их творчестве обозначенные произведения играют немаловажную роль, но вместе с тем недостаточно акцентированы в искусствоведении. Впервые обозначается искусствоведческая интерпретация черкесских образов в портретах "Фатьма, кабардинка Бабуковского аула" А. В. и А. С. Вышеславцевых и "Князь Наурузовъ Тыу-Султанъ" И. Е. Репина. Резюмируется факт заинтересованности отечественных художников не только в общем облике черкесского народа, но и отдельных его представителей, начиная с 1840-х годов, что требует более детального и длительного изучения.

Ключевые слова: этнография, искусство графики, портретная графика, черкесы, Русско-Кавказская война, Вышеславцевы, И. Е. Репин

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Introduction

The Adyghe, or Circassians, one of the largest indigenous peoples of the northwestern and central Caucasus, inhabit the contemporary republics of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia, as well as the Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai. Circassia and the Russian Empire were linked by centuries of diplomatic relations, which changed dramatically with the onset of the Russo-Caucasian War (1763–1864) (Glasheva, 2022, 31). The increasingly tense political situation in the region had a significant impact on the artistic perception of the Circassians. Feudal Kabarda, the most loyal of the Adyghe subethnic groups, was accessible to Russian artists, while democratic Western Circassia maintained greater ties with the Ottoman Empire (Kuraev et al., 2023, 163) and European emissaries (Kumykov, 2024, 120). For a long time, the Russian Empire's understanding of the Circassians, who had become a symbol of steadfastness and freedom, could only be obtained through engravings by foreign artists: A. Olearius, K. Geisler, F. Feroggio, and many others. These engravings can be found in a variety of history atlases¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷. The mythologem about the incredible beauty of Circassian women, prevalent in Europe and the Middle East, was

particularly reflected by foreign engravers in the images of Circassian females¹⁸. As Pochlebaeva M. B., Valueva A. E. points out, "the question of the nature of the ideal and its visual embodiment remains one of the central issues in art history, since it is precisely through the prism of ideas about the ideal that the deeper essence of cultural epochs is revealed" (Pochlebaeva, Valueva, 2026, 21). However, it is impossible to be sure that these images showed real women: many foreign artists had never personally visited the Caucasus (Kumykov, 2024) and relied on drawings by their predecessors or their own imagination. Images from life were extremely rare, and therefore any sketches were of great value to collectors and lovers of Orientalism.

An equally significant cause of the rarity of sketches drawn from life is the peculiarity of the Circassian ethnic mentality, i.e. unwillingness to sit for artists. Despite the sacred custom of Caucasian hospitality (Satusheva, 2025, 49), the Circassians were wary of sitting, which may have been accounted for by lingering pagan superstitions or the increasing Islamization of the population. However, in 1840, the British adventurer D. S. Bell published engravings from his life drawings as part of his *Journal of a residence in Circassia during the years 1837, 1838 and 1839*¹⁹. In the 1850s,

¹⁵ Hell, X. H. (1845). *Les Steppes de la Mer Caspienne, le Caucase, la Crimée et la Russie Meridionale: voyage pittoresque, historique et scientifique. Atlas historique*. Paris: P. Bertrand, 1845, 25 pl.

¹⁶ Olearius, A. A. (1986). *Moskowitische und Persische Reise. Die Holsteinische Gesandtschaft beim Schah 1633–1639*. Stuttgart: Thienemann, 1986.

¹⁷ Pallas, P. S. (1803). *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die südlichen Statthaltschaften des Russischen Reichs in den Jahren 1793 und 1794*. Leipzig: Martini, 1803.

¹⁸ Uncovering the Truth Behind Barnum's Circassian Beauties Hoax. (n.d.). The Collector. Available at: <https://www.thecollector.com/barnum-circassian-beauties-hoax/> (accessed on: 10 February 2026).

¹⁹ The Adventures of Agent 007 in Circassia (James Stanislaus Bell). (n.d.). Medium. Available

the Scottish artist W. Simpson also created watercolours and pencil sketches. It is important to note that the former lived in Circassian society for three years (The Adventures..., n.d.), and the latter – for less than a month (Simpson, 1903, 68–76). Similar processes of cultural representation and concealment can be observed in other regions that experienced dominant imperial influence. As A. Grasskamp notes in his analysis of the Japanese influence on the development of modern Chinese woodcuts, the role of the regional intermediary was often deliberately ignored in favour of national narratives. The author points out: "While the role of Japanese texts and translations in the shaping of Chinese art history is well-researched, and Sino-Japanese connections in painting, as well as lithography and collotype reproduction, have been investigated, the importance of Japanese agents, concepts, and artworks in the development of modern woodcut aesthetics, techniques, and motifs in China in the 1930s has not been fully acknowledged" (Grasskamp, 2023, 1).

The war between Circassia and the Russian Empire was the main reason why Circassians refused to sit for Russian artists. It is known that Emperor Nicholas I desired to acquire a portrait of the renowned Shapsug leader Sheretluqo Qizbech (Kizbech), but received a point-blank refusal. At the same time, the Circassian leader agreed to sit for J. S. Bell²⁰, an engraving of which was

published in the British emissary's *Journal of a residence in Circassia*. This difference in attitudes toward *our* and *foreign* artists reflects the broader context of the interaction between the empires. As M. Taroutina points out in her study, the visualization of various peoples played a key role in the imperial project: the author "also raises larger issues relating to colonialism, imperial identity formation, and the development of racial ideologies, and tackles a series of complex and interconnected issues such as the various ways in which the visualization of individuals, communities, social types, fictive characters, artefacts, and landscapes facilitated both Russia's understanding of the disparate peoples and cultures in its imperial orbit and its self-conceptualization as a European colonial power" (Taroutina, 2022, 5). As A. Frizon notes in her work on the representation of Africa in Russian culture, the Russian Empire, without overseas colonies, was nonetheless involved in the pan-European process of colonialism. Analyzing the theoretical concept of *colonialism without colonies*, A. Frizon writes: "Proposed by Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert, this theoretical framework builds on previous research into the involvement of non-colonial European countries in a globally colonial environment. It also contributes to the discussion on the applicability of the same analytical framework of colonial vs. non-colonial Western political entities,

at: <https://vshtybin.medium.com/the-adventures-of-agent-007-in-circassia-james-stanislaus-bell-585ae00445f3> (accessed on: 10 February 2026).

²⁰ Bell, J. S. (1840). *Journal of a residence in Circassia during the years 1837, 1838 and*

1839 (Vol. 2). London: Edward Voxon, Dover Street, 1840.

or even to European vs. non-European forms of empire. According to Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert, countries without colonies "had an explicit self-understanding as being outside the realm of colonialism, but nevertheless engaged in the colonial project in a variety of ways and benefitted from these interactions". This perspective challenges the assumption that a country had to be directly involved in colonialism in order to participate in the creation of colonial knowledge. <...> examining its relationship with *external* colonized countries and the consequent creation of knowledge certainly makes a valuable contribution to the discussion" (Frison, 2026, 68–69). As Renaissance portrait researcher J. Hammond points out, "portraits were used by patrons for the careful presentation of self... The unstated pursuit of most portraiture was to encourage contemporary viewers to believe that the sitter lived up to the high standards of public life and other contemporary ideals. Neither portraits nor the Lives were merely empirical documents, they both also involved the promotion of particular ideals and individuals" (Hammond, 2023, 4).

In his autobiographical work, W. Simpson describes two situations demonstrating the complex, ambiguous attitude of the Circassians toward sitting. The artist, who was in Circassia in October 1855 and somewhat frustrated by the lack of female subjects, believes that the reason for the inaccessibility of Circassian women is the Islamization of the region (Simpson, 1903, 73). One day, while sketching a traditional dwelling, W. Simpson attracted the attention of Circassian girls

watching him from afar. The children, followed by the women, approached the artist, allowing to be sketched. Subsequently, W. Simpson specifically set out to depict houses, while carefully capturing images of local residents (Simpson, 1903, 74).

During another incident, W. Simpson witnessed a wedding procession and carefully sketched a ritual initially unknown to him. An equestrian, the bride's kidnapper, stopped next to him, suddenly throwing back his cloak and revealing a fair-haired girl to the artist. This act provoked the indignation of one of the Circassian elders, who forced the groom to continue on his way and stopped sketching (Simpson, 1903, 75). Thus, despite the religious and political situation in the region, it is important to note that the Circassians generally treated the familiar artists. W. Simpson himself wrote that he created sketches of Circassians "rather for costumes than for faces" (Simpson, 1903, 74).

The Russian Empire, like European explorers, was primarily interested in becoming familiar with the external characteristics of the new lands, rather than the inner, spiritual world of an individual highlander. We find a characteristic example of this approach in the descriptions of the traveller and historian A. N. Murav'ev. Having visited the Ateni-Sioni Church in Georgia in 1847, as researchers note: "Muravy'ev is therefore convinced that the church... belongs to a tradition that is emphatically not Armenian". He also addresses the question of the building's patrons, its restorations, and its decorations. Most

importantly, he does not hesitate a moment in explaining the quality of this artistic monument, writing that the best Georgian architectural production is the result of a *cultural transfer* from Constantinople. In other words, for Murav'ev, quality in a peripheral area like the South Caucasus can only be granted by cultural inputs from the center" (Nedd, 2023, 37–38). *Academic expeditions* undertaken in Russia at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries were largely based on the ideas of the Enlightenment. The genre of geographical descriptions or *description géographique*, which became an integral part of the Age of Enlightenment, "expanded the narrow boundaries of the known national space to the scale of the greater world" (King, 2008, 32). The *passion for description* that arose in Europe, the compilation of classifications and systematizations, were sensitively perceived by the Russian monarchy and put into practice. The first such expedition to the North Caucasus was initiated by Empress Catherine II during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774.

For this mission, I. A. Güldenstädt, a Baltic German naturalist, was invited from Berlin. He compiled valuable descriptions of the Caucasus region's natural resources and dictionaries of local languages. It is important to note that the expedition's drafter was G. Beloy, a student at the Drawing Chamber of the Academy of Sciences (Abaydulova, 2019, 202) – to date; he is the first known Russian

artist to depict Circassians (Güldenstädt, 1787).

The illustrations of population types from the treatises of the *Academic Expeditions* share a number of formal and compositional similarities: the elaboration of the background, e.g. painted manure or a conventional landscape, anatomical inaccuracies in the depiction of people, and conventional facial expressions with slight smiles and blushes on the cheeks.

As Russian troops advanced in the Caucasus region, the need to study the annexed territories remained urgent: expeditions were organized for *military-strategic survey*, and new albums and atlases were published. E. M. Korneev, a graduate of the Imperial Academy of Arts, was recruited for the expedition led by General E. M. Sprengporten in 1802²¹.

The engravings, based on his drawings, display a wide variety of compositional, coloristic, and narrative solutions. The artist depicted people in traditional dwellings, on the streets of cities and towns, with sophisticated renderings of the light-air environment and the background landscape. In addition to individual population types, E. M. Korneev created genre scenes: in the *Circassian Dance* engraving, he captured not only Circassians of various classes, but also his self-portrait in the lower right corner (*Academician Korneev himself, sitting by a Tent and playing the Guitar*²²). In the lower left corner, there is a portrait of General E. M. Sprengporten

²¹ Depping, G. B. (1813). *Les peuples de la Russie, ou Description des mœurs, usages et costumes des diverses nations de l'empire de Russie* (Vol. 2). Paris: De l'Imprimerie de D. Colas, 1813, 48 pl.

²² Rovinsky, D. A. (1895). *Detailed dictionary of Russian engravers of the 16th–19th centuries* (Vol. 2, columns 449–1248). St. Petersburg: Printing House of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 551. (In Russian)

with his wife. This decision testifies to the artist's new attitude towards the locals, his attempt to understand the world of the people from within, to become involved in their entertainment. The Russian Empire began to be interested in the Circassians as people, not only as inhabitants of strategically important territories, but portraits were not yet being created.

For a deeper understanding of this process, let us turn to the memoirs of General A.Kh. Benckendorff, who took part in this expedition while still an aide-de-camp (Benckendorff, 2012). In 1803, he accepted the invitation of the Kabardian prince Roslanbek Misostovich Atazhukin and paid a visit to his home. This was a very risky decision, since the prince, despite his rank of colonel, often took part in anti-Russian uprisings. A. Kh. Benckendorff decided to make a long and dangerous journey to see R. M. Atazhukin's sister: "It is almost impossible to see a single Circassian woman, and their beauty is so famous that I did not pay attention to the warnings they gave me about the danger I could be exposed to" (Benckendorff, 2012, 67). At the beginning of the 19th century, relations between the Kabardian leaders and the Russian officers were tense, and it was practically impossible for them to see Circassian women.

A similar interest in the beauty of Circassian women continued into the mid-19th century. N. Danilevsky wrote in 1846: "Whoever wants to understand the grace of beauty in our time must see a Circassian woman. Lively, fiery black eyes; a Greek outline; a charming white face, set off by

a vibrant blush <...> – this is the essence of a beauty from the mountains! ..." (Danilevsky, 1846, 123–124).

In the second half of the 19th century, the opinion of a representative of the Russian intelligentsia about the Circassian woman became more objective. Historian, academician, and Lieutenant General of the Russian Imperial Army N. F. Dubrovin argued that the concept of female beauty is relative: "... it cannot be said that all Circassian women without exception are beautiful, but, in any case, they serve as the finest representatives of the most beautiful white, or so-called Caucasian, tribe. Their beauty was greatly damaged by smallpox, for which no measures were taken to prevent it; the flatness of the body also detracted from their beauty" (Dubrovín, 2002, 138). This shift in the interpretation of Circassian beauty coincided with the development of realistic tendencies in Russian art.

In modern scholarship, interest in graphic art on Caucasian themes is gradually increasing. Images of the North Caucasus highlanders in Russian portrait art were touched upon by K. B. Kurbanova in a 2010 paper (Kurbanova, 2010). The study does not review images of Circassians: it is devoted to the iconography of Imam Shamil, a Dagestani religious and political figure. Nevertheless, this is one of the first research to raise the issue of the *Caucasian* portrait.

In L. N. Khludova's 2014 monograph, reprints of engravings from drawings by E. M. Korneev and Prince G. G. Gagarin are published (Khludova, 2014). The author analyses the depicted costumes

and weaponry from an ethnographic and historical perspective, and cites the memoirs of Russian officers and Western adventurers, revealing the historical and cultural context of the region.

In 2018, fragments of the *Caucasian Types* album by A. V. and A. S. Vysheslavitsev from the collection of the State Russian Museum were published for the first time in the book *Images of the Caucasus. Museum Rarities of the 19th Century* (Makhmudova, 2018). The author, Z. U. Makhmudova, accompanies a number of the drawings with original commentary by an unknown artist, as well as selected ethnographic artefacts. The book includes the drawing "Fatma, a Kabardian from the Babukovsky Aul" (Makhmudova, 2018, 91).

In a 2020 article, Z. U. Makhmudova raises the issue of attribution of the drawings in the *Caucasian Types* album (Makhmudova, 2020). According to the author, most of the images were created by A. V. Vysheslavitsev (1831–1888), a Crimean War veteran, military doctor, writer, artist, and art historian, as well as his uncle, the publicist and connoisseur A. S. Vysheslavitsev (1820–1889).

Domestic and foreign engravings depicting Circassians are presented in the catalogue of the 2022 *Legends of Three Centuries* exhibition by the private collector M. R. Tkhezeplov, who actively promotes

images of his people in global visual culture.

An overview of works created by Russian and Western artists in the Caucasus in the 19th and 20th centuries and their brief biographical notes are provided by M. G. Kuyok in a 2023 article (Kuyok, 2023). The author identifies the stages in the development of the Caucasus artistic image and describes the significant role of Prince G. G. Gagarin, author of the *Picturesque Caucasus*²³ and *Costumes of the Caucasus* albums²⁴.

Modern Western art criticism has also shown interest in Caucasian themes in Russian graphic art. In a 2023 article, A. M. Nedd examines the work of Prince G. G. Gagarin and V. F. Timm in the context of the foreign and domestic policies of the Russian Empire (Nedd, 2023, 77). The author analyses the image of Imam Shamil in the album and newspaper illustrations made by these two artists, referring to all the locals of the North Caucasus who resisted the Russian army, as Circassians, rather than to a specific people.

Thus, it can be concluded that portraits of Circassians in Russian graphic art, as well as graphic art on Caucasian themes in general, are currently virtually unstudied. The purpose of this article is to outline a historical interpretation of Circassians graphic portraits.

The work utilizes a comprehensive method based on:

²³ Le Caucase pittoresque. (1847). *Dessine d'après nature par Le Prince Gregoire Gagarine avec une introduction et un texte explicatif par le comte Ernest Stackelberg. Dedie a sa Majeste Imperiale Nicolas I-er Empereur de toutes les Russies*. Paris: Plon, 1847, 80 pl.

²⁴ Scènes, paysages, mœurs et costumes du Caucase dessinés d'après nature par le prince Grégoire Gagarine et accompagnés d'un texte par le comte Ernest Stackelberg. Paris: A. Hauser, 1845, 36 pl.

– a formal and stylistic analysis of graphic works: composition, line work, and tone;

– an attention to cultural and historical details necessary for understanding the authenticity of Circassian images.

However, the appeal to historical images in 19th-century art was rarely limited to purely aesthetic purposes. M. Mateo, analysing the role of the fictional monument in Spanish romantic nationalism, reveals a mechanism similar to that observed in Circassian portrait graphics. According to her, the art of that period often served multi-layered purposes: it not only recorded reality but also lent "it lent scientific credibility to a particular historical narrative of the nation; it helped construct and authenticate a national identity; it made that identity real; and it charted a pathway for the nation's future progress" (Mateo, 2023, 4). In this paradigm, the artist is not limited by the role of the creator – "the Spanish painter assumed the roles of artist, metaphorical architect, historian, and politician, blurring the boundaries between these domains" (Mateo, 2023, 4).

As M. Bowman notes in his review of Stephen Mooney's book on the analysis of American art criticism, Clement Greenberg's formalism, which has had a significant influence on global art criticism, should not be perceived as a set of rigid dogmas. On the contrary, Greenberg's key works demonstrate a complex dialectic, in which concepts such as *flatness* and *illusion* are in constant, fluid interaction. Bowman emphasizes that even in works such as *Collage*, Greenberg explores the *qualified defence of illusion*, and

his reflections on Cubism revolve around how works create *the illusion of forms in bas-relief* and achieve "sculptural effects through non-sculptural means" (Bowman, 2023, 4–5). This approach, which avoids a simplified understanding of artistic form, resonates with the authors' objectives in analysing graphic portraits of Circassians.

In Russian art, a special category of Circassians' graphic images is represented by the drawings from the *Caucasian Albums* of the 1840s–1850s, which belonged to A. V. and A. S. Vysheslavl'tsev and possess high artistic value, individual features, and a variety of imagery. The works were created in Kabarda and Eastern Circassia.

Fatma from Babukovsky Aul (Fig. 1) can be considered the first portrait of a Circassian woman in Russian art to date.



Figure 1. A. V. Vysheslavl'tsev or A. S. Vysheslavl'tsev (?). *Fatma, a Kabardian woman from Babukovsky Aul*. From the Vysheslavl'tsevs' *Caucasian Albums* Pencil, paper. 1840s–1850s. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

The artist's commentary, written next to the drawing, enables a deeper understanding of the sitter's character: "...the Russians, the Cossacks, call her, by the sound of it, Katenka, and the Kabardins

follow suit. She is the wife of a nobleman, he was exiled to Siberia, and she, left a widow, earns a living in Pyatigorsk, where attends a course, sewing arkhaluks (traditional Caucasian male kaftans), knitting belts, and so on. Wooden stilts or clogs, which are worn on the street, are very comfortable against dirt and dampness" (Makhmudova, 2018, 90).

The artist masterfully conveys the varied textures of Fatima's clothing: dense cross-stitching in the depiction of the fur trim on the caftan, soft, sparse lines for the flowing drapes of the scarf, and parallel lines in the detailing of the metal belt and the braid on the cap.

Finding herself in a difficult situation, the noblewoman Fatma is forced to manage the family's affairs alone, which is reflected in the portrait. The Kabardian woman is depicted in an unsteady sit, as if she could lose her balance at any moment while standing on her buskins. At the same time, the woman confidently holds a rich belt with her right hand, as if trying to maintain composure in the current situation. Fatma's expression is distant, and her large, sad eyes are directed somewhere beyond the graphic page.

Fatma's portrait is rich in ethnographic details. Her footwear – wooden buskins, a privilege reserved for highborn Circassian nobility – attests to her noble origins. It is noteworthy that the artist describes their wearing in damp weather, whereas costume scholars consider buskins to be a purely class-specific attribute: noble Circassian women used these shoes for ceremonial purposes during receptions or dances (Kanokova et al., 2022, 118).

The Kabardian hairstyle is also typical of the period. Beginning in the 1840s, Circassian women used to cut their bangs and side strands, which particularly accentuated the whiteness of their skin and corrected the shape of their faces.

I. E. Repin, who created a graphic portrait of the Kabardian prince Tausultan Magometovich Nauryzov (also Tyu-sultan, Toghu-sultan) in 1888 (Fig. 2), deviates from ethnographic details to a greater degree than the author of the Vysheislavtsev album. The portrait was made during the artist's trip to the Caucasus with his son and most likely was a quickly made sketch.



Figure 2. I. E. Repin. Prince Nauryzov Toghu-Sultan. Pencil, paper. 1888. Collection of V. N. Baksheev (1862-1958). Moscow (New information..., 1969). Current location unknown

It is noteworthy that a Circassian officer named Khamzaev sit for I. M. Bunakov, the Chuguev artist, I. E. Repin's teacher painting. According to I. E. Repin's memoirs, the equestrian sat "for an entire summer day, without rest or food, like a heroic figure" (New information..., 1969, 32). Raised according to strict Caucasian customs, the officer, upon seeing himself in Bunakov's painting, displays an unusual reaction – he smiled

with childish joy and exclaimed "Horseman Khamzaev! No matter how much you feed the wolf, he still looks at the forest". Although the painting's condition and location remain unknown today, this biographical detail testifies to a new Circassian attitude toward sitting: Khamzaev expressed the highest possible approval that a man of his ethnic origin could afford.

I. E. himself Repin spoke highly of this portrait, believing that the portrait of the Circassian Khamzaev particularly revealed Holbein's influence on the work of I. M. Bunakov (New information..., 1969, 31). The teacher's embrace of Circassian imagery could have sparked a similar interest in his student, and in this light, it is interesting to examine the portrait of Prince T. M. Nauryzov, painted by I. E. Repin in 1888.

Prince T. M. Nauryzov's youth (1870–1929) coincided with the post-war decades, when the North Caucasian nobility was just beginning to recognize itself as part of a multinational empire. The Circassians who remained in their homeland continued the primary craft of their ancestors—the art of war. Tausultan, like his father, Prince Magomet Khatakshukovich (whose appearance is known from an engraving based on a drawing by the German artist T. Horschelt, Fig. 3), took an active part in the First World War as a member of the Kabardian Cavalry Regiment.



Figure 3. T. Horschelt (author of the drawing, 1859). Kabardian Prince Magomet Nauryzov. *Caucasian Campaign Drawings*. Paper, phototype. 1896.

In 1913, T. M. Nauryzov was also among the representatives of the locals of the Terek and Kuban regions at the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the reign of the House of Romanov. The prince would later become a deputy of the Nalchik Mountain Verbal Court and a member of the Society for the Dissemination of Education among the Kabardians of the Nalchik District (Babich et al., 2020, 154).

A half-length portrait by I. E. Repin depicts the young prince at the age of eighteen. The figure of T. M. Nauryzov is presented full-face, with his head in a three-quarter turn. On the right side of the drawing is an inscription in Russian with the name of the sitter: "Prince Nauryzov Tyu-Sultan", incorrectly rendered in the 1969 collection of articles and letters, "New about Repin", as "Prince Nauryzov Togu-Sultan"²⁵.

In terms of the time of its creation, the work can be dated to the heyday of I. E. Repin's creative work (1880–1890),

²⁵ New information about Repin. (I. A. Brodsky, V. N. Moskvinov, Comps. & Eds.). Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1969. (In Russian)

when his graphic work was dominated by a linear approach with a light and dynamic artistic style (Skorobogacheva, 2015, 92–93). The artist achieves a sense of movement by using the opposing directions of the youth's head and body, as if the prince had suddenly turned toward something beyond the graphic sheet.

The artist pays more attention to the prince's facial features than to the details of his clothing and weaponry. The Circassian coat, cartridge belts, and dagger are drawn quickly, even cursorily—with just a few strokes and no tonal detail. This does not detract from the prince's well-proportioned figure: the contrast between his broad shoulders and slender waist.

In contrast, I. E. Repin's depiction of his subject's facial features is much more detailed: an open forehead, thick eyebrows, eyes with drooping outer corners, a large, straight-bridged nose, a long, slightly cleft chin, and barely visible moustache and stubble. For the first time, the image of a Circassian was reflected in the prism of high Russian realism, when the artist creates a portrait of a highlander, rather than his exotic costume and weapons.

Researcher of Repin's works, G. Mardilovich, analysing Repin's famous painting *The Unexpected* notes the dual characteristic of the artist during this period: "On the one hand, this canvas has been lauded as the quintessential work of Russian realism... there is a certain discomfort in the contrast between the dark-clad exile standing in that doorway and his family's sunlit room with its vibrant blue and violet wallpaper. One

is struck by the brightness, colours, and by how Repin's canvas is painted... Repin seems to have given equal weight to the narrative as to his mark-making in producing this work" (Mardilovich, Taroutina, 2020, 50)

Conclusion

Summarizing the material under study, some of which have never been studied before, we have come to the following conclusions:

- Portraits of Circassians in 19th-century Russian art are unique and quite rare for a number of historical and political reasons;

- Their availability, both to the general public and to critics, dates back only to the 1840s, which largely explains the fragmentary nature of their study;

- Based on the materials uncovered, we have established that both renowned artists (I. E. Repin) and those relegated to the background (A. V. and A. S. Vysheslavtsev) depicted Circassians; these works play a significant role in their oeuvre, yet remain under-represented in art criticism. Researcher D. Singh, analysing similar processes in the historiography of Indian art, emphasizes the importance of studying such *selective processes* in art criticism. As the author writes: "German-speaking art historians presented a new, revisionist take on Indian art history by ascribing equal importance to the different legacies of Indian art". They circumvented the impasse between, on the one hand, colonial writing on art... and, on the other hand, the emergence at the beginning of the twentieth century of so-called

nationalist art historians... German-speaking exiles presented, instead, an inclusive take on Indian art that emphasized both its Hindu and Islamic legacies" (Singh, 2017, 395). In this regard, graphic portraits of the 19th century, which captured the Circassians in the period preceding large-scale changes in their identity, acquire special value. Thus,

beginning in the 1840s, Russian artists began to show interest in not only the general appearance of the Circassian people, but also in their individual representatives, which has been revealed in this study and which undoubtedly requires a more detailed and lengthy study.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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