

**ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BLACK SEA:
INTERSECTING DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY AND EMPIRE
IN THE PAINTINGS OF IVAN KONSTANTINOVICH AIVAZOVSKY**



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To Kerem and Ümit Cem

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relationship between the visual arts and the imagination and construction of identities and spaces. It focuses on Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky (1817–1900) within a cross-cultural network of meaning, in particular addressing the manifold functions of the visual arts in nineteenth-century Russian society, while attending to a diverse range of voices within, and beyond, Russian culture.

This study examines how art and material culture were used to construct imperial, national, and social identities in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire and its southern coasts, and how these ways of making sense of the world interacted. Combining iconographic analysis of selected paintings, the context of nineteenth-century artistic milieus, and the biography of the artist, my research illuminates how the art of Aivazovsky was used to mediate critical stages in the relations of the nineteenth-century Black Sea world. It also shows how artistic and material contexts clarified the emergence of specific possibilities of national identity and their extension to the imperial.

Analyzing Aivazovsky's oeuvre thematically, in Ottoman and Armenian as well as Russian contexts, while retaining the artist's intersecting identities (Russian, Russian-Armenian, and Armenian), facilitates a more nuanced understanding of nineteenth-century visual culture and cultural diplomacy involving Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Armenia. Thus, art is shown to have functioned simultaneously as a process of building contextual cultural identifications and an instrument for cross-cultural and cross-imperial dialogue. Going beyond another round of national struggle for cultural ownership, the thesis investigates the complexity of context, artist, and oeuvre that emerged before the cultural hegemony of the nation. By contextualizing

Aivazovsky as “in-between” and “across,” rather than as embedded in the nation (or any given empire), this dissertation revises our understanding of his influence. A focus is placed on the function of the artist in respect of the histories, cultures, and politics of the peoples around the Black Sea and recalling of an older, more deeply rooted, artistic and intellectual cultural mapping of this region.

By analyzing not only the ever-shifting state policies with respect to the Black Sea region but also the varying aspects of the Black Sea topography (and specifically the Crimean region) in the Russian imagination, I offer intriguing perspectives on the shifting sense of “Russianness” itself as the nation looked to move from a land-based (supposed backward) territorial empire to a maritime (forward-looking) imperial power. Locating in his creative works the features of his “national” character as a Russian imperial citizen, the expressions of the ancient culture of the Armenians, and his passion for the natural beauty of the Black Sea, my new approach views Aivazovsky as a painter, subject, and citizen operating simultaneously within, beyond, and across imperial borders and national imaginaries.

Keywords: Aivazovsky, nineteenth-century Russian painting, seascape, the Black Sea, identity, Armenian painting.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma görsel sanatlar ile kimlik ve mekân algısının tahayyülü ve inşası arasındaki organik bağı kültürlerarası bir iletişim ağı içinde, Ivan Konstantinovich Ayvazovski'ye (1817–1900) odaklanarak incelemektedir. Çalışmam on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Rusya İmparatorluğu sınırlarına bakarak özellikle güney kıyılarında (Karadeniz ve Kırım coğrafyası) emperyal, ulusal ve sosyal kimliklerin inşa sürecini ve bu süreçte sanatın ve kültür politikalarının nasıl kullanıldığını; ne şekilde etkileşim içinde olduklarını analiz etmektedir. Sanatçının seçilen resimlerinin ikonografik tahlilini, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sanatsal ortamının bağlamı kapsamında biyografisi ile birleştiren araştırmalarım, her iki imparatorluğun ilişkilerinde kritik aşamalara aracılık etmek için Ayvazovski'nin sanatının nasıl kullanıldığını aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir. Aynı zamanda, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl sanat dünyasının daha net bir biçimde anlaşılması, o yüzyılın politik ortamının temelini oluşturan belirli ulusal kimliklerin nasıl ortaya çıktığının kavranmasını da kolaylaştıracaktır.

Rus ve Osmanlı bağlamlarında Ayvazovski'nin kesişen kimliklerinin (Rus, Rus-Ermeni ve Ermeni) etkisi altında çalışmalarını incelemek, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Rusya ve Avrupa arasında on dokuzuncu yüzyıla ait bir görsel kültür ve kültür diplomasisi anlayışını yaratmaktadır. Burada sanat, kültürel kimlikler oluşturma ve kültürler arası diyalog için bir araç oluşturma süreci olarak da tanımlanabilir. Ayvazovski böylece Rus, Ermeni ve Osmanlı/Türk sanat tarihinin en önemli figürlerinden sadece biri değil, aynı zamanda bu ulusal geleneklerin kesiştiği bir anın somut göstergesi konumuna gelmiştir.

Sadece on dokuzuncu yüzyıldan kalma Romantik Rus deniz manzarası ressamı olarak tanımlamak yerine, Ayvazovski'yi stilistik ve kimlik oluşumu açısından çok boyutlu bir mercek ile incelemek bu çalışmanın amacını oluşturmaktadır.

Ayvazovski'nin yaratıcılığını tam olarak anlamak için Ermeni ve Osmanlı sanatındaki rolüne atıfta bulunmak çok önemlidir. Böylece, Rus kültürüne ait olmakla birlikte, Ermeni ve (bir dereceye kadar) Osmanlı kültürüne de ait olduğu söylenebilir. Onu, bu iki imparatorluğun tam da kesişim noktasına yerleştirerek, Ayvazovski'yi Karadeniz çevresindeki halkların tarihlerini, kültürlerini ve siyasetini bir araya getiren bir sanatçı olarak ele alan bu çalışma, bölgenin daha eski bir sanatsal/entelektüel haritasını da ortaya çıkartmayı hedeflemektedir. Bir Rus imparatorluk yurttaşı olarak ürettiği eserler, Ermeni milli kültür bilincinin gelişimine katkıları aynı zamanda İstanbul'un pitoresk görüntüsüne karşı tutkusu onu bu üç kültür içerisinde paralel bir anlayışla ele almamıza yardımcı olur. Bu çalışma, çok uluslu bir karaktere sahip ressam ve vatandaş olarak Ayvazovski'ye odaklanarak ulusal sınırların ötesinde daha geniş bir coğrafya olarak tanımlayabileceğimiz “Karadeniz” bağlamıyla kesişecek ve birleşecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aivazovsky, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Rus resim sanatı, manzara resmi, Karadeniz, kimlik, Ermeni resim sanatı.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

ÖZET v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....vii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....xi

LIST OF FIGURES.....xiv

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION.....xviii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xix

INTRODUCTION..... 1

An Empire of the Land/Seascape..... 11

Sources and Structure..... 13

CHAPTER 1 Imagining the Black Sea: Representation of the Russian Imperial

“Paradise” 24

Introduction.....24

Painting the Russian Picturesque: Aivazovsky in Crimea 30

Authenticity versus Artificiality.....42

The Historicizing Visual Order of the Russian Navy in the Art of Aivazovsky’s

Commissions 44

Crimea Revisited: Seascapes of the Motherland.....48

Catherine the Great and the Paradise Myth.....52

Illustrating the Grandeur Realistically: The Black Sea.....56

Conclusion.....59

CHAPTER 2 Historical Vision and the Representation of History in Aivazovsky's	
Battle Paintings.....	62
Introduction.....	62
The Russo-Ottoman War of 1768–1774.....	68
The Battle of Chios and Chesme.....	68
The Battle of Navarino and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–29.....	73
“Azov” and “Mercury” as Representations of Russian Maritime Power	73
The Crimean War of 1853–1856.....	77
Depicting the Sacred Martyrdom: Heroic Death and Allegory in Aivazovsky's	
<i>The Malakhov Burial Mound</i>	85
The View from Sevastopol: The Two Depictions of the Squadron of the Black	
Sea Fleet Entering the Sevastopol Roadstead	89
The Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–1878.....	91
Conclusion.....	101
CHAPTER 3 God's Storm: The Portrayals of Maritime Disasters and Shipwrecks	
.....	104
Introduction.....	104
The Heroic Ideal: Peter the Great as the Father of Modern Russia	107
Shipwrecks and Loss: The Disaster of Ingermanland.....	112
Victory of Man, Humanity, and Life: <i>The Ninth Wave</i> , <i>Rainbow</i> and <i>The Wave</i> . ..	115
Creating the Sublime: <i>Storm at Cape Aya</i> and <i>Shipwreck</i>	120
The Biggest Shipwreck in History: Noah's Ark	123
Conclusion.....	127
CHAPTER 4 The View from Ararat: The Articulation of Aivazovsky's Armenian	
Identity.....	130
Introduction.....	130
The Nationalization of Nature: Depictions of Mount Ararat	134

Framed by a Bible: Depictions of Ararat as a Holy Mountain, <i>Descent of Noah from Ararat</i>	141
Portrayal of an Atrocity: Aivazovsky’s Responses to the Ottoman-Armenian Massacre of 1895–97	143
The Last Stage of His Life: 1899 Baku Exhibition and Depiction of Lord Byron.....	156
Conclusion.....	159
CONCLUSION	162
Aivazovsky: An Artistic Legacy	168
A Final Word: The Crimean Legacy and Staging the Black Sea.....	172
BIBLIOGRAPHY	174
FIGURES	193

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Moonlight Night on the Crimea Gurzuf</i> , 1839,.....	193
Figure 2 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Yalta</i> , 1838,.....	194
Figure 3 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Old Feodosia</i> , 1839, ...	195
Figure 4 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Landing at Subashi</i> , 1839, ...	196
Figure 5 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Sveaborg</i> , 1844, ...	197
Figure 6 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Reval from the 1843 Roadstead</i> , 1844,.....	198
Figure 7 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>View of Odessa on a Moonlit Night</i> , 1846,.....	199
Figure 8 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Moonlit Night on the Seashore</i> , 1849, ...	200
Figure 9 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Sunset at the Crimean Shores</i> , 1856,.....	201
Figure 10 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>View in Oreanda</i> , 1858,.....	202
Figure 11 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Moonlit Night in the Crimea</i> , 1859,.....	203
Figure 12 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Arrival of Catherine II in Feodosia</i> , 1883,..	204
Figure 13 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Black Sea</i> , 1881, ...	205
Figure 14 – The Black Sea, view from the balcony of Aivazovsky's estate, ...	206
Figure 15 – The Chesme Hall at the Grand Palace in Peterhof, St. Petersburg	207
Figure 16 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Battle of Çeşme at Night</i> , 1848,.....	208
Figure 17 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Naval Battle at Chios</i> , 1848,.....	209
Figure 18 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Battle of Navarino on 8 October 1827</i> , 1846, ...	210
Figure 19 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Mercury Brig Meeting the Russian Squadron After Her Victory over Two Turkish Vessels</i> , 1848,.....	211
Figure 20 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Brig Mercury Attacked by Two Turkish Ships</i> , 1892,.....	212
Figure 21 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Battle of Sinop</i> , 1853, ...	213

Figure 22 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Sinop. Night After the Battle on 18 November 1853</i> , 1853,.....	214
Figure 23 – Top: Ivan K. Aivazovsky's depictions of Osman Pasha and Adil Bey	215
Figure 24 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Siege of Sevastopol</i> , 1854, ...	216
Figure 25 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Malakhov Burial Mound</i> , 1893,.....	217
Figure 26 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Russian Squadron on the Sevastopol Roadstead</i> , 1846,.....	218
Figure 27 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet Entering the Sevastopol Roadstead</i> , 1895,.....	219
Figure 28 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Battle Between Steamer Vesta and the Turkish Battleship Feth-i Bülend on the Black Sea on 11 July 1877</i> , 1895,.....	220
Figure 29 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Cutters of the Steamship Grand Duke Konstantin Attacking the Turkish Battleship Asâr-ı Şevket on the Sukhumi Roadstead on 12 August 1877</i> , 1877,.....	221
Figure 30 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Alexander II Crossing the Danube</i> , 1878, ...	222
Figure 31 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Imperial Fleet in front of Çırağan Palace</i> , 1875,.....	223
Figure 32 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Ottoman Fleet</i> , 1874, ...	224
Figure 33 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Ottoman Fleet</i> , 1875, ...	225
Figure 34 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Peter the Great at Krasnaya Gorka Lighting a Bonfire on the Shore to Signal His Ships in Distress</i> , 1846,.....	226
Figure 35 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Battle of Reval</i> , 1846, ...	227
Figure 36 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Shipwreck of the Ingermanland in the Skagerrak on the Night of 31 August 1842</i> , 1860s, ...	228
Figure 37 – Ilya E. Repin, <i>Wide World</i> , 1903,.....	229
Figure 38 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Ninth Wave</i> , 1850, ...	230

Figure 39 – Théodore Géricault, <i>The Raft of Medusa</i> , 1818 and 1819,.....	231
Figure 40 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Rainbow</i> , 1873,.....	232
Figure 41 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Wave</i> , 1889, ...	233
Figure 42 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Storm at Cape Aya</i> , 1875,.....	234
Figure 43 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Shipwreck</i> , 1876,.....	235
Figure 44 – Arnold Böcklin, <i>Isle of Dead</i> , 1880,.....	236
Figure 45 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Icebergs in the Atlantic</i> , 1870,.....	237
Figure 46 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The World Flood</i> , 1864,.....	238
Figure 47 – Gustave Doré, <i>The Deluge</i> ,.....	239
Figure 48 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Chaos: The Creation</i> , 1841, ...	240
Figure 49 – Robert Ker Porter, <i>View of the Fortress of Erivan and Ararat</i> , 1821, .	241
Figure 50 – F. Parrot, <i>View of Ararat and the Monastery of Echmiadzin</i> , c. 1834,.	242
Figure 51 – H. F. B. Lynch, <i>Ararat from the Lake Echmiadzin</i> , c. 1901,.....	243
Figure 52 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Araks River and Ararat</i> , 1875,.....	244
Figure 53 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Mount Ararat</i> , 1868,.....	245
Figure 54 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Lake Sevan</i> , 1869,.....	246
Figure 55 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Mount Ararat</i> , 1885,.....	247
Figure 56 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Descent of Noah from Ararat</i> , 1889, ...	248
Figure 57 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Catholicos M. Khrimian in the Neighborhood of Echmiadzin</i> , 1895,.....	249
Figure 58 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Massacre of the Armenians in Trebizond</i> 1895, 1897,.....	250
Figure 59 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Turks Load Armenians onto the Ship</i> , 1897, ...	251
Figure 60 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Turks Offload the Armenians into the Sea of Marmara</i> , 1897, ...	252

Figure 61 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Noah's Descent from Ararat</i> , 1898,.....	253
Figure 62 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Descent of Noah from Ararat after the Great Flood</i> , 1892,.....	254
Figure 63 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Quiet Night: Armenians Thrown Overboard</i> , 1897, ...	255
Figure 64 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Night: The Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara</i> , 1897, ...	256
Figure 65 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Byron on the Island of San Lazzaro</i> , 1899,.....	257
Figure 66 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Niagara Falls</i> , 1893,.....	258
Figure 67 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Moonrise: The First Train in Feodosia</i> , 1892,...	259
Figure 68 – Railway in Feodosia, photography by the author	260
Figure 69 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Explosion of the Turkish Ship</i> , 1892,.....	261
Figure 70 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Sappho</i> , 1893, ...	262
Figure 71 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Flood in Sudak</i> , 1897,.....	263
Figure 72 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>The Explosion of a Ship</i> [uncompleted], 1900,...	264
Figure 73 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, <i>Atlantic Ocean</i> , 1896, ...	265
Figure 74 – Aivazovsky House and Painting Gallery, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	266
Figure 75 – Monument-Fountain, Feodosia, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	267
Figure 76 – The Aivazovsky Fountain, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	268
Figure 77 – The grave of Aivazovsky, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	269
Figure 78 – The Armenian Church of St. Sarkis and the grave of Aivazovsky, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	270
Figure 79 – Panoramic view of Feodosia, early 20 th century, scenic postcard, ...	271

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

When translating from Russian to English, I have used the Library of Congress system with occasional modifications. I use ‘y’ rather than ‘ii’ or ‘yi’ for the end of proper names (Aivazovsky rather than Aivazovski, Dostoyevsky rather than Dostoyevskii). I use established English variants of place names—such as Crimea, rather than Krym, and Moscow rather than Moskva. The names of rulers are also given in their familiar English form—hence Peter, Catherine, and Paul, rather than Petr, Ekaterina, and Pavel. The dates of a ruler’s reign are given at his or her first mention, as are the birth and death dates of key individuals. Finally, the names of some places vary in modern Russian and Ukrainian. I here use the Russian forms as they were most common during the period covered in this work. In parenthetical notations of Russian words or phrases, and throughout the notes and bibliography, I have preferred to provide the notations in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. It is easier to find the original sources with this original style of writing. However, for repeated footnotes, I indicate the sources in English translations to make the repetition easier to follow; the first footnote gives the original (Cyrillic) name and translation, and the footnotes thereafter use just the English. Unless specifically noted, all translations are mine. When quoting existing translations, I have made minor adjustments for clarity.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RGIA	Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg
RGALI	Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow
ORGTG	Manuscript Department, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
RGAVMF	Russian State Archives of the Navy, St. Petersburg
BOA	Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives, Istanbul



INTRODUCTION

While Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky (1817–1900) is nowadays considered as among the most esteemed Russian painters of his age, particularly of seascapes, his unique “intersected” identity—a mix of Russian, Crimean, and Armenian heritage—invites larger questions about his visual representations in relation to broader social, cultural, imperial and national contexts. In 1881, the hall at Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow—regarded as the artistic pride of Russia—received Aivazovsky’s monumental canvas *Black Sea*, celebrating the magnificence of the sea and its eternity. Yet, this single example of the artist’s work represents but one of many instances of the intersection, the duality, of art, and nation-building work produced by Aivazovsky over the course of the long nineteenth century.

My own attempt to grapple with Aivazovsky began with a project I started in 2012, “The Intersection of Identities: The Russian Aivazovsky vs. Turkish Aivazovsky,” in which I reached the conclusion that the issue at hand involved recovering the complexity of a context, artist, and oeuvre that emerged before the cultural hegemony of the nation. In this respect, my dissertation has analyzed the relationship between the visual arts and the imagination and construction of identities and spaces.

Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky was and is an important artist whose intersecting identities and contexts (Russian, Russian–Armenian, Armenian, and Crimean/Black Sea) have traditionally been neglected. Here, through his body of work, I have addressed the manifold social, cultural, and political functions of the visual arts in nineteenth-century society from a cross-cultural perspective. My study has recovered and highlighted the complexity of multiple intersecting contexts, a versatile and highly successful artist, and an oeuvre more diverse than usually remembered at a

historical moment on the eve of, but also still before, the cultural hegemony of the nation. Contextualizing Aivazovsky and his work as “in-between” and “across”—rather than as already (or still) securely embedded within the nation (or empire)—helps us revise our understanding not only of his oeuvre and influence but also of the Black Sea region as the site of alternative and productive cultural mappings.¹

While Aivazovsky’s work was diverse, he is particularly associated with his seascape paintings. Modern seascapes emerged as a genre and then became an important pictorial symbol in close conjunction with the construction and visualization of national narratives. Through Aivazovsky’s work and a deep and original exploration of his historical context, I explore the interaction of seascapes, geography, art (and its social and commercial conditions), state policies, and individual as well as local agencies in the shaping of identities in the Black Sea area.

I was interested in exploring the presence of Aivazovsky in the Black Sea region, covering my study of his biography beyond the geographical borders of St. Petersburg and Russian artistic circles. I wished to gain a better understanding of Russia’s links with the lands of its southern frontier, the Crimean Peninsula, as well as the Empire’s relationship with a nineteenth-century Armenian born Russian artists from the Crimean region along an extended Black Sea borders. My study captures the image of the Black Sea functioning both as a showcase of the Russian Empire,

¹ In the decades following the fall of the Soviet Union, scholars have explored the Black Sea region in several scholarly texts: Neal Ascherson, *The Black Sea: The Birthplace of Civilization and Barbarism* (London: Vintage, 1996); Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); James Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography Exploration and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Andrew Robarts, *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region: Ottoman – Russian Relations in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Moreover, the Black Sea Research Project, the Columbia University Black Sea Network, and the recently founded journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies attest to the increasing interest among scholars concerned in the Black Sea’s economic, cultural, political, and social history. Regarding Aivazovsky and his work, however, none of the studies already in existence capture – or attend to – the crucial relation between visual culture and multiple, interacting identities. For more information see: <http://www.columbia.edu/~bag2132/blackseanet/people.html>; <https://blacksea.gr>; and <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/balkar>.

displaying its ambitions as a maritime power and as the projection of the self-fashioning of a highly successful nineteenth-century artist in a world of multiple—national, imperial, local, professional, and religious—identities.

Resisting the simple cultural cartography of a borderline between East and West, I think it would be useful to consider the Black Sea region as a whole, as an extensive border zone with dynamic, complex cultural and historical meanings. From a range of critical viewpoints, the term “border zone” implies the significance of the specific region (the Black Sea) in cultural and social theory; no longer perceived as a “peripheral other” in relation to those empires that were surrounded by the sea or marginalized by human spatial relations, the Black Sea has been re-oriented as a “site of history, geography and cultural activity.”² I will seek to understand how the Black Sea, one of the most significant veins connecting the Russian Empire to the Mediterranean to the south and Europe to the west, influenced the political and social life of the empire from the eighteenth century. I imagine the Black Sea as the archetype of a vast land-based empire,³ with its coastlines (often depicted in Aivazovsky’s works), in which I will examine the relationship of water to historical actors that experienced it socially, politically, and culturally. The Black Sea had long been personified as a door that opens to European Russia and warmer territories, and I shall

² Charlotte Mathieson, “Introduction: The Literature, History and Culture of the Sea, 1600–Present,” in *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600–Present*, ed. Charlotte Mathieson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2. Recent studies have shown the human geographies of the watery world, worked to visualize the sea as a social space and examined the historic seascape; while others have tried to historicize the historical existence of the sea, retrieving lost and interconnect traces of the sea via various cultural types. For more information, see: Mike Brown and Barbara Humberstone, eds., *Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea* (n.p.: Routledge, 2018); Jon Anderson and Kimberly Peters, eds., *Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2016); Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Tricia Cusack, ed., *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Jerry Harrell Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Kären Wigen, eds., *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

³ In 19th century Russia, expansion, then settlement in Siberia and the Caucasus were vital components shaping Russian imperial identity and Russia’s dream as a continental Eurasian power. Accepting the Black Sea as a frontier between the empires around it, my study is an attempt to explain the role of the Black Sea in the vision of Russia as a Eurasian power.

show how its seascapes became a key element in a new national geography with particular reference to seascapes by a celebrated artist such as Ivan Aivazovsky. It is important to briefly consider the complex cultural context and cultural debates that enabled the development of the Russian national identity in this period and encouraged the creation of a “native” seascape.

It will be one among the arguments of this dissertation that the aesthetic features of Aivazovsky’s paintings, which were both “emblem” and “expression,” correspond not only to stylistic (aesthetic and visual) developments as these emerged and unfolded but also to an altered appreciation of what maritime empire and nation were and the potential functions of art in supplying its articulation of place of the individual within these abstractions.⁴ Aivazovsky’s masterpieces, I shall argue, address several second-order sign-systems by which the identity of the artist as a native of the Black Sea/Crimea and Russia as a maritime nation was naturalized and homogenized.⁵ Also, his Armenian roots and, through the shipwreck iconography, his religious side will be discussed. The dissertation examines the seascape as a “distinct genre,” doing so with particular reference to how seascapes have been represented and “constructed” through the visual world of Aivazovsky.

Ivan Aivazovsky is one of the most influential painters in the history of Russian art. He was also one of the nineteenth century’s greatest and most prolific marine artists, and one for whom naval and maritime Crimea provided a rich source of

⁴ For the relationships between art, identity, maritime nation, and empire, see: Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Geoff Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768–1829* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Tricia Cusack, ed., *Art and Identity at the Water’s Edge* (London: Routledge, 2012); Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Cusack, ed., *Framing the Ocean*.

⁵ As Tricia Cusack shows through the “generalization” and “homogenization” of individual perceptions, it is possible to create particular images of the national river (in Cusack’s case, *the river*). So, the depictions of the watery geography attach the river/sea, etc. to a particular topography that enhances a reflection for imagining the whole watery area and its national identity. Cusack, *Riverscapes*, 13.

inspiration. He painted the water (both as a subject and object) more commonly than any other subject: from his earliest paintings, through which his reputation was created, to his later, controversial works, the water remained at the center of the artist's vision, and later, increasingly so in the empire's, then the nation's, cultural and political agenda.

It is the exceptional diversity of the artist's creative engagement with the sea that provides the basis of this dissertation, placed within the wider social, political and national context into which Aivazovsky was born, and to which he made such a significant contribution—in other words, his self-understanding shaped by the space in which he lived and painted, that is, a portrayal of Russia as a distinct “maritime power in the Black Sea” during the nineteenth century. Over the course of a career that spanned some seven decades, images of the sea produced by Aivazovsky extended and surpassed inherited and current conventions to establish a new maritime aesthetic.⁶ One may also note that the sea as a site of pictorial possibilities for Aivazovsky was also intrinsic to the very subject, characterized as it is by a constant flux of emotive movement.

In Aivazovsky's paintings, I will seek to analyze the character and cultural significance of the visual representation of the sea (and, more broadly, nautical geography) between circa 1830 and 1900, investigating how the discrete, but highly

⁶ For theoretical information about the landscape see: Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994); Martin Warnke, *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013); for basic and “exhibitionary” information about the origin of the seascape painting and specifically Dutch marine painting, see: George S. Keyes, *Mirror of Empire: Dutch Marine Art of the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1990); David Cordingly, *Painters of the Sea: A Survey of Dutch and English Paintings from British Collections* (London: Lund Humphries, 1979); Norbert Wolf, *The Golden Age of Dutch and Flemish Painting* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2019).

significant, maritime content of Russian art could assume such a prominent place during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the most prominent public and national spaces tended to include marine and nautical references. It does appear that the sea occupied an immensely significant position in nineteenth-century Russian culture, one that may be assumed as characteristically recognizable and multi-layered, yet which also, beyond that and more deeply, spoke of the collective cultural, as an evocation of the very essence of the nation, its blessings and its dreams and its suffering and tragedies. What was it about Russia itself that attracted the attention of so many of its painters to water? I shall contend that it was the mutability of the sea, among other things, that enabled a dynamism in its representations. Thus, the cultural conception of the maritime image as related to empire and the national character was able to shift through time (during the nineteenth century), and this was profoundly and acutely expressed by Aivazovsky in ways that were pertinently informed by his multifaceted identities.

The country has the Pacific Ocean to the far east, while the Baltic Sea, with its St. Petersburg gateway and Kronstadt maritime port, is to the west. To the south is the warm Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, with its resorts and trading ports fed by the large, wide waterway of the Volga River, which divides the country into the east and west empires. The cold seas built mostly from the frozen Arctic Ocean are to the north, beyond the great waste of the Siberian tundra. Russia's south has a relatively calm climate—as beautifully demonstrated in the paintings of Aivazovsky, who spent most of his life in Crimea. Aivazovsky invested most in the imaginative potential of the iconography of the sea, which he realized at the level of the highest forms of landscape painting, his representation of the sublime sea introducing a maritime aesthetic that transcended mundane depiction and the explanatory heritage.

My dissertation traces the role of the philosophical link between the seascape and history in the oeuvre of Aivazovsky, covering the era from the 1830s to the 1900s. Aivazovsky was well suited and well placed to discern a set of ideas about the historical significance of the sea and seafaring at the heart of both national and imperial conceptions. This study will demonstrate how the depictions of the seascape in Aivazovsky's works reflect the rich historical significance of the sea in Russian culture in the nineteenth century.

I argue that the sea in Russian tradition serves a historiographical and literary role as it draws on this contextual cultural significance: it functions as a way to explore the course and essence of history and to define and challenge contemporary Russian identity in the light of this historical exploration. The notion that natural scenery is, in and of itself, an aesthetic artifact—a landscape rather than a piece of land—is primarily a product of modernity. My concern is with the way in which representation of the sea operated as a negotiation and reconciliation with the multiple, mutable, and often contradictory significations of the maritime in nineteenth-century Russia, where the nautical experience played a significant role in the expanding of identity of the nation as empire.

I make two further main points. First, the identification of the nation with progress and its representative control of the sea supported the naturalization of this developing national and imperial identity. The essence of that which was Russian was encapsulated in and expressed through the inimitable form of the sea, mediated through the palpable expanse as fact. This discourse became particularly significant during the 1790s, when loyalty was an acute issue and the subject of patriotism at its most contentious. Second, the interweaving and cross-currents of politics here with

aesthetic sensibilities has implications for representations of the sea in visual art, particularly given the contemporary trend in painting toward sublimity and naturalism.

Notwithstanding the wealth of literature on these subjects, more attention is required on the relationship between identity at the level of nation (and empire) and the naturalism and the sublime as a metaphysics (particularly in travel imagery). This dissertation proposes that the naturalistic representation of the sea in nineteenth century Russia both functioned as a way to negotiate problematic issues of subjectivity and identity while also deflecting their more radical implications by enforcing a naturalizing ideological identification (i.e., of the nation with the maritime).

Although the then-and-now gulf in our experience of the sea and travel is enormous, we should nevertheless appreciate and acknowledge that some aspects of the nineteenth-century maritime mythology remain.⁷ These have continued to affect the formation of national identity and measurement methods in different respects. Yet, the subject of the maritime has assumed a special place in the academic disciplines of nineteenth-century Russian history and art history and also a subsidiary significance in the dominant demands of a plethora of other, more or less closed related disciplines

⁷ The growth of nationalism during the nineteenth century requested depictions of national homelands, landscapes and seascapes; this imagery merged as a separate genre in art history and proliferated with both traditional heroes and novel artistic creations as mythical figures. The mythology of the sea was an inspiration to stories such as *Sadko* in Russian and *Sanasar* in Armenian folk culture. The myths of Sadko represented in both Ilya Repin's impressive canvas and in the famous opera written by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Both art works are named *Sadko*. Numerous stories, sagas and legends devoted to the sea have been sung for many centuries, even though Armenia is a landlocked country. According to the Armenian ancient epic story, *Tsovinar*, the mother of the Armenian nation and the goddess of the waters, conceived her two sons *Sanasar* and *Baghdasar* from the waters. Sanasar was born for the oceanographers, astronomers, and scientists and it was believed he held Noah's Ark on his shoulders. Several generations of heroes of city of Sassoon trace their ancestry back to *Sanasar*. Thus, pre-national mythological associations of maritime history contributed to its subsequent symbolic power. This will also demonstrate how various cultural and religious beliefs have long been cited in nautical geography and maritime history. For the Sanasar myth, see Razmik Davoyan, ed., *Six Armenian Poets* (Tadmorden: Arc Publications, 2013), 1; Shahen Khactrian, *Aivazovsky: Well-Known and Unknown* (Samara: Agni Publishing House, 2000), 32.

(including but not limited to socio-economic history and political ideology, ethnicity and sex-gender constructions, and class dialectics).

After theories of economics and class stimulated by the prominent influence of Marxist theory, the field of art critique has generally been informed by psychoanalytic and semiotic perspectives and then feminist and gender approaches. Meanwhile, maritime history has slowly been (re)integrated into the *longue-durée* comprehension of nineteenth-century Russia, with more complete recognition of its status as both an imperial and as well as maritime nation. However, there has not been a parallel initiative in the field of art history. This unfortunate lacuna remains unfilled, a gap in the analysis of art history in relation to Russia, empire, and the sea. The lack of attention may be compared to the identification of travel in eighteenth-century literary studies as a structural matrix for any sort of human activity or experience.

In general, the role of visual imagery in shaping modern identities, especially national identities, has received attention in the pertinent literature. Thus, recent studies by scholars such as Denis Cosgrove, Stephen Daniels, James S. Duncan, T. J. W. Mitchell, Christopher Ely, Tricia Cusack, Geoff Quilley, Mark Bassin, Jane Costlow, and Arja Rosenholm have contributed greatly to our understanding of the political, social, cultural, and artistic history of the relationship between the land/seascape, identity, empire, and nation.⁸

⁸ For a selected bibliography, see: Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); Denis Cosgrove, *Geographical Imagination and the Authority of Images* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006); Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape*; Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein, eds., *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); T. J. W. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Christopher David Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Tricia Cusack, ed., *Art and Identity*; Tricia Cusack, ed., *Framing the Ocean*; Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes*; Geoff Quilley, *Empire to Nation*; Geoff Quilley, *Art for the Nation: The Oil Paintings Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2006); Mark Bassin, *Visions of Empire: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mark Bassin, *Space, Place a, and Power in Modern Russia:*

In the case of the Russian Empire, one of the recognized “great powers” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and a site of important developments in cultural history, the importance of seascapes has not yet been the subject of systematic analysis. Yet, no less than elsewhere, the growth of national and imperial identities during the nineteenth century created a demand for the representation of the homeland, landscapes, and seascapes. From the late-eighteenth century, the sea developed into a picturesque object: the seascape came to embody an evolving set of aesthetic ideals that shaped its representation.⁹ In particular, my work reveals how Aivazovsky’s extremely successful art functioned to construct imperial, national, and social identities in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire, paying special attention to efforts by political and cultural elites to re-imagine Russia as a maritime power.

For example, Christopher David Ely’s book *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* analyzes landscape painting after the pattern developed at the start of the century.¹⁰ This involved first, the construction of such works produced by a specific artist as a series of monographic vignettes exemplifying what were adjudged to be the artist’s best or typical pieces. Then, these would be placed within pre-classified schools that manifest seemingly objectively determined

Essays in the New Spatial History (n.p.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018); Mark Bassin, Sergei Glebov and Marlene Laruelle, eds., *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); Jane T. Costlow and Arja Rosenholm, eds., *Meanings and Values of Water in Russian Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹ Extensive research has been conducted into seascape painting and famous artists. I would like to mention here three artists that enabled the wealth of Aivazovsky’s creative output to be placed in perspective. The British seascape painter J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) is among those seascape painters granted a long period of creativity. He successfully brought the “art of the sea from the margins to the very center of the British art world” (Christine Riding and Richard Jones, *Turner and the Sea*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2013, 11). The French artist Philippe Tanneur (1795–1878) was also an important figure in Aivazovsky’s career, one of Aivazovsky’s teachers at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. Although their relationship was tense, Tanneur’s approach to seascape painting enabled Aivazovsky to see the world in a new way. Finally, a conscious understanding of the effect produced by the Prussian artist Jacob Philipp Hackert’s (1737–1807) famous cycle of paintings on the Battle of Chesme presupposes a complex interaction of creative possibilities in art, something Aivazovsky achieved through various means in the course of his creative life.

¹⁰ Ely, *This Meager Nature*.

elements. Such an approach usually lends itself to the general survey form, operating on the assumption that the constancy of character and incommensurability of the land has resulted in an essentially constant human and aesthetic response to it, transcending differences of time and intent.

By contrast, my aim here is to analyze the discursive function of the iconography of the sea in nineteenth-century Russia, when and where the shifts in pictorial appearance and emphasis can be seen as responding and articulating a range of cultural and ideological contexts in a way that ultimately went quite beyond the concern for representational verisimilitude. The domain of the water, in a geographical sense, might be a marginal or peripheral place, but in social and cultural terms it might become a site of some importance and centrality, such as a fashionable place (for the imperial family), a key port, or a strategic naval point. My intention is also to demonstrate how the ownership and definition of the seashore can be both asserted for dominant imperial/national or political interests and challenged by and among different ethnic or social groups. The sea has, therefore, been imagined, embodied, and appropriated in Aivazovsky's seascapes thematically in various ways, and the centrality of water for the formation of cultural and imperial/national identities is not in doubt.

An Empire of the Land/Seascape

The tsarist empire encompassed a huge territorial extent that included within its numerous smaller ethnic populations and a wide array of different terrains, from the Scandinavian north to the temperate Crimea in the south, from the mountainous Caucasus to the central Asian plains. There were many other geographical regions within the vast extent of the empire as well, so to speak of any single landscape of the entire Russian Empire is not possible. What boundaries, then, have been marked out

as the subject of this study? Apart from any consideration of the Crimean landscape and national identity, the geography of Crimea contributed crucially to the history of what would come to be generally understood as the Great Russian landscape. Images and descriptions of the Crimean landscape were deeply involved in the imagination of Russian national space, even if some observers today might feel that the Crimean landscape was culturally appropriated by Great Russia to represent its native territory. The fact remains that geographical Crimea helped shape the image of the Great Russian landscape as it came into being in the nineteenth century.¹¹

My answer to the complexities of these overlapping boundaries and indistinct national entities is to rely on an interpretive pragmatism. It is a fact for the historian of national identity formation that the definition of a nation is the antithesis of a fixed category. Even individual identity is an open and evolving subject. As a kind of collective imagining, national identities are always multiple and always open to change. National identity should thus be understood as a modern organizing principle of cultural self-definition. The conceptualization employed is not of a fixed notion that can be specified in and of itself but rather a *process*, one that aims to narrow and shape the thoughts and experiences of a number of individuals at the same time. Thus, the relationship between a geographical territory and a national identity is again open to change, as well.

¹¹ Neal Ascherson describes Crimea “as a sort of theatre, an apron-stage, for events important to the whole Black Sea region and its peoples.” Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea*, 10. Crimea occupies the strategically important space between the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Black Sea region since the Black Sea coast has served as a land and sea throughfare for many civilizations and cultures, and in particular, Crimea has been crucial to the historical development of the entire area. Historically, Crimea was the main interface of the Black Sea region, providing an important connection to Europe and the Ottoman Empire. This has placed the region at the heart of any understanding of interaction of Russian, Ottoman, and Crimean history. It is worth mentioning that the political geography of Crimea facilitated various settlement waves throughout history, and thus multi-ethnicity became one of the region’s key characteristics.

Historically, Russia has comprised a congeries of peoples and principalities dating back to Kievan Rus. After the Muscovite consolidation and the establishment of the empire, the Russian tsars continued to conquer and partially assimilate widely different peoples across a huge and expanding territory.¹² In this way, Great Russia came to dominate a large amount of land and ultimately succeeded in asserting itself as a true and essential land known as Russia. As a consequence of this domination, it bears repeating that this study will be concerned primarily with the identity of Russia as articulated by the Crimean/Russian/Armenian Aivazovsky and as pertaining to Great Russian territory and the seascape. It must be kept in mind, however, that the vagaries of Russian identity have always been fairly permeable and have not yet been resolved entirely by Great Russians, Ukrainians, Siberians, and many others, to this day. Geography and society conspired to produce terrain in Russia that differed significantly from the ideal landscapes of Western Europe. Hilly vistas, temperate vegetation, marine views, medieval ruins, spectacular mountains, boundaries, and well-cultivated land—almost all the components of beautiful European scenery—were absent from Russia’s landscape. However, Aivazovsky broke this. Throughout his artistic creativity, he celebrated the virtues of the sea and drew attention to features of Russian marine history and topography which had, he felt, given its people a special relationship with the sea.

Sources and Structure

Recent studies on river- and seascapes have shown that rivers, seas, and oceans—the waterworld, in general—are recognizable as a significant feature in the

¹² Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 1–26.

study of history, history of art, and history of civilizations. In her book *Riverscapes and National Identities* (what the author calls as “riverscapes”), Tricia Cusack elaborates how the images of selected rivers’ landscapes played an important role in creating national identities. As she shows, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists portrayed rivers and their cultural and natural landscapes as a demonstration of their national identity. Claude Monet’s impressionistic portrayals of the Seine, Isaak Levitan and Ilya Repin’s Volga depictions, or Thomas Cole’s Hudson scapes became very symbolic; not only were they a representation of nationalistic ideas, they also embodied nationalist ideas about a specific place and culture. When the ideas of nationalism were taking root across Europe and the United States, as Cusack shows, the riverscape became a potential actor in solidifying the abstract concept of nationalism into a potent visual image. Cusack argues that just “river narratives [...] have tended to metamorphose to accommodate the dominant religious and political groups in different cultures at different times [...] The function of national riverscapes had adapted to carrying the contemporary ideologies of the elite strata in the nation-state.”¹³ A national riverscape, Cusack proposes, can be “regarded as a visual text that forms part of a discourse in the Foucauldian sense; that is, it actively constitutes national imaginings, but imaginings based on highly selected and readily identifiable images of the river.”¹⁴ Using the symbolic potential of rivers as representing life and time, Cusack focuses on the riverscape of the Volga and how it provided a metaphor for the mythic stream of national history flowing unconstrained out of the past into the future.

¹³ Cusack, *Riverscapes*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

Seascapes¹⁵ similarly emerged as an important new genre (re)presenting a nation's newly born yet already ancient mythos. This study will explore how these elemental portrayals operated, specifically covering the Black Sea. The paintings of this water realized by Aivazovsky fused a variety of identities; an understanding of his seascapes affords new insights into this instance of nation-making. The present study thus aims to portray the relevant combination of individual agency, suitable locations, and imperial and national ingredients that went into this.

Tricia Cusack, using the members of the artistic environment of the Slavophile debate of Russia, such as Isaac Levitan and Ilya Repin, claims the Volga River was depicted to promote the Orthodox Christian Slavic Russian as the national archetype. The present study, following Aivazovsky and his carefully selected Black Sea depictions, stresses the image of the Black Sea as both the showcase of the empire (then the nation), proving the rise of the Russian Empire as a rising maritime power and the inner world of a nineteenth-century artist with multiple identities and how that sea serves for each of these national, political, artistic, and cultural constructions.

Cusack discusses how art began to play a significant role in Russian nationalism, mentioning that from the 1850s onward, a group of painters refused the “high” art,¹⁶ turning their attention to nature to create realistic scenes. Many

¹⁵ Using Zygmunt Bauman's argument, Tricia Cusack distinguished between river landscapes and landscapes, claiming the former from the latter as suggestive of a temporal flow leading the nation to a promising future. As Cusack mentions, “Rivers therefore have presented a potent metaphor for the passage of time, for life, and for renewal in a way that solid landscape cannot do easily” (Ibid., 2). I also argue that Aivazovsky's seascapes divided in a thematic way in this study offer an excellent metaphor for life and renewal and were appropriated as a symbol of imperial, then national, vitality. In some cases, this vitality has seemed sacred as well as historical and merged with a religious or spiritual story in which Aivazovsky's examples have represented this merging efficiently.

¹⁶ Ibid., 137. For more information about the meaning of “high” art in the history of Russian painting see: Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art, the State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, “The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s,” *Russian Review* 34, no. 3 (July 1975): 247–265; Dmitry Sarabianov, *Russian Art from Neoclassicism to Avant-Garde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990); Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757–1881* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

intellectuals, including artists, writers, and art dealers, were involved in the process of modernizing the basic elements of Slavophile culture, and the River Volga became a national icon. In Aivazovsky's appropriation of the images of Black Sea exploration—rendered for use on the walls of the imperial palaces—in the newly founded museums/art galleries, and in his official commissions of views of the Russo–Ottoman wars of the Black Sea, we see the imperial house adapting the long-standing practices of European rulers using visual propaganda to assert their authority. Here, the notion of the seascape, as in the Volga riverscape, offers an insight into the ways that, in the southern imperial spheres, the emulation of the practices of imperial powers often opens up a space for the demonstration of Russia as an imperial maritime power. However, the “Romantic” attachment Aivazovsky felt to the Black Sea has led to criticism of his artistic career¹⁷ being outside of the Russian realist Slavophile circle. Yet, the Black Sea has been fundamental to the Russian Empire for centuries (and is still critically important);¹⁸ Crimea and the edge of the sea is the location where the empire situated naval bases and where citizens came to love their warmer territories, a paradisaal myth, as discussed in Chapter I.

The ocean, the sea, and the seashore have also suffered from relative academic neglect. Philip E. Steinberg's unique book *The Social Construction of the Ocean* uses the instruments of political geography and international relations to explore how the oceans were perceived and used by nations and peoples. In social science, the river

¹⁷ Many nineteenth-century Russian art history studies have a tendency to exclude Aivazovsky from the mainstream circle and eliminated his role as a “romantic seascape” painter, although the River Volga became an iconic symbol of the Russian soul (or Herder-inspired notion of “folk”).

¹⁸ For the recent debate on Russia and Crimea, see: John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, “The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (December 2014): 247–269; John O'Loughlin and Paul F. Talbot, “Where in the World is Russia? Geopolitical Perceptions and Preferences of Ordinary Russians,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 46, no. 1 (May 2013): 25–50; Mikhail D. Suslov, “Crimea is Ours! Russian Popular Geopolitics in the New Media Age,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 6 (May 2015): 588–609.

and sea and the ocean is generally regarded as economic resource. Steinberg perceives them rather than human territories, as geo-political spaces where social as well as natural forces guide and control lives and destinies and thus also their imagination. He cogently summarizes the book's major themes: the sea is not a *place* but a *space* "where social contradictions are worked through, social change transpires, and future social relations are imagined."¹⁹ As mentioned above, there have been relatively few studies of visual art related to the seashore. Geoff Quilley, with a specific focus on Britain, talks about "the low position of art history" despite "the obvious national importance of all activities connected with the sea."²⁰ He suggests that "the very lack of analytical engagement with the subject [of marine art] is ... indicative of the degree to which the maritime is naturalized as part of national historical consciousness."²¹ Quilley's *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768–1829*, which explores the relationship between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British maritime art and the growth of empire and the newly emerging concept of nation, is helping to reshape this neglect.²² My study is an attempt to show how the emergence of the idea of a maritime empire/nation and the multiple identities of an artist and allegiances are embedded within a broader imperial identity, with a particular reference to the artist Aivazovsky and to a geographical feature, the Black Sea. It considers how the representation of the sea-space connects, covers, and rearranges cultures and identities. This dissertation discusses and outlines the politics of identity, and their volatilities and how these relate to conceptions of the seascape and how the sea may function as a liminal space that allows a new identity to be formulated. It also

¹⁹ Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209.

²⁰ Geoff Quilley, "Missing the Boat: The Place of the Maritime in the History of British Visual Culture," *Visual Culture in Britain* 1, no. 2 (2000): 81, 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

²² Quilley, *Empire to Nation*.

considers how shipwreck and mythological narratives expressed social and moral prescriptions, acquiring a wider range of symbolic connotations, and how depictions of battle paintings were reimagined and reworked; it shows how the iconography of battles was represented in the context of imperial/national history studies and how art, in turn, displayed a particular manifestation of empire, nation, sea, and the conception of identity. The art of Aivazovsky is shown to be not simply illustrative of but integral to these rich themes.

There is copious literature on Aivazovsky and his paintings, yet comparatively little academic attention has been paid to either, especially in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences. Guidebooks, and even single biographical monographs, on Aivazovsky, provide a historical view from his birth to his death, illustrated with his selected paintings, but they do not specifically focus on seascape art nor on the empire, the identity, or the role of visual art in such discourses. The three most well-known biographies²³ on Aivazovsky—Minas Sargsyan's *The Life of the Great Marine Painter: Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, Nikolai Barsamov's *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky 1817–1900*, and Nikolai Kuzmin's *The Prisoner of the Sea: Encounters with Aivazovsky*—and the guidebooks (re)published for the 200th anniversary of the artist's death²⁴ focus on the detailed life chronology of the artist and a catalog of his pictures rather than on a seascape analysis in visual art or the mutual relationship between the seascape and artist's identity and its role in Black Sea

²³ Minas Sargsyan also mentions this commission. Minas Sargsyan, *Жизнь Великого Мариниста Иван Константинович Айвазовский* [The Life of the Great Marine Painter: Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky] (Feodosia, 2010); Nikolai S. Barsamov, *Иван Константинович Айвазовский, 1817–1900* [Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky, 1817–1900] (Moscow, 1962); Nikolai Kuzmin, *Пленник Моря: Встречи с Айвазовским* [The Prisoner of the Sea: Encounters with Aivazovsky] (Moscow, 2017).

²⁴ Nikolay Navauspensky, *Великие Мастера Живописи: Иван Айвазовский* [The Paintings of the Great Master: Ivan Aivazovsky] (St. Petersburg, 2010); Elena N. Yevstratova, *Иван Айвазовский: Великий певец моря* [Ivan Aivazovsky: The Great Singer of the Sea] (Moscow, 2017); Gianni Caffiero and Ivan Samarine, *Неизвестный Айвазовский* [Unknown Aivazovsky] (Moscow: Slovo, 2016).

geography. Samarine and Caffiero's English biography²⁵ (with a great number of pictures provided) *Light, Water and Sky: The Paintings of Aivazovsky* concentrates on his life story chronologically, but without any particular focus on a theoretical framework for art history. Shahan Khachatryan's *Aivazovsky: Well-Known and Unknown*²⁶ and Vazken H. Davidian's "Image of an Atrocity: Ivan (Hovannes) Aivazovsky's Massacre of the Armenians in Trebizond 1895"²⁷ tend to focus on his Armenian identity, concentrating on the concept of an Armenian artist. At the same time, an exhibition and international conference for the 200th anniversary of Aivazovsky's birth in 2017, organized by the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and the essays written for the accompanying two-volume special issue²⁸ of *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* focused on his individual biography and a catalogue of his paintings, but did not explore his intersected identity.

Appreciating Aivazovsky's true complexity may have been made harder by his greatest success: the aesthetic model that Aivazovsky developed the most and the most effectively, his unique seascapes which would help shape a new standard of Russian seascape painting. He did not "discover" or establish the genre; rather, he created a new, extremely resonant idealization of the specifically Russian-connoted seascape. For this, the Black Sea played a crucial role: he produced its new Russian (in both meanings, imperial and national) version and vision, aesthetically accessible to large audiences. Yet he did not understand or describe himself simply as (ethnically) Russian; he was also aware of being – and choosing to be – an Armenian and a Crimean, articulating both in his art as well.

²⁵ Gianni Caffiero and Ivan Samarine, *Light, Water and Sky: The Paintings of Aivazovsky* (London: Alexandria Press, 2012).

²⁶ Khactrian, *Aivazovsky: Well-Known and Unknown*.

²⁷ Vazken Khatchig Davidian, "Image of an Atrocity: Ivan (Hovannes) Aivazovsky's Massacre of Armenians in Trebizond 1895." *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 11 (2018): 40–73.

²⁸ *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 53, no.4 (2016) and *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54, no.1 (2017).

I argue that the processes of identity shaping which Aivazovsky's art promoted did not occur "naturally" or even unintentionally but through deliberate efforts on the part of the artist and his patrons to produce and support art serving, if in a complex manner, empire, nation, or both. Thus, in the nineteenth-century Black Sea world, the creation of a "national" or "imperial" seascape was a matter of agency, the outcome of conscious programs devised and carried out by cohesive networks integrating artist and patrons. At the same time, however, he also articulated the Black Sea as an intersected border and frontier zone, Aivazovsky depicted not only segmented histories but also links between religious communities, linguistic groups, empires, and nations.

My study has recovered both the nation/empire-affirmative aspects of his work and the complexity of his response to multiple intersecting contexts, recovering (especially from nation-centric narratives) a versatile and highly successful artist and an oeuvre crucially more diverse and complex than usually remembered. In sum, I have sought to capture what was so special about Aivazovsky's historical moment, framed by empire and its spaces while also on the eve of but also still before the cultural hegemony of the nation.

While being an art-historical study with distinct art-historical concerns, I have placed equal importance on the broader historical context. The wider scope adopted and an open methodological reach explains the variety of the visual and the breadth of the textual material brought together. Diverse material from numerous sources has been utilized, including a rich variety of images—paintings, drawings, illustrations—as well as texts—including newspaper and journal articles, letters, diaries, literature, and exhibition catalogs. A secondary, but no less important, role in the thesis is played by state institutions, including the monarch himself. Of the great variety of sources

utilized in this study, the most influential of the visual sources have been the paintings of Aivazovsky. Meanwhile, with regard to the texts, access to the greater body of Aivazovsky-related archival documents²⁹ and the Russian press has formed the axis of much of the research presented. My physical observation of his great oeuvre in very different geographies, including all the small corners of the Crimean Peninsula, and age-old documents and newspapers alike has been a privilege and has provided feelings that will remain indelible in my mind. Luckily, Aivazovsky's paintings are generally in public collections, and, with special permission, they are accessible to the art historian. The majority of the main protagonist's material objects presented in this study are in museums and institutions, where the directors have been generous.

While the thesis is structured thematically, it follows a certain chronological logic within and across the chapters. With the purpose of making the following text more explicitly multifocal, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 approach the representation of seascapes of generally the Black Sea region from the vantage point of thematic selections that illuminate the organic connection of Aivazovsky with the empire, nation, and the nautical geography, while Chapter 4 adopts the view of the intersected,

²⁹ The bulk of the Aivazovsky-related archival material is located in St. Petersburg and Moscow: The Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA, St. Petersburg) is one of the largest archives in Russia, having received major funding from the highest bodies of state power in the Russian Empire, mainly from the beginning of the 19th century until 1917, as well as public organizations, institutions and individuals of pre-revolutionary Russia. The Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI, Moscow) is the largest archive in Russia, where the richest materials on history, literature, music, fine arts, architecture, cinema, and theater are focused. As a result, these two institutions provided for much of my directly related research. The Russian State Archives of the Navy (RGAVMF, St. Petersburg) was also crucial for my research since Aivazovsky became an official naval officer and attended military expeditions with the navy. I also conducted research in the Manuscript Department of the State Tretyakov Gallery (ORGTG, Moscow), where I was able to study correspondence between the founder of the museum, and one of the famous art dealers of the nineteenth century, Pavel Tretyakov and Ivan K. Aivazovsky. Also, the manuscript department and letters of the national libraries of Russia (both in St. Petersburg and Moscow) gave me opportunities to conduct detailed research and to record information for my source material and to classify and photograph these sources. They possess rich, old, and rare books, exhibition catalogs, photograph albums, and journal collections. Specifically, from the microfilms, it is possible to research 19th century Russian periodicals. Moreover, in the Aivazovsky National Art Gallery (Feodosia), I conducted research in the special archive of the museum and to observe various sketches, drawings, and personal notes of the artist still unpublished.

“other” identity of the artist: Aivazovsky as an Armenian. Throughout the chapters, while fundamental importance is given to exchanges between Russian imperial and subaltern national discourses through the seascape descriptions, these exchanges are often weaved seamlessly into the following narrative. Non-Western voices often left outside the realm of art-history writing—and underestimated even in Russian art historiography—are featured.

Chapter 1, “Imagining the Black Sea: Representation of the Russian Imperial ‘Paradise,’” considers how depictions of the Black Sea, with a special focus on the Crimean Peninsula, contributed to a contemporary patriotic discourse that imagined the Black Sea as a defensive boundary space and privileged the heroic – exploring and martial – registers associated with maritime power. It firstly introduces the phenomenon of the Russian expansion through the watery geography, especially from, initially, the northern Baltic coasts and then the southern Black Sea, and considers the changing discourses of the Russian empire defining herself as a maritime empire in the nineteenth century. Secondly, as one of the iconic representations of this changing status of Russia, it examines the Empire’s southern coastal depictions by Aivazovsky as a paradisiacal naval myth of the land-based empire. Thirdly, the chapter inquiries into Aivazovsky’s identity formation, assessing it within his life and local geographical experiences. It considers the closer look taken at coastal depictions by the artist and his multifaceted representations of this subject. It examines Aivazovsky’s maritime geography representation, utilizing a mythical atmosphere associated with nineteenth-century Romanticism (to some extent, Orientalism) and proposes this as a result of complex interplay between the artist and the rulers.

Chapter 2, “Historical Vision and the Representation of History in Aivazovsky’s Battle Paintings,” explores the construction of a visual history of the

maritime–imperial nation. Focusing primarily on battle paintings, it probes these images’ reflection of Russian military victories, especially with regard to the rival Ottoman Empire. The chapter also focuses on Aivazovsky’s battle painting depictions in terms of the nature and function of history as a discursive channel for articulating the relationship between empire and nation.

Chapter 3, “God’s Storm: The Portrayals of Maritime Disasters and Shipwrecks,” examines the shifting semiotics and symbolism of the shipwreck. The chapter also probes the imaginative potential of shipwrecks, reviewing meanings that have historically been attached to maritime disasters and, in general, human suffering at sea. Addressing a range of political, religious, aesthetic, and environmental concerns, this cross-cultural chapter will shed new light on changing attitudes to the sea as a national and imperial space.

Chapter 4, “The View from Ararat: The Articulation of Aivazovsky’s Armenian Identity,” queries and supplements Aivazovsky’s self-representation as a loyal and patriotic Russian imperial subject by focusing on works where he articulated himself as an Armenian. Considering the substantial number of depictions of landmarks associated with Armenian national discourse among his paintings, I explore how Aivazovsky represented Armenian nation-building myths and how these works have become nationally iconic. Paying close attention to his renderings of Armenian myth-scapes and resonant yet rarely researched images that he produced for international humanitarian campaigns to highlight the persecution of Armenians, I explore the relationships between discursive politics, art, and the shaping of modern Armenian identity.

CHAPTER 1

Imagining the Black Sea: Representation of the Russian Imperial “Paradise”

Introduction

Nikolai Karamzin, a founding father of Russian nationalism, defended Russia in the first part of his 1802 essay “On Love of the Fatherland and National Pride” against an argument that it had proved susceptible to the extreme nature of its environment and the lack of natural beauty there. “The native land is dear to one’s heart,” wrote Karamzin, “not because of the beauty of its landscapes, its clear sky or its pleasant climate.” Nevertheless, he had to admit that a warm and attractive natural environment helped reinforce patriotic feelings: “I do not say that natural beauties and advantages have no effect whatever on the general love for one’s native land – some lands richly endowed by nature can be so much that dearer to their inhabitants. I am saying only that these beauties and advantages are not the main foundation of men’s physical attachment to their country.”³⁰

Although Karamzin expresses an assertion of Russian nationality, he also shows a discomfort of the native climate and terrain. Not only did Karamzin believe that this vast native land possessed little natural beauty, he also acknowledged that the lack created a loss for his countrymen.³¹ Manifestly, an important aspect of Russian identity was expressed in attitudes toward and interactions with the natural environment. Thence also, the growing body of works focusing on Russian history and

³⁰ Nikolai M. Karamzin, “Love of Country and National Pride,” trans. Jaroslaw Pelenski, in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. Marc Raeff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 107. Also, see Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 3.

³¹ Even until the First World War, Russian attitudes toward the native landscape remained problematic. The sights and recovery of Western Europe had continued to exert a magnetic attraction on Russian travelers right up to the Great War. For the newly formed Russian Society of Tourism and Study of Fatherland, on the other hand, the war was seen as an opportunity to reorient Russian travelers away from Europe toward new horizons within the Empire.

the national claims to the Black Sea.³² As Georges Nivat argues, the creation of a special attitude to Russian space is one of the founding ideals of Russian identity.³³ I agree, to some degree, with Nivat that the image of the Russian landscape is best understood as a founding myth of national identity. Yet, I am interested mainly in the role of land/seascapes and specifically the marine paintings of Aivazovsky in the creation of this myth and what they can tell us about the way Russia defined itself a maritime empire and later conceived itself as a maritime nation.

Closely focusing on a number of Aivazovsky's paintings, this study places Crimea in the broader historical and political context of nation and empire. Crimea and its various representations are employed as a site in which to explore the breadth and implications of Russian beliefs and identities. This chapter focuses on the interaction of places, ideas, and people through their connection with Aivazovsky, not only did they set up a new settlement in Crimea, but they also constructed a new iteration of the Russian identity as both nation and empire. So, I argue that Aivazovsky's seascape work was not a minor genre of interest mostly to nautical specialists but rather located as central to a newly formalized art establishment. It emerged reflexively as a narrative vehicle through which nineteenth-century Russians could see and learn about their heroism and virtue as national endeavor and natural trait.

The waters of the Black Sea were long known to escape through the straight to the west, flowing through the Bosphorus, the Marmara, and the Dardanelles to gain the Mediterranean.³⁴ The Black Sea had long been a significant trade route for

³² There is a significant number of works focusing on the relationship between Russian identity and its nature in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Steppes. I will explain this issue later in this chapter.

³³ Georges Nivat, "Le paysage russe en tant que mythe," *Rossija/Russia: studi e recherche* (1988): 7–20.

³⁴ Neal Ascherson, "Sea with a Heart of Darkness," *Independent*, June 18, 1995, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/sea-with-a-heart-of-darkness-1587017.html>. With Fernand Braudel's famous work on Mediterranean world, it is possible to speak about the Mediterranean as a "meaningful place." However, it is difficult to say the same about the Black Sea. King, *The Black Sea*, 3–4.

Byzantines, Ottomans, and Russians, and it was also seen as the boundary between Russia and the West. Russian discourses concerning domination over the Black Sea (specifically the Crimean region) from the 1770s, when explorers claimed the right to have a fleet there,³⁵ were intimately linked to the shifting place of this geography in the Russian imagination. It is in this context that I interrogate Russianness, as the centralizing state looked make the upheaval from a land-based (backward, agrarian) empire to emerge as a maritime (modern, industrializing) power.

I hope to show that Aivazovsky's Crimean/Black Sea depictions were profoundly involved in national identity formation,³⁶ specifically through their contributions to the creation of Russian seascape imagery. Rather than intentionally emphasizing the most public and well-known depictions of Russian landscapes across a broad spectrum of cultural endeavors, the aim of this study is to explore the artistic sensitivity and ingenuity of Aivazovsky as a cultural figure who invented and interpreted Russian seascape imagery throughout his artistic life. Aivazovsky's Crimean commission sets out a very complex relationship between the artist, the spectator, and the wider public, at the center of which is the production of a national school of art, though this use of nation suggests an expanded—indeed, imperial—sense of national art in seeking to explain why an empire like the Russian should have wanted for such an ornament to adore its great territorial domain. The implication,

³⁵ Two long-running wars against the Ottoman Empire, a Crimean invasion, a steady advance toward the Northern Caucasus, and the ambitious – if not realized – “Greek Project” to regain Constantinople were the hubs of a Southern policy which was among Catherine the Great's ruling principle. For more information, see: Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 115; Kelly O'Neil, *Claiming Crimea: A History of Catherine the Great's Southern Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Larry Wolff, “Imagining Eastern Europe: Fiction, Fantasy, and Vicarious Voyages,” in *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Minds of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 89–143.

³⁶ Although there is an ongoing debate, that it is inaccurate to apply nationalism theories into a Russian context before the breakup the Soviet Union, it is clear that in nineteenth-century Russia, as in contemporary Western Europe and the USA, an exclusive sense of national consciousness was a developing issue. David G. Rowly, “Imperial versus National Discourse: The Case of Russia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 1 (January, 2000), 23 and Cusack, *Riverscapes*, 127.

therefore, is that the formation of distinctive marine art is consequent upon imperial opulence and power.

Establishing a wider context for Crimea, one of conquests, colonialism, and identity negotiation, this chapter interrogates conventional representations. Russian and Western narratives alike have tended to approach the region as the garden of Catherine II (r. 1762–1796), as an fairytale land of mystique somehow outside of and irrelevant to the practical demands of its time.³⁷ The aim of this chapter is to see the seascape as an analytical category (as the landscape is), not simply a genre of art history but more a category that moves between art history and history, particularly the history of the seascape and the recent conceptualizations of the issue. By doing this, I seek to place Aivazovsky's seascape/marine paintings on Crimean geography³⁸ within a wider context of the nineteenth-century artistic sphere in Russia and to examine the ways in which marine painting, particularly those works depicting the natural beauty of the Crimea, helped to shape conceptions of nation and empire. At issue is the degree to which marine paintings, products of an intersection between the naval and artistic spheres, were able to fulfill their potential role in the public sphere. By picturing the struggle for control of the Black Sea, which would ensure the success of Russia's

³⁷ In his article on the appropriation of the Crimea, Andreas Schönle discusses a letter from Grigorii Potemkin to Catherine II. Potemkin wrote: "The conquest of Crimea will neither strengthen nor enrich you, but it will bring tranquility." However, although Potemkin indicated that Crimea would not, in fact, strengthen the empress, in the same letter, contradictory to his argument, he also supports the theory of taking military control of the Black Sea. Andreas Schönle, "Garden of the Empire: Catherine's Appropriation of the Crimea," *Slavic Review* 60, no. 1 (spring, 2011): 1–23. For more information about the Russian annexation of the Crimea see: Sara Dickinson, "Russia's First "Orient": Characterizing the Crimea in 1787," *Kritika* 3, no.1 (winter 2002): 3–25. Also, the memoirs of Catherine the Great gives important information about the annexation. For more information about the memoirs of the Tsarina see: Monika Greenleaf, "Performing Autobiography: The Multiple Memoirs of Catherine the Great (1756–96)," *The Russian Review* 63 (July 2004): 407–426.

³⁸ According to Neil Ascherson, the story of the Black Sea starts with the Crimea: "The Crimean Peninsula has functioned as a sort of theatre, an apron-stage, for events important to the whole Black Sea region and its peoples. The Greeks made the Crimea the center of their trading empire and so did the Italians a thousand years later; the Crimean War was fought here in the nineteenth century, and the Crimea was the scene of some of Hitler's and Stalin's worst atrocities in the twentieth. In 1945, the Yalta conference held on Crimea's southern tip became the code-name for Europe's division during the Cold War." Ascherson, *The Black Sea*, 11.

imperial claims, Aivazovsky's seascapes represented Russian national identity as an imperial power. Also, the depictions of the sea (specifically the Black Sea) gave him an autonomous starting point from which to position himself.

Aivazovsky is much more explicit about the imperial dimension. Within his overall scheme, landscapes—particularly the seascape of Russian watery territorial domains—and national history are taken as the two dominant genres and subjects for the painter, surely a recognition of the profound effect and the importance of both of these for nineteenth-century Russian culture. This chapter devotes considerable space to the painterly genre of the seascape, which appears as a touchstone for the problems of construing Russian art, perhaps because of the relative novelty of the genre, with the consequent difficulty of establishing any clear aesthetic guidelines for its practice and meanings. More significantly, in the case of seascape painting, this difficulty has been enforced by the recent unprecedented development of global travel, research, and discovery and by Russian maritime exploration and imperial expansion, the impact of which has been to transform seascape painting as a genre and to redefine seascape artists' profession.

Russian expansion and resettlement (in my case, the Crimean expansion) cannot be separated from the environment in which they take place, and, as Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland point out, "the interplay between colonizers and the natural environment [...] unfolded as an essential dynamic wherever and whenever colonization occurred."³⁹ And as an increasing body of writings on Russian history and colonialism show, the natural environment was

³⁹ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader and Willard Sunderland, "Russian Colonizations: An Introduction," in *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 14.

approached in this context as an important aspect of national identity as well as a aspect of the imperial image.

Willard Sunderland's *Taming the Wild Field* explores the meaning of the Great Steppe for Russians, not only that they could physically occupy it but also how it developed in the Russian imagination, transiting during the eighteenth century from the antithesis to the essence of Russianness.⁴⁰ Also, Mark Bassin looks at colonization of the Amur region in the middle of the nineteenth century, where he looks at the conflict between the pervasive regional myth of Russia's "very own New World," comprising a "vast, virgin, and essentially empty territory," on the one hand, and the need, on the other, to construct the land as Asian and savage and thus demanding from Russia a civilizing mission.⁴¹

Away from the colonial frontier, Christopher Ely, uses landscape painting as an inquiry into the open steppe, vast, uncultivated, and unrestrained, which he portrayed people during the late imperial period as standing for true, unencumbered Russianness. He notes that the peoples themselves viewed the land as essential to their Russian identity, citing V. G. Korolenko, a prominent writer who had been forced to leave his homeland to Siberia, who wrote in 1901, "We are Russian because we were born in Russia; from birth we have breathed Russian air and gazed upon Russia's sad and desolate but also sometimes beautiful nature."⁴²

Geographical terrains were transformed from a collection of separate localities with relatively permeable boundaries into the modern inviolable national homeland, the material benefits and scenic beauty of which became the national birthright of all

⁴⁰ Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10, 275.

⁴² For Korolenko's quote, see Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 3.

the nation's citizens. Regarding the Crimea, I argue, geographic determinism coexisted with a view of the land as a beautiful, heavenly, fairytale landscape that was soon reimagined as Russian.

Painting the Russian Picturesque: Aivazovsky in Crimea

“Aivazovsky! I rule on land, and you rule at sea!”⁴³

One ardent admirer of Alexey G. Venetsianov's (1780–1847)⁴⁴ work greeted an 1824 exhibit of his paintings as a major event: “We have finally seen the arrival of an artist who has turned his wonderful talent toward the fatherland alone, toward the depiction of the object that surrounds him, that are near to his heart to ours.”⁴⁵ This review was written in the journal *Отечественные записки*⁴⁶ [*Notes of the Fatherland*] by its founder and primary contributor during the 1820s, Pavel Svinin. Christopher Ely asserts Svinin detected a sympathetic mind at work behind Venetsianov's paintings, perhaps because he had chosen as his own life's work the promotion of the beauty and importance of his native land. He undertook this task “by

⁴³ The painter Kirill Lemokh, a member of the Imperial Academy of Arts and a student at Aivazovsky's studio, described that the artist had a very intimate connection with the Tsar Nicholas I: “When the Tsar took a paddle steamer out to sea, he took Aivazovsky with him. Standing on one paddle wheel cover, the Tsar called out to Aivazovsky, who was standing on the other one, ‘Aivazovsky! I rule on land, and you rule at sea!’” Natalya Buyanova, “The Great Seascape Artist and the Russian Imperial Family,” *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 53, no. 4 (2017), 49.

⁴⁴ Alexey Gavrilovich Venetsianov was a Russian artist known for his paintings and a commitment to peasant life and common people. The rural iconography of Venetsianov focused on the importance of the peasant at the time, especially in Slavophile thought. The common citizens, or *narod*, were the real carriers of the national spirit and Russian uniqueness. Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*, 191. As Molly Brunson indicates, that perspective could be as easily applied to the mundane experiences of everyday life as to a historical or religious scene. “Perspective thus became essential to Venetsianov's expansion of the repertoire of Russian painting, making the humble people and places of the empire visible and available to artistic representation, in many cases for the first time.” Molly Brunson, “Gogol Country: Russia and Russian Literature in Perspective,” *Comparative Literature* 69, no. 4 (2017), 379.

⁴⁵ A. V. Kornilova, ed., *Алексей Гаврилович Венецианов: статьи, письма, современники о художнике* [Alexey Gavrilovich Venetsianov: Articles, letters and contemporaries about the artist] (Leningrad, 1980), 49.

⁴⁶ *Отечественные записки* [Notes of the Fatherland] was a long-running Russian literary magazine, which featured several major novels, such as Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Adolescent* (1875). The tsarist authorities closed *Notes of the Fatherland* in 1884. Charles Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), 198–199; Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, 298–299.

creating *Notes of the Fatherland* as a sort of running picturesque guidebook to provincial Russia.”⁴⁷

In these works, Svinin had focused on the appearance and beauty of the natural landscape, which was standard practice in the picturesque travelogues of his day. However, natural scenery never played a significant role in Svinin’s accounts of provincial Russia. He conceived his native land in a different way. *Notes of the Fatherland* became Svinin’s vehicle for fulfilling his debt to his country. He wrote and edited its pages in the spirit of national patriotism, offering up the journal as a lesson in Russian history, geography, architecture, and archeology, rather than simply a guide to the beauty of the natural landscape. Svinin’s conception of tourism was less an escape from the present than an engagement with the past, which concealed within itself essential knowledge of the “national character” that would generate Russian pride and dignity. By emphasizing the appearance and historical importance of the monumental buildings, *Notes of the Fatherland* set a pattern that would be followed by future writers and artists. Most importantly, Svinin’s journal was important in representing how provincial Russia should not be reflected as an empty wilderness, rather was crowded with picturesque points of interest that deserved to be appreciated and studied.⁴⁸

The attempt to fashion a picturesque image of the Russian countryside would remain an important concern, and picturesque travelogues of the Russian countryside continued to appear into the early 1850s.⁴⁹ Painters and travel writers had been able to draw on certain features of the countryside to create an isolated and limited picturesque

⁴⁷ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 73.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 74–75.

⁴⁹ See, for example, D. I. Matskevich, *Путевые заметки* [Travel Notes] (Kiev, 1856); O. P. Shishkina, *Заметки И Воспоминания Русской Путешественницы* [Notes and Memoirs of a Russian Traveler] (St. Petersburg, 1843); Vadim V. Passek, *Очерки России* [Sketches of Russia] (Moscow, 1840).

landscape. But by the mid-1820s, evidence of a fundamental revision of Russian landscape imagery had already begun to appear in the work of Russia's foremost national poet, Aleksandr S. Pushkin (1799–1837). Pushkin reconsidered the entire question of landscape aesthetics in his work, and once he had discarded traditional assumptions, he formulated new ways to appreciate his native terrain. The aesthetic model he developed would become an important foundation for a new standard of Russian landscape depiction and appreciation in subsequent years. It should be noted that Pushkin's innovative landscape imagery has often been described as a sort of literary conquest of new territory, in which his unflinching honesty and remarkable talent led him to see and portray the real Russian landscape for the first time. Pushkin certainly did describe Russian scenery more accurately than his predecessors had, but as Christopher Ely shows, he did not so much “discover” a landscape heretofore invisible to eyes that could appreciate only idyllic nature, rather created a new idealization of Russian terrain that made the landscape interesting and admirable to Russian readers. He “discovered” ways to make the Russian countryside aesthetically accessible to his public, as did Aivazovsky.⁵⁰

One of Russia's most picturesque journeys was undertaken by Aivazovsky, who was already then a talented painter at the Imperial Academy of Arts; he received a gold medal and was sent to Europe for his further education.⁵¹ In 1837, the Academy of Arts, with the approval of the Ministry of Court, decided to send Aivazovsky for two years to the Crimean lands (his hometown) before his European voyage and

⁵⁰ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 78–79.

⁵¹ In a note written by the President of the Academy of Arts, A. N. Olenin, to the Ministry of Imperial Court on October 3, 1837 “Academician Aivazovsky was awarded for his excellent success in his works about the genre of marine painting of the first-degree gold medal, which entails travelling abroad for the improvement of his technique [...]” Report of the President of the Academy of Arts letter to the Minister of the Court, October 3, 1837, transcript in Minas Sargsyan, G. Artunian and G. Shatirian, *Айвазовский: Документы и материалы* [Aivazovsky: Documents and Materials] (Erevan: Aistan, 1967), 20–21.

provided funds for him to travel through Russia's southern provinces and paint, particularly, seascapes that illuminated the beauty of Russian shores.⁵² In respect of tracking the fashion of illustrating the Russian picturesque, Aivazovsky's mission was no exception. In 1838, the Ministry of the Imperial Palace funded the brothers Grigory and Nikanor Chernetsov to travel the length of the River Volga, from Rybinsk to Astrakhan, in a "floating studio," outfitted to help them sketch and paint their impressions.⁵³

When this search by the Chernetsovs' for a distinctly Russian scenic identity was being made, the novel idea in Russia of river travel as a pleasurable activity was already well established in the West.⁵⁴ Of course, the civilized consumers of the novel and poem and etching and painting would have imbibed a sense of what was a distinctly "Russian" nature. From the poetry and novels of Aleksandr S. Pushkin (1799–1837), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), and Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883) and from

⁵² A Report by the President of the Academy of Arts to the Minister of Court on the decision of the Academic Council to send I. K. Aivazovsky on fieldwork in Crimea and then abroad for his improvement: "The Council decided that it would be more useful for Aivazovsky before his departure to Europe to stay one or two years in Crimea to study marine paintings that depict the southern shores of the Russian landscape under the supervision of the Academy." Russian State Historical Archive [RGIA], fund 789, inventory 1, part II, item 1679, p. 12–13. However, with the tsar's permission, Aivazovsky was ordered to leave for Crimea not for two years, as decided by the Academy council, but for one. In a letter written by the Minister of the Imperial Palace, P. M. Volkonsky, dated February 14, 1838: "The Emperor commanded [...] six paintings of the academician Aivazovsky, [...] to pay him three thousand rubles from the Cabinet; give these paintings to the Academy of fine Arts, and allow him to go to Crimea for one year to paint there, so that these, upon returning a year later, will represent the highest discretion."

⁵³ According to a ministry decree, the Chernetsovs had been commissioned to "draw from nature the beautiful places of both banks of the Volga in panoramic views." The purpose of their task was to document the beauty of the great river: "At the time as this voyage," this Ministry specified, "they are intended to take for their subjects general view of the cities, sizable villages, other picturesque sites, places marked by historical events, vestiges from antiquity, clothing and other finds that, in whatever way, merit attention." G. V. Smirnov, "Grigory Grigorovich Chernetsov and Nikanor Grigorovich Chernetsov," in *Русское Искусство Очерки о Жизни и Творчестве Художников* [Russian Art: Essays on the Life and Work of Artists], ed., A. I. Leonov (Moscow, 1958), 549.

⁵⁴ By 1800, accounts of picturesque routes in Europe and the United States included Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel 1750 to 1915* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), and Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan, eds., *The British Abroad since the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 1: Travelers and Tourists* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

the paintings of Aleksei Savrasov (1830–1897), Ivan Shishkin (1832–1898), and Isaak Levitan (1860–1900), they received the image and sensed the vast, flat plains, rustic rurality, heavy skies, and dense forests. Generally, this idiomatically and quintessentially Russian landscape was pit against the spectacular beauty of western Europe, the Caucasus, and the Crimea.⁵⁵

Especially during the reign of Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855), travelers saw the provincial landscape as an open, unattractive territory. Visiting Russians experienced a striking natural beauty and immense historical importance in western Europe as opposed to the undifferentiated terrain at home. Thus, their own sense of place and national self became characterized as quiet or dull, with simple beauty perhaps, but essentially unspectacular and decidedly less than picturesque. Fedor M. Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) asked rhetorically in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, “Does there exist a Russian who does not know Europe twice as well as Russia? I say twice only out of courtesy, ‘ten times’ would be more accurate.”⁵⁶ The demarcation of a scenic image of the southern shores of Russian terrain was to follow another, linked trajectory, and Aivazovsky’s Crimean journey was to provide one travelling vista of this.

⁵⁵ In her memoir, the eldest daughter of Pavel Tretyakov, a famous Russian art patron of the nineteenth century, Vera P. Ziloti mentions her family voyage to Crimea and how it was influential in her life: “Russian south, Little Russia, even from the windows of the car fascinated us. The first time we saw the Russian expanse and the Steppes. How beautiful was the bay of Sevastopol! I saw the open sea from the mountain of the St. George Monastery, I will never forget the feeling of an infinite horizon. We drove to Yalta through the Baydar Gate on horseback. Tatar villages were our first exotic experience. Going down the Baydar along the swirling wonderful, smooth roads was so exciting. We drove up to Yalta in the darkness, and Yalta, bathed in stars of lights, merged with the stars in the dark sky.” She also relates a memory of Aivazovsky: “We saw Mount Ayu-Dag, which we had long known from Aivazovsky’s painting. Aivazovsky just in that fall lived in the Crimea. Accidentally, he came to visit us on the day of my birthday, October 6, when I was 9 years old. He seemed to us too important, especially his sideburns.” Vera P. Ziloti, *В доме Третьякова* [In the House of Tretyakov] (Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, 2016), 217–18.

⁵⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. Richard Lee Renfield (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), 35.

This is not to say that Russian landscape imagery had not developed its own forms of distinct value in literature, criticism, and travel writing by the mid-nineteenth century. On the contrary, the written word was depicting Russianness in and through the land as something quite admirable. In painting, however, a solid body of work presenting the nation's landscape as a new aesthetic had not yet emerged. Also, taking for granted the strict rules and censorship environment era of Nicholas I, the artists, in service to the state, subordinated art to the court.⁵⁷ As Aivazovsky's official commission by Tsar Nicholas I suggests, Aivazovsky was not simply charged with describing a historical evolution in Russian scenery in art but with the civic significance and function of art in a national context and with how improvements in art were to be linked to the national constitution and to improvements in taste and refinement.

Both the material and the appearance of Russia's southern coastal (the Crimea, the Black Sea) scenery offer strikingly new picturesque opportunities for artistic practice that are not only pleasant but are universal and of consistent quality

⁵⁷ Elizabeth K. Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 4. Throughout the early nineteenth century, Russia's knowledge of and passion for fine arts was limited to a few aristocratic patrons and appeared to adhere to European scholarly concerns regarding portraiture and scenes of history. For more information, see John Bowl, "Russian Painting in the Nineteenth Century," in *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 114–15. For their study and subsequent career, artists relied on the state, and Nicholas I, an autocrat and supporter for the visual arts, presided over official art decreed by the Minister of Public Enlightenment, Count Sergei Uvarov, in 1833. This decree sustained three guiding principles: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality. (For the political side of this decree, please see footnote 83.) Each of these concepts was reflected by particular forms of artistic medium and genre: autocracy was represented by historical themes, orthodoxy by icon production and religious subjects, and nationality by genre scenes. S. Frederick Starr, "Russian Art and Society, 1800–1850," in *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 105–7. However, by the 1850s, some members of the Moscow and St. Petersburg Academy of Arts were initiating a new type of art intended to move from Western models in favor of Russian and Slavophile expression. This new path would uphold and conflate two of the earlier principles of official art, orthodoxy and nationality, although the latter was to be more precisely defined than previously, more exclusive and more dominant. Cusack, *Riverscapes*, 138. These three aspects of official art continued to be expressed in Aivazovsky's paintings, while autocracy was excluded from the new formation as Aivazovsky adhered to his "bureaucratic" networking and was spoiled by the official commissions, which sometimes caused him to be a target.

throughout every part of the seascape. The Empire, it seems, was an unrivaled source of painterly potential, in much the same way that the Crimean landscapes supplied an abundance of discourses for the Russian Empire, which was gaining military control over the Black Sea. This also provides just about every component necessary for the realization and articulation of national identity, according to the formulation of the modern political theorist, Anthony Smith, who identifies several features essential to the articulation of national identity on a Western model of the nation-state. Principal among these is “a historic territory, or the idea of homeland” in relation to which are generated “common myths and historical memories” and a “common mass public culture.”⁵⁸ In Aivazovsky’s first commission (commissioned by the Academy of Arts, later approved by Tsar Nicholas I), describing Russia’s southern coastal territories, the Crimean region, and the Black Sea coast are “homelands,” a precondition for every aspect of national character by which the very being of people is defined by watery nature, including fights against nature (storms, shipwrecks) and fights against the enemy for the hegemony of these impressive maritime domains.

How many changes in my concepts of nature, how many new delights I have achieved, yet how much still awaits me, which now seems hidden behind the golden horizon, which requires much time in order to reach [...] I observe nature from the peaks of the hills, perched higher than the clouds, and the horizon continues for 20

⁵⁸ Anthony Smith defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining *autonomy, unity and identity* on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation.” Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 74. There is almost total consensus among contemporary historians that nations and nationalisms are modern phenomena. From the early 1980s, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, and others stressed the nations’ “ethno-symbolic” character and their reliance on actual or “imagined” historical roots. Constructivist theories of nationalism have designed nations as imagined, constructed, or invented categories. Historians have cogently shown that the recovery of the history of a nation generally involves the invention of a pattern that contains a migration story, a founding myth, a golden age, etc. This view finds its voice particularly in Benedict Anderson, who perceives and depicts nationalism as a “cultural construct” or as something “invented, imagined.” They are imagined as limited, sovereign, and as a community. In particular, see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) and Anthony D. Smith, “Ethnic myths and ethnic revivals,” *European Journal of Sociology*, 25 (1984), 292–293.

*versts*⁵⁹ in front of me, unlike in the north, but by 200 and 300 *versts* there is much to go deeper and your eyesight will not collide, as you have in the north, with *Chukhon's Laibas*,⁶⁰ and here also battleships, slightly visible through the clouds that rub across the sea and the whole landscape is made of clouds, and all this is under you. That is our Crimea!⁶¹

Through Aivazovsky's picturesque depictions of the Crimean region, this chapter, therefore, intends to identify a spatio-temporal shift through time from land-based empire to maritime empire (then nation) in terms of the entrance into modernity. It emphasizes the prime importance of the Black Sea as material link—the only channel, in fact—between Russia and the Aegean and the Mediterranean worlds in this period, and thus asserts the importance of the representation of this maritime. The visual and non-visual imagery of the Black Sea functioned for Russian as an articulation of the particular relationship between empire as heartland and province as coastal metropolis.

Indeed, the image of the maritime is manifestly one of displacement and extension for the bounded landmass of a nation to its colonial or imperial territories. The received idea of the empire, despite the rising claim of its maritime status, has been conceived in opposition to the sea: the classic image of the Russian Empire at its height as consisting of far-flung Siberian forests and Central Asian Steppes, presiding over Caucasian possessions and Oriental-Asiatic subject populations supposes a basically territorial empire. Yet, this is an image strongly associated with the pre-nineteenth-century empire. By the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the clear distinction between land-based and sea-based imperial definition became less visible in the Russian domain. Similarly, there was not yet a dominantly territorial description

⁵⁹ *Verst* is a Russian unit of length, equivalent to about 1.07 kilometers.

⁶⁰ *Chukkon* refers to a Finnish tribe living in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, and *laiba* means a Finnish boat.

⁶¹ A letter from I. K. Aivazovsky to A. R. Tomilov, dated March 17, 1839, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 26–27.

of the empire. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the composition of the empire was in a constant state of flux. From the decisive victory in 1774 against the Ottoman Empire to the ambivalent results of the Crimean War of 1853–56, the exceptional status of Central Asia, and the domestic and imperial crisis of the 1820s, the profile of Russian imperial possessions changed dramatically and consistently.

This chapter also points to a chronological shift as well as a geographical one. While most of what follows is, in some way, concerned with the growing impact of an imperial consciousness upon Russian culture of the nineteenth century, I also argue that the maritime empire of discovery and encounter of the 1830s, so typified by the imperial commissions, was superseded, by the 1840s, by a nationalism that absorbed Russian enterprise. With the expansion of Russian imperial dominion during the nineteenth century toward the Black Sea, cognate visual material proliferated in abundance. However, this was increasingly assigned to a specialist category, associated with scientific and geographical documentation and was regarded as having greater relevance to recently established institutions such as the Imperial Russian Geographical Society.⁶² What I identify as the project of Aivazovsky's Crimean

⁶² The society was founded in 1845 in Saint Petersburg. Its official presidents were Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich of Russia, 1845–1892, and Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich of Russia, 1892–191, although actually it was run by the vice-presidents, including Fyodor Litke (1845–1850; 1855–1857), Count Mikhail Muravyov (1850–1857), and Pyotr Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky (1873–1914). The Imperial Russian Geographical Society inspired figures not only in science but also in art. In particular, Society member Aivazovsky painted the picture *Ice Mountains in Antarctica* (1870) to perpetuate the achievement of the Russian navigators Bellingshausen and Lazarev, who discovered Antarctica during their expedition. In that era, an achievement of this kind was a tremendous step for mankind. For a history of the Russian Geographical Society, see: P. P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, *История Полувековой Деятельности Императорского Русского Географического Общества, 1845–1895* [*History of Activities of Imperial Russian Geographic Society, 1845–1895*] (St. Petersburg, 1896); W. Bruce Lincoln, *Pyotr Petrovich Semenov-Tyan-Shansky: A Life of a Russian Geographer* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1990). For an analysis of the relationship between ethnography and the Society, see Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845–1855," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108–141.

voyage (1837–1840), that of amalgamating the roles of an eyewitness and seascape artist, was an ambitious degree by a Russian artist commissioned by the tsar in the mid-nineteenth century. Aivazovsky's artistic, historical world view, I argue, was displaced in Russian art by a nationalist focus that saw national life (for both Russians and Armenians, as discussed in Chapter IV), seascape, and history as the most appropriate subjects for art and, reciprocally, saw the state of Russian art and culture as an index of national prosperity and social wellbeing. No doubt, there is an important ideological dimension to the consequences of the divergence of culture and imperialism in the nineteenth century; however, that is not a major concern for this dissertation. Rather, I am concerned to identify and examine through one aspect—Aivazovsky's visual imagery through the dominant gaze of the sea—the particular circumstances and significance of the moment when that divergence began.

In this chapter, I concentrate on those paintings completed by Aivazovsky as an officially appointed artist by the Academy and the Imperial Court to the Crimean region simply to draw the nature of the southern shores of the Russian Empire. In this regard, I want to particularly question the apparent tension in the persona of the artist—a seascape painter—in the cultural context of early nineteenth-century Russian academic artistic circles, between, on the one hand, the requirement to be a detached, objective, almost disembodied observer and recorder of places and events encountered on his voyage and, on the other hand, the need to project a clear and distinctive artistic personality that would meet increasing academic emphasis on painting and on the artist as a unique creative sensibility, rather than a simple manual craftsman. This idea of the artist as a unique individual was also increasingly allied to the greater prominence of the value of creative genius, deeply implicated in the development of an ever-more

populated and competitive commercial marketplace for art.⁶³ I will suggest that this tension emerges, especially in Aivazovsky's case, in the emphasis placed upon the artist as an eyewitness and upon his works as firsthand accounts stressing his subjective presence at the scenes depicted.

In addition to the extensive scope for the motives behind Aivazovsky's Crimean missionary voyage's image-making provided here, there is an important acknowledgment of the value of textual descriptions (through a rich collection of his letters), which are corroborated throughout his voyage. In the immediate environment of the Crimean voyage, it highlights and reinforces Aivazovsky's appreciation of the natural beauties of the southern Russian shores and of his presence and role as both an eyewitness and a local Crimean. In the first place, this is manifested most clearly as an issue of painterly style. Take, for example, the visual immediacy, compositional inventiveness, and emphatic impasto and mark-making of paintings such as *Moonlight Night on the Crimea Gurez* [figure 1], *Yalta* [figure 2], and *Old Feodosia* [figure 3].⁶⁴ Far from St. Petersburg, from supervision and academic tasks, the young artist gained a sense of freedom and complete independence. Nature had become the object of his close study. He drew only from nature. However, some of the rules of academic education still dominated him. Trying to get rid of them, he realized the need to study nature, to know its beauty, to take from it something more important than the canons of academic writing.

Yalta seemed very unusual at the time. Everything in it moved: waves, pinkish clouds, and even the light, which would pass from the town buildings to the sea, which

⁶³ Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*, 220–221.

⁶⁴ Although it is difficult to obtain the correct names for each painting, Aivazovsky mentioned his paintings done for the Crimean voyage. As understood from letters, he was commissioned for the six paintings but, during his voyage, he was able to finish five works. These mentioned above are the paintings I was able to match from the letters and from Sargsyan's biography of the artist.

was in the shade. As the painter himself used to say in the process of work, he studied atmospheric changes, the play of light, shades in the waves in the sea, on the peaks of the mountains, and on the trees. Creating a picture of *Yalta*, the artist stood *en plein air* on the shore. Through the use of bluish, mute-green coloring, *Moonlight Night in Crimea Gurzuf* succeeds in transmitting the elegance of the summer night and the peace and romance of the south coast of Crimea. The painting also illustrates the small clouds in Gurzuf floating over the bay, the moon dancing over Ayu-Dag quietly. In the meantime, Old Feodosia, in warm weather, provides a glimpse of the artist's home town. The effects of daylight are shown in the sky on the pinkish clouds, on the sea, and on the seashore. The most picturesque hill is surrounded by vineyards. The color of the sea in the background was very similar to the color of the sky.⁶⁵ The contrast between the light sky and the dark seashore makes the picture more expressive. He writes: "There [Crimea] I stayed until July 1838 and made some successful sketches; from there I returned to Simferopol and in a short time painted many Tatars, then arranged a workshop in my native land in Feodosia, where there is also my favorite element: the Sea."⁶⁶

Remarkably sensuous and virtuoso paintings as they are, all their stylistic qualities point to an artistic presence that is traced in the mark on the canvas, just as the paintings themselves are a trace of the unfolding progress of the Crimean voyage. These paintings' extraordinary inventiveness, particularly their use of the *plein air* oil painting technique (a technique new in Russia, especially when comparing them with European examples), had been noted by the Academy of Art and his teachers. More

⁶⁵ For the description of the paintings see: <https://en.opisanie-kartin.com/description-of-the-painting-by-ivan-aivazovsky-moonlit-night-in-the-crimea/>.

⁶⁶ Aivazovsky's letter to the president of the Academy of Arts about his studies in Crimea with the request to extend the term of the trip and allow him to participate in the military maneuvers of the Russian squadron off the Caucasian coast. I. K. Aivazovsky' letter to the President of the Academy of Arts, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 27–30.

importantly, though producing works that obeyed the Academy's instructions for a visual record of the voyage, Aivazovsky was also able to assert his individualism both as a physical presence through the paintings' active mark-making and as a form of talent in academic terms through their compositional and technical originality.

The art of the landscape was directly associated with the picturesque movement since pictures, which manifested the artist's skills of observation, were taken as a guide for how to see. In the eighteenth century, the picturesque could have been defined by the style of a picture. But by the nineteenth century, the picturesque connoted not simply a style of composition but an entirely new way of seeing.

Authenticity versus Artificiality

Discussions of Aivazovsky's seascapes have been cast in a language of authenticity versus artificiality. On the one hand, the strength of Aivazovsky's seascapes managed to convey, in individual, concrete forms, the typical prevailing character of Russian nature. On the other hand, Aivazovsky was accused of being repetitive and continuously creating conventional idyllic seascapes. How is it possible for two such contradictory readings of Aivazovsky's seascape imagery to exist? This question lies at the heart of Aivazovsky's unique creative abilities. In a way, both interpretations are correct. Aivazovsky engaged in the delicate balancing act of an artist working and was very productive in the whole of the nineteenth century, quite a long period. Most of Aivazovsky's imagery keeps within the bounds of tradition, but he ingeniously managed to both deploy the conventional imagery he had inherited from his predecessors and devise a wholly original solution to the representation of Russian nature as an aesthetic subject. He broke with the seascape imagery commonly appreciated by his contemporaries, but in portraying the Russian countryside shores, he did not simply convey the typical and prevailing character of Russian space; rather,

he worked to make an appreciation of unconventional seascapes possible for his spectators. In order to understand the particular attainments of Aivazovsky's land and seascapes, it will be useful to follow his nature descriptions through the course of his career. Based on a thematic way, this dissertation aims to explain Aivazovsky's responses to the idealization of Russian "space" through his "intersected identities."

These pictures of the Russian southern seascape present a fresh idealization of Russian maritime space. They represent an early expression of the desire, on the part of Russian rulers, to identify with the marine-based empire. A long tradition of a constantly increasing interest in navigational culture (since the time of Peter the Great) as one of the remaining sources of a new definition of Russia as a maritime empire already existed among Russian visual and literary culture. As early as Catherine II's generation, some members of the ruling class and artistic circles had taken an interest in the visualization of maritime power. But Aivazovsky's deliberate aestheticization of a seascape associated with Russia's nautical natural beauties reveals a new desire for a deeper connection to maritime culture. The fantasy of immersion in the turquoise, blue, green, and sometimes stormy gray space of the Russian shores marks the beginning of a new aesthetic ideal.

Aivazovsky's seascape depictions can thus be seen as part of the wider set of negotiations surrounding the making and meaning of art that particularly confronted artists involved in voyaging, exploring, and empire, and in the representation of a rapidly expanding geographical consciousness in nineteenth-century Russia. And both his mission as a naval officer and his circumspection with regard to the Academy of Arts were likewise, in part, strategies for forging a career in this still novel area of artistic practice.

The Historicizing Visual Order of the Russian Navy in the Art of Aivazovsky's Commissions

In this section, I will consider some further aspects of the visual representation of the Russian Navy (particularly the Black Sea Fleet), with special reference to Aivazovsky's personal choice and the work produced by him for the Admiralty during his Crimean voyage. Aivazovsky decided to leave Crimea with the Black Sea Fleet under the command of General Nikolai N. Raevsky the Younger (1801–1843). He wrote to the President of the Academy to ask permission to attend the Navy:

For a long time I did not dare to do this without asking for permission from you, but, on the one hand, the convictions of General Raevsky accepted his petitions in asking me this permission, on the other – the desire to see the sea battle with such a luxurious nature and the thought that the image on the canvas of military heroic deeds of our heroes will please his Imperial Majesty, and finally the advice of my well-wisher Alexander Ivanovich Kaznacheyev – they decided me send the Argonauts to the campaign, especially since A. I. Kaznacheyev himself, an old friend of Raevsky's, went with him almost for me.

So, I venture to ask the indulgence of Your Excellency, that, without waiting for my superior permission, I decided to leave with the circle of this big event. Confident of your generosity and thinking that it will not be unpleasant for you to see my new experiences in depicting the plots of sea and coastal battles, I aggravate my all-pervasive request for permission to be on military expedition with General Raevsky, who himself writes about the military minister for his report to the Emperor, as well as to postpone my holiday until the next spring.

In the course of this time, I will have time to finish everything and I will appear to my superiors before the postponement. Here, on the shore of Asia, I managed to draw portraits of many Circassian, linear Cossacks for future paintings, but now ships and a fleet are standing in front of my eyes for taking troops, the day after tomorrow I hope to see something that I have not seen, and maybe never in I will not see my life. After the first landing, which will be about May 1, I will go to Feodosia to finish the painting completely to the exhibition and then again come with the fleet to the second and third landing, if for that will be your consent. I will finish all these stories till the spring and come to Petersburg.⁶⁷

During his first attendance at the naval maneuvers, Aivazovsky painted *The Landing at Subashi* [figure 4], which he believed the Emperor would like, describing the painting as the reason for his leaving Crimea and attendance with the Navy: “And

⁶⁷ Ibid.

I hope that the latter [*The Landing at Subashi*] can be liked by the Emperor, who already knows that I was left in the Crimea for this.”⁶⁸

The Landing at Subashi reveals the Subashi Valley’s seacoast as quiet, yet untouched by the troops. The palette of bright paints apparent with the naked eye on the canvas tends to be in the middle. Huge ships are lined up in a row to prepare for the enemy’s next attack. The view of the sea is absolutely irresistible, referring to valiant defenders and the overwhelming strength of Russian mariners ready to fight for their homeland until the last war.⁶⁹ It was this experience, as Aivazovsky recounted with regard to his view of the Black Sea, that enabled him to comment, via seascape painting, upon history and to develop the hybrid genre of historical seascapes,⁷⁰ (discussed in Chapter II). There is a real sense in which the Black Sea world was becoming increasingly visible “at the same instant” through visual representation.

In the light of this work, I want to return to a more emphatically art-historical focus (though this is not to impose any rigid distinction between art history and history, between the lines seemingly now irretrievably and productively blurred). After these naval experiences, Aivazovsky was made a naval officer with the right to wear naval

⁶⁸ Aivazovsky’s letter to the Secretary of the Academy of Arts, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 31–33. Also, see The attitude of the Military Minister to the Minister of the Court for Aivazovsky’s participation in the expedition of General Raevsky: “The head of the Black Sea coastal line and the Commander of the detachment active there, Lieutenant-General Raevsky, having learned that from the highest permission the academician Aivazovsky is in Crimea for the removal of marine species, and believing that the majestic nature of the eastern shores of the Black Sea, the squadron sailing and the military scenes in the occupation by the enemy the land will be presented with items worthy of the brush of this artist, invited him to go on an expedition. Meanwhile, referring to Aivazovsky’s intention to paint several types of eastern coast of the Black Sea with oil paints, Lieutenant-General Raevsky, on the approaching date of this academician’s departure to St. Petersburg, asked for his resignation in Crimea until the spring of next year and at the same time solicited on providing him with travel allowances.” Ibid., 30–31.

⁶⁹ For the description of the painting see: <https://en.opisanie-kartin.com/description-of-the-painting-by-ivan-konstantinovich-aivazovsky-landing-in-subashi/>.

⁷⁰ Geoff Quilley also considers and explains the hybridization of the genres in British maritime painting and their important role in the transformation from empire to nation by using examples from Hodges. For information, see Geoff Quilley and John Bonehill, eds., *William Hodges 1744–1797: The Art of Exploration* (Greenwich: Yale University Press in association with the National Maritime Museum, 2004).

uniform, and, in 1844, the Minister of the Imperial Court, Pyotr Mikhailovich Volkonsky,⁷¹ under Tsar Nicholas I commissioned Aivazovsky to travel to several major Russian ports.⁷² I will concentrate my discussion on a group of major inter-voyage paintings by Aivazovsky, considering them as art-historical or historicizing artifacts, not just in the way they offer a schematic narration of the Black Sea navy and the ports, but rather in the way they correspond and answer the development of the discourse of maritime history itself in Russian culture at this time. Through reference to a historicizing mode of pictorial representation, Aivazovsky offered a tentative, but clearly discernible, visual ordering of the Black Sea that was substantially different from other voyage artists, because of its relationship with the contemporary debate over the history of Black Sea domination, a debate that was itself reciprocally amplified and complicated by the encounter with the Black Sea. Importantly also, this was referred for its own legitimation to the autoptic artistic presence of the artist as an eyewitness. Aivazovsky's historicizing order of the Black Sea was not, and could not be, that of an "armchair traveler."⁷³ His claim to authority for his representations of Black Sea seascapes derived from his having himself traveled on and recorded the voyage, and from the benefit of his direct visual experience.

Two closely related paintings of six, the *Sveaborg* [figure 5] and *Reval from the 1843 Roadstead* [figure 6], following a post-European period in his life, were

⁷¹ P. M. Volkonsky (1776–1852) was a military commander who rose to the position of Chief of General Staff 1815–1823. While serving as the Acting Secretary of the Army from 1812 to 1823, he was simultaneously the commanding general. He was in charge of the Russian forces at the Battle of Austerlitz and served as an Ambassador at the coronation of Charles X of France in 1824. After that, he assumed the role of Minister of Imperial Court and Properties from 1826 to 1852.

⁷² Minister of the Court Pyotr Mikhailovich Volkonsky's memorandum to the Imperial Academy of Arts regarding commissioning Paintings from Aivazovsky: "The sovereign emperor commissioned Aivazovsky to make oil paintings representing the main ports of the empire: 1. Kronstadt, 2. S. Petersburg from the entrance to the Neva, 3. Peterhof Palace with fountains from the sea, 4. Revel from the sea, 5. The fortresses of Sveaborg from the sea, 6. Gangut." July 1844, Russian State Historical Archive, fund 789, inventory 1, item 2870, p. 1. Minas Sargsyan also mentions this commission. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 67.

⁷³ I employ the term from Geoff Quilley: Quilley, *Empire to Nation*, 54.

painted at the direct request of the tsar and represent the roadstead used by the Russian Navy and commercial ships. Combining an array of small passenger boats with larger merchant and naval vessels, Aivazovsky represents the commercial and militarized waters around the Baltic Sea as a microcosm of the Russian maritime economy—a self-secure and regulated arena (of the northern coasts) in which the industrial and military histories of the Russian Empire are connected. The pictures are large, forceful statements—inescapable in the context of the tsar’s request—that consolidated the direction of his previous ambitions for seascape painting while simultaneously attempting to validate a different type of subject matter. The genre the pictures epitomize might well be termed “poetic topography.”⁷⁴ Previously, Aivazovsky had rarely exhibited purely topographical scenes on such a commanding scale. Moreover, most of the recognizable views he had shown before had been the result of commissioned imperial depictions of the southern shores of Russia, which he had always sought to imbue with a sense of naturalism, in terms of either a specified time of day or an atmospheric effect. Aivazovsky’s naturalism, however, was never a straightforward transcription; he was wedded to the traditional ideas of composing images based on observation and wider experience in order to produce something more idealized. As previously mentioned, the tsar asked for depictions of the Russian ports. In their overlapping focus on the exposed coasts and ports in Russia, during the mid-nineteenth century after the wars with both the Ottoman and Swedish empires, they were implicitly conceived as a patriotic endeavor to celebrate the country’s hard-won autonomy of this geography. Conceived as a set of *Portal Views*, the scenes depicted

⁷⁴ In his article, Ian Warrell uses the notion of poetic topography for his analysis of J.M.W. Turner, and I believe this is also valid for Aivazovsky since he hybrids the topographical concerns of the imperial commission with the romantic and poetic sense of artistic value. Ian Warrell, “Shifting Currents: Turner’s Depictions of Coasts, Rivers, Harbors, and Ports in the 1820s,” in *Turner Modern and Ancient Ports*, ed. Susan Grace Galassi and others (New York: The Frick Collection in association with Yale University Press, 2017), 25.

the key locations on the northern Russian coast—concentrating on the natural bulwark off the cliff around Reval/Tallinn and from there, round the tip of the Baltic coasts, the northern part of the Russian Empire.

Crimea Revisited: Seascapes of the Motherland

“The Russian Geographical Society has long recognized you [Ivan Konstantinovich] [as] an outstanding geographical figure, the first Russian original artist of the sea, which in Russian chronicles is called “Russian.”⁷⁵

A veritable litany of outstanding Russian poets, writers, and artists had long depicted the very soul of Russia in her lands. Crimea, on the other hand, was a little-known outskirts, and it was Aivazovsky’s artwork that introduced this new maritime to Russian society. Russia’s picturesque land and seascape could be humble and gently charming, as Pushkin, Venetsianov, Svinin, and Aivazovsky, among others, demonstrated in the mid-nineteenth century. New ways of seeing and portraying the seascape arose in the 1840s that superseded the picturesque image of Russia. By the end of that decade, the new imagery would amount to the creation of an entirely unprecedented aesthetic sense of Russia’s unique terrain.

We have almost the whole spectrum of emotions in this one painter: Romantic grief, chauvinistic pride, deep wonder, tingling expectation, pleasure, the enjoyment of recognition, and, above all, curiosity. How did these emotions inevitably overtake the artist peculiar to Russianness? Aivazovsky was his own man with all his early European influences. Nobody painted the sea like him, and while this subject was famous outside Russia, he overshadowed everyone else and made it his own.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The Russian Geographical Society saw in the works of Aivazovsky not only high artistic merit but, at the same time, recognized their great educational value. This was reflected in the speech of the vice-chairman of the society, P. P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, at a meeting at the Academy of Arts on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the creative activity of I. K. Aivazovsky. Also, importantly, the sea was the Black Sea, known as Russian in Russian chronicles since the 12th century.

⁷⁶ Victoria Charles, *Ivan Aivazovsky and the Russian Painters of Water* (New York: Parkstone International, 2018), Kindle.

Prior to his departure for Constantinople, Tsar Nicholas I had Aivazovsky paint images of various Russian seaports. *View of Odessa on a Moonlit Night* [figure 7] was completed in Crimea in 1846 and first exhibited in Odessa. In July 1846, the tsar commandeered four of Aivazovsky's pictures, including *View of Odessa*, "taken from the extremity of the practical wharf," for the Imperial Hermitage collection. The newspaper *Одесский Вестник* [Odessa Bulletin] wrote: "The longer one stands in front of Aivazovsky's *View of Odessa*, the more it enchants the eye. The sea has so much life and movement, and the light on the ripples is so natural. One is amazed at the artist's ability to capture and convey the charm of the southern moonlit night with such inimitable verity."⁷⁷ Aivazovsky often painted nocturnal views in the late 1840s. *View of Odessa on a Moonlit Night* appears to depict the Black Sea coast near Feodosia. The artist's masterful ability to convey the effects of the moonlight on the clouds and its *pastoso* path on the water delighted both art critics and visitors, who flocked to his exhibitions in St. Petersburg, Feodosia, Odessa, and Moscow.

Upon his return from Europe, Aivazovsky stopped in the Crimea, his hometown, where he painted scenes that he recalled from his recent sailings and views of the coastal settlements and panorama along the Black Sea. *Moonlit Night on the Seashore* [figure 8], *Sunset at the Crimean Shores* [figure 9], *View in Oreanda* [figure 10], and *Moonlit Night in the Crimea* [figure 11] provide magnificent panoramic views and wonderful phenomena, which was a part of his mission as an artist. For example, *Moonlit Night in the Crimea* shows an unusual presence of poeticized modern building prosaic by the light of a country dacha on the shoreline surrounded by a garden near Alushta alongside the more usual motifs of the sea with sailing vessels

⁷⁷ "Exhibition of Ivan K. Aivazovsky in Feodosia," *Одесский Вестник* [Odessa Bulletin], no. 49–50, 19–22 January 1846.

and the mass of Ayu-Dag in the distance. In this respect, I would like to discuss the term “homesickness.” Particularly at the beginning of the 1860s, Russian landscape painting was moving in a new direction, with an increasing insistence by many landscape students that they be allowed to complete their studies at home in Russia rather than going abroad.⁷⁸ Although he accepted going abroad, the remaining part of Aivazovsky’s life was dedicated to Crimean geography. He was a tireless traveler, and his journeys were driven by a thirst for knowledge. However, he described these voyages as being “like a bee I suck honey from the flower garden to bring in grateful tribute to the Tsar and to Mother Russia.”⁷⁹ As soon as his first European voyage was over, he immediately returned to Feodosia, where he always longed to be, as he wrote:

I happily spend my winters in St. Petersburg; I work, I have a good time, I share my leisure with my good friends, but as soon as it begins to feel like a spring, I feel homesick – I yearn to be in Crimea, by the Black Sea [...] It is my soul’s desire; if you will, it is what my very being demands. Many a time His Majesty the late Emperor would kindly warn me against it. Once he said, “You will get lazy there, doing nothing.” In response, I assured him that I would continue working hard while I was in the South; the Emperor answered, smiling, “Then again, you can live where you like, just keep painting, don’t be lazy. You are like that wolf in the proverb: no matter how much you feed him, he still runs for the forest.”⁸⁰

So, accepting the fact that regarding Aivazovsky as being homesick may be open for discussion, it is, nonetheless, obvious that he loved his native land and he used every opportunity to go there and to live inside the Crimean geography. Throughout the *Crimean Coasts* series, the images are invariably defined by evidence

⁷⁸ In 1858, Mikhail Klodt was awarded a gold medal at the Academy. The award carried the regular corresponding scholarship for three years to study abroad. But, two years into his European visit, he requested the Academy allow him to return home early “in order to occupy the remaining period of the pension painting views from nature in Russia.” Klodt was allowed to return and to work painting and sketching landscapes in different areas of his native country for the next two years. Also, the landscape painter Pyotr Sukhodolskii, after winning his own gold medal in 1864, received permission from the Academy to spend his entire three years of study in Russia. Similarly, Vladimir Orlovskii, after winning the gold medal in 1868, requested to be allowed to study in his own native Ukraine for at least a year before going to Europe. Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 174.

⁷⁹ *Русская Старина* [Russian Antiquity], 1878, vol. 22, July, p. 246. Also see: Galina Churak, “An Artist of Hellenic Spirit,” *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 4, no. 53 (2016), 30.

⁸⁰ *Русская Старина* [Russian Antiquity], 1878, vol. 22, issues 5–8, p. 443.

of the weather—most often in the form of scudding clouds being driven across the sky, and the beautiful representations of sunrise, daytime, and moonlight, and the contrasting weather conditions could be read as contemporary Russian “times of the day.”

Crimea was not only a key to the developing Russian imperial vision, therefore, but also meditation on Aivazovsky’s own destiny. Thus, it expresses a personal negotiation of national and imperial as well as regional identities. In the modern era of the birth of nations, the cultural upheaval produced a constant flux of profound emotions revealed through “culture,” the social production of creativity in the form of artifacts. Historical forces were thus reproduced to reflect this sense of a constantly change set against the mere appearance of permanence.⁸¹ Modernity as progress and the establishment of nation in nineteenth-century Russia was certainly expressed from the start of the new century. Notably, the works of Sergei Uvarov’s (1786–1855) professed a doctrine of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality.⁸² Standing as conservative bulwark to the onward rush, this key contribution to a specifically Russian character captured the nation through an intimate combination of its political philosophy, religion, and language and their setting in the land.

As regards the Crimean example, peoples and cultures, ideas and languages, and land and seascapes of the region were all gathered and molded to fashion a novel sense of place and citizen consciousness; thence, the new Russia, the modern

⁸¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6–7; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3–6.

⁸² Uvarov’s doctrine, Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality was designed to oppose the 1830s revolutionary and liberal movements, which were influential in Europe. “Orthodoxy” represents the opposite view to the French Revolutionary idea of secularism in a very clear way. “Autocracy” ended political ambiguity. As Uvarov emphasized, autocracy constituted a base for Russian political thought. The third element, “nationality,” represents the ethnic solidarity even though the translation from the Russian word *Narodnost* is very difficult. For more information, see Catherine Evtuhov and Richard Stites, *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 204), 47–50.

Russian.⁸³ Indeed like any becoming nation and nationality, the ingredients of this Russia and these Russians were added over time according to circumstance and combined with the narratives trouv  , a coherence conceived among the varied folk stories and territories claimed for incorporation. The changing image of the Crimean region, from Catherine’s heavenly backyard to a place still very beautiful but geographically a very important intersection point, demonstrates also the shifting meanings of Russianness itself, and Aivazovsky’s lifetime occupation with the seascape of Crimea is key to understanding this transformation.

Catherine the Great and the Paradise Myth

Compelled by the worsening Crimean situation, Catherine the Great signed the declaration “On the Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Island Taman and the Entire Kuban Province under Russian Rule.” Thus, Crimea became one of the most important representative political experiments. Situated on the southern outskirts of the Russian Empire, where it could improve Russia’s access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean—and blessed with good harbors, fertile valleys, and a largely mild environment—Crimea enjoyed a long history of international trade through the Silk Road via Feodosia, a very much ethnic and cultural entrep  t. Crimea existed during the final century of the Russian ancien r  gime as a key division along the expanded imperial borderland.⁸⁴ While under the direct rule of Russia, the area became a common haven for travelers and merchants, many of whom were wealthy, noble, and royal. So, for many, Crimea was a land of hope, a possible paradise.

⁸³ For a general view on national identity in Russian culture, see Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ Edward J. Lazzerini, “Local Accommodation and Resistance to Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century Crimea,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 172.

The paradise trope had a rich background in Russian culture. In a book dedicated to the “paradise myth” of the eighteenth century, Stephen Baehr showed how representations of this heavenly realm frequently invoked the political in the propaganda service of the state, its ruler, or a dignitary. The central idea of this paradise drew a kind of composite image derived from various sources, referencing the Golden Age of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for example, and the biblical Garden of Eden,⁸⁵ and in Catherine’s time, the Russian Eden served as a central literary cliché.⁸⁶ Potemkin’s reference to paradise quoted above (footnote 37) should also be seen in this context, insofar as he “proposed to realize the metaphor, to embody into imperial political practice a trope that runs through the literary glorification of Catherine II.”⁸⁷

Catherine appears to have started to think of the province as a sort of garden after Crimea was annexed; I suggest that she did so to support Crimean association with the Garden of Eden.⁸⁸ Andrei Zorin reviews the evidence for Catherine’s desire for Crimea in his article on the region’s position in Russia’s national identity.⁸⁹ Assuming, thus, that the Empress conceived Crimea as an idealized self-representation, I shall try to establish a link between her sea- and landscape design and political philosophy with her successors’ treatment of this “colonized” region and the surrounding discourses.⁹⁰ Aivazovsky’s Crimean paintings, both those commissioned

⁸⁵ Stephen Lessing Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1–3; 171–174; Andreas Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden: Politics and Landscape Design in Imperial Russia* (Bern: Peter Lang Ag, International Academic Publishers, 2007), 77.

⁸⁶ Baehr, *The Paradise Myth*, 65–68.

⁸⁷ Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden*, 78.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Andrei Zorin, “Крым в истории русского самосознания” [Crimea in the History of Russian Identity], *Новое Литературное Обозрение* [New Literature Review], no. 31 (1998), 135–137. Catherine’s concern for aesthetic and semiotic value of landscape design and her penchant for incorporating gardens into politics have both been known. For this, see: Dmitrii O. Shvidkovskii, *The Empress and the Architect: British Architecture and Gardens at the Court of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 41–42; 102–105.

⁹⁰ Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden*, 79.

and those painted by his own choice, present Crimea as a paradise, resting on the bounteous climatic properties of the region.

Aivazovsky painted *Arrival of Catherine II in Feodosia* [figure 12] for the 100th anniversary of the Crimean annexation of the Russian Empire. Instead of being a successful conqueror, Peter the Great was unable to reach the Black Sea but, undergoing long wars with the Ottoman Empire, Catherine the Great obtained the right of passage and achieved sovereignty over the Black Sea. The artist presented the empress and her suite against the panorama of the town, Feodosia. The biggest part of the canvas takes in the bay with the soft waves glittering under sunlight. Despite being rich in natural resources and blessed by its geographical location, the Crimean Peninsula was described as poor and backward under Ottoman rule. But Russia changed this: “In its forward movement to the south, to its natural borders, reclaiming the right to its ancient property, to the age-old Russian [Black] Sea, it [Russia] took possession of Crimea and restored to it the ancient time of enlightenment and peace [...] In Crimea arrived the happiest of days [...]”⁹¹

The Crimean annexation process reveals major questions around Russia’s imperial identity, the meaning of Russia, its land, and how they were changing. These questions find possible answers throughout the career of Aivazovsky. Aivazovsky saw Crimea as his homeland and a unique, organic part of the empire. Also, Russia’s Crimean policies and experiences on the peninsula both encapsulated and affected the shifts ongoing in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the self-identity of heartlands. To put it somewhat convincingly: to note that an image of a sea-based empire is imagined is not to dismiss it as imaginary. Rather, this picturesquely fabricated notions of Russia’s maritima identity – as depicted in Aivazovsky’s paintings – take on the bits

⁹¹ A. Ivanov, *Столетие Присоединения Крыма К России* [Centenary of Crimea Joining Russia] (1883), quoted in Edward J. Lazzerini “Local Accommodation and Resistance to Colonialism,” 174.

and pieces, which may or may not be complete, but which are nevertheless integral to formation-like. Thus, the affective meaning of the annexation of Crimea during the reign of Catherine II was still lively a hundred years later, and it had a celebratory meaning for a native Crimean painter. It is also worth mentioning that this painting was not an official commission: Aivazovsky himself chose to depict this historical moment because he was always proud of being part of a Crimea that was a part of the Great Russian Empire. As a notable person of Feodosia, he was very much interested in the social and economic life of the city. In a letter written to the Chairman of the Engineering Council of the Ministry of Railways, V. Vasilievich, he suggested building a new port at Feodosia instead of Sevastopol. He wrote:

Recently, a true rumor has apparently spread that they finally decided not to build a commercial port in Sevastopol and, as a result, Feodosia was chosen for commerce. I do not know how fair this is, in any case this winter has proved the advantages of Theodosius. Firstly, the colds were severe, up to 15 and 16 degrees, and our port did not freeze at all, although Sevastopol did not freeze either, but there were many ships from under Sevastopol in Feodosia, they were saved from terrible storms, during which ships could not enter to the Sevastopol Bay, and the tightness of the Sevastopol Bay was also very clearly defined [...] You have repeatedly expressed your opinion favorable to our Feodosia, finally complete it. I don't know how the new minister will relate to Feodosia, but I ask you to humbly inform him of this fact on occasion.⁹²

Biographers of the artist indicate that Aivazovsky uses the same view, the panoramic view of the city, as a backdrop for his seascapes. This Catherine painting is again occupied by the image of Feodosia Bay, a city lying within a ring of ancient walls with waves lapping widely on the shore. However, these biographers missed one important point: the year 1883 was also the 100th anniversary of Catherine II's annexation of Crimea. These two events (the centennial anniversary and the official request letter) lead directly to a two-pronged evaluation that strikes me as central to our understanding of the depictions of the Crimean region in Aivazovsky's career: the

⁹² Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to V. Vasilievich, February 10, 1893, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 188–189.

representation of Crimea (both geographically and also militarily) illuminates the promotion of visual strategies of Russian rulers and how the arrival of Catherine II as a symbol of the cities taken by the Russians played an essential role in the defining and forming of national identity.

Illustrating the Grandeur Realistically: The Black Sea

“The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters ... This is one of the most majestic paintings I know.”⁹³

In 1881, Aivazovsky painted one of his main works, full of greatness and strength: *Black Sea* [figure 13]. Externally, *Black Sea* is so simple that it cannot be described; yet, at the same time, it is one of Aivazovsky's most expressive paintings. Aivazovsky himself, of course, was well aware of the significance of this work; hence, one must think, the simple but effective name of the painting, *Black Sea*, came about. Initially, it had a different name: “A storm begins to play out on the Black Sea.”⁹⁴ But this did not satisfy Aivazovsky since it spoke only about the external state of nature. He felt that, with this work, he was achieving something more than mere marine depictions. Here, he managed to create a synthetic image of the Black Sea, including many of its distinctive features: the sea is depicted on a gray, windy day; the sky is covered with clouds; the entire foreground of the picture is filled with waves approaching from the horizon, which move, ridge after ridge, and, through their alternation, create a special rhythm and a stately structure to the whole picture. Through this painting, Aivazovsky transformed the watery images into a new personal vision of seascapes. This notable large-scale work demonstrates the inner world of the

⁹³ In response to Aivazovsky's tremendous painting *Black Sea* when it was exhibited, the painter and art critic Ivan Kramskoi quoted from the Bible: “This is the greatest sea I have ever seen.” Aleksey Suvorin, ed., *Иван Николаевич Крамской: Его жизнь, переписка и художественно-критические статьи. 1837–1887* [Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi: His Life, Correspondences and Critical Art Reviews. 1837–1887] (Saint-Petersburg, 1888), 681–682.

⁹⁴ Barsamov, *Ivan Aivazovsky*, 110–112.

artist depicting his native maritime borders. The attempt to paint a deep ocean wilderness was, it seems to me, his most radical departure. Aivazovsky was constrained to paint seascapes in new ways because of the new space he confronted.

In 1881, Aivazovsky exhibited *Black Sea* at the Moscow Exhibition. Its audience was both startled and mystified. The painting was strikingly modern. Its reductive pictoriality and yet ambiguous meaning produced a disquieting sentiment. It also announced what would become a seal of this painter's art: the subject of the small, isolated sailboat as a reflection on the relationship between the individual and the environment and thus between humanity and the natural world. As compared to the canvases filled with simple, harmonious romanticism, a painting had been produced in which the devotion of young people seems forgotten, where any outward flamboyancy was evident only in the artistic life of the sea.

Aivazovsky addressed the *Black Sea* to examine the eternity of existence, with the majestically respiring ocean viewed as a symbol of human life and its destiny.⁹⁵ The landscape before our eyes presents the thick, vast expanses of the Black Sea. The composition is separated into two equal parts, the upper half the sky, the lower half the sea. They are contrasting reflections about the line of the horizon. We see clouds in the sky, which darken closer to the right side of the canvas, transforming into a storm.

Looking deeply into the picture, we see just underneath the clouds, nearer to the left of the screen, from afar, a blurry, scarcely visible shape, barely distinguishable as a vague figure close to the coastline, reminding us of a solitary sailing boat. The sea-green shades swell disturbingly, while the sky contains hues of yellow, milky-white, dark pink, brown, turquoise, violet, and even gray-blue. The clouds are driving with the bad weather, revealing a clear space in the sky, and turning the abyss of water

⁹⁵ Churak, "An Artist of Hellenic Spirit," 25–26.

into something magnificent. The lower portion of the wedge of cloud curls like a tornado to the west, while the upper part expands more gently toward the middle of the image. The distance between thunder and cumulus, therefore, creates a luminescent space over the distant detail of the boat. In the Black Sea, the depth of boats and human beings (the only ship on the horizon) is unmediated. The remarkable achievement of the painting is to deny us the distance that those mediators frequently allow for. Rather, we *are* on the water, the feeling of activity around us overwhelming.

Aivazovsky's connection with Crimea was vividly reflected in his work, through what he loved most, and what he most often portrayed—the Black Sea. He was, in fact, the first painter to show the Black Sea as a Crimean landscape rather than as a specific picture. He also conveyed the power of the sea as well as the majesty and vastness of the sea and the steppe expanses.

Although descriptive of the natural world, Aivazovsky's seascapes also go beyond a simple materiality of nature, treating their topographic features as a transcendent immanence. Their greater significance, however, resides in the wider cultural import of the Black Sea to nineteenth-century Russia, in which respect it provided a mythical source of pragmatic potential for an ideological cohesion in the maritime nation. In one sense, it served as the semi-divine, umbilical-type linkage between Russian's innate insularity and global aspiration, and in another, it provided a symbolic site of contemporary debates about art, its history, and theory. In this painting, the realistic aspects of the art of Aivazovsky were uncovered with unprecedented fullness. This allowed him to create a generalized image of the formidable sea elements, without invoking either pathetic dramatization of the plot, or too light or too colorful effects. This picture was then acquired by P. M. Tretyakov⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Pavel M. Tretyakov was a Russian businessman, a supporter of the fine arts, and a wealthy collector who bequeathed the Tretyakov Gallery in his hometown of Moscow. For recent information about

(1832–1898), and it deeply agitated artistic circles as the aging artist had managed to create a work that became another milestone on the path of a new (unexpectedly, for many) rise of his talent in the development of Russian realistic painting.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Arranged chronologically, this chapter focuses on the interaction between individuals, places, and ideas involved not only in building not just a modern maritime empire on the Crimean Peninsula but also in constructing a new Russian identity as both empire and nation. During the nineteenth century, the new Russian landscape and seascape imagery had been definitively established and accepted as a signifier of nationality in literature and painting. At the same time, the notion that Russia's land/seascape had had a formative impact on the consciousness of Russian individuals transcended the boundaries of art criticism and appeared in new spheres of thought. Russia's preeminent historian of the late nineteenth century, Vasily Kliuchevsky, felt comfortable making unsubstantiated assertions about the effect of the land on the individuals:

The forest, the steppe, and the river – these, one might say, are the fundamental elements of Russian nature in its historical significance. All of them and each separately by itself have taken lively and original part in the construction of the life and ideas of the Russian individual.⁹⁸

Pavel Tretyakov and his family, see: S. P. Botkina, *Павел Михайлович Третьяков Жизнь В Искусстве* [Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov: Life in Art] (Moscow: The Tretyakov Gallery, 2012); Ziloti, *In the House of Tretyakov*, and for the correspondences of Pavel Tretyakov with artists, including Aivazovsky, see: *Письма Художников Павлу Михайловичу Третьякову: 1856–1879* [Letters of Artist to Pavel Tretyakov: 1856–1879] (Moscow, 1960).

⁹⁷ It is difficult to think about Aivazovsky's art without the *izms* of art history. However, although he was always labeled under the romantic category, the Black Sea was a turning point in his artistic career. I assert that we should consider Aivazovsky as a realist painter; to comprehend these kinds of patterns, it is easy to understand and make stronger analyses on both his artistic career and the significant role the Black Sea played in Russian history.

⁹⁸ V. O. Kliuchevsky, *Сочинения: Курс Русской Истории* [Compositions: A Course on Russian History] (Moscow, 1956), 66.

Thus, the once self-effacing indigenous lands had become transformed as a symbol of pride in Russia, in its national character and its culture. The place of the insecure steppe in Russian government policies during the reigns of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great is hard to overemphasize. Indeed, it played a significant role in the transition from principality to strong monarchy, from Muscovy to modern Russian Empire.⁹⁹ Similarly, in the transformation of a land-based to a sea-based empire, and later maritime nation, the role of the sea, particularly the Black Sea, played a crucial role both geographically and ideologically.

Crimea was celebrated as “the garden of the empire” for poets and tsarist propagandists, and as the century progressed, the garden flourished.¹⁰⁰ The Crimean region had a more complicated identity and played an ambiguous role in Russian conceptions of the native terrain. It was considered foreign at times and national at others. Apart from any consideration of the Crimean landscape and national identity, the geography of the Crimean Peninsula made an extremely important contribution to the history of what would come to be generally understood as the Great Russian landscape. Images and descriptions of Crimean sea and landscapes were extremely involved in the imagination of Russian national space. Neal Ascherson wrote that the Black Sea coast belonged “to all their people, but also to none of them ...” Crimea has long been a historically precious and disputed region, a location with a non-permanent ethnic center, a regional obsession for Russians, Ukrainians, Turks, and Tatars.¹⁰¹

As this dissertation shows, even individual identity is an open and evolving subject. As a kind of collective fiction, national identities are always multiple and

⁹⁹ For more information see: Katia Dianina, *When Art Makes News: Writing Culture and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ King, *The Black Sea*, 202.

¹⁰¹ Konstantin Plesakov, *The Crimean Nexus: Putin’s War and the Clash of Civilizations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 6.

always open to redefinition. Only with reference to culture is national identity viewed as an example of how culture defines people and influences who they are. Thus, the relationship between geographical territory and national identity is open to interpretation, and Crimea helped shape the image of the Russian Empire's landscape as it came into being in the nineteenth century. Without doubt, Ivan K. Aivazovsky was key to completing this transformation, capturing, as he did, the monumental essence of tempestuous seas, the waves battering against the ancient cliffs, and the wild waters lapping against the primeval coastlines now, finally, being brought under the restraining sway of civilization, which was Russian.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Vision and the Representation of History in Aivazovsky's Battle Paintings

Introduction

Although the great inland waters and seas of the Russian Empire have always influenced its history, the systematic and policy-driven development of naval expertise, and hence a maritime heritage, dates from the reign of Peter I (r. 1682–1725).¹⁰² The tsar desired, above all else, to pursue the twin ambitions of centralizing and modernizing the government of Russia and expanding his domain into North-Central Europe and the Mediterranean. Among all the challenges presented by such an ambitious policy, those related to the sea were invariably of primary importance. In his desire to take Russia into Europe, he was confronted by the resistance of Sweden, an already well-established maritime power, which saw the Baltic as a Swedish lake, while Russian expansion to the southeast would be at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰³ The Russian Empire had always aspired and fought hard for a secure and

¹⁰² For a history of the Russian Navy, see: Eric Morris, *The Russian Navy: Myth and Reality* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1977); Anthony J. Watts, *The Imperial Russian Navy* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990) and as primary sources for the rise of Russia as a maritime empire, see: Baron George Sydenham Clarke, *Russia's Sea-Power, Past and Present or The Rise of the Russian Navy* (London: John Murray, 1898); Fred T. Jane, *Imperial Russian Navy: Its Past, Present, and Future* (London: Thacker & Co, 1899); for a general history of Peter I, see: Paul Bushkovich, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of the Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Marc Raeff, ed., *Peter the Great Changes Russia* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1972); Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, vol. 1, From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁰³ For a general history of the Russian Empire, see: Gregory L. Freeze, ed., *Russia: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); William Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia 1600–1914* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and Russians*; Lindsay Hughes, *The Romanovs: Ruling Russia 1613–1917* (London: Humbledon Continuum, 2008); Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (New York: Longman, 2001); John Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Boris Mironov and Ben Eklof, *The Social History of Imperial Russia 1700–1917* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Marc Raeff, *Imperial Russia 1682–1825: The Coming Age of Modern Russia* (New York: Knopf, 1971); Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Thomas Sanders, ed., *Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a*

easy access to “warm” waters, which meant the Mediterranean since the North Sea and the Baltic Sea were too disconnected from the Mediterranean world. The Black Sea was thus one of the natural bodies of water that provided important access and influence. The various conflicts and wars between the Russians and the Ottomans are testimony to this Russian fact.

Indeed, for most of Aivazovsky’s life, the Russian Empire was embroiled in war against the Ottoman Empire, and thus the impact of the conflict on the life of the nation, on land and sea, was a major theme in his works. Starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, Aivazovsky was commissioned by Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) and Alexander II (1855–1881) to depict major Russo–Ottoman naval battles. Treating the naval battles inclusively both within Aivazovsky’s works and within our understanding of nineteenth-century history and visual culture, in general, will allow us to properly begin to understand the visualization of the “intersected territories” of both the Russian and the Ottoman empires through the eyes of Aivazovsky.

Battle painting¹⁰⁴ was an established and a distinct branch of marine art, and the extended period of conflict represented by the Russo–Ottoman wars of the nineteenth century (1827–29, 1853–56, 1877–78) was to feature very often in Aivazovsky’s oeuvre. Within the mix of tragedy and glory are the burning enemy

Multinational State (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999); Brian L. Davies, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ The nineteenth century was a significant period for the reinvention of history painting and the re-appearance of battle scenes as a military subgenre of history painting. Although the neoclassical style articulated historical subjects successfully in the late eighteenth century, evolving audiences, attitudes, and perceptions demanded new approaches in the nineteenth century, which also saw the emergence of a race toward historical consciousness, embodied in all corners of European civilization. There was a real break, a true transformation in historical consciousness, and this break is also related to Romanticism. Historians of the Romantic era turned to history as a narrative that could present and recreate the past. At a time when the whole range of contemporary concerns with the past first became accessible to representation, this historical consciousness of the Romantic period thus initiated a new genre of history painting that would flourish in France, particularly during the Napoleonic period, and would continue into the nineteenth century in other parts of Europe. The way in which history was depicted was an attempt to create an illusion of visual heroics; but further, the past began to be appropriated for political purposes to reinforce the cultural and political myths of the moment. Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 5.

ships, representing victory; Aivazovsky's paintings fitted all the requirements for the creation of modern, national history painting. Aivazovsky's paintings served a double purpose here: on the one hand, they sought openly to repeat a highly successful pictorial strategy, adapting the formal academic demands of history painting to a modern, national iconography; on the other, they also advertised the artist's own esteemed reputation in the shadows of the exploded ships, referring to the rise of Russia as a marine empire and a dominant figure in the Black Sea. The idea of Russian art as a battleground had a lineage going back at least Jacob Philipp Hackert's *Chesme* series. However, whereas the contest in Hackert's series is between his own German art and that of the imperial commission of Catherine II, by the mid-nineteenth century, the scramble for artists with Russian Academy of Fine Arts backgrounds to respond as quickly as possible to latest events of the war indicates that Russian artists' battles engaged their patriotic feelings, which reached a peak during the reign of Nicholas I. Thus, Aivazovsky's prideful self-referencing of Russian naval victories—primarily against the Ottoman Empire, giving dominance over the Black Sea—also shows a deep awareness of the commercial potential of the subject, which is demonstrated in the increasing official commissions by the rulers and the accompanying exhibitions of these paintings organized by Aivazovsky himself.¹⁰⁵ This exhibition contributed to feeding a consumer-driven imperial circle and a public appetite for memorabilia and lively representations of the Russian great naval victories, generally accepted to have been one of the cornerstones of Russian imperial history.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ By September 1854, Aivazovsky had moved, with all his family, to Kharkov in southern Ukraine. He stayed there for exactly a year; while there, he received grand dukes Nikolai and Mikhail Nikolaievich, two of Nicholas I's sons, who were on their way to St. Petersburg from the war zone. He gave them a number of drawings he had made while he was in Sevastopol. On their way back, the grand dukes again stopped in Kharkov in order to thank Aivazovsky on behalf of their father. They also communicated the emperor's words: *Whatever Aivazovsky paints, I will buy*. Caffiero and Samarine, *Light, Water and Sky*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Although nineteenth-century Russo–Ottoman wars have a great importance in the imperial policies both politically and sociologically, Russian history has accepted two wars as “patriotic wars.” The

If the depiction of actual battle scenes was of limited artistic interest, then, in contrast, Aivazovsky's engagement with the major Russian naval attacks in the Black Sea in particular, and the navy more generally, were wide-ranging and profound. It was a subject that he returned to repeatedly in exhibited paintings, and in designs for numerous print projects. A great place in the artist's work is occupied by victories of the Russian fleet that occurred during his lifetime. He had opportunities to talk with participants of the sea battles, even to visit the battlefields. Aivazovsky's deep interest in Russian naval history throughout his entire life was vital in establishing and then augmenting his creative consciousness. Once appointed as a Russian navy painter in 1844, he both accomplished court and military commissions and gave himself to his personal emotional attachment to Russia.¹⁰⁷ He sought to immortalize initiatives and achievements, following his true interests in and ability to reflect Russian maritime culture.¹⁰⁸

This chapter presents his naval battle paintings as powerful and important documents of Russian artistic and imperial patriotic engagement with the figure of the “victorious” Russian navy in the Black Sea.¹⁰⁹ My redutant interest concerns the

first one is the Russo–French War of 1812, the heroic defense against Napoleon Bonaparte, and the second was the Second World War, again an epic resistance against the Fascist regime of the Nazis. Except of the Crimean War, all of nineteenth-century Russo–Ottoman wars ended with Russian victories. Despite, during the Battle of Sinop, the Russians defeating the Ottoman fleet, the intervention of France and Britain into the war on behalf of the Ottomans (because of their concern for maintaining the neutrality of the Straits and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire) transformed the Crimea, which had erupted from a Russo–Ottoman war into a European war. Thus, the defense of Sevastopol, as in the case of the so-called patriotic wars, became very significant in the historical narration of the Russian Empire. For further information about the Crimean War and the Ottoman official discourse, see: Fatma Özyiğit Coşkuner, *Ottoman Official Discourse and its Reflections during the Crimean War*, unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2010; Candan Badem, *Kırım Savaşı ve Osmanlılar* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ In 1844, he was awarded the title of official artist at the Russian Naval Headquarters, with the right to wear the uniform of the Russian Naval Ministry. Russian State Naval Archives, no. 3712, 16 September, 1844. [*РГА ВМФ* - Российский государственный архив военно-морского флота]

¹⁰⁸ Churak, “An Artist of Hellenic Spirit,” 31.

¹⁰⁹ Nineteenth-century “naval patriotism” was not simply a reflection of naval success and commemoration of its officer heroes, past and present; rather, as a hierarchical community, the navy had become an influential allegory for the Russian Empire and a focus for debate around issues concerning the land-based versus sea-based empire.

visual representation of maritime Russia in the nineteenth century through the observations of Aivazovsky. In analyzing Aivazovsky's responses to the Russo–Ottoman wars, it is important to understand the broader context of Russian wartime and post-war patriotism, as well as its associated “culture of victory against the Ottomans,”¹¹⁰ at a time when the navy had achieved a unique position within Russian culture (dominance of the Black Sea) more widely. As Charles King describes, the nineteenth century witnessed the division of the Black Sea between “the waxing and waning powers of Eastern Europe, the Russians and the Ottomans, a waterway on which two sets of imperial ambitions came into intimate contact.”¹¹¹ Indeed, from the late-eighteenth century onward, “naval patriotism” was not simply a reflection of Russian naval success. Rather, as a hierarchical yet relatively meritocratic community, the navy had become a potent metaphor and idealized picture for Russian society, and a focus for Aivazovsky's responses, his “national identity.” The depictions of Russian naval victories can be defined as a mutable space between the history of the empire and the history of a nation, an arena that becomes invested with layers of cultural, historical, and national meanings. I will explore ways in which naval patriotism was imagined, represented, appropriated, and transformed in the world of the nineteenth-century Crimean artist and, in the process, contributed to the formation of cultural, national, and political identities. The symbols of naval patriotism were its victories, ships, commanders, and sailors, expressed in Aivazovsky's works throughout the nineteenth century. The sea captured in the cultural and literal frame of painting intersected closely, I argue, with the historical discourse of the emerging maritime identity of the Russian Empire, with the Black Sea as its most prominent figure.

¹¹⁰ Erin McBurney, “Art and Power in the Reign of Catherine the Great: The State Portraits” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2014), 282.

¹¹¹ King, *The Black Sea*, 139.

Further, that this intersection between visual and historical discourse mirrored and articulated the relationship between empire and nation, which was far from being monolithically stable, but instead fluid, contested, and conflicted, much like the seas/oceans through which that relationship was materialized.¹¹²

A striking aspect of the relationship between nation and empire in this period as personified in Aivazovsky's battle paintings is presented in the construction of the sea, in terms of an irreconcilable self-contradiction that a problematic in the relationship of "empire" to "nation." The sea is treated simultaneously as both the arterial access from the nation to the empire and also as a barrier that separates the nation from the wider empire, and it maintains each's distinctiveness. This is particularly acute for the period in question, unlike earlier times, since the empire was increasingly and exponentially an intense fact, a material practice, as well as an ideological construct, that affected and determined increasing numbers of individual lives both in Russia and its other lands, something that Aivazovsky's paintings so strikingly witness. In his case, rather than commercial enrichment, as in the case of Great Britain, the sea is treated as a source of threat through possible invasion or infection and, thus, always should be protected. This image of the sea for nineteenth-century Russia also explains the inherent tension in the discourse of naval battles, was virtually synonymous with "the conquest of nature; the sea."¹¹³ For the realization and articulation of national identity, many a theorist of national identity identifies several features of the nation-state. Principal among these is "an historic territory, or homeland" in relation to which are generated "common myths and historical

¹¹² Quilley, *Empire to Nation*, 3.

¹¹³ In her article, Ekaterina Pravilova examines the geopolitics of the Russian Empire to Central Asia and the newly conquered Turkestan. She also analyzes how the policies on "water" would be used for the conquest of nature and transformed to concentrate the centralized and highly complex management system of irrigation. Ekaterina Pravilova, "River of Empire: Geopolitics, Irrigation, and the Amu Derya in the Late XIXth Century," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 17/18 (2009): 255–287.

memories” and a “common mass public culture.”¹¹⁴ In Aivazovsky’s descriptions of naval battles against the Ottomans, the status of gaining hegemony on the Black Sea is the “homeland”—the precondition for many aspects of nineteenth-century Russian national character, by which the “very being” of the artist is defined by navigation and, consequently, everything related to the Black Sea. This is an idea that buttresses the common public culture, resulting in an imperial ideology dispensing the “mythical” idea of Russia as a maritime empire. For Aivazovsky, to focus on the image of the sea from seascapes to history painting, therefore, is also to implicate the myriad of routes of cultural exchange and transculturation between the Russian Empire and the artist himself.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1768–1774

The Battle of Chios and Chesme

Of all naval engagements, it was the Battle of Chios and Chesme [*Çeşme*], fought on 5–7 July 1770 against the Ottoman Empire, that defined the relationship between the navy and the Russian Empire for the next hundred years. This was primarily because of what the battle as a whole as represented: first, it was a decisive and strategic victory that underlined Russia’s naval supremacy and signaled to the Russian public the end of Ottoman domination of the Black Sea; second was the nature and the conduct of battle itself, with its emphasis on total victory; third, the victory at Chesme is also regarded as an inspiration for the Greek War of Independence;

¹¹⁴ From the early 1980s, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, and others formed main lines of debate around the origins and character of nations. In particular, see: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Smith, “Ethnic Myths and Ethnic Revivals” and idem, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 14. For further information, see footnote 58.

resistance to the Ottoman rule. Thus, Chesme came to signify a uniquely powerful fusion of victory, inspiration, duty, and hegemony.¹¹⁵

Aivazovsky's choice to depict this war was by no means unique. Peterhof Palace¹¹⁶ has a memorial hall devoted to the strengthening of Russia's position on the Black Sea. The hall became known as the *Chesme Hall* [figure 15] after the crucial victory of the Russian fleet.¹¹⁷ In August 1778, work on the redesigning of the room began in connection with its use for the twelve paintings by the German painter Jacob Phillip Hackert (1737–1837), determining the subject matter and character of the interior design. The paintings illustrate various episodes from the expedition of the Russian fleet to the Archipelago—the islands of the Aegean Sea and the coastlands of Anatolia and the Balkans. The expedition played a significant role in the course of the Russo–Ottoman War of 1768–74.

Tsar Nicholas I commissioned Aivazovsky to depict this crucial victory of the Russian fleet. In his letter to Count Alexander N. Mordvinov¹¹⁸, he wrote that “I spend the whole winter depicting the battles ordered by His Majesty the Emperor to me. The other day I finished the third and after that I will start writing stories of my choice.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ For general information on the 1768–74 Russo–Ottoman War and the Battle of Chesme, see: Ali Rıza İşıpek and Oğuz Aydemir, *1770 Çeşme Deniz Savaşı: 1768–1774 Osmanlı Rus Savaşları* (Istanbul: Denizler Kitabevi, 2006).

¹¹⁶ In addition to urban palaces, the construction of country residences on the south shore of the Gulf of Finland and in the forests to the southwest of the city was also encouraged by Peter the Great. Peterhof was the most extensive of these projects. For more information, see: William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 218–219.

¹¹⁷ The Chesme Hall, originally called the Anteroom, took shape in the middle of the eighteenth century, during the reconstruction of the palace according to a project by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli. Located in the northwestern part of the building, it became an intermediary interior between the Light Gallery (Ballroom), where all the arriving guests waited for a reception, and the Great Hall (Throne Room) used for official receptions. *The Chesme Hall*, text by Olga Kislitsyna, trans. Valery Fateyev (St. Petersburg: Abris Art Publishers, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Alexander Nikolayevich Mordvinov (1799–1858) was the son of a famous Russian admiral, Nikolay Semyonovich Mordvinov (1754–1845). Although he did not receive systematic art education, during a trip in Italy he made picturesque landscape sketches, which, on his return to St. Petersburg, were embodied in the paintings.

https://arthive.com/artists/1423~Alexander_Nikolayevich_Mordvinov.

¹¹⁹ Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to Count Alexander N. Mordvinov, February 4, 1848, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 102. Also, in his monograph about

Although this statement shows, rather than his own choice, these naval battle paintings were produced as a result of the tsar's order, he decided to take advantage of having a lucrative relationship with the imperial family. He did, after all, owe much of his reputation to paintings depicting the Imperial Navy and the tsar's feats.¹²⁰ In later years, in the article compiled by P. P. Karatygin, from stenographed recordings of conversations with the painter, he indicated that "Every victory of our forces, whether at sea or land, makes me happy as a Russian, and as an artist gives me the impulse to paint it."¹²¹ Perhaps the first stage of his career produced works by his own "commission," but in later years, Aivazovsky obviously chose to continue to depict Russian victories as a result of both official commissions and his own need. It should be noted that these battles signified the transformation of the Black Sea from Ottoman territory to Russian dominance; in particular, the Crimean region that included Feodosia, where the artist was born and spent many periods of his life, was the first area among the huge Russian Empire to see, witness and hear "the winds of change."

Aivazovsky's naval paintings were helpful to propagandize the celebrations of the might of the Russian navy. Yet, rather than to show the depiction of the battle itself in all its detail, both topographically and strategically (as was expected from Hackert in the previous century), utilizing diverse pictorial modes, Aivazovsky focused on burning ships surrounded by a chaotic depiction of the sky within a broader, more panoramic view of the action to create a novel pictorial middle ground between the intimacy of the tragic battle scenes of contemporary history painting and the more

Aivazovsky, Minas Sargsyan indicates that Aivazovsky was commissioned by the emperor. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 87–88.

¹²⁰ Caffiero and Samarine, *Light, Water and Sky*, 41.

¹²¹ P. P. Karatygin, "Иван Айвазовский и его 42 года художественной деятельности 1838–81," [Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky and His 42 Years of Artistic Activity 1836–81] *Русская Старина* [Russian Antiquity], 21, 22, 23, (1878) and 31 (1881).

distant viewpoint conventional with naval battle painting, as practiced by Jacob Phillip Hackert and others. In *Battle of Chesme at Night* [figure 16], Aivazovsky sought to encapsulate the significance of Chesme, rather than create a more literal representation of a particular moment in the battle, underlined by his incorporation of a number of key events from across the action. The battle took place at night, and thus the battlefield itself is illuminated by the fire of burning ships. The main focus of the painting is the dramatic explosion of the Ottoman fleet. We might, therefore, assume that his composition found some parallels with Hackert's series of the same subject, exhibited almost a century before. Over and above its enormous size, Hackert's painting is characterized by a number of compositional devices that are also notable in his other paintings in the Chesme series: the ships of the line dominating the upper half of the composition and, in the lower half, there are many sailors from both sides trying to save themselves on one of the fragments. Aivazovsky's composition broadly follows this format. However, the paintings from the two different artists are markedly distinct. Whereas Hackert's composition encapsulates the kind of spectacular battle painting popular in the 1790s by emphasizing the movement and dramatic confrontation between two colossal ships, Aivazovsky's paintings have a central, static emphasis dominated by the destroyed image of the Ottoman fleet with a complex grouping of Russian and Ottoman sailors in and around, positioned directly below.

The painting by Aivazovsky portrays a stunning and dark scene and characterizes the talent of the artist's unique method. In particular, he was admired for being able to depict the reflection of the light on water accurately, and in this piece he compares the moonlit waves in the forefront with the red water in the context in which the boats are devoured by fire. The flames glitter on the surface of the water, giving the painting almost a surreal quality as the spectator moves into the inferno. This

painting is also characteristic of the artist's ability to romanticize the dramatic reality of fire-breaking ships by contrasting them with soft clouds, with a full moon (the moon can be considered as Aivazovsky's favorite feature, in complete harmony with his Romantic spirit) peeking gently from the tops. The battle is very dark, and the moon alone is drawn into the haze. The sky is colored in black. His reflection of the moon reveals the tragic events that led to the death of many sailors. Aivazovsky's other painting in the Chesme series is *Naval Battle at Chios* [figure 17]. More or less, this painting also followed a successful formation that presented daring colors, dramatic contrasts of light and darkness, and other sublime effects. Both armadas are depicted side by side. The Ottoman and Russian fleets both reached the Chios Channel and expended their naval forces early in the morning. The two sides formed with their eyes on each other. The battle ended in the waters of Chios. Russian and Turkish ships fired at one another, dumping clouds of gunpowder—some in the air. Each Russian ship closed on the Turkish fleet and fired just twenty meters away. The central location of two ships from both sides demonstrates Aivazovsky's ability to create an objective historical moment, yet to deliver a dramatic effect.¹²²

The Battle of Chesme became known as one of the proudest of all Russian naval victories and the most devastating Ottoman defeat since the Battle of Lepanto, as well as an inspiration for the Greek War of Independence and Greek freedom in western Anatolia. Aivazovsky continued to essentialize the lucrative relationship between the maritime and artistic spheres.

¹²² For more details about the battle, see: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/medieval/chesma1770-humiliating-defeat-ottomans-russians.html>.

The Battle of Navarino and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–29

“Azov” and “Mercury” as Representations of Russian Maritime Power

The Eastern Mediterranean was the scene for a joint venture between the navies of the British and Russian empires, and once again, the enemy was the Ottoman Empire. The Battle of Navarino¹²³ (1827) was fought by naval contingents from Britain, France, and Russia against the combined forces of Ottoman and Egyptian fleets. The victory resulted in the destruction of the Ottoman ships, assuring the Greeks of independence and leading the Ottoman sultan to acknowledge Russian supremacy in the Black Sea. Although the Russian squadron was the last of the combined fleet to join the battle, the Russians have always been proud of this victory. It is worth mentioning that, rather than being a speculative venture, Aivazovsky’s painting of *The Battle of Navarino* [figure 18] was again a royal commission.¹²⁴ Thus we must conclude that the representation was meant by the artist to be broadly celebratory. On the one hand, Aivazovsky seems to have been engaging with the conventions and visual language of marine art, in particular the ship portrait; on the other hand, if we accept that the ship could represent the empire and that the *Azov* could itself symbolize an outcome of national importance, then any representation of it could achieve significance beyond mere ship portraiture to a contemporary audience.

¹²³ Morris, *Russian Navy*, 7–8. For information on the Battle of Navarino from the Ottoman side (in the Turkish literature, it is called “the Disaster of Navarino”), see: İdris Bostan, *Osmanlılar ve Deniz: Deniz Politikaları, Teşkilat, Gemiler* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2010); Ersan Baş, ed., *Çeşme, Navarin, Sinop Baskınları ve Sonuçları* (Istanbul: Piri Reis Araştırma Merkezi, 2007).

¹²⁴ 1846 was also year in which Aivazovsky painted his first large group of pictures on the history of the Russian Navy, including *Peter the Great at Krasnaya Gorka Lighting a Bonfire on the Shore to Signal His Ships in Distress*, Russian Museum, 1846). The painting depicts an episode from the Russian emperor’s military campaign of 1710: Russian galleys and provision ships headed for *Vyborg* were carried out to sea by a storm. Risking his life, Peter the Great and some sailors from his ship came ashore at the fort of Krasnaya Gorka, where they lit a large bonfire as a beacon to show the ships the way to safe harbor. This enormous canvas lauds the personal courage of Peter the Great in sailing across the Gulf of Finland. Evgenia Petrova, ed., *Ivan Aivazovsky: On the 200th Anniversary of the Artist’s Birth* (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, Palace Editions, 2016), 27.

The Russian battleships sat in the center and thus suffered the main blow of the Turkish–Egyptian forces, yet destroyed the bulk of the enemy fleet. The ship *Azov*, under the command of Captain Mikhail Petrovich Lazarev, devastated them.¹²⁵ Aivazovsky shows the flagship *Azov* badly damaged, but when the ship is boarded by the crew of an Ottoman ship, the heroic Russian sailors cross to the Ottoman deck to complete the destruction of the enemy ship. This episode is placed in the center of the composition of the picture. By the very nature of the composition, through a willingness to demonstrate the aggressive rush of the *Azov* and the Ottoman ship's doom, Aivazovsky does not doubt the outcome of the war. The *Azov* won the flag of Saint George in memory of the praiseworthy deeds of the chiefs, of the courage and fearlessness of the commanders, and of the bravery of the lower ranks; the whole world praised the courage and skill of Russian sailors. The contemporary naval paintings of Aivazovsky respected, more or less, the same procedure favoring vivid differences of lightness and darkness with daring colors. The widespread popularity of these paintings expressed a broader public interest in events surrounding the ongoing wars with the Ottoman Empire. This painting seems to be the political and cultural backdrop

¹²⁵ As the captain of the *Azov*, in 1827, the Russian fleet commander Lazarev (1788–1851) was appointed Chief-of-Staff of the squadron tasked with a cruise in the Mediterranean. Renowned for his larger-than-life personality, Captain Lazarev personally gave battle orders to the squadron ships and took his ship to the center of the arched battle line in the Battle of Navarino, which was where the Ottomans concentrated their leading thrust. The *Azov* was pit against five enemy ships at once, and all were destroyed. The *Azov* received the highest award, the Ensign of St. George, and Lazarev was promoted to the rank of rear admiral. D. V. Bugayev, *200 лет триумфа [200 Years of Triumph]* (Simferopol, 2017), 102–107. Admiral Mikhail Lazarev was also depicted by Aivazovsky. In 1839, Aivazovsky observed the landing operations of the Russian Navy on the Caucasian shores. During the operation at Fort Lazarev near Subashi [*Subaşı*], he made the acquaintance of Mikhail Lazarev, commander of Silistria. Accepting the fact that this is not a “unique” portraiture in the history of art by his insufficient technical details, Lazarev's portrait was a fitting subject for the times following in the tradition of the “the portraits of heroes” representing the famous commanders of the wars. This portrait of the Russian admiral appears to have been painted on board the warship. Rather than heroically depiction of the Admiral or representation of historical personas by the union of facts with allegorical machinery, Aivazovsky choose to paint him truthfully by tending to exemplify Lazarev emphasizing the individual resemblance. Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Portrait of Vice-Admiral Mikhail Lazarev*, 1839, oil on canvas, 47 x 49 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg.

for Aivazovsky's post-war interpretation of the battle: the navy/empire emerges triumphant and victorious despite devastation and misery.

Alongside with the *Azov*, the brig *Mercury* is famous for its battle with two Ottoman ships in 1829. In 1836, in the Russian magazine *Современник* [The Contemporary], a contemporary witness talked about the *Mercury*: "Preferring seemingly inevitable death to the dishonor of captivity, the brig's commander staunchly endured a three-hour battle with his colossal adversary, forcing it to withdraw in the end. The Turk's moral defeat was full and unequivocal. Manifested in the feat of the brig *Mercury* was a spirit which reigned throughout all the navy's rank."¹²⁶ *Azov* and *Mercury* are the only two ships in the Russian navy which wear a special battle honor ensign.¹²⁷ Aivazovsky depicted the *Mercury* several times. The choice of subject and its sublime treatment need to be considered in light of the perception of the Russian victory symbolized through the visualization of the two ships: *Mercury* and *Azov*. With the tsar's commissions to commemorate the Russian navy, Aivazovsky's firsthand involvement with the maneuvers of the Black Sea Fleet, and eyewitnesses' textual documents, the Black Sea Fleet's meaning and visualization through the genre of battle painting became one of the cornerstones of Aivazovsky's career, independent of inflections of whichever part was exemplified. All of which raised the issue of how the history of the battle was to be represented visually. In this respect, these two *Mercury* paintings by Aivazovsky were not simply commemorative but were a wide-ranging pictorial essay on the nature of Russia as a "rising" maritime empire at a critical juncture. In his 1848 *The Mercury Brig Meeting the Russian Squadron after Her Victory over Two Turkish Vessels* painting [figure 19], Aivazovsky depicted one of the episodes of the Russo–Ottoman War of 1828–29.

¹²⁶ Petrova, *Ivan Aivazovsky*, 132.

¹²⁷ Morris, *Russian Navy*, 8.

During the battle, the brig *Mercury* was attacked by two Ottoman ships. Thanks to skillful maneuvering and resistance capability, the *Mercury* managed to inflict considerable damage on the Ottoman naval forces before avoiding pursuit. In this painting, the artist depicted not the battle itself but the moment when the seriously damaged Russian brig, pierced with holes from Ottoman shells, was bearing down upon the other Russian ships in full sail on the Black Sea. The emotional atmosphere of the painting is full of majestic grandeur and power. Great white clouds move slowly across an immense blue sky. The *Mercury*, flying full sail against the background of the sea, comes across a Romantic image of the victory itself. Fifty years later, the artist again chose to depict this victory. *Brig Mercury Attacked by Two Turkish Ships* [figure 20] presents three ships in near combat over the raw sea; as the name indicates, two Ottoman warships battle against the Russian *Mercury* and the other ship named in the title.

While Aivazovsky painted numerous seascapes, many of which contained ships, boats and many that depicted damages or wrecks, few of his works included ships in close naval battles. Aivazovsky did not simply make the scene up: this battle actually occurred in 1829. The battle depicted was part of the Russo–Ottoman War, a war ignited in the 1820s by the Greeks independence struggle and was heavily romanticized in European thought, especially in Britain, and in which, perhaps the ultimate “Romantic,” Lord Byron¹²⁸ offered his services to the Greek side (eventually

¹²⁸ Between 1850 and 1870, a strong strain of Romanticism, influenced by the movement in Western Europe, developed among Armenian writers, poets, and artists in all over the world, glorifying figures from Armenian history. As Vahé Oshagan writes: “The romantic, virtuous, and patriotic hero became the dominant figure in the new self-consciousness, nurturing around itself the nascent aspirations of the period.” Vahé Oshagan, “Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians, 1789–1915,” *Armenian Review* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 64. Byron was of particular interest to Armenian writers because of his commitment to Armenian language and culture. In 1816, Byron visited the Mechitarist Order at the convent of St. Lazarus, a center of Armenian culture, where he studied Armenian. His letters recounting this experience, translations of Armenian history and from the Armenian Bible, as well as some his poems, were published in English and Armenian in 1870. His visit was celebrated by Aivazovsky in his painting *Byron on the Island of San Lazzaro* dated 1899.

dying of disease).¹²⁹ Throughout the war, the Russians supported the Greek rebels. The Ottoman sultan closed the Dardanelles to Russian ships in response. In May 1829, the *Mercury* was ambushed by the Ottoman ships off the coast of Anatolia; despite daunting odds, it was able to escape after a pitched battle.¹³⁰

The Battle of Navarino, like the other Russo–Ottoman naval battles of 1828–29, is not only viewed as being the decisive success in the naval war against the Ottoman Empire (with the allied powers of Egypt), but also the possible start of the pursuit of national excellence.

The Crimean War of 1853–1856

Aivazovsky's paintings depicting the Battle of Sinop extrapolated a tragedy (the Russians lost the war against the alliance of Great Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and Piedmont Sardinia) into an event of national significance due to the timing of such a victory at a critical period of war. The works also represent a didactic transformation of the loss of war into a moralized account of heroism in the depiction of the destruction of the Ottoman fleet by the Russians. Although eventually losing the war,

¹²⁹ Rather than imposing a reductionist manner, the usefulness of European Romanticism, and to some degree, orientalism theories and practical applications of methodologies to dominant canons, where the voices of mainly Western European artists may provide valuable concepts. Of the mainstream French artists, Théodore Géricault, Eugène Delacroix, and Horace Vernet and their followers argued that contemporary events were a significant element in modern art of painting. Their untraditional artistic means bolstered the concept of Romanticism as a language of dissent, an expression of liberal politics or, it has been said, an artistic democracy designed by outsiders. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, "Romanticism: Breaking the Canon," *Art Journal* 52 (Summer 1993): 18 – 21; Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 39. The new emphasis on contemporary subject matter brought with it an increased insistence on concrete, realistic detail and a sense of specific place, time, and setting. Ordinary people with ordinary emotions found their way into history painting, and if the nation's ruler and his generals continued to be idealized, they now performed on an idealized stage that exposed any pretenses of allegory. Stephen Bann, "Questions of Genre in Early Nineteenth-Century French Painting," *New Literary History* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 501 – 511. Another approach was to select contemporary subjects that opposed the government, at home or abroad, and many of what were probably the last generation of history paintings were demonstrations directed at contemporary incidents of persecution or indignation at home or abroad: Eugène Delacroix's *The Massacre at Chios* and *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*. They were heroic but showed the heroic suffering of ordinary civilians.

¹³⁰ Grinevetsky and others, *The Black Sea Encyclopedia*, 653.

the Russian victory over the Ottoman fleet gave it temporary control over the Black Sea. Just one Ottoman vessel survived the battle, while all others sank or went offshore intentionally to avoid sinking. This single ship managed to escape Istanbul to notify the Ottoman administration of the Sinop defeat. The assault strengthened pro-war forces in Britain and France and justified war against the Russian invasion.

Aivazovsky painted two pictures of the Battle of Sinop fought on November 18, 1853. One canvas is dated 1853 [figure 21], implying that the artist took just over a month to paint this enormous canvas. Aivazovsky may have based *Battle of Sinop* on the personal recollections of Pavel Nakhimov (1802–1855). The artist first met the famous admiral on board the *Silistria* in 1839, during the landing operations on the Caucasian shores. Following an increasingly dominant convention in shipwreck iconography of this period, Aivazovsky set the scene on a topographically accurate, recognizable stretch of the Ottoman and the Russian fleets. It is important to indicate that topographical specificity also appealed to a level of personal association, for local eyewitnesses were part of the country, thus appealing further to a sense of individual identification with the navy.¹³¹

In the direction of the Russian ship *Vladimir*, a boat sails with Russian sailors, who, apparently, inflicted damage on the Ottoman flotilla *Pervaz Bahri*, setting ablaze this first ship. The Russian squadron ships are depicted unharmed. They have stayed so due to skillful battle techniques. The Russian ships rise in the foreground proudly. The image shows a contrast between dark and light tones, the Russian fleet flagship in

¹³¹ Accuracy is one of the important characteristics of Aivazovsky's naval battle paintings. In a letter written to L. A. Preovsky, Aivazovsky wrote: "These circumstances prevented me from traveling to St. Petersburg. Despite our glorious victories, the coastal inhabitants are living in fear, and no matter how much we try to talk them out of it, it's all in vain, so we have moved to our estate. In addition to this circumstance, another reason holds me back in Crimea, the orders of the pictures reflecting the capture of the ships. Also, I am now painting a wonderful Battle of Sinop. In order to collect material I have been living in Sevastopol from where I have taken the most accurate information." Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to L. A. Preovsky, January 18, 1854, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 115.

the forefront. The stylized quality of composition also suggests that Aivazovsky intended to create an image that was more historical than symbolic or allegorical. In the background of the painting, as masts shatter and collapse and clouds of smoke and fire obscure the ships, people try to escape from imminent death by clinging to wreckage or rigging. Here is shown the fire of not one or two ships but an entire Ottoman armada. On the one level then, what Aivazovsky emphasizes via this modern-day apocalypse—the “brutal battle”—is the human cost of the battle, the inevitable outcome.

The second depiction of the Battle of Sinop, *Sinop. Night After the Battle* [figure 22], presents the brutality of the war at night. By utilizing the dramatic effect of darkness with the sharp contrast of a bright yellow/orange fire, Aivazovsky focuses on the destroyed image of the Ottoman fleet. At the right bottom corner, the silhouette of the city of Sinop is visible, which is rare in his naval paintings. At the low center of the painting, we see the group of Ottoman sailors depicted lamenting their ship and trying to reach the coast to save themselves. It should be considered through the iconography of shipwrecks of this period (which is the subject of the preceding and proceeding chapters); rather, it resembles the situation from the enemy’s side. This image, following the increasing tendency toward melodrama in the published narratives of the events, has a decreasing emphasis on the accurate material description of the event in favor of highlighting the human element from a perspective of empathetic emotive sensibility.¹³²

The Crimean War was the beginning of a new way of naval warfare. The Battle of Sinop, on the evening of November 18, 1853, was the last major naval engagements

¹³² I believe that in this painting Aivazovsky created a highly effective, dramatic scene of the Russian victory. But this time, he also created a more emotional and humane tragedy of war, like in *Battle of Chesme at Night*.

ever fought to feature sailing ships in history. The Russian fleet, under Admiral Nakhimov, found the Ottoman fleet in the Bay of Sinop off the north-Ottoman coast. Nakhimov, in the Russian flagship *Empress Maria*, gave orders to approach to point-blank range, despite heavy fire from Ottoman coastal batteries. In the space of a few hours, the Russians completely destroyed the Ottoman fleet. In May 1854, Aivazovsky traveled to Sevastopol with a group of five paintings, all of them depicting scenes from the war. He was greeted by the distressing sight of the tops of the masts of his beloved Black Sea Fleet, which had been deliberately sunk at the entrance of the harbor in order to block access to enemy ships. The Romantic age of warships under sail was over. Among the pictures Aivazovsky had brought with him to the besieged city were two depictions of the Battle of Sinop. “During the exhibition, which opened at the beginning of June, Admiral Nakhimov declared these to be extremely realistically done.”¹³³

Alongside the scene of victory in battle is the conventional parallel narrative of the misery of the defeated: “conquering” and the “humanization” of the enemy go hand in hand in both paintings. Aivazovsky’s paintings focused on “celebratory nationalism,” retreating from the military and ideological uncertainties of the Empire. These works provide ample demonstration not only of the enormous public appeal that such paintings could enjoy but also the degree to which they were also conceived. To an extent, therefore, Aivazovsky’s Battle of Sinop depictions are as much about artistic self-promotion as they are about contemporary national history and its representation, and they point to the degree to which art, and particularly the representation of a nation’s identity through its history, was itself a battleground.

¹³³ Caffiero and Samarine, *Light, Water and Sky*, 45. Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 115–116.

An overview of eyewitness stories and representations from the fronts that published in the illustrated periodicals reveals the operation of an established textual and visual classification throughout the 1850s and 1860s, well into the era of the Russo–Ottoman conflicts and their aftermaths. Colorful images attracted subscribers, attracted by visual interpretations close to reality.¹³⁴ The cumulative body of representations—both text and image—were effective in V. Timm’s *Русский Художественный Листок* (The Russian Art Leaflet).¹³⁵ This illustrated magazine published Timm’s own and other artists’ works, including Ivan Aivazovsky, Peter Sokolov (1821–1899), and Mikhail Mikeschin (1835–1896) in lithographs and was of chief importance in the reproduction and use of images. Before photography became a key important medium for reporting, Timm’s lithographs promoted a political agenda and a cause, aiming to shape public opinion in a propagandistic way.¹³⁶ Timm’s journal’s contribution was of great significance to the visual materials of the Crimean War, for example in the drawing by Aivazovsky depicting Osman Pasha [figure 23], the vice-admiral and commander of the Ottoman ships at Sinop, and Adem Bey, commander of the Ottoman frigate at Sinop, as captives—wounded and situated at the top of the picture lying down on the bed; the French illustrator and lithographer Auguste Marie Raffi’s lithograph portrays the Ottoman recruits at the bottom. When Raffi was in Sevastopol, he had an opportunity to talk with the Ottoman commanders.

¹³⁴ Hanna Chuchvaha, *Art Periodical Culture in Late Imperial Russia, 1898-1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 22.

¹³⁵ *Русский Художественный Листок* (The Russian Art Leaflet) was produced two or three times weekly between 1851 and 1862. Timm’s innovation was to hold the copyrights to all the pictures published. He used this “artistic property” extensively in his lithographic works, which carefully reproduced his models and achieved a high level of authenticity. Timm did not include full textual accounts of the incidents shown in these lithographs, however. Rather, his goal was to educate the reader visually, with the images dominating and text giving only a summary detail. Prior to the advent of photography as the primary medium of reporting in Imperial Russia, Timm was its premier art reporter, recording the Crimean War as well as the St. Petersburg court life and the fairs, festivals, and races of everyday St. Petersburg. Ibid.

¹³⁶ For propaganda, see: Nicholas Cull and others, eds., *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 317–323.

In the short text with the drawings is written that “Aivazovsky asked the Pasha why they did not send a ship to Sinop and Pasha replied: ‘The result would only be the same with our [incapable] sailors.’”¹³⁷ The historian Candan Badem gives more detail about this decision and supports Osman Pasha, who found himself wounded and robbed by his own crew.¹³⁸

In both lithographs, the artists assembled every trope relating to defeat, which suggests a perception of a precise Russian naval victory: the group of soldiers taken as prisoners of war, walking under the watch of Russian leaders, two wounded Ottoman commanders, lying on a bed with desperate and embarrassed gazes. These coalesce into a suitable backdrop showcasing a victorious battlefield setting with masculine and patriotic virility and wounded and defeated enemy figures. These typical examples of the pervasive exoticization of the enemy idealize the concept of victory and nudge the emotions of the Russian people into being lively and prideful.

A unique painting in the series of Aivazovsky’s depictions of maritime successes, the *Siege of Sevastopol* [figure 24] is set against the background of the “glorious victories” production of the visual history of maritime Russia, crossing the blurred boundaries of public and private interests in the victory depictions. With prolific imagery representing the “heroic” Sevastopol defense desired, this painting shows an episode in the life of the besieged Sevastopol during the Crimean War. Aivazovsky himself visited the town during the war several times.¹³⁹ He made

¹³⁷ Vasilii Timm, “Отрывок Письма из Симферополя от 24-го Декабря” [Excerpt Letter from Simferopol on December, 24th] *Русский Художественный Листок* 3 [The Russian Art Leaflet] 20 January 1854.

¹³⁸ Badem, *Kırım Savaşı ve Osmanlılar*, 120.

¹³⁹ In one of his letters written to the head of the Lazarev Oriental Languages Institute in Moscow, Christopher Ekimovich Lazarev, Aivazovsky wrote: “Recently, I myself went to the Crimea alone, was also in Sevastopol on October 28, had the good fortune to introduce myself to their imperial highnesses, and, at the request of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, I quickly drew a general view of Sevastopol during a strong cannonade. It is sad for the Russian heart to see the impudent enterprise of dishonest British and French, but with God’s grace our brave army, our dear corner of the Crimea will stand; the courage of our sailors is beyond description. We must see the action of our bastions, and

exhibitions of his creative works, communicating with the participants to solicit their ideas. Quite different from his Romantic style, in this painting the buildings are painted thoroughly since this is a miniature technique. Sevastopol remains alone in this dramatic situation. To the right of the town are the mountains; to the left, up to the horizon, is the sea. Numerous explosions with smoke above vanishing into air, masts of scuttled ships at the entrance of Northern Bay, and military figures remind us of the war. Beyond this descriptive information, this painting reminds one of the “Lejeunian mode,”¹⁴⁰ which had become popular during the Imperial Period and the Restoration of France. This mode provided for a general overview of the military episode, which include as much detail as possible of the battlefield and the chaos.¹⁴¹ Louis-François Lejeune (1775–1848) turned to past examples of official topographical military scenes and reworked their conventions to fit artistic needs. Lejeune also depicted the Battle of Borodino, fought in 1812 between the Napoleonic French and the Russian army under the command of Tsar Alexander I. Different elements of this patriotic war were later painted over and over again by Russian artists, including Vasily Vereshchagin

then we can imagine and believe everything that is told about the garrison of Sevastopol.” Ivan K. Aivazovsky’s letter to C. E. Lazarev, 17 November 1854, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 117.

¹⁴⁰ Derin Tanyol’s term “Lejeunian mode” refers to the paintings of Louis-François Lejeune, which depict the whole battle in tiny proportions within a topographical view. Derin Tanyol, “Napoleonic Painting from Gros to Delaroche: A Study in History Minor” (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 1999), 303.

¹⁴¹ The war paintings of the post-revolutionary salons generally boasted monumental proportions and towering themes of military glory in foreign lands; however, they differed hugely in style. This reflected the range of commissioned artists and their personal and artistic backgrounds. In her article, Susan Siegfried classifies two modes, or “new rhetorics,” of military painting produced under Napoleon: the affective mode, represented by Gros’s *The Battle of Nazareth*, and the documentary mode, exemplified by Louis-François Lejeune’s *The Battle of Marengo*. Siegfried, Susan L. “Naked History: The Rhetoric of Military Painting in Postrevolutionary France.” *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (June 1993): 236. Siegfried also notes that the fact that he had been a soldier may explain Lejeune’s interest in documentary details. Besides the “documentary” and “affective” modes, another interpretation comes from Michael Marrinan. He describes two genres of history painting: one is the grand manner of history painting, exemplified by François Gérard’s *Battle of Austerlitz*, while the other possesses a more illustrative approach, as shown in Horace Vernet’s Napoleonic battle-painting canvases. Michael Marrinan, “Historical Vision and the Writing of History at Louis-Philippe’s Versailles,” in *The Popularization of Images: Visual Culture under the July Monarchy*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Gabriel P. Weisberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 113–143.

(1842–1904). This time, through Aivazovsky's topographic view, we perceive the fundamental divergence in history painting's uses as both a system of documentation and as a realm of personalized delight in narration; this would also result in the transfiguration of history painting, once a forum for academic idealism, into an expression of public and personal consciousness. Consequently, following the formal structure of the classical heroic mythology, the visual narrative concludes appropriately with the heroic defense of the city, Sevastopol—this time, in a sentimentally mundane and documentary composition, in contrast to Aivazovsky's other epic scenography.

It is interesting to note that the Crimean War, which was a turning point in Russian history, was poorly reflected in Russia and, in particular, academic painting of that time. Rather, Russian battle painting decided to pass by the Crimean War and its heroic events in silence. In his article "Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art," the famous art historian/critic Vladimir Stasov criticizes academics and battle painters that avoided the important events of the era, drawing instead on military events of the past—more precisely, ancient Greek and Roman eras. Stasov writes:

The Crimean War began. It was, of course, the time for art to serve its real great service. What other epoch could be more important, where it would be possible to find more amazing tasks and plots, more expensive for the whole Russian society, where there was a greater variety of life and scenes? But the art of the Nicholas time remained blind and deaf to this; it was caught off guard in the midst of its lethargy and aristocratic colorlessness. He was alien to everything where there is life and truth. [...] And then suddenly it was required to depict real living people [...] Let any of our professors be asked then to draw the 'Battle of the Horatii and the Christians,' or 'Samson Beating the Philistines,' or 'The Battle of Alexander the Great,' or, perhaps, even 'Alexander Nevsky,' no one would refuse. But depicting real living people, for today's Russian artists, did not have its own place.¹⁴²

Agreeing with Stasov's criticism concerning the neglected subjects in Russian battle painting, Minas Sargsyan wrote that, in spite of their significance, even the battle

¹⁴² Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, *Избранные сочинения в трех томах* [Selected Works in Three Volumes], vol. 2, (Moscow, 1952), 398–399.

paintings of Aivazovsky were, for some reason, simply ignored.¹⁴³ And yet, as Sargsyan strongly emphasizes, Aivazovsky was one of the first artists to reflect the theme of the Crimean War, and these paintings should be considered rare and important sources of Russian artistic and intellectual engagement with their depictions of Russian superiority and how Russia's maritime rise on the Black Sea was perceived by Russian–Armenian intellectuals, including artists.¹⁴⁴

Depicting the Sacred Martyrdom: Heroic Death and Allegory in Aivazovsky's *The Malakhov Burial Mound*

On October 16, knowing that a heavy allied bombardment would take place the following day, Kornilov wrote his wife, 'Many of us will not be alive tomorrow night.' An aide pleaded with the admiral in advance to stay under cover when the shells fell, but Kornilov replied, 'If I am not seen everywhere out there tomorrow, just what will they think of me?' Joined by Nakhimov, Kornilov kept his word. Nakhimov was soon slightly wounded, and his aide was drenched with the blood of a sailor blown apart by a heavy shell, but now accompanied by Istomin, Kornilov continued his rounds until hit by a round shot that smashed his leg and tore into his abdomen. Rushed to the naval hospital, Kornilov told surgeons not to waste their time on him. He died only minutes later and was buried in a plot on a nearby hill.¹⁴⁵

In 1893, Aivazovsky painted *The Malakhov Burial Mound* [figure 25] showing the panorama of Sevastopol with the legendary Malakhov Burial Mound in the foreground in the rays of setting sun. In 1854, the commander of the Russian fleet, V. A. Kornilov, headed up the defensive positions of Sevastopol. On October 17, 1854, he was mortally wounded when the town was bombarded. The sailors made a cross of cannonballs (the cross has been preserved) on the Malakhov Burial Mound, at the

¹⁴³ As Sargsyan notes, his name is not even mentioned in the relevant section of V. Sadoven's book *Russian Battle Painters of the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 104–105. For further information, see, V. V. Sadoven, *Русские Боевые Художники XVIII-XIX Век* [Russian Battle Painters of the 18th and 19th Centuries] (Moscow, 1955).

¹⁴⁴ Sargsyan also mentions that the Crimean War, specifically the eastern (the Caucasian) front was also depicted by Armenian artists. A portrait of the commander of the Caucasian front, General V. H. Bebutyan (Behbutov) by the Armenian artist Stephanos Hagob Nersisyan shows an unparalleled corpus of such representations during the war period. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 106.

¹⁴⁵ Robert B. Edgerton, *Death or Glory: The Legacy of the Crimean War* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 199.

precise site of the tragedy. As mentioned throughout this chapter, Aivazovsky's visit to Sevastopol under siege during the War involved an exhibition of his work there for the defenders of the city.

In the later decades, he painted the Malakhov Burial Mound with the inscription: "The Place Where Kornilov Was Mortally Wounded." When the confusion and the power of the war are replicated, in which day and night fuse together and sky and sea seem to be burning with fire, the artist portrays things that go way beyond routine, just as when he paints the moods of nature in tempests and gales. This painting represents a premier manifestation of Aivazovsky's Romantic view of the world, of nature, and of the extreme bravery and selflessness of sailors.¹⁴⁶ By applying one of the primary functions of history painting,¹⁴⁷ Aivazovsky focused on glorious and heroic death that demanded depiction in an "epic manner." However, rather than using the established conventions of history paintings (see Horace Vernet's *The Taking of the Malakhov Redoubt*, 1858),¹⁴⁸ Aivazovsky developed a highly successful (if inherently fictionalized) form of heroic representation that matched Russian visual culture criteria representing the heroic defense of Malakhov, Sevastopol. Utilizing the quasi-religious tradition of the "death tableau" in his Malakhov painting, Aivazovsky incorporated a focus on the figure of a wounded soldier visiting the cross created by the soldiers of the war within a broader, more panoramic view of the city (from the hill) to create a novel pictorial "middle ground" between the intimacy of the "death tableau" of contemporary history painting and the more distant viewpoint conventional with naval battle painting. This Aivazovsky achieved by adopting a usual viewpoint looking down

¹⁴⁶ Churak, "An Artist of Hellenic Spirit," 31.

¹⁴⁷ See for example, Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 145–65.

¹⁴⁸ Vernet made use of soldiers' and eyewitness' accounts of the Crimean War and Jean-Charles Langlois's photographs of Malakhov Kurgan. Stephen Bann, *Printmakers, Painters and Photographs in Nineteenth Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 123.

from the hill of Sevastopol, where Admiral Kornilov was mortally wounded, toward the city of Sevastopol, which has a great significance (both geographically and ideologically) in Russian history.

Furthermore, what Kornilov and the others sought at Malakhov was a decisive outcome. Russia might have appeared almost invulnerable to a naval power, but the loss of the Sevastopol further embarrassed Nicholas I as he had vowed to protect it with limitless resources and at any expense. It was an unexpected setback. During Sevastopol's nearly one-year siege during the Crimean War, the fortifications of Malakhov, overlooking the entire city and the inner harbor, were strongly contested. But after the French army was successful in 1855, the Russian defenders evacuated the whole city, bringing a climax to the war. With the fortress enabling control of Sevastopol's Black Sea Harbor, the Russian forces destroyed and withdrew all their equipment and left Russia on the Black Sea without any more military fortifications. Free passage through the Straits to the Mediterranean for Russian ships was not, it turned out, to be enabled by a domination of the inland sea. Aivazovsky chose to represent, in 1893, the heroic defense of the city. But the cost of that defense would also be devastating for the Russians. As Kornilov insisted on leading from the front, he necessarily put himself within range of enemy fire and, finally, he was fatally wounded. At first glance in this painting, Kornilov is notable by his absence. In reality, he infuses the canvas, not only by his association through the focus on the hill where he was wounded and by the various details Aivazovsky incorporated—such as the cross made from cannonballs and the inscription of the painting—but also through the tranquil representation of the whole city itself. Indeed, the hill of Malakhov, and thus Admiral Kornilov, presides over a scene of martyrdom and national pride. On one level then, what Aivazovsky emphasizes via this modern-day apocalypse—this “heroic

defense of Sevastopol,”¹⁴⁹ as various nineteenth-century novelists and poets described it, including the famous Leo Tolstoy¹⁵⁰—is the human cost of the battle, the inevitable outcome. Note that Aivazovsky’s painting should be read as a rebuke: by the standards of his day, he was a very patriotic man who admired the navy and the admirals (Kornilov, Nakhimov, Lazarev—whom he personally met during naval maneuvers he attended) in equal measure. The transition from Aivazovsky’s former battle scenes, which focused on the destruction of the enemy fleet, to this painting and its broader focus, requires further examination.

In contrast with other celebratory images of this epoch-making event, by Aivazovsky himself and others (including the Russian Bogulyubov and European artists), Aivazovsky’s melancholic representation focused on its terrible aftermath, and specifically on the dead or wounded image of the army. Aivazovsky sought to

¹⁴⁹ The medals that were ordered after the battle clearly illustrate how the city and the defense of Sevastopol occupied a great place in Russian official history. Generally, in Russia, medals and decorations and love for the motherland combined with patriotism are clearly illustrated. The Sevastopol medal has a distinctive place among the Russian medals and decorations awarded during the Crimean War. There are three Sevastopol medals: the Sevastopol Defense Medal features on one side monographs of Tsar Alexander II and Tsar Nicholas I, the latter having died during the war. On the other side are engraved the dates 1854–1855. This medal was given by Alexander II to the soldiers that defended Sevastopol. The Sevastopol Cross was created by Alexander III in 1890. On one side, the number “349” is engraved, a code indicating the 349 days the Sevastopol siege lasted, thus referring to the “great” Russian defense. On the other side is engraved “1854–1855 Sevastopol.” The third medal is the Sevastopol Medal, which was minted by Tsar Nicholas II to commemorate the fiftieth year of the Sevastopol defense. Taking into consideration the fact that a medal was created for Sevastopol fifty years later, it is safe to assert that Sevastopol was a milestone in Russian war mythology. Robert Werlich, *Russian Orders, Decorations and Medals including those of Imperial Russia, the Provisional Government, the Civil War and the Soviet Union* (Washington: Quaker Press, 1981), 4–5; The Moscow Kremlin, *Old Russian Orders* (Moscow: The Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum, 1995), 12–15.

¹⁵⁰ Serhii Plokhyy has termed “the myth of Sevastopol,” which stressed the heroism of Russian troops in a conflict that resulted in defeat for the army but a “victory” for Russian heroism and the “Russian spirit.” Because of such heroism, Sevastopol became a “sacred space,” a site of patriotism and national identity that transformed the Crimean city into a “city of Russian glory” representing a symbol of Russia’s “glorious past.” Serhii Plokhyy, “The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35/3 (July 2000): 369–83. He obtained, he his commission in 1854 and was transferred, at his request, to the army fighting in Walachia against the Ottomans, where he took part in the siege of Silistria (located in northeastern Bulgaria). In November of the same year, he joined the garrison of Sevastopol, where he wrote the battlefield observations *Sevastopol Sketches*, widely seen as his first approach to the techniques to be used so effectively in his masterpiece *War and Peace*. Leo Tolstoy, *The Sevastopol Sketches*, translated with an introduction and notes by David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 1986).

encapsulate the significance of the defense of Sevastopol, focusing on the human cost this time, by creating a more literal representation of a particular moment after the battle, underlined by his incorporation of the panoramic view of Sevastopol. The stylized quality of the composition, this time suggests he intended to create an image that was, contrary to his naval battle scenes, more symbolic than strictly historical.

While Aivazovsky's painting responds in sophisticated ways to a wider discourse on the visual representation of national history in the Russian Empire between the 1850s and 1890s, it also makes reference to the artist's own personal interest in the defense of Sevastopol and the Crimean War in general.

The View from Sevastopol: The Two Depictions of the Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet Entering the Sevastopol Roadstead

My voyage with his imperial highness Konstantin Nikolayevich was extremely pleasant and interesting, everywhere I managed to sketch out for paintings [...] Returning from there to his homeland, I was fortunate by the will of his imperial majesty to sail from Nikolaev to Sevastopol on the same steamship with his majesty, who all the time was extremely gracious to me and commissioned me to paint many works during a naval inspection in Sevastopol.¹⁵¹

In the summer of 1846, Aivazovsky contributed a painting entitled *Russian Squadron on the Sevastopol Roadstead* [figure 26]. Commissioned by Tsar Nicholas I, the painting shows an Emperor's standard afloat on a yacht. His ships are lined up in front of the Black Sea it, waiting to greet the Tsar. There is no indication of the tragedy to come, when the boats depicted in the painting, including the flagship *The Twelve Apostles*, were sunk at the entrance to Sevastopol Bay in 1854 trying to prevent the entry of the French, British, and Turkish fleet. The painting, does, however,

¹⁵¹ Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to Count Zubov, March 16, 1846, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 89–90.

illustrate the ritual of sailors, afterward abolished, in which they would stand on the mast of the boat in harbor.

In contrast to his second depiction of the squadron of the Black Sea Fleet, *Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet Entering the Sevastopol Roadstead* (1895), the first one was a royal commission [figure 27]. Thus, we must conclude that the representation was meant by the artist to be broadly celebratory (indeed, Aivazovsky was with the navy and the Emperor to record this visit). Returning to the idea of the symbolism of the navy and the ship of the state: the key to Aivazovsky's approach may be found in the contemporary significance of *The Twelve Apostles*, both as a ship and an outcome, in post-war years. Aivazovsky's numerous representations of *The Twelve Apostles* signify not only national defense but also the power and authority of the navy, and, by extension, the state. Thus, the Crimean War, and more specifically the defense of Sevastopol, offered a unique opportunity for the "final rehabilitation" of the sailors as consenting members of a deeply patriotic, loyal, and dutiful community. Indeed, the loyalty that Admiral Kornilov inspired in those who served under him was emphasized in reports, narratives, and biographical sketches, before and after his death. This loyalty was symbolically re-enacted by the depiction of a wounded soldier at the place where Kornilov was mortally wounded, with the cannon-made cross shown at the very center of the painting, alluding to Sevastopol's status as a "sacred" city.

A glance at Aivazovsky's 1895 *Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet*, *The Twelve Apostles*—more as a silhouette in smoky gray clouds with a shadowy light sea—suggests that, despite its depictions of *The Twelve Apostles* ship in the center (as was a namesake painting, dated 1846, different in its restrained and stylistically conservative celebration), the artist's newest brushes endowed his subject with a

Romantic emotionality. This complex image can accommodate countless interpretations, such as the passing of the age of sail to that of steam, or more broadly death and regeneration. At the time, Aivazovsky was focusing, above all, on the expendability of this famous warship and the resonance of its fate in terms of Russian naval and imperial power. The city of Sevastopol was the headquarters of the tsar's Black Sea Fleet, and its siege is notorious still today, culminating in the battle for the strategic Russian port in 1854–55, the final episode during the Crimean War. On 13 February 1855, *The Twelve Apostles* was ordered to construct a second beamline in Sevastopol Bay together with six other vessels. The Russian commanders arrived at the difficult decision to plunge the ships across the entry channel in order to prevent entry to the port to help the coastal batteries. The crew of the ship disembarked to reinforce the walls of the city, and *The Twelve Apostles* was scuttled and sunk.

Both of Aivazovsky's squadron Black Sea Fleet paintings formed part of his bequest to the nation. Technically similar, the second painting provides a study of unrestrained emotional pathos, its amplified Romantic timbre visible in the artist's overflowing empathy for the Black Sea Fleet. The second representation of the fleet with a focus on the lonely image of *The Twelve Apostles* is tinged with sadness, and, rather than being celebratory, represents essential sacrifice, patriotism, and endurance. The unrestrained Romanticism of the second image, in particular the sole focus on the image of *The Twelve Apostles* as representing the brutal nature of the war, means it is far from being nationally commemorative and celebratory.

The Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–1878

Russia's entry into the war against the Ottoman Empire entailed numerous domestic and foreign policy advantages and opportunities. By mobilizing Russian nationalist fervor in support of the Slavic cause, Russia's victory over the Ottomans would

perpetuate the unity of all Russian classes, heighten the prestige of the autocracy, and erode domestic political dissent and opposition; internationally, the liberation and unification of the Slavs would, at last, be realized. The Crimean War convinced all the maritime powers that it was essential to build steamships.¹⁵² Indeed, Russia was almost defenseless at sea at the end of the war. The Black Sea Fleet was sunk; a single screw-propelled *Vyborg* ship guarded the Baltic coast in 1856. Yet, the Russian fleet's military strength ranked third in the world in the late 1870s, after Russia refused the terms of the 1871 Paris Peace Treaty and restored its Black Sea Fleet.¹⁵³ Russian officials and sailors, having gained experience on expeditions in the 1860s and 70s, returned to the fleet to reveal the success of their training and their fighting skills.¹⁵⁴

In 1877, Russia was again at war with the Ottoman Empire. Although principally characterized by a series of land campaigns, the war was notable for the introduction of a number of new naval systems. In the Black Sea, Russian naval forces based their efforts on the defense of Odessa, Ochakov, Sevastopol, Balaklava, and Kerch. Just eight fast steamers were able to disrupt enemy lines. On 11 July 1877, The *Vesta*, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Nikolay Baranov, withstood a five-

¹⁵² The Crimean War has nearly always been regarded as a predominantly land campaign, but from a naval point of view it must be regarded as one of the turning points in the development of the warship. It ushered in the new explosive shell, for which the Russians must be given full credit, which in turn led to the development of the armored ship and the race between gun and armor which occupied the second half of the nineteenth century. The Crimea also heralded another major development in warship design steam propulsion. Watts, *Russian Navy*, 14.

¹⁵³ The Baltic Fleet was rebuilt after the Crimean War, but without any addition in sailing ships. The new Fleet comprised eighteen ships of the line and ten frigates, all steam-powered with screw propellers. A Mediterranean squadron was created for the destroyed Black Sea Fleet, while the Siberian Flotilla and Pacific squadron were formed for the Far East. Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ General-Admiral Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, a younger brother of Emperor Alexander II, directed the restoration of the fleet. After taking command of the Russian navy and naval department, in 1855, Konstantin Nikolayevich initiated reductions in the central administration and coastal unit staffs. A tremendous effort was made to recover Russia's maritime position, and a new shipbuilding program laid down the foundations for steamships. The introduction into the British and French navies of ironclads led Russia to convert two wooden ships to armored frigates. As innovative technology on its own does not make a modern, efficient navy, the Grand Duke also instituted a major reorganization of training with a new scheme of naval education and training affecting the whole fleet, from newly joined boys right up to flag-officer level. Ibid.

hour battle, taking on the sizeable and heavily armored ship *Feth-i Bülend*. It was a heavy engagement, with the *Vesta* losing one quarter of its crew (killed or wounded), but still the *Vesta* inflicted damage on the enemy ship and was able to escape pursuit. The Russian ships victory was hailed by contemporaries, compared even with the exploit of the legendary *Mercury*, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Aivazovsky painted a series of works depicting episodes from the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78. He also held an exhibition of works in St. Petersburg to raise money for injured soldiers. He closely followed the course of events and painted many pictures lauding the heroism of the Russian fleet such as *Battle between Steamer Vesta and the Turkish Battleship Feth-i Bülend on the Black Sea on 11 July 1877* [figure 28],¹⁵⁵ *Cutters of the Steamship Grand Duke Konstantin Attacking the Turkish Battleship Asar-ı Şevket on the Sukhumi Roadstead on 12 August 1877* [figure 29], *The Russian Steamer Russia Taking the Turkish Steamer Mersin on the Black Sea on 13 December 1877*, and *Explosion of a Three-Mast Turkish Steamship Sulina on 27 September 1877*. All of these four paintings done by Aivazovsky to glorify the Russian navy during the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78 can be read as the transformation of a contemporary maritime event into full-scale grand history painting across the introduction of the steamships, clearly an attempt to transcend the particularities of battle and turn them into something of general, philosophical, and national significance, as history painting was meant to be. In this sense, it can be regarded as

¹⁵⁵ In this painting, Aivazovsky depicts the moment when *Vesta*, a Russian steamship converted into a military vessel and commanded by Admiral Baranov (1837–1901), meets the *Feth-i Bülend* on the open sea and engages the Ottoman ship in battle. The *Feth-i Bülend* pursued *Vesta* for five hours, pounding the Russian ship and its crew. The *Vesta* heroically withstood the Ottoman attack and then scored a direct hit on the *Feth-i Bülend* from its six-inch cannon, forcing the Ottoman warship to withdraw from the scene of battle.

an allegory of the maritime empire/nation through reference to the prestigious and iconic episodes of contemporary maritime history.

In *Asar-ı Şevket on the Sukhumi Roadstead*, Aivazovsky depicts an episode from the 1877–78 War. In 1876, Vice-Admiral S. O. Makarov (1849–1904) received command of the *Grand Duke Konstantin*, a commercial steamer converted into a battleship. Undercover of darkness, the *Grand Duke Konstantin* conveyed steam cutters equipped with mines and torpedoes to the Sukhumi Roadstead, where the Ottoman fleet was moored. The Russians blew up the Ottoman ships, making a major contribution to the Russian victory in the war. The story of the encounter also gave the artist the opportunity to paint the lightning effects and the seawater exploding into the air. Admiral Makarov was one of the first to adopt the idea of using fleets of torpedo boats and had combat experience as a torpedo boat commander.

Except for *Asar-ı Şevket on the Sukhumi Roadstead*, the other paintings’ “failure,” at this level, rests in their falling between the incompatibilities of the documentary marine painting on the one hand and history painting on the other. But there are other wider contexts that need to be considered here as well. In the first place, Aivazovsky was responding to the specific requirement taking account of numerous compositional and thematic ways. Aivazovsky’s Russo–Ottoman War (1877–78) picture series is, therefore, a response to the contemporary history of art as well as the maritime nation. Importantly in this regard, rather than evaluating these works as a reflection of the artist’s “conforming to a lifelong preoccupation with painting the sea,” we should place them within a larger technical documentary trajectory of national maritime history: all of them depict newly created steamers emphasizing their novel methodology. It is worth mentioning that the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78 gave a second chance to Russia to renovate the Black Sea Fleet lost after the Crimean War.

Thus, the new historically conceived pictorial scheme followed the broad discursive pattern and didactic schemes. The earlier paintings depicting the Russo–Ottoman wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be seen as the abandonment of the more conventional and generalized format of marine painting in favor of being a more idiosyncratic and particularized treatment of the battle and was, therefore, also a move toward a more personal artistic historical concern with previous battles, especially the Crimean War. However, his paintings of the 1877–78 war have a resonance with history in general and the wider significance of historical discourse in the 1870s, particularly regarding the role of the changing naval history in the construction of the Russian Empire as a maritime nation and a sole dominant figure in the geographical boundaries of the Black Sea.

Among the romanticized and represented battlefield scenes of the Russo–Ottoman wars executed by Aivazovsky, *Alexander II Crossing the Danube* [figure 30] appears as an alternative inspirational source for the “pan-Slavism” project, which was one of the motivations for the Russian Empire in this war. The crossing of Russian troops over the Danube and arriving in Sofia was celebrated by both the Bulgarians and Russians.¹⁵⁶ This war was depicted as a holy war designed to free fellow Christians from Muslim control. The role of the tsar as the commander of the army and his arrival in Sofia is also important in showing the triumphal tone continued in Aivazovsky’s paintings and in other popular culture media, including *lubki*.¹⁵⁷ By the end of the fall

¹⁵⁶ Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity: 1812–1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 91; Walter G. Moss, *Russia in the Age of Alexander II, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 178–186.

¹⁵⁷ In Russia, the traditional concept of the *lubok* (plural *lubki*) was very important to nation’s visual and cultural presentation. These colorful prints, can be best described as energetic illustrations with short text placed in the lower portion of the images Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). The Russian army capturing Plevna and Kars was also one of the popular themes in popular culture. By analyzing how the *lubok* prints occupied a significant role in Russian culture and in the articulation of national identity between the years 1812 and 1945, Stephen Norris indicates that the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78, described as a holy war against the Muslim enemy, and both the captures of Plevna

of 1877, the siege of Plevna had taken its toll on the Ottomans. After three unsuccessful attempts to storm the fortress, the Russian troops isolated the Ottoman fort and forced the Ottoman army into the open. The fortress fell into Russian hands in late November 1877.¹⁵⁸ The impending Russian victory prompted the appearance of Tsar Alexander II in the wartime images. As Norris states, with the war apparently won by December, the popular prints reemphasized the role Alexander II had played in the victory, in which he appeared not only to inspire Russian courage on the ground but also as a fellow soldier and a father figure involved in the welfare of his armies.¹⁵⁹ The persona of the tsar as a dual liberator provides a realistic and powerful vehicle for Aivazovsky to represent his own settled image of both the tsar and the war, and through that figure to render, on the one hand, a victory-building tsar with an emphasis on him being in the battlefield personally, and on the other hand the symbolization of Russia's glorious navy through the depiction of the Russian steamship in the foreground.

Another point I would like to examine in the course of this war is the capture of the city of Kars by the Russian army. According to Minas Sargsyan, who wrote a monograph about the artist, with the naval battle depictions of this war, Aivazovsky also chose to paint the power and strength of the Russian army fighting for "the liberation of the Christians from the Ottoman yoke," including the Armenians. In

(in the west) and Kars and Ardahan (in the east) symbolize the liberation of Christians (both Slavs and the Armenians) from Ottoman rule. Norris, *A War of Images*, 80–106.

¹⁵⁸ Bruce Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁹ Norris, *A War of Images*, 89. The popular prints of 1878 attempted to laud the Russian tsar's role in bringing victory. The startling print entitled "Two Unforgettable Victories of Emperor Alexander II" contains separate panels that celebrate the greatest achievements of the tsar's reign. The first depicts the tsar standing on snowy ground in the middle of a peasant village with the text at the bottom noting that this image depicts "the freeing of twenty-three million peasants from the bonds of servitude," a reference to Alexander II's freeing of Russian serfs in 1861. The second panel contains the tsar on a white horse riding at the head of his troops, greeted by foot soldiers waving the imperial flag. On the left, several Serbian peasants kneel in joy before their Russian hero, and the text claims that the second victory of Alexander II was "the freeing of the Slavs from the Turkish yoke." As the image makes clear, both of these "victories" helped to advance the idea that Alexander was a dual liberator. *Ibid.*, 223.

addition to naval victories, Aivazovsky produced a painting that glorified the victory of the Russian army on land. He was particularly pleased with the successful campaigns on the Caucasian front on behalf of the Russian army. *The Liberation of the City of Kars* depicted the successes of the Russian army and was directly related to the liberation of Armenians.¹⁶⁰

Sargsyan also mentions the Armenian intelligentsia and how they were working to help the Russian army spread a national consciousness among the Armenian people. Tbilisi was one of the important intellectual political and socio-economic centers of the Russian–Armenian population and their networks across the Empire and beyond.¹⁶¹ It should also be noted that the Tbilisi intelligentsia played an active role in illustrating how Ottoman Armenia and its people were perceived. It was one of the intellectual centers for Armenians in the nineteenth century.¹⁶² One of the Tbilisi newspapers, founded by Grigor Artsruni, was *Mshak*,¹⁶³ which serialized Armenian literature and was linked to liberal ideas. One of the influential writers of the magazine, Raffi¹⁶⁴, and others wrote numerous articles, poems, and prose that encouraged Armenians to free themselves from Ottoman rule.

¹⁶⁰ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 160–161. I have not personally come across this painting. Sargsyan also mentioned this painting never reached audiences, but Shahen Khactrian also mentions this painting, emphasizing that, although this painting was not an official commission, Aivazovsky chose to depict this scene, and it expresses “general national enthusiasm with which Aivazovsky possessed.” Khactrian, *Aivazovsky: Well-Known and Unknown*, 46.

¹⁶¹ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Modern Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁶² By providing population statistics of nineteenth-century Tbilisi, Vazken Davidian indicated it was impossible to have discussions in the Russian, Armenian political, cultural, and socio-economic development in the nineteenth century without taking account of the role of Tbilisi and its intellectual elites. Vazken K. Davidian, “The Figure of the Bantoukhd [migrant worker] from Ottoman Armenia in Late Nineteenth Century Constantinople,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2018, 244. I am grateful to Vazken K. Davidian to share his article and also the part of his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation devoted to Russian intellectual perception on Ottoman Armenian victimhood in which include Aivazovsky’s depiction on the subject.

¹⁶³ For *Mshak* see: *Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1981, vol. 7, 655.

¹⁶⁴ Agop J. Hacikyan and others, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 420–422.

The Russian troops took the fortress of Kars on the night of November 6, 1877. During the campaign, the Russian army was aided by Armenian generals, officers, and local residents. The “heroic” liberation of Kars and Armenians from Ottoman rule was celebrated in the region. The *Mshak* newspaper wrote: “Sunday, November 6, Tiflis learned that our troops took the fortress of Kars. When every Tiflis citizen learned that the city was captured by the Russian army, the whole of Tiflis expressed great joy.”¹⁶⁵ As Sargsyan noted, when Aivazovsky learned this news, he decided to depict this heroic victory. *Русская Старица* [*Russian Antiquity*] also wrote that “we assume that our venerable artist will depict the capture of Kars at night. In addition to drawings and photographs, Ivan Konstantinovich intended to use guidance from the eyewitnesses who saw this stronghold of Asian Turkey.”¹⁶⁶ Although Sargsyan also mentions that the picture never reached an audience, Aivazovsky, for an accurate view, interviewed and consulted with many people who had seen the fortress. Among these was the famous Armenian Lieutenant-General Arshak Ter-Gukasov, the commander of the Yerevan forces of the Russian Army during the war. Owing to his success in battle, Ter-Gukasov was awarded medals by Imperial Russia.¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, all the

¹⁶⁵ *Mshak*, no. 83, November 1877, 2–4. On the first page of the newspaper, under the “Unification of Armenia,” the author writes that the capture of Kars was an important turning point in the war. Erzurum, in a very short period of time, would also fall, and thus all Armenia would be able to unite with Russia because when Erzurum fell, there would be no fortress to resist the strong armies of Russia and Armenia. By indicating that the war would end soon, the author speaks about other Russian newspapers that mentioned the policies of the unification of Armenia with Trans-Caucasia. This unification would be a reward for the war losses and expenses that Russia had incurred. “Turkey cannot pay this debt with money. The territories gained as a result of the war will compensate this.” If Armenia were to unite with Russia, the country would return to the “land of flowers,” the same as the taking of Yerevan by the Russians. In addition, if such a combination of events were to occur, the Muslim Armenians would return to their old religions and thus reclaim their Armenian identity. In addition, in the section on the second page of the newspaper, “Battle on the Stage,” the capture of Kars is given in detail. All the people of Tbilisi welcomed the news with great enthusiasm. In fact, a masquerade held on that day was deemed better after receiving this news, and the Russian anthem started to play. I thank Megerditch Basmajian from Bibliothèque Nubar for providing a digital copy of this issue and also Vağarşag Seropyan for Armenian translations.

¹⁶⁶ *Русская Старица* [*Russian Antiquity*], no. 23, 1878, 70.

¹⁶⁷ P. F. Brozh, I. Matiushin, Yu. Baranovsky and F. Gerasimov, *Герои И Деятели Русско-Турецкой Войны* [*Heroes and Figures of the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–1878*] (St. Petersburg, 1878), 99–107; Christopher J. Walker, “Kars in the Russo–Turkish Wars of the Nineteenth Century,” in Richard G.

information we have about this “mysterious” painting is from the Sargsyan and *Russian Antiquity* articles. Despite Aivazovsky’s original painting being unknown, this study and chapter present these two sources, with information from rare and important documents concerning Aivazovsky’s engagement with the Russian–Armenian artistic and intellectual world; it also demonstrates how the scarcity of accessible sources can be partially provocative by turning one’s gaze toward visual representations of the artist’s “multi-identity” character. It is worth mentioning that both Sargsyan and Shahen Khachartryan’s monographs on Aivazovsky¹⁶⁸ interestingly write that the hall where the peace negotiations took place between the Ottoman and Russian empires at the end of the war featured Aivazovsky paintings depicting a quiet sea at dawn and at evening twilight. These paintings were probably selected from his Istanbul paintings, which were generally commissions from Ottoman sultans.¹⁶⁹ We also know that there are three paintings by Aivazovsky glorifying the Ottoman navy. One, dated 1875, depicted the renovated Ottoman fleet erected in front of Çırağan Palace [**figure 31**], the other a nineteenth-century imperial residence in which the Balyan family was responsible for the architecture. In the other two paintings depicting the Ottoman navy, dated 1874 and 1875 [**figure 32** and **figure 33**], Aivazovsky focuses on drawing the ships only. Although one contains a city silhouette, these two paintings do not refer to any architecturally symbolic place, like the Çırağan Palace. Both reveal a dynamic atmosphere and its sometimes conflicting art-historical setting, including the long-

Hovannisian, ed., *Armenians Kars and Ani*, UCLA Armenian History and Culture, Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers), 217–220.

¹⁶⁸ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 163; Khactrian, *Aivazovsky: Well-Known and Unknown*.

¹⁶⁹ He worked for the three Ottoman sultans and was decorated by these rulers: Abdülmecid, Abdülaziz, and Abdülhamid II. For information on Aivazovsky’s reception by the Ottoman palace, see: Semra Germaner and Zeynep İnankur, *Constantinople and the Orientalists* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2002); Pars Tuğlacı, *Aivazovsky Türkiye’de* (Istanbul: İnkılâp and Aka, 1983) and Elmon Hançer, “Saray Ressamı Ivan (Hovannes) Konstantinoviç Ayvazovski,” in *150. Yılında Dolmabahçe Sarayı Uluslararası Sempozyumu*, ed. Kemal Kahraman (Ankara: TBMM Milli Saraylar, 2007), 360–376.

established relationship of the artist with the Ottoman Empire, the sincere and, indeed, lucrative relationship¹⁷⁰ with the Ottoman Imperial Palace (especially his high regard for Sultan Abdülaziz [r. 1871–1876]).¹⁷¹ This also concerns his background as a creator of “anti-Ottoman” works, which mostly glorified the Russian army/navy during the major Russo–Ottoman wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (examined throughout this chapter) as well as praising the Ottoman navy and his strong and long-standing connections with both Russian–Armenian and Ottoman–Armenian intellectual elites. Thus, attempts to reintroduce traces and reflections of this challenging and complex position of the artist and an understanding of his widespread adoration shared in equal measure by Russian, Armenian, and Ottoman publics will hopefully be helpful in rethinking Aivazovsky as not only one of the most significant figures in the history of Russian/Armenian and Ottoman/Turkish art but also in

¹⁷⁰ In an Ottoman journal, *Mecmua-i Ebüzziya*, the journalist Ebüzziya Tevfik Bey published an interview with Aivazovsky about the relationship between the artist and Sultan Abdülaziz. It is an important document that shows the mutual relationship between the sultan and the artist: “I [Aivazovsky] did not get the respect/compliments from any other ruler as I was given by Sultan Abdülaziz. Yet, I have a precious gift from the sultan that I do not change with the treasures of the world as my great honor. This is composed of four or five lines drawn by the sultan himself. I am an artist and I saw many sketches in my life. However, even I could not imagine a painter who is able to depict a small boat in a four- or five-line drawing.” I found this article in the personal archive of Taha Toros, “Ünlü Deniz Ressamı Ayvazovski’nin Türkiye Hatıraları” [A Memoir of a Famous Seascape Artist Ayvazovski on Turkey]. For a complete version of this article of Taha Toros see: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/84782785.pdf>. Also, in his article published in *Русская Старина* [Russian Antiquity], P. Karatygin mentioned Aivazovsky’s views about Sultan Abdülaziz and confirmed Toros’s article: “Sultan Abdülaziz whose talent is undeniable supported my paintings providing sketches which are against the religious doctrines of Quran.” P. Karatygin, “Иван Айвазовский и его 42 года художественной деятельности 1838–78,” [Ivan Konstantinoviç Aivazovski and His 42 Years Artistic Life 1836–78] *Русская Старина* [Russian Antiquity], 21, 22, 23, (St. Petersburg, 1878) and 31 (St. Petersburg 1881). This article is in volume 23 page 295.

¹⁷¹ In respect of tracking the fashion of illustrating history, the Ottoman Empire was no exception. The second half of the nineteenth century, especially the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, witnessed tremendous changes in Ottoman history, culture, and art. Many painters, including Aivazovsky, were commissioned to produce a complete history of the Ottoman Empire through the representation of Ottoman glories on the battlefield. Mary Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges: Ottomans, Orientalists, and Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* (California: University of California Press, 2015); Fatma Coşkun, “Between Myth and History: Reflections of the European Battle Paintings in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Imperial Imagery,” paper presented to Fourteenth Annual Graduate Student symposium in Nineteenth-Century Art, New York, 26 March 2017.

embodying a moment when the two national traditions were in direct and productive conversation.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the visual representation of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russo–Ottoman naval wars from the vantage of Ivan K. Aivazovsky during the nineteenth century from three perceptions: firstly, that the visual imagery of, and related to, the sea is much more embedded and is far more significant, at many different levels, in Aivazovsky's art and Russian art and culture of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than has been pursued in the art-historical study of this period. In the years following 1856, the battles of Chesme, Navarino, and Sinop became synonymous with Russian victory. Together, they represented a statement of total martial dominance on the Black Sea that was illustrative of the Russian rulers' wider commemorative cultural patronage in the wake of the nineteenth-century Russo–Ottoman wars. Starting from the reign of Catherine II, the rulers of Russia had demonstrated their interest in the visual commemoration of the nation's military achievements as a way of supporting the development of contemporary art. Secondly, that the visualization of the naval battles also formed a substantial means of articulating the enormously important relationship between the nation and its empire, a relationship that underwent profound changes during this time. And thirdly, that the changes in the relationship of empire to nation were interwoven with changes in the discourse of history and the historicization of Russia as a maritime–imperial figure were represented in Aivazovsky's works through the lens of national history. Through considering a series of related works by Aivazovsky, I have attempted to draw attention to the various aspects of these overriding concerns in order to explore them not as monolithic narratives but as a multifaceted nexus of inter-related and sometimes

competing and conflicting discourses, and to illuminate various ways in which Aivazovsky's "intersected" national identities on the threshold of the Russian Empire were conceived in visual terms, articulating a wider set of cultural frameworks within which those relationships could be seen to operate. In this respect, Aivazovsky's battle painting series should not at all be considered merely descriptive or commemorative. On the contrary, they present deep and insightful commentaries on current and far-reaching national, socio-political issues in the Empire. The subject of the sea was consistently at the heart of Aivazovsky's artistic projects, both subjectively and in terms of his place in the larger "imagined community" of the nation. Analyzing Aivazovsky's oeuvre from different perspectives explores increasingly and variously the connections between Aivazovsky's maritime subjects and the imperial contexts deriving from Russia's "relatively new" self-identification as an imperial maritime nation. Thus, this chapter traced the fully-fledged construction of a visual history of an imperial maritime nation, within predetermined nationalistic parameters, in the series of naval battle paintings by Aivazovsky through the inclusion of his relatively "unknown" pieces within a newly historicizing pictorial scheme representing both Russian naval victories and the initial responses of Aivazovsky's own origins, his Armenian identity. In this scheme, the visual articulation of "painting history," with its inclusion of the artist's eyewitness role, reveals a set of questions presented in Aivazovsky's paintings regarding the nature and function of history as a discursive channel for articulating the relationship of empire to a nation.

Between the poles of two different, though intersected, visualizations of Ottoman and Russian navies, therefore, I have offered a set of issues and instances of Aivazovsky's personification and his art that point to a much greater involvement between Russian art and empire, and between art and the maritime, and the expression

of his *Armenianness*, than has, until very recently, been acknowledged in art studies. While understanding the expanded conceptual and disciplinary framework of his creative field and individual position and contributions within the concept of the “sea” must occupy a prominent position, we need to include Aivazovsky’s roots and identities instead of being nationally marginalized or exclusive toward his historical position in Armenian and Ottoman art.



CHAPTER 3

God's Storm: The Portrayals of Maritime Disasters and Shipwrecks

Introduction

The integral relationship between Aivazovsky's artistic practice and the broader maritime culture of the Russian Empire can be usefully demonstrated by a contextual reading of his depictions of maritime disasters and shipwrecks. The representations of shipwrecks demonstrate one of the major concerns of Aivazovsky's career: they promoted, within Russian's cultural elite, that the sea was the nation's proper domain, the central geographical theater of the Russian naval forces, and one of the main natural forces shaping their world. However, his dramatic representation arguably went beyond then-standard ideas of the pictorial sublime to embrace both the commercial potential of the subject and the mundane, yet tragic, reality of a maritime nation. As the leading naval power in the Black Sea, Russia was able to establish a global trade and extend its imperial networks; accordingly, maritime imagery became more prominent as an element informing national and imperial identity construction in particular and Russian popular culture in general.¹⁷² This was facilitated by the accurate yet highly charged and dramatic depiction of the sea conveyed by Aivazovsky and his depiction of the effect of moving water and reflected sun and moonlight, which, all together, brought the artist his great success.¹⁷³ He had experienced the ocean's savagery and man's futile struggle on its surface, as well as its salvation. From the

¹⁷² Storms and shipwrecks had been rendered in painting in every period. For instance, the fury of the sea must have been a real issue for maritime Venice: Tintoretto's *St. Mark Rescuing the Saracen* is perhaps the first shipwreck where the vast terror of the sea is realized. The Netherlands too had some storms amongst their sea paintings. Brueghel's famous *Storm at Sea* is one of the earliest attempts to render the heaving of the deep rather than the lonely expanses of mid-ocean. In the seventeenth century, wreck pictures become much more common. On the whole, Van de Veldes preferred depicting calm or slightly swelling seas.

¹⁷³ Edward Strachan and Roy Bolton, *Russia & Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Sphinx Fine Art, 2008), 22.

mid-nineteenth century onward, the depiction of storms and shipwrecks was associated with artists as diverse as the British painter J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) and the French artists Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) and Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714–1789), each of whom was an important artistic model for Aivazovsky. While past and present masters would always inform his art, Aivazovsky put a premium on personal experience and disciplined observation of the natural world.

In this chapter, I would like to develop some of the issues raised by Aivazovsky's shipwreck depictions, particularly surrounding the representations of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea in Russian nationalist terms as arenas for heroic, maritime Russian power and, conversely, the problematic dialectic between this nationalist construction and the depictive existence of religious, mythical, and biblical certainties that implicitly threatened the idea of social realism in a changing Russia.¹⁷⁴ I shall be especially concerned to show how this dialectic emerges in relation to visual representation. In the Russian case, this was articulated with growing force as maritime-imperial identity (especially over the Black Sea), and I shall focus on the role of visual culture in developing this idea of national character. Significantly, national identity was articulated by reference to—in terms of its distinction from—the wider imperial sphere represented by the Siberian forests and the Caucasian territories.

¹⁷⁴ Russia experienced a huge socio-cultural upheaval in the early 1860s. The liberation of serfs in 1861 was followed by a radicalization of younger intellectuals. Fourteen young artists in the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts refused to take part in the annual gold medal competition in 1863, primarily opposing the inflexible insistence of the Academy on historical painting as irrelevant to the contemporary situation in Russia. Rejecting the Academy, however, also meant rejecting the tsarist government as patron, and several of the artists who protested had to create their own exhibitions. Later, in 1870, the Society for Travelling Exhibitions (the Wanderers) was founded, with the twin goals of supporting an art that more honestly represented life in Russia as it was at the time and of taking (this) art out of the urban centers and into the countryside—to the people—and thereby producing a modern art for the nation. Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*; Valkenier, "The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s;" Sarabianov, *Russian Art from Neoclassicism to Avant-Garde*; David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*; Rosalind P. Blakesley and Margaret Samu, eds., *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014).

Furthermore, this sense of distinction and difference demarcated the maritime nation from the wider imperial sphere of its maritime activity. It was represented most tellingly through the trope of the idealization of the rulers and the Russian naval victories, and was epitomized in the preternatural bodies of sailors/humans in distress.

This section particularly addresses how the tensions and crises surrounding the cultural construction of the national maritime power of Russia over the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea were played out through the iconography of shipwrecks, which both provided the arena for heroic performance but also, in itself, enacted the ultimate failure of heroic endeavor. I shall argue, therefore that the visual imagery representing maritime disasters on the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea during the period of Russia's rise as a maritime empire while creating secure access to both seas can be understood not only in relation to that specific conflict but more widely in terms of changing the cultural emphasis from empire to an ideologically nuanced reading of a cultural identity. The seascape portrayals may be interpreted as part of a historical discourse and a narrative of Russia's shift from land-based power to a maritime empire. To assert the certainty of the maritime in this relationship, then I also challenge and question the conventional binary distinction between land-based and sea-based territorial definition of the Russian Empire. Similarly, the prevailing territorial concept of the Empire had yet to be drawn up, although it was clear that Russia could not entirely become a European entity, deprived of safe access to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea,¹⁷⁵ and

¹⁷⁵ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Sweden still had the strategically important Baltic provinces of Ingria, Karelia, Finland, Estland, and Livland. Poland had ceded the eastern (left) bank of the lower Dnieper. Russia's greatest reward for the eighteenth century was the vast area of the Steppe region, the Southern defense, and the northern Black Sea coasts. Such territories were crucial strategically and economically to the establishment of Russia as a Eurasian empire and a major European power. Moreover, Russia was able to view the prospect of its commerce and its naval force being built via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles into the Mediterranean, which would allow it to avoid its collapse and participate in a wealthy, lucrative Levantine market that replaced the trade in the Eurasian continent in earlier centuries. For more information, see Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, 184–195.

the image of the maritime is almost, by concept, an image of displacement as it discusses the “other areas” at a fundamental level—the areas of the sea, traditionally considered as culturally and materially distinct from the surrounded regions of the nation and its imperial territories.

The Heroic Ideal: Peter the Great as the Father of Modern Russia

“One can’t help but feel gratitude for the talent [of Aivazovsky], who doesn’t forget to immortalize everything that could possibly be of interest to future generations one day, because people die, and only names and deeds remain the people’s memory.”¹⁷⁶

The subject that impelled Aivazovsky to embark on this potentially very lucrative venture was a celebrated contemporary survivor narrative set against the backdrop of Peter the Great’s war with Finland. The Russian fleet, under the command of the tsar himself, was returning from Sweden following the important naval victory at the Battle of Vyborg in 1710. On the way back, the fleet was hit by a storm—a notoriously commonplace feature of the Baltic Sea. The fleet was dispersed and many ships lost. Peter I, sailing his yacht, risked his life, reached the coast, and started a signal fire, which, like a lighthouse, showed the ships the way to a safe bay. A week later, the fleet was able to deliver weapons, ammunition, and supplies the siege of Vyborg, which soon after surrendered.¹⁷⁷

Aivazovsky’s painting, *Peter the Great at Krasnaya Gorka Lighting a Bonfire on the Shore to Signal His Ships in Distress* [figure 34], depicts this moment, with Peter I dynamically directing proceedings in a defiant signal against the storm, rearranging the fully depicted Russian fleet. This painting also related the storyline

¹⁷⁶ The journal *Panthéon* notes Aivazovsky’s responsiveness to current events. Petrova, *Ivan Aivazovsky*, 26.

¹⁷⁷ Somewhat later, the victory was celebrated on the island of Kotlin, and this scene was repeated as a theatrical performance, which the entire command of the young Baltic Fleet witnessed and participated in. In the same year, on the shores of the Gulf of Finland, they began to install signal beacons for the night passage of ships.

specifically to the representation of seascape and its dialogue with other paintings and genres. The expression of the tsar is achieved in a much more specific way than simply a general merging of the two genres. For, while the main figure in the painting is obviously an individualized portrait of the most recognizable person of the Russian Empire, Peter the Great, Aivazovsky appears to have conceived this dialogue also through reference to the classical and academic taxonomy of the “passions.” As a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Aivazovsky was probably aware of the contemporary agreements dealing with the nature and artistic representation of the passions through the expressions of the human face and head. What all these agreements have in common is the fundamental belief, deriving from classical theories of beauty, that abstract emotions and internal attitudes may be individually discerned, precisely identified in the expressions of the face. Aivazovsky’s depictions (both of Peter and the other figures castaways at sea) are, of course, are hardly specimens of beauty. However, his representation of the characters in his painting, who wear a variety of distinct expressions that involve both exaggerated facial distortion and theatrical postures, surely responds to the prevalent artistic and aesthetic concern of this period with establishing a taxonomic classificatory system for representing mental states and the passions.

The hybridization, therefore, of seascape and history through the portraiture, which, in one sense, marks out the painting’s Russianness and also its modernity, is at the same time annexed to its claims to the unchanging academic ideal for history painting, articulated through reference to the classical tradition of the theorization of the passions, by which its heroic character could be both individualized and idealized, rendered as frail and mortal, in a real life-and-death struggle with the sublime sea. Importantly also, in view of the primacy assigned to the spectator’s embodied, this

mechanism offers a legible means to enable the spectator's sympathetic identification with the sentiments represented in the scene. As such, the spectator may also be projected as a member of the nationhood that the painting allegorizes in terms of distinction, via the construction of self within the sphere of visibility, part of what Peter de Bolla has termed "the education of the eye."¹⁷⁸

Aivazovsky was awarded with a professorship by the Academy;¹⁷⁹ this painting received a significant amount of attention, and in various ways, it has been argued, shows a "patriotic affirmation." The tsar commissioned Aivazovsky to fill the walls of the Academy of Fine Arts with his marine paintings, and he opened his first exhibition in the capital, St. Petersburg.¹⁸⁰ The exhibition opened on February 26, with twenty marine artworks exhibited in two halls of the Academy of Fine Arts. Within two weeks, the exhibition conquered the public of St. Petersburg.¹⁸¹ If viewers had not already been aware of it, then Aivazovsky's painting would have made abundantly clear the "new-born" colonial naval victory that formed the context for Aivazovsky's scene of stable and strong survival, the tsar. In the travel journal of Peter I, it is written

¹⁷⁸ Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁷⁹ Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 100.

¹⁸⁰ On February 23, the Academy's Board published an announcement in the St. Petersburg *ведомости* [The Record] newspaper: "Many art lovers who have not had the chance to visit the workshop of our famous marine painter I. K. Aivazovsky have long expressed their desire to see their new works. The Imperial Academy of Arts from the highest sovereign emperor ordered the appointment of several halls for paintings by Aivazovsky in the Academy, where art lovers can see from February 26 to March 8. Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 98.

¹⁸¹ Young poet Apollo Maikov wrote about this: "Despite the mud and melting snow, crowds were striving for Vasilevskiy Island, filling the halls of the Academy and various expressions of delight and pleasure obviously showed that everyone was fully rewarded for their curiosity [...] Thank you Mr. Aivazovsky! Deciding to expose our works alone is a feat for which the artist must thank, we really understand how much firmness is needed to defeat the petty fears and false shame imposed on the artist the general opinion of his fellowships [...] Finally, the southern species of Aivazovsky, who are still excellent [...] We, according to our extreme understanding, wanted to determine the peculiarity of his talent; his sea and sky have nothing to say at all: this is the height of perfection, and since they are a third-party thing in his paintings [...] Thank you for the pleasure they brought to us." A. N. Maikov, "выставка картин Айвазовского в 1847 году," [Aivazovsky's Exhibition in the Year of 1847] in *отечественные записки* [Notes of the Fatherland] 51 (1847): 166–176.

that on May 1, on Walpurgis Night,¹⁸² “a great misfortune happened, foodstuffs and galleys almost all carried it into the great sea [...]”¹⁸³ This contemporary travel journal on the wreck at Krasnaya Gorka certainly made the connection between the naval victory and wrecks, using a rhetorical strategy of reversal of fortune that was commonplace in shipwreck accounts. Also, the quasi-mythological and religious vision of Walpurgis Night and bonfires as battling against witches then gives way to an account of Aivazovsky’s display of “Russian courage (through the depiction of the tsar)” in confronting the “horrid, turbid” scene. The disposition of the pictures in the exhibition space would thus have made equally clear the visual dialogue of “patriotic affirmation” that the viewer was meant to read between them. This dialogue was further reinforced by Aivazovsky himself, whose other major submission for the 1847 exhibition was the depiction of the sea battle at Reval (with the Swedes again) [**figure 35**], which served as one of the cornerstones of patriotic heroism of Russian history.¹⁸⁴ Also, its aesthetic dimension is perhaps the most immediately and unexpectedly—striking aspect of Aivazovsky’s narrative. For it is intensely dramatic and full of suspense, centering on the critical choice between the ships or the tsar, which comes

¹⁸² The night of Walpurgis is the eve of Saint Walpurga’s Christian Festival, an abbot of the eighth century in France, and it is observed on the night of 30 April and the day of 1 May. This festival commemorates the canonization of Saint Walpurga and its relics to Eichstätt, which took place on 1 May 870. The ways of celebrating vary from one nation to another and from one city to another. The activities typically involve lighting the bonfire, choral singing, and a speech to honor the arrival of the springtime, particularly in Sweden. Walpurgi fires are part of an early eighteenth-century Swedish tradition. Farm animals were brought to graze in Walpurgis (Valborg), and bonfires were lit to scare predators. For basic information on Walpurgis Night, see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walpurgis_Night.

¹⁸³ <https://www.rusmuseumvrn.ru/data/mediateka/ayvazovskiy>

¹⁸⁴ The painting depicts a battle during the Russo-Swedish War of 1788-1790. Enjoying significant superiority, a Swedish squadron counted on destroying a part of the Russian fleet anchored in Reval harbor. Warned of the Swedes’ approach, Admiral Vasily Chichagov placed his forces at anchor in three lines, allowing him to fire accurately on the approaching Swedish ships. The Swedish fleet was forced to withdraw after suffering large losses from the Russian artillery and its own unsuccessful maneuvering. Aivazovsky recreates the historical event, depicting cannon-smoke-shrouded Russian ships firing on the Swedish fleet with Reval in the background. Nikolai Sobko’s *Encyclopedia of Russian Artists* includes “the Naval Battles with Swedes at Reval, Vyborg and Krasnaya Gorka” among Aivazovsky’s works in 1846, with note that the paintings were commissioned by Tsar Nicholas I.

almost exactly in the middle of the narrative and thus literally the pivot on which the tsar's story balances. This "human-interest" angle immediately involves the viewer's sympathy and both humanizes and dignifies the tsar and his crew, making even more poignant Peter's subsequent decision to risk his life and create the bonfire. Here, therefore, is a demonstration of the potential of shipwrecks to be turned from disaster into triumph and to confirm the devotion to duty (and hence to country) of both the newly emerged Russian navy as a whole and the individuals comprising it. Aivazovsky's narrative neatly and skillfully serves the double function of recording the details of the shipwreck for the Russian naval Admiralty and of parading the heroism of its protagonists, including the tsar, Peter I. The former is essentially private for Aivazovsky, or at least transacted within a narrowly confined section of the public sphere (through the exhibition), while the latter operates at the most culturally open level, through the painting's new location: Tsar Alexander III bought this painting and hung it on the walls of the Russian Museum.

In the case of *Krasnaya Gorka*, the heroization of Peter the Great was made even more emphatic by the common knowledge that this campaign, after the storm had subsided, became successful for setting out for Vyborg, which later surrendered without a fight. This naval victory had both a national and cultural effect in depriving Sweden of secure access to the Baltic and providing maneuvering capacity for the Russians on the Black Sea after they secured the Baltic coasts. Within these much larger public contexts, therefore, Aivazovsky's choice, upon which his narrative and subsequent rise to the status of hero depend, matches something of the character of the paradigmatic choice presented in nineteenth-century Russian artistic culture.

Shipwrecks and Loss: The Disaster of Ingermanland

The coastline of Norway is littered with the wrecks of countless sailing warships lost while making the perilous journey from their birthplace Arkhangelsk to join the Baltic fleet at Reel or Kronstadt. Built in Arkhangelsk, the 74-gun ship of the line *Ingermanland* got caught in a storm on her way to Kronstadt on August 31, 1842, and broke up on the rocks in the strait of Skagerrak twenty miles from the coast of Norway. Of the 900 men on board, 389 perished and 503 were rescued. Of the 389 who died in the tragedy, there were 21 women and 7 children accompanying their husbands and fathers, who were, of course, officers and not seamen.¹⁸⁵ Also, it is important to emphasize that, in this vein, we might echo Linda Nochlin's observation of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* concerning the absence of women.¹⁸⁶ Within the light of the evidence indicating a female presence, an unseen, but understood, discourse of femininity underpins Aivazovsky's construction of masculinity in all of his shipwrecks.

In the case of *The Shipwreck of Ingermanland* [figure 36], the lure of the sea is confirmed by the popularity of voyage narratives and shipwreck narratives, which during Aivazovsky's lifetime became a distinct literary sub-genre.¹⁸⁷ The significance

¹⁸⁵ Eduard Sozaev and John Tredrea, *Russian Warships in the Age of Sail 1696–1860: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2010), 231.

¹⁸⁶ Linda Nochlin, "Géricault or the Absence of Women," *October* 68 (1994): 45–60.

¹⁸⁷ Famous for his books of the Russian Imperial Navy, the Russian writer Konstantin Mikhailovich Stanyukovich also wrote sea tales of captains kind and cruel, of efficient first officers, of lieutenants and careerists indifferent and idealistic, of boatswains terrible and harmless, with shipwrecks and shipboard duels, female passengers and adventures in distant America as foils for the curse of the sea. In a story from 1897, Stanyukovich wrote: "Submerge[d] in the water, the ship rocked on the waves. Filled with people, the quarterdeck and bowsprit sank ever deeper into the brine. Now only the mizzenmast rose above the surface, swaying over the sea and swarming from top to bottom with human figures as with ants. Barely visible in the distance, fifteen miles away, was the thin line of the Norwegian coast. Not a single sail which might give hope of aid could be seen on the horizon. Around the half-sunken ship floated the wreckage of spars, boards, hatch covers, boarding ramps and two cut-down masts. And hundreds of people on all of this. Their numbers decreased with each passing minute. The weakest and most exhausted were taken by the unrelenting sea into its cold embrace." Konstantin M. Stanyukovich, *Собрание сочинений в 13-ти томах* [Collected Works in 13 Volumes] (Moscow, 1897).

of the details of Aivazovsky's case, as well as the ramifications of the wreck of *Ingermanland* into wider areas of cultural representation, can best be demonstrated by considering them in relation to the general iconography of shipwrecks in nineteenth-century Russia, and, further, to the way this pertains to a range of articulated national ideologies and discourses. This is not just a simple issue of documenting how shipwrecks were employed as a metaphor for national political crises. Rather, it is to investigate their more attenuated and indirect relationships to dominant concepts, particularly of being a maritime power and imperial discourse. In this section, I choose to focus on the disaster of the *Ingermanland*, not only because of its pervasive cultural impact—being regarded as an event of national significance and presented across a wide spectrum of media and genres from eyewitness reports, to poetry, to prints, oil paintings (and even Tsar Nicholas I's declaration that shared the public outrage)—but also because of the ways in which they harness particular discourses surrounding shipwrecks and the Baltic fleet. I concentrate them into an event that was regarded at the time as a singularly significant calamity.¹⁸⁸

As we have seen with Aivazovsky's ambition for his painting of the loss of the *Ingermanland*, the visual imagery of wrecks formed part of a more general moralized category of maritime disasters. This offered speculative grounds for artists from both marine and academic backgrounds to produce works that could more closely conform to the demand for history painting—that the subject should be generally interesting and thus appeal to universal spectatorship. Furthermore, these images, following the increasing tendency toward melodrama, placed decreasing emphasis on the material loss of the ship and its cargo, in favor of privileging the human element from a perspective of empathetic, emotive sensibility. In the melodramatic quest, the

¹⁸⁸ Sozaev and Tredrea, *Russian Warships*, 231.

shipwreck provided ample representational opportunities for the passion of duty. It was an already ideal framing for the grand action that would provoke a virtuous empathy, through which the viewer could gaze upon the loyal and heroic subject of “maritime Russia.”

In this respect, the story of *Ingermanland* bears all the hallmarks of the exemplary shipwreck narrative, and I dwell on it at length because of its pragmatic status in encapsulating the complex and distinctive features pertaining to the status and meaning of shipwrecks in nineteenth-century Russia. This subject thus meets, improbably, all the aesthetic criteria and all the market factors for the creation of successful history painting: improbably, because as many scholars have recently explained, the mismatch between the ideals of history painting and the actualities of the demands for art in Russia, where the market was overwhelmingly dominated by the social realists [figure 37],¹⁸⁹ was such that it was almost impossible to make a living from pursuing the high ideals of history painting. The subject, being taken from an actual event, therefore required less imaginative invention on the part of the artist to adapt it to history painting. This twofold artistic appeal to “history” and “nature” is

¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, for another of the important artistic figures of nineteenth-century Russia, a member of the *Wanderers*, Ilya Repin (1844–1930), the sea functioned symbolically and purposefully. In *Wide World*, “[t]he great swathe of white-flecked olive sea sweeps around, past, and almost over the laughing young lovers obviously half engulfed on the dangerous edge of a rocky ledge, over which the foaming sea boils. The dark, choppy waves a few yards away, spume blown from their crests, are menacing intimations of potential calamity to these carefree young people who have not yet noticed something that Aivazovsky’s sailors well knew, that the world—the sea—is both pleasurable and potentially deadly. Here, Repin deploys, not altogether successfully, impressionistic painterly techniques and colorings. Where Aivazovsky’s painting is always representational, Repin’s foreground rush of seawater is almost a smear of grubby green paint, which must be intended to underline the ambiguity of the narrative. Who could really survive upright in such turmoil of water? Who but this idealized young couple could survive dry and untouched in such circumstances? Here, we have the sea underlining an allegory of young love triumphing, oblivious amid the tempest.” https://www.russianpaintings.net/articles/russian_fine_art/russian_fine_art/the_russian_painters_of_water. For more information on Repin, see: David Jackson, *The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin* (Woodbridge: ACC Art Books, 2015), 169–172.

effected in Aivazovsky's hybridization of history painting with the seascape genre and corresponds with the artist's deep knowledge and interests.

The shipwreck, the Russian naval fleet's largest at the time, provoked a massive response in society. The novelty depiction of the subject of a shipwreck correlated directly to the massive contemporary increase in Russia's global maritime and imperial interests. This painting also enabled Aivazovsky to use visual rhetoric and create a remarkable conversion of disaster into triumph. Not only is the loss of the *Ingermanland* no longer a catastrophe, it is instead a reminder and inevitable symptom of Russia's "unrivaled greatness": Russia's rivals did not suffer shipwrecks to the same extent. Yet again, and even more ironically, the more shipwrecks suffered by Russia, the more "unrivaled" would its greatness be since that would be a positive demonstration of its increasing hegemony on the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

Victory of Man, Humanity, and Life: *The Ninth Wave*, *Rainbow* and *The Wave*

"In his storm, we sense rapture, we see that eternal beauty which strikes the observer in any real, natural storm."¹⁹⁰

The Ninth Wave [figure 38], generally regarded as the most prominent work by Aivazovsky, is a large painting depicting an image of a group of people adrift in turbulent waters and placed within the sunlight of a golden setting. Painted at the age of 33, it is typical of Aivazovsky's mature Romanticism in art, subject matter, and populist appeal. *The Ninth Wave* is a classic interpretation of shipwrecks, along with

¹⁹⁰ Aivazovsky himself never denied that he used his own personal recollections and made use of his imagination. Writing in 1861 in the magazine *Время* [Time], Fyodor Dostoyevsky compared Aivazovsky's work with that of Alexandre Dumas as both artists "produce a remarkably striking effect: remarkable indeed, as neither man ever produces anything ordinary at all." Rather than judging him harshly for his creative thinking, Dostoyevsky liked Aivazovsky's lively imagination. In other words, no one can hope to understand everything about nature, nor even try to look at all of the aspects of it during their short lives. Thus, the artist's paintbrushes cannot keep pace with the constantly shifting and never-ending characteristics of nature and is rendered useless in the process. Natalya Kalugina, "Reporting Aivazovsky in 19th Century Russian Periodicals," *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (2017): 111–120.

Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* [figure 39], although not associated with a social or political statement. Its title comes from the idea that waves occur in trains of nine and surge in size to the ninth wave.¹⁹¹ Aivazovsky refers to Géricault's pyramidal shape of the survivors but has borrowed little else.¹⁹²

The Ninth Wave, a Russian maritime custom, was a wave of dread to sailors, for the wave was the killer. In the low forefront of the *Ninth Wave*, a small huddle of sailors clings to the remains of a mast while a giant wave of fume is about to fall, while another is constantly rising in the sulfurous light of the winter sun just breaking through dark and terrible clouds. The viewer wonders which of the waves the "ninth wave" is, since they all look just as dangerous. There can be no certainty. The mystery of the fate of the sailors, in this endless mass of water, and the fear generated by the color of the sky and the frightening waves, translucent in their peaks and black in depth, produce what Edmund Burke¹⁹³ termed "the Sublime," a state in which the

¹⁹¹ Some nautical myths indicate that there are seven rather than nine, and while there are many facts to support wave trains, real life is obviously not as typical.

¹⁹² We need to appreciate the historical context in order to understand the impact of the portrayal of this single maritime loss in July 1816 off the west coast of Africa when actually such events were relatively commonplace. The overwhelming and sublime feelings of Romantic art functioned to produce a "tragedy" in this case against the background of a sequence of events begun by ineffective guidance by naval captain Hugues de Chaumareys, who had been nominated for his post by the ultra-royalist Minister of the Marina, Vicomte de Bouchage. This made of the wreck of *Medusa* a political and a naval scandal that highlighted corruption in the Restoration rule and exposed the Royalist versus liberal fault-line—which developed into a national controversy following the November 1817 publication of a survivors' account from the rafts of physician Henri Savigny and geographer-engineer Alexandre Corréard (the text of which constituted Géricault's main source). The primary goals of Savigny and Corréard were to blame for the shipwreck and illustrate the misfortune of the commandants, who abandoned 150 troops, sailors, and official passengers on a forthcoming raft: only 15 of them survived at sea after nearly two weeks. For more information on Géricault's *Raft of Medusa*, see: Yvonne Scott, "Reconstructing the Raft: Semiotics and Memory in the Art of the Shipwreck and the Raft," in *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present*, ed. Tricia Cusack (London and New York: Ashgate, 2014); Patrick Noon and Stephen Bann, eds., *Crossing the Channel: British and French Painting in the Age of Romanticism* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003); Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁹³ For idea of the Sublime, see: Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, with an introduction and notes by Adam Philips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

emotions are completely stretched.¹⁹⁴ The motive behind shipwreck production and the use of wreck-related material is, therefore, subject to various interpretations. There is, however, another degree of possible significance in terms of this debate; it explicitly concerns the mechanism by which the spectator uses his creative and logical faculties in front of his sublime object.

The Christian message, which deals with the posturing of the unafraid in anticipation of wave coming up to greet them before they are able to see the cross, is not as distinct as they would like. In terms of composition and palette, the *Ninth Wave* exemplified the classical, academic art that Aivazovsky learnt and then imbibed in the galleries and salons of the European capitals. It features his sense of melodrama at its most febrile and communicates a certain magnificence in his impressive portrayal of affect.

Rainbow [figure 40] shows survivors tossed in a violent stormy setting in the background serves as a reminder that they are no longer safe and happy, as their ship has sunk below the waves in the depth of the sea in the background. The atmospheric and oceanic colors are muted and use a gentle, subtle pastel palette of hues that morph and merge, generating a tone of exposed resignation in direct contrast with *The Ninth Wave*'s overstated melodrama of two decades earlier. An almost invisible rainbow tingles the light that flows from the right across the sky. The painting as a whole gives the impression of a whirlpool. Its swirl of water, clouds, and sea pull the eye towards the line of light between men and ship marking the lower part yet also imagistic center of the "rainbow," where, one senses, the storm may pass, sweeping off to the left. In Judeo-Christian iconography, the rainbow is God's covenant with

¹⁹⁴ For more information about Russian painters of water and the water and its symbolism see: https://www.russianpaintings.net/articles/russian_fine_art/russian_fine_art/the_russian_painters_of_water.

mankind after the deluge, His pledge to never again lay the Earth waste thus. The fact that Aivazovsky juxtaposes the rainbow with a wrecked mast and the evidence of the shipwreck adds a further layer of complexity to this enigmatic late work. The ship's pathos of failure gives way to our awareness of the deep thrill that the sailors feel in the moment.

The Wave [figure 41] is a continuation of sorts of the theme interpreted in Aivazovsky's most famous work, *The Ninth Wave*. Here, the format has become larger, the palette colder and more reticent, the raging of the elements even more magnificent and unrestrained, and the shipwrecked sailors' situation seemingly more hopeless. The theme of catastrophe, of the all-destroying elements returning the world to a state of chaos, once again come to the fore. The struggle for life and the shaming of human hopes are insignificant in the face of natural forces.

The Wave of 1898 breaks a series of barren and intensely physical seascapes begun in 1881 with *The Black Sea*.¹⁹⁵ This version returns to the artist's old theme of shipwrecked mariners but now consumed by all loss of hope. There is no sunlight breaking through here, there is no rainbow, there is nothing to pray for, and there is no sense of the storm subsiding and life clinging to some hope of rescue. Here, life itself is being sucked out, swallowed by the unforgiving sea. Aivazovsky's depiction of the sky also forbids, appearing as an angry continuation of the ocean and thus oppressively closing in on the scene of desperation. While the others cling to a fragile hope of saving their lives, this character is obstinate and disheartened. The overriding motif in Aivazovsky's seascapes is the ocean rediscovering itself. The painter's own vigorous

¹⁹⁵ Aivazovsky wrote to Russian journalist, publisher and the editor of *Новое время* [New Time] Alexei S. Suvorin: "All the paintings are already in Paris. There will be up to thirty in all, of which only nine were painted three or four years ago, the remaining twenty in the last two years and several have never been seen by anyone before. The largest is the 7^{1/2} – arshin – wide *Last Minutes in the Ocean* [*The Wave*], which is my best storm ever." Sargsyan Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 253–254; Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 202.

contact with the painted surface appears to have characterized these late seascapes with a physical strength that contrasts with its light, romanticized evocations of old land and picturesque shores. “I am deeply convinced that my last picture of the *Last Minutes in the Ocean* [*The Wave*] belongs to the best of my works, in which I manage to convey all the experience of my long-term artistic activity. Therefore, I’d consider myself happy if the painting became part of the public legacy.”¹⁹⁶ Shipwrecks could be understood to erase or equalize differentiation of rank and status: men and women, black and white, master and servant, differences of gender, race, and class were leveled in the face of the engulfing sea or ocean. As a consequence, shipwrecks, in one sense, could offer a vehicle for the heroic representation of humanity regardless of their status.

Once again, it is important to consider this painting as a kind of summation of his marine subjects of the previous decades. The claim that Aivazovsky’s “Romantic seascapes” had declined was a view shared by a number of scholars (add to that how the changing taste of Tsar Nicholas II also supported this idea). As a means of assessing the ongoing ambivalence of the status of painting, as well as its predictive and retrospective qualities, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, I would like to consider seriously the accusations leveled at Aivazovsky of “freezing in his time” and Aivazovsky’s oeuvre as a whole. If a combination of creativity and destruction informs the wrecks of Aivazovsky, moreover, then a similar mixture also structured Aivazovsky’s approach to creating his own reputation, as well as fostering a Russian school of painting. A number of factors combined in the nineteenth century to make Aivazovsky’s seascapes particularly important to his developing career. First, seascapes had become increasingly prominent as a means of negotiating and creating

¹⁹⁶ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 202; 207.

Russian national and imperial identity. Second, these depictions, in an increasingly competitive artistic environment, created considerable concern among aesthetic theorists, who worried that the private demands of the marketplace¹⁹⁷ might overwhelm the public concerns of history painting. This placed an ambitious artist such as Aivazovsky in a kind of double-bind, for he needed at once to strive to build his own reputation in a combative marketplace while also attempting to serve the cause of Russian art—art in general even (although, according to Rosalind Polly Blakesley, he is relatively unknown in the West).¹⁹⁸

Creating the Sublime: *Storm at Cape Aya and Shipwreck*

At the peak of the Romantic period, a lot of debate took place on the nature of the sublime. Artists wrestled with the complexities of their interpretation when attempting to achieve sublime effects. However, as I would like to show in this section on shipwrecks, it is difficult to ignore the sublime when challenged. In this review of the sublime subject-paintings displayed during this time at the Royal Academy, Martin Myrone encourages us to think about the artistic dedication and the use of the sublime as a primarily market-oriented business.¹⁹⁹ He concludes that the sublime can “probably best be described as a certain kind of effect which had more to do with

¹⁹⁷ One of the most prominent art dealers of Aivazovsky’s time Pavel Tretyakov was interested in Aivazovsky’s seascapes in general and shipwrecks in particular. For Pavel Tretyakov, see: S. P. Botkina, *Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov: Life in Art*; V. P. Ziloti, *In the House of Tretyakovs; Letters of Artist to Pavel Tretyakov*. Also, as Sargsyan mentions after the close of his exhibition of Paris Aivazovsky returned to St. Petersburg to the President of the Academy and the Minister of the Court with a proposal to present the Hermitage with his large canvas *The Wave*. The canvas was accepted with gratitude, and as the Minister of the Imperial Court notifies, Tsar Alexander III expressed his satisfaction. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 207.

¹⁹⁸ Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*, 218–219.

¹⁹⁹ Christine Riding, “Shipwreck, Self-preservation and the Sublime,” in *The Art of Sublime: Terror, Torment and Transcendence*, ed. Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/chrstine-riding-shipwreck-self-preservation-and-the-sublime-r1133015>, accessed 18 July 2020.

manipulating public and critical response than with attending to some pre-ordained theoretical prescription.”²⁰⁰

As mentioned by Aivazovsky in a letter to the Academy of Fine Arts Conference Secretary Pyotr Iseyev, the work *Storm at Cape Aya* [figure 42] was painted in the summer of 1875 at the artist’s country estate Sheikh-Mamai in the Crimea. Aivazovsky added in the letter: “I intend to donate this painting to the Academy of Fine Arts as my best work.” Cape Aya is a thirteen-kilometer-long promontory located southeast of Balaklava on the Crimea’s southern coast. The place was always considered extremely dangerous during storms. For sailors in distress, there was a double danger: the roiling waves ready to swallow up their ship and the steep cliffs they could be dashed up against by the storm.

Aivazovsky created his most remarkable shipwreck in 1876 [figure 43]. Shipwrecks are, of course, the inventory of any seascape artist from Ludolf Backhuysen to Claude-Joseph Vernet to Jean Pillement and Theodore Géricault, and Aivazovsky had himself painted many.²⁰¹ However, this image captures so sublimely the stirring power of the remains of the ship’s crew, whose arms extended to helpless watchers on the high ground, the pillar on which the boat is bound to be sunk. Much like Arnold Böcklin’s *Isle of the Dead* [figure 44] from 1880, the large rock is named for a selectively illuminated sunlight, turning the flying spray into a magical cloud around its foundation. In reality, in his earlier *Icebergs* [figure 45] in 1870, Aivazovsky used the same kind of lighting effect in which a huge, broken edifice with mysteriously lit ice over a slow-moving three master is chosen for special illumination. From the dark shadow of the foreground of *Shipwreck*, a floating mast rises from a

²⁰⁰ Martin Myrone, “The Sublime as Spectacle,” in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 8.

²⁰¹ Charles, *Ivan Aivazovsky*, 1067, Kindle.

storm, its jagged edge flowing seawater (Aivazovsky's favorite visual device), while in the gunwale harbor a doomed boat is filled by a storm, which will imminently grab and hurl it on the large rocks.²⁰²

The two works present approximate proof of the type of dramatic effects and devices expected of "sublime images," such as sharp contrast in light and darkness, battering winds and seas and struggling ships and human beings. Yet what effect the proximity of the rocky coastline (i.e., dry land as a symbol of safety) has on viewers of the paintings can be seen in Aivazovsky's composition. For both paintings, Aivazovsky was aware of the complex spectacle-spectator relationship and tried to confuse, even problematize, this division by placing the edge of the mountains beyond the confines of the framed canvas and into the spectator's plane. And because many seamen are depicted turning to or facing the mountains (i.e., gazing in the same directions as the painting viewer), the artist is obviously attempting to trick us into feeling, if only briefly, what they are experiencing. Are we shipwreck participants? Of course, the sheer size of these paintings makes human suffering more visible and thus more immediate and efficient than in most marine paintings. Nevertheless, how Aivazovsky's composition miniaturizes and obscures the shipwrecked forms physical and emotional suffering. Can we, as observers, be submerged in the human sense of an occurrence or scene if we are distanced from human presence?

Edmund Burke in the *Philosophical Enquiry on pain, anguish, torment and death as productive of the sublime* indicates the desire for self-preservation:

"The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I

²⁰² Ibid., 1070, Kindle.

call *sublime*. The passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest of all the passions.”²⁰³

Thus, the reason behind the usage and development of shipwreck-related material is open to several interpretations. And there is another line of possible interpretation here, one that directly relates to the mechanism by which the spectator employs their creative and logical faculties before the sublime object. Generally speaking, the fact that the shipwreck affords the spectator the luxury of an experience of pure desperation in all-consuming demand of self-preservation without actually having to face death or even anything dangerous at all may well be the reason why it became adapted to the sublime in all its forms and was so frequently embraced by artists preparing works for public consumption.²⁰⁴

The Biggest Shipwreck in History: Noah’s Ark

Aivazovsky’s choice for what might count as the biggest shipwreck in history was a scene that was easily transferred to more strictly historical subjects. Indeed, *The World Flood* [figure 46] provided an ultimate opportunity for this force of nature to be displayed. Here, the canvas—the world—is vertically bisected by violent contrast of light and shade, enacted as the Almighty in conflict with His own creation. The humans, perhaps drowned or still alive, are as statues, the broken remains of stone on the huge, half-submerged rocks desolated by the deluge. The whole planet is engulfed in a war that is physically frozen, a temporary halt to this horrific natural event—a Faustian moment, indeed not of joy but of sorrow. Even in the sense of biblical themes, the artist chose those that helped him to paint water. Struck by God’s wrath, people and animals throw themselves off the cliffs, the artist’s habitual *mise-en-scène* taking

²⁰³ Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 97.

²⁰⁴ Riding, “Shipwreck, Self-preservation and the Sublime.”

on new connotations here, reminiscent of Gustave Doré's engravings [figure 47] of biblical scenes.²⁰⁵ Aivazovsky's choice offers a complex variant upon this aesthetic model, as a Russian–Armenian marine painter who has fulfilled his duty to create a biblical story as a painter finally chooses to depict this story through the lens of the story of the Noah's Ark (it could be interpreted as a shipwreck) and its ground on the mountain of Ararat (see Chapter IV for a detailed analysis on Mount Ararat and Aivazovsky's Armenian identity) because “the being of good Christian and Armenian prevailed.” But this, we are led to understand from that narrative, from his own words on the subject, and from the significant symbolic meaning of Ararat for the Armenian nation, was self-expression in the ultimate interest of the Armenians, via a biblical and a painful ordeal that could be ready to spur to public sympathy. Back in November 1862, responding to a letter from Prince D. I. Dolgorukov, Aivazovsky wrote: “I am delighted now with my painting *The World Flood*.” I almost finish it, and she, I can safely say, is my best work.”²⁰⁶ In 1864, Aivazovsky opened a solo exhibition in St. Petersburg, where he presented *The World Flood* along with eight other paintings created in the same year.

The huge canvas made a strong impression on art lovers and the public of the capital. The artist depicted not just the sight of the storm, but a picture with a biblical storyline: Mount Ararat, people and animals scrambling at its summit, fleeing from the flood. The canvas depicts an episode of the greatest tragedy of mankind. On the left side of the canvas, on the rocky top of the mountain, a lot of people and animals are sheltered, clinging to the stones, striving upward to escape from the frenzied waves of

²⁰⁵ For more information on Gustave Doré, see: Eric Zafran, Robert Rosenblum, and Lisa Small, *Fantasy and Faith: The Art of Gustave Doré* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

²⁰⁶ Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 135. Aivazovsky painting *The World Flood* was presented at the exhibition of the Imperial Academy of Arts in 1864. Tsar Alexander II later purchased it, and it has since been moved to the Hermitage Museum.

the flood. But the waves follow, capturing many people and animals in their whirlpool. Hanging over the water, the black sky with gloomy clouds further underlines the tragedy. As always, the hopelessness of the position somewhat eases the bright light of the sun, making its way in the corner of the upper part of the picture, cutting clouds and illuminating individual parts of the image. Clinging to the sharp rocks, the father of the family, holding his hands to the sky, prays for salvation. Elsewhere in the picture, the woman, dying, prostrated herself next to the body of a tiger, and the monkey, with her young, in fear, runs to the top of the mountain. Very expressive in the foreground of the canvas are people in a state of horror, as well as elephants, bears, and other animals. The fear is so great that the animals, running past people, do not even harm them. One may recall the impressive painting by Karl Bryullov, *The Last Day of Pompeii*, where there are similar images: the priest of the church, hiding social values under his arm, runs away when people on the verge of death help each other. Depicting these aspects of life, Aivazovsky was far away from the religious interpretation of the Bible.

Sea foam appeared once more in Aivazovsky's work. The image depicts a very primitive force, a tragedy that is more uncontrolled than the tale of the Sacred Letters. The emphasis is on the sea, which challenged even the beauty and dignity of cruelty. There is a "victory over all things" in the huge shaft of light focusing our attention on the dreadful scene of *The World Flood*. But it directs us to the overwhelming sense of the terrible waves that will spare nothing that lives. Remorselessly, they follow the unchanging law of their element, pitiless and relentless.

We are attracted by the enticing factor of hypnosis. People die deep down in the sea: the whole spectrum of colors indicates the catastrophic outcome, the lack of redemption. In the magnificent painting, *The World Flood*, Aivazovsky depicts the

misery of a man left trapped in a horrific catastrophe. It is humanity's only chance to be cleansed and the only way to pursue the creator's salvation and grace. The artist also portrays the sea as a common framework of nature and history: water vanished from sins and obscurities, but in spite of darkness and sorrow, the masterful dimension is a glimmer of hope and confidence. For the painting does suggest a way out of the darkness and into the light and goodness apparent in the bright colors on the left of the canvass. Aivazovsky here conveys a real sense of life and deep emotion, for there is hope, but one for which we must be truly humbled.

In this respect, it is worth remembering that, if the story's moral Christian dimension was picked up later on, at the beginning of his career Aivazovsky was alert to its artistic potential, no doubt also in part because of its moralizing dimension: *Chaos: The Creation* [figure 48] (created in his early twenties when Aivazovsky domiciled in Rome, following a fellowship from the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg to study abroad) was commissioned by Pope Gregory XVI, who had it hung in the Vatican, in spite of its dispute over the abstract image of a divine presence in the Vatican. In this regard, the famous nineteenth-century Russian novelist, Nikolay Gogol wrote: "Your *Chaos* caused a chaos in the Vatican."²⁰⁷ Clearly, the chaos to which the title of the painting refers comes from God creating the universe, represented here as an act of forcing the natural elements to submit to divine will and taking it from them.

In *Chaos: The Creation*, the upper area of the painting shows how an artist wishes to utilize his creativity while taking advantage of nature's tendency to produce works of art, which suggests a story, especially with regards to this type of art, and the main idea behind his romantic devotion is not begets that Aivazovsky has to steer it.

²⁰⁷ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 48–49.

Chaos: The Creation may be interpreted as indicative of his belief in the advancement of marine art through poignant references to the past or references to biblical and classical themes. It is quite possible that, through the symbolism of the waves, Aivazovsky attempted to explore, for the first time, the issue of fallacious hope and the possibility of catastrophe at sea.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the visual representation of shipwrecks assumed wide-ranging applications and meanings for nineteenth-century Russia, particularly when treating the virtue of humanity, which occupies a disproportionate place in the shipwreck iconography of Aivazovsky. As such, this wider iconography provides a deeper cultural context for understanding the nuances of meaning in his epic treatment of heroic naval disaster in *The Wave* and *Rainbow*. However, it is also important to attend to the differences between the depiction of commercial vessels, such as in the case of the wave series, associated especially with the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea and what they entail, and that of the *Ingermanland* and Peter I, a naval ship active in the theater of war in the Baltic, despite their shared status as loaded images of maritime disasters. In the first place, Aivazovsky's prominent inclusion of Tsar Peter I might be alerting us further to the "absence of prominent figure" in later paintings. The unnoticeable figurative representations of his work both highlight the spiritual dimension of shipwrecks as a "leveler" for mankind and, at the same time, emphasize inspired trust in the triumph of man, humanity, and life.

In the second place, therefore, they both articulate the relationship between empire and nation in rather different ways. The discourse of and around shipwrecks, as exemplified by these images and the commentaries on them, was fundamentally a discourse, albeit generalized and elliptical, on nationhood, insofar as shipwrecks could

be both symbolic of the nation's military, commercial and political conditions and also represent a particular, actual circumstance in which the whole nation might have an interest. There is a third sense of submergence in relation to the analysis of shipwrecks that can be brought into play here, with particular reference to religious history. It is worth noting in this context that the theme of the shipwreck, with its attendant associations of either salvation or divine retribution by reference to the biblical deluge, was regularly employed in this period in the visual and literary rhetoric of national campaigns.

Through considering a series of related case studies, this chapter, turning to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea as the primary arena of interest, considered the various ways in which the maritime nation was increasingly defined, through imperial maritime imagery in terms of difference from the imperial sphere to which it was commercially, religiously, and militarily wedded. Thus, the figure of national heroism, typified by Peter the Great in *Krasnaya Gorka*, was constructed in terms of masculine triumph in adversity, displacing the complexity of evil in the rise of the imperial power that both created the disasters for the Russian people but provided the material context for the ruler's nationally celebrated act of heroism. On the cusp of this tension between empire and nation were, mercantile organizations, whose dominant association in maritime imagery with the nemesis of shipwrecks pointed to the delicate balance in the discourse on empire between national commercial enterprise and its damaging pursuit of wealth and depictions of ordinary humans (i.e., sailors) pitched quite literally between empire and nation. This was both in physical and ideological terms (and in some examples through the religious connotations), whose visual representation brings into question the construction of the national naval hero presented in Aivazovsky's works.



CHAPTER 4

The View from Ararat: The Articulation of Aivazovsky's Armenian Identity

Introduction

Considering the distinction between memory and myth in his article, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” Duncan Bell states that “the careless employment of term ‘memory’ results not only in ... confusion but also can obscure the phenomenon through which “collective remembrance an actually run against the grain of the dominant narrative (or ‘governing mythology’).” Bell seeks to draw distinctions between memory and myth—he asserts that memory is only experiential and that it enters into the communal conception of the past through mythologizing in a space known as the “mythscape.” By pursuing the new “mythscape” conception of Duncan Bell— “the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which the myths of nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed”²⁰⁸—the first part of this chapter explores the role of the Ararat²⁰⁹ landscape in the formation and reconstruction of Aivazovsky's Armenian national identity from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of his life.

²⁰⁸ Duncan Bell, whose work I have employed in my approach to the Armenian symbolic narratives and their lucrative relation with Aivazovsky, cautioned against the accuracy of the term “historical memory,” historians used to employ the phrase previously employed by him. Duncan S. A. Bell, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” *British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (March 2003): 65, 70–1.

²⁰⁹ In his book *Crowds and Power*, German author Elias Canetti argues that neither language nor territory nor history is sufficient to constitute what, today, we call “national identity.” A national “crown emblem” is required. Canetti goes on to show how European nations possess one emblem in particular through which a common sense of national identity is voiced. In the case of England, for example, it is the sea; it is the forest for the Germans; while in France, it is the Revolution. One may debate the accuracy of Canetti's comments on national mass symbolism in these cases, but this approach does enable a (geographical and religious) positioning of Ararat symbolism in Armenian national identity and afford an (ideological) reading of Aivazovsky's Ararat images that differs from that given in conventional landscape histories. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1962), 169–174. By attempting at establishing meaningful links between “nature” and culture, Oliver Zimmer also utilizes Canetti's “crowd symbol” and examines the Alps as significant factor in search of the authenticate the Swiss nation. Oliver Zimmer, “In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (October, 1998): 637–665.

Ararat is historically linked to Armenia, although it lies beyond the boundaries of the modern Republic of Armenia.²¹⁰ It is widely regarded as the country's key national emblem. The representation of Ararat, usually portrayed in a nationalizing voice, is pervasive in everyday material culture in Armenia. These terms—“national,” “modern,” and suchlike—of course themselves have histories; as throughout this work, I read modern definitions back into cultures that originally did not include them. I highlight my use of these words to emphasize both the importance of a historian's choice and the independence of the historian. Imperial, national, geographical, transnational, and local are, among other things, matters of scale, and scale, as I am using it throughout my dissertation [mainly discussed in the Introduction and Chapter I], is largely a spatial category. Space is socially produced, a human geography, as elucidated by Henri Lefebvre.²¹¹ Every society, every means of production, creates space. We should look at Ararat as the most famous national emblem of Armenians, in the sense of Lefebvre's space as a socially formed relationship, a connection between things and see its importance to history. Ararat as national symbol did not replace but rather complemented history; the national past and (or rather) its popular memory was closely intertwined with the Ararat landscape and (or rather) its representation.²¹²

²¹⁰ M. Wesley Shoemaker, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States 2014-2015* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 203. Shoemaker indicated that “Mount Ararat [is] traditionally associated with Armenia.” and Christopher Walker, *Armenia: Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 11. Walker wrote that “Mount Ararat [is] closely identified with Armenia throughout her history.” In his book, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, Ronald Grigor Suny traces the cultural and social changes and interventions which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produces a new sense of Armenian nationality. Ancient and specific conceptions merged in common imagination with experience of scattering, genocide and reconstruction in Transcaucasia to create an Armenian nation. Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

²¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009).

²¹² For getting information about how the Mount Ararat is defined as both a spatial and religious category in the history of Armenia, see: Armen Petrosyan, “Biblical Mt. Ararat: Two Identifications,” *Comparative Mythology* 2, no. 1 (December 2016): 68–80. Alternatively, to know how Ararat is receipted in Turkey see: Özlem Köksal, “Past No-So-Perfect: Ararat and Its Reception in Turkey,”

This chapter begins from these assumptions, first looks at how ideas developed in terms of geography and cultural characteristics, and providing a context for the study of the relationship between land/seascape and national identity. It then differentiates the historical stages in which the relationship between the Ararat landscape and the Armenian nation has been established. This conceptualization of the relationship between Aivazovsky and Armenian depictions could be called his “nationalization of nature.”²¹³ Characteristic here is the projection of imagined national pasts onto a significant land/seascape in order to lend Armenian national identity a continuity and distinctiveness.

Although actually sited outside the borders of modern Armenia, Mount Ararat is historically associated with the nation, it is the “holy mountain” of the people and central to pre-Christian mythology as the home of the gods. While the adoption of Christianity led to decline in the pagan mythology linked to worship of the mountain, the geographical center of ancient Armenian kingdoms, Ararat, in many respects, has remained widely considered the country’s prominent patriotic symbol. In the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth-century, when Armenians lived in empires of the other (especially Ottoman, but also Persian and, to a lesser extent, Russian), Mount Ararat symbolized the historic Armenia as symbol of the imagined nation-state. Thus, in a letter dated 1 October 1861, Armenian poet Mikayel Nalbandian,²¹⁴ witnessing Italian

Cinema Journal 54, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 45–64. Following the Armenian film director Atom Egoyan’s 2002-released movie called *Ararat*, Özlem Köksal examines the problematic reception of Ararat in Turkey, investigating both the film and the coverage in the media, as well as academics’ arguments, which have become quite controversial in regards to it.

²¹³ Zimmer, “In Search of Natural Identity.”

²¹⁴ Mikayel Nalbandian, writer, activist, and revolutionary democrat, was born in Nor Nakhijevan. Collaborating with the leaders of the Armenian revival movement, including Stepan Voskanyan (1825-1901), editor of the biweekly review *Arevmutk* (Occident), in Paris, and Harutiun Svachian (1831-1874), editor of *Meghu* (Bee), in Constantinople, Nalbandian promoted Armenian revolution, cultural nationalism and agrarianism influenced by the Enlightenment and the Italian unification. His long travels through Europe and in Eastern and Western Armenia allowed him to establish contacts with a number of illustrious people. He also participated in the underground organization *Земля и воля* (Land and Liberty) with Nikolai Chernyshevsky. He was a passionate revolutionary and certainly took many risks. After that letter addressed to Harutiun Svachian, he was arrested by the tsarist government

unification, mused: “Etna and Vesuvius are erupting; is there any smoke left in the old volcano of Ararat?”²¹⁵ Levon Abrahamian, an ethnographer, remarked that Ararat is physically present for Armenians in reality (there are many Erevan houses and settlements in the Ararat plain), as well as symbolically (e.g., on Armenia’s coats of arms), and culturally (e.g., in architectural depictions).²¹⁶

The second phase of this chapter considers the “atrocities”²¹⁷ image: Aivazovsky’s visual responses to the Armenian massacres targeting the Ottoman Armenians during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1908) between 1894 and 1897.²¹⁸ The “atrocities” images consist of five surviving images by Aivazovsky, four of which—including two engravings of sketches reproduced in the massive illustrated Russian-language tome *Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам* [Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey —hereafter cited as *Fraternal Help*]²¹⁹—were compiled and edited by the Moscow-based Russian–Armenian reformist and lawyer Grigor Djanshiev (1851–1900).²²⁰

and imprisoned in St. Petersburg (1862-1865) and banished to Kamyshin, in Saratov, where he died in 1866. Hacıyan, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 290–291. For more information on Nalbandian see: Sarkis Shmavonian, “Mikayel Nalbandian and Non-Territorial Armenian Nationalism,” *Armenian Review* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 35–56.

²¹⁵ Hacıyan, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 292.

²¹⁶ Levon Abrahamian, “Dancing around the Mountain: Armenian Identity through Rites of Solidarity,” in *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*, ed. Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (Berlin: Lit Verlag; London: Global Distributer, 2008), 167–188.

²¹⁷ To see the recent publication about this subject: Vazken Khatchig Davidian, “Image of an Atrocity.”

²¹⁸ For an introduction on this massacre, see: Christopher Walker, “From Sasun to the Ottoman Bank: Turkish Armenians in the Mid-1890s,” *Armenian Review*, vol. 31, no. 3–123 (March 1979): 228–264; Christopher Walker, *Armenia: Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 136–176; Robert Melson, “A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894–1896,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (July 1982): 481–509; Arman J. Kirakosian, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894–1896: US Media Testimony* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); Arman J. Kirakosian, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894–1896: British Media Testimony* (Dearborn, MI: University of Michigan–Dearborn, 2008).

²¹⁹ Grigor Djanshiev, *Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам* [Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey], 1st ed. (Moscow, 1897), 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1898). I would like to thank the staff of National Library of Russia at St. Petersburg’s Rare Collection to organize access to the originals of both editions.

²²⁰ Davidian, “Image of an Atrocity,” 42.

Heeding calls by Constantinople Patriarch Maghakia Ormanian for funds for the urgent provision of shelter and food for the thousands of orphaned children²²¹ in the aftermath of the massacres, *Fraternal Help* was initiated, edited and published by Djanshiev and remains uniquely impressive in terms of its place among Russian–Armenian responses to the massacres.²²² Although Vazken Davidian’s recent publication provides a detailed interpretation of these sources, this chapter presents these visual responses as well as personal correspondences of Aivazovsky as rare and significant documents of Russian–Armenian artistic and intellectual engagement with Armenian national identity. The documentation of these unique works provides a genuine understanding of how Armenian victimhood was perceived by Russian–Armenian intellectuals, including artists. It is also important to demonstrate that these rare sources can be helpful in turning one’s gaze toward the more critical and more integrated visual representations of Russian–Armenian artists and considering them in relation to the increasing development of distinctive national identities.

The Nationalization of Nature: Depictions of Mount Ararat

I went out of the tent into the fresh morning air. The sun was rising. Against the clear sky one could see a white-snowcapped, twin-peaked mountain. ‘What mountain is that?’ I asked, stretching myself, and heard the answer: ‘that’s Ararat.’ What a powerful effect a few syllables can have! Avidly I looked at the Biblical

²²¹ Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 132–136. According to sources, receipts of the two editions were approximately 100,000 rubles transmitted by the Russian Ambassador to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and helped to establish 12 orphanages across areas of massacre: see Davidian, “The Figure of the *Bantoukhd Hamal* of Constantinople,” 6.

²²² Ibid. The 1898 edition runs to 920-plus pages, divided into three parts: Introduction (24 texts including the forewords of both editions and reviews of first edition), Part I (largest section with 74 texts including scholarly essays on Armenian history, literature, music, theatre, architecture, archaeology, etc.); Part II (comprising of 25 reports, essays, articles, original works and translations on the current situation in Ottoman Armenia and the recent Massacres, with some 130 other texts, 170 images, and contributions by many representatives of Russian literature academia, and sciences. It is worth noting that the volume received universal acclaim in the Russian Armenian and Ottoman Armenian press outside the Ottoman Empire.

mountain, saw the ark moored to its peak with the hope of regeneration and life, saw both raven and dove, flying forth, the symbols of punishment and reconciliation.”²²³

We may find different ways to construct a symbolic relation between a national community and a particular landscape.²²⁴ In the Ararat-Armenian relationship, popular tales and legends, folk memories, and supposed national virtues are projected onto a specific landscape for the continuous, characterizing elements of national identity. As a way of conjoining landscape and nation, the discourse of the “nationalization of nature”²²⁵ came into use in Aivazovsky’s depictions of Armenian natural national symbols.

It is supported by the verse of the eight chapter of the *Book of Genesis* (Genesis 8:4), after the flood, Noah’s Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. That verse does not state that the Ark landed on Mount Ararat but on the “mountains of Ararat.”²²⁶ Ararat was the Hebrew version of the name—not of the mountain but nearby land of the mountain, its ancient Armenian home. Most scholars and Bible historians believe that Ararat, Armenia’s geographical counterpart, denoted the wider area rather than a mountain today known as Ararat. Mount Ararat is still considered the traditional location of the resting place of Noah’s Ark. Therefore, it is called the “biblical” mountain. Of note here is that the theme of the “Mountains of Ararat” could refer to any part of the country’s mountain mass.²²⁷ In this respect, Mount Ararat is not only a

²²³ In his *Journey to Arzum*, the celebrated Russian poet Alexander S. Pushkin recounted his travels to the Caucasus and Armenia at the time of Russo–Ottoman War of 1828–39. Alexander S. Pushkin, *A Journey to Arzum*, trans. Birgitta Ingemanson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974), 50.

²²⁴ Oliver Zimmer, “Forging the Authentic Nation: Alpine Landscape and Swiss National Identity,” in *Modern Roots: Studies of National Identity*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff and Natividad Gutiérrez (New York: Routledge, 2001), 95–117.

²²⁵ Zimmer, “In Search of Natural Identity,” 643–45; Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer, “In Search of the Authentic Nation: Landscape and National Identity in Canada and Switzerland,” *Nations and Nationalism: Journal of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism* 4, no. 4 (1998): 483–510.

²²⁶ <https://origins.swau.edu/papers/global/noah/eng/index.html>.

²²⁷ Mount Ararat itself is still assumed by Christians to be the biblical mountain, notwithstanding the fact that six other landing places have been proposed. Richard James Fischer, *Historical Genesis: From Adam to Abraham* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 109–111; Vahan M. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia* (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union of America), 2;

symbol of nation, but also a symbol of church (or at least the sacred element of church) and family. A special relationship was established between God and the land of Armenia through Noah. Since all living things, except the inhabitants of the Ark, were destroyed by the flood, Armenia provided the propagation of mankind and, in a symbolic sense, served the kinship role as progenitor.²²⁸

European travelers could find Ararat depicted in their books, including those of many British travelers, who visited the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A French botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort,²²⁹ Scottish artist and diplomat Sir Robert Ker Porter,²³⁰ [figure 49] Baltic German naturalist and traveler Friedrich Parrot,²³¹ [figure 50] British academic and historian James Bryce,²³² and British traveler H. F. B. Lynch,²³³ [figure 51] particularly in connection with the changing discourse on the relation of “culture and imperialism,” showed specific interest in this geography and joined a voyage of exploration, surely seeing it as an unexpected opportunity to further their career.

In 1875, Aivazovsky painted a remarkable landscape known as *Araks River and Ararat* [figure 52]. Long before Aivazovsky painted the work, Scottish artist and diplomat Sir Robert Ker Porter wrote about the same scenery:

A vast plain, peopled with countless villages; the towers and spires of the churches Echmiadzin, arising from amidst them; the glittering waters of the Araxes,

Lloyd R. Bailey, “Ararat,” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills and Roger Aubrey Bullard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 54.

²²⁸ Ingrid Poschmann O’Grady, “Ararat, Etchmiadzin, and Haig (Nation, Church, and Kin): A Study of the Symbol System of American Armenians” (Ph. D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1979), 98.

²²⁹ Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London: Printed for D. Browne, 1718).

²³⁰ Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc. during the Years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1821–1822), 181–186.

²³¹ Friedrich Parrot, *A Journey to Ararat*, trans. William Desborough Cooley (London: Longman, 1845).

²³² James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat, being notes of a vacation tour in the autumn of 1876* (London: Macmillan, 1877).

²³³ H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia, travels and studies: With 197 illustrations, reproduced from photographs and sketches by the author, numerous maps and plans, a bibliography, and a map of Armenia and adjacent countries* (Beirut: Khayats, 1967).

flowing through the fresh green of the vale; and the subordinate range of mountains skirting the base of the awful monument of the antediluvian world. It seemed to stand, a stupendous link in the history of man, uniting the two races of men before and after the flood. But it was not until we had arrived upon the flat plain, that I beheld Ararat in all its amplitude of grandeur.²³⁴

Aivazovsky placed Mount Ararat clearly in the background of his canvas, along with its valley, lending a rigid symmetry to the composition. The mountain, snowcapped and twin-peaked, dominates the painting, holding the blue sky above and the gray line of the River Araks below. Although depictions of the monastery of Echmiadzin²³⁵ and the fortress were visible in the drawings of European travelers, Aivazovsky chose to omit both these and any figurative representation. In fact, the only moving or temporary thing in the entire composition is the river of Araks through the valley to the skirts of the mountain. Aivazovsky's 1875 *Araks River and Ararat* has none of the "iconographic fragments" of his Armenian national-identity; on the contrary, it depicts a deep acalm, with Ararat as a unifying and sublime symbol, devoid of any signs of political messages. Aivazovsky depicted Ararat as an idyllic soil capable of nurturing a natural concept of straightforward, pure character, along with that of free thought and liberty. The natural beauty of the ancient Armenian territories reflected a historical and political merit and the patriotism of the Armenian people; it equated to freedom itself. Regardless of their geographical, linguistic, cultural, or

²³⁴ Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia*, 182.

²³⁵ Echmiadzin, still the center of the Armenian church, was established by St. Gregory the Illuminator around 301 A. D. Gregory, subjected to torture and confined to a pit thirteen years, finally managed to convert the King to Christianity. Gregory is reported to have been a vision of a flood of light near the king's palace and to have been told to build a church on the spot. Although the Patriarchal See has been moved in the course of Armenian history, Echmiadzin has remained as sacred spot and from the fifteenth century again resumed its place as the center of the Armenian church. So, Echmiadzin's link to the nation/state is a very strong one. Poschmann O'Grady, "Ararat," 97–8. Aivazovsky also depicted Gregory the Illuminator. In his painting, *Grigory the Illuminator Consecrates the Palace where the Echmiadzin was Layed*, he represents the moment of laying of the Echmiadzin cathedral. Two years after baptism of Armenian people in 301 A. D. the cathedral was built in the neighborhood of Erevan. All the successors of the Grigory were called Catholicoses and their residence was in Echmiadzin Monastery. The scene is painted against Ararat. Snow-capped Ararat which is mentioned in the Bible in the story of the flood makes the picture more impressive. Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Grigory the Illuminator Consecrates the Palace where the Echmiadzin was Layed*, 1892, oil on canvas, 158 x 97 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia.

political diversity, the vast majority of the Armenians nevertheless saw their own church as their primary source of belonging and their distinguishing language and history. Within the literature of early writers, clerics, and bishops, constant expressions of sorrow for the destruction of the homeland, together with religious and mythical stories, dogmas, and practices claiming to represent God's will, became important explanatory models.²³⁶ In his eighteenth-century travelogue, John Bell described Armenian religiosity in the following way: "... But certain it is, that when the Armenians see this mountain [Ararat], they make a sign of the cross, and say their prayers as is their custom, when they approach any place which they esteem sacred."²³⁷ Such places reflected unity and are considered to be subordinated by social and cultural powers by offering a detailed narrative that represents Armenian history and the causes of dispersion.²³⁸

Aivazovsky painted the Ararat landscape with its imposing mountain—the perennial symbol of Armenia—on about ten different occasions. According to some sources, Aivazovsky was actually the first Armenian painter to depict Ararat. The natural majesty and awesome sanctity of the mountain and its setting as portrayed by Aivazovsky carried a sense of foreboding, with an iconoclastic influence in the world of Armenian art. In 1868, Aivazovsky broke that spell.²³⁹

During a trip to the Caucasus in 1868, the artist created two canvases with the views of Mount Ararat and Lake Sevan. Painted in 1868, *Ararat* [figure 53] depicts a mountain shrouded in mist and the adjacent valley. Attention is drawn to the

²³⁶ Lisa Khachaturian, "Cultivating Nationhood in Imperial Russia: The Periodical Press and the formation of a Modern Eastern Armenian Identity" (Ph. D. diss., Georgetown University, 2005), 221.

²³⁷ See John Bell, *Travels from St. Petersburg, in Russia, to Diverse Parts of Asia*, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1764), 86.

²³⁸ Jivan Tabibian, "Modernization, Political culture, and Political Economy in the Diaspora," *Armenian Review* 31, no. 1 (1983), 20.

²³⁹ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 134.

foreground, where the valley of Ararat is depicted and a camel caravan is passing along the road. Animals are loaded with big and, apparently, heavy bales. All items in the foreground are masterfully and accurately reproduced. Although a mountainous country, ancient fables and legends in Armenia were devoted to the sea. One favorite of folklore heroes, Sanasar,²⁴⁰ was born from the sea, which gave him great strength. Across the generations, a love of the sea took its place as a national feature of Armenia.

The lakes Van and Sevan are still called in Armenian “seas.”²⁴¹ Aivazovsky’s *Lake Sevan* of 1869 [figure 54] sums up his preoccupation with the painterly possibilities of water. The depiction of an island serves as a narrow middle ground, a device to mark the transition between the pinkish sky and sunset and its reflection in the deep azure of Lake Sevan.

Notable in this context is that Aivazovsky never actually visited the lands of Ararat. In November 1868, during his stay in Tiflis, Aivazovsky received a letter from Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg IV (1812–1882), inviting him to visit Echmiadzin. “The news of your arrival in Tiflis made us very happy,” wrote the Catholicos. “You approached us, and if you think of unforgettable holy places from there, then fill your hearts with joy.” The Catholicos wished the artist health and long life: “Always be happy, be the pride of a respectable kind, and God-given talent to capture wonderful views of nature on the canvas.”²⁴² The letter, written with paternal

²⁴⁰ Sanasar and Baghdasar: two brothers founded the town of Sassoon. Sanasar was considered the ancestor of several generations of heroes of Sassoon. David Adams Leeming, “Armenian Mythology,” in *The Oxford Companion to world Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

²⁴¹ As indicated by Shahen Khachatrian, Armenians have associated the sea with freedom and rescue since ancient times, for which reason they strove for the coasts—including those of Cilicia and Crimea—when they had to leave their motherland. Khachatrian thus also suggests that this tradition could explain the appearance of modern Armenian maritime painters, in a group of which Aivazovsky was the founder. Khachatrian, *Aivazovsky Well-Known and Unknown*, 32–33.

²⁴² Catholicos Gevorg IV’s letter to Ivan K. Aivazovsky, November 30, 1868, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 102; 153–154. I thank Vağarşag Seropyan for Armenian translations.

care, deeply influenced the artist. On December 18, 1868, he replied in Armenian with the same cordiality:

Holy Father and Blessed Master! With love, having received the letter and blessing of your Holiness, I answer: Although I should have come to an unforgettable native/homeland a long time ago, in order to rejoice at the sight of it, to win the love and blessings of your holiness however, the cruel winter blizzards keep me in Tiflis. But when spring comes, in April, with the blessing of your holiness, I will certainly fulfil the vow that I have given for a long time. I remain a humble servant and son of your holiness and the Father of the whole people.²⁴³

Aivazovsky could not fulfill his promise to visit Echmiadzin. With the thought of the upcoming visit to Armenia, Aivazovsky returned to Feodosia, where in April and May, he painted pictures of his sketches brought from the Caucasus. However, circumstances dictated otherwise, and an urgent invitation to attend the opening of the Suez Canal²⁴⁴ meant he did not visit the land of his ancestors on that occasion. Nonetheless, he resumed with Armenian subjects in his spirit and imagination and in his paintings many times during his life. Although dreaming of visiting the homeland of his ancestors, depicting these symbolic landmarks through his imagination is not altogether surprising given the practical necessities of the process of building national consciousness, but it demonstrates an intellectual standing on the part of the artist

²⁴³ Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to Catholicos Gevorg IV, December 18, 1868, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 154–155.

²⁴⁴ The impressive visual frame of the inauguration of the Suez Canal was intended to represent the canal as a modern wonder of the world achieved by European intelligence and technology. In the autumn of 1869, Aivazovsky went to Sevastopol, where he joined the tourist group that had arrived from St. Petersburg and together with them went on a steamer to the Mediterranean Sea, and then to Egypt. Prominent state and public figures from many European countries, in particular, the French Empress Eugene and the Austrian Emperor Franz-Joseph, arrived at the celebrations to mark the opening of the channel. Together with one of the prominent Russian admirals F. P. Litke, Aivazovsky had a chance to observe the opening ceremony of the Suez—the shortest sea route connecting the Western world with the Orient. At the same time, the artist made sketches in his travel album. An impressive painting of Aivazovsky, *Suez Canal* depicts the entrance to the channel through which sailboats and small ships sail. In the center of the picture there is a pillar striving into the sky at the entrance to the canal, past which a caravan of sailboats slowly passes. Aivazovsky portrayed the Suez Canal in broad-water against the background of flat space: in the foreground are large and small sailboats and several ships, one of them is a steamer. In the lower right corner, you can see the front of a large sailboat, whose passengers congratulate the first visitors of the canal. The spectacle is beautiful and impressive! Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Suez Canal*, 1876, oil on canvas, 34.2 x 44 cm, Sotheby's London. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 137–38.

commensurate with his traditional standing in the second half of nineteenth-century Armenian society and with the received status of his art as a manifestation of his intersected identities.

Ararat and *Lake Sevan* are important symbols in the imagined history of the Armenian nation. As indicated above, no Armenian painter had previously depicted Mount Ararat, its valley, and Lake Sevan. Aivazovsky was the first Armenian, in Tiflis in 1868, to depict the ancestral homeland, subsequently attracting the attention of young artists to the picturesque nature of Armenia. Indeed, Aivazovsky again painted the majestic two-summit mountain in 1882, naming it *The Valley of Mount Ararat*.²⁴⁵ Moreover, he signed his name in Armenian, as “*Aivazian, 1882*,” on the rock at the bottom and to the left of the painting, as well as his usual Russian signature.²⁴⁶ In 1885, he signed another, *Mount Ararat* [figure 55], both in Armenian and Russian.

Framed by a Bible: Depictions of Ararat as a Holy Mountain, *Descent of Noah from Ararat*

In 1887, Aivazovsky once again painted Mount Ararat, this time with the biblical theme of “after the deluge.” He named it simply *Descent of Noah from Ararat*. In this painting, “the vast emptiness of the world-universe after the Deluge, the majesty of Mount Ararat, and the chilling serenity of the disciplined descent of the survivors, all breathe biblical inevitability. Moreover [...] Noah’s group has chosen to bend the path of the caravan in a semicircle [...] The Patriarchal group is pushed further away

²⁴⁵ Although I could not reach the image of this painting, Nikolai Barsamov mentions that this picture exhibited in Moscow during the Exhibition of Union of Soviet Artist in 1950 and now in Private Collection. Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Valley of Mount Ararat*, 1882, oil on canvas, 69 x 102 cm, Private Collection. See: Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 203.

²⁴⁶ Pars Tuğlacı also mentions that Aivazovsky preferred to sign the paintings which depicted the Armenian themed as “Aivazian.” He further indicates that *The Virgin and Child*, 1891 which was executed for an Armenian Church in Feodosia and *Walking on the Waters*, 1873, which was drawn for the Simferopol Armenian Church, now both are located in the Aivazovsky National Art Gallery in Feodosia are example to paintings that Aivazovsky signed them also as “Aivazian.” Pars Tuğlacı, *Ayvazovski Türkiye’de* (İstanbul: İnkılâp ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1983), 16.

from its followers, in an anticlockwise motion, towards the right, thus creating a guiding momentum for the bemused survivors in their descent.”²⁴⁷ In 1890, he showed this large-scale painting, the depiction of the biblical mount literally lit by divine light, at the salon of Paul Durand-Ruel during his Paris exhibition, in which Emperor Napoleon III and his wife were among the visitors. The exhibition lasted more than three weeks. A journalist of the Armenian periodical *Bazmavep*²⁴⁸ reported that in a Paris exhibition of Aivazovsky’s paintings in 1889, one of the visitors recalled: “I carefully looked at the pictures, when the artist suddenly approached me and asked: Surely, you are looking for an Armenian motive in my paintings? Yes, sir, you guessed my thoughts correctly, I replied. He led me around the hall and said: Here it is, our Armenia! This was the picture *Descent of Noah from Ararat*. [figure 56].”²⁴⁹

The panorama created here by Aivazovsky, around Noah’s Old Testament story and his kin, him of guiding the animals from the Ark, their postdiluvian place of rest, is of a common history preserved by apparently eternal, uncorrupted truths. This implied message may have persuaded many of Aivazovsky’s admirers, but it was also an anathema to others, such as Repin, who claimed that art’s duty in Russia was constantly questioned and not sconvincing. Aivazovsky’s Armenian-themed paintings can be seen to correspond broadly to the rise of a national consciousness among the Armenian people, which is also directly analogous to the social change not only in Russia but also in the Ottoman Empire and in Armenians who lived in the world of

²⁴⁷ For a detailed description of this painting, see <https://keghart.org/turner-aivazovsky-an-auspicious-encounter/>.

²⁴⁸ *Bazmavep* is an academic journal covering Armenian studies. It is published by the Mechitarist monastery in San Lazzaro, Venice, Italy. *Bazmavep* was established by Aivazovsky’s brother Gabriel Aivazovsky and Ghevond Alishan in 1843. Hacikyan, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 57 and Bogos Levon Zekian, “Բազմավեպ.” հայագիտական հանդեսներու նահապետը (150-ամյա հոբելյանին առթիվ), [“Bazmavep.” The Forefather of the Armenological Journals (dedicated to 150th anniversary)] *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* 1 (1995): 103–110. I am grateful to His Excellency Levon Zekian to share his valuable comments with me and provided to access this source.

²⁴⁹ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 203.

both empires. The analogy is important since it gives a sense of continuous connection within the changing status of the Russo–Ottoman world of the nineteenth century. One of the most striking aspects of a culturally and realistically relative assessment of Aivazovsky’s paintings is how closely they match current social and political philosophy of the geography, covering, partially, the Ottoman and Russian empires and the Armenian territories. In this regard, both the biblical and the picturesque depictions of Armenian landmarks might be seen as the paradigmatic expression of an artist aware of the rise of a national consciousness among Armenians, yet who has an in-depth understanding of Russian imperial discourse and has an association with Armenians during the long nineteenth century.

Portrayal of an Atrocity: Aivazovsky’s Responses to the Ottoman-Armenian Massacre of 1895–97

In the second part of this chapter, I consider some aspects of the visual representation of Ottoman–Armenian victimhood, with special reference to Aivazovsky’s responses to the Armenian massacres as systematically published in the massive, illustrated Russian-language tome *Fraternal Help*, compiled and edited by Grigor Djanshiev.²⁵⁰ Recent scholarly examinations²⁵¹ of Djanshiev’s accounts of Armenian victimhood have emphasized its formative contribution to the

²⁵⁰ In his unpublished dissertation, Vazken H. Davidian clearly explains the aims of *Fraternal Help* in three points: firstly, the journal organized philanthropic activities and helped to raise funds for survivors of victimhood; secondly, it raised cultural and political awareness of Ottoman rule; and lastly—as Davidian emphasized, criticizing the rising Russian nationalism under the reign of Alexander III—it informed and reminded Russian audiences of the loyalty of Armenians and portrayed them as victims of Ottoman misrule. Davidian, “The Representation of the Figure,” 34.

²⁵¹ In her article about Ottoman-born Armenian painter Panos Terlemezian, Gizem Tongo has described *Fraternal Help* as a “Russian propagandistic publication.” Gizem Tongo, “Artist and Revolutionary: Panos Terlemezian as an Ottoman Armenian Painter,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 6 (December 2015): 140–141. Indeed, the volume aimed to shape public opinion and promoted a political agenda, as Vazken Davidian emphasizes, although characterizing it as “Russian,” because of the language used, may incorrectly be taken to indicate that it was simply sponsored by an/or supportive of the Russian state and overlooks the Russian Armenian agency in the production and its distribution. The choice of the Russian language rather than Eastern Armenian ensured the widest possible constituency within Tsarist borders. Davidian, “Image of an Atrocity,” 64.

historiographies of ethnicity and nationality as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. This process has also entailed analogous (re)consideration of the complementary visual material. In light of this important and valuable source, I want to return to an art-historical focus, concentrating on a group of major in-massacre paintings by Aivazovsky, to consider them as historical or historicizing artifacts that corresponded with and answered the development of the national discourse of Armenian history in Russian culture at the time. Throughout these paintings, Aivazovsky demonstrated how the conceptualization of history was challenged, and to an important extent, redirected by the encounter with the proto-nationalist Armenian culture. Conversely, through reference to a historicizing mode of pictorial representation, Aivazovsky offered a tentative, but clearly evident, visual representation of the Armenian massacre, one substantially different to other artists because of its relationship with the contemporary debate concerning the Armenians' situation in the Ottoman Empire, a debate that was amplified and complicated by the experience of a massacre. His claim to authority for his representations of Armenian victimhood derived from the fact that he was well informed about the various incidents in the Ottoman Empire.²⁵² As a side benefit, his lands in Crimea provided him with close, first-hand access to the testimony of refugees, increasing his ability to comment, via the power of painting, on history and to combine politics and art in service of national consciousness. The stories of Armenian refugees, from Trabzon, Iğdır and from other areas of the Black Sea coast of the Ottoman Empire, about the extermination of innocent people caused Aivazovsky personal distress: in a "Letter from Feodosia," signed T. Khanoyan and published in the influential Russian–Armenian liberal and Russophile daily *Mshak*²⁵³ [*Cultivator*]

²⁵² Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 233–234.

²⁵³ *Mshak* [The cultivator] was formatted as a newspaper and circulating first as weekly (1872–1875), later as a tri-weekly (1876–1877), and finally, as daily paper beginning in 1878. It was founded by Grigor Artzruni (1845–1892). *Mshak* played a prominent role in advocating social democracy and

on 5 May 1900, immediately after the artist's death, the author describes Aivazovsky's response:

The artist's face was darkened when he listened to the stories of Armenian refugees about the monstrous and terrible pogroms that took place in Turkey in 1896' – said an eyewitness – about the capturing of his sisters and beating his sons. The artist was tormented, understanding that he could not help his half-brothers, and only calmed him with the words: 'Do not despair! Work! Perhaps one day the dark horizon will clear up and you will see a bright dawn ... Ah!' In the days of the Armenian pogroms, the refugees who told Aivazovsky about the suffering they had endured left his house mentally lightened and with a soothing heart.²⁵⁴

Going beyond consolations and words of hope, Aivazovsky helped many refugees settle in Crimean villages and cities. With his mediation, they were given new plots of land and places to live. And to some, especially the poor, Aivazovsky opened up the "Sheikh-Mamai," lands of his estate, giving them a place to live and work.²⁵⁵ He opened his doors to Armenians who had fled the massacre, bringing them in supplies and allowing them to settle in and start new lives. "It is shameful to turn away from your own people," Vasily S. Krivenko²⁵⁶ wrote, quoting the painter's own words, "especially so small in number and so oppressed." Further on, he wrote, "The source of painful feelings for Aivazovsky was the thought of those acts of violence which the Turks had committed on the defenseless and wretched Armenians. He did not stop believing, did not stop hoping that people's hearts would be moved, that Europe, at

initiating reforms in labor organizations. Artzruni in particular recognized the significance of how frequency of a journal for national prestige; he often compared his subscription with European periodicals, and worked hard to upgrade his journal *Mshak*'s status from a weekly to a daily. He believed that national progress could be measured by a rise in the circulation frequency of a journal. Hacıyan, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 69; Lisa Khachaturian, "Cultivating Nationhood in Imperial Russia," 37.

²⁵⁴ Davidian, "Image of an Atrocity," 48; Sargsyan, *The Life of Great Marine Painter*, 234.

²⁵⁵ Not content with only such help, the artist set about organizing new exhibitions and selling his paintings, the proceeds from which he transferred to the Foundation for Assistance to Armenians affected by the pogroms. In addition, according to his projects, and sometimes at his own expense, he built chapels for refugees in different parts of the Crimea. Sargsyan, *The Life of Great Marine Painter*, 235; Khachaturian, *Aivazovsky Well-Known and Unknown*, 47; Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 93–95

²⁵⁶ Vasily S. Krivenko (1854–1931), the writer and public figure who was a contributor to the newspaper *Новое Время* (*New Time*), was also a frequent guest of Aivazovsky and wrote a book of memoirs about him. Tatyana Gayduk, "Aivazovsky's House and Guests," *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 1, no. 54 (2017),

last, would stand up for them and not let the Turks completely destroy the poor people.”²⁵⁷ Aivazovsky’s assistance to the Armenian people was broad and versatile. A wave of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire had spread over the Caucasus, the Crimea, and the southern region of the Russian Empire. Aivazovsky donated all funds received from the exhibition of paintings to the themes of the bloody events in the Ottoman Empire.²⁵⁸

Such profound sadness permeates a missive of 8 September 1896, written by Aivazovsky in response to a letter from the Catholicos of All Armenians²⁵⁹ Mgrdich Khrimian (1820–1907), affectionately known as *Hayrik*.²⁶⁰ Written soon after the Ottoman Bank Incident²⁶¹, as Vazken Davidian emphasizes, following the massacre in Constantinople, and perhaps referring to these events, the letter shows the great sorrow of Aivazovsky.²⁶² Also, as one of the surviving exchanging correspondences between

²⁵⁷ Memoirs of Krivenko [Мемуары В. С. Кривенко], RGALI [Russian State Archive of Literature and Art], fund 785, op. 1, unit xp. 1, pp. 34–51. Until 1992, this archive was called as Central State Literary Archive (TSGLA). Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 94. I am grateful to Kseniya Venediktova to provide me to access these sources in Russian archives.

²⁵⁸ As well as from the realization of these paintings, to the relief fund for the most-needy Armenian families. Probably, in addition to these funds, he sent money directly to the Ottoman Empire, as there was gratitude from the Russian Embassy in Constantinople, in which Aivazovsky is informed that the money donated by him in favor of the Armenians was sent to the Consul General in Erzurum, where it was distributed to the most-affected Armenians. Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 95.

²⁵⁹ Supreme Head of Armenian Orthodox Church, residing in Echmiadzin in Russian Armenia.

²⁶⁰ Hayrik means “little father” in Armenian. Mgrdich Khrimian was a fervent advocate of reform and a great educator who published the first Armenian-language newspaper in Ottoman Armenia (*Artsiv Vaspurakani* or *Eagle of Van*), aimed at sensitizing the capital’s elite population to the provincial plight. For Khrimian, people’s reformation and wellbeing were above all other concerns, and he aligned with regional mass interests. As such, he also criticized the oppressive regimes of Sultan Abdülhamid II and Tsar Nicholas II and other powerful Armenians in Istanbul. Tongo, “Artist and Revolutionary Tongo,” 140–142. Gerard Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 59–62; Hacikyan, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*, 236–238.

²⁶¹ A party of some 20 Dashnak militants raided the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul on 26 August 1896 and kept some of the workers for ransom, announcing that if their demands were not met, they would blow up the bank. For more information, see: Edhem Eldem, “26 Ağustos 1896 ‘Banka Vakası’ ve 1896 ‘Ermeni Olayları’” *Tarih ve Toplum* 5 (spring 2007): 113–146; For a firsthand account of the attack on the Ottoman Bank, written by the Dashnak leader, see: Armen Garo, Osmanlı Bankası: *Armen Garo’nun Anıları* (Istanbul: Belge Uluslararası Yayıncılık, 2009).

²⁶² Davidian, “Image of an Atrocity,” 48.

Khrimian and the artist, this document illuminates intriguing indications into the two men's responses to the massacres:

Blessed Lord, His Holiness the Patriarch!

I was greatly honored by your holy message. [...] Holy Sovereign! The long-time dream of my heart was to visit your Supreme Throne, to be at your feet, and I'm keen for God to get the means to successfully fulfil my dream. God's anointed! You have made me a very sensitive and wonderful proposal – to paint a red paint over a picture of the Armenian massacre against the background of blood-drenched mountains and the grief-stricken *Hayrik* over the ruins. If it pleases the Almighty to give me life and a little longer, the day will come when I will fulfil this touching offer. (The proposal of the Catholicos Khrimyan to paint a picture on the subject of the extermination of Armenians in Turkey was accepted by the artist.)

Yes, His Holiness the Patriarch, my heart is deeply hurt by an unprecedented and unheard of massacre perpetrated against the Armenians. Your Excellency over there, we over here, and each in his own place, bitterly mourn the lost souls of our unfortunate congeners and call upon God's mercy. My wife and I bow down before your holiness, we attach ourselves to your holy hand wishing for more days of consolation.²⁶³

Aivazovsky's letters, written in a formal tone, show great respect and appreciation for Khrimian. These two men, perhaps the most honorable Armenian elders of their era, met the year before when Aivazovsky hosted Catholicos on his land, on his return journey from St. Petersburg after his failed mission to facilitate the intervention of Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) to stop the massacres.²⁶⁴ As Count Dimitri A. Milyutin²⁶⁵ wrote in his diary, Aivazovsky was deeply grieved by the position of the Armenians in Turkey, accusing Russian policy-makers, and Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky²⁶⁶ in particular.²⁶⁷ Sargsyan describes Khrimian's arrival in

²⁶³ Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to Mgrdich Khrimian, September 8, 1896, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 277–278.

²⁶⁴ Davidian, "Image of an Atrocity," 49.

²⁶⁵ Dimitri Alekseyevich Milyutin (1816–1912), Minister of War for two decades until 1881 and the last Field Marshal of Imperial Russia in 1898, carried out sweeping military reforms of the Russian army in the 1860s and 70s. In his own Crimean estate in Simeiz the retiree Milyutin was often visited by numerous colleagues and disciples as well as by Ivan K. Aivazovsky.

²⁶⁶ Prince Aleksey Lobanov-Rostovsky (1824–1896) was one of several imperial Russian officials who proposed the policy of "Armenia without Armenians." He supported the Ottoman integrity. For "Armenia without Armenians" see: Ronal Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 180; Manoug Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1912–1920* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995), 23.

²⁶⁷ Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 95. I, personally, could not gain access to the original document of the diary which is in the Russian State Library, Moscow.

Feodosia and the celebratory atmosphere surrounding his visit. He held a church service in St. Sarkis' church, then went to Surb-Hach Monastery and stayed for a week in the painter's house as a guest. Aivazovsky is recorded as having sketched Khrimian during that visit, which was probably the basis for his full-length portrait of the Catholicos [figure 57], dated 1895. However, the trip may have had certain benefits for both men, they almost certainly did discuss the massacres as well, as Sargsyan suggests: "These days, in the house of the maestro, questions were raised that worried Armenians throughout the region."²⁶⁸

Aivazovsky expressed his indignation at Ottoman violence in his works. Responding to these events, he painted large-scale works depicting awful tragedies. Of his paintings on these themes, the most prominent one is *The Massacre of the Armenians in Trebizond in 1895* [figure 58]. The canvas depicts the coastal region of Trebizond (inhabited by Armenians) to which Ottoman troops arrive by boat; the Ottoman soldiers kill the Armenian men on the shore and carry off an Armenian woman. Late nineteenth-century thought had it as axiomatic that a "de-humanization" of the enemy and the Romantic idealization of the nation (Armenian, in this instance) could induce the sympathetic imagination of the viewer, especially through scenes of pity or distress; experienced vicariously at an aesthetic remove, these could certainly generate a national as well as Romantic sensibility. Such anxieties over the massacres through the gaze of "Romantic idealization" of a nation are not culturally isolated, of course, but pertain to a much deeper and long-standing discursive matrix concerning Armenians' apprehension of Ottoman rule.

Since the nineteenth century, Ottoman–Armenian relations, specifically the representation of the Ottoman "yoke," has undergone significant scholarly scrutiny.

²⁶⁸ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 226–227.

What I want to draw attention to is the way in which, in particular circumstances of the late nineteenth century Ottoman–Russian–Armenian world, such deep-rooted attitudes toward the massacres became conjoined with the nationalistic perceptions of both the Ottoman/Turkish and Armenian nations and in particular how the generalized art-historical and iconographic analyses of Aivazovsky’s atrocity images were filtered through specific national concerns. Thus, in Armenian art historiography, it is uncritically accepted that *Trebizond in 1895* was “created on the basis of true occurrences” where “the subject has been lifted from reality.” Although Aivazovsky was not an eyewitness to the massacre of Trebizond in 1895, Minas Sargsyan claims that “Aivazovsky correctly and in greatest detail has presented not only [the] seaside landscape of Trebizond, that he had seen in the past, but also the tragedy occurring,” hence “depicting [a] true event which he learned from the newspaper reports and from testimonies of refugees who fled to the Crimea through the Black Sea.”²⁶⁹

However, does *Trebizond in 1895* depict “reality?” Is it surprising that the painting was the subject of such a prolific and executed amount of visual imagery of the artist’s concern? Following closely in the footsteps of the reports of eyewitnesses, Vazken Davidian argued that the events indicated in the reports do not correspond to the scene depicted in *Trebizond in 1895*, that the massacre illustrated in this painting is not a representation of the massacre that took place in the city in 1895.²⁷⁰ Also, Davidian continues to consider this painting and other atrocity images of Aivazovsky as “conforming to a lifelong preoccupation with painting the sea [...] and [proposing] a subjective and imagined dramatization of history presented as spectacle.”²⁷¹ I agree with Davidian that Aivazovsky’s composition plays entirely upon the sentimental

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 233–234.

²⁷⁰ Davidian, “Image of an Atrocity,” 53.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 44.

drama of the event, dispensing altogether with reference to the seascape context. Yet, rather than redeploying an existing building for the purposes of nationalistic display of massacres, Aivazovsky proposes the construction of a new, ideally conceived structure on the subject of Armenian Ottoman victimhood. The panorama thus provided aesthetically satisfying visuality (in the sublimity of the scene of a seascape), combined with a highly moralized criticism concerning the dehumanization of the Ottoman rulers. It offered a minor prototype for Armenian nationalist artistic ideology, and it is worth reiterating that Aivazovsky's work became available to many viewers, thus crucial to the national memorial, so the full significance of Aivazovsky's atrocity images are appreciated by relating them to this larger discursive framework Nikolai Barsamov also mentions that in 1898, Aivazovsky sent those pictures to Moscow for exhibition, and the tragedy of their content was noted in an article on the exhibition of these paintings: "One cannot look at the picture of *Trebizond: Beating of Armenians in 1895* without a shudder and tears."²⁷²

On the subject of the Armenian massacre, Aivazovsky created the paintings *Turks Load Armenians onto the Ships* and *Turks Offload the Armenians into the Sea of Marmara*. Only sketches of them reached readers through the support of *Fraternal Help*, the first publication within an Armenian context to reproduce atrocity images. These comprised engravings of a painting and two sketches by Aivazovsky. Considering the elderly artist's international fame, the importance of his active involvement in *Fraternal Help* cannot be overstated. For the 1897 edition, Djanshiev wrote that "for the current collection Aivazovsky has sent four drawings from Nice: *Turks Load Armenians onto the Ships* [figure 59], *Turks Offload the Armenians into*

²⁷² Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 95.

the Sea of Marmara [figure 60], *Descent of Noah from Ararat*,²⁷³ *Ship at the Sea*.²⁷⁴

A footnote was added in 1898: “With the kind permission of the illustrious artist we are reproducing the painting which was shown in his last exhibition *Massacre of Armenians at Trebizond*.”²⁷⁵ The special respect awarded to him by Djanshiev is reflected throughout both editions, making Aivazovsky the sole participating artist in *Fraternal Help* to have his biography, portrait, and a facsimile of signature published. In stark contrast to the plethora of traditional representations of Ottoman–Armenian suffering, Aivazovsky’s images are the earliest by a Russian–Armenian artist to provide direct depictions of specific, recorded events of mass violence.

Set against the backdrop of Constantinople, *Turks Load Armenians onto the Ship* depicts a crowd being moved onto (one or maybe two) large boats, with a larger vessel waiting. This is an orderly operation, but conducted by a group of armed men, bayonets held high. *Turks Offload the Armenians into the Sea of Marmara* depicts the human cargo being violently unloaded into a calm sea. Here, there is panic and fear, a sense of struggle as some of the victims plead for mercy or try to swim or at least remain afloat.

An 1898 edition of *Fraternal Help* also included Aivazovsky’s sketch *Descent of Noah from Ararat*.²⁷⁶ An 1897 edition of the tome included the painting Aivazovsky’s 1889 dated painting *Descent of Noah from Ararat* [mentioned in the first part of this chapter, and see figure 56] It is interesting to note that while Aivazovsky was depicting the annihilation of the Armenians in the atrocity images of Ottoman

²⁷³ *Descent of Noah from Ararat* included in 1897, but apparently not in 1898: Djanshiev, *Fraternal Help*, 1897, Part 1, 501.

²⁷⁴ It appears that only three were reproduced in the 2nd edition.

²⁷⁵ Djanshiev, *Fraternal Help*, 1898, pg. 426, fn. 2.

²⁷⁶ Vazken Davidian indicates that Aivazovsky “revisited his 1887 monumental canvas of biblical myth” which is reproduced in *Fraternal Help* 1897 edition. A closer look at sources reveals a different picture, though. Aivazovsky did this picture in 1889. Khachatrian, *Aivazovsky Well-Known and Unknown*, 136; Nikolai Novouspensky, *Иван Айвазовский. Великие Мастера Живописи* [Aivazovsky. Great Painters] (St. Petersburg, 2010); <http://www.gallery.am/hy/database/item/296/>.

massacres, this sketch [figure 61] and the painting allegorically represent the salvation of the Armenians after the massacres. The illustration of the patriarch leading his kin to salvation from the Ark after the deluge provides a compelling allegory of deliverance: as it was for humankind after the great flood, the salvation of the Ottoman Armenians would come after the massacres in the foothills of the great mountain, their eventual safe harbor under Russian protection. However, my further research has revealed this sketch could be another impressive painting of Aivazovsky called *Descent of Noah from Ararat after the Great Flood* (stylistically very similar to the 1889 painting) [figure 62], dated 1898 and located in the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul.²⁷⁷ What I want to suggest here is that such an elusive referential force was biblical, and the ancient root of the nation was communicated and understood effectively through visual culture and its related forms in the formulation of nineteenth-century national identities, and Aivazovsky preferred to draw, for the second time, this biblical mythical story to consider something of the relationship between the ancient root and identity in the Russo-Armenian world, specifically regarding the ways in which the visualization of Ararat functioned as a means of articulating the emerging national identity that was seriously under attack toward the end of the nineteenth century.

While *The Massacre of the Armenians in Trebizond in 1895* and its reproduction appear to have caught the public imagination and the critics' attention, two engraved sketches and two paintings, *Quiet Night: Armenians Thrown Overboard*

²⁷⁷ I had an opportunity to see this painting at the Patriarchate. As far as I could research, only in Pars Tuğlacı's book is there information about this work. Tuğlacı, *Aivazovsky Türkiye'de*, 62. I suggest that Aivazovsky drew the subject of Noah and Mount Ararat for the second time in a similar context. However, I could not find any information how and under which circumstances this second image came to Istanbul. Yet, a closer look to the sketch and the painting reveals that the 1898-dated painting is the finished version of the sketch that was published in *Fraternal Help*. The scarcity of the sources about this painting can also explain why G. Djanshiev elected to include the 1889 painting of the artist; he probably did not see the 1898 version.

[figure 63] and *Night: Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara* [figure 64], depicts a mass drowning, a primary figure in Aivazovsky's visual realization of the massacres. As previously mentioned, Aivazovsky was never an eyewitness to the events of the massacres directly. However, the testimonies, letters, and published materials drew a picture in Aivazovsky's mind. In his book, *Armenia and Its Sorrow*, W. J. Wintle provided a private letter from a resident in Constantinople:

Wholesale deportation became the order of the day. The miserable creatures were driven like cattle to the quays and embarked on Turkish vessel, professedly destined for Asia Minor. The ugliest rumors are abroad as to the fate of these people. It is even stated that they were simply thrown into the sea; certainly nothing has – at the time of writing – been heard them.²⁷⁸

Meanwhile, it is not certain whether the two surviving atrocity paintings, also produced in 1897, were formally visualized as part of a series alongside *Trebizond in 1895*. Some of the Russian-language press presents clues in citing these two surviving paintings. However, partly due to inconsistent captioning of these works, it is probably inaccurate to cite these massacre-related paintings. However, a letter written by Aivazovsky to Karapet Yezov²⁷⁹ about his current exhibition in Odessa gives more reliable information about the paintings:

At the present time in Odessa there is an exhibition of my latest works. Among the sixteen paintings, there are three depicting the cruelty of the Turks, the cutting of Armenians in Trebizond, how they cast live Armenians from the steamer to the Sea of Marmara and the third, as the Turks in Thessaly burn Greeks during the war. The money from the exhibition will be given to the Greeks and Armenians who suffered during this war. When the exhibition closes, I will ask that money for the Armenians is sent to our [Russian] ambassador Zinoviev [...]"²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ W. J. Wintle, *Armenia and Its Sorrows* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1896), 117–118. Also, Vazken Davidian provided an example from this letter and as he emphasizes these sketches narrate the rumors of the letter and that Aivazovsky was well aware of these narrative stories. Davidian, "The Representation of the Figure," 45.

²⁷⁹ Orientalist and educator Karapet Yezov (Yezyan), 1835–1905, was a leading figure in the 1881 establishment of the Sanasarian College in Erzurum, Ottoman Armenia. D. V. Bugayev, *200 лет мруымфа* [200 Years of Triumph] (Simferopol, 2017), 303–305.

²⁸⁰ Ivan K. Aivazovsky's letter to Karapet Yezov, February, 23, 1897, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 281. The exhibition of Aivazovsky's works was opened on December 1, 1897 in Odessa. In this regard, Aivazovsky wrote to the mayor of Odessa in November with a request to promote the construction of the exhibition. This exhibition showed a number of paintings on the massacres of Armenians and Greeks in Turkey, including *Beating Armenians in*

Scholars widely agree that the massacres represented the turning point in the artist's long-term lucrative relationship²⁸¹ with the Ottoman palace. While evidently optimistic²⁸² toward Abdülhamid II,²⁸³ at least until 1882, Aivazovsky became unhappy on at least two occasions²⁸⁴ about being honored by a sultan that pursued anti-

Trabzon, Loading Passengers—Armenians on the Steamer, Unloading Armenians into the Sea of Marmara, Moonlight, Thessaly, European Fleet off the Coast of the Island of Crete, etc. These paintings were also exhibited in Moscow in 1898.

²⁸¹ Greater numbers of civilians, especially artists, would receive such imperial orders as a kind of award. Specifically, starting with the famous *Mecidi* Order of 1852 the Ottomans would gradually start to use such decorations. Several documents from the Ottoman archives show that Aivazovsky was awarded the fourth-class *Mecidi* upon the presentation of one of his paintings to the Sultan. The documents indicate: "As I have understood from the painting he has made and presented to My Imperial Person that Aivazovsky, a Russian subject and renowned artist, is a man of great talent and knowledge, I have honored him by bestowing upon him the insignia of the fourth class of My Imperial Order of the Mecidiye, to which effect My present Imperial diploma has been issued." BOA, A.DVN.MHM. 24/69, 20–30 Cemaziyülahir 1274/January 6–16, 1858; BOA, A.DVN. 129/42, 17 Cemaziyülahir 1274/February 2, 1858. Aivazovsky continued to be awarded by the Ottoman sultan. He would receive a second decoration, in the form of the second-class *Osmâni* from Sultan Abdülaziz in 1874. For more information about the Ottoman decorations see: Edhem Eldem, *Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Center, 2004) and for Aivazovsky's order see page 187.

²⁸² In the journal of *Mecmua-i Ebüzziya*, an Ottoman journalist Ebüzziya Tevfik mentions a memory of Sultan Abdülhamid II soon after his enthronement. Abdülhamid was deciding on spaces for the paintings' hangings, and he asked Ebüzziya specifically about Aivazovsky: the Sultan said, "[...] These paintings were made by Aivazovsky. They were commissioned by Sultan Abdülaziz. Especially that was painted upon my uncle's sketch [Sultan Abdülaziz's sketch] Sarkis Bey [an Armenian architect Sarkis Balyan] indicated that kind of depiction quality has no precedent. Indeed, this [fog] feels like it will be held by hand. What a talented painter is he? Do you recognize him? [...]" Ebüzziya answered: "Yes, Your Excellency, I know him. The photographer Abdullah Frères introduced him. He even gave one of his paintings to me as a compliment." The Sultan asked what kind of man he was: young or old looking. I continued, "I saw him five years ago. He was a man in his 45s at the time. He looked pretty cute. His moustache and chin are shaved. If you would not know he is a Russian, it a quite possible to think that he is an American or English. He speaks Caucasian Turkish." For a complete version of Ebüzziya Tevfik's memoir with Sultan Abdülhamid, see: <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/17964>. I would like to thank Dr. Deniz Türker, who directed me to this source. Also, it is interesting to note the comment, "If you would not know he is a Russian it a quite possible to think that he is an American or English." The Russian image in the eyes of the Ottomans was generally someone high-tempered, large, and somewhat rough. The writer would have written of Aivazovsky's image as a gentleman, unable to match him as a Russian.

²⁸³ Following the massacres of southeastern Anatolia in 1894–1895, and of Istanbul in 1895 and 1896, the sultan Abdülhamid II had acquired his reputation of a "Red Sultan," which was conveyed throughout most of the western press. As Edhem Eldem emphasizes, this was one of the touchiest issues for the Sultan and his well-known paranoia had been further exacerbated by the events and by the accusations made against him. Eldem, *Pride and Privilege*, 346.

²⁸⁴ BOA, Y.A.HUS 344/51, 06 Şaban 1313/January 22, 1896. The document indicates that during a dinner party he had organized at his home, the Russian Armenian painter Aivazovsky, several times decorated by Abdülhamid and his predecessors, had unleashed his rage against the Ottoman state, claiming that the army and the Kurds were gradually annihilating all the Armenian population of the Empire, that these massacres caused much concern among the Great powers, but that if they did not intervene in time, it would be for the Armenians living in Istanbul and outside of the Empire to take up arms and fight for the independence of their country. It also reveals that the Palace had immediately had decided to reclaim the decorations from Aivazovsky.

Armenian policies, promising never to wear the medals. Edhem Eldem referred to the occasion stated by the consul of Feodosia to Constantinople in December 1895, in one version of the story according to which Aivazovsky “had thrown [the medals] on the floor, had forbidden his wife to wear the second-class *Şefkat* and had decided to turn all these objects into brooches for his daughter and toys to be worn by his nephew at school.” Apparently, there was an official Ottoman attempt to reclaim the decorations. The Palace made a formal complaint in response to the affront. In another version, the artist delivered some ribbons for the Ottoman consul, stating he had thrown the medals into the Black Sea, adding, “Your Sultan too can throw my paintings into the sea, I would not care.”²⁸⁵

In what follows, then, I want to consider something of the relationship between Aivazovsky’s constructive setting and his Armenianness in his illustrative atrocity world, specifically regarding the ways in which the visualization of the sea (depicted as calm in all of these images) functioned as a means of articulating the national identities that were increasingly understood to comprise the artist, Aivazovsky, toward the end of the nineteenth century. In speaking of “visualization,” I do not mean simply the graphic or artistic depiction of the sea, but rather the sea in terms of visibility, that is, how, for a given world of Aivazovsky, certain ideas and phenomena became literally “see-able.”

In Aivazovsky’s images, the sea is depicted as sublime because of its vastness and unpredictable power, and the sublime relies upon the capacity for sympathy or empathy in the subject experiencing it. The capacity for sympathy among the figures unloading from the boat afloat this sublime element, evident in the close attention Aivazovsky has paid to their pained expressions, indicates that they too are engaged

²⁸⁵ BOA, Y.A.HUS 344/51, 11 Receb 1313/December 28, 1895, Eldem, *Pride and Privilege*, 348.

in what is an Ottoman–Armenian victimhood. As an instrument of war produced by a painter who has intersected identities and was a political and intellectual being, these paintings, through the provision of systematic publishing opportunity (*Fraternal Help*), were employed to effect public opinion and counteract official policy as well as to raise money and prompt sympathetic intervention.

The Last Stage of His Life: 1899 Baku Exhibition and Depiction of Lord Byron

At the beginning of October 1899, Aivazovsky sent 14 paintings for his personal exhibition in Baku. The exhibition was organized at the request of the representatives of the Armenian population. As Minas Sargsyan emphasizes, there is almost nothing written in Russian art-history literature about this exhibition. As he points out, it was not even included in the list of personal exhibitions of Aivazovsky published by Nikolai Barsamov.²⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the Baku exhibition, both in the artist's life and in the history of Armenian art, was a significant event. It should be noted that Baku in the 1890s was one of the largest centers of Armenian culture after Tiflis and Constantinople. Newspapers reported that visitors filled the exhibition from morning to evening. Art lovers, sometimes whole families, visited the exposition of the great marine painter. On November 30, the *Mshak* newspaper wrote: "The exhibition [Aivazovsky's paintings] which opened in Baku, was a great success. Almost all works were sold. Many people wanted to buy paintings by such a famous artist, and, undoubtedly, all of them would be sold in Baku."²⁸⁷

Aivazovsky was pleased with the ongoing exhibition. In a letter written to K. Yezov, the artists wrote: "In general, the result of the Baku exhibition is very good,

²⁸⁶ Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 244–245. Also see: Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 175.

²⁸⁷ *Mshak*, 1898, no. 223.

except for 10 paintings sold, two more large paintings I send to Tagiev [Z. A. Tagiev, oil millionaire from Baku] on his request.”²⁸⁸

One of the paintings that the Baku exhibition shows is *Byron on the Island of San Lazzaro* [figure 65]. Between 1850 and 1870, a strong strain of Romanticism, influenced by the movement in Western Europe, developed among Armenian writers, poets, and playwrights in whose work figures from Armenian history were glorified. As Vahé Oshagan notes: “The Romantic, virtuous, and patriotic hero became the dominant figure in the new self-consciousness, nurturing around itself the nascent aspirations of the period.”²⁸⁹ English Romantic poet Lord Byron was of particular interest to Armenian writers because of his commitment to Armenian language and culture. In 1816, Byron visited the Mechitarist Order at the convent of St. Lazarus, a center of Armenian culture, where he studied Armenian. His letters recounting this experience, translations of Armenian history and parts of the Armenian Bible, as well as some poems, were published in English and Armenian in 1870.²⁹⁰ Lord Byron was also depicted by an Ottoman–Armenian artist, Mgrdich Jivanian (1848–1906), before Aivazovsky. Although not included in any of his catalogues, his painting *Lord Byron’s Dream* was exhibited in Pera under the patronage of the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.²⁹¹ Aivazovsky, in all likelihood, saw this picture in 1890 in

²⁸⁸ Ivan K. Aivazovsky’s letter to Karapet Yezov, December 1, 1898, transcript in Sargsyan, Artunian and Shatirian, *Documents and Materials*, 305. Although Aivazovsky wanted to attend the opening of his exhibition, because of his illness he could not be able to attend it. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 245.

²⁸⁹ Vahé Oshagan, “Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians, 1789–1915,” *Armenian Review* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 1983), 64.

²⁹⁰ George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron’s Armenian Exercises and Poetry* (Venice: In the Island of S. Lazzaro, 1870).

²⁹¹ Mayda Saris notes that: “*Masis*, one of the important newspapers of the Istanbul Armenian Press, in its May 1882 issue, reports of an Exhibition that was held in Pera under the patronage of British Ambassador. It contained 198 paintings done by both local and foreign artists, including close to 15 Armenian painters. In addition to the works of such important painters and engravers as Yervant Oskan, Bedros Srabian, those of M. Civanyan were exhibited. The first of the latter was entitled *Lord Byron’s Dream*. Here, a mystical atmosphere is created against the breathtaking landscape consisting of Greek ruins and Oriental caravans.” Mayda Saris, *A Painter of Istanbul: Megerdich Jivanian / Bir İstanbul Ressamı: Mıgırdic Civanyan* (Istanbul: Raffi Portakal Antikacılık Müzayede, 2006), 54.

Constantinople during a meeting with local Armenian artists.²⁹² The maestro returned to the topic of Byron to show how many artists, including the great English poet, highly appreciated the centuries-old rich culture of the Armenian people. The painting *Byron on the Island of San Lazzaro* depicts the moment of a solemn meeting. Within a group of monks, Byron, the singer of freedom, is represented being met by Mkhitarists on the quayside. Aivazovsky intentionally united the figures of different epochs—unprecedented in his creative work. This touch strengthens the ideological basis of the picture—the dream of the liberation of his motherland. In the center of the painting is Ghevond Alishan, the most important researcher of Armenian culture and also a historian and poet. He was not yet born when Byron visited St. Lazarus Island. Among the other figures, the heads of the Brotherhood, Sukias Somalian, Mekertich Avgerian, and the brother of the painter, Gabriel Aivazovsky, are depicted with portrait-like exactness.²⁹³

Hugely admired by Romantic-nationalist movements in the Russian–Armenian world throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century,²⁹⁴ it is certain that Aivazovsky would have been familiar with the British Romantics. In its preface, the poet wrote about the Armenians: “But whatever may have been their destiny – and it has been bitter – whatever it may be in future, their country must ever be one of the most interesting on the globe.”²⁹⁵ Beyond the narrative of Lord Byron and the

²⁹² Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 246.

²⁹³ Khachatryan, *Aivazovsky Well-Known and Unknown*, 160. Aivazovsky painted this picture during his stay in Tbilisi while living in Mikhail Smirnov’s house. Mikhail Smirnov’s father, a Russian diplomat, Nikolai Smirnov, met Byron in Italy and thus, almost certainly, Smirnov was to give a firsthand account of Byron’s contact with the Armenian Fathers on the Island of St. Lazarus. Innes Merabishvili, “Liberty and Freedom and the Georgian Byron,” in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. Richard A. Cardwell (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 415.

²⁹⁴ Richard Lansdown and Dosia Reichardt, “Almost as Far as Petersburg: Byron and Russians,” *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 56 (2007): 52–77; Nina Diakonova and Vadim Vatsuro, “No Great Mind and Generous Heart Could Avoid Byronism: Russian Byron,” in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. Richard A. Cardwell (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 333–352.

²⁹⁵ Anahit Bekaryan, “Byron and Armenia: A Case of Mirrored Affinities,” in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. Richard A. Cardwell (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 394.

Armenian intelligentsia against the Romantic backdrop of Venetian seascape, Byron's influential ideas and Aivazovsky's depiction by bright rays of sunrise share a deviousness in their allusions to the national awakening.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter considered the visual representation of the Armenian "natural" national symbols from Aivazovsky's gaze during the second half of the nineteenth century. As the Mount Ararat (as well as Lake Sevan) example shows, using geographical symbols can be a highly effective way of reconstructing the nation as an authentic community. This method, in which history and nation are unified in a common discourse of national identity, naturalizing the nation, is necessary for the task of uniting nations strongly in time and space. In general, nature and particular countries contribute greatly to the strengthening of trust in the historical unity of nations and their resolve in terms of external, physical, and social influences. However, it is worth noting that the role of landscape in the reconstruction of the nation concept varies according to time and circumstance. In the case of Aivazovsky's Armenia, the Ararat myth gained considerable currency between the 1860s and 1880s when the rise of Armenian national consciousness found its voice within both the Ottoman and Russian empires.

Within the Armenian community, at a time of considerable social and political trepidation, guidance was needed and a sense of endurance and stability gained from the natural realm in the form of the Ararat hybridization of landscape and biblical myths. Intellectuals (writers, artists, thinkers, and so on) portrayed this mythscape as a relentless force capable of determining the character of their nation and of its inhabitants—an ideological pattern that I also used the terms of "naturalization of the

nation.” Yet, it should be kept in mind that what and how we see in the natural world is not (only) natural but a result (also) of what and how we have learnt to see. Per national foundation myth, that of Ararat was not dependent on truth for its effect. In fact, as the nineteenth century proceeded and concluded, an Ararat narrative emerged that was entirely efficacious, which has continued until contemporary times.

How and the supposed character of Armenians a product of the mountains and why was the Ararat myth believable, even? Answers to this, I believe, are to be found in the historical imaginaries that had previously contributed to the mythological matrix of “Armenia.” Then, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the development of a nature that was essentially romantic—fostered by the brush of Aivazovsky—supplied a crucial completion to this synthesizing fusion of the mountain and meaning with the nation and the past.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the same dominant concerns permeate the visual imagery of Armenian victimhood of this period. I have argued, in the second part of this chapter, two broadly conceived issues: firstly that the visual imagery of, and related to, the massacres were far more embedded and far more significant, at different levels, in the Armenian art and culture of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries than has, to date, been considered in the art-historical study of this period. These atrocity images set out a very complex relationship between the artist, the spectator, and the wider public, at the center of which is the production of his proto-national vision of art, though his use of “plural nations” suggests an expanded sense of national (indeed, imperial) art, a sense that Aivazovsky had openly pointed to in the 1860s in his very first Ararat depiction, in seeking to explain “intersected” discourses on his identity and contradictions in the relationship of “empire” to “nation.” In this context, the visualization of the massacres also formed one substantial means of articulating

the enormously important relationship between the nation and its empire, a relationship that underwent profound changes during this time. Secondly, through considering a series of Aivazovsky's Armenianness-related depictions mainly published in the Russian journal *Fraternal Help*, I have attempted to draw attention to how Ottoman–Armenian victimhood emerged and became established among Russian–Armenian intellectuals. The instrumentalization of the narrative of drowning burdens by moonlight against the Romantic background of Constantinople as a personification of Ottoman–Armenian suffering was utilized to serve the newly constructed nationalist narrative.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation gathers conclusions from multiple subdivisions. First, this study recaps why and how seascapes contributed successfully to the creation of identities in Russia and the Black Sea region in the nineteenth century, including the active role of artists and patrons in creating them. This analysis has shown how seascapes in the nineteenth-century Black Sea world served the function of those interested in building and reflecting imperial/national identity, as well as how prevailing ideologies influenced an imperial/national identity. Next, I consider the particular role of the seascapes of Aivazovsky in establishing the national religious identity and then reflect on the capacity of his seascapes to portray a smooth imperial, then national, past focused on imagination, creativity, memory, and forgetting. I then follow these observations with some summaries on the seascape.

Owing to the current symbolic significance of seas, such as their ability to represent life-giving virtues and to reflect the passage of time, seascapes were able to create a particularly strong imperial, then national, imagery. Modern seascapes emerged as a genre and then became an important pictorial symbol in close conjunction with the construction and visualization of imperial and national narratives. A native of Feodosia, Ivan K. Aivazovsky, the nineteenth century's nonpareil painter of Black Sea seascapes, captures the essence of the tempestuous sea and its coastline, the waves battering against the ancient cliffs of Crimea, the wild water against the primeval shores that were at last on their way to becoming civilized. While Aivazovsky's work was diverse, he is most associated with his seascape paintings. Through his work and in-depth and original exploration of his historical context, I explored the interaction of seascapes, geography, art (and its social and commercial conditions), state policies, and individual as well as local agencies in the shaping of

identities in the Black Sea area. Thus, analyzing Aivazovsky's selected paintings through the gaze of his multiple identities, this study also sheds light on the history of peoples living around the body of water known as the Black Sea. In this respect, the Black Sea is a corridor as well as a border between the Ottoman and Russian empires, and distinct in all of them, making it an integral part of a whole story as well as one involved in human interaction and exchange.

The present dissertation is the first scholarly work on Aivazovsky to systematically apply a set of theoretical frameworks that span history, art history, and cultural history and that brings our understanding of his work up-to-date with pertinent fields and issues. Thus, rather than a biography, this is a monograph that takes an interdisciplinary, comparative, and cross-cultural approach, helping shed fresh light on a significant period in Russian/Ottoman art and culture. This study traces an underexplored link between the making of seascapes and the shaping of modern historical imaginations. In general, the visual imagery of, and related to, the sea (the Black Sea networking) was far more embodied and far more significant, at many different levels, in the art and cultural history of the nineteenth century than has been allowed in the art-historical study of this period.

The aesthetic model that Aivazovsky developed (unique seascapes) would become an important foundation for a new standard of Russian seascape depiction and appreciation in subsequent years. He did not "discover" a genre of the seascape; rather, he created a new idealization of the Russian seascape—power over nature—which made seascapes interesting and admirable to viewers.²⁹⁶ He discovered ways to make

²⁹⁶ Once the new Russian seascape imagery had been definitively established and accepted as a signifier of nationality in painting, it began to exert an influence in other spheres. From high-culture venues, it moved into popular journals, tourist guidebooks, children's literature, postcards, books of photographs, and advertisements. Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 223. In the 1890s, popular magazines had begun to regularly portray the Crimean region as a space for summer recreation among the dacha-going community. By this point, too, a growing tourist industry had begun to market the Crimean

the Black Sea and its countryside aesthetically and accessible to spectators. As this dissertation emphasizes, while doing this, he did not describe himself as simply Russian; he was also an Armenian and a Crimean, and he reveals self-understanding shaped by the space in which he lived and painted. He was a part of a more extensive empire with strong regionally intersected identities. I have argued that seascapes of the Black Sea geography made significant contributions to the formation of the identity construction process. Nevertheless, this process did not usually occur naturally or unintentionally but was the result of more or less coordinated and deliberate efforts on the part of the artist and the patrons to produce art that would provide an acceptable image of the empire and then the nation. Thus, in the nineteenth-century Black Sea world, the creation of a “national” seascape was the outcome of conscious programs carried out by cohesive networks of an artist and influential patrons to create an imagery of the region.

Religion’s role in the creation and development of national identity has been discussed in studies on nationalism since Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson,²⁹⁷ and others made clear that they regarded the concept of nationalism as, in some way, a heroic replacement for religious authority, while other historians²⁹⁸ have successively debated that religion could be an essential/integral part of nationalism. This dissertation has also demonstrated an intimate connection was constructed between Christianity (with a particular emphasis on the Orthodox sect) and imperial/national identity in some of Aivazovsky’s seascapes and landscapes. Nautical geography has

coastal regions (Feodosia, Yalta, Alupka, Alushta, and so on) as destinations for leisure travel. The expansion of travel and tourism meant that more and more people were beginning to experience their own seacoasts for the first time.

²⁹⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

²⁹⁸ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Tricia Cusack, “‘Tis the Wild Things that Have the Real Beauty’: Jack B. Yeats, Modernity and Other Worlds,” *Irish Review* 21 (Autumn, Winter, 1997): 75–91.

commonly been identified with divinities possessing qualities such as the power of fertility or the ability to heal. With the advent of the monotheistic religions, the waters acquired new narratives, and existing stories were modified. The story of the deluge, Noah's Ark, and the Mount Ararat narratives were appropriated as components of national identity, as represented in the seascapes of Aivazovsky.

Furthermore, as Tricia Cusack mentions, religion was used to exempt certain inhabitants of the national territory from full nationality, and this exclusive religious nationalism was symbolically emphasized in land/seascapes.²⁹⁹ In Aivazovsky's case, specifically depicted in Chapter IV, Mount Ararat, whose skirts were topographically part of the nineteenth-century Ottoman imperial domain, was appropriated as a Christian mountain (the salvation of humanity after the deluge), and a conservative Orthodoxy was reflected in art and art patronage. Efforts to facilitate cultural homogeneity and enforce ethnic exclusivity were supported by Aivazovsky's land/seascapes that contained apparent symbolisms, such as the Prophet Noah and his descendants, or represented the kind of simple mountain/river view that was read as an expression of Christian modesty.

My work also explores Aivazovsky's seascapes reconstructing the representation of the political and cultural dynamics of Russo–Ottoman relations and reveals Aivazovsky's understanding of and interaction with his Armenian identity. Paying close attention to his renderings of Armenian mythscapes and resonant, yet rarely researched, images that he produced for international humanitarian campaigns, I explore the relationships between discursive politics, art, and the shaping of modern Armenian identity. In this area, Aivazovsky's art facilitated processes of building contextual cultural identifications and of cross-cultural and cross-imperial interaction.

²⁹⁹ Cusack, *Riverscapes*, 193.

The Russian seascape genre presented as a set of nineteenth-century cultural representations supplied by a single individual invites the interpretation of terrain in terms of a homeland narrative. Aivazovsky's seascapes in particular but also his landscapes used the power of painting to imagine recognizable scenarios yet creative sceneries that subtly inculcated their future audiences with new subjects of the nation. By turns, depending on the location and historical context, the Russian, the Armenian, and the Crimean land/seascapes were perceived as a vast empire with widely varying types of terrain: an Arcadian retreat, a favored Holy Land, a boundless expanse, a collection of nostalgic and unpretentious spaces, and a place to experience scenery and leisure.

The seascape also helped to determine the direction of the nation's self-regarding and forgetful gaze toward either a past paradigm or an ideal future. Certain alternative constructions of Aivazovsky's sea- and landscapes have received attention here. First, there was the image of Russia as a maritime empire. Aivazovsky played a crucial role in shifting the prevalent thinking, to imagine the empire as a sea-based power. Second, there was the image of Russia as a glorious naval power in the Black Sea, through the depictions of naval battles, which often appeared in Aivazovsky's oeuvre, appealing to the empire, the ruler, and the people of Russia. Third, there were the land/seascapes of the Armenian nation, the images of both the religious and the proto-nationalist were created and used in different ways to depict the entire empire with its interconnected populations. Each of these visions was related to, but somewhat peripheral from, the primarily aesthetic images described in the preceding chapters.

Aivazovsky's images of Russian land- and seascapes often corresponded with grander visions of the land and sea themselves. In the context of the search for national identity, the sea came to be imagined according to certain idealized models. Whether

Russia was conceived of as a rural pastoral nation, Holy Rus, or the native home of the Russian peasant, such dreams and visions of Russia did exist before Aivazovsky as well as during his era. However, with Aivazovsky's images, seascape imagery became a visible manifestation of the ideal of Russian nationhood as a rising maritime nation. Yet, as such, images of Aivazovsky unavoidably contained an uncomfortable mixture of idealization and reality. Can it be any wonder that Russia's seascapes evolved into an array of different, and often contradictory, forms? The seascape image was a moment of crystallization. It was a pivotal point at which Russia, as an abstraction, put itself to the test as a visual and potentially realizable space.

Several different sea- and landscapes were produced by Aivazovsky to correspond with the variety of different approaches to Russian identity developed in the nineteenth century. And yet, as I have been arguing all along, one image (or more accurately, a set of related images) of the national nautical terrain came to dominate Russian imagination. This was the seascape of the southern shores of the empire, terrain associated with naval supremacy, while the triumphal Russian naval battlefields, with the rising ship industry, implied a special Russian sense of power. The national seascape of the national consciousness thus emerged; a national portrait of the Russian native represented in the watery geography.

Yet, interestingly, as an artist who had a successful career inside the Russian Empire, Aivazovsky was successful in utilizing national narratives of the empire to depict a regional identity. His Armenian-related oeuvre can be acknowledged in this regard. Further, what was primarily intended as images of heroic feats became, during the nineteenth century, more aesthetic recognition, a routine and conventional way of seeing the special beauty of both the Russian and Armenian lands and seas.

Establishing and naturalizing essential aspects of nationality, seascapes have played a vital role. Individuals and networks that seek to create a collective culture and identity have carefully channeled the flow of national history. However, national histories appear to be inaccurate because they create a comfortable and self-supporting narrative, which is reflected in visual imagery.³⁰⁰ My study, therefore, has recovered and highlighted the complexity of multiple intersecting contexts, a versatile and highly successful artist, and an oeuvre more diverse than usually remembered at a historical moment on the eve of, but also still before, the cultural hegemony of the nation. Contextualizing Aivazovsky and his work as “in-between” and “across”—rather than as already (or still) securely embedded within the nation (or empire)—helps us to revise our conventional approaches not only to his oeuvre and influence but also to the Black Sea region as the site of alternative and productive cultural mappings and as nexus of entangled cultures, both the Islamic and Christian, perpetually in dialogue throughout the long nineteenth century.

Aivazovsky: An Artistic Legacy

The problem in attempting a summary of Aivazovsky’s significance is manifest. Both his paintings and his written oeuvre (letters, official biographies as kinds of autobiographies) confound easy answers. In both spheres, his output can be regarded as that of Romantic imperialist or a traditionalist, a cosmopolitan or a nationalist, a utilitarian or an adherent of artistic autonomy. Aivazovsky ran the range of artistic genres. In the critical and Russian public eye, however, he was then, as now, most consistently associated with scenes of Romantic sea- and landscapes. Undoubtedly, in Russia, he was one of the most successful, professionally and personally, painters of his age.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 196.

As Aivazovsky entered his seventies in the 1890s, he had cause to be satisfied with his career. He had been at the forefront of his profession for over fifty years, and his astute engagement with the art market and management of his personal finances had made him independently wealthy. Far from resting on his achievements, however, he continued to develop and diversify his artistic practice, giving fresh impetus to themes and subjects that had preoccupied him from his youth. This is above all true of the sequence of extraordinary marine paintings he exhibited into the 1890s, *Niagara Falls* [figure 66], *Moonrise: The First Train in Feodosia* [figure 67],³⁰¹ *The Explosion of the Turkish Ship* [figure 69],³⁰² *Sappho* [figure 70], and *Flood in Sudak* [figure 71]. All of these underlines once again the sea as a prime site through which to address timeless issues such as death, destruction, cruelty, and hope, as well as science and industrialization, while exalting human insistence and creativity in the face of nature's overwhelming power.

On one level, Aivazovsky was continually refreshing previous themes and subjects, even as he continued to explore new ones, such as the *Atlantic Ocean* series.³⁰³ Aivazovsky and his wife went to Europe on a large ocean liner. On the way, the ship was caught in a storm. In the raging ocean, the waves tossed the ship like a splinter. Almost all of the passengers hid in their cabins in horror, while the artist, his

³⁰¹ Aivazovsky realized various projects for his native city, Feodosia, including a seaport and a railway line, which he worked hard on to manifest. In 1892, the first trains traveled from Feodosia to St. Petersburg construction was commence on the port, which was completed by 1894. It was this fulfillment of the painter's debt to home, therefore, that was represented in the *Moonrise* image. Enthralled by the visual realization of scientific discovery, Aivazovsky changed nothing in the landscape—the sky, the bay, and the slopes of the mountain remained the same—but return opened a new chapter of its life. My photograph taken in 2017 [figure 68] from the identical perspective of this painting in Feodosia indicates Aivazovsky's legacy in both the history of the art and urban settings. Fixed by the bay and mountain behind the trees, the silhouette of the city has little changed (just the lane before the sea has been widened).

³⁰² Aivazovsky's last canvas is also known as *Explosion* [figure 72] but was never completed. According to biographies, he was depicting the explosion of a Turkish ship. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 251–252.

³⁰³ V. V. Polyakov, *Альбом Выставки Академии художеств Айвазовского: "Niagara" и "Атлантический Океан"* [Album Exhibition of the Academy of Arts; Aivazovsky: "Niagara" and "Atlantic Ocean"] (St. Petersburg, 1893).

wife, and a few other daredevils remained on the deck. They watched with admiration the formidable element. The next day, when the storm had subsided and the ocean calmed, Aivazovsky sat down in front of the easel set on the deck and, in the presence of the amazed passengers, began to draw on a large canvas the storm he had seen.³⁰⁴ This painting has received wide recognition for its artistic merit: the Russian newspaper *Север* [North] in 1893 respected the artist's courage and diligence, as well as the high artistry of his works. Nikolai Barsamov mentions this event: "The artist's last trip to America proved this with striking clarity, the mighty expanse of the ocean made a strong impression on him, and this impression right there, on the deck steamer, expressed in a big picture."³⁰⁵ The *Atlantic Ocean* [figure 73] canvas represents a wide and endless expanse of water. In an effort to vividly and convincingly depict the features of the nature of the ocean, the artist in this canvas significantly overcame the elements of showiness observed in previous works. The picture is distinguished by its grandeur and a new compositional solution. It also has an autobiographical content.³⁰⁶ Given the autobiographical context of this painting and the claims, it thus appears to show the artist as an interpreter of the natural world.

Prospective generations of artists might study how Aivazovsky's approach to land/seascape art prompted his ambitious oeuvre, a life project which emphasized that the role of past masters was to inspire originality in contemporary practice, rather than serve as a model to be slavishly imitated. Thus, this dissertation challenges the paradigm of Aivazovsky as a copier,³⁰⁷ and, in terms of marine painting, this study

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 221.

³⁰⁵ Barsamov, *Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky*, 135.

³⁰⁶ Sargsyan mentions that this autobiographical content fell out of the attention of the artist's biographers (specifically he gives a quotation from Barsamov's 1962 biography). Meanwhile, the artist portrayed himself, his wife, several sailors and passengers. The artist's widow, who lived in Feodosia until 1944, also testified to this. Sargsyan, *The Life of the Great Marine Painter*, 221.

³⁰⁷ Aivazovsky was regarded as a copier of Western seascape artists by many art historians, including the famous Russian artist and writer Alexandre Benois. He indicates: "The most interesting figure among the Russian landscape painters of the 1840s and 1850s is Aivazovsky, who was influenced by

shows how Aivazovsky was acting in the 1880s and 1890s as his own “past master,” resulting in works that were not only varied in their subject matter and formal qualities but, as exemplified by the critical fortunes of *Atlantic Ocean* and his depicted explosions, could also, in turn, delight and revolt, inspire and provoke. One might argue that by including both of these paintings in his legacy, Aivazovsky was guaranteeing that the precise nature of his artistic inheritance would remain settled and stopped to be debated.

Toward the end of his career, Aivazovsky was thus being absorbed into a long tradition associated specifically with marine artists, one that placed a premium on firsthand experience and heroic catastrophe. The attraction of such a tradition for Aivazovsky may, in part, relate to the reputation of British and French marine artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who—like J.M.W. Turner, Nicholas Pocock, and Dominic Serres—had been at sea in the navy or merchant service, and the assumed accuracy and thus authority that their images had as a result. As the appreciation of Aivazovsky’s distinctive articulation continued to grow, the vast range and variety of his marine subjects offered countless pointers for a new generation of artists that followed Aivazovsky’s restless example by exploring new and self-conscious, modern ways of representing the marine geography.

a Romantic spirit stronger than his fellow-artists, and who is favorably distinguished from his moderate and reasonable comrades by his passion for the sea. But even Aivazovsky does not stand comparison with the West. He is only a poor copier from such magnificent connoisseurs of the sea such as Théodore Gudin and Eugène Louis Isabey. As to his “grandiose conceptions” they repeat the setting and the style of Turner’s follower, John Martin, who was one of the favorite painters of the Romantic epoch.” Alexandre Benois, *The Russian School of Painting*, with an introduction by Christian Brinton (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1916), 151–153. However, I believe, contextualizing Aivazovsky and his works as “in-between” and “across,” rather than as already embedded within the notion of Romantic reproduction, helps us revise our understanding his oeuvre and influence.

A Final Word: The Crimean Legacy and Staging the Black Sea

Neither the Ottoman nor the Russian empires exist today; even the Soviet Union has collapsed, and the new Russian “meta-geographical” orientation toward Crimea is still under discussion. However, the strategies that Aivazovsky developed to create a new Black Sea identity have become hallmark indicators of art and politics. The establishment of a new Russian seascape imagery, which has come to be accepted as a signifier of nationality in painting (as well as in literature), led to influence in other spheres.

By the turn of the new twentieth century, the images produced to aestheticize the national terrain had become a cornerstone in Russian popular culture, from ballet or opera set design, images moved into popular journals, postcards, photographic albums, tourist guidebooks, and advertisements. For instance, the postcards from early twentieth century Feodosia illustrate how the visual narratives of Aivazovsky’s paintings documenting the land/seascapes of the Crimean region migrated out of the confines of the frames and returned in the form of new media and as scenic postcards [figure 74; figure 75; figure 76; figure 77; figure 78; and figure 79].

It is important to understand the legacy of Aivazovsky that framed and articulated the visual contents of these scenes when they acquired a second life as postcards. The visual continuity between Aivazovsky’s canvases and the postcards reveals how, first, imperialist, then proto-nationalist narratives became surrounded by descriptions citing enduring clichés. The symbol of Crimea resurrected the dream of Catherine II (“Greek Project”), adding significant implications to the “Byzantine” paradigm of legitimization. The mid-nineteenth century celebrated this, as a locus of patriotic heroism after the Crimean War: “Crimea remerged on the intellectual horizon of the traditionalist intelligentsia as a place of reconnection with Russia’s true cultural

roots as contrasted to Western Europe.”³⁰⁸ Apart from Peter the Great’s opening of the window to the West on the Baltic, the annexation of Crimea manifested the overall reorientation of imperial policy toward Black Sea area by the time of Catherine II.

Beginning in the 1800s, and especially during and following the Crimean War, geopolitical visions were recontextualized through Uvarov’s official ideology, “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality,” related absolute monarchy and imperial loyalty with the Christian faith, a representation of which—the baptismal font of Prince Vladimir the Saint—was rediscovered in Chersonesus in Crimea. Interconnected with Sevastopol’s reputation as a place of military glory and fulfillment of Russia’s history as a maritime empire, this religious myth promoted the centrality of the Crimean region to Russian imperial identity. In this respect, it is important to see how Aivazovsky’s paintings contributed to cultural practices that signify enduring power relations and attempted to place the viewer in a closer, more intimate relationship with the surrounding land/seascape. These postcards, as legacies of Aivazovsky’s scenery, would sustain and survive the Russian Empire to merge with new ideologies in the formation of the Soviet Union.

After the fall of the Russian Empire, both Aivazovsky’s paintings and the postcards continued to be displayed. New spectators interpolated the ideologies operating in these postcards as citizens of the new Soviet Union. Yet, they learned to apply the cultural codes and signifiers in operation in these postcards (and formerly paintings) to sentiments of territorial possession and belonging associated with a new Black Sea identity fostered by both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

³⁰⁸ Suslov, “Crimea is Ours,” 591.

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FIGURES



Figure 1 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Moonlight Night on the Crimea Gurzuf*, 1839, oil on canvas, 101 x 136 cm, Private Collection



Figure 2 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Yalta*, 1838,
oil on canvas, 47 x 67 cm, National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 3 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Old Feodosia*, 1839,
oil on canvas, 46.7 x 66.1 cm, National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 4 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Landing at Subashi*, 1839, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 5 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Sveaborg*, 1844,
oil on canvas 115 x 188 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 6 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Reval from the 1843 Roadstead*, 1844, oil on canvas, 118 x 188 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 7 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *View of Odessa on a Moonlit Night*, 1846, oil on canvas, 122 x 190 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 8 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Moonlit Night on the Seashore*, 1849, oil on canvas, 123 x 192 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 9 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Sunset at the Crimean Shores*, 1856,
oil on canvas, 58 x 83 cm, Private Collection



Figure 10 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *View in Oreanda*, 1858,
oil on wood, 34 x 27 cm (oval), Peterhof Museum Preserve, St. Petersburg



Figure 11 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Moonlit Night in the Crimea*, 1859, oil on canvas, 56.4 x 76 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

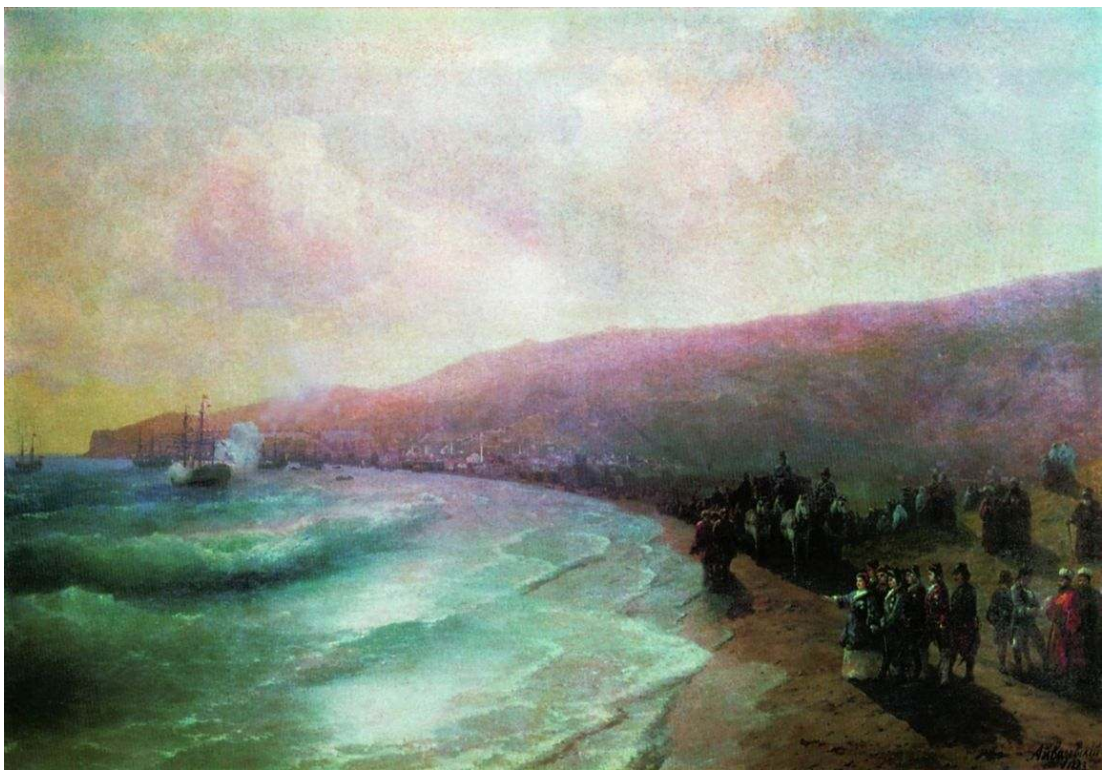


Figure 12 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Arrival of Catherine II in Feodosia*, 1883, oil on canvas, 196 x 220 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 13 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Black Sea*, 1881, oil on canvas, 149 x 208, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Figure 14 – The Black Sea, view from the balcony of Aivazovsky's estate,
photography by the author



Figure 15 – The Chesme Hall at the Grand Palace in Peterhof, St. Petersburg

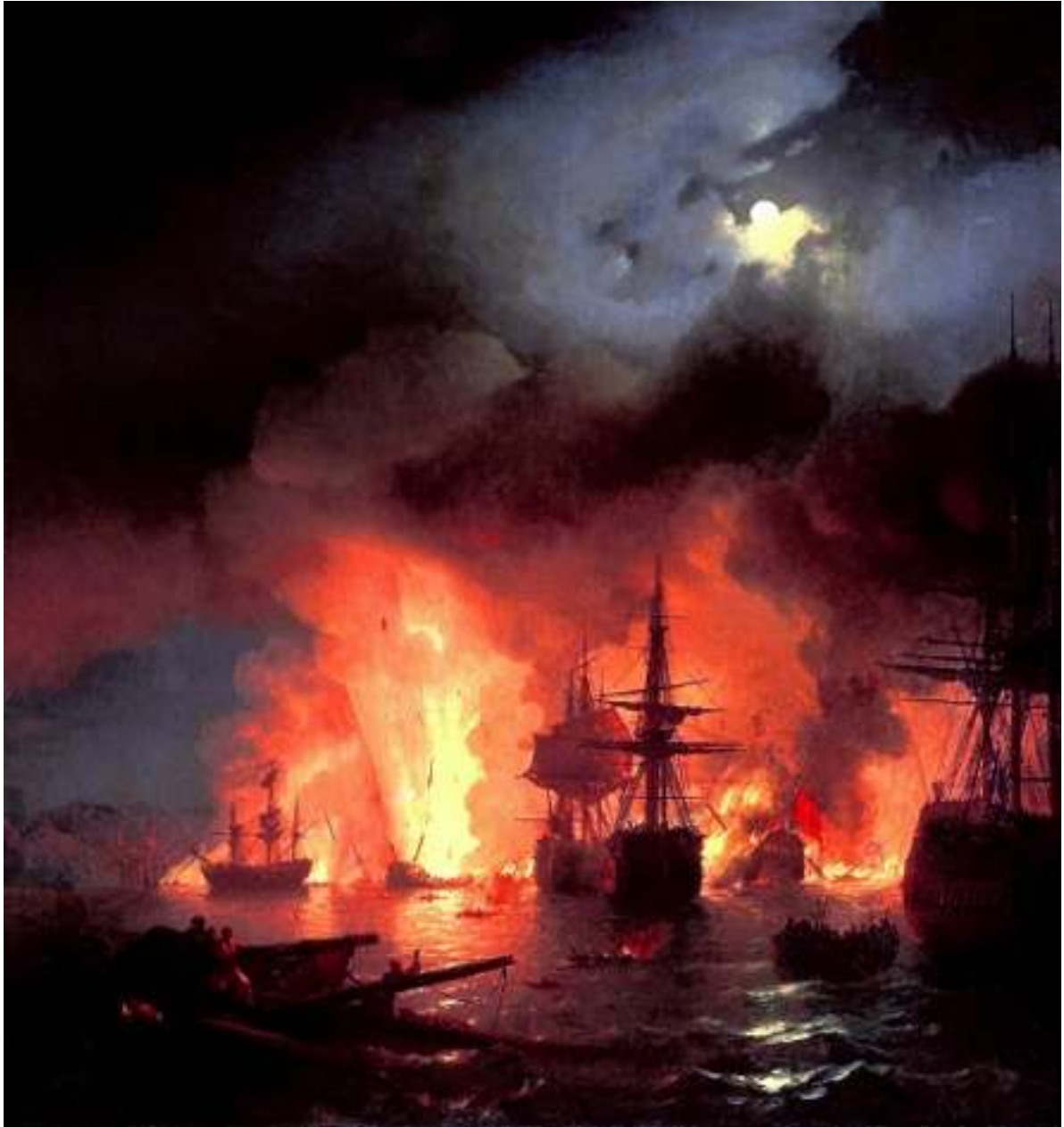


Figure 16 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Battle of Çeşme at Night*, 1848,
oil on canvas, 183 × 193 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 17 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Naval Battle at Chios*, 1848,
oil on canvas, 220 × 190 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 18 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Battle of Navarino on 8 October 1827*, 1846, oil on canvas, 221 × 331 cm, Naval Engineering Institute, St. Petersburg



Figure 19 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Mercury Brig Meeting the Russian Squadron After Her Victory over Two Turkish Vessels*, 1848,
oil on canvas, 123.5 × 190 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 20 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Brig Mercury Attacked by Two Turkish Ships*, 1892, oil on canvas, 216 × 344 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 21 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Battle of Sinop*, 1853,
oil on canvas, 220 × 331 cm, Central Naval Museum, Saint Petersburg



Figure 22 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Sinop. Night After the Battle on 18 November 1853*, 1853, oil on canvas, 331 × 220 cm, Central Naval Museum

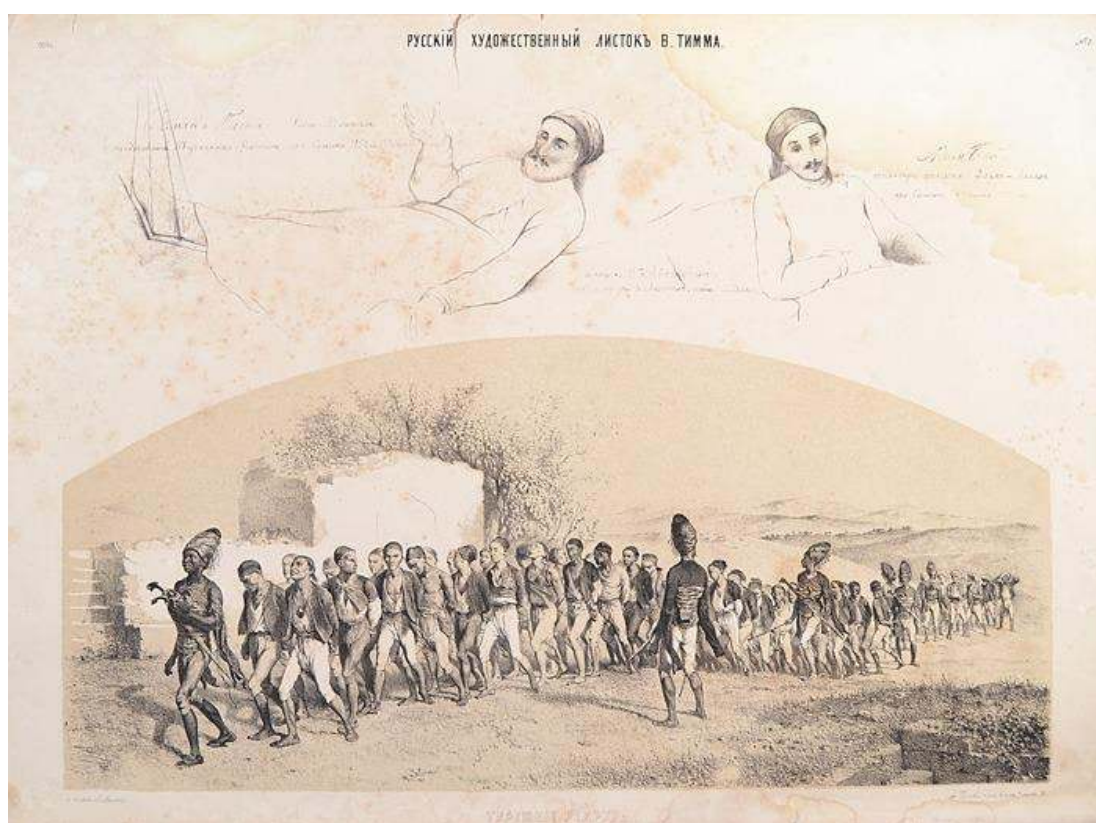


Figure 23 – Top: Ivan K. Aivazovsky's depictions of Osman Pasha and Adil Bey



Figure 24 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Siege of Sevastopol*, 1854,
oil on canvas, 33 × 73 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 25 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Malakhov Burial Mound*, 1893, oil on canvas, 51.5 × 73.5 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 26 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Russian Squadron on the Sevastopol Roadstead*, 1846, oil on canvas, 121 × 191 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 27 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet Entering the Sevastopol Roadstead*, 1895,
oil on canvas, 98 × 150 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 28 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Battle Between Steamer Vesta and the Turkish Battleship Feth-i Bülend on the Black Sea on 11 July 1877*, 1895, oil on canvas, 99 × 124 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 29 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Cutters of the Steamship Grand Duke Konstantin Attacking the Turkish Battleship Asâr-ı Şevket on the Sukhumi Roadstead on 12 August 1877*, 1877, oil on canvas, 98 × 123 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 30 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Alexander II Crossing the Danube*, 1878, oil on canvas, 62 × 92 cm, Private Collection



Figure 31 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Imperial Fleet in front of Çırağan Palace*, 1875, oil on canvas, 130 × 193 cm, Dolmabahçe Palace Painting Museum, Istanbul



Figure 32 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Ottoman Fleet*, 1874,
oil on canvas, 72 x 59 cm, Dolmabahçe Palace Painting Museum, Istanbul



Figure 33 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Ottoman Fleet*, 1875,
oil on canvas, 71 x 97 cm, Dolmabahçe Palace Painting Museum, Istanbul



Figure 34 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Peter the Great at Krasnaya Gorka Lighting a Bonfire on the Shore to Signal His Ships in Distress*, 1846, oil on canvas, 223 x 335 cm, The Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 35 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Battle of Reval*, 1846,
oil on canvas, 221 x 331 cm, Naval Engineering Institute, St. Petersburg



Figure 36 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Shipwreck of the Ingermanland in the Skagerrak on the Night of 31 August 1842*, 1860s,
oil on canvas, 98 x 126.5 cm, Central Naval Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 37 – Ilya E. Repin, *Wide World*, 1903,
oil on canvas, 179 x 284.5 cm, the Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 38 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Ninth Wave*, 1850,
oil on canvas, 221 x 332 cm, The Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 39 – Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of Medusa*, 1818 and 1819, oil on canvas, 491 x 716 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris



Figure 40 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Rainbow*, 1873,
oil on canvas, 102 x 132 cm, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Figure 41 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Wave*, 1889,
oil on canvas, 304 x 505 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 42 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Storm at Cape Aya*, 1875,
oil on canvas, 215 x 315 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 43 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Shipwreck*, 1876,
oil on canvas, 132.7 x 170 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 44 – Arnold Böcklin, *Isle of Dead*, 1880,
oil on canvas, 110.9 x 156.4 cm, Kunstmuseum, Basel



Figure 45 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Icebergs in the Atlantic*, 1870,
oil on canvas, 110.5 x 130.5 cm, Aivazovsky National Art Gallery, Feodosia

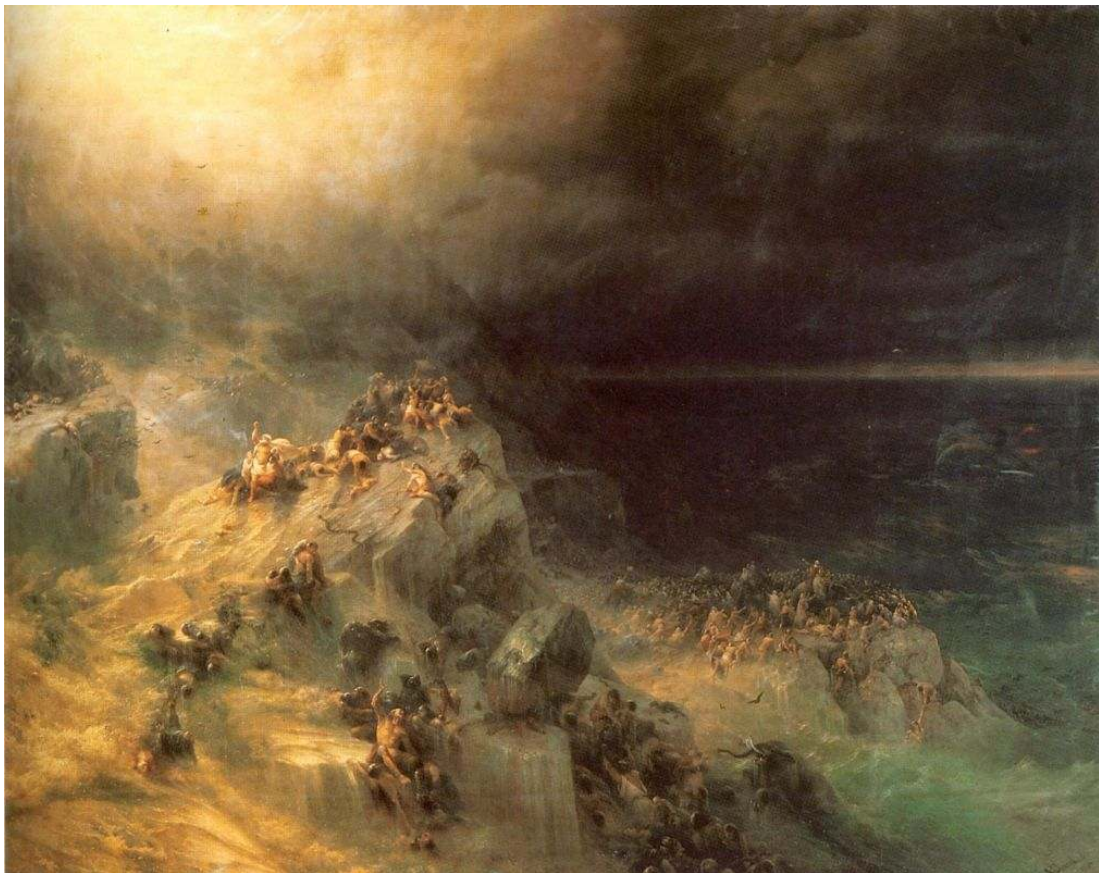


Figure 46 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The World Flood*, 1864,
oil on canvas, 246.5 x 319 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 47 – Gustave Doré, *The Deluge*,
Frontispiece to Doré's illustrated edition of the Bible. Based
on the story of Noah's Ark. Reprinted from the Holy Bible:
Containing the Old and New Testaments according to
authorized version



Figure 48 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Chaos: The Creation*, 1841, oil on canvas, 73 x 48 cm, Monastery of St Lazzaro, Venice

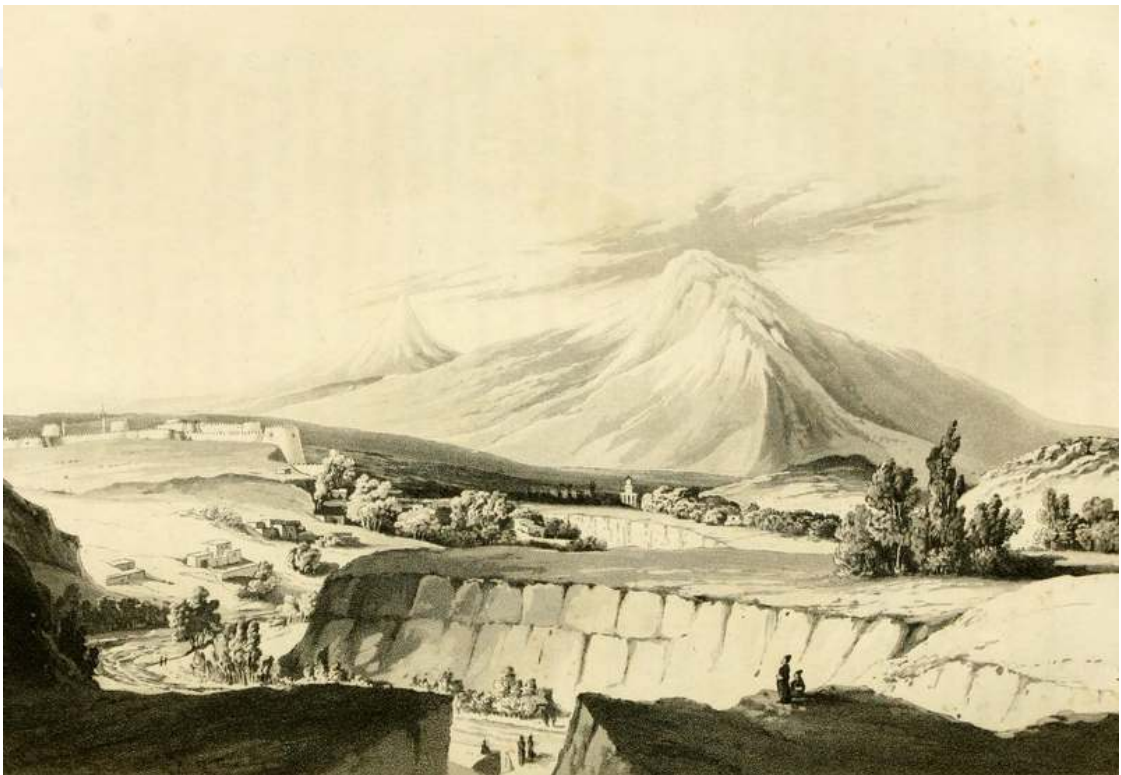


Figure 49 – Robert Ker Porter, *View of the Fortress of Erivan and Ararat*, 1821, drawing, executed for the book Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc. during the years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820* (London: Longman, 1821)



Figure 50 – F. Parrot, *View of Ararat and the Monastery of Echmiadzin*, c. 1834, drawing, executed for the book Friedrich Parrot, *A Journey to Ararat*, trans. William Desborough Cooley (London: Longman, 1845)



Figure 51 – H. F. B. Lynch, *Ararat from the Lake Echmiadzin*, c. 1901, drawing, executed for the book H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia, travels and studies: With 197 illustrations, reproduced from photographs and sketches by the author, numerous maps and plans, a bibliography, and a map of Armenia and adjacent countries* (Beirut: Khayats, 1967)



Figure 52 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Araks River and Ararat*, 1875,
oil on canvas, 40 x 64 cm, Private Collection



Figure 53 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Mount Ararat*, 1868,
oil on canvas, 124.5 x 167.5 cm, Private Collection



Figure 54 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Lake Sevan*, 1869,
oil on canvas, 98 × 120 cm, Private Collection



Figure 55 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Mount Ararat*, 1885,
oil on canvas, 23 x 34 cm, Museum of Armenian Congregation of Mikhitarists, St. Lazarus
Island, Venice



Figure 56 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Descent of Noah from Ararat*, 1889, oil on canvas, 128 x 218 cm, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan



Figure 57 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Catholicos M. Khrimian in the Neighborhood of Echmiadzin*, 1895, oil on canvas, 155 x 101 cm, Aivazovsky National Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 58 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Massacre of the Armenians in Trebizond 1895*, 1897, tinted engraving, executed for the book *Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey* [Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам], 1898, p. xxxvii



Figure 59 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Turks Load Armenians onto the Ship*, 1897, engraving, executed for the book *Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey* [Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам], Pt. II, p. 78



Figure 60 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Turks Offload the Armenians into the Sea of Marmara*, 1897, engraving, executed for the book *Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey* [Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам], Pt. II, p. 79

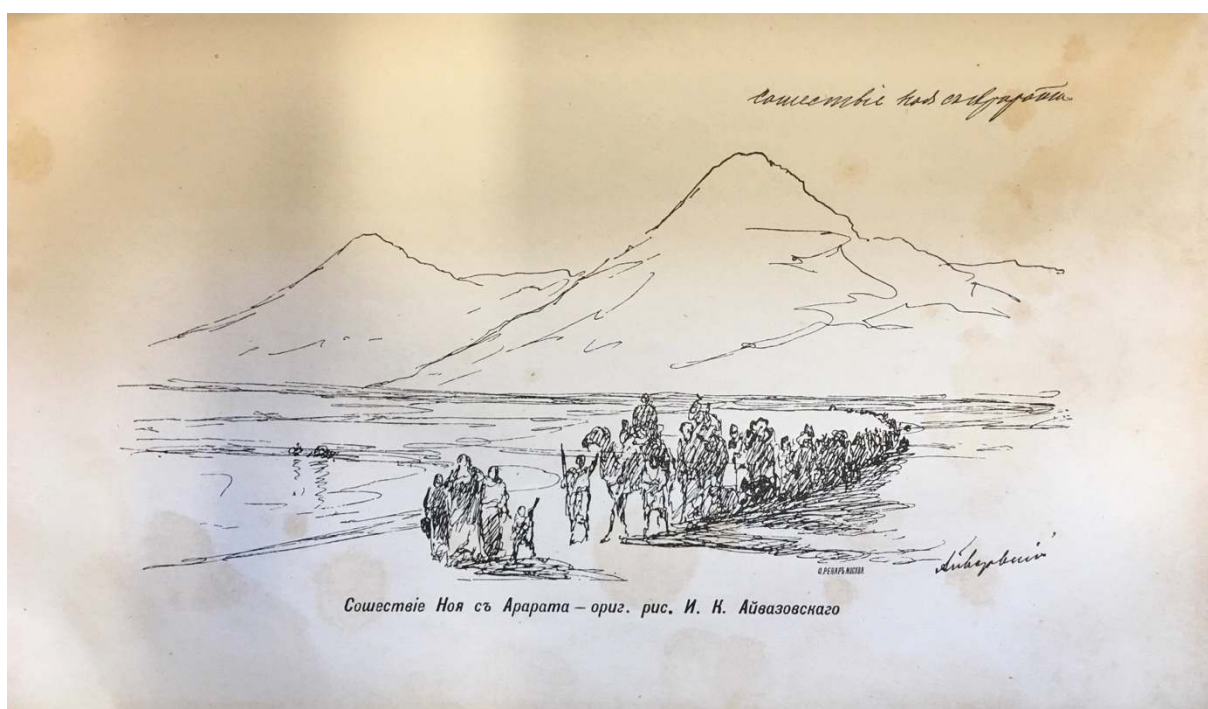


Figure 61 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Noah's Descent from Ararat*, 1898, engraving, executed for the book *Fraternal Help for the Suffering Armenians in Turkey* [Братская Помощь в Турции Армянам], 1898, p. 42



Figure 62 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Descent of Noah from Ararat after the Great Flood*, 1892, oil on canvas, 105 x 182 c, Armenian Patriarchate, Istanbul



Figure 63 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Quiet Night: Armenians Thrown Overboard*, 1897, oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm, Private Collection

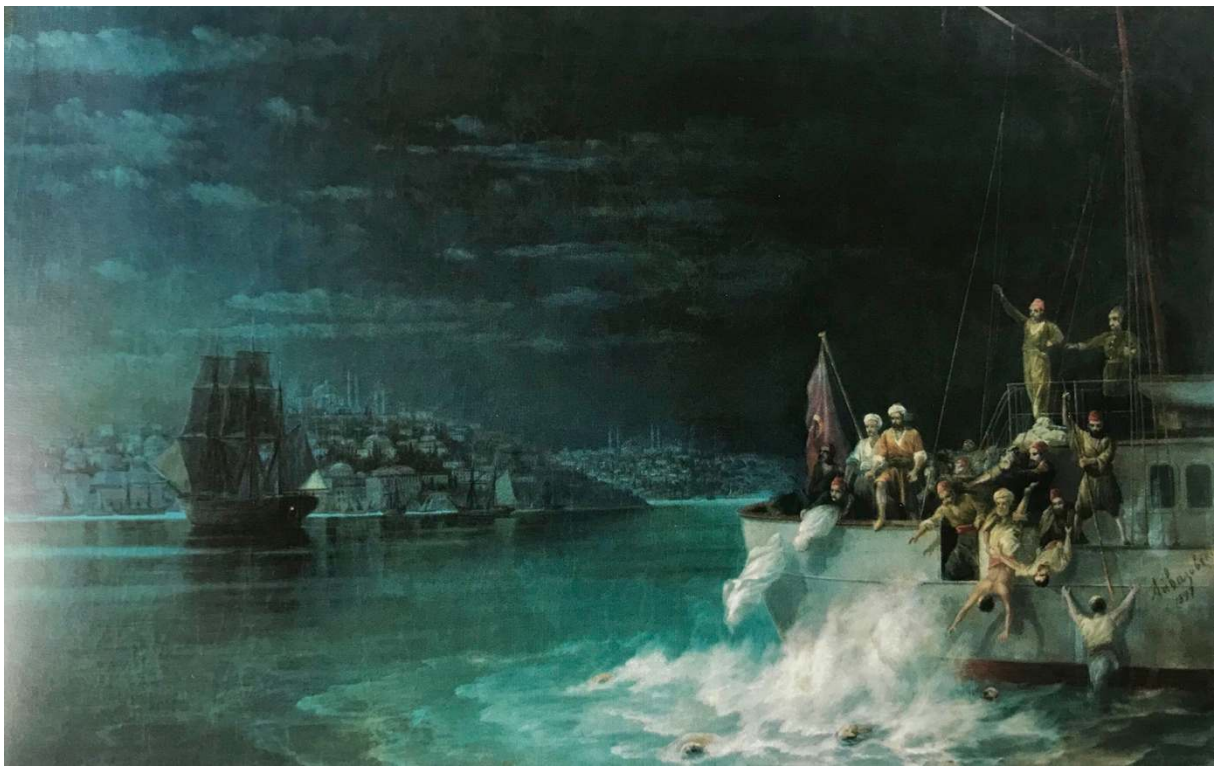


Figure 64 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Night: The Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara*, 1897, oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm, Collection of Djemaran School, Beirut



Figure 65 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Byron on the Island of San Lazzaro*, 1899, oil on canvas, 133 x 218 cm, National Gallery of Armenia, Erivan



Figure 66 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Niagara Falls*, 1893,
oil on canvas, 126 x 164 cm, Aivazovsky National Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 67 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Moonrise: The First Train in Feodosia*, 1892, oil on canvas, 96 x 194.5 cm, Aivazovsky National Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 68 – Railway in Feodosia, photography by the author



Figure 69 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Explosion of the Turkish Ship*, 1892, oil on canvas, 124 x 90.4 cm, Sotheby's London



Figure 70 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Sappho*, 1893, oil on canvas, 165 x 125 cm, Private Collection



Figure 71 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Flood in Sudak*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 106 x 141 cm, Aivazovsky National Gallery, Feodosia



Figure 72 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *The Explosion of a Ship* [uncompleted], 1900, oil on canvas, 69 x 99 cm, Aivazovsky National Gallery, Feodosia

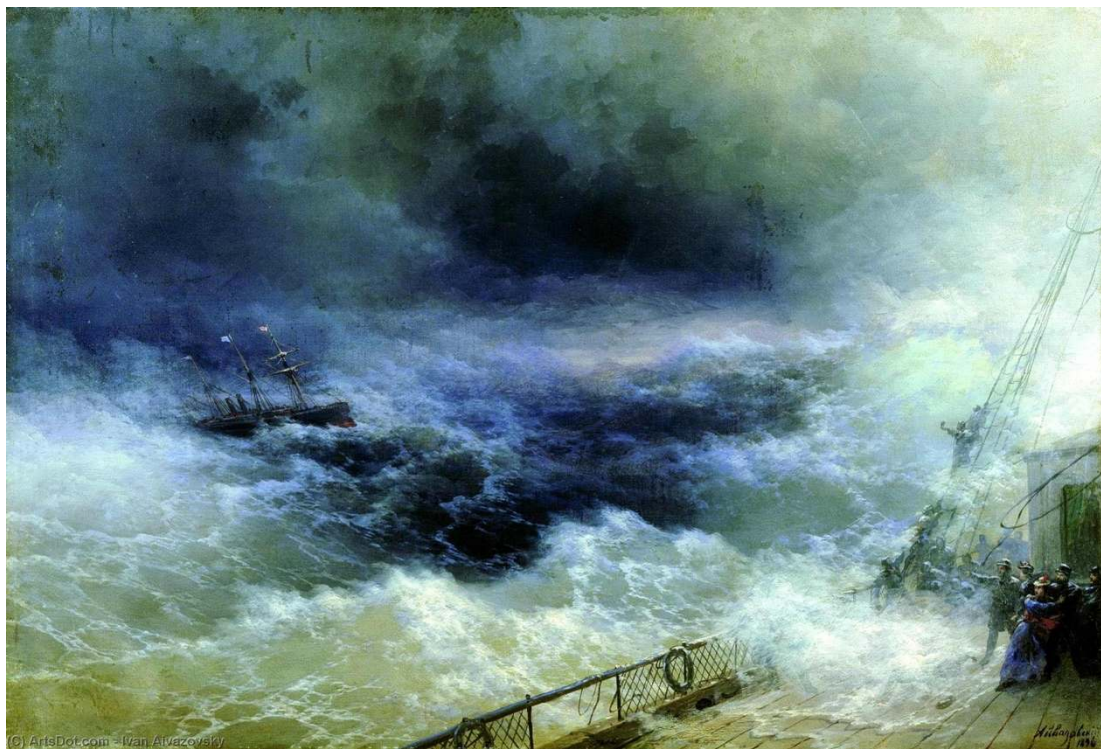


Figure 73 – Ivan K. Aivazovsky, *Atlantic Ocean*, 1896,
oil on canvas, 67.5 x 100 cm, The Fine Art Museum, Arkhangelsk



Figure 74 – Aivazovsky House and Painting Gallery, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83



Figure 75 – Monument-Fountain, Feodosia, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83

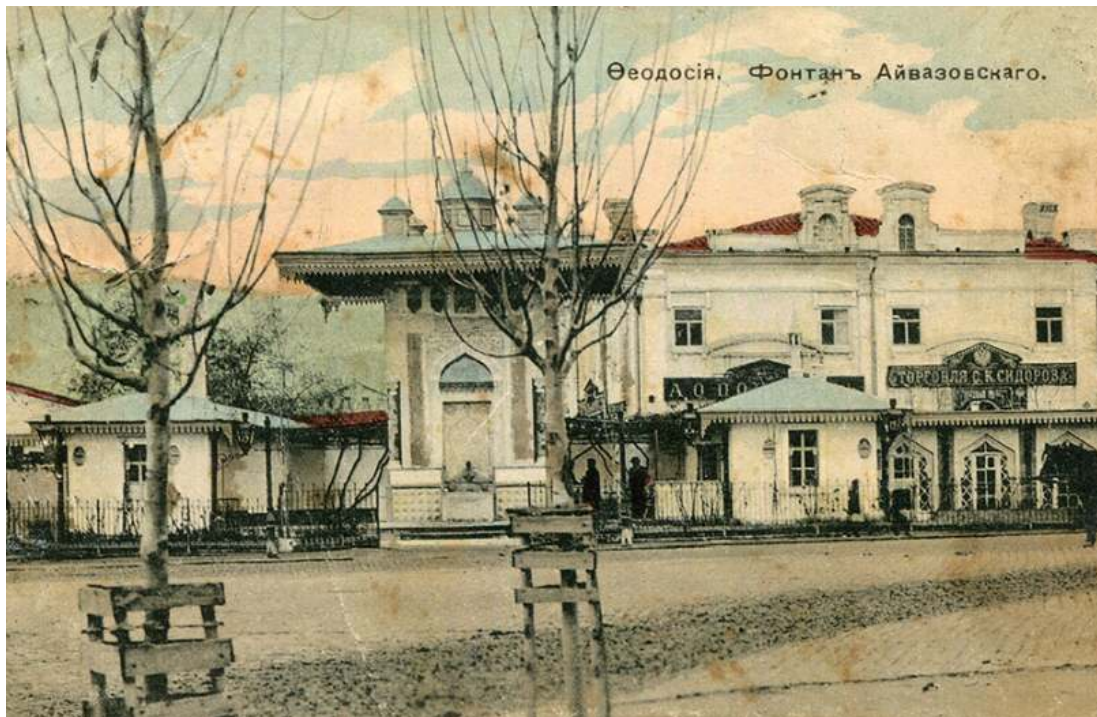


Figure 76 – The Aivazovsky Fountain, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83



Figure 77 – The grave of Aivazovsky, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83



Figure 78 – The Armenian Church of St. Sarkis and the grave of Aivazovsky, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83



Figure 79 – Panoramic view of Feodosia, early 20th century, scenic postcard, reprinted from Dmitry Losev, “Father of the Town, Ivan Aivazovsky and Feodosia: A Lifelong Attachment,” *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 54 (January 2017): 74–83