



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTE ARCHIVES

Fig 1. Ivan Alekseevich Vladimirov (Russia, 1869–1947) *Vandalism of the Revolutionaries*, a scene in the Winter Palace in December, 1918 [sic 1917].



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTE ARCHIVES

Fig. 2. Great Imperial Crown (Plate III), Russia's treasure of diamonds, Aleksandr Evgenievich Fersman, 1925.



PHOTO: HOOVER INSTITUTE ARCHIVES

Fig. 3. Silver and Gold Treasure of the Moscow GOKHRAN, June 1923. M.J. Larsons Papers [Maurice Lazerson, d. Sydney, 1961].

Imperial scatter

Some personal encounters and reflections

by **Edward Kasinec**

First encounters...

I began my graduate studies on the Morningside Heights campus of Columbia University in New York more than fifty years ago. At that time the nearby Interchurch Center (120th Street and Riverside Drive) housed the offices of Paul B. (Frantsevich) Anderson (d. Black Mountain, North Carolina, 1985), former YMCA Russian *liaison* and secretary during the 1917 Revolution to John R. Mott (d. Orlando, Florida, 1955), who was General Secretary of the YMCA. A large gallery in the Center also displayed a portion of the legendary pre-revolutionary and “imperial” art and book collection of Paul M. Fekula (d. New York, 1982). Although he identified as Great Russian, Fekula was of immigrant Carpatho-Rusyn (Lemko) descent, a Harvard College graduate, and an oil company executive by profession. His political and religious views were conservative and stridently anti-communist. He numbered among his dealers Armand Ju. Hammer (d. Los Angeles, 1990), Israel Perlstein (d. New York, 1975), Simeon Ia. Bolan (d. Dix Hills, Long Island, New York, 1972), and Alexander Schaffer (d. New York, 1972), the principal of *A La Vieille Russie*.

By the late 1930s, Fekula was already actively exhibiting his collections of Tsarist manuscripts, old Slavonic printed books and manuscripts, sacred art and textiles, and imperial presentation volumes to the Tsars and Grand Dukes. Fekula's displays and exhibits were dedicated to the “Martyrs (*strastoterptsy*)” of the Revolution and those from whom these properties were *stolen* [Figs. 1, 2, 3]. When Mr. Fekula died suddenly and intestate, his collections went “under the hammer” in a series of well-publicized auctions and private sales lasting over the course of a decade.¹

A bit further south from the Interchurch Center, on West 86th Street, stood the grand House of Free Russia (*Dom Svobodnoi Rossii*), founded after World War II by Prince Sergei S. Beloselskii-Belozerskii (d. Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1978) and supported by his second wife, heiress Florence Crane (called Svetlana Richardovna when she accepted Orthodoxy) (d. New York, 1969). Prince Sergei was an Imperial Guards officer, long-time president of the Russian Nobility Society, and heir to the pre-revolutionary “Krestovsky Island Palace” collection of portraiture, decorative arts, and militaria.² After the closing of the House of Free Russia in the late 1980s, the collections were dispersed to his descendants and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and his papers were gifted to the Bakhmeteff Archives at Columbia University. In 2017, upwards of a hundred objects from the Beloselskii-Belozerskii collections were donated by his daughter to the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, Georgia.

These were my first early exposures to major émigré collectors and collections of the Russian imperial cultural heritage. In the course of the subsequent forty years, I have been privileged to have worked with collections in Moscow, Harvard University, Cambridge, the University of California, Berkeley, and The New York Public Library. While at Harvard, I recall with pleasure the few acquisitions I made for the Houghton Library from the 1975 Monte Carlo auction of the collection of Sergei P. Diaghilev (d. Venice, 1929) and Sergei Lifar (d. Lausanne, 1986).³ I was then on a steep learning curve immersing myself in the riches of the Harvard Libraries, among them imperial association copies in the International Legal Studies Library, Bayard Kilgour's literary first editions in the Houghton Library, and icons and rare pre-revolutionary art folios in the Fogg Art Museum.⁴ Unlike these



Fig. 4. Lascelle Meserve de Basily (1890–1989) and Nicolas de Basily (1883–1963).



Fig. 5. Feodor Stepanovich Rokotov (Russia, 1730–1808). Countess Anna Vorontsova (1722–1776) [possibly Princess Vorontsova-Dashkova (1743–1810)], circa 1774.

that were acquired in Soviet Russia during the post-revolutionary years, Diaghilev's collections of literary first editions and old Slavonic printed books and manuscripts were obtained in Western Europe between 1927 and 1929, the last two years of the maestro's life. These acquisitions and the dealers from whom they were acquired are documented in Diaghilev's notebooks at the Music Division of the Library of Congress and in correspondence housed in the Harvard Theatre collection. Sergei Pavlovich began his intensive collecting in 1927, a year which marked the 10th anniversary of *vlast' Sovetskaiia*, and the growing realization by some in "Russia Abroad" that return was not an option and that "museumification" of imperial Russian culture abroad might be an alternative response. Tragically, three weeks after Diaghilev's death in Venice, his brother Valentin was executed in the Solovki special camp of the Gulag.

In 1980 I moved from Cambridge to a library curator's position at the University of California, Berkeley. After adjusting to the shock of Bay Area culture, I began to avidly explore the pre-revolutionary art and book holdings at UCB and beyond. At Berkeley these included the remnants of the dacha library of historian Pavel N. Miliukov (d. Paris, 1943), illustrated nineteenth-century Russian Americana in the Bancroft Rare Books Library, and paintings in the University Museum by Vasilii Vereshchagin gifted by Phoebe A. Hearst (d. Plesanton, California, 1919), mother of the collector extraordinaire William R. Hearst (d. Beverly Hills, California, 1951). Beyond Berkeley, I ventured to San Francisco and the Russian Jesuit rare book collections co-founded by Father Andrei Prince Urusov, S.J. (d. Trail, Oregon, 2002) and The Museum of Russian Culture, and

while at the other end of the Bay explored the *kunstkammer* that is the Hoover Library and Archives at Stanford.

THE MUSEUM OF Russian Culture (*Muzei Russkoi Kul'tury*) founded in 1948 was then curated by Nikolai A. Slobodchikoff (d. San Francisco, California, 1991),⁵ a grand gentleman who had immigrated to the Bay Area from the Russian Far East. In addition to curating a rich collection of archival and book material documenting the Russian post-revolutionary diaspora in South and East Asia, the museum holds paintings and artifacts depicting the personalities and historical events of Imperial Russia, includ-

ing correspondence between Alexander II and his daughter Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna (d. Zurich, 1920), paintings by Elena Luksch Makovskii (d. Hamburg, 1967), Alexander A. Geffer (d. Paris, 1956), and Anatoly A. Sokolov (d. San Francisco, California, 1971), as well as imperial coins, medals, decorations, etc. Then, as now, the mission of the museum

"THE DE BASILYS' SHARED A COMMON INTEREST IN WORLD TRAVEL, ART, AND WESTERN EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN IMPERIAL CULTURE."

remains the preservation (and representation to non-Russians) of the art, archival, and print legacy of pre-revolutionary Russia and the first two waves of the emigration. Four short years after coming to Berkeley, I relocated back to my native Manhattan, New York, and a curatorship at the New York Public Library.

I first gained an inkling of imperial rarities held by the NYPL in the late 1960s,⁶ but it was only two decades later that I chanced on a box of catalog cards with locational information on the imperial presentation (or association) volumes found throughout the stacks of the then Slavonic Division. In the following years, my colleagues and I strove to further identify, study, and publi-



Fig. 6. Feodor Stepanovich Rokotov (1730–1808) Emperor Peter III (r. January–July 1762; 1728–1762), circa 1762.



Fig. 7. Johann Baptist von Lampi "The Elder" (Austrian, 1751–1830) Portrait of Catherine II (r. 1762–1796; 1729–1796), circa 1790.



Fig. 8. Giovanni Domenico Bossi (Italian, 1767–1853). Grand Duke Alexander Pavlovitch (r. 1801–1825 as Emperor Alexander I; 1777–1825), circa 1804.

cize these books and photo albums from the libraries of the last three tsars and Romanov grand dukes. In addition to mining the NYPL collections, I strove to reach out to representatives of the Russian Church Abroad (Synodal jurisdiction) and solicit collections from the few remaining representatives of the Russian aristocracy and elites. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the NYPL collections were thus enhanced by the books, archival materials, and *objets* from the collections of Vera Konstantinovna Romanov (d. Valley Cottage, New York, 2003); Elizabeth Sverbeva-Byron (born Paris, 1924), great granddaughter of the Grand Duke Aleksei Alexandrovich (d. Paris, 1908); and descendants of the former military elites such as Vladimir D. Lehovich and Colonel John L. Bates (adopted name of Oleg O. Pantukhov) (d. Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, 1995). These initiatives brought to the Library several significant items that were later exhibited and publicized and continue to gain the notice of colleagues in Russia.⁷

So, throughout my professional life I have constantly encountered the post-revolutionary “scatter” of the Russian Imperial art and cultural heritage and the various ways in which interwar émigré collectors and dealers imbued “value and significance” to this legacy. In order to try to bring this very poorly studied subject into greater relief, I wish to share some of my most recent findings from research at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California.

The de Basily Collections, Hoover Institution Library and Archives

The art, books, and archives of Nicolas (d. Tampa, Florida, 1963) and Lascelle Meserve (d. Geneva, 1989) de Basily (*Bazili* in Russian) [Fig. 4] constitute the largest single gift to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives in its almost century-long history. These paintings, *objets*, books, and archives serve as a valuable prism through which to further assess the little-studied respons-

es of elite figures in “Russia Abroad” to the cultural and political aftermath and the art of the October Revolution. The recently opened Cantor Arts Center and Hoover joint exhibition “The Crown Under the Hammer” (October 15, 2017–March 9, 2018)⁸ represents the first public display of what is only a representative selection from those collected by Nicolas and Lascelle⁹ of a dozen paintings, miniatures, and *objets* by artists of the “high” Russian Empire (Borovikovskii, Rokotov, and Lampi the Elder, among others) and 18th-century Western European masters.

On his paternal side, Nicolas was of Phanariote Greek and Russian ancestry. Like his ancestors, de Basily was an Imperial diplomat, a political economist, a financial counselor (in emigration) at Marshall, Field & Clore, and a connoisseur and collector of late 18th and early 19th-century paintings and decorative arts. While at Military Headquarters in March 1917, Basily counseled Nicholas II and drafted the “Abdication Manifesto”. Nicolas’s second wife, Lascelle Meserve, was the wealthy and widely travelled stepdaughter of Harry Fessenden Meserve (d. Sarasota, Florida, 1941), an international banker and financial consultant.

The de Basily first met in the elite social and financial circles of pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg, subsequently re-acquainted in Paris, and married in the Rue Daru Cathedral, Paris (Western European Exarchate) in 1919. While the de Basily’s marriage was childless, they shared a common interest in world travel, art, and Western European and Russian imperial culture.

The de Basily maintained homes near the Bois du Boulogne and in Versailles until the Nazi occupation in 1941, and they travelled widely throughout Central (Berlin and Prague) and Western Europe and the Americas. After leaving France and a brief residence in Greenwich, Connecticut, they settled on an estate in Moldanado (near the Riviera Rio Plata), Uruguay, and an apartment in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (For much of their residency in Uruguay, General Juan Dominquez Peron and Evita



Fig. 9. Vladimir Lukich Borovikovskii (1757–1825), Count Grigori Aleksandrovich Stroganov (1770–1857), n.d.



Fig. 10. Nikolai Nikolaevich Glebov-Putilovskii (Russia, 1883–1948) Propaganda poster for the October Revolution, 1920.



Fig. 11. East wall of the Nicolas de Basily Room, Hoover Institution ("A Romanov Iconostasis").

Duarte dominated Argentinian political life.) The de Basily family remained in South America for almost two decades, only to relocate to a home in Coral Gables, Florida, in the late 1950s. After Nicolas's death in 1963, Madame de Basily alternated her residences between the Carlyle Hotel on Manhattan's Gold Coast and the Hotel Richemond on Lake Geneva, Switzerland. Even well into her mid-nineties (!), she continued to socialize with the few remaining Romanovs like the aforementioned Princess Vera Konstantinova and others (Prince Alexis P. Shcherbatov, Marc Sevastopoulo) in the "white" Russian community.

THE DE BASILYS may well have first heard of the Hoover War Library (founded in 1919) in Paris, possibly from one of their long-time acquaintances, former Imperial Ambassador to France Vasilii A. Maklakov (d. Baden, Switzerland, 1957) or from others in their circle like artist Aleksander N. Benois (d. Paris, 1960) or the collector and philanthropist Boris A. Bakhmetev (d. New York, 1951).¹⁰ Whatever the facts of the initial contact, Madame de Basily's first visit to the Hoover came only in the late 1960s, several years after Nicolas's death. During these years, the Hoover had assembled a small Russian expatriate community that included Prince Vasilii A. Romanov (d. Woodside, California, 1989), Professor Elizabeth "Countess" Stenbock-Fermor (nee Sevastopoulo, d. Palo Alto, 2001), Dmitrii von Mohrenschildt (d. Pondicherry, India, 2002), editor of the journal *Russian Review*, and the Canadian Russophile historian and collector Marvin M. Lyons (d. Burnaby, Canada, 2014).

**"ART AND THE
'SCATTER' OF EMPIRE WAS
FOR THE DE BASILYS AND
OTHERS OF LIKE MIND
A REMONSTRANCE
AND RETORT TO THE
REVOLUTION WHOSE
CENTENNIAL WE HAVE
JUST MARKED."**

Even after fifty years and the publication of a brochure in 1972 on the de Basily Room,¹¹ we still know little of the provenance trails, movements, and sources of the art collected by the de Basily family. The work of stabilizing, conserving, and authenticating many of the paintings and other *objets* has just begun. Despite these caveats and limits in our sources, several interesting details have emerged from careful first-time physical examination of some of the paintings and objects on display, documents in the Hoover business (internal) records, and the few hints in her published memoirs and a recently uncovered recorded interview with Madame de Basily.

For example, Francesco Guardi's (d. Venice, 1793) important "Piazza San Marco" was purchased from Pavla (d. Buenos Aires, 1976) and Nicolas (d. Sao Paulo, 1952) de Koenigsberg. Nicolas began as an antiquarian in Soviet Russia in mid-1920s. By the late 1920s the de Koenigsbergs' "Gallerie Le Passe" in Paris (later in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Mexico, and New York) became one of de Basily's principal and long-time dealers. Fedor S. Rokotov's (d. Moscow, 1808) "Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich" was first exhibited by Prince Vladimir E. Golitsyn (Galitzine) (d. London, 1954) at

the grand 1935 London Belgravia exhibition of Russian art. This significant exhibition of art of the Imperial period was organized by former Russian governmental official and émigré art dealer Aleksandr A. Polovtsov (d. Paris, 1944) and his wife Sofia (nee Kunitsyn, d. Paris, 1970).

Like his colleague Benois, Polovtsov served as an art advisor to the de Basily family and as well as as the broker for this sale.¹² Still oth-

PHOTO: THE HOOVER INSTITUTION LIBRARY

PHOTO: STEVE GLADFELLER, STANFORD VISUAL SERVICES

er paintings were obtained through private sales from Parisian émigré collectors and connoisseurs – from attorney and philanthropist Alexander Iu. Rozenberg (fl. Paris, 1920s) (also known as Rozembergh) came Rokotov's (d. Moscow, 1828) "Countess Vorontsova," [Fig. 5] and Stepan S. Shchukin's (d. Moscow, 1828) "Emperor Paul I"; from memorist and collector A. A. Trubnikov (d. Paris, 1966) came Rokotov's "Peter 3" [Fig. 4]; from Countess Elizaveta (Betsy) V. Shuvalova (nee Bariatinskaia, d. Paris, 1938) came "Empress Catherine II" [Fig. 7] by Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder (d. Vienna, 1830); and from Ivan (Jean) P. Isaevich (d. 1971) came Georg Christof Groot's (d. 1749) "Elizaveta Petrovna".

In places, Lascelle also notes the provenance and exhibition history of individual paintings. So, for example, both the Guardi and Shchukin were reportedly deaccessioned from The Hermitage collection and auctioned on behalf of the Soviet Government in the well-publicized Rudolph Lepke Berlin sales of the late 1920s. The Shchukin was then acquired by the wealthy entrepreneur Leonid F. Davydov (Davidoff) (d. Nice, 1941). Davydov subsequently exhibited the painting in the 1928 Brussels exhibition of Imperial era art organized by Vera S. Naryshkina-Vitte (d. Paris, 1963) and the art historian Ivan (Jan) I. Zharnovskii (d. Paris, 1956).¹³

The miniatures of "Grand Duke Aleksander Pavlovich" by Domenico (Johann Dominik) Bossi (d. Munich, 1853) [Fig. 8] and "Count Stroganov" by Vladimir L. Borovikovskii (d. St Petersburg, 1825) [Fig. 9] were purchased from the Italian diplomat Valentin Andreolette Andreoletti (fl. 1940s) and Vladimir A. Artzimovich (fl. 1930s), respectively.

According to Madame de Basily's manuscript notes, purchases from these collections were on occasion negotiated by art brokers such as Pavel A. Mikhailov (d. Paris, 1962) and Georgii (Georges) M. Destrem (d. Paris, 1959), a shadowy figure who may have been associated with the Wildenstein Gallery in Paris.

Three years after the October (Bolshevik) Revolution, Lascelle privately published in Paris her collected poetry titled *Echoes from Russia*, one poem of which reflects her mature (then at age 31) world-view:¹⁴

"The Cry of Holy Russia"

Where is the Father worshipped of yore,
When the world had scarce begun?
Where is the Power we knelt before,
When God and the Czar were one?
... Ye [EK: the Bolsheviks] who are weaving Free Russia's fate
With hordes obeying each nod,
Without the White Czar, thro' God is great,
He seems to be only half God
Ye say we are comrades, equals, free?
Come to the end of our search?
Ah! Give back the days that used to be
When our Czar was part of the Church

The Basily's had of course both the means and opportunities to collect and exhibit Imperial elite art and books. In doing so, I argue that they wished to present an alternative narrative of Russia's past to the Soviet political, economic, and modernist artistic

program that they witnessed unfolding in Soviet Russia [Fig. 10]. Along with their contemporary collectors, dealers, art historians, and connoisseurs – Count Sergei P. Zubov (d. Buenos Aires, 1964), Georgii K. Lukomskii (d. Nice, 1952), and Baron Vasilii de Lemmerman (d. Rome, 1975) among others we have mentioned – the de Basily's strove to collect, preserve, and later exhibit the artistic and cultural legacy of the Imperial period. Art and the "scatter" of Empire was for the de Basily's and others of like mind a remonstrance and retort to the Revolution whose centennial we have just marked [Fig. 11]. ✕

Edward Kasinec is a research associate at the Harriman Institute of Columbia University.

references

- 1 The literature on Fekula and his collections is vast. For a start, see *The Paul M. Fekula Collection: A Catalogue, 2 vols.* (New York: Estate of Paul M. Fekula, 1988).
- 2 Serge Sergeevitch Belosselsky-Belozersky, *Memoirs of Prince Serge Sergeevitch Belosselsky-Belozersky*. Preface and edited by Marvin Lyons; introduction by Baron Leonid Platonovitch von Wrangell (Paris: s.n., 1990–1994?).
- 3 *The Diaghilev-Lifar library: Ordre des vacances exposition publique à partir de mercredi 24 novembre [1975] ... : vente aux enchères publiques au Sporting d'hiver ... Monte Carlo* (Monte Carlo: Sotheby Parke Bernet Monaco S.A., 1975).
- 4 *The Kilgour collection of Russian literature, 1750-1920 with notes on early books and manuscripts of the 16th and 17th centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1959).
- 5 N.A. Slobodchikoff (ed.) *Museum of Russian Culture: khranilishcha pamiatnikov kul'tury i istorii zarubezhnoi Rusi* (San Francisco: Museum of Russian Culture, 1966).
- 6 Edward Kasinec (comp.), *Eighteenth-century Russian publications in the New York Public Library: A preliminary catalogue* (New York: New York Public Library, 1969–1971).
- 7 For example, Edward Kasinec et al. (comp.), *The Romanovs, their empire, their books: The political, religious, and social life of Russia's Imperial house, 1762–1917: An exhibit catalog and checklist of items held by the New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1997).
- 8 Bertrand M. Patenaude and Jodi Roberts, *The Crown under the Hammer: Russia, Romanovs, Revolution* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Library & Archives and Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2017). The catalog contains a preface by Edward Kasinec.
- 9 Nicolas also inherited some art and rare books from his mother, the art historian and Romanian-French Countess Eva (nee Callamaki-Catargi) (d. Paris, 1913).
- 10 Most of Ambassador Bakhmetev's collection of paintings, icons, and engravings were gifted to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- 11 Lascelle Meserve De Basily, *Memoirs of a Lost World* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975) and her earlier 1972 booklet on *The Nicolas de Basily Room of the Hoover Institution*, published by The Hoover Institution.
- 12 Aleksander Aleksandrovich Polovtsov, *Russian exhibition gossip ... by A. Polovtsoff* (London: O. Burridge, 1935). An important role in the organization of the exhibition was played by the Finnish-born art dealer and historian Carl Tancred Borenius (d. Wilts, England, 1948).
- 13 *Bruxelles. Exposition D'Art Russe. Ancien et Moderne...Mai-Juin 1928* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1928).
- 14 Published for Madame de Basily by Herbert Clarke, 14–15.