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LIMITING THE VIEW. CENSORSHIP OF FINE ARTS IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1865-1905

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Abstract: *The paper deals with the history of art censorship in the Russian Empire, which started with the reform of 1865 and lasted until the Revolution of 1905, when the restrictive measure was officially abolished. The paper summarises the legislative measures that were taken by the government to control the distribution and display of the works of fine art. The authors point out that the censorship disapproved images that unfavourably represented the Russian monarchy, that glorified nationalist and revolutionary movements as well as those considered as threatening to the Orthodox Church or public morality. The authors conclude that the government attempted to implement a system of screening all the paintings, lithographs, and photographs before they were published or displayed. However, it achieved only limited success.*

Keywords: *Russian Empire, Censorship, Fine Arts, Chief Administration of Press Affairs, Circular Letter, Exhibitions, Peredvizhniki.*

Rezumat: Limitând privirea: Cenzura lucrărilor de artă în Imperiul Rus, 1865-1905. *Lucrarea tratează istoria cenzurii artei în Rusia Imperială care a început cu reforma din 1865 și a ținut până la Revoluția din 1905, atunci când măsura restrictivă a fost oficial abolită. Sunt prezentate rezumativ măsurile legislative adoptate de guvern în vederea controlului distribuției și expunerii lucrărilor de artă plastică. Autorii evidențiază modul în care cenzura a dezaprobat imaginile ce ilustrau monarhia rusă într-un mod nefavorabil, cele care glorificau mișcările naționaliste și revoluționare, precum și cele considerate drept amenințare la adresa Bisericii Ortodoxe sau a moralității publice. Autorii ajung la concluzia că încercările guvernamentale de a implementa un sistem de verificare a tuturor tablourilor, litografiilor sau fotografiilor înainte de a fi publicate sau expuse public au avut un succes limitat.*

Résumé: Limitant le regard: La censure des œuvres d'art dans l'Empire Russe, 1865-1905. *L'ouvrage ci-joint traite l'histoire de la censure de l'art dans la Russie Impériale, qui commença avec la réforme de 1865 et finit avec la Révolution de 1905, lorsqu'on abolit*

officiellement la mesure restrictive. On y présenta en résumé les mesures législatives que le gouvernement adopta en vue du contrôle de la distribution et de l'exposition des œuvres d'art plastique. Les auteurs ont mis en évidence la manière dans laquelle la censure désapprouva les images qui illustraient la monarchie russe d'une manière défavorable, celles qui glorifiaient les mouvements nationalistes et révolutionnaires, ainsi que celles considérées comme une menace à l'adresse de l'Eglise Orthodoxe ou de la moralité publique. Les auteurs arrivèrent à la conclusion que les essais gouvernementaux d'implémenter un système de vérification de tous les tableaux, des lithographies ou des photographies avant d'être publiés ou exposés en public eurent un succès limité.

INTRODUCTION

The invention of book printing, engraving, lithography, and photography influenced the spheres of public communication and fine art dramatically. These inventions and the widespread use of such technologies encouraged the circulation of ideas and knowledge. But it also increased the risks of social disorder. History has shown that the ruling elites were unprepared for such changes. Almost all European governments, at some point, introduced pre-publication censorship. However, over time, the governmental control of information weakened. London abandoned the preliminary censorship as early as in 1695; Paris – between 1789 and 1822; Berlin – in 1850. While the state regulations for the printed word became much more liberal, the censorship of fine arts persisted during ‘the long nineteenth century’ in almost all countries¹.

The history of the art censorship in the Russian Empire provides an interesting example of how the state officials tried to limit the flow of visual information and why those attempts finally failed. There are a lot of studies devoted to the history of censorship in Russia². The majority of them deal with the

¹ See: R. J. Goldstein, A. M. Nedd eds., *Political Censorship of the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Arresting Images*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 271 p.

² Among the most important contributions one may note the following works: М. Лемке, *Очерки по истории русской цензуры и журналистики в XIX веке* [Essays on the history of the Russian censorship and journalism in the 19th c.], Санкт-Петербург, Труд, 1904, 512 с.; И. П. Фут, *Циркуляры цензурного ведомства 1865-1905 гг.* [Circular letters of the censorship administration 1865-1905], in *Цензура в России: история и современность* [Censorship in Russia: history and modernity], Вып. 3, Санкт-Петербург, 2006, с. 106-132; C. A. Ruud, *Fighting words. Imperial censorship and Russian press 1804-1906*. Toronto, University of Toronto press, 2009, 327 p.; Н. Г. Патрушева, *Цензурное ведомство в государственной системе Российской*

copyright of books and periodicals. The authors who touched upon the history of art censorship focused their attention on the period between the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917³. The censorship of fine arts during the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries is much less studied. It was a crucial time for the Russian Empire when its ruling elite tried to find a balance between the social demands for liberalisation and the Empire's aspiration to maintain the current political *status quo*.

This paper deals with the practices used by the Russian Imperial censorship to gain control over the distribution of visual information. We examined a wide range of official documents produced by the Russian censorship authorities from the mid-19th to early 20th cc. In this study, we applied a structuralist approach to political history. Within its conceptual framework, we discuss the censorship not as a single entity, but rather as a multilayered structure. It consisted of the interrelated elements, including a state policy shaped by the Imperial ruling elite, higher secular and ecclesiastical censorship authorities, and the local civil servants. They embodied the censorship of visual media, feeling the pressure of different social groups that demanded either weakening or strengthening of the limitations.

Such an approach allowed us to assume that during the discussed period, the Imperial censorship was concerned mainly by the images widely available for the lesser-educated class. The censorship controlled the production, display, and distribution of photographs, post-cards, lithographic works, and other cheap media. Until the early 20th c. the censors paid little attention to the creativity of professional artists whose works had a rather modest influence over the broad layers of the population.

CENSORSHIP OF ART IN THE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

Charles A. Ruud defines censorship as a formal pre-publication prohibition

империи во второй половине XIX – начале XX века [Censorship in the system of state institutions of the Russian Empire in the second half of 19th c. - early 20th c.], Санкт-Петербург, "Северная звезда", 2013, 620 с.

³ Д. А. Северюхин, *Изобразительное искусство и цензурная политика в дореволюционной России* [Visual arts and censorship policy in Tsarist-era Russia], in "Пространство культуры" [Culture space], 2009, №1, с. 44–58; M. B. Betz, A. M. Nedd, *Irony, derision and magical wit: censors as a spur to Russian abstract art*, in R. J. Goldstein, A. M. Nedd eds., *Political Censorship of the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Arresting Images*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 9-60.

of words that a government finds unacceptable. He stresses that among the screening of written works before or after publication, there were other forms of control such as licensing, official warnings, fines, committees of persuasion, prosecutions, and directives⁴. The Russian Imperial censorship was a highly complicated institution administered by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as higher ecclesiastical authorities⁵. By the middle of the 19th century, several attempts were made to normalise the censorship laws, particularly in 1804, 1826 and 1828. According to the Statute of 1828, all literary writings, scientific papers, and works of art, including gravures and drawings, were subjected to the preliminary censorship. The censors were empowered to ban artworks that discredited the Orthodox Church or Christian beliefs, the ruling dynasty, the government, and its decisions, morality, and decorum⁶.

New censorship regulations were relatively liberal. However, the gap between the declared principals and actual censorship control remained huge⁷. During the reign of Nicholas I the censorship proliferated. The years afterwards, the Revolution of 1848 became widely known in Russia as the age of ‘censorship terror’⁸. In the field of fine arts, the censorship focused its attention on the *Lubki* – popular prints supplemented with simple graphics and narratives. The law of 1851 prescribed the destruction of all existing *Lubok* prints. Publishing of the new ones had to be approved by censors (See **Figure 1**). The censorship banned this painting and similars that referred to folk beliefs related to Christianity.

In the early 1860s, Alexander II initiated liberal reforms that deeply affected all aspects of Russian social and political life. In April 1865 the “Temporary press regulations” were implemented. They replaced preliminary censorship with an administrative one. Local censorship committees, most of the independent censors in the largest cities, as well as inspectors of publishing facilities were subordinated to a new higher censorship authority (the Chief Administration for Press Affairs). At the same time, the St. Petersburg and Moscow censorship committees, some independent censors as well as the foreign censorship agencies

⁴ С. А. Рууд, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵ В. Р. Фирсов (ред.), *Цензоры Российской империи. Конец XVIII – начало XX века. Библиографический справочник* [Censors of the Russian Empire. The late 18th – early 20th centuries], Санкт-Петербург, Рос. нац. б-ка, 2013, с. 34-52.

⁶ *Устав о цензуре. Утвержден 22 апреля 1828 г.* [Censorship Statute. Approved on April 22, 1828], Санкт-Петербург, Департамент народного просвещения, 1829, с. 4-5.

⁷ С. А. Рууд, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁸ М. Лемке, *op. cit.*, с. 183-308.

that screened all published materials from abroad, remained under the direct control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. “Temporary press regulations” of 1865 remained unchanged until 1905.

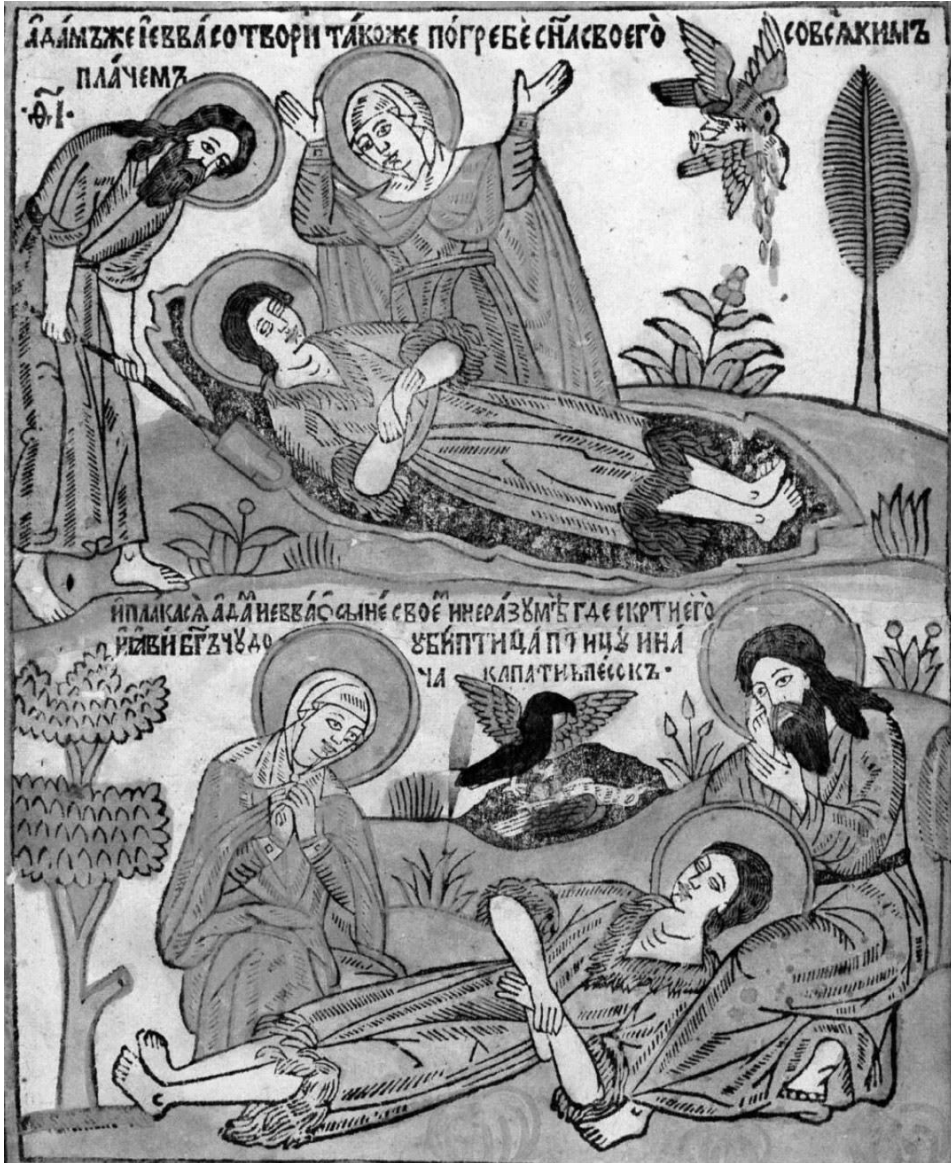


Figure 1. *Lubok* depicting how a magic bird taught the ancestors to bury deceased persons.

Source: А. А. Плетнева, *Лубочная Библия. Язык и текст* [The Lubok Bible. Language and text], Москва, Языки славянской культуры, 2013, с. 63.

By the end of the 19th c., only some 29.3% of males and 13% of females in Russia were literate⁹. That is why the ruling elite considered the illustrated media as a powerful instrument of propaganda. One must note that the censorship liberalisation of 1865 regarded mainly narratives. All “gravures, drawings and other images, whether supplemented by texts or not” remained subject to the preliminary censorship.¹⁰ Further editions of the censorship statutes, including the one adopted in 1890, preserved this norm in general.

POLITICAL CENSORSHIP IN ART: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The censorship regulations of the 1860s were levelled against those ‘unacceptable’ works of art that could be produced in multiple copies. For a long time, only the works of devotional art were screened by the ecclesiastical censorship. Civil servants paid no or little attention to non-religious paintings, sculptures and other original artworks. There were only some exclusions from this general rule. For example, a few portraits of the Russian military commanders who were involved in the Decembrist uprising of 1825, were exempted from the Military Gallery of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. However, during the reign of Nicholas I, there were no particular regulations concerning the display of artworks. Severiukhin points out that the emperor himself was the main art censor. His opinion on the aesthetic value of one or other artwork could end an artist’s career¹¹.

Until the mid-19th century, Academic art flourished in Russia. Artist’s professional fulfilment largely depended on his education in the Imperial Academy of Arts (established in 1746) as well as on his ability to produce paintings suitable for the tastes of the upper class. That is why the artists preferred politically neutral historical and mythological themes in their work. However, under the influence of the European Realism art movement, things started to change. Since the early 1860s, the artists increasingly referred to both

⁹ *Общий свод по Империи результатов разработки данных Первой Всеобщей переписи населения, произведенной 28 января 1897 года* [Empire-wide summary of results of processing data of the First All-Russian census, held on January 28, 1897], Санкт-Петербург, Паровая типо-литография Н. Л. Ныркина, 1905, Т. 2, с. XXXVII.

¹⁰ *Периодическая печать и цензура Российской империи в 1865-1905 гг. Система административных взысканий: Справочное издание* [Periodicals and censorship in Russia in 1865-1905. System of administrative penalties: Reference book], Санкт-Петербург, Нестор-история, 2011, с. 358-359.

¹¹ Д. А. Северюхин, *op. cit.*, с. 45.

social problems and disputable episodes of Russian history. It was especially true about the *Peredvizhniki* ('Wanderers') – a group of realist artists who neglected traditional Academism and arranged mobile public exhibitions in the largest cities of the Russian Empire. Cheap post-cards with reproductions of some *Peredvizhniki*'s paintings were in great demand. An innovative style of their realistic paintings, the scope of the themes reflected in the artworks as well as the increasing popularity of the public exhibitions deeply concerned the rightist group of the Russian ruling elite.

In February 1885 Ilya Repin, one of the leading realist artists in Russia, presented his painting "Ivan the Terrible and his son Ivan on November 16, 1561" (**Figure 2**) at the 13th annual exhibition of *Peredvizhniki* in St. Petersburg.



Figure 2. Ilya Repin, *Ivan the Terrible and his son Ivan on November 16, 1561*

Source: Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

The painting referred to the historical episode when psychologically deviant Tsar killed his heir with his own hands. The right-wing politicians immediately labelled the painting as disgusting. Alexander III, who visited the

exhibition personally, prohibited demonstration of the Repin's work elsewhere. Shortly after, the emperor's younger brother Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich banned another painting depicting the cruelty of Ivan the Terrible – "Kudeyar's third trial" by Konstantin Gorsky¹². On April 6, 1885, the Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced the regulations of art exhibitions. According to the document, any exhibition of the artworks had to be held only by approval of the local governor. Before the exhibition opening, all the artworks were to be examined by civil servants who were empowered to ban the displaying of any artworks considered as "harmful because of their biased character".¹³

However, it seems likely that in the years that followed censors tended to ignore the art exhibitions. On May 19, 1901, Nikolai Shakhovskoi, the head of the Chief Administration for Press Affairs, sent out a secret circular letter in which he indicated that "the artworks of harmful and biased character" came into sight at the art exhibitions throughout the Empire. The civil servants were reminded of the need to respect the regulations¹⁴.

Nonetheless, there is no evidence to confirm that the local censors intensified their control over the exhibitions after this proclamation. Rather weak control of the fine arts may be explained by the limited resources of the local censorship agencies. By 1905 all the censorship institutions throughout the Empire had only 141 public servants (including 81 censors) at their disposal. In their routine work, the censors directed their efforts mainly to the screening of the literary works and theatrical performances.

Furthermore, the censors usually disregarded the visual media due to the absence of strict evaluation criteria that would categorise a certain image as "harmful and biased". The local public servants, being apprehensive about their reputation among the educated class, preferred to avoid intrusions into the artistic life. They asked higher censorship authorities to provide more precise recommendations to help them pass judgments on the artworks. For example, in 1893 Nikolai Korchinskyi, the inspector of publishing facilities and book trade in Kyiv, initiated a lawsuit against Martinian Burmistrov, who sold the portraits of Polish national heroes in his bookshop. Korchinsky argued in his report that the Statute of Press (1886) contained no direct regulations concerning printed artworks, including paintings, drawings, and photographs. Korchinsky stressed

¹² Центральний державний історичний архів України, м. Київ [Central State Historical Archive in Kyiv] (**hereinafter: Ts.D.I.A.K.**), Fund 294, register 1, file 4-a, f. 376.

¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 379.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 101.

that although all paintings imported from abroad were to be screened by the foreign censorship, there is no list of approved artworks or stamps of the censorship approval on particular paintings.¹⁵

In practice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs never produced lists of artworks either approved or banned by the censorship. However, it continued to remind local civil servants about their obligation to screen the circulation of published images. In 1902 the Chief Administration for Press Affairs informed in its circular letter about numerous cases of unauthorised trade of illustrated materials throughout the state. It stressed that all sellers are allowed to trade post-cards or other pictures only by permission¹⁶.

There is no doubt that censorship authorities used to screen gravures, lithographs, photographs, and other images in a selective way. When a censor decided that a specific image cannot be approved, he informed other censorship authorities about his decision by a special circular letter¹⁷. The images, which were banned for political reasons, may be divided into two major groups. The first one included inappropriate portraits of the royal dynasty members. The second group included pictures that were considered unacceptable from the ideological point of view.

Since the times of Nicholas I, images depicting the emperor, his family members or his ancestors were in the centre of the censorship's attention. Censors used to evaluate the artistic level of the printed portraits, mainly those that were to be published in significant quantities. Such images were sometimes banned because of their low quality, "unsatisfactory execution", "lack of similarity", inappropriate imaging of decorations, and so on¹⁸. The censorship immediately banned images that unfavourably represented the monarch. For example, it prevented the publishing of a photograph showing Nicholas II in civilian clothes

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Fund 442, register 624, file 446, f. 13-14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Fund 294, register 1, file 4-a, f. 392.

¹⁷ It is noteworthy, that the inspectors of publishing facilities and book trade possessed the same power to stop the production and distribution of the unacceptable images as the censors and censorship committees actually possessed. See, i. e.: Державний архів м. Києва [State Archive of Kyiv] (**hereinafter: D.A.K.**), fund 287, register 1, file 56, ff. 79-79b. However, unlike the censors, the inspectors were not obliged to inform their colleagues about their decisions with special circular letters. For this reason, it is almost impossible to clarify a precise number of images banned by the Imperial authorities.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 37, 52, 69, 78.

together with his uncle – German emperor Wilhelm II, who held his hand on the Tsar’s shoulder¹⁹ (see **Figure 3**).

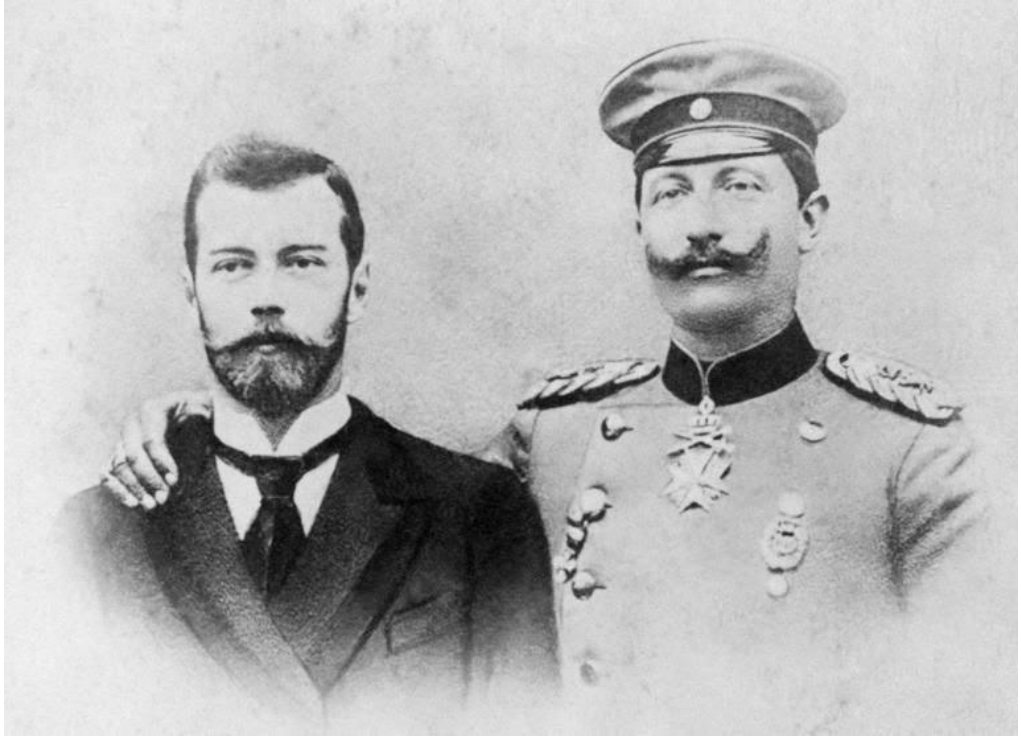


Figure 3, Photographic portrait of Nicholas II and Wilhelm II banned by the Russian censorship.

Source: <https://news.yahoo.com/toasts-tears-joy-germany-started-wwi-031602713.html>

Some circulars prohibited placement of the Royal dynasty members’ portraits on commercial products. For example, in 1899 the St. Petersburg censorship committee disapproved the image of Nicholas II and his daughters printed on the package of the chocolate sweets produced by Vasiliev’s factory as well as the portraits of the emperor and his brother Grand Duchy Mikhail Alexandrovich on the candy wrappers.²⁰ Next year the Moscow censorship committee approved the same decision towards the candy wrappers with the photograph of the Alexander II monument.²¹ At the same time, Odessa and

¹⁹ И. П. Фурт, *op. cit.*, с. 110.

²⁰ Ts.D.I.A.K., Fund 294, register 1, file 4-a, f. 97.

²¹ *Ibid.*, file 354, f. 80.

St. Petersburg censors banned the portraits of Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra on the covers of the pull-off calendars.²²

The group of politically unacceptable images included mainly those, which glorified the national movements throughout the Empire. Particularly, in 1895 the Chief Administration for Press Affairs banned a diptych named “The Soul of Armenia” by an anonymous author. One of its parts depicted a woman crying in the ruins of Ani, the ancient capital of Armenia; another one represented “a woman who shows young Armenia, depicted as a youngster, the source and the goal of the young generation’s unity (with the names of ancient Armenian towns inscribed on ruins)”. The censorship authority stated that such “exceptionally biased” artworks as well as similar paintings, gravures and photographs could not be allowed for publishing²³. However, in

most cases, the local authorities had to identify politically unacceptable images on their responsibility. For example, in 1903 the inspector of publishing facilities and the book trade in Kyiv prevented the duplication of an image “depicting the Finnish woman carrying the Code of Laws in her hands and the two-headed eagle tearing it”.²⁴ As matters stand, the inspector had no idea about the origin and authorship of the image. But it seems clear that the issue referred to the reproduction of “Hyökkäys” (“The Attack”) by Edvard Isto (1865-1905) – an iconic image for the Finnish nationalism.²⁵



Figure 4. Edvard Isto, “Hyökkäys” (“The Attack”), 1899.

Source: National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.

In most cases, the censorship restrictions concerned the portraits of historical figures that were once important for certain national movements. On May 15, 1898, the Chief Administration for Press Affairs asked the local censors to

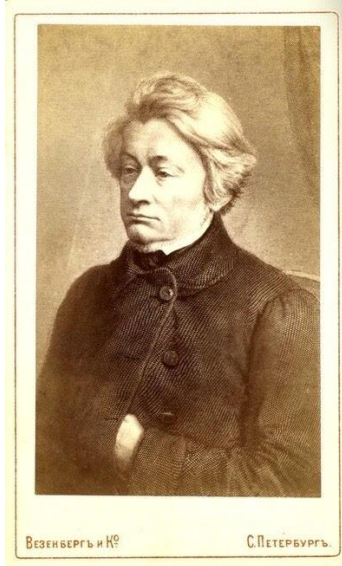
²² *Ibid.*, file 4-a, f. 52, 71.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 71.

²⁴ D.A.K. [State Archive of Kyiv], fund 287, register 1, file 49, ff. 27-27b.

²⁵ M. Valkonen, *The golden age: Finnish art, 1850 to 1907*, Helsinki, Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1992, p. 74.

pay special attention to all published materials devoted to the jubilee of the famous poet Adam Mickiewicz who was a symbolic figure for the Polish nationalism (See **Figure 5**). The document banned any portraits of Mickiewicz that could be distributed among the population for lower prices either separately or as a decoration of goods (such as packs of cigarettes, candies, etc.)²⁶. In the



following year, Saint-Petersburg's censorship committee prohibited the printing of Mickiewicz's portrait as well as the image of a monument erected in his honour in Warsaw printed on the packs of cigarettes "Shapshal"²⁷. In 1903 the St. Petersburg censorship committee, in its circular letter, banned the publishing of the portraits of "the former Polish kings Jan Zamoyski and Jan Sobieski", as well as the drawings of some scenes from Maxim Gorky's play "The Lower Depths" on packs of pencils²⁸

Figure 5. Portrait of Adam Mickiewicz published by Vezenberg & Co in St. Petersburg.

Source: Private collection.

Other circulars touched upon the portraits of contemporary political opponents to the monarchy.

Specifically, the censorship banned the portraits of Mykhailo Drahomanov, one of the leading Ukrainian political activists, Alexander Herzen, "the father of Russian socialism" as well as some left-wing political figures, such as Karl Kautsky, Ferdinand Lassalle, and August Bebel²⁹.

To some extent, such restrictions were caused by the activity of the Russian nationalists and monarchists. For example, in 1905 the Governor-General of Kyiv, Podolia, and Volhynia received a letter from certain "Little Russian patriots" who were incensed by the fact of displaying "the post-cards in Polish revolutionary spirit" in the bookstore located on the central street of Kyiv. Stating that such images "abuse the heart of a Russian man" and threatening to use violence against the store, "the patriots" asked the police to take away the post-cards³⁰.

²⁶ Ts.D.I.A.K., Fund 294, register 1, file 4-a, f. 89.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 189b.

²⁹ Ts.D.I.A.K., Fund 294, register 1, file 354, f. 90; *ibid.*, Spr. 297, Ark. 221, 267, 283.

³⁰ D.A.K., fund 287, register 1, file 57, ff. 192-193.

Sometimes the censors considered the images that touched upon the Empire's internal or foreign policy unacceptable. Shortly before the war with Japan, when Russia attempted to master Manchuria, the censorship authorities banned some pictures with specific names: "Horrors of war", "Current events in China", "Chinese wurst", etc.³¹

On June 15, 1905, the Chief Administration for Press Affairs issued probably the last ban of a particular politically unacceptable artwork. It concerned the monumental painting "The Bloody Sunday in Petersburg, January 5, 1905" by the Polish artist Wojciech Kossak. The painting, created in Vienna, depicted the dragoon attack on a peaceful manifestation in St. Petersburg. It was an event that triggered the revolution of 1905-07³².



Figure 6. Wojciech Horacy Kossak, "The Bloody Sunday in Petersburg, January 5, 1905", 1905.

Source: Kirovograd Regional Art Museum, Kropyvnytskyi.

Soon after that, in October 1905, Nicholas II officially abolished censorship.

STANDING FOR PUBLIC MORALITY

As it was mentioned above, one of the aims of censorship was to protect the Orthodox religion and public morality. In the late 19th century, the ecclesiastical censorship dealt with religious literature and images almost

³¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 50, 71.

³² *Ibid.*, f. 279.

exclusively. However, civil censors had to consult with the Most Holy Synod on the issues concerning religious matters. From time to time, the ecclesiastical censorship banned the printing of images that represented the religious symbols, Orthodox church interiors, etc.³³ Sometimes, such bans were partial. For example, in 1903 the Chief Administration for Press Affairs approved the publishing of an album of Nickolai Ge's paintings that included some images criticised by the church authorities. At the same time, it restricted the reproduction of these images in any other books and periodicals³⁴. In general, there were only sporadic cases when censorship banned images for religious reasons. In the field of public "morality and decorum," it tended to act more vigorously.

During the 19th century public authorities of all European states more or less actively tried to prevent the distribution of pornography. In this way, the Russian censorship was in no case different from any other similar institution. While depicting a naked human body was allowed and even encouraged by the Academic art, it was rather a complicated task for censors to distinguish artistic erotic images from pornography. For example, in 1871 the Committee of Foreign Censorship sends out a circular letter concerning thirty imported "photographic cards depicting persons in obscene poses". It restricted the distribution of fifteen images, "either in colour or in the original form". The circular contained a list of the titles of banned images, i. e. «La Douche», «L'Art de nager», «Le Bain en fleuve», «Qui est dans ma chambre?», «Avant», «Après», «Cancan», etc. The local censors had to use this list to prevent the distribution of all similar images³⁵. To avoid further discussions, the Chief Administration for Press Affairs in July 1889 reminded censors that they should prohibit the publishing of all images depicting the naked female body.

From 1864 the local magistrates investigated all the cases of "public display and distribution of obviously tempting products and images". The local authorities were empowered to set a fine of no more than 25 rubles or imprison a guilty person for seven days or less. However, such measures did not prevent the trading of erotic images. It seems clear that the production of pornography was an important source of income for many professional photographers. For example, Alexander Kuprin, who worked as a journalist in Kyiv during 1895-1900, argued in his novels that the production of pornography was a highly profitable business

³³ Ts.D.I.A.K., Fund 294, register 1, file 4-a, f. 162, 169, 185.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 384.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Fund 293, register 1, file 552, f. 59-60.

for the local photographers who were ready to pay their models 5 rubles for each negative³⁶.

On the other hand, there is only one documented evidence of the legal prosecution of a photographer charged with distributing erotic materials in Kyiv. In 1899 inspector of publishing facilities and book trade Alexander Nikolskyi received a denunciation from a local inhabitant who accused photographer Dmitri Markov of producing pornographic images and keeping a bagnio right in his studio. The police officer who examined the Markov's studio found twenty-seven negatives of "the obviously tempting and immoral images". Markov claimed that he bought all the negatives from a bookstore. He aimed to produce photographic cards for sale to the local artists. Since no other evidence was presented, in June 1899 the magistrate adjudged Markov to pay a fine of 15 rubles³⁷.

CONCLUSIONS

One may note that there was a significant gap between the theory and practice of the art censorship in the Russian Empire. The law listed numerous cases when certain images were to be prohibited from printing, displaying and distributing. However, the censorship authorities applied such limitations only from time to time. Most of the restrictions concerned cheap and widely available visual media, such as lithographs, photographs, and post-cards. The censorship used to ban any images that glorified national movements or left-winged political activists as well as the portraits of the Royal family members made inappropriately. The distribution of the erotic images was restricted as well. However, such measures were rather ineffective. In any case, the scale and effectiveness of the art censorship in Imperial Russia was not even close to the one that existed in the Soviet Union later.

Two main reasons caused this situation. Firstly, the censors had to pay almost all their attention to screening the literary works, including books, plays, and periodicals. Having rather limited resources at their disposal, they considered examination of the works of fine art a less important duty. The higher censorship authorities failed to make a complete list of banned images, whereas the local

³⁶ А. Куприн, *Полное собрание сочинений* [A complete collection of works], Т. 6, Москва, Воскресенье, 2007, с. 112.

³⁷ Д.А.К., fund 287, register 1, file 37, ff. 170-175b, 206-207b.

censors preferred to avoid intrusions into the artistic life. The second reason was the self-censorship of publishers, who unwillingly invested in the production of illustrative materials that could be potentially banned.

Finally, it should be stressed that until the early 20th c., most of the artists were hardly interested in political issues. Things started to change only after the revolution of 1905-07. During the following decade, the Imperial authorities had to develop new approaches to control the fine arts and distribution of visual information.