
"The East is a subtle affair." This catch phrase from Vladimir Motyl's iconic Soviet film of the 1960s, the *White Sun of the Desert*, serves, in a sense, as the leitmotif for David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's new study of Russian views of Asia. Rather than reconstruct a single hegemonic discourse of the East in Russian culture, Schimmelpenninck emphasizes the ambivalence and multiplicity of Russian views, rooted in large measure in Russia's own contested identity. The result is an engaging and insightful study that vividly brings to light Russia's multifaceted Eastern entanglements.

Not surprisingly, Schimmelpenninck takes as his starting point Edward Said's influential work, *Orientalism*, as well as more recent debates on the applicability of a Saidian approach in the Russian context. While acknowledging the importance of Said's contribution, Schimmelpenninck refuses to accept the derogatory connotation of the term Orientalism propagated by Said and the related assumption of a uniform orientalist discourse. Rather than engaging in theoretical debates, however, Schimmelpenninck offers a lively historical account of the individuals and ideas that constituted Russian orientalism.

Schimmelpenninck defines the scope of his topic along much the same lines as Said. Orientalism, for both, is an enterprise of imagination and representation finding expression in the arts and scholarship as well as political thought. Thus, while the center of gravity in Schimmelpenninck's study falls clearly within the realm of what he terms "orientology," the scholarly study of Eastern languages, history and culture (*vostokovedenie* in Russian), his work is not a comprehensive history of an academic field. Key figures in Russian Turkology, (V. V. Barthold, V. V. Radlov and E. A. Malov, to name a few) are given scant attention, for example, while long and quite interesting discussions are devoted to artists, composers, philosophers and writers. But if Schimmelpenninck delineates the confines of orientalism in roughly Saidian terms, he resolutely resists Said's contention that these pursuits are part and parcel of a common enterprise devoted to the marginalization, domination and subjugation of the oriental "other".

*Russian Orientalism* is divided into thematically framed chapters organized more or less chronologically. Schimmelpenninck sets the scene by investigating what the forbearers of modern Russia from Kievan Rus' through the Muscovite period knew and thought about their eastern neighbors: notwithstanding the inherent biases, Schimmelpenninck finds evidence of interaction and relatively tolerant attitudes. In Chapter 2, Schimmelpenninck reviews the first scholarly investigations of the East during the reign of Peter the Great. Skipping over the mid-18th century, Schimmelpenninck concentrates in Chapter 3 on the extraordinary vogue for oriental images and artifacts during the reign of Catherine the Great. Even at a time when Russian elites most strongly identified themselves with European culture, they continued to view the Orient as "an object of wonder, amusement and beauty."(59) By the nineteenth century, as Schimmelpenninck describes in Chapter 4, this fascination with the East had developed into a potent source of artistic and literary inspiration. But unlike their Western counterparts, Russian writers and artists drew on an awareness of Russia's own eastern roots producing works that were often surprisingly nuanced and sympathetic.

Having explored images of Asia in the creative imagination, Schimmelpenninck turns back in the mid section of the book to the realm of academic Orientology. Chapter 5 focuses on the
rise of Oriental studies at Kazan University, a major center whose prominence was abruptly curtailed in 1854 when the decision was made to consolidate the study of Asia in St. Petersburg. Chapter 6 looks at Oriental studies in the context of missionary work in the Russian Orthodox Church. Few missionaries, of course, had as deep a sympathy for Asian cultures as Father Iakinf Bichurin, the renegade monk whose exploits "going native" while head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing brought both condemnation from the Church and international acclaim as one of the founding fathers of Russian Sinology. But even the famous Nikolai Il'minsky, founder of the network of missionary schools for Russia's ethnic minorities, whose hostility to Islam later in life was legendary, showed surprising balance and tolerance toward Islam in his early years when he produced the bulk of his scholarly work. In the next two chapters, Schimmelpenninck examines the Oriental Faculty at St. Petersburg University looking first at its origins and then its heyday from the 1860s onward when it stood as Russia's preeminent center for the study of the East. While acknowledging the ties linking the Oriental Faculty to the state, Schimmelpenninck emphasizes its scholarly orientation and the steadfast resistance of its professors, regardless of their political views, to any attempt to subjugate the scholarly pursuit of knowledge to the practical needs of the Empire.

Turning back to the arts in chapter 9, Schimmelpenninck probes the ways in which fin de siècle artists expressed the idea of an affinity between Russia and Asia. Among the first to embrace this theme was the composer Pavel Borodin who, in his opera Prince Igor, explored the notion of Russia as a fusion between East and West. Silver Age writers such as Vladimir Solov'ev, Andrei Belyi and Alexander Blok took this theme in an apocalyptic direction, envisioning impending doom at the hands of Asiatic hordes yet placing the Russians squarely in their midst: if there was to be an apocalypse it would be from within. In his concluding chapter, Schimmelpenninck reiterates the multiplicity of perspectives on Asia and Asians in Russian culture. He does not deny the strongly negative views espoused by Slavophiles and Westernizers alike who concurred in their association of the East with backwardness, corruption and immobility. Yet there were always exceptions--individuals who recognized and celebrated Russia's eastern roots, from the Slavophile Alexi Khomiakov, to Alexander Herzen the Westernizer. Scholars such as Vasilii Grigor'ev, Vasilii Stasov, Nikolai Veselovskii and Baron Victor Rozen took up the theme of Russia in Asia (and vice versa) and imprinted the notion of Russia's Asiatic origins with the stamp of scholarly legitimacy. As a foil to the mechanistic rationalism of Western modernity, the idea of Russia as an Asiatic civilization rapidly gained force fueled by the writers and artists of the Silver Age and reaching its culmination in the historical and cultural theories of the Eurasianists. The revival of Eurasianist thinking in post-Soviet Russia and the immense popularity of writers such as Lev Gumilev (whom, surprisingly, Schimmelpenninck does not mention) remind us that these ideas remain a potent force in the present day.

Schimmelpenninck recounts the story of Russian Orientalism with economy, vigor and a sharp eye for exemplary detail. His vivid portraits and thoughtful analysis make the book a pleasure to read. While its approach is by no means simplistic Russian Orientalism should be accessible to the well informed general reader and is eminently suited for use with undergraduates. Specialists may find the work slightly less edifying. It does not appear that Schimmelpenninck engaged in significant archival research, and scholars already familiar with this material will find little that is fundamentally new. Still, given the breadth of the topic and the author's love of biographical detail there are more than enough intriguing morsels to reward readers on all levels.