

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Russian School, Nineteenth Century

View of the Pechersk Lavra, Kiev

titled in Cyrillic; further inscribed 'La Ville de Kieff' (on the mount)
watercolour and ink over pencil on paper
20.2 x 29.4 cm (8 x 11½ in)

This detailed watercolour provides a wonderful view of the historical heart of Kiev. The foreground is populated by figures going about their daily business: an artist sketches whilst engaged in conversation with two smartly dressed men, and on the other side of the pile of timber, two companions relax in the sunshine. Two men on a sailing barge are doing their best to keep the boat from running aground. On the water, there are two smaller craft; the one furthest away seems to be engaged in fishing, while the two men in the other are paddling slowly downstream. As the viewer's eye moves from this foreground scene and across the expanse of the Dnieper River, the hills of the Pechersk neighbourhood rise steeply from the far bank. The first building visible, nestled amongst the trees, is the Vydubychi Monastery. Established in the eleventh century by Vsevolod I, Grand Prince of Kiev (1030-1093), the monastery takes its name from the Ukrainian word *Видобути*, meaning 'to emerge from water'.

Above Vydubychi is the main focus of the image, the sprawling complex of buildings known as the Pechersk Lavra, an historic Christian Orthodox monastery in Kiev, also known as the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. Since its foundation in 1015, Pechersk Lavra has become a pre-eminent centre for Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe. It contains numerous interesting architectural features, many of which can be seen in the present work: bell towers, cathedrals, underground cave systems and strong fortification walls.

The topographical accuracy is consistent throughout the work: if one follows the line of the river the district of Podil, the residential centre of Kiev, is visible in the distance. The artist has displayed an accomplished handling of the brush, with great detail in all aspects of the scene, whether in the architectural modelling of the monastery or in the folds of the clothes of some on the staffage.

These types of topographical watercolour views were quite common in nineteenth-century Russian art. For example Fiodor Alexeyev (1753-1824) painted an entire series entitled *Views of Moscow and its Environs*, one of which was [View of the Foundling Hospital](#). It is constructed similarly to the present

work with a few foreground figures animating an accurate depiction of a notable landmark, whilst a view of the city stretches away in the background. These detailed urban landscapes, which portrayed the significant buildings of the Russian Empire, were much sought after and *View of the Pechersk Lavra, Kiev* is an excellent example of the genre.