SPHINX FINE ART



Pierre Alexandrovich Parisot, called Ludoviki (Paris 1750 - Moscow 1820)

Village Fête in the Environs of Tsarskoe Selo

signed 'P. Ludowick' (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
70.5 x 89 cm (27¾ x 35 in)

'Howtender is the wealth of Flora here. Howthe pleasance of the air is linked with the goddess of these beautiful heights.'

- Mikhail Lomonosov's *Ode to Elizabeth, For the Royal Favour Shown to him in the Town of Tsarskoe Selo,* 1750

In this jovial village scene, reminiscent of Dutch sixteenth-century genre painting, or a *fête champêtre,* the local fête appears to be in full swing with merriment and dancing. On the left-hand side, a group of villagers drink together around a table. Two of the men, with heavy eyelids that speak of the day's excesses, lean across to embrace their less than amused female companions. The large jug by the side of the table suggests that the wine will continue to flow for some time to come. To their right, a mother affectionately holds her daughter's hand, as she nibbles on a biscuit with much enjoyment, whilst her sister sits contently in their mother's lap. Further to the right, in the centre of the painting, a young girl with a golden, crescent-shaped *kokoshnik* on her head appears to have caught the attention of more than one suitor; the arrival of a new gentleman, who appears keen to take over the lead in the dance, disquiets her partner. The girl wears her hair in a single, long, braided plait, finished off with a ribbon, as was characteristic of unmarried women of the time. As part of the wedding ritual, their hair would then be re-braided into two braids, and wrapped around their heads and covered by a scarf.

Village Fête in the Environs of Tsarskoe Selo, a cheerful scene, is interspersed with groups of

dancers, who merrily jig away; this is contrasted by the more solemn and dishevelled vagrants on the far right-hand side, one of whom desperately reaches out towards the group of men standing by the barrels of wine or beer, pleading for just one drop. Beyond the festivities, in the far distance, in a break in the lush wooded surroundings, lies a riverbank lined with the buildings of Tsarskoe Selo.

Tsarskoe Selo, or 'Tsar's Village', located fifteen miles south of St. Petersburg, was the former residence of the Imperial family, and a popular summer residence for the nobility. Celebrated as the Russian Versailles, the town's layout and culture owed much to the admiration that the Russian Imperial family felt for the French original, and other European models. In 1708, Peter the Great (1672-1725) gave the estate to his wife, the future Empress Catherine I (1684-1727), who started to develop the place as a royal country retreat. It was however, her daughter, Empress Elizabeth (1709-1761), together with her favourite architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1675-1744), who undertook extensive work on the estate, and was largely responsible for the building of the Catherine Palace. Later, Empress Catherine the Great of Russia (1729-1796), and her architect Charles Cameron (1745-1812), extended the palace building, adding what is now known as the famous Cameron Gallery. Catherine the Great's contribution to the development of Tsarskoe Selo inspired Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765) to write his poem *To Tsarskoe Selo* in 1764, in which he praised both the town and the Empress: 'Catherine herself decorates this land. In her presence it is the golden age, and paradise is flowering.' By the end of the eighteenth century, Tsarskoe Selo had become a popular summer residence among the nobility.

The guards' regiments were stationed to the south of Tsarskoe Selo, where Catherine the Great founded the town of Sophia in the 1770s, named after her German name of Sophie. The five-domed neo-Classical Ascension Cathedral, designed by the Scottish architect Charles Cameron, is the chief monument of that area. In 1808, Sophia and Tsarskoe Selo merged and became one town. In 1811, Alexander I (1777-1825) opened the celebrated Lyceum next door to the Catherine Palace. Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was one of the first graduates, followed by Alexander Gorchakov (1798-1883) and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889). The literary traditions of Tsarskoe Selo were continued in the twentieth century by such notable poets as Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and Innokenty Annensky (1855-1909).

It was between Tsarskoe Selo and St. Petersburg that the first Russian railroad was built in 1837, but other than this, the town largely escaped nineteenth-century industrialisation. The estate was to take on further historical significance, for soon after his forced abdication in February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1918) and his family were imprisoned in what had been his favourite residence, the Alexander Palace. As such, it is poignantly ironic that this great palace, which his ancestors had built to consolidate their power and status, was to become the stage for what became the final act for the Romanov dynasty. The area was badly damaged by Nazi occupation between 1941 and 1945 when many of its eighteenth and nineteenth-century monuments and buildings were destroyed.

Currently, two imperial palaces exist: the Baroque Catherine Palace with the adjacent Catherine Park and the neo-Classical Alexander Palace with the adjacent Alexander Park. The Catherine Palace is surrounded by a regular French-styled garden, and also a characteristically English landscape park, it contains numerous eighteenth-century structures including the Dutch Admiralty, Creaking Pagoda, Chesme Column, Rumyantsev Obelisk, Marble Bridge, as well as several Chinoiserie structures, notably the Chinese Village.

Pierre Alexandrovich Parisot was born in Paris in 1750. Though he received no formal training, he went on to study at Montauban, and from 1785 was director of the Grenoble Art School. With the outbreak of

the Revolution in France, in 1789, he left for Russia arriving in Moscow in 1792. Upon arrival in Russia, Parisot adopted the name Ludoviki and registered himself as Swiss. He lived in Moscow for thirty-two years and was one of the few foreign artists to work in Russia at the end of the eighteenth-century. Whilst in Moscow his work came to the attention of Prince Vasili Dolgoruky who bought a painting titled Selski Prazdnik from the artist for 400 roubles. Parisot was also a teacher of art to the children of Prince Cherkassky from 1814 to 1820. Works by Parisot are extremely rare as many were destroyed in 1812 when Napoleonic troops entered Moscow, and the ensuing fire destroyed three-quarters of the city. A painting of a similar subject matter to the present work was in the collection of Mme. J. Claverie, Montauban.[1]

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[1] For an illustration of this painting see *Starye Gody,* 1914, pp. 8-19.

Artist description:

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Collections

Parisot is represented in museums in Russia, in Montauban, and in the Louvre, Paris.