

A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



Crossing the Bosphorus

Signed 'Constantinople, 1846, Dorogoff'

Alexander Matwjejewitsch Dorogoff (Aleksandr Matveevič Dorogov) (1819-1850)

Watercolour and pencil

27cm x 36.5cm

An anxious party await safe passage as they negotiate tempestuous waters off the banks of Constantinople. The ghostly apparition of a tall ship listing wildly as it approaches their boat intensifies the fervour. The oarsmen's expressions convey fear and despair as they endeavour to navigate the perilous waves. The women clutch one another's hands in reassurance, their eyes downcast as they entrust their fate to the ocean. Beşiktaş written on the side of the vessel indicates a crossing point for trade on the Bosphorus, much frequented during the Ottoman period. Paying particular attention to the passengers' costume, Dorogoff's exquisite palette of lapis blues, dusky oranges and reds, contrasts with soft pink and blue tones. The women's yaşmaks are enriched with dashes of white highlights, reminiscent of the frenetic waves themselves.

Alexander Dorogoff was a Russian artist whose works encapsulated romantic notions of the Orient. Born in St. Petersburg, he worked as an engineer until 1844 when he committed to his love of painting. Under the tutorage of M. N. Vorobyev he attended the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts, which awarded him several medals in 1845 for his paintings of the Crimea. He also travelled to the Caucasus and Constantinople during that year and undertook the present work. Three years later he was invited to join Peter von Tschichatscheff's geological expedition throughout Asia Minor and illustrate the adventure.

Dorogoff's works can be found in a number of institutions including The Russian Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, The State Russian Museum (formerly the Petersburg Museum of Emperor Alex III) the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The present work certainly attests to Dorogoff's consummate skill in portraying the truly vertiginous nature of the ocean, whilst his refined use of pencil and watercolour so adeptly reveals the sentiment of his characters. The composition results in a delicacy born in the midst of the dynamic.

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