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NICHOLAS ROERICH: IN SEARCH OF SHAMBHALA

BY

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APPROVED:
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In loving memory of my mother Galina Alexeevna Mayorova.

The light of your love is always with me.

And in memory of my brother Alexei Petrov.

He flew like a bird, and died tragically in the skies in July 2009.

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SUPERVISOR: Linda D. Henderson

Nicholas Roerich, the well-known Russian artist, writer and mystic from the early twentieth century is best known in the West for his theatrical design work, above all for the sets of the celebrated ballet *The Rite of Springs*. The goal of this thesis is to provide a fuller understanding of Roerich's art and literary works within the historical context of his time. In particular, I have sought to illuminate Roerich's focus on depiction of nature, especially mountains, in relation to his fascination with the mythical Shambhala.

In the first chapter of this thesis I analyze Roerich's early career, as well as his personal and professional relationship with the World of Art, the leading art group at the turn of the twentieth century in Russia. Roerich's early interest in the history of ancient Russia, archeology and geology, which I discuss, was central to the meaning of his landscape depictions in both his stage designs and paintings. The second chapter of this work investigates how these interests evolved into the artist's quest for Eastern wisdom and mystical revelations. Although Roerich is often treated as an oddity, his concerns with occult ideas were not unique in his time. The third chapter focuses on Roerich's activities abroad and his international success as a promoter of ancient wisdom. I discuss the Russian émigré art scene in New York in the 1920s and Roerich's place within it. I also offer an examination of the artist's correspondence with his family and colleagues, which sheds light on Roerich's beliefs in his mysterious "Teachers" and their role in leading him to the East.

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Introduction

Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich is one of the most controversial figures in Russian art from the first half of the twentieth century. His supporters unequivocally admire his paintings and accept his philosophic teachings, while, except for his theater sets and costume designs, his critics find his art mediocre. While the followers of his spiritual writings see Roerich as a prophetic figure, others reject him as a charlatan, thirsty for power and money, and suspect him of being a Soviet spy and guilty of a tax fraud.

Several of Roerich biographies and many other publications about him are sketchy and incomplete. Two major biographies of the artist in Russian were published in the 1970s in the Soviet Union, and although both are well-written and provide valuable information about the artist's life, Soviet censoring did not allow the authors to fully explore the philosophic and spiritual sources that affected Roerich's world view.¹ Jacqueline Decter, the author of the first full-scale Roerich biography in English, skims the surface of the artist's life, summarizing the information found in the Soviet biographies. Decter's work lacks any critical perspective and contains several important errors.² Roerich scholars choose the hagiographical, so to say, approach to his life and art. They elevate him above his contemporaries, and consequently Roerich remains mysterious and misunderstood. The purpose of this thesis is, first of all, to better understand Nicholas Roerich and his art by analyzing both his personal and professional relations with other artists and the roots of his deep interests in history, archeology and geology.

Secondly, this inquiry seeks to illuminate Roerich's fascination and incurable attraction to the East. This fascination became increasingly apparent around 1910. To fully understand Roerich's interest in Eastern wisdom, his beliefs need to be examined in the context of historical and cultural currents of his time—particularly, the overwhelming influence of the national revival and quest for ancient Russia, mysticism and Theosophy.

Following the October Revolution of 1917, Roerich left Russia for England and, later, the United States of America. In the 1920s Roerich abandoned the comfort and

success of his New York life and risked his reputation, becoming the central figure of scandals, all in the name of Shambhala, the mythical land of knowledge hidden somewhere in the mountains of Tibet. Some scholars question both Roerich's artistic and philosophic sincerity, thinking that he was a calculating "seller of the spiritual."³ This thesis will introduce the artist's personal correspondence from the 1920s from the archives of the Roerich Museum in New York, which has never been examined before. Roerich's letters to his family and close collaborators show that he truly believed in the mysterious Teachers and the higher role he saw as predestined for him.

The abundance of Roerich's heritage makes a comprehensive study difficult, since he produced thousands of paintings and designs on various subjects, and he left a significant body of literary texts as well. However, the artist is best known as "Master of Mountains," as rocks, skies and mountains are central in his imagery. Thus, the analysis will focus on Roerich's works depicting nature, because this motif seems to have been closely tied to his quest for mystical knowledge.

CHAPTER I

RUSSIAN PERIOD

EARLY BIOGRAPHY: FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich's interests in painting and archeology, along with his passion for collecting and unveiling mysteries of the distant past, started to develop in his early childhood and continued throughout his life.¹ When he contemplated his childhood, the artist wrote about the three most important factors that influenced his life: his first archeological experiences at the mounds on his family's estate, geography lessons at the gymnasium of Karl von May (1842–1912), and the stories of Russian writer Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852).²

Roerich was born in Saint-Petersburg on October 9, 1874 into the family of a successful lawyer and notary, Konstantin Roerich (1837–1900). The Roerichs spent summers at their country estate Isvara, about fifty-five miles southwest of St. Petersburg.³ When the future artist was nine years old, a family friend, the archeologist Lev Konstantinovich Ivanovsky (1845–1892), showed him ancient burial mounds around Isvara and introduced him to excavation techniques. Around the same time, Roerich learned about the mountains of China and plateaus of Mongolia from his father's friends, the prominent orientalists Konstantin Fedorovich Golstunsky (1831–1899) and Alexei Matveevich Pozdnev (1851–1920).

From 1883 to 1893, Roerich attended the gymnasium of Karl von May. At his geography lessons, May had his students draw maps, outline mountains and deserts, and mark elevations and plains “to record hieroglyphs of the Earth with lines and paints and

reliefs.”⁴ For Roerich, such an artistic approach to geographical information made the vastness of the Earth conceivable to his young mind. Later in his life, he devoted many years to exploring the Earth, which became the main subject of his art.

At the same time, the students put on stage performances of Nikolai Gogol’s short stories and plays. Although Gogol was most valued for his realism and ethical criticism in the depiction of Russian society, young Roerich was especially attracted to the mystical and metaphysical qualities of some of his works. Gogol’s witches and drowned maidens, who came alive at night, captured young Roerich’s imagination and stimulated his later interest in spiritualism.

Interestingly, Roerich never wrote about close childhood friendships, even though the gymnasium of von May was a remarkable school with children from noble families, as well as the creative intelligentsia and business people. Many of its graduates became key players in Russian culture, science and politics. Some of the future members of the World of Art [*Mir iskusstva*]—Alexander Benois (1870–1960), Walter Nuvel (1871–1949), Konstantin Somov (1869–1939) and Dmitrii Filosofov (1872–1940)—studied in the gymnasium in the same years as Roerich. Benois wrote in his memoirs about the lifelong friendships that started in the gymnasium, remembering boyhood tricks he and his friends played on their teachers and, more importantly, their first discussions about art and literature. No such anecdotal memories can be found in Roerich’s rather impersonal diaries. Benois remembered Roerich in the gymnasium:

In school I did not interact with him much and he did not become my friend. The reason was simple, he was two years younger than I and we met only because of probabilities of the system of combined classes. That is why I remember little about him in those years—only that he was a pretty boy with pink cheeks, very

affectionate, a little shy with his older schoolmates. By no means was he influenced by our group, as well as after graduation he remained an outsider for many years.^{*5}

Did young Roerich want to be close to his more outgoing schoolmates? Fifty years later Roerich wrote that in the “Procession of the Rivers,” a school play staged for Karl von May’s birthday, Benois impersonated the Huang He River, another schoolmate Kalin was the Yangtze River, and he was the Volga River.⁶ This fact suggests that he certainly remembered his schoolmates but preferred to leave any emotions out of his writings.

From the evidence available, Roerich’s childhood portrait suggests an intelligent, hardworking and lonely teenager, who dug the mounds of Izvara in the northern landscape, and meticulously recorded and catalogued his discoveries and possessions. Young Roerich also spent a good deal of time outdoors hunting and observing nature. His earliest sketches of animals and hunting scenes show a considerable artistic gift and a keen eye for nature [fig.1]. Roerich sought recognition for his activities on his family land, asking for official authorizations from the Imperial Archeological Society and the St. Petersburg Forestry Department to conduct archeological research, and sending his first essays for publication in hunting and nature magazines.⁷

Upon graduation from the gymnasium, Roerich wanted to study art. However, his father saw his son as a lawyer who eventually would take over his law firm. As a compromise, Roerich studied both, and in 1893 he simultaneously passed the required entrance exams to the St. Petersburg University Law Department and the Academy of Art.

* Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian to English have been done by the author of this thesis, Victoria Klimentieva.

BETWEEN OLDER TRADITIONS AND *MIR ISKUSSTVA*

Roerich entered the Academy of Arts during a time of relative artistic freedom. Recent academic reforms had ended a thirty-year struggle between the academy's administration and the so-called Wanderers [*Peredvizhniki*] movement. The educational program had become more flexible, and students could choose their own subjects for their final projects, as well as the professors with whom they wished to study. Roerich completed two required lower-division courses on figure and life drawing in one year instead of the normal two. His teacher in figure drawing, Pavel Chistyakov (1832–1919), characterized his style as “good but too suitcase-like.”⁸ Roerich wanted to study in the studio of the famous realist painter Ilya Repin (1844–1930), the highest authority among the students. Although Repin liked Roerich's work, he could not accept him because his class was full, and so Roerich chose the landscape studio of Arkhip Kuinji (1842–1910), which was a fateful choice.

Kuinji was an exotic character. Of Greek origin, with dark eyes, thick hair and beard, he resembled a Greek god. A son of a poor shoemaker and a talented artist, he became famous and rich.⁹ Unlike other Russian realist painters of his generation, Kuinji was not interested in depicting social subjects, and instead he concentrated on landscapes. He never directly copied nature, but omitted unnecessary details in order to render the image he wanted. He captured the romanticism and psychological atmosphere of nature by using dramatic light and shade effects, sometimes employing unrealistic colors and forms. Kuinji's landscapes are philosophic and contemplative. When in 1880, he exhibited the work *Moonlight Night on the Dnieper*, it was a tremendous success in

Russia [fig. 2]. There were long lines to see the painting, and many viewers tried to look behind the painting, thinking that there was a lamp lighting up the river. This painting also received critical acclaim in France during the World Exposition of 1878.¹⁰

Roerich respected his teacher not only for his talent, but also for his honesty, kindness and generosity. They developed a close friendship, which continued for fifteen years until Kuinji's death.¹¹ Roerich adopted many of Kuinji's painterly techniques. He often structured his paintings around a slightly off-centered compositional organization (hill–river–vista) and a peculiar view point, either from above or from below, as in his 1907 *Finland Studies, Punkaharju* [fig. 3]. Kuinji used this technique in *The Sea, the Crimea* (1898–1908) and many other works [fig. 4]. They shared a love of nature, especially mountains, which were their favorite subject. Kuinji in his landscapes, such as *The Elbrus in Sunset* (1898–1908), and Roerich in *Himalayas* (1933), and in many other works, often rendered not only the physical beauty, but also suggested the grand and eternal essence of the mountains [fig. 5 and 6].

Kuinji's influence is noticeable in Roerich's *The Messenger: Tribe Has Risen against Tribe*, which he submitted to the academy in 1897 as a final project for his graduation [fig. 7]. Roerich chose an original subject for a historical painting. Rather than depicting a battle or another conventional historic theme, he depicted a rower and a messenger making their way up the river in a wooden boat. The old man's face expresses concern, and his bent shoulders and posture suggest his tiredness and the heaviness of his thoughts. The new moon lights up the night sky and the darkness of the water. Its light slides over the men, highlighting their white shirts. The unusual outline of the shores with

the settlement on the hills, the quietness of the moonlit night, the stillness of the water, and the earthy colors evoke a romantic and mysterious mood. This work not only earned Roerich the title of artist, but also recognition in art circles: it was purchased by one of the most important art collectors, Pavel Mikchailovich Tretyakov (1832–1898), from the exhibition of the graduating students.

Studying in Kuinji’s studio, Roerich learned not only landscape foundations, but he also continued exploring the subjects that always interested him: ethnography, history, folklore, and archeology. He worked on historical paintings based on Russian epic poems [*bilini*], paying attention to historically accurate depictions of architecture, artifacts, and costumes. In conducting his research, Roerich became a frequent visitor to the St. Petersburg Imperial Public Library. There, he met the most important critic of contemporary Russian art, Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov (1824–1906). Seventy-year old Stasov and twenty-year old Roerich became friends. Recalling this friendship Roerich wrote:

He, so to say, was the first to introduce me to the archives of the Public Library. He gave me access to the treasures of the archives and encouraged my first callings about Russia.

I remember our correspondence. I always wrote my letters to him in a manner of old Russian documents, and he was always glad when the style was true to the origin. Sometimes he answered my letters in the same original style. Sometimes he good-naturedly laughed: “Although your yellowish deed smelled of fresh coffee, its substance was truly and originally Russian.”¹²

Even before Roerich was born, Stasov had written an article in which he analyzed the similarities between Russian folk epics *bilini*, and the Persian and Indian epics *Shāhnāmé* and *Mahābhārata*.¹³ He suggested that the origin of *bilini* is relatively recent compared to the Eastern epics, and there are substantial borrowings from the East in

bilini. In 1868, when Stasov's article was published, the thought that *bilini* had foreign origins, and that Russians had the same roots as "uncivilized Asia" was unconventional and unpatriotic. But Roerich wholeheartedly accepted Stasov's theory because he studied these folk epics and saw numerous similarities. More importantly, these similarities confirmed Roerich's belief in the common origin of human knowledge. Later, he would devote almost thirty years trying to find the birthplace of civilizations.

Stasov introduced Roerich to some of the most important figures of the cultural scene, such as the writer Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910), the philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), the composers Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881) and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), and the famous tenor Feodor Chaliapin (1873–1939). When in 1898 Roerich completed his legal studies by successfully defending his thesis "*Legal Rights of Artists in Ancient Russ*," Stasov helped him to obtain the prestigious position of assistant secretary of Society for the Encouragement of the Arts [*Obshestvo pooshrenia khudozhestv*]. He also became an assistant to the editor-in-chief of Stasov's journal *Art and Artistic Industry* [*Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennaia promishlennost*]. As a successful artist in holding important administrative positions, Roerich was at the center of the cultural scene.

The booming literary and artistic life in Russia at the turn of the century was complex and multifaceted, with a strong rivalry between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The leading art journals competed, artists were divided mainly into the "Westernizers" and the "Russophiles," and, of course, there were personal friendships and dislikes.¹⁴ Roerich's friendship with Stasov, and his work in the conservative journal that promoted

realism while criticizing everything new and European-oriented as “decadent” and pseudo-innovative, made him an outsider to the leading, vibrant art group *Mir iskusstva*. He signed his articles and reviews under the pseudonym R. Izgoy, which means “an outcast” in Russian. Roerich’s biographer Jacqueline Decter has suggested that he did so “to underscore the independence of his opinions and his lack of affiliation with any group.”¹⁵ However, Roerich must have had much deeper reasons for choosing this name—he knew that his fellow artists disliked and rejected him.

In the 1890s, Benois, a talented artist who never received a formal artistic training, and the writer Filosofov started the self-styled Society of Nevsky Pickwickians, which was later joined by Filosofov’s cousin Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929), a musician. Within eight years, other artists and writers joined the organization that crystallized into *Mir iskusstva*. The group organized two series of exhibitions (1899–1906, 1910–1924), launched the magazine of the same name (1898–1904), promoted Russian art and music, and became famous in Europe through the productions of the Ballets Russes. *Mir iskusstva* did not have a definite artistic program: the group’s motto was “pure and free art.” The Russian public, led by Stasov’s powerful and sarcastic voice, neither understood nor welcomed such a broadly-stated position.¹⁶

Roerich’s relations with *miriskussniki* are a rare instance when one can see his true character. Although Roerich knew many of the *miriskussniki* from his childhood and university years, their relations with him were, at best, cautious. Reminiscing about him, Anna Ostroumova–Lebedeva (1871–1955), an artist who was a member of *Mir iskusstva*, wrote that “Roerich was always alien to us.”¹⁷ Another *mirriskussnik* Mstislav

Dobuzhinsky (1875–1957), reacting to Roerich’s decision to reject his drawings for publication because they were insufficiently colorful, refused to make any changes: “I will be glad and grateful for suggestions from my comrades, but I do not want to receive any from Roerich.”¹⁸ Benois, characterizing Roerich of that time, said that his “sense of accomplishment, which was expressed in his tone and in every even insignificant action, and thirst for fame produced a dull and fatiguing impression on people.”¹⁹ Benois perceived a disparity between the quality of Roerich’s works and his pretensions. He disliked Roerich’s crude brushstrokes, incompleteness and indistinctness of forms, and the way he depicted buildings so that they always looked as if they were made of clay.²⁰ Indeed, Roerich’s paintings of Russian towns show that Benois’ opinion was not entirely biased and ungrounded [fig. 8 and 9].

Roerich, probably unintentionally, played quite an important role in the closing of the journal *Mir Iskusstva* in 1904. It was published with money from the Russian patrons of art, Princess Tenisheva (1867–1928) and merchant millionaire Savva Mamontov (1841–1918). The magazine’s general editor was Diaghilev. It consisted of three departments: artistic, literary and a chronicle of cultural events. Also, it was not expensive—initially seventy copecks and later fifty copecks. *Mir Iskusstva* was truly a fresh voice of change in Russian culture, but the issues were often late because of the editors’ general disorganization.²¹ By 1904, Diaghilev’s activities in organization of exhibitions and his work in theater, and Benois’ engagements with other journals, especially with *Khudozhestvennie sokrovisha* [*Art Treasures*] and *Sovremennoe iskusstvo*

[*Contemporary Art*], started to take their toll. The leaders of the journal also were getting tired and felt that they had out-grown the ideas behind it.²²

The final blow to *Mir iskusstva* was the financial strain and the cooling of Benois' friendship with Tenisheva, the journal's principal patron.²³ Roerich, who probably always secretly cherished hopes of being a part of the magazine, appeared at this opportune moment. Always polite and diplomatic, he was well-liked by the Princess.²⁴ When Diaghilev came to Tenisheva's estate, Talashkino, to negotiate the next editions of the journal, he found Roerich there. The Princess announced that she would finance the next issues contingent on Roerich's involvement as an editor of the journal. Of course, Benois, who called Roerich "appendix," "Black Leporello," and "nightmarish figure," could not agree on Roerich's participation, sarcastically predicting that "soon on covers of the magazine there will be drawings by the expert of ancient times."²⁵ Although Diaghilev tried to continue to publish the journal, *Mir Iskusstva* ceased to exist in 1904. Eventually, Roerich's ambitions became reality, and he chaired *Mir Iskusstva* which was revived in 1910 until his departure from Russia in 1916. Although in reality Roerich never was a full member of the group when it was in its highest influence, later in his life he positioned himself as the first President of *Mir Iskusstva*.²⁶

Because of the open relation of *Mir iskusstva* with European art circles, it is generally believed that the group was pro-western. However, many of the artists who were affiliated with the group, such as Victor Vasnetsov (1848–1918), Maria Yakunchikova (1870–1902) and Ivan Bilibin (1876– 1942), worked exclusively on subjects of Russian folklore, history and archeology. This fact suggests that

miriskussniki's reluctant attitude toward Roerich was based more on personal or ideological reasons, rather than artistic views. Roerich had participated in two annual exhibitions of *Mir Iskusstva* in 1902 and 1903, eliciting a scathing reaction from Stasov who called him "a tender calf who sucks two cows."²⁷ Roerich's most successful cooperation with Diaghilev and the group was in theater productions.

In 1907, before his involvement with the Ballet Russes, Roerich designed sets for Nikolai Evreinov's (1879–1953) mystery play *Tri Volkhva* [The Three Magi], which was a production of the *Starinny* [Old] Theater. Although the play received positive reviews, its esoteric content did not appeal to a broader audience. The theater was a commercial failure and ended after the first season; however, it was revived in 1911–12, and Roerich was again invited to design the sets for its productions.²⁸

Also in 1907, Roerich, on his own initiative, worked on designs for Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*. The characters and plot of the Scandinavian saga—the Supreme God Wotan, Brünnhilde, his Valkyrie daughter and the messenger of Death, love between gods and humans, a magic sword and a cursed ring, prophecies that come true—inspired Roerich's imagination. In *Fire Spell*, the fiery orange of the flames, subdued earthy colors of the rocks, the majestic blue of crystals, and the warm browns of clouds that seem to be moving toward the viewer, create the atmosphere of an approaching storm [fig. 10]. This is a mysterious and harsh landscape, a place accessible only to gods. Roerich's designs for *Die Walküre* show that the artist had an acute understanding of Wagner's music. He masterfully rendered the dynamism of the musical leitmotiv of the

“Flight of the Valkyries” through a rhythmic interaction of rocks, flames and skies.

Roerich considered these designs his most significant contributions to the stage.²⁹

Interestingly, in 1925, looking at the Himalayas and admiring them, Roerich thought about Wagner’s music:

We are looking upon the inexhaustibly rich rock formations. We note where and how were conceived the examples of symbolic images. Nature, having no outlet, inscribed epics with their wealth of ornamentation, on the rocks. One perceives how the forms of imagery blend with the mountain atmosphere. . . . And how many enchanted stone knights await their liberation! How many enchanted helmets and swords are hidden in the chasms! . . .

Over the mountains rings out “Forging of the Sword” and the “Call of Valkyrie” and the “Roar of Father.” I remember Stravinsky once was ready to annihilate Wagner. No, Igor, this heroic realism, these harmonies of achievement are not to be destroyed. And the music of Wagner is also true, and rings remarkably in the mountains.³⁰

Roerich’s superior knowledge of Russian medieval architecture and his unparalleled understanding of ancient history and culture motivated Diaghilev to invite him to work on the production of Alexander Borodin’s (1833–1887) opera *Prince Igor* in 1909. Roerich created historically truthful sets depicting the walls of a medieval Russian city and royal chambers. But, particularly stunning, was his design of *The Polovtsian Camp*, the backdrop for the second act [fig. 11]. Instead of the customary vision of the Orient with shady courtyards and ornamental carpets, he took the audience into the wilderness of the Russian steppe with the vast sun-burnt land, austere landscape, smoke from the bonfires next to nomad tents, and breathtaking golden skies lit by the sunset.

The culmination of Roerich’s theater design work was *Le Sacre du Printemps* [*The Rite of Spring*], the ballet that evolved out of the creative union of Roerich and the composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971). The idea came in 1910, when Roerich was not

yet forty years old, and Stravinsky was only thirty-two. For a while, they kept their work secret from Diaghilev, and when Diaghilev learned that they were working on a new ballet, he could not hide his excitement.³¹ The ballet consisted of two parts: “The Kiss of the Earth” and “The Great Sacrifice.”³² For the first act, Roerich depicted his favorite northern landscape: a gigantic old oak in the middle of green hills with scarce vegetation, an unwelcoming northern lake surrounded by birch-trees beneath a cold wintry sky [fig. 12]. Nature only starts to awaken after the long winter months. The Slavic tribal people would come here to celebrate spring and to choose the most beautiful maiden as their gift to the gods. The artist conceived the second act under the boundless sky of a light northern spring night [fig.13]. The presence of the god, who came to accept the offering, was revealed in the clouds that formed a frightening silhouette of a mysterious face that watches over the hills.

The ballet premiered at the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées on May 29, 1913. The reaction of the audience to the ballet was unexpected: screams, whistles, stamping of feet. The public was shocked by the melodies of Russian and Lithuanian folk-songs underlying Stravinsky’s music. Instead of dance, there were simple moves, including jumping and marching.³³ The primitive T-shape costumes with symmetrical geometric patterns, rich and unusual colors, like maroon, green, turquoise, orange and red, added to the audience’s disbelief [fig. 14]. The dancers wore metal necklaces, which were stitched to the costumes only at the central medallion, while the chains hung loose and produced jingling noises.³⁴ The art historian Christopher Cook has summarized the impact of the ballet:

One dance above all changed the public perception of classical dance for ever—*The Rite of Spring*. Stravinsky's music caused a scandal, Nijinsky's choreography horrified purists with turned-in, not turned-out feet. And then there were Nicholas Roerich's costumes Russian and primitive.³⁵

In addition to the unusual music, dance and costumes, the audience could not fully understand the plot of the ballet, specifically the pagan celebration of the sacrifice, and the sacrificial maiden's acceptance of the fate and delirious happiness at being chosen. In its first version, the ballet ran only four times in Paris and three times in London in 1913–1914. To prevent another riot during the London premiere, Diaghilev arranged for an explanatory lecture before the performance. It took major changes in the music and choreography and, most importantly, in the plot of the ballet, for the public to accept *Le Sacre du Printemps* in the 1920s. The story was modified into a drama of two lovers: a Chosen Maiden, who pierces herself with a dagger, and her beloved, a shepherd, who watches the death of his lover and who then challenges the gods by piercing an idol with the same dagger.

Although the public was not ready for the ballet in its first variant, Roerich, creating the scenario, envisioned the ballet as a ritual celebration of primitive people that climaxed in the Chosen Maiden's death. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Roerich had accumulated a deep knowledge of archeology and history. His understanding of the ancient wisdom of pre-historic people, and their union with nature, was also consistent with the dominant intellectual currents in Russia at that time.

CHAPTER II

SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES FOR ROERICH'S SPIRITUAL IDEAS

ROERICH AND RUSSIAN COSMISM

In an album of the Schneider sisters, who were his friends in the 1900s, Roerich responded to the question: “What characters in history do you most dislike?” with this answer: “Peter the Great.”¹ Why did Roerich dislike Peter the Great (1682–1725), the tsar who in the first decades of the eighteenth century leapfrogged the backward medieval Muscovite State to the level of the most progressive of European countries? Roerich’s response shows that he shared a widespread sentiment that Peter the Great destroyed the unique modes of life and the mentality of old Russia, by forcing western culture as well as progressive science and education on his country.

It is known that Peter’s administrative and ecclesiastical reforms, modernization of everyday life, and modifications to the Russian language, which he started in 1700, were broadly opposed already in his time. James H. Billington, a historian of Russian Culture described the response to the Petrine reforms:

Yet the suddenness of such reforms and the ruthlessness of their enforcement generated a passionate reaction. From many directions men rose up to defend the greater “glory and beauty” of the old ways. In the same year, 1700, an educated Muscovite publicly proclaimed that Peter was in fact the Antichrist, and a violent Cossack uprising on the lower Volga had to be crushed by long and bloody fighting. Such protest movements continued to plague the “new” Russia and to influence its cultural development.²

As a serious historian Roerich knew that Russia during the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov (1629–76), Peter’s father, was a country with thriving art and

culture, which started to incorporate progressive European ideas.³ But unlike Peter who destroyed the original culture trying, so to say, to fit it into the European fashion, his father was modifying European ideas to suit the Russian way of life. Roerich also knew the real price of Peter's economic and military decisions, a good example of which are the results of the census in 1710 that showed a 40% population decrease from 1678.⁴ Peter the Great was a ruthless ruler who repressed any opposition with savage cruelty. For example, he personally participated in torture and execution of the 330 *streltsy* [a special military unit] who revolted against him in 1698.⁵

The twofold attitude toward Peter the Great remained over the next two centuries. On the one hand, the positive impact of his actions was undeniable. On the other hand, however, the Russians were increasingly searching for a national identity in the traditions and culture that were so abruptly changed by Peter the Great.

At the turn of twentieth century, with the development of the earth sciences and the revival of Russian philosophy, many in Russia mourned the loss of what they believed to be an earlier mentality of harmonic existence of people within, while facing the western technologically-oriented mentality that promoted human domination over nature. The Russian intelligentsia struggled to develop a comprehensive worldview that would satisfy the search for "some overarching meaning to life outside that of conventional institutions such as church and state."⁶ The new turn in Russian philosophical and scientific thought that today is known as "Russian Cosmism" emerged at this time. The Russian philosophers such as Sergey Soloviev (1820–1879), Vladimir Soloviev, Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), Pavel Florensky (1882 – 1945), Nikolai Lossky

(1870–1965), and the scientists Nikolai Fedorov (1827–1903), Vladimir Vernadsky (1863–1945) and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857– 1935), thought that they would find answers to their search, not in the West, but in the roots of ancient Russian history or Eastern philosophies. They also promoted a worldview that did not separate man from nature, but, quite the opposite, considered man an organic part of nature and the cosmos.⁷ Russian Cosmism was a remarkable phenomenon that combined theological, spiritual and moral searching with the latest scientific ideas.

Roerich was personally acquainted with many Russian historians and philosophers from the time of his studies at St. Petersburg University, and Lossky was his friend for many years.⁸ Roerich’s colleagues, representatives of Russian culture, were frequent guests in his St. Petersburg apartment on Moika Street. Roerich particularly valued the one-on-one meetings with his guests:

Sometimes Gorky, Andreev, Block, Vrubel, and others came alone, and the conversations were especially rich in content. Nobody knew about these meetings under the low green lampshade. They were needed, otherwise people would not seek them. . . . It’s a pity that these late night conversations were never recorded. So much was discussed, and it cannot be found in books or scriptures.⁹

The Russian Cosmists were looking for connections between the past and the future of the civilization. Sergei Soloviev explained: “In the cradle of history, I hope to find some kind of a thread, which through the ruins and graves, could connect original life of humanity with the new life that I am awaiting.”¹⁰ They often idealized the past, thinking that people then were more in-tune with nature. For example, Florensky wrote:

A man was always and everywhere a man, and only our arrogance assigns ape-like qualities to a man in the past or distant past. I do not see any core changes in man; there are changes only in external forms of life. Moreover, a man of the

past, distant past, was more human and keen than the later one, and most importantly—nobler.¹¹

Roerich's interests in archeology, Old Russian architecture and art, and his spiritual seeking, paralleled many of the ideas of the Russian Cosmists: "Looking at ancient murals, tiles and ornaments, one thinks how beautiful the life was. What strong people lived then! Their art was part of life, unlike today, when it is a toy for the majority."¹²

Roerich's numerous depictions of the life of ancient Slavic tribes show that he admired them. Roerich saw the pagan Slavs as a creative and hardworking society: his Slavs are building boats and cities, they are working and trading, yet they are not destructive. Roerich is often criticized for the lack of individuality in his characters. Indeed, in the busy life of an ancient city, which Roerich depicted in his 1905 painting *Slavs on the Dnieper*, he only outlined typical physiognomic features: beards, blond hair and strong bodies [fig. 15]. The only two characters that more or less stand out are the big man in a red shirt in the center and an old long-bearded man with a cane, who observes the boat loading from the hill on the left. The absence of individuality is not incidental. It was not Roerich's goal to tell individual stories. He took an anthropological approach in his studies of ancient Slavs and was interested in the character of their society as a whole.

Roerich explored the mentality and culture that he saw as an example of the harmonious existence of humans within nature. In the 1911 work, *Human Forefathers*, the artist presented the viewer with a panoramic view of green, blue and lilac hills, and a sparkling river that reflects the sun [fig. 16]. The pristine picture of a landscape untouched by man could be an illustration for a folk-tale. On the top of the hill in the foreground, there is a man, dressed in traditional Slavic costume. He plays a reed pipe for

a rather unusual audience—the six peaceful bears surrounding him. The mood of the painting is idyllic and serene. However, this seemingly simple painting can be read as Roerich’s philosophical contemplation of the beauty of a world where man was an organic part of the surrounding nature.

However, Roerich’s depictions of the past are not always peaceful and harmonic. Many of his works have apocalyptic visions. In *The Commands of Heaven* (1915) Roerich shows a group of men with their hands raised to approaching masses of clouds that glow with a dramatic and frightening scarlet color [fig. 17]. Roerich’s pagan Slavs are aware of the all-consuming anger and power of nature. They believe that by appealing to and pacifying the forces of nature they will find a harmonious place within it.

In the 1912 work, *The Last Angel*, the artist depicted the Earth—cities, rivers, mountains—consumed by flames [fig. 18]. Above this universal catastrophe stands an apocalyptic sword-and-shield, bearing an angel as a symbol of retribution for all evil human deeds. In another work, *The Doomed City* (1914), a huge, serpent with evil eyes has wound itself around the walls of an unsuspecting and peaceful town [fig. 19]. This work produced an uneasy impression on its viewers. The writer Alexei Remizov (1877–1957) wrote a poem about this painting:

Doomed, trapped by a serpent, stood the blockaded city.
For some time nobody knew or felt trouble—
People were drinking and eating,
They were getting married.
When the time had come, they started ringing the bells,
But there was no escape!¹³

Roerich was not alone in feeling and seeing the ominous signs of approaching changes. The leading minds of science and the arts could not avoid the realities of their

time: the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-05, various political movements and reforms, the Russian Revolution of 1905, World War I, and finally the February and October Revolutions of 1917 that ended the Russian Empire. Russian Symbolists poets Alexander Blok (1880–1921), Andrei Bely (1880–1934), Valery Bryusov (1873–1924), and such artists as Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), and Pavel Filonov (1883–1941), were concerned with the impending catastrophe, and so at times created disquieting images of a gloomy tomorrow: storms and winds, bloody sunsets, the darkness of the future, and frightening clouds. Blok summarized the atmosphere of those years in one of his poems:

Those born in stagnant years
Do not remember their path.
We—the children of Russia’s dreadful years—
Do not have strength to forget.

Incinerating years!
Is madness in you, or hopeful news?
The days of war, the days of freedom—
Left bloody reflection is on every face.

The muteness—alarming bells
Tightly shut off our lips.
In the hearts, which were ecstatic once,
There is fatal emptiness.¹⁴

The early 1900s were filled with a new spirit that saw science and philosophy as interconnected, so the leading minds of the time were thinking about the role of people in the destiny of the Earth and their place in the Cosmos. Vernadsky, in his 1902 essay “Natural Science and Philosophy,” stated that scientists trying to find solutions to scientific problems would face ethical and philosophical questions at some point in their life:

At this moment, in the domain of exact science we stand at the border, at the foot of probably great discoveries. Scientific work has just begun, we are barely approaching, and very far from, the understanding of the forces of nature, and instinctively the human thought is directed into the future. . . .

What does this future hold? What will be the results of our activities? Where should the efforts of our will and thought be directed to achieve significant results in the humanitarian tasks of scientific knowledge, in work beneficial for humanity, in personal human growth? What means will we find to fight the evil? Could the forces discovered by science be harmful and evil?

. . . . These are timeless questions of philosophy. They cannot be solved by science alone, even less by the natural sciences. And so, unintentionally a naturalist faces these philosophical questions.¹⁵

Although Roerich did not indicate how much he knew about Vernadsky's work, given the fact that Roerich was widely read in science, especially in geology and physics, as well as because of his interest in collecting minerals, he could have read publications by Vernadsky, who was the leading geologist in Russia in the early 1900s.¹⁶ Also, Vernadsky was a close friend of the Russian orientalist Sergei Oldenburg (1863– 1934), and Roerich was also a friend of Oldenburg and studied his works on Buddhism.¹⁷ The mutual friendship with Oldenburg further suggests Roerich's familiarity with Vernadsky's works.

Through his research on the development of the Earth, Vernadsky studied the chemical reactions of the earth and the changes of the entire organic world over the course of geological history created by these reactions. In 1908, he wrote to his son: "My thought is occupied with the new area which I am embracing—about the quantity of living matter, and about the interrelationship between living and inert matter."¹⁸ It was at this point that Vernadsky started to think of all life as if it were a geological stratum, a single mass which he called "living matter." In search for evidence of "living matter" and its products in other parts of the Cosmos, he started to study meteorites.¹⁹ By 1914, he

was the first to define the term “biosphere” as a part of the atmosphere at the very surface of the earth, where biological processes are the most active due to the chemical role played by “living matter.”²⁰ He wrote that “at the very surface of the Earth—in the region of the biosphere—it is scarcely possible to speak about preservation of chemically unchanged matter of any kind over the course of millions of years.”²¹

This was the context for Roerich’s understanding of life on Earth. Although he did not use the term “living matter,” he believed that traces of life could be found everywhere, even in minerals. He saw stones and surrounding nature as “recorders” of the changes of evolutionary processes. In 1915, Roerich wrote his famous poem *Sacred Signs*, from the collection of sixty-four poems, *The Flowers of Morya*:

We do not know. But they know.
Stones know. Even trees
know. And they remember.
They remember who named mountains
and rivers. Who built past
cities. Who gave name to
vanished countries.
Words unknown to us.
They have deep sense. . . .
. . . . Letters
safeguarded wise mysteries.
And once again everything is clear. Everything is new.
A legend has come into
life. And we live again.
And we shall change again. And again
we shall touch the earth.
Great today will fade
tomorrow. But the sacred signs
will step forward. When
it is needed. They will remain unnoticed.
Who knows? But they will build
life. Where are the sacred signs?²²

Stones and rock formations were a prominent part of Roerich's iconography from early on in his career. In 1901, the artist produced a breathtaking seascape with ravens, *The Ominous Ones* [fig.20]. In this work, no direct omens or signs are present. Yet, the atmosphere of this rocky northern landscape is uneasy. Only the flock of black ravens disturbs the solemn solitude of the Earth. The ancient rocks and the hills covered with green moss, the dense cold water, and the low overcast sky, are full of sorrow and alarming premonitions.

In another work, *Conjuration of the Earth* (1907), the universe leaves mysterious omens for humans to decipher [fig. 21]. Roerich depicts pagan men who came to a sacred place to communicate with the Earth on a light northern night. The mask motif, which was left as a protective message, is prominent on the large rocks that cover the surface of the earth. This is also probably the first painting in which Roerich depicts three circles surrounded by a larger circle—the symbol which he would use in the late 1920s in designing the Banner of Peace, which became well-known when he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1929 [fig. 22]. Recollecting the time before World War I, in his essay “The Dream,” Roerich wrote:

Long ago there were conjurations. We conjured evil with soil and water. We conjured lies. We conjured with animals and birds. It did not help. Evil crawled out.

Then there were omens. We did not detect them. We did not believe them. We did not think of them. . . . There were conjurations. There were omens.²³

In his poems and paintings, Roerich time and again insisted on the importance of memory and suggested that the tracks of past human experiences could be found in the surrounding nature. Roerich clearly believed that the inner memory of inorganic forms of

nature was superior to the memory of people. He spoke of a circle of evolution and emphasized that the universe's recording of all human deeds never stops.

Searching for answers and ways to achieve salvation, Roerich could not remain indifferent to the philosophic works of Vladimir Soloviev, who was a major cultural influence in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. Roerich met Soloviev during the days of his friendship with Stasov and corresponded with him for several years until his death in 1900.²⁴ Soloviev's mystical and utopian philosophy appealed to Roerich's generation of intelligentsia because it offered an absolute and monistic worldview. Soloviev's main input into Russian philosophy was the idea of all-unity [*vseedinstvo*]—an eternal, organically-whole world that has meaning only within a spiritual foundation. Soloviev's philosophy was based on the belief that “all things in the world are in search of a unity that is bound to be realized in the concrete world through Sophia.”²⁵

He envisioned Sophia, not only as the divine wisdom of the Greek East, but also as the unreachable and forever beloved [*pogruga vechnaia*], whose love will help him to overcome death and time. In the 1898 poem, *Three Meetings* [*Tri Svidania*], he described his three personal encounters with Sophia:

Triumphing over death,
Conquering chain of time with love,
I shall not name, my forever beloved,
But you will feel my trembling song.²⁶

The most interesting is the third encounter that happened in the Egyptian desert. The author woke up on the barren land, smelled roses around him, and then Sophia's unlimited feminine beauty entered him. Soloviev believed that “in seeking a kind of

mystical erotic union with Sophia, man puts himself in communion with the ideal ‘all-unity’ which pervades God’s cosmos.”²⁷

The mystical visions in Soloviev’s philosophy also must have been very attractive to Roerich. The materialization of Sophia in the form of a divine woman who can miraculously appear was typical of the occult and mystical traditions, which Soloviev revived and made respectable in Russia.²⁸ Fascinated with mysticism from his childhood, by the early 1900s he was also seriously engaged researching the occult.

Soloviev’s all-unity was not simply an abstract and unattainable idea. He offered practical solutions for finding all-unity through art, self-expression and personal relations. He donated substantial amounts of money to various charities and funds, such as the Red Cross and the fund for restoration of the Santa Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople.²⁹ Roerich corresponded with Soloviev about the Santa Sophia Cathedral, and in 1898 he published articles on its restoration.³⁰ In various publications, Roerich wrote on the subject of restoration and protection of art and architecture, and he also raised money for such projects.³¹ Roerich believed that

a powerful country does not break up connections with its past. Yet, the past has not been researched enough. Art heritage of the past disappears every day. While it is not too late and time has not yet erased all traces of the past, it is a duty of those who think forward to save the Russian people’s cultural property.³²

Like Soloviev, Roerich believed in the feminine origin of the world. However, Roerich’s Sophia is different from Soloviev’s intimate beloved—she is the Queen of Heaven and the Mother of the World. Roerich envisioned the *Queen of Heaven* when he worked on the mural decorations in the church of the Holy Spirit at Talashkino in 1910-12 [fig.23]. The murals, unfortunately, no longer survive. In the context of Talashkino,

the *Queen of Heaven* was the central image surrounded by the heavenly city and the saints. The stormy river of life flows at the foundation of the throne. The Queen is dressed in a beautifully decorated cloak, a heavy golden crown and pearls. Two large windows played a crucial role in Roerich's conception of Talashkino *Queen of Heaven*: the rays of light that came through, in combination with the intensive black color of the background, created the illusion of Divine Light.

In this mural, Roerich followed the Byzantine pictorial tradition of the Madonna Enthroned, but with the noticeable absence of the traditional Child Christ on the Virgin's knees. This fact caused protests from the Smolensk Eparchy, but the church was constructed with money from the personal funds of Princess Tenisheva, and therefore the difficulties with the Eparchy were solved.³³ Roerich's choice not to depict Child Christ points that by 1910 the artist had already started to diverge from the traditional Christian understanding of God.

In the early 1930s, in *Mother of the World* Roerich kept the centrality and the position of the 1910 image [fig. 24]. However, the 1930s work has no Christian connotation: instead of the heavenly city, the Mother of the World seems to float on a throne of ancient rocks in a fantastic cosmic space. She does not have a traditional halo or a crown, but her head and body radiate waves of the light of wisdom. The veil conceals her eyes, indicating that the Divine Knowledge has not yet been revealed to man. Roerich's friend Sina Fosdick, who worked closely with the artists for many years, explained:

For Roerich feminine origin is inspiring, heroic and transformative. In this image he embodied his understanding of beautiful. In the image of a woman all the

beauty of the world is concentrated. Mystery always accompanies beauty, which is why the upper part of her face is hidden by the cover. Seven luminous figures on the left symbolize the Big Dipper, the three on the right—Orion. Above is the star of the Mother of the World, Venus.³⁴

Roerich depicted two small figures kneeling in front of the Mother of the World in the lower corners of the foreground. One is dressed in Eastern religious garb, while the other is wearing a dress reminiscent of a nun's habit. Analyzing this painting, Jacqueline Decter suggested that, by depicting the two figures from different religions, Roerich emphasized the unifying power of the feminine origin: to both East and West, the image of the Great Mother—womanhood—is the bridge of ultimate unification.³⁵

What were the main factors for Roerich that motivated the metamorphosis of the Christian Queen of Heaven into the cosmic Divine Sophia with distinct Eastern religious overtones? First of all, Roerich seriously studied Buddhism and Theosophy. He became convinced that the answers to the origin of civilization, as well as the ways to its salvation, could be found in Eastern Philosophies. Secondly, he had a deep interest in the occult, and believed in unexplained premonitions and messages.

Also, in 1898 Roerich met Elena Ivanovna Shaposhnikova (1879–1955), an aristocratic woman of exquisite beauty and sharp intelligence. They were married in 1901. She and her husband had common views, beliefs and hopes. Their long and happy marriage was blessed with two sons: Yuri, who became a linguist and orientologist, and Svetoslav, who followed his father's steps and devoted his life to painting. Elena Ivanovna was not only a wife who shared her husband's success and difficulties, but she also played an important role in her husband's spiritual development. She had an unusual gift of astute intuition and psychic abilities that would later play a crucial role in

receiving messages from the “Teachers,” who would become one of the major forces that sent the Roerichs to the East.³⁶ When considering Roerich’s activities, it is essential to remember Elena Roerich’s presence and role in his life.

ROERICH AND THE OCCULT

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian cultural scene was in a state of spiritual fever. Various spiritualist, philosophical, religious and pseudo-religious societies overwhelmed the populace with their publications.³⁷ In addition to popular books on dream interpretation, fortune-telling and supernatural stories, some of the most widely read books of that time were French occult classics, such as the writings of Papus (1865–1916) and Eliphas Lévi’s (1810–1875) instructions on practical magic, Kabbalistic studies, Hindu teachings of the Upanishads, philosophical works by Vivekananda (1863–1902), Helena Blavatsky’s (1831–1891) Theosophical writings, and works on the culture and history of the East by Russian travelers Nikolai Przhevalsky (1838–1888) and Prince Esper Ukhtomsky (1861–1921).

Maria Carlson, a scholar of Russian culture and literature, in her historical survey of Russian occultism, concludes that by far the most popular and widespread occult movement of that time was spiritualism—a belief in the continued existence of the dead, and in the ability of the living to communicate with the dead through a medium.³⁸

The royal courts of Alexander III (1845–1894) and Nicholas II (1868–1918) were fond of spiritualism, which explains the relative tolerance of the Russian Orthodox Church

towards these groups outside the borders of traditional religion. Mediums and occultists visited Russia on the invitation from the Royal Family of Nicholas II.³⁹

In 1881, in spite of church censorship, the leading St. Petersburg spiritualist Victor Pribytkov started to publish the first Russian spiritualist journal *Rebus*, which appeared weekly from October 1881 through 1917. Eventually *Rebus* garnered thousands of subscribers.⁴⁰ After 1905, there were other spiritualist magazines such as *The Voice of Universal Love* [*Golos vseobshchei lubvi*], *From Beyond* [*Ottuda*] and *Life of the Spirit* [*Zhizn Duha*]. Carlson noted that “these journals were quite cosmopolitan, and informed interested Russian readers on everything from animal magnetism, telepathy and somnambulism, to automatic writing and *Naturphilosophie*.”⁴¹

Roerich closely followed the experimental works of the Russian scientists and doctors who were taken by spiritualism and conducted various scientific studies in this field. Roerich’s friend, the St. Petersburg neurophysiologist and psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev (1857–1927), studied thought transference and “hypnotic suggestion.” In 1903 he published a book on the subject, titled *Suggestion and Its Role in Social Life* [*Vnushenie i ego rol v obshchestvennoi zhizni*].⁴² In 1904, the Moscow psychiatrist Naum Kotik (1876 –?) tried to prove the existence of so called N-rays—invisible rays that transmit thoughts of one person to another. Kotik concluded that “...all humans are linked by invisible threads of N-rays, which play an insignificant role in daily life, but may well acquire enormous importance and influence in all mass movements.”⁴³ Roerich read publications on scientific research on spiritualism, hypnosis and thought

transference. He thought about both Bekhterev's and Kotik's works, as well as the works of their followers, while visiting India in 1924:

All that takes place at the metapsychical institute in Paris—the experiments of Nötzing and Richet in ectoplasm, the experiments of Baraducque [sic] in the photography of physical emanations, the works of Kotik in the exteriorization of sensitiveness, and the attempts of Bekhterev in thought transference at a distance—all this is familiar to India.⁴⁴

Roerich's attitude to the occult was well known within artistic circles. Alexander Benois, speaking about his own short-lived interest in spiritualism, noted Roerich's devotion to it:

From the beginning of the XX century he, together with his wife, started a systematic engagement in communicating with the realm of spirits, and later, in immigration, and then turned this occupation into something semi-professional, which, according to rumors, brought him significant material gain and respect of all kinds.⁴⁵

A member of *Mir Iskusstva*, Igor Grabar (1871–1960), in his memoirs gave a detailed account of a spiritual séance which he, Benois and Diaghilev attended in Roerich's house on Gallernaia Street. It was a séance led by a famous Polish medium Jan Guzik, whose séances were famous for the aggressive behavior of the spirits, physical attacks by spiritual “elementals” on the participants of the séances, and the occasional materialization of a mountain spirit that looked like a hirsute man. Although the participants were warned that breaking the chain of hands was extremely dangerous, Grabar decided to “risk” his life in order to check under the table:

Finally the lights are off. There is an unbearable stuffiness in the room caused by many people holding their hands in a chain under the table. Suddenly we hear terrifying sounds: something between a guitar and a balalaika, something is moving and banging . . . something under the table was especially restless. . . . I decided that it was time to act, slowly I freed my hands from my left and right neighbors and started to fumble under the table. I touched some kind of pelt; . . .

and started to pull it in my direction. The pelt did not yield, somebody held it firmly . . . in a couple of minutes I felt a strong fist hit in my back. . . . In an instant somebody switched on the electricity and the séance was over.⁴⁶

Despite the cases of obvious trickery as described above, Roerich remained a firm believer in the possibilities of communication with the other side. For example, he concluded his 1935 essay *From the Other Side [Potustoronnee]*, which basically is a collection of stories about the unexplained, with the following statement:

It is especially valuable, when those who witness something unusual do not try to attribute it to their own special abilities, but just state the fact in every detail. If a simple film can record subtle forms, then how much more the human consciousness can perceive given a certain condition.⁴⁷

Roerich not only believed in various spiritualist phenomena, but also searched for their explanations. In 1937, replying to the critics of his mystical and occult interests, he explained his pursuit of them as a search for truth and “scientific knowledge that in the past years shifted to unearthly realms, closer to understanding of subtle energies.”⁴⁸

The turn of the twentieth century was also a time when secret orders flourished in Russia. Occult societies were shrouded in secrecy, so the evidence of them is often impossible to produce. However, it is known that distinguished figures of Russian culture and science of the nineteenth and twentieth century belonged to Masonic lodges.⁴⁹ According to the writer Nina Berberova (1901–1993), “there was no profession, no institution, no official or private society, organization or group in Russia without Freemasons.”⁵⁰ Especially popular was a Masonic form of Martinism, revived by Papus during his stays in Russia between 1900 and 1905.⁵¹ It combined interests in the occult, hypnosis, ancient cults, Eastern teachings, and Theosophy. Close to Martinism was another Masonic lodge, “Lucifer,” which was established around 1910. Allegedly,

the Symbolists poets Blok, Bely, Bryusov and Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) were the members of this lodge.⁵² In general, nine Masonic lodges were established in Russia between 1906 and 1909, four of them operated in Saint Petersburg.⁵³

The journalist Oleg Shishkin, conducting his research about the Soviet interest in Himalayas concluded that Roerich was a high level member of the St. Petersburg Martinist Order and had the esoteric name Fuyama. He also suggested that Roerich inherited a Rosicrucian Cross made of rock crystal engraved with the depiction of St. George from his father.⁵⁴ Several respected Russian historians such as Alexei Vinogradov and Victor Brachev share this opinion.⁵⁵ However, the scholars at the International Centre of the Roerichs in Moscow deny these allegations.⁵⁶ The question about Roerich's participation in Freemasonry activities remains open. Much more important is the Roerichs' positive attitude to Freemasonry which was expressed in one of Helena Roerich's letters. To those who have a negative attitude to Freemasonry, she recommended they study the history of Russia:

All most honorable representatives and the best minds of our country, such as Novikov, Duke Kudashev, Suvorov, Golenichshev-Kutuzov, Duke Smolensky, Griboedov, Pushkin, Khersakov, Bakunin, and others—were Freemasons. . . . Familiarizing ourselves with the foundations of Freemasonry, we shall be amazed by the high morals of its principles.⁵⁷

Roerich's friend, a talented psychiatrist Konstantin Riabinin (1877–1956), provided an illuminating account of Roerich's interest in secret societies. Allegedly, Riabinin, like many other prominent St. Petersburg doctors, was a Rosicrucian.⁵⁸ Riabinin, in the introduction to his diary which he wrote in 1925–28 while participating in Roerich's Central Asian expedition to Tibet, recalled:

I met Roerich in 1898. The common interests in studies of difficult areas of the human spirit, inaccessible for mass understanding, made us friends. . . . From time to time, I shared my thoughts and the results of my experiments in the area of human consciousness with N. K. [Nicholas Konstantinovich] and his wife E.I. [Elena Ivanovna]. Their acute interest in these experiments, understanding of my spiritual search, and our intellectual exchanges brought us even closer. Thinking of that time, I remember we had numerous conversations about great spiritual achievements in India, the Eastern Teachers, whose deep thoughts and teachings were testimonies of the ultimate spiritual knowledge, which is collected and safeguarded in secret centers of ordination, primarily in the Himalayan Brotherhood, which, according to the legend, has existed since distant times.⁵⁹

It is clear from Riabinin's account that by 1898 Roerich was aware of and believed in the teachings of the Mahatmas of the Great White Brotherhood, the Hierarchy of Adepts, who watch over and guide the evolution of humanity. The most famous disciple of the White Brotherhood Mahatmas was Mme Blavatsky who claimed to receive knowledge directly from the Mahatmas in Tibet.⁶⁰ By then, Roerich could have read some of Blavatsky's writings and they would have reinforced his interest in such secret teachings.

It is certain that Roerich knew a myth about the White Tsar, which was extremely popular in Russia at that time. According to this myth, this tsar was a reincarnated Buddhist divinity born in Russia and destined to become a ruler of Russia and Eastern Asia.⁶¹ The government of Imperial Russia spent significant political, economic, cultural, and scientific efforts to legitimize its expansion in the East:

The idea that Buddhist people awaited the arrival of the famous White Tsar deeply impressed itself on Russian nationalist circles, Dostoevsky included; he in fact declared that he was pleased that "among these peoples of several million men the belief in the invincibility of the White Tsar and his sword is strengthening and has spread to the borders of India and indeed into it."⁶²

The myth of the White Tsar was instrumental in deepening interests in Buddhism and Eastern teachings among the Russian intelligentsia.

One of the key figures behind the “White Tsar of Asia” myth was Agvan Dorjiev (1854–1938). A citizen of Imperial Russia and a Buryat by origin, he was an assistant, confidant and teacher of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876–1933). He graduated from the Gelugpa Drepung monastic university near Lhasa with the highest degree in Buddhist Philosophy. In 1901, Dorjiev visited the Ninth Panchen Lama (1883–1937) and allegedly received some of the secret teachings about the Kingdom of Shambhala, particularly the thirteenth-century legend called “The Prayer of Shambhala.”⁶³ He was also an important connection between Lhasa and Russia, which was an enormous responsibility during the time when Lhasa could have sought Russian protection from the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-04. The British authorities accused Dorjiev of being a Russian agent in Lhasa.

In 1909, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama allocated enough money to construct the first Buddhist Temple in St. Petersburg. Dorjiev presented the First Buddhist Temple “as the symbol of Russia’s reconciliation with its ‘internal Orient’ and national minorities, when in reality this temple would be attended by the Russian intelligentsia looking for exoticism.”⁶⁴ Dorjiev invited Roerich to serve on the planning committee of the temple construction because of Roerich’s knowledge of Eastern Teaching and influential position within artistic circles. Roerich also worked on the stained windows on the second floor of the temple.⁶⁵

As already mentioned, Dorjiev claimed to receive “The Prayer of Shambhala”—the secret teachings from the Mahatmas of Tibet. The legend stated that the founder of the Yellow Hat sect would be reincarnated in a town located to the North of Tibet close

to the Polar Circle. St. Petersburg fit the location and description. Dorjiev's mythological arguments about the connections between Russia and Shambhala appealed to Roerich. Everything Roerich had been reading and studying about the mysteries of Tibet for at least a decade found its living proof in Dorjiev's accounts. This meeting was the defining factor in Roerich's life, and in his subsequent quest for Shambhala.

ROERICH AND THEOSOPHY

Although it was not as strong in terms of numbers of followers as spiritualism, Theosophy was the most important trend in terms of cultural and philosophical content at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁶ The first Russian branch of the Theosophical Society was officially opened in St. Petersburg in 1908, but the public was familiar with Theosophical works by Blavatsky before 1908, through publications in popular scientific and spiritualist magazines, particularly the weekly *Rebus*. Undoubtedly, Roerich read such publications; moreover, he personally knew one of the organizers of the Theosophical Society in St. Petersburg, Anna Pavlovna Filosofova (1835–1912), who was the mother of Dmitrii Filosofov and the aunt of Sergei Diaghilev.

The motto of the Theosophical society, “No Religion Higher than Truth” [*Satyât Nâsti Paro Dharmah*], reflected the goal of Theosophy, which was a reconciliation of all religions and races in one common system of ethics, with an emphasis on Eastern religions. In *The Key to Theosophy*, Blavatsky explained that one of the advantages of becoming a member of the Theosophical Society was to receive esoteric instructions to learn “the genuine doctrines the Esoteric Philosophy” that could provide scientific

knowledge of the occult.⁶⁷ She also emphasized that any knowledge of occult science should have an ethical foundation:

A true Theosophist must put in practice the loftiest moral ideal, must strive to realize his unity with the whole humanity, and work ceaselessly for others. Now, if an Occultist does not do all this, he must act selfishly for his own personal benefit; . . . he becomes forthwith a far more dangerous enemy of the world and those around him than the average of mortal.⁶⁸

Although Theosophy stated that it was impossible to absorb the Truth in its totality, it encouraged its followers to explore their spiritual possibilities: “the volume of the Absolute Truth that we are able to absorb depends exclusively on the degree of the proximity to the Truth in our consciousness.”⁶⁹

Blending religion, occult, Eastern philosophies and yoga practices, with the news of the latest scientific discoveries, Blavatsky offered a well-rounded world conception, which appealed to the Russian intelligentsia at the time. Not surprisingly, Theosophy attracted thousands of enthusiasts. Roerich was not an exception; his interest in the occult and Eastern teachings also found its support in the works of Blavatsky. He and his wife were avid pupils of Theosophy and active members of the Theosophical Society.

Blavatsky’s colorful personality, her extensive travel in India, and the mysterious book of Dzyan, from which she claimed to receive her knowledge, and seen by nobody besides the Madame herself, definitely influenced Roerich’s desire to travel to the East. Roerich knew Blavatsky’s works, but surprisingly did not read works of other Theosophists. Helena Roerich, explaining her husband’s Theosophical sources, wrote: “I must say that, besides works of E.P Bl[avatsky], N.K. read no other books, because he

prefers primary sources. He knows well Eastern Thoughts and the works which E.P. Bl. used for her sources.”⁷⁰


Blavatsky’s mysterious teacher Master Morya would also become Roerich’s teacher. The title of *The Flowers of Morya* suggests that when Roerich was writing the poems he thought about Master Morya. Roerich reflected his own development on the path to Enlightenment in these poems. For example, the 1915 poem *We Shall See*, he was clearly at the beginning point of this path:



We are going to search for the sacred signs....
It is hard to see the way. The places are unclear.
Where can they be—
The sacred signs? Today,
We might not find them.
But tomorrow there will be light.
I know—we shall see them.⁷¹

Roerich’s poems are vague, simple, and filled with grand but rather elusive words: eternity, purity, victory, knowledge, light and darkness. Roerich obviously aspired to be prophetic and deep. Roerich also used his favorite symbols—rocks, mountains and stars:

Look on the top of the mountains and
On the seabed. You will find a wonderful stone
of love.⁷²

If in *The Flowers of Morya* Roerich described his formative path to the sacred. By the beginning of the 1920, he was clearly convinced that he was getting the divine words from the Master himself. For example, in the 1924 essay *The Star of the Mother of the World*, he seems to be speaking on behalf of the Teacher: “We saw revolutions. We saw crowds” and he concludes, “We shall bring the Beauty to people.”⁷³

Also around 1918, Roerich started to sign his works with the Greek cross . Blavatsky discussed the etymology of this symbol in detail in the *Anthropogenesis* volume of *The Secret Doctrine*. Roerich, who believed in all sorts of signs, was probably fascinated that his name contained connotations of the cycle of life and the cardinal direction north:

This then represents the circle made in the northern heaven by the Great Bear, which constituted the earliest year of time, from which we infer that the loop or Ru of the North represents that quarter, the birth-place of time when figured as the Ru of the Ankh symbol. Indeed this can be proved. The noose is an Ark or Rak type of reckoning. The Ru of the Ankh-cross was continued in the Cypriote  and the Coptic Ro, P.† The Ro, was carried into the Greek cross , which is formed of the Ro and Chi or R-K. . . . The Rak, or Ank, was the sign of all beginning (*Arche*) on this account, and the Ank-tie is the cross of the North, the hind part of Heaven.⁷⁴

Probably the most interesting visual connection to Theosophy can be found in Roerich's celestial riders who became a reoccurring image in his work at the end of the 1910s. Some background is needed to fully understand these riders, which are major symbols in Roerich's work. He had explored the rider in earlier works, such as *Alexander Nevsky* (1904), *The Dragon's Daughter* (1906), the *Bogatyr Frieze* series (1910), and *Conquest of Kazan* (1914). This symbol is deeply rooted in Russian cultural tradition. A favorite character in Russian *bilini*, *bogatyr*, is the embodiment of strength and justice. Closely connected to the symbolic meaning of *bogatyr* is Saint George, a fearless hero-warrior. The image of Saint George has an important place in Russian icons. He is one of the most revered Russian saints, the protector and savior of people.

Both *bogatyr* and Saint George appeared in the works of many of Roerich's fellow artists. For example, *bogatyr* was a one of the beloved characters of Victor

Vasnetsov, who was a close friend of Roerich's teacher Kuinji. Vasnetsov created numerous works with *bogatyrs* and Russian knights, most notably *A Knight at Crossroads* (1878) and *Three Bogatyrs* (1898) [fig. 25 and 26]. Mikhail Vrubel (1856–1910) also explored the character in his 1898 impressive work, *Bogatyrs* (1898), and in *Thirty Three Bogatyrs* (1901) [fig. 27 and 28]. Kandinsky did many variations of St. George, for example, *St. George I* (1911) and *The Knight. St. George* (1914–1915) [fig. 29 and 30]. Composer Alexander Borodin explored the theme of *bogatyrs* in his second symphony, which he called “*Bogatyrskaya*.”

The symbol of a rider had become important in Russian culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the pillar of Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), created powerful images of horsemen in *The Song of the Wise Oleg* (1822), and in *The Bronze Horseman* (1833). In *The Song of the Wise Oleg*, a horse becomes an agent of death: an unnerving prediction that Oleg will receive his death from his favorite horse comes true when Oleg visits the grave of the horse. In *The Bronze Horseman*, a horseman is a metaphor for natural disaster, a horrible flood that killed hundreds in St. Petersburg. The bronze horseman is an equestrian statue of Peter the Great (1782) by the sculptor Étienne Maurice Falconet (1716–1791), which stands in the Senate Square on the left bank of the Neva river. Therefore, Pushkin also implied that Peter the Great was a symbol of predestined terrible changes:

and Him
 Who, moveless and aloft and dim,
 Our city by the sea had founded,
 Whose will was Fate. Appalling there
 He sat, begirt with mist and air.
 What thoughts engrave His brow! what hidden

Power and authority He claims!
What fire in yonder charger flames!
Proud charger, whither art thou ridden,
Where leapest thou? and where, on whom,
Wilt plant thy hoof?--Ah, lord of doom
And potentate, 'twas thus, appearing
Above the void, and in thy hold
A curb of iron, thou sat'st of old
O'er Russia, on her haunches rearing!⁷⁵

Nikolai Gogol in *Dead Souls* (1842) reflected on Russia's fate, comparing Russia with a *troika* that speeds into the future:

Russia, are you not speeding along like a fiery and matchless *troika*? Beneath you the road is smoke, the bridges thunder, and everything is left far behind. At your passage the onlooker stops amazed as by a divine miracle. "Was that not a flash of lightning?" he asks. What is this surge so full of terror? And what is this force unknown impelling these horses never seen before? . . . Russia, where are you flying?⁷⁶

Pushkin's and Gogol's horsemen are messengers of catastrophic historic changes. A rider became a leitmotiv of the 1910s, which was very effectively expressed in Block's famous words: "Bronze Horseman—we all are in the vibrations of his bronze."⁷⁷ A rider came to symbolize changes, and often death.

Benois did an illustration to the poem in 1904 which captures the image of a bronze horseman haunting the main character of the poem, a simple man Evgeny [fig. 31]. The Symbolist poets continued the theme: groups of horsemen traversing cold cities, as well as resonating sounds of hoofs on the empty streets and bridges, are prominent images in their works. The most well-known riders of all are, of course, Kandinsky's horsemen. They appear at the earliest stage of his career, for example in *Comet, Night Rider* (1900) [fig. 32]. And in 1910, he created a powerful work in tempera on glass *The Horsemen of Apocalypse* [fig. 33]. Three horsemen are flying above the Earth. Kandinsky

rendered the total chaos is the bodies of the horses and the riders. The Earth is a scarlet, orange and yellow flattened circle far beneath the horses. It seems that the horsemen are speeding away from the flames. The premonitions of tragic changes that lied ahead were on the minds of many.

Roerich's first celestial rider appeared in his 1917 work, *The Command* [fig. 34]. The artist depicted a giant rider that sweeps across the sky. The man watches him and waves in the direction of the rider's destination, as if indicating his readiness to follow the rider. In this work, the rider is a harbinger of change, and taking into consideration Roerich's personal circumstances, the waving man reflects the artist's readiness for dramatic and inevitable changes.

In 1916 Roerich was ill with recurrent pneumonia. The Roerichs decided to move to Sortavala, Finland, on the shore of Lake Ladoga, where the air was more suitable for Roerich's health.⁷⁸ Although Saint Petersburg, by then Petrograd, was not far in distance, the political events that followed the 1917 October Revolution put a barrier between Russia and Finland.⁷⁹ In 1918, while living in Sortavala, Roerich wrote one of his best essays *The Fire* [*Plamia*], which is pierced with loneliness and dreams. Roerich thought about his past, summing it up, and understood that one period of his life had ended: "I feel that I have strength to start a new page in my life. Nothing prevents me. The past does not concern me anymore."⁸⁰

Also in 1918, Roerich created a stunning suite, *Equus Aeternus*, which consists of five paintings of fantastic riders appearing in the morning, evening, and night. In *The Fire*, describing his days in Finland, he wrote about the skies, and, without mentioning

Eques Aeternus, he provided a clue for the suite: “High in the skies, celestial horsemen are racing in the battles of clouds. Heroes are chasing frightening beasts. In deadly contests, they slay the dragon. Sorceresses swim majestically, with hair spread and long arms outstretched.”⁸¹

In *Knight of the Morning*, a white knight on a white horse majestically trots across the sky, over northern lakes and hills [fig. 35]. His silhouette is formed out of the transparent air of a glorious morning. The spirit of the painting is triumphant. In *Knight of the Evening*, a rider on a horse with enormous wings hastens through the darkening clouds that thicken over the sunset [fig. 36]. The distinctly northern landscape of the *Knight of the Morning* changes into the eastern mountains. In the two paintings, titled *Knight of the Night*, the riders of the night keep speeding over sleeping mountains and enigmatic towns [fig. 37 and 38]. The strikingly beautiful silhouettes and shadows are highlighted by moonlight.

Alternation of times of a day was Roerich’s way of connoting memory, death and rebirth. Working on the celestial riders, he continued writing *The Flowers of Morya*. In many of his poems, such as *Time [Vremia]*, *Tomorrow [Zavtra]*, and *Bottomless [Bezdonno]*, he used the same associations. For example, in the poem *Tomorrow* he wrote:

Only yesterday I knew much,
But all was darkened in the course of the night.
Indeed, the day had been great.
Long and dark was the night.
A fragrant morning came.
It was fresh and delightful.
And illuminated by the new Sun,
I forgot and lost

What I accumulated.⁸²

Living in Finland, the Roerichs had to postpone their dream of a trip to the East for an indefinite time. It must have been a very difficult time for them. Their comfortable and, more importantly, full and busy life in Saint Petersburg was lost. They also had a difficult financial time. In a letter to his friend, Roerich wrote:

I live in Serdobol. I am ill—as always pneumonia. Only God knows when I'll get better. The rain is knocking at the windows. In front of me are the pages of Knut Hamsun with his small culture. The same steamboat pier. The same interests of a small town... It is difficult to live here within Hamsun's culture.⁸³

Roerich's melancholic mood is seen in *They Are Waiting* (1917) [fig. 39]. He depicted a settlement in a deserted rocky shore. The lonely figures of a woman and three men sit on the rocks, looking to the horizon and waiting for change.

All the difficulties, however, could by no means stop Roerich from continuing to think about the East. Moreover, Theosophy and Eastern teachings were probably the pivotal, supporting ideas for the Roerichs. There is a direct connection between *Equus Aeternus* and Theosophical teachings of Mme Blavatsky. The most important message that Blavatsky claimed to receive from the invisible Mahatmas was what she termed the "Book of Dzyan," which became a foundation of *The Secret Doctrine*. The connection between the fifth Stanza of Dzian and *Equus Aeternus* is impossible to miss:

THEY MAKE OF HIM THE MESSENGER OF THEIR WILL. THE DZYU BECOMES FOHAT, THE SWIFT SON OF THE DIVINE SONS WHOSE SONS ARE THE LIPIKA, RUNS CIRCULAR ERRANDS. FOHAT IS THE STEED AND THE THOUGHT IS THE RIDER. HE PASSES LIKE LIGHTNING THROUGH THE FIERY CLOUDS; TAKES THREE, AND FIVE, AND SEVEN STRIDES THROUGH THE SEVEN REGIONS ABOVE, AND THE SEVEN BELOW.⁸⁴

In the commentary on the fifth Stanza Blavatsky explained that the Dzyu is a magical or occult wisdom which deals with eternal truth, Fohat is a creative and transforming energy, the Lipika are the recorders of the karmic ledger who operate between the planes of spirit and matter.⁸⁵

Obviously, Roerich believed that he had accumulated occult knowledge, and therefore the Teachers sent the magical riders, Lipika, as guidance for him. For Roerich, Blavatsky's sons of Fohat became the messengers of knowledge, hope and change. He believed they would guide him to the East, the place where Roerich longed to be. In his 1916 poem, *It Is Time [Pora]*, he expresses his readiness for the journey:

Cosmic runes are awake.
Take your belongings.
Weapons are not needed.
Put on sturdy shoes.
Tighten the belt.
Our path will be rocky.
The East is appearing. For us
It is time.⁸⁶

By the time Roerich left Russia, he was forty-three years old. He was an accomplished artist and writer. Not liked by everybody as a person, he was nonetheless respected for his expertise in Russian history and architecture. He was a man of broad knowledge in religion, philosophy and science. Yet, Roerich was remarkably focused and goal-driven. His interest in the origins of civilizations and man's place within the Cosmos had started at very early age, and evolved into the serious study of Buddhism, Theosophy and the occult. By 1917, Roerich believed that he would find the answers he was searching in the East, and that mysterious Shambhala was close.

CHAPTER III

ABROAD

ENGLAND

The Roerichs lived in Finland from December 1916 until the summer of 1919. At first, they did not think that they were leaving Petrograd for good. Roerich visited Petrograd several times from Finland, meeting with artists and important cultural figures, such as a writer Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) and revolutionary ideologists Georgy Plekhanov (1857–1918) and Petr Kropotkin (1842–1921). He worked on the project of the Peoples Art Academy [*Svobodnaia narodnaia academia*] that would replace the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. In March 1917, he was elected a member of the Art Committee under the Provisional Government of Russia. Among other members of the Committee were Gorky, Benois, Dobuzhinsky, Filosofov, the writer Alexei Tolstoy (1883–1945), and the artist Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (1878–1939).¹ Considering Roerich's administrative experience, he could have been offered a high position in the newly formed Soviet government. Before the conservative Finnish government closed the borders with Soviet Russia in May 1918, the Roerichs' return to Russia was possible, but such a move would have meant the indefinite postponement of their dream of the East, and so they decided not to go back.

In 1918, Roerich received an invitation from the Professor of the Art Academy of Sweden Oskar Bjork (1860–1929) to visit Stockholm and to organize an exhibition that would consist of Roerich's paintings that had been in Sweden since the 1914 Baltic Exhibition in Malmö.² Roerich's exhibition at Gummesons Konsthall opened on

November 10, 1918 and ran for twenty days. It not only gave the Roerichs a much-needed financial boost, but more importantly, his work received favorable reviews. A series of subsequent exhibitions followed in Copenhagen, Helsinki, and later London, where the Roerichs traveled in autumn of 1919.³ In addition to the paintings left from 1914, Roerich exhibited the works he had created while living in Sortavala, such as *Messengers of the Morning* (1917), *Heat of the Earth* (1918), *Ecstasy* (1918), and many Karelian landscapes. Most of Roerich's Karelian landscapes, such as *Lake* (1917) and *Rocks, Tulola* (1918), show that he was moving away from realistic details [fig. 40 and 41]. In *Lake*, he used a view from above to render the dramatic zigzagging outline of sandy dunes that cuts through the glittering water. In *Rocks, Tulola*, Roerich zoomed in on the masses of rocks, so that the details became exaggerated and the surface of the rocks became one great chaotic mass. The artist used bold lines, and unusual, rich colors: black, dark rich blue, ochre, white and lilac. It seems that Roerich wanted to render the core of nature, which he found impossible to do through realism.

The changes that the Roerichs had been waiting for while living in Finland were finally realized once they arrived to England. Their most important connection in London was the omnipresent Diaghilev, who was then working on productions at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Diaghilev must have been very glad to see Roerich, first because they shared a common past and were connected by long-term successful cooperation, and, second, because he had many plans for Roerich. For example, one of his first immediate jobs was to restore the decorations for *Prince Igor*, particularly the famous *Polovtsian Camp*. By 1919, the opera had run five hundred times, so it is no wonder that

the backdrops had started to wear out.⁴ It was Diaghilev who helped to arranged Roerich's exhibition, "The Spells of Russia," at the Goupil Gallery in May 1920. The Honorary Committee of the exhibition presented the Victoria and Albert Museum with two of Roerich's works: *The Northern Landscape* and a stage design, *The Polovtsian Camp*. The design became a part of the *International Theater Exhibition*, which the Victoria and Albert Museum organized in the summer of 1922.⁵

Roerich met with his St. Petersburg friend, a musician Albert Coates (1882–1953), who had been a conductor of the Mariinsky Theater before the 1917 Revolution. Coates, by then a conductor at Covent Garden, introduced Roerich to Sir Thomas Beecham (1879–1961), the founder of the London Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic orchestras and an impresario of the Covent Garden. In 1919 Beecham commissioned the artist to work on the designs for Rimsky-Korsakov's operas *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, *Snegurochka* [The Snow Maiden] and *Sadko*. Unfortunately, Sir Beecham's financial difficulties did not allow the realization of these projected productions.

Roerich made good connections, however, through the exhibition and his theater work with Diaghilev and Sir Beecham. For example, he became acquainted with the writers John Galsworthy (1867–1933) and H.G. Wells (1866–1946).⁶ Roerich started a life-long friendship with the Indian philosopher, artist and poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). He also met with Robert Harshe (1879–1938), director of the Art Institute of Chicago, who offered to arrange a tour for Roerich in the United States.

One of the most significant events in the Roerichs' life took place in March of 1920. Allegedly, they met they met their Teacher, Master Morya in London. According to Roerich scholar Ruth Drayer, they saw him one day when they were walking on Bond Street. They immediately recognized him because they knew how he looked through their meditations. Roerich even had a portrait sketch of Master Morya [fig. 42]. They claimed that later that night the Master visited them in their flat at Queen's Gate Terrace. After this meeting, the communications between the Roerichs and the Teacher began taking place through thought transmissions.⁷ Whether or not this event indeed took place, Roerich was often thinking of India while in London. It is obvious in the works he did in London, such as *The Song of the Waterfall* (1920) and *The Song of the Morning* (1920) [fig. 43 and 44]. These works are decorative panels for a private residence in London. In *The Song of the Waterfall*, a beautiful Indian woman contemplates a flower in a rocky landscape with a waterfall. In *The Song of the Morning*, an Indian woman in a red dress is dancing with a deer in front of a palace, or temple, on the shore of a peaceful river surrounded by mountains.

The work which is probably the most representative of Roerich's thoughts in London is *Dream of the Orient* (1920), where he depicts a gigantic sleeping spirit which has materialized in the horizon [fig. 45]. Roerich's design sets for *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* also show that India was on his mind. For example, on the drop-curtain for the opera *Ledenetz Palace*, the artist depicted an ambiguous architectural space with two arches and a domed ceiling [fig. 46]. The arched space of the main hall opens up into a view of the Tsar Saltan's town, with a tower and a bell, as well as a glimpse of the sea

and a boat. A silhouette of a distant mountain is visible through another arch. The colors and ornamentation of the drop-curtain have distinct eastern overtones. The artist explained that he attempted to give the designs of the opera somewhat of “an Indian tonality. The fairy-tale itself has an oriental flavor, besides, at that time we were already dreaming of going to India.”⁸

In his memoirs, Russian émigré Vladimir Shibayev, one of the friends the Roerichs met in London, who became a frequent visitor at their home, gave a glimpse of the atmosphere of a typical evening at the Roerichs’:

The time went so fast in interesting conversations, and I didn’t notice that we had not had dinner or even tea. Clearly, there was an assumption that we had dinner before eight, and it was always like this during many other visits. Only later I have understood the deep wisdom of such order—like this, we all could keep the concentration of goals, which would be lost if we were distracted by food. It was, by the way, a characteristic of Roerich—when he had a firm goal and a plan of action, he did not allow himself or others to be distracted, not to disrupt “the straightness of a flight of an arrow” and “the monolith of action,” as he put it.⁹

Shibayev became the Roerichs’ assistant and helped them to obtain their visas to India. He remembered how overjoyed they were when they got the visas.¹⁰ However, because of financial setbacks they had to postpone their trip to India and instead, accepted Robert Harshe’s invitation to visit the United States of America, under the auspices of the Art Institute of Chicago.

AMERICAN PERIOD

The Roerichs arrived in America on October 3, 1920. They brought several hundred of Roerich’s works, ranging from his earliest paintings to more recent pieces.¹¹ These works were soon on their way around the United States in a traveling exhibition.

It was not the first time Roerich exhibited his works in America; sixty landscapes from his *Ancient Russia* series had been featured in St. Louis World Exposition in 1904 and had attracted attention.¹² It was good timing for the exhibition, because Russian art was *in vogue*, due to the world-wide fame of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, as well as the considerable efforts of the art critic and promoter Christian Brinton.

The American public was introduced to the *Ballets Russes* in 1916, when Diaghilev's company toured sixteen cities. The programme included *The Firebird*, *La Princesse enchantée*, *The Midnight Sun*, *Schéhérazade*, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Prince Igor*, *Petrushka*, *Le Spectre de la rose*, *Carnaval* and *Cléopâtre*. Diaghilev had some trouble with American censorship regarding *Schéhérazade* and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. He had to tone down the Negro slaves in *Schéhérazade* and to change the suggestive and objectionable scene in *Faune*.¹³ There was also a noticeable absence of principal dancers Tamara Karsavina and Vaslav Nijinsky. Nijinsky joined the company only at the end of the tour. However, on the whole, the tour was successful. Almost every review shared the opinion of the music critic Carl van Vechten, who said that Diaghilev had given New York "a finer exhibition of stage art than had previously been even the exception here."¹⁴ There was a second American tour of the Ballets Russes in 1917.

When the Roerichs arrived in New York, there was a large community of émigré Russian artists, many of whom Roerich knew and had worked with before. For example, one of the principal dancers of the Ballets Russes, Adolph Bolm (1884–1951), a friend of Roerich, decided not to return to Europe after the second tour. He organized his own group *Ballet Intime* in New York. Another of Roerich's friends, the artist Boris Anisfeld

(1879–1973), who had worked with Diaghilev’s ballets since 1910, also lived in New York. Anisfeld worked for the Metropolitan Opera and his designs for the opera *La Reine Fiammette* were sensational.¹⁵ By 1920 Anisfeld had two large exhibitions: a travelling exhibition in twenty cities in 1918 and a large exhibition at Grant Kingore’s gallery in New York in the winter of 1919-1920. Both of Anisfeld’s exhibitions were organized through contacts of Brinton.

It was Brinton who arranged the organization and promotion of Roerich’s exhibition at the Kingore Gallery. He also wrote a catalog of the exhibition. In this catalog, Brinton introduced Roerich as “a scholar and a poet as well as a painter” and “a mystic and a visionary,” who “appears to have had a subtle premonition of the fate that was to overtake himself as well as his countrymen.”¹⁶ Comparing him to Anisfeld’s Asiatic and southern Slavic art, Brinton called Roerich a Balt, whose art “stems from solitary, sub-Arctic wastes where mind and eye have been forced to seek inspiration from within not from without.”¹⁷ The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition opened on December 18, 1920. From the start it was very successful. Two thousand people showed up at the Kingore Gallery the first day, and thousands came in the following weeks.¹⁸ The pianist Sina Fosdick, who visited the opening of exhibition, remembered huge crowds and the Roerichs that evening:

And here he was—medium height, the blue eyes full of light, a pointed beard, a noble head, which radiated an invisible and welcoming power, unusually penetrating gaze; it seemed that he could see into the very deepness of a human soul. . . . Next to him was standing his breathtakingly beautiful wife, H.I. Roerich.¹⁹

The exhibition received favorable reviews. For example, the *New York Times* found that

his landscapes are the most impressive when neither figures nor buildings interrupt the artist's expression of his passion for nature. . . . It is difficult, however, for Mr. Roerich to eliminate humanity. Clouds and rocks are more interesting to him when he can invest them with human form and impose upon them a human significance.²⁰

The art critic Olin Downes wrote, "In the midst of our modern society, so positive and so limited, [Roerich] gives his fellow artists a prophetic example of the goal they must reach—the expression of inner life."²¹

Over the next year and a half the exhibition traveled to twenty-eight major cities of the United States. Roerich also traveled around the country working on new paintings of his impressions of America. He could not remain indifferent to the majestic nature of the Grand Canyon, the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico, and the northern rocky shoreline of Main. He continued to see the mystical spirits of nature and to create anthropomorphic images of mountains and skies. In the 1922 work *Strength*, he depicted a cliff facing the ocean in the form of the head of a giant [fig. 47]. The giant's profile with a long nose, heavy eye-brows, and eyes veiled by the clouds produces an austere and solemn atmosphere.

Although financially it was not always easy during the first year in America, still the future was promising for Roerich. The paintings at the exhibition were priced from \$200 to \$6000, and Roerich sold a number of them. The artist also received a contract from the Chicago Opera Company to design sets for Mussorgsky's *Snegurochka* and Prokofiev's *Love of Three Oranges*. Roerich had been a successful administrator in the past, so it was only natural that in 1921 he decided to organize an art school in New York, which he called the Master Institute of United Arts. The primary aim of the

Institute was “to instill into its pupils an unswerving devotion to the highest ideals of art.”²² Around the same time, he was also the leading force behind the organization of an international society of artists, *Cor Ardens* [Flaming Heart] in Chicago, and an international art center, *Corona Mundi* [Crown of the World] in New York. When Roerich was asked why he established these institutes, he replied that these organizations were the necessities of the time: the goal of *Cor Ardens* was to promote Beauty, and *Corona Mundi* supposed to “sparkle young hearts with sacred fire” and help Beauty enter ordinary lives.²³

Of course, behind the official rhetoric of the institutions, there was a financial side of these establishments, which Roerich hoped to be lucrative, although he never spoke publically about these hopes. In a letter to his oldest son George, he wrote that *Corona Mundi* will be “a golden bottomless pit” [*zolotoe dno*].²⁴ In October 1922, the Roerichs moved to a spacious apartment on 250 West 82nd Street. Roerich wrote to George: “The mother is very tired from constant moving. I am so happy that finally this winter I can give her a good apartment and servants.”²⁵

Roerich managed to involve talented, and often famous, artists from both American and Russian émigré circles in the activities of his institutions. Among the faculty of the Master Institute of the United Arts were the Russian musicians Constantine Beketoff, Maurice Lichtmann, Sina Lichtmann (later Fosdick), and the famous choreographer Mikhail Fokine (1880–1942). Among the guest lecturers were the painters George Bellows (1882–1925) and Norman Bel Geddes (1893–1958), the art critic Royal Cortissoz (1869–1948) and the architect Claude Bragdon (1866–1946). Roerich also

attracted wealthy art patrons, such as the wealthy philanthropist Charles R. Crane, the foreign exchange broker Louis Horch, the copper magnate Adolph Lewison, the successful business man Spencer Kellogg, the influential Chicago doctor Cornelia Debey, and the investment banker Otto Kahn.²⁶

To explain Roerich's success, one must take into a consideration the fact that Americans were also looking for spirituality and some sort of higher wisdom in the postwar period. Interest in Theosophical ideas, the Wisdom of the East and spiritual knowledge was prominent in the world of art and culture. One of the most widely read books among the artists in the 1920s was P. D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought, a Key to the Enigmas of the Word*, which was translated into English in 1920 and published by Claude Bragdon's Manas Press.²⁷ Ouspensky thought that human beings had three levels of perception: sensation, representation, and concept; but there was also the fourth level beyond time and space, attainable only by mystics and those who could reach cosmic consciousness. Just like Roerich, Ouspensky believed that traditional methods for approaching esotericism might still be preserved in the East.²⁸

Many writers and artists "imbued the untainted American wilderness with a divine signification and relished sensory experience of the natural world as a pathway to enlightenment."²⁹ In this period Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) made his *Equivalents* photographs—images of the sky, in which he hoped to capture the divine spirit: "Several people feel that I photographed God. May be.... I know exactly what I have photographed. I know I have done something that has never been done."³⁰ Blavatsky's and Ouspensky's influences are evident in Arthur Dove's (1880–1946) search for light

and space: “White light and space are perhaps more analogous than pinning it to a form through which one might imagine objects—ourselves for instance. One can never quite grasp that.”³¹ Blavatsky compared the purity of absolute truth with the “white ray of the spectrum.”³² Dove called his paintings “absolute bits of reality” and thought that color is white light and there are millions of whites.³³

For Bragdon, who became Roerich’s friend, Ouspensky’s construction of the fourth dimension was the empirical truth of an unseen, spiritual reality.³⁴ In his memoirs, Bragdon remembered that his friendship with Roerich started because they both were “practically and vitally interested in the theatre,” and because of their theosophical outlook upon life and mutual admiration for Ouspensky’s *Tertium Organum*.³⁵ Bragdon also believed that “there is a Beautiful Necessity which rules the world, which is a law of nature and equally a law of art, for art is the idealized creation: man carried to a higher power by reason of its passage through a human consciousness.”³⁶ This statement parallels Roerich’s thoughts: “Beauty is the Shield of the World, if the aura of the World’s Teacher is luminously radiant, even the smallest seeds of this splendor must be reflected in our life.”³⁷

No wonder that Roerich attracted many followers among the seekers of spiritual enlightenment in the 1920s. Bragdon, for example, thought that Roerich was “not an artist merely, but a prophet and a pioneer, clearly foreseeing and quietly planning a better order in a world still in the grip of its so terrible recent nightmare, not yet risen from a bed drenched with blood and stained by tears.”³⁸ The historian Robert C. Williams in his book *Russian Art and American Money 1900 – 1940*, has described Roerich as “a

salesman of the spiritual” who found many buyers in depression-ridden America. He terms Roerich’s organizations “a curious religious cult.”³⁹ Williams’ essay suggests that Roerich was not sincere in his beliefs. However, from Roerich’s correspondence with his family and colleagues, it is evident that he truly believed in his own higher predestination, and that his communications with the Teacher were not staged effects.

To an outsider the Roerichs’ relations with co-workers and friends might seem rather strange. In the letters the Roerichs’ colleagues addressed them “dearest parents,” “Mother,” “Father,” and “Teachers.” In turn, the Roerichs called them “my daughter,” “my very own,” or “my beloved.” Also, in addition to their real names, the followers received “esoteric” names. Frances Grant, who was the Executive Director of the Roerich Institute, usually signs her letters to the Roerichs’ “your daughter Modra.” Sina Lichtmann was given the name “Radna,” and Nettie Horch became “Porooma.”⁴⁰ The content of the letters is a blend of business and dreams, accounts of coincidental experiences that they all took as signs from above, visions that occurred during numerous séances, and above all reverence for the Roerichs. Everyone in the Roerichs’ close circle seemed to consult spirits and live according to the messages from the Master.

Grant’s letter to the Roerichs from October 21, 1923 is a typical example of the correspondence:

Dear Parents,

This week, one holy day came after another. After reading your letters about the glorious Gift and how It was brought to you, we all were as though in a tremor. . . . The thought of hearing His Voice is so great that the heart does not realize it—Can life be such Glory!

Mother, mother, mother! Your words to me are more precious than life. No sacrifices, no labor, no life can ever repay them. Each morning I rise early so that for at least half hour I can think and read. And as I meditate upon the Blessed

Teacher, your image too, beloved mother, comes before me so strongly, with all its radiance, all its strength.

Grant continued for a while along these lines, and then moved on to everyday business matters of publishing Roerich's articles: "The coming week we begin our real publicity work. The routine of the school is getting under way, and now we want to turn to this other great work." Grant ended the letter with the words of reverence: "Dear Parents, I close again with thanks to you for your great teachings. Unworthy as I was, you permitted me to be among the workers, and taught me, and I shall try with all my strength."⁴¹

The Roerichs' private letters reveal their unparalleled love and devotion to each other, and they also show that by this time their days were spent under the daily directions of the Master and the Divine blessing. For example, in the very beginning of their life in New York, when they needed money for a trip, probably a short vacation, Roerich wrote the following letter to his wife:

My own one,

Yesterday I was asking the Master for help, and all of a sudden I heard the voice in the hall "all right"! Before the closing of the exhibition, a young woman from Honolulu approached me in the street and said that she had very little money and that she really needed my art—anything at all! [She said that] she will come tomorrow at 9:50 to the exhibition because she leaves for Honolulu at 11. . . . This lady from Honolulu came with the check of \$300 and said that this was all she had but she must [underlined in the original] buy something. She got *Eclipse (Zatmenie)* from *Igor [Prince Igor]* and right from the wall took it to Honolulu. This is how the Master gave us "for the road".⁴²

The Roerichs expected their sons to also devote their lives to the Great Service, especially the older son George. He was a talented linguist and orientologist, so they saw him as their most important assistant and the heir of their mission. When in 1923, George

lived in Paris and met a woman he wanted to marry, his parents used all their power of persuasion not to allow this marriage:

Are you ready to cross out all achievements and lose the access to the Teacher? Right now I see a star lighten up in front of me. This is the sign of communication with the Teacher. This is the sign of harmony. George [Yurik], my very own, find the strength to resist this early marriage—don't kill yourself. . . . Mara is only the fact of current time, but she can change your karma. Your karma is brilliant, it leads to us. You should go with us and be our heir.⁴³

Clearly, the Roerichs thought that the Teachers selected them to play some unique role in history, and it was not only the honor but also a karmic duty to carry on the Teachers' tasks.

Robert Williams suggested that when in 1922 Roerich met the wealthy patron Louis Horch and his wife Nettie, their generosity "exceeded Roerich's wildest fantasies."⁴⁴ However, the Roerichs believed that it was a part of the "Great Plan," Helena Roerich in the letter to her oldest son reminded him of message they had received before they even met the Horchs: "do you remember the message from 1921—New man will come and buy the paintings—New man will understand the nature of Roerich—You should sell the paintings to L. Then we did not understand who L. was. It is clear now that this is Louis H."⁴⁵ The Roerichs saw meeting Horch as a miraculous aid sent by the Teachers, because he would provide the funds for their expedition to the East.⁴⁶

There are hundreds of the Roerichs' letters from the 1920s that show that they lived according to what they saw as the "Great Plan." In their visions they often saw Roerich surrounded by miraculous radiating light which clearly indicated an important role that he was supposed to fulfill in this plan.⁴⁷ In 1923, the planets aligned—the funds were ready, George graduated with a master's degree in Indian philology from the

Sorbonne University—and the Roerichs were all set to embark on their life-long awaited journey to the East. Some of the last pictures Roerich produced in New York before their departure were *Bridge of Glory* and *Vision* [fig.48 and 49]. They both reflect Roerich's victorious mood. In *Bridge of Glory*, the blue sun rises in the horizon highlighting the silhouette of a saintly monk. Roerich clearly referred to himself and his belief that the radiating light would lead him to the spiritual glory he was so ready for. In *Vision*, the artist depicted a traveler at the foot of the mountains. At the very top of one of the mountains the traveler sees the Teacher who seems to expect him. *Vision* is also a self-referential work which expresses Roerich's dreams and expectations for what he would find in the East.

THE EAST AT LAST

Roerich would spend the next ten years exploring the Himalayas, ultimately settling in the Indian Kulu Valley in 1935. In their first trans-Himalayan expedition (1925-28) the Roerichs covered 15,500 miles and thirty-five mountain passes, fourteen to twenty-one thousand feet in elevation. The artist's popularity in the United States and his close friendship with wealthy patrons guaranteed the Roerichs a good life in New York. Yet, they preferred the cold nights, severe winds, and the dangers of the Himalayas, over the comforts of the city. Did Roerich find the birth of civilization, he was looking for since childhood? Did the Teachers welcome him in the mysterious land of Shambhala? What was the "Great Plan" predestined for Roerich?

There are various answers to these questions. In the expedition, along with his search for ancient cultures, Roerich keenly observed the customs and cultures of the East. His travel diary was first published as a monograph in 1926, and later in 1929, under the title *Altai—Himalaya*. It is a collection of histories, poetic notes, descriptions of festivals and curious facts. The *New York Times* reviewer wrote about the book:

These are notes of landscapes powerfully and poetically pictured in words, of sights and sounds in the mountains and habitations of Sikhim and Kashmir—the tremendous sounds of religious ceremonial trumpets, the chiming of silver bells, notes of color and design in costume, sculptor’s and painter’s notes of faces and figures. All these are of extraordinary vividness. Mingled with them higgledy-piggledy are other notes—pregnant notes of mystery and mysticism.⁴⁸

Indeed, Roerich’s diary is full of mystical messages and signs they encountered on their way. For instance, near a small village of Dras, they came upon what they thought to be the first Buddhist message: “Near the road are two stone stelae representing Maitreya. Nearby, a stone with the image of a rider. Is this rider not upon a white horse? Is this not a messenger of the new world?”⁴⁹ In 1915 in *The Flowers of Morya* Roerich said “we are going to search for the sacred signs. Today, we might not find them. But tomorrow there will be light. I know—we shall see them.”⁵⁰ It took him ten years to finally see the sacred signs.

Roerich also continued his research on the roots of religions and their inevitable unification. In Ladak, he followed the lead of Nicolas Notovitch (1858 – ?), a Russian aristocrat and a traveler, who in 1887 published the book *The Unknown Life of Christ*. There he stated that according to the scrolls he allegedly had discovered in the Hemis monastery in Ladakh, Jesus Christ journeyed to the East and engaged in spiritual studying there before he went back to Palestine at the age of twenty-nine.⁵¹ The Roerich

expedition never found the scrolls from which Notovitch supposedly got his information, because they allegedly perished in the monastery, which Roerich thought to be the darkest place and “the reverse side of Buddhism”:

On approaching one already feels strange atmosphere of darkness and dejection. The stupas have strange fearful images—ugly faces. Dark banners. Black ravens fly above and black dogs are gnawing at bones. . . . And the objects of service are heaped together in dark corners like pillaged loot. The lamas are half-literate. . . . It is an old monastery founded by a great lama who left a book about Shambhala and these manuscripts are lying down below, out of sight, probably feeding mice. . . . Legends about Jesus and the Book of Shambhala lie in the “darkest” place. And the figure of the lama—the compiler of the book of Shambhala—stands like an idol in some sort of fantastic headgear. And how many other relics have perished in dusty corners.⁵²

Nonetheless, Roerich did not doubt Notovitch. For him the evidence was in legends about Issa (the Asian pronunciation of the name Jesus), which everybody seemed to know:

There have been distinct glimpses about a second visit of Christ to Egypt. But why is it so incredible that after that, he could have been in India? . . . Many remember the lines from the book of Notovitch, but it is still more wonderful to discover, on this site, in several variants, the same version of the legend of Issa. Local people know nothing of any published book but they know the legend.⁵³

The legends of the monastery of Leh convinced him that it was the site where the paths of Buddha and Jesus connected.⁵⁴ Also, everywhere he found images of Dugar, Mother of the World and Maitreya, the Coming One. In Roerich’s mind, every legend, song or image they encountered was evidence of the coming of Maitreya—the age of universal unity. A skeptical New York *Times* reviewer of Roerich’s travel diary sarcastically noted:

There is looking forward to another figure—a figure who is in the prospect of far-off divine events in most religions—the Ultimate Redeemer of the world. This figure looms mysteriously in all Roerich’s backgrounds. He is coming out of the

North—possibly Siberia or Russia. The wise man of the East with whom Roerich has been in touch.⁵⁵

At the same time, Roerich was disappointed by the drunkenness of the lamas, the deserted monasteries of Tibet, the profiteering religious bureaucrats, the extreme poverty of the population and the decline in the spiritual purity of Buddhism. He saw numerous cases of manipulation of Buddhist laws. For instance, he was upset to see the cruelty with which lamas treated their animals: “Lamas denounce the killing of animals, but, to achieve further hypocrisy, the animals are driven to the edge of a rock so that, falling they kill themselves. Thus they violate the laws of Buddha.”⁵⁶ These observations he compiled in his essay *Buddhism in Tibet*.

Roerich collected Asian artifacts, manuscripts and books, and sent them to the Roerich Museum, which was open in affiliation with the Master Institute of United Arts and Corona Mundi in 1924. Roerich also produced five hundred paintings during his sojourn in the East. Some of the paintings reflect the legends of the East and Roerich’s spiritual thoughts. For example, in *He Who Hastens* (1924) Roerich once again depicted a rider [fig. 50]. He is a messenger on a reddish-brown horse, who is galloping in the clouds between the mountain peaks, which glow with the pink and purple of the rising sun. The artist wrote that while working on this series he thought about the Mahatmas.⁵⁷ Thus, the rider must be one of the legendary messengers of Shambhala. According to Roerich’s essay *Art in Tibet*, the rider is the harbinger of Maitreya:

The rider is galloping from far away. He carries the warning from the unknown friends. . . . Where are you from, Rider? Where is your smile from? Only several years will pass, and we will hear the powerful steps of the Ruler—the Renovator of life. Already now we can see unusual events and meet unusual people. The gates of knowledge are opening, and ripened fruits are falling from the tree.⁵⁸

Since Roerich invested so much energy and time into the “opening of the gates of knowledge,” there is no doubt that he also thought of himself as a messenger coming ever closer to this mystical land.

Although his paintings with religious or mystical connotations are undeniably important, Roerich’s breathtaking landscapes of the Himalayas are unsurpassed. They earned him the widespread praise “Master of the Mountains.” Before his departure to the East in 1922, Roerich claimed to receive the following message from the Master: “I want to give Roerich’s paintings healing power.”⁵⁹ Most probably this message was Roerich’s own belief; however, his glorious snowy peaks of the Himalayas do suggest a magical quality.

In 1924, the Roerichs lived in Darjeeling in a house with a view of Himalayas. Roerich worked on his “Himalayan” and the “His Country” series. It must have been a very happy time for him—the artist was in the country he always wanted to be in, and he was full of hopes and had never been closer to his dreams: “We find an excellent house. And calmness and solitude, and the entire chain of Himalayas before us. And still another surprise: last here lived the Dalai Lama during his long flight from Lhasa.”⁶⁰

This closeness to the Himalayas brought noticeable technical changes in Roerich’s work. The lines and angles became sharper and the colors bolder. Representative of these changes are such works as *Everest Range* from the “Himalayan” series and *White and Heavenly* from the “His Country” series [fig.51 and 52]. He managed to render not only the majestic power but also the vibrating silence of the mountains. He used the brightest whites to achieve the blinding light of the peaks, and it

seems as if his canvases shine from within. Dramatic shading helps him single out the volumes and forms of the icy slopes, as well as the planes of the valleys between them. He often used a promontory point to render the perspective of endless space. In *White and Heavenly*, the artist showed the top of the world, where the mountains and clouds exist in a sort of cosmic harmony: “As soon as you reach the peaks of the Himalayas and look over cosmic ocean of clouds beneath, you will see endless chains of rocky shafts and lines of pearly clouds. Heavier and darker clouds move behind them. Isn’t this a cosmic picture that helps to understand great creative achievements?”⁶¹

Roerich was never tired of the Himalayas. He produced hundreds of mountainous landscapes in different seasons and times of the day. Roerich’s biographer E. Poliakova precisely described his works: “Mountains embody eternal stillness and eternal movement. Forms, peaks and ledges are immobile—their colors and shadows change, the lighting never repeats. Motionless becomes changeable, and movement becomes eternity.”⁶² Roerich’s mountains are always unique: they are like snap-shot “portraits” of the mountains that are being seen through some magical prism.

Roerich’s Himalayan landscapes alone demonstrate his great artistry. However, what was the “Great Plan” of the Teachers for Roerich? Did he achieve all his dreams and find his Shambhala? Recent research shows that besides his archeological and historical research and painting, Roerich wanted to be a political leader of the East.

Ironically and sadly Roerich never reached Lhasa. On their way to Lhasa Roerich’s expedition was detained in a camp on the Chang-Thang Mountains, not far from the Tibetan outpost of Nagchu from October 1927 until March 1928. They spent

those winter months in summer tents in one of the coldest places in the world at 15,000 feet altitude. It was so cold that the expedition doctor's cognac froze.⁶³ Miraculously all the members of the expedition survived, but their caravan of a hundred strong and healthy animals perished from cold and starvation. The official version from the Roerich institutions for the reason for this detention is that British authorities of Tibet did not trust Roerich because of his sympathetic attitude toward Soviet Russia.

Indeed, Roerich visited Russia in 1926, interrupting his expedition. He had a message for the Soviet government from the Teachers, which is widely known today as the "Letter of Mahatmas." In this letter the Mahatmas praised the achievements of the Soviet regime and made glorious predictions:

In the Himalayas we know of your achievements. You abolish the church which had become a breeding ground of falsehood and superstition. . . . You demolished the prison of upbringing. You demolished the prison of hypocrisy. You burned the army of slaves. You crushed the spiders of profit. . . . You recognized the religion is the teaching of universality of matter. You recognized the insignificance of personal property. You understood the evolution of commune. . . . We stopped the uprising in India when it was still premature. We also recognized the timeliness of your movement and send you all our support, asserting the unification in Asia. We know that many great achievements will happen in years 28 – 31 – 36.⁶⁴

The Mahatmas apparently did not see the terrible future that awaited the Soviet Union: the famine of 1932-33 that killed millions, the terror of Stalin's regime and its labor camps. Were the Great Mahatmas wrong or was Roerich himself the author of this letter? Jacqueline Decter, whose Roerich's biography was sponsored by the Roerich Museum in New York, explains that this letter is Roerich's (and the Mahatmas) desire to "encourage the development of the New Russia's best possibilities, but it was not meant to condone the Soviet system or suggest closer ties in the future."⁶⁵ Decter clearly

overlooks the predicted great dates. The historian Victor Brachev gives a much more reasonable explanation, suggesting that Roerich observed the unstable political situation in the East, and so predicted a revolution there “cunningly proposing himself as a mediator between the Soviet government and virtual Mahatmas and, therefore reserving the role of a real spiritual teacher of humanity for himself.”⁶⁶ Brachev’s version finds support in the expedition diaries of Doctor Riabinin, whose knowledge and talent saved the members of the expedition from certain death during the months of the detention. According to his account, Roerich sent a declaration of protest to the British authorities in which he explained the purposes of the expedition:

I, Reta-Rigden, am the Head of World Union of Western Buddhists which was founded in America. For the great task of the unification of Western and Eastern Buddhists under the leadership of the Dalai-Lama, I, my spouse, my son and other members of the Embassy, agreed to undertake this difficult and dangerous journey.⁶⁷

Riabinin’s diary contains evidence that Roerich had a political agenda. Roerich’s life shows that he always enjoyed leadership positions and craved titles like “President,” “Director,” or “Head.” The radiating light that surrounded the artist in his visions also suggests that Roerich fancied himself as an embodiment of the mythical White Tsar, whose legend captivated his mind during his work with Agvan Dorjiev in 1909. It seems that Roerich sincerely believed that the Masters of Shambhala predetermined the role of great leader of the East for him.

In the beginning of the 1930s the Roerichs settled in the picturesque Kulu Valley in Nagar, to the north of New Delhi in the Himalayan foothills, “the land of cool breezes and sweet gardens.” The artist said that it was impossible to render the beauty of Kulu in

words, and that once he felt the aroma of Kulu, he understood that it would be difficult to leave it.⁶⁸ He continued painting stunning landscapes of the Himalayas. Roerich's later works, such as *Mount "M"* (1931) or *Path to Shambhala* (1933), show a tendency toward greater simplification and omission of details [fig. 53 and 54]. Focused on the mountains in the distance, Roerich completely ignores the details that usually can be seen in the foreground, such as trees, grass, shrubbery or rocks. Instead, imposing mountain slopes and peaks, or endless skies, occupy the picture plane. One of Roerich's favorite color techniques is visible in both *Mount M* and *Path to Shambhala*: the artist employs earthy colors, variations of brown and terracotta in the foreground, and majestic blues and whites or non-naturalistic purples, violets and yellows in the background. Such colors seem to have helped Roerich distance himself from earthly realities and emphasize the magnificence of the mountains. Although Roerich's more conservative critics criticized him for such simplification, his goal was not to create a realistic landscape, but to render the spirit of the mountains.⁶⁹

These two works also show that notwithstanding the failure of the "Great Plan" and his great disappointment, Roerich never stopped believing in Shambhala and the Mahatmas. The awe-inspiring peak of Mountain Meru overlooks the Kulu. Roerich dedicated *Mount "M"* to his Master Morya.⁷⁰ In *Path to Shambhala*, the mountains' peaks shine with mysterious light: there where the Earth meets the Sky is Roerich's unattainable dream, the land of Shambhala.

Conclusion

“Let’s not be ordinary, otherwise only the mundane will be predestined for us,” wrote Roerich in a letter to his son.¹ Roerich’s life was anything but usual. From early on it was defined by purpose: his childhood interests in archeology and mystical stories developed into the goal of his life of finding the birthplace of civilization.

Although not always loved, he influenced Russian artists and other major cultural players in the first decades of the twentieth century. It will be useful to restate a few examples of this influence. Wassily Kandinsky, by far the most famous Russian artist, looked at Roerich’s images while working on his early depictions of Russia.² Roerich’s Slavs from *Slavs on the Dnieper* (1905) are recognizable in Kandinsky’s *Song of the Volga* (1906) and *Motley Life* (1907). The revolutionary innovations of Stravinsky’s music and Nijinsky’s choreography overshadowed Roerich’s contributions to the creation of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. However, Roerich’s role was instrumental because his vision and understanding of ancient tribal cultures, which came from his archeological and folklore studies, influenced both the music and the choreography of the ballet. It is also significant that when in 1910 the Union of Russian Artists dispersed in various directions and needed a unifying idea, the artists chose Roerich as a President of the revived “World of Art.” He not only had experience and organizational talent, but also a focus and an understanding of the needs of Russian art, which could bring the diverse and squabbling groups together.

Unfortunately, Roerich’s art and philosophic ideas are still not fully understood. The exalted writings of Roerich’s followers, especially those from the International Centre of the Roerichs in Moscow, lack objective interpretation and any critical approach. The followers present Roerich as a messiah sent by the mysterious cosmic Teachers to save civilization:

What the Roerichs have achieved cannot be defined simply as interest. They entered inside the Indian spiritual tradition and became the collaborators of the unique group of philosophers and Teachers. In India they are called the Mahatmas or Great Souls. They [the Roerichs] stood on a higher level of evolution than the

rest of humanity. They can be called the subjects of evolution, in other words, the essences, who could consciously influence the evolution of Spiritual Cosmos.³ Such writings quickly lose the interest of a critical reader. Yet, Roerich's philosophical platform and artistic investigations were formed when leading minds world-wide were taken by the ideas of Theosophy, Eastern thought, the occult and mystical tradition, thought transmission, and the evolution of consciousness. Roerich's idea of Unity, the Mother of World, is grounded in the Russian philosophical traditions led by Vladimir Soloviev. Roerich's mysterious Teachers were clearly connected to Mme Blavatsky's Theosophy. His spiritual search to understand man's place in the Cosmos was shared by the Russian scientists, artists, writers, and poets of that time—the representatives of Russian Cosmism.

However, the questions of humanity's place in the universe and unseen reality were not limited to the Russian intelligentsia. The mystical perception of the universe and the fourth dimension, championed by the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, the philosopher P.D. Ouspensky and the mystic George Gurdjieff were a main trend of artistic thought in the beginning of the twentieth century world-wide. Discussing the cultural context of modernism, the art historian Linda D. Henderson has noted:

Both occultism and mysticism, sometimes combined, figured centrally in the development of modernism, as a number of authors have argued in recent years. These books, including Alex Owen's superb *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004), make a powerful case for occultism, in particular, as a central factor in modernism's evolution.⁴

Roerich's interest in mysticism and occultism, as well as his international success as a mystic and promoter of an ancient wisdom as a basis of spiritually enlightened future are rooted in the cultural currents of that time.

The cultural and historical perspective is unfortunately still missing from Roerich scholarship. Although it is impossible to explore Roerich's remarkable career in every detail, it is my hope that this thesis has filled in some of its blank spaces. Some scholars do not like Roerich's "craggy cliffs and billowing clouds, the faceless worshipers and interchangeable seers, the magic flames and holy rays," and question Roerich's sincerity and truthfulness.⁵ The examinations of Roerich's personal letters and facts of his life

undeniably prove his spiritual genuineness and illuminate his character, and therefore open up the artist's work for deeper understanding and appreciation.

Although this thesis closely follows a biographical outline, it was not my purpose to discuss each of the artist's achievements or failures. That is why I left out Roerich's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, or the scandal of the notorious "Guru letters," written by Henry Wallace, then Roosevelt's secretary of agriculture.⁶ Yet, I think that it is important to discuss Roerich's political aspirations, which are rarely mentioned in English-language materials, and presented in Russian-language literature more as spy stories, rather than scholarly writings. The artist's political goals were closely connected to his dream of finding the spiritual land Shambhala. Roerich's last painting *Command of the Master* (1947) depicts a lonely figure among the enormous mountain cliffs [fig. 55]. A large white bird disturbs the solitude. The distant golden sky, splashed with coral, is the sky of a beautiful far away land. This painting shows that, although Roerich's dream of Shambhala did not realize, he never stopped believing in this land and his Master.



Figure 1: Nicholas Roerich, *Ivan the Woodsman*, 1884.



Figure 2: Arkhip Kuinji, *Moonlight Night on the Dnieper*, 1880.

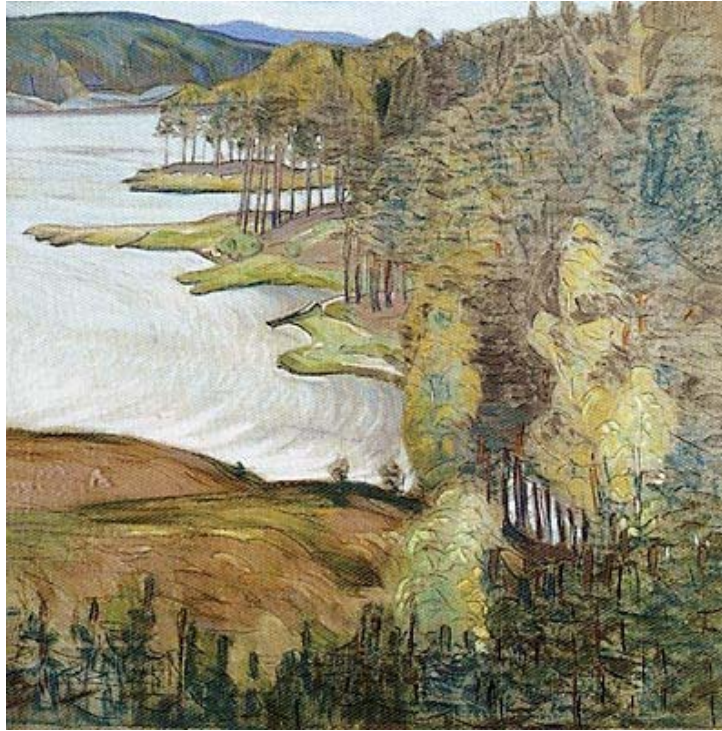


Figure 3: Nicholas Roerich, *Punkaharju*, from *Finland studies*, 1907.



Figure 4: Arkhip Kuinji, *The Sea, the Crimea*, 1898–1908.



Figure 5: Arkhip Kuinji, *The Elbrus*, 1898–1908.



Figure 6: Nicholas Roerich, *Himalayas*, 1933.



Figure 7: Nicholas Roerich, *The Messenger: Tribe Has Risen Against Tribe*, 1897.



Figure 8: Nicholas Roerich, *Isborsk. Towers*, 1903.

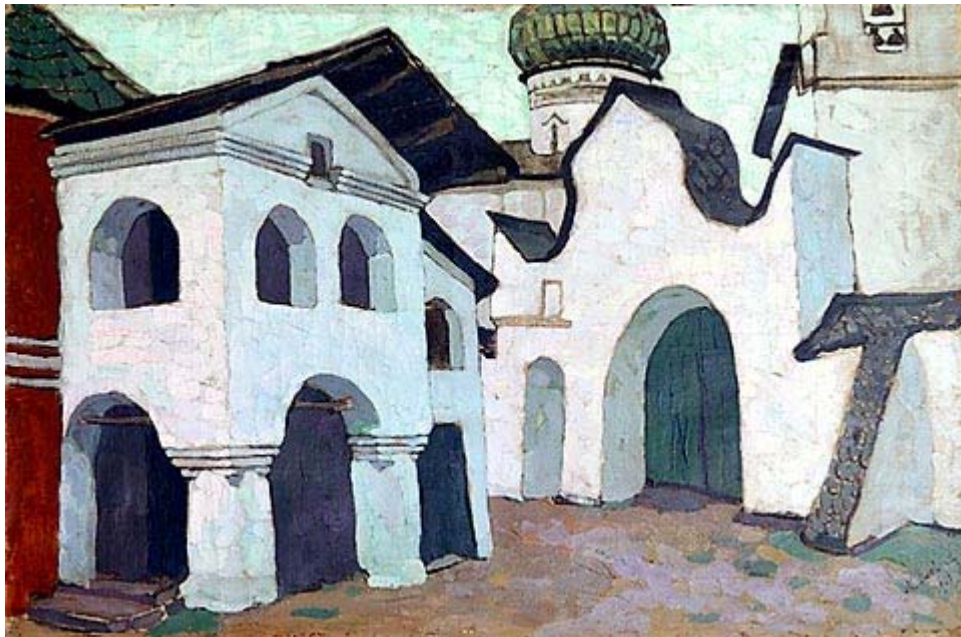


Figure 9: Nicholas Roerich, *Cemetery near Pskov*, 1903.

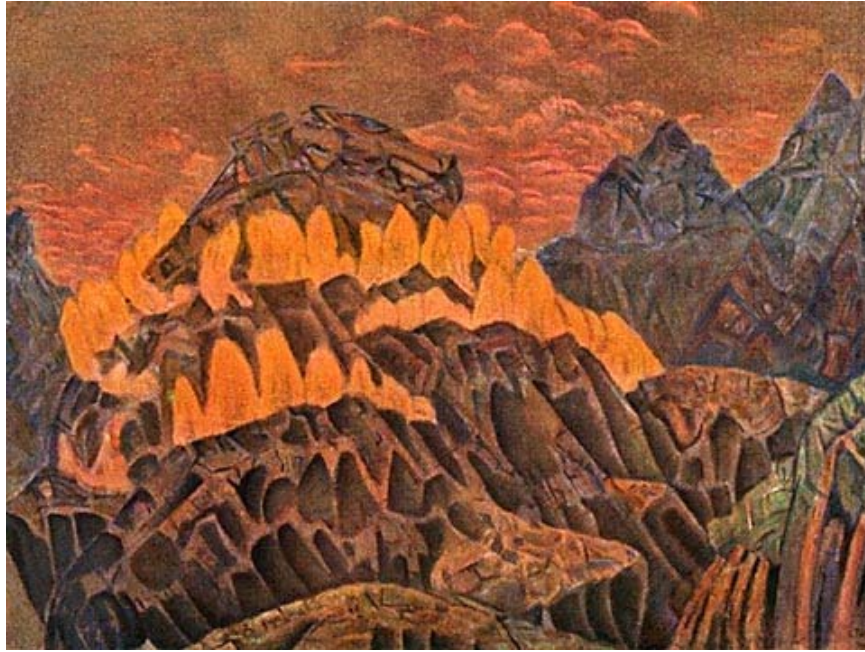


Figure 10: Nicholas Roerich, *Fire Spell*. Décor for Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*, 1907.



Figure 11: Nicholas Roerich, *Polovtsian Camp*, 1908.

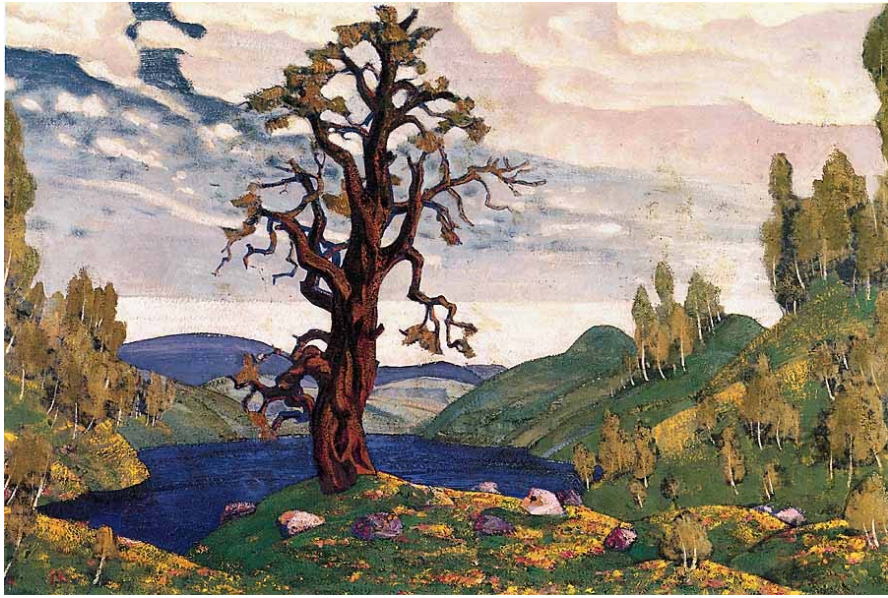


Figure 12: Nicholas Roerich, *Kiss of the Earth*, 1912.



Figure 13: Nicholas Roerich, *The Great Sacrifice*, 1910.



Figure 14: Nicholas Roerich, Costume from *Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913.



Figure 15: Nicholas Roerich. *Slavs on the Dnieper*, 1905.



Figure 16: Nicholas Roerich, *Human Forefathers*, 1911.



Figure 17: Nicholas Roerich, *Commands of Heaven*, 1915.



Figure 18: Nicholas Roerich, *The Last Angel*, 1912.

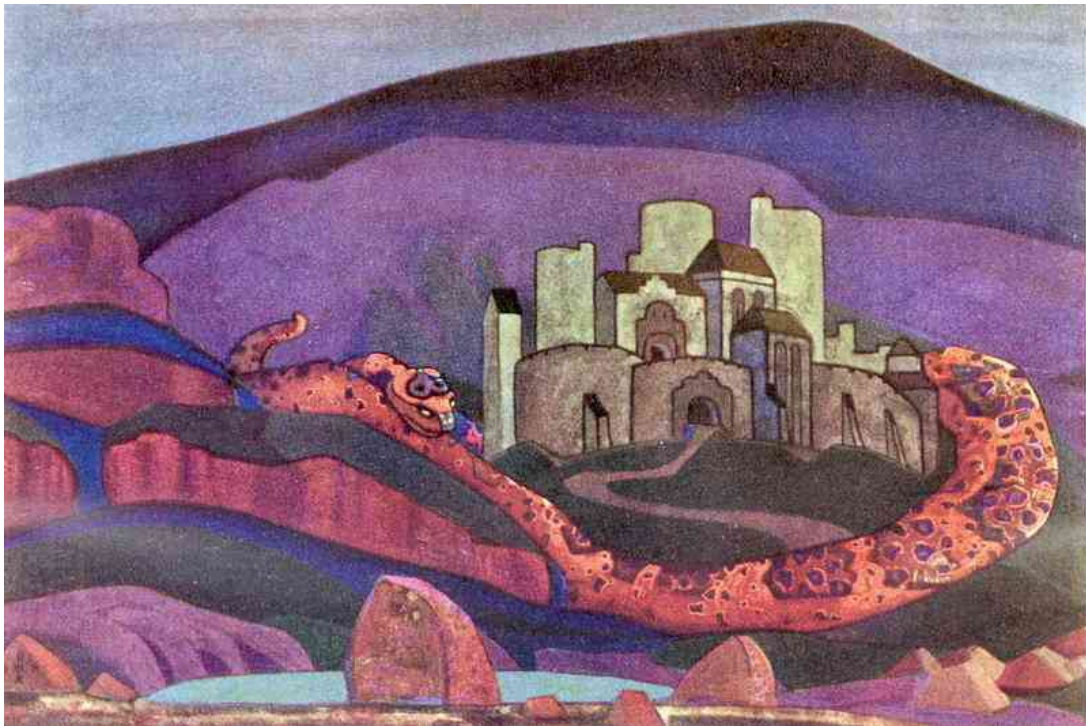


Figure 19: Nicholas Roerich, *The Doomed City*, 1914.



Figure 20: Nicholas Roerich, *The Ominous Ones*, 1901.

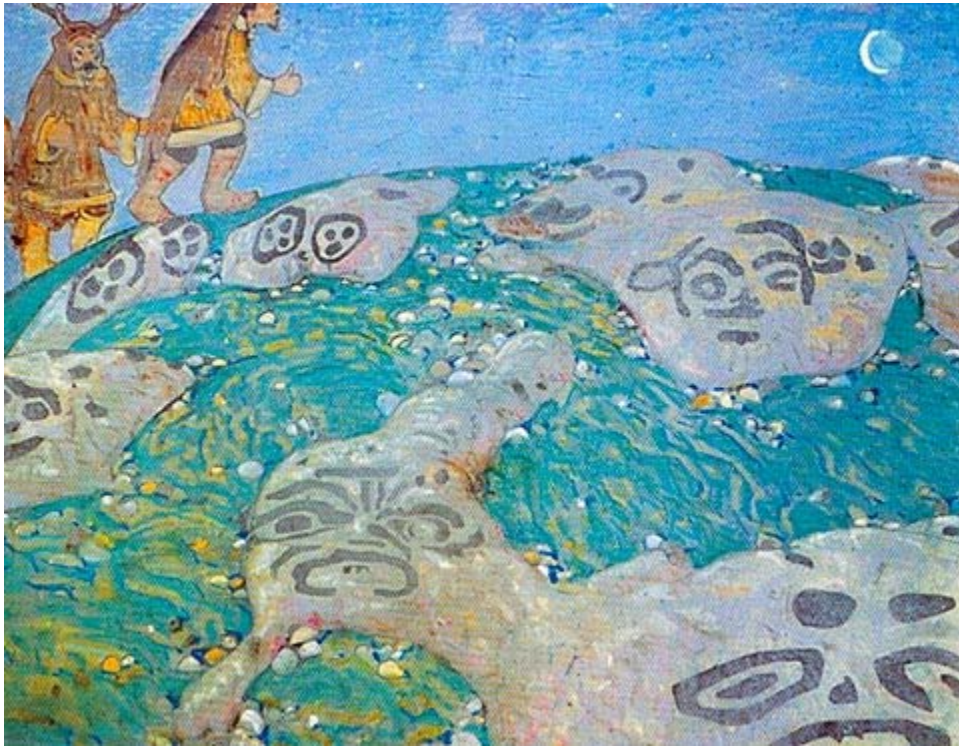


Figure 21: Nicholas Roerich, Conjunction of the Earth, 1907.



Figure 22: Nicholas Roerich, The Banner of Peace, 1929.



Figure 23: Church of Holy Spirit in Talashkino, interior, c.1914.

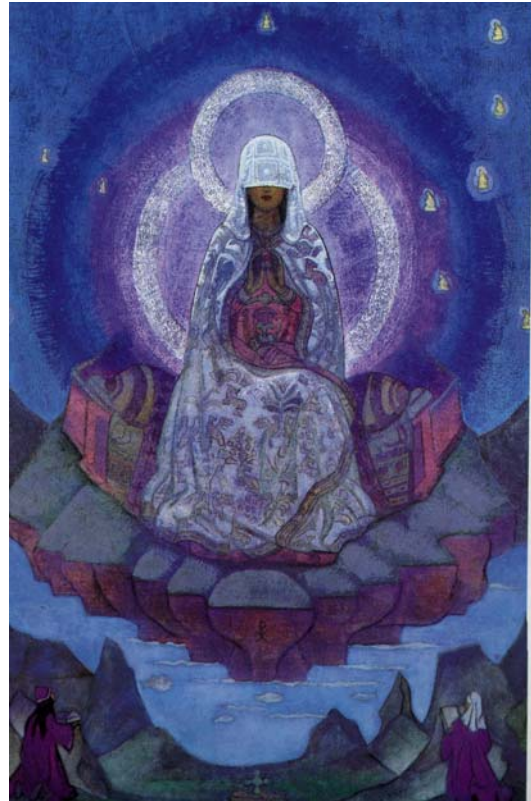


Figure 24: Nicholas Roerich, *Mother of the World*, variant, c.1930s.



Figure 25: Victor Vasnetsov, *A Knight at Crossroads*, 1878.



Figure 26: Victor Vasnetsov, *Three Bogatyr*, 1898.

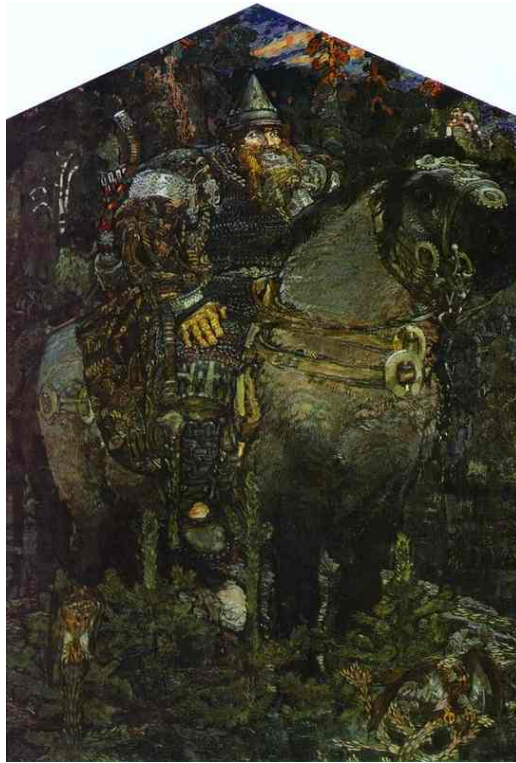


Figure 27: Mikhail Vrubel, *Bogatyr (Hero)*, 1898.



Figure 28: Mikhail Vrubel, *Thirty-Three Bogatyrs*, (unfinished), 1901.



Figure 29: Wassily Kandinsky, *St. George I*, 1911.



Figure 30: Wassily Kandinsky, *The Knight, St. George*, 1914-15.



Figure 31: Alexander Benois, Illustration to A. Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman*, 1905.



Figure 32: Wassily Kandinsky, *The Comet. Night Rider*, 1900.



Figure 33: Wassily Kandinsky, *The Horsemen of Apocalypse*, 1910.



Figure 34: Nicholas Roerich, *The Command*, from “Heroica” suite, 1917.



Figure 35: Nicholas Roerich, *Knight of the Morning*, from “Eques Æternus” suite, 1918.



Figure 36: Nicholas Roerich, *Knight of the Evening*, from “Eques Æternus” suite, 1918.



Figure 37: Nicholas Roerich, *Knight of the Night*, from “Eques Æternus” suite, 1918.



Figure 38: Nicholas Roerich, *Knight of the Night, Study*, from “Eques Æternus” suite, 1918.



Figure 39: Nicholas Roerich, *They Are Waiting*, from “Heroica” suite, 1917.

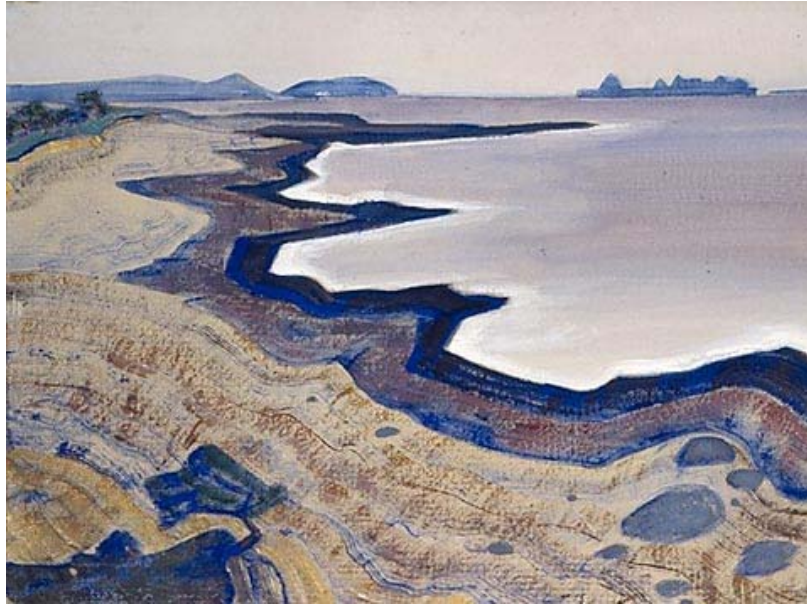


Figure 40: Nicholas Roerich, *Karelia landscape (Lake)*, 1917.

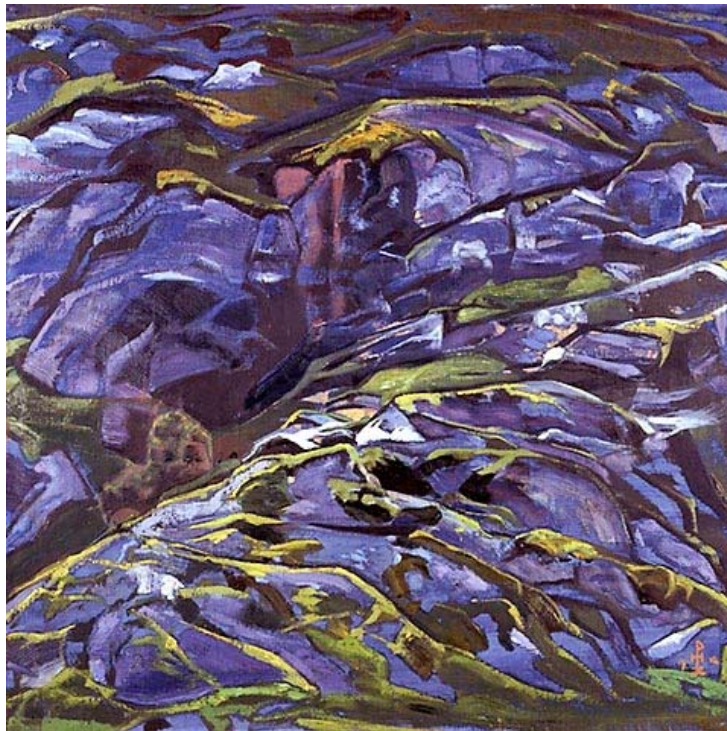


Figure 41: Nicholas Roerich, *Karelia landscape (Rocks, Tulola)*, 1918.



Figure 42: Nicholas Roerich, Portrait sketch of Master Morya, N/D.



Figure 43: Nicholas Roerich, *Song of the Morning*. Decorative Panel from “Dreams of Wisdom” series, 1920.



Figure 44: Nicholas Roerich, *Song of the Waterfall*. Decorative Panel from “Dreams of Wisdom” series,” 1920.

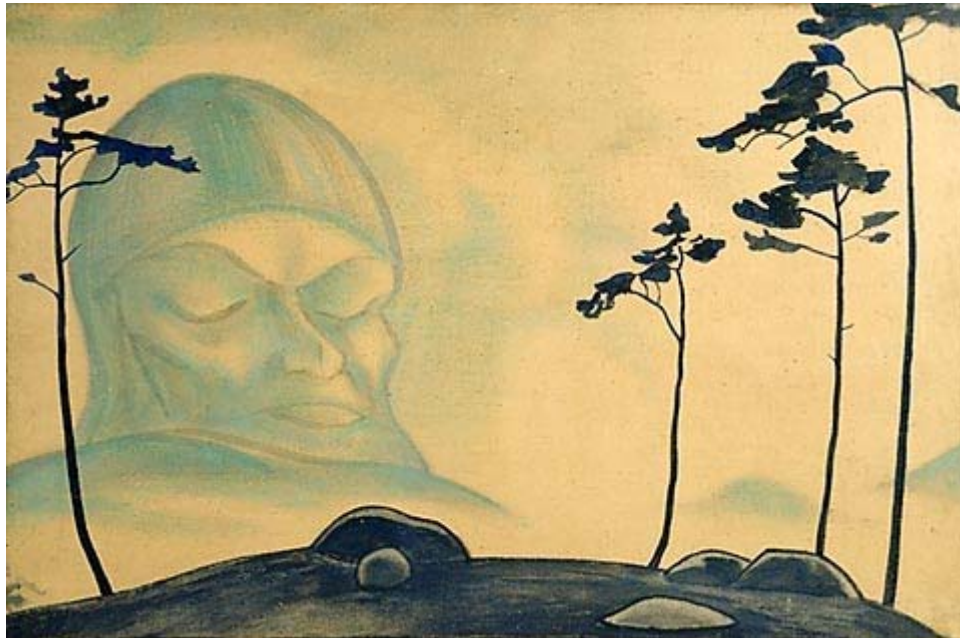


Figure 45: Nicholas Roerich, *Dream of the Orient*, 1920.



Figure 46: Nicholas Roerich, *Ledenetz Palace*. Drop-curtain for Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, 1919.



Figure 47: Nicholas Roerich, *Monhegan, Main (Strength)*. From “Ocean” series. 1922.



Figure 48: Nicholas Roerich, *Bridge of Glory*, 1923.

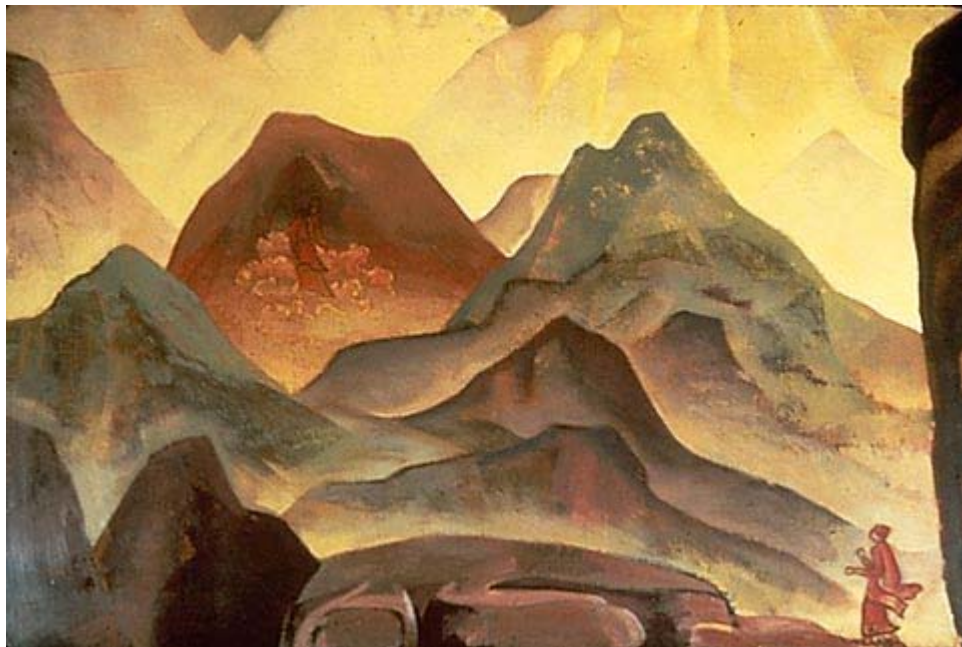


Figure 49: Nicholas Roerich, *Vision*, 1923.

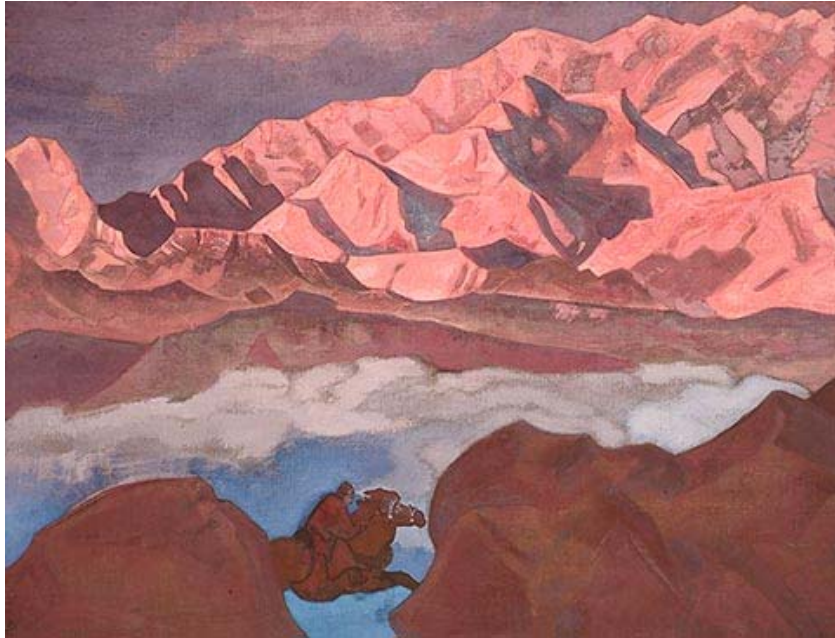


Figure 50: Nicholas Roerich, *He Who Hastens*. From “His Country” series, 1924.

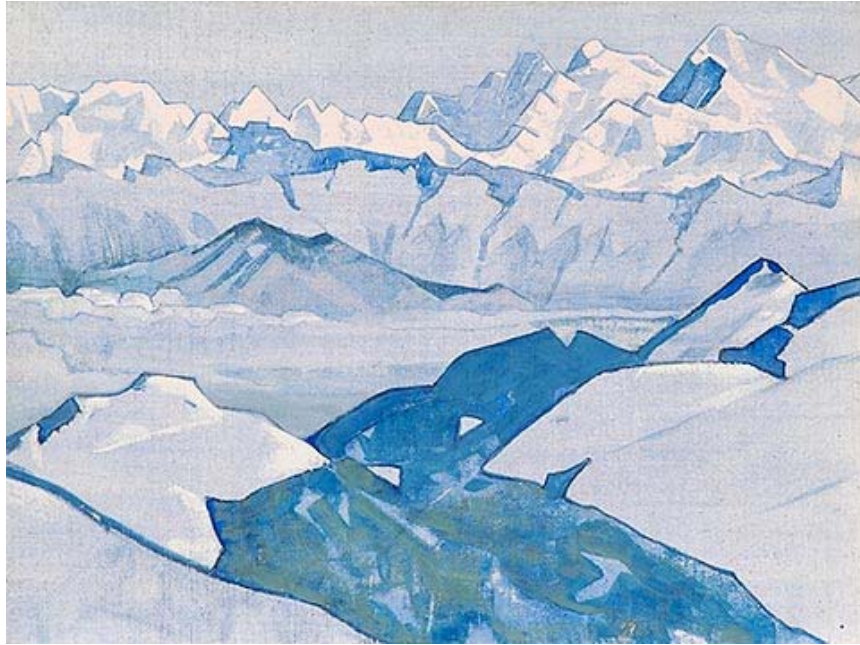


Figure 51: Nicholas Roerich, *Everest Range*. From “Himalayan” series, 1924.



Figure 52: Nicholas Roerich, *White and Heavenly*. From “His Country” series, 1924.



Figure 53: Nicholas Roerich, *Mount "M"*, 1931.



Figure 54: Nicholas Roerich, *Path to Shambhala*, 1933.

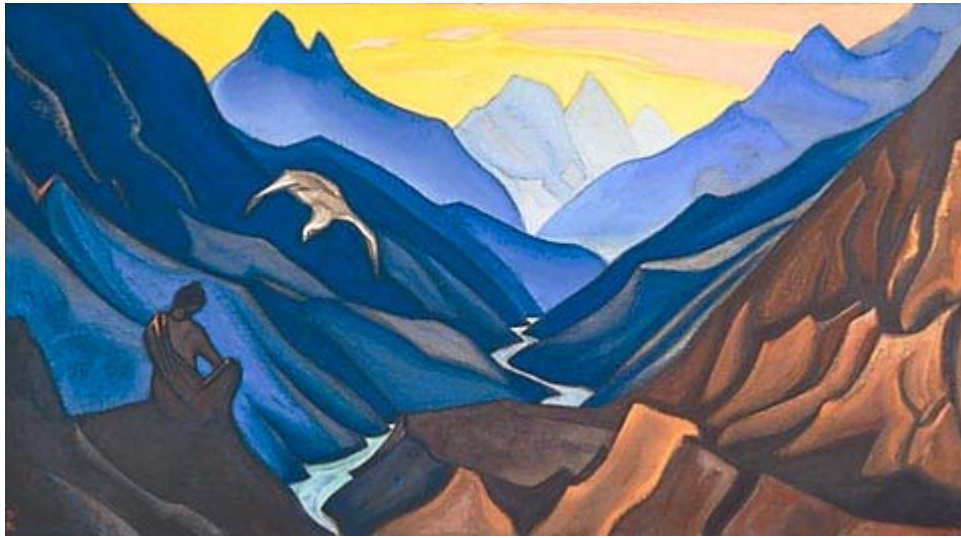


Figure 55: Nicholas Roerich, *Command of the Master*, 1947.

NOTES

Introduction

- ¹ Elena Poliakova, *Nikolai Rerikh* [Nicholas Roerich] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978). See also, Pavel Belikov and Valentina Kniazeva, *Rerikh* [Roerich] (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardia, 1973). Both biographies briefly mention influence of Theosophy and works of Indian Philosophers but interpret this influence from point of the socialist-materialistic ethics and morals.
- ² Jacqueline Decter with the Nicholas Roerich Museum, *Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Master* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1989). In her discussion of Roerich's works, sometimes Decter, uses illustrations from later dates. For example, for Prince Igor production of 1908, she introduced Roerich's works of 1944 (pp.76 and 77). Speaking about Roerich's 1920 exhibition at the Kingore Gallery in New York, she states that it was the first exhibition of a Russian artist in America. She seems to be unaware that Boris Anisfeld had an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum two years earlier, and also had an exhibition at the Kingore Gallery several months earlier than Roerich's. For a discussion of inaccuracies and ambiguities, see Kenneth Archer review of *Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Dancer*, by Decter in *Dance Research Journal* 22, no.2 (Autumn, 1990): 31-33.
- ³ Perhaps that most damaging for Roerich's artistic reputation, is the opinion of the leading scholar of Russian Art John E. Bowlt, who finds him "too cautious and too calculation to break with the academic structures and to pursue a truly original, experimental style." Bowlt sees Roerich as "a symptom of the fashionable interests of his age." See for example, John E. Bowlt, *Russian Stage Design scenic innovation, 1900-1930. From the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Nikita D. Lobanov-Rostovsky*, exh. cat (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Museum of Art, 1982), 250-255. See also, Robert C. Williams, "Mysticism and Money: Nicholas Roerich" in *Russian Art and American Money* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). Williams calls Roerich "a salesman of the spiritual" and "the mystical messiah of a curious religious cult that flourished in New York in the 1920s" (111-113). Williams concludes that "the Roerich industry manufactured wisdom; art was simply its raw material," (146).

Chapter I

- ¹ As sources of biographical fact in this thesis I used Poliakova, *Nikolai Rerikh* [Nicholas Roerich], 1978; Belikov and Kniazeva, *Rerikh* [Roerich], 1973; Decter with the Nicholas Roerich Museum, *The Life and Art of a Russian Master*, 1989.
- ² N. Rerikh [Nicholas Roerich], "Pol veka" [Half a Century] in *Listi Dnevnik* [Diary Leaves], ed. L. Shaposhnikova et al. (Moscow: The Roerichs' International Center, 1995), 149.
- ³ The Roerichs owned Isvara for twenty-eight years. It became Roerich's source for inspiration. Roerich thought that the word "Isvara" has Indian roots, and means "Divine Spirit" in Sanskrit. The first person who directed Roerich's attention to this fact was Rabindranath Tagore. N. Roerich, "Znaki zhizni" [Signs of Life] in *Diary Leaves*, 57. For more information about Isvara, see the web-site of the Isvara Museum: <<www.roerich-izvara.ru>>
- ⁴ N. Roerich, "Half a Century" in *Diary Leaves*, 148.
- ⁵ Alexander Benois, *Moi Vospominania*, [My Memoirs] (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 1:486.

It is important to keep in mind that personal dislikes seem to play quite a crucial role for Roerich, particularly in his relations with Alexander Benois, therefore Benois' accounts, although valuable, are often subjective.

- ⁶ N. Roerich, "Half a Century" in *Diary Leaves*, 148. It is interesting that when Benois read Roerich's recollections, he admitted that he did not remember Roerich's impersonation, and suggested that Roerich did not participate in the show at all, but probably was among the audience. See, Benois, *My Memoirs*, 1:485.
- ⁷ N. Roerich published his first nature and hunting essays in the magazines *Russian Hunter* and *Nature and Hunting* when he was 16 years old, in 1890. For details, see Alexander Rostislavov, *N.K. Rerikh [N.K. Roerich]* (Kaliningrad, Russia: Knizhnoe izdatelstvo, 1995); rpt. of 1st edition (Petrograd: Izdanie Butkovskoi, 1918), 16-17. Around 1886, while still in the Gymnasium of Karl von May, Roerich got permission from the Imperial Archeological Society to conduct his own archeological research, see Poliakova, 19. In 1892 collects birds' eggs in forests of St. Petersburg region, conducting research for the St. Petersburg Forestry Department, see Poliakova, 15.
- ⁸ Poliakova, 25.
- ⁹ For details of Kuinji's biography, see Vitaly Manin, *Arkhip Kuinji* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1990).
- ¹⁰ The final date of *The Moonlit Night of the Dnieper* is 1880. Kuinji continued working on it after it was exhibited in 1878 in Paris. Critics acknowledged Kuinji as the most original Russian artist presented at the 1878 World Exposition. For example, P. Matz found Kuinji the most interesting "without any indication of imitation: *The Moonlit Night on the Dnieper* surprises, and gives the impression of unnatural." Quoted in V.V. Stasov, *Izbrannie Sochinenia [Selected Works]* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1952), 1:346.
- ¹¹ N. Roerich, "Kuinji" in *Glaz Dobryi [Kind Eye]*, Intr. V. M. Sidorov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1991), Reprint of 1st edition (Moscow: Izdatelstvo I.D. Sitina, 1914), 165-66.
- ¹² N. Roerich, "Rossia" [Russia] in *Diary Leaves*, 379.
- ¹³ Vladimir Stasov, "Proishozhdenie rysskih bilin" [The Origin of Russian Bilini]. *Vestnik Evropi*, (1868): 1-4, 6-7.
- ¹⁴ There is ample research on Russian Art of the turn of the twentieth century available. See, for example Camilla Gray, *Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922* (London: Thames & Hudson world of art, 2002). See, Also, John Bowl, *Moscow and St. Petersburg 1900-1920: Art, Life and Culture of Russian Silver Age* (New York: Vendome Press, 2008).
- ¹⁵ Decter, 36.
- ¹⁶ The first exhibition of *Mir Iskustva* took place at the Stieglitz Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts in 1899. In his review on the exhibition, Stasov called it "an orgy and madness," he wrote: "Current exhibition imposes on us, as a stone on a neck, then into a sack and into water—the multitude of things that horrify, and are no good at all." Throughout his brilliantly written review, Stasov bombarded the exhibition with following comparisons: terrible, useless, mistake, nonsense, the worst possible, outrage, disgrace, etc. See, Stasov, *Selected Works*, 3: 215-222.
- ¹⁷ Extract from A. Ostroumova-Lebedeva's diary quoted in notes to Igor Grabar's letter to Ostroumova-Lebedeva from February 1, 1949. N. Evsina et al., ed. *Igor Grabar, Pisma [Letters]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1983), 257.

- ¹⁸ Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Letter to Benois, September 28, 1905. I. Vidrin, *Alexander Nikolayevich Benois and Mstislav Valerianovich Dobuzhinsky, perepiska (1903–1957)* [Correspondence] (St. Petersburg: Sad Iskusstv, 2003), 17.
- ¹⁹ Alexander Benois, “Put Rerikha” [Roerich’s Journey] in *Derzhava Rerikha* [Roerich’s State], ed. D. Popov and V. Kniazeva, (Moscow: Izobrazitelnoe Iskusstvo), 55.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ²¹ Grabar, Letter to Dobuzhinsky, September 22m 1905. Evsina, 318.
- ²² Benois, Letter to Diagelev, 1905. I. Vidrin, ed, *Alexander Nikolayevich Benois and Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev. Perepiska (1893–1928)*, [Correspondence] (St. Petersburg: Sad Iskusstv, 2003), 58-59.
- ²³ Benois’ friendship with Tenisheva started in 1895, when she invited him to catalogue her art collection, and continued through 1898. At the end of 1898, Benois was tired of financial dependence on Tenisheva. Benois’ father died in December of 1898, and left his son modest inheritance. It allowed Benois to stop working for Tenisheva. Tenisheva was disappointed and saw Benois’ resignation as betrayal. For details, see Benois, *My Memoirs*, 2:438-439.
- ²⁴ Princess Tenisheva held an esteemed opinion about Roerich: “Out of all Russian painters, except for Vrubel, he is the only. . . cultured, very educated, truly European, not narrow minded, not one-sided, well-mannered and very pleasant in relations, irreplaceable conversationalist, who broadly understands art and is deeply interested in it.” M. K. Tenisheva, *Impressions of My Life*, 387. Quoted in notes to chapter 49 in Benois, *My Memoirs*, 2:697.
- ²⁵ Benois was extremely bitter about Tenisheva’s decision to include Roerich as editor to *Mir Iskusstva*, which is evident from Benois’ letter to a fellow artist Yaremich, November 18, 1904. Quoted in notes to Benois, Letter to Diaghilev, undated, 1905 in Vidrin, *Benois to Diaghilev*, 60-61.
- ²⁶ Christian Brinton, introduction. *The Nicolas Roerich Exhibition. ex. cat.* (New York: Redfield – Kendrick – Odell Company, Inc.), 10. See also, Alema Adamkova, *Nicholas Roerich in Indian Journals (1933–1946)* (Bangalore, India: Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, 2000), 11.
- ²⁷ Stasov, *Selected Works*, 3:287.
- ²⁸ For details on *Starinny* Theater and the production of *The Three Magi*, see Poliakova, 149-154.
- ²⁹ Brinton, 12.
- ³⁰ N. Roerich, *Altai – Himalaya, a Travel Diary* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929), 107
- ³¹ Igor Stravinsky, Letter to Roerich, June 19, 1910. Stravinsky wrote: “Sooner or later we will have to tell him [Diaghilev] about the “Great Sacrifice.” In fact, he has already asked me to compose a new ballet. I said that I was writing one which, for the moment, I did not wish to talk about, and this touched off an explosion, as I might have guessed. “What? You keep secrets from me, I who do my utmost for you all? Fokine, you, everyone has secrets from me.” As soon as I said that I was working with you both Diaghilev and Bakst were delighted.” For a full text of the letter in English, see Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 153-154. For a complete correspondence between Roerich and Stravinsky regarding the ballet over the years 1910-1919, see V.P. Varunetz, *Vokrug “Vesni Sviashennoi” Perepiska I.F. Stravinskogo i N.K. Rerikha, [Around “Le Sacre du Printemps.” Correspondence between I.Stravinsky and N.K Roerich]*. Russian Humanitarian Scientific Fund, research project N 97-04-06174:
<<<http://www.roerich-museum.org/PRS/book4/22-Stravinskiy%20-%20Roerich.pdf>>>

- ³² For a detailed description of the ballet, music, choreography and reception, see Buckle, *Nijinsky*, 291-302.
- ³³ Millicent Hodson discusses choreographic collaboration between Nijinsky and Roerich in “Nijinsky’s Choreographic Method: Visual Sources from Roerich for *Le Sacre du printemps*.” *Dance Research Journal* 12, no.2, Russian Folklore Abroad (Winter, 1986–1987), 7-15. See also a comprehensive research on Stravinsky’s use of folk sources in Richard Tarushkin, “Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33, no 3 (Autumn 1980), 501-543.
- ³⁴ See, Christopher Cook and Sarah Woodcock discussion on costumes designed by Roerich for the 1913 production of *The Rite of Spring*. Part of the 2004, Performing Art season of talks. <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/audios/rite_of_spring/index.html>>
- ³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter II

- ¹ N. Roerich’s, answers to the questionnaire of Varvara and Alexandra Schneider, May 31, 1900. Quoted in Decter, 40.
- ² James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1966), 192 and 695. Billington explains that Grigory Talitsky’s proclamation of Peter as Antichrist was taken so seriously that the highest ecclesiastical authority, Stepan Yarovsky, wrote a reply *Znamenii prishestviia antikhristova i konchiny veka* [*Signs of Antichrist’s Coming and the End of Century*].
- ³ For a detailed research on Peter’s the Great reforms, as well as a historical overview of Alexei Romanov’s rule, see Boris Bashilov, *Istoria russkogo massonstva. Tishaishiy tsar and his time. Robespierre na trone. [History of Russian Masonry. The Quiet Tsar. Robespierre on the Throne]*, (Moscow: Ruslo, 1992), 2:16-25.
- ⁴ P. Miliukov, *Istoria gosudarstvennogo hozaistva [History of State Economy]*, quoted in Bashilov, 2:108.
- ⁵ Bashilov, 2:70. Also, this fact of the Russian history is well-known. For example, the day of execution was masterfully captured by V. Surikov in his famous painting *The Morning of Streltsy’s Execution*, (1881, Tretyakov Gallery).
- ⁶ Kendall E. Bailes, *Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions. V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 51.
- ⁷ For an overview on Russian Cosmism and Roerich’s views, see Evgeny Matochkin, *N.K. Rerikh i russky cosmism [N.K. Roerich and Russian Cosmism]*. Originally published in Collection of Articles of the Roerich’s 120-Anniversary Conference, (Nizhniy Novgorod, 1994), 3-30. Center of Culture and Education Adamant: <<<http://lomonosov.org/aspects/fouraspects222159.html>>>.
- ⁸ V. L. Melnikov gives an exhaustive list of Roerich’s personal contacts and lectures he attended at the Department of History and Philology at the St. Petersburg University in *N.K. Rerikh i istoriko-philologicheskoye fakultet Imperatorskogo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta [N.K. Roerich and the Department of History and Philology at The Imperial St. Petersburg University]*. Roerich’s Center at St. Petersburg University. *Grany Epohi*, 37 (Spring 2009): << http://ethics.narod.ru/articles1/spb_univer.htm>>

- ⁹ N. Roerich's diary, quoted in Belikov, 99.
- ¹⁰ Sergei Soloviev, quoted in Matochkin, 6.
- ¹¹ Pavel Florensky, quoted in Matochkin, 6.
- ¹² N. Roerich, *Po Starine* [About Ancient Times] in *Kind Eye*, 56.
- ¹³ Alexei Remizov, "Grad Obrechenny" [Doomed City] in *Roerich's State*, 63.
- ¹⁴ Alexander Blok, "To Z. N. Gippius, 1914" in *Sobranie socinenii v shesti tomah* [Collection of Works in Six Volumes], ed. S. A. Nebolsin (Moscow: Pravda, 1971), 3:176.
- ¹⁵ V. I. Vernadsky, *Estestvoznanie i filosofia* [Natural Sciences and Philosophy] in *Filosofskie misli naturalista* [Philosophical Thoughts of a Naturalist], ed. A. L. Yanshin (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 393-94.
- ¹⁶ Between 1890 and 1911 Vernadsky taught mineralogy and crystallography in the University of Moscow. His first major scientific book, *Osnovi kristallografii* [The Fundamentals of Crystallography] was published in 1903. Another work, *Opyt opisatelnoi mineralogii* [Attempt in Descriptive Mineralogy] was published in 1908. See, Bailes, 69-79. Both works could be of great interest to Roerich. Roerich's serious attitude to geology is evident in his 1898 article, in which he refers to the latest geological and archeological publications. N. Roerich, *Na kurgane* [On a Kurgan] in *Kind Eye*, 15-32.
- ¹⁷ On friendship between Vernadsky and Oldenburg, see Bailes, 81. On friendship between Roerich and Oldenburg, see Melnikov, 3.
- ¹⁸ Bailes, 121.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ²⁰ Vernadsky was not the first scientist to use the term "biosphere." The Austrian geologist, Eduard Suess, contemporary of Vernadsky, used it earlier than 1914. But while Suess used this term in passing, Vernadsky gave it precise quantitative and qualitative definition. See, Bailes, 123-124.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ²² N. Roerich, "Sviashennie znaki" [Sacred Signs] in *Nastavlenia lovtzu v hodiashemu v les* [Roerich, Advice to Hunter Entering the Woods], ed. D. Popova (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), 125-126. In quoting this poem, I omitted the middle part, however the meaning of the poem was not altered.
- ²³ N. Roerich, *Son* [Dream]. On-line library of the International Centre of the Roerichs: <http://lib.roerich-museum.ru/node/514>
- ²⁴ Roerich described one of his meetings with Soloviev at Stasov's in his essay "Erdeni Mori" [Erdeni Mori] in *Diary Leaves*, 299. For Roerich's note about correspondence with Soloviev, see "Chutkim Serdzam" [To Keen Hearts] in *Diary leaves*, 227.
- ²⁵ Billington, 466.
- ²⁶ Vladimir Soloviev, *Tri Svidania* [Three Meetings] in Alexei Losev, *Vladimir Soloviev i ego vremia* [Vladimir Soloviev and his Time] (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardia, 2000), 491.
- ²⁷ Billington, 466.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 466.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 467.
- ³⁰ N. Roerich, "To Keen Hearts" in *Diary leaves*, 227.
- ³¹ See, Roerich's essays in *Kind Eye*: "Podzemnaia Rus" [Underground Russ], "Velikii Novogorod" [Great Novgorod], "Tserkov Ilii Proroka v Yaroslavle" [Church of St. Ilya in Yaroslavl].
- ³² N. Roerich, "Zemlia obnovlennaia" [Renewed Earth] in *Kind Eye*, 131.

- ³³ Belikov, 104.
- ³⁴ Valentin Sidorov, Interview with Zinaida Fosdick in “Musei Rerikha” [Roerich Museum] in *Roerich’s State*, 352.
- ³⁵ Decter, 159.
- ³⁶ Who were the mysterious Teachers of the Roerichs? In my conversation with the leading Roerich scholar, the curator of the Roerich Museum in New York, Aida Tulaskaia, she explained that they were not people, and the Roerichs received the information through invisible channels of energy. Allegedly, the only time when the Teachers met the Roerichs in a usual human form was in London in early 1920s (see discussion in chapter III). This question is complex and may never be answered. The most fruitful approach to understanding the Roerichs’ activities is to accept that the Roerichs sincerely believed in the Teachers.
- ³⁷ There is ample scholarship on the Occult, Spiritualism and Theosophy in Russia. See, Carlson, Maria, “No Religion Higher than Truth.” *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey). See also, Bernice Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997). John E. Bowlt, “Esoteric Culture and Russian Society” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985*, ed. Edward Weisberger (New York: Abbeville Press, NY and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California, 1986), 165-183.
- ³⁸ Carlson, 22.
- ³⁹ On the relations between the Court of Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandre reverence to mediums, see Victor Brachev, *Masoni i vlast v Rossii [Masons and Power in Russia]* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2003), 404-408.
- ⁴⁰ On Rebus and other publications see Carlson, 23-28.
Also, Maria Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism” in Rosenthal, 136-139.
- ⁴¹ Carlson in Rosenthal, 138.
- ⁴² Mikhail Agursky, “An Occult Source of Socialist Realism. Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference” in Rosenthal, 253.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 250.
- ⁴⁴ N. Roerich, *Altai – Himalaya*, 23.
- ⁴⁵ Benois, *My Memoirs*, 1:474.
- ⁴⁶ Igor Grabar memoirs, quoted in Oleg Shishkin, *Bitva za Gimalaii, NKVD: magia i shpionazh [Fight for Himalayas, NKVD: Magic and Espionage]* (Moscow: Olma-press, 2000), 20-21.
- ⁴⁷ N. Rerikh, “Potustoronnee” [From the Other Side], *Diary Leaves*, 204.
- ⁴⁸ N. Roerich, quoted in Belikov, 108.
- ⁴⁹ Carlson gives an impressive list of Russian Masons in “Fashionable Occultism” in Rosenthal, 144-147.
- ⁵⁰ Nina Berberova, *Liudi i lozhi, russky masoni XX stoletia [People and Lodges, Russian Mason of XX century]*, (New York: Russica Publishers, Inc. 1986), 20.
- ⁵¹ On a brief history of Martinism revival in Russia, see Berberova, 23.
For a more detailed overview, see Brachev, 404-410.
- ⁵² Berberova, 24.
- ⁵³ Brachev, 310.
- ⁵⁴ Shishkin, 23.

- ⁵⁵ Brachev, 548-550. See also, Alexei Vinogradov, *Tainie bitvi XX stoletia* [Secret Fights of XX century] (Moscow: Olma-Press, 1999), 190. Vinogradov in his work analyses the Masonic character of the Roerich Pact (1935).
- ⁵⁶ Numerous articles and protest letters are generated from the International Centre of the Roerichs in Moscow. For the links to three volumes of materials of the Initiative “Zaschita imeni i nasledia Rerikhov” [Protection of the Roerichs’ Name and Heritage], see <<<http://www.icr.su/rus/protection>>>
- ⁵⁷ Elena Rerikh, Letter from December 12, 1934 in *Pisma 1929–1938* [*Helena Roerich, Correspondence 1929 – 1938*], (Minsk: Sergei Tarasevich, 1994), 1:309.
- ⁵⁸ Shishkin, 25.
- ⁵⁹ Konstantin Riabinin, *Razvenchanny Tibe. Dnevnik K.N. Riabinina, doctora Buddiyskoy Missii v Tibet. [Debunked Tibet. Diaries of K. N Riabinin, the doctor of Buddhist Mission to Tibet]*, (St. Petersburg: Ariavarta, 1995), 35:
<< http://ay-forum.net/1/Ariavarta_0/0_31_103.pdf>>
- ⁶⁰ On the Brotherhood of the White Lodge, see Carlson, 31.
- ⁶¹ Marlene Laruelle, “The White Tsar’: Romantic Imperialism in Russia’s Legitimizing of Conquering the Far East,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 25 (2008), 113-134.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 113.
- ⁶³ Laruelle provides details of Dorjiev’s biography, 117-119.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ⁶⁵ Good reference about the history of the First Buddhist Temple in St. Petersburg is provided by the official site of the Temple: <<<http://dazan.spb.ru/datsan/history>>>
- ⁶⁶ Carlson, 28.
- ⁶⁷ Helena Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*. (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1953), 11-13.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ⁶⁹ Helena Blavatsky, “Chto est istina?” [What is the Truth?], first published in *Lucifer*, vol. I, № 6, Feb. 1888. Theosophy in Russia: << <http://www.theosophy.ru/lib/hpb-ist.htm>>>
- ⁷⁰ Helena Roerich, Letter from July 1, 1937 in *Correspondence*, 2:224-25.
- ⁷¹ N. Roerich, “Uvidim” [We Shall See] from *The Flowers of Morya* in *Advices to Hunter Entering the Woods*, 127.
- ⁷² N. Roerich, “Kak ustremlius?” [How I Shall Seek?] from *The Flowers of Morya* in *Advices to Hunter Entering the Woods*, 145.
- ⁷³ N. Roerich, “Zvezda Materi Mira” [The Star of the Mother of the World] in *Shambhala*, ed. Ludmila Shaposhnikova (Moscow: The International Roerichs’ Center, 1994), 98 and 104.
- ⁷⁴ H. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine, Variations of the Symbolism, Cross and Circle* (Theosophical University press Online Edition), Vol.2, 547.
<<<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd2-2-09.htm>>>
- ⁷⁵ Alexander Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman*. Trans. Waclaw Lednicki and published in: Waclaw Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1955):
<<http://web.ku.edu/~russcult/culture/handouts/bronze_horseman.html>>
- ⁷⁶ Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*. Trans. George Reavey, intr. Maurice Bowra (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 305.
- ⁷⁷ Alexander Blok, *Notes* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965), 169. Quoted in V.N. Yaranzev, “Medny vsadnik” *A.S. Pushkina i “Peterburg” A. Belogo* [*A. Pushkin’s “The*

Bronze Horseman” in A. Bely’s “*Peterburg.*”]

<<<http://www.prometeus.nsc.ru/museum/texts/sibpush/jaranz.ssi>>>

⁷⁸ Decter, 109-10.

⁷⁹ Following the events of October Revolution of 1917, Finland declared from Russia on November 15, 1917.

⁸⁰ N. Roerich, “Plamia” [The Fire] in *Puti Blagoslovenia* [Journeys of Blessing] (New York: Atlas, 1924), rpt. in (Novosibirsk, Russia: Detskaia Literatura, 1991), 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁸² See, N. Roerich, “Zavtra” [Tomorrow] from *The Flowers of Morya* in *Advices to Hunter Entering the Woods*, 131.

⁸³ N. Roerich, Letter to A. Ivanov, quoted in Belikov, 132.

⁸⁴ H. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. The Seven Stanzas of the Book of Dzyan. Stanza V/2.* vol.1, 31. Theosophical University Press Online Edition:
<<<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-1-01.htm>>>

⁸⁵ H. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. The Seven Stanzas of the Book of Dzyan. Commentaries to Stanza V*, vol.1, 106.
<< <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-1-06.htm>>>

⁸⁶ N. Roerich, “Pora” [It Is Time] from *The Flowers of Morya* in *Advices to Hunter Entering the Woods*, 140.

Chapter III

¹ On details of Roerich’s activities in Petrograd in 1917- 1918, see Belikov, 132-139. Also, Poliakova, 192-206.

² The subject of the Russian paintings that once formed a part of the 1914 Baltic Exhibition still awaits its research. They were left in Sweden because of the outbreak of the WWI. Currently fifty-nine works by Vrubel, Repin, Kustodiev and others are on display in the Malmo Fine Art Museum in Sweden.

³ The information of Roerich’s three 1918–1919 exhibitions in Scandinavian countries is scarce. For general overview of these exhibitions, see Selivanova, 81-83. Also, some information can be found in the past Roerich’s sales records at Christie’s auction house: <<<http://www.christies.com>>>
Exhibitions’ chronology:

Stockholm, Gummesons Konsthall, *Rörich Separatutställning*, November, 1918.

Copenhagen, Kunsthadel Henry Schou, *Rörich, Maleriudstilling*, January, 1919.

Helsinki, Salon Strindberg, *Nicholas Roerich Konstutställning*, March – April, 1919.

⁴ Diaghilev, Telegram to Roerich, in which he congratulated the artist on the 500th performance of “Igor,” quoted in Selivanova, 86.

⁵ Cecil Harcourt Smith, ed. *International Theater Exhibition: Design and Models for the Modern Stage Victoria and Albert Museum, June 2–July 16, 1922*, exh. cat. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1922), 43.

⁶ Belikov, 146-147.

⁷ Ruth A. Drayer, *Nicholas and Helena Roerich. The Spiritual Journey of Two Great Artists and Peacemakers* (Wheaton, Illinois and Chennai, India: Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, 2005), 17-18. Drayer describes the meeting in details. Unfortunately, Drayer is not

citing the sources of her fourteen-year quest explaining that “since a large portion of my material was taken from personal interviews and letters, crumbling scrapbooks, microfilmed newspapers, old diaries, and magazines, it is highly improbable that anyone will track these sources.” (Drayer, Foreword to bibliography). Drayer’s major problem with citations makes her account unreliable.

⁸ N. Roerich, quoted in Christie’s sales records. April 18, 2009, New York Rockefeller Plaza, lot No 8.

⁹ Vladimir Shibayev, “Iz vospominaniy ochevidtza, 1970” [Memoirs of the Witness, 1970] in *Roerich’s State*, 334.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹¹ See Brinton, records in ex. cat. *The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition*.

¹² Robert C. Williams, “Unclaimed Merchandise” in *Russian Art and American Money*, 52.

¹³ American censorship objected sexual content of *Schéhérazade* and *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*. See, Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 302-303.

¹⁴ Buckle, *Nijinsky*, 354.

¹⁵ Janet A. Flint, *Boris Anisfeldt, Twenty Years of Designs for the Theater*. Ex. cat. (Washington City: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), 13-14.

¹⁶ Brinton, ex. cat. *The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition*, 10; 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ Williams, “From Russian Art to Soviet Propaganda, Christian Brinton” in *Russian Art and American Money*, 89.

¹⁹ Sina Fosdick, “Den moi vstrechi s uchitelem” [The Day of My Meeting with the Teacher] in *Roerich’s State*, 320.

²⁰ “The World of Art: Russian and American Paintings and a Group of Etchings” *New York Times*, December 19, 1920, BR11.

²¹ Olin Downes, quoted in Decter, 115.

²² Selivanova, 132.

²³ Roerich, “Novaia Era” [New Era] in *Journeys of Blessing*, 54.

²⁴ Roerich, Letter to George Roerich, October 5, 1922 (Roerich Museum New York, Archives [RMNY]): <<<http://www.roerich.org/archive/correspondence/correspondence.html>>>

²⁵ Roerich, Letter to George Roerich, October 10, 1922. (RMNY)

²⁶ For details see Selivanova, chapter 11, especially pages 88, 95-96.

²⁷ P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought, a Key to the Enigmas of the World*, trans. from 2nd Russian ed. by Claude Bragdon and Nicholas Bessaraboff (Rochester, NY: The Manas Press, 1920; 2nd American ed. rev., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922).

²⁸ P. D. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe. Principles of the Psychological Method in its Application to Problems of Science, Religion and Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 7.

²⁹ Kristina Wilson, “The Intimate Gallery and the Equivalents: Spirituality in the 1920s Work of Stieglitz,” *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (Dec., 2003): 747.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 755.

³¹ Arthur Dove, Statement “Pencil Notes Written on a Boat” in a letter to A. Stieglitz, quoted in Sherrye Cohn, *Arthur Dove, Nature as Symbol* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 58.

³² H. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 53.

³³ Cohn, 61-63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

- ³⁵ Claude Bragdon, "Mighty Hunter (Nicholas Roerich)" in *Merely Players* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 127.
- ³⁶ Claude Bragdon, *The Beautiful Necessity* (Rochester, N.Y., 1910), 9, quoted in Robert M. Crunden, *Body and Soul. The Making of American Modernism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 381.
- ³⁷ N. Roerich, quoted in Selivanova, 93.
- ³⁸ Bragdon, "Mighty Hunter (Nicholas Roerich)" in *Merely Players*, 131.
- ³⁹ Williams, "Mysticism and Money, Nicholas Roerich" in *Russian Art and American Money*, 111-113.
- ⁴⁰ See, for example, N. Roerich, letter to co-workers, March 1, 1924, (RMNY).
- ⁴¹ Francis Grant, Letter to the Roerichs, October 1, 1923, (RMNY).
- ⁴² N. Roerich, Letter to Helena Roerich, September 17, 1921, (RMNY).
- ⁴³ Helena Roerich, Letter to George Roerich, January 25-27, 1923, (RMNY).
- ⁴⁴ Williams, "Mysticism and Money, Nicholas Roerich" in *Russian Art and American Money*, 117.
- ⁴⁵ Helena Roerich, Letter to George Roerich, September 28, 1922, (RMNY).
- ⁴⁶ In numerous letters from 1922–23, both Nicholas and Helena Roerich to George Roerich call their friendship with Horch "a miracle." See, for example, Helena Roerich, letter to George Roerich, September 28, 1922: "Miracles continue. Our friendship with the new friends is growing. We believe that there is nothing they could not do for Him. Our trip is funded." (RMNY).
- ⁴⁷ For example, in the letter from September 28, 1922 Helena Roerich tells her son that they are receiving letters from the Californian followers of M.[Master]. Apparently they all see N. Roerich surrounded by radiating light in their visions. (RMNY).
- ⁴⁸ H.I. Brock, "Roerich Seeks a Composite Messiah in Tibet," *New York Times*, July 4, 1926, BR4.
- ⁴⁹ Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 102.
- ⁵⁰ N. Roerich, "Uvidim" [We Shall See] from *The Flowers of Morya* in *Advices to Hunter Entering the Woods*, 127.
- ⁵¹ N. Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 89. Traveling in Ladak, Roerich writes: "Many remember the lines from the book of Notovitch, but it is still wonderful to discover, on this site, in several variants, the same version of the legend of Issa." Nicolas Notovitch published his *La vie inconnue de Jesus Christ* [*The Unknown Life of Christ*] in 1894. Notovitch never produced any evidence for his claims.
- ⁵² N. Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 113-114.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 89.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.
- ⁵⁵ H.I. Brook, *New York Times*, July 4, 1926.
- ⁵⁶ N. Roerich, "Buddhism v Tibete" [Buddhism in Tibet] in *Shambhala*, 51.
- ⁵⁷ N. Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 15.
- ⁵⁸ N. Roerich, "Iskusstvo Tibeta" [The Art of Tibet] in *Shambhala*, 66.
- ⁵⁹ N. Roerich, letter to colleagues, September 6, 1922.
- ⁶⁰ N. Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 14.
- ⁶¹ N. Roerich, "Sokrovishie snegov" [The Treasures of Snows] in *Shambhala*, 46.
- ⁶² Poliakova, 284.
- ⁶³ N. Roerich, "Svet pustini" [The Light of the Dessert] in *Shambhala*, 150.

- ⁶⁴ See full text of the “Letter of Mahatmas” in Brachev, 549.
- ⁶⁵ Decter, 165.
- ⁶⁶ Brachev, 550.
- ⁶⁷ Riabinin, 79.
- ⁶⁸ N. Roerich poetically describes Kulu in “Urusvati” in *Shambhala*, 120-125.
- ⁶⁹ Poliakova, 276-277. Poliakova quotes A. Benois’ 1939 article about Roerich, in which he criticizes Roerich’s “messianic activities.” He says that these activities became “an obstacle for Roerich’s talent” and made many of his works superficial. Also, Lynn Garafola, *The Enigma of Nicholas Roerich*, review of *Nicholas Roerich, the Life and Art of a Russian Master*, by Jacqueline Decter (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1989), *Dance Chronicle* 13, No.3 (1990-1991), 408-410. Garafola follows Benois’ thoughts saying that the quality of Roerich’s later works is distressing: “these later works are like pop posters of the 1960s—pseudo-mystical visions turned out by rote and by hundreds.”
- ⁷⁰ N. Roerich, *Altai-Himalaya*, 67. Roerich devotes a paragraph to Mount “M”: The Talmud relates that the dove brought the first olive branch to Noah from Mount Moriah. And Mount Moriah and the mountain Meru both lie in Asia. Here is the beginning of all things. Here is the source for all travelers and all searches. Here is raised the first image of the Blessed Maitreya—Messiah—Muntazar. Thrice powerful M! Here above all disputes, the teachings have raised up the olive branch of the new world.”

Conclusion

- ¹ N. Roerich, Letter to George Roerich, January 5, 1923, (RMNY).
- ² For details on Roerich’s influence on Kandinsky see Valery Turchin, *Kandinsky v Rossii [Kandinsky in Russia]* (Moscow: Obshestvo druzei tvorchestva Vasilia Kandinskogo, 2005), 63-64, 106-120.
- ³ Ludmila Shaposhnikova, *Nikolai Rerikh. Iz kolektsii Mezhdunarodnogo Tsentra Rerikhov*, Moskva [Nicholas Roerich. From the Collection of International Centre of the Roerichs] (Aschau, Germany: Mirovaia Spiral, 1997), 15.
- ⁴ Linda D. Henderson, “Reintroduction: the Fourth Dimension through the Twentieth Century” in *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (MIT Press 2010, forthcoming), 24.
- ⁵ Garafola, 408-410.
- ⁶ Roerich’s relationship with Wallace is documented in Williams, “Mysticism and Money” in *Russian Art and American Money*, 136-143.

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