

OLLI 7 Eurasia: The Opera Wars

(Still looking at the Rus-Turkic Frontier)

But first, some things I learned this week:

- Turkey loves rattling Greece (new missiles)
- The Iranians are maybe in denial about their Turkic-ness
- Memes are actually a good teaching tool for high school

and, finally

- I heard a beautiful version of “Danny Boy” at the Folk and Roots festival this week, but it started me thinking of how Siberia played the role of Australia for the Russians.

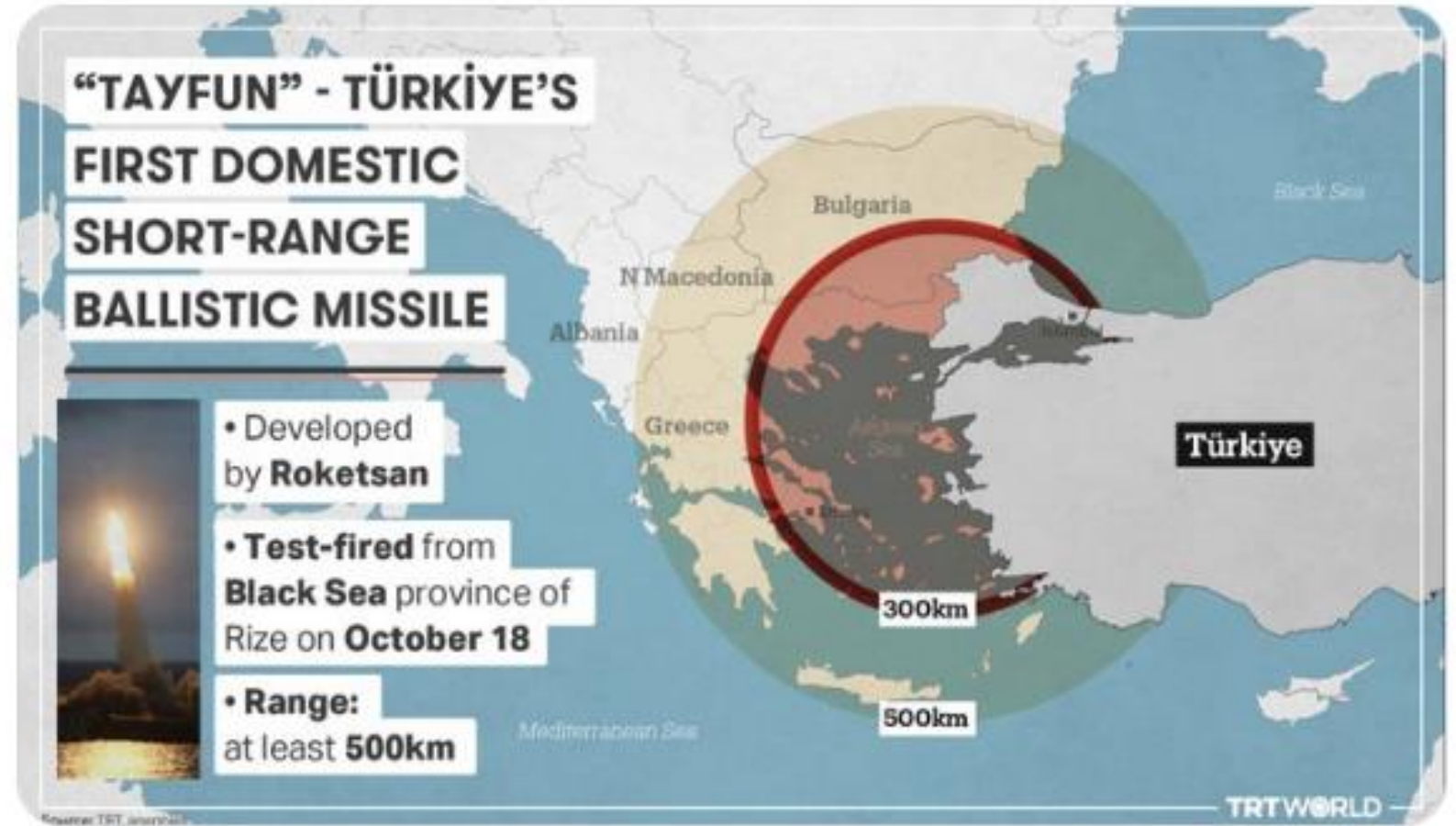
1. In the news this week: (Oct. 18, 2022) Turkey demonstrates new technology-- for whose benefit?

Turkish military technology advances have been very popular with the domestic audience and a helpful reminder to Greece and NATO that Turkey is not the passive ally of the past.



Nicholas Danforth @NicholasDanfort · 9h

TRT world basically just designing graphics for Greek lobbyists at this point



31

159

627





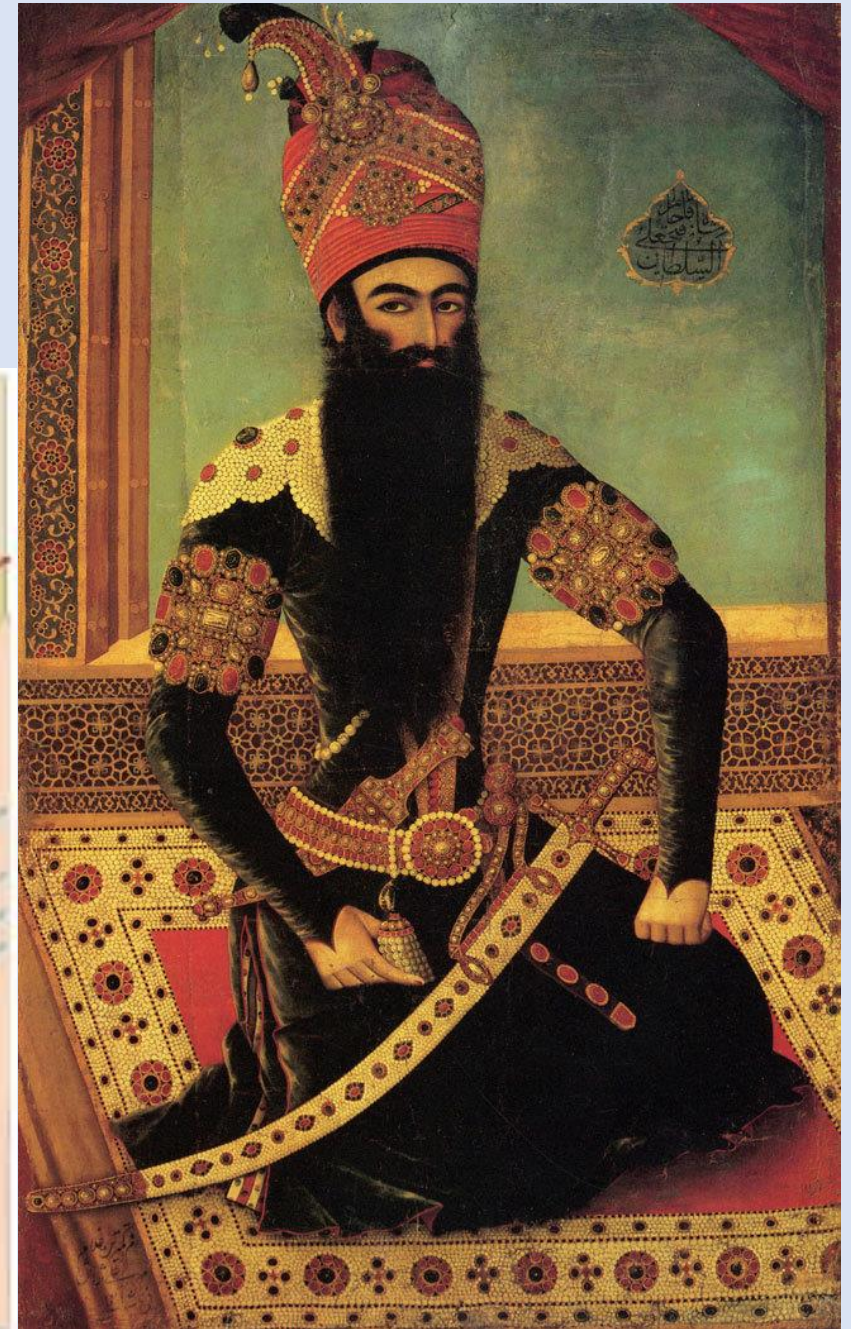
2. Iran's Pahlavi Dynasty, (1921 – 1979) Turkic roots?

(Riza Khan's first language was Turkish, which started me thinking about the strong Turkic undercurrents in Iran's history)

- Riza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty, was a member of the Cossack Brigade (unit trained by the Russians) who took control amid the chaos post WWI. He crowned himself Shah in 1925
- Khan is demonized in post-revolutionary histories, but he prevented the British from creating a protectorate over Iran and/or partitioning Iran in 1921. He pursued Atatürk-like reforms as well, including secular government, industrialization, education, Western dress, women's rights...
- Sadly he enriched his family in the process and later cultivated a relationship with Germany as a counterweight to the powerful British. That got him exiled in 1941.



And Iran's Qajar Dynasty, 1798-1925?
Also Turkic!
(Controlled from Azerbaijan to Turkmenistan
to Afghanistan). Historic base in Azerbaijan.





And much farther back, the Seljuk Dynasty was also a Turkic Dynasty (that adopted Persian Court Culture)

3. The meme world in teaching High Schoolers

One of my grad-students made students create WWI memes to illustrate class material – I thought it was a silly exercise until I saw the memes. Clever memes certainly demonstrate their understanding.

So what is a meme? This art/literary form of the 21st c. is when you take a normal picture, drawing, etc and repurpose it to make a point. Example: the pre-meme photo on the right...



Cat people
get this
meme.



Or repurposed for 2019 Trump-Putin meetings



Minsk Summit over Crimea, 2015, before Meme edits (Putin and Lukashenko of Belarus at the back)





And finally, some Eurasian History memes



Gratuitous photo of my children (and a loaner) in Kyrgyzstan, 2001.

Kyrgyzstan was a beautiful spot for a Fulbright year. Looking back now I realize I was captured by the Russian historiographic tradition. It presented Kyrgyzstan, and all of Central Asia really, as empty landscapes waiting to be populated in the 19th c.

Sound like a familiar story?



Today we return to the topic of the Russian-Turkic confrontation by tracing that history from the Rus expansion in the 900s into the Steppes populated by Turkic tribes, through the 19th c. wars against the Turkic Central Asian khanates.

Its a quick tour of this 1000 year period; the focus will really be on examining how late 19th c. Russia *thought* about that expansion. Many of the themes (and prejudices) of this perspective lived on in the Soviet years of control over Eurasia.

These themes (civilization against barbarity, settlement against nomadic savagery, Christianization, empty lands, manly frontier warfare, ethnic cleansing and repopulation) are strikingly similar to 19th American and European ideas justifying expansion, and the way the memory of those confrontations is recycled in 19th c. culture is also striking. In particular, the Russian art tradition reminded me of Frederick Reminton-style art, Buffalo Bill shows, John wayne movies, and even the “Noble savage” use of images like “the Chief” in everyday culture that keep a certain image of the past alive. The way 19th and 20th c. America saw its identity linked to a romantic image of the frontier is similar to what we see in Russian art.

The Rus-Central Asia encounter still permeates Russian identity, but it is a pretty selective reading of that encounter.

Where we were last week: the end of the Khazar state.

900s- Rus/viking expansion along the rivers into Kiev/Ukraine challenges Khazar State

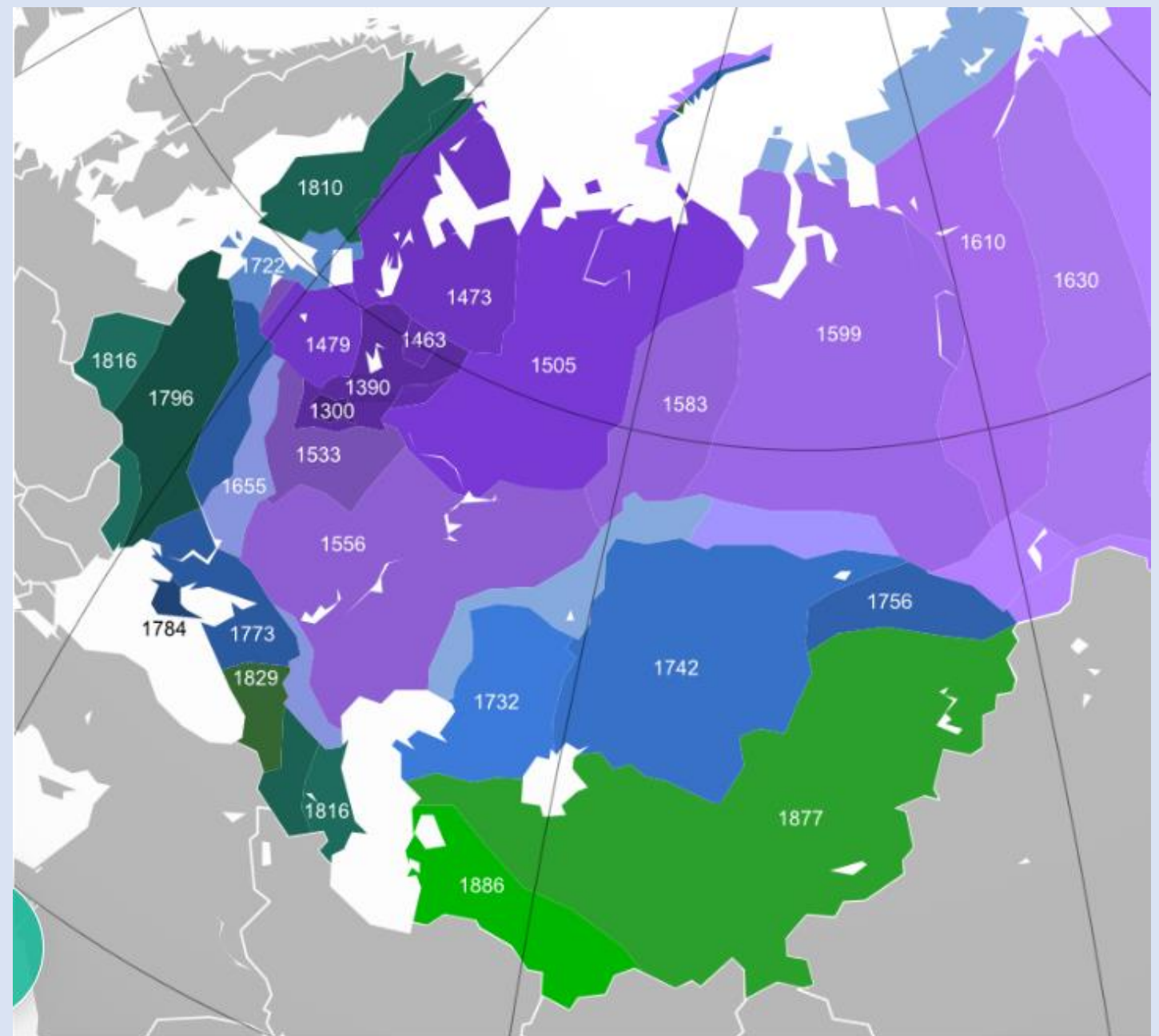
1200s Mongol invasion, establish tribute states over the Rus in Ukraine

1300s-1600s post-Mongol Rus emerge in Moscow, Cossack led expansion into Siberia

Push into E. Europe, the Baltic and Black Sea Rivers 1770-1816

The Caucasus – a path into Persia 1773-1829

Central Asia – to control Silk Road cities and counter the British and Chinese 1732-1886



The Expansion of Russia, 1300-1945

From Khazar, to Vikings to the Rus in the 900s

Last Week, we ended with the **Khazar Khanate**, c. 600- 900 ce, (This was the Turkic Khanate whose elite converted to Judaism).

By the 800s **Viking trade routes (right)** linked the Black and Baltic Seas, bringing awareness of the riches of the Silk Road. The **Rus** getting interested and moving in.



Baptism of Vladimir the Great to Christianity, 988

Vladimir the Great (ruled 988 – 1015 ce) switches from persecuting Christians to making Eastern Orthodox Christianity the state religion. He may have chosen Orthodox over Catholic because his rivals to the East were Catholic.

Vladimir was of Viking background and . But under Vladimir the Rus began to challenge the Turkic tribes.

1000 years later (in this 1890 Painting by Victor Vasnetsov), Saint Vladimir is honored as the founder of the Rus soul.





Kyevan Rus State, c. 1000

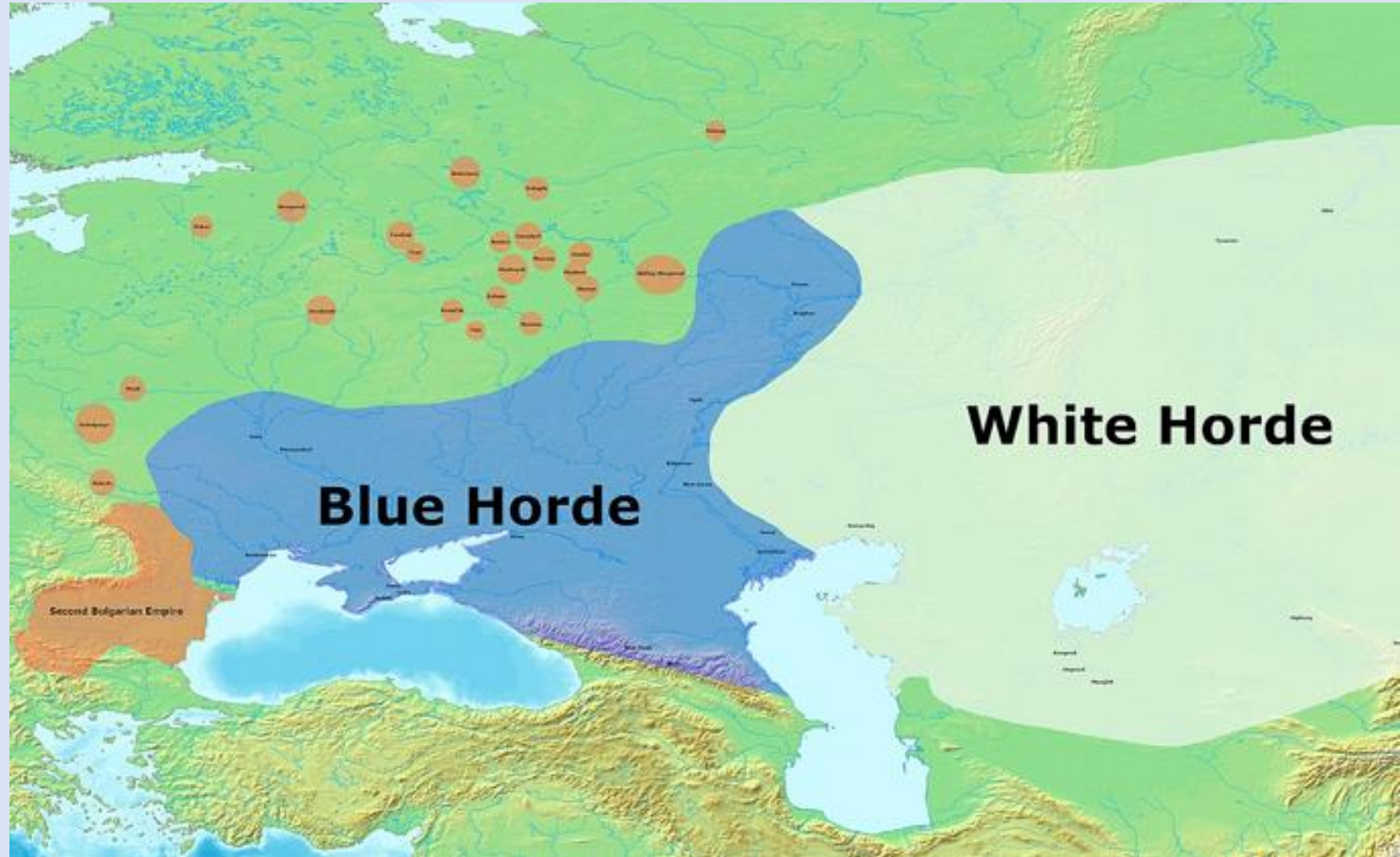
In the time of Vladimir, the Rus state of Kyev was at its high point, (c. 1000 ce) but, alas, the Mongols are on their way and arriving about 1200 to turn the Rus into vassals contributing labor and tribute to the Mongol Khans.

The Golden Horde, 1200-1400 ce

– After Genghis Khan’s death (1259) the Mongol kingdom split and became increasingly *Turkicized and Islamized*

The “Golden Horde” one of the successor states) appointed some **Rus as “grand princes”** to collect labor and tribute. (Rus vassal states shown in orange on the map)

- The Horde fragments into Turkic Khanates by late 1300s, but they are still exacting tribute and slaves from the Rus



Alexander Nevsky (1200s), the most famous Grand Prince of The Rus!

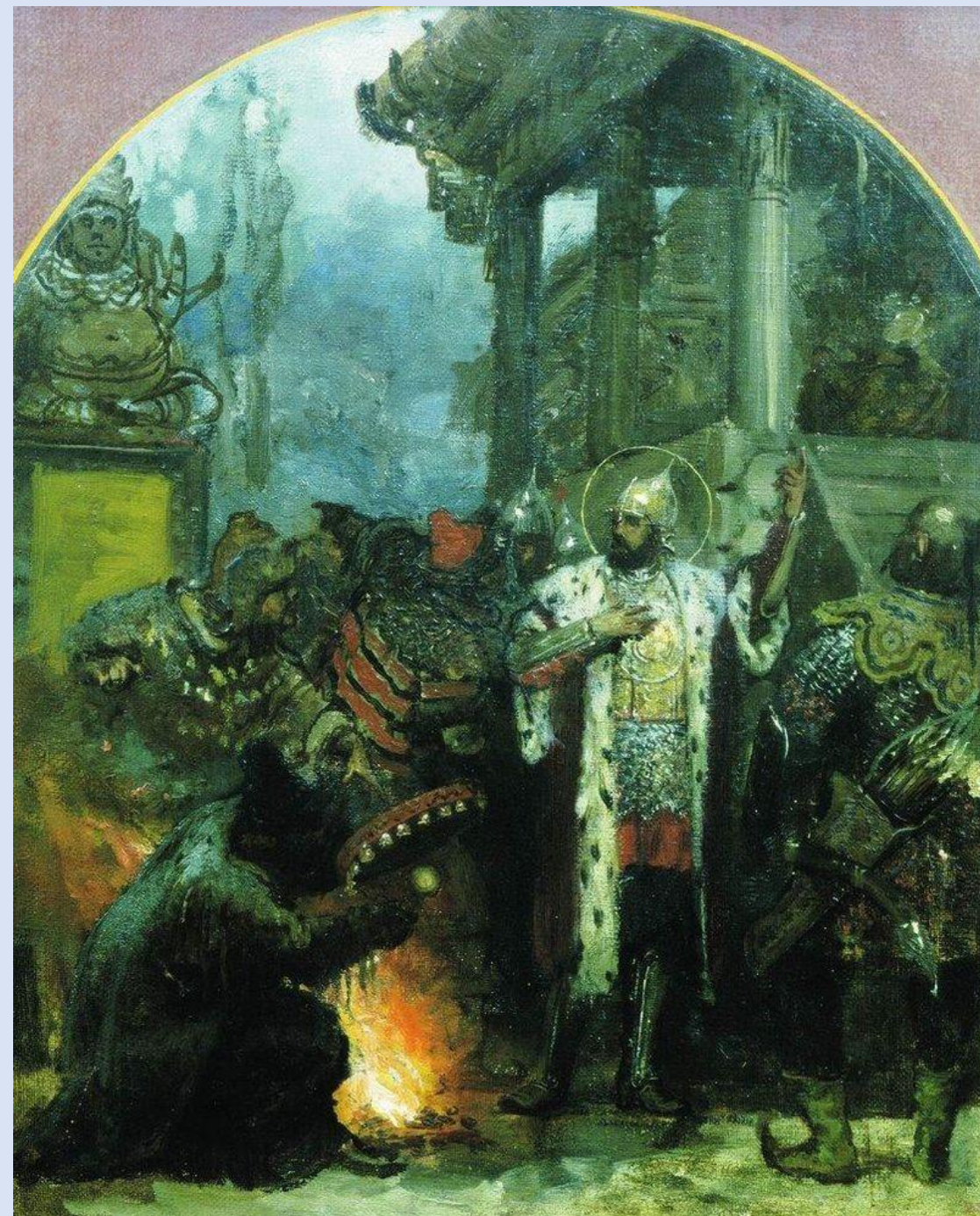
-Credited with protecting the Rus from having to convert to Islam, and resisting German and Swedish invasions.



Canonized an Orthodox Saint in the 1500s

But the job of being a “Grand Prince” meant collecting tribute for the khans, it requires a bit of historical image massaging or editing to turn it into a glorious role.

In the 19th c. Nevsky portrayed as the prince “protector” of the Rus.



1938 Sergei Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*, with music from Prokofiev, both rehabilitated Nevsky and highlighted the historic danger from the Germans.

In the film Nevsky allies with the Mongols as Prince only to protect his people! Teutonic Knights seen as more dangerous than the Turkic Muslims. There are some pretty horrific scenes of Catholic priests overseeing the immolation of Rus children in the film.

Clip here of the Ice Battle against the Livonians (Teutonic Knights) – a famous film sequence.

youtube.com/watch?v=pXr0m7SaGvs&t=211s



While much of the movie has Nevsky fighting the Livonians, the opening sequence is all about the Mongols, and their enslavement of the Rus.

- <https://youtu.be/Gq4PaJfod4w>



- In 1249 Nevsky traveled to Karakorum (capital of the Mongols, now in Mongolia) to receive his appointment as “Grand Prince”
- He fought the Germans and Swedes, and the Livonian order of Teutonic Knights. The evils of Catholicism on full display in the film.
- Canonized in the 1500s by the Orthodox Church
- In 1725 Peter the Great had his body moved to the new capital of St. Petersburg. Peter literally building his vision of the Russia empire on the body of Nevsky.
- In 1922 the Soviets removed his body from the Nevsky Cathedral to a museum basement, but he was returned in 1989! Nevsky is still the most popular Russian hero.

The Alexander Nevsky Ballistic Submarine



1400s-1500s. The small Turkic khanates of the Black Sea are caught in the middle of the expanding Rus and Ottoman Empires.

The khanates become protectorates of the Ottomans in the 1500s.

Slave raids into Slavic territories still a key industry. Just one raid in the late 1700s yielded 20,000 slaves.



Cossacks are the vanguard of Rus expansion in the 1500-1600s. Cossack-led fur trade followed the Rivers east.


Similar to early French expansion in North American - following the rivers for the fur trade and trading with natives rather than colonizing them.



Cossack buffer state (purple) emerges in the 1500s to protect against slave raids from the Turkic states.

Also note the division of Ukraine. The West came under the Polish Lithuanian Catholic church. The cultural divide still evident in today's Ukraine.





The Ottoman fort of Azov became a target for Cossacks from Zaporizhia as it controlled access to the Black Sea. It changes hands a bit in the 1600s, but Moscow primarily focused on the Baltic until the 1700s



Repin's 19th c. painting ("The Zaporizhian Cossacks Writing a Reply to the Turkish sultan ") a favorite of Stalin's

The letter itself:

"Thou Turkish Devil and Soulmate of Satan! Who dares to call himself Lord of the Christians but is not! Pot scraper of Babylon! Ale vendor of Jerusalem! Goatherd of Alexandria! Swineherd of Upper and Lower Egypt! Armenian Sow! Insolent Infidel! Go to Hell! Cossacks spit on your present claims or any you may invent in the future!

(followed an offer from the Sultan to take the Cossacks under his protection, 1663)

1700s finally sees Muscovy organized enough to confront the Turkic lands.

1717 First attempt, a disastrous attack on Khiva (Peter the Great needed Gold for war against Sweden, also dreaming of making trade contact with Mughal India and Persia) leads to a gradual approach of defense lines.

Fort construction was along the rivers, gradually advancing south in the 1700s-1850s. Four attempts on the Khanate of Khiva before it is conquered.

Muslim refugees from Caucuses and Crimea stream into the Ottoman Empire throughout the 1800s. Circassians, Crimean Tatars...

The Siberia Line:
by 1800 a line of
forts followed
the divide
between the
Forest and
Steppe

(Similar strategy
to that of the US-
Indian Wars)



Siberian Line about 1800

○ =the three Khanates

Not just similar in strategy to the US continental expansion experience, but also similar in many cultural aspects.

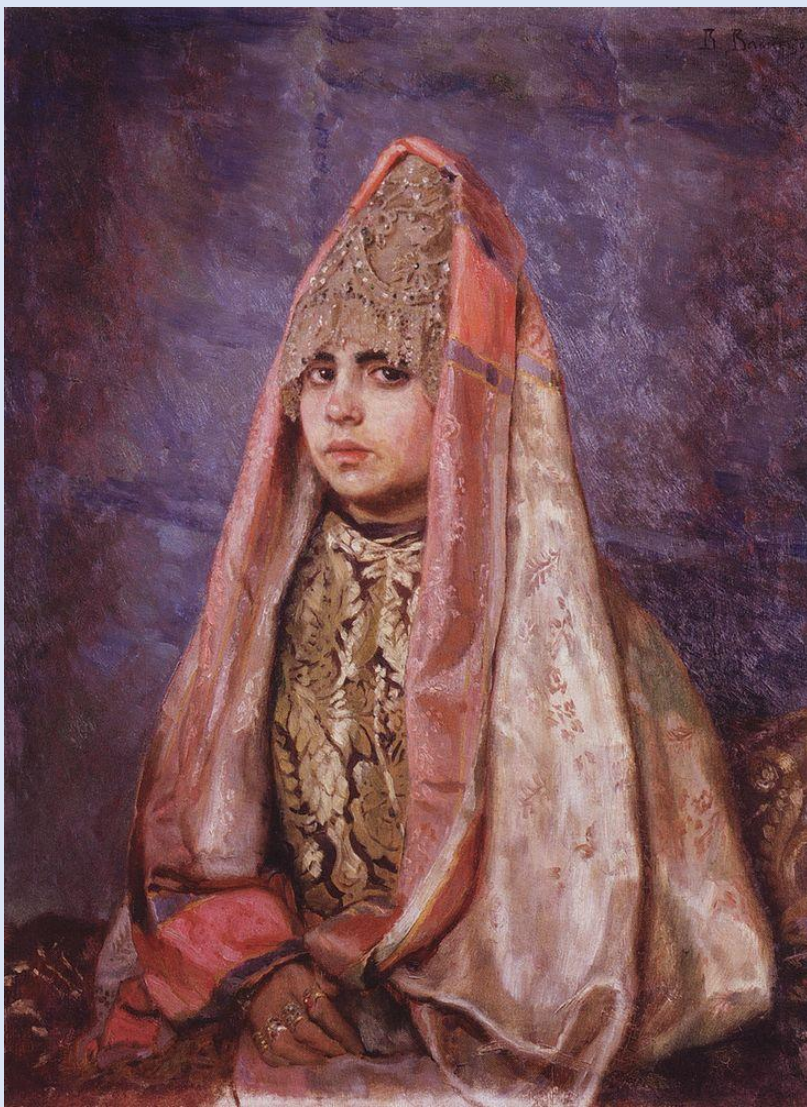
The national identity becomes associated with this war of “civilization against barbarism,” but at the same time, the “noble savage” begins to be celebrated. (Think of the Chief, the books of James Fenimore Cooper, the art of Remington, the Buffalo Bill shows or the movies of John Wayne). In American history this is seen as possible once the original inhabitants of the Americas no longer posed at threat and could be safely incorporated into the idea of what made America unique from Europe.

We see some similar trends in Russian art, opera and literature in late 19th-early 20th c. There is a rediscovery of the Asian origins of Russian culture, as well as a celebration of conquering those cultures. Makovsky’s “Boyar Wedding Feast” (next page) a good example of this celebration of the Pre Peter the Great-Europeanization-of-Russia Asian origins of Russian culture. It is what makes Russia distinct from Europe.

This is part of a larger nationalist moment where European powers “discovering” their unique heritages and incorporating them in art and literature and linguistics. Both the native culture and the conquest of that Native culture gets repurposed into what makes the colonizers culture unique.

A Boyar Wedding Feast, 1883 (Makovsky)





Russian women's clothing before Peter the Great included the kokoshnik.

[Boyaryshnya](#) (left) by [Viktor Vasnetsov](#) 1884; others Makovsky, 1880s

19th c Art loved revisiting the Central Asian chapter of Russian history. Of course, the 1855 Crimean War (Brit-Ottomans vs. Russia) also inspired a new look at that history.

Cossacks fight Kyrgyz,
Alexander Orlovsky.





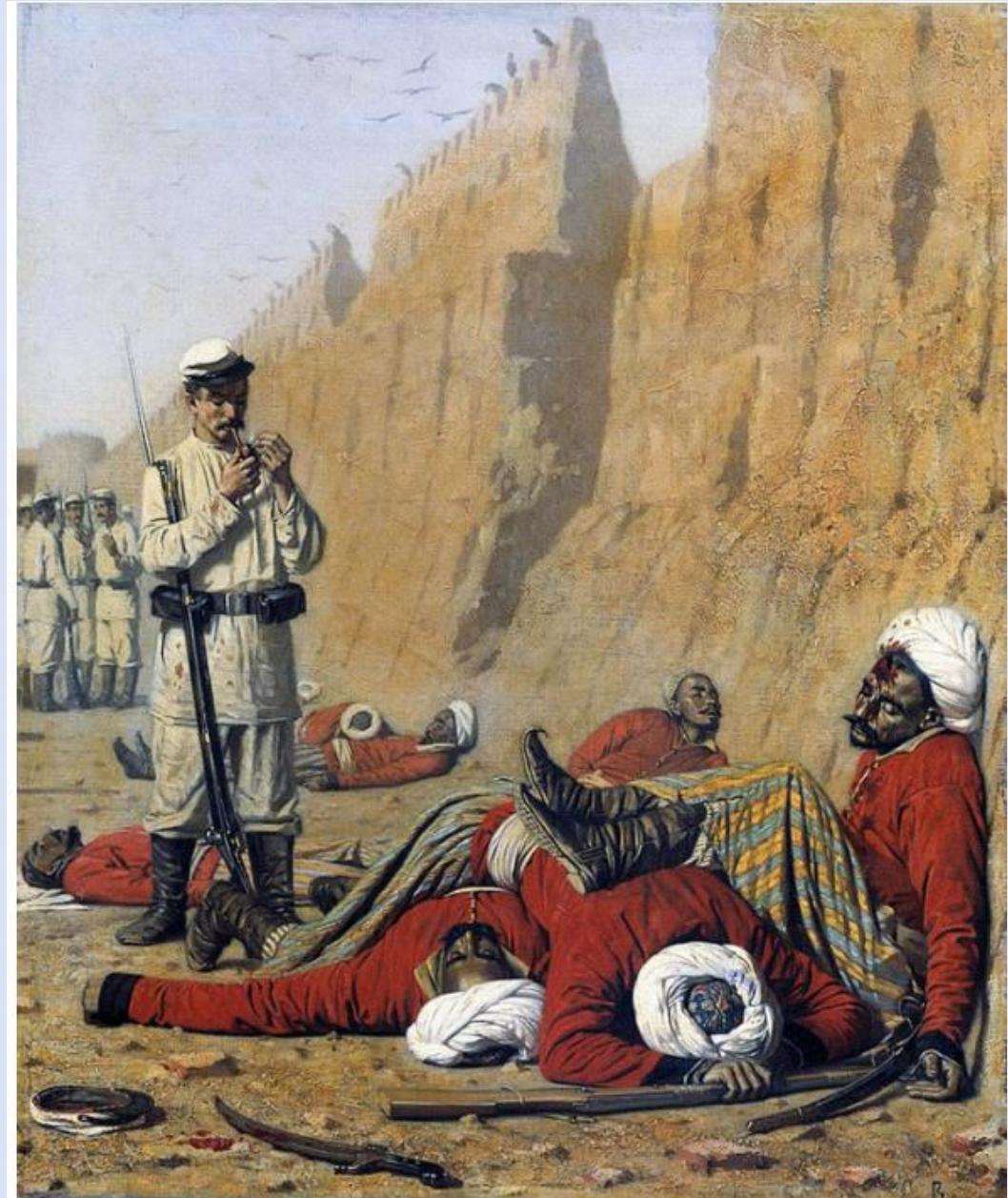
Russian Forces Crossing the Amu Darya River, Khiva Campaign, 1873, by Nikolay Karazin, 1889.

The Capture of Khiva, 1871



"By the Fortress Wall. 'Let Them Come in'".

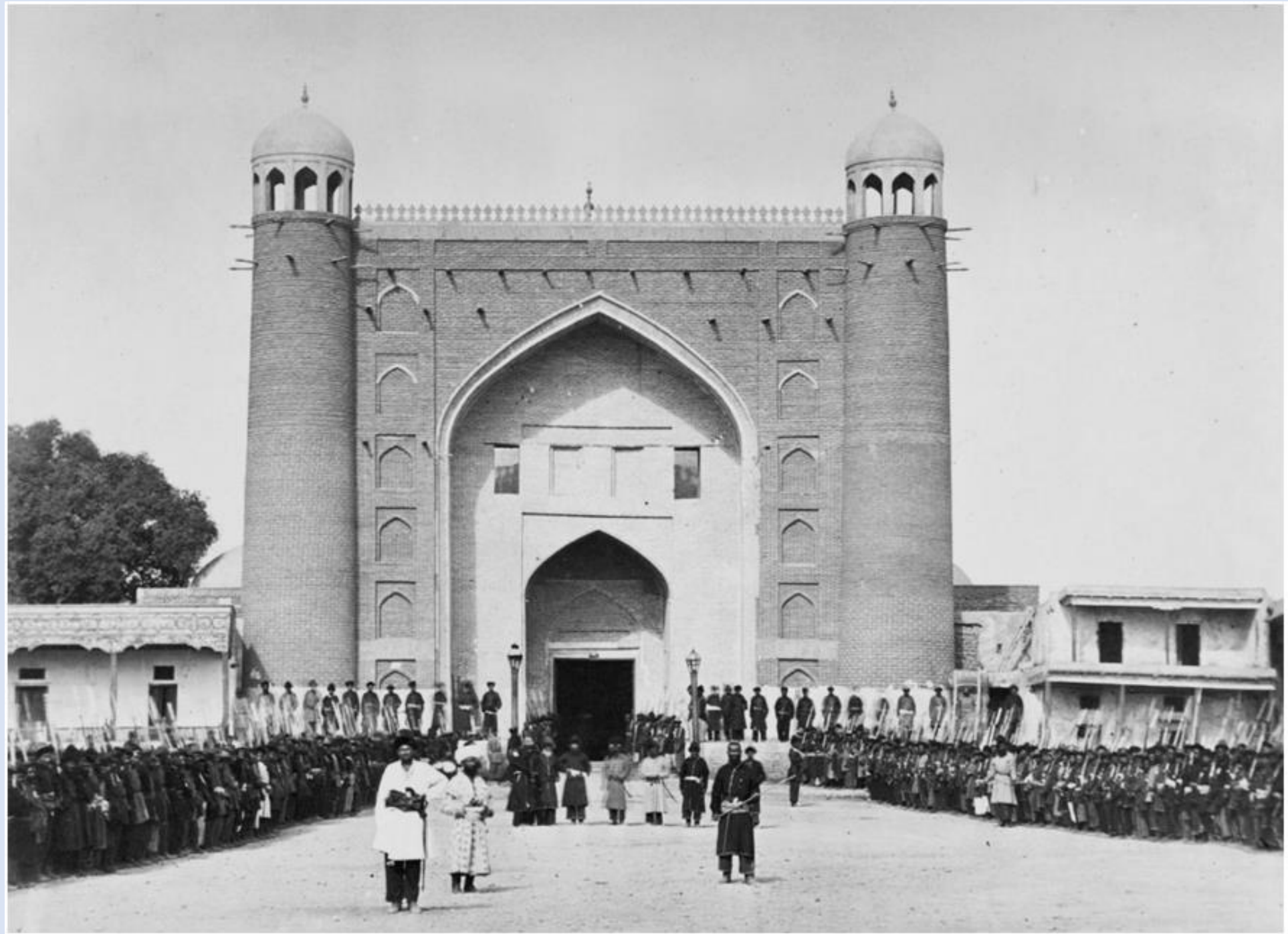
Vasily Vereshchagin/The State Tretyakov Gallery



"After failure".

Vasily Vereshchagin/The State Russian Museum

Khanate of
Kokand
before
Russian
Conquest in
1883



1868 Defeat of Bukhara Khanate(by Nikolay Karazin, 1880s)



A detail



Entry of Russian Troops into Samarkand, 1868



Opera another way of romanticizing the exotic frontier.

Borodin's Opera "Prince Igor" (1887) based on the tale of a Kiev prince and his son caught in the Polovtsian invasions (Turkic tribes that precede the Mongols) in 1185 ce. The son marries the Khans daughter, an operatic conclusion only possible once the frontier no longer a threat.

(started by Borodin, but finished after his death by Rimsky-Korsakov)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWSxWagSP24> dances
- <https://youtu.be/YfYEZ2C-LwE> chorus with subtitles



In contrast, the Ottoman memory of the 1700s-1800s clash with Russia is one of loss and tragedy.

Muslim refugees from Caucuses and the Crimea flow down into the Ottoman Empire throughout 1800s. Circassians, Crimean Tatars, and later muslims from Bulgaria, Romania, etc.

This muslim refugee crisis causes increasing anti-Christian sentiment in Ottoman lands as tales of persecution arrive with the refugees. This causes a shift in historic Osmanlik view of a multi religious empire to one of an empire to protect Muslims.

In 1850 about 45% of Ottomans had been Christians, stretching from Armenians, to Greeks to Romanians. By 1923 98% Muslim.

By 1922 *more than half of Anatolia descended from muslim refugees from Russia.* (Before 1914 20% of the population was Christian, but after the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the expulsion of the Greeks it is less than 2%)

1860-64 Circassian Genocide



Circassian parade, Istanbul, 2021



Right – a great book; and
below a fun article on early
“Wild East” years in Central
Asia after 1991
independence from USSR.

<https://eurasianet.org/memoir-on-the-coast-of-bohemia-the-us-and-central-asia-in-the-early-1990s>

