

Title: Subtexts of Imagery in Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002)
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Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark* was praised in film quarters as a technical and artistic achievement; in Slavic studies the film came in for criticism as a nostalgic celebration of Russian nationalist myths and for its idealized portrayal of the monarchy and aristocracy. Sokurov is unapologetic for the selective focus and omissions of his artistic vision, affirming "I prefer Romanticism to fact."

This paper examines the symbolism of images that pass through the frame as mute background, but are far from random and serve to develop Sokurov's idealized vision and moralizing message. The director's censure of the materialistic West for spiritual tone deafness and "hard-heartedness" recalls Christ's rebuke to the unfaithful and invites scrutiny of the Christian imagery of the paintings depicted as commentary to the running dialogue between Europe and Russia. Europe—Custine (the French aristocrat Marquis Astolphe de Custine, author of *La Russie en 1839*, a scathing account of Russia as a land of sycophants and boorish pretentiousness) flouts his technical knowledge of the art on display, while the modern-day Russian visitors to the museum have a personal relationship with and spiritual affinity for the images. This message is overt in paintings that receive special focus: the blind sculptor Tamara Kurenkova "sees" the imagery of van Dyke's "Rest on the Flight" as an affirmation of faith and God's presence; before El Greco's "Sts. Peter and Paul" Custine faults a young admirer for his uninformed contemplation of the images.

Other lesser images convey notions dear to the Russian religious sensibility: sanctifying suffering; redemption through repentance and forgiveness; Russia's messianic mission as keeper of faith and cultural treasures.

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