

WILLIAM CARRICK

(1827 - 1878)

One of the first visual anthropologists of Russia

BY IEVA MEILUTĒ-SVINKŪNIENĒ



Most people today, when thinking about Russia's past, are influenced by the brilliant literary works, such as the novels by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in which the life of 19th century Russia was described in vivid and detailed words. But there is also visual material that offers much insight into the Russian way of life at the time, as depicted in 19th century paintings, drawings and photographs. In the 1860s, series of photographs produced in Moscow and St. Petersburg portrayed members of the working class while performing daily life activities such as drinking tea, washing clothes, playing or crossing themselves, while others were photographed carrying out their professions, for example, offering goods or sharpening knives (Brawn n.d.).

The photographic legacy of William Carrick is an excellent example of such work. Carrick was born in Edinburgh in 1827, but the following year his parents decided to move to Kronstadt, Russia, where his father prospered as a timber merchant. In 1844 Carrick moved to St. Petersburg where he studied architecture at the St. Petersburg Academy. Later he travelled to Rome to pursue his interests in painting and drawing. On his return to Russia in 1857, Carrick was to discover that the family business had been virtually ruined by the Crimean War. It was in the same year that he visited Edinburgh where he met a young photographer, John MacGregor, and invited him to establish a photography studio together. In 1859 the two men set up a photo studio in the city centre of St. Petersburg at 19 Malaya Morskaya Street, a vibrant and prestigious area of the capital, near St. Isaac's Cathedral. The partnership lasted for thirteen years until MacGregor's death in 1872. Carrick continued to work by himself until he passed away in 1878 (Brawn n.d.; Waters 2010).

St Petersburg in the 1850s and 1860s was not only the seat of the monarchy and the social locus of the Empire, it was also its photographic centre. Both Russian and foreign photographers were opening their studios, resulting in a very competitive environment. Due to the higher prices of photographic materials in Russia compared to Western Europe and the absence of a substantial middle class (the prime clien-

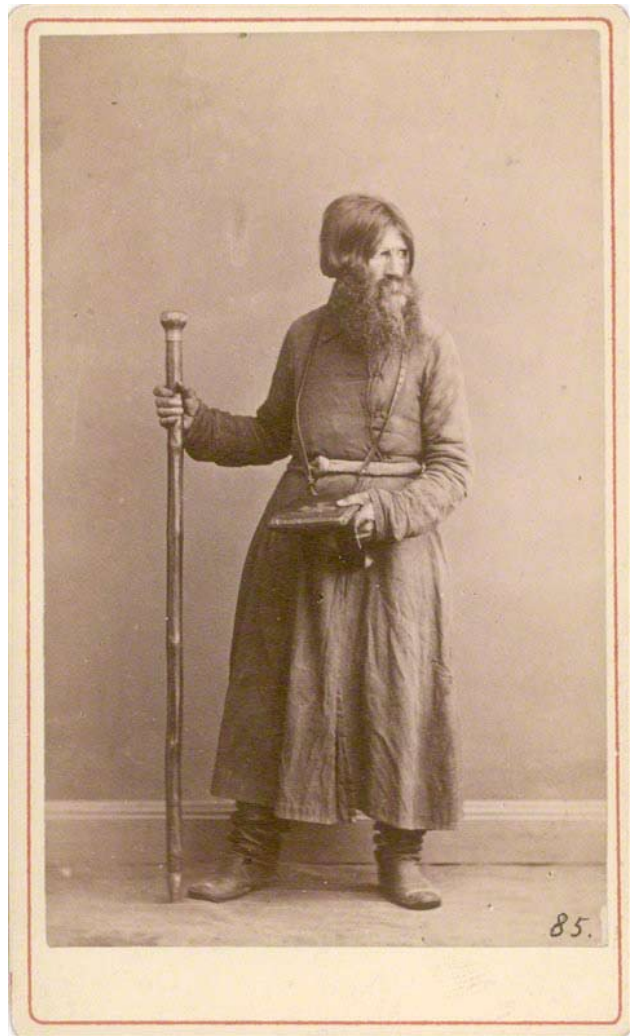
tele of mid-19th century photographers), the businesses never proved to be a great financial success (Brawn n.d.; Medišauskienė 2011).

Nonetheless, Carrick did manage to acquire some acclaim and financial security during his lifetime, which allowed him to develop his passion for photographing ordinary people – chimney-sweepers, postmen, cab-drivers, abacus sellers, icemen, woodmen, and knife-grinders among others. Carrick asked them to pose for him in his studio and produced from the resulting photographs *Cartes-de-visite* under the title *Russian Types* or sometimes *Rasnoshchiki (Hawkers)*, which were primarily intended for the tourist market (Ralston 1870).

William Carrick very aptly captured the characters of the locals, their physiognomy and their dress. Through posing, his subjects are mimicking their own occupations. The way that people appear relaxed and look alive in these photographs suggests that the photographer cultivated good relations with his subjects. There was a worldwide trend to approach photography in the tradition of paintings and printmaking of the time and many of Carrick's photographs are stylistically reminiscent of paintings by Ilya Repin and Ivan Kramskoi from the same era (Waters 2010).

Throughout Russia, there were photographers such as J. Monstein, Alfred Lorens and H. Laurent, but also Russian artists M.B. Tulinov, A.I. Denjer and V.V. Stasov, who similarly depicted representatives of different Russian ethnicities (Rossijskaja nacional'naja biblioteka 2006). Yet, despite huge competition, William Carrick managed to win the favour of the Grand Duke Nikolai Aleksandrovich as well as that of the subjects of his photography. To this day he is nationally and internationally renowned for his ethnographic photography, a work that remains a significant document of Russian folk heritage. ◆







All photographs courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum

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