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Constantin Guys, the Croatian Portative Narguilé – the Drawing from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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The author corrects the erroneous title of a drawing by Constantin Guys preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, proposing the title Croatian Portative Narguilé. The drawing shows Croats in Balaklava during the Crimean War (1853 – 1856). The author dates the drawing to 1885 and associates it to the drawing in the Smith College Museum of Art entitled Croats' Camp at Balaclava, in which he identified Guys's self-portrait. The paper includes an illustration of the Croats' Camp at Balaclava after Guys published in The Illustrated London News in 1885. On the basis of historical facts, the author determines the precise date of execution of the New York drawing, between February and July 1855.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York holds a drawing, accession number 2003.388.3, which is there called *The Croatian Potentate Narguile* (Fig. 1),¹ the author of which is Constantin Guys (Flushing, 1802 – 1892, Paris). It was bought in around 1950 at the Kraushaar Galleries in New York, and donated to the museum by Anne K. Jones in 2003. The period in which the drawing was made is stated as being from 1817 to 1892. That is, from the year in which the artist was fifteen and, it is assumed, could have drawn in this skilled manner, to the time of his death, when he was ninety. The dimensions are 167 × 203 mm, and it was rendered in pen and brown ink, with grey and brown washes.

In the upper part of the drawing, slanting upwards, the author wrote by hand four lines of writing, the beginning of which is placed in the top left corner, the lines running in sequence towards the centre. Guys wrote the title of the drawing by hand at the bottom of the drawing, in the centre.

As we can read on the page from the museum quoted, the person who attempted to read the words on the drawing arrived at the following results:

Utterance [?] / for the... [illegible] / of the Croatian camp / near... [illegible]; bottom, centre: The Croatian potentate Narguile [?]; verso in graphite, centre: 19 (question marks by the person from the Metropolitan).

Since I had started to study Guys while doing research into a drawing I thought he might have done, showing two riders on horses with very long legs, I devoted my attention on the whole to the drawings on which horsemen are shown, for it is one of his very frequent motifs. Viewing on the Net the Guys drawings kept in the Metropolitan Museum, after many equestrian pictures, I was attracted first of all to the exotic depiction, and then, to the mention of a Croatian potentate in the title of the drawing. It seemed at once that it was a Turkish and not a Croatian *magnifico* that was shown, if it was at all about a “potentate”, while it seemed to me that parts of the text were not accurately read.

I found the process of transcribing relatively easy, apart from one word, *sketch*,² which was however rapidly deciphered. This is how I read the wording:



1. Constantin Guys, *The Croatian Portative Narguilé*, 1855, Metropolitan Museum, New York / *Constantin Guys, Hrvatska prijenosna nargila, 1855.*, Metropolitan Museum, New York



2. Constantin Guys, *Croatian Camp*, 1855, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton / *Constantin Guys, Hrvatski tabor, 1855.*, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton



3. Constantin Guys, *Croats' Camp at Balaklava*, 8 September 1855, *The Illustrated London News* / *Constantin Guys, Hrvatski tabor u Balaklavi, 8. rujna 1855.*, *The Illustrated London News*



4. Constantin Guys, *Les soeurs de la charité à hôpital de Péra*, 1854, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris / *Constantin Guys, Sestre milosrdnice u bolnici u Peri, 1854.*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Pariz

Reference / for the sketch / of the Croatian camp / near Balaklava

Confirmation of my reading I found on the drawing by Constantin Guys, *The Ceremony of Kourban Bairam*,³ which once belonged to the Nadar Collection. In the upper right-hand corner of the drawing is written in Guys' handwriting *Sketch for reference only* and on the back a long text starts with: *This sketch which is to be used only as reference (...)*.

This is how I read the title:

The Croatian portative Narguilé

The handwritten word *Balaklava* was not easy to resolve, but here I was helped by the fact that Constantin Guys was

a war reporter for *The Illustrated London News* during the time of the Crimean War.⁴ The figures shown in the drawing could well have fitted into this part of the artist's life. After a cursory look at the map of the Crimea, it became clear at once that it was the port of Balaklava that was meant. The Crimean War, which went on from October 1853 to February 1856 also helped in the dating of the drawing. The drawing gives a very lively impression, as if it were made on the spot, not subsequently in the workroom. Since the French and the British troops, after the Battle of the Alma, started their Balaklava campaign on September 23, 1854,⁵ with the intention of investing Sebastopol from the south, the time of origin of the drawing can be narrowed down still

further, to between 1854 and 1856. The historical facts tell us that an English railwayman⁶ offered to build a line from Balaclava to the position of their troops 8 miles off towards Sebastopol.⁷ After February 1855, the Turkish side provided a contingent of 200 navvies, Croats and Montenegrins, from the peripheral provinces of the Empire, in order for them to prepare the land across which the railway line was to run. I assume that the Croats were brought from Bosnia, known on the maps of the time as Turkish Croatia,⁸ whence their being dressed in the Turkish style. The line was ready in a couple of months, and it is logical to assume that the Croatian labour force left the site the same year. Drawing on this fact, I think then that the drawing *The Croatian Portative Narguilé* can be placed with great confidence in the year 1855.

Guys drawing *Croatian Camp*⁹ (Fig. 2) from the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton helped me in more precise dating of the drawing. Guys sent this drawing to *The Illustrated London News* where it was published on September 8, 1885 (Fig. 3) where it was entitled *Croats' Camp at Balaclava*.¹⁰ The point of departure for the central representation of Northampton drawing is the drawing from the Metropolitan Museum. On it, apart from a man who is smoking a portable narghile and the boy who is lighting it, there is a depiction of a largish group of men sitting under a tent with raised flaps, on raised benches from which their feet are dangling, sometimes bare, while the shoes they took off are on the ground underneath them. Around the big tent there are ordinary military tents, and among them, to the right and in the middle ground, horses and riders, and in the distance a hilly landscape is shown. To the right of the central depiction are three male figures standing, who might from their clothing be allied soldiers or officers.¹¹ To the extreme left of the drawing sits a man by a ewer, turned in the opposite direction to the ewer in the Met drawing; over it a barber is shown, together with a man whose head he is shaving. To the right of them are two men, dressed in Western European style, looking at the Croats. The one on the left is taller, shown in profile, looking to the right, in a light coloured suit with a bag under his arm. He has quite long hair and a beard, and on his head a shallow hat with a narrow rim. To the right of him, a male figure is seen from behind; he has put his hand behind his back. He is wearing a shallow hat with a wider rim, around which a light coloured scarf has been tied. He is wearing checked trousers. It is possible that Guys has represented himself in this figure. On the drawing *Les soeurs de la charité à hôpital de Péra*¹² (Fig. 4) from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, in a spacious hospital ward, two nuns are depicted in conversation and one man, dressed almost identically, but without the scarf on the hat. To the right of his feet, in Guys' handwriting, runs the inscription: *My humble self*.

In the left hand corner of the drawing *Croatian Camp*, Guys signed with the underlined monogram C. G. In the

next line he writes: *Croatian Camp* and in the third *Balacklava 19 of July 55*. From this it follows that the drawing *The Croatian Portative Narguilé* from the Metropolitan Museum, taking into consideration the Croats' arrival in Balaclava after February 1855, was made between February and July 1855.

Translation: Graham McMaster

NOTES

1 <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/363374?rpp=20&pg=2&ao=on&ft=Constantin+Guys&pos=29>

2 Deciphered by the writer Vesna Ćuro-Tomić, for which I owe her many thanks.

3 Pencil, ink, ink wash, and water color; 267 × 401 mm. KAREN W. SMITH, *Crimean War Drawings 1854-1856*, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1978, ill. 35 and p. 78.

4 EMMANUEL BÉNÉZIT, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, Vol. 6, Librairie Gründ, Paris, 1999, 619; KLAUS GERHARD SAUR, *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, Vol. 66, München–Leipzig, 2010, 348. In 1842 the British entrepreneur Herbert Ingrams founded *The Illustrated London News*, in which he at once employed Guys. The paper had immediate and enormous success, for some time even appearing in a French-language version. – LOUIS-ANTOINE PRAT, *Le dessin français au XIXe siècle*, Louvre éditions, Musée d'Orsay, Somogy, Paris, 2011, 386.

5 The actual Battle of Balaclava took place on October 25, 1854. – ORLANDO FIGES, *The Crimean War: A History*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2010, 341–354.

6 His name was Samuel Peto. – ORLANDO FIGES (note 5), 355.

7 ORLANDO FIGES (note 5), 355–356.

8 NENAD MOAČANIN, *Turska Hrvatska*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1999.

9 PIERRE DUFLO, *Constantin Guys: Fou de dessin, grand reporter: 1802-1892*, Éditions Arnaud Seydoux, Paris, 1988, 322, 345. Smith College Museum of Art Northampton, Pen and brown ink with blue, gray and black washes on white paper, 321 × 495 mm, Accession Number SC 1952:2. <http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?museum=all&t=obj&type=all&f=&s=constantin+guys&record=2>

10 *The Illustrated London News*, September 8, 1885, 293.

11 For a more precise determination, it would be useful to compare them with officers and men from the photographs of Roger Fenton (1819–1869). On the same pages there are several photographs of Croats, and on one of them is a man recalling the one in the drawings smoking the narghile.

12 *Sisters of Mercy in a Hospital in Pera*. Inv. no. 34708, pen and ink with brush wash, 177 × 264 mm. PIERRE DUFLO (note 9), 190, 344. – In Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris it is entitled *C. Guys en visite à l'hôpital de Pera*. In the description of the drawing it is written: *Constantin Guys, vu de profil, en conversation avec deux soeurs de charité (St Vincent de Paul) dans une salle de l'hôpital de Pera*. – Constantin Guys, seen in profile, in conversation with two sisters of charity (St Vincent de Paul) in a hospital ward in Pera.

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- ORLANDO FIGES, *The Crimean War: A History*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2010.

The Illustrated London News, September 8, 1885.

NENAD MOAČANIN, *Turska Hrvatska*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1999.

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Sažetak

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Constantin Guys, Hrvatska prijenosna nargila – crtež iz Metropolitan muzeja

U muzeju Metropolitan u New Yorku čuva se crtež koji tamo nazivaju »Nargila hrvatskog moćnika« autora Constantina Guysa (Flushing, 1802. – Pariz, 1892.). Kao vrijeme nastanka crteža navedeno je razdoblje od 1817. do 1892. godine. Pravilnim čitanjem teksta napisanog autorovom rukom naslov je ispravljen u »Hrvatska prijenosna nargila«, a utvrđeno je i mjesto radnje i nastanka crteža: Balaklava na Krimu.

U muzeju Smith College Museum of Art u Northamptonu čuva se Guysov crtež »Hrvatski tabor« na kojem su autorovom rukom napisani inicijali i tekst na engleskom jeziku s nadnevkom: »C. G. / Hrvatski tabor. / Balaklava 19. srpnja 55« (C. G. / Croatian Camp / Balaklava 19 of July 55). Razvidno je da je skica iz Metropolitana pripremni crtež za središnji prizor ovog crteža. Na njemu je, među inima, prikazan i muški lik izgled kojeg odgovara liku s crteža »Sestre milosrdnice u bolnici u Peri« iz Musée des Arts Décoratifs u Parizu pokraj kojeg je Guys na engleskom zapisao: »Moja malenkost« (My humble self). Iz toga proizlazi da je na crtežu iz Northamptona prikazan dosad neprimijećen Guysov autoportret.

Guys je kao ratni reporter radio za »The Illustrated London News« kamo je poslao crtež iz Northamptona. Objavljen je 8. rujna 1885. pod naslovom »Hrvatski tabor u Balaklavi« (Croats' Camp at Balaklava).

Uzmemo li u obzir povijesnu činjenicu da su Hrvati u Balaklavu stigli nakon veljače 1855. godine, kao i nadnevak na crtežu iz Northamptona, možemo zaključiti da je crtež iz Metropolitana nastao između veljače 1855. kada su Hrvati stigli u Balaklavu, i srpnja 1855. godine kada je nastao northamptonski crtež, a sva je prilika bliže srpnju jer prikazuje uhodani tabor.