

The Artistic and Scientific Legacy of Alexander Mozhaiskiy : The Sailor, the Artist and the Inventor

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Alexander Mozhaiskiy was born on March 21, 1825 in the Baltic Sea port of Rochensalm. He was the first child in the family. His father was a naval officer and in that time a commander of the ship. Six years after then in the family were five children his father was appointed to Arkhangelsk as a commander of the port.

In the 1831 then Alexander was in the age of ten years he entered Naval cadet corps in St.-Petersburg. He began his education in one of the ancient high school in Russia, which was founded by Peter the Great in 1701. I must to mention that now it is a High naval institution of Peter the Great. In the time of Mozhaiskiy's education Admiral Ivan Krusenshtern was the director of Naval cadet school. This famous Russian navigator attracted to the teaching great Russian scientists of that time. As a result the level of teaching in the school became very high. All teachers of Alexander Mozhaiskiy noted his abilities first of all in mathematics and in drawings. In the age of sixteen years Alexander graduated from the school and began his naval service in the Baltic fleet.

In the first years served on the sailing ships on the Baltic Sea. In 1849 he became a lieutenant (Figure1).

Alexander Mozhaiskiy started his round-the-world voyage on the board of sailing frigate "Diana" in the beginning of 1853. The ship left the main Russian naval base Kronstadt and was bound at first for Copenhagen. Then he crossed Atlantic Ocean and visited Rio de Janeiro.

There was no one camera on the board of "Diana". There are the facts that one camera was on the board of frigate "Pallada" on which started from Kronstadt the mission of Admiral Putjatin. (It is known that later Admiral Putiytin with his staff passed on the board of frigate "Diana" to reach Japan.) The famous Russian writer Ivan Goncharov who was in the staff of the mission in the position of the secretary left the description of the process of filming on the pages of his novel "Frigate Pallada". This full of humor scene makes a possibility to understand that the camera on the board of "Pallada" was not so perfect and all negatives made with its help must not to be high quality. But it is very pale that these films are not to come to our days.

In spite of the practice in Russian Navy of sending the artist for the fixing the main events and for collecting ethnographical and anthropological material during the expedition to the important round-the-world voyages there was no professional artist on the frigate "Diana". Then the ship turned round the cape of Hoorn Lieutenant Mozhaiskiy began to make the drawings. And most thanks to this he became a famous.

The overwhelming majority of drawings which were made by Lieutenant Mozhaiskiy are in the collection of the Central Naval Museum in St.-Petersburg. Some drawings were lost. And we have information about a few drawings in the private collections. And also we are acquainted with the few counterfeits.

There are 25 drawings of Lieutenant Mozhaiskiy in the museum's collection. 22 drawings are having a signature of the author. All drawings are collected in one album. They can be divided by the subjects on some groups.

First are the ethnographic plots, which including the portraits of the native citizens and the views of coastal districts of Japan. It is very interesting what the author makes realistic portraits of the easy peoples.

The portraits of “Young Women, Old Women and a Boy” (Figure2), “The Portrait of the Girl” and “The Small Soldier” can be noted by the democratic matter.

The pictures of views of the coastal districts of Japan have not any components of the reconnaissance. The artist trying to fulfill the beauty of the exotic country. Of course it is easy to understand that some of the pictures Mozhaiskiy as a sailor impressed the image of his ship the frigate “Diana”. In the bottom right corner of the drawing “The Frigate Diana in the Shimoda Harbor”, we can see the image of Russian naval officer, who is sitting and drawing. Behind him young Japanese is standing attentively watching for his work. This detail is in the traditions of the Russian painters during the travel.

The next are the pictures of the events during the in Shimoda on December 11, 1853. During this catastrophe frigate “Diana” was destroyed. Mozhaiskiy could not help responding to this tragedy. We have two drawings – “The Destroying of the City of Shimada by the Earthquake” and “The Continuation of the Sea Oscillation” (Figure3).

Ought to distinguish the drawings, which are reflecting the activity of Admiral Putiytin’s mission Lieutenant Mozhaiskiy was only the officer of frigate’s staff and didn’t take part in the negotiations. But he well understands the importance of this political mission for the both of the countries. Today we have a possibility to see the places were lived Russian mission during the negotiations. To my mind one of the more interesting from this point of view is the group portrait “The Japanese Representatives on the Negotiations”. In the bottom of the drawing the author left the names of all present persons.

May be the analysis of the artistic manner of Alexander Mozhaiskiy’s drawings is out of the frames of this report but I must mention that some of his works have very high references among the art critics. And first of all, correct using of the color in his drawings. But we must confirm that the experience of the sailorman helped a great for the non-professional artist.

Some words about the further fate of the drawings. Mozhaiskiy presented them to the chief of Russian Navy after the return to motherland. The General-Admiral Grand Duce Konstantin Nickolaevich appreciated the works of his lieutenant and generously rewarded Mozhaiskiy. He presented him the ring with the diamonds. The drawings were passed to the library of the Hydrographic Department and later to the Central Naval Library. In the middle of the XX century the album of Alexander Mozhaiskiy took its place in the collection of Central Naval Museum. One of the drawings – the landscape with self-portrait of Mozhaiskiy now is in the main exposition of Museum.

Mozhaiskiy had to stop his artistic activity after the wreck of frigate “Diana”. In that time there was no ship for Russian sailors to return home. And in this state of anxiety’s moment Alexander Mozhaiskiy found the issue of “Morskoy Sbornik” – the official magazine of the Russian Navy in the saving frigate’s library. In this issue the plans of the schooner “Opyt” were published. And Mozhaiskiy was at the head of building of the new ship. Her name was “Heda”. After some times on the board of the new ship Russians returned to the motherland. And it was a great merit of Lieutenant Mozhaiskiy.

After returning to Russia Mozhaiskiy took part in one more geographical expedition to Khiva (The Middle Asia) in 1858. But we have no facts about any artistic activities of him during this travel.

In 1860 Mozhaiskiy was passed to the port of Pori there the clipper “Vestnik” were building. At first as a

naval officer who had experience in the shipbuilding he was at the head of the assembling of the steam engine and all mechanisms of the ship. Some times later he becomes the commander of this new ship. The time spent in Pori was an important school for his knowledge in the questions of mechanic and theory and practice of using of the steam engines.

Mozhaiskiy was temporary retired in 1862. In same year he married and for some time lived in the estate of his wife near the city of Vologda.

It was a new period of life of talent person – Alexander Mozhaiskiy decided to build an airplane. He observed the flying of the birds. And his first creation was like a air kite. His second creation was larger and Mozhaiskiy could twice to flight on it himself. In that moment he decided to use the immobility wing and the air screw.

In 1873 Mozhaiskiy began to create the first models. In the memorial Museum of Mozhaiskiy in his estate near Vologda collected a few of them and also restored his workshop.

Mozhaiskiy demonstrated his best model in St.Petersburg in 1876. The show had a great success. It took more confidence to the inventor. But creation of the full-scale airplane demanded great money. Mozhaiskiy applied for the help in this question to Russian Ministry of defense. For this question the special commission was established.

Here the short description of the airplane prepared by the inventor himself. “The airplane consists from the boat, which using for accommodation of the steam engine and the pilots, from two immovable wings, from the tail, from the great front screw, from two small screws in the back side, from the small cart with the wheels and from two masts, which using for strengthening of all parts of airplane and for rising of the tail.”

In spite of positive comments of many experts and engineers verdict of special commission was negative. But inventor tried to continue the creation of the airplane by his own means for the time when his means were exhausted. Mozhaiskiy was on the threshold of poverty. In this moment he remembers about his acquaintance with the Great Duce Konstantin Nikolaevich who was interested by this project and gave some money. After that Mozhaiskiy became a teacher in his native Naval cadets corps.

On November 30, 1881 Mozhaiskiy took a patent for the airplane and began the assembly of it near St. Petersburg. The airplane was ready for the summer of the next year. Mozhaiskiy retired from the Naval service in the rank of rear-admiral and began the tests.

On the trial flight in spring of 1883 the Mozhaiskiy's airplane took off but after this was a blow against the fence. The airplane got serious damages of the wing and chassis.

The official estimation of the trial was negative. But today we can value the work of Mozhaiskiy as a triumphal. Today we know that the first flight of Wright brothers which was accomplished about twenty years later was continuing only 3 seconds and also finished with accident.

For some years inventor tried to restore his airplane and to continue the trials. But his strengths were undermined. Alexander Mozhaiskiy died on April 1, 1890. He was buried on Smolenskiy cemetery in St.Petersburg.

His airplane not remained. But remained his excellent traveling drawings, which are existing to be a unique nonwritten cultural materials for memorizing and documenting human culture. Also remained the memory about this distinguished man – the sailor, the artist and the inventor.