

Case 1

Antoine-Louis Barye

French, 1796–1875

Tartar Warrior Checking His Horse, modeled ca. 1845

Bronze, presumed sand cast

Originally from Central Asia, the Tartars were among the nomadic peoples unfairly depicted by 19th-century European historians who described an innately violent culture they called “barbarism.” Early historical records recount that the territories previously conquered by the Roman Empire were constantly subjected to attacks from invading tribes from the East between the 4th and 6th centuries. Although historians today present a far less biased account of this period of large-scale cultural migration, the earlier negative reputation of these tribes was inscribed in the consciousness of modern Europeans. Artists of the Romantic generation perpetuated these stereotypes, often revealing an ambivalent regard in their awe-inspiring representations of “noble barbarians.”

Although Barye demonstrates considerable care in modeling the details of the warrior’s military attire, his image of a proud knight from a distant land is nevertheless typical of this kind of biased historicism. In this portrayal, a vision of medieval history melds with a fascination for the cultures of the East as viewed through the lens of exoticism and otherness.

Copper: 84.0%, Zinc: 11.2%. Tin: 3.5%, Lead: 0.8%, additional trace elements

Gift of Mrs. Nelson L. St. Clair Jr., 2012.440

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