Russian Explorations in Central Asia at the Turn of the 20th Century

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Russian in Central Asia

THE vast spaces of Central Asia, inhabited by numerous nomadic and sedentary peoples speaking different languages and combining features of Buddhist, Muslim and Christian East in their cultures, have been an object of systematic study in Russia since the early 19th century.

The earliest evidence of Russian presence in Karakorum dates from the 13th century. During the same period Russian prisoners were brought to China via Mongolia to serve on the Russian guard regiment at the court of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). In the 16th century, Russia received some information about Kashgaria through Ivan Petrov and Burnash Yamyshev, the Cossack *atamans* dispatched to China by Ivan the Terrible in 1567. In the early 17th century, the diplomatic missions led by Vasily Tyumenets (1615), Ivan Petlin (1618) and Fyodor Baykov (1654), traveled to China via western Mongolia. In 1713, F. Trushnikov, a Tobolsk merchant, reached Lake Koko Nor and the upper course of the Huang He. In the 18th century, Filipp S. Efremov (1750–1811?) visited Kashgar and recorded his reminiscences of Eastern Turkestan and Middle Asia together with information on the population and commerce in the towns of Kashgar and Yarkend.

Early-Mid 19th Century: Pioneering Study

Contribution by Bichurin

In Russia, a scientific study of Central and Middle Asia was started by the outstanding Sinologist Nikita Ya. Bichurin (Father Iakinf, 1777–1853). Having amassed a wealth of material during his stay in China, he determined that the Russian public should be made aware of regions bordering on China before being introduced to China itself. He wrote:

> It was in the order of things that Tibet, Turkestan and Mongolia should be dealt with first, as those countries have long maintained contacts with China and given China itself access to India, Middle Asia and Russia. It was deemed appropriate to begin by surveying the geographical location and political structure of the aforementioned countries and then go on to describe China's political views on those. Therefore, I decided to preface my account of China with some notions pertaining to its court and politics, government and legislation, and popular customs and traditions. In dealing with China proper, then, we would find it easier to give a full perspective on the Chinese Empire with all of its political twists.[1]

Bichurin's works on historical geography are undoubtedly the most prominent part of his writings, published or otherwise, preserved in the archives. Owing to the perfectly accurate translation and localization of geographical data, they still remain valid today, serving as a valuable resource on the archaeology, history and ethnography of ancient and medieval Asia. In 1828, Bichurin published his *Account of Tibet in Its Present State*, based on the annotated translation of the 18th-century Chinese treatise entitled *Account of Tibet with Illustrations* (*Wei Zang tu shi*). His work, the first book on Tibet to be published in the Russian language, was highly acclaimed in Russia and abroad. A number of periodicals carried reviews emphasizing its great scholarly value. The French translation with commentaries by Heinrich Julius Klaproth (1783–1835) was completed in 1829.

In 1828, Bichurin published his *Notes on Mongolia*, a comprehensive description of Mongolia based on Chinese sources. This book, too, was soon translated into French. It was chiefly due to his publications devoted to Tibet and Mongolia that Bichurin was elected Corresponding Member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences on 17 (29) December 1828. His next book, *Account of Jungaria and Eastern Turkestan in Their Ancient and Present State* appeared in 1829, becoming Father Iakinf's (Bichurin's) third major work. It included translated excerpts from three of the most prominent Chinese sources, i.e., *Narratives about the Western Regions* (*Xi yu zhuan*), Chapter 96 of the *History of the Former Han Dynasty* (*Qian Han shu*), *An Account of What Has Been Seen and Heard of the Western Regions* (*Xi yu wen jian lu*), published in 1777, and the 18th-century Chinese official geographical compendium entitled *A Comprehensive Geographical Outline of the Great Qing Empire* (*Da Qing yi tong zhi*). Unfortunately, this book on Eastern Turkestan did not bring as much public attention as had Bichurin's two previous works. It was not until much later that the true worth of his

Account of Jungaria and Eastern Turkestan in Their Ancient and Present State was recognized. Meanwhile, the only contemporary review was that by N. A. Polevoi.[2]

In 1848, the Academy of Sciences entrusted Bichurin with compiling a history of the peoples of Middle Asia. As a result, he produced a thorough three-volume study entitled *A Collection of Information about the Peoples Living in Central Asia in Ancient Times*, first published in 1851.[3] It was based on translations of Chinese sources previously unknown to the Western public. It included an edited translation of Chapter *Xi yu zhuan*, an excerpt about China's neighbours from the *Historical Records* (*Shi ji*) by Sima Qian, and materials from the official histories of the Later Han (25–220), Jin (265-420), Wei (386–534), the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui (581–617) and Tang (618–907) (*Hou Han shu*, *Jin shu*, *Wei shu*, *Bei shi*, *Nan shi*, *Sui shu* and *Tang shu*).

Bichurin's works came out at a time when Russia was emerging on the international scene as a powerful Eurasian state. Having established a firm foothold in the Far East and the Pacific, it became aware of the real geopolitical significance of Inner Asia and the necessity of its comprehensive investigation. On 6 (18) August 1845, the Russian Geographic Society was established by an imperial decree for the "primary task" of collecting and propagating reliable information about Russia and the "second most important task of studying foreign countries, primarily those that border on Russia, i.e., Turkey, Persia, China, etc."[4] Furthermore, the Russian Archaeological Society, comprising the Slavic-Russian, Classical-Byzantine, Western European and Eastern archaeology sections, was established in 1846.

Mapping of Geographical Features and Cartography

The wide readership in Russia took a keen interest in the unknown world of Asia. Many people believed it was necessary to explore and map its geography. In 1848, the Court Counsellor P. V. Golubkov donated 2,350 Rubles to the Geographic Society towards the publication of Carl Ritter's fundamental work *The Science of the Earth* (*Die Erdkunde*), with supplements, as well as a map of Asia. In fact, the mapping of Central Asian geographical features in the early 19th century was based on investigations by Carl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt, even if their theoretical evidence was not based on field work and therefore had a number of flaws, e.g., exaggeration of the extent of mountain ridges and plateaus and inaccurate localization of some mountain systems. Nevertheless, preparation and publication, between 1856 and 1879, of the five-volume Russian translation of Carl Ritter's work,

edited and supplemented by the prominent geographer Pyotr P. Semyonov-Tian-Shansky (1827–1914), gave an impetus to the development of historical geography and the cartography of Central Asia in Russia.

The first attempt to draw a comprehensive map of Asia was made in 1850; later that year, Ya. V. Khanykov and A. P. Bolotov published a map of the northwestern part of Middle Asia. In 1851, Ya. V. Khanykov completed a map of the Issyk Kul area. In 1856-57, P. P. Semyonov became the first European to conquer the peaks of the Tian Shan. His explorations radically changed the concept of the geological structure of Inner Asia. P. P. Semyonov continuously headed the Geographic Society from 1873 to 1914, initiating large numbers of challenging and productive expeditions. The first results of these explorations highlighted the necessity of pursuing not only geographic, but also ethnographic and historic goals.

Toward Study on Historical Geography

Issues of historical geography were of immediate concern to many contemporary scholars. Universities offered courses on the history of geographical discoveries and historical toponymy. A tangible contribution to a study of the historical geography of China and Central Asia was made by the Sinologist Vasily P. Vasilyev (1818–1900), a quarter of his published work dealing with geography.[5] V. P. Vasilyev was the first to suggest that in ancient times the rivers of Middle Asia were one system with the Syr Darya, being its tributaries.[6] Regrettably, many of his articles remained unpublished, e.g. *An Outline of the History of Eastern Middle Asia from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century* (23 pages, 1857), *A Record of Inhabited Areas of Eastern, or Former Chinese Turkestan* (25 pages), and *Kuldja* (*From travel notes*) (2 pages).[7]

In 1845, V. P. Vasilyev completed his translation of *Da Tang Xi yu ji* by Xuan-zang, which, unfortunately, never saw the light. The text is preserved in the V. P. Vasilyev files in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences; it includes 12 notebooks with total volume of 334 folios complete with commentaries and maps.[8] Subsequent studies into Central Asia, including works written in the Russian language, have relied on the French translation of Xuan-zang's work published in 1851 by the French Sinologist Stanislas Julien (1799–1873).

Ivan P. Minayev, a famous Indologist (1840–1890), brought out a book on the geography of the countries lying between Russia and India.[9] He also made, in the 1880s, an academic translation of Marco Polo's

Travels into Russian. His translation, revised by V. V. Bartold,[10] was published posthumously.

Investigations by Chokan Ch. Valikhanov (1835–1865), a Kazakh scientist and educator who participated in a number of expeditions to Middle Asia and China, made a significant contribution to Russian Oriental studies. In 1856, he traveled to Western China and Kuldja. Between October 1858 and March 1859, disguised as a Muslim trader, he traversed the Tian Shan stayed in Kashgar, where, apart from accumulating abundant historic and numismatic material, he made a record of ancient Buddhist monuments. Based on the results of his journey, he wrote two extensive articles, *On the Western Regions of the Chinese Empire* and *On Trade in Kuldja and Chuguchak*, which were not published until 1962.[11] Valikhanov was also interested in the history and religion of the countries he visited. He pointed out in describing the area in the vicinity of Kucha, "There are many caves in these mountains, their lights visible in the summertime. One cave has carved Buddhist idols in it. They are traced back to the Tang Dynasty."[12]

In the latter half of the 19th century, works by N. Ya. Bichurin, A. von Humboldt, J.-P. Abel-Rémusat and S. Julien, inspired a number of thoroughly comprehensive resumptive treatises on the history, historical geography and ethnography of Central and Middle Asia. Eastern, or Chinese Turkestan,[13] a historical compendium by Vasily V. Grigoryev (1818–1881), appeared in two volumes in 1869 and 1873 as a supplement to Carl Ritter's *Die Erdkunde*; not only it was based on research by European scholars, but it also drew on antique, Arab and Persian sources. Emil V. Bretschneider (1833–1901) published his books on historical geography in 1876 and 1888.[14]

Mid-Late 19th Century: To Full-Fledged Survey

Increase in Military and Political Interest

Central Asia was an important object of Russia's military and political interests. From the mid-19th century the enormous Eurasian space became the scene of rivalry between Russian and British empires, which aimed to gain control over new markets and sources of raw materials. Moreover, China and Afghanistan were also parties in *The Great Game*, as their boundaries were not clearly delineated at the time. By dividing the spheres of influence, these powers were trying to solve, at the geopolitical level, the problem of establishing conventional geographical boundaries, zones or state frontiers. The geographical factor was of

paramount importance, because it was obvious that the prospective boundaries were to be conveniently fixed by particular natural contours.

Therefore, Russia's government and General Staff launched expeditions on a regular basis from the mid-19th century onward in order to carry out reconnaissance in Mongolia, China and regions of the Middle East. Not only did they result from Russia's policy in the Asian region, but they partially determined that policy.

The 1877 mission headed by Aleksei N. Kuropatkin (1848–1925) was part of the same programme.[15] When, in 1883, the border between China on the one hand and, on the other, the Fergana and Semirechensk Regions, which had recently joined the Russian Empire, was being established, it was decided that the representatives of the Chinese and Russian administrations were to inspect the border once every three years and renew the border marks. The first of these inspection trips was entrusted in 1885 to Bronislaw L. Grąbczewski (1855–1905), who compiled a detailed report.[16] Although his immediate task was to provide an account of armed forces and military fortifications in Kashgaria, he also submitted his detailed route survey and a few maps of the region. In subsequent years, many travelers relied on the cartographic evidence and itineraries provided by those expeditions, finding them highly accurate.

Having annexed Western Turkestan in 1867, Russia came close to the frontiers of British India. In 1869, Britain tried to prevent Russia's expansion in Central Asia by proposing an initiative to start negotiations with Russia on dividing the spheres of influence and creating a buffer zone between the possessions of the two powers. The Russo-British agreement of 1872–73 delineated the Afghan border as the demarcation line between the two empires' spheres of influence. In 1876, however, Russia annexed Kokand and began gaining a foothold in the Eastern Pamirs. Meanwhile, the Afghan emir Abdurrehman-khan took over a number of territories adjoining Badakhshan in 1883, an occupation that met the interests of Great Britain. Henceforth, both empires strove, by advancing their outposts, to explore the disputed territories still further so as to secure a basis for future negotiations.[17]

In systematically carrying out a topographic and cartographic survey in the region, the Russian Empire's General Staff did not limit its goals to military intelligence; it also ordered its commissioners to map the ruins of old temples and fortresses. Nikolai N. Obruchev (1830–1904), Head of the General Staff, initiated the establishment of the Scientific Military Committee of the General Staff, which published *Collections of Geographic, Topographic and Statistical Materials on Asia*. Eighty-seven volumes were published before the beginning of World War I.

Przhevalsky's 'Epic' Journey

In 1867–69, Nikolai M. Przhevalsky (1839–1888) made his first journey to the Ussuriysk region. This prominent traveler undertook four expeditions to Central Asia between 1870 and 1880, covering a total of thirty thousand kilometers. In 1870–73, he went Mongolia, China and Tibet, then in 1876–77, to Jungaria and Lop Nor Lake; in 1879–80, he led the First Tibet Expedition and, in 1883–85, the Second Tibet Expedition. He wrote a number of books giving a scholarly outline of his expeditions and containing detailed and vivid descriptions of local nature, climate, relief, as well as of animal and plant life. Przhevalsky himself modestly described his journeys as 'scientific reconnoitering'; indeed, the Asian territories he visited were previously unexplored by scientists. It was he who introduced Europeans to Central Asia, stimulated an interest in regions difficult of access and thereby contributed to launching an extensive and regular expedition activity.

Przhevalsky, who was the first to chart thousands of kilometers of previously unexplored lands and dozens of mountain chains, described his time as an 'epic' period of Central Asian journeys. His last book contains what might be described as his scientific will; he pointed out, in particular, that further studies of Central Asia should naturally take two directions: "scientific reconnoitering of the still unexplored areas and in-depth investigation of the more accessible countries or those that have been but superficially reconnoitered by short journeys."[18] Giving top priority to a study of Tibet in terms of geography and natural science, he emphasized the necessity of specialized archaeological investigations in some areas of Eastern Turkestan, particularly in Cherchen, and made a number of comments pertaining to archaeology:

> What gives the traveler even more telling evidence of the depletion of life-giving water supplies and the advance of the deadly forces of the desert is the sight of once flourishing oases and towns now buried in sand. We know many of those from Chinese chronicles and saw some ourselves; in fact, we heard the natives say that in olden days the area limited by Khotan, the Aksu and Lop Nor used to have twenty-three towns and 360 villages, now gone. At that time one was able, legend has it, to reach Lop Nor from the town of Kucha by stepping "on the house roofs", so densely populated was the Tarim Basin, now deserted. Even today, the residents of Khotan, Keriya, Niya and other still surviving oases venture into the sands annually, during autumn and winter, in search of the ruins of old settlements uncovered by storms. They say

> that gold and silver objects can be found there on occasion. One can also stumble on an old *saklya* dwelling containing clothes and felts, both usually so decayed that they turn to dust when touched.[19]

In 1879, botanist Arnold E. Regel visited Kuldja and Turfan, his expedition to the Turkestan region in 1876–79 organized primarily for natural history purposes[20]. However, his report mentioned, in particular, "finds of ancient, most likely Aryan ruins near Turfan, Sandja and Manas."[21] He drew up plans of a few archaeological monuments, including that of the ancient Idiqutshari site. Sergei. F. Oldenburg (1863–1934) referred to Regel as the first Russian to take notice of Eastern Turkestan's antiquities.[22]

I. P. Minayev was the first to recognize the real significance of vast Eastern Turkestan as an ancient contact zone between Eastern and Western civilizations. He wrote in his review of N. M. Przhevalsky's report of the latter's expedition to the southern part of the Tarim Basin:

> First-hand evidence ever since the 5th century AD has revealed the dominance of a foreign civilization in the area; whatever existed there previously is still hidden from the present-day chronicler of human history. Extant ancient eyewitness accounts seem to be extremely biased and, as it were, deliberately one-sided; Buddhist pilgrims would see only one side and it seems never as much as hinted that the dominance of Indian civilization, which they often emphasize, might parallel other local cultures, indigenous or imported.[23]

In speaking about the need to launch a reliable archaeological expedition to Eastern Turkestan, Minayev pointed out, "the whole area between Lop Nor Lake and Khotan is due for a focused historic and archaeological study."[24]

Pevtsov's Survey on Ancient Monuments

N. M. Przhevalsky's pursuit was taken up by his students and followers, Mikhail V. Pevtsov (1843–1902), Vsevolod I. Roborovsky (1856–1910), Grigory N. Potanin (1835–1920), Pyotr K. Kozlov (1863–1935) and Grigory E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo (1860–1936).

M. V. Pevtsov's Tibetan expedition of 1889–90, based on the plan of Przhevalsky's tragically terminated journey, "succeeded foremost in drawing the first real map of Southern Turkestan"[25]; moreover, it gave considerable attention to relics of lost civilizations in the area. Besides Pevtsov, the expedition included V. I. Roborovsky, P. K. Kozlov and


Mikhail V. Pevtsov

Karl I. Bogdanowicz (1864–1947), a geologist and mining engineer. M. V. Pevtsov, who was appointed leader of the expedition in December 1888, after N. M. Przhevalsky's death, had prepared for the journey very thoroughly. He had taken three months to study all available sources on the history of Eastern Turkestan, e.g. writings by N. Ya. Bichurin, Carl Ritter, Ch. Valikhanov, R. B. Shaw, T. D. Forsyth, H. W. Bellew, A. N. Kuropatkin, N. M. Przhevalsky, B. L. Grąbczewski, N. L. Zeland and N. F. Petrovsky.[26] Furthermore, he consulted the Sinologists E. V. Bretschneider and V. P. Vasilyev. M. V. Pevtsov wrote:

> Of great help to me was our famous Sinologist, Dr. E. V. Bretschneider, who copied for me from an 1863 Chinese atlas the 26-versts-to-an-inch maps of Eastern Turkestan, Jungaria and Northwestern Tibet and supplied Russian translation of all place-names. Moreover, he provided me with an excerpt on E[astern] Turkestan from a recent Chinese geography book called *Xi yu tu zhi* and made up a list of European books and articles on that country and on Tibet. …As for Northwestern Tibet, no mention of it has been found in European or Chinese sources scanned through by our Sinologists E. V. Bretschneider and V. P. Vasilyev. A handwritten geographical survey compiled by Academician V. P. Vasilyev based on Tibetan sources,[27] which he kindly allowed me to use, doesn't contain any information on the northwestern part of the country either, except for the general remark that it is very elevated and distinguished by extreme climate.[28]

During his expedition M. V. Pevtsov would talk to the natives so as to elicit information about ancient monuments in the region:

> In Yarkend I was also trying to find out about the Takla Makan Desert ruins. The *aksakal* Nasyr-Dzhan-Hodjah, who had been a resident of that town for eighteen years, told me that, according to many local people of his acquaintance, 40 *versts* east of Yarkend on the edge of the desert there are sprawling ruins called Konö-Tatar. The basements of houses are quite prominent there; there are also stumps of the big trees that had once overshadowed the settlement. The natives find household utensils, fragments of various implements and sometimes even gold and

silver coins in the ruins.[29]

In his report, M. V. Pevtsov mentioned a few ancient monuments he had discovered near Khotan, Cherchen and Urumqi.[30]

Other Expeditions

G. N. Potanin made a great contribution to the study of Central Asia and particularly Mongolia. He went to Northwestern Mongolia and Tuva in 1876–77 and 1879–80, to Northern China, Eastern Tibet and Central Mongolia in 1884–86 and 1892–93, and to the Greater Khingan in 1899. In his activities, he combined a study of natural history and a study of ethnography. His subsequent publications outlined the wealth of material on culture, folklore and popular arts and crafts of Mongolian and Turkic amassed during his expeditions.

In 1889, G. E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo, who was interested in local antiquities, visited the northern parts of Eastern Turkestan and provided a detailed description of the Assashar ruins while also mentioning a number of ancient Buddhist monuments.[31] Nikolai F. Katanov (1862–1922) visited Eastern Turkestan in 1890 and delivered materials on Turkic languages. Exploratory exhibitions to Tibet were led by O. M. Norzunov in 1898–1901 and G. Ts. Tsybikov in 1899–1902. Gombodzhab Ts. Tsybikov visited Kumbum and Labrang, reached Lhasa and returned to Russia via Urga and Kiakhta. He put together a large collection of original Tibetan literature, which entered the Asiatic Museum of the Academy of Sciences. The report on G. Ts. Tsybikov's journey was published in 1919.[32] In 1899, N. M. Yadrintsev discovered runic monuments in Northern Mongolia; their study was the objective of J. R. Aspilin's Finnish expedition and V. V. Radloff's (1837–1918) Orkhon expedition (both in 1890).

The main purpose of the 1893-95 expedition undertaken by V. A. Roborovsky and P. K. Kozlov was the topographic and meteorological investigation of the Lukchun (Tarim) Depression south of Turfan. In addition to large natural science collections, the expedition brought to St. Petersburg a number of manuscripts and art objects from Turfan. In his preface to the publication of the expedition's materials V. A. Roborovsky pointed out that the report did not include "information about the coins, *burkhan* images, samples of ancient local scripts, drawings, pottery, ornaments, etc., that the expedition gathered in ancient towns throughout the Lukchun Depression or copied from books in indigenous languages. At the same time, the present selection includes fragments of Uighur records found in the Lukchun Depression, in the

ruined city of Idiqutshari and the Toyuq caves; these have aroused so much interest that the Imperial Academy of Sciences sent a specialized expedition headed by D. A. Klementz (1848–1914) to that region."[33]

Nikolai F. Petrovsky

Diplomat Petrovsky's Contribution

Russian diplomats who contributed greatly to academic research of the region included Nikolai F. Petrovsky (1837–1908), Consul-General in Kashgar, his successor Sergei A. Kolokolov, Sergei V. Sokov, Consul in Kashgar, Nikolai N. Krotkov (1869–1919), Consul in Urumqi, as well as I. P. Lavrov, Ya. Ya. Lutsch, secretary of the consulate in Urumqi, Aleksei A. D'yakov, secretary of the consulate in Kuldja, Consuls Boris Vasilyevich and Vladimir V. Dolbezhev, and Aleksandr I. Kokhanovsky, doctor of the consulate in Urumqi.

N. F. Petrovsky, who held his post in Turkestan from 1867, collected manuscripts and art objects, buying them from the local people and carrying out archaeological excavations. According to S. F. Oldenburg, "N. F. Petrovsky's brilliant finds ushered in a new era in the archaeological study of Eastern Turkestan."[34] Furthermore, N. F. Petrovsky collected ethnographic and folklore material. In 1891, the Eastern Section of the Russian Archaeological Society approached N. F. Petrovsky about Kashgarian antiquities. He enclosed with his reply a few photographs and the 'Kashgar Manuscript', fragments of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*), in Sanskrit, which came to be studied by S. F. Oldenburg. After that N. F. Petrovsky sent new materials to St. Petersburg on a regular basis. Travelers and scientists sought his advice and invariably benefited from his helpfulness. N. F. Petrovsky noticed that contemporary *mazar* tombs concealed ancient Buddhist relics; he also drew a detailed map of Eastern Turkestan marking the sites of ancient monuments known to him.

A Thirst for Buddhist Studies

It should be noted that the results of Central Asian studies sparked a keen interest in Russian society. It was not only the academic community but also the public at large that was impatiently looking forward to the publication of new monographs on Asia, particularly on Buddhism, and translations of original works from Oriental languages. There was,

as it were, a thirst for Buddhist studies, as is shown by G. N. Potanin's letters to S. F. Oldenburg. In his letter dated 7 December 1890, Potanin writes this in asking S. F. Oldenburg to visit his place:

> I've also invited V. V. Lesevich, who is interested in legends about Avalokiteśvara, too. I'm fascinated by those you've lent me. What I find extraordinary is that they seem to resemble extracts from the Ayu-Bodhisattva legend I recorded in Mongolia.

In his letter dated 30 April 1898, he asks for a lady of his acquaintance to be advised "on what manuals of elementary Sanskrit she should buy." His letter of 20 October 1900 says among other things:

> Mme Panteleyeva intends to organize a public lecture on the Buddha and asks me to point out to her some drawings from the life of the Teacher in order that they may be projected onto a screen by means of a magic lantern… When the lecture gets published, the same kinds of lectures could also be given in the Siberian towns of the Irkutsk province and Transbaikalia region, and this would be conducive to inculcating the local population with religious tolerance.[35]

Activities of The Russian Geographic Society

In 1896, the Russian Geographic Society received a bag containing fragments of records picked up or bought by V. I. Roborovsky's expedition in various localities of the Turfan Oasis and delivered to St. Petersburg. Alexander V. Grigoryev, Secretary of the Russian Geographic Society, approached S. F. Oldenburg about an expert assessment of the fragments. Having sorted out the contents of the bag, S. F. Oldenburg and A. O. Ivanovsky identified fragments of Chinese, Uighur, Sanskrit and bilingual Uighur-Sanskrit manuscripts. The materials were handed over to V. V. Radloff, who dealt with them in a paper presented to the Academy of Sciences. The History and Philology Department appointed an *ad hoc* Committee to investigate the archaeological collections; it included V. V. Radloff, A. A. Kunik, V. P. Vasilyev, C. G. Salemann and V. P. Rozen, with D. A. Klementz and S. F. Oldenburg acting as invited experts.

The Committee suggested that D. A. Klementz should be sent on a mission to Turfan in 1898 so as to specifically investigate the monuments of Toyuq-Mazar and Idiqutshari. In organizing his journey the Committee sought counsel from members of V. I. Roborovsky's

expedition. Klementz wrote in a card posted to P. K. Kozlov on 4 (17) March 1898:

> Considering the intense interest created by your expedition's discoveries in the Turfan area, the Academy of Sciences set up an *ad hoc* committee to take care of organizing an expedition to Turfan; therefore, Academician Radloff requests you to come to the [Asiatic] Museum for a talk, hoping that you would be kind enough to share some information about the location of the sites you had seen.[36]

The term for expedition was set up for four months.[37] Besides D. A. Klementz himself, it included his wife, Elizaveta N. Klementz, and the ethnographer Mikhail S. Andreyev (1873–1948). The limited time in Turfan and lack of funding prevented D. A. Klementz from carrying out excavations; however, he was able to describe and photograph the monuments, draw their plans and make tracings and rubbings. The expedition yielded sensational scientific discoveries, its results presented in Klementz's detailed records[38] and published in his brief report.[39]

On 27 January (9 February) 1900, Nikolai I. Veselovsky (1848-1918), D. A. Klementz and S. F. Oldenburg submitted *Note on the Organizing an Expedition to the Tarim Basin for Archaeological Purposes* for the consideration of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society. They brought up the issue of sending expeditions to Eastern Turkestan on a regular basis, suggesting that two expeditions should be organized, to work continuously. The first one, they supposed, could explore the Turfan and Kucha regions, whereas the second could explore the vast territory between Turfan and Khotan, including the area near Lop Nor Lake and the Cherchen and Keriya Oases.[40]

The scholars pointed in the 'Note': "The study of the Tarim Basin and, indeed, its very discovery as an object of scientific investigation is undoubtedly credited to Russian explorers. The sum total of works by Regel, Przhevalsky and his companions, the brothers Grumm-Grzhimaylo, Pevtsov and Bogdanowicz, Obruchev, Petrovsky and the Academy of Sciences' recent expedition far exceeds what has been done by foreign scholars, although the findings of the expeditions headed by Forsyth, Count Széchenyi, Francis Younghusband and Dutreuil de Rhins are such that they are hard to compete with."[41] The economic and commercial development of the region, especially the spread of agriculture, was likely to entail what the 'Note' described as "a merciless destruction of old monuments, with their stucco used for fertilizer and the masonry knocked down to be used in building dwellings."[42]

As has been said, the 'Note' suggested organizing two expeditions to work continuously. The first one was expected to explore the Turfan and Kucha regions, and the second, the vast territory between Turfan and Khotan, including the area near Lop Nor Lake and the Cherchen and Keriya Oases. Either expedition was to be a team of five, unfailingly including one artist; the first expedition was to take eight to ten months and the second, twelve to fifteen months. Moreover, an estimate of 17,000 Rubles was made for the first expedition.[43] On 27 January 1900, the 'Note' was discussed at the meeting of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society. However, the Ministry of Finance rejected their request for funding,[44] and therefore the Turfan expedition project was not carried out until nine years later.

In 1899, Academicians V. V. Radloff and S. F. Oldenburg spoke at the 12th International Congress of Orientalists held in Rome on the ancient Uighur and runic monuments as well as art objects discovered by D. A. Klementz's expedition in Turfan. This entailed the establishment, on 2 (14) October 1899, of the International Association for Central and East Asia Exploration, which set itself the task of geographic, ethnographic and archaeological investigation of the aforementioned regions. The Association's charter was approved on 8 (21) September 1902 by the 13th International Congress of Orientalists in Hamburg. National committees set up for similar purposes in many countries agreed on dividing Eastern Turkestan territories for investigation by Europeans. In spite of this, A. Grünwedel's expedition, organized immediately following the Congress, violated the agreement.

20th Century: Increase in Material Collection and Study

Establishment of RCMA

The Russian Committee for Middle and East Asia Exploration (RCMA) was established in 1903, its charter given imperial approval on 2 (15) February 1903. Vasily V. Radloff became the Committee's chairman, and S. F. Oldenburg, vice-chairman. The Committee's board consisted of V. A. Zhukovsky, V. V. Barthold and L. Ya. Sternberg. The Committee, affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had the right to send its representatives to areas under investigation, launch expeditions and publish proceedings in Russian and French. The task of the Russian Committee for Middle and East Asia Exploration was "to promote in every possible way a study of extant monuments, both material and spiritual, in their countries of exploration."[45]

Initially, the authorities were rather benevolent to the newly established Committee. On 16 (29) January 1904, Nicholas II ordered that the Committee "be allocated twelve thousand Rubles towards financing archaeological expeditions to Eastern Turkestan during the current year" and granted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the right to allocate seven thousand Rubles annually "towards the same undertaking" during four years (from 1905 onwards).[46] The following year, however, "the allocation of the aforementioned funds was suspended for reasons of serious financial difficulties,"[47] and in March 1908 the State Duma's Budget Committee proposed that the RCMA should be made accountable to the Academy of Sciences.

The proposal was declined because the challenges faced by the RCMA required substantial government support. On 18 (31) March 1908, the Preliminary Committee convened to draft the Russian Committee's charter unanimously voted for the Russian Committee to remain accountable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The following rationale for this decision was sent to the State Duma:

1. The Russian Committee, being the leading agency of the International Association for Middle and East Asia Exploration, is supposed to be able to contact foreign governments as needed, which is guaranteed by the Committee's affiliation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. Since the larger part of the area under Committee's scholarly investigation lies beyond the boundaries of the Russian Empire, it is necessary that the Committee should continuously maintain direct contacts with Russian embassies and consulates in foreign countries.
3. The Russian Committee is supposed to provide expert conclusions to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the permissibility of scholarly activities by foreigners on the Russian territory and those by Russian scientists on the territories of Asian countries; this requires immediate and close contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The members of the Committee Board must have the full confidence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and this is ensured by the current arrangement whereby their nominations are approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.
4. If the Russian Committee as the central body of the International Association is to keep up its scholarly and international reputation, it must be totally independent from any other scientific institutions.[48]

Financial problems impeded expedition activity, as the Committee reported to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs time and again. Letters addressed to the minister said:

> [Funding cuts] have had an adverse effect on the Committee's projects in Eastern Turkestan, first by dramatically slowing down their progress and then by bringing them to a halt altogether, a situation that foreigners, i.e., the Germans and the French, were quick to benefit from: they have sent huge expeditions following in our footsteps. Unless the Committee resumes its activity vigorously and without delay, the Russian scholars' work of many years in Eastern Turkestan is likely to be completely wasted.[49]

Financial Support by Imperial Court

During that period the RCMA only just managed to afford small-scale expeditions to Central Asia. In 1903, Andrei D. Rudnev (1878–1958) was dispatched to Eastern Mongolia to study Mongolian dialects. In 1905–07, Mikhail M. Berezovsky's expedition visited Kucha. It included a relative of his, the draughtsman Nikolai M. Berezovsky, a civil engineering student.

Mikhail Berezovsky visited Subashi, Doldur-akur, Tadjit, Kumtura, Kucha, Kizil and Kirish. He made water-colour copies and tracings of paintings, drew a great number of plans and made a multitude of photographs. Subsequently, his activity was thus described by S. F. Oldenburg: "A brilliant photographer. An excellent mapmaker, insufficient training, slow pace."[50]

In 1905–07, the Committee took an active part in preparing and organizing Badzar B. Baradiyn's (1878–1939) journey to Labrang, which yielded some valuable research material and enriched the Academy of Sciences' collection of Tibetan literature with "a thoroughly and competently selected assemblage of Tibetan xylographs published in Amdo."[51]

Although the RCMA long had difficulty in getting funds for mounting a large-scale archaeological expedition to Central Asia, geographic and natural science investigation of the region continued, carried out by the Russian Geographic Society. In 1906–07, Carl G. Mannerheim (1867–1951) was "secretly" dispatched to China on imperial orders. He spent a long time examining, recording and photographing ancient monuments, particularly in Karashar and in the Turfan area, and drawing plans of some of them.[52] Highly effective was the expedition led by P. K. Kozlov, who in 1907-09 discovered the remnants of the dead Tangut city of Khara-Khoto in the Gobi Desert and delivered unique relics of Tangut art and written texts to St. Petersburg.

In 1908, wishing to draw august attention to its activity, the RCMA approached the Court Ministry to organize 'An Exhibition of Ancient

Relics from Eastern Turkestan and Samarkand' in the Grand Tsarskoselsky Palace for the benefit of Emperor Nicholas II and a select group of visitors. The exhibits included finds of M. M. Berezovsky's expedition to Kucha and Samuil M. Dudin's (1863–1929) expedition to Western Turkestan. The one-day exhibition took place on 30 November (13 December) 1908, between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. V. V. Radloff, S. F. Oldenburg, M. M. Berezovsky and S. M. Dudin were among those invited, too. On having gone round the exhibition, the emperor "kindly agreed to give his especial patronage to the Russian Committee."[53]

Oldenburg's Archaeological Method

The exhibition resulted in the RCMA getting a government subsidy to organize an expedition to Turkestan. It was headed by S. F. Oldenburg, whose journeys to Turfan (1909–10) and Dunhuang (1914–15) were referred to as Russian Turkestan Expeditions.

The 1909–10 Turfan Expedition was conceived by Oldenburg as reconnoitering because no materials of previous expeditions had been published. In effect, it created a sense of profound disappointment with traces of his predecessors' activity. Th. I. Stcherbatsky (1866–1942) had this to say on the subject:

> As a result, when the expedition led by S. F. [Oldenburg] set out, that country had already been visited by a large number of other expeditions that had literally plundered the area, archaeologically speaking. Having arrived in their wake, the Russian expedition could but establish the fact

Walls and Buddhist ruins in Khara-Khoto: one of the major cities of the state of Xixia from the 11th century, now deserted and uninhabited

Sergei F. Oldenburg

and return home practically empty-handed. Meanwhile, a magnificently rich museum of Chinese Turkestan finds opened in Berlin; it has become one of the city's highlights, thronged with scholars and foreign tourists.[54]

The activity of the S. F. Oldenburg's First Russian Turkestan Expedition chiefly focused on the northern oases of Eastern Turkestan, i.e., Karashar, Turfan and Kucha, where about a dozen surface and cave Buddhist temples were investigated. Oldenburg's method of archaeological study mainly relied on precise, unambiguous photographs and thoroughly drawn plans. Therefore, he made a point of recruiting first-rate art photographers and topographic engineers. The artist and photographer S. M. Dudin and the mining engineer Dmitry A. Smirnov were members of his first expedition. Only a brief account of the First Russian Turkestan expedition was published.[55] The materials acquired by S. F. Oldenburg in the course of his expeditions have now entered the Institute for Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the State Hermitage Museum and the Russian Museum of Ethnography. Particularly worthy of note are vast archives of the Russian Turkestan Expeditions, preserved in the State Hermitage Museum, the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Archives of the Orientalists kept in the Institute for Oriental Manuscripts.

First Buddhist Exhibition in Civil War

In 1909–11 and 1913–14, Sergei Ye. Malov (1880–1957) made journeys to Eastern Turkestan and Central China to study the language and everyday life of the local Turkic nationalities, i.e., the Uighur, the Yellow Uighur, the Lop Nor and the Salar. As a result, their languages received the first scholarly outline. The discovery of the unique Uighur manuscript called the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Altun Yaruq*) was a major achievement of S. Ye. Malov's first expedition.

Buddhist art relics were shown in the *First Buddhist Exhibition* held in Petrograd. It opened in the rooms of the Russian Museum on 24 August 1919, at the height of the Civil War. The exhibition aimed to introduce the Russian public to the diversity of Buddhist art schools by displaying articles brought from India and Central Asia. The exhibits included the tracings and photographs of Dunhuang murals, statues and

paintings from the Tangut city Khara-Khoto, as well as the objects of Buddhist decorative art from India, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, Java and Indo-China. The exposition centered on the image of Buddha and its interpretations by various cultures. Only a few Buddhist art relics, those that were in a good state of preservation and didn't need to be restored, had been put on show. No murals, manuscripts or ethnographic collections were displayed. The exposition was accompanied by public lectures, given weekly by the most prominent scholars on the history of Buddhism and its current state, e.g., 'The Buddha' by S. F. Oldenburg, 'Buddha's Teachings and The Holy Community' by Th. I. Stcherbatsky, 'Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia' by B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, and 'Buddhist Worldview in Japan' by O. O. Rosenberg.[56]

The Soviet Era

The study of Central Asia resumed during the Soviet era. In 1923–26, the Mongolia and Tibet Expedition led by P. K. Kozlov succeeded in excavating the Noyon Uul burial mounds. Vladimir A. Obruchev (1863–1956) made a great contribution to the study of the geography and geology of Siberia and Central and Middle Asia. He described his experiences in a large number of popular science books and fascinating science fiction novels.

Russian scientists' large-scale investigations on vast territories in Central and Middle Asia made a most significant contribution to world science, still valid today. A substantial increase in the amount of scientific material due to Russian expeditions provided new points of reference for a wide range of major historical, archaeological and linguistic disciplines.

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