

A TREASURY OF OLD IMAGES FOR THE STUDY OF INNER ASIA

Daniel C. Waugh

University of Washington, Seattle

V[aleriia] A[leksandrovna] Prishchepova. *Illustrativnye kolleksii po narodam Tsentral'noi Azii vtoroi poloviny XIX–nachala XX veka v sobraniakh Kunstkamery* [Illustrated collections on the peoples of Inner Asia from the second half of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century in the collections of the Kunstkamera]. Sankt-Peterburg: “Nauka,” 2011. 452 pp. ISBN 978-5-02-038269-5

Important collections of resources for the study of Central Asia have too often lain neglected for want of published guides to their contents. V. A. Prishchepova's book is thus to be applauded, as it opens the way now for research in the extensive image collections housed in the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera) in St. Petersburg (not to be confused with the city's Russian Museum of Ethnography). Even though the Kunstkamera began to acquire photographs and drawings not long after the Russian conquest of Central Asia, since the emphasis was on objects, little was done to systematize and describe the image collections. As anyone who has looked through old photo albums can appreciate, unless the pictures in them were properly captioned at or near the time when the photos were taken, proper identification of subjects and the locations where the photos were taken can be a formidable, if not impossible task. Other major collections that include photographs of Central Asia (for example, the Royal Geographical Society and the British Library in London) have a lot yet to accomplish in this cataloguing process.

While she readily admits that much work is yet needed, Prishchepova has made an impressive start. She begins by contextualizing the early photography in Central Asia within the larger history of the development of photography in Russia. Chapter 2 describes the history of the growth of the Kunstkamera collections, and Chapter 3 provides biographies of key figures responsible for the visual documentation of Central Asia, either as organizers of projects or as artists and photographers.

Among those of particular interest are N. Orde (variously referred to as Orden and most commonly Hordet), K. N. de-Lazari, and S. M. Dudin. For the first

(pp. 58-68), there is not even enough information for a biography. While he has been identified as French, Prishchepova argues from analysis of his captioning on his negatives that he likely was a Russian citizen if not ethnically Russian. Hordet's photos are amongst the best known of this early documentation from Central Asia, as they are represented in several Western collections and have appeared in various publications.¹ De-Lazari (pp. 68-74, 140-50) was an administrator in Kazakhstan and became a correspondent for the museum, which houses a remarkable collection of his photos of Kazakh life.

Samuil Martynovich Dudin-Martsynkevych (pp. 83-102, 154-164) left what is undoubtedly the largest and most widely ranging set of images amongst these early recorders of Central Asia. Plucked from a period of Siberian exile for revolutionary activity, he was enrolled by V. V. Radloff in 1891 in his expeditions to Mongolia, for which he drew and photographed the important finds, including the famous Orkhon inscriptions. He then made his career working in the museum as the curator for the Turkestan collections. Of particular interest for the history of the “Silk Roads” is the extensive work in did in Samarkand in 1905-8, drawing and photographing the Timurid monuments and assembling a large collection of fragments of their ceramic tiles. In 1909 and again in 1914-15, he was the photographer for S. F. Ol'denburg's Turfan and Dunhuang expeditions. Unfortunately plans for properly publishing his material on the mausoleum complex at Shah-i Zinda in Samarkand never were realized, and most the drawings (but apparently not the photos) he made there seem to have disappeared. To date apparently only isolated examples (but ones stunning for their quality) have been published from among the hundreds of photos he took on the Ol'denburg expeditions.²

It is of some interest, of course, to consider which photographers are apparently (judging from the index) not represented in the *Kunstkamera* collections. There were, of course, a good many Europeans who visited Central Asia and whose work is in Western collections. Among the Russian photographers who left noteworthy images are I. Volzhinskii and I. Vvedenskii, the latter having taken striking pictures of the historic architecture in Samarkand. A particularly noteworthy omission for the *Kunstkamera* is Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii, who pioneered in color photography a century ago, and whose color and black-and-white pictures of Central Asia have all been made available on the Internet by the Library of Congress.³ The pioneering Central Asian (Uzbek) photographer Hudaibergen Divanov also seems to be missing from the *Kunstkamera* collections.⁴

Prishchepova begins her Chapter 4 with a classification of the *Kunstkamera* collections by thematic content. Subheadings under each of the main ethnic groups include: anthropological types, representatives of ruling elites, traditional occupations, transportation, etc., and these in turn are broken down into further topics. Thus one can identify, e.g., what collections contain photographs of camel transport or of textile manufacture. Apart from the main ethnic groups we think of today (Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, etc.), there are sections for Central Asian Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and Indians. Following this listing, she highlights some of the most interesting kinds of visual information the collections contain.

She then discusses the challenges of establishing the history of individual images and the proper identification of their subjects and where they were taken. While the photographers often themselves wrote captions on the negatives, such indications are usually cryptic and generic. Among the more interesting examples where Prishchepova's work has borne fruit are images of the family of the famous Kazakh ethnographer Chokan Valikhanov (p. 229–37). Ultimately it was the opportunity to consult with his heirs which provided the key to identifying the individuals in some striking pictures taken at the time of a family wedding.

A separate section of this chapter (pp. 237–44) deals with the history of the pioneering collection of Central Asian photographs in the *Turkestanskii al'bom* produced on the initiative of the Turkestan Governor-General K. P. fon Kaufman in the early 1870s. This was part of one of the more ambitious and productive "Orientalist" undertakings by any Imperial power, where scholars, artists and photographers were all enlisted to record the indigenous peoples.⁵ Perhaps best known are the paintings fon Kaufman commissioned by V. V. Vereshchagin. The *Turkestan Album*,

four large portfolios (in a total of six volumes) was printed in only six or seven copies, and remains one of the most valuable and comprehensive of all the Central Asian photo collections. By some great stroke of good fortune, the Library of Congress acquired one of the sets in 1934 (the early Soviet government had been selling off large chunks of the various imperial collections) and has now, unlike the *Kunstkamera*, digitized all the pages and all the individual photos and drawings on them and made this material freely available in both web-size or high-resolution images.⁶

Although the author is obviously well aware of the dangers of assuming photographs and drawings represent "objective" evidence about their subject matter, she has no interest in a kind of post-colonialist or post-modern politicized "deconstructing" of this evidence. Even where so often photos were carefully posed, many with studio backdrops, she feels that one can extract from them a great deal of valuable information on Central Asian realities. She devotes a considerable effort to contextualizing the visual material with reference to verbal descriptions left by scholars, officials and travelers.

Photographs of Bukhara form a significant part of the *Kunstkamera's* collection and were of particular interest when first taken, since Bukhara had previously been so little visited by Europeans. Prishchepova devotes a long chapter to them and in particular explores the challenges of identifying the individuals in the many striking images of the Emir's family and the members of his court.

Her final chapter describes the ways in which the press and popular journals depicted Central Asia. An interesting part of the museum's collections consists of articles, clippings, lithographs, and the like, which were responsible for creating a popular image of what for Russians was still an exotic "Orient."

Her book concludes with a bibliography, personal name, ethnographic and geographic indexes, a list of the some 100 illustrations in her text (most decent black-and-white, and also a section of good color plates of paintings and colorized photos), and a tabular catalogue of the *Kunstkamera's* Central Asia image collections. This latter includes the archival deposit number, the name of the collector or donor, the acquisition year, the ethnic group represented in the images, the place where the collection was made. The majority of the material is either photographic prints or negatives. Drawings and paintings are a distinct minority. The book is entirely in Russian, but the author has published an article in English that provides information on specific topics illustrated in the collections.⁷

Her work on the cataloguing of the collections has been accompanied by a Ford Foundation funded project to put the collections on-line. Indeed, one can now find thousands of images from the Kunstkamera's collections on its website but ones, alas, all disfigured by a large copyright "watermark" across their middle.⁸ Fortunately it is possible to zoom in on the images to see in and around the watermark what is often remarkable detail. However, to see any of the images properly would require that one place an order with the museum. I do not know whether it would provide them for non-profit educational purposes free of charge (as do a number of other repositories).

If we project ahead, what might the ideal future regarding preservation, cataloguing and accessibility of image collections for Central Asia hold? Such collections are huge and fragile; simply ensuring their survival requires the investment of significant resources. Many institutions are working on major digitization projects, with some (notably the International Dunhuang Project at the British Library) taking the lead in trying to bring together scattered material on-line. Ultimately what we should really want is a coordinated and linked worldwide collection catalogue that would enable any researcher to search out and compare images from different periods and angles. The value of this for studies of costume or architecture is obvious. Where photographs may reveal important evidence about climate change or the deterioration and subsequent re-building of important sites, it would be of immense help to be able to see views taken from the same perspective. Some initiatives are already juxtaposing recent photos with the historic ones precisely for such purposes.⁹ To be able to access such an image bank at least for on-screen viewing and for projection for educational purposes is very important if we are to learn from these visual resources as much as they have the potential to offer.

Notes

1. Among the best published examples of Hordet's work are those in Ergun Çagatay, *Bir Zamanlar Orta Asya* (Istanbul: Tetragon, 1996), pp. 51, 62–63, 72–75, 79–81, 86–87. He includes a range of other large-format historic photos, by N. Veselovskii, I. Volzhinskii, G. Krivtsov, P. Nadar, V. Kozlovskii, I. Vvedenskii, L. Poltoratskaia, M. Nekhoroshev, G. Pankrat'ev, and A. S. Murenko, not all of whom are represented in the Kunstkamera collections. A few of Hordet's photos (unattributed) are reproduced somewhat badly in Chloe Obolensky, *The Russian Empire: A Portrait in Photographs* (New York: Random House, 1969), nos. 405, 413, 414, along with at least one of Vvedenskii's (no. 412) among the several for Turkestan. A selection of Hordet's photos is also available on the website of the Anahita Gallery <<http://www.anahitaphotoarchive.com/19th-and-early-20th-c-pre-revolutionary-photography/f-hordet>>.

2. Presumably his photos (unattributed) were used for site illustrations in the Hermitage Museum's exhibition catalogue *Peshchery tysiachi budd. Rossiiskie ekspeditsii na Shelkovom puti. K 190-letiiu Aziatskogo muzeia. Katalog vystavki* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo. Gos. Ermitazha, 2008). A collection of the Turfan expedition photos was transferred from the Kunstkamera to the Hermitage in the 1930s. L. N. Menshikov, "Samuil Martynovich Dudin (1863–1929)," *IDP News* no. 14 (on-line at: <http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news14/idpnews_14.a4d#4>) indicates that Dudin's photos from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang were to have appeared in the Shanghai edition of the Russian collections of Dunhuang manuscripts, but I have not seen those volumes to check. On Dudin, see also the essay by Elena Kordik, "A Mission to Central Asia – S. M. Dudin's Journey in 1900–1902 to Bokhara, Samarkand, and Beyond," originally published in *Hali* 123 (2002) (on-line at <<http://www.tcoletribalrugs.com/article4.html>>, with a gallery of his photos included in the generous selection of historic images from Central Asia <<http://www.tcoletribalrugs.com/zOldPhotos-101.html>>), and Kate Fitz Gibbon, "Turn of the Century Art Photographer and Ethnographer S. M. Dudin" <<http://www.anahitaphotoarchive.com/Home/Essays/turn-of-the-century-art-photographer-and-ethnographer-sm-dudin>>, with an accompanying selection of his photos <<http://www.anahitaphotoarchive.com/Home/Photographs/dudin>>.

3. See "Prokudin-Gorskii Collection," <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/prok/>>.

4. For him, see "Hudaibergen Divanov – First Central Asian Photographer" <<http://www.anahitaphotoarchive.com/19th-and-early-20th-c-pre-revolutionary-photography/divanov-first-central-asian-photographer>>.

5. On this project, see Daniel Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Colonial Policy in Turkestan," in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 122–30. For fon Kaufman's biography, see Prishchepova's sketch, pp. 122–25.

6. A description of the *Turkestan Album* and links to a translation of its introduction and to the photos may be found at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/287_turkestan.html>. What apparently was a separately published collection of some of the same material, *Tipy narodnostei Srednei Azii*, has also been digitized by the Library of Congress <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/61057703/>>. For quick, searchable access to most of the Library's historic photos of Central Asia, go to the main picture collection page <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>>. The Kunstkamera does not have a complete set of the *Turkestan Album* (a copy is in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg) but only the volumes on industries and the ethnographic images. There is, however, a separate album issued in 1873 that covers Khiva (*Vidy i tipy Khivinskago khanstva*) which is not registered as a separate holding in the Library of Congress and apparently does not duplicate the material in *Turkestanskii al'bom*.

7. V. Prishchepova, "A View from the Outside: *Urda, Jalab, Bachcha* (by the MAE RAS Photograph Collections of 1870–1920)," *Manuscripta Orientalia: International Journal for Ori-*

8. The searchable access page for the Central Asian collections, in English, is at <<http://www.kunstkamera.ru/kunst-catalogue/index.seam?path=62%3A3496381&c=PHOTO&cid=1330520>>. The page links to more than 9500 images. There are also a small collection of “ethnographic post-cards” for Central Asia <<http://www.kunstkamera.ru/kunst-catalogue/index.seam?path=62%3A3496381&c=POSTCARD&cid=1330566>>, and additional sets of ethnographic drawings, mostly for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, linked at <<http://www.kunstkamera.ru/kunst-catalogue/index.seam?path=14&c=ARTS&cid=1330608>>. Unfortunately the Russian Museum of Ethnography <[\[seum.ru/\]\(http://seum.ru/\)>, which has extensive Central Asian collections, including photographs, apparently has not yet put much of its material on-line.](http://eng.ethnomu-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

9. For example, “The Journey to Khiva, the world heritage in Silk Road through old photographs,” part of Digital Silk Road Project, National Institute of Informatics (Japan) <<http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/khiva/en/03architecture.html>>, and the recent expedition of the International Dunhuang Project that revisited sites recorded by Aurel Stein and provided new photographs taken from the same locations and angles as his (see “On Stein’s Tracks in the Taklamakan,” *IDP News* No. 39 <http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news39/idpnews_39.a4d>).
