

Into Russian Turkistan, 1872-1917: English Travel Literature and the Creation of the Russian Orient

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“Where...Connolly...[and the early martyrs of geographical research] fell victim to barbarism, we now find that the supreme power of the Western world is gradually making itself felt. The walls of seclusion are ruthlessly pulled down, and the resistance caused by the favored superstitions, prejudices and the ignorance of the sleepy and apathetic man in the East is slowly being overcome... our present day Europe, in its restless, bustling activity will take good care not to let the East relapse again into its former indolence. We forcibly tear its eyes open, we push, jolt, toss and shake it, and we compel it to exchange its world-worn, hereditary ideas and customs for our modern views of life; nay, we have even succeeded to some extent in convincing our Eastern neighbors that our civilization, our faith, our customs, our philosophy, are the only means whereby the well-being, the progress, and the happiness, of the human race can be secured.”¹

–Arminius Vambury, 1906

“The Russians have carefully guarded from observation the progress they have made by gigantic strides in a marvelously short space of time. Travelers who have seen the immense benefits their rule has brought to Central Asia will hesitate to condemn as unnecessary their relentless severity in the past... Their mode of warfare and treatment of the vanquished are in accordance with the traditions of every conqueror in these countries.”²

“Russia treats Orientals in Oriental fashion. The moderation of England is looked upon as weakness. We, in England, ignorantly look upon Russia as a European country, and as such, a civilizing power. Travelers tell us that the civilization of the masses in Russia is lower than that of the Asiatic tribes; should that be true it is difficult to see what advantages to these people themselves can accrue from their incorporation into the Great Muscovite Empire.”³

–Isabelle Mary Phibbs, 1899

At the very twilight of the Britian’s 19th century glories in 1897, Isabelle Mary Phillips honored Russia’s Transcaspian and Turkistan provinces with a visit in the company of several other British gentlemen and women with the permission and escort

¹ Vambury, Arminius. *Western Culture in Eastern Lands* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1906), 2.

² Phibbs, Isabelle Mary. *A Visit to the Russians in Central Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1899), 3.

³Ibid, 148.

of the Governor of Trascaspia, General Kuropatkin. On her return, armed with the volumes of Vambery and Gibbon and a hodge-podge of anecdotes, mistranslated words and jumbled historical facts, she unleashed upon the English-speaking world the daring account of her adventures among the religious fanatics and barbaric half-humans of Central Asia, as seen from the behind the windows of her first-class “traveling hotel” and tables at dinners given in their honor.

The already slender volume in reality only consists of two or three chapters of actual travel narrative: the rest of the space is filled by often un-attributed lengthy quotations from other works, rough sketches of history culled from a few textbooks, and conflicting and contradictory generalizations of Russian and Sart civilization based largely on hearsay and racial prejudice, all rounded out by little gems of the author’s small acts of charity—passing out cigarettes to soldiers, candy to children, and snacks to shackled, Siberia-bound prisoners on the train platforms as they passed from station to station. In writing each of these episode she carefully notes with almost sickening patrician condescension how glad she was to ‘do her small part’ in making that brutal place ‘just a little brighter’.

In some ways, the book is so bad that it hardly deserves a place in a survey of the travel literature of Central Asia.⁴ It’s very foibles and lack of subtlety, though, expose the foundation below much of the other works of the same period; when one reads them together and examines the way that they respond to one another--and the way the reading public in England and the United States responded to them--a sense builds that this

⁴ Among its several errors that would have to have been glaring even to an editor paying the slightest attention include the author’s placing the conquest of Tashkent in the wrong decade in one of her “historical” chapters and proving the Russians’ essential “Asiatic” character by attributing the word “tsar” to a title for the Tatar Khans.

almost careless amateur travelogue represents somehow the essence of this miniature genre.

While this survey cannot pretend to be complete, travel restrictions imposed on Europeans by the Imperial government in Turkistan and later Transcaspia greatly limited the field;⁵ before the completion of the Trans-Caspian railroad, the sheer hardship of the journey itself precluded all but the heartiest, best connected and resourceful travelers from ever reaching Turkistan across Russia and the steppes.

The mysteries of Central Asia, the most landlocked region on earth and one of the very last to be divided among the European empires at the height of their power, drew all the same a wide variety of travelers from England and the United States. Those whose work will be examined in this paper include the American diplomat Eugene Schuyler, whose account of his 1873 visit was not published for political reasons until 1876; his companion for the early part of his journey, the New York *Herald* reporter J.A. MacGahan, whose work was published first in that paper and subsequently collected as a book in 1874; Capt. Frederick Burnaby and his alarmist *Ride to Kiev*, completed in 1876; the English “Bible merchant” Henry Lansdell, representative of the British Bible Society and member of the Royal Geographic Society, whose more than 1,300 page account of his 1882 journey was the second British contribution to the genre; and the account of Lord Curzon, future viceroy of India, and his detailed analysis of the military frontier between Britain and the Russian Empire that appeared in 1889. With the completion of

⁵ While it seems to have been the very height of Russian paranoia, Lord Curzon, at the time an MP in London, reports that he needed permission from five separate high officials—including the Minister of War—before he could visit Turkistan: Curzon, George Nathaniel, Marquis of, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), 17. Others of the authors traveled with express permission of the Tsar himself.

the Trans-Caspian railroad and its extension to Tashkent the road was opened to the more casual traveler, and the railroad brought the first female English authors to the region, delivering the scholar Annette Meakin in 1897 and again 1902, and Isabelle Phibbs in 1897 as well. In 1899 the railroad brought back from Transcaspia the Englishmen Robert Jefferson, who will safely remain the only person in history to have ridden a bicycle from London to Khiva, inspired by Burnaby's slightly more conventional ride 25 years before. I will also mention Stephen Graham, a British reporter who was in the region when WWI broke out in 1916; and lastly the lately famous Reginald Teague-Jones, a British intelligence operative in Transcaspia in 1917. While some other minor works will also be referred to, these works, particularly the earlier ones, appear to have been the most influential and widely read.

A missionary, a spy, adventurers, a diplomat, tourists, reporters and a man who crossed half of Eurasia and two deserts on a bicycle⁶ could hardly be expected to provide a unified view of a region where at least two complex cultures met⁷. Their diverse accounts, however much they vary in style and form, do have a great deal in common.

While each author's interpretations of the things he or she saw and the places they visited were intimately influenced by their own personal experiences, backgrounds, and interests, they all more or less entered the region with the same intellectual tools at their disposal, and with more or less the same set of expectations—thanks largely and usually explicitly to Dr. Joseph Wolff⁸ and the unavoidable Arminius Vambery.⁹

⁶ On a journey of over 6,000 miles, Jefferson claimed to have incredibly gone less than 100 on anything other than his own bicycle, including stretches where he rode with his wheels half buried in the sand. Robert L. Jefferson, *A New Ride to Khiva* (London: Methuen & co., 1899), 312.

⁷ Yuri Bregel has described Transoxiana as a unique fault-line for two separate bi-cultural overlaps, since for centuries before the Russians expanded their cultural zone into the region it had been the fault line between Turkic and Persian cultures already.

⁸ Joseph Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bukhara* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1845).

All of the authors, for as little as they may have had in common in other respects, were visiting a space that, while new and foreign, had also already been discursively created for them by the contemporary media¹⁰, by Arminius Vambury and subsequent visiting authors¹¹, and perhaps most importantly by the already well-established paradigm of Orientalism that Vambury so securely had already blanketed over the region.¹² Operating within this discursive space, how then did they view Central Asia? How did they evaluate the civilizing mission, or lack thereof, that the Russians brought, the methods of conquest, their effect on Central Asian society, and the justifications for Russian rule?

The Culture and Peoples of Central Asia

The geographic conception of the region these authors were visiting was shaped, it would seem, almost entirely by negation—while Turkistan and later the Trans-Caspian were defined administratively by St. Petersburg, the most significant conceptual and imaginative geographical boundaries were defined as negative space: the untamed, “natural” regions beyond the reach of the great empires inhabited by Turkmen, Sarts, Persians, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz (the terms “Kazakh” and “Kyrgyz” are generally interchanged without distinction in these accounts) who continued to exist outside the current of History. The Russian incursion into the region was perceived by European authors as a modal link that re-connected the region (in tiers, as the Russian conquest

⁹ See bibliography for a list of the more relevant Vambury titles.

¹⁰ An example of a contemporary popular account on adventurers in the region is Charles Marvin, *Reconnoitring Central Asia : Pioneering Adventures in the Region Lying between Russia and India* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1996).

¹¹ Being a tiny genre, the books bear an almost incestuous relationship to one another (with the exception of Schuyler and MacGahan, who do not rely especially on Vambury, and, preceding the other accounts, form a foundation for the others to heavily reference them—especially Schuyler—in their works).

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

advanced over this 50 year period) to the march of History and knowable world¹³, while preserving the independent Khanate of Khiva and Emirate of Bukhara as a kind of living museum where earlier stages of human progress could still be observed as if frozen time.

From Schuyler in 1872 to Teague-Jones in 1918, the conception of this geographical space from afar was dominated by long shadows of slavery, war, arbitrary violence, Muslim “fanaticism” and the veiling and seclusion of women. The degree to which their experiences in the country modified their expectations and their views on the region varied greatly depending on the author.

The first time most of the authors seem to have become aware of the region at all was either during the ordeal of Stoddart and Connelly, or subsequently with the publication of Dr. Wolff’s report of their imprisonment and execution by Nasrullah Khan, the Emir of Bukhara.¹⁴ The primary association that grows out of this for almost all of the authors is that the Central Asian khanates were--or in the case of the independent khanates Khiva and Bukhara, continued to be--a place of arbitrary and extreme violence: whenever the Ark (the Emir’s palace) of Bukhara is mentioned, the ordeal of Connelly and Stoddart follows, along with the dungeon within that was reported to be full of lice and vermin specially raised to feed on flesh.¹⁵ And no one could fail to pass the Great Minaret of Bukhara without noting that particularly infamous criminals were thrown

¹³ Lansdell’s journey, while ostensibly motivated by the Great Commission, was in fact primarily dedicated to expanding the intelligible space of the British Geographical Society rather than the reach of the Anglican Church.

¹⁴ Teague-Jones, in one of very few nostalgic moments in his diary, mentions “their tragic adventure” fueling his first interest in Central Asia as a child. Reginald Teague-Jones, *The Spy Who Disappeared : Diary of a Secret Mission to Russian Central Asia in 1918* (London: Gollancz, 1990), 54.

¹⁵ Shuyler, Vol. II, 98. Henry Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia, Including Kuldja, Bokhara, Khiva and Merv* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885). vol. 2, 74. Curzon (179) notes that there seems to have been no effort by the Russians to interfere in the practice of public executions in Bukhara.

from its top.¹⁶ Annette Meakin, who in other places provides iconoclastic and observant notes on Central Asian women, was apparently so affected by both ideas that she merged them into one, and erroneously reports that the two English captains were thrown from tower as well.¹⁷

The region's reputation for slavery preceded it in the all the travelers' minds, each spending a good length of time expounding on the "man-stealing" and "barbaric" Turkmen whose goods were sold in Khiva and Bukhara. While in the later accounts it might be tempting to assume that the author's descriptions of Bukhara and Khiva as the former "slave markets of all Asia," were no doubt influenced by Russia's enthusiastic self-congratulation as the liberators of the region,¹⁸ and while Vambery's rhetoric that influenced most of the writers was certainly exaggerated at times, the slave trade was very real.¹⁹

Of these authors, however, only Schuyler saw the slave trade first hand—and this is in no small part thanks to him. Schuyler attempted to visit the slave markets a number of times and was frustrated by the Emir's minders who were his constant companions.

¹⁶ Lansdell, whose personal mission compelled him to visit prisons all over the Russian empire, and who had a habit of attempting to view each new town from the top of its tallest building, tried to gain entrance both to the Ark to view the dungeon and to climb to the top of the minaret. He was frustrated by the chief minister on both accounts, and noted with particular interest that he was banned from climbing the tower because it would have allowed him a view into all the women's courtyards across the city. He was told that before executions, the women of the city were all warned to stay indoors—a story that he apparently found dubious.

¹⁷ Annette M. B. Meakin, *In Russian Turkestan; a Garden of Asia and its People; Russian Turkestan* (New York: Scribner, 1915), 4.

¹⁸ See Curzon, 160. This emphasis was also often used as a *causis belli* against the Khanates, both in early failed attacks and before the more successful ones, like the campaign against Khiva in 1882. See Fred Burnaby and Peter Hopkirk, *A Ride to Khiva : Travels and Adventures in Central Asia* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 390.

¹⁹ While slaves were most often Persians captured in Turkmen raids, many of the earlier visitors to Bukhara either met in person or were aware of many Russian slaves and an Italian clockmaker who had been unfortunately captured while traveling in Persia. The clock that he eventually constructed for Nasrullah Khan in the Ark is noted by most of the authors, who were also aware that the clockmaker was subsequently executed. See Kathleen Hopkirk, *A Traveller's Companion to Central Asia* (London: John Murray, 1993), 292.

One day, though, he managed to slip away with his translator and found the market fully functioning and anticipating a new slave caravan already the next day.²⁰ He bought a young Persian boy with the intention of setting him free and then proving that the slave trade continued in Bukhara in spite of the Emir's denials, but the Emir's ministers found out and the boy was never delivered. Not one to give up easily, Schuyler quickly arranged to purchase a second boy, a young Persian whom he then set free, named Hussein, and brought with him back to St. Petersburg where he quickly informed the newspapers of the boy's story. All Russia was scandalized, and Von Kaufman quickly negotiated a new treaty with the Emir of Bukhara that put an end to the slave trade once and for all.²¹

Side by side with violence and slavery, of the expectations that the author's arrived with no assumption was more prevalent it would seem than that, "throughout the whole of the Mohommadan world, there is no one so strict or so fanatical as the Sart."²² Curzon notes with irony that according to the older accounts the Emir of Bukhara still had "the utmost difficulty in preventing his subjects from breaking out and declaring holy war against the infidels."²³

It would seem that nearly all of the travelers were almost disappointed, however, with utter lack of the violent religious zeal they had expected to find.²⁴ Generally it was found that across the Central Asia, be it in Turkistan or the independent Khanates, the religious establishment was slowly disintegrating. The number of mosques and

²⁰ Schuyler, Vol. II, 102.

²¹ Ibid, 107. Schuyler apparently raised the boy in his own household, sending him to school in St. Petersburg and eventually finding him an apprenticeship with a Tatar Muslim artisan of the Tsar's own court.

²² Meakin, 64.

²³ Curzon, 161.

²⁴ With the exception, perhaps, of Schuyler who did have a half-hearted attempt made on his life in a village outside Bukhara. Vol. 2, 113.

madressahs was found to have been exaggerated by nearly every author, and the Russians were credited with “doing away with everything that might fan zeal or increase the fanaticism of their Asiatic subjects.”²⁵

One famous marker of this so called fanaticism, however remained in public view, and this most infamous social issue remained dually attributed to both Muslim zeal and “Asiatic backwardness:” the ever popular theme for the Western traveler, the veiling of women and their “imprisonment in the harem.”

The Veil and the Role of Women in Central Asian Society

Much work has already been done Western and the Russian fascination with the veil, polygamy, and the “harem,”²⁶ but a close examination of these accounts sheds some new light on the issue in Central Asia and the way it was perceived in Europe.

The old assumptions are more or less summed up by Phibbs, with her usual lack of tact, who on seeing a colony of lepers outside a city and noticing that these women were allowed to go unveiled says that, “at least the poor creatures escaped the feeling of suffocation which their sisters must endure behind their hideous, stiff black coverings.”²⁷

Graham, traveling at the very end of the period, writes no more delicately: “When you

²⁵ Meakin, 64. Only Schuyler and Curzon seem to entertain the possibility that the “fanaticism” may have been greatly exaggerated. Schuyler goes so far as to note that Christianity has entertained many fanatical sects as well, and notes that he didn’t believe “fanaticism” was something inherent in the religion at all, but only in its interpretation and practice. He alone among the authors attributes the developmental backwardness of the region not to Islam or the “Asiatic race,” but to the destruction of the Mongol and subsequent conquerors. Schuyler, Vol. 1, 171.

²⁶ For an account of Russian and Western responses to the veil, see Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire : Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). For work on the Western fascination with and manipulation of images of the veil and the harem, see: Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women : The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet, 1988).

²⁷ Phibbs, 178.

looked at five or six women sitting patiently side by side, each and all in voluminous green cloaks, and where the faces should appear a black mask the color and appearance of an oven shelf, you felt a horror as if the gaze had rested on corpses or the plague stricken.”²⁸

Dissonant voices, however, come from both Schuyler and Meakin, who it should be noted are the only of the authors who really made any attempt to visit non-Russians in their homes and get to know them personally—rather than just reporting what the Russians told them or parroting Vambery.²⁹ Schuyler, visiting the region some 25 years before Meakin, felt that in Tashkent especially the veiling of women had only become zealously strict after the Russian occupation, when young women felt that they had to be careful not to be confused with the prostitutes whose business had flourished with the influx of Russian soldiers. In 1872, he was apparently able to get a glimpse of unveiled women quite often, and was able to give a full account of their normal dress, features, and even interact with some of them in the home.³⁰

It is Meakin, however, who throws the most light on the lives of Turkistani women, even taking every chance to photograph them when possible. According to her, the Russian insistence that, “the [Sart people] can have no future as long as their women are veiled,” and their habit of referring to the women as prisoners and their *ichkari* (women’s quarters), which they imagined as dank, unhygienic cesspools of filth, was at the least a great misconception, and in retrospect, an important propaganda tool.³¹

²⁸ Stephen Graham, *Through Russian Central Asia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 29.

²⁹ Lansdell, to be fair, was fascinated with the Central Asian Jews, and did visit as many of their homes and synagogues as he could. The bulk of his massive (nearly 1,400 page) account, though is made up of careful lists, charts, indices, geographic and meteorological observations and extensive accounts and descriptions of the flora and fauna of Central Asia.

³⁰ Schuyler, vol. 1, 124.

³¹ Meakin, 106, 108. See Northrop for details on later Russian propaganda against the veil.

Information that she was given by local Russians about the lives of women and the conditions that they lived in frequently turned out to be not only wrong, but entirely ignorant.³² The Russians told her that Uzbek women wore wigs (which Meakin found was not only untrue but forbidden by tradition), lived in cramped, airless houses and led deeply immoral private lives. She found, on personal acquaintance with women from across Turkistan, that many were not only literate but avid readers and industrious masters of arts and handicrafts who often earned more money than their husbands or even financially supported the family themselves. As to hygiene, she remarks, “I have no hesitation in saying that out of every 60 houses, rich and poor alike, only one will be found in which the air is not perfectly fresh and sweet.”³³

More to the point, the Russians and Europeans alike had deeply misunderstood Central Asian Muslim theology and practice in regards to women. Meakin informs her readers that Russians even mistakenly and widely believed that Central Asian Muslims held that women had no soul and were therefore not actually human, but animals, and had no recourse to divorce their husbands under any conditions.³⁴ Discovering the error of these ideas required only a slight acquaintance with the actual religious practices of the region. While Europeans could be more easily forgiven for misconceptions like these, if for no other reason than that of distance, one perhaps suspects that among the Russians in

³² Schuyler says, “I could not but be struck in the Russian society of Tashkent, not only with the want of knowledge of the country, but with the lack of interest in it which was manifested, and it seemed to many difficult to understand how I could be interested in a country...which for them was the epitome of everything disagreeable.” Vol. 1, 84.

³³ Meakin, 106, 122, 116, 108.

³⁴ Ibid, 73. Meakin devotes quite a bit of attention to the details of Central Asian divorce law, but her account differs in significant ways from Schuyler, who also researched this topic and was informed that in Tashkent a woman could appeal to a *kazi*, or local judge, to persuade her husband to divorce her. Or, more simply, he adds that many women visited the Russian medical clinic with the express purpose of provoking their husbands to divorce them. Schuyler, Vol. 1, 124.

Central Asia in particular it was probably only part ignorance and part purposeful distortion and exaggeration.

Russia's Orientalism

It becomes clear in the survey of this literature that most, if not all, of the authors who visited the region felt that the Russians were deliberately constructing a discursive picture of the region to fit their own ends. This narrative was by no means consistent, and was constructed to serve two specific purposes that were often at odds with one another—on one hand, military and personal glory, and on the other, a civilizing mission that would bring glory to the empire. Russia's perspective on their only true colony and their representation of it to the world can be understood as an alternating pulse between these two impulses.³⁵

During the militant phase of colonial administration, when the conquest was yet ongoing, Turkistan was a martial-law regime, and Tashkent attracted young officers from all over the empire who were eager for promotion. As Curzon says, “where the ruling class is entirely military, and where promotion is slow, it would be strange if war, the sole avenue of distinction, were not popular.”³⁶ Burnaby likewise notes, “...you cannot be with Russian officers in Central Asia for a half an hour without remarking how they long for a war.”³⁷

³⁵ For a detailed examination of this question based on the Russian archival documents and from the Russian imperial perspective, see: Daniel R. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London ; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

³⁶ Curzon, 240. He continues: “Tashkent is a military city. In 1888, it was clear that martial law was fully in effect at the expense of commercial development and cultural mixing.”

³⁷ Burnaby, 181.

During this first period of the colonial administration, when Schuyler, MacGahan, Burnaby, and Curzon visited, the focus of their Russian hosts was on emphasizing the barbarity and war-like nature the peoples surrounding them, offering the Russians frequent opportunities for military campaigns that would provide them with rapid career advancement, and simultaneously justifying these campaigns in the eyes of the public. The early travelers were often warned against going any further at each stage of their journey, and especially against traveling outside of the zones of Russian control. Burnaby, on his way to Kiev, was warned that ‘the Emir is likely to put out his eyes’³⁸ and MacGahan was given similar warnings, though both were received by native peoples (both Kazak and Sart/Uzbek) with great hospitality and not the least violence.³⁹

Russian accounts of the region, combined with the earlier accounts like Vambéry’s,⁴⁰ constantly emphasized the violent, barbaric and ruthless nature of each native people it would decide to conquer next, building them up into formidable military opponents and dangerous foes (who in reality were usually defended by clay walls, antique armaments and a few rusty cannon without proper shells). As Burnaby observes, with each new conquest the case was made for the imminent danger of deadly attack from each new neighbor-enemy who would only understand blunt force.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid, 174.

³⁹ Though Burnaby was dismissive of Russian accounts and exaggerations, he did later feel foolish for putting himself under the razor blade of an Uzbek barber on the way into Khiva.

⁴⁰ Phibbs, 29: Passing by the ruins of the Goek Teppe fort on the railroad line, Phibbs was tempted to feel sympathy for the Turkmen locals--all of whom she assumed must have lost a loved one in the massacre—but then realized the futility of that emotion, because she had read in Vambéry that the Turkmen race was not capable of understanding or feeling “pity or sympathy.”

⁴¹ “The Turkoman raids are purposely exaggerated, in the same way as previously the Khivans were maligned. This is done as an excuse for a subsequent advance upon Merv. The fact is, that if the Kirghiz [Kazaks] carry off a Turkoman’s cattle, no one hears of it. If, on the contrary, the latter crosses the Oxus by way of retaliation, it is made the subject of a tirade of abuses.” Burnaby, 248.

This doctrine was turned most destructively towards the Turkmen and carried to its apex by General Skobelev in the battle, or more appropriately, the massacre at Geok Tepe, where the Tekke Turkmen had made their last stand against the Russian Empire—huddled behind a clay-walled fortress with some 30,000 women and children taking refuge inside. Curzon was especially moved by this event, and addresses it at length in his account, quoting a letter from Skobelev, who wrote: “I hold it as a principle that in Asia the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict upon the enemy.”⁴² By Curzon’s reckoning, based on information given to him by a French journalist who witnessed the massacre, after the fortress was breached and the battle already won, more than “8,000 persons of both sexes and all ages were mercilessly cut down and slain. ‘On the morning after the battle they lay in rows like freshly mown hay.’”⁴³

Once all of Central Asia was subdued, though, this strategy had clearly run its course. By the time the later visitors arrived, after the completion of the railroad and the subjugation of the last of the warring tribes, the rhetoric and style of the Russian administration had shifted, and even Geok Tepe was made into a symbol of Russia’s civilizing power. By the late 1890s, groups of survivors of the massacre were paraded in front of European travelers to be photographed,⁴⁴ and by 1916 travelers passing through the nearby rail-station were greeted with wax statues of victorious soldiers and a museum exhibit of the massacre.⁴⁵

⁴² Skoboleff in Curzon, 85.

⁴³ Curzon, 82.

⁴⁴ John Thomas Woolrych Perowne, *Russian Hosts and English Guests in Central Asia* (London, The Scientific press: limited, 1898), as quoted in Hopkirk, 70.

⁴⁵ Graham, *Through Russian Central Asia*, 24.

Russia's Civilizing Mission

With no more military campaigns to fight, by the mid 1880s attention already automatically had to turn to the “civilizing mission.” The military campaigns had indeed been fought with wild success and usually amazingly few casualties on the Russian side, but its ultimate achievements met with mixed reviews both domestically and from the foreign travelers visiting the region. Early authors report that Von Kaufman’s regime succeeded in creating an orderly, clean, and comfortable city in Tashkent. Von Kaufman’s personal excesses, though, were noted or repeated even post-mortem by all of the earlier authors. Schuyler includes in his first volume biting criticism of the Russian administration’s lack of understanding and implied contempt of local culture, even as he praised the administration for allowing religious freedoms for Muslims and not attempting to interfere in local customs and traditions. He did, however, speculate as early as 1873 that the administration’s lack of care in importing European vices to the booming Russian section of the city, including alcohol, prostitutes, dancing girls, and corruption,⁴⁶ were causing a growing and unnecessary rift between the native population and their conquerors. He also records (as Brower does as well) that the lack of Russian officials trained in local languages provided an opportunity for the few native translators to become grossly rich and highly powerful by accepting bribes and manipulating the access of the local population to their colonial government and its courts.

⁴⁶ Schuyler seems to have been much impressed by Von Kaufman’s vanity. He includes in his account the fact that the Governor had long been in the habit of having a new triumphal arch constructed for him every time he returned to Tashkent, and using his government budget to pay for these parades and cannon salutes. When St. Petersburg discovered this expenditure, he was ordered to stop, but Von Kaufman continued the tradition and paid for his public accolades out of his own pocket. On another occasion, the general attended an outdoor celebration complete with dancing girls and was told that the girls were wives of a local chief dancing in his honor. The governor was so fully deceived that he handed out lavish presents to the girls, a fact that caused great scandal when the presents turned up in local brothels the next day. Schuyler, Vol. 1, 140.

In his second volume, Schuyler translates an internal Russian report that is fiercely critical of the corruption, incompetence, and lavish spending in not only Kaufman's government, but in the whole officer corps serving in Central Asia. Schuyler himself notes that, "it seems almost impossible for a Russian administration to conceive of something like legality,"⁴⁷ and that "it is perfectly well known that in the provinces of [Russia] almost every police and administrative official adds to his scanty income two or three or even ten times the amount properly received from the government."⁴⁸

For What Purpose?

As doubtful as these accounts are regarding the morals and methods of the Russian conquest and occupation, most of them agree that Russian rule is clearly superior for the native populations compared to that of their local emirs and khans. As low as the opinion of the Russians and their government sinks in several of the accounts, they are considered at least one step above the "Asiatics," and this is enough to justify the conquest, no matter how brutal, and in fact no matter what the results. Curzon, for example says: "The conquest of Central Asia is a conquest of Orientals by Orientals... This is no 19th century crusade of manners and morals, but barbarian Asia, after a sojourn in civilized Europe, returns upon its former footsteps to reclaim its own kith and kin."⁴⁹

In most of the accounts, the Russians as a culture and a people, and their government, tactics and policies in Central Asia are alternatively praised and maligned in

⁴⁷ Ibid, vol. 2, 245.

⁴⁸ Ibid, vol. 2, 209. Curzon and others note that Tashkent was the life in exile for Russia's less reputable nobility as well, and the report that Schuyler quotes goes so far as to say that the officers serving in Turkistan were the "scum of Russia's officer corps." (220).

⁴⁹ Curzon, 392.

a manner that on first reading is maddening in its logic.⁵⁰ I would argue that this inconsistency is incomprehensible without interpreting the works through the Orientalist paradigm. If Russian conquest was fueled by sporadic personal gain,⁵¹ and if Russian rule was deeply flawed and contradictory, and at very best wanting in “civilizing efforts,” what, then, justified Russia’s right to rule Central Asia?

For these authors, it seems clear that two things were true: firstly, Russian rule, however flawed, was viewed as more just than native rule had been, particularly judging by the preconceptions that the visitors had before coming to the region at all; and secondly, Russians represented *Europe* and *progress*, however imperfect their adaptation and however short their “sojourn” in Europe had been according to Curzon, there was no doubt in any of the author’s minds that Russian rule represented a dual *European/Occidental* and *progressive* force.

While most accounts describe the Orient and “Orientals” in perhaps less abusive and radical tones as Vambéry did, nonetheless the accounts of Curzon, Phibbs, Meakin, and Burnaby are rife with pillories demonstrating the inferiority of the “oriental race.” Natives were described as childish, incompetent, barbaric, and above all, lazy. Meakin says, “[the Asians] are lazy people, who would rather walk than run, stand than walk, sit

⁵⁰ The conflicting quotations from Phibbs in the epigraph are examples of this back and forth.

⁵¹ Schuyler and Curzon, the two authors off the genre positioned to understand internal Russian politics both emphatically felt that Russia’s conquest of Central Asia was disorganized, sporadic, and initiated in almost all cases by generals on the ground, guided by no policy or plan from St.Petersburg. (Schuyler, vol. 2, 260. Curzon, 316: “It is scarcely possible to overestimate the degree in which the extension of Russian dominion... has been due to the personal ambition of individuals, acting in rash independence of orders from home.”

than stand.”⁵² MacGahan, who is affable and friendly with the local people he meets along the way, still refers to them as “barbarians.”⁵³

For the remaining authors, including Schuyler, whose religious tolerance and deep interest in Central Asian cultures seemed decades ahead of his peers (and who would go on only five years later to be almost personally responsible for Bulgaria’s independence and the right to self-rule from the Ottoman Empire),⁵⁴ the justification for Russian rule seems to have hinged on “progress” and development. The supreme gift of the Russians, no matter how imperfectly they implemented the benefits of modernity in their own society, was the chance for Kazaks, Kirghiz, Uzbeks and Sarts, Tajiks and Turkmen to be brought to a higher level of evolutionary development.

The evolutionary theory of social progress, the logical and well-ordered march of civilization is the single strongest paradigm of understanding informing these observers as they attempted to understand a land and culture radically different than their own. Lansdell, the missionary, quotes the Bible as he journeys through Turkistan, assuming that the customs of the peoples of the East could be explained not by regional or cultural difference, but by the stage of development reached by the culture at hand, judging, for example, that the people of Tashkent “live at the stage of civilization portrayed in the book of Job.”⁵⁵

⁵² Meakin, 58.

⁵³ J. A. MacGahan, *Campaigning on the Oxus, and the Fall of Khiva* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1874), 60.

⁵⁴ Peter Bridges, “Eugene Schuyler, the Only Diplomatist.” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16: 12-22, 2005. Schuyler and MacGahan remained friends after their journey, and together they investigated and exposed Turkish atrocities against the Bulgarians, creating the public cause that pressured the Turks to release Bulgaria.

⁵⁵ Lansdell, vol. 1, 458. Our missionary is not alone in this assumption. A number of the other authors make similar conjectures--Phibbs does it almost as often as the theologian himself does.

When Graham traveled through the region in 1916, the Russians in Tashkent were praised for bringing motorcars and cinemas, and most of all for turning Tashkent into an extension of Europe itself.⁵⁶ The greatest criticism of the Russians in this regard comes in fact from the intrepid cyclist Jefferson, who mourns the choice to bypass Khiva with the railroad and therefore the march of progress, leaving it out of the program for modern development and dooming it to decay and disintegration.⁵⁷

While Russian rule undeniably had brought to Central Asia benefits of modern technology that clearly improved the quality of life for many of the subjects of their rule,⁵⁸ it is not readily apparent the contemporary reader how, by virtue of being the bearers of this modernity, the Russians therefore had a right to take the land by violence and maintain their rule by martial law. This question, however, is not substantively raised in a single one of the accounts. The only debate governance of the region raised by the visitors from Europe and American is whether rule would be better by Russia or England (in both Turkistan and India as well).⁵⁹ The very idea that the peoples of Turkistan could have a right to self rule is virtually never mentioned, and the right of Russia, as the available representative—however imperfect or bastardized by 200 years under the Tatar Yolk—of the European Occident and scientific progress is essentially never questioned.

Thus, as a body of literature, the English-language travel accounts were both influenced by the discursive “Orientalist” space that had been created for them already in

⁵⁶ Graham, 64.

⁵⁷ Jefferson, *A New Ride to Khiva*, 273. Jefferson charges that the war indemnity levied against Khiva had been made purposely un-payable by leaving Khiva off the railroad line after it rendered the caravan obsolete. He was so disappointed with the debilitated state of Khiva that he left after two days, having cycled 6000 miles to get to it.

⁵⁸ Clean, running water for the cities outside of Tashkent was a much and appropriately remarked benefit—nearly every visitor to Bukhara remarked on either the presence or the eventual removal (in later sources) of the *reshita* worm, a torturous parasite that had been endemic there apparently for centuries.

⁵⁹ The question of Russia’s aspirations on India was an important theme in many of these works, particularly the earlier ones, but addressing it in any detail would require a separate analysis.

European science and literature, and also served to modify, populate, and perpetuate that space. While as the genre progresses, the blatant racism of Vambery's Orientalism may fade into the background, it is replaced in style but not, perhaps, in substance by a more complicated and mixed paradigm of "progress" that is used to measure the full humanity of a people.

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