

Introductory text from the Turkestan Al'bum, 1871-72. Translated by Heather S. Sonntag, 2006-2007.

Foreword to the Turkestan Album

Before the Russian advance into the territory which lies along the middle course of the Syr Darya, the scope of knowledge about the regions subject to the khans of Kokan and Bukhara was very limited. Although presenting few detailed facts about the topography of the covered territory, the information recorded by Arab geographers over decades and subsequent centuries all still pertains despite the extremely distant time from ours. European travelers have rarely penetrated this part of Central Asia.

The first travelers to penetrate Kokan were the Russians of this century. Within the boundaries of the Bukharan khanate from the Amu Darya to Shahrisabz, and the route from Bukhara to Samarkand, it occurred in 1404 that Gonzales-de-Clavijo, envoy of King Henry III of Castille, traveled to the court of Timur. After that, in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, the Bukharan khanate was visited by Russians, yet we gained very little intelligence from the envoy of Peter the Great, Beneveni. In the early 1820s, Baron A. Meyendorf, who was formerly at the embassy of Negri, conveyed more detailed facts about this khanate. Knowledge concerning the smaller part of the khanate is based on personal observations, and others on inquiries. They pertain to the northwestern parts of the khanate from the Kizyl Kum to Bukhara. More of this area examined and described is quite detailed, including the 1840 mission of Butenin. N.V. Khanikov and Leman reported knowledge about the eastern and southern parts of the khanate in their articles. After Clavijo, this was the most important detailed description of Samarkand and route to Karshi. N.V. Khanikov's essay is remarkable both for faithful observation about subjects described by him and for the conscientiousness of work, rare among European experts of the Orient. The expedition of General Ignat'ev, however, added to the knowledge, yet it was primarily concerned with the northwest part of the khanate.

At the beginning of our century, agents, like Burnashev, Pospelov and Nazarov, for the first time gathered notions about the Kokan khanate by traveling from western Siberia to Kokan and Tashkend, but all of them were extremely brief and superficial.

Constant unfavorable conditions, which surrounded the aforementioned travelers in Central Asia, would disappear when a significant part of Central Asia was opened up by the Russian troops to European civilization.

The occupation of Tashkent, and then of Samarkand, had opened up a vast field of knowledge to be seized through comprehensive familiarization with the region by Russian researchers of Central Asia. Over a long period of time, they compiled knowledge on the object of their avid curiosity for those in the sciences.

In light of satisfying the common interest and for the rapid familiarization of the reading public to our newly occupied land, by order of the Turkestan Governor-General, Adjutant-General K.P. von Kaufman 1st compiled the photograph album to introduce the world of enterprising administrations to the region. The main aim of these albums is to visually present: 1) the past life of the region in preserved ancient monuments (archaeological part); 2) contemporary life of the population – types, beliefs, rites, customs, dwellings, dress and views of more populated place (ethnographic part); 3) culture of the country in industrial and technical relations (industrial crafts and trades part); and 4) advancement of the Russians into these new lands, grouped together as one, views of the places which are distinguishable because of Russian arms, and portraits of individuals who were among the first to open routes to Central Asia (historical part).

Owing to the magnitude of this undertaking, work on the album lasted more than two years. The compilation of photography was entrusted to A.L. Kuhn, and the survey of remarkable architecture related to the antiquities of Samarkand was assigned to N.V. Bogaevskii. L.A. Shostak made watercolor copies of the detailed tile designs, which decorated the ancient buildings in Samarkand.

Descriptions about the four parts of the Turkestan Album are as follows:

“Materials for the archaeological description of the ancient monuments in the Syr Darya region and the Zaravshan district,” by A.L. Kuhn,

“Ethnographic observations,” also by Kuhn,

“Industries by the Central Asians,” by M.I. Brodovskii and

“An essay in the Russian advancement into Central Asia,” by M.A. Terent’ev.

[lower left] Permitted by the Censor, Saint Petersburg, 6 November 1872.

[lower right] Printing-house of K. Zameslovsky, Bolshaya Meshchanskaya, No. 33.