

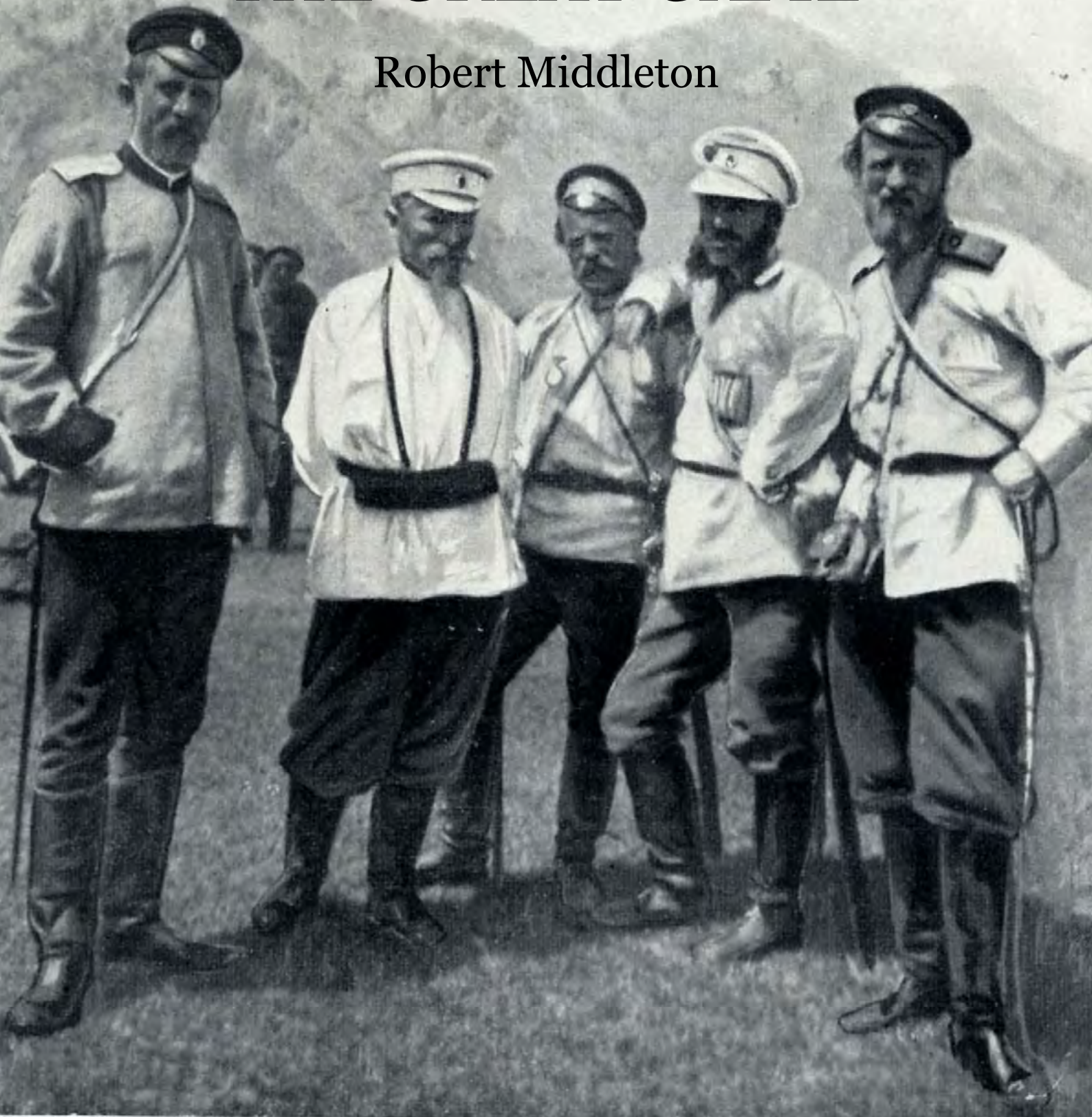


UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT
Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit

RESEARCH PAPER #2, 2019

THE RUSSIANS IN THE GREAT GAME

Robert Middleton



Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit's Research Paper #2

THE RUSSIANS IN THE GREAT GAME

The author: Robert Middleton

Abstract:

From the time of their defeat in the Crimean War in 1856, the Russians sought to extend their Empire into Central Asia. Their success was rapid. Imperial expansion was not, however, the sole motivation: almost all Russian military excursions and expeditions within Central Asia were accompanied by scientists and undertaken with remarkable academic rigour. This interest in the local peoples, their history, culture and environment was one of the main differences between the Russian performance in the 'Great Game' and that of their British rival, whose interest was almost exclusively strategic. In addition to a more coherent military policy, it also explains the greater success of the Russians in not only subduing the Central Asian tribes but creating new and lasting alliances. This was nowhere truer than in the Pamir region of today's Tajikistan. The multiple Russian expeditions in the Pamirs from 1871 to 1935 resulted in a sound and broad-based scientific record of the region and its inhabitants and cemented a close relationship with them. The Russians liberated the peoples of the Pamirs from Afghan and Bukharan oppression and made significant investments (first as Empire, subsequently as Soviet Union) in the economic and social development of the region. A major crisis occurred as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union that was only relieved thanks to the support given by various actors in the Tajik and Russian governments and the international community, in which the author was an active participant. Friction between Russian border guards in the Pamirs and the local population led in 2004 to the replacement of the Russians by a Tajik contingent, thus putting an end to 120 years of very close Pamir-Russian relations.

Keywords: Central Asia, history, the Great Game, conflict

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He lives in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland where he is active in local politics. He is currently mayor of the town of Crans-près-Céligny.

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Foreword

This is a companion to my paper *The Great Game – myth or reality?* published by UCA as *Research Paper #1, 2019*. There I concluded: “If there was a ‘game’, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Russians played it rather better than their competitor.” This essay attempts to show some of the reasons why. It is based to a large extent on Russian sources and is a reworking of my chapter “Russian Expeditions” in *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*.¹ Since researching this chapter in 2005-2006, a multiplicity of new websites that provide original source material from the period have become available,² as well as a large number of books, articles and doctoral dissertations.³ While these are, of course, easily accessible to Russian speakers, it is my intention here to present in short form and to a wider audience a summary history in English of the Russian presence in the Pamirs.

If the original ‘Great Game’ ended with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, a similar ‘Game’ of imperial rivalry continued (and continues), with some changes of players. The Pamir region, by its proximity to China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Central Asian republics, remains an important geopolitical playing field. I have therefore extended the time-frame of this paper to include the Soviet and early post-Soviet periods.

1 R. Middleton and H. Thomas, *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, Odyssey, Hong Kong 2012, pp. 386-436.

2 I include many of these in the footnotes. Some sites, regrettably, have disappeared, in particular <http://www.chakhma.tajnet.com/pamir/pamir.htm> that gave extensive extracts from the superb Soviet publication Памир [The Pamirs], Planeta, Moscow 1987 (out of print). Copies of relevant transcripts from this (and other websites no longer accessible) can be provided for scholars on request.

3 For recent historical surveys of the Russian presence in the Pamirs at this time, see: Nazarsho Moenshoyevich Nazarshoyev, *На южном рубеже. Российские пограничники в Таджикистане XIX–XXI вв* [On the southern frontier. Russian borderguards in Tajikistan 19th-21st centuries] Moscow 2017, <https://readli.net/na-yuzhnom-rubezhe-rossiyskie-pogranichniki-v-tadzhikistane-xix-xxi-vv/> - also a source of several historical photographs in the text below (attributed ‘Nazarshoyev’); Oleg Vladimirovich Nekrasov, *Исторический Опыт Памирского Отряда по Охране Границы Российской Империи В Конце XIX - Начале XX ВВ* [Historical Experience of the Pamir Detachment of Borderguards], Moscow 2017; Munir Haidarshoyevich Pirumshoyev, *Памир в русской историографии второй половины XIX - начала XX вв* [The Pamirs in Russian historiography of the second half of 19th-early 20th centuries], Dushanbe 2011, <https://geci.cn.ua/work/887867/Pamir-v-russkoj-istoriografii>. See also D. Karamshoev and I. Kharkavchuk, *Пограничники и Жители Памира*, [Borderguards and the Inhabitants of the Pamirs], Khorog 1995.

I. Introduction

The Pamirs, specifically the Wakhan and possibly the Ghunt valleys, were familiar to Silk Road travellers on their way to the ‘Stone Tower’ mentioned by Ptolemy.⁴ Early Chinese Buddhist pilgrims and 17th century Jesuit missionaries also passed through the Pamirs; there are legendary accounts of visits by Ismaili saints and missionaries such as Shoh Khomoush, Shoh Burhon, Shoh Malang and Shoh Koshon, whose memory is still revered at shrines and other holy sites in the Pamirs;⁵ the Ismaili poet and philosopher, Nasr Khusrow, is credited with the conversion of the Pamiri people to the Ismaili faith in the 11th century; and Marco Polo claimed to have been in Badakhshan and Wakhan.⁶ But it was not until the arrival of Russian military forces in the late 19th century that the inhabitants of the Pamir region of Tajikistan benefited from any form of social or economic advancement. The territory was unmapped, its political status was unclear and the population was victim to slavery and other forms of exploitation.⁷ In the areas in the north-west, from the early 19th century, the Sunni Mangit rulers of Bukhara also imposed forced conversion to Sunni Islam from the traditional Ismaili faith predominant in the Western Pamirs.

Prior to the Russian occupation of the Pamirs, certain fairly well defined regions of the Pamirs (Shughnan, Darwaz, Wakhan) were ruled by local potentates, whose allegiance to external authority fluctuated and could be multiple. Recognised as part of ‘Soghdiana’, ‘Turan’, ‘Transoxiana’ or ‘Turkestan’, the Pamirs were claimed at various times from the 19th century onwards and with varying degrees of confidence and military coercion by Russia, China, the Emirs of Afghanistan and Bukhara and the Khan of Kokand (Ferghana valley). In 1868, Kokand became by treaty a Russian vassal state and, in February 1876, the Khanate was annexed by Russia. As we shall see below, as of that date Russia claimed at least *de facto* control of the Pamirs. In 1895, with the establishment of a permanent Russian garrison in Khorog, the Pamir region came *de jure* under Russian sovereignty. In 1924 it became briefly part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and then, as the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, became part of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek SSR. Present-day Tajikistan became a separate Soviet Socialist Republic on 5 December 1929.

II. Russian expeditions and scientific exploration

After the Russian defeat in the Crimean War in 1854-56, Tsar Alexander II approved a strategy of military conquest in Central Asia, with the objective of finding new opportunities for territorial (and commercial) expansion in the only direction remaining, east. The Russian advance into Central Asia in the 19th century was rapid and unstoppable. In 1865, the Russians took Tashkent and, in 1867, General Konstantin Kaufman was instated there as Governor-General of the new province of Turkestan. By 1868, Bukhara, Khodjent and Samarkand were in the hands of the Russians. Kuldja

4 In his *Geographia* (circa 150 CE) Ptolemy described a trade route across Central Asia drawn from the writings of his contemporary Marinus of Tyre. Marinus’ work has been lost but was based on an account by the Macedonian Maës Titianus of his agents’ travels to China. The ‘Stone Tower’ (‘Tashkurgan’ in Turkic languages) may well have been the city of this name in the Xinjiang province of China. See *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op.cit., pp. 267-294.

5 *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op.cit., pp. 634-640.

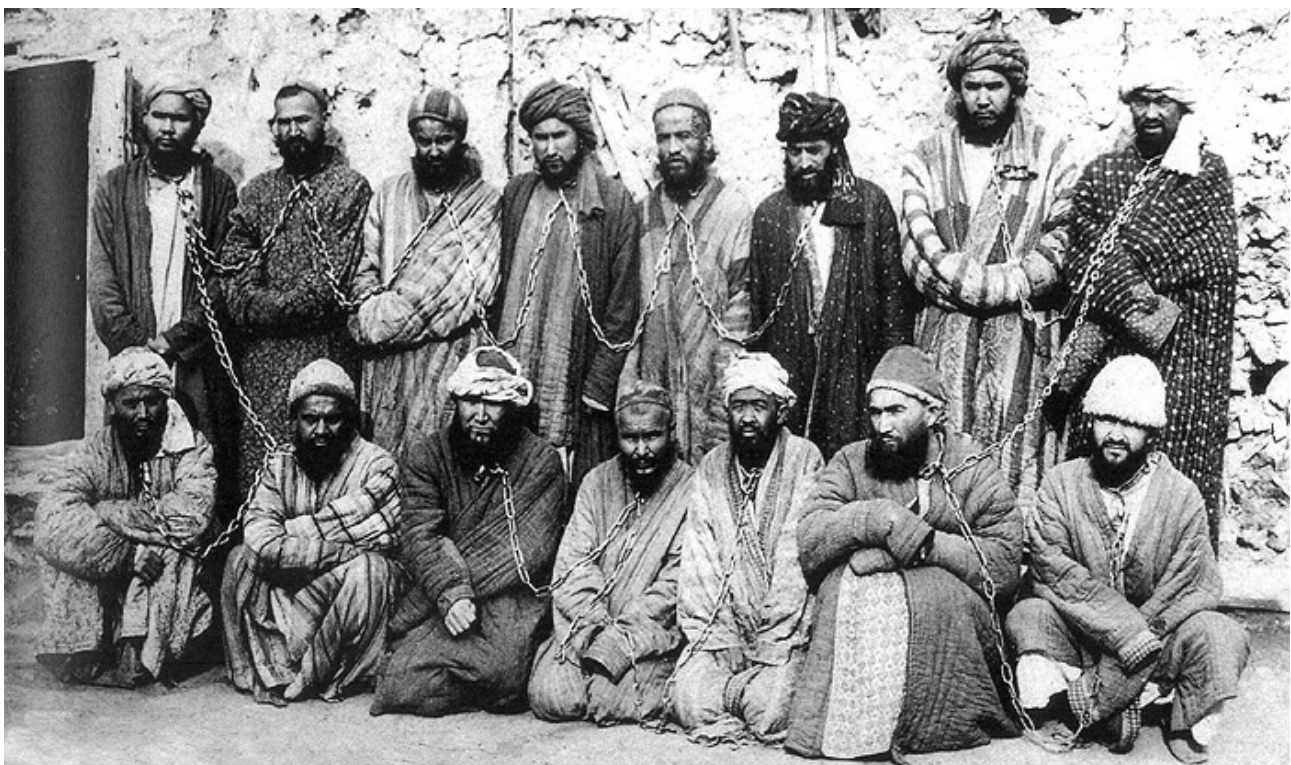
6 See Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo go to China?* Westview Press, Boulder 1995.

7 There are excavated caves near several villages in the Western Pamirs that were used for refuge from slave-traders and other marauders; the Tajik population of Tashkurgan (Sarikol) county in Xinjiang province has its origin in a wave of refugees from such exploitation - many others fled to Chitral and Afghan Badakhshan.

(Yining), in Chinese territory, was occupied for a short time in 1871; Khiva fell to the Russians in May 1873 and Kokand (Ferghana valley) was annexed in February 1876.

Two other reasons gave weight to imperial ambitions. A large number of Russian soldiers and settlers had been captured by Turkoman raiders and sold into slavery on the markets of Khiva and Bukhara. The Russian government was determined to free them.⁸

In addition, the American civil war had led to a shortage of cotton and the climate of Central Asia offered a welcome alternative source of production. As is by now well known, this was subsequently



Slave market in Turkestan, 1890
(Paul Nadar, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/125167366@N02/19138437181>)

to prove disastrous: for the ecology of the region, by the diversion of water resources, and for the economy, by dependence on a monoculture.⁹ The problems of water allocation and management inherited by today's Central Asian Republics from Russian and Soviet obsession with cotton production are already a serious cause of friction between them. Fortunately for the Pamirs, cotton cannot thrive in this mountainous region.¹⁰

It is striking that while contemporary British participants in the Great Game in the Pamirs travelled

⁸ See Nikolai Muraviev, *Muraviev's Journey to Khiva Through the Turcoman Country, 1819-1820*, Calcutta 1871 (<https://archive.org/details/muravievsjourne00muragoog/page/n9>); and Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game - On Secret Service in High Asia*, London 1990, Chapter 6 (<https://erenow.net/common/thegreatgamepeterhopkirk/9.php>).

⁹ Also socially, as a result of the need for seasonal work that involved (and continues to involve) involuntary manual labour (see <https://www.rferl.org/a/global-slavery-index-uzbekistan-pakistan-worst-offenders/27770928.html> and https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/swiss-ngos_cotton-tajikistan-s-pride-and-shame/41680322).

¹⁰ See, for example, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/water-war-in-central-asia-the-water-dilemma-of-turkmenistan/>.

alone and frequently revelled in highly personal accounts of their exploits, almost all Russian expeditions had a serious scientific purpose. This exploration of Russia's newly acquired territories in Central Asia received official encouragement from an early stage and almost all military missions were accompanied by a broad range of experts: cartographers and surveyors, of course, but also zoologists, botanists, entomologists, anthropologists and others.

The result was not only a major improvement in Russian maps and in assessments of geological resources, but also a surge of Russian official and academic interest in Central Asia, most



Russian scientific officers at Pamirsky Post 1900 - Wilhelm Filchner, *Ein Ritt über den Pamir*, Berlin 1903 - (<http://www.pamirs.org/historical%20photos.htm>).

notably in the work of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society IRGS (Императорское Русское Географическое Общество - ИРГО). A methodical and broad-based approach to the integration of the new territories into the Russian Empire was adopted, leading to the development of an extensive scientific literature on the region that was pursued until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, when state funding for these activities virtually ceased. The Pamirs were one of the focal points of this research, not least because of the widely held theory that the inhabitants were descended from the original Indo-European population of Central Asia (see section on Dmitri Lvovich Ivanov below).¹¹

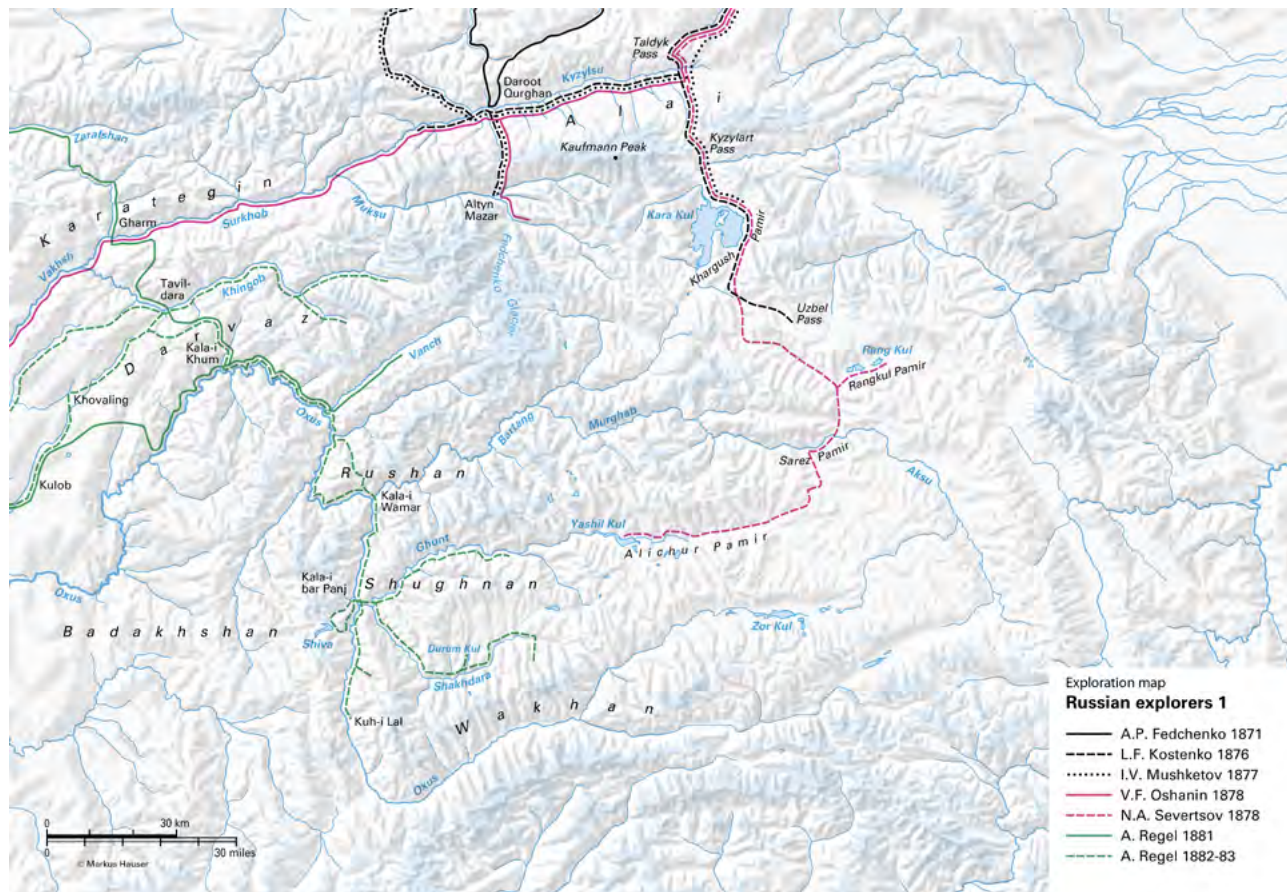
¹¹ The methodical approach of the Russian (and Soviet) scientific community was exemplary. A comprehensive list of materials collected, and reports produced by Soviet expeditions to the Pamirs in the period 1928-1935 was published by the Academy of Sciences in Moscow in 1936: the list alone runs to 250 pages! (*Памир-Таджикистан-Средняя Азия: Обзор Трудов и Материалов Экспедиций 1932-1935 и 1928-1932 гг.* [Pamir-Tajikistan-Central Asia : List of Works and Materials from the Expeditions of 1932-1935 and 1928-1932] - (<https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01005297031>)). A list of 18th and 19th century Russian expeditions in Central Asia was published between 1955 and 1971 in Tashkent (O.V. Maslova, *Обзор русских путешествий и экспедиций в Среднюю Азию* [List of Russian Travellers and Expeditions in Central Asia], Part 1 1715–1856, 1955; Part 2 1856–1869, 1956; Part 3 1869–1880, 1958; Part 4 1881–1886, 1971) - part 4 on <http://lit-i-docx.ru/37istoriya/69462-1-im-lenina-obzor-russkih-puteshestviy-ekspeditsiy-srednyuyu-aziyu-chast-1881-1886-izdatelstvo-fan-uzbekskoy-ssr.php>. See also Filin Mikhailovich Nazarov *Записки о некоторых народах и землях средней части Азии* [Sketches of some peoples and territories in Central Asia] 1968 - summary on http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/M.Asien/XIX/1800-1820/Nazarov_2/pred.htm; and Nazirkhon Ashurboevich Ikromov, *Роль Русских Востоковедов В Изучении Истории, Археологии И Этнографии Северного Таджикистана (вторая половина XIX-начало XXвв).* [The Role of Soldiers as Researchers of History, Archaeology and Ethnography in northern Tajikistan (second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries <https://studylib.ru/doc/949928/vtoraya-polovina-xix--nachalo-xx-vv>), Khujand 2015 (dissertation).



Turkestan Officers at an oriental language training course, late 19th-early 20th century (centre standing, Ivan Dionisievich Yagello, 1865-1942; far right Andrei Yevgenevich Snessarev (?) - see section V below) (<https://mytashkent.uz/2019/04/03/ivan-dionisievich-yagello/>)

The distances covered by these explorers (on foot or horseback and in extremely un hospitable climate and terrain) are truly phenomenal (see the maps at the head of the main sections below).

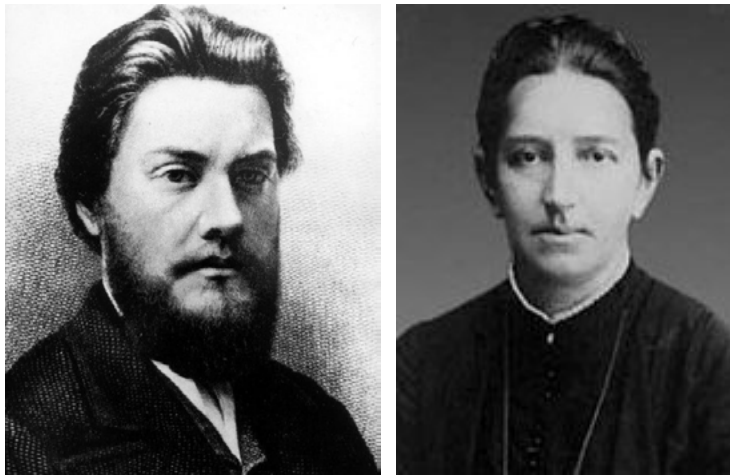
III. 1871-1883



Map courtesy Markus Hauser

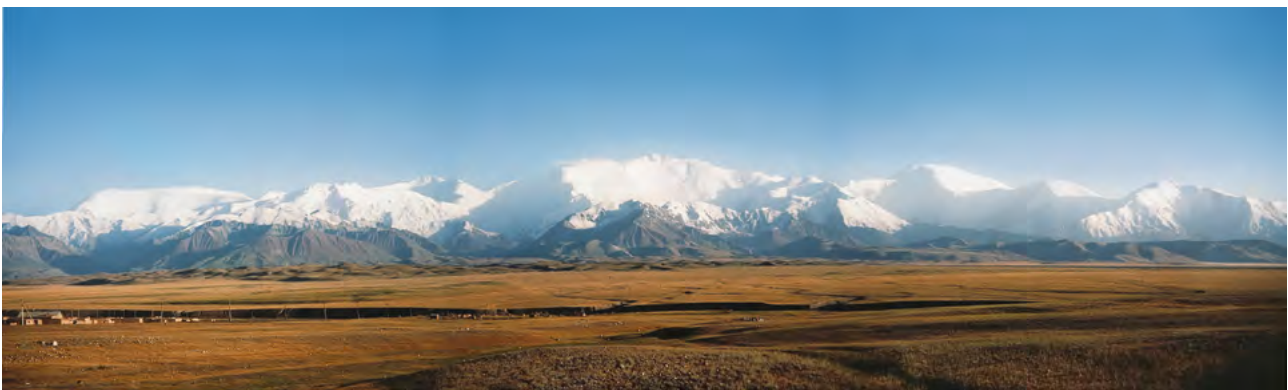
1871 Alexei Pavlovich (1844-1873) and Olga Alexandrovna Fedchenko (1845-1921)

Already prior to the annexation of Kokand, Russian researchers had penetrated the Pamirs. In 1868, with the encouragement of the Russian authorities, Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko and his wife Olga Alexandrovna travelled to Tashkent – a coach journey of 53 days – and began their expeditions to Turkestan with the exploration of Samarkand, Penjikent, the Zerafshan valley and Hissar (including the Fan Mountains and Iskanderkul Lake), the Kyzyl Kum Desert and the Ferghana valley.



Alexei and Olga Fedchenko (<https://ru.wikipedia.org/>)

In 1871, they were on the northern edge of the Pamirs. There they were dazzled by the spectacular peaks opposite them on the other side of the Alai Valley. Fedchenko called this range the Trans-Alai and identified what was for some time believed to be the highest peak in the Pamirs and named it after the Governor-General of Turkestan, Kaufmann; this name remained until it became Lenin Peak in 1928 and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Peak in 2006.



Ibn Sina Peak and the Trans-Alai range (1998)

From local informants in Kokand, Fedchenko gleaned information about the hitherto unexplored region of Darwaz and its chief settlement, Kala-i-Khum, also known as Iskander Sindona (“Alexander’s prison”). He also learned that Darwaz included a territory beyond Karategin known as “Wachia” by ancient geographers that had sometimes been confused with the Wakhan in the south.¹²

¹² *Mittheilungen des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Leipzig*, 1872, pp. 7-8. The territory known by the ancient geographers as “Wachia” is still known locally as “Wachio”.

Fedchenko's report to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGS) in December 1871¹³ caused a sensation, as it was the first report by a Russian on the Pamirs and was considered as equivalent in importance to the discovery of the sources of the Nile. Having seen the chain of high mountains running along the south of the Alai valley, Fedchenko felt confident in confirming the hypothesis of a vast plateau behind them. He reported the information given him by the local inhabitants that there were two Pamirs: the "little" Pamir ("Pamir-Khurd") that he supposed to be the area around Zorkul (visited by John Wood in 1838¹⁴); he suggested that the "great" Pamir ("Pamir-i-Kalan") was to be found directly behind the Transalai range.



View of the Transalai range from Sary Tash (1995)

After Fedchenko's untimely death in the French Alps in 1873, his research was continued by his widow Olga, a remarkable woman who overcame many male prejudices against her participation in her husband's expeditions by her professionalism and scientific competence. It was Olga who prepared for publication all the materials collected during their travels in Central Asia (*Пы путеше ствие в Туркестан - Travel to Turkestan*, Moscow 1875).

In 1900, together with their son Boris, she finally fulfilled her husband's ambition to travel to the Pamirs. Their stay in Shughnan led to the publication by the Academy of Sciences of extensive studies on the flora of the Pamirs in 1901, 1905 and 1906. She died in 1921, leaving more than sixty scientific publications under her name and with the distinctions of correspondent member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and honorary member of the French Société de Géographie, the Boston Academy of Science and the International Academy of Botanical Geography – truly one of the foremost women scientists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her name lives on in the designation by the Leningrad Botanical Garden of the Central Asian plant *Olgaea Iljin*.

13 Summarised by de Khanikoff in the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie (BSG)*, 1872, pp. 60-64.

14 See *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op.cit., pp. 337-348.

1876 Lev Feofanovich Kostenko (1841-1891)

In October 1875, the Russian forces under Mikhail Dmitriyevich Skobelev defeated the rebel Khan of Kokand and, in 1876, Russia annexed the Khanate of Kokand.

In July 1876, Skobelev sent a military expedition to subdue marauding Kyrgyz tribes on their summer pastures in the Alai. The expedition included Captain Lev Feofanovich Kostenko (1841-1891) - for geographical and statistical studies; Vasily Fedorovich Oshanin - as the mission's naturalist – see below; A. R. Bonsdorf - as surveyor; and eight topographers under Lebedev (among them Korostovstsev and Zhilin).



Генералъ-маіоръ
Л. О. Костенко,
Т. XIII, стр. 217).

[\(https://ru.wikipedia.org/\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/)

Three columns were formed to travel to the Alai by different routes. Kostenko, Oshanin and Bonsdorf were sent to Gulcha to catch up with the column led by Prince F.K. Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg, a colonel on the Turkestan General Staff. Wittgenstein had been sent by Skobelev to catch Abdul Beg, a rebel Kyrgyz leader, over the Kyzyl Art pass to Kara Kul and was thus the first European to see the lake. Some of his officers returned to camp shortly afterwards and reported that the Kara Kul was so high that “many of the men bled from the nose, while several of them fainted away.” Skobelev, who had just received the submission of the Kyrgyz in the Russian camp, despatched another group to assist Wittgenstein at Kara Kul and ordered Kostenko to accompany it.



Prince F.K. Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg with Kyrgyz escort

<https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/206840.html>

Crossing the Kyzyl Art pass on 14 August, Kostenko explored Karakul and noted that

A rude piercing wind blows daily from the north, beginning at 2 or 3 p.m. I never experienced more violent gusts. The hard sandstone exposed to the wind is strongly affected by it. Some of the rocks are perfectly drilled. In spite of the violent gusts of wind, I ascended to the top of the highest elevation, and was well rewarded for my pains. A magnificent scene opened to the view. The mountain circle seemed to spring directly from out of the water, proudly looking at its own reflection in the glassy lake whose blue waters lave the feet of the heights.¹⁵



Kara Kul north shore (1998)

A scout had been sent on to seek information on the whereabouts of Abdul Beg and returned with a report that he had already escaped to Afghanistan. Since no order had yet been received to return to the Alai, Wittgenstein authorised Kostenko to undertake an exploratory expedition to the regions of Rang Kul and Sarikol.

The expedition, comprising Kostenko, Lebedev, Bonsdorf and fifteen horsemen, left Kara Kul on 18 August. From the Uzbek pass (4,651m) they were able to confirm Humboldt's hypothesis of the existence of a north-south range of mountains bordering the Pamirs on the east (the Kongur and

¹⁵ <http://www.chakhma.tajnet.com/pamir/pamir.htm> - see footnote 2.

Mustagh Ata massif), that George Hayward had seen from Kashgar in 1869¹⁶ – Kostenko estimated their height more correctly than Hayward, at 25,000 feet. They had underestimated the distances to be covered, however, and shortage of food forced the expedition to return before being able to explore Rang Kul.



View of Mustagh Ata from Kulma (1998)

A further expedition with Prince Wittgenstein took Kostenko to Daroot Kurgan in the western Alai valley, where there was a fort established by the Khan of Kokand to keep a watchful eye on the nomadic Kyrgyz in the valley. Wittgenstein sent Kostenko on a reconnaissance across the Kyzyl Su and up the Min Teke river to the Ters Agar pass where he discovered an ancient shrine (Altyn Mazar), identified the three confluents of the Muk Su (Sauksai, Kaindy and Selsu) and saw glaciers and high peaks beyond.



Fort in Daroot Kurgan (1999)

The expedition moved on to Karamyk to discuss the delimitation of frontiers with an envoy of the Shah of Karategin, and returned through Shakhimardan to Kokand at the end of September 1876. They had mapped, at a scale of 2 versts¹⁷ to the inch, 3,700 square versts of what Kostenko described as

“the most interesting and least known portion of the Pamir upland.” In 1880 Kostenko’s account of his work was published in St. Petersburg under the title *Туркестанский край. Опыт военно-статистического обозрения Туркестанского военного округа* [The Turkestan frontier: Report on the military-statistical overview of the Turkestan military district].

Kostenko comments, correctly, that “I am the first European who has obtained a sight of the headwaters

¹⁶ George Hayward, ‘Journey from Leh to Yarkand and Kashgar, and Exploration of the Sources of the Yarkand River’, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society (JRGs)*, Vol. 40 (1870), pp. 33-166.

¹⁷ 1 verst = 1.0668 km

of the Muk Su river.” What he did not know was that the glacier arms he saw from there were part of the glacier system later named after Fedchenko. No European would actually set foot on the glacier for another two years and it would not be fully explored until 1928.



Ivan Vasilievitch Mushketov
(<https://ru.wikipedia.org/>)

1877 Ivan Vasilievitch Mushketov (1850-1902)

Ivan Vasilievitch Mushketov was born in Alekseyevskoi on the Don. In 1866, the Russian College of Mining began research into the coal resources of the Donetsk basin and began recruiting promising students from the area for training as geologists. After starting his studies in the faculty of history and letters at St. Petersburg, Mushketov was selected for an army scholarship and transferred to the College of Mining under Professor Romanovsky, and graduated in 1872 with a first class degree. Geology was to become his consuming passion.¹⁸

In 1873, on Romanovsky’s recommendation, he was attached to the Russian General Staff in Turkestan, where other famous names had preceded him: Semyonov Tienshansky, Severtsov (see below) and Fedchenko. None before him, however, had had specific responsibility for geological and geographical surveying. Expeditions to the western Tian Shen, the Syr-Darya, the Zerafshan valley and western Ferghana led him to the conclusion that the proper study of the geology of Central Asia necessitated an understanding of its mountain systems and, in particular, the Pamirs.

In 1875, he explored the Tien-Shan and, for his work there, was elected a full member of the IRGS and was awarded its silver medal. In 1877 he travelled from the Alai to explore the Muk Su valley and got a glimpse of the glacier above it. Returning to the Alai valley, he went into the Pamirs as far as Kara Kul, but had to cut short his explorations because of the unsettled situation in neighbouring Kashgar, where Chinese forces were attempting to wrest power from the Kokandian adventurer Yakub Beg. In 1878, he explored the upper Alai valley, the Kyzyl Su and the geology of the central Tienshan range up to Chatyrkul.

Mushketov concluded, from their geology, that the Pamirs were once on the seabed.

If we could go back in time to the period of the tertiary deposits, we would see instead of the present mountains an entirely different picture. Where there are now the massifs of the Pamirs there was then a stormy sea which extended far to the West, probably as far as the Caspian, and, to the east, covered all of East Turkestan and the deserts of Gobi and Mongolia, the Hanhai of the Chinese. In this sea only here and there would we be able to see some island formations... At the end of the tertiary period, these island masses were mainly to be found where are now the Pamirs: they increased in volume and began to stand apart as mountain ridges. In the process of drainage the sea receded, and the Pamirs area became more and more prominent and formed a land mass protruding from the sea; its height increased, but not so high that life was extinguished, for we must suppose that at that time the climate on the Pamirs was more temperate than now, and plant and animal life incomparably richer.

¹⁸ Source for much of this section: <http://wiki.tpu.ru/wiki>.

... Finally the sea gradually recedes, and as the land is drained and raised, the upper parts of the Pamirs become less accessible, less suitable for life and more deserted: the fauna moves to more hospitable ground and humans gradually descend in search of better refuge, following the path of the waters, so to say, and are spread across the continent in proportion to the retreat of the sea.¹⁹

Mushketov and Romanovsky produced the first geological map of Turkestan (30 versts to the inch) in 1881. The first volume of Mushketov's *Туркестан. Геологическое и орографическое описание по данным, собранным во время путешествий с 1874 по 1880 гг.* [Turkestan: Description of Geology and Relief on the Basis of Data Collected during Travels in 1874-80] was published in 1886 and led to a much better understanding of the mountain system of the Pamirs. For this work, he received the Makarev prize of the Academy of Sciences and an award from the Russian Mineralogical Society. In 1887 he studied the causes and effects of the great earthquake that devastated Verny (Almaty) and, shortly before his death, was involved in the extension of the Trans-Siberian railway.

He died of pneumonia in 1902, and the second volume of *Turkestan* was published posthumously in 1906. It was republished in 1915 with additions and notes from subsequent scientific explorations and was a major work of reference for the next generation of researchers of Central Asia. He was also the author of a work in French, *Les Richesses Minérales du Turkestan Russe* [The mineral wealth of Russian Turkestan], published in Paris in 1878. He received the highest award of the IRGS – the Konstantinov medal – and was made an honorary member of the Vienna Geographical Society. A glacier in the Tien-Shan range in Kyrgyzstan is named after him.

In his obituary, V.F.Oshanin (see the next section) wrote:

The seven best and most productive years of the scientist's life were devoted to geological research of our outer regions, and these works gave him widespread and well-deserved fame... People possessing such abilities, with such energy and love of their work, are not frequently encountered in the scientific community: the death of such an outstanding scientist, at the age of only 52, is a heavy and irreplaceable loss for science and for all humanity.

1878 Vasily Fedorovich Oshanin (1844-1917)

Vasily Fedorovich Oshanin was born in Lipetsk Oblast south of Moscow. He entered the faculty of physics and mathematics at the university of Moscow at the age of seventeen and graduated in natural history in 1865. After beginning his career as a teacher, he was sent to Turkestan in 1872 by the Ministry of State Properties to study silk-making and took up a teaching position at the Tashkent school of silk manufacture and later became the secretary of the Turkestan section of the IRGS.

As we have seen, Oshanin was in the Alai in 1876 as part of Skobelev's mission and in 1878 he returned as the head of a scientific expedition put together by the Moscow 'Imperial Association of Friends of the Natural Sciences' (*Императорское общество любителей естествознания, антропологии и этнографии*), that – in addition to Oshanin as entomologist – included Fedchenko, the topographer G.E. Rodionov and the botanist M.J. Neveysky. Leaving Samarkand in July 1877, the expedition

¹⁹ 'Памир и Алай' [Pamir and Alai], in *Живописная Россия* [Picturesque Russia], Русская Средняя Азия [Russian Central Asia], St.Petersburg-Moscow, 1885, pp. 299-322. Mushketov's conclusion explains the presence of coral in the Eastern Pamirs, used in traditional jewellery http://www.pamirs.org/culture_and_religion.htm.

reached the Karategin in April 1878. In Jayilgan, just above the junction of the Muk Su with the Kyzyl Su ('red river' in Kyrgyz - further downstream it is known by the Tajik equivalent 'Surkhob'), Oshanin noted some very high peaks to the south-east to which he gave numbers, leaving it to others to give them names. The easternmost and highest (to which he gave the number 1) he estimated at about 25,000 feet. Not long afterwards, the Russians named several of Oshanin's numbered peaks in honour of contemporary explorers and scientists: Severtsov (see below); Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz, US naturalist born in Switzerland (1807-1873); and John Tyndall, Irish physicist, naturalist and educator (1820-1893) – evidence of a world where the scientific community was still truly global and not divided by ideology.



Oshanin (top left) with Fedchenko (centre) and other "Friends of the Natural Sciences" (<https://mytashkent.uz/2016/04/17/oshaniny-chast-pervaya/>)

Unable to travel with loaded animals up the valley of the Muk Su, the expedition continued up the Kyzyl Su as far as the Min Teke river and followed it to Altyn Mazar. From there they were able to ascend to the tongue of the great glacier at about 3,000m, which they named after Oshanin's friend Fedchenko, and explored the Seldara river and the little Tanimas glacier. In his report, Oshanin estimated the length of the Fedchenko glacier at some twenty versts (the 1928 Russo-German scientific expedition measured it more accurately at 77 km, confirming it as the longest mountain glacier in the world).

It was originally intended that the expedition would attempt to travel from the upper Muk Su to look for a way into Shughnan and explore Yashilkul. The narrow rock-strewn valley of the Belandkiik was impossible to pass on horseback, however, and, after only 15 km, with several of his party suffering from illness, the expedition was forced to turn back. From local Kyrgyz, Oshanin learned that their preferred route to Murghab

was up the Kaindy river and over the pass of the same name (4,822m). It was, however, still covered in deep snow from the preceding heavy winter and an attempt to cross it was out of the question. The expedition came down to the Alai and returned to Tashkent via Gulcha and Osh.

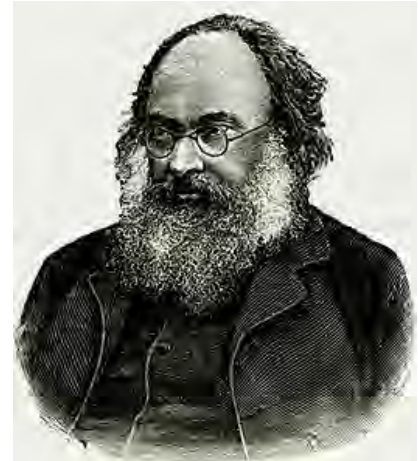
A map showing their route was drawn up by Rodionov and published in *Petermann's Geographische Mittheilungen* in 1882.

1878 P.G. Matveyev

The map showing Oshanin's route also showed part of the route of a Russian expedition later the same year to left-bank Badakhshan under the leadership of Colonel P.G. Matveyev. This expedition included the German director of the Tashkent observatory, Schwartz, a surveyor, Lieutenant Trotsky, and a zoologist, Rusov. After crossing the Oxus near Kulob, they were first stopped in Rostaq on orders of the Afghan government and then taken over a very difficult mountain route to Faizabad where the late season forced them to abandon their intention of visiting Kafirstan and to return to Samarkand through Taloqan, Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif. The unusual route forced on them by their Afghan 'hosts' across the central mountains of Badakhshan enabled them, however, to map hitherto unexplored territory and add considerably to the data on the region collected by British and 'native' explorers (the 'pundits').²⁰

1878 Nicolai Alekseevich Severtsov (1827-1885)

By the time he undertook his exploration of the Pamirs, Nicolai Severtsov was already a seasoned and famous traveller. Privately educated, he entered the faculty of physics and mathematics of Moscow university at the age of only 16 and began zoological research in his home province of Voronezh, completing his Master's degree in 1855. Shortly afterwards he was sent on a scientific expedition to the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya. This work was not without danger, as he was attacked and badly wounded early in the mission by marauding bands from Kokand, who carried him off to Turkestan. Freed after a month in captivity, he took up his research work in the field almost immediately.



Nicolai Alekseevich Severtsov
(www.ru.wikipedia.org)

In 1864 he was attached to the staff of General Chernyaev at the time of the latter's assaults on Chimkent and Tashkent and, in the period 1865-68, made expeditions to the Syr-Daria region, the Tien Shan, lake Issyk-Kul and Khujand. The results of these expeditions were published in 1873 (*Путешествия по Туркестанскому краю и исследования горной страны Тянь-Шаня* [Travels in Turkestan and research in the high Tian Shen])²¹ for which he was awarded an honorary degree of doctor of zoology at Moscow university, the Litke gold medal of the IRGS and the gold medal of the Paris International Geographical Congress.

On Kaufmann's instructions, he made a first attempt to reach the Pamirs at the end of 1877, hard on the heels of Mushketov's expedition to the Alai. The expedition, under the command of Captain Skorniakov, included - in addition to Severtsov - Schwarz, head of the Tashkent observatory, the cartographer Skassi and the botanist and entomologist Captain Kushakievich.²² They left Tashkent

20 See 'Поездка по бухарским и афганским владен полковника Матвеева' [Colonel Matveyev's Travels in Bukhara and Afghanistan] in *Сборник географических, топографических и статистических материалов по Азии* [Collection of Geographical and Statistical materials on Asia], Issue V, Military Scientific Committee of the Russian General Staff, St. Petersburg 1883 (http://starieknigi.info/Zhurnaly/SMA/SMA_05.pdf); also BSG, Paris, 1879, pp. 527-9. For the pundits, see *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op.cit., pp. 348-368; and Hermann Kreutzmann, *Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploration and espionage during and after the Great Game*, Wiesbaden 2017; Kreutzmann's work is notable for his timely praise for the work of the pundits and his criticism of the arrogant attitude of their masters.

21 See https://ru-lib.3dn.ru/publ/severcov_nikolaj_alekseevich_puteshestvija_po_turkestanskomu_kraju/1-1-0-1051.

22 George Nathaniel Curzon, 'The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus', *The Geographical Journal (GJ)*, Vol. 8-1, 1896, p. 80.

on 30 September and, travelling via Osh and Gulcha, reaching the Alai on 26 October. At the Kyzyl Art Pass they encountered severe weather conditions, and were forced to return to Osh, not entirely without results since Severtsov had collected many specimens, Skassi had been able to measure fifteen mountain peaks and Schwarz had made several measurements of terrestrial coordinates.



Markansu (“Death”) valley near the Kyzyl Art pass (1993)²³

The next year, Severtsov put together another expedition, that started research in the Ferghana Valley and reached the Alai on 27 July. After a few days’ independent research, the scientists met up at Kara Kul on 12 August and continued together beyond Kara Kul into unexplored territory in the eastern Pamirs: Rang Kul, Murghab, Alichur and Yashilkul – and, as Severtsov put it in the report of the expedition, “made the first comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and thorough research of the Pamir and finally determined its orography and scientific geography in relation to the Tian Shen.”²⁴

Unfortunately, a caravan bringing food was plundered en route by local Kyrgyz and the team had to cut short its work before reaching the Great Pamir and Zorkul. They returned to Ferghana on 26 September, bringing back specimens of 20,000 plants (representing some 1,000 different species), 60 mammals, 350 birds and 20 fish. Their work filled in many blanks in knowledge of the Pamirs and permitted major improvements in the maps produced by the Russian General Staff. In 1880, Severtsov published a map (*Карта Памира и сопредельных стран, дополненной по съемкам топографа Скасси и сведениям доктора зоологии Северцова* [Map of the Pamir and adjacent countries, supplemented by the surveys of the topographer Skassi] - 30 versts to the inch) that showed the main mountain ranges and valleys of the Pamirs and the subdivision between the different principalities of the Pamirs

²³ In the Turkic languages, appropriately, *kyzyl* means ‘red’.

²⁴ <http://www.chakhma.tajnet.com/pamir/pamir.htm> - see footnote 2.



Severtsov's painting of a Marco Polo sheep (<http://www.pamirs.org/wildlife.htm>)

(Karategin, Darwaz, Rushan, Badakhshan, Shughnan) and the historico-geographical areas of the Pamirs (Alichur, Khargush, Great, Little, Rang Kul, Sarikol, Sarez). A map showing Severtsov's route was also published in *Petermann's Geographische Mittheilungen* in 1880.

Like his contemporary Pyotr Semyonov - who explored the Tien Shan and was later permitted by Imperial decree to add the word Tienshansky to his name - Severtsov enjoyed a high reputation during his lifetime and he had hardly

returned from the Pamirs in 1878 when he was awarded the Imperial gold medal for his work there. It was, however, his last expedition. He was still cataloguing and writing up his collections of specimens and giving lectures at Moscow university and the IRGS when, in 1885, he was the victim of an accident in which his carriage broke through thin ice on a river near his home. The complete results of his work were published posthumously in 1886 by the IRGS.

1881-1883 Dr. Albert Edwardovich Regel (1845-1909)

At the time of Severtsov's Pamir expeditions, the Russians knew little about the Western and Southern Pamirs – Darwaz, Vanch, Rushan, Shughnan and Wakhan – and were dependent on the British for their maps. The legal status of these districts was moreover disputed and would not be clarified until 1895 (and not finally settled until 1907). The next Russian expeditions brought back more knowledge about them.

The Russian botanist and explorer Dr. Albert Regel, son of the director and founder of the St. Petersburg botanical garden, was the first European in the Western Pamirs (with the military topographer Kossiakov) and made a total of 3 expeditions to Shughnan, Rushan and Darwaz between 1881 and 1883. The king of Shughnan, Yusuf Alikhan, offered him generous assistance and encouraged his work - hospitality that cost the king his life, for when the news of Regel's mission reached the Amir of Afghanistan Yusuf Alikhan was arrested and executed. The Russians concluded that the British had instigated the execution as a warning to the local leaders not to encourage Russian exploration of Shughnan.

Regel had already travelled to the Tien Shan and Turfan in western China. In 1881 he travelled from Samarkand to the region of the Zarafshan glacier and entered the Pamirs through Garm and Saghirdasht to Kala-i-Khum. The Afghans had just occupied Shughnan and the uncertain political situation prevented him from travelling beyond Vanch. He returned to Samarkand on 12 December through Kulob.



Saghirdasht pass (1995)

In June 1882, Regel set off again from Samarkand to Saghirdasht and travelled up the Panj from Kala-i-Khum as far as the ruby mines in Shughnan, that he reached at the end of the year. En route he made detours to the Shiva lake on the left side of the Panj, the hot springs in Garm Chashma on the other side, Yemts on the Bartang, Durumkul in the Shokhdara valley and the Ghunt as far as Yashilkul. After more than twelve months' pioneering research, he returned to his base in Baldjuan (north of Kulob,

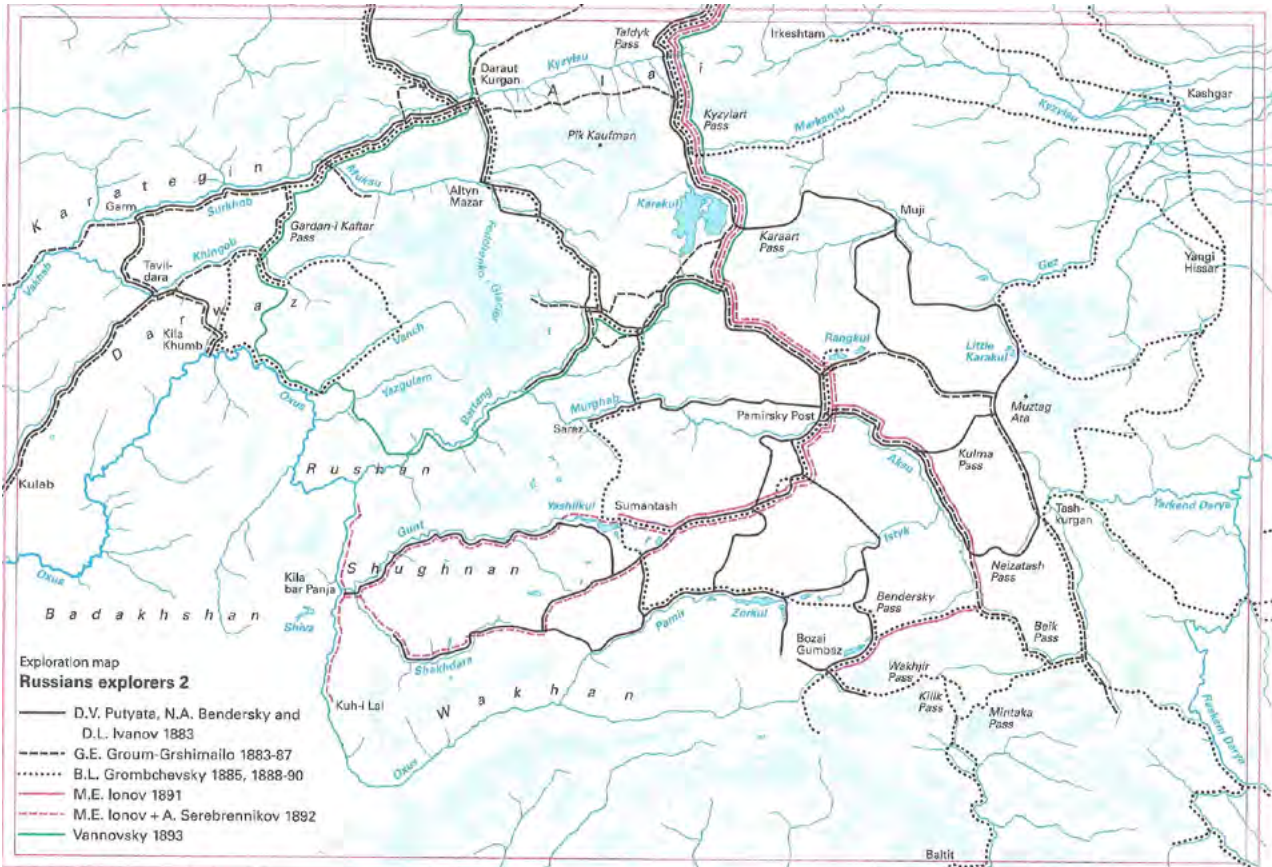
near what is now the Nurek lake). In November and December, despite illness, he returned to the Pamirs and travelled up the valley of the Khingob river, almost as far as the Garmo glacier.²⁵



Durumkul (Surat Toimastov)

²⁵ In 1884, reports on Regel's 1883 travels ('Путешествие в Шугнан' [Travel to Shughnan]) were published in the IIRGS, Vol. XX, No. 3, pp. 268-274; and in Petermann's Geographische Mittheilungen (pp. 86-89 and 332-334). See also: Royal Geographical Society (RGS) 1886, ref. nr Tajikistan S.9 – 5427581 (map of 1882 itinerary); and IIRGS 1883, Vol. XIX p.332 (provisional report of Shughnan itinerary with map).

IV. 1883-1893



Map courtesy Markus Hauser



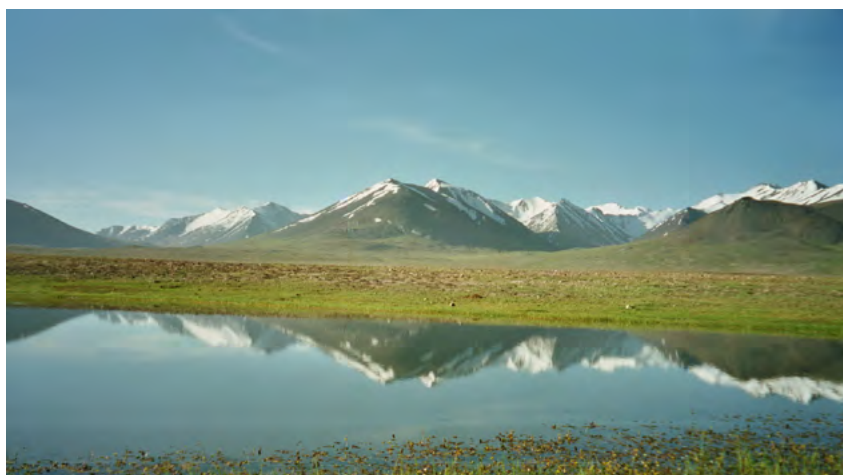
Putyata in 1904 (<https://ru.wikipedia.org>)

1883 Dmitry Vasilyevich Putyata (1855-1915)

The materials from Russian surveying activity up to 1880 were recorded on a new map: *Рекогносцировка путей, ведущих с урочища Сары-Таш к озеру Кара-Куль и на перевалы Кальта-даван и Кокуй-бель, произведенная инструментально с 11 по 23-е июля 1880 г. классными топографами Шемановским и Данковым* [Reconnaissance of routes leading from the fixed point Sary Tash to Kara Kul and to the Kalta Dawan and Kokuibel passes, measured with instruments from 11 to 23 July 1880 by the senior topographers Shemanovskiy and Dankov - 5 versts to the inch].

In the summer of 1883, the new Governor-General of Turkestan, Chernyaev, sent another military expedition to the Pamirs, under the leadership of an officer of the General Staff, Captain D. V. Putyata, to complete Severtsov’s work. The mission included the geologist D.L. Ivanov (1846-1924) - see next section - and the military topographer Bendersky (formerly attached to Stolietov’s mission to Kabul in 1878 and subsequently member of the 1895 Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission - see *The Great Game - myth or reality?*).

The group travelled together as far as Kara Kul. From there, Putyata and Bendersky travelled through Bulun Kul and Little Kara Kul (in Western China, today Xinjiang) to Tashkurgan, Ivanov taking the route through Rang Kul before joining them in Tashkurgan. The group returned to the Pamirs across the Nezatash pass and down the Aksu to the junction with the Akbaital. Splitting up again, Putyata went to Alichur and Yashilkul and then made a circuit across the Koitezek pass and back up the Toguzbulak confluent of the Ghunt. Meanwhile, Ivanov and Bendersky travelled through Chechtebe to Chakmaktynkul in the Little Pamir and went down the Wakhan as far as the Urta Bel pass and from there to Zorkul, and through Bash Gumbez to Alichur where they met up with Putyata. Returning by the Khargosh pass to the Great Pamir, Putyata and Bendersky discovered the Andamin pass (later named after Bendersky).



View to the Bendersky Pass from the Great Pamir (2000)

Ivanov travelled to Yashilkul across the Mats and Koitezek passes and then went down the Ghunt as far as Sardem, which was at that time the highest inhabited village of Shughnan. The group reunited and went up the Ghudara river to the foot of the Fedchenko glacier and returned to Marghilan in December.²⁶



Rang Kul, near the junction of the Aksu and Akbaital (2000)

Putyata, Bendersky and Ivanov covered more territory and provided more detailed and accurate information than any previous (or subsequent) expedition and completed the work reflected in the 1880 map. In his report, Putyata summed up the outcome as follows:

1. The drawing up of a map of all places visited on a scale of five versts. The topographic work achieved in the Pamirs was joined in the north and west to previous Russian and English

²⁶ *IIRGS*, 1884, summarised by Curzon, 'The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus'.

surveys. In the Khanate of Bukhara it covered a few unexplored routes.

2. Achieved 17 astronomical observations with the aim of defining longitudinal and latitudinal points. The observations resulted from application of basic measuring points of the Russians and English intermediate on the route followed by the expedition.
3. Plot of the locality around the points to a size of 1 square verst taken at 250 sazhen scale [a sazhen corresponds to 7 feet].
4. Collected herbarium of Pamir flora.
5. The geological member, mining engineer Ivanov, put together a rich mineralogical collection and made a great quantity of pencil sketches.
6. Made observations with thermometer, barometer and aneroid for determining heights.²⁷

Putyata was also an accomplished artist and in 1889 published in St. Petersburg a handbook on military drawing: *Принципы военного искусства в толковании китайских полководцев* [Principles of Military Drawing in the Representation of Chinese Military Leaders]. Ivanov's diary and sketch map of the expedition are kept in the Russian State History Archive in St. Petersburg.



Dmitri Lvovich Ivanov in 1870
(http://az.lib.ru/i/iwanow_d_l/)

1883 Dmitri Lvovich Ivanov (1846-1924)

Dmitri Lvovich Ivanov had a somewhat unusual military and academic career. While studying at Moscow University, he was convicted as an accomplice in the April 1866 assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II, had to abandon his studies and – in lieu of banishment – was compulsorily drafted to the front line battalion in Orenburg as a foot soldier, and later transferred to Tashkent. He participated in the campaigns in Samarkand and Khiva and was rewarded for his bravery by being made an officer. His military experience made him a convinced pacifist, and he left the army as soon as he could to resume his studies. After graduation as a mining engineer, he returned to Turkestan and, in 1880, travelled with Mushketov on an expedition to the Zerafshan glacier, and, as we have seen, was attached to Putyata's 1883 Pamirs expedition.

In August 1883, Ivanov left Putyata's camp near Kara Kul and set off on his own down the Akbaital river to Murghab and Sarez in search of provisions for the detachment. *Шугнан* [Shughnan], the account of his journey was published in St. Petersburg in 1885. His encounter with the mountain Tajiks, the first recorded by a European, was the beginning of a long and mostly cordial relationship between the Russians and the peoples of the Pamirs.²⁸ It also has a certain poignancy: less than thirty years later a major earth slide blocked the Murghab river just downstream from their

27 See *PRGS* Vol. 6, No. 3, March 1884, pp. 135-142 (with map): <https://pahar.in/mountains/Books%20and%20Articles/Central%20Asia/1884%20Russian%20Pamir%20Expedition%20of%201883%20from%20PRGSv6NS%20s.pdf>

28 See http://az.lib.ru/i/iwanow_d_l/text_1885_sugnan1.shtml. In view of the historical importance of this encounter, substantial extracts from Ivanov's memoir are given here.

meeting-place and the village of Sarez was fated to disappear under the waters of the lake that built up behind this enormous natural dam that bears today the name of what was once a village.

The fields are scattered around Sarez, rising in fine terraces, one above the other. The grain has already been harvested and the sheaves are stacked upright near the threshing floor, in a long pile, around which a group of oxen and donkeys moves stupidly round and round, a square wicker basket in the centre.

They stopped me 3/4 versts before Sarez, under tall poplars on grassy knolls. The fresh wind was unpleasantly sharp despite the fact that it was about 11 o'clock and the sun shone in a clear sky.

Soon a group of some twenty-five mountain men came from the settlement to the poplars. In front were the



Threshing in the Pamirs - unchanged since 1883 (above, Yamchun 1997;
l. Djamak, Yazgulom valley - Bobrinsky 1908 <https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/336875.html>; r. Vanch 1995)

old men, the 'white beards' (Aksakals), in new light-coloured cloaks and with fresh turbans on their heads. At their sides they carried huge wooden cups. The deputation moved without haste, with eastern dignity. On a meadow they spread two long felt carpets: one for me, one for the deputation.

The meeting began in a most friendly way.

"You will not believe how glad we are at your arrival," the headman started saying. "Such a visitor we never

thought to see in Sarez.”

I answered with an appropriate greeting. We were content. Opposite me they set out some flat plates about three feet wide. In each of them there was local mountain food. Among the most typical I will mention the thin (2 mm.) flat cakes covering the whole plate, easily rolled in a tube; like big flat cakes, but magnificent, reminding me of our rural “pancakes” with a filling of oil and sour cream; rich pasta in thin quadrangular slices with the same filling; clearly, moreover, such hospitality had to include curdled milk.

“Now that you are among us, we count ourselves already as Russian citizens,” the old men pressed forward with their political conclusions, “already we are no longer afraid of the Afghans! Give us only a note in your hand and nobody will dare touch us.”

I did not really expect such a resolute move from secular delicacies directly to the question of citizenship and, I must admit, rather hesitated in the presence of such a large group of people who were clearly used to plain speaking. To be a diplomat with simple people is indeed a most difficult thing, and it seemed to me that I was now in a delicate diplomatic situation.

“My dear friends!” I began my diplomatic reply, “I must thank you for your hearty welcome and I hope I shall manage to repay you for your kind attentions. But I came here as a simple scientist who is interested in stones, mountains, rivers and glaciers: it is not my business to interfere in your people’s lives.”

“We understand,” they answered, “that you have many occupations! But we ask you, we beg you, please to take us under the protection of Russia.”

“You live here far from the world outside,” I continued, “but you know that such things cannot be done as simply as you would wish them to be. Only the will of the Great White Tsar can decide on your naturalization.”

In this way I tried to hint delicately that it was not appropriate to conduct such conversations in public.

“Ah! In this respect we are not afraid,” the old men quickly replied, “there are no traitors among us! Here we are one family, with one soul. Each of us thinks the same: all, as one, and one, as all. For us there is only one enemy: the Afghan!”²⁹

In face of such sincerity, I immediately decided to abandon diplomacy and to use simple language with these simple people. I tried to give them the best advice, since I had no clear orders. I told them that the best action for them was to approach the Russian leadership (the Governor of Ferghana) though I did not hide the fact that their isolated position in the mountains far from Ferghana, Alai and Pamir, would make it very difficult to fulfill their wishes in relation to citizenship of Russia. It would be easier to address themselves to the Emir of Bukhara.

“We already tried it,” they answered. “The Bukharans have tightened their rule, and we no longer trust them. We are reluctant to pass under their authority.” (This last comment hinted at a difference in Moslem doctrines.)

“Well, and how about the Afghans?” I asked.

“The Afghans cannot reach us here, and we shall not go to them. There are only three roads from here

²⁹ For instances of the depredations of the Afghans (and, to a lesser extent, the Bukharans) see the reports by Grombchevsky, Skersky and Serebrennikov in the sections below.



Lake Sarez today (1998)

to Shughnan: this one here, the Marjanai, the one through Langar and the one down the Murghab river. To get here is difficult, and Bartang cannot be passed at all. You know now the road here along the Murghab from above; downstream the road is ten times more difficult. Here you may walk, but there even on foot you will not get through.” “No, they will not pass!” someone added confidently.

After further discussion about my mission, I asked to visit Sarez.

“For you there is nothing forbidden. You, as our chief, may see everything,” the foreman answered kindly. “We doubt though that you will find anything interesting – we are so poor.”

The villagers gave Ivanov a letter for the Russian authorities, that had been sent up the Bartang from Shughnan, confirming the request of the local population for Russian citizenship and for help against the Afghans.

Leaving Sarez, I again complained that fate, yet again, had not given me sufficient opportunity to peer closely and at length into the life of a people interesting in every respect. I needed to hurry to join Putyata’s detachment in order to deliver the urgent provisions I had obtained.

The Journal of the IRGS published the following notice shortly after the return of Putyata, Bendersky and Ivanov:

1883 will remain forever engraved in the history of the exploration of the Pamirs. All the scientific expeditions and travellers that have been recently to the Pamirs – whether from our country or from India – described relatively unimportant territory, between which there remained many unseen and disconnected areas. What Pamir travellers brought us was each time only a small part of what was hoped for them.

Already for some time there was a feeling that a larger and properly equipped expedition would be necessary, one that could at once settle the array of unanswered geographical questions in relation to the Pamirs. The Pamir expedition that was organised last year meets this criterion exactly, at least for the eastern Pamir. ... Thanks to the energy of these persons, the eastern part of the Pamir highland has now been covered in all possible directions.³⁰

A map showing the routes taken by the individual members of the expedition was also published by

30 *Памир* [The Pamirs], op.cit. (<http://www.chakhma.narod.ru/pamir/pamir.htm> - see footnote 2).

the Society.³¹

In May 1885, Ivanov spoke to the IRGS about his travels and experiences in the Pamirs:

Agriculture is characterised by ... back-breaking and difficult work – for meagre results. To prepare the fields, they must begin by removing the vast deposits of stones. It is not enough to move aside just the large stones – the main task is to collect the mass of small stones that cover the earth.³² If you see the land of these mountain people, you would not believe that they are fields and not stone-paved roads. But when you catch sight of the stone walls that surround every little parcel of land, and when you understand that these walls are built with the millions of stones collected in their fields, you begin to appreciate the work put in by these mountain people to obtain some kind of a living from this land. And then you understand their great need to settle and cultivate and live on their own land, however tiny in size. ... If a mountain dweller saw a narrow stream and a piece of land next to it, he would go there, even if he had to travel 20 versts to get there and his harvest were only a few handfuls of barley. Admit that one must have a very great love of the land!³³

Ivanov was deeply impressed by his encounter with the remarkable people of the Western Pamirs and started to put together a glossary of local words. Published in 1895,³⁴ it awakened enormous interest in the academic community, and led to the systematic study of the Pamir languages, for here was living proof that the inhabitants of the Pamirs were the direct descendants of the peoples who had created the Avesta and Zoroastrianism – and theories emerged that the Pamirs were the cradle of Aryan civilisation and that their languages might be older even than the Avesta.

1884 Grigorii Efimovich Grumm-Grshimailo (1860-1936)

Grigorii Efimovich Grumm-Grshimailo entered the faculty of physics and mathematics at the university of St. Petersburg in 1880 and rapidly developed an interest in entomology. After publishing a scientific work on the butterflies of the Crimea in 1881, he was elected a member of the Russian Entomological Society.



Grigorii Efimovich Grumm-Grshimailo (Pamir Archive - Markus Hauser)

On vacation in Saratov in 1883, he met the German collector G. Rückbeil who had made collections in Turkestan and probably awakened his interest in exploring the butterflies of Central Asia. Shortly after his return to St. Petersburg, he was introduced to the Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich Romanov – also a keen lepidopterist – who expressed interest in publishing an article by him in his *Mémoires sur les Lépidoptères* (St. Petersburg, 1884-1901).

31 Also published by the RGS in 1884: *The Pamir – Illustrating the Russian Explorations in 1883. From a map compiled by M. Bolsheff - translated for the Royal Geographical Society by J.F. Beddeley.* (RGS ref. *nr Asia S/S.50*).

32 This remained a major task at the time of the Aga Khan Foundation's agricultural reform programme, beginning in 1993 (see Section VI below).

33 *IIRGS*, Vol. XX, 1885, p. 230.

34 Ivanov had given his notes on the Shughnan language to the IRGS. They attracted the attention of one of the leading philological scholars of the time, Karl Germanovich Zaleman, a Baltic German and member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In 1890 he succeeded V.V. Radlov as director of the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg and became responsible for its rich collection of manuscripts. In 1895, Zaleman published Ivanov's glossary in *Восточные заметки* [Eastern Notes], St. Petersburg, 1895, pp. 269-320 ('Шугнанский словарь Д.Л. Иванова' [Shughnan Glossary of D.L. Ivanov] with his own analyses and commentaries).



Illustration by Grumm-Grshimailo
(<http://rusevr.asia/nastoyashhie-evrazijcy-kak-russkie-issledovali-centralnuyu-aziyu/>)

This meeting had a major influence on the course of Grumm-Grshimailo's subsequent work. The Grand Duke offered to finance an expedition to the unknown regions of the Pamirs on condition that part of his collections should be placed at the Grand Duke's disposal. Excited at the prospect, Grumm-Grshimailo obtained permission to bring forward his final examinations – refusing the offer of a faculty post at the university – and, with the help of Mushketov, Oshanin and Ivanov, put together an itinerary for his journey in the Pamirs.

In early 1884, he left St. Petersburg and arrived in Osh two months later. Accompanied by an escort of Cossacks, he left for the Pamirs on 20 May. Reaching the Alai a few days later over the Vuadil pass, he started up the Altyn Dara to the Ters Agar pass, with the aim of exploring the upper Muk Su and getting on to the glacier. However, bad weather forced him to return to the Alai valley and he travelled from there over the Kyzyl Art pass as far as Kara Kul, completing his collections along the way.

The expedition returned to Osh on 20 August with twelve thousand specimens of 146 different species – of which 30 were hitherto unknown. Excited by the wealth of information assembled, he decided not to return to St. Petersburg, but to stay in Turkestan to assess his collections and write a report for Romanov's *Mémoires* (published in the 1885 volume). In agreement with Romanov, he put together the itinerary for a new expedition for the summer of 1885.

This time, in addition to Romanov's financial support, the IRGS gave him a grant and the Governor-General of Turkestan, Rosenbach, provided an escort of Cossacks and two laboratory assistants.

Rosenbach also arranged for the topographer Rodionov to accompany the expedition. They left Samarkand on 29 March and travelled to the Khingob river and Tavildara before exploring Karategin, Darwaz and much of Kulob.

The expedition returned to Samarkand on 9 August, bringing with it more than twenty thousand entomological specimens and many animals and birds, a large number of which had never been seen before. Grumm-Grshimailo worked on classifying the



Colias christophi Grumm-Grshimailo (<https://www.lepidofrance.com/>)

collections during the following year: his report was published in the *Mémoires* in 1887 and the collection of animals and birds was transferred to the Zoological Museum of the Academy of Sciences.

Grumm-Grshimailo was elected as a full member of the IRGS and was awarded the Society's silver medal for his work on these two expeditions. After an expedition to the Tian Shen in 1886, he was again in the Pamirs in 1887, travelling from Kara Kul to the Tanimas and Ghudara rivers (the easternmost glacier in the Fedchenko system, close to this route, was subsequently named after Grumm-Grshimailo). He also explored the Akbaital river, the Great Pamir (Zorkul) and Sarikol. On their way from there to the Wakhan, Petrovsky, the Russian Consul-General, sent them orders to return. Travelling down the Aksu to Murghab, they reached Osh on 17 August and brought with them a large collection of specimens from the eastern Pamirs.

In 1889-1890, he travelled on an expedition to Western China and, in 1890, his monumental work on the butterflies, flora and fauna of the Pamirs: 'Le Pamir et la faune lépidoptérologique', was published in four volumes in Romanov's *Mémoires*. In the last years of his life, Grumm-Grshimailo served as Vice-President of the IRGS.

The legacy of his published works is more than enough to confirm Grumm-Grshimailo's scientific reputation, although many are now out of print and only available through antiquarian booksellers.³⁵ Several of his writings are as yet unpublished and remain in the scientific archive of the IRGS: diaries of expeditions to the Pamir (1885-1886), to Western China and Mongolia, reports on expeditions and texts of lectures on the geography of China and Mongolia. Many butterflies are named after him.

1888-1892 Bronislav Ludwigoich Grombchevsky (1855-1926)

³⁵ Some, however, have been digitized for the Internet (e.g. *Le Pamir et sa Faune Lépidoptérologique*: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/26230219#page/11/mode/1up>; and *Novae species et varietates Rhopalocerorum e Pamir*: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/12349342#page/867/mode/1up>).



Bronislav Ludwigovich Grombchevsky (<http://www.pamirs.org/historical%20photos.htm>)

Bronislav Ludwigovich Grombchevsky (Grabczewski) was born into a Polish noble family and, like many young men of his class at that time, joined a Russian infantry regiment. As soon as he became an officer, he was sent to Turkestan where he served as an aide-de-camp successively to General Skobelev and Prince Wittgenstein: in 1875-6, he participated in Skobelev's campaigns in Kokand and the Alai and, in 1878, in Samarkand. In 1880, he was appointed to the military staff as deputy head of the Marghilan district. In addition to his military duties, he rapidly developed an interest in surveying, entomology, botany and ethnography, that he was able to put to good use on his travels, of which he also kept a hitherto unpublished photographic record. He had a gift for languages and spoke fluent Tajik and Uzbek.

In 1885 he was sent to Kashgar as a member of the Russo-Chinese border commission and took the opportunity to explore large parts of the frontier regions and survey some 1,000 kilometres of routes. For this work he was awarded the silver medal of the IRGS.

In 1888, Grombchevsky travelled from Kara Kul through Sarikol to Hunza, where he was cordially received by the Mir, causing much consternation in London and Calcutta.³⁶ Just after leaving Hunza, Grombchevsky received an invitation from the ruler of Wakhan, Ali Mordan Shah, to visit his territory, offering him a safe passage to Shughnan because (according to him) the Afghans had now withdrawn. Reluctantly, however, he was forced to abandon this idea.

... my remaining financial resources consisted of 37 roubles. Moreover, I no longer had any gifts and almost all my horses, and those of my Cossacks, had died. To travel on foot in Wakhan and further through Shughnan and Badakhshan to Bukhara on foot, without money and the gifts required in Central Asia was not appropriate for my national pride. I changed direction to Kashgar, hoping to borrow money in the consulate to get horses and gifts and, then, freshly equipped, to travel through the Pamirs to Wakhan. In Kashgar I received the most hospitable and a cordial welcome in the family of the consul N.F. Petrovsky who, having supplied me all my needs for my return travel in winter through the Tian-Shen to Ferghana, categorically rejected my plans for a journey to Wakhan, on the grounds that he did not have the approval of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for such a venture.³⁷

On this journey Grombchevsky travelled some 2,800 kilometres through the Pamirs, much of it in hitherto unexplored territory, described twelve high passes and made a detailed survey of a large part of this route. He also established 14 astronomical positions and measured 158 heights, as well as bringing back entomological and geological collections. For this expedition he was awarded the gold medal of the IRGS.

³⁶ See *The Great Game – myth or reality?* op. cit.

³⁷ Handwritten report by Lieutenant-Colonel Grombchevsky dated 14 March 1891 (<http://militera.lib.ru/research/grombchevsky/index.html>). As we have seen, a year later Petrovsky also prevented Grumm-Grshimailo's party from going into the Wakhan. His motives may have been genuine concern for their safety, but more likely a desire not to exacerbate the already tense relations with the British about the status of the Wakhan.



Poi Mazor in the upper Vanch valley, looking towards the Academy of Sciences range (1995)

In 1889, Grombchevsky was sent by the IRGS to explore Kafiristan, Chitral and neighbouring regions, accompanied by the botanist Conrad. Leaving Marghilan on 12 June, he travelled through the Alai and Karategin and reached Darwaz and Vanch in July, but was prevented from going further south.

When we came to borders of Roshan the ruler, Said Akbar Shah, had sent me a letter containing the following: “To the Conqueror of the world who resembles an eagle, the Great Lord. I pledge to you, to the possessor of the universe, that up to the present time I counted my country as part of the possessions of the Great White Tsar – and then thieves and bandits were here and have seized half my possessions. I have previously sent a report about my situation to the servants of the Great Sovereign, but have not yet received an answer. As far as my affairs are concerned, I express my hope that my country will be accepted under the protection of the Great White Tsar, that the thieves will depart and will cease to ruin my native land. I shall inform you in due time about subsequent events. While Roshan is in my hands, count this province as your possession. What can I say more?” The letter was signed: Said-Mahomed-Akbar-Khan, son of Said-Emir-Khan.

After this came a second letter from the ruler of Shughnan, who writes: “Having inquired about your desire to pass to Kafiristan, I must report, that the roads through Shughnan are held in an iron ring by the Afghans and everyone is at their mercy. The road to get out through Bartang to the Pamir is blocked by the collapse of the cliff-ledges and by the flooding of the river – this is a serious danger and it is hardly passable even for pedestrians. Do not think that I want to prohibit you from passing by the river Bartang! In response to your request, I only report on the difficulties awaiting you.”³⁸

38 Ibid.



Collapsed cliffside road near Roshorv in the Bartang valley, August 2010 (Stéphane Henriod)



Cliffside passage near Roshorv in the Bartang valley 1898 (Ralph Cobbold)

As a result, he was obliged to adopt the alternative plan given him by the IRGS to explore the upper Yarkand valley. He went back through Karategin to the Alai, and made his way to the Taghdumbash Pamir through Ghudara, Sarez, Murghab and Yashil Kul.³⁹

In 1889, being unable to get into Kafiristan from the Badakhshan side, I decided to try to get there through Chitral and, for this purpose, I sent a courier with a letter to Aman-ul-Mulk in which I asked him to help me reach Kafiristan, only accompanied by one of my servants, and that I would recompense him with whatever

³⁹ Letter from Grombchevsky to Veniukoff of 22.10.1889, cited in *BSG*, 1890, No. 1, pp. 6-7. See also *BSG*, 7e Série, Tome 12e, 1891, p. 417; and *BSG*, 1892, 7e Série, Tome 13e, p. 406-7.

he wished to take from the property of my expedition. Having sent the letter, I went to explore the upper Aksu and, accompanied by 3 Cossacks, reached the sources of the river Wakhan-darya with the purpose of reaching the Hudargurt (Sukhsu-rabot) pass, the entrance to Chitral and Yasin. This excursion was very risky, as it was necessary to pass over a kind of natural boundary at Langar, where there was an Afghan post. Due to strong winds we were able to get past Langar unnoticed, but the same winds wiped out the traces of the path and heaped up such huge snowdrifts that we could go no further. Nevertheless, we were able to determine precisely the position of the Hudargurt and Kelenj (Irshud) passes into Hunza. On our return we had to stop in a lodging for the night so close to the Afghan post that we clearly heard the neighing of the horses and the calls of the night-watch.

We passed the post before daylight and left on the main route to Boza-i-Gumbez and on the fourth day returned to camp. Shortly afterwards, my courier returned from Chitral and brought a letter from Sarvar-ul-Mulk, the ruler of Mastuj who wrote:

“In the name of my father I inform you that my country is overflowing with Englishmen who watch my every step and it is therefore impossible to help you to pass in any way. You wrote: ‘Let me pass with one or two servants; what harm I can cause your native land, having come alone?’ You do not know what that means. As a herd of sheep runs in panic in front of one wolf so the Ferenghis are afraid of one Russian. How can I protect you from your most malicious enemies who, I tell you, are all over my country? And if anything should happen to you, what can I tell the White Sovereign?”

The letter is interesting in that it is written by the ruler of a country that has no relations with Russia and, on the contrary, has for many years been receiving a grant from the Indian government.⁴⁰

Changing his plans yet again, he travelled to the Yarkand valley where his path crossed with that of Francis Younghusband, the English explorer (and spy) who described their meeting as follows:

At the camping-ground near the junction of the Ilisu with the Yarkand River, I received a letter from Captain Grombtchevsky, written in Turki, saying that he had halted at Khaian-aksai and was anxious to meet me. I answered, in Persian and English, that I was very glad to have the opportunity of meeting so distinguished a traveller, and would arrange to encamp with him the next day.

On October 23 we marched to Khaian-aksai, leaving the valley of the Yarkand River and ascending a narrow valley whose bottom was almost choked up with the thick growth of willow trees. Rounding a spur, we saw ahead of us the little Russian camp, and on riding up to it a fine-looking man dressed in the Russian uniform came out of one of the tents and introduced himself as Captain Grombtchevsky. He was about thirty-six years of age, tall, and well built, and with a pleasant, genial manner. He greeted me most cordially, and introduced me to a travelling naturalist. We had a short talk, and he then asked me to have dinner with him, and we sat down to a very substantial repast of soup and stews, washed down with a plentiful supply of vodka.

This was the first meeting of Russian and English exploring parties upon the borderlands of India, and there was much in each of us to interest the other. Captain Grombtchevsky had already been to Hunza, having

⁴⁰ Handwritten report, 14.3.1891, op. cit.

made a venturesome journey across the Pamirs into that country in 1888, that is, the year before we met. It had on the present occasion been his intention, he informed me, to penetrate to the Punjab through Chitral or Kafiristan, but the Amir of Afghanistan had refused him permission to enter Afghan territory on his way there. He had accordingly come across the Pamirs, and was now hoping to enter Ladak and Kashmir, for a permission to do which he was writing to the British Resident in Kashmir.⁴¹

Grombchevsky nearly met his death on attempting to reach Tibet after their meeting: Younghusband had recommended a wholly impracticable itinerary across the Karakoram pass to the edge of the high Tibetan plateau in the middle of December that led to the death of twenty-five of his thirty-three horses and to severe frostbite for his cossack escort.⁴² It is difficult to condone Younghusband's behaviour, yet he seemed positively to have revelled in it, noting in a letter to the British Resident in Srinagar, Colonel Robert Parry-Nisbet, that it was "a route of absolutely no importance, leading from nowhere to nowhere, and passing over very elevated plateaux and mountains without grass or fuel, and to cross which in winter will cause him extreme hardships and loss to his party."⁴³

Grombchevsky was understandably aggrieved at the British refusal to allow him to pass the winter in Kashmir since

.... at the very time when he was thus treated, the Russian government had given permission to (1) Major Cumberland to travel all over the Russian strategical frontier, viz., through Cashgar, Fergana (Fergistan), Samarkand, Bokhara, and to proceed to Europe by way of the Trans-Caspian Railway; and (2) Lieutenant Littledale to travel in a contrary direction to India, viz., through Turkistan, the Pamir region, Tchatra [Chitral], etc. and to enter Cashmere by the same route of which Colonel Grambcheffsky desired to make use.⁴⁴

Not long afterwards, similar permission (and VIP treatment) was accorded by the Russians to Lord Dunmore. Grombchevsky commented ironically: "My expedition comprised only 13 persons, the majority of whom were ignorant Asiatics. Surely, British rule in India is not in such a precarious condition that it has cause to fear such a formidable expedition?"⁴⁵

He deserved better in his relationship with Younghusband. He had shared with him (and the Chinese) the latest Russian cartographic information as well as his honest perception of the vexed issue of legal sovereignty over the Pamirs: he was well aware of the signal importance of a stone with Chinese inscriptions at Sumantash⁴⁶ and hoped sincerely that the assertion of Chinese sovereignty might put an end to Afghan atrocities against the population of the Pamirs. His openness caused him some problems at home, but was typical of the approach taken by most Russian explorers – even if they were officers – that scientific research came before military ambition and he could be forgiven for assuming that Younghusband was playing the 'game' by similar rules. Moreover, it was not at all clear at the time of his meeting with Younghusband that the Russians would adopt a 'forward policy' and if he caused political problems for his masters, he at least had the merit – by pushing into the outer edges of the Pamirs and by his unprecedented visit to Hunza – of provoking them to define and implement a policy for the territory of the Pamirs (and explain it to the British!).

41 Francis Younghusband, *The Heart of a Continent*, London 1904, pp. 234-5 (<https://archive.org/details/heartcontinent00unkngoog/page/n276>).

42 Hopkirk, op.cit., pp. 457-458.

43 Letter 26 October 1889 – quoted in Patrick French, *Younghusband – The last great imperial adventurer*, London 1994, p.77.

44 Article and interview by W. Barnes Stevani in *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, New Series Vol. II, July-October 1891, pp. 257-8.

45 Ibid.

46 See <http://www.pamirs.org/The%20Sumantash%20Stone.pdf>.

In February 1890, he started again for Tibet, reaching the Tibetan plateau in May. In September, he was in the lower Yarkand, where he again met Younghusband (and shared several cordial dinners in his company). In October he returned along the upper Kyzyl Su to the Alai.

On his 1889-90 expedition, Grombchevsky covered 7,680 km (of which 5,300 in unexplored territory), fixed 73 astronomical points, measured 351 heights and brought back some 32,000 zoological and botanical specimens together with geological samples and many photographs.⁴⁷ On return to St. Petersburg, he suffered a physical and mental collapse and was reportedly on crutches for some time.⁴⁸ He was placed on leave for two months to convalesce abroad but was unable to leave immediately as the Tsar had requested that he present to him personally his collection of photographs. In 1891, he accompanied Vrevsky, the Governor-General of Turkestan, to the Pamirs, and in 1892, was part of Ionov's 'flying detachment' (see below).

Grombchevsky drew particular attention to the sufferings of the local population, of which he had direct evidence.

The Pamir is far from being a wilderness. It contains a permanent population, residing in it both summer and winter... The population is increasing to a marked extent... Slavery on the Pamir is flourishing; moreover, the principal contingents of slaves are obtained from Chatrar [Chitral], Yasin, and Kanjut [Hunza], Khanates under the protectorate of England... On descending into Pamir we found ourselves between the cordons of the Chinese and Afghan armies... The population of Shignan, numbering 2000 families, had fled to Pamir hoping to find a refuge in the Russian provinces from 'the untold atrocities which the Afghans were committing in the conquered provinces of Shignan, &c.'⁴⁹

In 1892 he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and appointed head of the military district of Osh; in 1903, he became governor of Astrakhan. His three-volume account of his travels was published (in Polish) in Warsaw in 1924-5; his Memoirs were published the following year, also in Warsaw.⁵⁰

Grombchevsky made a major contribution to knowledge of the Pamirs and enjoyed a high reputation both inside and outside Russia. His social origins, his fame, as well as his friendly relations with the Tsar, however, did not serve him well under the Bolsheviks and he died in poverty in 1926.⁵¹

47 BSG, 1890, Nos. 16-17, 'Communication de M. Veniukoff', pp. 566-7; BSG 1891, 7e Série, Tome 12e, pp. 416-7; and BSG, 1892, 7e Série, Tome 13e, p. 406.

48 A.V. Postnikov, *Схватка на «Крыше Мира» - Политики, разведчики и географы в борьбе за Памир в XIX веке* [Struggle on the 'Roof of the World': Politicians, spies and geographers in the contest for the Pamir in the 19th century], Moscow, 2001, p. 231.

49 *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, New Series Vol. III, January-April 1892, p. 32.

50 Grabczewski, Bronislaw: *Kaszgaria: Kraj i ludzie* [Kashgaria: the place and the people], 1924; *Przez Pamiry i Hindukusz do źródeł rzeki Indus* [Through the Pamirs and Hindu-Kush to the source of the Indus], 1925; *W pustyniach Raskemu i Tibetu* [In the deserts of Raska and Tibet], 1925; *Na służbie rosyjskiej* [On Russian service], 1926. A further account of his travels, *Podróże po Azji Środkowej* [On the road in Central Asia], was published posthumously in 1958.

51 For summary of Grombchevsky's career, see <https://tourist.academic.ru/11954/>.

1891-1893 Mikhail Efremovich Ionov (1846-1923)

In 1876, after the annexation of the Khanate of Kokand, a young captain, Mikhail Efremovich Ionov, was appointed head of the new military administration in Osh. His post required unusual talents: strong military qualifications, a cool head at a time when Russian power was constantly under threat from local leaders – frequently with the encouragement of the British – and an ability to understand and negotiate with the local population, jealous of their freedom and nomadic traditions. It was under his supervision that the contours of modern Osh were developed: roads, bridges, canals, bazaars and public buildings.

In 1891, Ionov was put in charge of a ‘flying’ Pamir detachment that was sent in July to report on the security situation throughout the Pamirs and make a demonstration of Russian sovereignty. They left their camp in Bor-Daba (now the site of a customs post at the Kyrgyz frontier) on the north side of the Kyzyl Art pass on 21 July.



Mikhail Efremovich Ionov
(http://pamirgeo.ru/perv_issl)

One of Ionov’s first acts was to appoint a Kyrgyz, Kurumchi-Bek, as headman of the local communities in Rang Kul, Murghab and Alichur. This provoked, naturally, the hostility of the Chinese and it did not take long before the Kyrgyz elders wrote formally to Ionov requesting Russian protection. In his book *Памирская страна* [The Pamir country],⁵² published in New Marghilan in 1903, Captain Vasili Nikolaevich Zaitsev – who succeeded Ionov as civil and military administrator of Osh and then of the Pamirs – quotes Kurumchi-Bek’s reaction to the arrival of the Russians in the Pamirs:

In the Spring of 1891 the Chinese fetched me to their leader and handed over an order from the Kashgar governor that the Englishman Younghusband was to be received with honours, and shortly afterwards he arrived with 10 armed riders and 20 horses in train. At our first meeting he gave me a double-barrelled breech-loading shotgun, a big Yamba [piece of silver] worth 110 roubles and tried to persuade me to be his faithful servant, promising me the highest position after their occupation of the Pamirs. He said that the English would first send the Afghans, and then occupy the Pamirs themselves – according to him there may be many Russians here but they are a bad people and their soldiers are undisciplined thieves; his, however, are restrained and honest. For myself, I never saw any English soldiers, and I don’t know how they are, but from the Russians we get now only help, without insults and are surprised that we don’t hear any bad words from their officers about the English, while they are always swearing about the Russians. Why is this? The Chinese and the Afghans have put a price on my head and now the English are probably angry with me because I took their presents but have not yet provided them with any information.⁵³

By early August Ionov reached Boza-i-Gumbez in the Wakhan, and was surprised to find Francis Younghusband camped there. This is how Younghusband described the encounter.

On August 13 the [Russian] reconnoitring party returned [from the Baroghil pass]. As I looked out of the door of my tent, I saw some twenty Cossacks with six officers riding by, and the Russian flag carried in front. I

52 See <http://forum.rusbaseda.org/index.php?topic=11782.0>.

53 *Памир* [The Pamirs], op. cit., p. 85.

sent out a servant with my card and invitation to the officers to come in and have some refreshments. Some of them came in, and the chief officer was introduced to me as Colonel Yonoff [Ionov]. He and all of them were dressed in loose 'khaki' blouses, with baggy pantaloons and high boots, and they wore the ordinary peaked Russian cap, covered with white cloth. Colonel Yonoff also wore on his breast a white enamel Maltese cross, which I recognised as the Cross of St. George, the most coveted Russian decoration, and I at once congratulated him upon holding so distinguished an order. Colonel Yonoff was a



Chinese Yamba (Shaimak - 2004)

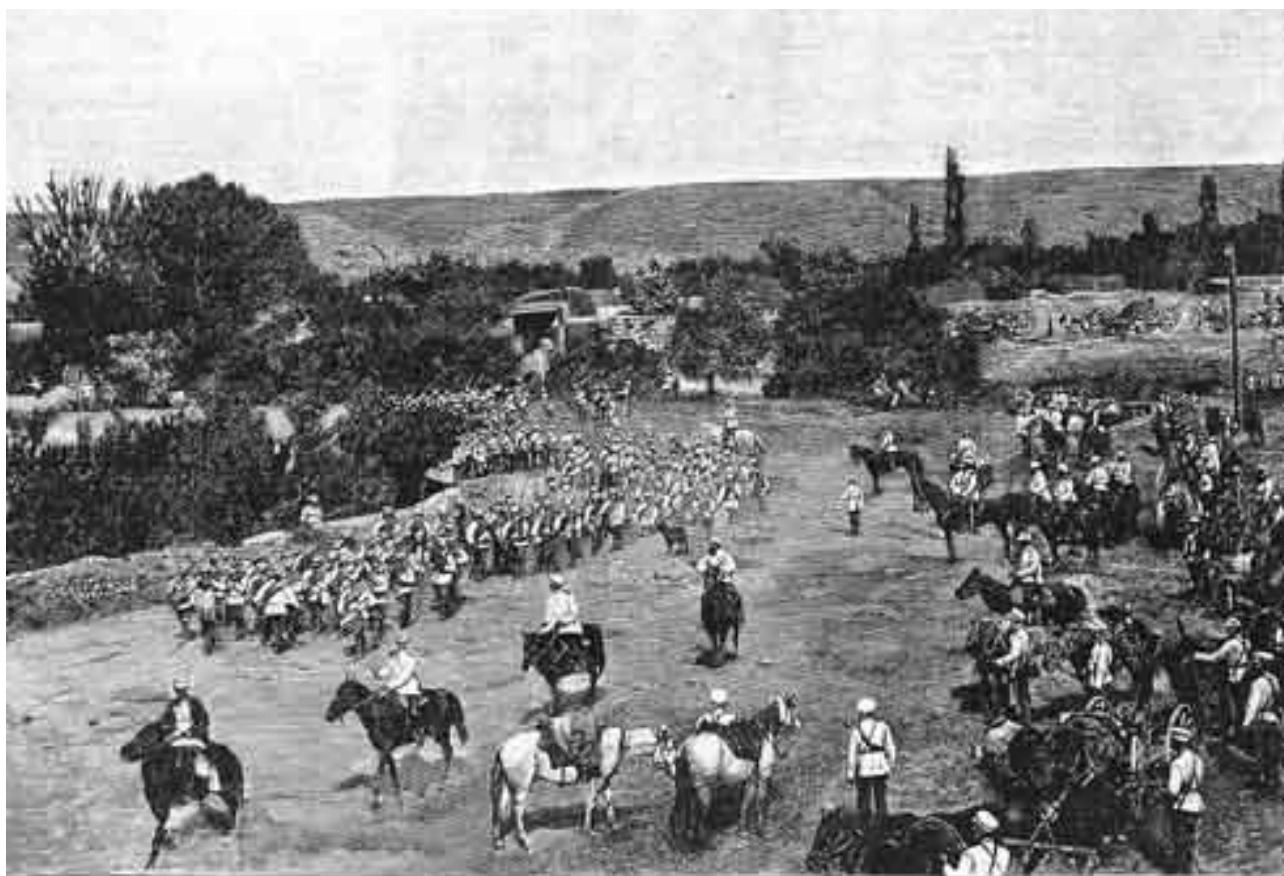
modest, quiet-mannered man, of a totally different stamp from Captain Grombchevsky. He had less of the *bonhomie* of the latter, and talked little; but he was evidently respected by his officers, and they told me he had distinguished himself in the Khivan campaign. I gave the Russian officers some tea and Russian wine, which M. Lutsch, the consul's secretary had very kindly procured for me from Marghilan; and then I told Colonel Yonoff that reports had reached me that he was proclaiming to the Kirghiz that the Pamirs were Russian territory, and asked him if this was the case. He said it was so, and he showed me the map with the boundary claimed by the Russians coloured on it. This boundary included the whole of the Pamirs except the Tag-dumbash, and extended as far down as the watershed of the Hindu-Kush by the Khora Bhort pass.⁵⁴

Ionov invited Younghusband courteously but firmly to leave what he considered to be Russian territory (the famous 'Pamir incident' that enraged Parliament and press in England). Ionov's group then travelled to Zorkul over the Bendersky pass and on to Alichur, where – in a second 'Pamir incident' – they met Lieutenant Davison at Sumantash and obliged him to return with them to Marghilan.⁵⁵ Ionov also encountered a Chinese armed group in the Alichur Pamir, the leader of which obeyed without demur his request to leave – an act that convinced the Russians that the Chinese had effectively conceded the territory to them. The detachment returned to winter quarters in Marghilan on 13 September, having covered some 1,800 km and asserted *de facto* Russian sovereignty over almost all of the eastern Pamirs.

A much larger Pamir detachment was formed under Ionov in 1892, comprising three cossack squadrons and a battalion with 4 artillery pieces – a total of 3 officers, an engineer, administration officials, 906 lower ranks and 508 horses. The detachment left Marghilan for Osh on 2 June and, on 15 June, set off for the Pamirs with orders to "maintain calm and protect the local population from violence and plunder."

⁵⁴ Younghusband, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-290.

⁵⁵ See *The Great Game – myth or reality?* *op. cit.*



Возвращение Памирского отряда под начальством полковника М. Е. Ионов. 21 сентября 1892 г., в с. Кошъ-Нарчи. Сх. фот. грав. Шюблера.

Ionov's Pamirs 'flying detachment' in Marghilan, 21 September 1892
(<http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i455.html>)

One of Ionov's officers, Boris Leonidovich Tageyev (1871-1938), wrote a memoir of the expedition, extracts of which were published in the Russian journal *Hуea* [Field] the following year, in which he described the suffering of the soldiers unused to marching at altitudes, as they crossed the Taldyk pass ('only' 3,615m).

With every hundred steps, the air got thinner and at last got to the point where it was almost beyond human strength to climb higher than we had ever been before. A rifle was no longer an ordinary weight and pressed hard on their shoulders. The soldiers crept along – some took ten steps and had to sit down, equipment was dragged along, horses fell, the group had to stop and wait and meanwhile all felt the penetrating cold from the snow that covered the pass. And so it was with our transport – I cannot describe the chaos, in which it was impossible to disentangle anything.

And then our eyes took in the majestic and awe-inspiring view of the wide Alai valley, with the Kyzyl Su running through it and the white peaks of the Trans Alai beyond. Our attention was involuntarily fixed on this mass of snow reaching up to the clouds and disappearing behind them and we could not escape the thought that in two days we would have to cross it.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Hуea* [Field], 1893 No. 47, pp. 1074-75 (see <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/t892.html#2>). See also <http://www.foto.kg/istoricheskaya-spravka/891-tageev-boris-leonidovich-pamirskie-kirgizy.html>).



Boris Leonidovich Tageyev in a studio pose (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_L._Tageev)

In July, Ionov's detachment went on a reconnaissance to Yashilkul, where they skirmished with a small group of Afghans and effectively ended the Afghan presence in the eastern Pamirs – the British explorer Lord Dunmore arrived very shortly afterwards at the place where the Russians had camped.

.... the marks of their encampment were perfectly fresh; broken bottles, cigarette ends, etc., were all lying about, amongst other camp *débris*. But the most gruesome sight was that of the Afghan great-coats, which had been taken off the bodies of the dead by the Kirghiz and had been left lying on the ground as useless, between the scene of the engagement and the camp. These coats were all blood-stained, and on examining them closely, we could guess pretty clearly how each of their ill-fated owners had met his death.

.... I was told afterwards by the Russian officers that Colonel Yonoff had only an escort of nineteen Cossacks, and the officers who were present with him were Colonel Grombtchevsky, Captains Sheremetieff (son of the Governor-General of the Caucasus) Gourko (son of the famous General), and a young officer of Cossacks who commanded the escort. the Afghans were well-nigh wiped out, as out of fifteen, fourteen were killed including their captain, Golam Haider Khan.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See The Earl of Dunmore, *The Pamirs; being a Narrative of a Year's Expedition on Horseback and Foot through Kashmir, Western Tibet, Chinese Tartary and Russian Central Asia*, John Murray, London 1893; and <http://www.pamirs.org/a%20summary%201892%20dunmore.pdf>.



Afghan soldier and officer (Pamir Archive – Markus Hauser)

The Russians were convinced that the British had encouraged the Afghans to attempt to extend their control over the territory on the right bank of the Panj and had armed them specifically for this purpose.⁵⁸ Tageyev, in another part of his memoirs,⁵⁹ describes the British uniforms of the Afghans they met.⁶⁰

They were dressed in uniforms of red cloth with a white collar and cuffs, and white shoulder flashes and side packs. Their buttons were of copper, with the English royal arms, and they had narrow red shoulder straps with an embroidered inscription ‘S. Stafford’ – it was obvious that their uniforms were English.

The detachment spent the winter in yurts on the Murghab river, near the ancient cemetery of Schajan at 3,500m. In his memoirs Tageyev described the conditions there.

The first garrison under the command of Captain Kuznetsov of the Joint Staff spent the winter in this fort, living in yurts adapted for the winter conditions. Despite the terrible winds and frosts, all ranks courageously overcame all disasters and deprivations under the leadership of their beloved first officer, and, having safely wintered, returned and were replaced by Captain Zaitsev and his group. In 1893 Major General Povalo-Shveikovsky of the Joint Staff was again appointed as commander of the armies of the Ferghana area, and, on arrival in Marghelan, left directly for the Pamirs, where he made an inspection of the group that had wintered there and, finding all in good condition, expressed his gratitude to the chief of the group, Captain Kuznetsov.⁶¹

58 Youngusband had indeed attempted to raise the Afghans against the Russians.

59 *Husa* [Field], 1893 No. 50, pp. 1146-1147 (see <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/t893.html>).

60 “Cast off uniforms of all sorts were imported from India by way of Peshawar and used by the Afghan army. One might see Afghan soldiers dressed as railway porters, or even as admirals.” (note by Bijan Omrani).

61 *Husa* [Field], 1895, No. 10, pp. 225-229 (see <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/t995.html>)



Adrian Georgievich Serebrennikov
<http://www.pamirs.org/historical%20photos.htm>

1893 Pamirsky Post - Establishment of a permanent Russian presence in the Pamirs

In April 1893, Vasily Nikolaevich Zaitsev was appointed as head of the military and civil administration in the Pamirs and, at the end of July, the military engineer Captain A. Serebrennikov began construction of the Pamirsky Post at the junction of the Akbaital and Murghab rivers – the site of modern Murghab town.

By November, they had completed the defensive earthworks, a reception area with a small pharmacy, an officers' wing with offices and a common canteen, together with huts for half a company, a kitchen, a bakery and a sauna. In August 1894, the new construction was inspected by the head of the Turkestan military engineering division, Major-General Klimenko, and Serebrennikov received a high commendation.⁶²

Zaitsev was a cultured and well-educated officer, who used his time in the Pamirs to further knowledge of the region by studying its people and their environment. He participated actively in the work of the IRGS, the Asian Society, the Association of Friends of the Natural Sciences and subsequently rose to the rank of Major General. Coming from a humble background, he survived the Bolshevik revolution better than many officers and served in the Red Army. He was highly respected by the local people and, in 1926 at the age of 75, was invited back as an honoured guest to Osh.

After spending the winter safely in the Pamirs, Zaitsev's detachment, was replaced in 1894 by a group under Captain Alexander Genrikhovich Skersky⁶³ – who was the first Russian officer to be accompanied to the Pamirsky Post by his wife.

In August 1894, Sven Hedin was the first non-Russian traveller to visit the new post and described it as follows:



Vasily Nikolaevich Zaitsev with his wife and daughter Evgenia, Osh 1890
<http://www.foto.kg/galereya/3088-nachalnik-oshskogo-uezda-polkovnik-vn-zaycev-s-suprugoy-i-docheryu.html>

62 В.Л. Тажеев, *Русские над Индией. Очерки и рассказы из боевой жизни на Памире* [Russians above India. Reports and stories of military life in the Pamirs], St. Petersburg, 1900, http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/tageev_bl

63 See Alexander Genrikhovich Skersky, 'Краткий очерк Памира' [A short sketch of the Pamirs], *Сборник географических...* [Geographical Collection], op. cit., Issue L, 1892: http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/M.Asien/XIX/1880-1900/Skerskij/ocerk_pamira_1892.htm.

The Pamirsky Post makes a quite pleasant impression on a foreign traveller. After a long and tiring road through uninhabited and wild mountain regions, he suddenly arrives at this little piece of Great Russia, where a group of the kindest and most hospitable officers receive you like a fellow countryman, like an old acquaintance.

In general the Pamirsky Post reminds one of a naval ship, the walls are the hull, the Murghab river - visible everywhere - is the sea, the courtyard is the deck on which we often strolled and from which we observed with our telescopes the farthest boundaries of vision, where on Tuesday a single rider appeared. It was the Djigit-Courier, who brought the longed-for mail from Russia. His arrival was a real event.

After receiving the mail, the whole day is spent reading it. News from the Fatherland is consumed eagerly and at lunch the officers exchange their impressions about important items of information and events outside in the maelstrom of the western ocean of life.



Alexander Genrikhovich Skersky
(<http://www.pamirs.org/historical!%20photos.htm>)

Everyone shows an exemplary manly bearing, displaying no sign of the long cold Pamir winter that they spend in this desert, in almost the same conditions as polar navigators on their ships frozen in the ice – not a trace of sluggishness, apathy or passivity. Now, when the sun is getting warmer and the snow in the mountains and the ice on rivers and lakes is melting, and new life is awakening, the inhabitants of the fort are especially lively and happy – a new interest in life and nature is awakening. The relations between officers and men are optimal. At the end of their period of service thirty soldiers will return to Osh and it was touching to see how, according to Russian custom, the officers kissed three times each departing member of the lower ranks.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ See Sven Hedin, *Through Asia*, New York and London 1899. Concerning Mrs. Skersky, Hedin remarks (p. 386): “Two other changes had been made since my former visit. The lonely fort, which one of my friends in Fergana called a paradise, because there were no women within its walls, was now honored with the presence of the young wife of the new commandant, Madame Skersky. German by birth [Sophia Yegorovna Skierska (Pflug)], and a lady of an exceptionally sweet and amiable disposition, she did the honors at table with exquisite charm. Tastes, as we know, differ; but in my opinion the fort was now infinitely more like paradise than it had been before. Threadbare tunics and dusty boots had given place to a more becoming exterior, while linen cuffs, blacking, and the little arts of the toilet-table afforded evidence of their existence; everything, in fact, bore witness to the ennobling presence of woman.” Wilhelm Filchner, a German officer and remarkable explorer, was one of the next to describe his impressions (see *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op. cit., pp. 497-503).



Pamirsky Post in 1900 (photos from Wilhelm Filchner, *Ein Ritt über den Pamir*, Berlin 1903)
(<http://www.pamirs.org/historical%20photos.htm>)

Skersky was assailed with reports from the local population of atrocities committed by the Afghans. He reported to his chiefs in Fergana:

I have received sixteen letters from the local population in Rushan and Shughnan in which they complain of the continuous taxation and oppression of the Afghans. According to the letters, ten of the most typical of which I attach for Your Excellencies, the population is driven to despair.⁶⁵

The following from the headman of the population of Yazgulom, is typical.

I must tell you that Ibadullah Khan [ruler of Badakhshan] has called us to him. If we do not come he threatens to plunder our homes. We are now poor and in difficulty. We beg you to think of our poor people and trust in your goodness. Ibadullah Khan says the Russians will not defend us.⁶⁶

On 9 July 1894, Ionov arrived with his staff, with orders to mount an extensive reconnoitring expedition to the Shokhdara and Ghunt valleys and to the small settlement of Khorog at the junction of the latter with the Panj, in order to forestall a strengthening of the Afghan positions on the right

65 *Памир* [The Pamirs], op. cit., p. 92.

66 *Памир* [The Pamirs], op. cit., pp. 89-90.

bank of the Panj. Although the Russian forces had extensive survey knowledge of the Pamirs, they had not yet penetrated this far into Shughnan: in 1883, Ivanov was in Sarez and the Ghunt valley as far as Sardem, in 1886 Captains Pokotilo, Trussov and the surveyor Glagoliev had travelled in Darwaz along the right bank of the Panj – followed in 1891 by Komarovskiy and, a year later, by Kuznetsov. In August 1893, a small survey group under captain Vannovsky had travelled from Pamirsky Post to Savnob and then almost all the way down the Bartang. They had engaged the Afghans at Yemts and escaped into the Yazgulam valley at Andarbak, returning from there to Ferghana through Vanch and Kala-i-Khum.⁶⁷ In October-November of the same year, another Russian officer, Captain Bedryag, had made a reconnaissance tour from Savnob through Sarez and then to Kara Kul and along the Markansu to Kashgar, returning to Pamirsky Post via Rang Kul.⁶⁸ Regel, as noted above, had been to Shughnan for purely scientific purposes in 1882.

Captain A. Serebrennikov kept an account of life in Pamirsky Post in his diary.⁶⁹ After a long winter there, the Russians were suffering from the “monotonous run of garrison life” and Ionov’s orders provided welcome relief.

.... we were all heartily sick of the great ‘monotonous Pamir,’ which should furnish an ideal country for the pessimist if he is ever in want of such. Indeed, for an image to express downright, utter melancholy, in the abstract, I cannot think of anything more apt than the picture of a pessimist reading Schopenhauer in the Pamirs. It is the ‘land of no hope.’

On 19 July,

Our two parties, each consisting of three officers, twelve infantry, twenty cossacks, and some guides, set out at eight o’clock this morning in a drizzling mist. We forded the river Murghab after parting from and receiving the good wishes of all our brother-officers remaining behind, and also—last but not least—those of the only lady on the Pamirs, Madame S. G. Skerskaya,⁷⁰ who had, in spite of the weather, been one of our honorary escort up to this point.

After a rough up-and-down scramble, a steep descent brought us to the confluence of the Kok-bai-Chat and the Mats. From this spot we had a truly splendid view of the distant snow-capped Wakhan mountains and the green valley of the Jaushankoz river, the latter being one of the sources of the Shakh-Dara. Of the Wakhan mountain range, two peaks tower pre-eminent, one rising to a height of 23,000 feet, and the other, the Tsaritsa Maria, to 20,000 feet above sea-level. These two majestic mountains stand adjacent and tower



Sergei Petrovich Vannovsky 1893
(<http://www.pamirs.org/historical%20photos.htm>)

67 See: *Отчет Генерального Штаба капитана Ванновского по рекогносцировке в Рушане 1893* [Report by Captain Vannovsky of the General Staff on reconnaissance in Rushan 1893] http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/M.Asien/XIX/1880-1900/Vannovskij_S_P/text1.phtml; and http://nikzdaru.com/vanovski/text_vanovski.htm - includes Tageyev *Памирские походы. 1892-1895* [Pamir Journeys 1892-1895], Warsaw 1902; Boris Leonidovich Tageyev, *Русские над Индией* [Russians above India], St. Petersburg 1900 (http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/tageev_bl/index.html) pp. 307-24; N.N. Pokotilo, “Travels in Central and Western Bukhara in 1886,” *Proceedings IRGS*, Vol. XXV, No. 6, 1889; Postnikov, op. cit., p. 165; A. Serebrennikov, ‘Очерк Памира’ [Sketch of the Pamir], *Военный Сборник* [Military Collection] St. Petersburg: No. 6, June 1899, p. 443 and Nos. 11-12, November 1899, p. 230.

68 *Сборник географических...* [Geographical Collection], op. cit., Volume LVI., 1894. See also http://nikzdaru.com/bedryaga/bedryaga_text.htm.

69 Extracts were published in the *Geographical Journal* of the Royal Geographical Society (*GJ*), Vol. XVI No.6, December 1900, pp. 666-679. The date in the *GJ* extract is given erroneously as 1892.

70 Actually Sophia Yegorovna (see note 65).

above all the others in their impressive majesty and might.⁷¹

The group reconnoitring the Ghunt valley was led by Lieutenant-Colonel Judenich; that in the Shakh-dara valley – in which Serebrennikov participated – was led by Skersky.⁷² On 22 July they camped at Tuz Kul.

Here we received a deputation of a hundred Shughnanis, who petitioned us on behalf of the inhabitants of the Shakh-Dara for protection against the Afghans. They were a poor, dispirited looking body of men, and must have stood to the Afghans as sheep to wolves. Their dress, made from the coarsest stuffs, led us to think that they were all simple peasants; but in this we were mistaken, as we soon perceived, for no less a personage than Azis-Khan, nephew of the last independent ruler of Shakh-Dara, was amongst them. This was the ruler who had been executed in Rosh-kala by order of the Shughnan ruler (Shah-Abduraim-Khan).



Engels (left) and Karl Marx (right) peaks from Jawshangoz (2001)

Serebrennikov's group crossed the Koitezek pass and travelled down the Shakh-dara from Jawshangoz 'accompanied by an enthusiastic and increasing crowd of Tajiks and Kirghiz' as far as Roshtkala, where they encountered the first Afghan troops. After a short skirmish, Russian reinforcements arrived and the Afghans retreated to their base at Bar-i-Panjah, enabling the Russians to continue their explorations as far as Khorog, where they were joined by the group that had descended the Ghunt valley. Undisturbed by the Afghans, the Russians completed a survey of the Panj between the ruby mines and Vomar.⁷³

71 Now called Engels peak; the other mountain referred to by Serebrennikov, then called the Pik Tsar Mirotvortz ('peacemaker Tsar'), is today (for the time being) Karl Marx peak.

72 Tageyev, *op. cit.*, Chapter 21.

73 A. Serebrennikov, 'Очерки Шугнана' ['Essays on Shughnan'], Сборник географических.... [Geographical Collection], *op. cit.*, Vol. LXX, 1896 (http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/M.Asien/XIX/1880-1900/Serebrennikov_A_G/text1.htm); and Памир. Краткий очерк [Pamirs. A short report] New Marghilan, 1902 (<http://bookre.org/reader?file=639169&pg=1>). His numerous articles in this and other periodicals (including Военный Сборник [Military Collection]) summarise all the then available knowledge of Shughnan, Shakh-dara and Wakhan and record in much detail the life of the inhabitants of the Western Pamirs. See also: <http://www.zhurnal-prostor.kz/assets/files/2016/2016-8/2016-8-7.pdf>.

On the right (Russian) side of the Panj are about fourteen kishlags. The whole country is rather densely populated, and the inhabitants are fairly well-to-do. The climate is so mild that even vines grow here and are cultivated by the Tajiks. A nearer acquaintance with the Tajiks, and the study of their customs and manners, forces us to sympathize with this persecuted nation, which has gone through so many trials. Indeed, it is a wonder how it is they have not disappeared from the face of the earth. In far-off times this nation turned their eyes towards the north, to the Russians, and waited patiently for the occasion when they might become subjects of the great white Tsar, and thus free themselves from the persecution of the Afghans. This desire to be under Russian government, which was one of the principal reasons why the Afghans persecuted them, did not weaken as time went on, notwithstanding that their hopes were not soon realized. With the appearance of the Russians on the borders of Shughnan in 1894, it seemed that the end of their miseries had come, but fate has once more mocked their hopes, for, as we could not gain permission to leave even a small garrison to winter in Shughnan, we had to return. This we did *via* the Gund valley on September 15, followed by a great number of Tajiks and their families. The latter were forced to migrate in anticipation of revengeful reprisals from the Afghans, which would undoubtedly follow their having extended such a friendly welcome to us.

Serebrennikov estimated the inhabitants of Shughnan (right bank) at 3,779 in 1894 and the 1896 census carried out by the Russians recorded a total of 2,221 Kyrgyz in the eastern Pamirs. Serebrennikov also noted that

The position we occupied in the valley of the Kharokh offered many conveniences, and if at some future time we should have to maintain a garrison in Shughnan, and to erect a fortified position there, this place should undoubtedly be chosen.

This was to be realised only a year later.

V. Borders and Bases

1895 Anglo-Russian Border Agreement and Transfer of the Russian Base to Khorog

In March 1895, agreement was reached between the Russians and the British on the need to reach a final settlement of the boundaries and respective spheres of influence in the Pamirs. A Boundary Commission was set up and both parties gathered on the banks of Lake Zorkul in June: the Russian mission, under General Povalov-Shveikovskiy, included Colonels Galkin and Zaleski, Lieutenant Orakolov, Captains Krutorogin and Alexandrovich, Mr. Bendersky (the two last-named acting as surveyors), Dr. Welman and Mr. Panafidine (a Frenchman who acted as Secretary); and the British, under Major General M.G. Gerard, included Colonel T.H. Holdich, Captain E.F.H. McSwiney, Major Wahab and Dr. Alcock).

The work of the 1885 Afghan Boundary Commission had been hampered by the absence of comprehensive topographical knowledge of the area and the Russians had bowed to the better survey data possessed by the British; in the case of the Pamir boundary, the situation was reversed as the Russians by now possessed more accurate information covering almost all of the Pamirs that was recognised by their British colleagues as “of the first rank.” At their first meeting each side compared the other’s data on the frontier region with its own and Holdich commented:

We found ourselves standing on the roof of the world, with practically no differences between us to eliminate and disperse as far as our mapping was concerned.⁷⁴

On 28 July the first two pillars were placed; a third – on the pass subsequently named after the Russian surveyor Bendersky – on 5 August; the fourth and fifth at the Urta Bel pass on 14 August; and the last ones on 8 September just before the advent of snow. The final protocols were concluded shortly after. A delegation from Afghan Badakhshan arrived on 27 July and set their seals to the protocol and other official documents, and the British consular representative in Kashgar, George Macartney, arrived on 7 August with some Chinese representatives from Kashgar to witness the work. It is perhaps amusing to note that, since the Secretary of the Commission was French, that language was used for all documents, correspondence and discussions.

The English version of the Commission’s report was withheld from publication until 1899 for reasons that are not fully apparent. Gerard contributed an account of the arrangements preliminary to delimitation (and of his journey through Russian Turkestan after the completion of its work); Holdich gave a report of the proceedings – together with historical and geographical notes on the Pamir region; Wahab wrote the detailed technical report *per se*; and Alcock added a section on natural history.⁷⁵ Holdich gives a vivid description of the ceremonies at the farewell dinner organised by the British:

The scene of the dinner was one which will be long remembered in the Pamirs. With considerable difficulty and delay a supply of wood had been collected from valleys south of the Hindu Kush as a provision against a winter sojourn on the Pamirs. All this wood was now stacked into such a bonfire as the Pamirs will never

⁷⁴ *GJ*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1896, pp. 92.

⁷⁵ A brief summary was published “The Monthly Record” of the *GJ*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1896, pp. 91- 93. More detail appeared in: “The Proceedings of the Pamir Boundary Commission”, *GJ*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 1899, pp. 50-56; and a letter from Trotter in *GJ*, Vol. 13, No. 4, April 1899, pp. 442-448.

see again, and round about it various dances were performed with much spirit and energy. The night was still, and as cold as 25 degrees of frost could make it, and the moonlight glinted on the freezing surface of marsh and river, adding not a little to the fantastic effect of the scene. Men of Hunza and Nagar, Khataks and Cossacks, Kirghiz and Wakhis, all danced to the inspiriting strains produced from two kerosene tins and a reed pipe, with a Cossack concertina accompaniment. The dances were led by a most able master of ceremonies in the person of Lieutenant Miles, who had joined the Commission party for a few days from a political tour in Hunza. The proceedings closed with the old-world chorus of ‘Auld Lang Syne.’⁷⁶

Following the border settlement, Captain Sulitsko replaced Skersky as head of the Pamir forces and, in early 1896, when the transfer of territory between Afghanistan and Bokhara was complete, the Russians began construction of a base in Khorog. The main Russian garrison was moved from Murghab to Khorog in the following year. Sulitsko reported that more than a hundred Pamiri families then returned from Ferghana to Shughnan, where they were resettled without incident. He added that he was able to free some of the last slaves on the Pamirs and help them establish an independent existence by a gift of cattle.⁷⁷



Russian base in Khorog 1911⁷⁸ (Arved von Schultz)

Sulitsko was replaced by Captain Eggert and, in August 1897, Captain Edward Karlovich Kivekes, a Russian of Finnish origin took over the command in Khorog.

The following year, the British explorer Ralph Cobbold, having been arrested by Bukharan forces in Vomar, became an involuntary “guest” of the garrison in Khorog (although with all courtesy and actually

⁷⁶ *Report on the Proceedings of the Pamir Boundary Commission*, Calcutta 1897. IOLR Mss Eur F111/657. The collection of such a large quantity of wood suggests that the British were more pessimistic than the Russians about the chances of concluding the work rapidly!

⁷⁷ *Памир* [The Pamirs], op. cit., pp. 93-94.

⁷⁸ The Russians occupied the base on this site until their withdrawal in 2004 - see below.

in Kivekes's residence) and noted that the Russian fort was strongly built of clay, wood and stones, and the earthworks are of great thickness. The fort was laid out under the direction of Kevekiss [Kivekes], who certainly deserved great credit for his work, considering the means at his disposal and the lack of skilled labour. The garrison consisted of four officers and about fifty Cossacks, and there were two Maxim guns mounted on the earthworks facing the river, as a warning to the Afghans of what might be expected if trouble arose.

Kivekes and his wife adopted a young Pamiri girl, Gulbegim Barakat, who returned with them to Finland at the end of their tour of duty.

In 1896, scientific expeditions (botany, glaciology) were organised by Vladimir Ippolitovich Lipsky (1863-1937)⁷⁹ and Sergey Ivanovich Kordzhinsky (1861-1900).⁸⁰ Lipsky returned in 1897 and 1899 and, as we have seen, Olga Alexandrovna Fedchenko and her son Boris Alexeyevich undertook research on the flora of



Edward Karlovich Kivekes
(Pamir Archive – Markus Hauser)



Khorog garrison in 1898
(Ralph Cobbold, *Innermost Asia: Travel & Sport in the Pamirs*, London 1900)

⁷⁹ Vladimir Ippolitovich Lipsky, *Горная Бухара - результаты трехлетних путешествий в Среднюю Азию в 1896, 1897 и 1899 гг* [Mountain Bukhara – results of journeys over three years in Central Asia in 1896, 1897 and 1899], St. Petersburg, 1902.

⁸⁰ Sergey Ivanovich Kordzhinsky, *Очерки растительности Туркестана* [Sketches of vegetation of Turkestan], 1896 (<https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/biograf2/7318>).

the Pamirs from 1900 to 1904, exploring several ‘new’ passes, including the Shtam pass.⁸¹ Between 1903 and 1928, Nikolai Leopoldovich Korzhenevsky (1879-1958), an autodidact, made major contributions to geological and geographical knowledge of the Pamirs and, in 1904, was the first to explore the Muk Su valley from end to end.⁸² Several of his research works were published by the Central Asia University in Tashkent, where he became a Professor.

D.I. Golovnin and Yuliia D. Golovnina, with M.M. Voskoboyinikov and N.P. Bartenjeva visited the Pamirs in 1898 as perhaps the first Russian ‘tourists’,⁸³ although the British travellers who had been there a few years earlier as ‘spies’ might equally well be described as tourists. The first archaeological and ethnographic surveys were undertaken by Alexei Alexeyevich Bobrinsky (1852-1927) in 1898.⁸⁴



Kivekes and Gulbegim in Finland in 1914
(Archive Daulat Khudonazarov)

After Kivekes’s first term, the Khorog garrison commanders were:

- 1899–1900 N.S. Anosov
- 1900–1901 M.S. Badritsky
- 1901–1902 E.K. Kivekes
- 1902–1903 A.E. Snesarev
- 1903–1905 M.M. Arsenyev
- 1905–1908 E.K. Kivekes
- 1908–1912 A.V. Mukhanov
- 1912–1914 G.A. Shpilko
- 1914–1917 I.D. Yagello
- 1917–1918 V.V. Fenin⁸⁵



Korzhenevsky (centre) in Murghab with members of the 1903 expedition (Sven Hedin)
(<https://www.tkg.org.ua/node/9691>)

81 Olga Alexandrovna and Boris Alexeyevich Fedchenko, *Флора Памира* [The Flora of the Pamirs], St. Petersburg, 1901, 1905 and 1906; *Материал для флоры Памира и Алайского хребта* [Materials for the Flora of the Pamirs and the Alai Range] and *Материал для флоры Шугнана* [Materials for the Flora of Shughnan], Botanical Museum of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg 1902.

82 P.F. Peters, *Памирские Путешествия Николая Корженевского*, [The Pamir Travels of Nikolai Korzhenevsky], 1998 (<http://www.alpkclubspb.ru/ass/49.htm>; <http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/M.Asien/XX/1900-1920/Korzenevskij/text1.htm>)

83 *Памир* [The Pamirs], op.cit., p. 81; Yuliia D. Golovnina, *На Памире - Записки русской путешественницы* [In the Pamirs - Essays by a female Russian traveller], Moscow 1902 (https://royallib.com/read/golovnina_yu/na_pamirah_zapiski_russkoy_puteshestvennitsi.html#0); Katya okanson, ‘Russian Women Travelers in Central Asia and India’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Jan. 2011), pp. 1-19.

84 A.A. Bobrinsky, *Горцы Верховьев Пянджа* [Mountain people of the Upper Panj], Moscow 1908 (<https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/336875.html>); and Daulat Nazar Khudonazarov, *Памирские экспедиции графа А. А. Бобринского 1895-1901гг.* [The Pamir Expeditions of Count A.A. Bobrinsky 1895-1901], Moscow 2013. See also <https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/157103.html>.

85 Nazarshoyev op. cit., p. 71.



Grigori Andreevich Shpilko (1872-1936) receiving petitions in Khorog 1914 (Nazarshoyev)

Snessarev wrote several books and articles on the ethnography and history of the Pamirs⁸⁶ and Shpilko left a substantial collection of photographs, several of which are now in the Khorog museum. The famous British archaeologist, Aurel Stein, had a fortuitous encounter in the Alai with Colonel Yagello in 1915, and described him as ‘an oriental scholar deeply interested in the geography and ethnography of the Oxus regions, and anxious to aid whatever investigations could throw fresh light on their past.’⁸⁷



Shpilko in the Eastern Pamirs in 1913 with his wife Tatiana and daughter Ariadna (Nazarshoyev)

86 <https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/history/more.htm?id=12073105%40cmsArticle>; <https://e-libra.ru/read/531486-general-snesarev-na-polyah-voyny-i-mira.html>; and <http://www.snesarev.ru/>.

87 *GJ*, Vol 48, No. 3, (Sep. 1916), p. 212.



Snessarev (1865-1937) and his wife Yevgenia Vasilievna (Nazarshoyev)⁸⁸

In 1905 the post of deputy (Beg) of the Emir of Bukhara in Shughnan was abolished, and administrative authority over the whole of the Pamirs passed to the Russian head of the Pamir detachment.



Bukharan troops in Kala-i-Khum (Lipsky, 1899)

(<https://www.litres.ru/fergus/na-uzhnom-rubezhe-rossiyskie-pogranichniki-v-tadzhikistane-xix-xxi/chitat-onlayn/page-2/>)

In 1907, a Captain of Russian Joint Staff, A.K. Razgonov, undertook a thorough survey of the inhabited areas of the Pamirs and in his report, published by the Turkestan military district in 1910, in addition to cultural and religious information, estimated the local population at 25,000 Tajiks in the valleys leading to the Panj and 2,000 Kyrgyz on the high plateau.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Most portraits of the time show only the men; how nice to see the wives of Zaitsev, Shpilko and Snessarev. (N.B. The most frequent portraits of Snessarev are in fact identical with the photograph above but elide Mrs. Snessarev!) More romantically, the latter was, in fact Zaitsev's daughter (see photo in Section IV above): they met when Snessarev stayed with the Zaitsevs in Osh on his way to Khorog. (Nazarshoyev, op. cit., p. 81.)

⁸⁹ A.K. Razgonov, *По Восточной Бухаре и Памиру* [Across Eastern Bukhara and Pamir], Tashkent, 1910 (<https://en.calameo.com/read/00205596866454e73a728>); and Salavat Iskhakov, *Население Памира глазами российских военных* [Pamiri peoples through the eyes of Russian soldiers], (<http://forum-eurasica.ru/index.php?/topic/304-%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80/>).



Khorog in 1910 (<http://www.sary-kol.ru/stati/pamir/pamir-krysha-mira-istoriia-pamira-v-fotografiakh.html>)

The Russian presence in the Pamirs was now firmly established; all the valleys and several of the main passes had been comprehensively surveyed and mapped: the age of the pioneers was past. The region settled down, officers began to bring their wives and social and cultural activities were organised.



Russian officer's family (the Shpilkos? - see photo above) en route to Khorog in 1913 (<http://www.sary-kol.ru/stati/pamir/pamir-krysha-mira-istoriia-pamira-v-fotografiakh.html>)

In 1913, Shpilko arranged the transport from Osh (more than seven hundred kilometres away) of a piano made in 1875 by J. Becker of St. Petersburg. It was brought by cart as far as Murghab, and then the remaining three hundred kilometres by some twenty bearers. It was placed in the officers' mess of the military base where in the evenings officers and their wives would gather. It now has pride of place in the Khorog museum.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Some years earlier, Catherine Macartney – wife of the British representative and later Consul-General in Kashgar from 1890-1918 – had brought a piano from England that had to be carried in a similar way over the passes to their home in Kashgar. (Lady Macartney, *An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan*, Oxford, 1985.)



Christmas 1913: the Becker piano in the Russian officers' mess in Khorog
(Khorog Museum Archive)

Several Russian scientific expeditions to the Pamirs were subsequently organised, of which the most important were:⁹¹

1915-1932: Dimitri Vasilievich Nalivkin (geological research);⁹²

1916: N. Vavilov (botanist) visited Shughnan and Rushan districts and discovered many wild species of grains in the Pamirs.⁹³

In addition to protecting the population from the depredations of the Afghans and Bukharans, the newly arrived Russians began road building, encouraged the use of horses⁹⁴ and gradually spread a minimum of basic health care by means of the Russian *feldsher* system.⁹⁵ On 1 July 1913, Shpilko inaugurated the first hydropower station in Khorog, that was used to light 2 arc lights and 88 lamp bulbs, and to mill grain.⁹⁶

A road between Osh in Kyrgyzstan and Murghab was opened in 1897 and the connection to Khorog was completed a few years later. The Russians introduced the first potatoes, cabbages, new seed varieties for cereals and some improvements in livestock. However, with poor soil, the high altitude, harsh winters, and the primitive tools available to the local inhabitants, no fundamental changes could be made to the essence of subsistence farming and nomadic herding. A Russian fact-finding mission in 1904-6 “was shocked by the extreme poverty of the local population...”⁹⁷

91 <http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/tadjik/soe2/eng/htm/research.htm>. This list does not include expeditions of which the main aim was climbing. For information on these adventures, see <http://www.alpklubspb.ru> and <http://www.mountain.ru>.

92 See <https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01005847313>.

93 See <http://www.vir.nw.ru/about/>; and https://www.bioversityinternational.org/fileadmin/migrated/uploads/tx_news/Vavilov_and_his_institute_a_history_of_the_world_collection_of_plant_genetic_resources_in_Russia_26.pdf.

94 Ole Olufsen, *Through The Unknown Pamirs - The Second Danish Pamir Expedition, 1898-99*, London 1904, p. 117: “When I passed from Langarkish to Khorok the first time in 1896, there were no horses to be seen. But of late years the province has made much progress under Russian protection, and now the little horses of Kirghiz and Badakhshan have been imported. These horses are small, persevering, sagacious, and well adapted to mountain use, and they are highly prized by the people.” (<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/afghanenglish/21/>).

95 Feldsher is the Russian name (Фельдшер) for a health care professional who provides various medical services, mainly in rural areas. Feldshers provide primary, obstetrical and surgical care services in many rural medical centres and ambulatories across Russia. (Wikipedia 2014)

96 Nazarshoyev, op. cit. p. 64.

97 Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan - National Identity and the Origins of the Republic*, Tauris, London 2007, p. 34.



The first public school was opened in Khorog in 1910 (Nazarshoyev)



Young man with goitre, Vanch valley (Gorbunov, 1928)

The Soviet period 1918-1991 ⁹⁸

Revolution in Russia, followed by the locally inspired *Basmachi* revolt against the new Bolshevik hegemony in Central Asia, diminished Russian presence and influence in the Pamirs. A combination of political reconciliation, cultural concessions and demonstrations of overwhelming military power led progressively to the pacification of Central Asia by 1926. In the Pamirs, however, the inhabitants continued to see only advantages from Russian occupation and never joined the *Basmachi* movement.



Meeting of Basmachi in Dushanbe (Nazarshoyev)

⁹⁸ This section draws heavily from Middleton, 'History of the Development of the Pamir Region of Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan)' in *Mapping Transition in the Pamirs*, Springer 2016, pp. 245-265 (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-23198-3_16; and <http://www.pamirs.org/history-development-pamir.pdf>).



Nikolai Petrovich Gorbunov (1892-1938) -
(Pamir Archive – Markus Hauser)

In 1923, the first Soviet expedition to the Pamirs was led by Nikolai Leopoldovich Korzhenevsky (see above) to study topography, glaciers, geology, flora and fauna of the remote regions of the Pamirs. The botanist Ilariya Alexeyevna Raikova participated in this expedition and continued her work in the Pamirs for more than five years; other participants were I.I. Bezdeka (geologist) and S.A. Polozov (military topographer).⁹⁹ It was followed in 1928 by a joint Soviet-German expedition led by Nicolai Petrovich Gorbunov and Willi Rickmer-Rickmers (eleven Russian and eleven German participants). The expedition surveyed and mapped most of the glaciers in the NW Pamirs – including the Fedchenko glacier – and undertook geophysical, botanical, zoological and ethnographic studies.¹⁰⁰

Between 1932 and 1935, three Tajik-Pamirs expeditions were organised by the Russian Academy of Sciences, led again by Gorbunov, with, among others, and on different occasions, Pavel Nicolaevich Luknitsky,¹⁰¹ Korzhenevsky, Nikolai Vasilievich

Kirilenko, N.M. Prokopenko, Ivan Grigorievich Dorofeyev, Alexander Alexandrovich Saukov and Dmitri Ivanovich Sherbakov.¹⁰²

The results of the multi-disciplinary expeditions undertaken from 1928 to 1935 were published by the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. As noted above,¹⁰³ the abstracts and bibliography alone, published in 1936, comprise 250 pages and they effectively filled in the last blank spots on the map of the Pamirs.

Based on reports by the ‘pundits’ and Russian surveys, the population of what is now the Tajik Pamirs probably did not exceed 25,000 until the Soviet period. It became declared Soviet policy to encourage human settlement in strategic border areas and population began to grow steadily. Nomadic herders in the eastern Pamirs, for example, were forced to live in an urbanised environment, leaving their houses only in the spring and summer for their yurts and pastures. Best estimates of population¹⁰⁴ show a growth from some 29,000 in 1926¹⁰⁵ to 45,000 in 1950, 128,000 in 1979 and 200,000 at the end of the Soviet period. At the beginning of the Tajik civil war (1992-1997) the population reached a peak of some 250,000 as a result of an influx of displaced persons from other parts of Tajikistan.

The Soviet central government decided that the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO) should be seen as an example of socialist revolution in a Muslim country and invested heavily in its modernization “to show the neighbouring poor peoples to the south the superiority of the Soviet system....”¹⁰⁶ On 29 November 1934, *Izvestia* reported breathlessly on the fifth Congress of

99 See http://www.nikzdaru.com/korzenevski/text_korzenevski.htm.

100 Willi Rickmer Rickmers: *Alai! Alai! Arbeiten und Erlebnisse einer deutsch-russischen Alai-Pamir- Expedition*. Brockhaus-Verlag, Leipzig 1930; see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German-Soviet_Alai-Pamir_Expedition & <http://nmr.nioch.nsc.ru/history/> with links to original reports. *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs*, op. cit., pp. 504-513.

101 See <https://silkadv.com/ru/node/3906> and http://www.lib.ru/PROZA/LOUKNITSKIY_P/s_pamir.txt.

102 See *Научные итоги работ Таджикско-Памирской Экспедиции* [The Scientific Results of the Work of the Tajik-Pamirs Expedition], Leningrad 1936 (<https://ru.b-ok.org/book/2558333/a94574>); also <https://cyberpedia.su/8x61f.html>; <http://www.alpkclubspb.ru/persona/luknickiy.htm>; <http://www.alpkclubspb.ru/persona/gorbunov.htm>; and <http://pamirgeo.ru/node/7>.

103 See footnote 11.

104 Hermann Kreutzmann, *Ethnizität im Entwicklungsprozess*, Reimer, Berlin 1996, p. 169.

105 By this time the *Basmachi* anti-Bolshevik revolt in Central Asia had been finally put down and stability had returned.

106 Frank Bliss, *Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs (Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan)*, Routledge, London 2006, p. 247.

the Soviets of GBAO:

On foot, on horses, on yaks, on donkeys, along mountain tracks hanging over precipices, the delegates come from the distant Murghab, Bartang, Wakhan, and other places in the S. and E. edges of the U.S.S.R. that border with Afghanistan, India and Western China. The 110 delegates elected were 78 Tajiks, 16 Kirghiz, and 16 Russians. In the conference hall were many women in their white garments of homespun silk. Khorog is now lit with electricity that was started and first seen by the Pamir people in the spring of this year. The president of the congress, Faisilbekov, spoke of the wonderful things that have taken place in the Soviet Pamir. Aeroplanes are flying over inaccessible mountain ranges, a splendid automobile road has been made from Khorog to Osh, 700 km long, that now links the Pamir with the rest of the U.S.S.R. Formerly there was only 1 school in the whole of the Pamirs - now there are 140, and a training school for teachers: instead of dark smoky earth huts or skin tents, European houses are now being built: collective farms are established in the Pamirs, and they are growing and getting good crops of wheat, millet and beans; and now they know how to manure their fields and be sure of good crops.¹⁰⁷

A hospital was built in Khorog in 1924; the Khorog airport was completed in 1932 and the road between Osh and Khorog was fully asphalted and open to motor traffic by 1935.¹⁰⁸ It was followed in 1940



Early road transport (USSR in Construction No. 12, 1936)

by the 567 km road between Stalinabad (as Dushanbe was then known) and Khorog.

Following from these early Soviet initiatives, schools, hospitals, public meeting halls, power stations and electricity grids, phone lines, roads, and airports were subsequently built in all major areas of the province.

State-sponsored education began from the realisation that a large majority of party cadres in Tajikistan were illiterate. Schools for the eradication

of illiteracy (*Likbez* - Ликвидация безграмотности у населения) were organised from 1927 onwards.¹⁰⁹ Compulsory universal primary education was introduced as early as February 1931.¹¹⁰ In GBAO, school No. 12 in the village of Porshinev, just outside Khorog, celebrated its 70th anniversary in 1996.¹¹¹

107 Quoted by Hermann Kreutzmann, *Wakhan Quadrangle*, op.cit., p. 215.

108 This strategic road - the 'Pamir Highway' as it later became known to tourists - regained significance as a military supply route during the Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan 1979-1989 (v. Hermann Kreutzmann, "The significance of geopolitical issues for internal development and intervention in mountainous areas of Crossroads Asia", *Crossroads Asia, Working Paper Series 07*, Bonn January 2013).

109 Bergne, op.cit., p. 63.

110 Ibid., p. 83.

111 The school is named after Shirinsho Shotemur, born in Shughnan, who was one of the main actors in the establishment of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. In 1927 he negotiated the exit of Tajikistan from the Uzbek SSR and the establishment of the new Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.



Arrival of one of the first flights from Dushanbe to Khorog (*USSR in Construction No. 12, 1936*)



70th anniversary celebrations of the Shirinsho Shotemur school in Porshinev in 1996

The first nursery schools were set up at the end of the 1940s;¹¹² from the 1950s, education was being provided free from kindergarten to postgraduate studies and the literacy rate increased exponentially.

In 1926 an official report by the Soviet *Sredazburo* (Central Asia Bureau) estimated village literacy in Tajikistan at 1.1% for males and 0.2% for females;¹¹³ by 1984, the official estimate for the whole of GBAO was more than 99%. GBAO held pride of place in the whole Soviet Union in numbers of higher education degrees and produced a disproportionate number of highly educated professionals who made valuable contributions to Tajik society. Where educational facilities were not available at village level, schooling was taken over by the state farms.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, a 1993 programme feasibility study by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), a private development agency, described the health system in GBAO as follows:

- the health status of the population in GBAO is better than that of most middle-income countries in the world;
- the health system is accessible to everyone, with facilities located in even the most remote settlements and there are no economic barriers to access;
- it is equitable in its treatment of groups of people who, in many other systems, are often disadvantaged, such as women, the poor, those living outside major towns, etc.;
- there are large-numbers of well-trained professional staff, both doctors and nurses;
- there are 15 hospital beds per thousand population, a higher ration than in almost any country in the world;
- there is a higher ratio of doctors and nurses to population than for almost all middle-income countries.¹¹⁴

112 Bliss, op. cit., p. 257.

113 Bergne, op. cit., p. 75.

114 Middleton et al., Mission Report on the Medium Term Development of Gorno-Badakhshan, 17 November 1993. Unpublished, Aga Khan Foundation, Geneva 1993, p. 72. Quoted in Bliss, op. cit., p. 255.

In GBAO in 1993, there were 28 hospitals, 7 polyclinics, 32 village clinics and 149 medical stations. The AKF study noted that some three-quarters of the school-age population of GBAO had eleven years of schooling and almost all the remainder at least nine years. In addition, some 12% of school-leavers went on to university every year, 78% of teachers had taken five-year university diplomas and a significant proportion of the remainder had attended colleges of education.¹¹⁵

If the social sector had been promoted extensively in GBAO during the Soviet period, the same was not true for agriculture. Soviet planning came late to Central Asia, especially in isolated regions such as the Pamirs. The collectivisation of farming and herds that resulted did not improve yields; the system of state farms ('sovkhoz', from *советское хозяйство* [Soviet farm]) imposed in the Pamirs from the early 1970s provided no incentive for the population to increase production. The arable land of Gorno-Badakhshan, the poorest and most isolated part of the poorest Republic in the Soviet Union, is not sufficient to meet the food needs of its population: valleys are narrow and most of the land area is above 2,500m; in 1992, of a total of about 16,000 hectares of arable land, only 12,000 hectares were actually under food crops.

From 1940 to 1974, the number of agricultural production units had decreased from 3093 (mainly collective farms) to 245 (state farms). By 1993, the latter had been consolidated into only 57 sovkhoz.¹¹⁶ Yet, at the end of the Soviet era, Gorno-Badakhshan was dependent for 85% of its food (and all of its fuel) on heavily subsidised supplies from other regions. To meet the needs of the population, a complex system of food deliveries was organised along 'The Pamir Highway' from Osh in Kyrgyzstan - vital during the winter months, when the road from the Tajik capital Dushanbe is closed for 4-5 months by snow.

In the Soviet period there were six hydro-electric power stations in GBAO. Because these stations did not generate sufficient electricity, towards the end of the Soviet period they were supplemented by power stations operating on diesel that came from Russia. During the civil war the electricity infrastructure was damaged which resulted in shortages. A major step towards harnessing the potential of fast-moving rivers such as the Ghunt was the Pamir-1 project launched in 1993.

This dependence was deliberate. Since the progressive occupation of the area by the Russians from the late nineteenth century onwards, the Pamirs were of great strategic importance: first, in the 'Great Game' pitting British spies and surveyors against Russian military expeditions, then in the contested area of Turkestan immediately after the Bolshevik revolution and, finally, for military access to Afghanistan after the invasion of that country by the Soviet army in 1979. Moreover, Soviet foreign policy required a sedentary population as proof of sovereignty.

These measures ensured the well-being of the people (and prevented the depopulation of a strategic border area), but there was little development. Moreover,

On the negative side, Soviet times also witnessed periods of forced collectivization of agriculture, during which lands were nationalized and certain types of crop production (e.g., tobacco and cotton) were forced upon people. Forced migration of the mountainous Ismailis to the southern lowlands of Tajikistan with radically different climatic conditions resulted in the death of many. Under various pretexts, Stalinist

115 Ibid., pp. 51 and 80; the report also notes that "there are said to be public libraries in all major centres." See also Bliss, op. cit., p. 257.

116 Middleton *et al*, op. cit., p. 5.



'Pamir Highway' near Alichur (1998)

purges eliminated a great number of the Ismaili political, intellectual, and cultural elite. Local youth were encouraged to move to other parts of the Soviet Union to fill the human resource deficit in the labor market. The Cultural Revolution, carried out in the name of creating a 'new Soviet human being' who was to be above religious, ethnic and cultural 'prejudices', also impacted the Ismailis. Being a 'Soviet human being', however, was not very different from being or becoming 'Russian', and while education was free and comprehensive, its quality and relevance to the community's development and culture remained questionable.¹¹⁷

A few production units were set up in Khorog - a textile factory, a printing works, workshops for processing semi-precious stones, bread, milk and meat factories - but apart from basic infrastructure, productive investment in GBAO remained very low. People's needs were met by free or subsidised deliveries to the urban centres and state farms and there was little trading. Interviews carried out by the Aga Khan Foundation team in 1993 revealed that a telephone call to the district centre would result in the delivery of most basic necessities: "If ever we got too much flour, we fed it to the animals," was one comment. Over 70% of the GBAO budget was covered by funding from the capital Dushanbe.¹¹⁸

This situation was unsustainable and led to a major crisis in the region when the Soviet Union collapsed.¹¹⁹

117 Sarfaroz Niyozov, 'Evolution of the Shi'a Ismaili Tradition in Central Asia', *The Ismaili UK*, 2002 (Retrieved 2014 from http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=105413).

118 Middleton *et al.* op. cit., p. 93.

119 Between 1993 and 2001, the Aga Khan Foundation delivered an annual average of 23'000 tons of humanitarian assistance from Osh in 5-ton 'Zil' trucks: 4'600 round-trips per year at an average of 1'500 km per journey. Deliveries peaked at 34'000 tons in 1996. The main donors (by order of magnitude) were government agencies in the USA, Germany, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.



Kala-i-Hussein (1994)¹²¹

VI. A Personal Postscript 1992-2004

The relationship between the Russians and the people of the Pamirs has been close since the 1883 encounter between the Bartangis and Dmitri Lvovich Ivanov described above. Within fifteen years, the Russians had effectively ended Afghan atrocities against the inhabitants of the right bank of the Amu Darya/Panj and ended absentee rule by the Emir of Bukhara. For that the people of the Pamirs are, without doubt, eternally grateful. At the end of the Soviet period, however, as noted above, relations began slowly to deteriorate.

During the Tajik civil war (1992-1997) the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division (201-я мотострелковая дивизия), gave material assistance to the proto-communist forces fighting against the coalition between the Democratic party (that enjoyed strong support in GBAO) and the Islamic Renaissance Party. In the early stages of the civil war, the local government in GBAO even formally requested to be reunited with Russia (as in the immediate pre-Soviet period).¹²⁰

During this time, as co-ordinator of the Aga Khan Foundation's programmes in Tajikistan, I had to liaise with the Tajik and Russian authorities in order to ensure freedom of passage for humanitarian goods and - to the extent possible - security for AKF personnel. Thanks to the positive support received from President Emomali Rakhmon at a meeting in August 1993, permission was given for the initiation of the Foundation's activities. Similarly, total support and understanding were expressed by the Russian authorities.¹²²

At the beginning of the civil war, the border guards and the Badakhshan self-defence border forces had friendly relations and there was even a 'hot line' telephone link between the two bases in different parts of Khorog. By 1995, however, relations had totally deteriorated.¹²³

¹²⁰ The Russians did not respond.

¹²¹ The village of Kala-i-Hussein in northern GBAO was the furthest point reached by government troops during the civil war.

¹²² With thanks to: Foreign Ministry (Deputy Ministers Anatoly Adamishin and Albert Chernyshov; Alexander Vladichenko, Yuri Mikhailovich Kotov, Viktor Zotin and Sergei Nikolayev in the Central Asia division); the Military (Lt. General Leonid Grigorievich Ivashov); the Ministry of Emergency Situations (Col. Gennadi Vasilievich Filatov); the Embassy in Dushanbe; the border guards in Khorog and Murghab (various commanders during the period 1993-2003); and Vyacheslav Alexandrovich Mikhailov, Minister for Nationalities Affairs. (It is interesting to note that, until 2001, Russia had a Ministry for Nationalities Affairs, successor to Stalin's People's Commissariat for Nationalities, now the Federal Agency for Nationalities Affairs; Minister Mikhailov received me in 1994: he was very well informed about the people of the Pamirs, expressed great interest in the plans for Aga Khan Foundation programmes in Tajikistan and set up meetings for me.) In Moscow, during negotiations for the preparation of the Aga Khan's first visit to GBAO in 1995, the head of the border guards, General Andrei Ivanovich Nikolayev, was asked how his troops would respond if there was a sudden influx of the Aga Khan's followers from Afghanistan over the Panj. "We would shoot", he said - long pause - "in the air." In Dushanbe, the Russian Ambassador, Mecheslav Ivanovich Senkevich, made a (French-speaking!) translator available for my first meetings with Tajik officials (as did the US Ambassador, Stanley Escudero).

¹²³ Interview with Atobek Amirbekov, leader of the Лалы Бадахшон party [Rubies of Badakhshan, named after the writings of Sufi pirs], in *ASIA-Plus* 20 November 2011.



Involuntary guest of the Russian military commander in Murghab (1997)

A number of suspicious deaths of local leaders were blamed on the Russians. In December 1994, the commander of the ‘self-defence forces of the Pamirs’, Abdulamon Ayumbekov (‘Alyosha the Hunchback’), was killed by a remotely-detonated mine; subsequently, two other commanders, Majnun Pallaev and Hoji Abdurashid, were poisoned.¹²⁴

Moreover, at troop level, poor behaviour and lack of respect for the local population led to a number of incidents with potentially far-reaching consequences. On 22 April 1996, for example, a shooting incident initiated by drunken Russian soldiers killed one local person and wounded three others. There were Aga Khan Foundation staff in the vehicle attacked and I requested an interview with the Russian commander Pavel Tarasenko at which I pointed out that if this continued, the Russians would soon have enemies not only in Afghanistan but also on the Tajik side of the Panj. His response was courteous but clear: Khorog was a hardship post to which some of the lower elements of the Russian forces were assigned, over which he had difficulty in maintaining discipline.

In Vanch and Darwaz districts, an uneasy truce was maintained between armed opposition groups and the Russian forces. The entrance to the Vanch and Yazgulom valleys, for example, was controlled by the Russians, but, a few hundred meters up the valley, the opposition had their own checkpoints. Each was careful not to provoke incidents. I had to negotiate first with the Russians and then with the opposition for access to these areas.

¹²⁴ <https://thereareno sunglasses.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/who-is-tolib-ayombekov/>.



Opposition commander Zaynuddin in Bodom, Yazgulom valley, 1996 (Alim Walji) - on the left, the current Governor of GBAO, Yodgor Faizov, then head of the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme, a project of AKF

In November 1996, a further incident provoked by the Russian border guards nearly led to a coup by a Tajik drug ‘baron’. Four young men had recently been arrested by the Russians and had disappeared, feared killed while in custody in Khorog. Demonstrations were organised by local leaders (political and armed opposition) and tents were set up in front of the government headquarters. The protesters complained that the Russian border guards behaved like a colonial occupying power and treated the local inhabitants as inferior beings; they claimed that 36 citizens had been killed by the Russians in the last 12 months and that no charges had been brought.¹²⁵

The outcome of this accumulation of incidents was a formal request by the protesters to the Russian government that the Russian commander be replaced, and better judicial control exercised over the troops. More significantly, they requested that local people be integrated in the guarding of the border. In 2004, the Russian border guards were withdrawn and replaced by Tajiks,¹²⁶ thus putting an end to 120 years of very close Pamir-Russian relations.

¹²⁵ The government of GBAO was paralysed at the time, due to the illness of the governor, Alimamad Nyozmamadov, who was recuperating at the Russian base. At this precise moment, Rizoali Adjiev, a Tajik with links to the drug trade, arrived in Khorog from Osh with a group of armed men who proceeded to occupy the governor’s office in the name of the ‘Jihad Council of Badakhshan’. Rizoali claimed to have a letter from Said Abdullo Nuri, the leader of the United Tajik Opposition, authorising his action. The protesters were doubtful about this claim and suspected that they were being manipulated. At the request of Davlat Mamadrisobekov, head of the Tajik KGB, and with the help of Yuri Khubonshoyev, an employee of the Aga Khan Foundation and former opposition commander, both of whom by a fortunate coincidence happened to be in Khorog, I organised a meeting with Rizoali and the leaders of the original protest: Atobek Amirbekov, Khalifa Alimardonsho Shobibulloev (‘Alik’, a local religious leader) and four opposition commanders (Khudodod Ruzadorov, Tolib Ayumbekov, Olim Mirasanov and Muhammadbokhir Muhammadbokhiro). I pointed out that this putsch would likely end, for the immediate future, the Foundation’s activities in GBAO. (A delegation from the German development agency GTZ was in Khorog at the time.) It was agreed with the leaders of the protest that Atobek Amirbekov would try to contact Nuri’s entourage in Teheran to ascertain whether the supposed letter was authentic. A telephone call revealed that it was not: the protesters ended their “camp” and persuaded Rizoali to leave GBAO; he returned to Khujand, where he was arrested and died in suspicious circumstances. Khalifa Alik was assassinated the following year; no charges were brought. It is interesting to note that Tolib Ayumbekov (interview with Radio Azodi, 11 August 2012 - transcript on <http://www.pamirs.org/Ozodi-article.pdf>) and Imom Imomnazarov (*Asia-Plus* 10 August 2012) claimed to have refused an offer of \$7 million to stage a coup during the 2012 unrest in Khorog.

¹²⁶ See <https://www.rferl.org/a/1052661.html>. Russian forces remain, however, in Tajikistan and military cooperation is currently being strengthened (See <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/russias-bulwark-tajikistan-on-the-afghan-border/>).

