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Expedition photographs of Russian researchers in the Mongolian archives as sources on the history of exploration of Mongolia

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Abstract

The article provides a brief overview of the expeditionary photo albums of Russian researchers stored in the Mongolian archives. They belong to the expedition's members of the Mongolian Commission of the USSR Academy of Sciences in the 1920s. Photo albums were a supplement to the reports they submitted to the Mongolian Scientific Committee in accordance with the agreement between the Mongolian Commission and the Scientific Committee. It has been shown that expeditionary photographic materials are important sources on the history of the exploring of Mongolia by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which helps in analyzing the conditions and methods of work of expeditions and the joint activities of Russian and Mongolian researchers.

Key words

Mongolia, the expeditions of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Mongolian Scientific Committee, photo reports

The study of photographs, along with other visual documents (images, films, etc.) has become a developing area in Russian and foreign historiography, which has prompted historians to talk about a visual turn in modern historical science (Magidov 2005; Mazur 2015). One of the reasons for referring to this type of source, in our opinion, is the fact that the visual way of transmitting information about an object (person, event, landscape, etc.) is the most accessible, intelligible, and representative, and in addition, it has a great potential to communicate. This trend is observed when analyzing the history of the study of Mongolia by Russian researchers. The photo collections are not only a carrier of historical memory, but have also become important objects of scientific research. Photographic materials provide additional information for further analysis of the conditions and working methods of expeditions and their

individual participants, as well as the results of their work. In this article, we briefly discuss the history of incorporation of photographs taken by Russian scientists in the Mongolian archives, as well as the history of their study and inclusion in public space.

In 1925 the Mongolian Commission was formed under the auspices of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. In 1927, the entity became part of the Academy of Sciences. The Commission's major task was to promote the study of Mongolia by Russian scientists in conjunction with the Mongolian Scientific Committee. Each year, the Commission sent several expeditions to Mongolia, formed in accordance with the wishes of the Scientific Committee and the initiatives of Soviet academic institutions. Among the scientific areas, the closest and longest contacts between Mongolia and USSR during this period were in the fields of archeology, biology, geology, linguistics, ethnography, and a number of other disciplines.

The legal basis for the activities of Russian scientists in the territory of a neighboring country was the agreements on the procedure for the work that the Mongolian Commission concluded with the Scientific Committee. The first contract was drawn up in 1925 immediately upon the arriving of academic expeditions to Ulaanbaatar. It was very short and consisted of only three points which prescribed the expeditions to follow the laws of Mongolia, including the law of 5 September 1924 "On the Protection of Ancient Monuments", which regulated the procedure for the export of scientific collections gathered by foreign scientists and expeditions. The working conditions and commitments to the Scientific Committee were spelled out in more detail in the 1926 document, which became the model for further contracts. In accordance with clause 11 of this agreement, all expeditionary units before returning to their homeland were to "submit a detailed report on the work done to the Scientific Committee. Second copies of photographs and copies of manuscripts also had to be transferred to the Scientific Committee". This condition did not extend to negatives, which remained at the disposal of scientists (Yusupova 2018: 111–126).

At the Institute of History and Archeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences (IHA MAS), much work is being done nowadays to study the photographic materials of Russian researchers. To date, about twenty reported photo albums have been identified, which were transferred from the archive of the Presidium of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences to the archive of the Institute. They belong to a group of Russian researchers sent by the Mongolian Commission in the period 1926–1929, including philologist L.A. Amsterdamskaya, Mongolist V.A. Kazakevich, ornithologist E.V. Kozlova, geologist K.L. Ostrovetsky, linguist N.N. Poppe, the staff of the Scientific Committee of Mongolia S.A. Kondratiev and A.D. Simukov and the famous traveler P.K. Kozlov,

whose Mongolian-Tibetan expedition worked in Mongolia in 1923–1926. Photo albums provided an addition to scientific reports. We briefly present a part of the expeditionary albums with photos:

1. Liudmila A. Amsterdamskaya (1903–?), a graduate student at the Leningrad University, was sent to Mongolia by the Mongolian commission in 1927. There she studied Mongolian folklore, in particular, East Khalkha folk tales and epics (*uligers*) in the eastern part of Mongolia, “in the steppes of Khan-Khentey aimag”. The materials “are recording of a living Khalkha-Mongolian spoken language”. She published the results of her work in 1940 in the Proceedings of the Mongolian Commission (Amsterdamskaya 1940; Nosov 2013).

In the reporting photo album of L.A. Amsterdamskaya, there are 26 photos. On the cover, there is an inscription: "Appendix to the report No. 1. Photo album. Summer 1927. L. Amsterdamskaya" in Russian and the old Mongolian languages. Photos are numbered and accompanied by captions in the Russian language. The pictures show ancient stone sculptures, co-called “stone women”, views of the Undurkhan (*Өндөрхаан*) khure, portraits of Cecen-khan (*Сэцэн хан*) and his entourage, scenes of the mystery dance *Tsam*, the holiday of *Naadam* in Undurkhan and Halshar khoshuns, views of the Halshar khoshun, including photographs of branches of Moncekop (*Central Consumer Cooperative of Mongolia*) and Stormong (*Soviet Foreign Trade Organization for trade with Mongolia*).

2. Photo album of the Mongolist Vasiliy A. Kazakevich (1896–1937) refers to his business trip to Mongolia in 1927 as a member of an ethnological-linguistic expedition of the Mongolian Commission led by N.N. Poppe. Prior to this, V.A. Kazakevich had already visited Mongolia in 1923–1925. He and two more students of the Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental Languages were sent to Mongolia to, as the director of the institute V.L. Kotvich, wrote, they entered "in a live connection with the people who <...> will be studied" (Burdukov 1969: 287). After graduation (1926), V.A. Kazakevich stayed there to work as a teacher, and in 1929 became an employee of the Asian Museum of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

In 1929, V.A. Kazakevich worked in the Dariganga area (*Dariganga*), at the south-eastern border with Inner Mongolia, collected linguistic material and got acquainted with archaeological sites. In his report, he wrote that "gravestone statues in Dariganga are interesting in that they are concentrated in a small area around which

stone sculptures are not found for a distance of several hundred kilometers. They are scary"(Kazakevich 1930: 31).

In the photo album of V.A. Kazakevich, there are 40 pictures, and the title inscription is in the old Mongolian language. Under the photos, the captions are also in Mongolian. Most are pictures showing stone gravestones and many of the 31 photographs were published in the expedition report of V.A. Kazakevich. In the book, the photos are placed in the insert and are not signed. When describing grave monuments in the text, links to photographs are given with an indication of the pages of insert they are located.

3. The photo album of the ornithologist Elizaveta V. Kozlova (1892–1975) named "Landscapes of Khangai, the report of the Zoological expedition of the Academy of Sciences, 1929". E.V. Kozlova was also sent by the Mongolian Commission. The first time she worked in Mongolia was a participant of the Mongolian-Tibetan expedition led by P.K. Kozlov, her husband, in 1923–1926. The main objective of her own travel in 1929 was "the study of the high-mountain fauna (mainly birds) of Khangai, mainly in the area of Othon-Tengri (*Otgontenger*), located 130 kilometers east-south-east of Uliassutai (*Uliastai*)".

E.V. Kozlova's group included an employee of the Mongolian Scientific Committee, V.M. Kanaev (1903–?), also a former member of the Mongolian-Tibetan expedition, a local Russian settler hunter V.V. Marchuk, the translator Dagma Vazarov and the guide Lundun-Lubsan (Kozlova 1932). The result of the research in these difficult environmental conditions was, nonetheless, exhaustively complete: the travelers found 117 species of birds, 16 species of mammals, and collected herbarium of local flora. A route-eye survey was also conducted and several heights of areas were determined (Report 1930: 13–14). In 1931, E.V. Kozlova was once again sent to Mongolia and explored East Khentey and the Kerülen river basin (Kozlova 1933).

E.V. Kozlova's report opens with a numbered and annotated list of 31 photographs. In the album, only numbers are given, without any captions. In the publication of the report "Birds of Alpine Khangai" (1932), E.V. Kozlova used five photographs, accompanied by captions corresponding to the album annotations.

4. The next photo album belongs to the geologist Kazimir L. Ostrovetsky (1889–1938). In 1926–1927, K.L. Ostrovetsky participated in the Geochemical expeditions of the Mongolian Commission. His involvement with Mongolia was quite by accident. His

major professional activity was mainly associated with Karelia – north-western part of Russia, where he worked at a number of mining enterprises.

In 1926, K.L. Ostrovetsky became a member of the Geochemical expedition, led by a mineralogist B.M. Kupletsky (1894–1965). His group worked in two areas (geology and geochemical) in northeastern Mongolia, examined granite massifs "in order to find out the possibility of finding in them topaz-containing pegmatites" and produced a geological survey along the route. At the request of the Scientific Committee, B.M. Kupletsky also made a "commitment to visit <...> a number of mineral springs located in the surveyed area and illuminate the geological structure in surrounding area" (Kupletsky 1929:1).²

On the back of the title of the reporting album of K.L. Ostrovetsky, it is written in Russian: "Commission on Scientific Research of the Mongolian and Tannu-Tuvian People's Republic of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR.³ Geochemical expedition. Exploration work. Group by K.L. Ostrovetsky, 1926." In the album, there are 139 photographs, which are mainly landscapes along the route (Maimachen, Ulaanbaatar, the Kerülen and Onon river basins, the foothills of Khentey), geological features are shown and terrain and expeditionary work are displayed. Pictures are numbered and have short annotation: the place names, geological phenomena and the names of people are indicated.

In 1927, K.L. Ostrovetsky himself led the Geochemical expedition of the Mongolian Commission, but the work took place only on the territory of Tannu-Tuva. At the request of the government of the republic, he examined the gold deposits in the area of the river Kemchik and the prospects of its industrial development.

5. Album of the Mongolist Nikolay N. Poppe (1897–1991) refers to his research in Mongolia in 1927. N.N. Poppe headed the Ethnological-Linguistic expedition of the Mongolian Commission, which was divided into four groups, led by V.A. Kazakevich (his account album is described above), B.B. Bambaev, G.D. Sanzheev and N.N. Poppe himself, who studied the Dagurian and Solonian languages (Poppe 1930; 1931).

N.N. Poppe's album includes 12 photos. Pictures have captions in the old Mongolian language. The photographs are mainly general views of the Buddhist monastery Amarbayasgalant. All pictures are included in another photo album of N.N. Poppe – "Views and types of Mongolian" ("*Vidy i tipy Mongolii*"), stored in the Archive of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg (Sizova and Shevelchinskaya 2014). It contains 46 photos, accompanied by captions in the Russian language. In addition to the Amarbayasgalant monastery, one can see on his pictures

views of the areas near the rivers Tunkhel-gol and Orkhon, visited by expedition, as well as images of representatives of different ethnic groups.

6. Today, the largest array of photographic materials in the Mongolian archives belongs to Sergey A. Kondratiev (1896–1970) and Andrey D. Simukov (1902–1940). They both started as members of the Mongolian-Tibetan expedition led by P.K. Kozlov. In 1925, S.A. Kondratiev went to work in the Scientific Committee, where he was engaged in geographical research, meteorological and astronomical observations and study of the musical creativity of the Mongols (Zhukov and Kulganek 2006).

A.D. Simukov became an employee of the Scientific Committee in the fall of 1926, after the completion of P. Kozlov's expedition. He had worked in Mongolia for 16 years, before his arrest in 1939 A.D. Simukov made a significant contribution to the geographical study of Mongolia. From 1927, he was in charge of the Scientific Committee Geography Cabinet, traveled extensively in the country and was well aware of its climatic and economic features (Simukov 2007). The expeditionary activities of S.A. Kondratiev and A.D. Simukov concentrated on the study of the country and its natural resources, upon the decision of the Scientific Committee in the 1920–1930s. Among the items stored in the Mongolia albums are photo reports about the Onon expedition of 1926 led by S.A. Kondratiev, the Gobi expeditions of 1927 led by A.D. Simukov, their joint Khangai expedition of 1928 and others.

One of the most significant finds are two albums of the Mongolian-Tibetan expedition of P.K. Kozlov. In his report, Kozlov noted that the expedition took 300 shots on photographic glass plates (Kozlov 1928: 45). During his stay in Ulaanbaatar, he took these to local photo workshops for printing. As a result, several prints were made of each photographic plate.

It was known that the main photographs were kept in the Russian Geographical Society (RGS) and the P. Kozlov Memorial Museum in St. Petersburg. For the most part, the photo prints of these two collections duplicate each other. Their proper description has not yet been carried out either in the RGS or the Kozlov Museum. Only part of the photos was signed by P.K. Kozlov or his wife E.V. Kozlova. However, they did not always indicate the date and place they were taken. Most of the photos are of landscapes, having no captions, so their identification is quite difficult.

In two of Kozlov's photo albums, about 300 photographs are arranged in chronological order and have short captures, usually, without giving the dates and, often,

naming the people. With the help of P.K. Kozlov's detailed diary entries and reports, we however managed to establish the exact dates when they were shot as well as identifying events and most personalities. The photo collection was prepared for publication as a joint project of the Institute of History and Archeology of the MAN and the Russian Geographical Society and was published in Mongolia in 2018 (Chuluun and Yusupova 2018).

Unlike the Scientific Committee, in reports to the Mongolian Commission, the photographic materials were not mandatory. Therefore, it is difficult to find them in Russian archives. Today, the following expeditionary photographs have been identified, as indicated above: N.N. Poppe – in the Archive of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts; geologists I.P. Rachkovsky (1878–1961) and Z.A. Lebedeva (1893–1975) – at the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Mandrik 2014), archaeologist G.I. Borovka (1894–1941) – in the Scientific archive of the Institute of History of the Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IHMC RAS).

In this series, we would especially like to note the photographs taken by G.I. Borovka in 1924–1926. At that time, photographing for archaeologists became an integral and mandatory part of their work, the main method of fixing the stages of excavation and finds. G.I. Borovka complied with professional standards when shooting excavations, and when photographing other objects. In the field photo diary, he always indicated the date, shooting time, weather conditions, shooting technical specifications (film and frame number, size aperture, exposure time, etc.), and brief image content.

The photographs of G.I. Borovka depict general views of burial grounds and the process of excavation in the Noyon Uul mountains, archaeological sites of the valley of the river Tola, the scribbles on the rocks, "stone women", wooden architecture, ethnographic types of Mongolia, and members of the Scientific Committee. Upon completion of the work report, "equipped with photographs", he like other Russian researchers, transferred them to the Scientific Committee of Mongolia (Borovka 1927: 53). The photographs of G.I. Borovka were the first of the expeditionary photo collections of Russian researchers published as part of the project "History of Mongolia in Photographs" (IHA MAS jointly with IHMC RAS) (Chuluun and Medvedeva 2017).

The work on the identification of expeditionary photographic materials in Mongolia continues. Photographs of Russian researchers are a valuable source for the history of exploring of Mongolia, which the Scientific Committee conducted jointly with the Academy of Sciences in the 1920–1930s. They include diverse information about

Mongolia, its landscapes and natural features, architectural and archaeological sites, Buddhist monasteries, ethnic types, and everyday life of the Mongols. They also give an idea about the objects of study, geographical features of the expedition routes, the expedition participants, as well as about the means of traveling and working conditions, and, finally, they reflect the interaction of Russian and Mongolian researchers and the activities of the Scientific Committee.

New information coming from the study of photo materials, significantly expands the story of Soviet-Mongolian scientific cooperation and increases our knowledge of historical research dealing with the activities of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Mongolia.

Note

1 For more details about K.L. Ostrovetsky see: [http://vizz.nlr.ru/person / show / 119649](http://vizz.nlr.ru/person/show/119649) (accessed: 07.24.2019).

2 The book includes 8 photographs of the geological group and a map. It is found in the Mongolian archives reporting album B.M. Kupletsky has not yet been identified.

3 Full names of the Mongolian Commission since November 1925 to 1928. It was assumed that their tasks would center on the study of Buryat Republic and Tannu-Tuva bordering with Mongolia. However, only work in Tuva, the Archaeological expedition of S.A. Teploukhov (1926–1927) and the Geological expedition of Z.A. Lebedeva (1927) took place, and a special commission was created to study Buryatia. Since 1928, the sphere of activity of the Mongolian Commission was only Mongolia.

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