

Archive of the Russian Geographical Society: Photo Collections of Mongolia

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Archive of the Russian Geographical Society

The Russian Geographical Society was established by the highest authority of the Emperor Nicholas I in 1845 (from 1849 – the Imperial Russian Geographical Society). It is one of the oldest Geographical Societies in the world. The founders of the Society were a group of leading geographers and naturalists and seafarers.

The main task of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO) was: “the geographical, statistical, and ethnographic study of Russia and neighboring countries.”

The first Chairman of the Society was the Grand Duke Constantine (1821–1892), the second son of the Emperor Nicholas I. After his death, the Society was headed by Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich (1892–1917), grandson of Nicholas I.

An important role in the activities of the RGS at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was played by its vice-chairman Peter P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shanskii. Over the four decades, from 1873 until 1914, he helped to organize a great number of geographical expeditions and individual trips around the world, including those to Central Asia and Mongolia.

The Russian Geographical Society is all currently a non-governmental society.

The RGS is in St. Petersburg, in its own house on Gritvsov lane, built in 1908 by the architect G. Baranovskii.

There are a library, a museum, and an archive in the building.

The formation of Archives collections began simultaneously with the establishment of the Russian Geographical Society.

The Archive now includes:

--115 collections on ethnography and geography of Russia.

--144 personal collections of outstanding Russian geographers and travelers. Among them: P.P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, N.M. Przhevalsky, N.N. Miklouho-Maclay, G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo, G.N. Potanin, P.K. Kozlov, V.A. Obruchev, N.I. Vavilov, Y.M. Shokalsky and others;

--collection of papers on the administrative activities of the Society’s office;

--an archive of photographs and negatives.

In personal collection are also photographic materials, which are related to the activities of their researchers.

Photos about Mongolia are located:

--in the personal collections of travelers and researchers of Central Asia and Mongolia (N.M. Przhevalsky, G.N. Potanin, G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo, M.V. Pevtsov, P.K. Kozlov and others);

--in the photo archive are photos of views and types of Mongolians.

I will describe three photo collections dedicated to Mongolia:

1) album of photographs "Views and types of North-Western Mongolia", made by a member of the RGS A.V. Adrianov. He participated in the expedition to North-Western Mongolia (1879–1880) under the leadership of the famous Russian explorer of Central Asia G.N. Potanin (1835–1920).

Alexander Vasilyevich Adrianov (1854–1919) was a Siberian traveler, ethnographer, archaeologist, and botanist and was born in the family of a priest, in the Tobolsk province in Siberia. In 1874, he entered the St. Petersburg University. Here he met G.N. Potanin and another researcher of Mongolia – N.M. Yadrintsev (1842–1894).

Both Potanin and Yadrintsev opposed the centrist policy of the tsarist government and supported granting the administrative freedoms of Siberia. Because of their political views, they were deported from the capital to exile, where they spent 9 years. In 1874, they were amnestied at the request of the RGS.

Potanin and Yadrintsev had a great influence on the fate of A.V. Adrianov, determined not only his research interests, but also political preferences.

After the end of the Potanin expedition, Adrianov lived in different cities of Siberia, the last few years in Tomsk.

Since 1879, on behalf of the RGS, he had conducted research in northwestern Mongolia, in the Altai and Sayans. He made his last expedition in 1915–1916 to the Uriankhai (now the Republic of Tuva, Russian Federation).

From 1917 to 1919, he was an editor of the newspaper *Siberian Life*, where he criticized Bolshevik ideas. In December 1919, he was arrested by the Bolsheviks and was shot in March 1920. He was 66 years old.

In his expeditions, G.N. Potanin paid great attention to the study of peoples inhabiting Central Asia, and to the collection of ethnographic materials. In his expedition to Northwestern Mongolia, he conducted ethnographic research by himself. Meanwhile, A.V. Adrianov was engaged in the gathering of natural-science collections. In addition, he was instructed to take photographs, mostly ethnographic. He acquired for this purpose a new camera invented by Russian engineer L.V. Warnerke in 1877, the world's first camera with roller cassettes for bromosilver collodion cassette tape.

The camera was light and easy to handle, which was useful in travel.

The route of the Potanin's expedition passed from the village of Kosch-Agatsch (Russian Altai) through the Altai mountain range) to Ulang (a city in seventeenth-century Mongolia). Then the expedition headed south to the Mongolian Altai mountains. From here, it turned back north to the Tannu-Ola ridge, then along the border with Mongolia, through the East Sayan Mountains. To the west of the lake Khövsgöl Nuur, the most beautiful and deepest lake in Mongolia, the expedition marched out to Irkutsk.

A total of about 1,800 km had been covered, route maps had been compiled, and excellent diverse natural history collections had been collected. Materials of the expedition were published by G.N. Potanin in the book **Sketches of North-Western Mongolia. The Results of the Journeys, Executed in 1876-1877; 1879-1880, on Behalf of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society**“ (Vols. 1–4, 1881–1883). In addition, Potanin transferred to the RGS about 70 photos of Mongolia's views and types made by Adrianov, the best of which were included in the Album *Views and Types of Mongolia*“ (**63 photos**).

This album was the first one dedicated to the ethnography of Mongolia in the collection of the RGS.

For participation in G.N. Potanin's expedition, A.V. Adrianov was awarded a silver medal by IRGS (1880).

All photos in the album are annotated by A.V. Adrianov, and the signatures are in French. The size of the photos is mostly 16.5 x 10.5 cm; the size of the sheet (passepartout) of the album is 30x23 cm., the preservation of the photos is good.

A.V. Adrianov also compiled a list of photographs with annotations in Russian. It was published in “Izvestiya IRGS” (1880).

There are several photos from this album on the slide. The album was never fully published.

2) A few words about G.N. Potanin.

The Central Asian expeditions of G.N. Potanin on the exploration of North China, East Tibet, and Central Mongolia took place in 1884–1886 and 1892–1893. The Archive of RGS stores photographs and negatives made in his Tangut-Tibet expedition (1884–1886), as well as photos of Central Mongolia. The collection consists of 86 photographs and 170 negatives of different size and degree of preservation. The results of the expedition were published by G.N. Potanin in the book **Tangut-Tibetan Outskirts of China and Central Mongolia** (1893)

During his expeditions to Central Asia, Potanin collected folklore materials, which described the life and material culture of nomadic and sedentary peoples. Especially valuable is the information about the numerous Turkic and Mongolian tribes, Tanguts, Chinese, and Dungans. Potanin recorded over 300 works of Oriental epics, which were used in the book **Eastern Motifs in the Medieval Europe Epic** (1899)).

G.N. Potanin's long-term study of the nature and populations of Central Asia was highly *appreciated* in the IRGO. In 1886, he was rewarded the highest award of the IRGS – Konstantinovsky medal.

3) There are many interesting materials in the Archive. **I would like to say a few words about another well-known researcher of China and Mongolia, G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo. (1860–1936).**

He made several expeditions to the Pamir countries, to Western China, and to Mongolia. His expedition to Western Mongolia and the Tannu Uriankhai took place in 1903. During the expedition, the topographic survey of the traversed route was carried out, and meteorological and geological data of this region, numerous natural-science collections, as well as materials on ethnography and information on trade, were collected.

G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo presented the materials of the expedition in the book **Western Mongolia and the Uruankhai Country** (1914). The Archive of the RGS stores an album of photographs taken during this expedition, mainly of the views and types of Mongolia, in the personal collection of G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo.

There are 38 photos of different degree of preservation in the album. In addition, there are about 40 negatives.

On the slide – several photos of G.E. Grumm-Grzhimaylo from this album.

We hope that the researchers who will work in the Archive of Russian Geographical Society will make many other interesting discoveries.