

Tibetan Studies in Russia:

A Historical Sketch

Alexander Zorin

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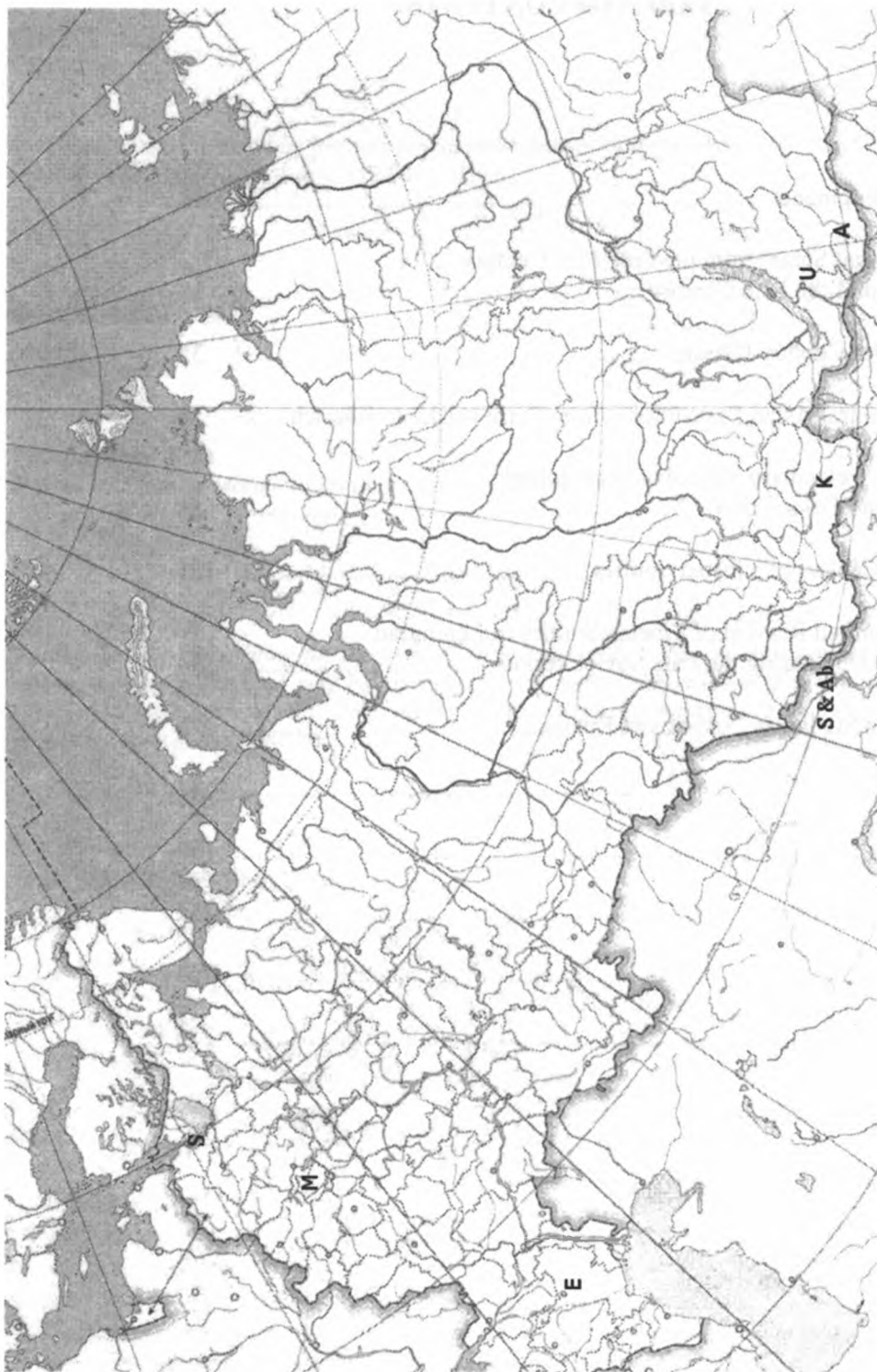
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A fragment of the map of the Russian Federation

S — Saint Petersburg, M — Moscow, E — Elista, K — Kyzyl, U — Ulan-Ude, A — Aginskoye
Add.: S & Ab — area where Sem Palat and Ablai-kit used to be located (presently, Eastern Kazakhstan)

И изречения Дзонкавы
Смешает с чистою росой,
Срывая лепестки купавы,
Славянка с русою косою.

And the sayings of Tsongkhapa
Will be blended with pure dew
By a light-brown braided Slavic maiden
Plucking petals of a *kupava-nenuphar*.

Velimir Khlebnikov. *Ladomir*
(1920–1921)

FOREWORD

Tibetology is one of the oldest branches of Oriental studies in Russia that used to be closely connected with foreign and inner policy of the Russian State starting from the late 17th century. The neighborhood with various Mongolian political formations and gradual spread of Russian sovereignty upon some of them caused a necessity of studying Tibetan, in addition to the Mongolian, Oirat (Kalmyk) and Buryat languages, and also Tibetan Buddhism as the dominant religion of the Mongolian world.¹ Huge collections of Tibetan texts and various artifacts were gradually gathered in Saint Petersburg (henceforth St. Petersburg) and some other cities, this process having been initiated by Peter the Great, the first Russian emperor.

However, Tibetology mostly remained in the shadow of Mongolian studies. Official courses of Tibetan were first included in the educational programs in the early 20th century only, while there had been a lineage of important scholars of Tibetan (mostly but not exclusively Germans who lived in Russia) who had made a great contribution to European Tibetology. Naturally enough, Tibetan studies in Russia were intertwined with Buddhology, and the St. Petersburg School of Buddhology founded by S. F. Oldenburg and Th. I. Stcherbatsky used Tibetan as a major language, along with Sanskrit and Mongolian (some other languages were also used but to a lesser extent). A great impact was made by a series of expeditions to Central Asia from the 1870s to the middle of the 1920s that had both academic and political goals. The culmination of the development of Buddhology and Tibetology took place in the Soviet Russia during the late 1920s to the middle of the 1930s, but both disciplines were almost totally cut off with the Stalinist political oppressions in 1937. Their gradual revival started after World War 2 in

¹ It includes also the Tuva (Tyva) Republic and, to a lesser extent, the Altai Republic, whose indigenous peoples speak Turkic languages.

Leningrad / St. Petersburg,² Moscow and Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia. The process accelerated after the end of the Soviet era when any ideological pressure on religious studies was removed. Elista, the capital of Kalmykia, joined the list of major centers of Russian Tibetology in the 1990s.

Although no special monograph on the history of Russian Tibetology was ever published, its numerous aspects were illuminated in quite a many papers and monographs, mostly by the Russian authors. Those written in Russian remain largely unknown to foreign colleagues. The general surveys of the history of Tibetology in St. Petersburg and Buryatia were written by Andrey Vostrikov (VOSTRIKOV 1935), Margarita Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya and Lev Savitsky (VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA, SAVITSKY 1972; 1981); Andrey Bazarov and Nikolay Tsyrempilov (BAZAROV, TSYREMPILOV 2012; 2012b), Sergey Lepekhov (LEPEKHOV 2011).³ The monographs by Alexander Andreyev (ANDREYEV 2006) and Tatyana Ermakova (ERMAKOVA 1998) contain a lot of valuable information on historical contacts between Russia and Tibet and the development of Buddhist and Tibetan studies in Russia from the 19th century to the 1930s. Papers and books dedicated to various scholars and institutions written by Hartmut Walravens, Vladimir Uspensky, Helen Ostrovskaya, Tatyana Ermakova, Margarita Kozhevnikova, Elena Khamaganova, Aleksandr Dyuldenko, Aleksey Vigasin, etc. are of great importance, too.

I have tried to present, on the basis of these works⁴ as well as my own researches,⁵ a coherent description of the history of Tibetan studies in Russia. Without doubt, another author could emphasize some other points and arrange the facts and names differently.

² The city was renamed to Petrograd in 1914 after the beginning of World War I, ten years later it was renamed again, this time to Leningrad. The historical name, Saint Petersburg (in Russian Sankt-Peterburg), was returned to the city in 1991.

³ See also general accounts of the history of Oriental studies in Russia: BARTHOLD 1977b: 412–414, 458–460; SHASTITKO ET AL. (eds) 1990: 375–380, etc.; SHASTITKO ET AL. (eds) 1996: 284–289, etc. Some data on the St. Petersburg scholars who studied the Tibetan language and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are found in BULICH 1904: 201–202, 411–413; WALRAVENS 2008.

⁴ All the English translations of the quoted passages are mine. The translation of the epigraph was kindly edited by Florin Deleanu who made some valuable suggestions concerning its style. For the epigraph I borrowed a stanza from a poem by Velimir (Viktor Vladimirovich) Khlebnikov (1885–1922), a Russian avant-garde poet, who was born in Kalmykia (his father was a district administrator of the Maloderbetovsky Ulus for several years). Khlebnikov had distinct anti-Western (or, rather, anti-capitalist) sentiments and believed that Asia would revive from the long period of decay and colonialist oppression after the victory of the Russian revolution.

⁵ They are mostly connected with my work as a curator (from 2006) of the vast collection of Tibetan texts preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (Asiatic Museum) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.

Nevertheless, I hope my vision will provide the foreign reader with an understanding of the main processes that instigated or obstructed achievements of Tibetology in the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation.

Moreover, I have tried to name the majority of principal works written *in Russia* in various languages (Latin, German, Russian, French, English) on Tibet, its language, religion, history, culture, etc. for almost three centuries by people of various ethnical backgrounds.⁶ I hope my text can be used as a guide to Tibetological literature produced in our country. The parts of the last chapter that concern the 21st century contain a very simple narrative, being rather an enumeration of contemporary scholars and titles of their most important contributions. Their more critical and objective analysis has to be undertaken when the current stage is over. Nobody knows when and how it happens, it will certainly depend on the flow of Russian history which is rather unpredictable.

Whatever the future may bring, Tibetan culture is inseparable from Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism, which is officially recognized as one of the traditional religions of the Russian Federation, and its studies can hardly lose significance for the successful development of our multinational society. The rich academic collections will also continue to attract interest of scholars and educated people. These two circumstances make me moderately optimistic about the fourth century of Tibetan studies in the country that was always a place where Asia and Europe, or vice versa, the classical *twain* of Old World, met.



⁶ I did not include information about some contemporary scholars who have the Russian background but belong, at least presently, to the foreign academia such as Yaroslav Komarovsky, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or Dmitry Ermakov, based in London.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The draft of the sketch was written in 2017–2018 as a part of the Major Bidding Project of the National Social Science Fund, China [14ZDB115], chaired by Prof. Dr. Wang Qilong, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, who also invited me to Xi'an to deliver some lectures on the same subject in May 2017. I am sincerely grateful to Prof. Wang for his encouraging me to write this sketch. I doubt I could ever think about it, if not for his kindest interest.⁷

In May 2018 I also delivered four lectures connected with the history of Russian Tibetology in the *École pratique des hautes études*, Paris, by the invitation of Prof. Dr. Matthew Kapstein. An abstract of the first lecture was published in the *Bulletin of EPHE* (ZORIN 2019d). The Paris experience supported my feeling that the sketch might be interesting for the foreign colleagues, in both East and West. In 2019, it was accepted for the publication by the International Institute for Buddhist Studies, Tokyo, to which I have felt warmly connected since 2010 when I was its visiting researcher for three happy months. I would like to specially thank Prof. Dr. Saito Akira and Prof. Dr. Florin Deleanu for their kind attention to my work and Mr. Shin'ichirō Hori for his technical assistance. The initial text was revised and enlarged by me significantly during the winter and spring of 2020.

⁷ Prof. Wang Qilong also initiated, within the same project, the compilation of *The List of the Publications on Tibetology and Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism by the Russian Authors or Authors Who Were Affiliated with the Russian Scholarly Institutions, 1730–2018*. This work that remains unpublished was started by Meng Xia and Tao Yuan, his colleagues at Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, in 2017. It was consequently revised and enlarged by me and, finally, enlarged and thoroughly edited by Alla Sizova, my friend and constant co-author, in 2018. For a shorter list that the reader will find in this book I had to romanize Cyrillic titles and provide their English translations. The Latin transliteration follows the American Library Association & Library of Congress System of Romanization for Russian as it is presently used by many Russian journals. However, in all other cases I prefer to use a more natural (or, perhaps, familiar) way to render the Russian letters *э, ё, -ьй, ю, я* with use of the Latin letter *y*, i.e. *yo, y, -y, yu, ya*. I also spell the names of some authors in the way they themselves like(d) to do when writing in English.

I am sincerely grateful to all my Russian and foreign colleagues and friends who have supported me in this project. I am indebted, in particular, to Prof. Dr. Andrey Terentyev, Prof. Dr. Vladimir Uspensky and Prof. Dr. Hartmut Walravens for their much learned advice. Some valuable remarks were shared with me by Prof. Dr. Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Dr. Irina Garri, Dr. Tatyana Ermakova, Alla Sizova, Viacheslav Zaytsev, Dr. Elena Kharkova, Dr. Shinga Kanako. Needless to say, all remaining errors are my own.

I dedicate this book to my wife Maria whom I met in 1996 when we two joined the group of Tibetan philology at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg University.

Sarva maṅgalaṃ!



The eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism
(painted block print, Buryatia or Mongolia, the 19th or early 20th century);
collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS,
call number: И-1321