

Reviews

Dmitriev S.V. *Fond etnograficheskogo otdela Russkogo muzeia po kul'ture narodov zarubezhnogo Vostoka: Istorii formirovaniia i sud'ba (1901–1930-e gg.)*. St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2012. ISBN 917-5-8465-1259-7.

At first glance, the subject of this volume seems a little arcane, the history of a particular collection within a single museum, the more so, since the tome runs to 829 pages. Moreover, the subject of the book also appears puzzling. Why would a museum dedicated to the cultures of the Russian Empire, the Russian Muzei incorporate a collection of materials and artifacts about Asian peoples specifically outside the borders of the Empire? Explaining how this came about is one of the purposes of the work, but does that warrant such a lengthy exposition?

In fact, it does, and S.V. Dmitriev has produced an impressive volume that is both history and reference work. The study is about more than a particular set of archive collections. First, it is about the founding and evolution of the Russkii Muzei, which is closely tied to the history of Russian imperial construction during the 19th and 20th cc. The story that Dmitriev tells touches on the lives and activities of some of the most prominent high state officials, royal patrons, and members of the Russian ethnographic community. Second, by examining how the foreign peoples section became incorporated into the Museum he provides fascinating insights into how Russia viewed its destiny and role in Asia. Third, by examining the fate of the individuals and collections of the Museum after 1917, Dmitriev offers valuable insight into the fate of individuals and the scattered whereabouts of the museum's collections. The latter, as Dmitriev explains, required painstaking work in tracking the dismemberment and disbursal of various collections and fragments of collections, which in itself gives insight into the evolution and politics of Soviet nationality and foreign policy designs. Finally, by producing this volume, Dmitriev provides a useful guide for researchers hoping to find the bits and pieces of collections housed in various post-Soviet archives and libraries.

In the first section, Dmitriev explores the different ideas of the founding figures of the Museum and its ethnographic section and, in doing, so, distinguishes the

different approaches to ethnicity and ethnography that split the academic community in 19th c. Russia. He describes, for example, the proposal of V.I. Lamanskii, the prominent Slavist, Slavophile, and member of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, to create a museum based on thirteen territorial areas, and the various peoples that inhabited each of those areas. In contrast, D. Mikhailov, ethnographer and pedagogue, argued for a division of the museum's departments into separate ethnic-territorial groupings, such as Finns, Great Russians, Little Russians, the Baltic peoples, Turkestan, etc. Yet another proposal advocated exhibition halls based on linguistic distinctions. The renowned orientologist D.A. Klementz outlined the most detailed program in the first several years of the 1900s, which was finally accepted, along with Klementz himself as the first head conservator. Reflecting Russian imperial ambitions, Klementz argued that a Russian Museum should not be limited to the current borders of the Empire, but should reflect imperial ambitions in all directions, even beyond the Empire's borders. As a result, he argued, the Museum should include departments devoted to the study of cultures, especially in Asia, including religious collections of the different forms of Buddhism (76–85, 96–98). In several lucid sections, Dmitriev summarizes the consequent debates about organizational and conceptual specifics and about the relations of the new Museum to the already long-established Russian Imperial Geographical Society and the Russian Academy of Sciences.

In the second section, Dmitriev offers short essays about how certain Asiatic collections came to be housed in the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum. These sections alternate with descriptions of the influence of prominent Orientologists on the organization of exhibits and collections. Essays cover major collections, especially from Persia, Kurdistan and Turkmen and Armenian areas outside the Empire. Other collections included those from Mongolia, Tibet, China and Japan and Buddhist religious artifacts, books, and manuscripts. These essays are rich in detail and well annotated. They include discussions of the provenance of collections of both explorers and wealthy collectors, such as Princes N.I. Amatuni and D.E. Ukhtomskii, life-long Sinologist and influential head of the Asian Desk of the Foreign Ministry, N.I. Liubimov and the eccentric businessman, F.M. Pliushkin. Dmitriev also discusses the influence and polemics of such prominent and controversial figures as V.V. Stasov and his insistence on the Asian origins of Russian folk traditions. Especially interesting is the discussion of the strong influence of A.A. Miller, Chief Curator of the Ethnographic Department of the Museum from 1908 to 1918, and then Director of the Museum until 1921. A paleontologist and ethnographer, Miller specialized in the Caucasus regions, and strongly influenced the Museum in these directions. He steered the Museum through the revolutionary turmoil after 1917, and continued to work actively until his arrest in 1933. Miller died in a Soviet labor camp in 1935. His papers were eventually transferred to the Museum from the political police archives. His fate was not unlike those of many who worked for or with the Museum.

Dmitriev devotes the third and largest section of the book to a bibliographic dictionary of those whose work contributed to the Museum's ethnographic collections. Each entry includes biographical information, works by and about the individual, the provenance of the collections, and any information that is available about where and when the materials were reorganized or transferred to other institutions. As Dmitriev notes, there are gaps in records about the disposition of many of the Museum's collections, but the work in this section is meticulous and will be appreciated by any scholar who consults the book. This is a valuable book for anyone, whether archivist or researcher, who has an interest in the history of Eurasian empires in the modern era.

David R. Shearer,
Professor of History
University of Delaware
