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## **В НОМЕРЕ:**

### **НАУЧНАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ О. М. КОВАЛЕВСКОГО**

- Н. Г. Альфонсо.** «Буддийская космология» О. Ковалевского и «Учение о мире» Васубандху. . . . . 5  
**О. Н. Полянская.** История востоковедения на страницах корреспонденции монголоведа О. М. Ковалевского (1801–1878) . . . . . 16

### **ИСТОРИЯ, ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ, ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЕ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ**

- А. Д. Цыбиктаров, Э. О. Хакимова.** Деятельность Императорского Русского географического общества по изучению бронзового и раннего железного веков Монголии (70-е гг. XIX — начало XX в., источниковедческий аспект) . . . . . 25

### **ФИЛОЛОГИЯ**

- A. V. Zorin.** Ivan Minayev and “Heart of Darkness”: an Indological dimension of J. Conrad’s tale . . . . . 33  
**Э. Вандан.** Семантические особенности монгольского перевода романа Ф. М. Достоевского «Идиот» . . . . . 40  
**А. С. Донгак.** Новые полевые данные по фольклору и традиционной обрядности народов Западной Монголии (хотоны, урянхайцы и тувинцы) . . . . . 46

### **АРХИВЫ МОНГОЛОВЕДОВ**

- С. С. Сабрукова.** Страницы истории отечественного монголоведения: из воспоминаний Г. И. Михайлова (1909–1986) . . . . . 54

### **СМЕЖНЫЕ ДИСЦИПЛИНЫ**

- Ю. А. Иоаннесян.** Некоторые аспекты сходства и отличия в учении между шейхизмом и исмаилизмом (по материалам персоязычных исмаилитских источников) . . . . . 64  
**Д. А. Костандян.** Терминологическая система современной арабской музыки. . . . . 75  
**А. А. Туранская, М. А. Козинцев.** Эстампажи надписи Моюн-чора в коллекции Института восточных рукописей РАН . . . . . 89

### **IN MEMORIAM**

- Ушел Марк Исаакович Гольман (*ред. коллегия*) . . . . . 95

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

### RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF OSIP M. KOVALEVSKY

- N. G. Alfonso.** “Buddhist Cosmology” by O. Kovalevsky and “The Teaching of the World” by Vasubandhu 5
- O. N. Polyanskaya.** History of Orientalism in the Correspondence of a specialist in Mongolian Studies O. M. Kovalevsky (1801–1878) . . . . . 16

### STUDIES IN HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA

- A. D. Tsybiktarov, E. O. Khakimova.** Activities of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society for the Study of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Mongolia (70s XIX — early XX centuries, source study aspect) 25

### STUDIES IN PHILOLOGY

- A. V. Zorin.** Ivan Minayev and “Heart of Darkness”: an Indological dimension of J. Conrad’s tale . . . . . 33
- Enkhsaya Wandan.** Semantic Features in the Mongolian Translation of the novel “The Idiot” by Dostoevsky . . . . . 40
- A. S. Dongak.** New field data on folklore and traditional rituals of the peoples of Western Mongolia (khotons, Uryankhais and Tuvinians) . . . . . 46

### ARCHIVES OF MONGOLIAN STUDIES

- S. S. Sabrukova.** A history of Mongolian studies in Russia: from the memoirs of G. I. Mikhaylov (1909–1986) . . . . . 54

### RELATED DISCIPLINES

- Y. A. Ioannesyan.** Some aspects of similarities and differences between the Shaykhi and Ismaili teachings (based on Persian-language Ismaili sources) . . . . . 64
- D. A. Kostandian.** Terminological System of modern Arabic Music . . . . . 75
- A. A. Turanskaya, M. A. Kozintcev.** Estampages of the Bayanchur inscription kept at the Institute of Oriental manuscripts, RAS . . . . . 89

### IN MEMORIAM

- Mark Isaakovich Golman (07.11.1927–05.09.2021) (*by editorial board*). . . . . 95

A. V. Zorin

Ivan Minayev and “Heart of Darkness”:  
an Indological dimension of J. Conrad’s tale

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This paper proposes a hypothesis that the image of the young Russian sailor in J. Conrad’s tale “Heart of Darkness” partially relates to the outstanding Russian Buddhologist I. P. Minayev. The first factor behind this idea was their common Tambov origin. This choice of the birth-place for a fictional character created by a foreign author (albeit connected with Russia) requires an explanation. While external features of the Russian sailor do not correspond to Minayev’s portrait, a number of other details could be based on personal impression made by him on Conrad in early January 1886 in Calcutta. The latter could witness conversation(s) between Minayev and several British officials at the Bengal Club. As follows from Minayev’s diary, they discussed issues related to Indian religions (including the role of charismatic leaders in the genesis of religious movements) and political topics such as the British suppression of Burmese resistance. Minayev’s main subjects of interest — Buddhism and Indian manuscripts — could be touched upon, too. This paper attempts to find traces of their talk(s) in “Heart of Darkness” and its Russian character. The suggested hypothesis explains use of the iconography of the Buddha in Conrad’s tale and proposes a new interpretation of its title.

**Key words:** I. P. Minayev, expedition to India and Burma, Bengal Club, J. Conrad, “Heart of Darkness”, Buddhism.

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Joseph Conrad’s (1857–1924) novella “Heart of Darkness” (1899) has a few important secondary characters, including that of an enigmatic Russian sailor whom the narrator, captain Marlow, gave a name of Harlequin. This strange member of the retinue of Mr. Kurtz, a sublime and ferocious European “king” of a trading station hidden in the depth of Africa, remains a puzzle for both the readers and critics of Conrad’s most famous story. A few attempts were made at defining his role in the narrative or investigating his symbolism<sup>1</sup>. Since the character is highly ambiguous any notions may be true and false at the same time, this indefiniteness being encoded in the text where we see him with the eyes of captain Marlow whose remarks on the young Russian vary between irony and sympathy, irritation and envy. Whatever

Conrad himself thought about his character, there seems to be a key in the text of the story that can help us to learn more about how he was created. The key is found in the field of Russian geography.

When reading the story for the first time many years ago, I got stuck for a moment on the words “introduce myself... Russian... son of an Arch-Priest... Government of Tambov”. It seemed to me an extraordinary choice for a foreign writer to associate his character with Tambov, a relatively little-known Russian city. Even in case of Conrad who, as I learnt soon, used to be a Russian subject and had had to get acquainted with some parts of central Russia in his childhood this choice needed to be explained. Yet, there was no explanation. In November of 2020 I read a paper [Albedil, 2020] about Ivan Pavlovich Minayev (1840–1890), an eminent Russian Indologist considered a founder of the famous Saint Petersburg school of Buddhology. It reminded me

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<sup>1</sup> Different interpretations of the character are suggested in: [Morgan, 2001; Etkind, 2011. Chapter 11; Gloger, 2014], etc.

of the fact that Tambov was his birthplace. Suddenly a thought struck me — what if there is a link between him and Conrad, what if Minayev who had traveled to the Indian subcontinent three times could have been seen there by Conrad who had spent a few years of his life as a sailor in the southern seas? <sup>2</sup> It was not too difficult to find out that the two men indeed had had a chance to meet.

Minayev made three expeditions to India: in 1874–1875, 1880, and 1885–1886, during the first one he also visited Ceylon and Nepal, during the third one Burma. The first two have nothing to do with Conrad's biography. The hypothetical meeting could take place in Calcutta (presently, Kolkata) at the very beginning of 1886. Minayev arrived in this city on 2 January 1886 and left it for Burma on 6 January. Conrad was there during all these five days: he had arrived in Calcutta on the clipper ship *Tilkhurst* on 21 November 1885 and left it on 8 January 1886 [Ray, 1990. P. 59].

Unfortunately, we know virtually nothing about Conrad's stay in Calcutta although the writer's epistolary in English starts at the time when he served as the second mate on the *Tilkhurst*. In a series of his letters (dated from the 27th September 1885 to the 6th January 1886) to Spiridion Kliszczewski (1819–1891), a son of Polish emigrants to Britain, Conrad discusses some business plans of his and some issues of international and inner British politics but mentions no details at all concerning his stay in Singapore and Calcutta where the letters were written [Conrad, 1983. P. 11–21]. In his turn, Minayev kept a travel diary and recorded some of his meetings in the then capital of British India but he does not mention Conrad in any way. However, these notes allow us to speculate that Conrad could see him there and use his impressions partially for the character of the Russian sailor.

Here is the English translation of the fragments of Minayev's diary that can be relevant for the subject of the paper <sup>3</sup>:

*2nd January. <...> Went to Tawney<sup>4</sup>. Met [me] cordially. Sent [me] to Hoernle<sup>5</sup>. Afraid of the heat, [I]*

<sup>2</sup> The other detail of the Russian sailor's biography, *son of an Arch-Priest*, does not have a clear relation to Minayev. There is very little information about the latter's family but we know that Minayev's father was a collegiate assessor in Tambov. It is notable that this civil rank was equal to the clergy rank of protodeacon according to the Table of Ranks introduced by Peter the Great in 1722. The role of protodeacon in the Russian Orthodox Church is close to that of archdeacon, this term resembling the one used by Conrad.

<sup>3</sup> I used the translation published in India (Minayeff 1958) but changed it slightly at certain points to make it closer to the original Russian text.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Henry Tawney (1837–1922), an English educator and scholar, translator of Sanskrit classics; the Principal of Presidency College (presently, Presidency University, Kolkata) in 1875–1892.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Hoernle (1841–1918), a British Indologist, linguist and collector of ancient Indian manuscripts who spent many years in India teaching at leading universities there; in

*declined the visit. Letters of recommendation were given [to me] everywhere.*

*3rd January. <...> Today I visited Ware Edgar<sup>6</sup>. Had a talk about Buddhism. Not interesting. [He] showed [me] his collection of Buddhist images.*

*4th January. Visited the Museum, then the Asiatic Society<sup>7</sup>. <...> From the As[iatic] Soc[iety] I went to the S[an]kr[it] College; wanted to see the Principal<sup>8</sup> but failed to find him there.*

*Dined at the club with W. Edgar. The conversation was about religion. He does not know much about Buddhism, but he obviously thought a lot about religion. He made one remark that is correct, in my opinion. Religion at the beginning of its development must have a "Teacher" — a person who by his own life would impress, influence fantasy, beliefs of the people.*

*Perhaps, he did not want to say this: at any rate, the above words are not his, but that is how I understood him and this seems to be correct, particularly, in relation to India.*

*In the course of our conversation he observed that in his opinion a new world religion must be conceived either in India or in Russia.*

*I asked him why he supposed this should be in Russia. He stopped short. However, from further talks it became clear why. We are less cultured. That is so, but our political ideas are beginning to grow stronger. And at those places where this crying evil of the clay has taken possession of the minds of the people, there is no place any more for religious tendencies.*

*5th January. <...> Dined at the club with Ware Edgar; talked about the Congress. Hume composed the Congress<sup>9</sup>. This is his idea.*

*After dinner, Hensman, Editor of the Pioneer<sup>10</sup>, took his seat near us.*

*We talked about Burma. H[ensman] has just returned from Burma. Dacoits<sup>11</sup> are a matter to be dealt with by the police, not the army.*

1897 was elected the President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in 1899 retired and settled in Oxford.

<sup>6</sup> Sir John Ware Edgar (1839–1902), a colonial administrator in British India in 1862–1892.

<sup>7</sup> The Indian Museum was founded in 1814 by the Asiatic Society or, more precisely, the Asiatic Society of Bengal (est. 1784).

<sup>8</sup> The Sanskrit College was founded in 1824 to promote studies of Sanskrit and Classical Indian heritage. In 1876–1895, Mahesh Chandra Nyayratna Bhattacharyya (1836–1906), an important figure of the Bengal Renaissance, was its principal.

<sup>9</sup> The Indian National Congress, a political party in India, was founded in 1885. Its creation was initiated by Allan Octavian Hume (1829–1912), a British member of the Imperial Civil Service, ornithologist and botanist who worked in British India.

<sup>10</sup> *The Pioneer* is an English language daily newspaper founded in Allahabad in 1865. Howard Hensman (d. 1916), a British journalist and photographer, the author of the book *The Afghan War of 1879–80* (London 1881) written when he was a special correspondent of *The Pioneer*.

<sup>11</sup> Dacoits (dacoity), a term used for bandits (and, sometimes, rebels against the British power) in India and Burma. In the context of Minayev's risky journey to Burma in 1886 it was applied to the ex-soldiers of the King Thibaw (1859–

*The Madras army is no good for the operation.*

*Sir Ch. McGregor and General Roberts*<sup>12</sup> believe that the Afghan difficulties will be solved only by occupation, or rather, by a division of Afghanistan between Russia and England. We should occupy the country from this side of the Hindu Kush and Herat; the rest is to go to England.

*6th January. On board the steamer "Pemba"*<sup>13</sup>. *Stands at anchor at Diamond Harbor*<sup>14</sup>. *The evening is cool and pleasant.*

*There is nobody else in my cabin yet. Yesterday [we] had a very interesting conversation at the club. It is a pity that it lasted too long, and I had no time to look through the collections of W. Edgar.* [Minayev, 1955. P. 112–114; Minayeff, 1958. P. 121–123].

It is clear that if Conrad did see Minayev it had to take place at the [Bengal] Club where the latter dined two nights in a row, on 4 and 5 January. The first time Minayev dined with one person only and we can only wonder if their talk could be witnessed by somebody else. As for the second time, there was apparently a lively and long conversation among a group of people, it could involve more participants than are mentioned by Minayev and, perhaps, some visitors could simply hear it as well. There remains a question if a second mate of a British ship could get an access to the Bengal Club. Although being one of the most exclusive clubs, it "relaxed its rules about guest nights in 1872, enabling members to invite guests any night of the week so long as the name of the member and his guest was entered in the dinner book the previous evening" [Sinha, 2001. P. 507]. Minayev was obviously invited by Ware Edgar. It is quite possible that somebody else could invite Conrad (a Polish aristocrat by origin) to the Club, too<sup>15</sup>.

1916) of Upper Burma deposed by the British forces in 1885. Even though their king had neither paid nor fed the soldiers, they willingly continued to slaughter Europeans even after the defeat. Each day some of them were caught and executed but they went to execution smiling and smoking their cigars. The bodies of killed dacoits were carried through the streets to frighten the locals but this demonstration did not make any impression on them [Minayev, 1955. P. 126–127; Minayeff, 1958. P. 138].

<sup>12</sup> Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor (1840–1887), a British explorer and officer of the British Army in India. Lord Frederick Sleigh Roberts, 1st Earl Roberts (1832–1914), a British general who served in India in 1851–1893, Commander-in-Chief, India, in 1885–1893; an active participant of the suppression of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880).

<sup>13</sup> Built in Scotland in 1877, this cargo liner was broken up at Bombay (presently Mumbai) in 1900, see the *Scottish Built Ships* website: <http://www.clydeships.co.uk/> (access: 28.03.2021).

<sup>14</sup> Diamond Harbour (former Hajipur) is a town about 50 km south of Calcutta/Kolkata.

<sup>15</sup> In March 2021, I sent a query to the Bengal Club concerning a possibility to check its "dinner book" for January 1886. If such a book still exists it can contain information about people who visited the Club on the dates under question. Regretfully, I have not received any reply. It could support the hypothesis but not undermine it completely. Even if Conrad

Before we turn to the text of "Heart of Darkness" two more things have to be pointed out. First, Minayev was a great lover and tireless collector of old Indian books. His personal collection of manuscripts mostly purchased during his expeditions was one of the biggest outside of South Asia at the time. Second, he basically traveled alone and showed no arrogance or racial prejudice towards the local people. Judging by his diary, he was eager to talk with them and discuss various topics, including political sentiments. Without doubt, he collected information for the Russian authorities who sponsored the expedition (the Great Game was in full swing) but he also had his own academic and personal interests when striving to come in contact with "educated natives" in the countries he studied.

The theme of the Russian sailor first appears in the book when the reader does not know about his existence. During a stop on the move to the final destination, Marlow investigates a hut and finds a strange book there.

*It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness, but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was 'An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship' by a man Tower, Towson—some such name — Master in his Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book, but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work which made these humble pages thought out so many years ago luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor with his talk of chains and purchases made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough, but still more astounding were the notes penciled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn't believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it—and making notes—in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery*<sup>16</sup>.

As we learn later it belonged to the Russian sailor who was happy to get the book back, and "the cipher" turned out to be nothing but some Cyrillic cursive notes written by him.

It is very easy to imagine Minayev talking passionately about old fascinating manuscripts and, possibly, even showing one or two to his interlocutors. Perhaps, a

did not get an access to the Bengal Club he could be told about a notable Russian traveler by somebody else who had met him in Calcutta.

<sup>16</sup> All the quotations from *Heart of Darkness* follow [Conrad, 2006].

book in his possession could also bear some interlinear notes in Russian as he usually bought books for his studies<sup>17</sup>. The words *illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures* can easily hint at some original illustrations, perhaps, Buddhist, Hindu or Jain iconographic miniatures which could seem repulsive to a European of narrow cultural preferences. W. Edgar had collections of religious artefacts, too, this subject being discussed to some extent at the Bengal Club, according to Minayev's diary.

The name of the author of the book also attracts attention. Marlow does not remember it well and provides three possible forms. This uncertainty may be intentional, an artistic means to show that "the owls are not what they seem". Conrad certainly could have in mind navigation manuals written by "a specialist in the mathematics of navigation — not seamanship — named John Thomas Towson" [Arnold, 1976. P. 121] while borrowing the ideas for the title and contents from a book by another author, Nicholas Tinmouth [Ibid. P. 122], this fusion being rather suspicious. Let us, however, look closer at the three names muttered by Marlow. Each of them has the same initial part:

Tow- er  
son  
ser.

One of Minayev's acquaintances in Calcutta was Mr. **Tawney**. Although the Russian Indologist does not mention him in connection with the Club, we cannot rule out his presence there, either physically or as a figure referred to in the talk. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that the form *Tower* could hide in it a combination *Tow + Ware* (the first name of Sir Edgar).

The portrait of the young Russian sailor that appears to the reader through the further Marlow's narration has virtually nothing to do with that of Professor Minayev who had a big beard (the sailor was *beardless*), did not wear a "harlequin costume"<sup>18</sup> and certainly could not

<sup>17</sup> Minayev's collection of Indian manuscripts was passed to the Russian Public Library (presently, the Russian National Library) after the scholar's death. It was catalogued by N. D. Mironov (1880–1936), and the first part of his catalogue (others were never issued due to political calamities in Russia) does indicate that one book, an illustrated (!) Jain manuscript, 26 ff., 15 il., has numerous interlinear glosses written by Minayev [Mironov, 1918. P. 132, catalogue no. 185].

<sup>18</sup> This outlook feature is certainly very memorable and must have some explanation. In this connection, I find it worth considering that the word "harlequin" was used by a writer Vladimir Burnashev (1810–1888) for a verbal portrait of the well-known Polish-Russian Orientalist, writer and journalist Osip Senkovsky, or Jozef Julian Sękowski (1800–1858), aka Baron Brambeus: *The head of the great Brambeus was covered with a dark red fez with a blue tassel, and his whole person was dressed in some kind of Albanian dark blue jacket over a pink taffeta shirt, in the widest, brick-colored shalwar, from under which toes of bright yellow Moroccan babouche slippers were visible. Yes, I forgot to say that in addition to this motley Harlequin dress, the shalwar was girded with a light green cashmere shawl that had the motley-colored trimming* [Burnashev, 1872. P. 676–677]. As a young man Sękow-

ski made a long travel through Turkey, Syria, Nubia and Egypt. His vividly written accounts of the travel were published in Polish and Russian and brought him first recognition. His move to Saint Petersburg and service for the Russian Empire made him unpopular among the Poles. However, Conrad had to know something about him since Sękowski presumably taught Arabic to his father, Apollo Korzeniowski (1820–1869), at Saint Petersburg Imperial University. Another possible source for this image could be found in Lord Byron's (1788–1824) poem *Don Juan* where it was applied to the Russian general Alexander Suvorov (1730?–1800), in the line *a harlequin in uniform*. Suvorov defeated Polish troops several times throughout his career, hence the semi-ironic portrait of the general suggested by the English poet had to be known to Conrad and, most likely, resounded with his national sentiments.

call himself "a simple man"<sup>19</sup>. However, the frame into which this portrait is placed makes me remember about his general image of a lone traveler and certain issues of his talk with the British interlocutors at the Bengal Club. *'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset sometimes — and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.'* <...> *'They are simple people — and I want nothing, you know.'* <...> *'I have a canoe and three black fellows waiting not very far. I am off.'* Just like this Russian, Minayev had a vessel waiting not very far (at Diamond Harbour) and was off soon (to Burma). Just like him, Minayev was not afraid of the natives and apparently felt calm traveling amongst them. He had a thirst for old manuscripts and, most probably, some weapon for self-defense<sup>20</sup>. In a similar way, when the Russian sailor left Marlow, *one of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges<sup>21</sup>, from the other (dark blue) peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' etc. etc. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness.*

The talk at the Club touched upon the ex-soldiers of the Burmese army who continued threatening the westerners and were ruthlessly persecuted by the British power. The latter used the term *dacoits* (bandits) to designate them while Minayev's description of these people is closer to the concept of rebels (see no. 11 above). When Conrad's Marlow sees the heads on the stakes in front of the residence of Mr. Kurtz, he exchanges the following remarks with the Russian sailor — *he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear. There had been enemies, criminals, workers — and these were — rebels. Those rebellious heads*

That Conrad could easily construct a character from features of two people he encountered in his life is distinctly expressed in *Author's Note* (1920) to his novel *Victory* (1915), in a passage on two prototypes of 'plain Mr. Jones'. In general, the *Note* provides us with an unique opportunity to learn from Conrad himself how his impressions of real people were transformed into memorable fictitious figures.

<sup>19</sup> But, perhaps, he could be described as having *little blue eyes that were perfectly round*.

<sup>20</sup> See: [Minayev, 1955. P. 128; Minayeff, 1958. P. 140].

<sup>21</sup> For the Martini-Henry, a rifle he had.



looked very subdued to me on their sticks. Marlow's thought is not expressed very clearly but he seems to mean that the concept of "rebels" is simply not adequate for the "savages" he faced. Such a notion would exactly correspond with the official British approach to the conquered natives, e.g. Burmese soldiers.

Last but not least, the Russian sailor was fascinated with the charisma of Mr. Kurtz, a supreme king of an African locality, both sublime and inexorable, a person who got the tribe to follow him as Marlow puts it straightforwardly. According to the Russian, 'His ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl' — but Marlow interrupts this talk with a shout: 'I don't want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz'. Thus, Kurtz was a type of an archaic ruler, i. e. he was a quasi-religious figure who turned his subjects into his worshippers. It is notable that on 4 January Minayev and Edgar talked about the origins of religion that must be connected with a "Teacher" — a person whose life would impress, influence fantasy, the beliefs of people. India seemed to both of them a proper place to see such a phenomenon appear<sup>22</sup>. A notable passage is also found in *The Note of Professor of Saint Petersburg University, State Councilor Minayev* that he composed for the Ministry of War of the Russian Empire after his return from the last expedition to India:

...The masses of people still lead a completely different life, a life of their own... in Broach, a certain Lakha — a messenger from God, from the great creator and almighty, — conceived nothing more or less than to overthrow the "engresi raj", that is, the British power, and to found his own kingdom<sup>23</sup>. <...> The Broach event did not make much of an impression on either the British or the natives, but the investigation of the case revealed a number of facts that are highly important for the characterization of India. The confession of the leader, the testimony of those involved in the uprising transfer you to some archaic, epic world: a crowd of naive believers appears before you. Strike their fancy with some grandiose fable — they will believe in you and follow you<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar thought Russia could also produce a new religion. According to Minayev, the spread of political ideas in our country made it complicated. However, the Soviet form of communism that had its own developed cult and that put a big part of the world under its strict ideological control by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does seem to have been a quasi-religious movement (cf. [Slezkine, 2017]).

<sup>23</sup> This little-known rebellion took place in Broach (presently, Bharuch) in November 1885. "About forty were captured and the Lakha Bhagat and his two principal adherents were hanged in public and hence the rebellion was suitably crushed" [Sabnis, 2014]. Minayev recorded some interesting details about this Lakha, originally a village night watchman, and his movement [Vigasin, 2008. P. 175–176].

<sup>24</sup> Translated into English by me from [Vigasin, 2008. P. 189].

If Minayev's conversation with W. Edgar and other British gentlemen did feed Conrad with some material for *Heart of Darkness* it does not mean at all that Minayev had the Russian sailor's personality, including devotion to any charismatic leaders. On the contrary, he was a sober-minded person and hated dilettantism, self-assumption and voluntarism, his diaries containing sharp remarks on some Russian high officers' attitude to the Indian matters as well as the style of Russian colonial administration in comparison with the British one<sup>25</sup> [Vigasin, 2008. P. 164–169]. Minayev was no way a Harlequin but Conrad could borrow some of his features to construct this character that would play his ambiguous role in the narration.

The Indian substrate of the story gets manifested in a surprising presentation of its narrator, Marlow, as a Buddha-like figure, some recognizable features of the Buddhist iconography being applied to him. And this motive is repeated thrice — two times at the beginning and one time at the end of the novella:

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. <...> "Mind," he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that with his legs folded before him he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower. <...> Marlow ceased and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha.

As far as I know no other writing of Conrad involves Buddhist context to such an extent<sup>26</sup>. The story concerns a completely different geographical and cultural region and, apparently, Conrad himself was not interested much in Buddhism. Why then this enigmatic comparison? This problem is effectively solved if Minayev's conversation(s) with the British gentlemen at the Bengal Club (including possible discussion of Buddhism and Buddhist arts<sup>27</sup>) was really a source of inspiration for Con-

<sup>25</sup> However, he criticized the British colonialists in his notes, too, and was rather sceptic in regard of their "civilizing" mission in India and Burma.

<sup>26</sup> One more example is found in the novel *Victory* (1915) where the ghost-like Mr. Jones is depicted once in a similar but highly ironic way: *Cross-legged, his head drooping a little and perfectly still, he might have been meditating in a bonze-like attitude upon the sacred syllable "Om."* It was a striking illustration of the untruth of appearances, for his contempt for the world was of a severely practical kind (see any edition of the novel: Part 3, Chapter X). Another description of the same character — *He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it* (Part 4, Chapter XI) — is also notable in connection with *Heart of Darkness* (see next note).

<sup>27</sup> The brutal image of human heads on the stakes, by the way, can remind about the garlands of fifty freshly cut heads, a standard *symbolical* attribute of wrathful Tantric deities. Conrad could see some Buddhist or Hindu icons of this kind in India or somewhere else. It is highly likely, however, that he

rad<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, even the title of the novella may have a Buddhological dimension.

The great Russian Buddhologist Vasily Vasilyev<sup>29</sup> (1818–1900) wrote in the first volume of his book *Buddhism, Its Dogmas, History and Literature* (1857): ...there appears the teaching of *dhāraṇīs* or those mystical expressions and formulas that are capable of reproducing everything <...> Every being, even every concept can be expressed in these formulas, and those who grasp them via simple multiple repetition (and, later, via contemplation of letters that constitute them) acquires power over this being, obtains those concepts that they express almost algebraically, so that there are some *dhāraṇīs* that encapsulate in themselves the teaching of *pāramitās*, while others can conquer spirits and gods, can call *Bodhisattvas* and *Buddhas*, deliver means for the fast accomplishment of the *Bodhi*. <...> Thus, we see that *dhāraṇīs* are considered to be the *heart* of the *Tathāgatas*, *Bodhisattvas*, etc. [Vasilyev, 1857. P. 142–143].

The term “heart” (*Skr.* *hr̥daya*) is one of the standard designations used in *dhāraṇī* literature, many texts of

this kind (better known in the West as mantras) having it in their titles: *Tathāgatahr̥daya* (*Heart of Tathāgata*, i. e. Buddha), *Mahākālahr̥daya* (*Heart of Mahākāla*, a Buddhist deity), *Pratītyasamutpādahr̥daya* (*Heart of Dependent Origination*), etc., etc. It is clear that the title of Conrad’s novella perfectly fits this pattern. The writer could learn about the Buddhist concept in two ways. On the one hand, Minayev was Vasilyev’s student and could mention it in the course of the conversation at the Bengal Club. On the other hand, Vasilyev’s book, the only source of information on *dhāraṇī* literature in Europe by the early 20th century, was promptly translated into French (and German) and, therefore, was available to Conrad<sup>30</sup>.

To conclude this paper, I should finally point out that the text of *Heart of Darkness* contains a short verbal formula that grasps its essence. I mean, of course, the famous utterance of Mr. Kurtz: *The horror! The horror!* It is hard to say, however, what power can be achieved by the repetition of this heart mantra.

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borrowed this image from the terrible realities of life in Belgian Congo. In 1897 one of the British journalists reported about Captain Léon Rom who used twenty-one shrunken heads of African rebels against the white “civilizers” “as a decoration round a flower-bed in front of his house” [Hochschild, 2006. P. 176–177].

<sup>28</sup> A notable metaphor is used by Conrad in *The Congo Diary* (1890): *Saw another dead body lying by the path in an attitude of meditative repose* [Conrad, 2006. P. 255]. It may have no relation to Buddhism but it testifies that the topic of meditation, Buddhist or not, fed his imagination already in Africa (just a few years after his visit to India).

<sup>29</sup> It may be important to add that he was a student of Jozef Szczepan (Osip) Kowalewski (1800/01–1878). Exiled from Vilna (presently, Vilnius, Lithuania) by the Tsarist Russian authorities for pro-independence Polish activity, Kowalewski was allowed to study Mongolian in Kazan University and eventually turned into one of the most important Orientalists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>30</sup> See the quoted fragment in [Vassilieff, 1863. P. 142–143] and [Wassiljew, 1860. S. 153–154].

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