

RUSSIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND ORIENTALISM

Large-scale and versatile ardour for the East, born in Europe at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, can equally be ascribed to the Russian culture as well. Historically, however, the relationships of Russia and the East had their own peculiarities: its empire included nations that professed Buddhism and Islam, cultural proximity of ancient eastern tradition was an integral part of Russian self-consciousness. In Russia, where military developments unfolded directly at the borders of or on the territory of the empire, the interpretation of the eastern theme always possessed a great amount of “involvement”, a shade of personal participation and attitude.

In the Russian cultural tradition of the first half of the 19th century the East was associated with the Caucasus. The expansion of Russian borders conditioned not only the need for accounting and development of natural resources, drawing geographical maps of various territories or obtaining more specific information on those, but also the search for the principles of systematization of data about the peoples inhabiting those territories. That was exactly the period, when the application of photography was starting, for the purpose of acquisition of objective data in various branches of natural sciences and trustworthy fixation of national living was starting. The gradual spread of the technology of shooting on location made it possible to put together a visual description of one of the most interesting regions of Europe in ethnographic realm; the possibility of documentary communication emerged for the first time [1]. Painters of battle scenes, on high demand in the first half of the 19th century, gradually lose their ground. Only Vasilii Vereshchagin, an unsurpassed expert in reporting sketching and special immersion into history, customs, colours and flavours of the oriental world, works actively and paints from nature.

1851 saw the opening of the Caucasian Department of the Russian Geographic Society, founded in 1845 according to the high injunction of Emperor Nicholas I, and by and by a special Department of Photography under the General Staff of the Caucasian Army. Among the tasks of photographers, the graduates of the Military School of Topographers, where they acquired knowledge of the history, geography and geology of the Caucasus and photography, was filming of natural landscape, living and ways of life of various peoples. The names of many of those, who

worked in the 50s and the 60s of the 19th century, remain unknown: submitting to the articles of war they did their work professionally and within the frameworks of their designated duties. There is no doubt that the new way of reality transmission was more accessible and inexpensive than the sketches of artists; and it met not only military interests, but was also directly related to scientific needs: naturalists, archaeologists and travellers turned to photography. It was exactly during that particular time that photographs and photography albums emerged: from popular daguerreotypes of the mountain views of the Caucasus of Sergey L'vovich Levitskiĭ to whole photographic series — famous portraits of horsemen fighters (dzhigits) of Andreĭ Ivanovich Denier, and landscape and architectural photographs of the lands around the Caspian Sea and the regions of Transcaucasia of such photographers as Petrov, Novikov and Edward Westly. One of the rare samples of “ethnographic” daguerreotypes of the prominent Austrian artist Josef Weninger, who operated in the mid 1840s in Petersburg, is kept in the Russian Ethnographic Museum: a group portrait of Kazakhs [2] (*fig. 1*).

In the 40s and 50s of the 19th century the first attempts at more systematic study of Central Asia were undertaken. One of the participants of the diplomatic embassy to Bukhara of 1841—1842, Nikolaĭ Vladimirovich Khanykov, on his return authored a book titled “The Description of the Bukhara Khanate”, acknowledged as the best work in the scientific community and soon translated into English, German and French languages. In 1857 he noted in his substantiation of the scientific report planned that great scientific significance is assigned to historical, ethnographic and philological survey, which should have “consequences for success in science as well as in industry” [3]. In 1858 by order of the government the prominent orientalist headed the scientific mission to the Persian province of *Khurāsān*. At the same time a military and diplomatic mission of Colonel Nikolaĭ Pavlovich Ignat'ev set out in 1858 to *Khīwa* and *Bukhārā*. A specialist in photographic art, second lieutenant of artillery Anton Stepanovich Murenko took part in the mission. The album titled “From Orenburg to Bukhara via Khiva. The Photography of Second Lieutenant of Artillery Murenko”, which gathered together the materials of the expedition, the board of the Imperial Russian Geographical So-