

ОБЗОРЫ И РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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**Some Critical Remarks on the Book
“Russian Orientalism” by the Canadian Slavist
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18, Dvortsovaya nab., St. Petersburg, 191186, Russian Federation**For citation:** Zorin A. Some Critical Remarks on the Book “Russian Orientalism” by the Canadian Slavist David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies*, 2020, vol. 12, issue 3, pp. 466–475. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2020.310>

The book that will be discussed in this review was published quite long ago [1]. It seems to have brought D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye an international reputation of the leading expert in the field of the history of Russian Oriental studies, although more among the Slavists than the scholars of the Orient. In 2019, a Russian translation was published [2]. It does not present a revised version of the book, therefore my review can be considered regarding both English and Russian editions. Since the book is now easily available and well-known to the English speaking colleagues, I will briefly introduce its contents before passing on to my critical remarks.

The main question of the book is the following one: can we speak of a Russian Orientalism? Generally speaking, it is an attempt to ascertain if E. Said’s criticism of the Orientalist (in his opinion, synonymous to *colonialist*) discourse can be applied to the Russian material. To answer this question the Author chose to write biographical sketches of such individuals as Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Count Sergei Uvarov, poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Andrey Bely, painter Vasily Vereshchagin, composer Aleksandr Borodin, Orientalists Mirza Aleksandr Kazem-Bek, Father Hyacinth (Nikita Bichurin), Osip (Józef) Kowalewski, Osip Senkovsky (Józef Sękowski), Vasily Vasilyev, Baron Victor Rosen, Sergei Oldenburg, missionary and scholar Nikolai Il’minskii, with many more figures mentioned as well. The chapters of the book treat either artistic figures or oriental-

¹ *Schimmelpenninck van der Oye D.* Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010.

ists, as if they had represented two parallel realities. Those devoted to the orientalists, if taken together, present a history of Russian Oriental Studies during the 18th to the late 19th century. This part of the book seems to have been especially appreciated and widely used by scholars outside of Russia. To my mind, this attention is underserved. What is going to be said below does not mean that the book has no value at all. It is well-written from the stylistic point of view and the reader will probably enjoy it and get a lot of interesting facts about old Russia. My intention is only to warn *scholars* from uncritical use of this book in regard of the history of Oriental studies in Russia.

The shortcomings of the book can be roughly divided into three types: 1) it contains a number of factual mistakes², 2) it presents a distorted picture of the development of Oriental studies in pre-revolutionary Russia, 3) it is not very convincing in achieving the declared aims.

The factual mistakes are of two kinds. The first group are incorrect names, dates, identifications, etc. The Author consistently calls the great 19th century Buddhologist Vasily Pavlovich Vasilyev (or Vasil'yev) *Vladimir Petrovich* (see the index)³; he claims that Vasilyev devised *phonetic* system for organizing Chinese characters (p. 183) while his pioneering system was *graphic*; he characterizes Lev Gumilev as a *Brezhnev-era dissident* (p. 237) while this person, a victim of the *Stalinist* purges, made rather a successful academic career in the late Soviet time and if he was criticized by his colleagues it was not for political issues but for his careless use of historical and cultural facts⁴; the Author repeatedly calls the contemporary Russian film director Nikita Mikhalkov *Mikhailkov* (p. 237); he calls the Moika, one of the rivers of St. Petersburg, a *canal* (p. 82); he places the city of Orenburg to *Siberia* (p. 80, 202) while it is located to the west of the Urals; he knows some Optina *Pustina* monastery (p. 233) while the Russians know only Optina Pustyn' monastery; he constructs a Russian neologism *kitaizaism* ("Chinaism") but ascribes it to the 19th century literary critic Vissarion Belinsky (p. 227) who would have probably had some troubles to utter this interesting word (the real word he used was *kitaizm*, of course); he thinks that Sergei Oldenburg's own contribution to the famous *Bibliotheca Buddhica* series was a *collection of Buriat woodblock prints* (p. 192) while the fifth volume of the series contained the edition of a *manuscript* copy of a woodblock print album of the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Pantheon [4, p. i-ii]. Moreover, it is well known that Oldenburg, who founded the series, remained its editor until the 1930s [5, p. 203] and so his contribution far exceeded this single volume.

The last example takes us to the second group of factual mistakes connected with the author's evaluation of certain figures, institutions, projects, etc. A few striking examples could be listed here but I will limit myself with only two of them. One concerns Isaak Jakob (Iakov Ivanovich) Schmidt (1779–1847), the first curator of the Tibetan and Mongolian collections of the Asiatic Museum of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (est. 1818). The author writes about him as follows:

² Some of the plainest mistakes of this type are corrected in the Russian version.

³ I cannot help mentioning that the index in the Russian version of the book also names the famous scholar Vladimir while in the main text the correct name Vasily is used.

⁴ E. g. his book *The Old Buryat Paintings* (1975) was severely criticized by a leading Russian expert in Buddhist iconography Boris Pankratov for many errors, sometimes ridiculous, such as the description of the Buddha's tufts of hair as "the blue hood of a monk" [3, p. 289–301].

“Although he was elected to membership in the Academy of Sciences ten years later, Isaac Schmidt does not occupy a prominent place in the pantheon of tsarist orientologists. His accomplishments were respectable, including some important pioneering works in Mongolian and Tibetan philology. However, the irascible Dutchman did not take kindly to criticism, and he is best remembered for his quarrels with more illustrious Russian colleagues” (p. 110–111).

This is completely wrong. Schmidt was the founder of Mongolian studies and one of the founders of Tibetan studies as academic disciplines in Russia and Europe. To say nothing about a number of his excellent papers and monographs, he was the author of the grammars and dictionaries of both languages and, what is especially important for Russia, both works were released in two versions, German and Russian [6–10]. Without doubt, he was one of the *most eminent* figures in the pantheon of tsarist orientologists. D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye ignores Schmidt’s works when appraising Józef Kowalewski (or Kovalevskii as he artificially calls him): “As Kazan’s first Mongolian specialist, Kovalevskii’s most pressing task was to produce proper study aids for his classes. Whereas his colleagues who taught Turkish, Arabic, and Persian could at least rely on the work of Western orientologists, the new professor’s field was essentially virgin linguistic soil. Within two years of taking up his post, he published a grammar” (p. 114). Although Kowalewski’s contribution to the development of Mongolian studies cannot be overestimated, he wrote his works after Schmidt’s *Grammar* and *Dictionary* had already been published, so the “linguistic soil” was not so “virgin”⁵.

The other bizarre statement is found in the following passage: “Baron Rosen was also affiliated with the Academy of Sciences, although his relationship with the hallowed institution did not get off on the right foot <...> when Rosen was taken on there were three academicians and one associate. None of them was particularly distinguished, and within three years, all had died, save a Sanskritist who had long ago returned to his native Germany. As a result, by 1881 Rosen was the only orientologist left, and at the lowest rank to boot” (p. 187–188). It is not too difficult to figure out that the four academicians who were not even named (!) by the Author include such certainly *distinguished* figures as the important scholar of Indian, Tibetan, Mongolian and some other languages and literatures Franz Anton (Anton Antonovich) Schiefner (1817–1879); the founder of Georgian studies Marie-Félicité (Marii Ivanovich) Brosset (1802–1880); the eminent expert in Persian, Afghan and some other languages and literatures, Bernhard (Boris Andreevich) Dorn (1805–1881); and Otto (Otton Nikolaevich) Böhtlingk (1815–1904), the editor (in cooperation with R. Roth) of the famous St. Petersburg Sanskrit dictionary [12], a pivotal scholarly project.

Such erroneous statements correspond with and partly create the second type of the shortcomings of the book, due to which its picture of the history of Oriental studies in the Tsarist Russia appears somewhat distorted and inadequate. The Author concentrates so much on the development of universities in Russia that he repeatedly diminishes the significance of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences for the accumulation of fundamental knowledge about the Orient in the Russian and European academia. He does not take into consideration that the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences published a lot of im-

⁵ It can be also added that Schmidt’s translations of the New Testament and some other Christian texts into Mongolian and Kalmyk were published (starting from 1815) with use of specially created movable types, see [11]. These unique types were later used for the editions prepared by Kazan Mongolists, too.

portant papers on various Oriental issues in its official *Bulletin* (est. 1837) and they were duplicated in the special series *Mélanges asiatiques* (1849–1894). The Author claims that the first Orientalist series published in St. Petersburg was *Zapiski Vostochnago otdeleniia Imperatorskago Russkago arkheologicheskago obshchestva* (*Transactions of the Oriental Section of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society*) founded in the 1880s and that “Russia was a latecomer in this respect. Already toward the end of the eighteenth century, William Jones’s Asiatic Society in Bengal had begun publishing its *Asiatic Researches*, while the French *Journal asiatique* first appeared in 1823, followed some twenty-five years later by the German Oriental Society’s *Zeitschrift* (Journal)” (p. 187). Even if *Mélanges asiatiques* was not a journal but rather a digest, it is not correct to ignore it completely.

Moreover, the Author claims that “the Asian (Asiatic. — A. Z.) Museum played second fiddle to St. Petersburg University for most of its existence” because its first directors Frähn and Dorn were not “overly enthusiastic about working with students or other scholars, and they devoted their considerable energies to cataloguing and studying the collection under their care” (p. 159). According to this view, people who study the collections can only play second fiddles to those who teach students. Even if such eminent scholars as Frähn and Dorn had not exerted any direct influence on the younger colleagues (although they certainly did) such a statement would be a sign of misunderstanding of the character of St. Petersburg school of classical Oriental studies that has always largely relied on the study of the written heritage of the peoples of the East⁶.

The origin of the academic collection of the texts in Eastern languages is traced back to the personal library of Peter the Great who paid much attention to some strange manuscripts with golden writings brought to him from Siberia presumably in 1718. A few years later another sample of these writings was sent to Europe and identified there as a Tibetan text. It was reproduced in Leipzig by Johann Mencke in 1722 and, a year later, a (completely wrong) translation of this text was produced for Peter the Great by the Parisian Royal Academy of Sciences (*Académie Royale des Sciences*) whose honorary member he was⁷. Peter the Great’s enthusiasm in this case was explained with his strong desire to have the history of his whole empire to be written and he was sure that such a history could be written on the basis of local documents and artifacts. Of course, as a ruler, he put practical interests in the forefront but it seems that love for learning was an important driver of his deeds as well. It is thanks to him that the active academic exploration of vast Siberian territories started, and the first expedition of this kind, carried out by the German naturalist Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685–1735), was organized on his orders. D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye totally ignores this expedition as well as a few others led by G. F. Müller (1705–1783) and J. G. Gmelin (1709–1755), P. S. Pallas (1741–1811), etc.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of these expeditions for the growth of knowledge about geography, history, ethnography, linguistics, etc. of the eastern parts of the Russian Empire. Mostly carried out by invited foreign naturalists, they nevertheless

⁶ When the Asiatic Museum was founded in 1818, the Oriental texts, coins and works of art initially kept at the Academy of Sciences were prelocated there. Quite soon, however, the latter ones were transferred to the newly founded Museum of Ethnography and Anthropology. The Asiatic Museum served as a center for gathering and study of historical documents (including coins, which were transferred to the State Hermitage in the early Soviet time) and literary and religious texts.

⁷ This story is rather famous and was outlined in many papers in both Russian and other languages, e. g. [13]. A revised look at the story of the first Tibetan texts in St. Petersburg was presented in my later paper [14].

were directed from St. Petersburg and objectively worked for the interests of the Russian educated public, quite narrow during the 18th century. To increase their numbers universities were certainly needed and, therefore, the appearance of new ones (in addition to Moscow University established in 1755) in the early 19th century was a necessary measure. However, it is not correct to separate the Oriental studies in the universities from the collections and scholars of the Academy of Sciences. Although more scholars worked at the Universities than at the Academy of Sciences, the number of important works published by both sides was more or less equal. *Both fiddles* were important. With these remarks taken into consideration, the Author's statement that "by the 1880s together they basically constituted a single center for orientology in the Russian capital" (p. 189) would be appropriate.

It does not mean though that there were no conflicts. Thus, a very serious one took place in the 1860s between two Buddhologists, Anton Schiefner and Vasily Vasilyev, whose cooperation was first very productive and promising. After Vasilyev, whose knowledge of Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism was truly vast, came to St. Petersburg from Kazan in 1855, Schiefner did his best to promote Vasilyev's works in Western Europe. For many years Schiefner served as a very active mediator between Russian and Western scholars and it is thanks to him that Vasilyev's introductory volume on the history, philosophy and practice of Buddhism was translated into German quite soon after its Russian edition appeared⁸. Unfortunately, their conflict about Schiefner's German translation of Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* that he published almost simultaneously with Vasilyev's Russian translation without mentioning his name on the cover put an end to their cooperation. Vasilyev wrote an article in which he accused Schiefner in plagiarism; some nationalistic sentiments against the Academy of Sciences as a place dominated by Germans, already could be felt in this episode. Ten years later another scandalous situation with Schiefner's participation (an attempt to elect another Baltic German Sanskritist L. von Schröder to the members of the Academy while the ethnic Russian Indologist Ivan Minaev was ignored) had an even louder response in the media. A well-known scholar and Russophile Vladimir Lamansky published a severely critical article on the Academy and its members of the German origin, in particular Schiefner, and the Sanskrit Dictionary project that, according to him, was too expensive and was rather a German not Russian scholarly achievement. The elections failed and quite soon, coincidentally or not, Schiefner died at the age of 62⁹. It is strange that the Author does not mention this situation although he does state that the Academy was accused of being a "German institution" and refers to the scandal with the chemist D. Mendeleev "who was turned down for membership" (p. 188)¹⁰.

Vasilyev died more than twenty years later than his opponent Schiefner. He was finally elected to be a full member of the Academy of Sciences (1886) and his status as the head of Russian Sinology was unchallengeable. Why then was he prone to depression that

⁸ On this translation see [15].

⁹ More information on these collisions see in [16–18].

¹⁰ Cf. a detailed and unbiased analysis of the situation with Mendeleev made by I. S. Dmitriev who concludes that the negative result was predetermined with other reasons than the "intrigues" of the so-called German faction in the Academy; however, the influential Russian media stressed the ethnicity of those members who voted against Mendeleev's election [19].

In any case, the end of the 19th century witnessed a decisive turn of the Russian political and intellectual elites to encourage the use of Russian as a major language in all the spheres, including sciences.

is mentioned by D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye without any explanations (p. 184)? An answer may be found in some memoirs written by Vasilyev's students who would become leading scholars in the early 20th century, primarily, Sergei Oldenburg and Vasily Alekseev. Their own scholarly approach was largely based on disgust with the "suffocating air" of Vasilyev's lectures when the famous professor was an old man, severely disappointed with his life. Oldenburg knew about another Vasilyev, who at the younger age had written voluminous manuscripts, expanding those preliminary works on Buddhism that he was only able to publish. As Oldenburg wrote in his essay on Vasilyev, "Not once I faced distrust, even among the academia, when I talked about these documents... As a young student I could see them and got a rare opportunity to read hundreds of pages from these manuscripts, miserable remnants of the amazing whole, and even they did not exist by the day of his death because he did not take care about them [anymore]" [20, p. 536]. D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye seems to know nothing about the tragedy of this man that was not atypical for the Russian Oriental Studies (and other academic studies as well) from the 18th through 19th century when a number of projects that could bring numerous important academic fruits could not be realized or, even if they were started, never had a continuation because of a lack of support¹¹.

It is a merit of the book that the Author paid attention to the studies carried out by some representatives of the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy (the Russian Orthodox Christian educational center) whose role was almost totally neglected in Soviet historiography. The so-called "missionary Oriental studies" (*missionerskoe vostokovedenie*) did have some impact on the development of the academic studies of the East in Russia. At the same time, another kind of Oriental studies that was generally much more important for their development and *is essential* for the aims of the reviewed book is not even formulated in it. I mean the military Oriental studies (*voennoe vostokovedenie*). This aspect brings us to the discussion of the third type of shortcomings of the book that, in my opinion, do not allow it to contain a well-founded answer on the main question of the research — "Can we speak of a Russian Orientalism?" (p. 10).

This question is found in the introductory chapter — titled, strangely enough, "What is Russian Orientalism," as if it already contained the answer to it — and is the only directly announced objective of the study. The author promises to find out if the Russian situation can be explained within the framework of Edward Said's ideas about the European Oriental studies as a means of colonialism and imperialism. To this end, his book "highlights representative individuals rather than attempting to provide an encyclopedic account of everyone of importance" (p. 10). It is a pity that the author does not try to explain what criteria he used to make his selection of individuals (they are listed at the beginning of my review) and why he ignored numerous military expeditions sent by the Russian General Staff to Central Asia, Far East and Near East that had both reconnoitering and scientific goals. Russian diplomats, some of them Orientalists themselves, were also engaged actively in collecting documents, books, etc. for the St. Petersburg academia. How can one hope to understand Russian Orientalism without this dimension? The author certainly mentions some Russian military campaigns (not expeditions) to Central Asia and even quotes once the most famous Russian military traveler Nikolai Przhevalsky (p. 230) but

¹¹ However, examples of several above-mentioned scholars such as Schmidt, Frähn, Böhlingk and some others show that serious projects that claimed years of hard work could be fulfilled during the same period.

this subject remains out of his focus. I think it is a serious methodological defect of the book. In particular, it leaves out of brackets some eloquent examples of how variegated Russian pre-revolutionary reality was, e. g. that of Carl Gustaf Mannerheim who would become one of the most important leaders of independent Finland but, in 1906–1908, served as a Russian emissary to Central Asia and China.

The Author tries to investigate if we can speak of a Russian Orientalism by means of presenting rather lengthy biographic sketches of a number of scholars and people of arts from the 18th to the late 19th century. However, there is a significant difference between them. While the cultural figures are treated also in respect of their works of art, the academic works of the scholars do not play a significant role in the narration. If we consider, for example, Oldenburg's case we will see several quotations of general humanitarian kind, mostly drawn from his non-scholarly publications. They certainly show him as a person who belonged to Russian intelligentsia but do not seem to characterize him well as a Russian Orientalist. In fact, I cannot see anything in the biographic sketches that could show distinctively an originality of the Russian Oriental studies in comparison with those of Western Europe. Such an originality obviously existed.

The first volume of the *Bibliotheca Buddhica* series that was prepared by the eminent English Buddhist Cecil Bendall (1856–1906) started with the Preface where he remarked: "The Imperial Academy of Sciences <...> worthily maintains its great traditions of patronage for Oriental learning, and sets a noble example to all nations, especially such as number amongst their fellow subjects adherents of Oriental faiths, amongst which the 'Good Law' of Buddha must ever take a prominent place" [21, p. iii-iv]. How did this phenomenon appear? Cannot it be significant to understand why the 18th century Russian traveler to India Gerasim Lebedev (1749–1817) (never mentioned in the reviewed book) did not see any obstacles for him to learn Indian music and drama from the local experts and even make joint performances with them while the Western "masters" of India would never allow the locals to join their respected assemblies?¹² What happened in the Transbaikal area in the late 1820s to 1830s when the first group of Russian revolutionaries, some of the brightest representatives of the Russian nobility, was sent in exile and suddenly found themselves face to face with the local Buryats and had to start their lives anew among them? One of these revolutionaries, Nikolai Bestuzhev, found a Buryat wife and was friends with the head of the Buryat Buddhists, the Bandido Khambo Lama Gomboev. What was the reason for close friendship between the Russian nationalist Fyodor Dostoevsky and the eminent Kazakh scholar Shoqan Valikhanov? Without doubt, the questions of this kind (some of them have a direct connection with the history of the Russian revolutionary movement¹³), if properly analyzed, would have allowed D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye to be more precise in the characteristics of Russian Orientalism. At the same time, its more military components shall not be recast, either. I believe the Soviet approach to the inner and outer Orient turned out to be a logical continuation of the mixture of both egalitarian and expansionist tendencies in the imperial period.

¹² This is an internationally recognized figure, his full biography was recently published in Russian [22].

¹³ Some people involved in the underground circles became eminent ethnographers after they were exiled to Siberia. It suffices to mention such important figures as the explorers of Central Asia Grigory Potanin (1835–1920) and Dmitry Klements (1848–1914), and the founder of the Museum of Religion in Leningrad Vladimir Bogoraz-Tan (1865–1936). By the way, Sergei Oldenburg's second wife was Elena Klements, the ethnographer's niece.

It is not easy to understand what is the actual conclusion of the Author in regard of his objective. The final two pages of the book intend to present it in the following way:

“There is no simple answer to Dostoyevsky’s question of what Asia is to Russia. Much more familiar with the East than other Europeans, Russians have invariably seen the Orient in a multiplicity of hues. Whether foe or friend, danger or destiny, other or self, or, as Vladimir Solov’ev put it, ‘of Xerxes or of Christ’, their perceptions of Asia have defied easy characterization. As in the West, for the Russian imagination the Orient has been the source of both dreams and nightmares, but greater intimacy with its people has fashioned a unique symbiosis of fantasy and reality.

By the same token, Russian orientologists did not reduce the object of their inquiry to some uniform, Saidian other. Their views varied widely, but on the whole, neither fear nor contempt dominated the academy.

<...> The most intriguing element of Russian thinking about Asia is the sense among many of a shared heritage. Not a few noble lineages took pride in their Tartar bloodlines, and the population more generally has been less anxious about intermarriage among races than other Europeans.

<...> Russian musings about Asia often reflect considerations about national identity” (p. 238–239).

To my mind, these musings of the Author are rather vague and nebulous. Almost the same things, maybe in somewhat different words, are said in the Preface. I myself do not have a ready answer concerning the main question of the book. It is clear that a wider and deeper analysis is needed. It is also possible that we cannot understand the situation without considering events of the 20th century. During the Soviet time local schools of Oriental studies appeared in many national republics of the former USSR and they still seem to remember and recognize their origination from the stem of the St. Petersburg/Leningrad school.

In the end, I need to point out that I can only judge, more or less professionally, the issues regarding Tibetan, Mongolian and Indian studies¹⁴. Perhaps, scholars of other parts

¹⁴ I would like to mention here another Tibetological mistake made by the same author in another paper: “Elizabeth’s niece (sic! — A. Z.) Catherine the Great was the first Russian sovereign to take serious notice of Tibet. On several occasions, she sought to establish trading links with Lhasa, and she corresponded regularly with its leading clergy” [23, p. 43–56]. The Author refers here to an account by Capt. S. Turner, a British officer who visited the Tibetan city of Shigatse and the residence of the Panchen Lamas, the dynasty of the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs second to that of the Dalai Lamas, in 1783–1784:

“Some years ago the Empress of Russia, I learnt, had invited Taranaut Lama to a correspondence, and ambassadors had been sent to him with considerable presents. Among these, I saw a Bible with plates, in the Russian language, which they still preserved. Taranaut, who at that time esteemed Teshoo Lama, as the guardian of the state, and oracle of the Lama hierarchy, forwarded the presents, and the letter to him, for the purpose of receiving his advice upon so important a subject. The Lama gave little encouragement to the Russians, yet consented to a limited intercourse; in consequence of which, the Russian traders have since resorted occasionally to Kharka, the place of Taranaut Lamas residence, where they still carry on by their agents a considerable traffic” [24, p. 272].

For a scholar of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism it is clear that the name “Taranaut Lama” refers to the dynasty of the highest Buddhist hierarchs of Khalkha (*Kharka*, according to Turner) Mongolia, known also as Jebtsundamba Khutuktu or Bogd Gegen and considered reincarnations of the famous early 17th century Tibetan lama Tāranātha. So it was with the religious Mongolian ruler that the Russians tried to establish trade relations and he, in turn, asked for spiritual advice to the Panchen Lama (*Teshoo Lama* according to Turner) in Shigatse, not to the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, while the Russians probably had no idea about this consultation. Cf. an exhaustive analysis of this passage from Turner’s account in [25, p. 47–49].

of Asia and North Africa could add more critical remarks. It is truly brave for a non-Orientalist to try to write a history of Oriental Studies in Russia, even though there is a huge corpus of literature on this matter, mostly in Russian¹⁵. Unfortunately, the Author (to whom the use of Russian must not have been an obstacle) avoids characterizing this corpus in his introduction so we can only wonder to what extent he studied it¹⁶. We can also wonder what novelty he thought to convey with his book to the professionals who know about the preceding literature. Perhaps, it is our own fault that foreign colleagues who cannot use Russian know so little about the history of our academia. In this regard, we should be probably grateful to D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye for drawing attention of foreign Slavists to our orientalist heritage. If this book can help to change the situation, it will be the best kind of contribution imaginable for it.

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¹⁵ Another attempt of this kind, the well-known book by Vera Tolz, a Russian expat in the UK, *Russia's Own Orient. The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* [26] is based on a deeper analysis. However, I believe it is quite clear that the author's knowledge about the history of Russian Oriental studies is rather limited. In Russia, studies of this kind are usually carried out by either professional scholars of the Orient or by historians of sciences who work at the same institutions or keep close academic contacts with them.

¹⁶ It seems to me that both V. Tolz and D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye are inclined to trust too much the views on the history of Russian Oriental studies expressed by scholars of the early 20th century, especially V.V. Barthold who wrote a lengthy account of the history of teaching Oriental languages at St. Petersburg University (supplied with chapters on the development of Oriental Studies in Russia from the 18th to 1855) [27] and a book on the history of Oriental Studies in Europe and Russia [28]. These significant works contain certain prejudice to the stages of development of Oriental studies that preceded appearance of the so-called school of Baron Rosen. Some late Soviet and especially post-Soviet works on the history of Oriental Studies in Russia were more balanced in this regard. I think the importance of the 18th and 19th century Russia-based Orientalists for the history of this branch of studies in Europe is getting more and more clear and deserves proper presentation.

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