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On: 05 August 2015, At: 04:04

Publisher: Routledge

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Iranian Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cist20>

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Published online: 04 Aug 2015.



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To cite this article: Denis V. Volkov (2015) Rupture or Continuity? The Organizational Set-up of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies before and after 1917, *Iranian Studies*, 48:5, 695-712, DOI: [10.1080/00210862.2015.1058641](https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2015.1058641)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2015.1058641>

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Denis V. Volkov

Rupture or Continuity? The Organizational Set-up of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies before and after 1917

The article presents a systematic appraisal of the essential Russian- and English-language scholarship on Russian Oriental studies and particularly on Russia's Iranology. However, the main target of this article is to trace the discursive continuities and epistemological shifts which have existed in late imperial, Soviet and, partially, post-Soviet Russia's Oriental studies since the end of the nineteenth century. Drawing on the sources of the main Russian political, military and academic archives, the article offers an assessment of the question of rupture or continuity, which is based on a synthesis of the above-mentioned scholarship from an entirely new angle. Dealing with the seemingly overwhelming watershed of 1917, an analysis is provided that transcends the unhelpful continuity/change dichotomy, putting forward a new interpretation, which is informed by the Foucauldian conceptualization of the productive nature of the power/knowledge nexus.

Andrei Snesev, a lieutenant-general in the tsarist army and founder of the Military Academy of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants, made a profound contribution to both late imperial and early Soviet Oriental studies. On the eve of the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 on Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet, this “dazzling combination of military theorist, linguist, statistician, mathematician, geographer, philosopher and orientalist”¹ said:

The conquest of Asia was cruel and boorish, particularly in the areas where the purer representatives of Europe came into contact with the local population. Our [Russian] mode of conquest was distinguished by its soft, subdued approach. Thanks to the long presence of Turko-Mongol–Finnish peoples, both on our territory and in the neighborhood, [and] our familiarity with their world and their way of life, we appeared neither arrogant nor disdainful during our conquest, and we differed little from the nations we conquered. Along with our knowledge, we brought leniency and an awareness of some of our Asian neighbors' advantages

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or at least virtues to our interaction with them. However, wherever pure Europeans, particularly the English, entered the Asian continent, their confident stride signified vicious cruelty, mass theft and undisguised contempt for all things Asian.²

This quotation is a succinct but comprehensive summary of the discursive components intrinsic to Russian Orientalism as a separate phenomenon and it represents the quintessence of the attitude of most Russian Orientologists³ in both the late imperial and Soviet periods. By and large, the same views are widespread in post-Soviet Oriental studies in Russia.⁴

In the vast body of literature available on this topic, scholars have disagreed on whether the political changes in 1917 represented a significant watershed. Wayne Vucinich, Richard Frye, Semen Agaev, Ashot Baziiants, Nina Kuznetsova and Aleksandr Tamazishvili argue that 1917 brought about a deep rupture in the organizational set-up of Russian Oriental studies and led to the creation of entirely new structures. Others, such as Vera Tolz, Alex Marshall, David Schimmelpenninck and Michael Kemper, contend that there was a high degree of institutional and structural continuity for a long time after 1917.⁵ This article presents a systematic appraisal of Russian- and English-language scholarship on the subject, and highlights the shift in research focus that has occurred in Iranian studies in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It then offers the author's own assessment of the question of rupture or continuity, based on an appraisal of available scholarship from a new angle. The analysis presented here transcends the unhelpful continuity/change dichotomy and puts forward a completely new interpretation informed by the Foucauldian analysis of the role of institutions, discourses and intellectuals in the context of power/knowledge relations.⁶

The article is part of a larger research project studying the interface between Iranian studies in imperial and Soviet Russia and the country's foreign policy towards Iran between the late nineteenth century and 1941. This article draws on English- and Russian-language works by the above-mentioned scholars and also on documents and other previously unpublished materials retrieved from Russian and Georgian archives in 2012.⁷ Focusing on the late imperial and early Soviet periods, the author argues that the involvement of Russian imperial Orientologists in the complex interplay of power/knowledge relations occurred in four domains of Orientological knowledge production: academic scholarship, the military, the diplomatic service and the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church. Indeed, despite the seemingly overwhelming events of 1917, early Soviet Oriental studies demonstrated strong structural and discursive continuities between the imperial and Soviet eras, albeit with significant qualitative and quantitative transformations in certain areas.

Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Iranian Studies

After the controversial works and activities of the 1920s and 1930s, and a relative slack during World War II and in the post-war period (the 1940s and 1950s), Iranian studies in Soviet Russia acquired a unified institutional shape in the 1960s, with

the content completely under state control. In this sense the importance of the works on the history of Soviet Oriental studies published in the 1960s can hardly be overestimated. Andrei Kononov's *Oriental Studies at Leningrad University* is a case in point; it is an excellent guide to the entangled organizational changes of the 1920s and 1930s and traces the institutional development of Soviet Oriental (particularly Iranian) studies up to the late 1950s, focusing mainly on the Leningrad Orientological school. It also contains a valuable succinct excursus on the history of Oriental studies in late imperial St. Petersburg.⁸ Kononov's work was continued by prominent Soviet Iranists such as Nina Kuznetsova and Liudmila Kulagina in their *On the History of Soviet Oriental Studies, 1917–1967* and later by Baziiants in *The Formation of Soviet Oriental Studies*. These detailed studies are still the main chronicles of the organizational development of Oriental studies (in particular Iranian studies) in the Soviet Union and they also describe in detail the shaping of several centers of Iranian studies in the union republics.⁹

One of the most valuable aspects of Agaev's influential work *Soviet Iranian Studies in the 1920s* is its narrow focus on the emergence of Soviet Iranology, shaped mainly by experts in the so-called practical area studies. The book describes the activities and views propagated by Sergei Pastukhov (Iranskii), Vladimir Osetrov (Irاندوست), Avetis Mikaelian (Soltanzadeh), Fedor Rotshtein (Mirza), Mikhail Vel'tman (Pavlovich), Vladimir Gurko-Kriazhin, Vladimir Tardov and others. All of them participated in the abortive attempt to organize a socialist revolution in Iran and in the activities of Iran's Communist Party. It focuses on the new approaches these individuals brought to Iranology, promoting practical application of Orientological knowledge in the cause of spreading social revolution.¹⁰ The Soviet works mentioned above are full of ideological underpinnings and lack analysis, which is not surprising given the discourse and self-censorship of the period when they were published. However, if one makes use of the Foucauldian tools of archaeology of knowledge and disregards the disadvantages determined by the publication date, these works can be a valuable source of factual historical narrative on the content and forms of early Soviet Iranology.

The 1990s and early 2000s represented a transitional period in Russian history, creating shifts in academic focus as researchers turned to previously unavailable archival materials. In Iranian studies this shift was marked by Moisei Persits' groundbreaking work *The Timid Intervention. The Soviet Invasion of Iran and Bukhara in 1920–1921*, published in 1996 and 1999 and based on the declassified archives of the Komintern.¹¹ This research trend was continued by Vladimir Genis, a former employee of the Russian Socio-Political Archive and not a conventionally trained Orientologist, who nevertheless made an enormous contribution to contemporary Russian Iranology. He has not shirked research into areas that are gradually becoming restricted again. Preceded by a number of historical articles, Genis' first book—*Red Persia. The Bolsheviks in Gilan*—examines the Bolsheviks' plans to unleash “communist wars”¹² in the Orient through a military invasion of Persia and the historical development of this abortive political gamble.¹³ One of his recent books, *The Disloyal Servants of the Regime. The First Soviet Defectors, 1920–1933*, sheds light on the destiny of the first Soviet diplomatic plenipotentiary in Tehran and Kabul (still suppressed by the establishment).¹⁴

Another of Genis' works, *Vice-Consul Vvedensky. Service in Persia and the Bukhara Khanate*, draws attention to the reckless and ruthless activities of the Bolsheviks in Turkestan during the first years after the October coup.¹⁵ The book also, unintentionally but accurately, points the readers to the archival documents in Russia's State Archive for Socio-Political History (RGASPI) that reveal the Bolsheviks' institutional practices (nascent for that time) of using scholars' labor in prisons.¹⁶ In general, Genis' works are saturated with facts from archival documents, though they often lack analysis. This should be seen in the context of Genis' efforts—similar to other Russian researchers—to unearth and publish as much material as possible because access to archives has become much more restricted since 2000.¹⁷

Another illustrative example of the transitional period is a project by a group of scholars headed by Marina Sorokina—the *Bibliographical Dictionary of Orientalists: Victims of Political Terror in the Soviet Union, 1917–1991*.¹⁸ It contains detailed biographical information, in particular on victimized Iranists. It also discloses that some of them had secretly cooperated with the punitive organs of the state and played a controversial role in their colleagues' destinies.¹⁹ However, the authors do not venture moral judgments since, as pointed out by Dmitry Likhachev in reference to the Academy Case of 1929–30, “police investigations kept only the documents that played into the hands of the police version of the story, which had been beaten out of those under investigation at times by (not only) physical torture,” and no one “has the right to judge harshly those who, without penetrating even to the essence of what they were signing, confirmed the investigators' version.”²⁰ The book's worth is in the material that helps us understand *the regime of truth* and the institutional practices in Oriental studies at the time, greatly assisting with the Foucauldian *archaeology of knowledge*. In this sense, the above-mentioned scholars (and also Mikhail Rodionov, about whom more below) represent Foucauldian intellectuals moving against the main discursive stream of contemporary Oriental studies in Russia and breaking through its inherent *governmentality*.²¹

The mainstream branch of Iranology in post-Soviet Russia is represented by works such as *Iranology and Iranists in Russia* (edited by Kulagina), and *Iran: Islam and Power* edited by Mamedova and Mehdi Sanaie. These works contain valuable information on institutional and individual activities in Iranian studies, as well as historical and contemporary aspects of political and social life in Iran. However, contemporary authors have continued the discourse prevalent in Oriental studies in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. Earlier Russian and Soviet scholarship often comes out on top in these authors' comparisons of Oriental studies in Russia and the West, due to reportedly showing a better understanding of the Orient. Their works are ultimately loyal towards the current and all earlier forms of state power in Russia, even appealing to patriotism.²²

There is another feature illustrative of Foucault's interplay of power/knowledge relations involving *institutional practices, intellectuals, discourses, governmentality* and the *state*.²³ In the 1990s and 2000s, the Russian government had a poor record of funding national scholarly institutions. Since the second half of the 1990s the Iranian embassy and consulates in Russia have adopted a policy of active participation

in the activities of Russian Iranology institutions, including assistance with publications—a status quo naturally palpable in the choice of topic and the content of the publications.

However, discursive inclusions cannot do without exclusions. There have been occasions in Russian–Iranian bilateral relations when scholars felt it necessary to “clarify” historical issues, such as the Iranian discourse on the illegitimacy of the Golestan and Turkmanchai treaties and the Iranian right to the territories lost in the Russo-Persian wars. The territorial question was aggravated by the difficulties in the multilateral negotiations on the status of the Caspian Sea. Kulagina and Elena Dunaeva’s work *The History of Russia’s Border with Iran* provided scholarly underpinning of the Russian claims. The book presented the Russian version of the history of the shaping of the Russian–Iranian border from the Achaemenids to the late 1990s, supported by juridical documents from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁴ Similarly, President Ahmadinejad’s attempt to initiate a discussion on reparations for the allied occupation during World War II triggered a reaction from the scholarly community in Russia. Mamedova’s collection of articles *Iran and the Second World War* included an article by Vladimir Sazhin titled “Operation ‘Sympathy’ and President Ahmadinejad’s Reaction to it.” The article, rather sharply worded, claimed to prove the legitimacy of the invasion (though only for the USSR) and the historical benefits of this “benevolent” step for Iran.²⁵

The above works, situated within mainstream contemporary Russian Iranology, could be said to demonstrate a straightforward dependency on the state.²⁶ They remind one of Likhachev’s notion of *dependent* scholars, discussed in his “On the Russian Intelligentsia.”²⁷ Their activities also seem to support Laura Engelstein’s thesis that the sophisticated Foucauldian “regime of power/knowledge never came into its own in the Russian context”²⁸ of the *Polizeistaat*. However, Kremontsov, Tolz, Hirsch and others have recently argued that Russia has experienced the same, mostly discrete and unconscious, interplay of discourses, institutions, knowledge and power, as well as the resistance of intellectuals, as western societies, although perhaps with a great degree of specificity.²⁹ After all, ideological underpinnings and state coercion are by no means the only influence in today’s Russia and in Russian scholarship on Iran.

Western Scholarship on Oriental Studies in Russia

The main recent English-language works on “Russian Orientalism” are also important for this discussion. Schimmelpenninck’s *Russian Orientalism. Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (2010) resurrected the debate on the applicability of Said’s model of Orientalism to Russia.³⁰ The author covers a rather long period and a broad spectrum of branches of Russia’s intellectual life that shaped Russian perceptions of the Orient, particularly in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century: scholarship, literature, religion, philosophy and painting. However, the focus on Oriental studies is limited to missionary Orientology and the Kazan and St. Petersburg schools.³¹

Schemmelpenninck also contributed a chapter on “The Imperial Roots of Soviet Orientology” to Kemper’s volume *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*. The article is a summary of his work *Russian Orientalism*, but it also discusses the influence of the discourses prevalent among the Orientologists in the late imperial period, most of whom strongly believed in Russia’s *civilizing mission* in the Orient. Schemmelpenninck reiterates that notwithstanding the imperial colonial context, “many Russian Orientologists, but by no means all, were sympathetic and respectful of the nations they studied.”³² He supports the conclusion, reached by Adeb Khalid, Nathaniel Knight and Maria Todorova, that it is impossible “to reduce Russian scholars of Asia to a single archetype.”³³ However, his analysis does not go further, even though the limited scope of Said’s model calls for a return to Foucault’s initial postulates on power/knowledge relations.

In another article, “Reforming Military Intelligence,”³⁴ Schimmelpenninck studies Dmitrii Miliutin’s reforms and their influence on the establishment and development of the scholarly component of Russian military intelligence. Intelligence work profoundly contributed to Orientological knowledge in Russia in the last quarter of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, and Persian military studies were leading in this domain.³⁵ In 2006, Marshall published a substantial work based on materials from Russian military archives, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917*.³⁶ A significant portion of the book is dedicated to the activities of the Asiatic section of the Russian General Staff and it sheds light upon the enormous contribution of the Russian officers-*vostochniki* (military Orientologists) to Persian studies.³⁷ The work also retraces the history of courses in Oriental languages for officers up to their closure in 1910, the organizational changes in the Asiatic section until its demise in 1918 and its influence on early Soviet Oriental studies and on the resumption of Persian studies in Soviet Turkestan in 1919.³⁸

Kemper’s above-mentioned edited volume also contains the chapter “Profiles Under Pressure: Orientalists in Petrograd/Leningrad, 1918–1956,” by Russia-based Orientologist Mikhail Rodionov.³⁹ The chapter focuses on the two greatest Orientologists of the Soviet period—Vasilii Bartol’d, an expert on Central Asia and Iran, and Ignatii Krachkovskii, an expert in Arabic studies, and their activities and Foucauldian resistance in the rigorous conditions of Bolshevik rule. This work is notable for its detailed periodization of the gradual destruction of traditional Orientological scholarship by the Bolshevik regime. The author also stresses the high importance of the work carried out by Sorokina and her colleagues (see above), and touches upon the increasingly difficult access to Russian archives.⁴⁰

Tolz’s seminal work *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* dwells upon Russian and Soviet Oriental studies within the Academy of Sciences, and perceptions of the Orient in the context of Russia’s national discourses.⁴¹ She argues that Viktor Rozen’s disciples, among whom Bartol’d was one of the most prominent, had a great impact on the Bolshevik elite’s perception of “various ethnic groups in the eastern and southern periphery of the Soviet state in the 1920s.”⁴² Tolz engages with the debate on the applicability of Said’s model to Russia and argues that his

notion of “Orientalism” is an echo of a larger spectrum of ideas expressed by Russian Orientalists of the *fin de siècle*. The advantage of this book is that the author goes beyond Said’s approach and actively engages with a broader concept of power/knowledge relations.⁴³

Late Imperial and Early Soviet Oriental Studies: Discursive Continuities and Epistemological Shifts

A study of the organizational structures in the late imperial and early Soviet periods, based on the existing English- and Russian-language literature and relevant archival materials, has revealed four main domains in late imperial Oriental studies, namely academic scholarship, the military, diplomatic services and the Orthodox Church. The set-up is evident in Persian studies—one only has to consider the nature of the Russian presence in Persia during the late imperial period. The scholarly activities of Russian diplomats (Vladimir Minorskii, Aleksandr Miller, Nikolai Bravin, Mikhail Baranovskii), military officers (Konstantin Smirnov, Aleksandr Tumanskii, Ivan Iagello, Andrei Snesev) and the Russian Orthodox mission in Urmia, in addition to the so-called Russian “pure” academic research, by Valentin Zhukovskii, Vasili Bartol’d and Nikolai Zarudnyi—suggest a fourfold structure in late imperial Persian studies.

The devastation of the Urmia mission by Turks and Kurds in 1918 marked the end of Russian Orthodox missionary activities in Persia, a situation made official by Article 15 of the Soviet–Persian Treaty of Friendship in 1921. In the treaty, Soviet Russia returned all Russian Orthodox Church property in Persia to the government in Tehran and condemned all missionary activity.⁴⁴ Missionary activities in the late imperial period are of particular interest; despite their professedly peaceful objectives, the missions worked in conjunction with all the other domains in the front line of the turf war between Russia and the European powers. The Russian Empire often employed scholarly religious institutions for the purpose of gaining influence among people of other beliefs, particularly Muslims, in the neighboring areas. The research done by Russian missionaries is a perfect illustration of the interconnectedness between state power and knowledge, institutional inter-penetration and the role of discourse—a state of affairs also typical for today’s activities of the Russian institutions of foreign policy and the Russian Orthodox Church abroad.

Despite the closure of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at Kazan’ University in 1854, the Russian state continued to support Oriental studies at the Kazan’ Ecclesiastical Academy, namely the teaching of Persian, Arabic and Tatar languages, Islamic law and anti-Islamic polemics. The fact that the academy employed a chair of anti-Islamic subjects points towards its direct engagement in state policies and the discourse on the superiority of Russian culture in general and Orthodox Christianity in particular. It also implied that research and training activities were aimed at countering Islam from the standpoint of the Russian Orthodoxy.⁴⁵ The creation of this chair was initiated by Nikolai Il’minsky, a professor of Islamic studies and Aleksandr (Mohammad-Ali) Kazem-Bek’s disciple. Il’minsky was also the first to take up the post and he

significantly accelerated the establishment of institutions training clergymen in Oriental studies in preparation for missionary work among Muslims.⁴⁶ The Academy also produced ministers for the Orthodox mission in Persia.⁴⁷ Il'minsky, Sergei Malov, Mikhail Mashanov and Nikolai Ostroumov developed and taught special courses on anti-Islamic polemics; they literally fought Islam relying on their personal belief in the superiority of Orthodox Christianity and the positive influence of their own scholarly work on state policies towards Muslim peoples. They consciously adjusted their scholarly and practical activities to support the interests of the Russian state, which for them were inseparable from those of Orthodox Christianity. In this sense, the example of Mashanov and Ostroumov, both devout Orthodox Christians engaged in scholarly activity while also working in an official government capacity and actively consulting high-ranking military and diplomatic functionaries, is indicative of the discourse of promoting Russian interests abroad.⁴⁸ Their activities included conventional practices also common in the other three domains of Russian Oriental studies, namely work trips involving a multiplicity of tasks (with missionary, scholarly, political and military components).

In 2002, Aleksandr Zarkeshev, father superior of the St. Nicholas Church in Tehran, published his noteworthy book *The Russian Orthodox Church in Persia-Iran (1597–2001)*, based on the research he carried out in 1998–2001. The author tried to reconstruct the history of Russian religious missions to Persia from the reign of Shah Abbas I (1588–1629) to the present, using the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire, fragments of missionary documents and interviews with elderly Russian residents in Iran. The work is not free of self-serving discursive connotations of the superiority of Orthodox Christianity over Islam, and of all things Russian over all things Persian in general. In this sense, it complements the works of the above-mentioned clerical scholars as well as mainstream Iranology in today's Russia. However, it still remains the only relatively comprehensive, albeit brief and superficial, work on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Persia/Iran. The book shows some similarity of practices in the four branches of Oriental studies; it includes a description of several expeditions and missionary trips to Persia undertaken by Russian clergymen, during which they gathered valuable ethnographic and historical material—in particular on the history, traditions and societal practices of Nestorians in Persia.⁴⁹ Based on the information gathered during these trips, in 1898 the St. Petersburg Sacred Governing Synod decided to readmit the Assyrians in Persia into the Russian Orthodox Church and establish a permanent Orthodox mission in Urmia. This was in line with the imperial foreign policy of a peaceful yet comprehensive penetration of Persia, as proclaimed by the Finance Minister Sergei Witte (1892–1903) and War Minister Aleksei Kuropatkin (1898–1904).

By the beginning of World War I there were ten Russian Orthodox parishes (mostly around Russian diplomatic missions and consulates) and almost forty Orthodox churches under the jurisdiction of the Urmia mission.⁵⁰ This broad presence in Persia coincided with a period of inertia and even backwardness in the Russian Orthodox Church (touched upon by Schimmelpenninck in *Russian Orientalism*).⁵¹ Russian clerical institutions in Persia usually lacked experts in Persian studies, which does not speak much for their efficiency. However, thanks to the Orthodox Church's proximity

to and dependence on the Russian government authorities in Persia, the necessary linguistic and expert assistance was usually provided by diplomatic and military personnel. The missions' role in Russia's foreign expansion also involved translation into Persian and Assyrian in order to disseminate religious literature and facilitate conversion, and in this they were assisted by Russian-speaking Persian Assyrians.⁵² The accumulation and processing of Orientological knowledge and the subsequent exertion of influence that ultimately results in the attainment of more power was also typical of the other three domains of Oriental studies. The work undertaken by the Russian Orthodox Church in alliance with the other domains of Oriental studies on the gathering and study of historical, ethnographic and religious data helped the missions focus the application of their institutional influence on the areas and peoples of Persia most susceptible to it, and to acquire power in the context of the conjoint national discourse on the promotion of *Russkoe delo* (the Russian cause).⁵³

Trade and commerce did not play a considerable role in the production of Orientological knowledge in the imperial period, because capitalism was only nascent inside Russia at the time. However, in the early Soviet period the Bolsheviks' foreign policy towards Persia changed, and from the mid-1920s onwards Soviet trade activities gradually became an important component of gaining local knowledge. This was evidenced by the active role played by *Narkomvneshtorg* (People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade) and the appearance of multiple state-run Soviet companies in Persia, though still under the diplomatic aegis.⁵⁴

Indeed, based on the analysis of Soviet–Persian relations in the 1920s, one can see the emergence of a new domain in early Soviet Persian studies—one that involved trade and economic activities. After 1921, due to the changes in the perception of Orientological knowledge in Soviet Russia, this domain quickly began to gain momentum.⁵⁵ The earlier emphasis on gathering linguistic, ethnographic and cultural information on Persia gave way to an enhanced focus on political and especially economic data. According to the political guidelines on securing and developing economic cooperation between Persia and the USSR, the newly established Soviet trade representations in Persia collated information and produced analytical reports on economic issues in the 1920s and 1930s—these were also used by scholars in the early Soviet period. However, given that trade activities were carried out under the aegis of and by experts from the *Narkomindel* (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs), the military and the INO OGPU (Foreign Department of the Joint State Political Directorate), these activities cannot be defined as a self-contained domain of Orientological knowledge production.⁵⁶ Thus, early Soviet Iranology possessed only a threefold structure: academic scholarship, the diplomatic service and the military.

It appears that all four domains of late imperial Russia's Oriental studies had become quite well institutionalized by the turn of the twentieth century. However, despite their professional self-consistency they were closely intertwined. In addition to the close connection between academic training and practical application of Orientological knowledge within each of the four domains, all four were deeply interconnected at both the institutional and individual levels. This fact has been ignored in the studies of Russian Orientalism mentioned above, but it has crucial importance

for the analysis of power/knowledge relations. As in the imperial period, Oriental training was shared by all domains in the early Soviet era; however, it was the Military Academy of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants that played a leading role in the training of experts on Persia in the 1920s.⁵⁷

It also appears that the close institutional interconnectedness among the military, diplomatic, missionary and scholarly domains during the late imperial period resulted in a dynamic, interrelated development of both utilitarian and scholarly aspects of Persian studies. Senior military officers (Tumanskii, Snesarev, Kuropatkin) and diplomats (Ivan Zinov'ev, Minorskii, Matvei Gamazov) were active members of various Orientalological societies, using their professional activities to pursue scholarly work. In addition, prominent Russian scholars of Persian studies (Aleksandr Kazem-Bek, Viktor Rozen, Bartol'd, Zhukovskii and others) had strong ties with the military and the diplomatic service and played a leading role in officers' training.⁵⁸ The same interconnectedness applied to Persian studies in the early Soviet period. Tsarist Lieutenant-General Snesarev was one of the founders of the Military Academy of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants and, along with Konstantin Chaikin,⁵⁹ he taught Persian to Yakov Bliumkin, the unaccomplished head of the Cheka in the abortive Soviet Socialist Republic of Persia.⁶⁰ The tsarist Colonel Ivan Iagello, a specialist in Persian and Urdu who founded the Tashkent Officers' School of Oriental Languages in 1897, returned to Tashkent in 1920 when already in the Red Army—following Frunze's order to oversee Oriental studies there.⁶¹ Even more significantly, Sergei Pastukhov, Vladimir Osetrov and Vladimir Gurko-Kriazhin, who formed the new, so-called "practical," school of Persian studies in Moscow (as opposed to the old, "purely academic," school in Petrograd), virtually formulated the Soviet policy towards Persia in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s.⁶² The recently declassified documents paint a slightly grotesque picture of a heated debate of the Party inner circle over Soviet policy towards Persia in 1926, during which the then foreign affairs Commissar Georgii Chicherin tried to justify himself in front of the Central Committee after accusations by other Bolsheviks that it was not Chicherin who designed and executed foreign policy but "various certain Pastukhovs, Osetrovs and Gurko-Kriazhins."⁶³

It is pertinent to point out that in the imperial era, the role of military or diplomatic Orientalologists in foreign policy could be identified more easily than that of the individuals who were, first and foremost, scholars and were engaged in state politics only in addition to their "academic status." Overlooking this nuance in scholar Vasilii Grigor'ev's activities, Knight tries unsuccessfully to identify his unequivocal and straightforward impact on state power in his article "Grigor'ev in Orenburg." Khalid does point this out, saying that "Knight demands proof of the connection between knowledge and power at such a crudely instrumental level that nothing short of Orientalists issuing marching orders to troops conquering regions of their expertise would satisfy him."⁶⁴ Ironically, the "practical" Orientalologists of the early Soviet period fit Khalid's exaggerated description precisely. In late 1920 and 1921 the founders of the new Soviet Orientalology successfully advocated the withdrawal of Bolshevik support for the Persian revolutionary movement and actually participated in Reza-

Khan's crackdown on Kuchek-Khan's forces, as well as playing a leading role in shaping Soviet policy towards Persia in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁶⁵

In spite of the greater diversity of discourses among the late imperial scholars, as noticed by Knight and studied in detail by Tolz,⁶⁶ all four Orientological domains were relatively coherent regarding the advancement of *Russkoe delo*. Their spirit of patriotism was distilled into the promotion of Russia's state interests and Russian culture in Persia and mixed with the sense of a *civilizing mission*. This was typical for all four domains, as was a belief in the greater capability of Russian culture, in comparison with the West, to interact with the Orient because of Russia's geographical and cultural proximity to the latter.⁶⁷ This took place against the backdrop of the concomitant turf war with European powers. The same was true for the early Soviet period, though from a different angle. After the abortive attempt to sovietize Persia, it was believed that Persia and other eastern societies were not sufficiently ripe for social conversion. Thus they were to be "groomed" by specially trained agents of the Bolshevik cause, who understood the needs of the oppressed eastern nations better than anyone else.⁶⁸ The establishment of the Oriental Scholarly Commission in Turkestan and the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow for the above purpose is the best example of this approach.⁶⁹

One of the most distinctive features of Soviet Oriental studies in all domains was the involvement of native agents, particularly in practical work. The KUTV mainly chose its students from among the most deprived representatives of Oriental nationalities, thinking they would be better placed to exert Soviet influence on their fellow countrymen through working in state organs in the Soviets' "own Orient" and abroad. Training was provided in the students' native languages, since the emphasis was on non-Russian-speaking students from poor social backgrounds. The first Persian class, consisting of twenty-four students, commenced on 2 August 1921. Judging by their curriculum, which comprised the study of Turkestan, Bukhara, Khiva, Persia and Afghanistan, they were later assigned as operatives throughout the Persianate world.⁷⁰ In addition to diversification of sources and the intensification of knowledge acquisition, ultimately leading to Foucauldian reproduction of power/knowledge relations,⁷¹ this illustrates the absence of an underlying racist component, as present in Said's *Orientalism*, in the Soviet case.

To further rebut the speculative universality of Said's model, one may mention those scholars in late imperial Russia who were less united in their understanding of the Russian mission in the Orient. For instance, within the discourse on separating scholarly knowledge from politics there were efforts to dissociate Oriental studies from state power, at the institutional level and otherwise. But these efforts could not change the deep involvement of scholarly institutions in training practical specialists and their intense production of area studies knowledge that was at least *potentially* useful for the state—a thesis that was glossed over by Knight in "Grigor'ev in Orenburg." It appears that in both the late imperial and the early Soviet periods the impact of scholarly institutions and scholars should be mainly sought in their indirect influence on state power.

This tendency remained in the early Soviet period, with the difference that the impact of "old school" scholars on foreign policy diminished significantly. The Bolshe-

viks continued to seek their advice on redrawing the nationalities map of Central Asia,⁷² but few were allowed even to train new specialists on the Orient. For example, Bartol'd—one of the main pillars of the Persian and Islamic studies of the first third of the twentieth century—was banned from teaching and his scholarly views were rejected as bourgeois.⁷³

However, the most interesting finding of this analysis is the shift that occurred in the correlation between academic scholarship and practical knowledge after 1917. In the late imperial period Rozen, Bartol'd and Zhukovskii represented the influence, albeit indirect, of Persian scholars on practical domains. However, in the 1920s and 1930s the very right of existence for scholarship that did not yield immediate practical returns was questioned. This resulted in the establishment of new Orientological institutions and formulation of new discourses on the practical use of Oriental studies. Consequently, the so-called practical knowledge began to influence academic scholarship profoundly, pushing it aside not only in the practical but also in the academic domain—in fact, virtually substituting it.

The beginning of the decentralization of Oriental studies, hardly visible in the early twentieth century, was challenged by some academics in the field of Persian studies.⁷⁴ The vigor with which the Bolsheviks continued to decentralize this sphere was significant. When the officers' courses run by the Educational Section were dismantled in 1910, the War Ministry decided to establish similar courses in Tbilisi, Ashkhabad and in the other Central Asian military districts. After 1917, this initiative was developed by the Bolsheviks and spread to all branches of Soviet Oriental studies. This led to the creation of a vast and relatively efficient institutional apparatus, with centers of expertise in all the eastern republics of the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ This leads us to another important finding applicable to Iranian studies in particular and to Oriental studies in general. Study of the late imperial period could not find any evidence that the state had fully apprehended the direct link between power and knowledge (*knowledge is power*), while, as Tolz and Knight argue when referring to Grigor'ev, this was “the main slogan of scholarship in the nineteenth century.”⁷⁶ There was no well thought-out and structured political approach towards Oriental studies on the part of the state. The very existence of scholarly knowledge in some domains was in question, and all domains lacked funding.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the early Soviet period witnessed a quantitative blossoming in the establishment and activities of new centers of Oriental studies funded by the state.⁷⁸

Summing Up

These conclusions bring to light multiple components of power/knowledge relations, including the productive role of institutions and individuals contributing to scholarly knowledge, and at the same time pursuing their own agenda comprising institutional, personal and state interests.⁷⁹ This also supports Foucault's thesis that the more capabilities the agents of power are endowed with, the greater their reciprocal productive impact. Therefore it is important not to look for continuities or shifts only within

Said's narrow model of two-vector relations between knowledge and state power, but to study the late imperial and Soviet Iranology in the context of manifold multi-vector relations of a power/knowledge nexus where all agents exert power on one another: scholars, experts, institutions, discourses, state etc. As shown by the quote at the beginning of this article, since the late nineteenth century Russian Orientologists have juxtaposed Russia and their own activities not only with the Orient but also with the "purer representatives of Europe." In the Russian case, the discourse of a civilizing mission *dans un esprit européen* was often mixed with the perception that Russian culture was unique and it was able to integrate Oriental cultures organically—in comparison with the West, Russia was perceived as closer to the Orient. Since the late nineteenth century Russian Orientologists have often claimed to have a better understanding than their western colleagues of their "Asian neighbors," and intended to incorporate their culture for Russia's own cultural enrichment.

The deep and active reciprocal interaction of the late imperial and Soviet Orientologists with the state, as studied in this article, is also worth reiterating: its considerable scale and sophistication are among the most distinctive features of the Russian case in comparison to the West. Since the end of the nineteenth century this Foucauldian interaction has allowed Russian scholars to pursue their own personal and institutional interests within the grid of power relations. This also applies to post-Soviet Oriental studies, although it should be noted that this article does not aim to provide an exhaustive study of late Soviet and post-Soviet Iranology. In any case, the restricted access to archives and the attitudes of the state structures in today's Russia would have seriously hampered such a project. Hence, the author was limited to using the open sources mentioned above and making use of his former position as an insider to draw some analytical parallels with the present day. Thus, employing a broader German notion of Islamic studies,⁸⁰ it is reasonable to conclude that Oriental studies as a discipline in the late imperial and early Soviet periods, "with its structures, networks and discourses, is not only of interest as a historical topic; rather, it continues to inform much of present-day research on Islam in Russia."⁸¹

Notes

1. See Marshall, *General Staff*, 154.
2. The Archive of Orientologists (St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts) (henceforth - AV), f. 115, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5–6 (Snesarev's manuscript *Attitudes toward the Asiatic World*).
3. In order to avoid the Saidian connotation and to preserve the neutral epistemological denotation of the term, I henceforth use the noun *Orientalist* and the adjective *Orientalist* throughout the article, similarly to Tolz and Schimmelpenninck. Whenever the term is used with the Saidian relevant connotation or in the context of the debates related to Said's concept, the words *Orientalism* and *Orientalist* are used, except for direct quotations where the original is naturally preserved.
4. See Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military." See also the debate on Russian Orientalism—Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg"; Knight, "On Russian Orientalism"; Khalid, "Russian History"; Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*; Kemper, "Integrating Soviet"; Schimmelpenninck, "The Imperial Roots"; Marshall, *General Staff*; Andreeva, *Russia and Iran*; Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*; Todorova, "Does Russian Orientalism?"; Bartol'd, "Istoriia izucheniiia Vostoka," 418–19; Bartol'd, "Vostok i russkaia nauka," 537–40.

5. Kemper, "Integrating Soviet," 2; Schimmelpenninck, "The Imperial Roots," 31–42; Khalid, "Russian History," 691–9.
6. See e.g. Foucault: *The Order of Things; The Archaeology of Knowledge*; "Prison Talk."
7. In 2012, the author gained access to the eleven main political, military and academic archives of Russia and Georgia, which allowed him to establish a rich and nuanced source base for the project.
8. Kononov, *Vostokovedenie*.
9. Kuznetsova and Kulasina, *Iz istorii*; Baziiants, *Stanovlenie*.
10. Agaev, *Sovetskoe iranovedenie*.
11. Persits, *Zastenchivaia interventsiia*.
12. Russia's State Archive for Socio-Political History (RGASPI), f. 159 (*Chicherin. Persia*), op. 2, d. 51, l. 122 (Chicherin's letter to Lenin); f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 14, l. 1–2 (Karakhan's letter to Ordzhonikidze).
13. Since 1988 Genis has published more than 25 historical articles in the journal *Voprosy istorii*.
14. Genis, *Nevernye slugi rezhima*. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) still denies Russian and foreign researchers access to Nikolai Bravin's reports and information on his activities in general. The case is aggravated by the fact that Bravin's successor, the second Bolshevik Plenipotentiary to Afghanistan Iakov Surits, albeit a diplomat, directly participated in the design and perpetration of Bravin's liquidation on the territory of Afghanistan. RGASPI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 2179, l. 29 (Surits' top-secret cable to NKID).
15. RGASPI, f. 122, op. 2, d. 44 (Kolesov's crusade against Bukhara); f. 133, op. 1, f. 26 (Revolutionary movement in Turkestan).
16. Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*. On the phenomenon of Soviet *sharashki*, widespread in the 1930s and 1940s, see Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, 3. The word was an informal name for the secret research laboratories organized for imprisoned scientists and scholars within the Soviet GULAG camps system.
17. Genis, *Krasnaia Persiia*; Volkov, "Struggling through the Politics of History."
18. See <http://memory.pvost.org/pages/index2.html> (accessed October 22, 2012).
19. See, for example, the article on Iranist E. Bertel's.
20. Likhachev, "On the Russian Intelligentsia," 2.
21. Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, 36–41; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 21–3. On the role of the intellectual see also Foucault, "Power," 133.
22. Kulagina, *Iranistika*; Mamedova and Sanaie, *Iran: Islam i vlast'*.
23. Simons, *Foucault*, 82; Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 33, 58; Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, 4–5, 29–30.
24. Kulagina and Dunaeva, *Granitsa*.
25. Mamedova, *Iran*.
26. See Dunaeva, "Russo-Iranian Political Relations." For a critique of such approaches and, particularly of Dunaeva's mentioned work, see Volkov, "Individuals, Institutions and Discourses." See also Volkov, "The Iranian Electric Power Industry," 5.
27. Likhachev, "On the Russian Intelligentsia," 1.
28. Engelstein, "Combined Underdevelopment," 225.
29. On late Imperial Russia, see Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*; Volkov, "Persian Studies." On early Soviet Russia, see Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Kemper, "Integrating Soviet."
30. See note 3.
31. Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*.
32. Schimmelpenninck, "The Imperial Roots," 42.
33. Ibid.
34. Schimmelpenninck, "Reforming Military Intelligence."
35. Volkov, "Persian Studies."
36. Marshall, *General Staff*.
37. For more details on Persian studies within the late imperial Russian military see Volkov, "Persian Studies."
38. Marshall, *General Staff*, 189–90.

39. Rodionov, "Profiles under Pressure."
40. *Ibid.*, 55–6.
41. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*.
42. *Ibid.*, 4.
43. *Ibid.*, 69–84.
44. The Persia and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic Treaty of Friendship, 1921, Article 15: [http://en.vionto.com/show/me/Russo-Persian+Treaty+of+Friendship+\(1921\)](http://en.vionto.com/show/me/Russo-Persian+Treaty+of+Friendship+(1921)) (accessed March 12, 2013).
45. Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*, 131, 134–8; Vigin and Khokhlov, *Istoriia*, 38–43.
46. Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*, 129–31, 134; Werth, "New Discoveries."
47. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 85; Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*, 122.
48. Khalid, "Russian History," 691–9; Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*, 138; Geraci, *Window*, 91–2.
49. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 68–9, 82, 91.
50. *Ibid.*, 109.
51. Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*, 122.
52. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 86–7, 109.
53. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 31–46.
54. RGASPI, f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 63 (Materials on Soviet trade with Persia); f. 532, d. 350, l. 11 (data collected by Trade representations).
55. AVPRF, f. 04 "NKID Referentura Archive. Chicherin," op. 18, p. 115, d. 50750, l. 70–71 (Pastukhov to Chicherin, February 18, 1923); f. 08 "NKID Referentura Archive. Karakhan," op. 10, papka 33, d. 190, l. 26 (Karakhan to Yurenev, January 27, 1927).
56. AVPRF, f. 08 "NKID Referentura Archive of. Karakhan," op. 10, papka 33, d. 190, l. 5–6 (Karakhan's correspondence with Davtian).
57. AV, f. 115, op. 2, d. 63, l. 1 (Snesarev's report to the Oriental Section of the General Staff, 1923); d. 29, l. 1 (Pavlovich's letter to Snesarev, 1922); The State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth - GARF), f. P-1335, op. 1, d. 5, l. 88, 90–95ob.; d. 6, l. 119, 142.
58. AV, f. 17, op. 2, d. 50; d. 34; d. 29; f. 17, op. 2, 64; op. 1, d. 168. See Bartol'd, "Istoriia izucheniia Vostoka," 446; Marshall, *General Staff*, 24, 164–5, 168; Vigin and Khokhlov, *Istoriia*, 128–9.
59. Konstantin Ivanovich Chaikin (1889–1938), Zhukovskii's disciple, graduated from the St. Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Studies in 1916. Based on his dissertation—the verse translation of Jami's *Selaman and Ebsal*, he stayed at the university to prepare for a professorship of Persian literature. In 1920–26 he worked as an interpreter for the Soviet diplomatic mission in Persia. After returning to the USSR he worked in various Oriental studies institutions, authoring a number of works on Persian poetry. In the 1920s–1930s he was used by NKID as a linguist at the highest level until he was executed in 1938 on charges of espionage. AVPRF, f. 08 "NKID Referentura Archive. Karakhan," op. 10, papka 33, d. 190, l. 22.
60. RGASPI, f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 26, l. 1. See Simbirtsev, *Spetssluzhby pervykh let SSSR*, 95–6; Marshall, *General Staff*, 191.
61. Lunin, "Vostokovedenie," 111–13.
62. RGASPI, f. 159 "Chicherin. Persia," op. 2, d. 51.
63. RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 51, l. 180–82 (Chicherin's notes); f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 106 (Ten Persian letters of Vardin), l. 8ob., 16ob., 260, 267.
64. Khalid, "Russian History," 696.
65. RGASPI, f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 38, l. 1 (Chicherin to Ordzhonikidze); d. 14, l. 1 (Rotshtein to Chicherin); d. 11, l. 1–2 (Ordzhonikidze's complaint); f. 159, op. 2, d. 51, l. 60–8 (Osetrov's reports).
66. Knight, "Grigor'ev," 81. See also Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*.
67. AV, f. 115, op. 1, d. 70 (Snesarev's manuscript *Attitudes toward the Asiatic World*). See also Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 5, 30.
68. AVPRF, f. 94 "Secret Cryptographic Section on Iran," op. 5a, papka 105, d. 1, l. 269; f. 04, op. 18, papka 109, d. 50644, l. 3 (Raskol'nikov's report to Chicherin); papka 109, d. 50638, l. 1–5 (Koloim'tsev's letter to Chicherin).

69. The Oriental Scholarly Commission was established in Tashkent to study the countries neighboring Turkestan, particularly Persia and Afghanistan, with branches in all NKID and The People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade (henceforth – NKVT) representation offices. GARF, f. p-1335, op. 1, d. 5, l. 1–7, 52–52ob, 55, 61.
70. GARF, f. p-1335, op. 1, d. 5, l. 61, 80–81.
71. Foucault, "Prison Talk," 52; Foucault, "Power," 120; Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 33; Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 70.
72. On the engagement of the academicians of the "old" Orientological school in the Bolsheviks' state-run projects of nationality policies see Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Baziiants, "Iz istorii," 50.
73. Rodionov, "Profiles under Pressure," 50–51.
74. For example, Bartol'd was strongly against the establishment of the Officers' School of Oriental Languages in Tashkent and elsewhere in the periphery, explaining it by the lack of funding for Oriental studies in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Bartol'd, "Po povodu proekta," 492; Baskhanov, *Russkie voennye vostokovedy*, 278; Marshall, *General Staff*, 169–70.
75. Vashurina and Shishkanov, "Rodoslovmaia voennykh perevodchikov." See Klub Voennogo Instituta Inostrannykh Iazykov: <http://www.clubvi.ru/news/2011/05/20/vash/> (accessed November 15, 2011).
76. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 70. See also Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg," 75.
77. AV, f. 17 (Zhukovskii V. A.), op. 1, d. 185, l. 2–3.
78. On the establishment of multiple new centers of Oriental studies in Moscow, St. Petersburg and on the periphery of the early Soviet state see Baziiants, "Iz istorii"; Vucinich, "The Structure of Soviet Orientalology," 56–7.
79. Simons, *Foucault*, 82; Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 33, 58; Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, 4–5, 29–30.
80. As Fragner and Matthee postulate, "[i]n contrast to the situation in most countries, in German-speaking countries the study of Iran is not concentrated in one academic discipline" (Fragner and Matthee, "Islamic-Iranian Studies," 53). These various disciplines are generally subsumed under the broader notion of Islamic studies.
81. Kemper, "Integrating Soviet," 21.

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