

Individuals, Institutions and Discourses: Knowledge and Power in Russia's Iranian Studies of the Late Imperial, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods

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The scholarship on late Imperial Russia's Oriental studies is divided by a disagreement over the applicability of Edward Said's *Orientalism* to the Russian case. Moreover, in a broader sense, since the mid 1990s, Western scholarship has not been unanimous on the applicability of the underlying Foucauldian notions to late Imperial and Soviet Russia. While presenting a systematic study of Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship (mostly unfamiliar to Western readership), this article offers an assessment of the institutional and individual practices adopted within Russia's Oriental studies from the late nineteenth century to the present. The article aims to provide an analysis that goes far beyond the Saidian restrictive East-West dichoto-

my and his concept of two-vector relations between knowledge and state power. It offers a new reading, based on the deconstruction of the interplay of the manifold multi-vector power/knowledge relations that is clearly identifiable in Russia's long twentieth-century Iranian studies.¹

Keywords: Power / Knowledge; Iranian Studies; Soviet Oriental Studies; Russo-Iranian Relations

Russia and the Foucauldian

In today's social sciences and humanities, few scholars, if any, would deny that there is a strong correlation between scholarly knowledge and the social context within which this knowledge is pro-

duced. However, in Europe, the scholarly contemplation of this topic dates back to the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century—the period of the genesis of various social theories and the beginning of scholarly attempts at conceptualizing the nation-state. Naturally, while these developments shared a number of common features that were the same across all the Western countries in which they occurred, there were also marked differences and characteristics that were specific for each individual country. In this regard, Russia, which had always been distinct from both Europe and Asia, is a case in point (Hirsch 25-30, 44; Gerasimov and Kusber 3-23, 229-72; Vucinich xiv, 5-14, 30-34; Slezkine 388-90; Kremontsov 13-16).

The issue of distinctions in possible modes of social development directly influencing all other spheres within different nation states was also considered by Russia's intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. A good illustration of this can be found in the words of Bogdan Kistiakovskii, a renowned social philosopher and legal scholar of Ukrainian origin in late Imperial Russia, who had stated as early as 1909:

There are no same unified ideas of personal freedom, of legal system,

of constitutional state, identical for all peoples and times, just as there is no capitalism or any other economic or social order identical for all countries. All legal ideas acquire unique coloration and their own tinge in the consciousness of each separate people. (Author's translation)

However, against the backdrop of various kinds of national specificities, there were common general tendencies and factors, namely at the social, economic and political levels, in all Western societies which were considered by many historians to be major influences on science and scholarly knowledge and their development (Graham 1; Tolz 6; Hirsch 25-30; Beer 3-8; Slezkine 388-90; Krementsov 13-16; Kotkin 14, 21-23). These general tendencies and factors were clearly apparent in Russia throughout her long twentieth century.²

Generally, twentieth-century European thought witnessed major international debates on the philosophy and social history of scientific and scholarly knowledge. Since the beginning of the century, humanities scholars studying the history and present of science, and scientists themselves, particularly in those countries which were in the vanguard of the rapid development of science, had been paying further attention to questions such as

the social effects of this process on societies, the role that science and scholarly knowledge play for a particular country or a society, and for mankind in general. In the second half of the twentieth century, the issue of the relationship between scientific and scholarly inquiry and their social context and, especially, the role of state power in this relationship became the subject of the scrutiny of social philosophers and historians. They also pondered the question of the place of scientists and scholars in the complex and entangled grid of multi-branch reciprocal influence between individuals and various forms of knowledge, social institutions and state power.³

Among them, Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) work is of particular interest. His ideas on power relations within the power/knowledge nexus, the notions of *épistème* and discourse deeply influencing the process of scientific/scholarly knowledge production and perception of various truths by society, the role of intellectuals and the phenomenon of resistance are the most pertinent to the subject of this study.⁴ Foucault's work is characterized by a high level of inherent inconsistency and a lack of theoretical totality and cohesion, but especially by its iconoclastic and challenging nature. However, what goes without saying is that

his influence is clear in a great deal of post-structuralist, post-modernist, feminist, post-Marxist and post-colonial theorizing. The impact of his work has also been felt across a wide range of disciplinary fields, from sociology and anthropology to English studies and history (Mills 1).

Foucault's concepts of power, knowledge and discourse caused heated debates in the 1960s and 1970s and had a considerable impact on the further development of critical thinking at the end of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Among Foucault's main concepts, his insistence on the absence of an absolute and pure truth is most noteworthy. Taking an approach to the study of the production of knowledge that he conceives of as archaeology,⁵ he argued that the process of striving for ultimate truths through conventional scholarly activities throughout the course of human history had always been subject to the influence of a vast range of factors, which led him to conclude that all truths are conceived or, to be more precise, constructed rather than being absolute and ultimate. Therefore, according to Foucault, there are no objective, constant and independent truths within the system of human knowledge, especially in the human and social sciences.

This inherent feature of human knowledge is reckoned by Foucault as the consequence of the constant interplay of power relations comprising the various components and factors of both those on the highest level of structures organizing human societies (for instance, state power, social and cultural structures, academic and other communities) and those of less complexity (relations between individuals, their personal viewpoints, endeavors, passions). All these shaped or indeed constructed knowledge, which therefore cannot be considered truly impartial, constant and objective (Mills 33-42, 48-52).

Hence, another crucial Foucauldian notion, namely 'governmentality' that deals with "the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" 19). It demonstrates the tight interconnections and relationships between power exercised towards individuals by institutions or a state and that which is exercised by individuals towards themselves. These processes imply interaction between aspects of politics and human ethics. There are conduct regulation rules and techniques in our society that are designed and applied from the top, but, simultaneously, there are also rules and techniques exercised by individuals in order to control and arrange their own conduct, and they are tightly en-

tangled with each other (Simons 36-41; Mills 42-52; Kotkin 21-23).

Notwithstanding the seeming universality of these theoretical notions, it must be noted that their applicability to the analysis of late Imperial and Soviet Russia has been questioned since Foucault arrived at his conclusions through the study of the late European juridical monarchies and liberal states, a grouping to which Russia arguably did not belong.⁶ The very applicability of the Foucauldian to Russia, in general, was questioned by such scholars as Laura Engelstein in the 1990s. Moreover, somewhat overstating the Russian case's "otherness," Engelstein comes to conclusions which might also partially reflect a residual Cold War mentality. She emphasizes that Foucault stresses the underlying difference between the so-called Old Regimes, where the state is the sole source of power, and liberal societies in which power regulates activities, based on scientific/scholarly knowledge, and is realized by means of disciplinary practices permeating society (Engelstein 224). She therefore concludes on the Russian case that

... [a]lthough Western culture penetrated the empire's official and civic elites, and the model of Western institutions to a large extent shaped the contours of state and social organi-

zation, the regime of "power/knowledge" never came into its own in the Russian context (225).

It appears that Engelstein's reasoning takes into consideration only the general organizational modes of modern Western society, as discussed by Foucault, and operates with very narrow definitions of structures when exploring the applicability of the power/knowledge nexus to Russia's late imperial and Soviet societies. Her focus is on the outward appearance and the concrete shape of structures. However, I would argue that what are really at stake here are not structures, but principles. Indeed, although Russia had considerable distinctions from its Western contemporaries in terms of social organization, the principles according to which power relations operated and permeated the whole society were quite similar (Beer 205-09; Kotkin 21-23).

Indeed, more recently scholars have argued convincingly in favor of the Foucauldian approach to the study of Russian history emphasizing the universality of Foucault's thoughts on power relations.⁷ Drawing on the insights provided by these scholars, the theoretical framework of this article will be informed by the above-mentioned Foucauldian notions. While surveying the main common features and distinctions of the process of

Orientalist knowledge production during the above-mentioned historical periods, I will trace the presence of Foucauldian power relations in the context of Russian society of the time. As a subaltern outcome, certain parallels of the same interplay of power/knowledge relations will be drawn within present-day Russia's Iranology. Thus, I will demonstrate the validity of Foucault's relevant concepts for the student of Russian history.

From Persian Studies to Iranology

The involvement of Russia's Orientalists⁹ in the intense manifold interactions between the Russian Empire and Persia during the period from the late nineteenth century to 1917 predominantly took place within the main four professional domains, namely academic scholarship, the military, diplomatic service and the Orthodox Church's missionary activities. Given the nature and the historical developments of this interaction, the extent of the involvement of each domain in question was different, as was their impact on Russo-Persian relations of the period (Vigasin and Khokhlov 7-8). However, there were also well-discernible commonalities in the organizational set-up and practices of these domains as well as in the roles of individuals involved in the activities of

these domains, namely academic scholars and practical experts of Persian studies. In addition, despite the great systemic shift, which took place in 1917 and led to sequential significant changes in all spheres of the life of Russian society, there were strong continuities on the structural level of early Soviet Oriental studies and also in discourses, which were widespread among the Orientalists of a new generation.

The issue of the formation of Russia's Oriental studies after 1917 was initially dealt with in the works of Muriel Atkin, Nina Kuznetsova, Wayne S. Vucinich, Semen Agaev and Richard Frye. They all emphasized the mainly new, different from late Imperial, nature of early Soviet Oriental studies, particularly on the institutional level (Atkin; Kuznetsova and Kulagina; Vucinich; Agaev; Frye). For example, Atkin ascribed the establishment of Oriental studies in Central Asia to the Bolshevik regime (229). Later, the scholarship represented by Marshall, Schimmelpenninck, Tolz and Kemper argued in favor of the presence of strong organizational continuities throughout all the Soviet Oriental studies of the 1920s-30s. This has also been supported by the archival documents only recently brought into scholarly circulation (Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military"). They shed light on the insti-

tutional activities of the War Ministry regarding the establishment of Oriental studies on the periphery of the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, the successful initiative of Staff-Captain Ivan Iagello (1865-1942) aimed at the creation of the courses of Urdu, Arabic and Persian in Turkestan dates back as early as 1897. In 1908, the courses evolved into a full-scale Officers' School of Oriental Languages in Tashkent, where history, geography and Islamic law were also taught (*Oriental Studies and Foreign Policy*).

The publication of the works by Schimmelpenninck, Tolz and Kemper also resurrected the slightly outdated debate on the applicability of Edward Said's Orientalism concept to the Russian case, which had been initiated by Nathaniel Knight, Adeeb Khalid and Maria Todorova at the turn of this century (Knight, "Grigor'ev," "On Russian Orientalism;" Khalid; Todorova; Schimmelpenninck, "The Imperial Roots;" Andreeva; Bartol'd, "Istoria izucheniia Vostoka," "Vostok i russkaia"). Unfortunately, the above-mentioned debate failed to break through the bounds of the Saidian two-vector relations of "the complicity of knowledge with imperial power," whereas the scholarship of Tolz, Schimmelpenninck and Kemper succeeded in qualitatively transforming the debate into a

broader debate on Russian Orientalism, engaging with Foucault's genuine notions of the productive interplay of power/knowledge multi-vector relations between individuals, institutions, state and discourses (Tolz; Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism*; Kemper; Marshall; Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military").

The study of the late Imperial period demonstrates that all four domains of Russia's Oriental studies were organisationally developed enough and remarkably self-reliant. At the same time, their organisational activities were deeply interconnected with each other and their institutional practices were much alike. This productive mutual interpenetration at the level of institutions and individuals which was inherent to all four domains is extremely illustrative of the presence of power/knowledge relations (Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military" 932). Based on the character of Russia's presence in Persia during the late Imperial period, it appears that the above-mentioned state of affairs within the four-domain structure becomes particularly clear when studying the example of Persian studies. In the case of the diplomatic and military domains, this can be supported by the scholarly and professional activities of such individuals as Gamazov, Zinoviev, Minorsky and Tumanskii, Iagello, Smirnov, Snesarev, accordingly. The mis-

sionary domain is evidenced by the activities of the Russian Orthodox Orumie Mission and the Russian Orthodox ministers-Orientalists Ilminskii, Mashanov and Ostroumov. The forth (academic) domain of late Imperial Persian studies is represented by the scholars of world fame, such as Zhukovskii, Bartol'd, Zarudnyi and others.⁹

Considering the Soviet Oriental studies of the 1920s-1930s, it is possible to conclude that they kept the overall pre-revolution organizational structure, with the understandable exception of the missionary domain. The demise of this domain was predetermined by the militantly atheistic nature of the Bolshevik ideology and was stipulated by Article 15 of the *Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship*, according to which Soviet Russia repudiated all Russian Church property in Persia in 1921 and pledged not to undertake similar activities henceforward.¹⁰ However, in actual fact, the once powerful presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Persia had ceased to exist by 1918 because of the hostilities in the West and North-West of Persia and the eventual devastation of the Orumie Mission by Turks and Kurds.¹¹

Simultaneously, judging by the immensely high activity of the Soviet-Iranian trade relations during the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, the strong emphasis of

Soviet foreign policy on the development of economic and trade ties with Iran, and the contribution of Soviet trade representations of the time to the accumulation of Orientological knowledge on Persia, the trade domain could have supplemented the remaining three domains of early Soviet Persian studies.¹² However, given the fact that the personnel of Soviet trade representations, as a rule, consisted mainly of experts, assigned from *Narkomindel*, *Razvedupr* and *INO OGPU*,¹³ the trade activities with their organizations, personnel and practices cannot be marked out as an institutionally self-reliant domain of Oriental studies.¹⁴ Therefore, during the early Soviet period, Persian studies, or Iranology, was predominantly represented by the academic, diplomatic and military domains.

Taking into account that "[i]n the early years of its existence, the Soviet regime perceived a need for people with area expertise to work in the government, party, and military in Asian regions of the country and to advance Soviet interests elsewhere in Asia" (Atkin 229), the emphasis of Orientological training radically changed. Stressing the crucial importance of the practical usefulness of Oriental studies to state needs, the Bolsheviks replaced the former emphasis on gathering linguistic, ethnographic and cultural information for

the study of Persia with enhanced political and, particularly, economic components. Though, similarly to the late Imperial period, academic Oriental training was shared by all domains, this time, it was the Military Academy of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants that played the leading role in the Oriental training of practical experts on Persia during the 1920s, contrary to the former leading role of Russia's Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs in this field.¹⁵

The study of the late imperial period also demonstrates that the eventual production of knowledge within Persian studies greatly benefited from the tight individual and organisational interrelationship between all four domains of Russia's Oriental studies. As is clear from the research, scholarly active diplomats and military officers used their professional postings for obtaining new area-study material and made immensely significant contributions to the activities of various Orientological societies, members of which they were. On the other hand, the main Russian scholars of Persian Studies played the underlying role in the Orientological training of officers and often carried out the narrowly specified assignments of their diplomatic and military colleagues during their scholarly missions to Persia.¹⁶ The same interrelation-

ship was inherited by the Persian studies of the early Soviet period. Konstantin Chaikin¹⁷ taught Persian to Yakov Bliumkin at the Military Academy of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants, founded by the former Tsarist Lieutenant-General Andrey Snesarev.¹⁸ In 1920, although simply for the sake of surviving, the former Tsarist Colonel Ivan Iagello, a specialist in Persian and Urdu and the founder of the Tashkent Officers' School of Oriental Languages, accepted Frunze's invitation to restore and to again take the lead of Oriental studies in Tashkent (Lunin 111-13).

Furthermore, during the 1920s and the early 1930s the scholars of the so-called new "practical" school of Persian studies were enthusiastically involved in both the activities of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the academic and scholarly activities related to Persian studies. This period in the whole history of Russia's Oriental studies can rightfully be regarded as the most straightforward illustration of the amalgamation of scholarly knowledge and state power, hence, the supreme manifestation of Said's Orientalism.¹⁹ In 1926, during one of the sessions of the Party Central Committee, Georgii Chicherin was accused of losing control over Persian affairs, and that even the general guidelines of the Soviet Eastern policy had been shaped by his employees,

namely Pastukhov, Osetrov and Gurko-Kriazhin—the leading *Iranists* of the new generation.²⁰

The study of the late Imperial period has also revealed the presence of an underlying discourse throughout all Persian studies. All four domains were rather united in the promotion of *Russkoe delo* ("The Russian Cause"), which also included the notion of the Russian civilizing mission in the Orient. The spirit of patriotism, boiled down to the promotion of imperial Russia's state interests and Russian culture in Persia, was generally inherent to the activities of all domains. Notwithstanding the fact that all this was taking place in the context of the intense rivalry with European powers, the conception of a civilizing mission was solidly based on Russia's sense of superiority towards Asians that was caused by their perceived belonging to the so-called European civilization. However, simultaneously, most late Imperial Russia's Orientologists strongly believed in the greater capability of Russian culture, in contrast to the West, to interact with the Orient because of Russia's geographical and cultural immediate proximity to the latter.²¹ As was first emphasized by Knight, such discursive manifestations were particularly widespread within the academic domain of late Imperial Oriental

studies and were passed on to their disciples in diplomatic and military services (“Grigor’ev” 81; Tolz).

Discourses of a similar nature were also inherent to Oriental studies of Soviet Russia. The representatives of the new Orientalological school continued to look down on Persia, this time because of the fact that Russia became the first society of the victorious socialist revolution in the whole world. Hence, the civilizing mission was replaced by the proliferation of socialist revolution.²² The developments of 1919-1920 in Europe and the Orient, including the failed attempt to sovietize Persia, led to the conclusion that Persian and other eastern societies had not sufficiently developed and were not ready for an immediate revolution.²³ So, the above-mentioned discourse transformed into the belief in the necessity of a significantly more protracted process of cultivating Persians for social conversion. Both discourses predetermined that the agents of the Bolshevism Cause with relevant Orientalological expertise and, hence, a better understanding of the oppressed Orientals, be trained in required quantities.²⁴ In addition to the Oriental section of the Military Academy, this goal was also pursued by the foundation of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow, which preferred to accept students from

among the most deprived, illiterate Asians, with the aim of nurturing efficient experts and practically useful scholars.²⁵

In actual fact, this motion was the industrialized development of what had initially been offered by Vasilii Grigorie’v long before—as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Knight, “Grigor’ev” 95-97)—and transferred to the Bolsheviks through Viktor Rozen’s disciples, academicians of Oriental studies Vasilii Bartol’d and Sergei Ol’denburg, deeply involved with the early Soviet nationalities’ policy (Tolz 3-4, 7-19).²⁶ So, the massive engagement of all three Orientalological domains with native agents became one of the most characteristic features of the Soviet period that originally derived from late Imperial Russia. In support of further refutation of the universality of Said’s Orientalism that was so advocated by Khalid, the above-mentioned interplay of power/knowledge relations proves that the Russian/Soviet case was devoid of any racist component whatsoever. It is also maintained by Vladimir Minorskii’s private diaries, dated from the time he was Head of the Russo-British-Turko-Persian Quadripartite Commission for the demarcation of Persia’s western border in 1913.²⁷ Furthermore, and most important, the above-depicted interplay supports the presence of one of the fundamental elements of Foucault’s power/

knowledge relations, namely their ‘productivity’ (Foucault, “Truth and Power” 113-14, 120; “Prison Talk” 52; Mills 33; Tolz 70; Volkov, “Persian Studies and the Military” 932).

Along with that, after 1917, the new political ideology predetermined the creation of a new discourse, which seriously affected the relationships between main components of the Foucauldian power grid—academic and expert knowledge, state, institutions and individuals. This implied the making of practical use of Oriental studies—the discourse which challenged the very right of physical existence for scholarship that was unable to yield immediate practical returns (Kemper 2-3; Rodionov 47, 51-52). The expert Persian scholarship of Pavlovich, Pastukhov, Osetrov and Gurko-Kriazhin not only crucially affected the activities of early Soviet diplomacy and the military towards Persia but also put aside the still-existing classic scholarship of Persian studies, which had been influencing Russia’s foreign policy towards Persia since before 1917, albeit indirectly but rather successfully. However, this state of affairs in Persian studies lasted merely until the mid-1930s, by which time almost all the representatives of the “old school” and of revolutionary expertdom (practical Orientalologists of the first wave) had either died from natural causes or

been dismissed from their posts and executed during Stalin's purges. By that time, the academic domain had been staffed with the graduates of newly established institutions and, in general, the interaction between the domains had significantly diminished (Tolz 6).²⁸

'Governmentality' and Intellectuals

Given the hampered access to the archival documents of later periods in Russia, which has become even more restricted since 2000, the study of the mature Soviet period has had to confine itself to merely the analysis of published works. Another reason for this is the much deeper professional specialization of practical domains that has not allowed diplomats and military officers to have enough time for scholarly research since the 1930s, and the area-study information professionally produced by them has not been allowed into the academic domain, either. On top of that, the level of their academic Orientological training could not be compared to that of the pre-1917 period, and very few people would come into academia after their retirement from military or diplomatic service. Therefore, the study of the main scholarly works, published only within the academic domain after the 1930s, is quite representative of Soviet and post-Soviet Oriental studies as a whole.

After the understandable slack of 1940s-50s in the activities of Oriental studies, it is possible to discern a period from 1960 to the mid-1980s when Soviet Iranology turned into a monotonous uniform scholarship in full conformity with the Communist Party's ideology. In view of the above and given the self-censorship of that time, inculcated from the top, the works by Ivanov, Kuznetsova, Kulagina and Agaev were overwhelmed with relevant ideological underpinnings and are lacking in analysis (Kuznetsova and Kulagina; Agaev). For example, one of the central figures of the Soviet Iranology of the time, Mikhail Ivanov (1909-1986), focused on the Iranian "anti-feudal" movements of the nineteenth century and the Iranian revolution of 1905-1911, heavily drawing on Vladimir Ulianov-Lenin's writings (M. Ivanov, *Iranskaia revoliutsiia*; "Soz'v pervogo iranskogo;" *Antifeodal'nye*). During the 1950s to 1980s, he also occupied key administrative positions, including Head of the Leningrad Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and Head of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations affiliated with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the USSR.²⁹ In 1970, Nina Kuznetsova and Liudmila Kulagina published a very detailed study *Iz istorii sovetskogo vostokovedeniia* ("Of the History of Soviet Oriental Studies")

which, however, almost did not engage with archival materials and was based totally on Soviet secondary sources. Its emphasis on the development of Soviet Oriental studies, and Iranology therein, in strict accordance with the Party resolutions and the government decrees as well as on its "Marxist-Leninist foundations" (35) significantly reduces its historiographical value. However, due to its scrupulous, sometimes mechanical description of the events, this study still remains one of the main references regarding the organisational changes of Soviet Oriental studies. It therefore can be concluded that knowing the social and political conditions of the time in which they were written, the works of this period, nevertheless, are to be studied as scholarly valuable sources of factual historical material. For example, Ivanov's works extensively drew on archival materials, since the author's administrative positions, deeply embedded into Soviet science bureaucracy and party structures, granted him additional unrestricted access to the archives of the Soviet foreign affairs entities, hence securing more operational autonomy for him. The developments in the political and social life of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s opened more archival documents even for the Soviet researchers with a lesser operational autonomy and allowed for

new approaches in their study (Mamedova, "O nekotorykh" 40-41). For Soviet Iranology, this moment was marked by the publication in 1988 of collected archival materials on the modern history of Iran. The collection, called *Novaia istoriia Irana* ("Modern History of Iran"), was edited by Ninel' Belova and other renowned Soviet *Iranists*. It contained a new portion of previously intact documents which had been spotted in the Soviet archives, including the one of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which became slightly more open during Gorbachev's proclaimed policy of *glasnost*. As if pushing forward the official authorities, the editors remarked that "the collection of documents that would represent the whole period of the modern history of Iran had been published neither in the USSR nor out of its borders. However, the need in this kind of edition [was] immensely great" (3). The edition still bore the imprint of ideological self-censorship, although to a considerably lesser extent compared with previous works.

However, it was the work of Moisei Persits which was truly groundbreaking; this work was based on the declassified archives mainly of the Comintern and saw the publication of two series in the 1990s. The author gave a really symbolic name to his book: *Zastenchivaia interventsiiia*:

O sovetskom vtorzhenii v Iran i Bukharu v 1920-1921 godu ("The Timid Intervention: The Soviet Invasion of Iran and Bukhara, 1920-1921"). The word *zastenchivaia* ("timid") symbolically bridged the reticent and uncertain nature of the Bolsheviks' attempt to sovietize Persia in 1917-1921 and the state's efforts, aimed at suppressing the matter within Soviet historiography.³⁰ As the current hampered research into this and other similar issues in Russian archives illustrates, present-day Russia's authorities resumed the Soviet discursive practices of the politics of history in the early 2000s.³¹

In this sense, the works by Vladimir Genis became a logical and timely continuation of Persits' initiative, based on the access to the documents, opened in the 1990s, shedding light on the early Soviet policy towards Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Genis' books, in detail and for the first time in Russian historiography, highlighted such topics as: the role of Bolsheviks in the establishment of the Gilan Socialist Republic and the winding-up of this abortive enterprise; the destiny of the first Soviet plenipotentiary to Persia and Afghanistan, Nikolai Bravin, and the Soviet politics of history around him, still supported by the Russian state establishment; and, finally, the destiny of the Impe-

rial Russian diplomat-Orientalist Pavel Vvedenskii, whose expertise as a scholar was used by the Bolsheviks in a classical discursive mode à *la Foucault* while he was imprisoned. On balance, Genis' scholarship can be distinguished by the scrupulous saturation of previously restricted archival materials and is immensely valuable for researchers in terms of guiding them towards new, unconventional for present-day Russia's historiography, areas of research (Genis, *Krasnaia Persiia; Nevernye slugi rezhima; Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*).³²

It is also worth noting that the 1990s' relative openness of Russian archives was hardly asked-for by Russia's mainstream historians of Iran, who are mostly based in or around the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies of Russia's Academy of Sciences. They concentrate their scholarship on traditional, mainly Soviet, perceptions of Russian-Iranian relations, while trying to avoid topics leading to the negative interpretation of Russian/Soviet impact on Iran. Their analysis of historical and contemporary developments mainly moves in full conformity with Russia's foreign policy priorities. It could be supported by such works as *Granitsa Rossii s Iranom: Istoriia formirovaniia* ("Russia's Border with Iran: The History of Shaping") by Liudmila Kulagina and

Elena Dunaeva; “Operatsiia ‘Sochustvie’ i reaktsiia na nee presidenta Ahmadinezhada cherez 70 let” (“Operation ‘Sympathy’ and the President Ahmadinejad’s Reaction towards It after 70 Years”) by Vladimir Sazhin; and “Russo-Iranian Political Relations in the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century” by Elena Dunaeva.

The first one became a factual response to the Iranian old public discourse, questioning the legitimacy of the Golestan and Turkmenchay peace treaties, and, on top of that, it appeared at the time when Russia came across serious difficulties during the negotiations with Iran on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea (Dunaeva, “Formirovanie granitsy” 63, 75, 77-88; “Kaspiiskaia diplomatiia Moskvu” 66-77). It is noteworthy that the work begins with a thesis reflecting the widespread discourse within Russian historiography that the territorial gains of Russia in Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia took place as a result of the ‘voluntary entry’ of those areas to the Russian Empire (Kulagina and Dunaeva 5).

The second one was published shortly after Iran’s former President had tried to initiate a discourse on Iran’s integral right to claim reparations for the country’s occupation by the allied forces during WWII. The author put forward an argument on

the legally substantiated legitimacy of the Soviet occupation of Iran, contrary to those of Great Britain and the United States, and also for the profound historical benefits of this action for Iran (Sazhin, “Operatsiia ‘Sochustvie’” 145-51).

The author then follows with a rather dubious formula holding that the occupation of Iran “secured its sovereignty and independence as well as its decent place in the post-war world” (146).

The third one can be regarded as an archetypal sample of Russia’s Foreign Affairs’ propaganda on contemporary Russian-Iranian relations, albeit rather sophisticated and enshrined into a scholarly form. Having been written in the context of the recent, most intense stage of the age-old triple interplay (the West-Iran-Russia), the article was targeted at an English-language scholarly readership and championed the thesis of the mostly bilateral productive nature of Russo-Iranian relations during the last dozen years and their future great potential, both of which, I would argue, have simply never existed (Dunaeva, “Russo-Iranian Political Relations” 468-69).³³ It is also noteworthy that the article draws solely on the sources of the state establishment of the two countries and avoids engaging with third-party views. Except for one book and three jour-

nalist articles in the very beginning as the proof of “many publications about Russo-Iranian relations in the West,” the article does not contain a single reference to independent scholarly or media sources (443, 447-48, 452, 455). Not engaging with independent sources on Russian-Iranian relations at all, and not bothering herself with too many references, in general, the author is content with emphatically referring to her counterparts on the Iranian side—certified “spokesmen” on Russia—Mehdi Sanaie and Jahangir Karami, as well as to the representatives of Russia’s mainstream Iranology. All this makes the language of the article declarative and reminiscent of a foreign policy communiqué which can also be explained by relying almost totally on the official documents of Iranian state organizations and, particularly, of Russia’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Russia’s President Office, the fact catching the eye even without a brief language discourse analysis (444, 447-49, 451-52, 454-57, 459-61, 465-68).

Notwithstanding the fact that some Russian *Iranists* themselves acknowledge that the development of present-day Russia’s Iranology has become a hostage of the triangle-shaped relations between the USA, Russia and Iran (Mamedova, “O nekotorykh” 43), such a state of affairs can-

not be regarded as a support to the Saidian rather limited model of two-vector relations between knowledge and state power. By no means I am arguing that the above-mentioned works were merely produced according to a straightforward state order, though for a significant number, that cannot be ruled out, either. Rather, I would maintain that those works became the organic brainchild of that interplay of power/knowledge relations which, in this particular case, is an interaction of institutional and public discourses, knowledge, state power and 'governmentality' (Simons 82; Mills 33, 58; Kremontsov 4-5, 29-30). In this sense, Persits, Genis and suchlike scholars,³⁴ on the contrary, represent the examples of the Foucauldian intellectual, breaking discursive institutional practices and overcoming 'governmentality' (Simons 36-41; Kotkin 21-23).³⁵

Another manifestation of this interplay is the close interaction of various branches of Russia's Iranology (the Academy of Sciences, universities, scholarly societies, etc.) with Iran's political state structures. It is common knowledge that Russian scientific and scholarly institutions have been seriously underfunded by the state since the 1990s. As Loren Graham states, "science never proceeds in a political and economic vacuum" (27), and, in the

case of Russian Iranology, this vacuum in the Foucauldian power grid has been filled since the second half of the 1990s by the result of a thoughtful approach of the Iranian Embassy in Moscow and its sections in other cities. This is also pointed out in Mamedova's insightful article, in actual fact, unintentionally demonstrating that the Iranian government has virtually taken Russia's Iranology on its payroll ("O nekotorykh" 41-42).

In addition to sponsoring the equipping of the so-called "Iranian closets" in Russian universities and institutes, enabling students and scholars to watch the broadcasting of Iranian official channels, and providing a year abroad for Russian students, as well as sponsoring Russian scholars' trips to Iran, the Iranian Embassy has been actively participating in the scholarly activities of Russian Iranology institutions, including tangible assistance in organizing thematic conferences and publishing special editions on Iran and Iranian studies with the participation of Iranian "authorized" scholars. For instance, the Russian-language works with the titles that speak for themselves, *The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*; *The Islamic Revolution: Past, Present and Future*; *Iranology in Russia and Iranists*; *Iran: Islam and Power*

and *The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, have been published only by virtue of Iran's Embassy (42). It is also illustrative that some of the works have been co-edited by the head of Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Abuzar Ebrahimi Torkaman (Mamedova and Torkaman; Mamedova, *Dvadsat' piat' let Islamskoi*; Mamedova and Sanai), and Iran's current Ambassador to Russia, Mehdi Sanaei (an Iranian politician well known in relevant circles, an IRGC veteran of the Iran-Iraq war and a former cultural attaché of Iran's Embassy in Moscow (1999-2003), he was a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee and head of the IRAS, the Institute of Iran-Eurasian Studies, the former Iranian Center for Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus Studies).³⁶ It goes without saying that such a status quo inevitably tells upon the chosen subject area and the content of published articles and books on Iran which, thereafter, results in the acute scarcity of comprehensive scholarly analysis in present-day Russia's Iranology.

Seriously lacking in critical approach, the chapters of these edited collections put forward the overall positivist thesis regarding the events of the modern and contemporary history in both countries and their

interaction. In so doing, some of them implicitly (Fedorova 60-71; Polishuk 118-25; Kulagina and Akhmedov 116-27; Mamedova, "O nekotorykh" 40-41)—others explicitly (Dunaeva, "Iran i Tsentral'naia Aziia" 126-33; "Politicheskoe zaveshanie" 78-81; Kulagina 43-52; Sazhin, "Dialog tsivilizatsii" 62-65)³⁷—underpin the idea of inherent historical and present-day unity of the Russia-Iran nexus against the third-party forces in the region and worldwide. The character of the used sources is also noteworthy. Solely drawing on either Iranian or Russian primary and secondary sources, the above-mentioned works completely ignore sources originated in third countries. Even in the most recent edited collection, *Iran: Istoriia i sovremennost'* ("Iran: History and Modernity"), which is immensely interesting in terms of the diversity of topics discussed, the works authored by scholars possessing full command of English in the book section "The Present" do not engage with the relevant literature or primary sources from other countries (Kulagina and Mamedova).

With regard to the Russian case of the long twentieth century, the issue of politicizing historiography is not new. Its resumption during the course of the hectic pursuit of the 'expedient' national identity in the 2000s was studied in detail in Hans

Bagger's timely work that, having been published in 2007, in fact predicted the further development of "Putin's humanities," particularly within the walls of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Bagger). Simultaneously, it, certainly should be noted that in any country, Iranian studies as a scholarly domain does not consist only of the experts of Iranian contemporary history and politics. In germano- and russo-phone countries this domain is much more organizationally united and homogeneous at the institutional level in comparison with their anglophone analogues (Fragner and Matthee). A leading Russian *Iranist*-linguist, Professor Vladimir Ivanov, denotes the domain of Iranian studies in a broad sense as

a complex of humanities which study the mode of life, history, literature (folklore), material and spiritual culture, music and singing, written artefacts (manuscripts, rock inscriptions), religion and beliefs, socio-political situation, economy and languages of the iranophone peoples (V. Ivanov 35)

and in a narrow sense, as "the study of the above-mentioned disciplines specifically in application to Iran" (35). While the Foucauldian concept of power relations applies to all representatives of the whole domain defined above, the power/knowl-

edge nexus is more straightforward and can potentially be highlighted in more precise colors in the case of those working on the modern and contemporary issues of Iranian politics, economy and culture. This is particularly justified under the current conditions of inaccessibility to archival documents related to contemporary institutional activities. Hence the emphasis of the given study of the post-Soviet Iranology has been on this particular group within the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences as embedded into present-day Russia's power/knowledge nexus with greater intensity.

Conclusion

Thus, when analyzing Russia's Iranian studies scholarship during late Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, it appears that there has been a common and mainly underlying discourse throughout all three periods. Regardless of whether it was conscious or unconscious, Russian *Iranists* have been seeing their scholarship in a tight concurrence with their own country's interests. The representation of such interests is conventionally usurped by the political institutions of the ruling power—the status quo that eventually results in the in-

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strumental use of knowledge in the interests of current state power, as is also supported by Alexander Morrison (629). In further rebuttal of Engelstein's thesis, it is also feasible to conclude that "operational autonomy" in its Western form was not that developed in Russia, especially in the Soviet Union since the end of the 1920s, but as such it existed nonetheless with the disciplinary mechanisms of self-control and self-regulation being of a different kind (A. Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge* 123; Kremontsov 31-36; Beer 207; Kotkin 23). Moreover, the power/knowledge nexus, which definitely existed in the Russian case, had its specificities and its unique sophistication within late Imperial Russia's Oriental studies and even during the Soviet period. Soviet scientists and scholars would act not only under the pressure of various discursive and ideological stipulations, imposed by the party and creatively developed by some of their ideologically driven colleagues, but also under the vigilant control of special institutional structures (from the party committees—*partkomy*—in workplaces to the monitoring by political security entities—

VChKa-KGB).³⁸ However, in spite of all this, scientists and scholars also managed to play their own game.

While it was considered important to protect oneself as much as possible against ideological attack from philosophers or professional competitors, it was also recognized that party approval did not in fact depend ultimately on ideological factors, but rather on the ability of scientists to play politics... (Fortescue 18)

Notwithstanding the lack of totality and comprehensiveness of the analysis the post-Soviet period in terms of sources and groups studied in this article, it appears that during the period in question, along with the significant diversification of political forces on the scene, the interplay of power/knowledge relations became more entangled and intense.

Irrespective of the issue of the level of "individual operational autonomy," Foucault was particularly interested in power relations and how they influenced the development of knowledge. As it appears, these power relations and their productive impact can be equally found at work in

late Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet societies. The technicalities of the power/knowledge operation, embracing discourses, institutional practices, resistance, and the relationships between state power and the intellectual—all these elements, in other words, the components of the Foucauldian 'power relations grid' (Foucault, "Truth and Power" 113-14; Kotkin 21-23)—can easily be seen in the Russian case. However, what is most surprising in the present-day Russian case is that the Foucauldian methodological approach has not yet been employed or even studied in Russian social sciences and humanities as a theoretical tool. Though the above-mentioned refutes, in its essence, Engelstein's thesis on the non-applicability of the Foucauldian to Russia, it is nevertheless pertinent to quote her in a slightly supplemented form in the end, saying that, for certain, in the field of humanities, "Russia is a society that has yet to generate the luxury of a Michel Foucault to push it to consider the incitements of paradox" ("Combined Underdevelopment" 236).

Notes

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² The author defines Russia's long twentieth century between Nicholas II ascension in 1894 and the annexation of the Crimea in 2014.

³ In this context, the names of such prominent scholars (who this or that way touched upon these issues) as Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Louis Althusser (1918-1990), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) are worth mentioning.

⁴ See the works by Michel Foucault such as *The Order of Things*; *The Archæology of Knowledge*; "Prison Talk."

⁵ In brief, it can be defined as analyzing scientific and scholarly notions and the process of their production in the social context of a particular historical period within a certain society.

⁶ For the debates on the feasibility of application of Foucauldian ideas and notions to the Russian case see Beer 3-8, 16-26, 202-08; Kotkin 21-23; Engelstein.

⁷ In the first instance, such scholars can be named among them as Nikolai Kremmentsov, Loren Graham, Alexander Vucinich, Vera Tolz, Michael Kemper, Daniel Beer, Peter Kneen, Nathaniel Knight, Stephen Kotkin, Jeffrey Roberg, Stephen Fortescue, Francine Hirsch, Ilya Gerasimov, Vadim Birstein, Yurii Slezkine and others.

⁸ In order to avoid the unnecessary Saidian connotation and to preserve the neutral epistemological denotation of the term, I henceforth am using the noun *Orientalist* and the adjective *Orientalological* throughout the piece, similarly to Tolz and Schimmelpenninck.

⁹ The Archive of Orientologists (IVAN in St. Petersburg) (henceforth AV), f. 134 (Private archive of Minorskii); f. 115 (Private archive of Snesarev); The Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, f. 39 (Private archive of Smirnov); Russia's State Military Historical Archive (henceforth RGVIA), f. 409, op. 1, d. 172812, p/s 148-610 (Service Record of Tumaskii); The Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (henceforth AVPRI), f. *Central Asian Desk*, op. 485, d. 706, l. 1-3 (Argiropulo to Gartvig about Miller, 1902).

¹⁰ The Russo-Persian 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))> (12 Mar. 2013).

¹¹ AVPRI, f. *Persian Desk* (1915), op. 486, d. 156, l. 7, 9 (Reports from Russian Consulates). Zarkeshev, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia* 68-123.

¹² Russia's State Archive of Socio-Political History (henceforth RGASPI), f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 63 (Materials on Soviet trade with Persia); f. 532, d. 350, l. 11 (data on economic issues, collected by Trade Representations).

¹³ The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs; Military Intelligence; the Foreign Section of the United State Political Directorate (political intelligence).

¹⁴ The Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (henceforth AVPRF), f. 08 "The Secret Archive of NKID. Karakhan," op. 10, papka 33, d. 190, l. 5-6 (Karakhan's correspondence with Davtian).

¹⁵ 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, 93ob., 95ob.; d. 6, l. 119, 142.

¹⁶ AV, f. 17, op. 2, d. 50; d. 34; d. 29; f. 17, op. 2, 64; op. 1, d. 168. See also Bartol'd, "Istoriia izucheniia Vostoka" 446; Marshall 24, 164-65, 168; Vigasin 128-29.

¹⁷ Konstantin Ivanovich Chaikin (1889-1938), Zhukovskii's disciple, graduated from the St. Petersburg Faculty of Oriental studies in 1916. In the 1920s-1930s he worked in early Soviet various Orientalological institutions as an academic. The then 'spokesmen' of Soviet Iranian studies, Evgeny Bertels (1890-1957), would criticize Chaikin for "being under the influence of Western-European science and for using its methodology." Shortly after, Chaikin was executed as a foreign spy in 1938. GARF, f. 7668, op. 1, d. 2889, l. 2-3ob.

¹⁸ In 1920 Yakov Bliumkin was preparing to become in charge of the Cheka in the would-be Soviet Socialist Republic of Persia. RGASPI, f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 26, l. 1. See also Simbirtsev 95-96; Marshall 191.

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- ¹⁹ RGASPI, f. 159 "Chicherin. Persia," op. 2, d. 51.
- ²⁰ RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 51, l. 180, 182 (Chicherin's notes); f. 85 "Secret Persia," d. 106 (Ten Persian letters of Vardin), l. 8ob., 16ob., 260, 267.
- ²¹ AV, f. 115, op. 1, d. 70 (Snesarev's manuscript Attitudes toward the Asiatic world). See also Tolz 5, 30.
- ²² Russia's State Military Archive (henceforth RGVA), f. 157 (Revolutionary Military Council), op. 8, d. 7, l. 11 (Trotskii's cable), 58ob.
- ²³ Ibid, l. 58 (Investigation material on the catastrophe of the Persian front); AVPRF, f. "Chicherin," op. 18, d. 50638, papka 109 (Kolomiitsev's Reports), l. 3-4.
- ²⁴ AVPRF, f. 94 "The 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 (Kolomiitsev's letter to Chicherin).
- ²⁵ GARF, f. p-1335, op. 1, d. 5, l. 61, 80-81.
- ²⁶ On the engagement of the academicians of the "old" Orientalological school in the Bolsheviks' state-run projects of nationality policy see also Hirsch; Baziiants 50.
- ²⁷ AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803, l. 1.
- ²⁸ Pastukhov, Osetrov, Soltanzadeh, Tardov, Chaikin, Smirnov were executed. Bartol'd, Ol'denburg, Pavlovich, Gurko-Kriazhin, Snesarev, Iagello died (Sorokina and Vasil'kov).
- ²⁹ Moscow State University of International Relations, "Rektory" <<http://www.mgimo.ru/about/history/rectors/document3578.phtml>> (15 Feb. 2015).
- ³⁰ AVPRF, f. 94 "The Secret Cryptographic Section on Iran," op. 4, d. 4, papka 2, l. 13, 28, 52.
- ³¹ On the current ambiguous situation in the present-day Russian archives see Volkov, "Fearing the Ghosts of State Officialdom Past?"
- ³² On the phenomenon of Soviet *sharashki* that was widely spread in the 1930s and 1940s see Kremontsov 3. The word was an informal name for the secret research laboratories which were organised for imprisoned scientists and scholars within the Soviet GULAG concentration camps system.
- ³³ Additionally, on the character of the Russian-Iranian relations see Volkov, "The Iranian Electric Power Industry" 5. See also "Ahdnameh-i golestan" published on the *BBC Persian Website* in a special collection dedicated to the bicentenary of the Gulistan Treaty.
- ³⁴ The group of the scholars-editors of *Bibliograficheskii slovar' vostokovedov: zhertv politicheskogo terrora v sovetskii period, 1917-1991*.
- ³⁵ On the role of the intellectual see also Foucault, "Truth and Power" 133.
- ³⁶ <<http://www.drसानaei.ir>> (25 Sept. 2013).
- ³⁷ In his profound monograph published in Russian with the help of Nina Mamedova in 2014, a veteran expert on Russia, Iranian diplomat, Mohammad Hasan Mahdian, is sincerely cunning in his assertion that "Iran has never had doubts regarding Russia implementing its obligations for supplying Iranian nuclear power plants with fuel" (154). During the annual meetings of the Intergovernmental Commission on Russian-Iranian economic cooperation, the author of this article was many times approached in private by Iranian officials expressing their profound doubts related to Russia's realization of its obligations regarding the Iranian civilian nuclear energy programme.
- ³⁸ GPU NKVD (State Political Directorate affiliated with the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) was organized on 6 February 1922 as a subordinated structure within NKVD and became a successor to VCheKa (1917-1922)—the all-Russia Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage, established on 20 December 1917 and subordinated to the Council of the People's Commissars (SNK). In connection with the formation of the USSR, on 15 November 1923 GPU was reorganized into OGPU (United State Political Directorate), again subordinated directly to SNK. On 10 July 1934 it was merged with NKVD, becoming its Chief-Directorate of State Security. It existed until 3 February 1941 when it was again separated from NKVD and became NKGB (the People's Commissariat of State Security). During the war, it suffered a series of transformations and turned into MGB (the Ministry of State Security) on 20 August 1946. It finally evolved into KGB (the Committee of State Security affiliated with the Council of Ministers) on 13 March 1954, after some reorganizations, mergers and transformations (Korovin).
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AVPRF MID RF (Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii): Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation

AVPRI MID RF (Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii): The Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire

RGASPI (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii): Russia's State Archive of Socio-Political History

RGVA (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv): Russia's State Military Archive

RGVIA (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv): Russia's State Military Historical Archive

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→ AV (Arkhiv Vostokovedov):
The Archive of Orientologists
of the Institute of Oriental
Manuscripts

GNCM: The Georgian
National Centre of
Manuscripts (Tbilisi)

