

GUERRE ET PAIX EN MONDE IRANIEN REVISITER LES LIEUX DE RENCONTRE



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FLORENCE JULLIEN

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WAR AND PEACE IN THE OTHER AND THE SELF:
IRAN THROUGH THE EYES OF RUSSIAN SPIES
THE CASE OF KONSTANTIN SMIRNOV (1877-1938)
AND LEONID SHEBARSHIN (1935-2012)

RÉSUMÉ

Guerre et paix chez l'autre et chez soi : l'Iran à travers les yeux d'espions russes.
Le cas de Konstantin Smirnov (1877-1938) et Leonid Shebarshin (1935-2012)

Comme il en est aujourd'hui, l'omniprésence de la Russie en Iran au cours des 19^e et 20^e siècles a été soutenue par les activités de l'Intelligence militaire et politique russe, principalement représentée par des officiers spécialement formés aux études orientales. La spécificité des discours orientalistes russes a non seulement permis à ces personnages d'acquérir une profonde perception de l'Autre oriental, mais les a souvent amenés à y juxtaposer une conception confuse d'eux-mêmes, ce qui a donné lieu à des interprétations qui n'étaient pas toujours en phase avec leurs sentiments patriotiques. S'appuyant sur les notes privées et autres écrits des deux officiers supérieurs de l'Intelligence militaire et politique de la Russie, à savoir le tuteur personnel (1907-1914) d'Ahmad Shah Qajar, Konstantin Smirnov, et le chef du centre du KGB à Téhéran (1979-1983), Leonid Shebarshin, cet article a pour objet d'étudier les rapprochements épistémologiques de leurs écritures autobiographiques. Ce faisant, cette réflexion traite également de la valeur méthodologique de ce genre littéraire, et de l'importance de la composante militaire pour l'étude des relations russo-iraniennes.

Mots-clés : Russie – Union soviétique – Iran – orientalisme russe / soviétique – Renseignement – intellectuels.

ABSTRACT

Similar to the present day, Russia's overall pervasive presence in Iran throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century was underpinned by the activities of Russian military and political intelligence, represented mostly by officers specially trained in Oriental studies. The specificity of Russian orientalist discourses not only allowed these individuals to produce deep insights into the Oriental Other, but quite often caused them to juxtapose it with their troubled perception of the Self, resulting in conclusions that were not always pleasant for their patriotic sentiments. Drawing on the private notes and other writings of the two senior officers of Russia's military and political intelligence, namely the personal tutor (1907-1914) of Ahmad Shah Qajar, Konstantin Smirnov, and the Tehran KGB Station-Chief (1979-1983), Leonid Shebarshin, this paper studies the epistemological congeniality of their life-writing. In so doing, the paper also discusses the methodological value of life-writing and the significance of the military component for the study of Russo-Iranian relations.

Keywords: Russia – Soviet Union – Iran – Russian/Soviet Orientalism – Intelligence – the Intellectual.

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Since the end of the 18th century, a key characteristic of Russo-Iranian relations has been the military dimension.¹ Particularly during the last quarter of the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th century, Russia's pervasive presence in Persia was underpinned by the activities of Russian military and political intelligence, represented mostly by officers specially trained in Oriental studies. Traditionally for this cognitive domain in Russia, many of them were intellectually active, engaging in scholarly activities, including regular presentations in various Russian learned societies and the publication of articles and books, and later writing their memoirs. This peculiar phenomenon, mostly conditioned by the 1861-1881 Minister of War and Professor Dmitrii Miliutin's reforms

¹ I would like to wholeheartedly thank Oliver Bast, Abbas Amanat, Vera Tolz, Ali Ansari and Philipp Casula as well as the editors of this volume for their generous and insightful comments on the earlier versions of this paper. Also, I would like to separately thank the British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS) for its generous help that enabled me to successfully present the first draft of this paper in Istanbul, at the 7th Biennial Convention of ASPS.

in the Russian military, was studied in detail in 2014 by the author.² Notwithstanding colossal shifts brought about by the Bolshevik coup and the devastating events in its immediate aftermath, the early Soviet period witnessed some strong continuities and even notable qualitative and quantitative productive transformations within the above-mentioned practices, laying foundations for institutional memories to last for decades – until the 1980s.³

In this regard, the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power/knowledge relations and the Bourdieusian notions of practice, the field and the habitus, appear to be the most productive analytical tools securing the precise and multi-dimensional deconstruction of these relations in their most unconventional manifestations within Russia's Oriental studies field.⁴ Drawing on this insightful theoretical toolkit, the paper analyses the private notes of Konstantin Smirnov, Deputy-Head of the Intelligence Unit of the Caucasian Military District Staff and the personal tutor of Ahmad Shah Qajar (1907-1914),⁵ as well as the memoirs, other writings and interviews of Leonid Shebarshin, the KGB Station-Chief in Iran (1979-1983).⁶ Notwithstanding the time gap of almost a century that separates their writings, the observations and

² See Volkov 2014b, p. 915-932. On Miliutin's activities see his memoirs: Miliutin 2010. Also see Nikolaeff 1949, p. 117-126; and Menning 2000; Marshall 2006. See also Zakharova 1991, p. 6-33.

³ On the continuities within institutional practices in Russia's political and military Oriental studies see Volkov 2015d, p. 695-712. See also Bast 2006, p. 163-176; Bast 2013, p. 261-297; Holquist 1999, p. 85-86. See also Volkov *forthcoming*.

⁴ See Foucault 1980; Foucault 2000; Foucault 1989; Foucault 1972. See also Bourdieu 1990, p. 52-65, p. 80-121; Bourdieu 1988, p. 21-35; p. 62-69; p. 77-105.

⁵ Military orientalist Colonel Smirnov authored a considerable number of works on Persian history, ethnography, geography and economy. Having graduated from the Officers' Courses of Oriental Languages, he served in the Intelligence Unit of the Caucasian Military District Staff and was appointed as Soltan Ahmad Mirza's, the later Ahmad Shah Qajar's personal tutor (1907-1914). He participated in WWI and after the Russian Civil War he served as an interpreter in the Red Army in the Caucasus. In the 1920-1930s he worked as a research associate in the Academy of Sciences of Georgia before he was executed in 1938 (Vasil'kov / Sorokina 2003). On Smirnov's life, see Ter-Oganov 2002b, p. 4-14. Smirnov's articles were extensively published in military journals and the journal of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (see, for example, Smirnov 1904, p. 282-326; 1910a, p. 20-64; 1910b, p. 1-62; 1909; 1911. Books – Smirnov 1916 and 1917).

⁶ See Shebarshin 1993; 1997; 1998; 2003; 2012a; 2013.

reflections of these two representatives of different Russian intelligence services (the army and political intelligence) serving different political systems have much in common. Although both can undoubtedly be regarded as the bearers of significantly diverging ideological biases – the former was a staunch apologist of *Russkoe Delo* as wide-spread in late Imperial Russia, and the latter was “a soldier of the armed squad of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”, as the KGB used to pathetically be called in the USSR⁷ – they demonstrated comparable patterns in intellectual behaviour and ultimately arrived at similar epistemological conclusions as a result of their interaction with Iranians. These conclusions, of course, should not be taken at face value but rather have all the potential to serve as a fertile source of new lines of inquiry for the researchers of Russo-Iranian relations in particular, and in a broader sense for the participants in various Orientalism/Occidentalism debates.⁸



Konstantin Smirnov (1877-1938)



Leonid Shebarshin (1935-2012)

This article maintains that the intellectual contribution by these two individuals represents first-hand insights into Russian perceptions of Iranian culture, and of Iranians themselves, as well as into themes crucial

⁷ On the discourse of *Russkoe delo* (the Russian Cause) among late Imperial Russia's military officers see Volkov 2014b. The term *vooruzhennyi otriad partii* (the armed squad of the party) was coined by Vladimir Lenin and was recently revitalised by Vladimir Putin shortly before the presidential elections of 2012, see Putin 2012.

⁸ See Nanquette 2016; see also Bast 2016, p. 73-98; see Buruma / Margalit 2014.

for 20th century Iran and Russia, such as war and peace, violence and humaneness. The research also engages with theoretical approaches to studying the methodological value of life-writing for historiography. However, most importantly, the article highlights the Foucauldian biopolitics at play that illustrates how the multifaceted interaction of each of these two men of letters with the ‘Other’ changed their perceptions of their own people, *i.e.* the ‘Self’.⁹ The research contributes to the multidimensional history of Russo-Iranian encounters, which still remains seriously understudied, partially caused, of course, by the hampered access to Russian archival depositories during the Soviet period and, unsurprisingly, during Putin's period since 2000.¹⁰

In view of the above, notwithstanding its significant importance for contemporary historiography, Russia's manifold presence in Persia/Iran during the two preceding centuries still seems, to a great extent, *terra nova*. Even worse, – in this context, international scholarship has published practically nothing on the activities of the Russian military in Persia/Iran that was the main underpinning of Russia's political influence. In addition to a few works by Nugzar Ter-Oganov¹¹ and Stephanie Cronin,¹² of which later in more detail, one can only mention the works with a broader focus by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye¹³ and Alex Marshall.¹⁴ In his article “Reforming Military Intelligence”, Schimmelpenninck studies Miliutin's reforms and their influence on the fully-fledged establishment and development of a scholarly component in Russian military intelligence activities, which so profoundly contributed to Russia's Oriental studies of the last quarter of the 19th and the early 20th century, when Persian studies were leading in

⁹ See Foucault 2008; Foucault 2011.

¹⁰ On the situation with unjustifiably excessive secrecy in present-day Russia's archival industry and the politics of history under Putin's “regime of truth” see Volkov 2015a, p. 901-921. On more general institutional problems in the so-called ‘Putin's humanities’, see Bagger 2007, p. 109-125; and Volkov 2015b, p. 61-79.

¹¹ See Ter-Oganov 2015; Ter-Oganov 2012; Ter-Oganov 2009, p. 445-463; Ter-Oganov 2010, p. 69-79.

¹² See Cronin 2012, p. 143-186.

¹³ See Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2004, p. 133-50; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010.

¹⁴ See Marshall 2006.

this domain.¹⁵ Marshall succeeded in significantly developing this field through his fundamental work *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800-1917*, based on protracted and scrupulous archival research carried out in Russian military archives.¹⁶ A significant part of the research is dedicated to the activities of the Asiatic Section of the Russian General Staff and, in particular, it sheds light upon the enormous contribution of the activities of Russian officers-*vostochniki* (military orientalists) to Persian studies. The work also retraces the organisational destiny of the dedicated Officers' Courses in Oriental Languages to the moment of their dismantling in 1910, as well as the organisational perturbations of the Asiatic section until its demise in 1918, and its influence on the early Soviet Oriental studies and, in particular, on the resumption of Persian studies in Soviet Turkestan in 1919.¹⁷ However high is the scholarly value of this work it does not focus on Persia, mainly dealing with the activities of Russian military intelligence in Russia's broader "inner" and "outer" Orient.

For the time being, this missing focus can only be found in the work of Stephanie Cronin but mainly in the articles and books of Nugzar Ter-Oganov. Cronin's article-length work insightfully deals with unconventional (for international scholarship) facets of Russia's military presence in Persia, that is Russian deserters and revolutionaries in Persia, highlighting rarely studied human dimensions of the problem.¹⁸ The author focuses on the interaction of Iranians and Russians from the angle of the surprisingly successful cultural assimilation of Russians¹⁹ who ended up living in Iran, in the period 1800-1920, namely from the time of the first considerable waves of Russian prisoners-of-war and deserters entering Persia, to the demise of the Persian Cossack Brigade shortly before the establishment of diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia. While the author hardly engages with Persian and Russian archival sources, the work provides a sophisticated theoretical analysis drawing on primary sources for the Russian perception of Persia, namely the published writings of Russian senior military officers and bureaucrats of the time, such as Adolph Bergé, Colonel Gaspard Drouville, Colonel Aleksei

¹⁵ See Volkov 2014b.

¹⁶ See Marshall 2006.

¹⁷ Marshall 2006, p. 189-190.

¹⁸ See Cronin 2012.

¹⁹ The mentioning of Russians attending mosques, praying and crossing themselves in the Russian Orthodox mode is particularly noteworthy (Cronin 2012, p. 157-158).

Domantovich and Colonel Vladimir Kosagovsky, as well as using recent Russian-language scholarship on the issue, including the writings of Nugzar Ter-Oganov, Aleksandr Kibovsky and Nina Mamedova.²⁰

In this sense, Ter-Oganov's ground-breaking writings focusing specifically on the activities of the Russian military in Persia and its role in the broader context of Russian political influence in Persian affairs justify his status as the main expert in the field. His recent monograph in Russian, *Persidskaia kazachia brigada* (The Persian Cossack Brigade), and his articles published in English- and Russian-language leading peer-reviewed journals are of particular significance for a better understanding of the omnipresent and crucial character of the military context for the Iran-Russia nexus throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.²¹ Indeed, if one glides over the lineal chronology of the developments it becomes obvious that

the military aspect of Russo-Iranian relations was predominant from the early 19th until the mid-20th century: two full-fledged wars in 1804-1813 and in 1826-1828; Russian assistance to Persia in the first Herat crisis under the aegis of military orientalists Ivan Simonich, Ivan (Johann) Blaramberg and Ivan (Yan) Vitkevich (1837-1838) and then again in 1856-1857 during the second Herat crisis; the establishment of His Majesty the Shah of Persia's Cossack Brigade in 1879 and the ensuing Russian participation in the training of the Persian military; the influx of Russian armed revolutionaries after 1905 and the resulting virtual occupation of the north of Persia by the Russian military, overflowing into combat activities in the West and North-West of Persia before and during World War I directed against Turks and Germans; the Bolshevik invasion of 1920; the military cooperation of the 1920s, secured by the Caucasian GPU with Lavrenty Beria at its head; and, finally, the Soviet occupation of 1941-1946.²²

In the late 1980s, this underlying component was re-installed by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the disintegrating Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics Mikhail Gorbachev's signing the \$1.3 billion arms deal with the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which opened ways for new rapprochement in various fields, including,

²⁰ See Volkov 2015c, p. 292.

²¹ See Ter-Oganov 2012; Ter-Oganov 2009.

²² Volkov 2015c, p. 291-292.

most importantly, inter-state techno-economic, trade and cultural cooperation.²³ The direct impact of the above-mentioned deal on all other spheres of cooperation can also be supported by the later difficulties in bilateral relations which would emerge every time the due implementation of the deal was hampered or at risk, e.g. as illustrated by the difficulties caused by the secret 1995 'Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement'. Although Mark Katz argues that "the agreement did not seriously impinge on Russian-Iranian relations",²⁴ the immensely problematic nature of the agreement for these relations is evidenced in John Parker and Clément Therme's works, as well as by the fact that the abrogation of the agreement in question was amongst Putin's first presidential orders in 2000.²⁵ The period from 2000 to the present is characterised by the same patterns of Russo-Iranian military-political interaction, including the Iranian Nuclear Programme, the destiny of the S-300 anti-aircraft system deal, and the cooperation on Syria, – all this has been enormously influential on the other spheres of the bilateral ties throughout the period, affecting them in every way from sudden revitalisations to no less unexpected attenuations in their development.²⁶

Therefore, given the historical significance of the implications of these activities for the subsequent and contemporary periods, this underexplored cognitive field is worth developing much deeper in various dimensions. In this sense, and in the conditions of rather scarce source base, Smirnov's private, not to say intimate, life-writing notes seem of particular value since, in addition to the information on the Russian intelligence activities as such, as well as their original aims and eventual outcomes, the diaries contain information on the multifaceted manifestations of Russo-Iranian interaction in practically all possible spheres – politics, culture, economy, ethnography, and simply at the level of everyday life. Technically, Smirnov's diaries, or in other words, private notes, comprise most of his reports to the Russian Minister in Persia and to the Headquarters of the Caucasian Military District, as well

²³ See Volkov 2012, p. 5. In 1990-1991, the initial deal was supplemented by new contracts amounting to almost \$5 billion (see Parker 2009, p. 34, p. 105-107).

²⁴ Katz 2015.

²⁵ See Parker 2009, p. 95-134; Therme 2015b, p. 155-237.

²⁶ See Therme 2015a, p. 95-115.

as other data on his interaction with Persians which were not included in his official reports.²⁷

As Ter-Oganov points out, the notes

are a serious document which allows for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the tendencies of the socio-political history of Iran, as well as for the understanding of Iranian-Russian and of British-Russian relationships in the epoch of the Constitutional Movement until the very beginning of WWI ... [The notes] contain much highly interesting information about the British, German and Turkish policies in Iran, about dozens, if not hundreds of political activists, and are undoubtedly most valuable and relatively objective eyewitness accounts...²⁸

Another researcher of the period, Moritz Deutschmann, rightly notices other dimensions of the work which Smirnov himself called *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha* (The Notes of the Tutor of the Persian Shah). *The Notes* demonstrate how Smirnov's position at the Qajars' Court considerably assists the greater interpenetration of two different cultures and symbolises a tendency in Russo-Iranian relations, rather characteristic for that time: the increasing, unequal but mutual influence exerted in cultural and political fields between the two countries.

By giving a detailed insight into Ahmad Mirza's education, Smirnov's text documents important transformations in the way the Qajars looked at themselves. He also shows how these transformations were linked to Russian attempts to monopolize their influence on the dynasty at the cost of other groups at the court. Furthermore, Smirnov's role was not an exception, but was part of a broader trend: in fact, many members of the Iranian elites at the time even sent their sons to Russia for education, most importantly to military schools. This role of military education in the Russian empire had a long tradition; it had, for example, played a central role in integrating Muslim elites from the Caucasus into the empire.²⁹

²⁷ The Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (henceforth GNMC), f. 39, d. 11, l. 3.

²⁸ Ter-Oganov 2002a, p. 26. Unfortunately, Smirnov did not publish *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha, 1907-1914* because of the information, given in the manuscript, that could be potentially harmful and unpleasant to the characters in the Notes, as stated by himself (GNMC, f. 39, d. 11, l. 1). *Zapiski...* were published only in 2002 in Tel-Aviv due to the efforts of Nugzar Ter-Oganov who had prepared the manuscript for publication.

²⁹ Deutschmann 2013, p. 403.

Smirnov himself was a product of this tendency, descending from Daghestani nobility who had embarked on military service to the Russian Empire at the time of the Russo-Persian wars. This is particularly important in the light of the then current Russian perceptions of Persia as the Russian would-be “inner” Orient – the perceptions which were widely spread between Russians dealing with Persia at the time.³⁰

However, and the most importantly in this context, there is a third dimension. These life-writing notes contain Smirnov’s thoughts and reflections regarding Iranians themselves and many aspects related to their culture and the mode of life as juxtaposed to the Russian way of life as it was perceived at the time. At first, it is a glance from the outside. Gradually, it acquires some features of an inward observer, as if Smirnov sometimes felt native among Iranians, well apprehending their human interests and worries. This is also done in the context of the analysis of the views of other Russians and foreigners, mainly the British and French, about Iranian and Russian cultures.³¹ So in a certain sense Smirnov’s notes are of a higher historiographic value than conventional archival documents since, in addition to informing about significant events and important activities, they convey the spirit and perceptions of each period (he analysed his notes made between 1907 and 1914 three times – in 1920, 1924 and 1933 – each time adding his new reflections over his former thoughts and analyses).³²

The situation with Shebarshin’s life-writing is simultaneously much more complicated and much more straightforward. His memoirs are well situated within a broader body of similar – however in many senses rather simplistic – works authored by Russian diplomats and/or GRU/KGB³³ officers who served in Iran and Afghanistan. Among them, there

³⁰ See Volkov *forthcoming* 1.

³¹ GNCM, f. 39, d. 11, l. 1ob.-2ob; d. 20, l. 39ob.

³² GNCM, f. 39, d. 22. l. 1-1ob. See also GNCM, f. 39 ‘Smirnov’, d. 78 (*Hartvig’s letter to Smirnov*, dated 02/08/1909, with Smirnov’s later remarks, dated 1933).

³³ GRU (*Glavnoe razvedovatel’noe upravlenie*) was/is the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR/the Russian Federation). KGB (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*) was the Committee for State Security. In 1991, it was split into different (counter-)intelligence services all reporting directly to the President, in contrast to the Soviet time when the KGB was subordinate to the Council of Ministers. Present-day Russia’s intelligence community comprises several services, including FSB (*Federal’naia sluzhba*

are memoirs by Georgy Agabekov, Lev Kostromin, Georgy Ezhov, Vladimir Kuzichkin, Evgeny Kalinin, Revaz Uturgauri, and others.³⁴ The works are certainly not academic and some of them, naturally, are heavily loaded with patriotic and corporate biases; however, they quite successfully convey the spirit of the time and, more importantly, introduce the reader to the inside perceptions of multi-faceted interaction between the Other and the Self, particularly benefiting from the strategic positions of the authors within the habitus. Not claiming academic value, they favourably contrast with the six-volume collection *Istoriia rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki* (The History of Russia’s External Intelligence) initially edited by the late bigwig of Soviet/Russian politics and former head of the SVR, academician Evgeny Primakov, – a work of extremely poor quality comprising chapters with haphazard referencing, as well as complete fairy tales narrated by retired officers.³⁵ As rightly observed by Schimmelpenninck, this “sloppy scholarship” aggravated and “marred by an overly tendentious approach”, in fact, simply leads readers astray by its title and claims of drawing on new archival sources.³⁶ In this respect, the earlier-mentioned personal accounts not hiding under academic terms are more convincing and of significantly greater epistemological value.

The author of *Ruka Moskvy* Shebarshin did not have such a diverse multifaceted protracted cultural experience as Smirnov, nor did he live among Iranians. On the other hand, the professional “weight” of Shebarshin at the time of his Iranian posting and especially after that was much heavier than that of Smirnov, hence his greater operational autonomy and breadth of accessed information. Shebarshin’s posting as

bezopasnosti) – the Federal Security Service, and SVR (*Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki*) – the External Intelligence Service.

³⁴ See Agabekov 1930 and its first English-language version Agabekov 1931a. See also Agabekov 1931b. See also Kostromin 2011; Ezhov 2009; Kuzichkin 1990; Kalinin 2010; Uturgauri 2014.

³⁵ It had taken several years to compile all six volumes and the first edition was published in 2006, having been edited by different heads of the SVR during different periods: Evgeny Primakov, Viacheslav Trubnikov and Sergey Lebedev. Its initial title was more modest – *Essays in the History of Russia’s External Intelligence*. In 2014, the editors, apparently, decided not to think small and the title was changed into *Istoriia rossiiskoi razvedki* (The History of Russia’s External Intelligence), without any improvement in its poor quality in comparison with the first edition containing its Vol. 1 reviewed by Schimmelpenninck (see the following reference).

³⁶ See Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2008, p. 222-223.

the KGB Station Chief in Iran lasted from 1979 to 1983. In terms of ample access to all sorts of information, such a post was roughly equivalent to Head of the Russian Legation in Smirnov's times, whereas Smirnov's operative and official status was lower than those of Colonel Vladimir Liakhov, Seraia Shapshal, and even his most intimate life friend Vladimir Minorsky.³⁷ Moreover, from April 1989 to August 1991, Shebarshin served as First Deputy to the head of the KGB, hence directing the entire external intelligence of the USSR. This factor, of course, particularly aggravated by the recency of his activities, causes insurmountable difficulties for current research in Russia, totally ruling out the possibility of any kind of archival cross-referencing verification of the material in question.

It is also highly noteworthy that the recency of Shebarshin's activities and the significance of his personality for present-day Russia's discursive context resulted in the manifestation of an additional, rather rare phenomenon in the politics of historical memories: the creation of the life-writing by Leonid Shebarshin's colleagues specifically dedicated to Shebarshin's life-writing and explaining or even "correcting" Shebarshin's thoughts and reflections on various issues. It is particularly related to his views regarding historical and contemporary developments in Russia, her state and society, which allegedly do not fit into the context of "correct" patriotic discourses inculcated from the top in present-day Russia.³⁸ This process started immediately after Shebarshin's suicide in 2012, which created a deep resonance in Russian society. Some of his pieces were re-published with new relevant forewords and many of his colleagues wrote their own memoirs, deconstructing Shebarshin's memoirs and softening his critique of systemic faults in the Soviet system and the post-Soviet Russian civil society.³⁹ Finally, an amateurish Internet site, www.shebarshin.ru, which was designed and maintained by some of the admirers of his literary talent in the 1990s and contained the initial versions of his publications, and all his interviews and videos with his lectures in free access, was closed down in 2015, and even all the online copies of its pages were deleted.

³⁷ On the activities of Vladimir Liakhov, Seraia Shapshal and Vladimir Minorsky in Persia see Volkov *forthcoming*. Additionally, on Minorsky see Volkov 2017, and Volkov (*in preparation 1*).

³⁸ See Leonov 2012. Also see Povoliaev 2014.

³⁹ See Zhitnukhin 2014. Also see Mlechin 2015. Also see Primakov 2014; Kostromin 2011.

In general, these two intelligence officers-*vostochniki* (orientalists) – Colonel Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov (1877-1938) and Lieutenant-General Leonid Vladimirovich Shebarshin (1935-2012) – are remarkable personalities for drawing historiographic parallels and analysing their activities and writings. They were both specialists on the broader Persianate World. Smirnov graduated from the Oriental Languages Courses within the Educational Section affiliated with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, headed by Professor Valentin Zhukovsky (1858-1918) – the founder of late Imperial Russia's Persian studies as an institutionalised narrowly-specialised sub-domain.⁴⁰ On the other hand, in 1957, Shebarshin graduated from an institution that can be defined as an almost direct successor to the Oriental Languages Courses – the Moscow State Institute of International Relations affiliated with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that was also headed at that time by Professor Mikhail Ivanov (1909-1986) – a central figure in Soviet Iranology of the time and a complete analogue to Zhukovsky in terms of their embeddedness in state power structures and institutions.⁴¹ This is noteworthy too, since it points to the institutional continuities in Russian/Soviet Oriental studies, where the leading positions within the Russian late imperial and early Soviet power/knowledge nexus belonged to the Persianate Studies, and this status quo made its way well into the 1950s. The habitus organised by the practices adopted by the intellectuals, such as Zhukovsky and Rosen, was later transformed and developed by the field of early Soviet Oriental studies, based on new practices but preserving strong continuities from the imperial period. This produced, at different times, individuals such as Smirnov and Shebarshin who continued to develop and productively alter their fields.⁴²

Both Smirnov and Shebarshin were *ahl-e ghalam*; they both dedicated their entire free time to reading, writing and collecting books and manuscripts. The latter practice survived into Shebarshin's times as a fading remnant of the conventional practice widespread among Russian late imperial diplomats and military officers, who would even arrange competitions for obtaining ancient manuscripts in order to make their

⁴⁰ GNCM, f. 39 (Smirnov's Private Collection), d. 11 (Diaries, 1907), l. 18, 21; d. 12 (Diaries, 1909), l. 43ob.-46; d. 13 (Diaries, 1910), l. 26ob.-27, 95-96, 142.

⁴¹ See Volkov 2015b, p. 68.

⁴² On the leading positions of the Persianate Studies within Russian Orientology see Volkov 2014a.

former teachers in St. Petersburg and Moscow happy. One example is the graduate of the St. Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Languages and would-be émigré employee of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs Leonid Bogdanov, who obtained 246 manuscripts from 1904 to 1914 which all ended up in the hands of Rosen, Zhukovsky, and Barthold. On 2 May 1906, sending rare books retrieved at the request of St. Petersburg, the dragoman of the Russian Consulate Nikolay Bravin, with barely concealed envy, wrote to Zhukovsky from Mashad that Bogdanov had succeeded in obtaining some of Omar Khayam's manuscripts.⁴³

Shebarshin, of course, would collect antique and rare books for himself because of his passion for reading. As his former subordinate, the head of the 'N' line in the Tehran Chief Station, Vladimir Kuzichkin (1947-2012?),⁴⁴ would later characterise him:

Shebarshin lived a modest personal life, and this distinguished him quite sharply from his predecessors. He spent most of his time in the Residency [Chief Station], working on information. The rest of the time he was at home, reading a book. Shebarshin was widely read, and he was also what we in the Soviet Union call a "bookman", a collector of rare books.⁴⁵

As Shebarshin himself put it, he often used to spend hours in antique bookshops in Manuchehri street – the street that always occupies a central place in his detailed and picturesque depictions of Tehran.⁴⁶

Although Smirnov's literary heritage is more significant, in addition to the serious contribution to Oriental studies of his scholarly monographs and articles, in contrast to Shebarshin, the cases of these individuals have much in common and represent a remarkable epistemological cohesion

⁴³ Volkov 2014a, p. 131.

⁴⁴ The author of this paper, for understandable reasons, was unable to document the date of Kuzichkin's death, due to his special status on the territory of the United Kingdom, and had to confine it to using oral information. In this case, it is noteworthy in terms of bitter irony of fate that Shebarshin and Kuzichkin died in the same year since, throughout the rest of his days, Shebarshin considered him a person who had inflicted the largest harm to his personal life and professional career by defecting in 1982. In his interviews, Shebarshin constantly referred to Kuzichkin with outward spite, saying: "I hope he has dropped dead by now!" (see Shebarshin's interviews, e.g. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/302817>, accessed 10/05/2017; see also Mlechin 2004, p. 120-121; see also Parker 2009, p. 16-17).

⁴⁵ Kuzichkin 1990, p. 278.

⁴⁶ See Shebarshin 2012a, p. 118-121.

for this study to build on. The professional postings of these two patriots of their country took place precisely at the final stage of the existence of these empires, Russian and Soviet, before their imminent collapse, which both Smirnov and Shebarshin had sensed in their notes. During two subsequent decades, they also passed through historic events of great magnitude, which made them reconsider their staunch personal beliefs and their views regarding their area of expertise and, most importantly, about their own country.⁴⁷ Those events also had a direct impact on these individuals' eventual fates, resulting in them having been betrayed by their own state.

In this respect, it should be noted that the phenomenology of life-writing was first extensively investigated in the 1990s,⁴⁸ and its study was further developed in the more recent scholarship of Michael David-Fox, Gisèle Sapiro, Serguei Oushakine, Aleksandr Dmitriev and others.⁴⁹ They dealt with the epistemological significance of the written evidence left during crucial periods by various intellectuals, highlighting the importance of their reflections for better understanding of the current perceptions related to each particular period. As argued by Dmitriev, the most important feature of this field is

[...] the subjective and personal characteristics of humanities, including those related to the vision of the past, collective perspectives and authorities, as well as the conditions of individual freedom. Memoir texts grant unique material to a researcher for the study of exactly these dimensions of the humanities field. And it is precisely in the post-Soviet time that the public operation of memory (the production of memories and their reflection is only one constituent of these activities) became the important mechanism of academic continuity.⁵⁰

The turning-point of the late 1980s and the early 1990s was not significant only in terms of the re-definition of ideological and methodological premises of the USSR/Russia's humanities knowledge, but also as a rupture in the status, capabilities and material well-being of intellec-

⁴⁷ GNCM, f. 39, d. 22. l. 1-10b. Also see Shebarshin 2012a, p. 121-123, p. 125-183. Also see Volkov 2014a, p. 208.

⁴⁸ See Folkenflik 1993; Shortland / Yeo 1996; Dintenfass 1999, p. 150-165.

⁴⁹ See Franklin 2009; Bradatan / Uoshakine 2010; Sapiro 2006, p. 3-24; David-Fox / Péteri 2000; Vishlenkova / Savel'eva 2013; also see in particular Dmitriev 2013, p. 358-384.

⁵⁰ Dmitriev 2013, p. 361.

tuals. A historical analogue to this in Russia's history can be found only in the 1917 developments and the ensuing civil war. This division into 'before' and 'after' proved an additional methodological impetus in intellectuals' life-writing, securing a more in-depth and comprehensive deconstruction of both sides of the rupture.⁵¹ The overarching utmost value of Smirnov and Shebarshin's memoirs is stipulated by the same factor. Moreover, their linkage is even more productive for analytical ends since Shebarshin's memoirs contain references to Smirnov's thoughts and his own reflection of them, as, for example, in the case of the theme of violence underlying this paper.

It goes without saying that Smirnov's 1907-1914 posting at the Persian Court – the peak of all sorts of unrest and insurgency as well as the weakest point of state power in modern-history Persia – in addition to gathering relevant political and military intelligence, was, first of all, meant to exert cultural influence on the would-be Shah and his close environment by means of "civilising" them, which entailed inculcating the European "civilised" mentality yet with a simultaneous strong emphasis on the Russian cultural and political component. In his *Notes*, Smirnov writes of how he adjusted the curriculum of his teaching in order to give 'a proper European education' to the Heir and to instil good manners in his charge; however, at the same time, throughout his whole communication with Ahmad-Mirza and his surrounding, Smirnov always tried to behave and to speak in a way that would be for the good of the Russian state and culture and to the disadvantage of other countries – Turkey, Britain and France. He also quite often points out the witnessed positive outcome of his influences.⁵²

His diaries for 1909 also contain a noteworthy depiction of a successful intelligence micro-operation, aiming at "civilising *andarun* in the interests of Russia", which he solely designed and perpetrated. It resulted in 'planting' a Russian Muslim governess into the *andarun* of the Shah's Court who was supposed to cultivate European customs among women of the Court and, simultaneously, to promote all things

⁵¹ Dmitriev 2013, p. 362.

⁵² GNCM, f. 39, d. 19, l. 51-53 (The Annual Report on teaching Soltan Ahmad-Mirza). See also d. 11, l. 21, 22; d. 12, l. 2ob.-7, 25-26, 65-66, 70-70ob., 75-77, 83ob.-84ob.; d. 13, l. 98-99, 114-114ob.; d. 14, l. 27-32, 50-58ob; d. 15, l. 6-11ob.; d. 17, l. 35ob.-39; d. 19, l. 3ob.-4ob.

Russian.⁵³ Given the important role the women of the Qajar Court played in the political life of Persia, which was also pointed out by Abbas Amanat,⁵⁴ one can judge the scale of the potential impact of Smirnov's operation.

As the author demonstrated in his earlier studies,⁵⁵ after the 1917 Bolshevik coup and the failed attempts to quickly sovietise Persia, the new Soviet Persian studies, heavily linked to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the military, came to the conclusion that the Persian society had not developed sufficiently and that there would be a need for a significantly more protracted process of cultivating Persians for social conversion. So the new Soviet society continued to look down on Persia, however this time not from the Orientalist premise of *Russkoe delo* being ready to benevolently embrace Persia into the Russian Empire but rather as the society of the victorious social revolution – the only one in the entire world. This early Soviet discourse survived into the late Soviet Union. Thus Shebarshin was heading to Iran in May 1979, albeit with concrete technical aims (the recovery of the depleted agent network),⁵⁶ however with the same superior moral background.

As evidenced by Smirnov's notes, his cultural perceptions of superiority had faded away by October 1920 – the very thick of Russia's Civil War, when he compared the behaviour of his own people to that of Persians during revolutionary unrest. Having re-read his notes, he wrote:

Looking back, I regret that I was so harsh towards Persians. Now that I have seen my compatriots left on their own, I no longer resent Persians. After I have seen what a human being is capable of when not restrained with a bridle, I start to value in Persians the fact that, having felt the weakness of the bridle long ago, they did not reach as near the state of monkeylike progenitors as my compatriots did after the overthrow of the monarchy. When I was serving at the Persian Court, I had a better opinion of the Russian people and I did not doubt in the stability of order in Russia nor in the level of culture of Russian intelligentsia. I therefore made too harsh a judgement about the lack

⁵³ GNCM, f. 39, d. 12 (Diaries, 1908), l. 53-53ob., 66ob.-69ob., d. 13 (Diaries, 1909), l. 4ob; d. 19, l. 1-2ob.

⁵⁴ See Al-Saltana 1993. See also Abbas Amanat's introduction and historiographical notes to the book.

⁵⁵ See Volkov 2015d.

⁵⁶ See Shebarshin 2012a, p. 106-111. Also see Kuzichkin 1990, p. 275-276.

of culture in Persians, about the dishonesty of the ruling class in Persia, about their lack of energy, and about other qualities. All this affected the tone of my notes which therefore no longer correspond to the later epoch, however I have not dared to redo them, while simply mentally apologising to Persians that, without understanding their psychology, I was too harsh towards them, and hence, may-be, wrong.⁵⁷

Having been familiar with Smirnov's notes before entering Iran, Shebarshin came to a similar conclusion already during his posting, while observing the events that took place in Iran between 1979 and 1983. He depicts in detail how he was perplexed by the luxurious jewellery trade and cash currency exchange operations still quietly ongoing in Manuchehri street in a very open unguarded manner in the thick of the virtual civil war – a time when neither of multiple armed groups in Iran bothered with carrying out conventional police duties.⁵⁸ Later, Shebarshin reflects in his memoirs:

All the components are present – unrest, weak and disjointed central power, wealthy merchants, everybody is armed. There must be armed raids and robberies; there must appear their own Iranian Iaponchiks⁵⁹ and Dillingers.⁶⁰ My memory may fail me but during all the post-

⁵⁷ GNCM, f. 39, d. 22. l. 1-1ob.

⁵⁸ See Shebarshin 2012a, p. 120-121.

⁵⁹ It is highly likely that Shebarshin precisely hit both bloody gangsters' personalities, notoriously legendary in Russia's criminal world, by using the alias 'Iaponchik' in the plural. The first one Mishka Iaponchik – Mikey the Jap (Moisey Volfovich Vinnitsky) was heavily involved in both criminal and revolutionary activities (as many Bolsheviks were, including Stalin) in the period from the early 1900s until 1919 when he was killed, mainly with an overwhelming emphasis on criminal activities, though. After 1917, he closely cooperated with the Bolsheviks, serving in the Odessa *Cheka* and the Red Army. He was immensely famous in the South of modern Ukraine during Russia's Civil War and even perpetuated as the main hero in literary works about Odessa's criminal world by Isaac Babel (Savchenko 2000). The other criminal 'authority', widely known as Iaponchik in the 1990s-2000s, was Viacheslav Kirillovich Ivan'kov allegedly linked to Russia's FSB. Having led Russian gangsters in the 1990s, he succeeded in expanding his criminal empire to European countries and the USA, where he was finally arrested and several years after extradited to Russia. Having preserved his links to the very top of Russia's state establishment, he remained immune until his murder in 2009 (Maksimov 1997; see also Iutenkov 2014; see also Gilinskii 2009).

⁶⁰ Dillinger (1903-1934) – a notorious character of the American depression-era times, the head of a gang involved in multiple bank robberies widely famous in the 1920s-

revolutionary years in Iran only one provincial bank was robbed and another one in Tehran suffered an attempted robbery.⁶¹

The last sentence, of course, appears to be a literary hyperbole used by Shebarshin to enhance the effect of his observation. However, this comparison indeed conveys striking differences noticed by both writers in application to the situations during Russia's post-1917 Civil War and the criminal wars that flooded the entire territory of the former USSR in the 1990s.

This resulted in Shebarshin coming up with a noteworthy conclusion that is underpinned by a direct quote from Smirnov:

A Persian⁶² does not have a propensity to commit violence for profit. This phenomenon was noticed by our compatriots as early as the beginning of the century. I am with pleasure quoting the words from K. Smirnov's book published in 1916 in Tiflis which I learnt by heart: "Persia's dwellers have no idea about expropriations,⁶³ and even theft

30s. The fact that Shebarshin put him in the same row with Russian "heroes" is also indicative. Contrary to rather diverse perceptions professed by Russia's intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century regarding the binary West-East Self of Russian culture, in the Soviet times there were no doubts, at least amongst Soviet intellectual officialdom, regarding the fact that Russia totally belonged to European cultural tradition, hence mentioning the realities of American society as a society emanating from European culture and quite identical to Russia.

⁶¹ Shebarshin 2012a, p. 121.

⁶² During the 19th and 20th century, the Russian word *pers* (a Persian) was quite often used by Russians as a neutral equivalent to an Iranian – the general definition of all citizens of Iran. It is still widely used by the majority of Russian diplomats and intelligence officers working in/on Iran however with a definitely pejorative connotation stressing their own "moral and cultural superiority" towards "underdeveloped" Iranians. This attitude, as also evidenced by Shebarshin, emerged among Russians after the Islamic Revolution as towards a society that allegedly was rolling centuries back in its development. Notwithstanding the fact that Putin's regime from time to time sides with Iran in the context of some strategic and tactical considerations, such pejorative perceptions survived into the present-day state of mind of Russian diplomatic corps and intelligence community at a simplistic everyday level (Shebarshin 2001).

⁶³ An act of expropriation (in Russian – *ekspropriatsiia*, or *Eks* in an abbreviated form) was a fashionable term wide-spread among pre-1917 Bolsheviks. They used to carry out armed robberies of wealthy people and banks with particular cruelty under a plausible pretext that the money would be used for the needs of the cause. In the 1900s-1910s, Joseph Jugashvili (Stalin) was involved in many cases of *ekspropriatsiia*, particularly in the Caucasus (Emel'ianov 2002).

is quite rare. A merchant is carrying bags of silver coins from a bank [on a cab] and can be sure that nobody will touch him. There are no authorities, no laws, but murders, robberies and other serious crimes are immensely rare, except for gargantuan financial and trade frauds. [...] In Europe, even without any revolution, in the quietest times, in cities, there are far more murders, brigandage, armed robberies and suchlike incidents than there were in Persia in the thick of the [constitutional] revolution." Times have changed, dozens and hundreds of people are killed every day but there is almost no robbery or plunder [in Iran in the early 1980s], as at the beginning of the century.⁶⁴

Such utterances indeed demonstrate a rather curious common perspective on the perceived realities of Iranian society as part of the Other and the realities of Russian society as an inherent part of the European Self, as reflected in notions such as war and peace, in general, and violence and order during times of troubles, in particular. The use of the word combination 'in Europe' by Smirnov designates a strong marker confidently guiding us to the presence of the discourse of *Russkoe delo* with its intrinsic component of *la mission civilisatrice* adopted by Imperial Russia's officers and diplomats from West-European colonial powers. As convincingly argued by Elena Andreeva in *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism*, where she had gathered and analysed almost two hundred travelogues authored in the 19th and the early 20th century by Russian military officers, diplomats and travellers to Persia, Russians at that time staunchly perceived themselves as bearers of the European civilising mission in Persia, contrary to their rather low self-esteem in the context of their interaction with the representatives of Western Europe.⁶⁵ However, as was argued later, particularly by Nathaniel Knight – the father of the insightful debate on Russian Orientalism with the initial participants, such as Adeeb Khalid and Maria Todorova,⁶⁶ at the turn of the century, Russians' attitude towards the Orient was significantly more sophisticated. It possessed a triangular character, 'the West-the Orient-the Self', which implied Russia's allegedly better knowledge and understanding of the Orient in comparison to Europeans as well as its cultural proximity to

⁶⁴ Shebarshin 2012a, p. 122.

⁶⁵ See Andreeva 2007.

⁶⁶ See Knight 2000a, p. 74-100; Knight 2000b, p. 701-715; Khalid 2000, p. 691-699; Todorova 2000, p. 717-727.

Oriental nations, hence its alleged better capability of dealing with Oriental affairs.⁶⁷ This was mostly encapsulated in the late imperial discourse of *Russkoe delo* and passed over to the orientalist of the late Soviet Union, of course, in a more simplified and straightforward form deprived of inner doubts about the triple character of its origins. This time, it operated beyond or supra any fully-fledged or quasi-orientalist civilisational structures but was rigidly framed in the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy, where the USSR was playing the role of the saviour. However, based on their personal receptive experience within the context of the culturally rather diverging and unequally developed societies, both officers came to the conclusion that their own societies seriously lacked the main constituents of civilised status, in comparison to the people whom they had come to civilise.

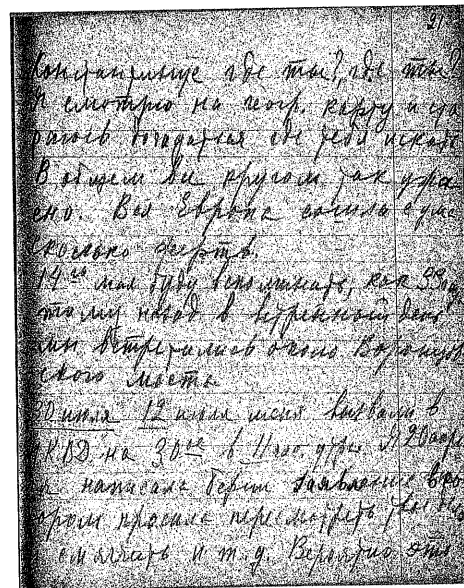
Simultaneously, it is worth noting that neither Smirnov nor Shebarshin elaborated on the atrocities committed by both sides in Iran during revolutionary unrest. Smirnov was well aware of the cruelty demonstrated by the constitutionalists during hostilities, as well as the reciprocal brutality used against revolutionaries by the Shah, assisted by Russian officers and advisers.⁶⁸ It is also hard to imagine that Shebarshin was unaware of the mass extrajudicial executions and shocking tortures in the prisons of the Islamic Republic which eclipsed the alleged brutality of the SAVAK prisons.⁶⁹ All this seemed to them the inevitable content of troubled times, similar to discovering a secret mass grave on the territory of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran during construction works. It later became clear that, during the 1920s-1930s, the Bolshevik intelligence would hunt the former participants of the White Movement in Iran, and used to torture and execute them on the territory of the Embassy. This material was dealt with in Shebarshin's memoirs without any judgemental tone about the atrocities of his service and as just a peculiar

⁶⁷ Knight 2000b; see also Volkov 2014b, p. 928, p. 930-932.

⁶⁸ GNCM, f. 39, d. 13, l. 95-6; d. 13ob.-14; see also Volkov (*in preparation 2*).

⁶⁹ See Abrahamian 1999, 2008; Affolter 2005, p. 75-114; Rafizadeh 2016. On similarities in torture and execution technique implemented by the authorities in IRI and in Lenin/Stalin's USSR and, in fact, often excelling the brutality of the Nazi regime and the present-day ISIS, see Parker 2009, p. 17; interview with Kirill Aleksandrov 2017; Mesdaghi 2011 and, of course, Solzhenitsyn 1973. On the manhunt led by Bolsheviks on the territory of Iran, see also Agabekov 1931a; Volodarsky 2013, p. 890-909.

reality of those times.⁷⁰ In general, there is little of criticism towards the criminal practices of the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD-KGB in his writings, and surprisingly nothing regarding the fate of Smirnov himself, whereas Shebarshin, in 1978-1979, briefed himself for his posting to Iran by reading Smirnov's manuscripts preserved in the KGB archives.⁷¹ Shebarshin could not be unaware of the origins of this body of documents and the dire fate that befell their author. According to the private diaries of Smirnov's wife Kseniia, the papers were confiscated at Smirnov's arrest on 7 January 1938 by the NKVD. Four months later Smirnov was executed and his wife received a notice that he had been sentenced to "ten years without the right of correspondence" – the then conventional designation of capital punishment that became intelligible to the citizens of the USSR only in the late 1980s when the crimes of the Stalinist era were fully revealed. However, unaware of the truth at that time, Kseniia continued to enquire about the place of her husband's imprisonment from the NKVD in Tbilisi and Moscow, as well as handing over parcels with food and money in his name until her very suicide in February 1942.⁷²



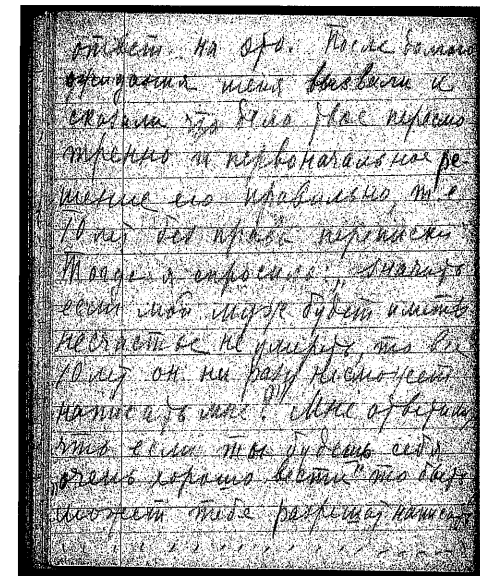
Document 1. An excerpt from Smirnov's wife diary, 1940. Korneli Kekelidze GNCM.

⁷⁰ See Shebarshin 2012a, p. 136. See also Bajanov 1930; Agabekov 1930.

⁷¹ See Shebarshin 2012a, p. 122, p. 133.

⁷² GNCM, f. 143 (*Kseniia Karlovna Smirnova's diaries*, 3 notebooks, 1938-1942).

Document 1.⁷³ Konstantinus, where are you? Where are you? I am looking at the map and am trying to guess where to look for you. In general, everything around is so terrible. The whole of Europe has gone mad. So many victims. On the 14th of May, I will be recalling how we met near the Vorontsov bridge on a windy day 33 years ago. July, 30th. On the 12th of July, I was summoned to the NKVD [the then Soviet secret police] for an appointment on the 30th at 11 in the morning. On the 20th of April, I had written an application to Beria [the then head of the Soviet secret police] in which I asked him to review your case and to commute [the sentence] and so on. Probably, this is... (cf. Document 2).



Document 2. Korneli Kekelidze GNCM.

Document 2.⁷⁴ ... a response to that. After a long wait, I was let in and was told that your case had been reviewed and the initial decision was correct, i.e. "10 years [of prison camps] without [the right of] correspondence." I then asked whether, if my husband was lucky enough not to die within 10 years, he would be unable to write to me during all that time? I was told that if you behaved yourself, may-be, you would be allowed to write. After that, I started to look for morphine again.

⁷³ GNCM, f. 143 (*Kseniia Karlovna Smirnova's diaries*, Notebook 2, 1940), l. 21.

⁷⁴ GNCM, f. 143 (*Kseniia Karlovna Smirnova's diaries*, Notebook 2, 1940), l. 21ob.

The sad fate of Smirnov highlights another understudied stratum of research, namely the topic of repressed orientalists in the Soviet Union. This professional group of intellectuals suffered even more than the other layers of Soviet society since they raised more suspicion in the state punitive organs by their diverse linguistic skills and former/current professional contacts with abroad.⁷⁵ Almost all the representatives of the pre-revolution orientalist school who had not emigrated or died of the civil war deprivations, were later arrested and executed by the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB organs. In this respect, a Russian-language ground-breaking work, *Biograficheskii and Bibliograficheskii slovar' vostokovedov-zhertv politicheskogo terrora v sovetskii period, 1917-1991* (Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the Orientalists-victims of political terror of the Soviet Period, 1917-1991), had been finalised by the early 2000s by Iaroslav Vasil'kov and Marina Sorokina, opening a long-awaited niche of research.⁷⁶ This was taken up by another Russia-based researcher Mikhail Rodionov in the form of a chapter regarding the Foucauldian resistance of the internationally acknowledged scholars Vasili Barthold (1869-1930) and Ignatii Krachkovskii (1883-1951) under the totalitarian regime.⁷⁷ In 2011, the above-mentioned research was successfully introduced to francophone scholarship by "Les orientalistes et la répression: Russie – URSS, 1917-1991" by Véronique Schiltz.⁷⁸ One can also assume, of course, that the rules of corporate behaviour did not allow Shebarshin to elaborate in more detail on the crimes of his former professional home, just as Vladimir Putin has failed to pay even a symbolic tribute to the victims of Soviet political terror, at least, by attending any such memorial in Russia throughout all his seventeen years at the top of Russia's power.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Scholars were often accused of cooperating with the same countries' intelligence services whose languages they spoke. For example, Konstantin Chaikin (1889-1938), one of Zhukovsky's disciples, spoke English, French, German, Turkish and Persian, and was executed on the accusation of cooperating with the intelligence services of Britain, France, Germany, Turkey and Iran (see Volkov *forthcoming*).

⁷⁶ See Vasil'kov / Sorokina 2003.

⁷⁷ See Rodionov 2011, p. 47-57.

⁷⁸ See Schiltz 2011, p. 337-360.

⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that Dmitry Medvedev did pay his tribute to the victims of political repressions during the first months of his presidency in 2008. It is also noteworthy

Following the Nietzschean "cognition comes through comparison," it is also possible to assume that, against the backdrop of the cruelties that took place in Russia during and in the aftermath of the 1905-1907 revolution, as well as later, under the Soviet regime and during the 1990s turmoil, some similar aspects of Iranian realities during the constitutional unrest of 1905-1911 and the first decade of the existence of the Islamic Republic might have seemed significantly milder and led both officers to other interesting conclusions. Being military men, they both commented on combat features of Iranians, namely the fact that, in their opinion, Iranians lacked militancy and were a rather peace-loving nation. Smirnov even uses phrases such as 'too peace-loving a nation' and 'big pacifists.'⁸⁰ This logically results in questions very common for foreign military officers in Iran in the times of the Great Game and the Cold War: how many days and what forces are needed to militarily occupy Iran.⁸¹ In 1909, while separately touching upon the small numbers and high combatant value of Eprem Khan's Caucasian forces,⁸² Smirnov comes to the conclusion:

that the information about this visit posted by Presidential Press and Information Office on 24/09/2008 has recently been deleted (Medvedev 2008; Medvedev 2009).

It is convincingly argued that present-day Russia represents a virtual junta-type state, with the power of its security organs having permeated all state and major private-business structures. The *siloviki's* grip on power in Putin's Russia is enormously stronger and omnipresent than that of the Soviet KGB since, in the USSR, the KGB power was restricted by the control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and the KGB was officially subordinated to the Council of Ministers, whereas in present-day Russia all intelligence services are directly subordinated to President without other regulating organs in place. This qualitative and quantitative transformation, that mostly took place in the course of years after Putin's coming to power, was facilitated by the conspiracy mentality and the servile awe of post-Soviet Russia's society towards the 'blue shoulder straps', initially inculcated during Stalin's times and actively encouraged by Putin's regime now (for example, see Marten 2017; Bateman 2016; Bateman 2014).

⁸⁰ GNCM, f. 39, d. 20, l. 51ob.; d. 16, l. 21.

⁸¹ See Wilson 1941; Wilson / Sykes 1926; Wright 1977.

⁸² Eprem Khan (1868-1912) – an Armenian revolutionary and important military leader of the Constitutional Revolution. Eprem led a number of successful military campaigns against opponents of the constitutional regime, including the capture of Tehran in 1909 (Arkun 2017).

Eprem with his Caucasians is a great strength for Persia in which, in general, one can perpetrate whatever coups, having small forces but enough courage and decisiveness.⁸³

On the other hand, I personally, being familiar with the spirit of Persians at that time, would not only undertake to take Tabriz but also to conquer all Persia with the help of a squad of 1,000 bayonets, 300 sabres and 12-20 artillery guns of different calibres along with 4 machine guns; however, on condition of my communications staying uninterrupted and my not having to detach forces in conquered places to maintain order.⁸⁴

In this respect, it should be noted that in the context of conventional colonial practices, hence the ensuing overall mentality of the times, when the strongest was right and military power was the right itself, such hypothetical military considerations were quite common for all military officers in the Orient, be they British, French, German or Russian. The same attitudes survived into Shebarshin's times of the late stages of the Cold War, as illustrated by his colleagues' and his own similar considerations with tank divisions coming through Mashad and Tabriz, and paratroopers falling on Tehran, however, as he rightly adds, 'the lessons of the Soviet Afghan war were still ahead.'⁸⁵

It is, therefore, possible to conclude on three main topics dealt with in this paper. As demonstrated above, the military component possessing underlying and sometimes omnipotent character has been present in Russian-Iranian interaction throughout the entire 19th and 20th centuries, including the present-day developments. This component has been having an enormous impact on all other dimensions of the manifold Russo-Iranian relations, both in their bilateral and broader international context. In this sense, first-hand evidence in the life-writing of the military officers-participants in key historical developments is of immensely great historiographical value, possessing the methodological potential identified in this paper to contribute to the Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge in the process of studying several historical periods at once.

⁸³ GNCM, f. 39, d. 13, l. 123ob. These two words are highlighted by the author of this paper in view of the other subsequent developments in Iran during the 20th century.

⁸⁴ GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, l. 73ob.

⁸⁵ Shebarshin 2012a, p. 139.

Additionally, it is particularly noteworthy that both officers state that, during the years of revolutionary unrest caused by the Constitutional Movement and the Islamic Revolution, which saw the greatest failure of central state power in the modern history of Iran, criminal manifestations remained at low levels and Iranians hardly revealed any tendency to violent robbery or homicide for personal gain, in contrast to Russians during their own periods of unrest. Hence, according to these Russian officers-*vostochniki*, and based on their own scale of values dictated by their habitus, Iranians turned out to be much more civilised than the people of a greater country that was trying to carry out *la mission civilisatrice* for them, believing it would thereby incorporate them into its own allegedly greater culture. Although these idiosyncratic conclusions should not be taken at face value, nevertheless, the individual cases studied in this paper, on their own, offer intriguing intellectual perspectives on the Other and the Self, with rather unconventional outcomes for the current context of different orientalist debates mentioned in this paper, namely Saidian Orientalism and its overwhelming critique by international scholarship, including its garden-fresh ramifications like Russian and Soviet Orientalism as well as Occidentalism, and have the necessary potential to inaugurate a new research niche for their further analysis in conjunction with other historical evidence.

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