

200 years Oriental Studies in Russia

The Institute of Oriental Studies against the background of Russian history

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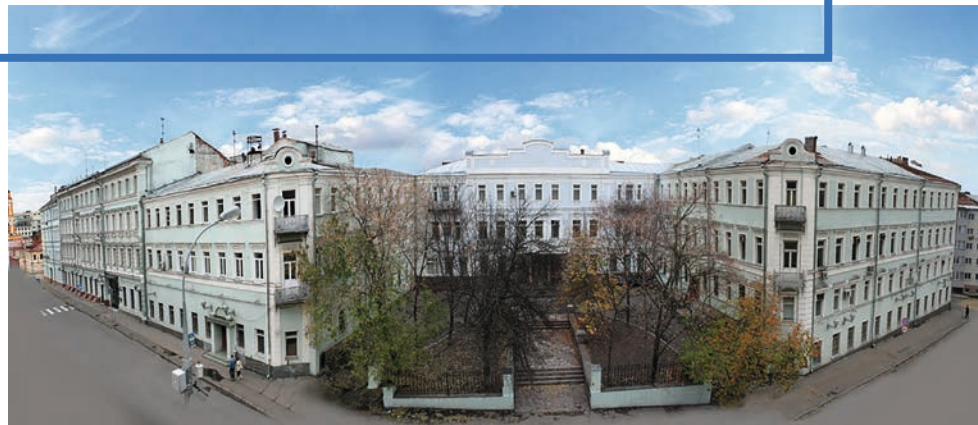
This year marks the 200 Years Anniversary of the Institute of Oriental Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences, RAS). To celebrate this grand achievement, we gladly share this fascinating account of the history and scope of Oriental Studies in Russia.

In 1818, the Asiatic Museum, founded in the capital of Saint Petersburg as a continuation of Russian pursuits in Oriental research (in Moscow, Kazan and elsewhere), became the new platform of academic endeavour in all things Asian, from numismatics to linguistics, to history. For the Russian Empire, this interest was not recreational. Since before Peter the Great, Russia's orientation was towards the East. It bordered on Turkey, China and Russian Central Asia, embraced Georgia and Armenia, and thus had a burning need to understand 'the East'. The Asiatic Museum's first home was Peter the Great's *Kunstkamera* (1714), one of the oldest world museums. Its first Director was Christian Martin Frähn (1782-1851), who acquired the outstanding Arabic manuscripts, medals and book collection of the French diplomat Jean-Baptiste-Louis-Jacques Rousseau (1780-1831). It was thanks to Frähn that the future of Oriental research could take shape, supporting researchers in both capitals. From this foundation, the Asiatic Museum steadily grew in numbers of researchers as well as materials, including Chinese and Mongolian collections, the Buddhist collection of Pavel Schilling von Cannstatt, those of the Caucasian Fund as well as Armenian and Georgian collections, up to the October Revolution of 1918.

The second Director (1876), Boris Dorn, started the publication *Mélanges asiatiques*, the first Russian scholarly periodical (in French), followed by many other orientalist journals. In 1876, the Third International Congress of Orientalists was held in Saint Petersburg, and by the end of the century the Russian school could boast scholars of international merit, including Directors Victor Rozen, Ferdinand Videman, Wassily Radloff and Karl Zaleman as well as other eminent scholars.

In order to survive the October 1918 turmoil, 'Oriental Studies', in part, followed the new Soviet government to Moscow, where the Moscow Institute of the Orient (MIO) was established. In Saint Petersburg, Oriental Studies embarked on a new chapter in 1930 under its present name of 'Institute of Oriental Studies' at the then Soviet Academy of Sciences (IOS/SAS), led by the outstanding Orientalist and Head of the Russian Buddhology School, Academician Sergey Oldenburg (1863-1934).

The 1930s were a very difficult and tragic period for Soviet Oriental Studies, attacked both theoretically by the Leninist-Stalinist demands of Marxist approaches to the Humanities and by up-front attacks: arrests, prosecutions, exiles and executions of scholars, under false pretences. One victim was the next Director of IOS/SAS, Academician/Turkologist Alexander Samoilovitch (1880-1938). Accused of being a Japanese spy, he vanished in 1937 and was shot in 1938. His successor, Egyptologist Wasily Struve, managed to establish a shaky balance between the Humanities and the regime by putting forward the pseudo-Marxist idea of the 'Five-part Theory' of socio-economic formations. It was so highly appreciated by Stalin that Struve was elevated in the Academy 'on the basis of merit'.



During World War II, IOS/SAS continued its work, both in besieged Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), led by A. Boldyrev, and led by Struve, 'in evacuation', a time passed mainly in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), where Soviet scholars did their best to both carry on their general studies and help the country with up-to-date research, such as *Fascist Escapade's Collapse in Iran* by G. Gelbras, *German Imperialism in the Far East* by A. Guber. Meanwhile, the Moscow Group of IOS/SAS emerged, headed by another outstanding scholar, Academician and Arabist Ignaty Krachkovsky (1883-1951), who soon gathered the main orientalist forces of the country around the Moscow-based research of Asia and Africa, including Iran-specialist V. Gordlevsky, Indologist I. Reiser and Byzantologist N. Pigulevskaya, and many others.

In the summer of 1950, IOS/SAS moved to Kropotkinskaya St.12 on the banks of the Moscow River, as per usual absorbing a number of institutions along the way (most notably the famous SAS Pacific Ocean Institute). After several other directors, it was finally headed, in 1955, by the truly exemplary scholar and Southeast Asia specialist Alexander Guber (1902-1971). Unfortunately, events of the liberating 20th CPSU Congress once again shook the Institute hard when Party functionary Anastas Mikoyan declared that "the Orient has woken up, while the Institute of Oriental Studies still keeps sleeping". He was neither right, nor helpful. Both young and older communists-scholars of the Institute had been discussing Khrushchev and his responsibility in Stalin's terror. Director Guber was forced to resign and Party functionary and Soviet Orient expert Bobodjan Gafurov took over, well-known in the USSR and abroad as a wise man, diplomat and a perfect 'Oriental sage'.

Gafurov's time was the first period after the war that the Institute flourished, profiting from Khrushchev's Thaw and blessed with manifold theoretical discussion, new breakthrough scholarly journals, its very own publishing house and a massive increase in personnel. The Institute thrived under Gafurov. Many liberal intellectual leaders (among them J. Brodsky and A. Solzhenitsyn) gave talks at the Institute. Soviet orientalist scholars participated in all orientalist scholarly activities of the time. In 1960, Moscow hosted the 25th International Congress of Orientalists with about 1400 visitors from around the world, and in 1964, 38 Soviet scholars participated in the 26th International Congress in Delhi, publishing their talks and articles in English and French.

In 1977, IOS/SAS moved to the centre of Moscow, where it still resides today in the old spacious mansion on Rozhdestvenka Street 12. This period is marked by scholarly discussion, thousands of publications, the establishment of leading Schools of Sinology as well as Arabic, Turkic, Indian, Pakistani, South-East Asian, Japanese, Israeli, and Middle Eastern Studies. Their activities include research of written

and epigraphic sources, linguistics, literature and culture, vast expeditionary activities, translations of works of the East and Africa and the composition of dictionaries, the most famous being the legendary Big Chinese-Russian Dictionary. After twenty years, Gafurov was followed by a very special person in Soviet history: Evgeny Primakov (1929-2015), brilliant political scientist, journalist, diplomat and the future Foreign Minister and Prime Minister) of Russia, and famous for his drastic U-turn over the Atlantic Ocean during the Yugoslavian Crisis of 1999 (Primakov's Loop).

In spite of Brezhnev's stagnation period, Primakov's years of the second Post War Renaissance proved to be quite productive for the Soviet Oriental Humanities. Producing numerous situational analyses for the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Institute's prestige soared. It became an eminent think-tank, both profiling modern political problems and producing research in the 'traditional cycle' of Oriental Studies. Led by Primakov (from 1979 Academician of SAS), IOS/SAS was awarded the Order of Labour Red Banner, with many of its scholars also winning other prestigious awards and distinctions, both Soviet/Russian and international.

From 1987, the Institute was led by the Sinologist and former Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa (1921-1995). Economic problems had a major impact; together with the whole country the Institute survived rather than thrived. Yet, somehow, Chernyshevsky's principle of 'the worse, the better' proved to be true when the Third All-Union Congress of Orientalists in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, declared its most inclusive umbrella theme 'Interaction of Cultures and Civilizations'. After Kapitsa, the most notable Director of IOS, now part of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was Vitaly Naumkin (presently Scientific Director), established Arabist and Yemeni history researcher and author of the acclaimed 'Corpus of Soqotri language', declared the second most important scholarly achievement of 2014.

Since 2015, the Institute is headed by Professor Valery P. Androsov, notable Buddhistologist, Sanskrit specialist and author of many books. Nowadays IOS/RAS holds numerous domestic and international conferences, undertakes expeditions in Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, the Crimea and Central Asia, and publishes multiple journals (among which the *Journal of IOS/RAS*, whose Executive Editor is the author of this article) as well as numerous monographs and edited volumes. Most importantly, the Institute is raising new, young scholars in the field of Oriental Studies to carry on our 200 years of research, service to the Humanities and to the country, and our love for the Orient.

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Call for Papers

Symposium:
Open Pages in
South Asian Studies,
Gauhati University,
Assam, India
22-23 January 2019

Organisers

The Symposium is organised by The Centre for South East Asian Studies and the Department of Foreign Languages at Gauhati University, India and the The International Centre for South Asian Studies and the Faculty of International Relations and Area Studies at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia.

Themes

Ethno-linguistic pluralism is both a hallmark of South Asia and a prime factor of contentious relations among its countries and of intra-country conflicts. Terrorism further derails mutual understanding and harmonious relations. Border conflicts make the region volatile and migrations across borders are an issue of contention. Neo-liberal economic policies have brought both opportunities and challenges. Progress in terms of GDP are accompanied by inequality in income and social security domains, leading to popular outrage. The growing privatization of essential services raises concerns over ecology and common resources.

The symposium cum workshop aims to deliberate the following issues and areas, both from the perspective of countries and South Asia as a transnational region: (1) Understanding South Asia as a region; (2) Cultural realm of South Asia, including religious diversities, linguistic and sociological mosaics; (3) Common Historical Connections; (4) Linkages of the South Asian region; (5) State processes and development experiences in South Asia; (6) South Asian Regionalism and Integration: Trends, Problems and Prospects; (7) Engaging Russia in South Asia.

Proposals

Speakers will be given 15 minutes for their presentation, followed by 10-15 minutes for discussion. The working language of the workshop will be English. Postgraduate students are encouraged to participate as well.

Abstracts can be sent to any of the following:

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