

The 'Turkestan Generals' and Russian military history

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Amid the restless hum and chatter
The measured glitter of the ball
How strange to see against the walls
Those lofty, grizzled generals

Nikolai Gumilev *Turkestanskie Generaly* (1912)

The Russian Empire's Central Asian campaigns are usually regarded as a sideshow compared with the great set-piece battles and sieges of the Napoleonic, Crimean and Russo-Turkish Wars, or even the fifty-year campaign in the Caucasus. Aq Masjid, Uzun-Agach, Irjar and Makhram do not have the resonance of Borodino, Sevastopol, Plevna or even Dargo – and yet the former were all decisive engagements that between 1853 and 1881 led to more than 1.5 million square miles of new territory - the governor-generalship of Turkestan - being added to the Tsar's domains. The Turkestan campaigns were fought in regions distant from the empire's heartlands, for territory of dubious economic and strategic value, against populations that were characterised simultaneously as 'savage' and 'fanatical', and as primitive 'asiatics' who did not constitute a serious foe – a clear case of what Patrick Porter has called 'military orientalism'.¹ Such stereotypes still predominate in much modern Russian-language historiography.² Meanwhile Turkestan barely features in the standard English-language histories of the 19th-century Russian army, which often make similar judgements about the marginal significance of these campaigns.³ This is partly because logistical constraints – primarily the reliance on camels for baggage transport – ensured that these steppe and desert

¹ As he notes, such stereotypes of colonial warfare tell us more about the observers than the observed: Patrick Porter *Military Orientalism. Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (Oxford, 2013) pp.27-48.

² Evgenii Glushchenko *Rossia v Srednei Azii. Zavoevaniia i preobrazovaniia* (Moscow, 2010) is a particularly egregious case.

³ Bruce Menning *Bayonets before Bullets. The Imperial Russian Army 1861 – 1914* (Bloomington, IN, 1992) p.12 devotes a single page to what he describes as 'a series of minor military campaigns' against 'semi-barbarous tribes'. William C. Fuller has three pages on the Central Asian campaigns in *Strategy and Power in Russia 1600 – 1914* (Toronto, 1992) pp.289 – 292, but Turkestan and Central Asia barely feature at all in John L. H. Keep *Soldiers of the Tsar. Army and Society in Russia, 1462-1874* (Oxford, 1985).

campaigns were fought on an extremely small scale, usually with no more than 5,000 – 10,000 men.⁴ While the Central Asian campaigns presented particular challenges of supply, the Russians enjoyed a significant technical superiority in weapons, as their opponents rarely had rifled firearms or artillery.⁵ There is thus a widespread assumption that these campaigns can tell us little about wider developments in Russian military tactics, technology or leadership, with Baumann, the only Anglophone historian to have given much attention to the subject, describing their influence as ‘modest and short-lived’.⁶ Studies of Russian colonial warfare have tended to focus on the better-known campaigns in Caucasus,⁷ which also produced a rich literary legacy that those in Central Asia could not hope to match: they never captured the popular imagination or entered deeply into Russian culture in the way that the capture of Hajji Murad and Shamil would do.⁸ While individual episodes were celebrated, notably the capture of Tashkent, a city of 100,000 people, by a force of just 2,000 men, it did not seem to inspire many poets or authors. When the acmeist poet and traveller Nikolai Gumilev (1886-1921) composed his short, semi-satirical poem about the ‘Turkestan Generals’ (*Turkestarskie Generaly*) in 1912 it became almost the only well-known reference to Turkestan and its conquest anywhere in pre-revolutionary Russian literature.

⁴ Alexander Morrison ‘Camels and Colonial Armies. The Logistics of Warfare in Central Asia in the early nineteenth century’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* LVII (2014), pp.443-485.

⁵ Robert F. Baumann ‘The Conquest of Central Asia’ *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan* Leavenworth papers No.20 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993) pp.59-61.

⁶ Baumann ‘The Conquest of Central Asia’ p.76; see also Robert F. Baumann ‘The Russian Army 1853 – 1881’ in Frederick W. Kagan & Robin Higham (ed.) *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (Basingstoke, 2002) pp.146-9.

⁷ Dmitriy Oleinikov has argued convincingly for the role of the Caucasus Wars in influencing Russian military reform in the 1860s and 1870s: ‘The Caucasus Factor in Russian Military Reform’ in David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye & Bruce W. Menning (ed.) *Reforming the Tsar’s Army. Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004) pp.205-214. The classic account of the Caucasus Wars in English remains John Baddeley *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London, 1908). See also W. E. D. Allen & Paul Muratoff *Caucasian Battlefields. A History of Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border* (Cambridge, 1953), pp.3-53 & Moshe Gammer *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar. Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan* (London, 1994).

⁸ Tolstoy’s *Khadzhi Murat* became the defining image in Russian literature of the ‘noble savage’ stifled by a dead civilization. For Shamil the Russian *ur-text* was E. A. Verderevskii’s account of the kidnapping of the Princesses Chavchavadze and Orbeliani in 1855: *Plen u Shamiha* (St Petersburg, 1856). See Susan Layton *Russian Literature & Empire. Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.263 – 287; Austin Jersild *Orientalism and Empire. North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845 – 1917* (Montreal, 2002), pp.110 – 125.

Gumilev portrayed the Turkestan Generals as a distinct breed: stern, greying men, incongruous amid the dandies and stuffed shirts of Silver-Age St Petersburg, who brought to gay social gatherings a whiff of the dusty sunshine of the vast Central Asian possessions they had acquired for the Tsar since the 1850s. The image Gumilev summoned up in his poem, of a group of generals lining the walls of a ballroom, reminiscing of camels and camp-beds as the gilded youth of St Petersburg danced around them, was imaginary, but he must have had certain individuals in mind: who were they? The poem was dedicated to Nikolai Ivanovich Grodekov (1843 – 1913), who had been Governor-General of Turkestan from 1907-8 and had served there in the campaigns of the 1860s and 1870s, but who was hardly a household name.⁹ The names of the other commanders who both led and chronicled the Turkestan campaigns – V. A. Perovskii, M. G. Cherniaev, K. P. von Kaufman, M. D. Skobelev, A. N. Kuropatkin, – today either do not resonate at all, or for reasons other than their connections with Central Asia: Cherniaev's dabbling with Panslavism and Serb nationalism, Skobelev's celebrity as the 'White General', an icon of Russian nationalism after the Russo-Turkish War, or Kuropatkin's later tenure as Minister of War. And yet clearly for Gumilev the 'Turkestan Generals' were a recognisable cadre, linked by their service in the region. The career of Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin (1848 – 1925) in particular suggests that service in Turkestan could allow one to climb the military hierarchy in late Imperial Russia, and that perhaps these campaigns had a greater significance for Russian military history than is usually allowed.¹⁰

Of the names mentioned above, only Grodekov and Kuropatkin were still alive in 1912. Vasilii Alexeevich Perovskii, Governor-General of Orenburg and leader of the failed winter expedition to Khiva in 1839-40, had succumbed to asthma in 1857; Mikhail Grigorievich Cherniaev,

⁹ The poem was first published in issue No.1 of the journal *Russkaia Mysl'* in January 1912 with the dedication 'To N. I. Grodekov': N. Gumilev 'Turkestanskii Generaly' *Stikhotvoreniya* (Leningrad, 1988) pp.180-181, 565.

¹⁰ William Fuller notes that the Turkestan campaigns 'solidified the reputations of such prominent generals as M. G. Cherniaev and M.D. Skobelev': 'The Imperial Army' in *The Cambridge History of Russia* Vol.II ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge, 2006) p.541.

who captured Tashkent in 1865, had died in 1898, outliving his hated rival, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman, first Governor-General of Turkestan and conqueror of Samarkand and Khiva, who died in 1882 after suffering a stroke. Mikhail Dmitrievich Skobelev, undoubtedly the greatest celebrity among the Turkestan Generals, renowned both for his victories in the Russo-Turkish War and against the Turkmens, died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1882 at the age of just 38, reputedly in the arms of a Moscow prostitute. Bald, bespectacled and bookish, Grodekov seemed worlds away from the glamour and scandal surrounding Skobelev, but he was the chief chronicler of his victories in Transcaspia. Perhaps the quintessential *Turkestanets* (old Turkestan hand), a participant in the campaigns of the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, Governor of Syr-Darya Province in the 1890s, and then Governor-General of Turkestan after an interlude in the Far East, he died the year after Gumilev dedicated the poem to him, in 1913.¹¹ This left Kuropatkin as the last Turkestan General still standing. Though he too passed much of his career in Skobelev's shadow, his trajectory was in many ways the most striking of all: catapulted from relative obscurity as the Governor of Transcaspia to be Minister of War in 1898, Commander in Chief in the Far East against Japan in 1904-5, before resigning in disgrace after Russia's defeat. He would have a final hurrah as the last Governor-General of Turkestan, sent to suppress the Central Asian revolt of 1916.

Although Gumilev's poem evokes the austere, hard-bitten competence of the 'Turkestan Generals', the loss of the Russo-Japanese war was widely blamed on the fact that Kuropatkin had only ever served in one-sided colonial campaigns, which led him to underestimate the Japanese as 'asiatics'.¹² He had an additional literary cameo in Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, where the

¹¹ For a brief biography of Grodekov and list of his publications see M. K. Baskhanov *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy. Biobibliograficheskii Slovar'* (Moscow, 2005), pp.67-8.

¹² This idea originated partly with Count Sergei Witte, whose main aim was to exculpate himself: S. Yu. Witte *Vospominaniya* ed. A. Shemarulina (3 Vols, Moscow, 1960), II, p.297. See Wada Haruki 'Study your Enemy: Russian Military and Naval Attachés in Japan' & Bruce W. Menning 'Miscalculating One's Enemies: Russian Military Intelligence before the Russo-Japanese War' in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* ed. David Wolff, Steven G. Marks, Bruce W. Menning, David Schimmelpenninck Van Der Oye, John W. Steinberg & Yokote Shinji (Leiden, 2007), pp.14, 61.

author remembers being led into his father's study 'to say-how-do-you-do to a friend of the family, General Kuropatkin. His thickset, uniform-encased body creaking slightly, he spread out to amuse me a handful of matches, on the divan where he was sitting' but was interrupted as he was about to do what the five-year old Nabokov hoped would be a better trick than his first, a simulation of a storm at sea, because he had just 'been ordered to assume supreme command of the Russian Army in the Far East.' Fifteen years later, in the second part of this artfully crafted anecdote, Nabokov's father would offer a light to a disguised Kuropatkin, fleeing the Bolsheviks: 'I hope old Kuropatkin, in his rustic disguise, managed to evade Soviet imprisonment [he did], but that is not the point: what pleases me is the evolution of the match theme: those magic ones he had shown me had been trifled with and mislaid, and his armies had also vanished, and everything had fallen through...the following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography.'¹³ As Nabokov more or less openly tells us here, it may be that neither part of the story is literally true (in fact his removal to the Far East came about in part because of his growing conflicts with Nicholas II), but it does tell us something both of Kuropatkin's stature before the Russo-Japanese War, and his subsequent fall from grace.¹⁴

The group of 'Turkestan Generals' that I have chosen to focus on in this article may or may not coincide with those Gumilev had in mind, but their public image does accord with that put forward in the poem: hard-bitten, professional, heroic. They all played a prominent part in the campaigns of conquest in Central Asia, most also served as Governors-General of the region, and some made a substantial contribution to developing narratives about the Russian conquest. That said, they would not have viewed themselves as a homogeneous group. They belonged, broadly speaking, to three generations – Perovskii (1795 – 1857) had a place of his own. One of several

¹³ Vladimir Nabokov *Speak, Memory. An Autobiography Revisited* (London, 1966), pp.26-7.

¹⁴ John W. Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men. Russia's General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898 – 1914* (Baltimore, MD, 2010) pp.122-3. David McDonald 'The Military and Imperial Russian History' in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye & Menning (ed.) *Reforming the Tsar's Army* pp.320-1.

illegitimate sons of one of Russia's greatest magnates, Count A. P. Razumovskii, he was part of a generation that came of age during the Napoleonic Wars - he fought at Borodino at the age of 17, where he lost a finger.¹⁵ Perovskii came to be seen as the pioneer, whose tragic failure in the expedition to Khiva in 1839-40¹⁶ nevertheless showed the path to future conquest, confirmed with his capture of the Khoqandi fortress of Aq Masjid in 1853.¹⁷ Perovskii himself was keenly conscious of the need to redeem this earlier failure while besieging Aq Masjid, not least as he was already semi-prostrate with asthma and knew that he did not have much longer to live - however, he did not oversee or commission any history-writing himself.¹⁸ Cherniaev (1828-1898), and von Kaufman (1818 - 1882) made up the next generation – they were already senior officers at the time of the fall of Tashkent in 1865, and directed the campaigns of the 1860s and 1870s, as well as the administration of Russia's new Central Asian colony for the first twenty years of its existence. Grodekov (1843 -1913), Skobelev (1843 – 1882) and Kuropatkin (1848 – 1925) served in Turkestan as subalterns in the 1860s and 1870s, and reached positions of leadership in the 1880s and 1890s. Von Kaufman, Grodekov and Kuropatkin were self-identified *Turkestantsy*, professional officers of relatively humble origin (Kaufman was a military engineer, descended from an Austrian mercenary who had converted to Russian Orthodoxy, not a Baltic German noble) who built their careers through continuous service in the region as both soldiers and administrators. Perovskii, Cherniaev and Skobelev were aristocrats, well-connected in St Petersburg, who spent short periods in Turkestan on active service, and only in Cherniaev's case served briefly as an administrator. They

¹⁵ 'Graf Vasilii Alekseevich Perovskii', *Russkii Arkhiv*, No. 3 (1878) pp.373–74.

¹⁶ On the Khiva expedition see Alexander Morrison 'Twin Imperial Disasters. The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1839 – 1842' *Modern Asian Studies* XLVIII (2014) pp.253 – 300.

¹⁷ I. N. Zakhar'in, *Graf V.A. Perovskii i ego zimnii pokhod v Khivu* (St Petersburg, 1901); M. L. Iudin *Vz'yatie Ak-Mecheti v 1853 godu kak nachalo zavoevaniya Kokandskogo Khanstva* (Moscow, 1917).

¹⁸ Perovskii to Dolgorukov 20/04/1853, 28/05/1853, 17/06/1853 Russian State Military-Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.483 Op.1 D.31 ll.198-9, 236-7, 261 in the last of which he refers to Wellington's observations on 'the unhappy Khivan expedition', communicated in 'Copie d'une dépêche du Baron de Brunnow, en date de Londres, le 23 Avril/5 Mai 1840' A. G. Serebrennikov (ed.) *Sbornik Materialov dlya Istorii Zavoevaniya Turkestanskogo Kraya* II (Tashkent, 1912) Doc.71 pp.113-5

also conducted their personal correspondence in French, an important marker of class distinction in Russia. This distinction between plebeian professional officers and aristocratic dilettantes is one of the staples of Russian military history, and framed the principal conflicts over military education and strategy between the 1860s and the early 1900s.¹⁹ In this particular case, however, it would become less important than the common experience and reputation that bound these men together.

Despite their disparate origins, varied personalities and in some cases bitter personal rivalries, I argue that by the early 20th century a particular and consistent image of the ‘Turkestan Generals’ had been constructed through a concerted effort to define, control and narrate the historical record of their campaigns. There were at least two distinct elements to this image: the first was that of the ‘imperial hero’, all dash, flair and bristling moustaches, sharing a good deal in common with figures such as Boulanger, Marchand, Wolseley or Kitchener in the British and French empires, and becoming similarly embedded in domestic popular culture.²⁰ The other was that of the diligent military professional, the devotee of scientific warfare; this last may not have captured the public imagination, but it did resonate in the corridors of power in St Petersburg. What is striking about the careers of the Turkestan Generals, considered as a collective, is how a series of small-scale, relatively one-sided colonial campaigns could be translated into real influence and advancement within the military bureaucracy, and in the case of Cherniaev and Skobelev, considerable public celebrity. All of the ‘Turkestan Generals’ punched well above their weight, either in terms of their own historical output, or the outsized roles they played in the narratives of others. Based on their publications, collections of private papers, and archival records related to the publication of official military histories, this article is both a collective biography, and an exploration of the historical narrative which the ‘Turkestan Generals’ created to enhance their reputations. It

¹⁹ See David Alan Rich *The Tsar's Colonels: Professionalism, Strategy, and Subversion in Late Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* pp.9-36.

²⁰ Berny Sèbe *Heroic Imperialists: Promoting the Heroes of the British and French Empires in Africa (1870-1939)* (Manchester, 2013) pp.1 - 53

argues for the often overlooked importance of the Turkestan campaigns – and the men who led them – to the public image, institutional culture and political leadership of the Russian military in the last fifty years of Tsarism.

I – Russian military memoirs and historiography

The author of an anonymous article ‘On military history’ which appeared in the specialist Russian military journal *Voennyi Sbornik* in 1875 referred to a multitude of historical authorities, most of them foreign, including George Earle Buckle, François Guizot, Alexander von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke and Lord Macaulay. All of these, he suggested, could offer satisfying models that would allow Russian military historians to navigate their way through the bewildering abundance of source material which awaited them. When looking at the existing European *oeuvre* of military history one problem concerned him, however: ‘genuine military scholars are too few; each of these military writers to a greater extent belongs to a known army.’²¹ Even today there is no historical field where practitioners, active and retired, play so prominent a part in writing up their own exploits or those of their colleagues and predecessors as in military history, something that has prompted considerable debate and some disquiet. As Michael Howard noted long ago, the histories written by serving and ex-soldiers are traditionally concerned with promoting patriotism and glorifying the exploits of particular units or individuals, while practitioners often assume that it will hold clear lessons and practical applications: this leads to a lack of critical distance from the subject.²² In Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century such tendencies were marked: the standard histories of the Caucasus, Crimean, Russo-Turkish and Russo-Japanese Wars were all compiled by serving officers with the purpose of both glorifying the valour of their compatriots and informing

²¹ Anon ‘O voennoi istorii (nabroski)’ *Voennyi Sbornik* [VS] (1875) no.1, pp.5-38 here, 27.

²² Michael Howard ‘The Use and Abuse of Military History’ [1962] in *The Causes of Wars and other Essays* (London, 1983) pp.188 – 197.

‘military science’ so that their insights could be used in future campaigns.²³ Alongside these official military histories, the second half of the nineteenth-century saw an explosion in the number of campaign memoirs, some self-consciously literary, others more in the ‘scientific’ mode. While the Russian officer corps was once stigmatised as made up of poorly-educated, card-playing, drunken duellists,²⁴ in recent years assessments of its professional and intellectual calibre have been more positive.²⁵ The organs of the military press, notably *Russkii Invalid* and *Voennyi Sbornik*, reached a surprisingly wide readership. The latter was established in 1858, and its ‘unofficial’ section of travel sketches, campaign memoirs and scientific pieces clearly aimed to compete with the civilian ‘thick journals’ of the day: with a subscription list of 5,000 in the 1860s, its circulation was certainly comparable, reflecting the high levels of militarisation in Russian educated society.²⁶ While some of this writing drew on established narrative genres that sought to entertain through stories of heroism and resource, much of it was intended to instruct – to provide information about the peoples, places and environments encountered during campaigns, together with suggested tactics for steppe, mountain or siege warfare. As in the other European armies, the proliferation of such publications from the 1870s onwards was a product of a growing professional ethos, as the army reforms introduced by War Minister Dmitri Miliutin (1816 – 1912) led to a much greater emphasis on the

²³ Lt-Gen. V. A. Potto *Kavkazskaya Voina v otdel'nykh ocherkakh, epizodakh, legendakh i biografiyakh* (5 Vols, St Petersburg, 1885-1891). Potto also served in Turkestan – see V. A. Potto ‘Iz putevykh zametok na stepi’ *VS* (1876) no.8, pp.383 – 409 & Baskhanov *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy* p.192; Lt-Gen Chernyavskii *et al* ed. *Materialy dlya Opisanie Russko-Turetskoi Voyny na Kavkazsko-Maloazjatskom Teatre* (9 vols., St Petersburg, 1901 – 1913) & *Sbornik Materialov po Russko-Turetskoi voine 1877-78g na Balkanskom Poluostrove* (97 vols., St. Petersburg, 1898 – 1911); Gen. A. M. Zaionchkovskii *Vostochnaya Voina 1853-1856gg. V svyazi s sovremennoi ei politicheskoi obstanovkoi* (5 vols., St Petersburg, 1908); General G. I. Gurko *Russko-Yaponskaya Voina 1904-1905gg* (9 vols., St Petersburg, 1910); see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye ‘Rewriting the Russo-Japanese War: a centenary retrospective’ *Russian Review* LXVII (2008), p.79.

²⁴ Peter Kenz ‘Russian Officer Corps before the Revolution: The Military Mind’ *Russian Review* XXXI (1972), pp.226-236. John Bushnell ‘The Tsarist Officer Corps, 1881-1914: Customs, Duties, Inefficiency’ *American Historical Review* LXXXVI (1981), pp.753-60.

²⁵ Dennis Showalter ‘Imperial Russia and Military History’ in Menning & Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (ed.) *Reforming the Tsar's Army*, pp.326-7

²⁶ E. Willis Brooks ‘The Russian Military Press in the Reform Era’ in Menning & Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (ed.) *Reforming the Tsar's Army*, 123-5; Robert E. Belknap ‘Survey of Russian Journals 1840-1880’ in Deborah A. Martinsen (ed.) *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.91-116.

education and training of the officer corps, who were encouraged to publish accounts of their campaign experiences for the benefit of ‘military science’.²⁷

The military historiography of the conquest of Central Asia was no exception to this pattern, but was distinguished by its sheer quantity, particularly given the very small numbers of troops involved: the small cadre of officers who participated in the Russian conquest of Central Asia seem to have felt an acute need to record and publish their impressions and experiences.²⁸ Many of these texts go well beyond the merely didactic: their authors created a particular narrative of conquest. Heroic, certainly, and contributing to the greater glory of the Tsar and the empire, but also civilizing, a shouldering of a responsibility for ‘backward’ Asiatic regions that was shared with other European powers, principally France and Britain (comparisons with Algeria and India were frequent).²⁹ This was not a retrospective gloss applied to the conquest once it had been completed, but something that was being actively constructed even as it proceeded, such that certain campaigns almost seem to have been conceived to fit a pre-existing narrative. This was true of accounts by individual officers, and it was particularly true of the official historiography of the conquest, conceived, sponsored and written well before the whole of Central Asia had succumbed to Russian rule. By 1917 the narrative of the conquest had been retrospectively smoothed out into an unbroken teleology of triumph. Edward Said was quite correct when he asserted that ‘the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming, is very important to Culture and Imperialism’.³⁰ In the Central Asian case what this narrative served to disguise was that the conquest had been a largely unplanned, haphazard process, driven by Russian anxieties at being excluded from the European ‘Great Power’ club,

²⁷ Peter von Wahle ‘Military Thought in Imperial Russia’ (Indiana University Ph.D. Thesis, 1966), pp.113-6.

²⁸ My working bibliography of books and ‘thick journal’ articles on the Russian conquest of Central Asia currently contains over 250 titles, plus a further 500 shorter articles from daily newspapers collected in the 594 volumes of *Turkestanskii Sbornik*, a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings, pamphlets and longer works assembled in the Turkestan Public Library in Tashkent from 1867 – 1881 under the Governor-Generalship of K. P. von Kaufman, and renewed in 1908 by N. I. Grodekov.

²⁹ L. F. Kostenko ‘Istoricheskii ocherk rasprostraneniia russkago vladychestva’ *VJ* (1887) no.8, pp.146-50; no.9, p.17.

³⁰ Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), p.xiii

marred by bitter personal rivalries, and with its fair share of military reverses and logistical catastrophes.³¹ In purely military terms the victories had mostly been very one-sided, often with little in the way of courage or tactical skill required of either officers or men, and with large numbers of unarmed civilian victims. Central Asia itself was hardly the unequivocal economic and strategic asset its conquerors made it out to be. It was only by obscuring these awkward truths that the legend of the Turkestan Generals could be created.

II Initiating a historical narrative – von Kaufman

The chief chronicler of the exploits of all three generations of ‘Turkestan Generals’ in the Russian conquest of Central Asia was General Mikhail Afrikanovich Terent’ev (1837-1909), author of the standard history which appeared in 1906 and which remains the only comprehensive treatment of the subject.³² Terent’ev had taken part in the conquest himself, and was also largely responsible for the first, and one of the most grandiose efforts to produce a coherent narrative, albeit in visual form. This was the so-called ‘historical section’ of the ‘Turkestan Album’ (*Turkestanskii Al'bom*), one of the great colonial photography projects of the nineteenth century, which was commissioned by the first Turkestan Governor-General, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman.³³ The album was designed to represent and classify the peoples and products of the newly-created Turkestan Governor-Generalship, packaging them as a gift to the autocracy and the Russian public, and a conscious attempt to dispel criticisms that the conquest of the region had cost

³¹ See Alexander Morrison ‘Killing the Cotton Canard and Getting Rid of the “Great Game”. Re-Writing the Russian Conquest of Central Asia, 1814 – 1895’ *Central Asian Survey* XXXIII (2014) pp.131-142. In many ways this anxiety was true of the British Empire as well – see John Darwin *The Empire Project. The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830 – 1970* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.2-3, 651-2.

³² M. A. Terent’ev *Istoriia Zavoevaniia Srednei Azii* (3 vols., St Petersburg, 1906).

³³ A. L. Kun (ed.) *Turkestanskii al'bom. Po rasporiazheniiu turkestanskogo general-gubernatora general-ad'iutanta K. P. fon Kaufmana 1-go. Chast' istoricheskaiia*. Sost. M. A. Terent’ev. 1871-1872g. (Tashkent, 1871-2). http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/287_turkestan.html (accessed 25/06/2013). See Heather S. Sonntag ‘Genesis of the “Turkestan Album 1871–1872”: The Role of Russian Military Photography, Mapping, Albums & Exhibitions on Central Asia’ (University of Wisconsin, Madison Ph.D. Thesis, 2011); Margaret Dikovitskaya ‘Central Asia in early photographs. Russian Colonial Attitudes and Visual Culture’ in Uyama Tomohiko (ed.) *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia* (Sapporo, 2007), pp.99 – 121.

a fortune which was unlikely to be recouped.³⁴ The 'historical' volume had a still narrower agenda. Its founding assumption was that the history of the region was synonymous with the history of the Russian conquest, and that the only places, people and events worthy of record were those which had figured in that process. Amidst photographs of stern, moustachioed officers and men who had won the Order of St George, of carefully-coloured plans of the various sieges, and of the shattered mud-brick walls of 'native fortresses', there was one deliberate and spectacular omission. Cherniaev, the 'Lion of Tashkent', whose capture of the latter city was seen by many (and would later be commemorated) as the central event of the conquest, was not included. Instead the Album opened with a dramatic, Byronic image of Perovskii, now canonised and commemorated as the initiator of the Russian advance into Central Asia, but who was also safely dead.³⁵

Cherniaev had been dismissed as governor of Turkestan in 1866 after an unsuccessful assault on the town of Djizak (an episode which, unsurprisingly, did not figure in the Album either). He and von Kaufman were bitter rivals, and Cherniaev used his subsequent ownership of the newspaper *Russkii Mir* to mount public attacks on von Kaufman's administration in Turkestan, something of which the latter was acutely aware.³⁶ Cherniaev's usual line was that von Kaufman had made a costly error by trying to introduce an expensive and insensitive Russian bureaucracy in the region, rather than preserving local hierarchies relying on native intermediaries, as he claimed to have done. In

³⁴ He wrote a detailed defence of the conquest for the Tsar shortly after the fall of Samarkand in 1868: 'Zapiska K. P. fon Kaufmana o pol'ze, prinesennoi Rossii priobreteniem Srednei Azii 16/12/1868 Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) F.954 'K. P. von Kaufman' Op.1 D.112 ll.1-8. The 'Turkestan Exhibitions' organised by von Kaufman between 1867-1872 had a similar purpose: see Svetlana Gorshenina 'La construction d'une image «savante» du Turkestan russe lors des premières expositions «coloniales» dans l'Empire russe: analyse d'une technologie culturelle du pouvoir' in *Le Turkestan Russe, un colonie comme les autres? Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* 17/18 ed. S. Gorshenina & S. Abashin (Tashkent-Paris, 2009), pp.133-178. For Terent'ev's description of and response to the widespread tendency to criticise the expense of the conquest see M. A. Terent'ev *Rossiia i Angliia v Srednei Azii* (St Petersburg, 1875), p.270.

³⁵ Orenburgskii general gubernator i komanduyushchii voiskami orenbur. korpusa. General ad'yutant graf A. Perovskii' A. L. Kun (ed.) *Turkestantskii al'bom. Po rasporyazheniyu turkestantskago general-gubernatora general-ad'yutanta K. P. fon Kaufmana 1-go*. (Tashkent, 1871-2) Pt. 4 *Chast' istoricheskaya* ed. M. A. Terent'ev 1871-1872g pl.1 No.1 <http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/ppmsca/09900/09957/00001v.jpg> (accessed 31/10/2016)

³⁶ David Mackenzie 'Kaufman of Turkestan: an assessment of his administration 1867-1881' *Slavic Review* XXVI (1967), p.276; *idem The Lion of Tashkent. The Career of General M. G. Cherniaev* (Athens, Ga., 1974), pp.108-114.

1875, for instance, commenting on von Kaufman's plans for the suppression of the ongoing rebellion against Khudoyar Khan in Khoqand, *Russkii Mir*'s editorial noted that

‘in an explanatory note appended to one of these projects, presented to the government by the Turkestan Governor-General, the idea is expressed that the native population presents a *tabula rasa* for all innovations that we might want to make in their way of life and administration. We cannot agree with this opinion, and think that, for such time as it prevails we cannot even count on the peacefulness of this already conquered region.’³⁷

Twelve years after Cherniaev's departure from Central Asia, a complicated dispute over money which he supposedly owed the Turkestan administration made its way into the newspapers, and moved von Kaufman to rage in his private correspondence: ‘if for his self-justification he will stoop to such lies ... does this embittered man want me to engage in polemic with him, or is it that he is really mistaken and has got things mixed up in his head? But I cannot get involved in a Cherniaev-style combat (*Cherniaevskii boi*) with him.’³⁸ It was perhaps partly because of this ongoing dispute with Cherniaev as to who had the greater right to Turkestani laurels that he felt such an urgent need to construct an alternative narrative of Central Asian conquest, and indeed to embark on conquests of his own that might eclipse the fame which Cherniaev had won as the conqueror of Tashkent. Certainly his patronage of military historiography did not end with the Album: Terent'ev's history of the conquest of Central Asia, although it appeared twenty-five years after von Kaufman's death, was also commissioned by him, well before the conquest itself had been completed. In

August 1900 Terent'ev wrote to the Ministry of War's Military-Historical Commission that:

‘In 1870 the late Adjutant-General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman requested me to assemble a ‘History of the Conquest of Central Asia’, which I carried on with him until 1872, and then left the *krui*. In 1896, brought once again to Tashkent, I continued my unfinished work and to the three earlier volumes added a fourth, going up to the 1st May 1899. His Excellency the War Minister [A. N. Kuropatkin], having been made acquainted with an outline of my work, and looking on it favourably, wished to me to present this work to the Military-Historical Commission to be examined. In fulfilling the will of his Excellency, I have the honour to present with this letter the seven volumes of the said history.’³⁹

³⁷ ‘Po povodu izvestiya iz Kokana’ *Russkii Mir* 1875 No.193 in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* Vol.148 p.202.

³⁸ Von Kaufman to ? 26/01/1878 RGIA F.954 Op. 1 D.33 ‘Pis'mo K. P. von Kaufmana neustanovlennomu litsu o nepravil'nostyakh v pis'me gen. Cherniaeva, opublikovannoi v “Turkestanskikh Vedomostiakh” po povodu zloupotrebenii v ego shtabe v 1876g.’ ll.1-2

³⁹ M. A. Terent'ev to Karl Mavrikevich Voide 05/08/1900 RGVA F.483 Op.1 D.148 l.1

The Ministry, then led by Kuropatkin, duly footed the bill for publication. By the time Terent'ev's magisterial history finally appeared in 1906, 35 years had passed since von Kaufman originally commissioned it, and 25 since the latter's death. Terent'ev thus allowed himself many criticisms of von Kaufman's military judgement, and of the works of military history his erstwhile patron had commissioned after Terent'ev left Turkestan, though unsurprisingly he still presented the conquest as a heroic and necessary enterprise that had brought many benefits to the Russian empire.⁴⁰

Terent'ev's departure from Turkestan in 1872 had coincided with the launch of the campaign which von Kaufman hoped would secure his military reputation, namely the expedition to the Khanate of Khiva. This was weighted with symbolic significance: Khiva was the state where Prince Bekovich-Cherkasskii and his mission had been massacred in 1717, which Perovskii had failed to reach with his punitive expedition in 1839-40, and which for at least 200 years had cocked a snook at Russian pretensions to sovereignty over the steppe. Desperate last-minute attempts by the Khivans to reach a negotiated settlement through the agency of a Sufi religious leader from the Mangishlaq peninsula were deliberately ignored.⁴¹ Von Kaufman was determined to have a military triumph that would outshine Cherniaev's, and he took no chances, launching no fewer than four different columns towards the khanate from Orenburg, Djizak, Mangishlaq and Krasnovodsk. Although the latter failed to reach its destination because it had antagonised the Turkmen on whom it was reliant for baggage camels, the Khanate was duly subdued, with very few Russian casualties. Von Kaufman then ordered the massacre of an estimated 5,000 Yomud Turkmen, described in graphic detail by J. A. Macgahan, an American journalist who had travelled with the Djizak

⁴⁰ See for instance Terent'ev *Istoriia Zavoeraniia* Vol.II pp.171-2, where he excoriates von Kaufman's leadership of the Turkestan column during the assault on Khiva.

⁴¹ Khan Muhammad Nur Muhammad oghli and Yusuf Muhammad Emin Ishan Oghli to Prince Melikov 07/06/1872 RGVIA F.400 'Glavnyi Shtab' Op.1 'Aziatskaya Chast' D.301 'O vysylke khivinskim khanom poslantsev v Tiflis dlia ustanovleniya mirnykh otnoshenii s Rossiei' ll.119-120*ob*.

column.⁴² This account would eventually make its way into the Khanate's own historiography,⁴³ but found no place in the official history which von Kaufman commissioned shortly afterwards.⁴⁴ In stark contrast to the travails of the official history of the Russo-Turkish War, commissioned just five years later by the then newly-constituted Military-Historical Commission, but not completed until 1913, von Kaufman had no difficulty securing funding from the War Ministry.⁴⁵ His fulsome letter requesting financial subvention made a case that was both patriotic and pragmatic, arguing for the importance of the Khivan experience for the advancement of military science:

'The fall of the Khivan khanate in the past year 1873, completed so gallantly by the glorious troops of your Imperial Majesty, the command of which, by the desire of His Majesty the Emperor, was bestowed on me, undoubtedly presents enormous interest, not only as a great fact in the history of our advance in the East and in Central Asia, but from a purely military-historical point of view, or, so to speak, in the history of the steppe's military art (*stepnogo voennogo iskusstva*). In none of our previous steppe expeditions, have so many different forms of hardship had to be experienced, beginning from the gathering of the forces to their fulfilment of the Imperial will. The forces of the three *okrugs* directed themselves from different sides to the small Khivan oasis, surrounded by hungry steppes and sandy deserts, considered up until now impassable for military forces, on roads along which until now not one European foot had trodden, and simultaneously, in excellent condition, reached their goal. How could such a goal have been achieved with such relatively insignificant casualties? How could the forces succeed in reaching famously inaccessible Khiva, with such small losses of men and strength?'⁴⁶

Von Kaufman here glossed over the fact that *four* columns had set out, one of which failed to reach its destination. He made it clear that he intended to devote almost as much attention to planning the history of the Khiva campaign 'under my personal supervision' (*pod moim lichnym nabludeniem*) as he had to the campaign itself, personally selecting one officer who had been with each of the four columns to produce a volume on its experiences, together with further volumes of 'scientific discoveries' to be produced by the leader of the team of Military Orientalists who

⁴² J. A. Macgahan *Campaigning on the Oxus and the Fall of Khiva* (London, 1874), pp.352-400.

⁴³ Ron Sela "Invoking the Russian Conquest of Khiva and the Massacre of the Yomut Turkmens: The Choices of a Central Asian Historian" *Asiatische Studien* LX (2006), pp.459-477; Muhammad Yunus Bek Bayani *Shajara-yi Khwarazmshahi* [1914] in Ron Sela & Scott Levi (ed.) *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), pp.300-306.

⁴⁴ When referred to in later works it was usually justified in terms of the 'savage' and 'predatory' nature of the Yomuds: see Kostenko 'Istoricheskii ocherk' *V/S* (1887) no.10, 146-7; Terent'ev was more open about this episode, criticising both Golovachev, the commander who carried out the massacre and von Kaufman: Terent'ev *Istoriia Zavoevaniia* II, pp.267-285.

⁴⁵ Menning *Bayonets before Bullets*, pp.94-5.

⁴⁶ 'Dokladnaya zapiska General Ad'iutant fon Kaufman I-go' 4/02/1874 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.375 'O sostavlenii i izdaniya na kazennoi schet "Istorii Khivinskago Pokhoda 1873 goda"' l.1.

accompanied the expedition, A. V. Kaul'bars.⁴⁷ Of these only that by the naturalist who accompanied the expedition seems to have appeared.⁴⁸ Alexander II personally authorised the expenditure of 10,000 roubles on the project, and the history appeared for limited circulation in military circles in 1881-2.⁴⁹ The original four volumes on the campaign itself were reduced to three, with the experiences of the Mangishlaq and Krasnovodsk columns amalgamated. Ostensibly they were all edited by Major V. N. Trotskii, von Kaufman's chief of staff, but his first draft of the volume on the Orenburg column was rejected by its commander, Lt-Gen. Verevkin, who claimed that it was full of errors and inaccuracies and did not accord with official documents. Instead he and Colonels Konstantinovich and Glukhovskii re-wrote it using records from the archives of the Orenburg staff corps.⁵⁰ The most sensitive volume, relating to the failed Krasnovodsk column, was entrusted to Grodekov. Grodekov's notes reveal clearly von Kaufman's role in altering the text. He gave a list of reasons he wanted adduced for the failure of the Krasnovodsk column, all of which related to inadequacies in the commissariat organisation rather than his own lack of knowledge of the terrain the column would have to pass through.⁵¹ When it came to the description of the final assault on Khiva, von Kaufman made further annotations to the text, altering words and insisting Grodekov made it clear that the city was occupied because of disorder within its walls which threatened the lives of Russian prisoners.⁵² Von Kaufman thus got what he wanted: the standard

⁴⁷ *Ibid* ll.3-5. The documents seized from the Khanate's archive by the orientalist Alexander Kuhn would only be used in the Soviet period. Yu. E. Bregel *Dokumenty arkhiva khivinskikh khanov po istorii i etnografii Karakalpakov* (Moscow, 1967), 59-62 Baskhanov *Voennye Vostokovedy*, pp.64, 107-9.

⁴⁸ M. N. Bogdanov *Ocherki Prirody Khivinskogo Oazisa i pustyni Kizil-Kum. Opisanie Khivinskago Pokhoda 1873 goda, sostavlennoe pod redaktsiei general'nogo shtaba general-leitenanta V. N. Trotskago* Vypusk XII (Tashkent, 1882).

⁴⁹ V. N. Trotskii (ed.) *Materialy dlia opisaniia Khivinskago Pokhoda 1873 goda. Opisanie deistvii Kavkazskikh otriadov* (Tashkent, 1881); *idem. Opisanie deistvii orenburgskago otriada v khivinskiu ekspeditsiiu 1873g., sostavlennoe pod redaktsiei svity Ego Velichestva general-maiora Trotskago* (Tashkent, 1881); *idem. Opisanie deistvii Turkestarskago otriada v Khivinskiu ekspeditsiiu 1873 goda* (Tashkent, 1882).

⁵⁰ Lt-Gen Verevkin to Count Fedor Loginovich Heiden 04/06/1877 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.375 ll.101-102ob.

⁵¹ 'Rezoliutsiya gen ad' fon Kaufmana lgo po povodu zakliucheniya polkovnika Grodekova (v istorii Khivinskogo pokhoda) o prichinakh neudachi Krasnovodskago otryada' 23/10/1874 Russian State Historical Museum: Manuscripts division (RGIM OPI) F.307 'N. I. Grodekov' Op.1 D.7 ll.98-9.

⁵² 'Zamechaniya gen-ad' f. Kaufman 1 na sostavlennoe polkov. Grodekovym opisanie khivinskago pokhoda 1873 goda' RGIM OPI F.307 Op.1 D.7 ll.100-102.

account of the campaign and victory at Khiva, whilst it never circulated widely among the general public, ensured that in military circles he would get most of the credit. The final publication of Terent'ev's history in 1906 set the public seal on a posthumous military reputation that had already been firmly established by von Kaufman himself when he was still alive. It was this that ensured he would be remembered in a lavish volume commissioned for the 25th anniversary of his death as both the conqueror and administrator of the Turkestan region (*pokoritel' i ustroitel'*).⁵³ Perhaps reflecting his background as an Engineer officer, von Kaufman's narrative of the Turkestan campaigns, which endured long after his death, emphasised efficiency, economy and organisational capacity almost as much as physical courage or tactical prowess.

III – Cherniaev

Though he began with considerable social advantages, from a family with a substantial estate at Tubyshki in Mogilev province, and educated in the elite noble regiment, M. G. Cherniaev's lack of an institutional base in Turkestan, and his repeated alienation of the War Ministry, meant that he initially lost the historiographical contest to von Kaufman.⁵⁴ He was acutely aware of this: Cherniaev's touchiness and concern for his reputation and legacy are well-known, and amply illustrated in his private papers. His personal feuds were legion, and many of them revolved around the interpretation of particular episodes during the conquest. He carefully selected and preserved official correspondence which both vindicated his point of view, and illustrated his remarkable capacity for bearing grudges: one letter from a superior, Colonel A. L. Danzas, carries an annotation by Cherniaev in pencil which reads 'A document which characterises my relations with the commander of the Syr-Darya line in 1858' – the letter itself was innocuous, but the fact that Danzas

⁵³ A. A. Semenov 'Pokoritel' i Ustroitel' Turkestanskogo kraia. General-Ad'iutant K. P. fon-Kaufman 1-i' *Kaufmanskii Sbornik. Izdannyi v pamiat' Pokoritelia i Ustroitelia Turkestanskogo Kraia, General – Ad'iutanta K. P. fon-Kaufmana 1-ogo* (Moscow, 1910), pp.i – lxxxiv.

⁵⁴ Mackenzie *Lion of Tashkent* pp.1-4

had addressed it to 'Petr Grigorievich' rather than 'Mikhail Grigorievich' clearly still rankled many years later.⁵⁵

One of the most controversial episodes of the Russian conquest of Central Asia concerned Cherniaev's first, failed assault on Tashkent in September 1864, which his superiors claimed was unauthorised. He had preserved a letter of rebuke which had clearly wounded him, in which A. O. Duhamel, the Governor of Western Siberia, wrote that Cherniaev had suppressed news of the attack, in which one of his best officers, Obukh, had been killed, and another, Lerkhe, seriously wounded.⁵⁶ Duhamel wrote that Cherniaev had originally presented it to him as a reconnaissance expedition, and had no authority to attack the city. Cherniaev had preserved his response together with this letter, in which he claimed that he had not sought new laurels, but that he was trying to drive out the Kokandi garrison from Tashkent to prevent them from re-grouping.⁵⁷

As we have seen, Cherniaev used his ownership of *Russkii Mir* from 1866 to 1878 to attack his successor's policies and promote his own version of the history of the conquest – he was also briefly considered as a purchaser of *Voennyi Sbornik* when the War Ministry contemplated selling it in 1866.⁵⁸ He also used his Central Asian military reputation to become a pan-Slavic champion in the Balkans. When the 'Eastern Crisis' flared up in 1875-6 after the rebellion by Bulgarian Christians against the Ottoman Empire was brutally suppressed, Cherniaev volunteered to lead the Serbian armed forces without receiving permission from St Petersburg, and consequently drew upon himself a great deal of official suspicion.⁵⁹ When he did succeed in getting himself appointed as Turkestan Governor-General after von Kaufman's death, his zeal to expunge every trace of his predecessor's reign can be gauged by a letter to his wife in which he wrote that he hoped her dresses would alter

⁵⁵ Danzas to Cherniaev n.d. (1858) RGIM OPI F.208 'M. G. Cherniaev' Op.1 D.4 l.37

⁵⁶ Duhamel to Cherniaev 12/11/1864 RGIM OPI F.208 Op.1 D.5 l.27^{ob}

⁵⁷ Cherniaev to Duhamel 17/12/1864 RGIM OPI F.208 Op.1 D.5 ll.29-30

⁵⁸ F. A. Maksheev 'K 60-letiiu zhurnala "Voennyi Sbornik" VJS (1916) no.6, p.4.

⁵⁹ Mackenzie *The Lion of Tashkent*, pp.121 – 131.

the extravagant fashions encouraged by Mrs von Kaufman – ‘Je voudrais que tu commences une nouvelle époque à Tachkent au sujet des costumes des dames. Mme Kaufman a introduit ici un luxe effréné sous ce rapport’ and added ‘Toute l’administration civile est contre moi, le monde m’a reçu ici avec beaucoup de froideur et au commencement on a voulu me forcer, à tous prix de continuer l’ancien régime, mais je suis Ivan Grosniy’.⁶⁰ He had commissioned an inspection of Turkestan’s administration led by a close ally, F. K. Girs, which produced a report that was highly critical of the first Governor-General’s administration.⁶¹ Cherniaev was himself dismissed shortly afterwards, having alienated the local settler population with his high-handed manner, and what was seen as excessive friendliness towards the natives.⁶² However, while Russian settler society rejected Cherniaev the man, it was only too happy to assist in the creation of his legend. As Jeff Sahadeo has shown, Cherniaev’s conquest of Tashkent was commemorated annually by its Russian population in ever more elaborate ceremonies.⁶³ While Cherniaev was still alive, he was not invited to these, noting bitterly as the 25th anniversary approached that since the days of Cortes in Mexico or Pizarro in Peru there had not been such a feat as the capture of Tashkent: ‘if I had been the inspector of latrines in some palace for twenty-five years I would have received some sort of order of the white beard’, but as it was he had no recognition.⁶⁴ He died a disappointed man, but his niece, A. M. Cherniaeva, did much to restore his reputation posthumously, publishing some of his early memoranda in *Istoricheskie*

⁶⁰ ‘I want you to begin a new epoch at Tashkent on the subject of ladies’ costumes; Mrs Kaufman introduced an unbridled luxury here in that regard’; ‘The entire civil administration is against me, I have been received in society with much *froidure*, and to begin with they wanted at all costs to force me to continue with the *ancien régime*, but I am *Ivan Grosnyi* [Ivan the Terrible]’ M. Tcherniaeff to A. A. Cherniaeva 29/11/1882 RGVIA F.726 Op.1 D.74 ll.12 – 13ob

⁶¹ F. K. Girs *Otchet, revizuiushchogo, po Vysochaishemu povoleniiu, Turkestanskogo Kraia, Tainogo Sovetnika Girs* (St. Petersburg, 1884)

⁶² N. P. Ostroumov, ‘2-i Turkestanskii General-Gubernator General-Leitenant M. G. Chernyaev (1882–1884gg)’ (unpub. typescript, Navoi State Library, Tashkent), February 1930, 13, 24, 41. See Bakhtiyar Babajanov ‘How will we appear in the eyes of *inovertsy* and *inorodtsy*? Nikolai Ostroumov on the image and function of Russian power’ *Central Asian Survey* XXXIII (2014), pp.277-9.

⁶³ Jeff Sahadeo *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865 - 1923* (Bloomington, IN, 2007) pp.47-56.

⁶⁴ M. G. Cherniaev to A. M. Cherniaeva, 22/12/1889 International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam Mikhail Grigor’evich Cherniaev Papers, Folder 17.

Vestnik and commissioning an adulatory biography.⁶⁵ What we might call the ‘Cherniaev strand’ in the history of the Turkestan campaigns placed a greater emphasis on flair, dash and individual heroism than the often grimly logistical histories commissioned by von Kaufman. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the fall of Tashkent marked the zenith of a process of exaggerated myth-making. In the midst of war with the Central Powers, Cherniaev was now a more appealing hero than the Germanic von Kaufman, and *Voennyi Sbornik* produced a commemorative portrait and a series of articles which emphasised his status as a peculiarly Russian hero, and his Slavophile exploits in Serbia.⁶⁶ The celebrations in Turkestan itself were still more elaborate - Nikolai Mallitskii, the Mayor of Tashkent, made a point of sending a telegram to Cherniaev’s widow, Antonina Alexandrovna, informing her that the new ‘House of the People (*Narodnyi Dom*) and, somewhat incongruously, the Labour exchange, were to be named after Cherniaev, and inviting her to attend the ceremony.⁶⁷ In the same year the entire city of Chimkent was also renamed after him, though this particularly egregious act of appropriation did not long survive the revolution. As with von Kaufman, Cherniaev’s reputation as a military commander, however shaky it had been when he was still in the field, would be posthumously burnished. The rivalry the two men had pursued when alive was reflected in slightly different approaches to the history of the Turkestan campaigns – the drier, more technical style of the official histories of the Khiva campaign and of Terent’ev’s history, with their lengthy descriptions of commissariat arrangements, as opposed to the romantic celebration of Russian patriotism in works on Cherniaev. Nevertheless, both strands were agreed on the significance of the conquest of Central Asia for the history of the Russian army, and of the empire

⁶⁵ A Ch[erniaeva]: ‘M. G. Cherniaev v Srednei Azii (Na Syr-Dar’inskoi linii)’ *Istoricheskii Vestnik* [IV] (1915) no.6, pp.840-872; A. Mikhailov *Mikhail Grigor’evich Cherniaev. Biograficheskii Ocherk* (St. Petersburg, 1906).

⁶⁶ Apart from the series of articles by N. Abramov cited above, see N. Abramov ‘k biografii Cherniaeva (pereskaz posluzhnogo spiska) *V/S* (1915) no.3, pp.175 -184; L. V. Evdokimov “‘Slavnyi Liubimy General” - M. G. Cherniaev’ *V/S* (1915) nos.11-12, pp.111 - 128, 151-160; *V/S* (1916) no.1, pp.129-44.

⁶⁷ Telegram N. A. Mallitskii to A. A. Cherniaeva 09/05/1915 RGVIA F.726 Op.1 D.238 l.1

as a whole, and they agreed on the essentials: that it had been a series of glorious victories against the odds, requiring remarkably few soldiers, and with many heroic episodes.

IV – Skobelev

Unlike von Kaufman and Cherniaev, M. D. Skobelev, the son of Lt-Gen D. I. Skobelev, had already developed a public profile as a popular imperial hero while he was still alive. He is often compared to the French populist leader (and colonial hero) General Boulanger,⁶⁸ and there are persistent theories that had it not been for his untimely death in the arms of a prostitute in a Moscow brothel in 1882, he might have led a military coup in an unlikely alliance with the Populists of *Narodnaia Volia* to overthrow the autocracy.⁶⁹ Instead he ended up with an equestrian statue on Tverskaia Street (destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1917) and a posthumous personality cult fostered in part by the writings of his fellow Turkestani officers, and in part by metropolitan Slavophiles for whom he had become the next great white hope after Cherniaev.⁷⁰ Judging by the number of adulatory biographies and his appearance in two Boris Akunin novels this has been enthusiastically revived since 1991.⁷¹ Although Skobelev's emergence as a public figure was largely down to his starring role as the 'White General' in the Russo-Turkish War,⁷² he first built his reputation in Turkestan, though it was by no means unblemished. In 1870 von Kaufman responded to an enquiry

⁶⁸ Andreas Dorpalen 'Tsar Alexander III and the Boulanger Crisis in France' *Journal of Modern History* XXIII (1951), pp.122-136.

⁶⁹ Evgenii Romanovich Ol'khovskii *Tainy i avantiury v rossiiskoi istorii* (St Petersburg, 2003), pp.355-8; this was fictionalised by Boris Akunin in *Smert' Akhillesa* (Moscow, 1998).

⁷⁰ See in particular O. A. Novikova *Skobelev and the Slavonic Cause* (London, 1883). For a more detailed account of his posthumous cult see Hans Rogger 'The Skobelev Phenomenon: the Hero and his Worship' *Oxford Slavonic Papers* Vol.9 (Oxford, 1976), pp.46 - 78.

⁷¹ The best-known account of him to appear before the revolution was that by novelist and war correspondent V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko *Skobelev: Lichnye vospominaniia i vpechatleniia* (St Petersburg, 1882 & 1884, reprinted Moscow, 1993), translated as *Personal Reminiscences of General Skobelev* (London, 1884). Skobelev was not an acceptable figure in the Soviet period, although at least one biography of him appeared in émigré circles: N. N. Knorring *General Mikhail Dmitrievich Skobelev. Istoricheskii etiud* (Paris/Tallinn, 1939). Both these works were republished in V. Drobyshev (ed.) *Belyi General* (Moscow, 1992). Most recently see B. Kostin *Skobelev* (Moscow, 1990); Valentin Masal'skii *Skobelev. istoricheskii portret* (Moscow, 1998); B. Kostin *Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei – Skobelev* (Moscow, 2000); Evgenii Glushchenko *Geroi Imperii. Portrety Russkikh kolonial'nykh deiatelei* (Moscow, 2001) (this jingoistic volume also contains uncritical biographies of von Kaufman and Cherniaev); Boris Vasil'ev *Russkie Polkovodtsy - Skobelev* (Moscow, 2001); V. I. Gusarov *General M. D. Skobelev. Legendarnaia slava i neshynshiesia nadezhdy* (Moscow, 2003); R. Gagkuev *General Skobelev* (Moscow, 2011).

⁷² Fictionalised by Akunin in *Turetskii Gambit* (Moscow, 1998).

from Miliutin by singing his praises, albeit with some reservations about the young officer's evident ambition, but later that year he sent him away from Turkestan after he fought several duels with his superior officers and carried out an unauthorised raid on Bukharan territory.⁷³ Skobelev transferred to the Caucasus, and managed to return to Central Asia, much against von Kaufman's wishes, by joining the Mangishlaq column of the Khiva expedition, during which he energetically sought the limelight and a St George's cross for valour.⁷⁴ He came to real prominence in the brutal campaign to annex the Ferghana Valley in 1875-6, after a revolt had overthrown the Russians' client Khan, Khudoyar.⁷⁵ Skobelev was remarkable for the ruthlessness with which he not merely defeated but slaughtered the enemy: in his despatches he referred with evident relish to the 'mowing down' of hundreds of 'Sarts' at a cost of just a few Russian wounded, something remembered with disgust by the Orenburg Cossack officer V. P. Nalivkin (1852-1917), who also alleged that Skobelev ordered deliberate attacks on non-combatants, including women and children.⁷⁶ It was the reputation Skobelev developed during this campaign, together with his excellent connections in St Petersburg, which led to him being offered the Balkan command during the Russo-Turkish war, and it was the campaign against the Akhal-Tekke Turkmen in 1880-1, in which Kuropatkin was his chief of staff, which cemented his reputation as Russia's greatest general. Although the massacre of 8,000 men, women and children after the fall of the fortress of Gök-Tepe was something even some of the General's many apologists found hard to defend,⁷⁷ it also prompted Fyodor Dostoevsky to pen his

⁷³ Von Kaufman to Miliutin 30/09/1870 ' "Voiska nasha takaia prelest', chto nel'zia predstavit' nichego luchshego". Pervyi Turkestanskii general-gubernator: 12 let perepiski' *Istochnik. Dokumenty russkoi istorii* (2003) no.1 (61), 17; A. N. Maslov *Zapiski o M. D. Skobelev (Materialy dlya biografii)* (St Petersburg, 1887) pp.219-220.

⁷⁴ Maslov *Zapiski o M. D. Skobelev* pp.224 – 239

⁷⁵ E. Tolbukhov 'Skobelev v Turkestane (1869-1877g.)' *IV* (1916) Nos.10-12, pp.107-132, 369 – 403, 638 – 667.

⁷⁶ Skobelev to von Kaufman 07/12/1875 RGVA F.1396 Op.2 D.93 ll.106ob – 107ob; Nalivkin later became a distinguished orientalist and ethnographer and a political radical, which may have coloured his withering portrayal of Skobelev as a cowardly sadist in a newspaper profile shortly after the 1905 revolution: V. P. Nalivkin 'Moi Vospominaniya o Skobelev' *Russkii Turkestan* (1906) Nos.119 - 120, reprinted in T. V. Kotiukova (ed.) *Polvaka v Turkestane. V. P. Nalivkin: biografiya, dokumenty, trudy* (Moscow, 2015), pp.535-8.

⁷⁷ The crucial phrase in Skobelev's official report which outraged international opinion was that Turkmen 'of both sexes' (*oboego pola*) had been killed while fleeing the fortress; M. D. Skobelev 'Osada i Shturm kreposti Dengil-Tepe (Geok-Tepe)' *V/S* (1881) No.4 p.52; on the controversy which followed see Charles Marvin *The Russian Advance towards India*

celebrated outburst on ‘what is Asia to us’, which has been a touchstone for understanding Russia’s relationship with ‘the East’ ever since.⁷⁸

Two years after the publication of his official history of the Khiva expedition for von Kaufman, Grodekoff would perform a similar service for Skobelev, having served on his staff throughout his last, brutal campaign in Transcaspia in 1880-81. Here we have an snapshot of the historian at work, courtesy of the British journalist Charles Marvin: ‘the writing section consists of a large table and desk, both piled up with maps and manuscripts, for General Grodekoff is writing an official history of Skobeleff’s great campaign, under the supervision of Skobeleff himself. There is a curious absence of books about the place, but Grodekoff lives close to the magnificent library of the General Staff, which contains every book he requires, and plenty of clerks to copy matter out for him.’⁷⁹ Had he lived to see it, Skobelev would not have been disappointed with the results, which while distinctly dry (Grodekoff had been one of von Kaufman’s officers) were certainly comprehensive (four volumes to describe a six-week siege). Grodekoff concentrated on Skobelev’s meticulous commissariat preparations and the careful and methodical digging of siege-works. Above all, he skated over the most controversial aspect of Skobelev’s conduct at Gök-Tepe, namely the massacre of women and children – while Grodekoff wrote that the ‘pursuit and hewing’ (*rubka*) of the Turkmen by the cavalry continued for up to fifteen km, he implied that these were all male combatants.⁸⁰ Kuropatkin, in his private notes on the Gök-Tepe campaign, wrote that the claim that 8,000 Turkmen were deliberately ‘chopped up’ (*porublennye*) was an exaggeration, and that most of those found dead around the fortress had been wounded during the siege and died while fleeing.⁸¹

Conversations with Skobeleff, Ignatieff, and other distinguished Russian generals and statesmen, on the Central Asian Question (London, 1882) pp.98-9.

⁷⁸ Novikova *Skobeleff and the Slavonic Cause*, p.213; Fyodor Dostoevsky ‘Dnevnik Pisatelya III. Geok-Tepe – Chto takoe dlya nas Aziya?’ *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenie* (21 vols., St Petersburg, 1896) XXI, pp.513-23.

⁷⁹ Marvin *The Russian Advance Towards India* p.40

⁸⁰ N. I. Grodekoff *Voina v Turkmenii: Pokhod Skobeleva v 1880-1881gg.* (4 vols., St Petersburg, 1883-4) III, pp.292-3.

⁸¹ A. N. Kuropatkin ‘Neskol’ko zametok po ekspeditsii v Akhal-Tekke’ *Dnevnik Kuropatkina A. N. Za vremya pokhoda v Turtsii 1877 - 1881* RGVIA F.165 ‘Kuropatkin A. N.’ Op.1 D.1833 l.116

After Skobelev's death, his supporters made still more extensive claims for his military genius, arguing that he, rather than von Kaufman, was responsible for drawing up the plans for the successful invasion of Khiva.⁸² Like Cherniaev, he also had the dubious distinction of having a Central Asian town named after him, though in his case, more appropriately, it was the Russian garrison town of New Marghelan in Ferghana. Whether Skobelev had any real political ambitions beyond the usual career path in the army is doubtful, but he became a symbol on which those of a Slavophile and extreme nationalist persuasion could project their ambitions.

V- Kuropatkin

Cherniaev and Skobelev exploited their Central Asian reputations in order briefly to become icons of Russian nationalism, but neither succeeded in transforming this into real political power – Cherniaev because of his open defiance of the Tsar in 1876, and Skobelev because of his untimely death. It was left to our remaining Turkestan General, Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, to truly capitalise on a military reputation largely forged in Central Asia, and underpinned by the historiography of the Russian conquest. Unlike Skobelev and Cherniaev, Kuropatkin came from a humble background (his father had only reached the rank of Staff-Captain) and would never have achieved a position of prominence without a convincing record of military achievement. For the historian of Asiatic Russia, Kuropatkin is the key figure for the last fifty years of Tsarism – its Widmerpool, if you will. From the 1860s to the early 1900s he was present at almost every major turning-point in Russia's violent relationship with its Asian neighbours, at first in a supporting, and finally in a starring role. He left behind a vast private archive, but he still has no full biography in any language.⁸³

⁸² Anon 'Posmertnye bumagi M. D. Skobeleva. II – Zapiska o zaniatii Khivy (1871g.)' *IV* no.10 (1883), pp.130 – 138.

⁸³ Kuropatkin's *Fond* in the Russian Military-Historical Archive, No.165, has more than 5,000 files. Kuropatkin's diary alone runs to over 150 volumes, from the 1870s to the First World War. Portions of it were published in the journal *Krasnyi Arkhiv* in the 1920s, mostly with the aim of showing up the iniquities of late Tsarist military policies: that relating to the suppression of the 1916 revolt is in P. Galuzo (ed.) "Vosstanie 1916g. v Srednei Azii" *Krasnyi Arkhiv* XXXIV (1929), pp.39-94. The portions relating to the Russo-Japanese War and its aftermath have been republished with an

It was Kuropatkin's early service in Central Asia in 1866-8 that gained him admission to the Nicholas Academy of the General Staff in 1870, and he subsequently acquired recognition as a military geographer with publications on Kashgaria, Algeria and Transcaspia.⁸⁴ To some extent Kuropatkin would piggy-back on Skobelev's reputation. He had fought alongside him in Ferghana, and was his chief of staff during the Balkan and Transcaspien campaigns, both of which he chronicled.⁸⁵ While he lacked the flamboyance and showmanship of Cherniaev or Skobelev, like von Kaufman he acquired a reputation instead for diligence and professionalism, the military technician who had supported Skobelev's tactical brilliance. After eight years as Governor of Transcaspia, Kuropatkin was unexpectedly appointed Minister of War in 1898, partly because the Tsar wanted a 'professional' officer to balance the influence of the aristocratic guardsmen who traditionally dominated the War Ministry, but above all because of the reputation which he had built in Central Asian campaigns.⁸⁶ Witte's memoirs give some retrospective indication of the surprise this caused in St Petersburg, where many apparently thought he was too young and inexperienced for such an appointment.⁸⁷ In his diary Miliutin (by then long in retirement) wondered whether Kuropatkin would be able to uphold the prestige of the War Ministry amid the aristocratic cliques and

introductory essay by Oleg Airapetov which, together with David Schimmelpenninck and John Steinberg's accounts of his career, are the closest thing to a biography currently available: O. A. Airapetov (ed.) *Dnevnik generala A. N. Kuropatkina* (Moscow, 2010) pp.3-76. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL, 2001) pp.86-91; Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* pp.37-74. For a description of the Kuropatkin *fond* see P. A. Zaionchkovskii *Samoderzhavie i russkaya armiya na rubezhe XIX – XX stoletii 1881 – 1903* (Moscow, 1973) pp.15-18.

⁸⁴ A. Kuropatkin *Alzhiriia. Sostavil General'nogo Shtaba Kapitan Kuropatkin* (St Petersburg, 1877); A. Kuropatkin *Turkmeniia i Turkmenii* (St Petersburg, 1879); A. Kuropatkin *Kashgaria: Eastern or Chinese Turkistan*. Trans. Walter E. Gowan (Calcutta, 1882); Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* p.42.

⁸⁵ A. N. Kuropatkin *Deistvie Otryadov General Skobeleva v Russko-Turetskoi Voine 1877-78g. Lovcha i Plevna* (St Petersburg, 1885); A. N. Kuropatkin *Zavoievaniia Turkmenii (Pokhod v Akhal-Teke v 1880 – 1881gg) s ocherkom voennykh deistvii v Srednei Azii s 1839 po 1876g* (St Petersburg, 1899).

⁸⁶ Menning *Bayonets before Bullets*, pp.93-4; he does not emphasise the importance of Kuropatkin's status as a *Turkestanets* and veteran of Central Asian campaigns to explaining his meteoric rise. On this see Zaionchkovskii *Samoderzhavie i russkaya armiya* pp.67-78, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun* p.89, Alexander Marshall *The Russian General Staff and Asia 1800-1917*, (Abingdon, 2006), pp.44-45, 50-51 & Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* pp. 40-44; on Kuropatkin's tenure as Governor of Transcaspia see Alexander Morrison 'The Pahlen Commission and the restoration of rectitude in colonial Transcaspia, 1908 – 1909' *Monde(s). Histoire, Espaces, Relations* IV (2013) pp.45 – 64.

⁸⁷ Witte *Vospominaniia* ed. Shemarulina Vol.2 pp.149 – 152; B. Anan'ich et al (eds.) *Iz Arkhiva S. Yu Witte* (St Petersburg, 2003) Vol.1 Book 1 pp.509-511.

hierarchies of power in the capital, but he noted that 'Kuropatkin showed himself in Turkestan and in the Transcasian region to be an excellent officer, an able and active military leader'.⁸⁸ As War Minister he lost little time in ensuring that those campaigns would be exhaustively documented.

As we have already seen, it was in 1900, during Kuropatkin's tenure, that Terent'ev submitted his history of the conquest of Central Asia, originally commissioned by von Kaufman over 25 years before, to the War Ministry's Military-Historical committee – it would be published five years later. Meanwhile Kuropatkin had initiated an even more ambitious project, a collection of documents that would chronicle the history of the Russian conquest of Central Asia. The origin of this idea may have lain in his own near-obsessive preservation of copies of all the (mostly very banal) correspondence he had received during the three-week siege of Gök-Tepe,⁸⁹ but this project would be on an altogether grander scale:

'Now it would seem to be most desirable for a fundamental collection on the history of the conquest of Turkestan, which occupies not the least glorious page in the annals of our fighting past, to appear in print. In view of which I consider it timely to set about the collection and publication of materials on the subjugation of the said region. The commander of the forces of the Turkestan Military *Okrug*, Lt-General Ivanov, has requested that this work be assigned to the head of the Semirechie Engineering Division, Military Engineer Colonel Serebrennikov.'⁹⁰

The project was approved personally by the Tsar on the 11th November 1901. Adrian Georgevich Serebrennikov (1863 - ?) was almost certainly chosen as editor because of his recent publication, serialised in *Voennyi Sbornik*, of a glowing account of the Kokand campaign of 1875-6, in which Kuropatkin had played a prominent role.⁹¹ The total cost of the new publication was meant to be 12,000 roubles over three years, with publication envisaged early in 1905.

⁸⁸ Diary entry 04/01/1898 D. A. Miliutin *Dnevnik 1891 – 1899* ed. L. G. Zakharova (Moscow, 2013) p.471.

⁸⁹ RGVIA F.165 Op.1 Delo 248 'Perepiska nachal'nika Turkestanskogo otryada polkovnika Kuropatkina A. N. s komanduyushchimi voiskami Generalom Skobelevym N., Generalom Grodekoyem i s drugimi ofitserami po provedeniiu Akhal-Tekinskoi Ekspeditsii' 02/12/1880 – 06/02/1881.

⁹⁰ Doklad po Glavnomu Shtabu. Kantseliariia Voenno-Uchenogo Komiteta 09/11/1901 RGVIA F.483 Op.1 D.150 l.2

⁹¹ A. G. Serebrennikov 'K istorii kokanskogo pokhoda' *V/S* 1897 no.9, pp.5-28; 1899 no.4, pp.211-226; 1901 no.4, pp.29-55; nos.7-11 pp.29-55, 69-96, 37-74.

From the beginning, Serebrennikov's ideas for the document collection seem to have been more ambitious than Kuropatkin envisaged – either that, or he rapidly decided that he preferred being paid a retainer to do research rather than continue his work as a military engineer. In December 1903, after he had already been working for almost two years, he sent in a lengthy report to Turkestan Governor-General Ivanov describing his activities to date, which had taken him from Vernyi to Tashkent and the archive of the General Staff in St Petersburg, but which still left him with a great deal of work left to do in the archives of the War and Foreign ministries, and in Orenburg, Omsk and Tiflis. He concluded regretfully that he was unlikely to be finished by the deadline of 31st December 1904. 'From this your Excellency will see that the necessity to extend the period of work is not unexpected and stems entirely from the enormous quantity of material on the conquest of Turkestan' and he requested an assistant.⁹²

The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war created further difficulties, and the money allocated also proved inadequate. Over four years after Kuropatkin had initiated the project, there was only sufficient left to cover the publication of just two volumes.⁹³ The publishing history of Serebrennikov's gargantuan *Sbornik* proved so protracted that it would still be incomplete in 1917.⁹⁴ Despite the orientalist V. V. Barthold's urging, publication was not resumed after the revolution.⁹⁵ The notes and transcripts for the unpublished volumes are in Serebrennikov's personal *fond* in the

⁹² Serebrennikov to Ivanov 09/12/1903 RGVIA F.483 Op.1 D.150 ll.4-7

⁹³ Shtab Turk. V. O. to Glavnyi Shtab 17/01/1906 RGVIA F.483 Op.1 D.150 l.110

⁹⁴ The first four volumes bore the message that they were not originally intended for public circulation: A. G. Serebrennikov *Sbornik Materialov dlia istorii zavoevaniia Turkestanskogo Kraia* I (1839) (Tashkent, 1908), II (1840) & III (1841) (Tashkent, 1912), IV (1842-3) (Tashkent, 1913). From volume V onwards there was a slight change in the title: A. G. Serebrennikov *Turkestanskii Krai. Sbornik Materialov dlia istorii ego zavoevaniia* V (1844-46), VI (1847), VII (1848-1850), VIII (1851-52); Serebrennikov was then clearly forced to break the sequence and jump to the volumes for 1864-6 in order that their publication might coincide with the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of the fall of Tashkent in 1915: XVII (1864 pt.I), XVIII (1864 pt.II) XIX (1865 pt.I) & XX (1865 pt.II) (Tashkent, 1914); XXI (1866 pt.I) XXII (1866 pt.II) (Tashkent, 1915).

⁹⁵ V. V. Bartol'd 'Turkestanskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka i mestnaia musul'manskaia pechat' (1920) *Sochineniia* IX (Moscow, 1973), pp.558-9

Tashkent archives,⁹⁶ and a comparison of the published volumes with the original documents on which they were based is possible in some cases. Serebrennikov himself wrote that ‘It was decided to publish the material in its raw, wholly unworked form, in the form of accurate copies not only of the documents themselves, but of the resolutions made upon them, marginalia and notes, which often have an important significance.’⁹⁷ This is a fair assessment: a comparison of the published documents with archival originals suggests Serebrennikov did not falsify or suppress material, and indeed his approach was somewhat pedantically comprehensive.⁹⁸ Embarrassing episodes such as Cherniaev's failed assaults on Tashkent and Djizak, or the Yomud massacre, are dealt with in full, which was not always the case in earlier writing.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of the conquest which remain invisible if one relies on Serebrennikov's selection. Chief amongst these are logistics: the two volumes Serebrennikov devoted to the 1839 Khiva expedition, for instance, do not contain any of the extensive correspondence with the Kazakh Sultans of the Orenburg division about the 10,000 camels which were needed for transport.¹⁰⁰ More generally, as Leila Mirzaeva, the only scholar to have done any comprehensive research on the Serebrennikov Fond in the Tashkent archives, has noted,

⁹⁶ Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TsGARUz) F. I-715 ‘A. G. Serebrennikov’. The materials held here are typescript copies of original documents made by Serebrennikov and his assistants, already marked up for publication. Bakhtiyar Babajanov *Kokandskoe Khanstvo: vlast', politika, religii* (Tokyo-Tashkent, 2010), pp.281 – 304 & Svetlana Gorshenina *Asie Centrale. L'invention des frontières et l'héritage russo-soviétique* (Paris, 2012), pp.95-132 both make extensive use of this *Fond*.

⁹⁷ Serebrennikov ‘Predislovie’ *Sbornik* I, p.ii

⁹⁸ Compare for instance Obruchev to Chernyshev 12/11/1846 RGVA F.1441 *Shtaba Otdel'nogo Orenburgskogo Korpusa* Op.1 D.14 ‘O vozvedenii na r. Syr-Dar'e trret'yago ukrepleniya’ with the identical text published in Serebrennikov *Sbornik* IV Doc.58, pp.306 – 313; see further L. Mirzaeva ‘Sbornik “Turkestanskii Krai» A. G. Serebrennikova i ego znachenie dlia sredneaziatskoi istoriografii’ Avtoreferat dissertatsii (Tashkent, 1963), pp.8-9.

⁹⁹ Kostenko, for instance, denied that Cherniaev had been repulsed at Djizak in 1866: see ‘Istoricheskii Ocherk Rasprostraneniia Russkogo Vladychestva v Srednei Azii’ *V/S* (1877) no.9, 10. In Serebrennikov's volume, by contrast, we can read Miliutin's complaint that Cherniaev's explanation of the defeat was ‘incomplete and unsatisfactory’. Miliutin to Kryzhanovskii 08/02/1866 Serebrennikov *Sbornik* XXI 1866g Ch.I Doc.33, pp.52-3. In the Serebrennikov Fond in Tashkent there is a copy of a damning letter which suggests that the Yomud massacre was staged purely to allow the 4th Turkestan infantry battalion to see some action: Lomakin to Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov 06/07/1873 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.57 Doc.364 l.332.

¹⁰⁰ Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan F.4 ‘Orenburgskaya Pogranichnaya Kommissiya’ Op.1 D.2167, ‘Materialy ob otpravke v Khivu voennogo otryada dlia osvobozhdeniia russkikh plennykh’ 12/09/1838 – 30/10/1857 872 folios; none of this material makes it into Serebrennikov I & II, which are dedicated to the Khiva expedition.

Serebrennikov showed little interest in the 'lives of Central Asians' themselves: the assumption that the history of the conquest was simply the history of Russian actions, so visible in the 'historical' section of the *Turkestanskii Albom*, was still present forty years later.¹⁰¹ Serebrennikov was working with a less conscious political purpose than von Kaufman, Cherniaev, Grodekov or his immediate patron, Kuropatkin, but he nevertheless chose to exclude certain areas which he simply considered unimportant.

In 1905, long before even the first volume of Serebrennikov's *Sbornik* appeared, Kuropatkin resigned as Commander in Chief because of the disastrous course of the Russo-Japanese War. He became (not entirely justly) the scapegoat for Russian defeat, and one common argument was that he and other 'colonial' generals had neither the experience nor the tactical nous to fight a serious, industrialised enemy.¹⁰² Those Turkestani laurels had, after all, been won fighting against 'savages'. It is noticeable that in the book he published to restore his reputation as a strategist Kuropatkin made very little reference to his Central Asian experience.¹⁰³ Although he would eventually achieve a partial rehabilitation within the military hierarchy, with a return to command during the First World War, Kuropatkin's wider reputation would never fully recover. This was largely because of the widely circulated opinions of Sergei Witte, who like many others became wise after the event about Kuropatkin's supposed indecisiveness and the inferiority of his colonial experience, and also sought to deflect attention away from his own role in Russia's far eastern debacle.¹⁰⁴ Witte's memoirs are the source of the oft-quoted judgement of Kuropatkin by Skobelev, that he was 'afraid to make decisions and assume responsibility' and 'unfit to hold command in time of war', something he claimed to have heard from Skobelev's sister, and which despite its dubious provenance came to

¹⁰¹ Mirzaeva 'Sbornik "Turkestanskii Krai" A. G. Serebrennikova', p.10.

¹⁰² Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* p.113.

¹⁰³ A. N. Kuropatkin *Zadachi Russkoi Armii* (3 vols., St Petersburg, 1910) 3 Vols.

¹⁰⁴ Zaionchkovskii *Samoderzhavie i russkaya armiya* p.68; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun* pp.80-81; Francis W. Wcislo *Tales of Imperial Russia. The Life and Times of Sergei Witte, 1849 – 1915* (New York, 2011) pp.183-188.

dominate Kuropatkin's posthumous reputation.¹⁰⁵ In the emigration, and in subsequent Soviet historiography, Kuropatkin became inextricably linked with the black legend that grew up around the debacle of the Russo-Japanese War, seen as exemplifying the corruption, decadence and irresponsibility of the Tsarist ruling elite which had made revolution possible.¹⁰⁶ While this came to overshadow his earlier Central Asian career, this was not quite the end for the 'Turkestan Generals'.

Conclusion

In 1841 the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville had written that:

'Africa is the only place one hears the clash of arms today. All eyes are drawn to it. Reputations are made there, often very cheaply, that don't offend anyone. Men emerge who take on distorted proportions in the public imagination, because they alone are acting in the midst of universal sloth; they alone acquire the reputation of warriors among a people who love war and are not fighting. I fear that one day they will appear on the stage of domestic affairs with the force of opinion they acquired abroad, often undeservedly. God save France from ever being led by officers from the African army!'¹⁰⁷

De Tocqueville's fears came close to realisation in 1848, when Louis-Eugène Cavaignac used the 'pacification' techniques he had developed over sixteen years' service in Algeria to suppress the June insurrection in Paris, and came within a whisker of being elected President of the new Republic.¹⁰⁸ The spectre of military leadership appeared again in the 1880s with the emergence of General Boulanger (though he had seen colonial service in Cochinchina rather than North Africa). After the Fashoda incident in 1898 Colonel Jean-Baptiste Marchand's status as a 'colonial hero' was also exploited by the French right, although he was more of a pawn than an instigator.¹⁰⁹ Britain saw similar legends developed around General Charles Gordon and Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener: while in this case there was no prospect of these men using their colonial reputations to seize power, here too the creation of these 'Imperial Heroes', and the careful manipulation of their public image,

¹⁰⁵ In Shemarulina's edition of Witte's Memoirs Vol.2 p.156, in Anan'ich's edition Vol.1 Book.1 p.195 and, in English translation, in Sidney Harcave (ed. & trans) *The Memoirs of Sergei Witte* (Armonk, NY, 1990) p.107.

¹⁰⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun* pp.5-6; see M. N. Pokrovskii's introduction to the original publication of Kuropatkin's diary for 1902-1904: 'Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkina' *Krasnyi Arkhiv* (1922) no.2 pp.5-8.

¹⁰⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville "Essay on Algeria" (1841) in *Writings on Empire and Slavery* ed. & trans. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore, MD, 2001), pp.77-8 111; A. de Tocqueville "Travail sur l'Algérie" (1841) in *Tocqueville Sur l'Algérie* ed. S. L. Boulbina (Paris, 2003), p.122.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Gildea *Children of the Revolution. The French 1799 – 1914* (Harmondsworth, 2008), pp.56-8

¹⁰⁹ Sèbe *Heroic Imperialists* pp.225-263

had a profound effect on popular perceptions of empire and on domestic politics.¹¹⁰ If Africa was the field where military reputations were most easily won in France and Britain, Central Asia was the equivalent for Russia from the 1860s to the 1890s – though as in Britain a military coup was a very remote prospect. The conquest of Central Asia was the Russian army’s one unequivocally successful campaign of the post-Crimea period. The Caucasus war contained many heroic episodes and was ultimately successful, but there were numerous humiliating reverses at the hands of supposedly ‘savage’ mountaineers, and the human cost was high. Victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8 also came with many casualties, and any triumphalism was wiped out by the bitterness of diplomatic defeat at the Congress of Berlin, where most of Russia’s gains were lost at the negotiating table. By contrast, as Serebrennikov put it, the conquest of Central Asia offered ‘a shining example of how, with negligible resources it is possible to attain great results.’¹¹¹ Small forces of no more than 5,000 men had defeated armies of ‘savage tribesmen’ ten times the size, 1,500,000 square miles of territory had been added to the ‘Tsar’s domains in the space of forty years, the British in India had been kept on their toes, the historical humiliation of the ‘Tatar Yoke’ had been avenged, and prayers were now said for the ‘White Tsar’ in the mosques of ‘fanatical’ Tashkent and Samarkand.¹¹² Although conceived in rivalry, in the end there was little to choose between the narratives created by von Kaufman and Cherniaev in this regard, and by the early 20th century the differences between the ‘Turkestan Generals’ had blurred. In Russia these heroic narratives of imperial conquest reached a much narrower audience than in Britain or France,¹¹³ but even there they circulated more widely than is often assumed, with articles about Central Asia and its conquest forming staple fare for the

¹¹⁰ Sèbe *Heroic Imperialists* pp.139 - 173

¹¹¹ Serebrennikov ‘Predislovie’ *Sbornik* Vol.I, p. i

¹¹² It was very common for descriptions of the conquest of Central Asia to begin with the fall of Kazan, making the connection quite explicit: Terent’ev *Istoriia Zavoevaniia* I, p.1-5; S. M. Seredonin ‘Istoricheskii ocherk zavoevaniia Aziatskoi Rossii’ *Aziatskaya Rossiya* I (3 vols., St Petersburg, 1914), I pp.1-2; V. V. Grigor’ev ‘Russkaia politika v otnoshenii k Srednei Azii’ in V. P. Bezobrazov (ed.) *Sbornik Gosudarstvennykh Znaniï* I (St Petersburg, 1874), pp.233 – 261.

¹¹³ see John M. Mackenzie (ed.) *European Empires and the People* (Manchester, 2011).

middlebrow literary magazine *Niva*.¹¹⁴ In any case, their significance went beyond the textual. As we have seen, they were instrumental in creating the reputations of the only two 19th-century Russian Generals who gained public prominence as Russian nationalists and pan-Slavists, and in catapulting another Turkestan General, Kuropatkin, to the heights of the War Ministry, with important consequences for the empire as a whole. While his colonial background would come to be held against Kuropatkin, the appeal of the Turkestan campaigns for the Russian military did not entirely disappear. With the outbreak of the First World War Kuropatkin had to wait until the autumn of 1915 before he was once again granted a responsible command, but by April 1916 he had been made commander of the Northern section of the Eastern Front, before being sent back to Turkestan in July 1916 to suppress the rebellion there.¹¹⁵ As we have already seen, despite the pressures of war *Voennyi Sbornik* devoted considerable attention to the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Tashkent in 1915, and in the same year began publishing a lengthy series of articles by A. D. Shemanskii (1868 - ?) a General Staff Officer who had spent most of his career in Turkestan, and previously published on the Russian campaigns in Transcaspia.¹¹⁶ Here his subject was the best methods for maintaining and administering a long military front against the enemy, something of urgent importance for an Empire at war.¹¹⁷ Laced with copious references to the standard strategic works of General G. A. Leer (1829 – 1904), chief instructor at the Academy of the General Staff,¹¹⁸ Shemanskii's somewhat counterintuitive thesis was that lessons of the military frontier drawn from the Russian conquest of Central Asia were of the greatest relevance in understanding how to hold

¹¹⁴ e.g. N. N. Karazin 'Abdurakhman-avtobachi' *Niva* (1876) no.10, pp.163-4; *idem* 'Boi pod Zarabulakom' *Niva* (1887) no.25, pp.625, 627-8. 'Imperator vstrechaet geroev Pokoreniya Khivy 1873g' *Niva* (1898) no.24 pp.477 - 478; On *Niva*'s circulation & audience see Jeffrey Brooks *When Russia Learned to Read. Literacy and Popular Literature 1861-1917* (Princeton, NJ, 1985) pp.111 – 114.

¹¹⁵ O. A. Airapetov *Uchastie Rossiiskoi Imperii v pervoi mirovoi voine. 1916* (Moscow, 2016) p.124.

¹¹⁶ Baskhanov *Voennye Vostokovedy* pp.266 – 268.

¹¹⁷ A. Shemanskii 'Boevye Fronty Gosudarstva i upravlenie imi (na primere nashego sredne-aziatskogo boevogo fronta' *V/S* (1915) nos.1-12, pp.1-24, 1-16, 1-18, 1-16, 1-16, 1-16, 1-12, 1-10, 1-12, 1-14, 1-16, 1-16; *V/S* (1916) nos.1-12, pp.1-18, 1-16, 1-16, 1-16, 1-12, 1-16, 1-16, 1-16, 1-16, 1-24, 1-16, 1-16; *V/S* (1917) no.1, pp.1-16.

¹¹⁸ Menning *Bayonets before Bullets*, pp.125 – 9; Steinberg *All the Tsar's Men* 47-52; General-Major Leer *Zapiski Strategii* (St Petersburg, 1877).

back the Germans. ‘From the history of these events in Central Asia it is possible to see, how often many wonderfully thought-through strategic combinations on this front, set aside for some reason, and then resurrected, after considerable passage of time, from the dust of the archives, can be of the greatest use to the state.’¹¹⁹ Despite this Shemanskii never satisfactorily explained how his historical narrative of the mobile campaigns the Russians fought in the steppe in the 1840s and 1850s against an enemy without rifled weapons or artillery were relevant to the current experience on the Eastern Front. Throughout the whole of 1915 and 1916 every issue of *Voennyi Sbornik* began with another instalment of Shemanskii’s interminable narrative - the last of the 25 articles to be published appeared in the last ever issue of *Voennyi Sbornik*, in January 1917, by which time Shemanskii had only reached Cherniaev’s capture of Chimkent in 1864.¹²⁰ The revolutionary and Civil War years brought a new set of concerns to the forefront of Russian military thinking; nevertheless, in the first major history of the Russian army written in the emigration, Anton Antonovich Kersnovskii (1907 – 1944) also reserved a special place for the Turkestan campaigns, where ‘spirit predominated over materiel’

‘Over the course of some thirty years, out of these humble, almost forgotten steppe garrisons was forged a body of troops in which to serve was an enviable honour’.¹²¹

The memory of the Russian conquest of Central Asia, and the ‘Turkestan Generals’ who were made by it, continued to comfort the Tsarist military and offer a vision of past glories, even as their world collapsed around them.

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¹¹⁹ Shemanskii ‘Boevye Fronty Gosudarstva’ *VS* (1915) no.1, p.9.

¹²⁰ Shemanskii ‘Boevye Fronty Gosudarstva’ *VS* (1917) no.1 pp.1-16.

¹²¹ A. A. Kersnovskii *Istoriya Russkoi Armii* (4 vols., Moscow, 1993 – orig. ed. Belgrade, 1933-1938) II *ot vzyatie Parizha do pokorenie Srednei Azii* pp.302-3.

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