

***Aleksandr A. Semenov (1873-1958): Colonial Power,
Orientalism and Soviet Nation-building***

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the life of the prominent Russian Orientalist and colonial administrator Aleksandr Semenov (1873-1958). In the course of his long and versatile career in Central Asia – where he came to in 1901 as a low-ranking member of Turkestan’s colonial administration, and where he died in 1958 as the first director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of Tajikistan’s Academy of Sciences – Semenov participated in the transformation of the region from a Tsarist colony into part of what Francine Hirsch has called an “Empire of Nations.” His influence on national historiography and notions of national identity was especially marked in the case of the Soviet Union’s only Persian-speaking republic, Tajikistan, with which Semenov was connected through his interest and expertise in Persianate Central Asia. This thesis even goes so far as to argue that Semenov’s scholarship and his work as an advisor to the Soviet government facilitated the very establishment of Tajikistan, which Paul Bergne has described as a nation initially promoted by Russian Orientalists. Further research in Russian archives is required, however, to better substantiate this claim. Rather than focussing on the (early) Soviet period and on so-called national territorial delimitation of Central Asia, as scholars such as Hirsch and Arne Haugen have done, the present study, in the vein of scholars like Vera Tolz and Vladimir Genis, highlights the ways in which both Bolshevik nationalities policy and Soviet Oriental Studies grew out of the studying and ruling of Central Asia in the late imperial period. It does so through an examination of Semenov’s career, scholarship and personal networks, and on the basis of his personal archive in Tajikistan’s Academy of Sciences, which has not been researched in any systematic way since the early 1970s, and in which no scholar from outside the former Soviet Union has ever worked.

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Aleksandr Semenov in 1900

Eichenwald

Moscow

Introduction

Few, if any, Soviet policies had a more lasting and profound effect on Central Asia than the establishment of national republics in the region between 1924 and 1936. According to Oliver Roy, the supposed “artificiality” of the states that emerged during the so-called national territorial delimitation (NTD) of Central Asia¹ “led many observers to predict that [with] the fall of the USSR” they, too, would disintegrate.² Instead, these states not only outlived the Soviet Union, but their current political and intellectual elites continue to cultivate a previously Soviet-sponsored discourse of primordial, essentialist and ethnocentric national identity – a discourse that Adeeb Khalid has described as “arguably the most powerful legacy of the Soviet period in contemporary Central Asia.”³ Generally speaking, this study is an exploration of one of the major sources of that legacy: Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies. It examines the influence of late imperial Oriental Studies on the development of the discipline in the early Soviet period (approximately 1917-1929), and consequently on the local Central Asian dynamics of the NTD, and on the discourse of primordial, essentialist and ethnocentric national identity. More specifically, it analyses the career, scholarship and personal networks of Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov, who came to Central Asia as a 27-year old colonial administrator in 1901 and died there in 1958 as a celebrated Soviet Orientalist.⁴ The example of Semenov’s career is uniquely suited to elucidate the origins of Bolshevik nationalities policy – especially towards the Tajiks – in late 19th and early 20th century Russian scholarship. His case supports and illustrates Vera Tolz’s point that “[t]he politics of identity following the October 1917 revolution built on the thinking of the Russian imperial and non-Russian elite about ethnicity and nationality in the

¹ The NTD of Central Asia is the Soviet government’s policy of establishing “territorially clearly-defined national units for state-recognized titular nationality groups” in Central Asia between 1924 and 1936. See: Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p.99.

² Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations* (Tauris, 2007), p.xiii.

³ Adeeb Khalid, “A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003), p.579 and: Sergei Abashin, “Post-Soviet Nationalism, Ethnos Theory, and Constructivist Critique,” *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 44, no. 4 (2006), p.58.

⁴ For a short discussion of the term Orientalist, see: p.20 (including footnote Nr.59).

last decades of the tsarist regime.”⁵ In the vein of the microhistorical approach of works, such as Timothy Snyder’s *The Red Prince* and Stephen Norris’ and Willard Sunderland’s *Russia’s People of Empire*, this study asks what a single life can tell us about this development.⁶

The present study, rather than merely examining Semenov’s role as a passive agent of both imperial Russian and Soviet rule and academia in Central Asia, explores his limited leeway for action in accordance with his own personal preferences and professional objectives, especially with respect to his research interest in Persianate Central Asia. In order to do so, it focusses on Semenov’s formative years in late imperial Russia, i.e. the period between 1895, when he enrolled at the Lazarev Institute, and 1924, when the first Tajik state was founded. This thesis asks in particular whether or not, and if so, how and why he influenced the emergence of the idea of Tajik nationhood and even facilitated the establishment and consolidation of Tajikistan. Last but not least, it addresses these questions by examining Semenov’s correspondence and his published and unpublished works, which are held at his personal archive and library at the Ahmad Donish of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan in Dushanbe.

The relevance of Semenov’s case

The interaction between Soviet Oriental Studies and Bolshevik nationalities policy has been dealt with in the scholarship, as I will show later in this chapter. But researchers have generally paid much less attention to the ways in which both Bolshevik nationalities policy and Soviet Oriental Studies grew out of the experiences of studying and ruling Central Asia in the late imperial period. The present study, by examining the career of Aleksandr Semenov, promises to shed more light on this question. After all, by the time Semenov began working for the fledgling Soviet state in Central Asia, he was already well versed in both ruling and studying that region, as

⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.135.

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *The Red Prince: The Secret Lives of a Habsburg Archduke* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Stephen M. Norris and Willard Sunderland, eds., *Russia’s People of Empire Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

I will show in the following section. In fact, it is one of the major arguments of this study that his career greatly benefited from the synergies and the overlap between the interests of Oriental Studies and those of the colonial state in late imperial Russia; his ability to combine and reconcile these interests, which is key to explaining his professional success, is a recurring theme in this thesis. As a scholar *and* colonial administrator, Semenov's career prior to 1917 epitomises the "interpenetration of the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule" in early 20th century Russian Turkestan, which Alexander Morrison has identified as one of the distinctive features of the Russian Empire as compared to the British one.⁷

Additionally, Semenov's case suggests that the above-mentioned liaison of scholarly and governmental authority continued into the Soviet period (albeit in a different guise). As one of the most prominent colonial administrators-turned Soviet academics, his career demonstrates the significant penetrability of the early Soviet state-service for experts of the *ancien régime*, which has been noted by scholars such as Tolz⁸ and Alisher Ilkhamov.⁹ Semenov was indeed "one of the most distinguished Soviet Orientalists of the *old* [my emphasis] generation [...]," to quote the words of his biographers (and former protégés) Boris Litvinskii and Nariman

⁷ Speaking about the "connections between the colonial state and Orientalist scholars," Morrison has argued that "Russia's distinctiveness may lie in the fact that there we find a much greater interpenetration of the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule than in the British Empire." See: Alexander Morrison, "'Applied Orientalism' in British India and Tsarist Turkestan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 3 (2009), p.644.

⁸ Vera Tolz, "European, National, and (Anti-) Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008), pp.76ff; Vera Tolz, "Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 2 (2009), p.262.

⁹ Alisher Ilkhamov, for instance, has examined "the canonization of [Uzbek] national history" after 1917, stressing that "the input of the Russian Orientalist school of the pre-revolutionary period [to the canonization of Uzbek national history] was invaluable, although it was sometimes characterized by an imperial missionary tone [...]." Interestingly, Ilkhamov also argued that while Russian Oriental Studies after 1917 "turned into a servant of the party and the state, an instrument to carry out Soviet politics [...]," there were some, including Semenov, "who did not comply with the party framework [...], [who] were repressed and expelled from academic institutions [...], [and] who found refuge (and thus survived) in remote corners of the country." See: Alisher Ilkhamov, "Archeology of Uzbek Identity," *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 44, no. 4 (2006), p.26f. While Ilkhamov is quite right to stress that Semenov was neither a Communist nor a proponent of Marxist Oriental Studies or of any other form of subordination of scholarship to practical and political needs, he hardly regarded Central Asia as a place of exile (even if staying there might have been the key to his survival). And the fact that the Bolsheviks allowed and even encouraged and relied on him to follow his scholarly pursuits in Central Asia, not only reconciled him to the Soviet regime, but allowed him to greatly benefit from it.

Akramov.¹⁰ To conclude, the biographical study of Semenov's metamorphosis from colonial administrator and amateur scholar to Soviet Orientalist and (occasional) government advisor provides new insights into the origins of early Soviet Oriental Studies and Bolshevik nationalities policy in the late imperial period. It shows that both Oriental Studies and the NTD were crucially informed by the experiences and knowledge gathered by highly skilled representatives of the old regime, whose influence (and leeway for individual action) was further increased by the fact that the fledgling, understaffed and underfunded early Soviet state in Central Asia had to rely on their skills and expertise.¹¹ Semenov, whose past rendered him very vulnerable after 1917, seized this opportunity to prove himself useful to the new regime and, as a result, managed to leave his mark on its policy towards Tajikistan.

Semenov's career

While this study's overall focus is on the late imperial and early Soviet periods, I will give in the following a short outline of Semenov's entire career, which spanned almost six decades, and during which he actively participated in the transformation

¹⁰ Semenov's biography was published in Moscow in 1971, and its editor-in-chief [*otvetstvennyi redaktor*] was Bobojon Ghafurov, formerly Tajikistan's head of state, who by then had become the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. The book described Semenov as "one of those intellectuals who after the October socialist revolution started to serve the people. [He] devoted his knowledge and organisational talent to Soviet scholarship [nauka]. As a lecturer who educated an army of Orientalists [vostokovedy], as a scholar who wrote a series of works on the history, philology, archaeology, ethnography and art history of the Central Asian peoples, and as the organiser and leader of several major research groups, [he] greatly contributed to the development of the culture and scholarship of the republics of Central Asia." See: Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Ocherk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.3.

¹¹ The early Soviet state lacked qualified cadres in Central Asia and thus had to be relatively indiscriminate in its recruitment policy. Isaak Zelenskii, the Secretary of the *Sredazbiuro* (The Central Asian Bureau [of the Executive Bureau of the Russian Communist Party], in existence between May 1922 and 1934), stated this principle quite bluntly in 1927: "Our chief task is to attract all cultural forces in [Central Asia], regardless of their class position, as long as they are loyal to Soviet power." See: Terry Dean Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001), p.136; and: Botakoz Kassymbekova, "Helpless Imperialists: European State Workers in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011), pp.21-37.

of the region from a tsarist colony into a part of what Francine Hirsch has called an "Empire of Nations."¹² The length and versatility of this career is quite exceptional.

Within a year of his graduation from the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow in 1900, Semenov began serving as a low-ranking member of the colonial administration of what was then called Russian Turkestan in the town of Ashkhabad, capital of the province of Transcaspia, in close proximity to the Persian border. He soon rose to senior positions in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara. Between January and April 1917, he even fulfilled the duties of the Military Governor of the Samarkand Province.¹³ The Bolsheviks' rise to power in 1917 cut short his promising career as a colonial administrator. But thanks to his language skills, regional expertise and contacts, both with Central Asian dignitaries such as the last Bukharan Emir, Alim Khan, and to senior metropolitan academics such as Vasilii Bartol'd and Sergei Ol'denburg, he managed to quickly find a role for himself within the new regime. In the aftermath of the October Revolution, he assisted in the organisation of various research and educational institutions in Central Asia and even in the new Soviet capital.¹⁴ During the 1920s and early 1930s he advised the Soviet government on issues relating to the NTD of Central Asia. In May 1931, during the purge of Tashkent University's Oriental faculty of eleven lecturers branded as Bartol'dists [*Bartol'dovtsy*] (i.e. members of the academic school headed by the renowned Russian Orientalist Vasilii Bartol'd, who had died the previous year), Semenov was arrested and (in January 1932) exiled to Kazan.¹⁵ In 1934, however, he returned to Tashkent, and – in contrast to the Communist Party functionary and Marxist historian Mikhail Tsvibak, who had initiated the purge but was executed in

¹² Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹³ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba V Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve (1906-1920 Gg.): Rossiiskaia Diplomatia V Sud'bach* [Vice-Consul Vvedenskii: Service in Persia and in the Bukharan Khanate (1906-1920): Russian diplomacy in destinies] (Moskva: Izdat. Sotsial'no-Politicheskaiia Mysl', 2003), p.277.

¹⁴ Semenov participated, for instance, in the organisation of the Central Asian State University in Tashkent and the museum *Ars Asiatica* in Moscow (today's State Museum of Oriental Art), both of which were established in 1918.

¹⁵ Nadezhda Fioletova, "Istoriia Odnoi Zhizni [the History of One Life]," *Minuvshee: Istoricheskii Al'Manakh* [the Past: A Historical Almanac], no. 9 (1992), pp.79ff.

1937¹⁶ – he continued to work as a Soviet academic until the end of his life. Only in 1951, at the height of the campaign against so-called rootless cosmopolitans, did Semenov come once more under intense political pressure, and he was forced to leave Tashkent, which had been his home for most of his life. Fortunately for him, however, the then First Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, Bobojon Ghafurov, invited him to the Tajik capital, Stalinabad, where he became the first director of the above-mentioned Ahmad Donish Institute of the newly established Academy of Sciences of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.¹⁷ He remained in this post until his death in 1958, when the former colonial administrator entered the pantheon of Soviet academia.¹⁸

The story of Semenov's life is one not only of survival, but also of extraordinary success. There were, of course, other representatives of Russian imperial rule in Central Asia who reinvented themselves as Soviet academics and/or Central Asia experts.¹⁹ Within my argument, regarding the influence of experts of the ancien régime on the formation of Soviet Oriental Studies and on the course of the NTD, I assert that he was representative of a broader trend. Only Semenov,

¹⁶ Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "The contribution of Oriental scholarship to the Soviet anti-Islamic discourse: from the Militant Godless to the Knowledge Society", in: Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p.73; S. Brachev Viktor, "Istoriik Tsvibak i Ego Sud'ba (1899-1937) [the Historian Tsvibak and His Fate (1890-1937)]", *Terra Humana* 7, no. 2 (2008), p.49.

¹⁷ According to the Tajik historian (and Semenov's pupil) Ahror Mukhtorov, Ghafurov received Stalin's permission to provide a safe haven for scholars who – in Ghafurov's words – were "caught up in the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign" but who "had brought great benefit to science" and could continue to do so. As a result, Semenov moved to Stalinabad, where, in addition to his positions at the Tajik Academy of Sciences, he was given an apartment in walking distance from the Ahmad Donish Institute (equipped with a separate electricity supply to circumvent the frequent power-cuts), an official car, and access to an exclusive grocery store. See: Ahror Mukhtorov, *Akademik Bobodzhon Ghafurov* [The Academician Bobojon Ghafurov] (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1998), p.171. Currently, Hanna Jansen, who is completing her PhD at the University of Amsterdam, is examining Ghafurov's life and career.

¹⁸ An obituary, written in 1959 by Boris Lunin, a historiographer of Russian Oriental Studies and a friend of Semenov's, hailed him "one of the most senior and most famous Soviet scholars-Orientalists [...] professor and academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR." See: Lunin, B.V. (1959): "A.A.Semenov", *Sovetskaia Arkheologiya*, No.2 (1959), p.299.

¹⁹ Two other prominent examples are the former Tsarist diplomats-turned Soviet Orientalists Mikhail Andreev (1873-1948) and Pavel Vvedenskii (1880-1938), who, like Semenov, both specialised in Iranian subjects and whose careers, as a result, were connected to Tajik affairs. Semenov, however, outlived both. See: Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, p.212. For more information on Andreev's connection to the organisation of Tajik academia during the 1920, see: Efim Shagalov, *Pervoe Nauchnoe Obshchestvo Tadzhikistana* [Tajikistan's first scholarly society] (Dushanbe: Donish, 1966), pp.12-14.

however, lived long enough to author both a eulogy to “the conqueror and benefactor of the Turkestan region Adjutant-General M.P. von Kaufman I” *and* an obituary of Stalin; and it is hard to think of another deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, who had also been, in effect, the Temporary Governor of the Samarkand Province of Russian Turkestan.²⁰ Most important for the argument of this study, however, is not merely Semenov’s prominence as a scholar and representative of both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, but the length and timing of career, which not merely coincided with the establishment of the Soviet Central Asian national republics, but predated and paved the way for it.

Literature on Bolshevik nationalities policy

As I have argued above, the chronological boundaries of Semenov’s career are among the main reasons that make it worth studying. Equally important, however, is its location, i.e. the fact that he spent almost all of his life between 1901 and 1958 in Central Asia (which is also where his archive is located). This gave him a local perspective on the events unfolding around him. And this perspective is reflected in his archive, and hence in this thesis, enabling it to make a contribution to the scholarship in its field. As I have already indicated above, historians have analysed Bolshevik nationalities policy and the forging of national identities in the Soviet Union.²¹ Some studies have even examined the involvement of scholars in these

²⁰ *Kaufmanskii Sbornik, Izdannyi V Pamiat' 25 Let, Istekshikh so Dnia Smerti Pokoritelia i Ustroitelia Turkestanskago Kraia Gen.-Ad. K.P. Fon-Kaufmana I* [The Kaufman Anthology, published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the death of the conqueror and benefactor of the Turkestan region General-Adjutant K.P. von Kaufman I] (Moscow: 1910); A.A.S., b1, f4: An obituary of Stalin [by A. A. Semenov].

²¹ A pioneering work on the subject (with a focus on Tajikistan) was: Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970). One of the book’s central points, namely the argument that the creation of national republics was intended “to break up the national unity of local cultures [...]” (p.231) however, is now outdated. Another relatively early work that has dealt with Soviet nationalities policy more generally is Ronald Suny’s *The Revenge of the Past*, which argued that the “territorialization of ethnicity” and the policies of “nativization” have fostered nationhood and national identity in Central Asia and, eventually, contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union. [Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).] In a similar vein, Yuri Slezkine’s article from 1994 “The USSR as a Communal Apartment” has argued that, notwithstanding the teleological anti-nationalist implications of Marxism, “Soviet nationality policy was devised and carried out by nationalists [...]” and that early Soviet nation building [*natsional'noe stroitel'stvo*] was “a spectacularly successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, ‘culture,’ territory and quota-fed bureaucracy.” [Yuri Slezkine, “The

processes; the most prominent among them is Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations*, which has highlighted the crucial contribution of former imperial scholars like Semenov to the nation-building effort of the early Soviet state.²² Most scholarship on Soviet nationalities policy, however, has focussed on state-action and on initiatives from Moscow, leaving us with a very limited understanding of the impact of local agency and initiative and the role of individuals on the national delimitation of borders and populations. From such a state-centric perspective, however, the establishment of national republics in Central Asia appears as something done *by* Moscow *to* Central Asia. Roy, for instance, has argued that the nationalities policy in Central Asia "had been conceived [...] to break the existing nationalisms [...] and to break up the large linguistic and cultural blocs founded on language (Turkic) and religion (Islam)."²³ In a relatively similar vein, Martin contended that the policy of "indigenization" was "prophylactic [...] and designed to defuse and prevent the development of nationalism among the formerly oppressed non-Russian colonial

USSR as a Communal Apartment, Or how a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), p.414f.] Olivier Roy, in the vein of Suny and Slezkine, has described the "territorialisation and systematic ethnicisation of populations" as the "major effect of the Soviet period." He has, moreover, given more substance to this abstract formula, by exploring how "collectivisation, the assignment of individuals to collectives (the *kolkhoz*), the structuring of the Communist Party on the basis of territorial administrative divisions" helped to fix basic local communities (some of them on the basis of pre-Soviet solidarity groups) by giving them "reality that was both economic and administrative." [Olivier Roy, *The New Central...*, p.x.] In a similar vein, Terry Martin highlighted the importance of the Soviet policies of "indigenization" and positive discrimination towards "titular" nationals in "their" respective republics to explain the reification of the idea of nationality. According to Martin, this affirmative action politicised the question of nationality and made it meaningful for people more than anything else, because it turned nationality into an asset that provided access to crucial resources such as jobs, education and public offices. [Terry Dean Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire...* . An excellent summary of the research on Soviet nationalities is given by Arne Haugen in his book on the subject, in which he argued that there are essentially two interpretative frameworks: While earlier scholarship on the topic tended to emphasise the tactical and Machiavellian nature of Moscow's policies aimed at securing its grip on Central Asia, later works have taken Soviet ideology more seriously and stressed the push for modernisation and societal transformation. Haugen's own take on the issue is that "the establishment of national republics in Central Asia" – in contrast to the early view that it was a divide-and-rule strategy to prevent Central Asian unity – "was to a great extent a practical measure [...], [...] a strategy that the regime hoped would bring an end to the considerable fragmentation that they felt characterized the entire region." Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan Basingstoke, 2003), pp.10ff and 106.

²² According to Hirsch, the Bolsheviks – eager to use the notion of national self-determination "to reconcile their anti-imperialist position with their strong desire to hold on to all of the lands of the former Russian Empire" – heavily relied on the "assistance of former imperial ethnographers and local elites" to classify the empire's population and integrate it into official national categories. Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations...*, p.5.

²³ Olivier Roy, *The New Central...*, p.xiv.

peoples [...].”²⁴ In this light, the Soviet Central Asian republics appear to be external impositions and the “creation of [Soviet] decrees [...].”²⁵

For the same reason, in order to explain the relative success and longevity of these states, historians of the Soviet Union have focussed on what happened *after* their establishment (which is a perfectly justifiable but limited approach). Roy, for instance, has emphasised the importance of “the existence of institutions [...], a bureaucracy and intelligentsia [...] a national territory, national symbols [...]” as well as schools, all of which produced a “nationalism [...] [that] is not an ideology, [...] [but] a *habitus*, a way of being [...].”²⁶ Terry Martin’s argument about the significance of the policies of “indigenization” and affirmative action also concentrated on the effects of the NTD rather than on the path towards it. Nevertheless, the local Central Asian dynamics of the NTD also need to be considered, as scholars such as Hirsch, Haugen and Adrienne Edgar have pointed out.²⁷ One of Haugen’s key findings was that “[...] the nationalization of political discourse and ultimately the entities that were established as a result of the delimitation process to a great degree corresponded to historical divisions and formations in Central Asia.”²⁸ This point suggests that the NTD must have been crucially informed by local Central Asian initiative.

The present study complements and counterbalances the above-mentioned state-centric perspective by an approach that takes into account the local Central Asian dynamics of the NTD as well as the path towards that event. It argues that today’s Central Asia of nation states is not merely the product of some Soviet grand design. Designations, such as Uzbek and Tajik, which the Bolsheviks employed as ethnic categories and fundamental nation-building blocks, preceded Soviet rule and

²⁴ Terry Dean Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire...*, p.126.

²⁵ Roy described the former Soviet republics in Central Asia as the “creation of decrees [...] which determined not only their frontiers, but also their names, their re-invented pasts, the definition of the ethnic groups that they were reckoned to embody, and even their language.” Olivier Roy, *The New Central...*, p.xiii.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.xv.

²⁷ Arne Haugen, *Establishment of National...*, p.122 and Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations...*, pp.11ff; Edgar has argued that “[f]ar from being passive recipients of a national culture invented in Moscow, Turkmen themselves played a major role in shaping the institutions and discourses of nationhood in the 1920s and 1930s.” Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, N.J., Oxford: Princeton, N.J. Press, 2004), p.5.

²⁸ Arne Haugen, *The Establishment...*, p.7.

had been used to describe various groups in Central Asia by imperial scholars and European travellers as well as by these groups themselves.²⁹ Moreover, the Bolshevik state did not decide unilaterally and arbitrarily who qualified as a nation or where to locate one on a map. Instead, these questions were solved in a process of negotiation that was characterised by alliances and rivalries between a variety of state and non-state actors, including Central Asian intellectuals and merchants, dignitaries of the former political and religious elites of city-states, such as Bukhara, and those of previous Tsarist colonial administrators, exiled academics of the *ancien régime*, various revolutionary adventurists and communists from Russia, Central Asia and even neighbouring countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. The interaction between this dazzling array of individuals in early 20th century Central Asia not only informed Soviet nationalities policy, it also predated it. The career of Aleksandr Semenov offers a unique avenue of enquiry into this complex phenomenon. It demonstrates the crucial importance of the late imperial period, which should not be seen as merely a prelude to Soviet nationalities policy, but as having paved the way for it. According to Vera Tolz, “prerevolutionary discourses of nationhood and modernity actually exercised a major impact on the early Soviet nationalities policies.”³⁰ In a similar vein, Adeeb Khalid, Franz Wennberg, Stephane Dudoignon and other scholars have shown that debates about reform, the concept of nationhood and the role of Islam among Muslim elites in Central Asia, as well as factional struggles between them, preceded the NTD and influenced its outcome.³¹

²⁹ The meaning of these designations, however, was contextual and varied over time and place. For the case of the terms “Tajik” and “Uzbek”, scholars, such as Bert Fragner, Eva Maria Subtelny and John Samuel Schoeberlein-Engel, have emphasised the interdependency, symbiosis and fluidity of Tajik and Uzbek identity in late Tsarist and early Soviet century Central Asia. See: Bert Fragner, ‘The Nationalization of the Uzbeks and Tajiks’ in: Edward Allworth, *Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Duke University Press, 1994), pp.13-33; Eva Maria Subtelny, ‘The symbiosis of Turk and Tajik’, in: Beatrice Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), pp.45-61; John Samuel Schoeberlein-Engel, “Identity in Central Asia: Construction and Contention in the Conceptions of “Özbek,” “Tâjik,” “Muslim,” “Samarqandi” and Other Groups” (PhD, Harvard University).

³⁰ Vera Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and...”, p.262.

³¹ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, (University of California Press, 1998); Franz Wennberg, *On the Edge: The Concept of Progress in Bukhara during the Rule of the Later Manghits*, (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: 2013); Stephane Dudoignon, “Faction Struggles among the Bukharan Ulama during the Colonial, the Revolutionary and the Early Soviet period (1868-1929): A Paradigm for History Writing?” in: Sato Tsugitaka, ed., *Muslim Societies: Historical and Comparative Aspects* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004). pp.62-96.

Semenov was familiar with these debates and factional conflicts as well as with their protagonists. Long before he acted as an advisor to the Soviet government on the issue of the NTD, his understanding of the complex and overlapping religious, territorial and socio-cultural identities in Central Asia had been shaped, not only by his studies at the Lazarev Institute and through his friendship with Vasilii Bartol'd, but also by his interaction with members of Central Asia's Muslim elites, such as the distinguished Bukharan dignitary, Mirza Salim Bek; the prominent member of the Ismaili community of Shughnan,³² Sayyid Haidar Sho; the Bukharan bookbinder, calligrapher and scholar, Ibadullah Adilov and the poet and madrasa-student from the Bukharan countryside, Sadriddin Aini. All of this needs to be borne in mind when explaining Semenov's later stance on the NTD in general and specifically on the question of Tajik nationhood. To sum up, this study's focus on the pre-revolutionary period, on Central Asia as well as its granular and microhistorical approach to Semenov's life-story, differs from the way earlier works have approached the subject.

Literature on the linkages between Oriental Studies and the establishment of the Central Asian national republics

In the following I will discuss in more detail some of the scholarship that is especially relevant to this study, i.e. the influence of Russian Oriental Studies on the emergence of nation states and nationalism in Soviet Central Asia. Since the present thesis seeks to explore the link between Semenov's career and scholarship on the one hand, and the establishment of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in late 1924 and the subsequent emergence of Tajik nationalism on the other, two books on Tajikistan need to be mentioned in particular. The first one is Lutz Rzehak's *Vom Persischen zum Tadschikischen*, an excellent in-depth study of the transformation of the Persian-Tajik language during the first half of the 20th century. Rzehak's argument that "[t]he founding of Tajikistan was not the result of Tajik nationalism but the hour of its birth [...]," is key to understanding the dynamics of

³² Shughnan is located in the present-day Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan and in the Badakhshan Province of northeast Afghanistan.

the emergence of Tajikistan and the role played by Orientalists in it.³³ The opposite is of course claimed by official Tajik nationalist historiography, which regards the establishment of Tajikistan not as the birth of the Tajik nation but as the *rebirth* of an ancient Tajik people.³⁴ Rzehak was among the first scholars to point out that Tajik nationalist historians, writers and intellectuals have been able to draw on the works of Russian Orientalists, such as Semenov, to make that claim since the very emergence of Tajikistan.³⁵ The most striking example of this coalition between Russian Orientalists and advocates of Tajik statehood was also noted by Rzehak: In 1925, the then leading Russian Orientalist Vasilii Bartol'd published his paper '*The Tajiks—A Historical Outline*', which ended with an appeal not to overlook the Tajiks in a region dominated by speakers of Turkic languages:³⁶

When in 1920 the constitution of the Turkestan [Soviet Socialist Republic] republic [1918-1924] was ratified, only the Kirgiz, Uzbeks and Turkmen were recognised as its 'indigenous nationalities' [korennye natsional'nosti]; the country's most ancient inhabitants, the Tajiks, were forgotten. The future will

³³ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum Tadschikischen: Sprachliches Handeln Und Sprachplanung in Transoxanien Zwischen Tradition, Moderne Und Sowjetmacht (1900-1956)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001), p.152.

³⁴ John Heathershaw and Edmund Herzig have rightly pointed out that Tajik "nationalist historiography has made claims for the Aryan roots of the Tajik and the historical basis of modern Tajikistan in the 8th-9th century 'Samanid state' [...]." See: Heathershaw, John., Herzig, Edmund., ed., *The Transformation of Tajikistan: The Sources of Statehood* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), p.5.

³⁵ Rzehak has shown, for example, that in the aftermath of the establishment of Tajikistan, intellectuals such as Abduqodir Muhiddinov, the son of one of Bukhara's richest merchants and subsequently the head of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Samarkandi poet Taraqul Zehni – used the scholarship of Semenov, Mikhail Andreev and Vasilii Bartol'd in order to lend historical depth to the novel idea of a Tajik nation (and literature) and to buttress their political claims with academic arguments. See: Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum...*, p.160. Subsequent works have noted the same phenomenon. Francine Hirsch, for instance, has shown that Tajik communists in their urge to establish a Tajik republic readily quoted Russian Orientalists. She wrote that: "[...] Tajik leaders, in their own appeals to the Peters commission, cited from Bartol'd's works to argue that the Tajiks were the descendants of Iranian tribes that were indigenous to contested parts of Uzbekistan." See: Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations...*, p.184; Sergei Abashin also noted that between 1926 and 1929, when Tajik intellectuals were extensively lobbying for a "Greater Tajikistan," their arguments were taken from works such as Bartol'd's *The Tajiks – A historical outline*, and from the volumes *Tadzhikistan* and *Po Tadzhikistanu*, published by Mikhael Andreev and Aleksandr Semenov in 1925. See: S. N. Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii: V Poiskakh Identichnosti* [Nationalisms in Central Asia: in search for identity] (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2007), p.190f.

³⁶ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum...*, p.160. pp.159ff

*tell to what extent the national [territorial] delimitation of 1924 will further the national rebirth [vozrozhdenie] of the Tajik nation [natsional'nost].*³⁷

The notion of the Tajiks as “the country’s most ancient inhabitants” was designed to lend greater historicity to the idea of the Tajik nation (and hence legitimacy to the Tajik state), as Rzehak has pointed out.³⁸ Since Bartol’d’s words were published in a volume (entitled *Tajikistan: An Anthology of Articles*) that was financed by the Provisional Government of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, they must be seen as part of a concerted effort to lend historical depth and legitimacy to the concept of a Tajik nation, and to improve the political fortunes of the Tajik state.³⁹ Since Semenov’s paper ‘*Material monuments of Aryan Culture*’ was printed in the same volume, at least some of his scholarship must be seen as part of that effort. In Bartol’d’s vein (and partially adopting his wording), Semenov described the Tajiks as “the descendants of the ancient aborigines of the country, the Aryans of Asia, belonging to the Iranian group of the great Aryan tribe [*plemia*].”⁴⁰ Anyone familiar with contemporary Tajik nationalist discourse will know that his words have not fallen on deaf ears. (Suffice to say that, in 2006, Tajikistan commemorated its 15th anniversary of national independence with the proclamation of a “year of the Aryan civilisation”)⁴¹ By portraying the Tajiks in this light, Semenov was acting as part of a coalition between Russian Orientalists and advocates of Tajik statehood.

The other book on the history of Tajikistan that needs mentioning is Paul Bergne’s *The Birth of Tajikistan*, an accessible and pioneering account of the establishment of the Tajik republic.⁴² Especially important for the argument of thesis

³⁷ V. V. Bartol’d, “Tadzhiki – Istoricheskii ocherk” (The Tajiks—A Historical Outline), in: V. V. Bartol’d, *Sochineniya*, vol2 part I (Moscow 1964), p.468.

³⁸ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum...*, pp.159ff.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ A.A.Semenov, “Material'nye pamiatniki ariiskoi kul'tury” [Material monuments of Aryan Culture], in: N. L. Korzhenevskii, *Tadzhikistan: Sbornik Statei* [Tajikistan: An Anthology of Articles], (Tashkent: Obshchestvo dlia izucheniia Tadzhikistana i iranskikh narodnostei za ego predelami [Society for the Study of Tajikistan and the Iranian Peoples Beyond its Borders], 1925), pp.113; Semenov’s formulation is akin to the one that had been used in 1896 by Bartol’d, who wrote: “As far as we can trace the history of Central Asia, its settled population has always belonged to the Aryan tribe [*plemia*] and, more precisely, to the Iranian group of the Aryan peoples [*narody*].” See: V. V. Bartol’d, “Neskol'ko slov ob ariiskoi kul'ture v Srednei Azii” (Some words on the Aryan culture in Central Asia), in: V. V. Bartol’d, *Sochineniya*, vol2 part ii (Moscow 1964), p.322.

⁴¹ *Jumhuriat*, 14.09.2006.

⁴² Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

was his suggestion that the Tajiks had initially been a nation promoted by Russian Orientalists. According to Bergne:

At the beginning of the 20th century, it had been Russian scholars who took up the cause of the Tajik nation. When in 1924, the Soviet government decided on the 'National Territorial Delimitation', it was exclusively Russian "Orientalists" who contributed to the exhaustive study of the Tajik nation that was to promote the realisation of the Tajik 'ethnie'.⁴³

To some extent, Bergne's proposition was the starting point of this thesis and something that it sought to scrutinise. That said, the present study cannot ascertain the level to which Semenov and other Russian Orientalists influenced the decision to establish a Tajik state in and around 1924, not least because it is based on documents from Semenov's personal archive in Dushanbe, rather than on material directly pertaining to the NTD. Even so, I would argue that the relative significance of Semenov's voice and that of some of his colleagues was a direct function of the comparative weakness of support for a Tajik state among Central Asian urban elites. Both Bergne and Arne Haugen have noted this. Even Adeeb Khalid, who is more familiar with the debates among Central Asian intellectuals in early 20th century Central Asia than both Haugen and Bergne, has stressed the lack of support for a Tajik state.⁴⁴ As I have already indicated above, this study argues that Semenov was one of those Orientalists, whose studies "promote[d] the realisation of the Tajik 'ethnie' [...]," and a rather prominent one at that. At the same time, this study goes beyond that argument by asking what prompted him to act in this manner, besides the obvious factors of opportunism and fear of persecution.

Other books that were of great assistance to this thesis were Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations* and Vera Tolz's *Russia's Own Orient*, and also the edited volume by Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental*

⁴³ Ibid., p.127.

⁴⁴ According to Arne Haugen, the Tajik case was unique in the context of the national territorial delimitation of Central Asia in that it was "virtually impossible to identify a Tajik voice in the deliberations." See: Arne Haugen, *Establishment of National...*, p.150; Similarly, Adeeb Khalid points to the initial lack of support for a Tajik state among Central Asia intellectuals in the chapter on Tajikistan of his latest book *Making Uzbekistan*, a draft of which he was so kind to share with me. In fact, Khalid argues that it was political defeat that compelled members of the Muslim urban elite, such as Abduqodir Muhiddinov, to identify as Tajiks and with the Tajik case. See: Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, 2015).

Studies.⁴⁵ All of these works have highlighted the vital contribution of Orientalists to the construction of nation states in (early) Soviet Central Asia (and beyond): Hirsch has spoken of a “revolutionary alliance” of former imperial scholars and the Bolshevik government, whose shared “appreciation for the potential of scientific government [...] and interest in the nationality question [...] shaped the very formation of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁶ She particularly mentioned the cooperation between Lenin and the Orientalist and permanent secretary of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Sergei Ol’denburg.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, Tolz has emphasised the influence of the so-called “new school of Orientology”, which was set up by Baron Viktor Romanovich Rozen at St. Petersburg University during the 1890s and consisted of such renowned Orientalists as Ol’denburg and Vasilii Bartol’d. According to Tolz, “the views of Rozen’s disciples [...] affected how the new Soviet political elite perceived various ethnic groups in the eastern and southern periphery of the state in the 1920s.”⁴⁸ Last but not least, Kemper and Conermann have pointed out that the purpose of Soviet Oriental Studies, apart from providing “information on Islam and Muslim societies abroad, with regard to foreign policy,” was to inform the state about “the Muslim areas of the USSR, where scholarship was crucial for the formation of national histories and identities.”⁴⁹ Moreover, they have argued that because “Soviet Orientology [...] was appropriated by the scholars of the USSR’s ‘Oriental’ republics [...] it could easily become the basis for the construction of new identities after these ‘peripheries’ obtained their independence.”⁵⁰ The benefit of studying Aleksandr Semenov’s case is that it substantiates each of the arguments mentioned above, as I will show in the following.

⁴⁵ For a broader study of Russian Orientalism see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (London & New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations...*, pp.21ff.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient...*, p.3f; Tolz has also argued that apart from informing Bolshevik nationalities policy, Ol’denburg’s critique of the discipline of Oriental Studies, which he articulated in the late 1920s and the early 1930s – and which argued, for instance, that Western scholarship participated in “‘rendering the East voiceless’ [...],” – anticipated “[...] key arguments against Western ‘Orientalism’ expressed by Said.” See: *ibid.*, pp.98ff.

⁴⁹ Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, *The Heritage of...*, p.xiii.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Firstly, Semenov's specialist skills and connections to senior metropolitan scholars, such as Ol'denburg and Bartol'd, allowed him in 1917 to enter the above-mentioned "revolutionary alliance" of former imperial scholars and the Bolshevik government. As early as October 1918, for instance, he was authorised by the "Russian Committee for the Study of Middle and Eastern Asia in historical, archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic terms" to travel to Turkestan for the gathering of manuscripts and other artefacts for the collections of both the newly established museum *Ars Asiatica* in Moscow (today's State Museum of Oriental Art) and the Russian Academy of Sciences. The relevant mandates, signed by the committee's chairman Ol'denburg and its secretary Bartol'd, have been preserved in Semenov's personal archive (which might in itself be an indication of how much these documents meant to him at the time).⁵¹ By January 1920 he had obtained a similar document from an even higher authority, introducing him as a "member of the Sub-Department for Central Museums of the all-Russian collegium for museum affairs and protection of monuments of art and antiquity."⁵² It was issued and signed personally by the People's Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii. Clearly, Semenov greatly benefited from the opportunities offered by the revolutionary alliance that Hirsch has identified.

Secondly, even though Semenov was himself not a graduate of St. Petersburg's Oriental faculty, he was nonetheless closely associated with the above-mentioned "new school of orientology", first and foremost, through his connection to Bartol'd, whom he called his *pir*, i.e. master, in one of his numerous letters to the metropolitan scholar.⁵³ Moreover, such as the views of Rozen's disciples, Semenov's opinion on Central Asian affairs was taken seriously by the Soviet authorities, who, for instance, in 1924 commissioned him to write a "historical-ethnographic outline" on the "problem of national [territorial] delimitation."⁵⁴ In other words, his work,

⁵¹ A.A.S., b6, f9 (Archive Aleksandr Semenov, box 6, folder 9): Mandate by the *Russian Committee for the Study of Middle and Eastern Asia*, dating from 5.10.1918.

⁵² A.A.S., b6, f9: Travel Warrant from Commissariat of Enlightenment of the Russian Federal Soviet Republic to A.A.S., signed by the Commissar A.V.Lunacharskii and his Director of affairs [*upravliaiushchii delami*] [Iakov L'vovich?] Markus and dating from 28.1.1920.

⁵³ Semenov uses the term, which literally means "elder", according to the Sufi tradition, in which it is reserved for the teacher and spiritual leader. See: A.A.S., b13, f6, p.74: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on 21.4.1918 (according to the Julian calendar).

⁵⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p132: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 27.01.1925.

too, shaped the way “new Soviet political elite perceived various ethnic groups in the eastern and southern periphery of the state in the 1920s.”⁵⁵ In this sense, Semenov’s research transcended the academic realm because, as Adrienne Edgar has pointed out, while in theory Soviet ideology emphasised popular demand as the decisive factor in questions of NTD, in practice ethnographic criteria, together with the voices of local communist leaders were often more crucial.⁵⁶

Thirdly, Semenov’s case also substantiates the earlier-mentioned point by Kemper and Conermann about the impact of Soviet Oriental Studies on “the formation of national histories and identities” in “the Muslim areas of the USSR [...]”. His legacy, in this respect, is particularly marked in the case of Tajikistan. As a scholar of Persianate Central Asia, Semenov was especially involved in constructing a national identity and history for the Soviet Union’s only officially Persian-speaking republic. And he did so in a variety of ways: as an academic and teacher of a generation of Central Asian scholars; as an advisor to the government on issues reaching from language and alphabet reform to border delimitation; as an editor of textbooks for schools and universities and of screenplays for the Soviet film industry; and as someone who was in touch with many leading writers, poets, composers and intellectuals in Central Asia.

The structure of the thesis

This study is interested in Semenov’s role, not merely as an agent of both the Tsarist and the Soviet state, but as someone who managed to exploit and even influence these states’ political agendas to further his own research interests and career. It argues in particular that his commitment to furthering the case for Tajik statehood during the early Soviet period should be seen in this light, and that this behaviour was informed by his previous experience of successfully exploiting the overlap between the world of scholarship and that of colonial rule, between his interests as a researcher and those of the colonial state. In other words, this study maintains that Semenov’s career as a Soviet academician and his actions in early Soviet Central

⁵⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, p.3f.

⁵⁶ Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation...*, p.53.

Asia need to be seen in the context of his pre-revolutionary past. Therefore, it pays special attention to his past in late imperial Russia and, in particular, to his education and formation as a scholar, and his career as a scholar and member of the colonial administration of Russian Turkestan.

The chronological scope of this thesis is somewhat surprising. The decision to end this study with the establishment of Tajikistan in 1924 might seem arbitrary – especially given that Semenov lived for another three decades. However, this study’s focus on the pre-revolutionary and early Soviet periods helps to redress the biased image of Semenov that was promoted by his biographers, Litvinskii and Akramov, who portrayed him, first and foremost, as a Soviet academician.⁵⁷ More importantly, this thesis is not a fully-fledged biography of Aleksandr Semenov that covers all aspects of his life, career and scholarship. Such a study would go beyond the scope of a doctoral dissertation (even if I ultimately intend to pay more attention to his later career in Soviet academia). Rather, this thesis aims to shed light on the influence of the nexus of Russian colonial rule and Oriental Studies on Bolshevik nationalities policy and on the emergence of a Tajik state and of Tajik nationalist discourse. Concentrating on Semenov’s life in late imperial and early Soviet Central Asia allows this thesis to examine how he (and other Orientalists) influenced Bolshevik nationalities policy and how he utilised it and even helped to pave the way for it. Rather than a biography, this dissertation is a case study that asks whether a Russian colonial administrator and scholar of Persianate Central Asia played a role in the establishment of the Soviet Union’s only Persian-speaking republic. It is an inquiry into the question of individual agency and motivation.

The present study begins with a *description of the archive* on which it is based, namely the Semenov archive at the earlier-mentioned Ahmad Donish Institute in Dushanbe, which I have helped to catalogue, and which – to the best of my knowledge – has hitherto not been researched by any scholar from outside the former Soviet Union. I will outline the archive’s benefits and limitations, and explain how I have made use of the sources contained in it.

⁵⁷ See: Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.2f.

The *first chapter* of this thesis stresses the importance of Semenov's education at Moscow's Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages between 1895 and 1900. It asks how Semenov's *alma mater*, its curriculum, teachers and social environment influenced his scholarly ethos, his research interests and career plans. It argues that it was at the Lazarev Institute where the seeds of his future career in Central Asia were sown, and where he gained the knowledge and skills, and made many of the acquaintances that would serve him well in his career in the colonial administration and subsequently in Soviet academia. Located at the intersection of the worlds of colonial rule and academia, the institute opened the gates to both worlds to Semenov, allowing him not only to gain knowledge about the past and present of the empire's Islamic borderlands, but also to join the Russian imperial and cosmopolitan elite, whose outlook he internalised to a significant extent.

Chapter Two is a brief and mainly descriptive overview of Semenov's career between 1901, when he embarked on a rather illustrious career in the colonial administration, and 1924, the year in which Tajikistan was established. It asks if one can (and whether it is useful to) differentiate between Semenov's academic interests and career plans, on the one hand, and his ambition to join the colonial administration, on the other hand. Similarly, it poses the question whether Semenov's practical experience of ruling colonial Turkestan during the Soviet period (in addition to his academic knowledge of the region) was actually an advantage, rather than merely a blot on his CV. The chapter acknowledges that, together with language skills and specialist knowledge acquired at the Lazarev Institute, his rapid progression through the ranks of the colonial administration was also enabled by his sustained interest in Central Asia (which must be seen as part of the reason why he joined the colonial service in the first place). The chapter also suggests his success was partly due to his ability to marry his scholarly interests with his administrative duties. Last but not least, the chapter argues that the expertise he had managed to acquire as colonial administrator and amateur scholar allowed him to reinvent himself after 1917 as a Central Asia expert and Soviet academic.

The *third chapter* is divided into two parts, the first of which is an examination of Semenov's perception of himself and his role in the colonial administration, and of his efforts to distance himself from the image of the ignorant,

venal and careerist *chinovnik* [civil servant/administrator], with whom the colonial administration was so often associated, as Jeff Sahadeo has pointed out.⁵⁸ It asks if Semenov identified himself primarily as a scholar or as a colonial administrator, and if he even differentiated between these two roles. It examines to which extent his academic aspirations and outlook allowed him to be critical of the colonial administration and to detach his identity from his role within it. The chapter argues that, although Semenov took his scholarly pursuits rather more seriously than many of his fellow colonial administrators, these pursuits were also a way of improving both the image of the colonial administration and his standing in it. The second part of chapter three deals with Semenov's interest in Central Asian cultural heritage and his strategies for preserving it. It is an examination of the motives behind Semenov's engagement in the construction of cultural heritage and in its conservation and protection. In line with the previous research questions, it asks to which extent he differentiated between the political and the academic aspects of cultural heritage conservation issues. The chapter argues that Semenov exploited the colonial state's concern about its international prestige to enforce a better protection of, what he regarded as, monuments of antiquity. At the same time, it suggests that it never occurred to him to question his and the administration's right to enforce this protection and thereby also lay claim to these monuments as part of the empire's cultural heritage (a process that has recently been discussed by Svetlana Gorshenina).⁵⁹

Chapter Four asks whether Semenov was an Orientalist in the Saidian sense of the word, and what that label meant to Semenov himself. The chapter consists of two parts, both of which examine the relationship between knowledge and power. More precisely, it explores the nature of the knowledge produced by Semenov as a colonial administrator, the way in which it was produced and the concept he had of it. The first part compares Semenov's vision of Orientalist scholarship with that of his friends and fellow Orientalists, Vasilii Bartol'd and Nikolai Ostroumov, both of whom had a very different understanding of the role and nature of Orientalist knowledge.

⁵⁸ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.60.

⁵⁹ Svetlana Gorshenina, "Samarkand and its Cultural Heritage: Perceptions and Persistence of the Russian Colonial Construction of Monuments," *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014), p.246.

In order to shed light on a particular mode of knowledge production in the colonial setting, the second part of chapter four examines Semenov's collaboration of 1912 to 1916 with his earlier-mentioned Ismaili research assistant Sayyid Haidar Sho. The chapter argues that Semenov's vision of the nature and purpose of Orientalist knowledge was akin to that of Bartol'd, who – as Tolz has pointed out – believed that it was ideally possible to reconcile academic freedom and rigour with the conviction “that the [Tsarist] government should base policies in the eastern borderlands on the knowledge produced by academics [...]”⁶⁰ On the one hand, the chapter suggests that Semenov's striving for academic rigour, autonomy and objectivity meant that he was able to avoid many of the stereotypes and fallacies that are the hallmark of what we understand today as Orientalism. On the other hand, it argues that the fact that he wished to see his scholarship employed for the benefit of the colonial state, and the colonial context in which it was produced rendered this knowledge Orientalist (in the Saidian sense of the word). For that reason, I call Semenov an *Orientalist* rather than an *orientologist* throughout this study.⁶¹

The *fifth and concluding chapter* of this thesis asks whether one of the cornerstones of contemporary Tajik nationalist discourse – the notion of the Tajiks' Aryan descent – can be traced back to the scholarship of Semenov and, by the same

⁶⁰ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, p.70.

⁶¹ The term “Orientalist” (both as an adjective and as a noun) has essentially become a pejorative since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. In order to avoid confusion and the overtly negative connotations of the term Orientalist, scholars, such as Vera Tolz, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Michael Kemper, Stephan Conermann, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, Alfrid K. Bustanov and Denis Volkov, have opted for the word “Orientalology” to describe Oriental Studies (*vostokovedenie* or more old-fashioned *Orientalistika* in Russian) and “Orientologist” to describe a person professionally engaged in the study the societies of the Middle East and Asia. Semenov was a scholar who was professionally engaged in the study of primarily the history of the Muslim societies of Central Asia and, as such, an Orientologist. Yet, I will use the word Orientalist to describe him because – both as a Soviet academic and as a Tsarist colonial administrator and amateur scholar – Semenov was located right at the heart of this nexus of the exercise of imperial domination and production of “colonial knowledge”, which Said and other scholars, such as Bernard Cohn, have studied. Like British colonial administrators and Orientalists in India, who assumed, according to Cohn, that the “society [...] they were governing, could be known and presented as a series of facts [...],” and “that administrative power stemmed from the efficient use of these facts [...],” Semenov wished to see Orientalist scholarship applied to make colonial rule more efficient. See: Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.4.] This does not mean, however, that the knowledge produced by Semenov was necessarily also used by the colonial state. On the contrary, he often complained that it was not, and that the authorities preferred to subsidise and consult the work of people who were more partisan (i.e. anti-Islamic), less qualified and more concerned with the immediate practical needs of the colonial state than with the complexities of Central Asian history and culture, than he was.

token, to what extent his scholarship has facilitated the emergence of the idea of Tajik nationhood and hence of a Tajik state. It suggests that his scholarship is in part responsible for sowing the seeds of the idea of Aryan descent in Tajik nationalist discourse, and that it has indeed played an important role in the genesis of Tajik statehood. Moreover, it finds the origins of the “Aryan myth” – to use an expression coined in this context by Marlène Laruelle – in 19th century Russian Orientalist scholarship.⁶² In contrast to Laruelle, however, it argues that Semenov used the Aryan rhetoric not so much because he was a prejudiced Persophile, but rather strategically and pragmatically to promote an essentialist idea of Tajik nationhood.

⁶² Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Aryen Et Rêve Impérial Dans La Russie Du XIXe Siècle (The Aryan myth and the imperial dream in 19th century Russia)*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2005).

Working with the Semenov archive at Tajikistan's Academy of Sciences

The Semenov archive is located at the Ahmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of Tajikistan's Academy of Sciences. Perhaps its greatest value is that it reflects the exceptionally long and varied career of a prominent Russian Orientalist and representative of both the Tsarist and the Soviet state in Central Asia. The archive is a fruitful source of information on a great variety of subjects, ranging from the worlds of scholarship and colonial and Soviet rule, to the domains of the everyday and the private. Consequently, it offers insights into Semenov's official role as a colonial administrator, scholar and advisor to the Soviet government as well as into his personal network of friends and colleagues.

Additionally, unlike the records of most Russian Orientalists, which are held in the Archive of Orientalists of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg and in the Academy's main archive in Moscow (ARAN), the Semenov archive is located in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. This gives it a more local (Central Asian) perspective on the history of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies and the disciplines interaction with Tsarist and Soviet rule in Central Asia. The archive's location in Dushanbe, where it is a source of local pride, is thus a major part of its appeal.

Last but not least, whereas the archive's location and Semenov's prominence as a scholar have lent it some modest fame among historians of Central Asia, its contents remain unknown to all but perhaps a handful of scholars. The archive has not been researched in any systematic way since 1971, when Nina Kuznetsova published a short survey of its contents, and when Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov consulted it for their biography of Semenov.¹ What is more, to the best of my knowledge no scholar from outside the former Soviet Union has ever worked in

¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Ocherk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971). I am grateful to Paolo Sartori for bringing Kuznetsova's survey to my attention: Nina A. Kuznetsova, "Obzor Arkhiva Akademika Tadzhijskoi SSR A.A. Semenova" (Survey of the Archive of the Academician of the Tajik SSR A.A. Semenov), in: Nina Kuznetsova, ed., *Iran: Sbornik Statei* [Iran: An anthology of articles], (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), pp.28-40.

the Semenov archive. In conclusion, Semenov's extraordinary career, the wealth of information preserved in his archive, the fact that it is relatively unexplored and, last but not least, the hospitality and assistance of those working there have reassured me in my decision to base my own research so heavily on it. Furthermore, it is my intention to undertake future supplementary research in other depositories in Moscow, St. Petersburg and possibly Tashkent.

A general overview of the archive's scope and content

The archive is best described as Semenov's *Nachlass*, i.e. a collection of both his scholarly documents and his correspondence as well as some artefacts of everyday life (such as receipts and medical prescriptions). When Nina Kuznetsova published a survey of the archive in 1971, it comprised roughly three hundred files (*dela*), which were divided into three categories (*opisy*): a) scholarly works and related material (1913-1958; 247 files), b) biographical material (1919-1958; 22 files) and c) material concerning Semenov's activities (*deiatel'nost'*) and his correspondence (1900-1958; approx. 20 files).² By and large, the content of the archive has remained the same until the present day. Its structure, however, has changed somewhat, so that it now comprises 260 folders (the files or *dela*), each of which holds on average eighty-six pages of documents. The division into *opisy* has not been maintained, but the folders still bear the number of the *opis* to which they used to belong and, more importantly, each folder is labelled according to the kind, volume and age of material it contains.³ Altogether, the archive holds approximately 11,200 sheets of documents (mostly double-sided and in A4), which are usually typed, sometimes handwritten and overwhelmingly in Russian (with a few exceptions in Persian, Tajik and English).

Almost all the material in the archive has some bearing on academic questions. It contains most of Semenov's published and unpublished works (of which Litvinskii and Akramov have compiled a comprehensive bibliography),⁴ some of his

² Nina A. Kuznetsova, "Obzor Arkhiva...", p.28.

³ One such label, for example, reads: "Reports of the deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR A.A.Semenov on his official duties; begins: February 1955, ends: December 1957; on 94 sheets."

⁴ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.153-177.

reviews (including internal ones, which were not intended for publication), some conference-papers and addresses, as well as various notes and teaching papers. The material reflects the full breadth of Semenov's research interests, which comprised a variety of disciplines, including philology (mainly the study of Persian, Turkic and Arabic manuscripts), archaeology (especially epigraphy) and ethnography. Also included were a multitude of more specific subject areas such as Islamic thought (especially Ismaili and Sufi), 19th and early 20th century Russo-Bukharan relations, 17th century Central Asian music, the Russian conquest of Central Asia, the administrative structure of the late Bukharan emirate, as well as the history of *waqf* property and law and of Oriental Studies in Central Asia. It would go beyond my qualifications and the scope of this study to try to give a comprehensive and critical survey of the full range of topics addressed in the archive. Having said that, I had the privilege of assisting the archivist of the Ahmad Donish Institute, Ahmad Hojiev, to whom I am very obliged, in surveying the archive and creating a catalogue, which will be published in the near future.

The manageable size of the archive and the significant amount of time I have spent in Dushanbe enabled me to be relatively indiscriminate in my examination of its contents. I have managed to skim through all 260 folders (this was especially important since some of them were labelled incorrectly) and to read the overwhelming majority of the documents in the archive. I have paid special attention to documents that dealt with the themes of Tajik history, literature, language and culture. Of particular interest in this respect were some of Semenov's unpublished articles, such as *A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people* and *An Article on Turkestan*, which appear to have been written in connection with the NTD of Central Asia and the establishment of a Tajik state in the mid-1920s.⁵ Additionally, this study has benefited from the vast amount of material that deals with the organisation and administration (and hence with the politics) of scholarship and academia in Central Asia in Semenov's lifetime. The issues touched upon in the archive are as varied as Semenov's career and include the curation of a museum in

⁵ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: "Kratkii ocherk istoricheskikh sudeb tadjikskogo naroda"; and: A.A.S., b12, f14: *Stat'ia o Turkestane*.

colonial Tashkent,⁶ the organisation of the Turkestan People's University in Tashkent (the future Central Asian State University) in the same city in the aftermath of the October Revolution,⁷ as well as the recruitment of a sober and cautious driver for the various research expeditions throughout Tajikistan that were organised by the Ahmad Donish Institute during the 1950s.⁸

The archive is noteworthy, not merely as the *Nachlass* of a prominent Russian Orientalist, but as a source of information on a career that was unusually long, varied and centred, for the most part, in Central Asia. Furthermore, almost as exceptional as that career is the extent to which it is documented in the archive. One of the earliest documents in the archive, for example, is a reference that dates from the summer of 1895. Written by the Inspector of People's Vocational Schools of Semenov's home province of Tambov, it attested that the latter had conscientiously administered and taught at an elementary school in Konobeevo between September 1892 and August 1895.⁹ Although the document was essentially merely a formality, it helped to pave the way for Semenov's enrolment at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow and, thereby, for his future career in the colonial administration, as I will show in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Among the latest documents in the archive, in contrast, are the minutes of "the third Annual General Meeting [of the Association Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum], held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, on Thursday December 18th, 1958 [...]."¹⁰ On that day, a small gathering of renowned scholars of Iranian languages and history, namely Walter Bruno Henning, Harold Walter Bailey, Mary Boyce and Vladimir Minorsky, learned of "the death of Professor A.A. Semenov at Tashkent on November 15th, 1958, at the age of 85." On the same occasion, "Professor

⁶ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.7: Letter from Semenov to V.V.Bartol'd on the 23.12.1906.

⁷ A.A.S., b6, f9: Letter from the "Rector of the Turkestan People's University in the city of Tashkent" (Aleksandr Vasil'evich Popov) to the "Civil Commissar (*Gr.[azhdanskii] Komissar*) at the Bukharan Government" from the 25.4.1918.

⁸ A.A.S.b13, f4, Letter from A. Pisarchik to Semenov on the 30.6.1957.

⁹ A.A.S.b13, f2, Reference letter for Semenov from the Inspector of People's Vocational Schools of the Tambov Province (signature illegible) from the 21.8.1895. See also: Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.11.

¹⁰ A.A.S.b13, f12, p.22, Minutes of the third Annual General Meeting of the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, 18.12.1958.

Minorsky¹¹ paid a moving tribute to [his] character and achievements [...].”¹² The Association *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* counted only three Soviet members in its ranks and, of them, only Semenov was based in Central Asia.¹³ His election into this prestigious scholarly association in 1957 (possibly with Minorsky’s assistance) is a sign of the relative liberalisation of the so-called Khrushchev Thaw.¹⁴ At the same time, it attests to Semenov’s extraordinary scholarly success and, more precisely, to his ability to combine the production of high quality scholarship – which tended to be of little direct relevance for the political goals of the Soviet state – with the fulfilment of his more practical duties as an administrator of academic and educational institutions, as an occasional government advisor, and as the author of scholarship that was more politically utilisable.

All in all, the material in the archive gives a vivid impression of Semenov’s intimate knowledge of Central Asian history and of his admiration and enthusiasm for it. At the same time, it also serves as a reminder of the fact that he himself was part of that history for over half a century. An illustration of this is the following excerpt from a letter by Minorsky, who wrote to him from his home in Cambridge in 1957, after four decades of radio silence:

*[...] How well I recall your Chancellery on the right side of the entrance [of the Chancellery of the Turkestan Governor-General in Tashkent], where you would always have something interesting to say. For many years you have been a living history of Turkestan. It is as if I just heard your eloquent and lively speech.*¹⁵

¹¹ Minorsky was a senior Tsarist diplomat, who knew Semenov from his service in Russian Turkestan. Minorsky did not return from his posting to the Russian Legation in Tehran after 1917 and later became Professor of Persian at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. Upon his death in 1966 an obituary in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* hailed him as “a scholar of quite outstanding distinction, whose impact on Oriental Studies will be felt for many generations.” In: Ilya Gershevitch, “Professor Vladimir Minorsky (Obituary),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1/2 (1967), p.53.

¹² A.A.S.b13, f12, p.22, Minutes of the... .

¹³ The other two members were the Leningrad scholars Aleksandr Arnol'dovich Freiman and Igor' Mikhailovich D'iakonov. See: *ibid*.

¹⁴ The archive holds an undated draft letter by Semenov in English, in which he responds to a letter by the CII's secretary, Mary Boyce, from October 1957 to accept his election and apologise for his late reply. See: A.A.S.b13, f12, p.21, draft letter by A.A.Semenov to Mary Boyce, late 1957.

¹⁵ A.A.S., b13, f12, p.5: Letter from V.F.Minorsky to A.A.Semenov on the 6.1.1957.

The only factor diminishing the sense of immediacy and intimacy that permeates this letter is the limited legibility of Minorsky's handwriting. Otherwise, the document is a typical treasure of the Semenov archive: confidential in tone, written by a prominent scholar, and a reminder of the sheer length, versatility and distinction of Semenov's career, of his passion for his subject and of his personal involvement in both the writing and the making of Central Asian history.

Semenov's correspondence

The most useful source of information for this study was Semenov's private and official correspondence (approximately a thousand sheets, i.e. over two thousand pages), which I have read in its entirety, transcribing or summarising most of it. Over two thirds of the correspondence preserved in the archive is incoming, i.e. was written by Semenov's friends, family and colleagues. Most of these letters date from the Soviet period (especially the 1940s and 1950s) and deal primarily with scholarly questions or with organisational and administrative issues within Soviet Oriental Studies. Among Semenov's correspondents were – as Kuznetsova has pointed out – “almost all major Soviet Orientalists [...],” including luminaries of his own generation, such as Vasilii Bartol'd, Sergei Ol'denburg and Ignatii Krachkovskii, as well as younger scholars, such as Abdulghani Mirzoev, Olga Smirnova and Bobojon Ghafurov. Additionally, some letters by foreign academics, such as Charles A. Storey in the UK and Jan Reyman in Poland, have also been preserved.¹⁶ Although I have already analysed all of this material, the present study pays particular attention to documents pertaining to the time between 1895, when Semenov matriculated at the Lazarev Institute, and 1924, the year Tajikistan was established. This focus is not only consistent with the subject of this thesis, but also allows for a more rounded image of Semenov as both a scholar *and* representative of the Tsarist and the Soviet state.

The archive holds markedly fewer letters from the early Soviet period and the 1930s. Those that have been preserved, however, are often rather revealing official documents, such as travel warrants and mandates, which gave Semenov the authority to carry out certain tasks on behalf of various academic and governmental

¹⁶ Nina A. Kuznetsova, “Obzor Arkhiva...”, p.38.

institutions in Soviet Central Asia and, between 1918 and 1920, also in Moscow, Petrograd and Morshansk (where his family lived at the time). These documents provide striking evidence of Semenov's usefulness to the Soviet state in Central Asia. In one letter from April 1918, for example, Aleksandr Popov,¹⁷ the first rector of the Turkestan People's University in Tashkent, informed the "Civil Commissar at the Bukharan Government" that:

*The directorate of the Turkestan People's University (with the approval of the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan region) commands the Manager [zavedyvaiushchii] of the local [tuzemnaia] Chancellery at the Russian Residency in Bukhara, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich SEMENOV, who is currently at your disposal, to travel to the cities of Petrograd and Moscow in connection with the imminent opening of an institution of higher learning in Tashkent.*¹⁸

This was one of Semenov's most critical assignments, allowing him to kill several birds with one stone. His part in helping to gain the support of the authorities in Petrograd and Moscow for the establishment of a university in Tashkent enabled him not only to facilitate the creation of an institution (the future Central Asian State University [SAGU]) that would provide him and many of his friends and colleagues with positions, but also to make vital connections to patrons at the heart of the Soviet government, such as Anatolii Lunacharskii, the People's Commissar for Education, or Ekaterina Kalinina, the wife of Mikhail Kalinin, who would soon be elected as chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.¹⁹ Arguably,

¹⁷ Popov was a graduate of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, who was the rector of the Turkestan People's University between April and December 1918. In the same year, he published an article in the university-newspaper about the importance of teaching God's law [*Zakon Bozhii*], i.e. Russian orthodoxy, in higher education. See: Iurii Flygin, "'Otkryvat' Shkoly vo vsiakom selenii i derevne..." (Pravoslavnye Shkoly i Biblioteki V Turkestanskom Krae) ['Open Schools in Every Settlement and Village...' (Orthodox Schools and Libraries in the Turkestan Region)], *Vostok Svyshe* 29 (2013), p.23.

¹⁸ A.A.S., b6, f9: Letter from the "Rector of the Turkestan People's University"..., 25.4.1918.

¹⁹ In a short auto-biographical outline Semenov explicitly stressed his "gratitude to those members of the central government who greatly facilitated the formation of a university in Central Asia, and who were always very accommodating towards me in this respect, these were the late: Professor M.N. Petrovskii and A.V. Lunacharskii (the Deputy People's Commissar for Education and the People's Commissar for Education), V.D. Bondzh-Bruevich (the Managing Director of the Council of the People's Commissars) N.A.Semashko (People's Commissar of Health), E.I.Kalina (the wife of M.I.Kalinin, who held a position in a certain military institution)." Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.75.

Popov's letter documents the moment in Semenov's life that most firmly set him on the course of a career in the academic, educational and cultural institutions of the Soviet state. Moreover, the SAGU mission set a powerful precedent for a *modus vivendi* between Semenov and the representatives of the Soviet state (in Central Asia), which allowed the former to combine the pursuit and promotion of his academic interests with the political goals of the latter. Evidence of another example of this coalescence of interests is a letter from November 1927, in which the authorities of the fledgling Tajik republic, who had just embarked on a process of abandoning the Arabic script in favour of the Latin one, remunerated Semenov for his "project for a Latin alphabet for the Tajik language" with eighty roubles.²⁰ Last but not least, the Uzbek government, too, regularly secured the services of Semenov. In August, 1938, for instance, the Office for National Economic Accounting (*Narkhozuchet*) of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic instructed him to give his opinion on the "project for a list of nationalities for the preparation of the upcoming All-Union Census of 1939 [...]," which had been devised by the Institute of Ethnography of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences.²¹ Evidently, the learned colonial administrator and graduate of the Lazarev Institute, who had been trained for "practical work in the lands of the East", had little difficulty in finding both new and familiar types of practical work in Soviet Central Asia.²²

As regards the late imperial and early Soviet periods, the best sources of information in the archive are those that have been deposited by Litvinskii and Akramov, who have photocopied some correspondence concerning Semenov's education in Moscow and in the Tambov province. There are, for example, Semenov's letters to Vasilii Bartol'd (approximately 200 double pages, dating from 1904 to 1930) and to Sergei Ol'denburg (11 double pages, dating from 1918 to 1930), which Litvinskii and Akramov have gathered in the archives of the Academy of

²⁰ A.A.S., b6, f9: Letter from the "Central Committee for the new Tajik alphabet at the C[entral] E[xecutive] C[ommittee] of the T[ajik] A[utonomous] SSR" in Samarkand to Semenov from the 13.11.1927. For the latinisation campaign in Tajikistan see Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum Tadschikischen: Sprachliches Handeln Und Sprachplanung in Transoxanien Zwischen Tradition, Moderne Und Sowjetmacht (1900-1956)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001), pp.222ff.

²¹ A.A.S., b6, f9: Letter from the Office for National Economic Accounting (*Narkhozuchet*) of the Uzbek SSR to Semenov from the 20.8.1938.

²² Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.14.

Sciences of the USSR (in Moscow and Leningrad), of the Leningrad Department of the Institute of Archaeology and in those of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow.²³ In particular, Semenov's letters to Bartol'd have been exceptionally valuable for this study, as they have provided information on the former's activities and attitudes as scholar and administrator both before and after the October Revolution. I have quoted them extensively throughout the thesis. Unfortunately, only a handful of letters by Bartol'd have been preserved in the archive. There are almost no other archived examples of Semenov's outgoing correspondence, and to find such correspondence in Russian archives is the task of future research. Notwithstanding these limitations, the work with Semenov's correspondence was by far the most rewarding, but also the most laborious part of the research, not least because it included deciphering the different styles of handwriting of over a hundred different correspondents from a period spanning sixty years (1898-1958).

The archive's viewpoint

In conclusion, it is worth saying a few words about the archive's location and institutional affiliation and how these have influenced its content. The fact that the archive is situated in Tajikistan is indicative not only of Semenov's connection to that country, where he spent the last eight years of his life, but also of his value to the Tajik authorities, which bestowed numerous privileges upon him after his arrival in Stalinabad (as Dushanbe was known at the time) in 1951. Semenov was appointed the first director of the Ahmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, and became a full member of the newly established Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan.²⁴ According to the Tajik historian Ahror Mukhtorov, who was one of Semenov's most eminent doctoral students, Bobojon Ghafurov, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, personally initiated and oversaw this transaction.²⁵ On the whole, the Stalinabad years (1951-

²³ *ibid.*, p.6f.

²⁴ A.A.S., b6, f8, A list of prizes and promotions received by Semenov between 1943 and 1951.

²⁵ Ahror Mukhtorov, *Akademik Bobodzhon Ghafurov* [The Academician Bobojon Ghafurov] (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1998), p.171.

1958) were thus the peak of Semenov's career as a Soviet academic and dignitary (even if they had also been the result of growing political pressure in Tashkent).²⁶ The archive is the product and testimony of Semenov's late and extraordinary professional success and, by the same token, it documents this final stage of his career particularly well. Semenov's *Nachlass* in Dushanbe is thus not a random repository of information about his life and career. Rather it was designed to conserve his legacy as a Soviet academician and the first-ever director of the Ahmad Donish Institute and, consequently, it is somewhat biased towards this representation.²⁷

The obvious downside of the archive's focus on the later stages of Semenov's career (in particular on the Stalinabad years) is that it contains less information about his activities in the early Soviet period and even fewer traces of his role in Russian Turkestan before 1917. The dearth of material covering his background as a colonial administrator seems at least in part to be the result of an attempt to suppress evidence of that aspect of his career. After all, the initial "curator" of the archive was Semenov himself, who kept whatever documents he deemed important for personal or professional reasons and, by the same token, who probably discarded files that he regarded as trivial and, more importantly, as potentially damaging for his career in Soviet academia. In any case, evidence of Semenov's

²⁶ Tajikistan was essentially a refuge for Semenov, whom the Stalinist campaign against so-called rootless cosmopolitans during the late 1940s had forced out of Tashkent. See: Alisher Ilkhamov, "Iakubovskii and Others: Canonizing Uzbek National History", in: Florian Mühlfried and Sergey Sokolovskiy, eds., *Exploring the Edge of Empire: Soviet Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Vol. 25 (Berlin; London: Lit, 2011), pp.251ff. In that sense, Semenov's unprecedented professional promotion in Stalinabad was merely sugaring the bitter pill of having to move from his adopted hometown Tashkent to the much more provincial capital of the southernmost Soviet republic. In the same vein, Sergei Abashin has argued that anti-cosmopolitanism gave those Uzbek historians who were opposed to Semenov and his views an opportunity to accuse him (at a session of the Department of Humanities of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences in 1949) of an "pro-Iranian position [and] anti-Uzbek attitude." See: Sergei Abashin, "Ethnogenesis and Historiography: Historical Narratives for Central Asia in the 1940s and 1950s", in: Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister, eds., *An Empire of Others: Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2014), p.149f. Similarly, Kuznetsova has pointed out that some material in the Semenov archive "bears the marks of the struggle with cosmopolitanism and with bourgeois objectivism that unfolded in the late 1940s in the humanities." Sergei Tolstov, the director of the Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, for instance, accused Semenov of racism and the Tajik branch of the Academy of Sciences of USSR of "an unacceptable act of liberalism" because of the allegedly unacceptable usage of the terms Iranian and Iranian culture in relation to Central Asian history. See: Nina A. Kuznetsova, "Obzor Arkhiva...", p.35f.

²⁷ The archive's official designation as "[t]he scholarly archive of the full member of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR Professor A.A. Semenov" certainly echoes this bias.

proximity to the *ancien régime* is conspicuous by its near absence in the archive – with the crucial exception of the earlier-mentioned pre-revolutionary correspondence that was photocopied by Litvinskii and Akramov (and which I have used extensively for precisely that reason.)

An additional factor discouraging Semenov's colleagues and students at the Ahmad Donish Institute (some of whom were responsible for the establishment of his archive) from documenting the politically delicate issue of his career in the colonial administration must have been the changing political climate of the mid-1950s, which emphasised the Soviet Union's commitment to anti-imperialism.²⁸ Moreover, as part of this ideological agenda, as Kalinovsky has pointed out, Oriental Studies began to play an increasingly important role in "Soviet public diplomacy by presenting the Soviet Union as the defender of cultures that had been subject to European colonialism."²⁹ In this context, it was neither in the interest of Soviet Oriental Studies nor in that of the Union's most senior Orientalist,³⁰ Bobojon Ghafurov, to see a very prominent Soviet Orientalist, who was also a colleague, protégé, friend and the previous director of the Ahmad Donish Institute, being branded as a former coloniser and imperialist. That said, the variety and complexity of the material in the archive is such that it defies any unambiguous definition of Semenov as either a handmaid of empire or as an enlightened intellectual and exemplary Soviet academic. Rather, the material suggests that the defining characteristic of Semenov's entire career in Central Asia was his ability to display (and often combine) both independent initiative as a scholar and conscientiousness

²⁸ Artemy Kalinovsky has argued that "[i]n 1956 the Soviet Union was in the early stages of a sustained push to win allies among the newly independent states." As part of this effort to engage with the Third World, anti-imperialism was becoming a more prominent feature of Soviet ideology, and Central Asia was assigned the propagandist role of showcasing the achievements of Soviet rule to other Muslim societies outside the USSR. See: Artemy Kalinovsky, "Not some British Colony in Africa: The Politics of Decolonization and Modernization in Soviet Central Asia, 1955-1964," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2013), p.191f. For the role of Tashkent as "[...]truly 'high modern' city that would showcase socialism in Asia[...]," see: Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), p.15.

²⁹ Michael Kemper and Artemy M. Kalinovsky, eds., *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2015), p.2.

³⁰ In 1956 Ghafurov swapped his post as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan for that of Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. See: Iraj Bashiri, *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century* (Dushanbe: Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan & International Borbad Foundation, 2002), p.86.

in the fulfilment of his official duties in the colonial administration and later in Soviet academia.

CHAPTER I – The Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages

The seeds of Semenov's future career in Central Asia were sown in the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. The knowledge and skills he gained and the acquaintances he made there would serve him well in his career in the colonial administration and subsequently in Soviet academia. Established in Moscow in 1815 by the Lazarev (Lazarian) family of Iranian-Armenian noble origin, initially to educate Armenian children, the institute had by the beginning of the twentieth century become Russia's foremost institution for the preparation of government administrators for "practical work in the lands of the East."¹ According to David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, the institute was "modeled on St. Petersburg's orientology curriculum, but with a much more practical orientation."² Its main objective was the training of "dragomans and consular officials [...] in Arabic, Persian and Turco-Tatar, with optional courses in Armenian and Georgian."³ Consequently the institute focussed on concrete Orientalist skills that were useful to the colonial administration, in particular in Central Asia, and to the imperial diplomatic service. However, Semenov's years there (1895-1900) coincided with the directorship (1897-1911) of the distinguished scholar Vsevolod Miller, who put more emphasis on academic training and on less "practical" subjects such as the ancient Persian language and comparative linguistics.⁴ With hindsight, the well-known Russian Orientalist Ignatii Krachkovskii commented that "towards the advent of the new century the scholarly standard of the graduates of the Lazarev Institute began to rise significantly."⁵ As a result, the institute was to become the alma mater of many distinguished Russian Orientalists, such as Nikolai Ashmarin (a leading specialist in Turkic languages, and in particular, Chuvash, with which he grew up, who graduated

¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Oчерk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.14.

² Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.176.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.12 and 14.

⁵ Ignatii Krachkovskii, *Die Russische Arabistik: Umrisse Ihrer Entwicklung* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1957), p.165.

in 1894);⁶ Kharlampii Baranov (the author of an authoritative Arabic-Russian dictionary, who graduated in 1915);⁷ Bentsion Grande (a trained physician who entered the institute around 1910 and became head of the department of Arabic at Moscow University in 1947);⁸ the specialist on Ottoman history, Vladimir Gordlevskii, and the historian of Persia, Vladimir Minorskii, (whose careers will be examined in more detail below); Agafangel Krymskii (an important figure in the popularisation of academic Oriental Studies in Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century, who, despite his great professional knowledge, had an equally racist and influential vision of Islamic history and societies and who began teaching at the institute in 1898);⁹ and Boris V. Miller (the son of the institute's director, Vsevolod Miller, and himself a specialist on Iranian philology, with a particular interest in the Talysh and Tat dialects).¹⁰ For Semenov, Krachkovskii found the following words:

*To the cohort of 1900 belonged the outstanding adept at the history of Central Asia, the scholar of Iranian philology [...] Semenov [...], our prime authority in the field of the history of the Ismaili movement, whose works have made formidable material concerning Islamic studies accessible to scholarship. The ones that deal with manuscripts located in Central Asia, particularly Arabic ones, belong to the most outstanding scholarly achievements.*¹¹

With some of the above-mentioned scholars, such as Gordlevskii, Minorskii, Miller and indeed with Krachkovskii himself, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich would remain in touch for the rest of his life, partly for sentimental, partly for pragmatic reasons. But in all cases, the Lazarev Institute played a key role in fostering professional and personal networks of scholars and diplomats, and a sense of community between

⁶ N. I. Ashmarin, "Chuvashskaia Narodnaia Slovesnost, Moe Zhizneopisanie (Chuvash People's Literature, My Life)," http://www.nbchr.ru/virt2/pdf/1.1.1_ashmarin.pdf (accessed 27.3.2014).

⁷ Noel' Karibovich Usmanov, "Patriarkh Rossiiskoi Arabistiki (the Patriarch of Russian Arabic Philology)," *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta (Moscow State Institute of International Relations)* 3, no. 24 (2012), p.244f.

⁸ Jack Miller, *Jews in Soviet Culture* (New Brunswick [N.J.], U.S.A.: Transaction Books, 1984), p.281.

⁹ Ignatii Krachkovskii, *Die Russische Arabistik...*, p.163.

¹⁰ For a sympathetic account of Krymskii's efforts to popularise and advance Oriental Studies in Russia see: *ibid.*, p.166ff; For a critical approach to Krymskii's legacy see: Mark Batunsky, "Racism in Russian Islamology: Agafangel Krymskii," *Central Asian Survey* 11, no. 4 (1992), 75-84.

¹¹ Krachkovskii, I.F. (1957): *Die Russische Arabistik...*, p.166.

them, which in many cases outlasted the political and personal convolutions of the decades to come.

The institute, the establishment and state control

Since higher education was the path to higher office, better pay and to more influence, the state took an interest in who would receive one. The Lazarev Institute was no exception in this. This seemingly inconspicuous institution was extremely well connected with the political elite of imperial Russia. Both the institute's director in the years between 1856 and 1861, Nikolai D. Delianov, and his brother Ivan Davidovich — who from 1866 onwards was Assistant to the Minister of Enlightenment (Dmitrii A. Tolstoi) and who would take over that position himself in 1882, and hold it until his death in 1897 — were close relatives of the Lazarev family. In 1870 Tolstoi personally functioned as the institute's head and patron (*glavno-nachal'stvuiushchii*).¹² Unsurprisingly thus Semenov's academic merit and personal motivation alone did not translate into a place at the Lazarev Institute. First, a reference from the Ministry of People's Enlightenment about the young student's political reliability had to be produced. Conveniently for him, in mid-September 1895, such a reference letter reached the Director of the Lazarev Institute. It read:

*I (the Inspector of People's Vocational Schools of the Tambov Province, MB) have the honour to bring to Your Excellency's awareness, that the Chancellery of the Directorate of People's Vocational Schools of the Tambov Province [Guberniia] has at its disposal an attestation from the Governor of Tambov about the political reliability of the free student (vol'nyi slushatel') of the Lazarev Institute, the former teacher (...) Aleksandr Semenov.*¹³

To put this political clearance-letter into context one should remember that, in the face of an increasing political polarisation among Russian intellectuals towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Tsarist secret police and the Ministry of Education took extra care to control and supervise the political mood at the empire's

¹² Ashot Baziiants, *Lazarevskii Institut V Istorii Otechestvennogo Vostokovedeniia [The Lazarev Institute in the history of national Oriental Studies]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p.87.

¹³ A.A.S., b13, f3, p3: Letter from the Inspector of People's Vocational Schools of the Tambov Province (signature illegible) to the Director of the Lazarevskii Institute (Vsevolod Miller) from the 15.9.1895.

academic institutions. The charter of imperial Russian universities from 1884, for example, obliged any prospective lecturer to sign a statement, to confirm that he did not belong to “any Masonic lodges or to other secret societies, under whatever names they may exist.”¹⁴ In subsequent years the situation only grew more tense, so that towards the end of Semenov’s studies at the Lazarev Institute, in 1899, the Russian Ministry of the Interior placed a total of 184 “politically suspicious” academics under secret surveillance at the University of St. Petersburg alone.¹⁵ When a wave of student unrest shook the university in the same year, several professors suspected of sympathising with the students were sacked, prompting the resignation of the renowned Russian Indologist Sergei Fedorovich Ol’denburg (1863-1934), who wrote to his teacher Viktor Rozen: “Obviously when men with whom I am *in full solidarity* are expelled from the universities, I cannot stay there anymore [...]”¹⁶ Rather than marking the end of his academic career, however, Ol’denburg’s resignation was followed by his election into the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences, where there was a vacancy in the Sanskrit chair.¹⁷ For the rest of his life, his career would remain closely linked with the fate of the academy. He was appointed its permanent secretary in 1904, and after 1917 he became the main architect of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a strong defender of the institution’s academic freedom, which ultimately led to his dismissal from the post of the academy’s permanent secretary in 1929. Although Ol’denburg spent the nights following his dismissal sleeping fully dressed (in anticipation of his arrest by the secret police), he was rehabilitated in the following year and appointed head of the newly established Institute of Oriental Studies – a post in which he remained until his death in 1934.¹⁸ Ol’denburg seems to have played an important role in helping Semenov to refashion himself as a Soviet academic in the aftermath of 1917, as I have mentioned in the introduction. Given the positive outcome of Semenov’s political clearance-process, it

¹⁴ Mikhail Gribovskii, “Politicheskii Nadzor Nad Professorami i Prepodavateli Rossiiskikh Universitetov V Kontse XIX- Nachale XX Veka (the Political Supervision of Professors and Lecturers of Russian Universities at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries),” *Vestnik Tomskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, no. 1 (2011), p.25

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.28.

¹⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David, *Russian Orientalism...*, pp.193ff.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

seems unlikely that he was part of any secret societies, or that he had expressed any sympathies for them or any criticism of the political status quo. Unlike Ol'denburg, who was of noble origin and thus part of the elites he criticised, Semenov was not, and rather than subverting the elites of the day, he was eager to join them. It is somewhat ironic that, while Semenov greatly benefited from his acquaintance with Ol'denburg after the October Revolution, in 1895 it most likely would have had a detrimental effect on his application to the Lazarev Institute. Unsurprisingly, his Soviet biographers, despite being aware of this clearance-letter in the 1970s, were little inclined to quote from it, so as not to portray Semenov as the ambitious young conformist he apparently was.

The curriculum — knowledge, skills and social upward mobility

Most students at the Lazarev Institute took part in the basic (*gimnazicheskie*) courses, which educated them to a secondary school level and qualified them for university entry. But these courses were of little interest to Semenov, who had already received his secondary education (mainly in theology) at the Ekaterinsk pedagogical institute in Tambov not far from his birthplace of Pol'noe Konobeevo in the Shatsk District (*uezd*) of the northern Tambov province.¹⁹ In addition to that, the Lazarev Institute offered special courses in modern Oriental languages (and history), which lasted three years and were comparable to a university education in Oriental Studies (albeit one with a more practical and contemporary outlook). The number of classes taught in those three years actually exceeded the amount of tuition given during a four-year degree at Petersburg University's Oriental faculty.²⁰ This more specialised and potentially more lucrative part of the curriculum proved more attractive to the young Aleksandr Aleksandrovich. However, after his graduation from the Ekaterinsk institute in September 1892, Semenov was legally obliged to work for three years as the head [*zavedyvaiushchii*] of an elementary school in Konobeevo (presumably, in order to recompense the state for the cost of his

¹⁹ Nina Kuznetsova, ed., *Iran: Sbornik Statei* [Iran: An anthology of articles], (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p.29.

²⁰ Ashot Baziiants, *Lazarevskii Institut Vostochnykh Iazykov: Istoricheskii Ocherk* [The Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages: a historical outline] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1959), p.34; and Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.11ff.

education).²¹ Once his contract there ended he immediately travelled approximately 400 kilometres to Moscow in order to apply to the Lazarev Institute. Upon arrival at Moscow's Hotel Switzerland on 31 August 1895 he sent a letter to "His Excellency the Director [V.F. Miller, MB] of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages" asking to be allowed to enlist as an "external student [*storonnii slushatel'*]" in the institute's special courses in "Turkish-Tatar, Persian and French."²²

Before addressing the question of what might have motivated Semenov to learn these specific languages, I would like to ask why he applied as an external student. The latter were applicants from outside the Lazarev Institute, who were interested exclusively in its special courses in Oriental languages and for whom evening classes had been introduced in 1886. Most of these externals came from Moscow University; in the case of the first cohort of graduates in 1899, for instance, ten out of sixteen students were matriculated at that university. The standard of tuition must have been sufficiently high to attract students from such a prestigious institution. Moreover, at a tuition fee of five roubles each subject per annum the evening classes were relatively affordable, giving students the opportunity to earn some money during the day.²³ It is unclear whether such financial considerations were a factor in Semenov's decision to apply as an external student, since we know so little about his family background. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich was certainly not the peasant's son most Soviet accounts portray him to be. He contributed to this hagiography of a Soviet academician of humble descent by claiming that he was born "into the family of a former serf" and that his father had been a soldier who died during his infancy, while his mother (Aleksandra Ivanovna) just about managed to secure an education for him.²⁴ However, in the different political climate of the late nineteenth century, Semenov had given a divergent account of his descent: "My father and mother (were) merchants of the 1. guild. They busied themselves with commerce," he wrote as a young student in 1899, adding that his father went bankrupt before his death and that his ancestors "held various positions at the court

²¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.11.

²² A.A.S., b13, f3, p7: Letter from Semenov to Vsevolod Miller from the 31.8.1895.

²³ Ashot Bazilians, *Lazarevskii Institut Vostochnykh...*, p.39.

²⁴ In 1899 Semenov wrote that "after father's death it was only thanks to the frugality of my mother and to her art of living that I received a genuine education." See: Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.10.

of the Qasim Kingdom,²⁵ resigning themselves to the situation and to the increased Russian colonisation of the country they converted to Orthodoxy and changed their Tatar surname to a Russian one.”²⁶ Both accounts reflect the political climate of their day; the former is an outright denial of his family’s relatively privileged position in society, the latter an attempt to emphasise this very privilege. It certainly did not go amiss to stress that one came from a “good family” when seeking employment in the Tsarist diplomatic corps at the turn of the century. However, after 1917 it was essential to deny such a thing lest to be branded a class enemy. As merchants, Semenov’s parents had been part of the business elite of urban Russia, the more so as they belonged to the first guild. Merchants were divided and organised in three guilds in accordance with the value of their declared capital. The requirement for membership of the first guild was a capital of 10,000 roubles (and 5,000 and 1,000 roubles for the second and third guilds, respectively). With this membership came other privileges, such as the right to permanent passports and thus to freely move and trade throughout the territory of Russia.²⁷ At the same time, it seems that Semenov was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth and the story about his father’s bankruptcy is, in all probability, accurate. Why would he have made it up? Why did he apply for the affordable evening courses instead of the surely more prestigious regular ones? And most importantly, why else was he considered a *meshchanin*²⁸ in official correspondence?²⁹ According to a contemporary edition of the Russian *Brockhaus* encyclopaedia, *meshchane* were “people of the middle kind” who belonged to “the lower category of town-dwellers” — typically hucksters, artisans or day-labourers — who did not have sufficient funds (500 roubles) to be

²⁵ The Qasim Khanate was a Tatar khanate and vassal of Russia, which existed from the second half of the 15th to the second half of the 17th century along the Oka river in the north-eastern parts of modern Ryazan region. See: “Kasimovskoe Tsarstvo” (the Qasimov Kingdom). <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/es/26352/Касимовское> (accessed 11/30, 2013).

²⁶ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.9f.

²⁷ Elena Apkarimova, “The role of the business elite in the social, economic and cultural life of the Russian provincial city”, in: Robert Lee, *Commerce and Culture: Nineteenth-Century Business Elites* (Farnham (Ashgate): 2011), p.200.

²⁸ From Polish *mieszczanin* for burgher or townsman.

²⁹ A.A.S., b13, f3, p5: Letter from V.F. Miller to the fiscal office of the Tambovsk Province from the 31.5.1900.

included in the merchantry.³⁰ *Meshchane* belonged to the taxable estate (*podatnoe soslovie/sostoianie*) whose legal rights and financial situation had somewhat improved only recently (in the mid-nineteenth century they were excluded from corporal punishment and, in 1866, freed from the poll tax (*podushnaia podat'*). Whatever Semenov's financial situation was in 1895, it did not allow for a lengthy and costly university education.

The evening courses at the Lazarev Institute must have seemed an attractive alternative to university. They were shorter, cheaper and its graduates were relatively employable. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, Aleksei Orlov, the head of the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery — essentially the Tsarist secret police — is reported to have demanded “to put off (*otvrashchat'*)” graduates of the Lazarev Institute from applying to universities by offering them stipends and other benefits after graduation.³¹ This was meant to ensure that enough *Lazarevtsy* would enter the government service (for some, this was an obligation); but Orlov's reasoning also reflected the imperial government's suspicion towards the universities as places that were deemed to be freethinking and potentially subversive. This suggests that *Lazarevtsy* had certain advantages when it came to entering government service, compared to their more politically suspicious peers from university. Graduation from the institute was thus accompanied by rewards in terms of social upward mobility that were not inferior to those of university graduates. According to the institute's charter from 1848, graduates of the special courses enjoyed the same rights and privileges as those of Petersburg's Oriental faculty: the 12th (exceptionally the 10th) rank in the table of ranks (ranging from 1 to 14).³² Such an exception was made for Aleksandr Aleksandrovich and, upon his graduation in the spring of 1900, the institute's director Vsevolod Miller requested the fiscal office of the Tambov region to exclude “the *meshchanin* of Shatsk Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov [...],” who “graduated from the course of Special Classes at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages with the right to a rank

³⁰ “Meshchane (Townsfolk).” http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz_efron/67213/Мещане (accessed 11/30, 2013).

³¹ Ashot Baziiants, *Lazarevskii Institut Vostochnykh...*, p.25.

³² *ibid.*

of the tenth grade [...] from the taxable estate (*podatnoe sostoianie*).”³³ The ordinary *meshchanin* Aleksandr Aleksandrovich had thus risen out of the estate he was born into and become a collegiate secretary (*kollezhskii sekretar'*) — a rank that meant higher social status and certain legal and financial (tax) benefits. The *kollezhskii sekretar'* was, of course, also a figure much ridiculed in Russian literature. In Anton Chekhov's 1886 short story *The Exclamation Mark*, for instance, one such *sekreter'*, Efim Fomich, while at an evening party that discusses the virtues of education, is taken by surprise when asked about his educational credentials. Chekhov writes:

- *Let's just take your example, Efim Fomich, [...] you are holding a respectable position... but what kind of education did you receive?*

- *None. Oh but we don't need an education [...]. If you can write correctly, that's about it.*³⁴

All ranks within the bureaucratic system were regularly lampooned, especially the junior levels. While Anton Chekhov and some of his enlightened readers might have duly laughed at the *kollezhskii sekretar'*, for the young Semenov, his promotion must have been a cause for celebration and pride. It was his entrance ticket to rise higher in the table of ranks and social status and to climb the ladder of the governmental service. It is clear he was determined to make the most of it, for despite being offered a post as Turkish lecturer in the Lazarev Institute, he chose instead to try his luck as a colonial administrator in Central Asia.³⁵

A cosmopolitan classroom in Moscow

“In the Lazarev Institute I found what I had been looking for: I had an opportunity to satisfy my curiosity, and I studied Oriental languages more or less adequately.”³⁶ This is how Semenov laconically summarised his experience of his education in Moscow towards the end of his studies in 1899. The tuition, not only in Turkish (Tatar),

³³ A.A.S., b13, f3, p5: Letter from V.F. Miller to the fiscal office of the Tambovsk Province from the 31.5.1900.

³⁴ Anton Chekhov, “‘Vosklitsatel'nyi Znak’ (the Exclamation Mark),” *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka “Russkaia literatura i fol'klor”* (The Fundamental Digital Library “Russian literature and folklore”), <http://feb-web.ru/feb/chekhov/texts/sp0/sp4/sp4-266-.htm> (accessed 11/30, 2013).

³⁵ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.30.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.11.

Persian and French, but also in Chagatai and Arabic, could hardly have been achieved without some compromise regarding the general standard to which these languages were taught at the institute. Nonetheless, Semenov's statement seems to underestimate the influence his training there had on his scholarly views and preferences. Moreover, it completely fails to account for the social aspect of his student years in Moscow. At this early stage in his life Semenov was probably not yet aware of the extent to which his student years had affected him. Furthermore, he was eager to leave the institute behind and enter professional life and to. But this changed towards the end of his life, when nostalgia for his youth, Stalin's death and the subsequent Khrushchev Thaw made it possible for him to write a more elaborate and sympathetic account of his time at the Lazarev Institute. In the unpublished manuscript *From my Distant Student Years — Recollections of the Academician Korsh* Semenov pays tribute to the cosmopolitan and vibrant community of scholars and students at the Lazarev Institute. First of all, the text is a laudatory recollection of Fedor Evgen'evich Korsh (1843-1915), whom Semenov much revered as a teacher and philologist, and whom he praised as the "[...] great enchanter of all male and female humanists" and a "Russian Mezzofanti"³⁷ (after the famed Bolognese cardinal, linguist and professor of Arabic). This reference to the eminent theologian is not coincidental but reflects Semenov's own academic interest in the history of religion which, because of the atheism at the heart of Marxist ideology, was, of course, a topic he had to handle with kid gloves or even avoid altogether for most of the Soviet period. Accordingly, in this manuscript too, Semenov felt impelled to assert that Korsh was "not a religious person at all" and that "[...] notwithstanding his irreligiousness, [he] read the 'church fathers' both of the Latin West and of the Byzantine East."³⁸ But clearly, his teacher's erudition in the history and dogma of religions impressed Semenov and shaped his ideal of a scholar and as a humanist philologist, who was intellectually at home both in occidental and Oriental literature and history.

³⁷ A.A.S., b1, f14, p.3: 'Iz moikh dalekikh studencheskikh let, Vospominaniia ob akademike Korshe' (From my distant student-years, Recollections of the academician Korsh).

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.4.

The Lazarev Institute not only conveyed a certain ideal of a scholar and of scholarship to Semenov, it equally inspired and cultivated his admiration for the Persian language and literature. Fittingly, *From my Distant Student Years* begins with a humorous account of a Persian class and of his Isfahani lecturer, Mirza Ja'far, whose recitations of Persian poetry Semenov described particular vividly:

There are two ways or methods to translate: one, so to say, crude and mostly based on feelings and on temperament; and the other one, rooted in the standard of high science. Our Persian lecturer Mirza Ja'far was in his own way an educated Persian, quite close to Iran's and Moscow's world of commerce and finance and the author of a textbook for the Persian language. In one of our Persian conversation classes we dealt with a poem by Hafez:

[... Semenov quotes the poem in Persian and then gives a Russian translation:]

*One early morning I walked into the garden to pick a rose,
When suddenly the trilling of the nightingale reached my ear, etc.*

At once the respected M. Ja'far fell into a mood of exaltation:

- 'Gentlemen, how well has spoken monsieur Hafez from Shiraz! There is subtlety of meaning here, and I will try to explain it to you in Russian.'

[... Semenov quotes Mirza Ja'far's translation, which is in flowery yet incorrect Russian.]

Our tutor rolls his eyes, puts his hand on his heart and slightly shakes his head.

- 'The poor thing, just like your humble servant it suffer from love for rose. The rose is a tyrant and pierces his bottom with her needle. And my nightingale does like this...'

Here, he thrusts open his jacket widely, his hands glide underneath his waistcoat and his starched shirt creaks mercilessly at the scratch of his long fingernails.

Someone sitting on the school bench in front of me is pulling my coat relentlessly, and from behind I can hear the choking of suppressed laughter. The strong smell of French Houbigant tells me that a handkerchief has been pulled out, and immediately follows the sound of someone blowing his nose

to prevent bursting into laughter. I am glancing to the left at my colleague Gvineev, [... who now] is bending down and diligently searching for something on the floor. Only his shaking shoulders give away the fact that he is nearly suffocating from laughter. I suppose that even in his later career as a popular lawyer he didn't have that much fun.

- 'Well, gentlemen — our tutor continued enthusiastically the translation of the Persian lyrical poet — don't even think that nightingale was able to erase its love from its soul!'

And here he lowered his voice to a sweet whisper:

- 'Oh, little rose, you are my [...] sweetheart, why did you hurt me with your thorn in a certain sensual place!'

Someone from behind is pinching me, and from the benches at the back blares a sound somehow reminiscent of the neighing of a young donkey. The popular lawyer to be [...] has tears of laughter shooting out of his eyes. And even the future academician Gordlevskii — otherwise a gloomy nature — hides his face behind his hand, his whole body shaking as if in a shivering fit. The last lines of the ghazal resonate in the room.

- 'Oh, Hafez!' -

Our tutor lets out a deep sigh like blacksmith's bellows and his eyes roll back showing only the whites. Waving his hand in a gesture of desperation, which seems to instantly darken the magnificent turquoise in his golden diamond-ring (a gift of Nasser al-Din Shah), Mirza Ja'far exclaims:

- 'Oh, Hafez, you are also faithful, and you suffer like nightingale. And like nightingale you have been wounded by love in a...'

It's plain to everyone which place, but one of us can't hold himself and prompts in an artificial bass voice:

- 'In one sensual place!'

To which Mirza Ja'far responds with a coquettish wave of a his hand:

- 'Exactly, gentlemen!'

At this point the bell saved us. And as the door closes behind our lecturer the unnaturally long suppressed giggle turned into a deafening Homeric laughter.”³⁹

Even without going into a detailed literary analysis, the whole anecdote proves to be Orientalist (in the Saidian sense of creating a “systematic difference” between a “rational [...and...] superior” West and an Orient, “which is aberrant [...and...] inferior”⁴⁰). First of all, Semenov resorts to the stereotype of the emotional (and hence irrational) ‘Oriental’. Secondly, he later juxtaposes Mirza Ja’far’s emotionality and subjectivity with the scientific precision of Korsh’s translation of Persian poetry, which proves to impress even Semenov’s Persian bench neighbour:

Sitting next to me was the elegant Mirza Hasan Khan, the future Persian Extraordinary Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary at the court in Petersburg but for now merely an unknown student in his 4th year at Moscow University’s law faculty, who was hopelessly infatuated with mademoiselle Semen (the daughter of the French language lecturer at the Lazarev gymnasium). He nudged me and whispered:

- ‘This is music to my ears! In the whole of Iran nobody has a clue how to recite our poems. My God, what a delight!’⁴¹

Another student too, compares Mirza Ja’far’s interpretation and recitation skills quite unfavourably to the alleged mastery of Korsh’s performance:

At this moment our enfant terrible, the Constantinopolitan Armenian Bedrosov, suddenly jumped from his seat and, mixing Russian, French and Turkish words, proclaimed with passion:

- ‘Fedor Evgen’evich, dear teacher, dare I ask why in your case everything works out so splendidly, while in Mirza Ja’far’s it doesn’t?’

While saying this Bedrosov spread his arms in a helpless gesture, his huge dark eyes filled with excitement. I wonder whether the hapless Bedrosov ever again felt such exaltation and admiration in his future political career (during which he

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.1f.

⁴⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p.300.

⁴¹ ‘A.A.S., b1, f14, p.3f.

would head the Turkish Dashnak [Armenian Revolutionary Federation] Committee and which ended tragically).⁴²

For entertainment's sake Semenov repeatedly and, I think, consciously employed Orientalist tropes, such as Bedrosov's dark eyes, his impulsiveness and slight confusion. This indicates that — in Semenov's mind — such tropes were married, not so much to Islam, as they were to "the East" in general, and that they were more a stylistic device than an objective description of reality. Mirza Hasan Khan's infatuation, excitement and elegance as well as his acceptance of the notion that Western scholarship knows the Orient better than its inhabitants do themselves all this taps into the same Orientalist vein. Therefore, while Semenov's account is hugely sympathetic towards his Persian and Armenian contemporaries at the Lazarev Institute, it is also patronising. That said, the text quoted above has to be seen in the context of its time. The Orientalist and slightly condescending nuances are at least as much the expression of the author's prejudice, as they are stylistic devices, which aim to convey the exoticism of the cosmopolitanism at the Lazarev Institute, and its community of students from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds and with various career-prospects. This style is supposed to highlight how different a place his alma mater had become since his "distant student years." The mockery of Mirza Ja'far and the reference to his connections to the "world of commerce and finance" and to the "gift of Nasser al-Din Shah" are not so much a critique of his bourgeois teacher and institute, but expressions of affection that are permeated by a sense of nostalgia and attachment to that bygone era.

Another alumnus of the Lazarev Institute who shared Semenov's sentimentality and who had, incidentally, been taught by the same Persian tutor, was Vasilii P. Nikitin. Twelve years Semenov's junior, the latter served as a Russian diplomat in Iranian Azerbaijan (Rasht, Tabriz, Urmia) and in Tehran between 1912 and 1919, when he left the Persian capital for Paris never to return to Russia.⁴³ Because of his status as an émigré, Nikitin was less constrained by ideology in his

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba V Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve (1906-1920 Gg.): Rossiiskaia Diplomatiia V Sud'bakh* [Vice-Consul Vvedenskii: Service in Persia and in the Bukharan Khanate (1906-1920): Russian diplomacy in destinies] (Moskva: Izdat. Sotsial'no-Politicheskaia Mysl', 2003), p.264.

judgement of his teacher's character. Around the same time that Semenov penned his memories of the Lazarev Institute, Nikitin wrote:

*Mirza Ja'far, who was the teacher of Persian literacy and a clever and witty man, occasionally welcomed us in his home. At these personal, warm and unpretentious receptions our teachers were present as well, and a sincere intimacy developed between us.*⁴⁴

Had Semenov written his reminiscences in Paris instead of Stalinabad, they would have probably sounded similar. Nothing suggests that he, a young student from the Russian province, had a less affectionate relationship with his teachers, including Mirza Ja'far, in whom he must have seen more than merely an eccentric Persian lecturer. In the first part of his *Along the borders of Bukhara and Afghanistan* (1902), Semenov describes an episode from his travels in the region in 1898, in which he states that, while returning to his quarters from a stroll through the town of Kulob/Kulyab in Eastern Bukhara (contemporary Tajikistan), he encountered a group of Peshawari merchants and moneylenders whom he had met earlier at the bazaar, conversing over tea with his fellow travellers on the balcony of his lodgings. One of the merchants, who was well versed in Persian history and claimed to be of royal Sassanid descent, claimed to have converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam primarily for the sake of commercial advantages. A discussion about the meaning of religion ensued and Semenov asked him:

- *"Very well, but what is left for the afterlife? – I [Semenov] mockingly asked this apparent custodian of worldly goods.*
- *Has anybody seen the afterlife? A wise man once said: 'nobody ever came to us from heaven or hell to tell us what it's like.' And there is nothing to object to that [...], the merchants replied.*
- *That's from Khayyām, I [Semenov] said – and if you add to this the words of Hafiz: 'What do I care for either heaven or hell and the people and celestials therein?'*
- *Oh, how educated you are, Ottoman [Semenov is wearing a fez and hence mistaken for a Turk]! – the 'progeny of Yazdagird' replied in a sarcastic tone.*

⁴⁴ Vasilii Nikitin, *Irānī Kih Man Shanākhatah-Am (the Iran that I Knew)*, trans. Muhammad 'Ali Farahvashi (Tehran: Ma'refat, 1941), p.14.

[...]

*How could I not be educated, I [Semenov] am thinking! Such 'verselets' I have been taught by my venerable tutor, a Persian from Isfahan while still in school."*⁴⁵

The teacher Semenov had in mind was, of course, Mirza Ja'far, whose educational legacy in the form of popular Persian literary heritage might not have always met the highest academic standards, but which certainly served Semenov well in his career in the colonial administration – in particular, so suggests the text, in situations like the one portrayed above, in which he had to stand his ground and show that he had learned the 'sophisticated Oriental ways' of these 'cunning and suspicious' British subjects.

But lessons in Persian poetry were not the only thing Mirza Ja'far had to offer. The latter — his full name appears to have been Ja'far Mohammad Hussain Rezazadeh Mahallati (Sayyah)⁴⁶ — was a well-known personality in Moscow and a valuable source of information and potential professional connections for any of his students. He had left Iran in the early 1870s to travel the world and eventually settle in Moscow, where he found employment at the Lazarev Institute.⁴⁷ According to some authors, he became a Russian subject in 1875⁴⁸ and accepted the Christian name Artemii Ter-Zakharov after his conversion.⁴⁹ His brother Mirza Mohammad Ali Mahallati — who would later be known as Hajj Sayyah (meaning "The Traveller") because of his extensive travels around the world — was a well-known personality

⁴⁵ Aleksandr Semenov, "Po Granitsam' Bukhary i Afganistana: Putevye Ocherki 1898 G. Chast' I (Along the Borders of Bukhara and Afghanistan: Travel Notes of 1898. Part I)", *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 87 (1902), 961-992. p.990f.

⁴⁶ Rezazadeh stands for "the son of Reza"; Mahallati, for "from the town of Mahallat" (Qom Province, southwest of Tehran); and Sayyah (lit. the Traveller) is a name given to him in honour of his brother, the famous Iranian political activists and world traveller known as Hajj Sayyah.

⁴⁷ Alireza Hezar, "Daneshmandan Va Mashahir-E Haram-E Hazrat-E Abd Al Azim Hasani Va Shahr-E Rey (the Scholars and Luminaries of the Abd Al Azim Hasani Shrine and of the Town of Rey)," *Sazman-e Chap va Nashr-e Dar Al Hadis*, <http://www.hadith.net/post/2351/حضرت-حرم-مشارع-ایرو-ودان-شمن-دان/2/p401/> (accessed 12/3, 2015).

⁴⁸ Ashot Baziiants, *Lazarevskii Institut V...*, p.97. According to Baziiants, Mirza Ja'far was also known under the name Kir'iakos Solomonovich Demirza. There seems to be much confusion about his name.

⁴⁹ Jores Ananian, "Lazarevskii Institut Vostochnykh Iazykov V Pervoi Polovine XIX Veka (the Lazarevskii Institute of Oriental Languages in the First Half of the 19th Cent.)," *Patma-Banasirakan Handes*, no. 1-2 (1998), p.70.

and an influential figure during the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911).⁵⁰ On a journey to Moscow in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, during which Tsar Alexander II received him, Hajj Sayyah also visited the institute at which his brother was teaching.⁵¹ And when the famous Muslim intellectual and political activist Jamal-al-din al-Afghani visited Moscow in 1887 to seek Russian support against Great Britain, Mirza Ja'far was asked by this brother — an adherent of Jamal-al-din⁵² — to assist the latter during his stay in the city.⁵³ Hence, the mentioning of Mirza Ja'far in Jamal-al-din's letters from Moscow, which has led some Iranian scholars to emphasise (and possibly overstate) that Mirza Ja'far "was not only a simple teacher (*mo'alle-m-e-sadeh*) at the Lazarev school, but that he was occasionally involved in political matters as well, and that from such stemmed his relationship with the Seyyed (Jamal-al-din, MB)."⁵⁴

Regardless of how sympathetic Mirza Ja'far might have been to political reforms in his native Persia, when the October Revolution struck in Russia he was not pleased: "After the endurance of emotional distress and the confiscation of my property — which had been the result of 50 years of hard work — a year has passed since I have entered the fortunate capital of Tehran by the grace of the kind Lord."⁵⁵ Ironically, however, Mirza Ja'far's Moscow-born daughter Fatemeh Sayyah — who was fifteen at the time of the Revolution of 1917 and who, at forty, would become the first female professor at the university of Tehran⁵⁶ — was much more favourably inclined towards the Soviet Union. During the 1940s she worked side by side with the influential Iranian intellectual, Said Nafisi, at the journal *Payam-e Naw* (The New Message), which was published by the *Iranian Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR*. Nafisi was the society's secretary and the journal's editor, and Sayyah —

⁵⁰ Ali Ferdowsi, "ḤĀJJ SAYYĀḤ," Encyclopædia Iranica, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hajj-sayyah> (accessed 11/21, 2013).

⁵¹ Muḥammad 'Alī Sayyāḥ, *An Iranian in Nineteenth Century Europe: The Travel Diaries of Haj Sayyah, 1859-1877*, trans. Mehrbanoo Beyhin Nasser (Bethesda, Md.: IBEX Publishers, 1998), p.315.

⁵² Roxane Haag-Higuchi, "An Iranian in Nineteenth Century Europe: The Travel Diaries of Haj Sayyah 1859-1877 (Review)," *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 1/2 (2000), p.259.

⁵³ Muḥammad 'Alī Sayyāḥ Mahallātī and Ḥamīd Sayyāḥ, *Khāṭirāt-i Hājj-i Sayyāḥ, Yā Dawrah-i Khawf Va Vahshat* [The memoirs of Haj Sayyah, or: The period of fear and terror] (Tehran: Ibn-i Sina, 1967), p. 294.

⁵⁴ Alireza Hezar, "Daneshmandan Va Mashahir... .

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.92.

fluent in Russian and versed in Russian literature — was a valuable member of the journal's editorial board.⁵⁷ Moreover, Fatemeh's husband, Hamid Sayyah (the son of Hajj Sayyah and Mirza Ja'far's nephew), had served as an emissary to Russia before the Revolution of 1917,⁵⁸ studied law at Moscow University in the 1920s and was appointed Iran's ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1947.⁵⁹

There are no letters by Mirza Ja'far (nor by anyone from his family) in Semenov's archive in Dushanbe. But the example of the Sayyah family nonetheless illustrates that the academic community at the Lazarev Institute was, not only well connected with the political elite of imperial Russia, but that it equally had some contacts to those of Qajar Persia. Incidentally, both above-mentioned pupils of Mirza Ja'far, Semenov and Nikitin, would, in the course of their careers in the imperial diplomatic service, receive decorations from Qajar Shahs. In 1905, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar awarded the "Titular Councillor [9th rank] A. A. Semenov a Golden Persian Star for [his] scholarly accomplishments as a lecturer of Persian" in the "*madreseh* of Ashkhabad."⁶⁰ And Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar accorded Vasilii Nikitin the honour of the Order of the Lion and Sun in 1913.⁶¹ The overlap of academic and vocational training at the Lazarev Institute and the high degree of political and academic patronage it enjoyed turned it into an intersection of the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule. On top of that, this institution functioned as a bridge to the circles of the learned and of those in public office in what contemporaries would have called the Muslim East, including Persia. Mirza Ja'far is one example of this. His family stands for the continuity, in one form or another, of these connections between the Tsarist/Soviet and the Persian/Iranian state and academia even after the dynasties of

⁵⁷ Mohammad Asayesh Talab Tousi, "Payam-E no/Payam-E Novin," *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, <http://encyclopaediaislamica.com/madkhal2.php?sid=2908> (accessed 11/24, 2013). For the topic of Soviet-Iranian cultural relations during and after WWII see James Pickett, "Soviet Civilization through a Persian Lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity 1941-55," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2015), pp.805-826.

⁵⁸ Stephanie Cronin, *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013), p.130.

⁵⁹ Jamil Hasanli, *SSSR-Iran: Azerbaidzhanskii Krizis i Nachalo Kholodnoi Voiny, 1941-1946 Gg.* [USSR-Iran: The Azerbaijan crisis and the beginning of the Cold War, (1941-1946)] (Moskva: Geroi Otechestva, 2006), p.464; and: "Hamid Sayyah." <http://rasekhoon.net/Mashahir/Show-119432.aspx> (accessed 11/25, 2013).

⁶⁰ A.A.S.b13, f12, p.30, A firman by the Persian Shah Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar dating from 10.2.1905 and bestowing the Golden Persian Star on Semenov.

⁶¹ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, p.264.

the Romanovs and the Qajars had been overthrown. Just like Aleksandr Semenov, and despite all political convolutions, the Sayyah family managed to remain in a privileged position (even if Mirza Ja'far himself died in the 1920s). In both cases this was due to a large extent to the skills and connections their education had equipped them with. The Lazarev Institute offered both.

Networks of alumni

There are striking examples of the long-term persistence of networks between graduates of the Lazarev Institute. One is the friendship between the earlier-mentioned diplomat and Orientalist, Vladimir Minorskii, and Aleksandr Semenov. Another example is the relationship between the scholar of Turkey, Vladimir Gordlevskii, and Semenov. Both will be outlined in the following pages.

Vladimir Fedorovich Minorskii (1877–1966) entered the imperial Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1903 (three years after Semenov) and subsequently served as a Dragoman in Tabriz Consulate General and at the Russian Legation in Tehran during the heyday of the Persian Constitutional Revolution. He returned to the Ministry of Foreign affairs in St. Petersburg in 1908, where he met the prominent Russian Orientalist Vasilii Bartol'd, whom both he and Semenov considered as their teacher. From 1909, Minorskii served in the Chancellery of the Turkestan Governor-General in Tashkent (together with Semenov), and from 1912 onwards he was assigned to the Russian embassy in Constantinople as second secretary. He took part in the Four-Power (British, Russian, Turkish, and Persian) Commission to delimit the Turco-Persian border (1911-1914), and in 1915 he was attached to the Russian legation in Tehran as first secretary and subsequently as chargé d'affaires.⁶² The Bolshevik takeover forced Vladimir Fedorovich to remain in Persia until 1919 when he immigrated to France. In 1932 he left for England where he became professor at the London School of Oriental and African Studies.⁶³ In early 1959 a letter of condolence to Semenov's wife, Vera Iul'evna, arrived in Tashkent from Cambridge. In

⁶² For Minorsky's role in the delimitation, see: Denis Volkov, "Vladimir Minorsky (1877-1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)" *Ab Imperio* (forthcoming).

⁶³ Clifford Bosworth, "Minorsky, Vladimir Fed'orovich (1877-1966), Outstanding Russian Scholar of Persian History, Historical Geography, Literature and culture
," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/minorsky-vladimir> (accessed 11/4, 2013).

it, Minorskii expressed the hope that the memory of her husband, whom he called the “Sheikh of Turkestan”, would be honoured in the Soviet Union. The letter read:

I knew A.(leksandr)A.(leksandrovich) for around 59 years. He had just returned from his first trip to ‘Gorno Badakhshan’, when I, after having graduated from university,⁶⁴ entered the Lazarev Institute. Later in 1911, while I was serving in Tashkent, I regularly met with A.A.; I longed for his balanced character, his humour and for the countless stories and observations about people. Still in the summer of 1958 we were in touch for the last time; and, although he was already then full of apprehension and presentiment, his gentle wit hadn’t abandoned him. [...] I was glad that there is still a person my senior in the world and that so many memories are linking us... (...)

The oldest friend V.Minorskii.⁶⁵

Vera Iul’evna could not have read those lines since she passed away forty days after her husband’s death.⁶⁶ Clearly, the letter was meant to express the mutual attachment that had formed between the two alumni of the Lazarev Institute.

Another graduate of the Lazarev Institute, with whom Aleksandr Aleksandrovich developed a close (albeit not always unstrained) relationship, was Vladimir Aleksandrovich Gordlevskii (1876-1956), whose career would take a slightly different course than his own or that of Minorskii. Gordlevskii, who attended Persian classes at the Lazarev Institute together with Semenov, graduated from the institute in 1899 and, five years later, from the historical-philological faculty of Moscow State University. In 1910 he also received a *magister* in Turkish-Tatar literature from St. Petersburg’s Oriental faculty. Upon his return from further Turkic and Arabic language-training in Syria and Istanbul in 1907, he started to teach Turkish language and literature at the Lazarev Institute, which in 1921 was reorganised into the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, where he was professor from 1925 until 1948. From 1938 until his death in 1956 he worked in the Oriental Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, first as senior research assistant, from 1946 as academician

⁶⁴ Minorskii graduated from the law faculty of Moscow University in 1900.

⁶⁵ A.A.S., b13, f12, p7: Letter from Vladimir Minorskii to Vera Semenova from the 5.2.1959.

⁶⁶ Ahror Mukhtorov, "Osnovy Nauki i Znaniia: Rol' Akademika A.A.Semenova V Izuchenii Istorii Tadzhikskogo Naroda (the Foundations of Scholarship and Knowledge: The Role of Academician A.A.S. in the Study of History of the Tajik People)" (Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 2004), p.17.

and from 1950 onwards as the director of the sectors "Turkey and the Arab countries" and "Literature of the countries of the Near and Middle East."⁶⁷

The October Revolution, the merging of the Lazarev Institute into the newly established Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies (MIO) four years later and its closure in 1954, the constant reorganisation of the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies and its relocation from St. Petersburg to Moscow in 1950⁶⁸ — for many scholars any one of these events could mean the end or at least a serious setback for their careers, but not so for Gordlevskii. He was made professor at the MIO in 1918; he joined the Soviet Academy's Oriental Institute during the time of the Stalinist purges in 1938; and when the latter was brought under tighter political control and thus moved to Moscow in 1950 he was promoted. Not least because of his closeness to the central institutions of Soviet Oriental Studies, Gordlevskii was a valuable connection for Semenov, who was at the periphery of the politics of academia. In 1946, when Gordlevskii became a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, Semenov sent him a congratulatory note – a step that was probably as sincere as it was strategic. Gordlevskii seems to have accepted the tribute. In a postcard to Semenov dated 19 June 1946 he thanked him for his congratulations and added: "I want to say thank you [*spasibo tebe*], dear comrade, one of the few old Lazarevs of the past century."⁶⁹ Neither the usage of the intimate second person singular "you" nor that of "comrade" is typical of Semenov's correspondence with his confidantes, so it remains highly questionable whether Gordlevskii was one of them.

Minorskii and Gordlevskii are merely two examples of the wealth of connections the Lazarev Institute offered Semenov and other alumni. To all of them the institute served as a reference point of mutual identification, affiliation and sometimes trust.

⁶⁷ "V.A.Gordlevskii." Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences, <http://www.isaran.ru/?q=ru/fund&guid=D08231CB-5E57-B16E-FF64-69F804DDA0AD&ida=1> (accessed 11/6, 2013).

⁶⁸ "Moskovskii Institut Vostokovedeniia (the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies)." <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/bse/110950> (accessed 11/6, 2013).

⁶⁹ A.A.S., b13, f1, p132: Postcard from V.A.Gordlevskii to Semenov from the 19.6.1946.

Employability – Oriental Studies between the worlds of academia and colonial rule

In 1899 during the fourth year of his studies in Moscow Semenov wrote a short curriculum vitae that gives us some insight into what led him to Oriental Studies:

For some while the Muslim East had lured me and it seemed so mysterious and enigmatic; I had already some preparation for it; the Tatar language, which I was familiar with since my childhood [and] knew both practically and theoretically[;] I never stopped occupying myself with Eastern religions and with the ethnography of the East.⁷⁰

Curiosity and an academic interest in “the Muslim East” were clearly part of Semenov’s motives. Moreover, the reference to his familiarity with the Tatar language also hints at a more personal aspect of his decision to study Oriental languages. But it would be wrong to ignore — as Semenov’s Soviet biographers tended to do — the more mundane aspect of his decision, made at 21 years of age and without any formal Orientalist training, to take courses in Turkish, Persian and French. The knowledge of Oriental languages significantly improved the chances of a young man from a relatively modest social background, such as Semenov, of embarking on a promising career in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, whose European sections were the preserve of candidates from more privileged families.⁷¹ Indeed, the lack of personnel with the relevant language skills in Turkestan and Transcaspia was so severe that, in 1905, the Governor-General of Turkestan, Dean Subbotich, complained to the War Ministry that:

[...] [M]embers of the administration who know the native languages even slightly can be counted on the fingers of one hand. [...] The state of things is disastrous. How can the people be ruled, how can lawsuits be investigated, without understanding the speech of the ruled and the judged?⁷²

In this light, Semenov’s choice of languages made perfect sense. For someone willing to work in Central Asia as a diplomat or in the colonial administration, Turkic languages and Persian were far more useful than Arabic. Moreover, the fact that he

⁷⁰ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.11.

⁷¹ My thanks to Denis Volkov for pointing this out to me. See: Denis Volkov, “Vladimir Minorsky....”

⁷² Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.149.

had been familiar with the Tatar language since his early childhood made it an obvious choice.⁷³ French, while it would also prove convenient for Semenov's scholarly activities, was an equally important language of diplomacy. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia's increased military presence in Central Asia and the intensifying competition with the British in Afghanistan and Persia heightened the awareness among the Russian political (and in particular, military) elites of the need for well-trained officers with in-depth knowledge of the region and its languages.⁷⁴ According to Denis Volkov, officers were encouraged to learn Oriental languages, with those who mastered Arabic, Persian and Turkish receiving additional allowances.⁷⁵ The usefulness of the relevant language skills is also expressed in the Sergei Chirkin's memoirs. The latter graduated in 1900 (from St. Petersburg University's Oriental faculty) and was keen to join the Foreign Ministry, which, as he noted, was usually the domain of "sons of people, holding important posts in the world of military and bureaucracy."⁷⁶ Luckily for Chirkin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

*[...] was constantly experiencing a lack of people specially trained for the service in Oriental countries, and a small number of such specialists, regardless of their parentage and connections, was admitted [into the Foreign Office], on the recommendation of the educational institutes that had prepared them, in other words, the faculty of Oriental languages of St. Petersburg University and the Lazarevskii Institute in Moscow.*⁷⁷

Training in Oriental languages was also an asset for anyone wishing to enter the colonial administration of Russian Turkestan. In terms of improving his career-prospects, Semenov had thus chosen both the right course and the appropriate place to study.

Semenov's employability was further increased by the fact that most aspiring diplomats preferred the Near East, Constantinople in particular, to Turkestan,

⁷³ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.11.

⁷⁴ Denis V. Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863-1917) State Power in the Service of Knowledge?" *Iranian Studies*. 47, no. 6 (2014), p.922.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadsat' Let Sluzhby Na Vostoke: Zapiski Tsarskogo Diplomata (20 Years of Service in the East: Notes of a Tsarist Diplomat)* (Moskva: Russkii put', 2006), p.9.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

Transcaspia and especially to Persia. The Russian diplomat, contemporary of Semenov and his colleague in Ashkhabad and Tashkent in the first decade of the twentieth century, Andrei Dmitrievich Kalmykov (1870-1941), recalls in his memoirs the careers advice, given to him in St. Petersburg soon after his graduation from Petersburg University's Faculty of Oriental Languages in 1893, by Pavel Lessar,⁷⁸ the then political agent in Bukhara. The latter, upon learning of Kalmykov's wish to serve in Persia, commented: "[...][T]hat means the Middle East. I must warn you that advancement there is very slow. Constantinople and the Near East offer better chances for promotion, and life there is much more pleasant for a young man."⁷⁹ However, when Kalmykov pointed to his academic credentials, the senior diplomat replied:

*You happen to know Asian languages and have graduated from the Oriental School – this is enough to spoil all your future career in the Foreign Office. Any other diploma would be better, even one from the Academy of Music. Then at least you would not be treated as an interpreter fit only for minor positions.*⁸⁰

If, indeed, there were potential drawbacks for a young diplomat in knowing Oriental languages and of serving in Persia or, to a lesser extent, in Turkestan, they were the direct result of the lack of qualified and willing candidates. Lessar implied that such candidates, because of their usefulness on the spot, were less likely to be transferred and promoted — something for which there is little evidence, at least in Russian Turkestan. But even if such minor disadvantages existed, this would have been of little concern for Semenov, who was embarking on a career, not in the Foreign Office, but in the colonial administration, and who appears to have been more worried about getting into that administration and into Central Asia in the first place, than the fastest route to climb its ranks. Kalmykov, however, was “thoroughly upset” after his consultation with Lessar and “sadly returned home and reported to [his]

⁷⁸ Pavel Mikhailovich Lessar (1851-1905) was a Montenegro-born and Petersburg-educated military engineer, diplomat, participant of the Russian conquest of Central Asia and subsequent (1895) Councillor at the Russian Embassy in London and (1901) Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Beijing. See: T.H.H. and P.K., "Obituary: Paul Lessar," *Geographical Journal* 25, no. 6 (1905), 680-683.

⁷⁹ Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat: Outposts of the Empire, 1893-1917* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1971), p.15.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.13.

mother”, who consolidated him with the words: “[D]on’t worry. All you need is a proper recommendation. I shall get you one.”⁸¹ Aleksandra Mikhailovna (1849-1926) was a prominent and well-connected propagator of elementary education for girls, and her husband, Dimitrii Aleksandrovich (1835-1889), had been a privy councillor (*tainyi sovetnik*) of the senate of the Russian Empire (since 1864 Russia’s supreme court).⁸² The young Kalmykov had thus every reason to take his mother at her word. Sure enough, he joined the Persian Bureau of the Foreign Office in St. Petersburg in 1893 and, in January 1895 (the year Semenov enrolled at the Lazarev Institute), Kalmykov was on his way to his first secondment in Tabriz.⁸³ Following subsequent posts in Persia and Siam,⁸⁴ however, he asked the Director of the Asiatic Department, Nikolai Hartwig, in December 1900 for permission to swap his position as consul in Astarabad for the post of “commissioner for frontier relations” in the Transcaspian town of Ashkhabad. The latter was located only approximately 230 kilometres as the crow flies to the north-east of Astarabad. However, it was under Russian rule, and Kalmykov regarded it as “a Russian town connected by railway to St. Petersburg [where] life [...] was extremely cheap and much more comfortable than in a Persian town.”⁸⁵ Evidently, his great interest in Persia, this “wondrous land of beautiful poetry and works of art, of roses and nightingales [...]”,⁸⁶ had subsided to the extent that “the idea of returning to Persia was so unpleasant that [he] grew disgusted with my career at the Foreign Office.”⁸⁷ Hartwig granted Kalmykov’s request and told him to assume office on 20 May 1901 in Ashkhabad, where he would meet Aleksandr Semenov for the first time.⁸⁸

Semenov, too, had recently (in January 1901) solicited employment for himself in Ashkhabad, where his very first assignment since graduation was to begin

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.14.

⁸² Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian...*, p.8.

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp.30ff.

⁸⁴ In 1896 Kalmykov became 2. Secretary of the diplomatic mission in Tehran; the following year he became Consul in Astarabad; and between 1898 and 1900 he served in Bangkok. See: "Predvaritel'nyi Spisok Rossiiskikh Diplomato, Ostavshikhsia V Emigratsii Posle Oktiabria 1917 G. (Provisional List of Russian Diplomats Who Stayed in Emigration After October 1917)." Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad, http://bfrz.ru/data/rus_diplomatu/rus_diplomatu_spisok.pdf (accessed 4/1, 2014).

⁸⁵ Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian...*, p.141.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.13.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.141.

⁸⁸ Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian...*, p.146.

in May 1901. However, in contrast with Kalmykov, he neither had recourse to any illustrious relatives nor to the Director of the Asiatic Department, but had to contend himself with an appeal to the Commandant (*nachal'nik*) of the Transcaspian Province, Andrei Bogoliubov, whom he asked for "any position in this province."⁸⁹ Clearly, Semenov had to be less demanding than Kalmykov regarding his first secondment. And yet even "any position" in Transcaspia was not to be had without recommendation, which, in Semenov's case, was provided by Vsevolod Miller, the Director of the Lazarev Institute, whom Bogoliubov had asked to avouch for Semenov's "moral qualities, diligence and industriousness and reliability."⁹⁰ This was not the first time that Miller had shown generous and vital support for his outstanding pupil, who was evidently not only more academically minded and more interested in Persia and Central Asia than others, including Kalmykov, but also more reliant on his scholarly credentials and his teacher's backing.

At the same time, Semenov's scholarly inclinations and Kalmykov's slightly more careerist outlook appear to have been not only a question of their diverging characters, but also a function of their different social backgrounds. Semenov simply did not have the same professional opportunities as Kalmykov, who came from a more illustrious family, had therefore better connections and held a more prestigious diploma. It is telling in this regard that, according to Semenov's daughter, Lidia Aleksandrovna, her father married Agrippina Ivanovna Nazarova, who came from a wealthy family of merchants. Their wedding in 1900 had been against the will of the bride's parents, who had little trust in the groom's future career and no sympathy for his scholarly ambitions.⁹¹ Indeed, the Nazarovs would have probably preferred Kalmykov as their daughter's future husband. But this does not mean that Semenov was an undemanding and unworldly academic, uninterested in the advancement of his career in the colonial administration, or that Kalmykov had no interests other than promotion. Quite the contrary, while Kalmykov was keen to be regarded, not only as a diplomat, but as a scholar too, Semenov took every opportunity to rise in the ranks of the administration. Indeed, their scholarly activity

⁸⁹ A.A.S., b13, f3, p9: Letter from the Governor of the Transcaspian Province, A.A.Bogoliubov, to the Director of the Lazarev Institute, V.F.Miller, on the 7.1.1901.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.30.

and official capacity complemented each other. Admittedly, Semenov's career did not kick-start in the same way that Kalmykov's did: the latter served in four different positions and three countries within the first five years of his graduation, while the former remained stationed in Ashkhabad from the spring of 1901 until the summer of 1906. But Semenov's ascent in the ranks of the colonial administration was equally remarkable. His language skills and knowledge of local culture did not go unnoticed among his superiors in the administration, neither did the fact that he apparently made no attempts to leave Russian Turkestan for a more lucrative post. On top of that, his scholarly activities further increased his standing as an expert on Central Asian history. Last but not least, Semenov's great personal tact in his dealings with his peers, superiors and with the Central Asian religious and governmental elites apparently also contributed to his success.

On the whole, a short comparison of the careers of Semenov and Kalmykov suggests that, in Russian Turkestan, the advancement of one's reputation as a scholar and of one's career in the colonial administration went often hand in hand.⁹² Arguably, both Semenov and Kalmykov liked to think of themselves as scholars *and* diplomats/colonial administrators, and they did so to varying degrees at different moments in their lives. "I considered that diplomacy in Asia was the right thing for me, since I had a diploma in Oriental languages[;]"⁹³ asserted Kalmykov, indicating that he regarded his Orientalist knowledge, first of all as a professional advantage, and also an asset to his career in diplomacy. Semenov's interest in Oriental Studies and in the Orient itself was arguably more serious and certainly more fruitful in scholarly terms; but he too was eager to kill two birds with one stone: Oriental Studies allowed him to both climb the career ladder of the colonial administration, and make himself a name as a scholar and expert on Central Asia. The great proximity and overlap between the spheres of colonial rule and scholarship, which

⁹² Kalmykov's stepfather-in-law, Major General F.V. Neelov, was Acting Governor in Transcaspia (in 1905) and corps commander of the Russian Imperial Army's 2. Turkestan Corps (between 1901-1905). And his mother-in-law, M.Ia. Neelova, successfully lobbied P.A. Stolypin in 1911 over Kalmykov's posting to the Balkans. See: Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian...*, pp.160 and 214f.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.13.

has been noted by several scholars,⁹⁴ created synergies between the narrower interests of colonial rule and the broader concerns of scholarship. And people, such as Semenov and Kalmykov, readily exploited these to improve their standing and authority in both academic and governmental circles. As far as their idealised self-perceptions were concerned, their double identities as diplomats/colonial administrators and scholars complemented them and vaguely mirrored the concept of Russia's *mission civilisatrice* to both rule and enlighten or civilise the Orient. In a rather crude, Orientalist (in the Saidian sense of the word) and also poignant form, this notion has been expressed by the rector of Petersburg University, Mikhail Vladislavlev, in a letter to the Minister of Enlightenment (and member of the Lazarev family), Ivan Delianov, in 1888:

*Our civilising mission in the East and the political confirmation of our power and influence in all corners of Asia will not succeed unless we carefully prepare for it, unless along with military measures we train men who know these regions, their way of life, beliefs and languages.*⁹⁵

In conclusion, however, it is necessary to qualify the point about the synergies between the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule. Semenov would have agreed with the statement above. At the same time, he was all too aware that not all “men who [knew] [or claimed to know] these regions, their way of life, beliefs and languages” had a serious academic interest in these matters. In fact, he knew from experience that the state tended to favour politicised, simplified and “practical” scholarship over research, which attempted a more unbiased, academic and historically-informed approach to the study of Islam. On the one hand, Semenov embraced the benefits of the state's interest in Oriental Studies and was eager to

⁹⁴ Alexander Morrison argues that the Russian Empire displayed even “greater interpenetration of the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule” than the British one. See: Alexander Morrison: “‘Applied Orientalism’...,” p.637; Jeff Sahadeo, speaking about the “difficulty of separating state from society in late imperial Russia [...],” maintains that state control and patronage over learned societies was particularly high in the Russian Empire. See: Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.59; Alex Marshall specifically points to the example of Andrei Snesarev as a prototype of a practical Orientalist and military officer who personified the symbioses between Oriental Studies and military intelligence. See: Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860-1917* (Routledge, 2006), p.154ff; And Denis Volkov has described how in late Imperial Russia scholars of Persian studies/state officials exploited the opportunities and authority of their official capacity for the benefit of scholarship. See: Denis V. Volkov, “Persian Studies and...,” p.932.

⁹⁵ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David, *Russian Orientalism...*, p.174.

take advantage of the opportunities the imperial state (and expansion) provided for aspiring scholars, such as the possibility to study Central Asia in a relatively academic fashion at an institute that trained people, not for academia, but for the colonial administration. On the other hand, he was conscious of the downside of this interest: the subordination of scholarship to political expedience, which he rejected.

Semenov did not doubt the state's role as a patron of academia. But he regarded this patronage as a double-edged sword. As I will show in more detail in chapter four, he repeatedly discussed this dilemma with Vasilii Bartol'd. In 1912/13, for instance, when Bartol'd edited the journal *Mir Islama (The World of Islam)* and tried to resist the attempts of the state (which subsidised the publication) to push it towards a less academic and more polemical publication, Semenov supported his mentor; even if, ultimately, Bartol'd's efforts proved in vain and he was dismissed from his post after only a year in office.⁹⁶ In addition to that, Semenov repeatedly voiced critiques of works that were overly ideological or biased, such as Mikhail Terent'ev's *History of the Conquest of Central Asia*, published in 1906. From Tashkent Semenov wrote a letter to Bartol'd in the following year, in which he commented on the book: "PS. Did you read the recently published 'History of the Conquest of Central Asia' by M.A. Terent'ev? A surprising work for its unceremonious treatment of facts!"⁹⁷ As Morrison has pointed out, Terent'ev's book, which received funding from the War Ministry, was rather biased indeed. The author, for instance, glossed over the massacre of an estimated 5,000 Yomud Turkmen, which Governor-General von Kaufman had ordered in 1873.⁹⁸ Semenov might not have had this particular event in mind when complaining about the author's "unceremonious treatment of facts", but it was this sacrificing of historical evidence for the sake of a preconceived narrative which he objected to.

One last example, which demonstrates that Semenov was aware of not only the synergies but also the pitfalls of the interaction between the colonial state and Oriental Studies, is his critical stance towards the publications of his fellow colonial

⁹⁶ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.74

⁹⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p9: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 23.3.1907.

⁹⁸ Alexander Morrison, "Writing the Russian Conquest of Central Asia" (Conference Paper, St. Petersburg, 29.5.2014).

administrator Pavel Tsvetkov, the author of the multi-volume *Islamism* [*Islamizm*]. In 1912 Semenov rather dismissively described its first volume to Bartol'd as "a collection of some western-European sources, among which there are many references to [Washington] Irving's book about Mohammad."⁹⁹ While Tsvetkov's work found many admirers among Russia's political and military elite, Bartol'd agreed with Semenov and wrote a review that was highly critical of its factual and methodological mistakes and anti-Islamic tendencies.¹⁰⁰ Tsvetkov's *Islamism* delivered precisely what the rector of Petersburg University Vladislavlev had demanded in 1888, a book – in the author's own words – "for people who, because of the nature of their profession or [government/military] service, need to interact with Muslims in one way or another."¹⁰¹ But to scholarship, as Bartol'd and Semenov understood it, Tsvetkov had done a disservice; and his success was indicative of the state's attitude towards Oriental Studies. Bartol'd's review concluded that while Tsvetkov's deeply flawed work was published in four volumes and recognised (and, incidentally, republished in 2011); the more sophisticated research of "a few separate specialists", who treated "Muslim culture [...] as a complex historical phenomenon" and the study of it "as a branch of knowledge [that] like any other needs to take into account the latest achievements of scholarship," was "considered superfluous in Russia [...], as the fate of the [...] journal *Mir Islama* attests."¹⁰² Unlike Bartol'd, Semenov was not a famous metropolitan "cabinet-scholar" but merely a member of the colonial administration with a passion for scholarship. He never had the same academic freedom as Bartol'd. And his research was more closely interlinked with the practical concerns of colonial rule and with his own career-advancement in Turkestan's administration. Nonetheless, Semenov produced scholarship for its own sake, not for that of the colonial state, even if he hoped that his research might benefit the latter. The Lazarev Institute and his career as a colonial administrator was simply the easiest route to achieve that.

⁹⁹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p21: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 26.12.1912.

¹⁰⁰ Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 6 (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), pp.403-412.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.403.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.412.

CHAPTER II – An outline of Semenov’s career in the colonial administration of Russian Turkestan and in the aftermath of 1917

Ashkhabad (1901-1906)

Semenov’s first assignment in Central Asia was in Ashkhabad, the administrative centre of the Transcaspian Province of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, where he assumed office as Acting Assistant to the Clerk of the Chancellery of the Province-Commandant on 5 May 1901.¹ Located between the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea and the western limits of the Emirate of Bukhara, and bordering Khivan territory in the north and Afghanistan and Persia in the south, Transcaspia was the latest addition to the Russian Empire in Central Asia.² Ashkhabad’s proximity to Persia and its connection to the Transcaspian Railway – which connected the town with Tashkent via Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand by the late 1890s³ – catapulted Ashkhabad to the forefront of the imperial rivalry between Russia and Great Britain. The British statesman and former Viceroy of India, George Nathaniel Curzon, who travelled along the line in 1888, warned that “Russia has acquired and fortified a new line of advance, and has planted her foot on the path which every Indian conqueror has trod from Alexander to Nadir Shah.”⁴ Curzon even went so far as to

¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskiĭ Ocherk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.32.

² "Zakaspiiskaia Oblast'." http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz_efron/41600 (accessed 11/4, 2013). The conquest of Transcaspia culminated in General Mikhail Skobelev’s victory at Geok-Tepe in 1881, which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Turkmen. Skobelev famously justified the massacre with the words: “I hold it as a principle that in Asia the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on the enemy.” See: Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp.41ff.

³ Alexander Morrison has noted that the construction of the Transcaspian railway had considerable commercial and demographic consequences, making it possible to send “large quantities of cotton from Krasnovodsk to Baku and Astrakhan” and that it facilitated the growth of Russian colonies along its line. See: Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.20.

⁴ George Nathaniel Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889: And the Anglo-Russian Question* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889), p.293f.

say that the railway led to a “shifting of the centre of gravity in Central Asia [...] [and to] the dethronement of Tashkent by Askabad [sic].”⁵ This statement corresponded less to reality, as to the wishful thinking of the Transcaspian authorities, who were eager to see the province transformed into an autonomous Governor-Generalship, as Morrison has argued, adding that Transcaspia was in fact subordinated to Tashkent by the 1890s.⁶ Nevertheless, Semenov began his career in the colonial administration in the administrative centre of a province of key strategic and economic importance to the imperial state.

The Chancellery of the Province-Commandant in Ashkhabad was the foremost executive organ in the province and stood relatively high in hierarchy of the so-called Military-Popular Government (*Voenna-Narodnoe Upravlenie*)⁷ that ruled Russian Turkestan. By 1901, the entire region had been divided into five provinces: Syr-Dar'ia, Semirech'e, Samarkand, Ferghana and Transcaspia, which were administered by five chancelleries. These, in turn, were supervised by and modelled on the Chancellery of the Governor-General in Tashkent, the administrative centre of Russian Turkestan (and of the Syr-Darya Province).⁸ The Chancellery of the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province was the executive organ through which the Province-Commandant exerted his authority and dealt with a variety of issues: from law enforcement, the execution of court sentences, public health measures and construction projects, to taxation and communications.⁹ It oversaw the District Commandants (*uezdnye nachal'niki*) and their assistants, as well as the local Police Chiefs (*uchastkovye pristavy*), who were responsible for the sub-districts (*uchastki*). Positions further down the chain of command were usually delegated to the so-called native administration.¹⁰

⁵ *ibid.*, p.292.

⁶ Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand...*, p.20.

⁷ This form of government was a simplified version of the provincial administration of European Russia with the crucial difference that military and civil administration were combined and headed by the Governor-General. From the onset the military element decisively dominated and all senior bureaucrats – such as administrators, judges or doctors – were army officers, while the Province-Commandants usually had the rank at least of Major-Generals. See: Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia...*, p.66; and: Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand...*, p.126.

⁸ Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia...*, p.56f.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.66.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.64-66 and: Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand...*, p.126f.

Almost a month before Semenov's arrival in Transcaspia, the Province-Commandant, General Andrei Bogoliubov, had been replaced by General Dean Subotich.¹¹ This must have seemed rather unfortunate to Semenov, who had – as mentioned in the previous chapter – asked Bogoliubov for a job in Transcaspia in January 1901.¹² After the general had received a satisfactory recommendation from Vsevolod Miller, the Director of the Lazarev Institute, he agreed to Semenov's plea. Ultimately, however, Bogoliubov's replacement by Subotich – who would himself remain in office in Ashkhabad only between April 1901 and the end of 1902 – proved advantageous to Semenov's career, as I will show later.¹³ It is worth dwelling on Semenov's decision to solicit Bogoliubov for employment in early 1901, which might very well have been influenced by the fact that the general was himself a military Orientalist, who had just edited the book *The Natives of the Transcaspian Province and their Life*.¹⁴ Presumably, Semenov hoped that Bogoliubov would share and understand his scholarly interests; apparently he was not mistaken. The sense of connection to the general is palpable in Semenov's recollections of his first encounter with him in a more scholarly setting, only days after his arrival in Ashkhabad:

*Some of the 'Transcaspians' probably remember the session of the Transcaspian Circle of Devotees of Archaeology and History of the East in early May 1901, when General Bogoliubov presented his [...] very interesting report 'On the settling of the Turkmen tribes according to the ornamentation of their carpets.'*¹⁵

In the Transcaspian Circle of Devotees of Archaeology and History of the East, which had been founded in March of the same year, Semenov found a welcome distraction

¹¹ M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy do 1917 Goda: Biobibliograficheskii Slovar'* [Russian Military Orientalists until 1917: A biblio-biographical dictionary] (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura (RAN), 2005), p.36.

¹² A.A.S., b13, f3, p9: Letter from the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province, A.A.Bogoliubov, to the Director of the Lazarev Institute, V.F.Miller, on the 7.1.1901.

¹³ B. V. Gryzlov, *Gubernii Rossiiskoi Imperii: Istorii i Rukovoditeli, 1708-1917*. [The Provinces of the Russian Empire: History and Heads] (Moskva: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, 2003), p.471f.

¹⁴ F. A. Mikhailov and A. A. Bogoliubov, *Tuzemtsy Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti i Ikh Zhizn': Etnograficheskii Ocherk* [The natives of the Transcaspian Province and their life: an ethnographical outline] (Askhabad: Parovaia tip. K.M. Fedorova, 1900).

¹⁵ Aleksandr Semenov, "Kovry Russkogo Turkestana (the Carpets of Russian Turkestan)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 88, no. 1 (1911), 137-179, p.138.

in the otherwise rather sleepy town of Ashkhabad. He soon became the circle's secretary, and its gatherings and publications proved a useful platform upon which to present and publish his scholarly work, some of which was dedicated to Transcaspia's numerous ancient archaeological sites along the Silk Road.¹⁶ The connection between Semenov and Bogoliubov is a reminder of the fact that the former's scholarly ambitions were at least as great an aspect in his decision to go to Central Asia, as in his wish to embark upon a career in the colonial administration. Indicative of the seriousness of his scholarly pursuits, for example, is the fact that he was granted membership in the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography in February 1900.¹⁷ By the time he penned his letter to Bogoliubov, he had made himself a name as a promising scholar. Among his publications were, not only the short popular-scholarly book *Central Asia: An Outline*¹⁸ (published in 1899), but also a handful of articles, some of which targeted a broader audience – including the travelogues of his two previous journeys to Central Asia, *'In sacred Bukhara'*¹⁹ (published in 1897) and *'On the Frontier of Afghanistan'*²⁰ (published in 1900) – others, such as *'The attitude of the Mountain Tajiks to children'*²¹ (published in 1899) and *'About the beliefs of the Mountain Tajiks'*²² (published in 1900), addressed a more scholarly public. While many members of Turkestan's colonial administration pursued more or less serious scholarly interests, regardless of whether they were academically trained or not, Semenov was academically exceptionally well qualified and, by the same token, a splendid addition to Bogoliubov's subordinates.

¹⁶ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.34f.

¹⁷ Semenov's selection was probably facilitated by the fact that he enjoyed the support of the Vsevolod Miller, who had been the society's director between 1889 and 1891, and who headed its ethnographic section, into which Semenov was elected. See: A.A.S., b13, f17, p.1: Certificate of Semenov's membership in the OLEAE (*Obshchestvo Liubitelei Estestvoznaniia, Antropologii i Etnografii*).

¹⁸ Aleksandr Semenov, *Sredniaia Aziia: Ocherk* [Central Asia: an outline] (Moscow: Tipografiia O.L. Somovoi, 1899).

¹⁹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.152.

²⁰ Aleksandr Semenov, *Na Rubezhe Afganistana. V Blagodatnom Khissare (Putevye Ocherki) [on the Frontier of Afghanistan. in Gracious Hissar (Travelogue)]* (Moscow: Duke A.A. Bobrinskoi, 1900).

²¹ Aleksandr Semenov, "Otnoshenie K Detiam Gornykh Tadzhikov (the Attitude of the Mountain Tajiks to Children)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 42, no. 3 (1899), 99-107.

²² Aleksandr Semenov, "Iz Oblasti Religioznykh Verovanii Gornykh Tadzhikov (about the Religious Beliefs of the Mountain Tajiks)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 47, no. 4 (1900), 81-88.

Semenov's growing scholarly reputation and above-average qualifications seem to have made some impression on his superiors in Ashkhabad. So much so that, by the end of his first month in office, he was appointed Manager of the Statistical Department of the Chancellery of the Province-Commandant.²³ This department published annually statistical *Surveys of the Transcaspian Province*, which were paralleled in all the other provinces of Russian Turkestan since the 1880s,²⁴ and which painstakingly illustrate the meticulous compilation of data on a great variety of issues which the administration was attempting to regulate, or at least register. They contained information on geography, censuses, irrigation, agriculture and raw materials, on the distribution of settlements and towns, on infrastructure, the population (nationality [*natsional'nost'*], lineage and tribal affiliation, denomination, estate), on crafts and trade, taxation, the judiciary and on education and healthcare.²⁵ With all this information already collected, sometimes by Semenov personally during field-trips throughout Transcaspia, it was a relatively easy task to turn it into scholarly publications, such as the article '*The basic principles of the land and water distribution among the Turkmen of the Transcaspian Province*'²⁶ (published in 1903), which addressed not only economic but also ethnographic questions.

When Semenov arrived in Ashkhabad he was 27 years old, newly married and still childless. His first daughter, Olga, would be born in July 1903 in the settlement of Firuza, which was located approximately thirty-five kilometres to the west of Ashkhabad in a valley of the Kopet Dag mountain range that lined the frontier of Persia – a place “cool and shady, with a clear swift brook [...]”, wrote his colleague Andrei Kalmykov, “a paradise for unpretentious people”,²⁷ whereto Ashkhabad's society, including the Chancellery, took refuge from the sweltering heat from May to

²³ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.32.

²⁴ I am grateful to Alexander Morrison for pointing this out to me.

²⁵ *Obzor Zakaspiiskoi Oblast'i Za 1901 God (Survey of the Transcaspian Oblast' for the Year 1901)*, (Ashkhabad: The Russian Imperial Ministry of Interior, Chancellery of the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province, 1902).

²⁶ Aleksandr Semenov, “Glavnye osnovy raspredeleniia zemli i vody u turkmen Zakaspiiskoi oblasti”, *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, 57, no. 2 (1903), 116-220.

²⁷ Andrei Kalmykov and Aleksandra Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat: Outposts of the Empire, 1893-1917* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1971), p.154.

September.²⁸ According to Vasilii Ianchevetskii, who served with Semenov in Transcaspia at the time, Ashkhabad was a “small tidy town, consisting of a multitude of clay houses, surrounded by fruit gardens, with straight streets that had been drawn up by the hand of a military engineer [...].”²⁹ In Semenov’s time it was still considered a military fortification and, according to the local newspaper *Ashkhabad* (Nr.98/1903), its population amounted to approximately 36,500 souls, of which 10,700 were Russians, 11,200 Persians, while the remaining 14,600 inhabitants were mainly Armenians and Caucasian Tatars.³⁰ After several earthquakes the construction of any other than single-storey houses was banned. The only exceptions to this rule were the Municipal Museum, which had opened in March 1899 – five months after Bogoliubov took office –³¹ and “the small bell tower of the local church”, which Semenov noticed from his train window on his first arrival, and which “forlornly towered over the town that was covered in green against the backdrop of the high mountains and the flickering flat roofs of the houses.”³² According to Ianchevetskii, life in early twentieth century Ashkhabad was relatively comfortable for its Russian community of bureaucrats. In his memoirs he wrote: “[e]veryone received a 50% increase on the salary, because they were considered to live in a military settlement near the border, but there was nowhere to spend the

²⁸ Vasilii Ianchevetskii, *Sobranie Sochinenii V 4 Tomakh* (Collected Works in 4 Volumes), ed. M. V. Ianchevetskii, Vol. 4 (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), p.487.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.486; Vasilii Grigor'evich Ianchevetskii (1875-1954) is better known to a broad Soviet public by his pen name Yan, under which he published several works of historical fiction such as the novel *Genghis Khan* (1939) that won him the highly prestigious Stalin Prize of 1st degree in April 1942. [See: "O Prisuzhdenii Stalinskikh Premii (about the Awarding of the Stalin Prize)." *Izvestiia*, 12.4.1942, p.0.] Yan arrived in Ashkhabad in late 1901 (where he met Semenov), following an invitation by his brother, the publicist Dmitrii Grigor'evich, who had participated in the Russian military campaigns in Manchuria in 1900 under Subbotich's command, and who now, proclaiming that “Russia’s future is in Asia [...],” urged Vasilii to work for the latter in Ashkhabad. His brother Dmitrii Grigor'evich (1889-1942) was a well-known publicist, Orientalist and correspondent for the journal *Novyi Krai* during the 1900 Russian invasion of Manchuria. He is the author of *U sten nedvizhnogo Kitaia* (At the Gates of inert China) (1903) for which he was admitted into the Académie française. In 1927 he was arrested and sent to the Solovki prison camp where he died. [See: A. A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent, V Proshlom...*, p.280.; on N.G.Mallitskii see: “Mallitskii” in: Ia V. Vasilkov and M. Iu Sorokina, *Liudi i Sudby: Biobibliograficheskii Slovar Vostokovedov - Zhertv Politicheskogo Terrora V Sovetskii Period 1917-1991* [People and Destinies. A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of Orientalists: Victims of Political Repression during the Soviet Era (1917-1991)], Vol. 2014 (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie); (online at: http://memory.pvost.org/pages/ds_yanchevitskij.html) According to his brother Vasilii, however, he died in 1942. See: Vasilii Ianchevetskii, *Sobranie Sochinenii...*, p.481.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*; and: B. V. Gryzlov, *Gubernii Rossiiskoi Imperii...*, p.397.

³² Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.30f.

money since life was so cheap.”³³ Beer gardens, brothels and opium bars, but also the town’s museum, for the more highbrow Transcaspians, and a travelling circus offered relief from the “provincial boredom” that must have been endemic.³⁴ Nonetheless, according to Semenov’s reminiscences of his first assignment, which he wrote in 1957, early twentieth century Ashkhabad and its surroundings offered a fair amount of attractions for him:

The only recently created Province-town of Ashkhabad grew gradually into its surroundings. [...]“In the passage running from the “Grand Hotel” to the central Bazaar Street sat, sometimes right on the brick sidewalk, a few Armenian and Lezghin craftsmen with their small cases covered with glass. Altogether maybe 4 or 5 people on the long passage, they busied themselves with the repair of little metal objects. In their cases one could always see excellent Parthian silver coins, and sometimes alongside ancient gems, cut out of dark red sard. [...] I remember a hot day in May 60 years ago; I was walking along Gogol street when I had to halt at the Kirpichnaya crossing, because a huge caravan of about 700 camels, all heavily loaded, was crossing the street. The sarban [caravan leader] led the way, a most typical Afghan in very wide, white “Sassanid” shalwars, belted with a broad kushak, underneath which an entire arsenal of various weaponry was shoved.” [...] I stopped and asked what the caravan is carrying, to which the Afghan laconically replied “cherkhi” (pressed cotton). [...] [i]t turned out the caravan was transporting the cotton on a special permit to Kandahar. When, out of curiosity, I asked the sarban about his ring, he kindly took it off and handed it to me. The gem turned out to be an excellent Greek, or to be more precise Hellenistic, work [...] Without further ado I acquired the object from its owner right on the street.”³⁵

Even if this sentimental and nostalgic account reflects only a particular aspect of Semenov’s life and work in Transcaspia, it appears to be the one he was most

³³ Vasilii Ianchevetskii, *Sobranie Sochinenii...*, p.487.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ A.A.S., b5,f7. “Nechto o sredneaziatskikh gemmakh, ikh liubiteliakh i sobirателиakh. (Iz vospominanii proshlogo)” [Some notes on Central Asian gems and those admiring and collecting them (memoirs).”

invested in. It certainly offered him ample distraction from provincial boredom and the routine of the Chancellery.

A cause of even greater excitement for Semenov must have been the visit of Vasilii Bartol'd to Ashkhabad in 1902. The famous scholar travelled to Transcaspia to conduct research, and to form a working relationship with the local amateur scholars, who organised themselves in the above-mentioned Transcaspian Circle of Devotees of Archaeology and History of the East.³⁶ It was during this visit that Semenov first made the acquaintance of Bartol'd, whom he would regard as his teacher and friend for the rest of his life, and who, as an academic role model, greatly influenced his ideal of scholarship and academia.³⁷ Bartol'd – as I will show in chapter four – initially saw Semenov as an exceptional local amateur scholar who shared his vision of academic scholarship, and who could provide metropolitan academics like him with useful scholarly raw material from Turkestan, and with information about the state of academic research there. He was particularly keen to hear from Semenov about the state and location of various ancient sites in Turkestan, where – in Semenov's words – “[t]hroughout the cheerless and sun-baked sands lay scattered a multitude of ruins of ancient cities and settlements”, such as Anau, Merv and Nisa, which even lured scholars from as far as the United States to Transcaspia.³⁸ In 1904, the US-American geographer Raphael Pumpelly, for instance, organised an expedition (financed by the recently founded Carnegie Institution of Washington) with a view to “explore Turkestan” and “the Prehistoric Civilizations of Anau.”³⁹ Semenov was charged by the Province-Commandant with the local supervision of the excavations carried out by Pumpelly, whose published

³⁶ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.34 and 40.

³⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p2: Letter from A.A.Semenov to V.V.Bartol'd on the 12.6.1904.

³⁸ A.A.S., b5, f7. Among some of the sites that Semenov visited and researched himself were Anau, where (a few kilometres to the east of Ashkhabad) a relatively well-preserved mid-15th century mosque of remarkable beauty is located and within the mounds (kurgans) of which remains dating from the Neolithic have been found; Nisa, the capital of ancient Parthia, located about 18 kilometres to the west of Ashkhabad; and Merv, which as early as the 5th century BCE had been an administrative and trading centre of some importance within the Achaemenian Empire, and which would subsequently be known as the centre of the Sasanian province of Khurasan and later as the eastern capital of the Seljuq Empire. See: "Anaw." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, "<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anaw>" (accessed 5/1, 2014) and: "Nisa." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, "<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nisa>" (accessed 5/1, 2014).

³⁹ Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan, Expedition of 1904: Prehistoric Civilizations of Anau, Origins, Growth, and Influence of Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908).

results of the expedition acknowledged that: “[...] [T]he required government supervision [of our work] was courteously executed by Mr. A. Semenov.”⁴⁰ Semenov reported on the expedition’s proceedings to “the professor of Petersburg University V. V. Bartol’d”, who had initially been charged with the central “control over Pumpelly and his colleagues [...]”.⁴¹ The correspondence between the two suggests that the Petersburg professor was less interested in the progress of the American expedition, upon which both seemed to have looked relatively favourably, and more eager to learn from Semenov about possible measures taken by the Russian administration to preserve ancient sites in Turkestan, as I will show in chapter three.⁴² Pumpelly and his colleagues, including “Dr. Hubert Schmidt of the Royal Museum für Völkerkunde [...] an expert on prehistoric pottery, [who] had been at Troy and was in charge of the Schliemann Collection in the Museum [...],”⁴³ believed themselves to be taking part in a task of monumental importance and hoped to find proof for the hypothesis that “[...] central Asia is the region in which the great civilizations of the far East and of the West had their origins[...].”⁴⁴ According to Pumpelly, “[t]he evolution of civilization has been traced backward to a time when, before its dating in Babylon and Egypt, man at Anau already lived in cities,[...]” were active in agriculture, animal husbandry and knew the “fundamental industrial arts [...]”.⁴⁵ Initially, Pumpelly had even hoped to be able to substantiate the theory that “the [...] shrinkage of an inland sea” in Central Asia led to “destructive radial migrations” which, in turn, resulted in “migrations similarly forced [which] might have brought to Europe the Aryan peoples, Aryan culture, and Aryan languages.”⁴⁶ “As regards the Aryan problem,” however, the American scholar had to concede, its solution “awaits much more extended archaeological, anthropological, and philological research.”⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, the young Semenov was deeply impressed by

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. xxxiv; and: Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.37.

⁴¹ A.A.S., b13, f3, p2: Letter from A.A.Semenov to V.V.Bartol’d on the 12.6.1904.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations...*, p.xxvi.

⁴⁴ Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan with an Account the Basin of Eastern Persian and Sistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1905).

⁴⁵ Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations...(1908)*, p.xxxif.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.xxv.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.xxxiii.

this array of eminent scholars and groundbreaking hypotheses, which must have only further encouraged him to follow the path of academic research in and on Central Asia.

Semenov's scholarly pursuits seem to have kept him away, not only from gambling and drink, but also from the sort of unethical or illegal pursuits that other less high-minded colonial administrators tended to engage in, such as the extortion of money or goods from the population. According to Morrison, a commission of inspection led by Count Konstantin Pahlen, which toured Transcaspia in 1908-9, "found violence, bribery and corruption in the administration and management of state resources everywhere in Central Asia [...]" but nowhere more so than in Transcaspia.⁴⁸ Semenov seemed to have made a timely exit from that province in the summer of 1906. His departure coincided with the rise of a certain Colonel Strzhalkovskii, the head of Chancellery between 1906-1908 and the *de facto* Governor of Transcaspia, who was at the centre of a corruption scandal and found guilty of receiving bribes for the appointment of government posts and contracts, and of shielding rogue officials from persecution.⁴⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that Semenov was involved in such practices. As I will show in the following chapter, he tried hard to rid the members of Turkestan's administration of their foul reputation as venal ignoramuses. At the same time, he would probably not have reported such abuses to the authorities in St. Petersburg for fear of reprisals from his immediate superiors. Privately, he criticised the colonial administration. In a letter written in June 1904, for example, he complained to Bartol'd about the destruction of ancient monuments in Transcaspia, and asked him to protest in St. Petersburg about the issue. But he also declined to be named lest he be punished as the informant.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Alexander Morrison, "The Pahlen Commission and the Re-Establishment of Rectitude in Transcaspia, 1908-1909," *MOND Monde(s): Histoire, Espaces, Relations* 4, no. 2 (2013), p.50.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.59.

⁵⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p2: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 12.06.1904.

Tashkent (1906-1916)

In the summer of 1906, Semenov's career gained additional momentum when he was appointed clerk (*deloproizvoditel'*) at the Chancellery of the Governor-General in Tashkent, the administrative centre of Russian Turkestan and a city of more than 170,000 inhabitants.⁵¹ Governor-general at the time was Dean Subotich, who remained in that post for less than a year, between November 1905 and August 1906, when allegations of liberalism resulted in his dismissal by St. Petersburg, where, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Nicholas II had just dissolved the Duma and appointed Pyotr Stolypin as Prime Minister.⁵² There is evidence that Semenov owed his promotion to the patronage of Subotich, who knew him from Ashkhabad. The earlier-mentioned (p.70) Vasilii Ianchevetskii – who worked with Semenov in Ashkhabad in the Chancellery of the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province in 1901 – claimed in his memoirs that he had “told General Subotich about A. A. Semenov; who [...] afterwards helped him to climb the career ladder.”⁵³ After Subotich's dismissal, Semenov expected to be transferred from Tashkent as well. In early December 1907 he apologised to Bartol'd for not having answered his last two letters and explained: “The reasons were the following: The expectation of the transfer from Tashkent, afterwards its ‘fall-through’, then the trip with the Emir, and finally – into a two-month vacation.”⁵⁴ Instead of being dismissed together with Subotich, however, Semenov continued to rise in the ranks of the colonial administration: in July 1908, he was appointed Assistant to the Director (*upravliaiushchii*) of the Governor-General's Chancellery in Tashkent;⁵⁵ in June 1911,

⁵¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.43&49.

⁵² Subotich was particularly attacked for his supposedly too pardoning stance towards the strikes of railway workers in Russian Turkestan, which broke out in the aftermath of the slaughter of unarmed protesters by Tsarist troops in St. Petersburg on January the 9th 1905. See: Vasilii Ianchevetskii, *Sobranie Sochinenii...*, p.505; For the topic of railway worker activism see: Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp.124-27.

⁵³ Vasilii Ianchevetskii, *Sobranie Sochinenii...*, p.489.

⁵⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p2: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 03.12.1907.

⁵⁵ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.43; The post of Diplomatic Officer to the Governor-General was held at the time by Vladimir Mustafin, who had assumed office on May 21st 1906 – only a few months before Semenov's arrival in Tashkent – and remained in that position until March 18th 1911, when he was appointed military judge of the Vilno Military District. See: A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent, V Proshlom i Nastoishchem; Istoricheskii Ocherk* [Tashkent past and present: a historical outline] (Tashkent: Tipo-Lit. O.A. Portseva, 1912), p.451f.

he was made Acting Diplomatic Officer to the Governor-General, and subsequently he repeatedly acted as the Chancellery's Temporary Director.⁵⁶

A token of Semenov's value to the colonial administration is a decoration that he received for "the temporary fulfilment [...] of the post of an officer of the diplomatic corps of the Governor-General of Turkestan" in May 1914.⁵⁷ It is worth dwelling on this decoration and, especially, on the fact that it was awarded by the Governor-General on behalf of the Russian Foreign Ministry, which communicated the request through the Russian Imperial Political Agency in Bukhara.⁵⁸ This shows that, while Semenov was a member of the Military-Popular Government (and hence subordinate to the Governor-General), he also maintained a connection to the Foreign Ministry in St. Petersburg, where his acquaintance and fellow Lazarev Institute graduate, Vasilii von Klemm, headed the Foreign Ministry's Central Asian Department since July 1914. Von Klemm had already earlier tried to attract Semenov into the Foreign Office or, more precisely, into the Russian Political Agency in Bukhara. In June 1913, he had enquired from the Diplomatic Officer in Tashkent, Aleksandr Baranovskii, about "the Court Councillor Semenov, his career [...] [and] "current employment status and salary."⁵⁹ In his reply, Baranovskii summarised the main stages of Semenov's career up to date and added that:

Since 1910, he is a Honorary Magistrate of a Military District [pochetnyi mirovoi sud'ia] of the Tashkent Military District Court. He is also a member of a whole range of committees and commissions dealing with a number of local issues. Additionally, he is known for his scholarly works on the study of our Central Asian dominions. Already in 1903, the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography awarded him a gold medal for a very valuable work on the ethnography of Central Asia [...]. Lately, he actively participated in the compilation of the so-called Kaufman anthology

⁵⁶ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.43ff.

⁵⁷ A.A.S., b13, f3, p88: Letter from the Russian Foreign Ministry's Department for Personnel and Economical Affairs to the Russian Imperial Political Agency in Bukhara on the 5.5.1914.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba V Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve (1906-1920 Gg.): Rossiiskaia Diplomatia V Sud'bakh* [Vice-Consul Vvedenskii: Service in Persia and in the Bukharan Khanate (1906-1920): Russian diplomacy in destinies] (Moskva: Izdat. Sotsial'no-Politicheskaia Mysl', 2003), p.275.

*[Kaufmanskii sbornik], published in memory of the first Governor-General of Turkestan [...].*⁶⁰

Von Klemm also learned that a Supernumerary Assistant to the Director of the Governor-General's Chancellery was remunerated with 5,000 roubles per annum, and that the position was scheduled to become permanent, thus entitling Semenov to a 1,000 roubles pay-rise, an official residence, and advancement from his current rank of Court Councillor to that of a Collegiate Councillor – a position equivalent to the 6th rank on the table of ranks. Baranovskii concluded his letter with more praise for Semenov and his usefulness to the administration:

*Regarding [...] [his] personal qualities, I can personally attest to his enormous professional experience, gained during 13 years of uninterrupted service in Turkestan, in the course of which he often travelled the country as part of the Governor-General's entourage, and to his great tact in his personal relationships [...]. At the moment, [...] [he] has been sent to the Amu-Darya with the aim of studying the condition of the Russian settlements in Bukhara [...].*⁶¹

Given Semenov's responsibilities as a senior member of the Governor-General's Chancellery, the privileges he enjoyed, and his proximity to the Governor-General himself, von Klemm had to postpone his efforts to recruit him into the Russian Political Agency in Bukhara. "In these circumstances it is hardly possible to attract Semenov into the service at our department and we will have to bury this idea for the time being [...]," he replied to Baranovskii in late August 1913.⁶² But von Klemm persisted in his efforts to make Semenov his confidante in Tashkent. When a few months later, in December 1913, Baranovskii resigned from his post as Acting Diplomatic Officer to the Governor-General before a replacement could reach Tashkent, von Klemm asked Semenov to step in:

[...] Baranovskii resigned from the post in Tashkent and he is about to receive another assignment, [...]. He justified his decision with the ill position of the dipl.[omatic] officer in Tashkent, who does not have the opportunity to do any

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.276.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

*fruitful work whatsoever. Unfortunately, there is much bitter truth in his words. This matter absolutely has to be reconsidered and possibly put in order. Baranovski will be succeeded by [Sergei] Chirkin, at present the Secretary of the Consulate Gener.[al] in Korea who earlier served in Persia and India. [...] I am only afraid that his arrival there will be delayed, [...]. If this was the case, I hope you won't refuse us for some more time your kind assistance. We are very indebted to you for taking this difficult task.*⁶³

Von Klemm concluded his letter with the words: "Once more thank you for helping us out of trouble. If you find some free time please write me some lines about what is going on in your life. With sincere respect, yours Klemm[.]"⁶⁴ By the time the new Diplomatic Officer, the above-mentioned Chirkin, arrived in Tashkent in early June 1914, following a four-day journey from St. Petersburg via Orenburg, Semenov had acted as his substitute for more than half a year.⁶⁵ He was among the first people Chirkin sought out the morning after his arrival, to be introduced into the routines of his new job. While the following description of Semenov by Chirkin is clearly sympathetic, it equally reflects the snobbery and slightly sneering attitude of a Tsarist diplomat towards a member of Turkestan's military administration, which also indicates the small but noticeable gulf between the two men and bureaucracies:

[...] Al. Al. Semenov was to some extent my confrère, who had received his education at the Lazarev Institute and was regarded as a master of his craft and connoisseur of all the intricacies of the Chancellery. [He] was a conspicuous man of 38 years of age with a long black moustache and of a military cast, inasmuch as on duty all members of the Governor-General's Chancellery permanently wore uniform, one that for some reason was even equipped with spurs, and had acquired military manners such as standing at attention, clicking their heels etc. He was, apparently, surprised that I was dressed in a regular 'tropical' white costume with a helmet while making him an official visit and told me with amusement that it is not that hot yet and that the 'uriukniki' (those [Russians/Europeans] born in Turkestan, from the

⁶³ A.A.S., b13, f15, p2: Letter from Vasilii Oskarovich von Klemm to A.A.S. on the 21.12.1913.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadtsat' Let Sluzhby Na Vostoke: Zapiski Tsarskogo Diplomata (20 Years of Service in the East: Notes of a Tsarist Diplomat)* (Moskva: Russkii put', 2006), pp. 237f

*word 'uriuk', meaning apricot) were entirely ignorant of helmets, preferring to wear straw-hats [...] instead.*⁶⁶

Chirkin might have been smug about his diplomatic airs and graces and mocked the spurs of the Turkestani uniforms and the military crudeness of those wearing them. Semenov, in turn, probably had to suppress his laughter at the sight of the newcomer in a tropical costume and helmet. Their cooperation, however, demonstrates the overlap between the worlds of diplomacy and that of Turkestan's military-popular administration. The same holds true for the position of the Diplomatic Officer at the Governor-General's Chancellery, in which the authority of the Russian Political Agency and that of the Governor-General intersected. Baranovskii's above-mentioned complaint about "the ill position of the dipl[omatic] officer in Tashkent, who does not have the opportunity to do any fruitful work whatsoever [...]," suggests that this overlap could also be a source of conflict. As an appointee of the Foreign Ministry under the command of the Governor-General, the Diplomatic Officer had quite limited room for manoeuvre, having to reconcile the demands and rivalries of both sides. That being said, for Semenov the connection to von Klemm proved to be great advantage in 1917, as I will show later.

Semenov's letters to Bartol'd make relatively little reference to his professional duties in the colonial administration of Russian Turkestan, but they show that his non-academic workload increased in Tashkent, compared to Ashkhabad. The frequent temporary assignments meant that he had less time for his scholarly pursuits. In March 1913, he apologised to Bartol'd that it had taken him so long to write to him about the location and state of the ancient site of "Nisa, which the Turkmen call Nusa or Nusai" because he had been plagued by "endless jobs, such as the temporary fulfilment of the post of a Diplomatic Officer, the inspection of a commercial school, etc."⁶⁷ Similarly, in the spring of 1914, he wrote to Bartol'd that he was pressed to answer his letter because, from 21 May until 15 September, he would have "less occasions to make any time for my private duties [*lichnye dolzhnosti*]: I will be the Acting Director of the Chancellery amidst the general

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p23: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 19.3.1913.

desolation in Turkestan[...].”⁶⁸ On the whole, however, even in Tashkent Semenov managed to marry his scholarly interests with his administrative duties, and occasionally both converged in ways that were rather fortunate for him. In a short CV – written for the administration of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan during the 1950s⁶⁹ – he stated:

*While carrying out various [administrative] duties, I did not interrupt my scholarly pursuits: A multitude of trips through Central Asia and supplementary spells in rich local archives allowed me to widen my scholarly horizon and collect interesting and often hitherto entirely unknown material of great scholarly significance.*⁷⁰

The outbreak of the First World War, however, not only thinned out the ranks of Turkestan’s colonial administration and facilitated Semenov’s rise through these very ranks, but it also meant that he had much less time for scholarship. The day after his spell as Acting Director of the Chancellery ended, i.e. on 16 September 1914, he wrote to Bartol’d:

*I spend the whole summer in Tashkent burdened with a mass of difficult and extensive work (The director of the Chancellery left for a 4-months vacation and abroad ‘ended up in German captivity’), besides, it was particularly difficult during the time of mobilisation; by now, during such a short period, from the month of May, I have experienced the sixth General-Governor (all of them acting). On the 1st of October, the Dir.[ector] of the Chancellery returns from Berlinian captivity, and I am dreaming of being able to relax for a month or two, i.e. at least free myself a little from these floods of papers.*⁷¹

During the war years, Semenov was forced to deprioritise scholarship, the condition of Russian rule in Central Asia was becoming increasingly precarious and his mood darkened, as the same letter attests: “[T]he times are such that I’m in no mood to work on such [scholarly] issues. Therefore, I have to put off all this until ‘peacetime’ or, at least, until freer days.”⁷² Little did he know that, in September 1914,

⁶⁸ A.A.S., b13, f6, p40: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 22.5.1914.

⁶⁹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.6&9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.45.

⁷¹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p42: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 16.9.1914.

⁷² Ibid.

peacetime was a distant future, and the world he had known before the war would be a mere memory by the early 1920s, when these freer days would eventually begin.

Samarkand (1916-1917) – The culmination of Semenov's administrative career in times of crisis

The fact that the colonial administration relied so heavily on Semenov is an indication of the weakness of the imperial state, which evidently lacked well-qualified administrators of his calibre. This became especially apparent in times of crisis, such as the one of the summer of 1916, when a popular uprising against Russian authority in Central Asia plunged Russian rule in the region into the direst emergency it had known hitherto. The authorities soon called upon Semenov's assistance, facilitating his ascent to the pinnacle of his career as a colonial administrator: in August 1916, he was posted to Skobelev, the administrative centre of the Ferghana Province, to temporarily fulfil the duties of the province's recently dismissed Military Governor, Aleksandr Gippius.⁷³ In the course of ten days, he was appointed the Acting Assistant to the Military Governor of the Samarkand Province, Nil Lykoshin, who was both a capable Orientalist-administrator and a close friend.⁷⁴ After Lykoshin's dismissal in January 1917, Semenov became Samarkand's Acting Military Governor.⁷⁵ In the following, I will look closer at the circumstances of what was both the culmination and the end of Semenov's career in Turkestan's colonial administration.

The Central Asian uprising of 1916 was the result of a disastrous miscalculation made by the imperial state. On 25 June 1916, Nicholas II signed a decree ordering the drafting of "the empire's male alien [*inorodcheskii*] population" of ages between 19 and 43 into labour battalions for the war effort.⁷⁶ Rather than

⁷³ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.43.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy...*, p.146; Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, p.277; Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadtsat' Let Sluzhby...*, p.284.

⁷⁶ A. V. Piaskovskii and S. G. Agadzhanov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916 Goda V Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane: Sbornik Dokumentov* [The uprising of the year 1916 in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: a collection of documents] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), p.25.

alleviating the lack of manpower, as the Russian general staff had intended, the conscription call triggered what Daniel Brower has described as “anti-tsarist, anti-Russian demonstrations, riots, and mass revolt in Central Asia.”⁷⁷ Even before the public announcement of the conscription call on 8 July, rumours about it spread to the town of Khojent in the Samarkand Province, where a riot took place on 4 July, resulting in the deaths of dozens of Tsarist officials, Central Asian administrators and demonstrators.⁷⁸ The unrest soon spread to the other four provinces of Russian Turkestan. In Tashkent, for example, an agitated crowd of protesters, of whom women formed the most vocal part, gathered on 11 July to prevent the drawing up of conscription lists.⁷⁹ The situation escalated and led to the death of a Central Asian police officer, and of nine protesters who were killed by Cossack gunfire.⁸⁰ Resistance to the conscription continued, even if it did not always manifest itself in violent ways. On 29 July, a telegram – signed by “the Act.[ing] Dir.[ector] of the Chanc.[ellery of the Governor-General], State Councillor Semenov” – reminded the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province, Nikolai Kalmakov, to scrutinise the conscription lists more carefully, since they were often populated by “non-existent natives [...] [and by] people, who in many cases do not even know that they have been registered [...].”⁸¹ This practice had to stop, the message read, since it was “undoubtedly, one of the ways of passive resistance, aimed at inhibiting the actual draft.”⁸² By January 1917, the revolt had been brutally suppressed, having cost the lives of many natives, including thousands of Kyrgyz nomads, who died at the hands of both the Russian military and of Russian settlers.⁸³ According to a confidential report about the uprising, which Turkestan’s last Governor-General, Aleksei Kuropatkin, submitted to Nicholas II in February 1917, over two thousand Russians were killed during the revolt. Kuropatkin stressed that, during the entire conquest of

⁷⁷ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.178; Daniel R. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p.1.

⁷⁸ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.178.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.179.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ A. V. Piaskovskii and S. G. Agadzhanov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916 Goda...*, p.43.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate...*, pp.1f.

Central Asia, fewer soldiers had died.⁸⁴ Semenov's exact role in executing the conscription call and suppressing the ensuing revolt is unclear, but it certainly went beyond writing telegrams, as I will show in the following.

The first question that arises is: what may have been Semenov's take on the conscription call? Did he misjudge the mood among the population as dramatically as by the imperial authorities in Petrograd and Tashkent? On 2 July 1916, the highest echelons of Turkestan's Military-Popular Government met in Tashkent to discuss the conscription call during a "special meeting on the question of the mobilisation of natives for rear-area labour service[...]"⁸⁵ In attendance was also "the Acting Director of the Chancellery of the Governor-General, Collegiate Councillor Semenov[...]"⁸⁶ Jeff Sahadeo has argued that those assembled that day failed to read the mood among the population because of their stereotypical view of Turkestan's Muslims as essentially submissive.⁸⁷ Initial concerns articulated at the start of the meeting; for example, the high number of draftees and the fact that the conscription call collided with the cotton harvest season, "dissipated before the image of the passive Muslim [...]," wrote Sahadeo.⁸⁸ Alexander Morrison has suggested that the belief that "Islam [...] constituted the great stumbling block to assimilation and the most profound threat to the stability of Russian rule" blinded even such relatively enlightened, liberal and qualified administrators as Lykoshin to "the more profound grievances of Turkestan's colonized population concerning land, water and Russian settlement, which were brought to the fore [...] in July 1916."⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the minutes of the meeting do not contain Semenov's reaction to the conscription call, presumably because he was not senior enough. They did, however, record the remarks of some of his colleagues, such as Lykoshin and Aleksandr Galkin, the Military Governor of the Syr-Darya Province, both of whom he respected and most

⁸⁴ "Vosstanie V 1916 Godu V Srednei Azii (the Uprising of the Year 1916 in Central Asia)." *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 3, no. 34 (1929), pp.85f.

⁸⁵ L. V. Lesnaia and T. R. Ryskulov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916 G. V Kirgizstane: Dokumenty i Materialy* [The Uprising of the year 1916 in Kyrgyzstan: documents and materials] (Moskva: Gos. sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izd-vo, 1937), pp.15ff.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.178.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Morrison A., "Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic: Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the Aftermath of the Andijan Uprising," *Past Present Past and Present* 214, no. 1 (2012), p.304.

likely agreed with. Despite their prejudice, these administrators did actually air their reservations concerning the conscription call. Galkin stressed that the lack of household registers and precise data on the age of individuals made it “almost impossible” to carry out the mobilisation in the manner the Ministry of the Interior had envisioned, and suggested the implementation of the conscription in the already tested way of calling people for irrigation works and roadworks. Otherwise – he argued – people may suspect that they were being sent to the front to fight, and rebel.⁹⁰ Lykoshin concurred with Galkin, arguing that the conscription should run smoothly as long as the administration refrained from drawing up family registers and, instead, carry out the draft in a manner already familiar to the population.⁹¹ The fact that the assembly decided to appeal to the central government to lower the number of draftees from 250,000 to 200,000 due to the conscription call’s potential negative impact on the cotton harvest, indicates that the voices of concern were not entirely ignored.⁹² Ironically, Kuropatkin’s report about the revolt named as its main causes, not only the timing of the draft (during the harvest season), but also precisely Galkin and Lykoshin’s points, namely the “absence of household registers” and the damage done by “rumours that the recruitment is actually a covert attempt to enlist the native population into compulsory military service.”⁹³

Some hints of Semenov’s views on the conscription call and the revolt it provoked are given in a letter to Bartol’d, written in Samarkand in December 1916. In it, he apologised for not having written to him since Bartol’d had left Tashkent, where the metropolitan scholar had spent the first half of June 1916 as part of a research trip to Turkestan,⁹⁴ and explained:

Please forgive me for this long silence; I can explain it with all the experiences I had to endure during this time: the insurgence of the local ‘loyal subjects’ [‘vernopoddannye’ tuzemtsy] over such a totally unexpected governmental measure as the drafting of workers, the absence in the country during that

⁹⁰ L. V. Lesnaia and T. R. Ryskulov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916...*, pp.15ff.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*, p.20.

⁹³ “Vosstanie V 1916... (*Krasnyi Arkhiv*), p.75.

⁹⁴ V. V. Bartol’d, “Otchet o komandirovke v Turkestanskii krai letom 1916 goda” [Report about the assignment to Turkestan in the Summer of 1916]; Vasilii Bartol’d, *Akademik V. V. Bartol’d Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 8 (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp.336—339.

*time of the Governor-General and the Director of the Chancellery, then my departure to Ferghana, where there was no [Military] Governor, and then [my] transfer to Samarkand and a vagrant life (because of the unpreparedness of an official apartment) until the end of October [...].*⁹⁵

Semenov's words suggest that the "insurgence of the local 'loyal subjects'" came as less of a surprise to him than the "totally unexpected" conscription call, which was ultimately to blame for the disturbances. The sarcasm in his expression "'loyal subjects'" (note the quotation marks) mocks overly optimistic notions of the allegiance of Turkestan's natives to the Russian crown. It indicates that the reason he was more baffled by the conscription call than by the population's response to it, was that he did not regard the vast Sunni Muslim majority of Turkestan's population as loyal subjects. Nor did he consider them citizens equal to the empire's other subjects, including those who, like him, came from a non-Christian background. Rather, he saw Turkestan's natives in a similar light as his friend Lykoshin, who published an article on the issue in a Tashkent newspaper in March 1917, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, and which argued that the denial of "[o]ur native fellow-citizens [...] to fulfil the smallest part of their duty to the motherland [...]" in 1916 had shown that "[o]ur natives had never been citizens [...]," but that they were Muslims first and foremost.⁹⁶ Semenov was more liberal, more knowledgeable about Central Asian cultures, languages and religiosity, as well as less biased by anti-Islamic stereotypes than most of his colleagues in the colonial administration, including his superior, Governor-General Kuropatkin. Still, he would most likely have agreed with the general's opinion that one needed to be cautious regarding the extension of suffrage and legal equality in Turkestan. Kuropatkin expressed this view in a "telegram [...] to the Acting Military Governor of the Samarkand Province A. A. Semenov about the organisation of municipal self-government [...]," dating from 13 March 1917. On the one hand, the message read that "the order of life in free Russia" demanded fundamental changes in local self-

⁹⁵ A.A.S., b13, f6, p72: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 25.12.1916.

⁹⁶ Morrison A., "Sufism, Pan-Islamism...", p.297.

government, such as the election of city dumas.⁹⁷ On the other hand, it concluded with the words:

*In my opinion, the most honourable and, at the same time, most weighty duty, namely that of military service, does not for now rest on the shoulders of the natives of Turkestan, whose rights in the municipal self-government can thus not be fully equal to the rights of those groups of the population to which military duty applies.*⁹⁸

There is little reason and no evidence to suggest that Semenov did not agree with this logic in principle. That is not to say, however, that he saw eye to eye with Kuropatkin on all issues, as I will show in the following.

When Nicholas II installed Kuropatkin as the new Governor-General on 21 July 1916 to end the revolt and execute the conscription call, Semenov still headed the Governor-General's Chancellery in Tashkent.⁹⁹ It took Semenov some time to "get acquainted with the new course (very peculiar) of local politics that is applied by the new Governor-General [...]," he wrote to Bartol'd with a little hindsight in December 1916.¹⁰⁰ His words suggest that he did not entirely agree with policy of Kuropatkin who, soon after his arrival in Turkestan, dismissed the Military Governors of the Ferghana and Syr-Darya Provinces, the above-mentioned Gippius and Aleksandr Galkin, for their failure to effectively control and suppress the insurgency.¹⁰¹ The entry in Kuropatkin's diary from 31 July reads:

In Ferghana [...] Gippius performed miracles. He proclaimed that Tashkent misunderstood his majesty's will, and that the call was only addressed to those who want to go to work voluntarily. About this he sent tens of thousands of appeals to the population. He fell out with commander of the armed forces in chief, Erofeev, wrote to him that his instructions will lead to a revolt, announced that he will directly get in touch with the chairman of the

⁹⁷ M. L. Vais and Kh. Sh. Inoiatov, eds., *Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii V Uzbekistane: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Tashkent: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1963), p.35.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁹⁹ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.180.

¹⁰⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p72: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 25.12.1916.

¹⁰¹ Gippius was dismissed in late July 1916, Galkin in August of the same year. See: A. V. Piaskovskii and S. G. Agadzhanov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916 Goda...*, p.718; M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy...*, p.57.

*Council of Ministers, with the Minister of War and so on. As if this was not enough, Gippius put on a [Muslim] khalat and skullcap, appeared in front of the people in this costume, kissed the Quran...*¹⁰²

Gippius, who seems to have disagreed with Tashkent's and Petrograd's demands and with the military's intransigence, had already exceeded his authority by reinterpreting and hollowing out the mobilisation-call. The episode with the kissing of the Quran in a mullah's disguise, which took place in Namangan on 23 July 1916, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Believing that the people would follow their religious and political leaders if these told them to serve the Russian state, Gippius decided to read out appropriate sections of the holy book in order to convince the Muslim population that it was their duty to obey the regime.¹⁰³ In the eyes of his more hard-line superiors this was unacceptable behaviour for a representative of a strong and self-confident Russian state. At any rate, this appears to have been the point of view of Kuropatkin, who wrote in his diary:

*The power is in bad hands. The Syr-Daryan Military Governor Galkin [Aleksandr Semenovich] – drunk every day. Lykoshin of Samarkand – blind. Gippius in Ferghana – crazy. Kolmakov [Nikolai Klavdievich] of Transcaspia – weak, lacking backbone.*¹⁰⁴

Of the above-mentioned men, only Nikolai Kolmakov “for whatever miraculous reason remained in his post, [although he was] a man of rather lower talent and education than Galkin and Gippius [...],” Sergei Chirkin wrote in his memoirs.¹⁰⁵ It is rather telling that Kolmakov, in contrast to Gippius, Galkin and Lykoshin, had voiced no concerns at all during the above-mentioned special meeting on 2 July, at which he argued that it was “entirely groundless to fear any action against the draft of workers from the side of the population [...]”¹⁰⁶ He even proposed the announcement of awards for the native recruits whose “inherent [...] passion for badges of merit would serve as a motivating factor.”¹⁰⁷ Trying to make sense of Kuropatkin's personnel policy, Chirkin added that the Governor-General “it seemed,

¹⁰² “Vosstanie V 1916... (Krasnyi Arkhiv), p.47.

¹⁰³ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.180.

¹⁰⁴ “Vosstanie V 1916... (Krasnyi Arkhiv), p.46.

¹⁰⁵ Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadsat' Let Sluzhby...*, p.255.

¹⁰⁶ L. V. Lesnaia and T. R. Ryskulov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916...*, p.17.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

could not stand people in his environment who could in one aspect or another hold a candle to him [...]", in particular, if they proved to be too independently minded.¹⁰⁸ Semenov most likely shared Chirkin's lack of understanding for Kuropatkin's decision to sack Galkin, Gippius and Lykoshin. There is no mention of Gippius in Semenov's correspondence, but with Galkin he seemed to have been on good terms, as I have already indicated. In the spring of 1914 he had written to Bartol'd that "on a visit to Galkin [...]" the latter had shown him a bronze object, engraved with "various scenes from ancient-Egyptian mythology [...]," which had been found "in the sands of the extreme south-east of the Semipalatinsk Province [in today's north-east Kazakhstan], where Galkin had been stationed between 1903 and 1908."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, it is rather unlikely that Semenov approved of Kuropatkin's decision to sack an administrator as capable as Lykoshin. That being said, it was during Kuropatkin's watch, and as a result of the dismissals initiated by him, that Semenov became Assistant to the Military Governor of the Ferghana Province in August 1916 and, in January 1917, Acting Military Governor of the Samarkand Province.

Around 10 August 1916, Semenov began assisting Lykoshin in the Samarkand Province, where the revolt had begun. According to Kuropatkin's confidential report, "[...] of all three core provinces of Turkestan the unrests the Jizzakh District, which began on the 13th of July, took the form of an open insurgency."¹¹⁰ A punitive expedition was dispatched on 12 July which, by 25 July, had brutally suppressed the uprising in Jizzakh.¹¹¹ On 20 August 1916, Lykoshin informed Kuropatkin about the results the expedition, in the course of which the "centre of the old town of Dzhizak" and several other settlements and villages in the province had been wholly or partially destroyed.¹¹² Scholars have rightly noted that Lykoshin had played an important role in suppressing the uprising.¹¹³ According to Adeeb Khalid, "Lykoshin

¹⁰⁸ Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadtsat' Let Sluzhby...*, p.255.

¹⁰⁹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.36: Letter from Semenov to Bartol'd on the 3.5.1914; M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy...*, p.57.

¹¹⁰ "Vosstanie V 1916..." (*Krasnyi Arkhiv*), p.67.

¹¹¹ A. V. Piaskovskii and S. G. Agadzhanov, eds., *Vosstanie 1916 Goda...*, pp.152ff.

¹¹² "Dzhizakskoe Vosstanie 1916 G. (the Jizzakh Uprising of the Year 1916)." *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 5, no. 60 (1933), p.91.

¹¹³ See, for instance: Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, "The Fall of the Czarist Empire", in: Edward Allworth, ed., *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p.219.

[...] had been responsible for the suppression of the uprising in Jizzakh, one of the bloodier episodes in the uprising [...].”¹¹⁴ For a more complete understanding of the role played by Lykoshin, however, it is worth citing Marco Buttino’s characterisation of him as “someone who most likely did not share the authorities’ view on the issue of mobilisation, who tried to avoid the insurrection and to reach an agreement with influential people from the Muslim side [...].”¹¹⁵ Buttino also noted that “[t]he order to suppress the insurgency came from Kuropatkin [...], [who] deemed Lykoshin incapable of action [and] dismissed him.”¹¹⁶ In the same vein, Richard Pierce has written that in Samarkand, “General N. S. Lykoshin [...], one of the few Russian officials with a good knowledge of the Uzbek language and customs, managed to avert violence by explanations and promises.”¹¹⁷ It is unclear what role Semenov played during the suppression of the uprising, which had already been largely put down by the time he arrived in Samarkand. But it seems unlikely that he would have acted much differently from Lykoshin, had he been in his place.

Semenov’s earlier-mentioned CV gives the following account of his posting to Samarkand:

*[T]he mobilisation of all of the military personnel, from which the members of the local administrative personnel ruling the country were mainly drawn, left many posts empty; posts which had to be substituted by various people in a rather accidental way. In this situation, [I] was appointed Acting Assistant to the Military Governor of the Samarkand Province (in August 1916), and after the revolution I was confirmed by the Provisional Government as the Manager for provisions in the Samarkand Province.*¹¹⁸

Semenov’s account tries to scatter any suspicion of careerism from his side, which is hardly surprising given that it was written during the Soviet period, when he was well advised to downplay his career in the colonial administration. It neither

¹¹⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.250.

¹¹⁵ Marco Buttino, *Revoliutsiia Naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia Mezhdru Nadeniem Tsarskoi Imperii i Obrazovaniem SSSR* [A revolution in reverse. Central Asia between the fall of the Tsarist Empire and the creation of the USSR] (Moskva: Zven'ia, 2007), p.392.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia...*, p.273.

¹¹⁸ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp. 6&43f.

mentions his ten-day assignment in Ferghana nor the fact that he had, not only managed the provisions in the Samarkand Province, but also stepped in as the province's Military Governor in January 1916. What is more, his relationship with the Provisional Government was not as relaxed as he may have implied in his remark concerning the role he played as Samarkand Province's manager for provisions. This I will show in the following section. That being said, Semenov's above-mentioned letters to Bartol'd, such as the one from September 1914 regarding his having seen six Acting Governor-Generals come and go in less than five months, indicate how much his rise through the ranks of the administration was indeed a result of the increasingly chaotic situation in Russian Turkestan. The crisis of the imperial state in Turkestan in the second half of 1916 rendered Semenov almost indispensable to the faltering colonial administration, allowing him to hold such prominent positions that forced even his Soviet biographers, Litvinskii and Akramov, to concede that:

*It would not be right to close one's eyes, and to try to ignore the fact that in pre-revolutionary times A. A. Semenov was a cog (and by not means an ordinary one) in the large wheel that the Tsarist autocracy created to oppress the population of Central Asia. [...] [He] was a Tsarist administrator, who held high posts in the apparatus of the Turkestan General-Governorship.*¹¹⁹

It is easy to imagine Semenov rising even higher in the hierarchy of the colonial administration, had it not collapsed in the aftermath of the February Revolution.

Semenov's transition from colonial administrator to Soviet academic and advisor (1917-1924)

While the Revolution of 1917 certainly disrupted Semenov's life and career, this rupture was not as complete as it could have been or, indeed, as one might have expected it to be for someone of his seniority. To begin with, the February Revolution did not end Semenov's career in the colonial administration in an instant. The Provisional Government confirmed him in his position as manager for provisions in the Samarkand Province, as Semenov stressed in his above-mentioned CV. What he passed over, however, was the fact that managing the foodstuffs in the

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.44.

Samarkand Province was essentially part of his role as the province's Acting Military Governor. On 16 March 1917, for example, on behalf of Governor-General Kuropatkin, Semenov informed the Commandant of the Kattakurgan District about the need to organise democratically-elected provisions committees at various administrative levels, consisting of "elected representatives of all institutions, cooperatives, unions and societies."¹²⁰ The growing food shortages in Turkestan meant that Semenov's job was not a particularly thankful one. As the prices for food were rising in Turkestan, so were the tensions. For example, on 22 March Semenov received a cable from Jizzakh, sent by the police-chief of the Bogdan sub-district (one of the main centres of the Jizzakh revolt), a certain Afanas'ev, who told him that he had sent twenty rifles to the stations of Lomakino and Obruchevo. They had asked for the weapons because of "persistent rumours of imminent unrests among the native population, owing to the rise in prices for basic commodities."¹²¹ Semenov remained Samarkand Province's Military Governor even after the Russian leaders of several Tashkent Worker and Soldier Soviets had arrested his superior, Governor-General Kuropatkin, on 31 March 1917.¹²² He was dismissed from that post only about a month after Kuropatkin's arrest. Semenov's name comes up in a letter sent by the Provisional Government's Turkestan Committee to Aleksandr Kerenskii on 7 June, informing Petrograd of the decision to elect provincial commissars in Turkestan and to dismiss the former Military Governors and Province Commandants: "After the overthrow of the government" – the letter read – "public bodies have been set up in Turkestan, like elsewhere in the Russian state, to help the authorities consolidate the new political order in the country."¹²³ The letter's wording indicates that the Provisional Government in Petrograd and its Turkestan Committee in Tashkent continued to regard Turkestan as part of the "Russian state" [*rossiiskoe gosudarstvo*], despite the new political order. At the same time, they were keen to dissociate themselves from the discredited imperial legacy. Sacking senior representatives of the *ancien régime*, such as Semenov, was one way of doing so. Accordingly, the message declared:

¹²⁰ M. L. Vais and Kh. Sh. Inoiatov, eds., *Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi...*, p.38

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.48.

¹²² Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.192.

¹²³ M. L. Vais and Kh. Sh. Inoiatov, eds., *Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi...*, p.129.

The initial measures of these [public] bodies were aimed, firstly, at removing from administrative positions in the country individuals whose further remaining in these positions, due to their previous activities, was undesirable in the eyes of the population and, secondly, at their replacement through the election of people deserving of the public's trust. In this manner, were dismissed, among others, the Acting Military Governors of the Ferghana Province – Colonel Ivanov (who left for the Caucasus Army) and of the Samarkand Province – State Councillor Semenov (who is on leave [v otpusku])[...].¹²⁴

At the time, i.e. in late April 1917, this rather unceremonious end to his career as a colonial administrator might have come as a blow to Semenov. In the long term, however, his exit from the colonial administration was a sacrifice to the February Revolution that seems to have helped him to avoid the more serious repressions that would accompany the next revolution. More importantly – as the letter implies – his removal from office was more a cosmetic exercise and a concession to the public mood, rather than a genuine expression of mistrust from the side of the Provisional Government. Accordingly, Semenov was soon given a new position. In his above mentioned CV he described the episode as follows:

At the end of April 1917, I was granted a four-month vacation during which I was appointed Councillor at the Russian Residency in Bukhara [...] I practically fulfilled the responsibilities of the Manager of the local Chancellery at the Russian [Political] Residency and held the post of the first dragoman.¹²⁵

In other words, during his four-month vacation – which had of course been forced upon him, and which marked his exit from the disintegrating Russian colonial administration – Semenov managed to start working directly for the Provisional Government's Foreign Ministry, under whose jurisdiction the Russian Political Residency in Bukhara was placed. He had turned defeat into success.

The question thus arises of why Semenov was assigned to the Russian Political Residency in Bukhara? Sergei Chirkin, who headed the Residency between

¹²⁴ Apart from Ivanov and Semenov, the letter mentioned that the Acting Commandant of Transcaspia, Kalmakov, and the Military Governor of the Syr-Darya Province, a certain Korul'skii, had resigned from their posts. See: *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.43f.

late April and early October 1917, writes in his memoirs that Semenov arrived in Bukhara “shortly before the Bolshevik *coup d’état* [...],” and that he was invited there to prepare the ground for reforms in the formally independent emirate.¹²⁶ Chirkin stressed that the Provisional Government was pushing for reforms, and that, while there was no immediate need for serious changes to Bukhara’s political system, it was imperative to show that the emirate was “going in the same direction of liberal reforms as its patron Russia.”¹²⁷ Reform plans had already been drawn up and approved by Petrograd under Chirkin’s predecessor as Political Resident in Bukhara, Aleksandr Miller, and “a [reform] commission consisting of several experts [including Semenov] had been appointed under the leadership of the Resident, and based on his proposal.”¹²⁸ In mid-May 1917, Chirkin sent a telegram to the Foreign Ministry in Petrograd, informing them about the plans to appoint Semenov to the reform commission, adding that “[he] has already made a positive impression on the ministry because of his repeated fulfilment of the post of a Diplomatic Officer in Tashkent.”¹²⁹ The person in charge of the Foreign Ministry’s Central Asian department at the time was the earlier-mentioned von Klemm, who had previously tried to attract Semenov into the Residency in 1913 and thus needed no convincing of his qualities. In June 1917, von Klemm gave instructions to put Semenov in charge of the plans for the reforms of the Bukharan administration.¹³⁰ In August of the same year, the Foreign Ministry described Semenov’s proposed role as that of “an advisor [and] organiser of the administration of the central government [of Bukhara].”¹³¹ Von Klemm’s and Chirkin’s support for Semenov’s candidature was certainly important. The initiative for his appointment, however, seems to have come from Tashkent’s Turkestan Committee, the instructions of which Chirkin repeatedly referred to in his cables to Petrograd. On 7 August, for example, he cabled the Foreign Ministry that, during a visit to Tashkent, he had learned that Semenov was about to be posted to the Kiev Military District, and that this would complicate his invitation to Bukhara in the near future, “whereas at the moment [Semenov] could

¹²⁶ Chirkin, S. V., Simbirtseva, T.M., *Dvadtsat' Let...*, p.284.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ "Bukhara V 1917 Godu (Bukhara in the Year 1917)." *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 1, no. 20 (1927), p.113.

¹³⁰ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, p.373.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

easily be posted to Bukhara [...].”¹³² He added that, on behalf of the chairman of the Turkestan Committee, he had spoken about the issue with the Emir, “[who] did not raise any objections to the invitation of Semenov, but expressed the wish that [...] his work would not be of an all too active character, at least for the time being.”¹³³ In addition to the backing of von Klemm, Miller, Chirkin and the Turkestan Committee, Alim Khan’s approval of Semenov’s posting was crucial for its success. Another two months passed, however, until he finally assumed office in Bukhara at the beginning of October 1917. Moreover, in line with the Emir’s wishes, Semenov’s tasks were merely preparatory and very limited indeed. According to a report by Chirkin’s successor, Vladimir Elpat'evskii, dating from 4 October 1917, Semenov was supposed to study the administrative system of Bukhara, and to set up the publication of a “very moderate, purely informative newspaper in the local language.”¹³⁴ Even that idea had to be abandoned because of the protests of the Bukharan government, which argued that the population and *ulama* “apparently, did not condone the prospect of publishing newspapers in the Persian language [...],” Elpat'evskii wrote in another letter in October 1917.¹³⁵ Ultimately, perhaps the most tangible fruit of Semenov’s work in Bukhara during the autumn of 1917, is a book published in 1954 and entitled *An Outline of the Structure of the Central Administrative Government of the Bukharan Khanate*.¹³⁶ The importance of this episode for Semenov personally, however, is that the transfer to the Russian Political Residency turned out to be a crucial stepping stone on his way to becoming an advisor to the Bolsheviks, as I will show in the following.

The overthrow of the Provisional Government in the course of the October Revolution also sealed the fate of its agent in Bukhara, the Political Residency. But the Bolsheviks were still faced with the question of how to deal with the nominally independent Bukhara, and its Emir, who chose to ignore them, regarding them as

¹³² “Bukhara V 1917 Godu...”, p.121

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, pp.373f.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Aleksandr Semenov, *Ocherk Ustroistva Tsentral'Nogo Administrativnogo Upravleniia Bukharskogo Khanstva Pozdneishego Vremeni* [An outline of the structure of the central administrative government of the Bukharan Khanate.], Vol. 25 (Stalinabad: Akademia Nauk Tadzh. SSR, 1954).

temporary usurpers.¹³⁷ In the aftermath of the October Revolution, Alim Khan refused audience to the newly established Soviet Collegium for Bukharan Affairs, as one of its members, Mikhail Preobrazhenskii, complained in an article in the Bolshevik newspaper *Nasha Gazeta* on 3 April 1917.¹³⁸ Preobrazhenskii wrote that the Emir continued to address all official correspondence to the Political Residency, “which was still governed by the old spirit of the three administrators [Kazimir] Rolzdol’skii,¹³⁹ [Ivan] Umniakov and Semenov.”¹⁴⁰ The article even claimed that an unspecified arrested Bukharan dignitary had been in possession of a letter written by the Emir that read: “These are our people, you can turn to them for advice.”¹⁴¹ Regardless of whether this anecdote is true or not, Semenov’s expertise in dealing with the Emir and with Bukhara’s elites more broadly rendered him a potentially valuable ally for the fledgling Bolshevik government. As a result, Semenov was later able to write in his CV that “[a]fter a Soviet commissar had been appointed in Bukhara, I was asked to help to organise and establish normal relations with Bukhara, [...] something that I eagerly accepted.”¹⁴²

In late April 1918, Semenov left Central Asia for Russia in order to help with the setting up of a university in Tashkent, the future Central Asian State University (SAGU). In his above-mentioned CV, he wrote:

*[...] I was summoned to the Sovnarkom [Council of People’s Commissars] of the Turk[estan] Republic, where I was told that I am ordered to the centre, to Petrograd and Moscow, in order to plead for the opening of a university in Tashkent [...].*¹⁴³

If Semenov’s previous cooperation with the Bolsheviks was essentially pragmatic, the prospect of helping to create a university in Central Asia, at which he would eventually teach himself, seems to have filled him with a degree of enthusiasm. On 21 April 1918 (according to the Julian calendar), Semenov wrote his first letter to

¹³⁷ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii...*, p.126.

¹³⁸ M. L. Vais and Kh. Sh. Inoiatov, eds., *Pobeda Oktiabr’skoi...*, p.217.

¹³⁹ Rozdol’skii succeeded Elpat’evskii as Political Resident in Bukhara in December 6th 1917. See: *ibid.*, p.272.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.73f.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

Bartol'd since December 1916, informing him about "the question of the opening of a university in Tashkent in the autumn of this year," and about proposals for both "a historical-philological and an Oriental faculty."¹⁴⁴ He also invited Bartol'd and other professors to Moscow to discuss the matter. "Money and accommodation for the university are promised [...]," Semenov assured Bartol'd, betraying his excitement.

Semenov's stay in Russia was delayed because the civil war interrupted "the regular traffic on the railways [and] disturbed the connection with Turkestan for almost two years [...]," as he wrote in his CV.¹⁴⁵ In the period between April 1918 and January 1920, he continued gathering governmental support, finances, staff and equipment for the planned Tashkent University, even gaining the backing of the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, whom he mentioned among "those members of the central government, who greatly assisted the formation of a university in Central Asia, and who were always very accommodating towards me in this respect [...]."¹⁴⁶ At the same time, Semenov cultivated his contacts [to/with] metropolitan scholars, such as Bartol'd, and also to Ol'denburg, the permanent secretary of the Russian/Soviet Academy of Sciences between 1904 and 1929. According to David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, it had been Ol'denburg whose pragmatic readiness to seek accommodation with the Bolsheviks "helped to ensure the [academy's] survival [...]," and thereby also that of such specialists of the ancient régime as Semenov.¹⁴⁷ These connections helped him to find work in several research institutions during the precarious years of the Russian civil war. In Semenov's own words (taken from his CV):

*I was [...] working for the All-Russian Museum Collegium and for the Russian Academy of History of Material Culture; [...] I was a delegate from Moscow at the All-Russian museum conference, which met in 1919 in Petrograd; [...] I was sent on museum-matters to the towns of Ivanovo-Vosnesensk, Morshansk and to other places [...].*¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ A.A.S.b13, f6, p74: Letter from Semenov to V. Bartol'd 21.4.1918 (Julian calendar).

¹⁴⁵ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.73f.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.196.

¹⁴⁸ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.74.

One can imagine the sense of relief and assurance that Semenov must have felt when, in his own words, “I left [Moscow] in January 1920 at the first opportunity to travel to Tashkent with the first echelon of the Turkestan University, carrying the professors, instruments, books etc.”¹⁴⁹ For those on the train – Semenov wrote to Bartol’d in December 1919 – “[...] a special and rigid political filtration has been set up, on the basis of a questionnaire individually composed for everyone.”¹⁵⁰ Yet he, a former Acting Military Governor, was on that train equipped with a travel warrant issued by Lunacharskii himself.

The establishment of Tashkent University in September 1920 laid the groundwork for Semenov’s future career as a Soviet academic in Central Asia, even if he continued to work for some time for the above mentioned and other metropolitan research and educational institutions. Initially, Tashkent University did not have a separate Oriental faculty. But an Oriental institute existed in the city from the autumn of 1918, until it was merged with the university in 1924 to create an Oriental faculty.¹⁵¹ During the early 1920s, Semenov found employment in both institutions, teaching courses such as “an introduction to Iranian philology, Persian poetry, Persian literature, Persian language, and the history of research on Turkestan as well as the archaeology of Turkestan.”¹⁵² Tashkent, which was soon to become the capital of Uzbekistan, would remain his home for most of his life. But the following lines from a letter by Semenov to Bartol’d, dated 27 January 1925, hint at his emerging connection to another embryonic Soviet republic, whose capital was much less appealing than Tashkent, but whose national history and culture he would help to conceptualise in the course of his career:

The other day the ‘Scientific Society of the Study of Tadzhikistan’ was formed here with two sections: 1) geography and economy and 2) historical-philological and ethnographical. The programme is very broad, and thus hardly realisable by the local [...] Iranian-Slavonic actors (the presidium consists out of Tajiks, Russians, of an Afghan a Czech etc.). A printed

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.74.

¹⁵⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p96: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 2.12.1919.

¹⁵¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, pp.76f.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

*publication is planned. The centre of the society will be in Tashkent, and a filial in Dyushanbe (the capital of Tadzhikiya).*¹⁵³

¹⁵³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p132: Letter from Semenov to V. Bartol'd on the 27.1.1925.

CHAPTER III – From “Tashkent gentlemen” to “Turkestantsy”

Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, the authors of Aleksandr Semenov’s biography published in 1971, have deliberately paid little attention to his pre-revolutionary career in the colonial administration. The hint is in the book’s subtitle, which describes the work as a “scholarly-biographical outline.” According to Litvinskii and Akramov, “[t]he administrative [*sluzhebnaia*] career of A.A. Semenov the administrator [*chinovnik*] is of little interest for the history of scholarship [...]”¹ In fact, Semenov’s scholarly pursuits and administrative work (in particular before 1917) were often highly interwoven and sometimes complementary. Moreover, Semenov had never been exclusively a scholar. By the time of the October Revolution he was already in his mid-forties, and when he was eventually admitted into the privileged circle of Soviet academicians (he became corresponding member of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences in September 1943) he had just turned seventy.² Soviet historians are right to stress that Aleksandr Semenov was committed to scholarship throughout his life; but they should not forget that he equally and simultaneously served the Russian state in Central Asia – no matter whether the latter was ruled by Nicholas II, Lenin, Stalin or Khrushchev. As such, he was consistently an agent of Russian colonial and imperial rule in the region.

But even as a colonial administrator of this executive and thoroughly militarised branch of the Tsarist state, Semenov was still very engaged in a whole range of cultural, scholarly, educational and conservational matters, which transcended the basic political, military and economic concerns of the colonial state. Semenov himself repeatedly, and sometimes not without irony, referred to such matters in his correspondence as “questions of the higher order” [*voprosy vysshego poleta*] (which could also be translated as “highbrow matters”); whereby the irony, usually indicated by quotation marks, mocked those who, unlike Semenov, regarded

¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Ocherk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.44f.

² *ibid.*, p.112.

libraries, museums and various scholarly concerns as mildly worthwhile only if they promised to impress their superiors and hence lead to promotion. This ridicule is echoed in a letter, which Semenov wrote shortly before Christmas 1906 and addressed to his friend and teacher, the renowned Orientalist Vasilii Bartol'd. The lines describe the mood among Tashkent's Russian colonial society on the eve of the arrival of the new Governor-General, Nikolai Grodekov, who succeeded Dean Subbotich, who had been dismissed in the summer of that year because of his alleged liberalism in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905:

All institutions in one way or another are beginning to prepare themselves for the arrival of Grodekov; even the ill-fated museum, which Subbotich has called a 'joke' [anekdot], is brought into order, of course only as far as this is possible. Because in order to identify and tidy up all that trash that has been heaped up carelessly in the rooms months and not some two-and-a-half weeks are required. The following is typical for the 'Tashkent gentlemen' [gospoda tashkenttsy]: even those who never in their lives have cared much for museums are now beginning to drop by there and to give instructions. All this, of course, because a new General-Governor is coming, who has an interest in things 'of the higher order'.³

Semenov used the expression "Tashkent gentlemen" as an umbrella term for the sort of colonial administrators he was eager to distance himself from. But his choice of words was deliberate in that it referred to a broader discourse of contemporary political satire. The *gospoda tashkenttsy* had become proverbial among the reading Russian public following the publication of a series of satirical articles between 1869 and 1872 by the writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. In these, the author ridiculed the members of the colonial administration by contrasting their lofty rhetoric of Russian and European civilisation and enlightenment in Asia with their own rather modest personal qualities and trivial motives for serving in the empire's periphery,⁴ which, according to Saltykov-Shchedrin, could be summarised with a single word: "zhrat"

³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.7: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 23.12.1906.

⁴ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.60f.

(to stuff oneself).⁵ Anyone serving in Turkestan, but particularly those with an academic and long-standing interest in the region, were obviously keen to disassociate themselves from such clichés and to better the image of the local administration. One way of doing that was by establishing various scholarly societies and institutions, such as museums and libraries. Although I am not claiming that vanity and the machinations of sycophants were the only motives behind such endeavours, Semenov's reference to the "ill-fated museum" – the Turkestan Museum in Tashkent – suggests that they often were; although in Semenov's case the museum was, indeed, a matter quite close to his heart. Regardless of this, the Tashkent gentlemen, on the one hand, and the so-called things of the higher order, such as the museum, on the other, were clearly interlinked and essential in helping Semenov to find his own role and identity in Turkestan's colonial administration. I will, therefore, dwell a little longer on the issue.

The ignorant, venal and careerist *chinovnik* (civil servant, from Russian *chin* for rank) was, of course, not only an object of contempt for Semenov but a popular literary cliché in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the minds of the reading Russian public of that time, according to Jeff Sahadeo, the hometown of this *chinovnik* was Tashkent, where Semenov spent most of his pre-revolutionary career (and, indeed, of his professional life during the Soviet period).⁶ This cliché probably contained more than just a kernel of truth. Indeed, many members of the colonial administration regarded Tashkent (and generally Russian Turkestan) as merely a brief and insignificant station in their career. The American writer and diplomat Eugene Schuyler, who travelled to Tashkent in the 1870s, wrote that the city was "looked upon as a temporary place of exile, [...]" and that Russian society there was "divided into cliques and coteries, for though with the exception of the highest officials, nearly everyone who is there has either come there to avoid his creditors or [...] to keep out of some scrape, or [...] on account of increased pay [...]"⁷ Apparently, such notions made Semenov and his associates only more resolute to

⁵ Mikhail Saltykov, *Gospoda Tashkenttsy: Kartiny Nравov* [Tashkent Gentlemen: sketches of their morals] (St. Petersburg: V.V. Pratts, 1873), p.25.

⁶ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.60.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.61.

prove the opposite and to dissociate themselves from the so called Tashkent gentlemen.

The Tashkent Museum and other “highbrow matters” – Improving the image of the colonial administration

The “ill-fated museum” that Semenov referred to was the Turkestan Museum in Tashkent. Its origins date back to 1871, when members of the Turkestan branch of the *Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography* envisioned a project to create a museum in the capital of Russian Turkestan. The project was not realised at the time because Governor-General Konstantin von Kaufman deemed it premature, even though he was supportive of the issue in principle, arguing that “the successful development of the Turkestan region depends on a thorough acquaintance with it, and a museum is the best means to achieve this.”⁸ Evidently, Tashkent’s Russian intellectuals had managed to convince von Kaufman of the idea of – to use Jeff Sahadeo’s phrase – the “complementarity of state power and scientific knowledge” in Russian Turkestan.⁹ Only six years later (in 1876) a provisional museum opened at the statistical committee (of the Chancellery of the Governor-General), as a result of the lobbying of the committee’s head and Governor of the Syr-Daria Province, General Nikolai Golovachev and his secretary, Nikolai Maev,¹⁰ who was the long-term editor of the *Turkestanskii vedomosti* (Turkestan Gazette).¹¹ Golovachev was well known for his extensive collection of coins, among those educated members of Turkestan’s administration who displayed some interest in the history of Central Asia.¹² He was also notorious for his command of the punitive detachment responsible for the massacre of Turkmen refugees of the

⁸ A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent, V Proshlom i Nastoishchem; Istoricheskii Ocherk* [Tashkent past and present: a historical outline] (Tashkent: Tipo-Lit. O.A. Portseva, 1912), p.277.

⁹ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial...*, p.62.

¹⁰ Nikolai Aleksandrovich Maev (1835—1896) was a military statistician, geographer and ethnographer. He was the secretary of the Turkestan Statistical Commission, organiser of the Turkestan Public Library and Museum, and editor of the *Turkestanskii vedomosti* from 1869 until 1892 when he retired in the rank of a Major-General. See: M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy do 1917 Goda: Biobibliograficheskii Slovar'* [Russian Military Orientalists until 1917: A biblio-biographical dictionary] (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura (RAN), 2005), p.149.

¹¹ A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent, V Proshlom ...*, p.277.

¹² Svetlana Gorshenina, *The Private Collections of Russian Turkestan in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), p.88.

Iomud tribe in the summer of 1873.¹³ One cannot but wonder whether the following verse from a Turkmen lament, commemorating the excessively bloody Russian victory at Gök-Tepe in 1881, and translated by Semenov in 1903, contains a hint to the origins of at least some of items in Golovachev's collection:

[...] *[Our] carpets, beds and horse harnesses*
And the kibitkas from white felt carpets,
The silver and gold of our women's dress,—
*Everything in pieces, all was taken, [...]*¹⁴

Semenov must have known about the general's bloody record. Moreover, his translation of the Turkmen lament suggests a level of empathy with the victims of the massacre. Nevertheless, Semenov found nothing but praise for Golovachev in the propagandistic (as well as scholarly in part) publication *Kaufmanskii Sbornik* (*The Kaufman Anthology*) published in 1910. Describing von Kaufman's second Bukharan campaign against Muzaffar ad-Din, Semenov wrote that, after "fanatical Mullahs, proponents of the 'holy war' [had] flooded the [...] Zarafshan valley," von Kaufman sent out "General Golovachev, who had so heroically excelled in the battle at Samarkand, [...]" against Katta-Kurgan.¹⁵ Golovachev's subordinate, Nikolai Maev –

¹³ The Iomuds had been the major force defending the Khanate of Khiva against the Russian conquest in the spring of 1873, for which Governor-General Kaufman was eager to punish them. Under the pretext of the Turkmen's unwillingness to fulfil virtually unfulfillable reparation payments, the Russians, under the command of Golovachev, attacked, overtaking the refugees, who were roaming the desert around Khiva, devastating their livestock and carts, destroying their food supplies and houses, killing many of them and driving them into the Zaikesh river where many drowned. See: Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 33; By the time Semenov was stationed in Tashkent (from 1906), historians such as M. A. Terent'ev criticised Golovachev for the massacre but defended von Kaufman's role in the episode. See: Alexander Morrison, "Writing the Russian Conquest of Central Asia" (St. Petersburg, 29.5.2014), p.16.

¹⁴ The above-quoted verse of the song is relatively mild, compared to the much more graphic parts that concern the physical annihilation of the Turkmen. See: Aleksandr Semenov, "Turkmenskaia Pesnia Pro Vziatie Geok-Tepe (A Turkmen Song about the Taking of Geok-Tepe)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 4, no. 59 (1903), p.124. Elsewhere Semenov wrote the following lines on the issue: "The fortress of Geok-Tepe was taken by the Russians and handed over to the soldiers to loot it for three days. This episode has burned itself into the memory of the Teke [people] for a long time. Those who managed to escape dashed through the sands in panic fear, spreading everywhere the news of the approach of the implacable and terrible foe." See: Aleksandr Semenov, *Ocherki Iz Istorii Prisoedineniia Vol'noi Turkmenii (1881—1885)* [Episodes from the history of the adjunction of free Turkmenia] (Tashkent:, 1909), p.3.

¹⁵ A. A. Semenov, "Pokoritel' i ustroitel' Turkestanskogo kraia general-ad'iutant K. P. fon-Kaufman I" (The Conqueror and Constructor of the Turkestan Region General-Adjutant K.P. Von-Kaufman I), in: *Kaufmanskii Sbornik, Izdannyi V Pamiat' 25 Let, Istekshikh so Dnia Smerti Pokoritelia i Ustroitelia Turkestanskogo Kraia Gen.-Ad. K.P. Fon-Kaufmana I* [The Kaufman Anthology, published on the

likewise a participant of the campaigns against Khiva and Kokand – was also a voice that was very familiar to Russian colonial society, on account of his extensive journalistic work. In 1872, for example, he had written the article *Our situation in Central Asia*, published simultaneously in St. Petersburg and Tashkent, which argued that Russians had a “moral obligation” to effectively rule the region and develop its wealth for their state, nation and for European civilisation.¹⁶ Maev was keen to distinguish the Russian frontier from its allegedly exploitative and individualist/egoistic American counterpart. He warned that the ignorance and arrogance of “the English race” had provoked the Indian uprising in 1857, an event that challenged European civilisational superiority.¹⁷ Maev’s message was clear: lest history repeat itself in Russian Turkestan, the state had to rely on well-trained and scientifically-minded colonial administrators with accurate regional expertise. Administrators such as Maev wanted to upgrade the damaged image of the “Tashkent gentlemen” and to assert the importance and benefit of their profession to nation and state, arguing that “questions of the higher order” were not a sham but of vital and practical importance.

In 1898 the organisation of the Turkestan museum was temporarily laid in the hands of the highly influential missionary, educationalist, Orientalist and author of, at times, virulently anti-Islamic publications, Nikolai Ostroumov,¹⁸ and Nikolai Mallitskii (1873-1947). Mallitskii had been the editor in chief of *Turkestanskii vedomosti* (between 1901 and 1906), Mayor of Tashkent (between 1907 and 1917), member of the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology (TKLA) as well as the long-term chairman of the Turkestan branch of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society (TOIRGO), and after the 1917 Revolution one of the organisers the Central

occasion of the 25th anniversary of the death of the conqueror and benefactor of the Turkestan region General-Adjutant K.P. von Kaufman I] (Moscow: 1910), p.xxi.

¹⁶ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.62f.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Nikolai Petrovich Ostroumov (1846–1930), after graduating from the Theological Seminary of Tambov and subsequently from the Kazan Theological Academy, moved to Tashkent in 1877, where he worked as inspector of schools in Turkestan and as editor of the *Turkestanskaia tuzemnaia gazeta*/Turkiston viloyatining gazeti (Turkestan native newspaper) between 1883-1917. See: B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo Vostokovedeniia i Arkheologii V Turkestane; Turkestanskii kruzhok Liubitelei Arkheologii (1895-1917 Gg.)* [From the history of Russian Orientalism and Archaeology in Turkestan; The Turkestan Circle of Amateurs of Archaeology (1895-1917)] (Tashkent: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1958), p.71.

Asian State University (SAGU) in Tashkent.¹⁹ Incidentally, he was also Ostroumov's son-in-law. Both men would remain close to Semenov until their deaths in 1930 and 1947, respectively.²⁰ Participation in scholarly or educational societies did not function in an academic vacuum, but was also a way of improving one's career prospects in the colonial administration. Sahadeo has pointed out that Mallitskii, "who began his career in Turkestan as a history and geography teacher at the Tashkent gymnasium, used TOIRGO as a ladder to climb among Russian Tashkent's elites [...]."²¹ As caretakers of the Tashkent museum, however, Ostroumov and his son-in-law proved less capable. By 1907 the exhibits were displayed in no apparent order and the museum's "appearance was so unappealing that the [Governor]-General N.I. Grodekov instructed A. A. Semenov, who was well versed in this matter, to knock the museum into shape, something that A.A. accomplished successfully."²² Where two dutiful colonial administrators having interests in cultural and educational matters and a stake in improving the image of the local Russian administration failed, Semenov succeeded. Apparently, it helped that he was interested in the museum for its own sake.

The Turkestantsy

As mentioned above, Semenov and his associates were eager to distance themselves from the so called Tashkent gentlemen. Finding an appropriate self-designation was a crucial part of this endeavour. Since, according to Sahadeo, the meaning of "Tashkenters" was already appropriated, Semenov and his colleagues "sought other labels to define their quest for progress on the periphery."²³ The choice fell on *Turkestantsy* (Turkestanis) – a term Semenov used the rest of his life to describe not

¹⁹ B. V. Lunin, *Istoriografiia obshchestvennykh nauk v Uzbekistane: Bio-Bibliograficheskie Ocerki* [Historiography of the Social Sciences in Uzbekistan: Bio-Bibliographical Outlines] (Tashkent: Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, 1974), pp.230-233.

²⁰ A. A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent, V Proshlom...*, p.280.; on N.G.Mallitskii see: "Mallitskii" in: Ia V. Vasilkov and M. Iu Sorokina, *Liudi i Sudby: Biobibliograficheskii Slovar Vostokovedov - Zhertv Politicheskogo Terrora V Sovetskii Period 1917-1991* [People and Destinies. A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of Orientalists: Victims of Political Repression during the Soviet Era (1917-1991)], Vol. 2014 (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie), online at: <http://memory.pvost.org/pages/malitskij.html>.

²¹ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.67.

²² A. I. Dobrosmyslov, *Tashkent V Proshlom...*, p.280.

²³ *ibid.*, p.58.

only himself, but also his friends and colleagues from the pre-revolutionary period. In November 1925, for instance, Semenov appealed to Bartol'd: "PS. We Turkestantsy would be happy if you would not travel to Turkey."²⁴ Even thirty-one years later, in November 1956, Semenov's fellow Orientalist and friend, Aleksandr Vasil'evich Pankov (1883-1959), was pleased to tell him the news that, in Tashkent, "the old learned men [*stariki-uchenye*] and youngsters devoted to science, such as the lecturer G.[eorgii] N.[ikolaevich] Chabrov",²⁵ had founded a "Circle for the History of the Study of Turkestan", in the library of the SAGU, where "once a month talks take place, which are dedicated to the old Turkestantsy, to their work for the peoples of Turkestan and for science."²⁶

Who were the *Turkestantsy*, and what united them? For example, the above-mentioned Aleksandr Pankov was, in many ways, connected to both his birthplace, Tashkent, and to Semenov, with whom he shared several experiences: both studied Oriental Studies in Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century;²⁷ both were members of the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology (TKLA) and worked for the Turkestan Department of the Russian Geographical Society;²⁸ after the October Revolution both participated in the organisation of the Central Asian State University (SAGU) in Tashkent, and of the Turkestan Oriental Institute (TVI) and taught at both these institutions and at Tashkent's Military School of Orientalism (*Voennaia shkola vostokovedeniia*); and in May 1931 both were among the SAGU-professors arrested and exiled from Tashkent for three years, whereafter they resumed their work at

²⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.136: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 4.11.1925; Either Semenov was simply concerned about Bartol'd's health (which would be odd, given the fact that he invited him numerous times to come to Central Asia), or he was afraid that he might emigrate. At any rate, when the Bartol'd travelled to Turkey three years later (in November 1928) he sent a postcard to his "dear fellow [golubchik]" Semenov, to inform him about the publication of his works on the Ismailis in a Turkish journal. In: A.A.S., b13, f1, p.37: Postcard from V.V.Bartol'd to Semenov on the 30.11.1928.

²⁵ Georgii Nikolaevich Chabrov (+1904 in St. Petersburg) came to Central Asia in the 1930s (after his graduation from the faculty of linguistics and material culture of Leningrad University in 1927). According to Svetlana Gorshenina, he was among the leading organisers of the study of art history in the region since the 1940s. See: Svetlana Gorshenina, "Iz Istorii Iskusstvovedeniia V Tashkentskom Universitete (from the History of Art History at Tashkent University)," *Arkheologiya i Khudozhestvennaia Kul'tura Tsentral'noi Azii (Archaeology and Artistic Culture of Central Asia)*, no. 2 (1995), p.19f.

²⁶ A.A.S., b13, f4, p93: Letter from A.V.Pankov to A.A.S. on the 29.11.56.

²⁷ "Pankov" in: Ia V. Vasilkov and M. Iu Sorokina, *Liudi i Sudby...*

²⁸ "Spravochnik Nauchnykh Obshchestv Rossii (Handbook of Scientific Societies of Russia)." http://www.snor.ru/?an=sc_482 (accessed 15/11, 2013).

SAGU and were temporarily employed at the Tajik Teachers' Institute (*Tadzhikskii uchitel'skii institut*) in Tashkent;²⁹ both laboured on the description of Oriental manuscripts in SAGU's Fundamental Library; and last but not least, both Pankov and Semenov died in Tashkent within a year of each other. In his letter, Pankov invited Semenov to visit Tashkent and give a talk about "any cultural figure [*deiatel' kul'tury*] of Turkestan [...]," and to follow the example of Boris Lunin and of unspecified others, who had already spoken about Vasilii Bartol'd; Vladimir Petrovich Nalivkin (1852–1918), a Russian nobleman, officer and participant of the campaign against Khiva in 1873, but also an Orientalist, socialist and leading Turkestani educationalist;³⁰ Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin (1860–1922), an outstanding military Orientalist from the nobility and, among other things, Commandant of the Khujand District (between 1905 to 1912), and Semenov's predecessor as Governor of Samarkand province from January 1914 until January 1917;³¹ the earlier-mentioned Nikolai Mallitskii; and Mikhail Evgen'evich Masson (1897–1986), a Russian

²⁹ A.A.S., b13, f4, p93: Letter from A.V.Pankov to A.A.S. on the 29.11.56.

³⁰ Vladimir Nalivkin, whom Boris Lunin has called "a socially complex and contradictory figure" (see B. V. Lunin, *Istoriografiia obshchestvennykh nauk...*, p.247), was a highly capable member of Turkestan's military administration (taking charge of the Russian native schools between 1885–1890 and temporarily becoming the secretary of the Governor-General), before he became increasingly critical of the Russian administration. In 1907 he entered the second Duma (as non-party delegate from Tashkent close to the Social-Democratic fraction), and in the aftermath of the February Revolution (on July 19th 1917) Aleksandr Kerenskii appointed him head of the Provisional Government's Turkestan Committee (see: Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868–1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.68). However, after having lost a political struggle with the Bolsheviks and other radical parties which split from the Turkestan Committee in September 1917, Kerenskii replaced Nalivkin later that month as head of the Committee with General Pavel Korovichenko, who in turn lost power to the Bolsheviks in October and was subsequently arrested and shot in a Tashkent prison in December. Nalivkin, who had lost the confidence of both the Bolsheviks and their opponents, "was afraid that he would be killed, escaped, went into hiding" and, eventually, shot himself in January 1918 on his wife's grave. According to Lunin (1974), he left a note, which asked not to blame anyone for his death and to organise a "simple, proletarian and civilian burial, since already for a long time I do not belong to any faith." In an article from 1990 Lunin added the following words to Nalivkin's note: "[...] I cannot consent with what is going on, but an enemy of my people [...] I cannot be and I am leaving this world [...]." (See: S. N. Abashin, "V. P. Nalivkin: 'Budet to, chto neizbezhno dolzhno byt'; i to, chto neizbezhno dolzhno byt', uzhe ne mozhnet ne byt'." *Krizis orientalizma v Rossiiskoi Imperii?* [V. P. Nalivkin: 'That Which Inevitably Must Be Will Be; and that Which Inevitably Must Be Already Cannot Fail To Be.' A Crisis of Orientalism in the Russian Empire?], in: N. G. Suvorova, ed., *Aziatskaia Rossiia: Liudi i Struktury Imperii: Sbornik Nauchnykh Statei* [Asian Russia: People and Structures of Empire: A volume of scholarly articles] (Omsk: Izd-vo OmGU, 2005), pp.55f.

³¹ M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy...*, pp.145–147; According to Alexander Morrison, Lykoshin is "perhaps the most prominent example of the very common overlap to be found between the production of scholarly work on Russia's colonial territories and their administration." See: Morrison A., "Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic: Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the Aftermath of the Andijan Uprising," *Past and Present* 214, no. 1 (2012), p.264.

archaeologist/Orientalist and learned irrigation-engineer, who was also a member of *Turkomstaris*³² (Turkestan Committee of museum affairs and for the protection of relics of antiquity, arts and nature) during the 1920s, the head of SAGU's archaeological faculty from 1940 onwards, and who became an academician of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan in 1951.³³

As the self-designation *Turkestantsy* implies, the above-mentioned men (with the exception of Bartol'd, who was nonetheless heavily involved in Turkestani affairs) strongly identified with the place they worked, lived and died (in all cases bar Lykoshin's, who was forced to spend the last few years of his life in Samara). But they were by no means a homogenous group. There were generational differences between them, and differing world-views; perhaps most importantly, they were sometimes divided by rivalries. According to Semenov's daughter, Lykoshin and especially Mallitskii were among her father's closest friends in Tashkent.³⁴ Their occupational duties and their scholarly interests united them. All three were members of the TKLA, which Lykoshin had co-founded in 1895,³⁵ and of various other learned associations. Furthermore, they closely cooperated with each other in their scholarly and journalistic pursuits.³⁶ Moreover, their collaboration as scholars and as colonial administrators was perfectly complementary. For instance, the fact that Mallitskii from Tashkent favourably reviewed Semenov's diploma-dissertation in the *Turkestanskii vedomosti* (1900, Nr.56), only months before the latter began his career in the colonial administration in Ashkhabad certainly did not damage his image in the eyes of the Turkestan elites and thus enhanced his chances of employment.³⁷ Mallitskii was, indeed, an influential and steady ally to have in a Russian Turkestan, which otherwise was characterised by a high fluctuation of many of those in the more senior ranks. Similarly, without Lykoshin's support as Governor

³² In Russian: Turkestanskii komitet po delam muzeev i okhrany pamiatnikov stariny, iskusstva i prirody.

³³ "Masson, M.E." <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/bse/107132/Maccoh> (accessed 6/10, 2014).

³⁴ Litvinskii, B.A. & Akramov, N.M. (1971): *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.51.

³⁵ M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie Voennye Vostokovedy...*, p.146.

³⁶ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, pp.79f, 83f and 204.

³⁷ Litvinskii, B.A. & Akramov, N.M. (1971): *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.28.

of Samarkand province, Semenov would probably not have been appointed his Acting Assistant in August 1916.³⁸

The limits of the label *Turkestantsy* is perhaps best illustrated by the case of Nalivkin. Almost twenty years Semenov's senior, Nalivkin was in many ways a typical *Turkestanets*, and yet he differed greatly in his political outlook from most of his colleagues, including Semenov. There is no mention of his name in Semenov's correspondence. No matter how their relationship may have appeared prior to February 1917 – for example, Nalivkin was also involved in the *TKLA* – it most likely changed thereafter. For in the aftermath of the revolution, Nalivkin not only held positions of much higher authority than any of the afore-mentioned *Turkestantsy*, but also favoured more wide-ranging political and social transformations than Lykoshin, Mallitskii or, indeed, Semenov. Nalivkin was appointed head of the Turkestan Committee only weeks after the temporary committee had removed Semenov and other colonial administrators from office in June 1917, on the grounds that their previous involvement in the colonial administration forbade their further employment in Turkestan's government.³⁹ He did not reverse its decision. Moreover, when Turkestan's only native-language newspaper, the government controlled *Turkestanskaia Tuzemnaia Gazeta/Turkistan Wilayatining Gazeti* (Turkestan native gazette), was taken over in mid-March 1917 by a group of Jadids, among them Ubaydullah Khojaev⁴⁰ and Munawwar Qari,⁴¹ replacing Nikolai Ostroumov as its editor (a post the latter had held since 1883), Nalivkin chaired a public meeting of the Provisional Government's Tashkent Executive Committee, at which, speaking in Turkic, he criticised the previous limitations on the freedom of the vernacular press and promised improvement: "now that there are no secrets between the

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.43.

³⁹ Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba V Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve (1906-1920 Gg.): Rossiiskaia Diplomiia V Sud'bakh* [Vice-Consul Vvedenskii: Service in Persia and in the Bukharan Khanate (1906-1920): Russian diplomacy in destinies] (Moskva: Izdat. Sotsial'no-Politicheskaiia Mysl', 2003), p.277.

⁴⁰ Ubaydullah Khojaev (1886-1942) a Tashkent lawyer, publisher and one of the city's leading Muslim reformists/educationalist. See: *ibid.*, p.235f.

⁴¹ Munawwar Qari Abdurrashid Khan oghli (1878-1931) was one of Tashkent's leading Muslim reformists/educationalists. See: Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Vol. 27 University of California Pr, 1998), p.95.

government and the Muslims."⁴² Irrespective of their familiarity with the region's history, languages and customs, and despite their friendships with members of the Muslim elites, for liberal members of the colonial administration, including Lykoshin, Mallitskii and (I suspect) Semenov, this takeover and — more importantly — the government's intention to extend Russian citizenship and equal electoral and representational rights to Turkestan's Muslim population was viewed as too much too soon. At a meeting hosted by the Tashkent Constitutional Democrats in January 1906, Mallitskii argued that equal voting rights for Central Asians, which were demanded by a minority, should be denied to them temporarily "until the 'civilizing mission' was complete."⁴³ Similarly, on 19 March 1917, Lykoshin published an article in the liberal daily *Turkestanskii kur'er*, entitled *Grazhdane tuzemtsy!* (Citizens natives!), in which he, essentially, argued that the natives had never been genuine citizens, only members of the Muslim religious community and subjects of despotic emirs and khans, and that their civic consciousness was not yet sufficiently mature to deserve Russian citizenship.⁴⁴ According to Morrison, "[Lykoshin's] views of Russia's mission in Turkestan are best described as paternalistic."⁴⁵ The same holds true for the above-mentioned colonial administrators, excluding Nalivkin but including Semenov, whose views on what he understood to be Russia's civilising mission, and his opinions on the tasks, vices and virtues of the Russian administration in Turkestan are well reflected in the following excerpt from a letter to Bartol'd, sent from Tashkent on 3 March 1916. In it Semenov complained about the Tashkent gentlemen, calling them "phrase-mongers and careerists", and about the "absence of ideas, principles and of a programme in the administration of the frontier." Apparently, his critique was shared by Bartol'd and many more enlightened colonial administrators. Semenov wrote:

I read your lines about the 'Turkestani ideals' of Turkestan's youth with great interests. All of it is, of course, the bitter truth. You are wondering why Russian society was not blessed with any cultural success during the last

⁴² *ibid.*, p.249.

⁴³ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial...*, p.140f.

⁴⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim...*, p.249f.

⁴⁵ Alexander Morrison: "'Applied Orientalism' in British India and Tsarist Turkestan" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*; 51(3), (2009): p.636.

decades? The crux of the matter is that latterly there is no Russian society here. There only are "flying visits" [naezdy]: military-men are arriving, administrators and merchants etc. are living here for a couple of months, maximum two, three years, they don't have time to settle in, don't manage to make sense of what Turkestan really is, when they already have to move somewhere else. And they are moving with pleasure, partly because from year to year life is getting so much more expensive here that the 'Turkestan allowance' by no means cover the expenses of 'family life' [po domashnosti], and partly because our government is not at all imbued with the idea that for the frontier [okraina] one needs experienced civil servants, who live at this frontier for a prolonged period of time, and who are connected with it through something; and that, therefore, the conditions of service local administrators are confronted with have to be altered. On the contrary, here they think that a frequent changing of administrators will prevent them from getting bored with the daily routines and from [developing] a certain 'biased view on governmental measures,' [and from the tendency] to always adopt these views 'to the local conditions'. Add to this the absence of ideas, principles and of a programme in the administration of the frontier. Thus if one than turns to the 'heroic times' of the beginning here of Russian rule [vladychestvo], then, despite some wholly negative sides of that epoch, there was a perfectly definite programme of administration and of the creation of Russian civic values or a civilian life [grazhdanstvennost']⁴⁶ here. The lack of a comfortable railway connection 'with Russia', the low living costs here, and the adequate salary of the administrators and the good merchant wives [baryni kuptsov] tied the newly arrived cultured population for many years to the place, and produced from it not a small number of useful figures [poleznye deiateli]. Now this is not the case at all, and to our shame I should say, everybody who newly arrives here to serve (with very, very few exceptions) only thinks about the quickest move (in terms of his career) and about a high

⁴⁶ Translations for this term vary. While Alexander Morrison uses the term civic values, Jeff Sahadeo translates it as civilian life. See: Alexander Morrison, "Writing the Russian Conquest of Central Asia" (St. Petersburg, 29.5.2014), p.10; and: Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society...*, p.30.

*salary, the young Orientalists (to be more precise, the Orientalists of a new formation) are no exception. I saw many of the latter here, several I have assigned to a position myself, but eventually I have asked the right people to free me from the obligation to find a job for these young people, because I need translators, sensible compilers of the local documents, and not phrase-mongers and careerists, who within a month ask for a pay rise or for a transfer to other departments 'where they pay more'. Obviously, as long things look like this, what kind of 'cultural successes' can you expect.*⁴⁷

Lykoshin shared Semenov's grim view of the state of Russian colonial rule in Turkestan. Daniel Brower has pointed out that Lykoshin also lamented "the lack of a system of governance and clear goals for the region" and "the ignorance, among Russians living and working in the region, of the way of life, language, and religion of the population [...]."⁴⁸ He, too, saw the failure of *grazhdanstvennost'*, which he understood as the improvement of the civilian administration and the greater involvement of citizens in local governance.⁴⁹ According to Brower, the more enlightened and reformist minded colonial administrators sought to "integrate the people within the imperial order."⁵⁰ But despite the benevolence of this intent – especially when compared to more aggressive notions, such as the slogan that natives respect strength alone – integration ultimately meant subordination. "Imperial arrogance was inherent" in this thinking, Brower has rightly argued.⁵¹ Semenov seemed slightly less concerned than Lykoshin about the fate of Russian colonial rule as such. His considerations were somewhat narrower. Arguably, the most crucial "cultural success" in Semenov's terms would have been to improve the conditions for academic work in Turkestan, which he regarded as a sort of laboratory for scholarly endeavours (hence his complaints about uninterested and unqualified Orientalists). The colonial state merely constituted the frame and setting in which "useful figures" could do their work.

⁴⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.64: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on 3.3.1916.

⁴⁸ Daniel R. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p.165.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.19.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

In conclusion, what distinguished the above-mentioned *Turkestantsy* from most of their colleagues were their language skills and long-term and intensive acquaintance with — and interest in — Turkestan and its culture and people. Although their scholarly output was of varying quality and not always strictly academic, many of their works significantly contributed to the advancement of both theoretical and practical knowledge about the region among scholars and within the colonial administration. This rendered them important mediators between the local population and elites, on the one hand, and the colonial administration, on the other. Arguably, their understanding of local affairs was often more accurate and less prejudiced than that of their numerous less gifted colleagues and, thus, had the potential to make colonial rule better informed, less irrational and paranoid and hence more efficient, more responsive to the concerns of the Muslim population, more inclusive of local elites and, as a result, possibly even less violent. In practice, however, they never seemed to have questioned the overall superiority of contemporary Russian/European culture and thus the justification for Russian colonial rule. Moreover, in times of crisis such as 1917, they (with the exception of Nalivkin) were clearly committed to the maintenance of Russian privilege and dominance.

Last but not least, the variety of quite different characters subsumed under the term *Turkestantsy* suggests that the latter, although not devoid of meaning, was just as much a metaphorical umbrella term as the antithetical Tashkent gentlemen. As such, it was, first of all, indicative of the way those employing it perceived themselves, and wished to be perceived by others. In other words, the critique by the self-proclaimed *Turkestantsy* of the incompetence of some colonial administrators cannot always be taken at face value, but must also be seen as part of an attempt to distance themselves from the image of the Tashkent gentlemen.

Semenov's strategy to promote the study and preservation of Central Asian cultural heritage

Throughout his life, Semenov busied himself with issues such as the description, procurement and preservation of manuscripts, the management of museums and

organisation of archaeological excavations and the supervision of the restorations of ancient monuments. In short, with things he would have termed – as I have explained above – “questions of the higher order.” This sustained interest in the study and preservation of various aspects of, what may be described as, Central Asia’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage is arguably the most striking line of continuity between his career before and after 1917. One has to bear in mind that “cultural heritage” is not so much an objective reality but rather an intellectual concept. In the case of colonial Turkestan, Svetlana Gorshenina has argued that cultural heritage was constructed in a process of “patrimonialization”, which “transformed from mere buildings without any definition into ‘historical monuments’, theoretically called upon to be the cultural identifier of the Nation or empire.” It is also worth pointing out that Semenov did not initially use the term “cultural heritage”; Instead, he tended to speak of “historical monuments” or “monuments of the past (or of antiquity).” At the beginning of his career in the colonial administration, in September 1904, he published an article (under a pseudonym) that appealed to the monarchy’s fear of being branded as uncivilised lest they protect ancient sites and ruins within its imperial realm. This I will show in more detail in the following. It was only during the period following the Second World War that Semenov spoke of the more abstract and politically charged concept of “cultural heritage” (*kul’turnoe nasledie* or *nasledstvo*). Moreover, the notion of cultural heritage was also a centrepiece of nationalist discourse in the Soviet Union post 1945, as the following quote by Semenov from 1956 demonstrates. In front of audience of academics in Stalinabad he warned that “it won’t take 10 years for there to be not a single monument of antiquity left on the territory of the republic [...],” [...] unless citizens displayed greater “[...] awareness of the necessity to protect the cultural heritage of one’s own people.”⁵² Semenov’s rhetoric changed, but the central message and strategy remained the same: he appealed to the authorities’ political sensitivities in order to urge them to take action.

⁵² A.A.S., b13,f13: Speeches by Semenov on various conferences and meetings.

“There is one thing that stared me in the face in ancient Merv⁵³ and which I did not mention in my previous letter to you,” wrote Semenov to Bartol’d from Ashghabad in June 1904, “the destruction (and that in a systematic and irresponsible manner) of old monuments.”⁵⁴ He complained that “the site of the ancient town of Abdulla Khan” had essentially become a depository for bricks for a nearby construction site, and he asked Bartol’d to report the issue “to the right people” [*gde sleduet*] upon his “return to Petersburg, [...] since, apparently, the destruction is set to continue and to affect both Sultan Kala and Gyaur Kala.” He also reminded Bartol’d not to name him as the whistle-blower, as he feared that it would be “the informer who receives the first knout.”⁵⁵ This caution was not entirely unfounded, given that the Russian government and Turkestan’s administration sought to disguise the failure to protect cultural heritage in the empire’s colonies lest it damage the country’s international prestige. In the case of Samarkand, which was in many ways the focal point of both Tsarist and Soviet efforts to preserve, politically utilise and canonise monuments of antiquity, Svetlana Gorshenina has even argued that the “glorification of the [city’s] monuments, connected with its Hellenistic and Timurid periods, was intended to reinforce colonial power, which attempted to present the Russian Empire as the lawful inheritor of both previous empires.”⁵⁶ Incidentally, a similar concern for the international reputation of the young Soviet state seems to have facilitated the establishment of *Turkomstaris* in the 1920s; when the Bolsheviks, eager to secure popular support among the Muslims within and beyond Soviet borders, publicly announced that “the Soviet of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR [...], regardless of the civil war, [...] raised issue of the rescue of Muslim monuments as a high-priority task.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Merv is the site of a succession of cities along the Silk Road, such as Sultan Kala and Gyaur Kala. As early as the 5th century BCE Merv had been an administrative and trading centre of some importance within the Achaemenian Empire. Subsequently it would be known as the centre of the Sasanian province of Khurasan and later as the eastern capital of the Seljuq Empire. See: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/merv/merv>

⁵⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p2: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 12.06.1904.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Svetlana Gorshenina, “Samarkand and its Cultural Heritage: Perceptions and Persistence of the Russian Colonial Construction of Monuments,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014), p.261.

⁵⁷ Svetlana Gorshenina, “Turkomstaris-Sredazkomstaris-Uzkomstaris: Formirovanie Institutsii i Etnocentricheskii Razdel Kul’turnogo Naslediia Srednei Azii (Turkomstaris-Sredazkomstaris-

Semenov's regard for heritage protection was less mindful of public opinion among the local population, even if that population had to be involved in the process due to a lack of funds and personnel. An example of such involvement is described in the above-mentioned letter. In it Semenov, not without pride, told Bartol'd that on his initiative a Turkmen guard had been set up in Anau (a few kilometres to the east of Ashkhabad), in order to deter raiders from entering the site of a relatively well-preserved mid-fifteenth century mosque that was located there.⁵⁸ In addition, he went on, the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province was about to issue a "binding decree [*postanovlenie*] for the greater protection of monuments of antiquity," which was to be printed on premonitory signs "in Russian and in a local language," attached "at visible spots on these monuments" and enforced by the Turkmen guard. "To some extent, I suppose, this decree, over the execution of which the locals [*tuzemtsy*] themselves will watch, will halt the destructive appetite of the local vandals [...]," Semenov concluded.⁵⁹

Later that year (1904) Semenov informed Bartol'd that the Commandant of the Transcaspian Province had finally issued a decree, which banned "excavations in ancient cities and ruins 'without a specific allowance for that'", and persecuted those responsible for the "destruction of ancient buildings, the theft of tiles, etc.." But he was also aware of the limitations of such legal acts: "[C]onsidering the vast desert-like provinces in which all these Abiverds, Sher-i Islams, Meshed-i Misrians and other glorious ruins scattered in isolation," he added, "it's doubtful whether the local authorities on the basis of this order will persecute all those engaged in the destruction of ancient monuments[...]"⁶⁰ In order to raise public awareness of the issue he submitted an article to the popular Moscow newspaper *Russkoe Slovo* (Nr.263, 21.9.1904). Interestingly, he did so three days *after* the above-mentioned decree was published and under the cover of anonymity (for fear of repercussions from his superiors). Entitled *Sorry ruins* [*Pechal'nye ruiny*] it dealt with the precarious state of the remains of ancient Merv, which "I suppose", Semenov wrote to Bartol'd,

Uzkomstaris: The Emergence of Institutions and the Ethnocentric Division of Cultural Heritage of Central Asia), *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, no. 1 (2013), p.53.

⁵⁸ A.A.S., b13, f6, p2: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 12.06.1904.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p3: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 5.11.1904.

“are not covered by this protection.” The article, according to its author, repeated the mantra: “‘how many times has the world been told’ that these ruins will soon cease to exist because of the plundering of their bricks.”⁶¹ Apart from *Sorry ruins*, Semenov published a further piece in *Russkoe Slovo* on 23 July 1905, in which he protested against the gradual destruction of ancient sites in Transcaspia. Its title – *A Barbarian in the house of beauty (Varvar v dome krasoty)* – implied that the Russians and their government risked being branded (by other European powers) as uncivilised if they failed to meet their duty to protect cultural heritage within their imperial realm. The previous article’s expression “how many times has the world been told” obviously tapped into the same vein. By appealing to a Russian sense of national and imperial pride, Semenov hoped to put pressure on the authorities in Turkestan to match words with deeds.

It is hard to say whether or not these articles urging St. Petersburg and Tashkent to do more for monument protection made any difference. In 1915, a decade after Semenov published his pieces in *Russkoe Slovo*, Bartol’d still publically warned that “the study of the culture of past times and the careful protection of monuments of this culture remains one of the fundamental attributes of a cultured government [*kul’turnoe gosudarstvo*].”⁶² He also made clear that, up until then, the state had repeatedly failed to do so and that the situation remained precarious. In fact, he emphasised the responsibility of the empire for all its subjects “regardless of nationality”, responding to those who maintained that “studying a foreign [*inorodcheskaia*] culture and protecting its monuments – means harming the interest of Russian culture” and imperial expansion.⁶³ According to an unsubstantiated report by the Soviet archaeologist Mikhail Masson, during a visit to Samarkand, Aleksandr Samsonov – the Governor-General of Turkestan between 1909-1914 – supposedly spoke about the *Registan* and the three (fifteenth and seventeenth century) madrasas framing it, stating that: “The quicker all of this is

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² V. V. Bartol’d, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia v Turkestane” (The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan), in: Vasilii Bartol’d, *Akademik V. V. Bartol’d Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p.533.

⁶³ *ibid.*

destroyed, the better it will be for the Russian state.”⁶⁴ While this opinion would have certainly been extreme, the concerns of academics were hardly common sense either. Bartol’d reminded his readers that in late nineteenth century Samarkand “the destruction [of buildings surrounding the *Registan*] continued under Russian rule [...] [and that] the voice of Russian scholars remained unheard [...].” Only the appeal of a Swedish architect (Martin) to the Russian Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte, prompted the government in 1895 to allot funds for the preservation of the city’s ancient architecture, he concluded.⁶⁵ In other words, diplomatic currency mattered, rather than the concerns of even the most renowned scholars, to say nothing of junior researchers such as Semenov.

The role of informal networks for heritage conservation

The press was not the only organ through which Semenov and his fellow *Turkestantsy* could make their voices heard. Their reliance on their personal networks seems to have been more effective. I have already pointed to Semenov’s appeals to Bartol’d, in which he asked him in 1904 to pass on information about the destruction of Merv in St. Petersburg. Their later correspondence contains more striking examples of how these networks operated in Turkestan both before and after 1917. In late 1906, for instance, a new Governor-General, Nikolai Grodekov, took office in Tashkent. He was inclined to pay more attention to cultural, scholarly and educational questions. However, his subordinate, the Military Governor of Samarkand, Sergei Gesket, was more of a philistine in these matters. Semenov decided to take advantage of this discrepancy and to make the strict hierarchies of Turkestan’s administration work for his own benefit (and arguably for one of Samarkand’s monuments). But he could only do so with the help of his friends in Samarkand: the military engineer and amateur archaeologist, Boris Kastal’skii (1868–1943) and the Turkestan-born Vasilii Viatkin (1869–1932). The latter being a teacher at the so-called Russian-native school of Samarkand and the excavator of the ruins of

⁶⁴ Svetlana Gorshenina, “Samarkand and its Cultural Heritage...”, p.258.

⁶⁵ V. V. Bartol’d, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia...”, p.530.

the famous fifteenth-century Ulugh Bek observatory. Semenov wrote to Bartol'd in late March 1907:

N[ikolai] I. Grodekov busies himself exclusively with 'questions of the higher order': Museums, antiquities, history and ethnography, it seems, greatly interest him, so that everything else, including the purely administrative affairs, are relatively neglected. In view of this, we try to utilise the General-Governor's inclinations at the right opportunity. For instance, about a fortnight ago I was visited by my old acquaintance, the head of the Samark[and] engineering section, Colonel Kastal'skii, who is a great lover of archaeology. He was lamenting that everything in Samarkand is being plundered, while he and Viatkin sit like [Gaius] Marius amid the ruins of Carthage unable to do anything about it. The Governor [of Samarkand] made clear that 'such matters' are none of his concern. Therefore, it was proposed to put the right amount pressure on Gesket via Grodekov. The following day I 'composed' a letter to Gesket in the name of [Grodekov] to the effect that his Excellency [Gesket] should undertake decisive action to prevent the plunder of Samarkand's antiquities and to facilitate the purchase of various antiques for sale on Samarkand's markets for the Tashkent museum[;] More generally the Gov[enor]-Gen[eral] asked Gesket to 'urgently' present him with detailed considerations concerning the protection of Samarkand's antiquities. We only mentioned Tashkent museum to attain Grodekov's signature; the letter was actually supposed to make Gesket ask the Gov[enor]-Gen[eral] of Turkestan establish an archaeological circle [of Devotees of Archaeology] and a museum in Samarkand. Everything worked out the way it was meant to. Grodekov signed the letter without objection; Gesket received it and called for Viatkin, Kastal'skii and five others. He read the letter to them and asked what to do and how to respond the Governor-General and so forth. But those gathered to think of a response to the letter were 'offended' by it and announced to Gesket that Samarkand, 'this living museum of antiquity, deserves 'an independent museum with a separate circle of Circle of Devotees of Archaeology and History of the East' [...]. Gesket was 'persuaded'; Viatkin was charged with writing a response and Kastal'skii, with composing the circle's

*statute. Yesterday I received Gesket's letter, and Grodekov gave instructions to 'discuss' the matter. The Director [of the Chancellery of the Governor-General] asked me to report on the content of the letter. [Paragraph] I don't know what will come from this, but in any case Samarkand ought to have a good museum, all the more, since there are funds which allow this to happen.*⁶⁶

Towards the end of the same year (1907) the *Samarkand Circle Devotees of Archaeology, History and Ethnography* was, indeed, established. Vasilii Viatkin remained its chairman until 1917.⁶⁷ But equally after the October Revolution and throughout the 1920s Viatkin and Kastal'skii figured prominently in the field of monument preservation. As early as 1918, for instance, both (together with the architect Mikhail Fedorovich Mauer) established a committee for the repair of the leaning north-eastern minaret of Samarkand's Ulugh Bek *madrassa*. Within two years this committee was turned into a permanent committee for the protection and preservation of monuments of antiquity and art.⁶⁸ Last but not least, when the all-Central Asian *Sredazkomstaris* was split into separate republican committees (in line with the NTD) and Uzbekistan's *Uzkomstaris* was set up in late 1928 as the *primus inter pares*, its was initially headed by Vasilii Viatkin.⁶⁹ The Grodekov-Gesket episode is just one example of how the *Turkestantsy* successfully lobbied and manipulated their superiors through informal solidarity networks; and how in doing so they had not only improved the conditions for the protection and study of ancient monuments in Samarkand, but equally created a platform on which they were able to pursue their scholarly interests and careers.

The danger of an emerging market in antiques

It is impossible to speak of Semenov's efforts to promote the study and preservation of cultural heritage without pointing out that, to some extent, his medicine threatened to kill the patient. The interest in antiques that he and his friends helped

⁶⁶ A.A.S., b13, f6, pp9-11: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 23.3.1907.

⁶⁷ "Spravochnik Nauchnykh Obshchestv Rossii (Handbook of Scientific Societies of Russia)." http://www.snor.ru/?m=articles&an=sc_423 (accessed 15/11)

⁶⁸ Svetlana Gorshenina, "Turkomstaris-Sredazkomstaris...", pp.53f.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.64.

to generate also created demand for these very antiques, not to mention the fact that the *Turkestantsy* were themselves prolific customers and collectors. After all, in particular, Russian and European demand had prompted the “local vandals” (to use Semenov’s own words) to go treasure hunting in the first place. It is quite possible that this demand was generated by factors that were separate from any scholarly agenda and that it would have continued growing independently from any such agenda. Moreover, a failure to decree any protective legislation, once a market for antiques had emerged, would have surely done even more damage. Nonetheless, there was a certain tension between, on the one hand, Semenov’s role as a scholar and admirer of Central Asian material-culture and, on the other, his function as a collector and buyer of manuscripts and other artefacts. There were synergies between the study and the preservation of monuments of antiquity, but there was some contradiction, too.

Semenov knew full well about the implications of the emerging local market for antiquities he had helped to create. One of his last articles, written in 1957 on the subject of Central Asian engraved gems and their collectors, gives us some valuable insights into the trade in antiques in that region during the early twentieth century.⁷⁰ In it he draws a picture of Turkestan as a treasure trove of antiques and ancient monuments, undisturbed – at least initially – by both locals and travellers:

*I still witnessed the heroic times when only some 14 or 15 years had passed since the final attachment [prisoedineniia] of the Transcaspian Province (today’s Turkmen S[oviet]S[ocialist]R[epublic]) to Russia [1885]. Throughout the cheerless and sun-baked sands lay scattered a multitude of ruins of ancient cities and settlements; the habit of tomb raiding had not yet infected the Turkmen at all; [and] the newcomers still kept their hands off the relics of the past.*⁷¹

This is probably a somewhat exaggerated account of Turkestan as a virgin-like land. Suffice it to say that Semenov informed Bartol’d about the necessity to take action

⁷⁰ A. A. Semenov, "Nechto O Sredneaziatskikh Gemmakh, Ikh Liubiteliakh i Sobirателиakh. (Iz Vospominanii Proshlogo), (Some Notes on Central Asian Gems and those Admiring and Collecting them [Memoirs " IAN Tadzh. SSR OON [Proceeding of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR] 14 (1957), pp.143-155.

⁷¹ A.A.S., b5,f7. "Nechto o sredneaziatskikh gemmakh, ikh liubiteliakh i sobirателиakh. (Iz vospominanii proshlogo)" [Some notes on Central Asian gems and those admiring and collecting them (memoirs)."

to halt the destruction of ancient monuments as early as 1904. And even earlier, in 1898, he had complained about the devastation of Central Asian cultural heritage, such as the demolition of a sixteenth-century *madrasa* in the town of Kulab in order to build a bathhouse from its bricks.⁷² However, the point he tried (and was right) to make was that, at turn of the century, Central Asia saw the emergence of an unprecedented demand for antiques and their destruction at an exponential rate. During the trip that brought Semenov to Kulab, for instance, he also visited the remains of ancient Termez. When he returned there for second time in 1913 he was saddened to see how little of it was left:

*This summer I was on a prolonged 'wandering' through the towns and settlements alongside the Amu-Darya. June and July in Turkestan this year were exceptionally hot, even the elderly didn't remember such a heat; and, therefore, I can say for sure that my journey in a little boat on the Amu-Darya was a 'narrow and deplorable path' (how a church song has it). The ruins of Termez have made an especially depressing impression on me. I have not been there for fifteen years and during that time they underwent a solid destruction. The tiles, for instance, on the portal of the mosque-mausoleum of Sultan-Sadat [a complex of buildings, built between the 11th and 17th centuries] have been preserved only to a very limited extent.*⁷³

The information about the missing tiles clearly suggests that the complex of Sultan Saodat had fallen victim not to neglect or new building projects but to the growing foreign demand in antiques, which also changed the attitudes of local people towards them. Semenov witnessed this change himself. Regarding engraved gems, for instance, he tells us that: "The few people in the khanate of Bukhara [...] to whom engraved gems meant something – and be it for their commercial interest – took notice of them [only] when occasionally the odd *parangi* (European) asked for them [...]." ⁷⁴ Bukharan antiquarians were quick to grasp that "Europeans, in particular Russian officers" paid considerable prices for objects, such as engraved

⁷² Aleksandr Semenov, "Po Granitsam' Bukhary i Afganistana: Putevye Ocherki 1898 G. Chast' I (Along the Borders of Bukhara and Afghanistan: Travel Notes of 1898. Part I)," *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 87 (1902), p. 971.

⁷³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p24: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V. Bartol'd on the 24.11.1913.

⁷⁴ A.A.S., b5, f7.

gems, in which “Bukharans were not interested in the slightest.”⁷⁵ Semenov observed this development at first-hand. When he, for instance, first made the acquaintance of a well-known Bukharan expert on precious stones – a “*sang shinos-i kalon*” [a great connoisseur of stones] in Bukharan Persian – with the nickname Haji Melek, the latter hoped to win his interest in two rubies, “which even in the usually dim light of the Bukharan covered bazaars gleamed with a glowing crimson.” But when Semenov proved more interested in engraved gems, Haji Melek brushed off his enquiry with the remark that these were not particularly valuable. However, when he spotted his potential customer roaming the jewellers’ stands at a bazaar on another occasion, he presented him with an emerald, engraved with the profile of a Medusa and set in an ancient (probably Hellenistic) ring of red gold. Correctly reading the excitement on Semenov’s face he “slightly nudged [him] and said quietly: ‘take it, mister, it’s a treasure, after all’ (*Girid, tiurl: in gandzhast*).” To Semenov’s disappointment, however, Haji Melek “[not only] had very good stones but also knew how to ask very good money for them.”⁷⁶ Semenov should have known better. After all, he had helped to create the demand himself.

There must have been little doubt in Semenov’s mind that, whatever antiques he or others acquired, had most likely been removed from some ancient site. He, for instance, not only knew that the second-best place in the emirate (after Bukhara) to find gemstones, “various manuscripts [...] and genuine masterpieces of ancient art” was Qarshi; but he also realised that “the neighbouring [sites of] Er-Kurgan and Kamashi, obviously, supplied the local markets with such goods.”⁷⁷ When Semenov asked merchants about the provenance of various objects he received evasive answers. In Ashkhabad he was told that: “[S]ometimes people come here and bring them. But we don’t know who they are nor where they took these coins and stones from; and we don’t want to ask.” In Tashkent a certain Mir Sabirov from Khujand occasionally sold some gems. But where they had come from, according to

⁷⁵ Ibid., According to Semenov, the fact that these stones sported engraved images meant that they were inappropriate jewellery for Bukhara’s Muslims.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Semenov, was known to “Allah alone”. In any case, Mir Sabirov’s standard reply was: “‘az zamin baromadagi’ ([they were] found in the ground).”⁷⁸

Accessibility played a crucial role in this nexus of supply and demand in regard of antiques. Semenov understood that. For instance, he wrote that while Qarshi was “second only to Bukhara in the Khanate in terms of the variety of objects of antiquity one could find there,” it was not a major market place, since the town lacked a railway connection and only few “amateurs of antiquities decided to make the journey by horse or caravan.” As a result, most objects from there were dispatched to Tashkent, Bukhara or Samarkand.⁷⁹ Among these cities Samarkand – the final stop on the Transcaspian railway (completed in 1888) – boasted the biggest market for antiques in Central Asia.⁸⁰ According to Semenov:

*With the appearance of this railway many representatives of the intelligentsia from European Russia and abroad immediately flocke[d] into the ancient capital of Timur. People of various professions, with various interests and [...] mindsets were all captivated and astonished by the uniqueness of Samarkand and its majestic architectural monuments; and they all – each according to his [or her] taste – looked for something to take home as a souvenir[:][...] the wonderful Samarqandi bedspreads from silk [...] [or] relics of local antiquity: beautiful ceramic tiles, old seals and coins etc.,[...] Based on this demand, a long row of stands emerged between the Ulug-Bek and the Tillo-Kori madrasas on the always lively Registan.*⁸¹

The functioning of the market for antiques in Central Asia was thus no secret to Semenov. However, at least in his article, he did not question the right of travellers to buy souvenirs, despite the fact that these had often been obtained in a manner that was unsustainable, and even though he was clearly concerned about the widespread theft of tiles, to name but one example. Moreover, his own purchases of antiques, such as manuscripts, (either on behalf of government institutions or for his personal use) he probably justified with the greater good of scholarship.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

The procurement of antiques via Turkestan's population and elites

The bazaar was not the only channel open to those who were interested in obtaining antiques and manuscripts. Semenov and his fellow *Turkestantsy* made ample use of their contacts within the local population, including the nomadic and semi-nomadic Kirgiz and Turkmen, the Tajiks of the mountainous regions of Eastern Bukhara and representatives of the (predominantly Muslim) urban intellectual elite. After Semenov's re-assignment from Ashkhabad to Tashkent in 1906, for instance, he began to explore the area surrounding the city and, in the following year, enquired after information from Bartol'd concerning "the hills (or, more precisely, kurgans) around Tashkent, [such as] [...] 'Gandzh-Tepe' [...], 'Khan-Abad', 'Tau-Ket', 'Khatai-Tepe' and others."⁸² He also informed the Petersburg scholar that he had suggested to the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology to conduct excavations at one of these sites. He knew that there was something to be gained here, because he was already being supplied with items from these ancient burial grounds:

*From the inside [of these kurgans] people [occasionally] bring me various things: amphora-like vessels from clay (with a conical base) [...]; big cast-iron pots on openwork stands; [and] cast-iron kumgany [jugs] [...] with very peculiar ornamentation etc. – All this unearthed by the Kirgiz.*⁸³

Similarly, when Semenov travelled to Kushka (modern-day Serhetabat in southern Turkmenistan) in October of the following year (1908), he enquired about potential sites from the local population. To Bartol'd he wrote that:

[...] local Turks told me that once while they were digging aryks [irrigation canals] they discovered a wall made of local bricks that stretched on extensively somewhere around Merv (the new town). In one place there was a descent deep into the ground through a well carved-out corridor. Someone went down there with a candle and almost at the entrance his eye met a dress hanging at the wall, which, however, there and then turned to dust when he touched it. The Turkmen didn't go further, since the candle died and

⁸² A.A.S., b13, f6, p11: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 23.3.1907.

⁸³ *ibid.*

'someone clutched his head' (obviously bats). It might very well be a depot or cache from a departed era.⁸⁴

In part, Semenov hoped to lure Bartol'd to Turkestan with this and similar accounts of the country's untapped riches awaiting discovery. He also simply wanted to share his excitement, even if nothing seems to have been retrieved from the mysterious depot in this particular case. But more importantly, these anecdotes show that, regardless of Semenov's disapproval of single-handed, unsupervised and potentially damaging excavations by non-professionals, he was often reliant on them for his own scholarly and leisure pursuits.

Apart from the above-mentioned loose agreements and occasional encounters with the Kirgiz, Turkmen, Afghans and other people from all over Central Asia, there are other examples of a closer and more systematic cooperation on the fields of scholarship and antiques between Semenov and individuals such as Mirza Salim Bek, a high-ranking Bukharan dignitary, and Sayyid Haidar Shoh, a relatively prominent representative of the Ismaili community from Shughan in the Pamirs of Eastern Bukhara. Both men supplied Semenov with valuable information and manuscripts, especially those regarding the Ismailis. I will discuss Semenov's relationship with Mirza Salim Bek in the following, and that with Sayyid Haidar Shoh in the next chapter.

Mirza Salim Bek (1850-1929) was one of the people who provided Semenov with a privileged and direct access to manuscripts, and information about them. Semenov described him as "a bookish person, primarily interested in history, [who] in the course of his long life gathered an excellent historical library, consisting mostly of manuscripts, [...] often of exceptional rarity."⁸⁵ He admired Salim Bek's appreciation of books, history and poetry. In so far as one can speak of a friendship between the two, it revolved around their common interest in Central Asian history and admiration for its material relics, especially manuscripts. This sense of affinity between them also permeates Semenov's account of an encounter with Mirza Salim Bek:

⁸⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p15: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 14.2.1909.

⁸⁵ A.A.S, b12, f3 and b9, f12: "The last Bukharan historian and courtier Mirza Muhammed Salim Bek 'Parvanachi'"

In March 1916 I happened to live for some time in the city of Bukhara, where I was collecting material about [the subject of] Ismailism (followers of this sect lived also in the capital of the Khanate). [...] I required a reference from the Habib al-Siyar [...] by [Muhammad] Khondemir. None of the booksellers at the bazaar had the work, neither as a manuscript nor in form of a lithograph. Mirza Salim Bek expressed his unreserved willingness to give me his own, in his words 'only authoritative' (faqat mu'tabar), copy of the Habib al-Siyar. The manuscript turned out to be 'exclusively authoritative', indeed: it was a superbly preserved autograph by the famous Persian historian, rewritten by him, as far as I can remember, in the year 932/1525-26 and kept in a binding of that period. The happy owner, according to Bukharan custom, put it into an envelope made from expensive Russian brocade. What happened to the manuscript-collection of Mirza Salim Bek – I do not know.⁸⁶

The quote conveys Semenov's gratitude to Salim Bek and his excitement at what he appears to have experienced as a direct link with Central Asia's Irano-Islamic heritage: the opportunity to consult an authentic (in its content and materiality) sixteenth-century autograph manuscript, presented to him in Bukhara by one of the city's most eminent historians. At the same time, Semenov's lines, particularly those referring to the unknown fate of Salim Bek's library, also convey a sense of loss of cultural heritage and continuity. This theme – an often nostalgic and fairly sentimental evocation of a bygone world and lost connection to that world – permeates some of Semenov's later (and partially autobiographical) works, such as his earlier-mentioned paper on Central Asian gemstones. The article on Mirza Salim Bek, from which the citation is taken and which was written in the mid-1940s, also falls into this category.

The nostalgia for some aspects of pre-revolutionary Central Asia, as well as the vague sense of loss and the implicit accusation of the neglect of cultural heritage, is clearly apparent in Semenov's article on Salim Bek. However, this view did not sit well with the Stalinist dogma that the legacy of socialism in Central Asia was unequivocally positive. Entitled (and dedicated to) "The last Bukharan historian and

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

courtier Mirza Muhammed Salim Bek '*Parvanachi*', the work was not published in the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Among other things, the expression "the last Bukharan historian" in its title provoked the disapproval of an editor who commented: "Why 'the last'? Did Bukhara cease to exist and her historians became extinct?"⁸⁸ The comment hit the mark. Indeed, the paper's general tenor was that the Bukhara Semenov had witnessed (and clearly held dearer than the more ideologically-orthodox editor was comfortable with) had vanished with the Bolshevik conquest of the city in 1920. Furthermore, with the death of its last historian, Mirza Salim Bek, in circa 1929⁸⁹, the embodiment of that Bukhara had disappeared as well, together with the tangible connection to its historic traditions, customs, political order and culture. The very first sentence of Semenov's article heralds this theme, introducing its hero as: "[a]n extraordinarily characteristic relic of the remote past of Central Asia, a physical echo of the 17th or 18th centuries of this country."⁹⁰

In conclusion, it is worth highlighting that the concern for the protection of ancient monuments and artefacts, as well as the later promotion of the concept of cultural heritage and strategies for its conservation were not specific to imperial Russia or the Soviet Union. Rather, these questions were part of a wider pan-European and even global trend. For that reason, the conservation of cultural heritage in Central Asia in Semenov's lifetime was always also a matter of imperial or national prestige on a global stage. Similarly, both in the late imperial and in the Soviet periods, the politics of heritage conservation were also the politics of empire and nation-building. The restoration of ancient sites, the founding of museums and other demonstrative efforts to create and conserve cultural heritage served a great variety of political goals. This chapter has aimed to show how successfully Semenov used the changing political imperatives – from furthering Russian imperial prestige, to advancing the cause of Soviet nation-building – to pursue his own scholarly interests and contribute to the construction and preservation of cultural heritage.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

CHAPTER IV – Conflicting notions of the nature and purpose of Orientalist knowledge

As the two preceding chapters have shown, ruling and studying Central Asia were in many ways two sides of the same coin for Semenov. He skilfully exploited the synergies between his administrative duties and his scholarly pursuits, thereby consolidating Russian colonial rule in Central Asia, increasing academic knowledge about that region and, last but not least, promoting his own academic and administrative career. This chapter uses Semenov's case to further investigate this relationship between the administration of colonial rule and the production of colonial knowledge in Russian Turkestan. It examines his understanding of the nature and purpose of the scholarship he produced as colonial administrator and amateur scholar, and in this respect, compares him to his academic role model Vasiliĭ Bartol'd, on the one hand, and his friend and fellow *Turkestanets*, Nikolai Ostroumov, on the other. Furthermore, the latter part of this chapter sheds light on a particular collaborative and dialogic¹ mode of the production of academic knowledge in a colonial setting, namely Semenov's cooperation with his Ismaili research assistant, Sayyid Haidar Sho, between 1912 and 1916.

Semenov's career undoubtedly benefited from the considerable overlap between his official role as a colonial administrator and his private one as a scholar. Admittedly, there was also a certain friction between these roles, and he certainly differentiated between them. In an earlier-mentioned letter to Bartol'd (written in the spring of 1914), for example, he anticipated that his paperwork for the Chancellery of Turkestan's Governor-General would leave little time for his "private

¹ The concept of colonial knowledge as being produced in a 'dialogic process' has been developed by Eugene Irschick in his *Dialogue and History*, in which he criticised the argument that knowledge about what was to become Indian society "was a product of an 'imposition' by the hegemonic colonial power onto a mindless and subordinate colonized society." Irschick proposed that the creation of colonial knowledge was better described as a "heteroglot and dialogic production of all members of any historical situation, though not always in equal measure [...]." See: Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Press, 1994), p.8.

[scholarly] duties.”² But as the expression ‘private duties’ indicates that, while he distinguished between his scholarly pursuits and his official duties, he also seems to have regarded them as somewhat complimentary. Moreover, the same thinking is reflected in the self-appellation *Turkestanets*, which denoted both affiliation to Turkestan’s colonial administration *and* an academic interest in the country (as shown in the previous chapter). At the heart of the term *Turkestanets* and of Semenov’s juxtaposition of official and private duties was thus the idea of the “complementarity of state power and scientific knowledge [...],” to use Sahadeo’s earlier-mentioned phrase. This idea is key to understanding Semenov’s concept of the purpose and potential practical applicability of the scholarship he produced. Incidentally, it also helps to explain why he and many of his colleagues were allowed and, indeed, were often eager to join what Hirsch has called a ‘revolutionary alliance’ between imperial scholars and the Bolsheviks, based on their shared “appreciation for the potential of scientific government and a shared interest in the nationality question.”³ In Semenov’s mind, the alliance between Russian Oriental Studies and colonial rule, which he personified, ideally benefited both sides, promising to advance academic knowledge about Russian Turkestan and, by the same token, render colonial rule more efficient. His outlook on the relationship between power and knowledge (specifically between Orientalist scholarship and colonial rule) was thus in line with the view held by the majority of Russian imperial scholars, who “[...] fully subscribed to the same views as [Bernard] Cohn and [Edward] Said: namely, that culture and scholarly knowledge, above all, gave the Europeans the greatest power to dominate the ‘Orient’ [...],” as Tolz has argued.⁴ Semenov believed in the complementarity of colonial rule and Oriental Studies. That is not to say that he regarded the support of colonial rule as the *raison d’être* of Oriental Studies. On the contrary, this chapter shows that he shared the view of Bartol’d, who defended academic autonomy, and was diametrically opposed to the subordination of academia to the practical needs of the colonial state. But like

² A.A.S., b13, f6, p40: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 22.5.1914.

³ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.62; and: Francine Hirsch, *Francine Hirsch, Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p.21ff.

⁴ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.70.

Bartol'd, who – as Tolz has pointed out – also believed “that the government should base policies in the eastern borderlands on the knowledge produced by academics [...],” Semenov wished Orientalist knowledge to be employed in the interest of empire.⁵ All of this suggests that Semenov was an Orientalist in both the pre- and post-Saidian sense of the word. He regarded himself as what is described in Russian as a *vostokoved* (or sometimes *Orientalist*), i.e. as a scholar of the history and dominant languages (Arabic, Persian, Turkish) of Muslim societies. The title of his personal research notebook, which he kept between the years 1915 and 1958, for example, was ‘Notes on Oriental Studies [*vostokovedenie*] in general and specifically on Muhammadanism [*musul'manstvo*].’⁶ He was also quite clearly an Orientalist in the Saidian sense of the word, i.e. a handmaid of empire, who helped to perpetuate what Said has called Orientalism: “a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁷ It would be difficult to disagree with the contention that the knowledge produced by Semenov was “somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact [that it was generated by a representative of a European colonial power].”⁸

That being said, Semenov disapproved of scholarship that was openly Islamophobic and Orientalist in the sense of creating an “absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.”⁹ For example, as I have already pointed out in chapter two (see p.61), he criticised Pavel Tsvetkov’s multi-volume *Islamism* and Mikhail Terent’ev’s *History of the Conquest of Central Asia*. For the same reason – as I will show in this chapter – he did not take seriously the partisan and often anti-Islamic works of his friend Ostroumov, and applauded Bartol’d’s efforts to create a journal that would be “an impartial mouthpiece of the cultural life of the Muslim peoples, which in many aspects doesn’t merely depend on religious beliefs [...],” as he wrote in a letter to him in 1911.¹⁰ Semenov knew that Orientalist

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ A.A.S., b4, f9, p.2: Semenov’s research notebook: ‘Notes on Oriental Studies in general and specifically on Muhammadanism.’

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.3.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.11.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.300.

¹⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.195: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d, November 1911 (date not specified).

scholarship that aimed for objectivity and impartiality had to assert itself against a more aggressive, partisan and popular tendency in Oriental Studies. And he understood that the former school competed with the latter (for the funding and attention of the authorities), and that works such as Tsvetkov's *Islamism* – which he once described to Bartol'd as “a collection of some western-European sources [...]” – actually relied on more rigorous scholarship.¹¹ In other words, one form of Orientalism – namely the sort of works that Said would have described as “latent and manifest Orientalism”¹² – was, in the words of Thomas Trautmann, not only “parasitic of the Orientalism produced by [...] Orientalists,” such as Semenov or Bartol'd, but also “often hostile to it [...]”¹³ While Said – as Trautmann has pointed out – wished to “draw attention to the common ground that unites the opposing parties [...],” this chapter takes the differences between the two camps and the varying degrees of Orientalism more seriously.¹⁴ It agrees with Nathaniel Knight that “[i]t is the mundane realm of praxis rather than the metaphysics of discourse that will ultimately shed most light on the nexus of knowledge and power.”¹⁵ It argues that in this realm – which Morrison has called ‘applied Orientalism’ and defined as “the direct employment of Orientalists and the knowledge they produce by colonial states, together with the actual impact of ‘Orientalist’ attitudes on colonial governance and law [...]” – different Orientalist and colonial knowledge, such as that produced by Semenov and Ostroumov, affected the administration of colonial rule differently.¹⁶

What Christopher Bayly has argued for the case of the British ‘empire of information’ – namely that “[p]rejudice or ignorance excluded the Europeans from many areas of Indian life [...],” and led to the misrepresentation of Indian society and to “information panics” that actually weakened the imperial state – was also true in

¹¹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p21: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 26.12.1912.

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp.201ff.

¹³ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*. (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), p.18.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (2000), p.100.

¹⁶ Alexander Morrison, "'Applied Orientalism' in British India and Tsarist Turkestan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 3 (2009), p.622.

Russian Turkestan.¹⁷ Morrison has identified such an ‘information panic’ in the Russian reaction to the Andijan uprising of 1898,¹⁸ which saw colonial administrators waste time and resources on investigations that were largely the fruit of their Islamophobic imaginations.¹⁹ What ended the wild goose chase was the intervention of Nil Lykoshin, one of Semenov’s friends, together with superiors and fellow Orientalists (whom I have already introduced in the previous chapter). By “dispelling prejudices about Muslim ‘fanaticism’ rather than reinforcing them [...],” Morrison argued, Lykoshin demonstrated the “value of a skilled Orientalist to the colonial administration [...].”²⁰ However, Morrison stressed that the investigations had already lasted ten months by the time Lykoshin intervened. He added that, even this educated and liberal colonial administrator held the common, misguided and Orientalist belief that Islam was the greatest threat to Russian rule – a belief that blinded him to the population’s more important grievances. Grievances which had little to do with religious sensitivities.²¹ Still, the employment of an actual academic Orientalist had rendered colonial rule actually freer of Orientalist stereotypes. Like Lykoshin but unlike most of his colleagues, Semenov was an Orientalist who was more aware of the danger of Orientalist prejudices and misconceptions getting in the way of scholarly objectivity and effective colonial rule. As I will show in this chapter, he complained to Bartol’d about the narrow-mindedness of the imperial elites and his superiors, who seemed more interested in battling Islam than in trying to understand it, and were indifferent to scholarship that displayed a more complex vision of Islamic culture. In other words, in his desire to advance the study of Russian Turkestan and consolidate colonial rule over it – i.e. as a prototype of a Saidian Orientalist – he came into conflict with Orientalist attitudes and stereotypes, which he rightly regarded as impeding these aims.

¹⁷ Christopher Alan Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.365.

¹⁸ During the uprising, a popular Sufi spiritual leader called Muhammad Ali Sabyr led an attack on the Russian garrison of Andijan in present-day Uzbekistan.

¹⁹ Morrison A., "Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic: Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the Aftermath of the Andijan Uprising," *Past and Present* 214, no. 1 (2012), p.264.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.285.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.304.

Nikolai Ostroumov – the arch-Orientalist?

In the debate on Russian Orientalism in the pages of the journal *Kritika*, Adeeb Khalid has used Ostroumov's example to illustrate the applicability of Edward Said's model to the Russian case.²² Ostroumov can indeed be regarded in many ways as an arch-Orientalist in the Saidian sense, to whom the study of Islamic texts and of Central Asian culture and languages were not so much to meet an end in itself but rather a means to ensure the assimilation, in other words, the Russification and ultimately the Christianisation of the empire's Muslims. Bakhtiyar Babajanov, however, has argued that, on the one hand, "Ostroumov worked with his knowledge entirely consciously to strengthen power and colonization[;]"²³ but that it remains rather questionable, on the other hand, to which extent "his research and writings were instrumentalized by the Russian colonial regime to produce administrative or judicial policy [...]."²⁴ Babajanov also stressed, on the basis of an analysis of Ostroumov's diaries, that the latter himself very much doubted the "relevance and effective use of his knowledge in the decisions of the Turkestan administration."²⁵

In addition to that, Ostroumov's missionary zeal was constrained by his more academically minded colleagues, as Lunin pointed out in his discussion of Ostroumov's vital role as an organiser of the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology (TKLA).²⁶ Throughout Ostroumov's career, Turkestan's authorities made clear to him that he had been sent to the region not to proselytise, but because he was one of the few people with some knowledge of local languages and, possibly, as a person who, due of his conservative and loyalist opinions, could be trusted not to 'go native.' Members of the administration might have agreed with him in private on the issue of the desirability of the local population's conversion. But the official policy of *ignorirovanie* (ignoring) Islam, which was supposed to avoid any

²² Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate Over Orientalism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (2000), p.691.

²³ 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* 33, no. 2 (2014), p.283.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.271.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.283.

²⁶ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo Vostokovedeniia i Arkheologii V Turkestane; Turkestanskiĭkruzhok Liubitelei Arkheologii (1895-1917 Gg.)* [From the history of Russian Orientalism and Archaeology in Turkestan; The Turkestan Circle of Amateurs of Archaeology (1895-1917)] (Tashkent: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1958), pp.69-73.

provocation of the alleged fanaticism of the empire's Muslims, ensured that the first anti-Islamic Orthodox mission, according to Morrison, was permitted to open in Tashkent not before 1912.²⁷ Hence, when Nikolai Il'minskii, who had taught and befriended Ostroumov in Kazan, penned a reference letter for him to von Kaufman, in which he characterised his pupil as "in his soul [...] a missionary", he made sure to add:

*But don't shy away from that term, which on the face of it implies intolerance and similar unseemly things. My enlightened friend Ostroumov has a most humane understanding of missionary work, and he is wholly confident that only popular (narodnoe) education can be a solid foundation for Christianity.*²⁸

Evidently, the professor of the Kazan Theological Academy meant to calm von Kaufman's unease about bringing onto himself an overly-zealous and thus potentially troublesome graduate of that institution.

At the same time, in 1884 in a note to the Governor-General, Nikolai Rozenbakh, concerning the "tasks of the Russian administration of the Turkestan region in relation to its Muslim population", Ostroumov argued that, "the interests of the Russian state" demanded "not only the convergence but the merging" of the Turkestan's local population with the Russians; and that this was feasible only if people were unified by either a common language, religion or tradition.²⁹ Furthermore, he maintained that: "Muslims, by force of their religion's character, cannot be amicable towards Christians." Himself a deeply devout person, Ostroumov seems to have extrapolated his own prejudices and intolerance of others. As a European – "at least in (Central) Asia"³⁰ – he believed that Russia ought to learn from the colonial experiences of other European nations, in order to "create the sort of relationship with the native population, which would not particularly restrain it and,

²⁷ Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.57.

²⁸ Svetlana Asanova, "'Russkoe Kolonial'Noe Upravlenie V Turkestane Glazami Vostokoveda" (the Russian Colonial Administration in the Eyes of an Orientalist)," <http://www.ia-centr.ru/expert/831/> (accessed 9/5, 2014).

²⁹ Lenar Faizrahmanov, "N.P. Ostroumov - Missioner i Islamoved (N.P. Ostroumov - Missionary and Islamologist)," <http://www.asu.ru/search/documents/638/?query=stud&page=5> (accessed 1/5, 2014).

³⁰ I am referring to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's frequently cited words: "In Europe we have been Tatars, but in Asia we are Europeans." See: Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work.*, trans. Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 646.

at the same time, met the basic interests of the Russian state.”³¹ In the light of these quotes Ostroumov quite clearly emerges as an advocate of Orientalist knowledge for the sake of a smoother and more effective control over the “Orientals.” His Christian values, expressed in the hope for the conversion of the Central Asian Muslims, helped him to steer free of more racist and militant attitudes towards the people of Central Asia.³² But his humanism stopped short of admitting that violent conquest and foreign rule, on the basis of technological and military hegemony and conceived civilisational superiority, were immoral. At the same time, we should keep in mind that, just as in Maev’s case, Ostroumov’s arguments were meant to alert the government to the practical relevance – the “impact” in today’s words – of “matters of the higher order”, such as education and Orientalist scholarship.

In many ways, Khalid was thus right to see in Ostroumov an “arch-Orientalist.” But it is worth interjecting that his fellow Orientalists and friends, such as Semenov or Bartol’d, might have considered him a capable and educated administrator and a genuine *Turkestanets* with a sustained interest in Russian Central Asia and in the long-term success of Russian rule in the region. They did not, however, regard him as a scholar or Orientalist. The following letter, written by Semenov in Tashkent in early November 1906 and addressed to Bartol’d, makes this quite clear:

*From the sphere of local news I can only mention that Nik[olai] Petr[ovich] [Ostroumov] amuses himself ‘writing’ about the Quran and Arabia; and that Andr[ei] Dm[itrievich] Kalmykov was first occupied with the earliest geography of Persia and is now developing a theory (his own) about the origin of the Aryans. By the way, I don’t think this will last for too long, neither in the first nor in the latter case; even if N.P. [Ostroumov] seems to be steadier in the pursuit of his goals.*³³

³¹ Lenar Mansurovich Faizrakhmanov, "N.P. Ostroumov... .

³² Ostroumov was, for instance, positively impressed with von Kaufman’s (Governor-General between 1867 and 1882) understanding of the role of education in Turkestan, and in a tribute to the general quoted him saying: "Only public [*narodnoe*] education can conquer a region morally; neither arms nor legislation can do this [...]." See: David Mackenzie, "Kaufman of Turkestan: An Assessment of His Administration 1867-1881," *Slavic Review* 26, no. 2 (1967), p.281.

³³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.5: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 8.11.1906.

The amusement and benign condescension with which Semenov dismissed the scholarly aspirations of his colleagues is striking. But no personal antipathies were involved here. Semenov counted as esteemed colleagues and friends, not only the diplomat, Andrei Kalmykov, whom he had previously met in Ashkhabad in the spring of 1901 and with whom he was now serving in Tashkent, but Ostroumov in particular. The fact that one amused himself with “‘writing’ about the Quran and Arabia,” while the other speculated on the fashionable topic of the origins of the ever-elusive Aryans, did not yet make them “Tashkent gentlemen” (see p.99ff) in Semenov’s eyes. Both had some knowledge of Oriental languages; Kalmykov had even graduated from St. Petersburg University’s Oriental Faculty.

As far as Semenov was concerned, Ostroumov and Kalmykov were pursuing pastimes that were laudable for learned colonial administrators. Had ambition in both cases not so vastly exceeded qualification, Semenov would have more readily recognised their research as academic. But there was yet another factor that, from Semenov’s and Bartold’s more orthodox academic point of view, additionally disqualified Ostroumov’s writing as Orientalist scholarship: the fact that he was evidently driven, more by missionary zeal to undermine what he understood as the foundation of the Muslim faith, than by any scholarly agenda or personal curiosity. The personal correspondence between Bartol’d and Ostroumov, who were united by a close friendship between them and their families, bears testimony to their very different approaches to scholarship and to their subject of study – the world of Islam. In a letter to Ostroumov in March of 1911 Bartol’d insisted on his vision of Orientalist scholarship as aspiring to impartiality:

Two more words about “missionary work” [missionerstvo]. You know yourself how well I am familiar with your life in Tashkent and, for that matter, with your attitude to the Mullahs. But that all this applies only to you as an individual and not to the discipline you represent. I wholly believe your eloquent words about your teachers in Kazan [...] and besides you there are people among the representatives of the Kazan school who deserve full respect; but respect for individuals is one thing, the attitude towards the views they express is another. I find [...], that in countries such as Turkestan, where the population has adopted Muslim culture in an era when in Russia

*Christianity had barely come into existence, missionaries have no business. Such is my opinion about missionary work from the point of view of the requirements of scholarship [...]. As far as scholarship is concerned, a one-sided polemical attitude towards Islam can harm the understanding of Muslim culture as a phenomenon of global history with all its bright and dark sides.*³⁴

Ostroumov's Orientalism, Babajanov has argued, "was emphatically political and confessional, and only then popular and publicist, but it was in no way academic, in the sense of being knowledge that existed for its own sake, and it only indirectly served the interests of power."³⁵ The above-quoted correspondence between Bartol'd and Ostroumov and between the former and Semenov supports Babajanov's conclusion. While Ostroumov was eager to serve the colonial state with advice and publications, his works – even though they predominately dealt with contemporary and hence more inherently practical matters – were so biased and unprofessional that they "may even have rendered colonial governance less effective."³⁶ In contrast, even though they could and sometimes did provide the state with useful and accurate information, Semenov and (even more so) Bartol'd were primarily concerned with producing scholarship in its own right and not for practical purposes. This scholarship, moreover, tended to deal with the somewhat remote past or with issues that were of little if any use to the colonial state.

Vasilii Bartol'd – the closet scholar?

Bartol'd's conviction that Orientalist knowledge could and should benefit colonial rule did not, in contrast to Said, lead him to conclude that this knowledge was therefore necessarily compromised, Tolz has argued.³⁷ Genuine scholarship, which was aiming for objectivity and was produced for its own sake, Bartol'd maintained, could also be used by the state. In this Bartol'd saw no moral dilemma. At the same time, however, he was very explicit that Orientalist scholarship, which tried to

³⁴ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.232.

³⁵ Bakhtiyar Babajanov, "'How Will We Appear...', p.283.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, p.71f.

discredit or belittle Islam (or further the proselytisation of Muslims), and was produced primarily with the practical and political needs of the state in mind – was both compromised and detrimental to the interest of both the state and science. “As far as scholarship is concerned, a one-sided polemical attitude towards Islam can harm the understanding of Muslim culture as a phenomenon of global history with all its bright and dark sides [...],” Bartol’d wrote in a letter to Ostroumov in 1911.³⁸ In the same letter, he pointed out that he had full respect for Ostroumov and other “representatives of the Kazan school” but not necessarily for the “views they express.” His words are a reminder of the fact that this was more than just an argument between friends and quasi-colleagues. Rather, their disagreement reflected a broader controversy concerning the nature, methods and objectives of Russian Orientalism between the largely academic Petersburg school of Oriental Studies, represented by Bartol’d, and the more practical (missionary) and partisan (anti-Islamic) Kazan Theological Academy, Ostroumov’s alma mater. One should, however, not be too categorical in this division. After all, already the close relationship and cooperation between Ostroumov and Bartol’d exemplify the contacts and linkages between the two schools. Both men discussed each other’s work and disseminated it, even if Bartol’d sometimes refused to do so. When, for instance, in February 1912 Ostroumov asked Bartol’d, who at the time edited the journal *Mir Islama* (The World of Islam), to publish his article ‘Mir islama v proshlom i nastoiashchem’ (*The World of Islam in Past and Present*) in that journal, the latter replied with greatest politeness that its publication in Petersburg “would place us significantly below the scholarly standard to which we aspire.”³⁹

Despite the friendship and collaboration between Bartol’d and Ostroumov, the differences between them were as much a matter of their distinct intellects and characters as they were a function of their divergent educational backgrounds. To a degree, Bartol’d saw Russian Oriental Studies as one entity and as part of a larger pan-European enterprise, no matter whether it was practised in Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan or Tashkent. At the same time, his comments about the Kazan school and his refusal to publish Ostroumov’s work indicate that he made a

³⁸ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.232.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.234.

distinction between the academic Oriental Studies of the Rozen school, to which he himself belonged, and other forms of Orientalist knowledge, such as the missionary Orientalism of Kazan, which he regarded as both non-academic and damaging to the agenda and international reputation of his discipline. Bartol'd had specific ideas about its scholarly standard and the hierarchies and division of labour between St. Petersburg and Moscow, on the one side, and the periphery, on the other. He repeatedly reminded Ostroumov of the limitations of scholarship in the provinces, where, he wrote in a letter in February 1912, "the character of Russian cultural life" and "the poorness of the provincial libraries" did not allow for cutting edge scholarly work, which was the domain of the "closet scholars" (*kabinetnye uchenye*) in the empire's capitals.⁴⁰ While Bartol'd, particularly early in his career, followed his teacher Rozen's ideal of combining philological research with archaeological work,⁴¹ he also saw the benefits of utilising local scholars and amateurs in Turkestan for the gathering of scholarly raw material that was subsequently to be interpreted and analysed by metropolitan scholars like him. The TKLA would be a useful first instance in this process.

Bartol'd was keen to take advantage of the opportunity to study the newly conquered regions and to make them accessible for Russian scholars and for scholarship in general. He thus welcomed the consolidation of Russian colonial rule and, in particular, of Russian cultural and scholarly life in Turkestan, of which the TKLA was a vital part. It seemed to Bartol'd that, ideally, the interests of empire and academia would coincide. He expressed this idea in an article about the role of scholarship in Turkestan, which was published in 1915, a time when Europe was ripe with nationalist sentiment. The paper stressed that every country has "cultural tasks, which may be postponed [a hint to the war effort, MB] but cannot be forgotten even for a minute without harming, not only a country's dignity [*dostoinstvo*], but also the direct interests of its state."⁴² In the case of Russia these were, according to Bartol'd,

⁴⁰ In the letter Bartol'd more politely differentiated between work that required "knowledge of the literature" and such that demanded "a direct contact with the life." In: B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.233.

⁴¹ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, p.14.

⁴² V. V. Bartol'd, "Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia v Turkestane" (The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p.522.

“the study of the multi-tribal peoples, which constitute the population of the empire, and of the relics of the culture of the vanished peoples within its borders.”⁴³ This is why Bartol’d repeatedly travelled to Turkestan and was keen to build a working relationship with the *Turkestantsy*.

Bartol’d’s refusal to publish Ostroumov’s works, and his reservations about the quality of much of the scholarship produced locally in Turkestan were, to an extent, a function of his assertion of Petersburg’s authority and the division of labour within academia. But this was also a conflict between two visions of scholarship: one rather academic and independent, the other more practically oriented, more popular-scientific (less elitist)⁴⁴ and relatively subservient to the state. Presumably, Bartol’d had good reasons to suspect that, if the “local figures” – including Ostroumov but also Semenov – enjoyed too much autonomy, they would gravitate towards the latter model. For him, in other words, as long as the *Turkestantsy* were learned civil servants who assisted the genuine scholars, there was little to fear for the development of Oriental Studies (and for the fate of Russian rule in Central Asia). However, once they started writing about “Islam and the Sharia”,⁴⁵ they risked becoming dilettantish and subservient scholar-civil servants. According to Bartol’d, this would neither be in the interest of (Russian) science nor in that of the Russian imperial state, which could only succeed if it tried to understand rather than combat Islam and Muslims. If the state, in partnership with academia, championed “its cultural tasks”⁴⁶ to research and preserve Muslim cultural heritage and to show some respect for its Muslim subjects, Bartol’d implied, Russian rule in Central Asia and the Caucasus would not only be beneficial for the Russian state and its international image, but also good for the advancement of scholarship and, as a result, justified in the name of (European) progress. The following episode illustrates this point.

In a letter to Ostroumov from early April 1912 Bartol’d gave vent to his irritation about the words of the director of the Second Girl’s Gymnasium in

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p. 233.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.234.

⁴⁶ V. V. Bartol’d, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia...”, p.522.

Tashkent, Mikhail Lavrov, who used the expression “Islam – a petrified enemy of progress” in one of his publications:

If an enemy is ‘petrified’, well, thank God [...]. But that’s exactly the problem [beda], that Islam is not petrified in the slightest. As you yourself are demonstrating in your works, it rather displays sufficient resilience [zhiznesposobnost’] and capacity to adapt to [new] circumstances.⁴⁷

One should keep in mind that Bartol’d spoke Ostroumov’s language here, so as to convince him of a more careful and qualified assessment of the subject of Islam. When Lavrov published a textbook for Turkestan’s schools in 1914, Bartol’d called for “all chauvinism and sorts of attacks on Islam and, in particular, all contemptuous references to the *khalatniki* [a pejorative for the local Muslim dignitaries, wearing long-sleeved outer gowns]” to be removed from it.⁴⁸ But he did so, not only because such comments were morally and factually wrong, but also because they were unsuitable for “a gradual introduction [*priobshchenie*] of the locals [*tuzemtsy*] to Russian culture [...]”.⁴⁹ Bartol’d thought that the interests of the Russian Empire, its scholars and its Muslim population need not clash. At least such a conflict could be avoided, if the state would respect Oriental Studies and its subject – the “Muslim world.” This – I am taking the liberty of interpreting Bartol’d’s words – would strengthen European/Russian culture, assist its spread among the Muslims and automatically address the “problem” of Islam’s resilience.

Semenov vis-à-vis Bartol’d and Ostroumov

Semenov largely shared Bartol’d’s scholarly ideals and he accepted his notion of hierarchies within academia. As I have mentioned before, in one of his letters he duly called Bartol’d his *pir*.⁵⁰ And, like Bartol’d, Semenov welcomed the spread of European/Russian culture and *grazhdanstvennost’* (as I have shown in chapter three). However, sometimes Semenov’s own ambition and academic pride prevailed over his great admiration for his teacher and he refused to fulfil this role as supplier

⁴⁷ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.234f.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.235.

⁵⁰ Semenov uses the term, which literally means “elder”, according to the Sufi tradition, in which it is reserved for the teacher and spiritual leader. See: A.A.S., b13, f6, p.74: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on 21.4.1918 (according to the Julian calendar).

of scholarly raw material.⁵¹ Regarding the virtues and vices of their mutual friend Ostroumov, however, the *pir* and his pupil were of the same opinion. They valued him, not as a scholar, but as a gifted organiser of scholarly life in Tashkent, and regarded him as an educated civil servant of the calibre the colonial administration was short of. Thus, when Ostroumov decided to leave the city in early December 1907, Semenov wrote to Bartol'd:

*It's a great shame that Nik[olai] Petr[ovich] [Ostroumov] is leaving: I suppose the archaeological circle [TKLA] will finally wither away. Be that as it may, when it came to the matter of archaeology Nik[olai] Petr[ovich] stood for a certain fanaticism that pushed aside the inertia of the local archaeological devotees and that made them work in one way or another.*⁵²

Ostroumov was, indeed, an enthusiastic supporter and co-founder of the TKLA, and according to Boris Lunin, "his name is inseparable from the history of the TKLA, since Ostroumov was its immediate guiding hand."⁵³ The TKLA itself is characterised by Lunin in rather positive terms as a non-governmental or public [*obshchestvennaia*] scholarly association for regional studies [*kraevedenie*], specialising in humanities, and the "study of the archaeology and history of material culture of Central Asia." It functioned between 1895 and 1917 and "left a noticeable trace in the scholarship [...]." According to Lunin, its discoveries gained the attention of "distinguished representatives of the pre-revolutionary Russian Orientalism [...]," such as Vasilii Bartol'd, Nikolai Veselovskii, Ignatii Krachkovskii, Sergei Ol'denburg and others.⁵⁴ It is clear that Lunin held the so-called bourgeois academics of the pre-Revolutionary school in high esteem. Ostroumov, on the other hand, did not come off unscathed in Lunin's book. Irrespective of the credit given to him by Lunin in regard of his organisational skills, he is described as someone who saw Turkestan's native population with the eyes of "a *kul'turtreger* [*Kulturträger*] and russifier" and who

⁵¹ In 1907, for instance, Semenov sent his article "Razvaliny mecheti bliz seleniia "Anou" v Akhal-tekinskom oazise" (The ruins of the mosque near the settlement 'Anou' in the Akhal Teke oasis) for publication in Petersburg to Bartol'd. When the latter suggested to Semenov to include his plan and photographs of the mosque into the article of Professor Valentin A. Zhukovskii on the topic Semenov refused. In: Litvinskii, B. A. & Akramov, N. M. (1971): *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.44.

⁵² A.A.S., b13, f6, p.13: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 3.12.1907.

⁵³ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.69.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.10.

wrote “great-power-chauvinistic [velikoderzhavno-shovinisticheskii]” works on Islam.⁵⁵

Semenov’s apprehension about Ostroumov’s departure from Tashkent proved unfounded. In spite of his threats to leave Tashkent, Ostroumov appears to have been none too serious about his departure from the town where he had spent the last thirty years. Soon Semenov wrote to Bartol’d: “Somehow the departure of Nikolai Petrovich keeps being delayed; will he leave at all, I wonder? After all, this is not the first such case with him; he is sure though that his transfer will happen.”⁵⁶ Apparently, the veteran *Turkestanets* was offended that he had been replaced as Director of the Tashkent Classical Gymnasium for Boys, a post he had held since 1889, and was now bargaining for a new role. “I feel sorry for him,” wrote Semenov, “it’s a shame that the local authorities did not keep him by offering him a position in Tashkent comparable to the one as director of the Gymnasium. That’s, at any rate, what he told me about it.”⁵⁷ As I have already mentioned, Ostroumov felt unappreciated and undervalued by the colonial administration. In the end, Ostroumov remained in Tashkent until 1917, at which time his world collapsed. Wronged by life, he withdrew from there to his home in Sasovo (in the Tambov province) and considered entering a monastery. In a letter from August 1918 Semenov told Bartol’d that Ostroumov had written to him that:

[...] come autumn he [Ostroumov] will enter a monastery. I am sorry for him, all the more because he is without any means and I can’t correspond with him because of the current events. I wrote to him about the opening of a university in Tashkent [the future Central Asian State University (SAGU)], but he sees everything so gloomily that he wrote: ‘Nothing proper will come from this undertaking!’⁵⁸

Ostroumov was obviously much more pessimistic about the future than Bartol’d and especially Semenov, who in the summer of 1918 already occupied himself with the organisation of SAGU in Tashkent. According to Babajanov, while many of Ostroumov’s colleagues, such as Semenov, “became more liberal, or adopted then-

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.69.

⁵⁶ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.192: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 30.12.1907.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.78: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 7.8.1918 (Julian calendar).

fashionable socialist ideas”, he himself “remained faithful until the end of his days to the same conservatism [...]”⁵⁹ Nonetheless, his pious resolution did not materialise either. Eventually, Ostroumov returned to Tashkent and worked there as a lecturer from 1921 until his death in 1930. He might have not been the most gifted Orientalist but he was a genuine *Turkestanets*. As such, he was more loyal to the *ancien régime* and its paternalistic and imperialist vision of Russia’s role in Central Asia than most of his more opportunistic and less conservative colleagues, such as Semenov, who were both younger and more academically minded than him, and who saw an opportunity in the Bolsheviks’ patronage of scholarship.

The rise and fall of the journal *The World of Islam*

Bartol’d’s above-outlined vision of state and academia working for their mutual benefit did not mean that scholars were not to enjoy any autonomy. On the contrary, according to Vera Tolz, Bartol’d and his teacher, Viktor Rozen, repeatedly maintained that “the solution of foreign and domestic policy issues should not be the task of scholars—theoreticians.”⁶⁰ This insistence on scholarly autonomy indicates that Bartol’d knew that, in practice, scholars were in constant danger of not being independent advisors to the state and its partners, but merely its tools and clients, whose purpose, methods and agendas were the subject of political discretion. What is more, he himself experienced such governmental interference during his time as editor of the journal *Mir Islama* (The World of Islam). He took office in 1912, on the invitation of the Society of Russian Orientalists (*Obshchestvo russkikh Orientalistov*), but lasted only one year as the journal’s editor. Evidently, the state, which subsidised the journal, was unhappy with the publication’s proclaimed “purely scholarly orientation” and with Bartol’d’s refusal “to advise European governments, including the Russian government” on policy issues.⁶¹ As if Semenov anticipated the trouble to come, he wrote to Bartol’d in late 1911:

I read in the newspapers ('Nov.[oe] Vr.[emia]') and 'Turk.[estanskie] Vedom.[osti]') about the launch of the governmental publication 'Mir Islama',

⁵⁹ Bakhtiyar Babajanov, “How Will We Appear...”, p.282.

⁶⁰ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, p.74.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

*of which you will be editor in chief; and I have to admit that, honestly, I don't envy you, as you are about to step on a 'narrow and deplorable path'; I am afraid that often you will have to put up with people saying all sorts of things to or about you; but whatever you might hear, don't stop fulfilling the role of someone impartially describing bygone times.*⁶²

Apparently, Bartol'd was at that point still more optimistic than Semenov and hoped to be able to reconcile his concept of scholarship with the government's notion of it. In any case, after Semenov had received a reply from his teacher "in [his] capacity as editor of the new journal", he wrote (in late November 1911) that he would "take back [the] words that [Bartol'd] will the have to endure the 'ordeal' of [his] new position."⁶³ Underpinning his newfound optimism Semenov added that the journal's programme had convinced him that it would be "an impartial mouthpiece of the cultural life of the Muslim peoples [*narodnostei*], which in many aspects doesn't merely depend on religious beliefs."⁶⁴ Here Semenov echoed the journal's guiding principle, which Bartol'd had laid down and which emphasised that "Muslim culture" was a "complex historical phenomenon, not to be explained exclusively by the influence of religious dogmas and instructions [...]" but only through the elucidation of "cultural influences and political, cultural and other causes [...], irrespective of the abstract ideal constructed by the religion."⁶⁵ Semenov concluded that he would respond "with great pleasure [...] to [the] invitation to take part in the new journal." However, he could not deny himself the postscript: "Probably, you had to stand up a good bit for your rights as editor against Al[eksei].N[ikolaevich] Kharuzin [who was at the time Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and Director of the Department of the Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions]."⁶⁶

Bartol'd, indeed, had to overcome great resistance from government officials and scholars (Kharuzin was, incidentally, both a civil servant and an ethnographer

⁶² A.A.S., b13, f6, p.18: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 6.11.1911.

⁶³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.195: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd, November 1911 (date not specified)..

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Robert Geraci, "Russian Orientalism at an Impasse: Tsarist Education Policy and the 1910 Conference on Islam", in: Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.157

⁶⁶ M. M. Kerimova and O. B. Naumova, "Aleksei Nikolaevich Kharuzin — Etnograf i Antropolog (A.N.Kharuzin - Ethnographer and Anthropologist)," <http://www.ihst.ru/projects/sohist/books/ethnography/1/164-198.pdf> (accessed 5/30, 2014).

and anthropologist). And Bartol'd's argument with Ostroumov attests that his vision of the tasks and methods of Oriental Studies and of the division of labour within the discipline was met with opposition, not only in St. Petersburg but also in Turkestan. Bartol'd's engagement in Tashkent and his involvement in the TKLA, expressed in his extensive correspondence with local scholars and members of the colonial administration, such as Semenov, Ostroumov, Nikolai Mallitskii, Mikhail Andreev and Vasilii Viatkin,⁶⁷ has to be seen as part of an effort to assert his own authority in the periphery and to affirm the primacy and influence of the St. Petersburg school against the government's calls for more practical and politicised scholarship. In Turkestan, where almost all scholars and would-be-scholars were simultaneously members of the military administration, this was particularly difficult. But Bartol'd tried patiently and tactfully to win others over to his side. This is quite apparent in his earlier-mentioned letter to Ostroumov, in which he explained his unwillingness to publish the latter's article. "I am wholly aware", Bartol'd wrote, "that the way we have set things [Oriental Studies] up is extremely shaky, and that it hardly corresponds to the ministry's wishes."⁶⁸ In St. Petersburg, however, he went on, "not a single of the few noticeable specialists on Islamic studies [*Islamovedeie*] [...] agrees to do things differently." Such was the legacy of Victor Rozen, he maintained, should the government wish to discard it, then this would have to happen "without our participation and with the help of people of an entirely different category."⁶⁹ Bartol'd saw himself and his Petersburg colleagues as the bastion of academia against the encroachment of the government; and he appealed to Ostroumov to join his camp. "[I think] we could expect to find understanding among the educated Russian society of Turkestan and in the Caucasus for our notion of the tasks of Russian culture and statehood [...]," he wrote to Ostroumov.⁷⁰ According to Bartol'd, the "local figures" were to provide relevant source-material to the metropolitan scholars but should abstain from writing about issues they knew little about – or, in his words, for which they "don't possess the necessary sources."⁷¹

⁶⁷ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.226.

⁶⁸ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, p.233.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

Ultimately, Bartol'd's battle for a more objective and balanced understanding of Oriental Studies was decided, not in Turkestan, but in Petrograd and Moscow. As mentioned above, he lasted only one year as the journal's editor. Upon hearing the news, Semenov wrote to him late December 1912:

It was with great surprise that I read in your last letter in more detail about the end of the publication of 'Mir Islama' as from January the first of 1913. It's obvious that certain circles and people of a certain outlook request a 'bellicose' publication [organ 'boevoi'] to slag off and crash its opponents, but what is often forgotten is that polemics on ethnographic-religious grounds do not give any results in terms of understanding the world-view on the opposing side. I suppose the appointment of a new Minister of Education won't change anything in the matter. I can imagine what my old acquaintances V. D. Deyneko and Vasya Yanchevetskii [Vasilii Grigor'evich Ianchevetskii] had to say about pan-Islamism in the Russian Assembly [Russkoe Sobranie].⁷² Apparently, this will be the genre of the employees of the new journal on Islam.⁷³

In July of the following year (1913) Semenov sent another letter to Bartol'd, telling him how many people regretted the closure of *Mir Islama*. The journal's reincarnation was, according to Semenov, "totally different, in terms of its content [...]; [it] tendentiously at times portrays merely the present, but does not give any answers as to why things have developed in Islam in such a way and not in another."⁷⁴ This was too important a matter to leave it to the polemicists, Semenov found and added: "[T]he publication of a popular-scientific journal on Islam is, it seems to me, something of vital importance in Russia [*u nas*]." There might be few readers in the first year, Semenov commented, but this would change quickly "without doubt", since "we are too connected through strong and living bonds with the Muslim peoples." In conclusion Semenov expressed his regret that:

[...] Your colleagues, for reasons that have nothing to do with the spreading in Russia of Orientalist knowledge, are failing this big and important matter.

⁷² For more information on the Russian Assembly, see Don Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.46ff.

⁷³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.21: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 26.12.1912.

⁷⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.27: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 05.07.1913.

*And I think, that the Caucasian and the Turkestan authorities will also fail to comprehend the importance of the problem, since our [u nas] views are too narrow-minded and we still will have to wait a long time for people with broader horizons and more wide-ranging thoughts. Hazor afsus ast! [What a pity [in Persian]!]'*⁷⁵

Furthermore, Semenov's words of sympathy, encouragement and understanding for his teacher bespeak his own scholarly ethos, which was obviously much closer to Bartol'd's than to that of Ostroumov. Semenov wanted *The World of Islam* to be "an impartial mouthpiece of the cultural life of the Muslim peoples." A journal that would not reduce the "World of Islam" to Islam alone and focus almost exclusively on contemporary issues; a publication not "'bellicose' [...] to slag off and crash its opponents [...]" and engage in "polemics on ethnographic-religious grounds," but instead one that is inquisitive, professional and unprejudiced.

The World of Islam was a symbol of the sort of Orientalist scholarship that Semenov envisioned. And this vision was rigorously academic in its defence of academic autonomy and freedom of inquiry, independent from the state's concerns. It was not, however, a vision of an ivory-towered academia that was indifferent to the concerns of the colonial state and unrelated to contemporary concerns. All his remarks – about the "vital importance [for] Russia" to have a "popular-scientific journal [my emphasis] on Islam"; about the Russians' "strong and living bonds with the Muslim peoples"; and about the need to "spread Orientalist knowledge in Russia" – suggest that, in Semenov's opinion, Oriental Studies ought to be applicable and relevant to contemporary challenges. And these challenges pertained, not only the world of academia, but society as whole (hence a popular-scientific journal). Furthermore, Semenov's resigned comments about the "Caucasian and the Turkestan authorities" and the "Minister of Education" suggest that he regarded it as the government's duty to give support and recognition to (academic) Oriental Studies (even if it regularly failed to do so, as the closure of *The World of Islam* under Bartol'd's aegis attests.)

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

Last but not least, one of Semenov's letters to Bartol'd (from January 1915) demonstrates that Semenov believed that Oriental Studies in general and *The World of Islam* in particular should be consulted, to render colonial rule more effective and efficient. The letter is clear evidence of that fact that even such a strictly academic journal as *The World of Islam*, whose editor explicitly and repeatedly refused to yield to the state's demands to give it a more practical direction and contemporary outlook, was not something that Semenov read exclusively in his armchair during leisure time; but that the journal could in fact be a useful compendium for his administrative work as a colonial administrator. The letter shows what Semenov regarded as the "tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan" and how *The World of Islam* could help in achieving them. It reads:

Thank you very much for your promise to send me your talk "The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan" [Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia v Turkestane]; I will read it with the greatest interest. I think it will perfectly correspond to the current state of affairs [in Turkestan] (I can only guess about its content)[;] because it seems that never before did the local current state of affairs raise so many complicated questions as it does now. And never before were those, who ought to know all of this and deal with the situation, in such a helpless position: There is a mass of materials, but everything is tucked away somewhere without systematisation; somewhere at some point on this or that question something has been written and published, but where exactly – that is impossible to figure out now, [...]. As a result, as if someone had shouted 'Stop the engine', one has to compile a hurried inquiry into, let's say, the history of Badakhshan for the last 40 years. It [for instance,] became suddenly imperative to precisely document the border between our and the Bukharan Pamirs and to determine where exactly in the Pamirs the Kirgiz are living, where the Sunnis and where the 'Shiites' (the Bukharans reckon the entire Iranian population of the Pamirs [to be Shiites], about the Ismailis they haven't heard yet) – [this matter] resulted in an extensive correspondence between Tashkent and Petrograd, however no one really knew where to find all this. It is particularly deplorable that our diplomacy is so helpless in all these questions. How bad that we no longer have 'The World of Islam' under

*your editorship: how useful [the journal] would be now! How it would help to solve some of those questions that life is putting forward! [my emphasis] If you would know how we suffer from the lack of understanding and knowledge of some specific aspects of eastern life, the roots of which are in the past! It's impossible to explain all this in more detail [...] in a letter and anyway... I suppose you know and understand all this without me saying it.*⁷⁶

Semenov's testimony suggests that the state of Russian colonial rule in Tashkent was not so different from Morrison's view of it with regard to Samarkand: "Lack of money; lack of knowledge; lack of power: all these characterized Russian rule in Samarkand in the Tsarist period [...]"⁷⁷ Semenov was probably right to propose that *The World of Islam* under Bartol'd's editorship would have alleviated this lack of knowledge to some degree. We will never know. The colonial state, at least in this case, not only refused to listen, but it deliberately undermined the publication of the kind of colonial and academic knowledge that Bartol'd and his allies produced.

The rehabilitation of bourgeois scholarship as "high and pure science"

Lunin presented another interesting argument in his treatment of the TKLA and its relationship to Ostroumov. In his book *From the History of Russian Orientalism and Archaeology in Turkestan*, which was published in 1958, he wrote that Ostroumov "was satisfied with the 'apolitical' [and hence equally not anti-monarchist] character of the scholarly work" of the TKLA.⁷⁸ The circle's apolitical stance, Lunin argued, was guarded by the authority of other eminent members, such as Bartol'd, who represented the "Petersburg school of Orientalists" and saw the reactionary and "russificatory views and methods" or the Kazan school as "a violation of the tradition of 'high and pure science.'"⁷⁹ The separation of Russian Oriental Studies into a reactionary and an academic school can thus be traced back to the work of Lunin, who must have been aware of the weaknesses of this dichotomy. After all, the TKLA was a good example of how the two schools acted together and overlapped. To

⁷⁶ A.A.S., b13, f6, p46: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 8.1.1915.

⁷⁷ Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand...*, p.292.

⁷⁸ B. V. Lunin, *Iz Istorii Russkogo...*, pp.69-73.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

some extent this dichotomy has therefore to be seen as the result of the ideological pressures under which Lunin was working during the second half of the 1950s.

Lunin himself appears to have sympathised with the ideal of “high and pure science” and of minimal political interference in academia. But he also had to adhere to the Soviet, and hence explicitly political (Marxist), model of scholarship, which explains his usage of quotation marks in ‘apolitical’ and ‘high and pure science’ in his text. Conscious of the delicacy of the topic of pre-revolutionary Orientalism in Turkestan, he explicitly quoted Lenin’s assumption, that an “objectivist”, focussing on the “inevitability of a given historical process,” always risks turning into an “apologist of these facts,” whereas “materialism always implies [...] partisanship [*partiinnost*].”⁸⁰ Lunin realised that he was rehabilitating scholars such as Bartol’d and (albeit to a much lesser extent) Ostroumov; and the Lenin-quote was meant to avoid him being branded an apologist of bourgeois and colonialist Orientalists. Moreover, as if Lenin’s blessing was not enough, Lunin opened his book with a reference to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of USSR, at which Khrushchev delivered his famous speech denouncing the personality cult around Stalin and some of the most violent excesses of his dictatorship. The congress, so Lunin wrote, had infused historians with “new vigour and energy” – a clear hint at the unprecedented freedoms he took advantage of for his study.⁸¹

The Khrushchev Thaw had put an end to the fierce campaigns against the so-called bourgeois legacy of Bartol’d and his pupils the Bartol’dists (*Bartol’dovtsy*), which had started immediately after the latter’s death in 1930, and which, with varying intensity, had intimidated countless Orientalists for more than two decades.⁸² For example, in May 1931 (only nine months after Bartol’d’s death), in a campaign initiated by the Communist Party functionary and historian Mikhail Tsvibak, Semenov was arrested, together with ten other Bartol’dists who taught at

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.11.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁸² Rodinov, Mikhail, “Profiles Under Pressure – Orientalists in Petrograd/Leningrad 1918-1956”, in: Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p.51.

Tashkent's Central Asian State University (SAGU).⁸³ Similarly, in 1951 – at the height of the campaign against the so-called rootless cosmopolitans (*bezrodnye kosmopolity*) that had begun at the end to the 1940s – Semenov was forced to leave Tashkent for Stalinabad. In ideological terms Lunin was thus navigating troubled waters, having to locate the TKLA somewhere between Scylla of Ostroumov's russificatory Orientalism and Charybdis of Bartol'd's bourgeois and cosmopolitan legacy. In this context, the notion of supposedly pure academic scholarship came in handy. It allowed Lunin and other historiographers to claim that, while Bartol'd, Semenov and to some extent even Ostroumov worked in a colonial setting and used bourgeois and not sufficiently Marxist methodology, their objectivism and apoliticism – however illusionary and misguided it may have been – helped them to sidestep even more reactionary monarchist and imperialist sins in their scholarship. In other words, in order to speak about the scholars of the “old school” at all – even after 1956 – their pre-revolutionary scholarship had to be regarded as ‘purely’ academic. For the same reason, the academic career of scholars such as Semenov had to be portrayed as almost entirely separate from their administrative responsibilities.

In conclusion, the dichotomy that Lunin helped construct has subsequently found its way into western scholarship for, despite its limitations, it now allows us to characterise and group the variety of opinions within Russian Oriental Studies. I have already mentioned the work of Vera Tolz.⁸⁴ But long before this, Wayne S. Vucinich had identified two tendencies within Russian Oriental Studies, which separated in “the period from the last decades of the nineteenth century down to the Revolution.”⁸⁵ One was represented by “the ‘academic’ Orientalists”, such as Bartol'd, who, according to Vucinich, were influenced by the earlier Romanticists and “found allies among those liberal thinkers who promoted ideas of *Heimatkunde*, or the need to promote as well as study the languages and cultures of the non-Russian

⁸³ Bobrovnikov, Vladimir, “The contribution of Oriental scholarship to the Soviet anti-Islamic discourse: from the Militant Godless to the Knowledge Society”, in: Kemper, Michael, Conermann, Stephan., *The Heritage...*, p.73.

⁸⁴ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, pp.73-80.

⁸⁵ Wayne S. Vucinich, “The structure of Soviet Orientology: fifty years of change and accomplishment”, in: Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1972), p.46.

peoples of the empire.” Those who advocated more russificatory and discriminatory policies towards the empire’s minorities represented the other tendency.⁸⁶ I think I have made it clear that Semenov was more at home in the former group, while, for instance, Ostroumov found more allies in the second. At the same time, the friendship and cooperation between both *Turkestantsy* hints at the limitations of this dichotomy. In terms of their respective scholarly work, however, Lunin’s (and Vucinich’s) model does apply. While Ostroumov’s writings were often biased, inaccurate and driven by an essentially missionary impulse to discredit Islam, Semenov consciously – albeit not always successfully – avoided such polemics and the reproduction of clichés and stereotypes. For the colonial administration, Semenov’s and Ostroumov’s work – each for its own (earlier-mentioned) reasons – was of limited use. Still, both men hoped that their knowledge would facilitate colonial rule, even though Ostroumov was arguably keener to be heard by the authorities than Semenov, for whom the praise of scholarly peers, such as Bartol’d, Sergei Ostroumov and Iganitii Krachkovskii, was more important. Last but not least, both complained frequently that Orientalist knowledge was not sufficiently employed by an administration that seemed to lack coordination.

Orientalist clichés, however, were present in Semenov’s works as well, especially in his writings on the so-called Mountain Tajiks, which I will examine in the final chapter of this thesis, and which would profoundly impact the construction of a Tajik national identity during the early Soviet period. Reminiscent of Trautmann’s above-mentioned distinction between “two kinds of Orientalism [...],” Ronald Inden has identified two British Orientalist visions of India. Both of them see the country as Europe’s opposite, but one “can be referred to as romantic, spiritualistic, or idealistic [...],” while the other is best described as a “rationalist, secularist, and positivist view.”⁸⁷ The former vision, which according to Inden, originated with Sir William Jones:

[...] take[s] those very features of Indian civilization which the utilitarian-minded criticize and see as worthless and find them worthy of study and

⁸⁶ Vucinich has also argued that “[m]ost of the students in the Lazarev Institute in Moscow and in St. Petersburg followed their professors in the first category.” See: *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ronald Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 03 (1986), p.430.

*perhaps even of praise. The very ascetic practices, philosophies, cosmologies, customs, visual art forms, and myths which the utilitarian or materialist finds wasteful, deluded, or even repulsive, the romantic idealist takes up with great fascination.*⁸⁸

As I will show in chapter five, Semenov (especially in his early work) can be described as a Russian representative of this romantic and spiritualistic school of Oriental Studies. His romantic and culturalistic rather than racist vision of Central Asia's Iranophone mountain population as Aryan or Indo-European brethren, however, contained the seeds of an anti-Turkism that was the hallmark of some of the most Orientalist and racist Russian scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which would go on to inform an ethnocentric vision of Tajik national identity. Somewhat ironically, however, this particular vision of Tajik national identity and history is today being employed in Tajik nationalist discourse to legitimise national independence.⁸⁹

Semenov and the Ismailis in Tashkent 1912-1916

In *Russia's Orient* Daniel Brower et al. have argued that: "[t]o emphasize the importance of the colonial experience suggests the need to explore points of contact or 'encounters,' [...] among the empire's peoples and between the tsarist regime and its subject communities."⁹⁰ Tashkent, as the centre of Russian power in Central Asia, was such a contact point, as was Semenov's work place, the Chancellery of the Governor-General, albeit on a smaller scale. The latter was a port of departure from where Semenov undertook several trips and official visits to Bukharan and other dignitaries and a port of call for a variety of delegations from all over Turkestan. Semenov was thus uniquely placed to experience "the colonial encounter", and some of his scholarship was directly informed and inspired by it. In one of his letters Semenov described an incident, which illustrates the advantages of his work at the

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ David Ludden has described a similar development for the case of India. See: David Ludden, "Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge," in: Carol Breckenridge Appadurai and Peter van der Veer, "Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia" University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.252.

⁹⁰ Brower, Daniel; Lazzerini, Edward (1997): *Russia's Orient...*, p.xvi.

Chancellery, and shows it as a place that, rather than burdening him with dull paperwork, offered the chance to establish extraordinary contacts with people from all over Turkestan, including representatives of the Pamiri Ismaili community, by whom Semenov was particularly intrigued. In early April 1914 he wrote to Bartol'd:

A week ago I was about to write to the Pamirs concerning the Mervanites, when, just as I was picking up the pencil, I saw some figures [tipy] appear in the courtyard. To my astonishment they were Ismailis who had come from the Pamirs. That was, so to speak, 'at the right time in the right place,' [i vpopade i kstatij].⁹¹

Both the proverb and anecdote sum up Semenov's position at the time. He (rather than the Ismailis) was, indeed, in the right place at the right time. After all, the Governor-General's Chancellery in early twentieth century Tashkent was an intersection of the worlds of scholarship and colonial rule. The arrival of the Ismailis in Tashkent, for instance, has to be seen in the context (or even as a consequence) of the Russo-Ismaili relations that Semenov himself had helped to establish through his participation in the 1898 Pamir expedition of the Russian nobleman and amateur ethnographer, Aleksei Bobrinskoi, a subject I will cover in more detail in the next chapter (p.179ff). Just as Russia's imperial expansion had favoured scholarly exploration in the case of the expedition, the consolidation of colonial rule also offered opportunities to interested colonial administrators such as Semenov. That is not to say that the interests of scholarship and the colonial state always converged. In fact, they sometimes contradicted each other, and more often the state made little use of existing scholarly knowledge. But while the state, on the one hand, used Semenov's expertise to make the colonial administration work, Semenov, on the other hand, managed to make his administrative duties and position work for his research interests. His encounter and cooperation with the Ismailis is a perfect example of this, as I will show in the following.

In 1914 Semenov contributed an article to a *Festschrift* in honour of the academician Aleksei Nikolaievich Veselovskii.⁹² Entitled 'The Bukharan Sheikh Baha-ud-Din, 1318-1389, (On his biography)', the article dealt with one of Bukhara's most

⁹¹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p34: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 02.04.1914.

⁹² Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.157.

famous sons, the founder of the influential Sufi Naqshbandi order. By chance, and due to his position at the Chancellery of the Governor-General in Tashkent, Semenov was acquainted with a rather unflattering and, for him, surprising account of Baha-ud-Din's life. In May 1914 he wrote to Bartol'd that:

*A year or so ago one of the Ismailis [who arrived in Tashkent from Shughnan in March 1912] during a conversation told me a story about Beha-ud-Din (Nekshbendi) [Sic!]; [which] seemed rather interesting, as very mean satire not so much about the sheikh as about his Bukharan admirers.*⁹³

Semenov asked his acquaintance to put the account to paper but later decided not to use this narrative, but rather several "little-known manuscript-biographies of [Baha-ud-Din]" for the Veselovskii Festschrift. The reason was, as he explained to Bartol'd, that the Festschrift "[...] will receive publicity and the appearance in it of a 'heretical' and on top of that mean biography of this quite revered saint [sviatoi] of Central Asia will provoke great discontent among the [Sunni] Muslims."⁹⁴ Ultimately, Semenov published the Ismaili account of the life of the eminent Sufi Sheikh in the following year (1915). Bartol'd, who edited Semenov's paper, suggested that he comment on how common this satirical view of Baha-ud-Din was among Ismailis, to which Semenov replied that he could say "nothing specific on this topic."⁹⁵ In order to at least somehow address this issue, he gave a vivid account of an encounter between him and a group of Ismailis in Tashkent in 1912. I will quote it in its entirety because it is a rare personal account of Semenov's attitude towards the Ismailis of the Pamirs:

One evening in 1912 I had three or four (I don't remember exactly) Ismailis [from Shughnan] sitting at my place, [and we were] speaking, among other things, about Bukhara when Baha-ud-Din, who is revered so much by the Bukharans, was mentioned. Not attaching much importance to it, I asked the speaker (or rather pushed him): 'What do you think of Baha-ud-Din?' The Ismailis quickly exchanged looks and smiled slightly. I asked what the matter was. It was then that they told me that where they came from Baha-ud-Din's

⁹³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p36: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 03.05.1914.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ A.A.S., b13, f6, p46: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 8.1.1915.

reputation was quite different from what Bukharans think of him; in addition to that, one of them almost whispering (they always speak half-whispering about their religious questions and about Shia and Sunni Muslims) briefly added that, essentially, Baha-ud-Din legalised pederasty in Bukhara and that this is really what it is about. The subtlest of smiles did not for a minute disappear from their lips while they were telling this story. As it was getting late, I told my guests that it was time to part and that their tale was most interesting when listened to unhurried, and that I would be grateful if an educated Mulla among them could write it down for me. In the course of two days the story was written down and sent to me. [Paragraph] As for your other remark that [the piece], on the one hand, refers to the Sheikh in a seemingly respectful tone while, on the other hand, it imputes great indecencies to him, so it seems to me this is the precise aim of the Ismaili satire: To speak in a reverential tone about the abominations of the main character and his followers. In general, I have to say that to me the educated [gramotnye] Ismailis make the impression of surprisingly subtle [tonkie] people [:] and I can fully understand that the Ismaili da'i [missionaries] had such exceptional success in the Muslim lands of ancient times [...], [in particular] if one assumes that they surpassed in talent the contemporary men of letters [gramotei], who did the ta'vil [interpretations] with the blessings of the pirs [elders]. A certain manner of adhering to an extraordinary level of politeness, of suavely and very seriously speaking of sometimes unmentionable things and similar manifestations of the 'high adab' — these are the inevitable attributes of such learned people. Although I have to admit that I haven't met many of them, but each of them has made exactly such an impression on me.⁹⁶

Encounters of this kind revealed to Semenov both the diversity of identities of those whom he categorised as Central Asia's Iranian peoples and the cultural, religious, geographic and linguistic divisions among these groups. In fact, the above-mentioned Ismaili satire about such a venerated Sufi *pir* and "his Bukharan admirers"

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

is a particularly telling example of these divisions; not least because, according to Semenov, Baha-ud-Din “[a]mong the multiple saints of ‘Sacred Bukhara’ takes the first place [as] her patron [...]”⁹⁷ And Semenov’s concern that the publication of the satire in the Veselovskii Festschrift would “provoke great discontent among the [Sunni] Muslims highlights the religious differences between the Ismailis and the urban population of Bukhara (and other cities).”⁹⁸ All in all, the satire and Semenov’s conversations with the Shughnis helped to raise his awareness of the limits of the concept of a common Central Asian Iranian identity. (I will elaborate on this point in the following sub-section.)

Semenov’s meetings with the Ismailis continued to take place in the following months and allowed him to publish several papers on topics such as the religious beliefs and history of the Shughnis. His interaction with the Pamiri visitors went far beyond the scope of his duties as a colonial administrator. Nonetheless, these duties, constituted the basic prerequisite of their exchange, as Semenov acknowledged in the introduction to his article *About the Religious Beliefs of the Ismailis of Shughan* (1912): “Having been to an extent compelled by the existing circumstances to take an interest in the fortunes of the Shughnis, I then for several months had lively exchanges with some of them.”⁹⁹ Apparently, the Ismaili delegation had come to Tashkent to seek Russian support in their dealings with their Bukharan overlord. And it was part of Semenov’s administrative duties at the Chancellery of the Governor-General to take care of the matter. In his own words:

In March 1912 a group of twenty-four Shughnis, belonging to the sect of ‘Ismail’ia’ (or, according to their pronunciation, ‘Ismoil’ia’) arrived in Tashkent. Various misfortunes, inflicted upon them in their homeland [rodina], forced them and some of their compatriots to leave their remote and harsh homeland in the midst of winter and, notwithstanding the difficult journey through snow-covered mountain-tracks and closed passes, to make

⁹⁷ Aleksandr Semenov, "Rasskaz Shughnanskikh Ismailitov O Bukharskom Sheikhe Bekha-Ud-Dine (A Tale by the Ismailis of Shughnan about the Bukharan Sheikh Bekha-Ud-Din)," *Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdeleniia Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva* 22 (1915), p. 321.

⁹⁸ At the same time, Semenov’s caution was also partially a pretext to get the paper published in the *Proceedings of the Oriental department of the Russian Archaeological Society [SVORAO]* with Bartol’d’s support.

⁹⁹ A. A. Semenov, "Iz Oblasti Religioznykh Verovanii Shughnanskikh...", p.524.

*their way to Tashkent. [...] Of the sixty people who left Shughnan, almost two thirds stayed behind [...].*¹⁰⁰

I do not know exactly what prompted the Shughnis to seek Russian assistance. But the fact that they turned to Tashkent suggests that, when confronted with the choice between the Emir and the Tsar as their patron, they tended to regard the latter as the lesser evil. The western Pamirs had been declared part of Bukharan sovereign territory in 1895. Ten years later they came under direct Russian control but formally continued to belong to Bukhara.¹⁰¹ Wolfgang Holzwarth has pointed out that, because the various local formerly-independent valley principalities in the Pamirs had collapsed under Bukharan and Afghan rule, the Russian military administration relied on representatives of the lower local nobility, consisting of “village elders and respected (Ismaili) clergymen” to enforce this form of indirect rule.¹⁰² Among this group was a certain Sayyid Haidar Sho. He had been part of the group of two dozen Shughnis that arrived in Tashkent in March 1912 and, as I will shortly outline in the following section, with whom Semenov was in touch relatively closely between 1912 and (at least) 1916.

Sayyid Haidar Sho, Semenov, Bartol'd and the quest for the Mervanites

Sayyid Haidar Sho presumably belonged to the higher echelons of the lower local Shughni nobility. Furthermore, at that time he was probably not very advanced in years, since he had to be able to withstand the discomforts of repeated journeys between Shughnan and Tashkent. While Semenov's relationship with Haidar Sho was inseparable from the colonial context in which it developed, it revolved less around the issue of Russian patronage and indirect rule in the Pamirs, and more around Semenov's scholarly interest. The latter probably experienced the unexpected arrival of the Shughni delegation in Tashkent like an echo from the Bobrinskii expedition of 1898, when he had first met people from that part of Central Asia. The Ismailis'

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.523.

¹⁰¹ Wolfgang Holzwarth, *Die Ismailiten in Nordpakistan: Zur Entwicklung Einer Religiösen Minderheit Im Kontext Neuer Aussenbeziehungen* [The Ismailis of North Pakistan: about the development of a religious minority in the context of new foreign relations] (Berlin: Verlag das Arabische Buch, 1994), p.34.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.36.

presence in Tashkent allowed Semenov to study one of his favourite subject matters without having to travel to the Pamirs himself, and to interview the Shughnis and ask them to procure reports, manuscripts and books for him. Haidar Sho fulfilled precisely this role, and Semenov's publication *Ta'rikh-i Shughnan* (History of Shughnan), published in 1917, was the product of their cooperation, as he acknowledged in the foreword:

*[...] [t]he original [text], on which the present translation is based, was written at my request at the end of 1912 in Persian by the quite well educated Shughni Sayyid Haidar Sho, the son of Muborak-Sho, from the village of Porshiniv by the [river] Panj, one of my acquaintances among the locals [tuzemtsy], who eagerly told me about their country and various aspects of their way of life [byt].*¹⁰³

Semenov not only regarded Haidar Sho as one of those Ismaili "men of letters" whom he admired and whose refined manners, education and subtlety he praised in his above-mentioned letter to Bartol'd; but he actually employed him as a personal research assistant. In fact, he paid Haidar Sho in 1915 and 1916 in order to gather information about the Shughnis and other Pamiri Ismailis in Bukharan and Afghan Badakhshan. Of particular interest to Semenov (and to Bartol'd), were the Mervanites; the followers of a certain branch of Sunni Islam, who, according to Bartol'd, lived in "Chitral and Kanjut [Hunza] [in British India]" and found their first mention in (European) scholarship in Semenov's paper 'About the Religious Beliefs of the Ismailis of Shughnan' from 1912.¹⁰⁴ In a short article on the subject Bartol'd maintained that the "evidence ascertained by Semenov" of the presence of Mervanites "in the depths of Central Asia is of great scholarly interest."¹⁰⁵ He went on to say that:

On my request A.A. Semenov took measures to obtain more detailed information about the life and teachings of this sect; unfortunately, these measures have so far not been crowned with success; we only have managed

¹⁰³ Aleksandr Semenov, *Istoriia Shughnana (History of Shughnan)* (Tashkent: Tipografiia pri kantseliarii General-Gubernatora, 1916), p.II.

¹⁰⁴ V. V. Bartol'd, "Musul'manskaia sekta Mervanitov [The Muslim sect of the Mervanites]" in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 6 (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), p.462.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.464.

*to obtain a note about the Mervanites, written in Persian by the learned Ismaili Haidar Sho [...].*¹⁰⁶

Semenov's letters to Bartol'd suggest that the former was at least as much a driving force behind the initiative concerning the Mervanites as the Petersburg academician. Moreover, Semenov was eager to deepen the cooperation between him and Haidar Sho and to get Bartol'd, and even the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, involved in it as well. In February 1915 he wrote to Bartol'd that "in December and January only two Ismailis have remained in Tashkent, one of whom [is] Haidar Sho [...] [...]," implying that the time to entrust the latter with new assignments was now or possibly never.¹⁰⁷ He also told Bartol'd that he had received (via the Commandant of the Pamir Detachment [*otriad*]), letters containing information about the Mervanites from Haidar Sho's brother (Ibrahim Sho) and "a certain Suleiman [...] who lived many years among [the Mervanites] in Chitral and speaks [their language]." However, Semenov went on:

*Both these letters are lying here in front of me still unopened, because I just cannot find out where Haidar Sho, to whom they are addressed, has disappeared. I asked the local police to find him, but within two days the 'alguacils' reported to me that their quest was fruitless [...]. Probably, he has left the city for somewhere (even though it's strange that he didn't, as usual, drop in at my place!); but to open somebody else's letters I find extremely improper.*¹⁰⁸

It tells us something about the relationship between Haidar Sho and Semenov (and about the hierarchy between the two) that Semenov on the one hand asked the police to look for him, while on the other hand he did not dare to open Haidar Sho's letters, even though he assumed their content to be of an official/academic nature rather than a private one.

Semenov clearly had great hopes for his ventures with Haidar Sho and, with Russian institutional backing, wanted to send him to Chitral in pursuit of the Mervanites. Trying to convince Bartol'd of the idea he wrote:

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p50: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V. Bartol'd on the 21-22.02.1915.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

*I had an idea (which you possibly might find somewhat bizarre!)[;] wouldn't it be possible to send Haidar Sho to the 'Mervanites' in Chitral on the behalf of some learned society, in order for him to take notes on their beliefs and texts and on the religious books that are obtainable? Of course, these notes won't be perfect, but they would produce quite some interesting material, nevertheless. Think about it!*¹⁰⁹

In order to forestall potential objections from Bartol'd's side, Semenov added in the following letter that he need not fear any bureaucratic complications in connection with Haidar Sho's assignment, since the latter was not a Russian subject. He wrote:

*Haidar Sho is not a Russian but a Bukharan subject (Shughnan, Roshan and a part of Vakhani de jure belong to Bukhara and to us only two volosts [administrative divisions]: Pamirskaia and Oroshorskaia). Therefore there is no need for any [diplomatic] dealings [snoshenie] with England about his assignment. Everything will be settled (or rather can be settled) simply by issuing a Bukharan passport for Haidar together with a request to do this and that. There is even no necessity to equip him with a document from the Academy of Sciences: he will simply go to Chitral and to Badakhshan like a usual, perfectly ordinary Shughni, one of the hundreds that are crossing our and the Afghan-Indian border every day. He just needs to be paid for the labour of taking scholarly notes in accordance with a specified programme.*¹¹⁰

One might easily suspect that Haidar Sho's reconnaissance mission to Chitral was aimed at gathering not only academic but also political and military intelligence. And maybe such concerns helped Bartol'd to quickly (within approximately two months) raise a research grant of 299 roubles, for research on the Mervanites through the Academy of Sciences.¹¹¹ But there is no sign in the correspondence that would suggest that this was the case. The issuing of a Bukharan passport for Haidar Sho seems to have been a way of simplifying the whole affair, not one of masking a spy. In fact, in his text on the Mervanites, Bartol'd explicitly expressed the wish that the

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p54: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 24.03.1915.

¹¹¹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p56: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 11.06.1915.

“maturing friendship between Russia and Great Britain will make possible the sending of researchers from Russian Turkestan to Chitral and Kanjut.”¹¹²

In June Semenov told Bartol'd that Haidar Sho had agreed “in principle” to the research trip.¹¹³ And in September he informed Bartol'd that:

*By the end of this month I am planning to give the necessary instructions concerning the Mervanites to [...] Haidar Sho, who is on his way home [...]. But I won't give him the money in advance because the times are 'troubled' [smutnie] and I risk losing the money for nothing.*¹¹⁴

By February 1916 Semenov, nonetheless, had advanced fifteen roubles to Haidar Sho who, because of “the death of his mother other family business” did not find out anything about the Mervanites. “That was in November”, Semenov wrote to Bartol'd and added: “[...] I suppose that he is on his way to the “Mervanites’ backwoods. [But] I am not sure whether he will return [to Tashkent].”¹¹⁵ He did, however, receive from Haidar Sho (via the Commandant of the Pamir Detachment) some manuscripts, including a hitherto unknown (but incomplete) version of Nasir Khusraw’s *Safarnama* [Book of Travels]. Simultaneously, Semenov began working on a description of another manuscript by Nasir Khusraw, his “*Wajh-i-Din or Ruh-i-Din* [The Face of Religion]”, of which, due to the amount of administrative work, Semenov could make only a very limited description.¹¹⁶ Their cooperation was slowly beginning to bear fruits.

By April 1916 Haidar Sho had returned to Tashkent with some notes, which his acquaintance Suleiman had taken (and from which Bartol'd quoted in his article about the Mervanites). Semenov described them as follows: “All this is not what I had in mind, but since from tomorrow onwards (due to official duties) I won't have time for ‘Mervanites’, I sent the sheet of Haidar Sho to you [...]: It is not uninteresting in parts. Maybe you will use it.”¹¹⁷ In his letters to Bartol'd, Semenov displayed a certain sense of caution and mistrust towards Haidar Sho. But this can largely be explained as an effort by Semenov to portray himself to his sponsor as

¹¹² V. V. Bartol'd, “Musul'manskaia sekta...”, p.466.

¹¹³ A.A.S., b13, f6, p56: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 11.06.1915.

¹¹⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p60: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 07.09.1915.

¹¹⁵ A.A.S., b13, f6, p62: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 05.02.1916.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ A.A.S., b13, f6, p66: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 16.04.1916

someone who is responsibly handling the funds entrusted in him. In fact, Bartol'd – not least because he had to rely solely on somebody else's judgement – was in fact more suspicious of the travails of the "learned Ismaili" than Semenov, who tried to appease his teacher in one letter with the words: "It would, undoubtedly, be inconvenient to send Haidar Sho on behalf of the Academy of Sciences, for the perfectly justified reason that you mentioned regarding 'eastern people'. For me, too, the money-question is not yet quite clearly resolved [...]"¹¹⁸ Semenov, however, clearly wanted to go ahead with the plan and went on:

*[...][B]ut recently I spoke with Haidar Sho about the assignment. He expressed his full willingness, and, according to [his] words, the entire journey from Tashkent to the 'Mervanites' takes five months, taking into account the long and difficult path and the inevitable stops along the way in order to rest. While he finds it difficult to anticipate the details of the journey at this point, he can describe them after having consulted one of his coreligionists (whom he expects from Ferghana) and who knows Badakhshan and Chitral well. In any case, according to him, it makes no sense to begin the journey before July. I think between 50 and 60 roubles per month would be sufficient for this 'Ismaili da'i'[:] but, as I said, I have not addressed the question of finances yet.*¹¹⁹

Apparently, Semenov convinced Bartol'd of the benefits of sending Haidar Sho on a second trip. However, the latter returned from the Pamirs in late April 1916, without having managed to enter Afghanistan, because it was "rather dangerous now."¹²⁰ According to Semenov, he had been "repulsed at the left shore of the [river] Panj at Kala Bar Panja. Even so, Haidar Sho managed to find out where exactly the Mervanites lived. Semenov asked Bartol'd whether he was supposed to send the notes to St. Petersburg (and invest thirty-five roubles) or wait for Haidar Sho's second trip in the summer."¹²¹ He also added that no religious books had been found yet, but that Haidar Sho's acquaintances in the Pamirs had send a letter, asking "what would be a good price for [...] a book [outlining the beliefs of the Mervanites],

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p68: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 25.04.1916.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

which is in the hands of one of Haidar Sho's acquaintances from Afghanistan."¹²² Semenov asked Haidar Sho to reply that he would be willing to pay "200 Indian rupees (125 roubles) on the condition that this is really the book of the Mervanites and not something else."¹²³

Eventually, Semenov published his article *About the Muslim Sect of the Mervanites* in the journal *The Muslim World (Musul'manskii mir)* in 1917, which was written on the basis of information obtained from Haidar Sho. In late December 1916 Semenov, while he was still waiting for more information from Haidar Sho concerning the geographical location of the Mervanites, sent the first part of the article to Bartol'd from Samarkand. Until that point Haidar Sho had only received thirty-five roubles for his work. The research budget was thus far from exhausted; and the promised book about the religious beliefs of the Mervanites had not yet been purchased. As far as Semenov was concerned, much work remained to be done.¹²⁴ But the revolutionary upheavals of 1917 appear to have put an end to these plans. There is no more mentioning of Haidar Sho in Semenov's correspondence. Both Haidar Sho and Semenov were too busy adjusting themselves to the new political circumstance to be able to uphold their cooperation. According to Paul Bergne, after the February Revolution of 1917, when the Khorog garrison in the Pamirs set up a so-called Shughnan Soldiers' Committee, "a leading local notable, Haidar Sho, was elected 'Comrade Chairman'."¹²⁵ And in the aftermath of the October Revolution, Haidar Sho again found himself (together with a certain Guminskii) in charge of the newly elected local executive committee.¹²⁶ I am unfamiliar with his further fate. In the late 1950s Semenov participated in the publication of the multi-volume *Outlines of the History of Historical science in the USSR*, to which he contributed the section on Tajikistan and wrote: "In 1915 the Shughni Haidar Sho writes the first history of Shughnan (in the Tajik language)."¹²⁷ In

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ A.A.S., b13, f6, p72: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 25.12.1916.

¹²⁵ Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p.35f.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ A.A.S., b11, f10: Oчерк razvitiia istoricheskoi nauki v Tadzhikistane s drevneishikh vremen do nastoiashchego vremeni (1956); (An outline of the development of historical scholarship in Tajikistan from ancient times until today).

1915 neither Semenov nor Haidar Sho could have anticipated the political implications of their work; namely, the fact that they were producing knowledge about a remote part of Eastern Bukhara, which would form the nucleus of a future Tajik state, and about people whose (perceived) distinctiveness (in terms of culture, language and physical appearance) from the Persian speakers of the plains would form the basic building block of the concept of a Tajik people and of Tajik “otherness.” In other words, their work was an important part of the prerequisite knowledge without which a (Soviet) Tajik state might not have been created.

This chapter has dealt with one of this thesis’ major and recurrent themes, namely, the fact that it is often impossible to disentangle Semenov’s scholarship from his role as a representative of two successive imperial states in Central Asia. As I have already mentioned in the introduction (p.21), Semenov was located right at the heart of the nexus of power and knowledge described by Said and other scholars. As such, he was clearly an Orientalist in the Saidian sense of the word. What is more, he seemed to have had little quarrel with his double role as a scholar and administrator/advisor. His letters to Bartol’d demonstrate that he did not regard the interaction and interconnection of academic knowledge and state power as something problematic *per se*. This is despite his knowledge that *in practice* this relationship was fraught with difficulties (as Bartol’d’s dismissal as the editor of *The World of Islam* illustrates). Semenov might not have been an archetypical Orientalist of Ostroumov’s calibre. In fact, he disagreed so strongly with Ostroumov and his aggressive and anti-Islamic polemics that he did not even regard him as a ‘proper’ scholar and Orientalist. Additionally, the problem of the degree to which Orientalist knowledge of any kind was actually employed by the authorities, raises the question how tight the link between knowledge and power really was. Likewise, Semenov’s complaints about the ignorance of his superiors and their preference for simplistic, partisan and unrigorous scholarship, which hinders the administration of colonial rule, illustrate how Orientalist (i.e. biased and stereotypical) knowledge might actually weaken the colonial state. Be that as it may, I agree with Khalid that historians do not need to come across “Orientalists issuing marching orders to

troops conquering regions of their expertise” in order to acknowledge their complicity in Russian imperial (and, I would add, Soviet) rule.¹²⁸

That said, this chapter has also shown that Semenov’s case provides further evidence to Knight’s argument that there is “ample reason to suppose that the framework put forward by Said for understanding western Orientalism should be applied with caution, [...], to the Russian context.”¹²⁹ The correspondence between Semenov and Bartol’d, as well as between the latter and Ostroumov, demonstrates that there were different and competing visions of Orientalist knowledge, and that they cannot all be measured with the same yardstick. Additionally, the question whether Orientalists were actually listened to and, if so, whether their knowledge actually improved or weakened the effectiveness of the imperial state’s control, further complicate Said’s model. However, the main reason caution is warranted when using Said’s framework is that its strength, namely its overarching generality, is also its weakness. Not only is the theory of Orientalism extremely abstract and generalising, but also Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse from which Said drew inspiration.¹³⁰ Unsurprisingly, when historians apply Said’s model to the Russian case, they are faced with several contradictions. According to Volkov, “Russia’s Oriental Studies” (especially Persian studies) was its most Orientalist, i.e. complicit with imperial power, “during the 1920s and early 1930s.”¹³¹ However, during this time the Soviet state was at its least colonialist and officially anti-imperialist position, as Khalid (who is very much in favour of applying Said to Russia) has argued.¹³² Moreover, Kemper and Conermann have maintained that, while Soviet Oriental Studies “fit very well into [...] [Said’s] overall definition [...],” the high level of

¹²⁸ Adeeb Khalid, “Russian History and...”, p.696.

¹²⁹ Nathaniel Knight, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg...”, p.97.

¹³⁰ Said’s famous study described Orientalism (and mainly French and British Oriental Studies within it) as “a Western style for domination, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient [...]” and as part of a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it [...]” Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.3.

¹³¹ Denis V. Volkov, “Individuals, Institutions and Discourses: Knowledge and Power in Russia’s Iranian Studies of the Late Imperial, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods,” *Middle East-Topics & Arguments* 4 (2015), p.66.

¹³² According to Khalid, “[t]he Soviet remaking of Central Asia makes sense only as the work of a different kind of modern polity, the activist, interventionist, mobilizational state that seeks to sculpt its citizenry in an ideal image.” Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006), p.232.

integration of non-Russian students and scholars into its teaching and research process, differentiated Soviet Oriental Studies from its European counterparts (and hence ran somewhat against Said's argument).¹³³ This specificity, however, was in part a legacy of the late imperial period, more precisely of Rozen's "new school of Orientology", as Tolz and Volkov have argued.¹³⁴ The collaboration between Semenov and Sayyid Haidar Sho, which has been outlined in this chapter, suggests the same by demonstrating that Orientalist knowledge was not exclusively the product of Orientalists.

Semenov's biography exemplifies and helps us to understand the above-mentioned paradoxes. It highlights both the applicability and the limits of Said's model to the late imperial and early Soviet cases. As a Soviet Orientalist, academician and government advisor, Semenov was more integrated into the state (and hence complicit with imperial or at least metropolitan rule) during the early Soviet period, than had been the case before 1917, when he was first of all a member of the colonial administration and only privately a scholar. In other words, Semenov was in many ways more clearly an Orientalist (in the Saidian sense of the word) during the early Soviet period, during which scholarship had a declared emancipatory agenda (and the state an anti-imperialist one), than he had been as a high-ranking Tsarist administrator in a regime that was ideologically much less ambitious and socially less interventionist.

¹³³ Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p.xiii.

¹³⁴ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, pp.3f & 111ff; Denis V. Volkov, "Individuals, Institutions...", p.67.

CHAPTER V – The Tajiks as Aryans

In 2006 Tajikistan commemorated its 15th anniversary of national independence with the proclamation of a “year of the Aryan civilisation.”¹ In the same year the influential Tajik historian and director of the Ahmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Rahim Masov, published an article accusing his Uzbek counterpart, Ahmadali Asqarov, the director of the Institute of Archaeology of Uzbekistan’s Academy of Sciences, of “falsifying and misappropriating” Tajik history and of ignoring the scholarship of:

*[...] V.V. Bartol’d, L.V. Oshanin, S.P. Tolstov, A.A. Semenov, M.S. Andreev, I.I. Zarubin and others, [...] who confirmed that the Tajiks are the direct descendants of the Aryans and, consequently, the most ancient inhabitants of Central Asia.*²

Masov’s words are symptomatic of what Victor Shnirelman has described as the contest for ancient ancestors and the status of indigenoussness among former Soviet Central Asian republics – a contest that is particularly heated between some Uzbek and Tajik historians.³ The quote shows how the claim to Aryan pedigree is central to Tajik state ideology and nationalist historiography.⁴ Additionally, Masov’s reference to Russian Orientalists suggests that the notion of the Tajiks’ Aryan descent is not the brainchild of contemporary Tajik historians, but that of an older generation of scholars, to which Semenov also belonged.⁵ According to Marlène Laruelle, it is indeed late imperial Russian Orientalist scholars who have originated the notion of

¹ *Jumhuriat*, 14.09.2006.

² Rahim Masov, "Fal'sifitsirovat' i prisvaivat' chuzhuu natsistoriiu nel'zia (otvet Panturkistam) (it is wrong to falsify and misappropriate some else's history [a response to the Panturkists])," <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1141856700> (accessed 1/14, 2016).

³ Victor Shnirelman, "Aryans Or Proto-Turks? Contested Ancestors in Contemporary Central Asia*, " *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 5 (2009), pp. 557-587; Tajikistan’s celebrations of the year of the Aryan civilisation in 2006, for example, were preceded by Uzbekistan’s commemoration of the 2700th anniversary of the Avesta in 2001 under the aegis of UNESCO.

⁴ Erica Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Silk Road Paper* (2008), 21.01.2015. http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2008_marat_national-ideology-and-state-building.pdf, pp.59ff.

⁵ All of the scholars mentioned by Masov were born between 1869 and 1887, with the exception of Tolstov, who was born in 1907.

the Tajiks' Aryan descent, and who are ultimately responsible for what she has called "the return of the Aryan myth."⁶ This chapter asks what Semenov's role was in that respect.

The reason the Aryan theme is so prevalent in Tajik nationalist discourse today is directly related to the fact that Tajikistan was established as "the first Iranian Soviet state in Central Asia" – as the local authorities heralded the founding of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in late 1924.⁷ The fact that the Tajiks were conceptualised as a nation of Persian speakers (and speakers of other Iranian languages) in the early 20th century, gives advocates of the notion of their Aryan descent a certain advantage in the contest for Aryan ancestry. After all, the Aryans are essentially a linguistic extrapolation, i.e. the hypothetical speakers of an Indo-European *Ursprache*, whom scholars have tended to regard as the aborigines of Central Asia.⁸ At the heart of Tajikistan's pretence to Aryan ancestry therefore is language, more precisely the fact that linguists consider Persian an Iranian and hence Indo-European (or Aryan, according to archaic terminology) language. Semenov, Bartol'd and other Russian scholars also believed the aborigines of Central Asia to have been Aryans. Moreover, these scholars portrayed the Iranophone population of Central Asia as Tajiks and, by the same token, as being of Iranian and therefore Aryan descent, as some Tajik historians do not tire to point out. Masov, for example, wrote that:

[...] A.A. Semenov in his article 'Material monuments of Aryan Culture' stresses: 'The Tajiks [...] are, as is well known, the descendants of the ancient aborigines of the country, the Aryans of Asia, belonging to the Iranian group of the great Aryan tribe [plemia]. [...] [T]he monuments of the past are a powerful reminder of this population, revealing, as it were, that the Aryan culture extended extremely far beyond the borders of contemporary

⁶ Marlène Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology," *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 1 (2007), p.55.

⁷ Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p.48.

⁸ According to Shnirelman, the most ancient written sources for the history of Central Asia, such as the Avesta, identify "the first inhabitants of the regions in question [...] with the Iranian-speaking nomads, [which only] later [...] have been replaced by Turkic-speaking ones." See: Victor Shnirelman, "Aryans or Proto-Turks...", pp.558ff and 569.

*Tajikistan. [...] The current Tajik republic is, of course, merely an insignificant part of the rich archaeological inventory of the Aryans of Central Asia; it is but one of many details in the overall picture of the country's history and, as such, cannot be seen in separation from the remaining parts of the picture.*⁹

Semenov's "Material monuments of Aryan Culture" was published in 1925, in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of Tajikistan. The paper attests that the notion of the Tajiks' Aryan descent had already been an integral part of the earliest examples of Tajik nationalist historiography. This chapter explores both the origins of this notion in late imperial Russian Orientalist scholarship, and its political utilisation during the NTD, when it helped to conceptualise the Tajiks as a distinct ethnic group, in need of a separate national territory – the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which was established in late 1924. In addition to that, this chapter asks why a hypothesis that had grown out of and hinged upon linguistic observations turned into a racist myth of Aryan superiority and autochthony, which has even entered the curriculum of schools in present-day Tajikistan.¹¹

On the one hand, the celebrations of the "year of the Aryan civilisation" in 2006 rightly suggest that the Aryan myth in Tajik nationalist discourse and state ideology is a recent phenomenon and the product of often rather crude propaganda. On the other hand, Laruelle was right to point out that the origins of this myth can be traced back to late 19th century Russian Orientalist scholarship, in particular to a racist and Turkophobe trend of "'Persophilia' or 'Tajikophilia' within Russian academic Orientalism at the *fin de siècle*."¹² Laruelle did not explicitly mention Semenov in this context. But she did point out that one of his teachers at the Lazarev

⁹ Masov failed to signify that he omitted some of Semenov's words. For Semenov's original article, see: A. A. Semenov, "Material'nye pamiatniki ariiskoi kul'tury" [Material monuments of Aryan Culture], in: N. L. Korzhenevskii, ed., *Tadzhikistan: Sbornik Statei* [Tajikistan: A Collection of Articles] (Tashkent: Obshchestvo dlia izucheniia Tadzhikistana i iranskikh narodnostei za ego predelami, 1925), p.113.

¹⁰ Rahim Masov, "Fal'sifitsirovat' i prisvaivat'..."

¹¹ Helge Blakkisrud and Shahnoza Nozimova have pointed out that this myth has also entered the curriculum of Tajik schools. For example, one Tajik textbook for the 6th grade (published in 2001) reads: "At the time when the Arabs conquered our lands from the West and the Turks from the East, we forgot the name of our nation – Aryan. However, we kept our understanding of the notions of superior race, purity, supremacy, aristocracy, and pure blood [...]." Helge Blakkisrud and Shahnoza Nozimova, "History Writing and Nation Building in Post-Independence Tajikistan," *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 2 (2010), p.177.

¹² Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Aryan Et Rêve Impérial Dans La Russie Du XIXe Siècle (The Aryan myth and the imperial dream in 19th century Russia)*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2005), p.172.

Institute, Agafangel Krymskii, was an influential representative of this trend, whereas Semenov's mentor and friend, Bartol'd, strongly criticised this fashionable preoccupation with the Aryan topic.¹³ The question thus arises as to what Semenov's stance was on that issue, and to what extent was he responsible for embedding the Aryan myth in Tajik nationalist thought and historiography. This chapter argues that Semenov was influenced both by Krymskii and by Bartol'd. It suggests that he was, indeed, a Persophile historian of Central Asia, whose portrayal of the Tajiks as a nation of Iranian and hence allegedly Aryan descent has facilitated the genesis of the Aryan myth in early Soviet Tajikistan. But it also contends that, what motivated him to portray the Tajiks in this light, was not so much racist prejudices or the result of an obsession with the Aryan topic, but rather his wish to see Persianate culture persist in Central Asia, which, for centuries, had been part of what Bert Fragner has described as the *Persophonie* – i.e. the spatio-temporal area, where Persian was the language of literature and often also the vernacular.¹⁴ During the 19th and 20th centuries, however, the rise of both colonialism and nationalism led to the dissolution of this *Persophonie*, with English (and Urdu) replacing Persian in India; Iranian intellectuals reframing Persian language and culture in national Iranian terms, and the rise of Turkism in Central Asia.¹⁵ Semenov believed that Persian culture had played a very significant role in Central Asian history and should be acknowledged, studied and where possible preserved – something that was of course also in his personal interests as a scholar of Persianate Central Asia. In the political climate of the 1920s, the best way to achieve these goals was through the establishment of a Persian-speaking state in Soviet Central Asia. In order to facilitate the founding of such a state, Semenov married the by then somewhat outdated 19th century Aryan rhetoric with the prevailing topical concept of national self-determination. In doing so, he followed a strategy that he had employed throughout his career both before and after 1917, one which has surfaced time and again in this

¹³ *ibid.*, p.171.

¹⁴ Bert Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität Und Sprachkontakt in Der Geschichte Asiens* [The "Persophonia": Regionality, Identity and Language Contact in the history of Asia] (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999).

¹⁵ Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016 - forthcoming).

thesis, namely the exploitation of synergies between his research interests and the concerns of the state he represented in Central Asia.

Semenov's case offers valuable insights into the uses and abuses of the Aryan theme in 20th century Tajik history. It demonstrates that its vitality in post-Soviet Tajikistan is directly related to the way the Tajiks were conceptualised as a people or nation (*narod* in Russian or *qawm* in Persian) by Russian Orientalists and Central Asian intellectuals and political actors between the late 19th century and the 1920s, at which point Tajikistan was established in the course of the NTD. Aleksandr Semenov – both as an imperial scholar and as an advisor to the Soviet government – was not only a witness but also an active (albeit sometimes reluctant) participant in this process of delimiting national borders and identities in Central Asia. He was a prominent proponent of the hypothesis that the Tajiks are the descendants of the Aryan aborigines of Central Asia, and therefore clearly shares some responsibility for the fact that this notion has become a central tenet of Tajik nationalist discourse.¹⁶ It is hard to explain the emergence of the Aryan myth in contemporary Tajikistan without considering the fact that, well before Soviet nationalities policy was even thought of, Semenov and other Russian Orientalists had categorised and conceptualised the Tajiks both as Iranians and descendants of the region's supposed ancient Aryan aborigines.

This chapter explores the relevant intellectual influences on Semenov, his early experiences as a young researcher in Russian Turkestan in the late imperial period, as well as the more pragmatic and implicitly political motives which seem to have prompted him to apply the Aryan theme to Tajik history shortly before and after the establishment of Tajikistan. It also maintains that, while Semenov's example corroborates Laruelle's argument about the origins of the Aryan myth in 19th century Russian Orientalist scholarship, the impact of Tsarist Orientalists on Tajik nationalist discourse alone does not sufficiently explain the current virulence of the Aryan debate. What gave this debate its acuteness were the political arguments between the Central Asian (and European) advocates of Tajik and Uzbek statehood

¹⁶ Sergei Abashin, for instance, has described the Aryan theme as "one of the most important symbolic assets of Tajik nationalism." See: S. N. Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii: v Poiskakh Identichnosti* [Nationalisms in Central Asia: in search for identity] (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2007), p.202.

in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of a Tajik republic in late 1924 (in the course of the NTD). It was then that the notion of the Tajiks' Aryan descent was increasingly employed to demarcate and differentiate Tajik from Uzbek identity and to support calls for greater independence of the Tajik from the Uzbek republic. This chapter demonstrates that Semenov's work, such as the above-mentioned "Material Monuments of Aryan Culture", played an important role in this process of delimitating borders and identities.

Laruelle's contention that the Aryan myth has returned suggests that it had temporarily disappeared. While the supposition of the Tajiks' Iranian or Aryan descent and indigenesness to Central Asia has always played a vital role in Tajik nationalist thought and continues to do so, one should keep in mind that it was muted for much of the Soviet period by the constraints of Marxist ideology; a philosophy which emphasised class-struggle, the friendship of peoples and (especially after 1945) the fallaciousness of racist historical explanatory models that were branded as bourgeois-imperialist and fascist. The 1971 edition of Bobojon Ghafurov's seminal work *The Tajiks*, for instance, speaks of the mistakes of "bourgeois historians-emigrants" and accuses them of presenting the history of Central Asia only in terms of national and racial struggles while neglecting the importance of class and of putting forward "speculative 'theories' about the predominance of one or another of the 'pure' [*chistyykh*] races."¹⁷ Ghafurov valued Semenov enough not to allude to him in this critique, even though his former teacher was not entirely innocent of such sins. He understood very well that, although Semenov's scholarship was not always fully orthodox from a Marxist point of view, it was very useful for the Tajik state, nevertheless. In fact, it was precisely Semenov's vulnerability, as well as the unorthodoxy and quality of his work, together with his appreciation for Persianate Central Asia that rendered him such a valuable ally for any Tajik nationalist. More importantly, Ghafurov himself recognised the

¹⁷ Bobodzhan Gafurov, *Tadzhiki. Drevneishaia, Drevniaia i Srednevekovaia Istoriia* [The Tajiks: early-ancient, ancient and mediaeval history] (Moskva: Nauka, 1972), p.4.

usefulness of the Aryan theme and even employed it in his own work – although he avoided speaking explicitly of an Aryan race.¹⁸

All of the above suggests that, while the origins of the Aryan theme can indeed be traced back to late 19th century Russian Orientalist scholarship, it must also be taken into account that its introduction into Tajik nationalist discourse was only possible because certain influential scholars and political actors shared a common interest in promoting it, among them Semenov and Ghafurov (but also Sadriddin Aini, as I will show later). Ghafurov and others, whose careers were intimately linked with (Tajik) national and Soviet politics, were keen to point to the Tajiks' alleged Aryan descent in order to stress the antiquity, and hence legitimacy, of the Tajik nation and state. However, for Semenov the Aryan theme was first of all a way of linking Tajik to Iranian history. By this means it became free of the ideological straitjacket of a strictly national and, inevitably, more provincial history within the borders of the Tajik republic. And it helped to emphasise the wider regional and global historical significance of Central Asian history, and secure funding and public recognition for scholarship on Persianate Central Asia, which was, of course, also in his professional interests as a scholar with particular links to that field.

The Aryans – from an Indo-European family of languages to one of peoples

An analysis of the motives and arguments, which led Semenov and other scholars to categorise the Tajiks as the descendants of Central Asia's indigenous Aryan population, is incomplete without an examination of the concept of the ancient Aryans itself. The Aryans – just as the Tajik *nation* – were an entity primarily constructed on the basis of language. They were the creation of comparative philology, which had become fashionable since the end of the 18th century, following William Jones's discovery of close resemblances between European languages, on

¹⁸ Ghafurov's *Tajiks* (under the subsection *The ethnic makeup of the population of Central Asia in the Bronze Age. The Aryan problem*) reads: "Already the first reliably datable written sources, which contain information about Central Asia, testify that in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE its entire territory was populated by tribes and peoples belonging to the Iranian ethnic group [...]." Describing these tribes in more detail Ghafurov speaks of "Aryan tribes", of an "Aryan period" and of "Indo-Iranian unity" which was "not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a real historical entity, which existed in a certain period on a single territory." See: *ibid.*, p.27 and 32;

the one hand, and Sanskrit and Persian, on the other. On the basis of this discovery the hypothesis of an Indo-European language family emerged. Deduced from this hypothesis was the concept of a primal population of Indo-European speakers, who were given a name taken from Sanskrit – Aryans.¹⁹ Thomas Trautmann has pointed out that the comparative legal historian, Sir Henry Maine, encapsulated this idea in a speech held at the University of Cambridge in 1875: “[...] [T]he new theory of language has unquestionably produced a new theory of race [...] [...],” Maine said, adding that the notion “[t]hat peoples not necessarily understanding one another's tongue should be grouped together politically on the ground of linguistic affinities assumed to prove community of descent, is quite a new idea.”²⁰ This new idea proved to be extremely influential. From it emerged the twin-concept of an Indo-European family of languages *and* peoples.

This linguistic understanding of the Aryans is, however, neither the only nor the most popular one. Stefan Arvidsson has pointed out that scholars have defined “‘the Indo-European branch of humanity’ [...] either as the group of people who spoke some Indo-European language [...] or as the group of Aryans, who were typically imagined as tall, blond, and blue-eyed specimens of *homo sapiens*.”²¹ Initially, the former culturalistic definition wholly dominated the scholarship on the Indo-European subject; two of the most influential popularisers of the Aryan theme, the philologists Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892), both saw the alleged superiority of the Indo-Europeans “as (mainly) the result of their extraordinary language and culture” and not as a consequence of their blood or complexion.²² However, during the entire period in which the notion of an Indo-European entity existed, and especially throughout the 19th century, this humanistic-philological perspective was challenged by a more naturalistic approach, which was promoted by racial anthropologists eager to define the Aryans in physical terms. This ultimately led to what Trautmann has described as “scholarly warfare over the competing claims of language and complexion as the foundation of ethnological

¹⁹ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.10; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*. (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), p.2.

²⁰ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.1.

²¹ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.2.

²² *ibid.*, p.313.

classification.”²³ As a result, towards the end of his life, Müller saw himself forced to defend the hegemony of philology against the rise of racial anthropology, arguing that “[i]t would be as wrong to speak of Aryan blood as of dolichocephalic grammar!”²⁴

The Indo-European subject intrigued scholars and intellectuals throughout Europe, especially because it promised to shed light on the origins of Europe’s languages and, crucially, of its *peoples*. According to Arvidsson, between the second half of the 18th and the mid 20th centuries a whole pleiad of historians, archaeologists, ethnographers and other scholars “have tried to re-create a lost [Aryan or Indo-European] culture [...] [and to describe] [...] a world, religion, and a people older than the Sumerians, with whom all history is said to have begun.”²⁵ Arvidsson has argued that the fact the supposed ancient Aryans “have not left behind any texts, no objects can definitely be tied to them, nor do we know any ‘Indo-European’ by name [...] [...],” has not dissuaded scholars from (re)constructing an Aryan civilisation in the hope of finding “the foundation of their own culture and religion there.”²⁶ Russian academia was not unaffected by this fashionable preoccupation with the Indo-European subject. Marina Mogil’ner has shown that Russian scholars not only embraced racial anthropology and the idea of an Aryan race, but even claimed that the Russians were “one of the most homogeneous groups of the Arians [...] [...],” as the professor and anthropologist Ivan Sikorsky wrote in 1915.²⁷ Likewise, Vera Tolz has pointed out that “[t]he interest in the origins of European civilization and the search for the original homeland of the Europeans [...] was an important feature of academic research” during the late 19th century, at a time when, not only Semenov’s career began, but also of those of such eminent Russian Orientalists as Vasilii Bartol’d and Sergei Ol’denburg (both of whom

²³ *ibid.*, pp.313; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.3.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.61.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.XI.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ The Aryans (and hence the Russians) – Sikorsky claimed – were the race with the “highest intelligence, a very keen insight, and the most foregoing ability to predict the future.” See: Marina Mogil’ner, *Homo Imperii A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln: UNP - Nebraska, 2013), pp.11&178.

Semenov greatly admired and corresponded with).²⁸ Some Russian scholars, led by Vasilii Grigor'ev (1816-1881), even “identified the Aryan historic homelands in Central Asia or in Siberia [...],” Tolz has maintained.²⁹ Such claims (about an Aryan homeland on Russian territory) then encouraged 19th century Russian intellectuals to embrace the notion of their nation's Aryan descent, Laruelle has argued.³⁰ According to her, the idea of the Aryans' Asian origins enabled these intellectuals to counter condescending voices from (western) Europe, labelling the Russians as Asians, with the argument that Russia and the Russians were closer to Europe's Aryan roots.³¹ All of this indicates how bound up research on the Aryan subject was with the quest for the origins of the nation and for a national identity in both western Europe and Russia. This also explains its appeal to both scholars and a more general public.

In 1904, the notion of the cradle of the Aryan (and hence European) civilisation in Central Asia even lured the American geographer Raphael Pumpelly to Turkestan. He wrote in the introduction to his *Explorations in Turkestan* that “[t]he home of our Aryan ancestors was [...] thought by such authorities as [Christian] Lassen and [Friedrich] Max Müller to have been in High Asia.”³² As we have seen, Semenov, who was in his fourth year in Transcaspia at the time, was given the task of supervising the American's excavations. In a letter to Bartol'd from May 1904 he expressed his excitement about the excavations in Anau:

On the 25 of May I returned from the Americans in Bayram-Ali. You have probably already seen the objects found by Mr. Pumpelly and his companions in Gyaur-Kale when you were in Bayram-Ali. [...] [E]veryone very much regrets that with the move to Merv the excavations in Anau could not be brought to

²⁸ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.60.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.22.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan, Expedition of 1904: Prehistoric Civilizations of Anau, Origins, Growth, and Influence of Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908), p.xxv.

*an end; according to them, the objects found here point to a more peculiar culture than that of the Stone Age or Bronze Age.*³³

Semenov's imagination had obviously been spurred by the discovery of traces of this unknown "peculiar culture." And maybe he shared Pumpelly's hope that these traces were the remains of a prehistoric Aryan civilisation. It is important to note, however, that Bartol'd, who evidently discussed such matters with Semenov, was rather sceptical about the vision of Turkestan as the homeland of the Aryans. In an article from 1896 he wrote that the question whether or not Central Asia was also "the cradle of the Aryan tribe [...] remains so far disputed."³⁴ Moreover, even Pumpelly himself came to the conclusion that "the Aryan problem [...] awaits much more extended archaeological, anthropological, and philological research."³⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that his research had addressed this question of the Aryan origins of the Europeans almost certainly helped him to attract both attention and funding.

Given the public appeal of the Aryan subject, it is not surprising that it was embraced by writers of popular science, who tended to be less restrained than Bartol'd (and Semenov) in promoting the theory of Turkestan as the homeland of the Aryans. One of them was the director of the Turkestan Meteorological Institute, Franz von Schwarz, whom the Governor-General von Kaufman had invited from Munich to Tashkent in the 1870s. In his book *Turkestan – the Cradle of the Indo-Germanic Peoples* (published in 1900) he wrote: "During the 15 years I spent in Turkestan, I have become wholly convinced that Turkestan was the *Urheimat* [original homeland] of the Indo-Germanic peoples [*Indogermanen*],³⁶ i.e. another

³³ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Oчерk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.37.

³⁴ V. V. Bartol'd, "Neskol'ko slov ob ariiskoi kul'ture v Srednei Azii" (Some words on the Aryan culture in Central Asia), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 6 part II (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), p.322. Likewise, in a paper from 1925, in which Bartol'd argued that the Tajiks were the descendants of the indigenous Iranian inhabitants of Turkestan, he explicitly avoided the "complex and disputed questions concerning the homeland of the Iranian tribe." See: Vasilii Bartol'd, "Tadzhiki: Istoricheskii oчерk" (The Tajiks: A historical outline), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 2 part I (Moscow: Nauka, 1963), p.451.

³⁵ Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan...*, p.xxxiii.

³⁶ Von Schwarz and his contemporaries used the terms Aryan, Indo-European and Indo-Germanic more or less synonymously. Von Schwarz, for instance, wrote that the view of "Turkestan as the *Urheimat* of the Indo-Germanic peoples" challenged the hypothesis of "the European descent of the Aryans." See: Franz von Schwarz, *Turkestan, Die Wiege Der Indogermanischen Völker. Nach*

term for the Indo-Europeans].”³⁷ Von Schwarz even claimed that “[a]ll contemporary civilised peoples [*Kulturvölker*] originate in Turkestan [...],” including in this category not only the ancestors of the Chinese, but also those of “the Indians, Greeks, Italians, Celts, Germanic peoples, Slavs and of the other members of the Indo-Germanic tribe [...].”³⁸ Von Schwarz also regarded the Tajiks as members of that tribe, even though he described them as “a mixed people [*Mischvolk*], which [...] in the course of time has incorporated foreign elements [...].”³⁹ Furthermore, he expressed a view that was characteristic for descriptions of the Tajiks in the scholarly and popular-scientific literature at the time: the idea that the Iranophone inhabitants of Central Asia’s mountainous regions were of the purest Aryan lineage:

*The Tajiks [...] have until now preserved their original Persian language – even though it is intermixed with Arabic, Turkic and Mongolic elements – and even their type [Typus, i.e. physiognomy] resembles the one of the unalloyed [unvermischt] descendants of the Indo-Germanic aborigines [of Turkestan], the Galcha.*⁴⁰

“Ghalcha” was exclusively a foreign appellation, which was used by the Persian speakers of the plains and by some speakers of Turkic to signify the Iranophone mountain dwellers of Eastern Bukhara.⁴¹ According to Daniel Beben, it often implied boorishness and rudeness, and the most likely explanation for the term is that it is a Turkified version of the old-Iranian term *ghar* for mountain, to which the Turkic adverbial suffix *–cha* has been added.⁴² European scholars used it during the late

Fünfzehnjährigem Aufenthalt in Turkestan Dargestellt Von Franz V. Schwarz [Turkestan, the Cradle of the Indo-Germanic Peoples. Presented by Franz v. Schwarz after his 15-years stay in Turkestan.] (Freiburg im Breisgau; St. Louis: Herder, 1900), p.XVI.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.XVf; Already in 1894 Schwarz had made similar claims in his book *The Flood and the Migration Period [Völkerwanderung]*, which dealt with a topic that also inspired the American explorer Raphael Pumpelly to organise excavations in Turkestan in order to demonstrate that the shrinkage of an inland sea in Turkestan had caused the Aryan migrations to Europe. See: Raphael Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan...*, p.XXV.

³⁸ Franz von Schwarz, *Turkestan, Die Wiege...*, p.XVf.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.8f.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum Tadschikischen: Sprachliches Handeln Und Sprachplanung in Transoxanien Zwischen Tradition, Moderne Und Sowjetmacht (1900-1956)* [From Persian to Tajik: the use of language and language planning in Transoxiana between tradition, modernity and Soviet rule (1900-1956)] (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001), p.20.

⁴² Beben also pointed out that whereas initially the term Ghalcha did not necessarily designate Ismailis, “by the late nineteenth century, the sources indicate an almost complete overlap between the prevalence of Pamiri/Ghalcha languages and adherence to Ismā‘īlism.” See: Daniel Beben, “The

nineteenth and early twentieth century as an umbrella term for the Pamiri peoples, but later Soviet scholarship tended to speak of “Mountain Tajiks” instead.⁴³ Semenov rejected the term as an exonym. In his *Ethnographic outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*, which was published in 1903, he wrote that whereas “Ghalcha” was used “in the plains to signify this or that people” and “often appears in various works on Turkestan”, it was “unknown in the mountains.” According to Semenov, “[t]he mountaineer calls himself nothing other than Tajik.”⁴⁴ None of this stopped von Schwarz from using the term to denote the “inhabitants of the inaccessible mountainous regions along the headwaters of the rivers the Amu-Darya, Tarim and Zarafshan [...],” whom he and other scholars credited with having preserved their Aryan looks and “Indo-Germanic *Ursprache*” due to the fact that they lived in isolated mountainous areas (unlike “their brothers” – i.e. the Tajiks of the valleys – who “settled in the cities and villages of the plains” and thus mixed with later immigrants to the region).⁴⁵ This notion has been the hallmark of Russian writing concerning the so-called Mountain Tajiks since the second half of the 19th century; it is also present in Semenov’s works on the topic, and it remains an integral part of contemporary Tajik nationalist discourse, as I will show later. Moreover, Dane Kennedy has noted that the British often perceived and portrayed mountain dwellers in India in exactly the same light, namely as “an open, naive, harmless populace, perhaps misguided in some of its social practices, but graced by the vestiges of a more pristine moral order.”⁴⁶

Von Schwarz was not the first scholar to have made such claims. I already mentioned that Pumpelly referred to Lassen’s and Friedrich Max Müller’s proposition that High Asia was the Aryan homeland. Arvidsson has pointed out that the Norwegian-German Indologist, Christian Lassen (1800-1876), whose work with that of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), popularised the terms ‘Arier’

Legendary Biographies of Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Memory and Textualization in Early Modern Persian Ismā‘īlism” (PhD, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2015), p.252.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki Zarafsanskich Gor, Karategina i Darvaza* [Ethnographic outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz] (Moskva: Izdanie Grafa A. A. Bobrinskogo, 1903), p.23.

⁴⁵ Franz von Schwarz, *Turkestan, Die Wiege...*, p.9.

⁴⁶ Dane Kennedy, “Guardians of Edenic Sanctuaries: Paharis, Lepchas, and Todas in the British Mind,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991), p.63.

and 'Arische' in the German language, had first portrayed "the Hindu Kush as a place where racially pure Aryans still live [...]."⁴⁷ In his own book Von Schwarz referred to Charles de Ujfalvy's *The Aryans to the North and South of the Hindu Kush* (published in 1896), in which he suggested that the Aryans of Europe stemmed from brunet Aryans of alpine Central Asia, and in which Ujfalvy argued that:

*The Tajiks of northern Persia and Turkestan as well as the Galcha of the valleys neighbouring the Pamirs are [...] brachycephalic and represent the same cranial characteristics that are absolutely typical for the Savoyards, the Auvergnats and the Lower Bretons.*⁴⁸

Pumpelly's and von Schwarz's theories about the Aryan *Urheimat* as well as Ujfalvy's analysis of people's hair colour and skull form strikingly demonstrate how much the theory of an Indo-European family of languages had evolved since its humanistic-philological beginnings. The idea – summed up so well by Henry Maine in Cambridge in 1875 – that linguistic affinities indicated a "community of descent" (understood not in racial but linguistic terms) had turned into a fully-fledged theory of racial anthropology by the time Semenov began his career as a scholar.

The 1898 Pamir expedition of Duke Aleksei Bobrinskoi

In order to understand Semenov's take on the Aryan theme and on the question of the supposed Aryan origins of the Tajiks, one needs to go back to the year 1898, when he first encountered the Iranophone inhabitants of the mountainous region of Badakhshan,⁴⁹ whom von Schwarz's regarded as the "Indo-Germanic aborigines [of Turkestan]," and whom the young Semenov called Mountain Tajiks.⁵⁰ Semenov was in his mid-twenties and a student at Moscow's Lazarev Institute, when a recommendation by institute's director Vsevolod Miller gave him the unique opportunity to participate in the second Pamir expedition of the Russian nobleman

⁴⁷ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.20.

⁴⁸ Charles de Ujfalvy, *Les Aryens Au Nord Et Au Sud De L'Hindou-Kouch* [The Aryans to the North and South of the Hindu Kush] (Paris: G. Masson, 1896), p.8.

⁴⁹ Badakhshan is part of present-day south-eastern Tajikistan and north-eastern Afghanistan.

⁵⁰ Franz von Schwarz, *Turkestan, Die Wiege...*, p.8f.

and amateur ethnographer Aleksei Bobrinskoi.⁵¹ Between May and August 1898, he joined Bobrinskoi and the professor and zoologist Nikolai Bogoiavlenskii to visit Darvaz,⁵² Qarategin,⁵³ and parts of the Bukharan plain bordering with Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Semenov was responsible for studying the folklore and languages of the people the expedition encountered; Bobrinskoi studied the “*vneshnii byt*”, which is best translated as visual culture (such as, for instance, decorative patterns); and Bogoiavlenskii was in charge of the “study of the mountaineers in anthropological terms, the collection of zoological materials, the taking of pictures and of meteorological and geographical observations.”⁵⁵ While these were relatively esoteric scholarly concerns, it is hard to ignore the inherent geostrategic dimension of such expeditions. According to Victor Terekhov, from the 1870s onwards both military personnel and civilian explorers travelled to Eastern Bukhara, Afghan Badakhshan and to the Pamirs primarily to research the geography (“orography, hydrography and cartography”) of these regions, which had only recently been annexed to the empire.⁵⁶ As a rule, ethnographic issues, such as language, religion and customs, clearly took the backseat to questions of practical and military relevance.⁵⁷ In Semenov’s case, however, the opposite seems to have been true. To him, the people rather than the geography of Badakhshan were of greater interest. According to Bogoiavlenskii, Semenov’s stubbornness in this respect even provoked an argument among the members of the expedition when they reached Darvaz: Unlike Bobrinskoi and Bogoiavlenskii, Semenov “did not want to analyse the glacier and went on to cross the mountain pass” without his colleagues, preferring to study

⁵¹ Bobrinskoi’s first expeditions to Badakhshan took place in 1895, the second in 1898, and the last one in 1901. See: V. P. Terekhov, “Iz Istorii Pamirovedeniia: Tri Ekspeditsii Grafa A.A. Bobrinskogo (from the History of Pamir-Studies: Three Expeditions of Duke A.A. Bobrinskii),” *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 2 (2011), p.33.

⁵² Darvaz is divided today between Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province and as the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan.

⁵³ Today’s Rasht Valley in Tajikistan.

⁵⁴ V. P. Terekhov, “Iz Istorii Pamirovedeniia...”, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Davlat Khudonazarov, “Graf (Duke),” http://www.kunstkamera.ru/files/lib/978-5-88431-142-8/978-5-88431-142-8_14.pdf (accessed 4/3, 2014); and: V. P. Terekhov, “Iz Istorii Pamirovedeniia...”, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Russia had taken control of the Bukharan-Afghan frontier only in 1895, the year in which the Russo-British border agreement in the Pamirs was reached. See: Seymour Becker, *Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.122; and: V. P. Terekhov, “Iz Istorii Pamirovedeniia...”, p.28.

⁵⁷ V. P. Terekhov, “Iz Istorii Pamirovedeniia...”, p.28.

the ethnography of Darvaz.⁵⁸ The path Semenov decided to take and the research he did as a result proved to have a formative impact on his research interests.

The chance alone to conduct pioneering research in these recently annexed regions of Central Asia must have filled the young Semenov with a sense of excitement and adventure. The enthusiasm which the expedition inspired in him are echoed in the words of Vladimir Minorsky, who wrote to him from his Cambridge home in 1957 (a year before Semenov's death):

*I remember you just upon your return from the [Duke Aleksei] Bobrinskoi expedition [of 1898], as you were shouting out 'Allah Akbar'. And how well I recall your chancellery on the right side of the entrance, where you would always have something interesting to say. You are a lifelong living history of Turkestan.*⁵⁹

The fashionability of the Aryan theme must have further heightened Semenov's interest in the expedition. As I have indicated above, he was especially fascinated by his encounters with Central Asia's highlanders, such as the Yaghnobis or the Shughnis, whose ancient Iranian languages and "primeaval religious ideas" – as he wrote in one publication resulting from the expedition – spurred his imagination.⁶⁰ This interest was not only shared by many of his contemporaries and teachers at the Lazarev Institute (as I will show later in this chapter), but it was also symptomatic of the wider European scholarly preoccupation with the origins of European languages and civilisation in Asian antiquity, and with the quest for direct descendants of the Indo-Europeans or Aryans in alpine Asia at the time. In fact, by 1914, studying Turkestan's alleged Aryan heritage had become so popular with some representatives of the community of amateur scholars in the Russian colonial administration, that it prompted the protest of Vasilii Bartol'd. In his paper "The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan" he warned that this trend would lead to

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁵⁹ A.A.S., b13, f12, p5: Letter from V.F.Minorskii to Semenov on the 06.01.1957.

⁶⁰ Aleksandr Semenov, "Iz Oblasti Religioznykh Verovanii Gornykh Tadzhikov (about the Religious Beliefs of the Mountain Tajiks)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 47, no. 4 (1900), p.81.

an unbalanced and one-sided allocation of resources and scholarly attention to the complex history of Central Asia.⁶¹

Bobrinskoi's expeditions were more than merely the expensive pastime of a Russian nobleman and amateur scholar with an interest in a very fashionable and topical subject. Beben has pointed out that these expeditions produced some of the earliest studies on the Pamiri peoples and on the religious traditions of the adherents of the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam in the region.⁶² The trip of 1898 was indeed a pioneering undertaking, which helps to explain why it had such a profound impact on Semenov as a scholar. It also marked the beginning of his lifelong fascination with the history and literary heritage of, what he regarded as, Central Asia's Iranian or Persianate culture in general, and specifically with the teachings of Ismailism. After his return to Moscow, Semenov wrote his dissertation at the Lazarev Institute about the dialects of the Mountain Tajiks.⁶³ A further result of his liaison with Bobrinskoi was his first major scholarly publication *Ethnographic Sketches of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*,⁶⁴ which in 1903 earned him a gold medal of the Moscow University-based Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography, under whose aegis the expedition had taken place.⁶⁵ The short book continues to be of great scholarly value up to this day, and

⁶¹ In his paper 'The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan' (published in late 1914) Bartol'd wrote with a slight tone of mockery that "[t]he least cultured people of the country" had attracted the most attention of "ethnographers and linguists, for whom the so-called 'primordial' peoples constitute an even greater interest than the cultured ones." The fact that "[a]mong the Turkish [Turkic] peoples [*narodnostei*], who inhabit Russian Turkestan at present we do not come across any living representatives of such a remote antiquity [...]," did not mean that scholars were right to ignore them, Bartol'd wrote. See: Vasilii Bartol'd, "Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia v Turkestane" (The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977)., p.530f.

⁶² Daniel J. Beben, "The Legendary Biographies...", p.29.

⁶³ Aleksandr Semenov, *Materialy Dlia Izucheniia Narechiia Gornyx Tadjikov Tsentral'noi Azii. Grammaticheskii Oчерk i Pamiatniki Narodnogo Tvorchestva*. [Materials for the Study of the Dialects of the Mountain Tajiks of Central Asia. Grammatical outline and records of popular arts and crafts.], Vol. 1 (Moscow: 1900); and: Aleksandr Semenov, *Materialy Dlia Izucheniia Narechiia Gornyx Tadjikov Tsentral'noi Azii. Pamiatniki Narodnogo Tvorchestva i Slovar'*. [Materials for the Study of the Dialects of the Mountain Tajiks of Central Asia. Records of popular arts and crafts and a dictionary.], Vol. 2 (Moscow: 1901).

⁶⁴ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Oчерki...*

⁶⁵ According to Joseph Bradley, the *Obshchestvo Liubitelei Estestvoznaniia, Antropologii i Etnografii* (OLEAE), founded in 1863 during the era of the Great Reforms, was critical of older and more prestigious societies of a similar profile, such as the Moscow Society of Naturalists (*Moskovskoe obshchestvo ispytatelei prirody*), which it regarded as too closed, too academic and too dominated dependent on Western scholarship, methods and languages. Seeing itself as an extension of the over-

was among the first of several other studies on the so-called Mountain Tajiks, which would make Semenov's name "our prime authority in the field of the history of the Ismaili movement [...]," as the Russian Arabist Ignatii Krachkovskii wrote in 1950.⁶⁶ Semenov's contribution to the scholarship in this field is remarkable indeed. According to Daniel Beben, "the true beginnings of the study of the Central Asian Ismā'īlī tradition rests entirely upon the shoulders of three Russian scholars: Ivan Zarubin, Wladimir Ivanow, and Aleksandr Semenov."⁶⁷ Apart from its academic significance, however, Semenov's work on the past and present of the so-called Mountain Tajiks, and his personal interaction with representatives of Badakhshan's Iranophone mountain dwellers, such as the earlier-mentioned Sayyid Haidar Sho, would have direct political implications for the future Tajik state and its national ideology, as I will show at the end of this chapter.

As was often the case in his career, the reason Semenov was able to leave his mark on the scholarship about the Pamiri peoples was that he was able to exploit the synergies between academia and empire. After all, the scholarly interests of Bobrinskoi and his team went hand in hand with Russian imperial expansion and foreign policy. I have already mentioned that the first expedition was organised in the same year in which the Russo-British border agreement in the Pamirs was reached. In it, the parts of Roshan, Shugnan, Ishkashim and Vakhan that were located on the left bank of the river Panj were allocated to Afghanistan, and those on the river's right bank to the Emirate of Bukhara, a vassal state of Russia.⁶⁸ According to Wolfgang Holzwarth, the settlement had been preceded by decades of

regulated activities of the university, the OLEAE set itself the aim to be more accessible to a wider public, to publish in Russian and advance the interests and self-reliance of Russian scholarship. By the time of Semenov's first scholarly steps the OLEAE was already more established, but his career still greatly benefited from the on-going popularisation and opening of science and academia the society had advocated. See: Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.130-136.

⁶⁶ Ignatii Krachkovskii, *Die Russische Arabistik: Umriss ihrer Entwicklung* [The Russian Arabic Philology: an outline of its development] (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1957), p.163.

⁶⁷ According to Beben, Semenov together with Ivan Zarubin and Vladimir Ivanov "carried out critical researches and manuscript collection efforts in the 1910s and 1920s, before the political imperatives of the new Soviet regime effectively brought a halt, for a time, to the study of Ismā'īlism in the Soviet Union." See: Daniel J. Beben, "The Legendary Biographies..." , p.30.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.28f.

intelligence gathering by both the British and the Russians.⁶⁹ When Bobrinskoi published the results of his previous Pamir expeditions in the *Ethnographical Survey* in 1902, the text contained information not only for scholars but for policy-makers as well. It argued for the official recognition of the Ismailis as an independent denomination, who deserved protection from the Russian state. If Russia, he claimed, liberated the Ismailis “from the yoke of the official Sunnism of the Bukharans [...],” they might find a valuable ally in them.⁷⁰ The Russian Political Agency in Bukhara sent the diplomat Anatolii Aleksandrovich Cherkasov (1873–1942) to the western Pamirs to collect documents in support of Bobrinskoi’s case.⁷¹ There was, indeed, evidence that Sultan Muhammad Shah (Aga Khan III, the spiritual leader of the Ismailis) had encouraged a senior Ismaili from Shughnan not to replace the Sunni despot of Afghanistan with that of Bukhara, but instead turn to the Russian authorities for help.⁷² According to Holzwarth, Bobrinskoi’s concept, to trade “loyalty to the state for the protection of minorities”, functioned well between 1905 and 1918. It led to an opening up of Ismaili religious dogmas and philosophical convictions which, hitherto, had been shrouded in secrecy and kept strictly confidential from outsiders by their spiritual leaders.⁷³ As a rule, argued Semenov in an article from 1912, “[t]heir religion is secret and its mystery, as something that transcends the usual knowledge of mankind, cannot be revealed to strangers.”⁷⁴ But when a group of twenty-four Ismailis from Shughnan who, according to Semenov, “ill fate” had forced to leave their homeland, arrived in Tashkent in March 1912 (a meeting described in the previous chapter), they told Semenov that this pledge of secrecy only applied to “Sunni and Shia Muslims, but not to Russians.”⁷⁵ This

⁶⁹ Wolfgang Holzwarth, *Die Ismailiten in Nordpakistan: Zur Entwicklung Einer Religiösen Minderheit Im Kontext Neuer Aussenbeziehungen* [The Ismailis of North Pakistan: about the development of a religious minority in the context of new foreign relations] (Berlin: Verlag das Arabische Buch, 1994), p.36.

⁷⁰ A. A. Bobrinskoi, "Sakta Ismail'ia V Russkikh i Bukharskikh Predelakh Srednei Azii (the Ismaili Sect in the Russian and Bukharan Realms of Central Asia)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 2, no. 14 (1902), p.20.

⁷¹ Wolfgang Holzwarth, *Die Ismailiten in...*, p.36; and Davlat Khudonazarov, "Graf..."

⁷² *ibid.*, p.36.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁷⁴ Aleksandr Semenov, "Iz oblasti religioznykh verovanii shughnanskikh Ismailitov (about the Religious beliefs of the Ismailis of Shughnan)," *Mir Islama* 1, no. 4 (1912), p.523.

⁷⁵ To prove their point, the Ismailis added that one of the *pirs* of Shughnan, Said-Yussuf-Ali-Shoh, had handed the theological book *Qalam-e-Pir* (The Master’s Word) over to Cherkasov in 1902. See: *ibid.*, p.524.

newfound accessibility of the intellectual treasures of the Pamir-Isma'ilis hugely benefited those members of the colonial administration who possessed adequate language skills and had an interest in the topic. Semenov was among them, and so were his friends and colleagues, such as Mikhail Andreev and Ivan Zarubin.⁷⁶

Semenov's portrayal of the Mountain Tajiks

The works on the Mountain Tajiks that Semenov published as a result of the Bobrinskoi expedition demonstrate that he saw his subject matter through the prism of the Aryan theme. His above-mentioned *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*, for example, introduced the geographical setting of his study as a place that is "highly revered in the legends of the primaeval [*pervobytnye*] Indo-Iranians [...]," and where "the two vast systems of the Iranian and the Mongolian plateaus entwine."⁷⁷ Both the reference to the "legends of the primaeval Indo-Iranians" – which is essentially a synonym for 'Aryans' – and the evocation of the epic dichotomy of Iran and Turan (Mongolia in this example), on which I will elaborate later in this chapter, are reminiscent of the scholarship on the Indo-European or Aryan subject. The same holds true for his portrayal of the Mountain Tajiks. Admittedly, in contrast to many of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as von Schwarz and de Ujfalvy, Semenov did not call them Aryans or use the term Aryan explicitly. Instead, he suggested nonetheless that these mountain dwellers, due to their geographic isolation, had preserved in their culture, physical appearance, language and religious ideas the traces of an ancient past – a notion that of course bore the hallmark of the Aryan theme. Likewise, the *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz* contain a rare example of Semenov venturing into the realms of racial anthropology. Speaking about the appearance of the Mountain Tajiks, he remarked that some of them "are of a purely Semitic type [...] with Arabic and Jewish physiognomies [...]," while others are not.⁷⁸ He also added that:

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Holzwarth, *Die Ismailiten in...*, p.37.

⁷⁷ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki...*, p.1.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp.24-26.

[...], [I]n almost every village one can find some people, whose appearance sharply differs from that of their tribesmen. [...] These fair-skinned and ginger-haired specimens [predstavitelei] of the local population strongly resemble in their typical facial features the population of our Great Russian provinces and the German plains.⁷⁹

Again, Semenov did not explicitly describe these people as the descendants of the ancient Aryans. But his words allowed readers to make that connection themselves.

On the whole, however, Semenov was much more interested in the culture of the Mountain Tajiks than in their looks. Their dialect of the Persian language as well as their religious texts and beliefs, he believed, contained the vestiges of an ancient pre-Islamic civilisation. It was this connection to an ancient past that he found most remarkable. Accordingly, his chapter on the Mountain Tajiks began with the words:

The locals [tuzemtsy] [...] call their ancestors by the generic name 'otash-parast', i.e. fire worshippers [...], and in the mountainous villages one can still hear, in form of a memory of an irretrievable past, the name [...] of the ancient prophet Zoroaster [...]. And since the religion of Zoroaster was revived [vozrodilas'] among the Iranians [...] we are hardly wrong to regard [...] [the Mountain Tajiks] as Iranians. A further indication of this is their language, which is older than the one spoken by the contemporary Persians and differs from it in its specific pronunciation and very many archaic forms.⁸⁰

In other words, Semenov regarded the Mountain Tajiks as Iranians. And he did so, not so much because of their physical appearance, but because of their Indo-European language and their way of practising Islam (on which he saw the influence of earlier Mazdaist beliefs). All of this suggested to him (and other scholars) a possible connection to the elusive ancient Indo-Europeans. Semenov was thus one of those "ethnographers and linguists", identified by Bartol'd in his above-mentioned paper from 1914, who was fascinated by the "so-called 'primordial' peoples [...]," of Central Asia, seeing them as "living representatives of [...] a remote antiquity [...]."⁸¹ It also needs to be pointed out, however, that Semenov's scholarship on this subject

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.26.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.19.

⁸¹ Vasilii Bartol'd, "Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia...", p.530f.

would become more sophisticated as he matured. And even his early writings on the Mountain Tajiks were not merely the speculations of a young and impressionable student. After all, even an authority like Bartol'd maintained in his *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, which was published in 1900, that the mountainous provinces of Badakhshan, due to "their inaccessibility and their complete unsuitability for nomadic life [...]," were "little touched by foreign incursions, and have preserved a purely Aryan population to the present time."⁸² Even though Bartol'd was – as I have already pointed out and will elaborate on in the end of this chapter – very critical of the Aryan preoccupation and its concomitant prejudices, he too believed there to be remnants of an Aryan population in alpine Central Asia. Moreover, Semenov often followed Bartol'd's lead on this issue, as I will show in more detail later.

The above-mentioned quotes from Semenov's *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz* suggest that it was the perception of the culture of the Mountain Tajiks as a direct link to an "irretrievable past" (to use his own words) fired his enthusiasm for that subject. Already his paper "About the beliefs of the Mountain Tajiks", which had been published three years earlier than the *Ethnographic Outlines*, betrayed its author's vision of "the Tajiks of highland Asia" as a population that had preserved its "primordial religious concepts."⁸³ According so Semenov:

*[T]he mountain dweller treats his present religion – Mussulmanism – relatively indifferently, but holds sacred his old perennial [iskonnye] beliefs and customs, which have almost disappeared among his kinsmen [sorodich] – the Valley Tajik.*⁸⁴

This view that Islam has not fully taken root among the Mountain Tajiks (which of course betrays a somewhat essentialist understanding of that faith) was rather popular among Russian scholars at the time, including Krymskii, as I will show later in this chapter. But it was also at the heart of Semenov's interest in this subject, because it encouraged him to believe that, through it, he would be able to explore

⁸² Vasilii Bartol'd, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pub., 1992 [reprint]), p.66.

⁸³ Aleksandr Semenov, "Iz Oblasti Religioznykh Verovanii Gornykh..." p.81.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

what he regarded as Central Asia's ancient Iranian heritage. That he was indeed able to do so, as Beben's and Krachkovskii's comments attest, was something for which he must have been indebted, first of all, to Miller and Bobrinskoi, but also to his teacher, Krymskii, who had similar (albeit more general) research interests, as I will demonstrate towards the end of this chapter.

To conclude, even though Semenov's portrayal of the Mountain Tajiks in his early publications was in many ways in line with what was characteristic for the scholarship on the Aryan or Indo-European subject at the time, he tended to use the term Aryan more carefully than many of his contemporaries, including his teacher Krymskii and his benefactor Bobrinskoi. Possibly, he had internalised some of the caution from his teacher and patron, Miller, who had written a work on ancient Aryan mythology in 1876, in which he had argued that "comparative mythology [...] risk[s] to lose all credit in the eyes of serious [*trezvaia*] scholarship [...]," were it to remain in the "nebulous sphere of speculation and fantasy."⁸⁵ In 1900 Miller taught Semenov to treat his material with academic rigour and restraint, reviewing his diploma-dissertation on the dialects of the Mountain Tajiks with the words: "Even if Semenov's book is weak in its scientific-philological treatment, as a collection of linguistic raw material, as a compilation of raw texts, it is of doubtless importance."⁸⁶ As a result, in 1909 when Semenov reviewed *The Mountaineers of the Upper Reaches of the River Panj* – a book that Bobrinskoi had published the previous year – he seemed more hesitant to speak of these mountaineers as Aryans than the author of the book. Semenov called it "an extremely interesting work" about the "ancient Iranian and other peoples [*narodnostei*]", inhabiting the upper reaches of the Amu-Darya, "whose traces have irreversibly disappeared elsewhere in western and central Asia."⁸⁷ Semenov did not, however, speak of Aryan peoples, preferring the term Iranian instead. Likewise, he wrote that: "The traces of an ancient aristocratic

⁸⁵ Vsevolod Miller, "Ocherki Ariiskoi Mifologii V Sviazi s Drevnieishei Kul'turoi (Outlines of Aryan Mythology and its Connections to the Ancient Culture: Ashwin-Dioskouri)," <http://www.bibliard.ru/vcd-1627-1-1788/index.html> (accessed 5/15, 2014).

⁸⁶ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.28f.

⁸⁷ Aleksandr Semenov, "Bobrinskii, Duke A.A., Gortsy verkhov'ev Piandzha (Vakhantsy i Ishkashimtsy). Ocherki byta po putevym zametkam. [The Mountaineers of the Upper Reaches of the River Panj (The Vakhanians and Ishkashimians). Outlines of their Way of Life on the Basis of a Travelogue.] (Review)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 80, no. 1 (1909), p.99.

race, the Aryan one, according to the words of the author [my emphasis], have not yet disappeared in these mountain dwellers.”⁸⁸ Moreover, speaking about the information provided by Bobrinskoi about the customs and ceremonies of certain Pamiri peoples, Semenov commented that:

*[A] thoughtful historian-orientalist [istorik"-Orientalist"] and philologist-Iranist will doubtlessly find much material [...] for thought about the ancient aspects of the way of life [byt] of the Aryan tribes.*⁸⁹

The reason Semenov did use the word Aryan in this context is, I would argue, that he was referring to the hypothetical ancient Aryans (or Indo-Europeans), whose customs he believed to be reflected in the contemporary *culture* of the Pamiri peoples. The question of whether or not these people were necessarily also the descendants of ancient Aryans, however, Semenov regarded as less obvious and as a matter, not of culture but of lineage. As such, it was in the domain of the anthropologist, and not in that of “historians-orientalists and philologists-Iranists” like him.

The Tajiks as Aryan brethren – Semenov’s “A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people”

In this section I will elaborate on Semenov’s notion of the Aryan origins of the Tajiks, the roots of this notion in his educational background, and how it fits in with the wider scholarship on the issue. I have already indicated that Semenov gravitated towards Max Müller’s culturalistic definition of the Aryans. His work was clearly influenced by the ideas of the German Oxford scholar. Trautmann has pointed out that Müller was “the most ardent and consistent advocate of the idea of the brotherhood of the Aryan peoples, more especially of the kinship between Indians and Europeans.”⁹⁰ He also noted that it was Müller who formulated the dichotomy of “Iran, land of the Aryans, to Turan, the Central Asian land of nomads” on the basis of Zoroastrian sources, and who proposed a Turanian language family, consisting of

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 100.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.172.

Turkic languages.⁹¹ On the basis of rather dubious (from today's perspective) etymologies, Müller constructed an opposition between nomadic pastoralists and farming Aryans, who were regarded as "a people in a higher state of social evolution."⁹² According to Arvidsson, this opposition "between the Iranians or Aryans, 'people of the plow' [...], and the Turanians, the warlike and barbaric nomads, was one of the central pillars in the discourse about the Indo-Europeans."⁹³ In the same vein, Laruelle has emphasised that, in the Russian context, the Aryan myth helped to portray the entire history of Central Asia according to the extremely simplistic scheme of a struggle between the good Aryans and the bad Turanians.⁹⁴ This model, she has argued, also allowed the portrayal of Russia's imperial mission as enabling the revival of Aryan rule, of agriculture and of the study⁹⁵ of the pre-Islamic religious traditions (such as Mazdaism and Buddhism), in order to weaken Islam and diminish both the Turanian dominance and nomadism.⁹⁶ In some of Semenov's works similar notions appear, including the idea of the Tajiks as the Asian brothers of the Europeans; that of a historical conflict in Central Asia between the cultivated Aryan or Iranian farmers and the invading foreign (Arab, Mongol, but most prominently Turkic) and barbaric nomads; and even the notion of the Russian duty to enable an Iranian or Tajik renaissance in the region. Interestingly, this is more apparent in the case of scholarship published during the early Soviet period, than it is in works written before 1917. I would argue that this reflects the fact that the debate about Tajik identity and history had become politicised by the 1920s, something which also affected Semenov's writing on these issues. In the following, I will demonstrate how, on the eve of the NTD (and in its aftermath), some of Semenov's texts on Tajik history began to marry the 19th century Aryan rhetoric with the concept of national self-determination.

A good example of this kind of writing, which reads more like a homage to the Tajik people for a more general audience than a purely academic paper, is Semenov's unpublished article "A Short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.14.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.58.

⁹⁴ Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Arien...*, p.138.

⁹⁵ Laruelle uses the verb "renew" in this context, but I think the term "study" is more appropriate.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

People.”⁹⁷ It appears to have been written around 1924 and displays some similarity with Semenov’s paper “On the problem of national delimitation of Central Asia”, which was published in the same year, and which I will discuss later.⁹⁸ According to “A Short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People”:

*The Tajiks are the most ancient inhabitants of Central Asia and belong to the Asian representatives of the great Indo-European family of peoples [narodov]. Their ancestors stemmed from the Iranian branch of that family, the same to which also the Persians belonged, the founders of history’s first global monarchy.*⁹⁹

In connecting Tajik with Persian history, Semenov merely followed the example of Bartol’d, whose *History of Turkestan* had read: “The ancient population of Turkestan, [...] belonged to the same Iranian tribe [*plemia*] as the Persians, the founders of history’s first global monarchy.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, in the vein of Müller, Semenov evoked the idea of a common Indo-European heritage and of a connectedness between Tajiks, Iranians and Europeans. This is especially palpable in the expression “the Asian representatives of the great Indo-European family of peoples”, as it evokes in the reader’s mind the image of the complementary European members of that family. The paper’s last words speak the same language of an Indo-European brotherhood linking the Tajiks with the Europeans: “It is with immutable trust in the bright future of the talented Tajik people [*narod*], this eastern brother of the European nations [*natsii*], that I shall come to a conclusion.”¹⁰¹

On the whole, Semenov’s paper reads like a nationalistic and essentialising tribute to the Tajiks’ cultural achievements and – in his words – their “Aryan genius” [*ariiskii genii*], which operates with an inclusive understanding of the Aryan theme (hence portraying the Tajiks as the Europeans’ Indo-European brethren). At the same time, the article also employs that theme in a more exclusive manner, depicting the

⁹⁷ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk istoricheskikh sudeb tadzhikskogo naroda” (A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people).

⁹⁸ A.A.S.b10, f2, p1; Semenov, Aleksandr, “K probleme natsional'nogo razmezhevaniia Srednei Azii (istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk)” [On the problem of national delimitation of Central Asia (historical-ethnographical outline)]. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Srednei Azii* no. 2-3 (1924): 26-40.

⁹⁹ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

¹⁰⁰ Vasilii Bartol’d, “Historia Turkestana (Konspekt lektskii): [The History of Turkestan (a course-design)], in: *Vasilii Bartol'd, Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia...(Vol. 2 part I)*, p.109.

¹⁰¹ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

Turks, Arabs and Mongols as hostile foreign invaders and oppressors who, lacking an equally sophisticated culture of their own, adopted the superior cultural traditions (first of all language) of the Tajiks. Semenov wrote:

And when during the 9th and 10th centuries Central Asia witnesses the rise of the local Iranian national [natsional'naia] dynasty of the enlightened [prosveshchennykh] Samanids, who ruled from Bukhara almost independently from the Arabian caliphs [...], the country begins to experience an epoch of unusual recovery and renaissance and achieves an extremely high level of economical and intellectual development [...].¹⁰²

Not only did “trade and industry” expand, Semenov continued, but also “the Persian language and literature made a brilliant comeback.” Anticipating contemporary Tajik nationalist discourse, he proclaimed: “This was – in the real sense of the word – a ‘golden age’ of [...] Persian literature [...].”¹⁰³ After having named such famous Persian poets and scholars as Rudaki and Avicenna, who “give the Tajik people the right to eternal fame among humankind [...],” he argued that, with the fall of the Samanids, the fortunes of the Tajik people turned for the worse. The demise of the famous dynasty “once and for all ended the hegemony of the local Iranian element in Central Asia [...],” he wrote and added:

[The Iranian element] was replaced by the hegemony of the Turks, and what followed – the various Turkish dynasties: the Kara-Khanids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks and Kara-Khitai, then the ruinous hurricane of the Mongol invasion [...], the wars [...] among Genghis’s successors, the rise of Timur and the Timurids and, finally, in 1500 the invasion of the Uzbeks of Shaybani Khan, the breakup of their dominions and later the establishment of three independent Uzbek khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand – [all of this] was a gloomy period in the history of the Tajiks. Nonetheless, they managed to preserve their cultural primacy [pervenstvo] during the above-mentioned centuries-long peripeteias. Representatives of the Tajik nationality [natsional’nost’], owing to their highly developed intellect, fulfilled the critical roles of various

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*; and: William Beeman, “The Struggle for Identity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 4, p.104.

*statesmen, and the Tajik language until the very fall of the Central Asian Uzbek khanates (with the exception of Khiva) was the official language of almost all governmental chancelleries, it was spoken by every member of high society and its knowledge was required of every educated Turk. This guaranteed the greatest development of the local Persian literature, which was valued and loved by many Uzbek rulers as well [...].*¹⁰⁴

Semenov's last remark concerning the prevalence and development of Persian culture among the Uzbek ruling elite hints at a more balanced view of Central Asian history, which bears in mind the prominent symbiosis of Turkic and Iranian culture in Central Asia. Bartol'd had also emphasised this when he wrote that "[t]he history of the cultured regions of Central Asia and the history of such nomadic empires [as the Mongol empire] constitutes one almost inseparable whole."¹⁰⁵ The paragraph in its entirety, however, promotes an essentialist understanding of Central Asian culture as having been shaped primarily by the Tajiks' alleged "cultural primacy."

Most strikingly, however, Semenov defined Tajik national identity as essentially Iranian and hence non-Turkic in the concluding paragraph of the paper:

Contemplating the historical fates of the Tajik people, its rises and falls and the inextinguishable light of pan-human [obshchechelovecheskii] culture that burned in it, we become convinced that the Tajiks, like all Persians in general, always rose [to their feet] after an epoch of oppression[;] [and] that while saving their national essence [natsional'naia sushchnost'] they transferred a significant part of their own spirit [dukh] onto their conquerors, the Arabs, Turks and Mongols[;] and that after all the shocks and devastations they created new cultural conditions. Admittedly, this persistence might have exhausted the potential strength of the nation [natsia], but now that it has been led onto the broad path of self-determination [samodeiatel'nost'], the Tajiks, undoubtedly, will succeed in liberating their primordial [national]

¹⁰⁴ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: "Kratkii ocherk...."

¹⁰⁵ Vasilii Bartol'd, "Sostoianie i zadachi izucheniia istorii Turkestana" (The condition and tasks of the study of the history of Turkestan), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia...* (vol.9), p.512.

*essence [pervonachal'naia sushchnost'] from the admixtures [primes'] overshadowing it.*¹⁰⁶

On the one hand, Semenov's references to the "inextinguishable light of pan-human culture" embodied by the Tajik people, and to its capacity to "create new cultural conditions" and to "transfer [...] their own spirit onto their conquerors" spoke the language of a culturalistic and non-racial definition of the Tajiks' "national essence." On the other hand, the notion that national independence will enable the Tajiks to liberate this "primordial essence from the admixtures [or impurities] overshadowing it" is not only essentialist in its dismissal of all "alien" (Turkic, Arabic and Mongolic) influences on the Tajiks; it is also reminiscent of the more naturalistic and racist language of the time and could also be interpreted as implying purity of race.

In order to understand what motivated Semenov to sing praises to the Tajiks, however, it is worth pointing out that "A short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People" celebrated Persian culture rather than Aryan blood. The reasons for this can be found in Semenov's educational background, which was shaped, as I have already indicated, not so much by the concepts of racial anthropology, which became increasingly influential in early twentieth century Russia, but rather by Müller's culturalistic understanding of the Aryan idea and by a humanistic-philological tradition that was inspired by German Romanticism. Laruelle has emphasised that, in the Russian context, the Aryan theme was less susceptible to "the physiological determinism fashionable in the west and preferred to assert its 'culturalism' [*culturalisme*]." ¹⁰⁷ For Russians, she has argued, the Aryan myth was an identity myth, which was "Romantic, and not racialist, [...] focused on the idea of an Asian origin of the Europeans [and] including without hesitation Russia in the Aryan world [...]." ¹⁰⁸ One has to be careful not to overstate this point. Mogil'ner has criticised "the persistent exclusion of Russia from the world of race science" on the basis of the notion of Russian exceptionalism, i.e. the idea that "the 'non-classical' nature of the Russian empire and its equally 'non-classical' modernity made Russian

¹⁰⁶ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: "Kratkii ocherk...."

¹⁰⁷ Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.181.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.15.

intellectuals immune to ‘the racial obsessions of Western Europe [...]’.¹⁰⁹ According to her, the idea of race during the 19th and 20th centuries “was [...] a dominant epistemology, an instrument that unlocked nearly all social, cultural, and political phenomena in the world, and Russian physical anthropologists participated in this universal discourse.”¹¹⁰ But Laruelle has not disputed the existence of Darwinist and Positivist currents in Russian anthropology and ethnology in the second half of the 19th century.¹¹¹ These currents did exist and one of Semenov’s close friends, Lev Oshanin, was one such supporter.¹¹² What Laruelle has argued, however, was that scholars in the humanities who were reflecting on questions of national identity, “remained within a Romantic and Herderian tradition” that operated with a “specific Russian definition of culture, history and religion [...]”.¹¹³ For such scholars, she concluded, “the Russians [were] Aryans not because they [were] tall, blond, blue-eyed and had a dolichocephalic skull, but because they [were] Christian, Slavophone and of European culture.”¹¹⁴ Semenov, too, depicted the Tajik people as “the eastern brother of the European nations” not because some of them were blue-eyed and blond, but because they spoke Indo-European languages.¹¹⁵ I am not claiming that he was representative of a non-racial *Sonderweg* of Russian academia, but simply that he was primarily a philologist and someone interested in texts and languages, rather than an anthropologist who was looking for racial types.

To a certain degree, the influences, which informed Semenov’s formation as a scholar, can be traced back, not only to Müller, but to a broader German influence on Russian academia. Arguably, Semenov (in terms of his scholarly work) saw himself primarily as a philologist. According to Arvidsson, Johann von Herder (1744-1803) and Karl Friedrich Schlegel described philologists as “expert[s] in foreign languages and cryptic texts, [...] who [were] best equipped to discover the spirit of long-

¹⁰⁹ Marina Mogil’ner, *Homo Imperii ...*, p.2f.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.181.

¹¹² Oshanin was a Russian physician, physical anthropologist and ethnographer, who was born in Tashkent in 1884 and spent most his life there. Incidentally and unsurprisingly, the above-mentioned Charles de Ujfalvy quoted Oshanin in his section on the so-called Ghalcha. See: Charles de Ujfalvy, *Les Aryens Au Nord...*, p.123.

¹¹³ Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.181.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

forgotten religions.”¹¹⁶ Semenov seems to see himself in a very similar light. For example, his above-mentioned remark that Bobrinskoi’s book would be of great value for “a thoughtful historian-Orientalist and philologist-Iranist [...],” eager to uncover the traces of ancient Aryan traditions, indicates that Semenov saw himself in precisely this role. His understanding of the Indo-European family of peoples was grounded in comparative linguistics rather than in racial anthropology. A closer look at his terminology validates that point. Take the example of his portrayal of the Tajiks as “the Asian representatives of the great Indo-European family of peoples.”¹¹⁷ The expression “Indo-European family of peoples” obviously derived from the concept of an Indo-European family of languages; and so did the phrase that the “ancestors [of the Tajiks] stemmed from the Iranian branch [*vetva*] of that family.”¹¹⁸ The words and concepts Semenov chose bespeak their origins in comparative linguistics. Trautmann has argued that it is often assumed that the tree-model, with which Semenov operated here and which has found application in linguistics and ethnology, has derived “from biology, specifically comparative physiology.”¹¹⁹ In fact, however, the opposite was the case. Trautmann has pointed out that Charles Darwin made it “quite clear in his great chapter on classification in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) that the influence runs from linguistics/ethnology to biology [...].”¹²⁰ One should not, therefore, jump to the conclusion that Semenov thought of the Indo-European family of peoples as a community held together by bonds of blood. On the contrary, the Indo-European family tree which he evoked, appears to have been nourished, not so much by the idea of Aryan blood, but by the one of a common Indo-European or Aryan language (and culture).

Semenov thus gravitated towards the Russian Romantic and Herderian tradition. According to Laruelle, in nineteenth century Russia not only the academic humanities but also intellectual life more broadly were affected by German Romanticism, understood not merely “as aesthetics but as a way of knowing the

¹¹⁶ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.30.

¹¹⁷ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.9.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

world” and as an ideology.¹²¹ Similarly, Trautmann and Arvidsson have indicated that theories about an Indo-European *Ursprache* and primal population, although British in origin, fell on most fertile ground at German-speaking universities, from where they spread to Russia.¹²² In the same vein, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye has also stressed that “Russian orientologists often shared the interest of their German colleagues in Asian influence on their own culture.”¹²³ Schimmelpenninck’s point is validated by the example of two teachers at the Lazarev Institute, who greatly affected Semenov’s formation as a scholar: Vsevolod Miller and Fedor Korsh, both of whom had a special interest in Iranian languages *and* Russian folklore. Miller, whose book on ancient Aryan mythology I have already mentioned, specialised in Indo-Iranian languages and in Russian folklore.¹²⁴ And Korsh, who taught Semenov Persian literature and poetry at the Lazarev Institute, and one of whose major works is a translation of Persian poetry, also researched Russian folk literature. Last but not least, Vera Tolz has argued that “the new school of Orientology”, set up by Baron Viktor Romanovich Rozen (1846-1908) at St. Petersburg University during the 1890s, was profoundly influenced by a German-speaking scholarly tradition.¹²⁵ Rozen and two of his most famous disciples, Bartol’d and Sergei Ol’denburg, were of German origin. Bartol’d in particular was “influenced by the methodologies of German positivist historiography of the late nineteenth century [...] [and] focused mainly on the interpretation of textual sources in his research.”¹²⁶ Bartol’d, as Tolz has pointed out, explicitly “criticized the use of linguistic classifications to identify racial groups, and objected to explanations for cultural differences based on biology.”¹²⁷

Semenov’s friendship with Bartol’d deeply affected his own formation as a scholar and, by the same token, his views on the Aryan subject. Therefore, it is worth dwelling a little longer on Bartol’d’s take on the issue. As I have already pointed out earlier in this chapter, Bartol’d criticised many scholars’ preoccupation with the

¹²¹ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Arien...*, p.22.

¹²² Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.27; Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.26.

¹²³ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010), p.98f.

¹²⁴ Vsevolod Miller, *Ocherki Ariiskoi Mifologii...* .

¹²⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient...*, pp.7ff.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.14.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.61.

Aryan subject in his paper “The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan.” The paper argued that the idolisation of the Aryans and of pre-Islamic culture was problematic in itself. But it also pointed out that, even more detrimental to Russian Oriental studies, was that this idolisation was accompanied by a disparaging attitude towards Islamic history in general and specifically towards the Turks. In Bartol’d’s words, those who “[...] described Muslims [as] Barbarians, who merely destroyed the previous religions and the cultural values [*tsennosti*] [...],” and who “not without reason, it seemed, made this accusation even more often against the Turks as a tribe [...],” based their reasoning on an ignorant and/or biased reading of the historical evidence.¹²⁸ As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Semenov asked Bartol’d for a copy of the paper in a letter from January 1915.¹²⁹ He thus must have been aware of the pitfalls of the Aryan topic, not least because Bartol’d, whose opinion he immensely respected, had called his attention to them. Further evidence to suggest that Semenov shared his teacher’s scepticism of the Aryan subject was his scoffing attitude towards some of the research on the issue, even when produced by his friends and colleagues such as Andrei Kalmykov. As I have shown in an earlier chapter, Semenov wrote to Bartol’d in 1906 that Kalmykov “was first occupied with the earliest geography of Persia and is now developing a theory (his own) about the origin of the Aryans. By the way, I don’t think this will last for too long [...].”¹³⁰ Semenov valued Kalmykov as a colleague; according to Semenov’s daughter, he even belonged to her father’s inner circle of acquaintances in Tashkent.¹³¹ His mockery was therefore not so much aimed at Kalmykov personally or at the fact that this colonial administrator and graduate of St. Petersburg University’s Oriental faculty had scholarly interests. Rather, it was aimed at the focus of these interests, namely the “theory [...] about the origin of the Aryans.”

All of this helps to explain why Semenov, although he was not unaffected by the fashionable preoccupation with the Aryan subject (in particular around 1900), still managed to avoid many of the subject’s more blatantly racist tropes. Even where he explicitly used the expression Aryan genius in his paper “A short Outline of

¹²⁸ Vasilii Bartol’d, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia...”, p.529.

¹²⁹ A.A.S., b13, f6, p46: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 8.1.1915.

¹³⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p5: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 8.11.1906.

¹³¹ Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov...*, p.51.

the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People”, he meant essentially intellectual culture, first and foremost, literature and language. The following excerpt from that paper illustrates this rather well:

[...] [I]n the course of many centuries, the Tajik nationality [narodnost’], even after having lost its political dominance, preserved the light of high cultural achievements in this country[;] and the Aryan genius [ariiskii genii] manifested itself in the local architecture, in fretwork and ironwork, in magnificent ceramics, in the distinctive bright floral patterns on cloths, in the art of binding books, in exquisite miniatures, and, most importantly, in the creation of a vast local [mestnaya] literature on a whole range of questions and scholarly subject areas. Unfortunately, so far this vast, almost inexhaustible treasury of the local Iranian intellect [intellekt] stands before us like a beautiful stranger [prekrasnaia neznakomka]. The recently completed four-volume opus of the English professor Browne ‘A Literary History of Persia’ is quite telling in this respect: The author mentioned the forefathers of contemporary Tajik literature, those ancient Central Asian poets and writers that are common to all Persians; but he totally passed over all the subsequent literati, as a result of which an entire page of great importance ended up being torn out of the common literary history of the Iranians. At the same time, the centuries-long Tajik literature saw so many famous names of great talent, who have produced so many notable works of importance for both scholarship and poetry.¹³²

Semenov’s case seems to validate Laruelle’s point regarding the more culturalistic understanding of the Aryan theme in the Russian context. It was not race (physical appearance), but first of all language and then culture (i.e. customs, traditions, religious beliefs etc.) that were the decisive criteria prompting him to categorise the Tajiks as Iranians and hence as the descendants of Aryans. That is not to say that racist prejudices or the notion of race were entirely absent from Semenov’s writings on the Aryan theme; but neither were they at its heart. Instead, culture and language took centre stage in his works. In this Semenov appears to have been

¹³² A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

influenced by Bartol'd, for whom – as Yuri Bregel has pointed out – it was not race but cultural and economic factors, such as the shift of international trade routes, which led to the economic and cultural prosperity and political hegemony of certain regions and peoples and to the decline of others.¹³³ At the same time, Semenov's works also bear the traces of scholarship, which was less sober and rigorous than that of Bartol'd. Agafangel Efimovich Krymskii's (1871-1942) vision of an Aryan brotherhood between the Russians and the Tajiks, for instance, was not only vehemently racist and Turkophobe, but also a source of inspiration for Semenov, as I will show in the following section.

Turk vs. Tajik – The Orientalist 'ethos of complementariness' and the legacy of Krymskii

The recurrent Aryan myth in contemporary Tajikistan is a prime example of what Shnirelman has described as the state-sponsored attempt to claim autochthony in Central Asia by "identify[ing] remote ancestors with the Aryans and oppos[ing] them to the Turkic invaders [...]," in a dichotomous narrative of history that depicts the former as "the bearers of higher culture" and the latter as "the alien barbarians, the destroyers of great civilizations."¹³⁴ While the undisguised promotion of this narrative is a recent phenomenon and a concomitant of the Aryan myth, it has also been a prominent trope in the scholarship on the Aryan or Indo-European subject. According to Arvidsson, such scholarship was often characterised by an "ethos of complementariness" that juxtaposed supposedly ingenious Aryans to unimaginative Semites, Aryan farmers to Turanian nomads.¹³⁵ Russian academia was not unaffected by this binary model, which had been popularised by such influential western authors as Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) and the earlier-mentioned Ernest Renan, who conceptualised the history of the Muslim world as a struggle between a *génie sémitique* and a *génie aryen*, depicting the former in a negative light and conferring to the latter the virtues of creativity, reason and

¹³³ Yuri Bregel, "Barthold and Modern Oriental Studies," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 3 (1980), p.387ff.

¹³⁴ Victor Shnirelman, "Aryans or...", p.570

¹³⁵ Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols...*, p.30.

culture.¹³⁶ Some Russian authors, in contrast to their western colleagues, opposed the Aryans to Turks rather than to Semites, thereby often avoiding anti-Semitic tendencies only to replace them with anti-Turkic ones. A prominent example was Agafangel Efimovich Krymskii (1871-1942), an Orientalist, poet and famous Ukrainian nationalist who, according to Mark Batunsky, viewed Islamic societies through a racist and dichotomous prism, which opposed allegedly creative and rational Aryans (and Semites) to supposedly dull and fanatic Turks (and Mongols).¹³⁷ Krymskii influenced Russian academia in general and specifically Semenov, who was one of his students at the Lazarev Institute. As a result, at least some of the anti-Turkic tendencies, which feature so prominently in Tajik nationalist discourse today, can be traced back directly to the works of Semenov and indirectly to those of Krymskii, whose case I will examine in more detail in the following.

According to Batunsky, Krymskii's anti-Turkic and Persophile vision of Islamic history was an "unprecedented aggressive and malicious polemical style for academic Oriental studies [...], [which] gave Russian racism a great destructive power and vast influence."¹³⁸ Laruelle has pointed out that Krymskii's influence was especially great among members of the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology, such as Semenov, who, after 1917, often went on to become advisors to the Bolshevik government on its nationalities policy.¹³⁹ Krymskii seems to have made quite an impression on the young Semenov while teaching in Moscow. The renowned Russian scholar of Arabic, Ignatii Krachkovskii, singled out two Moscow academics for their efforts to popularise and raise the standards of Oriental studies in Moscow: the earlier-mentioned Fedor Korsh and Krymskii.¹⁴⁰ These two men were also Semenov's favourite teachers at the Lazarev Institute, according to Nina Kuznetsova, who surveyed Semenov's personal archive in the 1970s.¹⁴¹ Krachkovskii described Krymskii as "Ukrainian by birth [...] and [...] of Crimean Tatar blood [...]. [...]"

¹³⁶ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.173; Mark Batunsky, "Racism in Russian Islamology: Agafangel Krimsky," *Central Asian Survey* 11, no. 4 (1992), p.79.

¹³⁷ Mark Batunsky, "Racism in Russian...", pp.75-84.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.75.

¹³⁹ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Aryen...*, p.172.

¹⁴⁰ Ignatii Krachkovskii, *Die Russische Arabistik...*, p.164.

¹⁴¹ Nina Kuznetsova, "Obzor Arkhiva Akademika Tadzhijskoi SSR A.A. Semenova" (Survey of the Archive of the Academician of the Tajik SSR A.A. Semenov), in: Nina Kuznetsova, ed., *Iran: Sbornik Statei* [Iran: An anthology of articles] (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p.29.

[H]e was Slavacist and Orientalist (and as such again Arabist, Iranist and Turkologist) [...] [and] a significant Ukrainian writer and poet[...].”¹⁴² As a student, Semenov probably looked up to Krymskii, seeing in him an Orientalist of a very broad profile and a public figure and populariser of scholarship who, like him, came from a Tatar background and had literary inclinations.¹⁴³ Krymskii disagreed with the widespread view among European scholars and intellectuals that Islam *per se* was incompatible with Westernisation. His *Mohammedanism and its future* argued that “the Islamic faith in itself, just as any other religion, should not be regarded as an obstacle to progress and civilisation.”¹⁴⁴ He suggested that, whether or not “the Muslim peoples are capable of making progress and of embracing our European civilisation [...],” depended not on their religious but racial affiliation.¹⁴⁵ “That the Persians with their great abilities will catch up with Europe and will become our brothers, in that there is no doubt [...],” he prophesied, adding that the “Arab nation” too, had “become closer to the west [...].”¹⁴⁶ However, the “Turkic race”, Krymskii argued, was less susceptible to “European civilisation” because of its “mental immobility and blind conservatism in its customs [...],” which had resulted in an interpretation of the faith that was characterised by “fanatical stagnation and fanatical hatred to everything foreign and non-Islamic.”¹⁴⁷ On the whole, Krymskii’s “ethos of complementariness” – to use Arvidsson’s expression – juxtaposed Aryans to Turks, depicting the former as tolerant and open to European culture and the latter as fanatical and opposed to all non-Islamic influences. Whereas he portrayed the Turks as “the most orthodox and fanatical Muslim people [...],” he described “Persia [...] [as] the source of light for a

¹⁴² Ignatii Iulianovich Krachkovskii, *Die Russische...*, p.164.

¹⁴³ But Semenov was well advised not to publicly mention his connection with Krymskii in his later career, since the latter’s name was tarnished as a “bourgeois nationalist” since the 1930s (he was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1941). See: Ia V. Vasilkov and M. Iu Sorokina, *Liudi i Sudby: Biobibliograficheskii Slovar Vostokovedov - Zhertv Politicheskogo Terrora V Sovetskii Period 1917-1991* [People and Destinies. A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of Orientalists: Victims of Political Repression during the Soviet Era (1917-1991)], Vol. 2014 (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie), online at: <http://memory.pvost.org/pages/krimskij.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Agafangel Efimovich Krymskii, *Musul'manstvo i ego budushchnost': proshloe Islama, sovremennoe sostoianie musul'manskikh narodov, ikh umstvennyia sposobnosti, ikh otnosheniia k Evropeiskoi tsivilizatsii* [Mohammedanism and its future: the past of Islam, the contemporary condition of the Muslim peoples, their intellectual capacities and attitudes towards European civilisation] (Moscow: Knizhnoe Delo, 1899), p.114.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.116.

great part of Asia [...].”¹⁴⁸ His Persophile and Turkophobe vision of Central Asian history was uniquely compatible with the Tajik nationalist narrative of history, which Semenov would help to design and which, until today, defines Tajik (Iranian/Aryan) national identity against an Uzbek (Turkic) “other.”¹⁴⁹

At the same time, it would be wrong to draw too direct a line between Krymskii, Semenov and the development of Tajik nationalist discourse. After all, this discourse has evolved since 1924; and Semenov – despite his Persophile inclinations – did not write in the same blatantly racist fashion as Krymskii. Still, Semenov and several other scholars of his generation were extremely influential in determining the path along which the Tajik nation would be conceptualised. Furthermore, the scholarship of both Semenov and Krymskii shows a degree of commonality. They both paid special attention to Persianate Central Asia. Whereas Krymskii, for example, referred to Persia as “the source of light for a great part of Asia [...],” Semenov praised the Tajiks for spreading “the light of high cultural achievements.” Moreover, both emphasised the kinship between Europeans and Persians. And both were keen to identify traces of the pre-Islamic religions in the customs and beliefs of peoples whom they regarded as Iranian. Krymskii, for instance, described Shiism as merely the reincarnation of pre-existing Zoroastrian and hence Aryan religions in the cloak of Islam.¹⁵⁰ In the same vein, Semenov – as I have pointed out earlier – reiterated the notion that Islam had taken root only superficially among the Iranophone mountain dwellers of Central Asia. Most importantly, however, Semenov – just like Krymskii – tended to juxtapose the notion of Aryan (or Iranian) ingenuity to a Turkic lack thereof, especially in articles written during the NTD, such as the above-mentioned “A short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People.” Echoing Gobineau, Renan and Krymskii, the paper portrayed the lion’s share of the

¹⁴⁸ Agafangel Efimovich Krymskii, *Musul'manstvo i Ego...*, pp.7&34; Incidentally, the light-metaphor was also popular among Iranian nationalists during the 20th century. And Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi tellingly titled himself *ariyamehr*, the “Light of Aryans.” See: Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, “Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the “Aryan” Discourse in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011), p.446.

¹⁴⁹ For a debate on the interconnectedness of Tajik and Uzbek national ideology and historiography, see: Mohira Suyarkulova, “Statehood as Dialogue: Conflicting Historical Narratives of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan”, in: Heathershaw, John., Herzig, Edmund., ed., *The Transformation of Tajikistan...*, pp.161-177.

¹⁵⁰ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Aryan...*, p.173.

riches of Central Asian cultural heritage (“the local architecture, [...] fretwork and ironwork, [...] ceramics, the art of bookbinding [...] the local literature [...]”) as the manifestation of the Tajiks’ “Aryan genius.” The Turks, on the other hand, were politically and militarily successful, establishing “a vast nomadic empire, bordering with China, Persia and Byzantium” in 6th century (Common Era) Central Asia, wrote Semenov. But he added that “lacking their own culture, they subdued themselves to the influence of the surrounding Iranians, in terms of both material and spiritual culture: they were either Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Manicheans or Nestorian Christians.”¹⁵¹ To some extent, Semenov’s paper described a process of cultural transfer and symbiosis between Turkophone nomads and an Iranophone sedentary population, characterised by the coexistence of Turkic political and Persian cultural hegemony.¹⁵² But he depicted this process as unidirectional (from the culturally more sophisticated Iranians to the less civilised Turks). Krymskii had done the same, when he argued that the only Turkish “philosopher of genius” was Farabi, who grew up in a Persian (Aryan) environment that encouraged intellectual aspirations.¹⁵³ Thereby, Semenov helped to construct what might be described – to use the words of the theorist of national identity Stuart Hall – as an internally homogenising and externally differentiating national narrative,¹⁵⁴ which represented the Tajiks as a) the descendants of the Aryan aborigines of Central Asia and as the region’s civilising force (who, “even after having lost [their] political dominance” during the “gloomy period” of the “hegemony of the Turks [...] managed to preserve their cultural primacy [...]”) and b) as the victims of oppressive and foreign Turkic invaders.¹⁵⁵ Semenov was not the originator of these ideas; but his writings helped to introduce these notions into the nationalist discourse, historiography and state ideology of the nascent Tajik state during the 1920s, as I will show in the concluding part of this chapter.

¹⁵¹ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

¹⁵² Semenov wrote, for instance (as I have already pointed out), that “Persian literature, [...] was valued and loved by many Uzbek rulers as well.” See: Ibid.

¹⁵³ Mark Batunsky, “Racism in Russian...”, p.79.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart Hall, *Ausgewählte Schriften 2: Rassismus und kulturelle Identität [Selected Works 2: Racism and Cultural Identity]*, (Hamburg: Argument-Verl. 1994), p.204, in: Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia and Martin Reisigl, *Zur Diskursiven Konstruktion Nationaler Identität [About the discursive construction of national identity]* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), p.62.

¹⁵⁵ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

Regardless of the differences between Semenov's and Krymksii's scholarship, traces of the latter's dichotomous (Turkophile and Persophile) vision of Central Asian history as a struggle between Aryan Iranians and non-Aryan Turks have clearly entered some of Semenov's scholarship, which has in turn contributed to a historical narrative that represents the Tajiks as both the indigenous and the most cultured inhabitants of the region. Unsurprisingly, this narrative – often in forms that are even more disparaging about the Turks' contribution to Central Asian history – has found numerous advocates among Tajik nationalist historians, such as the earlier-mentioned Masov, who has repeatedly tried to substantiate it by referring to the works of Russian Orientalists. In his polemic with his Uzbek counterpart, Asqarov, for instance, he stressed that even the “great Orientalist and Turkologist V.V. Bartol'd” had written that:

[I]n 1885 [sic! ¹⁵⁶], on the occasion of the opening of the local archaeological circle [the Turkestan Circle of Devotees of Archaeology (TKLA)], the highest representative of the Russian authorities in the country [Aleksandr Vrevskii, the incumbent governor-general of Turkestan between 1889 and 1898 and chairman of the TKLA] suggested to the circle the task of studying the ancient Aryan culture of the country, which had been destroyed by the Turkic barbarians [varvary – tiurki] and was now due to be restored under the rule of other Aryans – the Russians. ¹⁵⁷

Masov concluded that the creation of a Tajik state in the 20th century finally (after “almost 900 years”) liberated “the indigenous descendants of the Aryans of Central Asia – the Tajiks [...] from the oppressive and plundering steppe-dwellers [who] expelled the settled agricultural population of Central Asia.”¹⁵⁸ The influential Tajik historian wholly distorted Bartol'd's original point, which the latter had only made to point out the fallacy of Vrevskii's prejudiced and simplistic vision of Central Asia's past.¹⁵⁹ As I have outlined above, Bartol'd disapproved of this view and condemned

¹⁵⁶ It should say “1895” instead of “1885”; Vasilii Bartol'd, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia...”, p.529.

¹⁵⁷ Rahim Masov, “Fal'sifitsirovat' i prisvaivat'... ” <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1141856700>.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ If the Governor-General's words were to be taken seriously, Bartol'd argued, scholars would be forced to dismiss the “entire period from the last years of the 10th century until the 1860s [...] as a

both “[t]he exaggerated notion of the cultural achievements of the Aryans and the barbarity of the Turks [...],” and the fact that “prejudiced assertions about races are even more widespread among educated members of society in all countries than biased judgments about religion [...],” despite the “extreme precariousness of the assumptions of ‘racial psychology’.”¹⁶⁰ Masov’s selective and, presumably, wilfully misrepresentative reading of Bartol’d is a good example of the cultivation of the sort of essentialist and ethnocentrist national identities that have mushroomed all over post-Soviet Central Asia.¹⁶¹ Still, there is no denying that the narrative put forward by Masov is also based on and inspired by Russian Orientalist scholarship, and that Semenov and some of his colleagues and teachers, such as Krymskii, share some responsibility for sowing the seeds of the virulent anti-Turkic aspects inherent in it.

Sharpening the contours of Tajik national identity

I have already pointed out that the quest for Aryan ancestors in contemporary Central Asia is part of a contest for autochthony among the former Soviet republics in the region. But I have not made quite clear yet that this contest had already accompanied the NTD of the 1920s; and that then as now the competition for autochthony has polarised, politicised and racialised the Aryan discourse. The idea of race had of course already been present in the Aryan discourse since the mid- 19th century, as Mogil’ner has shown.¹⁶² And race had also played a certain role in Semenov’s writings before 1917, as I have demonstrated. Moreover, Laruelle has

time of total barbarity and absolute cultural decline.” See: Vasilii Bartol’d, “Zadachi russkogo vostokovedeniia ...”, p.529.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Sergei Abashin has pointed out that all over Central Asia contemporary political leaders and scholars revert to Soviet scholarly traditions, such as “the logic and terminology of the ‘ethnos theory,’” in order “to construct national ideology and modern nation states.” See: Sergei Abashin, “Post-Soviet Nationalism, Ethnos Theory, and Constructivist Critique,” *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 44, no. 4 (2006), p.58. Other scholars, such as Alisher Ilkhamov and Adeeb Khalid, have made similar arguments. See: Alisher Ilkhamov, “Archaeology of Uzbek Identity”, *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2006); and: Adeeb Khalid, “The Modernity of Identity”, *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2006).

¹⁶² Mogil’ner has pointed out that while “‘race’ entered the Russian political language relatively late, on the wave of mass politics raised by the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907, in the Russian academic discourse it was actively present from the mid-nineteenth century.” Mogil’ner also stressed that the term “coexisted and in a way competed for academic prominence with such categories as *plemia* (tribe), *narodnost’* as a more cultural, ethnographic denomination of people, and a more politicised *narod* (people).” Marina Mogil’ner, *Homo Imperii...*, p.8.

stressed the political instrumentalisation of the Aryan myth at the *fin de siècle*, when it served as a Russian myth of empire and of a European national identity.¹⁶³ Last but not least, Krymskii's work is an example of a racist and polarised (Turkic vs. Iranian) vision of the history of Islam, which had been fully developed long before the NTD or even the advent of Soviet rule. That being said, it was only the NTD that gave the Aryan theme its racial edge and political significance for Tajik nationalist discourse, because it helped to conceptualise the Tajiks as a distinct and autochthonous nationality (*natsional'nost'*). It was the NTD that turned the Aryan myth from a Russian myth of empire and identity into a Tajik myth of national delimitation and identity. Semenov's writings from the time not only bear the marks of this development, but they also helped to bring it about. As I have mentioned earlier, "A short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People" married the Aryan theme with the concept of national self-determination, and juxtaposed the Tajiks as racially Aryan, Iranophone and culturally dominant aborigines of Central Asia, to the oppressive, politically dominant but culturally less sophisticated and invading Turks (Arabs and Mongols).

Semenov's "Material Monuments of Aryan Culture" (which I have mentioned in the introduction to this chapter) must be seen in the same context as "A Short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People." The circumstances of this paper's publication demonstrate how interlinked it was with the politics of the NTD and the Tajik authorities. First of all, the article was published in the immediate aftermath of the establishment (on paper) of a Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as part of Uzbekistan in October 1924.¹⁶⁴ Secondly, it was a contribution to the volume *Tajikistan: A Volume of Articles*, which had been commissioned and financed by the provisional government of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Revolutionary Committee (*Revkom*) of Tajikistan, which had been instated by the Uzbek government in late November 1924.¹⁶⁵ Thirdly, the paper was

¹⁶³ Laruelle, Marlène, *Mythe Arien...*, p.13.

¹⁶⁴ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.55.

¹⁶⁵ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.160; and: Ikskandar Kalandarov; Natal'ia Dzhamalova, "Organizatsiia Tadzhiiskoi Avtonomnoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki" (The establishment of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic), in: R. M. Masov, ed., *U Istokov Istorii: K 130-Letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Nusratullo Makhsuma* [At the Origins of History: On the Occasion of the 130th Anniversary of Nusratullo Makhsum] (Dushanbe: Mega-basim, 2011), p.486f.

published by the *Society for the Study of Tajikistan and the Iranian Peoples Beyond its Borders*,¹⁶⁶ which had been founded in Tashkent in January 1925 on the initiative of the Tajik *Revkom* (and with Semenov among its founding members).¹⁶⁷ It fits into this pattern that *Tajikistan: A Volume of Articles* also contained an appeal by Bartol'd not to forget the Tajiks' entitlement to the status of one of Central Asia's "indigenous nationalities."¹⁶⁸ It is thus not surprising that, as Rzehak has pointed out, this publication was used by advocates of Tajik statehood, such as the Tajik statesman Abduqodir Muhiddinov and the poet Taraqul Zehni, to legitimise Tajik statehood with academic arguments.¹⁶⁹ "Material monuments of Aryan Culture" began with the words:

*The Tajiks, who make up the majority of the population of the contemporary state formation [gosudarstvennoe obrazovanie], known as 'the Tajik autonomous republic', are, as is well known, the descendants [potomki] of the ancient aborigines of the country, the Aryans of Asia, belonging to the Iranian group of the great [velikii] Aryan tribe [plemia].*¹⁷⁰

Reading these words, one might be forgiven for wondering why the Tajiks had to content themselves with such a comparatively small and not even fully-independent "state formation", which belittled their indigenous and illustrious ancestors, who had left their mark all over "[t]he vast territory of the contemporary Central Asian republics and autonomous provinces, stretching from Kashgar to the Caspian Sea and from the regions along the Syr-Darya to the southern frontier with Persia and Afghanistan [...]."¹⁷¹ The Tajik authorities that had commissioned the paper (and

¹⁶⁶ In Russian: *Obshchestvo dlia izucheniia Tadzhikistana i iranskikh narodnostei za ego predelami*.

¹⁶⁷ Following the election of the Central Executive Committee of the TaASSR in December 1926, the latter financed and oversaw the activities of the *Society for the study of Tajikistan*. See: Efim Solomonovich Shagalov, *Pervoe Nauchnoe Obshchestvo Tadzhikistana*. [Tajikistan's first scientific society] (Dushanbe: Donish, 1966), p.7; and: D. S. Saidmuradov and Iu S. Mal'tsev, *Iz Istorii Vostokovedeniia V Tadzhikistane, 1917-1958 Gg.* [From the history of Oriental Studies in Tajikistan, 1917-1958] (Dushanbe: Donish, 1990), pp.19-26.

¹⁶⁸ In his "The Tajiks—A Historical Outline" Bartol'd complained that the "constitution of the Turkestan [Soviet Socialist Republic] republic [1918-1924]" recognised "only the Kirgiz, Uzbeks and Turkmen [...] as its 'indigenous nationalities'" but ignored "the country's most ancient inhabitants," the Tajiks. See: Vasilii Bartol'd, "Tadzhiki...", p.468.

¹⁶⁹ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.160.

¹⁷⁰ A.A.Semenov, "Material'nye pamiatniki ariiskoi kul'tury" [Material monuments of Aryan Culture], in: N. L. Korzhenevskii, ed., *Tadzhikistan...*, p.113.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.118f.

possibly even Semenov himself) were well aware of the fact that these words would evoke this question in the reader's mind. In fact, they had aimed for that effect.

Semenov's depiction of the Tajiks as the descendants of the Aryans not only buttressed Tajik claims to autochthony in Central Asia, it also sharpened the contours of Tajik national identity, which was of course a prerequisite for the establishment of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The NTD was also a delimitation of national identities, which proved particularly difficult in the case of the delimitation of Tajik from Uzbek identity (a difficulty that persists until today, as the above-mentioned argument between Masov and Asqarov suggests). As Khalid has pointed out in his latest book, separating "Uzbek" or "Turk" from "Tajik" or "Iranian" was not simply a matter of separating different coloured marbles from a jar [...], especially since "language [had never been] the node of identity" in Central Asia, where intermarriage and bilingualism were widespread and had created, what Khalid has called, a "deep symbiosis between Turkic and Persian speakers."¹⁷² In the same vein, Semenov argued in the 1950s that Tajiks and Uzbeks had in the past "lived a shared life, nourished by a common essence of culture."¹⁷³ Semenov knew that heterogeneity was the rule rather than the exception in Central Asia, and especially throughout the oases along the Syr-Darya, Amu-Darya, and the Zarafshan. In 1911, he had written a sympathetic review of the book *Tapisseries de l'Asie Central*, which his former superior, General Bogoliubov, had published in 1908.¹⁷⁴ The book's "Ethnographic and Carpet Map of Central Asia" and especially the location of the "ethnic groups of the Bukharan Khanate," however, "display[ed] some substantial shortcomings [...]," wrote Semenov.¹⁷⁵ Things were far more mixed up than the map suggested, he argued. Along the Amu-Darya, in the "cultured belt", as he called it, "live not only Turkmen, but also Uzbeks and in some places even

¹⁷² Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan...* (forthcoming); In the introduction to this thesis, I have already referred to the work of scholars, such as Bert Fagner, Eva Maria Subtelny and John Samuel Schoeberlein-Engel, who have also stressed the interdependency, symbiosis and fluidity of Tajik and Uzbek identity in late Tsarist and early Soviet century Central Asia. See: p.9.

¹⁷³ AAS, b12, f10, p1ff: "Proekt prospekta kratkogo ocherka stat'i o razvitii kul'tury i nauki v Tadzhikistane v periode imperializma" [Project for the prospectus of a short outline of an article about the development of culture and science in Tajikistan in the period of Imperialism], late 1950s (not dated precisely).

¹⁷⁴ A. A. Semenov, "Kovry Russkogo Turkestana," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie (Ethnographical Survey)* 88, no. 1 (1911), pp.137-179.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.138.

Tajiks.” Moreover, the domains of the Beks in the Khanate of Bukhara, the city itself and its surroundings “are all inhabited not exclusively by Uzbeks [...] but also by Tajiks (who live in all towns and in very many villages [*kishlaki*]), and by Persians [...], Kirgiz [...], Turkmen [...], Arabs [...], Jews, and Lyuli¹⁷⁶ and *Aralash*.”¹⁷⁷ As for the latter term, Semenov explained its origins with the Turkic verb *aralashmaq* (to mix), adding that “it is, indeed, hard to imagine something more diverse than the *kishlaki* and nomadic encampments of the *Aralash*”, where one can find “Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Arabs and Kirgiz etc. – all mixed together. Strangers, if asked the question to which tribe they belong, invariably answer “*Aralash*.”¹⁷⁸ At the same time, Semenov divided the bulk of the population of Russian Turkestan into essentially either Turkish or Iranian (or mixed Turko-Iranian) origin in the same review, but he was clearly aware that this was somewhat schematic and arbitrary.

The NTD sought to divide Central Asia and its population into clear-cut national categories and republics, leaving little room for such ambiguity. In this context, the notion of the Tajiks’ Aryan descent helped to provide clarity and create a distinct Tajik identity, which was based on the idea of their Iranian or Aryan descent, and which significantly strengthened the political case for the establishment of “the first Iranian Soviet state in Central Asia.”¹⁷⁹ As I have shown earlier, the Aryan theme was particularly prevalent in descriptions of the so-called Mountain Tajiks, whom scholars, such as Semenov, had conceptualised as Iranian or Aryan, i.e. as both different from and older than the remaining population of Central Asia. Nowhere was Tajik identity less ambiguous than in the case of the Mountain Tajiks. Their perceived distinctiveness was a prerequisite for the establishment of a separate Tajik state. Bergne has stressed the pivotal role of Russian Orientalists in 1924 in “[taking] up the cause of the Tajik nation” and promoting “the realisation of the Tajik ‘ethnie’.”¹⁸⁰ But he has also pointed out that “[i]t was the Tajiks of the high

¹⁷⁶ The Lyuli are a subgroup of the Dom People and branch of the Central Asian Roma. For more information see: Shirin Akiner, “Enduring Stranger: Mughat, Lyuli, and Other Peripatetics in the Social Fabric of Central Asia”, Joseph C. Berland and Aparna Rao, eds., *Customary Strangers New Perspectives on Peripatetic Peoples in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), pp.299-307.

¹⁷⁷ A. A. Semenov, “Kovry Russkogo Turkestana...”, p.148.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.148f.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.48.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.127.

mountains where, if not always Persian, then at least Iranian languages were spoken, who struck them [the Orientalists] as different in manners, culture and appearance” [from the urban dwellers of the plains, who were mostly bilingual in Turkish and Persian and rather indistinguishable in culture and physical appearance].¹⁸¹

Semenov was one of these Orientalists mentioned by Bergne. In 1924 he was commissioned by the authorities of the Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic, who were preparing for the NTD, to write what he called (in a letter to Bartol’d) “a historical-ethnographical outline of Turkestan, written on the orders (to put it mildly) of the journal ‘The National Economy of Central Asia’.”¹⁸² On the one hand, the paper began with the statement that most Central Asians belonged to “the mixed Turkish-Iranian settled population of many cities and settlements (the so-called Sarts).”¹⁸³ On the other hand, it categorised the Tajiks as one of the “Iranian” and “indigenous [*korennoi*]” peoples “of the country [the Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic],” and described them as “the descendants of one of the most cultured peoples of Central Asia.” It also pointed out that:

*[The Tajiks] are usually are divided into the Tajiks of the plains and the Mountain Tajiks [...]. The mixing of the Tajiks of the plain with other peoples affected their type/physical appearance [tip], the purity of their Persian language, which contains many Turkish elements[;] while the Mountain Tajiks, isolated by the mountains from the numerous vicissitudes of this country’s history, have preserved their Aryan type and language in great purity.*¹⁸⁴

Semenov’s lines helped to propagate among both European Bolsheviks and Central Asian intellectuals in Soviet Central Asia the idea that there was not only a cultural and linguistic but also a racial difference between the Tajiks of the mountains and those of the plains (and hence, crucially, between the Tajiks and the Uzbeks). It is important to note, however, that Semenov’s “On the Problem of the National Delimitation of Central Asia” differentiated between the Tajiks of the mountains and those of the plains without entirely separating them. This was critical if the term

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

¹⁸² A.A.S., b13, f6, p132: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol’d on the 27.01.1925.

¹⁸³ A.A.S., b10, f2, p1; Semenov, Aleksandr, “K probleme....”

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Tajik was to signify more than merely an obscure minority in remote Badakhshan that was rather insignificant in numbers and held little cultural prestige – which seems to have been the way in which Central Asia’s urban elite saw the Tajiks.¹⁸⁵ It is telling in this respect that the initial proposal for a Tajik state (which had been put forward by the Central Asian Bureau’s [*Sredazbiuro*] Special Commission for the NTD in early May 1924) had intended the creation of merely a Tajik Autonomous Province (*Oblast’*) within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.¹⁸⁶ Only in October 1924 was the status of the future Tajik state upgraded to that of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, as a result of the intervention of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, which otherwise gave its blessing to the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic’s recommendations concerning the NTD.¹⁸⁷ It almost certainly facilitated the upgrade of the Tajik state that a reputable academic, such as Semenov, subsumed the “Tajiks of the plains and the Mountain Tajiks” under *one* national category on the basis of their alleged common Iranian and hence Aryan descent.

Semenov was, of course, aware of how diverse and far from united around some sense of common Iranian identity the various Iranian-speaking peoples of Central Asia were. He knew about of the divisions between groups that after the NTD would be united in one Tajik state (and hence subsumed under the category Tajik). Experiences like the Bobrinskoi expedition and the encounter with Haidar Sho and other Ismailis had taught him to differentiate, not only between Mountain and Valley Tajiks, but also between the Tajiks and other groups that spoke predominately Iranian languages, such as the Shughnis, whom in 1916 he described as a “people” [*narod*] and “ethnographic unit” in his “History of Shughnan.”¹⁸⁸ In 1912 he had published another article, entitled “About the Religious Beliefs of the Ismailis of Shughnan”, which explicitly distinguished the Shughnis from the Tajiks and read:

¹⁸⁵ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.21.

¹⁸⁶ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, pp.42&45.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁸⁸ In the introduction of the article Semenov wrote: “And if every people [*narod*] – as an ethnographic unit – has the right to scientific attention in all its aspects, then it would seem to us that the Shughni, as well, are fully worthy of being studied from a philological and religious angle, their past, too, is not uninteresting, even if it is hidden under a web of legends and ambiguities.” See: Aleksandr Semenov, *Istoriia Shughnana (History of Shughnan)* (Tashkent: Tipografiia pri kantseliarii General-Gubernatora, 1916), p.lf.

*The Shughnis do not look very favourably on the surrounding peoples [narodnosti]. The neighbouring Tajiks (Todzhik) of Darvaz and Badakhshan, for instance, they regard with contempt and call the former immigrants from all over the place.*¹⁸⁹

Semenov thus knew how academic, artificial and generalising was the subsumption of these various Iranophone peoples under the category Tajik. And his “On the Problem of National Delimitation of Central Asia” listed the Shughnis (described as “*Shugnano-Roshantsy*”) separately from the Tajiks. Still, he included them into the category of “other Iranian peoples, which are related to the Tajiks.”¹⁹⁰ It was one thing to argue, as Semenov did, that all these groups were somehow historically and linguistically related. But it was quite something else to deduce from it that all of them should form a national community within a Tajik state. But it was not up to him to comment on the political agenda. His role was to help the Soviet state reach an informed decision. The information he contributed, in particular on the Mountain Tajiks, however, proved to be an essential component of the academic and political case for the establishment of a Tajik state.

On the whole, Semenov’s contribution to the emergence of Tajikistan was that he facilitated – at a critical point in time, and from a position of scholarly authority – the transformation of the term Tajik from what it had been (according to Bert Fragner) for centuries prior to the Russian conquest – namely not an ethnic designation but a socio-cultural category – into an ethno-linguistic classification that constituted the basis of the idea of a (Soviet) Tajik nation.¹⁹¹ Bartol’d captured the essence of this transformation rather well in his entry “Tadjik/[*Tadzhiki*]” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which was published in 1925. The article highlighted both

¹⁸⁹ Aleksandr Semenov, “Iz oblasti religioznykh verovanii shugnanskikh...,” p.527.

¹⁹⁰ A.A.S., b10, f2, p14; Semenov, A.A. “K probleme....”

¹⁹¹ Fragner has argued that those who tended to fall under this (socio-cultural) category “Tajik”, i.e. the “nominal precursors” of the modern Tajiks, were not those speaking an Iranian language (Persian-speaking nomads, for instance, would not have included in it, but the “settled, nontribal or detribalized groups of the population that were influenced by Iranian culture.” With this connotation the term had been in use, according to Fragner, from Timurid times onwards “distinguishing the Turkic clans, politically and militarily dominant for centuries, from the settled social groups acculturated to New Persian.” See: Bert Fragner, ‘The Nationalization of the Uzbeks and Tajiks’ in: Edward Allworth, ed., *Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics, and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p.15.

the modernity of the term Tajik as an ethno-linguistic classification and its political importance as a prerequisite for the establishment of a Tajik nation state:

Nowadays [...] [t]he Russians subsume under the name 'Tajik' all Iranian peoples [narodnosti] of Turkestan – both the Tajiks as such [sobstvenno Tadjiki], i.e. the population that speaks Tojiki (the Tajik language) [...], and the mountain peoples settling alongside the river Panj and the higher reaches of the Zarafshan who have a special status in terms of language. In keeping this usage of the term [iskhodia iz etogo znachenii] the autonomous republic of Tajikistan was created in 1924 with its capital Dushambe [...].¹⁹²

Semenov played an important part in establishing this new meaning of the term Tajik. “On the Problem of National Delimitation of Central Asia” employed exactly this rather indiscriminate definition of the term:

[...] [B]etween the Arab conquest of Central Asia and the 13th century AD, thanks to the large number of written sources that have been preserved, the ethnical composition of the country becomes more discernable. The Sogdians, Tocharians and others disappear from the scene as separate cultured peoples [kul'turnie narodnosti] of Iranian origin, and the entire Iranian population consolidates around the name [ob'ediniaetsia v nazvanii] Tajiks.¹⁹³

It was indeed – as Bartol'd had written – “[i]n keeping this usage of the term [that] the autonomous republic of Tajikistan was created in 1924 [...]” This definition of the term Tajik ensured the official classification of the Tajiks as a titular nationality in Soviet parlance. The only thing that those falling under this category had in common, was that they spoke languages that were considered Iranian. By ascribing Iranian (and hence Aryan) origin to them, however, the term Tajik was transformed into an ethno-linguistic classification, which must be regarded as the nucleus of the idea of a Tajik nation and as the precondition for the establishment of Tajikistan.

¹⁹² Vasilii Bartol'd, “Tadjiki (iz Entsiklopedii islama)” (The Tajiks [from the Encyclopaedia of Islam]), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia...* (Vol. 2 part I), p.470.

¹⁹³ A.A.S.b10,f2,p1; Semenov, Aleksandr, “K probleme... ”

Semenov's rationale for promoting the idea of a Tajik nation of Aryan descent

What were Semenov's motives for conceptualising the Tajiks as a nation of Aryan descent, thereby facilitating the establishment of Tajikistan during the 1920s? And how aware was he of the political implications of his work? On the one hand, as a prominent representative of the *ancien régime*, Semenov had little choice but to cooperate with the Soviet authorities and prove himself useful to them. As I have mentioned above, the authorities of Soviet Turkestan essentially ordered him to write 'On the Problem of National Delimitation of Central Asia'. On the other hand, he had considerable leeway in deciding what he would write, in that and other articles. Nobody compelled him to portray the Tajiks as "the descendants of one of the most cultured peoples of Central Asia" and to praise their "Aryan genius", as he did in 'On the Problem of National Delimitation of Central Asia' and in 'A Short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People' respectively. That he did so, however, influenced the dynamics of the NTD, and continues to inform Tajik nationalist discourse today. Consequently, explaining why he described the Tajiks in a certain manner sheds light on his role as someone who implemented Bolshevik nationalities policy, influenced it, and even exploited it to his own advantage.

Arguing that Semenov employed the Aryan theme somewhat strategically does not mean that he regarded the hypothesis of the Tajiks' Aryan descent as spurious. A close look at his works shows that he used the term Aryan synonymously with the term Indo-European. Whereas in one (unpublished) paper he spoke of an "Iranian branch" of the "great Indo-European family of peoples", in another (published) article he used the formulation "Iranian group of the great Aryan tribe" instead.¹⁹⁴ This suggests that he considered the Tajiks' Aryan (or Indo-European) descent to be a function of their Iranian ancestry.¹⁹⁵ The simplest answer to the question of why

¹⁹⁴ I am referring to "A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people" and "Material monuments of Aryan Culture."

¹⁹⁵ In fact, in a 1944 edition of "Material monuments of Aryan Culture" the term Aryan – which by then had been thoroughly discredited by Nazi race ideology – was replaced with Iranian throughout the paper, thereby illustrating how interwoven the meaning of these two terms were. See: Aleksandr Semenov, *Material'nye Pamiatniki Iranskoi Kul'tury V Srednei Azii* (Stalinabad: State Publishing House of the Council of People's Commissars of the Tajik SSR, 1944), p.3.

Semenov ascribed Aryan descent to the Tajiks is that he conceptualised them as an Iranophone people. In his opinion, the linchpin of the Tajiks' Aryan origin was their Iranian ancestry. To uncouple the assumption of Iranian ancestry from the question of language, however, was impossible. In other words, the Aryan hypothesis hinged on the observation that the Tajiks spoke Iranian languages. These languages were regarded as Indo-European and hence as descendent from an assumed Indo-European *Ursprache*. From this it was then deduced that the Tajiks stemmed from the speakers of this Indo-European *Ursprache* – the Aryans. As I have shown, not only Semenov but also Bartol'd supported this hypothesis. A few more steps were required, however, for a scholarly hypothesis, which identified the indigenous inhabitants of Central Asia as Aryans, to be turned into a myth about national identity and superiority. The question thus arises why Semenov took these steps during the NTD, even though he had shown no interest in doing so before 1917. He showed much less restraint in portraying the Tajiks as the descendants of Aryans (and as, not only culturally and linguistically, but racially kindred to them) during the mid-1920s, than he had done before 1917, when the Aryan subject had been high on the agenda of many of his colleagues in Turkestan. This suggests that he employed the Aryan rhetoric strategically during the NTD. He did so for reasons that I will outline in the following.

Ascribing Aryan ancestry to the Tajiks allowed Semenov to portray and study Tajik history in connection with Iranian history and in a wider regional context. The Aryan theme helped him to represent Tajik and Central Asian history for what he believed it to be: not peripheral and provincial, but as cosmopolitan and significant in a regional and global context. His earlier-mentioned complaint that Edward Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* paid too little attention to Central Asian poets is telling in this respect. According to Semenov, poets from Transoxiana, were part of a wider Persian literary tradition; and the so-called Mountain Tajiks, despite their material poverty and geographical isolation, were rich in languages, customs and traditions, all of which promised to shed light on ancient Iranian history and on the origins of one of the oldest monotheistic religions – Zoroastrianism. Alfrid Bustanov has stressed that, following the NTD, scholars were pushed to write Central Asian history not from a regional but from a national point of view. He argued that, while

some members of Bartol'd's school acquiesced to the rules of Marxist historiography, "and participated in state-sponsored campaigns to produce national historiographies; others, like Aleksandr A. Semenov, did not give up their regional perspective."¹⁹⁶ In fact, Semenov did participate in the creation of national historiographies, which is precisely why – as Bustanov has also pointed out – he was "able to [...] keep [his] institutional positions and authority [...]."¹⁹⁷ At the same time, Semenov did indeed favour a regional approach to Central Asian history, and the Aryan theme was part of that approach. A good example is his 'Material Monuments of Aryan Culture', which described the "[t]he current Tajik republic" as "merely an insignificant part of the rich archaeological inventory of the Aryans of Central Asia" and as "one of many details in the overall picture of the country's history [...]." Traces of that ancient Aryan culture, according to the paper, could be found "in the (Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirgiz [later Kazakh], Kara-Kirgiz [later Kirgiz] and Kara-Kalpak) autonomous republics and provinces of the former Turkestan."¹⁹⁸ It is little surprising that advocates of a "Greater Tajikistan" referred to Semenov's paper to buttress their territorial claims, as Abashin has pointed out.¹⁹⁹ Semenov's intent, however, had not been to spur Tajik irredentism, but to write about Central Asia's past from a regional perspective.

Another striking example of Semenov's regional approach to Central Asian history and of his attempt to connect Tajik to Persian history is his unpublished paper 'An Article on Turkestan', which is a brief and general overview over the history of Turkestan. An anonymous reviewer of Semenov's archive dated the paper to 1917, but it is much more likely that it was composed during the early 1920s.²⁰⁰ Its opening paragraph read:

¹⁹⁶ Alfrid Bustanov, "Settling the Past: Soviet Oriental Projects in Leningrad and Alma-Ata" (PhD, University of Amsterdam), p.23

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.334.

¹⁹⁸ A.A.Semenov, "Material'nye pamiatniki ariiskoi...", p.113.

¹⁹⁹ S. N. Abashin, *Natsionalizmy V Srednei...*, p.190f; Incidentally, the authors of the latest *History of the Tajik People*, which the Tajik Academy of Sciences published 2010, cited the above-quoted to illustrate the full extent of the "area of settlement of the Tajiks during the 18th and 19th centuries." See: R. M. Masov et al., ed., *Istoriia Tadzhikskogo Naroda* [History of the Tajik people], Vol. 4 (Dushanbe: Donish; Instituti ta'rikh, bostonshinosi va mardumshinosii ba nomi A.Donish, 2010), p.290.

²⁰⁰ A.A.S., b12, f14, pp1-4: "Stat'ia o Turkestane" (An Article on Turkestan); The article's terminology, the sort of paper it was written on and the fact that its spelling adhered to the reformed Russian

*The great territory of Turkestan, [...], is home to a great variety of ethnicities, alone the country's so-called indigenous multi-tribal population consists essentially out of two races: Aryan and Turkic-Mongolic, with a the small amount of Semites, Arabs and Jews. The most ancient inhabitants of Turkestan are the Tajiks, who in terms of blood and language are very close relatives of the Persians. Already in the distant past the Tajiks were the cultivators of civilisation in this region, they were proliferating the arts and the finest social conditions. Their broad literature reveals the great achievements of the human spirit and reflects the entire versatility of the Aryan genius and the sophisticated influences of various cultures of the east and of the west on this ancient nation. Having been part of the great Persian monarchies of the Achaemenids and Sassanids, Turkestan, just like the whole of Iraq, was situated between China and India on the one side and the Greco-Roman world on the other. Not only was Greek philosophy and art well received [...] by the Persians at the time of the Achaemenids and Sassanids, i.e. in the period from the 4th century BC until the 7th century AD, [...]; Iran was under an equally strong cultural influence from the east, from China and India – those classical countries of silk and china, of precise craftsmanship, which possessed a deep and unique philosophy and a not less inimitable music. All these influences affected the broad space of Iran, reinforcing each other, and forming a unique amalgam of various cultures, and created one of the most ancient and distinctive civilisations – Persia.*²⁰¹

On the one hand, the text was a short, general and accessible tribute to the historical significance and cultural wealth of a region at the crossroads of ancient civilisations. In this sense, it displayed a rather cosmopolitan approach, describing Persia as a “unique amalgam of various cultures.” On the other hand, it is telling that Semenov's take on Turkestan's past began with an emphasis on the Tajiks' indigenous status (“most ancient inhabitants”), their racial and cultural connection

orthography all suggest such a dating. Most importantly, however, Semenov authored three other articles during the mid 1920s which dealt with similar (rather general) topics, namely ‘On the problem of national delimitation of Central Asia’, ‘A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people’ (probably published in 1925), and ‘Material monuments of Aryan Culture.’

²⁰¹ A.A.S., b12, f14, pp1-4: “Stat'ia o Turkestane.”

with the Persians (“blood and language”) and their civilisational predominance (“the cultivators of civilisation”) in Turkestan. That being said, Semenov also stressed that the “achievements of the local Turks in the sphere of art found their expression in excellent carpets and felted textiles [...]” and that:

*Worth our attention are also the artifacts of the popular creativity [narodnoe tvorchestvo] of the Central Asian Turks, the epic sagas, folk tales and songs, which are characterised by a sincerity of feeling, a directness of emotions of the primitive [pervobitni] man, and by wit and fantasy.*²⁰²

On the whole, however, he argued that Turkestan had been shaped most profoundly by the “Persian-Muslim culture”, adding that:

*The life-style of the higher classes was Persian, and such was the language of state and of the governmental offices. The Tajiks, because of their high culture, were the most suitable element for the staffing of various posts in the government and education sector; thereby they instilled Persian culture into the one of the Turkic conquerors and subdued them to their civilising influence.*²⁰³

To reserve Persian culture for a Persian/Tajik people, to define that people as a racial community (based on the conflation of language and race), and to attribute a “civilising influence” to it is both essentialising and inaccurate. It is one thing to stress the sophistication and dominance of Persian culture (as an intellectual construct), but it is quite something else to regard this culture as the exclusive creation of a specific race or ethnic group. And to accredit the development of this culture to some vague Aryan genius is a racist fallacy. To some extent, ‘An Article on Turkestan’ reflects Semenov’s biased (Persophile) vision of Central Asian history, its conceptual weaknesses, and, more broadly, the influence of Krymskii and the scholarship on the Aryan subject. At the same time, the paper bespeaks Semenov’s attempt to stress the need to have a holistic understanding of the region’s history as part of a wider cosmopolitan Persianate world.

The other reason for Semenov to employ the Aryan theme in relation to Central Asian history was that it allowed him to represent the Persian language,

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

literature and other elements of what he regarded as Iranian culture – i.e. the “culture of the Iranian speaking peoples (Tajiks, Persians, Parthians, etc.) for certain historical periods [...],” as he explained in one of his papers in the late 1940s – as an inherent and indispensable part of Central Asia.²⁰⁴ The Aryan theme allowed Semenov to portray the Tajiks as an Iranian, indigenous and distinct nationality, whose culture had to be reckoned with. Whenever he spoke of Aryan culture, genius and aborigines during the 1920s, he wished to flag up something he considered worthy of scholarly attention and preservation. In the case of “A Short Outline of the Historical Fortunes of the Tajik People”, this was “local architecture, [...] fretwork and ironwork, [...] magnificent ceramics, [...] the art of binding books, [...] exquisite miniatures, and, most importantly, [...] literature [...]”.²⁰⁵ In the case of “Material Monuments of Aryan Culture”, it was the “colossal archaeological treasure house, which had neither been studied nor sufficiently surveyed.”²⁰⁶ In order to highlight the importance of researching Central Asia’s monuments of antiquity, he described them as the “archaeological inventory of the Aryans of Central Asia.” He hoped that depicting ancient sites as the national heritage of the Tajiks would increase the chances of them being studied and preserved. His primary concern was not the establishment of a Tajik state, but rather the potentially beneficial consequences of this step for the study of Persianate Central Asia (and hence thus for his own career and survival). He especially welcomed the prospect of Persian being officially recognised as the national language of a titular Soviet Tajik nation, rather than being dismissed as a feudal, elitist and non-proletarian remnant of foreign Irano-Islamic influences. That way, the language would be sanctioned and promoted by the state (via schools, institutions of higher learning and research, the media, the arts and humanities, etc.), which was, of course, in his professional interest. The recognition

²⁰⁴ I have taken this quote from an article by Nina Kuznetsova, who published a short survey of Semenov’s archive in Dushanbe in 1971, has pointed out that in the course of the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns of the late 1940s, Semenov was accused by his opponents, such as Sergei Tolstov, of having explained the emergence of relics of material culture in Central Asia “with the influence or cultural impact of foreign [*zarubezhnyi*] Iran.” This prompted Semenov to publicly defend his terminology, and to explain what he meant with the collective term “Iranian culture.” See: Nina Kuznetsova, “Obzor Arkhiva Akademika...”, p.35f. Unfortunately, the relevant article by Semenov from which Kuznetsova has quoted has not been preserved in the archive.

²⁰⁵ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: “Kratkii ocherk....”

²⁰⁶ A.A.Semenov, “Material'nye pamiatniki ariiskoi...”, p.113.

of Tajik statehood and official promotion of Tajik national culture and language promised to preserve at least some part of Persianate Central Asia in the Soviet Union, which must have reconciled Semenov with the project of Tajik nation-building. After all, Persian literature and poetry, manuscripts and miniatures and other “things of the higher order” had always captured the imagination of the scholar (and snob) in him. As a result, during the 1920s he was prepared to portray a whole range of cultural riches as the manifestation of the Tajiks’ “Aryan genius” and hence as an inherent and important part of Central Asian cultural heritage, in the hope that this would prevent them from sinking into oblivion.

The same strategy of salvaging Central Asia’s Persian literature for the Soviet future in the guise of Tajik national culture was pursued by Sadriddin Aini in his *Specimen of Tajik literature*. The book, which had been commissioned by the Tajik authorities in the spring of 1925 and was published the following year, can be considered as one of the earliest and most influential written manifestations of Tajik nationalism.²⁰⁷ In its foreword, Aini conflated race and language to depict the Tajiks, not only as a nation of Persian speakers, but also as one of Aryan descent:

*[...] [t]he flourishing of the Tajik language and literature in these lands [Mawarannahr and Turkestan] is not merely the result of the rule of the Samanids or of the immigration of Iranians[:] its genuine cause is the existence in these lands of a great people [qavm] by the name of ‘Tojik’, which belongs to the Aryan race [ki mansub ba irqi Orist].*²⁰⁸

Aini’s emphasis on the alleged racial distinctiveness of the Tajiks allowed him to essentialise and reify Tajik national identity, and to defend it against Central Asian Turkist intellectuals, such as Abdulrauf Fitrat, who questioned the idea of a Tajik nation. According to Aini, his book “On the Basis of Precise Historical Facts” silenced those “[...] Pan-Turkists [who] denied the necessity to create a Tajik republic [...]” and who claimed that “[...] there is no such people as the Tajiks in Central Asia [...], [and that] the Tajiks are the same Uzbeks, who under the influence of the Iranians and

²⁰⁷ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.161; and: Sadriddin Aini, *Sobranie Sochinenii* [Collected Works], Vol. 1 (Moskva: Khudozh. Lit-ra, 1971), p.118.

²⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, in view of the recent “Aryan revival” in Tajikistan, Aini’s words were picked up in the 2010 edition of his book and used as an epigraph. See: Sadriddin Aini, *Namunai Adabiëti Tojik* [Speciment of Tajik Literature] (Dushanbe: Adib, 2010), p.4.

the madrasa have lost their native Uzbek language.”²⁰⁹ By labelling his opponents as Pan-Turkists, Aini resorted to a prominent Soviet ideological trope (that of the struggle between progressive Bolsheviks and their allies, on the one hand, and reactionaries, such as the Pan-Turkists or Pan-Islamists, on the other), thereby simplifying the more complex conflict that accompanied (and shaped) the NTD and involved various factions and personal rivalries.²¹⁰ Still, Aini’s polemic with his opponents reflects an attitude towards the Persian/Tajik language that was prevalent among some influential Central Asian intellectuals during the 1920s, namely, the view that Persian was essentially a foreign Iranian import to an otherwise Turkic Central Asia. Paul Bergne has pointed out that, following the establishment of the People’s Republic of Bukhara in September 1920, its leader, “Faizulla Khojaev, declared Uzbek to be the official language of the state and instituted a conscious campaign to downgrade the Persian language.”²¹¹ Khalid has demonstrated that, prior to 1917, the critique of the old-method religious schools voiced by Muslim reformists (the so-called *Jadids*), “often carried an anti-Iranian subtext.”²¹² (This critique is echoed in the above-mentioned notion that the Tajiks are merely Uzbeks who have lost their mother tongue “under the influence of the Iranians and the *madrasa* [my emphasis].”) In order to understand this resistance against Persian, one needs to bear in mind that it had been the official language of

²⁰⁹ Sadriddin Aini, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, p.118.

²¹⁰ Given the early fluidity of Tajik and Uzbek identity, scholars, such as John Schoeberlein-Engel, Gero Fedtke, Adeeb Khalid and Franz Wennberg have maintained that the Central Asian agents of the NTD chose their nationality on the basis of personal antagonisms and alliances. Franz Wennberg, for instance, has pointed out that early 20th century Bukharan society typically displayed “pronounced division[s] in the ranks of political actors,” such as the clear split among the Bukharan Jadids between Khojaev and Muhiddinov. When the former went to Tashkent, seeking the support of the Bolshevik revolutionary Fedor Kolesov, the latter travelled to Moscow. Subsequently, the first would head the government of the Uzbek SSR, the second that of Tajikistan. See: Franz Wennberg, *An Inquiry into Bukharan Qadimism: Mīrzā Salīm-Bīk* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002), p.61; John Samuel Schoeberlein-Engel, “Identity in Central Asia: Construction and Contention in the Conceptions of “Özbek,” “Tājik,” “Muslim,” “Samarqandi” and Other Groups” (PhD, Harvard University); Gero Fedtke, “How Bukharans Turned into Uzbeks and Tajiks: Soviet Nationalities Policy in the Light of a Personal Rivalry,” *Patterns of Transformation in and Around Uzbekistan* (2007), pp.19-50; Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015, forthcoming).

²¹¹ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.26f.

²¹² According to Khalid, in 1914 “[a] Jadid schoolteacher complained that although old-style maktab teachers “are Turks, [they] do not know their mother tongue and do not teach it, but rather look upon it... with hatred. Instead, they waste the poor children’s time with Persian fairy tales and puzzles, whose harmfulness in the present day is quite obvious.” See: Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.208.

the Emirate of Bukhara, a polity that was widely considered and portrayed by the Bolsheviks and their Central Asian allies as the bulwark of Islamic bigotry.²¹³ With its lyric and poetic air of an antiquated elite and prestige language, Persian compared rather unfavourably with Turkish, which was perceived as the more modern, vigorous and national-democratic language by many Bolsheviks and especially by many Central Asian intellectuals, who had been influenced by a Turkism, which was inspired by the prestige of the Ottoman empire and movements such as the Young Turks. In January 1925, the Tashkent newspaper *Turkestan*, for instance, published an article that reflects this notion:

*The desire to use the Tajik language means, firstly, a striving to shun life, because life, the movement of history are opposed to it; secondly, the fact of its adoption means the adoption of a useless and superfluous language, and that's why Tajiks must immediately begin to use the Uzbek language and not cling to a separate Tajik language [...] the path of socialist progress as already decided its fate.*²¹⁴

Similarly, Jiří Bečka has pointed out that Aini's book was met with resistance by "propagators of the theory of proletcult, who conceived the literary revolution as the negation of all classical and pre-Revolutionary literature."²¹⁵ Persian, which for centuries had dominated the spheres of "religion, science, literature, administration, correspondence and trade" in the multilingual society of Transoxiana, as Lutz Rzehak has pointed out, was especially threatened by such radical iconoclastic trends.²¹⁶ By conceptualising Persian (*Farsi*) as *Tojiki* (a process described by Rzehak), i.e. as national language and attribute of the Tajiks, and by associating the language, not primarily with foreign Iran, but with the Central Asia's own supposed ancient Aryan past, however, there was a chance of rehabilitating Persian and Persianate

²¹³ Bert Fragner, "Sowjetmacht und Islam: Die Revolution von Buchara", in: Hans Robert Roemer, Ulrich Haarmann and Peter Bachmann, *Die Islamische Welt Zwischen Mittelalter Und Neuzeit: Festschrift Für Hans Robert Roemer Zum 65. Geburtstag* [The Islamic world between Middle Ages and the Modern Period: Festschrift on the occasion of Hans Robert Roemer's 65. anniversary] (Beirut; Wiesbaden: Ergon, 1979), p.153f.

²¹⁴ Rahim Masovich Masov, *Tadzhiki: Istoriia Natsional'noi Tragedii (The Tajiks: The History of a National Tragedy)*, (Irfon, 2008), p.51.

²¹⁵ Jiří Bečka, *Sadriddin Ayni: Father of Modern Tajik Culture* (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, Seminario di studi asiatici, 1980), p.26.

²¹⁶ Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.XI.

culture. Precisely in order to make this connection to the “Aryan dawn of history”, Aini’s book began with the assertion that the Tajiks had lived in Central Asia “from the moment history was recorded [*az boze, ki vaqoe’ro ta’rikh kaid mekunad*] [...]”, and that they “belong[ed] to the Aryan race.”²¹⁷ There is little doubt that Aini and other Central Asian writers, who used this notion of an Aryan race, had been influenced (directly or indirectly) by the scholarship of Semenov and other Russian and European Orientalists, who had portrayed the Tajiks as the descendants of the Aryan aborigines of Central Asia. In the same vein, the unpublished ‘An Article on Turkestan’, although it described the Tajiks as “in terms of blood and language are very close relatives of the Persians [...]”, also stressed that they were not Iranian immigrants but “more archaic proto-Persian[s].”²¹⁸ For Aini to be able to claim in 1925 that the Tajiks were not merely Persianised Uzbeks, but that they stemmed from the Aryan autochthons of Central Asia, however, it was of vital importance that such an esteemed Russian Orientalist as Semenov had recently, and in an authoritative Soviet journal, described the Tajiks as one of the Central Asia’s “Iranian” and “indigenous” peoples, thereby making a clear distinction between the Uzbeks and the Tajiks.²¹⁹

The Bobrinskoi expedition and the origins of Tajik statehood

A fundamental aspect of the primordial, essentialist and ethnocentric national identity promoted by the Tajik state today is the notion of Aryan descent, which, to use Semenov’s words, originated from the perception of the Mountain Tajiks as having preserved “their Aryan type and language in great purity [...].”²²⁰ This perception stood at the beginning of Tajik statehood, since it allowed scholars to differentiate between the often bilingual (in Turkish and Persian) population of the plains and cities, on the one hand, and the speakers of Persian and other Iranian languages of the mountains, on the other, thereby paving the way for the conceptualisation of the Tajiks as a separate ethnic group. A major stepping stone on

²¹⁷ Sadriddin Aini, *Namunai Adabiëti...*, p.9.

²¹⁸ A.A.S., b12, f14, pp1-4: “Stat’ia o Turkestane.”

²¹⁹ A.A.S., b10, f2, p1: Semenov, Aleksandr, “K probleme....”

²²⁰ Ibid.

this path was the Bobrinskoi expedition of 1898, after which Semenov began, not only to highlight the distinctiveness of the Tajiks of the mountains, but also to idealise them as essentially ‘noble savages’, as I have outlined earlier. This is especially evident in his *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*, in which, after having stressed the physical fitness of the hardened mountaineers, he wrote:

*[...] [this is] a general sketch of the Mountain Tajik with all typical external features, which so sharply distinguish him from the nimble, cunning and feeble Lowland Tajik, whose sole advantageous difference from the mountaineer is his fancy outfit, for which the poor and unsophisticated clothes of the former are no match.*²²¹

In part, Semenov’s “defence” of the Mountain Tajiks was a reaction to urban Tajiks’ condescending and contemptuous attitude towards them.²²² More importantly, however, it was indicative of the same sympathetic, patronising and strategic stance towards the Ismailis that had been propagated by Bobrinskoi at the turn of the century. In fact, Bobrinskoi’s earlier-mentioned (p.183ff) advocacy of the official recognition of the Ismailis as an independent denomination (and of the extension of Russian patronage over them) prefigured Semenov’s support for the recognition of the Tajiks as a Soviet nation, eligible for Bolshevik affirmative action.

Bobrinskoi’s and Semenov’s works on the Mountain Tajiks exhibit a level of sympathy for them that reflects this sense of Russian patronage. The former’s *The Mountaineers of the Upper Reaches of the River Panj*, for example, gave a very flattering account of the character of these ‘noble mountaineers’: “Self-respect, the absence of theft, the treatment of each other with greatest politeness, respect for the elderly, and gracefulness of manners – these are their distinctive features [...],” Semenov pointed out in his review of the book, adding that:

²²¹ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki...*, p.28.

²²² Rzehak has pointed out that an observation made by Semenov during his first trip to Central Asia as a student in 1897, indicates that the townspeople in Central Asia looked rather condescendingly upon the highlanders: “The summer of 1897 I could spend in the ‘Noble Bukhara’, where I was allowed to witness several times how a horde of elegant townsmen encircled an unfortunate foreigner from the mountains and encouraged him to tell a story, only to then burst out in collective laughing when he said ‘guftak’ instead of ‘guftagi’ (said, has said) or instead of ‘modar’ (mother) ‘ochai-mudar’ etc.” See: Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen...*, p.21.

*The book gains a lot from the author's affectionate attitude towards the people [narodnost'] he is describing, the Mountain Tajiks, who were cast to these harsh lands of peaks enshrouded in clouds and the blinding glare of permanent snow and ice by the will of fate and various peripeteias of history.*²²³

Semenov's and Bobrinskoi's writings on the Mountain Tajiks prefigured what the architects of the first Tajik state wrote concerning the Tajiks in the mid-1920s. The above-mentioned quote, for instance, facilitated the emergence of a Tajik persecution myth, i.e. the notion that the Tajiks were forced into the inaccessible mountains to escape various misfortunes. Bobrinskoi evoked an image of the downtrodden Mountain Tajiks, describing them as "harassed, dispossessed in a struggle beyond their strength, [...]oppressed by bad fate or by a ruthless despot or victor [...]"²²⁴ Like the notion of the Mountain Tajiks' Aryan pedigree, this persecution myth was instrumental in the establishment of the first Tajik state, because it allowed this state to be seen as an affirmative compensatory measure. Accordingly, the initial proposal for the creation of a modest Tajik Autonomous Province from 1924 read:

*The offer of autonomy to this province is especially significant, since no nation in the world has been subjected to such a long and heavy oppression as has the mountain Tajik nation. Driven by the victorious Turks into the inaccessible mountainous ravines, they were forced to lead a half-starved existence, to suffer a shortage of land and to struggle against the exceptionally harsh climate.*²²⁵

Bergne has suggested that these words contained "the kernel of a Tajik persecution myth which could be used later to consolidate the Tajik sense of common identity."²²⁶ The roots of the persecution myth, however, reach back further than 1924. It had been present in Bobrinskoi's work as well as Semenov's. His *Ethnographic Sketches of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*, for example, argued that the Tajiks had migrated from the "valleys of ancient Sogdiana

²²³ Aleksandr Semenov, "Bobrinskii, Duke A.A., Gortsy verkhov'ev..., p.99f.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.48.

²²⁶ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.128

and Bactriana” to the mountains of Eastern Bukhara.²²⁷ “One can only speculate about the causes of this resettlement [...],” Semenov wrote, adding:

*Perhaps the mountains served as a refuge to those fleeing from the invasions of the ‘Turanians’, from the unstoppable flood of the Arab conquerors, from the sword of the Mongols; or lastly, one might suppose that [...] [the highlands] were sought out by those whom worn out and exhausted by the continual wars of the various Timurids, Sheybanids and other restless rulers of Mawarannahr.*²²⁸

All of this shows that the publications resulting from the Bobrinskoi expedition, including the above-quoted work by Semenov, already contained the seeds of a Tajik persecution myth, which facilitated, not only the long-term consolidation of a Tajik sense of common identity, but also the labelling of the Tajiks as a historically oppressed people, who deserved certain compensatory rights, including a form of territorial autonomy within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, from which the future Tajik state would later emerge. Tellingly, the above-mentioned proposal for the establishment of a Tajik Autonomous Province read: “Although part of one of the most cultured nations in Asia, the possessors of a centuries-old culture and rich literature, they [the Mountain Tajiks] themselves were exceptionally ignorant.”²²⁹ The notion of the downtrodden Mountain Tajiks dovetailed with the compensatory anti-colonialism promoted by the Bolsheviks during the 1920s. It allowed advocates of some form of Tajik statehood to point to the alleged historical injustices which had befallen the Tajiks, and which needed to be compensated by the Soviet state.²³⁰ In other words, what Bobrinskoi had conceptualised as a form of imperial patronage was later re-fashioned as Soviet decolonisation and cultural and economic assistance to the formerly oppressed. Admittedly, neither Bobrinskoi nor Semenov invented what has become arguably the most central tenet of current Tajik nationalist

²²⁷ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki...*, p.19f.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁹ Paul Bergne, *Birth of Tajikistan...*, p.48.

²³⁰ Similarly, Botakoz Kassymbekova has pointed to the example of the former colonial administrator, Orientalist and Semenov’s colleague, Pavel Vvedenskii, who was part of a Special Commission for Tajikistan Affairs (formed in 1926 under the auspices of the Central Asian Economic Bureau) that identified the Tajiks “as an ‘oppressed nation’ because, [...], they had been expelled by tribal groups into the mountains.” See: Botakoz Kassymbekova, “Humans as Territory: Forced Resettlement and the Making of Soviet Tajikistan, 1920–38,” *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3-4 (2011), p.355.

discourse, namely the notion that the Tajiks are the descendants of the Aryan aborigines of Central Asia and the victims of (predominately Turkic) conquerors. Vambery had documented exactly the same narrative earlier in 1868, when he explained why some of those who were called Tajiks were uncomfortable with that name, which they deemed to be an “expression of contempt with which the Oezbeg [Uzbek] conquerors regard the subdued aborigines.”²³¹ What makes Semenov’s case so important, nonetheless, is that he reproduced this and similar notions about the Tajiks, thereby acting as a crucial link and medium through which they were transferred into the early Soviet period and into the discourse of (Tajik) nationhood, of which the above-mentioned proposal for the creation of the Tajik Autonomous Province is but one example.

To conclude, both in the late 19th century and even more so during the 1920s, Semenov’s portrayal of the Tajiks as the oppressed descendants of the indigenous Aryan population of Central Asia promoted metropolitan patronage over them. The only difference was that, whereas before 1917 he tended to oppose the Mountain Tajiks to the Tajiks of the plains, during the NTD he juxtaposed the Tajiks as a whole to the region’s Turkic population, thereby sharpening the contours of Tajik national identity. He did so, not as defender of Tajik national self-determination, but as a champion of Persianate culture and representative of what he most likely regarded as the successor state of the Russian empire. Trautmann has described the British Sanskritists whom he discussed in his book as “empire loyalists [...] for whom the relation of their intellectual work to the governance of India was by no means concealed or shamefaced.”²³² The same holds true for Semenov. He, too, was an empire loyalist and advocate of Russian and Soviet rule over Central Asia. But he was also an advocate of the preservation of what he regarded as Central Asia’s Persianate heritage. The rhetoric of Tajik nationalism and Aryan race was merely a means to this end.

²³¹ Armin Vambery, *Sketches of Central Asia: Additional Chapters on My Travels, Adventures, and on the Ethnology of Central Asia* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1868), p.334.

²³² Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British...*, p.19.

CONCLUSION

The Tajik and Pamiri filmmaker and one-time presidential candidate, Davlat Khudonazarov, discussed his book *The Pamir Expeditions of Duke A.A. Bobrinskoi of the Years 1895 and 1901*¹ in a recent interview, in which he also touched upon the link between the establishment of Tajikistan in 1924 and the scholarship of such Russian Orientalists as Semenov, who participated in one of Bobrinskoi's expeditions (as I have mentioned in final chapter of this thesis).² After having mentioned some of the "founding fathers of the Tajik S[oviet]S[ocialist]R[epublic]", such as Abduqodir Muhiddinov (the first head of the government of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic), and their Bolshevik allies, such as Andrei Znamenskii (the Plenipotentiary of the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in Central Asia), Khudonazarov argued that:

At the origins of Tajik statehood also stood [...] the scholars Nikolai Korzhenevskii³, Mikhail Andreev⁴ and Aleksandr Semenov. They studied the history and culture of the Tajiks, wrote much about our people, thereby demonstrating that the Tajiks were not a national minority, as was thought during the early 1920s, but a nation worthy of its own territory.⁵

Khudonazarov has put his finger on the important fact that the scholarship of Semenov and some of his colleagues existed not in an academic vacuum, but in a certain political and discursive context, in which it had potent implications for the emergence of Tajik statehood. Additionally, his focus on the Bobrinskoi expeditions

¹ Davlat Khudonazarov, *Pamirskie Ekspeditsiii Grafa A.A. Bobrinskogo 1895-1901 Godov: Etnograficheskii Al'bom* [The Pamir Expeditions of Duke A.A. Bobrinskoi of the years 1895 and 1901: Ethnographical Album] (Moscow: Nauka, 2013).

² Davlat Khudonazarov, "Ob odnoi nauchnoi oshibke, Ili istoriia bez politiki (about One Scholarly Inaccuracy, Or History without Politics)," <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=8655> (accessed 10/3, 2015).

³ Nikolai Korzhenevskii was a Russian geographer and explorer of the Pamirs, who had served in Turkestan's colonial administration before refashioning himself as a Soviet academic and lecturer at the Central Asian State University. He was also the editor of the volume *Tajikistan: An Anthology of Articles* and founding member of the *The Society for the Study of Tajikistan and the Iranian Peoples Beyond its Borders*. See: Efim Solomonovich Shagalov, *Pervoe Nauchnoe Obshchestvo Tadzhikistana*. (Tajikistan's First Scientific Society), (Dushanbe: Donish, 1966), p.7.

⁴ For more information on Andreev, see p.6.

⁵ Davlat Khudonazarov: "Ob odnoi nauchnoi... ."

highlights another crucial point, i.e. the fact that whatever Semenov and other scholars of his generation wrote about the Tajiks during the early Soviet period was informed by what had been published on the subject in the late imperial period. In fact, the Bobrinskoi expeditions and Semenov's career confirm what Vera Tolz and Adeeb Khalid have argued for the understanding of Soviet nationalities policy in general, namely that this policy needs to be seen in the context of discourses on nationhood and ethnicity that were articulated by Russian and Central Asian elites in the late imperial period.⁶

It is worth elaborating on Khudonazarov's claim that Semenov's work helped to demonstrate "that the Tajiks were not a national minority [...], but a nation [...]."⁷ This thesis has argued that Semenov did indeed help to conceptualise the Tajiks as a distinct nation; and that he did so both during the NTD and in the two decades preceding it. As chapter five has shown, his early writings on the Tajiks, such as *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz* (published in 1903), as well as his later work on the issue, such as 'On the Problem of National Delimitation of Central Asia' (published in 1924), helped to create (and promote among the participants of the NTD) the notion of the cultural, linguistic and alleged racial distinctiveness of the so-called Mountain Tajiks, which facilitated the official recognition of the Tajiks as a separate nationality eligible for its own national territory within the USSR. Moreover, connected to that notion of distinctiveness was the narrative of the alleged historical victimhood of the (Mountain) Tajiks, for whom "the mountains served as a refuge" from various invaders, as Semenov suggested in *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*.⁸ This Tajik persecution myth – to use the expression chosen by Paul Bergne – dovetailed with the declared anti-imperialist and compensatory ideological agenda of the early Soviet state, and further facilitated the establishment of the Tajik Autonomous

⁶ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.135; and: Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.2.

⁷ Davlat Khudonazarov: "Ob odnoi nauchnoi... ."

⁸ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki Zarafsanskich Gor, Karategina i Darvaza* [Ethnographic outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz] (Moskva: Izdanie Grafa A. A. Bobrinskogo, 1903), p.19f.

Soviet Socialist Republic in late 1924.⁹ In that sense, Semenov was indeed one of the midwives of Tajik statehood.

That being said, it is one thing to argue that Semenov was an advocate of the establishment of Tajikistan, and quite another thing to romanticise him in this role. He was not a partisan of Tajik nationalism, but a scholar and a bureaucrat, whose attachment to Tajikistan was not ideological but pragmatic. His relative affinity to the only officially Persian-speaking Soviet republic was first of all a function of his specialist skills and research interests in the field of Iranian Studies (*Iranistika*). For example, due to the lack of qualified personnel in early Soviet Central Asia (Botakoz Kassymbekova has spoken of “helpless imperialists” in this context), the authorities of the fledgling Soviet state called on his expertise in this field when preparing for the NTD.¹⁰ Semenov simply did not have the luxury to decline this opportunity to prove himself useful to the new regime. Among the distinct features that “set Soviet Oriental studies apart from what we know about other European ‘Orientalisms’ [...]”, were the “huge political pressures that Orientalists worked under, including physical threat and even annihilation [...]”, as Stephan Conermann and Michael Kemper have argued.¹¹ These pressures were even greater in the case of Semenov, whose past as a high-ranking colonial administrator rendered him particularly vulnerable. It is therefore important not to confuse compulsion with commitment when analysing his scholarship on Tajik issues during the 1920s. Both on the eve of and during the NTD, Semenov was not a defender of Tajik national self-determination, but a former colonial administrator and amateur scholar, eager to survive and to safeguard both his career and the maintenance in Central Asia of what he appears to have regarded as Russian rule in a new Soviet guise.

Between coercion on the one hand and opportunism on the other, however, Semenov did have a certain leeway for action in accordance with his own personal and professional preferences. And this leeway needs to be taken into consideration

⁹ Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p.128.

¹⁰ Botakoz Kassymbekova, “Helpless Imperialists: European State Workers in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s,” in: Heathershaw, John., Herzig, Edmund, ed., *The Transformation of Tajikistan: The Sources of Statehood* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.17-35.

¹¹ Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p.xiii.

when analysing his role as an advocate of Tajik statehood in Soviet Central Asia. As I have argued in the concluding chapter, Semenov welcomed and facilitated the establishment of the Tajik republic as a way of preserving and perpetuating the study and cultivation of Central Asia's Persianate cultural heritage. In his eyes, Tajikistan and the notion of Tajik national self-determination were vessels that promised to steer through the stormy waters of *Proletkult* and other iconoclastic impulses the Persian language, literature and other elements of what he regarded as Iranian culture in Central Asia. At the same time, Semenov was not a natural proponent of the NTD.¹² On the contrary, he regarded Turkestan as one entity and himself as a *Turkestanets*, as I have shown in chapter three. But he acquiesced in the Soviet government's decision to carry out the NTD; and like Bartol'd – who in 1924 protested against the authorities' failure to recognise the Tajiks as an 'indigenous nationality' – he opposed the exclusion of any of Central Asia's linguistic and cultural traditions on the grounds that they were branded foreign, backward or feudal, and that they lacked the official status of a titular or indigenous nationality.¹³ In other words, Semenov spoke the language of nationalism and self-determination in order to appeal to the concerns and ideology of the Soviet authorities, and to prompt them to recognise first and foremost the Persian language and literature as inherent features of Tajik national culture (and hence as a part of Soviet Tajikistan). This was a well-trying strategy, which he had already employed before 1917, when he repeatedly sought to raise awareness among his superiors in the colonial administration and in St. Petersburg of the fate of ancient sites on the territory of Russian Turkestan (as I have shown in chapter three). Semenov's role as a champion of Tajik statehood during the 1920s was thus merely an aspect of his broader concern for the preservation of Central Asia's cultural heritage.

¹² In one of his letters to the Vasilii Bartol'd (from November 1924), Semenov complained about the chaos the NTD was causing in the local academic, educational and research institutions. He wrote: "Here there is total perturbation in all institutions because of the delimitation. Who will be sent to other cities? Who will be closed down? The inventory and funds are being divided." A.A.S., b13, f6, p188: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V. Bartol'd from November 1924.

¹³ Vasilii Bartol'd, "Tadzhiki – Istoricheskii ocherk" (The Tajiks—A Historical Outline), in: Vasilii Bartol'd, *Akademik V. V. Bartol'd Sochineniia* [The Academician V. V. Barthold, Works], Vol. 2 part I (Moscow: Nauka, 1963), p.468.

Semenov's support for the establishment of a Tajik republic was rooted in an imperialist paradigm that worked in the interest of metropolitan rule in Central Asia, and it had been prefigured by the stance of members of the Russian imperial elite, such as Bobrinskoi, who, at the turn of the century, had advocated the extension of Russian imperial patronage over the allegedly downtrodden Mountain Tajiks. Semenov's endorsement of the fact that "the Tajik nation [...] [had] been led onto the broad path of self-determination [*samodeiatel'nost'*]" – as he wrote in an unpublished paper from the mid-1920s – is best understood as a somewhat updated expression of the same paternalistic vision of Russia's civilising mission in Central Asia. This approval had been an inherent part of his self-image as a *Turkestanets*, as well as that of his superiors and friends, such as Nil Lykoshin or Nikolai Mallitskii, (as I have argued in chapter three).¹⁴ In other words, Semenov was as sympathetic towards the Tajiks, as he was patronising. The same holds true for Bobrinskoi. "[W]hatever [Bobrinskoi] wrote about the Tajiks, was permeated by his great respect for the people, [...] whose life he studied [...]," Khudonazarov wrote in the above-mentioned interview.¹⁵ His words echo those of Semenov who, in 1909, in a review of one of Bobrinskoi's books, also praised "the author's affectionate attitude towards the people he is describing, the Mountain Tajiks [...]."¹⁶ Apart from being patronising, however, Bobrinskoi's and Semenov's attitude towards the Mountain Tajiks was reminiscent, not only of much of the scholarship on the Indo-European or Aryan subject, but also of the way British Orientalists had portrayed the mountainous population of British India, namely as essentially noble and innocent savages and "guardians of edenic sanctuaries [...]," who were diametrically opposed to the more sophisticated but morally corrupted inhabitants of the plains.¹⁷ According to Dane Kennedy, "[t]his binary opposition was part of what Said has

¹⁴ A.A.S., b12, f4, pp1-9: "Kratkii ocherk istoricheskikh sudeb tadzhikskogo naroda" (A short outline of the historical fortunes of the Tajik people).

¹⁵ Davlat Khudonazarov: "Ob odnoi nauchnoi... "

¹⁶ Aleksandr Semenov, "Bobrinskii, Duke A.A., Gortsy verkhov'ev Piandzha (Vakhantsy i Ishkashimtsy). Ocherki byta po putevym zametkam. [The Mountaineers of the Upper Reaches of the River Panj (the Vakhanians and Ishkashimians). Outlines of their Way of Life on the Basis of a Travelogue.] (Review)," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 80, no. 1 (1909), p.99.

¹⁷ Dane Kennedy, "Guardians of Edenic Sanctuaries: Paharis, Lepchas, and Todas in the British Mind," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991), pp.59&77.

termed the 'imaginative geography' of Orientalism"¹⁸ Semenov's above-mentioned *Ethnographic Outlines of the Zarafshan Mountains, Qarategin and Darvaz*, for example, claimed that the physical fitness of the hardened Mountain Tajik "sharply distinguish[es] him from the nimble, cunning and feeble Lowland Tajik [...]"¹⁹ Around 1900, this "imaginative geography" of Orientalism justified the Russian imperial patronage over the territories of Eastern Bukhara; during the NTD it helped to make the case for a separate Tajik state; and in present-day Tajikistan it is being employed to oppose a primordial, essentialist and ethnocentric Tajik national identity to its Uzbek counterpart.

All of the above suggests that Semenov's role as an advocate of Tajik statehood in Soviet Central Asia can only be explained with reference to his pre-revolutionary past. For that reason, this study has paid particular attention to:

- Semenov's educational background and his scholarly ethos (chapter I)
- the main stages of his career as a colonial administrator, and his capacity to exploit the synergies between his official duties and personal scholarly interests (chapter II);
- Semenov's concept of himself as a learned colonial administrator and *Turkestanets*, and his interest in Central Asian cultural heritage and his strategies for preserving it (chapter III)
- his understanding of the knowledge he was producing as both academic and potentially practical and politically applicable, and the colonial setting in which that knowledge was produced (chapter IV)
- the origins of Semenov's vision of the Tajiks as the descendants of Central Asia's Aryan aborigines, and his strategic employment of this notion during the 1920s to construct an essentialist Tajik national identity (chapter V).

On the whole, the present study has shown that, from the moment Semenov enrolled at the Lazarev Institute, he was eager to join Russia's imperial and cosmopolitan elite. As a member of the colonial administration of Russian Turkestan he saw himself as a representative of a Russian and cosmopolitan empire and as a

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Semenov, *Etnograficheskie Ocherki Zarafsanskich...*, p.28

learned civil servant, whose duty it was to both produce academic knowledge about Turkestan and to consolidate Russian rule and *grazhdanstvennost'* (civic values and a civilian life) on the empire's periphery. At the same time, both as a scholar and as an enlightened bureaucrat he criticised the Islamophobic and confrontational attitudes that were prevalent among Russia's ruling elite, and the ignorance of those who failed to see how "connected [Russians were] through strong and living bonds with the Muslim peoples [...]," as he wrote to Bartol'd in 1913.²⁰ Even after reinventing himself as a Soviet academician, Semenov retained this outlook. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that his admiration and nostalgia for the more pluralistic and cosmopolitan world he inhabited as a young man in Russian Turkestan only grew stronger with time. As I have mentioned in chapter four, he wrote an unpublished biographical study of the Bukharan dignitary, Mirza Salim Bek, in the mid-1940s,²¹ which bespeaks his admiration for this representative of the multilingual and highly cultivated and educated elite of the emirate, and his sense of connection to him. Likewise, a speech that Semenov gave in front of his colleagues in Tajikistan on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in September 1953 is permeated by the same sense of nostalgia:

*At this hour of my life, when I am inevitably reviewing my entire past, I cannot fail to say that throughout my long lifetime, during which – in the words of Sheikh Saadi [Shirazi] – 'I have tasted from destiny's hand the warm and the cold,' I never shunned the company of others. In my younger years I met and knew well numerous people of various nationalities, of diverse convictions and ideologies. About many of them you now only know from books or hearsay.*²²

One of these people "of various nationalities, of diverse convictions and ideologies" was Mirza Salim Bek, whom Semenov described as "[a] tall and lean old man with a characteristic Bukharo-Iranian face, notable for his refined manners and his very agreeable courtesy", and as "a typical Bukharan bureaucrat, very educated, well

²⁰ A.A.S., b13, f6, p.27: Letter from A.A.S. to V.V.Bartol'd on the 05.07.1913.

²¹ For an excellent account of Mirza Salim Bek's life, see: Franz Wennberg, *An Inquiry into Bukharan Qadīmism: Mīrzā Salīm-Bīk* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002).

²² Boris Litvinskii and Nariman Akramov, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov. Nauchno-Biograficheskii Ocherk*. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov: A scholarly-biographical outline] (Moskva: "Nauka", 1971), p.136.

read, knowing Persian, Turkish, Arabic and Russian and superbly familiar with the history of the east and Russia [...].”²³ The Persian language and culture were an inherent part of Salim Bek’s universe; and Semenov’s advocacy of Tajik statehood must be regarded, at least in part, as an effort to preserve an aspect of this cosmopolitan world. Ironically, however, as the state that was created in the process has become more independent and more adamant in its adulation of the Persian language and literature than Semenov ever intended (or could have imagined), cosmopolitanism has fallen victim to the essentialist national identity he had himself helped to create.

²³ A.A.S, b12, f3 and b9, f12: “The last Bukharan historian and courtier Mirza Muhammed Salim Bek ‘*Parvanachi*’.”

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