

Commemorating the Russian Conquest of Central Asia

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Sacred to the perpetual memory of a great company of Christian people, chiefly women and children, who near this spot were cruelly murdered by the followers of the rebel Nana Dhundu Panth of Bithur, and cast, the dying with the dead, into the well below, on the xv day of July, MDCCCLVII

Inscription on the monument over the well at Cawnpore, 1864



Few places feel more utterly English, more serenely metropolitan, than the nave of Canterbury Cathedral. The key historical events associated with it, notably the martyrdom of St Thomas a'Becket, are often violent and highly political, but at first glance wholly domestic. A closer look reveals a different story, however, one that is intimately linked with the history of empire, and above all of imperial conquest and warfare. The chapel of the Royal East Kent regiment (The Buffs), with its rows of regimental colours and battle honours from Tel-el-Kebir, Sudan and the Boer War is the most obvious reminder, and a quick glance at the elaborate memorials that line the walls reveals many more. A memorial to eight officers, 27 NCOs and 264 private soldiers of Prince Albert's Light Infantry who fell in the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839–1842; to Frederick Mackeson, Lt Col. of the Bengal Army and Commissioner of Peshawar, who died “of a wound inflicted by a Mahometan fanatic,”¹ and others commemorating those who died in battles of the Anglo-Sikh Wars, or the Boer War. Canterbury is just one of the grandest examples—almost every parish church in Britain has

1 The underlying significance of attacks of this kind and the British casting of them as “fanaticism” is considered in Mark Condos, “‘Fanaticism’ and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 3 (2016): 717–745.



FIGURE 11.1
Memorial to the men of Prince
Albert's Light Infantry who died
in the First Afghan War, Canterbury
Cathedral
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memorials commemorating individuals and groups who served a now vanished empire, usually as soldiers, but also in many other capacities—the tiny church of Hubberholme in the Yorkshire Dales, for instance, commemorates George Andrew Hobson, who designed the Victoria Falls bridge over the Zambezi.

Memorials of this kind are not confined to religious spaces—civic commemoration of imperial conflicts can be found in almost any British urban centre. In the 19th century these were usually statues of individuals, but from the early 20th century, beginning with the Boer War, these began to be joined by collective memorials commemorating the sacrifice of ordinary soldiers.² The most prominent examples are perhaps the statues of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock (Relief of Lucknow), and General Sir Charles Napier (Conquest of Sindh)

2 On this transformation of war memorials from sites of relatively narrow monarchical, aristocratic or regimental significance to collective sites of national mourning see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78–90; Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual. Commemoration in the City and East London 1916–1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 25–26, 98–135.

on two of the four plinths in Trafalgar Square. Probably barely one in a hundred of those passing them by today could say who they were or what they did.³ However, their ubiquity is a testament to the deep imprint of imperialism on British culture: these commemorative sculptures, brasses and inscriptions are so commonplace that until very recently they barely called for remark, but they create webs of connection that span the globe, and ensure that even now the history of empire—of imperial service, but also imperial conquest and violence—is woven into the very fabric of British life and its public spaces.⁴ Neither John Mackenzie nor Catherine Hall, the authors of the most influential works on the infusion of British metropolitan culture with imperial themes and ideas, pays particular attention to practices of memorialisation and commemoration, but the ubiquity of such monuments adds powerful support to their arguments.⁵

In the colonies themselves the commemoration of conflict and warfare played if anything a more important role. It was a means by which the landscape and the memories and meanings associated with it could be appropriated by the imperial power. Older, indigenous historical narratives and sacred landscapes, such as those associated with gods, kings and saints in India, were overlaid with the narratives and landscapes of empire. The “Black Hole of Calcutta” is a prime example of this, a narrative of war, victimhood and Indian “savagery” which became of enormous importance in legitimising British rule in India. While resting on a very slender textual foundation, it was first commemorated in stone in the late 18th century with a monument that was reconstructed with a very deliberate political purpose by Viceroy George Nathaniel

3 One of these plinths, as is well known, is kept open for a rotating exhibition of public sculpture, but there was a suggestion, not entirely tongue in cheek, that it be permanently occupied by a statue of General Charles Gordon on a camel, which once stood in Khartoum, and is currently languishing at Gordon's School in Woking. See Jeremy Paxman “What Empire did for Britain,” *The Daily Telegraph* 02/10/2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8801370/Jeremy-Paxman-what-empire-did-for-Britain.html>.

4 See the map of statues that some activists now want removed at <https://www.toppletheracists.org>.

5 John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire. The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002). These arguments have been criticised by Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists. Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and he may have a point when it comes to active engagement with and celebration of empire, which was the preserve of a largely middle-class minority. However, this is not in contradiction with the almost unconscious infusion of empire into metropolitan culture that we see in memorials.

Curzon in 1905, during the agitation over the partition of Bengal.⁶ However the most important sites of commemoration for the British in India were connected with the Indian “Mutiny” of 1857—Lucknow, Cawnpore, Delhi. The ruined Residency at Lucknow, site of a seven-month siege, was turned into a gigantic open-air shrine to British heroism, its shattered brick and stucco buildings hosting a plethora of commemorative tablets, headstones and inscriptions recording the deaths and feats of particular individuals, and the roles of particular groups, with the central place given up to the tomb and epitaph of Sir Henry Lawrence, “who tried to do his duty” and whose posthumous reputation is best described as that of an Anglican saint.⁷ His grave became a place of pilgrimage for visiting Britons, and to this day garlands of marigolds are laid on it by the students of the Lawrence Schools at Sanawar (in the Himalayan foothills) and Lovedale (in the Nilgiri Hills).⁸ A grimmer memorial was erected at Cawnpore (Kanpur), where the British garrison surrendered and was massacred. Here the narrative centred on the slaughter of women and children by the Nana Sahib as relieving forces approached the city. Marochetti’s mourning angel, erected on the site of the well where their bodies were thrown, and framed by a Gothic screen, became an imperial icon.⁹

The heavy Italianate Gothic of the Cawnpore Memorial Church was the setting for a list of the officers and their families who died, placed behind the altar. In Delhi, where the tide of the rebellion was turned, a raw red gothic Mutiny Memorial was erected on the ridge overlooking the old city, on which “native” and “European” deaths were carefully separated and enumerated. As William Dalrymple has written, contrasting it with the hybrid architecture of the nearby house of the British officer William Fraser: “one monument, with its Mughal borrowings and position determined by Timur’s camp, represents what the *Raj* might have been. The Mutiny memorial represents—crudely and distastefully—what it was.”¹⁰

6 The only contemporary source is John Zephaniah Holwell, “A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen, and Others, Who Were Suffocated in the Black-Hole in Fort William, at Calcutta,” [1758] *India Tracts by Mr Hobwell and Friends* (London: T. Beckett, 1764): 253–275; see Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1–6.

7 Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

8 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 82–107.

9 Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny*, 36–37.

10 William Dalrymple, *City of Djinn. A Year in Delhi* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 150.



FIGURE 11.2 Cawnpore. The Memorial Well; Marble Statue by Marochetti
 PRINCE OF WALES TOUR OF INDIA 1875–1876 (VOL. 3) 1860–1876 RCIN
 2701749 © ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST

Although the popular memory of those who were on the receiving end of British campaigns of conquest and punishment is more difficult to recover (but by no means impossible),¹¹ reconstructing the official history of commemoration in the British Empire is thus relatively easy—the monuments themselves

11 See Badri Narayan, “Popular Culture and 1857. Memory against forgetting,” in *The 1857 Rebellion*, ed. Biswamoy Pati (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007): 271–280.



FIGURE 11.3
The Mutiny Memorial, Delhi, 1863
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

nearly all survive, both in the metropole and in the colonies, at least in the Indian case. With remarkable and laudable forbearance the Government of India has preserved most such monuments since independence, either *in situ* with an additional inscription giving the Indian perspective on the events commemorated (as in Delhi and Lucknow), or by moving them to a less public position—the graveyard of St John's Church for the memorial to the Black Hole of Calcutta, and of the Cawnpore Memorial Church for Marochetti's weeping angel (a bronze statue of the Indian rebel leader Tantia Topi was erected on the original site).¹² These and other memorials of the *Raj*, such as the European cemeteries in Calcutta and Surat, remain popular with British tourists to this day.¹³ Historians of the British Empire in India have produced a rich and sophisticated literature which combines aesthetic and symbolic analysis of these physical reminders with textual research on their origins, construction and reception.¹⁴ The same is true in large degree of the French empire, at least in the metropole, where memorials to those who fell in North African and

12 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence. The 1857 Kanpur Massacres* (Delhi: Viking, 1998), 2.

13 Elizabeth Buettner, "Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India," *History and Memory* 18, no. 1 (2006): 5–42.

14 e.g. Rebecca M. Brown, "Inscribing Colonial Monumentality: A Case Study of the 1763 Patna Massacre Memorial" *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 1 (2006): 91–113; Robert Travers, "Death and the Nabob: Imperialism and Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century India," *Past & Present* no. 196 (2007): 83–124.

Indochinese campaigns can also be found in churches, and a memorial to that quintessential French Imperial Hero, Colonel Claude Marchand, was erected as late as 1949.¹⁵

This leaves Russia, the third great European imperial power of the 19th century, with colonies in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Far East: here we find no such visible legacy of commemoration. Monuments and memorials abound, indeed, on the territory of the former USSR, but these are almost exclusively of Soviet origin: to early Bolshevik leaders, to those who died in the Civil War, to the heroes of the “Great Patriotic War” (by far the greatest number), and, since 1991, a handful of memorials to the millions who were murdered or imprisoned under Stalin.¹⁶ For the Bolsheviks rituals of commemoration were of huge importance from the very earliest days of their political activity, something seen to good effect in the carefully staged funeral of Nikolay Bauman after his murder by a mob in 1905.¹⁷ The enshrining of Lenin after 1924 is the most famous and elaborate example, but it reached its apotheosis in the elaborate monuments commemorating the fallen of the “Great Patriotic War”, an event of such key significance in re-legitimising the Soviet regime that ever larger monuments were still being constructed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with the largest, at Park Pobedy in Moscow, completed only after the regime’s collapse in 1995.¹⁸ I could write a very different essay on the manifestations of this in Central Asia, where the spectacular Panfilov monument and cenotaphs in Almaty commemorate the (largely fictional) exploits of the 28 Panfilov guardsmen: some of those whose names are inscribed there were actually still alive when the monument was erected in 1976.¹⁹

15 Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa. The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 257–258.

16 The best-known of the latter was placed by the *Memorial* organisation in Lubyanka square in Moscow outside the KGB headquarters in 1990, but they remain extremely rare in Russia. There is an interesting example, which lists thousands of names of the repressed, next to the main war memorial in the Northern Kazakhstani city of Petropavlovsk.

17 Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905—Russia in Disarray* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 262–265.

18 On the commemoration of the Second World War in Moscow and the evolution of Soviet commemorative monuments, see Mischa Gabowitsch, “Russia’s Arlington? The Federal Military Memorial Cemetery near Moscow,” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* no. 2 (2016): 93–97.

19 Alexander Statiev “‘La Garde meurt mais ne se rend pas!’: Once again on the 28 Panfilov Heroes,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 4 (2012): 769–798. Unlike in the rest of Central Asia, *Den’ Pobedy* (Victory Day—9th May) is still enthusiastically celebrated in Kazakhstan on the 9th May. The elaborate War memorial on the *strelka* in Ust’-Kamenogorsk was actually erected in the mid-1990s, after Kazakhstan’s

The need to control both the historical narrative and ritual public space meant that the Bolsheviks systematically removed and demolished earlier memorials, sought to erase previous commemorative practices, and entirely excluded any commemoration of the sacrifices of the “imperialist” First World War.²⁰ As Aaron Cohen has noted in his study of memorials to the Russo-Japanese war, traditionally in Tsarist Russia “War monuments ... were not generalized sites of memory for the amelioration of suffering, the creation of national identity, or the reinforcement of masculinity; they served to explain the history of the monarchical state, demonstrate its power, and legitimize its rule.”²¹ This had begun to change with the commemoration of the Russo-Japanese War, whose monuments began to place a greater emphasis on collective, national sacrifice, but even so most of them were anathema to the new regime.²² In the metropole the process of removal was not completely comprehensive, partly because some monuments (such as the Bronze Horseman in St Petersburg) were deemed to be of artistic merit, and others could be incorporated into a national narrative shorn of its tsarist associations: the monument to those who died at the siege of Plevna in the Russo-Turkish War, which still stands on Il’inskii square next to Kitai-Gorod metro station in Moscow, is a good example of this, while that to the torpedo boat *Steregushchii*, sunk during the Russo-Japanese War, which still stands in St Petersburg, was reinterpreted as a symbol of proletarian sacrifice.²³ In the Central Asian periphery, however, the obliteration of the past was nearly total. The monuments erected by the Tsarist regime in its colonised territories almost all commemorated their conquest, and those who died for it. They embodied the values of the Tsarist officer

independence. On Victory Day see Mikhail Gabovich, “Pamiatnik i prazdnik: etnografiia Dnia Pobedy,” *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas* (2015) no. 3: 93–111.

20 Catherine Merridale “War, death, and remembrance in Soviet Russia,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62–63; Steve Smith, “Bones of Contention: Bolsheviks and the Exposure of Saints’ Relics, 1918–1930,” *Past and Present* no. 204 (2009): 155–194, although as he notes many of the practices associated with religious pilgrimage came to be applied to Party shrines such as Lenin’s mausoleum instead.

21 Aaron J. Cohen, “Long Ago and Far Away: War Monuments, Public Relations, and the Memory of the Russo-Japanese War in Russia, 1907–1914,” *The Russian Review* 69, no. 3 (2010), 391.

22 Cohen, “Long Ago and Far Away,” 399; it is striking that the transformation of the significance of war memorials in Russia coincides with that in Britain, where it was first seen in memorials to the Boer War erected after 1901. See Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain. The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 1998), 40–44.

23 Cohen, “Long Ago and Far Away,” 396, 411–412.

corps and of “Great Russian chauvinism,” and this meant that they could have no place in the new world of national emancipation that was being constructed in the 1920s.²⁴ There are only three Tsarist-era monuments of any kind which I have seen during my travels in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The most obscure is that to the men of a force sent towards the Afghan frontier in 1878, who died of cholera near the village of Jam. This was erected in 1913 and was still standing in 2008—overlooked perhaps because of its remote location, at the almost uninhabited crossroads of Sary-Qul.²⁵

The only monument to the Tsarist conquest which survives is that to the battle of Uzun-Agach in 1860, in which Russian forces defeated those of the Khanate of Khoqand near what was then Fort Vernoe and is now Almaty. This was erected ca. 1910, and while its overtly Tsarist symbols were removed in a coordinated attack in 1921, by 1958 it featured in a Soviet film about the revolutionary period as a symbol of homecoming to Semirechie—it was fully restored in 2007.²⁶ Semirechie is also home to the best-known Tsarist monument in Central Asia, that to the explorer Nikolai Przheval'skii, erected in 1894 near the town of Karakol (renamed Przheval'sk in his honour until 1991, and now in the Issyk-Kul province of Kyrgyzstan) where he had died in 1888. Although a champion of Russian imperial expansion with distinctly racist views of Chinese and other Asian peoples, Przheval'skii was considered a “progressive” figure by the Soviet regime because of his geographical discoveries, and hence his rather beautiful monument was spared.²⁷ Today it is an object of local pride, a popular tourist attraction and a site for wedding photographs, while the accompanying

24 See, amongst others, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation. The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006); Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan. Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

25 See Alexander Morrison, “Beyond the ‘Great Game’: The Russian Origins of the Second Anglo-Afghan War,” *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017): 686–735.

26 Niccolò Pianciola, “Décoloniser l’Asie centrale?: Bolcheviks et colons au Semireč’e (1920–1922),” *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, no. 1 (2008), 123. The film is *My iz Semirech’ia* (1958), scripted by the well-known Kazakhstani writer Dmitrii Snegin. See further <https://almaty-history.ucoz.ru/publ/106-101-0-224>.

27 On Przheval'skii see Daniel Brower, “Imperial Russia and Its Orient: The Renown of Nikolai Przheval'sky,” *The Russian Review* 53, no. 3 (1994): 367–381; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 24–41; Peter Waldron, “Przheval'skii, Asia and Empire,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88 no. 1/2 (2010): 309–327.



FIGURE 11.4 Monument to the men of the Jam Force, Sary-Qul, Uzbekistan (1913)
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FIGURE 11.5 Monument to Nikolai Przheval'skii, Karakol, Kyrgyzstan (1894)

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museum, first opened in the 1950s, continues to give an entirely Soviet-inflected account of his life and career.

These are slim pickings, however—and accordingly any study of the memorials and commemorative practices associated with the Russian conquest of Central Asia has to be based on textual sources and surviving images, rather than a study of the monuments themselves.²⁸ In this paper I will give an overview of the surviving visual evidence of memorials that I have found so far, before focusing on the two most prominent examples of public commemoration of the conquest—the long-standing plan for a grand public monument to commemorate those who fell at the taking of Tashkent in 1865, first mooted in 1883 but not erected until 1913; and the memorial complex erected at the site of the 1881 siege and storming of the Turkmen fortress of Gök-Tepe, consisting of a museum and a set of monuments and cenotaphs, created on the initiative of the War Minister and former governor of Transcaspia, A.N. Kuropatkin, between 1898 and 1902. Central Asia of course had a dense and complex sacred and commemorative geography of Islamic shrines, each with their own associated narrative, long before the Russians came.²⁹ I argue that, just as the British did in India, the Russians sought to overlay existing sacred sites with a new commemorative geography of their own.

1 Early Commemorations of Conquest

Perhaps the earliest image we have of a monument commemorating the conquest is from the “historical” section of the *Turkestan Album* of 1871. This remarkable work, one of the great colonial photography projects, has recently become the focus of much excellent scholarship which has explored how it presented to an elite metropolitan audience a newly-conquered region of whose worth many in St Petersburg were doubtful.³⁰ While the “architectural,” “ethnographic” and “trades” volumes emphasised the wealth and exoticism of

28 Svetlana Gorshenina gives an overview of important photographic collections that can be used for reconstructing vanished architectural monuments in Central Asia in *The Private Collections of Russian Turkestan. Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), 122–124.

29 There is an enormous literature on these sacred landscapes, but see in particular Devin DeWeese in “Sacred History for a Central Asian Town: Saints, Shrines, and Legends of Origin in Histories of Sayrām, 18th–19th Centuries,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, Vols. 89–90 (July 2000): 245–295. <http://remmm.revues.org/index283.html>.

30 The album as a whole is available from the Library of Congress: https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/287_turkestan.html. On its genesis and the techniques used in its photography see Heather S. Sonntag, “Genesis of the ‘Turkestan Album 1871–1872’: The Role of Russian

Turkestan, the most striking aspect of the fourth, “historical” volume, is that the history it narrates is purely that of the Russian conquest of the region, with no suggestion of any prior or alternative indigenous narratives.³¹ Most of the photographs are of the officers and men who took part in the campaigns and won the St George’s Cross for bravery, together with photographs of captured fortresses, plans of battles and sieges, and of Russian fortifications and garrisons. Among these last there is a photograph of a monument at Perovsk, erected to commemorate those who fell while storming what was then the Khoqandi fortress of Aq Masjid in 1853. Judging from the image, it was a simple whitewashed brick and plaster structure with an iron cross, and a brief (and unfortunately illegible) inscription.³²

The *Delo pod Ikanom* (Affair near Iqan) of 1864, in which a small group of 60 Ural Cossacks under Esaul Serov had beaten off an attack by a much larger Khoqandi force near the village of Iqan, south of Turkestan, was an early target for commemoration, not least because it helped to erase the memory of a reverse at the hands of the Khoqandis near Chimkent shortly before.³³ A monument was erected there on the 20th anniversary of the battle in 1884—an illustration published in *Niva* in 1890 shows a simple brick structure crowned by an iron cross, with the inscription “in memory of the soldiers who fell near Iqan in 1864.”³⁴

Military Photography, Mapping, Albums & Exhibitions on Central Asia,” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011); on some of the representative tropes visible in the Album see Margaret Dikovitskaya, “Central Asia in early photographs. Russian Colonial Attitudes and Visual Culture,” in *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Uyama Tomohiko (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, 2007), 99–121; on the need to “sell” Turkestan to a sceptical educated public see Svetlana Gorshenina, “La construction d’une image ‘savante’ du Turkestan russe lors des premières expositions ‘coloniales’ dans l’Empire russe: analyse d’une technologie culturelle du pouvoir,” in *Le Turkestan russe, un colonie comme les autres? Cahiers d’Asie centrale* nos. 17/18, ed. S. Gorshenina & S. Abashin (Tashkent-Paris: IFEAC, 2009), 133–178.

31 See further Alexander Morrison, “The Conquest of Central Asia through the Turkestan Album,” *Voices on Central Asia* 02/05/2018 <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/the-conquest-of-central-asia-through-the-turkestan-album/>

32 “Syr-dar’inskaia oblast’. Pamiatnik nad russkimi ubitymi pri osade Ak Mecheti,” in A.L. Kun (ed.), *Turkestanskii al’bom. Po rasporiasheniū turkestanskago general-gubernatora general-ad’iutanta K.P. fon Kaufmana 1-go*, Chast’ IV *Istoricheskaiia*, ed. M.A. Terent’ev (Tashkent: Lit. Voenno-Topogr. Otdela Turk. Voen. Okruga, 1871–1872) pl. 16, No. 16. LC-DIG-ppmsca-09957-00016 (<https://memory.loc.gov/pnp/ppmsca/09900/09957/00016v.jpg>).

33 Mikhail Khoroshkhin, *Geroiskii podvig Ural’tsev. Delo pod Ikanom 4, 5 i 6 dekabria 1864 goda* (Ural’sk: n.p. 1895); on the campaign during which this incident took place see Alexander Morrison, “Russia, Khoqand, and the search for a ‘Natural’ Frontier,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2014): 166–192.

34 “Dvadtsat’-piataya godovshchina Ikanskogo boia,” *Niva* (1890) no. 24, 620, 624, 626–627,



FIGURE 11.6
Monument to those who
fell storming Aq Masjid
(Perovsk), Turkestan
Album, 1871

Another celebrated incident of heroism was the defence of the Samarkand citadel in the summer of 1868, in which a Russian garrison of 400 men, including the artist Vasilii Vereshchagin, had repeatedly beaten back the assault of the townspeople and forces from Shahrissabz and Kitab under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Malik Tura, the rebellious son of the Amir of Bukhara.³⁵ By 1879 there was a small neoclassical monument, topped with an orthodox cross, outside the citadel at the point where the walls had been breached.³⁶

<http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i331.html>; Aleksei Plentsov, *Delo pod Ikanom. Sotnia protiv desiaty tysiach* (St Petersburg: Istoriko-Kul’turnyi tsentr Karel’skogo pere-sheika, 2014), 203; this comprehensive study provides an excellent technical description of the battle, but framed in very jingoistic terms.

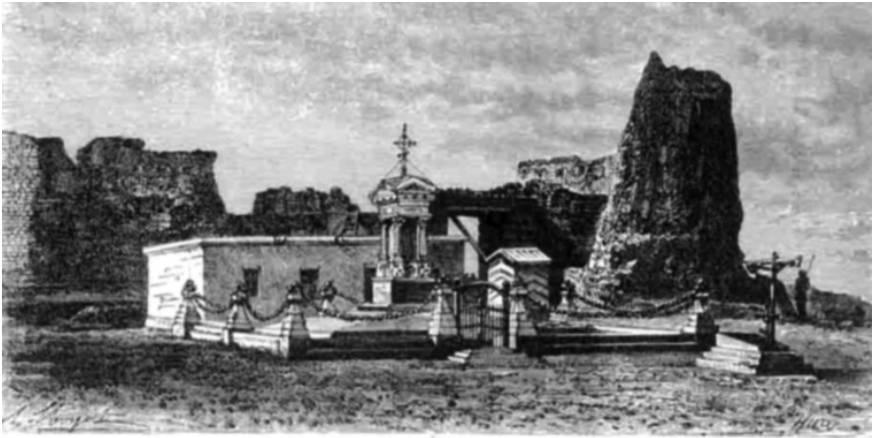
35 On this see A.S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868–1910. A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21–24; Azim Malikov, “The Russian conquest of the Bukharan emirate: military and diplomatic aspects,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014): 190–193.

36 “Pamiatnik nad mogilam Russkikh bliz Samarkandskoi Tsitadeli,” illustration to an article by P. Stremoukhov, “V Srednei Azii. Iz zapisok russkogo puteshestvennika,” *Niva* no. 43 (1879): 441–445, <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i333.html>.



Памятникъ воинамъ павшимъ подъ Икандомъ въ 1864 году
Грав. Гашевскій.

FIGURE 11.7
Monument to those
who fell at Iqan in 1864.
Niva, 1890



3. Памятникъ надъ могилами русскихъ близъ Самаркандской цитадели. Рис. Клерже, грав. Гильдебрандтъ.

FIGURE 11.8 Monument to those who fell in defence of the Samarkand Citadel, *Niva*, 1879



FIGURE 11.9 General Cherniaev's *domik*, Tashkent. *Turkestan Album*, 1871

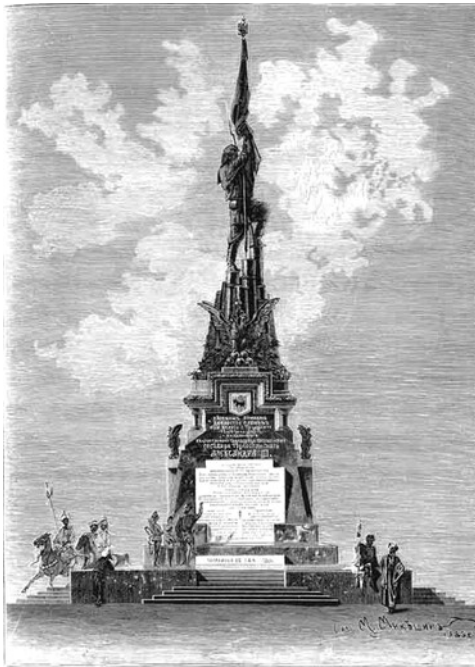
However, it was the storming of Tashkent by a small force of 3,000 men under General Mikhail Grigor'evich Cherniaev on 15th June 1865 which became the central event of the conquest narrative. While no monument to Cherniaev himself was erected in Tashkent until the early 1900s (a source of some controversy, as we will see), the *domik* (cottage) in which he had lived during his first period as governor in 1865–1866 was preserved as a relic of the earliest years of conquest, featuring both in the *Turkestan Album* of 1871,³⁷ and in later articles commemorating the anniversary of the fall of Tashkent.³⁸

As Jeff Sahadeo has shown, the first commemorative ceremonies were held in 1872, but so long as K.P. von Kaufman was Governor-General of Turkestan they remained limited in scope, and there was no permanent memorial, in large part because he and Cherniaev cordially loathed each other.³⁹ Representatives of the Russian settler community complained that the authorities

37 "Syr-dar'inskaia oblast'. Dom v kotorom zhil General Maior M.G. Cherniaev po zaniatii g. Tashkenda," in A.L. Kun (ed.), *Turkestanskii al'bom*, pl. 36, no. 77. LC-DIG-ppmsca-09957-00077, <https://memory.loc.gov/pnp/ppmsca/09900/09957/00077v.jpg>.

38 "Ko dnu dvadtsatipiatiletiia vziatie Tashkenta," *Niva* no. 25 (1890): 651, 653, <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i332.html>.

39 Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent 1865–1923* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 47–49.



Завоевание Ташкента. Памятникъ въ честь воиновъ, павшихъ при штурмѣ Ташкента, 15 июня 1865 г.
Копія съ Высочайшаго утвержденного проекта М. О. Микешина, пром. М. Равнинскій.

FIGURE 11.10

Mikeshin's design for a monument to those who fell at the storming of Tashkent in 1865. *Niva*, 1883

were “highly unsympathetic to all things Cherniaev,” and had discouraged public subscriptions for a monument, causing them to fizzle out when only 1,000 roubles had been collected.⁴⁰ Cherniaev’s appointment as the second Turkestan Governor-General after von Kaufman’s death in 1882 opened up new possibilities. He commissioned an elaborate design in bronze from the sculptor Mikhail Osipovich Mikeshin (1835–1896) in 1883, which was to stand on Tashkent’s central Konstantinovskii square.⁴¹ The design for the monument featured a Russian soldier in the distinctive Turkestan campaign uniform (loose blouse, baggy trousers, *kepi* with sunshade) hoisting a flag over one of the captured bastions of the city, above a double-headed eagle with outstretched wings crouched, hen-like, on a pyramid of newly-laid artillery shells.⁴²

40 Iu. D. Iuzhakov, *Shestnadsatiletniaia godovshchina vziatiia Tashkenta (Vospominanie starogo Turkestantsa)* (St. Petersburg: V.V. Komarov, 1881), 16.

41 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.1089 “Ob Otkrytie v g. Tashkente pamiatnika na mogile pavshikh vo vremia shturma 15 iunია 1865 g.,” ll. 1–4; Donesenie Akademika Mikhail Osipovich Mike-shina 17/08/1883 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 48–49.

42 “Pamiatnik v chest’ pavshikh pri vziatii Tashkenta,” *Niva* no. 31 (1883), <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i173.html>.

Cherniaev also wanted to construct a cathedral with a burial vault in which there would be individual coffins for each of the fallen soldiers, but he was recalled before the funds for the grandiose design could be raised.⁴³ Some of its motifs would eventually appear on the monument that finally appeared on Konstantinovskii square in the centre of the city 1913, only to be torn down six years later. Meanwhile a smaller monument in the Russian national style was erected in 1886 by Governor-General Rosenbach on the site where most of the soldiers were actually buried, beneath the walls of the old city, where it became the focus of ever more elaborate religious processions and commemoration ceremonies on the 15th June each year.⁴⁴

2 Monumental Controversies

However, the idea for a grander monument in the centre of the city did not go away. In December 1898 Governor-General Dukhovskoi wrote to General Sakharov, the Chief of the Main Staff, proposing to revive Cherniaev's plan. The original cost was estimated at 27,550 roubles, and Cherniaev had proposed to raise this through public subscription. Unfortunately, Dukhovskoi wrote, Cherniaev was unsuccessful—they had only managed to raise about 5,000, and his successor, Rosenbach, had spent half of this on a clock and on restoring a cemetery. The balance of 2,151 roubles had remained in the bank ever since. Dukhovskoi felt the time had come to revive the idea, as he had found some spare cash elsewhere in Turkestan's budget. The stone—marble, jasper and granite—was to come from a quarry near Khujand, and he calculated that the total cost would be about 50–60,000 roubles. The design would be the same as that published in *Niva* in 1883.⁴⁵ The initial response to Dukhovskoi from Sakharov was discouraging, saying that this was not a suitable use for the money he had found, and “in general the construction of such expensive monuments is premature.”⁴⁶ However, two weeks later an article appeared in *Novoe Vremya* announcing that in view of General Cherniaev's death the previous year, a memorial was now planned for him in Tashkent, including restoring

43 Sahadeo *Russian Colonial Society*, 49.

44 Sahadeo *Russian Colonial Society*, 50–53.

45 Dukhovskoi to Sakharov 10/12/1898 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 “Po voprosam ob ustroistve: 1) pamiatnika voinam, pavshim pri shturme Tashkent 15 iunია 1865 g. 2) Pamiatnika pokoinomu Stepnomu General Gubernatoru Generalu ot Infanterii Kolpakovskomu. 3) muzeia v pamiat' pokoinogo General Leitenanta M.G. Cherniaeva,” ll. 1–4.

46 Sakharov to Dukhovskoi 11/01/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 l. 8.

his *domik* and turning it into a museum. It is not clear whether Dukhovskoi was behind this article, but it led Sakharov to write to him asking for details of these plans, mentioning that the War Minister, A.N. Kuropatkin, felt that there should be memorials to Cherniaev and von Kaufman in Tashkent, and to Skobelev at Gök-Tepe.⁴⁷ Dukhovskoi responded that he agreed, noting that there was already a museum dedicated to von Kaufman in Tashkent. He renewed his request to be allowed to use a surplus he had discovered in the budget for the Cossack regiments stationed in Turkestan to build a monument to the soldiers who fell during the storming of Tashkent.⁴⁸ Sakharov again demurred, saying that the Ministry was currently building a monument to Suvorov, and that it was undesirable to have two such expensive monuments under way at the same time.⁴⁹ Dukhovskoi waited for a year, and then tried again, this time writing directly to Kuropatkin, who as an old Turkestan hand could be expected to be sympathetic. He certainly laid it on pretty thick:

Thirty years ago a band of Russian heroes, with thousands of *versts* of desert at their backs, without any hope of assistance from the fatherland, approached the fortified walls of Tashkent, with a population of 100,000, defended by the whole population and numerous enemy forces. At the price of selfless heroism and blood spilled on the walls of this city new laurels were wreathed into the crown of Russian power. From the time of that highly significant event, the fascination of the Russian name has become a pledge of victory and of our further successes in Central Asia. Fulfilling the vows of their great Tsars, Russian troops step by step conquered a vast expanse and, with one hand overthrowing the rude arbitrariness of petty despotic rulers, with the other struck off the shackles of slavery and sowed the seeds of humane Christian culture.⁵⁰

He went on to link the need for a further commemorative monument with the imminent construction of a direct rail link between Turkestan and the core regions of Russia (the Orenburg-Tashkent railway, which would eventually be completed in 1906), thanks to which "Russian life has begun to pulse more strongly and pour into a moribund region a new current of life ... This moment, as one that brings us closer to the vow of Peter the Great, crowned by the efforts of his successors ... I find the most appropriate for the immortalization of the

47 Sakharov to Dukhovskoi 30/01/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 11-ob.

48 Dukhovskoi to Sakharov 03/02/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 12-13.

49 Sakharov to Dukhovskoi 11/02/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 l. 14.

50 Dukhovskoi to Kuropatkin 08/01/1900 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 20-21-ob.

feats of Russian arms by means of a fitting monument.” The Main Staff and the War Ministry now grudgingly agreed, provided it could be funded by a public subscription, and they took the same line with a similar proposal from the City Duma in Vernyi in Semirechie to erect a monument to their own military hero, Gerasim Alekseevich Kolpakovskii, who had defeated the khanate of Khoqand at the battle of Uzun-Agach in 1860, occupied the Ili Valley in 1871, and served as Governor of Semirechie from 1867–1889.⁵¹

Dukhovskoi’s sudden death in March 1901 seems to have led to the project lapsing once again, and it was only after the turmoil of the Russo-Japanese War and 1905 Revolution that it was revived once more, with the appointment of N.I. Grodekov (1843–1913) as Governor-General of Turkestan in September 1906.⁵² Grodekov had served in Turkestan continuously since the 1870s, apart from a brief stint as Governor of the Maritime Region in the Far East, and was almost the last of the hallowed coterie of officers that had served with von Kaufman in the “heroic” years of Turkestan’s conquest and construction. His revival of the proposal for a Tashkent monument, sparked a fierce press debate about where it should be sited and to whom it should be dedicated—one correspondent noted that the original plan under von Kaufman in 1874 had been to place such a monument at the spot where the men actually fell, near the Kamelan Gate in the Native City. Cherniaev had changed this to Konstantinovskii Square. He thought it should actually be placed on the Cathedral Square, before the Governor-General’s residence. He also thought the inscription should be amended to: *“Покорителям и устроителям Туркестанского края”* (To the Vanquishers and Builders of the Turkestan region)—that is, to all the generals who had led Russian forces in the Turkestan campaigns and helped to create its administration.⁵³ From these innocuous beginnings the debates surrounding the monument became steadily more fraught, and highly revealing of the way in which the history of the Russian conquest of Central Asia was being reinterpreted in explicitly Russian nationalist, as opposed to dynastic or imperial terms, by the early 1900s.

In July 1907 Grodekov held the first meeting of a committee to obtain donations for a monument dedicated to von Kaufman. They decided to use the

51 “Ob otkrytii po Imperii podpiski na sooruzhenie pamyatnika v Tashkente vsem pokoriteliām Sredneaziatskikh nashikh vladenii,” 01/02/1900; MVD to Kuropatkin 14/02/1900; Petition from Alexander Ivanovich Putolov 31/01/1900; MVD to the General Staff 29/04/1900 RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 24, 26, 32–33, 37.

52 “O Pamiatnike General-Ad’iutantu K.P. Von Kaufmanu,” *Turkestanskii Sbornik* 1908 nos.148–9 in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* vol. 469, 154–158.

53 Evgenii Osipovich Moshilenko to Alexander Fedorovich 01/12/1906 RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.2332 ll. 55–56.

16,060 Roubles that were left over from the earlier schemes for the proposed monument to the “vanquishers and builders of the Turkestan region” and “unite/merge” this with a monument to von Kaufman. There was to be a competition for a design for a monument “to the first Turkestan Governor-General, the vanquisher of Central Asia and builder of the Turkestan *krai* K.P. von Kaufman, and also to the troops who conquered Central Asia.” The committee decided to install the monument “in the centre of Tashkent, at the crossing of the Kaufman and Moskovskii Prospects.” The Academy of Arts selected a jury, which in February 1908 chose 3 designs (out of 18) which were awarded prizes. These projects were: *Otboi* (The Last Post), by Boris Mikhailovich Mikeshein (1873–1937, the son of the artist who had produced the design for Cherniaev in 1883), *Ural* by A. Kurtatov, and *Aziatskaia Rossiia* by O. Gol'dberg. However, none of the three was considered appropriate by the committee—*Otboi* was not energetic enough, *Ural*'s composition was unharmonious, and *Aziatskaia Rossiia* was insufficiently monumental.⁵⁴

At this point a debate broke out in the metropolitan and Turkestani press as to who exactly the Tashkent monument should commemorate—the soldiers who fell during the storming, von Kaufman, Cherniaev, other Turkestani Generals or all of these. One correspondent wrote objecting to the published design, which had Cherniaev in an obscure position in a panel on the pedestal below Kaufman's feet, and suggested instead that Cherniaev and Kaufman should get equal billing on the same pedestal, the former as the conqueror of Turkestan, sword in hand, the latter holding a book of laws.⁵⁵ Old controversies were raked up from the 1870s, when the two men had been hated rivals, with Cherniaev baiting von Kaufman through his ownership of the newspaper *Russkii Mir*.⁵⁶ In March 1908 the journalist, dramatist and nationalist ideologue Alexei Suvorin published an article in the “patriotic” and pan-Slavist *Novoe Vremia* vehemently opposing the proposal to have busts of Generals Abramov, Kolpakovskii, Skobelev and Cherniaev at the feet of “the German” Kaufman—a position unworthy of such “Russian heroes,” as he called them in the text: “had

54 *Raport* Turkestan Governor-General to the Main Staff 11/03/1909 RG VIA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 “O sooruzhenii v g. Tashkente pamyatnika Generalu Kaufmanu,” ll. 11–15. My thanks to Matthias Battis for consulting this file for me in the Military Historical Archive, and providing his notes. All further references to it are also based on these.

55 Saryi i Pristrastnyi Turkestanets “Po povodu pamiatnika K.P. Von Kaufmana i ego spodvizhnikam,” *Na Rubezhe* 1907 no. 40 in *Turkestanskii Sbornik*, vol. 434, 100–101.

56 A.L.K. ‘Kaufman i Cherniaev’ *Tashkentskii Kur'er* 1908 no. 36 in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* vol. 456, 46–47. See David Mackenzie, “Kaufman of Turkestan: an assessment of his administration 1867–1881,” *Slavic Review* 26, no. 2 (1967), 276; idem, *The Lion of Tashkent. The Career of General M.G. Cherniaev* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1974), 108–114.

these generals been born with German surnames, they would not have ended up at the feet of Kaufman. General Grodekov would not have dared to lay a general of German descent at the feet of a German general." He concluded by saying that: "perhaps he [Kaufman] was a good Governor-General, but it is not his name but that of Cherniaev that will be linked to the acquisition of this wonderful land and with the liberation of the Slavic peoples from the Turkic yoke." (this also referred to Cherniaev's controversial role at the head of the Serbian army during the Balkan crisis of 1876–1877); the article caused considerable disquiet in the War Ministry.⁵⁷ By this point the debate had attracted the attention of Tsar Nicholas II himself—having read an article on the Kaufman/Cherniaev controversy in the conservative *Grazhdanin* (edited by the notorious Prince V.P. Meshcherskii, this was the only newspaper the Tsar regularly read),⁵⁸ which noted that both Skobelev and Cherniaev would be portrayed as under von Kaufman's feet, he instructed Baron Fredericks, the Minister of the Imperial Court, to write to War Minister A.F. Rediger that he "agreed with the objections raised in the article, and considered the placing of the monument to General Kaufman in the manner projected by General Grodekov entirely unsuitable."⁵⁹

Grodekov's committee responded to this imperial pressure by deciding to remove the busts of other generals from the monument altogether:⁶⁰ "with this, in view of HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR's recognition that it would be unsuitable to have on the monument busts of generals Cherniaev and Skobelev, the Committee proposed that there should be no busts or medallions of the aforementioned generals on the monument, nor of Generals Abramov or Kolpakovskii."⁶¹ The Mayor of Tashkent, Nikolai Mallitskii, suggested reviving Mike-shin senior's original design of 1883, with a smaller statue of Kaufman somewhere underneath the main statue of the Turkestani soldier hoisting a flag. G.K. Richter, another committee member, wanted to unite the three designs into one, and have "At von Kaufman's feet the soldier of the *Otboi*, a Sart presenting a Dastarkhan, and the project of Mikeshin in 1883." The committee asked the three prize-winning artists and some others, including Nikolai Georgevich Schleifer (1864–1928) and Boris Vasil'evich Edwards (1860–1924), to come up

57 G.L. Polivanov to the Main Staff 02/03/1908 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 l. 3.

58 D.C.B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), 72–73. See further, W.E. Mosse, "Imperial Favourite: V.P. Meshchersky and the *Grazhdanin*," *Slavonic and East European Review* 59, no. 4 (1981): 529–547.

59 Fredericks to Rediger 12/02/1908 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 l. 1.

60 "O Pamiatnike General-Ad'iutantu K.P. Von Kaufmanu," *Turkestanskii Vedomosti* 1908 nos.148–9 in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* vol. 469, 157.

61 *Raport* Turkestan Governor-General to the Main Staff 11/03/1909 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 ll. 11–15.

with new ideas for a monument to Kaufman and to the soldiers that conquered Central Asia, giving them the following guidelines:

a) the figure ... of Kaufman must in its expression be energetic and accord with the figure of a victor b) on the monument it would be desirable to have bas-reliefs which portray scenes from the campaign and military life of the Turkestan forces c) it would be desirable to have the figure of a Russian soldier, raising the Russian flag in an enemy land d) that it could also include the figure of a Sart, presenting a *dastarkhan*, but this figure must not be bowing in the Russian style, but must accord with the type, clothing, circumstances and form of greeting which exists among the Sarts e) in general, the monument must immortalise the figure of the builder of the Turkestan region General-Adjutant von Kaufman and embody in itself the fact of the pacification and securing of Central Asia by the victorious Russian forces for the Russian autocrat, and its further peaceful development.⁶²

Perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the sculptors felt capable of embodying this daunting ideological agenda in stone and bronze, and the re-submitted designs were also rejected. At this point, in January 1909, Richter presented his own project, created using photographs of people posing as statues, portraying Kaufman, a rifleman hoisting the Russian flag, and a "Cossack trumpeter, blowing the 'Last Post' on a pedestal in the form of a clay city wall." The committee then decided to ask Mikeshin, Schleifer and Edwards to come up with new ideas based on Richter's photographs. The artists presented their new models to the committee in October 1909, and that by Edwards was rejected. The committee then cast a public vote to choose between Schleifer and Mikeshin, who received 5 votes each, but as the chairman had voted for Schleifer, the commission went to him, despite Mikeshin's objections that the design plagiarized both his design and that of his father.⁶³ In a final twist, in December 1909 the Academy of Arts rejected Schleifer's design, considering it insufficiently monumental and badly composed. While in principle all public monuments were supposed to have the academy's approval, the Ministry of War managed to secure the Tsar's approval, overriding the Academy's objections.⁶⁴

62 Ibid.

63 *Doklad* of the Main Staff 12/01/1910 RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 ll. 62–63.

64 Zeil to Schleifer 14/01/1910 RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.3747 l. 64.



FIGURE 11.11

Schleifer's successful model for the monument to von Kaufman
TURKESTANSKIE VEDOMOSTI
 1909, IN *TURKESTANSKII*
SBORNIK VOL. 516, PAGE 91

Apart from providing an object-lesson in the dangers of trying to design anything by committee, this complex and somewhat tedious saga does illustrate the changing forms and meanings of public commemoration in Russia in the early 1900s. A monument that had begun life as a military memorial had first been transformed into a memorial to an individual, then a series of individuals, and had then acquired a distinctly more national tinge—for all that, no doubt much to Suvorin's disgust, the commission eventually went to a sculptor with a German name. Partly owing to problems with finance, it was only in 1913 that the Kaufman monument was finally completed. Cherniaev had meanwhile received a smaller bust in a public park. Both would be swiftly destroyed after 1917.⁶⁵

Despite the outbreak of war, the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Tashkent two years later in 1915 prompted a further frenzy of commemoration, this time

65 An excellent essay on the longer history of the "Tashkent square" and its monuments can be found in Mikhail Knizhnik, "Tashkent, Skver," *mytashkent.uz* 10/06/2007, <https://mytashkent.uz/2007/06/10/tashkent-skver/>.



FIGURE 11.12

The von Kaufman Memorial, unveiled
4th May 1913, destroyed in 1919

squarely focused on Cherniaev. The prominent local Orientalist and *Turkestanoved*, Nikolai Ostroumov, published a series of articles in *Turkestarskie Vedomosti* commemorating the capture of the city, and these were accompanied by poems, reminiscences and other forms of verbal commemoration.⁶⁶

Nikolai Mallitskii, still Mayor of Tashkent, despatched a telegram to Cherniaev's widow, Antonina Alexandrovna, informing her that the new "House of the People" (*Narodnyi Dom*) and the Labour exchange were to be named after Cherniaev, and inviting her to attend the naming ceremony.⁶⁷ In the letter that followed he wrote:

On the 15th June this year it will be fifty years since the day when the city of Tashkent was taken by the valiant force of Russian *bogatyr*s, led by your never-to-be-forgotten husband. Without admitting the thought of pompous celebrations, which would not be consistent with the heroic struggle against the cruel German powers which Russia is going through, the Tashkent Municipal Urban Social Administration proposes nevertheless to mark the 50th anniversary jubilee of the great event of the con-

66 N.P. Ostroumov "K 50-tiletiu Tashkenta. 15 iyunya 1865 g.—15 iyunia 1915 g.," *Turkestarskie Vedomosti* (1915) nos.108, 110, 111, 112, 115, 117, 119, 121, 122, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128.

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



FIGURE 11.13 The Tashkent *Narodnyi Dom*, renamed after Cherniaev in 1915

[HTTPS://MYTASHKENT.UZ/](https://mytashkent.uz/)

quest of Tashkent with modest triumphs on the 14th and 15th June, in the programme of which, amongst other things, will be the laying of the foundation stone of the new *Narodnyi Dom* and exchange in the name of Mikhail Grigor'evich Cherniaev.⁶⁸

Antonina Cherniaeva sent a gracious reply, which was reprinted in *Turkestanskies Vedomosti* alongside the full text of the many long speeches and fulsome speeches given at a special joint session of the city дума and the local learned societies.⁶⁹

These commemorative re-namings were not limited to buildings: the junction on the Samarkand-Andijan railway line where it branched off to Tashkent had already been named after Cherniaev when it opened in 1899. Now, in the jubilee year of 1915, the Russian town of New Marghelan was renamed "Skobelev" after the conqueror of Ferghana, and the ancient city of Chimkent was rebranded "Cherniaev". This appropriation of Turkestan's landscape for Russia and erasure of what were often ancient names can be appropriately

68 Mallitskii to Cherniaeva 29/05/1915 RGVIA F.726 Op.1 D.238 l. 2.

69 "Telegramma A.A. Cherniaevoi," *Turkestanskies Vedomosti* no. 130 (15 June 1915).

described as “an act of geographical violence,” to use Edward Said’s phrase, and some Russians felt this even at the time.⁷⁰ In 1898 the great orientalist V.V. Barthold had risked the wrath of the Russian settler lobby by writing a letter to the editors of the main unofficial newspaper, *Russkii Turkestan*, complaining that the renaming of stations on the Samarkand-Andijan railway after Russian saints, generals and governors was obliterating thousands of years of history.⁷¹ In 1916 an anonymous correspondent wrote to *Turkestanskii Kur’er* strongly condemning the renaming of Chimkent as Cherniaev, pointing out that the new railway station was still called Chimkent to avoid confusion with Cherniaev junction, whilst there was in fact another settlement called Cherniaevka in the Tashkent district.⁷² The proposed renaming of Chimkent proved abortive, but the settlement of Cherniaevka has preserved its name and today, incongruously, marks the main Uzbek-Kazakh border crossing.

3 Gök-Tepe, Memorial and Museum

The fall of Tashkent in 1865 had taken place at a time when the Russian reading public was still relatively small, and it took time for a legend to be developed around it in the metropole, although as we have seen it was enthusiastically commemorated by settler society in Tashkent itself. The fall of the Turkmen fortress of Gök-Tepe just over fifteen years later in January 1881 took place in the full glare of Russian and international publicity. Every stage of the campaign was relayed to the Moscow and St Petersburg newspapers by correspondents embedded with the Russian forces, of which the most articulate was Captain A.N. Maslov, for *Novoe Vremya*.⁷³ There are a number of reasons why Gök-Tepe seems to have resonated so strongly with the educated Russian public; one was that it was revenge for a humiliating reverse at the same fortress for Russian forces under General Nikolai Lomakin in 1879, which had attracted much condemnation and ridicule. Another was the presence of Russia’s greatest military celebrity, Mikhail Dmitrievich Skobelev, fresh from his triumphs in the Russo-Turkish war, whose every action seems to have had an

70 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 271.

71 V. Bartol’d, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” *Russkii Turkestan* no. 41 (30 Dec 1898).

72 “Proezhii” “Chimkent i ego okrestnosti,” *Turkestanskii Kur’er* no. 88 (22 April 1916).

73 Charles Marvin, *The Russian Advance towards India. Conversations with Skobelev, Ignatieff, and other distinguished Russian generals and statesmen, on the Central Asian Question* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1882), 150–151. Maslov’s articles and sketches were published in book form as A.N. Maslov, *Zavoevanie Akhal-Tekke. Ocherki iz poslednei ekspeditsii Skobeleva (1880–1881)* (St Petersburg: A.S. Suvorin, 1887).

irresistible fascination for the nationalist and Slavophile portion of Russian opinion.⁷⁴ Finally, something about the sheer scale of the violence inflicted on the Akhal-Teke Turkmen—6,000 killed during the siege, followed by an additional 8,000 in the massacre that followed—seems to have struck a chord.⁷⁵ Fedor Dostoevskii famously reacted with exhilaration, seeing this as the infliction of exemplary violence that would cement Russia's civilising mission and destiny in Asia.⁷⁶

Commemoration followed swiftly, both in the metropole and the provinces: Mikhail Nikolaevich Romanov, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, hosted an anniversary breakfast for participants in the storming of Gök-Tepe in his palace in Petersburg on the 12th January 1882, where Skobelev was the guest of honour. On the same day the Orthodox Bishop of Chernigov delivered a stirring sermon at a special service in Chernigov's cathedral of the Holy Trinity, invoking eternal memory of all those who fought, and the divine assistance offered to the victors:

The victory over the Tekke has a significance, sobering for those Russian peoples, who are now in a state of indecision between believers in God and those who dare to deny his very existence. The victory over the Tekke has a significance, bringing to reason those Russian people, in whose hearts a spark of shame has still remained, and they are prepared to return to the path of the truth and justice of God, to the path of peaceful government life. They are simply looking for an example to follow. Just such a worthy example has been set by the best people of Russia, who have carried out the expedition in the Transcaspian region.⁷⁷

74 This is seen clearly in O.A. Novikova, *Skobelev and the Slavonic Cause* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1883); V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Skobelev: Lichnie vospominaniia i vpechatleniia* (St. Petersburg: Tip Imp. AN, 1882), translated as *Personal Reminiscences of General Skobelev* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1884).

75 The only general account of the campaign in English currently is Mehmet Saray, *The Turks in the Age of Imperialism: A Study of the Turkmen People and their incorporation into the Russian Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1989), 138–239; the standard Russian account is M.A. Terent'ev, *Istoriia Zavoevaniia Srednei Azii*. Vol. III (1–252) (St Petersburg: Tip. V.V. Komarov, 1906).

76 Fedor Dostoevskii, "Dnevnik Pisatel'ia III. Geok-Tepe—Chto takoe dlia nas Aziia?," *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A.F. Marks, 1896) vol. 21: 513–523.

77 Anon, *Prazdnovanie godovshchiny shturma Geok-Tepe. Izvlecheno iz No. 590 Chernigovskikh Eparkhial'nykh Izvestiia 1882 g.* (Chernigov: Gubernskaya Tipografiia, 1882), 1, 9.



FIGURE 11.14 Painting of the Martyrdom of Agafon Nikitin

His target may not just have been atheism and free-thinking, but the many adherents of the Greek Catholic Church in this mixed region.⁷⁸ The siege also acquired its very own narrative of martyrdom—of a gunner called Agafon Nikitin, from the appropriately-named town of Calvary, who was captured by the Turkmen during a sortie from the fortress on the 30th December 1880, and suffered death by torture rather than serve his captors by directing their one cannon against his comrades. The inhabitants of Calvary raised 50,000 roubles to build a church in his memory, receiving a donation of 3,000 from Nicholas II. The building was consecrated in 1901, and contained a gruesome painting depicting Nikitin's martyrdom, in which the skin was flayed from his back and his fingers cut off.⁷⁹

Skobelev himself, of course, would die unexpectedly in 1882 of a heart attack, and thus became a potential object of commemoration. Despite his extremely

78 Paul Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths. Toleration and the fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 78–82.

79 Anon, *Russkim Voinam na pamiat' ob Agafon Nikitine, pogibshem mucheniskoïu smert'iu v 1880 godu za Veru, Tsaria i Otechestvo, pri vziatii nashimi voiskami kreposti Geok-Tepé* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1902), 1, 19–21.



FIGURE 11.15
Monument to M.D. Skobelev, Tverskaya St, Moscow, erected 1912
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

high profile at the time of his death, or perhaps even because of it, given the wild rumours that Skobelev was considering using his personal popularity to overthrow the Romanovs and establish a populist dictatorship, it was not until 1912 that the *Belyi General* was commemorated in an elaborate equestrian monument on Tverskaia street in the centre of Moscow—as Cohen notes, it was a throwback to an earlier style of commemoration, and considered very ugly by the Liberal Press.⁸⁰

It was thus unsurprising that the site of the Gök-Tepe siege and subsequent massacre would become the setting for the most elaborate commemorative complex created by the Russians in Central Asia. The appointment of Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, Skobelev's chief of staff during the campaign against the Akhal-Teke, as Governor of Transcaspia in 1890, and his subsequent appointment as Minister of War in January 1898, provided the necessary impetus.⁸¹ Within a month of taking up office in St Petersburg, Kuropatkin had set up a commission to create a memorial museum at the station of Gök-Tepe

80 "Otkrytie Pamiatnik Skobelevu v Moskve," *Niva* no. 27 (1912); Cohen, "Long Ago and Far Away," 402.

81 On Kuropatkin's administration in Transcaspia see Alexander Morrison, "The Pahlen Commission and the restoration of rectitude in colonial Transcaspia, 1908–1909," *Monde(s). Histoire, Espaces, Relations* 4 no. 2 (2013): 45–64.

on the Central Asian Railway, indicating that it should collect everything connected with the conquest of Transcaspia. The initial estimate of the cost was 3,000 roubles.⁸² The commission's first report recommended that all post trains passing through the station were to wait 15 minutes at Gök-Tepe to allow passengers to visit the museum. They proposed to contact veterans of the battle asking for medals to display, and to mark out the key points of the siege on the surrounding battlefield, such as the site of Skobelev's staff headquarters, the location of the three storming columns, and a monument on the spot where General Petrusevich had died. Inside they would display a map with Skobelev's own annotations (which apparently was in the possession of one Tikhonov). The Museum was to have a library of works related to the conquest (to be selected by Baron von Osten-Saken from Kuropatkin's own collection), portraits of the most important figures in the siege, a model of the fortress showing the moment it was stormed, examples of Turkmen weapons and artillery, Turkmen clothing and Russian uniforms.⁸³ The Military council gave its assent for the necessary expenditure, and the next year was spent gathering objects for the museum.⁸⁴ In May 1899 one of the searchers sent a telegram to the War Ministry to say that he had found several Turkmen weapons and even some falconets in Tiflis, and now needed money to have them transported to the new museum, which Kuropatkin was happy to authorise.⁸⁵ Later that month the commission authorised the expenditure of 950 roubles to purchase the painting "Skobelev on horseback" from its owner, Prince Viazemskii.⁸⁶ In December 1899 the Commission reported that the museum building was complete, and that a path had been constructed connecting it to the railway station. They had also identified several graves as suitable for memorials—notably those of General Petrusevich, Major Bulygin, and Esaul Ivanov in one spot, of Lt-Col. Prince Mogalov, Lt Col. Mamatsev, 2nd Lt Sandetskii, Lt Chikarev, 2nd Lt Gotto, Doctor Trotskii and 91 other ranks in another, and Lt Yanovskii and 52 other ranks in a third.

The head of the [Transcaspian] province, Lt-General Bogoliubov gave the opinion that all the graves should be marked with iron crosses or inexpensive memorials, with one of the more suitable of them beautified with

82 Kuropatkin to Sakharov 24/02/1898 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 "Ob ustroistva Muzeia i Pamiatnika v Geok-Tepe," ll. 1–ob.

83 "Zhurnal Komissii po ustroistva muzeia v Geok-Tepe," March 1898 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 l. 2.

84 *Voennyi Sovet* to Kuropatkin 14/04/1898 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 l. 13.

85 Telegram Kalitin to Kuropatkin May 1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 l. 19.

86 *Doklad* 02/05/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 l. 26.



FIGURE 11.16 View of the Gök-Tepe Museum with Monument behind

a good large memorial, giving it the appearance of a general, fraternal grave. The design for the memorial has been put together by Military Engineer Lt-Col. Chevalier de la Serre, and the cost of construction is estimated at 2,000 roubles.⁸⁷

The memorial complex as it finally emerged was even more elaborate than this description would suggest. While neither the museum nor the monuments surrounding it have been preserved (with the exception, apparently, of some of the cenotaphs erected to mark the points where the walls of the fortress had been stormed),⁸⁸ there is abundant textual and visual evidence to suggest what the museum and monuments once looked like, and the nature of the commemorative inscriptions. It was a popular subject for contemporary postcards, and also featured quite regularly in the press.

In 1906, on the 25th anniversary of the storming of Gök-Tepe, the popular magazine *Rodina* carried a full-page montage of images of the museum and the memorial surrounding it.⁸⁹ In 1907 *Zakaspiiskoe Obozrenie* celebrated the

87 *Otchet* 01/12/1899 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.2306 ll. 48–50.

88 See “Geok-Tepinskaia Bitva i Indiiskii sindrom,” *Khronika Turkmenistana*, 11/01/2015, <http://www.chrono-tm.org/2015/01/geoktepinskaya-bitva-i-indiyskiy-sindrom/>. I hope to visit the site myself in the near future.

89 “K 25-letiiu vziatiia Geok-Tepe. Istoricheskii Muzei na stantsiiu Geok-Tepe,” *Rodina* no. 4 (1906), 61. <http://zerrspiegel.orientphil.uni-halle.de/i421.html>.



FIGURE 11.17 a and b: Interior of the Gök-Tepe Museum

26th anniversary with a pair of articles on the original campaign and the modern museum.⁹⁰ While the text of the first was largely based on Grodekov's four-volume history of the campaign, and the second was an extract from K.K. Abazov's more populist summary, both were accompanied by numerous images.⁹¹ One of these clearly shows the interior of the museum, with the large oil-painting of Skobelev occupying pride of place, numerous other portraits of officers lining the walls, a cabinet full of weapons, a mannequin of a Turkmen warrior poised to strike and, somewhat incongruously, a piano.⁹² In a contemporary postcard the piano is absent, but we see that the Turkmen is seeking to defend himself against a Russian soldier attacking him with a bayonet.

Surrounding the museum building (which was in a semi-orientalised, vaguely gothic style) by 1902 there was an elaborate complex of memorials, some to individual officers (such as General Petrusevich), some to particular units (such as the Stavropol regiment) and two large monuments to all those who fell during the siege. We are fortunate to have a detailed description of these, with their inscriptions, from articles published in the *Proceedings of the Transcaspian Circle of the Lovers of the Archaeology and History of the East* in 1915–1916, not long before they would be destroyed. The author, A. Astrelin, made a telling comparison with the ancient monuments of the region, writing that if in Turkestan in General and Transcaspia in particular the monuments of the past were often mysterious, half-ruined, silent and scattered in the desert:

90 "Dvadsat' shest' let tomu nazad," "Shturm Krepost' Geok-Tepe," *Zakaspiiskoe Obozrenie* 1907 no. 9, *Turkestanskii Sbornik*, vol. 417: 122–133, 134–145.

91 N.I. Grodekov, *Voina v Turkmenii: Pokhod Skobeleva v 1880–1881gg.* (St Petersburg: Tip. V.A. Balasheva, 1883–1884) 4 Vols.; K.K. Abaza *Zavoevanie Turkestana* (St Petersburg: Tip. M. Stasiulevicha, 1902), 252–310.

92 "Shturm Krepost' Geok-Tepe," *Zakaspiiskoe Obozrenie* 1907, No. 9, in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* vol. 417, 140.

The same cannot be said of the memorials of more recent times, which testify to the opposite movement, bringing with it the resurrection of culture and the planting of civilization: these memorials already simply because they are new, are not a closed book—they are clear. And this book should always be open ...⁹³

The lesson this book was designed to impart was equally clear, in Astrelin's telling—one of Russian heroism in a noble cause, which explicitly overlaid and relegated to the background the ancient monuments of Transcaspian sites such as Merv, or indeed the importance of Gök-Tepe to the Turkmen themselves. Astrelin's account of the monuments and their inscriptions only reinforces this impression. He described the main monument within the fortress, opened on the 23rd April 1901, as standing on a small artificial mound, with a gold cross on top of a four-cornered pyramid. He reproduced the enormously long inscriptions in full—that on the northern side listed the commanders of the storming columns, the trophies taken (one cannon and 1,500 rifles) and the total number of Russian dead—1,104 men and 264 horses—the accuracy with which the latter deaths were recorded was in stark contrast to the laconic statement that “the losses of the enemy during the bombardment, during the storming and during the pursuit were over 6,000.”⁹⁴ This ducked the main controversy surrounding the fall of Gök-Tepe: according to Skobelev's original report, while 6,000 died during the siege and storming, after the fortress fell another 8,000 Turkmen “of both sexes” (*oboego pola*) were killed as they attempted to flee.⁹⁵

The inscription on the Eastern Side of the monument listed the medals awarded—A St George Cross 2nd Class for Skobelev (even though he did not actually take part in the assault), St George Crosses 3rd Class for Kuropatkin, Kozelkov, Verzhbitskii and Gaidarov, the leaders of the storming columns, and then 20 St George Crosses 4th-class, including N.I. Grodekov. The inscription on the Western side listed the names of the officers killed. However, the longest inscription by far was on the Southern side. This gave the precise numbers of the storming force (227 officers, 6,672 men), and indicated that there were 20,000–25,000 Turkmen defenders, with 5,000 horses, 5,000 firearms, of which 500 were quick-firing Berdan rifles, one bronze six-pounder cannon, two cast-

93 A. Astrelin, “Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti v chest' russkago oruzhiya i doblestnykh geroev-zavoievatelei Oblasti,” *Protokol Zasedanii i Soobshcheniya Chlenov Zakaspiiskogo Kruzhka Liubitelei Arkheologii i Istorii Vostoka* Vyp. 2 (1915–1916) (Ashkhabad: Tip. A.A. Aleksandrova, 1916), 11.

94 Astrelin, “Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti,” 13.

95 M.D. Skobelev, “Osada i Shturm kreposti Dengil-Tepe (Geok-Tepe),” *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 4 (1881), 52; see also Marvin, *The Russian Advance towards India*, 98–99.



FIGURE 11.18
Principal Monument at Gök-Tepe
(1901)

iron *zamburaks* and “a mass of pistols.” All of the Turkmen were described as armed with swords and pikes. This was accompanied by a detailed narrative of the main events of the siege, extracted from Kuropatkin’s own account of the campaign, *Zavoevanie Turkmenii*; it included the following passage.⁹⁶

When credible rumours that the Yomuds were preparing for a general uprising in the rear, Adjutant-General Skobelev averred “I reject all opinions that are inclined to lifting the siege, and I will not allow any actions that might delay the storming. Forward, forward and forward. God is with us. There will be no retreat under any circumstances!”⁹⁷

This was, of course, a bowdlerized narrative—Maslov’s surprisingly frank reminiscences give a different version of the same episode, several officers thought

96 Astrelin, “Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti,” 11–14; A.N. Kuropatkin, *Zavoevaniia Turkmenii (Pokhod v Akhal-Teke v 1880–1881gg) s ocherkom voennykh deistvii v Srednei Azii s 1839 po 1876 g.* (St. Petersburg: V. Berezovskii, 1899).

97 Astrelin, “Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti,” 13.

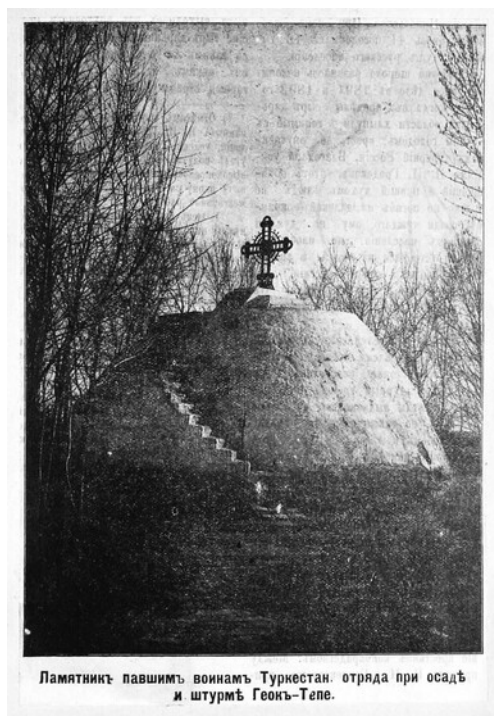


FIGURE 11.19

"Shturm Krepost' Geok-Tepe"

Zakaspiiskoe Obozrenie 1907 No. 9 in
Turkestanskii Sbornik Vol. 417, page 141

that the trenches needed to be put in better order and the soldiers given a few days' rest before the assault, to which Skobelev's response was "we didn't come here to dig holes, but to press forward! We must hurry! We must finish!" When the assault began with the detonation of a mine on the 12th January 1881, Skobelev rallied his men by crying "All right lads? The enemy—are scum (*drian*)".⁹⁸

This monument seems to have been only secondarily concerned with commemorating the dead: its main purpose was to tell, in enormously pedantic detail, the tale of a Russian military triumph, supposedly against tremendous odds, though the disparities in casualties and the fact that the Turkmen had only one functioning piece of artillery tells its own tale. At the end of an alley of trees leading from the railway-station there was another large monument to the Russian fallen in the form of a mound bearing a large cross, and the following inscription:

In 1881 on the 12th January, on the day of the storming of Geok-Tepe, after a 23-day siege, the first storming column under the leadership of Colonel

98 Maslov, *Zavoevanie Akhal-Tekke*, 64, 89.

Kuropatkin, having blown up part of the fortress wall with a mine, after a stubborn hand-to-hand fight gained possession of the rubble, in the process taking back two of our mountain guns, a Tekke cannon and the standard of the Apsheron regiment. Throwing back a mass of the enemy from the breach, Colonel Kuropatkin with a rapid advance was the first to capture Geok-Tepe and, advancing rapidly to the northern wall, pursued the fleeing enemy into the sands, thus deciding a complete victory, which gave Russia a new land. Eternal memory to those brave comrade heroes who fell here. "Ura!" to those who remained alive. 3 Officers killed, 5 contused and wounded. 124 men killed and wounded. In all 13 % of the storming party.⁹⁹

Once again, the emphasis is on narrating victory in rather long-winded detail, rather than commemorating the dead. While some of the other monuments scattered around the site were explicitly commemorative, most of them indicated key locations or moments in the siege, and like the museum were intended to be didactic, allowing visitors to reconstruct these events. Beyond Gök-Tepe itself, Astrelin gave an account of all the monuments commemorating the Russian conquest across the Transcaspian province. While some of these simply commemorated the dead, such as a small Cossack memorial at the village of Chaacha in the Tedjen district, the memorial at Chat to General Lazarev (who died of Carbunculum during the first Akhal-Teke campaign of 1879), and the memorials in Ashkhabad to the artillerymen and members of the Stavropol regiment who died during the 1880–1881 campaigns, others served a similar narrative purpose. The monument commemorating the clash with Afghan forces at Tash-Köprü in 1885 (erected by Kuropatkin during his tenure as Governor of Transcaspia) had a long inscription which not only listed the names of the dead, but noted the names of all the commanders and units that took part and the trophies captured.¹⁰⁰ Krasnovodsk had a large pyramidal column whose inscription explicitly linked the Transcaspian campaigns of 1879–1881 with earlier attempts under Peter the Great to subdue the Turkmen and Khiva, notably the Bekovich-Cherkaskii expedition of 1719, with the following doggerel:

99 Anon [A. Astrelin], "Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti v chest' russkogo oruzhiia i doblestnykh geroev—zavoevatelei Oblasti," *Protokol Zasedanii i Soobshcheniia Chlenov Zakaspiiskogo Kruzhka Liubitelei Arkheologii i Istorii Vostoka* Vyp. 1 (1914–1915) (Ashkhabad: Tip. A.A. Aleksandrova, 1915), 53.

100 Anon [A. Astrelin], "Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti," 50.

В пустыне дикой
 Вас, братья, мы нашли
 И теплою молитвою
 Ваш прах почли.
 Красноводский Отряд—сподвижников
 ПЕТРА I.

In the savage desert
 We found you, brothers
 And with warm prayers
 Honoured your dust.
 The Krasnovodsk Force—comrades in arms of
 PETER I.¹⁰¹

In all of these, of course, the Turkmen were almost completely invisible, except as an enemy whose ill-defined savagery had enabled these displays of Russian heroism, and as piles of indistinguishable corpses. It is hard to recapture or reconstruct Turkmen commemoration of what for them must have been a deeply traumatic event—far more so than the fall of Tashkent, in which casualties on both sides had been extremely low.

However, one account that hints at how different were Russian and Turkmen memories of the fall of Gök-Tepe and the commemorative practices associated with it, comes in a story recorded by the early Soviet Turkmen ethnographer S.M. Ovezbaev, at the end of his translation of an epic poem about a Turkmen elder and sage called Goni Bek:

Many years later, around 1900, General Kuropatkin, the head of the Transcaspian Province and commander of its forces, during one of his usual tours of the *auls*, talking to an old man, asked—how many Turkmen fell beneath the walls of Geok-Tepe? “3”, replied the old men. When the question was repeated, the old man replied once again, “3”. Supposing that the old man did not understand the question, Kuropatkin averred that they, the Russians, had buried more than 5,000 Turkmen, and that perhaps he knew more or less the number of all the dead, before and after the taking of the fortress. The old man repeated imperturbably once again “3”. Feeling the obvious perplexity of his interlocutor, the old man then told the translator: “you tell the general, that I understand his question—

101 Anon [A. Astrelin], “Pamiatniki Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti,” 51–52.

he is talking about the general number of people buried in the earth. It is true that there was a multitude who were killed and buried, but they were then reborn the following day. The “three” of whom I am talking—they are no longer, and never will be.

– Who were these “3”?

– Aman Geldy Goni, N. and N”.¹⁰²

4 Conclusion

It would be unsurprising to find that Russian and Central Asian ideas of death, heroism and commemoration were so different, or that they remembered Russia’s campaigns of conquest in Central Asia very differently, but a complete study of Central Asian memories of these events is beyond my abilities, and beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will conclude with some brief reflections on how Russian memorials and practices of commemoration in Central Asia compare with the better-known case of British India outlined in the introduction. They clearly had certain things in common—Christian symbols and imagery, class distinction in the commemoration of officers (by name) and men (by numbers), and above all the desire to use the commemoration of war and death to give new meanings to the landscape, creating a new colonial sacred geography. There were also some significant differences—in particular, Russian commemorative practices seem to have been more nakedly triumphalist than British ones. The most prominent British memorials in India—those to the Black Hole and Cawnpore—commemorated supposed atrocities committed by barbarous Indians against the innocent or powerless. These obviously served a wider imperial purpose in justifying and legitimising British rule, but they were still memorials to defeat, albeit defeats that would be avenged—though even that was not the case with the many memorials to the First Afghan War. Lucknow and the Mutiny ridge memorial had more in common with those at Tashkent and Gök-Tepe, in that they supposedly commemorated victory over the odds by heavily-outnumbered forces. Even here though, I would argue that the suffering that accompanied the siege of Lucknow, and the sense that the recapture of Delhi was retribution for earlier massacres and humiliations was what made these sites and the narratives associated with them compelling for British audiences. Both events produced mid-Victorian martyrs, in Sir Henry

¹⁰² Seid Murad Ovezbaev, “Goni Bek (Rasskaz Turkmena o bitve s russkimi pod Geok-Tepe),” *Turkmenovedenie* no. 1 (1927), 29.

Lawrence and John Nicholson, whose manly deaths were the most frequently commemorated aspects of both.¹⁰³ By contrast, Russian commemoration of the conquest of Central Asia seems more straightforwardly concerned with celebrating victory and the brutal fact of conquest, rather than remembering the dead. No doubt both types of commemoration served the same purpose—domesticating and sacralising an alien landscape, but the contrast is striking. There are a number of probable reasons for this: despite the enthusiastic reception of Gök-Tepe in educated circles in metropolitan Russia, the main audience for Russian commemorative practices in Central Asia was the military themselves—the kinds of more populist memorials which Cohen identifies for the Russo-Japanese War (and which interestingly did lay a greater emphasis on death and sacrifice) were less prominent in Central Asia, though by the time it was finally completed the Tashkent monument had acquired at least a flavour of this. The Central Asian campaigns were in no sense “people’s wars”—even less so than the Boer War. They were fought by very small forces of professional soldiers, most of whom came from the Urals region, Siberia and the Caucasus rather than metropolitan Russia. The centrality of the Indian Mutiny to the British imagining of empire and commemoration of the sacrifices it required was because so many of the victims were middle-class women and children.¹⁰⁴ This did not apply to any of Russia’s Central Asian campaigns—a possible parallel would be the 1916 revolt, where in Semirechie over 3,000 Russian settlers, many of them women and children, were killed by Qazaqs and Kyrgyz. However the revolutions of 1917, and the huge political transformations that followed, ensured that no memorials to the 1916 revolt were erected until after the end of Soviet rule, and then they would be to the tens of thousands of nomads who perished in Russian reprisals. Perhaps, had the colonial regime in Central Asia persisted, a culture of commemoration using the deaths of the innocent as a justification for the imperial civilizing mission might have emerged there as well.

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103 See Charles Allen, *Soldier Sahibs. The Men who Made the North-West Frontier* (London: John Murray, 2012) & Harold Lee, *Brothers in the Raj. The Lives of John and Henry Lawrence* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

104 Chakravarty, *Indian Mutiny*, 35–41.

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