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### *Central Asia in Early Photographs: Russian Colonial Attitudes and Visual Culture*

Histories are not backdrops to set off the performance of images. They are scored into the paltry paper signs, in what they do, in what they encompass and exclude, in the ways they open on to or resist a repertoire of uses in which they can be meaningful and productive. Photographs are never “evidence” of history; they are themselves the historical . . . And the ways in which photography has been historically implicated in the technology of power-knowledge, of which the procedures of evidence are part, must themselves be the object of study. (John Tagg<sup>1</sup>)

Fourteen years after John Tagg published his seminal book *The Burden of Representation*, Paul S. Landau wrote in *Images and Empires*: “Photography affected the practices and institutions that composed empires because of its imagery. Yet historians have hardly begun to consider the practical involvement of visual images in the structures of power that composed imperialism. How should they do so?”<sup>2</sup> Landau proposed to

1 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 65.

2 Paul S. Landau, “Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa,” in Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 149.

begin by studying the circulation of images. My goal in this paper is to examine the context of production and reception of the image of the racial/ethnic "Other" that was created by visual means in the Russian Empire at the dawn of the twentieth century. Specifically, how did the photographic image shape, affect, and ultimately reveal Russian colonial attitudes after the imperial conquest of Central Asia?

I agree with the historian John Armstrong who posited that "the primary characteristic of ethnic boundaries is attitudinal. In their origins and in most fundamental effects, ethnic boundary mechanisms exist in the minds of their subjects rather than as lines on a map or norms in a rule book."<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, *attitude* is understood as both "a mental position with regard to a fact or state" (also "a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state") and "a negative or hostile state of mind, an arrogant manner."<sup>4</sup> The advent of photography as a professional venture and the unprecedented development of new technology leading to a mass consumption of photographs coincided chronologically with the end of the century during which basic attitudes toward the nationalities in the Russian Empire were formed. I am interested in tracing the formation of the racist "natural attitude" toward non-Russians as well as the "knowledge" concerning them postulated by mass culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and I use historic photographs of Central Asia to challenge the assumption of the muteness and relative mildness of Russian Orientalism. Contrary to what some students of Russian history<sup>5</sup> would have us believe, I argue that Russian colonialist discourse was not marked by a lesser degree of ethnic and racial prejudice than that of other European states. The echo of the cultural workings of these attitudes—feelings, emotions, or mental positions with re-

3 John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 7–8.

4 Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster), p. 74.

5 Violet Conolly, "The 'Nationalities Question' in the Last Phase of Tsardom," in Erwin Oberlander et al., eds., *Russia Enters the Twentieth Century, 1894–1917* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 154; Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 267; Emanuel Sarkisyanz, "Russian Imperialism Reconsidered," in Taras Hunczak, ed., *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), p. 73.

gard to peoples of different stock, or *inorodtsy*—can be heard in the post-Soviet space today [III. 1].<sup>6</sup>

I employ the methodology of visual studies, a new field for the study of the cultural construction of the visual in arts, media, and everyday life that regards “the visual image as the focal point in the processes through which meaning is made in a cultural context.”<sup>7</sup> From the viewpoint of visual studies, the history of photography is neither a history of art, nor a history of science. Instead of viewing photography as being developed in an aesthetic vacuum or solely linked to its technological advancements, visual studies holds that “the indexical nature of the photograph—the causative link between the pre-photographic referent and the sign—is highly complex, irreversible, and can guarantee nothing at the level of meaning. . . . Like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded.”<sup>8</sup> The photograph is a mediated view of the object placed before the lens.<sup>9</sup> Although photography was valued for its realism and objectivity by positivists in the nineteenth

6 Having conducted some 2,850 interviews in 2002, Vyacheslav Karpov, a professor of sociology at Western Michigan University and the principal investigator of the National Council for East European and Eurasian Research project *Religious Intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia*, came to the following conclusion: “While negative perceptions of Islam are common among Russians, they are only indirectly and remotely linked to religiosity, and directly—to intolerant political and ethnic attitudes” (Vyacheslav Karpov, “Orthodoxy, Religious Ethnocentrism and Intolerance in Russia,” paper presented at the Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, April 2005, p. 6). Karpov, who works within the framework of social scientific research, explores the phenomenon of Russian religious ethnocentrism, that is, a belief system that rigidly links a group’s ethnic identity to its dominant religion and views other religions as ethnically alien and potentially threatening to the group’s identity and well-being. This empirical study is an important breakthrough because it departs from an opinion commonly held in the West that finds the intrinsic roots of intolerance in the theology of Orthodoxy itself (on this account, Orthodoxy is incompatible with western pluralism) and ignores the ethnic realities and aspirations at the level of everyday mass culture.

7 Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), p. 1.

8 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, pp. 63–64.

9 In all visual arts, even so called “neutral” characteristics, such as rendering objects in pictorial or photographic space (in fore- or background) and perspective (in European painting, the linear perspective discovered by Leonardo da Vinci, which grants the viewer a privileged, dominant position) affect the overall meaning.

century – the Russian photographer Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii even went so far as to call the human eye “a nature-given camera” – it is not a transparent medium but an artifact capable of determining or changing the way one sees its content. The camera’s dual capacity to record actuality as well as to deceive the eye made it an ideal apparatus for the representation of the ethnic “Other.”

In my research, I found useful a concept of “place-myth” formulated by the sociologist Rob Shields in his book *Places on the Margin*.<sup>10</sup> Place-myths are conglomerates of place-images, that is, stereotypes and clichés associated with particular locations, used in a society. Place-myths need not necessarily be in concordance with the veracity of a location; their power and influence are due to their reiteration and widespread dissemination. I argue that the Central Asia of the nineteenth-century Russian visual culture is such a place-myth, and the early photographs give us a possibility to glance at how Russian colonial attitudes took effect. I can say with Roland Barthes that “I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the [hidden] ideological abuse,”<sup>11</sup> which becomes transparent in the process of the reading of early photographs (emphasis added).

## Historical Backdrop

On July 13, 1867, Tsar Alexander II issued the Decree on Creation of the Turkestan Military District,<sup>12</sup> to which parts of the Emirate of Bukhara (with Samarkand) and of the Khanate of Khiva were added later. The Secretary to the Cotton Committee of St. Petersburg Nikolai Mala-

10 Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991).

11 Roland Barthes, preface to the 1972 edition, in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972; originally published in 1957), p. 11.

12 See *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, *Sobranie 2-e* (1830–1884), tom 42, chast’ 1 (St. Petersburg, 1871), uk. 44844, str. 1156–1164. The decree established the Turkestan Military District, not the Turkestan province; however, the Statute on the Turkestan Military District attached to this Decree provided for granting to the Commanding Officer of the Turkestan Military District the status of Turkestan Governor-General.



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howskii wrote about Turkestan in an English-language publication: "The area of Turkestan is equal to the combined areas of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Holland and Denmark. The greater part of Russian Turkestan is desert, of which only 4 percent is under irrigation and suitable for purposes of agriculture. Part of the remaining 96 percent may be exploited for pasture land."<sup>13</sup> He continued, "the artificially irrigated part is so rich that Russian Turkestan is indubitably the most precious gem in the Czar's crown. The most valuable product of this country is cotton, which saves the Russian people many million rubles, because it precludes the necessity of importing American cotton."<sup>14</sup> In Turkestan, the Russian government would set up cotton plantations or give land to Russian migrants—landless settlers—who were told that this land was virgin, empty, awaited their arrival, and above all, needed to be in capable hands. The state-sponsored migration began shortly after the military district of Turkestan had been established. The Ignat'ev Commission of 1884 recommended peasant colonization of Turkestan as well as Steppe; famine caused the massive migration of population from Great Russia in 1891–1892. In the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, there were 326 Russian villages with the peasant population numbering 248,500 in five districts,<sup>15</sup> and the process of migration of Russian population to Central Asia continued well into Soviet times. The superiority of Russian tillers who lacked previous experience with irrigation over the indigenous population, which had lived in this region for generations, was not questioned. This situation is familiar: Native Americans, Australian aboriginals, and Africans have also been the subjects of forced relocation, and those who were not physically eliminated in the first phase of conquest had to relocate and adjust their lifestyle, including means of production, during the second phase of white settlers' colonization.

13 Nikolai Malahowskii, *Russian Turkestan and Its Products* (St. Petersburg, 1910), p. 1.

14 Cotton was cultivated in the locals of Fergana, Samarkand, Syr-Darya, and Transcaspia.

15 V. I. Masal'skii, *Turkestanskii krai*, tom 19 of *Rossia: Polnoe geograficheskoe opisaniie nashego otechestva*, ed. V. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii (St. Petersburg, 1913), pp. 332–333.

## Russian Colonial Photography in the Nineteenth Century: *Turkestan Album and Types of Nationalities of Central Asia*

With what indigenous image was the Russian public of both the metropole and the colony presented? In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were two major systematic attempts to capture daily life in Central Asia through photography: *Turkestanskii al'bom* (*Turkestan Album*)<sup>16</sup> prepared in 1871–1872, and a volume of photographs *Tipy narodnosti Srednei Azii* (*Types of Nationalities of Central Asia*)<sup>17</sup> presented to the Third International Congress of Orientalists in St. Petersburg in 1876. *Turkestanskii al'bom*, commissioned by Governor-General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (1867–1882), was compiled by M. I. Brodovskii, N. V. Bogaevskii, a naturalist A. L. Kun, and a general M. A. Terent'ev. It featured images from the Zaravshan District, the city of Samarkand, and the Syr-Darya oblast. The album contained nearly 1,220 mounted photographs (gold-toned albumen prints) and consisted of six books covering four sections, or *chasti*: archaeology (two books), ethnography (two books), industry, and the recent military history. The preface, identical in all four sections, credits Kun with the selection of the photographs and Bogaevskii with most of the photographs in the archaeological volumes. Brodovskii worked with Kun on section 3 (industry). The fourth section (historical) was compiled by Terent'ev. Introductory pages were printed in St. Petersburg; headings and captions in sections 1, 2, and 4 were lithographed by the department of military topography (*voenno-topograficheskii otdel*) of the Turkestan Military District and section 3 by A. Argamakov, both probably in Tashkent. Supplementary volumes of explanatory materials were originally planned but only one was completed.<sup>18</sup> According to *Istoricheskii Vestnik* (1899, vol. 76, p. 96), there were only six sets of the album produced, including a copy for Tsar

16 *Turkestanskii al'bom*, po rasporiasheniiu Turkestanskogo general-gubernatora General-ad"iutanta K. P. fon Kaufmana (Tashkent, 1871–1872).

17 Komitet po uchastiiu Turkestanskogo kraia na Tre't'em Mezhdunarodnom kongresse orientalistov, *Tipy narodnosti Srednei Azii* (n.p., 1876).

18 M. I. Brodovskii, *Tekhnicheskie proizvodstva v Turkestanskom krae* (St. Petersburg, 1875).

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Alexander II; one for his heir, Prince Alexander; one for the Academy of Sciences; one for the Russian Geographic Society; one for the newly founded Public Library in Tashkent, and one for the governor-general of Turkestan.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that the compilers chose to call the last section detailing a story of the occupation and featuring the victors [III. 2] “historical,” in effect erasing the people of Central Asia’s history *before* the invasion and replacing it with a history of the Russian conquest. Moreover, the first section (archaeology) introduced “the past life of the region in preserved ancient monuments,” thus perpetuating the European myth of Asia as a land that had given birth to the world’s first and finest civilizations but whose glory days were forever removed [III. 3, 4, 5]. The message conveyed by the album composition was that a historical void took place or, in other words, there were no events of historical significance between the time of Sogdiana and Bactria and the time of Tamerlane (Timur) and again between the early fifteenth century and the imperial conquest of the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus the album’s composition provided a justification, in non-verbal form, as to how the Russian occupation should be seen as a magnanimous civilizing mission.

These events bear a striking similarity to a new strand of thought that appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1880s: the vision of the special role of the British to bring freedom and civilization to the world, with a sense of possession being replaced by a perceived obligation to help and develop their colonies. To the officials in St. Petersburg who closely observed the British advances in India and Afghanistan, the Russian acquisition of Central Asia was a victory in the undeclared war over colonies in Asia. However, this victory did not mean an end of the conflict. In the Introduction to *Problems of Greater Britain*, the influential Sir Charles Dilke wrote: “In the future conflict of rivalry between our own and the

19 Today, the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C., USA) owns one set of the *Turkestanskii al'bom*, which is believed to have come from the Turkestan Public Library that had almost been destroyed by von Kaufman’s successor. The Library of Congress catalog mentions *seven* original sets, following the number given by Richard A. Pierce in *Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 317.

Great-Russian people, we have upon our side the advantages of combining in our race the best qualities of the foremost races of the old world, with the result that in our daughter-countries there are present courage, national integrity, steady good sense, and energy in work such as are perhaps unknown elsewhere."<sup>20</sup> The Russians had to respond to an idea of imperial unity, and the works of visual culture such as *Turkestan-skii al'bom* helped them both to visualize the existent conditions in a remote colony and to realize a new obligation—"the white man's burden."

Heirs to the ancient culture, the current inhabitants of the Governor-Generalship of Turkestan were presented in the album's second, ethnographical, section devoted to "the contemporary life—patterns, beliefs, religious rites, customs, dwellings, dress, and views of the more populated surrounding districts" [III. 6–8] and the third section related to "the culture of the country in industry and technology" as exotic, odd species with primitive tools and methods of production [III. 9, 10]. This album served as both a visual "document" of the perceived backwardness of the indigenous people and a multi-volume invitation of sorts for the new overlords, to mobilize their forces and bring about change to this "decaying" region.

The compilers of *Turkestan-skii al'bom* included images of the representatives of ethnic groups in Central Asia. However, their efforts were far superseded by the colonial scientists who in 1876 assembled the photographic volume *Tipy narodnostei Srednei Azii*. Twenty years before *Tipy narodnostei* was released in Russia, the French photographer Felix-Jacques-Antoine Moulin created a series of photographs *Province d'Alger* (1856–1857). It included images of indigenous chiefs, dancing women, Arab villages, French settlements, and also what he called "manners and costumes." In 1868–1875, the eight-volume colonial study *The People of India*, containing over 400 photographs and descriptions of every Indian group and caste was produced. Approximately at the same time as *Tipy narodnostei*, in 1873–1876, Carl and Frederick Dammann's portfolios *Ethnological Photographic Gallery of the Various Races of Man* were published. It is interesting to note that photography in service of science was indeed

20 Charles W. Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain* (London, 1890), p. 3.

“the latest craze”: in the *Transactions of the Third International Congress of Orientalists*—and the first one that took place in Russia (St. Petersburg, August 20–31, 1876)—we find an article “About archaeological value of the Photographical Album of Armenia by Mr. Kurgiants.”<sup>21</sup> The Caucasus and Central Asia were given considerable attention at this congress.<sup>22</sup>

*Tipy narodnostei Srednei Azii* consisted of 85 pages filled with photographs of male and female inhabitants of Central Asian cities and towns. All images were taken in the studio of V. Kozlovskii in Tashkent. The Russian anthropologists and ethnographers used, in the spirit of the time, the style of the police “mug shot” [III. 11, 12]. The photographs featuring anonymous individuals were used to demonstrate Central Asians’ “racial” differences (between, among others, Afghans, Dungans, Jews, Kalmyks, Kirgiz, Sarts, Tajiks, and Uzbeks) as perceived by the colonial authorities at that time. The Russians were not unique or alone in such an undertaking: Harry Johnston pursued the same goal with regard to the Africans twenty years later in *British Central Africa* (1897). Inevitably, questions—or even doubts—arise. How did the Russians recruit their sample among the population (validity of procedure)? What were the assumptions and criteria for choosing these particular people to represent the specific groups (accuracy of representation)? What was the process through which the specific—ethnic, “racial”—groups got defined in the first place (soundness of theory)?

These images tell us a story of how photography was involved in the invention of ethnic and racial “types.” Based on his perception of peo-

21 K. P. Patkanov, “Ob arkheologicheskoi tsennosti fotograficheskogo al'boma Armenii raboty g. Kurgiantsa” in V. V. Grigor'ev, ed., *3 Mezhdunarodnyi s'ezd orientalistov: Trudy*, tom 1 (St. Petersburg, 1879), pp. 582–587.

22 Several articles dealing with the subject of the Caucasus and Central Asia appeared in the *Transactions of the Third International Congress of Orientalists*. See V. V. Grigor'ev, ed., *3 Mezhdunarodnyi s'ezd orientalistov: Trudy*, tom 1 (St. Petersburg, 1879) and vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1880): A. P. Berzhe, “Etnograficheskoe obozrenie Kavkaza” (tom 1, pp. 291–326); Patkanov, “Ob arkheologicheskoi tsennosti” (see above); M. N. Rostislavov, “Ocherk vidov zemel'noi sobstvennosti i pozemel'nyi vopros v Turkestanskom krae” (tom 1, pp. 327–359); N. Tcharykov, “Un voyage dans l'Ouzbekistan en 1671” (tom 1, pp. 595–604); H. G. Raverty, “On the Turks, Tatars and Mughals” (vol. 2, pp. 73–124); P. Lerch, “Sur les monnaies des Boukhar-Khoudahs ou princes de Boukhara avant la conquête du Maverennahr par les arabes” (vol. 2, pp. 418–432).

ples' appearances, the photographer portrayed some as representatives of specific groups (these groups were a result of earlier speculations by travelers, historians, and statesmen) onto which particular qualities were projected (e.g., "dirty Kirgiz," or "sneaky Sarts"). It was believed that the camera could document standardized traits, character, and behavior associated with these qualities. In reality, a number of deindividuated persons would stand in place of a population whose variety was reduced to the newly constructed "types." Today, we call such activity stereotyping. Then, it was a common practice, going hand-in-hand with, and feeding the developments in, sciences (anthropology, ethnography), medicine, and forensics. The further circulation of such photographs in the context of a colonial regime reinforced the notion of alien nature of the non-Russian subjects. One should not forget that the formulation of qualities that were being projected on the population was a *continuous* process of creating the "other" identity, correlated with the colonization itself, from the first encounter through a subjugation and domination and to response to resistance. Partakers in these processes, both photography and fine arts, through endorsing particular readings and attitudes while disabling others, were essential for shaping and redefining the colonial attitudes.

### **Central Asia in Color Photography of S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii (1909–1915)**

Between 1909 and 1912 and then again in 1915, Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii (1863–1944) made several trips and shot thousands of color pictures of agricultural scenes, industry, and daily life in eleven regions of the Russian Empire. About nineteen hundred sets of his glass negatives were acquired by the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.) from the photographer's sons shortly after World War II.<sup>23</sup> There are

23 Prokudin-Gorskii left Russia in 1918, and only one-half of his plates survived. These negatives were sold to the Library of Congress by the sons of Prokudin-Gorskii in Paris four years after his death, in 1948. Among the works chosen for publication as part of the Russian Translation Project of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) was Igor Grabar's multi-volume *History of Russian Art*. While such a book required numerous illus-

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only a handful of publications on Prokudin-Gorskii photography (in Russian and English), and the tone of the existent ones is celebratory: the photographer is praised for being among the first to experiment with polychromy. I am most interested in returning “text,” or Prokudin-Gorskii’s works, to its original “context,” that is, the history of conquest and colonization.

Prokudin-Gorskii was born to a noble family in St. Petersburg on August 31, 1863. He studied natural science, painting, and chemistry in St. Petersburg and completed his education in Germany where he worked for two years under the guidance of Adolf Miethe (1862–1927), professor at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin, who in 1902–1904 developed a process for color photography.<sup>24</sup> After his return from abroad, Prokudin-Gorskii joined the Division of “Light-Writing” – the name by which photography was then known in Russia – the fifth department of the Imperial Russian Technical Society, organized in the 1870s under the initiative of the chemist Dmitrii Mendeleev.

In 1898, Prokudin-Gorskii founded the first courses for practicing photographers in Russia. On December 13, 1902 he introduced the members of the Imperial Russian Technical Society to the new method of tri-color photography. According to Walter Frankhauser, Prokudin-Gorskii’s custom-built camera was “something like the old Kodak retina

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trations, the ACLS did not have access to the original plates used by Grabar in Russia. A translator working on the Project, Princess Maria Poutiatine, knew about works by Prokudin-Gorskii that, as she believed, could be used for illustrations in art history books. Mr. W. Chapin Huntington of the ACLS asked Mr. Donald A. Lowrie, the representative of the Union Chretienne de Jeunes Gens in Paris, to locate the negatives. Lowrie facilitated a purchase by the Library of Congress of the three-color separation plates, accompanied by the set of small black and white contact prints made from the “red” negatives and pages of identifying captions (later translated by Huntington into English). In 2000, Lynn Brooks, director of the Digital Scan Center at the Library of Congress, and Walter Frankhauser, owner of Walter Studio Professional Photography in Lexington, Virginia were the first to obtain a single digital color image through the process of *digichromatography*. They produced the first 122 color images from glass negatives (see *Professional Photographer*, February 2002, p. 40). Today, the fully digitized collection can be viewed on the Library’s web site [<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/empire> (valid as of January 29, 2007)].

24 For its description see Adolf Miethe, *Dreifarbenphotographie nach der Natur: nach den am Photochemischen Laboratorium der Technischen Hochschule zu Berlin angewandten Methoden* (Halle a.S.: Wilhelm Knapp, 1904).

folding cameras”: it had a bellows on the front and the front lens objective on a pull-out track.<sup>25</sup> Prokudin-Gorskii used interchangeable lenses, some made by Karl Zeiss. He worked with the Ilford red process (black and white) glass plates that he chemically modified to render panchromatic (e.g., sensitive to all colors throughout the spectrum). Prokudin-Gorskii would insert one long plate into a camera and rapidly make three separate shots of the same scene, one each through blue, red, and green supplementary filters. Each image registered the amount of that color present in the image. Then he would convert the glass plate negative containing three 3x3” monochrome images taken in succession into positive transparencies and project them in alignment, each through its corresponding color filter, using a three-light projection system of his own design. These images were superimposed on the wall to create a *transitory resulting image* that has received the name of “optical color projection.” Note, however, that Prokudin-Gorskii did not work with the color-emulsion film per se. Also, he did not develop a method of converting these combined screen images into permanent color prints on paper.

In January of 1905, Prokudin-Gorskii showed seventy color transparencies — his works dating from the past three years — at the Imperial Russian Technical Society in St. Petersburg. The images of scenes from Finland, Dagestan [III. 13] and Transcaucasia received the most enthusiastic response from the audience.<sup>26</sup> In 1908, a demonstration of color transparencies accompanied an exhibition of Russian photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. During the presentation, Prokudin-Gorskii displayed images of several ancient buildings and their architectural details from Turkestan that had disappeared in an earthquake shortly after being photographed. He also showed the image of an ancient vase from the Imperial Hermitage whose colors had begun to

25 Quoted in Joan T. Sherwood, “A Century in the Development,” *PEI: Photo>Electronic Imaging*, September 2001, p. 39.

26 Fame came to Prokudin-Gorskii when he shot an anniversary portrait of 80 year-old Leo Tolstoy in his estate Yasnaya Polyana. This portrait was reproduced in color, polygraphically, in the August 1908 issue of the *Zapiski IRTO* (*Notes of the Imperial Russian Technical Society*) and, at the same time, in the journal *Fotograf Liubitel'* (*Amateur Photographer*) edited by Prokudin-Gorskii.



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fade. He deemed “leaving a precise document for the future”<sup>27</sup> one of the important goals of the method of tri-color photography that he had developed. Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich Romanov happened to be in the audience that day. He approached the photographer and asked to acquaint him with the method of color photography from nature. On an invitation from Empress Maria Fedorovna that followed Prokudin-Gorskii showed his works to the royal family at their residence in Tsarskoe Selo on May 3, 1909. He chose to show the rural views, sunsets, snowy landscapes, pictures of peasant children, and flowers—the aesthetically “neutral” subjects. The show was a success, and Tsar Nicholas II asked Prokudin-Gorskii about his plans. The photographer outlined various possible applications of his work in a future and added, “Perhaps, it would be of interest to your Majesty to see from time to time *the real Russia and her great monuments*, as well as the colors of the diverse nature of our great Motherland”<sup>28</sup> (emphasis added). His proposition was warmly received, and the tsar ordered Prokudin-Gorskii to speak with Minister of Transportation S. V. Rukhlov who was to support the photographer in this endeavor. (Without special permission, neither foreigners nor Russian citizens could travel to remote places in Imperial Russia in the early twentieth century.) It was necessary for Rukhlov to equip Prokudin-Gorskii with a private railroad carriage—half living quarters and half darkroom—and a pass to allow this laboratory to be connected to any train in the empire, a steam boat with the crew, an automobile “Ford,” and a motor boat.

In 1909, Prokudin-Gorskii began work on “The Collection of Points of Interest in Russia” and spent the first summer surveying the Mariinskii Waterway (the Volga-Baltic Canal, linking the upper Volga and Neva Rivers), sites of the activities of Peter I, the Central Ural, and the Volga River [III. 14]. The first display of the commissioned work took place at

27 *Katalog obraztsov tsvetnoi pečati (tipografskoi) khudozhestvennykh fototekhnicheskikh masterskikh S.M. Prokudina-Gorskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1911).

28 Diary of S.M. Prokudin-Gorskii, Personal archive of S.M. Prokudin-Gorskii (property of his grandson Michel Soussaline, Paris), quoted in Svetlana Garanina, “Delo Kantseliarii Soveta Ministrov o priobretenii v kaznu kolleksii fotograficheskikh snimkov dostoprimechatel’nostei Rossii S. M. Prokudina-Gorskogo, 1910–1912 gg.,” in *Rossiiskii Arkhiv: Istoriia Otechestva v svidetel’svoakh i dokumentakh XVIII–XX vv.*, vypusk 9 (Moscow, 1999), p. 468.

the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg on March 20, 1910. Thereafter, Prokudin-Gorskii spent the summer months traveling and taking photographs across the empire, and in the fall presented the images first at the Ministry of Transportation and then at court. "The choice of subject was somewhat different for Tsar," recalled Prokudin-Gorskii in emigration, "special structures of the Ministry such as dams, excavations for railroad lines, and bridges of various types, could not interest the tsar as much as Russian antiquity, ancient monuments, and the beauty of nature."<sup>29</sup>

Prokudin-Gorskii made about four thousand sets of three-color separation plates, only one-half of which are known to us today. The photographic survey covered such geographically diverse regions as: 1) the area of the Mariinskii canal system; 2) Turkestan; 3) the Ural Mountains; 4) the Volga River basin; 5) Dagestan and Transcaucasia; 6) the historical area of the Napoleonic war (Smolensk, Belarus); 7) the area traversed by the Murmansk Railway under construction (it was a supply link between Russia and its allies during World War I); 8) the monuments commemorating the Romanovs' tercentenary; 9) Ukraine; and 10) Finland and Karelia (parts of the Russian Empire until December 1917; the Finnish region Karelia was ceded to the USSR after World War II). The subjects included the important religious and civic buildings, architectural details, murals, railroads, local industries, agricultural practices, topographical landscapes, ethnographic types, and panoramas of towns. Prokudin-Gorskii visited Turkestan twice: on January 1, 1907, when he observed a sun eclipse, and in 1911, with S. Maksimovich, another inventor and member of the Imperial Russian Technical Society.

When Prokudin-Gorskii began "compiling a systematic collection of photographic images, in natural colors, of the sights of interest in Russia" in 1909, he wanted to produce and make available some 10,000 images (!) that would "arouse love for the motherland, interest in studying its beauties and inexhaustible riches, without which it is unthinkable to teach truly patriotic feelings to the youth."<sup>30</sup> We find almost the same wording in an official document describing his activities. In a July 10, 1910 letter to Prime-Minister Petr Stolypin, Minister of Finances V. Kokovtsov stated that the main reason for this enterprise was for an "acqui-

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 473.

sition of materials for the study of the fatherland.”<sup>31</sup> We see a remarkable unanimity between the attitude of a private citizen and the opinion of a Russian official, the latter not ordering but, rather, supporting the citizen.

Perusing the first issues of *Fotograf-Liubitel'* – the influential magazine founded in 1890 by Aleksandr Stepanovich Lavrov, a photographer, metallurgical expert, and by coincidence founder of Russia's steel cannon industry (also Prokudin-Gorskii's father-in-law) – I discovered an embryo of the program for Prokudin-Gorskii's undertaking. In an editorial written some nineteen years earlier and titled, “What is Modern Photography, an Amateur and a Professional?” there is the following passage:

Russia provides so much material for an amateur photographer that the other European countries cannot. . . . Where else is there a country where the cold waves of the Arctic Ocean, under a sun that never sets, beat the granite rocks of the beaches of Murman where Lapps and Pomors work in their traditional costumes? Where else are there such forests as Belovezhskaia Pushcha with its buffalo or the natural forests of Pechora and Vologda, altogether different from those commonplace woods one sees when abroad, where human culture combined with a scarcity of land reproduce everything artificially, mutilating and disfiguring the nature itself? Are there in any other country the Ukrainian endless steppes, with their national character and clean wattle houses sheltered in the shade of poplar trees, with the herds of fat-tailed sheep and steppe horses, with melon fields behind corn fences? And how about Ukrainian women with their scampish black eyes that any Italian woman, long considered the ideal model for artists, would envy? Where else besides Russia is the Caucasus with its water falls, mountains, and canyons covered with rich vegetation and vineyards, not at all like those unattractive vineyards surrounding the muddy Rhine, with their sour grapes, bafflingly praised by local patriots? And our Volga River with its fleets of grain so coveted by our neighbors – the grain, piling our piers and railroads? Is there anywhere else such beautiful shores as the Crimea, washed by the greenish water of the Black Sea and covered by the thick southern lush, with Tatars on small and fast horses? Where else, apart from Russia, are so many historic monuments, not in the form of African noseless sphinxes or pyramids, but rather churches, fortresses, mounds, and even

31 Ibid., p. 473.

groves planted by our great ancestors! Would not all the above, if any of the modern European countries possessed such, serve as material for such a photo exhibition, one that would attract as many people as the Eiffel Tower?<sup>32</sup>

This is a mixed message in which patriotism is coupled with nationalistic pride and xenophobia, and an interest in one's own history and culture coupled with a feeling of racial superiority. This attitude was present at the turn of the century, and even twenty years later a special Inter-Agency Commission Concerning the Acquisition of Prokudin-Gorskii's Photographic Collection by the State Treasury reached the following conclusion: "When our educational institutions, both elementary and secondary, have access to the pictures taken by Prokudin-Gorskii, we will have the *exemplary, true study of motherland [rodinovedenie]*, and this important and necessary undertaking will bring Russia an enviable, leading position among the civilized countries, especially valuable given the vast stretches and extreme heterogeneity of various parts of the Russian Empire"<sup>33</sup> (emphasis added). The emphasis is somewhat different—a concern with educating the common man—but the undertones are similar to Lavrov's. An ultimate goal of this state-sponsored photographic survey was to educate the public, and especially the schoolchildren, about the Empire—to pass down the knowledge acceptable to and approved by its central administration—by means of the color slide projections. It was estimated that the schools and general public would purchase some 20,000 copies of albums and charts; in addition, the regular slide demonstrations were to be organized at various venues. While the majority of the population in the regions where Prokudin-Gorskii took photographs—Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, the Volga River basin, the Ural Mountains, the Caucasus, and Central Asia—was not Russian, it is telling that Prokudin-Gorskii viewed his work as a "common Russian" thing.

Throughout his collection, the non-Russian subjects were identified by a more generalized reference to their ethnicities, racial backgrounds, confessions, and lifestyles. An exemplar caption reads "The Bashkirs,

32 A. S. Lavrov, "Chto takoe sovremennaia fotografiia, liubitel'skaia i khudozhestvennaia?" *Fotograf-Liubitel'* 1, no. 3 (1890), pp. 4–13.

33 Garanina, "Delo Kantseliarii Soveta Ministrov," p. 484.

one of the many non-Russian peoples of the Urals, gave up their nomadic life in favor of villages, such as this" (e.g., the "settler vs. nomad" issue is taken up). "How striking is the contrast between these dirty wanderers of the steppe and monks of the Holy Russia—the latter not only pray the right God but are in a special relationship with the land!" the average member in the audience may have exclaimed [III. 15, 16]. Russians were imagining the people of Central Asia as indolent and lazy (as if they did not produce but only sold goods and fruit, judging from the numerous pictures of sellers [III. 17]), backward [III. 18], poorly educated (there only were religious schools, and there was a lack of modern education, even in Bukhara and Samarkand [III. 19]), superstitious, and in a need of correction [III. 20]. Prokudin-Gorskii helped create an image of the savage who had to be delivered from the vices of "medieval darkness" but whose capability to change and a readiness to embrace the civilized lifestyle had been severely impeded by the centuries of "despotism and tyranny" and was therefore questioned by Russians. In this manner, Prokudin-Gorskii's photographs of Central Asia wedded the study of motherland with a state-sponsored colonization and discrimination of indigenous population. His photography also served the reflexive function. The potential of the new visual technology as a publicity tool was tremendous. Anthropologists know that frequently groups define themselves not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion, through a comparison with "strangers." It is especially true in this case: the images produced by Prokudin-Gorskii shortly after the last imperial conquest provoked the Russian population to contemplate about their racial and cultural identity.<sup>34</sup>

The method of photography invented by Prokudin-Gorskii limited him to shooting static scenes and objects. As a result, we often do not find active agency in his images—only the objects, such as buildings and architectural details [III. 21], deserted city vistas, and objectified posing

34 This continues in contemporary Russian culture at many levels. For example, in 2004 the Federal Archival Service published an album whose compilers and editors had not only reproduced the old photographs of the Empire but had also replicated *the ordering* of subjects, with ethnic non-Russian "types" providing a background against which the imperial and nationalist spectacle was played out (Federal'naia arkhivnaia sluzhba Rossii, *Rossiiskaia Imperiia v fotografiakh: konets 19 – nachalo 20 veka* (St. Petersburg, 2004)).

subjects to whom history happens but they do not act upon their will [III. 22]. Frequently, landscape seems to appear as a still-life, laid out there for the viewer's eye [III. 23]. These panoramic landscapes were a representation of the "promised land" calling for settlement.

Prokudin-Gorskii was a pioneer of color photography. In contrast to the monochrome nature of black and white, the use of color served a double purpose. On the one hand, the color photographs had a lifelike quality since they appeared to be closer to the capturing the subject; yet, due to the technological shortcomings, the color of early images inevitably deviated from nature. In this situation, manipulation, deliberate or accidental, may have occurred (for example, as the result of insufficient lighting, a built-in feature of the camera designed to capture only light skin). I cannot agree more with Jean Baudrillard who has written: "The photographic event resides in the confrontation between the object and the lens, and in the violence that this confrontation provokes. . . . The photographic act is a duel."<sup>35</sup> In the absence of any other information, the skin color, the appearance of the subjects' face and hair served as a visual testimony to their inner identities [III. 24].<sup>36</sup> Prokudin-Gorskii's desire to use color was as if he wanted the photograph to become something else—to be more than merely a transparency or a print, but instead become a three-dimensional facsimile, and replica of the subject.<sup>37</sup>

I conclude that the early color ethnographic photography was meant to create the new portable, affordable and accessible to lay people,

35 Jean Baudrillard, "La photographie ou l'écriture de la lumière: littéralité de l'image," in *L'Échange impossible* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), pp. 175–184.

36 It is not a coincidence that the *Gorskii Brothers* (*Gorsky Frère*), a firm organized by Sergei Mikhailovich and his sons, Mikhail and Dmitrii, in emigration produced an album of color photographs of the national pavilions of the 1937 World Fair in Paris, *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques* (1937). In the 1930s, they also planned to produce a photographic survey of France and her colonies. This idea was never realized because of the lack of financial means and World War II. However, Mikhail Prokudin-Gorskii managed to compile an album of the ethnographic types of French women wearing national costumes.

37 In the early twentieth century, the avant-garde artists of the *Paris School* (Alexander Archipenko and others) reintroduced color into the art of sculpture that had remained monochrome since the Renaissance. Used for optical effects or as a means of clarifying the overall structure, color in this situation helped *minimize* the realistic qualities of the art object and thus fulfill the modernist aspiration of divorcing art and reality.

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"cabinet of curiosities," or museum on the screen and paper. As such, Russian photography played a special role in delaying the response to demands of the growing nationalist movements in Central Asia in the early twentieth century. As Roland Barthes noted, "there is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The 'Other' becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home."<sup>38</sup>

38 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 152.

## Illustrations and Captions

### 1. S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Emir of Bukhara. 1911.

Here is a single but avid example of what I call the “echo” of the colonial attitudes. The following is an excerpt from an article published in *Novoe Vremia* on May 18, 2005. After having attended the traveling exhibition of Prokudin-Gorskii images at the State Russian Museum, the author Marina Koldobskaia wrote: “В насмешку или по наивности, устроители выбрали для афиши выставки парадный портрет эмира Бухарского. . . . Лицом “империи, которую мы потеряли,” стал роскошный, в три обхвата, *тупорылый* восточный владыка в сверкающем орденами парчовом халате” (Марина Колдобская. Наружное наблюдение. Я люблю тебя, империя. *Новое Время* 20 (18 мая 2005), p. 5). “The organizers have chosen for the poster of the exhibition—either mockingly, or out of sheer naivety—an official portrait of the Emir of Bukhara . . . . The voluptuous, obese, *fat-witted* Oriental despot in brocade caftan covered with shining orders has become the face of ‘the empire we have lost’” (emphasis added). Anyone who is not blinded by racial hatred or obsessed with the idea of Russian supremacy would notice that the last Emir of Bukhara Alim-Khan sits rather awkwardly under the watchful gaze of the photographer and the colonizing state. It is the political and cultural subjugation that causes the tragicomic effect. The full-figured ruler, confined to a narrow airless space, is “squeezed” between the two doors: are these points of access connected to an imagining of the two nations competing for Central Asia, Britain and Russia? The national dress that Alim-Khan wears preserves the appearance of the old rule, while his chest is richly decorated with foreign orders. His pose is the traditional one of the eastern monarch or strongman, and yet something very fragile about this immobile figure appears to the Western eye—the softened shoulder line can be associated with the lack of willpower. Finally, Prokudin-Gorskii did not find it necessary to include the name of the emir in the caption, which created confusion and inaccuracy for generations to come. The Library of Congress catalogers who had to guess the emir’s identity some ninety years later wrote under the call number LC-P87-8086A-1[P&P]: “Sait Abdul Akhad,



Emir of Bukhara (died 1911).” A young man, the subject of the photograph, was the last emir of Bukhara who died in Afghanistan long after the USSR was formed. I thank Dr. Harold McIver Leich of the LC Russian Section and Ms. Shukria Ra’ad, the emir’s youngest daughter now working for “Voice of America” in Washington, DC, for the clarification. The caption should read, “Alim-Khan, the Emir of Bukhara.”

**2. A group of eight Russian soldiers from the Georgian cavalry who were decorated for the capture of the city of Khodzhent on May 24, 1866, Turkestan.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 4, p. 34. 1871–1872.

**3. Samarkand antiquities: The Grave of the Holy Kussam Ibn Abass (Shakh-Zinde) and the Mausoleum. Trimming of the niche inside.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 1, book 1, p. 47. 1871–1872.

**4. Samarkand antiquities: The Mausoleum of the Holy Sheik Nuretdin Bashir Kutbi-Chaardakhum (a general view from the South).** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 1, book 1, p. 129. 1871–1872.

**5. Samarkand antiquities: A bridge (a view from the North).** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 1, book 1, p. 152. 1871–1872.

**6. Fumigation of the sick, Zaravshansky District.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 2, book 2, p. 144. 1871–1872.

**7. Places of the public entertainment of the Central Asians: An opium smoker.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 2, book 2, p. 87. 1871–1872.

**8. Customs of the Central Asians: A circumcision.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 2, book 1, p. 71. 1871–1872.

**9. Fabric printing production, Turkestan: Two men painting cloth.**

*Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 3, p. 5. 1871–1872.

10. **Three men working at forge for fusing cast-iron, Turkestan.** *Turkestanskii al'bom*, section 3, p. 14. 1871–1872.

11. **V. Kozlovskii. A Tajik woman, 27 years old.** *Tipy narodnostei Srednei Azii*. 1876.

12. **V. Kozlovskii. A Kirgiz man, 44 years old.** *Tipy narodnostei Srednei Azii*. 1876.

13. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Dagestani types.** Between 1902 and 1915.

14. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. On the handcar outside Petrozavodsk on the Murmansk railway.** 1915.

Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii, an official, and four railway workers riding on a railroad handcar.

15. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Nomadic Kirgiz, Golodnaia Steppe.** Between 1905 and 1915.

16. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Monks at work. Planting potatoes, Gethsemane Monastery.** 1910.

17. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Mellon vendor, Samarkand.** 1911.

18. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Doctors, Samarkand.** 1911.

19. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Group of Jewish children with a teacher, Samarkand.** 1911.

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20. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Prison. 1911.**
21. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Portion of Shir-Dar minaret and its dome from Tilia-Kari, Samarkand. 1911.**
22. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Sart types, Samarkand. 1911.**
23. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. General view of the Shakh-i Zindeh mosque (evening photo), Samarkand. 1911.**
24. **S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii. Uzbek woman. 1911.**



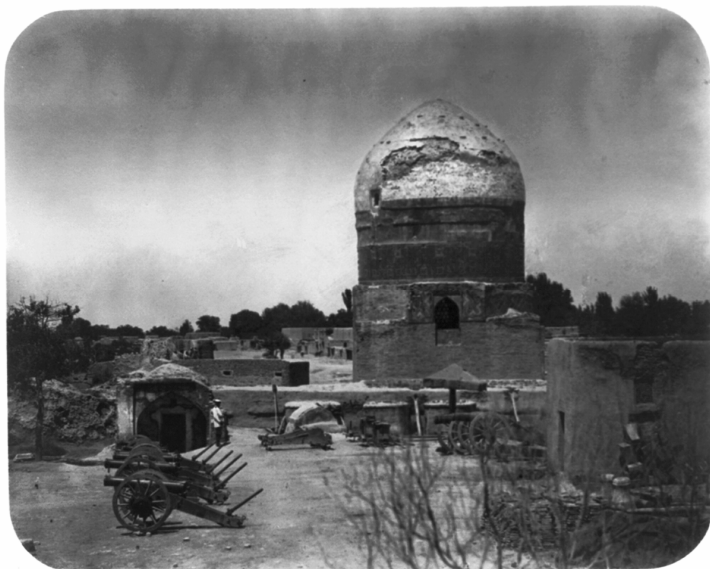
1 Emir of Bukhara



2 A group of eight Russian soldiers from the Georgian cavalry



3 Samarkand antiquities



4 Samarkand antiquities



5 Samarkand antiquities



6 Fumigation of the sick



7 An opium smoker



8 A circumcision



9 Two men painting cloth



10 Three men working at forge for fusing cast-iron





11 A Tajik woman, 27 years old



12 A Kirgiz man, 44 years old



13 Dagestani types



14 On the handcar outside Petrozavodsk



15 Nomadic Kirgiz



16 Monks at work





17 Mellon vendor



18 Doctors

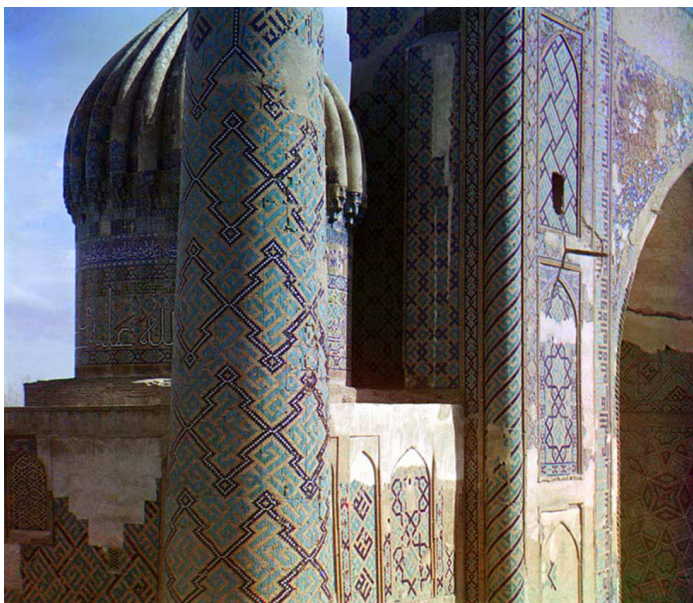


19 Group of Jewish children with a teacher

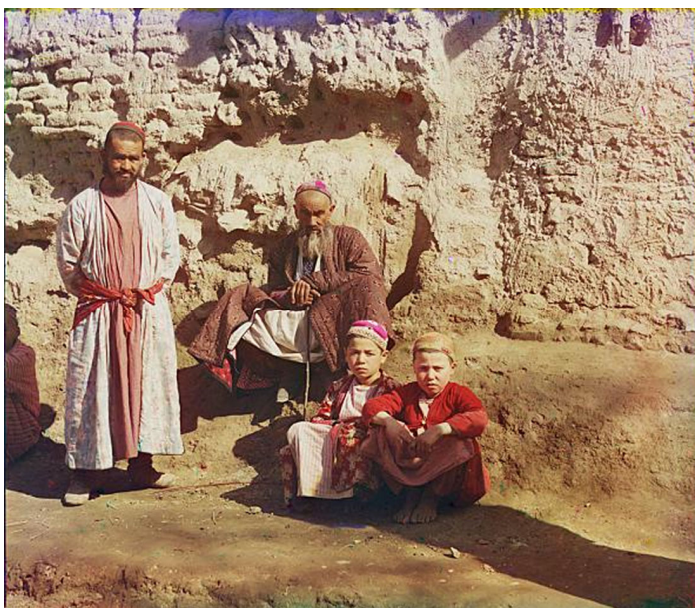


20 Prison





21 Portion of Shir-Dar minaret and its dome



22 Sart types



23 General view of the Shakh-i Zindeh mosque



24 Uzbek woman