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Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York: 2011, 224 p., ISBN: 978-0-1995-9444-3

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The aims of *Russia's Own Orient* are threefold: to explore perceptions of the "East" in Russia during Europe's second "Oriental Renaissance" between 1880 and 1920 (p. 1); to examine the political and intellectual influence of the students and followers of Viktor Romanovich Rozen, Professor of Arabic and Persian studies at St. Petersburg University[1] (p. 3); and, finally, to interpret the significance during this period of the epistemological construction of an integrated Eurasian political and cultural space with no boundaries between the "East" and the "West" (p. 5). Tolz frames these debates in the context of the power-relations between state and society, arguing that, while representatives of Rozen's Orientological School emphasized the practice of "pure scholarship" (pp. 71–72; 78), they were in fact profoundly engaged in state politics and were conscious of, and actively utilized, their special position in society as a bridge between scholarly knowledge and state power (p. 6).

Tolz outlines Vasilii Bartold's critique of the bias in Western scholarship towards the historiography of the East, alongside his contemporaries' contemplations on the power/knowledge nexus and its consequences across various social dimensions. This predated the late twentieth century's preoccupation with the criticism of the perceived dichotomy between the Western Self and the Oriental Other by several decades. These scholars' intricate and troubled relations with state power laid the foundations for future debates challenging the ability of scholarship to be objective. This book persuasively suggests that the bulk of the ideas enshrined in Edward Said's *Orientalism* echo the late Imperial Russian Orientologists' system of thought, which was subsequently filtered through the Soviet scholarship of the 1920s-1950s, and transposed to Western Europe and America by Said's teachers, such as Anwar Abdel-Malek who were trained in the Soviet Union in the 1950s (p. 5, pp. 100–101; 171–172).

Russia's Own Orient builds on Tolz's earlier work, and on David Schimmelpenninck's understanding of the term *Orientology* as a denotation of the scholarly domain in question; and *Orientologist* as the professional name for its representatives (instead of *Orientalism* and *Orientalist* respectively). This reclaiming of these terms is a timely correction of the latter's narrow "negative connotation" (p. 3)

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[1] Viktor Romanovich Rozen (1849–1908), Professor of Arabic and Persian studies. He was a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (1890), Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Languages of St. Petersburg University (1893), and Head of the Oriental Section of the Russian Archaeological Society (1885). Academicians Vasilii Bartold, Valentin Zhukovskii, Nikolai Marr, Sergei Oldenburg were among his disciples. See also Vasilii Bartold, "Baron Rozen i Russkii Provintsialnii Orientalism," in *Sobranie Sochinenii* [*Collected Works*] vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 589.

created in Said's eponymous work and the postcolonial turn that gripped the historiography of empire in the second half of the twentieth century. Intriguingly, this also seems to have something in common with a shift that occurred in the Russian-language terminology during 1917 and the switch from *vostochnik* to *vostokoved*.

It is also worth dwelling upon the myriad of institutional; state; and individual interests that unfolds throughout the six chapters of this book. Tolz engages with how coalitions of ideas and discourses interact with state power and the eventual outcomes of this interaction. This is part of the Foucauldian grid of power relations that permeates the entire social space. It is this interaction that is heavily affected by other equally potent components of the power grid. In this sense, the Orientologists of late Imperial Russia and the early Soviet period would actively use their power capabilities and the status bestowed on them by the state to promote the interests of their own scholarly domain or institution.

Quite often their activities were, in various ways, affected by their interpersonal relations, as well as by the twists and turns of their own lives. For instance, Professor Bartold's brother was in prison on political charges before 1917, which limited Bartold's own interaction with students as he himself also came under the category of political suspect. While Valentin Zhukovskii – another of Rozen's followers (p. 76) – exploited for institutional and personal benefits his own incorporation into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while he also utilized connections with his former students employed by the Ministry, or by the Military. And after 1917, Sergei Oldenburg effectively played on his acquaintance with Lenin to become one of the first Soviet "spokesmen" of their own scholarly fields – what was to become an intrinsic feature of the organizational set-up of Soviet scholarship.[2]

With its coverage of the activities of its protagonists during the early Soviet period, *Russia's Own Orient* unearths only part of the stratum of the history of Russia's Oriental studies of that period. This is understandable since the focus of the book is on the Rozen School, whose representatives had either died, or lost their operational significance by the late 1920s. Contrary to the late Imperial period when the representatives of the so-called "pure scholarship" were heavily engaged in foreign policy, after 1917, they increasingly found themselves politically marginalized and severed from the realms of state power. Although Tolz brings the reader rather close to the issue, the inception of Soviet Orientology and the sharpened interaction of power relations surrounding it, remains beyond the scope of the book. However, she is able to effectively and eloquently draw out the interplay of elite discourses; the ways in which these individuals' resist state power; and institutional practices which take on particularly intense and even tragic forms during the period in question.

In this sense, the example of Iranology – a prominent sub-domain of Russia's Oriental studies, of which Bartold and Zhukovskii were ardent exponents – is illustrative. A considerable number of its representatives opted for leaving or not returning to Russia under Bolshevik rule, and they ended up making enviable scholarly careers abroad. In the 1920s, amongst them there were Vladimir Minorskii, who was subsequently Professor of Persian Studies at Cambridge, only after serving as the secret informant

[2] See Nikolai Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 29.

in France to the Bolshevik Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgii Chicherin; as well as Vladimir Ivanov, Professor of Ismaili Studies at the Universities of Tehran and Mumbai and formerly Yakov Bliumkin's[3] designated contact in British India. The majority of the Orientologists who remained in Bolshevik Russia were imprisoned under charges of counter-revolutionary activities and cooperation with foreign intelligence services and eventually executed during the 1920s–1930s – a fate that befell the prominent Orientologists Konstantin Smirnov, Vladimir Tardov, and Konstantin Chaikin. The rest were coerced into becoming informants and provocateurs, playing sinister roles in the destinies of their own colleagues (as in the case of Evgenii Bertels – the most influential figure in Iranology under Stalin).

In the concluding section of the book, Tolz correctly notes that the thoughtful legacy of Imperial Russia's *fin-de-siècle* Orientologists remains absent in present-day Russia's hectic pursuit for a national idea. Instead, Kremlin philosophers are now working towards the creation of pseudo-patriotic discourses, which draw on Russia's Eurasian nature, crossbred with ideas of the superiority of Orthodox Christianity, in order to counter an allegedly hostile West. In this context, it should be noted that these discursive manifestations have also simulated the organic continuities of the Soviet belief in the superiority of domestic scholarship in present-day Oriental studies in Russia. Originally rooted in Grigorev's ideas about the duty of "scholarship to serve the society it belongs to" (p. 9), the patriotism of Rozen's disciples was inherent in the development of their own scholarship and its usage for the interests of Russia. This development was perceived by them as an open, productive competition and implied the extensive and organic integration of Western knowledge. Of course, there was conventional scholarly criticism and permanent juxtaposition of Russia's Orientology with that of Western Europe. However, late Imperial Russia's Orientologists did not place their work in opposition to Western scholarship or try to ignore it.

Unfortunately, following the institutional practices of Soviet times, certain aspects of present-day Russian Orientology preserve the binary division of world scholarship into indigenous Russian and Western understandings. They privilege the type of patriotism that implies discursive constraints on the integration of external knowledge into domestic scholarship and the implicit but omnipresent neglect towards foreign scholarly approaches. This kind of attitude is largely represented by Russia's mainstream "Iranology" hosted at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It is an attitude that is particularly encouraged by the current leadership's "regime of truth" that actively employs the inculcation of discourses on the external enemy waging war on Russia by challenging Russian traditional and religious values; the image of the assertive imposition of a Western, spiritually hollow way of life; and an associated promotion of false scholarly approaches. As Tolz convincingly documents, such discourses contribute to both a hostility and neglect of foreign scholarship, which stimulates domestic scholars' complacency within Russia's Own Orientology.

[3] Yakov Bliumkin (1898–1929), Dzerzhinskii's protégé, the assassin of the German Ambassador Wilhelm Mirbach (1918), the unaccomplished head of the Cheka of the abortive Soviet Socialist Republic of Persia (1920), Trotsky's friend and head of his personal bodyguard service, the INO OGPU Station-Chief in the Middle East, Turkey and Mongolia at different times, and a member of the Soviet delegation of 1924 to Afghanistan and Tibet that studied the possibility of instigating an uprising of Ismailits and Tibetians against the British.