EAST AND WEST
8.1 The Making of Oriental Studies

*Its Transnational and Transatlantic Past*

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While some disciplines of the humanities struggle with a seemingly waning attention, both within academia as well as at the interface with politics and society, the opposite is the case for the fields falling under the rubric of regional studies or Oriental studies. There are increasing efforts to come to terms with its past, including its intellectual shape, its institutional position, and its political baggage. Likewise, new visions of Oriental studies are drafted that better suit the needs of our time. Although much ink has been spilled over the challenges of the latter attempt, less has been done on the intellectual traditions. Still, there is a growing body of research that seeks to historicize the field.

Two predispositions, however, impede such efforts at providing historical context. First, this research is as yet markedly West-centric; by and large the focus is on Germany, France, and Great Britain, as well as partly on the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria. Second, a nationalizing perspective dominates. Single historical developments often stand disconnected side by side. When shared patterns are highlighted, then this is being done without asking for common origins. Both tendencies originate from the period of profound nationalism in which modern academia with its disciplinary divisions was created. Throughout the twentieth century, both inclinations were fueled, particularly during and following the Cold War that some interpreted as the victory of the West with the vanishing of the Second World. The degree to which the current state of the art reproduces these earlier world orders is remarkable. Two serious flaws accompany the scholarship: a disregard that Oriental studies existed also outside of Western Europe and the United States, maybe even to a larger degree, and the failure to address the international dimension of the field.

Without doubt, the field of Oriental studies was established in the eighteenth century by a network of scholars from various countries who shared a cosmopolitan outlook and were embedded in the international Republic of Letters. In the nineteenth century, mutual observation and exchange were promoted, which came
with the global competition that the various academic systems were engaged in. This global history, however, is much richer and reaches far beyond the nineteenth century. Concepts and organizational structures were also borrowed and appropriated later owing to the fact that the founding fathers and their successors lived transnational careers in a cross-boundary community of Orientalists. Colleagues abroad were known personally as their research projects served as mutual and constant reference points. These contacts had sweeping effects. With the knowledge and methods of these traveling scholars, intercultural experience and sensitivity for cultural differences circulated among different expanses of academia.

We argue that an international dimension was a core feature of the discipline when it was created, which was not lost in the twentieth century. To illustrate this, we will sketch the landscapes in which Oriental studies scholars in the Soviet Union and the US undertook their research, focusing on the period between the 1920s and 1960s and on the entanglements between both. With the juxtaposition of these cases, we want to question the strikingly similar judgment of both fields: Soviet Oriental studies are generally presented as isolated from international trends while its US-American counterpart is also said to have been inward looking and parochial, stemming from vain self-interest. If one takes a closer look, however, one finds an astonishing history of interaction that mirrors the new global order after World War I, namely the rise of the US as a global power, the establishment of the Soviet Union as a competing model for social and political organization, and the incipient decolonization. Russian Oriental studies had been internationally leading, especially for scholars from the United States, up until the late 1910s. But even after the October Revolution and the Bolshevik reorganization of the higher education system, the discipline did not turn inwards. Its international scale changed in the patterns of its architecture without losing its significance. Soviet scholarship became important for others, for example, scholars from East-Central Europe and from what came to be known as the Third World. US-American Oriental studies have a similarly surprising past. In fact they originated largely abroad, with ‘abroad’ meaning Russia and countries further east rather than Germany and France. We believe that recalling this transatlantic or trans-Pacific history, in fact a global history, of Oriental scholarship is worthwhile as it helps to decentralize it and to contextualize its ‘Western’ variant.

Soviet Orientalists

For a long time Soviet Oriental studies were treated marginally within Western research agendas, although this is fortunately changing thanks to several recent excellent studies on the topic. Still, they appear somewhat peculiarly in comparison to
its Western counterparts. This is due to Russia’s close entanglement with the ‘East’, which did not necessarily represent its ‘other’ but rather a part of its ‘self’. This resulted early on in an intense commitment to Oriental studies, which pushed Russian Orientalists to criticize Western claims of superiority over the Orient and positively appreciate its contributions to Russian history. Furthermore, scholars from the ‘Orient’ were also integrated into the academic system. With Russia’s unique geopolitical location, the Orient reached from Northern and Eastern Africa to the Middle East, Central, Eastern, Southern and South East Asia, while the equivalent Western conception of the Orient centered on the Middle East.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian Oriental studies were in some respect avant-garde. Its disciplinary breadth included history, philology, geography, literature, religion and philosophy, a constellation quite innovative for nineteenth-century Oriental studies. However, the Russian Orientalists also remained firmly rooted in philology, as were their German and Austrian counterparts. At the same time they systematically integrated other humanities disciplines into their approaches, in particular history, ethnology, cultural studies, and religious studies. Reflecting this setup, the St. Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Languages, founded in 1855, remained a unique academic institution until the beginning of the twentieth century – unrivaled, as thanks to its size and breadth it covered the whole ‘Orient’ from Islamic societies in Central Asia to Buddhist nations in East Asia.

A stronger interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and the social sciences was institutionally enforced in the early 1920s under new political conditions, for instance, when the St. Petersburg Faculty for Oriental Languages was reorganized in 1921 and, after it had to merge with the Department of History and Philology and the Department of Law, became a Section of Ethnology and Linguistics in the Social Science Department. In this manner, what has been described as an academic innovation of area studies in the US after the Second World War, namely the inclusion of and subsequent focus on the social sciences, had been implemented in the Soviet Union two decades earlier, even though this was a project conducted by the political elites, not one driven by internal academic motives. Russian Orientalists who migrated to the US during the 1920s carried their experiences of such an interdisciplinary cooperation with them, thereby making an impact on developments in their host country. This often underestimated transfer will be examined more closely below, focusing on the example of Serge Elisséeff.

As a highly transnational endeavor from its early beginnings in the eighteenth century – with a considerable import of German scholars into the Russian academic system – Russian pre-Revolutionary Oriental studies remained closely entangled with the Western academic community both through mutual study visits
as well as through a network of international academic organizations. Its excellent reputation was particularly epitomized by the Arabist Viktor Romanovič Rozen, dean of the St. Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Studies from 1893 to 1902, who remained influential after 1917 like many of his colleagues and pupils, such as Vasilij Vladimirovič Bartol’d, Sergej Fedorovič Oldenburg and Nikolaj Jakovlevič Marr.

The above-mentioned marginality of Russian Oriental studies may suggest that the October Revolution of 1917 erased these transnational and international networks, and led to the disappearance of its traditions behind the Iron Curtain. On the contrary we argue that Soviet scholars continued to be profoundly international, yet their preferences and strategies changed. A more relevant caesura with regard to the scholars’ outward orientation emerges in mid-1920s when Stalin’s distrust against everything ‘foreign’ infected large sections of Soviet society. To substantiate this claim, preliminary results of an investigation into patterns of transnational and international networks of Soviet Orientalists after 1917 will be presented. A quantitative analysis shall provide first observations, complemented with exemplary accounts and biographies.

For the quantitative analysis, the regularly updated biographical encyclopedias edited by Sofia Miliband were evaluated, the latest edition appearing in 2008. These comprise approximately 3000 Soviet Orientalists, mainly those active after 1917. Focus was placed on the generations that graduated in the decades up until 1953, i.e., immediately after the October Revolution, during the Second World War and under Stalin’s regime. Of these a sample of two hundred persons was analyzed in more detail. The period after 1953 demanded separate attention as the domestic and global context changed dramatically – both in the production of knowledge about the world as well as in the contacts with it.

The analysis (Table 1) reveals a clear tendency: 95% of the 200 scholars in focus had experiences abroad, as teachers, researchers and members of international scientific organizations, or involved in activities outside academia as journalists, diplomats, or staff members of Soviet companies. The career paths rarely followed either the academic track or the ‘practice’ one; rather these two aspects were often intertwined. Most of the scholars went abroad after their studies, usually in Leningrad or Moscow, and mostly turned to the regions of their specialization. They went as scholars or consultants, collected information for the government or helped building institutions in the higher education sector in Asia and Africa. The older pattern of going abroad for studies to England, France and Germany almost disappeared. Under these new circumstances basic education was achieved at home, while research and practical projects were developed afterwards in the regions of specialization. Western European institutions no longer appeared as the source for gaining necessary expertise, although this pattern did not vanish completely.
Table 1  Careers of Soviet Orientalists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientalists</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>graduating after 1917 with experience abroad</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thereof during their studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thereof after their studies</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thereof in the region of their specialization</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thereof outside the region of their specialization</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both within and without</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample:</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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The new geography of these contacts was shaped by a clear preference for the ‘Far East’ and South Asia, particularly for China and India [Fig. 18]. Second ranked the Middle East and Central Asia, reflecting the Soviet interest in its ‘near abroad’. For diplomats as well as researchers, Turkey and Iran were the most frequent destinations.14

A certain continuity in the scholars’ international orientation can be traced; however, their stays abroad had been postponed to later stages in the academic career. Furthermore, the linkages with the areas of specialization were strengthened; international research and travel were no longer directed toward Western Europe but to the regions of academic interest. In this regard, the profound reshaping of society under Bolshevik rule was tangible. A more radical caesura in academic careers was nevertheless the Second World War in combination with the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. While the generation born in the decades of the 1920s and graduating in the late 1940s/early 1950s represents more than 50% in the investigated sample, those born in the first decade of the century and graduating in the second half of the 1920s/early 1930s account for only 15%, and the cohort born between 1910 and 1919, graduating in the mid- and early 1940s, amounts to just 7%.

Certainly the quantitative analysis can only provide a general impression of much more complex patterns, which have varied considerably for individual scholars. The cohort taken into account here reflects diverse backgrounds and career paths. The first Soviet Orientalists were manifold with regard to their temperaments and interests as they followed diverse paths into the discipline and conceived of their subject differently. This shall be illustrated with three exemplary figures, reflecting divergent career patterns, strategies of internationalization and interaction with their region of expertise.

The Sinologist Vasilij Mikhailovich Alekseev15 embodies the passage from the czarist to the Soviet regime. Born in 1881, graduating in 1902 from the Faculty of Eastern Languages in St. Petersburg, he not only studied in England, France and
Germany, but since 1906 also in China for a three-year research trip. Specializing in Chinese literature, he promoted cooperation between historiography, philology, literature, and other disciplines to develop a nuanced concept of Chinese culture and society.\footnote{This conception seemed to have been congruent with the views of the new political elite, which helped Alekseev pursue his career successfully as a professor at the newly founded Faculty for Oriental Studies at Leningrad University from 1918 onward and a full member of the Academy of Sciences from 1929. Up until the mid-1920s he held lectures in France, England and China, and became a member of the American Academy for Political and Social Sciences in Philadelphia in 1923. During Stalin’s Great Purges, when some members of his research team were executed or deported, he went underground, restarting his career in the 1940s. Thus for him, the Stalinist purges as well as the subsequent campaign against ‘cosmopolitanism’ marked a more considerable caesura than 1917.\footnote{While Alekseev, educated in czarist Russia, represented the old academic elite, Dmitrij Alekseevič Ol’derogge was a part of an intermediate generation.\footnote{Born in 1903 into a noble Russian family of German origin, he started a military career in his youth and was recruited into the Red Army after 1917. After the Civil War he completed ethnological and linguistic studies at Petrograd University in 1925. In 1926/1927 he was sent to Germany to study with the renowned German Orientalist Diedrich Westerman, where he was commissioned to gather information about German ethnographic museums to improve the collections in Leningrad. As one of the first to teach African languages in the Soviet Union, he became}}
the ‘patriarch’ of Soviet African studies. Since 1946 he held the chair of African studies at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Leningrad University and enjoyed a venerable reputation not only in the Soviet Union – as a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences since 1960 – but also in the West. This was reflected in his memberships of international academic organizations, for example, in Great Britain, France, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic. Ol’derogge navigated the dangerous watersheds of the October Revolution as well as the Stalinist purges and his reputation transformed from a purported ‘bourgeois’ into one of the founders of the new Soviet disciplines. The strength of his international networks east and west of the closing Iron Curtain made him a decisive mediator in the international academic community.

Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin was the same age as Ol’derogge but born into a farmer’s family in Siberia. He joined the Communist Party in 1921 and was sent to Leningrad University in 1930 where he dedicated himself with Ol’derogge to African studies. He became a teacher at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in 1932 where he got in close contact with anti-colonial African elites. Since 1960, as the first director of the newly founded Africa Institute of the Academy of Sciences, he traveled frequently to African and Western countries, including the US, Italy, and the United Kingdom, promoting the academic agenda of Soviet African studies. Potekhin represents a generation that, on the one hand, profited considerably from the newly opened opportunities for upward social mobility, but, on the other hand, faced hardship during the Stalinist years. Combining both political and academic paths, his international career started ‘at home’ at KUTV with students coming from Africa and Asia.

Oriental studies in the United States

The general interpretation, mentioned at the beginning, that US-American Oriental studies were by and large parochial, needs some qualification, first of all because it is based on two convictions that do not stand closer inspection.

First, the origins of academic studies of the ‘non-Western’ world as we know it today are often dated to the end of the Second World War. ‘Non-Western’ cultures and societies became firmly anchored in higher education and research with the establishment of area studies – designating a particular concept of Oriental or regional studies established in the mid-1940s in order to distinguish between, on the one hand, the traditional disciplines (Sinology, Indology, etc.) that predominately analyzed languages, literatures, and ancient histories and, on the other, newly conceptualized interdisciplinary fields such as Chinese or South Asian studies which were more focused on the present, interested in the nineteenth
and twentieth centuries, and combined philological-historical approaches with questions and methods from the social sciences, especially economics, political science, and sociology.

Second, the geo-political context of the Cold War is usually emphasized in the development after 1945, which served the argument that Oriental studies and area studies were in essence instruments to ‘know the enemy’, particularly with regard to research on Russia. Such studies also related to inquiries of non-Western cultures as they were regarded as eminently important for winning hearts and minds in these regions in the ideological competition with the Soviet Union.20

While not denying the relevance of the political context, we argue that this is only half the story. Postwar Oriental studies were firmly rooted in a tradition of studying the world that dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, which only accelerated after World War I. The 1890s saw the opening of ‘Departments of Semitic Languages and Cultures’, the foundation of anthropology and archeology. Well before the First World War, the three strands – philological, ethnographical, and archeological research – had a small but safe base in US academia. Their position would expand in the 1920s, within the university and through the creation of research institutes like the well-known Oriental Institute in Chicago.21

Although the founding phase of Oriental studies was shaped by the characteristics of the US-American higher education system, it was part of a broader trend to investigate the world. Academic studies of foreign cultures began in many places at that time. Accordingly, American scholars examining foreign societies traveled, exchanged knowledge, and borrowed organizational patterns. They were strongly linked to scholarship from abroad and the geography of their careers spanned large distances. This state of affairs persisted in the second half of the twentieth century, albeit under different circumstances, as was the case in Russia following the October Revolution. This is evident in the biographies of leading figures of the field. The two we chose to present are especially illuminating in terms of their transatlantic linkages.

In the late 1920s, Oriental studies in the US was in the middle of a process of differentiation. After Indology had taken shape, Far East (or Asian) studies was given contours out of which China and Japan studies were crafted. In parallel, Byzantine studies, which at first was regionally and temporally concerned with the Eastern Roman Empire, was later broadened to include the Caucasus and Western Asia. The Second World War initiated another expansion of the field, now as Middle Eastern studies.22 Among the main actors of this period were Serge Elisséeff and Robert B. Blake.

Elisséeff is often portrayed as the first professional Japanologist in the US. Indeed he helped to build Japanese studies both at his home university (Harvard) and beyond by introducing the study of living Asian languages and bringing Rus-
sian and French research traditions to the US, from which the US Oriental studies gained its intellectual shape. It is telling that his work was also appreciated in the Soviet Union.23

Born in St. Petersburg in 1889, Elisséeff had witnessed the Russo-Japanese War as a young adult, which stimulated his interest in the East. Even before he passed his A-level studies, he introduced himself to Sergej Ol’denburg, the doyen of Russian Oriental studies at that time.24 After Ol’denburg suggested studying in Japan, Elisséeff went to Berlin to study with Eduard Sachs and soon after to Tokyo Imperial University. When he returned to St. Petersburg in 1914 he was familiar with the German and Japanese state of the art, allowing him to easily pass the exam to become a Privatdozent at the St. Petersburg Imperial University. He immediately returned to Japan to work on his dissertation, which he defended in Tokyo in 1917. Shortly after he had returned home, the Russian Revolution changed what could have become a decent academic career at home. His family lost almost all its property and he his position at the university, which was instantly restricted. It is interesting that his colleagues Ol’derrogge and Alekseev did not meet the same fate. For some, 1917 meant a break for their scholarly work, for others the interruption came later.

The few opportunities to publish, together with a job at the Oriental Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, did not provide enough money to live on and so in 1920 Elisséeff left for Paris. The move was challenging, but he soon secured a teaching post at the Sorbonne and established connections with the Japanese embassy, the Musée Guimet, and the International Committee for Intellectual Property of the League of Nations. In these years he met and worked with many of the leading French Sinologists, among others Henri Maspero, Antoine Meillet and Paul Pelliot. These contacts paid off. In 1930 he was appointed Maitre de Conference at the École des Hautes Études; two years later he advanced to become director of the Oriental division. While it looked as if he had settled within French academia, a visit to Harvard University in 1931 proved to be consequential. In Cambridge, the newly founded Harvard Yenching Institute – an independent institute for humanistic and social science research on China, continental Asia, and Japan, in which scholars from the Beijing-based Yenching University and their Harvard colleagues collaborated – was in need of a director. Initially it was hoped to have Pelliot take the position; however, he suggested his younger colleague Elisséeff, who accepted the double invitation to run the institute and to teach as a professor at the Department of Semitic Languages. Both positions provided the social and financial space of manoeuvre to establish the barely existing study of China and Japan at Harvard. Being able to use the internal mechanisms of a university for his own ambitions, Elisséeff accomplished much in a short time. In 1936 he founded the Harvard Journal of Asiatic History and the year after the Department of Far Eastern Languages.
Within a decade he had gathered the resources to establish nine university research and teaching positions, publish a book series, hold international congresses, and to build a well-organized library. The results of these activities went well beyond Cambridge. The doctoral program he created trained many of the later East Asianists, while the American Association of Asian Studies owes its existence also to him. When he retired in 1956, Chinese and Japanese studies had a firm and stable place at Harvard and within US-American academia. Besides his organizational influence, he had an intellectual impact that was decisively shaped by his education in Russia and Japan as well as his research in France.

Similarly, Byzantine studies came into being through the hands of someone profoundly influenced by Russian scholarship. Robert B. Blake, born in 1886, went to Freiburg and Berlin to prepare his dissertation, where his teacher, Eduard Meyer, encouraged him to go to St. Petersburg to study under Michael Rostovtzeff. Russian Byzantine scholars were seen at that time as internationally leading in the field. Deeply impressed by the wide range of courses offered at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg Imperial University, where one could learn all important languages of the Near and Far East, Blake resolved to build up a similar program at home. During his time at St. Petersburg, he tried to gain as much knowledge as he could in ancient history and Byzantine studies, and learned Arab, Armenian and Georgian. Fascinated by the history of the Caucasus, he focused his dissertation to the region. For administrative purposes, he returned to the US to defend the thesis, but since the conditions for further research were much better in Russia, shortly after he returned to St. Petersburg, passed the exam to be a university lecturer and gained a travel stipend from the Russian Academy of Sciences to do archival work in Tbilisi. His plans were interrupted by the Russian Revolution as well, which prevented him from returning to St. Petersburg. He successfully applied for a chair in church history at Tbilisi State University. He taught and studied there for five years before returning to the US, to Harvard, where he took up his initial idea in establishing Byzantine studies similar to and at the same level as the discipline in Russia.

In the first years he was involved in creating East-Asian studies together with Elisséeff, but he also invested tremendous efforts in institutionalizing his own field of expertise. For example, the establishment of the first chair of Central Asian history in the History Department was largely due to his merit.

Elisséeff and Blake do not account for the development of the whole field, but the biographies of their colleagues – Harley F. MacNair in Chicago, Martin C. Wilbur at Columbia University, and Edwin Reischauer in Cambridge – also display a lot of international experience and connections. These were of a dif-
ferent kind, though, since the strong linkages between US-American and Russian Oriental studies are typical for the founding period only. Later on, Russia lost its position as the prime training place and intellectual frame of reference for US scholars. Their international orientation, however, persisted. Oriental studies practiced in the regions of expertise itself became the main reference point, especially after the Second World War. Telling in this regard are several surveys on area studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. More than 50% of area studies specialists had worked at least two years in the region they were investigating. More than a third had stayed for three years, and no less than a fifth drew from the experience of five years of living and researching in the ‘non-Western’ world. This again could not but leave an imprint on their research, on how they approached their subjects and which questions they asked. The knowledge they produced was profoundly shaped by encounters they made during their stays abroad and by the material they collected there. Returning home they brought new insights, hitherto unknown research concepts, and unfamiliar arguments the US. Ideas and intellectual traditions thus traveled from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa to North America; cultural transfer shaped and changed Oriental studies at all the places involved. That did not prevent interpretations that are nowadays highly problematic— for example, the claims of the modernization theory — but these became increasingly questionable, an unease which culminated in current reconsiderations of the intellectual and political underpinnings of area studies mentioned at the beginning.

Conclusion

The disciplines of Oriental studies in the US and in the Soviet Union have a transnational and transatlantic past. In the development of both fields, a profoundly international dimension was a core feature, lasting well beyond the Russian Revolution into the early years of the Cold War. Along the way and due to the changing circumstances, patterns and strategies of involving the wider world took shape. With the progress of decolonization and the heating up of the Cold War, relations with the regions that were investigated were fostered while the entanglement across the Atlantic was cut off for the time being. These developments are one layer in the changing geography of the field’s connectivity. It has as yet been scarcely explored.

There is still few systematic and comparative research regarding the non-Western humanities, let alone about transfers from ‘East’ and South to the ‘West’, and even less from ‘East’ to ‘East’ and ‘South’ to ‘South’. While, for instance, Russian Orientalists obviously observed their Western counterparts and considered how to be
part of, or compete with, this academic community, at the same time they integrated learned ‘native’ scholars into the Russian and later Soviet academic systems. Here, a transfer in the opposite direction must be assumed; yet this remains, for now, a question for further investigation. The presence of ‘native’ scholars in the respective academic systems might be an excellent starting point for such a line of scrutiny; the encounters of Russian and US scholars with their ‘native’ counterparts during their fieldwork travels might be another. One could then trace in more detail how the ‘Orient’ was studied in various parts of the world and how concepts and ideas developed in Asia or Latin America influenced the disciplines in Europe and North America. One could compare the specific interdisciplinary composition of Oriental studies across the continents, i.e., how the approaches of philology, history, and the social sciences were combined and balanced. And one could follow the respective rhythms of intellectual shifts. After all, what was conceived, constructed, and researched as the ‘Orient’ changed and differed depending on where scholars and their own societies positioned themselves. The first steps that we have taken here on the path toward the global history of Oriental studies show, if anything, how much the usual national and ‘Western’-centric accounts leave out.

Notes

1 ‘Transatlantic’ usually denotes the space constituted by Western Europe and the US, but we refer here to a broader notion that includes Russia/the Soviet Union.


7 Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, convincingly demonstrates this.


10 Cf. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*.


16 Alekseev himself combined literary and historical studies in particular, cf., e.g., Vasilij Michailovich Alekseev, 'Otrazheniye borby s zavoyevatelyami v istorii u literaturye Kitaya' [The Representation of the Fight with Conquerors in Chinese Literature and History], *Izvestnik AN SSSR* 4/5 (1945), 187-199.

17 The persecutions and purges during Stalin's reign had paradoxical effects on Russian/Soviet Orientalists both as a group as well as as individuals (which is true for other groups in the Soviet society, too), as Alekseev's biography demonstrates. Those educated during czarist times in particular were suspected of being 'bourgeois cosmopolites', and thereby enemies of the new regimes and Stalin's Russification policy. Many were persecuted, exiled, or executed. Yet, this characterization needs to be cautiously placed in a historical context. While it is true for the 1930s, in the 1920s, Russian/Soviet Orientalists played an important role as experts and mediators for Stalin's 'korenizatsiia' policy in Central Asia, in particular. However, a decade later, this same circumstance was interpreted by the Stalinist regime as assistance to national counterrevolution and cited as an argument for punishment. In the 1990s again, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the affirmative role that Russian Orientalists played in the early nation-building of Central Asian societ-


22 Since Middle Eastern studies were oriented toward the study of modern times, the traditional Byzantine studies were set apart again. On the development of Middle Eastern studies in historical perspective, see Roderic H. Davidson, ‘Where Is the Middle East?’, Foreign Affairs 38/4 (1960), 665-675.

23 See a letter by Alekseev, in which he mentions Elisseeff as one of the most competent scholars who emigrated: ‘Otzyv o N.A. Nevskom’, 27 July 1922, published in Alekseev, Nauka o Vostoke, 88f.


26 Although there are no personal documents directly mentioning this ambition, he was a student of Archibald Coolidge who, like almost nobody else, established ‘non-Western’ studies at Harvard University and who taught his students how a scholarly field can be institutionalized, with the clear aim that they would continue what he had started: R.F. Byrnes, Awakening American Education to the World: The Role of Archibald Coolidge, 1866-1928 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

27 The first to be appointed, Richard F. Frye, had been taught by Blake. His ability to accumulate money changed Harvard further. In 1958 he persuaded the father of one of his students to donate a sum with which the Aga Khan Professorship in Iranian Studies was established, the first of its kind in the US.
