Early photography as cultural transfer in imperial Russia: visual technology, mobility and modernity in the Caucasus and Central Asia

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Introduction

Our paper will present an overview of photography as a mode of cultural transfer from Europe to Asia. Specifically, it focuses on examples from Russia to the Caucasus and Central Asia in the imperial context of the nineteenth century and discusses the social and political implications of these transfers juxtaposed to other contemporary global exchanges of this visual technology. Our case studies are based on substantial scholarly literature on global histories of photography, including that in the rapidly growing field on Russian photography, and they incorporate each author's own original research conducted in archives of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Georgia, the Russian Federation, France and Switzerland.

When we selected this topic, we chose the theory of cultural transfer as our method of analysis.[1] This theory is one of numerous approaches that can describe the circulation of ideas, technologies, material goods and people, as well as the interaction of different cultures within history, be they global, transnational, comparative, connected, shared or entangled.[2] Contrary to a common Eurocentric view of history, that assumes a unidirectional spread of the "Civilization" and its "benefits" from a "Creative Center" to a "Passive Periphery," the theory of cultural transfer offers a more nuanced vision of these interdependent contacts.

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[1] Espagne and Werner, 1988 ; Espagne, 1999; *idem*, 2013.
[2] Among the many studies devoted to this problem (e.g. A. Stanziani, K. Raj, R. Bertrand, S. Gruzinski, Y. Cohen), see, in particular, Werner and Zimmermann, 2003; Werner and Zimmermann (eds.), 2004.

In particular, one of the fundamental concepts defining cultural transfer, which is simplified here, suggests that a "culture-inventor" (identified below as Culture A) cannot impose some ideas or technologies onto another culture (Culture B) in a way that the latter will passively accept this innovation. According to the theory of cultural transfer, the central idea is that cultural exchanges are multidirectional, since any Culture B as a receiving agent can take an active role in selecting innovations that complement or conform to local conditions and customs. Selected ideas or technologies, therefore, can be accepted, while others rejected. In this process, cultural transfer can pass through both institutional channels and individual carriers. From this more complex relationship emerges a technology that has been adopted, adapted, and assimilated for varying social, political and economic applications.

Applying this theory to our case study on early photography in imperial Russia, we consider the agents and processes of transfer that originated from Western Europe and initially spread to Russia, then subsequently moved from Russia to Asia. We will first briefly sketch the standard history of photographic inventions and their global reach, and then more specifically detail its dissemination from France, England and Germany to Russia, where it moves from the imperial centers of power in St. Petersburg and Moscow through the Caucasus and Orenburg to finally reach Central Asia. Our examination here fits into the latest scholarly framework that considers a broader geographical range than previously applied to this theory of cultural transfer: already elaborated within an exclusively European context, this theory has more recently been advanced to include Russia,[3] the Central Asian[4] and Altai[5] regions, and China.[6]

It is well known that this unprecedented visual technology based on light-sensitive chemical processes was simultaneously developed in two imperial nations and having two distinct formats. In France, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) invented the daguerreotype, a delicate mirror-like image produced on a silver-plated sheet of copper that was officially revealed to the world in August 1839. At that same time in England, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) was perfecting what he called *photogenic drawings* that eventually resulted in the calotype, a paper-based

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[3] Dmitrieva and Espagne, 1996; Dmitrieva, 2011.

[4] Espagne, Gorshenina, Grenet, Mustafayev, and Rapin (eds.), 2016.

[5] See the conference "Transferts culturels dans l'Altaï", June 12-17, 2017: http://transfers.ens.fr/transferts-culturels-dans-l-altai-707.

[6] Siyan and Ledru (eds.), 2016. See also, in particular, the research project, "Les transferts culturels entre la Chine et l'Europe (XVIIᵉ-XVIIIᵉ siècles): échanges, esthétiques de la chinoiserie et constructions identitaires": http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/projet-anr/?tx_lwmsuivibilan_pi2%5BCODE%5D=ANR-12-JSH3-0002

image announced in 1841 that paved the way to printing from negatives — an essential element of modern photography.[7] These early innovations spread fast and far. Within weeks of Daguerre's announcement in Paris, he drafted a small booklet that was translated into English and German;[8] and within that same year, daguerreotypes were being made all over Europe and on at least three other continents, as wealthy travelers had already begun to haul cameras, chemicals and other equipment to the Mediterranean and the Middle East to document ancient cultures of Greece and Egypt as well as sites of the Holy Land.[9] This rapid international focus on the daguerreotype is punctuated by the fact that cameras were available as far away as Calcutta, India, being sold by private firms as early as January 1840;[10] and by March, images were already being shown at a meeting of the Asiatic Society.[11] According to the French scholar, Chahryar Adle, the British officer Arthur Conolly (1807-1842) tried to bring a camera to Bukhara on his second trip to Turkestan (1841-1842); but this exotic technological apparatus backfired on Conolly, and the emir, unimpressed, had him executed in 1842.[12]

Within a decade of Daguerre's and Talbot's developments, a more revolutionary process would deeply impact the continuing cultural transfer of photography within society and across empires. Invented by Frederick Scott Archerin 1852, the wet-plate collodion process allowed for the sharp detail of a daguerreotype combined with the ability to make an infinite number of print reproductions from the negative of the calotype. By this time in Europe, such advances in the technology — already significantly more improved, simplified and cost-effective — made photography a fascinating and favored phenomenon of the middle class. Many ventured abroad in search of new impressions, and the "Grand Tour" became as fashionable as it was exotic for travelers who wished to "discover" the legendary cities of Europe, North Africa (mainly Egypt), the Middle East (Holy Land, Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq) and North America. The first photographic "discoveries" to be made of the Caucasus and Turkestan, however, were to a great extent overlooked by the European middle class; rather, they would made by Russian military and members of the colonial administration traversing, surveying and settling the regions with their cameras.

For Russia, this period of photographic development and transfer intersected one marked by dramatic imperial expansion. In the mid-to-late 18th century, the three

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[7] Sixou, 2000; Watson and Rappaport, 2013.

[8] Watson and Rappaport, 2013, p. 157.

[9] Pérez González, 2014; Ryan, 2013, p. 9; Aubenas, 2001, p. 19.

[10] Dehejia, 2000, p. 14.

[11] Pinney, 2008, p. 9. Also, Falconer, 1990.

[12] Personal communication between Adle and Gorshenina. Documentary evidence for this incident is still unfortunately lacking.

nomadic Kazakh hordes that once formed *Independent Tartary* were gradually taken over, and these territories were reorganized into tsarist districts that included the Orenburg province. Administered out of the capital city by the same name, this province became the leading post of the subsequent Russian conquests in southern and eastern Asia. Beginning in the early 19th century, parallel maneuvers occurred in the Caucasus, where Russia gradually possessed the territories of the Ottoman empire. In 1844, the conquered territories in this region would form a Caucasus governorship (*Kavkazskoe namestnichestvo*), which was later divided into regional governorates and districts. The defeat of the Crimean War in 1856 led to a series of further military campaigns that, largely under Alexander II, resulted in the north Caucasus and all Central Asian khanates to be subjugated. In the wake of this intensified period, the transfers of photography from Russia to the Caucasus and Central Asia occurred primarily under colonialism;[13] these colonial situations, or encounters, were defined by institutional channels of the Russian empire and individual carriers, who were essentially Russian officers and administrators. In other words, the relationship between Culture A and Culture B was not equal. In general, the transfers of technology passed without any prior agreement from the recipients. In this case, photography can be seen as an instrument of power in conquest and submission, and the process of initial appropriation of this modern technology assumes a unidirectional path between the "colonizer" and the "colonized."

Photographic transfers to and from Russia, 1840s

The rapid dissemination of this new invention was equally met with a growing acceptance for the myth of photographic accuracy and its ability to truthfully replicate the real world on paper. Causing widespread excitement, social elite and royals alike sought to get their hands on it as soon as possible, and the Romanovs were no exception. It has been rumored that Nicholas I (1796-1855) offered 500,000 francs for Daguerre's secret, prior to the inventor's formal announcement in January 1839; the foreign sovereign later that year instead received three daguerreotypes as a gift from the Frenchman.[14] Outside of diplomatic transfers, the first photographic exchanges within the Russian imperial sphere were largely initiated by educated elite, commercial entrepreneurs and government officials. Within six months after Daguerre officially presented his process, I.Kh. Hammel (1788-1862), a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences working in the Department of Chemistry and Technology, was sent to both London and Paris, where he was expected to learn more about the calotype and daguerreotype and to return to St. Petersburg with

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[13] Balandier, 1951.
[14] Watson and Rappaport, 2013, pp. 153, 169, 270.

examples and equipment.[15] Several faculty members at the Academy, like Karl von Baer (*infra*), had serious interest in photography for its research applications for natural history.[16] By autumn of the same year, *daguerrotypomania* had also hit Moscow: it was possible to buy the first daguerreotype camera in the shops of Charles Bekkers and Michael Smirdin; the caricaturist, Nikolai Stepanov, had already written a detailed brochure on the "practical use" of these mirrored images; and it was even possible to order daguerreotypes from professional photographers.[17] The following year, the photographer Alexei Grekov, who improved this technology, opened the first commercial studio there.[18]

Russia quickly became not just a "talented appropriator" of this new technology but an active agent of its transmission to "eastern" countries. Hence, it began to engage in its own diplomatic transfers. For example, the Persian sovereign Mohammad Shah (1810-1848) contacted both the Russian mission in Tehran and the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry to request a Daguerreian camera for his personal use. In the autumn of 1842, Russia delivered: a camera, materials, and a specially "photo-trained" officer of the Asiatic Department were sent by the Moscow office of the Foreign Ministry, and via Tbilisi received in Tehran at the Golestan Palace.[19]

Russia also dispatched the daguerreotype to the Caucasus in the service of imperial geographical expeditions. In 1843, Sergey L. Levitsky (1819-1898), well before gaining status as a court photographer for the Romanovs, was working as a clerk for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, when he was sent to the northern Caucasus to document local sources of spring water. Hired for a special commission, he was assigned to accompany a group of General Staff officers and scholars from the Imperial Academy of Sciences[20] to make landscape views that could be used for future development of the region. Levitsky's daguerreotypes (among the first series of photographic landscapes taken in Russia[21]) can be regarded as pivotal in promoting photography as a technology of cultural transfer: they provided a new model for field operations that involved dispatching photographers on state-sponsored military expeditions within the empire; and, because they received gold medals at the 1849 French photographic society exhibition in Paris, Levitsky's

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[15] Elliot, 1992b, pp. 11 and 26-27, respectively.

[16] Barkhatova, 1992, p. 26.

[17] Abramov, undated; Bunimovich, 1950, pp. 5-6.

[18] Elliot (ed.), 1992a, p. 15.

[19] Sheikh and Pérez González, 2013, p. 1; Tahmasbpour, 2013, p. 7. Citing Yahya Zoka, Ali Behdad writes that cameras were gifted to the Shah between 1839 and 1842, and almost simultaneously by Nicholas I and Queen Victoria: Behdad, 2001, p. 144.

[20] Sonntag, 2011, p. 128; *Eadem*, 2012, p. 9.

[21] Loginov, 2008, p. 853.

Caucasian views dramatically (and emotionally) showed how Russian technological mastery could be exported to the world stage.[22] This active transfer of photography for both expeditions and exhibitions increased significantly after the Crimean War, as the empire expanded further into Asia and the state perfected the technology for military purposes. It is this military association that would come to largely characterize the early history of Russian photography in the age of modernity.

European transfers & the first Russian imperial photographic establishment

By the early-to-mid-1850s, photography became an urgent state affair. While Nicholas I had always been an avid proponent of photography for its mystery and novelty, he also began to understand its importance for new applications of military strategy and surveillance. No event underscored this more than the Crimean War, where Russian self-representation paled in comparison to the two leading photographic nations, France and Britain.[23] Archival collections show us that very few Russian or Russia-aligned photographers documented Russian interests between the outbreak of war in 1853 and the nation's defeat in 1856. Among the few examples are well known and virtually unknown photographers: the famous Hungarian Carol Szathmari (1812-1887), acclaimed at the time by Russian and British royals alike, compiled albums of nearly 200 prints that pictured both sides of the war, including notable Russian generals like Gorchakov and Soimonov; Vasily Timm (1820-1898), editor of the *Russian Art Gazette*, published a lithographic reproduction from a photographic portrait of nurses that he made during the war;[24] and Fedor Orlov (1844-1909) documented destruction in Sevastopol, Inkerman and Balaklava among other locales after the war in 1856, as pictured in a small album of thirty-three existing prints.[25] These examples (few in number largely because of Russian state censorship) hardly compare to the multitude by Allied photographers, who made thousands of negatives using the latest wet-plate collodion process to document heroes, camp life, military supply lines and consequences of the conflict. Ill-equipped to counter this optical disadvantage, Nicholas I ordered the General Staff in the Military Topographical Department (*Voenno-topograficheskii otdel*, *VTO* henceforth) to immediately begin research and experimentation with this process in 1854.[26] This order would spur a new wave of cultural transfer on photography between Russia and its European counterparts.

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[22] Sonntag, 2011, p. 128.

[23] For more on the visual representation of this war, see Keller, 2013.

[24] Kerr, 1997, pp. 23, 70, 84.

[25] Sonntag, 2012, pp. 4-7.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Responding to Russia's dismal outcomes and the growing costs of war, the tsar's principal motivation for officially promoting photography as an instrument of the state was to modernize mapping,[27] which would effectively modernize the empire. Scholars have routinely identified Russian "backwardness" as a cause for its military defeat in the Crimean War, its technological shortcomings amounting to antiquated weaponry and an absence of railways. Yet, given the ascendency of the collodion process, we can argue that there was a third technological disadvantage:[28] Russia, unlike its adversaries, simply lacked a rapid mechanical means of reproducing copy upon copy of maps that relayed strategic geographical knowledge. Nicholas I, therefore, accepted what other global military institutions had already begun to adopt: that, as an innovative visual technology, photography could both improve and speed up cartographic printing and reproduction; and that this state-of-the-art technology could be adapted and perfected for military purposes. Because of the sovereign's patronage, formal training for photographers would begin in earnest by the end of the war through an official photographic establishment set up in St. Petersburg at the General Staff.

After his father's death, Alexander II (1818-1881) continued the pursuit to modernize cartography, and in the autumn of 1855, the tsar ordered the opening of the first imperial photographic establishment (*fotozavedenie*) to be housed in the General Staff's *VTO* next to the Winter Palace.[29] This establishment, or "pavilion" consisting of a chemical laboratory and photography studio (*fotograficheskii pavil'ion*) — installed at rooftop levels with south-facing glass ceilings to allow for natural light — would be overseen by a Captain Pisarevsky from 1856 to 1861, and then by his successor, Artillery Lieutenant Nikolai A. Sytenko from 1862 to 1867.[30] During their consecutive five-year tenures, Pisarevsky and Synteko adequately equipped the studio workshop and lab to run intensive experimentation, such that it advanced with precision and speed, and was based entirely on European materials, instruction, and application.

Each officer was sent abroad to gather intelligence on the military photographic establishments of their western counterparts. Pisarevsky returned from Germany with lenses, glass plates for negatives, chemical solutions and other supplies and from France with an architectural plan of the studio at the Imperial Naval Department.[31] This initial mission would furnish the *VTO* establishment with a

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[28] Sonntag, 2011, p. 32.

[29] Sonntag, 2012, p. 4; *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossijsskoi imperii*, No. 29663 (September 21, 1855), Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaja Tipografiia, 1856, pp. 596-599.

[30] Sonntag, 2011, p. 128.

[31] *Eadem*, 2012, p. 4.

working laboratory, storage spaces, thirteen workshops and two large studios with five cameras.[32] He additionally designed formal lectures on chemistry for the *VTO*, modeled on pedagogical methods developed in the various European photography establishments he toured, most notably that of the British Royal Engineers[33] (these lessons on technique were combined with classes on composition and pictorial design taught by Professor I.A. Bogdan from the Imperial Academy of Arts).

Sytenko directed the photography pavilion on similar guidelines as Pisarevsky, but intensified transfers in technology and information through a heightened frequency of open interaction that suggests mutual exchange with his European colleagues. Making several trips to England which also included France, Belgium and Austria, he returned with the latest in technical information and equipment[34] and what would be his greatest contribution: a new design plan for the *VTO* pavilion renovation based on that for the British Royal Engineers.[35] In brief, we have a Russian establishment founded on the best European photographic developments available at the time: German and French optical instruments and materials combined with British printing technologies, instruction and studio-lab designs.

When fully operational, this *VTO* establishment quickly and efficiently produced maps that would rationalize military operations in the field. Yet, this specialized knowledge in "military photography" (*voennaia fotografiia*) produced more than just maps: It also produced the more conventional genres of photography — landscapes and portraiture — translated for military purposes (ie., to survey land for planning infrastructure, exploiting natural resources, positioning for surveillance and classifying ethnic groups). Previous methods of visualizing local places and people had been hand-drawn by military draftsmen, who typically rendered "views and types" as imagined, picturesque fantasy. Photography, however, permanently displaced this medium as it captured tack-sharp detail, conveying an immediate and undeniable accuracy, not to mention authenticity. The highly trained group of *VTO* military photographers consisted largely of those attached to engineering and artillery units, and their technical services were invaluable.[36] Representatives in institutions like the General Staff Academy, the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, the Academy of Sciences and the Naval Ministry actively sought after their newly Russian photographic expertise.

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[32] "Peterburgskaia letopis'," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, No. 117 (May 31, 1859), cited from Barkhatova, 2009, p. 72 (fn. 64).

[33] Sonntag, 2011, pp. 36-37.

[34] *Ibid*, pp. 35-36.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

As many scholars have well documented, photography became an instrument to serve the chief scientific disciplines as a means to visually translate, promote and spread research data and theoretical ideas that influenced state policy and guided empire-building. The collodion era came on the heels of the European "era of statistical enthusiasm" (1830-1848);[37] and in Russia, statistics invigorated the dominant field of geography, giving rise to "military statistics" which has been attributed to a powerful proponent of photography, Dmitry A. Miliutin (1816-1912), who would become Minister of War and key architect of the Central Asian conquest.

Similarly, photography would significantly shape ethnology and anthropology, two burgeoning fields that entered Russia with transfers of scientific communication and exchange. In St. Petersburg, co-founder of the Geographical Society and eminent German naturalist, Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876) remarked on the "real utility [of photography] for ethnological study": for him, photography was a useful technological tool for classifying the diverse peoples of the Russian empire.[38] He specifically relied on guidelines for ethnic portraiture that were set by Paul Broca (1824-1880), president of the French Anthropological Society. Broca proposed a set of imaging standards that became widely and formally adopted across Russia to inventory people as "types" using the perspectives of *en face* and profile; this French anthropological practice specifically called for the subjects to be photographed naked, which Russian photographers (military, scientist and entrepreneurial) categorically rejected in favor of picturing nationalities with their native dress, coiffure, and even daily implements.

 The transfer of these adapted ideas also spread across the foremost Russian intellectual circles in the 1860s and 1870s. For example, in 1866, Alexei Fedchenko (1844-1873), head of the photographic committee and of the Turkestan Pavilion for the 1867 *All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition* in Moscow (which was overseen by anthropologist, Anatoli P. Bogdanov [1834-1896]), obtained a translation of *Broca's General Instructions* (*Obshchii instruktsii Broka*); these would be used to establish specifications for ethnographic photographs that would be gathered from varying provinces for display.[39] And, as photography became integral to science, the Imperial Russian Geographical Society published a variation of these "instructions" in their journal in 1872.[40]

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[37] Holquist, 2001, pp. 112-114.

[38] Sonntag, 2011, pp. 47-49.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[40] Sonntag, 2011, p. 49; for these distinctions and guidelines, see Anonymous, 1872, pp. 86-88.

Once perfecting this technology and recognizing its applications, *VTO* photography became a modern mode of mapping strategic information for the state by providing reliable and comprehensive pictorial information about the territories and their populations. Consequently, the state authorities quickly deployed it to map outlying regions of the empire, particularly the Asian borderlands of the Caucasus and Central Asia. One critical outcome of this internal transfer that combined military and intellectual cultures was a veritable proliferation of albums, largely initiated during the reign of Alexander II when Russia modeled this global era of album-mania that spanned from the 1850s to the 1880s.[41] Albums — as unique photographic objects which began to appear regularly as portable image galleries and pictorial inventories of newly controlled Asian possessions — epitomized and encapsulated this cultural transfer of technology and ideas that were carried across the empire into ministerial hands, intellectual institutional and libraries and were even showcased abroad in exhibitions.

VTO photographers and studios to the Asian margins of empire

Transfers to the Caucasus

Photographic transfers and field activity by *VTO* staff occurred in the Caucasus, before moving into Central Asia. If Sergey Levitsky first brought photographic technologies to the northern Caucasus for state purposes, Colonel Alexander Ivanitsky (1811-1872) first brought them to the southern Caucasus. There, as a chief mountain army engineer, he produced more than what were among the earliest photographs of that region: he spearheaded the installation of a permanent studio for the Russian regional administration to be operated by a highly proficient staff known as the Caucasus Army Corps of Photographers.

As Pisarevsky was travelling to Europe on a buying trip for the *VTO* photographic establishment in St. Petersburg, his counterpart in Tbilisi, Ivanitsky, was making a substantial purchase in Paris from Charles Chevalier in 1857.[42] Ivanitsky was tasked by "the commander-in-chief of the Caucasus Army," Viceroy Aleksandr Baryatinsky (1855-1881), to completely furnish a "photographic establishment" equipped with dark room, laboratory and studio. Trunks arrived two years later holding 119 items, like chemicals, dark room lamps, glass plates, storage boxes, cardboard mounts, English and French "positive" paper, and lenses for landscapes and portraits. By 1862, the establishment would be staffed by officers and topographers sent from the Caucasus army, who had been trained in St. Petersburg

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[41] Sonntag, 2011, pp. 8, 51.

[42] *Eadem*, 2012, p. 9. Personal gratitude to Gia Gersamia for his sharing this information with the author [Sonntag] on June 8, 2012.

"in the photographic art" (*fotograficheskoe iskusstvo*) for the following areas: "copying, enlarging and reducing maps and plans, as well as making photographic and stereographic views from nature."[43] Serving in many respects as a *VTO* satellite pavilion to the one in the imperial capital, it officially opened in January 1863, advertising the photographic services of the "Caucasus Army photographic establishment of the General Staff."

Before Ivanitsky retired from the military in 1866 as Major General of the Caucasus Mountain Engineers, he successfully facilitated an impressive inter-regional technology transfer that shaped a highly specialized, very productive and new unit of officers collectively known as the Caucasus Army Corps of Photographers. Some of these military photographers, who later opened very successful studios after their service, were Vladimir V. Barkanov, Dmitry Ermakov and Dmitry Nikitin. Such officers applied photo-technologies to countless geographical surveys to map and gather statistical data on geology, hydrology and communication routes as well as on tangible cultural heritage (as seen in ancient monuments and church estates) and ethnographic knowledge of the diverse population. Working under the auspices of local administrative districts, they moved across the trans-Caucasian territory documenting Kuban, Tersk, Dagestan, Kutaisi and Yerevan (which overlap modern-day Chechnya, Dagestan, Georgia, Ossetia and Armenia).[44] Moreover, like Levitsky, they accompanied scholars from the capital and regional branches of the Russian Geographical Society and Archaeological Commission as well as members of the Caucasus Statistical Committee;[45] these researchers equally shared the growing interest in photography's capacity to convey and disseminate knowledge visually.

Once transferred from the field to the pavilion, staff of the army photography corps printed geographical maps and military sensitive "situational images" (*situatsionnye snimki*).[46] For these pictures, the photographers designated spots that were specifically chosen as strategic interest or as important local heritage fitting the general categories of "views, types and archaeological subjects." They could then compile albums from hundreds of negatives and panoramic plates (*s'emochnye listy*).[47] For example, in 1866, the army corps surveyed the Kutaisi province to update maps, while also making nearly 1,300 negatives that would be narrowed to about five-dozen to print for a single album.[48] Working within an imperial paradigm, their images had to appeal to Russian state interests: it is important to note, that in the

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[43] Sonntag, 2012, pp. 9-10; *eadem*, 2011, p. 126.
[44] *Eadem*, 2012, pp. 11-12.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 11; *eadem*, 2011, p. 132.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 130.
[48] *Ibid.*

background and foreground of many photographs, there is an unmistakable Russian
administrative presence represented as newly added infrastructure (ie., forts, roads,
bridges, hospitals, customs houses, police and postal stations, lamp posts along wide
boulevards, and Orthodox churches). By the 1870s, many photographs, like those
showing construction development along the Georgian Military Highway, would
also conspicuously include telegraph poles and railroad tracks. These symbols of
modern European civilization contrasted with the traditional life of so many local
ethnic communities.[49]

Although a seemingly topographical project, the Army Corps of Photographers were
also involved in an orientalist enterprise. This orientalist view dictated a field
practice that documented local populations according to nationality types, local
customs and architectural antiquities. In this context, *VTO* military photography can
be construed as a technology of power. By collecting images that exaggerated exotic
beauties or menacing mountain warriors, these images translated traditional Russian
literary perceptions of the Circassian "Noble Savage" into a visual-visible Georgian
"Other"; these perceptions then effectively merged all the "Caucasian" cultures into
a single sensational trope. If violence and fear functioned as instruments of the
military campaign, photography served to picture Russian legitimacy over a
culturally rich, multi-ethnic, and orientalized region.

Several albums produced by the Caucasus Army Corps of Photographers circulated
nationally and internationally to exhibitions, where they received high recognition.
They were viewed from St. Petersburg to Moscow and Berlin in 1865 to Paris in
1867.[50] As noted above, albums served to synthesize elements of photographic
transfer as much as to symbolize cultural competence in their technical presentation
and visual wealth. Once the *VTO* began to mobilize photographers to Central Asia,
this transfer would be initially wrought with technical and political tension but end
in what was perceived as Russian imperial triumph.

Transfers to Central Asia

While Ivanitsky had begun to develop a state-run photography establishment in the
Caucasus by 1857, no such facility existed anywhere near or in Central Asia, yet.
Technically, the remoteness and aridity of the region posed problems for making
pictures with wet-plate collodion negatives; but the larger problem was political:
Russia had not fully vanquished the territory of foreign sovereigns. Establishing a
VTO photographic presence in the region would take several years longer than in the
Caucasus; but serving as a model, the Tbilisi-based *VTO* satellite pavilion and its

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[49] Sonntag, 2012, p. 10.
[50] *Eadem*, 2011, pp. 121-155; Sonntag, 2012, pp. 12-13.

image output directly influenced provincial governors to the east, and in the end, two photographic establishments would be set up to document the vast Central Asian territory.

In 1861, when the General Staff *VTO* in St. Petersburg officially began to transfer trained military photographers to its Caucasus pavilion, it simultaneously focused on Central Asia. As in the Caucasus, a Central Asian state-run studio was crucial for military surveillance, and the first officers trained in photography (*fotograficheskoe delo*) were dispatched from the capital to a burgeoning establishment in Orenburg to renovate cartographic printing capabilities.[51] Because Orenburg served as a staging ground for military and scientific expeditions to the southern Kazakh Steppe and the Central Asian oasis regions, this provincial capital was strategic for the *VTO* studio. Yet, due to the aggressive onset of expansionist campaigns in 1863, the pavilion temporarily paused field and printing activity. Finally, in 1865, the newly appointed Orenburg governor-general, Adjutant General N.A. Kryzhanovsky (1818-1888) requested advanced instruction for his officers from Sytenko, and by 1866, the Orenburg *VTO* began conducting surveillance work in newly conquered lands and making the first modern maps of the region.[52]

These maps would begin to delineate the growing territorial strength of the Russian empire in Asia and show how tsarist troops "closed the lines" of the steppe frontier, when the southern oasis cities fell in rapid succession from 1863 to 1867, diminishing the Kokand khanate. In time, these cities would be added to the Orenburg *krai* and largely consolidated within the Turkestan *oblast'*, a new imperial district formally established in 1865 stretching from the Aral Sea to Issyk Kul. This *oblast'* was initially governed out of Tashkent by Mikhail G. Cherniaev (1828-1898), then Dmitiry I. Romanovsky (1825-1881), and finally overseen by Kryzhanovsky until 1867, when the *oblast'* would form part of the Turkestan *krai*, ruled by Konstantin von Kaufman (1818-1882). Under Kaufman, who was also an enthusiastic proponent of photography having witnessed its development in the imperial capital given his long experience in high positions of state government, a *VTO* photographic establishment would be set up in Tashkent by 1869. Like his administrative contemporaries and close colleagues, Kaufman well understood the power of photography to map, classify and inventory, and he actively and ambitiously commissioned *VTO* photography to promote Russia's only colony and largest province through such album projects as *The Turkestan Album, 1871-1872*.[53]

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[51] *Eadem*, 2011, pp. 164-165.
[52] *Eadem*, 2012, pp. 13-14.
[53] Gorshenina, 2007; Sonntag, 2011.

Tensions, combining state and regional politics that were wrapped up in the making of this vast borderland territory, would be played out in the activities of *VTO* photographers, who like their counterparts in the Caucasus, served as intermediaries to map and picture the region as commanders ordered. Photography albums and their production histories can demonstrate the early shortcomings and subsequent successes of transporting this visual technology to the khanates, which were not met without certainconflicts.

Two VTO *Photography Albums and Contexts of Tension*

In 1857, War Minister Nikolai Sukhozanet (1794-1871) recommended that officers organizing the imminent diplomatic mission to Khiva and Bukhara include "the photographic apparatus for the khanate expedition."[54] The lack of a localized pavilion in the region did not prevent expeditions from hauling camera equipment and accessories to the desert by camel-drawn cart and boat on the Aral Sea. Neither did the possibility of local tensions from native populations encountered in the Ust Urt plateau, Khiva or Bukhara deter the photographer, Artillery Lieutenant Anton S. Murenko (1837-1875). Rather, resistance to including photography on this high-profile mission originated with the campaign commander, Nikolai P. Ignatiev (1832-1908), who seemed simply ignorant to the optical advantages of the new apparatus and was suspicious of its cumbersome presence.

Ignatiev was charged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its auxiliary Asiatic Departmentas well as the Ministries of War and Navy to lead what would be a six-month diplomatic mission to secure commercial and political relations with the independent Central Asian states. In what amounted to an international probe, the mission was intended as a measure to assess, and potentially counter, British influence in the region. In this climate of espionage, Ignatiev expressed his frustrations with Murenko, who was hired to accompany two topographers for gathering visual data and testing the technology in the desert climates of Khiva and Bukhara.[55] The young leader saw the presence of a photographer as a security threat, able to draw immediate and unwanted suspicion (recalling the tragic fate of Stoddart and Conolly). Ignatiev's disdain was also one of expedition logistics: he simply regretted that one of the carts used to carry the photographer's equipment had been originally intended to haul artillery shells that would be used for sounding on the Aral Sea.

The resulting album contained twenty-seven salt prints under the title *From Orenburg across Khiva to Bukhara, Photographic Drawings of Artillery Lieutenant*

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[54] *Read Sonntag, 2011,* p. 62.
[55] *Ibid*., pp. 53-56.

Murenko.[56] It represents a survey that can be divided into six successive locations of the mission itinerary: Orenburg, the Ust Urt plateau, Aral Sea and Amu Darya, Khiva, Bukhara, and, Fort No. 1 (Kazalinsk) on the Syr Darya.[57] Combining photographic technologies developed by Archer and Talbot, Murenko's images are underwhelming in their lack of sharpness, which required retouching that rendered them more reminiscent of watercolors than photographs. Yet, they succeeded, too, for several reasons.

First, Murenko was the first to photographically document a naval expedition on the Aral Sea, one that was specifically commissioned by the head of the Imperial Navy, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich (1827-1892), to commemorate the very first naval expedition of Aleksey I. Butakov (1816-1869). That maritime campaign occurred in 1848 and was depicted in "an album of drawings" compiled by the poet and painter Taras G. Shevchenko (1814-1861).[58] Second, it demonstrated how local populations reacted to this innovation. Upon arriving to Khiva, Ignatiev's mission was placed under house arrest for the first three weeks in a palace garden courtyard, where they were constantly watched day and night with armed guards positioned on the ground and rooftops. It is under these conditions of the photographic encounter that Murenko made his Khivan portraits. Because the camera was initially perceived as a weapon, sitters were tentative at first, which is perhaps why "types" include the gardener and dragoman; once the magic of the image was known to be benign, Murenko photographed the khan's sons with their favorite Borzoi hounds among other inhabitants of the royal compound.

Finally, the album earned Murenko a silver medal at a meeting of the Russian Geographical Society back in the capital, which created a precedent for the state to deploy photography on future surveys of Central Asia as a campaign instrument. Moreover, this album gave Murenko authorial recognition that also garnered prestige for the *VTO* photographic establishment. This public acknowledgement would be denied to Captain Mikhail K. Priorov, a *VTO* engineer and sapper from Orenburg whose photographs of the Steppe Commission in 1865 were used to compile the second album of the region, *Out of Central Asia, 1867* (*Iz Srednei Azii, 1867*).

Commissioned by Orenburg Governor-General Kryzhanovsky himself, this album of thirty-nine photographs represents the first most important campaign in the region after conquest, documenting the Steppe Commission of 1865 and 1866. Led by

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[56] Morozov, 1953, p. 14; Devel', 1994, pp. 259-271; Dluzhnevskaya, 2006, pp. 282-291; *eadem,* 2011, pp. 32-34. The album copy at the Institute for the History of Material Culture (FA, op. Q211) has 24 photographs.

[57] Sonntag, 2011, pp. 54-89.

[58] *Eadem*, p. 66.

Fedor K. Giers (1824-1891), the Steppe Commission was organized to gather information on the economic, social, legal, and political institutions of the Kazakh populations. Kryzhanovsky assigned Priorov to accompany commission members in the second year, when surveys took place in the southern parts of the Orenburg province and specifically covered new Central Asian colonial possessions. Significantly, this Commission also included an archeological mission led by Petr I. Lerch (1828-1884), who was the same orientalist on the 1858 Ignatiev Mission to Khiva and Bukhara. Part of Priorov's assignment was to follow Lerch on what would be a five-month archaeological expedition to produce plans and sketches, in addition to making photographs.[59] While there are several portraits of local elite, the album images largely picture these surveys and scientific observations made at Forts No. 1 at Kazalinsk and Perovsky as well as in the cities of Shimkent, Turkestan, Tashkent, Khujand and Ura Tiube (today Istaravshan in Tajikistan).[60]

In considering the reasons for Kryzhanovsky to officially dispatch Priorov, and effectively photography, on this Commission, several points stand out. First, Kryzhanovsky may have been reacting to the call for the 1867 International Exposition in Paris as well as the Ethnographic Exhibition in Moscow held that same year; given the recent introduction of photography in Central Asia, he knew that its representation would be severely lacking.[61] Second, Kryzhanovsky was pressed to exploit the new medium, given that he invested much in the organization of the Orenburg pavilion. Third, Lerch's inclusion on the geographical surveys suggests that the governor-general may have reacted to a request by the Imperial Archaeological Commission to investigate the significance of the discovered archaeological site of Djankent. And finally, as a special committee member of the Steppe Commission together with Fedor Giers, he was personally and politically interested in the proposals that would reorganize Central Asia. Despite the importance and expense of photographic applications to ruling Central Asia at the time, Priorov (unlike Murenko) was outwardly ignored for his visual contributions.

Using modern terminology to describe that era, we can say that the "media impact" of *Out of Central Asia* was very high, despite the fact that his name was practically

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[59] Lerkh, 1870.

[60] Sonntag, 2011, pp. 175-188.

[61] For the Paris exhibition, Kryzhanovsky was able to send only a few collection items of agricultural tools belonging to the Khwaja Yusupov of Tashkent; in Moscow, Central Asia was already displayed by drawings of "primitive" (*diko-kamennikh*) Kyrgyz and the Greater Horde of Kazakhs by P.M. Kosharov, several mannequins dressed in traditional costumes and various items collected by Captain A.A. Kushakevich, the Governor of War for Khujand district, and it seems a few photographs by Priorov. See Gorshenina, 2009, pp. 136-137; Sonntag, 2011, pp. 159, 184-185.

never mentioned in the following context: Lerch included these photographs during a presentation at the Russian Geographical Society in 1867, but he failed, however, to focus on the role of the photographer, with whom he had developed a strained relationship. Priorov was again disregarded a year later, when some of his photographs were published by Petr I. Pashino in his description of a journey to Central Asia entitled *Turkestan in 1866*.[62] Again, in 1869, some of his images depicting archaeological sites were anonymously displayed in an exhibition that was organized at the Ministry of State Domains.[63] While ignoring or simply overlooking any acknowledgement to the photographer, this exhibition was due to the efforts of Vasily V. Vereshchagin and none other than Konstantin von Kaufman.[64] Indeed, he would become in the subsequent fifteen years the living personification of Russian Turkestan, which, as previously stated, resulted from the 1867 Steppe Commission. Drafted in two statutes that proposed separate administrations for the Steppe region and for the newly conquered regions of the Turkestan *oblast'*, this outcome entirely opposed Kryzhanovsky's view and dashed all hopes for his rule in the southern Central Asian khanates. All land stretching the extent of the Syr Darya in the Turkestan *oblast'* — represented in Priorov's album — was reallocated to form the new Turkestan governor-generalship. The first governor-general of this newly consolidated Turkestan province was handed to Kaufman, based on the recommendation of his friend, War Minister Miliutin.

Photographic Transfer among Local Asian Populations

During this colonial period, officials of the Russian military administration represented the majority of carriers involved in the transfer of photography to Central Asia. Uniquely acting as both patrons and proponents effectively of Culture A (culture-inventors) and Culture B (transfer adapters), they used political influence to promote photography as a technology new to the region and borrowed an established set of European theories and applications as well as themes and topics. The role of the local population in this process as a receiving agent, able to take an active role in selecting innovations that complemented or conformed to native conditions and customs, ranged from negligible to none.

Arguably, the initial reaction to this cultural transfer from the local point of view was rejection. Photography failed to find a worthy place at the court of the emirs of Bukhara as well as that of the khans of Khiva. Outside of Murenko enjoying freedom after experiencing a short-term house arrest in a Khivan palace when on the Ignatiev mission in 1857, most examples by Europeans to introduce this technology to the

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[62] Pashino, 1868, figures 5-8.
[63] Sonntag, 2011, 164-175; *eadem*, 2012, pp. 14-15.
[64] Gorshenina, 2009, pp. 136-147.

Central Asian population ended grimly: British officers, Stoddart and Conolly, were beheaded by the Bukharan emir in 1848 (*supra*); Frenchman Henri de Coulibeuf de Blocqueville was jailed in Khiva in 1860[65]; and Italian expeditioners, Modesto Miro Gavazzi, Count Pompeo Litta Biumi Resta and Ferdinando Meazza, were imprisoned in Bukhara in 1863.[66] All had tried to bring the magic and utility of photography to Central Asia, but failed. Even when Central Asian sovereignties had been officially reduced to Russian protectorates in the late 1860s and early 1870s, efforts to introduce photography transpired with little to no avail.

Unlike the photographic exchanges that defined the decades-long technological transfers of the Persian kings, Mohammad Shah (r. 1834-1848) and Nasreddin Shah (r. 1848-96),[67] the Turkestan rulers could not surround themselves with Western instructors and officers trained in photography. They could neither create their own court workshops, like those opening in Tehran as early as 1848, nor could they introduce specialized training courses on photography, like those held in institutions resembling the Tehran College Dar ul-Funun which added photography and chemistry to its mandatory curriculum in 1851. The khans and emirs could not send their subjects to study photography in Europe, while the first group of Iranian students from Tehran had already reached Paris by 1858.[68]

The restrictive situation in Central Asia also contrasts with that of the Ottoman empire. There, since 1863, the Armenian Abdullah brothers (*Abdullah Frères*) operated an atelier that also served as the official studio for the Sultan's court. They produced both state images authorized by the Ottoman Porte and touristic, orientalized photographs for European travelers. So, captivated by the art, Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) later installed a personal dark room at his Yildiz Palace; and in 1892, he issued a decree to regulate the manner in which European travelers could photograph his subjects.[69] Moreover, in the same photographic representations that he himself created, Abdulhamid II visibly attempted to depict the Ottoman empire as a modern equivalent to European powers. His photographs conveyed a desire to assert himself on the world stage as the monarch of a great country that spanned both Europe and Asia. In fact, according to modernization trends that were defining and reshaping the late-nineteenth century, the sultan was also developing contemporary technologies and modernizing education. His "imperial self-portrait" did not play into picturing an exotic extravagant power, but

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[65] Blocqueville, 1980; Tahmasbpour, 2013, p. 8.

[66] Gorshenina, 2003, p. 348; Gavazzi, 2007, pp. 64-97; Bitto, 2014, pp. 161-173.

[67] Behdad, 2001, p. 145.

[68] Tahmasbpour, 2013, p. 7.

[69] Gavin, Ş. Tekin, and G. Alpay Tekin, 1988; Pinguet and Gigord, 2011; Roberts, 2013, pp. 53 (citation), 54-74; *eadem*, 2015; Deringil, 1999, p. 152.

one rather of regal prestige that naturally displayed symbols of his own personal wealth and success like his collections of yachts and horses (collections that were not uncommon among European monarchs).[70]

Unlike the Persian or Afghan shahs,[71] Ottoman sultans or Ethiopian rulers[72], the emirs of Bukhara and khans of Khiva did not create on their own initiative any visual record of their possessions for their own status. Since they failed to maintain independent diplomacy, they also could not control and export a reputable likeness to Russia or to Europe (although Bukharan emirs actively participated in exhibitions with their own ethnographic collections, themselves often being part of the display!). They relied entirely on images produced and purveyed by Russian photographers. For example, the Bukharan emir, Muzaffar (1834-1885), spent several months — from February to June 1884 — negotiating at multiple colonial, ministerial levels to obtain twenty-five photographs for himself made by one Savenkov on a journey through the emirate.[73]

We cannot, however, speak of a complete absence of precedents. In 1872, according to the studies of Valeriya Prishchepova,[74] the ruler of Kokand, Khudoyar Khan (1845-1875), and his son, Nasireddin Bek (the governor of Andijan), had became interested in photography since their encounters with Lieutenant G.E. Krivtsov, who took portraits of the khan and his palace for the *Turkestan Album*. Soon after, the khan requested that Krivtsov sent to Kokand and Andijan the following: cameras, photo equipment, and detailed instructions (to which Krivtsov added oral instructions for the khan's envoy named "Kokandian Berdykul"). Unfortunately, the first independent experiments failed. And by 1876, the Russian conquest of the Kokand khanate postponed further darkroom discoveries until a much later date.

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From our discussion of this case study on cultural transfers of early photography in imperial Russia, it is difficult to speak at length about successful and equitable transfers in the southern periphery of the Russian empire.

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[70] Deringil, 1999, p. 152.
[71] Seraj and Dupree, 1979; Hanifi, 2014.
[72] Sohier, 2012.
[73] Tsentral'nyj Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistan (TsGA RUz), F. I-5, op. 1, d. 1378.
[74] Prishchepova, 2011, pp. 21-22.

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Summary

Early photography as cultural transfer in imperial Russia: visual technology, mobility and modernity in the Caucasus and Central Asia

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Photography is well understood as a global technology that rapidly circulated by the mid-nineteenth century, but the history of its early transfer to and within the Russian imperial context has been overlooked. This paper will focus on the technological transfer of photography from the 1840s to the 1870s, applying the theory of cultural transfer to examine various case studies of modernity along a trajectory from West to East. It considers exchanges of this visual technology from its European origins to Russia, and then from Russia to colonized territories in Asia. Specifically, this route of transfer assumes that from France, England and Germany to Russia, St. Petersburg and Moscow, and then, through the Caucasus and Orenburg, to Central Asia. This study brings to light new and original research on the general history of photography, its imperial relationship and applications for colonial power as well as its development and circulation within contexts of the late Russian empire.

Keywords: Photography, Visual technology, Modernity, Transfer, Colonial Situation, Russia, Caucasus, Central Asia.