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Knowledge, Adventure and Geopolitics  
Proceedings of a Symposium in Stockholm,  
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edited by Ingmar Oldberg**

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## Preface

The symposium was organized on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sällskapet – the Swedish Society for the Studies of Russia, Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. There are good reasons why precisely Sven Hedin was chosen as a starting-point.

Being a member of ICCEES (International Council for Central and East European Studies) the Society has got the honour of organizing the next world congress in Stockholm in 2010 on the theme *Eurasia – Prospects for wider cooperation*. Undoubtedly, Sven Hedin is Sweden's best known "Eurasianist", who in his activities combined the scientific principles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with 20<sup>th</sup> century geopolitics and a timeless search for adventure and knowledge.

Already a hundred years ago, Hedin's expeditions to still unknown parts of Central Asia made him famous all over the world. As this volume shows, he was well received by royal courts, scientific societies and the reading general public. Hedin also had many intriguing connections with Russia, which is a traditional field of interest of the Society.

This volume contains a selection of the papers that were presented at the symposium. The first paper by Professor Staffan Rosén gives a good introduction to the theme of Hedin and Russia by analyzing the changing relations of trust and distrust during over 50 years.

Based on documents in the Swedish National Archives, the Russian Professor Lebedev focuses on Hedin's Russian correspondence, for instance with scientists, Bolshevik leaders, and the exiled Princess Khovanskaia.

Under the theme of searching for Great Tartary Mr Fabian Linde then explores Hedin's relations with famous individuals such as August Strindberg, the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg and the theosophist Helena Blavatsky.

The Swiss Professor Philippe Forêt thereafter puts Hedin into the modern context of climate change by analyzing the thoughts of geographers like Spencer Weart, Halford MacKinder and Ellsworth Huntington.

The ex-Russian researcher and journalist Igor Torbakov widens the horizon by scrutinizing the context and the main thoughts of classical Eurasianism starting with Prince Trubetskoi.

Finally the Finland-Swedish author and politician Jörn Donner presents some of Hedin's contemporaries among his own ancestry and the importance of Siberia

to the Finnish national project.

The editing of this volume has aimed to facilitate the reading of the contributions, for example by inserting subtitles and adding new paragraphs. An effort has also been made to standardize the format and the references without infringing on the contents and the personal styles. Thus some differences remain.

In most papers the spelling is according to standard British English as the habit is in Sweden. However, concerning the transliteration of Russian names and places into English – always a contested issue – it mainly follows the most common US Library of Congress system, except for widely accepted spellings like in *Novoye Vremya* and Blavatsky. The way people spell their Russian names in English is respected as far as it is known and so are the spellings of names in quotations.

Stockholm, 5 March 2008

Ingmar Oldberg, board member of the Society

## Contributors

**Jörn Donner**, Finland–Swedish author, ex-parliamentarian, film director and traveller. Has renewed the travel literature with a row of books from *Rapport från Berlin* (Report from Berlin) (1958) to *I min fars fotspår: resor i Sibirien förr och nu* (In My Father's Footsteps: Travels in Sibiria then and now) (2006).

**Philippe Forêt**, professor at the Institute of Cartography, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala University. Editor of *Civilization, Climate and Science Policy*. His recent publications include *The Journey of Maps and Images on the Silk Road* (2008), *La véritable histoire d'une montagne plus grande que l'Himalaya* (2004) and *New Qing Imperial History* (2003).

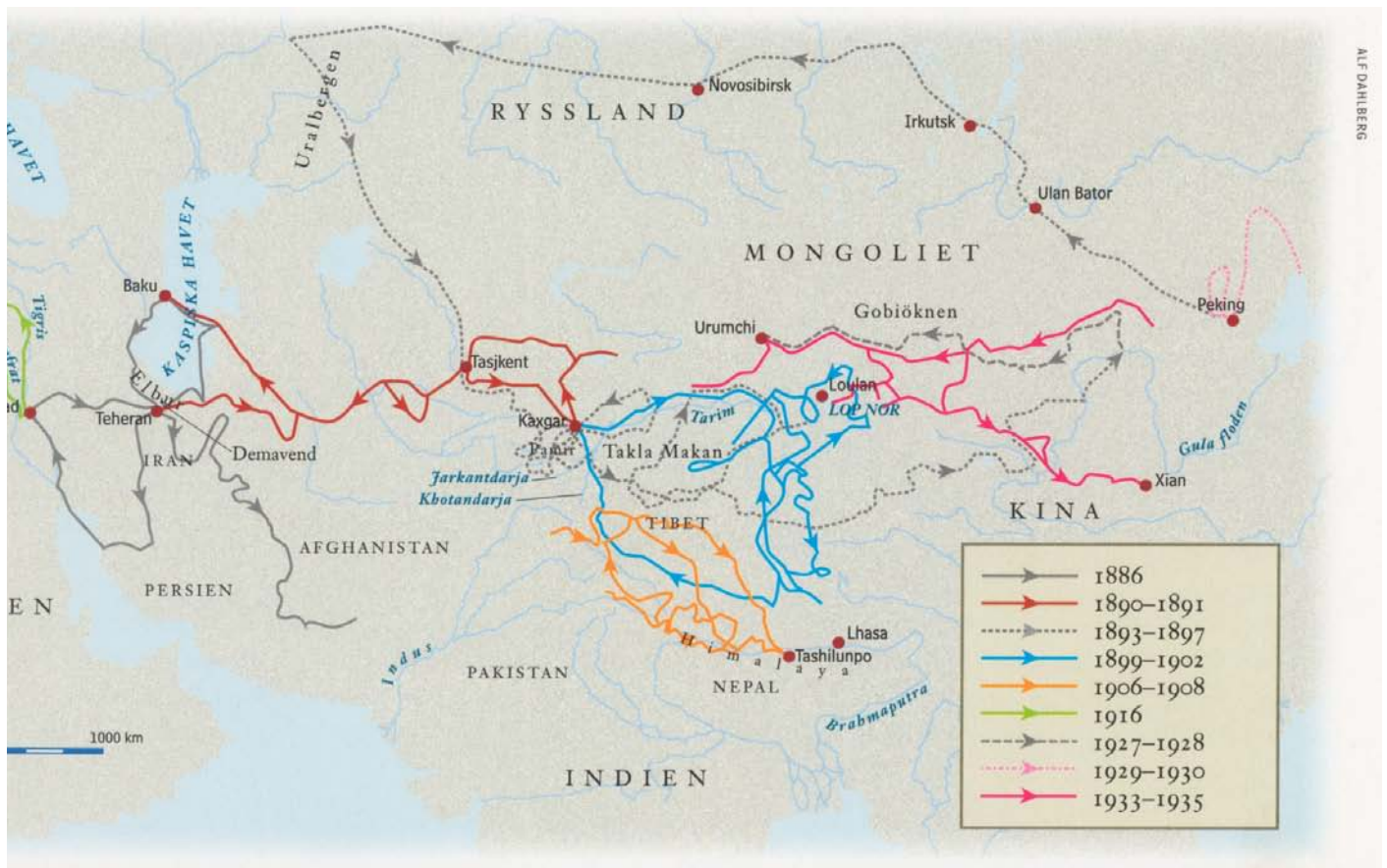
**Sergei Lebedev**, economic historian at the Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. His publications include *Russian Banks during the First World War and the Revolution* (2004) and *Konets Russko-Aziatskogo banka i KVZhD* (The End of the Russian-Asiatic Bank and KVZhD) (2006)

**Fabian Linde**, Ph.D. Candidate at the Stockholm University, researching on Nikolay Berdyayev (Berdiaev) and Jacob Boehme, historical movements and ideologies in German and Russian theosophy and mysticism.

**Staffan Rosén**, professor in Korean studies at Stockholm University, fellow at the SCAS, secretary at the Sven Hedin Foundation, participant in archeological expeditions to Taklamakan and Xinjiang. Has published widely on cultural contacts with the Far East and Central Asia, e.g. *Det okända Centralasien - en utmaning för svensk forskning* (1994) and *Written materials excavated from the sands* (2001).

**Igor Torbakov**, professor in history at the Open Society University, Istanbul, and fellow of SCAS. His publications include *The Historical Failure of Imperial Project in the Russian/Soviet Historiography* (2001). *From the Other Shore: Reflections of Russian Émigré Thinkers on Soviet Nationality Policies, 1920s-1930s* (2003).





Sven Hedin's expeditions

## Sven Hedin and Russia – Mutual Trust and Obstacles

*Staffan Rosén*

### Mutual trust

The well-known Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) started his explorative work from the southern provinces of the Russian Empire, when he in 1885 as a fresh student arrived in Baku to take up a temporary position as tutor of a Swedish schoolboy of a family in the service of the Nobel industrial conglomerate there.<sup>1</sup> During his time in Baku Hedin learnt the Russian language quite well and founded a sincerely positive attitude toward Russia and things Russian. When in the next few years he organized his “one-man expeditions” to Inner Asia, mainly to the Taklamakan desert in Xinjiang and to Tibet, he received considerable help from the Russian authorities.<sup>2</sup> As Hedin’s international reputation grew, the Russian authorities seem to have become more and more interested in supporting the intrepid Swede and his adventurous undertakings in a huge area, which at the time was so hotly contested by the two imperialistic powers Russia and Great Britain.

Hedin as a citizen of a neutral small Scandinavian state, from many points of view was the perfect person for them to support. Russian attention towards Hedin at times assumed very flattering forms. At the start of his second expedition (1899) Hedin even was received for the second time by the Tsar Nicholas II himself, who promised his Swedish guest not only free transportation on the Russian railways but also an “escort” of four Cossacks, who were to follow Hedin all the way through Tibet down to British India.<sup>3</sup> Hedin was duly flattered and to the end of his life seems to have been of the opinion that this extraordinary help only was a token of Russian good-will and general interest in geographical-scientific problems and nothing else.

It obviously never occurred to him that Russian interest in ‘Hedin the explorer’ also could have other, less idealistic, motives. Already during his first visit to Kashgar in 1890, Hedin met the illustrious Russian Consul General Nikolai

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Wennerholm, *Sven Hedin - En biografi*, Stockholm 1980, pp.34, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Wennerholm, *op.cit.*, pp 60-241. For bibliographic information on Hedin’s own extensive writings on his expeditions, see Willy Hess, *Die Werke Sven Hedins*, Stockholm 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Sven Hedin, *Stormän och kungar*, Vol.II, pp. 234-249.

Fedorovich Petrovskii (1837-1908)<sup>4</sup>. Petrovskii immediately seems to have realized that Hedin could be of some service to Russian interests in Xinjiang, and we must assume that the later very positive attitude towards Hedin from the side of the Russian authorities to a large extent stems from the reports sent by Petrovskii to his superiors in St. Petersburg. Hedin himself appreciated Nikolai Fedorovich immensely and all his life talked about him as his 'dear old friend'. On the other hand, according to the testimony of some Swedish missionaries in Kashgar, the Russian consul in private sometimes made fun of the Swedish explorer and talked about him in a depreciating way. A good example of Consul Petrovskii's skillful manipulating of Hedin is the fact that the consul in 1894 talked Hedin into changing his travel plans from Tibet to Pamir – an area of more immediate interest to the Russian authorities at the time.

## Obstacles

Hedin was well rewarded by Russia. He was received several times by the Tsar, to whom he had been sending regular reports of his travels, and he was elected a foreign member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. However, Hedin's relations to his beloved Russia were destined to develop in a fairly turbulent way, with several ups and downs. The main reason for this is that Hedin was not only a geographer and scientist – he was also a very energetic conservative politician and patriotic nationalist. This second side of Hedin's personality not only created problems in his relations with Russia but with time seriously damaged his reputation as one of the "great men of his time".

Already in 1890-91 Hedin personally witnessed the Russian expansion in Central Asia and had come to realize the strength and determination in the Russian expansionist policy and its active participation in 'the Great Game'. Hedin had created a new geo-political concept in which Russia and Central Asia with all its Russian and British political connotations were called by the term 'the Great East'. Hedin first brought forward this concept in a book called *Sweden and the Great East*, published in 1905.<sup>5</sup> The gist of Hedin's geo-political analysis was the following. After the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 Hedin had reached the conclusion that further Russian expansion towards the East was no longer possible, and that as a result Russia would be forced to seek further expansion in the North-West instead, i.e. in Scandinavia.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Emmerick and Margarita Vorob'eva-Desyatovskaya, *Saka Documents, Text Volume III: The St. Petersburg Collection*, London 1995, pp.19-20 ("The St. Petersburg Petrovsky Collection").

<sup>5</sup> Sven Hedin, *Sverige och den stora Östern*, Stockholm 1905, 269 pp. The book is dedicated to Professor Harald Hjärne, but the page preceding the title page carries a portrait of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II.

In 1912 he published a small pamphlet entitled *A Word of Warning*,<sup>6</sup> in which he further argued for a strong Swedish armament in the face of an increasing military danger from Russia. The pamphlet was printed in almost one million copies and freely distributed to every newspaper subscriber in the country.

These anti-Russian ideas, widely propagated by him nationally and internationally at the same time as – and this is important to remember – he strongly attacked British policy in Tibet, finally led to Hedin's expulsion from the Russian Geographical Society in 1912 and a total break with his official contacts with Russia. This process started with an unprecedented attack on Hedin in the Russian newspaper *Novoye Vremya* (27.II/11.III 1912). The article was written by Andrei Petrovich Semenov-Tienshanskii, the son of the famous explorer and president of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, and clearly was politically motivated, although Andrei Petrovich did his best also to reduce Hedin's scholarly and exploratory achievements to nothing. In the article Hedin was accused of ingratitude towards his Russian benefactors as well as having attacked Russia in an ambush.

Hedin was furious over what he considered the unfairness of this official Russian criticism. In a long letter to Semenov-Tienshanskii, dated 6 April 1912,<sup>7</sup> Hedin vehemently defends his position and richly pays back the personal attacks found in Semenov-Tienshanskii's article. Among other things he says that comparison made in the article between Roald Amundsen and Hedin are done in a way that is unworthy of the son of a President of a Geographical Society. He finishes his letter with a demand for an apology in *Novoye Vremya* signed by Semenov-Tienshanskii<sup>8</sup>. Already on 11 April Semenov-Tienshanskii replies by a very short letter, in which he dryly states that “Cela va sans dire que je n'accepte aucune de vos conditions”. In the final phrase of the letter he gives an extra kick to Hedin by pointing out that he is writing as a Russian: “Agréez, Monsieur, l'assurance de la sincérité des sentiments d'un Russe, avec lesquels je sousigne, André Semenov Tien Shansky “<sup>9</sup>. In another article in *Novoye Vremya* Artur A. Stolypin, brother of the murdered prime minister, delivers a personal attack on Hedin, accusing him of being a German spy, and he finishes his article with a flagrant expression of an anti-Semitic nature. I am sorry to say that a large number of Swedish newspapers quoted these racist lines with great satisfaction, and even added more of the same kind, often in terms of cartoons and pictures of Hedin of an even more pronounced anti-Semitic nature.

From a Russian point of view there may have been several points where Hedin

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<sup>6</sup> Sven Hedin, *Ett varningsord*, Stockholm 1912, 70 pp. This work was followed in 1913 by another pamphlet called *Tre Tal [Three Speeches]*, 59 pp., and in 1914 by *Andra varningen [The Second Warning]*, 80 pp., all of which were variants of the same political theme.

<sup>7</sup> Sven Hedin's archive in the Swedish National Archives ( Riksarkivet), section “Ryssland”.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

really deserved strong criticism. However, accusing him of attacking Russia in ambush certainly was unfair. Whatever we may accuse Hedin of – cowardice or a preference for ambush definitely is not among his characteristics. Instead he always staunchly declared his views often in the face of political or scholarly opposition and even ridicule. A good example of this is the fact that only days before the publication of *A Word of Warning* he traveled in January 1912 to St. Petersburg and asked for an audience with the Emperor. Tsar Nicholas received him as usual very kindly, and during the interview Hedin frankly told the Tsar about his forthcoming publication and asked him to understand that he was doing this as a Swedish patriot forced to write as he did by political realities. In no way this was to be understood as “anti-Russian” or as an expression of ingratitude from his side towards the Tsar or his other Russian benefactors. He still loved Russia and wished to remain a friend of this great country. The Tsar took Hedin’s declaration very calmly and thanked him in a friendly manner for speaking out so frankly with him. He added that he hoped that the dark clouds on the political heaven eventually should go away and that the tension in the world should ease.

A few days later, however, the Tsar had changed his attitude. During the grand New Year’s reception in the Winter Palace the Tsar almost immediately walked up to the Swedish Envoy Brändström and asked him to convey to King Gustaf V of Sweden that he was very annoyed and sorry that Dr Hedin, who had received so much goodwill in Russia, had been able to write so badly about Russia that the Swedish population now suspected Russia of hostile intentions towards Sweden. King Gustaf invited Hedin to a private dinner at the Royal Palace and informed him about the reaction of the Tsar.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after the ominous reception in the Winter Palace the article in *Novoye Vremya* was published.

In the famous scholarly polemics between General Przhevalskii and Baron von Richthoven on the Lop Nor issue, Hedin clearly sided with his German teacher and mentor. He did so on – what he considered – purely scientific and scholarly grounds.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that his standpoint in this matter somewhat helped to lower his favour with some of his colleagues in the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, notably its Vice President Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tienschanskii. A letter from Sven Hedin to the famous arabist Baron Viktor Romanovich Rozen (1849-1908) in St. Petersburg dated 19 March 1899 reveals that already at that time Hedin’s works had been severely criticized by the Imperial Archaeological Society, but this time on purely scholarly grounds<sup>12</sup>. It is possible that one of his main critics in this case was Academician Oldenburg.

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<sup>10</sup> Sven Hedin, *Kungar och Stormän*, Vol. II, pp. 249-252.

<sup>11</sup> Sven Hedin, *Scientific Results of a Journey in Central Asia 1899-1902*, Vol.2, *Lop Nor*, Stockholm 1905, 717 pages; Sven Hedin, *Forskningar i Lop-nor området*, Stockholm 1902, 190 pp.

<sup>12</sup> Sven Hedin’s archive in the Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet), section “Ryssland”.

In his letter to Baron Rozen Hedin asks that the baron shall help defending Hedin's name against what he considered unfounded critique.

On the personal level, however, many of the leading Russian scientists, like Kozlov, Oldenburg and Obruchev, continued to keep in touch with Hedin by mail expressing regrets that he had been expelled from the Geographical Society on purely political grounds. All these scholars seem to have defied the official policy of the Geographical Society and continued to keep up good personal relations with Hedin for the rest of their lives. In his Urga diary of 1923 Petr Kuzmich Kozlov remembers his meeting with Hedin back in 1912 "at my place in the Stolyarny Lane on the day when Sven Hedin had presented his notorious pamphlet to the Imperial protector of the Russian Geographical Society at Tsarskoye, which led to his expulsion from both the Russian and the English Geographical Societies..."<sup>13</sup>.

Hedin's annoying straightforwardness in political matters did not tally well with the other sides of his nature. His politeness, personal charm and natural friendliness in his contacts with other people made it easy for him to make new and many friends. To Hedin it was natural that personal relations should be strictly kept apart from political considerations. In this way he created for himself a somewhat naïve world where it was allright to have a close personal friend in a foreign country at the same time as he severely criticized the government and policies of that country. Unfortunately, not everybody around him shared this simplistic view of personal relations, and it was this very dichotomy in Hedin's character, which eventually created so many problems for him, not only with the Russians but also with the British and with his own countrymen.

Contacts with Russia were resumed in 1924, when Hedin, on his way from Peking to Stockholm, officially was invited by the Soviet government to give lectures in both Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>14</sup> Again, Hedin is given the red carpet treatment and is as always flattered by the attention shown him by such people as Chicherin and Lunacharskii. Hedin promises his hosts that in Stockholm he shall speak in favour of resuming full diplomatic representation between Sweden and the Soviet Union. The fresh contacts between Hedin and the Soviet Union were of great importance for a successful carrying through of the last big expedition organized by Hedin in Xinjiang between 1927 and 1935. As a matter of fact, the rumour of Hedin's forthcoming big expedition had preceded Hedin in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the Hedin archive in Stockholm we find several letters from Soviet citizens – both male and female of the most varying professions – asking Hedin to accept them as members of his new expedition. As a response to the warm reception given him in Russia, Hedin starts sending

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Sven Hedin, *Från Peking till Moskva [From Peking to Moscow]*, Stockholm 1924, 380 pp.

many copies of his printed scientific works to various scholarly institutions in Russia.

Towards the end of the 1930s Hedin's growing involvement with a Germany governed by the Nazi regime again made his star set in the Soviet Union as well as in most other West European countries, including his homeland. When Sven Hedin died in Stockholm in 1952 he was almost forgotten. If he ever was remembered it was because of his disastrous and inopportune association with Germany. It is only during the last 20 years or so that Hedin's geographical and scientific contributions again have become the object of scholarly attention. Many of the positive sides of this remarkable and complex man are now again allowed to come forward: his personal charm, his energy and incredible productivity, his skillfulness in mapping a huge area of the world, his artistry, his respect for other peoples and races and his untiring efforts to increase our knowledge of Central Asia's history and geography. It is therefore high time that we try to clarify the details of Hedin's relations with Russia through the years – a country which he always embraced with great sympathy no matter what government was in charge. Russian archives and Russian scholars reasonably still must have much to offer for further research into this remarkable chapter of Swedish-Russian relations.

## Sven Hedin's Russian Correspondence

*Sergei Lebedev*

### Hedin and Russia

Russia played an important role in Hedin's life: he was concerned with geopolitics, the Russian threat to Sweden<sup>15</sup> and to the West in general. According to Hedin, Germany is a barrier on the way of Russian expansion, while Nazi Germany is a barrier to Bolshevism. After 1917, Russia also made several steps towards Asia.

At the same time Hedin did his best to understand Russia and the Russian spirit. He idealized Asia and also identified "Asian" traits in the Russian character: the Russians are in their mass very kind-hearted and civilized people if one does not enrage them with violence.<sup>16</sup> Ever since the time of Rousseau, the "civilized individual" has been inclined to see his ideal in primitive or underdeveloped peoples.

On 12 February 1893, Sven Hedin became a full member of the Russian Imperial Geographic Society. On 11 March 1915, the Society expelled him for his "unseemly behaviour towards, and criminal activities against, Russia and, in particular, against the Geographic Society".<sup>17</sup>

There exist two collections of Hedin's Russian correspondence at the Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet). One was prepared by Hedin himself,<sup>18</sup> the other has been published by the contemporary historian A.I. Andreev.<sup>19</sup> Hedin's own letters can also be found in Russia at the Archives of the Geographic

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<sup>15</sup> The Hedin files contain some documents referring to his polemic with his Russian correspondents, including his replies in Russian. See also Katsova, M.A. "K voprosu o tak nazyvaemoi "ruskoi voennoi opasnosti" dlia Shvetsii nakanune i v nachale Pervoi mirovoi voiny" in *Saint Petersburg and the countries of Northern Europe*. Saint Petersburg (2007), p. 150-167.

<sup>16</sup> *Kriget mot Ryssland. Minnen från fronten i Öster. Mars-augusti 1915* (The War against Russia. Memories from the Eastern Front, March-August 1915) (Stockholm 1915, pp. 114-115)

<sup>17</sup> Andreev, A.I., "Russkie pis'ma iz arkhiva Svena Khedina v Stokgol'me", *Ariavarta*, 1997, No. 1. p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Sven Hedin, *Kriget mot Ryssland*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.



Society in St. Petersburg and Moscow (the files of Nicholas II).

Hedin's correspondence is also an important source of information about Russian orientalists (for a list of names, see Andreev). For instance, Vladimir Klavdievich Arsen'ev's well-known book *Dersu Uzala* is a collection of natural-scientific data presented in a fictionalized report about an expedition along the route of the future Amur railway. Incidentally, there were a number of similar reports which the Geographic Society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century published as books. In a letter to Hedin Theophilus Kolalis, Arsen'ev's colleague in the exploration of Primorskii Krai and later in exile, informed about some unknown details of Arsen'ev's life.

For his expeditions through Russian territory Sven Hedin needed support from the authorities and always found it in Tsarist Russia as well as in Soviet Russia. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, are known to have given much importance to Scandinavia and Sweden in their connections with the outer world, especially during the first blockade by the Entente against its enemy states, when they appreciated support from Western visitors. Thus, Sven Hedin at the beginning of the 1920s addressed the West with appeals to recognize the USSR.

The Bolshevik leaders also showed an interest in a new expedition to Tibet. In the winter of 1924, a dinner was given in Sven Hedin's honour at the House of Scientists, where Chicherin, the people's commissar for foreign affairs, said: "Doctor Hedin is especially dear to Soviet Russia, since he discovers new territories in Asia where some of the greatest objectives of Russia's historical destiny are situated ... Doctor Sven Hedin is an example of how the greatest achievements of science closely intertwine with the principles of the Soviet power. As he passed through Siberia, Doctor Sven Hedin could witness what a new historical epoch Soviet Russia has ushered in through its policy in the East". Indeed, the Bolsheviks always declared their respect for science and viewed their own philosophic and political doctrine as the most scientific of all.

In his response, Sven Hedin assured his partners: "When I come back home, I will tell people what I saw in Soviet Russia. In Sweden, I will be working for the creation of close links between Swedish and Russian academics. I am especially happy to see that the storm of political events has not stopped the progress of scholarly work in Russia... At present, Russia and China are the two most interesting countries in the world."<sup>20</sup> Sven Hedin also told about his journey to Russia in his book *From Peking to Moscow* (1924).

On 15 December, 1924, Anatolii Lunacharskii, people's commissar for education, wrote a letter to Hedin through the Swedish representation in Moscow, where he expressed his regrets for not having been able to attend Hedin's earlier lecture and asked about the time and place of the following one. On behalf of the Soviet Government Lunacharskii also congratulated Hedin on

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<sup>20</sup> Andreev, op. cit.

the occasion of his 60th birthday in 1925, and Hedin thanked by sending his best regards to the “friendly people of Russia” and the Soviet government.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, Hedin also rendered certain services to the USSR in the East. The files at Riksarkivet contain a note dated 6 November 1926 stating that Sven Hedin had been entrusted a letter by the Soviet envoy Karakhan addressed to the Chinese Marshal Fyn Youi-Sjan.<sup>22</sup>

At this time, also the number of Sven Hedin’s Russian correspondents increased: natural scientists, popularisers of geographic knowledge and multiple admirers from all over the USSR asked to be taken on his expeditions, ranging from enthusiasts to sometimes not quite sane persons. Hedin also continued to exchange literature with Soviet organizations.

However, already in the early 1930s Hedin’s letters to the Soviet Ambassador to Stockholm Aleksandra Kollontai reveal his concern about the rights of Soviet scientists, primarily their human rights. In 1935, Hedin visited the USSR for the last time, but he now received a different kind of reception, probably in connection with his enthusiasm concerning New Germany.

## Princess Khovanskaia

In Sven Hedin’s Russian correspondence at Riksarkivet there is a number of letters from Princess Antonina Khovanskaia (Howansky), the daughter of the governor general of Turkestan Baron Aleksandr Borisovich Vrevskii (1834-1910). Hedin first met her in Tashkent at the end of 1893. Antonina Khovanskaia also maintained close connections with Sven Hedin’s sister Alma.

Khovanskaia’s brother Boris Vrevskii was a religious thinker who was close to the circle of philosophy of *vseedinstvo* (universal unity). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Suvorin publishers in Russia produced two of his philosophical works. In the 1920s, he published two books in Russian in Berlin: *A Key to True Philosophy: The Conscience of Being as the Supreme Principle of Truth, Good, and Beauty* (1923) and *The Philosophy of Revelation as the Foundation of True Philosophy* (1925). Sven Hedin was probably interested in him, as Khovanskaia several times informs him of her brother’s life in exile.

Before the revolution, Khovanskaia was writing for newspapers and magazines in Russia and in France, including a critical note about the *zemstvo* which was creating obstacles to her project of establishing an orphanage. During the Civil War, she left in Bezhetsk the manuscript in Russian of her novel *My life and*

<sup>21</sup> Riksarkivet, 20 February, 1925.

<sup>22</sup> “Monsieur, ci-joint la lettre de Mr. Karachan au Maréchal Fyn-Youi-Sjan laquelle vous avez aimablement promis de lui transmettre”. (Riksarkivet)

*dreams*. In the early 1920s she was looking in vain for a European or American publisher who would be interested in printing the book of her memoirs in English. Sven Hedin recommended her to resume her writing for newspapers.

The correspondence between Khovanskaia and Hedin continued for 30 years. It reminds one of a novel-in-letters, and the subjects they discuss are quite diverse. It probably was a long game between two no longer young people which might have eventually become a burden for both of them. "The more I think about our correspondence, the more certain I am that there is a Babel tower growing up between us. We cannot understand each other any more! It is possible that you are an incarnation of Tamerlan, and this is the reason for your love of Asia." But even as late as the 1920s, Khovanskaia knew from some other correspondents of hers that Sven Hedin was still keeping her portrait on his desk.

Khovanskaia is writing about the impact that Sven Hedin's books produced on the Russian society in exile (a number of his books were published in Russian translations in Berlin in the early 1920s.) She informs him about new publications in fiction and memoir literature that are produced in emigration. She also tells him about a discussion of the recently published reminiscences by Sergei Witte and the newly published correspondence between Nicolas II and the Empress among the Russian aristocracy who had lived since before the war at German resorts and in the French Riviera. These people have not left any remarkable traces in the archives, and therefore even small fragments of information are useful for the historians. Khovanskaia also writes about her meetings with "the occult ladies" in Cannes, and Sven Hedin seems to be interested in these discussions on oriental mysticism. She also writes about the life of Russians in Britain and the US.

Many Russians were at that time moving to Germany as "life in Paris and in France in general is getting quite expensive". It was not only the Reichsmark but also the Russian rouble that had depreciated. (Among other things, Khovanskaia mentions that a letter she had received from Russia had a one thousand rouble stamp on it.) In her letters, one finds interesting facts about the life of the Russian Berlin at the beginning of the 1920s, where there were "all around Russian food and masses of Russian books". At the water resorts in Germany, the public "spoke all languages except for German". She also maintained connections with the local Swedish community.

In one of her letters dated 29 September 1924, one paragraph is marked with a red pencil. Sven Hedin was probably concerned about his reputation among the Russian emigration, or rather about his image in the West as a friend of the Bolsheviks. "Evil tongues never tire of telling me: Hedin is a complete Bolshevik! To which I respond calmly: And so I am, and have always been, even before this word ever existed. I believe in Russia's wonderful future..."

These letters do not only contain a history of personal affection but also reveal

the attitudes of those circles of the Russian emigration that were not negative towards Russia.

## Russian war letters

Hedin's archives further contain letters by people who were not personally known to him. They are parts of correspondence captured or found by him in spring 1915, which in part were published in his book *Kriget mot Ryssland* (The War against Russia). Hedin says the letters were found in the trenches, stained with blood, dirty and crumpled, often hardly legible, the ink almost washed out by rain and dew. Millions of similar letters had already disappeared under the earth, buried together with their dead addressees.

What is Russia and what kind of people are the Russians? On the eve of the world war, Hedin was warning that some time soon the Cossacks might appear in the streets of Stockholm. Reading the letters found in 1915, he is struck by the fact that the letter writers express no hatred towards the Germans. This is what Hedin is trying to explain to the Swedes and the Germans.<sup>23</sup> Hedin writes: "If one compares these letters with the British newspapers, the Russian muzhiks appear more cultured than British gentlemen."

These letters are highly expressive in terms of their graphics, capital letters often used instead of the lower case. An elevated style of church language is mixed with contemporary everyday speech. These are letters that seem to be written with a broken heart. They contain lamentations of death and futile attempts to cast a protective spell over the son, the family mourning a man who is doomed.

Nowadays in Russia there are projects of publishing such private letters from the time of the Great War. The letters written by uneducated people are of special value, since from their substandard graphics one can understand the mood and the psychological context of writing. The question is how to publish them in such a way that the documents do not lose their power.

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<sup>23</sup> In his German book *Nach Osten!* (Towards the East!) these letters found on dead Russians are omitted, since they probably looked too dangerous to the German censor.



## **“Specters Haunting Great Tartary”—in Search of the Primordial Tradition**

*Fabian Linde*

### **Sven Hedin and Strindberg**

**Sven Hedin** (1865-1952) was not a prophet, and could therefore be honoured in his own country. His reputation had reached unheard of heights already upon his return from his first explorations in Central Asia. He was ennobled in 1902 and was the last Swede to receive such an honour. Nevertheless, he did not lack critics, both home-bred geographers and other public figures. Perhaps his most bitter enemy was **August Strindberg** (1849-1912), whose attacks were so scathing that Hedin felt he had to respond publicly. Strindberg called Hedin a “humbug” and a charlatan. He wanted to prove that Hedin was not the first Swede to have discovered the wandering lake Lop Nor. (Furthermore, that the legendary traveller Nikolai Przhevalskii (1839-1888) was not the first European to have done so in 1877-78.) In his view, Hedin had not taken into account, or intentionally tried to conceal that Swedish explorers had visited these regions before him.

During the 1870s, Strindberg had been employed in the manuscript section of the Royal Library in Stockholm. He was at that time responsible for its collection of Asian documents and studied Japanese and Chinese to be able to decipher the texts and inscriptions contained therein. Strindberg nurtured scientific ambitions in sinology and corresponded with world-renowned specialists in the field. It was this acquaintance with cartography and sinology that he now employed in his crusade against Hedin. Strindberg knew from his professional experience of the accounts and maps of Central Asia brought home by Swedish soldiers returning from the Great Northern War, after their exile in Siberia. He had already written a number of articles related to this topic.

Two names should be mentioned here: **Johan Gustaf Renat** (1682-1744), who brought a couple of valuable maps from Siberia that remained forgotten until Strindberg uncovered copies of them in 1878 and handed these over to the Imperial Geographic Society in Saint Petersburg, which published them in 1881. (Later the originals were found in Uppsala, where they are kept to this day.) And **Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg** (1676-1747), who in the 1730s published

ethnographic and geographic descriptions of Siberia and Great Tartary jointly with a map of these areas.

Although Strindberg's resentment towards Hedin may partly be explained by petty envy, one may discern another, deeper motive as well. It is this that I shall explore here. In Hedin, Strindberg perceived what I would like to describe as *a lack of metaphysical sensitivity*. The themes from his earlier interests in sinology and cartography that came to the fore in his critique of Hedin were merged with his studies of the writings of the visionary mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Strindberg's worldview had been fundamentally transformed in the 1890s in connection with his Inferno crisis and Swedenborg had become his "Vergil lightening his path through the hell of earthly existence". Moreover, it had become clear to him from his Swedenborgian readings that not only had Central Asia been visited in the 18th century by Swedish prisoners of war, but Swedenborg had been there as well! As an explorer of the spiritual domains, not only had Swedenborg reached heaven and hell, but Asia too!

## **Emanuel Swedenborg**

**Emanuel Swedenborg** (1688-1772) was a prophet who was not honoured in his home country. As the judgment of his contemporaries went, after a period of serious psychological trouble, Swedenborg in 1744 abandoned the field of hard science and entered the domain of the irrational. But was this really a valid judgment? Not only can one point to a high degree of inner logic in his grand metaphysical system, but Swedenborg certainly nurtured a great respect for reason. And in fact, for better or for worse, Swedenborg did not altogether leave the scientific domain behind. At least not the fields of ethnology and geography. In consequence, trace elements from his personal readings weigh down some of his descriptions of supersensible regions. In this way, his 'sacred geography' becomes a venue, where the discipline of geography encounters the mystical and the sacred. In other words, where science meets the spirit. In this domain he was preceded by such Swedes as **Johannes Bureus** (1568-1652), who searched for the Hyperborean tradition in the runes, and **Olaus Rudbeck** (1630-1702), who searched for Atlantis and found it in Uppsala. But unlike his predecessors Swedenborg turned his gaze towards Asia.

Strindberg got to know about Swedenborg in 1896 through his reading of **Honoré de Balzac** who mentioned him in his *Louis Lambert* (1832) and *Séraphita* (1833). Balzac called Swedenborg "the Buddha of the North" and we shall presently have the opportunity to appreciate how fitting this designation was. Balzac moreover mentions Swedenborg's accounts of an ancient spiritual tradition still in existence in Great Tartary.

According to Swedenborg's historiosophy, there have been different ages past corresponding to various stages in revelation, a development which is consummated in the teachings of New Jerusalem (i.e. Swedenborg's own revelation). Each revelatory impulse, which he calls a Word, is connected with different congregations, called Churches, who safeguarded its legacy. According to his theory of correspondences, the Word is where the sensual and phenomenal world meets the inner domains, where time meets eternity. A primordial Asian Word had been abrogated by an ensuing "Ancient Word" (lat. *verbum vetustum*).

At first, the Asian connection had not caught Strindberg's attention, but a few years later he asked an acquaintance, who was also an expert on Swedenborg, to point out to him the passages, where Swedenborg mentions Great Tartary. In his *Apocalypse revealed*, written in 1766, Swedenborg relates how he conversed with angels who came all the way from Great Tartary to visit him. They revealed that the Ancient Word is still kept hidden there:

*"Concerning this ancient Word, which was extant in Asia before the Israelitish Word, it is worth while to mention, that it is still preserved among the people who inhabit Great Tartary..."*

In the custody of the Tartars were also kept some of the believed-to-be-lost source texts of the Old Testament. Swedenborg reiterated his assertion two years later in a work entitled *Conjugial Love*, where he also recounts how he was brought to visit Tartary himself.

But where is this ancient wisdom to be found? In other words, what exactly is intended by Great Tartary? Swedenborg's accounts of the geographic, ethnographic and religious conditions in Tartary are, alas, very ambiguous. It is likely that he blended accounts from different sources, both contemporary and older. (Anders Hallengren and Inge Jonsson have demonstrated that Swedenborg's description owes a great deal to Marco Polo.) First-hand reports of Asia reached Swedenborg through personal contacts. His most important source of information was very likely his cousin **Peter Schönström** (1682-1746), who during his time in Siberia had made ethnographic and religious studies of the Tartars. Interest in the Orient and the Far East was also a sign of the times. The Swedish East India company had been established in 1731.

Despite Swedenborg's quite concrete geographic designation, the ambiguity of his accounts of the region and the elusiveness of the name itself, does not make it very easy to locate. Nonetheless, Strindberg was determined to solve the riddle of the mysterious Great Tartary. As he was well aware, *Magna Tartaria* or Great Tartary was a common name for Central and Northern Asia from the Middle Ages onward. It covered an area from the Caspian Sea to the Urals, to the Pacific Ocean. Included were such regions as Siberia, Turkestan, Greater Mongolia, Manchuria and at times also Tibet. The peoples that lived there were ethnic Turkic and Mongol tribes, and were called Tartars. With the expansion of



the Russian Empire eastward, the term Great Tartary gradually fell into disuse. It is quite clear from Swedenborg's descriptions, that his Tartary did not correspond to neither China, nor Siberia. In his *Spiritual Diary* he related that the Tartar angels

*“spoke of the country where they lived, that it was populous, and that they knew nothing about war. They knew of China and of Siberia.”* And furthermore that: *“they call the Chinese their friends, because they are of their race: they do not think of wars, in their country. They have some fear of Siberia, but say that they have nothing, and that, if they came, they would at once surrender to them ...”*

In an entry entitled “Source texts of the Bible”, included in his second *Blue Book*, Strindberg commented on Swedenborg's reports. When Swedenborg related that

*“...they said that they are so populous, that they do not believe any country in the world to be more so; which is very credible from the wall so many miles long, which the Chinese formerly built as a defence against any invasion from them,”*

Strindberg noted: Since the Chinese built the Great Wall as a protection against the Mongols, then this statement undoubtedly points towards Mongolia!

Further on, Swedenborg added that *“...they cultivate peace with the Chinese, because the Emperor of China is from their country...”* Strindberg could now recall from his sinological studies that the Manchu Qing dynasty ruled China from the 1640s onward, and also during Swedenborg's time. Since the Chinese emperor originated from Manchurians, then the natural conclusion must be: Manchuria!

But Swedenborg also hinted in another direction: *“Moreover they related that they do not suffer foreigners to come among them...”* To this Strindberg noted, that since the people do not admit of Christian visitors, and Swedenborg in another passage had spoken of a high plain, this perhaps points towards Tibet! Tibet had after all always been well-known for its secrecy. Strindberg could moreover point to contemporary Theosophists' accounts of Lhasa, as a locus, where concealed mysteries are to be found. (Let us also recall that, unlike Przhevalsky, Hedin never actually succeeded in reaching Lhasa.)

Now, having taken Strindberg as guide, the question naturally arises: Have we at last been able to locate Swedenborg's Magna Tartaria? I believe that we undoubtedly still are a little confused. Things do not become much clearer, when Swedenborg adds a concluding remark: *“Seek for it (the Ancient Word) in China, and perhaps you may find it there among the Tartars.”*

But there is yet another way to come to grips with what Swedenborg meant, says

Strindberg. Swedenborg mentions in another context that there are unknown regions on earth where mighty spiritual beings live, who serve the Lord and control the destinies of men. This, says Strindberg, reminds us of Plato's *Phaedo* where the same is mentioned, and also of the Theosophists' Masters and Mahatmas who live in the Himalayas.

We have thus left physical geography altogether and have entered the mythic geography of a sacred realm, which in Eastern traditions is called *Shamballah*. But it is necessary that we try to orient ourselves also in this Asian metaphysical landscape, for it is possible that even the great Swedenborg wandered astray there. The difficulty is connected with the mystery of the *two* Shamballahs, which Strindberg may have solved if he had studied the foundation texts of Theosophy more thoroughly.

## Helena Blavatsky

**Helena Blavatsky** (née Yelena Petrovna Hahn; 1831-1891), one of the pioneers of modern esotericism, founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. Strindberg had during an earlier period been greatly interested in theosophy, an interest which is reflected in a number of his works (not least his later experimental dramas, such as *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play*.) He also upheld contacts with Swedish theosophists. But his personal animosity towards Blavatsky and his inability to accept a woman as a spiritual authority had eventually led to his rejection of these teachings. Nevertheless, at the time of his conflict with Hedin, his interest had been reawakened, and he accepted many of theosophy's tenets (except its rejection of a personal God).

Blavatsky parallels Swedenborg in a number of respects. Also she turned her gaze eastward! But whereas Swedenborg's historiosophy pictured a gradual continuation and increase in revelation, for Blavatsky all spirituality originated in an original impulse that had eventually been covered by the débris of ignorance and superstition. As she pictured it, the future of humanity is equal to a return to this ancient past. India was the cradle of the wisdom teachings and therefore all roads lead to India. So the first answer from Blavatsky, where the ancient wisdom is to be found, could be expected to be quite straightforward: Go to India! In her voluminous work, *Isis Unveiled*, from 1877, she writes:

*“The mass of cumulative evidence has been reinforced to an extent which leaves little, if any, room for further controversy. A conclusive opinion is furnished by too many scholars to doubt the fact that India was the Alma Mater, not only of the civilization, arts, and sciences, but also of all the great religions of antiquity; Judaism, and hence Christianity, included.”*

However, with India Blavatsky did not intend the modern Indian nation. According to her, in ancient times the designation ‘India’ comprised a vast territory that included Great Tartary:

*“...when we say, indiscriminately, "India" we do not mean the India of our modern days, but that of the archaic period. In those ancient times, countries which are now known to us by other names were all called India. There was an Upper, a Lower, and a Western India, the latter of which is now Persia-Iran. The countries now named Thibet, Mongolia, and Great Tartary were also considered by the ancient writers as India.”*

Great Tartary was in this sense for Blavatsky not a mythic, sacred land.

Unfortunately for us, in our efforts to locate Swedenborg’s Ancient Word, we have thus come back to square one, and seemingly lost all likelihood of locating it. But Blavatsky also points in another direction, towards another, a second, Shamballah.

In Kalachakra Buddhism Shambhala is a mystical kingdom hidden somewhere beyond the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. In 1775, the third Panchen Lama even wrote a guidebook for pilgrims called *The Way to Shambhala*. On the one hand we thus have what could be called the Himalayan Shambhala. But Blavatsky’s Shamballah is located in the Gobi desert! She writes:

*“Around no other locality ... hang so many traditions as around the Gobi Desert. In Independent Tartary this howling waste of shifting sand was once, if report speaks correctly, the seat of one of the richest empires the world ever saw. Beneath the surface are said to lie such wealth in gold, jewels, statuary, arms, utensils, and all that indicates civilization, luxury, and fine arts, as no existing capital of Christendom can show today. The Gobi sand moves regularly from east to west before terrific gales that blow continually. Occasionally some of the hidden treasures are uncovered, but not a native dare touch them, for the whole district is under the ban of a mighty spell. ... The district of the Gobi wilderness and, in fact, the whole area of Independent Tartary and Thibet is jealously guarded against foreign intrusion. ...*

*The time will come, sooner or later, when the dreadful sand of the desert will yield up its long-buried secrets...”*

Strindberg had already sensed this turn towards the desert of Gobi, since he finished off his analysis of Swedenborg’s accounts of Tartary by mentioning all the sacred manuscripts that have been found in Mongolia by Western explorers, such as Strahlenberg, Schönström and Hedin. Blavatsky continues:

*“Tradition says, and the records of the Great Book explain, that long before the days of Ad-am, and his inquisitive wife, He-va, where now are found but*

*salt lakes and desolate barren deserts, there was a vast inland sea, which extended over Middle Asia, north of the proud Himalayan range, and its western prolongation. An island, which for its unparalleled beauty had no rival in the world, was inhabited by the last remnant of a race which preceded ours. ... These were the "Sons of God" [...]. It was they who imparted Nature's most weird secrets to men, and revealed to them the ineffable, and now lost "word." "No wonder that the Northern seer, Swedenborg, advises people to search for the LOST WORD among the hierophants of Tartary, China, and Thibet; for it is there, and only there now..."*

*And: "The "Island," [the "fabled" Shamballah] according to belief, exists to the present hour; now, as an oasis surrounded by the dreadful wildernesses of the great Desert, the Gobi -- whose sands "no foot hath crossed in the memory of man.""*

*Blavatsky concludes : "No wonder that the Northern seer, Swedenborg, advises people to search for the LOST WORD among the hierophants of Tartary, China, and Thibet; for it is there, and only there now..."*

After our quite tangled search for the primordial tradition in Asia, I would like to conclude this presentation with a small piece of advice for all explorers, physical as well as metaphysical. In Gobi's "howling waste of shifting sand" perhaps these travellers would have unearthed this wisdom jewel from the ancient Taoist scripture *Tao Te Ching* (chapter 47):

*"Without stirring abroad  
One can know the whole world;  
Without looking out the window  
One can see the way of heaven.  
The further one goes  
The less one knows."*

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## **Sven Hedin and the Invention of Climate Change**

*Philippe Forêt*

*There is surely as much pleasure in the discovery of an idea as in the discovery of a lake [...]. Exploration, in the common sense of mapping new areas, is today relatively unimportant. (Ellsworth Huntington, 1910)*

### **Climate change**

In a bestseller that in 2003 entered the mainstream literature on global warming, Spencer Weart, a professor of physics history at Harvard delivered a definitive account of the history of climate studies. Reviews of his popular book, *The Discovery of Global Warming*, have however been mixed. Reviewers, especially if they were Europeans and meteorologists, noted that Professor Spencer Weart often forgot to credit non-American scientists. As far as I am concerned, his book overlooked the significance of several areas: the contributions of field cartographers, of maps as tools for interdisciplinary communication, of the collecting of evidence of climate change in geological ages or historical times, and of topographical survey campaigns that, to allow for meaningful comparisons, were led at a sub-continental scale: the US Southwest, the Sahara, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Geographers had indeed begun probing new theories on climate change at the turn of the 20th century. In this paper, I will explain how the concept of global warming was discussed and the proofs of global warming examined well before the early 1960s. This would be the date given by Weart for the discovery of global warming, when an American astrophysicist at the University of Colorado at Boulder complained that the sky in the Rocky Mountains was no longer as bright as it used to be. Early 20th-century cartography has played a more crucial role in the discovery of global warming than atmospheric chemistry has. I can present here only one example of that role significance: the survey of the western half of China (the two Mongolias, Inner and Outer, the provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, Eastern Turkestan or Xinjiang, and Tibet) that predated and followed debates held in London on the desiccation of the Earth.

## Halford MacKinder

We first need to step back one century. Let us enter the lecture hall which the famous but then impecunious Royal Geographical Society (RGS) of London rented to listen to its distinguished guest speakers. The audience, always courteous and often critical, included very few academics but had many professionals, civil servants and army officers who in the course of their careers in the British Empire had mastered the techniques of field geography. In February 1904, these experts were not impressed by Professor Halford J. Mackinder's claims that he had identified the “geographical pivot of world history”. Mackinder located the Empire of Evil in a “heartland”, and explained where and why its forces have attacked our civilization. Illustrated by maps of low quality and published soon after by the *Geographical Journal*, Mackinder's lecture became nonetheless the most influential of the 20th century. The German school of Geopolitik between the two world wars as well as the American strategists of the Cold War referred directly to the geographical-pivot lecture. Despite their flaws, I would attribute three merits to the lecture and its maps:

- Mackinder put an end to theories on exceptionalism in European environmental history
- He identified Central Eurasia as the critical region for the study of global climate
- He called for a better study of the relationship that human communities have had with climate.

Mackinder's lecture intervened just when fieldwork combined with theorizing framed a new understanding of global warming. That same year, in 1904, Piotr Kropotkin presented his theory on climate change at the Royal Geographical Society of London. Kropotkin believed he had found in receding lakes and a growingly arid landscape evidence to support “the desiccation of Eur-Asia”. This led to a vigorous debate that the First World War interrupted before a conclusion was reached. The difficulties met by Kropotkin and his critics were two:

- Finding more evidence of climate change to accurately determine its pace, extension, causes, evolution, and consequences,
- Forging an adequate terminology, free from emotional connotations, to interpret the conceptually new information on natural history that cartographers added to their maps.

## Ellsworth Huntington

Independently from what was discussed in London, Ellsworth Huntington, a young geographer at Yale presented the results of his years of fieldwork in Turkey, Persia and Turkestan in lengthy articles and two books, *The Pulse of Asia. A Journey in Central Asia Illustrating the Geographic basis of History and Civilization and Climate*. Huntington had been a member of the Barrett (1905–1906) and Pumpelly (1903) expeditions dispatched by the Carnegie Institution. What he had seen in the oasis of the defunct Silk Road convinced him that Kropotkin was right in believing that two or three thousand years ago the climate of Central Asia was moister than now. Huntington observed that the great nations of antiquity rose or fell in harmony with changing climate conditions:

With every throb of the climatic pulse which we have felt in Central Asia, the centre of civilization has moved this way or that. Each throb has sent pain and decay to the lands whose day was done, life and vigour to those whose day was yet to be.

With his “pulsatory hypothesis”, Huntington sought to elaborate on Kropotkin's prediction that the gradual desiccation of Asia would drive into Europe hordes of barbarians. Huntington moreover, and rather boldly, claimed that his *Civilization and Climate* (1915) was the product of the new science of geography. The old geography, because it “strove primarily to produce exact maps of the physical features of the earth's surface”, was unable to go further in mapping environmental change and the “human character”.

What had the entire community of geographers missed that Huntington, all by himself, had discovered? For established geographers, Huntington's essays were somehow embarrassing. His audacious synthesis on the consequences of climate change alarmed the officers of the RGS who discreetly sought the advice of a fellow geographer who could be trusted because he had explored and mapped Chinese Central Asia. Contacted in Stockholm, the flamboyant Sven Hedin, however, expressed uncharacteristic caution. On October 15, 1910, he replied to John Scott Keltie, the secretary of the RGS, who had asked him to comment on the article by Huntington that the *Geographical Journal* had published in April. Hedin advised his British friends to dismiss the whole idea of climate change discussed in *Problems in Exploration: Central Asia*.

*“The changes after the whole ice disappeared have been extremely slow. Seven thousand years ago the climate of Sweden was almost exactly the same as now [...]. Don't sacrifice too much of the G.J. for more speculation, which is very cheap sort of science”.*



This admonition is mystifying because we know that Hedin during his journey through Persia and Tibet from 1905 to 1908 devoted much time and his usual energy to the study of environmental history. Since he wanted to better understand desiccation, or at least map the contributions of deserts to climate change, why did Hedin reject the discussion that would logically follow on the historical interactions of climate and human society?

For motives we can only speculate about, Hedin decided not to comment on the pulsation hypothesis, although no one knew better than he did the physical geography of Central Asia. I had the privilege to catalogue Hedin's map collection and read his annotations in the numerous journals he subscribed to. His public figure, a daring explorer, was very different from his academic identity, a meticulous reader and the compiler of multi-volume encyclopedias. In his prolific travelogues and memoirs, Hedin never mentioned an exchange with London of letters about climatic pulse in Asia or global warming. The two geographers nevertheless appreciated each other since, in 1935, Huntington accepted to write a long piece for Hedin's *Festschrift*, where he forcefully reiterated his views. If we examine the records he left on the cartographic work done in Mongolia and Turkestan by himself, but also by Aurel Stein, Petr Kozlov, Roy Chapman Andrews, etc., we get the feeling that the question raised in 1907 by Ellsworth Huntington and remained unanswered before 1914 was still in Sven Hedin's mind when he arrived in Beijing in 1927. The return of water in 1921 to the previous bed of Lop Nor, which Hedin wanted to see with his own eyes, would have proven that climate barely evolved. As he was paddling down the Tarim, Hedin rejected Huntington's thesis, no doubt also because it encouraged speculations on the turbulent historical geography of Eurasia.

I would think that mapping climate change to confirm Huntington's theory was for Hedin an important mission, because much of the cartographic work in 1927–1935 occurred in areas, lake Lop Nor especially, where he and Aurel Stein had been active three decades before. We are all aware that Hedin's last expedition was remarkable in many ways. I will just quote a feature I find striking: premeditation in its organization. In 1922, well before he knew how to fund his campaign, Hedin declared to journalists of the *New York Times* that he would return to Central Asia as the head of a multidisciplinary team of scientists. He no longer wanted to work alone, and admitted with candour that his education in geography, geology and climatology was too shallow. Sven Hedin invited a noted meteorologist, Waldemar Haude, to measure and analyze temperature and rainfall patterns in the Gobi Desert. Geologists (Parker Chen, Nils Hörner, Erick Norin,) two archeologists (Huang Wenbi and Folke Bergman), and researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences joined the Scientific Expedition to the Northwestern Provinces of China that he led.

Volume 48 of the *Sino-Swedish Expedition Publications* should interest us

directly. In it, Erik Norin gave a chronological account of the various expeditions sent to Central Asia in order to comprehensively map the terrain and document the environmental history of the region. Published in 1967, Norin's *Records on Surveys* looks complete and fair to all participants. His account fails, however, to explain what exactly was at stake. Why was the careful mapping of shifting sand dunes and the previous banks of the terminal lakes of the Gobi desert so important to Norin and his co-workers? Missing is the central concept that makes sense of the scientific reports, petrologic and archaeological data, atlas sheets and landscape pictures produced by one of the largest scientific expeditions of the interwar period.

I have said earlier that the study of the development of climate studies should include the history of the surveys of Chinese Central Asia. This has simply never been the case, even if archival materials exist. Sven Hedin's vast library is intact at the Ethnographical Museum of Stockholm. At the Royal Library of Sweden, a helpful librarian cut open for me the pages of the first volume of the *Reports from the Scientific Expedition to the North-western provinces of China under the leadership of Dr. Sven Hedin*. The volume entered the library in 1943 and in six decades had never been read. Three decades of cartographic fieldwork have fallen into oblivion, although the debate on climate led to publications in major journals of the discipline, the *Geographical Journal* and the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*. Forgetting that geographers discovered and ignored global warming may have an explanation. Could it be the disappointment felt when grasping that Huntington's assumptions on civilization, Andrews' on the cradle of the white man, Mackinder's on the geographical pivot of world history, and the entire idea of environmental determinism were not validated by climate or archaeological data? The cartographic enterprise in Central Asia would simply have found itself divorced from its own historical context and at odds with ideologies that promoted empire-building to better serve the needs of a superior race.

I hope this instance of neglect and silence in the history of science will generate a discussion on the rich interaction we have seen between mapping activities and scientific objectives, data gathering and model-making, media hype and political agendas, collective amnesia and a sense of doom that together have so far constituted our response to global warming.



## Understanding Classical Eurasianism

*Igor Torbakov*

### Introduction

Over the last decade, the body of scholarly literature on “classical” Eurasianism has been constantly growing.<sup>24</sup> The most general reason for this interest is quite obvious. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the new geopolitical landscape in what has come to be designated – quite tellingly – as Eurasia, both scholars and the general public alike have experienced crises of identity – not unlike those which tormented the Eurasianists themselves in the wake of the unraveling of the Russian empire – and are still grappling with how best to analyze the new reality. The recent essay by Columbia University historian Mark von Hagen is both a manifestation of those crises and a helpful attempt to show the way out of them.<sup>25</sup> Remarkably, not only did von Hagen invoke the iconoclastic spirit of classical Eurasianists but he also advanced Eurasia as the anti-paradigm for the post-Soviet era.<sup>26</sup>

The study of Eurasianism, however, has produced mixed results so far. As one contemporary student of this fascinating school of thought observes, “As a body of doctrine, Eurasianism has been much more frequently summarized than critically examined.”<sup>27</sup> The Eurasianism-related archival materials, in particular

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<sup>24</sup> The literature on Eurasianism is voluminous. For the works written before 2000, see *O Evrazii i evraziitsakh (Bibliograficheskii ukazatel')* (Petrozavodsk, 2000). Among recent publications, the following are particularly useful: Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed. *Russia between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Marlene Laruelle, *Ideologiia russkogo evraziistva ili myslii o velichii imperii* (Moscow: Natalis, 2004). (Laruelle’s work first appeared in French in 1999 as *L’ideologie eurasiiste russe ou comment penser l’empire*); Aleksandr Antoshchenko, *Evraziia ili ‘Sviataia Rus’? Rossiiskie emigranty v poiskakh samosoznaniia na putiakh istorii* (Petrozavodsk, 2003); Marc Bassin, “Classical Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Mark von Hagen, “Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Space,” *American Historical Review* 109 (April 2004), pp. 445-468.

<sup>26</sup> For a critique of “Eurasia anti-paradigm” see Glennys Young, “Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism,” *Russian Review* 66 (January 2007), pp. 95-122.

<sup>27</sup> G. S. Smith, *D.S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life 1890-1939* (Oxford, 2000), p. 138.

the voluminous correspondence between the participants of the movement, still need to be studied. Moreover, the interest in Eurasianism has been traditionally skewed toward its geopolitical (“Exodus to the East”), socio-political (authoritarian leaning toward “ideocracy”) and, to a lesser extent, historiosophic dimensions. Recently, a number of useful studies of Eurasianist theory of culture have appeared.<sup>28</sup> But the Eurasianists’ attempts at rethinking empire and nation and at crafting a new historical narrative, in which Russia’s multi-ethnic character would find a more thorough treatment were not sufficiently explored.<sup>29</sup>

In the letter to his friend-linguist Roman Jakobson from March 7, 1921, Prince Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoi, the indisputable intellectual leader of the emerging Eurasianist movement, famously asserted that most of the basic ideas which he expressed in his fascinating *Europe and Mankind* (Sofia, 1920) – and which underlie much of what he wrote on historical-cultural issues in the 1920s–1930s – were formulated at least a decade before, around 1909–1910.<sup>30</sup> But there is little doubt that it was several crucial factors born of the global turmoil of 1914–1918 that gave rise to the classical Eurasianism as we know it. These were the disintegration of the Russian empire, the unprecedented upsurge of the “borderland nationalisms,” the victory of the Bolsheviks in the atrocious civil war and the beginning of the implementation of the Soviet nationality policy, the West’s reaction to the “Russian catastrophe” and the Entente Powers’ plans on restructuring the defeated continental empires. And, last but not least, it was the

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<sup>28</sup> Sergei Glebov, “Granitsy imperii kak granitsy moderna: Antikolonial’naia ritorika i teoriia kul’turnykh tipov v evraziistve,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003); David Chioni Moore, “Colonialism, Eurasianism, Orientalism: N.S. Trubetzkoy’s Russian Vision,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 41, No.2 (1997), pp. 321-340.

<sup>29</sup> A useful discussion of Eurasianist views on the national question is to be found in the exchange between V. Shnirel’man and V. Karlov: V.A. Shnirel’man, “Evraziiskaia ideia i teoriia kul’turny,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 4 (1996), pp. 3-16; V.V. Karlov, “Evraziiskaia ideia i russkii natsionalizm: Po povodu stat’i V.A. Shnirel’mana ‘Evraziiskaia ideia i teoriia kul’turny,’” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1-13; V.A. Shnirel’man, “Evraziistvo i natsional’nyi vopros. Vmesto otveta V.V. Karlovu,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 2 (1997), pp. 112-125; V.V. Karlov, “O evraziistve, natsionalizme i priemakh nauchnoi polemiki,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 2 (1997), pp. 125-132. See also Viktor Shnirel’man, “The Fate of Empires and Eurasian Federalism: A Discussion between the Eurasianists and their Opponents in the 1920s,” *Inner Asia*, No. 3 (2001), pp. 153-173. Shnirel’man’s main conclusion, however, is that Eurasianism did not have too much original to offer and was basically an intellectual continuation of Russian imperial nationalism and “Great Power chauvinism.” On Eurasianism as an ideological response to the concepts of pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism, see Stephan Wiederkehr, “Eurasianism as a Reaction to Pan-Turkism” in Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed. *Russia between East and West*, pp. 39-60. The study by M.G. Vandalkovskaia, *Istoricheskaia nauka rossiiskoi emigratsii: ‘Evraziiskii soblazn’* (Moscow, 1997), focuses mainly on the Russian émigré thinkers’ critique of the Eurasianists’ historical concept.

<sup>30</sup> *N.S. Trubetzkoy’s Letters and Notes. Prepared for publication by Roman Jakobson.* (The Hague, 1975), p. 12.

very fact that all the major Eurasianist theorists were émigrés – people deprived by the harsh circumstances of their homeland and living in the alien, and often not too friendly, environment. According to one witty commentary, the Eurasianists had lost Mother Russia and also failed to find a Mother Europe. “When Europe proved an alien world, there followed a fundamental re-examination of the self – what was Russian in a Russian.”<sup>31</sup> The urge to sort out the profound identity crisis was, thus, one of the most potent driving forces of Eurasianism. As one perceptive observer, Russian philosopher V.V. Zenkovsky (himself an émigré who left Russia at the end of 1919), had noted quite a while ago, “Not ideology, but psychology, is essential and influential in Eurasianism.”<sup>32</sup>

## Four contexts

To fully comprehend the inner logic of the Eurasianists’ reconceptualization of empire and nation, we, then, have to place and analyze their writings within the four intersecting contexts: 1) Russia’s pre-revolutionary imperial policies, 2) Soviet practices, 3) heated debates within the Russian émigré community in Europe, and 4) the discussion of nationalism in what the Eurasianists called, not without a degree of contempt, the “Romano-Germanic world”.

The intellectual task that the Eurasianist theorists set for themselves can be roughly formulated as follows: how to remap (re-imagine) “Russian imperial space” to escape the seemingly unavoidable contradiction brought about by modernity – the one between empire and nationalism. Since the Eurasianists’ ultimate goal was of course to prevent the political fragmentation of this “Russian imperial space” at all costs, some students of the movement perceptively note that the Eurasianist strategy was to seek the preservation of the empire through its negation.<sup>33</sup>

Three main considerations appeared to influence their thinking. First, the Eurasianists sought to repudiate certain legacies of Tsarist Russia’s nationality policy. However contradictory and incoherent the nationality policy of the late Imperial Russia might have been,<sup>34</sup> recent research demonstrates that there was

<sup>31</sup> Ladis K.D. Kristof, “The Russian Image of Russia: An Applied Study in Geopolitical Methodology,” in Charles A. Fisher, ed., *Essays in Political Geography* (London, 1968), p. 374.

<sup>32</sup> V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Thinkers and Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1953), p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> See Sergei Glebov, “Mezhdu imperiami: Iz perepiski uchastnikov evraziiskogo dvizheniia,” *Ab Imperio*, No. 2 (2003).

<sup>34</sup> A comprehensive analysis of the Russian empire’s failure to create a multinational Russian nation by elaborating “an identity distinct from a religious (Orthodox), imperial, state or narrowly ethnic identity” see Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial

a slow but steady trend to revamp the traditionalist dynastic empire and refashion it according to the modernist Western template, whereby the state would pursue national policies in certain regions of the realm and colonial/imperial policies in the other regions.<sup>35</sup> In the last decades of the imperial rule there were debates on the need to single out something resembling a “national core” within the Russian empire and clearly define the territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia as colonial possessions. “The direction in which the late imperial Russian state’s practices were moving was very similar to ‘overseas’ colonial empires such as Britain and France,” argues Peter Blitstein. “Russia was looking more and more like a colonial ‘empire of a nation’”.<sup>36</sup> To be sure, for the Eurasianists, such an “aping” of the “pernicious West” was anathema – not only because nationalism was a Western concept, but because they sensed that any attempt at defining a Russian-based “national core” – no matter which criteria for determining the “Russianness” will be employed – would undermine their cherished image of the cultural, political and economic integrity of the imperial space.

Second, the Eurasianists were definitely wary of liberal Wilsonianism that sought to bring the notions of sovereignty based on national self-determination to the East- and South European borderlands of the collapsed continental empires.<sup>37</sup> The meddling of the victorious Entente Powers into the “Russian” affairs in 1918-1920, including the decision to recognize several “secessionist territories” of the former Russian empire as sovereign states were still very vividly remembered by the Eurasianist thinkers.<sup>38</sup> The latter understood full well the challenges presented by Wilsonian ideas and policies. On the one hand, they now had to rethink the “Russian space” in such a way that it could not be classified as yet another unwieldy continental empire ready to be partitioned into national states. On the other hand, as they were aware that “nation” was increasingly becoming the “name of the game” in the contemporary world, the Eurasianists sensed the need to re-fashion the multiethnic imperial space so that it could be represented as some peculiar “super-nation,” a “multiethnic nation,”

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Russia, ‘National’ Identity, and Theories of Empire,” in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). pp. 23-66.

<sup>35</sup> See Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm* (Moscow: NLO, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Peter A. Blitstein, “Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917-1953,” *Ab Imperio*, No. 1 (2006).

<sup>37</sup> For Trubetskoi, “‘National self-determination’ as it is understood by the former [U.S.] President [Woodrow] Wilson and various separatists – the Georgians, Estonians, Latvians, etc. – is a typical example of false nationalism.” See *N.S. Trubetzkoy’s Letters and Notes*, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> See Charlotte Alston, “‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’: Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919,” *History*, No. 1 (2006).

or, to use their metaphoric manner of expression, a “symphonic personality.”

Finally, the Eurasianists could not fail to reflect on a rival project of rethinking empire and nation – namely, the Bolshevik one. The latter of course was not just pure theorizing; instead, it represented the set of concrete policies that was being implemented right before the Eurasianists’ eyes. Ironically, the Soviet government, which by the end of 1920 restored its control over most territories of the former Russian empire, was itself keen to preempt the calls for decolonization and thus sought to appease “borderland nationalisms”.<sup>39</sup> But for the Eurasianists, the Soviet practices of “territorializing ethnicity,” whereby in a number of cases “nations” would be artificially created, be assigned a clearly delineated “homeland” and given a certain status within the complex hierarchy of the “Soviet peoples”, were much worse than the most brazen imperial policy. Instead of disarming the nationalists, the Eurasianists argued, the Bolsheviks were encouraging them and in doing so they were undermining the indivisibility of the former imperial space.<sup>40</sup>

## Two Eurasianist concepts

In their treatment of the “empire vs. nation” problem, the Eurasianists were striving to build a theoretical model that would somehow manage to reconcile their desire to preserve the integrity of the former imperial space with the full recognition of the multiethnic character of the populations that reside in these lands. This left the Eurasianist thinkers with precious little options. The imperial model seemed to be discredited both because it was rejected by the peoples of the former Russian empire and, more importantly, because it was associated with European colonial practices. Classical national state appeared to be too narrow a framework for such a vast territory with ethnically diverse populations. The only way out, the Eurasianists argued, would be to refashion the former Russian

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<sup>39</sup> See a detailed analysis of how the victorious Bolsheviks addressed the imperial legacy in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Nikolai Alekseev, the Paris-based Eurasianist and legal thinker, noted that ethno-territorial federation coupled with the principle of self-determination, having gained wide currency, aroused “nationalist ghosts” inimical to the Soviet state and the proclaimed principle of internationalism. The Bolsheviks, wrote Alekseev, created “numerous national republics for peoples who never bothered to even think of any autonomy in the past.” “It would seem,” he continued, “that communist policy goes out of its way to make possible what now seems unthinkable – namely, the ruin of both Russia and internationalism by individual peoples currently contained within Russia.” See N.N. Alekseev, *Russkii narod i gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Agraf, 1998) p. 368.



empire as a *sui generis* supranational entity. Thus Russia would become “Eurasia”.

Two Eurasianist concepts are particularly relevant here. The first one, advanced by the geographer Petr Savitsky, was the vision of Eurasia – whose borders, incidentally, roughly coincide with those of the pre-1917 Russian empire – as a highly cohesive landmass. The integrity of this vast geo-massif, Savitsky argued, is an objective fact of physical geography as it is based on the region’s specific natural ‘structure’: the correlation between the horizontally shaped ecological zones and vertically shaped river systems.<sup>41</sup> “Eurasia is indivisible”, Savitsky asserted. Being a “special geographical world”, it serves as a natural *mestorazvitie* [developmental space] for the numerous peoples residing in Eurasia.<sup>42</sup> The Eurasianists held that there exists an organic connection between geographical territory, the peoples (ethnic groups) that reside in this territory, and the character of cultural development. Environment and culture constantly interact, experiencing mutual influences and tensions. So *mestorazvitie*, a key Eurasianist category, was coined specifically to embody this complex process of interaction between various types of natural and socio-historical milieu. “For us”, asserted Savitsky, the “socio-historical milieu and its territory should merge into a single unified whole – into a geographical individual or a landscape”.<sup>43</sup> The Eurasianists argued that this “geographical individual,” as it was supposedly born of the intimate interaction between culture/history and territory, was in fact a live organism – a “symphonic personality”.

Clearly, by inventing the concept of *mestorazvitie*, Savitsky meant to put a respectable scientific façade on what sounded rather like a mystical connection between Eurasia as a geographical entity and the culture of its diverse peoples.

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<sup>41</sup> For an excellent discussion of Savitsky’s “structuralist” geography, see Glebov, “A Life with Imperial Dreams.” It was none other than Roman Jakobson who, not long before his death, called Petr Savitsky “a highly gifted intellectual precursor of structuralist geography.” See R. Jakobson, K. Pomorska, *Besedy* (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> Petr N. Savitsky, *Rossiia – osobyi geograficheskii mir* (Prague, 1927).

<sup>43</sup> It’s noteworthy that Savitsky advanced the idea of Eurasia’s cultural uniqueness very early on – even before the first formal Eurasianist collection of articles was published in 1922. Already in 1921, in his review of Trubetskoi’s *Europe and Mankind*, Savitsky contended that the type of relations that existed between the Russian nation and other nations of Eurasia differed radically from that which “existed in the parts of the world involved into the sphere of European colonial policies.” For him, Eurasia “is a region where there is certain equality and certain brotherhood between nations – phenomena which do not have any analogies in the international relations [within] the colonial empires.” Furthermore, according to Savitsky, over the millennia of close and usually friendly interaction, the Eurasian peoples shaped up what can be called a common culture: “One can posit the existence of the Eurasian culture, which, to a certain extent, is a common product and common asset of the peoples of Eurasia.” See: P.N. Savitsky, “Evropa i Evraziia. (Po povodu broshury kn. N.S. Trubetskogo ‘Evropa i Chelovechestvo,’” *Russkaia mysl*, No. 2 (1921)p. 135.

Incidentally, in his letter to Jakobson from July 28, 1921, Trubetskoi conceded that in the Eurasianists' views there was a "strong dose of mysticism – a trait characteristic of all of us".<sup>44</sup> As one student of Eurasianism wittingly notes, the term *mestorazvitie* was likely introduced to compensate for the repressed word "empire."<sup>45</sup>

The other crucial concept – the idea of Eurasian nationalism – was advanced by Nikolai Trubetskoi. Trubetskoi, a brilliant linguist and ethnographer, took the Eurasianist reconceptualization of nation one step further and suggested – in an almost Gellnerian manner – that a "peculiar" Eurasian nation might, in fact, be created. He developed his arguments most fully in the short essay titled "Pan-Eurasian Nationalism." The revolution and the collapse of the Russian empire, asserted Trubetskoi, radically changed the position of the Russians within the former imperial space. The borderland peoples have attained the new broad rights which they would never give up voluntarily, while the Russians appeared to have forever lost their role of the 'master race' within the realm. At the same time, the political upheaval that followed the revolution and imperial implosion caused only the temporary fragmentation of the Eurasian space, and its unity was quickly restored – a fact that, according to Trubetskoi, should serve as yet another proof that "Eurasia constitutes a geographical, economic and historical whole". But here is a dilemma: "[T]here is no return to the situation in which Russians were the sole owner of the state territory, and, clearly, no other people can play such a role". Trubetskoi boldly resolves this conundrum in the famous passage. "Consequently", he asserted,

*the national substratum of the state formerly known as the Russian Empire and now known as the USSR can only be the totality of peoples inhabiting that state, taken as a peculiar multiethnic nation and as such possessed of its own nationalism. We call that nation Eurasian, its territory Eurasia, and its nationalism Eurasianism.*

To prevent the rise within the borderland peoples of political nationalism (separatism), Trubetskoi suggested that all ethnic groups residing in Eurasia should develop a hierarchy of loyalties that would be interconnected and complementary. Every individual people in Eurasia should combine its own local nationalism with the overarching Eurasian nationalism. By the same token, "all citizens of the Eurasian state" should be conscious of and take pride in the fact that they simultaneously belong both to a given people and the Eurasian nation.

Trubetskoi conceded, though, that this "Eurasian nation" was still a work in

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<sup>44</sup> N.S. Trubetzkoy's *Letters and Notes*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Igor S. Martynyuk, "Toward Understanding the Art of Modern Diasporic Ideology Making: The Eurasianist Mind-Mapping of the Imperial Homeland (1921-1934)," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, No. 1 (April 2006), p. 106.

progress as the understanding of the common destiny of the Eurasian peoples had yet to become a “significant part of their consciousness”. As an astute analyst of nationalism, Trubetskoi fully appreciated the need to “re-educate national self-awareness with a view toward establishing the symphonic (choral) unity of the multiethnic nation of Eurasia”.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, historical scholarship was of course an absolutely indispensable instrument. Furthermore, the Eurasianists were aware that they were engaged in a kind of “race against time”, as the intellectuals from the borderland nations were busy advancing their own, “nationalist,” narratives meant to challenge the discourse that highlighted the “Eurasian unity”.<sup>47</sup> The elaboration of an Eurasianist interpretation of Russian history that would uphold the idea of the historical unity of Eurasia was thus in order. “It is necessary to re-examine a number of disciplines from the point of view of the unity of the multiethnic Eurasian nation, and to construct new scientific systems to replace old and antiquated ones”, Trubetskoi forcefully argued. “*In particular, one needs a new history of the Eurasian peoples including the history of the Russians*”.<sup>48</sup>

To sum up: the Eurasianists had witnessed the power of ethnic nationalism and sincerely hoped that the new Eurasian identity that they fashioned in their bitter exile would help them preserve the integrity of “historic Russia” (be it the pre-1917 Romanov empire or the Soviet Union) in an age when empires appeared to be out of place. Their reasoning was indeed original if somewhat utopian: “if the Russian empire were a symphonic unity of people – more than that, if there were no Russian empire at all but only organic Eurasia – the issue of separatism would lose its meaning”.<sup>49</sup>

However, they were not mere ideologues but serious scholars. Unlike all their great 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors beginning with Karamzin and ending with Kliuchevskii and Platonov, who were treating Russian history as a *national* history, the Eurasianists clearly saw the Russian empire’s *multiethnicity* and tried to analyze the complex interplay between the “history of the Russian people”

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<sup>46</sup> Nikolai S. Trubetskoi, “Obshcheevraziiskii natsionalizm,” *Evrasiiskaia khronik*, No. 9 (1927), pp 24-31. The English translation is from Nikolai S. Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Ann Arbor, 1991, pp. 233-244.

<sup>47</sup> On Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky’s crucial role in nationalizing the past of what was previously seen as a part of a larger whole into a separate “Ukrainian history” and thereby “unmaking Imperial Russia,” see Serhii Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, 2005). In the 1920s, Ukrainian émigré intellectuals challenged Eurasianism’s attempt at re-conceptualizing empire and nation. For a Ukrainian critique, see D.I Doroshenko, “‘K ukrainskoi probleme.’ Po povodu stat’i kn. N.S. Trubetskogo,” *Evrasiiskaia khronika*, No. 10 (Paris, 1928), pp. 41-51; O Mytsiuk, *Evrasiistvo* (Prague, 1930).

<sup>48</sup> Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, p. 243 (emphasis added).

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 234-235.

and the “history of the peoples of Eurasia”. The Eurasianist approach toward Russian history appears to have been one of the possible ways out of the tangled historiographical dilemma formulated by von Hagen – “the dilemma, which, on the one hand ignores the multinational character of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and chooses thereby to treat the Russian past as the history of a nation-state, or, on the other hand, highlights the multinational character of those two state formations only to condemn them, in the name of national liberation and nationalism, as anachronistic and thereby inevitably fated to collapse as such”.<sup>50</sup> It is precisely this search for an alternative vision “between, or beyond, empire and nation-state” that the Eurasianists referred to as their attempts at building a “true” theory of nationalism.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire,” p. 397.

<sup>51</sup> The left-wing Eurasianist Prince Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii praised Eurasianism because, “despite the inherent nationalist temptation, from the very outset it showed the way toward overcoming Russian nationalism [and] underscored the supra-national character of its task by its very name.” See Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii, “Natsional’nosti SSSR,” *Evrasiia*, No. 22 (Paris, 1929).



## **Siberia as a National Finnish project**

*Jörn Donner*

There are very different connotations of the words *Siberia*, *National* and *Finnish*. They very much depend on who you are, where you are and on your knowledge of history and the external world.

For Gulag survivors and many others Siberia brings back frightful memories. But long before Stalin Siberia was the place, or the vastness and continent, where the Russian authorities deported people, among them thousands of Finns – during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The circumstances of these deportations have been described many times. One of the deportees before the Russian revolution was Stalin, who escaped once. The second time he was freed by the February (or March) revolution 1917.

*Siperia opettaa*, they say in Finnish. Siberia is teaching you. What exactly is meant by that is unclear, except the fact that Russia is our neighbour and will remain so with 1280 kilometers of common border. Except for the deportees from Finland, Siberia for a long time commanded Finnish attraction and interest, because of tribes and nationalities that were supposed to be somehow related to the Finns.

I think that I have to try to define the words Finnish and National and their meaning, especially when talking to a non-Finnish audience. A brief excursion into history is therefore needed. Before 1809 Finland was part of Sweden. As a centre of learning the University at Åbo had a certain importance. Swedish explorers into foreign lands before 1809 – and there were many – often were accompanied by Finns, that is Swedish citizens from Finland. Some of them had studied in Åbo. Later on Swedes considered the explorer Nordenskiöld to be a Swede.

In 1809 however, Finland became part of Russia, but not completely. It was in fact a separate Grand Duchy directly under the Russian Emperor. According to many observers this gave Finns fantastic possibilities, as the size of Russia at the time also comprised Alaska, until 1867, when it was sold for a pittance to the US. Two of Alaska's governors were Finns. One of the emigrants from Helsinki to Alaska was a certain Nybom, who founded a vineyard. Much later this vineyard became known as the Coppola-Niebaum vineyard, near today's San Francisco.

Russia even without Alaska was an enormous landmass, St. Petersburg was a

European centre of learning. All this, including the possibility to enter into Russian military service, was open to Finns. One of the many to use this opportunity was a young man, Baron Gustaf Mannerheim, who made a successful career in Russia. Much later he would fight the Russians in two wars and become Marshal of Finland. But he also, and this is where Siberia comes in, made a long trip from Siberia to China in 1906-1908, partly for military reasons, but also to study the peoples he met and their manners. His mentor for this scientific study was my grandfather Otto Donner, to whom I will shortly return.

So how is it that these three words, Siberia, national and Finnish are intertwined? The Finland that the Russian authorities took over in 1809 was a strange and partly very underdeveloped country, where Swedish was the *lingua franca* among authorities of all sorts, in the few schools that existed, among priests and professors, whereas the big majority of the people spoke Finnish and were often given Swedish surnames as the priests could not master this difficult and strange language.

Russian authorities in St Petersburg wished to diminish the Swedishness of Finland. It did not immediately mean a revival for the Finnish language, but by moving the capital (and later the university) from Åbo to Helsingfors (Helsinki) some of the Swedish connections disappeared, especially as Swedish dreams of imperial *reconquista* waned and disappeared. Since 1809 Sweden became what it is today, successfully avoiding interference in the business of others, except the business of being Swedish.

Early on during the Russian era in Finland some young scholars started to collect folklore materials that would become *Kalevala*, Elias Lönnrot's personal vision of a glorious past. One of the scholars of the time was Matias Alexander Castrén, who turned his attention to the tribes in northern Russia, whose language was supposedly related to the Finnish, like Hungarian, and Estonian. So this started the national Finnish Siberia project. Castrén was an enormously gifted linguist, traveller and writer. Like other travellers in Siberia, then and later on, he did not like the harshness of winter nor the heat of summer with its billions of insects. In wintertime he often travelled in a balok, a sort of covered and heated sledge, but his health was poor and he had to interrupt some of his travels due to illness.

Despite all difficulties he produced an incredibly vast amount of work. The bulk of it was published after his early death in 1852 in St Petersburg in 12 volumes as *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen*. Unfortunately almost nothing of this has been published in today's scientific *lingua franca* English, and in Swedish only part of it.

Castrén's footprints can be found along the Ob and Yenisei rivers and their tributaries, as well as southwest of Krasnoyarsk, near the Sayan mountains.

I do not know if the connection between Finnish nationalism, nationhood and

science, especially relating to western Siberia was seen as an obvious one, but I have reasons to believe that science was supposed to enhance the slowly growing national movement in Finland, a task that for many reasons had to be performed in Swedish. Castrén wrote in Swedish, also Johan Vilhelm Snellman, whose contributions of science were minimal, but who functioned as a sort of *capo di tutti capi* in the fight for the Finnish language and Finnish nationhood. This is a different story but must be mentioned in connection with later developments.

I have published a book about a certain Karl Eneberg, a gifted young scholar, who wished to become an assyriologist. In order to prove the usefulness of his research for the Nation he had to present a theory about relationships between Finnish and Turkish, ending up with some ill-founded ideas about the Assyrians. For that purpose he travelled to Mosul, where he was poisoned or died a natural death. This happened in the 1870s. He was engaged to be married to my future grandmother. As a consequence of his disappearance (his remains are unknown) she married my grandfather.

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So now I have to return to this Otto Donner, professor of comparative philology at Helsinki University, sponsor of scientific expeditions to the East, teaching Mannerheim to collect materials, forcing my father Kai to follow the footsteps of Castrén into Siberia. Otto was an organiser of networks, a spider, combining his scientific interests with political work, as was the common habit among intellectuals in Finland at the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He founded the so-called Finno-Ugric Society in 1883. Some members of this society still speak about the Siberian tribes as “relatives”.

During that time the national aspirations of the Finns has already gained some influence. A central bank had been opened, a national currency approved, and Helsinki had been embellished with buildings not unlike the ones in St. Petersburg, most of them designed by the German architect Carl Engel. Notions of national independence existed, but the way ahead was stony especially since the ascension to the throne of Nicholas II.

When my father Kai had finished his studies in Budapest and Cambridge in England, Finland had already, after the turmoil in Russia following the Russo-Japanese war, obtained important concessions, including free and fair elections to a parliament in 1907, females included. All the national institutions existed, but the Russian Emperor was still formally the only arbiter of Finnish decisions. They had to be approved in St. Petersburg. When looking at some of the original drawings for the new Helsinki by Engel I found the signature on them:



*approuvé*, signed by the Emperor. Easier than today's building bureaucracy.

The main parts of my father's diaries from his Siberian travels between 1911 and 1914 are extant and have been used by me for a book published in 2006 called *In My Father's Footsteps*.

I would also have called it in Castrén's footsteps, as my father's work was closely connected to what Castrén had observed, for instance linguistic work on the Selkup and Ket tribes, as well as finding the last surviving members of the Kamass in Abalakovo, a village that still exists, but which has been changed totally, like many other parts of Siberia, by the revolution, deportations, collectivisation of agriculture, but not by oil and gas exploration – that destruction took place farther north. In 2006 I visited Novii Urengoi, a booming company town. It is now all Gazprom territory.

In the diaries by my father, the last of them written when the Great War, later to be called the First World War had started, there are signs that he, like other Finns, understood that a Russian revolution of some sort would make Finnish independence possible. Upon returning to Finland in October 1914 he was one of the main instigators of secret meetings in order to send young people via Sweden to Germany for military training. Feelers went to Sweden to organise the training there, but Sweden declined.

Anti-Russian feelings were strong, not only in Finland but also in Siberia, where many members of the nomadic tribes felt the pressure of Russian merchants and colonizers and feared a bleak future. There even existed in Finland utopias that all the Finno-Ugric peoples would get together and form a large happy family. The problem was distance. Between Khanti-Mansiisk and Finland there are 4000 kilometers as the crow flies.

It has been said that the Siberian connection to Finland was totally broken for almost seven decades, but that is not altogether true. In the 1920s my father got permission to study the language and habits of a certain Dibikov, originally from a lake district near Turuchansk, who lived with our family in Finland for several months. But very soon such professors as they then were in Leningrad were dismissed and sent to prisons or deportation as exponents of what Stalin and his henchmen called nationalism, at the same time as Finnish nationalism in its exaggerated form wanted to get rid of democracy, admired Hitler and considered Soviet Union an enemy to be disposed of.

The lessons of geopolitics and geography had been forgotten, the connection Siberia–nationhood–Finland had served its purpose. So had the Swedish language, as the most ardent Finnish nationalists tried, but in vain, to have Helsinki University ban all Swedish-language professors. Up to a half million Finnish families changed their Swedish surnames.

This combination of ethnicity, language and nationhood had been invented a

long time ago by Herder and Hegel, and had influenced Finnish intellectuals ever since, despite the fact that they wrote in Swedish. The national poet Runeberg translated Serbian folk poetry. Now nationalism took a more dangerous, violent turn, and this misunderstanding contributed to the disastrous peace negotiations after the First World War as well as more recent developments in the Balkans and the Middle East. This is another story, to be told by others. Still I cannot deny that national science and understanding of what the Finnish nation stands for contributed to shaping the Republic as it is today, even if, hopefully, the old ethnic clichés are dead.





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Torbjörn Becker

VD för SITE och suppleant i Sällskapets styrelse