

M.M. Berezovsky's Expedition to Kucha (1905–1908)

Irina Popova

Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia

Mikhail Mikhailovich Berezovsky (1848–1912) from 1876 on he repeatedly took part in G.N. Potanin's expeditions to Mongolia, Northwestern China, Xijinağ and Tibet. In total, Berezovsky participated in fourteen expeditions, initially as zoologist and botanist and in 1902–1908 as head of expeditions to China and Central Asia, geographer and ethnographer. The Archive of Orientalists of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences keeps fourteen travel journals of the expeditions in which Berezovsky took part in 1877–1908.

In 1905 the Russian Committee for the study of Middle and Eastern Asia (RMCA) sent a small expedition to Kucha headed by M.M. Berezovsky to carry out archaeological surveying. Berezovsky's expedition coincided in time with that of Paul Pelliot, who worked in Eastern Turkestan in 1906–1908. M.M. Berezovsky's main objective was to prepare a detailed map, on which he wrote the names of the sites of ancient settlements and Buddhist monuments. In his journals for 1907–1908 he mentions that in all he found the remains of twenty ancient monuments, including temples and dwellings. Berezovsky collected some fragments of the murals and made watercolour drawings of them. One of the albums is kept in the Archive of Orientalists in the IOM of the RAS and two are in the Hermitage Museum.

The expedition work was completed in December 1907. Its results were reported to the meeting of the RMCA by S.F. Oldenburg on 9 (22) February 1908. M.M. Berezovsky made a report about his expedition at the meeting of the Academy of Sciences on 6 (19) March 1909.

M.M. Berezovsky's most valuable find comprised fragments of manuscripts that are now kept in the IOM of the RAS. In total, he found 1876 fragments in Sanskrit, Tocharian B, Uighur, Chinese and the Khotan dialect of the Saka language. Texts in the Uighur language were written on the reverse sides of the Chinese scrolls. Most of such fragments are Buddhist in content. They are datable to the 5th to 7th century. The majority of the fragments are in Tocharian B. The manuscripts found by M.M. Berezovsky represent a developed writing system and are therefore datable to the 7th century. Unfortunately, they are for the most part small fragments that provide no context. Only several of them were identified and published later by N.D. Mironov, Sylvain Lévi, G.-J. Pinault, G.M. Bongard-Levin and M.I. Vorobyeva-Desiatovskaya.