

Materials of the personal papers of Sergey F. Oldenburg as a source on history of the Russian expeditions to East Turkestan (according to the documents of the Saint-Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences)

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The year 2013 is marked as a 150th anniversary of the prominent Russian indologist and buddhologist Sergey Fyodorovich Oldenburg (1863–1934), who was very important in studying antiquities of East Turkestan. Oldenburg was one of the anchormen of the science-organizing process in the Russian Empire – the USSR: an academician (1900) and a permanent secretary (1904–1929) of the Saint Petersburg – Russian – All-Soviet Union Academy of Sciences, a founder and an editor of the series “Bibliotheca Buddhica” (from 1897), a secretary of the Eastern Department of the Russian Archaeological Society (1898–1905), a full member (from 1896) and a member of the Council (1913) of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. Oldenburg was one of the creators and the chairman (from 1918) of the Russian Committee for Studying Central and Eastern Asia (1903–1923) — the Russian division of the International Association on Studying Central and Eastern Asia, which was established in Hamburg (1902) during the 13th International Congress of Orientalists. From 1916 until his death the scholar was the director of the Asiatic Museum, reorganized in 1930 to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences (today the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of RAS in Saint-Petersburg).

The academic interests of Sergey F. Oldenburg in East Turkestan were connected with the research of the monuments of the “northern Buddhism”. It was Oldenburg who became the founder of a new branch of knowledge — the Central Asian philology and palaeography. The young scholar started to study the monuments of ancient writings and archaeology from the collection of the Russian Consul General in Kashgar (1892–1902) Nikolay Fyodorovich Petrovskiy (1837–1908). In the article “The Kashgar manuscript of N.F. Petrovskiy” published in the “Memoirs of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society” for the year 1892 (Saint Petersburg, 1893. Vol. 7. P. 81–81, table 2), Oldenburg was the first one in the world scholarship who showed publicly the newly found manuscript in Khotan in a dead “unknown language” from the collection of N. F. Petrovskiy, which was the beginning of the Tocharian studies as a separate branch. Being in Paris during the foreign mission, in 1893–1894, Oldenburg invited his French colleagues to deciphering of the text. In the letters, addressed to his teacher Viktor R. Rosen (1849–1908), Oldenburg wrote that “nobody there understood these inscriptions. They wanted to make facsimile copies and send them out so that everybody could exercise their wits”. Together with the Russian scholars publication of the manuscripts and deciphering of the “unknown language” was taken up by the West-European

specialists, including the professor of the University of Vienna G. Bühler (1837–1898), who already in 1894 published his own conjectures about the finds of N. F. Petrovskiy. Later on some other scholars joined the discussion: the professor of the University of Strasbourg E. Leumann (1859–1931), the president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the former head of the university in Calcutta R. Hoernle (1841–1918) (1897, 1899) and others. By 1908 the “unknown language” was deciphered.

In the summer of 1893 and in the spring of 1894 Oldenburg was planning to travel to Kashgar, but he was able to achieve his dream only 15 years later. His friend, a keeper of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences D. A. Klements was travelling over East Turkestan in 1898 and in his private letter stated that “the work in the Turfan region will suffice for one hundred years, for all Europe”. Oldenburg’s plans to get there in the summer of 1904, while N.F. Petrovskiy was alive, remained unrealized — in 1905–1907 an expedition of a traveller-naturalist Mikhail Mikhaylovich Berezovskiy (1848–1912) departed to Kucha. Finally, in 1909–1910 and 1914–1915 the two Russian expeditions took place to East Turkestan under the direction of Oldenburg, in the course of which there were made numerous discoveries and descriptions of the architectural-archaeological monuments belonging not only to the ancient Buddhist culture, but also the writings in different languages. Meanwhile, Oldenburg evaluated the works of the majority of his European predecessors more as antiquarian ones, and not as the academic complex research, and their results as a barbarous pillage of the monuments for the purpose of the replenishment of the West-European museums. On the contrary, the principle of the research for Oldenburg was “not to touch the monuments in situ, unless they are endangered to immediate destruction”. The first Oldenburg’s expedition to Karashar, Turfan and Kucha, explored around a dozen of above-ground and cave Buddhist temples, added to the Central Asian collection of the Asiatic Museum almost a hundred manuscripts and their fragments, discovered mainly during the excavations; the second one, exploring the cave complex in Dunhuang (Shazhou), — nearly 19 thousand keeping units (the Dunhuang manuscripts were published in facsimile at Shanghai in 17 volumes in 1994–2000).

Unfortunately, S. F. Oldenburg published only a short preliminary report on the expedition of 1909–1910 (1914) and several general articles on the expedition of 1914–1915 (1915, 1922). In 1923 during his foreign mission Oldenburg rejected an offer of the German publishing companies to publish the materials of the 2nd Turkestan expedition in 6 volumes, as he thought to publish them in the homeland. Because of the military and politico-social cataclysms, descended on Russia at the beginning of the 20th century as well as the enormous administrative workload, the most part of Oldenburg’s research on the languages and culture of Central Asia remained only in the projects. The unpublished field materials of the two Oldenburg’s expeditions to East Turkestan were deposited in the Saint-Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the RAS in the personal papers of S.F. Oldenburg (Manuscript group No. 208). The papers of the scholar contain 1572 archival units for 1747–1963,

being structured in 5 series. The materials of Oldenburg's expeditions are also represented in the institutional records of the Russian Committee for studying Central and Eastern Asia in the historical, archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic relations (No. 148, 110 units for 1900–1923), as well as in the official and private letters to the colleagues–orientalists. First of all, this is the correspondence with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, Russian and foreign organizations and scholars about organization and conduction of expeditions, reports, manuscript maps and plans, photographs, watercolours and drawings, check lists of the gathered collections, register books on manuscripts entry, archaeological and ethnographical objects, delivered to the Asiatic Museum, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of RAS and so on. However, the main value is represented by the handwritten field diaries of S. F. Oldenburg, by expedition' painter S. M. Dudin, painter and photographer B. F. Romberg, topographer and land surveyor N. A. Smirnov, descriptions of the caves, short surveys, odd parts of reports, which have remained unpublished to the present day. In the Soviet time S. F. Oldenburg compiled a manuscript, containing more than 1 thousand typewritten pages "Description of the caves of Chan Fo-dun near Dunhuang", which has remained unpublished in the Russian language. Its Chinese translation was published in 2000 in Shanghai, including maps, photographs and detailed reports of the 2nd Turkestan expedition in the series "The monuments of art from Dunhuang, kept in Russia". One book was published by S. M. Dudin, a partaker of the two Oldenburg's expeditions, "Architectural monuments of Chinese Turkestan" (Petrograd, 1916; Chinese translation: Beijing, 2006). In 1995 N. V. Dyakonova introduced only the materials about the monuments of Shikshin, gathered by the First Russian Turkestan expedition held by S. F. Oldenburg. The complete publication of the field materials of the two Russian Turkestan expeditions under the direction of S. F. Oldenburg in the language of the original — one of the main tasks of the Russian Oriental Studies of the 20th century — has not been solved yet.