

# ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ, ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЕ

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## IN-BETWEEN WORLDS: DUTCH AND RUSSIAN COLONIES DISPLAYED IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHY

This article contextualizes several large photographic collections in the Netherlands and Russia, focusing on the colonial albums produced under the Dutch republic in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Indonesia and in Russia's Central Asia of the same period. The production of such albums coincides with a global surge that can be identified as *albummania*, in which both countries fully participated.

These historically driven aims primarily predicated the photographic practices that shaped the overall representation of what was consequently used for scientific research, military or, strictly economic purposes, and later on for the ethnographic and historical analysis, both public and private. The albums visually conveyed and legitimated scientific ideological trends appropriated by the imperial administration to construct knowledge of colonized populations and territories — in a similar fashion that other European nations exercised over their colonial subjects.

*Mooie Indie* and Russian Turkestan — together they come to mind not so often. They all gone for a long time now, blurred into a flock of sailing through memory, their short lived and glorious colonial histories, and their exceptional colonial photography.

### Dutch Visions

Dutch imperialism has arguably the world's most glorious resources visualized by the splendid albums of the VOC's efforts

(Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) from at least the seventeenth century. These unique documents serve as a source for the *colonial album* phenomenon. The natural beauty of East Indies or, *Hindia Belanda* (Nederlands-Oost-Indie), which is known to us today as Indonesia, has inspired the works of artists and photographers that mostly capture the romantic scenes of colonial Indies, not unlike to the Russian nineteenth-century photographers in Central Asia who served the Empire. Similar to the Russian presence in Central Asia, Dutch 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial rule reached its peak, politically and economically, in the decades following 1870s.

The officials in Java were severely criticized by the Dutch Parliament for the introduction of *cultuurstelsel* (the cultivation system) back in 1830, practice that insured an on-going flow of money to the Dutch treasury and the compulsory delivery of coffee, sugar, pepper and indigo [The criticism was widespread thanks to the Multatuli]<sup>1</sup>. All four products have been successfully traded by the Dutch throughout Europe while the indigenous Javanese population laboured *in lieu* at the construction of new transport system (*corvee*) such as roads and bridges. There are many photographs of these impeccably built structures, some by the unknown photographers (“Construction of a Dam at Denpasar, Bali”, or “Willemstoren” (the Lighthouse “The Tower of William”) in Poeloe Bras, Aceh by Woodbury & Page in 1877.

The cultivation system was changed into the Agrarian Law (*Agrarische Wet*) in 1870 that allowed the European entrepreneurs to use the uncultivated areas on the basis of a long-term lease that resulted in the rapid expansion of the plantation ownership in Central Java. Many moved from their spacious vernacular premises into the attractive houses in the urban areas like Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta while securing the European properties as well<sup>2</sup>. Photographers followed the clients, thus bridging the gap between practice and politics, but not for long: by the early 1870s only a handful of the

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<sup>1</sup> Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887), known under the Latin pen name “multatuli” (much suffered) is an Amsterdam-born pedagogical and moralist writer, whose much regarded novel *Max Havelaar* of 1860 aimed to denounce the shadowy world of colonialist power in the Dutch East Indies.

<sup>2</sup> The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made the communication with Europe considerably easy.

Dutch civil servants maintained their positions in this vast colony: about 175 European civil servants to a Javanese population of thirteen million. The Dutch in the Mooie Indie made up a small proportion of the nation, whereas they were clearly part of the Dutch fatherland in its later nineteenth-century form. Successive waves of Dutch settlement in Java began in the 1870s, but continued later, an itinerant urge that marked out Dutch people as Europe's most persistent and progressive explorers until their steps were gradually redirected in modern times towards the Caribbean. Most moved voluntarily, some involuntarily; they were attracted by colonial opportunities, but also driven forth by the commerce and personal profit.

Early images of Batavia, made by the Belgian decorative artist, lithographer and theatre maker, Isidore van Kinsbergen (1821–1905) memorably captures the atmosphere of the calm before the storm. He tells the tales of people who witnessed the first decades of the Dutch power in Bali, getting closer to the “ethnic types” and comparing them to the Javanese antiquities, art reproductions, and still lives of rare fruits. The colourful example Van Kinsbergen serves a very different role for an early explorer-turned-photographer<sup>1</sup>; through and through he is a high-spirited artistic personality known in the Batavian artistic circles. He was one of the first European photographers to receive a commission from the highly regarded Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen) to carry a prestigious and costly photographic documentation of the Javanese antiquities including Borobudur. Without any written evidence, it looked like a long, mysterious and highly idiosyncratic process, which we can only judge from his photographs. It rests on an immense artistic freedom of van Kinsbergen, rising uncomfortable questions — about the authority of artists to comment on political issues, about the compatibility of high and low cultures — and it provides very moving and, at times, traumatic answers. Indeed, van Kinsbergen's photographic results are disquieting and despairing observation of the colonial society.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the link to the most recent (and complete until now) exhibition of his works at the Huis Marseille in Amsterdam (2005–2006): <http://www.huismarseille.nl/nl/tentoonstelling/isidore-van-kinsbergen>.

In his photographic cache there are some famous dramatic personae such as the three daughters of Hamengkubuwono VI, Sultan of Yogyakarta (1862–1865), the Son of the Regent Bandung (1865) and the group of the local children whom he gathered at his studio. Van Kinsbergen's strength lies in his intricate interweaving of episodes within living memory of his native (and highly romanticized) Bruges.

Six years later (August 1857) the British commercial photographic studio Woodbury & Page (Walter Bentley Woodbury, 1834–1885 and James Page (1833–1865)) opened an atelier in Batavia, where they remained for another fifty years. Unlike van Kinsbergen, this highly ambitious professional duo has pioneered the practice of panoramic photography, signing their prints, offered lessons to the amateur photographers, documented the natural disasters, and opened the shop to sell camera and props, as they recognize the growing interest in the business.

Politically these photographic studios remained more or less autonomous for the duration of the colonial rule, but have chosen urban areas where most of the clients lived. Works by the Woodbury and Page, A.E. v.d. Heide, H. Kleinmann & Co contributed to this trend. Their albums expose chronological as well as spatial history of Dutch colonial encounters, resulting in a construction of what Edward Said initially called the “imaginative geography” [Said 1978: 49].

### **Russian situation**

Photography plays a much larger part in the Russian conquest of Central Asia than both the Tsarist political strategy and popular criticism of the campaign would suggest, and does much to lighten the “military gospel” of the conquest that historians are preaching. Some of photography is ethnographic, some documentary, some personal. Many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian and, eventually, Central Asian photographers see it less in sentiments than in detail, in the actual “livingness” of colony life. It is somehow fitting that the “Turkestan Album” (1871–1872), the principle Imperial document of the conquest commissioned by the first Governor-General, Konstantin von Kaufman, should have to undergo these continual and unpredictable deaths and vanishings. Von Kaufman was a man of high authority in the Tsarist military echelon, a general, but also an honorary citizen

of a new Turkestan for whom the importance of a convincing and consequent visual history of the region as it was, helped to consolidate his rule, at the same time exercising all kinds of state pressure over his new subjects<sup>1</sup>. Like many Russian generals before him elsewhere, von Kaufman had his own way of registering undercover meaning and significance in his deeds, and his own brand of historicizing them for posterity. Like other colonial albums outside Russia, *Turkestanskii Al'бом* has its literal and didactic side, and the photographic display in the album sometimes openly debates the question of possible co-existence, a Great Russian utopia of the time.

Itinerant and professional studio photographers in Turkestan were sustained not just by the new affluence, or by their clients' desire to send likeness home, but by the strong sense of pride of being a pioneer and inseparable from the overwhelming process of making new history and extending the borders of the Russian Empire as far as the Southern steppes. The interests from abroad about what was happening in Central Asia enhanced the process of inventing and justifying the new looks of the territory. It was the subject of a steady stream of articles, pamphlets, photographs and books<sup>2</sup>. They entered Russian museums, archives and homes and became cherished collector's items. Photographs disseminated stereotypical imagery and influenced the perceptions of the many people who purchased, received, and collected them. The Russian nobility was eager for information about the new exotic region of the Empire that had come under the imperial domination.

Who would buy such pictures? The question of purchase was less important than the issue of fame. Most photographs were made on the higher order of the Russian Government to build and extend their "oriental collections", and the photographic albums about the newly

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written lately on the conquest of Central Asia by the Russian and non-Russian political historians, much less on the cultural life of the Russian society in Turkestan. Few examples might suffice: [Sahadeo 2010; Brower 2003; Ниязматов 2011].

<sup>2</sup> The existing publications, records and collections at the Russian archives offer enough historical information on the subject how attitudes towards the Russian Central Asia have changed over the past 150 years and the various ways in which this information has been used.

conquered territories were the “must” item in any self-respected and well-to-do families in St. Petersburg or, Taganrog (just like in the Hague or, Leiden).

The problem of the Russian colonial photography is as much historical and psychological as it is technical or formal. What were the criteria for the photographs? How precise the information had to be? How positive the delivery of the photographic documentation was expected by the Tsarist court? Could the photographers be critical, or neutral of their subjects and sitters? If the “accurate rendering” of emotions was a requisite for “moral beauty”, the exact mutation of nature was for the “Turkestan Album”’s photographers the *sine qua non* of the finest art whatever age.

This initial discussion on the history of the albums and their manifestations will, therefore, contribute significantly to the overall awareness and importance of such uniquely bound photographic collections not only about Central Asia and Indonesia, but also with respect to the Russian and European history of photography, encompassing an immense archive of colonial photography. It give us more than an insight into the process of assembling and reducing visual information they provide us with examples of how we first recognize colonies in reality. They begin to map the visual identity that these regions hold for us today.

### **Collections under investigation**

The Netherlands: Isidore van Kinsbergen, Brusse Press Photography Agency, Kassian Cephas, A.E. v.d. Heide, H. Kleinmann & Co, Woodbury & Page, C.J. Neeb, Gustave le Gray, August Salzmann, Roger Fenton, James Robertson.

Russia: anonymous photographers, A. Kun, N. Nekhoroshev, M. Bogoliubov, Ivan Priorov.

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## **К ИСТОРИИ РАЗВИТИЯ ЭТНОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ НАУКИ В ТУРКМЕНИСТАНЕ**

В 2009 г. был образован Институт археологии и этнографии Академии наук Туркменистана. Институт проводит международные научные конференции, этнографические исследования. В этом контексте представляется интересным обратиться к истокам — ко времени возникновения и развития этнологической науки в Туркменистане, первым исследованиям туркменских этнографов. Данная статья написана на основе малоизвестных архивных материалов, часть которых впервые вводится в научный оборот.

20-е годы XX столетия — период становления этнологии в Туркменистане [Васильева 2003: 10–12]. В 1925 г. открылся Туркменский научно-исследовательский институт, где было создано этнографическое бюро. Здесь трудились Г.И. Карпов, И.Н. Иомудская-Бурунова, А.А. Карелин, Н.В. Брюллова-