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OF THE KNOWLEDGE
ABOUT THE SLAVIC PEOPLES.
THE CASE OF MULTIVOLUME
“PICTURESQUE RUSSIA” IN THE
LAST QUARTER
OF THE XIXth CENTURY**

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The multi-volume edition “Picturesque Russia. Our Fatherland in its spatial, historic, ethnographic, economic and everyday life sense” (1879–1901, in 12 volumes and 19 books) contains a lot of data about the Slavic peoples – Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians and Poles. Most of the essays on different regions were prepared by the men of letters often simultaneously known as novelists, journalists, literary critics, historians and ethnographers. The study analyses their choice by the publishers, literary reputations in the mid-1880s, national and political affiliations. A special attention is paid to the holders of various ethnic and regional identities among the authors, as well as to some specific roots and consequences of the unique large-scale project under review.

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Like any other empire, the Russian empire extremely needed the knowledge of its ethno-cultural, socio-economic and natural diversity. The tradition of “academic expeditions” of the second half of the XVIIIth century was continued during the Crimean War, when on the eve of the Great Reforms the Naval Ministry initiated complex description of many regions. This time the known writers, in particular Aleksander N. Ostrovsky (1823–1886), Grigory P. Danilevsky (1829–1890) and Aleksey F. Pisemsky (1820–1881), were invited to participate in the so called “literary expedition” and publish in press the results of their observations. The appeal to the writers didn’t not only reflect their important role in public life and the enlightened bureaucracy’s intention to get closer to them, but also was caused by the popularity of “physiological sketches” [Vdovin, 2015, 100-118].

At the end of the 1870s, next period of public activity, a much more ambitious initiative was put forward by the private person – a famous publisher from St. Petersburg Maurice O. Wolff (1825–1883), who undertook a multi-volume edition entitled “Picturesque Russia. Our Fatherland in its spatial, historic, ethnographic, economic and everyday life sense” (1879–1901).

The characteristics of the Slavic peoples, especially Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians and Poles occupied the central place in it. The correspondent data one can find in the volumes on Belorussia, Ukraine, New Russia, Kingdom of Poland, Central Russia, European North, the Middle Volga and Ural regions as well as Siberia. The description of New Russia provides information about the Southern Slavs living in its territory – Bulgarians and Serbs. In the volume on Right-Bank Ukraine there is information about Czech migrants. In general, 8 of 12 volumes of “Picturesque Russia” (each of them normally consists of two books) are highly important from the viewpoint of Slavic studies. The volumes on Caucasus, Central Asia and the Baltic region, where the Slavic element occupied a relatively modest place, are less informative in this regard.

Wolff believed this project crowning his public service and relied on the experience acquired before moving to the Russia’s northern capital, at the time of his study and work in different parts of the partitioned Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as Western Europe. It is known that “the core or the cell of “Picturesque Russia” constituted an illustrated description of Poland under the editorship of the prominent Polish writer Kraszewski, conceived at the very beginning of Wolff’s publishing activity, in 1856, but not implemented then for the political reasons” [Librovich, 1916, 475]. Richly illustrated books were designed to meet the demands of the wide readership and promised a commercial success. Thus, this time we are dealing with a private entrepreneur’s initiative, inspiring by the desire to serve society.

If the “literary expedition” of the Naval Ministry was fully consisted of writers, Wolff also widely attracted representatives of science. According to the secretary of “Picturesque Russia” Sigizmund F. Librovich (1855–1918) “all the available scientific and literary forces” have been invited to participate in the publication (elsewhere: Wolff “tried to involve all available then literary forces”). “Like a number of foreign projects of this kind – believed Wolff – this edition can be carried out only under the condition of joint participation of literary and scientific forces of the whole country” [Librovich, 1916, 189]. The publisher managed to get “the promise of many prominent writers, not only from the ranks of geographers, ethnographers, economists, but also novelists and literary critics” [Librovich, 1916, 142-143, 475]. Scientific management of the project was performed by the vice president of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, senator Petr P. Semenov (known later as Semenov-Tian-Shansky, 1827–1914), who had to serve a guarantor of political loyalty of the undertaken publishing initiative in the authorities’ eyes [Librovich, 1916, 476].

We have to admit a great confusion in the information about the authors of “Picturesque Russia”, as the result of carelessness of its publishers, especially after Maurice Wolff was changed by his heirs. The time interval between the first and the last volume is more than 20 years. However, many of the texts published in the latest books had been prepared much earlier and were printed after the death of their authors. Figuring out the true composition of participants of twelve-volume edition has required considerable research work, resulted in a preparation of the extensive biographical dictionary.

The project was attended by the representatives of four types of writers: (1) novelists of various “range” and reputation; (2) journalists (“writers-journalists” as it put Librovich) [Librovich, 1916, 18]; (3) scientists who together with scientific texts created fictional stories; (4) literary scholars – historians of literature and literary critics. No doubt, while forming a body of authors, Wolff primarily focused on a wide range of the persons associated with his publishing house. “Who of the writers and publicists of the eighties didn’t visit the literature “almost-club”! – Librovich wrote about frequenters of the informal meetings in the Wolff’s office. – Gray-haired luminaries of Russian printed word and the little asterisks of the literary world, the old experienced writers and novice authors – in short, with a few exceptions, the entire literary brethren” [Librovich, 1916, 16-17]. In a natural way, St. Petersburg residents dominated among them.

Characteristically the Society for the benefit needy writers and scholars (Literary Fund, in force since 1859), as it is evident from its name, didn’t distinguish between the authors of artistic

and scientific texts. The indicative approach demonstrated Boris B. Glinsky, uniting in one volume published in the last pre-revolutionary years portraits of both writers and scholars [Glinsky, 1914]. In fact, it is a very old tradition, represented by Nikolay M. Karamzin, Aleksander S. Pushkin and even Nikolay V. Gogol.

“Numerous Russian writers, including some historians – Mikhail O. Koyalovich wrote about “Picturesque Russia” – were invited to take part in this edition” [Koyalovich, 1997, 480]. Nikolay I. Kostomarov reflected in the mid-1880s: “What would a historian nor entertained in his leisure hours, if such entertainment does not interfere with his scientific pursuits, no one has the right to put him in the reproach of the entertainment, and especially can not definitely recognize reprehensible such a kind of entertainment as writing fictional works, even though the novels...” [Kostomarov, 1996, 420]. The XIXth century literary critics wrote about one of the organizers and authors of “Picturesque Russia” Matvey L. Peskovsky (1843–1903) that he sometimes had clothed “publicistic thoughts in a fictional form” and his novel was not one of the “purely artistic works; it was rather a set of the historical everyday life essays” [Russkie pisateli 1800–1917. Biograficheskiy slovar', 2007, 567].

In the last quarter of the XIXth century the boundary between novelists, journalists and scholars in the field of humanities remained very blurred. Authors of scientific researches especially readily worked in the genre of the historical novel using the materials of the Russian XVII–XVIIIth centuries history [Glinsky, 1914, 222]. Evaded epic canvases the participants of “Picturesque Russia” Sergey N. Shubinsky (1834–1913), Evgeny P. Karnovich (1823–1885) and Vladimir O. Mikhnevich (1841–1899) preferred the description of everyday life, carefully working with historical sources. Edited by Shubinsky since the turn of 1870-1880s until the eve of the World War I, the magazine “Historical Herald” (“Istorichesky Vestnik”) deliberately cultivated a sort of engaging, “lightweight” reading. Librosvet, who, according to Ivan F. Masanov’s assumption, published his texts in “Picturesque Russia” under the pseudonym Evgeny Chernov also belong to this cohort. As for journalists, they wrote not only reportages and feuilletons, but artworks as well.

The most authoritative contemporary multi-volume biographical dictionary “Russian writers 1800–1917” [Russkie pisateli 1800–1917. Biograficheskiy slovar', 1989–2011, vol. 1-5] also fixes versatility of the authors of “Picturesque Russia”. Daniil L. Mordovtsev, Panteleymon A. Kulish, Evgeny P. Karnovich and Vladimir O. Mikhnevich are characterized in a different sequence of their qualifications as writers (prosaists, men of letters, novelists), publicists (journalists) and historians. Nikolay I. Kostomarov is seen as historian, writer and literary critic,

Vasily I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, Pavel V. Zasodimsky, Viktor P. Klyushnikov, Matvey L. Peskovsky, Evgeny L. Markov as writers and publicists. Ivan E. Zabelin as historian and man of letters. Sergey V. Maksimov and Vladimir N. Maynov are essayists and ethnographers, Yakov V. Abramov is publicist, essayist and literary critic, Dmitry V. Averkiev – writer, literary critic and publicist, Aleksander S. Gatsissky – man of letters, historian and ethnographer. Kulish and Markov were also literary critics. Although the dictionary describes Petr D. Boborykin as “pure” writer, he can be named literary critic and historian of literature as well. A writer Grigory I. Bogrov was also known as a publicist. Kulish had more incarnations than others.

Thus, one can recognize pronounced literature centrality of “Picturesque Russia”. Criteria for membership in the writer’s workshop – generating original texts, involvement in the broadly defined literature and, as a rule, the existence by literary work. All these features formed the professional identity and communication links.

When in 1886 the young and daring Anton P. Chekhov (still Antosha Chekhonte) composed his “Literary table of ranks”, having produced in the ranks “all living Russian writers, according to their talents and accomplishments”, he included in it the representatives of all the four categories listed above. Chekhovian distribution of writers by ranks differs from contemporary vision of their belonging to the first, second and less prestigious literary “ranges”. There were also some protests against humorous ranking immediately after its promulgation. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it’s extremely useful to correlate “Literary table of ranks” with the authors of “Picturesque Russia”.

Of the 68 writers represented in Chekhov's list, 15 were invited to “Picturesque Russia”, most of them having agreed to participate in it, though eventually only 9 persons contributed to the edition.

Upper positions (III-V ranks: the privy, active state and state councilors) were fully occupied by “pure” fiction writers, classics of Russian literature. Among the owners of senior officers VI-VIII ranks we can find the authors of not only literary texts like Sergey V. Maksimov, Aleksander N. Pypin, Mikhail N. Katkov and Aleksey S. Suvorin, who were placed even above Vladimir G. Korolenko, Petr D. Boborykin and G.P. Danilevsky.

The participants of “Picturesque Russia” begin in “Literary table of ranks” with the collegiate counselor (Maksimov), the court counselor (Boborykin, forgotten now Averkiev) and the collegiate assessor (Mordovtsev). Their number increases in the IX rank (“titular councilors” Vladimir V. Chuyko, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Mikhnevich). Collaborates of “Picturesque

Russia” were also among lowest bureaucracy in the face of Nikolay N. Karazin and Zasodimsky (Chekhov named the latter «collegiate registrar» that had clearly derogatory sense) [Chekhov, 1976, 143]. Thus, in the publication participated “middle” and “small” workers of pen, some of the young writers like Chekhov himself have improved later their position in Russian literature. The eminent historians (I.E. Zabelin, N.I. Kostomarov etc.) in Chekhov's “Table of Ranks” are not represented.

It should be stressed that Wolff clearly counted on well-known names, hoping that the essays on the regions of the Russian Empire written by recognized masters of word will receive an attractive literary form and be of interest for a wide readership. Publishing the collected works of the luminaries of Russian literature, Wolff maintained very close business and sometimes also friendly relations with many of them. Ivan S. Turgenev, Ivan A. Goncharov, Mikhail E. Saltykov-Shchedrin and Nikolay S. Leskov have received proposals to write for “Picturesque Russia”. Wolff expected that they would describe the most familiar areas of life and their native regions. For example, “the life of the landowners in the middle lane of Russia” was considered the most appropriate topic for Turgenev [Librovich, 1916, 143].

However, the literary stars of the first magnitude, referring to those or other obstacles have avoided cooperation in “Picturesque Russia”. Even a “privy councilor” Goncharov who belonged to Wolff’s closest circle refused, saying that all his life he almost continuously held in the city on the Neva, and therefore does not consider himself an expert on Russia [Librovich, 1916, 174]. A “state counselor” Leskov, the other permanent participant of “almost-club”, also didn’t join the project.

While supporting the very idea of creating “Picturesque Russia”, an “active state councilor” Saltykov-Shchedrin considered the intention to prepare a comprehensive description of a country such as Russia quite unrealizable: a satirist thought that only about single village located near Moscow it’s reasonable to write a half volume. Wolff’s appeal to the successful foreign experience of this kind the great writer retorted with his usual humor: “One thing – the French, Germans, and another thing we, the Russians. The Frenchman will say that the Russians candles eat, drink vodka by barrels and blow their noses in the floors of their coats – and they think that in this way they have characterized the whole Russian people. And we can not do in such a way...”. More seriously Saltykov-Shchedrin explained his refusal in a letter to Wolff in March 1878, saying that he had never engaged in “ethnographic works” [Librovich, 1916, 189-190; Kabakova, 1998, 55-77].

Turgenev in 1878 promised his participation. Soon, however, he decided to finish his literary activity. When later Wolff talked with him in Paris, the venerable writer hesitated, but ultimately he sent nothing [Librovich, 1916, 142-144]. In 1883 Wolff and Turgenev died. Thus, although all four classics welcomed the idea of “Picturesque Russia” «literary generals» eliminated from active participation in the publication.

The owners of high-profile literary names, as a rule, already elderly people have not found a willingness to work within the proposed format which didn't preclude elements of artistry, but was tougher than in case of “literary expedition” when rather young writers had to describe their travel observations. Travelogue – a genre firmly rooted in the pre-revolutionary Russian literature, was quite understandable format for the writers. The texts of the “Picturesque Russia” claimed more systematic and analytic presentation that encouraged them to doubt their competence.

Invited to the project a “court counselor” Evgeny A. Salias and died in 1883 Pavel I. Mel'nikov-Pechersky also didn't participated in it. A major Polish writer Jozef I. Kraszewski (1812–1887) arrested in Germany could not make his contribution. A young literary scholar “district secretary” Semen A. Vengerov was asked to write an essay showing “the role of Moscow in the history of Russian literature” [Librovich, 1916, 419], but his text is not found in “Picturesque Russia”. In general, the refusals contributed to the fact that the representatives of the middle generation gained predominance among the authors of multi-volume edition.

Wolff actively used the special personal links that he had in literary world as a result of his long and large-scale publishing activity. The core of the authors was identified in the first years of the project. After Wolff's death in early 1883 the role of editor of “Picturesque Russia” geographer Semenov associated with a different circle of potential authors has increased.

Along with numerous representatives of the group under review among the project participants were carriers of scientific knowledge, in particular economists, agronomists, mining engineers, statisticians, experts in banking and geographers. Sometimes they (for instance Konstantin A. Skalkovsky) actively cooperated with periodicals and published works, thematically unrelated to their main specialty. So, an art collector Semenov has prepared the essay about the Hermitage for “Picturesque Russia”. A zoologist Nikolay P. Wagner wrote fictional texts, including fairy tales.

The volumes devoted to the Kingdom of Poland and the Belorussian-Lithuanian provinces were written by a narrow enough range of people (with the core consisted of Adam

Kirkor, V.V. Chuyko, E.P. Karnovich, S.V. Maksimov and P.P. Semenov), but in the description of other regions under review numerous authors have been normally involved.

The essays on Ukraine were partly prepared by the Ukrainophiles – P.A. Kulish (1819–1897), D.L. Mordovtsev (1830–1905) and Mitrofan N. Aleksandrovich (1837–1881). It was also planned the participation of Vladimir B. Antonovich (1834–1908) and Pavel P. Chubinsky (1839–1884). And this took place despite the very cautious attitude of the authorities to the carriers of the Ukrainian identity, whose persecution intensified in the second half of the 1870s, as well as very complicated relationship between the Ukrainophiles themselves [Gorizontov, 2016, 72-77]. The creator of literary texts, along with the historical works N.I. Kostomarov (1817–1885) participated in «Picturesque Russia» as the author of the essays on the ancient Novgorod and Pskov lands.

However, it was the choice of the Ukrainophiles who stuck to the rather moderate positions then. According to B.B. Glinsky, Mordovtsev “during the last two decades was considered in our literature the most prominent and competent representative and, perhaps, the leader” of the Ukrainian question [Glinsky, 1914, 234]. Stubbornly defending ethnic and cultural peculiarities of the Little Russians (Ukrainians), he stood on the ground of the all-Russian tri-unity. “A Little Russian by origin, but a Great Russian by education and range of practical activities – Glinsky wrote – he managed to hold in his literary work these two principles, marching in his case constantly hand in hand... Perhaps, after Gogol none of our activists in the field of press has made more for the cultural brotherhood of both branches of the great Eastern Slavic tribe than Daniil Lukich” [Glinsky, 1914, 254].

The volume informing about the Belorussian-Lithuanian region (North-Western provinces) has been entrusted mainly to a Pole (polonized Belorussian) Adam Kirkor (1812–1886), Wolff’s friend for several decades. Kirkor was the recognized authority in the field of “Lithuanian antiquity” and actively published his works on the pages of Russian academic and official periodicals. In political terms, like Wolff, Mikhnevich or Vladimir D. Spasovich, he was an adherent of the Polish-Russian rapprochement and tried to act in this direction first in Vilna and then in St. Petersburg even after the uprising of 1863-1864. Since the beginning of the 1870s Kirkor lived in Cracow, being the sole author of “Picturesque Russia”, located outside the Russian Empire.

Having been published in 1884 among the first books of “Picturesque Russia” the volume devoted to the Lithuanian-Belarusian lands caused sharply negative review by the West Russians (Zapadnorusy) [Gorizontov, 2011, 930-939; Gorizontov, 2012, 631-635]. Kirkor was charged

with the Polish view on the region, distorting its relationship with the Russian world. The fact that first volumes were concentrated on the ethnically mixed or backward borderlands, not the core of the Russian Empire, gave rise to accusations from critics who rushed to expose one more “Polish intrigue”. It was perhaps the biggest scandal around “Picturesque Russia”. The volumes on Central Russia were actually printed among the last ones. The volumes about Ukraine, New Russia and the Kingdom of Poland have been published a little bit earlier.

The volume devoted to the Kingdom of Poland (Central Poland) was mainly composed by Vladimir V. Chuyko (1839–1899) – literary critic, historian of literature, translator and journalist, who wrote on very diverse topics [Librovich, 1916, 415]. This choice was the consequence of his trust relationship with M.O. Wolff, herewith the author can not be considered an expert on Russian Poland. The preparation of this volume constituted a unique precedent, when the author of “Picturesque Russia” was sent to the region for collecting materials. Chuyko’s “ethnographic journey” to the Kingdom of Poland in 1881 coincided with a new attempt to revise the attitude to the Polish question in the spirit of liberal approaches [Wiech, 2010]. The volume devoted to ethnically Polish lands within the Russian Empire went out of print only at the beginning of the reign of Nicholas II when a hope to solve the Polish question appeared again. At the same the growing interest in the Polish outskirts of the empire was demonstrated by Aleksey A. Sidorov’s publications [Sidorov, 1899-1900].

Selecting Chuyko is especially noteworthy that the Kingdom of Poland in the early 1880s became the subject of publications of V.O. Mikhnevich, who, however, prepared for “Picturesque Russia” a sketch on St. Petersburg [Librovich, 1916, 115; Mikhnevich, 1881] (about contemporary Moscow wrote Boborykin). Born in a Polonized noble family in Kiev province Mikhnevich attributed himself to the Ukrainians, but specializing in Russian history he was a stranger to the Ukrainophile extremes. “The study of our capital for drawing up the calendar made of Mikhnevich a unique and subtle connoisseur of Petersburg life” – testified Glinsky [Glinsky, 1914, 211, 216-217, 221]. A recognized expert on the city on the Neva was a writer Vsevolod V. Krestovsky, who, however, didn’t participate in “Picturesque Russia”, unlike another author of antinihilist novels – Victor P. Klyushnikov.

The Siberian volumes were marked by significant presence of regionalism followers (*oblastniki*) including Nikolay M. Yadrintsev (1842–1894, can be considered as a writer), Grigory N. Potanin (1835–1920) and Aleksander V. Adrianov. But the description of Urals was not a work of another holder of the Siberian identity, Dmitry N. Mamin-Sibiryak (1852–1912), who announced himself as a connoisseur of the region in the early 1880s [Gorizontov, 2005, 97-

118]. The aspiration to count on regionalists is obvious not only in Siberian case, but also in case of the Volga region (A.S. Gatsissky).

Among the authors of “Picturesque Russia” there were representatives of polar socio-political camps – from the oppositionists to the creators of antinihilist novels and governmental officials. It’s necessary to mention the impressive number of adherents of the liberal-democratic and populist orientations. Radical enough views held Y.V. Abramov, M.L. Peskovsky, Ivan S. Polyakov, Aleksander A. Kropotkin, P.V. Zasodimsky and others. As an example of the far-right activist can serve a prominent historian, archeologist and archivist Dmitry Y. Samokvasov.

A special attention should be paid to the figure of S.V. Maksimov (1831–1901), the participant of the “literary expedition”. Having made a long journey through the north areas of European Russia in the second half of the 1850s, later he traveled over many parts of the empire, including Belorussia and Siberia. Maksimov was a truly unique encyclopedist with amazing knowledge of almost the whole country. In addition, he has gained experience in the promotion of scientific, in particular economic, knowledge, publishing brochures about Russia for the common people [Gorizontov, 2013, 54-57]. Maksimov participated in several volumes of “Picturesque Russia”. In similar genres of travel essays and enlightening books addressed to low classes worked another participant of the project Dmitry I. Stakheev (1840–1918) [Librovich, 1916, 228-234].

On the Upper Volga region and Ukraine, for which in the “literary expedition” “state councilor” A.N. Ostrovsky and the “court counselor” G.P. Danilevsky [Gorizontov, 2007, 140-164] were responsible, another authors wrote in “Picturesque Russia”, although the famous playwright was well received in Wolff’s “almost-club”. One of its regular visitor and at the same time a member of the “literary expedition” A.F. Pisemsky died at the beginning of 1881. “Titular councilor” Sergey N. Terpigorev (S. Atava), distinguished by a very high activity in “almost-club”, has not been involved in the preparation of the volume about his native Central Black Earth region.

In “Picturesque Russia” one can find a wealth of information about the past and present state of the Slavic peoples, the development of their literature and ethnography. The edition is of high interest for the history of Slavic studies [Pypin, 1890-1892; Aksenova, 2006]. The publication reflected the existence of influential ethnic stereotypes. Much attention was paid to inter-ethnic communication both among the Slavic peoples and with neighboring non-Slavic ethnic groups. This aspect was especially topical in relation to the Great Russians and the processes of Russification.

Although the purpose of “Picturesque Russia” was to popularize already accumulated knowledge, considerable importance had the individual preferences of the authors, which could influence the images of regions. In any case, “Picturesque Russia” is neither strictly compilation compendium nor overt officialdom. In the last major pre-revolutionary project of this type “Russia. Complete geographical description of our Fatherland”, started at the turn of XIX-XXth centuries almost simultaneously with the finishing of “Picturesque Russia”, expressed literature centrality was not observed.

In this interrupted by the World War I multivolume a key role was played by the son of P.P. Semenov, creative scientist of a new formation Veniamin P. Semenov. Among the “knowledgeable people” selected by Semenov Junior famous literary names of Silver age practically does not occur. There were no also outstanding representatives of the national and regional identities. But the representation of specialists with serious professional background significantly increased. The experience of “Picturesque Russia” has predetermined that the new edition was started at the very end of the XIXth century with the books devoted to Central Russia.

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