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## In The Lens Of Russo-Turkish War And Peace

The war photography is one of the branches of photographic practice and the significant source for the visual history of past times. Soon after its invention and wide spreading, photography was beneficially used for depicting the various regions of the world, where the military operations took place. Though while discussing the wartime photography during the second half of the nineteenth century and despite the special attention to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, in the photography reference books there is no mention about the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The last was another significant event in the modern history and a conflict between two empires, again taking place in the region of the Black Sea basin. The reason of not paying attention to it and understudied visual history of the particular region and time, may well be the fact that the Western European states were not involved in the War. Accordingly, very few materials are preserved in the depositories of the West and it did not get the attention of the western historians of photography. The major part of the photographic material to be discussed below is kept at the National Museum of Georgia, and smaller collections of the same content are available at the other institutions in Georgia and worldwide. The "Ermakov Collection," called according the name of its last private owner, includes thousands of negative plates and is one of the renowned photographic collections, yet remaining not contextualized. Despite the full cataloguing of the plates, based on the inscriptions by Dmitri Ermakov (on the bottom of the most photos) much about the collection is unclear and needs the work of the generations of scholars for gaining precise information on each image, their subject, date and location. Our attention is now paid to the activity of the photographs, depicting the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the wider geographic region, where the war theatre took place, also before and after this geopolitical event.

Ermakov, born to the architect of Italian origin and a Molokan (Russian) mother in Nakhchivan, later moved to Tiflis (Tbilisi) and based there for rest of his life, while travelling a lot around the Middle East. In early 1860s, he attended the one-year course of military topographers at the Military-Topographic Depot in Ananuri (a historical fortress and settlement 102 kilometers north of Tiflis, on the Georgian Military Highway), which operated at the Caucasian Staff of the Russian Army. This Depot was open on January 8, 1863 and was the first Photographic Unit of the Caucasian Army of the Russian Empire. Its purpose was building up a strategic visionary of the Caucasus as well and bordering regions, and recording the military personnel of the army, their training activities, the path of military operations, and the daily life of the troops. What is noteworthy for us, the unit also made use of photography for topographical, archeological and ethnographic studies. In general, for every field of social life to which this new tool of recording could be beneficial. It would be there that Dmitri Ermakov, along with his fellow photographers studied and mastered photography. This determined the further thematic scope and approach

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of photographers to the recording tools. We should first settle on few known biographical facts of Dmitri Ermakov (1846-1916) and other photographers, connected to their activities in Turkey.

Ermakov, who travelled much abroad, also tracked the Turkish Black Sea coast in the prewar period and shot it, as well as the lands of the historic Western Armenia (nowadays, northeast of Turkey). In 1870, he delivered the collection of views, depicting the sites on the northeast of the Turkish city of Erzurum, with its ancient architecture and ancient roads. In 1872, Ermakov took part in the long-lasting archaeological expedition to the Asiatic and European towns of Turkey, reaching the city of Varna. The photographer's duties included the photographic recording of the architectural monuments and general views of the sites. At least, officially, it is true, but having conducted the preliminarily planned military intelligence is more believable. It is presumable, that Ermakov was undertaking the topographic shots for the high command of the General Staff of the Russian imperial army. In early 1870s, soon after the expedition, he sent the views of the Turkish (historical) Armenia to the Russian Geographic Society. In 1874, Ermakov participated in the Anniversary exhibition of the Société Française de Photographie, presenting 17 photographic views of the Turkish city of Amasya. The photographer, at the age of 28, was awarded the medal for this collection and gained the international recognition. This way, by the upcoming War, Ermakov had a well-established reputation of the master of photography. In 1877-1878, Ermakov was commissioned a military photographer at the Russo-Turkish War, depicting the views of the Caucasian Frontline and beyond.

Some shots, between numbers 2093-2198 in his catalogue of 1896 prove that the photographer was present in the regular army, certainly, in the dislocation area of the 41st division of infantry. He, at the same time depicted the ethnographic “types” on both, Russian and Ottoman sides, soldiers and civilians. Other photographers based in or associated with Tiflis, the capital of the Russian Viceroyalty of the Caucasus by those times, were also witnesses of fateful geopolitical power games in the region. Worthy of special mention are Vladimir Barkanov and Dmitry Nikitin who were actively involved in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as field photographers and whose work is messed up into an entire “Ermakov Collection.” It was during this period of 1870-1880s that the genre of military reportage was established, and its representatives produced thousands of images, that, finally because of no existing copyrights caused in the unidentified images. Barkanov served as a photo-reporter on the Caucasian front between 1877 and 1878 Russo-Turkish War, creating a unique series of photographs taken on the frontline. In 1881, at the Toulouse Photography Exhibition he was awarded a diploma for his contribution to the development of photography.

Another photographer, Nikitin spent twenty years living and working in nowadays Georgia. In 1863, he was working in Tiflis as an assistant doctor and that is his spare time he pursued his interest in photography. Nikitin served as a photo-reporter on the battlefields of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and he too made a great contribution to the field. He was particularly

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famous for his military photographs, widely published in magazines and newspapers.

The duties and tasks of the military photographers by the war of 1877-1878 included: the depiction of the military events, camps, frontline, portraits of the decorated soldiers and officers, the activities of the rear, military hospitals, and prisoners. Strategic cities and their suburbs of the northeastern Turkey and southwestern parts of Georgia (doubtful territories between two empires), were all captured in their lens. As the recording of the real battle (fast physical motion) was impossible for the reason of the technical development of the equipment by those times, the photographers often applied to the staged scenes. The same was with other photographers, not only Ermakov, Nikiton, and/or Barkanov and each of them continued their prewar activities, adding more fascinating, "exotic" imagery to their commercialized activities, as their photos, were overall, in high social demand. Ermakov would have been at work with one or more assistants, as it was a usual practice, he would need at least the physical help while dealing with heavy and uneasy cameras and chemical processes of developing. It is also quite possible that he would send his co-workers to these various places with preliminarily identified "smaller missions." In addition, some of the photographic material in the albums also comes from other photographers, from whom he simply purchased negative plates. The result is an enormous photographic informative richness, which can be termed extensive and multifaceted. The main visual feature of Ermakov's photography is the maximal capturing of the aerial space in his pictures that is conditioned by the use of wide lenses and is obviously linked with his background, knowledge and needs in topography, as well as the overall goals – such as collecting data for cartographic and ethnographic purposes. Part of these, served the illustrative material for press and the most, should have been the base for military-topographic maps. Unfortunately, it is difficult to clearly define links between the particular photographic images and maps, but obviously, the links (and preconditioned strategic needs in them) existed. All this material, for today is the invaluable documentation of history and not yet examined by various representatives of social sciences and humanities, studying the Russian and Middle-Eastern History. Despite all these notes, the major part of photographs remain unidentified in terms of dates and location. The reason is that, on one hand, the "Ermakov collection" includes the work of many other photographers and on the other, Ermakov himself, visited various parts of Turkey repeatedly, produced many images and paid nearly no attention to the precise annotations. Ermakov, who widely practiced photography on his own, also ran commercial photographic studios, worked on official state commission and was engaged in collecting. For this reason mostly, his photography is a subject of continuous misunderstandings, opposing considerations and difficulties of identification. All these photographs and still many more of other subjects can nowadays be found in Ermakov's 126 commercial albums. They contain the vast amount of photographs of regions and peoples in the Caucasus itself, territories of the empires of Turkey, Russia, Persia and beyond; including today's Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russian provinces of the North Caucasus, countries of the Central Asia, Crimea, Georgia, Northeast of Persia, and nearly half of the whole Turkey. Ermakov's legacy includes tens of thousands of positive prints, glass

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negatives, stereoscopic images and many albums. Though roughly more than a half of all these, as we stated above already, are not made by him personally. In different cases, images were inherited, purchased by or given for physical preservation and copying to Ermakov, who, according to free attitude to copyrights (common in those times) incorporated them into his vast collection and printed into two printed catalogues of 1896 and 1901, without indicating any authorship of other masters.

A very important amount of photographs, to which Ermakov has precisely erased signatures, while including in the collection, belong to other photographers. So many photographs by other masters are included in the entire collection. Names of more than ten authors of these images are known, but this does not aid the identification of particular images. Ermakov used to label photographs with a bottom-line (seen on negatives, as well as prints), indicating his catalogue number(s), image subject (often with orthographic mistakes), and location (not always). The vast photographic material, depicting the Russo-Turkish War theatre of 1877-1878, before and after it, and the wider region of the front (from the town of Poti in Georgia to Istanbul) can be conditionally organised into the following thematic groups:

1. The Views, cityscapes and landscapes of the territories, deserving the special attention of the strategic plans of the Russian empire, such as Trabzon, Changry, Erzerum, Ordu, Gumush-Khane, Baiburt, Sinop, Unia, Angora, Marsovan and many others. Their urban and suburban areas are been photographed repeatedly and from every possible angle.
2. Fortifications, that, at some point, can be detached from populated sites. These are, sometimes, the historic fortresses, but again very significant as the strategic peaks for artillery and the control over the surrounding lands. Kaladzhik, Sinop, Ardahan, Kaladib, Veli are few of them to name.
3. Antiquities can be treated out of direct politics and strategic plans of Russian Empire, but if we consider the scientific interest in the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and later also Byzantine, located on the territory of Turkey, it is not surprising to see various artefacts of architecture or minor arts in photographs.
4. Religion and Diaspora are two of very much interlinked subjects in the photographs and under them we group the mosques, churches and monasteries of various confessions, their graveyards, met on the military pathway of the Russian Army.
5. The Military are of course, in the centre of the attention of war photographers, and as mentioned above repeatedly, they were shown in every possible aspect of their service, as warriors, prisoners, heroes of the war. Further series depict several church services, care for the wounded, the field kitchen etc. Riflemen units or militia, along with the soldiers of the regular army are shown in the photos.
6. The Types is the last and largest group of photographs, as depiction of multiethnic civilians in the whole region of war by both sides of front was a kind of a norm for photographers. These are people of Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Kurdish, Lazi,

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Russian, and Turkish origin, of various occupations and confessional belonging, carefully sorted in terms of possible loyalty and confrontation to/of the Russian Empire.

All these was a vital part of collecting information, mostly for military and strategic purposes. Initial intelligence meanings of these photographs have later turned to the historical, ethnographic, social history meanings. The studies of photography of the former Russian and Ottoman empires does not have long history, as the world history of photography itself is a relatively newer field of knowledge. However, few facts, known from Ermakov's biography, related to his presence in mentioned territories and the overall scope "Ermakov Collection" should be analyzed properly for further studies. Nowadays, the photographs taken during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, before and after this long-lasting geopolitical event are the invaluable sources of the history of intelligence, topography, cartography, ethnography, and generally the visual history.

With countless photographs taken in the region of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the "Ermakov Collection" at the Georgian National Museum is undoubtedly the most important and most informative visual source for those studying the history of confrontation of Ottoman and Russian Empires, social history and material culture of Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Kurd, and Lazi peoples. Yet, many photos should be examined in comparison to other photos in other collections worldwide. It is not surprising, that the final target of the Russian Imperial ambitions, the self-proclaimed "Third Rome," was Constantinople referred to as Tsargrad (Russian for "Royal City") and this was preconditioned by the overall Russian political ideology toward the once centre of the Christian world. All the visual recordings referred above, as well as the military campaign in whole, in fact, served to this major purpose.

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