

# Images of north-east Asia in expeditional and author's photo projects: strategies for visualization of research objects in the II half of the 19<sup>th</sup> - the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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**Abstract:** Yakutia is a region, where 40% of territories are located in the Arctic zone; it belongs to a geographic zone with extreme natural and climatic conditions, where traditional types of farming continue to prevail. Today, the modern processes in the field of ethnic self-identification and revival take place in it considering its geopolitical significance, as well as the study of their historical past, and are of particular relevance, where not the last role is played by visual and anthropological resources that are currently preserved in institutions of historical memory (museums, libraries, archives). The visual image becomes a key unified means of influence. Using the example of the Yakutsk region, the article examines the aspect of the visual development of the north-eastern territories of the Russian Empire as a form of scientific knowledge developed by Russian academic science in the process of their study. The systematic use of artistic practices (pictorial recording, photography) in the scientific and methodological tools of the research carried out subsequently had a great practical result, and had formed an impressive layer of visual anthropological materials. The paper examines the main visual images representing a multi-ethnic region.

## 1 Introduction

The development of the north-eastern territories of the Russian Empire during the period under study had a great influence on the formation processes of its modern geographical boundaries. The outcomes of its scientific study are comparable to a technical and civilizational breakthrough in relation to sparsely populated areas with a harsh, sharply continental climate. Collecting information about the population is significant for replenishing the “encyclopedia” of the various peoples' life, the possibility of establishing contacts and comprehending the system of their survival [4, 2015, pp. 59-69]. Integration of research societies with state tasks laid the foundations for the organization of a completely unique experience in the formation of future visual anthropological resources, which made it possible to remotely observe the dynamics of development and social foundation of northern communities.

The formation and representation of visual images of the cultural environment of peoples living there through artistic practices (drawing, photography) has become for Russian science a way of indirect studying through the created visual images, the features of the social structure and living space of northern communities that characterize the cultural environment of peoples living

near the Arctic Circle. Currently, the key issue of social and humanitarian sciences studying the adaptation of northern ethnic communities to contemporary living conditions in the context of large-scale industrial development of their territories is the study of a wide range of points related to the preservation of their historical and cultural heritage [13; 5, 2021, pp.129-137].

Analyzing the processes of changing methodological approaches in the study of such a definition as “heritage”, it should be noted that its idea is inevitably associated with the potential loss or disappearance of human works or joint creations of man and nature.

The topic of attribution and study of significant masses of illustrative collections in archives, libraries and museums became relevant in the 1970s, when museum researchers were faced with the need for a scientific description [11, 1970, pp. 209–222; 12, 1987, pp. 70-71]. The study of their origin in the mentioned institutions has shown that industrial exhibitions and expeditions organized by Russian research societies have made a great contribution to their formation. The approach based on the fact that the development of new lands and their study required the simultaneous memorization of the events that took place, is justified in modern foreign historiography on intellectual history, historical memory, as well as the history of the activities of the first institutions of memory (archives, libraries and

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museums) [8, 2013, p. 88]. Among the works related to the conclusions being developed within the framework of the study, the work of D. Bate who considered the processes of collecting and acquiring photo collections in memory institutions (archives, libraries, museums) as an essential achievement of human civilization, should be noted. Other things allowed various social groups to find an identity with shared visualized memory [16, 2010, p. 245]. The photo album of Barbara Mathe and Laurel Kendall, who published the expeditionary photo project of the Jesup expedition in 1897-1902 as a visual source representing the outcomes of the historical and comparative study of the peoples living on both sides of the Bering Strait, stands out among the works dedicated to the historical and cultural memory of the North peoples [17, 1997]. Presently, foreign anthropology develops visual research at the intersection with the visual culture of the region under study. Scientists studying visual ethnographic archives and methods of their analysis tend to state the growing significance of ethnographic research based on digital resources, since they that include the technological tools required for the study of society [20, 2014, p. 24; 19, 2015, p. 7; 18, 2015, p. 362].

## 2 Materials and methods

The research methodological basis is an integrated interdisciplinary approach to the study of visual sources in the mainstream of the problem field of new cultural history. The study of the “image of others” becomes not only a tool for collecting data, where it acts as a basis around which information related to the techniques of its interpretation is layered. The given approach is founded on the “camera effect” hypothesis, which studies and fixes another culture in the light of its mental categories and its value system [14; 10]. Photography has become not only documentary evidence, but also a way of uploading information that cannot be expressed otherwise. It includes understanding the conceptual meaning of world perception, the impression of the photographer who fixes the focus of the lens during shooting, the conditions for creating these frames, as well as the correspondence, in some cases, to certain research objectives. The subjective assessment of the person standing on the other side of the camera plays a leading role, because it all depends on the personal baggage of the photographer, his perception of representatives of another culture, etc. All that constitutes the author's intentional locus and methodological modeling of his vision for the rest of the world, since a person of a diverse culture and ethnicity undoubtedly interprets what is happening on the experience basis.

## 3 Results and Discussion

Historically, the cultural transfer of ideas and sociocultural intellectual models (the organization of regional museums in the provincial outskirts of Russia, the first local branches of Russian scientific societies,

youth intellectual circles) in Yakut society came from the scientific circles of St. Petersburg and Irkutsk, starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Starting from the second half of the 1860s, programs with a list of collection of materials, including visual ones, were sent to all provinces of the Russian Empire, leading Russian research societies for presentation and exhibiting at Russian and international exhibitions. In total, from 1867 to 1913 the Yakutsk region took part in fourteen large exhibitions outside the region, including three foreign ones [3, 2000, pp. 26–28]. They involve: Ethnographic exhibition in Moscow (1867); Polytechnic Exhibition in Moscow (1872); Anthropological exhibition in Moscow (1879); All-Russian Nizhny Novgorod Exhibition (1896); World Exhibition in Paris (1900); All-Russian handicraft-industrial exhibition in St. Petersburg (1902); All-Russian Hygienic Exhibition in St. Petersburg (1913) and others.

The popularization and organization of thematic exhibitions in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed not only to the development of domestic and foreign trade, increased the competitiveness of domestic manufacturers, but also became a platform for Russia's breakthrough into the world museum space. For the first time, the collection of visual and ethnographic collections in the Yakutsk region was initiated by the Society of Natural History and Anthropology Amateurs at Moscow University to organize an Ethnographic Exhibition and Museum. In 1865, the SNSAEA committee appealed to the governor of Eastern Siberia with a request to take part in the arrangement of the exhibition and museum, promising to provide the required instructions [2, L.23]. In anticipation of the preparation for the Ethnographic Exhibition organization of 1867, SNSAEA distributed a detailed program of ethnographic gatherings throughout Russia, which, among other things, included the collection of photographs and portraits depicting various ethnic types of the population, as well as natural landscapes [Same, L. 23-24]. The Yakutsk regional administration, having received instructions from Irkutsk, to fully support this undertaking, in turn sent them out for fulfillment in the districts. The Yakutsk regional administration demanded that the district police officers could fulfill their orders, even if it concerned the collection of information for the Siberian Department of the Geographical Society.

Yakut ethnographic collections assembled for the All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867 at the initiative of its organizers A.P. Bogdanov and V.A. Dashkova, were transferred to the Moscow Public and Rumyantsev Museum. Dashkov Ethnographic Museum and the Department of Foreign Literature, which included the collections exhibited there, was created after the exhibition completion. Certain items from the Yakut exhibition department ended up in some private collections abroad. Subsequently, the Yakut things presented at the Ethnographic Exhibition in Moscow in 1867 were sent to the World Exhibition in Paris (1867) and some of them ended up in the British Museum [9, 1887, p. 122].

After the completion of exhibition projects, the exhibits were consistently deposited in the collection of

archives, libraries and museums, and in the hands of private collectors. Archives of future cultural memory were created in this way.

The thematic coverage and careful selection of visual fixation objects, prescribed in the programs and instructions of the conducted expeditions, became a fundamental support in the study of the cultural areas of north-east Asia. The formation and representation of visual images of the cultural environment of north-east Asia, allowed researchers to highlight the living space and social identity of the North Man, producing and preserving artifacts of cultural heritage (customs, forms of representation and expression, knowledge, skills - as well as related tools, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces) [15; 7, 2012, pp. 59-64]. Selections of visual images are created according to thematic categories: anthropological types of the local population; illness; beliefs and objects of worship; residential and outbuildings (types of collapsible dwellings); folk games and holidays; household items and everyday utensils; natural landscapes and waterways; sacred and revered objects; social contrasts; methods of hunting and fishing; ways of transportation; ways of managing; plot landscapes that convey the characteristics of the climate and natural landscapes; traditional handicrafts; shamanism.

The corpus study of photographic materials on the peoples of Yakutia in the collection of Yakut and Russian museums showed that the visual history of this outskirts of the Russian Empire was written through the lens of political exiles. It should be noted that the development of photography in the cultural and historical space of Yakutia is closely related to them and the scientific interests of Russian and local research societies, which, along with scientific research, carried out educational work among the local population as a form of intellectual activity. The percentage of local photographers was negligible. Mastering the applied craft by newcomers and political exiles served as a guarantor of constant earnings. Being citizens, rather constrained in their rights and economic opportunities, they mastered the art of carpenters and accounting, were hired as workers in various parties and expeditions, opened carpentry and shoemakers, and if financial resources allowed, then they opened photo salons. The North helped political exiles to rethink their political views, to look completely differently at the reality of the Russian hinterland and its break from the central metropolis. The complex climatic, social and national characteristics of society and cultural space, the way of spending leisure time, the perception of the movement of life, allowed them to build a fundamentally various visual material, which, even in the absence of color, conveyed amazing contrasts and at the same time captures the processes of the influence of technological progress on traditional societies.

Photographing skills became especially in demand with the increase in the number of both Russian and foreign expeditions after 1875, and were of great importance at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Yakutsk region participation in the work of Russian and international exhibition projects also made the work of

provincial photographers of the country northern outskirts in demand, who managed to realize their author's photo projects.

First photographs with views of Yakutia and images of its population appeared due to visiting photographers from the Irkutsk region. In the 1860s, Irkutsk photographers came to Yakutsk to work. Then they began to open small photo salons, which, as a rule, worked for a short time, no more than 1-2 years. Following Yakutsk, photo salons were opened in Olekminsk, Vilyuisk and Verkhoyansk.

Photography has firmly entered social life as a fashionable phenomenon and was even included in the educational process by the Ministry of Education for teaching the humanities [6, 2019, p.273]. In the Yakutsk region, photography was involved in the educational process at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [1, L. 85].

In the course of the study, it was possible to identify the main circle of photographers of the Yakutsk region:

- Irkutsk photographers - A. Stein, V.S. Kellerman (owners of photo salons in Yakutsk);
- Student representatives - Ageev (amateur photographer);
- Visiting amateur photographers from the bourgeois class: I.Ya. Kabritsky (Yakutsk, Machinskaya residence); A.V. Ivanov (Olekminsk); E. Verner (Tikhono-Zadonsky mine);
- Local photographers - amateurs from the bourgeois, merchant and Cossack estates: G.V. Kolesova (Vitim mines of the Olekminsky district), N.S. Gorokhov (Verkhoyansk), A.I. Nemtse-Petrovsky (Vilyuisk), N.L. Kondakov (Vilyuisk), K.G. Popov (Vilyuisk), V.N. Popov (Vilyuisk), P.I. Berdennikov (Yakutsk), P.A. Kushnarev (merchant, member of the Russian Photographic Society), M.V. Pikhtin (manager of the trading house "A.I. Gromova", later a merchant);
- Representatives of the Russian old-timers intelligentsia - I.V. Popov and M.M. Nosov (amateur photographers);
- Visiting amateur photographers from the bureaucracy - R.Yu. Zonnenburg (Irkutsk);
- Owners of photo salons in Yakutsk - I.Ya. Bratchikov, K.A. Atlasov;
- Amateur photographers among political exiles: V.E. Gorinovich, N.L. Gekker, N.A. Vitashevsky, V.M. Zenzinov, S.V. Przhiborovsky, I. Ya. Osmakov, M.I. Brusnev, A.K. Kuznetsov;
- Political exiles - photo studio owners: A.N. Osmolovskaya, P.V. Olenin (Yakutsk), P.T. Lozyanov (Yakutsk), Ya. F. Strozhetzsky (Srednekolymsk), V.P. Priyutov (Yakutsk), V.I. Pronevich (Yakutsk);
- Representative of the religious scopic movement - E.P. Eresko (village Spasskoye, Olekminsky district of the Yakutsk region).

Unfortunately, the photographic community of the Yakut region is practically not represented in Russian historiography devoted to the experience of visual research carried out in Siberia, and is limited to the names of famous Yakut museum figures and correspondents of ethnographic museums in St. Petersburg, namely, A.P. Kurochkin, I.V. Popov and V.N. Vasilyev. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the photographers V.S. Kellerman, philanthropist A.I. Gromova, collectors and photographers I.V. Popov, A.P. Kurochkin and many others contributed to the replenishment of the illustrative collections of major museums in the country.

Yakutia still has many lacunae that await their researcher in the history of the photography development. Unfortunately, there are problems with authorship and attribution to the heritage of a number of photographers. This was due to the fact that many photographers of the Yakutsk region were simultaneously fond of collecting photographs and carried out collecting work on orders from Russian and foreign museums. Brief and incomplete entries in the registration books of museums, in relation to a number of names, have errors in authorship that require serious verification.

Scientific research societies and the expeditions organized by them made a great contribution to the formation of visual anthropological archives in the second half of the 19th century. The East Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society (hereinafter VSORGO), founded in 1851, acted not only as the organizer of the expeditionary study of the Yakutsk region, but also as the largest collector of visual and ethnographic collections.

Visual research on the peoples of Yakutia was carried out by expeditions organized by the departments of the Russian Geographical Society: A.F. Middendorf (1844-1845); Vilyui expedition organized by R.K. Maak (1853-1855); Siberian expedition (1894-1896); academic expeditions by E.V. Toll and A.A. Bunge (1885-1886) and 1892; I. D. Chersky (1891-1892); North-Pacific expedition by M. Jesup, where V.I. Iokhelson and V.G. Bogoraz-Tan (1902) took part; expedition by V.N. Vasiliev and M. Ya. Kozhevnikov (1905); expedition by I.P. Tolmachev (1911).

The first complex expedition organized by VSORGO was the Vilyui expedition (1853–1854) under the leadership of R.K. Maak with the financial support of S.F. Solovyov. The collection of photographic materials was carried out on local groups of Yakuts living in the Nizhne-Amur and Amur regions by P.P. Shimkevich. V.N. Vasiliev collected people on the lake Essei in the Yenisei province, N.N. Petrov - in the Trans-Baikal region. The Yakutsk (Siberian) expedition, organized by VSORGO together with the St. Petersburg government of the IRGO, achieved the greatest outcomes. The activities of this expedition in 1894-1896 contributed to the intensification of regional studies in the north of Siberia, as well as exhibitions organized around the country.

Photography has become not just documentary evidence, but also a way of reproducing information that

cannot be expressed otherwise. Photographers intuitively endowed the visual images they had made with the properties of “northernness”, characteristic precisely for the climate, social organization and cultural diversity of the aboriginal population of Russia northeastern territories. It is essential to single out the main representative images: plot landscapes that convey the atmosphere of cold, ice and snow; mobile transport of the nomadic Arctic - sledges; traditional clothing made of leather and fur; mobile homes for life in extreme conditions. They also appeal to the formation of certain stereotypes of visual images (the predominance of snow-covered landscapes and horizontally elongated spaces).

The tasks of visual development of the northern territories were dictated by the following strategic approaches to fixing and collecting scientific material:

- ❖ programmatic approach to the production of visual images, where pictorial fixation and photography become a tool for collecting data about objects of study and the image of “others”, as an effective way of transferring/storing information that requires detailed study;

- ❖ formation of visual images that comprehensively characterize the features of the studied cultural environment and the aboriginal population.

Thus, the comparative corpus of pictorial and photographic documentary sources, representatively illustrating the cultural environment of the northeast Asia population, is being formed over many years of observations. Interpretation of the images gallery made by artists and photographers from the standpoint of the author's intention of the photographer, his ideas about people and the system of world perception, allows us to build a broad comparative context of visualization practices in the context of object-shaped dispositions in the contemporary ethnic and museum environment. Subsequently, this visual perception of the ethnic environment will become a visual resource for initiatives to ethno revitalize the lost elements of the traditional culture of northern communities.

## 4 Conclusion

The logical result of the tasks on complex visual fixation, initiated by scientific societies, of the traditional everyday life of the studied nations throughout the country was the design of the “ethnographic photography” and “ethnographic drawing” genres, including a large complex of works of various types of arts, united by time parameters and belonging to the scientific research field. The formation process of illustrative materials went on in all areas of scientific disciplines in Russian academic science over a long historical period, simultaneously with the process of the large centers formation of historical memory (libraries, archives, museums). The development of new territories and the expansion of the research society activities in the

second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered interdependent phenomena.

The educational mission of research societies in Russia included the initiative to fill the gaps in the vast research field that fell out of the sphere of interests of the Russian Academy of Sciences. At present, the corpus of the visual heritage of the North (the work of local and expeditionary artists and photographers), and shapes new forms of influence and communication with the viewer, finding a response in it.

The corpus of visual sources of the past is updated by modern society to obtain new data. An empirical analysis of expeditionary and everyday photo chronicles and pictorial recordings will allow reproducing the picture of global transformations in the life of northern communities, from the first steps of European civilization accession to global transformations in the life world in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the full-scale industrial development of its resources.

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