

A Tract for the Buryats

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Charles R. Bawden

A Tract for the Buryats

Edited by Hartmut Walravens

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Preface

The compilation of a survey of the publications of Pioneer Mongolist Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1779–1847) a few years ago¹ left a tantalizing gap – no. 4 in the list was based solely on a note by Schmidt's biographer Franz Babinger, and the paraphrased title was given as «Christliche Tractätlein zur Bekehrung der Burjaten», 1818. All available catalogues of Mongolian texts were perused – but the elusive tract could not be found. Only an old printed catalogue of the German Oriental Society (which mainly contains Near Eastern material) which was checked for Chinese holdings, yielded a hint – closer inspection confirmed the identification. The text even shows the pencil note «Christliche Tractätlein» – so Babinger probably got his information from the copy in the Halle library. So far this Mongolian text may be considered unique; even the rich holdings of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (Institut vostokovedenija), now easily accessible through A. G. Sazykin's catalogue do not comprise a copy.

Therefore it seemed desirable to have this rare item published. The poor knowledge of Mongolian of the present writer made it imperative to find a qualified scholar for his task – and so it is most fortunate that Professor C. R. Bawden, whose book, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals. The English Missionaries in Siberia*, was the first attempt at a full-length account of that mission since J. C. Brown's *First-Fruits of a Mission to Siberia*. Cape Town, 1847, agreed to do the work.

Professor Bawden suggested to add some information on the printer/publisher of the tract; even though Nikolaj Greč² was a famous person in his time, the search has not resulted in bringing to light an analysis or evaluation of his publishing activities. Nevertheless, it must be considered far-sighted that he undertook the printing of such an exotic publication as a Mongolian tract.

Nikolaj Ivanovič Greč was a Russian writer and journalist, born on Aug. 14 (3), 1787 at St. Petersburg, died on Jan. 24 (12), 1867. He was of German extraction: His grandfather, Johann Ernst (1709–1760) came from Prussia and worked as a teacher. His father, likewise Johann Ernst (Ivan Ivanovič, 1754–1803) was Senior Secretary of the Senate. Nikolaj Ivanovič attended

1 *Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1779–1847). Leben und Werk des Pioniers der mongolischen und tibetischen Studien. Eine Dokumentation.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2005. 180 pp.

2 This preface uses the international transliteration of the Cyrillic script.

the Junker school and then the Pedagogical Institute (later Petersburg university) as voluntary student. From 1803 to 1813 he taught Russian literature at the German St. Petri School, then until 1816 at the Petersburg Russian (later called: 2nd) Gymnasium. He started his literary career in 1806 by translating from the German *Germanija v glubokom vniženii svoem* and also *Nekotoryja mysli o sovremennyh proisšestvijah* (S. Schröder). 1807–1809 he was coeditor of the journal *Genij vremen*. 1809 he established, with Schröder, the *Žurnal novejših putešestvij*. He travelled in Germany and France, and in 1829 he was employed by The Ministry of the Interior, whose journal he founded (1829–1831, *Žurnal Ministerstva Vnutrennyh Del*). In 1836 he transferred to the Ministry of Finance, undertook again trips to England, France, Germany etc. and became Privy Councillor in 1838. Already in 1812 he had founded the patriotic weekly *Syn otečestva* (Son of the Fatherland) which he published till 1837 and edited till 1838; from 1825 to 1860 he edited (at first with Faddej Venediktovič Bulgarin) *Severnaja pčela* (The Northern Bee). He was a prolific writer, and among his many publications are:

Opyt kratkoj istorii russkoj literatury (Essay of a short history of Russian literature. St. Petersburg 1919–1822. 4 vols.) which contains samples from the best Russian authors, a rhetoric and a poetology as well as a short history of literature; *Prostrannaja russkaja grammatika* (Detailed Russian grammar. St. Petersburg 1827, 2nd ed. 1830, French version by Reiff, 1828–1829. 2 vols.); *Praktičeskaja russkaja grammatika* (Practical Russian grammar. St. Petersburg 1827 and 1839). An excerpt from it is *Načal'nyja pravila russkoj grammatiki* (Basic rules of Russian grammar. 1828, German version by Oldekop. 1830).

He was also active in the field of belles-lettres, even if – from today's point of view – not very successfully, and published: *Poezdka v Germaniju* (Travel of a Russian to Germany, in letters. 1830. German: *Ausflucht eines Russen nach Deutschland*. Leipzig 1831); *Černaja ženščina* (The black woman. 1834. German: Leipzig 1837. 4 vols.)

Recollections of his travels are:

28 dnej za graniceju ili dejstvitel'naja poezdka v Germaniju, 1835. 1837; *Putevyja pišma iz Anglii, Germanii Francii* (Letters from travels to England, France and Germany. SPb. 1839. 3 vols.); *Pišma s dorogi po Germaniju* (Letters from travels to Germany, Italy and Switzerland). 1843.

The lectures given in St. Petersburg were published as *Čtenija o russkom jazyke* (Lectures on the Russian language. 1841. 2 vols.)

He became the editor of the *Ėnciklopedičeskij leksikon* Pljušara (Russian encyclopedic dictionary) in 1834 and edited it up to vol. VII,2 (1840). In cooperation with general Baron von Seddeler he edited the *Voenno-ěnciklopedičeskij leksikon* (Military Dictionary).

His memoirs were published by A. S. Suvorin: *Zapiski o moej žizni* (Notes on my life. St. Petersburg 1886). His collected works (belles-lettres) were printed in 1855 (3 vols.).

Greč is mainly acclaimed as an author of pedagogical books as well as the founder of important journals, a pioneer of Russian journalism. After an early liberal phase in his life, pressure from the administration made him rather conservative, and critics condemn his close cooperation with the government and the secret police, which included denunciation. While there are a number of biographies³ and other works about him, there does not seem to be any detailed description or analysis of Greč's work as a printer and publisher. It seems that he started printing in 1812 in order to facilitate publication of *Syn otečestva*. Many of his books were published during the years 1817-1823.⁴

The present tract is not a completely isolated publication – there are, e.g., a historical dictionary of writers of the Russian orthodox church⁵, a publication of the Bible Society⁶ as well as several editions of the gospel.⁷

Hartmut Walravens

3 *Russkij biografičeskij slovar'*. Tom: Gogol'–Gjune. Moskva: Aspekt Press 1997, 437–448 (A. El'nickj); Brogauz/Efron: *Enciklopedičeskij slovar'* 9A. 1893, 686–687; *The modern encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet history*. Ed. By Joseph Wieczynski. Vol. 13. 1979, 122–124 (Abbott Glason).

4 S. O. Petrov: *Knigi pervoj četverti XIX veka*. Katalog. Kiev: AN Ukrainskoj SSR 1961. T. 2. 398 pp.

5 Bolhovitinov, G.: *Slovar' istoričeskij o byvših v Rossii pisateljah duhovnago čina grekorossijskoj cerkvi*. 1–2. 1818.

6 *Vozzranie ot komiteta rossijskago biblejskago obščestva*. 1821.

7 *Gospoda našego Iisusa Hrista sv. evangelie*. 1819; idem, izd. Rossijskago biblejskago obščestva. 1820.