



Access to Knowledge in the Digital Age: Unlocking Kyrgyzstan's Collections

Jyldyz Bekbalaeva

Library, American of Central Asia, Bishkeki, Kyrgyzstan

bekbalaeva_j@auca.kg

Bekbalaeva, J. (2024, December 2). *Access to knowledge in the digital age: Unlocking Kyrgyzstan's collections* [Conference paper]. **18th IFLA ILDS Conference: Global to Local – Diversity and Inclusiveness in Resource Sharing**, Baku, Azerbaijan. ADA University. <https://doi.org/10.60119/KLPE4883>



Copyright © 2024 by Jyldyz Bekbalaeva. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

In Kyrgyzstan, libraries have gone through multiple transformations reflecting political, economic and societal changes since the country gained independence.

Libraries look to expand the professional network through making the country's resources available to researchers and academics locally and globally. Multiple digitization projects have been implemented; however, the accessibility and discoverability issues remain and majority of collections are yet not accessible to the public even when converted into digital format.

While this presents the technological issue, the cultural aspect also imposes challenges event to a greater extent.

The paper examines the access to rare heritage collections in Kyrgyzstan based on the example of the Museum of Rare Books of the Issyk-Kul Oblast Library, located in the eastern part of the country.

Keywords: *Heritage collections, Kyrgyzstan, Rare books*

Introduction

With technological advances entering all spheres of academic research, we witness an increasing number of manuscripts and archival documents being digitized and made available for public access. At the same time, many sources remain unnoticed and are yet to be explored, analyzed, and interpreted. Vast collections of manuscripts and rare books sit in the archives and libraries in Kyrgyzstan. They comprise manuscripts of the Kyrgyz oral tradition in a variety of genres, and ethnographic documents. Once enjoying the post-Soviet rethinking and reexamination in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they became a part of the academic scholarship. However, many documents are to be explored and made publicly accessible.

The Museum of Rare Books is a part of the Issyk-Kul Oblast Library, the oldest public library in the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan founded in 1902. The collection includes about 700 items, part of them concerned with central Asian subjects - in particular, the Semirechenskaia Oblast, the most easterly part of Russian Turkestan. The Museum's collection has been locked from researchers due to the lack of public information about it, and by being located far from the modern capital.

Earlier initiatives to publicize the collection included partial digitization and public online access with the help of international assistance.¹ However, such projects lacked sustainability and the issues of maintaining online access, preservation, and proper discoverability remain.

The paper provides a general overview of the collection of early printed books in Kyrgyzstan, intends to draw attention to the wealth of underexplored material, and underlines the need for future collaboration of local organizations with international partners to conserve and study such collections.

Museum of Rare Books at Issyk Kul Oblast Library

The Museum of Rare Books traces its beginning to the foundation of the first public library in Kyrgyzstan, currently the Issyk-Kul Oblast Library. The history of the library is connected to Russian colonial politics in the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan. The town of Karakol was founded in 1869 as one of the Russian strongholds for China in the newly annexed territories in Semirech'ie (Semirechenskaia Oblast). Located in the most easterly part of Russian Turkestan, Karakol was meant to be the military, administrative, and cultural center on the way from Chui Valley to Kashgar.

The idea of establishing a library in Karakol was supported by Petr Kozlov² and Vsevolod Roborovskii,³ fellow travelers and followers of Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalskii,⁴ as the act of remembrance of the latter. It took several years before

¹ *Rare Books of Kyrgyzstan* project funded through Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation Program of the U.S. Department of State, URL: <https://rarebooks.bik.net.kg> and

² Petr Kuzmich Kozlov (1863–1935) was a Russian traveler, ethnographer, and explorer of Central Asia.

³ Vsevolod Ivanovich Roborovsky (1856-1910) was a colonel of the Russian Imperial Army, explorer of Central Asia.

⁴ Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalskii (1839-1888) was a Russian traveler, geographer and naturalist, honorary member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. He undertook several expeditions to Central Asia. After his death, the city of Karkaol was renamed Przhevalskii in the periods of 1889-1922 and 1939-1992.

the needed funds were collected and the library was officially opened in 1902 by Nikolai Matveevitch Barsov, a Russian medical doctor and the first city administrator of Karakol. The library collection was crowdsourced by donations from local scholars and educators.

In 1990, early printed and rare books were selected from the general library holdings and added into a distinct collection, which then was turned into the Museum of Rare Books.

Overview of the Museum Collection

Currently, the Museum collection contains some 720 items, most of which are in Russian. There are few books in Arabic script. The collection is organized according to the original classification scheme developed in Soviet times. Seven main sections are Marxism - Leninism; Natural Sciences; Technical Sciences; Agriculture and Forestry; Health and Medicine; Social Sciences and Humanities; Literature of the Universal Content.

In December 2022, the team of librarians, including the author of this paper, had a field trip to Karakol to examine the museum collection. We surveyed some 223 items in the following categories: 39 items in Natural Sciences; 31 items in Agriculture and Forestry; 148 items in Social Sciences and Humanities; and 5 items in Literature of the Universal Content. Our attention was drawn to the books on Semirechenskaia Oblast, the eastern part of Russian Turkestan. We identified 33 items dealing with various aspects of Semirech'ie including geography, climate, nature, and agriculture, as well as annual data and reports. Twenty - three items were selected for this overview.

The publication dates of the selected books range from the late nineteenth to early twentieth-century covering. The oldest item is *Technicheski'ie proizvodstva Turkestanskogo kraia* (Technical production in Turkestan region) by M. I. Brodovskii published in St. Petersburg in 1875 and describing technical production in the area, including cotton production, sericulture, leather, saddlery, sleigh, pottery and iron production (# 6T38). The publication is a 99-page appendix to the bigger volume on production in Turkestan (not present in the Museum), published by the special order of General Konstantin Petrovich fon Kauffman, who led the Russian colonization of the regions of Central Asia.

A significant item is *Kashgari'ia i perevaly Tian-Shania* (Kashgariya and Tien-Shan passes) by Nikolai L'vovich Zeland published in 1888 in Omsk (# 91347). Zeland, a Russian military doctor, German by origin, worked in Turkestan for many years and was known for his travel in the region, resulting in a series of publications. The book provides one of the first anthropological and physiological characteristics of the Uighur ethnicity in Russian academic literature.

Ocherki o faune Turkestana na osnovani'ii materiala, sobrannogo D. D. Pedashenko (Essays on the fauna of Turkestan based on the materials collected by D.D. Pedashenko) published in 1908 in Yur'iev (# 58П24) contains the Russian translation and the French text on zoological overview of *Amphipoda specimen* by Ed. Chevreux of Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris.

Turkestan by I. I. Geier, published in 1909 in Tashkent, provides detailed information and statistical data on Turkestan (#91Г29). This 2nd edition of the book includes an additional article on Semirechenskaya Oblast with data on geography, population, agriculture, livestock, trade, medicine, and public education. Another article describes the Varnenski *uiezd* and the city of Verniy.

Among the valuable holdings of the Museum is *Kaufmanskii sbornik* (Kaufman collection, published in memory of 25 years that have elapsed since the death of the conqueror and organizer of the Turkestan region, General Adjutant K. P. von Kaufman) published in 1910 in Moscow (# K921171). Marginalia's note defines the book as a "bibliographic rarity" containing "a brief overview of the colonization of the Turkestan region by the Tsarist government". Items of interest include articles on the Khivan campaign of 1873 by V. Bartold; on Kyrgyz melodies by G. I. Gizler; and some family customs of the Kyrgyz of Northern *uiezd* of Syr - Dar'inskaya oblast' by N. Kalmakova.

A series of annual reports include 1901, 1905, and 1907 *Obzor Semirechenskoy oblasti* (Overview of Semirechenskaia oblast) published (# 910-13); *Otchet po Semirechenskomu oblastnomu statisticheskomu komitetu za 1905 god* (1905 Report of Statistical Committee of Semirechenskaia oblast) published in Verniy (# 9H42), both published in Verniy. The items deal with administrative records and statistical data on the main aspects of public administration. Another two items containing annual reports, statistics, and directories of public institutions are *Pam'iatnaia knizhka Semirechenskoy oblasti na 1898 god* (Memorial book of Semirechenskaia oblast of 1898) (# 91K52) and *Pam'iatnaia knizhka and adres kalendar' Semirechenskoy oblasti na 1900* (Memorial book and directory of Semirechenskaia oblast of 1900) (# 91K53) published both published in Verniy.

Soviet-era items include *Turkestan and sopredelnyie strany: Bukhara, Kashgar, Afghanistan, Persiia, Khiva* (Turkestan and nearby countries: Bukhara, Kashgar, Afghanistan, Persia, Khiva) edited by Yu. Rusteiko and P. M. Voitik published in 1919 in Samara (# 91C89).

The locally published items are represented by *Poezdki po Semirech'iu: zagornaia chast' b. Pishpekskogo uiezda i iugo-zapadnaia chast' b. Prezheval'skogo uiezda* (Trips to Semirech'ie: behind the mountains of former Pishpekskiĭ uiezd and southwestern part of former Prezheval'skiĭ uiezd) by V. N. Shnitnikov published in 1930 in Frunze by the Scientific- Research Institute of Local Studies (# 91Ш76). The book contains a collection of essays, field notes, drawings, and sketches of expeditions in the Semirechenskaia oblast, undertaken in the period from 1908 to 1917.

Among the items dealing with the geography of Turkestan there are three textbooks. *Geografia Turkestan'skogo kraia* (Geography of Turkestan region) by N. V. Ostroumov, published in St. Petersburg in 1886 provides general information on the geography of the region and describes the resettlement of Russian in Central Asia (# 91O79). The book's title page has a stamp of *Karakolsko'ie dvukhklassnoe uchili shche* (Karakol city two-class school), which was organized in 1879 based on the general one-class school in the city. Such schools, following a 5 or 6-year primary curriculum, were widely opened in the territory of Turkestan following the 1864 decree of the Ministry of Public Education.

Another textbook, published in 1887 in Moscow, is *Rossi'ia glazami puteshestvennikov i uchenym issledovani'iam/ Tom IV. Turkestanskii krai* (Russia through the eyes of travelers and scientists. Volume IV on Turkestan region) by D. D. Semienov (# 91C29). The book contains field essays with geographic and historical information on Turkestan with a focus on Russia's role in the area. Some sections of the book provide information on the Kyrgyz people in Pamir, the Turkmen people, and Russian resettlers.

The third textbook is a 1920s *Turkestan: elementarniy kurs geografii* (Turkestan: elementary course of geography) by an unknown author (# 20B20). The 52-page book, intended for primary school students, provides an overview of the region, including the Caspian sea area, administrative division, production, and agriculture.

Several books deal with climate, farming, livestock melioration, and other aspects of agriculture. These are *Klimaticheskii ocherk Semirechenskoy oblasti* (Overview of the climate of Semirechenskaia oblast') by V. Mazurenko published in 1914 in Verniy (# 91M12); *Osnovy kultury Amerikanskogo khlopchatnika v Turkestanskom kraie* (Basis for a crop of the American cotton plant in Turkestan region) by A. Vilkins published in 1889 in Tashkent (# 63B46); *Otchet po proizvodennomu v 1914 godu obledovani'iu zhivotnovodstva v Pishpekskom uezde Semirechenskoi oblasti* (Report on the 1914 livestock survey in Pishpekskiĭ uезд of Semirechenskaia oblast) by L. F. Bezvuglyĭ published in 1916 in Petrograd (# 63O88); Issue #1 (1915) of *Semirech'ie: selskokhoz'iastvennyi i melioratsionnyi zhurnal* (Semirechie: Agricultural and melioration journal, issue #1, 1915) published in Verniy (# 63C29); *Bolezni kul'turnykh rastenii v Turkestanskom kraie po nabliudeniim 1912 goda* (Diseases of cultivated plants in Turkestan region upon observations of 1912) published in 1913 in Tashkent (# 63E39); *Semirech'ie, 1915* (Semirech'ie 1915) (# 9C30). The latter lacks the title page, so the information on the place and date of publication is not available.

The majority of the items in the collection dealing with Semirech'ie have been digitized by the Issyk-Kul Oblast Library. Some of the items are available in digital format through electronic libraries in Russia. Although the collection is not wide in scope, it is yet considered distinctive in its history and organization. Serving as the basis for the first public library in the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan, the collection well depicts the patterns of knowledge creation in the colonial past.

Conclusion

The overview reveals much of the historic context which impacted the creation, organization, and current state of the collections. The origins of the collection is deeply connected to knowledge-creation strategies and practices in the periphery of Imperial Russia and to a drive for Kyrgyz-language materials for academic and political purposes in the Soviet era. While offering valuable and rare content, the Museum of Rare Books also presents interest in the study of the historic, cultural, and social context behind its collections.

The Museum of Rare Books is among the few institutions dealing with collecting, preserving, and studying the historic and cultural heritage of the country. Unfortunately, the lack sustainability in properly maintaining their collections and making them available to greater audiences. In order to preserve and research these collections, local institutions need to work with various partners to ensure the

discoverability of the materials, dissemination of research results, and availability of needed funding.

References

Академическая наука Киргизстана: История и проблемы. Фрунзе, 1990.

Алпатов, Ковпик – Алпатов С.В., Ковпик В.А. Принципы построения полнотекстовой базы данных по фольклорным материалам
<http://www.philol.msu.ru/~folk/files/lib/SAVUSH99.doc>

Балашев Н.И. Туркестан: элементарный курс географии для учащихся школ 1-й ступени. – [Б.м.: б.и.], 1920.

Барбарин И. Болезни культурных растений в Туркестанском крае по наблюдениям в 1912 году. Отд. отт. из журнала «Туркестанское сельское хозяйство». – Ташкент: Типография при канц. Турк. Ген.-Губ., 1913.

Безвуглый Л. Ф. Отчет по произведенному в 1914 году обследованию животноводства: в Пишпекском уезде, Семиреченской области. – Петроград, 1916.

Вилькинс А. Основы культуры американского хлопчатника въ Туркестанкомъ краѣ. – Ташкент: Типо-литографія С. И. Лахтина, 1889.

Воротникова В.С. (Чуйскіе переселенческіе участки въ Пишпекском уезде Семирѣченской области.

Гейер И.И. Туркестан. – Изд. 2-е, испр. и доп. – Ташкент: Типография Туркестанского Т-ва печатного дела, 1909.

Зеланд Н.Д. Кашгарія и перевалы Тянь-Шаня. Путевыя записки Н. Зеланда. – Омскъ.: Типогр. окружн. штаба, 1888.

Кауфманский сборник, изданный в память 25 лет, истекших со дня смерти покорителя и устроителя Туркестанского края генерал-адъютанта К.П. фон-Кауфмана 1-гою. – М: Типолитография Т-ва И.Н. Кушнеров и Ко., 1910.

Книжные памятники Кыргызстана. / Пер. К.К. Кушубеков. – Б.: «St. Art Ltd», 2010. – 120 с.: ил. Текст на кырг., рус., англ. яз.]. (Кыргызстандын китеп мурастары. / Literary Monuments of Kyrgyzstan

Книжные памятники Кыргызстана. / Пер. К.К. Кушубеков. – Б.: «St. Art Ltd», 2010. – 120 с.: ил. Текст на кырг., рус., англ. яз.

Мазуренко В. Климатический очерк Семиреченской области: отчет о метеорологических наблюдениях с 1906 по 1914 гг. – Верный: Типография М.И. Обухова, 1914.

Масальский В.И. Россия. Полное географическое описание нашего отечества: настольная и дорожная книга. Е.19. Туркестанский край/ под ред. В.П. Семенова-Тянь-Шанского; сост. князь В.И. Масальский. – СПб. Изд. Ф.Ф. Девриена, 1913.

Обзор Семиреченской области за 1907 год (Приложение ко всеподданнейшему отчету). – Верный: Типография Семиреченского Областного Правления, 1908.

Остроумов Н.В. География Туркестанского края (родиноведение) / Н.В. Остроумов. – СПб.: Типография В.С. Балашева, 1886.

Педашенко Д.Д. Очерки фауны Туркестана на основании материала, собранного Д.Д. Педашенко, 1904–1906 гг. – Юрьев: Типография К.К. Маттисена, 1908.

Суздальцев А. Туркестан и сопредельные страны (Бухара, Кашгар, Афганистан, Персия и Хива). Под редакцией Ю. Ю. Рустейко и П. М. Войтик. Издание Политотдела Туркфронта/ А. Суздальцев. – Самара: Типография Политотдела Туркфронта, 1919.