

OKSANA N. POLYANSKAYA

**Professor Władysław L. Kotwicz  
and the Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research**

**Abstract**

Paper depicts Władysław Kotwicz's scholarly work including his expedition to Mongolia in 1912 and his connection with the Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research.

**Keywords:** W. Kotwicz, St. Petersburg University, Mongolian studies, Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research

Władysław Kotwicz (in Russian Vladislav Ludvigovich Kotvich, 1872–1944) is a well-known specialist in Mongolian, Manchu and Turkic, i.e. Altaic languages. He trained a number of eminent Orientalists including B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, S.A. Kozin, M. Lewicki (Poland) and Ts.D. Nominkhanov (Kalmykia). Having studied Józef Kowalewski's (Osip Mikhailovich Kovalevskiy, 1801–1878) publications on Mongolian philology, history and ethnography, Kotwicz considered himself to be his follower. He noted<sup>1</sup> that if later it was regarded that he (Kotwicz) had laid the foundations of Oriental science and in this way showed Russia its scientific approach, it should be known that he was obliged to the Polish Orientalist Józef Kowalewski for his development, scientific views and original ideas about national identity and research. Kowalewski's words not to bow before authority seeking for the truth, to criticize *sine ira et studio* the accomplished or told facts, without presupposing any problem being solved forever, sank deep into his mind and guided all his sympathies and antipathies.

Władysław Kotwicz received all-round education within the walls of Saint Petersburg University. Leading Russian Orientalists taught him subjects of their speciality:

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<sup>1</sup> Private Archive of Kotwicz at the Archive of Science of PAN and PAU in Cracow, K III-19, file no 84.

K.F. Golstunsky and A.M. Pozdneev gave him lessons in the Mongolian language; S.M. Georgievsky and D.A. Peshchurov educated him in Chinese and Manchu; V.P. Vasiliev – in history of Buddhism; I.N. Berezin and V.D. Smirnov taught him Turkic. After graduation from the university, Kotwicz remained there to prepare for Professor's rank. In 1900 he became privat-docent at Saint Petersburg University and started to teach Mongolian and Manchu languages up to the reorganization of the Faculty of Oriental Languages into the Faculty of Social Sciences (1919). He then worked actively to organize Petersburg Institute of Living Oriental Languages and became its director. He left to Poland in late 1923 to work at the John Casimir University in Lvov.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first two Oriental associations were set up in Russia: Imperial Society of Oriental Studies (1900) and Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research (1903). Władysław Kotwicz was the member of the latter and collaborated fruitfully with it, having organized several expeditions to study Mongolian peoples. A series of international events had preceded the organization of the Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research (RCCEAR). At the world orientalist congresses in Rome (1899) and Hamburg (1902) resolutions were adopted to establish special committees in European countries to investigate a large region, including the territories of Asian Russia, the Far East, Turkestan province, lands of today's Kazakhstan, Siberia and its nearest neighbors, ultimately China and Mongolia.<sup>3</sup> International Association for Central and East Asia Investigation in historical, archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic aspects was established. The Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research, founded in 1903 in St. Petersburg after ratification of the Charter prepared by the Russian scientists in Hamburg, became the leading division of this organization.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Russian Committee, created as a part of this "international union", was a unique association of Russian scientists maintaining close international scientific connections; it was not included into any Russian ministries or departments connected with science and education. The only ministry, to which the Committee reported, mainly about foreign business trips of its members, was Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which promoted the efficient organization of research expeditions to foreign countries of the East. The Director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) - Orientalist, academician Vasily Vasilyevich Radlov (Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff ) was appointed as the head of the Russian Committee, and Vasily Vladimirovich Bartold (or Wilhelm Barthold) and Lev Yakovlevich Sternberg were elected as secretaries of RCRIEA. The members of the committee were mainly Orientalists: the mentioned above V. Radlov, V. Bartold, L. Sternberg, and also F.I. Shcherbatskoi (Th. Stcherbatsky), P.S. Popov, I.Ya. Korostovets, W.L. Kotwicz. More eminent specialists in Mongolian studies, such as A.D. Rudnev, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, A.M. Pozdneev joined it later. All scholars represented different Russian organizations: Academy of Sciences, Petersburg University, its Faculty of Oriental

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<sup>2</sup> See Tulisow1986.

<sup>3</sup> IRK 1903, No 1, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 7–9, 10–12.

Languages, and a number of ministries: of National Education, Finance, Foreign Affairs, War Department, and also such scientific organizations as Russian Geographical and Archaeological Societies and Archaeological Commission.

From the first days of its activity, the Committee developed large-scale work studying Asian peoples in historical, ethnographic and linguistic aspects. The main way to achieve these aims were expeditions which allowed, as it was proved within the time, to study Oriental languages and to obtain authentic information, to find and preserve invaluable copies of manuscripts and to write down folklore material. In this way, the Committee was the successor of the Russian scientific school of Oriental studies and its traditions. The Committee organized expeditions to Tibet, Mongolia, East Turkestan, India, China, Korea, Japan, Siberia and Central Asia, all of them of great value.<sup>5</sup>

Mongolia and its adjacent areas played important role in the Russian Committee research due to their current political developments. All events at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could result in loss of historical values and consequently their loss for science; at the same time, 1911 and 1912 were marked with proclamation of sovereignty of Khalkha. These factors promoted the work of Russian expeditions: Russia became a friendly state for independent Northern Mongolia, and these circumstances intensified field research.

The period from 1908 to 1912 is marked with active work of the Russian Committee specialists in Mongolian Studies: W. Kotwicz, A. Rudnev, B. Vladimirtsov who cooperated fruitfully and directed activity of Buryat researchers, Tsyben Zhamtsarano and B. Baradiyn who became recognized experts in Mongolian languages. With the approval and financial support of the Committee Ts. Zhamtsarano and B. Baradiyn made numerous trips to Transbaikalian Buryats, as well as to Mongolia and Tibet. In 1910 B. Baradiyn continued to study life of Buddhist monasteries in Transbaikalia, and Ts. Zhamtsarano – national literature of Khori Buryats. At the end of 1909, Ts. Zhamtsarano was sent from Transbaikalia to Southeast Mongolia to collect samples of national literature and materials on dialectology.<sup>6</sup> During his stay in the Southern Mongolia, he ordered copies of some rare manuscripts to be made, and later they began to arrive to Petersburg. Owing to the fact, a new copy of Sagang Sechen's chronicle appeared; in connection with this, W. Kotwicz asked to compensate copyists' work with 100 rubles.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of 1911, Ts. Zhamtsarano arrived in St. Petersburg to work with the materials collected in Mongolia and Transbaikalia. The Committee collected his manuscripts and notes from the previous trips to the mentioned regions in the capital and later delivered them for storage in the collections of the Asian Museum.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nazirova 1992; IRK, 1912, Vyp. II., No 1, pp. 14–16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, No 2, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 1912, Vyp. II., No1, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Asiatic Museum (later Oriental Studies Institute, the Leningrad Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, nowadays Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences) – a place of concentration of the richest Russian collections on Oriental studies - manuscripts, books, blockprints, coins, etc.

W. Kotwicz and A. Rudnev addressed the Committee to finance Ts. Zhamtsarano's work in St. Petersburg. They asked for "the sum of 900 rubles (75 rubles a month from January for the current year of 1911) which would give him the chance to live in Petersburg and to concentrate on the arrangement of the stated above materials and their preparation for printing".<sup>9</sup> Władysław Kotwicz summing up Ts. Zhamtsarano's research activity within scientific programs of the Russian Committee, highly appreciated his work. To elicit "unusual wealth of national creativity" W. Kotwicz and A. Rudnev organized the work of Buryat students D. Rinchino, B. Vampilun and Kalmyk Naha Ochirov at St. Petersburg University, asking Committee to support their request. Scientists of the Committee used any possibility, acquaintance, even long-distance friendship to collect various materials containing folklore and ethnographical material of the Mongols. In 1909, W. Kotwicz initiated contact with Alexey Vasilyevich Burdukov – a representative of Russian merchant class in Northwest Mongolia. Burdukov had traded in the country of the Dörbet among underexplored generation of Bayids. Kotwicz reported to the Russian Committee that due to Burdukov's long stay among the Dörbet, he had learnt their language, studied local conditions and established strong links there that could give him a chance to collect materials easier than anyone. Kotwicz emphasized that Alexey Vasilyevich willingly and generously responded to his request to deliver some data. Władysław Kotwicz also asked the Committee to support the merchant in his further research according to his (Kotwicz's) instructions.<sup>10</sup> Since then, actually, A.V. Burdukov's<sup>11</sup> formation as a scholar began. Under W. Kotwicz's guidance he collected folklore samples, rare manuscripts and was engaged in exploring the Eastern languages. For his research work in Mongolia in 1911 the Russian Geographical Society<sup>12</sup> awarded him a minor silver medal.

In 1912, Władysław Kotwicz with the support of RCCEAR made an academic trip to one of the most interesting places in Mongolia – the Orkhon valley which is famous for archaeological artifacts and early inscriptions. He stayed in Mongolia for about three months and during this short time period he did a large amount of work though according to himself, he "did a little(...) because of lack of time". In general, he was satisfied with the trip to Mongolia; it was his unique meeting with the country he was so much interested in. Kotwicz had to admit that he had very little time – from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June until the 25<sup>th</sup> of August. Therefore, he decided to make the way [at once] through Urga to Orkhon to visit Erdeni-Dzu and ruins of ancient cities, like Khara Balgasun – the places where

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, No 2, pp. 36–38.

<sup>10</sup> Vasilkov, Sorokina 2003, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Burdukov Alexey Vasilyevich (1883–1943) was born in the Tobolsk province, in a rural family. As a boy he was in the service of a merchant in Mongolia; over time he became a manager of a trading post. He studied the Mongolian language and was interested in traditional culture of Mongols. Since 1923 he lived in Irkutsk and was a member of the East Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society. In 1927, he moved to Leningrad to profess in leading Oriental centers, teaching the Mongolian language. He was arrested several times and finally was sentenced to death in 1941. The punishment was replaced in the same year with 10 years of labor camp. He was sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> labor camp of Sibltag in the Taiga area where he died in March, 1943.

<sup>12</sup> St. Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SPF ARAN), F. 761, op. 2, d. 20, p. 41.

there supposedly was the capital of the first Mongolian emperors of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and other older monuments dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. During the trip, he visited Urga, Central and Western Mongolia aimaks, met representatives of new administration and clergy and different social groups, studied thoroughly life and manners of the local people, administrative structure and social and public relations in the country.<sup>13</sup>

Władysław Kotwicz's expedition, in its turn, took place due to support of Ts. Zhamtsarano, B. Baradiyn, and A. Burdukov working in Mongolia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is documented in rich correspondence between the scientists, in which are reflected trip routes and plans connected with it.<sup>14</sup> W. Kotwicz's travel to Mongolia resulted in several scholarly articles<sup>15</sup> and his monograph *Synopsis of history and modern political position of Mongolia*, published in St. Petersburg in 1914. In the next years, he constantly supplemented the materials acquired during his academic trip due to his wide range of acquaintances, among scientists and politicians. He was particularly interested in the events which happened in Mongolia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Proclamation of the independent Mongolian state was objectively a progressive phenomenon in the history of the country. Mongolia entered negotiations with Russia: the first official Mongolian delegation was sent in 1911, the second – in 1912. Władysław Kotwicz being a scholar and a government official of Russia (he worked in the Ministry of Finance and entered the Russian Committee as its representative) was not only in touch with all these events, but also helped with solving state-to-state problems.

Thus, the Russian Committee of Central and East Asia Research in the historical, archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic relations for two decades (1903–1923) was the coordinating center of Oriental studies in Russia as it provided effective cooperation of many leading research centers in the capital as well as regionally. Studies of Mongolian languages was one of the top priority goals of the Committee as well as its research work owing to the activity of leading scientists of Russia, specialists in this field: A.M. Pozdneev, W.L. Kotwicz, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, A.D. Rudnev, B.B. Baradiyn, Ts.Zh. Zhamtsarano, A.V. Burdukov, etc. They made scholarly expeditions to study Mongolian people, as well as involved native intellectuals in this work. These people in their turn, due to interaction with leading scientific centers of Petersburg, became recognized scientists. Besides, students of Petersburg University (a well known centre for Oriental studies) were involved in research work of the Committee. Coming back to their home, whether it was Transbaikalia, Irkutsk or Astrakhan provinces they collected valuable materials also under the guidance of the Committee. In this regard, the Russian Committee was the recipient and the successor of the Russian Oriental school. The school at the very beginning of its organization set a task of cooperation with indigenous peoples of the eastern Russian areas, which had a great effect and led to weighty scientific results. In many respects, the

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<sup>13</sup> As detailed in Polyanskaya 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. See also: Dashdavaa, Tsolmon, Naranjargal, Tsozolmaa 2011 and Tulisow 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Tulisow 2012, op. cit., pp. 128–129.

success of all these actions depended on dedication of the Committee researchers such as Władysław Kotwicz and his colleagues involved in the Mongolian Studies.

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