

Imperial Power and Violence in Central Asia through the 19th Century Western Travelogues

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Since the nineteenth century, travel writing has been a significant source for the discussion and analysis of key issues in the imperial project. More informed discourses pertaining to travel writing emerged already in the aftermath of World War II. More recently, however, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Mary Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992), and David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993), among others, have been encouraging travel writing studies specialists to venture beyond simple judgments of travelers' experiences and move toward a consideration of the larger sociopolitical and socio-cultural impacts of paradigms that appear in the travel narratives. As part of the so-called Great Game 1 rivalry between Russia and Great Britain in Central Asia, the Western and Russian travelers explored the region's physical, economic, material and cultural dimensions, as well as gathered information for political and military purposes. They also participated in the acquisition of artifacts and other archaeological and natural objects, some, ultimately, were to be displayed in museums. In Foucault's terms, knowledge in the hands of travelers could have served as power by which they promoted their own interests, be they personal, academic, or catering to geopolitical agendas (Foucault, 2008, p. 22). This kind of power also helped travelers to advance the economic and political trajectories of colonialism and imperialism in subaltern regions.

This article discusses the imperial dominance and violence that were described or encouraged by Western travelers in the "contact zone", to use Mary Pratt's designation emphasizing English-language travel writing about Central Asia from the 1870s through the turn of the century (with some reference to earlier texts, from 1820s-60s).