
“Vtoroi” i “Tretii” al’bomy o. Iakinfa (N.Ya. Bichurina) [The “Second” and “Third” Albums of Fr. Iakinf (N.Ya. Bichurin)] / Introduction by Academician V.S. Miasnikov and O.V. Vassilieva. Publication by O.V. Vassilieva — St. Petersburg: National Library of Russia, 2012. — 56 pp. + 58 pp. of facsimiles (Nontraditional sources on the history of China during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)). ISBN 978-5-8192-0438-2.

The albums published by Vladimir Miasnikov and Olga Vassilieva form part of the legacy of the outstanding Russian sinologist Father Iakinf (Nikita Yakovlevich Bichurin, 1777–1853) and show a hitherto unknown side of his talents as an artist and ethnographer.

These previously unpublished sources from the collection of the National Library of Russia appeared in the series “Nontraditional sources on the history of China during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)”. The “First Album” by Fr. Iakinf was published in the same series in 2010 under the title “On the Peoples Who Live along the Amur River from the Ussuri River to its Outlet, along the Shore of the Eastern Sea from Korea to the Russian Border and on the Islands along this Shore” (The “First Album” by Fr. Iakinf / N.Ya. Bichurin. A Study and Commentary. St. Petersburg: National Library of Russia, 2010). In spite of its small print-run, that publication aroused great interest among Russian and Chinese scholars and so a joint publication of drawings from Fr. Iakinf’s “Second” and “Third” albums was an expected and necessary step in the introduction of the most famous 19th c. Russian Sinologist’s diverse legacy to the world.

The discovery of such valuable materials, which were previously considered not to be of academic interest, is an outstanding fact in itself and a great contribution to Sinological studies and the history of scholarship. The publishers have carried out extensive and thorough archival researches. Since the 1930s much attention has been paid to Fr. Iakinf himself, his life and scholarly activities, and also to the importance of his works for Sinology. Indeed, in the introduction Vladimir Miasnikov justly

writes about the existence of a separate discipline of “Bichurin studies” (p. 10). Many scholars have studied the archives and have published many documents concerning Bichurin’s activities, thus the introduction of any new document by the man himself is an important event. In a supplement to his article “Documents on Fr. Iakinf’s life in China and on the School of the Chinese Language in Kiakhta”, Miasnikov included nine interesting sources from the Russian State Historical Archives that give a fresh insight on many events in the history of Russian Sinology (pp. 23–38). The importance of this publication is that it provides the complete texts (not abstracts), which allows them to be studied and used in further research.

Miasnikov’s introduction “The Publication of the Written Legacy and Archival Materials of N.Ya. Bichurin (Fr. Iakinf)” expounds the importance of Fr. Iakinf’s studies for Russian and world Sinology. Up to now, little has been known in the West about the history of Sinology in Russia. A comparison of the writings of Fr. Iakinf and Robert Morrison has clearly shown that the Russian Sinologist’s works met the main expectations of his time, and in scale and number exceeded the output of any of his contemporaries. To overcome the prevailing opinion (see V.P. Buzeskul’s assessment on p. 14), we should continue publication of works by Bichurin still in the archives. Actually, Miasnikov’s article does propose a plan and sequence for their introduction to the scholarly community.

Olga Vassilieva’s contribution “The Ethnographic Albums of Fr. Iakinf (N.Ya. Bichurin)” presents a detailed bibliographical study of these sources, analyses their history, contents and scientific importance. It proves the authorship of the drawings and captions; the artistic and paleographic studies are made at a high scholarly level with references to archival documents. The article offers a new view of researchers, political leaders, public officials, travelers and people from artistic circles, who influenced the development of Sinology in Russia. The published documents have an important value for the history of Chinese library collections in Russia.

The published albums prove that at an early stage Russian Sinologists were deeply interested in the life of the peoples who inhabit China and pictorially recorded their outward appearance and everyday life. The “Second” and “Third” Albums of Fr. Iakinf from the collection of the National Library of Russia are truly unique. There are no comparable sources in other collections worldwide. Thus publication of these albums is necessary and of current scholarly interest. From now on, the material in them is accessible to the general public and future multidisciplinary studies.

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