

## MODERN FRENCH NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTERS FOR THE STUDY OF CENTRAL ASIA: THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE IRANIAN WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

This article highlights the activities of the French national research centers operating in France to study the Timurid East. The history of the formation of the Center for Iranian Peace Studies is briefly given. It is supplemented by information about the scientific career of Ms. Maria Szuppe - director of the CERMI of CNRS

**Keywords:** French oriental studies, Central Asia, Timurid legacies, CNRS, CERMI

### INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has always attracted the attention of Europeans, especially French Orientalists. For years it was the research platform for historians, politicians, literary critics and other disciplines. However, Central Asia, which for a century and a half became a colony of the Russian Empire, was excluded from external international relations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former Soviet republics of Central Asia - Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - declared their political independence and became equal members of the global community. Closed countries were opening up. Independence was undoubtedly a political event of world historical significance. And so, in 1993, the first French scientific institution was created in Tashkent - the French Institute for Central Asian Studies, IFÉAC, and Pierre Chuvin was its first director. In addition to IFÉAC, there are several research centers for the study of Central Asia in France, such as the Chaîre de Collège de France: Etudes de l'Histoire et cultures de l'Asie centrale préislamique, CETOBaC-EHESS, CeRMI, SEECHAC and etc...

The sphere of interest of French orientalist covers chronologically the entire history of the region from antiquity to modern times, and thematically all areas: history, archaeology, ethnography, geography, religion, literature, politics, etc., characterized by careful research, objectivity of scientific approach and lack of politicization of historical research. Each year, in these new states, they have witnessed the rehabilitation of several large historical cities (Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, Turkestan, Osh), great historical figures (Ulugh Beg, Tamerlane, Avicenna), literary figures ('Ali Shīr Navā'ī, Chulpān, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Fītrat, 'Abd Allāh Qādirī, Choulpan) and nuns (Ahmad Yasavi, Bahā' al-dīn Naqshband), all condemned a few years ago by the former power. During thirty years they discovered many new facts in all the disciplines of the social sciences.

### MATERIALS

The material for research in this article is the scientific works of modern French orientalist on Central Asia and Iran. The works of Uzbek specialists in French oriental studies are also analyzed.

## METHODS

The researched theme of the herd is covered on the basis of the methods of component, comparative-historical and comparative-typological analyses.

## RESULTS

As a result of a comprehensive analysis of the research and translation activities of specialists in the study of Central Asia, which was formed in French oriental studies, for the first time the scientific views of orientalist are revealed, providing for a true coverage of the literary process in Central Asia.

The practical results of the research can be used: to cover the history of international relations, as well as in monographic studies on the study of French oriental studies. The reliability of the results of the study is ensured by the use of fully accessible information, indicating their sources.

## DISCUSSION

Each of the above institutions has its own research areas and a rich library. The research carried out by the members of the Center for Research on the Iranian World (CeRMI) is situated in the various fields relating to the human and social sciences – study of languages, texts and literatures, history, religions, contemporary societies –, and concerns a territory geographical area ranging from the Near East to Central Asia, wherever Iranian cultures have been present during different historical periods, from Antiquity to the present day.

The Center for Research on the Iranian World, the CeRMI, is a UMR of the CNRS, whose joint university partners are Inalco, the Sorbonne Nouvelle University and the Graduate School of Practical Studies (ÉPHE). It is indeed a research laboratory that is both very young, because it was restructured in 2020, and very old, because it is the direct heir of the laboratory founded in 1995 under the name of "Iranian World", and directed at the time by Bernard Hourcade, geographer, and now emeritus director of research at the CNRS. The CeRMI inherits a very long history which reflects the history of Iranian studies in France. It was at the end of the 1940s that Gilbert Lazard, who died in 2018, then professor of Languages 'O, started with the Iranologists, Émile Benveniste, professor at the Collège de France, and Jean de Menasce, professor at the EPHE, to structure the teaching of Iranian studies in France.

UMR 8041 CeRMI is currently directed by Mrs. Maria Szuppe, research director at the CNRS, assisted by the Laboratory Council composed of four researchers and teacher-researchers, an engineer and a representative of doctoral students.

The laboratory has around twenty permanent members (researchers, teacher-researchers, engineers and technicians), around twenty doctoral students, and several non-permanent members (post-docs, researchers and engineers on contract or guests). Its research library, James Darmesteter Library, has been deposited since 2011 at the University Library of Languages and Civilizations (BULAC).

Indeed, the James-Darmesteter Iranian studies library was officially created in 1947. began to form from that time. It then moved to Censier, in the premises of the Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, just after the creation of this university, in the early 1970s. This is how the Persian studies department, directed by Gilbert Lazard, began to form backed by a scientific structure, the Institute of Iranian Studies, the IIEI. The library then developed in an extremely dynamic way,

in particular thanks to regular donations. Then Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, the next director, and after him, Yann Richard, continued its development. CeRMI research laboratory has regularly provided financial support to the library, as has the central library of Paris 3.

The director of the scientific institute, Maria Schuppe, defended her doctoral thesis in 1991 and received permission to conduct scientific research in 2011.

She was a researcher at the CNRS for nearly thirty years, with few interruptions, during a two-year stay at the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC) in Tashkent or guest scientific stays, notably in Cambridge, London or Tokyo. She started working in Strasbourg with the CNRS team, whose researchers studied the Iranian and Turkish worlds, which was a very enriching experience for her. And then she joined the Iran World Cup team in Paris, where she stayed. She works mainly on medieval history and the modern era. In recent years, she has been particularly interested in the dissemination and transmission of scriptures, manuscripts through chains of transmission and transmitters, which are intellectual circles, various reading circles, local and provincial scholars.

Mrs. Maria Szuppe studied different languages initially, including Russian, because I am of Polish origin. As a young student, she was fascinated by these distant worlds that looked so different from her own. Fluency in Russian was decisive and helped him a lot in his research on Central Asia and Afghanistan. To study the history of the countries of this eastern part of the Iranian world, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan or Tajikistan, which belonged to the Soviet bloc, a large number of documentary resources, but also scientific works, are in Russian. And she was lucky at the Oriental Institute of the University of Warsaw to have some fascinating professors who guided and encouraged her on this path. She left for France to follow a master's degree, she stayed there to continue with a DEA, then a doctorate. She then spent my post-doctorate at the University of Cambridge. And if at the time it was rather commonplace in Poland to speak, read and, sometimes, write Russian, she could see that it was a less widespread skill in France and England. This became an asset in her research profile, which allowed her to spend two decisive years at IFEAC in Tashkent where she was a resident researcher a few years after her doctorate. The ties she was able to forge during this period with the research community have endured throughout the years. They allowed them to continue to set up within the CeRMI various collaborations with Uzbek researchers, for example, on research projects, such as BIBLIAC (Bibliothèques et lettrés d'Asie centrale médiévale et moderne (XV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)).

Ms. M.Szuppe's research fields are Medieval and modern history of Iran and Central Asia (Timurids, Safavids, Uzbeks) – Persian-speaking literate space (history of the book, circulation of literate people) – Strategies of dynastic legitimation – Formation of groups of influence – Women and power – Contacts of Safavid Iran with Europe – Codicology of manuscripts from Eastern Iran and Central Asia.

The theme of her first scientific works was the historiography of Timur and the Timurids. About 30 publications were devoted to the study of the cultural and literary heritage of the Timurids. The first scientific work in this direction "L'Héritage timouride: Iran - Asie centrale - Inde, XV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles" covers the reign of the Empire of Tamerlane (Timur) from which one of the most brilliant cultures of the Islamic world originated, which was destined to shine far beyond the century - our 15th century - handed down by history to the dynasty of Timur's descendants to rule in their region. Timurid culture was not only artistic, the remnants of which still shine in

Samarkand, Herat and elsewhere, but also political, economic, religious and, of course, military. Without doubt being the only model, it penetrated deeply into Turkish-Iranian societies, at least until the 19th century. where the last heirs of Timur had to bow before the colonial power, the British in Delhi, the Russians in Bukhara, and Qajar Iran once again reacted to external pressure with a search for national authenticity. Collected in this volume are 20 articles in French and English that explore political patterns, economies, societies and cultures, as well as the artistic influence and memory of the Timurid era.

The volume opens, after a very brief foreword, with two general articles. The first outlines a number of avenues for reflection on the Timurid and post-Timurid origins of modern and contemporary societies and cultures in Central Asia. In doing so, the first invites us to place in the medium term phenomena observable today, including in the sphere of community identities (Subtelny, Maria E., "The Timurid Legacy: A Reaffirmation and a Reassessment", pp. 4479-19). The second of these two introductory contributions draws up a general chronology of the relations between the Shaybanids and their two main neighbors to the south: Safavid Iran and Mughal India (Burton, Audrey, "Descendants and successors of Timour: territorial rivalry between Uzbek, Safavid and Mughal regimes", pp. 23-39).

The first large part of the collection is devoted to Timurid political models, and their transmission to later periods.

The second part bears a title that is ambitious to say the least: economies, societies, cultures.

The third part of the book is devoted to the artistic influence of the Timurid dynasty, based on typological comparisons specific to the history of Timurid art.

In short, CeRMI, under the leadership of Maria Szuppe, made a great contribution to the introduction of Timurid cultural heritage not only in France, but throughout Europe.

### CONCLUTION

So, the article traces the evolution of French Orientalism in that part of it that concerned the development of studies in Central Asia. As noted, in the XX-XXI centuries, the scientific and social thought of France was already familiar with the life of the peoples of Central Asia thanks to the efforts of several scientific centers. And despite the fact that French Orientalism has always been a part of European science, it had its own characteristics, which, at certain stages in the development of this discipline, allowed it to lead in certain areas. After 1991, nothing prevents direct political, cultural, scientific and economic dialogue between France and Central Asia. In this area, the CeRMI, headed by Maria Szuppe, has made an indispensable contribution in all social disciplines.

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