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MINORSKY, Vladimir Fed'orovich

(1877-1966), outstanding Russian scholar of Persian history, historical geography, literature and culture.

MINORSKY, Vladimir Fed'orovich (1877-1966), outstanding Russian scholar of Persian history, historical geography, literature and culture, who worked on a very broad canvas, with contributions of substantial value in the related fields of Turkish, Mongol, Caucasian, Armenian, and Byzantine studies, where they touched on Persian studies in the broad sense. Backed by formidable linguistic expertise in both European and Islamic languages, Minorsky's interests enabled him to range across Eastern Europe to Inner Asia, from the origins of the Rus to Mongol administrative and financial innovations in Eastern Islamic society, on the same scale as such of his predecessors as Josef Marquart/Markwart and Wilhelm Barthold/Vasili Vladimirovich Bart'old (q.v.); but it was the Persian world, in all its richness and distinctiveness of culture, that remained at the heart of his multi-faceted endeavors. Thus he wrote in the Foreword to a collection of his articles (Minorsky, 1964, p. vii), looking back over a life of eighty-six years, that "Despite the variety of problems which have attracted my attention, Iranian subject stand definitely in the forefront of my interests." The lands beyond Iran, from Anatolia to Central Asia and India, interested him as well, for, he continued, "Iran, its history and its literature have ever been linked with the life of many peoples both near and far, and I have often been tempted to trace these contacts and interactions."

Life. Minorsky was born on 5 February 1877 at Korcheva to the northwest of Moscow on the Upper Volga, a town which has now been submerged in the Moscow Sea. He was educated in Moscow, entering Moscow University to study law and, after graduating in 1900, entered the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages with a view to following a diplomatic career in the East and, for the next three years, studied with such scholars as A. E. Krimsky, Baron R. von Stackelberg, and V. V. Miller. During this time, he paid his first visit to Persia and this awakened what was to be a special interest of his, the role of the Kurds within Iranian culture. Edward G. Browne's researches on the Bābis and Bahā'is (qq.v.) had attracted considerable scholarly interest, and the young Minorsky now became intrigued by another esoteric sect of Iran the Ahl-e Haqq (q.v.) or 'Ali-Allāhis in Kurdistan. In 1911 he produced a monograph on this elusive group for which he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Ethnography Section of the Imperial Society of Natural Sciences in Moscow. In 1903 he entered the Imperial Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and between 1904 and 1908 he served in the Tabriz Consulate-General and then the Tehran Legation. Tabriz was at this time a center for the democratic and nationalist enthusiasm embodied in the Constitutional Movement (see CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION), and it was there that he met and began a lifelong friendship with the politician and scholar Sayyed Hasan Taqizāda (q.v.), and, over fifty years later, he was to contribute an article to the latter's Festschrift. In 1908 he was back in Russia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg, and through contacts with the Oriental Section of the Imperial Academy of Science, met