

---

NADEZHDA DUBOVA

## SERGEY DEMIDOV: SKETCHES OF AN ETHNOGRAPHER'S PORTRAIT

*This article, written in the form of an essay, provides the reader an overview of the life and scholarly activities of the oldest specialist in ethnography of the Turkmen, Sergey Mikhailovich Demidov (b. 1936), the author of several monographs and hundreds of articles in academic publications and the media. They cover various aspects of the spiritual and material culture of the Turkmen people, their religious beliefs, sacral scenery, traditional life, occupations, settlements, and dwellings. It also highlights the contribution Demidov made to the investigations of the founder of Turkmen studies, Georgy Ivanovich Karpov, and other scholars who left a noticeable mark in this field of knowledge.*

**Key words:** *Ethnography of Turkmenistan, history of ethnographic science, Bukhara, Moscow University, holy sites, Ashgabat, Turkmen language, ethnolinguistics, Kuban.*

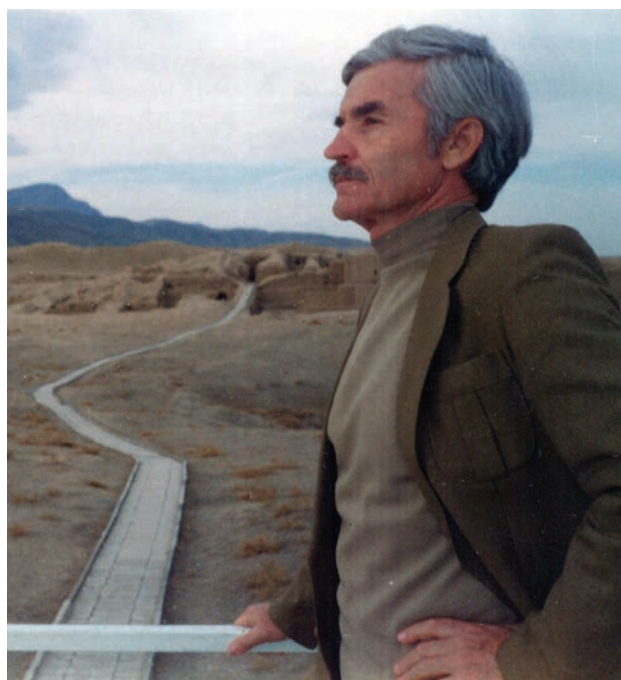
**Citation:** *Nadezhda Dubova (2021) Sergey Demidov: Sketches of an Ethnographer's Portrait, Bulletin of IICAS. Issue 31, 151-159. DOI: 10.34920/1694-5794-2021.151-159*

**Article link:** <https://doi.org/10.34920/1694-5794-2021.151-159>

---

ON JULY 3, 2021, Sergey Mikhailovich Demidov, ethnographer and Turkmenologist, celebrated his 85th birthday. He is a vivid example of classical ethnography, later ousted by ethnology, social, and cultural anthropology that emerged following the “postmodern revolution” of the 1980s, which now almost no longer exists. However, concrete knowledge and the “vanishing scenery” which he managed to capture and preserve for posterity will never be replaced by any new theories and methodologies because its value lies in the truth of fact rather than in false interpretation.

Though I belong to a slightly different generation, we have much in common. Both of us were born in Moscow and our *alma mater* was Lomonosov Moscow State University. In addition, Turkmenistan was the country of our professional interest and longstanding research and a place we both fell in love with as we got to know it. The main difference, perhaps, was Demidov's “business trip” to Ashgabat that dragged on for 38 years; while my work in the country involved only seasonal expeditions and international conferences held in the Turkmen capital since 2000, when Demidov had already returned to Russia. Despite the fact that I began to cooperate with Ashgabat colleagues back in the 1970s, we met quite late. The acquaintance, which soon turned into a real friendship, related to the preparation of the collective monograph *The Turkmen*. This major work which took years and,



Sergei Mikhailovich Demidov. Old Nisa, 1990

was issued in 2016 in the series *Peoples and Cultures* was published by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This period involved active correspondence and meetings

with Demidov who became one of the main authors of our long-suffering work.

At the time, he was already retired, although for any true scholar such a notion is very conditional since people obsessed with science and in love their work continues researching even when working freelance or as a member of a scientific institution. Sergey Mikhailovich was an outstanding social scientist who published several monographs and a number of articles on Turkmen ethnography. Thus, he is a genuine patriarch in this sphere of knowledge both in terms of age and authority.

Already by the beginning of our acquaintance I was curious about how he became an ethnographer and what life circumstances brought along his choice of this rather rare profession. He used to talk about this with enthusiasm. His father served as a soldier, a teacher of the Podolsk Artillery School, and became famous along with this renowned military school for their defense of the Ilyin frontiers on the outskirts of Moscow in the Fall of 1941. Demidov spent his early childhood, which occurred during the period of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), roaming the regions together with his parents where his father was stationed. At the beginning of June that year, Kirghizia (today's Kyrgyz Republic) specifically the town of Tokmok was his first location. This area, attractive for its purple-colored mountains, could be seen on the horizon and he was fascinated by the rapid mountain river – the Chu, that was traversed by horsemen. Demidov recalled, “I remembered the huge figure of a neighbor-hunter in a pointed white felt hat, riding a horse and holding a hunting falcon on a leather mitten.” The geo-political circumstances made the Demidov family depart from Tokmok and return to Podolsk on June 21, 1941. The 5-year-old boy with his entire family, miraculously survived those terrible first months of the War with its bombings and shootings. The terrible environment forced the women and children of the family to evacuate back to Tokmok to live with relatives while the father, as befits an officer, remained to defend the country. For the 75th anniversary of the Victory, Demidov wrote a major paper about the fate of his loved ones and his impressions of those days which will soon be published.

By the end of 1941, those from the Podolsk artillery school who survived on the Ilyin borders were transferred to Bukhara. Demidov also moved there with his family. The young Sergey, therefore, arrived in Bukhara – the former center of Central Asian Islam. The boy was even more impressed by this ancient city which retained its medieval appearance. He lived his childhood in the crooked streets along the mud walls; among mosques and madrasahs with their glazed facades and domes sparkling in the sun; near the half-lit workshops where women embroi-

dered dainty Uzbek skullcaps amid the clatter from the hammers of jewelers and coppersmiths that rang out in his neighborhood.

Bukhara, his residence for about three years, played a special role in his further enthusiasm for the East. It was in this city that he also saw the wonderful film *Nasreddin in Bukhara*, imbued with a delicate national spirit and filmed in 1943 based on Leonid Solovyov's novel *The Troubled One* with the lead role excellently played by Lev Sverdlin. The film, depicted the exact surroundings where several officers' families lived in the former house of some rich merchant or officials with carved ceilings and *tekche* niches in the walls, reminded what Demidov later saw in the Ark – the fortress-museum of the Bukharan *emirs*. It was also in Bukhara that the future ethnographer first learned about another people of Central Asia – the Turkmen. He read the tale by Pyotr Skosyrev, *Your Humble Servant*, about the kind and slightly crafty 19th century poet, Kemin. This fascinating, mature book excited the inquisitive Seryozha, who first learned about the life of the Turkmen village while still unaware of his future destiny.<sup>1</sup>

In 1944, the Demidovs left Bukhara since the Podolsk school was relocated to Tashkent. Sergey completed the first grade and the following year, in the summer of 1945, his father Mikhail Grigoriyevich, a chemist, was discharged from the army for health reasons. He was then sent to Ukraine to work as the director of one of the distilleries in the Kamenets-Podolsk (now Khmelnytsky) region. This factory was located in the large village of Raikovtsy, where Demidov had to go to the Ukrainian school and became acquainted not only with the language of his maternal ancestors – the Zaporozhye (western) Cossacks – but also with a new rural life with its Ukrainian customs and traditions. After studying six out of his ten school grades in the Ukrainian schools, he learned the language well. It became, in fact, a second native language for him and was helpful in his future study of other Slavic languages.

However, the Demidov family did not stay long in Raikovtsy due to the death of his father a year and a half later. His father's passing was brought on while leading the out-of-date factory into one of the leading enterprises of the region, but it cost him his health. He passed away just two weeks prior to his fortieth birthday. For his son, this was quite a shock which he only fully realized much later. From his father he learned honesty and an uncompromising passion for knowledge. According to Sergey Demidov, his father still remains his highest example of decency. “When he was gone,” he recalled, “it was a difficult time, first for my

<sup>1</sup> Ed. note: *Seryozha* is a Russian diminutive for the name Sergey.

mother, Anna Lvovna, who did not work because of the ten-month-old daughter in her arms – my sister. Moreover, we had both our grandmothers. I had to sell my clothes in order to somehow feed myself, and this was the widow of the director of the plant! And I, a ten-year-old boy, sometimes sat for an hour or more by the water ditch which flowed downhill from the factory after washing the potatoes for processing. Small potatoes sometimes slipped through the grate of the drain and I, like a fisherman, caught them and then carried the “bag” to my mother. She would then peel them and baked them into potato cakes without flour because there was simply no flour.”

Soon the Demidovs moved to the regional center of Proskurov (now Khmelnytsky). There, Demidov again encountered Turkmenistan. At first it was in Vasily Yan’s novel *Genghis Khan*, where the Turkmen and, in particular, the leader of their freemen, Kara-Konchar, sometimes were among the characters. Then he saw a short documentary film about Soviet Turkmenistan at the cinema. In the fifth grade he learned about this country during his geography class. In the autumn of 1948, he learned from the school director about the strong earthquake that shook distant Ashgabat and people who were in need at that time.

When Sergey was in the seventh grade, the forestry service, where his mother worked as an accountant, transferred to the regional center Yarmolintsy. There he studied his four years in high school, once again at a Ukrainian school. After Demidov read everything he could about the East in school and the regional libraries, he enrolled in the summer of 1954 in the history department of Moscow State University. “Despite the major competition, I was accepted for enrollment quite easily, although I was not a medalist at school,” said Sergey Mikhailovich, “Yet, at that time the main determiner for enrollment rested with knowledge rather than money. I was primarily included in a group of archaeologists. I even wrote a report about ancient Russian swords. But after the third semester, when I had to choose my specialization, I realized that despite all my respect for archaeology, I was more interested in living history, so I signed up for the Department of Ethnography. In addition, expeditions were under the guidance of a young teacher of our department, Gennady Yevgeniyevich Markov who was going to Central Asia, specifically to Turkmenistan, where I had been twice in the third and fourth grade.”

Demidov and two of his fellow students’ “baptism by fire,” occurred during their first independent interviews with locals at the “Leninism” collective farm, 8 to 10 kilometers from the city of Mary. The students were taken there by a candidate of historical sciences Kurban Ovezberdiyev an elderly employee of the recently created sector of ethnography for the Insti-

tute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR. He gave them instructions and showed them the data collection program. Demidov forever remembered his first interviewee – a short, thin elderly man named Tagan-aga. He was benevolent and talkative and somewhat reminiscent a sort of Turkmen version of the old man Shchukar – a character in one of the novels of the Nobel Prize Laureate Mikhail Sholokhov. “The conversation was lively,” Demidov recalled, “until I unknowingly made one mistake. After going through a whole armful of national clothes taken out of the chest, I put the old man’s *chokoi* – old rawhide shoes – down in a haphazard manner and one shoe turned upside down. Suddenly, Tagan-aga became sad and his talkativeness disappeared. I asked his grandson, a 10th-grader who assisted as a translator, what happened to his grandfather. The latter quietly explained that, according to Turkmen customs, turning over a shoe was a sign of wishing the owner to fall sick or even die. Naturally, immediately the *chokoi* was placed correctly and the old man felt a bit relieved, but his mood remained the same. I have learned this lesson and I still involuntarily check if shoes are placed properly – both mine and that of others.”

Of course, in the beginning of our academic journey, each of us had these sorts of annoying blunders. Demidov studied the life of the Turkmen and especially their religious beliefs. Gaining experience and delving into the topic helped him to understand many nuances in working with people from a different culture and become more confident in himself and his methods. Three student trips accompanied by his longstanding work and life in Turkmenistan resulted in more than one thousand interviews and several hundred interviewees who contributed to his overall sociological research. Among them included at least one hundred religious clergy – *mullahs*, *ishans*, and *mujevurs* (caretakers of holy sites). Each full-fledged ethnographic interview, although often held with a bowl of green tea, was no casual tea chitchat. An hour and a half such in-depth questioning fatigued both interviewee and ethnographer, the latter of whom continually guided the conversation in the right direction by repeatedly asking for and clarifying details. He also had to write down everything and confirm the information with the translator. Thus, two interviews a day was above-and-beyond the plan, and three was certainly a record.

Demidov, as a member of the expedition conducted by the Department of Ethnography of History Faculty at Moscow State University during his first two student trips to Turkmenistan, had the opportunity to visit the Mary and Kaahka oases and to go through the mountain village of Nokhur to the Sumbar Valley bordering Iran. He learned about the



**Sergey Demidov (center) with fellow ethnographers Annadurdy Orazov and Klychmurad Niyazklychev at the entrance to the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR. Ashgabat, 1959**

lives of the inhabitants of the steppe peri-Balkhan region and even climbed the Great Balkan ridge. These trips left many romantic memories in the souls of the twenty-something explorers. But the most memorable for Demidov was his third visit in the fall of 1958 during his fifth year of study. While collecting material for his theses with his classmate and friend Vladimir Basilov, they traveled the region without a guide or an expedition vehicle. For two months they lived like dervishes with no *kyashkuls* (begging cups) yet their heavy backpacks served as substitutes. The young men walked 400 km along the Iranian border crossing the Atrek, Chandyr, and Sumbar rivers. They passed three territories of the republic's southwestern regions walking from village to village, from *ovliya* (holy place) to *ovlia*, from cemetery to cemetery, from one ruin to another. They were both interested in the Turkmen's various religious beliefs. The old-timers they met were amazed at the many questions of the young ethnographers, particularly since they were asked by young Russian men as students on foot from such a prestigious university. It is not surprising that the locals remembered the trek of the *iki ors oglanlar* (two Russian guys) even after 10 to 15 years.

Demidov recalled that despite the heat, dust, and the danger of earthquakes during his student trips to Turkmenistan, he managed to fall in love with the distant land which from the windows of trains seemed to many merely a monotonous desert. He fell in love with its steppe expanse, but especially its mountain gorges and peaks inhabited by the continually hospitable, simple-hearted people. He also fell in love with its capital, the long-suffering Ashgabat (which still had not yet recovered from the remnants of the 1948 catastrophic earthquake) with its charm, provincial warmth and comfort. Upon graduation in the summer of 1959, ten of his fellow ethnographers by hook or by crook decided to find a employment in Moscow, but Demidov had no question about his future place of employment. Turkmenistan was waiting for him. At the time a popular song circulated among the students from the history department: "We will graduate and scatter to the distant lands / In remote villages. / You will go to the reindeer, / And I will go to hot Turkestan."

A block away from Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street, where the history department was located near the Manege and the towers of the Kremlin, was also found the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in a building on Volkhonka Street. Demidov entered the Department of the Ethnicities of Central Asia and Kazakhstan where Dr. Galina Petrovna Vasileva worked as a senior researcher. Like other Muscovite ethnographers (G. E. Markov, S. P. Polyakov, Ya. R. Vinnikov), she had dealt with Turkmenistan for quite a while and was eventually appointed head of the Ethnography Sector recently created in Ashgabat. Dr. Vasileva cordially supported the desire of the young graduate from Moscow State University and, from August 1 of that year, Demidov became a researcher in this sector. He managed to work during his annual July leave with the Turkmen people of the western part of the Stavropol Region on his way to Ashgabat.

His initial trips to the Turkmen were quite extensive: Ashgabat to Mangyshlak (today's Mangistau, Kazakhstan); the Astrakhan area and the eastern Stavropol region; the fishermen of the Caspian Sea; and cattle breeders from the Priatrchye and the peri-Balkhan region; farmers from Akhal, Tejen, and Serakhs; remote areas of the left bank (southern) Khorezm and Lebap. His first ten years of work included 40 months in the field. Among his first scientific publications was his thesis "More on Some Anachronisms of Pre-Muslim Rituals and Beliefs of the Southwestern Turkmen," which was recommended for publication during his thesis defense by the well-known religious scholar and head of the Department of Ethnography at Moscow State University, Sergey Aleksandrovich Tokarev. Demidov followed this by publishing the



**The village of Bendesen. With an interviewee (in the center) and an interpreter – both of the *packyr-shikh* clan. Autumn 1964**

articles “About the Anachronisms of Turkmen Beliefs Associated with Features of Water and Fishing,” “More on the Issue of Religious Syncretism among the Turkmen during the 19th – Early 20th Centuries,” “About the Beliefs and Customs of the Turkmen Associated with Fire,” “On *Zikr* in Turkmen” and many others. Demidov was interested in those topics of research that no one had previously studied.<sup>2</sup>

One monograph *Turkmen ovlyady* (Ashgabat, 1976), was dedicated to clarifying the true origin of the six so-called holy socio-religious groups of the Turkmen people (*khoja, shikh, magtym, ata, mujevur, seyit*), who claim to be descendants of the prophet

Muhammad. He devoted twelve years to developing this topic. Although the book was purely academic, it became a type of bestseller in the republic and with it the entire print run – almost 3,000 copies – sold out in less than a month. If the publication had occurred in the context of a market economy such a successful book would have been immediately reprinted until it met the demand, but alas.... However, there was a response from the black market with countless homemade duplicates made on copiers during the 1980s and 90s. Today an electronic version exists in pdf format available on the Internet. Has the author received any dividends from such popularity over the past 45 years? Of course, he has! But purely moral....

Demidov’s next monograph, *Sufism in Turkmenistan: Evolution and Anachronisms*, was published in 1978 in Ashgabat. Ten years later, without the author’s consent or accompanying royalties, the book was re-

<sup>2</sup> The list of the main works of S. M. Demidov for 1962-1995 are published in the Russian academic journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* [Ethnographic Review], 1998, No. 2, pp. 184-186.

published in Germany in the German language. Two more of his books appeared at the end of the Soviet era. These examine the holy sites in Turkmenistan and contain an overview of the history of the people's religious beliefs from this region starting from ancient times to the present. From the late 1960s, Demidov actively collaborated with the Ashgabat press to popularize ethnographic knowledge. For some time he even had a weekly column "Ask an Ethnographer" in the youth newspaper *Komsomolets Turkmenistana*. He also published articles in the "Russians in the Transcaspian Region" series in the Moscow weekly *Literaturnaya Rossiya*.

In the early 1970s, the publication of the 10-volume *Turkmen Soviet Encyclopedia* in the Turkmen language was initiated. Demidov compiled a glossary for it on the theme of religion and atheism. He also wrote a number of articles on this subject. He participated in these types of reference publications in later years as well as the 2000 encyclopedic dictionary *The Historical and Cultural Heritage of Turkmenistan* which was published in Istanbul and includes a significant number of his articles. Most recently, he is one of the active authors of the two-volume dictionary *Islam on the Territory of the Former Russian Empire* edited by Stanislav M. Prozorov (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2006-2018).

Sergey Mikhailovich devoted much time to the study of languages. He observed,

"An ethnographer needs to study language in order to be able to read multilingual publications about the people he is studying and, of course, to understand their language. It is no mere coincidence that such a science as ethnolinguistics appeared which combines ethnography and linguistics that studies specific terms associated with the traditional life and spiritual culture of specific people. Each language is a key to a new unknown world. I would even compare languages with this or that flower, which has its own unique aroma. Persian, for example, with the scent of a rose; Russian compared to cornflower or chamomile; and Turkmen with bitter wormwood. Of course, it is always possible to work with interviewees through the assistance of translators which I had to resort to in my early years. I was surprised that this was how my Muscovite colleagues worked all the time. But this naturally reduces the accuracy and volume of information received. Therefore, I set myself the goal from the very beginning of my life in Ashgabat to study the Turkmen language. Despite the fact that there were no study groups or language courses at that time, I sought to comprehend this language in every way possible."

As time went on, Demidov overcame obstacles not only in reading Turkmen-language literature and periodicals, but also in conversations with most interviewees, thus making a translator no longer necessary. By his own testimony, following three years of intensive study he decided to become acquainted

with the poetry of Magtymguly in the original language. His works are considered classics of Turkmen literature from the 18th century. Moreover, back in the late 1960s in the Turkmen SSR press, he was the first to raise the issue of the importance of studying Turkmen language by the adult, non-Turkmen population. These articles carried a deep resonance with the people and in 1974 he became the first *mughallim* (teacher) of Turkmen. Demidov's first student was the journalist Eduard Kondratov who, at that time, served as a correspondent of the Moscow newspaper *Izvestia* in the Turkmen SSR. Later, especially in the second half of the 1980s, when studying Turkmen became widely popular, he had the opportunity to teach courses in Turkmen at various institutions such as the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen Republic, the Central Committee of the Komsomol, and in the academic publishing house "Ylym" (Science) which published all his books. Undoubtedly, Demidov was a polyglot as demonstrated by this knowledge of almost a dozen European and Asian languages to one degree or another and at various times he began studying several more.

His knowledge of Turkmen allowed Demidov to make a number of translations without the aid of an interlinear gloss and, in particular, to translate into Russian *The Poetic World of Magtymguly*. This monograph was originally written by the late, young and talented literary scholar Akhmed Bekmuradov. Demidov's translation was published in 1993 by the same publishing house, "Ylym." His translation also included three previously unpublished sections of the Turkmen version of the Oghuz epic "Gorkut-ata." Demidov repeatedly spoke on ethnographic topics via the republic's radio broadcasts and authored two documentaries about the beliefs of the Turkmen which were produced by the "Turkmenfilm" film studio and Turkmen television. The special studio from Tashkent radio, broadcasting in seven languages to Asian countries abroad, named Demidov as one of their active commentators in 1972.

In 1995, Demidov completed work on his book *Plants and Animals in the Legends and Beliefs of the Turkmen*, then recommended for publication by the Academic Council of the Batyrov Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan. However, it remained unpublished for a significant period of time with eventually only four chapters published as part of academic collections in different years. Only a quarter of a century later, the book was finally published! It is filled with most valuable information collected and analyzed by the author over the course of many years. Vasilyeva, who gave a brief overview of the contribution made by Demidov to the ethnography of Turkmenistan, wrote in her book about this work stating that "this group of beliefs and legends

has very ancient origins, going back to the era of primitive society, to the distant ancestors of the Turkmen people related to the Iranian world. There are such demonological characters as the birds Hummet, Bagtgush, Garagush, etc.; the reptiles – Azhdarkha and Yuvkha or Gara-gyrnak...” Further, she noted that Demidov “establishes and analyzes the beliefs associated with representatives of feral animals, that is, a mountain sheep, wolf, tiger, lion, snake, various species of fish, and other inhabitants of bodies of water. Considering everything in the historical and ethnographic context, the author, in addition to his own large material, provides a retrospective analysis of legends, beliefs, and rituals based on written materials from the 19th -20th centuries and information found in sources of previous times utilizing materials from archaeology and architecture.”<sup>3</sup>

On December 15, 1997, the academic institute in Ashgabat where Demidov worked as a senior researcher was abolished. Literally the next day he took a last look at the peaks of the Kopet Dag (Turkmen-Khorasan) Mountains through the window of the plane that was taking him back to Russia. It is possible to imagine his feelings as he looked at the mountains where he walked so many paths, at the quarters of the city below that became his hometown where he first came as a student and where he thought he would stay until the end of his days. However, circumstances forced him to leave which was a rather unexpected decision for others, yet it was understandable. He provided the reasons for his departure in sufficient detail in an summary article of his memoirs.<sup>4</sup> Demidov settled in a new place, one of the villages of the Cossack Kuban, where the descendants of the Cossacks live. But even here, despite his age and the complexity of rural life, he continued to develop issues of Turkmen ethnography on the basis of his previously collected materials. He drew from his huge personal archive and ethnographic collection, as well as his unique library, which he carried back with him. For more than twenty years of the Kuban period, Demidov published three more monographs and about fifty articles, not counting popular academic publications on the Internet.

In 2002, Demidov’s book *Post-Soviet Turkmenistan*, published with partial financial support from the American Ford Foundation, was perhaps the first attempt to analyze the processes that took place in this country during the first decade of its independ-



With his wife Renata Palde (1943-2021) at home in the village of Baturinskaya, 2001

ence. But in terms of genre it was not political science. Rather, his research focused upon the spiritual and humanitarian sphere of culture, art, education, religion, and folk traditions. Demidov also wrote about national problems closely related to these fields and the new interpretation of Turkmenistan’s history and the Turkmen people, its linguistic situation, and the work of the media among other issues.

In his village of Baturinskaya, (in the Bryukhovetsky District of the Krasnodar Region), with the support of the village museum’s administration, Sergey Mikhailovich organized a ethnographic club called “Unity.” In the regional museum of local history he created an exhibition “The Land of Sands and Mountains” dedicated to his beloved Turkmenistan. Living in a new ethnic environment, in which he had shown potential interest in for a long time, Demidov naturally could not ignore local issues. He was engaged in the history of the Kuban Cossacks and published an ethnographic essay about the village of Baturinskaya. However, even in this topic his pen turned toward the Turkmen path. Thus, the article “The Cossack Church in Faraway Ashgabat” appeared, as well as the larger

<sup>3</sup> Vasileva, G. P. *The History of Ethnographic Study of the Turkmen People in National Science*. Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2003, pp. 103-107.

<sup>4</sup> Demidov, S. M. Last the Years in Turkmenistan: Memoirs of an Ethnographer, *Bulletin of Eurasia*. 2000. No. 4 (11), pp. 99-119.



With journalist Mikhail Pereplsnin and colleague Nadezhda Dubova. Moscow, 2017

work “The Kubans in the Transcaspian Region.” In addition, Demidov’s earlier manuscript about Georgy Ivanovich Karpov (1890-1947), the actual founder of the Turkmen ethnography whose name is well known to specialists in this field but whose main scientific legacy has not yet been published, will be soon go to print in Moscow.

There is an invisible, yet strong link between Demidov and his beloved Turkmenistan today. His two granddaughters, old colleagues, and friends all live there. His books can also be found which are still of some interest. They are constantly in demand in public libraries and have long become bibliographic rarities that are difficult to find at second-hand book-sellers. Even though these books were digitized long ago and are available on the web, voices are calling for the need to republish them on traditional paper and not just in electronic format. Is this not the most accurate indicator of a scholar’s real contribution to his field and much more significant than the notorious h-index? Of course, Demidov is cited in modern works; but it is much more important that his works are popular among ordinary readers and not merely researchers. People read to learn more about what really interests them. His works are easy to read because he writes simply and engagingly without juggling with neologisms and in every possible way

avoids what one might call “Talmudic scholarship.” Yes, Demidov’s articles and books, while remaining strictly academic in content, are simultaneously quite understandable to a mass audience. This puts them in the category of the best examples of ethnographic literature.

In addition to his unique library, Sergey Demidov is rightfully proud of his huge collection of periodicals from different countries which number several thousand copies. Almost always when I tell him that I am going to Germany, Thailand, or Russian cities; he asks me to bring him some samples from the local press. He discusses his collection at specially organized meetings with young people and students both in his now-native village and in the regional center of Bryukhovetskaya.

However, Sergey Mikhailovich himself considers his memoirs his main work of recent decades. He has entitled this book simply and succinctly, *Ethnographer* and is still working on it. He shares the history of his background and the events in the history of a large country that took place during his lifetime. Many characters are to be found in this book: relatives, friends, fellows, former colleagues, and those he interviewed. He provides a detailed description of the Ashgabat of 1959 when he began his work in Turkmenistan. Of course, many pages are devoted to his



field of ethnographic research. As historians know, any memoir, especially those of an academic, are an invaluable storehouse of information and no less important than his academic works. The memoirs of an outstanding person always contain something that future researchers will rarely find in the archives or publications of previous years. How good it is that today Sergey Mikhailovich Demidov turned to this genre in order to tell us more about himself and his times.

In 2008, during one of his last trips to Moscow, Demidov visited the greatly changed sector of the Ethnography of the Ethnicities from Central Asia of the Miklukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Science. The employees working in the sector, of course, knew his

work, but put their eyes on Sergey Demidov for the first time. To be succinct in the opening presentation during his visit, I stated that in front of us was one of the leading experts in Turkmen ethnography and even the “Last of the Mohicans” of Turkmen ethnography. Sergey Mikhailovich liked these words very much and to this day he signs almost all his letters to me, “Your Mohican.” I would like to wish the dear hero of the day health and strength to successfully complete *Ethnographer*, which undoubtedly, will be an inestimable testimony to this discipline’s history of development in Turkmenistan, as well for his personal, unselfish life. It is also important to see all of his works published and to hold in our hands the publications which comprised both sound knowledge and the great work of a researcher.