

**The Russian Prince  
and the  
Maharajah of Travancore**

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# **THE RUSSIAN PRINCE AND THE RAJA OF TRAVANCORE**

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In 1841, the Russian Prince Alexis Soltykoff made the first of two visits to India and published his observations upon his return to his adopted home country of France. The books - in French - covering both the 1841-1843 visit and the second 1844 -1846 visit - were hugely successful, and a subsequent Russian translation in 1851 earned him the title *The Indian* amongst his friends, colleagues and fellow aristocrats. Of particular interest is his sojourn in southern India where he met the king of the erstwhile state of Travancore - Raja Swathi Thirunal. This Raja is renowned for his love of learning and enlightened ways, but contemporary accounts of him are few and appear somewhat obsequious. We have dragged Soltykoff's previously untranslated musings off the shelf of the rare book room at the library and exposed them to the translator's eye. What we have found is an absolute treat, a feast, curried with Indian imagery and voices from 170 years ago. Along the way, we present our critical and contextualised commentary of his observations, but with the unfeigned delight of travelling with our Russian prince. Ultimately, we reveal that, although Soltykoff arrived in India with many preconceptions shaped primarily by his earlier

experiences in Russia and Persia and partly by his interactions, both positive and negative, with his travelling companions, we cannot overstate the importance of the freshness and uniqueness of his observations, especially his reactions to the different peoples, their cultures and the effect of their different religions on their daily lives. It should become apparent that we enjoyed this virtual journey with our keen-eyed companion - Prince Soltykoff - and want to share this experience with others as he so brilliantly did.

## **Introduction**

This article began as an investigation into life at the Royal Court of Travancore in the early 1840s. It was in Travancore that one of the first Indian astronomical observatories was set up by the Raja of Travancore and consideration was given to what influenced his decisions. We needed accounts of the Royal Court, but these were very limited and seemingly far from objective and written by court ‘insiders’ or visitors with a particular axe to grind. However, a travelogue by Russian Prince Soltykoff looked promising - and once it was translated from the French, a myriad of revelations opened up for us regarding life in Travancore, the ways Europeans in the Raja’s Court managed to stay connected with ‘home’, and their amazing feat in making their way overland from Madras, often with cases of delicate, scientific equipment pulled by bullocks in stifling heat and post-monsoonal humidity. Our vista broadened and we decided that a larger story needed to be told; a story of travel, travellers and travel writing in southern India around the early to mid 1800s. What began as an academic study had also become a travelogue.

Travel writing gives an invaluable perspective, at times because it might be the only eyewitness account available to historians and the public at large. In retrieving Soltykoff’s ‘lost’ texts from a rare book collection, we hope to provide an account of southern India in the early-to-mid nineteenth century that is valuable for contemporary historians.

Of course, Soltykoff's impressions may be a biased version of history, but that is a caveat about all texts (including this very article). It will be interesting to speculate on Soltykoff's purpose in publishing his book: was it for the parlour table - focused on the traveller's human drama and (mis-)adventures with previously unrecorded artistic curiosities; or was it for the gentleman's 'scientific' library - *scientific* in the sense of archaeology and ethnography; or was it an ingenious strategy to allow him to spy on the British administration in India for his anxious and belligerent masters in Russia. We shall see. But before we meet Soltykoff, first we need to introduce the subject of interest - The Raja of Travancore.

### Meeting Swathi Thirunal

The modern south Indian state of Kerala was created largely from the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin in the mid-1900s. The Raja of Travancore in 1841 was Swathi Thirunal<sup>4</sup> - a king who reigned from his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1829 until his untimely (and some would say 'suspicious') demise in 1846. He is a major focus in this article because of his importance to modern Keralites - and to us stern historians - for his contributions to indigenous culture and for his discriminating use of the knowledge and products of the West. Swathi Thirunal (also known as Rama Vurmah) is generally considered to have been a good ruler of Travancore although in his later years, his relationship with the British Resident Major Cullen had soured and the Raja's involvement in government declined. He is most noted as a great patron of music and as a musician himself. He encouraged both Hindustani and Carnatic music, but his first love was the Carnatic music tradition and he is responsible for hundreds of compositions.<sup>5</sup> He is less well known for his legal reforms, the introduction of the census and the incorporation of western medicine into the state service. To Western eyes, his great contributions were the Astronomical Observatory, the Museum and Gardens, the Zoo, Raja's Government Free School, the Government Press, the Public Library, and the Oriental Manuscript

Library - all in Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore (now known as Thiruvananthapuram, capital of Kerala). The Observatory is of particular significance to this article as the Travancore Royal Astronomer, John Caldecott, travelled to India with the Russian Prince Soltykoff on his first journey in 1841.<sup>6</sup> But the Raja is not without his detractors. Relations between the Raja and the British Resident - the formal representative of Britain in the guise of an officer of the East India Company - started promisingly enough, but when the much admired Resident Colonel Fraser was replaced by the domineering General (then Colonel) Cullen in early 1840, the Raja's tone changed. He seems to have wilted under intense pressure from both Cullen, a notorious womaniser, and manipulative members of his own government. From early 1842 onwards, the Raja's reign was marked by the shunning of his public duties and more intensely religious behaviour. He became most lavish and began large purchases of silks, velvets, gold cloth, jewels and costly buildings, and by the end of 1843, he wouldn't receive visits from any Europeans - even his own British physician - but finally relented when the Governor of Madras Lord Hay arrived. The Raja died in 1846 and was succeeded by his brother Martanda Vurmah. Today, Swathi Thirunal is regarded with great admiration and affection by most Keralites as they seek to find out more about his amazing past.

The most frequently cited observations of Raja Swathi Thirunal come from P. Shungoony Menon's *A History of Travancore from Earliest Times*.<sup>7</sup> Menon was a part of the Travancore establishment for 40 years - from 1839 - and as an insider, he presented a view of the Royal Court that has himself as an active participant. He is most deferential to the royal family and although sincere, he finds it hard to present them in anything but a positive, glowing and somewhat obsequious light. As an example, readers of Menon's history would come across phrases and passages about Raja Swathi Thirunal such as: 'the illustrious sovereign; His Highness's court became the cynosure of attraction'; 'the Madras Government expressed their unqualified

satisfaction at the young Maha Raja's conduct'; 'General Cullen was struck with the eloquence, affability and knowledge of the Maha Raja; 'Cullen applauded his learning, his poetical taste and patronage of the Western sciences'; 'the Maha Raja was naturally very sensitive, and therefore would not submit to the least contradiction, or slight thrown on his authority'. Menon's flattering observations become awkward as he always tries to use the titles 'Maha Raja' and 'His Highness' for Raja Swathi Thirunal and his successor Raja Marthanda Vurmah rather than identifying them by their distinct names. When he discusses the two Highnesses together in the same sentence, confusion abounds.

Another description - this time from the perspective of the Christian missionary, George Trevor Spencer, Lord Bishop of Madras in 1841: 'a very pleasing countenance, and his manners are strikingly simple and gentlemanlike. He speaks English with perfect fluency, is an accomplished Persian and Arabic scholar and is in other respects unusually well informed.'<sup>8</sup> The flaws in this will become evident later.

However, Menon's descriptions of Swathi Thirunal prior to 1840 were drawn from *Military Reminiscences*<sup>9</sup> by Colonel Welsh, a senior military officer with the Madras Native Infantry, who spent some time in Travancore in 1819 and 1825. Menon draws on many sources and is considered to provide the most authoritative commentary on the 19<sup>th</sup> century royal family. We will meet Welsh again later.

### **Prince Alexis Soltykoff and his family**

The Raja of Travancore had one interesting and important visitor to the Palace in Trivandrum in late 1840 - Prince Alexis Soltykoff - the former Russian diplomat turned traveller, collector and artist. An understanding of Soltykoff's background allows us to better appreciate the biases he brings to his travel and observations in India, and Travancore in particular. We are not suggesting his observations are faulty - all observations are laden with biases - but they are best

acknowledged at the outset. Menon's biases are clear - he is a part of the Travancore establishment; but at first glance, Soltykoff appears to be a disinterested, objective and impartial observer and no doubt sees himself as such. We need to dig more deeply.

The spelling of his name is variable and causes many headaches. Prince Alexis Soltykoff was known in Russia by the Latinised spelling Aleksei Dmitrievich Saltykov transliterated from the Cyrillic САЛТЫКОВ <sup>10</sup>. The change from 'Aleksei' to 'Alexis' most likely appeared because his European friends called him 'Alex', finding Russian names too long or too complex. The 'off' ending marks a Russian who either emigrated to, or lived in, France for a long time. However, there is no accounting for the change from *a* to *o* for the second letter in his surname.<sup>11</sup> It is just one of those things!

Alexis was born in St. Petersburg on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1806<sup>12</sup> to Prince Dmitri Nikolaevich Soltykoff and Anna Leontieva, and had three older brothers (the Princes Ivan, Petr and Vladimir) and an older sister Princess Mariya. The Soltykoff name was one of the more esteemed in Russia. When Peter the Great started the establishment of St. Petersburg in the early 1700s, all nobles who owned more than thirty families of serfs, were forced to settle there. It seems likely that this branch of the Soltykoffs arrived in St. Petersburg at this time.<sup>13</sup> The illustrious house of Soltykoff had four branches. Alexis was a scion of the 'Counts Soltykoff' branch which was ennobled in 1732 when General Simon Soltykoff, Governor of Moscow, was awarded the title 'Count' through his relationship to Empress Anna. They had been closely associated with the tsars and the political establishment of the empire since at least that time.<sup>14</sup> Without doubt, the most formidable and impressive of Alexis's close relatives was his grandfather General Nikolai Ivanovich Soltykoff (1736 - 1816) who became chairman of the war committee under Empress Catherine II and her son and heir Emperor Paul I, and later president of Council of the Empire and of the Board of Ministers

and lastly Field Marshal of the Empire. After the wedding of Grand Duke Pavel (Paul) Petrovich, son of Catherine II to Natalia Alekseyevna, General Soltykoff was appointed by Catherine II to run their small household. In 1795, at the age of 59, he was described as being 'small, thin and with a sharp nose; a very devout man who spent a long time each morning at his prayers; he wore a high, powdered and pomaded toupet and had a limp; and constantly pulled up his breeches'.<sup>15</sup> As an example of his commanding influence, when Catherine (The Great) had a stroke in 1796 and her grandson Alexander arrived at the Winter Palace, he was not allowed to see her for several hours. Count Soltykoff - 'first personage' of Catherine's court - had feared that Alexander might try to proclaim himself Tsar. At 5 pm he gave him permission. Catherine died the next evening.

When Alexis was born, General Soltykoff was at the height of his powers. He was very close to the grandchildren of Catherine II (The Great), Alexander and Constantine having been appointed by her in 1784 as their Governor ('Hofmeister'). She provided him with numerous pages of closely-spaced instructions about clothing, food, fresh air, washing, bed, sleep, amusements, illness, medicine, obedience, education and so on - but singing and music were banned; Catherine felt it would take away time from their studies. Not that the General objected; he was very much in tune with her thinking and would later seek the same for his own family. In 1783 he appointed tutors to teach Russian, Greek, French, German, Italian, Latin, a little English, Greek religion, geography, history, political economy, military tactics, and some of the sciences<sup>16</sup>. He expected the tutors to inculcate toleration, philanthropy and admiration of truth. His own children - Aleksandr, Sergei and Dmitri - were tutored in much the same manner. Aleksandr, his youngest son, became Minister of Foreign Affairs *ad interim* under the reign of Emperor Alexander and was said to have maintained the great name of his forefathers with 'weight and honour'. However, Dmitri (Alexis's father, 1767 - 1826) remains somewhat of a



mystery. He was born blind and his mother died when he was just nine years old, but it seems possible that he became a famous pianist and composer of Russian marching songs, perhaps as other avenues in the military or politics were cut off.<sup>17</sup> In 1814, General Soltykoff was exalted to the dignity of Russian Prince and his descendants also acquired this hereditary title; hence Alexis Soltykoff became a Prince at the age of eight. Two years later General Soltykoff was to die, but not before he received gifts from his grateful pupils, Prince Alexander and Prince Constantine, consisting of 100,000 roubles and a yearly pension of 25,000 roubles, a house in St. Petersburg, and a silver service. He had already acquired a mansion on the Neva (River) under the terms of Catherine the Great's will in 1796, which his children were later to rent out.<sup>18</sup>

Alexis's early years are almost as much of a mystery as his father's. We know he grew up in St. Petersburg with his brothers and sister and that he lost his mother in 1810 when he was four years old; when he was six, his great grandmother Princess Dolgorukaya also died, followed by the death of his grandfather, the General, at the age of 80. Alexis was only ten and attendance at his funeral in the Ukraine was his first real taste of travel. But the most profound influence on Alexis's life was the artist and tutor Aleksandr Orlovski. Polish-born Orlovski had fled hostilities in Warsaw and arrived in St Petersburg in 1802. Almost immediately he became a court painter to Grand Duke Pavlovich and quickly ingratiated himself into the liberal aristocratic intelligentsia of Russia with his striking portraits of nobles in uniforms.<sup>19</sup> This brought him to the attention of the Soltykoff family who were seeking tutors for young Alexis in various fields. Orlovski's previous ties with the national liberation insurgency in Poland had caused him to flee when they were crushed, but that same social conscience now led him to the backstreets of St Petersburg where many of his drawings showed a strong social commentary. However, his bread-and-butter income still came from painting scenes of battle and army life, as well as Romantic subjects featuring brigands and

shipwrecks. During the war of 1812 against Napoleon, Orłowski produced some remarkable drawings of leading military figures and in these, bravura gives way to observation and a sense of warmth of character, particularly in themes taken from everyday life such as beggars, prisoners and the rural and urban poor captured with assurance and elegance as he travelled widely through Russia.<sup>20</sup>

It is not hard to see how much Soltykoff was influenced by his tutor during those formative years in St Petersburg. Soltykoff's Indian drawings, whether they depict the common people sitting around waiting for a big event, or battle scenes with their high drama and exhilarating motion, could only have been inspired by Orłowski. It is not certain but evidence points to Alexis having attended the The Imperial Academy of Arts in St Petersburg, quite close to his house on the Néva, as would have been typical of a Prince at the time. Alexis's interest in the Orient was sparked by an event that remained with him for the rest of his life. In 1815, aged 9, Alexis was at home in St Petersburg sitting at the window of his house on the Néva, waiting expectantly for a procession organized by the Persian embassy for their new envoy Mirza Abul Hassan Khan. Through the wintry fog came the fierce and frightening warrior knight guards, followed by elephants caparisoned in gorgeous and fantastically painted drapes, then countless fiery horses covered in foam, led by Persian horsemen dressed in red; and finally, in a carriage drawn by eight horses, Abul Khan robed in white cashmere, adorned with the star of diamonds and the green sash of the Order of the Sun. Even at such an early age, Alexis had a keen, romantic eye and the procession, he said, 'for such a very long time, made a deep impression on my imagination and gave me a tremendous desire to go to Asia and especially to Persia, a desire that was only satisfied a long time later, in 1838'.<sup>21</sup>

At the age of 18, Alexis joined the diplomatic services with the Russian State Board (Collegium) for Foreign Affairs in Moscow. By

this time his sister Mariya had passed away, and then by the age of 20, Alexis's father Dmitri died in St. Petersburg. Three years later, Alexis was appointed to the Russian Foreign Service, first in Constantinople, then in Athens, later in London, Florence, Rome, and Teheran. It is possible that this was an honorary position held as a result of his princely title. Before Catherine the Great's time, the lives of nobles were regulated from a tender age. All boys had to present themselves to the local Governor for a decision about how they could serve the State without a wage. But by 1762, considerable numbers of nobles in the prime of life could retire from service and return to their estates or devote themselves to travel, literature or the arts. The literary and artistic interests of nobles flourished in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of this new freedom and self-respect. Alexis and his brother Petr were destined to be major beneficiaries of this social freedom.<sup>22</sup>

By 1832, Alexis's brother Ivan was dead. He had married into the richest noble family in Russia - the Stroganoffs - and upon death, left considerable wealth and a part of his collection of art, arms and armour to brother Petr.<sup>23</sup> Finally, in about 1835, Alexis's other brother, Vladimir, died. In 1839 in Persia, Alexis would finally realize that a diplomatic career did not really attract him and he would rather pursue the life of a traveller and an artist.

In 1839, Alexis was still a Russian diplomat and these Indian adventures were still two years off. He first had to complete his final posting as a diplomat - to Persia, fulfilling the dream he had since he was nine. Soltykoff had been briefed on his mission to 'Tehran' (Teheran) and was aware of the atrocious massacre of the Russian mission there a decade earlier – but was not to be dissuaded. His predecessor in Teheran was already known to him - Aleksander Griboedov, a phenomenally distinguished playwright from St Petersburg, a brilliant dramatist and insightful satirist who was regularly employed in diplomatic work in Persia and the Caucasus in the 1820s.<sup>24</sup>

The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry regarded him as a shrewd and reliable diplomat. Having to defend Russia's seizure of Persian lands during the late 1820s, Griboedov arrived in Persia in February 1829 to mediate a peace accord, but his overbearing extortions for food and money of the local Moslems won him no friends. The British regarded Griboedov as a 'low minded, corrupt and blustering personage',<sup>25</sup> and he was soon to make some fatal errors. The first was the delay in transit of the lavish gifts from Russia, and an offering by Griboedov of 25 newly-minted Russian coins instead was regarded as an insult. But when the Russians gave sanctuary to Christian slaves, including an Armenian eunuch who uttered the most impudent blasphemies against the Mohammedan faith, all hell broke loose. The mullahs of Teheran believed that their religion had been reviled by the Russian infidels and their monarch insulted. An infuriated and fanatical mob stormed the embassy and Griboedov was murdered by a stab to the heart by a public wrestler. The mob shouted in ghastly mockery as they dragged his body through the streets: 'make way, citizens, for the Russian Ambassador on his way to visit the Shah. Stand up and take off your caps. He is thirsty for the love you bear his master the Emperor [Alexander] – spit in his face'.<sup>26</sup> The British considered the Persian Government as 'the most barbarous government of whom we have any record'.<sup>27</sup> Immediately after the murder, the Shah made a coalition of neighbours against Russia and Russia conciliated. To soothe matters, the Teheran chief of police was imprisoned and numerous suspects had their ears, noses and tongues cut off.<sup>28</sup> And all was now well between Russia and Persia, and instead of invading Persia, Russia was to court her alliance. From that moment on, the British became far more suspicious of Russian aggressive designs on India.

So when Soltykoff was briefed for his visit to Persia, it was a delicate time - delicate, because trouble was continuing to brew between Russia and Britain over the area to the north and west of India. The British were expanding and consolidating their colonial holdings on the India

sub-continent, and were looking at the mountains of Afghanistan as a natural barrier to prevent invasion by rival Russian imperialists. The Russians, for their part, were expanding south and east, swallowing up several formerly independent sultanates and emirates in Central Asia (mostly Turkic and Mongol kingdoms that were remnants of Genghis Khan's empire). The British viewed Russia's absorption of these lands as a threat to their interests in the Indian subcontinent. The two great powers essentially engaged in a race for Afghanistan, and their fiendish seizures of land, overthrow of indigenous nations and reckless interference into the affairs of the remaining independent states in the region, became known as *The Great Game*. At the heart of the Great Game lay the willingness of Britain and Russia to subdue, subvert, or subjugate the small independent states that lay between Russia and British India. The question was not if Russia would march across Asia, but when.

Before the British could defend India and before the Russians could move towards India, they both needed to know something about India and the lands that separated it from Persia and Russia (that is, Afghanistan). Such knowledge was an advantage. Since the early 1800s, individual explorers, usually young army officers with strong nerves, a taste for adventure and a skill in native languages, went into impenetrable regions. They drew maps and wrote exhaustive reports, and many were killed. The Royal Geographical Society was founded in 1830 and the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1845. By mid-century, both were fronts for spying expeditions in Asia. Prior to Soltykoff's sojourn, the most famous of these missions were the journeys of Alexander Burnes (1805–1841) to the Punjab in 1831 and to Bokhara in 1832. His three volumes were instant best sellers in Europe. News reached St Petersburg where he was accused of fomenting unrest amongst trans-Caspian tribes and Soltykoff undoubtedly became intrigued with such tales of derring-do. John McNeill (1795–1883), a British diplomat in Teheran, published anonymously in 1836 *The Progress and Present Position of Russia in*

*the East*, which bolstered the British rationale for keeping a sizeable network of spies in Central Asia. Russia had equally as many spies in The Great Game. But in 1836, a new Russian Minister arrived in the Persian city of Teheran to inflame tensions; his name was Count Ivan Simonich.<sup>29</sup> He was, in British eyes, a coarse-looking, stout but handsome Dalmatian with a rather unpleasant countenance who served in Bonaparte's army but was captured by the Russians and stayed to serve them as a soldier and later as a diplomat. He remained an ardent Bonapartist and a hater of Britain.<sup>30</sup> In 1837 he actively promoted a campaign to invade the city of Herat in Afghanistan in direct opposition to British policy, and he provided Russian aid and money. When all of this ended in a shambles in 1838, he was recalled and replaced by a Colonel Duhamel<sup>31</sup>, Tsar Nicholas's Consul General in Alexandria. Into this mess in November 1838 stepped naïve young Russian diplomat Alexis Soltykoff, oblivious to how close Russia and Britain had come to war over Herat. In Teheran he was welcomed by Colonel Duhamel and as a present of royal munificence, The Shah of Persia sent Soltykoff two horses. He was mightily chuffed and wrote 'these noble animals were resplendent in gold and cashmere'.<sup>32</sup>

The espionage, if anything, bemused Soltykoff and he appeared more interested in pageantry, jewels and uniforms. Amidst the unfolding disaster, Soltykoff feigned little interest in politics, instead capturing the pageantry with paint brushes and words: 'the parade uniform of His Majesty was a Nizam's, like a kind of Cossack half-caftan, dark blue, with collar and cuffs embroidered with diamonds, emerald buttons, and epaulettes like a general's, also large emeralds with big pearls sewn on to it with thread'.<sup>33</sup>

Soltykoff had the opportunity to visit the royal treasury with Count Simonich: "I won't describe all the riches that make up this treasure; I'll confine myself to mentioning the precious objects which most particularly attracted my attention such as the famous diamond

known as the ‘Ocean of Light’, Dariénour, that the Shah wears on his left arm during formal occasions”.<sup>34</sup> Sometime in December 1838, Soltykoff visited the Shah of Persia and was asked to make some sketches of various members of the royal court. There they met the Shah’s second son. On the last day of January 1839, Soltykoff went one last time to the palace to draw a portrait of the Shah and to bid him farewell. The following morning, Soltykoff visited the Russian embassy and received, on the part of His Majesty, ‘two very pretty shawls, estimated to be worth 1000 roubles, and the Order of the Sun, rich in diamonds, with the official inscription (*firman*) of the Shah’.<sup>35</sup>

Weary of the lack of progress in Afghanistan, an army of British and Indian troops set out from the Punjab in December 1838 and invaded Kabul. The stress must have been too much for Soltykoff and he departed Teheran on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1839 to head back to the safety of St Petersburg for debriefing. However, back in the East, the British denied that they were invading Afghanistan, instead claiming they were merely supporting its legitimate government ‘against foreign interference and factious opposition’. The British Army of the Indus was composed of many regiments, and commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen’s Foot (Queen’s Royals) was Brevet Colonel Baumgardt, the only officer to have been in action beforehand. He was wounded in the Fall of Ghuznee (near Kabul) on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1839 and went on to fight in the Fall of Khelat on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1839. We’ll meet him the following year when he boards the ship to India and gives Soltykoff quite a surprise.

In all of the magnificent and mysterious lands Soltykoff had visited so far, he always carried his water-colours and pencils and was endlessly making sketches and studies. Everywhere he went, he was driven by a desire to see as much as he could, to admire new landscapes, meet new people and learn about their life and customs. So at the age of 34, he retired from the diplomatic service to devote himself to his hobbies – travel and painting. He moved to Paris where he started

to plan his trip to India and became even more seriously engaged in painting and drawing.<sup>36</sup> By now, only one of his siblings remained - Petr - and their affection would keep them close throughout the years ahead. The high status of the two Soltykoff brothers - particularly in light of their association with the leading noble family, the Stroganoffs - was assured. They were princes and could pursue their dreams.

Alexis Soltykoff had dreamed of India from his time in the Foreign Service. Not that he had been in or anywhere near the sub-continent in his 16 years of service: the closest was the Caspian Sea in the Caucasus and also Teheran in Persia. He was not unusual in this respect. Interest in India was quite marginal in Russian culture before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, before the rise of modern 'Indology'.<sup>37</sup> Published Russian works on India before 1840 were mostly cursory and brief, the only exception being that of the lonely Russian merchant Afanasy Nikitin who visited in the early 1470s and published his travel notes in Russian as *The Journey beyond the Three Seas*. These remarkable notes were little known even in Russia before being unearthed by historians in the early 1800s.<sup>38</sup> Even if cultured Europeans and Russians were not familiar with the history and geography of India, they were already acquainted with Indian literature - the Vedas, the Upanishads and other Indian epics. Russians learned about India not only from English, French and German translations but also from Russian sources, for Russian universities had their own Indologists who knew Sanskrit and read the originals.

In Paris, Soltykoff organised his voyage to India to see this mysterious land from the other side of Afghanistan. In Persia, he had become intrigued by stories of life to the west: the Delhi throne was still occupied by the Great Moghul, though his power was severely limited by the British, and in the Punjab, the brilliant Maharaja Ranjit Singh still ruled. Soltykoff dreamt of studying this unique, ancient culture at a time when not all parts had been seized by the British. He finally resolved to see India for himself and ended up making two voyages



there (1841-43 and 1844-46), and achieving the sobriquet *The Indian* from the Russian and French aristocracy. In 1849 he published a selection of his letters in French accompanied by his drawings<sup>39</sup>, which were a sensation with the press and public, and he became very well known in Europe. In 1851, the book was translated into Russian and became an instant success: it truly enraptured the Russian reading public. The drawings were published separately in London in 1859 as *Drawings on the Spot*.<sup>40</sup>

The question of why a French edition was published before a Russian one, may be asked. The status of the French language in the Russian court is the key. Peter the Great (1672-1725) was unable to speak French but he made sure his daughter Anna was not so deprived. From then on, the nobles of Russia ensured their offspring were fluent in French, especially under the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). In fact, the year 1756, which marked the beginning of the Seven Years War, was the turning point which aligned Russia with the *ancien régime* in France. French became the common language of the Russian aristocracy, bringing noblemen into the mainstream of European culture, which also resulted in their isolation from their own countrymen.<sup>41</sup> The Russian intellectual *élite* belonged to the contemporary European culture. They were the equals of graduates of Oxford or Paris. But the bulk of the Russian people remained quite unaffected by European culture. They still lived in the same squalid swamp of poverty and ignorance.<sup>42</sup> There had also been close, cultural contact with the skilled artisans of France in such trades as silversmithery and furniture-making. France also set the fashion trends. There was a history of encouraging French artisans to come to the Russian court, and Russian royals and nobles regularly visited Paris. In fact, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many Russian nobles were widely travelled to the extent that they were totally without roots in their Russian homeland.<sup>43</sup> In the light of this, it would seem very likely that members of Alexis Soltykoff's family had also spent a considerable amount of time travelling abroad, possibly in Paris. For instance, his brother Petr

travelled to Italy with his wife Vera in the spring of 1833. The expectation that all educated Europeans should have some knowledge of French, is illustrated with delicious irony by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. As Napoleon engages with Austro-Russian forces in the *Battle of Austerlitz* in late December 1805, two Russian nobles attend a salon in Moscow to discuss the war - in the language of their enemy.

British travellers in Russia, too, were in no need of Russian to communicate. The British surveyor, traveller and spy, Arthur Conolly, whom we discuss later, made his way to India from England through Russia in 1834. A more difficult route could hardly be found! He said that ‘the traveller in Russia who speaks French has so little occasion to use any other language that he rarely picks up any Russian’.<sup>44</sup> He was convinced that Russian authors gave up on Russian as being too ‘rude’ – lacking energy, flexibility, grace and delicacy. However, for diplomats French is attractive for a different reason: its subtle and graceful circumlocutions allow speakers to make elliptical allusions to situations when necessary, rather than speaking more directly and tersely as with Germanic languages. There are certain social courtesies with the French ‘formula’ language and certain language ‘registers’ or language styles and levels. Even the language structure of French adds to this ‘flowingness’ and elegance of expression. Certain verb tenses are commonly used to denote uncertainty and supposition, for example the subjunctive and past conditional. The language can be direct, however, when needed, but it does allow for the art of communicating a difficult situation tactfully and discreetly where appropriate. As we’ll see, Soltykoff was able to negotiate his way through difficult situations with great charm and flair. It will soon be apparent that he was a master of circumlocution.

In late 1840, armed with letters of introduction to the top British administrators in India, Alexis Soltykoff began his trip. He said he was

after some ‘colour’ in his life, but the collection of art and oriental arms his brother Petr had started to accumulate after Ivan’s bequest, indicates that Alexis’s motives may have been considerably more than that. His letters to Petr (Pierre) during the journey in India are most revealing - as we shall see.

### **Soltykoff’s Route to India**

There are several common ways that travellers could make their journey to India in the early 1800s. For continental Europeans, the most usual way was to proceed to the port city of Marseilles on the Mediterranean coast of Southern France, thence by boat to Alexandria, often stopping at the major port of Malta on the way. From Alexandria, the overland journey would take them by canal to Cairo, up the Nile by steamer and overland by camel, horse or donkey to Suez. At Suez, travellers would board an ocean-going steamer to Bombay (Mumbai) via the Red Sea and Aden; the total time was about four weeks. This is the route Soltykoff chose. For British residents, there was the much longer 15-week route via sailing ship around the Cape of Southern Africa and thence to Bombay; or there was the shorter ‘Overland’ route from England to Le Havre on the Normandy Coast of France, then by canal, road or rail to Marseilles and so on; or the more adventurous and stomach-churning sea route from London past France, Spain, Gibraltar, Malta (collecting travellers from Marseilles), thence to Alexandria - and so on to Bombay, Colombo and Calcutta (Kolkata).

#### **First Leg - from Malta to Bombay**

Soltykoff arrived in Malta by boat from Marseilles on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> February 1841. His journal summarises the first stage of his journey, but extra details from the Indian Office in London are used to flesh out his narrative<sup>45</sup>. He left for Alexandria in the same evening aboard a P&O ship that had arrived from England with many passengers also destined for India. From Alexandria, it took two days

for the group to reach Cairo, including travel by a small steam boat up the Nile; then a two-and-a-half day horseback ride across desert to Suez, thence to Aden by the 5<sup>th</sup> March.

Readers of *The Times* (of London) would have been very anxious for friends and relatives travelling to India when they opened the edition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1841 and saw the headlines ‘Bedouin *banditti* attacking travellers in Egypt’ and in a small, almost inconsequential, font ‘every English traveller proceeding from Cairo to Suez had to be escorted by a troop of horsemen in the pay of Mehemet Ali’. A force of 600 men pursued the banditti to try to rid the country of them. *The Times* noted that Mr Loeve-Weimar, the Consul of France at Baghdad, was well and safely ensconced at Cairo.

Soltykoff wanted ‘colour’ and the *banditti* gave him a paletteful. His journal was awash with vivid descriptions, most likely in a shaky hand. He and his companions travelled in a tightly-massed convoy of forty Europeans with numerous armed guards and servants because of the danger of Bedouin attacks. In the event, they did not come under attack, even in the most dangerous section where they were especially vigilant, but they did encounter camps of exhausted soldiers in rags and tatters of Ibrahim Pacha who had returned from a military campaign against the Sultan in Syria. He vividly describes all the bodies of dead horses and camels left by these soldiers and also seeing the corpses of three Nubian or Abyssinian soldiers arranged respectfully on the sand. He was complimentary about the very efficient organisation of this desert crossing by the English: they had established seven stations, Suez being the eighth, for this crossing and Soltykoff paid £15 sterling for it. A destitute and exhausted Arab woman attached herself for protection to their convoy and Soltykoff gave her an orange and a coin which were all he had at that time. Of Baron of Loeve-Weimar, Soltykoff wrote that he had tried originally to reach his posting through Arabia, but this was rendered impossibly dangerous because of the Bedouin situation. *The*

*Times* also reported that a grateful Pacha Mehemet Ali offered Sir Colin Campbell, the former Governor of Nova Scotia, a passage on the steam boat up the Nile. Soltykoff wrote, no doubt in a less shaky hand, that he was very lucky to accompany him as well, as otherwise he would have missed the boat from Suez, and would have had to wait another month! Other, less noble travellers suffered this fate.

Soltykoff is very impressed and delighted with his travelling companions to India: Baron Loeve-Weimar and Sir Colin Campbell KCB, the 65 year-old newly-appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Ceylon and Mrs Campbell. Accompanying them is also the 20-year-old Mr. Francis Villiers, former officer in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the youngest son of Lord Jersey, and now aide-de-camp to Colin Campbell - and wrongly listed on the passenger manifest as 'Bishop of Cochin'.

To historians, the presence of John Caldecott, newly-elected Fellow of the Royal Society and astronomer to the Raja of Travancore - is significant but does not rate a mention by Soltykoff. This will be examined later. Others not mentioned are Colonel Hunter of the Bengal Army, probably the bravest man on the ship, and Mrs Hunter; and Colonel John Baumgardt CB and Mrs Baumgardt. Colonel Hunter was returning to India after one-year's furlough in England, recently having been presented to the King at Buckingham Palace to receive the Companion of Military Order of Bath (CB) from King William IV for his courage and leadership at the Battle of Bhurtpoor a decade or so earlier, and now carrying a frightful injury that would not go unnoticed for more than a few days. The Baumgardts were on their way back to India from London after the Colonel, too, was awarded the CB from Queen Victoria in June for his bravery in The First Afghan War.<sup>46</sup> Soltykoff was unaware of this and never mentions Hunter, Baumgardt or their decorations, but it is certain that he would have been in awe of their courage - particularly as he would come face-to-face with the

aftermath in the later stages of his journey. It is also worth describing here as John Caldecott would be sure to be equally fascinated - but for another, more personal reason that we'll see later. The background was alluded to earlier but needs further clarification. In 1838, a Persian army laid siege to Herat, a city astride the trade route between China and the Mediterranean and the western approach to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Soltykoff was in Teheran soon after and became intimately involved in the diplomatic tension that this created for Russia who opposed the intervention and was not prepared to back Persia to the point of hostilities with Britain. Dost Mohammed, the ruler at Kabul, sought an alliance with the British in return for which he asked for their support for the return of the Peshawar Valley which had been appropriated by the Sikhs in 1826. However, the newly-arrived British Governor-General, Lord Auckland, decided instead to invade Afghanistan, occupy Kabul, and place a rival contender on the Afghan throne. The 'British Army of the Indus' was composed of many regiments, and commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's Foot (Queen's Royals) was Brevet Colonel Baumgardt, the only officer to have been in action beforehand. The sufferings of the army were immense, but the British prevailed and a compliant ruler was installed. Soltykoff, being a former Russian diplomat in Persia, was well aware that his diplomatic involvement might mark him as a Russian spy when he arrived in north India.

The remaining passengers include Charles Shubrick, Collector of Customs at Madras, returning from England after illness; and Captain A. N. McLean, Paymaster 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment Native Infantry. The rest of the passengers go unrecorded, but they include three unmarried ladies - all under 20 - from England, seventeen civil servants posted or returning from England, and a variety of nondescript passengers: 'one Armenian and two ladies, one servant and three children, one Jew and his son, nine Europeans and two native servants'. Presumably, the nine Europeans include Soltykoff's two servants, Theodore (a Russian) and

Francois (a German). The ship is the *Berenice*, a steamboat of the East India Company, commanded by Captain A. J. Young, and he set forth for India on 5<sup>th</sup> March.

Before we join Soltykoff and his companions on the trip to Bombay, let us consider some other influences that may already have affected him. Alexis Soltykoff was an avid reader and had already taken time to avail himself of the travel writings of others. Very little had been written about travelling in India up to the start of his journey - in 1841; for example, of the hundreds of travel books published (in English) in the preceding five years, only three pertained to tourist travel in India.<sup>47</sup> The most common accounts were for England, followed by Germany, Persia and Belgium.<sup>48</sup> The two books about India were *Travels in Western India* by Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod (1839), and *East India Voyager* by Emma Roberts (also 1839). We can be certain that Soltykoff availed himself of Roberts' work as he comments favourably on her writings as his ship leaves Suez; and more on this later. Of Tod's writings, we are not so sure. Tod was Political Agent to the western Rajput States, and his two-volume *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (1829 and 1832) became a classic authoritative British history of Rajasthan. But when it came to travel writing, Tod was out of his depth. His ponderous volume was overly heavy with dates and descriptions. As his reviewer in *The Spectator* said, 'he has filled his pages with elaborate disquisitions of Indian antiquities, the genealogies of deities, accounts of fables without a moral, of myths without interest, and of remote annals which have little history save its dry bones'.<sup>49</sup> The reviewer cautions the reader that Tod's treatment is 'minute, discursive, and wanting of art, it is wearisome, and with words that convey no meaning, neglecting the living for the dead'. This was hardly a book to stimulate interest! However, there were several other books available in libraries and second-hand bookstores that may have interested Soltykoff. Two are critical in this regard and there is reason to believe that they were read, probably avidly, by him. The first is *Letters from India* by the French

scientist Victor Jacquemont<sup>50</sup> who travelled through northern India at the request of the French Government from 1828 to 1831. Jacquemont, who embraced republican values, was an atheist and a utopian socialist, but had no empathy with Hindus, and, on racial grounds, distrusted indigenous sources. His travelogue is of the Northern provinces and is of little concern to our discussion about Travancore. Originally published in French, it was almost immediately translated into English (in 1834) and then, a century later, sections on the Punjab were again translated by Professor H. L. O Garrett, former Principal and Head of the History Department at the Government College, Lahore, and Keeper of the Records of the Government of the Punjab.<sup>51</sup> But many things can happen when a text is translated. It is easy to accuse the translator of bias and this is what has happened to Garrett. For example, in the 1915 edition of *The History of the Sikhs*,<sup>52</sup> Garrett plucked out the passages that the British found objectionable and instead, inserted another under the name of Waris Shah to depict Sikhs as depraved people, thereby justifying British actions against the Sikhs.<sup>53</sup> As we have said before, being aware of the authors' biases is necessary in evaluating these travellers' tales. Garrett also translates a latter chapter of Soltykoff and obliquely accuses him of plagiarism with his observation that Soltykoff's narrative 'compares very curiously with that of Jacquemont'.<sup>54</sup> Our reading of both Soltykoff and Jacquemont fails to support his assertion; similar events such as 'widow burning', 'child marriages', 'Kali worshipping thugs', and so on were simply favourite themes, curried throughout practically all European travelogues as proof of the natives' social and moral inferiority; and to add spice. They were common - but the perspectives of writers differed. Soltykoff was not a plagiarist, not even unintentionally.

The other account of travel in India worthy of mention is Colonel David Welsh's *Military Reminiscences*.<sup>55</sup> Welsh was a senior British military officer in Madras who spent some time in Travancore in 1819 and 1825. He describes his meeting with the young princes - the



future Rajas Swathi Thirunal (1829-1847) and his successor and brother Martanda Vurmah (or Utharadam Thirunal, 1847–1860). We are not given any great insights to Swathi Thirunal's character other than he was very talented in mathematics and Persian ('pure and elegant'), but his English was described as 'inelegant and ungrammatical'. Welsh is full of praise for the 'Dewaun'<sup>56</sup> - in effect, the Prime Minister of the Raja's government. He is Venket Rao, an 'uncommonly handsome, fair and elegant Carnatic Brahmin'; 'one of the most intelligent, well-educated men I have met'; and 'such a man to educate the young princes would have been worth his weight in gold'.<sup>57</sup> Soltykoff came after Dewan Vencatta (Venket) Rao's resignation in 1839, but unfortunately his appraisal of the successor Dewan Krishna Row is all too brief and meaningless, as will be shown later. Keep in mind that Welsh was not some effete Englishman prancing around Southern India looking for colour and adventure; he was a distinguished military man who had killed Indians in battle and had likewise seen his own men slaughtered in the Poligar and Maratha Wars in the south. Not a man to be taken lightly, but his observations of the Princes are premature and thus conspicuously deficient. Remember also that, to the British colonisers - of whom Welsh was a representative - a working knowledge, no matter how imperfect, of the local cultural and political landscape was critical for administrative and military control of India. Welsh, like all colonisers, had to come to terms with how Indians interpreted what the British were doing. Thus, his touring and observations served a particular administrative purpose. Soltykoff knows he can do this differently, and better - something more picturesque, something that only an outsider can achieve, since long-term, resident insiders cannot appreciate the images and what they represent for the European public. Up to now, 'outsider' travel books have focused on India as an antiquarian curiosity - old buildings and ruins - or singular features and ethnographically-interesting natives placed in a 'typical' landscape, often defining a nostalgic past that British imperialism will set right. Soltykoff is not as enamoured with England and aims to be different, as we shall see.

We have looked at the question of influences on Soltykoff's view of India prior to his trip. However, there are several new influences that have appeared once the journey has started. His fellow passengers are a complex mix of mainly French and English travellers who bring with them perspectives that will shake Soltykoff, not that he cares to admit it. The long voyage to India was renowned for nurturing friendships, but for some passengers it was more than that; it became a spiritual awakening, particularly on the old five-month cruise around the Cape. In 1823, Arthur Conolly, a 16-year old cadet from England, sat literally at the feet of the pious and tireless evangelist Right Reverend Reginald Heber, the newly- appointed Bishop of Calcutta. Conolly was an eager acolyte of Heber and became one of the most famous explorers and spies in Persia and Afghanistan, but never tired of propagating the Gospels to the Muslims. He was prepared to defend his convictions to the most bitter end – while our Russian Prince cooled his heels in the Himalayas.<sup>58</sup>

This will be no ordinary voyage because his travel companions are some of the most influential people he will ever meet. They are strong evangelical Christians, and with the exception of Loeve-Weimar, all very much pro-British and proud of it.

## **The Sea Journey Begins**

For the first leg of the journey, Soltykoff's impressions are generally very positive: airy, clean cabins, good service, excellent company provided by distinguished English merchants, coffee planters, charming young ladies, military men, all of whom are friendly, tactful and undemanding once the ice is broken - after several weeks. There is, however, a flaw – the cockroaches, a 'scourge of Egypt'. He's becoming convinced he's no longer on a boat but 'in a huge nest of cockroaches poisoning every minute, especially the nights' and thinks

he 'will be little more than a skeleton' when he arrives at Bombay. He's chosen, therefore, to sleep on the deck. Nor is he impressed by the wines – 'misleading mockeries' and 'bitter pretences' of the real thing. He's gratified to meet Baron Loeve-Weimar, and although Soltykoff makes no mention of their conversation, we can be sure it is a very pleasant and close one. François-Adolphe Loëve-Weimar was a 40 year-old author, publisher, theatre critic, historian and now a diplomat on his way to Baghdad circuitously via Bombay. Although his family was of German-Jewish origin in Hamburg (known as Loewe), he was born in Paris, converted to Christianity, returned and grew up there. He became famous for his translations of stories, particularly the beautiful French translation of the German *Tales of Hoffman* which one critic praised as 'scarcely believing it was a translation'. When he published an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Review of the Two Worlds, October 1836) which was favourable to the French President of Council (his friend Thiers), he was selected for diplomatic duties, baronized, and went to Soltykoff's home town of St Petersburg on a literary mission (in 1836) and was received at the Russian Court.<sup>59</sup> Here he fell in love with a girl from a wealthy Russian family, and a handsome dowry of 800 slaves was his.<sup>60</sup> His narratives of travel in Russia lauded Emperor Nicholas, the country he governed and its institutions; not unexpectedly, he became the toast of the Russian Court and upon return to Paris, fabulously wealthy, he continued his romance with Russia, exercising influence upon the French to reduce prejudice against Russia. We cannot be certain if Soltykoff and Loeve-Weimar met in St Petersburg in the late 1830s, but it would seem likely, given they were both diplomats and friends of Emperor Nicholas. Perhaps they renewed their acquaintance in Paris.

Not only is Soltykoff appreciative of friendship with the Baron, he is also very grateful to Mr. Francis Villiers who pays his passage and offers to act as guarantor, if needed, at Bombay where he must obtain cash on his letter of credit. Soltykoff didn't have enough time in

Alexandria and Cairo to obtain cash from the bankers, hence the kind services of Mr. Villiers.

Soltykoff should not have been surprised with the conditions and cockroaches as he had read Emma Roberts's *East India Voyager* beforehand; admittedly, it was light literature - a 'ten minute' guidebook for tourists who sought the picturesque, and for Anglo-Indians, especially women, who wanted to escape the tedium and entrapment of colonial life. Emma Roberts (1791–1840) was born in London and lived with her married sister in India from 1828 until her sister's death in 1832. As a writer on India, she won great acclaim. The objectivity gained from what she perceived to be her peripheral role as a spinster in British society in India, was turned to account in her descriptions of both the British and Indians, for whom she showed sympathy. Her articles for the *Asiatic Journal* were published as *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* (1835) and were widely praised, the Calcutta Literary Gazette noting, 'there is a vivacity, a delicacy, and a truth in her light sketches of all that lay immediately before her, that have never been surpassed in any book of travels that is at this moment present to our memory'. In September 1839 she returned to the East, undertaking to write an account of her outward voyage and her observations in western India for the *Asiatic Journal*. Travelling by the overland route through France and Egypt, she accidentally met John Caldecott who had just landed in Suez aboard the *Berenice* from Madras. He was on his way to England on behalf of the Raja of Travancore - Swathi Thirunal - to purchase astronomical instruments for the new observatory in Trivandrum. Caldecott and Roberts stayed in the same hotel - Mr Hill's Establishment - in Suez. Roberts boarded the *Berenice* and reached Bombay in November 1839, submitting her articles as she went. She was taken ill in April 1840 and died at Poona in September that year. Her collected articles were published, along with a memoir of her life, in 1841.<sup>61</sup> Soltykoff's voyage was before this book was published, but he had read the supplements that appeared in

the *Asiatic Journal* before then. His familiarity with Roberts's appraisal will be kept in mind as we progress on Soltykoff's voyage.

Let us return to Caldecott. He had been in Britain to purchase instruments, and while there met His Royal Highness Prince Albert - at the very same meeting of the Royal Society to which they were both admitted as Fellows. He and Prince Albert visited the library and had supper together.<sup>62</sup> In November, he travelled to Alexandria from London, taking the gruelling sea route past Gibraltar. It was a rough voyage but Caldecott took time to stop off at Cadiz to visit the Spanish naval observatory at San Fernando. He had with him crates of astronomical instruments for the Travancore observatory. Again, Soltykoff doesn't mention Caldecott, but there is a surprise in store. Caldecott is introduced to Colonel Baumgardt and the two converse about The Queen's Royals and the youthfulness of their officers. Baumgardt opines that, in contrast to himself, a fifty-two year old commanding officer, the rest of the Queen's officers are young; the lieutenants are in their twenties and the captains in their thirties. The only exception was the sixty-nine year old paymaster, Lieutenant John James Somerville Darby from Dublin. He survived the First Afghan War but died on his way back to Bombay soon after.<sup>63</sup> Caldecott's ears would have pricked up as he knows this man - his father-in-law John Darby whose daughter Selina married Caldecott on 8 Nov 1825 in Bombay. It is quite likely that Caldecott discussed Travancore with Soltykoff - and in a favourable light. Caldecott's argument with the Raja and The (British) Resident in Trivandrum, was still a few years off. Travancore seems an unlikely place for a Russian Prince to visit as it was so difficult to get to. It makes us think that Soltykoff may have been persuaded to visit by Caldecott who could have arranged the introductions.

The other old warhorse aboard *The Berenice* is Colonel Hunter. He goes unmentioned by Soltykoff, but there is no doubt that the Colonel's military exploits would have been quickly recounted, not by the Colonel himself for he was too modest, but by Mrs Hunter in accounting for her husband's useless left arm. Hunter was a scion of the wealthy titled gentry of Scotland, being descended from the Lairds of Burnside and the Lairds of Abergeldie, but the title passed to his oldest brother General David Hunter. As a Cadet in the East India Company (EIC) forces, George Hunter, aged 16, arrived in Calcutta in 1800, and served under Lord Lake throughout the Central India campaigns, notably the Battle of Deig in North West India in 1804, and all four abortive sieges of the fortress of Bharatpur (in the Indian state of Rajasthan) the following year. In 1809, Hunter was assigned as aide-de-camp to the staff of Major General Sir Rollo Gillespie, then in command of the Bengal Cavalry. Gillespie was promoted to Colonel in command at Bangalore, and Hunter remained on his personal staff. Assigned an expedition to Java, Gillespie, along with Hunter, left Madras in 1811 and under withering fire, he stormed the redoubts of Fort Cornelis by a personal bayonet charge; here, Hunter was injured when a powder magazine exploded. After the capture of Jakarta, the official report read: 'Our loss on the whole has been considerable. Capt. Young & Lt Hunter, at the head of the 14th Grenadiers, were blown up and much burnt but not dangerously'. Hunter was rendered helpless for some time. In Hunter's next expedition - to Sumatra in 1812 - Gillespie deposed the Sultan of Matran on the island of Java, but Gillespie was struck by a Ghurka bullet through the heart and died in the arms of Young and Hunter. However, it was in January 1826 that the Colonel suffered his permanent injury. At the Battle of Bhurtpoor, Hunter, in command of the 21st Native Infantry, stormed the citadel of Bhurtpoor and was intercepted by the Master of the Entry to the citadel - Khushal Singh. Singh, a fearless Brahmin personally selected for duty by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Lahore Court, delivered a mighty blow from his sword to Hunter which 'cut through his arm as if it were paper', and the fine edge of the Damascus blade rendered Hunter's arm useless evermore. The Colonel was soon to find out from Shubrick that

a steel foundry in Salem (Madras Presidency) where he was once a Collector, had supplied the swordsmiths of Persia with the ‘Indian wootz’ steel forged into the Damascus pattern. Colonel Hunter was too modest to complain; he was more likely to talk of his adorable eight-year old nephew, later to be Sir Frederick Sleight (‘Bobs’) Roberts, Commander in Chief in India 1885-1893 and one of Britain’s most celebrated heroes – Lord Roberts of Kandahar, VC.

### **Soltykoff’s Stay in Bombay**

The *Berenice* arrived in Bombay on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1841. Soltykoff is struck by the contrast between Indian life – the people, Indians and ‘Guèbres’ (Parsis - Zoroastrian Persians), their dress, the excessively strong smell of flowers in their hair, the stench of musk rats, the ‘barbaric’ music – and the sight of ‘elegant English horsemen’ and ‘women dressed in London and Paris fashions in lavish carriages’. He watches some Hindu wedding ceremonies of naked children wearing rings and bracelets, who are washed, smeared with yellow, and are repeatedly given water to put in their mouths and spurt it at each other – ‘absurdities’ in his opinion. As for company, he is honoured with a ‘gracious welcome’ by the Governor of Bombay, Sir James Carnack, who offers to accommodate him at his palace called Parel, but he has to refuse this as he needs to stay in town, a ‘fatal mistake’ as he then contends with the ‘suffocating heat and the insects of the Black Town’. He ends up sharing an abandoned and dilapidated house with Baron Loeve-Weimar, Soltykoff upstairs and the Baron downstairs, in which ‘the birds fly into his rooms as if it is nothing and seem quite decided not to change their habits one jot on his account’. The Governor invites Soltykoff to a ball in honour of the arrival of Sir Colin Campbell – the guests include Indians and Guèbres. With reference to Miss Emma Roberts, he comments that she was correct in saying, in her ‘charming work’, that Bombay offers ‘the sight of a continuous celebration

throughout the whole year'. Soltykoff paints a somewhat critical picture of the patronising attitude of the English towards Indian culture and scenery; 'they hardly enjoy what's so original and exquisite in India as for them, it's only trivial and commonplace'. He, himself, is 'lost in deepest contemplation of the mysteries of this marvellous country of India'. He deplores, for example, their insensitivity towards the mystical dancing of the Bayadère women, some of whom were extremely distressed by certain Englishmen's clumsy attempts to draw them into a waltz! He says that the 'English are disdainful of everything that is different from the ideas of their own country'. Lawns and trees looking like northern fir trees quickly replace palm trees, perhaps as a sign of English homesickness. He admires the graceful garb of Indian women compared with the 'disfiguring outfits' of European women. He writes ironically of the English who courteously show him 'docks, the mint, steam engines, schools and other curiosities as well as the fort', saying quizzically and contemptuously - 'imagine the joy I feel'! He says the government is patronising towards the different religions and notes ironically that 'the police admirably watch over their safety'.

### **Soltykoff's Sea Voyage from Bombay To Ceylon**

Soltykoff left for Ceylon on March 20, 1841. He is feeling the effects of the extreme heat and the excessive length of the voyage which should take 8 to 10 days but lasts 23 days owing to the lack of winds. He sleeps on the deck on a folding bed he purchased in Bombay. As an aside, we should comment on the cabin arrangements aboard the *Berenice*, seeing Soltykoff mentions it. He doesn't talk about cabins, but there are eight two-berth cabins for first-class passengers. All unaccompanied ladies and married couples are entitled to a cabin. That leaves three for the rest. From Suez to Bombay Caldecott and Shubrick share one, Loeve-Weimar and Francis Villiers share another, leaving the last for Soltykoff. However, Soltykoff tells us that he chose to sleep



on the deck. This was not uncommon: Emma Roberts did the same the previous year aboard the *Berenice* even though a cabin was kept for her. Soltykoff wears clothes as light as possible, still keeping in mind propriety with ladies aboard, and avoids his cockroach-infested cabin. Fortunately, there is a ferret on the ship to catch the more than plentiful rats! He misses the good company he enjoyed before as only Sir Colin Campbell, his children and his party are left to provide him with friendly, polished society. The Hunters and Baumgardts stay behind in Bombay, and in spite of their being British military families, it is quite certain that Soltykoff would have enjoyed their humility and friendship. Hunter would go on to become one of the most loved officers in the Indian Army. His single-handed quelling of a murderous mutiny of 12000 native troops in the Scinde in 1844 by appealing to their affection, is the stuff of legends.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, Baron Loeve-Weimar also stayed in Bombay, hoping to find a ship to take him to Bassora and from there to Baghdad. We say ‘unfortunately’ as it becomes apparent at the end of his journey that Soltykoff and Loeve-Weimar had developed a strong bond, so strong that Soltykoff revisits their old haunts in Bombay two years later, lamenting his soulmate. Why Garrett chose to omit this sojourn in his translation is intriguing, for what could anyone read into it? We’ll look more closely at this later on.

Soltykoff is tired of the ‘detestable diet’ of the English ‘who never change a thing! It’s always ham, stuffed goose, smoked herrings, Cayenne pepper, plum pudding, cheese, nuts and brandy’. He complains that the English constantly resort to their medicine chests; the captain<sup>65</sup>, a young, fat Englishman being a perfect example as, ‘after stuffing himself with old ham and bacon, invariably swallows some bicarbonate of soda with his wine’. He also complains of feeling an ‘emptiness in India, of being deprived not only of music but also of people who understand it’, saying that ‘a whole world of feeling is closed to the English’, and recalls unhappily the military music always played at the Governor of Bombay’s dinners. He’s bored by having

been an unwilling spectator at a game of whist which continued interminably over 16 days! We are not sure if he is talking about Caldecott when he refers to the 'English' - perhaps not, for there are 18 other Englishmen aboard, and Caldecott's professional training as an architect took him to the Royal Academy, followed by artistic and sophisticated wanderings through France and Italy in the early 1820s. Of Shubrick, we cannot be certain.

Soltykoff arrived in Ceylon on April 12, allowing the *Berenice* to continue on to Madras without him (but with Astronomer Caldecott aboard, although Soltykoff again omits this detail). The sea voyage to Colombo with good sailing weather would have been 8 to 10 days, but it lasted 23 days, irritating Soltykoff no end. His new friends Lieutenant Governor of Ceylon, Colin Campbell, and Mrs Campbell, disembarked with him at Colombo. Soltykoff is staying with Sir Colin who treats him almost as a member of his family. Soltykoff expresses reservations about the extent of the killing of elephants by English officers and hunters – in just one part of a hunt, an English officer had himself killed 40, justifying this as 'useful' because elephants 'devastate crops and are harmful to villagers and especially travellers, being in too great a number in comparison with the population'. As the figures on this comparison are unreliable, Soltykoff is far from convinced of this necessity. Soltykoff makes detailed observations about the Ceylonese, in particular commenting on the 'strange mixture' of European dress with Indian garb, especially evident with servants in English households, who look really comical in Dutch military dress including tails and frockcoats, while their long hair is piled on to the back of their heads with several large combs! He admires the generosity of the Ceylonese who have so very little, and expresses compassion for the poor who try to sell their handiwork in ivory or ebony with innocence and docility, and submissively accept being sent away by the servants of a household. Soltykoff is always interested in local culture and spontaneously commissions an evening performance by some Malabar actors and dancers, 'stoically giving up his English dinner at the Governor's'. He's accompanied by Mr Strachan who is his willing

interpreter on many occasions, having spent several years in Ceylon and acquiring a perfect command of the language. Soltykoff gives a very rich and evocative account of this historical performance which he also attempts to sketch, writing that he was ‘dazzled by the richness and profusion of the ornaments and by the strange shapes and attitudes’ he was seeing. He also vividly describes his visit to a Buddhist temple near Kandy, praising the courtesy and hospitality of the monks with no sense of condescension at all – ‘all this takes place in the silence commanded by respect and restraint’ – and is grateful for their unstinting help when he suffered a touch of the sun. He writes that ‘these forest priests teach their pupils goodness and modesty, making peaceful, gentle men of them’. Because he is attentive and respectful, the priests wish to please him and they mount him on an elephant for a walk along the streets in Kandy, deserted at that time of night. He writes admiringly of the Ceylonese, saying they have ‘noble features, a gentle and candid expression’.

### **On to Madras via Pondichéry (Pondichery)**

His letter to brother Petr on May 20 was written in an isolated house 35 miles from Kandy. By June 8 he was writing at sea ‘between Ceylon and Madras’ somewhere along the Coromandel Coast, having hired a small sailing ship of 37 tons with a Portuguese captain to take him to Madras. He disembarked briefly at Kalikari, a Moorish village on the Indian coast, but was overcome by the heat, and continued on to a small island called Ramisseram between Ceylon and the Indian peninsula.

He disembarked at the village of Pomben (Pamban) to visit a famous Hindu monastery, and was cordially received and given food, accommodation and transport to this monastery nine miles away by two English officers and an English lady. He’s somewhat embarrassed about being festooned by the Brahmin priests with necklaces and bracelets of

perfumed flowers in front of a rather mocking English officer who's arrived to paint the landscape while Soltykoff does some sketches. During the three days he spends there, he is able to wander freely except for entering certain inner rooms where Indian girls glide secretively, 'dedicated to the temple' and under the 'dissolute tyranny' of the Brahmin priests. He also witnesses a wedding of a heavily pregnant bride. His tone is a mixture of wonder at the uniqueness of this place but also unease towards the Brahmin priests – he calls the temple complex 'lugubrious'. He stayed there three days; after that, he observed from aboard the sailing boat the island of Jaffna; then the town of Negapatam belonging to the English on the Coromandel coast; then Nagour, Tranquébar (Tranquebar) - a Danish town - then he arrives in Pondichery, a French town where he disembarks. Here, he introduces himself to the Governor and dines at his home with about twenty French people, many of whom are native to Africa and India. He writes in a complimentary manner about the black population, saying they are 'very gracious' with an 'ineffable grace of movement', 'innocent and serious' in manner and have an air of 'vague sadness of inexpressible charm'.

Soltykoff's next entry is at Vélor (Vellore), 80 miles from Madras on June 26 where he stayed two days at the Prison Commandant's house, and says he'll continue his journey that evening so as to avoid the heat for himself and his porters. He has also visited Arcot (between Madras and Vellore) to watch sepoy training – this land expedition from Madras took 8 to 10 days. On June 27 Soltykoff arrives in Conjeeveram (Kanchipuram) where he writes that he'll return to Madras the day after tomorrow.

### **Soltykoff's Experiences in Condjévéram (Kanchipuram)**

Soltykoff is very grateful to the Governor of Madras, Lord Elphinstone, for his hospitable attentions – the provision of three servants with good food supplies – for his excursion to visit the Hindu

temples of Kanchipuram, writing that it is almost impossible not to become a ‘scrounger’ for food in India as he finds the food with its smells, oils and sweetness nausea-provoking, although in his other travels, he would try to eat as the locals do. He’s also unimpressed by the ‘horrible, writhing dancing’ he witnesses and the harsh treatment accorded to the dancer by her mother, and thinks of mentioning this issue to Lord Elphinstone while giving some money to this unfortunate dancer and chastising her mother severely. He writes admiringly, however, of the Hindu temple and its treasures, saying ‘the whole thing was marvellous and every detail of a feature was of profound interest’. He comments with awe that the tower of the monastery, for example, is higher and wider than Moscow’s tallest tower – and 4000 years old!

### **Soltykoff’s Experiences in Vélor (Vellore) and Madras**

Soltykoff visits the ancient Indian fortress of Vélor (Vellore), just over 80 miles from Madras, accompanied by Colonel Napier, the Prison Commandant with whom he’s staying for two days: inside this prison are the wives and children of Tippto-Saib and other remaining members of the family of his father, Haider-Ali, whose detention began forty years ago! There are also other Indian families including that of the last king of Ceylon, imprisoned twenty years ago and who died here, as well as his son aged fifteen years. The fortress is effectively guarded by crocodiles in the encircling moat. Soltykoff is amazed by this but notes that the prisoners are relatively free: the little Prince of Kandy has permission to go where he wants, but he does not take advantage of this as he’s well looked after and is afraid to return to Ceylon because of the cruelties his father had inflicted on his own people. Soltykoff is complimentary about Indian people, their ‘quite maternal’ care of him in his palanquin, writing that ‘even in the lowest class, Indians are more refined and more skilful than Italians’ (“plus fins et plus adroits que les italiens” - a phrase that Karl Marx picks up on a few years later).<sup>66</sup> He writes that his porters are ‘so hard-working, so gentle, working as one like brothers, happy in their work’, and he

always generously tips them in appreciation. He gives credit to the English, at least those who have been in India for some time, for recognising their probity and intelligence, and says that ‘the English do not abuse their power’ and are themselves ‘struck by the staunch bravery’ of these Indian soldiers, volunteers from the best castes, whom they have trained. Soltykoff witnesses sepoys doing manoeuvres on horseback and says they ‘do their duty as well as Russian Hussars’. At Madras, Soltykoff is staying with the Governor, Lord Elphinstone, a man of ‘rare goodness’, who receives him with ‘extreme politeness and attentiveness’ and gives him the best apartment in his palace, a room of ‘absolute tranquillity’. Elphinstone would have been well prepared for the Prince’s visit as his reputation would have preceded him. A few months earlier<sup>67</sup>, Royal Astronomer Caldecott called on the Governor in Madras on his way overland to Travancore. Caldecott and Elphinstone knew each other well from their days together in the early 1820s in Bombay where Elphinstone was Governor and Caldecott, a young architect and hobbyist astronomer freshly arrived from Britain. Soltykoff, of course, is unaware of this, and is unlikely to surmise that he and Elphinstone will become firm friends over the following years. Soltykoff then begins his overland journey, not unlike Caldecott’s route by bullock cart in mid April 1841.

### **Soltykoff’s Experiences in Tandjor (Tanjore)**

On July 25 he makes his first contact with Indian royalty when he visits Maharaja ‘Sivadji’ (Shivaji) at Tandjor. This account of Soltykoff’s visit to the fort of the Raja Shivaji, aged about thirty, is delightful! Shivaji’s father had originally been imprisoned in a dungeon by his own uncle, the usurper of his throne, and was slowly being poisoned. A German missionary, Schwartz, had comforted the little Prince and protected him from the cruel uncle. The Prince managed to escape and went to Madras to obtain English aid, being promptly installed on his throne by the East India Company. However, in reality, the English governed the whole state, paying the Prince three million

francs a year. When Schwartz died, the grief-stricken Prince had constructed for him a marble mausoleum in a pretty Christian church. In a footnote, Soltykoff observes that, amongst the Hindus, there are often examples of religious tolerance of this kind where Hindu Rajas will even wear Muslim costumes where needed and celebrate the Muslim holy days of their servants. Soltykoff describes vividly his ceremonious entrance to the fort with cannon firing, and he learns the Prince has forty elephants, seven tigers, five leopards and three hundred wives! He's greeted very warmly by the Raja and his step-son and writes with a gentle irony of the three topics of conversation they embarked upon in English – their respective states of health, their mutual pleasure in seeing each other and the heat of the day. Soltykoff is then 'covered with flowers from head to foot, sprinkled with rose water and anointed with some black oil of an excessively strong smell', possibly of sandalwood. Soltykoff then withdraws, to prepare for the Raja's return visit in the afternoon, to his own lodgings at the house of the English Resident (the representative of the East India Company for the British Government). In turn, Soltykoff welcomes him in the same manner, offering betel, pouring some oil and rose water and placing necklaces of flowers on their hands and necks. The Raja accepts all these courtesies with an amused delight and smiling condescension at Soltykoff's lack of experience, but is so pleased by it all that he sends over his own painter to take a likeness of his host. Soltykoff describes this sitting delightfully, mocking himself gently, as he's portrayed with a fat stomach, intended as a compliment, and every hair on his face is counted for accuracy! However, the project goes awry when he refuses to provide the painter with a lock of his own hair to paint its correct shade, as he's sensitive about its 'uncertain colour'. Soltykoff shows a complete lack of pretentiousness in his relations with Indians, accepting them naturally and unaffectedly, and quite happily adopting local practices where appropriate without strain.

### **Soltykoff's Experiences in Poudoucota (Pudukottai) and Tritchinopoli (Trichinopoly)**

Soltykoff heads off for the western coast and Travancore. On July 27 he visits the Raja of Poudoucota (Pudukkottai), aged eleven, who is dressed in a theatrical Turkish outfit, wears superb emerald and pearl jewellery, and spouts numerous English sentences. Eight elephants and many fine horses complete this picture. Soltykoff is accompanied by three Englishmen, a doctor, a soldier and a civil servant acting as an intermediary between the East India Company and the Rajas. Soltykoff is shown the portrait of the deceased father of the Prince after which the departure ceremonies commence. However, the Prince accidentally overturns the rose oil that was to be used to anoint them (to Soltykoff's 'great satisfaction!'), but nevertheless, the Prince still washes their hands in rose water and festoons them with flowers, a 'veritable amusement for him'. That evening, the Raja performs his return visit and the same ceremonies are repeated. He brings, however, hundreds of servants, elephants and trumpet players who 'performed with praiseworthy zeal but made a dreadful noise', and also a golden, wooden parrot on a long stick! Soltykoff decides that 'Indians think up everything they can to create an effect'. He leaves Pudukkottai on the same evening and arrives next morning at Tritchinopoli (Trichinopoly). His next entry is on the road between Tritchinopoli and Madura (Madurai) on August 1 and he finally arrives in the holy city of Madurai the next day.

### **Soltykoff's Experiences between Tritchinopoli and Madura and En Route for Travancore**

Soltykoff comments warmly on the excellent reception he is given at Trichinopoly where he is guest of honour at a military parade performed especially for him under the Commander, General Showers. He is invited to dine with the officers and to stay with Colonel Stratton who also provides hospitality and gives him useful advice about the



next stage of his trip. He's given accommodation half-way to Madura in an English-maintained house with two servants. Soltykoff comments on the strange sight at Trichinopoly of an officer smoking a mixture of candy sugar, rose essence and banana pulp through an Indian hookah, saying he'd rather eat bananas than burn them! He also discusses the local practice of burning the bodies of the deceased, commenting objectively that cow dung is used as fuel for the poor and sandal wood for the wealthy. He describes fairly dispassionately the smell of 'mutton chops' emanating from such a funeral pyre, and goes on to discuss the practice of burning bereaved wives as well, and their apparent willingness to die in this manner, giving as an example the wife of the last Raja of Tandjor. However, in the case of the bereaved wife of the Raja of Pudukkottai, Lord Elphinstone intervened successfully by sending her a letter imploring her not to have herself burned. According to Soltykoff, this practice is confined to the higher castes and is prohibited by the East India Company. Soltykoff is only able to stay in Madurai for several hours, describing it as a charming place with pagodas 3000 years old, a palace of Hindu and Moorish architecture, and troops of monkeys living freely on roofs and in the town like domestic cats. He passes through Palamcotta which, he says, 'isn't interesting' and proceeds to Courtalem which is elevated, cool and damp where he visits a temple and discusses his plans of travelling to Quailon (Kollam), 60 miles away, very early the following morning. He isn't able to travel there at night owing to the likelihood of an attack by any enraged elephant, banished from the herd because of madness. This situation happened to Colonel Havelock, military secretary to Lord Elphinstone, who was pursued through the forest by such an elephant and had to divest himself of his hat and frock coat to try to divert it! Lord Elphinstone also had a similar experience. Soltykoff resolves to undertake the trip with many natives who will make a lot of noise to frighten the elephants; besides, a detour would take too long. He's impressed that some English ladies will be travelling as well with 'astonishing courage'. As it transpires, he travels safely through the forest without encountering a single elephant. Soltykoff recounts the interesting story of his acquaintance with an Englishman at the court of

Pudukkottai who prevented the six concubines of the deceased Raja from burning themselves to death, by locking them in their apartment until the funeral ceremonies were concluded. Far from being grateful, they bitterly reproached him about being dishonoured in this way, as they claimed the queen had lost her sense of propriety by deciding not to burn herself on her husband's death and they, therefore, needed to do so. They were, in fact, treated very poorly at the court, having their heads shaven and being given little to eat. Soltykoff writes that the 'Hindus are mean-minded and miserly' to behave in this way to 'these poor women'. Generally, Soltykoff avoids making judgements of this kind, but he reacts this time with a natural compassion and humanity. He also comments positively on the East India Company's policy of assisting the maintenance of religious buildings, in spite of the great indignation of the missionaries, and regrets that a powerful English party has now succeeded in bringing this maintenance of 'heathen temples' to an end. He's afraid that the Brahmin priests will let the temples go to ruin and says that this would be a shame from an artistic point of view.

This outline of Soltykoff's route serves to show that he has travelled through much of southern India and that he is not a novice when meeting the Raja of Travancore. By August 6 he has passed through Palamcotta and Courtallem and is heading for Kollam some 60 miles away. As a matter of interest, the Travancore Royal Astronomer John Caldecott had passed this way three months earlier with the astronomical instruments travelling ahead. It was a rough route; in fact, some instruments were smashed.

### **Soltykoff's Stay at Quailon (Kollam) and his Visit to Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram)**

Soltykoff arrived in Travancore in early August 1841 but was certainly preceded by word of his forthcoming visit by Caldecott. We

can be certain that the Royal Astronomer, immediately upon his arrival in Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), would have detailed Soltykoff's impending visit to the Royal Court with the Raja. Caldecott and The Raja were on the best of terms and mutual respect was the order of the day. The following is a translation from the French of Soltykoff's narrative about meeting the Raja of Travancore. As we have said, an English translation has not been previously published.

The subtleties of translation are challenging. We have tried to render Soltykoff's work as closely as possible to the 'voice' and spirit of the author, taking into account with older texts like Soltykoff's, the social manners and courtesies of the time which inevitably affect the observations he's chosen to make. Nevertheless, the text has to be translated fairly accurately to fit in with the register of the language of that time. For example, he usually comments on the reception he receives when he arrives somewhere and the company he enjoys (or doesn't!) which was standard practice at that time. For example, Jane Austen's novels are well known for this formality of language register although Soltykoff is nowhere as formal as Austen can be at times. If we compare our translation of the Travancore section of his journey with Garrett's 1934 translation of the Punjab section, we find that they 'feel' the same. The fact that our translation is in a social climate 80 years after Garrett's, does not significantly affect the rendering of the text, as our aim - like Garrett's - is to remain faithful to the author's voice. What is endearing about Soltykoff is his very natural writing style and his expression of personal opinions and emotions where appropriate, as well as writing in a very detailed and usually quite objective manner to describe what he's experiencing. He's not narrow-minded, affected or pompous at all, in our opinion. The month is August (1841) and the translation is as follows:

*I'm afraid all these descriptions are going to be tedious. Today we're already up to the 13<sup>th</sup> or even the 14<sup>th</sup> (of the month). I'm at Quailon on the Malabar coast. The weather's been cooled down by*

*recent rains. Everything is delightfully green. I'm being put up in European homes and I'm surrounded by Europeans.*

*Yesterday, I came back from my journey to Travandrum, the capital of this area which is called Travancore, and also the official residence of a Raja who's an independent sovereign. This region never belonged to either the Dutch or the Portuguese, but both countries had several trading posts there and commanded great influence. The Dutch, in typical style, dug canals there, criss-crossing the greenest fields imaginable in all directions, and the Portuguese left a fine memory there, the tomb of the famous navigator Vasco de Gama, who died in this area.*

*Travelling by water and also by land in a palanquin, I went from here to Travandrum, roughly about 40 miles. The Raja of Travancore, his brother and his Prime Minister are completely European in their conversation. Wearing a robe of white muslin with gold sequins and a feather in his light turban which was adorned with precious stones, the Raja received me, seated on his throne. His whole outfit and his manner were exactly like a Russian merchant's. He spoke English and was excessively polite; and what really surprised me, he was extremely embarrassed, trembling with shyness. This must have been a serious problem for him to tremble in front of me, given that I scarcely knew what figure to cut in that throne room. He seemed to me to be not more than 25 to 27 years of age. His brother's bolder, very keen on European ways and quite annoyed about being in the Nair caste which hinders all his relations with us. The minister or Dewan is well educated and behaves just as he should. They all wear the true Indian dress and go bare-foot in the room, but they do appear to have a European spirit. The only exception was the brother of the Raja whom I also visited, who'd created for himself a half-Hungarian outfit that he sometimes wears and then looks really funny. He comes along to European dinners with his entourage of naked followers, not trying any food at all and*

*continually chewing on betel nut which he does to excess. He and his brother, the ruling Prince, each gave me some good copies of their portraits done by an Austrian painter who, when travelling through here, painted the whole royal family in life-like size. I was showered with courtesies in this court. They brought me elephants with howdahs on top for me to do rough sketches of them. The Raja's brother also sent me many meals from his table; the menu is restricted to vegetable dishes which were excellent, however, and he even came to explain them to me himself and to get me to taste these good foods which were served on banana leaves in place of crockery. He gave me another present of two Indian drawings, one representing 'The Blue God with his White Nurse' and the other showing 'The Capture of Ceylon by Rama's Monkeys'. Oh, and he told me, with deepest regret, but just when my boat and my palanquin bearers were ready to transport me back to Quailon, that he would've greatly liked me to attend a theatrical show and dance: 'The Story of Adam Arriving at Travancore from Ceylon at the Head of an Army of Monkeys'. That's roughly how the Prince described the subject of this play to me, and he showed me the costumes for this show that were kept in his little palace. I've never seen anything as weird as this elaborate wardrobe. Perhaps, eventually, I'll see these novelties somewhere else. At least I hope so! I'll always remember the kindnesses they wanted to bestow on me in Travancore.*

*At Travandrum, as in other Indian courts, there are some tigers and leopards; I saw them in cages next to the stables.*

*The Resident who's next to the Raja, is an extremely friendly man, unassuming, honest and educated. In each town of this area he has an excellent house, well furnished, with staff and everything you need to live there. I was offered the use of all of this with unbounded hospitality. Everyone rushes to be at my service, and I've absolutely nothing else to do other than respond to all these courtesies. Here at*

*Quailon, Captain Ross is doing the honours of the house for the Resident who is to be found at Courtalem where I paid him a visit. Mr Ross is kindly looking after everything concerning the arrangements for the continuation of my trip so that I can enjoy the coolness and comfort of this house in perfect ease. I've been introduced to Mrs. Ross, a young lady who's very pretty and pleasant. Their house has an excellent view over a lagoon (a 'backwater' in English) and onto a forest of coconut palms. Unfortunately, I have to leave this highly attractive company right away; when you've got a trip in mind, you have to keep going, otherwise it will all fall through. That's what the English understand so well, as they are also giving me their help to facilitate and hasten my departure while, at the same time, they offer me such generous hospitality.*

Some explanation needs to be made about his observations before we continue: Firstly, Travandrum (as he spells it) was more commonly spelt in English as Trevandrum or more recently, as Trivandrum. In the late 1900s, it was recast as Thiruvananthapuram. Secondly, Soltykoff's observation that an Indian king (the Raja's brother the Elija Raja, Marthanda Varma II) in the early 19th century would have looked like a half-Hungarian merchant, is something we are very sceptical about and needs to be accepted with caution. The Elija Raja, Soltykoff says, complains that he is of the Nair caste. Actually, Swathi and Elija Thirunal were of the Kshatriya caste; however, as there is only a very fine difference between Nair and Kshathriya, Soltykoff would have understood that both were nearly equal, just under Brahmins in the hierarchy, and he wrote accordingly. Today, for practical purposes, Varma (surname of Kshathriyas) are treated just like Nairs. Thirdly, and most significantly, the interaction between the various personalities at the meeting goes unrecorded. The Dewan, or Prime Minister, at the time was Subba Rao, and the resident, Major Cullen.<sup>68</sup> Subba Rao had been the personal tutor of Swathi Thirunal from a young age, having taught him English, Persian, Marathi, mathematics and introduced him to astronomy. He had been appointed Dewan in 1839 and was highly

regarded by the Raja. However, lack of support from Major Cullen, and the undermining of his authority by Cullen's close friend Krishna Rao, the Deputy Dewan Peishcar (Assistant Deputy Dewan), made his position untenable and he resigned two years after Soltykoff's visit. Krishna Rao was later to be appointed Dewan and was a person for whom Caldecott and the Raja had no respect: the Raja said to Caldecott that Krishna Rao was a 'vulgar minded man and a total stranger to learning' and Caldecott retorted 'this is a low ignorant Brahman'.<sup>69</sup> Cullen, on the other hand, would certainly not have won plaudits from the Raja. Cullen had come to India in 1805 as a Cadet aged 18 and had never returned to Scotland, or married or had children. But his amorous liaisons (with women, we should hastily add) were widely known; the gossip columns of the *Madras Athenaeum* provided readers with salacious details ready to be passed on to succeeding generations. His service with the Madras Artillery had left him deaf and this irritated the Raja immensely as conversation was laboured.<sup>70</sup> The Raja's contempt for Cullen's personal life and his deafness would have made their meetings increasingly frosty; in fact, it would not be long before the meetings stopped altogether. We can be fairly certain that Soltykoff would not have been aware of the court intrigues; but we can be even more certain that Cullen would have had a large say in what Soltykoff saw and did.

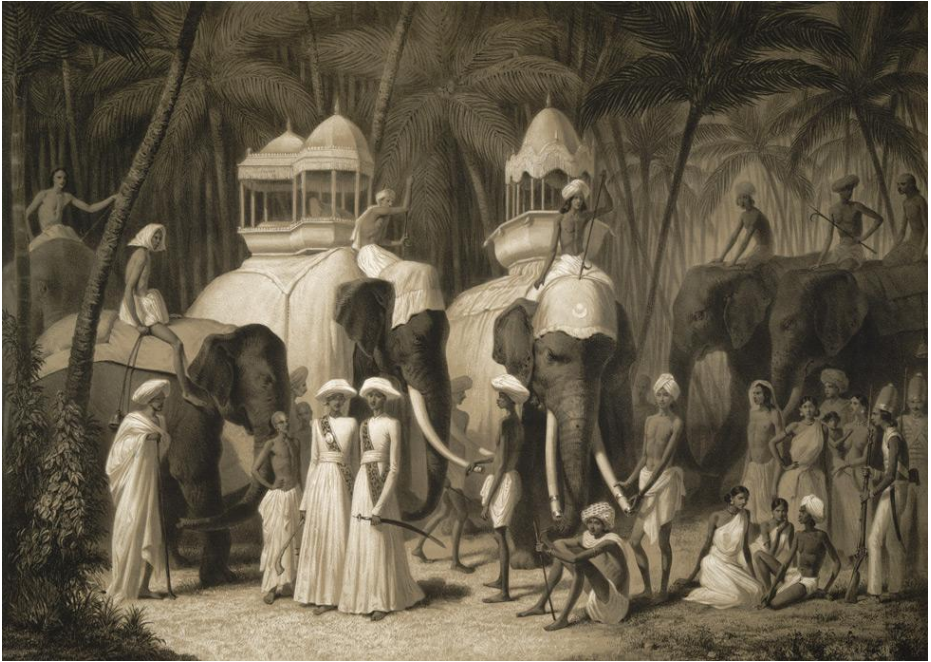
Finally, coming to Soltykoff's description of the fine and performing arts at the Royal Court, we are at a loss to explain the wrongly-titled works of art Soltykoff collected or saw. For example, Swathi Thirunal's brother Eliah Raja presented Soltykoff with a drawing that he (Soltykoff) called *The Blue God with his White Nurse* (in French: *le dieu bleu avec sa nourrice blanche*). There is no reference to a white nurse in Hindu mythology but it is highly likely he meant 'The Blue God with his Wet Nurse', referring to the story of Krishna being suckled by the wicked wet nurse Putana. We suspect that Soltykoff misheard the Eliah Raja's pronunciation of the word 'wet' and mistook it for the homophonic 'white' – quite plausible as they were both speaking to each other in English, their second language.

In the extract translated above, Eliah Raja invited Soltykoff to attend a 'theatrical show and dance' called *The Story of Adam Arriving at Travancore from Ceylon at the Head of an Army of Monkeys* (in French: *l'Histoire d'Adam, qui à la tête d'une armée de singes, arrive de Ceylan à Travancore*). We are quite perplexed that Swathi and Elija Thirunal would stage a play about the story of Adam - a character taken from Christian and Moslem theology. Given that the Raja is Hindu, it is to be expected that an epic from Hindu mythology would have been performed. Again, it seems likely that Soltykoff misinterpreted the Eliah's description of the story from the Hindu epic *Ramayana* in which Ravana - the demon - abducts Rama's wife Sita and escaped to an island called Lanka. Later, Rama, with the help of his monkey led by Hanuman the Monkey God, built a bridge across the sea to enter Lanka. Eliah probably said to Soltykoff that the bridge (Ram Sethu) is known to Westerners as 'Adam's Bridge' and Soltykoff, by then in a language tangle, thought he meant Adam crossed the ocean from Ceylon rather than that Rama crossed Adam's Bridge. Such misunderstandings highlight Soltykoff's somewhat superficial understanding of Indian culture, and we note this here as a prelude to more worrying interactions later in our story.<sup>71</sup>



Photo 1: *Éléphants du Radja de Travancor, Trivandrum.*

Image used with permission of the British Library



Before he departed, Soltykoff depicted his visit in the painting *Éléphants du Radja de Travancor, Trivandrum*. In it we note two young men in white robes occupying a position of central importance in the scene. It is not clear why Soltykoff would have focussed on these characters as they are certainly not from Travancore.<sup>72</sup> To a modern observer, they may appear to be the Maharajah and his brother, but it is more likely they are old Gujrati or Rajasthani *Daffedars* (officials of other States). Of this we can be confident as the headgear is not Keralan; in fact, there is no Malayalam name for the garments or the hat; the curved swords are never seen in the portraits of the royalty of Travancore; and the white robes are not traditional Malayalee dress at all; and when such ceremonial robes are worn (even today), a Keralan would certainly not be bare footed; and lastly, the central figures

obviously do not command the respect that royals would as no one would have squatted before the king. What prompted Soltykoff to highlight them is unknown, but it points, as we have said before, to a lack of familiarity with Travancorean social customs. However, the supporting imagery is decidedly Keralan and accurately captured. The men are bare chested, which is how most Malayalees were attired until the late 19th century. One is wearing the traditional white *mundu* (loin cloth).<sup>73</sup> The coconut trees are, apart from the *mundus*, the clearest indication that the picture is a Kerala scene. Further, the *mahouts* (elephant handlers) are depicted with an *aana thotti*<sup>74</sup>, a hook used for controlling the elephants, which is unchanged even today in Kerala. It appears that Soltykoff was with a group of people who have been waiting a long time for the arrival of the king, and judging by the squatting Malayalees, they will be waiting a lot longer! This painting is an immensely valuable insight into Travancore life; a treasury of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Travancore society that words alone could never capture.

The above discussion begs the question ‘how was Soltykoff, himself, dressed?’ An intriguing picture of him develops as we progress through his narrative and glean hints of the artist inconspicuously tucked away in the background of one or two paintings - he was surely a master of incognito. Maharaja Swathi Thirunal would have been fascinated to see Soltykoff’s finery as the king was conversant with the ways of the Western world and would be keen to learn of (but certainly not to wear) the latest European fashions. Prince Soltykoff was a wealthy noble who swanned around in fashionable society in Paris. In India, Soltykoff wore the height of late 1830s Paris fashion. Picture this: a shortish, slim, handsome man in a single-breasted, knee-length fawn frock coat with narrow shoulders and a tightly cinched waist and sleeves tapered to the wrist and buttoned with several buttons; his trousers were mostly loose, ankle-length pantaloons in off-white wool with straps under the instep and contrasting nicely with the coat; his shirt was of white linen with a turned-down collar set off with a wide,

dark cravat tied in a soft bow; low shoes with low heels and square toe, and a grey top hat made of long nap silk beaver (see photo 2). He also sported a small, tapered moustache and usually carried an umbrella now that the monsoons had arrived. We're sure the Raja would have been delighted to meet his flamboyant young guest. However, we must leave Trevandrum and continue our journey north with our Russian Prince.

Photo 2: *Procession religieuse dans les galeries du couvent de Ramisseram près de Ceylan* - a religious procession inside the Ramalingeshwara Temple at Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu showing a self-portrait of the artist Soltykoff to the far right. Image used with permission of the British Library.



Soltykoff returns to Quailon (Kollam) on August 13 or 14 after his stay in Trivandrum, 40 miles away. But the key section of his visit is over as

far as we are concerned. However, let us follow him out of Travancore. After Quailon (Kollam), he writes from Mysore on September 5 (although the seal is from Madras), and he has also been to the Nilguerries (Nilgiri) Mountains at Outacamande (Udhagamandalam).

### **Some Experiences of Soltykoff at Mysore**

Soltykoff has spent a week at Dr Bakey's house in the Nilgiri Mountains where Lord Elphinstone has also built his own 'modest cottage' with marble chimneys costing four thousand English pounds! He finds the doctor's company (and that of another house guest, Captain MacDonald) delightful, as much company in India is 'mediocre' and these men are 'educated, witty' and make him feel at home. He comments on the sacred cows feeding at the entrance to the Raja's palace in Mysore and the resultant lack of cleanliness. He witnesses a woman contentedly washing her hands in the stream of urine gushing from a cow, as this urine is regarded as pure and is used for purification. He watches an evening performance held in the palace square, portraying the story of a vampire, performed by masked actors wearing 'barbaric' costumes like the ones the Raja of Travancore had shown him and of which he'd been given a drawing. He thinks that life here for the Raja and his family must be 'monotonous and sad' with these 'lugubrious pastimes of barbaric paganism', and feels that, in earlier heathen times of Russian princes, there must have been a similar way of life. He is overcome by great sadness with these reflections.

### **Northern India and then Home**

Here our journey with Soltykoff comes to an end. But he continued on for another year, and for completeness, we give a short, potted commentary on the rest of his journey. From Madras he sailed to Calcutta (Kolkata)<sup>75</sup> and took a river boat along the Ganges to the holy city of Benares (Varanasi); and thence inland to Lucknow, employing palanquin bearers as he did in the south: six pairs of bare legs covering

such huge distances, usually overnight, to avoid the heat of the day. He perambulated around Delhi, Simla and the Punjab, collecting treasures all the way. In the Simla hills, he took a large house for the season for 600 rupees, stocked it with beer and claret (not being able to stand the local favourite brandy-pani) and hired 20 Indian servants, including a cook who, like any rest house chowkidar, cooked 'plainly but well.' A regular milk supply was ensured by keeping six goats. Soltykoff roamed the hills on one of his three horses or in a carrying chair called a *jampan*, his 'almost naked' porters having been provided with uniforms. He spent six months painting portraits, reading *Don Juan* and visiting ladies whom he had come to know in Delhi or Agra, and even attending a ball 'given on the occasion of the defeat of the Afghans, and the release of all the prisoners, the capture of Nankin, and peace with China'. He returned to Delhi and had an audience with Bahadur-Shah II - the last representative of the Great Moghul Dynasty. Soltykoff's letter to Petr about Bahadur is unforgettable. We provide here an unpublished translation by Elena Karatchkov:<sup>76</sup> *'The dry, long, pale and black face of his, his beak-like nose, extreme frailness of the body, hollow cheeks, absence of teeth and a thin purple-coloured beard – all this produced the most pathetic impression. His garments were made of velvet, dyed to look like tiger skin, and were trimmed with sable. As soon as I got a chance I rushed outside, wearing my ridiculous garments of brothel dancers, followed by the outcries of the court servants, who kept proclaiming the Moghul's glory and my gratefulness.'* Soltykoff at double-quick time made his way to Firozpur and down the Indus by boat to Bombay, and to home<sup>77</sup> - and fame!

This is a good juncture at which to comment on another discrepancy in Garrett's translation. Garrett fails to translate the passages where Soltykoff stops at Bombay and this is the only section omitted in the whole text. We reproduce the passage here to allow readers to opine on what Garrett was trying to hide: *'I expect to be in Bombay in approximately twenty-five days, or perhaps less. I'll*

*therefore have the month of February to spend there. It remains to be decided if I'll undertake a two week journey from Bombay to see the Ellora Caves. I rather think I'll let myself spend a peaceful month of freedom in my tent which is on a sort of Champ de Mars* <sup>78</sup>, *near the Indian town. It's almost two years ago that we lived in Bombay with Loeve Weimar in a Guèbre house.*<sup>79</sup> *You've probably had his news from Baghdad since then. Three days have now gone by, and I've made some new progress in the way of patience. I'm talking about the rats rather than anything else. I am now in that state of apathetic despondency that is called resignation.'* Equally surprising Garrett leaves out the price of the cat that Soltykoff buys to catch mice. It cost one rupee! Did Garrett want to omit any mention of Baron Loeve-Weimar and if so, why? The Baron was the French Consul in Baghdad and he succumbed to cholera in 1846 but recovered with the help of an Italian physician passing through the city. He later became Consul General of Lima, Peru and died in Paris in 1854. Loeve-Weimar, it may be recalled, was close to the Russians and a friend of Emperor Nicholas, but so was Soltykoff. So what was Garrett's motivation? Recall that Professor Garrett was employed by the Government as Keeper of the Records of the Government of the Punjab in 1934 when the translation was published.

## Discussion of Soltykoff and His Writings

Soltykoff writes richly and evocatively about his travels and experiences. He provides considerable detail to paint a verbal picture as clearly and as effectively as possible. While he writes as an observer, he also gives his personal impressions of the European company he meets, the local inhabitants, both wealthy and poor, and recounts numerous anecdotes to illustrate these impressions. The tone of his letters to his brother, Prince Petr (Pierre) Soltykoff, is conversational, warm, spontaneous and frank. Generally, he writes without apparent bias or

prejudice, accepting all the different ways of life with an open, unfeigned interest, fascination, and at times, considerable awe and wonder. He is perfectly prepared to adopt the prevailing customs of courtesy, as shown in his visits to several Rajas, and to return their hospitality in a similar manner. He shows little or no pomposity, nor is he patronising or condescending; rather, his comments about many indigenous people are full of praise for their qualities, and sympathy and compassion for some of their living conditions and arduous way of life. His observations do not carry that sense of 'superiority' conveyed by some other European cultures from a Christian background; where he does allude to certain 'barbaric' practices, his comments appear to be motivated by a lively sense of the common humanity of mankind, as he deploras unkindness, cruelty and human suffering. He pays tribute to his homeland in this respect, writing that it was in his 'cold country with its fir tree forests' that he first felt 'friendship, gratitude, love and sorrow'. The implication is that these experiences have formed his emotional foundations, allowing him to respond with empathy to whatever he encounters on his travels. His is an engaging, warm and emotional personality, sharpened by a gentle sense of irony, an awareness of the absurd, and at times, an amusing self-mockery and a delightful sense of humour.

Solytkoff's experiences at the court of Travancore show his personal qualities very well. He behaves respectfully and appropriately towards the Raja, his brother and the Prime Minister, while observing everything in detail and noting the influences of European dress and customs on local practices. He also makes some gentle comments on the rather amusing effects they tend to produce. At the same time, he is very appreciative of their attentions towards him: elephants to sketch, dishes to taste from the Raja's brother, gifts of drawings and their own portraits. He writes that he 'was showered with courtesies in this court' and comments that he would always remember the kindnesses they wanted to bestow on him.

His comments about the English, in particular, show some awareness and understanding of the difference in their attitudes towards the local peoples, depending on their length of experience in India and Ceylon and the occupations they pursue. The administrators, for example, are said to behave fairly, and the military are impressed by the courage of the native troops they command. On the other hand, indigenous servants in some European households are attired in bizarre combinations of European dress to create a certain image designed to impress. It could also be said that temperamentally, Soltykoff views India and the cultural experiences it offers the traveller in a different light from many English residents, expressing a preference for educated, cultured, European company and showing a deep respect for the ancient civilizations he explores. He certainly is fortunate to have the financial means to indulge himself with his travels as well as the social and professional background to claim introductions to English governors, Residents and Indian rulers; however, he does not presume on this inordinately, and he always expresses most warmly his appreciation of the hospitality and assistance they give him. He is similarly respectful of the native servants and porters whom he praises unreservedly. Clearly, the Russian artist's subtle understanding of the Indian people's character and culture gave him an outlook different to that of a British colonial official. He had really little in common with the collectors, merchants, seamen and army officers he met on his voyage. Contrast his affection for Indians with the attitude of one of his travelling companions, Charles Shubrick - his earlier shipmate aboard the *Berenice*. Shubrick had first arrived in India in 1833 and on the surface, he was quite a cultured man who, amongst other things, could speak Sanskrit, and at Haileybury College (the training ground for Indian civil servants), he had studied western and oriental literature, translated all of the Greek testament into English, translated Cicero and Tacitus from the Latin, and was a student of moral philosophy and the Christian religion. All of this was good preparation for the Indian service, and by the 1840s, he had worked his way up to be a 'Collector and Magistrate' in the Madras Presidency – at a village called Chingleput (Chengalpattu) about 56 km south west of Madras. Here, it



all came unstuck and his brutality became apparent. A collector is responsible for the collection of taxes and a magistrate oversees the administration of justice, including penalties for failure to pay taxes. When Shubrick was named in the House of Lords<sup>80</sup> for torturing the good people of Chingleput, he was quite irritated about this interference in his work. Shubrick tried to collect *moturpha*, a tax on trade and occupations such as weavers, carpenters, roadside vendors, extending to the most trifling of articles; until the *moturpha* on a one-penny razor was paid, a barber could do no work. Shubrick ordered that 14 weavers who had not paid taxes, be brought before him and punished. Shubrick's punishment was to make each of the weavers stand in the sun with his body bent towards his knees and a 12 pound stone placed upon each back near the neck until the fivepence tax was paid. Typically, no water or food was to be given to the victim (from 8am to 10pm), and when released for the night, he was forced to eat his meal in the latrine. The following morning, he would have to go to his village to beg for the money. If none were forthcoming from the 'penniless wretches', the victim was forced to resume his stance in the hot sun, often with another man sitting on his shoulders. This could go on for days. Although mentioned in the House of Lords for torture, Shubrick prospered and was soon to retire to England at the age of 46 with his wife and three children. Before departing, he was provided with an embroidered shawl to present to the presiding idol at the great Hindu feast of Conjeveram on behalf of the East India Company. He refused, saying that idolatrous tributes were not something a Christian could tolerate.<sup>81</sup> With that offensive retort, the citizens of Chingleput were probably happy to see him depart. He died in London in 1898 aged 79. Shubrick, then, is the other face of British administration in India that Soltykoff didn't see, or if he did, chose to ignore. Again, we must be aware of Soltykoff's audience in Europe and its desire to see the British portrayed as a civilizing influence, not deplorable like Charles Shubrick.

It is interesting to speculate how Victorian England could have responded to Soltykoff's writings. It is unlikely that they would have understood, let alone approved, of his enthusiasm for the wonders of Buddhist and Hindu temple architecture: in fact, ultimately, financial maintenance of these buildings was withdrawn from the East India Company after political lobbying in England, much to Soltykoff's regret. In addition, they could have felt somewhat critical of Soltykoff's generally uncritical acceptance of the different religions, given (his and) their own Christian background. His account of the distinctive odour of burning bodies and his anecdotes about the voluntary self-immolation (sati or suttee)<sup>82</sup> of deceased Raja's wives and concubines, for example, could only provoke shock and revulsion. However, Soltykoff himself seems not the slightest bit perturbed by sati. In a comment reported by an English officer trying to suppress a sati in Rajpootana, Soltykoff thought it a pity to suppress something so romantic, and if this were stopped, India would be less interesting.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps he recalled the time in Pudukkottai when concubines of the Raja were prevented from performing *sati* and they complained bitterly to him. Nevertheless, how clever is he juxtaposing the beautiful with the not-so-beautiful? We can only imagine how Victorian readers would be unsettled, perhaps even titillated, by his colourful description of the following, seemingly everyday, event in Amritsar. As he left a Review with the King, he noticed a hanging corpse - that of a thief; 'its feet were eaten by dogs', he wrote; 'The contrast between the corpse in the green meadow and our own brilliant cavalcade was striking'. He committed the scene to his sketchbook and called it *Sher Singh the Maharaja of the Punjab and his entourage out hunting on elephants and horses and passing a group of ascetics near Lahore*.<sup>84</sup> It was engraved and lithographed by L.H. de Rudder - one of the leading French lithographers - at his studios in Paris and published in 1848. But a second engraving, a coloured and gilded lithograph by Dickinson and Son in London (also in 1848) has the hanging corpse obscured by riders on a camel.<sup>85</sup> Why do this? Was the corpse removed to preserve Victorian sensibilities by simple censorship of the macabre detail for reasons of good taste, or was the corpse added to show the brutality of the Sikhs and Punjabis in contrast

to the fair-minded British? The French lithograph is a superior product, and more likely to reproduce Soltykoff's original drawing. Inevitably, lithography involved a complete redrawing by the artist (De Rudder in the first case) with a large measure of discretion given to the studio; but many would consider an engraver *par excellence* is one who does not stray outside the bounds of his own medium, being merely a 'simple translator' who will not presume to alter or overinterpret the works that he engraves. And this is the dilemma we find ourselves in here. The presence of the corpse better depicts Soltykoff's description so that the 'Victorian sensibilities' explanation seems more likely; but the argument about the British distortion of history will never go away.<sup>86</sup>

Soltykoff expresses concern over barbarism, not so much from a Christian point of view but rather from a humanitarian and compassionate outlook. Victorian England would not have easily understood his unreserved praise for so many of the native peoples he encountered, given the British Empire's perceived authority and presumed superiority in India and Ceylon, but they would also have been embarrassed to read his description of an English Colonel 'engaged in savage butchery with the Sikhs' as he hacked to death a boar with his sword: 'it was disgusting to the last degree'. Elsewhere, his gentle irony concerning the odd behaviour and habits of some English people, could also have been taken amiss or, at the least, attributed to, perhaps, his 'Russian temperament'!

Finally, we should comment on Soltykoff's accuracy in reporting facts and figures during his sojourn. He is quite accurate in the section translated, but elsewhere there are a few instances where he records inaccurate information that others have told him. These are fairly inconsequential in his narrative but are worth pointing out, nevertheless. He mistakes the distance from Ludhiana to Lahore (117 miles, not 60), names the wrong royal family member crushed to death

in Lahore, makes a few mistakes in the description of *sati* in Amritsar, and refers to one General as a Captain in Hyderabad.<sup>87</sup> But this is not unexpected given that he is recording what he hears and sees in his journal and not preparing a travel book or historical text.

## Aftermath

After Soltykoff returned to Paris and published *Lettres sur l'Inde* - in French in 1848, and its translation into Russian in 1851 as *Pis'ma ob Indii* - he became quite a celebrity and a most desirable companion in the fashionable end of town. The famous American writer George William Curtis sought his company in Paris and remarked that Soltykoff was 'a Russian sybarite who winters on the Nile as Englishmen summer upon the Rhine; he chats of Persia as men gossip of Paris and he illuminates his conversation with the glory of the Ganges.'<sup>88</sup> He would fondly recount his year amongst the summer houses of the Himalayas, drinking champagne and frolicking with dancing girls. 'Isn't it strange,' he said, 'to dine in silk stockings in such a place, to drink a bottle of Rhine wine and another of champagne every evening?' Dancing girls were Soltykoff's delight. His Indian journals swirl with visions of beautifully dressed (and half-undressed) dancing girls titillating him with their 'slow dancing'. And speaking of dancers, he became good friends with Lola Montez, famous as an exotic dancer, courtesan and the mistress of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. His presence at her sensational farewell party in Rue Blanche, Paris, in 1850 was noted in *The New York Herald*<sup>89</sup> as the paper prepared Americans for this flamboyant woman. He lost contact with her after she left for the U.S. in 1851, but had he known she would end up in Australia, doing her famous 'Spider Dance' to bemused audiences and 'raising her skirts so high that the audience could see she wore no underclothing at all', he may have been down to the P & O office in Marseilles to book a passage to Australia.<sup>90</sup> But he did also mix with respectable artists: the fabulously wealthy and talented German-born opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) met with Soltykoff in Berlin many times in the

1850s and used his Indian travelogues to generate dramatic, literary and visual stimulus for his opera *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*. Meyerbeer's biographer apparently did not care for the work, calling it sentimental, flag-waving, Prussian patriotism, and referring to it as *kunst-kitsch* (artistic junk). The French painter Eugène Delacroix met with Soltykoff several times too, and purchased a copy of *Voyages* and a book of his drawings. That was sufficient for Delacroix to do paintings of Indian subjects without setting foot in L'Indoustan.

Soltykoff would have been impressed that Karl Marx was a reader of his works - particularly *Lettres dans L'Inde*, had he even known who Marx was. In the early 1850s, Marx wrote a series of articles on India, trying to show how the British destroyed the social order for their own nefarious ends. Marx spoke of India as 'that great and interesting country whose gentle natives are, even in the most inferior classes, to use the expression of Prince Soltykoff, more refined and adroit, than Italians ('plus fins et plus adroits que les italiens')'.<sup>91</sup> Soltykoff used this expression on his way to Madras. He had no comment on Marx's use of the phrase, as Russian obsession with Marx started much later and in a totally different social stratum to the one Soltykoff swanned around in. An obvious question is: did Marx use Soltykoff's writings to help formulate new ideas about British capitalism and Indian society, or did Marx fortuitously locate in Soltykoff's writings, statements that supported his pre-existing ideas? The dramatic publication in early 1848 of *The Communist Manifesto*, now recognised as one of the world's most influential political manuscripts, predated the publication of Soltykoff's travel narratives. It would seem that Marx had formulated the major thrust of his thesis without access to Soltykoff's writings. We must therefore assume that Marx saw parts, and only parts, of the India narratives as exotic gifts, and cherry-picked desirable quotes and imagery from them to support his contentions. Marx concurs with Soltykoff on several occasions but is at odds with him more often than not. Marx, for example, like

Soltykoff, both celebrate the ‘sensualist exuberance’ and ‘self-torturing asceticism’ of the Indian religion; they both see India as ‘a world of voluptuousness and of a world of woes’.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, Marx derides the British for their ‘profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization’ and being ‘actuated only by the vilest interests, and stupid in her manner of enforcing them’<sup>93</sup>, whereas Soltykoff writes that the Indians ‘would welcome a British invasion’<sup>94</sup> for protection and maintenance of standards. In summary, we can say that Marx was unlikely to have been influenced by Soltykoff’s writings but sought in them observations in support of his thesis. But of one thing, we can be certain: Soltykoff would have been horrified at the call by Marx for the ‘annihilation of Asiatic society’<sup>95</sup>, irrespective of the context in which it was made.

On a lighter note, it seems apparent that Soltykoff’s good-humour, sincerity and amiability, generated much affection in his acquaintances. When in Northern India, the Governor General Lord Auckland treated Soltykoff very civilly but, as we hinted earlier, suspected him as an agent (‘emissary’) of the Russian government; a charge laid upon Jacquemont in the same area some 10 years earlier. Auckland was won over, nevertheless, by what he called ‘this charming and accomplished traveller’. He still refused Soltykoff a passport to the North West frontier, wisely and perceptively fearing for his safety. But Soltykoff’s meeting with Shekh Lutfu’alláh, a ‘Mohammedan gentleman’ in Surat, Northern India in 1844, was more pleasant. Lutfullah later wrote: ‘The Prince is a young man of very high talent and great ability. He showed us a portfolio containing beautiful drawings of cities, castles and vegetable productions of various countries in Asia, worked by himself, which showed great knowledge of drawing. He was an amiable fine-looking man, not in the least elated with the pride of birth’.<sup>96</sup>

Soltykoff was in London in August 1844 and took the time to visit Sir Jasper Nichols - former Commander-in-Chief of the army in India - to thank him for his kindness in Simla in 1842 and to apologise for sleeping-in and missing the Nichols's departure. While in London, he also sought out his old and dear friend from the Indian trip - the late Governor of Madras, Lord Elphinstone. Elphinstone was thrilled and promptly invited Soltykoff to Astley's Theatre in London (August 5<sup>th</sup>) for the evening gala of clowns, prancing horses and horsemanship. Soltykoff was in the company of Lutfullah that evening and introduced him to Elphinstone and the Duke of Cambridge who had sauntered over, and a pleasant evening was had by all. When leaving, Soltykoff gave Elphinstone his card so that if he should ever travel to Paris, they could meet up. But the card Soltykoff handed Elphinstone was not his own, but one belonging to the Eliah Raja (heir-apparent) of Travancore<sup>97</sup> that Soltykoff had been given by the Eliah Raja in Trivandrum in 1841. Elphinstone and Soltykoff were unaware of the mix-up, and when Elphinstone found the card sometime later, he assumed that the Eliah Raja had called on him in London and that he (Elphinstone) had discourteously failed to apologise for not meeting him. An astonished and bewildered Eliah Raja in Trivandrum received a letter of apology from Elphinstone months later - bewildered because he hadn't been to London and hadn't sought out Elphinstone. After an exchange of increasingly more puzzled letters, the matter was sorted out and laughs were had all around - except for Soltykoff who remained oblivious to the fuss he created.

### **Soltykoff's Collection**

We earlier speculated that, as well as 'colour', Alexis Soltykoff came to India for other reasons. His letters home were all to his brother Petr Soltykoff in Russia who would have been greatly interested in Alexis's descriptions of drawings, paintings, jewels and armour he was presented with by the Rajas on his way around India. Swathi Thirunal

delighted in inviting people of other nations to his court ‘to satisfy His Highness’s curiosity’,<sup>98</sup> and afterwards they ‘returned to their homeland loaded with presents’. Soltykoff’s narrative is laden with references to treasures on his trip: Sikh dandies in clothes of gold with jewel-encrusted swords, daggers and pistols; bottles of Royal Wine in the Punjab with submerged rubies, emeralds, diamonds and pearls. But he is also lyrical about his purchases and gifts: Kashmir shawls and valuable gifts brought in on shields by the King of Lahore who ‘hung around my neck a necklace of pearls and gave me an emerald *aigrette* (ornamental tuft of plumes) for my hat and a gold mounted sword; I was loaded like a mule.’<sup>99</sup>; strange and antique bangles and bracelets from the Himalayas, prised from the legs of the women by their menfolk; a Lahore violin and a panorama by a local artist; four steel shields, five entire suits of armour, a steel bow and articles of ivory, a tiny sword and shield and some jewels and pictures from Delhi; a long Sikh pike, painted with flowers and figures of women and Indian deities, from Amritsar (for just two rupees). We would love to know what he did with the ‘pure white horse with gold and silver trappings’ given to him by the King of Lahore. And we know what he did when he bought a baby elephant the size of a dog for 600 francs in Lahore; he gave it back and received a refund. What ever was he thinking? But we save the best until last: Soltykoff knew that the King of Lahore was in possession of one of the finest diamonds the world has known. While waiting for the King to make his entry, we can picture Soltykoff thinking ‘please be wearing the Koli-i-koor, please be wearing the Koli-i-koor’, and right on cue, the King entered with the fabulous specimen on his right arm. Poor Alexis - he probably needed Francois to hold him up. Within seven years, it became the property of Queen Victoria after her annexation of the Punjab.

Alexis Soltykoff’s brother Petr is described as being ‘so well known in Paris for his intelligence and passion for the arts and for his beautiful collection of arms, enamels, and antique jewellery, part of



which now adorns the Louvre'.<sup>100</sup> Petr shared an interest in collecting with his brothers Ivan and Alexis. A 19<sup>th</sup> century description of the arms and armour collection, purchased from Petr Soltykoff and exhibited at the Musée de Tsarskoé-Sélo, states: 'The most remarkable pieces in this last series had been collected in the Indies principally in Ceylon, Delhi, and Lahore, by the now deceased Prince Alexsei Soltykoff, whose travels in the East are known from the letters that he published...'.<sup>101</sup> His apartment was described as decorated with Persian rugs, Indian arms and Malaysian daggers,<sup>102</sup> and Petr inherited his brother's collection in 1859 when Alexis died in Paris of heart disease (some say liver disease). When the Petr Soltykoff collection was auctioned off in 1861, it was considered to be the most important collection of medieval and renaissance art of its time.

The catalogue of the sale of Petr Soltykoff's collection contained a total of 1109 lots – almost all of it consisted of western art from the medieval period forward. However, all of the 'Objets de L'Inde' were those that Petr inherited from Alexis. There was a 'large Tibetan painting representing heaven from oriental theogony' (lot 1095). It is described as 'finely painted on silk' and 'containing a great number of figures'. As for the Eastern (or so-called 'Oriental') Arms and Armor collection – most of this, too, was inherited from Alexis's estate. Prior to the spring 1861 sale of Petr's collection, in which this material was to be auctioned, it was acquired en bloc by a representative of the Russian Tsar (March 25, 1861), and for this reason, the auction catalogue does not contain any of this material. Identifying these works would require assistance from staff at the Hermitage (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia) – the collection was transferred there in about 1885. However, Christine Brennan<sup>103</sup> informs us that she has a Russian publication ('thankfully published in French') with a supplement describing the acquisition of this collection and with a description of the objects (all weapons and arms with, unfortunately, no images). This is to be followed up at a later stage.

## Conclusions

A final quote best sums up Soltykoff. It was made by a subaltern in the Indian Army, commenting on the Governor General of Bengal Presidency, Lord Auckland in Calcutta, 1841: ‘The Prince is a most accomplished and elegant man. I have seen him leave the Governor General’s side to shake hands with one of his old shipmates, probably a cadet, who, at the Presidency, is not valued so highly as a lump of American ice’.<sup>104</sup>

We have sought to present an additional account of Swathi Thirunal - with the observer’s biases disclosed. In doing so, we have asked ‘what was Soltykoff’s purpose in visiting India and what was his purpose in writing his letters, journals and books?’ The visit, itself, seems to fall into a number of overlapping reasons. The first was to get away from the humdrum of the Russian diplomatic circuit where little of any consequence seemed to be happening under Emperor Nicholas’s rule, and to put some ‘colour’ in his life. Secondly, he was able to impress his brother Petr with his exploits, and perhaps score well in the subtle game of one-upmanship with an older brother - not in a negative way but to enhance his reputation and respect from Petr. Thirdly, Soltykoff was keen to accumulate a sizeable collection of paintings, jewellery, clothing, armour and arms; and lastly, to record his experience by way of letters, journals and paintings for later publication.

The purpose of writing his books is likely to have been to enhance his reputation as a traveller, a socialite and a popular personage in the aristocratic and social circles of Europe and Russia. In this, he was very successful, being the author of best-selling books and paintings and perambulating through the world of the nobles and celebrities even more conspicuously than before. He certainly rejoiced in the epithet ‘The Indian’, and to complete the effect, he vlogged his

way around Europe in his Indian attire. Now that would be something to write about.

Did Soltykoff achieve more than this? Did he add to our knowledge of this foreign land in a way different from other travellers, observers and writers? The answer seems to be a definite 'yes'. Soltykoff's writing shared some characteristics of pre-1850s travel writing. After 1850, the travelogues were what Thomas Pynchon called 'Baedeker Land' after the *Baedeker Guide Book*, which prescribed routes, places to see, warnings about unscrupulous traders, and directions to where the tourist could find 'authentic' sites.<sup>105</sup> Soltykoff avoided most, if not all, of this. We find some features in his writing that are not uncommon in early 19<sup>th</sup> century travel writing. For example, he slips easily and entertainingly between the factual travel-author and the sentimental traveller where the author includes himself. He constructs in the reader's imagination vivid scenes that are quite alien to the readers (his beautiful descriptions of the Raja's Court in Travancore, to name just one example). Because they are so alien, he fills this associative vacuum by comparing these antique lands and inhabitants with more familiar, European, classical, biblical and medieval worlds. How satisfying would it be to a Russian or a European to hear the Himalayas were like the 'Eaux Chaudes of the Caucasus', or an Indian town was like a 'miniature Constantinople', or the military cantonment in Bombay being like the 'Champ de Mars' in Paris. He thought a crowd of Sikhs waiting to meet the King of Lahore was like 'a choir of priests in *The Magic Flute*'; and the nearby town of Ludhiana like 'the Jewish quarter in a Russian city'; and the Garden of Shalimar: the Versailles of the Kings of Lahore. Soltykoff is truly a master of beautiful, evocative imagery - as if we haven't already recognised that. But was there more to his work than this? Could it not be that he sensed, even at a subconscious level, the tension between the rulers and the ruled that would result in an explosion in 1857, a year that shook India? In many of his works, everything is in frenzied

motion – elephants charging, riders bent low in their saddles, galloping, swords ready, their robes and scarves flying in the wind, seemingly rushing off the page. Was he asking ‘how long can we contain this frenzy’?<sup>106</sup>

As well as comparing the alien with the familiar, we see an intermingling of colonial and indigenous narratives that results in a clash of cultures (his descriptions of a wedding ceremony, for example), but he tends not to claim the superiority of one over another. His writing is inflected by questions of nationality, gender and cultural identity; for example, witness the descriptions of brutish Englishmen, the heathenism of the Raja’s Court and the practice of *Sati* in the north. Soltykoff also tends to promote values central to European culture (expedition, heroism), but unlike many other writers, he acknowledges and admires those same characteristics in the Indians. We can also ask ‘how does Soltykoff situate himself in comparison to his readers?’ He would wish to project himself as a kindred independent spirit that the readers would like to see in themselves (if they had the time or the money), but his wealth and leisure time that allow him to do this, remain inconspicuous in his writing; Soltykoff is very much a self-effacing gentleman. He holds up some Indian social and religious types to ironic scrutiny, but is very measured and willing to be a gracious guest in a welcoming land. This is very much at odds with other writers who are relentless in their attacks on the wicked heathenism, particularly of the Hindus, and try to incorporate their observations into a Christian framework.<sup>107</sup>

Another feature of many travelogues is the misunderstanding by natives of British actions that turn into a colonial farce. For example, some writers mock the poorest natives for attempts at copying some colonial action, but for the wrong purpose. As readers may guess, Soltykoff never mocks and condescends; he has encounters where he and the natives are at cross-purposes (the cutting of hair for a portrait, for example), but he never mocks.

Some writers like to portray themselves as credulous tourists - innocent pilgrims - who are conned at every turn by scheming natives; but not so Soltykoff! He is tricked: 'What seemed to be a beautiful diadem, turned out to be made of the cheapest glass so poorly that it started crumbling in my hands like gingerbread right away and the pearl necklace was also made of glass',<sup>108</sup> but he never goes on to caution readers about unscrupulous locals. He thus avoids 'flattening' locals into one-dimensional caricatures of Indians that readers could easily visualise. His characters are quite complex - including our subject, the Raja of Travancore - and this makes them less predictable. This is not always good if you are producing a travel guide that suggests you know all there is to know about native behaviour, and unless you follow the author's wise path, certain unspeakable things will happen. Soltykoff doesn't fall into the trap of stereotype - suggesting everything is a sign of itself; that is, an Indian is a sign of Indian-ness; or more specifically, a Sikh is a sign of Sikh-ness. Soltykoff makes no attempt to try to define the (necessarily false) essential qualities of Indian culture, although he does make some generalisations: 'Sikhs are wild savages' and 'the Sikhs and English are like the wolf and the hunter', and so on. As to the last comment, Garrett dismisses it as 'continental spleen, not true'.<sup>109</sup> Lastly, Soltykoff alludes to the complex inter-relationships between the various communities; not just European versus India (colonised versus imperial power), but also between social groups within each culture, such as Brahmin versus Nair castes, or with the English, Governors General versus cadets. To reiterate our earlier assessment: he has an engaging, warm and emotional personality, sharpened by a gentle sense of irony, an awareness of the absurd, and at times, an amusing self-mockery and a delightful sense of humour. Even though he arrived in India with a collection of letters of introduction to the top British administrators who were attentive and extremely hospitable to the Russian prince, a member of their own class, the Prince generally preferred to rent cheap lodgings or stay in caravan-serais swarming with cockroaches. How engaging is that? He was able to avoid formal European parties and receptions so popular with the British and wanted to live amidst the people, mixing with street crowds,

conjurers, elephant handlers, in bazaars and back alleys. Orłowski's impact had been profound!

Our aim was to give another eyewitness account of the Royal Court of Travancore, particularly that of the Raja, Swathi Thirunal. We have done this and exposed to the reader the biases that the author, Alexis Soltykoff, may have necessarily brought with him. We were not looking to examine his account for objectivity as we, too, bring our own biases. We have presented the readers with sufficient information, analysis and conjecture for them to make up their own minds.

There are several research possibilities stemming from this article. A reconstruction of the presumed dialogue in the meeting between Soltykoff and the Raja of Travancore would be of exceptional benefit. The subtleties of diction, register and tone would be challenges for an expert to master, and would be most revealing to us, 170 years later. Perhaps the most obvious task is a translation of the remainder of Soltykoff's narrative and an analysis to see how the remainder of his trip is portrayed. You can see his cynicism rising the longer he stays in India, but perhaps this is just isolated to the Punjab and Garrett's translation. The rest of the text will hold the key.

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**Photo - 1**



## Photo - 2



## References:

- <sup>1</sup> Dr Richard Walding, Research Fellow, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. Email: [waldingr49@yahoo.com.au](mailto:waldingr49@yahoo.com.au)
- <sup>2</sup> Mme. Helen Stone, Former Head of French, Moreton Bay College, Brisbane, Australia. Email: [bluewren2@uqconnect.net](mailto:bluewren2@uqconnect.net)
- <sup>3</sup> Dr Achuthsankar Nair, Hon. Director, Centre for Bioinformatics, University of Kerala, Trivandrum, India. Email: [sankar.achuth@gmail.com](mailto:sankar.achuth@gmail.com)
- <sup>4</sup> Since we are Indianising our proper nouns, Dr R. P. Raja advises that it is more appropriate to use the spelling - *Swathi Thirunal* rather than the common alternative *Swati Tirunal* (and also known as *Rama Vurmah*).
- <sup>5</sup> R. P. Raja, *New Light on Swathi Thirunal*. Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Studies, P.R.A.G).



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- <sup>6</sup> Families in British India Society, *British Library's India Office (IOR) Passenger Lists*. URL: <http://www.fibis.org/>
- <sup>7</sup> P. Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*. Cosmo, New Delhi, 1878, Reprinted 1984.
- <sup>8</sup> George Trevor Spenser, Lord Bishop of Madras, *Journal of a Visitation to the Provinces of Travancore and Tinnevely 1840-1841* (London: Rivington, 1842), 97.
- <sup>9</sup> Published by Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1830.
- <sup>10</sup> Throughout this paper the authors will use the spelling as it is traditionally found in contemporary French sources: Soltykoff. Other spellings include Saltykov, Saltykow, Soltikoff and Saltukov. The only correct transliteration of the Cyrillic is Saltykov.
- <sup>11</sup> Dr. Elena Karatchkov, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, Russia. Personal communication, <ekaratchkov@earthlink.net> 24 January 2008. She adds: "Another well-known example of this is of Smirnoff (vodka) who was known in Russia as Smirnov, but he emigrated from Russia and became known as Smirnoff. In the case of Nabokov (author of *Lolita*), both spellings are common".
- <sup>12</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> February, New Style.
- <sup>13</sup> Geraldine Norman, *The Hermitage: the Biography of a Great Museum* (NY: International Publishing Co., 1979), 9. Cited in Christine E. Brennan, *Prince Petr Soltykoff: An Important 19<sup>th</sup> Century Collector of Medieval Art* (MA Thesis, Bard Graduate Center, N.Y. May 2003), 20.
- <sup>14</sup> See Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, *L'orfèvrerie Gothique* (XIII<sup>e</sup> début XV<sup>e</sup> siècle) au Musée de Cluny (Paris: Ministère de la culture, de la communication, des grands travaux et du bicentenaire, 1989, 12; Musée du Louvre.
- <sup>15</sup> Virginia Rounding, *Catherine the Great: love, sex and power* (London: Hutchinson, 2006), 398. A plate from the book *The Romanov Dynasty: Tsesarevich Konstantin Pavlovich* by Anna Barkhatova, ed. confirms the description.
- <sup>16</sup> *Nikolai Soltykoff, Obituary*. Gentleman's Magazine, 1862, 82.
- <sup>17</sup> This is difficult to verify but his compositions may have included *Triumphal March in B Flat*, *Siciliano in D Major* and *Rondo in F Minor*.
- <sup>18</sup> D. Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Slovar dostopamiatnykh*, 23, cited in Brennan 2003, 23.
- <sup>19</sup> Jane Turner, *Dictionary of Art*, (London, OUP, 1996), 530.
- <sup>20</sup> Drawings such as *Peasant on a Wagon* (1812; Moscow, Tret'yakov Gal.), *Train of Peasant Carts* (1810; Moscow, Hist. Mus.) and *Destitute Peasants by a Carriage* (1815; St Petersburg, Rus. Mus.), are rare subjects in the art of the early 19th century.
- <sup>21</sup> Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyage en Perse*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1854), 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 89.

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- 23 V. M. Faibisovich, *The State Hermitage: Collectors and Patrons in St. Petersburg 1703-1917*, 21-23. Petr Soltykoff, letters to Ivan Soltykoff, 1827-32, National Library, St Petersburg, Russia. Both cited in Brennan, 2003, 24.
- 24 David M. Lang, *Griboedov's Last Years in Persia*, American Slavic and East European Review, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Dec., 1948), p. 318
- 25 The National Archives, London: FO 60/31
- 26 Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol 28, No. 171 (1830).
- 27 FO 60/31, p 330.
- 28 Kaim Makam to Macdonald, Aug 14, 1829. FO 251/31.
- 29 Also spelt Simonitsch. He had a beautiful Georgian wife Elena Ivanova Countess Simonich (1837-1860) who lived at Tiflis with her large family. Count Ivan Osipovich Simonich (1793–1851), the Colonel-in-Chief of the Georgian Grenadiers (and subsequently Governor-General, of the Aleksandrov fortress in Warsaw) was, from 1832 to 1838, Russian Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at the Persian court.
- 30 William Bayne Fisher, *The Cambridge History of Iran*. (London: Cambridge, 1991), 341.
- 31 The Times, Tuesday, Jul 31, 1838; pg. 5. Emperor Nicholas I, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1838, announced to the Senate in St Petersburg that he had appointed Duhamel Minister Plenipotentiary in the Court of Teheran and also recalled Simonich (spelt Szimonowitsch) 'at his (Szimonowitsch's) own request' from Persia.
- 32 Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyages dans l'Inde et en Perse*, page 350.
- 33 Prince Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyages dans L'Inde et en Perse*. Paris 1853.
- 34 Ibid, 353; Soltykoff spelt it *Dariénour*. Considered to be the most celebrated diamond in the Iranian Crown Jewels and one of the oldest known, the 186-carat Darya-i-Nur is a crudely-fashioned stone measuring 41 × 30 × 12 mm. Today, the Darya-i-Nur holds a prominent place among the Iranian Crown Jewels.
- 35 The Quarterly Review, 1839, page 168.
- 36 Leonid B. Alayev, Aleksei D. Saltykov, *Pis'ma ob Indii*. Moskova: Nauka, 1985, Introduction.
- 37 Sergei D. Serebriany, *Some Marginal Notes on India and Europe* in Eli Franco & Karin Preisendanz (eds.) *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*. (Poland: Rodophi, 1997), 71.
- 38 Ibid
- 39 Prince Alexis Soltykoff (French editions), *Lettres sur L'Inde*. Paris, 1848; *Voyages dans L'Inde et en Perse*. Paris 1853. Russian edition *Pis'ma ob Indii*. Moskva 1851 (Reprint Moskva: Nauka. 1985).

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- 40 Edward Eastwick (ed.) *Drawings made on the Spot / by Prince Alexis Soltykoff*, London: Smith Elder, 1859.
- 41 James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretation of Russian Culture* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 210; David Warnes, *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd, 1999), 127. Cited in Brennan, 2003.
- 42 Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 225.
- 43 Billington, op cit.
- 44 Arthur Conolly, *Journey to the North of India, overland through Russia, Persia and Affghaunistaun* [sic] (London: Bentley, 1834).
- 45 Extra sources used to support Soltykoff's narrative include: *Families in British India Society* Database (India Office Records); and *The Times* newspaper.
- 46 Colonel and Mrs Baumgardt departed Bombay for London on 29 Feb 1840 and were received by Queen Victoria on 6th June 1840 (IOR).
- 47 Aggregating data from the 'List of New Publications - Voyages and Travel' in the *Edinburgh Review*, ten issues 1836 to 1840 show that of the 210 travel books advertised, eight were on India; however, of these, one was a handbook for EIC Cadets, and four were reports by Christian missionaries on the state of their work.
- 48 Of the 210 books published in English (some translated from French and German), the greatest were as follows: England/Wales 27, Germany/Austria 17, Persia 17, Belgium/Switzerland 16, North America 14, France 13, Italy 13, South America 10, Scotland 9, India 8, Spain 8, Africa 7. None was about Russia.
- 49 Anonymous. Review of Colonel Tod's Travels in Western India. *The Spectator*, 1839. Reprinted in *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* (London: Littell, 1839), 89.
- 50 Originally published in French for The Royal Museum of Natural History, Paris; later in English for The Asiatic Society by Churton of London (1834).
- 51 Herbert L. O. Garrett (trans.), *The Punjab a Hundred Years Ago as described by Victor Jacquemont (1831) & Alexis Soltykoff (1843)*. Punjab Govt. Record Office. Monograph No. 18, 1934.
- 52 J. D. Cunningham. *History Of The Sikhs*. New Delhi: D. K. Publishers Distributors (P) Ltd., reprint, 1996, pp. vii-viii.
- 53 Baldev Singh. *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* by Doris Jakobsh: A Critical Commentary. URL: <http://sikhpectrum.com/112006/doris/cover.htm>. Accessed 31 January 2008.
- 54 Garrett, op. cit. ii.
- 55 Welsh, op. cit. Volume 1, p 143-146, 216.

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- 56 Now spelt *Dewan* but pronounced as written by Welsh.
- 57 Welsh, op. cit. p 236. *Carnatic* means ‘southern India’; *Brahmin* refers to the highest or priestly caste. *Rao* was spelt *Row* by the British then.
- 58 Karl Ernest Meyer & Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game And the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (NY: Basic Books, 2000), 126
- 59 James Hogg, *Titan* (London: 1846), 410.
- 60 Eliakim Littell & Robert S. Littell, *The Living Age by Making of America Project*, Vol 10, (Boston: Waite, Pierce & Co., 1846), 74
- 61 Emma Roberts. *Notes Of An Overland Journey Through France And Egypt To Bombay*. London: Allen & Co., 1841.
- 62 *The Times*, 23 May 1840, page 4.
- 63 Died on 23 Feb 1839 on his way back to the regimental depot which was being formed at Poona (Bombay Presidency) to look after families and receive reinforcement drafts.
- 64 *The Times*, Friday, Nov 1, 1844, p. 5. He died, aged 70, in a sanatorium in Stirling, Dundee, Scotland in 1854 in obscurity; and his widow died two years later. Obituary in *The London Illustrated News* 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 1854. The Hunters had no children.
- 65 The Captain of the *Berenice* for this voyage was the popular Capt. A. J. Young. Source IOR.
- 66 Marx interprets Soltykoff’s phrase by using the word ‘adroit’ whereas we have chosen ‘skilful’ as being more appropriate for modern readers.
- 67 About April 14th, 1840.
- 68 Cullen had his own private retreat called ‘Loch Lomond’ which he built on Astamudi Lake in Quilon, and is now a government resthouse. The ambience was like a very tiny version of Nepal today – lots of time for gossip, intrigue and so on. His official residences were Bolghatty Palace at Kochi and another near the Fort in Thiruvananthapuram.
- 69 Letter from Raja of Travancore to J. Caldecott dated 4 Jan 1843 with recipient’s annotations in the margin. Royal Society: ES1/42/275.
- 70 Prof. Robin Jeffrey, Australian National University, pers. comm., 21 May 2008. Also: R. Jeffery, *Decline of Nayar Dominance, Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908* (Vikas: New Delhi, 1974), 40.
- 71 Our contentions regarding Soltykoff in Trivandrum receive tacit support from two eminent Travancore historians: from the Royal Family of Travancore - Sri Chempral Raja R Varma, Kaudiar Palace, Thiruvananthapuram; and Dr R. Pratapsimha Raja, author of *New Light on Swathi Thirunal*. INDIS, 2006. Pers. comm., 17 April 2008.

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- 72 Interpretation of the image is based on comments by Sri C. C. V. Varma, Dr R. P. Raja and P. Vijaya Kumar, Head of English, Women's College, Thiruvananthapuram. Pers. Comm. 24 April 2008.
- 73 Pronunciation could be tricky for a non-Malayalee but close to 'munde' although it is written 'mundu'. It is roughly what north Indians call *dhothi* or what in Tamil Nadu is called *vesthi*.
- 74 In Kerala, the hook is called the *thotti*, but it is referred to as an *aana thotti*, (*aana* = elephant) as *thotti* alone is also used to refer to a long stick with a hook or small basket at one end used to pick mangoes and other fruit from tall trees. It is also referred to from Sanskrit as the *ankusam* and hence more likely to be used in literature and by the educated, while *thotti* is the common usage. It is said that the *thotti* is used by the mahouts more as a means of threatening to give pain than to actually hurt the animal to get it to behave. The third word for the hook is the Sanskrit *churuni*, which could also have been used in Soltykoff's time. Source: P. Vijaya Kumar, Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, pers. comm., 22 May 2008.
- 75 Aboard the *Seringapatam* (Captain W. F. Hopkins), arrived Calcutta October 1841. Source: Passenger lists, IOR. His name is spelt 'Saltekoff'.
- 76 Elena Karatchkov. Personal communication, 10 January 2008.
- 77 Aboard the steamer *Victoria*, (Captain W. C. Barker), departed Madras for Suez on 2 March 1843, via Bombay. Name spelt 'Alexis Saltikoff'.
- 78 Soltykoff used the name *Champ de Mars* as a familiar reference to the large public green-space in Paris, located between the Eiffel Tower to the northwest and the École Militaire to the southeast. In English *Champ de Mars* means 'Field of Mars', from Mars the Roman god of war, from its original use for military training.
- 79 Guèbre refers to the Zoroastrian - the pre-Islamic Persian religion; today known as a Parsee or Parsi; it is dying out, with a prediction that the 70000 in India in the 2001 census will dwindle to be 23000 left in India by 2020, mostly in Mumbai (Bombay).
- 80 Earl of Abermarle in the House of Lords, April 3, 1856. See The Times, April 4, 1856.
- 81 *The Times*, London, November 27, 1858.
- 82 Soltykoff's use of 'suttee' is a phonetic spelling using the 19th century English orthography; however 'sati' is correct, using the more modern transliteration.
- 83 John Willam Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company: A History of Indian Progress*, (London: Bentley, 1853).
- 84 URL: <http://img244.imageshack.us/img244/3664/copyqx6.jpg>. Description: *Lithograph of Sher Singh the Maharaja of the Punjab and his entourage out hunting on elephants and horses and passing a group of ascetics near Lahore* by L.H. de Rudder (1807-1881) after an original drawing of April 1842 by Prince Aleksei Dmitrievich Soltykoff and published in Paris in 1848. Note: for many years the Jerwood Catalogue at the British

Library has wrongly attributed all of Soltykoff's paintings to the seemingly non-existent Aleksandr Mikhailovich Saltykov – even after we brought this to their notice.

URL: <http://img237.imageshack.us/img237/5355/originalat6.jpg>. Description: *Evening ride of H.H. The Maharajah Shere Singh at Omritsar, in the Punjab, near Lahore, March 1842*. Coloured and gilded lithograph. Illustrator: Dickinson & Son, after Saltykov, Aleksei, D., Prince. Production: c.1848

Our contention is supported by a personal communication (15 May 2008) from Dr Stephen Bann, Fellow of the British Academy, Professor of History of Art, University of Bristol, author of *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters, and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (Yale University Press, 2001) in which the Petr Saltykov collection is discussed.

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Lutfullah, *Autobiography of Lutfullah*. (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1858), 403.

The Eliah (or Elia, Elijah) Raja is the Raja-in-waiting or heir-apparent, namely Martanda Vurmah, Swathi Thirunal's younger brother. The story is alluded to without names in Menon, op. cit. p 452.

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Faibisovich, op. cit. 21-23.

The information about the 1861 auction is provided by Christine E. Brennan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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- <sup>104</sup> Anonymous, *Fact and Reflections, by a Sub-altern of the Indian Army*. (London: Madden, 1849). Refers to meeting Soltykoff on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1841 in Calcutta.
- <sup>105</sup> Thomas Pynchon, V. (London: Oan, 1978), 70.
- <sup>106</sup> Russian art historian Svyatoslav Potabenko asks this very question in *Vision of India in the works of Russian and Soviet Artists* (Sterling: New Delhi, 1989), 5.
- <sup>107</sup> See, for example, Bishop Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay 1824-1825* (London: John Murray, 1827); George Trevor Spenser, op. cit.; any of Honoria Lawrence's travelogues on India; and even Emma Roberts succumbs.
- <sup>108</sup> Unpublished translation by Elena Karatchkov. Personal communication 20 January 2008.
- <sup>109</sup> Garrett, op. cit., p 97.

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