

Towards an intellectual biography of Nikolay Ivanovich Sieber

October 2017

London & Paris libraries and comrades



London and Paris provided the libraries in which Sieber found the documentation he was unable to locate in local libraries during his Swiss exile (1875-1884).

In Paris, he also met with Petr Lavrov, member of the revolutionary socialist movement, and editor-founder of the journal *Vpered* (Forwards).

In London, Sieber went for several weeks with a whole "colony" of Russian scholars (a dozen) at the library of the British Museum to study the economic relations in primitive culture. With his colleague Kablyukov, he met several times Marx and Engels at the former's home in January 1881.

Geneva a secret war of spies

Sieber's friend from Kiev Mikhail Dragomanov was one of the leader of the community of Russian exiles in Geneva.

The Russian police kept him and others under close surveillance.



In 1881-83, Dragomanov edited in Geneva *Volnoe Slovo*, a newspaper which included articles written by Sieber, and *Hromada*.

Bern a quiet and prolific exile

Between 1875 and 1884, Sieber lived in the city of Bern, hiding from the Russian political police. Almost nothing is known about this period, except through his prolific publishing activity in Russian journals (either based in Russia or in Geneva). Sieber was keen to leave as little traces as possible.

It was possible to follow him in Bern, from pensions to pensions (starting at Marktgasse 36) only through Sieber's wife, Nadezhda Olimpijeva Sieber-Schumowa, student at the university of Bern. She earned a PhD in Bern and became a first-rank scientist, heading a scientific laboratory in St. Petersburg after Sieber's death.



St. Petersburg autocracy and terror

The capital of the Russian Empire and an important industrial center. Many journals were published here (*Slovo*, *Znanie*, *Otechestvennie Zapiski*). But the central office of the Czar's censorship was also here, and censors closed down some of the journals to which Sieber contributed.



Russia's secret police, was also headquartered in Saint-Petersburg.

When the revolutionary movement *Zemlia i volja* killed Czar Aleksander II in 1881, Sieber entered the Third Section's wanted list.



Moscow journals, publishers and friends

Sieber went in 1872-1873 in a government-sponsored study tour in Europe (Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium), with a few colleagues. Among them, the future professors at the University of Moscow, Aleksandr I. Chuprov and Ivan Ivanovich Yanzhul.



Sieber later published in journals and with publishers connected with Chuprov and Yanzhul, such as the *Yuridicheskij Vestnik* (Legal Herald).

Through them, he met his future wife in Leipzig



Kiev

learning classical political economy

Kiev, now the capital of Ukraine, was the main city in the South-West of the Russian Empire. Sieber moved to Kiev from Sebastopol in order to enroll to the local *University of Saint-Vladimir* in 1866.

Kiev was also the centre for the activity of ukrainophiles, such as Mikhail Dragomanov, Vladimir Antonovich, Fedor Volkov and others.

Sieber took part in many of the initiatives of his ukrainophile colleagues at the University.



A severe repression began after 1875 culminating with the Edict of Ems, which forbade the use and teaching of the Ukrainian language in the Russian empire and closed the Kievskij Telegraf.

Zurich a Russian library in a democratic city

Sieber visited the University of Zurich in 1872-73 during his tour abroad. There was a lively community of students from the Russian empire, often sharing revolutionary tendencies.



Sieber took part into the internal struggles of the community, supporting the revolutionary leader Petr Lavrov against the supporter of the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. After Sieber return to Switzerland, during the second half of the 1870s, a new generation of Russian emigres arrived in Zurich. Among them, the Marxist Boris Aksel'rod.



Crimea

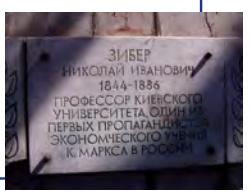
every story has a beginning, every story has an end

Sieber's father, Johann Sieber von Fluntern (Canton of Zurich), emigrated in Russia in the 1830s, to earn his life as a chemist. There, he met his (second) wife Anne Fierfort (whose father was French, but whose mother had an uncertain, not to say controversial nationality). They had two children, Sophie (1840) and Nikolay (1844), born in the city of Sudak(1) in Crimea.



Sieber studied at the gymnasium of Simferopol(2) until 1866, before enrolling at the university in Kiev.

In Switzerland, Sieber's health deteriorated, and in 1884, he moved to his native Crimea, in Yalta(3), where his mother (who died in 1887) and his sister took care of him until his death in 1888.



Who was Sieber ?

A Swiss citizen, born and dead in Crimea, in the then Russian Empire (1844-1888). He studied and lectured economics in Kiev, and spent a decade in exile in Switzerland. He was the first Russian Marxist, the translator of David Ricardo in Russian, and a friend of several Ukrainian activists.

A Swiss-Russian joint project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Russian Foundation of Fundamental Research. The Swiss team based in Lausanne — François Allisson (Swiss applicant) and Federico D'Onofrio — works with a Russian team based in St. Petersburg — Danila Raskov (Russian applicant), Leonid Shirokorad and Aleksandr Dubyansky. <http://francois.allisson.co/sieber> #ni_sieber