



NICHOLAS & HELENA ROERICH

The Spiritual Journey of
Two Great Artists *and* Peacemakers



Ruth A. Drayer



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Dedicated to Helena Ivanovna Roerich, Urusvati, the Light of the Star of the Morning, who foresaw the “Era of the Woman” as a time requiring great courage, cooperation, and compassion.

And to my friend and daughter Laurie Ann Brown, who is working to exemplify this era and who loves me.



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FOREWORD

In 1961, after returning from the first trip into cosmic space, the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was asked to describe what our planet looked like from space. When he replied that it reminded him of a Nicholas Roerich painting, Roerich was a name familiar to only a smattering of people around the world. Few Russians recognized it because of the Soviet authorities' strict ban against Roerich, enforced by the KGB. Few Americans recognized it because former vice president Henry A. Wallace, at first a Roerich supporter, had denied him reentry into the United States in the mid-1930s. But for those who did recognize the painter's name, Gagarin's description was an eloquent statement, for Roerich's art portrayed a world of multidimensional beauty and lyric color.

How could a painter of such breadth and scope be so little recognized? Who was Nicholas Roerich? Why was it that Americans knew of the spiritual work of such Russian greats as Kandinsky and Chagall, but not Roerich? These questions plagued Ruth Abrams Drayer after she encountered his glorious artwork at the Roerich Museum in New York in 1982, beginning a chain of events that led her to move to India to work with the painter's son Svetoslav Roerich and to interview and correspond with an international assortment of people. She spent countless hours digging through crumbling scrapbooks and microfilm in many libraries and reading through old correspondence and files stored in the Library of Congress, the British secret files, and reports from various departments of the American government released through the Freedom of Information Act (although most lines were inked out to protect the informants).

Drayer's fourteen-year quest and hard work has resulted in the fascinating story of two truly great leaders of the twentieth century. Here is a rare look into the lives of two modern initiates—spiritually advanced souls who lit up the human world with sparks of divine color and imparted a

fiery wisdom to all they met. Russian-born Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich (1874–1947) was an internationally acclaimed artist, author, explorer, archaeologist, humanitarian, and peacemaker. His wife, Helena Ivanovna (1879–1955), was an inspired and influential writer and teacher. Partners in all things, they shared the belief that “knowledge and beauty are the real cornerstones of evolution, the gates to a world community.” The Roerichs taught that a synthesis of knowledge from all fields of human endeavor was needed to form a fully developed being.

Nicholas Roerich wrote nearly thirty books and created over seven thousand paintings and theater designs, depicting scenes from ancient Slavic myths to the Himalayan Mountains to inspirational themes from the world’s religions. People who see his art for the first time are often speechless at the inspirational use of color and the spiritual power it evokes—especially his later work, completed during and after their four-year Central Asian expedition. Roerich’s paintings portray spiritual development, culture and its role in human evolution, and possibilities for peace in a troubled world. A broader and more metaphysical understanding is added to the paintings once the viewer penetrates Helena’s deeply spiritual writings.

In 1923 the Roerichs founded the Master School of United Arts in New York to teach all the arts in one place, and the following year they started an international art center, Corona Mundi. They believed that “beauty is the force that can bring nations together....Art and knowledge are the best international language....They will unify all humanity.” To reduce crime and illness—both mental and physical—Roerich promoted the benefits of hanging art in factories, hospitals, prisons, and city streets.

A daring explorer and archaeologist, Nicholas Roerich investigated remote and dangerous regions of China, Mongolia, and the Gobi Desert, where few Westerners had ventured before. In addition to seeking ancient manuscripts hidden in subterranean crypts and caves, their Asian explorations had deeper, hidden purposes. Following their Master’s direction to establish a Buddhist spiritual country in Asia, the Roerichs were searching for the sacred site of Shambhala and for signs of the return of Maitreya (an Eastern name for the World Teacher, or Christ), whom they saw as a symbol of the future—the messenger for all humanity of the New World to come. They later established the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute to study the discoveries made during their travels.

The Roerichs were Theosophists, studying the ageless wisdom of the East and West in depth and working inwardly with great spiritual Masters, sometimes called the “Hierarchy of Light.” Roerich wrote, “We forged the tapestry of our spiritual armor with the same golden threads that weave throughout all the great religious principles.” In the early 1920s they cofounded what became the Agni Yoga Society (*agni*, fire; *yoga*, union with God) to publish and promote the teaching of what they called “living ethics” and the wisdom they had received from the Masters.

While Helena preferred to stay quietly away from the spotlight, writing and doing her spiritual work, Nicholas went out into the public. In 1929 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in creating the Roerich Peace Pact, signed by President Franklin Roosevelt and twenty-two other world leaders, to protect the art treasures of the world. Roerich was a friend and advisor to heads of state, scientists, artists, writers, and poets, and his work won the praise of Albert Einstein, Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, and others.

Nicholas and Helena Roerich were spiritual pioneers, many years ahead of their time in promoting equality for women and brotherhood among races and nations. And like many pioneers, they saw their work attacked and sabotaged. Despite attacks and setbacks, the couple maintained a heroic serenity and dedication to their higher purpose and embodied the noblest of human qualities. Their greatest contributions to human evolution may never be known, for they are part of the sacred and mysterious work of all spiritually advanced people serving humanity.

Yet, nearly a century later, many of their key ideas have found a place in the human soul: the equality of the feminine and masculine principles, the wisdom of the heart, and striving for the common good and brotherhood. The eternal truths the Roerichs demonstrated on earth will echo through time, awakening humanity to beauty and unity: “Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully,” Nicholas wrote. “With beauty we conquer. Through beauty we pray. In beauty we are united.”

Since 1961, despite all of the political upheaval in Russia and the present official Church condemnation of Roerich and other “new religious movements...incompatible with Christianity,” Russians have “found” Roerich. In America, the book *Nicholas Roerich The Life and Art of a Russian Master* by Jacqueline Decker has done much to spread his fame, as

have the Roerich Web site, www.roerich.org, and various articles, and a video available through the Theosophical Publishing House at www.theosophical.org.

However, of all the books and articles that have been written, Ruth Drayer's is the first to be written from a spiritual perspective, interweaving the heart and soul of the Roerichs' life journey. It also is the first work in English to introduce the Roerichs' plan to form a country where all Tibetan Buddhists could practice their beliefs in safety. Because Drayer's original research comes from an American perspective, it brings to light many unknown facts regarding the Roerichs' connection with America. This book is a valuable resource and contribution to the world knowledge of the Roerichs and the living flame of the ageless wisdom they worked so diligently to ignite around the world.

Corinne McLaughlin
The Center for Visionary Leadership
San Rafael, California



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One fall day in 1982, Christie Mercer Platt, a friend since my Santa Fe days, met me in New York and introduced me to the Nicholas Roerich Museum. I was a professional numerologist, interested in art, and certainly had no plans to go to India or to write. But that day Roerich's glorious colors and images talked to me, and I left the museum curious to know more of this mystical painter.

Within days of returning home from New York, I was waiting for my friend Sandi Browne and there, on the very top shelf of her bookcase, was a book titled *Shambhala*. I stood on her sofa, pulled it down and opened it, and saw that it had been dedicated to Nicholas and Elena Roerich. From that day on, I was led, prodded, and propelled to continue researching them, and the rest is history. Over the next several years, I moved to Bangalore, India, returned to the United States, and wrote books. When people talk about my commitment to this endeavor, it always amuses me because it was truly something I could not have avoided doing.

What has been really incredible are the large number of interesting, kind, helpful people I have met and the many amazing experiences that have truly expanded and enriched my life. To have lived this closely with the Roerich family for all these years is something to be deeply thankful for, and I feel very blessed and humbled by the opportunity.

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PROLOG

Any millennium can be said to be the best of times and the worst of times. Probably the desire for war and conquest has been with us as long as humans have inhabited the earth. What makes each millennium unique, therefore, are the people born during it and the accomplishments made. The nineteenth century abounded with wars and revolutions: mechanical revolutions, industrial revolutions, physical revolutions, moral revolutions, and spiritual revolutions. It seemed to be a time when people awoke and expanded.

The steam engine was invented, the telephone, the telegraph, electric lights, photography, and ironclad warships. Florence Nightingale revolutionized military medicine; Freud probed the unconscious; the First Church of Christ, Scientist, was organized to teach that illness, pain, and death are illusions. In 1893, in America, the first-ever Parliament of Religions was convened. Delegates came from throughout the world. The two from India were Vivekananda, representing the Hindu faith, “the Mother of all Religions,” and Dharmapala, a Buddhist, who converted a number of Americans to Buddhism and founded the first Mahabodhi Society in America.

While serving in India, James Churchward discovered accounts of earth’s first civilization, “Mu,” believed to have been located somewhere in the great volcanic earthquake belt that encircles the Pacific basin. People who shared a conviction that death is not the end of the soul and that mediums can facilitate communication with the spirit world began the Spiritualist movement. They studied the laws of nature, received messages from beyond the grave, and observed phenomena on both the visible and invisible sides of life. The Society for Psychical Research was established to expand science and physics by investigating claims of unusual human powers.

An American Buddhist, Henry S. Olcott, and the courageous, fiery-spirited Russian Helena P. Blavatsky formed the Theosophical Society to conduct scientific research into unexplained aspects of nature. While traveling in Tibet, Blavatsky had learned of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, which she believed were the essential teachings of a prehistoric, universal religion, the common ancestor of all the world's great religions. If all religions shared a common ancestor, then all religions were one—essentially teaching the same doctrines and inculcating the same ideals of conduct and life. External differences were necessary to attract dissimilar races and temperaments.

The research of the Theosophical Society demonstrated the character, presence, and diffusion of this universal religion in every land. Blavatsky disseminated these teachings through her books *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. The books, crammed with the most comprehensive overview of esoteric wisdom ever to appear in print, exposed Westerners to the Eastern beliefs of reincarnation, karma, and the Hierarchy of Masters of Wisdom and Compassion, who lovingly guide the development of humankind on earth.

Because Blavatsky's "Universal Fraternity and Brotherhood of Humanity" was open to people of all religions and its teachings encouraged investigation into the infinite, Theosophy attracted vast numbers throughout the world. Her books were hungrily digested by Nicholas and Helena Roerich and other seekers, researchers, and people needing more than formal religion offered—many of whom would have been repelled if faith alone had been required.

One belief was that nothing is supernatural; rather, humans have inactive senses that, once stimulated, allow the perception of usually invisible realms. Blavatsky presented three basic teachings: (1) Human beings are immortal souls who mold and master their own destiny. (2) The evolution of the whole of humanity takes place with the help of a *Hierarchy of Light* that works from spiritual dimensions. (3) The Hierarchy is composed of people, called Masters, Mahatmas, Elder Brothers, or Arhats who have perfected themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally through many lifetimes and have dedicated themselves to working to uplift humanity while continuing their own evolution.

These teachings did not originate with Blavatsky. Down through the ages many secret societies and mystical teachings had spoken of the

Hierarchy under many names, including the Great White Brotherhood, the Occult Hierarchy, the Great White Lodge, the Enlightened Ones, the Holy Assembly, and the Invisible Church. “White” referred to the light pouring through from the soul, symbolic of the Good. In early Egyptian tradition, these Elders were referred to as “the Immortals, full of Wisdom and Knowledge.” In Persia they were called “the Magi,” thought to be the kings who brought gifts to the baby Jesus. In the Chaldean tradition they were “the Great Ones,” who knew the science of the stars and gave astrology to humanity. In 604 BC the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu, author of Tao-te ching, spoke of them as “Ancient Masters.” Many Tibetan monks believed that the Brotherhood began in Mu (the civilization of Churchward’s discovery), then moved to Tibet until the city of Lhasa grew up around their retreat, after which they settled elsewhere, possibly in northwestern Tibet.

By whatever name, all teachings agreed that because the Masters had conquered death, fear, pain, suffering, and other human emotional and physical problems, they were no longer limited by the laws applicable to most humans. They were spiritually evolved enough to move about in their higher bodies or slow their vibrations into physical bodies. They had the wisdom necessary to know the will of God and what violated it, and they were said to hold the plan for the future of humanity. Their guidance would eventually lead humanity into a glorious future where people would live compassionately in gratitude, taking responsibility for themselves, one another, Mother Earth, and all of creation.

The ancient wisdom passes down the concept of the earth as a school, where the Elders or Masters choose to remain in total service rather than progressing on to other spiritual dimensions. Committing their lives to helping humanity evolve, they are the loving faculty who inspire, comfort, and teach but never force their ways upon us or interfere with free will, for that would dishonor the principle of karma.¹

A widely held concept is that intermittently, when humanity is ready, the Masters initiate new ideals and aspirations by sending powerful waves of thought and feeling into the mental currents of the subtler worlds, which account for the important innovations and expanded perceptions that occur simultaneously in different parts of the world. The Hierarchy is credited with inspiring new goals, such as the intense desire for universal peace, the

ideal of religious tolerance, and a society based on cooperation and responsibility for the welfare of others. These ideals are then picked up as inspiration or through meditation by more highly attuned people, who relay them throughout the flow of human consciousness. Helena and Nicholas Roerich were among those who received guidance from the spiritual Masters and shared their teachings through writing and art.

Only three copies of the *Stanzas* were said to remain in existence. One was believed to have been hidden in India during the reign of Emperor Akbar the Great. It, and many other exciting treasures, lay buried through time, perhaps awaiting discovery by some enterprising artist, archaeologist, and explorer and his courageous wife.



AN INNER URGENCY FOR ARTISTIC CREATION

What could prevent an adventuresome young Russian boy from digging among the long-abandoned battlefields and ancient burial grounds scattered throughout the forest beyond his family's estate? By the summer the slim, blond, blue-eyed Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich was ten years old, the answer was nothing. Early one morning, in 1884, when the lure of those mysterious moss-covered *kurgans*, or mounds, and intriguing piles of stones, called *tumuli*, became irresistible, he began exploring. Unearthing a tenth-century bronze ornament encouraged him to continue. Before long, he had a collection of burial urns, charred bones, double-headed axes, spears, bronze and iron swords, threadbare scraps of embroidered cloth woven from the hair of horses, reins, belts, brooches, and other relics that needed to be concealed from his parents.

On some days visions of campfire smoke seemed to float in the mists around him. He could almost hear horses neighing or glimpse young warriors racing or brawling. Armed with short javelins, they were the dark-eyed Avars, who drank horse's milk and were buried beside their horses. They had traded with the Greeks on the shores of the Black Sea before being driven off by the fierce Iranian-Mongolians, who armored themselves and their horses in finely woven bronze chain mail. "With each swing of the shovel, each stroke of the spade, an alluring kingdom emerged," Nikolai later wrote.

As he dug, the ancient record that sifted through his hands gave life to the tribes he studied in school: the Scythians, who depicted animals in their art; the Sarmatians, who reigned supreme across southern Russia until about

AD 150; the Celts; the Huns and Attila, who crossed Asia in AD 375 on the way into Europe. He also studied the Goths, whose tribes had dominated Russia's waterways long enough to multiply and divide into the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, and the brutal Teutonic Goths, who clasped their tunics at the shoulder with the distinctive fibula. "My very first burial finds coincided not only with my beloved history lessons, but with my geography and Gogol's fantastic fiction as well," Nikolai wrote in his diary. At age eleven, he presented his school with a collection of his archaeological treasures.

History and tales of the olden days always fascinated him, especially the legend of Rurik, the Viking prince from Jutland whose blood was believed to run in Roerich veins. The story went back to AD 862, when the Varengians and the Pechenegs threatened to invade the settlements of Slavs from the Carpathian Mountains who were cultivating land and forming hill-fort communities. All along the Oka, the Don, and even the lower Volga River, Vikings were protecting villages in exchange for tribute. Prince Rurik had visited their land earlier, so the Slavs sent him a delegation requesting that he establish a dynasty and become their protector. Though he failed to stave off the waves of invasions, which continued long after his death, Rurik did succeed in fortifying the rivers and installing deputies in the outlying villages. As time went on, others of his line instituted Christianity, built churches and monasteries, opened the waterways for commerce, established trade routes, codified Russian law, and developed the alphabet. Since the Vikings had been called the "Russ," some believe Russia's name came from them.

Nikolai's mother, Maria Vasilevna Kalashnikova, traced her lineage back to the early Slavs who had invited Rurik and his tribe to rule. She was considered, therefore, to have an eastern, "Pure Russian" heritage. Since the Slavs belong to the vast family of Indo-Europeans, who entered European history in the sixth century, she could have been a mixture of many things, but her forefathers were known to have been merchants in Pskov, one of Russia's earliest cities, in the tenth century.

Wealthy and politically influential, Nikolai's father, Konstantin Fedorovitch Roerich, was a prominent notary and attorney born in Riga, Latvia. Throughout the centuries, many of the Roerich men had devoted their lives to service as political leaders, military figures, and members of secret societies like the Knights Templar and the Masons. Nikolai's parents

were part of the intelligentsia, the class of educated and liberal thinkers who mingled with royalty and worked actively to improve conditions in their country. When they received guests on Wednesday nights, archaeologists and Orientalists were often among the group.

Nikolai Konstantinovich was born in St. Petersburg on October 9, 1874 (September 27 by the Old Russian Julian calendar). His birth coincided with the short epoch of reform that began in 1861 when the Tsar decided to abolish serfdom and liberate twenty-three million people. Young Roerich's colorful lineage gave him a love for beauty and music, an unquenchable desire to travel, and a fervor to preach, evident even when he was young.

The Roerich family occupied a gracious building on the Neva River across from the prestigious Admiralty. Konstantin Roerich's office was downstairs and the family lived in rooms above it. Much of their leisure time was spent watching ships coming up to St. Petersburg from the Gulf of Finland. The walls shook and the glassware rattled with each booming salute of an incoming military vessel. During the winter holidays, or when mosquitoes and cholera began to cloud the stifling hot, long "white nights" of summer, the family happily moved to their country estate, fifty-five miles to the southwest. Its name, given by the previous owner, was Isvara, Sanskrit for "Lord" or "sacred spirit."

Prolonged bronchitis and weak lungs plagued Nikolai until about age eleven, when his doctor prescribed the fresh, cold air of the winter and spring to strengthen him. This radical treatment freed him to roam Isvara's three thousand acres, frequently accompanied by the estate manager, who imbued him with a love of the woods. It was here that young Roerich's happiest childhood memories were made. He loved being in nature and, as he learned to ride, trap, and shoot, he became a passionate hunter. Entire days were spent silently watching birds or tracking deer, bears, and tiny woodland animals. At twilight, he hunted the giant trolls and pixies hiding in the green and violet shadows of massive rocks and trees. The stones and clouds and the nature devas and spirits on other planes of reality seemed to speak to him. Once the snows fell, he strapped on skis and gulped great breaths of invigorating air while gliding down the sparkling white hills. His explorations eventually expanded to the serenity of the vast forests near the imperial hunting grounds and the neighboring villages.

The peasants greatly interested Nikolai, and they responded to his seriousness and curiosity by telling him stories and explaining their customs and traditions. Most Russians were devoutly Christian and belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. Pilgrims and wise holy men of great spiritual authority, called *Startsy*, wandered the countryside. Many chose lives of poverty and asceticism so they could guide others through times of anguish and turmoil. Large monasteries were located everywhere. Hundreds of priests and monks staffed the plentiful churches filled with brilliantly colored, miracle-working icons that were looked to for healing, protection, and inspiration. Russia's immense landscape, with its dark forests and moonless nights, combined with the general lack of education to become a breeding ground for superstition, legend, and a rich tradition of the supernatural. Children's heads brimmed with stories of fairies, fire-breathing serpents, and dangerous water sprites, as well as the legends of Christ, the apostles, and the saints.

Nikolai was a serious, sensitive, highly creative, and imaginative child. He spent much of his time alone and was aware of otherworldly influences. People noticed that, despite his friendly smile, he remained aloof. He learned to read early and enjoyed stories of Russian heroes and historical events. The Vikings, Genghis Khan's army, and Marco Polo crossing the great unknown into China all marched through Isvara in the plays he created to be staged by his older sister, Lydia, and his two younger brothers, Boris and Vladimir. Drama, science, and geography were his favorite subjects. He collected plants, minerals, and ancient coins, and wrote poetry and essays on his views. Some of his hunting adventures were published while he was still in middle school. At age sixteen, he learned scientific procedures and methods of excavation by accompanying a noted archaeologist during the summer.

Nikolai's earliest drawings were efforts to illustrate things that could be explained better with pictures. When a family friend discovered he had received no formal drawing instruction, he gave young Nikolai lessons, and the top floor of Isvara was soon converted into a studio. Years later, Roerich confided to a reporter, "Between the time I began my first painting and completed it, an inner urgency for artistic creation took such complete possession of my entire being that it convinced me I would perish unless I devoted my life to art." However, obtaining his father's approval was

another matter. Since Nikolai was the oldest son, he was expected either to serve in the military or to join his father in his law practice, but young Roerich believed he could help his country more with his art than with a sword or a degree in law.

This belief arose from his excavations, through which he discovered a richness of the Russian spirit too significant to be denied. From the time Peter the Great had first built St. Petersburg as “the window on the West” and demanded that people drop their traditional ways, Russians had been taught to look to Western Europe as the model of everything desirable. Many regarded their ancient eastern heritage and bloodlines as savage, ignorant, and subhuman. Roerich wanted to give his countrymen national pride and believed his paintings could help them find the same dignity he had found in the legacy of their remarkable past.

He placated his father by attending both the Imperial University and the Imperial Academy of Art, holding himself rigidly to the following schedule: 9:00, rise; 10:00–1:00, Academy; 1:00–3:00, University; 3:00–5:00, work on sketches; 5:00–9:00, evening classes and practical training at the Academy; 9:00–midnight, reading literary works, meeting friends, and participating in student circles. Holidays and vacations were devoted to nature trips, archaeological excavations, and hunting. After his first year at the art academy, he wrote in his diary: “Still far from my goal, it is now time to begin preparation for it—the pouring out of light, illustrations of my own history. Why is it that our history is usually made to look coarse and violent? Why don’t the paintings ever show any signs of joy in the eye? Isn’t it possible that even emaciated peasants could have attractive qualities?”

Although the current artistic trend was toward realism, Roerich had no desire merely to illustrate actual historical events. He wanted to depict the ancient Slavs and Vikings colored with the feeling of the times in which they had lived. Using vivid primary colors, he began to portray them developing new lands, building towns, battling and hunting, giving his paintings titles such as *Guests from Foreign Lands*, *Building a Town*, and *The Slavs on the Dnieper*. Everything in his work was enormous: strong, sturdy ships with heavy sails; hills and mountains and humans that seemed carved from stone. The smooth, unbroken contours and calm rhythm of forms created an impression of clarity and monumentality. In his paintings,

Nikolai transmitted the feeling of the harmony and beauty of the distant past that he had unearthed with the graves. “The whole district is akin to my soul,” he wrote in his diary. “The horizons, hills, moss, lakes, rivers, and clouds—all of it is mine...all of it is me.”

The financial burden of enrollment in two schools came at a time when the elder Roerich was having crippling financial misfortunes. To pay for art supplies, books, and acquisitions to his stamp, mineral, and archaeological collections and also to have money for the theater, concerts, and trips, Nikolai took an assortment of jobs, including painting icons for churches and writing short stories for magazines. Although his heart was at the art academy, he managed to complete both courses of study.

By the age of twenty-three, he had conducted archaeological expeditions throughout Russia and presented scientific papers discussing Slavic and Finnish archaeology from the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. After having several articles published in *Art and Archaeology* and other journals and receiving praise from the Archaeological Society of Prussia for his discovery of amber ornaments near the Baltic Sea, Roerich was elected to the prestigious Imperial Archaeological Society. He was the youngest member.

In 1899, when Roerich was twenty-four, the Imperial Archaeological Society sent him east to the provinces of Pskov, Tversk, and Novgorod to study Russia’s oldest monuments. The home of Prince Putyatin, another archaeologist, was on his route; there Roerich found not only a night’s accommodation, but his future wife as well. When he arrived, Elena Ivanovna Shaposhnikova and her mother were visiting her mother’s sister, Prince Putyatin’s wife, as they did most summers. Born on February 12, 1879 (January 31 in the old style), Elena was five years Nikolai’s junior, extremely intelligent, beautiful, and gifted. Her family was distinguished and aristocratic—the composer Moussorgsky was her uncle, and Mikhail Kutusov, who had commanded the victorious Russian forces opposing Napoleon in the War of 1812 and been portrayed by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, was her great-uncle.

Despite a protected childhood marked by frequent illness and delicacy, Elena was cultured, wise, mature, exceptionally sensitive, and an excellent pianist. She was a comfort and solace to all; even the birds and animals benefited from her healing skills. She had taught herself to read as soon as

she could carry the family's two large volumes of the Bible illustrated by Doré, and by age seven she was able to read and write in French, German, and Russian. She was six years old when she first met the "tall figure, dressed in white" she came to know as a "Teacher of Light, who lived somewhere far away." Shortly afterward, she began having numerous dreams and visions that would allow her access to deeper realms of reality and gave her the ability to predict future events.



Elena Ivanovna Roerich, ca. 1900

By the time she and Nikolai met, Elena had read the entire collection of books in her grandfather's library and had progressed to studying the

philosophies and traditions of the East, such as the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata, and the three Vedas, the oldest existing works of literature. The young couple quickly discovered that, except for Nikolai's love of hunting, they had much in common and shared all interests; before the end of the year they announced their desire to marry. Elena's family was at first opposed but relented after her third dream that the marriage was the wish of her deceased father. In December 1899, Roerich wrote in his diary: "The evening of the 30th I told E.I. all that was in my soul. Strange, when for the first time, you consider another person in addition to yourself. It is now a new year. In it I must be much newer."

Many other challenges also came with the new century. Roerich's father, disillusioned and depressed, died in the spring, leaving the family to face the debts left by his poor financial decisions. Isvara was sold, and Roerich's share of the inheritance allowed him to study in Germany and France, as all rising artists were expected to do. The young couple thought of combining their honeymoon with Nikolai's year abroad, but it seemed wiser to postpone the wedding.



Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich, ca. 1900

Finally, in the fall of 1901, they were married and moved in with Nikolai's mother. Roerich began working as secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, organizing exhibitions and lectures and appointing new, more broad-minded teachers. Shortly thereafter, he also became assistant editor of *Art & Artistic Industry*, a magazine for which he had been writing. Spiritual philosophy permeated their home and their hearts as the couple studied Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Buddha, and the work of India's poet laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. Their two sons were

born within the first three years of their marriage. Roerich continued his excavations and, becoming especially interested in the Stone Age, started a collection of relics that grew in time to seventy-five thousand, including one hundred pieces of amber ornaments accepted as being four thousand years old.

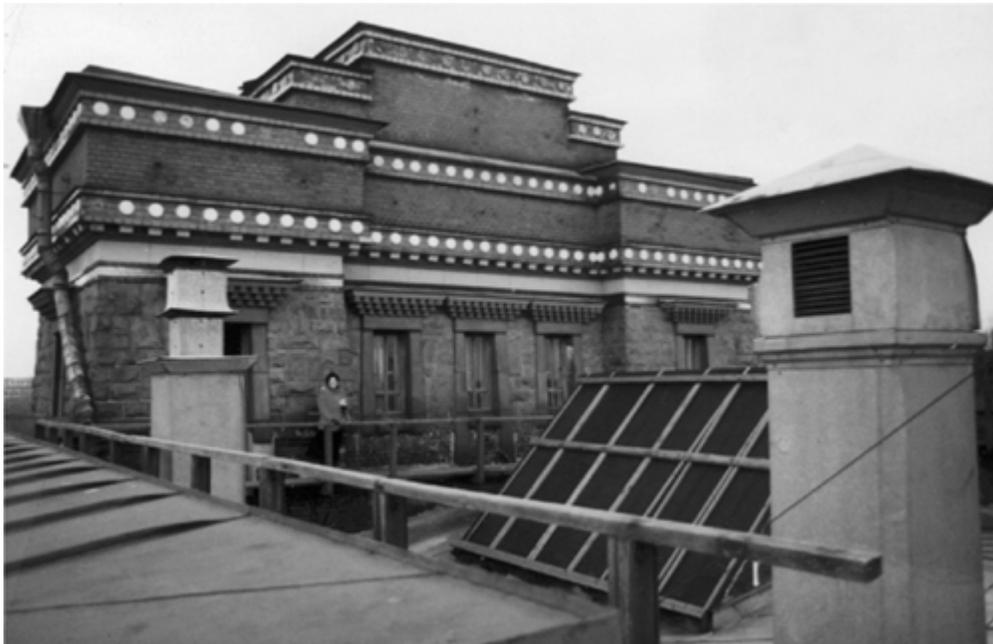
In 1891 delegates from China, Japan, Ceylon, Burma, and India had convened in India for the first International Buddhist Conference, where groups that had previously had little contact united in the common cause of restoring Bodh Gaya, the sacred place where Buddha had received enlightenment. This gathering began a Buddhist revival that rippled throughout the Orient, southeast and central Asia, Hawaii, America, and Russia.

In 1905, after mighty Russia was humiliated by tiny Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, Tsar Nicholas II saw the importance of courting the alliance of the Buriats, Kalmyks, and other Mongolian/Buddhist tribes in the eastern parts of Russia. In 1907 Kambo Laramba Agvan Dorzhiev, a Buriat from Siberia and an important figure in far eastern Russian politics, convinced the Tsar of the importance of having a Buddhist (or perhaps a Theosophist-Buddhist) temple in St. Petersburg. Dorzhiev raised most of the construction money, laid the cornerstone, and dedicated the temple to the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who blessed the undertaking. Fiercely loyal to St. Petersburg, Dorzhiev believed his purpose was to create a Tibetan-Mongolian federation with Russia, a spiritual empire led by the Dalai Lama but under the Tsar's protection.

Young Roerich, who enthusiastically supported the construction and designed the stained glass for the second story, had never met anyone with the charisma and authority of this lama-priest, diplomat, and trusted advisor of the Dalai Lama. Nikolai was captivated by Dorzhiev's ideas of peace, brotherhood, and enlightenment, and his prophecy of the dawn of Shambhala ignited a flame in the young man that never burned out. The prophecy involved the Panchen Lama,¹ the Second Coming of Christ, and the Maitreya, or Buddha to come; it predicted that if the Panchen Lama ever left Tibet, that would herald the final battle ushering in the new era. Dorzhiev, who saw himself as Tibet's emissary to the White Tsar (Nicholas II), spread the word that the mythical Shambhala was located in Russian

territory, north of Tibet; therefore, its emperor was the White Tsar, the Bodhisattva Tsar.

Despite the Tsar's involvement and sanction, the building of the Buddhist temple caused great controversy, and feelings ran high among St. Petersburg's many Christians. By the time it was completed in 1915, some people were so disturbed by Roerich's active role in its construction that they called for an investigation into his racial background. The inference that Mongolian blood ran in his veins was intended to discredit him, for in the thirteenth century the Mongols (including the Tartars) had invaded Russia and controlled it for centuries. Had the charge been proven true, Nikolai would have been proud, for he later wrote: "The Mongol invasions have left such hatred behind them that their artistic elements are always neglected. It is forgotten that the mysterious Cradle of Asia has produced these people, and has wrapped them in the gorgeous veils of China, Tibet, and Hindustan....The Mongol manuscripts and the annals of the foreign envoys of those days tell us unaccountable mixtures of both cruelty and refinement...yet the best artists and masters were found in the headquarters of the Tartar Khans."



The Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg dedicated to the thirteenth Dalai Lama

With Roerich's work and travels, the couple's spiritual studies, and raising their sons, the first years of the new century passed quickly. Roerich was promoted to director of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, which, with sixty-three teachers and two thousand students, was one of the largest art academies in Russia. He presided over a delegation authorized to establish a museum to display collections of art and culture predating Peter the Great. He belonged to the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in Russia, the Rheims Academy, the Vienna Secession, and the Paris Salon. His frequently controversial style and technique could be recognized in mosaics, murals, and monumental friezes scattered throughout Russia, as well as in architecture, theatrical sets, and costume designs; he was gaining the reputation of being one of Russia's greatest contemporary artists.

Nikolai's extensive research, discoveries, and unique knowledge of the restless, shifting natures of the tribal migrations over the centuries gave him a rare understanding of the quantities of good and evil that all humans possess. Had he been asked in those early years, like Dorzhiev he would have said that brotherhood and unity were the hope for the world; in time beauty was added to the list. In the years that followed, this philosophy would be severely tested.



Members of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, St. Petersburg. Third from left, standing: Nikolai Roerich



MAGNETIC MYSTICISM

By the fall of 1916, widely recognized as an artist, archaeologist, historian, and anthropologist, Nikolai Roerich was painting, writing, teaching, traveling, excavating, and living in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, now named Petrograd. He and his family were prospering, and his future looked bright. But despite so much success, Roerich was suffering. His health was poor due to lingering lung problems after a serious bout of pneumonia, and he was worried about the revolutionary unrest in the streets that was causing widespread fear, anxiety, and alarm. Railway stations were crammed with soldiers, and millions of Russians were on the move.

Nikolai had been offered a position in the proposed Bolshevik government, and from an idealistic, theoretical perspective, he and many others could recognize much in Communism that was similar to Buddhism: both wanted to lift and better the lives of the masses. But more realistically, he feared that accepting would cost him his artistic freedom. Perhaps his question of what to do was solved by his doctors, who agreed that the city air was harmful for him; as in his childhood, he needed to breathe clear, frosty air. To get away from the city but still be close to it, he and Elena leased a house in a pine forest near the Finnish border in the vicinity of Lake Ladoga.

Elena saw great hardships ahead. Although their relatives thought that leaving Russia was madness, the couple gathered their sons and left for Finland on December 17, 1916, just as the fierceness of the revolution began erupting. It was twenty-five degrees below zero as they wrapped themselves in all of their blankets and rode the unheated late train up the

Karelia Isthmus to Lake Ladoga, now controlled by Finland. Not wanting to give the impression they were leaving forever, they left behind their collections of archaeological relics and European masterpieces, their family heirlooms, and many other things. At first, traffic ran unimpeded between Lake Ladoga and Petrograd, and when affairs at the academy demanded Professor Roerich's attention he could be there quickly. Then, in May 1918, the frontier was tightly closed, but they were safely out.

Having abandoned everything, the couple had time to devote themselves to the arduous work necessary to prove the accuracy of their spiritual studies. Despite their pain and depression about the darkness rapidly covering their homeland, they started to work. Using themselves as instruments, exerting constant effort, and persevering through failure, they began to make important discoveries about the etheric part of the physical world, the subtle surrounding spheres normally invisible to the human eye. After experiences with the supernatural—with the nature and appearance of the emotional, mental, and soul bodies—they began to comprehend the purpose of existence and the laws of human growth and destiny.

Gradually a new understanding and truth began to emerge from the interweaving of their investigations into all spiritual teachings, including Buddhism and Theosophy. During what appeared to be the darkest time of the couple's life together, a spiritual peace began to ease their hearts. Many years later, remembering their pain and searching, Roerich wrote, "We forged the tapestry of our spiritual armor with the same golden threads that weave throughout all great religious principles." It was armor that would serve them well. Though people would later label Roerich a mystic, from his perspective, he was a scientist, studying, analyzing, and exploring life's mysteries.

The family could have remained safely in Finland, but when Nikolai regarded the surrounding snow-covered rocks, it was the magnificent Himalayas that filled his dreams. His true objective was India, the ancient land of spirituality and splendor, the home of the Masters and the Theosophical Society—India, the country so revered from their years of Eastern studies: the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita had all been written there, and there the Buddha had received enlightenment. To the Roerichs, it was the "Abode of Light."

In the preface to *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky wrote that when the Library of Alexandria had been destroyed, seven hundred thousand books of ancient sacred knowledge were lost to the world. The Mahatmas had sought diligently to replace them and had hidden this treasure throughout Asia. During the reign of Akbar the Great, some of these priceless manuscripts had been stored in India. Others had been hidden in subterranean crypts and cave libraries cut into the mountains beyond the Karakorum Range west of Tibet and in solitary Kunlun passes. The Roerichs yearned to explore the region, and the idea of an expedition began to germinate. Moreover, since childhood, Nikolai had been waiting for the opportunity to see Mount Kanchenjunga, the Himalayan peak whose picture had graced the wall of his summer home.

Roerich mentioned mountains frequently in his diaries, seeing them as metaphors for life. “A magnificent environ is necessary for supreme achievements, and nothing is more majestic than the unconquered Himalayas, with all their inexpressible radiance and their exquisite variations of form. A pilgrim becomes stronger, purer, and more inspired toward good in the very striving to ascend.” Without doubt, India was their destination. They would go to northern India and the Himalayas to search for hidden knowledge and, perhaps, find the home of the Masters.

However, large obstacles blocked their path. Considered “the jewel in the crown,” opulent India was the imperial prize in the clandestine “Great Game” for mastery of Asia waged between Tsarist Russia and Victorian Britain. Although it had been played actively during the previous century, it began again concurrent with the Russian Revolution.¹ Colonial India was tightly controlled by the British, who feared the Bolsheviks would infiltrate their empire. Few Russians were allowed entry, and no recourse was available through diplomatic channels. Without the proper papers and with little financial resources, the Roerichs had little chance of reaching their dream.

Since leaving Russia, their days had been worrisome and lean. Because they had fled with only what they could carry and the rubles they could stuff into their belongings, they had little to barter or sell, and financial concerns quickly became a part of their life. But a recurrent pattern in their lives was that just when a miracle was most needed some person or event would

intervene. So it was now. One day a man sought Elena out where she marketed and offered to loan them money. After the couple decided they would rather sell paintings than borrow, he accommodated them by arranging an exhibition in Stockholm. When the exhibition closed, an invitation reached them from Sir Thomas Beecham, who was devoting his own personal fortune to supporting English opera. Beecham wanted Roerich to design scenery at Covent Garden, and with the help of their friend Sergei Diaghilev, Nikolai was able to accept the commission. In 1919 the family crossed Scandinavia and reached London.

A year in London offered them a respite from worry. It also gave them new opportunities and temporarily altered their plans. Roerich's exhibition of paintings, *Spells of Russia*, was a tremendous success. The spectacle and color dazzled the crowds who flocked to see it. Several pages of the black scrapbooks Elena had begun keeping in Scandinavia were quickly filled with enthusiastic reviews, like this one from *The Arts Gazette*:

The tender violet-like amethysts of his snows at dawn, the emerald-like grass of his prairies, the pale turquoise of his northern skies, the mother-of-pearl of his clouds, the jasper and malachite of his rocks, the amber and rubies of his sunsets. Roerich's genius armed with all the wisdom of artistic experience, his poetic inspiration, his mastery of color-harmonics, is continually rising towards new heights of achievement. His work is full of barbaric splendor in which primitive emotions are vehemently expressed in sweeping design and vivid colour. The delicate purpose of his genius, the magnetic mysticism which infuses his legendary or spiritual compositions—these are the things of which dreams are made, but of which the reality is seldom seen.

Their days in London contained many surprises, but nothing equaled the experience the couple had one day while passing a group of Indian men on Bond Street. Making eye contact with the tallest, they immediately recognized the piercing eyes of Master Morya, so well known to them from their daily meditations. Although bearded and wearing a turban, it was their Master, and their hearts must have paused at the sight of him. Later that night, he visited them in their studio flat at Queen's Gate Terrace. "Our meeting with the Great Teachers and their close approach," were the words Elena recorded in her diary. In her dreams she began to receive books to

read, and two luminous silvery figures appeared at her bed with certain dates and glowing digits on their foreheads.

In March 1920, the thought transmissions, or communications, from Master Morya began. At first both of the Roerichs received messages; then, Elena carried on the work. The transmissions became their source of strength and brought a most precious solace into their lives. “Those who with a full heart fulfill our requests will attune their ears to the harmony of the Universe,” said Master Morya. Reams of messages were transmitted throughout the rest of their lives, inspiring, educating, and counseling them and giving them knowledge almost impossible to attain in any other way.² Answers to their questions and encouragement for the future were often provided.



Roerich's sketch of their Tibetan Master

Over the next few decades, the transmissions were transcribed in books that sounded the call for a new time of “the power of thought.” Given the name Agni Yoga, the teachings explained the creative relationship of human thought to the energy or fire of which the universe is made.³ Master Morya said:

I give you the Teaching, karmic messages, indications. The Teaching is intended for the whole world, for all beings....

The more broadly you comprehend, the more truly it is yours. My friends! Happiness lies in serving the salvation of Humanity. Put aside all prejudices and summoning thy spiritual forces, aid mankind. Turn the unsightly towards beauty. As the tree renews its leaves, so shall men flourish on the path of righteousness.

One day Nikolai, looking for a Russian transcriber, got into a conversation with Vladimir Shibayev. The men were surprised to discover that they both came from St. Petersburg and were members of the Theosophical Society; also Shibayev had been born in Riga, Latvia, as had Roerich's father. Shibayev became a regular visitor in the Roerich's home, and when they left England they entrusted him to take some of their notebooks and papers to Riga.

They made two other friendships in London. One afternoon, Rabindranath Tagore, the author of *Gitanjali*, the slim volume of beautiful poetry they treasured, appeared unannounced for tea in the company of a mutual friend. Nikolai was at his easel working on his Hindu series, *Dreams of the East*. The coincidence of Roerich's visualizing India when Tagore arrived struck them all, and they agreed that "life weaves the beautiful web as no human imagination can visualize it." Exchanging thoughts with like-minded friends was a rare treat for the couple, and they were pleased to find Tagore as inspiring as his poetry. When Tagore graciously invited them to visit him in India, it seemed the perfect solution to their entry problems, and they immediately began planning to go.

Robert Harshe, an American on holiday in London, extended a second invitation. Primarily a painter, Harshe was also an avid art collector, drawn especially to the forerunners of the Modern movement, the *peintres par excellence*. Deeply impressed by Nikolai's strong designs, use of color, and mystical symbolism, Harshe offered to arrange an invitation for Roerich to visit America under the auspices of the Art Institute of Chicago, of which Harshe was soon to become director. Going to the United States was not a new idea for Nikolai, who for years had been interested in furthering Russian-American friendship. Christian Brinton, an American art critic and great supporter of Russian émigré artists, had previously offered to arrange an exhibition and publicity. When Harshe assured the Roerichs that America was eager to see Nikolai's art and suggested a traveling exhibition,

beginning in New York, they were greatly tempted. But they had already reserved passage to Bombay and applied for their Indian visas.

While awaiting permission to enter India, the couple were shocked to learn that Beecham's Opera Company had gone into receivership. Instead of declaring bankruptcy, Beecham had agreed to pay off his creditors at twenty shillings to the pound; therefore, even if the Roerichs were granted entry to India, they no longer had the money to travel throughout the country. So the Bombay tickets were exchanged for passage to America. Four hundred paintings were crated into eleven cases, and the family packed and departed. They were setting sail straight into a relationship with a country and some of her citizens that would completely alter their lives.

On Sunday, October 3, 1920, the SS *Zealand* steamed into New York. While the Statue of Liberty may hold a light and welcome weary travelers to America's shore, the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization was a different matter. Perhaps the Roerich family was not aware of it, but the circumstances of their arrival and their timing were very fortunate. By traveling first class, they had secured tickets immediately and avoided the year's wait encountered by passengers going steerage. If they had arrived a little earlier, they might have found themselves involved in the "Red scare" that swept through labor groups across America, resulting in thousands of Russian immigrants being arrested and deported. Had they arrived eight months later, the first quota law might have prevented them from landing altogether.

The Roerichs were joining forty thousand formerly rich or titled Russians seeking sanctuary from the Bolshevik regime. Just before they arrived, this article had appeared in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*:

Ellis Island is again a bedlam of strange tongues. Its momentarily lulled voices have gained in volume within the last year. There is the old aura of nostalgia about it, mingled with a new and irresistibly flamboyant hope. For America is not merely the land of freedom now. It is the land of peace. Immigrants are coming in tens and hundreds and thousands...of a type, on the whole, better than in pre-war days. Mentally, morally, and physically they are in finer shape than we have ever found them—the highest type since the days of Columbus. They have better clothes, more luggage, and more money than ever before.

America had frequently been blessed and enriched by other countries' misfortunes. By 1910, over one million Russians had immigrated there to escape the tyranny of the tsars. But nothing before equaled the "Russian art movement." The wealth of culture, color, excitement, and artistry thrilled and overwhelmed New Yorkers and then filtered across the entire country. Great composers, painters, actors, dancers, singers, and musicians arrived alone or in troupes, some bringing their families. These included Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Nijinsky, Pavlova, Chaliapin, Kreisler, Zimbalist, and members of the Moscow Art Theater, to mention just a few.

Many of the new arrivals had been involved in the Russian artistic revival that began in the late 1800s when Leon Bakst, Sergei Diaghilev, and several school chums started organizing exhibitions. Next, hoping to influence society's attitude toward art, they published a brilliant literary magazine, *Mir Iskusstva* (The World of Art), which announced itself as "the first voice of a generation thirsting for beauty." The magazine folded in 1904 but was reorganized in 1910 with Roerich as president. In 1911 Diaghilev, now more experienced, assembled Russia's finest collection of artistic talents and took them to Paris as the Ballets Russes. Their aim was to demonstrate Russia's brilliance in music, choreography, and painting to all of Europe. Within several seasons, their fresh, original, and sensually flamboyant productions accomplished their goal.

One of company's most outstanding ballets had been *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) composed by Igor Stravinsky and choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky. Stravinsky and Nikolai had worked on the composition together at Talashkino, where the Roerichs had stayed for a while.⁴ Drawing on his unique knowledge of early Russia, Nikolai boldly designed the colorful costumes and intense scenery. When the score was completed, the two men enthusiastically inscribed excerpts of it on the living room beams. Although the production was expected to make an impact, no one anticipated the reception it did receive. When it premiered in Paris in 1913, some in the audience were so shocked that they screamed and shouted, drowning out the orchestra. The bewildered dancers, including Nijinsky, continued to perform, though fistfights erupted in the audience. A triumphant Diaghilev declared, "Let them hiss, let them cry! Inwardly they feel its value. It is their conventional mask that hisses. This is victory! And

we will see great results from this.” And it was true. The entire production made musical history. When Roerich wrote about it years later, he called it “the moment when modern art freed itself from conventionality and superficiality.”

The Russian artistic infusion into New York completely changed the life of Frances R. Grant, the small, dark-eyed music critic for *Musical America*. A recent graduate from Columbia School of Journalism, she was enjoying the importance of her first job and the power and independence it brought. Raised in a home surrounded by culture, she was knowledgeable on many subjects, especially music, writing, and art; she was also quite bold, confident, and daring for a young woman of her time. She loved drama and spectacle, and the Russian whirlwind caught her up and impressed her deeply. While covering the Ballets Russes performances at the Metropolitan, Frances became acquainted with the premier danseur, Adolph Bolm, a graduate of the Russian Imperial School of Ballet and recent émigré. Bolm and his wife took such a fancy to Frances that before long she was visiting with them at the Hotel des Artistes, the residence hotel that served as home to many Russians. She began to share the anticipation of the Roerichs’ arrival when Adolph insisted that she needed to meet the former head of *Mir Iskusstva* and join the group greeting the ship.

The Bolms had heard that Nikolai had not been well and had even heard rumors of his dying in Siberia, but during the revolution it was hard to know what to believe. When the Roerichs walked down the gangplank onto American soil, the Bolms saw a travel-weary family who had aged considerably since the last time they had all been together. At forty-seven, Nicholas,⁵ always neat and well groomed, was a slight, small-boned man whose proud, erect carriage made him appear self-possessed and composed. There was a certain remoteness in his manner; even in a crowd, he seemed to be standing alone. Except for the lines across the bridge of his nose, his face was smooth and unwrinkled, his complexion fair. He had intense deep-set blue eyes, high Slavic cheekbones, and no trace of what had once been blond hair, for his scalp was completely shaven. Between his moustache and trim beard, his mouth was well chiseled and firm.

The reunion was emotional. As they embraced, Adolph Bolm could feel the warmth and vitality concealed by Roerich’s delicacy, politeness, and

good manners. Even though a mask of inscrutability seemed to hide his thoughts, his eyes often lit up with humor. Always a good listener, Roerich spoke with a trace of solemnity and formality, like a teacher or lecturer giving forth his opinions. His face looked grave, yet there was a gentle strength about him.

Standing to the side of the group, Frances Grant looked at Helena Ivanovna and was reminded of a cameo. Her creamy complexion, fine features, and sparkling brown eyes were crowned by wavy brown hair that had a startling streak of gray in the front. Despite the young critic's curiosity about meeting the Roerichs, her attention immediately went to their two handsome sons, who were more nearly her age: Svetoslav, sixteen, and George, eighteen, were both Nordic blonds, slightly taller than their father. Both spoke proper English; their father had a good command of the language but spoke with a heavy accent, and though Mme Roerich spoke good English, she was more comfortable with Russian or French.

When Bolm inquired if they were immigrating, Nicholas replied that they were merely pausing on their way to India. It was a reply Frances would hear many times over the next three years, but for now, she wondered how America could be on the route from London to India. She would find out the following Sunday, for Mme Roerich invited her to visit them at the Hotel des Artistes. Struck by Helena's warmth and graciousness, Frances agreed without any inkling of what lay in store.

October is one of New York's best months, and the Roerichs' first day in the city was fair and balmy, measuring up to all expectations. Walking out into the sunshine, leaving the security of the Hotel des Artistes behind, Nicholas must have been surprised by the action and noise. Cars and trucks honked horns of all timbres, and thunderous rumblings shook the pavement beneath his feet when the subway train rushed by. Crowds of people hurried somewhere, pausing only at street corners and to watch building construction. Noisy lifts and cranes seemed to be everywhere. No doubt Roerich could sense the "melting pot" at work assimilating everyone; the very air he breathed must have felt expansive and free, as if anything could be accomplished.

Robert Harshe, who had organized their trip to America, was on hand to greet them and help organize Roerich's first exhibition in the United States, due to open at the Kingore Gallery on Fifth Avenue in early December.

Once the paintings had been uncrated, two hundred would be selected for the exhibition; the others would be stored at the Brooklyn Museum. In the month before the exhibit, canvases would need to be stretched, touched up, and framed. Time for sightseeing and for catching up with the many old friends now in New York would wait.

The pleasant visit Frances Grant had anticipated the next Sunday turned out to be one of the most incredible afternoons of her life. The conversation probably started casually enough, with Roerich explaining his plans to acquaint America with Russian art and culture and his visions of unity. After tea, however, the subjects deepened and turned to Madame Blavatsky, Theosophical teachings, karma, reincarnation, Frances's own past lives—and how they had all been together before. Frances was already familiar with Theosophy from her reading, and now, spellbound, she listened to their stories of the Mahatmas of the East. Just before leaving, she received a message from Helena's Master himself. Walking back out into the fall air, stunned, she was aware that she was no longer the same person who had entered hours earlier. In her later years, she reminisced: "It was all truly miraculous....They spoke to me as if I were their daughter, and told me everything....Perhaps if my family had been near, it wouldn't have happened so quickly...but from that time on, it all became a part of my life. It was just like a drama unfolding—and I became part of it."

When Frances mentioned that she would be going to New Mexico for the summer, she was surprised to hear them reply, "So are we! We hear it is very beautiful." Since New Mexico was one of the most recent states to join the union, Frances was more accustomed to people asking her where it was, rather than announcing they'd be going there, too. Excited, she volunteered that her sister lived in Santa Fe and, when they were ready, would be glad to find them a place to stay.

Roerich's European reputation had preceded him in New York, creating a great expectancy among cultured Easterners, the *crème de la crème* of society. The newspapers predicted thousands would be at the gala opening on December 18; it was later written ten thousand attended. Actually, two thousand were at the opening reception and several thousand more visited the show later. Although the gallery was unsuitably small, those attending seemed to step into another world.

Once, in Russia, a friend of Roerich's, the famous Russian writer Leonid Andreyev, had labeled the paintings "The Realm of Roerich." That title was especially appropriate to the art now displayed. Roerich's "realms of singular harmonious peace and indescribable beauty" had been painted mostly in tempera, because he preferred that his works lighten with time, rather than darken as they would with oils. The realm was composed of vast, majestic mountains and great azure skies that glistened in the sunshine, while surreal images appeared in the clouds. Many viewers agreed that the lavish acclaim for the painter had been justly deserved. *Treasure of the Angels*, *Pagan Russia*, and *Ecstasy*, three huge pieces, stood out with "superhuman beauty and serenity." People said these could only have been conceived and colored by a mastermind akin to Leonardo da Vinci.

Milling among the crowd, Frances Grant recognized numerous brilliant artists and theater people whose work she had reviewed for *Musical America*, including Sina and Maurice Lichtmann, graduates of the Vienna Meisterschule. Although they had met only casually, Grant remembered the couple were the extremely talented Russian pianists who owned the Lichtmann Piano Institute. Sina Lichtmann later admitted that she had come to the opening wondering why she was there. Her original plan had been to avoid the crowds and attend the following day. Yet it had seemed as if "some powerful force" had pulled her to the opening. Once inside, the crowd seemed to recede until Sina was viewing Roerich's work alone, "face to face with *Infinity*." As she stood transfixed, she felt as if she were inside the painting "with the first man, building his dwellings, worshipping and communing with God, absorbed in the greatest glory" that she had ever seen. Tears welled up and overflowed her eyes while thoughts and emotions filled her. Eventually, she became dimly aware that someone was insisting on introducing her to the artist.

She later remembered:

There he stood, a man of medium height, with a beard shaped to a point; radiating some invisible benevolent force, with such a penetrating look in his luminous eyes that he appeared to be seeing into the very essence of my soul...By his side stood his wife, Helena Roerich, so strikingly beautiful that I caught my breath. When we were introduced, I listened in amazement to the qualities in their voices as they

spoke to me in my mother tongue, and realized they were smilingly inviting me to visit them that evening in the Hotel des Artistes. Surprised that I had been asked, I accepted the invitation, and then waited impatiently for evening to come.⁶

Profoundly stirred by the beauty of the paintings, Sina was also deeply touched by the Roerichs' warm and friendly attitude. "When we entered the big studio that evening," she remembered, "my husband Maurice and I felt that rather than meeting strangers, we were being received as old friends." The Lichtmanns' surprise increased as the Roerichs began explaining their mission in the United States and what was to follow. Expressing a deep interest in the Lichtmanns' music and teaching, the Roerichs offered plans that could converge their paths and let them work together to bring art and knowledge to the youth of America. "Art and knowledge are the best international language...they will unify all humanity," stated Roerich firmly as he outlined plans of such vision and scope that the Lichtmanns were left breathless. The first step was to establish the Master School of United Arts, where music, painting, sculpture, architecture, opera, drama, and ballet would be taught under one roof and people would be encouraged to explore everything. Then would come cultural centers and international brotherhoods of artists—exciting places where artists could exchange ideas, encourage each other with new concepts, and hold unjuried exhibitions where everyone's work would be admitted.

Without doubt, the Lichtmanns went home with their heads spinning and stayed up talking until late into the night. Sina realized she had met her "Master" and recognized in Roerich "a noble messenger" sent to impel the hearts and souls of humankind steadfastly and fearlessly upward, seeking truth. She marked that evening as the beginning of her apprenticeship; it began an era of great cooperation and devotion to the Roerichs that ended only with her death—or perhaps not even then.

Recognizing that their teachers had appeared, teachers they were prepared to follow into the deepest understanding of art and the greater realities of Truth, the Lichtmanns joined Frances and the Roerichs in the unfolding drama. Another eighteen months would pass before the last two people appeared to complete the group that would oversee and execute all of the Roerichs' dreams.



CULTURE IS OF THE SPIRIT

When Roerich's art started to tour, Robert Harshe's prediction that Americans had not seen anything like it proved to be accurate. Critics were puzzled because it could not be classified. "School? It belongs to no school. It is just Roerich—and Russian. And the method and spirit are never twice the same." When asked about this by a newspaper reporter, Roerich replied, "Why should one do two paintings in the same way? Each subject requires a different approach and treatment. Each is painted as I feel."

Roerich's approach to painting was synthesized from several sources, including his own dreams and visions, his penetrating nature, and his accurate eye. From childhood, nature had taught him her secrets in the billow of clouds, the patterns in rivers, and the textures of the forest. And then there were the icons, which had embedded mysticism and symbolism deeply into his Russian soul. Painted in religious fervor or quiet meditation, they had communicated with him in a wordless language. Bright enough to be seen through wavering candlelight and the haze of incense, their blue horses, red mountains, and vigorous but tender pure hues had taught him that color could express profound emotion and triumphant joy.

The man Roerich considered his most influential teacher was Arkhip I. Kuindjy at the Imperial Academy of Art. He may have belonged to the mystical Order of Rosicrucians, which was tolerated by the Tsar and given unusual protection. On many levels, Kuindjy was the ideal teacher for Roerich, the perfect guru. Peerless in his treatment of contrasting color, sunlight, and moonlight, he discussed the deepest mysteries of life with the impressionable young man.¹

Then, in Paris, Roerich had studied with Fernand Cormon, well known for his Stone Age themes. Cormon encouraged great individuality and freeness in his students, who included Toulouse-Lautrec and van Gogh. With only occasional supervision and individual talks, Roerich had been allowed to work alone in his own studio; under the different conditions and new influences, his compositions moved from realistic to stylistic. He adopted more mystical ideas, and his portrayals of Russian nationalism expanded to become more universal. Free to manage his own time, young Roerich spent much of it at the Louvre, where he was influenced by the simple, clean shapes of color and massive murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, which encouraged him to paint on a large scale.

The massive social and cultural changes that had begun shortly before Roerich's birth had also contributed greatly to his approach to painting. America's Civil War had freed millions of Negroes from slavery. At nearly the same time, the Tsar had proclaimed an end to centuries of bondage for an even greater number of serfs. Liberation had stirred in every heart. Many artists and musicians felt they could no longer tolerate the traditional restrictions on their efforts. Demanding freedom to express themselves, some turned away from realism and explored their feelings and dreams. Since many of these people were also absorbed with the Theosophical belief that there is more to the world than what is seen with the eye, they tried to strip away the nonessentials and create a language of color through which to communicate. Simplicity was the key.

Roerich held himself to the firm discipline of painting almost every night from midnight until four, continually producing paintings no matter where else he was involved. He had developed a bold and uncomplicated style. Foremost for him was the freedom to discover original approaches to his subjects and techniques and new harmonies among color, line, and spirit. Even the way he applied paint was a continual discovery, from the lightest touch to the strongest, broadest, most palpable strokes, from translucent, moist, lovely, gentle caresses of color to startling ponderous effects with weight. His use of form as decoration often gave a charming vitality to his work.

Roerich seldom painted what he saw. Despite his boldness, many of his paintings were like dreams, filtered through his memory, imagination, and emotions. As time went by, he gave less prominence to humans, insisting

that “man cannot be King of nature; he is her pupil, small in comparison to the forces of nature and nature herself. Man’s place in the universe, that is what is important.”

When lecturing or writing, he painted with words. Sometimes the words were heavy, cold, and harsh, reflecting the anguish and pain from which he had escaped; at other times, they were delicate and heartening, conjuring up poetic images and beauty. No matter which words he chose, he always stressed that the path of beauty was the divine path, that the struggle between the constructive and destructive principles of nature was the ultimate mystery of existence, and that humanity’s goal—the Great Adventure of life—was to make the correct choices and evolve into independence, or self-completion.

Russians referred to “Roerich’s clouds,” “Roerich’s rocks,” and “Roerich’s vistas,” as if he had opened new windows in their minds and given them an additional viewpoint from which to discern more in nature than before. Soldiers in the First World War had written him from the front lines, telling him that the flames, the darkness, and the visions they saw around them during the fighting were exactly like those he painted. The Russians considered Roerich a master “colorist,” and his colors were spectacular; yet his early technique was crude and coarse compared to what it would eventually become.

The New York critics, however, saw his work differently than the Europeans:

The touch is not only heavy; it seems at times fairly clumsy. His style has vigor that needs refinement; it arrests attention but exerts no charm....Yet even while we are repelled by the crudities in Mr. Roerich’s technique, we are won back to him by their indescribable Russian savor, their suggestion of an inborn and organically wholesome racial habit. His art, with all its limitations, remains profoundly genuine. There is personality and a rough native force in it. It is as though one traveled through Russia and suddenly came upon some romantic place marked by curious architecture, and peopled by picturesque figures flooded with reverberating color. The strangeness of fairyland descends upon the beholder and he feels it has come true.

After his show at the Kingore Gallery closed, Roerich accompanied his paintings to openings in Boston, Buffalo, and Chicago. Then they were to

continue on alone, though this worried him greatly when he remembered the disastrous fate of his entire *Old Russia* series of church and monastery paintings fifteen years earlier. In 1904 about seventy-five of Roerich's paintings were included in a group of six hundred paintings sent to America for display at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. It was the largest exhibit of Russian art ever to have left the country, and none returned. Seventy-some paintings had disappeared into thin air.² All were from sketches made during the first two years of his marriage when he and Helena had traveled to some forty Russian cities, investigating the vast assortment of ethnic groups.

It had been a unique time in their lives. While Nicholas had sketched the heavy towers, the wide churches with cupolas, the multicolored cathedrals, and the monasteries from Russia's rich past, Helena had taken many photographs. The couple had roamed the countryside, talking about the early legends and stories of the monks, the saints, Christ, the Eastern philosophies they were studying—and becoming acquainted with each other on a deeper level. The time also marked the birth of their sons, George and, two years later, Svetoslav. George carried the name of Russia's patron saint; Svetoslav was named after a grandson of Prince Rurik, whose mother is credited with bringing Christianity to Russia. Nicholas had wanted to impress upon his compatriots' minds and hearts the grandeur of soul and character of a long-forgotten Russia. The *Old Russia* paintings had been such a great success that the Tsar had intended to purchase the series.

However, if Roerich's plans to organize the Master School of United Arts were to materialize, he would have to trust Harshe's arrangements and permit his paintings to travel across America alone. As the exhibition went from city to city, Helena pasted more reviews into her black scrapbooks. The *Boston Globe* reported that between two hundred fifty and four hundred visitors viewed it daily at the Boston Art Club. Though many found the work difficult to understand, they nevertheless returned and eventually came to appreciate it. In Boston, several paintings were sold and a few friendships established. During a pre-opening night interview, Nicholas told the *Buffalo Express*:

I am three years out of Russia, and of all countries where I have been, I am happiest here. To Russians, America is a sort of home country, a hope of what Russia herself may become. The freedom and big spaces of both countries must account for the similarities in the people. In London, I heard that Americans are only interested in business, with no tendency toward the spiritual. But in spite of the fact that the streets are bustling with business, there are also many churches. I ask myself whether Emerson and Walt Whitman were materialistic? And of course you know that the first head of the Theosophical Society was an American, Olcott.

After the show opened, the *Buffalo Evening News* reported: “Roerich and his wonderful splashes of spiritual paint—he was too perturbed at the lack of understanding of his extraordinary canvases to more than clutch your hand gratefully, when you told him he made of *Solitude* a religion, and of religious fervor, a sacred safety valve for primitive emotion.”

The *Chicago Tribune* reported:

Roerich brings a new sort of Russian propaganda to Chicago. The gospel he brings is not Bolshevik, though. It is the gospel of spirituality. Emphatically, Roerich insists, “Culture must conquer materialism. We often make the mistake of assuming that civilization is culture. The fact that a man dresses in modern fashion, utilizes modern conveniences, and goes forward with material progress, does not mean that he is cultured. Culture is of the spirit.” Two hundred canvases illustrating the artist’s versatility and almost barbaric boldness will be shown at the Art Institute for a month. Among the paintings is the model for one of the six settings Mr. Roerich is to execute for the Chicago Opera Company’s fall production of Rimsky-Korsakoff’s *Snegourotchka*.

Earlier, in Boston, Roerich responded to how he would portray the American girl: “I would paint a woman in whose face the struggle for spiritual culture over mechanical civilization had already gained victory. A woman who speaks and understands the cosmic language. She would realize that the true meaning of beauty and wisdom is not the superficial, artificial beauty, but the radiance which has its roots in the well-spring of the soul....We should know, as we gazed upon her, that she had experienced the pain and joy of self-sacrifice.”

At a society luncheon two months later, he gave the women more to think about than clothes when he spoke about the aura as a spiritual garment and colors that heal: “You know that these auras vary in accordance with

our spiritual achievements. And every single thought is capable of either brightening or darkening it...Man wears an eternal color dress around his spirit which he paints with his thoughts.” Roerich thought the feminist movement in America one of the signs that America was “the land of the future.” An ardent feminist, he appreciated the fact that women had won the right to vote and commented that his paintings *Song of the Waterfall*, *Language of the Birds*, and *Song of the Morning* were executed as “cosmic songs” for women.

With merely a glance at the daily paper, the Roerichs could see that all norms of conventional behavior were stretching beyond recognition. It was the beginning of the “anything goes” era. After winning the right to vote only a few months earlier, women were progressing on to bobbing their hair, shortening hemlines to several inches above their ankles, and smoking cigarettes. The first bathing beauty contest was held when thousands of soldiers were newly returned from war. When Prohibition was enacted, people were soon flouting the law, while gangsters and speakeasies made illegal fortunes. Everywhere Roerich went he heard talk of lawlessness, but he was looking for something better, and “in the shadow of elevators and steam shovels” he found it.

“The spiritual side is thriving...and a quieter movement is growing among people with higher ideals,” he said of those he saw heeding the call of the soul. Christian Scientists, Unitarians, and Spiritualists were packing their churches, while many others turned to the wisdom teachings of Blavatsky, Vivekananda, Tagore, Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner, Gurdjieff, and others. Nicholas expressed some of his views in an article in *The Messenger*:

Only with a true eye and open heart can we grasp the miraculous things which surround us. In pointing out the spiritual issues of American life, I cannot ignore its cosmic nature. In America, in our very presence, by means of mixing the elements of the world in a quick experiment, a new nation is being composed. By synthesizing the qualities of ethnic importance, religions, and universal achievements, a new national soul is being formed. It will produce a future spiritual culture. Of all the world projects, this is the most marvelous experiment...Beauty is the force that can bring nations together...American art is more truly international because it is distilled from all countries.

That is why America will be one of the first to make art the universal language it is destined to become. Different races may not understand each other's spoken language, but all understand when the language is art.

Wherever Roerich traveled, he searched for like-minded people. In Chicago he found many colorful, exciting people who were Theosophists or were strongly influenced by Theosophical ideas. Many who recognized and embraced Roerich's visions were invited to become his colleagues, faculty members, and supporters once the Master School of United Arts opened. He gathered together businessmen, theater people, painters, musicians, composers, and writers whose names still have a familiar ring: Deems Taylor, Robert Sherwood, Rockwell Kent, Olin Downes, and Robert Edmund Jones. They recognized the necessity of bringing a greater appreciation of beauty to the world and knew it would take a tremendous collective effort.

With his rich imagination, Roerich had always loved theater. Between his Viking ancestors, the fairy tales his grandmother told, and the superstitious tales whispered by the servants, he sometimes had more trouble distinguishing reality than creating fantasy. While still in Russia, a new avenue of artistic expression had opened for him when he designed the costumes and scenery for theatrical productions recreated from the Middle Ages. Over the years, he had designed for several operas, dramas, and ballets and, finally, the Ballets Russes. His designs for Maeterlinck's *Princess Maleine* and *Sister Beatrice* were particularly outstanding. He thought the secret to his success and originality was the way he prepared for them. First, he steeped himself in the spirit of the composer and librettist and aligned with their thought patterns. Then, he chose "a color key," to write in, and based his entire composition upon it. His deep love was Wagnerian music, and his personal favorites were the designs he created for the mystical *Valkyrie*.

Roerich's arrival in America was, therefore, exciting news for the very competitive New York Metropolitan and Chicago Grand Opera Companies, who vied for his services. In February 1921, the Chicago company snapped him up because the director, the Scottish soprano Mary Garden, was a Theosophist and longtime friend from his Ballets Russes days. Unfortunately, she forgot to tell him that the company was in serious

financial trouble and expecting to close. Two Russian operas premiered that season, Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges* and *Snegourotchka* (The Snow Maiden). The later based on an early Russian legend, filled with wolves, fairies, ghosts, beautiful water sprites, and goblins, Roerich loved it for successfully combining real life with the rich Old Russian world of enchantment, the best possible introduction to Russian nature and native costumes.

His designs were so superb that the production was called a "spectacle to dazzle the eye." *Snegourotchka* inspired Marshall Field's department store to come out with a line of high-fashion women's clothing. Unfortunately, none of Chicago's women wanted to look like they came out of a Russian enchanted forest. *Love for Three Oranges* had been involved in litigation for the entire previous year, but it, too, was a tremendous success, and played to sold-out houses.

The newspapers later reported the Chicago Grand Opera lost one million dollars that season, to which Garden remarked, "I don't know because I had nothing to do with the business end of it." All she knew was that they got the final blaze of glory she wanted, but Roerich thought he might end up with only smoke. In July 1922, the *New York Times* reported that Nicholas Roerich had been awarded a \$3,500 judgment in an undefended suit against the Chicago Opera Association, yet it is questionable if he ever received anything. Despite the problems, Roerich was pleased because he was convinced that if Russia and the United States understood each other's cultural treasures, true understanding and real friendship would result.

While in Chicago, the Roerichs visited the Little Theater, a new concept in theater using exciting innovations with light and color vibrancy. Raymond Jonson, a scenic artist in the Little Theater, was one of their kindred spirits. He attended night classes at the Art Institute, taught at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, and was identified with the younger, radical painters in Chicago. After attending Roerich's exhibition, he confided to his diary:

There has opened at the Institute the exhibition of the work of Nicholas Roerich. It is glorious. Would that I could express the wonder of it—I feel that at his best he

has accomplished that which all artists hope to do. There are at least six paintings that I believe to be the most spiritual pieces of expression that I have ever seen.

I feel here a great sympathy with my own feelings and desires. I feel very close to this art....This art should be recognized as fundamental—should be thought of outside of all physical aspects—It is the great love, its only purpose is to feed the spirit....*The Treasure, Ecstasy, The Call of the Sun* (second version) and some others of his best are great works of spiritual art. I feel very close and moved beyond by this man's spirit—his work....

A few weeks later (June 14, 1921), he wrote: “Since my last entry I have been so busy that I’ve had neither time nor inclination to write—so great a deal has taken place....A small group of artists have formed an organization which we are very much interested in. We finally decided on *Cor Ardens* as the name—meaning flaming heart. We have had many meetings, much discussion....Roerich joined us with much enthusiasm. I feel it is a fine beginning and that much will come from it.”³

When officers were elected, Jonson became secretary. So after only ten months in America, the first of Nicholas's dreams had taken form: the international society of *Cor Ardens* was born, a fiery, spiritual, radical group of young painters sharing Roerich's belief that “the only real fraternity among men is the fraternity of beauty as expressed in art.” They founded it on the awareness that “art is the universal medium of expression, and an evidence of the dominant spirit in life.” Roerich outlined its goals: a concrete step to bring together sympathetic isolated individuals, to walk the rising road of grandeur, enthusiasm, and achievement, free from commercial taint. Its aims were to form an international brotherhood of artists; to hold exhibitions without juries, prizes, or sales; to create contests open to art and artists of all countries; to work toward establishing universal museums that would permanently house works donated by the members.⁴ Pure and idealistic, *Cor Ardens*' purpose was to encourage artists to artistic heights, not for the money, but simply for themselves; to hold exhibitions and contests so that their art could be shown but not bought; and to contribute their art to museums around the world so that more and more people could benefit from its beauty.

Roerich found it hard to understand that after centuries of bloodshed and war so few people were interested in world cooperation. The League of

Nations had been formed without the support of popular opinion and was opposed by those wanting to “keep America free from foreign entanglements.” But Roerich gathered nine painters, writers, musicians, composers, and sculptors from around the world who shared his vision of brotherhood to be honorary presidents of Cor Ardens with him: his old friend Tagore from India, Maurice Denis from France, Maurice Maeterlinck from Belgium, Ivan Mestrovic from Serbia, Ignacio Zuloaga from Spain, Asel Gallen from Finland, Augustus John from England, Ione Noguchi from Japan, and Richard Strauss from Germany. “Has chaos not opened the gates of unity?” Nicholas wondered. “Perhaps physically separated souls can begin to understand one another through Art, the language of the highest blessings.”

One reporter succinctly summed it all up: “Roerich seeks to endorse art as a tongue to utter eloquent messages. You may find much with which you disagree...much that is mystic. But that is merely a question of subject matter. The important fact is that he is moving across the country, inspiring and invigorating every artist who is fortunate enough to see the exhibition...and exemplifying the possibilities of a vital and unfettered national art.”

This story appeared in the *Denver Post*:

Elimination of racial animosities and prejudices—unity of Orient and Occident—that is the all-pervading philosophical passion of Nicholas Roerich, one of the greatest artists of our generation. How to attain this almost unbelievable Nirvana is the problem. Roerich, whose life is governed by the ebb and flow of beauty, believes with the true soul of an artist, that art and beauty will eventually work the miracle. Man, in common with all men, loves the thing beautiful. Beauty is the lifeblood—the goal. The doctrine of world unity, a common sympathy and understanding of philosophy and the love of art—therein lies the hope of mankind for a better world in which to live.

Wherever Roerich went, he spoke as a prophet of peace, and repeated the same messages: “Art and Knowledge, Beauty and Wisdom.” He consistently told people: “Creation is the pure prayer of the spirit...art is the heart of the people...knowledge is the brain...Only through the heart and through wisdom can mankind arrive at union and mutual understanding. To understand is to forgive.”

A Kansas City woman was inspired with the idea of presenting her city's museum with the painting *Lord of the Night*, in the name of the children. The entire city and children of all ages enthusiastically adopted her plan. They made appeals through the news, held children's parades, and spontaneously raised one thousand dollars for the purchase. Roerich was delighted and wrote:

If youth are taught to cooperate all the world over, this will link them with the future. While much is said about the differences and misunderstandings that separate members of different generations...small mention is made when they unite. Stress the sense of collaboration and responsibility and it will engender a healthy strain of thought; then people will be able to discover and rejoice in all that is beautiful. Encourage cooperation.

Art and science, wisdom and beauty are the foundation stones upon which will rest the culture of the spirit.

One critic was touched deeply enough to observe, "Roerich is not only Russian—he is human." Another wrote, "Roerich is himself a seeker after hidden treasures, an idealist to whom reality is but a suggestion of that which lies beyond."

Nicholas felt his paintings would lead humanity to a future more magnificent than its past. "If the culture of spirit is to win, beauty must invade new regions—regions where now there is only ugliness." He preached that art should be hung in hospitals, asylums, factories, theaters, universities, public libraries, prisons, railway stations, city streets, and buildings as a means of reducing crime and illness—both mental and physical. His desire was to decorate everything. He wanted the world to blossom with art.

Roerich's few months in America had been full: painting, designing sets and costumes, crating and uncrating paintings, running for trains, traveling, attending openings, shaking hands, writing speeches, lecturing, and, in the midst of it all, completing his book of poetry, *Morya's Flowers*. Though the time had been stimulating, in many ways it was extremely difficult. He, Helena, and Svetoslav had moved many times, and money was a constant concern. They still did not have enough money for India, so their plans would have to be postponed again.

Russian men seldom spoke publicly about their wives; Roerich, however, was quick to acknowledge that life without Helena's strength and companionship would have been very different. During their years of travel and isolation, with only each other to turn to, their family closeness had deepened. Even having George away at school was hard for them, but his studies were preparing him for India. In London he had studied Sanskrit; now at Harvard, he was continuing to study Sanskrit while also learning Chinese and Pali, the language of early Buddhism. While George was the scientist and linguist, Svetoslav was the artist and a valuable assistant and apprentice to his father. The plan was that Svetoslav would join George at Harvard and begin architectural studies the next year. However, the school year was almost over, and then the reunited family would summer in Santa Fe.

A Pueblo Indian art exhibition had been at the Museum of Natural History when the Roerichs arrived in New York. It is doubtful whether many New Yorkers enjoyed it as much as Nicholas did, for he saw his own people of the steppes and the Asian desert reflected there. What he saw made him eager for more. The family's short time in Santa Fe would enable them to discover the culture of the New World, tour some excavations, and see more Pueblo art.



SANTA FE

Located high in the mountains, Santa Fe is a rare, spiritual place, unique in America. When the Roerichs arrived in August 1921, it was still adapted more to the pace of the sun than to that of the clock. The tiny adobe settlement was filled with mazes of narrow, crooked, dusty streets traversed by Mexicans, Indians, and burros loaded with firewood for cooking stoves and fireplaces. The sharp, sweet scent of piñon smoke gently drifted in the air. The beautiful, soft contours of adobe walls were accentuated by the intensity of the blue skies, fiery sunsets, gentle snow-caps, and vast vistas of serenity. Long the meeting places of trappers, traders, and Indians, Santa Fe, and Taos to the north, were rapidly becoming destinations for painters, musicians, and writers. Frances Grant had come earlier to visit her parents and found the Roerichs a house to rent on Galisteo Street.

With a population of 723, Santa Fe offered not only great beauty and charm, but also isolation and remoteness. The unavoidable influences and interferences of big cities and society's established traditions could be so completely forgotten that people were free to explore new ways. Founded in the 1600s by the Spanish, who conquered the Pueblo villages in an attempt to force the Indians into Christianity, the town blended the richness of its earlier cultures with that of newcomers gravitating to the fresh air and exotic beauty. Roerich was particularly interested in the ancient cliff dwellings on Pajarito Plateau in the Jemez Mountains north of Santa Fe. Excavations begun there in the early 1900s were continuing to uncover the remains of the life of America's prehistoric indigenous people of the Southwest, revealing the existence of a civilization and culture long before Europeans arrived.

Roerich lost no time in contacting Edgar Hewitt, who headed the excavations and documented the discoveries.¹ Almost before the Roerichs and the Lichtmanns could shake off the dust of their journey, the newspaper was reporting that the Roerichs and Hewitt had just returned from a few days in El Rito de los Frijoles, where they had toured the two miles of village ruins along the base of a canyon wall.

Although Edgar Hewitt was an Illinois farm boy nine years Roerich's senior, Nicholas had seldom met a person so similar to himself. Not only did the two men share many of the same interests, but their personality traits and life experiences were surprisingly similar. Hewitt had the same zest for life and also stood firm in his sometimes unpopular and controversial convictions. Both men wrote poetry and articles of scientific importance; both had law degrees, yet they had become educators rather than lawyers. Hewitt had directed a large school and formulated an educational philosophy that credited students with innate knowledge waiting to be developed, as had Roerich when he directed the School for the Encouragement of the Arts in Russia.

In conversation, both tended to hold forth, as though unaccustomed to interruption. Both continually sought the truth about humankind and held firm principles of right and wrong, yet were broad-minded and convinced that one person's religion was no better than another's. Practical men with high ideals, they desired to elevate humanity. Hewitt shared Roerich's fascination with ancient sites and ruins and the importance of preserving the past; both were absorbed in archaeology, ethnology, and anthropology and loved the actual digging and sifting involved. Each came from a well-to-do background and had experienced a life-changing upheaval resulting in comparative poverty. Both were deeply devoted to their wives. While Hewitt did not paint, he championed artists and encouraged them with free studio space. Both men held great hope for the future of humankind and deeply respected the tribes and ethnic groups being lost through the advances of civilization.

The first director of the Museum of Fine Arts and the School of American Research, both in Santa Fe, and the Museum of Man in San Diego, Hewitt still found time to visit with guests and people interested in his work. Both men must have enjoyed their days together. After showing

the Roerichs Pajarito Plateau, Hewitt graciously continued to extend every courtesy. The group toured all the pueblos, saw the Hopi Snake Dance at Walpi and the cliff dwellings at Puyé, and visited Taos Pueblo, which Roerich later painted several times. Hewitt was one of the rare white men who had truly befriended the Indians, and so his guests were accorded special hospitality.

When Roerich presented Dr. Hewitt with a painting of ancient Russian dancers encircling idols in a sacred dance, everyone thought it was of Alaska or one of the Indian pueblos. Roerich later wrote:

If you go through the fairyland of the Indian pueblos, listen to their wonderful songs and profound ceremonial dances, observe their feet bound in white linen, their unique headdresses, and ornamented shirts; after seeing the rich fantasy of their totem poles and examining their household utensils, you will then know the feeling of western Russia or Siberia. It all combines into evidence that strengthens the old legend that several Indian tribes migrated from Siberia and Alaska. Otherwise how could two groups on different continents, under vastly different circumstances, have such striking similarities? As an artist, I can assert that rather than an invention of fantasy, the pictorial and musical similarities are evidence that this old legend is a fragment of truth.

Fourteen years later, when the University of New Mexico and the School of American Research jointly sponsored a memorial volume to commemorate Hewitt's seventieth birthday, Roerich, then in India, contributed the article "Mongolian Epic" as a tribute to his friend. "My friendship with Dr. Edgar L. Hewitt will forever remain as one of the most cherished remembrances of my work in the United States," he wrote.

Santa Fe and the surrounding areas were more like remote Spanish towns than anything Roerich expected to find in America. He delighted in the variety of inspiring landscapes. "The beauty of Switzerland, Norway, Central Asia, and the Caucasus...Africa, Spain, Italy—it is all here and truly amazing," he told a reporter. Aware that Hewitt was meeting resistance from locals who did not want their sleepy town transformed into a mecca for painters and tourists, he added, "I believe that in a short time, Santa Fe will be a real art center with the greatest future."

Settled into Santa Fe life, the Roerich family began honoring the tradition enjoyed by Nicholas's parents of "receiving" on Wednesday

nights. Hospitality and aesthetic discussions were offered to the freethinkers, summer people, artists, musicians, writers, and town characters. Not only were these gatherings a pleasant way to meet people, but they also gave those who attended the opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions without the superficiality encountered in most social situations. Although Nicholas had a sense of humor and was known to joke on occasion with those close to him, his time was too valuable to spend on pleasantries and idle talk. Truth, beauty, and peace were his major topics of conversation. Though the Wednesday gatherings lasted for just a few short weeks, their impact on some of those involved lingered for a lifetime.

On Thursday afternoons, members of the Santa Fe Arts Club gathered under the shade trees in their clubhouse garden to chat with their guests over drink. It was a delightful way for visitors, resident painters, and townspeople to meet, and those who did not attend could stay abreast by reading Inez Sizer Cassidy's chatty social column in the evening paper. When Nicholas attended with his two sons, Cassidy described him as "quite the most important guest" of the afternoon.

Once again, the Roerich family had timed their arrival perfectly. This time the planning was more intentional, for Santa Fe was on the verge of erupting with its annual Fiesta—four days of colorful pageantry, Indian dances, feasting, and gaiety celebrating several historical events. Roerich, along with sixty well-known artists from Santa Fe and Taos, was invited to display his work in the art exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts. He was pleased to contribute *Pagan Russia* and *Oku, Sacred Mountain of the South* to the 106 paintings hanging in the show.

On the third day of Fiesta, Adolph Bolm and his family arrived, and the thousands of spectators were in for an unscheduled surprise. In full costume, Adolph performed the exciting war dance of an Armenian tribe, the Zeitoon, thrilling the crowd with his remarkable abilities. His "fearful leaps and bounds" suggested the mountainous country over which the Zeitoon traveled to war or to hunt. During the "thunderous applause" Bolm received, the Zunis, who had danced before his arrival, announced they would reciprocate. Then the stunned crowd enjoyed a rare treat, for the Zunis danced their magnificent "Yebechi" medicine dance for healing the sick, never before seen outside their pueblo. Bolm told reporters it was the most impressive Indian dance he had seen: "The tune, the form, the

expression—were all strikingly beautiful, and full of meaning...we felt the confidence of the Red Man in the power of nature to heal by bringing the sick one back into harmony with nature's laws."

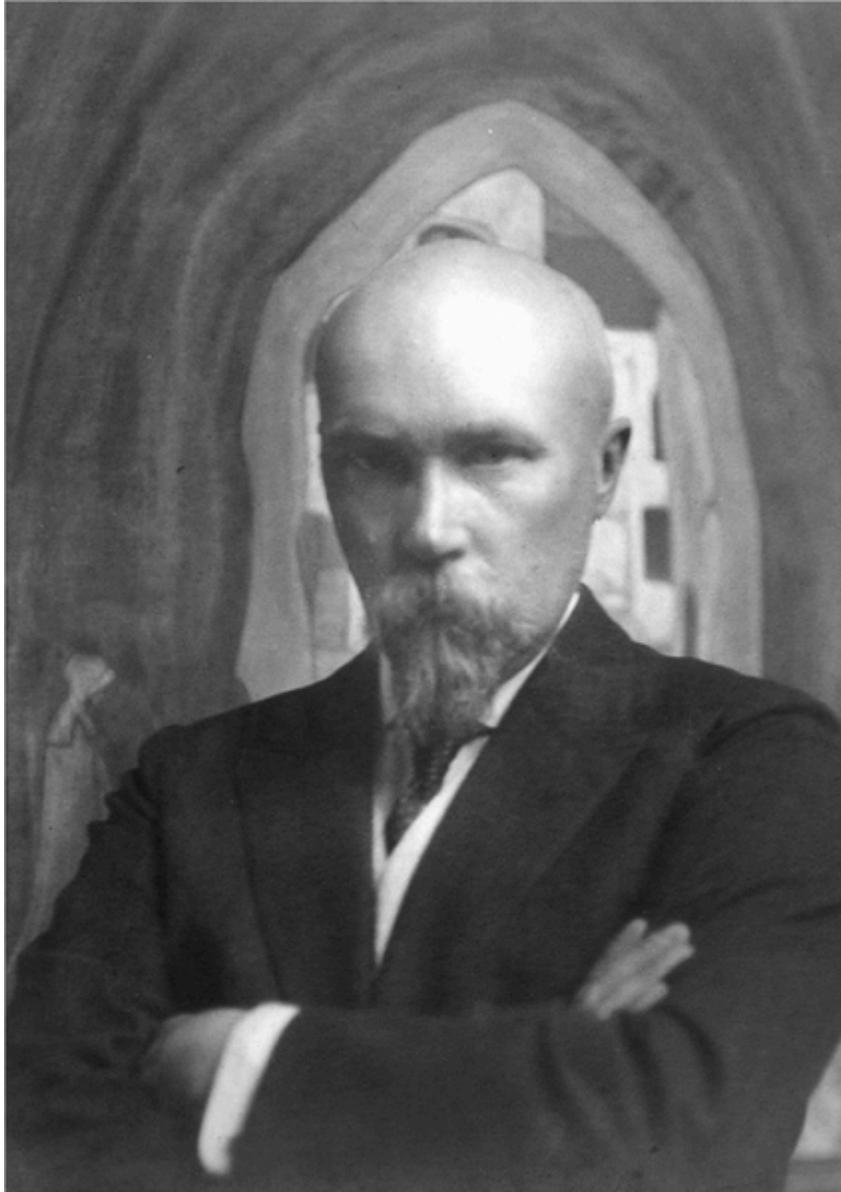
Roerich was invited to lecture several times, and these may well have been among the few occasions in the United States when he felt he was so completely among friends. Once, obviously relaxed, he revealed an unusual amount of himself as he spoke of the "new life that is rising amidst the ruins of human conventions." He reprimanded the "extremists who twist the concept of reality" and then excused them, saying it was not their fault for they had "forgotten that which rings in every atom of the starry sky... forgotten harmony...forgotten that the mysterious charm of art is in its origin...forgotten that art is not created by the brain, but by the heart and by the spirit." Perhaps he was exposing his own aloneness when he concluded: "I know how painfully difficult it is for you to walk past the gazes of those who have built life merely on the dark concept of money. I know you, the lonely ones, who sit alone in the light—remember there are many others sitting in this same light. And those who share this light cannot be lonely. Though your hand has not yet felt the pressure of another, your spirit will certainly receive this brotherly kiss."

Santa Fe was brilliant that fall, with the golden aspens and vivid red Virginia creeper against the azure sky. When the summer rains came to an end, the Fiesta guests and the summer people regretfully began to board the trains that would return them to their winter lives. The time had indeed been special for the Roerichs, whose group had expanded to include Natalie Curtis, an ethnologist, and her painter husband, Paul Burlin, the godfather of the Bolms' son. Frances Grant had included her sister and brothers, too. Now, however, they were scattering in different directions. George was going back to Harvard, soon to be joined by Svetoslav; Frances, the Bolms, and the Lichtmanns were heading to New York; and the Roerichs were continuing west to meet the exhibition in San Francisco.

As the train carried them toward California, September's intense, dry heat accentuated the monotony and flatness of the open land. After hundreds of miles of desert, they stopped at the Grand Canyon. Nicholas, who preferred the images he carried in his mind of the breathtaking wildness of India, the cloud-shrouded majesty of the Himalayan summits, and Russia's vast charm, did not enjoy the stark beauty of the desert. Although *The*

Miracle was painted as a radiant remembrance of the Grand Canyon, in *Himavat, Diary Leaves* he relates the story of a traveler so oppressed by the prospect of the endless descent necessary to reach the canyon bottom that even the expectation of seeing beautiful colors did not help. Whether that was Roerich's own sentiment or not, the paintings he completed at this time, other than *The Miracle*, were heavy, dark, and dull.

Traveling north through California, they stopped in some of the picturesque towns along the coast. Nicholas spoke on "Joy of Art" at the California Art School and the University of California, telling stories about the importance of his excavations and the beauty of Russian icons. A reviewer of his exhibition at the San Francisco Museum called Roerich "a Walt Whitman of painting" and wrote that only a master craftsman could handle tempera and pastel together in such a manner.



Traveling with his exhibition: Nicholas Roerich at the San Francisco Museum of Art

Within weeks, they were back in Santa Fe and once more among friends. On a warm Sunday afternoon in October, Nicholas spoke in the Women's Museum Room to an audience of Hewitt's invited guests. "New Beauty and Wisdom to Come From Present Era of Darkness, Says Roerich," read a headline the following day, and "Leader of Advanced School of Mysticism Makes Deeply Interesting Address."² Dr. Hewitt was quoted as saying in his introduction, "Other than what we read in the

newspapers, we know so little of Russia...of the Bolsheviki and the old-time anarchists and nihilists, that it is refreshing and enlightening to meet such representatives...as Professor and Madame Roerich, who have given us such a different idea of the Russian people.”

In his talk the artist chose his words with as much exactness as he did his paints:

Like bees we gather knowledge, and like bees we pack it into odd honeycombs. But at the end of the year who has the real treasures? The things of yesterday are like the ashes of last night's fires, but even in the midst of accidents and destruction, evidence appears of that which is precious to our spirit. It is this that leads mankind through all circles of achievement. From the heavings and the conflicts of the old yesterdays, a new path of beauty and wisdom shall come. Great beauty eventually follows earthquakes, floods, and the greatest cataclysms; so will it follow this world conflict. Be of good cheer. Amidst the ruins of human conventions, a new life already rises...one in which art and knowledge will support the throne of Divine Love.

He went on to say that throughout his travels, although he had frequently visited a museum or gallery that had an entire room devoted to the art of a single country, he had never found an American room. And in the United States, he had found none devoted to Russia. Before concluding with praise for Santa Fe, its artists and writers, and everyone involved with the museum and the School of American Research, he said, “Here is a mission for America. Send your art to Europe. Show them what this young nation is doing, and bring the stimulation of Russian art to your museums and galleries. This is one of the things for which I will work because I believe in the great principles of America.”

The next day's *Santa Fean* quoted his speech almost in its entirety, then concluded: “The fact that Professor Roerich is a well-known leader of the advanced school of mysticism as well as a leader in art, lent much significance to his address.” Thus did Santa Fe bid farewell to someone they had taken into their hearts as the Roerichs started back to New York in October. The paintings were to tour until April, ending in Rochester after exhibitions in Madison, Omaha, Colorado Springs, Cleveland, Denver, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Columbus, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Ann Arbor, Muskegon, Detroit, and a few other cities. Nicholas

had fulfilled his lecture commitments, and Helena was back to her writing. Reunited with the Lichtmanns and the others, the “school of mysticism,” the Agni Yoga group, reconvened for a period of intense study of Eastern philosophy under Helena’s guidance, while Nicholas taught them a deeper understanding of art.

Since thousands were viewing his paintings, Roerich was quite disheartened that only a few had been sold. Although the United States was beginning to recover from a postwar recession, most Americans were provincially conservative in their artistic tastes. Most seemed to think that culture, refinement, and the ability to purchase art were only for the rich; many considered art a luxury and wouldn’t think of spending their hardearned dollars on anything so impractical. It would take another world war before middle-class Americans would be affluent enough to turn their attention to art. Furthermore, if Roerich’s work was unclassifiable and confusing to the critics, it was even more difficult for the general public to understand. Exactly as Roerich himself had to search for that small segment of society that shared his views and beliefs, so did his art have to find its patrons. He observed there were far fewer people wanting to buy art than the great number of American artists struggling through great financial difficulties to continue creating it. He even heard that some people considered it bad taste to have too many art objects in one home. Wondering how one could be surrounded by too much beauty, he called this a “foolish prejudice.” Accustomed to a different set of priorities, he distinguished between buyers of art and collectors, and lamented America’s lack of the latter.

There had been more collectors than buyers in Russia. He remembered several who were “rich only in the brightness of their spirits” but neglected the more obvious necessities of life to collect art. In Russia, and throughout Europe, benefactors or patrons were a vital part of an artist’s life. Roerich’s *The Messenger: Tribe Has Risen Against Tribe*, from his first series *Slavic Symphony*, which incorporated his knowledge of Russian history and culture, had been purchased by Russia’s famous patron, Pavel M. Tretyakov.³ Nicholas had received his diploma from the Imperial Academy of Art with that painting, and its purchase established his artistic reputation. It also brought acceptance from his father, and recognition from Tolstoy.

Roerich had become accustomed to the large sums of money private collectors and the nobility were willing to pay to have one of his paintings in their personal collections or to donate to the famous treasuries such as the Louvre, the National Gallery of Rome, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. But in America, however, there was no royalty. American independence and private enterprise meant that people were expected to get ahead on their own; the “land of the free” was also the land of the “self-made” person. This expectation included artists. There were enough rags-to-riches stories to prove that all it took was initiative to become a success overnight.

If Roerich’s sales were meager, his expenses were not. Living in New York was costly. With Svetoslav and George attending expensive schools, more money went out than came in. Nicholas, however, managed to look unruffled and seemed convinced that things would work out. Meanwhile, George wrote from Harvard that he had only one dollar to his name. In November, Henry L. Slobodin, Roerich’s attorney, sent this note: “My dear Professor: I had a telephone conversation with Mr. Ross of the Hotel des Artistes. He says that you owe him up to October 1st \$500.00 rent, and \$52.12 for some charges for September. In all, you owe him up to October 1st \$552.12. Please send me a check for \$500.00 and another check for \$52.12 (if you owe it), and I will have the matter adjusted by securing from Mr. Ross a receipt in full for you.” To settle the emergency temporarily, Roerich used his paintings as collateral for a loan from Fifth Avenue Bank. With these crises handled, it was easier to focus his attention on creating his vision, “the cornerstone” of his future endeavors and dreams: the Master School of United Arts.

Private experimental schools were springing up everywhere. The poet Tagore had opened one in northern India, and Theosophists had started educating their children privately. Roerich had molded his own philosophies of education while directing the art academy in St. Petersburg and working at Talashkino. Many of his ideas were so advanced they seemed revolutionary. The previous summer, in Santa Fe, he had boldly told a group:

In the education of children we still forget the development of creative power. First, men seek to instill into the child a mass of conventional concepts, along with a full

course in fear. Then the child is acquainted with all the family quarrels. Then he is shown films, those criminal films in which evil is so inventive and brilliant—and good so dull and unrewarded. Then the child is given teachers who have no love for their subject, and transmit that. Further, children see all the vulgar headlines in the news. Next, the child is plunged into the sphere of a so-called “sport” so he may grow accustomed to blows and broken limbs. And this is how the youth’s time is occupied; he is given the most ignoble and perverted formulae; and after that, besmirched and rusted, he’s expected to begin creative work....

We are often astonished by the unexpected character of a child’s drawing, by the melody of a child’s song, or by the wisdom of a child’s reasoning. In the beginning, these things are always beautiful. But afterwards, when we notice that the child ceases singing or drawing, and that his reasoning starts to resemble that in so-called children’s books, the infection of triviality has already sunk in. All the symptoms of this horrible disease become evident...Boredom makes its appearance, there is no lightness in the smile, the child becomes submissive and afraid of loneliness. Something near, some ever-present, guiding principle, has therefore withdrawn or receded.

But if even a machine suffers from dust and dirt, how destructive must spiritual grime be to the tender young soul? In mortal yearning the little head seeks for light. In mortal pain it feels all the offenses of its surroundings. It suffers, weakens, and sometimes lies in the dust forever. And the creative apparatus runs down and all its wires fall away...Open the path to creative effort and the greatness of art in all schools. Preserve the child from the grimace of life. Give him a bold, happy life, full of activity and bright attainments. Develop the creative instinct from the earliest years of childhood. If the young soul creates, these scourges of humanity, triviality, loneliness, and weariness of life, will thus pass by.

A year later, in New York, he continued: “It is essential for young minds to search. If this is prohibited, it becomes necessary to destroy everything old, because in the young mind, everything old is connected with what has been prohibited. We must open the door to beauty not through denying and suppressing, but by demonstrating the real, practical way to search, we must impart a new feeling to the young soul: everything must be permitted. And only one certificate of honor should exist—the certificate of real culture.”

Roerich knew that if a new era were to be achieved, it would be accomplished by the children, whose “young hearts search for something beautiful and true.” He wanted to teach everyone that unity is achieved when all the arts fit together: “If we can see the beautiful evolution of civilization and culture, then we can understand that much more awaits us. It is near; it is vital; and it is practical for everybody....Only the bridge of

Beauty will be strong enough for crossing from the bank of darkness to the side of light.”



THE MASTER SCHOOL OF UNITED ARTS

Roerich envisioned that the Master School of United Arts would offer the opportunity to put all of his theories about education into practice. Yet this endeavor was so large that he recognized the necessity of embarking slowly; little could be accomplished if the teachers did not all share his views. Nicholas compared the formation of the Master School to a tree, saying they were about to plant a seed that would grow into a sapling, blossom, and then bear fruit. At the same time, the family still cherished the dream of going to India.

As the Master School plans progressed in New York, the *Cor Ardens* painters in Chicago were having problems. Their work and that of scores of other American painters and sculptors had been rejected by Art Institute of Chicago officials from the 34th Annual Exhibition of American Art. Raymond Jonson, as official spokesman and chairman of the artists' delegation, told a reporter: "We are not exactly making a protest, we shall just ask the Institute what it all means. We shall ask for an exhibition of all rejected paintings—not only those of Chicago artists, but of painters and sculptors throughout the country—so that the public may judge for itself whether our works are inferior to those included in the show at present....We want to know why 90% of the work submitted was rejected. We think an explanation is due us."

Calling on Roerich's friend Robert C. Harshe, who by that time had become director of the Art Institute of Chicago, the group requested a special showing of the rejected works. Two days later, one thousand of the rejected canvases were scheduled for exhibition at Rothschild's department

store. Rudolph Weisenborn, vice-president of Cor Ardens International Art Society and “leader of the youthful insurgents,” explained, “Today we had a conference with Director R. C. Harshe. He was very nice, but he couldn’t promise us anything definite.”

Roerich had grown up hearing stories of St. Petersburg painters who had won artistic freedom by rebelling against the authorities. If America was to have a unique art form, the contributing artists needed to be encouraged in free expression. Whether he suggested this revolt to his Cor Ardens group, or just enthusiastically spurred them on, the result was the same: Nicholas’s sponsor, Harshe, was caught in the middle with his loyalties divided and his hands tied. Harshe’s private taste may have run to the forerunners of the modern art movement, but he was directing an institute known for what one critic termed a “frozen Yukon” attitude toward progressive art. Although the mutiny made the plight of the artists more public, it did little to improve their situation. It went into artistic history as “the bloodless Chicago art revolution.”

Meanwhile, in New York the Roerichs and Lichtmanns were seeking the best space for the Master School. One day, Nicholas and Maurice Lichtmann saw a friend who could no longer pay the rent on his studio on West Fifty-fourth Street. When Nicholas heard it was located above a Greek Orthodox church, his interest heightened.

Few locations could have been more auspicious for the Master School of United Arts than a church. The vibrations would be perfect. After speaking with the priest in charge, seeing the beautiful wooden floors, large airy windows and the lift, the Lichtmanns and Roerichs pooled their money and rented it. As Roerich signed the papers, he commented, “If the tree is vital, it will grow; if not, then only one room would be sufficient.”



The original Master School of United Arts, 312 West Fifty-fourth St., New York City, 1922–23

On November 17, 1921, the Master School of United Arts was officially chartered. They painted the large studio, rented two concert grand pianos from Steinway, hired a secretary, and organized classes. They bought some necessary furniture and equipment, printed the catalog, hung a magnificent collection of rare Italian and Dutch masterpieces loaned by a nearby gallery, and the Roerichs' school became a reality.

Chosen for having the best influences, January 22, 1922, was opening night. When the big night arrived, crowds of well-wishers swarmed onto the lift, bringing warmth and merriment up to the studio. The whole evening sparkled, and the Roerichs were gratified to see the large number of people eager to share this momentous occasion. Roerich's friend the Russian composer Prokofiev was there; the Bolms attended and even friends from Chicago; Frances Grant joined the group later. Songs from *The Snow Maiden* filled the building with Russian melodies; music by Rachmaninoff followed, and then pieces by Lazare Saminsky and Deems Taylor, both members of the new music faculty.

Since the Master School of United Arts had actually merged with the Lichtmann Piano Institute, previously registered students were ready to continue their studies as soon as the new school opened. Their tuition

immediately covered the rent and put the school on a self-sufficient basis. Many celebrated artists and teachers quickly volunteered their services, wanting to take part in this exciting endeavor. Besides piano, classes were conducted in violin, cello, painting, drawing, harmony and composition, music appreciation, and voice, and a guest-lecturer series was presented.

A series of concerts began in March to raise money for scholarships, which were given to forty-two gifted young people. With the credo Through Art to Light, classes were offered for the sightless. First-year enrollment surpassed all expectations. English, Russian, Swiss, French, Italian, American—at least a dozen nationalities were represented in the classes, and almost as many among the faculty. Everyone seemed amiable to demonstrating the same unifying spirit and sense of pride that was bonding America.

With the title of vice president, Maurice Lichtmann assumed responsibility for actually running the school, and he and Sina headed the music department. While Frances attempted to be involved in a general way, she was reluctant to participate more actively because her personal goal was Paris. She hoped to be a correspondent there and pursue a writing career. Although Professor Roerich was president, he felt confident enough of Maurice's abilities to plan on leaving for India and Central Asia in 1923.

In the spring, Frances's closest friends, Louis and Nettie Horch, returned to New York from California, where they lived most of the year. Nettie and Frances had begun a friendship as schoolgirls that continued despite Frances's career and Nettie's marriage and motherhood. Poor health had recently forced Louis to retire from the Wall Street firm of Horch and Rosenthal, where he was senior partner and foreign-exchange broker. The couple was searching for something to fill the void left by the tragic death of their little son the previous winter.

When they heard Frances's enthusiastic conversation about the Roerichs—the school, the paintings, their dreams for the future—the Horches wanted to see for themselves. The scope of Roerich's vision, his views, and his theories captivated them. Even though the couple was more at home on a golf course than in an art gallery and knew more about sports than cultural pursuits, Horch was too much of a businessman to fail to notice that all of the people involved in the school were artists. If the enterprise was really to flourish, someone practical with financial expertise would be needed for the

business end. After buying some paintings, they implored Frances, “Let us be part of everything,” and she agreed to discuss it with her colleagues.

Considering the financial problems the Roerichs had encountered, Louis Horch must have looked like a guardian angel; almost certainly, he looked like a patron. Over the next few weeks, Horch assured the group that though he knew little about art, he nevertheless had much to offer the school. Both Roerichs must have privately heaved deep sighs of relief when the couple was allowed to join. With Horch agreeable to exchanging paintings for money, Roerich’s financial worries were eased for the first time in the five years since their departure from Russia. With that tremendous burden off his shoulders, everything seemed to have fallen into place.

Reflecting on the uncertainty of the troubled years now surmounted, Roerich might have thought about the many paintings he had created as a contribution to humanity. Beginning with his early rousing calls to Russians to take pride in their past, the paintings had ranged through many phases. As his own spiritual growth developed and deepened and his knowledge of the inner worlds strengthened, his paintings had progressed from grim warnings of the suffering and destruction of war to serene vistas of peace and hope. Although upon leaving Russia their days of alarm had been exchanged for days of uncertainty and unfamiliar problems, the work with their Master had put a fresh light on everything. Contact with the Hierarchy gave their lives true meaning and purpose.



The little circle of coworkers. Left to right: Frances Grant, Sina and Maurice Lichtmann, Sina's mother Sophie Shafran, Louis and Nettie Horch, Esther Lichtmann, and Svetoslav Roerich, the Roerichs' younger son

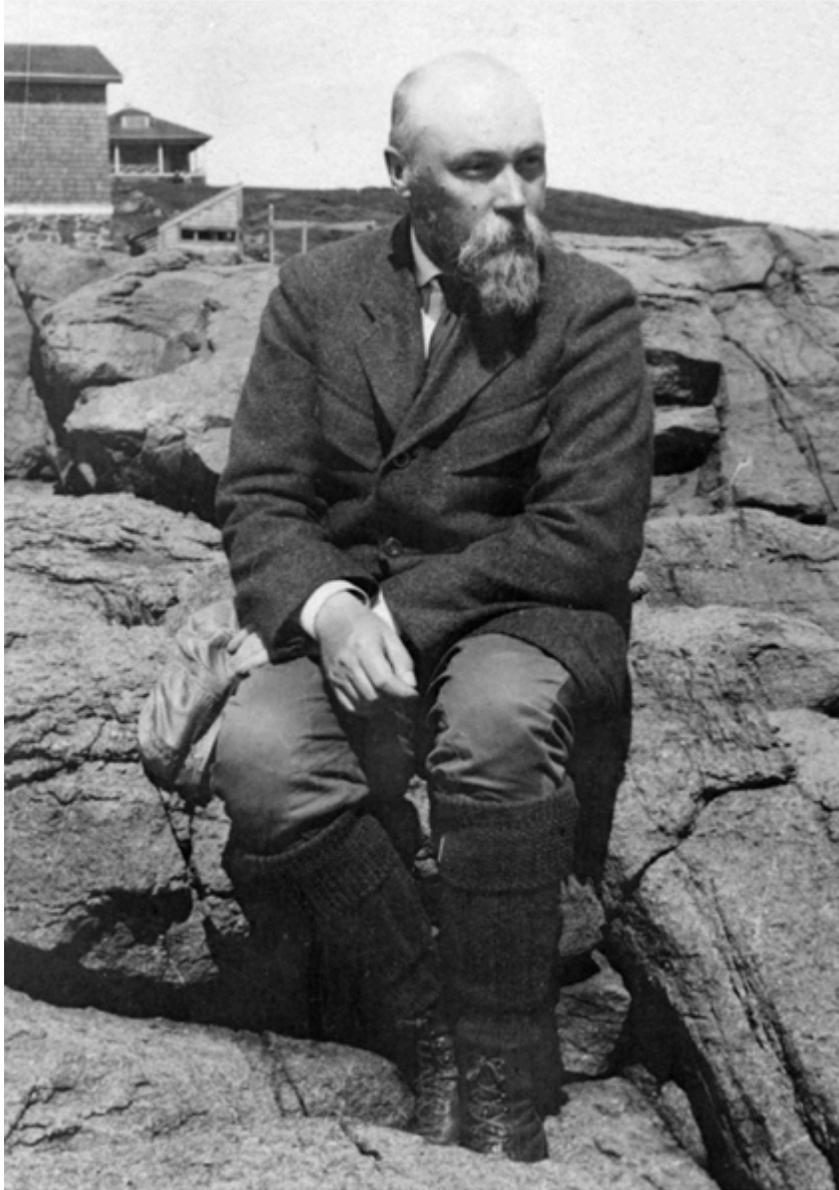
Now, with Horch part of the school, the uncertainty was behind. The Roerichs' sons were doing well. George had begun a young people's study group at Harvard. The Master School had opened, and the little circle of coworkers had been assembled and were meeting regularly. They would sit together as Nicholas, and later Helena, transmitted questions the students were allowed to ask Master Morya. The questions were on spiritual matters and issues related to developing the school; Nicholas wrote the Master's answers on big scrolls of sketching paper. Private guidance from the Master intended for the Roerichs alone was kept in Helena's journals.

The first book made from the scrolls was *Leaves of Morya's Garden: The Call*. In it, Master Morya said: "I disclose to thee the knowledge wherein is concealed Tibet's Wisdom. Friends, look forward, forget the

past, think of the service of the future, and I shall come to give thee counsel. Exalt others in spirit, and look ahead.” *Leaves of Morya’s Garden* became the first of the Agni Yoga series—a record of telepathic transmissions from the Masters that the Roerichs continued to receive and record for the rest of their lives.

When summer arrives in New York, people are just as quick to abandon their city as the St. Petersburg aristocracy had been. Some head to the shore, while others retreat to the quiet setting of thick forests and gently rolling hills. The Roerichs had become intrigued by the stories told by Nicholas’s artist friend Charles Hovey Pepper of giant rock formations and evenings spent gazing at the aurora borealis on a mystical island named Monhegan off the coast of Maine. A slower pace and cool air would be a welcome change from Manhattan. Reservations were made, the trip was organized, and Nicholas began planning the series of seascapes he would paint.

The ferry was Monhegan’s link with the world. Everything arrived by ferry—mail, catalog orders, supplies, as well as summertime painters and guests. When the ferry was spotted offshore, all the residents would drop what they were doing and scramble down to see who and what had arrived. Upon the Roerichs’ arrival, everyone crowded the dock, curious to see the famous artist and other “refugees from Russia.” Seventy years later, the two daughters of Pepper’s friend Eric Hudson still remembered the event as the time “royalty” visited the island. The sisters liked to relate, “They arrived as a group, Roerich, two blond teenage sons, his wife, and several others, including a princess!”¹ The group stayed at one of the town’s two hotels, Monhegan House, located in the north part of the village. And the aristocratic Roerichs gave the townspeople lots to watch. Mme Roerich walked off the ferry wearing red high-heeled slippers, and the islanders wondered how long it would be before she changed into something more sensible—but she never did. Soon it was common knowledge that the sons kissed their mother’s hand upon coming down to breakfast, and some of the islanders were unsure whether to bow or nod in greeting.



Nicholas Roerich on the cliffs of Monhegan Island, Maine, summer 1922

Sina and Maurice closed the Master School for the summer and followed shortly. Once on the island, Sina appreciated the unique opportunity to spend private time with her teachers. Early mornings Helena devoted to recording meticulously her dreams, visions, and work with the Masters, and Nicholas took the Lichtmanns out to where he was sketching. When Helena joined them, the young couple enjoyed listening while the Roerichs exchanged their thoughts about such things as the shoreline, the colors, and the clouds. It seemed to Sina that when Nicholas and Helena

were together they were in complete harmony and agreement in all things and a bright aura of light surrounded them. She was continually impressed with their “unity of thinking,” and felt that each word they uttered was a “pearl of wisdom.” She would always remember how quickly the days sped by while the group was involved in their “joyous studies.”

A lively correspondence began between Frances Grant and the Horches, still in New York, and the Roerichs and the Lichtmanns in Maine. Both for protection and to give the Master School better standing, Louis wanted to have the school incorporated, but they discovered it would not be possible unless the name was changed. That was completely out of the question for the Roerichs, who had picked the name with great consideration and purpose. So Horch was advised to fight for it. They exchanged several cables and finally reached a compromise: “Institute” would be substituted for “School.” Thus it became the Master Institute of United Arts. With that settled, Frances and the Horches boarded the train for Maine, crossed over on the ferry, and joined the others on Monhegan.

Now that everyone was together, much needed to be accomplished, and less than two weeks remained. Since sharing the same vision and goals was essential, it was vital to bring everyone into a commonality of purpose. One principle of Agni Yoga is that all students develop at their own speed, building their own path and striving to surpass only themselves. Therefore, the Horches needed to be initiated into the wisdom teachings slowly so they would avoid “psychic indigestion.”

Reincarnation and karma, difficult concepts for some, were accepted readily by the Horches because of the death of their son. To think that things worked according to a plan, with the Hierarchy, Mahatmas, or Masters guiding civilization, comforted them. The Horches were deeply touched and consoled when they received a “message” about their child who had passed over—and about the one to come, a daughter, who was born within the next few years. When Roerich revealed that he and Helena had actually met the Masters and worked in close cooperation with them, the little circle began to perceive that their work would have a greater depth and scope than they could have imagined.

The daily talks and conferences continued far into the night, as they laid plans for the future development and expansion of the institute. The Horches’ backing made everything look different. They worked out an

extensive advertising campaign, which Frances was appointed to handle; her first step was to contract for space in *Musical America*. With advertising, the school could become even more successful, and might need larger accommodations, but Roerich felt it was important to stay in the same location for another year, so they decided just to add a couple of partitions and create more classes for various teachers.

When the Master Institute matters were settled, the circle turned their attention to the next phase of Roerich's dreams: the creation of the Roerich Museum and Corona Mundi (Crown of the World), the international art center. The museum, intended to be the heart of the institutions, would coordinate and embrace all their activities. It would unify the arts with international cultures and all future artistic and scientific endeavors. The nucleus of the museum would be 350 of Roerich's paintings—the remainder of his traveling exhibition plus the unsold canvases painted in America.

Roerich believed that the entire fabric of contemporary life would broaden if people became more aware of the inspirational force permeating art, beauty, and culture. Corona Mundi's purpose, therefore, was to arrange exhibitions of Eastern and Western art. It would house an incomparable collection of the world's finest creative treasures so that all people could be elevated and influenced by the artistic accomplishments of other countries and other times.

Once they completed planning for the new institutions, India was next on the agenda. The greatly anticipated trip throughout Central Asia was finally to be scheduled. There were many versions of the purpose of this expedition. The public was told it was "to search the expanses of Asia, the cradle of mankind, for the origins of human culture, the earliest fruits of man's spiritual aspiration." The circle of coworkers was aware of additional purposes, such as being with the Masters and entering Shambhala—the spiritual center of the world. But the greatest secret, the one to which only a choice few had been initiated, was that since 1921–22, many messages had been received directing and explaining N. K. Roerich's destiny: He was to establish and lead the "New Country"—the "New Russia," a Buddhist spiritual state in the areas surrounding the Altai Mountains, Mongolia, and the Gobi.

Without even knowing the entire story, everyone was tremendously excited about the extent and possibilities of the undertaking. In addition to

his artistic aims Roerich wanted to study the ancient monuments of Central Asia, observe the present conditions of religions and creeds, and note the traces of the great migrations of nations. Months earlier, the New York Museum of Natural History had sent an expedition led by Roy Chapman Andrews that left from Peking, crossed the Gobi, and traveled into Mongolia. The whole world had heard the thrilling news of the expedition's discovery of the first dinosaur eggs ever unearthed, for it substantiated the theory that Asia was the mother of life.² Now their own brave, fearless Roerichs were preparing to go off into the unknown, for perhaps four or five years, with the hope of bringing back "an immortal record of Asia's spiritual treasures and evolution." In preparation, George, who was to be the spokesman and interpreter, had become fluent in eight languages and fairly conversant in some twenty others. His parents would not have to rely on strangers for their translations.

No matter how much or little each of the group understood of the actual purpose, the opportunity to participate in one of the greatest adventures of all time was breathtaking. The five New Yorkers would be the expedition's lifeline. Roerich would be the first Western artist to return with paintings of the "Panorama of the East," the hidden, mysterious parts of Asia, and enough cultural and educational data for several publications. The Asian artifacts obtained would make Corona Mundi an international art center.

Each member of the group felt extremely privileged to be working with the Masters and with the Roerichs, whose mission was to better humanity, spiritually and culturally. For years thereafter, outsiders questioned the circle's intensity, commitment, and unwavering devotion. Newspaper reporters and others wondered what it was that kept them so connected. Were they a "cult"? The group, not wanting to give people any reason to discredit Roerich, kept their teachings secret. They kept Agni Yoga and their studies so well hidden and separate from the Master Institute that not even the teachers in the school detected a trace of the secrets binding them together.

Before leaving, Roerich pledged to contribute several hundred more paintings and agreed that all paintings resulting from the expedition would belong to the museum. He was not to receive any salary or financial compensation in exchange, but could use money raised by the Master

Institute, the Roerich Museum, and Corona Mundi from various donors and sympathetic friends so that they could purchase artistic treasures for Corona Mundi during their travels. Louis Horch enthusiastically agreed to do his utmost to have all these plans realized and, when necessary, to contribute his own money to the institutions to enable them to finance the expedition.

Another item of great importance to Nicholas was the future of art in America. He stressed the necessity of encouraging the modernists to develop their own niche in the art world, perhaps by explaining that his benefactor Pavel Tretyakov had ultimately bettered the lives of both the painters, and all Russians, by contributing his vast collection of Russian art to Moscow. When Roerich recommended that the Horches become patrons and begin collecting the work of a few great American artists, they were so enthusiastic that they immediately ordered stationery and began planning for the first Museum of American Art.

Then the Monhegan respite was over. The group agreed with Sina, who remembered, “That lovely summer was forever ingrained in our hearts.” On all levels, the things that transpired on that island completely changed the lives of every person there. Each member of the circle left committed to studying the Agni Yoga teachings and doing the work necessary to advance along the spiritual path. Nettie and Louis Horch now had a sense of purpose and the peace of knowing they had a new, firm direction. Ahead for the Lichtmanns were plans for a school with a far greater potential than anything they had imagined. Frances abandoned her dreams of Paris, resigned from *Musical America*, and took over the job of institute director. She would handle the publicity, advertising, secretarial work, and anything else needing attention.

The Roerichs could see many, many benefits from their time in America. Perhaps the path to and through India would now be cleared for them. Naively, they hoped that leaving from America with American financial backing and carrying the American flag would spare them from difficulties that could arise because they were Russian. Their Master advised, “Strive and thou wilt perceive the light...Steadfastness is the requisite of those who strive for the path of ascension.” Did that forewarn that problems awaited them?

Perhaps the Master’s advice applied to Maurice Lichtmann’s young sister, Esther J. Lichtmann, who joined the circle that summer. Years later,

when Frances Grant remembered the whole affair, she would comment that Miss Lichtmann brought an “unfortunate note into the whole works.” A recent émigré from Russia, Esther had escaped into Switzerland and had been staying with another of Maurice’s sisters when Frances had visited earlier in the year. Seeing how poor their living conditions were, she arranged for them to get food and clothing and immediately informed Sina, who encouraged Maurice to bring Esther to America. Since someone was needed to teach children at the institute and Esther played piano, complying with the employment requirements for her immigration into the United States had been a simple matter. So it was that Esther appeared in New York one day. Before long, she had learned some English, joined their faculty, and was ready to take her perplexing part in one of the unfolding dramas.



INDIA AT LAST

The Master Institute came to life with the beginning of fall. Throughout the days and evenings, the studio was filled with the pleasant hum of various lessons and the muted voices of people lecturing on architecture, drama, sculpture, or painting. Maurice experienced the biggest change, for he was able to leave the administrative work to Frances and focus on teaching.

Roerich conducted special art criticism classes for artists and took on the job of educating the Horches. Wanting to support innovative and experimental artists, he encouraged the Horches to purchase an abstract fantasy painted by Jerome Myers, a pencil-watercolor-pastel done by Maurice Prendergast, a landscape by Sidney Laufman, and a fine example of Ryder's work. Roerich's other favorites were George Bellows, Rockwell Kent, Marsden Hartley, and many of the artists he had met in Santa Fe and on Monhegan Island.

Louis Horch covered the business side of things, handling the bookkeeping and meeting with lawyers about planning and organizational needs. He gave much time and consideration to finding a future location that would easily accommodate the anticipated growth. As far as anyone knew, theirs would be the first school dedicated to teaching all the fine arts under one roof, and they shared the hope that it would be the forerunner of many more. Interviewed in the *Musical Courier*, Maurice Lichtmann idealistically spoke of establishing similar art centers around the country to encourage artists to study both in their own fields of interest and in another of the arts. In *Art and Archaeology* he explained the Master Institute philosophy:

From what we know of the Stone Age, we can state that at that time, art existed in practically every home. As a matter of fact, art was part of the daily work; every home had its own artist, who carved wood, chiseled stone figures, painted garments, pots, etc. And there was music, although since the instruments were made of wood, only rare traces remain. We are living at a time when it is of great importance to reawaken people to art. To do this, we need to give free art education to every child in public schools, or else to create special centers where every child could get instruction in music, graphic, plastic, and dramatic arts....

Art destroys hatred and creates beauty in our hearts. And if children are given spiritual beauty in harmony with physical beauty, then war, hatred, and sickness will disappear like darkness when the sun appears. We must start this great work at once. Many mistakes may occur, but it is a crime to delay. Thousands of dedicated artists will answer this call which is so near to their hearts.

What true artist has not dreamed of imparting his knowledge to the masses, especially to children? The question of organization can easily be solved, and a few community meetings will bring unheard-of results. Art centers can be temporarily established in public schools, churches, libraries, and museums....

If every child could spend only one hour every day studying all the arts, the results would be remarkable. Talent would be discovered, almost daily. We would not have to wait almost two centuries for the birth of a genius. They would be found much more often than we think....

When a call for instructors is issued, thousands will come. True artists will understand this spiritual message and give unselfishly. Each will become a spiritual educator and the centers of art will become the spiritual centers, where the children will show us the light.

Everyone agreed that the Roerichs should leave for Europe during late spring so they would have time to purchase all they needed for India. So the Horches could manage *Corona Mundi* competently, they would accompany the Roerichs to Europe and be instructed on European art. Several meetings were held with Horch's attorney, and an agreement was drawn up clearly stating that there were seven trustees of the institute, each a stockholder: the Roerichs, the Lichtmanns, the Horches, and Grant. No share of stock was to be sold or transferred to anyone outside the circle, even in the event of death. Louis Horch was elected president and treasurer of the Master Institute, and the others gave him their stock shares to be held in escrow. Knowing the Roerichs' had no need of their stock in India, Horch put their two shares and receipts in his safe.

Throughout the spring, Horch searched for the perfect house to display the Museum's large art collection and provide a comfortable environment for the classes and for Corona Mundi. Finally, 310 Riverside Drive in Manhattan was selected; after further consideration, the house next door was also purchased. The buildings were to be joined.

By the middle of May, all details were worked out. The new institutions would be ready to open soon after the Horches returned from Europe in the fall. The Roerichs were now free to leave. Helena assured the circle she would never leave them without spiritual guidance and would send whatever material she gathered and the writings she received from the Master back to them for safekeeping. All that was left were the packing and the good-byes. Wishes for "safe journey" and "bon voyage" echoed throughout the building as friends stopped in for a last visit. And then they were gone.

Some of Roerich's influence in America remained behind with the five young Santa Fe painters who had decided to band together days after the Roerichs left Santa Fe. Wanting to be together, identified both personally and professionally, Willard Nash, Will Schuster, Fremont Ellis, J. G. Bakos, and W. E. Murk proudly announced themselves as "Los Cinco Pintores" (The Five Painters). United by the "bonds of youth, sincerity, and the strength of individualism," they saw banding together as the way to advance their shared goals of increasing popular interest in art, developing their individual expression, and protecting the integrity of art. The men restored five neglected old houses and converted them into studios.

Having taken a keen interest in them, Nicholas enthusiastically offered his influence and assistance to accomplish their purposes: "Friends, your idea of organizing a traveling exhibition pleased me indeed. You know my ideas of giving people true, honest art, and of introducing art in everyday life. Many cities are searching for art, and every opportunity to give it, is an honest necessity...I'm glad to hear you are forming a brotherly group, and that this group is formed in Santa Fe, in the city with such a beautiful name, where the wonderful colored country and poetic background of old Indian culture give a real foundation for the next Master School. Good luck!"

Los Cinco Pintores did succeed in achieving mastery. Eighty years later, their spirit can still be recognized as the Canyon Road School of Artists.

The streets surrounding their onetime studios continue to flourish as magnets for painters, photographers, sculptors, glassblowers, and tourists.

Roerich's influence was also acknowledged by the Transcendental Painting Group, formed in New Mexico in 1938 (and disbanded in 1942) by Raymond Jonson of Cor Ardens and Emil Bisttram, who taught painting at the Master Institute for several years. Their aim was to defend, validate, and promote abstract art, "to carry painting beyond the appearance of the physical world, through new concepts of space, color, light, and design." Other members were Ed Garman, Florence Miller Pierce, Horace Towner Pierce, Agnes Pelton, Stuart Walker, Dane Rudhyar, William Lumpkins, and Lawren Harris. Since Harris also belonged to the Canadian "Group of Seven," he introduced Roerich's ideas to that group.

While Roerich was in the United States, he kept in touch with Santa Fe through *El Palacio*, the semimonthly magazine of the Museum of Fine Arts and the School of American Research. Several issues mentioned him briefly, maybe a few lines on his travels or a review of an exhibition. *El Palacio's* last words about him were in August 1923, when it reprinted this item from *Art and Archaeology*: "Roerich leaves America at least assured that his visit has not been in vain, and that the institutions which he founded are already beginning to fulfill their purpose of spreading the international language of Beauty, which he proclaimed as man and artist, and which must open for all the Sacred Gates."

Then *El Palacio* summed up Roerich's time in America and added its own goodbye:

It is difficult to realize that Nicholas Roerich...has only been in America since 1920. For in that short time Roerich's influence in our art life has been tremendous, one that has left a lasting and mature impression on artists throughout the country....The result of his rotary exhibition of 200 paintings, which was seen in 28 cities in America, is felt in the great response from the people and younger artists, who have found in the work of this man a new goal towards which to strive. The personal honors and distinctions given to Roerich during his stay are too numerous to cite, but all attest a reciprocal tribute to the artist who, in Russia, first welcomed American art and showed belief in our artistic future.

It was roughly six and one-half years since the family had fled Russia. During that time, Nicholas had painted landscapes of Santa Fe, the Taos

Pueblo, the Rio Grande, the Grand Canyon, and Arizona, produced hundreds of sketches and other paintings, and completed three series.

The *Sancta Series* depicted his Russian past: intense amber-yellow dawns, monks, hermits, bears, fishermen, churches, and candles, painted in crimsons, violet-purples, and sapphire blues. The names of the paintings seemed a message of hope: *And We Work, And We Do Not Fear, And We Open the Gates, And We Continue Fishing, And We Bring The Light, Sainly Guests, And We See*, and *The Messenger* (which he gave to the Theosophical Society in India).

The *Ocean Series* was clearly America, the result of his summer in Maine: Monhegan's coves, mists, and giant rocks were portrayed with spiritual power and infinite peace. The third series was *Messiah*, his finest work up to that point. The paintings seemed to integrate his past with the best of America: Russian legends burst into life, with the Grand Canyon and Monhegan's aurora borealis behind them. *Himself Came, Bridge of Glory*, and *Miracle* bore witness to the ripening of Roerich's true genius.

With his Russian perspective and his sublime handling of color, all the paintings were distinctively Roerich. People said that only he could combine the velvet blue of Monhegan's night and the glory of the northern lights with Saint Sergius reverently walking toward the spiritual bridge connecting heaven and earth, and the Grand Canyon with seven figures bowing to a golden, radiant light on the other side of the bridge. Perhaps he perceived in America the fulfillment of Russia's old prophecies.

All of his paintings seem to be leading the viewer somewhere, but where, he alone knew. Like the Theosophical teachings and Agni Yoga, they encourage greater striving toward the higher realms of beauty. Perhaps they are a monument of hope for the possibilities he felt for America. Or maybe they illustrate his optimism for the new era he saw approaching, or his expectations of India. But whatever their message, India finally lay just beyond the bridge that Roerich and his family would shortly cross.

Nicholas, Helena, and George Roerich traveled to Europe with the Horches. Svetoslav needed to complete his studies before joining them in the fall. Once George was enrolled in the Sorbonne's School of Oriental Languages to finish his master's degree in Indian philosophy, the two couples set out to explore the world of art and antiques. As they studied the Dutch masters, the Rhineland painters, and the Italian masters in museums

and galleries, they assembled a unique collection of art for shipment to New York. In September, the couples exchanged fond good-byes, and the Roerichs began preparing for India.



Helena Roerich, Nettie Horch, Nicholas and George Roerich, St. Moritz, Switzerland, 1923

While staying on the Left Bank in Paris, the Roerichs were visited by a Siberian writer, George Grebentchikoff, and his wife, both devoted admirers. They wanted help organizing a publishing house, to be named Alatas, after a fairy rock often mentioned in old Russian tales. The name was chosen to symbolize their love for Siberia and to be the luminous,

eternal, indestructible, and brilliantly flaming beacon for travelers that they hoped the business would become. Roerich was tremendously enthusiastic about the project, saying that since the letter A signified something primordial and life-bearing, three A's in the name indicated good fortune, and therefore the business would burst with great vitality and potential. He not only agreed to help with the costs of forming the corporation, but went a step further and offered to help them reach New York. Alatas began operating in New York within several months.

For many years afterward, the Grebentchikoffs celebrated that meeting as a “glorious anniversary,” and the grateful Siberian recalled in his introduction to Roerich’s book *Himalayas* that both Roerichs radiated more light and unself-conscious joy than he had ever seen. Both Grebentchikoffs agreed that they felt the “very highest uplift of spirit in the Roerichs’ company...and if so bidden, would have made any sacrifice, gladly.” After completion of the Roerich Central Asian expedition, Alatas published the Russian editions of Roerich’s books *Heart of Asia* and *Abode of Light*.

By November, the Roerichs felt they had anticipated and assembled everything they would need when Europe was a continent away. Stocking up on pigments, brushes, poster board, and canvas was an undertaking in itself. They purchased a shiny new Victrola and carefully selected records so they could hear the soothing sounds of Wagner, Beethoven, and their dear Boris Chaliapin whenever and wherever they desired. Endless rolls of film and a new motion-picture camera had also been securely waterproofed and crated.

On November 17, 1923, “All ashore who’s going ashore” resounded through the Roerichs’ ship in the harbor of Marseilles, signaling the family’s imminent departure. Many people had come to see them off, including Charles Hovey Pepper from Monhegan. When the tugboats escorted the SS *Macedonia* out into the Mediterranean, excitement must have filled the Roerichs. They were about to close the gap that separated them from India.

Mahatma Morya told them: “Stretch thine arm across the abyss. Above the precipice there is no fear. More abhorrent to the spirit are the confines of room and rug.”

Their long-dreamed-of journey had begun. They were sailing to Morya’s land—Korya Morya—on the trail of the Mahatmas, and on their

way to explore a vast unknown country. Soon they were sailing around the boot of Italy toward Greece, Crete, and Port Said. Most of the voyage the family spent in the lounge chairs, savoring the trip and enjoying the sea breezes. They watched the Muslims on board praying toward Mecca, aware that it lay somewhere ahead. Docking in Egypt, the passengers were allowed three days to view Cairo, the Sphinx, and the pyramids. Their joy at arrival quickly vanished when they found the mighty pyramids hidden behind a circus of gaudy curio shops. Camels for hire, peddlers, and beggars crowded around, holding out their hands for *baksheesh*. A disheartened Roerich saw the deteriorated condition of the pyramids and the mutilated Sphinx as a total lack of respect for Egypt's glorious past.

Back aboard the *Macedonia*, they passed through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, gazing into the clear waters and imagining that they glimpsed wrecked vessels resting fathoms below. They were sailing southeast, crossing the Arabian Sea and approaching the lands immortalized by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and the ancient Bhagavad Gita. They scanned the shoreline expectantly, searching for the first signs of Buddhism and perhaps regaling each other with tales of the spiritual battles fought by Rama and his loyal monkey friend, Hanuman, in ancient Sri Lanka.

Since 1905, Nicholas had been dedicating paintings and essays to India. By creating the peace of India on his canvas, he had escaped thoughts of the bloodshed and violence of the thousands of Russian workers who had marched on St. Petersburg's Winter Palace and met bullets and death. The *Dreams of India* series he was working on when they first met the poet Tagore in England, *Song of the Waterfall*, *Song of the Morning*, and *Language of the Birds*, and several others were recognized as showing the influence of the Kangra style of painting, which flourished in the Kulu Valley of northern India in the eighteenth century.

Now the coast of India actually stretched before them. The family had been invited to stop in Adyar by Krishnamurti, the young man considered by many in the Theosophical Society to be the new Messiah. But the society had recently erupted with enough scandal and confusion to destroy it almost entirely, and Krishnamurti was questioning his own identity and duties, so now was not the time. Their plan was to sail to Bombay, cross India to Calcutta by rail, and be in Darjeeling by the end of the month.

Leaving Bombay, they decided to stop wherever they were drawn, for they were now in their Masters' country, and their journey was a pilgrimage. In Benares they stopped to pay their respects to the sacred Ganges, whose waters stay perfectly balanced and pure despite the hundreds of bodies and untreated sewage dumped into it daily. Roerich treasured the scenes he saw there, including a Sadhu sitting upon the water in meditation, as people on the banks watched. Ten years later, this event was immortalized in *The Lotus*, portraying the Sadhu in a river of aquamarine, holding a lotus and wearing little but the prayer beads around his neck, with the golden sky above him and the sun-drenched mauve ghats, catacombs, and caves behind.

Roerich also painted the gray-bearded man, his palms cupped like a chalice, offering himself to the rising sun, and the woman performing her morning pranayama on the shore. He speculated that she would return in the evening and send a garland of lights upon the river to pray for the welfare of her children. Her prayers would be as fireflies, traveling far upon the dark watery surface. When he thought of these offerings of the spirit or of the yogis who project their thoughts into space to construct the coming evolution, he could almost forget the fat, greedy priests he had watched in the golden temples.

Wandering among the thousands and thousands of bathing pilgrims and chanting crowds, the family felt at peace. As verses of Sanskrit scripture were being recited around them, the Roerichs were pleased to notice that the air smelled of incense, rosewater, and fragrant sandalwood rather than the burning bodies constantly being consumed in the purifying fires. The solemn cremations reminded Nicholas of tribal ceremonies performed in many other countries and times. Despite the accumulation of thousands of years of dust, the architecture of Benares charmed them. As they strolled through the streets, he identified the Hindu, Dravidian, and Muslim styles that contributed to the harmony.

Eventually they arrived in semi-European, semi-oriental Calcutta, which struck them as a fine mingling of East and West. Modern motorcars, horse carriages, rickshaws, cows, and a multicolored crowd of pedestrians streamed around them like a river. Calcutta was the poet Tagore's native city, and they had long envisioned being there with him. Although they had forgotten his address, they were unconcerned. Certainly if they had met

Tagore in London and again in New York, finding him here would be a simple matter. So they flagged a taxi and requested to be taken straight to the poet Tagore.

Three hours later they were still driving around the streets. First they had been taken to the Maharajah Tagore; then, after asking many policemen, peddlers, and passing babus (old fathers), they were directed into a large variety of alleys. Eventually, they recalled he lived on Dwarka nath Tagore Street and arrived there only to learn he had left for China. Many of Tagore's relatives and friends, however, were ready to receive them graciously, including Kumar Haldar, director of the art school in Lucknow and a splendid artist himself. In Roerich's usual way, all were soon engrossed in the free exchange of ideas.

Afterward, Nicholas lamented to his diary the universally precarious condition of artists and scientists: "Why must the path of knowledge and beauty be so difficult?" He was pleased to hear that new schools and three new universities would soon decrease India's high rate of illiteracy and claim a victory for evolution: "Legions of newly enlightened workers for science and beauty were being prepared to serve mankind."

The Roerichs enjoyed discovering the monuments to the cherished teacher of Vivekananda, the great Ramakrishna, esteemed by Master Morya. Across the river from Ramakrishna's home, Vivekananda had established the Ramakrishna Mission and built a mausoleum to hold the revered ashes of Ramakrishna and his wife. Vivekananda had once dreamed of building a Hindu university that would integrate science with Vedanta, the synthesis of Hindu thought, and help create a unified world by teaching an amalgamation of East and West. Roerich regretted that the dream had not been fulfilled. If it were possible anywhere, he felt America would be the place.

The Roerichs were completely delighted to see the pilgrims and tourists as they jostled among the profusion of shrines lined with brightly colored gods, goddesses, animals, and mythical figures. Scents of jasmine, spices, and humans filled the air. Women silently flitted by, looking like butterflies in their brilliant saris. Smells, sights, and sounds jumbled together, defying description.

Wherever they went, they heard the Ramayana being spoken or sung, and four times each day all Muslims were summoned to prayer. They

scarcely noticed the sacred cows and gentle-eyed dark water buffalo meandering serenely through the crowds, quite bland and colorless in comparison to the elephants, decorated in rich reds and mustard yellows, that paraded in religious spectacle.

While the Roerichs traveled through India, Helena Roerich and Master Morya were at work on the second book of *Leaves of Morya's Garden*, printed first in Paris. In it, Master Morya explained the quality and characteristics of the labor that expands consciousness, the universal functions, the cosmic laws, the commandments of Buddha and Christ, and infinitely more. These teachings of great delicacy and beauty would one day go around the world through Helena's books.

India surrounded them, adding great depth and dimension to their lives. Traveling gave the family wonderful opportunities for discussion, and they drew on the consistently encouraging messages from the Master.

I speak of alien bridges and gates. They must be spanned quickly without looking downward, and with only the wish to reach the other side. Since your way is determined, calmly demand your right of way and do not pause before foreign gates.

When times are difficult repeat: Nevertheless I am going into a Garden of Beauty. I fear not the predestined gates. Why is the shield above me? To safeguard me. If new dams arise I shall cross them because I do not fear!

When the raindrop taps upon the window—
it is My sign!

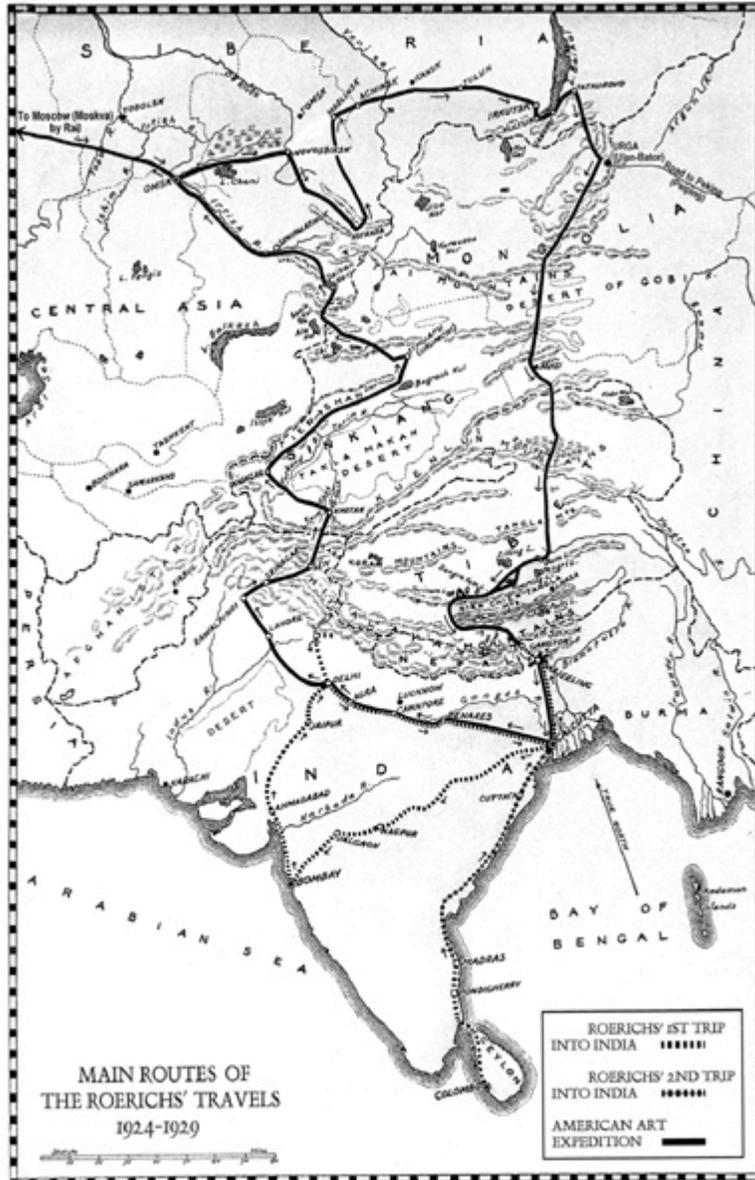
When the bird flutters—
it is My sign!

When the leaves are borne aloft by the whirlwind—
it is My sign!

When the ice is melted by the sun—
it is My sign!

When the waves wash away the sorrow of the soul—
it is My sign!

When the wing of illumination touches the harried soul—
it is My sign!





WHERE CAN ONE HAVE SUCH JOY?

Five miles from Benares lies the Deer Park, where Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha, or “Enlightened One”) originally gathered his disciples and preached the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths. Several gigantic stone stupas, believed to contain some of the Buddha’s physical remains, flank the entrance.¹ In December 1923, the four Roerichs were standing on the very ground where the Buddha once stood, discussing the tremendous impact his forty-five years of public ministry had made on the world. They recalled the legend that the High Ones had been present for the Buddha’s initiation “somewhere north of the Himalayas.”

The exact location, however, was as much a mystery as the actual locations of Mount Meru, the mountain at the center of the world that connects heaven and earth, or the place where Jesus had spent his “lost years.” Perhaps these places do not actually exist on the physical plane, but only in our consciousness, to be seen with the third eye.

When Padmasambhava brought Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century, he also brought word of Shambhala, the mystical kingdom, hidden behind snow peaks somewhere north of Tibet. The capital, Kalapa, is located in the center of the kingdom. Most recently, Master Morya had spoken of it as “Our Abode”: “Shambhala is the indispensable site where the spiritual world unites with the material world. As in a magnet there exists the point of utmost attraction, so the gates of the spiritual world open into the Mountain Dwelling. The manifested height of Mt. Guarisankar helps the magnetic current. Jacob’s Ladder is the symbol of Our Abode.”

The earliest references to Shambhala were found in the more than three hundred volumes of Kangyur and Tangyur, the sacred books of Tibetan

Buddhism. They told that the hidden kingdom, an oasis completely ringed by high, snowy mountains glistening with ice, lay to the north of Bodh Gaya, the Buddhist shrine in northern India. The mountains, ice, and harsh weather prevent the unfit from entering. Some lamas thought the peaks were perpetually hidden in mist, while others believed they were visible, but too remote for anyone to get close enough to see. Many Tibetans regarded Shambhala as a heaven of the gods or a special kind of paradise, meant only for those on their way to Nirvana.

However, when Lama Dorzhiev had spoken of it during construction of the Buddhist temple in 1912, he was not speaking of it as a destination, but rather as a prophecy. Legend foretold the day when Rigden Jyepo, the king of Shambhala, would come with a great army to destroy the forces of evil and usher in a golden age: the Age of Maitreya. Shambhala, therefore, symbolized the great future, when the Panchen Lama would be reborn as Rigden Jyepo and the reign of Maitreya, the Coming One, would begin. Shambhala was not only the abode of mystical Buddhist learning, it was the guiding principle of the coming cosmic age. At the sound of that powerful name, “Shambhala,” something surely awoke in the Roerichs, as it does in all mortals who yearn to live in peace and freedom.

But when Master Morya spoke to the couple of Shambhala as “the New Country” or the New Russia, that was another aspect of the meaning. In this context, they were to find the exiled Panchen Lama and take him with them into the Altai. There the New Country would be established, with Roerich ruling alongside him.

The study of *Kalachakra* (the Wheel of Time), the highest wisdom and most complex teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, would form the foundation of the New Country. The science of the mind, meditation, was at its heart. Kalachakra teaches people to use the material world, and its distractions, rather than renounce it as monks and hermits do. This attitude allowed the enlightened ones to develop an advanced science and technology, which they put to the service of spiritual ends. If Kalachakra were practiced correctly, eternity would be found in the passing moment—the indestructible in the midst of destruction. Enlightenment and extraordinary powers were gained through the practice. One reason George had learned Sanskrit, Mani, and various Tibetan dialects in his Oriental studies was so that his family could study Kalachakra from the original texts.

From their close contact with the Mahatmas, Nicholas and Helena knew that part of their mission was to find the abode of the Masters. Master Morya said:

I have ordained for thee a great task...entrusted the success unto thee. The needed strength to follow Me is bestowed upon thee. Arrows, shields, and swords hast thou received, and I shall cover thy head with My Helmet. Fight in my name and I will dwell with thee....

Children, children, dear children. Do not think that our Community is hidden from humanity by impassable walls. The snows of Himalaya that hide Us are not obstacles for true seekers, but only for investigators....Give thyself to thy work, and I will lead thee on the path of success in the yonder World.

Yet the discovery of the way would be a matter of utmost delicacy, requiring stillness and vigilance. Numerous hardships and great obstacles would have to be overcome to reach the goal. The entire expedition was to be a glorious test. As they traveled, Helena was to wear a fragment of the sacred Chintamani, a miraculous stone from the constellation Orion, through which the energies of the earth are tuned to the rhythm of the Heart of the Universe. The family had received it while they were in Paris. Before being passed to Helena, the Chintamani had passed from Atlantis, through the sacred temples of both the East and the West, and into the hands of King Solomon, Akbar, and other rulers. Now, because she had been selected by the Masters to symbolize the Mother of the World, the feminine principle in the new era, it had been bestowed upon Helena. She was to calibrate the stone's vibrations for the coming age. "And when they press around thee and cover thy garments with dust, then take in thy hand the chosen stone, and do not forget the Treasure of the World which I commanded thee to safeguard. Remember, remember, remember."

In her book *On Eastern Crossroads*, a collection of legends and prophecies of Asia written under the pseudonym Josephine Saint-Hilaire, Helena related the myth of the "Legend of the Stone," a mystical mission similar to the search for the Holy Grail:

When the Son of the Sun descended upon earth to teach mankind, there fell from heaven a Shield which bore the power of the world. Between three distinct marks in the center of the Shield were signs in silver, that would predict events....When the

sun ominously darkened, the Son of the Sun was thrown into despair, and he dropped the shield and it shattered. But the power remained in the central fragment. “Verily, I myself have seen this fragment of the world—I recall its shape—the length of my little finger, shaped like an oblong flat fruit or human heart, with a grayish brilliance. Even with signs I remember but did not understand.”

The stone had many rare qualities: when it darkened, clouds gathered; when it was heavy, blood was shed; when a star shone in it, success came; when it cracked, the enemy approached; when its bearer had a dream of fire, the world convulsed; and when it was tranquil, one walked courageously. It was to be carried in an ivory casket, no wine was to be poured over it, and only cedar and balsam could be burned near it. In *Himalayas, Abode of Light*, published in the year of his death, Roerich wrote: “The stone is usually brought by quite unexpected, unknown people. In the same way, in due time, it disappears again to be manifested some time after, in quite another country. The chief body of this stone is lying in Shambhala, and a small piece of it is given out and wanders all over the earth, keeping magnetic connection with the stone.”

Like most travelers, the Roerichs were anxious to see the breathtakingly beautiful Taj Mahal, but it was Fatehpur Sikri, the long-abandoned city built by Akbar, the greatest of the Mughal emperors, that held the most interest for them. Descended from Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, Akbar was believed to have been an incarnation of Master Morya. When Akbar united India in the 1500s, he had been the richest and most powerful monarch on earth. Preaching the Spirit of One Temple, he had established the Temple of Universal Knowledge and attempted to create a new religion culled from the best of Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. But opposition to his new faith was so tremendous that his teachings were abolished after his death. Akbar’s hopes for a unified world lived on in people like the Roerichs. Thinking about the misunderstood ruler, the Roerich family studied the walls of the temple and discovered fragments of Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian symbols. After touring his tomb, the fort, and the long-abandoned city, they departed with heavy hearts. A veil of limitless sorrow seemed to hang over the remains.

In the wild mountainous country of the western Deccan, they visited the famous Ajanta caves, carved out of solid rock and concealed by jungle for

two thousand years. They continued on to the splendid Ellora Caves, where they viewed Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain frescoes created over eight centuries. As they wandered among the thirty-four richly colored shrines strung along a cliff, Nicholas's first thoughts were for the preservation of the frescoes. Then he speculated about the possibility of hidden passages in the caves opening into extensive tunnels under Asia. According to ancient Brahmin tradition, when the Gobi was under the sea, the Nephilim who lived there dug tunnels and linked them to the outside world. It was even rumored that the tunnels were hundreds of miles long and connected with some in Tibet.

Before December was out, the family had seen roaring tigers; an arranged monkey battle; fakirs charming old, toothless cobras; pitiful yogis whirling in the bazaar; a fairyland astrological observatory; charming doors and balconies; and countless monuments. They had ridden through innumerable villages, observed superbly carved temples, strolled through marble palace halls inlaid with jewels, and toured places of artistic, historic, and religious significance. Continually astonished by India's striking beauty, they rejoiced to be in this land of endless wonder, and little escaped their attention.

To Nicholas's trained eye, everything seemed coordinated in tremendously lavish designs. He told his diary: "If in the crowd your next neighbor should be a skeleton, pale with leprosy, you are not frightened. Next to you will lean a sadhu, colored with blue stripes, with a headdress made of cow dung. You are not surprised. A fakir with toothless cobras will cheat you. You are smiling. The chariot of Jagernath crushes the crowd—you are not astonished. There is a procession of fearful Nagis of Rajputana, with blades like curved fangs. You are calm." Yet, compared with the real treasure of India, all of these things were as nothing: "Where are those for whose sake we have come to India? They do not sit in the bazaars and they do not walk in processions. And no one enters their dwellings without their consent. But do they really exist? Yes, yes, they exist, and so does their knowledge and skill. And all human substance is exalted because of them. Not even leprosy would turn me away from India."



The Roerich family in India, December 1923 (a rare shot of the entire family)

In Helena's messages, their teacher responded: "And when you ask yourself—where are They Who made promises?—We are standing behind you; and We rejoice, measuring the growth of the flower of your aura. We rejoice because this is Our Garden. Beyond bounded vistas the Light unites the hearts." The Master told them to ask not, "Where does He live? But rather, when can I be useful? When should I prepare myself for labor and when will the call come?"

They were told they could be useful from that hour unto eternity, to lose no time in preparation, to work by enhancing the quality of their labor, and even to sleep vigilantly. Roerich speculated that their friends in the West might think the wonders they saw were displays of a higher miraculous power: a man walking through fire, another sitting on water, a third suspended in air, a fourth lying on nails, a fifth swallowing poison without harm, while a sixth could kill with a glance, and a seventh was buried without harm. However, he did not believe he had witnessed any miracles, rather, displays of psychic energy obeying psychophysical laws. They were

proof that obstacles of lower matter could be overcome. Anyone could learn to do them.

He pointed out that India had long been familiar with research presently taking place at the Metaphysical Institute in Paris into ectoplasm, the photography of auras, and attempts to transmit thought at a distance. Rather than unbelievable novelties, he saw these phenomena as the results of long-known laws—perhaps the consequences of the practical teaching of Buddhism, which developed indomitable determination and tremendous patience in the person attempting to achieve an independent consciousness.

Nicholas frequently corresponded with Tagore's friend Sir Jagadis Bose, the president of the Indian Science Congress and the first Indian scientist to receive international acclaim.² Bose postulated that the vegetable kingdom was the link between the worlds of animals and inorganic matter. His scientific experiments had validated the accuracy of Vedanta, the Mahabharata, and the poetry and legends of the Himalayas. Using ingenious and delicate instruments he had invented, Bose demonstrated that plants were sensitive enough to feel the formation of a cloud long before it was visible to the eye. These investigations delighted Roerich, who said that when the silvery tones of Sir Jagadis Bose's "electric apparatus" tinkled out the pulse of plants, they reopened long-sealed pages of the world's knowledge.

About this time, the Master began instructing them on the roles of flowers, herbs, and plants for the health and well-being of the planet and her people. Long interested in herbology, the Roerichs were instructed to study the structure of plants: "Plants are not only valuable when they are alive, but useful preparations can be made after they have been dried in the sun; however, since decomposing attracts imperfect spirits, care needs to be exercised to prevent this." Cut flowers were to be watched closely, for decomposition was subtle, and though it could be difficult to see, it could be smelled and sensed. Small pine trees were useful if flowers were out of season, for they are dynamos that accumulate more vitality than breathing correctly provides. Like a good rest, pine trees offer a most condensed supply of *prana*, the breath of life.

Their teacher explained that understanding the power of nature was better than magic and frequently provided a completely new set of

possibilities. The Roerichs quickly set about using these messages about the medicinal uses of plants and herbs. The scientific possibilities excited Nicholas. “Since the acceptance of the theory of evolution,” he told his diary, “the old forms of thought are crumbling everywhere. New ideas are arising to replace them and before us lies the marvel of the West moving toward parallel philosophies with the East.”



George and Nicholas in Darjeeling, 1924

In this country of extremes, the family found much to fascinate and charm them and much to horrify and repel them. As the days passed, they relaxed into the knowledge that they were at home. Things impossible elsewhere were possible in India. “The charm of India lies in the close interrelationship between the visible and the invisible,” Nicholas wrote, “and the very thing which is unusual for a civilized European, will be an almost daily occurrence for the cultured Hindu, or Asiatic.” It was remarkable to find so many people who shared their interests. India’s very atmosphere seemed conducive to harmonizing and developing Nicholas’s scientific, artistic, philosophical, and spiritual quests.

After crossing the endless miles of humid jungles surrounding the famous tea plantations of Darjeeling, the family finally saw the Himalayas, the Roof of the World, with Kanchenjunga rising above the deep valleys of Sikkim. In his *Treasure of the Snows*, Roerich rapturously wrote: “Legends of the heroes are dedicated not so much to the plains as to the mountains! All teachers journeyed there. The highest knowledge, the most inspired songs, the most superb sounds and colors, all are created there. The Supreme stands on the highest mountains, with the other peaks around as witnesses of the great reality. Even the spirit of prehistoric man enjoyed and understood their greatness.”

Though it had been many years since Nicholas had last seen the treasured painting of sacred Kanchenjunga at sunrise, each line was etched into his memory and it was difficult for him to contain his excitement. Yet what he found in Darjeeling did not meet his expectations. British army barracks and plantation bungalows concealed the city’s famous charms. Even the reportedly colorful bazaars were hidden. He grumbled in his diary: “Just as when nearing the Grand Canyon of Arizona, in approaching the foothills of the Himalayas, you go through the most boring landscape. Is it necessary to seek the Himalayas in order to find merely a corner of Switzerland?”

However, soon they would have time to investigate everything, for they planned to stay a while in Sikkim and collect everything into one place, and George could acquire a good speaking knowledge of the Tibetan language in preparation for the more extensive journey into inner Asia.

The tiny kingdom of Sikkim perches between the borders of India and Tibet; Bhutan lies to the east, Nepal to the west. The perpetually snow-

covered Himalayas, the most majestic of all the world's ranges, occupy about two-thirds of the country. In 1924, perhaps some lesser peaks had been scaled, but no one had reached the top of Kanchenjunga ("Great Snow with Five Treasures"), which dominates the entire range despite being only the third highest. The third attempt on Mount Everest (Chomolungma, "Goddess Mother of the World" or "Goddess Mother of the Wind" or "the mountain so high no bird can fly over it") was being organized. Tibetan lamas retold ancient prophecies that the sacred summits would never be defiled and wondered why the strangers undertook such dangers to their physical bodies when there were simpler ways.

In *Altai-Himalaya* Roerich describes their arrival in Sikkim in December 1923: "We searched for a house, but the first information was not encouraging....We want something further away, where the city orchestra does not play its conventional tunes—and all of the Himalayas can be seen....We are persistent. We go ourselves, and we find an excellent house. And calmness and solitude and the entire chain of Himalayas lie before us."

A serene place of retreat, Talai-Pho-Brang was everything that they wanted. During his flight from the Chinese fourteen years earlier, the thirteenth Dalai Lama had maintained a three-year vigil and prayed for his country from one of its windows. In Buddhist tradition, anywhere the Dalai Lama stayed became a shrine, so no one had thought to show it to them. But if Roerich were to serve with the Panchen Lama in the New Country, it would be a fitting place for him to live. By a stroke of their guiding hand, the family was permitted to move in. Soon they became accustomed to being awakened at night by passing lamas bringing offerings and prayers. Bowing repeatedly to the sacred ground, they chanted, drummed, and marched around the house. The family was amused by tales that the house was haunted by a devil that appeared as a black pig. They were not amused, however, by the large number of servants required to run the house due to the strict Hindu caste system, which dictated the type of work each person could perform. Helena quickly learned to hire the good-natured Buddhists, who were fast, adaptable, and free to do anything.



Talai-Pho-Brang, Darjeeling. Svetoslav and Nicholas Roerich at far right

Enthralled by the majesty and grandeur surrounding them, the artist was impatient to get the domestic details settled so he could devote his time to painting and exploring their teacher's land. The beauty of the glistening mountain peaks was enhanced by local legends that an ashram of the Mahatmas had once been located in Sikkim and that passersby had seen the Masters arrive on horseback. In June, midway into the rainy season, white spots of mold began to cover his tempera. Hoping heat would dry the mold so that it would flake off; they stoked up the fires. Yet, despite the roaring fires, the smoke-filled rooms, the heat and humidity, the couple was content. Helena knew this was the place for them to regroup and begin building for the new era.

She was involved in some very demanding and challenging work with the Masters and was being prepared to be able to discourse with them in the planetary center, called the Sacred Land. Searching for ways to better the earthly plane and improve utilization of their discoveries, the Masters wanted to establish new procedures through which distant worlds could communicate. Helena had been given the name "Urusvati" and told: "Today is the beginning of the feminine awakening. A new wave has reached Earth today—new Rays are arriving on Earth for the first time since its formation.

Because the substance of the rays penetrates deeply, new hearths have been lit.”

In the New Country, Helena’s name was to be “She Who Inspires New Ways and Liberates from Prejudice.” Roerich began work on a new series of paintings entitled *His Country*, dedicated to Master Morya. *His Country* was a turning point in the ripening of Roerich’s art. The couple’s work with the Masters and the wondrous experiences of India had deepened him to the point where his paintings expressed a new vitality. He was now able to portray the expansiveness of spirit, reveal uncharted dimensions, and bring the viewer into the sacred realms of color, strength, and beauty.

The series consisted of twelve paintings in tempera: *Book of Wisdom*, *Burning of Darkness*, *Fire Blossom*, *He Who Hastens*, *Higher Than the Mountains*, *Lower Than the Depths*, *Pearl of Searching*, *Remember*, *She Who Leads*, *Star of the Mother of the World*, *Treasure of the World—Chintamani*, and *White and Heavenly*.

Treasure of the World—Chintamani illustrates the Tibetan story from AD 331 about a chest that fell from the sky while being transported by a winged horse that flew throughout the universe—a messenger of the gods. One of the four sacred objects in the chest was the sacred Chintamani. Roerich painted the sure-footed steed carefully making its way among towering russet brown mountain peaks, the small, flaming casket upon its back emitting an inextinguishable, blue flame.

Burning of Darkness is one of the rare paintings in which Roerich portrays himself, Helena, and George. Several people are in a tunnel of midnight blues and purples. A woman and a white-bearded man stand to one side, a young man on the other, a few others clustered behind. In the foreground are three people with faint halos, robed in white. The leader holds a brilliantly illuminated box that lights up the two behind. This painting has given people much to speculate on.

The splendor of the Himalayas surpassed the couple’s richest imaginings, and Roerich’s fantasies soared there. He wrote in his diary:

As you ascend the peaks of the Himalayas and look out over the cosmic ocean of clouds below, you see the ramparts of endless rocky chains and the pearly strings of clouds. Behind them march the gray elephants of heaven, the heavy monsoon

clouds. Does this cosmic picture not fill you with understanding of the great creative manifestation?

Before sunrise there comes a breeze, and the milky sea undulates. The shining Devas have approached the tail of the serpent and the great stirring has begun! The clouds collapse like the shattered walls of a prison. Verily, the luminous god approaches! But what has occurred? The snows are red as blood. But the clouds collect in an ominous mist and all around, the resplendent and beautiful becomes dense and dark, shrouding the gore of battle.

Asuras and Devas struggle; the poisonous fumes creep everywhere. Creation must perish. But self-sacrificingly, the great blue-throated Shiva consumes the poison which threatens the world's destruction! All the evil spirits of the night disperse before Lakshmi's radiant beauty as she arises from darkness, bearing the chalice of nectar. A new cosmic energy is manifested into the world with the new day!...

Where can one have such joy as when the sun is upon the Himalayas, when the blue is more intense than sapphires, when from the far distance the glaciers glitter like incomprehensible gems. All religions, all teachings are synthesized here....

Two worlds find expression in the Himalayas. The world of the soil—full of enchantment. Deep ravines and grotesque hills rear up to the cloud-line, into which melts the smoke of villages and monasteries. Upon the heights gleam banners, *suburgans*, or *stupas*. Sharp turns curve through the passes of the ascending mountain. Eagles in their flight vie with the colorful kites flown by villagers. In the bamboo stalks, amid the fern, the sleek leopard or tiger adds a glimmer of rich color. The dwarfed bears skulk on the branches and a horde of bearded monkeys often escort me.

A stately larch is all entangled with a blooming rhododendron and everything shades into the blue mist of the rolling distances crowned by a chain of clouds. I am startled to behold new ramparts mounting the clouds. Above the nebulous waves, above the twilight, erect and infinitely beautiful, stand the dazzling, impassable peaks, glimmering with sparkling snows. Two distinct worlds, intersected by a mist!

The fog seems to envelop the road to the side of the ascent, where the jagged, unending ridge of the Sacred Lizard merges the summits into one implacable wall. It is difficult for me to discern the points where the snowy summits of Jelep-la and Nathu-la are hidden. When the ragged, blue waves of fog crawled upward from Bhutan, they shrouded the snowy ridges and mountain paths in the deep mist and hid the glimmering Himalayas. Shall we deny the very existence of the Himalayas when they are invisible? How frequently when something is not visible to us, do we presume it does not exist?

Following the splendor of the sunset, a brilliantly gleaming night sky presented another world for his appreciation:

The stars are aglow here early and the triple constellation of Orion flames towards the east. This astonishing constellation has found its way into all the teachings. We once found a mosque called the Jawza Madjid. Since Jawza is a name of Orion, it means House of Orion. But only the sands of the great desert can identify which ancient cult was practiced there.

The wide-spread popularity of cults surrounding Ursa Major, Orion, and other constellations is amazing. The shamans worshipped them and Job pointed to them as the supreme act of achievement. The constellation of Orion contains the signs of the Three Magi, and in the ancient teachings it was as important as Atlas, who supported the weight of the world. Thus we see that Orion has unceasingly attracted the eye of man. Now the astronomy journals are telling of inexplicable pink rays suddenly flashing from Orion. Verily, it is the Star of the East! And only here in the East does one feel the vital sense and the scientific importance of astrology and astro-chemistry. The observatories in Jaipur and in Delhi overwhelmed me with their knowledge, and much remarkable data could undoubtedly be found in the old observatories.

Nicholas was continually aware of the diversity of mental powers displayed by the people; he recorded cases when people had been told, "Sahib will be sick," or "You will live only ten days," and because of the "evil eye" the persons named had, in fact, lost their energy, their resistance, and finally died as predicted. He speculated how psychologists and criminologists would handle patients with paralyzed nervous systems, incipient anemia, a stroke, or other visible effects caused by a dark command invading the will.

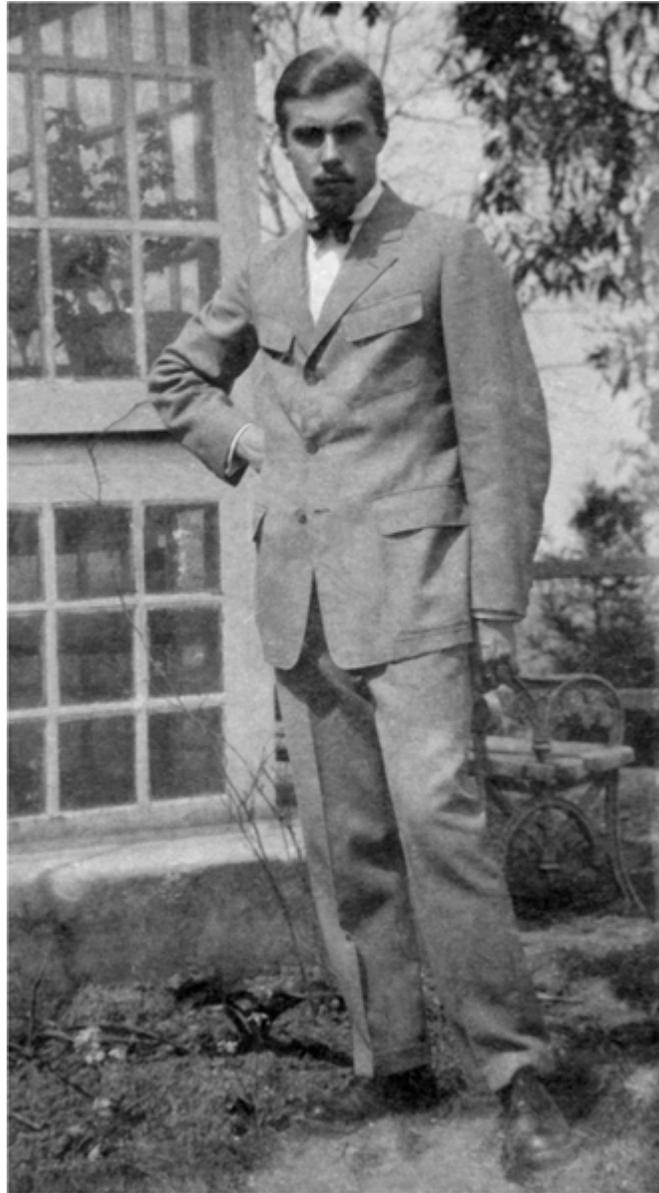
On the more positive side, he told of "attraction by thought," as when Helena received an old Buddha:

We had a great desire to find an antique Tibetan Buddha, but it seemed very difficult. We spoke and thought among ourselves, and in a few days a lama arrived with an excellent one, saying, "The lady wanted a Buddha, and I was told to give her the one from my house altar. I cannot sell this sacred image, please accept it as a gift."

"But how did you know of our desire to have a Buddha?" "The White Tara came in a dream and told me to bring it to you." And so it happens.

Comfortably settled in Talai-Pho-Brang, they hired a company of caravanners and servants and were joined by Laden-La, a general of the Tibetan army, and Lama M. Mingyur, a well-known scholar of Tibetan

literature and teacher of most European Tibetologists. Soon they were out exploring the monasteries in Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet (but not Nepal, which was closed to foreigners until 1951). Roerich was constantly alert to designs or symbols that might offer a clue to Shambhala and the arrival of Lord Maitreya, or a sign from the Masters; no detail escaped his keen observation.



Svetoslav Roerich in Sikkim or India, 1924

Nicholas's knowledge of historical legends and spiritual lore allowed him to derive meaning from things others might have overlooked. He recognized the power in simple patterns, formulas, gestures, and words, and enjoyed spotting similarities to things he had noted elsewhere. A person's facial structure, a head covering, the dances, jewelry, clothing ornaments, or the architecture could immediately remind him of Russian fairy tales, the American Indians, ancient periods of Italy or Spain, or perhaps the early Mongols.

He recognized in the Tibetan thankas the image of the same fish he had discovered on the walls of the Roman catacombs. In Buddha's Wheel of Life, he saw the circle of Christian mystical elements, united with the Wheel of Ezekiel. He searched through the great teachings of the world for material regarding pure fire, Agni, and found it everywhere. The cults of Zoroaster had been represented by a chalice and flame. In Solomon's time and in even older antiquity, a flame had been engraved upon the Hebrew silver shekels. Tibetan Bodhisattvas held chalices blazing with tongues of flame. The Holy Grail was shown afire, as was the Druid chalice of life. Nicholas observed the use of fire in ancient Hindu teachings and remembered that the enlightenment of Russia had been administered by St. Sergius of Radonega from a flaming chalice

An unprecedented event had occurred as the Roerichs arrived in Sikkim. Although the Dalai Lama had gone into exile previously, the Panchen Lama had never left Tibet. Now, following years of conflict between Tibet's two highest lamas, the Panchen Lama had fled to China. The government of Lhasa, in confusion, was searching everywhere. It was rumored that he had passed through Calcutta in disguise and was on his way to Mongolia via China.

With little way of receiving accurate information, the Roerichs could only wonder what military maneuvers were proceeding along the Chinese border and what was transpiring on the Mongolian side. Fulfilling the ancient prediction that "the time of Shambhala will occur after many ferocious wars have devastated countries, many thrones have fallen, many earthquakes have occurred, and the Panchen Lama has gone from his abode," this event was causing great speculation. Nicholas wrote in his diary: "Verily, a world-wide war has been fought, thrones have top-pled

around the world, earthquakes have destroyed the old temples of Japan, and now their revered ruler has left his country. The time of Shambhala is near.”

Many special guests visited Talai-Pho-Brang, the Rimpoche of Chumbi (southern Tibet) chief among them. An exalted Buddhist lama, he was traveling throughout Sikkim, India, Nepal, and Ladakh attended by several lamas and lama artists, erecting new images of the Blessed Maitreya and teaching of Shambhala. He told Roerich: “I see you know the time of Shambhala has approached. If you know the Teaching of Shambhala—you know the future....Evolution has been accelerated, and the enlightened rule of Maitreya will soon fulfill the prophecies. Then when the forces of evil have been defeated, peace and plenty will reign and the world will blossom with wisdom and compassion.”

Nicholas enjoyed hearing the reverence and devotion with which the enlightened lamas spoke of Christ and was sure that if Christian priests valued Buddha in the same way, then benevolent understanding would surely be guaranteed for the future.

Lady Lytton, wife of the viceroy and acting governor general of India, was another honored guest. Other guests included the British political officer in Sikkim, Lieutenant Colonel F. M. Bailey, and the entire Everest expedition party, who arrived while Nicholas was painting *Burning of Darkness*. His portrayal of one of the glaciers their expedition had passed was so accurate they found it hard to believe he had not actually seen it.

Nicholas told his diary that on the trail one day their guide had turned to them and passionately said, “But men must finally realize that all are equal despite their possessions!” Remembering Vivekananda’s teachings, Roerich realized that even among the blue hills of Sikkim, men were pondering when and how all people would finally be united in understanding. Roerich wholeheartedly shared the guide’s opinion and expressed it so openly that Lieutenant Colonel Bailey eventually decided Roerich must be a Communist. After conferring with the British Foreign Secretary, Bailey alerted the Tibetan government a few days before Roerich’s fifty-third birthday.

Oblivious to the grave consequences that Nicholas’s views would bring, and blissfully unaware of the letters being exchanged, the members of the Roerich expedition were preparing to continue their trip. Renewed by the quiet, gathering power, they began mapping their first two years, plotting a

route from Kashmir to Ladakh, from Leh to Khotan, Khotan to Kashgar, and then up the Northern Highway into Urumchi. Although they had pored over Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* numerous times, they now were in the very regions she had described. On the verge of departure, they must have tingled with excitement as they reread of underground crypts and cave libraries cut in rock of large, wealthy lamaseries, monasteries, and temples in the mountains.

Blavatsky claimed that several such places were hidden in the solitary passes of Kunlun, beyond the Tsaidam. She described a certain hamlet lost in a deep gorge along the ridge of Altyn-Taga. Amid a small cluster of houses was a poor-looking temple, where an old lama guarded subterranean galleries containing a collection of books said to be too large to store even in the British Museum:

The now desolate regions of the waterless land of Tarim were covered with flourishing and wealthy cities in days of old, though at present hardly a few verdant oases relieve its dead solitude. One such region is often visited by Mongolians and Buddhists who tell of immense deep abodes, and large corridors filled with tiles and cylinders.

Traces are still to be found in Central Asia of an immense prehistoric civilization, and the gigantic, unbroken wall of mountains that hem the whole tableland of Tibet have strange secrets to tell mankind. The Eastern and Central portions—the Nan-Shan and the Altyn-Taga—were once covered with cities that could well vie with Babylon. A whole geological period has swept over the land since those cities breathed their last, as mounds of shifting sands and now dead soil of the immense central plains of the basin of Tarim can testify.

Within those tablelands of sand there is water, and fresh oases are found blooming. Well-educated and learned natives of India and Mongolia speak of vast libraries reclaimed from the sand, together with various relics of ancient magic lore, which have all been safely stored away.

On the brink of one of the most formidable mountain systems of the world, the Roerichs intended to cross the upland plains, the dry deserts of sand and stone, and study the traces of cultures that once linked ancient China with the countries of the Mediterranean basin. However, entry into each country depended on securing the official documents and necessary visas. As Nicholas began applying for permission, everything bogged down and seemed complicated. He had no notion that his "Bolshevik views"—

and Colonel Bailey's intervention—were causing it. Roerich fumed in his diary, "As for the English Major Hinde—he surpasses everything. He refuses us permits to enter Ladakh, saying 'no one can watch us there.' As far as he is concerned, 'expeditions of celebrated people with cultural goals are of no consequence; they do not exist.' All this trouble for Washington and London because of an insignificant Major. So much the worse for the government which retains such an uncultured agent."

Soon thousands of rupees had been spent on visits to the authorities and telegrams to contact Washington, London, and the viceroy of India. Finally, to expedite matters, Roerich and both of his sons sailed back to New York. It took them one month. Once things were straightened out, Professor Roerich and George sailed for Europe, leaving Svetoslav in New York to resume his schooling and keep an eye on things at the Master Institute and Corona Mundi.

Hoping to secure permission for the expedition to cross the Soviet borders so that they could go into the Altai Mountains, see the site of the New Country, and perhaps even enter Moscow, the two men stopped to see the Soviet consul in Germany. But again there was so much red tape that by the time permission was granted they had left for Saint Moritz, Switzerland. There they were scheduled to meet Vladimir Shibayev. The young Theosophist from Riga was to return to India with them to be Roerich's secretary and oversee affairs while they were on the expedition.



Accompanied by Shibayev, stopping a second time at the pyramids. On seated camels: left, Vladimir Shibayev; right, Nicholas Roerich

Accompanied by Shibayev, Nicholas and George once more crossed the Suez and stopped in Egypt and Ceylon. This time they landed in Madras and visited the Theosophical Society in Adyar before continuing on to Darjeeling. Finally, back in Darjeeling, they were ready to depart on their Central Asian expedition.



THE CENTRAL ASIAN EXPEDITION BEGINS

On the morning of March 6, 1925, loaded down with luggage, the Roerich family climbed aboard the train for Calcutta. It was the official beginning of the Roerich Central Asian expedition. From Calcutta, their plan was to ride north on the Punjab Mail for two nights until the tracks ended, then continue by automobile to Srinagar, Kashmir, the major transfer point in the east. There they would outfit and staff the expedition.

Since in his writing, Roerich seldom mentioned his feelings or those of the others, one can only imagine the excitement the family surely felt on leaving Darjeeling and descending the eastern Himalayan slopes. Through the train's windows, they saw tropical jungles, fever-infected marshes, and rice fields slipping by, as an endless stream of hill people trod on dirt roads and cow paths beside the tracks. Finally, they arrived in the heat and dust of Calcutta. The railway station was filled with rushing people clad in saris, white turbans, or dhotis, pushing, shoving, and clamoring to board. Peddlers called out their wares above the high-pitched din. A peculiar and intense glare of the approaching hot season seemed to hang over the horizon.

Then, after the long rail journey across northern India, they motored along one of the most beautiful roads in the world, admiring the magnificent scenery and catching their breath as the road dipped and climbed to seven thousand feet in some places. Srinagar nestled in the Kashmir Valley, among towering snowy mountains, with majestic rows of elegant poplars lining the approach. Upon their arrival, the calm of the clear spring afternoon was quickly shattered by a shoving and yelling "motley crowd of

Kashmiris” attempting to sell their wares or pitch the virtues of a houseboat for rent.

No more than two hundred years old, Srinagar held little interest for Nicholas. In his diary, he wrote: “Of the ancient ‘City of the Sun’ nothing remains. The world of Kashmir roses and shawls no longer exists. The old mosque is only a shell; traces of the reliefs in the excellent stones from the ninth and eleventh centuries can be spotted in the ugly rivets of the wharf.” He speculated on the origin of Kashmir’s canals and about who might have planted so many poplars. Perhaps it was “done by nomads from Central Asia, where winter necessitates the marking of the paths and canals needed for irrigating the sands.” He wondered about the origin of the gondola-like boats being towed along the yellow banks of the Jhelum River, and remembered the Volga and the Mississippi.

Despite the trip to New York, the Roerichs had still not obtained travel permits. From their reading they were aware that until recently, European travelers had been allowed little freedom in Central Asia. Only a few years earlier, all foreign diplomatic envoys had been kept in confinement until it was time for them to conduct their business. They would then be led through the streets blindfolded. The explorers Colonel Przhevalsky, Sir Aurel Stein, and Sven Hedin had each mentioned the strict surveillance to which they had been subjected. However, since this expedition was traveling under an American banner, Nicholas expected better treatment. He gave little thought to the watchful eye of the British Colonial Office.

The Roerichs established headquarters in the Nedou Hotel and began hiring. Although George would be able to do much of their translating, they still needed to find other translators. They hired Lama Lobzang, a Kalmyk, and Tsai Han-chen, a Confucian in his eighties, who was an officer of the Chinese Army. They obtained a guide, drivers, porters, and pack animals, and stocked medical supplies, clothing, and food. Each small detail was considered. They would be crossing the highest mountain passes in the world, from Ladakh to the desert lands of Chinese Turkestan, and the well-being of the expedition would depend upon thorough preparation and forethought.

Upon leaving Sikkim, George began keeping an extremely detailed journal. His copious notes served as the trip logbook and later would be published as *Trails to Inmost Asia*. Nicholas started a new diary to sketch

out images for paintings and jot down his thoughts. The two journals differ so vastly that comparing them allows tremendous insight into the personalities of father and son. For example, during their early days in Kashmir, Nicholas mused on the great Mongol hordes, the lost tribes of Israel, and others who had passed through the area: “All have passed by way of Kashmir, where lie the ancient ways of Asia, and each caravan is a connecting link in the great body of the East...Beyond these sandy deserts awaits Peshawar, the blue peaks of Sonamarg, and the white slopes of Zoji La. To them we fly with the untiring spirit of eagles, maintaining a steady unalterable motion like the fleet steed.”

George, on the other hand, was engrossed with keeping a watchful eye on their outfit orders and worrying about how things would be packed. He listed the number of animals required and his concerns about obtaining them. It becomes obvious in reading the journals that George, in addition to serving as spokesman for the expedition, was often the one who kept things functioning. He pragmatically listed the essentials needed for surviving the mountain passes and the winter in Chinese Turkestan: fur coats lined with soft Tibetan wool, fur-lined boots, caps, socks, and sleeping bags. Nicholas, however, was more interested in the special chants the Kashmiri weaver used while creating his designs.

Since Kashmiri artisans were famed for their excellent winter outfits and camping furniture, the family had waited to purchase what they needed. Now they ordered several waterproof canvas tents with warm pattoo lining, constructed especially to withstand rough traveling and mountain gales. Two flaps were added to keep strong winds from lifting the tent. Tent poles were made of thick bamboo with strong metal joints, the pegs galvanized iron. All supplies had to be packed in leather-covered wooden boxes.

In Srinagar it was possible to buy horses descended from the herds of Genghis Khan, famous throughout Central Asia for their quality and endurance. Deciding that having their own riding horses would allow them independence from the sometimes-unreliable rental horses, the Roerichs bought six fine mounts. They had occasion many times over to appreciate this wise investment. Pack ponies would be hired in relay along the route, as was customary.

While they were shopping, they began investigating a rumor they remembered from 1894 when Nicholas Notovitch returned to St. Petersburg

from Tibet, claiming he had found a manuscript about Jesus in the monastery at Hemis. Subsequently published in French and English, it said that Jesus had spent his last years in Srinagar. The Roerichs spoke with some Muslims who agreed with that story and volunteered that, according to a local legend, the crucified Christ (or Issa, as they called him) had not died on the cross, but only lost consciousness. His disciples had hidden and cured him, and taken him to Srinagar, where he taught until his death. His tomb was located in the basement of a private house, which bore an inscription stating that the son of Joseph was buried there. Miraculous cures were known to occur near the tomb, where a pleasant fragrance filled the air. The Roerichs were excited by this information and continued to investigate it as their trip progressed. They found the story was widely accepted throughout India, Ladakh, and Central Asia, where it was also believed that Issa had been in those lands between the ages of thirteen and thirty.

Sikkim's solitude had left them unprepared for Srinagar's fast pace and bustle, so they quickly decided to rent a large houseboat on Lake Vular, surrounded by great beauty and high mountains, while awaiting delivery of their supplies. On their first night, however, they learned that the houseboats were not actually seaworthy; the boatmen spent several anxious hours struggling against a violent storm that almost swept the entire entourage overboard.

Another day, six cooks arrived to prepare a Kashmiri feast for everyone. At 7:00 p.m., after an entire day with nothing but tea, the whole group was seated around a table strewn with blue irises, and served a magnificent twenty-seven-course dinner. Nicholas termed it "the apotheosis of mutton and spices," and lamented that the food was too foreign for them to appreciate fully. The singing, dancing, and good fellowship that followed, however, were easy for him to enjoy. The lyrics of the Urdu, Kashmiri, Persian, and Arabian songs touched him so deeply that he recorded many of them in his diary: "Thou walkest upon the road but art not visible to me. Thou gavest me the wine of life and walkest away from me. Everything depends on God." "If I see but one man or woman, I already behold the entire world." "They say their praises of Christ in all manner of words... better was He than sun and moon."

Relishing the evening, Roerich wrote: “And thus, eight Moslems on a red carpet, of their own accord, glorify Christ and creation until the hour of midnight. Next, the boatmen all moved and swayed together, wearing white turbans and chanting, while the saazes droned like the whispers of the forest and our Confucian Chinese murmured ‘good’ in Tibetan over and over.”

In return, the Roerichs unpacked their Victrola and cranked the handle so that Chaliapin could serenade the group with the music of Rimsky-Korsakov. While the “white turbans nodded understandingly,” the program concluded with the locals singing the “Song of Akbar.” Devoid of the slightest friction, the entire evening was completely pleasant. Roerich joyfully exclaimed: “We were one consciousness! And all was mutually understood and accepted with kindly smiles. Now in Kashmir as it was in Sikkim, I am amazed by the spiritual understanding. So much can be accomplished with intuition...Before I hardly had time to crystallize my thoughts, my companion was already answering me.”

About April 15, 1925, they moved to Kashmir’s hill station, Gulmarg, in the foothills of the Pir Panjal. There they rented a sturdy yellow house, still covered with snow. Their preparations would be concluded in the coolness of the mountains as they studied the many challenges presented by their coming journey. George described their first week in his journal: “At night, the thunder rolled and crashed in the mountains and the lightning encircled us, making it bright as day. For several days we had to keep inside, completely cut off from the world. Never have we experienced electrical storms of such terrific violence.”

Roerich wrote: “For three days it thundered and the glare of lightning blinded us cruelly at night. Rings of lightning! The gushing rains poured down and sudden hail blanched the green hills.”

The Master explained: “In nature, ecstasies manifest as thunderstorms, earthquakes, eruptions of volcanoes and floods...Hence, a similar laboratory of spirit begins to work. All are blessed sparks of ecstasy.”

The blinding storms continued throughout May, June, and July, but nothing could dim the Roerichs’ joy when permission to visit Tibet finally arrived from the British colonial administration. So, though there were earthquakes each week and rains that dropped hailstones as big as dove’s eggs, when the stars were visible, bright as candles, everyone was very happy. The entire scene reminded them of Siberia, where towns are also

“girdled by thundering storms, surrounded by cedar and pine groves and topped by the white caps of mountains, glimmering high above.” Woodpeckers enhanced the picture, and turtledoves, orioles, musk deer, and mountain goats. All was fragrant with evergreen.

Amid this profound display of nature’s powers, Nicholas completed more paintings to add to the *Banners of the East* series, following Master Morya’s instruction to “think courageously about the Images of the Great Ones; thus you will follow their line of unity.”

The series included *Buddha the Conqueror*; *Moses the Leader*; *Sergius the Builder*; *Confucius the Just*; *En-No-Gyoja*; *Milarepa, the One who Harkened*; *Dorje the Daring*; *Sarakha the Benevolent Arrow*; *Mohammed upon Mount Hira*; *Nagarjuna, Conqueror of the Serpent*; *Oirot, the Messenger of the White Burkhan*; *Watch on the Himalayas*; *Chalice of Christ*; and *Confucius*. Several composition sketches were also in this series.

Still thinking of “the Great Ones,” Roerich also remembered Mani, the third-century founder of Manichaeism, who was crucified for his teaching of synthesis and belief in the commune, and Guru Kambala, who sacrificed his head as a symbol of devotion and service. About the woman Kali, the beautiful Kwan Yin, and the Mother of the World, he mused: “Who knows how ancient they are? Their light-bearing essences came down from incalculable antiquity, from continents gone long before the Bible or the Cabala. Future studies and investigation must be undertaken that will link the consciousness of the East and West without prejudice, with an eye for only truth and justice.”

Nicholas wrote back to the New Yorkers: “You may wonder how we fare without theaters. We have plenty of drama daily. Without a stage, without frayed curtains or make-up—it is real life....One day, it is a Chinese theater, with legends about unheard-of peoples; or perhaps the threatening monologue of the policeman; or perhaps the ill-omened ballet of the Kashmiri merchants; or perhaps the drama of a boat beaten by the waves; or perhaps the procession of horses, or the peaceful evening songs, or a *furioso* of hail and earthquake. The whole world participates in the mystery of evolution and the creation of universal beauty when understanding triumphantly enters into life.”

By the time the supplies from Srinagar were delivered, eighty-two pack ponies had been hired to haul everything up to Dras, on the Ladakh side of the Zoji La Pass. Because they had been told to expect poor forage along the way, George had hired extra ponies just to carry feed. This proved unnecessary and added considerably to their problems.

When their caravan was assembled on the evening of August 8, the scene must have been etched into their memories forever. As in the ancient nights of Genghis Khan, roaring campfires illuminated the velvet darkness surrounding the caravan, under a brilliant canopy of stars. Off to the side, eighty-two ponies and other animals moved restlessly in long rows, awaiting the morrow.

The supplies hauled up by boat from Srinagar were unloaded at daybreak. By late afternoon, amid shouting drivers and protesting animals, the expedition started to move. Helena, Nicholas, and George went by auto as far as Ganderbal, the land of Padmasambhava, and then mounted up. Astride Mastan, his Khotan horse with a star on its forehead, Nicholas quickly moved ahead to trot beside the guide. Step by step, hour by hour, they were leaving India behind, heading toward the land of the Buddha, following the thundering, yellow Indus up toward her snowy source.

Within days, a pace was established that allowed plenty of time for contemplation. Nicholas's thoughts centered on Buddha, Confucius, and Christ, "those teachers who carried the dream of a world united." In his diary he mused: "Is it not astonishing that the teachings of Christ and Buddha are leading all nations into one family? And the idea of the commune and communal welfare is also at the basis of Confucius' teachings? That the commandments of Christ and Buddha lie upon the same shelf, and that Pali and ancient Sanskrit unite the search for spirit?"

Roerich remembered Confucius's teaching, "If the hearts of mortals were kindled by love, then the whole world would be as one family—all men would be as one man and all things would appear to be the same element." Both Jesus and Confucius alike preached, "We must love others as ourselves and wish for them all that we wish for ourselves." Roerich asserted, "The time has come for the gilding to be removed, so that the image of Buddha can emerge as a great teacher, who preached against poverty, killing, intoxication, and excesses." In pondering the line of evolving humanity, he thought Buddha emerged with unquestioned beauty:

Buddha had seen the true possibility of a “scientific approach to religion” and summoned all to reexamine their values, renounce their personal property, and labor for the general well-being. But Buddha, the Lion-conqueror, was not the only lawgiver of communal welfare. Throughout time many others had performed that service. There was Moses, the untiring leader; Amos, the austere; Confucius, justice of life, who also wandered from place to place, trudging the path of exile; Zoroaster, the flaming poet of the Sun; Plato, who transfigured and reflected by his shadows; the blessed Christ, great in the immortal sacrifice; solitary Origen, the wise commentator; Sergius, great ascetic. All had worked untiringly; all had fallen victim to persecution in their day; all had known that the teachings of good men would inevitably come to pass; all had understood that sacrifice for the sake of the general good was the only way.

The communistic concept of collective good for one and all seemed only logical and practical to Roerich. He saw it as the way to merge the earthly community with the greater community, composed of all galaxies. “Who could be opposed to this idea?” he innocently wondered, unaware that many people were waiting with an answer.

Fine weather accompanied the expedition as they crossed Kashmir, but they had their full share of other problems:

Flies, mosquitoes, fleas, earwigs! All possible gifts has Kashmir....Our departure was not without bloodshed. In Tangmarg, a band of provocative rogues attacked our caravan and began to beat our men with iron canes, hurting four. Order was only preserved with revolvers and rifles.

Before we were allowed to leave Kashmir, it was necessary to pay. We paid quickly and departed. In Ghund, our hostlers fed the horses with poisoned grasses: four almost died the first night out. They shivered and had to be walked throughout the entire night. No local remedies helped, so we dosed them on bicarbonate of soda, and it worked wonders. By the next morning, all were fine and the caravan proceeded.

New to caravan work, the drivers had to be directed in every detail. One night they laid fires around the ammunition box, but the remarkably efficient and cold-blooded headman kept them well in hand. A wildcat crept into George’s tent one night and was found lying in wait under the cot. Nicholas wrote: “Wet, rainy Baltal. We had not yet succeeded in spreading the wet tents when a new provocation arose. A policeman came with a

report that our people had just destroyed a medical post and had seriously insulted the doctor. Fortunately, the guard at the railway station did not confirm this evil accusation. We again bid our men not to answer any insults. The caravanners insisted upon our waiting an extra day because of their fear of avalanches on the Zoji.”

Concerned that they would be robbed by wandering Afridi (from Afghanistan), the caravan leader brought special guards out from the village. Though they looked to Roerich like “five ragamuffins,” nobody came to steal. Before the expedition could finally escape from Kashmir’s poisonous herbs, cholera, and insects, they had to cross an icy bridge swinging above a roaring river. The caravan made it intact and once they crossed the 11,300-foot-high Zoji La, everything improved.



Zoji La Pass, one of the great Himalayan passes crossed by the Roerich Central Asian expedition. (Note expedition members in lower left corner)

As they descended, the landscape completely changed and appeared to be a different country. Typical Tibetan mountain country—boulders and barren mountain ridges—covered a broad upland plain lying between them and the scant grazing lands. The people seemed more honest, the streams healthier, the herbs more curative; the air was exhilarating, and even the rocks looked more lustrous.

They were now traveling along the ancient Kashmir-Ladakh road. Whenever possible, they took advantage of the dak bungalows, rest houses, and granaries provided for trading caravans and travelers. If these state-maintained accommodations were crowded, their men would set up camp and pitch tents. The brisk August mornings and afternoons of dry heat kept them aware that autumn was coming.

Casting shadows of purples and greens, impressive rocks surrounded them, and elegant carpets of golden grasses swayed with the breezes. Roerich spied forms hiding in the crags and chasms, and expected Kwan Yin, or perhaps an enchanted stone knight, to emerge, liberated from the massive boulders. At sunset the rocks and shadows magically softened into endless varieties and subtleties of color.

They identified abundant varieties of aromatic healing herbs growing from the recesses of the mountains down to the mud of the riverbed. Riding along the trail, Nicholas happily confided to his diary, "Although I know the beauties of Asia and am accustomed to their richness of colors, still nevertheless, I am astonished, and feel so elated that I could accomplish the impossible." He breathed in the expansiveness around him, and speculated that original thought was possible only where conclusions do not depend upon any defined rules. "Verily," he said, "in this place, great decisions are possible."

Roerich often thought he could hear strains of Wagner's music coming from somewhere inside the rock formations. While it played, he reminisced about his friends in Russia, recalling the time when Igor Stravinsky had been ready to annihilate Wagner. Roerich, who loved Wagner, had declared, "No, Igor, this is heroic realism, these harmonies of achievement are not to be destroyed...ragtime and fox-trots will not supplant them."

Just before Dras, they encountered two stone steles, both etched with the image of a rider upon a white horse. Roerich happily recognized they were announcing Maitreya, the messenger of the new world to come for all humanity. From there on, he encountered countless statues of Maitreya—colossal ones and miniatures, seated or standing, Maitreyas from all centuries, each a reminder that the time of Maitreya was rapidly approaching. "Maitreya stands as the symbol of the future." Nicholas thought it was that belief alone, in reverence for the future, that bound all sects of Buddhism together.

Inspecting the rocks for signs from the past, he spotted drawings of deer, mountain goats with twisted horns, and horses. He remembered similar images in Siberia and on stones in North America—the same technique, the same stylization, the same reverence for animals. “On the wall of a semi-grotto where we paused for rest, the hands of some unknown travelers had left the figures of animals. Through these images, America and Asia stretch out their hands to each other.” He found few human images, only an archer and several rows of people, perhaps representing some ritual.

Nicholas told his diary:

Again a caravan. Again days and dates are readily forgotten. The character of the day becomes of more importance than its number or name. Like Egyptians who named the years according to their qualities—“year of battle,” “year of lean crops”—one marks only the quality of the days. Perhaps the day of the horse—when the mount fell through the snowy bridge; the night of the wolf—when the packs stealthily approached the camps; the dawn of the eagle—when, with a whirl of wings, the golden eagle sped upon the tent; the sunset of the castle, which arose so unexpectedly that it appeared to burst from the fiery copper peak.

An excellent relay service was operated for travelers on the Ladakh route. Therefore, at Dras, when their caravan animals returned to Srinagar carrying other cargo, the Roerichs expected to be provided with new teams. But the large number of animals they required put a heavy demand on the scant supply. Long negotiations were required with the local headman, but everything was settled by evening. At dawn, packhorses and dzo (a crossbreed of yak and cow) began pouring into the dak bungalow’s compound. George began what he called “the ceremony of the distribution of the loads” as the headmen apportioned the caravan among the new drivers.

Among the crates loaded on the pack animals was the expedition library, including books by famous explorers who had traveled throughout northern China and Central Asia and two books by Rev. A. H. Francke, a missionary in the Moravian Mission Hospital in Ladakh. Much of the Roerichs’ knowledge of the area came from Francke’s *A History of Western Tibet* and *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, which gave them an idea of what to see and where to stop. Francke wrote of being in exactly the same spot and hearing

a tale told of “Ba-yul, the country of tall beings,” said to lie nearby: “Only highly developed people could find anything about the life in this Ba-yul—and if a simple man approached the snowy boundaries, he might only hear babble.”

Roerich loved these stories of hidden people and places; he collected and tried to investigate them. He remembered a well-known Central Asian legend of a mysterious nation of underground dwellers called the Agarti; anyone approaching the gates of this blessed underground kingdom would meet only silence. He had also heard a Russian tale of the “Tchud,” who went underground to escape the persecution of evil forces, and a legend from the north about the subterranean city of Kitezkh.

Listening around the campfires, Roerich felt that the whole world exchanged stories of underground cities, treasure troves, and temples. Russian and Norman peasants both spoke of these things with equal conviction, as did desert dwellers, who whispered of treasures that glow under the waves of sand and then disappear—until the ordained time for them to emerge. He remembered ancient stories that told of hideaways beneath the Potala Palace and subterranean dwellings near Lhasa and the Koko-Nor. A Mongolian lama had told them that when Tsong-kha-pa, the founder of the Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism, had laid the foundations of the Ganden monastery in the fourteenth century, smoke of incense had been seen rising through gaps in the rocks. So a passage was cut and they discovered an old man seated, motionless, in a cave. When aroused from his ecstasy, he requested a cup of milk, asked what teaching now existed upon earth, and then disappeared.

After many failed attempts to gain more knowledge of things of this nature, Roerich speculated: “Since we are strangers, perhaps it is naive of me to expect people to trust us with more than a cautious response. One authoritative astrologer assured me he had only heard rumors—another who was versed in the ways of antiquity insisted he had not heard of any of what I inquired. And why should they do otherwise? They must not betray. I discern much of this hiding is done from true devotion...If so much lies underground, how much more lies veiled by silence?”

Continuing at their leisurely pace from mountain passes to sandy plateaus, they passed castles built precariously atop craggy cliffs, half-ruined temples, old forts, palaces, and monasteries. After several days they

arrived at Lamayuru, famous for having one of the oldest monasteries on the entire route. When they climbed to the summit, 14,000 feet above sea level, a view of unique grandeur spread before them: a vast amphitheater of rugged mountains and sharp rocks, with snowy peaks in the distance. It took them an hour to ride down.



Ladakh, August 1925

At the entrance of a narrow gorge, they found stupas standing behind a low sandy spur. An amazing view of the picturesque lamasery of Lamayuru

standing high atop craggy sandstone cliffs greeted them. The steep sides of the cliffs were honeycombed with numerous caves that the villagers used as storerooms and living quarters. Stupas and monastic cells were clustered in the narrow crevices. The village of Lamayuru was situated at the foot of the cliffs, a little above the rest house. Although the Roerichs had read that such caves existed throughout this area, the beauty of it was so great that they decided to spend an extra day and visit the monastery. Once there, Roerich noted: “All of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism were practiced in Ladakh: *Gelugpa*, reformed in the fifteenth century by Tsong-kha-pa; *Sakyapa*, dating from the eleventh century; *Nyingmapa*, established by Padma Sambhava; and *Bon-po*, of pre-Buddhist origin, sometimes called the Black faith—worshippers of the gods of Svastika, whose ancient roots remain a mystery.”

Since the Lamayuru monastery was considered a stronghold of *Bon-po*, they approached it with even more interest. Roerich wrote in his diary: “From one side they are sorcerers, shamans, perverters of Buddhism. But on the other, faint traces of Druid fire and nature worship can be found in their teachings.” He felt the literature of *Bon-po* needed to be translated and thoroughly researched before it could be explained.

The location of the monastery, and the buildings themselves, had a unique fairyland beauty. If they encountered such beautiful sights in Ladakh, the Roerichs thought, what wonders could they expect to find in Tibet! After a complete tour, Roerich remarked, “Whoever built Lamayuru and Maulbeck knew true beauty and fearlessness. Italian cities pale before such expansiveness and adornment. These solemn rows of *stupas* stand like joyous torches upon the tourmaline sands. Where can one find such decorations as the castle of ‘Tiger’s Peak’ or the endless ruins of the castles crowning all the slopes near the village of Kharbu? Where lies a country to equal these forsaken spots? Let us be just and bow before such true magnificence.”

That night, a missionary from Yarkand rode into their camp. He had just crossed over the Khardong Pass by yak. His watch had stopped and he had lost all sense of days and dates. “It was a staggeringly hard journey,” he kept repeating, while explaining that Khardong Pass and Sasser Pass were the worst spots to cross, though Karakorum, while higher, was easier. He praised the people of Turkestan highly and informed the Roerichs that the

Amban (the governor) was already expecting their arrival and regarding them as his guests.

The next day's march was strenuous. In several places the caravan had to scale tremendous avalanche-swept slopes, struggle through huge accumulations of debris deposited by a recent avalanche, and wade across a stream of flowing sand and gravel. After three hours, they reached the open valley of the Indus, crossed the river on a suspension bridge, and stopped to rest in a pleasant apricot grove. Following the trail that led into the valley, they passed many interesting monasteries until they arrived in Basgo, famous for having both the ancient palace and one of the oldest monasteries of Ladakh. Nicholas wrote, "An impression of majesty was conveyed by Basgo. Ancient half-ruined towers and endlessly long walls sat atop the peaks of rocks, where they mingled with present day temples."

Kashmiri conquerors had invaded Ladakh and mercilessly destroyed all the Buddhist monasteries. What remained of their ancient glory and valiant spirit had been reduced to ruins. The name of the great hero of Asia, Genghis Khan (or Gessar Khan), rang throughout, for Ladakh is regarded as his birthplace. Inside the temple, a huge statue of Maitreya, erected about AD 1610, greeted them.

George also cherished the memory of Basgo. He wrote that it had the oldest convents of Ladakh and an ancient royal library possessing treasures never thoroughly investigated nor cataloged. It must have been difficult for them to leave these treasures. But Leh, the capital of Ladakh, was waiting.



LADAKH AND INTO CHINESE TURKESTAN

The following night they camped in tents at an altitude of 11,000 feet, only seventeen miles from Leh. Nicholas, who had gone to sleep early, was awakened by Helena shouting, "Fire! Fire!" Opening his eyes, he saw her silhouetted against an undulating violet-rose flame (the color of an intense electrical charge) that shot up like a bonfire. When she tried to extinguish the flame, it flashed through her fingers, escaped her hands, and burst into several smaller fires. Then they spread out, entirely illuminating the tent. The flames felt only slightly warm and there was no burning, no sound, and no odor. Helena explained that it had erupted when she had merely touched the blanket on her bed. The flames gradually diminished and finally disappeared, leaving them with the memory and a strong desire to know more of such a startling phenomenon.

Master Morya explained: "The entire being is shaken by the encounter with fires of different quality. But so important is the manifestation of fire, as a step in evolution, that I advise you to observe special caution at the time of mastering this element. This represents an essential part of the experiment of cosmic intercourse."

After the expedition was over and they were back in Darjeeling, Nicholas wrote in *Heart of Asia*, "We had many occasions to study electric phenomena, but I must say that we never experienced one of such proportions." Yet, later, in the Trans-Himalayas, they did have similar incidents: "We repeatedly experienced the effect of many different kinds of electric phenomena. I remember one night in Chunargen, at an altitude of 15,000 feet, when I awoke and, touching my bed rug, was surprised to see a

blue light flashing from my fingertips, as though entrapping my hand.” Thinking perhaps it was merely the result of contact with woolen material, he touched the linen pillowcase, then all kinds of objects—wood, paper, canvas—and each time, the blue light quietly flashed up, without warmth or odor. “Only in the heights do you come into contact with these inexpressible combinations of currents.” Perhaps, as he wrote this, the idea of a research institute was beginning to form.

The greatly anticipated Leh gates now stood before them. In his journal George recorded: “As one approaches the town of Leh, the towering white mass of its great palace is seen from afar. Until conquered by Kashmir several centuries ago, it was the residence of the Maharajahs of Ladakh. Since about AD 1620 the eight-story palace has crowned and dominated the city, and the houses cluster around it like stone steps leading to an imposing altar. There is indeed a resemblance between it and the great Potala Palace of Lhasa after which it is said to have been modeled. Two impressive citadels.”

Much about Leh was unique. Standing at the juncture of several important trade routes, it had the character of an ancient Asiatic caravan center. It also abounded with outstanding antiquities: palaces, stupas, and temples with carved stone images. Ancient graves, reminiscent of Druid graves, stood on a stony hill. At all times, a multicolored, motley crowd of shouting people seemed to jam the narrow streets.

A dak bungalow had been reserved for the family. They enjoyed sitting on the verandah, listening to the bells from the passing caravans and the singing of people harvesting grass. Caravans streamed by daily, transporting the products of India, China, Tibet, and Turkestan, or traders from Yarkand, Kashgar, and Khotan. The caravans from Turkestan usually arrived in July and August and began their return in October, or even November, before snow closed the passes for the winter. The Roerichs had intended to purchase their own caravan animals until they heard that hired ones were advisable, because the Karakorum trade route to Chinese Turkestan was so harsh.

After much consultation, they signed on Nazar Bey, a Karghalik who had thirty-six pack horses in good condition. Forty more were needed, so each day they went around to the rest houses, inquiring about new arrivals or planned caravans, until they located some new arrivals from the passes.

After three weeks of feeding and resting, they would be fit to leave. Seventy-six rupees was agreed upon for each horse on the condition that the trip from Leh to Khotan would be made in twenty-four days. The family was now free to investigate Leh.

After all of their time in the saddle, they would have been perfectly content to spend the entire month waiting in Leh; however, the Hemis Monastery, where Notovitch had said he discovered the long-lost manuscripts about Jesus, was only a few days' journey, so they went. The trip revealed more than they had expected. They found and viewed the Notovitch manuscripts, but Roerich also wrote: "If one wants to see the reverse side of Buddhism—go to Hemis. On approaching, one already feels the strange atmosphere of darkness and dejection. The *stupas* have peculiar, fearful images—ugly faces. Dark banners. Black ravens fly above and black dogs are gnawing at bones. And the canyon encloses itself tightly. The temple and the houses are all huddled together. The objects of service are heaped in dark corners like pillaged loot."

The lamas he found there were half-literate; their guide laughed, saying, "Hemis, a big name, but a little monastery." Roerich perceived prejudice and greed. The only good things about Hemis were the Notovitch manuscripts and the stags he saw standing upon the sharp cliffs of the neighboring rocks, turning their heads to greet the morning sun.

Back in Leh, they continued to search for more information on Jesus, and were amazed to hear the legends denied by the circle of missionaries. Little by little, however, fragments and details were volunteered, until it appeared that, though reticent, the old people of Ladakh knew a great deal of Jesus' life: "Such legends about Jesus and the Book of Shambhala lie in the 'darkest' places. How many other relics have perished in those dusty corners because the Tantrik-lamas have no interest in them? This is the other side of Buddhism."

One afternoon, a slender man, dressed in Tibetan garb and with a fine, intellectual face, approached them and announced that he was the king of Ladakh, or rather the former king, now living with limited means in his summer palace. The Roerichs shared tea with him and spoke of their love for his country and the remarkably peaceful, honest people. Then Nicholas led the conversation onto Buddhism and the fine quality of the ancient

places, and before long, the king offered to take them through his abandoned palace.

Entering through a fantastic network of walls, they were led to the famous Lion Gate. Then they climbed the steep uncertain staircases and passed along the dark crossings. “Then we paused upon the terraces and balconies, rapt in joy over the vista of mountains and sand-mounds spread before us. It was necessary to bend down to enter the low, tiny doors of the house temple, dedicated to Dukkar, the resplendent Mother of the World. She stood with Buddha on her right, fresh flowers before both images. The walls were hung with many fine colored banners and majestic paintings, startling in their richness of detail and depth finer than any we had seen in Sikkim.”

In a separate temple stood a gigantic image of Maitreya—two stories high, feet to waist on the first floor, waist to head above. Nicholas, struck by the remarkable symbolism, compared it to life: “As though the common man should not perceive the grandeur all at once, but must ascend the upper way in order to reach the Image—as though of a higher world.” The beauty of the temple and the surroundings touched him deeply. The lower floor was bathed in twilight, while rays of the bright, all-penetrating sun poured in through the narrow, glassless windows above. Outside stood many stupas, surrounded by glistening sands.

Nicholas began a new series of paintings based on many of the unique structures he had seen in Asia. He named it *Sanctuaries and Citadels*, saying, “I do not care to give them any ethnographical or geographical character....By their general tone of heroism and attainment, the buildings will stand as banners that speak for this country.”

The family attempted to rent a house from the Moravian Mission but was told they would have to sign an agreement “to do no religious, semi-religious, etc., propaganda.” Roerich asked his diary, “Who could pledge himself not to exceed the incomprehensible limit of ‘semi- and etc.’?” Perhaps shaking his head in disbelief, he wrote: “Only in the mountain does one feel safe. Only in the desert passes can one escape ignorance.” They decided not to stay at the mission headquarters and accepted the king’s invitation to the palace.

“So we live in a Ladakhi palace. The ruins of Italian castles pale in comparison with this picturesque pile, this mass which rises in the chalice

of the many-colored mountains.” Roerich tried to remember where he had seen such lofty roof terraces and previously walked upon such ruined alleys, and then it occurred to him—it was in a painting he had made in 1915, *Mehesky—The Moon People*. However, rather than the Mehesky he had painted, they were now walking among descendants of Gessar Khan.

Settling into the Ladakhi palace filled their days. They chose to occupy the top floor even though it trembled with each violent gust of wind. Upon the walls of the room they selected as the dining room, were paintings of brightly colored plants in vases. On the bedroom walls were symbols of Chintamani—the stone of the treasure of the world. For his studio, Nicholas chose the chamber with a door onto all of the roofs. The views from the roofs were compensation for everything. The studio, as George and Helena noted, looked as if it were straight out of his 1921 Chicago production of *The Snow Maiden*.

“Before nightfall, the wind blows freely through the passageways,” wrote Nicholas, describing the little doors and narrow glassless windows above a high threshold. “Throughout the night, the wind whistles and the old walls shake.” During their stay there, a door and a part of the wall collapsed. Every blast of wind was a reminder that each day was bringing autumn closer.

Tumbal, a fierce black dog, and Amdong, a gentle white one, joined the expedition here. The “two woolly travelers” soon became part of the family. Crowds of visitors arrived at the old palace: envoys from Lhasa, Tibetan merchants, Tashildar, and the district chief from Kashmir. “How wonderful that George knows all the necessary Tibetan dialects,” Nicholas told his diary. “People here will not speak about spiritual things through a translator. And we must absorb all that we hear and try to gather knowledge from it.”

Eventually the oldest, most revered lama came to visit them. Despite his poverty, he arrived with a retinue of about ten lamas and relatives. All of them knew of the Issa manuscripts and said many followers of Mohammed were also eager to see them. After speaking awhile of the Shambhala prophecies and plans to unite the Buddhists, the conversation continued to what Roerich termed “that which fills reality with beauty.” When the visit was concluded, the entire retinue, dressed in their white caftans, surrounded the old king lama and bowed reverently. Roerich was impressed by the simplicity and beauty of it all.

Next, a Mongolian lama arrived. He had traveled from Urga to Ceylon to Ladakh bearing thrilling news about the Panchen Lama, whose heroic flight had succeeded. His capture had been thwarted by a miraculous snowstorm, which allowed the Panchen Lama's caravan to cross a lake thick in snow. But the ice had melted by the time their pursuers arrived, detaining them for several days. All monasteries now were discussing the ancient prophecies and the future, and raising and restoring images of the Maitreya! The prophecies and new commands quickly spread among the local inhabitants, who were excitedly comparing the dates of predictions that had already been fulfilled. Three years previously, the Panchen Lama had ordered frescoes to be painted on the walls of his inner chambers portraying him wandering through the exact countries where he now was. All were preparing for the coming of Shambhala.

Roerich wrote, "One must be here to understand the excitement that is occurring, and one must look into the eyes of these visitors, to realize how vitally important the meaning of Shambhala is for them. The importance of the Panchen Lama can be pieced out from fragments of the ancient prophecies. And though they are sometimes dust-ridden and perverted, the very structures of their future are connected with these dates and events, and this makes them vital and thought-provoking. We must understand that these dreams and hopes are the web of the new world for them!"

As the Mongolian lama's stay continued, the Roerichs' astonishment and pleasure increased. "He has seen so much and knows so much and has such keen insight." The Roerichs told him of a memorable experience they had near Darjeeling:

We were in an automobile, near the Ghum monastery, when a porte-chaise, carried by four servants in white garments, approached us. In it sat a lama dressed in a remarkably beautiful garment, with a crown upon his head. He had a bright, welcoming face with a small black beard. Our automobile had to slow down, and the lama smiled and joyously nodded his head. We thought that he was the important abbot of a large monastery. But afterwards, we discovered that lamas are not carried in porte-chaises, nor do they wear crowns when traveling or appear in such beautiful robes. No one had ever heard of this lama—and though we saw his face clearly when the driver slowed down, he resembled no one we have seen anywhere.

One evening, someone arrived who whispered exciting news to the Roerichs of a new manuscript about Shambhala. And on the same day, three items about the legends of Jesus reached them, though the missionaries quickly tried to discredit them. In his diary, Roerich wrote: "So Issa is being discussed, and thus slowly the news begins to leak out. The chief thing is the unusual depth of these legends and the wonderful meaning they have to all lamas throughout the entire east."

The old king had told them that Issa had preached from Leh's high terraces, and suggested that Nicholas paint a series of everything that could be seen from that point, for Buddha had been there also. A legend referred to a "great and very ancient structure" that had stood where now there were only cliffs and rugged stones. The original stones had been carted off to construct stupas, which in their turn had also crumbled. Nearby were a hoary village, a sharp-peaked heap of ruins, and the remains of an obsolete fortress. Nicholas mused that though much had changed, the same heavens were still crowning the earth with the same glowing stars, the tides of sand were still swirling around like a congealed sea, and the deafening winds persevered in sweeping the earth.

Roerich recorded in his diary a conversation with "a good and sensitive Hindu," who spoke about the meaning of the manuscript on the life of Issa while wondering, "Why does one always place Issa in Egypt during the time of his absence from Palestine? Of course His young years were passed in study, for the traces of His learning can be seen in His later sermons. And to where can those sources be traced? To Egypt and to India and Buddhism. It is more difficult to understand why the wandering of Issa by caravan path into India, and into the region now occupied by Tibet, should be so vehemently denied."

Roerich commented, "There are always those who love to scornfully deny when something difficult enters their consciousness."

Although the once lavish palace was ideal for visitors, it was not practical for the expedition's hundreds of cases and bales that needed to be packed and distributed into pony loads. Therefore, after several days, the family returned to the dak bungalow, where they had plenty of space to rearrange the loads and keep their horses stabled. The town was buzzing with reports that snowstorms had begun on the high passes, and the caravan men were anxious to get started. Once the northwest wind approached

Karakorum, there would be only one more week to get through Shayok. If the passes closed, it would not be possible to proceed because people took the bridges apart and used them for fuel.

The party quickly had to prepare to march. If they were late, they would have to cross Khardong and Sasser, the very passes they had been warned to avoid. Short of men, they sent notice to the bazaars, and an assortment of Baltis, Ladakhis, Kashmiris, Arghuns, and Turkis appeared at the bungalow daily. Helena chose several promising ones, two of whom had served under Dr. Sven Hedin on his expedition of 1907–8, and several others who had worked on the Karakorum route before.

The family was pleased with the experienced men familiar with the difficulties and dangers. Most had been in Yarkand or Khotan before and spoke fluent eastern Turki. They were hired on as far as Khotan. Their return fare was paid, and each man was promised a warm fur coat and cap, a pair of soft boots, and felt socks. Though two tents were provided to shelter the men, many would choose to spend their nights sleeping in the open or under the flaps of the Roerichs' tents.

Nicholas was eager to get back on the trail and told his diary: "The sand is beckoning me...with desert nights and the glowing sunrises. And in this glimmer lies our whole dream and hope. Hence we start on the trail with suggestions of new possibilities, and walk up the mountains and then down to the deserts with our horses, with mules and yaks, with rams and with our dogs."

Few of the large isolated regions of the world are as rich in history as the Karakorum route—the gateway to Asia and turnpike of Eurasian history and religion. Whether on foot, mule, dzo, or yak, the only way to get from Leh to the oases of Chinese Turkestan or distant China is over the Kunlun Mountains and the Karakorum Range. Crossed by some of the mightiest tribes and clans of all time, this highest trade route in the world is crowned by the fearsome passes the expedition hoped to avoid. At 18,300 feet, Sanju Pass is the highest.

September 19, 1925, greeted the expedition with a brilliant morning and a wonderfully refreshing, cool mountain breeze. Surveying the scene of waiting yaks, horses, sheep, donkeys, mules, and dogs, the family thought they were seeing a scene from the Bible, or perhaps the ethnology display at the Field Museum in Chicago. Word had been passed that it was no longer

possible for loaded horses to cross the first pass, so the caravan leaders unloaded the packhorses, mules, and donkeys and drove them on ahead to wait for the caravan on the far side. Although yaks had been reserved several days in advance, for some unknown reason only forty of the woolly beasts had appeared.

Much of the afternoon passed before they arrived, but finally, the noisy yaks were assembled, loaded, and moving. George wrote: "After we had passed the last Ladakhi village and barley fields, a group of Ladakhi women and girls approached our column with cups in their hands, brimming with yak milk. We were asked to bow low in our saddles, so that our foreheads, and those of our animals could be sprinkled with it. They were wishing us Godspeed and a safe journey amid the dangers of the forbidding Karakorum."

The group left Ladakh's lush gardens and verdant fields behind after only three hours. Already they could see the monumental mountains crested with glaciers and snow. As long as the sun was out, the approach to Khardong Pass was easy, but at dusk, a sharp, cold wind sprang up. Vast masses of debris swept down from the towering, rugged slopes waiting to be scaled. The expedition picked a promontory near a ruined stone hut to camp for the night. No sooner had they dismounted, however, than a piercing northwest wind started to blow, and they raced to shelter beside the neighboring cliffs. When the yaks caught up with them, looking like a large, dark moving mass and resounding with loud shouts and the drivers' whistles, they slowly filled the open space on the plateau around the camp. They were unloaded in complete darkness.

Unused to the specially constructed tents, the men had great difficulty erecting them in the blasting, bitter wind. The first night was spent in cold as fierce as the Arctic's, camped on a naked plain, listening to the cutting wind. Indescribable confusion reigned, for the Kashmiris refused to share their know-how with the Ladakhis.



Khardong Pass, Ladakh, September 1925. Far right: Nicholas Roerich

Hemorrhages and headaches commonly attack animals and people on ascents higher than 16,000 feet. As soon as the Roerichs began the early morning march, they spotted frozen blood in the snow and then passed the skeleton of a horse. “We ascended the pass on yaks at three o’clock in the morning. Because of their soft step and steadiness, those heavy animals were irreplaceable.” From the top of Khardong the view was majestic. George thought the mountains looked like a giant sea crowned with sparkling, white foam. The entire northern portion was a powerful glacier, the descent so steep and slippery that they had to dismount and creep down. One loaded yak tripped and slipped down the smooth ribs of the glacier to the very edge of the precipice before it managed to right itself.

Ahead lay the Kunlun Mountains, which Chinese tradition called the “Abode of the Immortals.” It was said that the Emperor of the Chou Dynasty (1001–946 BC) had journeyed there, to the bank of Jasper Lake, to have an audience with Kwan Yin, Goddess of Compassion. Lao-tzu had said the Kunluns were the location of *Hsi Wang Mu*, the headquarters of the Ancient Ones—the Great White Brotherhood.

Months earlier, the Master had told them of a friend of the Brotherhood who had gone hiking on a mountain path: “And being accustomed to long marches, he went beyond the protected boundary and fainted there. When the Masters found him with their telescopic apparatus, he was lying on the

brink of a dangerous precipice while a man from a geological expedition, who also happened to be lost, was rushing to save him. Although hungry and weakened himself, he managed to lift 'Our Friend' (who was very tall) and carry him down the footpath." Since increased nerve tension accompanies that much effort, when "those sent by the Masters" arrived, the rescuer fell into a deep swoon. The Masters awarded him the honor of "co-worker" for his excessive efforts and reported, "He is presently engaged in historical research and is guardian of the paths, and is often heard to advise, 'Never fear an excessive load,' for he realized that the reason he had been lost from his own caravan, was so that he could be of service."

With this type of encouragement, the Roerichs blessed each obstacle and hardship. Although it was only autumn, as they crossed the pass, the family's fingers and toes were turning numb. One solicitous caravan man volunteered to rub them occasionally with snow. Nicholas, who found it impossible to sketch, wrote: "This threatening glacier is beautiful. Far below is a turquoise lake, which they say is very deep, and the entire path is strewn with gigantic boulders. I can well imagine how it looks during the winter."

Continuing by yak, they eventually descended. When they looked back, the pass appeared impenetrable. Once the caravan was reunited, they set up camp in a small, shady spot. For the next twenty-two days, the horses were able to carry the loads and still scale the forbidding heights of the mountain passes. After the party had left Khardong behind, they heard that a caravan of about one hundred horses and Balti men had frozen to death there with the men's hands cupped to their screaming mouths.

The expedition was now marching along the Shayok Valley. The country was gorgeous, with flaming yellow and red sandstone rocks, and flashes of green in the valley bottom. After the difficulties of the pass and the glacier, the granite boulders on the road seemed easy: "Following the piercing cold, we have heat and a vivid sun. The sands are hot; the mountains with their snowy rims, recede, and we have stream beds; sometimes a stream disappears into the stony mass and only the rumbling tumult remains to indicate the flow of the invisible water." Briar roses and tamarisks bloomed everywhere. The friendly natives told them the river was

a ponderous torrent in the spring, but now, in autumn, it was divided into channels of unusually beautiful and intricate designs.

Since Helena had never ridden a horse before, her stamina and strength astonished her husband. "Mrs. Roerich has been on horseback all the ten days. She does not do things in a small way, here she suddenly goes on horseback through Karakorum, and is the first one ready and always valiant. Even the knee she injured in Kashmir has somehow ceased to trouble her." A few days later, he told his diary, "Helena was on horseback for more than thirteen hours without dismounting. It shows that the usual so-called fatigue may be conquered by something more powerful." When even the Chinese translator remarked about her endurance, Nicholas decided she must have been a rider in other lifetimes.

Three miles above Khalsar, they crossed a suspension bridge and rode as far as the picturesque village of Tirit, where their foreman owned an estate with a large, comfortable country house. He was anxious to offer his hospitality and made the family comfortable in the upper rooms of his clean, bright Tibetan home. The walls were gaily decorated with paintings, and in the middle of the room stood a heavy pillar on which, to their great pleasure, hung an image of Chintamani, the Treasure of the World.

The view from his roof was superb. Late into the night they enjoyed the magnificent moonlight that illumined the surrounding mountain country and the peaceful valley below. They spent the evening happily, with Buddhist psalms intermingling with the drawling, melancholy songs of Turkestan. Few of the caravan men singing around the campfire seemed to have any care about the hardship and privation to come.

The next morning dawned clear. They headed toward the golden sands on a road lined with hedges of briar roses. Behind lay the blue mountains, capped white with early snow. Soon they reached Sandoling Monastery, the final outpost of Buddhism before the desert, where they had arranged to meet the lama who would accompany them. At Sandoling, the Roerichs were surprised to discover a newly erected altar to Maitreya, the vibrant image glowing upon it. Nearby was an excellent statue of Dukkar, the Mother of the World. There was a good library, and a rich collection of various colorful banners vividly trimmed with silk, painted in Ladakh.

The family was told that their lama had stayed for the night, but had gotten an early start on the road to the frontier. They hastened to overtake

him, but it was nighttime when a strange figure approached them from behind a stone in the moonlight. It was their lama, Lama Shak-Ju, dressed in a woolly cap and fur caftan like a Yarkandi. He proved to be a welcome addition to the expedition. Roerich later told his diary of an unexpected discovery: “It appears that the lama speaks Russian, and even knows many of our friends. All the while, no one would have suspected this. When we spoke Russian in his presence, not a muscle revealed that he understood. And his answers never once exposed that he knew what we had said. Once more, it is clear how difficult it is to appraise the measure of a lama’s knowledge.”

The following day the caravan reached the foot of the next pass and camped before beginning the ascent. The night was unexpectedly enlivened by a Muslim who came to share their fire and spoke to them of Mohammed and his reverence for woman. He knew the legends of Jesus’ tomb in Srinagar and Mary’s tomb in Kashgar. Roerich noted, “Again the legends of Issa...these are of especial interest to the Moslems too!”

Then the expedition started for Karaul Pass, which seemed more difficult than Khardong, despite being lower. Enormous masses of boulders lined the route; the path between them was so narrow that the caravan had to squeeze between rocks. As they filed past a trail of frozen animals’ skeletons in all stages of decomposition, Roerich was glad that it was too cold to smell the decay. Congealed in a jumping position, they reminded him of the last leap of the Valkyrie.

Somewhere along the trail was the boundary line dividing Ladakh and Chinese Turkestan. No one seemed to know exactly where it was, which Roerich enjoyed, for that made it seem as if this beautiful land belonged to no country. An unknown land! They passed a few animals and an occasional caravan, and met some Muslim pilgrims bound for Mecca, hurrying southward before the snow blocked the passes.

When the expedition reached Karaul, the first Chinese outpost, they received a hearty reception from the Chinese frontier officer in charge. Roerich told his diary: “Isolated in these far-off mountains, deprived of every means of communication, with his help and kindness this officer reminded me of those traits of the better China. This is so important to us—because we go to China with sincere friendship and an open heart!”

Touched by the officer's friendship, they set up their tents and spent the night in the dusty yard of the fort. While the Roerichs were waiting for their passports issued by the Chinese ambassador in Paris to be examined, they heard their elderly Chinese interpreter muttering "Chinese soil" thoughtfully to himself. Roerich was not sure whether the man was pleased or grieving. Before a few more of the passes had been crossed, there would no longer be any doubt.

Roerich, who had thoroughly loved the challenges of the passes, poignantly asked, "Crystals of the summits, can the lace of the desert sands replace you?" After a hard day's travel, the family loved the nightly campfires with their conversations, smiles, pipes, and rest. Fireflies of the desert, the campfires offered the opportunity to exchange stories with Ladakhis, Kashmiris, Afghans, Tibetans, Astoris, Baltis, Dards, Mongols, Sarts, and Chinese—each with his own astonishing tale. Nurtured by the silence of the desert, the Roerichs loved observing the people and watching their hand gestures as they spoke long into the night. And Nicholas's heart always lifted when he heard talk of Shambhala or the coming new era. Helena collected many of the campfire tales and parables, for she felt that they offered a glimpse into the souls of the peoples. They were published as *On Eastern Crossroads: Legends and Prophecies of Asia*.

From Karaul, two possible routes led to Khotan. The Roerichs thought it would save them six days and there would be fewer rivers to cross if they headed toward Yarkand, crossed over to Khotan, and continued straight. After Nazar Bey had strongly recommended this route, they headed toward Sasser Pass. Climbing in a dense whirl of snow, they had to stop and hastily pitch the tents for the night, a difficult task at an altitude of some 15,400 feet. They awoke to find the water frozen in the pitcher and everything deeply covered by snow, which had fallen throughout the night. The caravan leader, Omar Khan, had lost three of his best animals. The iron pegs were so frozen in the hard ground that it took almost two hours for the Ladakhis to pull them out.

The problems at the summit, however, proved the most challenging. A complete arctic stillness of glaciers and snow peaks greeted them as they approached 17,000 feet, and then a blizzard struck. While it intensified, the caravan men tried to shield the Roerichs from the sight of dead animals and human tombs scattered everywhere. Omar Khan lost two more horses. The

numerous mummified carcasses of animals looked as if they had died in agony. Someone had stood several horses in upright positions, and with their heads thrown back, they appeared to be galloping on a ghostly track. George's horse went into a slide that almost carried him into a crevasse. One caravaner suffered an attack of mountain sickness and, bleeding severely, fell off his horse. When the sun's rays pierced dense clouds for a brief moment, the whole snowy region sparkled with such unbearable intensity that it caused everyone's eyes to water. "The billowing clouds roll by and open up new, endlessly new combinations of the cosmic structure; we see only broad, flat lines, for everything is stripped clean of all ornaments and arabesques," wrote Roerich.

Finally they arrived at the northern edge of the glacier, and as they began the long descent, the weather suddenly brightened. When the rays of the setting sun hit the sand and rocks, the valley burst into flame. With the severity of the pass behind them, a tired George remarked, "A wonderful scene indeed!"

Continuing now toward the lowlands, they spotted Buddhist caves not mentioned in any of the travel books; the locals called them "Kirghiz dwellings." But landslides had obstructed the approach, so the Roerichs could only look up at the dark openings and imagine the frescoes and antiques that might be hidden there.

The gradual descent led them into a broad valley girded by grass-covered, rolling hills. It was a typical nomad highland, dotted with the light gray and white felt yurts of a Kirghiz encampment. The Kirghiz headman, a brave-looking man of about forty with a matchlock rifle and large fur cap, was waiting to accompany them. A picturesque crowd of nomads greeted them, and everyone enjoyed mingling once the camp was set up. Roerich noted: "They were extremely friendly, and offered us juicy melons—the first we had tasted for years. The women and children were neatly dressed, and the insides of the tents were artfully decorated with carpets and embroidery. These people seemed superior to their brothers of the Mongolian Altai and the mountain regions of Jungaria."

While horsemen shouted news of their arrival, a kindly crowd of Kirghiz women gathered around Helena and stared at her clothing. The women shook their high white headdresses in amazement over the camping equipment and everything else. Strings of camel caravans were slowly

passing by on the way up the trail into the mountains the Roerichs had just left. Never having seen camels before, their Ladakhi men were fascinated.

As the expedition continued, the two Kirghiz officers assigned to escort them proved to be decent fellows who willingly questioned the local inhabitants about possible ruins, caves, or tombs. The rich finds of Sir Aurel Stein and the ruined cities in the Takla Makan desert around Khotan were well known, but only some ancient Chinese copper coins had been unearthed in these mountains north of the Sanju Pass.

This area was famous for its oases, and the air grew decidedly hotter as they approached the first one. The sturdy Ladakhis stripped off their heavy sheepskins. Sensing water ahead, the men and animals hurried along the dusty loess-covered trail and soon reached the first village of the Sanju Oasis. Further on, the river gorge widened and the high rugged mountains on either side of it became low undulating hills that stretched away to the north. Marching eastward, they could no longer see Ladakh, the kingdom of the mountain passes and sparkling snows. Roerich wrote:

We said farewell to the mountains. Of course we shall find others, few worse than these—but it is sad to descend from them. The desert cannot bestow on us what the heights have whispered.

As a farewell, the mountain yielded up something unusual for us! With the very last rock that we could still touch, we spied the very messengers of the transmigration of peoples. And they have a special meaning, for these are the same designs we encountered previously. Here in Turkestan, we found the same Neolithic designs of the ibexes with huge twisted horns, the same archers, and the same circles of dancing people that we found etched in the rocks bordering Ladakh and other places in Western Tibet.

The Roerichs speculated that these dated back to the shamanistic form of worship celebrated throughout the higher regions of Asia. Rev. Francke had written about their ritual use in ancient Tibet, and George was able to document that the ancient Mongols venerated ibex and used them prominently in their fire cult.



THE SILK ROAD AND CHINESE HOSPITALITY

“It is time for breakfast and we want to stop, but some riders are galloping toward us, beckoning us to come farther,” wrote Nicholas in his diary. They were the headmen of Sanju, accompanied by a messenger from the magistrate of Guma, the nearest city. “The men dismounted, and stroking their beards in the approved Turkestani fashion, congratulated us on our successful arrival, and begged us to ride up to the next poplar grove where there was a feast awaiting! Then the headman, a Turkestani soldier, presented us with the large, red visiting card of the Guma Amban and announced they were there to escort us to Khotan, making sure we would be properly received by local authorities along the route. We went with them and found everything the country produces was spread before us on finely designed felts.”

Mounds of melons and apricots, juicy pears, red and blue tinted eggs, roast chicken, and mutton were provided, as well as Turkestani bread and steaming tea. The feast on colorful felts, and the entire scene, reminded Roerich of a French Impressionist painting or of the Russian countryside and his excavating days.

This was not a painting, however, nor was it Russia; nonetheless, “Here are the same caftans and beards and colored girdles and small caps bordered with wolf fur or beaver. Surprisingly, many of these bearded men know at least one Russian word and are very pleased if they own some small Russian object. Yet, they know almost nothing about America. It would be good if we had books on America, written in Turkestani, to give them. We must give it some thought.”

The Roerichs cheerfully accepted the honors and thoroughly enjoyed the feast while the delegation stood around them in a semicircle, gravely watching. Then, accompanied by the first of several detachments of guards that would attend them during their seven months in Chinese Turkestan, the caravan continued down the gradually sloping valley. The open plains were covered with fields of barley and corn; poplars and apricot groves were everywhere. The entire area appeared to be a thriving agricultural oasis, with numerous irrigation ditches to water the fields.

The first village was situated in a heavy grove of poplars, willows, and fruit trees. In the large shady garden reserved for them, a neatly dressed crowd of villagers waited, anxious to observe every detail as the caravan made camp. Then, while the Roerichs stood under the shade trees, enjoying the soft grass beneath their feet, the villagers milled around the tents. When Nicholas presented the friendly headman with a wristwatch, the old man beamed with satisfaction and immediately reciprocated by sending over peaches, pears, and delicious watermelons.

During the month they were resting in Ladakh and waiting for pack animals, they had received their first mail with news of the Master Institute and the museum. Catching up on the activities of the little circle of coworkers in America gave them much to talk about. After parting from the Roerichs in Europe, the Horches had returned to New York and moved the institute into its new location on Riverside Drive. A passageway had been opened connecting the two buildings. While the Roerichs had been exploring in Sikkim, leading representatives of New York's art, music, and literary world had gathered to celebrate the institute's grand opening. The school was already gaining a unique reputation for teaching "unity of the arts" and for being the art center devoted to the work of a living artist whose theories were influencing America. A collections catalog had been prepared.

Because Roerich's paintings had toured America, many visitors were flocking to the art center. Enthusiastic admirers who wanted to be more involved with the work had initiated The Society of Friends of the Roerich Museum. Charles Wharton Stork, an eminent poet and playwright from Philadelphia, was selected president. They soon published *Archer*, a magazine containing articles devoted to Roerich's aims and purposes, lists

of events at the museum, and announcements of contests. Branches of the society were opened throughout Europe.

Meanwhile, Frances Grant had formed the News Information Agency to supply leading newspapers and magazines with material dealing with the creative arts. The agency quickly evolved into the Roerich Press, publishing data of the expedition, and later Roerich's books, as well as works by outstanding writers such as James Cousins and Ivan Narodny.

Corona Mundi, the international art center, was sending paintings to tour museums, colleges, and libraries. The institute had added classes, including classes for the handicapped, and increased the faculty. The concert and lecture series had been expanded, and the summer study program had developed into a summer school at Moriah, New York, offering "rare cultural privileges—both for studies under an eminent faculty in all arts, and the educational opportunities of lectures, exhibitions and concerts." Located near Lake Champlain, Moriah had probably been chosen because its name so closely resembled Morya.

The little circle continued their study sessions, but without the Roerichs, it was not the same. Grant remembered, "Everything was possible with them here, but without them, things were difficult." Sina and Frances were both strong-minded women, opinionated and successful, and without the calming presence of the Roerichs, their egos sometimes intervened. While Sina, Maurice, and his sister Esther spoke Russian, the others did not, and although some of the letters from the Roerichs arrived in both languages, Frances often felt excluded when Sina had to translate the Roerichs' words.

The teachings encouraged them to exert their will to rise above petty differences, and they had the opportunity to do so, daily. As the Master explained to Helena:

In the formation of new communities, it is necessary to have in mind a troublesome specific human trait—I am speaking of envy. From rivalry, there gradually arises the viper of envy, and in the same nest are falsehood and hypocrisy.

The viper is small in size and its birth is sometimes impossible to notice. Therefore, at the formation of a community, it is necessary to foresee the differences between its members and to show that like the limbs of the body, none can be duplicated nor compared.

Thinking of his friends in New York, Roerich recorded advice in his diary on how to handle a journey like this one. Perhaps the third paragraph reveals another of the unmentioned reasons for the expedition:

You, my young friends, I remind you to provide yourselves with clothes for heat and especially for cold. The cold approaches quickly and sharply. Suddenly you cease to feel your extremities. Always have a little medicine chest at hand. The chief considerations are the teeth and stomach; also prevention against colds. Have bandages for cuts and bruises. All of this has already been of use in our caravan. Any kind of wine on the heights is very harmful. Against headaches—pyrimidine. One should not eat much. Tibetan tea is very useful for it is really hot soup that warms one very well. It is light and nourishing. The soda, which is used in the tea, keeps lips from painful chapping.

Do not overfeed the dogs and horses, otherwise bleeding will begin and you will have to do away with the animal. The whole path is strewn with the traces of blood. One must make sure, in advance, that the horses have already been on the heights. Many untried ones perish at once. On such difficult passes, all social differences are erased—all remain just people, equally working, equally near danger. Young friends, you must know all conditions of caravan life in the desert. Only in such ways will you learn to fight with the elements, where each uncertain step is already an actual death. Here you forget the number of days and the hours. Here the stars shine as heavenly runes.

The foundation of all teachings is fearlessness. Keeness of thought and resourcefulness of action are not learned in bittersweet, suburban summer camps. Not during lectures, in well-heated auditoriums do you realize the power of the work of matter, but upon the cold glaciers where you can understand that each end is but the beginning of something still more significant and beautiful.

When Roerich was unable to paint or even take photographs, he frequently made quick pencil studies in small sketchbooks, labeling each color in tiny Russian script. His passion for mountains was inexhaustible, and he observed that the atmosphere worked magic on everyone: “Without exception, people stop their disputes and all differences disappear as they sense the beauty of these no man’s heights. They help each other with their smallest needs and then share the warmth of campfires.”

The caravan traditions impressed him: “Often we saw bales of unguarded goods left behind by unknown owners. Perhaps an animal fell or became too fatigued to carry the goods, so it was left for later. And the property was safe, for no one would violate this ethic of the caravan. We

smiled, imagining what would happen if we left property unguarded on a city street. Yes, one enjoys greater safety in the desert....There is a special delight in knowing that one is safer and less molested in a distant, unpeopled place, than on the streets of a Western city.” He remembered that when he had entered the East End of London one night, a policeman had inquired if he was armed and prepared for danger. He seemed in far more danger on nights in the suburbs of Montparnasse or Hoboken than on the paths in the Himalayas or the Karakorum.

Roerich was exhilarated by the challenges of pitting himself against nature: “When the dangers of nature are essentially so joyous and arouse the vigor to purify the consciousness so greatly, it is a pity to descend from the unpeopled spaces into the whirl of the human crowd. Some people shy away from danger, but in me, it awakens an unknown resourcefulness.”

The Roerich Central Asian Expedition was now so far into Chinese Turkestan that the mountains were lost somewhere behind in gray mists. Missing them tremendously, he asked his diary:

How now to live and whither to direct my eye? We have emerged into a completely different country. Here Ladakhi heroism is no more, nor their clear singing with strong, agreeable voices. No more the *suburgans* and *kurgans* of fearlessness.

It is hot in this forgotten oasis. Around us we find only peaceful, agricultural, ignorant Sarts and the slow Turkis who have completely forgotten that their people took part in the marches of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.

Day by day they inched toward the formidable Takla Makan, an oval-shaped desert rimmed on three sides by lofty mountain ranges, among the most notable in Central Asia. The long, bleak, serrated Kunluns were to the south, the T’ien Shans to the north, and to the west, were the sky-piercing Pamirs, clustered masses of snow-covered mountains whose passes reach 20,000 feet. Takla Makan was 250 miles from north to south and 1,500 miles from east to west.

Seeing this vastness of mountain ranges and fierce deserts on a map, one might think nature had intended this region to serve as a barrier dividing the great Eastern and Western civilizations. But in the thirteenth century, the Mongol Empire had extended from the China Sea to the Danube, and European ambassadors, Christian and Buddhist missionaries, pilgrims with

their scriptures and sacred statues, and commercial travelers like Marco Polo had all traversed the patrolled Silk Road. Rather than dividing East and West, this region had linked them. By approximately AD 160, Buddhist teachings were widespread throughout Central Asia. Trained artisans had established Buddhist centers and exerted their influence by bringing Hellenistic art into Asia from thousands of miles away. Concealed in tumuli, graves, and caves, priceless relics of those times now awaited the excavator's spade.

October 9, 1925, was Nicholas's fifty-first birthday. What a happy day it must have been for him, for they had reached the region that had spawned the very tribesmen—the Scythians and the Sarmatians—into whose graves he may have dug so many years ago. He told his diary:

Soon we start on the old Silk Road. Now we can begin to search for antiquities. These places—and Khotan as well—are mentioned in the literature written three or four hundred years before the birth of Christ. We left Sanju oasis accompanied by the chirping birds, the joyous gurgling of the irrigation canals and the bleating of the goat herds. Then we turned and climbed the sandy incline of a riverbed and found ourselves in the real desert. The hot air vibrated on the horizon, heavy enough to interweave new formations in the sands spread out around us. But not a step of the great hordes that passed this way was revealed. Just as the waves of the seas do not show the traces of a passing boat, so the desert forgets the movement upon it. All eradicable signs are ebbd away.

The whole mercilessness of the desert starts here. A Kirghiz points to the hazy pink northeast and says, "There is the great Takla Makan!" He points out the hills that conceal buried cities, and still farther, those foothills of the heavenly mountains [the T'ien Shan]. And farther still lies the great Altai, which the Blessed Buddha reached. We inquire about antiquities only to be told that much has been carried away—but still more waits hidden beneath the sands. One can find it only gropingly. And now the wind blows up, and from the depths new *stupas* emerge and new temples and walls of unknown houses. The locals themselves are indifferent to it all.

For days they proceeded along the Silk Road toward China, named perhaps not only for the silk transported, but also for the lacy, iridescent designs in the wind-whirled, pearly dust and sand of the road. By mid-mornings it was so hot that the stirrups burned their feet through their boots. "What must it be like in summer?" Roerich wondered. There was great

sadness one evening when one of their mountain dogs, Amdong, perished from the heat.

The legendary beauty of China seduced them. It was a land walked by both Buddha and Confucius. Almost half of the entire Buddhist literature of teachings had been written in China, and Tibetan art was said to have its roots both there and in India. In fact, Roerich found it difficult to recall any architectural, sculptural, or painted monuments that did not originate from the delicate treasures of either China or India.

Ten miles from Khotan, they stopped to rest. Then they decided to rent a house, ignoring warnings they had been given to avoid Khotan because of the Tao-tai (governor). Other explorers, Przhevalsky for instance, had written of unpleasant experiences in Khotan, and even Marco Polo had condemned its customs. However, Nicholas felt confident they need not be concerned about the tyranny of any dangerous despot, civil unrest, or political intrigue. Certainly, he had not come so far just to be turned away by rumors of an evil governor.

His sense of security was increased because they were traveling with a passport from the Peking government, and had English and French passports as well. Furthermore, he had a special recommendation from the Chinese ambassador in Paris, a letter from the United States consul in Calcutta, and letters from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Archaeological Society in Washington, and six other American institutions. The greatest comfort, however, came from knowing they were a peaceful painting expedition, traveling under the flag of the United States. The former Chinese diplomat and officer accompanying the caravan would vouch for them, and they even had copies of all of the books published about Roerich's paintings. But none of these would be enough.

Compared with what the expedition was about to endure in Chinese Turkestan, the harsh ordeals of the Karakorum route would seem safe and simple. Only fourteen years after the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty, the China they were entering was a loosely allied group of principalities, where law was maintained by force. Although a republic had been established, the government did not function and had been replaced by the military and warlords with semiprivate armies and shifting alliances.

In Khotan, and later in Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang, the hypocrisy, ignorance, stupidity, and duplicity of devious Chinese bureaucrats severely

challenged the Roerichs. Since these experiences demanded that they control their tempers, develop greater patience, and search deeper within for peace, the Master advised them: “Master the problem of remaining cool throughout the entire Battle. The Battle of Light is just the beginning—millions are in it without knowing the final outcome. But you know, and this knowledge should make you wise and prompt a worthy decision....Truly, creative patience and CHEERFULNESS are the two wings of the workers.”

The first hints of trouble came when they attempted to rent a house, but they pushed their uneasiness aside and quickly established headquarters. Khotan was an ancient site and there was much that they wanted to explore, especially where shifting sands had uncovered new remains near the Rawak stupa and a recent landslide had exposed some old structures. Besides the scientific work, Nicholas was eager to capture the beauty of the Karanghu Tagh Mountains in and around Khotan.

Chinese Turkestan, however, was on the brink of war. As the Roerichs became embroiled in political rivalries and power struggles, they were asked, “Is it possible that in America and Europe they do not know about Sinkiang?” To which, with hindsight, Roerich later replied, “If we had known one-half of the reality, we would never have continued through China.”

Their Ladakhi caravanners were the first to complain: “Too much trouble in the bazaars.” They wanted to return to Ladakh. Even though those wonderful hillmen would be needed as the expedition continued into China, Roerich regretfully paid them for their splendid service and sent them off. Now they had to muster a new caravan of men and animals, and, amid this, friends and acquaintances began warning them that the Tao-tai, known to hate all “foreign devils,” seemed to be conspiring against them.

When the Roerichs presented their official papers, they were accused of having false passports. Their possessions were searched, their arms seized, all scientific work prohibited, and they were put under surveillance. Roerich was given permission to paint in the house but not outside it; photography and sketching were forbidden. The Tao-tai suspected them of spying. They narrowly escaped the fate of an American explorer, Owen Lattimore, who arrived a few months later and was locked straight into jail.

Roerich pondered in his diary:

One can imagine how much the Chinese intellectuals and students have to stand...I sorrow for them and can well imagine how they must blush for these others. I recall the tales of how Chinese officials searched Sven Hedin's trunks, looking for Russian soldiers; how Dr. Filchner, the German, had to sign a waiver that he had no claims against the Chinese for robbery; how badly Przhevalsky fared; how Kozlov was forced to enter the court of the Amban protected by twenty Cossacks to quell the lawlessness. It is sad to realize the new political regime has not brought this country out of gloomy medievalism. If the Amban chooses not to wipe his nose with a handkerchief, that endangers no one as much as his ignorance.

It is necessary to find ways to depart, in spite of the frost. We hired a camel caravan to carry our baggage to Kashgar, and once more the courtyard of the house and garden were filled with men and kneeling camels—a welcome sight to every explorer, but most especially to us at this time. Our old Chinese interpreter whispers, “The Chinese shoot from the rear—we'll be safer if you tell the escorting soldiers with guns to go ahead.” Our Expedition banner is ready. It will be carried out in front. Tzung sewed it in red and yellow with a black inscription: “Lo, an American Art Officer.”

“Lo” was one of the ways “Roerich” was said in Chinese, and by some strange circumstance it was also the word for danger.

The Roerichs were denied permission to leave, and their next four months were filled with anxiety and deceit. When they sought domestic help, they were shocked at the suggestion that they purchase the people they needed. They were told it would only be possible for them to leave Khotan if they retraced their steps over the Sanju Pass, which was now impassable until June. Roerich asked his diary, “Why, in point of fact, is Khotan considered a commercial center of Chinese Turkestan? We do not see any commerce. We live on a big road branching off to other provinces and into the depths of China, but seldom do we hear the camel bells or the cries of the donkeys. The rug industry has deteriorated considerably and the jade has disappeared. The antiques in Khotan seem exhausted and what is brought for our approval is mostly imitation.”

Roerich had read the fourth-century writings of Fa-hsien, who was alive when Khotan was thriving. Rich, generous, and hospitable Buddhists lived there then, who took great joy in their music. It seemed to Roerich that fierce screaming had replaced the melodious songs. He remembered his enjoyment of the singing of the Ladakhis, so full of rhythm and freshness. “Only when people are greatly depressed does their singing cease.”

Although much of the time passed in complete frustration and disappointment,¹ spurred by his ardent hope that the time of Maitreya was near, he managed to complete his *Maitreya* series.

On December 1, 1925, Nicholas recorded in his diary, “I cannot imagine a more remarkable contrast than when the shades of the desert are compared with those of the Himalayas and Ladakh. Sometimes it seems that my eyesight is gone or that my eyes are filled with dust. And where are the crystals of purple, blue, and green? And where is the abundance of fiery yellow and vivid red? It is like a gray and dusty storeroom! The sands cut the skin like glass and eat the tissues. My eyes have become so accustomed to tonelessness and not glimpsing any colors, that they slid into a void.”

When the haze cleared from the night sky, the stars were beautiful. Occasionally, when the sand stopped blowing, the faint blue range of the Kunluns was visible, reminding him of the charm of those mountains. Mornings, there was frost and the creeks were covered with ice. When the first snow fell, Helena fed the birds, and as masses of them flew around her, Nicholas’s thoughts went to the Hindus, who also fed the birds during the long winter months.

Just north of the Kunluns was said to lie a “Valley of the Immortals,” home of holy men whose wisdom was focused on saving humanity. The Roerichs heard that many who tried to locate them lost their way and failed. Interesting tales were told of huge vaults inside the mountains, where treasures had been stored since the beginning of history, and of tall men who disappeared into the rocks. These stories, and others like them, tantalized the family and took their minds off their captivity. All memory returned, however, the instant they glanced into the courtyard where their drivers were continually bemoaning their lot while milling about restlessly with their donkeys and camels.

A lama companion told them a learned Buddhist had wanted to arrange a discussion with George on the subject of Buddhism. At the time, the lama had been uncertain that George knew enough to speak on the foundations of the teachings, since many foreigners who called themselves Buddhists were unable to judge the truthfulness of the books and commentaries they read. Now that he perceived the depth of George’s knowledge, he was impressed enough to regret his uncertainty, saying, “George knows more than many

learned lamas. I have gradually and unnoticeably questioned you, and you, too, have explained everything. It is a pity I did not know this in Ladakh.”

On January 1, 1926, their things were packed, the camels were ready, and the Roerichs were preparing to depart quietly from Khotan, when a messenger arrived with the announcement that the Tao-tai specified that they could not go to Kashgar. They would be allowed to leave only if they went by way of the Tun-huang desert, famous for the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas and notorious for the bandits. Had the circumstances been different, the Roerichs would have been thrilled by this opportunity to visit the oldest, greatest, and most extensive rock temple complex in all of Central Asia.² But Roerich was furious. “With our arms taken away, it is impossible for us to go through the desert. Every expedition and every merchant who crosses that desert needs guns with him.”

This change of route would make a great difference. It would prevent them from seeing Yarkand, Kashgar, Aksu, or Kusha and deprive them of the opportunity to get much needed dental care, to receive money they were expecting, and to exchange their American checks at the Kashgar banks. Roerich fumed:

Our conference with the Tao-tai exceeded all limits of our patience. We explained that many of our plans would have to be altered. We had been expecting to meet our American friends [the Lichtmanns] in Urumchi and instead they must be notified that this is not possible. We told the Tao-tai that his conduct was offending the dignity of America. But he was adamant and informed us we could either go back to India over the Sanju Pass or cross through the robber-infested desert (of which he, himself, had warned). He would detain us in Khotan until we made our choice. This forced detention amounts to arrest—and without provocation.

Then the Tao-tai repeated everything he had said previously. He insisted that our passport issued by order of the Peking government, was not valid. “Is it possible that Mr. Chang Lo, the Chinese representative to the League of Nations, does not know how to give a passport?” The Tao-tai had never even heard of the League of Nations!

The disputes continued and Roerich felt as if he had fallen into a chasm of ignorance and madness.

And so we returned to our house arrested. We sat upon our packed trunks and ended New Year's Day by composing a letter to the Consuls of Kashgar: "On the eve of leaving for Kashgar, without cause, the Roerich Expedition has been arrested by the Chinese officials of Khotan. In view of the absence of a United States Consul, we are addressing ourselves herewith to the representatives of foreign governments in the city of Kashgar with an urgent demand that they give the most serious consideration to obtaining permission for the Expedition to proceed to Kashgar at once. In the event that permission of the Kashgar Tao-tai be insufficient, we beg you to telegraph the governor-general of the Province of Urumchi at our expense."

Helena was depressed over the dangerous situation. After setting out with an open heart, she wondered if there really was hope for humanity. Although the mission provided the only medical care for hundreds of miles around, the missionaries were so unpopular with the Chinese that they were periodically subjected to intense persecution. Not long before the Roerichs' arrival, the attacks had become so severe that the missionaries had decided to abandon their work. Throughout the entire expedition, Helena's healing abilities had benefited their caravanners and others along the route. People frequently approached their campsite in need, and the Roerichs were often taken somewhere to see sick ones. While still in Khotan, she had healed the Tao-tai's son—though that had not helped them escape their captivity.

George was also downcast: "The China we expected from museums and lectures has nothing in common with this!" Their Chinese translator begged them to keep quiet, fearing they would all be shot. Even the lama whispered, "The Chinese always behave the same."

To his diary, Roerich explains: "And so we live. Once we receive a piece of information from the heights and once from the abyss. Today a soldier stopped our Chinese at the bazaar, caught hold of his horse by the bridle and demanded money from him. Yesterday one of our 'guards' stopped a woman on the road and tried to demand money from her. And in such a country they have left us without arms! So we sit on our trunks amidst untold infamy. They brought us information from the bazaar that the Tao-tai is introducing the opium trade in Khotan."

Yet even in these days of seeming inactivity, there still were enough signs to remind them of their missions:

Here is a remarkable little casket (like the one to carry Chintamani)! And there is Maitreya!...After everyday life problems are discussed, most conversations seem to ascend to the order of things. There are periods, which could be called the “snowballs of events,” when each circumstance rolls one toward the common end. For seventeen years now, we have been observing the manifestations of the hastening of evolution.

Between the cradle of the future and the tomb of that which passes away, electrons of untold energy are gathering into new formations. And I, as the painter-hermit of the mountain abodes, am tracing the battle and victory of Maitreya with surety. Confidentially, it is the lines and signs of those approaching ones that I trace, as I keep track of what is passing away!

Even with such problems, the Roerichs believed that all forces were working together to lift evolution. In his diary, Nicholas quoted Sri Aurobindo: “We say to humanity: The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper, and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems that have troubled mankind, can only be solved by each person conquering the kingdom within. The solution does not lie in harnessing the forces of Nature to provide more comfort and luxury, but rather by mastering the forces of the intellect and the spirit. Man must liberate the freedom within—as well as without—and conquer external Nature from inside himself.”

Even with knowledge of the bigger picture, Roerich grumbled, “How is our consciousness enriched by sitting in Khotan? It becomes clear that a life such as that in Khotan should not exist. Imagine the lives of 100,000 people plunged into complete darkness, divested of all light. In this darkness, vice, lies, treachery, and ignorance are being born. Mutual strangulation is going on just below the surface in the bazaars. The people have managed to retain their small livelihoods only by cheating and deceit. The understanding of quality is gone, all promptness is forgotten, and the joy of creative originality has perished. How can this continue?”

A few days later, their mail from America caught up with them. It had taken almost as long to travel from Ladakh to Khotan as it had from New York to Ladakh, but the letters were a breath of fresh air. Roerich replied, “Beloved friends, with joy we read about all works, exhibitions, lectures, the school, the promoting of art among the people; all of this is so

imperatively needed. You are bringing true joy into the lives of the youth and are kindling heart-fires.”



Helena and George Roerich, Khotan-Yarkand, Chinese Turkestan, February 1926

The next day a telegram arrived, saying, “Washington undertakes necessary measures,” but Roerich was not comforted: “Our arms are not returned and I cannot attempt to sketch in unknown territories without them; I have a great many reasons for this, including my experience with

wild dogs and people. It is insulting to ignore all our documents and deprive us of our means of defense. Many expeditions have faced this kind of oppression, but somehow it seldom gets noticed. I am placing full responsibility upon the government of China.”

A second telegram arrived from America, but it was distorted beyond understanding. They were advised an order had been issued that all of their mail be opened before delivery. When money arrived from the Shanghai bank, they were thoroughly distressed to realize they were unprotected and unarmed while possibly all Khotan knew of their money. Their Chinese translator told them that, in the past, opening a stranger’s letter was punished by the removal of an eye, or the cutting off of a hand.

Finally a letter came from Major Gillan, a spy in the Great Game and the British consul in Kashgar, reassuring them that everything possible was being done. The next day another arrived, notifying them that the governor-general of Kashgar was allowing them to proceed immediately.

The lama, who regarded the insolence and cruelty as typical Chinese behavior, accurately advised them that they would be told that nothing at all had happened. Blaming everything on the governor-general of Sinkiang, the officials repeatedly assured them of friendship. Roerich said: “Since they are saying all that occurred was just fantasy, the officials now have the challenge of deciding on what pretext to return our seized arms. For three months we have passed through a wonderful schooling, but much of what we learned remains unclear. The local people warned us at the beginning not to believe the officials, and when we inquired why, they answered us, ‘Because they are fools.’ But there is some sort of warped reason even in the actions of hopeless fools. Now it occurs to me that not only stupidity is hidden here, but criminality as well.”

At the end of the month, Major Gillan finally arranged their freedom on condition that their guns and rifles remain locked away. Before anyone could interfere, they completed the final preparations—not knowing if they would be allowed to enter Urumchi. Since they had never unpacked after their last attempt to leave, all that was necessary was to hire a trustworthy caravan headman. They found one who provided them with seventy-four packhorses and agreed to get them to Kashgar in fourteen days. A military officer was ordered to furnish them with a guard of mounted soldiers to accompany them to Yarkand. He seemed uneasy as they inquired about the

day of their departure, as if conscious that a grave injustice had somehow been committed.

Two Chinese carriages were secured: one to carry Tumbal, their fierce Tibetan mastiff, traveling in the charge of a servant; the other for the case of firearms and their elderly Chinese interpreter, who was so depressed by the insulting attitude of the officials that he had taken to smoking opium. (By the time they reached Urumchi, it was necessary to dismiss him.)

On departure day, their courtyard was filled with trusted friends they had made despite the difficult and strained situation. Their route now read Yarkand, Kashgar, Kuchar, Karashahr, and hopefully Urumchi.



THE ROAD TO URUMCHI

The family was relieved to be traveling again. Roerich grieved as they left the Kunluns behind. Although he freely acknowledged the Himalayas as his favorites, to him each mountain range had its own endearing personality. “If we were able to create our own planet, it would be very mountainous!” he told his diary.

With the armed escort and their “Lo” flag in the lead, the caravan took on a fresh appearance as they headed for the land of the Sarts. Their escort had reported for duty mounted and armed with old Mausers and dressed in voluminous gray coats and fur caps with large earflaps. The commanding officer also carried an antiquated Chinese sword. Roerich thought they all looked old enough for retirement and wondered who would be guarding whom. The banner proved a wise addition, winning them greater respect than had all of their various papers and passports combined. It was quickly planted wherever they stopped for the night.

As they marched along, people frequently inquired, “What is this America?” Roerich enjoyed responding, “It is a far, far-away land, a land taken from a fairy tale, where anything is possible. Where wool is needed from all over the world and the guts from all the sheep of the Sarts would not make enough sausages to feed them; where people move and speak and write with the aid of machines, and do not count money on counting boards, but have instruments that do it for them.”

“Have you pictures of America?” people would ask, then struggle to snatch the photos from his hands and beg to keep them. Photographs of skyscrapers were especially cherished, as were colored labels and scraps of

paper. He was frequently asked for a book about America written in Turkish or Arabic so their mullah could read it to them.

Marching over the sands, Roerich was surprised to hear long-bearded Muslims ask if a Ford could pass on that narrow Chinese road, if a Ford could outrun a Kalmyk horse, or how much dirt a Ford could lift. The way that “Ford” was used made Nicholas wonder if they thought it was a man, a machine, or perhaps an abstract concept. He speculated that the name carried a momentum sweeping Asia with possibilities for a new life. Ford could do everything.

“Again the evening sands turn purple and the bonfires are lit,” Roerich wrote in his diary. “The caravan animals are much delayed with our belongings, but we will wait quite at ease as though these things which complicate life so much do not exist.” He discovered that their escort and some of the Chinese caravanners were confirmed opium smokers, and protested this great calamity. “And the light of the moon and the silence of the night are again permeated with human poison.” Even though it was decided to dismiss the smokers at the first opportunity, the opium problem plagued them continually throughout China.

Nicholas further described their journey: “Again the desert, but now traces of snow are everywhere. The silvery tones more severe. Though the snowy mountains on our left seem more ethereal and have greater variety, the sands are as wearisome as ever. I have seldom been so tired. In the twilight, a message is relayed that the oasis ahead is dry. Well, we shall go on somehow. About eight o’clock, in the darkness, under a dull moon, we enter Pialma. The Swedish missionary awaits us and tells us of other cases like ours with the Chinese officials—the same hypocritical instability and the same insolent changing of decisions.”

On one day, a moist bluish-white fog enveloped them. The sands seemed to merge into the horizon, broken only by an occasional bush, a partially covered skeleton, or the ruins of a tower.

They speak of buried cities and point toward the desolate Takla Makan desert. A sort of reverence and superstitious fear seems to resound when they pronounce the names of that great desert, or the Lob Nor salt marsh nearby.

We pass two narrow files of caravans on their way to Pialma for fuel, and then there is nothing else—no sounds, no colors—just the pearly dust blowing like a

pale curtain. Our ancient carriages proceed rhythmically on the slowly turning purple wheels. The Chinese officer has donned the most amazing yellow cape, lined with red—it appears to be flame-colored as it protects him from the wind.

I spot the silhouette of a small man walking boldly in the distance. From his gait I can tell he is not a Sart...nor a Chinese—for they do not take solitary walks through the desert. We make out a gray cloak and a cap with ear-laps, then, as he gets closer, we recognize he is Ladakhi.

Roerich's heart lifts: "Yes, a Ladakhi! They will go anywhere alone like that." They talked, and soon discovered mutual acquaintances. As the man continued on his way, Roerich mused on the courage it takes to cross the desert alone on foot—and about his own sense of ease and closeness with people from Ladakh. "I wanted to keep this passing friend with us."

The next morning began with a radiant glow. Though it was the end of January, it felt like spring. "The Turkis are working better today and for this they shall receive a sheep. Poor things, they have so little, they appreciate any gift. It seems the proprietor of the caravan is pressing them so hard that they all seem irritable." Roerich felt good and was happily devoting a part of each day to painting. There were many such days of contentment as they traveled the ancient Chinese road where jade, silk, silver, and gold had been transported for centuries.

One day a local Amban and his retinue joined them; hearing the cheerful camel bells and piercing chanting from their picturesque caravan reminded Nicholas of the hordes of Genghis Khan. Eventually, they arrived at a village, where a second Amban stepped out from behind the mud walls and ceremoniously welcomed the Chinese potentate. Then, holding hands, the two disappeared through large red gates. Watching through the sandy-pearly mist, Roerich saw their black silhouettes elongate on the clay wall, creating a scene from an old Chinese painting. To end that beautiful day, all religions were represented around the nightly campfire: chants of Allah! Allah! resounded from the Muslims preparing for their month of fasting, and two Ladakhis from the caravan started singing prayers to Maitreya.

As they continued toward Yarkand, dense clouds of mist moved in and gusts of wind blew from the north. "We journeyed through sandy corridors and deep creeks for a long time, not seeing much because of the all-pervading sand. Then gray salt marshes slowly started to appear among low

hillocks of a bluish-brown tone. We approached some high shores topped by a lofty frozen bridge, and the scenery became beautiful: some dams lay before us and a lovely cluster of houses and walls.”

A house had been prepared for them in Yarkand when they arrived in February 1926, but it was not adequate, so they stopped at the Swedish Mission with the Andersons and enjoyed exchanging tales with the missionaries. Over supper, they discussed the curative herbs growing wild in the surrounding fertile country and the large variety of vegetables being cultivated. Roerich observed that while people discussed the absence of trees, with just a little digging, he had found enough great stumps to indicate former forests.

A wonderful store of coal was also nearby. Analysis of some samples proved it was of the best quality. Roerich speculated that oil might be found in the neighborhood, and radium in the mountains. Since there was plenty of water during the summer, only a little diligence and resourcefulness would be required to start mining. If the Chinese would not fear everything new and if their officials were selected on merit and not just their capacity to steal, or were less immersed in gambling, opium, and hemp hashish, the plain would truly flourish with the help of only a few Ford tractors.

Leaving the friendly missionaries behind was difficult for the Roerichs, especially when their baby held Helena’s finger, staring happily at her with his blue eyes. They departed, nevertheless, and were soon marching again, watching the last patches of snow disappear as the billowing sand and dust again arose to choke them.



The house where the Roerichs stayed in Yarkand, February 1926

Then they reached Kashgar, on the edge of the Takla Makan. It was a pleasant oasis, though high winds off the Takla Makan enveloped it in huge clouds of sand that, legend had it, camouflaged the men from the sky who lived there.

The Roerichs were surprised to discover a little hospital, even better equipped than the Swedish Mission. The Russian doctor allowed them to replenish their medical supplies, and the local authorities were also helpful. No problems arose over the passports, and everyone seemed to concur with Roerich's indignation about their treatment in Khotan. As the family listened, many volunteered stories about plundering Chinese officials and showed them photographs of "victims of justice," rows of people with fingers chopped off or the tendons in their feet cut. Nicholas wrote his circle of coworkers in New York: "When you are seated in a peaceful Chinese restaurant in America, remember the robbers—the Tao-tais and the Ambans—who are keeping their people in complete subjugation. Let the sight-seeing motors to Chinatown remind you of the millions of people here who are perishing in the darkness of ignorance."

Letters from the States were waiting in Kashgar. Reading them, the Roerichs were transported back to America, sitting with their friends for a few brief minutes and catching up with the activities. The schools, lectures, and books were all progressing so well that the two buildings were no

longer adequate. After much designing and planning, construction had begun on a grandiose, ultramodern twenty-four-story skyscraper that would house all the institutions, the expedition paintings, a theater, a library, a restaurant, and several extremely large meeting spaces. There was to be a private sanctuary at the very top, apartments for them all, and inexpensive rental accommodations for artists, writers, and musicians.

Roerich replied enthusiastically to this exciting news: “To all friends greetings! A good year! My dear friends, at New Year, did you turn back or were you striving forward? In this call must be a command for those who desire to work, to devote themselves to the educational work. Build constantly. Build the towers high!”

His book *Adamant* had been published in Japanese, and he asked how it looked and praised the idea of an international literary contest:

Although we go beyond mail communication, we wish to see all of your work directed into the future, towards those masses whom art penetrates with such difficulty. Toward universities, schools, the people’s and workers’ clubs, libraries, village communities, railroad stations, prisons, hospitals, orphan asylums. There is a new consciousness growing; work to expand your creativity and see each obstacle as a birth of possibilities.

Speak to the people about this. Say nothing should impede them, that each barrier should be turned into a happy opportunity....Let pupils create freely in all branches—in art, in ballet, and in singing. Let them polish their creative gifts until they are singing their own song and creating their own dance.

Once the mail from America was digested, the Roerichs returned to their present surroundings in Kashgar, where the golden rays of the sun were reflecting off the ancient walls around them—walls that seemed to have withstood all the injustices of time. Perhaps Confucius, the Teacher of Ten Thousand Generations, had passed by these very walls as he traveled in his little cart. They drank tea with the British consul, Major Gillan, and his wife, then went to view some fantastic sand formations created over eons by water and earthquakes.

In the oldest part of Kashgar, they found the remains of an exceptionally large stupa—now a formless mass with the tower missing. Only the bricks lying at the base testified that it once stood as grand as the stupa in Sarnath.

Buddhist caves were nearby, bearing silent witness to the importance of Kashgar as a once-revered center of Buddhism.

Six miles outside the city was the Miriam Mazar. They had often seen *mazars* before—low tombs, found in old Kirghiz cemeteries, with semispherical vaulted roofs, each surrounded by poles with horsetails hanging from the ends. Ancient mazars are frequently Buddhist; this one, however, was exceptional because it was believed to be the tomb of Mary, the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ. A surprising legend told that she had fled to Kashgar after the persecution of Jesus in Jerusalem. As the Roerichs viewed her reputed grave, they could see that it was much worshipped.

They were plagued with money problems, for the amount needed in exchange for their traveler's checks was often more than post offices and banks could supply. The currency everyone honored was heavy silver Mexican dollars, but if they exchanged rupees for taels or sars, the Roerichs always lost. "Among the sars which were given to us with such difficulty in Kashgar, many are valueless. There should be ten letters written on each bill but often the tenth is torn off—which means no one will accept it. Whether in change from the bazaar or the bank, money needs to be carefully examined." Wooden chips inscribed with signs were even offered to them, with assurances that it was real money

Permission to enter Urumchi was finally received, but with frustrating conditions. They would be allowed to enter, but their guns would have to remain sealed and Roerich would not be allowed to paint outdoors. He was advised to try to paint anyway and see if the police actually prohibited it. It was also alarmingly close to the time of the spring thaw and flooding rivers. Urumchi lay eleven hundred miles to the northeast, and only donkey carts were available, meaning it would take fifty-five days to cross the desert instead of forty with horses. Roerich grumbled:

This is especially absurd when you realize that a whole day of exhausting travel is equal to two hours' ride by automobile or to an hour by aeroplane.

With this flatness of land, the roads here could be easily utilized for automobiles and planes would not need aerodromes. Perhaps a steel bird with a message of good cheer and necessary supplies would awaken the people's consciousness. A crevice of reason would open above these paths traversed by dusty and overloaded donkeys. I remember reading that Sir Aurel Stein was afraid the building of railroads and other signs of civilization would disturb the primitiveness of this

country. And I have always been against the ugly evidences of civilization. But this country is so paralyzed that it needs a super-measure of enlightenment. Buddhists know the reason for this apathy, for in the books of *Kanjur* it is said that if a country should reject the teaching of Buddha, the trees would wither, the grass droop, and the welfare disappear.

A new escort of soldiers arrived and Roerich complained, "They look more like insects than people." However, his mood improved greatly as soon as the opal silhouettes of mountains appeared against the yellow sky. With immense relief, he wrote, "Welcome beloved mountains!"

Another unpleasant experience awaited them. As an additional consequence of their arrest and long detention in Khotan, the river had already risen. "Some people gallop to meet us and warn of the water that has begun to overflow the road. This makes it necessary to detour twenty miles. Now we will be delayed by floods everywhere. We lost the best time for travel."

From Kashgar to Aksu to Kuchar the road was most tedious; dust penetrated everything, and they floundered through areas of deep quicksand and passed lifeless forests of gnarled, half-burnt desert poplars, left by travelers who set trees afire for campfires rather than chopping them down. The daytime heat was intense enough to kill anything: "It is very simple to give an idea of our passage today! On a round dish, place a good bit of gray dust; throw in a few pieces of gray wool and stick in fragments of matches. Let ants crawl over the bumpy plain, and in order to create realism, blow pillars of dust on it."

The sight of the snowcapped T'ien Shans, the Heavenly Mountains, lifted their spirits. There the Buddha was believed to have received his initiation, whereupon they burst into flames. After his prayers, the flames were extinguished by a snowfall.

The mountains marked the limits of the desert. Beautiful Buddhist cave temples and monuments—pilfered and ravaged over the years—had once filled the areas surrounding Kuchar. From what little remained, Roerich could detect that the ancient artists had been highly evolved and masterful with design and decoration. Well aware that this art was highly respected in Asia, he was saddened that careless European explorers had gouged out entire portions for museums, leaving only rubbish behind. And so many of

the Buddhist monuments in Muslim lands had been purposely destroyed with knives or fires. The intolerance and useless destruction was beyond his understanding.



Ancient Buddhist caves in Tograk-Dong, Chinese Turkestan, March 1926

I can sanction the removal of separate objects which have already lost their identity, but to arbitrarily hack a still standing composition apart?...Italian frescoes are not treated in that manner. Would it not be better to study all these monuments while carefully retaining them and fostering the right conditions for preservation? When fragments of frescoes are removed, they quickly disintegrate because of climate changes.

I remember seeing whole cases of frescoes destroyed by rats in Berlin, and in other countries, monumental pieces were piled up with no indication of their original purpose and meaning. Individual works of art need to move freely on our planet, but deeply conceived compositions must be preserved. Soon the speedy steel birds will fly all over the world putting all distances within reach. Let our winged guests be greeted by evidences of high creation rather than these ragged skeletons....When the regeneration of Asia shall come, she will ask, "Where are our best treasures, constructed by the creative spirit of our ancestors?" Even the Sphinx has not escaped this abuse.

Over the next few days, the Roerichs' thoughts dwelt on Buddhism and their yearning to locate old monuments. One evening, as they approached a lonely inn at sunset, something about the shadows on the sandy rocks high

above gave them the impression of cave openings. And so they were. The little structures and stupas beside the caves were covered by the same avalanche of rocks that had blocked some higher caves, but three passageways stood clear. Although the ceilings and walls were almost destroyed, inscriptions in Turki could still be recognized on the scattered relics. Nicholas thought they were fifth to eighth century. But the hollow echo from the floor below was the most tantalizing, for it indicated more caves. The caves faced east, and they imagined hermits sitting in the doorways, viewing the expansive mountains. A little mountain stream ran through a wooden trough under the caves; they watched as a Sart woman filled her pail with water, just as the hermits must have done.

A few days later Roerich noted in his diary: “One of the most beautiful days. Up to 7:00 it is freezing, and then the hot sun appears. First we find a valiant desert, in pearly tones. Then, a crossing brings us to the most unusual sand formations, like congealed ocean waves, hundred-towered castles, cathedrals, and rows and rows of yurts—all in endless variety. After we fed the horses, we noticed two caves with traces of colored decorations, so we dismounted and hurried over the sandy mounds.”

He suspected these were the celebrated caves explored and documented by LeCoq, but they were much more impressive than the photos. Perhaps the silence intensified everything. “One has to imagine all these cavern-shrines vividly and brilliantly frescoed, as they were before the walls darkened, with the statues of the Blessed One and the Bodhisattvas restored to their niches.” They found traces of hundreds of Buddhas in one cave, and in another a Buddha still reclined across part of the remaining ceiling. They could feel hollow spaces under the floors and suspected that unopened compartments lay below.

It was the beginning of the month-long fast of Ramadan. The Muslims in their party fasted during the day but were free to eat during the night, and on the eve of the fast they traditionally played and danced to keep from sleeping when they could eat. At one o'clock in the morning, the drums, trumpets, and singing began, making the dogs bark and run wild for the rest of the night. A few nights later, a fierce *buran* (high wind) struck with the power of a flying dragon and roared until daybreak. Their tent flapped so violently that they expected it to blow away. As suddenly as it started, the

wind stopped, and the peace of the sapphire blue sky and mother-of-pearl and opal desert once again surrounded them.

March 24, 1926, dawned hot and the Roerichs awoke with America on their minds. It was the anniversary of the founding of their institutions. Happily, they wrote to the little circle:

Our dear friends, we are sending our thoughts to America, to the Museum and the school and for the festivities of the day. The distance does not really exist, and we feel as if we are present at your annual meeting. Traversing these spaces, we are frequently reminded of the plains of Mississippi and Missouri and the immeasurable steppes of Russia.

Just now, we are rejoicing, for we are in the company of people who trade with America. This demonstrates that cooperation with Asia already exists. Both continents remember their former unity as though divided by a cosmic catastrophe. How much of the Mongolian we found in the Mayans and the red-skinned Indians! How much equal expanse there is in America and Asia. And now, in this moment of regeneration, Asia remembers its distant ties. Greetings to America, we wonder when we shall see you dear friends again.

They were now heading toward the villages of the Kalmyk. Despite a veil of faint, foggy mist, the ridge of the magnificent T'ien Shan Mountains loomed to the north, emanating such a beautiful quality of ethereal blue that Roerich was struck by the perfection of their name—Heavenly. The expedition was about to enter the region of Central Asia that came closest to matching in size and shape the Tibetan descriptions of Shambhala.

Enclosed by mountain ranges, this huge oval-shaped area could be viewed as an enormous lotus blossom surrounded by a ring of snowy mountains. The small kingdoms around the basin fringes may well have been the ninety-six principalities of Shambhala's outer region. Approaching the area, the expedition heard many exciting legends, such as the story of a dark-complexioned, serious woman who came out of subterranean passages and went about helping people, or the unusual looking horsemen seen near a cave and then vanishing—probably through a subterranean passage into their own land. Stories of underground irrigation canals, dwellings and passages and ancient Buddhist cave-temples gave an unusual aura to the land, reminding the Roerichs of India and Tibet, home of those anxious to serve humanity.

The family stopped to meet the chief prince of the Karashahr Kalmyk, the Toin Lama. Considered an incarnation of one of the most learned priests in Shigatse, Tibet, he was born in the higher valleys of the T'ien Shan and had an outstanding personality. When the Roerichs and the lamas accompanying them informed the prince of the predictions of Maitreya's timely coming, he listened with astonishment and replied, "If you come from the West and know this greatest knowledge, then verily the great time has come! We are all ready to sacrifice our possessions and everything that may be of use to Shambhala. All of our riders will be mounted when the Blessed Rigden Jyepo needs them."

The family had long anticipated stopping in the T'ien Shans, which had been worshipped as the gods' haunt for fifteen centuries before the birth of Confucius. Dozens of Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist temples stood there, as well as two steles over a thousand years old, with inscriptions that were still legible. According to tradition, pilgrims climbed the famous brick-paved road to the summit at dawn to view the world emerging, pristine gold in the first light.

The Roerichs planned to view the lovely frescoes and inner shrine of the Tai Miao Temple and browse through the bazaar where yellow mud tigers, brass work, and Kwan Yin figures were sold. Finally they would continue up the winding six-mile road called the Broad Way to Heaven, where prayers and pleas were incised into the rocks. They also looked forward to visiting a large monastery situated to the north, and to spending time in Kalmyk encampments.

There was another route to Urumchi, which went through the Turfan Depression, the hottest spot in China (504 feet below sea level) and was four days longer. "Why go through unbearable heat," they asked themselves, "when we could go through the mountains?" However, the expedition would need special permission from Karashahr to go through the mountains, and the Roerichs knew the local authorities felt uneasy about scientific explorations. At first, the Karashahr authorities seemed favorably disposed, and the Roerichs left the meeting believing that no obstacles would be put in their way. But, unfortunately, that impression was false. Late one evening, they received a visit from the postmaster and the secretary of the magistrate, who informed them that the Urumchi authorities had sent orders to deny the expedition permission to cross the mountains.

The Roerichs again found themselves pawns in the middle of a grave political situation. Surrounded by a dense crowd of threatening Torguts, they were prepared to break open the sealed arms box to defend themselves. Roerich ordered their Chinese guard to tell the crowd to disperse or expect to be fired on. George described what happened: “The officer was greatly surprised at our firm stand and ordered his soldiers to guard our camp. It was an exciting scene; when the Chinese soldiers pushed with their whips and rifles, the crowd slowly dispersed. Then the Torguts suddenly became friendly, and hinted that the whole affair was staged by the officers as an harassment, to force us to abandon our plans.” Roerich recorded in his diary:

Hardly has evening fallen before a new villainy occurs. We are told we will not be permitted to go over the pass and ordered to continue on the long, tiresome highway, through the sands and heat. An added insult; an added imposition; an added derision of the artist and the man. Is it possible that we will not see the monasteries? Is it possible that we must go by way of the dry sands, and be deprived of all that beauty?...We hurry to speak to all of the officials....They are either not at home, or indisposed. A secretary tells us the governor fears for us on account of the great snows in the mountain pass. We explain that the snow is no longer there, but to be safe, we could take a lower pass.

The authorities’ decision, of course, was negative. In his diary, an angry, disappointed Roerich complained: “These Chinese are capable of ruining every day; they are capable of transforming each day into a prison and a torture. In spite of the heat, the humidity and dust, we must go the long way. Helena says she will die from the heat, but the Chinese smile and notify us that their governor has a very small heart.”

Frustrated, the Roerichs sent a telegram to the governor-general of Urumchi: “Please wire instructions to the Magistrate at Karashahr to allow Roerich Expedition to proceed to Urumchi by mountain way. Health of Mrs. Roerich does not allow her to continue journey through the hot, sandy desert of the long road. The mountain road permits us to reach Urumchi sooner.”

Again to his diary: “The sense of surveillance and compulsion is abominable. How can I work when the warlords, with their ‘very small

hearts,' stand behind my back? Our whole mood is spoiled and we are again waiting as though in some medieval Chinese dungeon.”

Not knowing if their telegram was really sent, they decided to await the outcome at a monastery. Their escorting soldiers chided them, and the Toin Lama said he was afraid to get involved. To their little group in America, Roerich wrote:

Friends, you will think I am exaggerating somewhat. If anything, I should be glad to understate, but the occurrences are monstrous.

Again, a crowd of Kalmyks come with Chinese soldiers who have orders to demand our immediate departure. They are noisy and threatening. This means that I cannot work, nor can we visit the monastery. The whole purpose of the Expedition vanishes. The only thing to do is to leave Chinese soil as soon as possible. Within two hours, we demand our passports and a letter stating the reasons for our expulsion. The passports arrive with an official letter stating that the expulsion is by command of the governor of Karashahr, who accuses us of making maps. They offer to give us carts so we can leave more quickly.

I tell them that I am fifty-two years old; that I was honorably received by twenty-two countries, and that for the first time in my life, I am subjected to expulsion. Who would expect this treatment from an area of semi-independent Turguts? What kind of independence can this be—it is nothing but humiliating slavery: to cast out a guest violates all the customs of the East!

And where shall we go? Back to the heat of the desert? And can Helena endure it? Her heart is absolutely unable to bear the heat. And where is the nearest border in order to hide from the Chinese torturers?

Karashahr quickly became a black city for them. Roerich told the diary: “Verily I should much rather paint than write of these harmful, malevolent evils. But apparently it has to be so. Probably this will be useful somehow. America awaits my paintings of the Buddhist heights, but let the Chinese government explain why we were not permitted to go to the monasteries. In Sikkim, they met us with trumpets and banners; but here on Chinese soil, we are met with ropes...Let us get away from this Chinese threat quickly. Before us lie the islands of Japan; and perhaps this is the time to visit the long-dreamed-of Easter Islands, and see their mysterious stone giants.”

Prohibited from visiting the temples, painting, or even approaching the Heavenly Mountains, they were doomed to creep along hot sands for twelve days to reach Urumchi.

Instead of mountains, instead of monasteries, instead of Maitreya—again we have yellow steppes around us. What right do the Chinese have to deprive us of seeing beauty?

And to think in only four days, we could have gone amidst the far-off snows, through the solitary mountains. Even from this distance, those mountains are so beautiful! With pearly vistas, they stand dark bronze, with greenish, carmine spots, and blue, sapphire, purple, yellow, and reddish brown glinting against the gray sky. The dark shingled slopes of the desert behind seem strewn with light yellow bushes. A whole carpet of Asia! Today the first small pine appeared. For seventy-four miles, we saw only one inn and it had a bad well, one hundred feet in depth. And during the whole day, we passed only two small caravans of emaciated mules.

Rather than a big Chinese road, it seems we are in undiscovered country. We drag ourselves along this burning, stony desert, while hot air quivers on the horizon. The nonexistent lakes and the mirages melt into a gray pitiless plain as they merge in the heat with the far-off mountains. It is worse when we think, we might already be in Urumchi, reading our mail with good news from America, if not for the despotism of a stupid monster.

After tramping in the foothills for another three days, the family began to feel the refreshing cool mountain air from the eastern side of the T'ien Shans. Finally they were on the outskirts of Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang, the most inland city in the world. The road was suddenly so clogged with traffic that George wondered if the numerous riders, leading their strings of camels and horses, had sprung from underground: "We passed a long convoy of heavily loaded carts and soldiers in dark gray uniforms. The squeaking noise of the huge wheels, the trampling of the horses and the high pitched shouts of the drivers blended into one discordant cacophony. These were baggage trains for troops dispatched to the Kansu border."

War had been declared, and the atmosphere was heavily charged with anxiety. The governor-general was hastily mobilizing troops, and the arsenal was feverishly preparing ammunition and repairing firearms. Disquieting reports came from the Mongolian border, where clashes were occurring between Mongolian frontier troops and Kirghiz tribesmen. Some ten thousand men had already gone, and more were being trained in Urumchi. It was definitely not the time to study Buddhist ruins or paint.

Three greatly relieved Roerichs were met by friends and escorted to a house reserved for them in the former Russian Concession. A long argument

ensued at the courtyard entrance when a Chinese officer tried to requisition their carts and wagons for military purposes. He finally agreed to delay the matter. Their quarters were quite unsuitable to accommodate all their men, baggage, and horses, so they decided to hunt for better accommodations—a difficult task in the confusion of the walled city.



WAYFARER, LET US TRAVEL TOGETHER

Urumchi's Russian community provided a rare treat for the Roerichs. During most of the two years of the expedition, they had barely been in contact with the Western world and knew little about current events. For friends and the exchange of ideas, they essentially had each other and the knowledgeable lamas accompanying them. Along the route they met missionaries, and travelers shared their evening fires. Now Nicholas encountered a woman who remembered him from his school days in St. Petersburg. "We used to watch you through a crack in the door when you came to see Kuindjy," she confessed.

Ah, how long ago that was! For Roerich, it was lovely to find one who shared his remembrances of Arkhip Kuindjy, his revered and beloved art teacher, the fearless liberal who had inspired students with his lectures, aided needy students, and fed lunch to most of the birds of St. Petersburg. "The memory of Kuindjy does not tarnish with time or rust," Roerich told his diary.

The courtyard of the Russian settlement was always crowded. The family enjoyed watching the children of varied nationalities, some playing pegs while others swung on gym bars. Roerich, who loved seeing the world's peoples living harmoniously, heard of a club being organized and rejoiced in his journal, "It is so simple, and human, and joyous to behold."

A low white house with two rooms and a foyer had been prepared for the family, but when they learned that two foreigners were being evicted so they could move in, they decided to live in a yurt outside of the city. Their caravanners were afraid robbers would attack there, so Nicholas and George

went to speak to the town dignitaries (the Fan and the Tu-t'u), who assured them that the trouble they had experienced in the past would not be repeated here. But at that very moment, the chief of police and a translator were searching their living quarters and questioning Helena about the artwork.

They moved out near the snowcapped Altas Bogdo-Ulas, sacred mountains to the south of Urumchi. A late April snowfall made it necessary to light the stoves, and a delighted Roerich wrote: "During the night everything became white. By six in the morning, all was covered with snow, and we awoke to find billows of milky clouds creeping along the Bogdo-Ulas. It is a long time since we have seen mountains with all their fine crystal-sharp lines covered in snow."

After speaking with an old friend (probably a White Russian who had also left Russia under difficult circumstances), Nicholas, the romantic idealist, mused, "An inexpressible charm lies in the fact that people leave their native places and on invisible wings make the earth small and accessible. This accessibility is the first step toward reaching other worlds, farther away."

While all around them people were speaking of war, pillage, and the approaching heat, the Roerichs shared in conversations of a more satisfying nature, for many people here had broad interests similar to their own.

In the silence of the suburb of Urumchi, in a comprehensive way, we speak about the tasks of the evolution of humanity, about the movement of nations, about knowledge, about the significance of color and sound...It is gratifying to hear this open-minded reasoning...We learn that some islands have merged into the depths and out of the depths have arisen new ones, powerful ones.

During the time we were marching through mountains and deserts, some smaller stars have become of first magnitude and a whole island, with a population of ten thousand, sank into the sea. Lakes have dried up and new unexpected currents gushed forth. The cosmic energy confirms the steps of the evolution of humanity. Yesterday's "inadmissible" fairy tale is already being investigated by science. The refuse is being burned and the ashes are fertilizing the seedlings of new conquests. The conversations we hear are very significant...The Olets and the Torguts know about Issa, and this makes all denials of the legend even harder to understand. Every enlightened lama speaks about it as confidently as any other historical fact.

We were interested to be reminded of Mohammed's prophetic mission that began on Mount Hira. That after Archangel Gabriel had informed Mohammed he

was to be God's messenger, he was told that people would consider him a blasphemer, and he would face hostility, harassment, exile, and war. But this warning only served to strengthen his resolve and bring him peace.

It was now Easter, and saying, "Christ is risen," many lamas streamed into the house to share the joyous occasion. Roerich inquired in his diary, "Well, western clergymen, would you rejoice with the Buddhists on their holidays?" The Roerichs unpacked the thankas and Buddhist paintings they had been collecting and hung them so everyone could enjoy their beauty. All admired the resonant colors and deep meanings of the figures, and earnest discussions of Shambhala and Maitreya filled the house.

The following morning, a Mongolian lama friend arrived. Overjoyed, Roerich wrote: "The spiritual teachings we have gathered from the south are the same as he brings from the north. His eyes brimmed with tears when he told us exactly what fills the consciousness of those people and what they await. Another friend was near Lan-chow for six months, and each day he heard the significance of the future Maitreya mentioned. 'We have known these things for a long time,' said the lama, 'but we did not know how it would come about. And now the time has come. But we cannot tell everyone, only those Mongols and Kalmyks who comprehend.' The lama is such a humble man that until he spoke about various proofs, I would not have expected him to have such vast knowledge; he even spoke of the spiritual significance of the Altai to Russia."

Meanwhile, conditions on the border continued to worsen. The wireless and telegraph were strictly censored, and private individuals were seldom permitted to use them. Newspapers and other printed materials were forbidden throughout the province, and foreign magazines, papers, and correspondence were censored before delivery. The English diplomatic representative advised the Roerichs that the frontiers were practically closed. All foreigners, even the Chinese from China proper, were being viewed with great suspicion, and were often arrested and deported. It was especially difficult for those Chinese who had been educated at foreign universities and were trying to implement their modern ideas in China.

Due to the numerous bands of brigands and deserters who had abandoned their posts, the routes to Peking were in turmoil. The expedition was advised that the only safe artery open to foreigners was by way of

Chuguchak and through Siberia. The Roerichs heard that their friend Allen Priest had gone to Siberia through the Altai Mountains. If the way was secure through Siberia, they would abandon their plans for Peking, go to Lake Zaisan, on to Omsk, and then to Moscow.

So the couple applied to their friend Alexander Bystrov, the Soviet consul in Urumchi, for transit visas. They explained they were on a mission for the Mahatmas, who wanted to create a Buddhist federation. Therefore, it was necessary for them to enter the USSR. From there, they planned to go to Mongolia, get in touch with the Panchen Lama, and embark upon a spiritual journey for the liberation of Tibetans. Advised it would take him about two weeks to receive an answer, longer than they had expected to be in Urumchi, they accepted the hospitality of the director of the Russo-Asiatic Bank and stayed in his house and courtyard.

They passed their days meeting with local officials and exploring the city. Detachments of troops marched through the streets daily, usually preceded by a band of musicians and several standard-bearers carrying huge red, yellow, and multicolored flags. George thought the soldiers looked like a motley collection of uniformed ruffians. Often the Roerichs noticed little boys carrying rifles and marching with the troops. They learned these boys had been entrusted with the rifles while the real owners enjoyed a smoke in a nearby restaurant.

Wherever the Roerichs went, they heard about the Mongolian Altai Mountain. They also heard tales of the Katun River, where it was said that the last war of the world would occur—to be followed by a time of peaceful labor. There were also stories of a village of Russian “Kerjaks” (Old Believers), who preserved the ways of the old Christian faith and lived in complete isolation from “worldly men.”

Eight days passed before the weary family was honored with a luncheon and informed their passports would be ready the next day. When they returned to the banker’s house, their guns were already there. The next day a scroll was delivered, which, when unrolled, was as long as Nicholas was tall. To their surprise, it was their passport, with their equipment and personal effects itemized and the artistic and scientific aims of the expedition spelled out. “Such stupidity—to write on a passport the number and description of all objects,” Roerich fumed in his diary. “How many

changes might take place on the journey!” But all that really mattered was that they were finally able to depart from Chinese Turkestan.

Before leaving Urumchi, Roerich drew up a will, which he left with the Soviet consul. It stipulated that in the event of his death, if Helena were no longer alive, all of the expedition’s property and the paintings would go to the Soviet government. Considering that the paintings already belonged to the institutions in New York, one might speculate that this action was actually to ensure Soviet good will—or maybe it was a foreshadowing of the time to come when the Roerichs might well have wished that none of the paintings were in America.

All they could find for the journey were three carts, into which they crammed the drivers, a Tibetan lama, and Ramsana, their Ladakhi right-hand man. Their dog, Tumbal, had been left behind at the mission. If they were really going to leave China, they would have to whittle their possessions down until everything fit in the carts. Grateful they still had their horses, an exasperated Roerich complained to his diary, “Oh, how many difficulties with the packing! Possessions—enemies of man! Will we really leave tomorrow?”

Of course, the answer was no. Now there was trouble with the wagon drivers, a surly lot, who wanted to set their own pace. Roerich complained, “The old driver informed me that he will not go according to our conditions, but as God desires. I ask them to translate this to him, ‘that he can also return as God wills.’”

Finally they left Urumchi and the Kalmyk villages behind them, while the majestic beauty of the three snowy peaks of the Bogdo-Ulas shone joyously and full of light. On their left, the snowy ridges of the T’ien Shans sparkled purple and blue, and the air was filled with the scent of wild mint and wormwood. When the moon rose, it was so luminous that the glow of the Chinese dusk paled at once and the Bogdo-Ulas drowned in the mist. The T’ien Shans would keep them company for another three days until the expedition started into the bleak steppes, salt marshes, and saline lakes of Dzungaria.

Helena regretfully summed up their China experience: “If only the Chinese had received us well, so much would have been changed.” As Roerich reviewed the whole episode, he asked, “And is it possible that none of you Chinese of Sinkiang, who consider yourselves civilized, are

indignant at the license of the Khotan official? Is it possible that I will have to leave the boundaries of Chinese Turkestan with the firm conviction that this country is not fit for cultural intercourse? We sincerely wish to say a word of sympathy for China or to justify her! But we will proceed instead, feeling like prisoners who have escaped from the nest of robbers.” They would experience similar feelings of disappointment and frustration again ten years later.

Their first night out, they arose at 2:30 a.m. and spurred the ill-tempered drivers enough that they were ready to leave in two hours. Dawn broke cloudy, then the clouds changed into opalescent fissures, and a rain began that cooled everything off. Nicholas wrote in his diary: “The fresh grass was richly green and fragrant after the rain, but our mood was somewhat disturbed by the continual custom houses and inspections of our passports.” By day’s end, their arms had been inspected three times and the passports deciphered by an illiterate opium smoker representing the governor: “He read our five-foot-long passport syllable by syllable, and asked us to take our guns out of their cases. Then he timidly touched a revolver, paced for a long time, mumbled something to the innkeeper, and left. Can such an official be included in the evolution of humanity? Simply the dregs. But these stupidly annoying dregs are capable of obscuring the shining mountains and transforming every peaceful mood into the feeling of a prison. Away with such ignorance! And what for? Why do we go on these highways when we could turn and go into the mountains and cross without any inspections whatsoever?”

One of the expedition’s original objectives had been to survey and record the graves and other vestiges of nomad culture along the northern rims of the T’ien Shans, the Jain Mountains, and the Altai, none of which had been recorded by other archaeological expeditions. Now, however, Roerich realized that the ancient trade routes had been so thoroughly excavated and plundered that the probability of finding anything was small.

The comparatively untouched province stretching from Urumchi to the steppes of Russia was another story. The entire border of Dzungaria and Mongolia was a vast cache of the past. Burial mounds were known to contain ancient nomad chiefs, with their most precious possessions. Dzungaria’s sands, however, also teemed with gangs of well-armed bandits back from the civil wars. Although Chinese soldiers and local militiamen

guarded the mountain trails, frequent raiding and murder were quite common.

After all the Roerichs had endured, they were more intent on reaching the Siberian border as quickly as possible than on excavating in the terrible heat, so they began traveling at night. Over the next several days they passed through numerous Kalmyk and Kirghiz encampments where immense herds of horses and cattle grazed. Grave sites were everywhere, some surrounded by mysterious concentric rounds of standing stone slabs or other relics of the nomads' past. Stopping to dig or explore, or gather support for the pan-Mongolian New Russia, however, was out of the question.

Up at four. How beautiful! The mountains become pink. A purplish mist is rising and the grass is luxuriant. We leave on a wonderful road, enjoying the fresh, sweet scent of the silver jilda. The birds are singing unlike anything we have heard for a very long time. We cross a plain strewn with mounds of graves while the silvery blue mountains stand there like a forbidding wall. At half-past nine, we reach Yan-zi-hai; and just in time, for the sun is already scorching hot and everything is searing.

Jubilant, we enter a small clay hut where we shall rest until twelve tonight, and then in the coolness we shall proceed to Shiho by moonlight. We can already feel the nearness of Russia; it is something almost tangible. Either the village streets are broader, or there are more plowed fields. And the inns are cleaner! Once more we sit in a little clay hut; the swallows are busy with their nests under the beams. It seems that we are back twenty-five years along the plain of Russia. Helena speaks of other huts where we sat in Russian villages or under the walls of the monastery of Suzdal. Or later, when we were in the cells of Siena and San Gimignano, Italy. When we stop and think of all that we have seen, it is truly amazing!

The Roerichs had requested that the Lichtmanns meet them in Moscow but had never received a reply:

We have been waiting for news from our friends in America for months now. Where and whence are we going to receive it? Up to May 16th, we still did not receive an answer to a telegram that we sent April 12th. The condition of the telegraph station, of the wires, of the insulators, all spelled "Resign all hope." The words that did arrive were distorted beyond recognition, as if written in code.

The crest of the T'ien Shans is disappearing, while far ahead toward the north, the light line of the Tarbagatai Mountains starts to appear. In the steppe, Chinese

tombs like little *kurgans* are crumbling and we learned of Tsagan-Khutukhta, a new face of Maitreya. How instructive it is to compare the images from behind the Himalayas with those from the North! While not deviating from the truth, each country adds its own details and observations; and though he is called Tsagan-Khutukhta here, he is still coming.

The pulse of evening makes us uncomfortable, and after a drama with the drivers (who would rather rest than continue on), we decide to extinguish the lights, muffle the harness bells, load up our arms and depart despite the rain. For twelve hours (with two hours to feed the horses), we march through deep sands—difficult for the horses and carriages. We see few inns and there is no food. The sands change into the dark-pebbled hills of the Jair Mountains. Everything becomes clear. Blinding threatening clouds whirl and thunder begins ahead of us. We stop on a little hill near a wretched Chinese temple. The ridge of the Heavenly Mountains stretches in front of us, merging into the mist for the last time. They are so heavenly in tone, so rich with their white crests. Dear mountain snows, we shall see you again only in my paintings!

Finally, after carts breaking down, rude drivers and officials, and several nights without sleep, they arrived at the no-man's land separating the Chinese and Soviet frontiers. It was here that raiding bands of Kirghiz most frequently molested travelers. Roerich told his diary:

More border hassles; one carriage wheel broken. And here we sit again in our tents. Perhaps it will be the last time for a long time. The full golden moon looks unflinchingly through the flap of the tent; it brings back to us such pleasant memories of tents and beloved mountains. Today we passed a few nomad monasteries, and saw that Maitreya is revered there. But to avoid complications with the Chinese, we did not stop. What a pity, what a pity!



Members of the expedition repair a broken wheel. Center, wearing a pith helmet: Roerich. Dzungaria, May 1926

How solemn is this night of the end and the beginning! Farewell, Dzungaria! Here we descended and ascended green hills, and righted our fallen carriages. As a farewell, she reveals herself with abundant grass and flowers such as we have not seen for a long time: wild peonies, crimson red, yellow lilies, golden heads of a fiery orange color, irises, briar-roses. And her blue snow mountains, and the chrysopruse of the hills. The air is pervaded with the breath of spring.

The Kirghiz escort rode near us; they chased the wolves that crossed the road and picked a bunch of red peonies for Helena. The Kirghiz look just like the Scythians, who adorned the ancient vase we had; they wear identical caps, leather trousers, and half caftans. Only one more crossing and we will pass beyond the peak where a small heap of stones signifies the end of China!

And so they were back in their motherland, along with the many new paintings and albums of sketches Roerich had accumulated. Ironically, the first village they came to was named Rurikowsky. What more appropriate welcome than a village named after Prince Rurik. Exhilarated, Roerich wrote: "The white walls of the border post of Kuzeun, U.S.S.R. greets us! Welcome spring soil, in thy new attire! Continuous grass and little goldenheads. Soldiers approach us with questions. They are generally anxious to do what is best for us. We would expect crudeness and ignorance in an isolated little post like this, unmarked on the map; but they apologize

for taking our time and for bothering us. The head of the post comes out with his assistant, and his family, and we are invited to remain overnight.”

The boat that would carry them across the broad, smooth-flowing Irtysh River was to depart in three days. The soldiers at the post rejoiced to have this time in their company. Now, with the ordeals of China behind them, Helena started to receive transmissions from Master Morya for Book Three of the Agni Yoga series, titled *Community*. It opened:

Wayfarer, friend, let us travel together. Night is near, wild beasts are about, and our campfire may go out. But we can conserve our forces if we agree to share the night watch.

Tomorrow our path will be long and we may become exhausted. Let us walk together. We shall have joy and festivity. I shall sing for you the song your mother, wife and sister sang. You will relate for me your father's story about a hero and his achievements. Let our path be one.

Be careful not to step upon a scorpion, and warn me of any vipers. Remember we must arrive at a certain mountain village. Traveler, be my friend.

We are dissipating superstition, ignorance and fear. We are forging courage, will and knowledge. Every striving toward enlightenment is welcome. Every prejudice caused by ignorance is exposed. Thou who dost toil, are the roots of cooperation and community alive in thy consciousness? If this flame has already illumined thy brain, then adopt the mountains as signs of our Teaching. Greetings to workers and seekers!

Master Morya went on to explain that a planetary body can be just as sick as any other organism and that the spirit of the planet is affected by the condition of its body. Earth was suffering as from a fever because it had been cut off from the other worlds that could send assistance; therefore, poisonous, suffocating gases were accumulating in the lower strata of the subtle world.

On the first of June, 1926, they boarded the *Lobkov*, a boat in better condition than they had expected. They felt so refreshed by the sea breezes, the cool days and nights, and the delight of speaking their mother tongue with people who had open, curious minds that they were glad they had not decided to go to Omsk by train. Though the wind soon became a cold downpour and there was no heat, Helena was tremendously pleased, for she had worried that it might be too hot on the boat.

Here on the frontier, they again found people who spoke of Buddha, who understood Buddhism as a teaching rather than a religion. These people appreciated Buddha as a man, an actual historical personality, and were interested in the manuscripts of Issa. Roerich asked, “What accounts for this vital, clear thinking?” He wondered if he would have appreciated everyone so much had he not just come from China.

They stopped for three days in Omsk and were surprised to read newspapers stating that the Roerich expedition had “found” the legend of Christ. “How could we find something that has been known for so long?” Nicholas wondered: “What we found was greater than a legend, for we found that the story of the life of Issa, the Teacher, is accepted and alive throughout the entire east. On the borders of Bhutan, in Tibet, Sikkim, Ladakh, and Mongolia. Even in the Kalmyk encampments it is accepted as a firm, calm realization. That which is a sensation for the West is frequently old knowledge for the East.”

The family toured their first Russian museum in many years and found Roerich’s own paintings on exhibit—it was like seeing old friends: “To our surprise, we found two of my paintings: *Boats* (1903) from the suite called *Building the City*, and a sketch titled *Benevolent Tree*, both from the unfinished group which stood near the walls of my studio. A local schoolteacher walked up in astonishment and asked me, ‘Are you Roerich?’ ‘Yes!’ I replied. ‘But you were killed in Siberia in 1918!’ And here once again, we encountered the same fairy tale that had reached us in London and America; many heard of my obituaries and funeral services.”

Roerich thought that perhaps all the prayers had helped, for even though their family had been chanted for and mourned, nevertheless they had succeeded joyously in traversing the mighty oceans and ascending the great heights.

Finally, at midnight June 13, 1926, they were in Moscow. With them were a message from the Mahatmas and a small box filled with soil from the Himalayas—earth on which Buddha might have stood. While wondering if they would meet Maurice and Sina Lichtmann there, a weary sounding Nicholas wrote in his journal: “Friends, upon the completion of this journey, I shall rejoice to transfer my complete drawings to you, along with these brief notes. But for this, it is necessary to settle down somewhere for a time and arrange the notes and albums. But where and when?”



THE ALTAI: SACRED MAGNET FOR THE FUTURE

Before the family arrived in Moscow, Vladimir Shibayev, Roerich's secretary, had been corresponding with a close relative of Helena's, hoping to locate and reclaim the Roerichs' confiscated collection of Old Master paintings and artifacts. But the Russia from which the Roerich family had fled in 1916 bore little resemblance to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics they now entered, ten years later. The Tsar and his family had been brutally murdered, and all possessions of the rich ruling class had been given to the poor. Education had become compulsory, and brothels were closed. Little of the past remained.

Although bitter struggles, severe hardships, and continual turmoil had filled the intervening years, by 1925 the "policy of recovery" had relieved the worst of the economic shortages and restored a semblance of health to the country. A kind of freeness had occurred on the heels of Lenin's New Economic Policy. Major transformation was occurring politically, economically, culturally, and spiritually. Small-scale and light industries were largely in the hands of private entrepreneurs or cooperatives. Some people in the top echelons of government were Buddhists or involved with spiritual organizations such as the Masons and the Rosicrucians. With the support and encouragement of the Roerichs' old friend Lama Dorzhiev, the Soviets were entertaining the idea of influencing Tibet and turning it toward a "Red" Buddhism.

Although many writers and artists had greeted the early years of the new regime with high fervor, Roerich had not been among them. In 1919, his article "Violators of Art" had been published by the Russian Liberation

Committee in London and widely circulated. In it, he challenged the Bolsheviks' claim that they were the "Medicis of Petrograd," guardians of art and science encouraging "the cultural achievements of the Soviet Government." Roerich had warned readers not to be deceived, labeling the Bolsheviks

Judas Iscariots with their thirty pieces of silver....Vulgarity and hypocrisy. Betrayal and bribery, the distortion of all the sacred conceptions of mankind. That is Bolshevism.

The shameless monster which is deceiving mankind; a monster who has gained possession of the sparkle of precious stones. But do not be afraid to come nearer and look! The stones are imitations. Only a weak eye will fail to see that the glitter is false and the world and real spiritual culture are perishing in this glitter. Wake up and recognize what you know!

Roerich's views had been stated so emphatically that they were unlikely to have been forgotten by those he had implicated—who had been involved with the formation of the new government and now held many of the key political positions. Nevertheless, the Roerichs still had friends in Russia. The Mahatmas saw this special time as a window of opportunity and hoped that a message from them to the heads of state might help Russia turn toward a new path. In sending the Roerichs back to deliver it, Master Morya advised them:

It is wise to draw the line between past and future. It is impossible to calculate all that has been done....It is better to say, "Yesterday is past; let us learn how to meet a new dawn." We all grow, and our works are expanding with us. It is unworthy to rummage in yesterday's dust....

He, who affirms the Community, contributes to the hastening of the evolution of the planet. Fear and immobility signify a return to primitive forms. If you pay attention to history, you will perceive clear jolts of progress, and see that these jolts graphically coincide with manifestations of the idea of community—cooperation. When the banner of cooperation was unfurled, dictatorships were destroyed, new scientific forms were developed, new techniques of labor arose, and benevolent boldness shone forth....In our picture of Community, everyone is working in full readiness, and our resources are intensified for the Common Good.

Encouraged by the wisdom of these teachings, the family decided that if they could safely return to Russia, they would. Now, in Moscow, they were welcomed by G. V. Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and Nicholas's old school friend; A. V. Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education, who was interested in Buddhism; and several others, including Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. They listened to the Roerichs' tales of India and the research they had done in Asia, and accepted the small chest of sacred Himalayan soil ceremoniously presented to Chicherin, to be placed on the grave of "Mahatma Lenin." The Mahatmas' message read:

In the Himalayas, we know what you are accomplishing. You abolished the church, which was a breeding ground of lies and superstitions. You destroyed the bourgeoisie who had become agents of prejudice. You demolished the educational prisons. You destroyed the hypocritical family. You did away with the army, which had ruled as over slaves. You crushed the spiders of greed. You closed the night dens of cutthroats. You freed the land of wealthy traitors. You recognized that religion is the teaching of universal matter. You recognized the insignificance of private ownership. You foresaw the evolution of community. You pointed out the importance of knowledge. You bowed down before beauty. You brought the entire power of the Cosmos to the children. You opened the windows of the palaces. You saw the urgency of building homes for the Common Good.

We stopped the revolt in India because it was premature; but We recognized the timeliness of your movement, and We send you all our help, affirming the Unity of Asia.

Once Roerich had executed the Mahatmas' mission, he presented his *Maitreya* series and the painting *The Time Has Come* to Lunacharsky. Then he set about seeing friends and relatives and conducting some business of his own. He also hoped to display the work he had created during the expedition. Two years earlier, in November 1924, Roerich had formed the Beluha Corporation to take advantage of the easing economic conditions and attempt to begin business transactions with the Soviets. During the expedition, Roerich had seen many rich natural resources waiting to be developed: timber, coal, oil, ores, metals, minerals. In 1927, the Ur Corporation was incorporated; the purpose of both companies was to try to get these resources to market and manufacture, which would benefit the

New Country. Both corporations, however, were so ineffective that they were later abandoned.

Now Roerich felt he had a perfect opportunity to discuss the prospects of mining in Siberia with the Soviet authorities. With Herbert Hoover's Quaker Relief Fund feeding the perishing millions in the Ukraine, the well-remembered Roerichs, now with American connections, were very newsworthy. But the press pounced upon them. Accusations were hurled at the couple for desertion, for fleeing from the Bolsheviks, and for serving the capitalists of the world. Their "mysterious devotion" to Buddhism received the most severe criticism. Though the family tried to make light of these charges, they were understandably wary and troubled. *Pravda* printed an article, reprinted in the English language papers, saying the Soviets were considering equipping Roerich with Soviet passports and Browning revolvers so that he could lead a two-year scientific expedition to Tibet.

The publicity did broadcast the news of their arrival in Moscow to their friends and acquaintances. Roerich was able to speak with some young Russian painters, engaging them with stories of their American brother artists in *Cor Ardens* and *Los Cinco Pintores*. And, again, a brotherhood of artists was formed, called *Amaravella*. One artist who was there, Boris Smirnov-Rusetsky, remembered the meeting until his death in 1993. He often recalled how deeply Roerich's talk and the Agni Yoga teachings had affected the young artists. For many years thereafter, when free expression and symbolism in art were considered criminal acts deserving punishment, the Roerichs' support and the Agni Yoga teachings were all the artists had for encouragement.

Some weeks later, Roerich and George were sitting in the CHEKA reception room waiting to see Felix Dzherzhinsky, the head of that organization, when Dzherzhinsky suddenly dropped dead in his office.¹ After watching the funeral procession with all the important dignitaries pass beneath their hotel window, the family expediently packed and prepared to leave. With their supplies and equipment replenished, the Roerichs and the Litchmanns climbed into two hired cars and departed for the Altai Mountains. They had been in Moscow for two months.

Upon her return to New York, Sina told the American press that the Moscow visit was a great success. All doors flew open at the sound of the

Roerich name, and they were met with absolute hospitality and friendship everywhere. But the many conflicting stories lead one to wonder what exactly did happen.²

For anyone hoping to escape notice, the Altai Mountains were the perfect place to go. Partially on Soviet territory and partially in Mongolia, the range stretches from the West Siberian Plain southeast to the Gobi Plain, forming the northern boundary of the Gobi. With a tradition as holy as Shambhala, the mountains are regarded as sacred. The highly revered Mount Belukha rises in the center of the Katun Range. This was to be the location of the New Russia (called Zvenigorod by the Masters), the Buddhist spiritual country. Although the range has been described as cruel and unapproachable, to Roerich it was, “austere yet beautiful,” and their arrival was greeted by an auspicious double rainbow stretching across the entire sky, above the mighty river Ob. Their Master explained: “The sun’s smile amidst the clouds brings forth the radiant rainbow. Thou shall remember the Aura of the Teacher smiling through the dewdrops on that future day of glory.”

Passing beside the Shambatyon and Katun Rivers, the group saw rocks hurling through the rapids with tremendous force. Even though followers of Master Morya were said to be living already on the opposite shore, none of the group was reckless enough to wade across to investigate. They were watching for signs of the new city, but saw nothing obvious. They did notice an abundance of caves containing bones with carved inscriptions. Without a light to gauge the depth, the Roerichs felt sure these caves were the same secret passages that the Spiritual Ones of Asia used to reach Tibet, the Kunluns, Altyn-Taga, Turfan, and other places.

In *Heart of Asia*, Roerich explained:

The Altai played a most important part in the migration of nations and is an untouched treasure with Belukha, the ruler, nourishing all rivers and fields, ready to yield its riches. The so-called graves of the Tchud and those burial places marked with inscriptions on rocks, all direct our attention to that time when, whether impelled by glaciers or escaping the sands, nations from the far southeast collected themselves into an avalanche and overran and regenerated Europe. I believe the entire area is a sacred and powerful magnet for the future.

On the 17th of August we beheld Belukha; so clear and reverberant; “the Queen of the White Snows” of whom even the deserts whisper. Verily, she is Zvenigorod,

the City of the Bells that I painted while still in Russia. And beyond Belukha, the crests of the Kunluns, so beloved in my heart, appear far in the distance. “The Queen of the White Snows” stands alongside “the Five Treasures of the Snows” and all the other sacred names written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken.

During their weeks in the Altai, the Roerichs stayed in the home of an Old Believer, Vakhramey Semyonovich Atamanov. Writing of Atamanov, Nicholas noted: “Like many of the wise ones who know the secret traditions, Vakhramey is not astonished at anything; he knows the ores, the ways of the deer and the little bees. He loves herbs and flowers and understands them indisputably...His face lights up as he gathers a great bunch of varied-colored grasses that reach up and touch his gray beard. He delights in them, pets them, and caresses them as he speaks of their usefulness. Here is verily the same Panteleimon, the Healer, whom I first painted in 1916.”

Completely versed in the sacred shamanistic lore of the region, Vakhramey was a treasured resource. Whatever secrets he revealed to the group remained secret however, for neither Roerich nor Sina Lichtmann disclosed a word in their diaries. Even George, so meticulous with his lists and descriptions, completely omitted mention of the trip to Altai. Sina wrote only, “We went out exploring today, and discovered many wonderful things.” Nor did the Lichtmanns ever divulge anything when they returned to New York. The press was informed that the Roerich expedition was on its way to Abyssinia!



Nicholas and Helena, Altai, August 1926

Instead, Roerich wrote of the cave of the legendary Tchud tribe, who escaped bondage by going underground. He said stones encircled its entrance and it resembled other huge tombs he had seen from the period of the great migrations in such places as the foothills of the northern Caucasus. He further wrote that when the Central Asia expedition was crossing the Karakorum Pass, their Ladakhi groom had told them they were riding above caves where many treasures had been stored by a wonderful tribe who went underground because they abhorred the sins of the earth. The reverberation of the horses' hooves had sounded the same as it had when they approached Khotan. The caravanners had told them that people could reach distant countries through those passages.

To his diary, Roerich commented: "Great is the belief in subterranean people. Through all Asia, through the vast spaces of the deserts, from the Pacific to the Urals, I have heard the same wondrous tales of vanished holy people. 'Long ago people lived here; now they have gone inside; they found a passage and entered the subterranean kingdom. And only rarely do they

appear on earth again. Such people come to our bazaar with strange, very ancient money. No one can even remember when such money was used.”

When Nicholas inquired if he could see some of these subterranean people, he was told, “Yes, if your thoughts are similarly high and in contact with these holy people—because sinners stay upon earth, while the pure and courageous ones pass on to something more beautiful.”

The Roerichs were introduced to several village schoolteachers, who lowered their voices and inquired if the group had come from India. Upon hearing their affirmative reply, all eyes lit up with eagerness as they asked for information of the Mahatmas, whispering, “There are many of us and we exist solely for these teachings.” They spoke of an old monk who had died recently after traveling throughout India and the Himalayas. Among his possessions was a manuscript containing much about the Mahatmas, and indicating the monk had been intimately acquainted with this usually secret subject.

Much needed to be accomplished if the Roerichs were to return to the Altai someday and establish their pan-Mongolian country. Although they were now starting for Mongolia in the hope of finding the Panchen Lama, he wrote: “Mongolia (Land of Brave Men) attracts our attention. Tales creep to us of Kobdo, near the Northwest frontier, where a goodly number of temples and mud houses are built near the lake. Everyone seems interested in conveying at least something to us of the spirit of Mongolia, the land of magnetic storms, mirages of the sun, and cruciform moons.”

Geographically, the area loosely called Central Asia is outlined by the Caspian Sea on the west, Siberia on the north, and northern Iran and Afghanistan on the south. China lies to the east, Mongolia to the northeast. The Pamirs and the Himalayas rise in the south, and the T’ien Shans and the Altai are on the eastern flank. This vast expanse of arid plain and desert is the greatest landmass on earth. Inner and Outer Mongolia are the heartland of the Asian continent. In 1921, following the Russian Revolution, Mongolia peacefully converted from a centuries-old, completely pastoral society populated by nomads to a socialist state. Though after the revolution, the capital city was renamed Ulan Bator Khoto (City of the Red Warrior), most people continued to call it Urga.

From the Altai, the Roerich party went by train to the Buriat Republic and then arranged for autos to carry them into Mongolia. With the Altai

behind, George resumed his journal: “Around 4:00 in the afternoon, we started our journey toward the immense and boundless steppes of Mongolia, motoring through the country of the greatest conquerors of Asia. The road rose imperceptibly until we had crossed several ridges of low, grass-covered hills, and then we saw the true signs of Buddhist Mongolia: the suburgans or stupas, which stood sparkling, like a white necklace.”

The next day, when they tried to cross a swift current where there was no ferry, it became obvious that the cars were going to create more problems than they would solve:

One at a time, the cars were carried on barges; the driver made a careless movement and one almost slid into the river, but it was rescued just in time....Our progress was very slow, for after the recent heavy rains the route was sandy, extremely muddy, and slippery. It was often necessary to get out and push the cars along the slopes, greatly handicapped by the lack of headlights on one of them.

In the full darkness of a moonless evening, we reached the river Iro and persuaded the ferryman to take us across. We camped in the open, near to some wretched Mongol tents, from which two old women emerged, covered with rags. The night was cold and we had to light camp fires. A white mist arose from the river surface to envelop the far bank. Dark silhouettes of the forest-clad mountains stood to the south and we heard the conchshell of a nearby lamasery call the lamas for evening prayer. We were up before dawn and drove south toward a low pass. Though newly constructed, the road was so muddy and sandy that our cars sank deep into the mud and had to be rescued by horsemen.

We continued on, and found several cars traveling from Urga, stranded on the banks. They had endeavored to cross the river, but it flooded their engines. They all warned us that it was foolhardy to try and cross, but we decided to try it; so we crammed all the luggage inside the cars and covered the radiators with several sheets of waterproof canvas. Luckily, several horsemen came to our aid again. They tied ropes from the front of the cars to the pommels of their saddles and when we were all set, the drivers started the cars and the horsemen rushed towards the opposite river bank, shouting wildly. Water splashed high into the air but the two cars were pulled safely across the river.

They were heading toward the Tola Valley and the magnificent Bogdo-Ula, which rises 3,000 feet above Urga and forms the southern boundary of the forests in that part of Mongolia. Believed to be the birthplace of Genghis Khan, some scholars also believe he died there. The mountain dominates the entire valley and has a unique history. In AD 1778 when

Mongolia was under Chinese domination, the Bogdo-Ula was declared sacred and the Emperor legalized the cult of the sacred mountains. He ordered that incense and silk be sent there biannually and that ceremonial offerings be made by the spiritual leader, the Bogdo-gegen, the Living Buddha of Mongolia. Hunting and tree chopping were outlawed, and fishing forbidden. The area became a true natural reserve and haven for fauna large and small. One could observe herds of reindeer, mountain deer, wild bears, wolves, foxes, and hundreds of different birds, all quite tame and unafraid of humans. Over time, the Bogdogegen brought apes, bears, rare birds, and even an elephant to live in this sanctuary.

Though students of history considered Genghis Khan “the Scourge of God” for his acts of brutality, Roerich had never agreed. He recognized that Genghis had given the world a wise code of laws so usable that it was still Mongolia’s base of justice. Now Nicholas was pleased to discover that many in Mongolia shared his viewpoint.

Closely in touch with Tibet, Mongolia had been a stronghold of Lamaism for centuries. Even after the revolution, the Lamaist church continued to exist and membership was maintained in the World Buddhist Association. The old ways, however, were quickly dying out; there were only about one hundred priests in the entire country. Most of the lavish temples and sanctuaries had become museums. Roerich was anxious to offer the New Country as a safe asylum for the priests.

Eager to visit the Ganden Lamasery, the only sanctuary in Mongolia where Lamaism still functioned, the Roerich party also wanted to see the state library, with its monumental collection of theological works including the hundreds of volumes of the Kanjur and the Tanjur printed in rare woodblock form. The ancient brilliant textiles discovered by the Russian explorer General P. K. Kozlov were of special scientific interest; traced back to Greece, Iran, Scytho-Siberia, and China, the designs were evidence of the far-reaching trade of Central Asian nomads. Because of their strong resemblance to the well-documented silks excavated from the Tarim Basin by Sir Aurel Stein, the materials could be fairly well dated to the first century BC. The textiles’ composition affirmed for Roerich that different provinces of Central Asia had borrowed their inspiration from a common source. The Mongol Scientific Committee’s current research and

excavations of tumuli throughout the Noin-Ul Mountains were substantiating that and throwing fresh light on nomadic culture.

The sprawling city of Urga resembled a permanent settlement surrounded by a large colony of yurts. Most of the population lived in yurts during the cold winters. The glittering, gilded roofs of monasteries, the cathedral, and other religious buildings enhanced Urga's appearance. With wonderful luck, the Roerichs found a four-room house with two spacious courtyards and stables for rent. There was room to establish headquarters and space for brother Boris and the Lichtmanns.³ Dr. Konstantin Ryabinin, their dear friend from Russia, and Roerich's other brother, Vladimir, soon joined the expedition, renting a place nearby.

With many opportunities to attend dances, festivals, and services at the colorful temples, they were entranced by everything they saw and heard. The family spent their days productively: Helena had time to write, Nicholas to paint, George to share rare time with the lamas, and all three were able to study Kalachakra. "These rituals and music are remnants of the past," George wrote, "and harken back to shamanistic antiquity. Its peculiar charms touch me deeply." The family also needed time to organize and carefully study the route for the last phase of the expedition: the great crossing of Central Asia, through Mongolia and Tibet, back to India.

Touring near a temple in Urga one day, they spotted an open place surrounded by a stockade, unusual for Mongolian dwellings. They inquired, and were startled to hear that it was a site for the future temple of Shambhala. An unknown lama had purchased it. Roerich told his diary: "Not only do many learned lamas in Mongolia know of Shambhala, but even many laymen and members of the Government can relate the most striking details. When we showed some of the Shambhala prophecies to a member of the Government, he exclaimed in astonishment, 'But this agrees with the prophecy foretold by a young boy on the Iro River. Verily, the Great Time is coming!'"

The Roerichs were surprised to hear the same stories of the Mahatmas they had previously heard in India. Roerich wrote, "Such are the ties of Asia. Who carries the news? By what secret passageways do these unknown messengers travel? While one may be living an ordinary routine daily life in

Asia, confronted with difficulties, crudeness and many trying cares, still at any moment a knock may come at the door, bringing important news.”



Roerich with lamas of the Ganden Monastery, Urga, Mongolia,

The first theological school for study of Kalachakra, the higher metaphysics of Buddhism, had been established in Urga in 1741. Since the Panchen Lama had escaped, he had been spreading these hidden teachings of Shambhala everywhere, therefore it was experiencing a powerful revival. Numerous Kalachakra colleges had been established in Inner Mongolia, Buddhist China, and even Buriatia. As George explained in his journal: “Learned abbots and meditating lamas are said to be in constant communication with the mystic fraternity of Shambhala, for it guides the destinies of the Buddhist world. A western observer is apt to belittle the importance of this name, or to relegate the voluminous literature about Shambhala (and the still more vast oral tradition) into the class of folklore or mythology; but those who have studied both literary and popular Buddhism know the terrific force that this name possesses among the masses of Buddhists of higher Asia. For over the course of history, it has not only inspired religious movements, but even moved armies, whose war cry was ‘Shambhala.’”

The troops of the great war hero Sukhe Bator, who had liberated Mongolia from centuries of Chinese domination, marched to such a song.

The Roerichs were startled to hear the cavalry singing of the war of Northern Shambhala as they marched by, summoning the warriors of Mongolia to rise for the holy war and liberate their country from the oppressors. “Let us die in this war and be reborn as warriors of Shambhala” resounded through the streets as the soldiers passed.

Urga’s largest temple had been dedicated to Maitreya, and a colossal statue of him towered some fifty feet above the surrounding altars, candles, incense burners, and a Wheel of Life. George wrote:

One of the most important religious events is the Maidari procession, an imposing parade of Maitreya, the Coming Buddha, which encircles the entire city sometime during the third or fourth moon of the Mongol year. Its approach is heralded by the concentrated look of the tremendous crowd, and by the dim, yet ever rising powerful sound of the trumpets, the cymbals, and the many deep voices chanting prayers. The air becomes so dusty that the monks, and the richly bedecked horses that transport the holy images, the huge palanquins, and the silk umbrellas of bright hued silk, all seem to move in a yellowish cloud.

Hundreds of thousands of feet trample on the dusty road to the accompaniment of long trumpets sounding out their deep, sonorous notes, clear ringing tones of the clarinets, the clashing of cymbals, and the bass voices of the drums. Majestic abbots, resplendent in gold cloth, their high lama hats, and purple mantles can be seen marching ahead of the novices in shabby garments. In one massive crowd, garbed in rainbow colors, are officials and commoners, with ropes of pearls and precious stones set in gold, all following the images of the One who incarnates all the hopes of Buddhist Mongolia. Some onlookers prostrate themselves in the dust as the images pass, others murmur prayers and jostle to get in closer.

Aware that he was watching the last remnants of old Mongolia, George was struck by the contrast of the somber khaki uniforms of the Mongolian cavalymen, the colorfully costumed crowd, and the clergy in their deep purple robes.



Worshiper near the Temple of Maitreya, Urga, Mongolia

Professor Roerich presented the government with a painting of Rigden Jyepo, the ruler of Shambhala, and was moved by the emotion with which it was accepted. He was told a special memorial temple might be built where it would occupy the central altar. He was asked how he knew of this vision, for it was the same as one seen several months earlier by one of their most revered lamas. “Our lama saw a great crowd of people from many nations; all of them were facing the West. A majestic rider appeared on a fiery steed, encircled by flames, with the banner of Shambhala in his hand—it was the Blessed Rigden Jyepo Himself—who bade the crowd to turn from the West and face the East.”

“Two roads of life are evident in Asia,” Roerich explained. “Do not be confused. They are making a great effort to preserve their monuments to study and learn from them. Mongolia reveals its outer self to the casual passerby with an astonishing wealth of color, costumes, and age-old traditions that are blended with brilliantly staged ceremonials. But on closer observation, I found serious research being conducted and was pleasantly impressed by their attitude towards their past. Proof of the Great Truth may lie over the next hill.”



1. *Mother of the World*, 1930s.

Tempera on canvas, 98 x 65.5 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



2. *Krishna*. From “Kulu” series, 1929.
Tempera on canvas, 74 x 118 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



3. *Tibet. Himalayas*, 1933.
Tempera on canvas, 74 x 117 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



4. *Shirin and Khosrov*, 1938.
Tempera on canvas, 45.7 x 78.7 cm. Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow.



5. *Tidings of the Eagle*, 1927.
Tempera and oil on panel, 31.5 x 41 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



6. *Sophia—the Wisdom of the Almighty*, 1932.

Tempera on canvas, 107.5 x 153 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



7. *Most Sacred (Treasure of the Mountain)*, 1933.

Tempera on canvas, 73.5 x 117 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



8. *Great Wall*, 1935.

Tempera on canvas, 91.4 x 60 cm. International Centre of the Roerichs,
Moscow.



9. *St. Panteleimon the Healer*, 1931.

Tempera on canvas, 44.5 x 78.5 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



10. *Treasure of the World*. From “His Country” series, 1924.

Tempera on canvas, 88.5 x 116.5 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New

York.



11. *Star of the Morning*, 1932.

Tempera on canvas, 61.5 x 97 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



12. *Padma Sambhava*. From “Banners of the East” series, 1924.

Tempera on canvas, 74 x 117 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York.



13. *Madonna Oriflamma*, 1932.
Tempera on canvas, 173.5 x 99.5 cm. Nicholas Roerich Museum, New
York.



ACROSS THE GOBI

Locked in the heart of Central Asia, Tibet challenged Roerich's imagination as no other country did. In 1904, Tibet and Great Britain had signed a treaty granting the British government control of entry, but it had maintained Tibet's policy toward strangers. It was almost possible to count on both hands the foreigners who had entered the kingdom: Sir Charles Bell, a friend of the Dalai Lama; Lieutenant Colonel F. M. Bailey, the political officer in Sikkim; some English officials; the adventurers who were climbing Mount Everest; and a few others. The two famous women—Helena Blavatsky, Russian spiritualist and Theosophist, and Alexandra David-Neel, the intrepid French explorer and scholar of Buddhism—who had managed to penetrate the country had only done so disguised and under the greatest secrecy.

Tibet was forbidden to most outsiders, and Lhasa, its capital, was even more closely protected. Not one of the great explorers who had set out to reach Lhasa had been admitted. The Russian explorer Colonel Przhevalsky and his men had gotten within 150 miles before they were halted by Tibetan officials and ordered to leave the country. Neither Sven Hedin nor Sir Aurel Stein had gotten even that close.

If the Roerichs were able to visit Lhasa, it would be a brilliant achievement. While in Urga in the fall and winter of 1926, they met with a representative of the Dalai Lama who was willing to try to secure permission for them to enter Tibet and visit Lhasa. After waiting three months, they received an encouraging reply. Official passports would be issued, as well a letter of introduction to the Dalai Lama. The family was

thrilled, for mysterious Tibet was where Mme Blavatsky had met her Masters and obtained the *Stanzas of Dzyan*.

Meanwhile, the Lichtmanns had gone back to America and then managed to return to Urga, bringing the mountain of supplies needed to continue the expedition. Everything from tents to toilets, guns to paints, canvas to canned goods, had been brought from America. The Roerichs were completely outfitted to resume “encircling inner Asia” to search for future fields of artistic and scientific work—and Shambhala.

As the route to Tibet was unmapped, all they knew was that if they steered toward central Tibet, their path must cross the formidable, but uniquely interesting, Gobi. Roerich was aware that the regions of Mongolia and the central Gobi were an explorer’s and archaeologist’s paradise—with whole cities hidden beneath the sands—but nothing could be planned beforehand. Even the stretch of the journey after Tibet would not be known in advance. As George explained, “The chaotic state of affairs in inner Asia and China made all sorts of unexpected events possible and the only thing left to us was to trust Providence and proceed on our journey, leaving details to be decided on the spot.”

So with the good wishes of the Mongolian authorities, the expedition set off on April 23, 1927, heading southwest toward a Mongolian frontier post and the Yum-Beise monastery. The gear and supplies were packed in three trucks, and light baggage was strapped to the running boards of the two Dodge touring cars that would carry the group.

The Lichtmanns said their good-byes; they were returning to New York with plans for the new Roerich Museum building. It was to be the first skyscraper museum, a unique cultural center that would house all the Roerich institutions; apartments in the upper floors would enable it to pay for itself and allow educators, musicians, writers, and artists to live in the building and enjoy the cultural events held there. Construction was to be paid for by a bank loan, which they estimated could be paid off in ten years; after that, the income would be used for cultural programs. With Louis Horch’s good reputation, obtaining the loan should not be any problem.



One of the touring cars with the light luggage tied on the running boards

The banner of Maitreya, fastened to a Mongolian spear, had joined the flags leading the procession. The party had grown considerably, now consisting of the Roerichs, their caravanners, several lamas, Dr. Ryabinin, the chief of transport, several army men, and two Cossack girls, Ludmila and Iraida Bogdanova, who were to help Helena. (The sisters became part of the Roerich household and continued with them for the next thirty years.) George wrote:

A part of the way, we covered by motor. The heavily freighted automobiles looked like battle-tanks with our fellow travelers, the Buriat and Mongol lamas, sitting on top, colorfully dressed in their coned caps and yellow, blue and red robes. We intended to continue this way till beyond the border, for people had told us we could easily cross the Gobi by car, but it was impossible. With difficulty, we covered the nearly 600 miles to Yum-Beise in twelve days. There was no actual road, and with troublesome river crossings, stony ridges, and car problems some days we did no more than ten or fifteen miles. Here and there we traveled on a

camel path, but most of the trip we had to scout our way through virgin land. When our guide took us to an ancient, destroyed city fifty miles to the west, by mistake, we learned two important things: that all existing maps were inaccurate, and that we could not trust the local guides.

After endless negotiations, they managed to reach the Chinese border and continued by camel from there. Roerich wrote: “Draw a line from the South Russian steppes and the northern Caucasus across the steppes of Semipalatinsk, Altai, and Mongolia, then turn south, and you will have the main artery of our migration....The Central Gobi seems limitless. White—pink—blue—and slate black. The fierce gales bury the flat slopes under a layer of stones, and we soon learned not to be caught by it. The danger of continuing on this route was that the wells might be dry or filled with dead animals; the only other way would be toward the east, but that area was infested with Chinese bandits.”

George described the region:

The Gobi between Yum-Beise and An-hsi represents a succession of mountain ridges of crystalline rocks, intersected by desert. Most of the mountain ridges belong to the Altai system, which stretches northwest by southeast across the arid region situated between the southern branches of the Khangai Mountains and the eastern slopes of the T'ien Shans and the Barkol Mountains. I am confident that if explored properly, the numerous canyons that flank the desert ridges would offer ample opportunities to discover fossils.

Although Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews has thoroughly investigated the country to the northeast, scant attention has been given the southwest area we are taking. Only a few of the European travelers have touched this desolate region, and much remains to be done to reconstruct its geological past. Our headman Portniagin, and some of the other Mongols, say they have crossed the eastern part of the Mongolian Gobi, but have never seen a country so barren and desolate as where we are now.

After leaving Russia, Nicholas seemed to lose interest in keeping his diary. His notations dwindled to only a few lines, but George continued to document everything fully. On June 1, 1927, the expedition arrived at the edge of the central Gobi and set up camp on the silvery banks of the Shih-pao-ch'ang. “It is good,” Roerich noted. “The Nan-Shan Mountains glow at sunrise, the mountain streams murmur, and the herds of goats and rams gleam white in the sun. Riders speed by us—is there any news? Rumors fill

the air; they try to frighten us by giving us many reasons why we should wait here until September: the grass must thicken, the camels must fatten, their wool must grow, the treacherous swamps of Tsaidam must dry out, and the Blue River must subside.”

Waiting would also give them time to study future routes and complete preparations for their great march in August. As always, there was much to keep each of them busy. George was learning the language and customs of the local Mongols while inquiring about routes across the salt swamps of Tsaidam and the uplands of Tibet. Nicholas painted, while Helena and her two assistants sorted the baggage, making lists of supplies needed for the arduous trip ahead. Portniagin, the headman, handled the transport problems, saddlery, and other odds and ends.

Just as Portniagin was leaving to buy provisions and handle the cables to and from America, their Tibetan guide rode into camp on a fine black horse, driving a big herd of horses and mules to add to the caravan. They were advised that Lhasa had requested that all European travelers be prevented from coming any closer, but since the expedition carried Tibetan passports and letters of introduction, and was escorted by a deputy of the Tibetan representative in Urga, the Roerichs were confident this would not apply to them.

Ten difficult days followed. They had problems obtaining more animals. A local Chinese businessman, who called Roerich “the American King,” tried to cheat them at every opportunity. And Helena and several of the caravanners suffered health problems. Therefore, they decided to move their camp into the upper Sharagolji Valley, where there was less drought and better conditions. They climbed 9,000 feet, crossed the “Three Mountain Pass,” and entered the valley beside the snow-clad Humboldt Mountains (locally called the Doyugu), then continued until they set up camp in the foothills of Ulan Davan (16,000 feet).

In *Heart of Asia*, Roerich remembered it this way: “A long march for the camels. The song of Shambhala rings again through the air. Even here on the stony mountain passes and frozen uplands, we are not left without signs of Shambhala. Bending over a stony slope, our lamas were collecting pieces of white quartz and carefully designing them into something on the neighboring rocks. It was the monogram of Kalachakra they had embedded

into the sands. ‘Henceforth, this white inscription that invokes the Great Teaching will be visible from afar to all travelers.’”



Camped on the road to Tibet waiting for the camel caravan season to begin

The six weeks in camp waiting for the camel caravan season to begin were a special time. The Mongols, whose solitary tents were scattered wherever water and grass was best for their herds, loved occasions to socialize. The Roerichs had a great tent erected and invited everyone to join in the Festival of Maitreya, observed annually on July 5. The long service was conducted by the expedition lamas, and as they chanted together all hearts gladdened. In return, the group was invited to join the several days of festivities when the scattered people came together to enjoy themselves.

It was a peaceful time. Roerich painted the Bogdo-Ulas several times, then sketched and painted *Guardian of the Entrance*, *The Great Horseman*, and others. The Humboldt peaks glowed white with snow, and the air was invigorating. The stillness reminded them of the Himalayan heights. At night, the group held wonderful discussions on the new prayer to Shambhala, the prophecies of the Panchen Lama, or the need for a pan-Asiatic language to reconcile, at least elementally, the three hundred dialects of Asia. Roerich yearned to convey to the West through his

paintings and books—and through the establishment of the New Country—the importance that Maitreya, Shambhala, and Gessar Khan have in Asia.

They were camped in the area where the Mahatma had rested on his way to Mongolia forty years before, so they decided to commemorate the spot with a suburgan of Shambhala. Everyone gaily joined in the construction, building the understructure of stones, reinforced with clay and grass. The top was made of wood, covered with tin from a gasoline tank, and the entire surface was given a sturdy coat of Humboldt lime and reverently painted with red, yellow, and green designs by a Buriat lama using Roerich's paints. The suburgan was completed July 24. "The Elder Lama of Tsaidam comes to consecrate it," wrote Roerich.

In front of the tent of Shambhala, the lamas prayed for the coming of the Blessed Rigden Jyepo and placed a polished mirror before the image. Water was poured onto the mirror and the glass seemed to come alive with strange figures appearing on the surface. When it blurred, it resembled one of the magic mirrors in ancient stories.

A procession walked around the shrine with burning incense while the lama held onto a thread suspended from the roof. The altar was filled with gifts of turquoise, coral, and beads, an image of the Buddha, a silver ring with a most significant inscription, prophecies for the future, and other precious objects that had been placed there by an old lama who had helped with the construction. We also lay the Ak-dorje and the Maitreya Sangha within.

After a long service, the white thread that connected the lama and the suburgan was severed, and the monument stood there alone in the purple of the desert, forever to shine brightly, defended only by invisible powers.

That night news arrived that Colonel N. V. Kordashevski, a Lithuanian and long-time friend of the Roerichs who was to head the convoy, was crossing the Gobi after leaving Peking. Of vital importance, they also heard that the Panchen Lama and his Chinese escort were on the way to nearby Kumbun monastery and that his luggage was already there. "Toward evening on the 28th, N. V. came galloping along with his sword and the ring. We hardly had time to hear him, when a devastating torrent swept down the canyon. A flash flood in place of the peaceful stream, the result of the strange night-tumult in the mountains. The torrent swept away the kitchen, the dining tent, and George's tent. Much was destroyed and many

Mongol yurts were swept away. We walked in water up to our waist; many irreplaceable things were destroyed. N. V. told us that on the eve of his departure, for some inexplicable reason, the thankas sent to us by Y. were destroyed by fire. It is significant!”

August 5 was another exceptional day:



Suburgan to Shambhala, Sharagolji, Nan-Shan Mountains

Something remarkable! We are in our camp in the Kukunor district, not far from the Humboldt Chain. It was morning, about 9:30 when some of our caravaneers noticed a remarkably big black eagle flying above us.¹

Seven of us began to watch this unusual bird and at the same moment, another of our caravaneers noticed something flying far above it. And he shouted in his astonishment. We all saw it. Something shining and beautiful glistening in the rays of the sun—a huge oval moving at great speed flying from north to south. And then it disappeared in the intense blue sky, behind the Ulan Davan, the red pass in the Humboldt chain.

It was in view long enough for them to get field glasses from the tents, so they saw it quite distinctly: “An oval form with a shiny surface, one side of which was brilliant from the sun. And the lama whispered: ‘A good sign. A very good sign. We are protected. Rigden Jyepo himself is looking after us!’”

Other things happened during this extraordinary time. Some Roerich wrote about, others were whispered by a few of the party or repeated by the coworkers in New York. For instance, one warm day, when traveling in the desert, their caravan guide covered his nose and mouth with a scarf, explaining that precautions were needed. “We are approaching the forbidden lands of Shambhala,” he said. “We will soon encounter Sur—the poisonous gas that guards the frontier.” Lowering his voice, he continued, “We are close to the place where all the people and animals of the Dalai Lama’s caravan started to tremble while traveling with him from Tibet to Mongolia. The Dalai Lama reassured everyone and explained that they had approached the forbidden zone of Shambhala, and unfamiliar aerial vibrations were touching them.”

Another time, the group was roaming through the desolate rocks of the desert when many of them became simultaneously aware of an exquisite breath of perfume in the air—like the best Indian incense. “From where does it come?” they asked, “for we are surrounded by barren rocks.” The high lama with them whispered, “Can you smell the fragrance of Shambhala?” They also came to an area the caravanners refused to enter, yet the Roerichs rode into it and remained there for a few days. Upon their return, the Asians prostrated themselves, exclaiming they must be gods, for no mere people could have penetrated that territory without divine credentials.

Since Roerich’s travel diary was kept for himself and the coworkers in New York, it is doubtful that he thought it might ever be published or read around the world for decades to come. We must, therefore, assume he did not intend to cause the frustration many feel while studying *Altai-Himalaya, A Travel Diary*, wishing he had confided the entire story behind the mysterious accounts of these few days. What they uncovered in the desert remains a mystery, for unlike other explorers who trumpeted their finds and filled the newspapers with stories of their adventures, the Roerich expedition sought much that was only spoken of in secrecy. Perhaps they

found Shambhala, ancient cities or artifacts, or even a figurine of the Great Mother. Due to the diligent work of several Russians now translating the Roerichs' diaries and the writings of others involved with the expedition, more may come to light.

On August 19, 1927, they broke camp and started for the salt desert of Tsaidam, accompanied by several Mongols traveling in the same direction. They crossed a 17,000-foot pass without difficulty, pausing to view the panorama of mountains and rocky crags ahead. This was the trail taken by the Dalai Lama in 1904, and it was comforting to come upon the many sacred sites marking his journey.

Then, the dreaded salt desert of Tsaidam stretched before them. They decided to cross it at night: "We could not stop but had to continue for a hundred and twenty miles without a halt. In the darkness of the night, the road was invisible and fortunately, we crossed the most dangerous spots without realizing it. There were bottomless pits on either side of the narrow path, and if a horse had tripped, it would have been impossible to save him—one false step and we would have been finished. It was forbidding, but we made it and crossed Tsaidam in a new direction—the shortest way."

In his diary, Roerich wrote: "None of it was as the maps had indicated. After we were across, I chanced to look toward the west and saw endless pink sands glowing there. Although entirely unexplored, the maps show it as completely desert area; but this does not seem true to me. There may be much of the remarkable in the folds of those hills; maybe the ancient Buddhist monasteries expanded in that direction, with interesting hermitages and monumental caves. The Mongols seldom mention these regions, but they do tell stories of caravans lost in the sands and of buried cities."

By the time they neared the Tibetan border, both Helena and the recently arrived Tibetan commercial agent were experiencing heart problems, no doubt exacerbated when robbers attacked the caravan. Colonel Kordashevski led a counterattack that drove them off, and when the expedition expected another attack the next day, "in blew a terrific snowstorm mingled with thunder, and the superstitious robbers dispersed."

Roerich described their approach to the border: "We looked for Tibetan outposts, but instead, we saw something shining against the gray background of the hilly desert." Attempting to identify it, they wondered,

“Is it a huge tent?” But the white spot was too big for a tent. “Perhaps it is snow?” But why would there be so much snow in only one place? As they approached, it seemed to increase in size, and whatever it was, “was truly superb.” Getting closer, they realized they were looking at a huge pyramid, formed by the drippings of a gigantic geyser of Glauber salt. “A real fortune for the druggist,” Roerich remarked. “A snowy mass—glistening in the sun—verily, a sacred boundary.”

They had reached Tibet at last.



INTO TIBET

For the next twenty-one days, the expedition marched across the dreary, inhospitable northern plain of Tibet. Sitting 15,000 feet above sea level, it stretches from the Kunlun Mountains in the north to the Trans-Himalayas in the south. The contrast in temperature between sun and shade can be so great that it is possible to severely blister and develop chilblains at the same time.

One day they spotted a black tent by some foothills toward the west. A reconnoitering party was sent out and reported it was Camp Yatung, an outpost of Tibetan militia. As they watched, a horseman rushed out of the tent and galloped southwest. "Soon a group of militiamen approached us; their chief inquired about our passports and invited us to stop for the day. He checked our passports, and appearing to find everything in order, promised to send the papers to his superior and dispatch mounted messengers to Nag-chu to announce our arrival."

The chief neglected to mention that the British colonial administration had ordered that Nagchu, the first big settlement on the road to Lhasa, be notified immediately of the expedition's arrival, or that the Roerichs had been under surveillance since they had first secured permission to visit Ladakh, northern India, and Tibet. The secret service had received occasional reports throughout most of the journey, and after the expedition crossed into the U.S.S.R. their "friend" Lieutenant Colonel Bailey, the political officer in Sikkim, and others, had begun to take notice. On October 6, 1927, Bailey wrote the following confidential memo to the Indian foreign secretary in Simla:

With reference to the enclosure to your Memorandum #38(2)-X, dated July 1927, I have the honour to suggest that I should write and warn the Tibetan Government that Professor Roerich intends visiting Tibet and that he is a Bolshevik. I met Professor Roerich in Darjeeling in May 1924 and his son George stayed a few days with me in April 1924 in Gantok. At that time they were anti-Bolshevik. In your telegram No.1007-S, dated the 18th May 1927, mention was made of "Roe-Alex." Am I right in presuming that this is a mutilation of the name "Roerich?"

He received this confidential reply dated Simla, 11th October:

Reference your letter No. 907-P, dated 6th October 1927. The Government of India approve your suggestion that you should now warn the Tibetan Government of Roerich's intention to visit Tibet and inform them of his Bolshevik tendencies. Your assumption that "Roe Alex" is a mutilation of "Roerich" is correct.

Sd/- J.G. Acheson,
Deputy Secretary to the Government of India

The actual story of what next occurred can best be summarized by this communiqué sent from Tibet to Lieutenant Colonel Bailey, one year later.

Translation of a letter from the Ministers of Tibet to Lieutenant Colonel F. M. Bailey, C.I.E., Political Officer in Sikkim, dated the 6th day of the 9th month of the Earth-Dragon Year (corresponding to the 19th October 1928).

The reason of sending this letter by the Ministers of Tibet. In your letter of last year, dated the 16th day of the 9th Month of the Fire-Hare Year (10th November 1927), you informed us that one Russian Professor named Nicholas Roerich, an artist, intended to visit Tibet: that he was a Bolshevik: that he was said to have been in Urga at the time: that we were well aware of the condition of the country where Bolshevism was spread: and that you hoped the news would reach us in plenty of time.

Meanwhile we informed you that a party headed by Ral-drag had arrived on the frontier of Shangri. To this we received a reply from you dated the 15th day of the 12th month of the Fire-Dragon Year (5th February 1928), saying that he (Professor Roerich) stayed in America for some years and that he was a red Russian. You know that foreigners are not allowed to come to Tibet casually and in the case of Roerich, particularly after the fact of his being a red Russian was brought to our notice, we could not allow him to come to Tibet. Accordingly we had him stopped at Nagchukka and persuaded him to go back from there. Meanwhile there had been an unusually heavy snow fall in the northern region and many ponies and camels belonging to the party died in the intense cold. They also ran short of foodstuff. They fell sick owing to the rigors of the climate. In other words, they were put to

great hardship and it was simply impossible for them to go back. They therefore of their own accord, went to India through Sikkim following the Changtang route. We sent you a detailed report about this on the 1st day of the 4th month (20th May 1928).

So the Roerich Expedition had been held in confinement on the roof of the world, pawns in a political situation that left them defenseless. In *Heart of Asia*, an unaware Roerich described it this way:

This place will remain in our memory forever. The dull upland, arctic in character, was full of small mounds and was bordered by the drear outlines of sliding hills. The general's first welcome was the acme of kindness and friendliness. He told us that in consideration of our passports and letter, he would permit us to proceed to Lhasa via Nagchu, the northern fort of Tibet. He requested we move our camp closer to his headquarters and prepare to stay for three days...In all our meetings, the general was very friendly and probably was not guilty of what followed. When a week passed without reply, he informed us it was necessary for him to depart on duty, but that he would leave a major and five soldiers with us, to give all necessary instructions to the local elders.

The general left, and instead of three days, we remained in this dull place at 15,000 foot altitude, for five months. The situation became catastrophic. A severe winter set in, with whirlwinds and snow. What happened, and where, we could not discover, for all letters sent to us by the Dalai Lama and Governor of Nagchu were returned to us and often torn up. We repeatedly wrote to the American Consul in Calcutta, to the British Resident, Colonel Bailey in Gangtok, and to our institutions in New York, requesting the Governor of Nagchu to send all this by wire from Lhasa to India. And we were told that the telegram lines between Lhasa and India no longer existed—a downright lie!

When we asked the major's permission either to return back or to proceed to the general's headquarters, we were refused permission, as if they actually wished our destruction. Our money was exhausted. Of course the American dollars that we had with us were absolutely useless. Moreover, we had no more medicine and our provisions were at an end. Under our very eyes, the whole caravan perished.

Each night the freezing, starving animals approached our tents, as though knocking for the last time before their death. And in the morning we found them near our tents, dead. Our Mongols dragged them beyond the camp, where packs of wild dogs and condors and vultures were already awaiting their prey. Of a hundred and four animals, we lost ninety-two. On the Tibetan uplands, we also left the bodies of five of our fellow-travelers: three lamas, one a Buriat and two from Mongolia; and Chimpa, from Tibet, and finally the Tibetan major's wife, who died from inflammation of the lungs. Even the natives could not stand the severe

conditions. Our caravan had only summer tents, as we never imagined we would pass the winter in the most severe climate in Asia.

Mrs. Roerich's pulse reached 145, and our doctor called it "the pulse of a bird." My pulse was 130, instead of the usual 64. The pulses of George and the two Bogdanovas remained about normal. The doctor prophesied the most dark prospects and wrote medical certificates, stating that to detain an expedition under such conditions was equal to attempt at murder.

Of this stay in Nag-chu, I could write a whole book of the saddest reminiscences, but in any case, on March 6th, we finally started for India, compelled to go by the most difficult, circuitous way. With us also went the unsolved problems as to how the Government of Lhasa could refuse to recognize the passport issued by its own official. And whether one could detain a peaceful American Expedition, with three women members, at the most dangerous heights, in summer tents, for an entire winter. And why it was necessary for the Tibetans to imperil our health, starve the entire caravan to death, and destroy all our cinema films through acute changes in temperature.

Not only was the expedition camped in the coldest spot in all of Asia, but the area was also in the grip of an unusual cold spell. When the grass was snowed under and the animals began to starve, the local population thought the weather must be punishment for the behavior of their government. In his journal, George wrote: "Packs of hungry dogs are beginning to be troublesome, attacking our men outside the camp. The militiamen keep them away by throwing stones but after withdrawing, the dogs only collect in another place. At night we can hardly sleep for the continuous barking and howling."

On January 19, 1928, permission was granted for them to march on to Nagchu, where all caravans awaited orders from Lhasa. The group finally made it to Nagchu and was able to buy "bad flour, some *tsampa*, Chinese conserves in tins, very bad sugar, Chinese vermicelli, frozen turnips, and frozen tangerines." After their long diet of *tsampa* (a barley grain mixture) and mutton, these things seemed to be extraordinary delicacies. They were also glad to secure fifteen bags of food for their poor riding horses.

At last, on March 4, the expedition was finally allowed to leave. Nicholas wrote in his diary, "Everyone rose very early. The day promised to be fine. Having distributed the baggage among the different headmen who supplied yaks for the caravan, we started. Thus ended a five-month stay. Our Colonel was so weak after his illness that he asked us to leave him

behind to await his end, but we persuaded him to mount his horse and try and follow the caravan.”

The most arduous, roundabout route had been mapped, a wide loop west of Lhasa taking them through the Chang-Thang Mountains, over passes of 20,600 feet, across the Brahmaputra, and into Sikkim. Nevertheless, they were leaving. George wrote:

It was still night when everyone rose and packed his bedding, but the dawn was soon softly coloring the sky, veiling the snow peaks of the Chang-Thang Range behind a deep blue. Nag-chu's streets were still completely deserted, but columns of smoke were rising above the houses, and our yak drivers were squatting on the pavement near the big fires outside the gates of our headquarters, taking their tea and *tsampa*. Then the loading began; it took us almost three hours, but finally the yak caravan started.



Perishing camp of the expedition during the winter detention at Chu-na-khe, Tibet, October–December 1927

At 8:30, when everything was finished and the last section of the heavy caravan had disappeared across the river, we set out accompanied by two men from the village. Our Mongol servants, who were returning to Tsaidam, had presented us with ceremonial scarves and bade us farewell. They were sorry to see us go and feared trouble from the officials. While in Nag-chu, I had spoken to the local authorities on our men's behalf and was promised that they would be given every assistance on their return journey. We issued them certificates in Tibetan, requesting the civil and military authorities of Tibet to give them help and protection on Tibetan territory, and a high Tibetan lama, who was traveling to Tsaidam, agreed to take them with his caravan. Some four months later, I was gratified to hear that all of them had reached their native pastures safely.

Having crossed the river, still frozen hard, we ascended a spur and then Nag-chu was forever obscured from our view....We had finally escaped and were returning to India! We knew the way ahead would be difficult. Food was in short supply everywhere and it would be necessary to assemble a new team of men and animals for every stage of the journey—which might mean a delay of anything from a few days to a week or two. But we were on our way back and by following a westerly course, we would arrive in some fifty days. Next day we had to fight our way through the snows that blocked the Tasang La. The ascent was not steep but long, and it took us four hours to get to the top of the pass. Heavy clouds covered the sky. The yaks had a bad time on the pass, many got stuck in the snow, and had to be dragged out by their drivers—a tiresome job at these altitudes. The horses stumbled knee-deep in snow. We passed a Golok lama on the top of the pass. The poor fellow was struggling in the snows, his horse having fallen while climbing the pass. Several tea caravans were stranded, unable to proceed farther, all their caravan animals having perished.

Roerich tried again to obtain permission to go to Lhasa, but to no avail. Local officials along the way were at a loss about what to do with this group of foreigners who had no proper papers. After much hesitation, the viceroy of India authorized their return to Darjeeling.

With Tibet plunged into famine by the intense cold, their arrival at many of the villages was met with hostility and exasperation. At one point, their guide informed the natives that George was “a big Lhasan official, accompanying the American Mission,” and with his knowledge of Tibetan, and enormous fur cap, George was able to maintain the disguise.

Nonetheless, their traverse of Tibet's unmapped territory proved to be rich and fruitful. George wrote: “After a sixteen mile march, we camped in a narrow valley sheltered by undulating, grass hills. The place was called Do-ring or ‘The Lone Stone’ because of the curious megalithic monuments

found in the vicinity. While sanctuaries and the crude stone altars of the primitive Bon-po religion were known to exist here, monuments of this kind had never been found before.”

His father was more enthusiastic: “We especially rejoiced in discovering typical *menhirs* and *cromlechs* in the Trans-Himalayan region of Tibet. It was remarkable to see long rows of stones, and stone circles standing, which vividly transported me to Carnac and the coast of Brittany. Erected perhaps by prehistoric Druids, who were connected in some way to the ancient Bon-po. In any case, this discovery rounded out our search for traces of the great migrations.”

They also found graves thought to date to the Neolithic era. Arranged in a stone square, each grave was laid out from east to west with a large boulder standing at the eastern extremity. The Tibetan authorities objected too strenuously to any excavation for them to attempt anything more than photography.

In the same district, we also saw women wearing head-gear that was exactly like the Slavonic kokoshnik: red, adorned with turquoise and silver coins, or ornamented with beads—it was quite unusual for Tibet. Apparently some remnants had survived here that had been transplanted by an alien tribe, for the local dialects spoken were also different than anything in the area. And there were other interesting analogies. Since the unicorn is found in Chinese art and on Tibetan thankas, I showed a picture of one to a Tibetan, and he insisted there was an antelope with one horn like that, in a region nearby. And indeed the British explorer Bryan Hodson had exported a specimen of a special antelope with one horn. Perhaps we have proved the heraldic myth, here near the Himalayas.

And there were many other interesting facts: without drawing any conclusions, I will tell you that the tribes of Northern Tibet strongly suggested some European types to me. I saw nothing of the Chinese, Mongolian, or Hindu about them; before me passed faces similar to the ones painted by the old French, Dutch, and Spanish artists. It seemed that people from Lyons, the Basques, and the Italians were looking at me with their large, straight eyes, aquiline noses and characteristic wrinkles, thin lips, and long, black hair.

A special surprise came when the expedition passed through Tingri, where the hermit Milarepa had lived in the eleventh century. Milarepa, the St. Francis of the Snow Country, was one of Roerich’s greatest inspirations. Stopping to explore, they were rewarded by discovering the “Brothers and

Friends of the Hidden,” a secret brotherhood of followers who lived on the same ice-clad slopes Milarepa had graced. In the city itself, they located some wall paintings depicting Milarepa sitting in front of his cave in a huge snow mountain, with his right hand cupped to his ear, listening to his devas. While painted images of Milarepa seemed common, the Roerichs were pleased to find an exceedingly rare crude bronze statue to purchase.

Finally, the group was climbing over the 16,970 feet of Sepo La and passing the stone cairn marking the summit between Tibet and the Indian empire. Once again, India spread before them. The long expedition was over. Relief, thanksgiving, joy, disappointment, and a mixture of other powerful emotions assailed them as they gradually descended in the bitter cold, passing huge snow masses, glaciers, and tremendous peaks. George wrote, “Farewell Tibet, land of gales and winds and inhospitable rulers! We are heading toward the wonderland of Sikkim with its rhododendron forests and deodars.”

Farewell also to the dreams of the New Country and Roerich’s destiny to unite the world’s Buddhists under the Panchen Lama and himself.

With spring in full glory, India must have been a feast. They rode through fresh woods, crossed over mountain slopes thickly covered with evergreen shrubs, and smelled fragrant pines. Lush groves of colorful rhododendron bloomed around them. The family had been away from civilization for more than a year, and in all that time they had seldom removed their dust-covered fur coats, boots, and hats. Everything seemed so unfamiliar that they could easily understand when the Mongol horses shied at trees and objected to the stable. Nicholas recounted in his diary, “Two camels are survivors of the entire ordeal, they traveled more than 5,000 miles with us, and crossed the Himalayas. But because camels are unknown from Nag-chu to Gangtok, they attracted large crowds of onlookers everywhere.” The camels were presented to His Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim, who put them on his estate at Dobtra.

“The remaining part of the way to Gangtok was easy and the hospitable house of the British Resident, Colonel Bailey, was waiting to greet us,” wrote an unsuspecting George. “We spent two delightful days there.” So, aside from the feelings that doubtless started churning inside the colonel when he heard the heartrending tales of horror, hunger, and frustration, the Baileys were gracious hosts who had lively discussions with their company.

Perhaps Bailey was able to assuage some of his guilt by being “kind enough” to provide the party with much needed baths, clean clothing, and food before they continued.

By May 16, 1928, they were back in civilization. Letters and telegrams to America were their greatest priority. A justifiably proud Roerich announced the expedition to Central Asia as victorious. Their journey had yielded many discoveries about Buddhism, and much scientific and artistic data. Some of the newly created paintings were already in New York; the last batch had been sent from Mongolia. Roerich announced: “In spite of the tremendous difficulties, including political upheavals and unfavorable seasons for traveling, during which we were often obliged to continue on, we achieved a signal success and brought back a unique record of the regions of Inner Asia.”

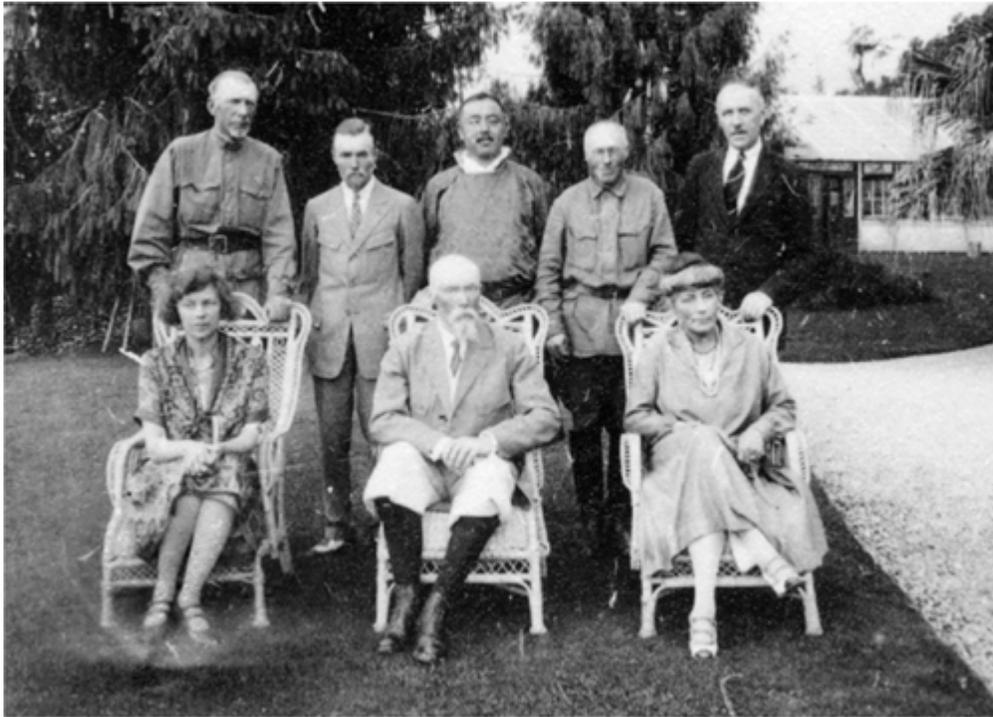


Crossing the Brahmaputra, Tibet, April 1928

The Master explained, “Truly, the experience of journeying gives the best key to the realization of cosmic lives. The true traveler reflects lucidly on the path which lies behind and clearly expresses the desired direction.

He will appraise former circumstances and will foresee the better possibilities.”

The expedition officially disbanded in Darjeeling, its members taking their recollections of the stupendous snow passes, roaring mountain streams, and never-ending deserts home as tales to tell forever. Helena had written two books, *Foundations of Buddhism* and *On Eastern Crossroads*, translated a portion of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* into Russian,¹ and added the third book, *Community*, to the Agni Yoga series.



Warm, clean, and well fed at the home of British Resident, Lt. Col. F. M. Bailey and his wife. Seated, left to right: Mrs. F. M. Bailey, Nicholas Roerich, Helena Roerich, Standing: Col. N. V. Kordashevski, George Roerich, Dr. Ryabinin, name not recorded, Lt. Col. F. M. Bailey. May 26, 1928

Now the family was back in Talai-Pho-Brang, being amused and confounded by the rumors that had filtered to Sikkim. Roerich had been described as “a French and American King,” “Commander of a Russian Corps,” and “King of all Buddhists.” The Mongols had decided the word *American* was really “Ameri-Khan” (Ameri, the King) and therefore

visualized Roerich as a kind of warrior. “When we heard the fairy tales told about us from Lhasa, we could identify ourselves only with difficulty. It was said I carried on a war with the Amban of Sinkiang, and the Tao-tai of Khotan had passed the word that our expedition brought a small cannon that would destroy the entire population (about 100,000 people) in ten minutes.”

The New Yorkers had received Roerich’s telegram with enormous relief. Five months had passed with no word from the expedition; their cables and registered letters had been returned and all investigation had failed to uncover anything. At their wits’ end, Svetoslav, the trustees, and the American friends had waited and prayed, trying not to imagine the worst. Once the telegram arrived, Svetoslav quickly set sail for Bombay; Frances Grant notified the media and then prepared to accompany Sina Lichtmann, who was following close behind Svetoslav.

A photo taken earlier of George and Professor Roerich, both sporting spats, hats, and overcoats, with their hands snugly in their pockets, appeared in the Art section of *Time* magazine:

ROERICH’S RETURN

Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich nursed his chilblains. Jailbirds were glad, as were school children, teachers, art students, functionaries at his Roerich Museum in Manhattan. They were glad because at last he was safe and recuperating from his five-year expedition in and around Tibet, in snow and desert. Where other expeditions dig and collect for science, he saw and painted for art. Snug with him at Darjeeling in northeast India last week were bales of his paintings. He has depicted the whole panorama of Tibet, scenery, people, customs. Some of his scenes are realistic; most are interpretative. A philosopher-painter, he prefers to translate a situation as he realizes it. Soon he will take his pictures to the United States for display in his museum, then in jails and school houses for the benefit of the crass as well as of the well-bred. To know what he is trying to say with paintings, many will need the aid of the scientific notes that he made incidentally on his trip.

Harvard men were glad: George Roerich, Nicholas’s son, was well. Brilliant young Orientalist, he studied there. Perfect in more than a score of Asiatic dialects, on this expedition he was his father’s facile interpreter and pacifier of obstreperous brigands. He is a painter, too. His brother Svetoslav is a portraitist. Svetoslav has just reached Darjeeling from the United States.

Women were glad: Mrs. Nicholas Roerich, mother and wife of the men, had the stamina to accompany them through five years of privation. Last week at Darjeeling she was still weak from starvation, long marches, high climbing, winters in thin tents. Two other women had endured with her.

Archaeologists were glad: In the Altai Mountains, along northern Tibet, Dr. Roerich found tombs like those of Ancient Goths in eastern Europe. Buckles ornamented with Goth-like double eagles strengthened his theory. Tibetans told him that the country around Lhasa was anciently called Gotha.

Scientists were glad: Roerich notebooks were crammed with important observations—magnetic, meteorological, geological, topical, botanical, zoological.

Devil worshipers were glad: The Roerichs found a Buddhism twisted topsyturvy, the black faith of Bon Po. They worship demons, hate Buddhists, have peculiar saints with a central, legendary protector similar to Buddha. The swastika is one of their symbols.

Swedes were glad: The Roerichs descend from Swedes who a thousand years ago founded the Russian empire.

Russians were glad: The Roerichs were born there....Fantastic flat decorations are his forte and peculiarity. In this manner he has tried to picture Russia's and Asia's past. His pieces number about 3,000. Seven hundred and fifty are in the Roerich Museum in Manhattan. They are weird, mystical, fascinating.

Artists were glad: Nicholas Roerich has shown them a way of becoming successful. Returned to St. Petersburg from Paris he wanted to found a school. He hobnobbed with intellectuals; joined societies, shouted out his art theories, got an audience....New United States friends organized the Roerich Museum for him to hold his swift paintings....Other productions are in the Louvre, Luxembourg, Victoria and Albert museums. Finally moneyed friends started to build him a twenty-four story skyscraper on Riverside Drive. It will be completed next July.

In June, barely recovered from the dreadful Tibetan experience, Roerich wrote His Holiness the Dalai Lama, identifying himself as a scientific man from the great kingdom of America and calling for certain explanations to enable him to present a report to his government. He wanted to know, "inter alia," why his expedition was detained for five months in the Chang-Thang region in terrible conditions and why the local people had been forbidden to sell food to his group, resulting in the casualty of many men and animals.

Uneasy over the idea that Roerich might be a representative of America and not a Communist as they had been told, Tibetan officials acknowledged his letter but were at a loss about what to tell him. They quickly contacted Colonel Bailey: "Please let us know whether these Americans were really sent to make inquiries into the matter (by the American Government). As the hope of Tibet centers on the British Government, please let us have your advice as to how a reply should be sent to their letter. An early reply is requested."²

“Point eight” of one communiqué that then passed between Bailey and the Home Office reads:

The Tibetan Government desires our advice with regard to the reply which they should give to Professor Roerich’s letter. It is not easy to suggest a suitable reply, especially as they were acting under our instructions in refusing him entering into Tibet. I would suggest that the Tibetan Government might reply that since the outbreak of the revolution in Russia they have issued stringent orders against the entry of any foreigners into Tibet by the Northern Route, and for this reason refused to have any dealings with the Roerich expedition which followed that route to Tibet. I do not think it would be advisable to inform the Tibetan Government by letter that they should send such a reply. They can be informed by telephone when I go to Gyantse next year or I can inform the Tibetan Trade Agent there verbally. For the present I may be empowered to send a reply to them acknowledging their letter and telling them that I have referred the matter to the Government of India.

By August, Sina and Frances had passed through the Suez Canal, seen Akbar’s Fatehpur Sikri, and toured the Ellora and Ajanta caves. In India’s heat, the trip was long and tiresome for the young women, despite their excitement. They were ready to be reunited with their dear Roerichs. Along with the many papers they were bringing from New York was a note from Horch, asking that Roerich confirm in writing that he, Horch, had purchased all of the paintings and drawings Roerich had completed in Finland plus those from 1924 to 1928. A letter explained this request was “a pure formality that did not in any way affect or change the original arrangements regarding the expedition and its results.” Louis Horch had clearly explained to both Lichtmann and Grant that the request was merely for technical reasons, since the paintings actually belonged to the museum. Should difficulties arise during construction of the skyscraper, however, the note would confirm Horch’s great assets.

Frances later claimed she thought the request strange, but was assured that the document would be destroyed as soon as the building was completed, if no difficulties had arisen from the bank, the contractors, et cetera. No sooner had the two women arrived in Darjeeling than Horch announced his intention to make the skyscraper twenty-nine stories rather than the originally planned twenty-four, necessitating an extra three hundred thousand dollars, but he would lend this money personally and

repay himself from the apartment rents. This decision greatly distressed the Roerichs, but little could be done from India, so they soon dropped the matter.

Frances and Sina immediately took over the job of consulting Indian lawyers to see how just compensation could be demanded from the Tibetan government for the losses sustained by the expedition. Frances wrote to the trade agent at Gyantse, but she got no further than Roerich had, for again, the Tibetan government forwarded copies of all correspondence to Colonel Bailey, who forwarded it to the government of India, which didn't know what to do.

Frances's and Sina's attention, however, was quickly concentrated on sorting, arranging, and cataloging the precious materials that had been so carefully loaded and unloaded daily onto the yaks, camels, donkeys, or horses. The young women felt privileged to be touching and viewing the tremendous collection of paintings, plus all the data and the assortment of Mongolian, Tibetan, and Hindu objects. They could easily visualize everything on display in the International Art Center and the Tibetan Library, where the sacred collection of the Kanjur and Tanjur would be exhibited.

They decided to publish Roerich's travel diary, so his notes needed to be put in some order and transcribed. Years later, Frances could still remember how happy she was to be seated at her typewriter by six each morning, transcribing Roerich's notes. Her drive and enthusiasm were such that he had to reassure her it would all get done soon enough.



Nicholas with Sina and Frances, who came to help, autumn 1928

Plans were formulated to establish the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute, a “permanent Institute which might dedicate itself to the scientific study of this region of Asia, untouched in its opportunities.” Their idea was to establish bases throughout the area so that specialists could conduct research in archaeology, arts, biology, botany, astrochemistry, and other sciences. The plans reached fruition later that year when the institute was founded by the Roerich Museum.

But now that the expedition was over, what about the Masters? In his travel diary and in *Heart of Asia*, Roerich wrote:

Approaching the picturesque banks of the Brahmaputra, one can find more indications and legends about Shambhala...Until quite recently several ashrams of the Mahatmas of the Himalayas existed near Shigatse and further in the direction of the sacred lake Manosaravar. Knowing this, and the facts that surround those remarkable sites, filled me with a special emotion. It was wondrous and strange to pass through the same places where They passed. There are still old people who remember meeting Them personally—calling Them by the names of Asaras and Khuthumpas. Some remember that a religious school was founded there by the Mahatmas of India....

We stood in the same courtyard where an episode occurred with a letter which was destroyed and then miraculously restored by a Master. We passed the caves where They had stayed and crossed the same rivers and in these same jungles of Sikkim stood outside Their outwardly modest Ashram.

To outsiders, who have not felt the energy of these places, the question of the Mahatmas is inconceivable. But traversing the Trans-Himalayas, I discovered it is not just a mountain range, but rather a whole mountainous country, filled with secret areas created by the ranges, the valleys, and the streams. As I wandered through those labyrinths, I realized that hidden places were accessible only through some happy “chance.” Old volcanos, geysers, hot springs, and the presence of radio-activity offered many unsuspected delightful discoveries. Often I stood beside a stark glacier and saw that the neighboring valley was rich with growth that must have been nourished by a hot spring.

While in the barren uplands of Dungkure, we spotted boiling springs with magnificent vegetation nearby. Strawberries, hyacinths, and many other flowers were in bloom. There were several such valleys in the Trans-Himalayas. Near Lhasa it is said that hot springs may be found in some courtyards, supplying hot water to the entire household. Having traveled through these unusual uplands, and seen the peculiar magnetic currents and electric phenomena, and heard and witnessed much, I feel that I know a great deal about the Mahatmas.

With every step, I was convinced that if the hermit can remain safely hidden within his cave, then it is possible for people to dwell undisturbed in a remote valley. There was so much unexplored in these regions, that maps were only useful for helping to gauge distance. While Europeans argue about the existence of the Mahatmas, the Hindus are significantly silent, for many not only know about Them, but have seen Them and have actual proof of Their deeds and appearances. Because the people of Asia had always yearned for Them, the Mahatmas created a special existence there, manifesting Themselves when it was necessary and passing unnoticed otherwise; leaving Their imprint only upon the hearts and minds of those who know. They are not a fairy tale, imagination, or invention, the Mahatmas are living forms.

I do not wish to persuade or try to convince anyone of Their existence. A great many people have seen Them, have talked to Them, and received letters and material objects from Them. If someone ignorantly asks, “But isn’t it all just a myth?” advise them to study the book *The Reality of the Origin of the Grecian Myths*, written by Professor Zelinsky of the Warsaw University. Real knowledge will only enter through open doors—if prejudice exists, it will be outgrown through inner development. For us personally, it was more important to verify that this belief was accepted throughout immense distances and that many people were ready and waiting for the future evolution. Throughout central Asia, we found that the same sacred respect and impregnability surrounded both the concept of Teacher and Guru. Only in the East, where Teachers are said to be conductors of electricity and unifiers of knowledge, is the importance of this relationship understood.

Many Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese scholars are familiar with the Mahatmas, but their reverence is so great that it prevents them from revealing anything to the uninitiated. The sacred meaning of the word “Guru,” Teacher and Spiritual Guide, makes the subject of the Mahatmas almost unapproachable, and for this reason, many who traveled in Asia have not mentioned Them. They were prevented from meeting this most precious concept by ignorance of the languages, or diverse interests, or bad luck in not meeting the right people. If one visits a museum or temple without special permission, he may never know that the most sacred things are in the hidden storeroom.

If you are in a hurry, or just curious, it might be difficult to understand even a simple chemical experiment, let alone anything as complicated as the Mahatmas. And what good would it do to just have your curiosity satisfied? How many people are there who would love to receive a letter from the Mahatmas! But after it provided a moment of astonishment and confusion, would it really change their lives? Probably not.

The average scientist talks about the Mahatmas as pure illusion; but Sir William Crooks or Sir Oliver Lodge would not speak so. Vivekananda and many Hindus who know Them safeguard Their names to such an extent that they are willing to deny Their existence rather than betray or reveal. But now people are knocking on the doors for this great knowledge; many of the younger generation simply want to start a correspondence with a Guru or find a real teacher. Everyone knocks in his own way. Many find disillusionment because they knocked on the wrong door, or lacked sufficient energy and the necessary determination to continue knocking.

What laboratory could analyze the intent of those who approach this method of knowledge? Yes, verily, it needs to be a laboratory, where labor and perseverance and fearlessness are the keys to the gates. The teachings of the Mahatmas speak about the scientific foundations of existence. They direct one toward the conquest of energy. They speak of those victories of labor which shall transform life into a constant festival. The things suggested by Them are not ephemeral or illusionary, but real, for without superstition or prejudice they pertain to the most all-embracing study of possibilities of life. The true followers of the Mahatmas are not sectarians or hypocrites—on the contrary, they are vital people, who are attempting to conquer life.



NEW YORK: THE ROERICH MUSEUM

The governments of India, England, and Tibet were not nearly as concerned about the Mahatmas as they were about the Roerichs. Although they had lived in the United States less than three years and did not hold American passports, they had traveled under the American flag and spent American money. They were Russian nationals who had recently been in Moscow, but did not have Soviet passports and had not acquired Soviet citizenship. When permission to tour India and conduct an expedition across Central Asia had been requested, no one had inquired into immigration. If they had come to India as tourists, they were expected to leave.

Nevertheless, it was very clear to the Roerichs that they were home. Nicholas told people that “India was his land of heart’s desire,” often explaining his “spiritual kinship” had begun in childhood; Rabindranath Tagore had even identified “Isvara,” Roerich’s ancestral estate, as the Sanskrit word for ashram. Of all the mountain ranges they had seen, none equaled the Himalayas, and where else but in the land of the Mahatmas could they await the Coming One and the time of Shambhala?



Kulu Valley

So, while the status of citizenship was a dilemma for everyone, the couple adopted India. In September 1928, Roerich was reluctantly granted permission to stay because Helena still suffered from the hardships of the expedition. Not knowing how long they would be allowed to remain, they decided to use wisely the time they did have. Once rested, they began traveling toward the western part of the Himalayas, to Naggar and Manali and into the Kulu Valley. Ancient Kuluta was known as the cradle of culture; some said it was the most beautiful spot on earth. Roerich wrote:

The sacred Kulu Valley lies hidden on the border of Lahul and Tibet, forming the northern part of the Punjab. The most significant names and events have gathered there, in the Silver Valley (and it well merits that name, whether under the cover of sparkling snow in winter, or in spring when the fruit trees are laden with snow-white blossoms).

The law-giver Manu himself gave his name to Manali, and the great Arjuna opened a miraculous passage when he went to the hot springs. The Pandavas came to Naggar after the great war described in the *Mahabharata*, and Rishi Vyasa compiled the book itself there. Much of historical importance happened by the Beas River. Thousands of pilgrims come because Padma Sambhava had been there, and a hill nearby still carries the name of Alexander the Great, who passed by.

In this ancient place, three hundred and sixty gods and protectors, including Akbar the Great, Buddha, Maitreya, and all the great teachers and kings, are memorialized with temples and statues...In this Silver Valley, Krishna joyfully called all things to life...And the fruit trees responded by blossoming. Under an apple tree, covered with rose colored blossoms, he played his divine songs of regeneration on his silver flute.

And his painting *Krishna—Spring in Kulu* captured it all.



Nicholas Roerich in Kulu Valley

At Christmastime, the family was visiting in Kulu when they saw a house high up on the hill that they knew was for them. But they were told that it was on the Rajah of Mandi's estate and not available. But they knew if a thing was destined, it would be. And so it must have been. They leased the house first, and then succeeded in purchasing it—along with rights and obligations, including a contractual agreement about the water rights, shared with the god Jamlu and the British government. Called the Hall Estate, the house sat near the top of a mountain, reached by a narrow

winding road closed by snowdrifts in winter. A carved statue of Guga Chohan, the protector of the valley, stood beneath a deodar tree guarding the terraces, stone walls, and majestic blue pines and other healing trees.

The Roerichs happily immersed themselves in the local traditions, taking part in all local celebrations. Their respect for the vegetable kingdom and love of trees touched their gardeners, who were ordered to avoid shortening the life of any plants or trees. “In ancient Kuluta, we found an abundance of all we needed!” Roerich joyously recorded. There was land nearby to start the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute, and the Rotang Pass, the path to Tibet and Central Asia, lay just to the north. By spring, they were so well settled that Roerich was ready to return to New York.

Nicholas and George sailed for Europe in spring 1929 and then on to New York. In their absence, Maurice’s sister Esther came to stay with Helena and the Bogdanova sisters. (She remained for two years.) When Frances and Sina had returned to the States in November 1928, they had carried the precious cargo of carefully crated additional expedition paintings and treasures for Corona Mundi. Sacred items and writings had also been sent, to be sealed in the cornerstone of the skyscraper museum in a rare four-hundred-year-old Rajput casket of handwrought iron, inlaid with elaborate gold and silver.

Construction of the new building was almost completed; preparations for its dedication and opening were coordinated through frequent cables and letters. Roerich suggested representatives of foreign countries and leaders of art and culture who would be interested in attending the dedication ceremonies, set for October 17, 1929.

Chicago’s Louis Sullivan had designed the first skyscraper in the 1800s, believing it portrayed the new spirit of the twentieth century and exemplified American progress and greatness. His skyscraper created great controversy, but many architects working on tiny Manhattan Island immediately grasped its potential and began to build high instead of wide. Skyscrapers were touted as the solution to New York’s congestion, and the city began “going tall,” with one building following another into the air. When the Master Institute needed to expand, the trustees wanted their new building to be the “outward visage of the spirit of America and its creative idioms.”



Carefully packed crates of paintings going to America

After Sina and Maurice had returned with the plans formulated in Urga, Harvey Wiley Corbett had been selected as architect. Then everything was moved into temporary offices so the institute buildings (and three adjacent structures) could be demolished. Now, a new Roerich Museum building was rising on the corner of Riverside Drive and 103rd Street. Construction of the first fifteen stories had gone fairly smoothly. Then difficulties arose.

When Roerich's opinion was needed, he was on the border of Tibet, completely out of touch—maybe forever. So without Roerich's knowledge, Louis Horch sanctioned changes and made revisions that greatly altered and improved the building from the original plans. Corner windows were added to let in more light. The stupa Roerich had planned for the capstone was replaced by a black zigzag design on the water tank. Faced entirely with brick, the building began with a dark purple tone, shading into mauve at its upper terraces and tower. The exterior walls were planned to give the effect of a growing thing, and the tower commanded a thirty-mile view of the Hudson.

As soon as Sina and Frances were back from India, they were caught up in the excitement of inviting hundreds of the world's distinguished and important people to join the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone. One invitation went to John G. Sargent, attorney general of the United States.

Sargent forwarded the invitation to J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who scribbled on a memo, "The Atty. Gen. asks 'What is it?'" This memo and the invitation became the first items in the FBI files on Roerich. Over the years, despite the fact that several folders eventually bulged with interviews, news clippings, and documents of activities of Roerich and the Master Institute (under close scrutiny and surveillance), no one ever reached a conclusion about what "it" was.

Few attended the ceremony, held in the unfinished Hall of Nations under banners of all nations flying from the steel network canopy, but telegrams and letters poured in. The highlight came when the gold- and silver-inlaid Rajput casket was cemented into the gray granite cornerstone.

Directly afterward, charged with the mission of establishing friendly relations with South American artists, Frances Grant (who spoke Spanish) sailed for Latin America with some Roerich paintings. She followed the route President Hoover had taken when he opened the doors with his "good neighbor" policy: down the western coast to Peru and Chile, across the Andes to Argentina, Uruguay, and then Brazil. She received enthusiastic responses everywhere.

Her return coincided with the Roerich men's arrival, and she joined those greeting them enthusiastically at the pier. A police escort rushed their party past the skyscraper to the temporary headquarters, and then to a tea in Roerich's honor at the Hotel Biltmore. The following evening, the city saluted him at the official reception in the museum. The reception committee roster listed 158 names. The press covered the event lavishly. Under the headline "Women Rule Far East," the *New York American* reported:

Women are fast assuming the reins in the Far East, Professor Nicholas Roerich, head of the Roerich American Expedition to Central Asia, declared yesterday.

The blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked little man of fifty-four, who has just returned from a three-year Expedition into the wilds of Tibet and Mongolia with his wife and son, George, mildly tells of climbing 17,000 foot mountain peaks, of being held in captivity by Tibetan bandits for more than a year.

Speaking of the Mongolians and the Tibetans, he said: "The women have more energy than the males. They are better business dealers, too. While the male seldom has more than one wife, the wife often has five husbands. They know little of

America but have heard of Henry Ford and President Hoover. They hope some day to achieve a state such as they vision America to be.”

During the next several days, the man who referred to himself as the “hermit artist” whirled through enough social gatherings to make him ache. He spoke to more people at one time than he probably had during the entire past five years altogether. He was feted, lauded, honored, and celebrated with accolades. On behalf of New York’s seven million people, Mayor Jimmy Walker praised Roerich as a “messenger of unity” among men, and thanked him for the great things he had done for humanity, saying that the understanding of peace and the message of brotherhood had been brought to remote peoples of the world by Roerich’s “Mission of Good Will”: “It is men like Professor Roerich who make us come to the realization that there are no foreigners, no alien races in the world, but that humanity represents one great brotherhood. Professor Roerich is teaching the world to achieve peace and happiness through art and the appreciation of beauty. We in America feel signally honored that he has chosen New York as the permanent abode of his remarkable collection of paintings.”

A few days later, Roerich was received in a private audience at the White House, where he presented President Hoover with a Himalayan painting and summarized his expedition and his impressions, concluding, “The people of Central Asia praised America in the highest way, considering it the land of ‘Shambhala’...the land of the enlightened future, the land of the new era.”

Reporters from newspapers around America came to interview Roerich, who enjoyed telling a Mongolian myth passed down over generations: Two brothers dwelt together in a rich and fertile land, each with his own family and servants. One day, the land was torn apart by a streak of lightning; the ocean poured in and the brothers were separated. Over time, they each founded races. The myth ended with the prophecy that the time will come when the brothers are reunited. Then Roerich would tell the reporters that when he showed photos of the Pueblo Indians to the Mongolians, they immediately called them cousins.

How New Yorkers and Roerich’s followers felt about his return is best told by Herbert Corey’s article in his column “Manhattan Days and Nights”:

The story of Prof. Nicholas Roerich is more than a week over-due because I have not known precisely what to write. I'm not sure that I know even yet. Other men travel to remote parts of the earth and risk their lives and come back and write books. But no other man, so far as I am aware, is like Nicholas Roerich....When he went to the Himalayas he was the head of a cult. Roerich might resent that statement. It is the fact that his disciples are ardent. Some of them almost to the verge of incoherence. When he returned to New York after five years, they were just as devoted. Yet he does not preach, so far as I know. He imposes no doctrine on his followers. He is a searcher for truth and beauty. That's all. It is difficult to understand the grip he has on his people. There can be no doubt of the reality of it.

Gladys Baker, a special correspondent for the *Birmingham News*, filled the huge first page of the Sunday supplement with this article of unusual sensitivity and perception. "Knowing the reticence and likewise the greatness of the man, whose name has become a by-word throughout America," she had asked to see his paintings before she began the interview.

Graciously acceding to my request, he took me at once up narrow stairs to the fourth story. We paused in front of a locked chamber which, for the present, guards the famous Asiatic series....It was only after the last canvas had been turned to the wall that I spoke with the artist. Something of the restfulness of the August afternoon, something of the mood of the paintings, of scenes and profound thoughts, which his brush had so recently described, was with him. Because this was Roerich, as he knows himself, and is known by his intimates, I would not have had it otherwise....Seated opposite Prof. Roerich I was able to regard him with that close and almost unconscious scrutiny which interviewers, by years of practice, bring to bear on the subject whose personality forms the background of their observations. Though his career stamps him definitely as a man of action, a man who makes his visions tangible, none of these qualities present themselves in his physical appearance. To begin with, Prof. Roerich is of small stature and slightly built.

His snowy-white hair, which has already left bare the temples and his gray Van Dyke, add another decade of years to the five decades chalked up against him in the matter of birthday anniversaries. He is uniformly quiet and relaxed in voice, gesture, and mannerisms. I could observe no single trace of that nervousness which usually marks the man whose imagination and quick impulses compel him to set his face on untrod paths.

In conversation he proceeds slowly, though without hesitancy. When he crosses a room he walks with unhurried pace as though eternity stretched before him. More than any other feature do his eyes transmit this spirit of ease and tranquility, indicating a nature unharrassed by the harsh outlines of a keyed-up civilization in

the midst of which he lives and exemplifies his creed, which calls for practical activity and constructive service.

The eyes of Roerich bespeak the seer, the priest, the poet. They are as baffling in analysis as that inscrutable quality in his paintings which defies concrete description. Though I made a definite effort to do so, it was impossible to even know their color...But I would not give the impression that only in the matter of the pigment are the eyes of Roerich his most arresting feature. It is something, which lies behind them—an age-old knowing which emanates so surely from the man that one is tempted to believe with the occultists that each person possesses individual vibrations. Without assuming that each man has his special “aura,” how else is one able to explain the rays of peace, goodwill, and higher purpose which seem to enfold one by merely coming within the radius of the man’s presence? And this, mind you, before a single word has been spoken.

Sitting with this gentle, quiet man and listening to conversation which showed the trend to which his thought turns most naturally, it was difficult to realize that a good part of his life has been spent in bold and spirited adventuring....

From what one has read and heard of Nicholas Roerich it is not difficult to sum up his philosophy. Leaning strongly to the original teachings of Gautama Buddha he has also forged into his spiritual armor the essence of all great religious principles.

“You will find,” he said, “the same golden threads woven into the tapestry of them all.” One of these golden threads he holds to be the theory of reincarnation. When I asked him directly if he himself believed that the soul rides on the winds of the centuries and comes back to inhabit a new garment of the flesh, he replied, “I do not believe in reincarnation—I know it. Without such an explanation, life would be meaningless and futile.” He reminded me that Jesus had taught reincarnation and that the belief was also current at that time among the people. Well informed on all subjects on which he converses, he underlined his statements with authentic quotations from the Testaments....



Nicholas Roerich, Naggar, India. In background: triptych Fiat Rex (1931)

In summing up the personality of Nicholas Roerich, I am inclined to believe his chief characteristic, and one which permeates the whole of his creations, is that spirit of humility, found only in the truly great.

He was taking the measure of his own heart when he wrote in *Morya's Flowers*:

When I get knowledge, I think there is someone
who knows better.

When I can, I think there may be some
Whose power strikes firmer and deeper—
And behold! I know not, and I cannot.

Thou who comes in the dead of the night,
Tell me, in the silent way
What have I willed and what accomplished in my life.
Put thy hand upon my head
And then I shall regain my will and my power.
And what I will in my dream at night
Will be remembered in the hours of the morning.

A few months ago the name of Nicholas Roerich was presented to the Nobel Commission for the peace prize through the Department of International Law of the University of Paris. The committee at this time pointed out his eligibility to the great award by reason of the fact that for the last twenty years, through his writing, painting, researches, and lectures, his propaganda for peace has reached into twenty-one countries carrying the unified message of international brotherhood.

The official opening of the Master Institute building on October 17, 1929, was described as “one of the most brilliant events in the history of art in America.” No expense had been spared, and the tremendous publicity brought thousands of congratulatory messages streaming in from all over the world. Representatives attended from universities, scientific and artistic institutions, and museums; the mayor of New York City, congressmen, cabinet members, and envoys from France and Italy attended as well.

The new building was entered from Riverside Drive through two large brass doors with framed panes of glass. The Tibetan Library, the Hall of the East, and the galleries of the International Art Center flanked the entrance. Murals painted by a Tibetan lama adorned the Hall of the East. Though the museum was located on the second and part of the third floors, paintings hung everywhere. Roerich had personally directed the lighting and hanging of each of the 750 paintings.



Roerich at the front entrance of the Master Institute

The spacious quarters of Corona Mundi International Art Center and a large adjoining office for Nettie Horch shared the main floor with a restaurant, built despite Roerich's objections, that could seat four hundred people and a theater that came to be called Roerich Hall. The third floor was chiefly occupied by the Master Institute of United Arts and the School of the Roerich Museum. There were sixteen studios—large ones for painting and ballet classes and standard-size ones for the various departments of music, painting, drawing, interior decor, and drama.

At Roerich's request, the St. Sergius Chapel had been constructed to house a collection of religious paintings of the Early Masters and the fine icon collection that Sina and Maurice had brought back from Moscow. These were said to be the first Russian icons to be exhibited publicly in America. This chapel proved to be a favorite with the thousands of visitors to the building. Private apartments for the trustees and additional apartments for artists and writers were above. They were advertised as "fine modern quarters at a very reasonable rental for people who want to live in the Roerich Museum building while enjoying the cultural privileges extended free of charge to its residents."

The building was considered outstanding in its practicality; the apartments were predicted to be one of the greatest successes in the country. The twenty-ninth floor was not mentioned to the public, for it had been built exclusively for the trustees, who generally met there weekly for discussions and to read whatever came from Professor and Mme Roerich. They went there when they wanted privacy. The Trustees' Room was graciously furnished with fine old statues, antique tables, and chairs. It also contained a steel closet built expressly to store Helena's precious writings. In it were the manuscripts she had completed before the expedition, the ones Sina and Maurice had transported from Moscow and Urga, and the books Esther Lichtmann brought back from her two extended visits in India.

The archives, all important documents, the original manuscripts of *Altai-Himalaya*, *Shambhala*, and the Agni Yoga series were also stored there. Eventually, the trustees felt that, since anyone could get a duplicate key and enter that room, a better way should be found to safeguard Mme Roerich's manuscripts. When they wrote to Helena in India, she replied that she, too, had been apprehensive and asked that Nettie Horch be responsible for their safekeeping, perhaps renting a special vault. Mrs. Horch informed the other trustees that she had done so and transferred everything from the closet.



The Tibetan Library, with sacred collection of Kanjur and Tanjur

On October 23, 1929, only six days after the opening, prices on the New York Stock Exchange started to plummet. By 3:00 p.m., when the second largest number of shares in history had been traded, the time of lavishness was over. The following day, Wall Street looked as if it were under siege. Hundreds of small investors—waiters, cooks, shopkeepers, housemaids, seamstresses—crowded into the narrow street, demanding to know if their money was safe. When the market closed on October 24, there was a three-billion-dollar loss, and a record 12,894,650 shares had changed hands. Representatives of thirty-five brokerage firms jointly issued a statement, assuring everyone that “the worst had passed,” that the market was “fundamentally sound” and “technically in better condition than it had been in months.”

When the final quotation clicked across the tickers the night of October 29, the New York Stock Exchange alone had lost over ten billion dollars, twice the amount of currency in circulation in the entire country at the time. Americans were in shock. How uncanny it must have been for Roerich to be in materialistic America in time to see the end of “the get rich overnight” era. In *Hierarchy*, their teacher explained:

With the loss of spiritual understanding, the planet loses its equilibrium and the consequences are inevitable; for there is no karmic effect without cause and no cause without effect. The manifestation called forth by the loss of spiritual striving will certainly spur those impulses which will bring regeneration to the planet. The appearance of physical changes will give the understanding of Agni Yoga to the planet. The financial crash will cause a revaluation of values. The distortion of religions will result in a search for a new spiritual achievement.

Therefore, verily the crumbling of the old world is a new affirmation, for through the coming of new values We bring the salvation of the spirit to the world.

Asked to address students at New York University, Roerich spoke of the “vital value of art”: “Anyone, who took the time to look, could have anticipated this blow-up of paper profits, for almost worthless objects had reached enormous values, and vice-versa. Now everyone is left holding piles of paper, litter. Many times during the time of the Russian revolution, we saw bankers and financial concerns swept away, but artists and collectors survived. Life itself demonstrates that creative work survives, as do scientific discoveries—and thoughts.”

Between one and three million Americans were immediately and directly affected by the crash—many almost totally wiped out. The market continued to slump downward until mid-November. Even the beginning of a sluggish return did little to change the aftereffects. The Depression had begun. In New York there was an immediate increase in requests for aid from charitable organizations; scholarships became a necessity at the Master Institute. Rents in the Master Apartment Hotel were lowered.

Fortunately, the many friends of the Roerich Museum were both wealthy and generous. People like Major Stokes, Mrs. Lionel Sutro, Mrs. Katherine Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Crane, and others had regularly helped financially in advancing Roerich’s visions. Now they stepped forward with donations, scholarships, and contributions and promised greater support in the future. Nevertheless, things looked rocky for the Master Institute. As the Depression set in, the opportunities for generating income from culture diminished greatly.

In *Roerich, Fragments of a Biography*, Maurice Lichtmann’s sister Esther (using the pen name Jean Duvernois) gave an emotional insight into the impact the building had on the city when she wrote:

Recently, approaching New York at night, along the shore of the Hudson...I spotted the tallest building on the entire shore of Riverside Drive; its top was glowing in a white light—it was our house. Suddenly, I was unable to proceed further. The hundreds of automobiles that were rushing around me completely blinded me, and a dampness impeded my vision as I made my way out of the avalanche of autos, stopped my car on the side, dried my eyes and with unforgettable emotion, looked at the lighted white “*Stupa*” —the daughter of the desert. And I said to myself, “This is that guiding white stone from our beloved mountains of Altai! For it is ours, created by our genius; for our glory, and for further growth, the treasure of our mind and spirit is raised to this height.”



THE PACT AND BANNER OF PEACE

The Depression notwithstanding, Roerich had still another dream for his American friends to transform into reality. He had been working on it since 1904, when he and Helena had traveled throughout Russia investigating and painting old churches and monasteries. Because he believed culture to be humankind's highest expression, the lack of concern over its preservation had been one of the most painful aspects of his travels. It hurt him to review all that had been destroyed by war—the libraries of Louvain and Oviedo, for example, or the Cathedral of Rheims, not to mention hundreds of museums, laboratories, schools, and private collections filled with irreplaceable treasures.

As he thought of ways to prevent this senseless waste, he decided to rally all nations together with a pact. Since pacts were signed and generally forgotten, his would also have a banner to fly above any building containing an artistic treasure; announcing, as did the Red Cross flag, that something needed protection from bombing.

With the Depression extending throughout Europe, many were predicting war. Over two million Germans were jobless; their nation faced bankruptcy while Hitler gathered strength and popularity. Roerich felt an urgent need for action and presented his ideas to his loyal coworkers, who, obliging as ever, were willing to start the wheels rolling.

On Sunday, March 16, 1930, the *New York Times* printed a letter from Roerich. Under the headline “Special Flag is Suggested to Protect Art Treasures,” he wrote of the loss of “precious milestones of human achievement” due to the “world’s misunderstandings”:

Against such errors of ignorance, we should take immediate measures....No one can deny that the flag of the Red Cross proved to be of immeasurable value in reminding the world of humanitarianism and compassion. For this reason, a plan for an international flag has been outlined through America to all the foreign governments, which would protect all treasures of art and science.

The plan is to create a flag to be raised above museums, libraries, universities, and other cultural centers, so they will be respected as international and neutral territory. When it was first propounded, we were not surprised to find that it met with unanimous interest and enthusiasm. Experienced statesmen wondered why it had not been thought of before. When we asked Roerich Museum honorary advisers Dr. George Chklaver, Doctor of International Law at Paris University, and Professor Albert Geouffre de la Pradelle, member of the Hague Peace Court and vice president of the Institute of International Law of Paris, to frame this idea into an international formula, they returned a splendidly formulated project of international agreement, along with many answers full of pan-human sympathy.

This international flag is for the protection of beauty and science and to prevent the repetition of the atrocities of the last war to cathedrals, museums, libraries, and other lasting memorials of the creation of the past. And to elevate the universal understanding of evolutionary discoveries and act as a guardian of culture....We often repeat that the cornerstone of future civilization rests upon beauty and knowledge. Now we must act upon this thought and act quickly. The League of Nations, which has progressed toward international harmony, will not be opposed to this flag, for it expresses their aims of a world unity. It has been submitted to the State Department and the Committee on Foreign Relations.

That the idea was originally conceived in the United States is not an accident. By its geographical position, the United States is least personally affected by such measures of protection. Hence the proposition comes from a country whose own art treasures are in no particular danger, better illustrating that this flag is a symbol of peace, not of one country, but of civilization as a whole. The flag is designed with three magenta spheres within a magenta circle on a white ground, as a symbol of eternity and unity....

It is imperative to take immediate measures to preserve the noble heritage of our past for a glorious posterity that can only come if all countries pledge themselves to protect the creations of culture. After all, these belong to the whole world and this plan may be the way to create the next vital step towards a universal culture and peace.

For Helena, the Banner of Peace and the unity of women in the name of the new era of culture were the two historical tasks at hand. From India, she repeatedly encouraged the coworkers to set aside their problems and petty differences and take on these causes. "You must understand the majesty of

this formidable time. You must realize that everything is in conflagration behind you and that the only salvation lies ahead....The time will come when the Banner of Peace and the Banner of Culture will cover the whole world. Can you sense the beauty and power of this symbol?" Much concerning the higher ramifications of the pact and Banner were included in *Hierarchy*, which the Master and Helena were writing. The Banner of Peace would open the gates to a better future, for salvation lies in culture. "Humanity cannot flourish without the knowledge of the greatness of culture."

Until late spring of 1930, the pact met with much opposition. Then it began gathering support. Senator Borah agreed to take the plan to Washington, and support was growing in Belgium, where the First International Roerich Pact Conference was scheduled. On their return to India, Nicholas and George would be going through Europe, seeking support, catching up with the latest scientific experiments, and planning for the newly established Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute.

At departure time, their Indian visa applications were knotted in red tape and confusion but they were not unduly alarmed, feeling everything could be straightened out in London. However, once there, they started to feel a little desperate when the troubles continued. After several weeks of requests, petitions, and memoranda, their appeals were denied—on accusations of Bolshevism. D. Petrie, head of the Indian Secret Service, wrote to London quite candidly that he had enough troubles without trying to keep suspicious people like the Roerichs under surveillance.

On May 23, 1930, an official of the Home Office answered George's request to return to his work as director of Urusvati by informing him that India was not a suitable place for people to research matters relating to archaeology, art, and science if their sympathies lay with the Soviets. That Roerich's wife was ill and that everything they owned was there did not matter; India's door was firmly closed to them. Roerich wired New York for help and a tremendous outcry of protest was raised, but it did nothing to change Britain's position. The press got nowhere in their attempt to reunite this "great figure" with his wife.

So father and son were faced with the challenge of finding a way home. As Roerich tried every approach, he must have seen the irony in the situation, for other countries were liberally heaping honors upon him and

“attesting to his inspiration as a force for cultural advances and the betterment and ennoblement of human life.” The president of France received him and placed the Palace of Fine Arts at his disposal should he care to exhibit his paintings. In September, the International Museums Committee of the League of Nations, some four hundred representatives from the governments of France, Belgium, and Italy and from many cultural societies, met in Bruges and organized a permanent association to further the worldwide adoption of the Roerich Peace Pact and the Banner of Peace.

Then, some progress was made. On the day after Nicholas’s fifty-sixth birthday, the governor of Pondicherry, French India, allowed the two men to enter his country. They remained a few months and began a little excavating. Then the viceroy of India agreed to allow them into India with a three-month visa. They reached Kulu on December 11, 1930, and were finally reunited with their dear Helena Ivanovna. When the three months elapsed, the British, wanting to escape another uproar of public sentiment, relented and permitted Roerich to remain in Naggar on condition that he go no farther into India than the Punjab’s southern border. Finally things in Kulu settled down, and Roerich and George began work at Urusvati.

Early the next year, the Roerich Museum Press published a slim book proudly entitled *Roerich Museum, A Decade of Activity, 1921–1931*. Now everyone could read how the Roerichs’ vision had been cultivated like a “garden of beauty.” The school had indeed flowered; the creative spirit of thousands had been awakened, nurtured, and developed. From India, Roerich wrote:

Dear co-workers,

On this day of greeting...I do not attempt simply to praise you, because is it possible to praise a man who is completely devoted to the idea of culture? Is it possible to praise a man for honesty? Can one give praise for spirituality? Or inspiration through beauty? Because all these are the basis for a cultural worker. Praise is always relative. But fact is absolute and today we mark a decade of arduous labor in the name of Culture. I wish to measure that which is undeniable.

Glancing back upon all labors, upon all our battles with ignorance, it becomes apparent that the creative work proceeds incessantly....Can we recall even one year that was spent in rest or self-indulgence? Can we name even one month, out of these one hundred and twenty months, when thought and labor did not mold new

possibilities? When endless obstacles were not turned into opportunities...and our energy was not devoted towards the Good?

As I have always said, Culture is the reverence of Light. Even the grass and the plants strive towards light. How inspiredly and exaltedly must people then strive to one Light if they consider themselves higher than the vegetable kingdom.

This very night, above the chain of the Central Himalayas, an extraordinary illumination is glowing. It is not lightning; the sky is clear. It is the luminous glow noted very recently over the Himalayas by scientists. In the name of Light, in the name of Light borne by the human heart, let us work and create and study. Greetings to you all on this memorable day.

The little volume triumphantly enumerated the activities and people who had shared in the work. It listed Roerich's hundreds of paintings, described the Asiatic expedition, and acknowledged the honors bestowed upon him from around the world. It also cited many of the programs that had been carried into settlement homes, schools, and women's associations. Thousands of lectures had been delivered over the radio, in libraries, at schools, to art clubs, societies, and institutions, and even in Sing Sing penitentiary.

Roerich's desire to create a common cultural bond and encourage finer understanding between all parts of the globe had resulted in thirty-nine paintings being exhibited in leading museums throughout Latin America. Branches of Roerich societies were also started around the world. The Latin American Institute had been founded in Brazil, and a European Center of the Roerich Museum was inaugurated in Paris, with plans underway to establish others in Buenos Aires, Belgrade, and Riga.

The list of eighty-six honorary advisors reads like a Who's Who of the world's renowned educators, artists, and cultural leaders, including Sir Jagadis Bose, India; Albert Einstein, Germany; Dr. Edgar Hewitt, Santa Fe; Charles Hovey Pepper, Boston; Leopold Stokowsky, Philadelphia; Deems Taylor and Claude Bragdon, New York; Rabindranath Tagore, India; and Ignacio Zuloaga, Spain. Hundreds of concerts, recitals, performances, and contests had been held, and many volumes of books written by Roerich and others had been published.

Under the guidance of Frances Grant, the Museum Press published the *Roerich Museum Bulletin*, a monthly magazine devoted to disseminating information about all movements for international friendship through

culture around the world, and the *Archer*, a magazine for members of the Roerich societies. A series of commemorative stamps was sold to raise funds for the publication of the New Era Library Series. The *Message of 1929* and *Message of 1930* had been published to keep everyone informed of the activities and participants for those years. On and on, the museum's accomplishments and committees continued, until the book ended with an inspiring message by Roerich, "On the Threshold of the New Decade."

More than 2,400,000 people had toured the new building in their first year, and over sixty diverse groups had used the meeting halls. The New York Chapter of Rosicrucians had moved their Grand Lodge and AMORC (Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis) reading rooms into the building. Their first meeting was such a success that they overflowed into two of the largest meeting rooms, and their entire membership enthusiastically pledged their support. The Rosicrucians considered Roerich one of their own, giving him the honorary title of "European Legate of the Rosicrucian Order in America." He was also called the representative-at-large of the Great White Brotherhood.



Riverside Drive, New York, 1929. The Master Institute is the tallest building

People from all over the world flocked to see the museum, Sarah Delano Roosevelt, mother of New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, included.

Like so many society women of her day, she was drawn to the occult practices in vogue. Iowa-born Henry A. Wallace, who became secretary of agriculture after Roosevelt was elected president, shared her interests. Wallace, who called himself a practical agriculturist, was mystically inclined. Searching for something deeper than his religion offered, he had joined the Theosophical Society, explored occultism and astrology, and incorporated some American Indian rituals into his life. He confided to a friend that he was searching for methods of bringing the “Inner Light” into outward manifestation.

Wallace, who saw the Depression as an opportunity for a spiritual reformation, became a great admirer of Roerich’s art, ideas, and principles and was soon a frequent visitor to the museum. Everyone felt honored by his interest. Either Frances or Maurice received a note from him almost weekly. He wrote and spoke with Frances so often, that some wondered if their interest in each other might have gone beyond the paintings and teachings.

Admiring the way the museum continued to function despite their severe money problems, Wallace volunteered to champion the Pact of Peace and the Banner. He wrote from Washington: “I believe so profoundly in the things for which the Banner of Peace stands that I am only too happy to offer you any cooperation in my personal capacity to help to make your efforts along this line successful.” The support Wallace offered was considerable. He eagerly lobbied Congress, and after the 1932 election kept President Roosevelt thoroughly briefed on the Pact. Roosevelt’s interest is shown in this handwritten note (undated) to Cordell Hull, his secretary of state:

Dear Cordell

As you know I am *very* keen about the Roerich Peace Pact and I hope we can get it going via “the Americas”—Will you and Henry Wallace talk this over and have something for me when I get back.

FDR

By 1932, the Pact had made enough progress to be considered by many government bodies, international jurists, and cultural groups. Pope Pius, King Albert of Belgium, King Alexander of Yugoslavia, President Masaryk

of Czechoslovakia, and others took up the cause alongside universities, scientific bodies, and national academies. When the Second International Conference met in Bruges, thirty-two countries were represented, and the *Fondation Roerich pro Pace, Arte, Scientia et Labore* was established.

Then the stock market took another plunge and more fortunes were jeopardized, Louis Horch's among them. Manufacturer's Trust started proceedings for foreclosure on the museum building mortgages and took action to put the building into receivership. Henry Wallace expressed his concern in many ways. When questioned about the situation by a member of the State Department, he wrote a "Memorandum in Regard to the Receivership of the Roerich Museum," stating that the Master Institute had "continued its activities and even increased the scope and measure from the educational and cultural point of view." He continued:

In line with this Receivership, however, I may state that I know from the Roerich Museum officials that a complete legal victory has been won by them, and a definite plan has now been drawn up whereby the building returns entirely into the hands of the Museum, which had never once defaulted in interest payments on the building.

The reason why wide attention has been drawn to this case is the fact that the Roerich Museum has been acclaimed for its fight in bringing about a revelation of the existing receivership practices and "rackets" worked in conjunction with the New York Banks, due to the lure of high receivership fees and other malpractices.

I may also state that this case—fought as a precedent by the Roerich Museum—has provided a basis for the new legislation in regard to Real Estate and Receiverships now promoted by Governor Lehman of New York, which are aimed to wipe out forever the insidious practices which have held in the real estate field, and which have long terrorized real estate owners.

The 1934 decision ending the litigation ordered the Roerich Museum to incorporate as an educational corporation but allowed it still to be governed by the Roerich Museum interests.

In September, Wallace became Protector of the Third International Roerich Peace Banner Convention, held in Washington, assuring America's participation with the pact. Fourteen American senators were honorary members and twenty-seven nations attended. Frances Grant gave a rousing speech, saying, "The East has said that when the Banner of Shambhala

encircles the world, verily the New Dawn will follow...Let us determine that when the Banner of Peace encircles the world, it will presage a New Morning of human brotherhood.”

Wallace, who followed her to the podium, was deeply troubled by the severe drought the southern Great Plains was experiencing. In late January, a dust storm had swept across the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma, and Kansas with sixty-mile-an-hour winds and a ten-thousand-foot high dirt cloud, damaging property and destroying crops. The high winds continued into the spring, carrying off much of the soil from land standing barren where the crops had failed. Rainfall was scanty and insufficient. The sky took on a violet-greenish hue, cars were stranded in highway ditches, and cattle huddled against the dust as they would against wind-driven snow. Lights had to be turned on in the afternoon. Farmers were left with commitments to pay for expensive machinery bought on credit and no income.

The civic-minded Wallace family had been helping farmers in Iowa for generations. Henry, who described himself as “first and last a friend of the farmer,” was aware that unusual measures were needed. As a usual practice, the Department of Agriculture sent botanists throughout the world to bring back pressed plants and seeds for cultivation. Two years earlier, Knowles A. Ryerson, Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction, had discussed the need for grasses to stabilize the topsoil with Joseph F. Rock, botanist and daring explorer of the Tibetan border. But Rock had said the severe fighting between the Tibetans and the Chinese to the north of Yunnan precluded all travel in those regions.

Now Wallace talked over his concerns with Frances Grant, and she repeated some of Roerich’s tales of parts of Central Asia where grass grew in areas that never received rain. If Professor Roerich would be willing to lead the Department of Agriculture team to the right places, perhaps Mongolian grasses could help. Several cables and letters were exchanged and Roerich was invited to America to discuss the plan in person. This brought up the passport situation again, but Wallace solved it easily. In February 1934, Professor Roerich and George stopped to see the consul of the American Embassy in Paris, the following letter in hand:

Dear Mr. Marriner:

This will introduce to you Professor Nicholas Roerich and his son, George Roerich, citizens of the Russian Empire who have taken out their first papers for American citizenship, but who have spent much of their time in recent years in scientific exploration in Central Asia.

Professor Roerich, as you doubtless know, has a worldwide reputation as an artist and archaeologist. His son George graduated from Harvard and is a specialist in Oriental languages. I know both of them personally and would appreciate any courtesies which you could afford them in obtaining their necessary visas.

Thanking you, I am

Sincerely yours,

Secretary Wallace

Leaving Helena with Esther Lichtmann and Svetoslav for companionship, Nicholas and George returned to the United States. On March 16, 1934, “on behalf of the United States,” the artist was officially asked to undertake the assignment. Wallace wrote to him that his “unusual understanding of Central Asia,” growing out of his many years of experience, would result in successful studies, to which Roerich replied:

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I have received your letter of March 16th, in which you invite me, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, to act as leader and protector of the botanical expedition organized by the United States Department of Agriculture to search for drought resistant grasses in the central Asian field.

For the past thirty-five years I have been working in the interests of the United States and during the last decade, I have been working in behalf of this country as an officer of an American institution, leading the American Expedition into Asia, and following this, as head of the Himalayan Research Institute, an American Educational corporation. Thus, your proposal coincides with my closest interests and is a natural continuation of my years of activity in this field.

It is therefore with pleasure that I accept your invitation, and I confidently anticipate that the work of this expedition will lead to new scientific benefits for America.

Now, the question is, did Wallace know about the plans for the “New Country”—the “New Russia”? If he did, and many so believe, then by sending the Roerichs back into the very area where they wanted to be, he was endorsing the plan. They would finally be able to assemble an army, find the Panchen Lama, who was now in Peking, ride triumphantly into the

Altai, and establish the New Country. When Roerich wrote to Wallace, “Your proposal coincides with my closest interests and is a natural continuation of my years of activity in this field,” it was his heartfelt expression of truth.

Nicholas and George stayed in America for five weeks, during which time the necessary papers were drawn up and signed and provision made for financial consideration to cover their costs. According to Frances Grant, Wallace stated that he was ready to give his life to the service of the cultural and spiritual work of the Roerich Museum.

A one-year contract was drawn up between the Department of Agriculture and the Roerich men, with Wallace providing all necessary papers and letters of recommendation to the American consuls in the Far East and to the leading statesmen and governmental officials there. Frances was designated liaison officer. All communication between the Roerichs, Secretary Wallace, and the Department of Agriculture was to go through her. Wallace agreed to put Grant in touch with Mary Rumsey, one of the pioneers in the establishment of agricultural and dairy cooperatives in America. He also agreed to obtain letters of recommendation from Henry Ford and Averell Harriman, chairman of the board of Union Pacific and an administrative officer of the National Relief Association.

Enthusiastic about the cooperative movement becoming a bond between the United States, China, and Mongolia, Wallace asked Roerich to come up with some definite figures and statistics on starting a small cooperative with China. That the secretary was interested in cooperatives was a stroke of luck for the Roerichs. If agricultural cooperatives could be organized with Mongolian or Chinese banks operating jointly with the United States government or leading American enterprises, they could also operate jointly with the New Russia.

When all the planning was concluded, the Secretary remarked that he was elated to have met Professor Roerich personally and expressed a great liking for George. Before leaving, the Roerichs met with Dr. Howard G. MacMillan, head botanist for the expedition. They discussed budgets, equipment, and maps, and made plans to meet in Asia. Then the two Roerichs departed for China via Yokohama, Japan.





THE ASIAN BOTANICAL EXPEDITION

Anyone going into the Far East in 1934 was walking into an area ~~on~~ning with chaos and turmoil. The tangled skein involved a volatile combination of spies, double agents, Bolsheviks bent on converting the world to Communism, displaced soldiers who had become bandits, and over 70,000 White Russians, as well as the Japanese and Chinese with their conflicting interests. It also involved Manchukuo, the new country formed by Japan from the three eastern provinces of China that had previously been Manchuria. Manchukuo had a population of over thirty million in a territory of 460,000 square miles extending from the Amur River to the Great Wall of China.

When Manchukuo declared its autonomy on March 9, 1932, Prince Teh (Henry Pu-yi) was appointed chief executive. At age three, he had been enthroned as Emperor Hsuan-t'ung of China. At age five, the uprising that brought Sun Yat-sen to power had caused him to "voluntarily" abdicate. Politicians and historians have called Manchukuo a puppet state, and Henry Pu-yi a puppet, but to many of his countrymen he symbolized unity and harmony. He was heir to his family's three-hundred-year Manchu Dynasty Dragon Throne, which, according to some, had given China the best form of government ever. According to Owen Lattimore, the much-traveled scholar of Central Asia and the East, Teh was the only Inner Mongolian prince capable of winning the alliance of all the other princes.

In the 1700s, the Manchu Empire had stretched from Formosa to Nepal, from Manchuria and Mongolia to what became Burma and Thailand. At that time, the rulers had observed a mandate from heaven called *Wangtao*, the Way of the King. Based on Confucius's teachings, it taught that the king

was the embodiment of *jen*, “love for fellow men,” and was to govern accordingly. The basic concepts were: (1) Everything under heaven worked for the common good. (2) Harmony ruled because the virtuous were elected to office and the able given responsibility. (3) Faithfulness was practiced constantly.

In *History of Chinese Political Thought*, Liang Chi-chao explained: “Unless all men stand together, no man can stand; unless all men strive for the attainment, no man can accomplish it. The real meaning of ‘establishing others’ and ‘elevating others’ embraces not merely individuals, but the whole of mankind.”

As ruler of Manchukuo, Prince Teh planned to combine *Wangtao* with modern knowledge and technology and restore peace, order, and happiness. A country based on Confucius’s principles was worth watching. If it worked, it could offer a new model for humanity. Some hoped Manchukuo would be a place where all nations could live side by side and eventually have a strong, free, democratic economy. Others feared the Soviet Union had plans to invade it, and then all the other Asian countries. The United States was refusing official recognition of the new country.

The situation in China was far worse than when the Roerichs had fled it earlier. The Chinese still hated foreigners, there was still no central government, control remained in the hands of local warlords, and Communist uprisings were fanning the flames. Japan had a long list of grievances against the Chinese and was using them as the excuse to send troops into Manchukuo.

Afterward, many (including Wallace himself) questioned why the elderly Roerich had been chosen to lead an expedition that the Department of Agriculture team was capable of handling. When the State Department questioned why Roerich, a “White Russian with French passport,” was representing the United States in a hotbed of Red Russian/White Russian hostility, Wallace ignored them. But what qualifications did the Russian artist have? Certainly he had no diplomatic skills. His greatest qualifications were his perspective on life and his dream of world unity.

Conjecturing in *The Way to Shambhala* that the grasses were merely a subterfuge, Edwin Bernbaum quotes an article from *Newsweek* magazine: “Around the Department of Agriculture the Secretary’s assistants freely admitted that in addition to searching for grass, Wallace also wanted

Roerich to look for the signs of the Second Coming.” Then Bernbaum speculates, “Wallace could only have been thinking of the prophecy of Shambhala and associating the future king of the kingdom with the coming Messiah.” How else to understand Roerich’s reasons for accepting such a strenuous trip?

Some said that Roerich saw it as an opportunity to establish a separate state in Siberia—with himself as ruler. Frances Grant claimed he did it out of “appreciation” for Wallace’s help. Ever the scientist and archaeologist, Roerich might have agreed with Roy Chapman Andrews that the key to understanding our world of today waited in Central Asia—where the true story of our past could be found, “for no other region on earth would yield such important results in every branch of natural science.” Without doubt, Roerich would have been pleased to be the one to find the key to the mystery of humans on earth. Possibly he wanted to bring spiritual help and encouragement to Prince Teh and Manchukuo. For the Master said to “manifest solicitous attention to each one who is ready to proceed toward the Light.”

It may be that under the cover of seed hunting, Wallace and President Roosevelt were sending Roerich to get first-hand information of Teh’s work without revealing American interest. But taking into account the Roerichs’ prior difficulties in Chinese Turkestan, Wallace’s choice and loyalty make no sense. Whatever the truth, Roerich was being given the chance to penetrate the areas from which he had been previously barred. He was to spread the word of the Banner and Pact and go forward to fulfill his destiny: locating the exiled Panchen Lama and then establishing and ruling the Buddhist spiritual country, New Russia.

Whatever the reasons, Roerich bungled it. Obviously, he could have quietly entered this country not recognized by America. But he strode in, presented the emperor with the insignia of the Roerich Museum, and requested to be housed as an official state guest. His request was denied. Now, with the expedition only two months along, the Department of State received a communiqué stating that Roerich had embarrassed the American government by being received in audience by the emperor. Yet could art-loving Roerich really have been expected to enter an area filled with magnificent art treasures from the former imperial palaces and Forbidden City without trying to see them? So matters got very complicated.

There was no way the American government could allow Roerich to do the things he was doing and still act as if he were America's representative. Over the next year, many telegrams and hundreds of pages of conflicting letters and reports flew back and forth to Washington as George Roerich and the botanists, Dr. Howard MacMillan and James L. Stephens, continually frustrated each other.

In his "Report of Activities for Period May–July, 1934," George wrote that the Roerichs were met in Japan at 11:00 p.m. on May 10, 1934, at the Yokohama pier by the Director of the Bureau for Culture and Arts of the Imperial Minister of Public Instruction. Whisked through customs and driven to Tokyo, they spent their next days making courtesy calls to the United States Embassy and to various governmental offices and institutions, such as the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Public Instruction, museum authorities, and the Imperial University.

On May 15, the Japan-American Society gave a luncheon to honor Roerich. U.S. Ambassador J. C. Grew, Prince Tokugawa, and Mr. K. Horinouchi of the Foreign Office attended. According to George, Ambassador Grew advised Roerich that "because of the very delicate situation with the new state in Manchuria, it is better to use personal connections in negotiations with local authorities." (Translated, this means the ambassador advised Roerich not to mention that his trip was funded by America.) But Roerich felt much would be denied them without the aid of his American connection.

Over the next few days, while the authorities studied the submitted exploration plans, the Roerichs visited the Imperial Botanical Gardens several times and Japanese scientific institutions involved with explorations into Manchuria, Mongolia, and northern China. Wallace's request that they collect data on "native *materia medica*" fit perfectly with their own desire to learn more of the vast lore on Oriental herbs, especially those for treating cancer. Then, Nicholas was given cards of introduction to the Manchukuo legation in Tokyo, visas, and instructions for the authorities along the route. Also, exploration privileges, which had been denied to Roy Chapman Andrews because he was suspected of wanting to prospect for oil and minerals would be granted. When they departed from Tokyo, they left the Banner of Peace happily flapping in the breezes above the museum and a

message of greeting for MacMillan and Stephens, who were expected shortly.

Before leaving for Manchuria, the Roerichs stopped in Kyoto for two days to see the Tibetan book collection at the Otani Daigaku Library and visit the great Kanjur Monastery.¹ Roerich later wrote: “George found a Tibetan medical manuscript in the possession of one of the old lamas, and succeeded in copying it—it is most fortunate that he is completely familiar with Mongolian and Tibetan, because it is invaluable for this work. In the monastery, we saw numerous great Images, and heard the lamas speak of the coming ‘War of Shambhala,’ adding, ‘But a man of great heart is needed for it.’”

Their translator, Mr. S. Kitagawa, joined them in Kyoto and accompanied them through Korea and the Manchukuo frontier, receiving official greetings and easing their baggage and the firearms they carried through customs. Along the route, a cable was delivered from Knowles A. Ryerson (Department of Agriculture) saying that MacMillan and Stephens were planning to arrive in Yokohama two days earlier than expected. With no desire to wait for them, George left a note. The Roerichs entered Manchukuo while MacMillan was catching up with his lost luggage in Japan and arranging things for the expedition.



Nicholas Roerich in Japan, 1934

Thoroughly upset, MacMillan wrote to Washington claiming that Roerich had stepped on the wrong toes in Japan and had compounded everyone's nervousness by telling them he was about to conduct an "expedition into the unknown for certain purposes." But those toes had already been bruised in 1924 when the Roerichs were returning to the United States to straighten out their visa problems. Traveling aboard a Japanese ship, they had received a cable, read by the Japanese, from Roerich's brother Boris, who indiscreetly mentioned the New Country. Now

the repercussions would be felt, for Roerich, though he didn't know it, had been on their list of suspicious people for ten years.

Left in the dark about their plans, MacMillan was understandably frustrated by not being able to connect with the Roerichs. He construed their being met by Japanese officials instead of U.S embassy people as a blatant disregard of protocol and sent many accusations and grievances back to Wallace, concluding his report:

The further I go on this expedition the more I have contemplated several factors in the character of it. Whatever we may have thought of this when I was in New York, each one started off in good faith and with nothing but conviction to make it succeed. We are not a month on our way, and not yet joined as a party and with still more time to elapse before that can be brought about. So far as the State Department officials are concerned in this section, the Roerichs are in bad favor. I know they will be informed in Dairen, and the Minister in China will be told. Those people should know. What the Japanese will decide as far as the Roerich status is concerned I do not know. But when you think of the decidedly nervous state they are in, the normal suspicion with which they regard even the innocent, not to say the bland, it should surprise no one if the Japanese suddenly decide to be through with all and sundry that have any connection with them, no matter how remote.²

From then on, MacMillan continually sent voluminous reports filled with every rumor he heard. His relationship with the Roerichs worsened as time went by. From Harbin, George categorically refuted and denied every accusation MacMillan made, but since the Roerichs were probably doing the very things George denied, one has to question what was truth and what was not when reading these concluding paragraphs:

The frequent statements made by Mr. MacMillan about alleged suspicions of anything connected with the name of Roerich are pure slander. We never visited any White Russian summer resort in the vicinity of Hailar. The information about a Cossack guard on the door is ridiculous. Mr. MacMillan never came near our house in Harbin. MacMillan's statement in his letter of August 11, para 4, is again entirely wrong. We had to postpone our departure due to the fact that there were breaches on the railway line and trains ran nine hours late. The station authorities, however, had instructions to conceal the actual state of affairs along the line, and continued to sell tickets. Mr. MacMillan and his companion made no attempt to meet the Leader of the Expedition [Roerich] during the journey to Hailar, although traveling in the

same [railway] car. There was no guard stationed at the door of the compartment occupied by Prof. Roerich and the other members of the Expedition.

There was no Cossack army or uniforms on the Expedition. The statement that we had promised that all including the two botanists were going to the Khingen Mountains is again absolutely false. Such statement was never made. On our return to Hailar, Mr. MacMillan again made no attempt to visit the Leader of the Expedition, although Mr. Sato, the Japanese botanist accompanying MacMillan, visited us in Hailar, and even came to the station to see us off.

The whole correspondence gives a very definite impression that Mr. MacMillan's statements were written with the object to handicap the Expedition and slander the good name of Roerich.

The relationship never improved. They never met nor worked together. In fall of 1934, still protecting the Roerichs, the Department of Agriculture recalled MacMillan and Stephens for serious insubordination and disobedience.

With so much internal dissension and so much fear, confusion, and political intrigue abounding in the area, it is little wonder that reporters, the military, the botanists, and the Roerichs all had different versions of what happened on the expedition. But there is no doubt that between December 1934 and September 1935, Nicholas wrote a book titled *Sacred Watch*, an essay titled "The Desert Will Bloom Again," and seventy-two other essays, which were compiled into *The Invincible*, his eleventh book. In the preface, he wrote that, despite the attacks of numerous adversaries, he remained faithful to his task and to the goal he had set for himself: to stand invincibly on watch over culture, dedicating his entire life to the battle with ignorance, superstition and prejudices, steadfastly molding the steps of consciousness of the new human.

There is also no doubt that between 1934 and 1936 he created sixty studies and 195 glorious paintings and drawings in watercolor, gouache, or tempera. Further, in 1934, he created a greater number of paintings with the name Shambhala in the title than at any previous time: *Shambhala Go* (subtitled *Shambhala Gate*) he painted twice, and *Entrance to Shambhala*, *Shambhala Lam (Kurul Davan)*, and *Shambhala Lam (Pass to Shambhala)*. Painting, writing, planning, organizing for the New Russia, and riding around searching for grass seeds, he was thoroughly occupied.

Nicholas's brother Vladimir lived in the White Russian community in Harbin. During the winter, Nicholas and George stayed with him. The Russian expatriates interpreted Roerich's zeal for Buddhism, the Banner, and the Agni Yoga teachings as an attempt to change the dogma of their church and "correct the religion of their forefathers." Whatever he did or said seemed to create dissension and misunderstanding within the Russian community. When the Japanese initiated a campaign in the émigré newspapers against Roerich, he played right into their hands by distributing a handbill saying that art and herbs were his purpose for being there, and that an understanding of Chinese art would help bring peace to the world. It also had a photo of him wearing the regal robes of the Dalai Lama, which no doubt he planned to wear when he was the administrative head of the New Russia. Gossip and aspersions spread like wildfire. When *Sacred Watch* was published, the Japanese censors banned it and arrested its editors.

Helena, thoroughly disturbed, wrote to a friend: "I am writing all this with pain in my heart, for I love my country and I suffer for its shortcomings...It is time to stop this senseless wasting of people who are real forces of the highest energies and in whom the entire significance of evolution is contained...It is time to change our thinking. We are standing on the edge of an abyss! And only a Miraculous Banner can carry us across and put us at the Gates of the Miraculous Castle. Let us accept the Benevolence which is sent to us!"

She advised everyone to read George Grebentchikoff's article "I Protest," in which he wrote, "Russia's Roerich leads his coworkers of all nationalities, creeds, and positions who are ready for any sacrifice that they may fulfill his ever beautiful call to Light. Perhaps it is possible that Roerich does not deserve to have the Russians themselves—no matter how they each believe or where they live—listen to his slanderers and allow them to pollute the atmosphere. Roerich is our national pride, one of the luminaries of today's culture, one of the very few who have constantly maintained a high position both spiritual and cultural."

A year after the expedition began, the *Peking & Tientsin Times* printed this perspective on things:

ROERICH EXPEDITION TO INNER MONGOLIA PARTY OF WHITE RUSSIANS MAKE EXTENSIVE TOUR

Inner Mongolia, the "hotbed of internal intrigue," is greeting with mingled wonderment and amusement at the activities of a botanical expedition sent into Inner Mongolia by the United States Department of Agriculture but staffed largely with White Russians, according to foreign travelers who have returned to Tientsin from desert territory.

The expedition is headed by Professor Nicholas Roerich, founder of the Roerich Museum in New York and revered by White Russian émigrés as an artist, journalist, and author of peace plans. This seventy-year-old bearded patriarch, who is accompanied by his son, George Roerich, and a collection of four White Russian guards and Mongol Buriat helpers, arrived in Inner Mongolia two months ago in search of plants that could be developed for use in the United States where lack of rain played havoc with crops last year.

He first sought to make his headquarters at the Palace of Prince Teh, just inside the Inner Mongolia frontier and 200 miles north of Kalgan, but Prince Teh is reported to have replied that he already had enough problems striving to accommodate the Japanese "medical mission" which has come to live with him, not to mention the frequent visits of Japanese military authorities. Professor Roerich and his retainers, whose luxuriant beards are a source of constant wonderment to the Mongols, thereupon took quarters at the nearby home of Swede Larsen, who has been adopted into the royal family, and is popularly known as the "Duke of Mongolia."

With the arrival of a batch of new motor trucks, which have been sent from Kalgan to the explorer's headquarters, Professor Roerich is planning to push his expedition farther into the interior through the Gobi desert along the fringe of Sovietized Outer Mongolia and thence southwards into the Ordos Plateau in Suiyuan province, returning about November. It is said that he will not attempt to enter Outer Mongolia owing to the danger of being shot by Reds. Rather, he will strive to avoid areas where suspicions would be likely to be aroused by his penetration and movements. Professor Roerich has already sent to his White Russian representative in Peiping, Mr. A. P. Friedlander, numerous specimen plants and seeds for transshipment to the United States, and has written him to the effect that he has already made several important discoveries of plants which are likely to assist the United States Department of Agriculture to combat the drought menace.

Professor Roerich's headquarters are at present situated about a hundred miles from the Outer Mongolia frontier where a "nottrespassing" sign hangs out for all White Russians, Japanese, and others unsympathetic to the Red cause. His expedition, according to reports, includes no Americans, the Professor himself being a Russian with French citizenship. A colorful personage, it will be recalled that the Professor was, a year ago, granted an interview with Henry Pu-yi, the Emperor Kang Teh of Manchukuo, to whom he presented a medal of his own

invention and design. The Professor is also a frequent contributor to the White Russian press in the Far East. His wife is at present staying in Kalgan, awaiting her husband's return from the Mongolian wilderness.

While the simple Mongolian mind cannot understand why the United States is sending an expedition half way round the world to collect a few Mongolian weeds, the Japanese are reported to be watching the movements of the expedition with greatest interest. The area of northern Chahar, nominally under Chinese control, in which the expedition is operating, is today the scene of ever-increasing Japanese penetration, according to foreigners who have been visiting the district. Japanese army trucks from Manchukuo come and go over the Inner Mongolian plateau at will, paying frequent visits to the Mongol princes. Manchukuo, it is said, caught between Japanese pressure and Chinese promises of autonomy, is striving to play off one nation against the other in hopes of improving their own lot. No longer is Inner Mongolia the buffer between Manchukuo and southern Outer Mongolia. Waves of Japanese influence have long since washed over this barrier and are beating against the Outer Mongolian frontier where extraordinary precautions are taken against the entry of Japanese agents or anti-Red propaganda.

The importance of Kalgan as the gateway to this region of international rivalry may be gauged by the presence in the town of both Japanese and Soviet consulates, despite the fact that the population of both nationalities is negligible. The recently established Japanese military mission is also highly active and has imported several motor trucks for Mongolian tours.³

When Wallace heard this, he cabled Roerich: "I do not know whether there is any foundation whatsoever for the insinuations of political activity on your part in Mongolia, but I ask that you be engaged, both actually and apparently, in doing exactly what you are supposed to do as an employee of the United States Department of Agriculture in searching for seeds valuable to our country. With times as troubled as they are, with due consideration for safety, I request that you travel to safer areas." "Actually and apparently"—an alarmed Wallace was requesting that Roerich stop what he was presently doing and begin doing only what an employee of the United States Department of Agriculture was "supposed" to do.

Then a Soviet military attaché supplied a United States military attaché with this item:

George Roerich, formerly a Czarist officer, has recruited assistance for his expedition from among the followers of the bandit Semenoff. The expedition was refused arms by the Commanding Officer, Fifteenth Infantry at Tientsin, but

succeeded in getting that decision overruled, and Commander of the garrison was directed to turn over rifles, revolvers, and a considerable quantity of ammunition to Roerich and the Semenov bandits.

The armed party is now making its way toward the Soviet Union, ostensibly as a scientific expedition, but actually to rally former White elements and discontented Mongols.

The American officer wrote to the War Department to refute or confirm the report. Since George had been fifteen when the Roerich family fled Russia and after that had been in Moscow for only two months in 1926, the idea of his being a former Czarist officer seems far-fetched, and he had no connection with the bandit Semenov.

Roerich wired Wallace on August 24, 1935:

Hope our radiogram 19th received stop Referring recommendations going Sining impossible reach there before end September due bad condition roads floods and necessity obtaining extra truck for gasoline stop New permission authorities also required stop Also essential bring personally present extensive collections seeds herbarium Peiping for shipment stop Much of seeding season will be lost during journey Koko-nor where seeding season closes about end September due altitudes stop Local seed collecting proceeding unhampered with good results stop Could terminate local collecting towards middle September and proceed as indicated Department's letter July 9th Please advise Roerich

With the State Department, the War Department, the Japanese, the military, and the press all looking to him for answers, the entire affair was becoming too politically explosive, too volatile for Wallace, who had political aspirations of his own. He called the whole matter to a halt and wired Roerich: "Impracticability transferring to Sining described in your cablegram of August 24th noted proceed immediately to Peiping complete work there as rapidly as possible and proceed not later than October 15th by most direct to India finishing there by February 1st."

Eventually, Washington received 435 seed and plant specimens, plus 170 herbarium specimens of various genera and species, and a trunk full of drug plant material. No one knew what to do with any of it.

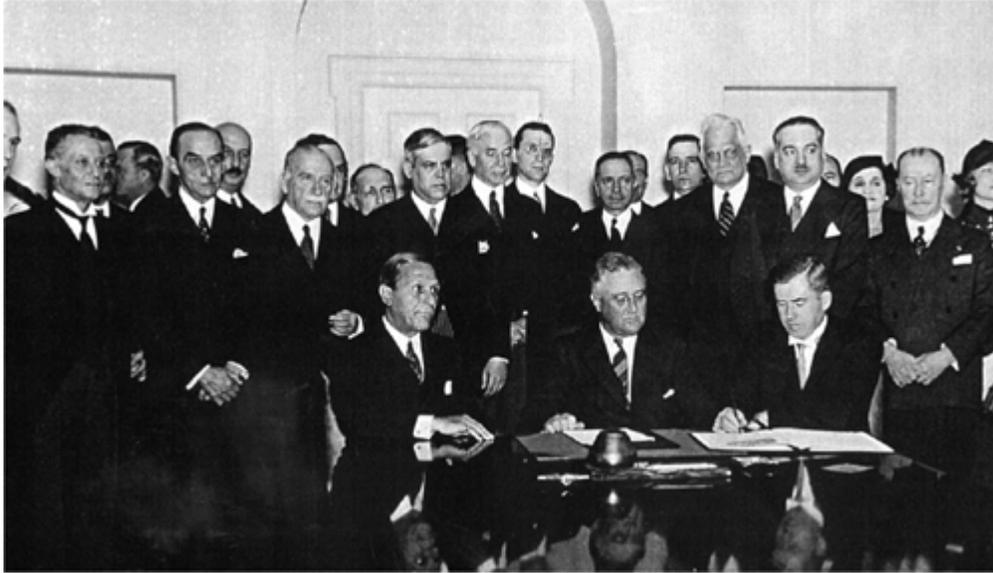


A DARK SPOT

Two weary Roerichs returned to Kulu Valley, India, in the fall of 1935, the plans, hopes and dreams of many years postponed yet again. The Masters' direction had been to begin small, but somehow the endeavor had escalated into something far larger than Roerich knew what to do with. Perhaps while traveling home, his thoughts had gone back to April 15, 1935, when he was camped in the Gobi.

On that day, representatives of twenty-two Latin American countries had assembled in Washington and commemorated Pan American Day by meeting with President Roosevelt and signing the Roerich Peace Pact. A joyous Helena had written to Roosevelt, "The people of the Americas will recall this Day as a symbol of the great destiny of One United America... and as the Reconstruction of the World proceeds at a gigantic pace, this day will go down in history."

Yet as Nicholas would soon discover, while the pact signing was a step toward world peace and the preservation of culture, it also stirred the forces of negativity into greater action. With America still in the grip of the Depression, the museum was facing tremendous financial difficulties, and the "Day in Washington" had been possible only because of generous donations. For several years, Master Morya had been forewarning of a betrayal, but with such loyal friends and coworkers, it was hard to imagine from where it would come.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt (center) and representatives of all American republics watch as Henry Wallace (right) signs the Roerich Peace Pact. The White House, Washington, D.C., 1935

As Roerich was on his way back to India, Louis Horch announced that the Horches and Esther Lichtmann were breaking with the Roerichs: they would no longer follow Roerich's advice and direction, and would govern themselves. If the others at the institutes did not like that, they could go to the Himalayas and join the Roerichs.

About the time Nicholas and George were staying with Vladimir Roerich in Harbin during the winter of 1934–35, Helena, in India, had initiated a correspondence with President Roosevelt. She wrote that the entire world was standing at the threshold of reconstruction and the fate of many countries was being weighed on the cosmic scales. She reminded Roosevelt of the tall stranger whose flaming speech had roused the Constitutional Assembly in Philadelphia prior to America's revolution in the 1700s. The man had disappeared as soon as the vote for a free America was taken, before anyone could greet him. Helena said that, down through the ages, such help had been extended to others, such as Napoleon and George Washington, and offered to aid Roosevelt in that way:

You, Mr. President, have realized that it is impossible to build the welfare and the future of the Country from the outlived measures that have reduced the world to its

present state of destruction, and so are indefatigably and courageously seeking new ways of constructiveness. You will be a true great Leader because You have understood that the Bird of Spirit of humanity cannot fly on one wing, and have given Woman her due place. Hence from the same One Source Who had offered Assistance in the past, the Mighty Hand is sending Fiery Messages to You in the White House.

The map of the World is already outlined and the worthiest place in forming the New Epoch is offered to You to accept or reject. The destiny of the Country is in your hands.

Roosevelt accepted her offer of assistance, and Helena sent him nine letters over a two-year period, covering a wide range of topics, including the warning that America should not disarm because intentions were being nurtured from two sides to involve her in war. Her eighth letter, written in December 1935, best explains the situation at the institutes:

I am writing to you in full confidence but with an open heart that is filled with deep sorrow. For several months now I have been seeking to find the way to warn you that after fourteen years of collaboration with us, two of the people who have conveyed my messages to you have proved to be traitors who have betrayed my trust.

Last April, having succumbed to covetousness and ambition, regarding certain financial matters (silver), they transmitted their personal advice to you pretending that it came from the Original Source through me. My Source warned me about the treason committed and I was ordered to question them both and they confessed to me in writing, that they did convey their own message to you, while giving you the impression that it came from the Original Source through me.

I was shocked and indignant at such treason and immediately cabled prohibiting them to convey any other message without my full knowledge and previous sanction. They both knew very well that all questions had to be referred to me, the more so as one of them was expected to return here this summer, bringing along any possible questions. When they saw my indignation at their action and realized the grave consequences, fear and revenge moved them to turn to the path of open treason and not only break all relations with us but start an odious campaign to discredit our name and destroy us as witness to their deceitful action.

In their present hatred they stop at nothing. Mr. H. took advantage of my husband's absence on the expedition to remove his name as Founder of the Institutions. Further, Mr. H., who had our full power of attorney since 1932, and who always attended to our personal accounts and taxes and led us to think that all tax matters were in order, suddenly after nine years, tells the Tax Department that for the years when we were in Tibet, that expedition funds were personal funds. As

a result of his actions, without previous notification, a lien was placed on our property in America (our paintings). These are but two instances of what they have done to discredit our name. Such is the revenge of these people whose treason has been disclosed.

I am writing all of this to forewarn you that Messages can no longer be transmitted through these people. But no matter how difficult the times are for us at present, we know that truth and justice will prevail. The path is not easy for those who bring new ideas and lay the steps for the new consciousness of humanity. But ideas move the world and thus evolution takes place.

I am especially grieved that I could not warn you before and was unable to communicate, for my heart was longing to convey the Great Words on the coming significant year. No human reasoning can solve the present problems of the world. Only Those, Who stand on vigil, know whither the Wheel of Necessity rolls.

May the Blessing of the Highest rest with you. I know that your great heart will understand.

She signed it with her initials and then added a P.S.: “If you approve this new channel, Messages could be sent again.” Helena’s final letter was sent to him January 11, 1936.¹



Helena Roerich, 1934

Sometime during the previous year Horch had decided to end his eight-year retirement and return to work as a foreign exchange broker. He had opened an office in downtown Manhattan and reestablished his former connections. According to Frances Grant, Horch seemed anxious to get Wallace to supply him with useful information. Frances related a conversation she claimed had taken place while she, Horch, and a few others were having dinner at Wallace's house, in which Horch had suggested that Wallace give Horch advance information on certain events.

The other trustees had been aghast at Horch's action. From then on, Frances took special pains to keep the men apart, for she wanted nothing to "impair the fine and friendly feeling which Mr. Wallace constantly expressed for Professor Roerich."

Grant reported that Horch frequently told her she was foolish not to use her friendship with Secretary Wallace for personal advantage and financial enrichment, quoting him as saying, "If I were his friend, I would already have a good position in the government. You could easily get one and he could pass on tips pertaining to the stock exchange and lots of money could be made in this way. You are very stupid not to use his friendship to help yourself and all of us."

Frances and both of the Lichtmanns believed that a friendship with a member of the president's cabinet should not be abused; it would be most unethical and definitely against their spiritual principles to ask Secretary Wallace for any position, let alone for a tip to speculate and make money on the stock exchange.²

Relationships between the trustees had been severely strained by the grave financial responsibilities they faced and the lengthy litigation the museum endured. One indication of the stress was Sina and Maurice's deteriorating marriage. All had put aside their differences, however, for the pact signing ceremony in Washington. Immediately after the ceremony, they had cabled Helena and hailed the Roerichs as "the great leaders of culture and spirit," while thanking them for "the glorious opportunities" they were continuing to bring the institutions. All of the trustees had expressed assurances of love and deep gratitude for the constant wisdom and advice the Roerichs provided.

When Esther Lichtmann had wanted to return from India for two months to be in Washington for the ceremony, the trustees had told her they could not afford to pay for the trip. But Horch took the money from somewhere and arranged it. Once Esther was back in New York, she said she had come especially to help Horch in his business. Since Frances and Sina were aware that Esther knew nothing of banking, they began to question her motives, accusing her of "embarking on some mysterious trip and enterprise with Horch." Next, Esther and Horch began taking trips together to Washington and other places, then announced they were going

to Europe to “further the cause of the Roerich Peace Pact and Banner.” Now the other trustees were disturbed by more than the expenses; they wanted to know why Esther was accompanying Horch at all.

The pair left, saying they would be gone only three weeks. Three weeks turned into almost two months. Esther then began insisting on returning to India, but never did. When she told her brother, Maurice, that she had no time to see him because she had to help Horch, Frances began to suspect that Esther had allied herself with the Horches. And She did manage, however, to find time to visit all the wealthy museum donors, telling them that Professor Roerich was little known in Europe and insinuating that the Peace Pact was barely recognized.

While the pair was in Europe, Nettie Horch, confiding her opinions of her husband’s activities with Esther to no one, announced that she was creating a Master Institute of Arts and Sciences in some of the empty rooms on the third floor of their building. Then, she began presenting a few lectures and classes. After the pair returned, Nettie arranged for all mail to go directly to her. She had a tap put on the telephone lines, and, according to Grant, told the teachers and students lies and distortions about Professor Roerich.

Next, Nettie wrote to Sina and resigned from the Agni Yoga Committee, saying she no longer wished to be involved in any way. She demanded that Sina take over the bookkeeping and files, and remove the Agni Yoga publication office from the fourth floor. Accordingly, Sina moved the business office of the Master Institute and Urusvati down to the third floor. She discovered that Nettie had done no work for months, and many accounts and reports were missing. Later, a museum guard reported that, under Esther’s direction, books had been burned in the basement. It appeared to Frances that each day the Horches created some new disturbance, attacking Sina Lichtmann and the school in some way.

The stockholders had originally allotted the trustees five years to rebuild and strengthen the school before expecting repayment of the debt. At the time, everyone had agreed that, with a united effort, five years would be adequate. Now nothing was bringing in revenue, and there was no cooperation. The normal functions of the school were so badly disrupted that concerts and lectures couldn’t continue. Horch adamantly refused to allow the Master Institute to function as before, demanding that all activities

be concentrated on the third floor. Frances felt as if she were confined in a fortress and besieged by enemies on all sides.

Roerich had been back in Kulu Valley for a few months, when, on January 30, 1936, readers of the *Washington Daily News* and other papers around the country opened their evening papers to read:

SPY RUMOR ENDS ROERICH EXPEDITION AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT RECALLS RENOWNED ARTIST

Announcement that the Agriculture Department had disbanded an Asiatic plant-hunting expedition headed by Nicholas Roerich and terminated the governmental services of Roerich himself today revealed that the internationally famous artist had become entangled in the turbulent politics of China and Manchukuo.

Officials here disclosed that informal protests against the expedition had been received from high authorities of the area in which it had been working.

The case was almost unprecedented in the history of the department, it was declared, though hundreds of similar exploring groups have been sent to virtually every country in the world.

BRUSQUE STATEMENT

Notice of Roerich's dismissal came in reply to rumors that the expeditions would resume. "A rumor has reached the Department of Agriculture," the announcements said, "that it would again employ the Roerichs for plant exploration in Asia. This rumor is entirely unfounded. The Department stopped the seed-collecting expedition in Western China on September 22, 1935. All connections of the Roerichs with the Department have been terminated, and the Department has no intention of re-employing them."

RETICENT

Officials refused to detail the protests against Roerich. It was learned, however, that the complaints declared he was believed to have become involved in the tense and potentially dangerous politics of Manchukuo, the Japanese-controlled state on which many serious international problems focused.

Agriculture officials said they had been informed that Roerich had finally come to be regarded as a "spy" by some officials of Manchukuo. This was given as one of the principal factors in the department's decision that it had best end the expedition.

DEPARTMENT SILENT

State Department officials professed to have no official knowledge of the "espionage" complaints against Roerich. It has been known for some time that a definite coldness existed between the State Department and Roerich, and officials were reluctant to discuss his case. If there had been grounds for spy charges, experts pointed out, it would be most unusual for the country concerned to communicate officially with this Government. Instead, the person suspected of

espionage customarily would be arrested in the foreign country and either placed in jail or deported.

NOW IN INDIA

Roerich was given until February 1 to return and complete his reports. But he is now in India, the department declared, so the termination has been imposed effective Saturday. They said the noted artist was chosen to lead the expeditions largely because of his high reputation and his minute knowledge of the Great Plains.

Roerich at one time spent five years in the region, painting 500 pictures. Born in Russia in 1874, he came to this country only in 1920. He was traveling on a French passport with the expedition, the Agriculture Department said.

FOUNDED ROERICH PACT

Roerich has painted more than 3,000 pictures, of which over 1,000 hang in the museum bearing his name in New York. In addition, he has written a number of books, largely along philosophic lines, and had been interested in archaeology. Followers of his religious philosophy have been organized in several cities.

He is given credit for the final approval in 1934 of the Roerich Pact, an international agreement, tentatively approved by twenty-one nations to protect artistic, scientific, historical and cultural monuments in time of war.

The following day, the *New York Herald Tribune* and other papers carried this story:

MUSEUM FIGHT REVEALED AS UNITED STATES DROPS ROERICH BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF RIVERSIDE INSTITUTION IS AT INJUNCTION STAGE WALLACE APOLOGY ASKED: HORCH FOES CHARGE ITEM WAS TIMED TO THWART THEM

A bitter fight for control of the Roerich Museum at Riverside Drive and 103rd Street broke into the open yesterday following the release in Washington of an apparently routine announcement from the Dept. of Agriculture that an Asiatic plant-hunting expedition headed by Nicholas Roerich, founder of the museum, had been disbanded.

Immediately Herbert Plaut and Harold Davis, attorneys for Mr. Roerich and for four other trustees of the museum, charged Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace had "timed" the announcement to come on the eve of injunction proceeding against Louis L. Horch, president of the museum.

Mr. Plaut was incensed particularly because the Washington announcement recalled rumors that Mr. Roerich had become involved in the turbulent politics of

China and Manchukuo and that charges of espionage were allegedly leveled against him.

ASKS WALLACE APOLOGY

He sent the following telegram to Secretary Wallace:

Evening papers carried today a statement: "Agriculture officials said it was even alleged that Mr. Roerich had finally come to be regarded as a 'spy' by certain officials in Manchukuo. This was given as one of the principal factors in the department's decision." On behalf of Mr. Roerich, whom we represent, we demand that you publicly retract these statements and insinuations with an apology. We demand you explain why the press release from your department and these quoted statements come on the eve of the injunction proceedings in the New York Supreme Court against your friend, Louis L. Horch."

No reference to allegations against Mr. Roerich were contained in the Department of Agriculture announcement, which merely said that the department had stopped the seed-collecting expedition in western China on September 22, 1935. According to The United Press, the notice of Mr. Roerich's dismissal came in reply to rumors that the expedition would resume operations. Since September, Mr. Roerich has been residing in the northern Punjab province of India, where, according to friends, he has been engaged in cancer research.

ROERICH OUT AS TRUSTEE

Last night Mr. Horch revealed that Mr. Roerich had not been a trustee of the Roerich Museum "for several months." He declined to say why Mr. Roerich's connections with the museum had been severed, but said that the action followed re-organization last February when the twenty-nine story skyscraper of culture was foreclosed.

The row between the museum trustees started December 15, when Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Lichtmann and Miss Frances R. Grant, three of the seven trustees, learned that Mr. Horch had summoned a stockholders' meeting for the next day. Protesting they had not been notified, they obtained an injunction to restrain Mr. Horch from performing any actions that might be voted at the meeting. Orders were served on Mr. Horch, but his attorneys obtained an adjournment until today, when the case will be heard before Special Term, Part III, of the Supreme Court.

Today's struggle marks a new crisis in the brief and unhappy career of the museum, founded in 1926 by disciples of Roerich as a skyscraper center to art and education. There were seven original trustees. Mr. Horch, the principal donor, gave more than one million dollars to the place. Mr. Roerich, who became the honorary president, contributed more than one thousand of his paintings. The other trustees were Mrs. Horch, Madam Roerich, Frances R. Grant and Mr. and Mrs. Lichtmann. Each of the trustees held one share of stock, entitling them to one vote in the museum's management.

Yesterday Mr. and Mrs. Lichtmann and Miss Grant charged that Mr. Horch had ousted Mr. and Mrs. Roerich as trustees, naming in their stead his brother-in-law,

Sidney Newberger, and Miss Esther Lichtmann, a sister of Mr. Lichtmann. The Roerichs said they had turned over their shares to Mr. Horch a few years ago under a deposit agreement, but had retained the right to vote. Today they will seek to regain their stock.

Within the next few days many newspapers did in fact carry a retraction, but it was so small, and so far in the back of the papers, that the trustees decided to sue the *New York Sun* (the first paper to carry the story) for libel. Three days after the first story appeared, the *New York Herald Tribune* and others reported:

ROERICH'S NAME TO BE STRICKEN FROM MUSEUM
CORPORATION HEAD EXPLAINS MASTER INSTITUTE
OF UNITED ARTS WILL SUPPLANT IT
DEFIANT TRUSTEES ADMIT HORCH \$1,000,000 GIFT

Justice Samuel I. Rosenman reserved decision yesterday in Supreme Court on application by opponents of Louis L. Horch, president of the Master Institute of United Arts, formerly the Roerich Museum, for an order to restrain Mr. Horch from carrying out plans voted at a stockholder's meeting last month.

The application was sought by counsel for five original trustees of the Roerich Museum, including Professor Nicholas Roerich, its founder, and his wife. It was stated that the meeting was held without their knowledge, although they controlled five of the seven shares of stock.

EXPLAINS CHANGE IN NAME

Meanwhile Mr. Horch announced all the "vital" activities of the museum would be continued under the auspices of the Master Institute. He has ordered the name "Roerich Museum" removed from the facade of the twenty-nine story skyscraper and has deleted "Roerich" from the title of several cultural projects. This was necessary, he explained, to keep them tax-free. He said there would be no curtailment of museum activities, but that an expansion of work is under consideration.

In court yesterday Jonas J. Shapiro, counsel for Mr. Horch, charged that the pro-Roerich trustees were never more than nominal stockholders and were pressing their fight for control because they feared they would lose their rent-free apartments in the building. He said that when the corporation was organized Mr. Horch believed that all the trustees had to be stockholders and therefore the stock was divided equally among them. He asserted that they never had contributed financially to the museum and argued that they never really believed they were more than nominal owners of the stock.

\$1,000,000 GIFTS CITED

Herbert Plaut, counsel for Professor Roerich and his supporters, said that the museum corporation was organized in 1922 and that Mr. Horch contributed to it. He admitted that his clients had endorsed over to Mr. Horch their stock certificates but said that each trustee retained the right to vote.

Mr. Plaut said he had received no reply to the telegram he sent to Secretary Wallace...On behalf of Professor Roerich and Mrs. Roerich who are in India, he was prepared to bring action for libel against "certain officials" because of the "innuendos" which he said were contained in the announcement.

Roerich was being attacked from all sides. Wallace had accused him of spying and "leaked" the stale news that his conduct in Manchukuo and Central Asia had embarrassed America. Horch was attempting to oust the Roerichs, Grant, and the Lichtmanns so he could take complete control of the museum and his million-dollar investment. Hardly a day passed that Mrs. Horch did not approach the teachers or students, trying to influence them against Sina and the school in general. She continued giving classes on the fourth floor, where Frances accused her of "pretending to conduct school."

Realizing the situation had gone far beyond anything that could be healed and anticipating what might be coming next, Sina asked on behalf of Mme Roerich that Nettie return all of the Roerichs' manuscripts. She was told that neither Nettie nor Esther had any. Then Sina put the request in writing and received the same response. Greatly alarmed, she quickly contacted their lawyer, Mr. Plaut, and cabled India.

Helena immediately replied that it was imperative to protect the tremendous body of work from any evil intentions. The manuscripts must be recovered because they contained valuable material she had written with the Master from 1923 to 1935. It could only be published under her direct supervision. She pointed out that some of it was so far ahead of the consciousness of the time that publication was not to be for many years.

Mr. Plaut wrote a demand letter and was told that whatever notebooks Mme Roerich had given Mrs. Horch had been gifts. Therefore, there was no reason to return them. Since all were handwritten in Russian, which Nettie could not read, Frances thought it "sounded absolutely incredible" to say they were presented as gifts. There was also abundant evidence in letters, cables, and trustee meeting minutes that could prove the notebooks had been sent to New York for safekeeping. Mr. Plaut attempted to secure the

books with a search warrant. When that failed, he started proceedings to sue for their return.

At the same time, other developments were proceeding. Mr. Jackson, an attorney, had begun negotiating with the federal government for a settlement of the back taxes. The trustees brought charges against Horch to recover the shares of stock they had entrusted to him for safekeeping, and Horch sued Roerich to recover money owed him for the thousands of dollars of IOU's in Horch's possession.

For several years, none of the suits won anyone anything except tremendous bitterness, frustration, and disappointment. In court and out, matters never seemed to go in Roerich's favor. Frances claimed she saw "the same sinister hand at work in that." Cases dragged on, lawyers were inefficient, things were bungled and postponed. Refusing to explain, the IRS turned down all attempts at settlement. In 1937, the court decided that since Horch was the only one of the trustees who had put in money, he had the right to keep all the shares in the Master Institute. Sina and Frances were given two days to move out all belongings of the Master Institute, Urusvati, and the Roerich Museum Press.

Everything was finally moved to new quarters on 72nd Street, where, though crowded and uncomfortable, Sina started holding classes for the few remaining students. The barely functioning Roerich Museum Press occupied a part of the same space. Even after the institutions were moved, Frances and Sina somehow still thought they could keep their "life tenure" apartments. When the situation became too unpleasant, they finally gave up.

When they heard that the bulk of the paintings had quietly disappeared from the walls, they rushed to inspect, and found only a few scattered ones remaining. In spite of their loud protests and hysterical demands for explanations, two days later the halls were completely empty. Upon reporting this to the police and the district attorney's office, they were told the district attorney had no jurisdiction over such matters. Horch's attorneys insisted that, since the paintings belonged to Horch, he had the right to remove them. The Roerichs' loyal followers maintained that "the entire Museum was stolen by criminals, people without any scruples, people who deliberately ousted the rightful shareholders and trustees from the Institutions and who succeeded in winning the courts and the judges over to their side."

They then gathered signatures of protest, trying to win in the court of public opinion, but the newspapers seemed to lose interest in the affair. In India, feeling powerless, the Roerichs sent constant guidance and advice to encourage the little group in the struggle. At the very beginning, Helena had written: "I most sincerely wish for you to become a real warrior, and to temper your spirit under the rain of those hostile arrows. There is a peculiar joy in receiving hostile arrows. Thus, at this moment a betrayal has been discovered where I least of all expected it. My heart was wounded, but somewhere in the depth of it joy is already rising. It is the joy of a warrior, the joy of a possibility of fighting for Truth, and above all the joy of one more liberation!"

She reminded them, "The power of faith, the power of love, that is the fire which transmutes all our feelings...Only the transmutation of energies, i.e., feelings or qualities of thought, can take us out of the magic circle of karma. Hence, let us uplift our vibrations through high emotions." And the Master, too, reminded them that "the law of Karma flows immutably."

Many wondered why Roerich never returned to the United States to clear his name. With Wallace opening the doors, Lichtmann and Horch had visited the undersecretary of state, Mr. Hornbeck. In the presence of the chief of the Visa Division, they showed photostats of tax notices to prove Roerich was in default in the amount of \$48,000 and claimed that if Roerich came to America, "He would cause a great deal of trouble." In reporting the conversation, Hornbeck noted, "Throughout the conversation they made it understood that what they want is that Roerich be kept out of the country." When Hornbeck heard that three members of the museum board were still for Roerich and three were against him, he asked what had caused that. Horch and Miss Lichtmann replied that it was their "discovery that Roerich was an impostor and a cheat." When he inquired if there was anything for which they would be inclined to prosecute Roerich, they said no. Yet, they maintained that Roerich was a dangerous person who mixed politics with art and would be a troublemaker wherever he went. On December 4, 1939, they were still persisting with their efforts to prevent Roerich's return to the United States. The undersecretary sent the following memo to Wallace:

My dear Mr. Secretary:

I refer to our conversation concerning Professor Nicholas Roerich who it was understood, would endeavor to obtain a visa at one of our consular offices. A telegraphic report from the Consulate General at Calcutta states that Professor Roerich is said to still be residing at Naggar, Punjab and that it has been impossible to learn anything regarding his plans. The Consul General has been requested to inform all consular offices in India that if the Professor should apply, a visa should not be issued to him without previous authorization from the Department.

Upon receiving the above information, one department head wryly asked how dangerous Roerich could be if he was only charged with tax evasion and suggested that matters might get settled if he was allowed entry. But as far as Wallace was concerned, Roerich was *persona non grata* in America. He had written the Roerichs ordering that neither the professor nor anyone in the family was ever to attempt to contact him or President Roosevelt again, and recommended that Roerich's name be removed from the Pact and Banner of Peace. Helena wrote:

And so we drink the chalice of poison tendered by the hands of our former co-workers. But in spite of this, strength and courage live in our hearts. For what is achievement without betrayal? The symbol of Judas is eternal and is inevitably present at the consummation of a great achievement. But after Golgotha, comes the resurrection, and the great exaltation of the spirit. This was indicated in the Mysteries, and causes joy to flame in our hearts. We know the Great Pledge of the Stronghold of Light, we treasure the signs of Trust, and we know the victorious shield. Our spirit cannot be frightened by any battles; we have even learned to love them, because what else can so temper the spirit and test our abilities and bring us great experiences for the crown of fulfillment? And so, we may once more say, "Blessed be the obstacles, by them we grow."

In 1939, the school moved to the Fisk Building at 250 West 57th Street, occupying two studios and an office. Sina had divorced Maurice and married Dudley Fosdick, a coworker who had been welcomed into the teachings and was devoted to the fight. He, Sina, and two members of the school faculty became directors of the newly formed Roerich Academy of Arts. Their faith, and that of a few other supporters like Mrs. Campbell and Miss Fritschi, was unwavering.

They began accumulating paintings from friends and private collectors, so that one day there would be another museum of Roerich's art in America.

They held to the hope that “the time was not far off when the battle for justice would be won and the Roerich Museum would be returned to its former status.” They saw the whole affair as “a dark spot on the history of culture in America.”



KULU VALLEY

Regardless of the situation in New York, an exhausted Roerich, now ~~sixty~~ sixty-three, was back in Kulu Valley in 1937. The hopes, plans, and dreams of uniting all Buddhists and establishing a spiritual country in the Altai were put on hold for another time, perhaps another lifetime. Restricted to the Punjab, his expeditions were very short. When his health was poor, he lectured himself:

Don't be ill...During half a century, there were many illnesses, but how much danger was passed. We were lost, we froze—the things have been difficult! But the will did not weaken. We crossed difficult passes, sometimes it seemed that we could ascend no higher, but the height proved surmountable. Sometimes on a narrow ledge, the rock seemed as if it would break away, but all the passes and the ledge are still there. One became dizzy when looking at the rapidly rushing blocks of ice in the river, but they were at a salutary distance. Do not be ill, there are great days yet to be seen.

His thoughts dwelt on Buddha, the Agni Yoga teachings, his paintings, Shambhala, old friends, and current scientific discoveries. Urusvati, the Himalayan Research Institute, exchanged information with many scientific organizations in Asia, Europe, and America and traded botanical and zoological collections with the University of Michigan, Punjab University, the Paris Museum of Natural History, Harvard, and the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences.

As Director of Urusvati, George studied and translated the books and cherished articles his family had brought back from their expeditions. Svetoslav continued to paint, producing, among other works, numerous

portraits of Nicholas and Helena. He also headed the Urusvati Botany Department and researched the medicinal plants of Tibet. A biochemistry laboratory was opened to study cosmic rays under high altitude conditions, cancer, and other subjects.

Kulu Valley was perfect for their needs. As Helena explained:

We selected the location of the center in the Himalayas quite deliberately and purposefully, for innumerable possibilities are offered by these heights, and the attention of the scientific world is directed here. In the sphere of magnetic currents which bring precious new energies to humanity, science is still in its infancy, and modern instruments are nothing but toys. But the discovery of new cosmic rays is possible here, for the finest and most valuable energies are found in this pure mountain atmosphere.

We pay attention to all meteoric precipitation which falls on these snowy summits and is carried into the valleys by the mountain streams. The astronomical observations are exceptionally good and the rarest medical plants, grasses, and botanic species are also here....Since the source of knowledge is found throughout the entire Cosmos, a scientific center should belong to the whole world and include co-workers of all nationalities. And the scientists of the world should be as united in their cooperation as the Cosmos is indivisible in all its functions.



Urusvati, the Himalayan Research Institute, 1935

In October 1937, the first Baltic Congress of Roerich Societies met in Riga, Latvia. It celebrated his fifty years of achievements and published a beautiful volume relating his attempts to further beauty and culture by working to conquer ignorance and hatred. In spite of the negative publicity from America, Roerich's fame as an artist, his humanitarian outlook, his support of India's freedom fighters, and Urusvati's activities turned remote, hilly Naggar into a cultural center and a beacon to the world. So many Indian scientists, artists, writers, and political figures were personally and professionally acquainted with him that it became standard procedure for scientific congresses and art conferences to send him invitations and salutations. But the great respect paid him by progressive circles of Indian society and his contact with the United States only made the British more suspicious, and he remained under surveillance.

Visitors to their home remarked that Helena, dressed in her long Edwardian skirt, looked like a tsarina, while Nicholas's most striking feature was his white beard, which he sometimes wore square, but usually wore pointed or even double pointed. He liked to wear a skullcap and a long jubba cloak, with a gold chain around his neck that gave him the look of a priest from an Orthodox church.

Most of the family's activities were viewed with distrust by their British neighbors, perhaps Great Game veterans. The Roerichs were accused of being Bolshevik spies and Russian Buddhists and criticized for welcoming Hindu priests, lamas, and wandering holy men to their door, for calling themselves Americans, for paying their serving staff more than the local wages, and for many other things. Gossipers labeled their actions "queer" and thought it "interesting" that they had traveled into trouble spots and chosen such an inaccessible location for their research headquarters. Who knows what would have been said if any of them had gone into Helena's study and seen the paintings of Master Morya surrounded by a most incredible light or holding a sacred censer to purify the world.

George F. Waugh, Lt. Col., U.S.A. (Ret.), wrote a long letter to the United States secretary of state passing on the innuendoes and rumors he had heard. In summation, he wrote, "The principle question one meets is what are they doing here, why do they want to stay, and where does their money come from."

When Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, visited for a week, Svetoslav sketched him and later painted his portrait. (He subsequently painted Indira, and her son Rajiv when he was prime minister.) As rumbles of war in Europe reached India, Nehru, convinced that a victory for Hitler would spell doom for the entire world, frequently quoted

Trotsky: “It is clear that the twentieth century is the most disturbed century within the memory of humanity; any contemporary of ours who wants peace and comfort before everything else has chosen a bad time to be born.”¹



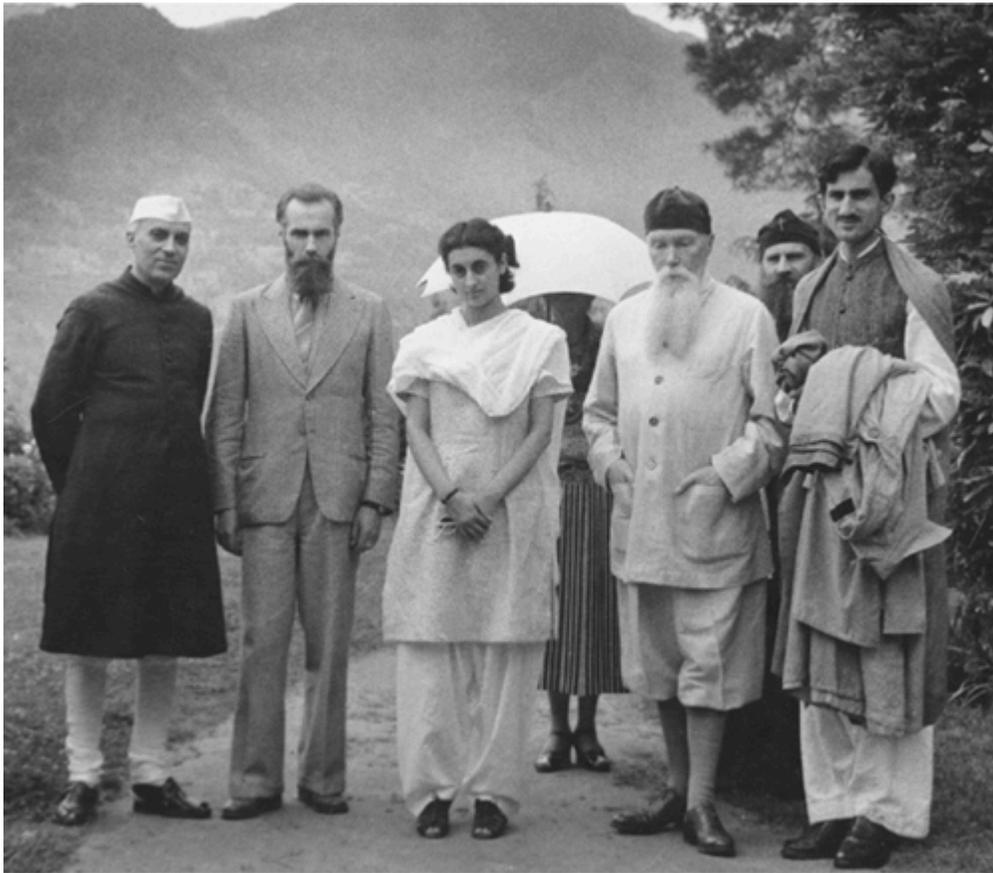
Interior of Helena's study in Kulu Valley, India, 1930s

As the opening shots of World War II were heard, Helena wrote that it was necessary for the first battles with the Prince of Darkness to take place in the subtle spheres before the Lord of Shambhala could act through his earthly warriors. The chaos would eventually usher in the Golden Age: "The threatening time has come. Very threatening—and a great sorting out is taking place. There is a shifting in the consciousness of people, an awakened striving toward the reconstruction of life, on a new basis and on a large scale."

And the Master said, “Therefore, verily, the crumbling of the old world is a new affirmation, for through the coming of new values we bring the world the salvation of spirit.”

In June 1940, Roerich wrote in his diary:

First we seemed cut off from Vienna, then from Prague. Now it is Warsaw and gradually the contacts with the Baltic republics have become difficult. Sweden, Denmark, and Norway have disappeared from the list. Bruges has gone silent, as have Belgrade, Zagreb, and Italy. Paris is not there and the Far East is silent. Even Switzerland seems a possessed country and it is not even possible to write to Russia any longer in response to the inquiries for herbs. Who knows how many letters have gotten lost or been destroyed by the hands of the censor. It is sad to see our work crippled and no improvement near.



Left to right: *Jawaharlal Nehru, Svetoslav Roerich, Indira Gandhi, Nicholas Roerich.* With umbrella: *Helena Roerich.* Naggar, India, 1942

Worried and grieving over the world's chaotic happenings, he immersed himself in the solidness of his mountains, painting and repainting his cherished Himalayas over and over again, in all kinds of weather and at every time of day. He produced huge canvases with masses of color which, as Svetoslav explained, "carried the message of the Teacher calling the disciples to awaken and strive towards a new life—a better life, a life of Beauty and Fulfillment."

Roerich painted military campaigns and the sorrows of war and gave them titles like *Armageddon*, *Heroes Awakened*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and the *Campaign of Igor*. In a letter to another artist, he wrote: "Above all earthly havoc Art and Religion remain, and if human beings reveal exalted feelings, they manifest through these two channels. At the moment there are few joys on the earthly plane, and the human heart is very much in need of rejoicing. We artists should be grateful to fate for giving us one of the best channels to bring people happiness of the heart. To someone else, these words might appear as nebulous abstractions, but for artists, they represent reality."

Still creating his own world, Roerich lost himself in the romance of India: "Here is the Abode of the Rishis. Here resounded the flute of Krishna. Here thundered the Blessed Gautama Buddha. Here originated all the *Vedas*. Here lived the Pandavas. Here Gessar Khan. Here Aryavarta. Here is Shambhala. Himalayas—Jewel of India. Himalayas—Treasure of the World. Himalayas—the sacred Symbol of Ascent."

Indian artist and lecturer B. M. Goswamy observed:

Roerich's whole view was different. India was not as he perceived her. It is difficult for us to think of Gautama the Buddha's "thundering." This is one of the last descriptions that comes to mind when one thinks of his gentle words, and yet this is how Roerich wants us to think of Buddha and, therefore, of the Himalayas. The Himalayas were not home to the Pandavas, nor did Krishna's flute ever resound in them, and yet, it is these images which are invoked by Roerich's enthusiasm for the great ranges that he so tirelessly traversed.

In Roerich's mind the view of the Himalayas merged with his belief in, and longing for, the Second Coming. In his writing and his painting alike, he seemed to be making prophetic pronouncements in his consistently emphatic tone. One turns to Roerich's writing and sees that while the flow of words is quite remarkable, the sequence of thoughts was as hard to follow as the jagged peaks of the mountains. Roerich was not beyond turning everything to his own purpose—even modifying facts in his impassioned desire to get the message across.

One sees fairly clearly that he aimed to bring the grandeur and the majesty of the mountain ranges into relief no matter if the facts had to be modified or nuances changed. It is as if his paintings, writings, and discourses were all calculated to merge and form the background to his conviction that the Second Coming was near and would manifest itself in the Himalayas. The paintings advanced this end as did the countless mysterious tales he collected and retold. And the sense of joy he felt at the fact that some of the mountain peaks were still “pure” because they were unconquered, is better understood with the perspective that it is in these ranges that the splendid legions of Maitreya would one day stand forth.

Now seventy, with his family in their beloved India, Roerich was heartened by the Master’s teachings. Concerned for the millions who were dying in Russia, he and Svetoslav arranged exhibitions, sold paintings, and sent the proceeds to the Russian Red Cross and the Red Army. George spoke of joining the ranks when the military action reached the Russian front. The Roerichs encouraged Sina and those still loyal to them in New York to establish the American-Russian Cultural Association, something very close to their hearts. They solicited Ernest Hemingway, Rockwell Kent, Charlie Chaplin, Norman Bel Geddes, and many others to work with them toward cultural cooperation.

Then the war was over. As Roerich contemplated the pointless destruction of the world’s culture, it aroused his passion to resume work on the Pact and Banner. In August 1946, Helena wrote to Sina about establishing a new Banner of Peace Committee: “It is time to understand that the greatest Banner in history is being unfurled. Never before has the Banner of Peace, the sign of the New World, been manifested. Let the people understand the Sign of Salvation. The firmament trembles. The currents are red-hot! The Banner of Peace, our Banner, is as a Beacon of Light during the storm. And the sowing of Culture is an antidote for poison.”



*Svetoslav Roerich painting the mountains his father loved in Kulu Valley,
India*

A few months later the All-Indian Conference of Cultural Unity endorsed the banner, while India demanded that the British “Quit India,” and massive demonstrations took place in every major town and hundreds of villages. Roerich applied for permission to return to the U.S.S.R. and was refused. Perhaps as the death tolls climbed to thousands, he realized that the only island of peace he would ever find was inside himself and in the world he and Helena created around them.

In her company, with their sons, the Bogdanova sisters, and the guests who came up the mountain to visit, Roerich turned to the simple joys of life. He greeted the early sun, took long walks in the mountains, watched the flowers grow in his gardens, and contributed generously to local fairs and celebrations. Most of his time was spent in his studio. Of his life with Helena, he fondly wrote in his diary: “Forty years—no less than forty. On such a long voyage, meeting many storms and menaces—from without. Together we overcame all obstacles. And obstacles turned into possibilities. I dedicated my books to ‘Helena, my wife, friend, fellow traveler, inspirer!’ Each of these concepts was tested in the fire of life. And in Petersburg, Scandinavia, England, America, and in all Asia we worked, we studied, we broadened our consciousness. Together we created, and not without reason is it said that the work should bear two names—a feminine and a masculine.”

When India became independent at midnight, August 15, 1947, waves of violence erupted, reverberating in every direction. By October, the entire country—particularly the Punjab territory west of Kulu—was a churning mass of migration and horror. All work ceased, the telegraph was silent, no mail was delivered. From the Hall Estate, the Roerichs could hear shooting, and as the neighbors from below requested shelter, Roerich retreated to his bed, heartsick and ill. He had been ailing since June with prostate cancer; surgery had been performed and bed rest prescribed.

An unfinished canvas, *The Master’s Command*, stood on his easel. On it, weighed down by the worries of the world, a figure perches among some enormous mountain cliffs that rise far above the winding stream in the valley. A large white bird—resembling an albatross—hovers close. Bird and man are surrounded by rich brown and intensely blue mountains. In the distant golden sky, streaked with coral, hope awaits.

December 13 was Shiva’s birthday, the most solemn day of the Hindu calendar. At 3:00 a.m., Roerich had endured enough; his heart, and possibly his kidneys, had failed. Perhaps the beauty he knew was possible would be found in his next incarnation, or perhaps he could achieve more from the other side. Helena wrote to Sina: “The heart could not endure the pressures and the terrible pain of seeing the oppression of all that belongs to culture, all that brings salvation for the coming generation. Our Light, Our Beloved

left as he lived—simply, beautifully, and majestically. The world is truly orphaned by the departure of this beautiful Spirit!”

Three days later, in front of his last earthly home—facing the Himalayas—the flames of a mighty fire consumed the frail body of the singer of the Holy, the artist who had loved to dig up graves, kurgans, and tumuli. His funeral pyre burned for two days, emanating the aromatic oils of deodar and sandalwood. Then a slab of mountain rock was installed on the spot and inscribed, “The body of Maharishi Nikolai Roerich, a great friend of India, was cremated here on 30th Magh, 2004th year of the Vikram era, corresponding to the 15th December 1947. Om Ram.”

On the reverse side, the stonemason had aptly chiseled, “This fragment of a mountain cliff was brought here from far away.”

A few days later, when George cabled the sad news to his friend Robert Horniman in Great Britain, he reported that his mother could have gone too, but the Master had said she still had some important work to do. Valentina Dutko, a beloved friend who did much of Helena’s translating, further reported that “Master was with Helena,” and as she watched her husband leave his body, he was “surrounded by truly beautiful colors and light.”

After her husband’s death, Helena wrote, “My spiritual loneliness on Earth is great. The loving understanding and spiritual harmony that bound me with him made all the difficult situations easier and brightened the future. With his departure, my isolation from all that is personal and earthly is even stronger. There is left only a deep desire to bring forth all the collected treasures and give whatever is possible to hungry souls.”

In 1949, two years after Roerich’s passing, following Helena’s advice, Sina Fosdick found a new location for the museum. She remembered, “As if Helena were not in India, but together with us in America, she guided us by pointing out better locations. And after searching for many weeks, even though its owner at first refused to sell it, the ideal house came to us through a series of unusual happenings. So with the help of our generous co-workers, we assembled a good collection of Roerich paintings.”

Eight years after Roerich’s passing, mere days before what would have been his eighty-first birthday, following several years of serious pain and frail health, Helena had two heart attacks and died in her sleep. She and George had moved to Kalimpong, where she worked heroically to consolidate the spiritual legacy for future safekeeping. According to her

wish, her body was cremated on the top of a mountain facing holy Kanchenjunga, the wonderful country of the Great Snows, the Abode of Light. Her ashes were placed under a Buddhist chorten. Her sons and daughter-in-law (Svetoslav had married in 1945) were deeply touched when people from all over Asia came to pay their respects. Hindus, Chinese, Afghans, Tibetans, Mongols, Nepalis, Bhutanese, and even some Japanese joined in the procession. Helena had previously told friends that the Master had said if she had died earlier, certain things would have had to be postponed for two hundred years or more: “I exist due only to the Ray of the Great Master, who said it was necessary for me to remain because no one could replace me as I work under the highest Cosmic Sign, and this century was in need of my attainment.”

On December 19, 1958, the Roerich Museum was chartered in a five-story brownstone just a few blocks away from the skyscraper. With Sina as director, renewed cultural activities began, and the work for the future continued.

Though their bodies burned away, much still remained. After all of the living—the drama, the striving, the intensity—when lives end, one may wonder, “What endures?” Of the countless millions who roam the earth, live out their days and then pass over, what stays behind to verify their existence? Many blessed ones are remembered for generations by those who knew and loved them. The more famous or infamous are recalled for what they did or said; a comparatively meager few are remembered because they expanded consciousness and added more beauty to the world.

“With every affirmation of the Beautiful and of the highest, we are creating that quality for the future life,” wrote Roerich in *Shambhala*. “The most gratifying and uplifting way to serve the coming evolution is by spreading the seeds of beauty. If we are to have a beautiful life and some happiness...it must be created with joy and enthusiasm for service to art and beauty...If the culture of spirit is to win, beauty must invade new regions.”



Svetoslav and George Roerich beside their mother's ashes

Reflecting on the books, the paintings, and all that the Roerichs gave to the world, one can recognize that their lives were lives of devotion—devotion to overcoming obstacles, to beauty, to service, and to following the will of their Master. They advocated that one never stop exploring his or her depths for the greater levels of strength, resourcefulness, and creativity waiting there. Their actions gave proof to their words. Spiritual pioneers, searching for something greater than themselves, the Roerichs cut a path through the darkness for all of us. Perhaps in our time, we will get to

Shambhala and live in peace. In the meantime, as the Roerichs' names are added to those exceptional ones who have contributed to our world, we might ask ourselves what we are willing to do for the coming generations. And then begin doing it!



Madame Roerich's chair



EPILOG

After the elder Roerichs were gone, Svetoslav and his wife, Devika **Ran**, first lady of the Indian cinema and niece of Rabindranath Tagore, lived in Bangalore, India; they had no children. He is widely known as a painter. George never married. He was allowed to return to the Soviet Union by special permission from Nikita Khrushchev—bringing the banned Agni Yoga teachings with him into the spiritually hungry country. Although in poor health and with a weak heart, he joined the staff of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Science. He continued his scientific work and research there and enriched the institute with his firsthand knowledge and expertise. He is recognized as a prominent Buddhist scholar and scientist.

Fulfilling Nicholas's last wish, George presented 418 paintings to Russia. Sixty of them went to the Novosibirsk Picture Gallery and the rest to the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. Roerich's childhood home, Isvara, is open to the public, and the house in Kulu has been made into a memorial museum.

The Agni Yoga teachings had been outlawed in the Soviet Union until Mikhail Gorbachev opened the door with *perestroika* and many of Russia's cultural treasures were returned. At that time, Svetoslav met with Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, herself an Agni Yoga student. The meeting resulted in a Roerich Fund being established in Moscow for the creation of a cultural center and museum. Gorbachev, calling Nicholas Roerich "one of the cultural pillars of Russia," contributed a palace and the rubles necessary to establish the Moscows International Roerich Centre.



*Raisa Gorbachev, Svetoslav Roerich, Mikhail Gorbachev, Devika Rani
Roerich. Kremlin, Moscow, May 14, 1987*

Into the center went four tons of paintings, correspondence, and unpublished manuscripts, which had been stored with Svetoslav in Bangalore. With the Roerich legacy safely back in Russia, a heavy burden of responsibility must have been lifted from Svetoslav's shoulders. He died within the next few years, and Devika Rani passed on soon afterward.



Sina Fosdick, first director of the Nicholas Roerich Museum, surrounded by Roerich paintings at the present location of the museum

Over the years, Horch steadily sold paintings out of the museum's storeroom and gave away many for tax write-offs. About one hundred went to the Rose Art Gallery at Brandeis University. Some of the paintings on display in the Roerich Museum were actually bought from Horch and donated back to the museum. The largest such collector was one of Helena Roerich's disciples, Baltzar Bolling. At his request, Helena had given him a list of the paintings she thought were important to rescue, and he kindly donated about a dozen of them.

Mme Roerich's notebooks were never returned. Due to the wisdom of the Horch's daughter, Oriole, however, they were not destroyed. They are deposited in the library of Amherst College along with other material she gave.

The Agni Yoga books have been translated into numerous languages. Agni Yoga societies meet around the world.

Over the years, many of Roerich's thousands of paintings and drawings have been photographed and cataloged. The largest collection on display in America is at the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Prints of his

paintings and books written by and about both Roerichs are available through the museum: 319 West 107th Street, New York, NY 10025. The museum web site address is www.roerich.org.



An old Tibetan story tells of a young man who set off on the quest for Shambhala. After crossing many mountains, he came to the cave of an old hermit, who asked him, “Where are you going across these wastes of snow?”

“To find Shambhala,” the youth replied.

“Ah, well then, you need not travel far,” the hermit said. “The kingdom of Shambhala is in your own heart.”

—Jacques Bacot, quoted by Edwin Bernbaum
in *The Way to Shambhala*

NOTES

PROLOG

1. Karma is the law of retribution: whatever is sown is reaped.

CHAPTER 1: An Inner Urgency for Artistic Creation

1. The Panchen Lama, or Panchen Rimpoche (the Precious Teacher), and the Dalai Lama, or Gyalpo Rimpoche (the Precious King), are titles indicating the difference between spiritual and worldly power. The Dalai Lama had greater political power and ruled over Tibet. The Panchen Lama, believed to be the ruler of Shambhala, had greater spiritual power and was more knowledgeable regarding sacred scriptures.

CHAPTER 2: Magnetic Mysticism

1. The term “Great Game” was adopted from Rudyard Kipling’s book *Kim*. It was the Victorian Cold War.
2. Many of the messages were eventually published by the Agni Yoga Society: *Leaves of Morya’s Garden*, *New Era Community*, *Agni Yoga*, *Infinity*, *Hierarchy* and other volumes.
3. *Agni*, fire; *yoga*, union with God: the yoga that can link humans with the highest divine principles.
4. Talashkino was an experimental village established by Princess Maria Tenisheva to educate the serfs and teach them the long-lost skills needed to create folk arts. The village became an artists’ colony, drawing together many people. Much of Talashkino interested Nikolai, especially the research necessary before the arts could be taught. The Talashkino products became so popular that they created

a revival of interest in the arts of medieval Russia. Roerich designed furniture and staged elaborate productions for the theater there. In 1912, he completed his fresco *Queen of Heaven* on the chapel wall and ceiling. It was the prototype for the Mother of the World, which he later painted several times.

5. Once in America, Nikolai used the name Nicholas and Elena became Helena.

6. *Nicholas Roerich, 1874–1947*, Nicholas Roerich Museum.

CHAPTER 3: Culture Is of the Spirit

1. Kuindjy had been dismissed from the faculty for having a bad influence on the students. When his students walked out with him, they were offered their diplomas contingent upon the work they would present. Nikolai presented *The Messenger*.

2. About half of the paintings were eventually recovered. While in California, Roerich discovered that thirty-five were in the Oakland Museum, and six others were in private collections. They were finally returned to Russia in 1976 and are on display in the Oriental Art Museum in Moscow.

3. Taken from Jonson's diary, courtesy of the archives of the Jonson Gallery of the University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

4. *El Palacio*, Vol. XI, No. 8, October 15, 1921.

CHAPTER 4: Santa Fe

1. Several years later, Hewitt's dream of making the area a national park was fulfilled with the creation of Bandelier National Monument.

2. The "Advanced School of Mysticism" referred to was the little study group, about ten in all, consisting of the Lichtmanns and Sina's mother, Sophie Shafran, Frances Grant, and a few others.

3. Tretyakov so liberally used his wealth as encouragement that after forty years of collecting he had amassed the most fabulous art collection in Russia. A few years before his death, he donated the entire collection of 1,757 paintings to Moscow, in appreciation for his family's success there.

CHAPTER 5: The Master School of United Arts

1. From an interview with the Hudson sisters. The names of the people in the party were lost over time.
2. Andrews, *Under a Lucky Star*.

CHAPTER 7: Where Can One Have Such Joy?

1. A stupa is a dome- or cone-shaped monument erected over relics of a revered person.
2. Bose was knighted in 1916 for his work with wavelengths and his experiments with plants.

CHAPTER 10: The Silk Road and Chinese Hospitality

1. See Roerich's *Altai-Himalaya* and *Heart of Asia* for a more detailed account.
2. The Caves of the Thousand Buddhas had recently been "robbed" over a twenty-year period of hundreds of Buddhist manuscripts, sacred texts, paintings, silks, and priceless art relics. Sir Aurel Stein and other archaeologists had startled the world by spirited them out of Chinese Turkestan into Western museums. The texts included the Diamond Sutra, the world's earliest printed book—the sixteen-foot-long scroll bears an exact date: May 11, 868, according to the Christian calendar.

CHAPTER 13: The Altai

1. CHEKA was the precursor to the KGB.

2. For another perspective on the Roerichs' trip to Moscow, see *Tournament of Shadows* by Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac.
3. Boris planned eventually to join the group in America, but in 1927 he was arrested by the Soviets for smuggling “contraband” and could not leave the country after that.

CHAPTER 14: Across the Gobi

1. In later books Roerich remembered the bird as a vulture.

CHAPTER 15: Into Tibet

1. The collected letters of Master Morya and Master Koot Humi.
2. This correspondence was taken from British secret files.

CHAPTER 18: The Asian Botanical Expedition

1. The monastery was named in the eighteenth century when the Chinese emperor gave it a complete collection of the sacred books of Kanjur.
2. From records of the United States Department of State, Division of Far Eastern Affairs.
3. Two obvious false statements—Roerich was sixty, not seventy, and Helena was in India, not Kalgan—call into question the accuracy of the rest of the report.

CHAPTER 19: A Dark Spot

1. Copies of her letters to the president were stored among his other papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Library, in Hyde Park, New York. None of his replies to her are there, but her letters make it clear that he did reply.
2. Horch was hired by the Department of Agriculture within the next two years to administer foreign exchange transactions with imports.

CHAPTER 20: Kulu Valley

1. Ali; *An Indian Dynasty*.



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Since a large portion of my material was taken from personal interviews and letters, crumbling scrapbooks, microfilmed newspapers, old diaries, and magazines, it is highly improbable that anyone will track these sources. Therefore, I have chosen not to document this work with many notes. I am, however, listing all of the books; many are obtainable, though out-of-print, and make fascinating reading.

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