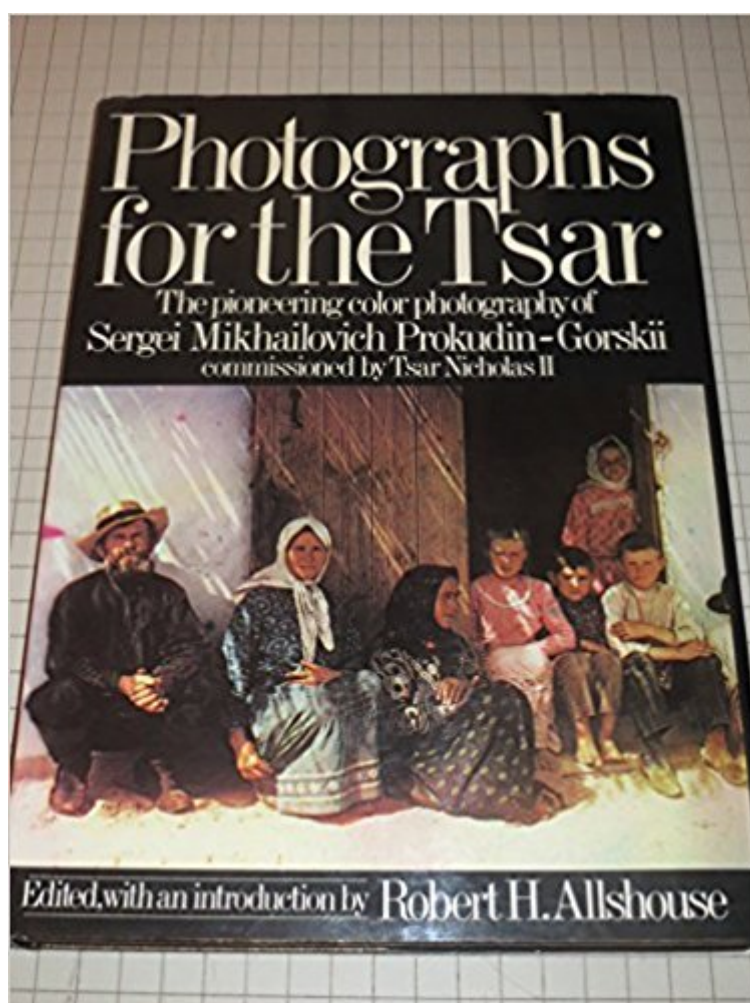


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# Photographs For The Tsar: The Pioneering Color Photography Of Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii Commissioned By Tsar Nicholas II



## Synopsis

Dust jacket notes: "The photographs in this extraordinary book are the work of a previously unknown pioneer in early 20th century photography, Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii -- commissioned by Tsar Nicholas II in 1909 to travel throughout the Russian Empire photographing things of interest and significance. To view these color images of an era we are accustomed to seeing in sepia tones is an experience of cultural shock -- a trip in a visual time machine to a vanished and exotic world that looks as though it had been captured by the photographer only yesterday. Prokudin-Gorskii, a chemist as well as a photographer, developed one of the earliest processes for taking color pictures and was the editor for many years of a St. Petersburg journal, *The Amateur Photographer*. During the six years he executed the Tsar's commission, he traveled vast distances in a special railway car outfitted with a darkroom -- to the Urals, the Caucasus, the Ukraine, Siberia, Finland, and as far east as Turkestan. Eminent in his own country, he became one of the countless emigres to flee Russia in 1918, disappearing into relative obscurity in Norway, and later in England and France. Like imperial society, he too was a victim of the upheaval of the Revolution. Prokudin-Gorskii managed to bring out of Russia his collection of nearly 2000 glass-plate negatives. This book, produced with the cooperation of the Library of Congress, contains 120 of his finest color photographs -- including the only extant photo in color of Leo Tolstoy. Another 120 have been reproduced in sepia from black-and-white prints. Photographs for the Tsar is a landmark, destined to become a classic in its field."

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (19 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

If you landed here through a title or subject search, you've probably already seen this book in the

library. You have my sympathy on learning that it is out of print. (If you came here through my personal page, I'm flattered!) This is a book of photographs of Russia from the decade before World War I. Thing is, these are mostly color pictures. This early color process produced images that are about as good as the color photos in the Sunday newspaper today. The photographer, S. M. Prokudin-Gorskii, showed the images in the form of a slide show to Tsar Nikolai II, in hopes of having similar exhibitions in Russian schools. The subject matter is fairly prosaic. The images are postcard views of rustic villages, broad rivers, wooden dams, happy peasants at work and at leisure, exotic Caucasian and central Asian tribespeople in colorful native dress, lots of onion-domed churches and shrines. Prokudin-Gorskii meant these pictures to show the pageantry and glory of Mother Russia. Today, they are painful reminders of a world that has been smashed forever. The peasants would die in the Great War, or starve in the postwar famines, or butcher each other in the Civil War, or be executed in the Red Terror. The public works would go to ruin due to the incompetence of the commissars who would run them after the bourgeois engineers had been eliminated. The colorful tribespeople would be exiled. The churches would be looted and demolished. The peaceful meadows would be paved over by ill-conceived, gigantic heavy industrial plants. The villages would be burned by civil war and foreign invasions. Seeing all these images which look like they were taken yesterday, and knowing the fate that awaited their subjects, is quite an experience. Contrast this book to another book of pre-war Russian color photographs, Leonid Andreyev, Photographs of a Russian Writer. His vision is much more personal, but no less poignant.

I came across this book many years ago in a bookstore and bought it immediately. Always interested in Russian history, this was a fascinating glimpse into the past for me. As the previous reviewer said, its like the pictures were taken yesterday. Well worth the price for someone interested in this period of history.(I think I paid \$35 for it new, a tidy sum for a book then)

If you are interested in history at all, this book will be quite a find. The photographs, beautiful and presented in color, are from the turn of the century before the Russian Empire fell. The pictures capture a time, place and spirit. It is spectacular to see.

I'd seen the photos online some time ago, but while my whole family was on Christmas vacation together, my father told us over lunch one day that he was enjoying the photos in this book, which was on the coffee table in my parents room at the B&B where we were staying. He said it was the

kind of thing he'd like to have at home, but "It's probably out of print and impossible to find, and expensive if you can find it." I pulled out my phone and ordered it off on the spot. It IS out of print, but there were plenty of sellers listing it, for a perfectly reasonable price. He was pleasantly surprised when it arrived in the mail two weeks later.

The pages just produced beautiful photos of the Russian landscape which is completely varied since it cuts across 2 continents. Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii is parallel to Rembrandt in the photography world. His skills here produce a work of art on every page. He captures the heart & soul of the people & the countryside. I have a hand-colored photo from my younger days & the artist, if not the same Mr. Prokudin-Gorskii, has copied him or was directed by him to produce a perfect photograph using the same technique. A must for a serious photographer. BRAVISSIMO!

I was so inspired by an Internet piece on this photographer that I bought this book. However, the colors were not as inspiring on paper as on the Internet. I don't know if that's how it was printed or whether the Internet photos were enhanced. But it was a bit of a letdown.

Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii was a chemist and photographer commissioned by Tzar Nicholas II to photograph as much of the Russian Empire as possible in color. Prokudin-Gorskii used three color separations for his photos and as a result some pictures are astoundingly sharp and brilliantly colored, and some the colors are out of register slightly. That's irrelevant, because the photos are spectacular and show the Russian Empire from end to end on the eve of its collapse. The only thing even remotely like this collection is that of Albert Kahn. Beautiful book with beautiful pictures and it allows the pictures to speak for themselves.

I came across this book while browsing through a used book store, but I actually found it cheaper here online. I was aware of Prokudin-Gorskii and his collection of photographs in The Library of Congress archive. But it was nice to see some of them in print form in this book. Not all of the pictures from the collection are in this book, but a good number of them are. I gave this book as a present to my parents. They liked it.

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