

The History and Philosophy of the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace

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OBJECTIVE: To introduce: 1) The Roerich Family; 2) The Roerich Banner; 3) The Roerich Pact for the Protection of Culture; and 4) The Pact's underlying philosophy of "Living Ethics" (Agni Yoga) as developed by Helena Roerich

I. THE FAMILY



Nicholas (1874-1947); Helena (1879-1955); George (Yuri) (1902-1960); Svyatoslav (1904-1993)

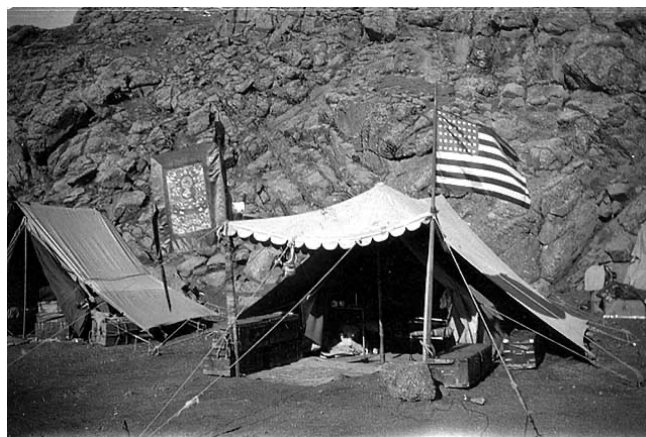
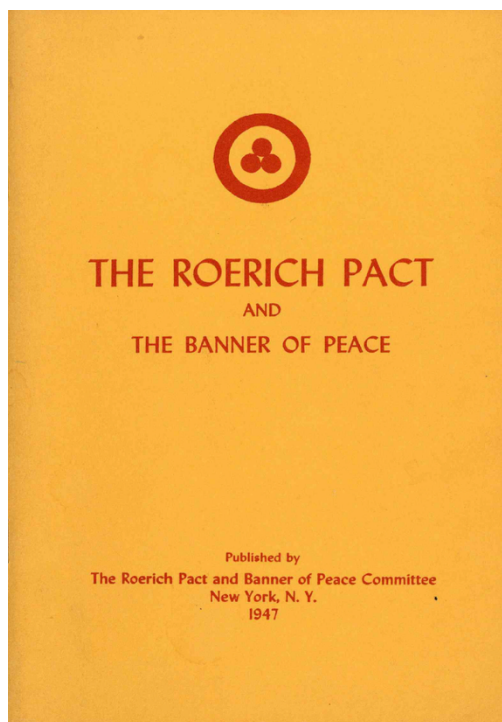


Photo from the Central Asian Expedition (1925-1930)

II. THE BANNER



Available at
archetypesofvirue.com/materials



1897 Peace Flag



1935 Roerich Banner of Peace



1954 Hague Convention Emblem

THE BANNER: "The Red Cross of Culture"

"The design of the Banner of Peace shows three spheres surrounded by a circle in magenta colour on a white background. Of the many national and individual interpretations of this symbol, the most usual are perhaps those of Religion, Art and Science as aspects of Culture which is the surrounding circle; or that of Past, Present and Future achievements of humanity guarded within the circle of Eternity. (page 5)

-See also **Red Card**

III. The Pact

All quotes come from the 1947 pamphlet pictured opposite this page and available at <https://www.archetypesofvirtue.com/Day1/> (under drawer of Hope Elizabeth May)

- 1) *"The Roerich Peace Pact has been justly named the Red Cross of Culture. If humanity recognized the Red Cross as a protection to the physically wounded and ill, then it will also recognize the Banner of Peace as the symbol of peaceful prosperity and health of spirit." (p. 3-4)*
- 2) *"...to cure the ills of humanity with the medicine of knowledge and beauty..." (p 19, quote from Svetoslav Roerich, discussing the aim of the pact)*
- 3) *"Nicholas Roerich created and promulgated the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace to safeguard the treasures of human genius. The Pact declares that educational, artistic, religious, and scientific institutions—as well as all sites of cultural significance—must be regarded as inviolable and respected by all nations, both in times of war and peace. On April 15, 1935, representatives from twenty-one governments across North, Central, and South America signed the Pact at the White House in the presence of President Franklin D. Roosevelt." (p. iii)*
- 4) *"This Treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself." (President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a radio address on the signing of the pact) (p. 3)*

IV. The Philosophy

- 1) "Agni Yoga" or "Living Ethics"- developed by Helena Roerich in 14 different books published from 1924-1938, originally in Russian.
- 2) The philosophy draws from Theosophy, Buddhism, Christianity and other wisdom traditions.
- 3) According to the philosophy, there is a "hierarchy of consciousness" and "Living Ethics" teaches that one should always be striving to uplevel or raise one's current level of consciousness. "Culture" can help one to do so.
- 4) The philosophy includes both a **metaphysical** component about the relationship between "matter" and "energy", and an **ethical** component stressing intention, action and decision. Both the metaphysical and ethical components are important to the pact. Cultural objects are regarded as a certain kind of "refined/energized matter," because of the intention and "fiery thought" that goes into their creation. When we come into contact with this culture/refined energized matter, "upleveling" and "expansion" occurs, driving the evolution of the human conscience.
- 5) One example of the power of culture or "refined matter" to uplift is the power of a Rodin sculpture to move Jules Mastbaum to collect Rodin's works and share them with Philadelphians at the sesquicentennial of the U.S. (150th in 1926). He died that year and his wife and daughter carried out his dream to create the Rodin museum in Philadelphia.

Question for Discussion & Food for Thought

Question 1: Can you think about a time/example when an encounter with culture (art, literature, philosophy, etc.) uplifted you, even causing you to choose/decide/intend more virtuously?

Food for thought: Cultural Heritage as a shackle? The Roerich Pact is sometimes regarded as the forerunner to UNESCO (which includes a "Memory of the World" program). However, a designation of "cultural heritage" by UNESCO (U.N. Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization) imposes strict duties (to preserve, conserve, etc.) even when doing so is burdensome to a people. Case in point is the UNESCO classification of mud brick homes in Djenné Mali as cultural heritage, which many locals classify as a burden. A movement exists to "declassify" the mud brick homes so that more durable concrete can be used *"The international community should free the people of Djenné of its status as a heritage site," ... "The responsibility is too heavy for us to carry."* - (see article from Bloomberg.com on Materials page, Day 1, at [archetypesofvirtue.com](https://www.archetypesofvirtue.com)).