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THE AMU DARYA EXPEDITION: THE STAGE OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF COLONIAL TERRITORIES (19th - early 20th centuries)

Abstract: This article examines the history of Central Asian peoples, including the Karakalpaks, the occupation of the region by Tsarist Russia, and the dispatch of the Amu Darya expedition for scientific study of the area in the late 19th century.
Keywords: Tsarist Russia, Karakalpaks, Amu Darya region, expedition, Khiva Khanate.

Аннотация: В статье описывается история народов Средней Азии, в том числе каракалпакского народа, оккупации региона царской Россией и отправки Амударьинской экспедиции для научного изучения региона в конце XIX века.
Ключевые слова: Царская Россия, каракалпаки, Амударьинский участок, экспедиция, Хивинское ханство.

Annotatsiya: Maqolada O‘rta Osiyo xalqlari, jumladan qoraqalpoq xalqining tarixi, hududning podsho Rossiyasi tomonidan bosib olinishi va XIX asr oxirida mintaqani ilmiy o‘rganish uchun Amudaryo ekspeditsiyasining yuborilishi tasvirlanadi.
Kalit so‘zlar: Podsho Rossiyasi, qoraqalpoqlar, Amudaryo ekspeditsiyasi, Xiva xonligi.

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The fundamental reforms implemented in political, economic, and social spheres during the years of independence in Uzbekistan are laying the foundation for the advancement of the country's cultural life. In Karakalpakstan, too, the targeted reforms being carried out are setting several priority objectives for representatives of the humanitarian field, alongside the development of science in the region. “We must all clearly understand one truth: we cannot achieve our lofty goals with the current pace of development. Today, times are changing, and its demands and the tasks it sets before us are continuously increasing”[1]. In this process, the new reality requires us to radically change our attitude towards the past and to analyze the events that have occurred in our history openly, transparently, and impartially.

Today, as outlined in the “Uzbekistan-2030” strategy, extensive work is being carried out to increase the proportion of young researchers in the scientific field and to support their scientific research, as part of the section on “creating suitable conditions for each person to realize their potential”[2].

Every nation lives and develops within a specific natural and social environment. During the period we are studying, the Karakalpak people forged their history under very challenging natural and political conditions. The natural environment of the Karakalpaks at that time was unfavorable for the population in terms of practicing effective agriculture. Since the Karakalpak people were directly connected to their surrounding nature, this factor primarily determined the types of economy and the directions of its development. Faced with harsh natural conditions, they sometimes succumbed to nature's forces and were compelled to seek more suitable places to live. Over time, centuries-old experience accumulated, and the Karakalpaks gradually began to adapt to the peculiarities of their natural conditions. This unique natural environment created an opportunity for the long-term coexistence of agricultural (sedentary) and pastoral (nomadic) societies throughout Central Asia. For centuries, the Karakalpaks have engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing.

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Relations with the Russian Empire in past centuries had a fundamental impact on the fate of the entire Central Asian region, both positively and negatively. This was a long and complex process in which the interests of the Karakalpak people intersected with those of Russia and evolved slowly under challenging conditions. Looking to Russia, the Karakalpak people consistently sought political protection, aspired to societal stability, and hoped that with the help of a powerful ally they could secure a peaceful existence and defend themselves against attacks from the Dzungars, Kazakhs, and Turkmens, who were their immediate neighbors.

Simultaneously, Russian interest in Central Asia had compelling reasons. One of the most important was the restoration of trade routes to India through Central Asia. With the fall of the Golden Horde and the conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan, the Volga River came entirely under Russian control. The prospect of expanding eastward via this river greatly intrigued Russian Tsar Ivan IV Vasilyevich. Starting with Ivan IV, this idea continued to captivate subsequent Russian tsars [3].

A person who made a significant contribution to the realization of this idea, according to Russian Emperor Peter I: “While opening windows to Europe in the Baltic and Black Seas, he sought the keys to the doors of Asian states through the Kyrgyz (possibly Kazakh) and Turkmen steppes”. The major river of Central Asia, the Amu Darya, was seen as a potential direct waterway to India [4]. Thus, news reached Peter I that the Amu Darya riverbed, which previously flowed into the Caspian Sea, had been blocked by the Khivans out of fear of Russian invaders. They revealed to the emperor the vast waterway through the Caspian to India, and in Peter I's mind, a desire arose to restore the river's former course. Rumors about the possible destruction of dams on the western channel of the Amu Darya, built with the help of Turkmens, and reports that the river was washing away golden sands finally prompted Peter I to implement his planned scheme. He decided to send an expedition led by Captain Bekovich-Cherkassky, a Kabardian prince,

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under the pretext of congratulating Khoja Muhammad Khan on his ascension to the Khivan throne [5]. It is known from history that this expedition was defeated by the Khan of Khiva, Sherghazi Khan. This was the reason for sending the first expeditions to the Khanate of Khiva.

Naturally, the establishment of Karakalpak-Russian relations, driven by the trade and economic interests of the population, involved securing necessary goods not only in the markets of Central Asia but also in Russia. Turkestan merchants were the first to discover and penetrate Russian markets. According to Russian historians, Turkestan merchants journeyed to Nizhny Novgorod in 1364 [6]. Following this, significant connections between Russia and the Central Asian khanates persisted for centuries. For instance, the Karakalpaks had been actively engaged in mutual trade relations with the Russians since ancient times. Karakalpak merchants frequently visited Russian cities. They purchased various goods from Russia, including clothing, while selling wool, sheepskin, and other items. Evidence of the substantial development of Karakalpak-Russian trade is the fact that in 1722, the Karakalpaks traveled to Russia with a trade caravan of one thousand camels [7].

In turn, the main motive behind Russia's relations with the peoples of Central Asia, including the Karakalpaks, was far from commercial objectives. Russia was unable to organize a direct military campaign against Turkestan until the early 18th century, although from the 16th century it had been striving to reach China through Siberia, India through Turkestan, and Iran and Turkey through the Caucasus [8]. First and foremost, Russian Emperor Peter I sought convenient trade routes to establish commercial relations with India. The activation of this idea was prompted by a particular event. This event was triggered by the spread of news in Khorezm about the abundance of fine sand and gold in the old branch of the Amu Darya that flowed into the Caspian Sea. In 1714, a Turkmen merchant named Khoja Nepes arrived in Moscow and informed Russian Emperor Peter I about the gold sand in the Amu Darya. Verifying the accuracy of information about gold

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deposits located in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya River was one of the objectives of the Bekovich-Cherkassky expedition to the Khiva Khanate in 1717, which ultimately ended in failure.

However, these objectives, such as discovering gold deposits and opening new routes, did not remain unchanged. After the Russian Empire finally conquered the Khiva Khanate on May 29, 1873, efforts were made to gather information about the territory that had been planned for exploration from the very beginning. To carry out this work, a special program was developed under the leadership of the Governor-General of Turkestan, K.P. von Kaufman. This program addressed many important issues, among which the question of the Amu Darya's former course took precedence.

Following the capture of Khiva, an expedition was immediately organized to study the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and its ancient channels, which had once flowed into the Caspian Sea. This expedition, known as the Urundarya expedition, initially comprised numerous diverse members (including: Colonel S.I. Zhilinsky, head of the Turkestan Military-Topographic Department, who supervised astronomical and topographic work in the lower Amu Darya region; topographers Shimanovsky, Syrovatsky, Petrov, and Kusikov under his command; and colonels Baron A.V. Kaulbars and D.I. Glukhovsky, who were tasked with studying the Uzboy direction of the old Amu Darya channel. They were assisted by Captain D.M. Rezvy of the Turkestan Sapper Company [9]. However, as the naturalists separated from the expedition to study Kunia-Urgench, it eventually became primarily a photographic endeavor. The expedition departed from Khiva to Old Urgench, and from there followed the old Amu Darya riverbed to Lake Sarykamysh. Unfortunately, it soon had to return due to a Turkmen uprising. After General Golovachev defeated the Turkmen at Chandyr on July 15th and pacified them, the Urundarya expedition resumed. Baron Kaulbars, known for his work in the Tian Shan, was appointed head of the expedition. Expedition members, topographers Sirovatsky and Rudnev, conducted research and observations [10].

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The main and most significant outcome of this Urundarya expedition was a detailed survey of the old Amu Darya riverbed called Urundarya, from Kunia-Urgench to Lake Sary-Kamysh. Based on these observations and his research in 1873, Kaulbars authored a work titled “The Lower Amu Darya”. However, this expedition did not fully accomplish all of its assigned objectives.

A continuation of this expedition was the Amu Darya expedition, organized by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1874. This expedition consisted of two parts, one of which, under the leadership of Colonel Tillo, focused solely on leveling between the Aral and Caspian Seas. It should be noted that the government did not limit itself to these actions. Experts determined that the difference in water levels between the Aral and Caspian Seas was 74 m [11]. The second part, under the leadership of General Stoletov, conducted meteorological, hydrographic, and natural history observations in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and the Kyzylkum Desert. Another section, known as the Aral-Caspian Expedition, established by the St. Petersburg Society of Naturalists, studied the natural history of the Caspian, Aral, and Ustyurt without a dedicated leader. Extensive research was conducted by the Amu Darya expedition department under the leadership of General Stoletov, N.A. Severtsov, botanist Smirnov, meteorologist Dorandt, ethnographer Sobolev, and hydrographers Zubov and Wood. This part of the expedition operated from Kazalinsk through the Kyzylkum, partly along the eastern coast of the Aral Sea, up to the Amu Darya and Petro-Alexandrovsk [12]. This expedition was to be sent to the region on one of the barge steamships of the Aral Flotilla. The expedition members left St. Petersburg in late April - early May 1874. In the same year, the “Golos” newspaper published information from its correspondent in the Chimbay district. It stated: “On July 25, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the steamship “Perovsky” arrived in Nukus and caused surprise among the local residents” [13]. The majority of the expedition members completed their duties at the beginning of October that year. Only meteorologists (Dorant and Milberg) remained in the region to continue

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observations for a year. 20,000 (twenty thousand) rubles were planned to be allocated for the expedition's expenses. According to the 1874 report of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, a general plan for the study of the Amu Darya's dry coast was developed. This included several points, such as: determining the water volume of the Amu Darya and its carrying capacity, measuring all river branches; determining the amount of water used for irrigating the Khiva oasis; conducting topographic research, studying geological and natural history processes; investigating the drying up of desert reservoirs due to sand spread; collecting information about the best land routes from Khiva to the Caspian Sea and gathering more detailed information about the nomadic peoples of the Aral steppes, their livestock numbers, and their relations with the Khiva Khanate [Report of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society for 1874:20].

Regarding the expedition's area of activity, it should primarily cover Uzboy along the lower reaches and the entire length of the Amu Darya at the border of Russia and Khiva, and then the territory along the Janidarya (New River). It was hypothesized that there were remnants of the former riverbed and that it merged with the Syr Darya River or that the Amu Darya flowed into the Caspian Sea. The task of verifying the accuracy of this hypothesis was included in the scope of the expedition's activities.

It should be noted that the results of the expedition sent by the Tsarist Russian government to the region are valuable as they help us obtain accurate information about the history of the peoples of the lower Amu Darya in the second half of the 19th century, their living conditions, and the occupations of neighboring peoples in the area. Therefore, further detailed and in-depth research of the Amu Darya expedition materials is one of the pressing issues in the history of Karakalpakstan.

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