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EASTERN CASPIAN COAST IN THE PROJECTS OF RUSSIAN ECONOMIC EXPANSION IN 1810–1820

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Abstract

The paper discusses the economic plans of the Russian Empire to increase its impact on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea and methods for their implementation in 1810–1820. These decades were a period of the intensified Russian integration policy in the Caspian region. The successful termination of the Russian-Iranian war of 1804–1813 and the accession of Transcaucasia under the Gulistan peace treaty, the terms of which were confirmed after the second Russian-Iranian war of 1826–1828 in Turkmanchay, allowed the Russian political elite to see the need for their increased economic (and then political) impact on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. During the period under review, these territories inhabited by Turkmen tribes "de jure" belonged to Persia. The young Russian industry, which had entered the stage of an industrial revolution, was in need of both raw material markets (primarily cotton) due to the increased production of textiles and markets for selling. Moreover, trade relations between Russia and the states and regions of Central Asia has lasted more than one hundred years. The southeastern coast was of great interest for Russian fishermen since it allowed the way to earn millions of profits. For centuries, the Caspian-Volga trade route linked Russia to Central Asian. The Volga part of the route was under the control of Russia from the middle of the 16th century, the coasts of the Caspian Sea belonged to Persia.

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 19th century, the tsarist government faced with the problem of strengthening and expanding trade relations with the Central Asian khanates – Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand – in order to achieve the increased impact by economic methods. In this regard, the Caspian problem acquired even greater political significance for Russia (Steinberg, 1949), since at the end of the 18th – the beginning of the 20th centuries almost all trade routes connecting Eastern Europe with Central Asia passed through the Turkmen steppes (Annanepesov, 1972).

One of the most important directions of these routes was the direction through Astrakhan and the Turkmen coast of the Caspian Sea. Commercial development of this route would reduce the transportation costs, facilitate the establishment of relations with Turkmen tribes, and most importantly, would make it possible to avoid the places where trade caravans were most at risk. But "the implementation of the plans was hampered by the lack of awareness of the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea" (Khalfin, 1978, p. 6).

According to baron Korf (1838), the first and most important step towards the improvement of trade relations should be "the closest consideration of local circumstances. To do this, it is necessary to familiarize yourself with the region, consider carefully the character of its inhabitants, and explore their needs and whims" (p. 12). These "circumstances" were the focus of St. Petersburg in the first decade of the 19th century.

The tsarist government strove for firm control over the eastern Caspian coast not only due to economic, but also political interests. Strengthening the defense of approaches to the Caspian Sea and ensuring Russia's impact in Iran and khanates of Central Asia through its increased impact on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea (Karryev, 1954). This task was set back in the time of Peter I. Nevertheless, "numerous attempts to create Russian military and commercial bases in the southern part of the coast did not yield practical results" (Steinberg, 1949, p. 119).

2. Problem Statement

Despite continuous contacts between Russia and the East, in the first decades of the 19th century, there was a shortage of reliable data on border areas of Asia. Even at the official level, there was vague information about certain regions in general, and the Turkmen coast, in particular (Soplenkov, 2000).

This situation was primarily due to the fact that information about the East, accumulated in the field of academic eastern studies at the beginning of the 19th century, contained mainly eastern studies that revealed or commented on ancient or medieval sources. "... Orientalists did not investigate topical political issues of Eastern countries. Despite the comparative proximity of Asia and continual contacts with the eastern peoples, the Asian territories were still largely "terra incognita" (Khalfin, 1974, p. 79).

Even geographical maps of Central Asia were significantly distorted. In 1832, Levshin summarized the information collected by Russian officers and created a new map of Central Asia. He stated that

the collection of these precious works has shown that all the maps of Asia available to date, common and private, excluding Meyendorff maps attached to his Journey to Bukharia, give an unfair concept of a country that makes up the subject of this work, and in some aspects they may be recognized as

dreamy assumptions rather than collections of topographical information. They represent mountains instead of valleys, there are lakes where no water can be seen, rivers flow in directions opposite to their true flow, and so on. (Levshin, 1832, p. 192)

To consider the geographical and economic position of possible partners of Russian foreign trade in the East and to achieve positive results, at the beginning of the 19th century the Russian government undertook a number of actions, one of which was expeditions to the Turkmen coast of the Caspian Sea. The ultimate goal of these expeditions was to identify the economic potential of the region in order to promote Russian foreign trade.

3. Research Questions

The study aimed to solve three interrelated tasks. The first is to define the goals and methods of the Russian economic policy with respect to the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea in 1810–1820. The second task is to identify historical factors that contributed to the advancement of Russia's economic impact in the Caspian region. And the third task is to analyze the actions taken by the Russian government in the water area and on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea in the period under review.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the goals and actions of the Russian Empire to strengthen its economic impact on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. Ultimately, economic interests prompted the government elite to make political decisions to strengthen their position in Central Asia.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study was a systematic approach in combination with the principle of historicism. A scientific comprehensive approach involves socio-historical, general scientific and interdisciplinary methods: problem-chronological, comparative historical, retrospective, etc. for the transfer and analysis of historical material. The principle of historicism implies consideration of the forms and methods of strengthening the economic impact of Russia in the eastern Caspian region with regard to specific historical conditions.

The study of various expeditions and missions of the Russian Empire in the Caspian during the period under review and the historical causes and factors leading to the problem formulation in government circles, was carried out according to the principle of actualization and was based on an essential and substantive analysis of the forms and methods of asserting the Russian impact in the region.

A systematic approach to the problem and a systematic analysis of the material made it possible to identify different opinions, to cover the understanding of the economic interests of Russia in Central Asia, the problems of relations between Russian trade circles and political elites of the nomadic people. The systematic structural and problematic historical methods were employed to obtain representative data from memoirs, case material, and other published and unpublished sources.

6. Findings

Why did Russia need an outpost on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea? The answer to this question is given by the Russian journalism of the period under review: "30 days from Tyuk-Karagan to Khiva, but just to Khiva, and Khiva itself is an insignificant piece of land, and there is no space for large capitals in its market. The most prolific oases are located to the east of Khiva, and the richest khanates like Bukhara and Kokand together with others, the smallest, subservient, or beyond them, like Tashkent, Turkestan, Khojent, Shehri-Sebz, Hissar, Balkh and others, represent or can represent fairly extensive market for our trading.

In particular, Bukhara is the most significant city of Central Asia suitable for trading. This rich and commercial khanate is famous not only for its goods, but also for its trade. Bukhara is engaged in trade with Russia, Persia, Afghanistan, India, China and with all the surrounding khanates. Thus, Bukhara is the most significant place. There are only 350 versts from Khiva to Bukhara".

One of the factors hindering the development of trade and economic contacts of the Caspian Turkmen with Russia in the early 19th century was the fact that Russian merchant ships occasionally visited the Turkmen coast, once or twice a year, and the goods brought could not fully meet the needs of the coastal population (Agayev, 1965).

The political sympathies of the Turkmen towards Russia were largely due to the needs of the country's economy. Turkmen tribes needed not only bread, but also industrial and textile products. Turkmenistan of the first half of the 19th century lacked cast iron, steel, iron, copper, chintz, cloth and other products. The acute need for goods could not be satisfied at the expense of foreign trade, which, despite some changes, was still poorly developed, and the basic form of trade remained a primitive barter (Karryev, 1958).

This fact, as well as the inconstancy of trade with Khiva and Iran, forced the Caspian Turkmen to seek for convenient foreign markets to sell their cattle, fish and handicraft products. Russia could be a convenient market. Turkmen traders experienced difficulties in exporting their goods to Astrakhan. Since they did not have a sufficient number of merchant ships, Turkmen traders were entirely dependent on Astrakhan merchants and owners of a fishing business. They had to wait for the arrival of Russian ships and home passages to Astrakhan. Departure from Astrakhan was associated with a long forced waiting for a passing ship. These travels took a total of one year, and sometimes two or three years. These difficulties caused numerous requests from the Caspian Turkmen that the Russian government would organize trade protection and establish trading posts on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea.

The tsarist government generously made promises, however it was limited to half measures: it carefully studied the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea and outlined certain convenient points for the annexation of trading posts and the construction of military fortifications. When choosing a place for the Russian trading post on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, St. Petersburg considered the following factors. 1) Proximity to Russian ports, mainly to Astrakhan. 2) Convenient geographical location. 3) Guarantees of good attitude of the local population – Turkmen (Steinberg, 1949).

The government assistance was crucial for successful economic cooperation on the eastern coast of the Caspian. The famous ethnographer Galkin (1868) argued that

in the 19th century, Russian merchants started trading first in Krasnovodsk bay from where they hoped to trade with Khiva; then they tried trading in the Astrabad Gulf with the Turkmen and Persians; but all these attempts to start a profitable trade without the government assistance failed: the locals did not buy fish or goods, they only had in mind how to rob the merchants and to seize their property for free, and they often succeeded in it. (p. 91)

The power of Russia on the Eastern coast of the Caspian increased after 1813. This was due to a number of reasons: from the end of the 18th century, the main focus of Russia's foreign policy was the struggle against Napoleon, which ended with the Patriotic War of 1812 and the foreign campaign of the Russian army in 1813–1815; in addition, in 1804–1813 Russia was in a state of war with Iran.

In 1817, a mission led by General A.P. Yermolov was sent to Iran with a special task to conclude a special peace treaty between the two countries (Abdullaev, 1965). The problem of economic and political relations with the Turkmen was specifically mentioned.

A.P. Yermolov considered it useful to resume relations with the Turkmen in order to create trade routes to Khiva and Bukhara through their lands, and then to Northern India. He argued the necessity of building a harbor and warehouses for goods on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea (Grodekov, 1883).

But A.P. Yermolov could not achieve significant progress due to the established relations between the Turkmen and tsarism. The conclusions of Soplenkov (2000) on the results of Yermolov's mission state that "despite the political successes of Yermolov, the Russian–Turkmen economic relations did not move towards a qualitatively new stage" (p. 39).

At the beginning of the 19th century, expeditions to this area were quite rare, and in 1820 expeditions became a start to "systematic study" (Khalfin, 1978). In order to develop trade, places for the construction of new wharfs were sought, and important statistical, physiographic, topographical, and ethnographic data about the Turkmen population of the coastal territory were collected.

Of high priority were political interests of Russia in the Caspian region. The inevitable consequence of the Gulistan peace treaty with Persia was strengthening of Russia's impact in the Caspian. Russia gained control of the Caspian basin. However, to control the Caspian in practice, the tsarist government needed naval bases not only on the northern (Astrakhan) and western (Baku, Tiflis) coasts, but also on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea (Steinberg, 1949).

The Russian command decided to create strongholds on the coast of Turkmenistan. After the first Russian-Iranian war, the situation for the implementation of this long-standing plan became more favorable than that in the 18th century. In 1819, A.P. Yermolov, the commander in chief in Georgia, sent an expedition to the Turkmen coast, which was led by the head of Elizavetpolsky (Ganja) district major M.I. Ponomarev, captain N.N. Muravyev, and merchant I. Muratov. One of the tasks was a firsthand acquaintance with the life of the Caspian Turkmen and establishment of mutually beneficial trade and economic ties. They were to choose a place to build fortifications, to incline the Turkmen towards affection for Russia, and to set up a wharf for merchants' ships on their coasts (Agayev, 1965).

Expedition materials were submitted to the Asian Affairs Committee for consideration. However, they did not satisfy Petersburg, and it was decided to send a new expedition for a more thorough study of Krasnovodsk and other bays. The documents stated that A.P. Yermolov was again requested to inform the

Turkmen that the Russian government agreed to establish permanent friendly and trade relations, such as those with other independent nations (Agayev, 1965), and Yermolov took certain steps in this direction. The Turkmen agreed to set up a trading wharf on their coast. However, ties with the coastal Turkmen built by N.N. Muravyev were not fixed and developed. The base created in Krasnovodsk bay was abandoned (Steinberg, 1949).

Thus, the main task of the expeditions of the 1820s was to strengthen friendly economic and political ties of Russia with the Caspian Turkmen. Other results of the expedition were significant: important historical, trade, economic and ethnographic data were collected, including those on the minerals of Cheleken Island, etc.

In April 1820, A.P. Yermolov reported to the vice-chancellor on the results of the expedition led by Ponomarev and Muravyev. He suggested the need to join the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea to Russia, which, in his opinion, could be done "without disrupting its location and impact of Persia" since they are not, in fact, subjects of the Persian Shah.

No doubt, this position was based on the conclusions of Muravyev (1822). He was the first to formulate the idea of expansion into Central Asia that significantly changed the plans of Petersburg officials, who preferred economic methods of penetration into Asia. The captain wrote about Khiva: "If this area was in the possession of Russia, then, of course, it would give considerable benefits to our trade, industry would revive, and all Asian trade ... could turn to Astrakhan through Khiva" (Muravyev, 1822, p. 4).

Meyendorff (1975), a member of the Russian mission of 1820 to Bukhara led by A.F. Negri, expressed similar opinion in his book published in Paris in 1826. Nevertheless, the proposals of Meyendorff (1975) and Muravyev (1822) were not yet timely, they were perceived by the government and society after three decades. Moreover, these ideas were implemented in the 70s–80s of the 19th century.

The more realistic and relevant task in this region in the first half of the 19th century was another proposal by Yermolov stated in his report, that the most important goal is to create an establishment on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, and to ensure the security of delivered goods. Interestingly, Yermolov proposed to arrange another fortification on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, in the Tyuk-Karagan tract, which was inspected and suggested as a stronghold in 1807 by the engineer Felkersam. According to the Caucasian commander-in-chief, the construction of two fortifications at once would confirm the position of Russia as the "sole possessor of the sea" and provide "uncountable benefits" (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire).

In 1825, to study the eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea, a trade and scientific expedition was headed by the ordinary professor at Kazan University, E.I. Eichwald. He arrived in Astrakhan in November 1825, and from May of the following year he "took a trip" across the Caspian Sea to "accurately describe it in relation to the works of local peoples".

7. Conclusion

Thus, we can see that in the first decades of the 19th century the Russian government was interested in strengthening its position on the eastern (Turkmen) coast of the Caspian Sea, primarily due to economic interests of the state. The organization of missions and expeditions was assigned to the most prominent

political figures of the period under review. In particular, A.P. Yermolov significantly affected strengthening of Russia in the Eastern Caspian region. He also initiated expeditions that were of great importance for the establishment of political dominance of Russia in this region.

The formation of a political program was due to objective historical reasons, when the Russian Empire vied for domination in Central Asia with other capitalist countries (primarily with England). The establishment of friendly relations with Turkmen tribes and the creation of a trading post on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea met the interests of Russia and helped resolve the issue of dominance in its favor.

The fact that in the 20s Russian fortifications on the eastern Caspian coast were not constructed was due to the Eastern crisis of the 19th century and the Russian-Iranian War of 1826–1828. These events distracted the attention of the Russian government, but it focused on this subject in 1830–1840. The issue of the establishment of a Russian stronghold on the Turkmen coast was resolved in 1846, when the Novo-Petrovsk fortification was founded at Mangyshlak.

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