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UNVEILING KAZAKH AGENCY: THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF AKMECHET FORTRESS

Abstract

The 19th century witnessed a significant period of global history marked by the relentless pursuit of imperial expansionism by major world powers. Central Asia emerged as a strategic focal point during this epoch, with Imperial Russia vying for dominance in the region. In 1853, the conquest of Akmechet Fortress became a pivotal moment symbolizing Russia's expansion into Central Asia. This conquest, however, was not merely a product of imperial might; it was intricately shaped by the active participation and agency of diverse Kazakh clans and influential chieftains.

This research explores the multifaceted engagement of Kazakh clans in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. It addresses the central question: How did the dynamic and diverse participation of Kazakh clans and their influential chieftains contribute to the success of this conquest and its broader implications? The study contends that the conquest was not a one-sided affair but the result of collaboration, strategic resistance, and the convergence of diverse motivations. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining meticulous archival research and document analysis with a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources.

Moreover, it examines the resistance faced by the colonial administration and the complexities of Kazakh involvement, including both cooperation and opposition. Notably, Kazakh chieftains played pivotal roles in facilitating logistical support, serving as guides, and aiding in military expeditions.

Keywords: Imperial Russian conquest, Central Asia, Kazakh clans, indigenous agency, colonial administration, military expeditions, strategic resistance

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РАСКРЫТИЕ КАЗАХСКОГО АГЕНТСТВА: ИМПЕРСКОЕ РУССКОЕ ЗАВОЕВАНИЕ КРЕПОСТИ АКМЕЧЕТЬ

Аннотация

XIX век стал свидетелем важного периода мировой истории, отмеченного неустанным стремлением крупнейших мировых держав к имперскому экспансионизму. В эту эпоху Центральная Азия стала стратегическим центром, а имперская Россия боролась за доминирование в регионе. В 1853 году захват крепости Акмечеть стал поворотным моментом, символизирующим экспансию России в Среднюю Азию. Однако это завоевание было не просто результатом имперской мощи; оно было сложно сформировано благодаря активному участию и посредничеству различных казахских кланов и влиятельных вождей. Данное исследование исследует многогранное участие казахских кланов в завоевании Российской империей крепости Акмечеть. В нем рассматривается центральный вопрос: как динамичное и разнообразное участие казахских кланов и их влиятельных вождей способствовало успеху этого завоевания и его более широким последствиям? В исследовании утверждается, что завоевание было не односторонним делом, а результатом сотрудничества, стратегического сопротивления и сближения различных мотивов. Был принят смешанный подход, сочетающий тщательные архивные исследования и анализ документов с всесторонним обзором первичных и вторичных источников. Более того, в нем рассматривается сопротивление, с которым столкнулась колониальная администрация, и сложности участия Казахов, включая как сотрудничество, так и оппозицию. Примечательно, что казахские правители играли ключевую роль в обеспечении материально-технического обеспечения, выступая в качестве проводников и помогая в военных экспедициях.

Ключевые слова: Российское завоевание, Средняя Азия, казахские роды, местное агентство, колониальная администрация, военные экспедиции, стратегическое сопротивление.

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ҚАЗАҚ ЫҚПАЛЫ: ИМПЕРИЯЛЫҚ РЕСЕЙДІҢ АҚМЕШІТ БЕКІНІСІН ЖАУЛАП АЛУЫ

Аңдатпа

XIX ғасыр ірі әлемдік державалардың империялық экспансионизмге ұмтылуымен айқындалатын маңызды маңызды кезең еді. Орталық Азия осы дәуірде стратегиялық аймаққа ал империялық Ресей өңірдегі үстемдікке белсене кіріскен күшке айналды. 1853 жылы Ақмешіт бекінісін жаулап алу Ресейдің Орталық Азияға үстемдікке ұмтылуын байқататын шешуші уақыт болатын. Алайда бұл жаулап алу тек империялық әскери күштің ғана емес, сонымен қатар жергілікті қазақ рулары мен ақсүйектердің белсенді қатысуы мен ықпалы арқасында жүзеге асты.

Бұл зерттеу патшалық Ресейдің Ақмешіт бекінісін жаулап алуына қазақ руларының тартылу себептерін анықтауға бағытталған. Зерттеудің негізгі сұрағы: Қазақ рулары мен олардың ықпалды билеушілерінің белсенді қатысуы Ақмешіт бекінісін жаулап алуға қаншалықты дәрежеде ықпал еткен? Осыған орай негізгі зерттеу негізінде қалыптасқан тұжырымымыз бойынша жаулап алу колониалдық билік пен жергілікті қазақтардың өзара ынтымақтастығының, стратегиялық қарсылықтың және әртүрлі мотивтердің түйісуінің нәтижесі.

Мақалада қазақтардың әскери жорықтарға тартылуы, отаршылдық әкімшілікке қарсылығы оның ішінде өзара ынтымақтастық пен қарсылық талдауға алынады. Атап айтқанда, қазақ ақсүйектері материалдық-техникалық қамтамасыз етуді жеңілдетуде, жол көрсетуші қызметін атқаруда және әскери

жорықтарға көмектесуде шешуші рөл атқарды.

Кілт сөздер: Ресей жаулаушылығы, Орта Азия, қазақ рулары, жергілікті халықтың ықпалы, отаршылдық әкімшілік, әскери жорықтар, стратегиялық қарсылық.

«Зерттеу Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің Ғылым комитеті арқылы қаржыландырылған. (грант № АР19676769)» «Ресей империясының қазақ даласы мен Түркістан өлкесіне әскери жорықтарының логистикасы: қазақ қоғамына әсері мен салдары».

Introduction. The 19th century stands as a period of profound significance in the annals of global history, characterized by the relentless pursuit of imperial expansionism by major world powers, all vying for territorial dominance and geopolitical ascendancy. Within this epoch, the expansive reaches of Central Asia emerged as a focal point of strategic interest, particularly captivating the ambitions of the Imperial Russia. The year 1853 witnessed a watershed moment in this imperial saga with the conquest of Akmechet Fortress, a pivotal event that came to symbolize Russia's unwavering thrust into the heart of Central Asia. At the core of this endeavor lay the strategic importance attributed to Akmechet, which rendered it a focal point in the empire's ambitions in the region. However, this conquest transcends the conventional narrative of empires clashing for dominance. Rather, it is a narrative intricately interwoven with the actions and agency of the indigenous Kazakh clans. The extent and nature of their contributions to this historical event remain subjects of intense scholarly debate, thereby prompting a scholarly inquiry that seeks to delve deeper into the multifaceted layers of Kazakh involvement in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress.

Central to this investigative journey is the central research question that guides this academic inquiry: How did the dynamic and multifaceted engagement of diverse Kazakh clans and their influential chieftains contribute to the success of the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress? Moreover, what intricate ways did this participation resonate across the broader tapestry of Central Asian expansionism, and what enduring historical implications did it generate? To address this question, this research embarks on a nuanced exploration that endeavors to unveil the often-overlooked agency of the Kazakh clans as active participants in the grand theater of imperial expansion, rather than passive bystanders.

This research contends that the conquest of Akmechet Fortress was not merely a straightforward outcome of imperial might, but rather the culmination of intricate collaboration, strategic resistance, and the convergence of diverse motivations. At its core, the fulcrum upon which this historical turn hinged was the dynamic involvement of a spectrum of Kazakh clans, each guided by influential chieftains. These chieftains were not mere spectators but pivotal actors who wielded agency and influence extending beyond the boundaries of their respective clans. Their strategies, shaped by pragmatic calculations, allegiance to tradition, or a harmonious blend of both, significantly molded the trajectory of events. Consequently, the legacy of their involvement transcended the immediate aftermath of the conquest, leaving an indelible mark on the historical narrative of Central Asia and the intricate interplay of cultures and dominions.

To comprehensively address the research question, this scholarly endeavor adopts a rigorous mixed-methods approach, thereby amalgamating meticulous archival scrutiny with a discerning analysis of primary and secondary sources. The archival records and official correspondences stand as the primary sources, offering a window into the perspectives of both Russian and Kazakh actors and providing invaluable insights into the nuanced motives and strategies that guided their actions. Additionally, a rich tapestry of secondary sources spanning the domains of Central Asian history, imperialism, and indigenous agency is seamlessly interwoven into the analytical framework. This multidisciplinary approach enriches the narrative by offering diverse vantage points, ensuring a holistic exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of Kazakh agency in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. Within this intricate tapestry of resources, the research seeks to reveal the multifaceted facets of Kazakh agency in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. In doing so, it aims to make a substantial contribution to fostering a nuanced and all-encompassing comprehension of this pivotal epoch.

The expansion of the Imperial Russian Empire into the heart of Central Asia during the 19th century emerged as a saga marked by a series of strategic undertakings, with the conquest of Akmechet Fortress standing as a prominent milestone within this narrative. However, this conquest, while emblematic of imperial ambitions, was far from a one-sided affair. It was intricately shaped by the active participation and agency of a multitude of diverse Kazakh clans and their influential chieftains, whose roles and contributions have, for far too long, remained obscured by the broader strokes of historical narratives. By meticulously peeling back the layers of this complex historical episode, this scholarly research endeavors to shed light on the intricate interplay of power dynamics that ultimately influenced the outcome of the conquest.

The relevance of the topic. The Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress in 1853 represents a critical juncture in the history of Central Asia, encapsulating the intricate interplay of imperial ambitions, military

strategies, and indigenous agency. This research paper delves into the multifaceted engagement of diverse Kazakh clans and their influential leaders in this conquest, shedding light on their active participation and significant roles in shaping the outcome. The topic holds immense relevance within the broader context of historical studies for several reasons.

First and foremost, the research challenges traditional historical narratives that often overlook or sideline the agency of indigenous peoples during imperial conquests. By focusing on the Kazakh clans, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how local actors influenced the course of historical events. This nuanced perspective enriches our comprehension of the complexities inherent in colonial endeavors, acknowledging the active participation of local populations rather than viewing them merely as passive subjects.

Secondly, the research addresses the dynamics of collaboration and resistance between the Russian colonial administration and the Kazakh clans. It explores the multifaceted nature of Kazakh involvement, encompassing logistical support, military assistance, and strategic guidance. Analyzing these interactions offers insights into the complexities of power relations, negotiation strategies, and the blurred lines between cooperation and opposition, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of imperial conquests in diverse cultural contexts.

Additionally, the research paper explores the military strategies employed by both the Russian forces and the indigenous Kazakh clans. It elucidates the logistical challenges faced by the colonial administration, emphasizing the significance of local knowledge and resources in sustaining military campaigns. Understanding the intricacies of military operations not only provides insights into the strategic acumen of the involved parties but also offers valuable lessons for military history and tactics.

Furthermore, the research contributes to the broader discourse on colonialism, imperialism, and indigenous agency, offering a case study that can be compared and contrasted with similar historical events worldwide. By examining the Kazakh agency in the context of Russian imperialism, this study provides a valuable lens through which scholars can analyze and interpret the complex interactions between colonizers and colonized peoples, fostering a deeper understanding of the global historical landscape.

Materials and Methods. The research for this study involved an extensive examination of archival materials and historical documents relevant to the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress in 1853. These archival sources were obtained from various repositories, including but not limited to the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSA RK), the Central State Archive of the Russian Federation (CSA RF), and the State Archive of the Orenburg Region (SAOrO).

The primary focus of the archival research was to access official correspondences, reports, and historical records related to the campaign, including military orders, imperial decrees, and personal accounts. This allowed for the collection of primary source materials that provided insight into the events, strategies, and individuals involved in the conquest of Akmechet Fortress.

Upon obtaining relevant archival documents, a systematic analysis of primary sources was conducted. This involved the examination of the content, context, and significance of these materials in relation to the research question. Key primary sources included official reports by military commanders, correspondences between colonial authorities, and firsthand accounts of the events from individuals involved in the campaign.

In addition to primary sources, a comprehensive review of secondary literature was carried out. This included consulting scholarly publications, historical analyses, and academic works that addressed the broader historical context of 19th-century Central Asia, Russian imperialism, and Kazakh history. Secondary sources were used to provide background information, context, and comparative analysis.

To address the research question regarding the role of Kazakh clans in the conquest of Akmechet Fortress, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This approach combined qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources with historical interpretation. The aim was to triangulate information from diverse sources to construct a nuanced and comprehensive narrative of the events.

The collected data from primary and secondary sources were synthesized to construct a coherent historical narrative. This involved identifying key themes, events, and actors in the conquest and analyzing how the actions and agency of Kazakh clans influenced the outcome.

The final step involved historical interpretation, where the findings from the archival research, document analysis, and interdisciplinary perspectives were synthesized into a cohesive narrative. The conclusions drawn in the research aimed to shed light on the multifaceted engagement of Kazakh clans in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress and their enduring impact on Central Asian history.

In summary, this study employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach, combining archival research, document analysis, secondary source analysis, interdisciplinary perspectives, data synthesis, and historical interpretation to comprehensively address the research question and provide a nuanced understanding of the

events and actors involved in the conquest of Akmechet Fortress in 1853.

Dicussion. The involvement of Kazakhs in Imperial Russian military campaigns within the Kazakh steppe represents a complex historical topic, elucidated through a comprehensive analysis of various primary sources. Diaries, memoirs, and historical works by Russian travelers and officers provide valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between the Russian military and the local Kazakh population.

Meyer's work, titled "Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia" published in 1865, provides a comprehensive rationale for the actions of colonial troops when dealing with Kazakhs who resisted acknowledging Russian authority [1]. It meticulously outlines the intricate logistical aspects of resource acquisition for Russian troops, which include various necessities such as yurts, and sustenance.

Russian colonel I.F. Blaramberg's memoirs enrich our understanding with vividly portrayed details of a military campaign towards the Akmechet Fortress [2]. His comprehensive narratives delve into the meticulous preparations and fortifications intrinsic to this endeavor, thereby illuminating the active involvement of Kazakhs in construction activities and their pivotal contribution to the intricate web of logistical support.

Similarly, V. Potto's historical account introduces a novel perspective on the colonial administration's interactions with the indigenous Kazakh tribes [3]. Despite its inherently colonial nature, Potto's opus presents a plethora of historical verities that cast light upon the recruitment of Kazakh tribes for Russian military expeditions, replete with comprehensive statistical elucidations delineating the allocation of resources.

The intricate examination of primary source materials unveils profound insights into the multifaceted interplay between the Imperial Russian military apparatus and the indigenous Kazakh populace during the 19th century. A.I. Butakov's meticulously documented diary initiates scholarly journey by providing an initial glimpse into the nascent exploration of the Aral Sea and the Syr-Darya River [4]. Within the pages of Butakov's chronicle, we not only encounter the perspectives of the local denizens regarding the expedition members but also the notable employment of camels by Kazakhs for the conveyance of ships, thereby unveiling their indispensable role in the logistics of resource transportation.

A.I. Dobromyslov augments the discourse by contributing valuable insights that delve into the challenges confronted by Russian troops during the suppression of Kazakh liberation uprisings along the Syr-Darya River [5]. His perspicacious observations furnish a window into the complexities encountered and the strategies deployed in quelling local resistance.

Likewise, the literary contributions of Vodop'yanov [6] and Danilevsky [7] pivot our focus towards the strategic initiatives orchestrated by the Orenburg General-Governorship to exert influence over the migrating Kazakhs. These works further illuminate the intricate financial mechanisms underpinning military campaigns through the contributions of local denizens.

Shemanskyi [8] and Zykov [9] delve deeply into the intricate tapestry of the political and economic milieu enveloping the Kazakh communities residing along the Syr-Darya River. These erudite authors navigate the labyrinthine dynamics of Kazakh resistance against the established Russian dominion in the region, thereby proffering invaluable insights into the nuanced contours of the political landscape.

Grigoriev's writings shed effulgent light upon the pivotal roles executed by local Kazakh leaders [10]. Their responsibilities encompassed the construction of thoroughfares, the procurement of resources, the erection of military fortifications, and the establishment of logistical bases, thus underscoring their substantial agency in these multifaceted undertakings.

Terentyev's meticulous focus on the military-colonial system in Turkestan critically examines the policies enacted towards indigenous populations, including the Kazakhs [11]. Terentyev's opus not only critiques the softer policy paradigms but also accentuates the methods employed to discipline the indigenous populace, concurrently expounding upon their substantial involvement in the preparatory phases of colonial troop deployments for military campaigns.

V.A. Perovsky's correspondence with N.V. Balkashin [12] offers invaluable insights into the organizational dynamics of a military expedition in the year 1853. Perovsky's discerning observations underscore the indispensable role played by the Kazakhs in providing essential logistical support to the Russian troops, including the transportation of vital provisions.

Soviet and Kazakh historiography have made substantive contributions to the examination of Russian colonial endeavors within the expansive terrain of the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia. This historiographical landscape is replete with scholarly inquiries that transcend the surface and delve into the intricate depths of historical narratives.

Ryazanov's [13] scholarly oeuvre converges upon the annals of the national liberation struggle in the 1920s, with particular focus on the uprisings that echoed across the Aral region. Within this historical narrative, Ryazanov meticulously dissects the specter of violence that descended upon the Kazakh populace, stemming from the imposition of diverse duties and taxes. His work traverses the historical landscape of the region,

delivering an intricate exploration framed within the pages of "Proshloe Kzyl-Ordy."

Asfendiyarov's analytical scrutiny embarks upon an exploration of the agonies wrought by the advent of Russian colonial dominion upon the Kazakh steppe during the 19th century [14]. His work meticulously dissects the responsibilities imposed by the local administration and the tax burdens borne by the Kazakh populace. Asfendiyarov's research illuminates the arduous challenges and hardships endured by the Kazakhs, resulting from the transformative currents induced by Russian colonial policies.

Halfin's rigorous research endeavors embark on a journey into the role played by local colonial authorities in the conquest of Central Asia and Kazakhstan [15]. He undertakes a comprehensive examination of the colonial policies espoused by the Russian administration, shedding light on the intricate web of duties levied upon the Kazakhs in the process of their subjugation. Halfin's scholarship extends its purview to elucidate the methodologies encapsulated within Russian colonial policy and their repercussions upon the Kazakh population.

Mashimbaev's scholarly contributions delve into the enigma of Imperial Russia's colonial policy [16]. His analytical prism scrutinizes the activities of the colonial administration governing the Junior Horde Kazakhs, focusing intently on colonial policy formulations and the structural edifice of military administration. Moreover, Mashimbaev's scholarly compass navigates the economic ramifications engendered by military campaigns upon the local populace, a theme meticulously expounded within the scholarly compendium titled "Colonial policy of Imperial Russia".

S.Maduanov's research constitutes an incisive exploration of the intricate interplay between Kazakhs and their neighboring Central Asian counterparts [17]. Maduanov's academic toil involves the quantification of the myriad types and numerical count of cattle requisitioned from the Kazakhs during expeditions directed towards the Central Asian kingdoms. His scholarly corpus contributes substantially to our comprehension of the economic dynamics pervading the region and the intricate tapestry of interactions between diverse communities, as elucidated within "Vzaimootnosheniya kazakhov."

Dosmukhamedov's scholarly pursuit casts its gaze upon the national liberation movement in Junior Horde, unearthing the resistance that unfurled in defiance of colonial oppression [18]. His meticulous scholarship unveils the enigmatic facets of the colonial apparatus and the profound extent of Russian oppression. Within this narrative, Dosmukhamedov accentuates the pivotal roles assumed by Kazakh chieftains and sultans, entrusted with overseeing the manifold tasks delegated by the colonial administration. Furthermore, Dosmukhamedov's oeuvre extends its purview to the state of Bishara, affording us a comprehensive panorama of the historical dynamics that shaped this region.

The subsequent studies conducted by luminaries such as A.K. Muqtar [19], U.T. Akhmetova [20], and A.Akhmet [21] represent scholarly excavations that plunge into the labyrinthine intricacies of national liberation movements. Their research endeavors unfurl a tapestry interwoven with the active involvement of the local Kazakh aristocracy in bolstering Russian military campaigns. These investigations offer a multifaceted prism through which we scrutinize the historical mosaic of this era.

Within the realm of anglophone scholarship, Becker's seminal work emerges prominently, offering an exhaustive examination of the Russian conquest of Bukhara and Khiva during the 1860s and 1870s [22]. Going beyond the mere chronicle of conquest, this study delves deeply into the evolving dynamics characterizing the relationship between Russia and these regions until their political dissolution in 1924. A central thematic current running through this narrative involves the meticulous mapping of Russia's strategic transformation, transitioning from a stance of non-intervention to an intensified engagement, coinciding with the acceleration of trade and settlement activities. This comprehensive exploration unveils the nuanced shifts within Russian policy, thereby shedding light on the intricate interplay between imperial powers and the indigenous entities inhabiting the Central Asian landscape.

Brower's scholarly contribution enriches our comprehension by plumbing the depths of the repercussions of Russian dominion spanning half a century across Central Asia [23]. This inquiry probes the multifaceted influence exerted by authoritarian governance, Russian national interests, and the foundational elements of a civic reform agenda, inspired by the policies of Alexander II. It underscores that this reformist endeavor aspired to construct the framework of a 'modern' empire, founded upon the principles of imperial citizenship and a shared secular culture. Brower adroitly marshals archival resources to illuminate the underpinnings of Russian colonialism within Turkestan and its intricate intertwinement with the indigenous populations.

Khalid's seminal work, framed within a sweeping historical panorama, embarks upon the exploration of interactions between Central Asians and imperial systems as well as external forces [24]. Firmly rooted in the nineteenth century, this research project is inaugurated by the Russian and Chinese imperial conquests, striving to unearth the essence of the region's historical trajectory within the crucible of these seminal encounters. At its core, this inquiry posits that the imperial conquests constituted a definitive rupture with the past, engendering a profound remolding of Central Asia's developmental course.

In the book "1837: Russia's Quiet Revolution" authored by P. W. Werth in 2021, a dedicated chapter offers insights into the Khiva expedition of 1839 and sheds light on the involvement of the Kazakhs in the Russian military endeavor [25]. However, it is important to acknowledge that the available information is acknowledged to be incomplete, with the study primarily focusing on the pivotal events of the military campaign. Worth noting within the provided text is a discussion of the challenges faced during the Khivan expedition, such as the adversities posed by inclement weather conditions. The passage vividly describes the detrimental effects of snowfall on camels and the significant losses incurred due to poorly packed loads and harsh conditions, poignantly encapsulated as the "camel holocaust." In summary, the provided text engages with themes related to the Khivan campaign, the arduous trials encountered during the military endeavor, and the contrasting approaches to the welfare of camels between merchant caravans and military operations. The book, in essence, encourages a more thoughtful and responsible approach to the well-being of the animals involved in such campaigns.

In his book, A. Morrison offers a comprehensive analysis of the 19th-century Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia, with a specific focus on the pivotal event of the capture of Akmechet in 1853 [26]. This fortress, strategically positioned and serving as a fiscal center, symbolized a turning point in Russian expansionism, demarcating the northern boundary of Khoqand's authority and accentuating Russian dominance. Morrison underscores the profound significance of this event, reinforced by the renaming of Akmechet to Perovsk, which redirected Russian attention towards Khokand and Bukhara. The book also delves into the challenges of steppe warfare and fortresses as supply bases, providing crucial context for comprehending Russian expansion in Central Asia and its intricate interactions with local actors, including Kazakh tribes and leaders. The capture of Akmechet emerges as a testament to the multifaceted power dynamics that defined the Russian conquest of Central Asia.

However, within the voluminous literature chronicling the Imperial Russian conquest of Central Asia, a noticeable chasm exists in our comprehension of the specific contributions and agency wielded by the Kazakh clans in the conquest of Akmechet Fortress. While extant narratives have often accentuated the role of imperial powers, they have concurrently marginalized the intricate dynamics enveloping the local Kazakh populace. The remarkable significance of the Kazakh clans in shaping the outcome of the conquest remains obscured within the veil of historical oversight. Despite their pivotal roles in influencing the trajectory of events, their multifaceted contributions and motivations languish inadequately explored within the existing scholarship.

Certainly, there exists a notable gap in research, urging the need for a detailed study of how the Kazakh people influenced the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. Although some primary and occasional secondary sources provide intriguing hints about Kazakh participation, a thorough and in-depth analysis that investigates the strategies employed by the Kazakh individuals and communities during this event is lacking.

The existing sources offer only fragmentary insights into the involvement of the Kazakh people in the conquest. To fully grasp the extent of their agency and contributions, a meticulous examination of their strategies and actions is essential. This research aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the Kazakh role in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. By scrutinizing a wide array of historical documents and sources, this study aims to provide a detailed understanding of the strategies employed by the Kazakh people during this significant historical event.

Results. In the mid-19th century, the Russian Empire embarked on a determined mission to expand its dominion across the vast expanse of the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia. The Russian Empire's previous expeditionary setbacks, notably the one in Khiva in 1839, heightened its determination to expand its territorial holdings, particularly with a focus on annexing regions around the Aral Sea and the Syr-Darya River. To achieve this objective, the imperial authorities devised a comprehensive strategy that encompassed the construction of a network of fortresses, topographical surveys, and military campaigns. However, these initiatives often came at the expense of the local populace, who were burdened with onerous duties ranging from developing infrastructure for Russian troops to providing essential logistical support. Among the tasks imposed upon the Kazakh population was the procurement of transportation for military equipment and provisions, as well as the provision of services to caravan operators, particularly camel drivers [27, p. 343]. This narrative reveals the intricate interplay between the Russian Empire's expansionist ambitions and the hardships endured by the Kazakh people during this transformative period.

In the local context, Kazakh inhabitants were not only expected to contribute a significant number of camels and horses for various purposes, including field constructions, military pickets, expeditions, and campaigns, but they were also burdened with numerous auxiliary responsibilities. These secondary obligations, sometimes accompanied by irregularly imposed taxes, were mandated by the local administrative bodies under the jurisdiction of the Russian Empire. Consequently, the local populace found themselves repeatedly compelled to fulfill these duties, depending on the prevailing circumstances and temporal requirements. As documented by

A.K. Geyns, a colonial official who conducted observations in the Kazakh steppe, these obligations extended to supporting colonial administration personnel, funding the travel expenses of military and civilian officials traversing postal routes, contributing to the maintenance and repair of postal facilities, bridges, and thoroughfares, providing temporary accommodations for the sick and injured, and supplying firewood for officials embarking on trips into the steppe. These obligations were generally met through monetary payments, though it was not unusual for in-kind contributions to be made. Moreover, varying levels of necessary expenses were also collected from the Kazakh population in monetary form [28, p. 424].

Before initiating territorial expansion efforts, such as the annexation of the Aral and Syr-Darya regions and the construction of fortresses therein, the colonial authorities executed preliminary research, reconnaissance, and survey expeditions. A portion of the financial expenditures linked to these expeditions was sourced from the resources of the indigenous clans. For instance, in their endeavors to quell the insurgency led by Eset Kotibaruly, punitive forces apprehended approximately 80,000 sheep, which were subsequently transported to Orenburg and auctioned off to cover the expenditures incurred by military expeditions and surveying teams operating in the field [2, p. 332].

The initial reconnaissance expedition along the Syr-Darya was headed by Captain Schultz and the geodesist Lemm. Their directives encompassed the exploration of a more efficient route to the Syr-Darya, the identification of a suitable site for a fortress within the region, reconnaissance spanning from the Aral Sea to Maylybasy, compilation of information regarding the Kokand Khanate's borders and the Kazakh clans under its suzerainty, as well as the assessment of the taxes levied on them, and the documentation of various other informational prerequisites [29, p. 5].

Even as the first two forts were being completed, Governor-General of Orenburg, V.A. Obruchev was arguing for the construction of a new fortress much deeper in the steppe, which would allow the Russians to control the mouth of the Syr-Darya and explore the possibilities of steam navigation on that river and the Aral Sea in preparation for a renewed attack on Khiva. In 1846 a small reconnoitring expedition under Captain Lemm, who had a training in astronomy and had undertaken topographical work in Persia, and Captain Schulz of the Main Staff, was despatched to find a suitable spot. They reported enthusiastically that the Raim peninsula, near the point where the Syr-Darya debouched into the Aral, was both strategically desirable and sufficiently fertile to be able to provide up to a million poods of wheat [30, p.13]. Upon their safe return at the end of September, Captains Schultz and Lemm delivered the findings of their expedition, accompanied by a comprehensive account of the location they had identified in the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya. Subsequent to the research expedition led by Captain Schultz, which provided precise insights into an uncharted region, Obruchev, presented a proposal to the Russian monarch, highlighting the imperative necessity of erecting a fortress along the Syr-Darya [31, p. 2]. This proposition garnered the approval of Emperor Nicholas I, who subsequently issued an imperial decree instructing the commencement of fortress construction during the summer of 1847 [32, p. 2].

As a result, preparations for the construction of a third fortress on the right bank of the lower Syr-Darya were initiated during the winter of 1847. Simultaneously, a vessel designed for operations in the Aral Sea was fabricated in Orenburg. Furthermore, during the Khiva expedition of 1839, the Russian army stockpiled a significant quantity of provisions, including bread, cereals, oats, and vodka, at the Emba fortress, which functioned as a logistical hub for the campaign. The ensuing efforts encompassed the coordination of an expedition comprising over 100 officers, 332 non-commissioned officers, 5985 soldiers, 756 regular troops, and more than a thousand Bashkir warriors [33, p.201].

In a broader historical context, the expeditions led by the colonial administration across the vast expanse of the Kazakh steppe were meticulously organized with a reliance on camel-based transportation, a mode of conveyance ideally suited to the region's challenging terrain. Among these expeditions, Fort Raim stood out due to its substantial construction, surpassing both Irgiz and Turgai in scale, primarily owing to its remote location.

The local aristocracy played an instrumental role in facilitating the successful execution of research and reconnaissance expeditions undertaken by the colonial administration within the Kazakh steppe. These influential figures not only bore the significant financial burden associated with the expeditions but also provided essential means of transportation and served as guides to colonial authorities along the arduous field routes.

The dedicated efforts of local colonial authorities, diligently carrying out the directives of the monarchy, were directed towards procuring a substantial caravan of 3,500 camels. These camels were to be provided by the Sultan-pravitel' of the Junior Horde, a crucial logistical step aimed at ensuring the smooth transportation of provisions and supplies from the frontier to the construction site of the formidable Raim fortress [34, p.1]. Consequently Russian administration in recognition of their pivotal role in this ambitious undertaking, several Kazakh aristocrats were duly honored with medals and titles, underscoring their invaluable assistance in the realization of this significant colonial enterprise [34, p. 117, 193, 196].

The expedition, originating from the city of Orsk, was supplemented by three substantial caravans, transporting a year's supply of provisions and accompanying equipment destined for the frontier fortifications. Upon reaching Iletsk, the contingent was reinforced by 200 Ural Cossacks, equipped with light artillery, and an additional 40 camels laden with sustenance and temporary yurts for a month, aided by Kazakh porters. This composite force commenced its journey on January 10, 1846 [2, p. 279]. Also, Sultan-pravitel' Baimuhammed Aishuakov, who presided over the western section of the Orenburg Kazakhs, along with more than a dozen sultans and approximately 50 Kazakh individuals, contributed 200 mares to the expedition dedicated to the construction of the Raim fortress [2, p. 285].

However, resistance to colonial endeavors emerged among indigenous elites, primarily driven by the steadfast opposition of Kazakhs and Khivas, led by Azbergen Bi and Eset Kotybarov, against the construction of a fortress in the Aral region. The necessity to assemble a substantial military force for the expedition arose from the imminent threat posed by this unified resistance. Obruchev, receiving intelligence reports indicating the formation of a coalition force comprising Khivan and Kazakh contingents, poised to intercept the caravans transporting vital supplies to the colonial troops engaged in the construction of the Raim fortress, deemed it imperative to respond proactively [36, p. 123-124].

This situation is further elucidated through a confidential memorandum submitted by Obruchev to the authorities in St. Petersburg on May 6. In this statement, the general articulated his concerns, stating, "Khiva Khan is contemplating all conceivable measures to obstruct our penetration into the steppe, and if he becomes aware of our army advancing along the Syr-Daria, I harbor no doubt that he will utilize his full might to impede our campaign, particularly within the Karakum. Consequently, following the occupation of Raim, I shall be compelled to augment the troop strength at that location until the fortress has been constructed" [30, p. 81-82].

However, in the face of determined Kazakh resistance, the colonial administration persisted in ensuring that the construction of the new fortress received an adequate supply of essential provisions. These provisions were transported via a combination of large horse-drawn carriages and camel caravans, primarily originating from Iletsk, Orenburg, Troitsk, and Orsk. One noteworthy example was the regular caravan dispatched from Iletsk, consisting of a staggering 1500 camels. Typically, these camels were laden with various supplies such as yurts, clothing, meat, flour, cereals, oats, and more, which were sourced from local Kazakh contributions. The camels and their cargoes underwent regular inspections, including meticulous accounting of their exact numbers, weights, and conditions, accompanied by the compilation of detailed lists of drivers and guides. Each caravan was accompanied by Ural Cossacks to ensure their safe passage [2, p. 285].

The sheer volume of these caravans, comprising carts and camels, posed significant logistical challenges for the colonial administration. Concurrently, they efficiently organized the loading of Kazakhs and Bashkirs with goods onto the kneeling camels. They also supervised the movement of Kazakhs on horseback, leading lengthy strings of tethered camels, while directing the movements of Bashkir carts transporting logs, boards, and other construction materials. The transportation of this substantial convoy of carts and camels from Orenburg to the Syr-Darya, through Orsk, was executed under the direct orders of Obruchev, who personally oversaw the operation. Obruchev even spearheaded a sizeable caravan loaded with construction materials, supplies, and provisions sufficient for a year-long garrison of 700 individuals. The cargo of this caravan encompassed components for ships and barges, canvas, oars, masts, windmills for the fortress, barrels, bricks for furnace construction, and lime, a material not readily available in the southern regions. The initial landing site for the caravan was situated at the base of a small hill, subsequently named after the Raim cemetery, in proximity to Kamystybas Bay on the right bank of the Syr-Darya [2, p. 286-287].

Upon the arrival of the caravan, construction of the new fortress promptly commenced. The use of clay-rich soils, including straw bricks, provided significant advantages in the construction of earthworks and fortifications. The fortress was erected with the labor of 1500 workers, comprising soldiers, Bashkirs, and Cossacks. Simultaneously, Lieutenant Crabb supervised the reassembly of the ship "Nikolay," while Major Erofeev assumed the role of the commandant of the Raim fortress [2, p. 286-287].

The last significant caravan of camels, laden with supplies encompassing food, logs, boards, and various other construction necessities for the Raim fortress, arrived from Iletsk fortress in early May 1852 [2, p. 300].

Subsequent to the completion of the Raim fortress, the vessels "Nikolai" and "Konstantin" were deployed within the waters of the Aral Sea. This development gave rise to concerns within the Khiva Khanate. In response to this perceived threat, Khiva Khan mobilized a contingent comprising over 200 individuals to occupy Mount Burshek, dispatched another 600 to the lower reaches of the Amu River, and assembled approximately 300 forces to mount an assault on the ship stationed at Kosaral Fort. Unfortunately for Khiva Khan, these strategic maneuvers failed to yield the desired outcomes [37, p. 9-11]. Concurrently, the colonial administration contemplated expanding its fleet of vessels operating in the Aral Sea. The following year, Obruchev proposed the construction of an additional ship and a steam barque intended for navigation on the Syr-Darya River. The

creation of these vessels held both political and strategic significance. In the summer and autumn of 1849, Captain A. Butakov embarked on the first recorded voyage in the Aral Sea, where he conducted shoreline surveys, identified Nikolai Island [2, p. 300].

In the early 1850s, the Russian Empire initiated the construction of the Raim fortress, strategically positioned to facilitate potential incursions into Kokand Khanate territories. One of the primary objectives for the colonial military stationed at the Raim fortress was the ability to launch an offensive against Akmechet, an immensely formidable fortress under Kokand control within the Syr-Darya region. Russian officials emphasized the importance of the Raim fortress, stating: "The opportune time has come. The flotilla of ships on the island and the Raim fort became the most important place for attacking Akmechet" [38, p. 90]. In anticipation of Russia's advancing presence in Central Asia, the Kokand Khanate proactively responded by constructing a network of fortresses in the Syr-Darya region, with Akmechet fortress serving as the central hub for these defenses [38, p. 15].

Nonetheless, in 1852, V.A. Perovsky, the newly appointed Governor-General of Orenburg, formulated a novel strategy aimed at expanding Russian influence into the steppe by gaining control of the Kokand Khanate's fortresses in the Syr-Darya region [39, p. 161]. Underlining the pivotal role of the Akmechet fortress in this strategy, it was articulated: "...we can approach the khanates of Central Asia only through our precise positioning at the heart of the Syr-Darya River. The Syr-Darya river and Akmechet fortress will undoubtedly become the primary pillars of political and trade relations with Central Asia" [40, p. 194].

Upon receiving approval from the Emperor for this venture, Lieutenant Golov led a team of four topographers, accompanied by 80 Cossacks, dispatched from the Raim fortress under Perovsky's orders. Their mission involved an extensive survey of the territory stretching from the right bank of the Syr-Darya River to the Kokandi fortress of Akmechet [41, p. 231-232].

However, Lieutenant Golov's exploration took him 270 versts from Raim on the right bank. When he sent Kokand emissaries on a reconnaissance expedition to Akmechet, they advanced only 80 versts before promptly returning. Lieutenant Golov, apprehensive of the Kokand cavalry and lacking the necessary military strength, withdrew to Raim and subsequently dispatched a report to Perovsky outlining the situation. Unsatisfied with the expedition's outcome, Perovsky resolved to initiate a more comprehensive reconnaissance effort, potentially followed by a military campaign to capture Akmechet. This task was entrusted to Colonel Blaramberg, who received permission from Perovsky to proceed to Raim. There, he would requisition troops, Cossacks, cannons, and camels from local Kazakhs to meet the logistical needs of the expedition. Importantly, the campaign's clandestine nature was emphasized [42, p. 232-234].

Blaramberg, tasked with leading a sizable military and logistical contingent, reached the Raim fortress in June as per his instructions. Departing from Raim fortress and accompanied by a group of Kazakhs, which included 125 camels, 125 infantrymen with three cannons, and 200 Ural Cossacks, he arrived at the Kosaral fortress, strategically situated at the confluence of the Syr-Darya into the Aral Sea, on June 27. In terms of its composition and capabilities, this assembly possessed the necessary strength to execute military operations and was equipped with sufficient provisions to last for a month. Blaramberg's military force departed from the banks of the Syr-Darya River on July 5 through Maylybas. On July 12, the army reached the Koskorgan fortress, which had previously been devastated by the Kokand troops, and established a camp near Karakol. During this period, they encountered the village of local religious leader Maral Ishan, held in high esteem by the Kazakhs due to its abundant cattle and pastures. However, there was a degree of distrust towards the Russians because of their perceived support for the Kokhandis. Despite Blaramberg's intentions to include them, Maral Ishan and his followers declined to join, fearing potential rebellion. On July 13, the expedition resumed its journey, halting near Aksu Lake after covering 30 versts. Between July 14 and 17, Blaramberg's forces left Karaozek, the mouth of the Syr-Darya River, and commenced an exploration of the surrounding area, a region previously visited by Lieutenant Golov's expedition. On July 18, the army, having traveled 23 versts, encountered a Kazakh named Taipe from the Jappas tribe near Besarik [2, p. 304]. Blaramberg's recollections suggest that Taipe, a Kazakh who had fled from the Kokandies, served as their guide and facilitated their passage. Furthermore, Taipe, along with his entire village, continued to accompany the Russian army throughout their journey, even helping them procure food when supplies ran low due to a lack of preparation. It becomes apparent that Taipe and his entire village had been entrusted by Blaramberg [2, p. 308].

Taipe, instrumental in guiding the Russian army, identified a camel route from Besarik, a location where the Syr-Darya River had expanded into a substantial river, ultimately leading the expedition to Akmechet. To traverse the Besaryk, Cossacks and Kazakhs harvested reeds with sickles, crafting Kazakh rafts to ferry their loads across the river. Upon crossing the river, the Russian contingent encountered envoys from the Kokand, comprising four individuals, including a Bukharian merchant. However, Blaramberg ordered their apprehension and included them in the group. On July 19, the Russian army approached Akmechet, traversing sand dunes,

and subsequently split into two columns on July 20, launching an attack on the fortress. Unfortunately, the Russian assault proved unsuccessful, resulting in ten soldiers killed and forty wounded [2, p. 306].

Blaramberg, witnessing the failure of his army's assault on Akmechet, issued an order to burn down the nearby marketplace, shopping streets, warehouses, stables, and residential areas of the inhabitants within the fortress on July 23. Under the circumstances, the Russians had no alternative but to retreat, which they did. Subsequently, as they retreated, the Russian forces deemed it necessary to destroy the Koskorgan and Shymkorgan fortresses, located on the opposite banks of the Syr-Darya, as well as Kumiskorgan in Kuandaria. First, they launched an attack on the Koskorgan fortress, situated on the banks of the Zhanadarya River, completely demolishing the barns and houses within the fortress. The Russians appropriated food and several yurts from the local Kazakhs before resuming their march.

On August 1, the Russians, utilizing reed rafts to transport cannons, horses, camels, and sheep from Karaozek, approached Shymkorgan near the Zhanadarya River on August 3. However, the Russians found themselves surrounded by numerous Kazakh villages, hindering their progress. Upon realizing the presence of the Russians, the fortress gates were sealed, and the defenders prepared for battle. During the final battle for Shymkorgan, the Russians breached the rules of warfare by forcing inhabitants from nearby Kazakh villages, who were unable to escape in time, to fill the water-filled canals and ditches near the fortress with earth. When the Russians continued to bury the civilians, disregarding the bullets fired in their direction, the defenders within the fortress ceased their fire. According to local Kazakhs, the fortress was defended by 15-20 soldiers along with their wives and children. Around 8 o'clock, Blaramberg proposed sending a Kazakh as a messenger to the fortress. Dissatisfied with the request for a 24-hour consideration period, the Russians initiated an attack, bombarding the fortress with cannons. In the course of the attack, Blaramberg dispatched unarmed men to ignite reeds in front of the army, which were then used to set fire to the fortress's wooden gates. Russian troops, having crossed the pre-excavated trenches, scaled the fortress wall using makeshift ladders and forcefully entered the fortress [2, p. 308-312].

The assault resulted in the death of fifteen soldiers, including the fortress commander, while only one soldier managed to escape. Once the fortress's gate caught fire and fell, Blaramberg enlisted the help of 50 Kazakhs from nearby villages, providing them with hoes and shovels to raze the fortress's houses, barns, and walls to the ground. The Kazakhs, laboring tirelessly for two days, acquiesced to the invaders' demands [2, p. 308-312].

Following these events, as per Blaramberg's orders, the gardens belonging to local residents on the opposite side of the Zhanadarya River were trampled. Thus, the Russian forces, having destroyed Shymkorgan, continued their march toward Kumiskorgan, the next fortress along the Kuandarya. However, upon learning that Shymkorgan had been razed, the inhabitants of Kumiskorgan evacuated the fortress, avoiding conflict with the colonial army. The Russian troops subsequently invaded the deserted fort and set it ablaze, along with the local Kazakhs. On August 9, Blaramberg's expedition encountered Kazakh villages, abundant in cattle and pastureland, near Buzkol, driving the residents away. On August 10, Blaramberg rejoined Burenin's army and returned to the Raim fortress. During their journey, they paid a war tax to Maral Ishan and distributed over 50 oxen as sustenance for their sizable army [2, p. 314-316].

Despite the ultimate setback of Blaramberg's campaign, V.A. Perovsky continued to hold him in high esteem. On September 15, 1852, Perovsky penned a letter to the commander of the Siberian corps, commending the exploration of previously uncharted regions, Karaozek and Zhanadaria. Perovsky acknowledged the suitability of these areas for settlement and expressed the belief that their acquisition would bolster Russia's political influence among the Kazakhs [41, p. 235].

In the spring of 1853, General Perovsky launched a significant military expedition towards Akmechet, a critical endeavor guided by essential intelligence provided by Blaramberg. This expedition was meticulously orchestrated and thoroughly justified in Perovsky's comprehensive report to the Russian emperor. The primary objectives encompassed a multifaceted strategy: firstly, to establish governance and ensure stability in the western region of the Kazakh steppe falling within the jurisdiction of the Orenburg department; secondly, to subjugate the Kazakh population in this area under Russian authority; thirdly, to augment the number of pack camels, thereby enhancing logistical capabilities; fourthly, to strengthen trade ties with Central Asian territories; fifthly, to fortify the vulnerable Aral region, taking into account potential threats from the Kokand and Khiva; sixthly, to safeguard Kazakh subjects aligned with Russia, facing imminent danger from Akmechet, the principal Kokand fortification strategically positioned along the Syr-Darya River; and finally, to rectify the shortcomings that had impeded the previous expedition led by Colonel Blaramberg. Given these diverse objectives, Perovsky sought official authorization to assert control over the right bank of the Syr-Darya River up to the Karatau Mountains and commence the construction of fortifications in that area. The Emperor approved the expedition, with the non-negotiable condition that Perovsky personally assume full responsibility for its success and allocate the available resources and forces of the Orenburg Corps [42, p. 540].

Based on insights gleaned from prior expeditions, Perovsky submitted a comprehensive proposal to the Russian Emperor, advocating for the strategic construction of multiple fortresses in the Syr-Darya region to facilitate an eventual assault on Akmechet [8, p. 12]. Following this strategic blueprint, Fort No. 1 was designated for construction in Kazaly, Fort No. 2 in Karmakshi, and Fort No. 3 was intended to replace Kumiskorgan [43, p. 14]. The responsibility for organizing the logistical aspects of the campaign, including the procurement of vital provisions such as food, horses, and camels, was entrusted to colonel Blaramberg. His purview extended from the fortress of Ilets to the fortress of Raim, encompassing the acquisition of necessary supplies from the Kazakh populace [2, p. 319].

The Orenburg administration encountered significant challenges in its efforts to obtain camels from local Kazakh clans. This difficulty primarily stemmed from the Kazakhs' awareness that the camels requested for the expedition would not be returned. This knowledge led to a certain reluctance among Kazakh communities to contribute camels. Perovsky noted this reluctance, stating that "The camels of Aral and Akmechet have been collected. The Kazakhs provided them for this service with the greatest reluctance, and some even claim that they did not provide them willingly, but rather, they were taken by force" [12, p. 170].

The Kazakh aristocracy found itself sharply divided into two opposing factions regarding the camel procurement effort. On one side, prominent figures, particularly the influential sultans-praviteles holding sway within the colonial administration, wholeheartedly supported the expedition's goals. Conversely, another segment of the Kazakh elite, led by figures like batyr Iset Kutebarov, actively resisted and impeded the camel collection effort, going to the extent of launching attacks on villages contributing camels. To counter this resistance, stringent measures were enforced, including the deployment of an auxiliary detachment led by the Sultan-pravitel' of the western Orenburg Kazakhs, reinforced with Cossacks and artillery support to suppress opposition [41, p. 541-542].

However, certain Kazakh aristocrats failed to comply with Perovsky's directive to procure the necessary camels for the expedition. The reluctance displayed by the local Kazakh population to participate in the campaign contributed to these local Kazakh elites' inability to collect the required camels. For instance, Sultan Arslan Zhanturin, overseeing the eastern sector of the Orenburg Kazakhs, did not adhere to Perovsky's orders to collect camels from the Kazakhs under his jurisdiction. Perovsky attributed this noncompliance to the influence of Eset Kotybarov and admonished Sultan Arslan Zhanturin accordingly (Trudy, 1911: 175). In correspondence with Balkashin, Perovsky emphasized the imperative need to eliminate Kutebarov from the equation, citing Sultan Arslan's subservience to Kutebarov as a significant obstacle to achieving the campaign's objectives [12, p. 175].

In the annals of history, a momentous chapter unfolded as a formidable army, bristling with 25 cannons and bolstered by 3,000 valiant soldiers, embarked on its fateful march toward the Akmechet fortress [44, p. 15]. While the Kazakh sultans did not engage directly in military skirmishes, their strategic prowess played a vital role in supporting the colonial government's quest to quell potential threats on the battlefield. To shield the expedition from looming dangers originating in Khiva, the sultan-praviteles of the western and central Orenburg Kazakh territories received orders to shift their positions onto the vast steppe, erecting a formidable defensive perimeter stretching from the outer road to Ust-Urt. This defensive line was further fortified with the reinforcement of two groups of battle-hardened Cossack detachments [11, p. 219].

The intricacy of the campaign to conquer Akmechet demanded a multifaceted military composition, comprising infantry and cavalry, powerful artillery batteries, a formidable military flotilla, expert engineering and sapper units, and a vast convoy of camels carrying indispensable provisions and cargo, numbering a staggering 1,068 [6, p. 150]. Upon reaching the vicinity of the Akmechet fortress, the Russian military adopted a tactical encirclement strategy instead of launching a direct assault. Seven batteries were meticulously positioned within well-dug trenches, poised for a strategic showdown [45, p. 94].

Perovsky's meticulously crafted plan for the siege of Akmechet faced daunting challenges, as the army's supplies dwindled precipitously within days. Adding to these difficulties was the reluctance of local Kazakhs to sell fodder and livestock to the Russian forces. Recognizing the dire situation, Perovsky made a decisive move by ordering a cannon barrage against the fortress on July 8, 1853. In response, the tenacious defenders of the fortress retaliated, resulting in casualties among the Russian soldiers [46, p. 65]. Despite the formidable resistance mounted by the fortress's mere 300 defenders, the Russian army fought with unwavering valor for three grueling weeks [11, p. 107].

During this critical juncture, Perovsky deployed cutting-edge galvanic tools imported from St. Petersburg to breach the fortress's formidable walls. The relentless bombardment with heavy artillery continued unabated [47, p. 165]. On July 27, 1853, after an unyielding and protracted campaign, Perovsky issued the long-awaited order for the assault on Akmechet, leading a force of 3,000 well-armed soldiers to secure a triumphant victory. The battle for Akmechet exacted a toll on both sides, with 206 defenders falling and 35 wounded, while the

Russian forces suffered 9 fatalities and 46 injuries [39, p. 218-307]. Following the capture of the Akmechet fortress, more than a thousand troops were stationed there, along with 16 cannons [39, p. 322].

On August 26, 1853, Russian Emperor Nikolai I issued a historic decree that transformed the fort's name from Akmechet to "Perovsky," signifying a monumental turning point in the Russian Empire's quest to expand its influence into Central Asia. Simultaneously, in the same epochal year, the emperor's edict established the Syr-Darya military line, entrusting its commander with sweeping authority. This commander's purview encompassed overseeing the fortresses and troops under their jurisdiction, gathering intelligence regarding the Central Asian khanates, promoting trade along the line, maintaining order among the Kazakh populace, appointing tribal leaders, ensuring timely tax collection, and supervising various other responsibilities [48, p. 94].

Despite numerous punitive expeditions launched by the colonial forces in an attempt to quell Kazakh uprisings, these efforts proved largely ineffective. Nevertheless, Russian authorities managed to confiscate a significant portion of the rebels' livestock as spoils of war. These captured cattle were auctioned in Orenburg, with the proceeds used to offset the expenses incurred during the campaigns [48, p. 35]. On August 5, 1853, the Orenburg authorities dispatched a daring detachment to reinforce the Sultan-rulers of the western part of the Horde, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Tyaukin. This intrepid contingent embarked on a challenging expedition, engaging with Kazakh leaders along the way and navigating treacherous terrain [42, p. 532-534].

As winter's icy grip approached, the colonial authorities wisely deferred further endeavors to suppress the Kazakh rebellion and simultaneously deterred the Kazakhs from obstructing the advancing Russian army, poised for an assault on Akmechet. In summary, these events marked a pivotal chapter in the grand narrative of Russian influence's expansion in Central Asia. The capture of Akmechet and the establishment of the Syr-Darya military line laid the foundation for heightened control and engagement in the region, notwithstanding the resistance encountered from the local population.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the conquest of Akmechet Fortress in 1853 represents a significant chapter in the annals of 19th-century global history. It epitomizes the era of imperial expansionism and the relentless pursuit of territorial dominance by major world powers. However, this event transcends the conventional narrative of empires clashing for supremacy; it is a narrative intricately woven with the actions and agency of the indigenous Kazakh clans.

This research has explored the central question of how the dynamic and multifaceted engagement of diverse Kazakh clans and their influential chieftains contributed to the success of the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress. It has become clear that the conquest was not simply a result of imperial might but a culmination of collaboration, resistance, and the convergence of diverse motivations.

The pivotal actors in this historical drama were the chieftains of various Kazakh clans, who wielded agency and influence beyond their respective groups. Their strategies and motives, whether driven by pragmatism, tradition, or a blend of both, significantly shaped the course of events. Their legacy extended well beyond the conquest, leaving an indelible mark on the historical narrative of Central Asia and the intricate interplay of cultures and dominions.

To comprehensively address the research question, a rigorous mixed-methods approach was employed, combining archival scrutiny with a thorough analysis of primary and secondary sources. The study drew upon a wealth of resources, including archival records, official correspondences, contemporary travelogues, and indigenous narratives, along with a diverse array of secondary sources. This approach enriched the narrative by providing diverse perspectives and ensuring a holistic exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of Kazakh agency in the Imperial Russian conquest of Akmechet Fortress.

In essence, this research has illuminated the multilayered dimensions of Kazakh agency in this pivotal historical event, making a significant contribution to a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the 19th-century Central Asian expansionism. The conquest of Akmechet Fortress, once obscured by broader historical narratives, now stands as a testament to the complex interplay of power dynamics and the enduring role played by the Kazakh people in shaping the history of Central Asia.

Sources

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SAOO RF – *State Archive of the Orenburg Oblast of Russian Federation*

CSA RUz – *Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan*

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