THE RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF CENTRAL ASIA

The Russian conquest of Central Asia was perhaps the nineteenth century’s most dramatic and successful example of European imperial expansion, adding 1.5 million square miles and at least 6 million people – most of them Muslims – to the Tsar’s domains. Alexander Morrison provides the first comprehensive military and diplomatic history of the conquest to be published for over a hundred years. From the earliest conflicts on the steppe frontier in the 1830s to the annexation of the Pamirs in the early 1900s, he gives a detailed account of the logistics and operational history of Russian wars against Khoqand, Bukhara and Khiva, the capture of Tashkent and Samarkand, and the bloody subjection of the Turkmen, as well as Russian diplomatic relations with China, Persia and the British Empire. Based on archival research in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia and India, memoirs and Islamic chronicles, this book explains how Russia conquered a colonial empire in Central Asia, with consequences that still resonate today.

THE RUSSIAN CONQUEST
OF CENTRAL ASIA

A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914

ALEXANDER MORRISON

New College, Oxford
In memory of John Malcolm Morrison (1949–2017)
CONTENTS

List of Illustrations   page ix
List of Maps       xi
List of Tables     xii
Acknowledgements  xiii
Note on Translation, Transliteration and Dates xviii
List of Abbreviations xix
Glossary             xxiii

Introduction         1

1 Russia's Steppe Frontier and the Napoleonic Generation     52
2 'Pray for the Camels': The Winter Invasion of Khiva, 1839–41    83
3 'This Particularly Painful Place': The Failure of the Syr-Darya Line as a Frontier, 1841–63  114
4 From Ayaguz to Almaty: The Conquest and Settlement of Semirechie, 1843–82  168
5 The Search for a 'Natural' Frontier and the Fall of Tashkent, 1863–5  216
6 War with Bukhara 1866–8     255
7 The Fall of Khiva 1872–3  307
8 'Those Who Should Be Spared': The Conquest of Ferghana 1875–6  374

vii
CONTENTS

9 ‘The Harder You Hit Them, the Longer They Will Be Quiet Afterwards’: The Conquest of Transcaspia, 1869–85 409

10 Aryanism on the Final Frontier of the Russian Empire: The Exploration and Annexation of the Pamirs, 1881–1905 476

Epilogue: After the Conquest 531

Sources and Bibliography 540
Index 593
ILLUSTRATIONS

I.1 Value of exports through the Orenburg customs, 1859–64. page 18
I.2 Value of imports through the Orenburg customs, 1858–64. 19
I.3 Khudoyar Khan’s sarbaz infantry on parade before the palace gate, Khoqand. 36
I.4 Soldiers Uchaev, Butarev and Kochergin, and NCO Arkhipov of the 1st Turkestan Sharpshooter Battalion, Private Tiuvin and NCOs Naidin and Tolstykov of the 4th Turkestan Line Battalion, awarded the St George’s Cross for bravery at the Battle of Irjar, 8 May 1866. 40
1.1 General Count V. A. Perovskii in the 1830s. 59
2.1 Allah Quli Khan of Khiva’s proclamation rallying resistance to the Russians. 94
2.2 Camels carrying packs with rusk and oats. 98
2.3 Orenburg Cossacks and line infantry in winter uniform. 100
2.4 Cossack light horse artillery. 101
2.5 Perovskii, Tsiolkovskii, Col. Kuz’minskii, Orenburg Cossack officer, N. V. Khanykov, V. I. Dal’. 106
3.1 Interior view of Fort Raim by Taras Shevchenko, 1848. 127
3.2 Plan of siege and assault on the fortress of Aq Masjid, 5–28 July 1853. 134
3.3 View of Aq Masjid after its capture on the 28 July 1853. 135
3.4 Syr-Darya Province. Kazalinsk Town. Trading lines (bazaar). 142
4.1 Early wooden barracks, Fort Vernoe, Almaty. 181
4.2 Gerasim Alexeevich Kolpakovskii. 189
4.3 The Pishpek Citadel. 196
4.4 Plan of the Battle of Uzun-Agach. 198
5.1 Mikhail Grigor’evich Chernyaev. 224
5.2 ‘Alimqul’s appeal to Jantai Batyr Dadkhwah. 226
5.3 Sketch map of the Syr-Darya Valley and the Qara-Tau range by ‘Abd al-Vali Qarabai-oghi. 228
5.4 ‘Surrender!’ – ‘Go to the Devil!’ – Vasilii Vereshchagin’s imagined portrayal of the Iqan Affair. 239
5.5 The seal of ‘Alimqul, military leader of Khoqand 1863–5. 246
6.1 Amir Sayyid Muzaffar of Bukhara. 262
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

6.2 Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman, first Governor-General of Turkestan. 284
6.3 The site of the battle of Chupan-Ata. 289
6.4 The Bukhara Gate of the city of Samarkand. 294
6.5 N. N. Karazin The Entry of Russian Forces into Samarkand on the 8 June 1868. 296
6.6 ‘At the Fortress Walls – Let Them Enter!’ Vasilii Vereschagin’s portrayal of the 1868 siege of Samarkand. 298
6.7 ‘Abd al-Ghafar Bek, the former ruler of Ura-Tepe. 304
7.1 Map of the Khivan invasion routes. 328
7.2 Baron Johann Friedrich Gustav Aminov. 333
7.3 N. N. Karazin, The Khiva Expedition of 1873. The Crossing of the Dead Sands to the Wells of Adam-Krylgan by the Turkestan Force. 335
7.4 N. N. Karazin, The Crossing of the Amu-Darya by the Turkestan Force, 1873. 339
7.5 The route of the Orenburg column from the Emba to Kungrad. 350
7.6 Nikolai Nikitich Golovachev. 365
8.1 Khudoyar Khan of Khoqand. 381
8.2 Mikhail Dmitri’evich Skobelev. 383
8.3 Nasruddin Bek, eldest son of Khudoyar Khan. 386
8.4 The two stormings of Andijan. 392
8.5 ‘Abdullah Bek’s letter to Skobelev. 402
8.6 A modern statue of Qurmanjan Dadkhwah, the ‘Queen of the Alai’, in Central Bishkek. 404
9.1 Nikolai Pavlovich Lomakin. 418
9.2 Plan of the engagement with the Turkmen at Qizil-Arvat, 1877. 426
9.3 Route of the Akhal-Teke expeditionary force from Chikishlar to Denghil-Tepe, 1879. 441
9.4 Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin. 452
9.5 Depiction of the martyrdom of Agafon Nikitin. 457
9.6 Plan of the Storming of Denghil-Tepe (Gök-Tepe). 459
10.1 Bronislav Ludwigovich Grombchevskii. 489
10.2 Map of the Pamir military expeditions. 496
10.3 Pamirskii Post from the south-west. 504
10.4 Andrei Evgen’evich Snisarev with other Turkestan officers, c. 1904. 526
### MAPS

1. Central Asia before the Russian conquest  
   *page xxv*
2. The northern steppe  
   86
3. The Syr-Darya valley  
   117
4. Semirechie  
   171
5. Tashkent and its environs  
   218
6. The Zarafshan valley  
   259
7. Khiva and the routes to it  
   314
8. The Ferghana valley  
   377
9. Transcaspia  
   414
10. The Pamirs  
   484
TABLES

I.1 Value of exports through the Orenburg customs, 1859–64 (roubles)  page 17
I.2 Value of imports through the Orenburg customs, 1858–64 (roubles)  19
I.3 Sieges and battles in the Russian conquest of Central Asia, 1853–81  31
2.1 Supplies for the Khiva expedition  99
3.1 Livestock seized on the Siberian frontier, June–July 1840  120
3.2 Garrisons of the Syr-Darya Line, February 1854  138
9.1 Daily summer ration for a soldier in Transcaspia, 1879  435
10.1 Major items of equipment and supplies for the second Pamir expedition  500
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xiii
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NOTE ON TRANSLATION, TRANSLITERATION AND DATES

For the transliteration of Russian terms and proper names I have used the simplified library of Congress system without diacritics, apart from ’ to indicate the soft sign (ь), and using ya rather than the misleading ia for я. Terms and names in Central Asian languages are generally transliterated from historic spellings in the Arabic script, again using a simplified system without diacritics except for ’ to indicate āin (غ) and ’ for hamza (ھ). Where familiar versions of a name already exist in English I have stuck with the established spelling (e.g. Samarkand not Samarqand). Where a direct English equivalent exists, technical terms have been translated, notably oblast’ (province) and uezd (district). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Russian, French and Persian are my own, while all translations from Chaghatai are by a friend who prefers to remain anonymous, but whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge.

Before 14 February 1918 the Russian empire operated according to the Julian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the rest of Europe, and now worldwide. Almost all dates in this book are Old Style (O.S.), but when the Russians were dealing directly with the British I have also given Gregorian dates. All dates in the footnotes are those given in the original document, which in most cases means they are O.S.
ABBREVIATIONS

Archives
F. – Fond (Fund); Op. – Opis’ (Catalogue); D. – Delo (File); l. – list’ (folio); ob – oborot’ (verso).

AV
Arkhyv Vostokovedov Sankt-Peterburgskogo Filiala Institutu Vostokovedenii RAN (St Petersburg Filial of the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Archive of Orientalists)

AVPRI
Arkhyv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (Archive of the Russian Empire’s Foreign Policy, Moscow).

BL
British Library, London.

GAOO
Gosudarstvenniy Arkhyv Orenburgskoi Oblasti (State Archive of Orenburg Province, Orenburg)

GARF
Gosudarstvenniy Arkhyv Rossiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow).

IAOO
Istoricheskii Arkhyv Omskoi Oblasti (Historical Archive of Omsk Province, Omsk)

IOR
India Office Records (British Library, London)

IISH
International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam

NAG
National Archives of Georgia (Tbilisi)

NAI
National Archives of India (New Delhi)

RGIA
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenniy Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, St Petersburg)

RGIMOPI
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenniy Istoricheskii Muzei, Otdel Pis’mennykh Istochnikov (Russian State Historical Museum, Division of Written Sources, Moscow)

RGVIA
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenniy Voenny-Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Military-Historical Archive, Moscow).

TsGARKaz
Tsentr’nyi Gosudarstvenniy Arkhiv Respubliki Kazakhstan (Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty).

TsGARUz
Tsentr’nyi Gosudarstvenniy Arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistan (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent).

Document Collections

AKAK
Akty, sobranne Kavkaszkoi Arkheograficheskoi Kommissii (Tiflis: Tip. Glavnogo Upravleniya Namestnika Kavkaszkogo, 1881)

KRO

xix
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**MPITT**

**PP**
Parliamentary Papers

**PSZ**
*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*

**PT**

**RTO**

**Serebrennikov**

**SIRIO**
*Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva*

**VPR**

**Zagorodnikova**

**Chronicles**

**Donish Risala**

**TA**

**TJT**

**TSh**
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS


Journals and Publications

AHR  American Historical Review
AI  Ab Imperio
AS  Asiatische Studien
CAC  Cahiers d’Asie Centrale
CAS  Central Asian Survey
CSSH  Comparative Studies in Society & History
EcHR  Economic History Review
EHR  English Historical Review
GJ  The Geographical Journal
HJ  The Historical Journal
IIRGO  Izvestiya Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva
IJMES  International Journal of Middle-East Studies
IS  Iranian Studies
IV  Istoricheskii Vestnik
IZ  Istoricheskie Zapiski
JAH  Journal of Asian History
JBFGO  Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas
JESHO  Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
JGH  Journal of Global History
JIS  Journal of Islamic Studies
JMH  Journal of Military History
JPS  Journal of Persianate Studies
JRGS  Journal of the Royal Geographical Society
JWH  Journal of World History
Kritika  Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History
MAS  Modern Asian Studies
MES  Middle-Eastern Studies
PPV  Pis’mennye Pamyatniki Vostoka
PRGS  Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society
RA  Russkii Arkhiv
RS  Russkaya Starina
RV  Russkii Vestnik
SEER  Slavonic & East European Review
SR  Slavic Review
St Pb.  St Petersburg
xxii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TKLA Protokol zasedaniya i soobshcheniya chlenov Turkestanskogo Kruzhka Liubitelei Arkheologii
TOUAK Trudy Orenburgskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komissii
TRHS Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
TVOIRAO Trudy Vostochnogo Otdeleniya Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva
TS Turkestanskii Sbornik
TV Turkestanske Vedomosti
VE Vestnik Evropy
VIRGO Vestnik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva
VS Voennyi Sbornik
ZIRGO Zapiski/Zhurnal Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva
ZVOIRAO Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdeleniya Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva
GLOSSARY

‘Adat – customary law, applied in the Russian Empire to the law used by nomads.
Aul – a nomadic encampment or winter settlement.
Aqsaqal – ‘white-beard’. An elder, a village headman.
Arba – a high, two-wheeled cart.
Ariq – an irrigation canal.
Batyr – a warrior or hero, cognate of Bahadur (Persian) and Bogatyr (Russian).
Bek/Beg – a title of respect, (sometimes) governor of a province.
Berdanka – affectionate term for the Berdan rifle, introduced in the Russian army after 1870.
Bii – a Kyrgyz or Qazaq judge or figure of authority.
Dadkhwah – a Khoqandi court rank, literally meaning a ‘petitioner for justice’.
Dasht-i Qipchaq – ‘the field of the Qipchaqs’. Name used for the steppe between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries.
Desyatina – Russian measurement of area, equivalent to 2¾ acres or 1.09 hectares.
Diwan – Qazaq term for the administrative divisions created by the Russians in the steppe in the 1820s, but with the broader meaning of a court or political centre.
Diwan-begi – chief minister (Khiva).
Dungan – Han Chinese Muslims, many of whom migrated to Russian Turkestan in the 1880s.
Fazany – ‘pheasants’ – a contemptuous term for aristocratic officers who secured a transfer to Central Asia when there was a campaign and a chance of medals or promotion.
Jigit – Turkic term meaning a mounted warrior, used by the Russians for mounted messengers, bodyguards etc.
Jungharia – what is now northern Xinjiang in western China.
Khan – a royal title indicating (in principle) both Chingissid descent and widespread recognition of a right to rule. By the nineteenth century only Qazaq Khans were genuinely Chingissids.
Khoja or Khwaja – a religious honorific indicating descent from the prophet’s kin, and (sometimes) membership of a Sufi lineage.
Kibitka – term used by the Russians for nomadic households and yurts.
Kirgiz – The generic term used by the Russians for both Qazaqs and Kyrgyz in Central Asia. I have preserved it in quotations from primary sources, while referring to Qazaqs and Kyrgyz in the main body of the text.
Inorodtsy – literally ‘those of a different birth’. A term used to describe some of the non-Russian peoples of the empire. As a legal category it denoted those excluded from Russian citizenship.
Ishan – a religious leader, whose authority could derive from personal charisma, or from blood descent from or being taught by a famous saint. Associated with Sufism, although not all ishans belonged to a Sufi order.

Lazutchik – scout or spy.

Manap – a figure of authority among the Kyrgyz.

Mawara ‘al-nahr – ‘the land beyond the river’. The river in question is the Oxus or Amu-Darya. This was the classic Arabic term for the settled lands of Central Asia, lying roughly between the Amu-Darya and the Syr-Darya.

Oblast – a province, with a population of a million or more. Known as a guberniya in European Russia.

Okrug – a military district.

Otdel – an administrative division.

Pood – Russian measurement of weight, equivalent to 36 lbs.

Pristav – in this period the officer in charge of a region whose administration has not yet been regularised.

Qazi-Kalan – the chief Islamic judge of a city.

Qush-begi – Chief Minister (Bukhara).

Sarbaz – infantry drilled according to modern methods in the armies of Bukhara and Khoqand.

Sart – a generic term used both by Russians and by nomads for the settled population of Central Asia.

Sayyid – one claiming descent from the tribe of the Prophet.

Shaika – raiding band.

Sotnya – a company of Cossack cavalry, usually 100–120 men.

Stanitsa – a Cossack settlement.

Sultan – a title which among Qazaqs indicates Chingissid descent, i.e. membership of the ‘white bone’ aristocracy.

Taranchi – ‘farmer’ – the name by which the modern Uyghurs were known in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Töre/Tura – a title of respect, indicating membership of the ‘white bone’ Chingissid aristocracy among Qazaqs.

Trakt – highway or post-road.

Tuzemtsy – ‘natives’. The general term used by Russians to describe the local population.

Uezd – a district, which in Turkestan could have a population of 250,000 or more.

‘ulama – the collective term for Muslim clergy and theological scholars, plural of alim.

Verst – Russian measurement of distance, equivalent to about two-thirds of a mile.

Volost – an administrative division, in Central Asia usually with about 2,000 households.

Zakat – the Islamic tax on goods, 1/40th of their value – widely applied to livestock in Central Asia.

Zhuz – ‘hundred’, usually translated as ‘horde’. Name for the three political divisions of the Qazaqs.
Map 1 Central Asia before the Russian conquest. (Redrawn from ‘Central Asia: First Half of the 19th Century’. © Yuri Bregel, with the kind permission of Natasha Bregel.)