



Introduction

Russia's movement to the East had already begun at the time of the Tatar Yoke.

Mikhail Afrikanovich Terent'ev, *History of the Conquest of Central Asia* (1906)

This book tells the story of how Central Asia became Russian. With the fall of Kazan in 1552 Medieval Muscovy had extended its frontier to the Volga. It reached the Caspian in 1556, with the capture of Astrakhan, and by the end of the sixteenth century had expanded beyond the Urals, with the destruction of the khanate of Sibir'. Over the following 200 years Russian rule in Siberia and the Urals was gradually consolidated, but until the 1820s the Russian Empire's southern frontier in Asia remained more or less unchanged, a string of fortified outposts along the Ural and Irtysh rivers. By the early twentieth century it lay almost 1,800 miles further south; 1.5 million square miles and perhaps 6 million new subjects had been added to the Tsar's domains. Russian Central Asia stretched from the Altai and Ala-Tau mountains in the east of what is now Kazakhstan to the deserts of Transcaspia (Turkmenistan) in the west, with a southern frontier which ran through the lofty plateaus of the Pamirs and along the Amu-Darya, the Oxus of antiquity. The basins of Central Asia's other great rivers – the Syr-Darya, the Zarafshan, the Ili, the Murghab – all lay wholly or partially in Russian territory, as did the whole of the Aral Sea and almost the whole of the Caspian shore. The states which had existed in southern Central Asia – the khanate of Khoqand in Ferghana, the khanate of Khiva in Khwarazm and the emirate of Bukhara in the Zarafshan valley – had in the first case been destroyed, and in the latter two transformed into Russian protectorates.¹

For some contemporaries this subjugation of the lands and peoples between Siberia and the Oxus was a form of revenge for the 'Tatar Yoke' of the

¹ See Yuri Bregel, 'The New Uzbek States: Bukhara, Khiva and Khoqand c. 1750–1886', in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chingissid Age* ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank & Peter B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 392–411 for a more detailed description of the political geography of Central Asia before the Russian conquest.

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when Muscovy had been subject to the Turco-Mongol Golden Horde.² It was also seen as part of a wider civilising mission, which saw Russia take her place among the other European colonial empires that dominated the nineteenth-century world;³ as a means of championing the spread of Orthodox Christianity in a region most of whose population were Muslims;⁴ and as a reconquest by ‘Aryans’ of a region long dominated by Turkic peoples.⁵ Above all, it was perhaps the pre-eminent assertion of Russia’s status as a Great Power in the nineteenth century. The pace and scale of Russian territorial expansion attracted the admiration and apprehension of Russia’s rivals, and formed an important part of the ‘myth of conquest’ which underpinned the authority of the Russian monarchy.⁶ Central Asia’s conquest was the most spectacular example of such expansion: it was by far the most substantial territory added to the Russian empire between the Congress of Vienna and the First World War. While the individual campaigns of conquest were usually fairly brief, taken together they spanned almost a century – from the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when Russian attention began to shift away from Europe towards the empire’s Asian frontier, to the early 1900s when the last formal territorial annexation took place in the Pamirs.

Russia’s new Central Asian possessions comprised a bewildering variety of landscapes, climatic zones and peoples. The steppe grasslands of the Sary-Arqa – Qazaq for ‘yellow back’ – which stretched across the provinces of Ural’sk, Turgai,

² M. A. Terent’ev, *Istoriya zavoevaniya Srednei Azii s kartami i planami* (St Pb.: A. V. Komarov, 1906), I, 1. See also V. V. Grigor’ev, ‘Russkaya politika v otnoshenii k Srednei Azii’, in *Sbornik Gosudarstvennykh Znaniy* I ed. V. P. Bezobrazov (St Pb.: Tip. V. P. Bezobrazov, 1874), 233–61; S. M. Seredonin, ‘Istoricheskii ocherk zavoevaniya aziatskoi Rossii’, in *Aziatskaya Rossiya* (St Pb.: Izd. Pereselencheskago Upravleniya, 1914), I, 1–2.

³ P. P. Semenov, ‘Znachenie Rossii v kolonizatsionnom dvizhenii evropeiskikh narodov’, *IIRGO* 38 (1892), 349–69; Adeeb Khalid, ‘Culture and Power in Colonial Turkestan’, in *CAC*. Vols. 17–18. *Le Turkestan russe: Une colonie comme les autres?* ed. Svetlana Gorshenina & Sergej Abašin (Tashkent & Aix-en-Provence: IFEAC, Éditions De Boccard, 2009), 413–47; Ulrich Hofmeister, *Die Bürde des Weißen Zaren: Russische Vorstellungen einer imperialen Zivilisierungsmission in Zentralasien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2019).

⁴ N. P. Ostroumov, *Kitaiskie emigranty v Semirechenskoi Oblasti Turkestanskogo Kraya i rasprostranenie sredi nikh Pravoslavnogo Khristianstva* (Kazan: Tip. Imperatorskogo Universiteta, 1879); Bakhtiyar Babajanov, ‘How Will We Appear in the Eyes of *inovertsy* and *inorodtsy*? Nikolai Ostroumov on the Image and Function of Russian Power’, *CAS* 33/2 (2014), 270–88.

⁵ M. I. Veniukov, ‘Postupatel’noe dvizhenie Rossii v Srednei Azii’, in *Sbornik Gosudarstvennykh Znaniy* III ed. V. P. Bezobrazov (St Pb.: Tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1877), 60; Marlène Laruelle, *Mythe aryenne et rêve impérial dans la Russie du XIXe siècle* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005), 138–9.

⁶ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Monarchy*. Vol. I. *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26–30, 42–51; Vol. II. *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6–15.

Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk – shaded into the lakes and pine forests of Siberia on their northern fringe. To their south lay the Turkestan governor-generalship, whose two northernmost provinces, Semirechie and Syr-Darya, also included much steppe country: in Semirechie this was bounded by the Ili river and the shallow waters of Lake Balkhash in the north, and by the snow-capped Tian-Shan range in the south, while in Syr-Darya the grassland and saxaul-studded scrub faded into the Qizil-Qum (Red Sands) south-east of the Aral Sea. All of this territory was inhabited primarily by nomadic or semi-nomadic Qazaqs, apart from scattered fortresses and small urban settlements with mixed Russian and Tatar populations. At the southern tip of Syr-Darya province lay Tashkent, the largest city of Central Asia and the administrative centre of the Turkestan governor-generalship. It sat on the threshold between the nomadic regions to the north – historically known as the *Dasht-i Qipchaq*, or ‘Plain of the Qipchaqs’ – and the irrigated basin between the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya, known by the Arabic name of *Ma wara’ al-nahr*, or ‘the land beyond the river’ – Transoxiana in English – where most of Central Asia’s historic cities were located. By the nineteenth century the most agriculturally rich region of the sedentary zone was the Fergana valley, core of the brash new khanate of Khoqand, whose population had probably overtaken that of the Zarafshan valley – with its ancient urban centres of Bukhara and Samarkand – in the late eighteenth century, as it grew rich on trade with Qing China.⁷ The third of the great agricultural oases of Central Asia was Khwarazm, a relatively isolated region in the delta of the Amu-Darya, south of the Aral Sea, alternating desert and marshland and centred on the city of Khiva. The settled oases of Central Asia were gentle landscapes of poplars and irrigation canals, intensively cultivated and managed as peasant smallholdings interspersed with compact villages and walled towns. Their inhabitants were known generically by the Russians as ‘Sarts’ – a term of disputed origin which by the late nineteenth century was used as a blanket label for the Turkic-speaking sedentary population of Central Asia.⁸ The ruling dynasties and elites of Bukhara, Khoqand and Khiva were Uzbeks, descended from a group of Qipchaq Turkic tribes which had migrated from the steppe to Transoxiana in the sixteenth century. In Khwarazm there were also Qaraqalpaqs (a settled people speaking a language similar to Qazaq) and Turkmens. These groups were all Turkic-speaking Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, but in Bukhara and Samarkand there were also significant numbers of Tajiks (i.e. Persian-speakers), Jews and *Iranis* (Shi’i

⁷ Scott Levi, *The Rise and Fall of Khoqand 1709–1876: Central Asia in the Global Age* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2017), 23; Laura Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: A Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand c. 1760–1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 184–209.

⁸ On the ‘Sart’ question see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 187–90; Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii: V poiskakh identichnosti* (St Pb.: Aleteia, 2007), 99–176.

Muslims, the descendants of Persian slaves). To the east of the Zarafshan and Ferghana valleys lay the great mountain massif of the Tian-Shan and Turkestan ranges, and ultimately the Pamir plateau and the Himalayas. These mountains were largely inhabited by Kyrgyz pastoralists, although some valleys along the upper Zarafshan and at the edges of the Pamir plateau had populations of sedentary agriculturalists, most of whom spoke dialects of Persian and followed the Isma'ili branch of Shi'i Islam. To the west, beyond the Amu-Darya and towards the Caspian, the Zarafshan and Khwarazm oases gave way to the harshness of the Qara-Qum (Black Sands), with cultivable areas along the Atrek and Murghab rivers and in the Akhal-Teke oasis at the foot of the Köpet Dag mountains, mostly populated by Turkmen.

The conquest of Central Asia presented the Russian empire with a vast, almost exclusively Muslim territory which, unlike earlier Asian conquests in Siberia, remained stubbornly 'alien' (*chuzhoi*) and turned out to be permanently unassimilable to the Russian 'core'. The military elite that conquered Central Asia also governed it for the fifty-odd years of Tsarist rule that preceded the revolutions of 1917, and fundamentally shaped its administration. This helped to ensure that until the fall of the Tsarist regime Central Asia would remain outside the main civic structures of the empire, and its very difference encouraged Russian statesmen to think of it as a colony analogous to French North Africa or British India – a colony which by the early twentieth century was subject to elaborate plans for economic exploitation and increased Russian settlement.⁹ In the Soviet period Russian colonialism would be replaced by an extraordinary experiment in nation-building, in which Central Asia once again represented the greatest challenge because of its perceived 'backwardness' and distance from European civilisational norms.¹⁰

⁹ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003), 140–5; Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865–1923* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); A. S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868–1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Willard Sunderland, 'The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was but Might Have Been', *SR* 69/1 (2010), 120–50; Alexander Morrison, 'Metropole, Colony and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire', *Kritika* 13/2 (2012), 327–64; Paolo Sartori, *Visions of Justice: Sharī'a and Cultural Change in Russian Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

¹⁰ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 125–81; Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (New York: Praeger, 2001); Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 160–86; Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006); Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Jeremy

Both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union would have been very different states without their Central Asian territories.

However, while its importance for the course of Russian history is beyond dispute, the conquest of Central Asia deserves also to be studied in its own right, not as an incidental outcome of the great power politics of the nineteenth century, or a minor appendage to the history of the Russian Empire. Its real significance is to be found in Central Asia itself, where its legacy was 130 years of Russian and Soviet rule, and an unequal political and cultural relationship with Russia which continues to this day. Understanding the course and consequences of the Russian conquest in and for Central Asia is at the heart of this book. The sources that can allow us to gain this understanding – both in Russian and in Central Asian languages – are almost embarrassingly abundant, though heavily skewed towards the Russian perspective. A brief glance at the bibliography will show that, even before former Soviet archives and manuscript collections were opened to foreign researchers after 1991, there was a huge amount of published material available – military memoirs, collections of documents, official histories, editions and translations of chronicles in Persian and Chaghatai.¹¹ Despite this, while there are excellent recent studies in English of the conquest of the Caucasus and Russian expansion in the Far East, the Russian conquest of Central Asia remains neglected and misunderstood.¹² There are no modern works which seek to explain its motives, processes and outcomes of the kind that we have for British and French conquests in Asia and Africa in the same period.¹³ There is nothing

Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 76–84; Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

- ¹¹ Two very useful Soviet-era guides to this material are L. M. Epifanova, *Rukopisnye istochniki po istorii Srednei Azii perioda prisoedineniya ee k Rossii* (Tashkent: Nauka, 1965) and L. G. Levteeva, *Prisoedinenie Srednei Azii k Rossii v memuarykh istochnikakh* (Tashkent: FAN, 1986).
- ¹² Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Russian Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994); V. O. Bobrovnikov, *Musul'mane Severnogo Kavkaza: Obychai, pravo, nasilie* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2002); Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).
- ¹³ Notably R. Robinson and J. Gallagher's classic study of the 'Scramble for Africa': *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Collins 1965). See also Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Randolph G. S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); John

comparable to Peter Perdue's magnificent account of the Qing dynasty's Inner Asian campaigns against the Junghars 100 years earlier.¹⁴ This is partly because, as Dominic Lieven has observed, the military and diplomatic history of the Russian empire have been thoroughly out of fashion for the past thirty years.¹⁵ It is also because, as discussed below, there have long been certain ready-made, facile explanations of why the conquest happened which historians have been happy to invoke unquestioningly without bothering to delve further. While there are some recent studies of specific episodes and campaigns, which will be referred to in the relevant chapters, the only works in English that attempt to understand the conquest of Central Asia as a whole were published in the 1960s and 1970s and are brief and outdated.¹⁶ David Mackenzie's biographical study of General Mikhail Grigor'evich Chernyaev (1828–1898) is perhaps the best of the existing scholarship, but is understandably focused on his principal protagonist, and is wedded to an explanation of the conquest as the outcome of disobedience which is in the end inadequate.¹⁷ With the exception of Robert Baumann and Alex Marshall, who concentrate on tactics, the conquest of Central Asia has been equally neglected by military historians.¹⁸ We have some books that offer a grand geopolitical perspective on Russian expansion, but they suffer from a lack of detailed local studies on which to base these generalisations, which leads to frequent errors and the casting of a retrospective smoothness and rationality over Russian actions

Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *EHR* 112 (1997), 614–42; Michael H. Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India 1757–1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of the Sahara* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984); A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁴ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Dominic Lieven, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of Russia* ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), II, 3.

¹⁶ In particular the articles in Alexander Morrison (ed.), *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia*. Special Issue of *CAS* 33/2 (2014); H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, 'Systematic Conquest, 1865 to 1884', in *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* ed. Edward Allworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 131–50; Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva 1865–1924* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1–45.

¹⁷ David MacKenzie, 'Expansion in Central Asia: St Petersburg vs. the Turkestan Generals (1863–1866)', *Canadian Slavic Studies* 3/2 (1969), 286–311 and *The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of General M. G. Cherniaev* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1974).

¹⁸ Robert F. Baumann, 'The Conquest of Central Asia', in *Russian–Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan*. Leavenworth papers No. 20 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 49–115; Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 46–66; Bruce Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army 1861–1914* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 12.

which is often deeply misleading.¹⁹ The closest equivalent to a holistic explanation for Russian imperialism as comprehensive as Cain and Hopkins's 'Gentlemanly Capitalism' thesis for the expansion of the British Empire is Dietrich Geyer's pioneering analysis of the interaction of Russian domestic and foreign policy from the 1860s, but unlike the former work, which has sparked more than three decades of intense debate and revision, Geyer's arguments have produced little in the way of engagement or response – and his book does not cover the period of Russian expansion in Central Asia before 1860 in any case.²⁰

Virtually all of the scanty Anglophone historiography tends to concentrate on the fall of Tashkent in 1865 and the campaigns which followed it, not least because this coincided (and it was no more than a coincidence) with the global cotton famine during the American Civil War which supposedly provided the main spur for the Russian conquest.²¹ Tashkent is almost 1,000 miles to the south of Orenburg and Omsk, the centres of Russian power in the northern steppe at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. How did the Russians come to be in the city's vicinity by the 1860s? How did the vast expanse of the Qazaq steppe come to be conquered?²² In fact the Russian empire had been pursuing an aggressive and expansionist policy in Central Asia since the late 1830s, and the most crucial stages of the Russian advance – from Orenburg to the Syr-Darya in the west, and from Omsk and Semipalatinsk across the Ili River into Semirechie in the east – took place in the 1840s and 1850s. Tashkent's capture was only the culmination of an advance which began twenty-five years earlier, and which would probably have been completed much sooner had the Crimean War not intervened. Whilst understanding the long-term thinking behind the annexation of Tashkent, the first major city taken by the Russians in the settled regions of Central Asia, is obviously important, as is understanding the reasons why the advance continued so relentlessly thereafter, the original motives which launched Russia on the path of conquest have to be sought in an

¹⁹ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia 1600–1914* (Toronto: the Free Press, 1992), 289–92; J. P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); John P. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650–1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 395–415.

²⁰ P. J. Cain & A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688–1914* (London: Longmans, 1990); Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy 1860–1914* trans. Bruce Little (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987).

²¹ LeDonne, indeed, claims that the conquest of Central Asia began in 1864: *Grand Strategy*, 235.

²² The only study of this in English is Janet Kilian, 'Allies and Adversaries: The Russian Conquest of the Kazakh Steppe' (Ph.D. Dissertation, The George Washington University, 2013).

earlier period. The men who took the crucial decisions that began the Russian conquest of Central Asia were not the ‘disobedient’ generals of the 1860s, but the generation of statesmen and soldiers that came of age during the war against Napoleon, something explored in Chapter 1.

The literature in Russian on the conquest is much more extensive, but – as we will see – most of it is distorted by the Soviet insistence that imperialism was primarily driven by economic motives, and some recent publications are marked by unapologetic jingoism.²³ Writing from the Tsarist period is often of much higher quality, but inevitably compromised by its proximity to events, and by the need to construct an appropriately heroic narrative: much of it, indeed, was produced under the direct sponsorship of the War Ministry. This is the case for the only previous history of the Russian conquest of Central Asia worthy of the name, that of General Mikhail Afrikanovich Terent’ev (1837–1909), whose opening line provides the epigraph for this introduction.²⁴ Terent’ev’s book is in many ways an astonishing achievement. He spent over thirty years researching and writing it, beginning it as a young man serving under the first Turkestan Governor-General, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (1818–1882), who commissioned it from him in 1871. Its eventual publication in three volumes in 1906 came thanks to the support of War Minister General Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin (1848–1925), another *Turkestanets* (old Turkestan hand).²⁵ Terent’ev’s is the only truly comprehensive history of the conquest, beginning with the winter invasion of Khiva in 1839–40, and culminating with the Anglo-Russian agreement to divide the Pamirs in 1895. It deals exhaustively with the decision-making behind Russian campaigns, their planning and organisation, and the many foibles and flaws of the personalities involved. It provides vivid descriptions of battles, marches through steppe and desert, triumphs and tragedies of Russian arms in Central Asia. Terent’ev knew most of the principal actors on the Russian side personally, and many of his insights are based on conversations, mess gossip and what we would now call oral history, though he was also an assiduous archival researcher. As I worked through piles of correspondence, campaign diaries and memoranda in the reading room of the Military-Historical Archive in Moscow (formerly that of the Tsarist Ministry of War), I frequently had the distinct sense that Terent’ev had been there before me – never more vividly than when, after congratulating myself on finding the Chaghatai original of a remarkable letter of defiance from a Kyrgyz leader called ‘Abdullah Bek to General Mikhail Dmitr’evich Skobelev (1843–1882), I opened

²³ For example Evgenii Glushchenko, *Rossiia v Srednei Azii: Zavoevaniya i preobrazovaniya* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010).

²⁴ M. A. Terent’ev, *Istoriya zavoevaniya Srednei Azii s kartami i planami* (St Pb.: Tip. A. V. Komarova, 1906) 3 vols.

²⁵ On this and other aspects of the Tsarist military historiography of the conquest, see Alexander Morrison, ‘The ‘Turkestan Generals’ and Russian Military History’, *War in History* 26/2 (2019), 153–84.

the relevant chapter of Terent'ev to find that he had clearly read exactly the same file and had included the Russian translation of the letter in his history (see Chapter 8).²⁶ I will refer to Terent'ev throughout this book, and there will be times when I rely on him for details that might once have been part of the common lore of the *Turkestantsy*, but which are now only available in Terent'ev's *History*. Nevertheless, it is high time his work was superseded. Terent'ev was a participant in the campaigns of conquest himself, and did not even pretend to emotional detachment from the events he described. To the usual prejudices and beliefs of a Russian officer of his day he added violent prejudices against the British – often blamed for their aggression and Machiavellian manoeuvring in a manner highly reminiscent of later Soviet historiography; against officers of German descent (including his erstwhile patron, von Kaufman); and against officers of the Caucasian corps. This led him, for instance, to excoriate von Kaufman's massacre of the Yomud Turkmen after the conquest of Khiva in 1873 (Chapter 7), but to turn a blind eye to the equally brutal and unnecessary violence committed by Skobelev against unarmed civilians during the Ferghana campaign of 1875–6 – indeed Skobelev was one of the all-Russian heroes of Terent'ev's narrative: the verdict on him in this book is very different.²⁷ Terent'ev had little interest in Russia's Central Asian opponents, apart from occasional unflattering character sketches of rulers such as Khudoyar Khan of Khoqand or Amir Sayyid Muzaffar of Bukhara. The 'natives' are described in his work using the usual tropes of his day – as savage, untrustworthy and often cowardly. He was almost entirely blind to the reliance of the Russians on Qazaq auxiliaries as guides, and as suppliers of the camels without which the Russian conquest would never even have begun. Above all Terent'ev was not really able to explain *why* the Russians conquered Central Asia – he made occasional references to the intransigence of Central Asian rulers and the aggression of the British, but was really too wholeheartedly wrapped up in the details of his story and settling scores with his enemies to spend much time analysing motives, or the unspoken assumptions that underpinned Russian policy. The chief of these assumptions was perhaps the most significant – that conquering and subduing your weaker neighbours was simply what was expected of a Great Power – especially when those neighbours were as turbulent and insolent as those in Central Asia. This is a theme I will return to.

To outside observers at the time the motivation for the conquest seemed quite clear. The British saw it as the pre-eminent example of Russian

²⁶ Terent'ev, *Istoriya zavoevaniya*, II, 418.

²⁷ Terent'ev, *Istoriya zavoevaniya* II, 267–279, 405–10. For an unadulterated hagiography (designed to stimulate patriotic feelings during the First World War) see E. Tolbukhov, 'Skobelev v Turkestane (1869–1877 g.)', *IV* (1916) No. 10, pp. 107–32; No. 11, pp. 369–403; No. 12, pp. 638–67. More broadly on the posthumous cult of Skobelev see Hans Rogger, 'The Skobelev Phenomenon: The Hero and his Worship', *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 9 (1976), 46–7.

aggression and territorial acquisitiveness, directed primarily at their own empire in India.²⁸ Later Soviet historians believed (or were forced to argue) that it was economically motivated, fuelled by a desire for captive markets and secure sources of raw materials. Both of these are misconceptions. Russian motives were rarely constant, and did not rest on any kind of ‘grand strategy’, whether political or economic. One great merit of Terent’ev’s history was that he focused mainly on Russian relations with Central Asian rulers and peoples. He was not in thrall to any of the grand narratives that have consistently blighted most attempts to write about the subject, of which the most infuriatingly persistent is the ‘Great Game’.

I.1 The ‘Great Game’

We all began to explain the Central Asian question off-hand, flinging army corps from the Helmund to Kashmir with more than Russian recklessness.

Rudyard Kipling ‘A Conference of the Powers’ (1890)

Russia was too big and was pointing in the direction of India

W. C. Sellar & R. J. Yeatman *1066 & All That* (1933)

Kipling’s Anglo-Indian short story and Sellar and Yeatman’s brilliant satire on the teaching of British history were written for very different purposes more than forty years apart, but between them they illustrate the enduring hold which the ‘Great Game’ between Britain and Russia has had on the way English-speakers view Central Asia and its history.²⁹ The most potent of historical clichés, this imagined nineteenth-century Cold War has spawned an entire school of historical writing based on the same narrow group of (mostly published) English-language sources, and consisting largely of a series of anecdotes of adventure and derring-do by heavily moustachioed officers and explorers against a picturesque but badly drawn Central Asian backdrop.³⁰ There is a more scholarly tradition which explores the foreign policy of British

²⁸ Rob Johnson, ‘“Russians at the Gates of India”: Planning the Strategic Defence of India, 1884–1899’, *JMH* 67 (2003), 697–743; M. E. Yapp, ‘British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India’, *MAS* 21/4 (1987), 647–65.

²⁹ Portions of this and the following section were first published in Alexander Morrison, ‘Introduction: Killing the Cotton Canard and Getting Rid of the Great Game: Rewriting the Russian Conquest of Central Asia, 1814–1895’, *CAS* 33/2 (2014), 131–42 and reappear here by kind permission of the publisher.

³⁰ The best-known of these is Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: John Murray, 1990), but see also Karl Meyer & Shareen Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Asia* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999); Rob Johnson, *Spying for Empire: The Great Game in Central and South Asia 1757–1947* (London: Greenhill, 2006); John Ure, *Shooting Leave: Spying out Central Asia in the Great Game* (London: Constable, 2010).