

3. The Amu-Darya Department and Fort Petro-Aleksandrovsk

The pioneering Scottish lady-traveler Isabella Robertson Christie in her *Through Khiva to Golden Samarkand* describes how, in the course of her travels, she found herself on a paddle steamer from Charjui with Colonel Lykoshin, who was travelling along his wife Elena Aleksandrova to take up his new appointment at the ADO. The journey took six days, and deposited the travelers upon arrival at the landing stage on the right bank of the Amu-Darya on 13 April 1912.⁶³ From the deck of the boat, Lykoshin would have been able to see to portside the Khivan khan's realm, while to starboard – in the middle of the flat, heat-baked landscape, some five or six miles from the landing, lay Fort Petro-Aleksandrovsk, the logistic center of the Amu-Darya Department, and his residence for the years to come. This small, fortified town was erected in August 1873 within walking distance of the river crossing over the Amu-Darya, and in the vicinity of the principal political and economic centers of the Khivan Khanate – the cities of Khanqah, Hazarasp, New Urgench and the capital – Khiva.

From the river station Lykoshin along with his wife and maid, as reported by Christie, were met by “[t]wo amazing carriages [that] dashed up with three mounted guards” and took them off to Petro-Aleksandrovsk.⁶⁴ Boris Cheprunov, a native of this town, and in later decades a popular Soviet writer, gives an eloquent description of the fort, which allows us to imagine how Petro-Aleksandrovsk may have appeared before the eyes of the newly arrived Lykoshin:

A few hundred miles away from the place where the railway traverses the Amu-Darya, there is a city that bears the names of two tsars – Peter the Great and Alexander II – Petro-Aleksandrovsk. It appeared on the ruins of the old Khivan fortress

⁶³ Ella R. Christie, *Through Khiva to Golden Samarkand. The Remarkable Story of a Woman's Adventurous Journey Alone Through the Deserts of Central Asia to the Heart of Turkestan* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Limited, 1925), pp. 54–61.

⁶⁴ Christie, *Through Khiva to Golden Samarkand*, p. 62.

of Turtkul. In the heart of the city is the church, on the site of the ancient Muslim cemetery. From the church the streets scatter off in a fan-like shape; along the streets behind shady alleys, in the middle of tangled gardens, hide the houses of officials, officers, merchants, governmental premises, and barrack-blocks.

The outskirts of the city look like a piece of the old Urals: without a shadow of the trees there are huts with low windows and with willow wattle fences; at the gates there are the *zavalinkas*⁶⁵ densely sprinkled with sunflower husks and *chebak*⁶⁶ skins. This is a settlement of the stocky sectarians from the Urals – descendants of recalcitrant Cossacks exiled by Alexander II to populate this new region ...⁶⁷

Next to the church is a stone house, from which the generals of the Russian army ruled over the Khanate beyond the river, for forty-five years. [...] It was from this place that they used to send regiments to pacify the recalcitrant tributaries of the Khan: Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, and Turkmens.⁶⁸

The Amu-Darya Department (ADO) was established in August 1873, shortly after Russian troops marched through the city of Khiva on 29 May 1873. This new administrative unit comprised the former territories of the Khanate that were located on the right bank of the lower delta of the Amu-Darya and were annexed, under the terms of the

⁶⁵ *Zavalinka* – a small mound of earth along the outer walls of rural houses in Russia.

⁶⁶ *Chebak* – the Russian colloquial designation of a rutilus roach, a brackish-water fish, large numbers of which were to be found in the lower reaches of the Amu-Darya.

⁶⁷ For more on the community of the exiled Ural Cossacks in the ADO, see *infra*: pp. 30–31, and also fn. 81.

⁶⁸ B. Cheprunov, *Djunaid-khan* (Nukus: Karakalpakstan, 1965), pp. 55–56. A.N. Samoilovich who visited the city in 1908, also mentioned the presence of two libraries in the town, see his “Kratkii otchet o poezdke v Tashkent i Bukharu i v Khivinskoe khanstvo”, p. 4.

Gandemian Treaty (signed on 12 August 1873), in favor of the empire.⁶⁹ On 15 August 1873, just a few days after the peace treaty was formalized, the commander of the Russian troops and the first Governor-General of Turkestan General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (off.: 1867–1882) undertook in person a reconnaissance along the right bank of the Amu-Darya, so as to establish where the new fort should be sited. The eyes of the Turkestan Governor-General seem to have been caught by a spacious garden belonging to the Khivan courtier Mat-Niyāz Divānbīgī, located less than ten miles from the river crossing at the Khivan city of Khanqah and some four miles from the settlement of Shurakhan.⁷⁰ Following subsequent negotiations with the Khivan authorities, the Divānbīgī's garden was handed over to the Russian authorities for the needs of the new fortification. “[U]pon the proposal of the Prince of Leuchtenberg”,⁷¹ it was furthermore agreed that the new town, which would henceforth be the center of the Amu-Darya Department, should take the name *Petro-Aleksandrovsk* “in memory of the Russian Emperors Peter I and Alexander II.”⁷² A few days later, on 26 August 1873, on the same spot, in the bivouac next to the newly designed town, von Kaufman signed the Provisional Regulations on the Administration of the Amu-Darya District (*Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii Amudar’inskim okrugom*).⁷³

In the following year however, the new territorial entity would be renamed as the Amu-Darya Department.⁷⁴ The structural configuration

⁶⁹ On the Gandemian Treaty and its conditions, see Becker, *Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia*, pp. 58–60.

⁷⁰ T.G. Tukhtametov, *Amudar’inskii otdel (Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe i politicheskoe znachenie dlia Khorezmskogo oazisa)* (Nukus: Karakalpakstan, 1977), p. 51.

⁷¹ Prince Evgenii Maksimilianovich Romanovskii, Herzog of Leuchtenberg was a grandson of the Russian Emperor Nicholas I. He participated in the Russian military invasion in the Khivan Khanate in 1873, see: Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia 1814–1907*, p. 311.

⁷² Driagin, *Doklad o revizii Amu-Dar’inskogo otdela, 15.09.1908*; O’zMA, f. I-1, op. 29, d. 1327, cited from Tukhtametov, *Amudar’inskii otdel*, p. 51.

⁷³ See “Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii Amu-Dar’inskim okrugom” *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* 321 (1873).

⁷⁴ K. Sarybaev, *Agrarnyi vopros v Karakalpakii (konets XIX – nachalo XX vekov)* (Nukus: Karakalpakstan, 1972), p. 29.

of the newly established territorial unity, as well as the remit of the ADO Commandant, over the subsequent years, would be regulated by the norms of the “Provisional Statute for the Administration of Turkestan” (*Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii Turkestanskim kraem*), as well as by numerous ordinances issued by the colonial authorities in Tashkent.⁷⁵

The new delimitation line between the ADO and the Khivan Khanate ran along the Amu-Darya up to its the westernmost tributary, the Taldiq. As a such, the territory of the ADO stretched from the edges of the Bukharan Emirate through the Aral Sea littoral. It was bounded to the north-east by the Perovsk and Kazalinsk Counties of the Syr-Darya Province, to the east by the Chimkent and Jizzakh Counties of the Samarkand Province, and to the southeast by the Emirate of Bukhara.⁷⁶

Administratively, the Department was subdivided into two sectors (sing.: *uchastok*): Shurakhan in the south (with its center in Petro-Aleksandrovsk) and Chimbay in the north (with its center in the village of Nukus). The sectors, in turn, were subdivided into *volosts*,⁷⁷ and the latter into two types of communities: either rural (*sel'skie obshchestva*) – in areas with settled populations, or *auls* (*aul'nye obshchestva*) – in those areas occupied by so-called “nomadic” groups.⁷⁸ In the early 1910s the entire population of the ADO was estimated at 218,956 inhabitants,⁷⁹ nearly 7,000 of them residing in Petro-Aleksandrovsk.⁸⁰ Of that figure, the “Russian

⁷⁵ Tukhtametov, *Amudar'inskii otdel*, pp. 55–56.

⁷⁶ Sarybaev, *Agrarnyi vopros v Karakalpakii*, p. 30; Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ Shurakhan sector consisted of six *volosts*, and further nine *volosts* were included in Chimbay sector, see Ia. Dosumov, *Ocherki istorii Kara-Kalpakskoi ASSR* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Tashkent: Akademiia nauk UzSSR, 1961, p. 148.

⁷⁸ V. Lobachevskii, *Voenno-statisticheskoe opisanie Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga. Khivinskii raion* (Tashkent: Tipo-litografiia shtaba Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga, 1912), p. 33.

⁷⁹ Lobachevskii, *Voenno-statisticheskoe opisanie*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ Ia. M. Dosumov, *Ocherki istorii Karakalpakskoi ASSR, 1917–1921* (Tashkent: Nauka, 1960), p. 38.

population” (leaving aside Russian troops) came to less than 1,5% (or 3,000 inhabitants). According to the Russian military authors’ estimations, the main parts of “the Russian population”, which included officials, city-dwellers, and former Ural settlers, were concentrated predominantly in Petro-Aleksandrovsk and Nukus.⁸¹ Interestingly, for surveying purposes the “Russian population” was also taken to include a number of Polish, Armenian and Jewish families, and a relatively large community of exiled Ural Cossacks.⁸² The representatives of the latter group resided in suburban village of Pervonachal’nii (located 16 *versts* from Petro-Aleksandrovsk), as well as in the villages of Nukus and Zair, located further north, in the lowest part of the Amu-Darya river.⁸³

Strictly speaking, the authority of the Commandant of ADO was no different from that of the ordinary heads of other districts in colonial Turkestan, like many of whom he was similarly subordinated to the Military Governor of the Syr-Darya Province.⁸⁴ However, the Department’s distance from the main centers of colonial administration and the weak state of the communicational infrastructure⁸⁵ meant that the head of the Department enjoyed significant *de facto* authority, and had direct dealings with the Governor-General of

⁸¹ Girshfel’d, and Galkin, *Voenno-statisticheskoe opisanie Khivinskogo oazisa*, pt. II, pp. 77–78.

⁸² Lobachevskii, *Voenno-statisticheskoe opisanie*, p. 61.

⁸³ On the origin of the Ural Cossacks and establishment of the settlement of Pervonachal’nyi, see: P.A. Shmachkov, “Pereselenie ural’tsev v Kara-Kalpakiiu (1875–1881 gg)” *Vestnik Karakalpakskogo filiala AN UzSSR* 2 (1960): 30–37. On the history of the Ural Cossacks’ resettlement in the Aral Sea region delta as well as their engagement in fisheries, see Niccolò Pianciola, “Cossaks and Sturgeons: Fisheries, Colonization, and Science around the Aral Sea (1873–1906)” *JESHO* 62 (2019), especially pp. 639–673.

⁸⁴ Tukhtametov, *Amudar’inskii otdel*, p. 64; *O vydelenii ADO iz sostava Syr-Dar’inskoi oblasti*, 03.03.1915; O’zMA, f. 1, op. 27, d. 429-a, l. 3.

⁸⁵ Suffice it to say that the nearest Russian urban centers – Charjui and Kazalinsk – were some 400 and 450 miles distant respectively. Furthermore, according to Lobachevskii, in both cases the roads ran through a barren desert, with limited access to water: see Lobachevskii, *Voenno-statisticheskoe opisanie*, p. 115.

Turkestan on a wide range of issues.⁸⁶ Most importantly, perhaps, the Commandant had personal responsibility for maintaining direct communication with the Khan of Khiva. As one Russian official put it in 1909, “not a single communication between the Khan and the [Turkestan] Governor-General could take place without the mediation of the Commandant of the Department;” the latter, he further noted, “conveys to the Governor-General the Khan’s respective requests, however more often than not with his own conclusions, which usually have a *determinative effect* [on subsequent actions]”.⁸⁷ Such powers doubtless played an important role in embellishing the authority of the Commandant of the ADO, both enabling and requiring him as they did to make independent decisions without consulting his seniors.

Upon his arrival to take up the office of Commandant of the ADO, Colonel Nil Lykoshin was immediately faced with two main sets of tasks: governing over the right or “Russian” side of the Amu-Darya, and “supervising” and “ensuring public calm” over the left side of the river, that is within the Khivan realm. As Nikolai von Rosenbach, Governor-General of Turkestan in the years 1884–1889, put it, the ADO Commandant’s responsibilities comprised first and foremost the consolidation of “Russian peaceful moral domination in Khiva and maintaining the charm (*obaianie*) of the Russian name among the native population of the Khanate.”⁸⁸ But Lykoshin quickly came to realize that while the course of life on the “Russian” side of the Amu-Darya revolved along established and predictable rhythms, maintaining control over the course of events in the neighboring Khanate was a far greater challenge, and one in which he found that he was heavily constrained. He was constrained both by the terms of his appointment, which prohibited him from directly interfering

⁸⁶ Becker, *Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia*, p. 64; Tukhtametov, *Amudar’inskii otdel*, p. 62.

⁸⁷ S.S. Voit, *Otnosheniia Turkestanskikh General-gubernatorov k Khive i Bukhare. 1909*; RGIA, f. 1396, op. 1, d. 33, l. 2.

⁸⁸ O’zMA, f. 11-c, op. 3, d. 828, l. 3, cited from Tukhtametov, *Amudar’inskii otdel*, p. 59.