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THE ROLE OF THE RAIM FORTRESS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RUSSIAN IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN THE SYR DARYA REGION

Abstract

This article examines the strategic significance of the Raim Fortress in the Russian Empire's expansion into the lower Syr Darya region during the mid-nineteenth century. The purpose of the article is a comprehensive criminal law and criminological analysis of the participation of citizens of Kazakhstan in foreign armed conflicts, identifying gaps and problems of legal regulation and law enforcement practice. The study aims to analyze the political and military motivations behind the construction of the fortress and to evaluate its role within the broader system of Russian imperial frontier policy in the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia. The research examines how the Russian administration sought to consolidate its authority in the Aral Sea region after the failure of direct military campaigns and the increasing instability along the imperial frontier. The study is based on the analysis of archival materials from several repositories, including the State Archive of the Orenburg, the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. The methodological framework of the research relies on the principles of historicism, systematic analysis, and comparative historical methods, which allow the Raim fortress to be examined within the wider network of Russian military-administrative fortifications in the steppe. The results demonstrate that the construction of the Raim Fortress in 1847 represented an important stage in the transformation of Russian frontier policy from episodic military campaigns toward the systematic establishment of fortified bases that combined military, administrative, and logistical functions. The fortress served not only as a defensive installation but also as a strategic center for controlling caravan trade routes and supporting further imperial expansion toward the interior regions of Central Asia.

The study concludes that the Raim Fortress played a crucial role in consolidating Russian influence in the Aral Sea region and in creating the infrastructural conditions necessary for subsequent military operations along the Syr Darya.

Keywords: Russian Empire, Raim Fortress, Syr Darya region, imperial frontier policy, Kazakh steppe, Central Asian khanates, military fortifications.

Introduction

The expansion of the Russian Empire into the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia during the first half of the nineteenth century constituted part of a broader process of imperial frontier formation and the consolidation of military-administrative control over the peripheral regions of Eurasia. For the imperial authorities in St. Petersburg, the Kazakh steppe represented a strategically significant zone that ensured the security of the empire's southern borders, enabled control over caravan trade routes, and provided a gateway for further political and military penetration into the states of Central Asia. From the early nineteenth century onward, the Russian government consistently sought to incorporate the territories of the Kazakh steppe into the imperial administrative system, treating the Kazakh zhuzes as formally subordinated political entities within the sphere of imperial influence.

In practice, however, the political situation within the steppe differed significantly from the expectations of the imperial administration. Kazakh society retained a complex socio-political structure based on tribal and clan affiliations, within which the influence of tribal elites and the military prestige of prominent batyrs often constrained the authority of khans and sultans. As a result, the mechanisms the Russian government used to govern the region frequently proved ineffective. The persistence of decentralized power structures within Kazakh society limited the capacity of imperial authorities to establish stable political control across the vast steppe territories.

Initially, the Russian administration attempted to manage the region indirectly through the institution of the khanate in the Junior Zhuz. It was assumed that the khans would serve as intermediaries between the imperial government and the nomadic population, ensuring political loyalty and maintaining order along the frontier. However, this model of governance soon revealed its limitations. A significant portion of Kazakh clans did not recognize the authority of the khans, while internal rivalries and competing political interests weakened centralized leadership within the khanate. Even after the abolition of the khanate system and the introduction of a new administrative structure based on sultan-rulers appointed under imperial supervision, the situation did not substantially improve. Despite the presence of Russian military garrisons and Cossack detachments along the frontier, imperial authorities struggled to exercise effective control over nomadic communities, frequently resorting to punitive expeditions deep into the steppe.

The situation was further complicated by active resistance from segments of the Kazakh elite and tribal leaders who opposed the expansion of Russian authority. Armed groups periodically attacked Russian frontier settlements and Kazakh clans aligned with the imperial administration. These activities were often supported by neighboring Central Asian polities, most notably the Khiva Khanate. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Khiva represented one of the principal political obstacles to the expansion of Russian influence in the territories of the Junior Zhuz and the Aral Sea region. The rulers of Khiva sought to preserve their political and economic influence among Kazakh tribes by encouraging resistance to Russian expansion and by utilizing the steppe as a buffer zone separating their domains from the advancing imperial frontier.

In an effort to resolve the problem of frontier instability and strengthen its position in the region, the Russian government organized a major military campaign against the Khiva Khanate in 1839-1840 under the authority of Nicholas I. However, the expedition failed, revealing the limitations of relying solely on direct military force in the vast, logistically challenging steppe. The campaign demonstrated the absence of reliable supply routes, communication lines, and permanent operational bases that were necessary to sustain military operations and ensure a stable imperial presence in the region [1].

In the aftermath of this failure, the Russian administration began to reconsider its expansion strategy in the steppe. A growing consensus emerged within military and governmental circles that long-term control over the region required the gradual establishment of a network of fortified military outposts. These installations were intended not only to serve as defensive structures but also to function as logistical bases for military operations, administrative centers for frontier governance, and checkpoints for regulating caravan trade and regional communications. By creating such fortified nodes, the empire aimed to consolidate its presence incrementally while extending its influence deeper into the steppe.

Within this strategic framework, the 1840s witnessed the construction of several new military fortifications in the interior of the Kazakh steppe, including the Irgiz and Turgai fortifications. These installations strengthened Russian control over key steppe routes and established intermediate bases between the Orenburg defensive line and the southern frontier regions. At the same time, imperial authorities increasingly recognized the strategic importance of advancing toward the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. Control over this region would provide access to the Aral Sea basin and create favorable conditions for further expansion toward the Central Asian khanates.

As a result, in 1847, the Russian government established a new military fortification at the mouth of the Syr Darya known as the Raim fortress. This installation became one of the most significant forward outposts of the Russian imperial frontier in the Aral Sea region. Its construction marked a transition toward a new stage in imperial policy, characterized by the systematic consolidation of military-administrative infrastructure designed to facilitate further territorial expansion.

Despite the significant role played by the Raim Fortress in the advance of the Russian Empire toward the lower reaches of the Syr Darya and the Aral Sea, this subject remains insufficiently explored in modern historiography. In pre-revolutionary Russian scholarship, the fortress was largely examined from a narrow military-strategic perspective. Authors of that period

primarily focused on operational aspects of frontier policy, logistical organization of military campaigns, and the tactical significance of fortifications in imperial expansion. As a result, the broader political, administrative, and socio-economic implications of the establishment of Raim received only limited attention.

During the Soviet period, the study of Russian expansion into the Kazakh steppe developed predominantly within the interpretative framework of Marxist historiography. Research was largely oriented toward the analysis of colonial exploitation, socio-economic transformations, and the resistance of local populations to imperial rule. Scholars such as Nikolai Khalfin and Vladimir Basin made important contributions to the study of nineteenth-century processes in the Kazakh steppe [2]. Their works significantly expanded the empirical base of research by introducing archival materials and analyzing socio-economic developments in the region. However, the primary emphasis of these studies remained on class relations, economic change, and anti-colonial movements, while the strategic role of specific military installations such as the Raim fortress was not analyzed in detail [3].

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, scholarly interest in the history of imperial expansion in Central Asia and the Kazakh steppe increased substantially. Post-Soviet historiography began to reassess many aspects of Russian colonial policy using broader methodological approaches and newly accessible archival sources. Researchers such as Mukhtar Abdirov and Serik Mashimbayev examined the mechanisms of military colonization and the institutional role played by Cossack forces in establishing imperial authority in the frontier regions [4]. Their works emphasized the structural mechanisms through which the Russian administration consolidated control over steppe territories, including the construction of military lines, the settlement of Cossack communities, and the gradual integration of local elites into imperial administrative structures [5].

At the same time, contemporary Western historiography has contributed important analytical perspectives on Russian imperial expansion in Central Asia. In particular, the works of Alexander Morrison have analyzed Russian expansion within the broader context of nineteenth-century imperial competition and frontier governance [6]. Such studies place the Russian advance into the Kazakh steppe within the wider geopolitical dynamics of Eurasian imperial rivalries and the transformation of borderlands into zones of administrative integration and military control.

A noteworthy contribution to the study of Raim and other early Russian fortifications in the region is the research conducted by Alexander Morrison, A. R. Sabitov, and E. Yu. Demidova, which focuses on the graphical reconstruction of two major Russian military fortifications of the nineteenth century in southern Kazakhstan, the Raim fortress and the Fort Verny [7]. The primary aim of this study is to reconstruct the physical appearance and architectural layout of these fortifications, whose original structures have largely disappeared due to the passage of time and modern urban development. According to the findings presented in this research, the Raim fortress, also known historically as the Aral fortification, was established in 1847 and became the first Russian stronghold on the Syr Darya. The fortress served not only as a military outpost but also as a major base for exploring the Aral Sea region. The reconstruction of the fortress was carried out using digital graphic modeling techniques developed by students of the Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering. The reconstruction relied on a combination of archival documentation, field investigations, and historical visual materials. The authors emphasize that this reconstruction represents an intermediate stage in the broader effort to reconstruct the material environment and settlement patterns of the region during the early phase of Russian colonial expansion.

Nevertheless, despite the growing body of research devoted to Russian imperial expansion in Central Asia, the role of the Raim fortress as a key element in the initial phase of Russian penetration toward the Syr Darya basin and the Aral Sea has not yet been comprehensively analyzed. A systematic examination of the political, military, and infrastructural significance of this fortress, therefore, remains an important task for contemporary historiography.

Against this background, the central research problem of the present article is to determine the strategic objectives that underpinned the construction of the Raim fortress and to evaluate its role in the formation of the Russian military-administrative system in the Syr Darya region.

Accordingly, the central research question of this study concerns the political and military objectives that motivated the construction of the Raim fortress and the role this fortification played in facilitating the establishment of Russian imperial control over the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. The article argues that the construction of the Raim fortress should not be interpreted merely as a defensive reaction to frontier instability or local resistance. Rather, it constituted an integral component of a broader imperial strategy aimed at the gradual penetration of Central Asia through the establishment of a network of military-administrative strongholds designed to control key communication routes across the steppe as well as the waterways of the Syr Darya and the Aral Sea. Within this strategic framework, the fortress functioned not only as a military installation but also as an operational base that enabled the consolidation of imperial authority in the Aral Sea region and created the logistical conditions for further expansion toward the Central Asian khanates.

This study aims to analyze the strategic preconditions, political motivations, and historical significance of the construction of the Raim fortress within the broader context of the Russian Empire's expansionist policy in the lower Syr Darya region during the mid-nineteenth century. In order to achieve this aim, the article examines the political situation in the Kazakh steppe and the Aral Sea region on the eve of the fortress's construction, explores the decision-making process within the imperial administration that led to the establishment of the stronghold, analyzes the military and strategic functions assigned to the Raim fortification within the system of Russian frontier defenses, and evaluates the reactions of the Kazakh population as well as neighboring Central Asian states to the emergence of this new imperial outpost.

The object of the research is the broader process of the expansion of Russian military-administrative control across the Kazakh steppe during the first half of the nineteenth century. The subject of the research is the construction and subsequent functioning of the Raim fortress as a key instrument of the imperial strategy aimed at consolidating control over the lower Syr Darya region.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in its comprehensive examination of the Raim fortress within the wider strategic framework of Russian imperial expansion into Central Asia. Drawing upon archival materials and contemporary historiographical debates, the article reinterprets the fortress not merely as a localized military structure but as a multifunctional military-administrative center that played a decisive role in establishing the Russian line of control in the Aral Sea region and in preparing the subsequent advance of the empire toward the interior of Central Asia.

Materials and methods of the research

The empirical foundation of the study is based on the systematic analysis of primary archival sources preserved in several major archival repositories. A significant portion of the materials used in this research was obtained from the State Archive of the Orenburg Region of the Russian Federation, which contains documentation related to the military administration of the Orenburg frontier. These records include reports on the settlement of Cossack populations in newly established fortresses along the Syr Darya, correspondence concerning frontier security, and documents describing conflicts involving Russian forces and the Central Asian polities of the nineteenth century.

Additional archival evidence was examined in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, particularly within Fund No. 715, which contains documents relating to the diplomatic and military activities of the Russian administration in Central Asia. These materials include reports concerning the Khiva campaign of 1839–1840 led by Vasily Perovsky, correspondence between Russian officials and Central Asian rulers, as well as administrative documentation concerning the planning and construction of frontier fortifications. The documents also provide important information regarding the impact of Russian military expansion on local tribal communities and regional political dynamics.

Important materials were also consulted in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Fund No. 4 contains extensive documentation related to the policies of the Orenburg General-Governorship, including military-administrative directives, reports of the Orenburg Border Commission, and documents reflecting both the internal administrative practices of the Russian frontier authorities and their interactions with neighboring Central Asian states such as the Khiva Khanate. These records offer valuable insights into the administrative mechanisms through which imperial authorities attempted to regulate political relations with the Kazakh steppe and to consolidate their authority in the region.

Furthermore, archival materials from Fund No. 383 were used to reconstruct aspects of the social and political life of the populations inhabiting the Syr Darya region. These documents contain ethnographic observations, administrative reports, and correspondence related to the local communities whose territories became incorporated into the expanding Russian frontier system. Taken together, these archival sources allow for a more nuanced reconstruction of the historical context surrounding the establishment of the Raim fortress and its role within the broader imperial strategy in Central Asia.

Methodologically, the research is grounded in the principles of historical analysis, including the principles of historicism, systematicity, and source criticism. The principle of historicism allows the examined events to be interpreted within the broader context of nineteenth-century imperial frontier policy. A systematic approach is employed to analyze the interconnected political, military, and administrative factors that shaped the construction and functioning of the Raim fortress. Comparative analysis is used to situate the fortress within the wider system of Russian frontier fortifications established across the Kazakh steppe during the same period.

Results and their discussion

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire consistently pursued a policy aimed at strengthening its political and administrative control over the Kazakh steppe. Imperial authorities regarded the territories inhabited by the Kazakhs as formally incorporated into the empire through earlier diplomatic arrangements concluded with steppe elites, particularly the rulers of the Junior Zhuz. In practice, however, the imperial government faced serious difficulties in establishing effective authority over the region. The nomadic structure of Kazakh society, the autonomy of individual clans, and the vast geographical space of the steppe significantly complicated administrative governance.

Initially, imperial policy relied on a system of indirect rule through the institution of Kazakh khans, who were expected to serve as intermediaries between the Russian administration and the nomadic communities of the steppe. Through these rulers, the empire sought to expand its influence into the interior regions and regulate relations among the various tribal groups. Nevertheless, this system proved unstable and only partially effective, as many clans did not fully recognize the authority of the khans and instead followed their own local leaders.

Even after the abolition of the khanate system in the early nineteenth century and its replacement by a new administrative structure based on sultans-rulers supported by the imperial administration, the situation remained complex. A considerable number of Kazakh clans of the Junior Zhuz continued to resist imperial authority despite the fact that the Russian government supported pro-imperial rulers by providing them with detachments of the Ural Cossack Host for punitive expeditions into the interior of the steppe. These military measures were intended to suppress opposition and consolidate imperial governance; however, their effectiveness remained limited due to the mobility of nomadic groups and the persistence of local political autonomy.

Resistance to imperial authority was also expressed through the activities of influential leaders of individual clans who rejected Russian domination. These groups periodically carried out raids on Russian frontier settlements as well as on Kazakh communities that had accepted imperial authority. Such actions were often encouraged or supported by the neighboring Khiva Khanate, which played an important role in the political dynamics of the region. The Khiva Khanate constituted one of the principal obstacles to the uninterrupted expansion of Russian power into the territories inhabited by the Aral Kazakhs of the Junior Zhuz, as it maintained political and economic influence over several steppe groups.

An attempt by the Russian government to resolve the problem of frontier security through direct military intervention was undertaken during the Khiva campaign of 1839-1840, organized under the command of Vasily Perovsky. Despite significant preparation, the expedition ended in failure, demonstrating the limitations of large-scale military operations in the steppe environment without the support of a stable logistical infrastructure and permanent military bases [8]. Nevertheless, the strategic objective of subordinating the Kazakh steppe remained unchanged. The imperial administration, therefore, concluded that the pacification of the steppe and the consolidation of imperial authority should be achieved through the gradual establishment of a network of military fortifications within the interior regions of the steppe.

In accordance with this strategy, the Russian government began to develop a system of frontier fortifications designed to perform several key functions, including military defense, administrative control, logistical support for further expansion, and supervision of caravan trade routes. Within this framework, plans were formulated to construct a number of fortified positions in the steppe. Among the earliest initiatives was the proposal to establish three fortifications in the regions of Irgiz, Turgay, and along the Temir River. These fortifications were intended to create a defensive line that would facilitate deeper military penetration into the steppe territories [9].

By the mid-1840s, the focus of the Russian administration had gradually shifted from the Khiva Khanate toward the Kokand Khanate. Internal political instability within the Kokand Khanate, characterized by prolonged civil conflicts, as well as military pressure from the Emirate of Bukhara, created favorable conditions for such a strategic reorientation. Analytical assessments conducted by imperial authorities indicated that the defensive capabilities of the Kokand Khanate were relatively weak, which encouraged the Russian government to consider more active military initiatives in the Syr Darya region.

In preparation for a possible military campaign, the imperial administration organized extensive topographical reconnaissance. On 10 January 1846, a reconnaissance expedition consisting of approximately two hundred Cossacks from the Ural Host was dispatched under the command of Captain Schultz, together with the military topographer Lemm. The expedition was tasked with surveying the lower reaches of the Syr Darya and identifying a suitable location for the construction of a fortress.

During this reconnaissance mission, Captain Schultz was assigned several important tasks. These included mapping the shortest routes from the Ural frontier fortifications to the Syr Darya region, determining an appropriate site for a new fortress in the lower reaches of the river, assessing the navigability of the river for transport vessels, and identifying territories suitable for the settlement of Cossack populations. The results of this reconnaissance significantly contributed to the preparation for the establishment of a permanent Russian military presence in the region [10].

Following the successful completion of this expedition, which provided valuable information about a region that had previously remained insufficiently explored by Russian authorities, the Orenburg governor-general Vasily Obruchev submitted a proposal to the imperial government advocating the construction of a fortress in the lower Syr Darya. In a confidential report addressed to the Minister of War in January 1847, Obruchev emphasized the strategic importance of this project. According to his assessment, the proposed fortress would enable imperial authorities to exercise control over approximately six thousand Kazakhs while simultaneously serving as an important link connecting the European regions of Russia, Western Siberia, the Kazakh steppe, and the Central Asian centers of Bukhara and Khiva [11].

Obruchev further argued that the establishment of the fortress would significantly strengthen Russian influence in Central Asia by creating a frontier position between the Kokand and Khiva khanates. In addition, it would enable the Russian administration to supervise the principal caravan trade routes leading toward Bukhara and Khiva, while simultaneously reducing the potential military threat posed by these neighboring states. This proposal clearly reflected the geopolitical ambitions of the imperial government and its intention to consolidate strategic control over the Syr Darya region for both political and economic purposes [12].

Even before Obruchev's proposal, similar ideas had already been expressed within the imperial administration. On 4 March 1840, the Minister of the Navy, Alexander Menshikov, advocated the construction of fortifications in the Syr Darya region as a means of securing Russian influence in Central Asia. Menshikov justified this initiative by referring to the broader geopolitical context, particularly the advance of British forces into Kabul and their growing proximity to Bukhara. In his view, the navigability of the Syr Darya created an opportunity for Russia to extend its influence along the river system toward the Amu Darya and potentially to the borders of Afghanistan [13].

This directive encouraged imperial military officials to elaborate plans for the creation of a chain of fortifications along the Syr Darya. The objectives of this policy were multifaceted. On the one hand, the empire sought to strengthen its authority over local Kazakh populations and consolidate control over the broader territories of the Junior Zhuz. On the other hand, the Russian government aimed to neutralize potential threats from neighboring Central Asian states such as Kokand, Khiva, and Bukhara while simultaneously expanding its influence over them. Control over the caravan trade routes passing through the region was also considered strategically important, as these routes represented key channels of economic and political influence.

Despite these strategic considerations, the proposal to construct a fortress in the lower Syr Darya generated considerable debate within the imperial administration. Several influential officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs Karl Nesselrode, the naval minister Menshikov, and the Orenburg governor-general Obruchev, expressed concerns regarding the possible consequences of such a project. In particular, they feared that the establishment of a new fortress might provoke hostility from neighboring Central Asian states and impose significant financial burdens on the imperial treasury.

In response to these concerns, the Russian emperor Nicholas I emphasized the importance of taking advantage of the favorable geopolitical circumstances. He warned that delaying the construction of the fortress could ultimately result in greater financial expenditures and strategic difficulties in the future. Consequently, the emperor ordered that the fortress be constructed in the summer of 1847 and allocated a budget of 71,327 rubles for the project. Plans were also made to station military specialists in the new fortress and to settle approximately fifty Cossack families from the Ural Host within its territory [14].

This imperial directive clearly reflected the strategic vision of the Russian government, which regarded the planned fortress as an important element in future military operations in Central Asia. The fortress, later known as the Raim Fortress, was therefore conceived not merely as a defensive installation but as a key instrument for expanding imperial influence in the Aral region.

Shortly before the construction of the fortress began in 1847, the imperial government attempted to reassure the authorities of the Khiva Khanate that the project was intended to strengthen peaceful relations. Russian officials referred to earlier diplomatic contacts and sought to avoid provoking a direct confrontation similar to the tensions that had preceded the Khiva campaign. As part of this diplomatic initiative, the imperial government planned to dispatch Colonel Ivanin of the General Staff to Khiva as a special envoy in order to prevent potential opposition to the construction of the fortress.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Russian fortification policy in the Syr Darya region occurred in a highly tense political environment. The local Kazakh population reacted with considerable hostility to the construction of imperial fortresses, perceiving them as instruments of colonial expansion. As a result, the imperial authorities were forced to postpone certain diplomatic initiatives, including the planned embassy mission.

At the same time, the construction of the Raim Fortress contributed to a noticeable deterioration in relations between the Russian Empire and the Khiva Khanate. The Khivan ruler Muhammad Amin Khan actively encouraged the Kazakhs of the Junior Zhuz to resist the construction of the fortress. In addition, he suspended trade relations with Russian merchants and conducted active propaganda among the steppe population aimed at opposing Russian expansion.

An examination of archival materials indicates that the Khiva Khanate deliberately supported the resistance movement of the Kazakhs inhabiting the Syr Darya region. Such support was motivated by the desire to prevent the further advance of Russian military forces toward Khivan territories. Evidence of this policy can be found in a confidential letter written by the Orenburg Governor-General Vasily Obruchev to the Minister of War on 6 May 1847. In this correspondence, Obruchev reported that several Kazakh communities wintering in the Kuandaria region had migrated toward the right bank of the Syr Darya and settled in the Karakum area. According to his report, these Kazakh groups began organizing armed detachments after receiving special instructions from the Khivan authorities to resist Russian troops should they appear along the Syr Darya.

Faced with the danger that anti-Russian resistance among the Kazakhs might expand, Obruchev attempted to contain the situation through a combination of political and administrative measures. One of the traditional methods employed by the imperial administration involved the distribution of privileges, rewards, and official recognition to influential Kazakh clan leaders who were willing to cooperate with Russian authorities. Through such measures, the tsarist administration sought to secure the loyalty of local elites and obtain their support for the construction of the fortress.

Nevertheless, the growing hostility among the Kazakh population compelled Obruchev to strengthen the composition of the military expedition assigned to construct the Raim fortress. According to archival records, the expedition included 9 staff officers, 100 senior officers, 332 non-commissioned officers, 5,985 soldiers, 756 irregular troops, and more than one thousand Bashkir auxiliaries [15]. The considerable size of this force reflects the level of concern within the imperial administration regarding potential resistance in the region.

The management of the fortress was entrusted to Lieutenant Colonel Erofeev, an experienced officer who had previously participated in several military campaigns. At the same time, Subhankulov, an adviser to the Orenburg Border Commission, was assigned the task of gathering detailed information about the Kazakh population of the Syr Darya region and establishing communication between local communities and the imperial administration. These administrative measures illustrate the broader colonial strategy of combining military control with intelligence gathering and political mediation.

Despite these efforts, resistance among the Kazakhs did not diminish and gradually escalated into open confrontation. Kazakh groups frequently attacked Russian merchants and supply convoys, refused to pay the so-called “smoke tax,” and in some cases migrated en masse toward Khivan territory. According to reports by Lieutenant General A. E. Tolmachev, several Kazakh clan leaders convened a council at which they resolved to resist Russian troops and attack Russian commercial caravans. To implement these decisions, prominent leaders such as Eset Kotibaruly and Zharas Otenov traveled to Bestamak to organize resistance [16].

Archival correspondence also indicates that figures such as Eset Kotibaruly and Zharas Oteuly played an active role in mobilizing Kazakh resistance against the colonial policies of the Russian Empire and opposed the advance of Russian forces toward the Aral region. The historian Vasily Grigoriev described Eset Kotibarov’s defiance, noting that he refused to provide camels for Russian military expeditions directed against Ak-Mechet Fortress. According to Grigoriev, Eset successfully avoided capture by Russian troops and spent several years moving across remote areas of the steppe beyond the reach of imperial authorities [17].

The uprising led by Eset Batyr was rooted in deeper structural causes associated with the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the expansion of imperial administrative control in the territories of the Junior Zhuz was accompanied by increasing military pressure, restrictions on traditional political institutions, and growing economic dependence on the imperial system. These processes significantly affected the traditional way of life of the Kazakh population and created conditions for widespread dissatisfaction and resistance [18].

Following the completion of the Raim fortress, further steps were taken to strengthen Russian military and logistical capabilities in the region. On 11 July 1847, in accordance with

directives issued by the imperial authorities, the vessels “Nikolay” and “Konstantin” were launched into the waters of the Aral Sea. Command of these ships was entrusted to Lieutenant Alexey Butakov, who later played an important role in the exploration of the Aral Sea.

Soon after the establishment of the fortress, military clashes occurred in the surrounding region. In early May 1848, the fortress was attacked by forces consisting of Khivan warriors and Kazakh fighters, resulting in the capture of several Russian soldiers. Later that month, approximately six hundred Khivan troops attacked a Russian detachment commanded by Ensign Yakovlev, which was stationed about sixty versts from the fortress. Despite the numerical superiority of the attackers, Yakovlev’s detachment successfully repelled seven successive assaults. When the Khivan forces learned that reinforcements were approaching, they withdrew.

Another attack occurred in August, when a combined force of approximately 1,500 Kazakhs and Khivans attempted to seize a supply convoy en route to the fortress. The convoy was guarded by a detachment under Military Sergeant Ivanov. Despite the limited size of his force, Ivanov, supported by Cossack soldiers and a single artillery piece, managed to repel the attackers and force them to retreat. During this engagement, the Khivan forces reportedly suffered around fifty casualties while capturing seven Cossack soldiers.

In 1849, the Khivan authorities attempted to resolve the escalating conflict through diplomatic channels. The Khiva Khan dispatched an embassy headed by Haji Mehrem Allaberdiev to the Russian administration in Orenburg. The envoy demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops and naval vessels stationed at Raim and Novo-Petrovsky Fort [19]. The Russian government, however, rejected these demands, arguing that the Kazakh populations of the region had long been under Russian sovereignty.

Instead of reducing its presence, the imperial administration considered expanding its naval capabilities in the Aral Sea region. Plans were made to construct additional vessels, including a new ship and a steam-powered barque intended for navigation along the Syr Darya. The deployment of such vessels had considerable political and strategic significance for the tsarist government, as it allowed the empire to strengthen its control over the Kazakh steppe by utilizing the river system as a logistical and military corridor.

In response, the Khiva Khan intensified his efforts to mobilize resistance within the Kazakh steppe. He continued to provide support to Kazakh groups opposing Russian expansion and encouraged further resistance against the advance of imperial forces along the Syr Darya. In one of his letters addressed to Kazakh leaders and warriors of the Junior Zhuz, the Khivan ruler declared his readiness to mobilize a large army and personally lead a campaign if necessary. At the same time, he called upon the Kazakh batyrs and clan leaders to unite, take up arms, and assist in resisting Russian expansion, promising recognition and rewards for those who participated in the struggle [20].

To prevent the advance of the tsarist army into their territories, representatives of the Khiva Khanate visited Kazakh settlements, urging local populations to initiate widespread uprisings against Russian forces. Simultaneously, Khivan troops, often allied with Kazakh rebels, intensified attacks on Russian reconnaissance units and villages under imperial influence. Prominent Kazakh leaders, including Eset Kotibaruly—highly regarded by Khiva—and other sultans opposed to Russian rule, circulated letters among the clans of the Junior Zhuz. When Cossacks led by Milyutin and Batyrashkin arrived to fish on the Tamdy River, a group of one hundred individuals led by Bukarbai Estekbayuly, son of Baikadam, and Suyindik ambushed them, killing two Cossacks and capturing the remaining three, who were taken to Kokand [21].

Leaders such as Eset Kotibaruly, Azbergen Munaytpasuly, and Zharas Oteuly not only disseminated letters advocating resistance but also actively participated in combat operations against the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, consistently opposing the advance of tsarist forces toward the Syr Darya region. Each step taken by the Russian Empire along the Syr Darya represented a broader strategy aimed at the eventual subjugation of the entire Kazakh steppe, which was central to imperial objectives in extending dominion over the Central Asian khanates, East Turkestan, and other Asian territories, while simultaneously undermining the interests of European rivals, particularly Great Britain. Consequently, the Kazakh steppe, and specifically the

Syr Darya region, became the most strategically significant area in the foreign policy calculus of the Russian Empire, prompting the tsarist administration to deploy extensive military, administrative, and logistical resources to achieve its objectives.

The construction of the Raim Fortress was a pivotal military initiative, granting Russian forces a strategic foothold within the territory of the Kokand Khanate and enabling operational conditions critical for the eventual capture of Akmesht, the most formidable Kokand stronghold along the Syr Darya. The strategic value of the fortress is explicitly highlighted in contemporary documentation: “A favorable period has come. The flotilla in the Aral Sea and the Raim fortress became the main point of attack against Akmesht” [22].

Both the Kokand and Khiva khanates, weakened by underdeveloped economies, limited military capabilities, and entrenched pre-modern political structures, were unable to resist the advances of the Russian Empire effectively. Persistent internal strife within the Kokand Khanate, coupled with uprisings by Turkmen and Karakalpak groups within the Khiva Khanate, and compounded by ongoing rivalries and conflicts among the Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand states, severely limited their capacity to organize a coordinated defense. The absence of mutual solidarity among these Central Asian khanates created a geopolitical environment conducive to the unhindered expansion of Tsarist forces into Central Asia via the Syr Darya region, facilitating Russia’s broader imperial objectives.

Conclusion

The construction of the Raim Fortress in 1847 represented a critical juncture in the Russian Empire’s strategic expansion into the Kazakh steppe and the lower Syr Darya region. Far from being a mere military outpost, the fortress functioned as a multifunctional instrument of imperial policy, integrating military, administrative, and logistical objectives. By establishing a permanent presence in the region, the Russian administration sought not only to secure control over local Kazakh clans of the Junior Zhuz but also to project power toward the Central Asian khanates of Kokand and Khiva, thereby shaping the geopolitical balance in the Aral Sea region.

Archival evidence demonstrates that the fortress served as a focal point for both coercive and integrative measures: it facilitated punitive expeditions, enabled the settlement of Cossack detachments, and provided a platform for monitoring trade routes, while simultaneously creating opportunities for diplomatic engagement with neighboring powers. The persistent resistance of local Kazakh leaders, often supported by Khiva, underscores the contested nature of Russian expansion and highlights the complex interplay of local agency and imperial ambition.

The strategic, political, and military significance of the Raim Fortress lies in its role as a linchpin of the Russian imperial frontier. It provided the infrastructure for subsequent campaigns, enabled the establishment of administrative networks, and ensured the gradual subjugation of the steppe, setting the stage for the integration of the region into the imperial economic and political system. By analyzing the Raim Fortress within the broader framework of Russian expansionist strategy, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of imperial consolidation in Central Asia, revealing the multifaceted mechanisms through which the Russian Empire extended its authority and navigated local and regional resistance.

Ultimately, the Raim Fortress exemplifies the combination of military foresight, administrative planning, and geopolitical calculation that characterized Russian policy in the mid-nineteenth century. Its construction and operation illuminate the processes by which frontier fortifications were not merely defensive installations but central instruments in the orchestration of imperial expansion, control, and influence across contested territories.

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СЫРДАРИЯ ӨңІРІНДЕ РЕСЕЙ ИМПЕРИЯСЫ БІЛГІНІҢ ОРНАУЫНДАҒЫ РАЙЫМ БЕКІНІСІНІҢ РӨЛІ

Андатпа

Мақалада XIX ғасырдың ортасында Ресей империясының Сырдарияның төменгі ағысы мен Арал маңы аймағына қарай кеңеюі контекстінде Райым бекінісінің стратегиялық маңызы қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты бекіністің салынуына негіз болған саяси және әскери алғышарттарды талдау және оның Ресей империясының қазақ даласы мен Орталық Азиядағы шекаралық саясаты жүйесіндегі рөлін анықтау. Зерттеуде империялық әкімшіліктің шекаралық тұрақсыздық жағдайында және тікелей әскери жорықтардың тиімсіздігі байқалғаннан кейін Арал өңірінде өз ықпалын нығайту үшін қандай стратегия қолданғаны қарастырылады. Зерттеудің деректік негізін Ресей Федерациясының Орынбор облыстық мемлекеттік мұрағаты, Өзбекстан Республикасының Орталық мемлекеттік мұрағаты және Қазақстан Республикасының Орталық мемлекеттік мұрағаты қорларында сақталған құжаттар құрайды. Зерттеу барысында тарихилық, жүйелілік, деректанулық талдау және салыстырмалы тарихи әдістер қолданылды. Бұл әдістер Райым бекінісін Ресей империясының қазақ даласында құрылған әскери-әкімшілік бекіністер жүйесінің құрамдас бөлігі ретінде кешенді түрде қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, 1847 жылы салынған Райым бекінісі Ресей империясының шекаралық саясатындағы маңызды кезеңді білдірді. Ол тек қорғаныс нысаны ғана емес, сонымен қатар әскери-әкімшілік орталық, логистикалық база және керуен сауда жолдарын бақылау пункті қызметін атқарды. Бекініс арқылы империялық әкімшілік Арал теңізі аймағында өз ықпалын күшейтіп, Сырдария бойымен әрі қарай әскери ілгерілеуге қолайлы жағдай қалыптастырды. Зерттеу қорытындысы бойынша Райым бекінісі Ресей империясының Арал өңірінде тұрақты әскери-әкімшілік инфрақұрылым қалыптастыруында маңызды рөл атқарып, кейінгі кезеңде Ақмешіт бекінісін басып алуға алғышарт жасағаны анықталды.

Негізгі сөздер: Ресей империясы, Райым бекінісі, Сырдария өңірі, отарлық саясат, қазақ даласы, Орталық Азия хандықтары, әскери бекіністер.

РОЛЬ РАИМСКОГО УКРЕПЛЕНИЯ В УСТАНОВЛЕНИИ ВЛАСТИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ В СЫРДАРЬИНСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается стратегическое значение Раимского укрепления в контексте продвижения Российской империи к нижнему течению Сырдарьи и в Приаральский регион в середине XIX века. Цель исследования заключается в анализе политических и военно-стратегических предпосылок строительства укрепления, а также в определении его роли в системе пограничной политики Российской империи в

казахской степи и Центральной Азии. В работе рассматривается проблема укрепления имперского контроля в регионе после неудачных военных кампаний и нарастающей нестабильности на южных рубежах империи. Источниковую базу исследования составляют архивные материалы Государственного архива Оренбургской области Российской Федерации, Центрального государственного архива Республики Узбекистан и Центрального государственного архива Республики Казахстан. Методологической основой исследования являются принципы историзма, системного анализа, источниковедческой критики и сравнительно-исторический метод, позволяющие рассматривать Раимское укрепление как элемент широкой сети военно-административных укреплений Российской империи в степных регионах. Результаты исследования показывают, что строительство Раимского укрепления в 1847 году стало важным этапом в трансформации пограничной политики Российской империи, переходе от эпизодических военных экспедиций к формированию устойчивой системы фортификаций, выполнявших военные, административные и логистические функции. Укрепление служило не только оборонительным пунктом, но и стратегическим центром контроля караванных торговых путей, наблюдения за деятельностью соседних центральноазиатских ханств и обеспечения дальнейшего продвижения империи вглубь Центральной Азии. В результате исследования установлено, что Раимское укрепление сыграло важную роль в укреплении позиций Российской империи в Приаралье и создании инфраструктурных условий для последующих военных операций вдоль Сырдарьи, включая продвижение к таким стратегическим объектам, как крепость Ак-Мечеть.

Ключевые слова: Российская империя, Раимское укрепление, Сырдарьинский регион, колониальная политика, казахская степь, центральноазиатские ханства, военные укрепления.

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