

**RUSSIAN AMBASSADORS AND EXPEDITIONS TO AFGHANISTAN
IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

In this article describes of Russian ambassadors and missions sent to Afghanistan in the 19th century, their geopolitical objectives in the region, the state structure of Afghanistan, its relationship with neighboring countries, the topography of Afghanistan, the economic political and social status, customs, traditions, way of life, diversity of nations, characteristic of this period. Reports in publishing by ambassadors and expedition of representatives reports, news, informations, about work of memoirs educates. The historical roots of trade, economic and political relations between Russia and Afghanistan will be explored.

Key words: Afghanistan, Afghan people, geopolitical, ambassadors - Bogdan Aslanov, I.V. Vitkevich, expeditions - N.V. Khanykov, N.G. Stoletov, N.I. Grodekov, L.G. Kornilov, Ahmadshah Durrani (1747-1773), Dost-Muhammadshah.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Research in Afghanistan has a long history in Russia. Research of this area has increased especially since the 19th century. Along with scientific research in Afghanistan, Russia and Great Britain also pursued their own political goals. The main purpose of almost all expeditions sent to Afghanistan in the 19th century was to study these areas from a geopolitical point of view, and for this reason, the researchers sent were mainly military orientalists. Nevertheless, the information they collected was of great interest from a historical point of view. In particular, the information about the geographical location of Afghanistan, the traditions of the Afghan people, the way of life, the diversity of the nationalities, and the social conditions obtained by Russian researchers is still invaluable today¹.

¹ А.А.Колесников, Г.С.Хараташвили. Россия и Афганистан. Миссии. Экспедиции. Путешествия. (Вторая половина XIX – начало XX вв.), – Санкт-Петербург, 2011. – С. 6.





It is worth noting that the reports, messages, information, memoirs published in the publication belonged to military researchers. British and Russian interest in the territory of Afghanistan was initially aimed at trade and economic purposes. It is known that trade, economic and political relations between Russia and Afghanistan date back to the 15th-16th centuries. Preliminary information about this can be found in the work of the medieval historian Abdurrazzaq Samarkandi. He stated that the Russian ambassadors arrived in the city of Herat, which was ruled by the Timurids, in 1464. Until the 18th century, Russia's interest in the region was mainly commercial and economic, and the main goal of many sent merchants was to find convenient and safe caravan routes to India through Afghanistan. From the time of Emperor Peter I (1689-1725), regular information about Afghanistan and the Afghan people began to be collected². This information is preserved in Russian archival documents of the 18th century. It should also be noted that the trade relations between Russia and Afghanistan were carried out mainly through merchants from Khiva and Bukhara.

In 1764, Russian army captain Bogdan Aslanov was sent to the palace of Ahmadshah Durrani (1747-1773), the founder of the Afghan state. He should have proposed to the ruler of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah, to establish diplomatic relations with the Russian state and to send an Afghan embassy to Petersburg. However, this was the first diplomatic relationship between the two countries. However, B. Aslanov's mission does not give the expected result³.

The Russian Empire tried to establish direct relations with Afghanistan in the 1930s and 1950s.

In the 19th century, the geographical structure, population, social conditions, and topography of the region became the object of great interest due to the rise of competition between Russia and England in the "Question of Central Asia".

On the other hand, I.V. Vitkevich, the first official ambassador of the Russian Empire in Kabul, actively worked in this regard. He worked as a translator at the Orenburg Border Commission. In 1836, Vitkevich was appointed senior adjutant of Perovsky. He was in Bukhara in 1835-1836 by the order of the Russian government⁴. In 1836-1837, he acted as an interpreter in the secret negotiations held in St. Petersburg with the ambassadors of the Afghan emir and the Russian

² Россия и Афганистан. – М., 1989. – С. 28.

³ Х.Г. Гуломов. Дипломатические отношения государств Средней Азии с Россией в XVIII - первой половине XIX века. – Ташкент, 2005, – 333 с.

⁴ Записки о Бухарском ханстве. (Отчеты П.И. Демезона и И.В. Виткевича), – М.: Наука, 1983.





government. In 1837, he was sent as a diplomatic mission to Afghanistan through Tiflis and Iran, and reached Kabul at the end of 1837⁵. He meets Alexander Burns, a British diplomat and spy who heads the British diplomatic mission in Kabul at the palace of the Afghan emir. Despite the resistance of A. Byrnes, he manages to sway Amir Dost-Muhammadshah in favor of Russia. However, Witkevich's successful negotiations in Kabul were interrupted by pressure from the British government. Unfortunately, the tsar's government recalled Vitkevich from Kabul due to the strained relations between the British and Russian governments, as a result of which he would not be able to complete the task assigned to him⁶. Soon after that, Great Britain started the first Anglo-Afghan war in order to dethrone Dost-Muhammad Shah, the emir of Afghanistan. At the heart of any expedition are hidden political goals. In 1841-1842, as a result of the uprising against the British government, the armed forces of the British Empire were defeated. Emir Dost-Muhammad, who was overthrown in 1839, returned to the throne of Kabul, and in 1855 he reached a peace treaty with the British government⁷. In the meantime, Russian researcher N.V. Khanykov will be in Afghanistan with the Khurasan scientific expedition in order to establish preliminary relations with Amir Dost-Muhammad along with scientific research⁸. It should be noted here that N.V. Khanykov had some experience as an active participant of the expedition organized to Bukhara. In particular, in 1840-1842, the mining engineer and diplomat KF Butenev came to Bukhara as part of the embassy and published his work as a product of the embassy trip⁹. As a result, a number of publications containing important information about the Bukhara Khanate were published by the participants of the embassy. The members of the expedition are botanist and doctor Professor A. Bunge (he is accompanied by his student Binert), geologist A. Goebel, geographer R. E. Lentz of the Petersburg Technical Institute, captain Ristori, E. Keyserling as an amateur tourist, as well as topographers Jarinov and Petrov. were also involved. This expedition is headed by Khanykov himself. The work of the expedition began directly from the date of March 23, 1858, from the port of Ashuradin, not far from the city of Astrobad. The expedition will continue unofficially until June 18, 1859, because N.V. Khanykov and A. Goebel will return

⁵ А.А.Колесников, Г.С.Хараташвили. Россия и Афганистан. Миссии. Экспедиции. Путешествия. (Вторая половина XIX – начало XX вв.). – Санкт-Петербург, 2011. – С. 45.

⁶ Ромодин В.А. Афганистан во второй половине XIX - начале XX века. Официальная история и историография. – М.: Наука, 1990. – 143 с.

⁷ Хидоятов Г.А. Британская экспансия в Средней Азии. (Пенде, март 1885 г.). – Ташкент: Фан, 1981. – 213 с.

⁸ А.А.Колесников, Г.С.Хараташвили. Россия и Афганистан. Миссии. Экспедиции. Путешествия. (Вторая половина XIX – начало XX вв.). – Санкт-Петербург, 2011. – С. 58.

⁹ Н.В.Ханыков. Описание Бухарского ханства. – СПб, 1843.





to their homeland on August 22 of this year, as they later conducted their research separately. N.V. Khanykov together with his colleagues will go from Astorbad to Mashhad and Herat via Sebzor and Nishapur, and then to the south in Seistan. It also goes to Tehran through the cities of Kermon, Isfahan, and Qom. Members of the expedition collected topographical data, botanical, zoological and geological collections. Also, 350,000 sq. km, explores more than 2,000 plant species, mountain structures. For the first time, N.V. Khanykov announced some of the materials collected by the Khurasan expedition at the conference of the Society of Geographers in Paris. After N.V. Khanykov, the remaining members of the expedition, namely A. Gobel and A. Bunge, processed the information they collected and gradually published it in various publications¹⁰.

Russia sent its mission to Kabul in 1878, taking advantage of British pressure on the Balkan issue and Afghan emir Sher Ali Khan's request for help against England from the Russian government in Tashkent. This mission is headed by General N.G. Stoletov. He was well versed in the culture, customs, painting styles, lifestyle of the peoples of the East, as well as the Persian language. N. G. Stoletov had to convince the Afghan emir that strengthening friendly relations with Russia is beneficial for his country and offer to establish a mutual alliance in a possible armed conflict with England.

On May 26, 1878, the members of the mission left Tashkent and arrived in Kabul on July 29 through Mazarisharif, Tashkurgan, Bamiyan and Kalu pass. Amir warmly welcomes the Russian mission. As a result of the visit, a draft Russian-Afghan agreement consisting of 11 points will be prepared. The document recognizes Afghanistan as a separate independent state. In addition, Sher Ali Khan is guaranteed that Russia will not interfere in the internal affairs of his country, in concluding bilateral agreements with other countries¹¹.

As a result of the mission, Stoletov and his companions make drawings of the roads traveled by the topographer Bendersky and their detailed description.

Stoletov and Dr. Yavorsky, who spent 11 days at the reception of the emir in Kabul, will leave for Tashkent. The remaining members of the mission remained in Afghanistan until 1879, when Yakub Khan came to the top of the government.

When N.G. Stoletov brought the contract draft to the tsarist government, the Berlin peace treaty had already been concluded, and the danger of war with

¹⁰ Россия и Афганистан. – М., 1989. – С. 88.

¹¹ Яворский И.Л. Путешествие русского посольства по Афганистану и Бухарскому ханству в 1878–1879 гг. Т.1-2. – СПб., 1882-1883.





Great Britain had appeared. The tsar's government does not ratify the Russo-Afghan treaty in order to prevent new conflicts in relations with the British.

Almost simultaneously with Stoletov's mission in 1878, Colonels Matveev and Grodekov's trip to northern Afghanistan begins.

Matveev's expedition left Samarkand on September 17, 1878. The expedition consisted of astronomer Schwartz, zoologist Rusov, proporshik Tortsy, two students, two more translators, a horseman and seven Cossacks, a total of 17 people¹². The purpose of the expedition was to explore and determine the shortest route from the borders of Russia to India. The expedition from Samarkand was supposed to go to Kulob and Badakhshan through Hisar, then to Hindikush along the Kokcha gorge and go to Chitral through Agram, Hartizak, Nuqsan pass, from there the expedition should descend to the Dir valley, go to Kabul through Jalalabad along the Kunar gorge, and then return back through Bamiyan. But thick snow in the mountains changed all plans.

On November 7, the expedition will be in Fayziabad, a large city in Afghan Badakhshan, then it will go down the Kunduz road, from there it will return to Samarkand through Tashkurgan and Mazori Sharif, crossing the Amudarya. The trip will last almost three months and will involve a lot of research. The expedition covers 1,500 miles and writes down the drawings of all the paths it has taken. Also, they study residential areas, the roads connecting them, 96 hills, exact geographical points of the cities of Fayziabad, Rustak, Kunduz, Tashkurgan, Mazari Sharif and collect rich ethnographic data¹³.

At the end of September 1878, Colonel N.I. Grodekov, accompanied by two people, left Tashkent for Samarkand. Mazari will arrive in Sharif in the middle of October. He will stay there for some time to get permission from the Afghan government to go to Herat. He will leave Mazar-e-Sharif through Maimana and arrive in Herat in early November. From there it goes to Khokhsan through the villages of Shekivan and Rozanak and returns to the Russian borders through Iran's Khurasan¹⁴.

During his trip, Grodekov gathers valuable information about the political situation in Afghanistan. Also, the information about Herat, Maimana, Mazari Sharif and other cities he visited consisted of information of different nature. Grodekov writes about this trip in the press, he provides information about the inhabitants of these cities, the number of inhabitants, the fortifications

¹² Матвеев — Поездка Генерального Штаба полковника Матвеева по Бухарским и Афганским владениям в феврале 1877 года. // Сборник географических, топографических и статистических материалов по Азии. – Вып. 5. – СПб., 1883.

¹³ Гродеков Н.И. Через Афганистан. Путевые заметки. – СПб., 1880.

¹⁴ Гродеков Н.И. Поездка Генерального Штаба полковника Гродекова из Самарканда через Герат и Афганистан (1878 г.) // СМА. – Вып. 5. – СПб., 1883.





surrounding the cities, ethnographic information about Afghans, that is, about the Khazars, Jamshids, about the peoples of the northwest of Afghanistan, about their paintings, customs, and traditions. The information he collected is still an important resource for researchers studying Afghanistan today.

In 1894, the officer of the general staff of the Russian army, L. G. Kornilov, traveled to the northern regions of Afghanistan for the purpose of intelligence work. Collects valuable military-tactical information during the trip. L. G. Kornilov submits the report of the results of the expedition organized to St. Petersburg University, which later serves as an important guide for politicians and diplomats¹⁵.

So, the Pedin crisis of 1885 had a significant impact on the forces in the international arena for a while, and the events of that time had a significant impact on the development of international relations in the 70s and 80s of the 19th century. As a result, two opposing blocs, the Entente and the Triple Alliance, were formed in Europe. As a result, in order to redistribute the world, the imperialist countries began to conquer the unoccupied territories.

Central Asia is considered an important geopolitical region, and Afghanistan occupied its main strategic point. But during this period, two large colonial powers were getting closer to the region. One is from the north, Russia, which has had mutual political and economic relations with the countries of Central Asia for several centuries, and by this time has decided its rule over the northern regions of Central Asia, and the other is from the south, which established its supremacy in the Indian subcontinent and systematically moved towards the north. England was on the rise. Undoubtedly, both of these colonial powers were trying to achieve the goal of gaining influence and establishing their rule in the region in order to gain access to new markets, sources of raw materials, and strategically favorable areas. Because of this, Anglo-Russian rivalry arose regarding this country, and it became one of the priorities of the system of international relations of the entire 19th century. The Anglo-Russian rivalry later got a new name: "The Great Game".

Many historical studies conducted in this area have shown that Afghanistan has long served as a bridge connecting Central Asia with India and Iran. This factor became important for the region and attracted the attention of the empires. Especially in the second half of the 19th century, Russia and Britain became more interested in Afghanistan from a geopolitical point of view. The reason for

¹⁵ Терентьев М.А. История завоевания Средней Азии. Т. 1, – СПб., 1906.





this was the fact that India, a British colony, borders Afghanistan, and the southern regions of Central Asia under the influence of the Russian Empire are also adjacent to the north of Afghanistan. More than the subterranean and surface wealth of the Afghan region, its location at an important strategic point attracted the attention of these empires. For this purpose, Britain and Russia sent many explorers to study this area. The sent researchers operated in the country under different guises. Their task was to collect information about the social, political and economic situation of Afghanistan. In particular, the Russian Empire sent its employees to Afghanistan several times with the task of studying the economic and political situation of the region, researching the caravan routes, determining the geographic latitudes of the necessary places, and also persuading the rulers of this country to establish political relations with Russia and to open their markets for Russian goods.

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