

BREAKING THE CHAINS: THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN CAPTIVES IN THE OCCUPATION AND ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN TURKESTAN

ZİNCİRLERİ KIRMAK: TÜRKİSTAN’IN İŞGALİ VE KÖLELİĞİN
KALDIRILMASINDA RUS ESİRLERİNİN ROLÜ

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Abstract

One of the most striking dimensions of the Russian Empire’s expansionist policies towards the Turkestan region was the discursive and strategic framework constructed around the practice of slavery. Throughout the long-term process extending from the 16th century to the late 19th century, the issue of Russian captives held in the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva consistently occupied a central position in the agenda of the Russians. However, diplomatic negotiations concerning prisoner exchanges or the release of captives largely failed, paving the way for Russia to activate military options. Russia’s military intervention in Turkestan was legitimized through a discourse that portrayed the Tsarist ideology and the imperial rhetoric of the period as committed to the abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, archival documents, travel accounts, and contemporary testimonies reveal that this discourse was largely based on political manipulation. Although slavery was officially abolished following the Russian domination of the Khanate of Khiva in 1873, it is evident that the slave trade and practices of captivity in the region continued for some time. For the khanates, the existence of Russian captives was not merely a matter of war booty; rather, it functioned as a strategic instrument providing negotiating superiority against Russia. This situation transformed the phenomenon of captivity from a mere economic activity into a crucial component of politics and diplomacy. On the other hand, for Russia, this issue was positioned at the very center of the argument of “humanitarian intervention” that justified its policy of conquest in Central Asia; yet in practice, it became clear that the primary motivation of this intervention did not go beyond the liberation of Russian captives. Russia did not aim for a profound transformation of the social and economic infrastructure of slavery in the region, a fact that became evident in its colonial practices. The role of the Turkmen groups in the slave trade constituted another complex dimension of this process. The entanglement of ethnic, sectarian, and economic factors in this structure not only shaped Russo-Turkestan relations but also formed an essential part of the internal dynamics between the khanates. Ultimately, the abolition of slavery in Turkestan was not so much the direct result of Russian intervention as it was the consequence of local resistance movements, internal rebellions, and broader processes of social transformation. The strategy of the Tsarist administration to present itself as a “liberator” was essentially a discursive construction that masked its imperial expansion. In this context, the question of slavery evolved into an ideological apparatus skillfully designed by Russia to legitimize its military and political expansion in Central Asia, becoming a striking example of the classical tension between imperial politics and humanitarian rhetoric.

Keywords: Russian captives, occupation of Turkestan, slave trade, diplomatic negotiations, imperial expansion

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Öz

Rus Çarlığı'nın Türkistan coğrafyasına yönelik yayılmacı politikalarının en dikkat çekici boyutlarından biri, bölgedeki kölelik pratiği üzerinden inşa edilen söylemsel ve stratejik çerçevedir. XVI. yüzyıldan XIX. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar süren bu uzun vadeli süreçte, özellikle Buhara ve Hive hanlıklarında tutulan Rus esirleri meselesi, Ruslar için daima öncelikli gündem maddelerinden biri olmuştur. Ancak esir değişimi ya da esirlerin serbest bırakılmasına dair yürütülen diplomatik müzakereler, büyük ölçüde başarısızlıkla sonuçlanmış ve bu durum Rusya'nın askerî seçenekleri devreye sokmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Rusya'nın Türkistan'a yönelik askerî müdahalesi, Çarlık ideolojisinin ve dönemin emperyal retoriğinin önemli bir söylem kaynağı olarak "köleliği ortadan kaldırma" vaadiyle meşrulaştırılmıştır. Ne var ki arşiv belgeleri, seyyah raporları ve dönemin tanıklıkları, bu söylemin büyük ölçüde bir siyasi manipülasyona dayandığını göstermektedir. 1873 yılında Hive Hanlığı'nın Rus hâkimiyetine girmesiyle kölelik resmî olarak yasaklanmış olsa da bölgedeki köle ticareti ve esaret uygulamalarının bir süre daha devam ettiği gözlenmiştir. Hanlıklar açısından Rus esirlerinin varlığı, yalnızca bir savaş ganimeti değil; aynı zamanda Rusya karşısında müzakere üstünlüğü sağlayan stratejik bir enstrümandı. Bu durum, esirlik olgusunu salt bir ekonomik faaliyet olmaktan çıkararak, siyasetin ve diplomasinin önemli bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Öte yandan, Rusya açısından bu mesele, Orta Asya'daki işgal politikasını meşrulaştıran "insani müdahale" argümanının merkezine yerleştirilmiş; fakat uygulamada bu müdahalenin temel motivasyonunun esir Rusların kurtarılmasından öteye geçmediği görülmüştür. Rusya'nın, köleliğin bölgedeki toplumsal ve iktisadi altyapısına dair köklü bir dönüşüm hedeflemediği, sömürge pratiğinde açıkça ortaya çıkmıştır. Türkmen grupların köle ticaretindeki rolü ise sürecin bir diğer karmaşık boyutunu teşkil etmektedir. Etnik, mezhepsel ve ekonomik faktörlerin iç içe geçtiği bu yapı, yalnızca Rus-Türkistan ilişkilerinin değil, hanlıklar arasındaki iç dinamiklerin de önemli bir parçasıdır. Son kertede, Türkistan'daki köleliğin sona ermesi, Rus müdahalesinin doğrudan bir sonucu olmaktan ziyade, yerel direniş hareketleri, iç isyanlar ve toplumsal dönüşümlerin birleşik etkisiyle gerçekleşmiştir. Çarlık yönetiminin kendisini bir "özgürleştirici" olarak sunma stratejisi, esasen emperyal yayılmacılığı perdeleyen bir söylem inşasıydı. Bu bağlamda, kölelik meselesi, Rusya'nın Orta Asya'daki askerî ve siyasi yayılımını meşrulaştırmak için ustalıkla kurgulanmış ideolojik bir aparata dönüşmüş; imparatorluk siyaseti ile insani retorik arasındaki klasik gerilimin çarpıcı bir örneği haline gelmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus esirleri, Türkistan'ın işgali, köle ticareti, diplomatik müzakereler, emperyal yayılmacılık

Introduction

The Russian Tsardom, following an expansionist policy toward the East, became a neighbour to the Turkestan region after conquering Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556). From this point onward, Russia intensified its diplomatic and commercial relations with the political entities in the region. Initially, the administration of Tsarist Russia, being rather unfamiliar with the geography of Turkestan, began dispatching diplomatic missions to the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, significant powers in Turkestan, in order to understand the region, and to explore methods of establishing trade and extending her influence. These newly initiated diplomatic contacts and the proximity of Russian settlements to Turkish-inhabited regions brought forth new issues for the Russians. Undoubtedly, the most significant of these issues was the situation of Russian captives who were taken prisoner on various occasions by the Turkestan Khanates. Thus, from the 16th century to the 19th century, investigating the conditions of these captives

and securing their release whenever possible always remained among the priority objectives assigned to the diplomatic missions dispatched by the Tsardom to the region.¹

As previously mentioned, the eastward expansion movement of the Tsarist Russia resulted in the conquest of Kazan, Astrakhan, and subsequently, the Khanate of Sibir. Thus, the borders of Russia extended to the Kazakh steppes from both the north and west. This situation increased the strategic importance of the Kazakh steppes for the administration in Moscow, which aimed to establish commercial and diplomatic relations with the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara, two political entities within Turkestan.² To express this more clearly and explicitly, the administration in Moscow, seeking to establish commercial connections within Turkestan and its periphery, had to traverse steppes that lacked central authority, were insecure, and politically chaotic and unstable during this period. Considering these conditions, establishing relations with Turkestan did not seem easy from Russia's perspective. Indeed, in 1573, a Russian diplomatic mission led by Tretyak Chebukov, dispatched to the Kazakh Khanate to enhance commercial relations, was captured by Mametkul, a subordinate of Küchüm Khan, the ruler of the Sibir Khanate.³ Similarly, in 1595, the Russian embassy led by Velyamin Stepanov encountered numerous difficulties when it reached Tevkil, the Kazakh Khan.⁴

In the diplomatic relations that the Russian Tsardom sought to establish with the Turkestan Khanates and their vicinity, two priorities stood out prominently: the recognition of the Tsardom's political authority by the Khanates and the discovery of new trade routes. However, there were additional problems arising from the unstable and insecure conditions of the steppe geography and its political climate. Among these, the issue that most troubled the Tsarist administration and led to political conflicts was undoubtedly that of the Russians captured in the Turkestan region. After Russia's Tsardom came into contact with the Turkestan steppes, interactions between Russians and the local Turkestan peoples grew significantly. Nevertheless, these interactions were characterized more by conflict than friendly relations. The Turkestan khanates captured many Russians and employed them as slave labor, either as a deliberate policy or due to actions by uncontrolled groups, for both skilled and unskilled tasks. Consequently, the administration in Moscow consistently tasked every diplomatic mission sent to explore, understand, and establish connections with the region by addressing the issue of Russian slaves and captives. Among the primary objectives assigned to these missions were determining the number of captives held in the khanates, assessing their living conditions, and, if possible, securing their release. As the Russian Tsardom extended its rule into Turkic-dominated lands, the presence of Russian captives in Turkestan's slave markets grew accordingly. Significant reasons behind this increase included the prominence of the slave trade among the nomadic Turkmens as a source of livelihood and

1 For detailed information, see. Mesut Karakulak, *Türkistan'da Efendiler ve Köleler*, Kronik Yayınları, İstanbul 2020.

2 Fatih Ünal, *Rus Emperyalizmine Karşı Stepte Büyük Başkaldırı, Sultan Kenesari*, İlgı Kültür Sanat Yayınevi, İstanbul 2010, s. 49.

3 Gerard Friderik Miller, *Opissanie Sibirskago Tsartsva, Kniga Pervaya*, Sanktpeterburg 1750, s. 129-145.

4 N. G. Apollonova, *Prisoedinenie Kazahstana k Rossii*, Akademii Nauk Kazahskoy, SSR, Alma-Ata 1948, s. 186.

the integration of slave labour into the steppe economy. Additionally, in response to the Russian Tsardom's efforts to impose its authority on the Turkestan khanates, the khanates began using captured Russian elites as diplomatic leverage against the Russian government. The direct correlation between the increasing political pressure exerted by Russia on the Khanates and the rising number of captives held by them supports this proposition.⁵

Between Diplomacy and Captivity: The Status of Russian Slaves in Turkestan

The enslavement and trade of Russian captives in the Turkestan Khanates became apparent in the 16th century and expanded further during the 17th century. In the 18th century, despite diplomatic delegations obtaining commitments from the Khans regarding the termination of the Russian slave trade, this commerce continued unabated. Even during the 19th century, when political relations had improved significantly and Russia had nearly established its authority in the region, the Russian slave trade could not be prevented⁶. This trade and the associated slave economy ceased only with the Russian occupation of Khiva in 1873.⁷

The first diplomatic contact between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan Khanates was established in 1558 by the English merchant Anthony Jenkinson, who was dispatched on behalf of Russia to Khiva and Bukhara. Jenkinson's primary reason for traveling to the Turkestan region was England's interest in exploring commercial opportunities there.⁸ As is well-known, during this period there was both commercial and military rapprochement between the administration in Moscow and the English. This rapprochement resulted in the establishment of a joint enterprise known as the Muscovy Company. Based on this cooperation, Jenkinson was dispatched to the Turkestan region as a representative of this company and acquired significant information regarding the geography of the area. Jenkinson, who was in Turkestan by the order of Tsar Ivan IV, provided information in the notes he kept throughout his diplomatic mission, not only on developing commercial relations but also concerning Russian captives in the region.⁹ The information provided by Jenkinson regarding the slaves sold in Turkestan markets is particularly significant. Upon examining the slaves in the Bukhara markets in 1558, the envoy noted that many were of Indian and Persian origin.¹⁰ In his observations in Bukhara, Jenkinson also mentions

5 Hamid Ziyaev, *Türkistan'da Rus Hâkimiyyetine Karşı Mücadele*, Ankara 2007, (dipnot) s. 68.

6 In contrast, some studies argue that although Russians were still being captured and enslaved in the early 18th century, such cases were gradually decreasing. For detailed information, see. Alessandro Stanziani, "The Architecture of Bondage: Slaves and Serfs in Central Asia and Russia", *Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*, Berghahn, New York 2016, p. 63-110.

7 In 1873, Eugene Schuyler, the American Consul General stationed in Bukhara, observed that, despite the prohibition of the slave trade mentioned in the previous section, it continued clandestinely, and he submitted a report regarding this matter to the Russian authorities. See. Schuyler, *Eugene, Türkistan, Batı Türkistan, Hokand, Buhara ve Kulca Seyahat Notları*, çev. Firdevs Çetin, Halil Çetin, Paradigma Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, s. 102-108.

8 V. V. Barthold, *Rusya ve Avrupa'da Oryantalizm*, çev. Kaya Bayraktar, Ayşe Mera, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, s. 171.

9 N.İ. Veselovskiy, *Oçerk İstorko-Geografiçeskikh Svedeniy o Hivinskom Hanstve ot Drevneyşih Vremen do Nastoyaşçego*, S. Petersburg 1877, s. 110-113.

10 Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and Other Englishmen, with Some*

Russian captives. The English merchant notes that Russian captives were mostly brought to the Turkestan region by Nogais and Bashkirs, adding that they had been captured in cities located in territories near the recently acquired Turkish regions of Russia. Moreover, some Russian captives had even been taken while working in fields or engaged in fishing.¹¹ Jenkinson, who also visited Kazan and Astrakhan during his travels, witnessed widespread poverty in the area, along with many people suffering from the plague. However, the issue that most drew the envoy's attention in this region was child slaves.¹² Returning to Moscow in 1559, accompanied by envoys from Bukhara and Khiva, Jenkinson managed to secure the release of 25 Russian captives in Turkestan and brought them back with him to Moscow.¹³ He does not provide information on how he located these captives or how much ransom he paid for them. Following Jenkinson, who offered no detailed account of this process representing the first diplomatic mission between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan Khanates no English representative visited the region for a long time.¹⁴

Beyond Jenkinson's account, there is little detailed information regarding Russian slaves in Turkestan during the 16th century. Starting from the 17th century, Russian official documents show an increase in information and correspondence regarding the issue of Russian captives. Only a small number of Russian captives were taken during warfare. The majority consisted of ordinary local people captured during raids by Kazakhs, Nogais, Bashkirs, and certain Turkmen groups living in the border regions of Russia. Therefore, Russian captives were not directly brought to the Turkestan Khanates. For instance, Martynko Ermolaev, who was captured by Crimean Tatars, was sold to a merchant from Bukhara just five days after his capture. Similarly, to gain a clearer picture of the journey of Russian slaves in Turkestan, the story of Trenogin, captured by Kalmyks, is particularly noteworthy. Trenogin was initially bought by merchants from Khiva, then entered the service of Abdulaziz Khan of Bukhara (1645-1681) for payment and was later presented by the Khan to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). After nine years of captivity in Mughal lands, Trenogin regained his freedom, returned to Bukhara, married another slave, and eventually returned to his homeland with the Khivan embassy delegation traveling to Moscow.¹⁵

Russian captives in Turkestan could be seen in every aspect of social life. Many captives were employed in agricultural fields, irrigation canal construction, building projects, and the care of livestock. Some captives were recruited into the service of the khanate to protect rulers and

Account of the First Intercourse of the English with Russia and Central Asia by way of the Caspian Sea, p. 89.

11 Audrey Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", *Post – Soviet Central Asia*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane, Tauris Academic Studies, Leiden, Amsterdam, p. 345-346.

12 Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and Other Englishmen, With Some Account of the First Intercourse of the English with Russia and Central Asia by way of the Caspian Sea*, p. 57.

13 Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and Other Englishmen, with Some Account of the First Intercourse of the English with Russia and Central Asia by way of the Caspian Sea*, p. 95.

14 V. V. Barthold, *Rusya ve Avrupa'da Oryantalizm*, çev. Kaya Bayraktar, Ayşe Mera, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, s. 171.

15 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 346.

high-ranking families. For instance, the close guards of Ubaydullah Khan II of Bukhara (1702-1711) consisted of Russian captives. Similarly, the guards of his successor, Abu'l-Fayz Khan (1711-1747), were composed of Russians and Kalmyks. Even Abu'l-Ghazi Khan's (1757-1785) close advisor was a Russian captive¹⁶.

Russian slaves in Turkestan were considered more valuable than other slaves due to their physical attributes and diligence.¹⁷ The ransom paid for them varied depending on the status of the captive, but on average, a Russian slave could gain their freedom for 70 rubles. This pricing also differed based on the personal skills of the captive. According to Meyendorf's 19th-century observations, the beauty of Russian female slaves also contributed to an increase in their ransom or sale price.¹⁸ Very few slaves were able to purchase their freedom. A slave needed to work for at least seven years to accumulate enough savings to pay the ransom. Many slaves obtained freedom upon the death of their owner. However, securing this freedom required permission either from the deceased owner's spouse or the Khan.¹⁹

Diplomatic Manoeuvres and Imperial Interests

In the 17th century, one of the key issues in the two-sided relations between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan khanates was the question of Russian captives. Numerous correspondences were exchanged between Tsarist officials and the rulers of the Turkestan khanates regarding the release of captives. In these letters, the Tsarist administration deliberately used the term "captive" instead of "slave." This conscious terminological choice underscored that the Moscow administration did not regard the Russians in the region as slaves, but rather saw their condition as temporary, emphasizing to the khanate rulers the urgency of their release. Early representatives, such as Jenkinson, who visited the region, were not officially assigned to handle the issue of captives. Therefore, detailed information about captive diplomacy between the Khanates and the Moscow administration from this period remains scarce.

Interestingly, the first captive diplomacy initiative between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan Khanates was initiated by the envoy of the Khan of Bukhara. At the beginning of the 17th century, Imam Quli Khan of Bukhara, economically weakened by conflicts with other Turkestan Khanates, dispatched his envoy Adem Beg to Moscow to enhance commercial relations with the Russian Tsardom in order to recover economically. This envoy from Turkestan congratulated Mikhail Fyodorovich (1613-1645), the first Tsar of the Romanov Dynasty, on behalf of Imam Quli Khan and delivered the Khan's letter to the Tsar. Besides requests to develop political, economic, and commercial relations, the letter notably contained appealing information

16 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 347.

17 Seda Yılmaz Vurgun, "XIX. Yüzyılda Türkistan'da Kölelik, Çapul ve Yağma", *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi*, XIV/1, (2014), s. 191.

18 Mayendorf, *A Journey from Orenburg to Bokhara in the Year 1820*, p. 61; Vambéry, *Sketches of Central Asia*, p. 213-214.

19 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 347.

about Russian captives. The Khan of Bukhara informed the Russian Tsar that THE Crimean and Nogai peoples had brought many Russian captives to Bukhara. He indicated that if the Tsar sent Russian representatives together with the Bukharan envoy in Moscow, these captives could be released.²⁰ Consequently, the Russian Tsardom decided to send Ivan Danilovich Khokhlov to Bukhara in 1620.²¹

It would be accurate to state that the first diplomatic engagement regarding Russian captives began with this embassy delegation. Until this point, the issue of captives had not been officially addressed in Turkestan-Russian relations. Despite Moscow's conquest of Turkic lands such as Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siber, even half a century after acquiring these territories, it had not fully established its authority over them. Consequently, Russian populations relocated from inner Russia to these regions were often captured by neighbouring Nogai, Bashkir, and Turkmen groups. Among these captives were ordinary Russians as well as military personnel skilled in firearms technology and even Russian nobles. Thus, bringing Russian soldiers and nobles back to Moscow was more significant than the local population. Captive soldiers were strategically important for the khanates in developing military tactics against the Russian Tsardom and in weapons manufacturing and usage. Russian nobles were critical both in terms of the empire's internal and external image and because wealthy boyar families provided economic support to the Tsardom during periods of crisis. Therefore, the proposal from the Khan of Bukhara appeared highly appealing to the Russian Tsardom. However, resolving the issue of Russian captives was not possible through this initial contact alone. Diplomatic missions between the parties continued for centuries. Ultimately, the matter that preoccupied the Moscow administration for centuries became one of the arguments justifying the Russian occupation of Turkestan.

To understand the captive diplomacy between the Turkestan khanates and the Moscow administration, it is necessary to examine the activities of the first Russian diplomatic mission in the region, as establishing contact with diplomatic delegations was extremely difficult during this period. This was certainly true for Ivan Danilovich Khokhlov. Initially commissioned by the Russian Tsardom, Khokhlov planned to travel from Astrakhan across the Caspian Sea into Khivan territory. However, after crossing the Caspian Sea, he entered territory controlled by Turkmen groups, marking the beginning of the difficult phase of his journey. The Turkmens, long known for their raids along the Caspian coast and frequent attacks on Russian villages, consistently supplied a significant number of captives to Turkestan slave markets over many years.²² The decision by the Russian diplomatic mission to take such a hazardous route toward Turkestan highlighted the Moscow administration's poor intelligence regarding both regional power dynamics and the methods by which Russian captives were seized. Demonstrating this intelligence failure, Khokhlov, who had gone to rescue captives in Turkestan, himself tragically

20 N.İ. Veselovskiy, *Ivan Daniloviç Hohlov*, S. Petersburg 1891, s. 59-60.

21 S. V. Jukovskiy, *Snoşeniya Rossii s Buharo i Hivo za Poslednee Trehsotletie*, Petrograd 1915, s. 15-16.

22 Vurgun, "XIX. Yüzyılda Türkistan'da Kölelik, Çapul ve Yağma", s. 181-182.

became a captive of the Turkmens. However, the delegation eventually managed to secure their release by paying a substantial bribe.²³

During his challenging journey, Khokhlov faced difficulties not only with the Turkmens. Although his main objective was to reach Bukhara, upon arriving in Khiva, he once again faced the danger of captivity. The diplomatic delegation barely escaped captivity in Khiva by paying large bribes. Eventually, after numerous misfortunes along the way, Khokhlov and his entourage managed to arrive in Bukhara²⁴. When Khokhlov reached Bukhara, Khan Imam Quli was in Samarkand, conducting a military campaign against the Kazakhs. After waiting for some time in Bukhara for the Khan, Khokhlov decided to head to Samarkand, eager to expedite negotiations regarding the Russian captives. The Khan warmly welcomed the Russian delegation at his Samarkand headquarters and received Khokhlov in his presence. During their initial meeting, adhering strictly to diplomatic protocol, the Russian envoy read the Tsar's letter to the Khan and conveyed his requests for an immediate resolution to the issue of Russian captives, a significant problem between the parties²⁵. Although the Khan of Bukhara had previously promised to release the captives through his envoy Adem Beg in Moscow, he demanded a high ransom from Khokhlov for their release. Despite Khokhlov's preparation and willingness to pay, the Khan informed him that the amount he offered would suffice to free only eight captives. Unable to successfully negotiate the issue of captives directly with Imam Quli Khan, Khokhlov consequently sought support from influential Bukharan officials who might persuade the Khan. Among these officials, the most prominent and influential was Nadir Bey, the Khan's uncle, who held the high-ranking position of *divanbegi*, effectively the second-in-command after the Khan himself.

In the instructions given to Khokhlov, priority was assigned to rescuing Russian captives from noble families or those who had served in the military. Additionally, the delegation was advised to keep the captives' high status from being disclosed to Bukharan officials, as that could cause ransom demands to escalate.²⁶ Indeed, during his initial meeting with Nadir Divanbegi, the Khan's uncle, Khokhlov emphasized the specific captive profile defined by the Tsarist administration rather than ordinary Russian captives. Aware that Bukharan officials accepted bribes, Khokhlov first offered Nadir Divanbegi six rubles, tanned leather, and valuable fabrics as gifts. Not particularly satisfied with these gifts, Nadir Divanbegi stated that only the captives serving the Khan could be released, provided they wished to leave. However, he also emphasized that the Russian captives actively serving in the Bukharan military were indispensable and thus could not be freed. As a result of these negotiations, Khokhlov secured the release of only 27 Russian captives. Due to the depletion of funds allocated by the Russian Tsardom for ransom,

23 Veselovskiy, *Ivan Danilovič Hohlov*, s. 62-65.

24 *Sbornik Knyazyia Hil'kova*, (1879) "Stateyniy Spisok Posolstva v Buhariyu Dvoryanina İvana Hohlova", S. Petersburg 1879, s. 398-400.

25 *Sbornik Knyazyia Hil'kova*, s. 400-402.

26 *Sbornik Knyazyia Hil'kova*, s. 427-30.

Khokhlov had to pay the ransom for 17 captives from his own resources. Notably, a ransom of 78 rubles was paid for two Russian soldiers, Feodor Velyaminov and Vasili Boltin. Khokhlov reported that some captives had married in Bukhara and had even forgotten their Russian names, and among those freed was an elderly, blind woman. Few diplomatic envoys sent before or after Khokhlov to negotiate the release of Russian captives in the Turkestan Khanates achieved comparable success²⁷. During his stay in Bukhara, Khokhlov also observed many details about the city and learned that Russian captives had been militarily employed by Bukhara in conflicts against the Kazakhs.²⁸

Following the ill-treatment, diplomatic improprieties, and hardships encountered by Khokhlov during his travels to Bukhara and Khiva, several diplomatic delegations were sent from Turkestan to Moscow to mend relations. Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich, displeased by the mistreatment of his envoy, did not reciprocate in kind and refrained from dispatching another delegation to the region for twenty years. By 1641, however, the Tsar's anger had subsided, and he appointed the merchant Anisim Gribov, who was proficient in local languages, as his representative to advance Russia's expansionist policies in Turkestan.²⁹ Gribov was sent to Khiva and Bukhara, tasked with both enhancing commercial relations and rescuing Russian captives, just like his predecessors. The Tsar had received numerous reports of Russian captives being tortured and starved in Bukhara and Khiva, and, as a result, caused further damage to the religious and political prestige of the Russian Tsardom. The Tsar charged Gribov with rescuing forcibly converted Muslim captives and restoring their Orthodox faith, aiming to repair his image as a protector and leader of Orthodoxy. The Tsar even sent a letter to Imam Quli Khan of Bukhara and the ruler of Khwarezm listing specific captives who were to be released. The diplomatic delegation carried 560 highly valued sable furs as gifts for the Khans. However, upon Gribov's arrival in Bukhara in 1643, governance had been taken over by Nadir Muhammad Khan. Gribov immediately met with the new Khan, conveying the Tsar's concerns regarding Russian captives and initiating negotiations for their release. Nevertheless, during this initial meeting, the Khan showed little interest in Gribov's request to release the captives.³⁰

During the Russian envoy's second audience with Nadir (Nazir) Muhammad (1642-1645), the Khan informed Gribov that captives in his service could be freed upon paying their ransom if they wished to return to Orthodox Christianity, whereas the release of other captives required negotiations with their respective owners. Gribov also met with the Khan's advisors, distributing numerous gifts and promising that those who would assist him in resolving the captives' issue would be rewarded by the Tsar. During these developments, Khan Nazir Muhammad expressed dissatisfaction to Gribov about receiving only four falcons compared to the eight presented by

27 *Sbornik Knyazya Hilko*, s. 402-405.

28 *Sbornik Knyazya Hilko*, s. 420-422.

29 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 352.

30 *Sbornik Knyazya Hilko*, s. 491-503; Jukovskiy, *Snošeniya Rossii s Buharoi i Hivoy za Poslednee Trehsotletie*, s. 24-25.

the Tsar to the ruler of Khwarezm.³¹ Gribov clarified that the Khwarezm ruler had specifically requested falcons from the Tsar for his son's wedding. Demonstrating diplomatic tact, Gribov suggested that if the Khan released the Russian captives, the Tsar would fulfill all his requests. Subsequently, diplomatic maneuvers intensified between the Turkestan Khanates and the Russian Tsardom. Three months after Gribov's initial request regarding the captives, he was again received by Khan Nazir Muhammad, who indicated he could meet the Tsar's demands if the Muslim captives (Nogais) in Astrakhan and its surroundings were freed. Gribov then reminded the Khan of specific captives named in the Tsar's letter. Despite these exchanges, however, the Khan ultimately refrained from making any concessions regarding the Russian captives.³²

Despite returning empty-handed from his meetings with the Khan, Gribov did not lose hope. Through the network of relationships he established in the region, he continued striving to fulfill the Tsar's requests. Some Russian captives approached Gribov with documentation proving they had purchased their freedom. However, even captives who had bought their freedom could not leave the city without the Khan's permission. Ignoring this restriction, Gribov decided to take the freed captives with him, attempting to leave the city secretly. Nevertheless, they were intercepted shortly after leaving by officials who sought to return the group, citing their unauthorized departure without the Khan's consent. Although Gribov argued that this action was unjust and that releasing the captives would enhance the Khan's reputation in the eyes of the Tsardom, the group was forcibly returned. Ultimately, despite his efforts, Gribov was able to secure the release of only a limited number of Russian captives.³³

Having failed in his mission in Bukhara, Gribov returned to Moscow accompanied by Kazak Nogai, an envoy sent by the Khan to improve bilateral relations. The Bukharan envoy held negotiations in Moscow, specifically discussing the issue of Russian captives. He informed the Moscow administration that Russian captives in Bukhara could be released in exchange for the Nogai and Muslim captives held by the Russian Tsardom. Through the practice of captive diplomacy, the power struggle between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan khanates unfolded with each side reacting to the moves of the other. However, ultimately, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645-1679) rejected the proposal from the Khan of Bukhara.³⁴

After the unsuccessful captive diplomacy in Turkestan, the Russian Tsardom aimed to exploit the power struggle between the Bukharan Khan Nazir Muhammad and his son Abdulaziz (1645-1681). Consequently, the Tsardom decided to send Gribov back to Bukhara three years after his

31 The Akdoğan (Saker falcon), a highly valuable species of predatory bird, was highly sought after by the rulers of the period as a symbol of prestige. See: Burton, Audrey, *The Bukharans: Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550 – 1702*, Curzon Press, Richmond 1997, p. 147, 148-165.

32 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara," p. 354.

33 Ron Sela, "Seventeenth-Century Russian Diplomatic Mission to Central Asia", *Writing Travel in Central Asian History*, ed. Nile Green, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2013, p. 79; Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara," p. 354.

34 Dinçer Koç, "XVI.-XIX. Yüzyıllarda Buhara Hanlığı'na Gelen Rus Diplomat ve Askerleri", *TDA*, C. 115, S. 227, (Mart-Nisan 2017), s. 65.

first mission. His new assignment involved supporting the Khan of Bukhara in exchange for the release of 14 named Russian captives and the development of trade relations with India through Bukhara.³⁵ However, by the time Gribov reached Isfahan, Khan Nazir Muhammad had lost the power struggle against his son and fled to Iran. As a result, the Russian envoy was unable to reach Bukhara, leading to the failure of another diplomatic initiative aimed at resolving the issue of Russian captives.³⁶

From the 17th century onward, the Tsarist administration positioned itself as the guardian of Orthodox Christianity, rendering the enslavement of Orthodox subjects in a Muslim state incompatible with the Tsar's legitimacy. Consequently, the presence of Russian captives in the Turkestan khanates emerged as a focal point in diplomatic engagements. Petitions sent to the Tsar, especially from Orthodox clergymen, highlighted this issue. One notable example was a petition by Orthodox priest Afanasii Ivanov³⁷, describing the capture of Russians by Kalmyks and Bashkirs in areas with weak Russian authority, urging the Tsar to intervene. Similar petitions from Orthodox priests in Siberia emphasized the urgency and compelled Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645-1679) to address the matter decisively. Consequently, the Tsar's image as protector of Orthodoxy and his political prestige necessitated proactive diplomacy to secure the release of captives. Despite these diplomatic efforts, full resolution proved elusive, and captive diplomacy continued to be an ongoing point of contention between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan Khanates.³⁸

Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich appointed stepbrothers Boris and Semen Pazukhin for the Turkestan mission³⁹. Tasked between 1669 and 1673 with negotiating multifaceted diplomatic relations with Khan Anusha of Khiva and Khan Abdulaziz of Bukhara, one of their responsibilities was securing the release of Russian captives. Departing on June 30, 1669, the Pazuhin brothers were welcomed more warmly than previous envoys upon reaching Khiva in early July. Three days after their arrival, they were received by Khan Anusha. During this initial meeting, the Pazuhin brothers presented their requests regarding the release of Russian captives, but Khan Anusha disregarded their demands. The issue of Russian captives continued to feature prominently in subsequent discussions between the parties, yet Khan Anusha maintained a cautious and distant stance on the matter.⁴⁰

Khan Anusha pursued a deliberate policy of setting excessively high ransom amounts for Russian captives, effectively leaving the issue unresolved. This approach also allowed him to

35 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara," s. 355.

36 V. V. Barthold, *Rusya ve Avrupa'da Oryantalizm*, s. 254; Nurettin Hatunoğlu, "Buhara Hanlığı", *Avrasya'nın Sekiz Asrı Çengizsoğulları*, Ötüken, İstanbul 2017, s. 494.

37 Between 1669 and 1673, the Pazukhin brothers, who were in Bukhara and Khiva, encountered the Orthodox priest Afanasii Ivanov, yet they were unable to secure his release.

38 A. N. Truvorova, "Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannim v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç 1669," *Ruskaya Istoricheskaya Biblioteka, Arheografičeskoy Kommissii*, ss. 1 S. Petersburg 1894, s. 23-24.

39 E. H. Oşanina, "Hozyaystvo Pomeşikov Pazuhinıh v XVII-XVII Vekah", *Voprosu İstori*, S. 7, (1956), s. 84-92.

40 *Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannim v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç 1669*, s. 40.

maintain diplomatic superiority over the Russian delegation. Subsequent negotiations and the Khan's statements confirmed this strategy. Anusha Khan's claim that Russian captives in Khiva had been purchased from Kalmyks and Bashkirs indicated the use of sophisticated diplomatic tactics. Thus, the Khan could justify demanding ransom payments while simultaneously avoiding responsibility for capturing the Russians, thereby deflecting Moscow's accusations. The lack of progress in the ongoing captive negotiations highlighted the effectiveness of the Khan's strategy. Reports submitted by the Pazukhin brothers to their government indicated their inability to reach an agreement with Khan Anusha regarding ransom payments.⁴¹

The second phase of the Pazukhin brothers' Turkestan mission took place in Bukhara, where they stayed for 16 months. The Russian diplomatic delegation was warmly received in Bukhara according to diplomatic customs and protocols. On June 30, 1670, the Pazukhins were received by Abdulaziz Khan of Bukhara. This initial meeting between the parties was marked by meticulous adherence to diplomatic rituals and protocol. As in Khiva, the issue of Russian captives was the primary agenda in this initial meeting. However, Abdulaziz Khan, much like his neighbour, avoided providing direct responses to the Russian delegation's inquiries regarding the captives during the first encounter.⁴²

Compared to previous diplomatic missions sent to Turkestan, the Pazukhin brothers were equipped with greater authority, intelligence, and resources. The instructions given to them by the Tsardom contained significantly more detail. Furthermore, the Pazukhins were also tasked with a religious mission concerning the release of Russian captives. Unlike previous instructions, the terminology in the Pazukhins' directive explicitly shifted from "Russian captives" to "Orthodox Christian captives", reflecting the Tsardom's policy of positioning itself as the protector and patron of all Orthodox Christians. This policy became evident during negotiations with Abdulaziz Khan. During these diplomatic exchanges, which evolved into a full-fledged diplomatic struggle, Boris Pazukhin demanded the unconditional release of all Orthodox Christians held captive in Bukhara. The Khan, in response, asserted that these captives had converted to Islam and thus could not be released. This interaction vividly illustrates the symbolic significance of the power struggle and the religious dimensions characterizing the negotiations over captives⁴³.

The issue of Russian captives between Boris Pazuhin and Abdulaziz Khan of Bukhara also became the main agenda during official banquets held in honour of the embassy. In these discussions, the Pazuhin brothers made significant progress on the matter, ultimately securing the release of nine Russian captives without any ransom. However, the Khan warned the embassy not to misinterpret this action, emphasizing that their release was purely an act of friendship and aimed at fostering good relations with the Russian Tsardom. Furthermore, the Khan indicated that more captives could be freed if the Tsar reciprocated by releasing Bukharan envoys detained

41 *Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannim v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç* 1669, s. 39-43.

42 *Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannim v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç* 1669, s. 48.

43 Ron Sela, "Seventeenth-Century Russian Diplomatic Mission to Central Asia", p. 82.

in Moscow. The rigid stance of the Khiva administration on refusing to release Russian captives was partly due to the absence of leverage held by the Russian Tsardom against them. Conversely, the presence of Bukharan envoys in Moscow strengthened the Pazuhin brothers' negotiating position, allowing them greater confidence and flexibility in negotiations. In addition to the nine captives freed without ransom, 21 other captives secured their freedom for 635 roubles.⁴⁴ Considering that the average market value for Russian captives in the 17th-century slave markets was approximately 150 roubles, the Pazuhin brothers' achievement of freeing captives for a significantly lower ransom represented considerable success. Moreover, the fact that 15 of these 21 captives were soldiers highlighted the strategic and meticulous efforts of the Russian Tsardom to realize its ambitions in the region.⁴⁵

During their stay in Bukhara, the Pazuhin brothers had the opportunity to secretly meet with Russian captives. In these meetings, they encouraged the captives to attempt escape but learned that many had tried unsuccessfully, losing their way on the vast routes and ultimately returning. The Pazuhins also included in their reports letters from captives expressing loyalty to Orthodoxy and allegiance to the Tsar. Among the valuable intelligence obtained by the Russian diplomatic mission was information regarding the number of Russian captives in the region: approximately 150 in Bukhara, 50 in Khiva, and 100 in Balkh.⁴⁶

Although the issue of Russian captives was central in relations between the Turkestan Khanates and the Russian Tsardom in the 17th century, missions continued to prioritize establishing trade links and assessing the region's military situation. An examination of continued interactions in the following century reveals a shift from the Tsardom's policy of exploration and regional understanding toward exploration and eventual occupation. For example, in 1653, Vasilii Aleksandrov Daudov, an American who fled to Moscow with Russian envoys in Iran, was sent to the region both to rescue Russian captives and to develop trade relations.⁴⁷ Daudov's mission to Khiva and Bukhara was influenced by a diplomatic delegation sent to Moscow by Khan Abdulaziz of Bukhara in 1671. The series of events that culminated in Daudov's appointment as envoy to Bukhara was particularly noteworthy: the Khan's envoy, Mollafar, had successfully conducted diplomatic negotiations in Moscow, obtaining a letter from the Tsar to the Khan requesting favourable trade conditions for Russian merchants and the release of captives. However, Mollafar passed away en route to Bukhara in September 1671 in Tobolsk. Subsequently, on March 1, 1675, another Bukharan envoy, Haji Ferik, arrived in Moscow with 28 Russian captives. In response to this generous gesture from the Khan of Bukhara regarding Russian captives, the Tsardom reciprocated diplomatically by deciding to send its own delegation. Vasilii Aleksandrov Daudov,

44 The embassy delegation not only paid the ransom for the captives but also provided for their food and clothing. Therefore, when the Pazukhin brothers submitted their report to the Tsar, they stated that the ransom paid for the released captives amounted to 685 rubles. See. *Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannum v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç* 1669 s. 154-158.

45 *Nakaz Borisu i Semenu Pazuhinim, Poslannum v Buharu, Belh i Yurgenç* 1669, s. 54.

46 Ron Sela, "Seventeenth-Century Russian Diplomatic Mission to Central Asia", p. 83.

47 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara," p. 359.

known for conducting the most effective diplomatic strategy concerning Russian captives among 17th-century Russian envoys to Turkestan, was appointed head of this new mission⁴⁸.

Vasiliy Daudov set out for Khiva and Bukhara along with another Russian envoy, Muhammed Yusuf Kasimov. The Tsar instructed the envoys to remind Abdulaziz Khan of Bukhara about his earlier promise to release Russian captives. Additionally, the envoys were directed to secretly meet with captives if their release was denied, recording their names, aliases, ranks, and details of their settlements, and reminding those who had converted to Islam of their Orthodox Christian origins⁴⁹.

Due to attacks along their route, it took five months for the Russian envoys to reach Khiva. During his initial meeting with Abdulaziz Khan, Daudov secured a promise for the unconditional release of 20 captives. Through skilled diplomacy, Daudov later gained the release of an additional five captives without ransom. Furthermore, several wealthy Russians in the region paid ransoms for many captives. Meanwhile, Kasimov, part of Daudov's delegation, paid ransom for 14 captives in Khiva and another 18 captives in other regions. Additionally, two Russian captives were freed in Balkh for 35 roubles. Through his diplomatic efforts, Daudov brought back 108 Russian captives to Moscow, with 53 directly under his protection.⁵⁰ Among those returned was Priest Afanasii, who had previously written to the Tsar, as well as seven children born into captivity. Daudov secured the release of 53 captives at the relatively low total ransom of 678 roubles. Kasimov paid 1,144 roubles for 40 captives. Daudov's effective diplomacy, freeing more captives at a significantly lower cost than previous missions, led to his recognition and reward by the Tsarist administration, making him arguably the most successful envoy concerning the issue of Russian captives in the 17th century⁵¹.

Russian envoys dispatched to the Turkestan Khanates in the 17th century frequently encountered similar scenarios. Initially, the Khanates would give certain assurances but generally avoided fulfilling the envoys' demands as much as possible. Through these political manoeuvres, the Khanates sought to deflect Moscow's attempts to gain influence over them. Turkestan rulers aimed to prolong negotiations over the issue of Russian captives to achieve diplomatic superiority, viewing captives—especially those of noble origin—as leverage and a means of security against Russia.

However, the Moscow administration pursued a systematic policy regarding Russian captives, aiming to expand its influence in the region. Captives, particularly soldiers who had spent extended periods in captivity, provided the Tsardom with valuable and strategic information about the region. Therefore, securing the release of military captives was prioritized. Moreover, the increasing number of captives freed toward the end of the century indicated the growing

48 Jukovskiy, *Snoşeniya Rossii s Buharoi i Hivoy za Poslednee Trehsotletie*, s. 32-36.

49 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 359.

50 Burton, "Russian Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Bukhara", p. 360.

51 Burton, *The Bukharans: Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550 – 1702*, p. 312-314.

pressure exerted by the Russian Tsardom on the Turkestan Khanates. In response, although the Khanates released more captives compared to earlier periods, recognizing that captives remained their most significant bargaining chip against the Tsar, they continued to enslave more individuals than they freed.

Diplomatic Shifts and Captive Negotiations: Russian-Turkestan Relations in the 18th Century

Diplomatic relations between the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan khanates in the 18th century became more defined and multifaceted under the rule of Peter I (1682–1725), based primarily on political and commercial interests. Compared to his predecessors, Peter dispatched a greater number of state officials, engineers, and specialists to Turkestan for extensive exploration. Oriental studies flourished, books were translated, maps drawn, and resources of the region identified, greatly enhancing Russia's knowledge about the region. Concurrently, internal turmoil caused instability in the Turkestan Khanates, altering the character of Russo-Turkestan relations. Notably, in 1716, Bukhara's envoy Han Kuli Beg, sent by Khan Abulfayz (1711–1747) to Moscow to congratulate Peter's victory over Sweden, brought along 33 Russian captives as a gift from the Khan.⁵²

Diplomatic discussions about Russian captives continued in Bukhara, while relations with Khiva became more militarized, notably with Prince Bekovich Cherkassky's unsuccessful campaign in 1717. Despite shifting toward military confrontation, Cherkassky's failure postponed further military operations until 1839, causing diplomatic efforts to persist during Peter the Great's reign.⁵³ Under Peter, the first diplomatic envoy to Turkestan was Italian-born Florino Beneveni, tasked primarily with improving relations and exploring trade routes. Departing Moscow in September 1718 and traveling via Astrakhan, Shamakhi, and Teheran, Beneveni arrived in Bukhara after a challenging year-long journey. Although not specifically sent to free captives, he reported valuable details about them, including that 30 Russians served in the Khan's guard, valued for their military expertise, particularly in artillery.⁵⁴ Other Russian captives performed diverse roles, including agriculture, animal care, and specialized craftsmanship directly for the Khan.⁵⁵ During Beneveni's stay, Shirghazi Khan of Khiva (1714-1726) invited him, offering

52 The Bukharan envoy Kuli Beg requested that the Tsar, in exchange for the Russian captives he had brought with him, release the Bukharan captives residing particularly in Astrakhan. A. Popov, *Snoşeniya Rossi s Hivoyu i Buharoyu pri Petre Velikom*, Petersburg 1853, s. 16; Dinçer Koç, "XVI.-XIX. Yüzyıllarda Buhara Hanlıđı'na Gelen Rus Diplomat ve Askerleri" *TDA*, C. 115, S. 227, (Mart-Nisan 2017), s. 68.

53 V. V. Barthold, *Rusya ve Avrupa'da Oryantalizm*, s. 287-288.

54 Selim Serkan Ükten, "16-18. Asırlarda Buhara Hanlıđı'na Gelen Batılı Seyyahlar ve Seyahatnameleri", *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, S. 18/2, (Aralık 2017), s. 150-151; *Poslannik Petra I na Vostokeye Posolstvo Florio Beneveni v Persiyu i Buharu 1718 – 1725 Godah*, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoy Literatury Izdatelstva "Nauka", Moskva 1986, s. 125.

55 *Kratkoe opisaniye Buhari i Hive* "Sibirskiy Vestnik", G. Spasskiy, Çast Pervaya, Tipografii Departamenta Narodnago Prosveşeniya, St. Petersburg 1823, s. 1-18.

the release of Russian soldiers captured during Cherkassky's campaign. Beneveni secretly left Bukhara, arriving in Khiva on April 19, 1725, and was warmly received. Ultimately, he secured 92 Russian prisoners from Shirghazi Khan's custody. Beneveni also noted the harsh living conditions experienced by many Russian captives in Bukhara and Khiva.⁵⁶

During Tsar Peter's era, the Turkestan khanates became more open to negotiations regarding Russian captives, adopting less rigid policies. This shift correlated directly with the internal chaos and weakened economic and military power in the Khanates. Simultaneously, Peter's military modernization efforts strengthened Russia's influence, compelling the Khanates toward a more moderate approach to the captive issue. Tashkent emerged as another focal point in Russia's expansion strategy in Turkestan. In 1738, Captain Karl Miller led a diplomatic mission and caravan to Tashkent aiming to enhance trade, identify resources, and secure the release of Russian captives. However, the caravan was attacked by Kazakhs near Tashkent, resulting in Miller and his entourage's capture. Miller was held captive for approximately a year before returning to Russia.⁵⁷ Despite Russian diplomatic successes in relatively stable regions like Khiva and Bukhara, uncontrolled areas, particularly the Caspian coasts and independent Kazakh steppes, posed challenges. The ongoing enslavement of Russians in these areas underscored the necessity for military intervention.⁵⁸

Among the 18th-century Russian envoys, T. Burnashev provided limited information about Russian captives during his stay in Tashkent. He reported that Kazakhs captured Russians even from their homes, forcibly converting many to Islam and selling them in Bukhara and Tashkent. Burnashev noted that Russian captives significantly contributed to Tashkent's military capabilities, particularly in artillery production. These observations highlight Russian captives' widespread roles, especially militarily, thus intensifying Russia's strategic interest in their release and contributing to growing pressure for military action.⁵⁹

Breaking the Chains: The Role of Russian Captives in the Occupation and Abolition of Slavery in Turkestan

Despite ongoing Russian diplomatic efforts, Russian captives continued to be sold in Turkestan slave markets during the 19th century. Western travellers, including Alexander Burnes of the East India Company, also documented this practice. Sent to gather intelligence on

56 *Poslannik Petra I na Vostoke Posolstvo Florio Beneveni v Persiyu i Buharu 1718 – 1725 Godah*, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoy Literatury Izdatelstva "Nauka", Moskva 1986, s. 25-26; *Poslannik Petra I na Vostoke Posolstvo Florio Beneveni v Persiyu i Buharu 1718 – 1725 Godah*, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoy Literatury Izdatelstva "Nauka", Moskva 1986, s. 119.

57 P. I. Riçkov, *İstoriya Orenburgskaya (1730-1750)*, Orenburg 1896, s. 39; P. I. *Topografiya Orenburgskoy Gubernii*, Orenburg 1887, s. 18; İKRI-VI. (2007), s. 32-40.

58 Eden, *Slavery and Emire in Central Asia*, p. 65.

59 "Puteşestvie ot Sibirskoy Linii do Taşkenta i 1800 gudo", *Sibirskiy Vestnik*, s. 235.

Turkestan in 1829, Burnes visited⁶⁰ various cities, including Bukhara and Khiva. In Bukhara, he observed numerous Russian captives, many of whom claimed to be Muslim to improve their living conditions, while others had assimilated over time. In Khiva, he estimated the presence of around 2,000⁶¹ Russian captives.⁶²

Despite Russian efforts, the Turkestan khanates neither punished those who raided Russian caravans nor stopped the slave trade. Russian merchants faced heavy taxation and frequent raids. In response, in 1836, the Russian government detained 350 Khivan and 500 Khorezmian merchants in Russia, confiscating their goods. This forced the Khivan ruler, Ali Quli Khan (1825-1842) to release 80 Russian captives. Even though he pledged to free the rest of the captives, the later negotiations did not lead to any outcome. Faced with diplomatic failures, Russia began preparations for a military campaign.⁶³

The inability to secure captives through diplomacy damaged the Tsar's domestic and international standing, making military intervention inevitable. The primary target was Khiva, with Orenburg Governor-General Perovsky appointed as commander. Before the campaign, Perovsky reported 599 Russian captives in Khiva. In an effort to legitimize the military operation, he referenced earlier British reports as well as Muravyov's 1819–1820 account, which stated that three thousand Russian captives were held in the khanate, and demanded their immediate release. Since this was impossible, Russia used the refusal as a pretext for war.⁶⁴ Perovsky also sought to counter British influence in Turkestan through this campaign. However, severe winter conditions in 1839-40 thwarted his efforts, preventing him from reaching Khiva and resulting in heavy losses. Thus, like Cherkassky's, Perovsky's campaign also failed. Nevertheless, recognizing Russian determination, the Khan of Khiva quickly released his remaining Russian captives to restore peace.⁶⁵

Additionally, a decree was issued prohibiting the capture of Russian subjects, ordering the Khorezm administration to comply.⁶⁶ By the 19th century, it was evident that Russia sought

60 Emin Özdemir, "Rus İşgalinden Önceki Dönemde Türkistan'a Gelen Batılı Seyyahlar ve Türkistan Tarihi Kaynak Olarak Seyahatnameleri", *History Studies*, V. 2/2, (2010), s. 120.

61 In 1819-1820, Russian officer N. Muravyov reported that there were 3,000 Russian captives in Khiva. He also stated that these captives were being sold for 60 to 80 tillas. Bk. N.N. Muravev, *Muraviev's Journey to Khiva through the Turcoman Country, 1819-20*, p. 58, 77.

62 Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, V. I, p. 267-285; Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, p. 294-297; Orhan Doğan, Aysel Erdoğan, "XIX. Yüzyılda Türkistan (Orta Asya) Türk Topluluklarında Kölelik ve Köle Ticareti", s. 976-977; Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, V. II, p. 386.

63 Jeffrey Eric Eden, *Slavery and Emire in Central Asia*, p. 63; Dinçer Koç, "Hive Hanlığı" *Avrasya'nın Sekiz Asrı Çengizogulları*, Ötüken 2017, s. 603.

64 Alexander Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters: The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1839-1842," *Modern Asian Studies*, 48/1, (2014), p. 282-291.

65 In October of the same year, 418 Russian captives were delivered to Orenburg. Additionally, on January 13, 1841, the Khan of Khiva, Allah Quli, along with his envoy Eshbay Babayev, returned five more captives to the Russian administration in Orenburg. See: Hamid Ziyaev, *Türkistan'da Rus Hâkimiyetine Karşı Mücadele*, s. 67; Edward Denison Ross-Francis Henry Skrine, *En Eski Çağlardan Rus İşgaline: Türkistan'ın ve Türkistan Hanlıklarının Tarihi*, çev. Resul Şahsi, Divan Kitap, İstanbul 2024, s. 191.

66 M.I. Ivanin, *Opisanie Zimnego Pohoda v Hivu v 1839-40g*, St Petersburg 1874, s. 157-158.

to use the captive issue as a pretext for occupying Turkestan. Consequently, new envoys were dispatched to negotiate the release of captives and reduce trade taxes on Russian merchants. Unlike previous missions, these envoys included experts to assess the region's geography, economy, culture, and military strength. In this context, in 1841, Perovsky sent Konstantin Fedorovich Butenev to Bukhara and Captain Nikiforov to Khiva, partly as intelligence agents. After a difficult journey, they swiftly pursued their mission, meeting with Emir Nasrullah to negotiate the release of Russian captives and lower trade taxes. However, no agreement was reached, and Nikiforov faced similar rejection from Khiva's ruler, Allah Quli Khan⁶⁷. Fearing a Russian invasion, Allah Quli signed a peace treaty with Russian envoy Colonel G.I. Danilevsky in 1843.⁶⁸

Although Russia maintained diplomatic engagements, military fortifications along the Kazakh steppes increased its influence over the Turkestan Khanates. In 1858, Russian envoy Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatiev was sent to Khiva and Bukhara. As in previous missions, discussions focused on captives and trade privileges, but negotiations remained inconclusive⁶⁹.

Upon reaching Bukhara, Ignatiev found that Emir Nasrullah was absent and instead conferred with his vizier, relaying Russia's demands, particularly the release of Russian captives. The vizier received the request favourably but suggested waiting for the Emir. When Nasrullah returned, he agreed to free Russian captives and grant trade privileges. However, despite the order to locate captives and reunite them with their families, only 12 captives agreed to return to Russia, indicating the Emir's reluctance to release more captives.⁷⁰

As diplomacy failed to fully achieve Russia's objectives, military action intensified, marking the beginning of Turkestan's occupation. In 1864, parts of the Kokand Khanate were annexed, followed by the capture of Tashkent in 1865. With these strategic conquests, Russia confronted the Bukhara Emirate. After a series of bloody conflicts, largely favouring the Russians, the Emir had no choice but to negotiate. Ultimately, on October 10, 1873, Emir Sayyid Muzaffar Bahadur and Turkestan Governor-General Kaufman signed a treaty⁷¹, solidifying Russian dominance over Bukhara.⁷²

67 Koç, "XVI.-XIX. Yüzyıllarda Buhara Hanlığı'na Gelen Rus Diplomat ve Askerleri", s. 80.

68 Koç, "Hive Hanlığı", s. 604.

69 Jukovski, *Snoşeniya Rossii s Buharoi i Hivoy za Poslednee Trehsotletie*, s. 152-153.

70 Nikolai Pavlovic Ignatyev, *Mission N.P. Ignatyev to Khiva and Bukhara in 1858*, John L. Evans, Oriental Research Partus, Newtonville 1984, p. 112-114; Selim Karagöz, "Rus Seyyahların İzinde 19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Buhara Emirliği", s. 154-163; Baymirza Hayit, *Türkistan Devletlerinin Milli Mücadele Tarihi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1995, s. 68-69.

71 The Ruler of the Russian Lands, in honor of His Glorious Empire and His Exalted Highness, Emir Sayyid Muzaffar, shall henceforth and forever prohibit the slave trade within the borders of Bukhara, as it is contrary to human dignity and individual rights. Emir Sayyid will immediately inform all the beys under his command of this decision and ensure the enforcement of the law. Furthermore, if slaves continue to be brought from neighboring countries into settlements within Bukhara's borders for sale, despite the Emir's decree, they shall be confiscated from their owners and immediately emancipated to enforce the law. See. Demetrius Charles Boulger, *England and Russia in Central Asia*, Vol. 1, W.H. Allen, London 1879, p. 337.

72 Baymirza Hayit, *Türkistan Devletlerinin Milli Mücadele Tarihi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınevi, Ankara 1995, s. 96-100.

Under the treaty, all slaves in Bukhara were to be emancipated within ten years. However, despite a decline in the slave trade, it persisted, as evidenced by official Bukhara records referencing the treaty while documenting ongoing transactions⁷³. Another key Russian military success was in Khiva. As in previous campaigns, Russia publicly framed its intervention as a mission to liberate captives. News of Russia's plans to abolish slavery spread rapidly among Turkestan's enslaved population, generating hope. Some accounts even describe slaves planning revolts against their masters upon hearing of Russian advances⁷⁴. Anticipating uprisings, some slave owners resorted to brutal punishments⁷⁵.

As Kaufman's army advanced toward Khiva, many slaves supported the Russians⁷⁶. With mounting external and internal pressure, the Khivan administration sought a ceasefire, but Russia rejected the proposal. Unwilling to surrender, Khan Muhammad Rahim fled to the Yomut Turkmens⁷⁷. When Kaufman's forces entered the Khivan capital on March 28, 1873, they

73 For example, the letter addressed to Muhammad Bey Inak Kushbegi on August 3, 1876, read as follows: "To the esteemed Muhammad bin Inak Kushbegi, the protector of the Emirate. After extending the highest expressions of respect and greetings, let it be known that Cengiz, an Iranian, and his wife Gulbibibi, having arrived from Bukhara-i Sharif to Samarkand, submitted a petition to the honorable General-Governor. They declared that four years ago, the Teke Turkmens had brought them from Herat and sold them in Bukhara-i Sharif to an elder named Vayskal. Cengiz was sold for 30 gold coins, while his wife was sold for 25 gold coins. They remain with the elder to this day, along with their 12-year-old daughter Mahvash. Furthermore, an Iranian woman named Sherike and her son Jafar were in servitude under Hadimbay Kichkina from the village of Tomishi, located four farsakhs from Karshi. They have now arrived in Samarkand, but Sherike's two daughters remain with Hadimbay Kichkina's wife—one is 18-year-old Gul, while the other is 12-year-old Gulon. Additionally, her third daughter, 8-year-old Zebani, was sold by Hadimbay to his neighbor Chahorbay and is currently in his possession. In accordance with the decree of the honorable General-Governor, I inform you, the protector of the Emirate, so that our kind and compassionate ally may be aware of this matter. Furthermore, the honorable General-Governor instructed me to remind Your Excellency of the commitments made. The Bukhara government, since the signing of the treaty, pledged to gradually eradicate slavery within ten years and to ensure its complete abolition. Since this obligation has been undertaken, whenever the fate of the enslaved becomes a matter of discussion, it is imperative that the government upholds its promise and frees them. It is necessary to submit this petition to the esteemed Emir for consideration. It is hoped that His Highness will once again act with generosity and mercy and ensure that the children of Iranian Cengiz are reunited with their mother. I sincerely trust that our kind and compassionate ally will provide a favorable response in this matter. May you remain in eternal divine peace. Written in the city of Samarkand on the third day of August, in the year 1876. See: TSGA RUz, Fond. 126. Op. 1. Hr. 304, s. 1; Faziyeu, s. 107-108.

74 MacGahan, one of the key witnesses to the Russian occupation of Khiva, noted that many slaves accompanied the soldiers as the Russian troops entered the city. See: Mac Gahan, *Campaigning on the Oxus, and the Fall of Khiva*, p. 233.

75 Jeffrey Eric Eden, *Slavery and Emire in Central Asia*, p. 242-243.

76 When the Khan of Khiva learned that the Russian army was advancing toward Khiva, he convened his council of advisors and decided to hand over 21 Russian captives to Kaufman. With this move, the Khan aimed to eliminate the prisoner issue, which the Russians had used as a justification for the invasion. However, Kaufman ignored the Khan's gesture and continued his advance. Bk. Ron Sela, "Rusların Hive'yi İşgalı ve Yomut Türkmenleri Katliamı, Bir Orta Asya Tarihçisinden Seçmeler", *Türkmenler Üzerine Makaleler*, çev. Resul Şahsi, Selenge Yayınevi, İstanbul 2019, s. 266; Mac Gahan, *Hive Seyahatnâmesi ve Tarihi Musavver*, çev. Kolağası Ahmed, haz. İsmail Aka, s. 68.

77 As the Russian army approached Khiva, some Iranian slaves rebelled against their masters and escaped. Overcome with ecstatic joy, some began cutting the chains from each other's necks and feet, freeing themselves. See: Mac Gahan, *Hive Seyahatnâmesi*, s. 145; Ziyaev, *Türkistan'da Rus Hâkimiyetine Karşı Mücadele*, s. 259-260; Koç, "Hive Hanlığı", s. 604-605; Mac Gahan, *Hive Seyahatnâmesi*, s. 68, 135-145.

encountered small-scale revolts as slaves clashed with their former masters, leading to looting and violence. To suppress the unrest, Kaufman publicly executed two slaves, which further inflamed tensions.⁷⁸ Realizing that the upheaval stemmed from demands for freedom and that the Russian military could not subdue nearly 60,000 slaves, Kaufman urged Muhammad Rahim to return to the city. Recognizing that a military crackdown on slaves would damage Russia's image in the West, Kaufman swiftly moved to abolish slavery in Khiva. On August 12, 1873, he and Muhammad Rahim signed an 18-article peace treaty. The treaty placed Khiva under Russian suzerainty, granting Russia full authority over the khanate. It also mandated the immediate abolition of slavery, with an official declaration of emancipation⁷⁹.

I, Said Muhammad Rahim Bahadur Khan, out of deep respect for the Russian Emperor, hereby decree that all subjects of my Khanate immediately grant full freedom to all slaves. Henceforth, slavery is entirely abolished in my domain. This humane law shall serve as a pledge of eternal friendship between the great Russian people and my honourable subjects. I have ordered its strict enforcement under severe penalties. All former slaves shall have equal rights with my other subjects and shall be subject to the same laws. They are called upon to maintain order, and those who disrupt peace will face the same punishments as other citizens. All former slaves are free to reside anywhere within the Khanate or leave if they so choose. Special arrangements will be made for those wishing to depart. Female slaves shall be emancipated under the same principles as men. Disputes between married women and their husbands will be settled according to Sharia law.⁸⁰

With the abolition of slavery in Khiva, thousands of slaves gained their freedom, with estimates ranging between 20,000 and 60,000. The issue of slavery played a crucial role in justifying Russia's occupation of Turkestan⁸¹. Despite British opposition to Russian expansion, *Levant Herald* reported on the Russian conquest of Khiva, citing *The Times*, which described it as an "honourable and beneficial victory." The Khan issued a proclamation praising the Russian Emperor and declared all slaves free, banning the slave trade permanently. The decree granted all former slaves equal status and the right to return to their homelands⁸².

Following their emancipation, many Iranian slaves prepared to return home. Though the Khan assured that former slaves could remain as equal citizens, most chose to leave.⁸³ However,

78 Jeffrey Eric Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*, p. 244-246.

79 Demetrius Charles Boulger, *England and Russia in Central Asia*, Vol. 1, W.H. Allen, London 1879, p. 326-332.

80 Boulger, *England and Russia in Central Asia*, Vol. 1, p. 337.

81 MacGahan, who witnessed the occupation of Khiva, reported that there were 27,000 slaves in the city. Meanwhile, M. Holdsworth stated that around 20,000 slaves were preparing to return home. Some sources even estimated the number to be as high as 70,000. See: M. Holdsworth, *Turkestan in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford 1959, p. 24-26; Mac Gahan, *Hive Seyahatnâmesi*, s. 189; Mehmed Emin Efendi, *İstanbul'dan Asya-yı Vusta'ya Seyahat*, haz. Muhibbe Darga, Everest Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, s. 125.

82 "The Russians in Khiva", *The Levant Herald*, Wednesday, 6 August 1873, p. 230.

83 Emil Schmidt, *The Russian Expedition to Khiva in 1873*, Foreign Department Press, Calcutta 1876, p. 121-123.

their journey posed significant dangers, as Turkmen tribes along the Iran route were known to attack travellers. Indeed, freed slaves traveling through the Etrek Valley were ambushed by Teke and Yomut Turkmens⁸⁴, while another caravan of 1,500 was massacred before reaching their homeland.⁸⁵ Some, however, managed to return safely⁸⁶, while others were offered asylum in Russia. Fearing forced military service, most declined and preferred to brave the journey to Iran despite the risks⁸⁷.

The emancipation of slaves in Turkestan was a transformative event, but Turkmen groups, the primary suppliers of slaves, continued their raids. This provided Russia with a pretext for military action. Citing their campaign against slavery, the Russians soon moved against the Turkmens, particularly the Teke and Yomut tribes. The escalating violence and systematic conquests culminated in some of the most brutal massacres in history, cementing Russian control over the region. Ultimately, with no remaining economic basis, slavery was officially eradicated in Turkestan⁸⁸.

Conclusion

Slavery in Turkestan remained widespread and active until the late 19th century. Most accounts on the subject came from Western travellers fascinated by Turkestan's "exotic" world, often presenting biased or fictionalized portrayals. Ehud R. Toledano, a scholar of slavery, describes enslavement as an unequal yet involuntary interdependence between master and slave, shaping the latter's social status. A slave's profession, physical traits, language, and perceived value in society could either provide advantages or exacerbate their vulnerability. Determining the true nature of this relationship requires careful study. While Western observers often depicted slaves as marginalized and exploited, official records from both Bukhara and Russia indicate that many continued living in their societies even after emancipation.

Another crucial factor in Turkestan's slave trade was the role of the Turkmens. Western travellers and witnesses often blamed them for sustaining slavery. However, when considering broader economic and social conditions, it becomes clear that the Turkmens resorted to raiding out of necessity. Their resources were limited, and their livestock was frequently seized by local elites, leaving them with no alternative for survival. As Vámbéry noted, they did not significantly profit from the trade but merely perpetuated a centuries-old raiding tradition. The true beneficiaries were local elites who controlled the trade. Religious doctrine also played a

84 O'Donovan, *Merv A Story of Adventures and Captivity: Epitomised from 'The Merv Oasis*, p. 37-38; George Campbell Napier, *Collection of Journals and Reports Recieved From G. C. Napier, Captain The. Hon. G. C. Napier, Bengal Staff Corps, on Special Duty in Persia*, George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, London 1876, p. 105.

85 Schmidt, *The Russian Expedition to Khiva in 1873*, p. 169.

86 Mac Gahan, *Hive Seyahatnâmesi*, s. 189.

87 Jeffrey Eric Eden, *Slavery and Emire in Central Asia*, p. 250-252.

88 Hayit, *Türkistan Devletlerinin Milli Mücadele Tarihi*, p. 106-113.

role in legitimizing slavery. While Islamic law prohibited enslaving fellow Muslims, slave traders circumvented this by labeling Shiites as “infidels,” exploiting sectarian divisions that deepened since the 16th century. Prominent religious scholars even issued fatwas supporting the enslavement of Shiites. For instance, Bukhara’s Abdullah Khan sought a decree permitting the massacre and plundering of Herat’s Shiite population during his siege. The most significant development in Turkestan’s slavery history, however, was the Russian conquest. The long-standing diplomatic exchanges over Russian captives, dating back to the 16th century, were crucial to understanding the region’s occupation. The extent to which the plight of Russian captives influenced the invasion remains debatable, but Russian envoys had gathered extensive intelligence on Turkestan’s geography, resources, and military structures. This knowledge undoubtedly facilitated the invasion. Both the Russian Tsardom and the Turkestan Khanates engaged in diplomatic maneuvering over captives. Until the early 19th century, the Khanates held the upper hand, using Russian captives as leverage for their independence. The number of captives and their selective release became a strategic defence mechanism. However, as Russian pressure intensified, the Khanates’ advantage diminished. In 1839, Perovsky launched an unsuccessful campaign against Khiva under the pretext of liberating Russian captives, leading to increased Russian military intervention. By the 19th century, Turkestan had become a battleground for Russian and British imperial rivalry. To justify its expansion, Russia needed arguments that would appease Western public opinion. The issue of Russian captives became a key justification for invasion, but alone, it was insufficient. Russia thus positioned itself as an emancipator, claiming it would abolish slavery and liberate the region.

On the surface, Russia played a role in ending slavery in Turkestan after its occupation. However, historical records show that even after Bukhara officially abolished slavery in 1873, captives were still being sold in the late 19th century. Western and archival sources confirm that Russia’s so-called “emancipation” was a mere facade to legitimize its conquest. Notably, Russian diplomatic efforts focused solely on Russian captives, ignoring other enslaved populations. The true abolition of slavery came not from Russian intervention but from large-scale slave uprisings following the occupation. Slaves fought for their freedom against Russian rule, rather than being freed by it. Russia had no real interest in ending slavery. Kaufman’s execution of two rebelling slaves in Khiva, leaving their bodies on display for days, underscored Russian attitudes toward them. Ultimately, Russia’s policies regarding captives and slavery were tools for justifying its conquest of Turkestan. Rather than a humanitarian effort, slavery was merely a convenient excuse to gain global legitimacy for imperial expansion—an effort in which Russia largely succeeded.

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