

The ‘fierce fight’ at Oshoba: a microhistory of the conquest of the Khoqand Khanate

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For some time now the theme of the conquest of Central Asia by the Russian Empire has been a subject of historical generalization. In a long-term temporal and broad geographical perspective, researchers have interested themselves in certain general tendencies and patterns, around which it is possible to structure grand narratives of ‘conquest’. One of the consequences of this approach has been a predominant interest in a few ‘key’ events. Another has been a narrowing of the circle of those historical personages garnering attention to a few ‘key’ figures. Finally, the very analysis of events has been reduced in many cases to a study of the thoughts and projects of the colonizers with regard to Central Asia; other interpretations of the ordinary participants in military actions on both sides, their expectations and misgivings, have become immaterial, the disregarded dross of history. In this article, based on written and oral accounts of Russia’s military campaign against the Khoqand Khanate in 1875–1876, I will attempt to write a microhistory of the conquest, reconstructing its local episodes, reconstructing and listening to the voices of various actors, and distinguishing different motivations, preferences and means of description.

Keywords: microhistory; colonialism; local narratives; Khoqand Khanate; Ferghana; conquest of Central Asia

Introduction

For some time now the theme of the conquest of Central Asia by the Russian Empire has been a subject of historical generalization. A short article does not permit an extensive historiographical analysis, but I will give a brief summary. The Russian military historian M.A. Terent’ev, who wrote the three-volume *Istoriia Zavoevaniia Srednei Azii* (History of conquest of Central Asia) (1906), began his narrative account in the sixteenth century, with the expeditions to Perm and Kazan, and then to Siberia, and ended on the threshold between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the arguments over the division of the Pamirs and the Andijan Uprising of the Dukchi Ishan. In the Soviet *Istoriia narodov Uzbekistana* (History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan), the second part, dedicated to the ‘penetration of Tsarist Russia into Central Asia’ (Bakhrushin et al. 1947, 204–252), began in the eighteenth century, discussing separately the ‘military incursions of Tsarism’ in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and only described the events of the 1860s–1890s as a ‘conquest’. In *Central Asia: 130 years of Russian Dominance*, the chapter entitled ‘Systematic Conquest’ (Allworth 1994, 131–150) restricts itself entirely to 1865–1884. The Uzbek historian Kh. Ziyoev, in his work *Turkistonda Rossiya tajovuzi va hukmronligiga qarshi kurash* (Struggle against the invasion and hegemony of Russia in Turkestan) (1998), begins his history with relations between the Slavic and Turkic peoples in the sixth and seventh centuries, then passes to the Golden Horde and the era of Timur, then directly to the Russian incursion into the Kazakh steppe and Uzbek khanates, and ends with the anti-colonial uprising of 1916. I have given just a few individual examples, but such generalizing narratives,

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with a few variations, are characteristic of the majority of works on this theme, written in different academic traditions and in different languages.

Within such lengthy temporal and broad geographical perspectives, researchers have been interested in certain general tendencies and patterns, around which they can construct grand narratives of 'conquest'. One of the consequences of such an approach has been a predominant interest in a few 'key' events, such as the taking of Tashkent in 1865 or of the Turkmen fortress of Gök-tepe in 1881. Many historical episodes have thus, willy-nilly, been excluded from this retrospective plan, turned into insignificant facts or entirely forgotten. Another consequence has been the narrowing of the circle of historical personalities to a few key figures such as M.G. Cherniaev (1828–1898) and M.D. Skobelev (1843–1882), on whose biographies, views and actions historians have tended to focus their attention. The roles of many other actors have manifestly been diminished and underestimated, which has excluded from history the majority of interests and opinions, which in their own way also influenced the course of the conquest. The widespread approach of such historical generalizations is the reduction of complex interactions to one supposedly decisive circumstance – economic inevitability, the Great Game, or the individual qualities of military officers. The interests and motives of the totality of participants are thus ignored. Finally, the very analysis of events has frequently been reduced, in sum, to the study of colonial (or anti-colonial) dreams and projects with regard to Central Asia, when other interpretations by ordinary participants in military actions on both sides, their expectations and misgivings, have remained immaterial, the mere dross of history, despite the fact that there is an abundance of such sources to be found in archives, in published memoirs, and in the eyewitness accounts of contemporaries.

In this article I attempt to write a microhistory of the conquest, reconstructing its local episodes, recovering and listening to the voices of different actors, and distinguishing different motivations, preferences and methods of description. My overall aim is to avoid all generalizations and refrain from the study of patterns, and instead to seek to fill the lacunae and substitutions created by those grand narratives which seek to create a single inevitable logic to explain past events.

I will examine Russia's military campaign against the Khoqand Khanate in 1875–1876, which researchers for many years have viewed as inevitable and predestined, and as such a rather uninteresting process. I present for the attention of the reader three accounts of the subjection of one particular village, Oshoba, which is located in the western Ferghana Valley, in the foothills of the Kurama Range.¹ One account is the report of a Russian officer, who took part in the events of that time and, specifically, commanded the military force which seized Oshoba. The second is the view taken by a religious intellectual ('*alim*') in Tashkent, who lived through the subjugation of the Khoqand Khanate to Russia, and independently gathered information about this which he compiled in a lengthy historical chronicle which, among other things, mentions Oshoba. The third account was heard, transcribed and translated into Russian by me directly from inhabitants of Oshoba in 1995, and in 2010 augmented with audio recordings, and I will argue that this too can be regarded as an idiosyncratic source on the history of the conquest.

The example of Oshoba of course has its individual specificities, but is neither exceptional nor typical – there is in any case no fool-proof formula to distinguish one from the other.² Rather, I look on it as one of those events in which one can see many levels of interaction and interpretation. Each of the sources I will be analysing has its own treatment of events, and uses the repertoire of silence and exaggeration best suited to the pursuit of its own ends. Microhistorical analysis by means of the comparison of different sources allows us to see the relationship of different social groups to the conquest; from which points of view they regarded the same events; which methods and metaphors they used; which models of explanation predominated; and how facts were constructed and formed by different imperial, religious, or local interests.

I see my goals as firstly, to see various individual actors through the eyes of both the conquerors and the conquered; secondly, to portray both conflict and cooperation, not only between conquerors and conquered, but also within each of these sides; and thirdly, to look at different evaluations which arose in the descriptions of the events at Oshoba, and relate those to the motives and interests of one or another personage or group.

The events of autumn 1875

Before the discussion of these narratives, I should give the sequence of events, to make it possible to understand what is being talked about.³

In the summer of 1875, in the Khoqand Khanate, which from the signing of the Russo–Khoqandi treaties of 1868 and 1872 had in practice been a protectorate of the Russian Empire, influential representatives of the higher Khoqandi elite demanded the abdication of the ruler Khudoyar Khan (1831/32–1881).⁴ The opposition movement took on such proportions that in July the khan was forced to flee from Khoqand with an escort of Russian Cossacks. His son Nasruddin (1849/50–1881) succeeded to the throne. This coup disturbed the Turkestan governor-general, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (1818–1882). He feared that the new Khoqandi regime might ally itself with Bukhara or with the ruler of Kashgaria, Yaqub Beg (*ca.* 1820–1877), and that this coalition, with the support of the British, might constitute a substantial force opposed to Russian predominance in the region.

On the pretext of defending themselves from the actions of the Khoqandis, who had carried out a number of raids on Russian posts in the region around the Akhangaran River, in August the military quickly invaded the Ferghana Valley from the direction of Khujand.⁵ On 22 August, in a fierce fight, they defeated a large Khoqandi force near the fortress of Makhram. On 29 August Russian troops seized the capital (Khoqand) and over the course of September occupied the remaining large towns. Despite the continuing hostilities, on 22 September 1875 Nasruddin Khan signed a treaty with von Kaufman, establishing a Russian protectorate over the khanate on still more severe terms.

In particular, the new treaty envisaged handing over all territory on the right bank of the Rivers Syr-Darya and Naryn – the north-western and northern parts of the Ferghana Valley⁶ – to the Turkestan governor-generalship. The entire eastern slopes of the Kurama Range, the former *bekstvo* (*vilayat* or province) of Babadarkhan, including the *qishlaq* (settlement) of Oshoba, was incorporated in this new administrative entity – the Namangan *otdel* (division), with its centre at Namangan and an additional military base at the town of Chust. This division was intended to serve as a buffer between the Khoqand Khanate and the main territories of the governor-generalship.⁷ The military garrisons placed here could control the main passes and routes from Ferghana to the north and west, and could move with ease into any part of the valley to put down opposition. At the same time, the physical boundary in the form of the Rivers Syr-Darya and Naryn, in the view of Russian officers, would make it more difficult for the poorly organized and equipped Khoqandi forces to make unexpected attacks on the Russians. M.D. Skobelev, who had played a prominent role in the battle at Makhram (he had been on his way to Kashgar as part of an embassy to Yaqub Beg when fighting first broke out in Khoqand), was made the first head of the new division.

However, Russian hopes of getting the situation in Khoqand under control easily were not realized. On 10 October 1875 Nasruddin Khan was also forced, like his father, to flee Khoqand, and the new ruler from amongst the rebels was proclaimed as Pulad Khan.⁸ This brought about the culmination of the conflict, as a struggle for power between different factions of Khoqandi society took place simultaneously with a struggle with the invaders. Some portions of the elite and society preserved their neutrality and attempted to escape participation

in military action, some expressed willingness to actively support the Russian side, and others actively fought against the Russians, whilst the rebels were often in conflict with each other and also attempted to draw the neutral population into their struggle. The entire Ferghana Valley became a single field of battles and revolts. Small groups of Khoqandis crossed into the territory of the Namangan *otdel* and quietly moved around, finding support from the local population, who more often than not did not realize that they had suddenly become subjects of Russia.⁹

In the foothills of the Kurama Range

One of the most restless regions of the newly-created Namangan *otdel* was its most westerly portion – the mountains and foothills of the Kurama Range, along and across which ran important routes from Khujand and Tashkent to Namangan. These were used for the transport of produce and military supplies. It was a region of steppe and mountain, where there was nowhere suitable for a permanent stationing of Russian soldiers, and because of this, Khoqandi forces of very diverse composition and leadership¹⁰ acted freely here and threatened to endanger communications between Russian military bases. Russian forces occasionally appeared in this territory and conducted military operations against these opponents, attempting to hunt them down, but the situation remained difficult, as the Khoqandis would attack unexpectedly in small groups and then rapidly disperse, disappearing from the view of the less mobile regular forces. The inaccessible *qishlaqs* in the foothills and mountains of Kurama provided the rebels with supplies and shelter, and the Russian military could not determine to carry out military operations there without artillery and a commissariat train.

In October–November 1875 the decision was taken to use force to bring the situation in this part of the Ferghana Valley under Russian control. On 16 October von Kaufman set off from Namangan to Khujand. On 19 October, during a halt at the village of Kamysh-Kurgan, he issued the following order:

To secure communications between Samgar and Chust, and to capture the principal bandits and ring-leaders of the disturbances amongst the population of the right bank [of the Syr-Darya], I have determined on the following measures: on the recommendation of those who know the former *bek* of Babadarkhan, Mirza ‘Abdullah, I have appointed him *naib*¹¹ of the region between Samgar and Tus [the older name for Chust] under Staff-Captain Bekchurin. I have authorized Mirza ‘Abdullah to appoint 100 marksmen from the inhabitants of Babadarkhan who are known to him. With this militia Naib Mirza ‘Abdullah will look after the safety of communications between Samgar and Chust, and in general the calm of the region between these two points. I have authorized the payment of 10 roubles per month to each marksman. I have set aside 300 silver roubles for Naib Mirza ‘Abdullah in his first month.¹²

On the same day, the acting military governor of Syr-Darya Province, Major-General P.K. Eiler (1827–1881), in his report informed von Kaufman that he had sent a force of soldiers under Colonel I.F. Guius to Shaidan.¹³ On 23 October 1875 von Kaufman gave the order to Colonel Pichugin,¹⁴ whose force was stationed at Samgar, near Khujand, to join with the forces under Mirza ‘Abdullah and Colonel Guius at Shaidan. On 24 October Pichugin’s force arrived at Kamysh-Kurgan, but by then plans had changed somewhat, as the commandant of the Kurama District wrote on 25 October:

Naib Mirza ‘Abdullah, whom your Excellency has placed in charge of a force of militia, has just arrived at Kuliuk, and told me the following: that he, having gathered around twenty *djigits* (brave horsemen), went with them to the village of Shaidan, in order to recruit a hundred or so good men, and in Shaidan he had managed to collect another twenty men; thus he had forty men around him, when at that time Khal Tursun with the Qipchaqs of Yazi and with the inhabitants of the *qishlaqs* of Ashaba [Oshoba], Gudas and Asht surrounded him and proposed to him to go back to Kokan

[Khoqand], but he managed, having neared the *qishlaq* of Pangas [Pangaz], with the help of the inhabitants of that village, to escape to Ablyk.¹⁵

In his turn Skobelev on 23 October despatched a force under Colonel A.H. Meller-Zakomel'skii (1844–1928) to the village of Aq-Djar, from which he was supposed to follow the route to Babadarkhan, Mullamir, Pangaz, Oshoba and Gudas. However, this expedition also failed to take shape owing to the activities of the Khoqandis around Namangan.

On 3 November 1875 von Kaufman ordered a force of three platoons of the Third Turkestan Rifle Battalion, together with two batteries of artillery, a half-*sotnia* (unit of 100) of Orenburg Cossacks and a *sotnia* of the Fifth Siberian Cossacks to move from Khujand to the crossing of the Syr-Darya at Aq-Djar. Colonel Pichugin was placed in command of this force, whose purpose was to guard the crossings of the Syr-Darya in the west of Ferghana and the roads from the settlement of Pap to Kamysh-Kurgan, i.e. the control of practically the whole territory of the south-eastern foothills of the Kurama Range.¹⁶

Over the course of a few days, those units which were to make up the Aq-Djar force arrived in the region, after which they carried out punitive operations in nearby villages on both banks of the river. A delegation arrived from the village of Asht and expressed their willingness to help the Russians and bring them supplies. Even so, Pichugin was concerned by the activities of the rebels. According to him, in the region he was responsible for there were several '*shaikas*' (robber bands), the largest of which, with several hundred men, was led by the former *bek* Ablyk Tanaberdy-Parvanachi, who was under the command of Zulfikar Bek.¹⁷ Apart from this, there were *shaikas* under the command of the Qipchaq Batyrkul (from the small village of Sarvak), the Tajik Isfandiyar (from the surroundings of Asht), Koltysun (from Oshoba), Mullah Kushai (from the village of Morguzar not far from Pap) and the Kyrgyz Ishput (Serebrennikov 1901d, 37). The main base for the Khoqandis was around Shaidan.

To put down resistance in the mountainous regions, the colonel decided to undertake a military expedition in the surrounding villages. The force consisted of 1.5 platoons of the Third Turkestan Rifle Battalion and a *sotnia* of Siberian Cossacks, i.e. around 300 men; they did not take any artillery with them into the hills.

On 16 November 1875 the Russian soldiers, emerging from Aq-Djar, reached Kamysh-Kurgan, where they spent the night, and on the following day arrived at Shaidan, where Colonel Pichugin publicly punished two elders, who had been accused by Naib Mirza 'Abdullah. After this, the force made its way to Babadarkhan, where the population did not resist and fulfilled all the Russian demands, presenting both supplies and information. In the evening, on the way to Pangaz, Pichugin received news that the large *shaika* of Tanaberdy and Batyrkul had carried out an attack on Shaidan and then made their way towards Oshoba. Without delay, though it was 11:30 PM, Pichugin roused his force and led them in the direction of Oshoba, where on the morning of 18 November there was a violent clash. Having crushed the enemy and destroyed the village, the Russian military force did not linger, fearing another attack by an enemy which outnumbered them, and continued the punitive expedition. They entered Gudas, the inhabitants of which expressed their absolute submission. On 19 November Pichugin left for Asht, and on the evening of that day returned to his position at the Aq-Djar crossing. Having received from Pichugin information on the result of the expedition, von Kaufman expressed his 'sincere gratitude for a bold move' to him, his officers and his men.

The fight at Oshoba through the eyes of Pichugin

In the story given above, my interest is in the events at Oshoba, and in particular the description which has been preserved of a ferocious fight in the *qishlaq* on the morning of 18 November

1875. This description exists in two versions: in the form of reports to Skobelev and to von Kaufman from Pichugin himself.

This is how Pichugin described these events at length in his report to von Kaufman.

Wishing to capture this *shaika*, at 11/12 on the night of 17 November I roused the force and took it along the mountain trails to Ashaba. I am purposely specifying the hour of awakening, because, as your Excellency yourself will be able to judge from the strictly accurate facts of my testimony, the energy and fortitude of the Russian soldier on the following 18 November were at such a level that your Excellency could look upon yourself with pride in the midst of such soldiers.

The infantry went on foot, and the *arbakesh* [cart] horses were loaded with ... pots and provisions for five days. The road was difficult, mountainous, with incessant steep ascents and descents. The difficulty of the road was increased by the darkness of the night. The column, having covered over 20 *versts*, at around 7 AM neared the village, which lay in a deep depression.

We went along a low side-road and could not at first see any buildings. Suddenly we noticed mounted pickets running from the heights. I immediately sent forward the Fifth Siberian *sotnia*, who scaled the heights, and the pickets ran off to the *qishlaq* without looking back. The *sotnia* approached closer. All of a sudden, from every roof, from behind the walls and fences they opened fire. Simultaneously a mounted *shaika* poured down from the heights. The *sotnia* retreated slightly and got under cover, and an exchange of fire began. From the strength and accuracy of the fire it was clear that the *qishlaq* had many weapons and had been expecting us for some time. The infantry, regardless of the wearisome march, ran up onto the heights at the double. A dense volley of fire broke out along the whole crest, swallowing up the line of enemy marksmen. The exchange of fire was unusually fierce. To strengthen the firing I ordered the Cossacks to deploy like infantry. The fire from the *qishlaq* began to slacken, and it was visible that the right flank of enemy marksmen had retreated. A further exchange of fire would only have led to the loss of men, because the *gortsy* [mountaineers – a term much used in earlier campaigns in the Caucasus] – the inhabitants of Ashaba, fired remarkably accurately. The infantry were ordered to storm. ... The columns met with fierce resistance, the inhabitants were behind a barricade, with loopholes in the *saklia* [fortifications – another Caucasian term], fences and walls. The entire *qishlaq* was on the barricades. Our men advanced irrepressibly forward, officers in the lead. There began an affray, or more accurately a series of separate fights. Not one of the *Ashabintsy* would surrender, they all perished with weapons in their hands. The women threw themselves with knives at the soldiers or threw stones at them from the roofs. Finally the *qishlaq* was taken, and all lay under bayonets. The vanguard of the second platoon under Lt. Zhuravlev clambered up the heights opposite to oppose the mounted *shaika* and opened a murderous fire on them. The latter flung themselves down to save themselves, scattering under our fire into the pass and disappearing from view, leaving on the spot a few tens of corpses. ...

At 9:30 AM all was over. Occasionally shots rang out, because individual fanatics galloped out from various hiding-places, fired on us and were slaughtered in their turn. Having called muster and collected the force, I despatched a portion of the force to destroy the *qishlaq*. After a little time they had produced a mass of flame, in which burned the corpses which littered all the streets, gardens and courtyards, together with livestock and all property that the force had no use for. ...

In the affair of the 18 November both the officers and men conducted themselves like heroes [*molodtsami*]. I can only reproach them with the fact that some men at the beginning of the affair put themselves too much at risk, disregarding cover, but by the end of the firing they adapted themselves excellently to the locality.

The road ahead lay through a narrow ravine, along which were located the gardens and *khutors* (homesteads) of Ashaba. On this road lay the *qishlaqs* of Gudas ... and Asht. ... In the event of a further attack I could have been placed in a difficult situation; however, to retreat without squandering the moral significance of the success at Ashaba was impossible. The *qishlaqs* were warned in advance that the Russians were coming, to waver was unthinkable, and the force, without having eaten, or rested, having only brewed tea, at 2 PM moved off along the Ashaba ravine. ... Occasionally there were shots; the riflemen shot at individual Sarts [a term used for the local sedentary population], who showed themselves in clefts, but no one fired on us. ... In this way, the men were on their feet for 24.5 hours, having only drunk tea; during that time they had sustained a fierce fight [*goryachee delo*] and had marched 44 *versts* along a barely passable road. The facts speak for themselves, and there is no need for me to add to them.¹⁸

The ‘*gortsy*’ fired ‘unusually accurately’; ‘fanatics fired on our men’; Russia soldiers advanced ‘irrepressibly forward’; and officers were ‘in the lead’ – these literary characteristics in a military report added drama and heroism to the description of the fight. The author added colour when outlining the difficulties that his force encountered and the heroism which his men displayed. A significant part of the text, omitted here, gave information on the trophies captured (weapons, standards) and detailed lists of losses. The colonel gave the names of those who perished on the Russian side: Under-officer Miroshnikov of the 1st platoon, Rifleman Ivanov of the 2nd platoon, Cossack Mandryshin of the Fifth Siberian *sotnia* – three fell in battle; two more Cossacks, Uriadniks Zhelezchikov and Dorogoi, were mortally wounded. Pichugin also named and commended some men for their excellent conduct, such as Under-officer Shemel’, ‘who seized a *bunduk* [musket] and slaughtered ten Sarts’. The report also gave the approximate numbers of the enemy killed (both inhabitants of Oshoba and members of the *shaika* of Tanaberdy and Batyrkul, who had led the defence of Oshoba) – 150 ‘with weapons in their hands’, apart from which ‘in the gardens, holes, along the slopes of the heights, everywhere corpses were scattered’ – again no less than a hundred. Anticipating von Kaufman’s doubts over such a large number, Pichugin added ‘with certainty’ that the numbers of enemy dead he had given were minimal.

Is everything in Pichugin’s account reliable? We must understand that before us is a report addressed to the high command, and not a publication for general consumption. The purpose of this type of report is, amongst other things, to present one’s actions in as advantageous a light as possible, in order to receive any possible bonus (praise, decorations, promotion). The whole text is decidedly marked by precisely this style. Pichugin ascribed tenacity and effectiveness to the defenders of Oshoba, which in turn demonstrated the significance of the victory obtained in this fight by the Russians. The same purpose was served by the ‘minimal’ figure of 250 enemies killed – far outweighing the few Russian soldiers who perished. The difference between the two sides in the number of casualties (250 and 3–5) looked especially high, and Pichugin thus sought to underscore it.¹⁹

In the report there is no mention of the fact that the Russian force included Naib Mirza ‘Abdullah (and his *djigits*), appointed by von Kaufman, who presumably had accompanied the Russians and shown them the road. Together with this, a year later Pichugin himself recommended the award to the former *bek* of a silver medal ‘For Bravery’ and a robe of honour ‘because in the affair at Ashaba on 18 November 1875, coming under heavy fire, almost at close range, from the enemy marksmen, he showed an example of rare cool-headedness’.²⁰ In the report there was also no mention of the number of men from the local population in the Russian force, nor of the role they played, nor of the possible number of killed and wounded among them. This small omission allowed him to highlight his achievements, further embellishing his success.

In some of his other reports to his superiors Pichugin showed himself ready in every way to be prepared for cruel measures. In one of his letters to Skobelev, the colonel, dissatisfied with the new orders he had received after von Kaufman’s departure,²¹ wrote:

As a military man, i.e., a man who already demonstrates the rudiments of real military gifts, which God willing will develop, you must understand that after the Ashaba affair we do not need a police force, not the dispatch of small forces at the behest of section commandants, because such forces could fall victim. Instead we need the bayonet, military dictatorship, and for responsibility to rest with a commander who has unlimited powers over a defined area, acting in your name and that of Konstantin Petrovich [von Kaufman].²²

The military report is an imperial genre, and in general all documents composed by the military are distinguished by their cynical pragmatism and cruelty; in them we find that administrative problems are judged and decided solely according to military criteria, and thus they are free from the necessity of including any political or moral reservations. Such reports present in the simplest and clearest way the opposition between those who are conquering and those who are resisting. This

conflict can only be resolved by the destruction and surrender of the enemy with the aid of unlimited power and military dictatorship. The sufferings of the enemy are not taken into account. The enormous number of victims on the opposing side is not regretted, but on the contrary confirms the unquestionable nature of the victory and the strength of Russian arms. The necessity of such cruelty was entirely obvious to Pichugin and to those he was addressing – the enemy must be cast down and suffer punishment for his opposition.

In the reports, all the attributes of victory were underscored – the losses of the enemy, and the skill and fortitude of the Russian military in attaining this result. Pichugin personalized this victory, specifying the names of heroes and victims – all were meant to be rewarded with glory and remembrance. Of course, the genre of the military report also suggested appropriate praise and reward for Pichugin himself. The opposition, by contrast, was presented as an incomprehensible and anonymous mass, apart from the names of the two main leaders, who nevertheless did not appear to become a subject for narrative.²³ Pichugin talked with some surprise of the furious opposition shown at Oshoba, on the accuracy of the firing, on the women who participated in the fight. In this surprise we can see, on the one hand, an allusion to the barbarity of an enemy who threw itself into thoughtless suicide, and on the other, the desire once again to emphasize the significance of victory over so ruthless an enemy.

In 1901 Pichugin's report was retold almost word for word, in all its particulars, in the journal *Voennyi Sbornik*, which dedicated a series of articles to the events in Khoqand in 1875–1876 (Serbrennikov 1901d, 39–42). M.A. Terent'ev's *Istoriia Zavoevaniia Srednei Azii*, published in 1906, also dedicated a few lines to this episode, where it was remarked that 'the mountain *qishlaq* of Ashaba' was 'destroyed to its foundations' in the fight (1906, Vol. 3, 388). Subsequently, this fact was not referred to, either in historical collections or in the public sphere.

Through other eyes

Notwithstanding the domination of the imperial viewpoint on the events of 1875 in the Khoqand Khanate, evidently those who struggled against Russia did not remain entirely silent – they thought and spoke about what had happened, judged it, and compiled their own explanations and narratives of it. To a considerable extent the latter took an oral form and have not been preserved in their fullness for historians. Some things might have been written down in the form of orders and messages – but these documents have also disappeared, with the exception of a few rare and accidental survivals of texts, which have been preserved, for instance, in the same imperial archives. I have found another such text – a proclamation of the Khoqandis in Russian translation:

To all *aqsaqals* and *amins* [elders of large settlements, which might have several *aqsaqals* under their authority] of the *qishlaqs* of Punk, Asht, Gudas, Pyskak-Ata, Shaidan, Ashaba, Pangas. The accursed Russians early on Sunday left Aq-Djar for Kamysh-Kurgan. All of you, young and old, gather yourselves in the name of *ghazat* [holy war] and in the name of the Muslim faith meet with them at Bardyn-Kul. This service you will perform as pleasing to God. For this purpose we are sending Mama-Zahid Yuzbashi [commander of 100]; set out with him and serve together.²⁴

From this document it is clear that the Khoqand forces had well-organized intelligence and maintained communications amongst themselves, upholding the necessary military hierarchy. The exceptionally religious rhetoric of course calls attention to itself; it was used for the ideological mobilization of people – a resort to the will of God and the necessity of holy war against the unbelievers.

There are also several chronicles written by local authors, in which there were attempts to set out the events of the period of the conquest and make sense of what had happened (for a description see Beisembiev 2009; Veselovskii 1894). Curiously, the episode of the conquest

of Oshoba was briefly remarked on in one of these historical chronicles: the *Ta'rikh-i Jadidah-yi Tashkand* (New History of Tashkent), the longest of all the Khoqand chronicles. The author was the Tashkent *alim* (religious scholar) Muhammad Salih Khwaja Tashkandi (ca. 1832/3–1909/10), who lived in Tashkent and was a direct witness of the capture of the town by Russian forces in 1865.²⁵

Recounting the fighting around Namangan in October–November 1875, Muhammad Salih wrote about the military forces which arrived to help the Russians – he was evidently referring to Pichugin's force:

They came through the foothills to the village of Shahidan [Shaïdan] and stopped at the village of Asht, which is opposite the village of Ashaba and very close to it. The Muslims and the Mujahids [holy warriors] of this village learnt of this and ... bound themselves to fight. ... At that time Mirza 'Abdullah Bek, who was known as Pansad Ghazi²⁶ and descended from Mullah Rahmatullah Pansad-bashi, and who was well known for his baseness and contemptibleness for having been a guide and scout for the Russians on the mountain and steppe roads, led the latter to this village, after which an uncounted number of Muslims from the settlement of Ashaba became martyrs [*shahidan*], and [the Russians] looted and burnt down the houses. From that settlement they set off for Shahidan. There they [the Russians] slaughtered with their pistols one of the learned people [*ulama*], and Kasimbai, whom people considered his closest pupil, and they beat Baba Shahid unmercifully with sticks. They took a fine from the people of Shahidan. From the village of Shahidan they turned their stirrups of violence towards the town of Namangan.²⁷

The description of the events at Oshoba by Muhammad Salih Khwaja fairly accurately repeats what we find in Pichugin's report and in other imperial sources: a punitive expedition by a military force into the mountains; the punishment of two figures of authority (the *aqsqaqs*) at Shaïdan; the cruel fighting at Oshoba, ending with the burning down of the *qishlaq*; the assistance given by Mirza 'Abdullah to the Russian military. The difference lies only in the fact that the author gives more information about those who took part on the Khoqandi side, and does not give any details of the Russians, who are presented as a single hostile mass, much as Pichugin saw the local population. The most telling difference is that the author is describing a catastrophe, not a victory, and he outlines the reasons for it.

The people of Ferghana were split into factions. Brother went against brother, tribe against tribe, town-dwellers against steppe-dwellers, servants against masters, the ordinary people against the poor, the rulers [*padishahan*] against the dervishes. And there was a great disorder. And those who rebelled wished without any right to seize the property of people, sit themselves on the throne of government, control their houses and lands, not disdaining even to take their wives, children and servants. And in the battle for power those who had raised rebellion and riot began to engage in unjust murders. They killed without any regard for the *shari'a* the descendants of those who for many centuries and years had been the rulers and high-born princes, the great *Sayyids* [descendants of the prophet Muhammad], the quintessence and flower of blessed stock.

In this judgement by Muhammad Salih Khwaja it is clear how the accent shifts from the cruelty created by the Russians to grief and regret over the rebellion and cruelty which occurred within Khoqandi society, between each other. Those Muslims who rose up against Khudoyar Khan, ceased to observe the norms of *shari'a*, broke the laws of Islam, overthrew the order which was secured by Muslim tradition: this was the reason for defeat in the struggle against the external enemy. The religious argument thus constituted the main rhetorical element of Muhammad Salih's historical narrative.²⁸

Nevertheless, within this religious rhetoric we can also discern a certain particular local patriotism. Muhammad Salih Khwaja's regrets on the factionalism within the Khoqand Khanate are the reverse side of his imagining of an ideal society, which would not have any internal contradictions and would be capable of resisting an alien invader, and in which different social classes would live in harmony, and power would rest in the hands of a legitimate hereditary elite. This

society imagined by the Tashkent chronicler, which would have had to be made up of the inhabitants of the Khoqand Khanate, could even be described as proto-nationalist.²⁹

Local voices

Writing of the point of view of Muhammad Salih Khwaja, I do not, nevertheless, wish to give the impression that his position was shared by all the inhabitants of the Khoqand Khanate. Muhammad Salih Khwaja presented in his work the particular point of view on these events of a religious intellectual, which reflected the interests of defined social and even regional groups. He himself looked on Oshoba from outside, which implied the ideological predominance of the speaker over his audience.³⁰

In Central Asia there was no single dominant attitude towards the conquest and its explanation. Different voices existed close to each other, side by side – elites and lower classes, men and women, different types of cultural and religious minorities, local and professional groups, who viewed and view different events from the past and present from their own points of view, with their own interpretations, with their own interests and their own logic of description.

During my own researches in Oshoba I transcribed a few local narratives of the conquest of the *qishlaq* by Russian troops.³¹ Holimboi Egamberdiev (about 70 years old, a former *kolkhoz* (collective farm) dispatcher and mullah) recounted the fullest version to me in June 1995:

The Russians fought with the people of Oshoba several times. The first time: they came from the direction of Shaidan. The people of Oshoba won, 247 Russians were killed, thanks to the fact that against the Russian ranks came forth Onor-pansad³² with a force of maiden-warriors (the women of Oshoba also knew how to shoot). The second time and the third time the defence of Oshoba was organized by Kurbashi-bobo, 400 and 150 Russians were killed. Kurbashi-bobo had served in the army of Khudoyar Khan, and had occupied a senior position there – he served, in particular, in Turkestan. ... Under Kurbashi-bobo there were Khwaja Murad, Mullah Pinyoz, ... Safar-Mergan, Ishmat-pansad (overall around 400 people of Oshoba served in the army of Khudoyar Khan). Only in 1877 did the people of Oshoba, on the advice of their mullahs and *ishans* [spiritual counsellors], decide to conclude peace with the Russians: from Kokand came a Russian general with a Tatar translator and some Kokand mullahs. The treaty was concluded with the condition that Oshoba was freed from payment of taxes.

In the accounts of other people of Oshoba, this story also revolved around the figure of Onor-pansad. In the narrative of Mirzobuvo Qodirov (about 80 years old, former chemistry teacher) recorded in September 2010, her story appeared in this fashion:

In the hamlet of Boi-tula there was a family, in which lived Onor. One day the Russians came there and grabbed her father, began to torture him, wound dough around his head like a *salla* [a turban or head-cloth] and began to pour hot oil over him from above. Onor, seeing this, grabbed a sword from a Russian soldier and struck him, saying, 'Why are you making my father suffer? It would be better if you struck him with a sword in the same way, and then he would not suffer, but would die at once.' The soldiers grabbed her hands, wishing to strike her, but Onor sank her teeth into the throat of the soldier, like a wolf [in the local pronunciation *qorishqi*, in the literary variant *qashqir*]. After this they began to call her 'Onor the wolf'. She collected twenty maidens, taught them how to sit on horses and to shoot, and their base camp was a little above Oshoba.

One day a scout brought news that Russian soldiers had come and were resting in a garden on the other bank of the Oshoba-sai, opposite the *qishlaq*. At that time forty *djigit-mergans* [marksmen] came from Dahana³³ to help the people of Oshoba, saying that they themselves would fight, and the people of Oshoba could help them, if their strength was insufficient. Onor came by night from the direction of Boi-tula with her force and began to fire from the other side on the Russians. The soldiers emerged into an open space, and at that point the *mergans* killed them all from the flank. There were only three Russians left, they went to Namangan, and from there returned a commission, which drew up an agreement with the people of Oshoba: a little below Oshoba, in a place where

birches grew, they drew a border. Below that the Russians would rule, and above would be looked to by Onor. Oshoba was freed from taxes.

At first glance, what we have before us, if we recall the military reports in general and the whole train of events described many times by different historians, is an entirely imagined story which bears no relation whatsoever to reality. Three wars with the Russians, three unsuccessful attempts by the latter to take Oshoba – this is an explicit tribute to the mythological logic of narration. The number of Russian soldiers supposedly killed alone is twice the size of the entire Aq-Djar force led by Pichugin, who wrote of just three killed on the side of the attackers during the storming of Oshoba on 18 November 1875. We should however recall that Russian officers and generals also liked to exaggerate the losses of the enemy (Terent'ev 1906) and that all that is written and testified to in historical narratives needs to be treated with caution. The history narrated by the local inhabitants evidently cannot be described as the reporting of real facts but is instead a reworking and rethinking of real events with the aid of the available means of expression: local mythology, local knowledge and a local scheme of classification.

The most surprising thing is that this version of the destruction of the Russians at Oshoba manifested itself, it would seem, not retrospectively, but during the course of the military action. In one of his despatches to von Kaufman of 28–29 October 1875, i.e. three weeks before the burning of the *qishlaq* by Pichugin, the commander of the Namangan *otdel*, Skobelev, passed on the following news from another officer, Bekchurin:

I inform you of one piece of news which I have received without attaching much importance to it. Yesterday, they say, a party of up to 2000 men and 9 cannon were sent from Kokand to Aq-Djar, and Mullah Kushai, with a party of 500 men, may be preparing to act against Sanga. This new outbreak among the Khoqandis is provoked, I am told, by the rumour spread among the Khoqandis that the Russians at Oshoba have been destroyed.³⁴

In this instance it is not entirely clear how these rumours could have arisen and what they were based on, as no other sources explain this. It is possible, indeed, that there were a few military clashes between the people of Oshoba and Russian forces which did not find expression in despatches (given that to the Russian military all the enemy looked the same, and that they did not distinguish between them by place of residence, by status or by any other signs). However, the very fact that these rumours, already fixed by Russian eyewitnesses, enter into a story heard by me 150 years later, speaks to the fact that they had strengthened in popular memory and become part of the reception of the past.

There is evidence of the active participation of the people of Oshoba in fighting against the Russians after the November pogrom also:

In all the reports which I have gathered from the time of the despatch of the force, it seems that on the same [left] bank from the beginning of January [1876], when they reached the Darya [the Syr-Darya], armed bands [*shaiki*] appeared ... opposite the ford at Chil Makhram. The main leaders of these bands were: Tana-Berdy, the former mullah of the village of Oshoba, Ahmed Awdaichi, Alimqul and Ish-Muhammad-Baibachi; the last, according to some reports, was chosen by Pulad Khan himself. ... These bands are made up predominantly of Kyrgyz from the mountainous *qishlaqs* and the inhabitants of the Kurama [Range]; the inhabitants of *qishlaqs* opposite the ford also take part. The aim of these bands is to engage all their strength in every form of robbery and raiding.³⁵

And here is another document, dated January 1876:

The commander of the joint Aq-Djar and Chust forces, Colonel Baron Meller-Zakomel'skii, during his tour through the *qishlaqs* in the foothills of my division in December last year, captured four inhabitants of the rebellious *qishlaq* of Oshoba and escorted them to me to be imprisoned pending your Excellency's decision. Not having yet received any word on this matter, I have the honour to request your Excellency's orders as to what should be done with the prisoners from Oshoba.³⁶

In other words, the destruction of Oshoba in November had in no way led to the end of opposition. The people of Oshoba continued to participate in battles against the Russian forces – and continued to compose their own history of their victories and achievements.

In local accounts of the conquest of the *qishlaq* there are many other concrete details: dates, place names, figures, personal names, the recollection of the general and his Tatar translator. Even the recollection of the agreement of 1877 and the exemption from taxes is not so far from the truth: the conquerors established their power in Ferghana in 1876, and only in the following year began to organize the collection of taxes on the territory; even then this was not wholly successful (Penati 2010). In 1880 von Kaufman brought into force in Ferghana Province his own draft statute of governance, which included in particular the introduction of a government tax, which was significantly lower than the taxes which had been collected under the Khoqand Khanate. In the local narrative this fact has been reimagined and presented as an agreement made between the Russians and Oshoba.

Some other details of this type suggest that the oral accounts I recorded are not modern inventions. Dating them is difficult, but in them one can sense a knowledge of the pre-Soviet situation, which the modern inhabitants have otherwise lost, which makes it entirely possible to suggest that this narrative appeared at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century and was passed on orally from one generation to another.³⁷ It is plausible that it could thus have been preserved to the present day and, not having a wide audience, will nevertheless continue to live, alongside the mass of written scholarly and ideological literature. Mythology, in this instance, can perhaps serve as a means of conserving an otherwise lost reception of history.

I would like to stress particularly that the attitude towards the conquest in the local narrative is very different from the description by Muhammad Salih Khwaja. In the local memory Oshoba was not conquered, but, on the contrary, the people of Oshoba in an unexpected way appear as victors over the Russians, forcing the latter to accept peace terms. The informant named enormous numbers (in the first instance precisely to the last man!) of losses among the Russian soldiers and said nothing about the losses among the local population: they did not disturb him at all, and were not considered in any way traumatic. With this, he not only had no sympathy for the losses among the Russian soldiers, but also did not reproach them for their own losses. In the narrative it was also described how after the clash between the two sides they engaged in talks and came to an agreement, concluding a treaty that endured for many years.³⁸

In this narrative the theme of victimhood is entirely missing. The accent instead is on the fact that amongst the inhabitants of Oshoba there were many who had served in the regular Khoqandi military, and that therefore their participation in military action was entirely lawful. It gives the impression that they fulfilled their military duty, placing themselves under the authority of higher military leaders.

There was no understanding of the ‘homeland’ in the local narrative, and in general no reference to a wider community – all that existed was the world of Oshoba, which defined the limits of the horizon for the narrator. For the local narrative, what is important above all is the names of concrete individuals, their titles and sobriquets. I would like to draw attention to the matter-of-fact way in which this account refers to women who participated in the violence, and to their leader Onor-pansad. Recall that Pichugin also with undisguised amazement described how the women at Oshoba put up fierce resistance,³⁹ although in his report they were anonymous and disorganized local inhabitants. The local narrative speaks of an organized female military division, and this is looked on more as a norm than as any kind of anomaly. It is possible, doubtless, to say that local inhabitants, narrating the war with the Russians, saw and evaluated the role of women in society entirely differently, not subscribing to their usual subordinated and second-class status.

Conclusion

In this article I set out to write a microhistory of the conquest of Central Asia. For this purpose I chose the events of 1875 in the Khoqand Khanate, and more specifically the clash which took place in November in the *qishlaq* of Oshoba.

This immediate focus on the details permits us to understand the conquest not as something planned and proceeding according to that plan, but as a series of successes and failures, discussions and contestations, and decisions which changed as the affair proceeded. In particular, Russian power in the autumn of 1875 was trying to model its policy in the Khoqand Khanate by analogy with that which had already been used in Bukhara and Khiva. However, the active opposition of the local population postponed by more than half a year the establishment of complete control over the territory, because of which they decided instead to liquidate the khanate altogether and include its lands within the body of the empire. Close attention to detail also gives the possibility of seeing how this opposition had an uneven character: in some places the population quickly agreed to the conditions of surrender, and in others there was fierce rejection. These differences in reaction may have been the result of local particularities of one or another society or group, their conflicts with each other, and local understandings of obligation and prestige.

This micro viewpoint allows us also to give attention to individuals at the second or third level, who did not take any key decisions, but through their actions at the local level often defined the available parameters of one decision or another. There are also figures such as Pichugin, Mirza 'Abdullah Bek, Tanaberdy and Onor-pansad. Each of these figures opens up additional perspectives on the history of the conquest of Central Asia by the Russian Empire, the opposition and coincidence of interests of different actors. The example of Pichugin in particular demonstrates that even officers of relatively low rank could act relatively autonomously, independently determining military tactics such as the application of violence or the choice of allies; they could also be influenced by more ideological considerations, even more radical than those of their commanders, and put pressure on superior officers.⁴⁰ The examples of the former *bek* Mirza 'Abdullah and *parvanachi* Tanaberdy demonstrate the contradictory strategies pursued by low-ranking Khoqandi officials in the face of the Russian conquest: one of them chose the route of collaboration, and the other, of active opposition. It is possible that this choice was defined by long-standing antagonism between different fractions in local society, and that the decision to come forward on the Russian side was dictated by the desire to use external forces to secure privileges or gain a victory over an old enemy. The population of one *qishlaq* might accept the conquerors' terms and yield without a fight, while that of another, such as Oshoba, rises up against them, disregarding the unequal forces, according to local conceptions of duty and pride.

Finally, this micro view allows us to see the variety of judgements and interpretations which accompanied the conquest, bringing suffering, hopes, unpleasantness and self-consciousness. Colonel Pichugin, in his report to his commanding officer, constructed his own military-colonizing version of events, invoking the effectiveness of violence, the heroism of Russian officers and soldiers and the fanaticism of a homogenized enemy. In the judgement and description of Muhammad Salih Khwaja the stress is laid on the importance of Islam, from which point of view he rationalizes what has happened as a result of the failure to fulfil Muslim obligations. In the version of the story preserved in Oshoba itself, they use mythological language with particular local meanings, comprehensible only to local inhabitants, and in this the record of military actions is presented not as trauma and tragedy but as the victory of their own heroes.

Each of these three versions, following its own logic of narration, manipulates information, hides some events and presents others in a favourable light. Nevertheless, looked at in parallel they allow us, if not to reconstruct the entire picture or give some 'correct' interpretation, then

at least to see in the history of the Russian conquest of Central Asia a multitude of varied aspects, each equally deserving of consideration.

Translated by Alexander Morrison

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Archives and abbreviations

IVANRUZ – Institut Vostokovedeniia Akademii Nauk Respubliki Uzbekistan im. Biruni (Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences)

Rukopis' K. D. 1084 (Manuscript No. K. D. 1084)

TsGARUZ – Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistan (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan)

Fond (F.) I-1 Kantseliariia Turkestanского General-Gubernatora (Chancellery of the Turkestan Governor-General)

F.I-19 Ferganskoe Oblastnoe Upravlenie (Administration of Ferghana Province)

F.I-715 A. G. Serebrennikov (Materials collected by A. G. Serebrennikov)

Notes

1. Today, Oshoba is located in the Asht region of Sughd Province of the Republic of Tajikistan. In written sources it is often called Ashaba.
2. At the time of the conquest the settlement contained around 400 dwellings, and its inhabitants called themselves Turks. (Now they are recorded as Uzbeks.) Their principal occupations were grazing sheep and goats on the surrounding hillsides and growing wheat, barley and sorghum, and also in external industries, including service in the Khoqandi army.
3. I will here describe these events from the point of view of the Russians (who generated the most detailed accounts), basing it primarily on the materials collected by A.G. Serebrennikov, which are partly published (1897, 1899, 1901a, 1901b, 1901c, 1901d, 1901e, 1901f) and partly held in TsGARUZ.
4. The Russians believed that this was largely for religious reasons (because Khudoyar had been collaborating with them), but in fact it seems to have been more closely linked to earlier rivalries between sedentary and nomadic populations in Khoqand, and to Khudoyar's recent attempt to introduce a tax on inheritance, which was denounced by the *'ulama* as contrary to Islamic law (Babadzhanov 2010).
5. The town of Khujand (in Soviet times Leninabad, now the centre of Sughd Province of Tajikistan), which lies at the western extremity of the Ferghana Valley, had been under direct Russian rule within the governor-generalship of Turkestan since 1866.
6. This region nowadays more or less corresponds to Namangan Province of Uzbekistan and the Asht region of Sughd Province in Tajikistan.
7. An analogous practice of creating buffer territories had been used by the Russian military before: von Kaufman created the Zarafshan *okrug* out of part of the territory of the Bukharan emirate in 1868, and the Amu-Darya *otdel* from Khivan territory in 1873. The special terms *otdel* and *okrug* signified the particular status of these administrative creations with their separate administration (Becker 1968).
8. Pulad Khan (1844 or 1846–1876) proclaimed himself the lawful successor to the ruling Ming dynasty in Khoqand, although his enemies, including Russian officials, accused him of being a usurper (Babadzhanov 2010).
9. I do not intend here to give a complete history of the conquest of the Khoqand Khanate, but would add that on 26 December 1875 a force under Skobelev's command resumed large-scale military campaigns against the Khoqandi forces, seizing Andijan, and beating off the main forces of the enemy. At the

- beginning of February 1876 the decision was taken in Saint Petersburg to liquidate the Khoqand Khanate entirely and unite its territory with Turkestan.
10. The Russians usually assumed that the forces opposed to them were made up primarily of Qipchaq or Kyrgyz nomads, but resistance amongst the peoples of Ferghana was actually more widespread.
 11. In the Khoqand administration a *naib* was an assistant to the *wazir*, i.e. the prime minister, and could also sometimes command artillery and infantry (Beisembiev 2009). However, it is entirely possible that von Kaufman took this term from his previous experience fighting in the North Caucasus, where *naibs* were appointed to govern particular territories.
 12. Von Kaufman to the head of the Namangan *otdel* 19/10/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 d.64 ll.214–5.
 13. Eiler to von Kaufman 19/10/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.64 ll.218–221.
 14. Petr Aristarkhovich Pichugin (dates unknown) was a participant in many military operations in Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s. One interesting detail is that his cousin was married to the well-known anthropologist A.P. Bogdanov, to whom the colonel ‘presented’ skulls for study (S.M.S. 2004).
 15. Report of the Commandant of Kurama District to K.P. von Kaufman 25/10/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.64 ll.271–272.
 16. ‘Zapiska o politicheskikh i inykh delakh na Kokandskoi granitse’ 15/11/1875 TsGARUZ F.I-1 Op.1 D.2551 ll.118–ob.
 17. Zulfikar (1839–?) was a high-ranking Khoqandi official, of Qaraqalpaq origin, who had rebelled first against Khudoyar and then against Nasruddin. We have no reliable information about Tanaberdy (Tangriberdy) (see Beisembiev 2009).
 18. Report of the commander of the Aq-Djar Force [Pichugin] to the commander of the forces of the Turkestan military *okrug* [von Kaufman] 20/11/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 d.65 ll.202–7.
 19. However, the significant number of casualties at Oshoba is confirmed by circumstantial evidence: a census of the number of houses in the *qishlaq* carried out by officials in 1877–1883.
 20. Report of Pichugin on the award to the former *bek* of Babadarkhan, Mirza ‘Abdullah, of a robe of honour, 11/09/1876 TsGARUz F.I-1 Op.20 D.9808 l.1
 21. After von Kaufman’s departure, Skobelev united the Aq-Djar and Chust forces and appointed as their commander Baron A.N. Meller-Zakomel’skii, who at the beginning of December carried out a punitive expedition along the left bank of the Syr-Darya, after which opposition in the Kurama foothills finally ceased.
 22. Pichugin to Skobelev 21/11/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.65 ll.230–1. Attached to the copy of this letter, another participant in the Ferghana campaigns, Major-General V.N. Trotskii (1836–1901), remarked on the strangely familiar tone with which Pichugin addressed Skobelev.
 23. I do not have any information as to whether Pichugin took part in the military campaigns in the Caucasus, which lasted for the whole of the first half of the nineteenth century, but certainly in his text one notices numerous clichés about ‘mountaineer – Muslim – fanatics’, which were already well established in Russian military discourse from the very beginning of the conquest of Central Asia (Bobrovnikov 2005).
 24. Proclamation of Aq Buta Bek, son of ‘Abd al-Ghafar, and Mullah Nur Muhammad (trans. 31/10/1875) bearing their seals, from Gudas. TsGARUz F.I-715 op.1 d.64 l.377. The original is not present in the file (for a similar letter see Terent’ev 1903, II, 418).
 25. He composed this work over 25 years, 1863–1887/8.
 26. *Pansad/pansadbashi*: commander of 500. *Ghazi*: warrior for the faith.
 27. Muhammad Salih Khwaja Tashkandi, *Ta’rikh-i Jadidah-yi Tashkand* IVANRUz Inv. No.7791, ff.804b, 805a. I gratefully acknowledge my profound debt to Bakhtiyar Babajanov for translating this passage from the original Persian and for his commentary on it. I am also indebted to Timur Beisembiev’s *Annotated Indices to the Kokand Chronicles* (Tokyo 2008) for having found the reference to Oshoba.
 28. On the characteristics of Muhammad Salih Khwaja Tashkandi’s world-view see Babadzhanov (2010).
 29. Although to become *national* it would have needed other elements – the imagining of a single name, a single language and a single culture, a secular view of historical development, a strong anti-imperial ethos, etc. In its full form a national narrative from a traumatic perspective of the tragic events at Oshoba emerged only in 1992, when Uzbekistan was proclaimed an independent state. An article by O. Abdullaev entitled ‘The Tragedy of Oshoba’ appeared in the newspaper *Uzbekiston adabiyati va san’ati* that year. The author was familiar with the articles in *Voennyi Sbornik*, where Pichugin’s report was reprinted, which became for him a means to reassess the tragedy of colonial subjugation. The imperial account was recalled and, paradoxically, became a seamless part of the national text.
 30. We should not forget that Muhammad Salih Khwaja was a Russian subject by this date, although he did not identify as Russian.

31. In all, I noted down around 10 interviews about these events with people of different ages and social backgrounds. My impression was that fragments of this narrative were known to all inhabitants of the village, but the fullest version was remembered only by a few older people.
32. In this instance *pansad* is either a sobriquet for the woman or else her husband's military rank.
33. There are two *qishlaqs* with this name in the Asht region – one in the direction of Pangaz, the other towards Asht.
34. Skobelev to von Kaufman 28–29/10/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.64 ll.324–325. It is possible that the letter refers to Mir-Salih Bekchurin (1819/20–after 1887), a Bashkir who served on the statistical committee in Tashkent, participated in military operations and was Skobelev's translator during the campaign of 1875–1876.
35. Report of the Commander of the Aq-Djar force to Lt-Col Komarov 12/01/1876 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 D.66 l.124.
36. 'File on the arrest of four inhabitants of the *qishlaq* of Oshoba, accused of rebellion', 12/02/1876 TsGARUz F.I-19 Op.1 d.10458 l.1.
37. It is possible that earlier this account had a written form. It is striking that N. Veselovskii, who at the end of the nineteenth century sought out local accounts of the Russian conquest, refers to an old man from Asht who 'kept such notes' (Veselovskii 1894, vi n.1).
38. On the significance of oral history in Central Asia, including the description of events connected with the Russian conquest, see Prior (2013). Researching a heroic poem about the Kyrgyz leader Shabdan Batyr, which was compiled on the basis of oral sources at the beginning of the twentieth century, Prior draws attention to the description of the successful career of this figure, who concluded peace with the Russians and was raised by them to high status.
39. This had also occurred during the Russian siege of the Khoqandi fortress of Aq Masjid in 1853, the first open clash between the two powers. Mullah Niyaz Khoqandi, in his *Ta'rikh-i Shahrulki* (composed 1871), writes that 'The besieged, men and women, throwing aside guns and bullets, took up knives and swords [*Zan va mard hama yakbara alat tir tuhfang ra par tafta dasteha-ra bar qabza tegh buda*]' (Pantusov 1885, 199).
40. For an earlier example of this see Mackenzie (1969), although the influence of 'military atamans' on Russian imperial expansion should not be exaggerated.

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