

## M.G. CHERNYAEV'S HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF KUNGRAD AND THE POPULATION OF THE SOUTHERN ARAL SEA REGION

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### Abstract

This article examines the historical value of the diary of Mikhail Grigorievich Chernyaev as a primary source for studying the history of Kungrad and the Southern Aral Sea region during the Kungrad uprising of 1858–1859. Based on Chernyaev's firsthand observations recorded during A.I. Butakov's expedition, the study analyzes the political situation in Kungrad, the activities of Muhammad Fana, the socio-economic life of the local population, interethnic relations among the Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Turkmens, as well as the settlement pattern, irrigation system, architecture, and everyday life of the region. Particular attention is paid to the source value of the diary as an important documentary account reflecting the political and social realities of the Southern Aral Sea region in the mid-nineteenth century. The analysis demonstrates that Chernyaev's diary constitutes a unique historical source that significantly enriches our understanding of the political, economic, and cultural development of the lower Amu Darya region during a period of profound political transformation in Central Asia.

**Keywords:** M.G. Chernyaev; Kungrad; Southern Aral Sea region; Karakalpaks; Central Asia; Russian Empire; historical sources; diary; Kungrad uprising; nineteenth century.

### Introduction

The history of the Southern Aral Sea region in the mid-nineteenth century is of considerable scholarly interest, as this period was marked by significant political developments, shifts in the regional balance of power, and the intensification of the Russian Empire's foreign policy interests in Central Asia. Personal written

sources occupy a special place in the study of the region's history, as they make it possible to reconstruct not only the course of political events but also the socio-economic, ethnocultural, and everyday life of the local population.

One of the most valuable historical sources is the diary of Mikhail Grigorievich Chernyaev, an officer of the General Staff, compiled during A.I. Butakov's expedition to Kungrad during the uprising of 1858–1859. Chernyaev's diary contains extensive factual information on the political situation in Kungrad, the activities of Muhammad Fana, relations among the Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Turkmens, the economic conditions of the region, as well as the urban infrastructure, irrigation system, architecture, and everyday life of the population of the Southern Aral Sea region. Owing to the author's direct observations, the diary possesses exceptional documentary value and provides a comprehensive picture of the region on the eve of the final establishment of Russian influence.

Although the diaries of participants in Russian expeditions have repeatedly attracted the attention of scholars of Central Asian history, many of the accounts relating to Kungrad and the Southern Aral Sea region remain insufficiently studied. Of particular importance are Chernyaev's observations concerning the socio-political situation in the region, the course of the Kungrad uprising, the ethnic composition of the population, economic activities, and the relations among the various peoples inhabiting the lower reaches of the Amu Darya.

The purpose of this article is to examine M.G. Chernyaev's diary as a historical source for the study of Kungrad and the Southern Aral Sea region during the uprising of 1858–1859. To achieve this objective, the article analyzes Chernyaev's accounts of the political situation in Kungrad, the activities of Muhammad Fana, the socio-economic life of the local population, the natural environment, urban infrastructure, and interethnic relations in the region. The analysis makes it possible to assess the source value of Chernyaev's diary and to determine its significance for reconstructing the political, socio-economic, and cultural history of the Southern Aral Sea region in the mid-nineteenth century.

## **Results**

Mikhail Grigorievich Chernyaev, who later became the Governor-General of Turkestan, was born in 1828 into a modest noble family in the village of Tubyshki, Mogilev Province. Gifted with remarkable intellectual abilities and

strength of character, he was a man of integrity, determination, and considerable complexity. Independent and original in both thought and action, he remained steadfast in his convictions throughout his life, despite the constantly changing intellectual and political trends that surrounded him [2].

At the beginning of June, M.G. Chernyaev joined the expedition of Captain A.I. Butakov, which sailed aboard the vessels of the Aral Flotilla to the town of Kungrad in order to assist the Karakalpaks during the uprising of 1858–1859. The flotilla consisted of the steamship *Perovsky* and several barges.

As an officer of the General Staff, Chernyaev's responsibilities included surveying the banks of the Amu Darya and commanding the flotilla's land detachment.

During the expedition, Chernyaev kept a diary in which he recorded valuable information about the population of the Southern Aral Sea region.

He wrote: "At seven o'clock in the morning on 19 June, we weighed anchor and entered the Kichkine Darya, proceeding upstream at a speed of two versts per hour. At a quarter past eleven we reached the Ulkun Darya, where the current carried us toward the right bank, but we immediately corrected our course and, having raised the sails on all the vessels, continued at a speed of four miles per hour. At the point where the Kichkine Darya branches off from the Ulkun Darya, the Karakalpaks have built a small sod fortress measuring about 150 sazhen on each side. The interior of the fortress is densely occupied by yurts, as are the surrounding areas. Throughout the entire stretch from the mouth of the Kichkine Darya to Ulkun, numerous Karakalpak yurts are scattered across the landscape, their inhabitants engaged in agriculture and fishing" [1].

On 22 June, after arriving in Kungrad, A.I. Butakov sent Chernyaev together with two members of the expedition into the town to select a suitable campsite. Chernyaev later described this visit in his diary:

"Kungrad lies about five versts from the place where our vessels were anchored. The entire area is intersected by irrigation canals running in every direction, most of them lined with Lombardy poplars and willows. As we approached the bank of the Taldyk River, on the opposite side of which Kungrad was situated, the inhabitants greeted us with gunfire and demonstrations of equestrian skill. Several boats were waiting at the shore. We boarded the best one ourselves, while the horses were loaded onto another. The boats were made of wooden planks fastened together with iron, without caulking, so they leaked badly, requiring the water to

be constantly bailed out during the crossing. To keep one's feet dry, the bottom of the boats was covered with grass or brushwood. On the opposite bank, where the walls of Kungrad reached the river, the entire population of the town awaited us. Frequent gunshots were fired from the crowd in our honour... After proceeding only a short distance, we entered through the gates of Kungrad" [4, p. 847].

Following his meeting with the ruler of Kungrad, Muhammad Fana, who had rebelled against the Khivan Khan Sayyid Muhammad, Chernyaev recorded the following observations:

"Having dismounted, we passed through a dark corridor into a covered courtyard where Muhammad Fana was seated with his close associates. His audience hall consisted of a small courtyard roofed over only halfway, while the remaining half was left uncovered to allow fresh air to circulate and so that smoke could be burned in the evenings to drive away mosquitoes. To the right of the entrance stood a roughly constructed platform about one and a half arshins high, unpainted, with a carpet spread upon it. This elevation served as the throne of the khan elected by the people of Kungrad. When we entered, he was seated upon his throne, his closest advisers sat on carpets spread along either side, while the remaining fifty or so attendants stood or sat at some distance" [2].

Chernyaev then provided a physical description of Muhammad Fana and expressed his surprise that the ruler of Kungrad had managed to maintain his independence from Khiva for as long as nine months.

As is well known, Muhammad Fana's army consisted mainly of Turkmen mercenaries under the command of Atamurat Khan, who were stationed in Kungrad. Chernyaev noted that Muhammad Fana paid the Turkmens twenty *tillas* for every enemy soldier killed. Among the Turkmen tribal leaders assisting the ruler of Kungrad, he mentioned two men from the Ijereli tribe - Auazmambet and Salak-Klychkar [3, p. 38].

In his diary, Chernyaev also described the khan's residence and garden, which made a favourable impression on him:

"This garden, or rather country residence, is situated two versts from the town walls and one verst from the riverbank. It is enclosed by a clay wall with battlements resembling those of Kungrad, although on a smaller scale. A house is attached to one section of the wall. The interior is quite spacious and consists of numerous dark corridors and rooms. There are no windows, and daylight enters

only through the doorways or openings in the flat roof. Some of the rooms are decorated with glazed tiles. The garden contains poplars, apricot and pear trees, as well as apple trees. Around the walls are beds planted with melons, watermelons, and dzhurzha. The garden, forming a small independent fortress in itself, would have been an excellent location for accommodating our small detachment had it been situated closer to the riverbank" [4, p. 851].

Chernyaev's diary also contains valuable information on relations among the peoples of Kungrad - Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, and Turkmens. He wrote: "The Yomud Turkmens showed no desire whatsoever to accept Russian allegiance. This people has become accustomed to earning its livelihood through raiding and warfare. Above all, they value their unrestricted freedom and would not exchange it for any benefits if these required order and good governance. Less than any other people, they are prepared to accept any form of civil administration. The barren and waterless lands they inhabit are poorly suited to agriculture or livestock breeding; consequently, they subsist almost entirely on raiding and the slave trade... The Uzbeks and Karakalpaks constitute the majority of the population and have little sympathy for Muhammad Fana, with the exception of his personal supporters... The Kirghiz leader Azbergen had allied himself with the people of Kungrad and the Turkmens, but the latter's raids and acts of violence against the Kirghiz forced him to withdraw to a small fortress twenty-five versts from Kungrad. Atamurat Khan laid siege to him with eight hundred horsemen but failed and eventually withdrew to his nomadic encampments. Unable to continue resisting the people of Kungrad and the Turkmens, Azbergen reconciled himself with the Khivan Khan and, during the latter's siege of Kungrad, joined his forces with his own followers. The Turkmens, embittered by their earlier failure against Azbergen, feared that with our assistance he would demand the return of the Kirghiz captured by them. Therefore, Azbergen informed Captain Butakov that he was willing to reconcile with the Turkmens, although he had little confidence in the sincerity of such a reconciliation" [4, p. 854].

According to Chernyaev, residents of Kungrad frequently approached members of the expedition to complain about the Turkmens who exercised control over the town. They sought protection, claiming that the Turkmens had abducted their wives and daughters and taken them to Turkmen territory to be sold into slavery. Captain A.I. Butakov, however, replied that the expedition would not interfere in

the internal affairs of Kungrad and advised the petitioners to address their grievances directly to Muhammad Fana [3, p. 38].

## Conclusion

Thus, M.G. Chernyaev's diary contains invaluable information on the peoples of the Southern Aral Sea region and constitutes an important primary source for the study of the political, economic, and cultural history of the region. The diary not only records the course of the Kungrad uprising of 1858-1859 but also provides detailed firsthand observations on the social structure, economic life, interethnic relations, settlement patterns, and everyday life of the local population. Consequently, it represents a significant documentary source for reconstructing the history of the Southern Aral Sea region in the mid-nineteenth century and remains an indispensable source for further historical research.

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