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Orynbay Oshanov

ANCIENT CARAVAN ROUTES OF WESTERN SARYARKA*

The article examines the ancient caravan and overland routes that passed through Saryarka and other areas of the Kazakh Steppe. The purpose of the study is to investigate the caravan routes of the Late and Medieval periods that passed through the western part of Saryarka, particularly the Turgai Steppe. The paper reveals the historical significance of the Ulytau—Turgai Steppe as an important link between Siberia and Central Asia since ancient times, providing data on 19th century caravan routes. The article also analyzes several medieval historical events associated with these routes, such as Tamerlane's campaign against Khan Tokhtamysh in 1391, the Sibanid campaign against the Ulytau in 1582, and the journey of the Italian ambassador Rubruk in 1252—1253. The author demonstrates that these events followed the same route, particularly the section passing through Betpakdala. Based on this research, the author proposes a new perspective on Guillaume de Rubruck's journey through the Kazakh Steppe. The caravan and overland trails have been mapped and are presented for study by the historical community. The study employed the methodologies of field ethnography and comparative historical analysis.

Key words: Tokhtamysh Khan, Emir Timur, Abdullah Khan, Guillaume de Rubruk, Saryarka, Jetisu, Ulytau, Torgai, Betpak-Steppes, Karatau, Emil, Sarysu, caravan, trails.

About the authors: Oshanov Orynbay, Senior Researcher, Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Contact information: 050010, Kazakhstan, Almaty, 44 Dostyk Ave., Margulan Institute of Archaeology, e-mail: dadan_@mail.ru.

О.Ж. Ошанов

ДРЕВНИЕ КАРАВАННЫЕ ПУТИ ЗАПАДНОЙ САРЫАРКИ

В статье рассматриваются древние караванные и походные пути, проходившие через Сарыарку и другие районы казахской степи. Цель исследования — изучение караванных путей позднего и средневекового периодов, которые проходили через западную часть Сарыарки, а именно через Торгайскую степь. В работе раскрывается историческая значимость Улытау—Торгайской степи как важного связующего звена между Сибирью и Центральной Азией с древних времён; приводятся данные о караванных путях XIX в. В статье рассматриваются исторические события Средневековья, связанные с этими караванными путями. Среди них — поход Тамерлана в 1391 г. против хана Тохтамыша, поход Шибанидов в 1582 г. на Улытау, путь итальянского посла Рубрука в 1252—1253 гг. и другие исторические факты. Автор показывает, что они следовали одним и тем же маршрутом, особенно на участке, проходящем через Бетпакдалу. На основе этого исследования предлагается новый взгляд на путешествие Гильома де Рубрука через казахскую степь. Караванные и походные пути нанесены на карту и представлены для изучения историческим сообществом. Исследование проведено с использованием методологии полевой этнографии и методов сравнительно-исторического анализа.

Ключевые слова: Тохтамыш, Эмир Тимур, Абдулла-хан, Гильом де Рубрук, Сарыарка, Жетысу, Улытау, Торгай, Бетпак-Дала, Каратау, Эмиль, Сарысу, караван, тропы.

Сведения об авторе: Ошанов Орынбай Жанабайулы, старший научный сотрудник, Институт археологии имени А.Х. Маргулана, г. Алматы, Казахстан.

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Контактная информация: 050010, Казахстан, г. Алматы, ул. Достык, 44, Институт археологии им. А.Х. Маргулана, e-mail:dadan_@mail.ru.

Introduction

In his research, the scholar A.Kh. Margulan provided a detailed account of the ancient caravan routes that crossed the Betpakdala (Fig. 1), connecting the cities of the Syrdarya area with Saryarka and Siberia (Margulan 1997; Manapova 2021). Further information about these caravan routes can be found in the works of other researchers, including K.M. Baipakov, A.Z. Beisenov and others (Baipakov 1986; Beisenov 2014: 3).

Saryarka is a large historical geographical region located in Kazakhstan. According to scientific data, Saryarka covers the lands of Karaganda, Ulytau, Kostanay, Akmola, Pavlodar and Semey regions of Kazakhstan. However, in the opinion of the people, this region covers an even wider geographical range.

Since time immemorial, the Kazakh Steppe has served as a vital transit corridor, connecting Siberia, the Volga-Ural region with Central Asian states, China and other regions through trade, economic exchange and diplomacy. Analyzing the caravan routes that traversed the Kazakh steppes from south to north (and vice versa), reveals that they are oriented not only toward foreign regions, but also toward the seasonal nomadic settlements. When the demand for nomadic products increased, traders ofen traveled long distances (sometimes up to thousand kilometers) to reach summer pastures, rather than waiting for the nomads to return to their winter quarters. The nomads themselves also drove their livestock for trade as far as Samarkand and Bukhara during the autumn season, a practice that continued until the early nineteenth century. From the nineteenth century onward, as the Russian Empire took control of the main trade centers, the Kazakhs stopped traveling to distant markets and began selling their livestock and its products at fairs established near their settlements.

In general, the caravan routes of the steppe demonstrate remarkable stability. Over the centuries, numerous states and tribal confederations arose in the Kazakh steppe, and various political transformations took place, yet the routes of the caravans remained virtually unchanged. This regularity, however, does not extend to diplomatic transit routes (used by envoys, postal couriers, and others). Diplomatic logistics, on the contrary, changed from century depending on prevailing political circumstances and did not adhere to the established laws of the caravan routes. Depending on the situation, diplomatic missions could travel either along the caravan routes or in any direction across the steppe.

Description of materials

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Russia’s expansion into Siberia and the Kazakh steppe gained momentum, leading to the emergence of many new settlements. Despite these developments, the ancient caravan routes that crossed the Kazakh steppe, although undergoing minor changes, retained their historical pathways. These routes began to serve as stations connecting the cities of Central Asia and as lines of communication between the newly established settlements in the Kazakh steppe. An example can be found in the 19th century city of Torgai. According to historical sources, three routes extended from Torgai, linking it with the cities of Orsk, Kostanay, and Perovsk. The first two routes were suitable for wagon travel, while the third, due to its difficult terrain, was used exclusively as a caravan road (Rossiya 1903: 341). The road from Turgai-Perovsk after leaving the city of Turgai continued through the Jaksy Qabyrga river, Batpaqquduk, the Ulyjilanshyk River, then passed through the Sazanbai well located within the Sarykum sands (today Sazanbai Kumy). From there, it stretched through Jaryq, Qudyqtysai, Bulaqty, Muyir and Bileuti

(Rossiya 1903: 342). In our article, we will focus on the last two locations in connection with the campaign of Shibani Abdullah Khan.

The Sazanbai Kumy (sand) is divided into three parts: Ulken Sazanbai (Great Sazanbai), Kishi Sazanbai (Small Sazanbai), Tokal kum. Sazanbai is one of the wealthy local landowners who lived in the 19th century and belonged to the Uzyn Kypchak clan. His wintering site was located in this sand, and later the area was named after him. According to local accounts, Sazanbai himself lived in Great Sazanbai, his son in Small Sazanbai, and his second wife (*kaz.: tokal*) resided in the middle part of the sands, which subsequently became known as Tokalqum ("the sands of the second wife"). (I).

One of the key locations in the Torgai region is the confluence of the Jilanshyk River and Lake Akkol. In this area, the ruins of several mausoleums and settlement sites dating to the period of the Jochi Ulus have been identified, including Syrlytam, Qyz molasy (grave) and Dogalaq Tobe.

The site where Syrlytam is located once served as a crossroads of nine routes and was one of the most important junctions in the region. These crossing passed through this very area: the Jilkibai Crossing, the Shoyinkap Crossing, and the Altybai Crossing. These crossings marked the convergence of caravan routes leading toward Ulytau, Karsakbai and further on to Turkistan.

In the Torgai region, the last name preserved in popular memory for the ancient caravan route (sometimes referred to as a campaign or expedition route) is associated with a man named Satbai. Among the local population, these routes are remembered as "Satbai joly (*kaz.:* Satbai's *road*)" or "Satbaidyn qara joly". The term "Satbaydyn qara joly" refers not to a single route, but to several ancient caravan roads that branch off and extend in different directions. In some works, the name "Satbai" has been mistakenly associated with the grandfather of the Kazakh scientist Kanysh Satpayev. In fact, according to local informants, Satbai was a man from the Jappas clan of the Junior Juz (one of the three traditional divisions of the Kazakh people) who lived in the 19th century (II). Satbai served as a guide, leading caravans arriving from Russia and other regions. Over time, all these roads came to be known among the people by his name.

The "Satbaidyn qara joly" (translated as black roads of Satbai), known in the Torgai region and identified during our research, are as follows.

The first road. This road begins in Russia (It must be from Orsk — *O.O.*) and runs along the western side of the Tosyn sands, reaching the Altybai crossing, located upstream from the confluence of the Jilanshyk River with Lake Aqkol. After crossing the river, it divides into two branches near the Kotibar thicket. One branch passes beyond the Sazanbai sand, continues along the Bozshakol, Ali, Bulanty and Baikonur rivers, crosses the Sarysu River, and extend toward Turkestan. The second branch, turning east from the Kotibar thicket, proceeds toward Kishitau and in the Ulytau (Ulytau — *O.O.*) area connects with caravan routes.

The second route leaves from Torgai and stretches through Shoshkakol to Karakum, from there descends toward the Syr Darya.

According to 18th century historical documents, the "Satbai black road" passing through Kishitau was already known as an ancient main road. This is the road that Russian merchants from Orsk passed on their way to Tashkent in 1741. Tolik batyr agreed to act as a guide for the joint caravan of three merchants (Shubay Arslanov, Semyon Drozdov and Mansur Yusupov) on their way to Tashkent.

Tolek batyr is a well-known historical figure during the Dzungarian-Kazakh invasion of the 18th century and a representative of the Argyn-Suyindyk clan. This source states that Tolek Batyr and his people inhabited the banks of the Ilek River in the Aktobe region.

This caravan from Orsk followed the Ilek River and then proceeded along the Torgai River eventually reached Ulytau. Here we offer a historical document without changes: "Eight days before reaching Turkestan, the caravan stopped at a small village (about 15 caravans) to buy food The Usinsk volost of the Great Horde. The ulus was located on the Yezdle River, near a large mountain that the Kyrgyz called Ulutau. The leader of the ulus, Khara-Khudai-Verdy, caused considerable trouble and inconvenience to the Russian caravan" (Arslanov 1888: 405). This document mentions one of the branches of the Uysun family and the Yezdle River, on whose banks

they settled — in fact, the Bolshoy Jezdi River, which originates on the southern sloples of the Ulytau mountains. Another noteworthy detail is that the source describes the distance from Ulytau to Turkestan as an “eight-day journey”.

This last fact, in turn, helps us to trace the route of another historical expedition that took place exactly five centuries earlier — the journey of Guillaume de Rubruck to the Mongol headquarters in 1253—1255, commissioned by the French King Louis VIII.

The exact route taken by the traveler across what is now Kazakhstan has been a matter of debate among scholars, with each proposing his own reconstruction. In the supplementary map accompanying A. I. Malein’s translation, which we use (the map of the roads traversed by Plano Carpini and Guillaume de Rubruck), the path taken by Rubruck after crossing the Ural River and before reaching the first city along the Syr Darya is rendered inaccurately. According to this map, after crossing the Urals, Rubruk continuously moved southeast and reached the village of Kynchat through the northern area of Jankent (on the map Yangikent) along the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. If this route were accurate, then beyond the Ural River, only the Jem River would be encountered, after which Rubruck and his companions would have had to traverse an extremely arid and uninhabited desert. That is, the road should go through today's Borsyk kym (kaz.: Badger Sands) and Karakum (North of the Aral Basin), but the map indicates otherwise. It is also important to note that this section of the journey took place between September and October, at which time the steppe clans were in the pastures in the north and only at this time they were heading back to the autumn pasture. This is also evidenced by Rubruck's record. There, after the steppe tribes (called Tatars in the book) descended to the south, they also head in this direction (Puteshestviye 1993: 109).

From the records, it can be inferred that after crossing the Ural River, Rubruck did not travel through a desert, but rather through riverine areas. He writes: “Forests also grow along the banks of some rivers, but this is rare" (Puteshestviye 1993: 108). These rivers were probably steppe rivers such as the Oiyl, Ankaty, Buldyrty, Kaldygaity, Kiyl, Elek, Irgyz, and Torgai, since trees are seldom found along their banks.

Judging by Rubruck statement, «On the eve of All Saints' Day, we left the road to the east» it appears that after crossing the Urals, they had been following an eastward route up to that point. This fact is fully written as follows: «On the eve of All Saints' Day, we left the road to the east, as the Tatars had already descended far to the south, and we turned directly south through certain mountains, traveling for eight consecutive days. In this desert, I saw many donkeys called kulam, which resemble mules; our guide and his companions pursued them vigorously, but to no avail because of their great swiftness. On the seventh day, we saw very high mountains to the south, and we entered a plain that was irrigated like a garden, where we found cultivated land.” He further notes that one week after the Feast of All Saints, they reached the city of Kinchat (Puteshestviye 1993: 109). This sentence alone conceals several valuable details. The description “we turned south through some mountains and descended for eight days” closely corresponds to the account of the Russian merchant Shubai Arslanov, who reported that “we reached Ulytau eight days before Turkestan.” It is only on this part of the route that Rubruck mentions a “desert” and the presence of wild kulans. From this, one can clearly identify the Betpak-Dala steppe stretching from east to west as the region he refers to south of Ulytau. Although the area is now barren, it is known that until recently Betpak-Dala was inhabited by kulans.

Thus, among researchers, Rubruck's note about the point where he turned from east to south agrees with the conclusions of Yule, Schmidt and Rockhill that the distance between 67 and 70 latitudes. If we specify this point, rotated from Ulytau, it will happen right at the 67th latitude. By longitude, Rubruck’s crossing of the Ural and turn eastward corresponds approximately to 49°40′—50°, while at Ulytau it is around 48°40′—which fully matches Rubruck’s remark that they continued traveling eastward.

It can be noted that Rubruck’s description of the section of the route from Ulytau to Karatau corresponds closely with the memoirs of the Cossack Dmitry Devyatov, who was captured by Kenesary's soldiers in Ulytau in 1845. While in captivity, Devyatov described what he saw along

the way as follows: “For five days we rode through the hungry steppe, and it is not for nothing that it is called so: nowhere could we see even a bush of elm or meadowsweet—only small sandy hills and here and there some bushy grass called kok-pek, a kind of wormwood. The water was salty, and even that was drawn from wells as deep as thirty arshins. Our daily crossings covered from fifty to sixty versts” or “Beyond the Chu, mountains could be seen, their summits faintly blue in the distance and lost in the clouds. I asked one Kyrgyz riding behind me: ‘Mamed, bu-ni-tau?’ — ‘Bu Kara-tau!’ That is, ‘What mountains are these?’ — ‘These are the Black Mountains!’ was his reply.

Having traveled fifteen versts or more through the mountains, we encountered the villages of the Karatau Kyrgyz in the gorges, who have been nomadic there for centuries. Beyond the mountains, along the road, rich valleys with hilly areas opened up, where herds of sheep and horses belonging to the Karatau Kyrgyz grazed. Everywhere there were ploughed fields of the settled Sarts, and clay az-sakli dwellings resembling Kyrgyz yurts with annexes. Along the road we often met tanned Sarts, working in the irrigation ditches, letting water flow to their fields” (Sherbakov 1873).

For the caravan route heading southward from Ulytau, there are two roads crossing the Betpak-Dala: the Sarysu and Jetiqonyr routes. The road departing from Ulytau joins the Sarysu Joly near Qarajar. Since ancient times, this road has been considered the main artery connecting the Arka and Syr Darya regions. These routes also served as seasonal migration paths between the wintering grounds (qystau) and summer pastures (jailau) of the steppe clans. The Sarysu Joly, following the course of the Sarysu River, was regarded as the safest route across the Betpak-Dala.

One of the branches of the above-mentioned *Satbai’s Qara Joly*, which diverges at the Kotibar thicket (along the Jilanshyk River), connects with this *Sarysu Joly* near Ulytau. The second branch of *Satbai’s Qara Jol* runs through Bozshakol and Ali, reaches Baiqonyr, then crosses the Sarysu Joly, joins the *Jetiqonur Joly* and follows this route toward Sozaq and Turkistan. Compared to the first, this second branch is considered the shorter and more direct route to Turkistan. However, it is also more dangerous, as there are few sources of water along the way (excluding the Bulanty and Baiqonyr rivers), and travelers rely mainly on wells.

As we wrote above, the scientist A.Kh. Margulan wrote extensively and consistently about other ancient caravan routes that crossed the Betpak-Dala, such as the Uanas Joly, Khan Joly, and others. Therefore, in this context, we rely on his works concerning the routes across the Betpak-Dala.

During the eight days of Rubruck’s journey southward, he described the area as a “desert” and did not mention any rivers, suggesting that they must have traveled along the Jetiqonyr Joly. Since the Sarysu Joly runs diagonally from north to southwest, this route would have taken the caravan to the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. In contrast, the Jetiqonyr Joly directly connects with the settlements along the middle reaches of the Syr Darya. Margulan provides the following information about the Jetiqonyr Joly: «The starting points for both the Uvanas and Jetykonur routes were the southern cities of Otrar, Turkestan and Suzak» (Margulan 1997: 21). At this point, the Karatau ridge should also be taken into account. It is evident that the high mountains Rubruck mentioned seeing “to the south on the seventh day of the journey” were the Karatau Mountains. Rubruck writes that he inquired of the local inhabitants about these mountains and was told that they were the “Caucasus” Mountains (Puteshestviye 1993:109). Considering that Turkic tribes from ancient times referred to the Caucasus as Kaptag (meaning “Kap Mountain”), it is possible that Rubruck may have misunderstood the locals, who said Karatag (Karatau), confusing the two because of the similarity between the names of mountains on the two continents.

One of the valuable information found in Rubruck's writings concerns Dyng monuments (also known as steppe temples) — religious structures dating back to the Early Middle Ages (8th—12th centuries). The Ulytau region is known as the main area where these dyng monuments, regarded as relics of the pre-Mongol period, are concentrated and well preserved (such as Dombaul, Dyng molasy, Kosuytas, Karadyn, and others). Rubruck writes about them as follows: “They (the Komani — *O.O.*) also build pyramids for the rich, that is, pointed houses, and in some places I saw large towers made of bricks, in others, stone houses, although there are no stones there” (Puteshestviye 1993: 89). However, Rubruck could have encountered dyng monuments almost anywhere along his

route. For example, on his way through Jetisu, he might have seen the Dyng (or Dynggek) monument near the present-day settlement of Jansugurov, or on his return journey, he could have observed the Kozy Korpesh—Bayan Sulu Dyng in Ayagoz. Regarding his return route, Rubruck writes: «We returned in the summer and through much higher northern countries» (Puteshestviye 1993: 163). Furthermore, describing his passage along the northern shore of Lake Balkhash, he notes: "The next day, after crossing the mountains which were the foothills of the great mountains to the south, we entered a very beautiful plain, with high mountains on the right (Dzungarian Alatau — O.O.) and on the left a sea or lake (Balkhash — O.O.), stretching for twenty-five days' journey in circumference. The whole plain is beautifully watered by streams flowing down from the mountains, all of which flow into this sea. In summer we returned along the northern side of this sea, where there were also high mountains" (Puteshestviye 1993: 110). Summarizing all the data, it can be concluded that along his route Rubruck might have seen dyng monuments either in Jetisu (near Jansugurov) or in the Saryarka steppe (in Ayagoz, Ulytau, or along the Torgai River).

Returning to the caravan roads Saryarka, the significance of the *Sarysu* and *Jetiqonyr* roads lies in their greater throughput compared to other caravan routes through Betpak-Dala or Karakum. This is because the natural barrier stretching from east to west — between the Syr Darya and Saryarka, that is, from the riverine to the steppe regions of Kazakhstan — could be crossed by large armies only along these routes.

This is evidenced by Amir Timur's campaign against Tokhtamysh Khan in 1391 and by the 1582 campaign of Abdullah Khan (a Shaibanid), who pursued Baba Sultan and crossed the Ulytau region. Both campaigns, separated by more than a century, began their passage through Betpak-Dala in early spring, in April, when melting snow provided additional water sources along the route. This indicates that spring was considered the most suitable time to cross Betpak-Dala. From these accounts, one can also see how perilous this region was for large military forces.

At this point, let us briefly touch on the routes taken by the two commanders through the steppe. Abdullah Khan advanced along the *Sarysu Road* and, upon reaching Qarajara (the confluence of the Sarysu and Karakengir rivers), received word that Baba Sultan's army was near the mausoleum of Jochi Khan. At that time, he reached the Jochi Khan Mausoleum along the Karakengir River (in a northeasterly direction).

In his work, the scholar Zh.E. Smailov studies the paths taken by Abdullah Khan in this region leading to the Jochi Khan Mausoleum. In addition to geographical names, the work also mentions the cities of Saraily and Toraily, located near the mausoleum of Jochi Khan (Smailov 1997).

From the Mausoleum of Jochi Khan, Abdullah Khan continued northward in pursuit of Baba Sultan and advanced into the Ulytau Mountains. He later returned through the northern slopes of Ulytau. Abdullah's return route from Ulytau lay further west than the route he had taken earlier. According to historical sources, «...On Thursday, the 25th [day] of the month of Rabi' II, he (Abdullah — *O.O.*) decided to return along the road to Miyar-Bilawati and raised the banner of return. On that day, the shadow of th camp fell at the source of the Sauk River» (Hafiz Tynysh 1969: 286). Many researchers suggest that the Sauk River mentioned in this source refers to the Torgai River, known by that name in the Middle Ages. It was from this area that Abdullah Khan decided to turn back. The Torgai River originates from numerous tributaries flowing northward from the Ulytau Mountains; therefore, the reference to the "source of the Sauk River" indicates that Abdullah Khan had not gone far from Ulytau. Only some of his military commanders continued pursuing Baba Sultan, marching in various directions before rejoining the main force. The route referred to as Miyar-Bilawati, along which Abdullah Khan began his return, actually consisted of two distinct rivers or watercourses. Bilawati corresponds to the Bileuti River (today known as Kalmykkyrgan), while Miyar refers to the Müyir River and the locality of the same name. These sites lie much farther west of Qarajar, where the Sarysu Road begins.

A day after leaving Ulytau (from the headwaters of the Torgai River), Abdullah Khan's army reached the Kyrk-Karaklar River on the following day and a day later they arrived at the Jilanshyk River. The *Kyrk-Karaklary* here should be one of the small rivers between Ulytau and Kishitau. The

Jilanshyk is the Shygyrly River flowing from Kishitau popularly known as Shygyrly Jilanshyk. This river merges with Dulygaly Jilanshyk, which flows from Ulytau, forming the Uly Jilanshyk River that empties into Lake Akkol. After crossing the Jilanshyk, Abdullah Khan's army reached Ters-Kandrlik the next day. This Ters Kendrlik most likely corresponds to the Bala Jezdy River, which lies below Kishitau and flows eastward.

In Kazakh lands, several rivers flowing east or north have the prefix Teris (from Kazakh 'on the contrary'). For example, the Teris River in the Jambyl region flows in an easterly direction. Also, the *Terisaqqan River* in Ulytau (originates in the Argynaty mountains) flows in a northerly direction. After crossing the Teris Kendirlik River, Abdullah Khan's army advanced along the Müyir-Bileuti River and eventually reached the Sarysu. Between the Bileuti and Sarysu rivers, at a place called Kyzylkak, they spent time hunting and enjoying leisure. All of these toponyms have been preserved to this day and can easily be found on modern maps.

In 1391, during a campaign against Toktamys Khan, Amir Temir crossed Betpak-Dala along this *Sarysu road.* Only Amir Temir near Karajar goes straight north along the Jezdi River and comes to Kishitau. From Kishitau, it arrives in Ulytau in two days (Sheref-ad-Din 1941: 161). Ulytau lies northeast of Kishitau and can be seen from afar. There exists an ancient caravan road running from the eastern slopes of Kishitau across Ulytau, and Amir Temir's army likely joined this route. Traces of this road have survived to the present day. This caravan route represents an ancient artery that once connected the lower reaches of the Syr Darya with Siberia. At the beginning of the 20th century, it still retained its importance as a major transport route connecting *Kokshetau — Atbasar—Ulytau — Karsakbai — Josaly* (Kyzylorda region). The British, who began mining ore from Karsakbai, used this very route to transport steam locomotives to the site. To do so, they spent nearly two years extending a short temporary railway—laying two kilometers of track, moving the train forward, and then repositioning the rails from behind to the front. However, with the outbreak of the October Revolution, these long-term plans of the British remained unrealized.

Further evidence that Amir Temir's campaign continued northwestward from Ulytau is provided by the inscription carved on a stone left in the Altynshoky area. The copy of this stone, discovered by the scholar K. I. Satpayev (the original is kept in the Hermitage Museum), has been reinstalled at its historical site. According to Sheref ad-Din Yazdi, Amir Temir's army advanced further north, reaching the Jilanshyk, Araqaragai (mentioned in the text as Atakaragui), and Tobol rivers, from where it turned westward (Sheref-ad-Din 1941: 161).

Approximately forty kilometers northwest of the Altynshoky site lies a locality known as *Khan Shabylgan* (kaz. translate: «Khan was beheaded»). But we do not know whether Toktamis Khan, Baba Sultan or Kenesary. Khan Shabylgan is a plain with several tombstones built of natural stone above the ground. In addition, no signs are known.

Conclusion

Thus, the ancient caravan routes of Saryarka encompass many significant moments of Kazakh history. These data indicate the historical significance of the Saryarka steppe. For transit purposes, the western part of the Saryarka, particularly the stretch of the Sarysu crossing through Betpak-Dala, served as a vital junction.

The Sarysu River functioned not only as a caravan route, but also as a corridor of diplomatic missions and military campaigns. The central and eastern expanses of Betpak-Dala, characterized by extreme aridity and the absence of reliable freshwater sources, constituted a naturally hazardous environment. These inhospitable conditions rendered large-scale movements—especially of military contingents—extremely difficult. Accordingly, Betpak-Dala may be interpreted as having played a defensive role, forming a natural protective barrier for the Saryarka heartland.

By examining historical events that occurred over multiple centuries, we gain a deeper understanding of the broader historical and geographical significance of this region. A comprehensive study of caravan routes, military campaign paths, and other historical trajectories — when analyzed in

conjunction and comparison — offers valuable insights into previously unexplored aspects of Kazakh history and provides access to a wealth of historically significant data.

List of informants:

I. Eralina Kenjetay. Born in 1945, Kostanay region. Jangeldi district. The village of Karasu.
II. Zholdikhan Nurmukhambetuly. Born in 1947, Kostanay region. Jangeldi district. The village of Karasu.

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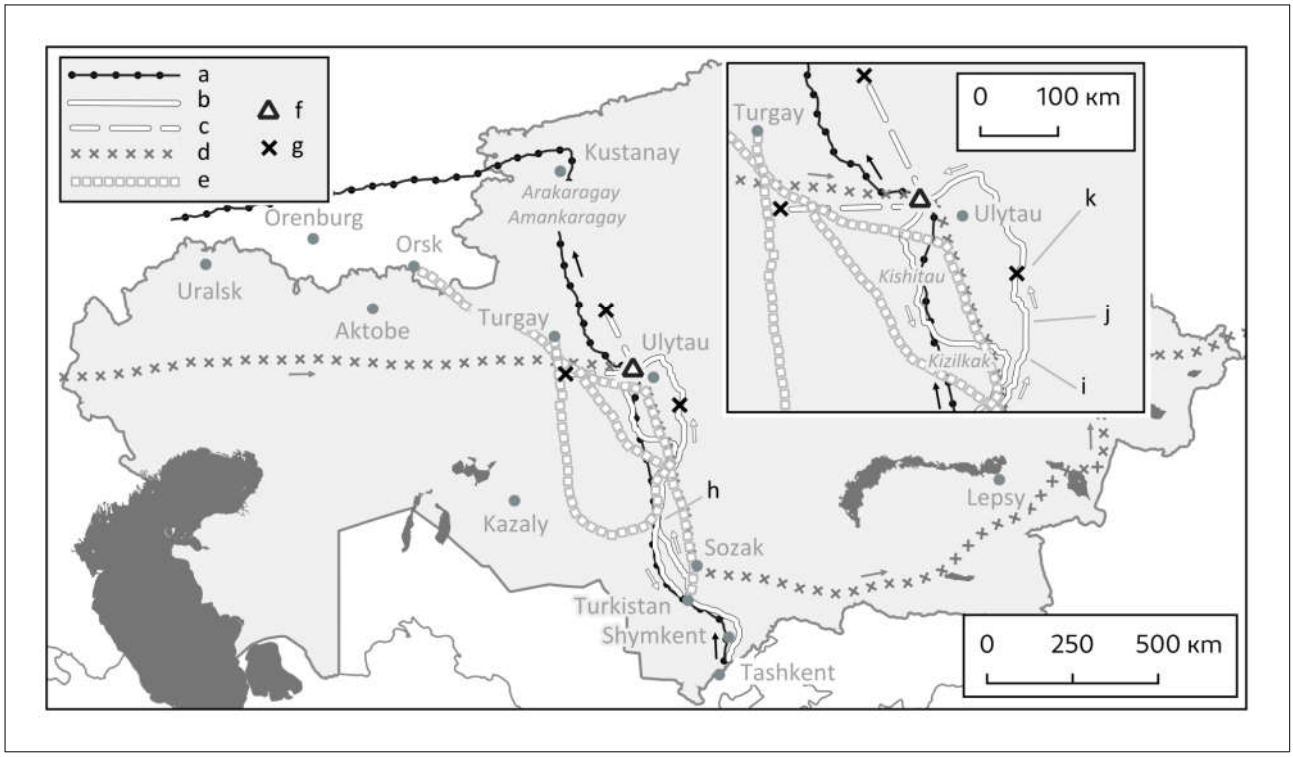

Fig. 1. Routes of caravans and military campaigns: (*a* — route of Emir Timur's campaign against Tokhtamish Khan, 1391; *b* — campaign of Abdullah Khan (Sheibani) against Baba Sultan, 1582; *c* — movements of separate detachments of Abdullah Khan; *d* — route of Guillaume de Rubrouck's journey to the Mongol headquarters, 1253–1255; *e* — caravan routes across the Turgai Steppe in the 19th century (black roads of Satbai); *f* — stone with an inscription left by Emir Timur in Ulytau (Altynshoky); *g* — sites of military engagements; and *h*—*k* — mausoleums — *h* —Bilen Ana; *i* —Talmas Ata; *j* — Bolgan Ana; *k* — Jochi Khan). Compiled by O. Oshanov and M. Antonov.