

## The Mining Industry in Colonial Turkestan

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**Abstract:** *The mining industry has long been developed in the ancient regions of Turan and Turkestan. The inhabitants of this region mastered methods for identifying mineral sources and incorporating them into their daily lives. After the Russian Empire established its colonial system in Turkestan, efforts were made to locate and exploit these natural mineral resources. Significant attention was paid to discovering and utilizing coal and oil deposits, driven in large part by Russian entrepreneurs seeking high profits. This article examines the formation of the mining industry in Turkestan using primary sources.*

**Keywords:** *Turkestan, coal, oil, salt, mine, Fergana, Transcaspian, Cheleken, Khodjent, I. Mushketov.*

### Introduction

The entire Turkestan region is rich in diverse mineral resources, with mining operations historically conducted to benefit both state interests and the daily needs of the population.

Starting in the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire, motivated by long-term strategic goals to exploit the region's natural resources, initiated geological surveys of the area. The research aimed to identify and mobilize sources of mineral wealth, which were subsequently directed toward the empire's interests, leading to the development of a mining industry. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs were encouraged to engage in geological ventures.

### Literature Review

Historical literature contains abundant information about geological exploration and the extraction of natural resources during the colonial period in Turkestan. Additionally, archival documents, periodicals, and statistical collections provide insights into mining industry processes under the Turkestan General-Governorship during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, many of these sources have not been fully introduced into academic circulation.

Modern research on the topic highlights various aspects of the issue across different geographical areas. For instance, I. Jamolhoja's studies focus on processes related to the oil industry, with a specific emphasis on the Fergana Valley.

### Research Methodology

The research employed systematic and problem-based analysis, historical methodology, and comparative analysis techniques. Examining the issue in a historical context provides insight into the

evolving nature of the imperial colonial policy in the mining sector. For example, a systematic analysis approach allows for a detailed study of the development of the coal industry.

## **Analysis and Results**

From the early days of the Turkestan General-Governorship, periodic publications reported on efforts to develop coal mines in the region. According to these sources, coal mines known as "Tatarinov" in the Syrdarya region were launched with state funding. These mines, which contained 1 million *puds* of coal at a depth of 2 *sazhens*, were found to produce up to 40,000 *puds* of coal per month. However, due to the uncertain demand for coal at the time, production volumes were relatively low. In 1868, 30,000 *puds* of coal were extracted from the mine, with 25,000 *puds* allocated to the Aral Flotilla and 5,000 *puds* sold[1,169].

Between 1868 and 1874, 266,500 *puds* of coal were extracted under the supervision of Colonel Fonitsky near Khodjent. This coal was primarily used to meet the military and other needs of the empire[3].

Over time, the demand for fuel increased significantly. In the 1870s, K. Kaufman invited Professor G. Romanovsky from the Russian Institute of Mining to conduct specialized geological research in the region. Romanovsky was tasked with compiling general information about coal mines in the region, focusing on the Karatau mountain range and areas such as Tashkent, Khujakent, Parkent, Uratapa, and Khodjent. These explorations were necessary to meet the growing coal demands of Tashkent's population and the Aral Flotilla.

K. Gilev, a representative of the Turkestan administration, emphasized the need for 100,000 *puds* of coal to meet requirements. Coal deposits were also discovered by Pervushin along the Ugam River, northeast of Tashkent (100 *versts* away), with reserves amounting to hundreds of thousands of *puds*.

In 1886, N. Maev highlighted the coal presented at the Turkestan Exhibition, noting that D.P. Petrov, referred to as "our sole oilman," was extracting coal from the Naryn mines in the Namangan district. This coal was supplied to military units in Namangan and Andijan[6,66].

In 1875, I. Mushketov conducted geological surveys along the Syrdarya River in areas such as Tashkent, Chirchik, Khujakent, Khumson, Kuchmulla, the Pskem River, and Chatkal. His studies identified significant mineral deposits, including sedimentary minerals (coal, graphite, rock salt, and other evaporites such as soda, ammonium, copper sulfate, alum, and kaolin) and ore deposits (iron, lead-silver, copper, arsenic pyrite, and gold). Mushketov documented his findings in detail, contributing greatly to the understanding of the region's natural resources[8,96].

## **Oil Exploration in Colonial Turkestan**

The colonial administration in Turkestan, particularly in the Fergana Valley, undertook significant efforts to explore oil deposits. Historical sources reveal that the locals referred to oil as "*yer moyi*" (earth oil) and had utilized it for various purposes for centuries. During the reign of Khudoyorkhan, starting from the 1860s-1870s, oil was extracted in the Kokand Khanate from Moybulok near the Karadarya River. A.P. Fedchenko, who visited the Fergana region in 1871, reported that when he expressed interest in inspecting a specially guarded oil well in the region, the guard informed him that a special permit from the khan was required[2,17].

After the Kokand Khanate was annexed by the Russian Empire, control over its oil industry was entirely transferred to the imperial government. By the early 20th century, global efforts to discover and extract oil intensified. Between 1900 and 1905, global oil production increased by 42%, from 1.144 billion *puds* to 1.622 billion *puds*. Consequently, the value of oil-bearing lands surged dramatically. The Russian administration in Turkestan expanded its search for oil deposits across the region to secure fuel sources. Oil is highly valuable, not only as fuel but also for its by-products. For instance, processed oil

yields mazut, which is used as fuel, along with kerosene, gasoline, and lubricants. Oil from certain regions, such as Fergana, was found to have a high paraffin content[10,119].

Due to its rich oil reserves, the Fergana Valley attracted many Russian entrepreneurs. One of the pioneers, D. Petrov, established a kerosene plant in Kamishboshi. However, issues such as inadequate financing and the absence of railroads hindered the expansion of production, leading to its eventual halt. The Fergana Valley's geographic isolation from waterways limited its ability to export crude oil or mazut to international markets. However, Fergana oil's high paraffin content, constituting about 5% of its composition, made it particularly valuable. Even when paraffin content reached only 3%, 30 *puds* of premium paraffin could be extracted from 1,000 *puds* of Fergana oil[10,119-120].

### **Oil Exploration and Industry Development in Turkestan**

On August 6, 1876, the Governor-General of Turkestan directed district chiefs to identify oil fields in the Fergana region and divide land with oil deposits into plots of 10 *desyatinas* each. As a result, the names of areas with oil reserves in the region were documented[4,26].

By December 1880, the leasing of oil fields "indefinitely" was initiated. By this time, 16 groups of oil-bearing areas had been identified. Land values varied by district: in Namangan, each group was priced at 10 rubles; in Andijan, 50 rubles; and in Isfara, 25 rubles[4,79].

Both Russian entrepreneurs and local investors leased these lands. For example, oil fields in the Namangan district were leased to Bobosh Khudoyberganov, a resident of Kizilravot village in the same district. Mullah Qambar Yoldoshboev, a resident of Namangan, also applied to lease multiple plots (groups 4–16) for an annual rent of 1,000 rubles. However, his application was rejected under the terms proposed[4,119].

In 1904, the first oil field in the Fergana region was discovered in Chimen village. This marked the beginning of what sources referred to as an "oil rush" in Turkestan. Oil extracted from the fields was transported using animal-drawn carts. The number of entrepreneurs interested in financing and developing this sector grew rapidly. This period marked significant changes in Fergana's oil industry, including the establishment of the "Chimen Oil Industry Society" in Margilan district, which was also known as the "Fergana Oil Industry Society." Several companies and private entrepreneurs began oil extraction, with the Chimen Society becoming the sole supplier of oil in Turkestan at the time.

Oil-related activities gained momentum in Fergana, one of the most significant being the establishment of an oil refinery. Turkestan's only oil refinery was located in the Vannovsky station of Skobelev district, Fergana region, about 20 *versts* from the "Chimen" oil fields. The refinery, which began operations in 1907, processed crude oil into gasoline, kerosene, and mazut. By 1913, oil production totaled 800,000 *puds*, valued at 260,000 rubles, a decline from earlier years (3,219,369 *puds* in 1907 and 1,754,533 *puds* in 1912). In 1912, 19 wells were operational, and the refinery transitioned from steam power to electric energy[4,119].

Oil extraction was also conducted in the Caspian region, particularly on Cheleken Island. In 1874, large tracts of land were leased by the Nobel Brothers' company. By the early 20th century, 15 wells on Cheleken were producing a total of 6 million *puds* of oil. The extracted oil was transported by the company's steamships to Baku, where it was refined into paraffin. Several other firms were also involved in oil extraction in the Cheleken region[9,69-70].

### **Resource Extraction and Industrial Development in Turkestan**

#### *Revenue Growth from Subsurface Resources*

Income from subsurface resources in the Caspian region steadily increased year by year. For example, the extraction of table salt in the region grew, reaching 2,500 *puds* by 1911[7,61].

#### *Coal Mining in Sulukta*

The "A.M. Verbov & Co." company operated coal mines in the Sulukta area of Khujand district, Samarkand region. The coal extracted was primarily used to supply state railways and military units. The company delivered 505,000 *puds* of coal to the Central Asian Railway and 430,000 *puds* to military facilities[5,156]. Known for its large-scale production, "A.M. Verbov & Co." was among the first enterprises in the region to utilize electric power in mining operations.

#### *Natural Resources During World War I*

The importance of utilizing natural resources for state defense increased during World War I. On August 15, 1915, the Mining Department sent a telegram to the Turkestan Mining District Engineer, requesting information about mining industry enterprises and workers involved in producing materials necessary for state defense. In his response, the district engineer noted the absence of such enterprises in Turkestan but mentioned that military-industrial committees in the region planned to mine key raw materials like lead ore, sulfur, saltpeter, and mercury. Additionally, coal and oil fields in the region were deemed essential for state defense[5,90-91].

#### *Oil Production and Electrification*

By 1916, the Fergana Oil and Mining "Chimen" Joint-Stock Company operated for the needs of state railways. It was recognized as a national enterprise, producing high-quality gasoline used in automobiles and aviation. This gasoline supported both state defense and economic needs[5,245]. The "Fergana" Mining and Industry Company extracted ozokerite from its lands in the Munkonsay area of Kokand district, Yaypan volost[5,247].

#### *Electrification of Mining Operations*

Efforts to electrify mining operations were evident during this period. In February 1916, "A.M. Verbov & Co." requested materials to repair and install new electric lighting conductors at its Sulukta coal mines. A detailed list of required materials was included in the request[5,249]. The "SANTO" Central Asian Oil Industry and Trade Company also sought materials for electrification, submitting a request to the Turkestan Mining District in the same year[5,253].

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The geological explorations conducted in Turkestan were closely linked to the colonial government's and entrepreneurs' policies of exploiting the region's natural resources in pursuit of wealth. This led to increased attention to mining activities, the organization of prospecting operations, and investment in the sector. However, the rights of local entrepreneurs were restricted, and major operations remained under the full control and discretion of the colonizers. Furthermore, there was limited allowance for foreign investments, which hindered broader development in the sector.

Today, some scholars and state officials in the Russian Federation deny the military conquest of Turkestan by the Russian Empire and the exploitative colonial policies, particularly its appropriation of the region's natural resources for its own benefit. Instead, they claim that Russia brought "progress" to the area. Demonstrating the historical inaccuracy of this narrative through authentic historical sources is one of the critical tasks facing national historians today, making further research on this subject essential.

#### *Recommendations*

- Restoring Historical Truth:** It is imperative for national historians to conduct in-depth studies on the historical consequences of colonial policies in Turkestan and to present them based on solid scientific evidence.
- Examining Local Entrepreneurship:** Studying the role of local entrepreneurs and their economic initiatives can shed light on the limitations imposed on national economic development during the colonial period.

3. **Analyzing the Role of Foreign Investments:** Understanding the impact of restricted foreign investments and their influence on regional development can provide valuable lessons for modern economic policies.

**Efficient Utilization of Resources Today:** Drawing lessons from past mistakes, there is a need to ensure the effective and equitable use of natural resources in the present, focusing on national interests and sustainable development.

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