

## The History of Tea of the Turkestan Region by Russian Orientalists of the Second Half of the 18 – 20th Centuries

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### Abstract:

The first mention of tea begins to be found in the literature of Russian orientalists from the second half of the 18th century. Further, tea is mentioned by all Russian travelers who visited the Kokand Khanate and Bukhara. In their memoirs, they describe the tea trade in Central Asia, local tea-related customs, tea-drinking culture, and the history of teahouses in 18 – 20th centuries.

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The Russian orientalist, Philip Efremov, who first mentioned about tea and came to Bukhara in 1774 as a prisoner and lived there for several years, already cites the word "tea" in the "Translation of Bukhara words" [1; P. 54]. Further, tea is mentioned by all Russian travelers who visited the Kokand Khanate and Bukhara. Speaking about tea when describing treats with officials and given out to the embassy as maintenance, both Filipp Nazarov [2; P. 48], who visited Kokand in 1823, and cornet Potanin [3; P. 261, 270, 275, 282,287], who visited there in 1830.

It must be added that at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. in Bukhara they mostly drank sweet and ordinary tea [4; P. 85], which is also confirmed in the diaries of F. Efremov, who lived in Bukhara at the end of the 18th century [5; P. 215]. Based on the historical information of P.I. Demeson, it can be argued that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of Bukhara drank ordinary tea 2-3 times a day [6; P. 40].

From the memoirs of J. Meyendorff, who traveled to Central Asia in 1820 as part of the Russian

embassy headed by Negri, when describing the Bukhara bazaars, among other goods he saw, he mentions “bars of bad tea” [7; P. 168]. J. Meyendorff wrote that guests are treated to tea, and then he says that in the morning Bukharians brew tea with milk, and immediately after dinner they drink tea prepared as in Europe [7; P. 289-290].

Within the borders of the Khiva Khanate (1535-1920) at the beginning of the 19th century, tea was known, but not everyone drank it. Gens, according to the information he received from the captive Kaverzin, who escaped from Khiva in 1826, writes that wealthy people drink tea, while the poor drink brick tea with milk, butter and fat. Regarding the Karakalpaks, it is said that they rarely drink tea, and “the simplest class does not drink it at all” [8; P. 38-398]. This can be found out by the fact that tea was brought with caravans, and it was very difficult to deliver it to Khiva. Because of this, tea was very expensive, and the poor population of the khanate could not buy it.

Judging by other information relating to the same time, one can understand that tea was not widely distributed, and even in the highest circles it was not drunk daily. N.I. Veselovsky, characterizing the poverty of life in the court of Muhammad Rakhimkhan (1805-1825), among others, cites the story of the Russian captive Grushin, which says: “Tea is drunk in the whole palace only by the khan, and even then Kalmyk, brick, and occasionally only, twice a week, he drinks tea with sugar. Khan's wives and children are never given tea” [9; P. 327]. Due to the stimulating effect of tea, it was usually drunk by the elderly, and children were not allowed to drink tea.

According to A. Burns, who traveled to Bukhara through Afghanistan in the early 30s of the 19th century, tea was very common both in Bukhara itself and in the Bukhara possessions. Burns tells that “the inhabitants of Turkestan” drink a lot of tea [10; P. 227]. As he notes that in Bukhara, in all parts of the bazaars, tea is prepared, in “europeanurns” (apparently, in samovars) and that Bukhara people drink tea at any time and in all places and in different ways: with sugar and without sugar, with milk and without milk, with fat, with salt, etc. [10; P. 227].

Arminius Vamberi, who traveled in Central Asia in 1863, noted that the inhabitants of this region provide hospitality, which consisted in organizing a small dasturkhan (most often a colorful tablecloth made of coarse linen, on which bread is placed for two people), from which the guest owes a little eat. In particular, he claims that the expression “I can’t eat anymore” for a Central Asian resident is an incredible evidence of bad manners [11; P. 98-99]. And he was sincerely surprised how the locals, without bursting from heavy pilaf, drank 15-20 large bowls of green tea in addition [11; P. 98-99].

Generally speaking, the piala, which is widespread in the east, was the Greek for “phiale” and is shaped like a modern piala. According to K. Abdullayev, the piala was originally of Eastern (Persian) origin and was adopted by the Greeks [12; P. 46-62]. And the Greeks lying down drank alcoholic drinks from the phial. Nevertheless, the Hellenic culture influenced the local (Bactrian, Sogdian) culture with minor morphological changes, not only survived to this day, but also gained wide popularity [13; P. 128-143]. It turned out such a cultural symbiosis that a phial for alcoholic drinks served for tea, and it was called not “phiale” but “piyola”.

According to the observations of P.I. Nebolsin, who traveled to the countries of Central Asia, Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand, in the mornings Bukhara drank tea with cream, but without sugar. It was drunk from Chinese porcelain or Russian faience cups, similar in appearance to Russian rinsing cups, but smaller. The tea of middle-class people was predominantly black, while that of the rich was green. To improve the taste, “yellow” or “golden”, that is, butter (sary-mai) was added to it [14; P. 16].

I.L. Yavorsky, who traveled in Afghanistan and Bukhara in 1878-1879, described the Central Asian treat "chai-talkh". Bukhara tea was nothing more than green tea brought from India. It was called "talh" when they drank it without sugar, but with sugar it was called "tea-shirin". The inhabitants of Central Asia also loved the so-called "shir-chai". It was made from brick tea brewed with milk, fat, salt and other spices. Often spices were added to it, such as: cinnamon, cloves, ginger, etc. [15; P. 38-39].

E.S. Vulfson, who studied in detail the life of the local residents of Turkestan, wrote that tea was one of the most consumed drinks. It was prepared in two ways: boiled in kettles directly on the water, or boiled in a cauldron with milk, butter, pepper and salt. Wealthy citizens drank tea with cakes in the morning, while the poor often boiled various herbs instead of tea. They drank tea in porcelain or clay cups, usually without sugar, although in rich houses a saucer with finely chopped sugar was served on the table [16; P. 56-57]. E.S. Vulfson also notes that the inhabitants of Bukhara regularly drank a cup of tea with milk and mutton fat, mainly after prayer.



Pic. 1. The customs of the inhabitants of Central Asia. Tea treat. Turkestan's Album.

<https://www.wdl.org/ru/item/10838/>

An objective study of Russian historiography shows that even in the daytime the people of Bukhara could not indifferently pass by a teahouse so as not to sit down for at least an hour. It must be said that every Bukharian had a koshtubag on his belt - a bag made of a piece of leather, divided into strips, to which a pair of knives, a toothbrush, a bag for money, a bag of tea and various trifles are attached. By the price of these little things they judged the prosperity and education of their owner [17; P. 110-111].

At the entrance to the teahouse, the Bukharians handed over pinches of their tea, so they paid only for warm water. Blowing on tea was considered indecent, even a sin. You can cool hot tea a little, as if

splashing hot drink in a cup until it gets cold. This must be done skillfully, otherwise they will be called ignorant. After tea, all visitors were served boiled leaves (shamma) as a treat: everyone takes as much as they can grab with two fingers [17; P. 110-111]. Such data is found in the essays of the traveler A. Vamberi, when he spoke about the life of Bukhara [18; P. 160-161].

Various varieties of tea were brought for trade, mainly from Kulja, Kashgar, and India. In written sources and archival materials, one can determine which tea varieties were drunk in Turkestan in the 19th-20th centuries.

According to A. Vamberi, there was a Chinese tea shop in Bukhara, who had up to 16 varieties of tea. Among them, for example, the following were presented: 1) kyrkma; 2) akhbar; 3) ak kuiruk; 4) kara tea (black tea); 5) sepet tea; 6) shibaglu; 7) gore shibaglu; 8) shivin; 9) it kellesi (dog's head); 10) byonge; 11) poshun; 12) pu-tea (fu-tea); 13) tuntei; 14) gulbuy; 15) mishkgez; 16) lonka [19; P. 158].



Pic. 2. Kalmyk tea in a box (slab tea). <https://organict.ru/product/kalmyckij-chaj/>

As A. Vamberi notes, all these are varieties of green tea, as soon as it was known and loved not only in Northern China, but also in Central Asia [19; P. 158]. However, A. Vamberi was wrong, since not all varieties listed here are green. Ch.Valikhanov, while in Kashgar, mentioned such green tea varieties: ak-tea; gura—big; gura—small; shiva-tea; kirk-we-shvah-dar; simple kyrk-we [20; P. 463-464].

In the 90s. 19th century through Dushak to Samarkand from Iran annually 5 thousand, to Bukhara 2-3 thousand poods of black tea [20; P. 463-464]. Black tea was also imported to Central Asia from Moscow by the trading firms K. and S. Popovs”, “Otto Vogau and K0”, “Rastorguevs”. The Popov firm sent its representatives to India and Mashhad to carry out trade operations and study the market [21; P. 61].

In addition to these above-mentioned types of tea, there was a special variety that was considered

neither black nor green, however, the Peshawaris considered it green. This variety was called kagazi - "paper" [22; P. 283-284], which can be packaged in paper. This Chinese tea was of very poor quality.

In addition to these varieties of tea, Ch.Valikhanov singles out the sixth grade of tea, which was sold in Kashgar to the inhabitants of Central Asia, the so-called jainok tea. It was packed in cylindrical cybics and weighed 9 pounds. One such cibik cost 1 liang [20; P. 464].

At the end of the XIX century. in Ferghana, they already drank mostly ordinary tea, which was brewed in teapots and samovars. Here, as in Khorezm, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, green tea (kuk-choi, choi-kabud) has become popular [23; P. 204-230].

It should be noted that these varieties of tea were very expensive (they were sold from 50 kopecks to 1 ruble 50 kopecks) [24], the inhabitants of Turkestan could not always buy them, and then they used tea surrogates. According to archival materials, we can find out that 14 types of surrogate teas were drunk by the inhabitants of Central Asia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The method of using tea surrogates was common, they were brewed in boiling water. According to archival data, tea surrogates were on sale in the markets, they came to the market in the form of manufactured products, while whole plants could only be delivered to the places of their cultivation [25].

In addition to local surrogates, the Chinese themselves began to sell their own surrogate, made up of a set of leaves, called medicinal tea in China and found in the wild. This mixture was pressed into oblong pieces and, under the guise of real tea, was increasingly distributed in Turkestan [26; P. 86].

One more point should be noted. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Central Asia used a special kind of tea - "shir-chai" (tea with milk), also known as "Kalmyk tea" [27; P. 285]. Since that time, shir-chai began to compete with ordinary tea.

According to E.K. Meyendorff, who traveled around Bukhara in 1820-1821, Bukharians: "... after the morning prayer they drink tea, which is boiled with milk and salt, which makes it something like soup. They dine no earlier than 4-5 o'clock (...) Now after dinner they drink tea brewed like in Europe..." [28; P. 147]. According to the memoirs of the Russian prisoner Grushin, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Khiva khan daily drank Kalmyk tea – shir-chai [23; P. 213].

Unlike ordinary tea, which is brewed and drunk with sugar and other aromatic additives, shir-chai is not a drink, but a special dish. According to A.P. Subbotin and S.V. Dmitriev, brick tea was usually used for shir-chai [26; P. 86; 22; P. 283-284].

I.V. Vitkevich, who visited Bukhara in 1836, wrote: "...here, in the shop, there is also a Russian samovar, of which many have now been brought here" [29; P. 97]. As Russian influence increased, the fashion for brewing tea in samovars spread. Prior to that, tea was brewed in copper kumgans (the Turkic word "qumg'on"). Also, kumgan was called "chaikush" (from tea and the Tajik verb "to boil") or "chaidish", was cast-iron or copper jugs, and it was used in rural areas for boiling in a small (1-2 litres) amount of water for regular tea.



Pic. 3. Kungans. Vessels for boiling water and tea. From the fund of the Shakhrisabz State Museum-Reserve.

With the accession of part of Central Asia to Russia, the samovar became an essential item not only in cities, but also in rural areas, where communal houses turned into tea houses (choikhona), which the local population called "samovars". E.M. Peshchereva's information completes the picture of the social history of tea: at first, only men drank it in public places or on solemn occasions; later, women and children began to drink tea every day at home, including women and children [27; P. 283-284].



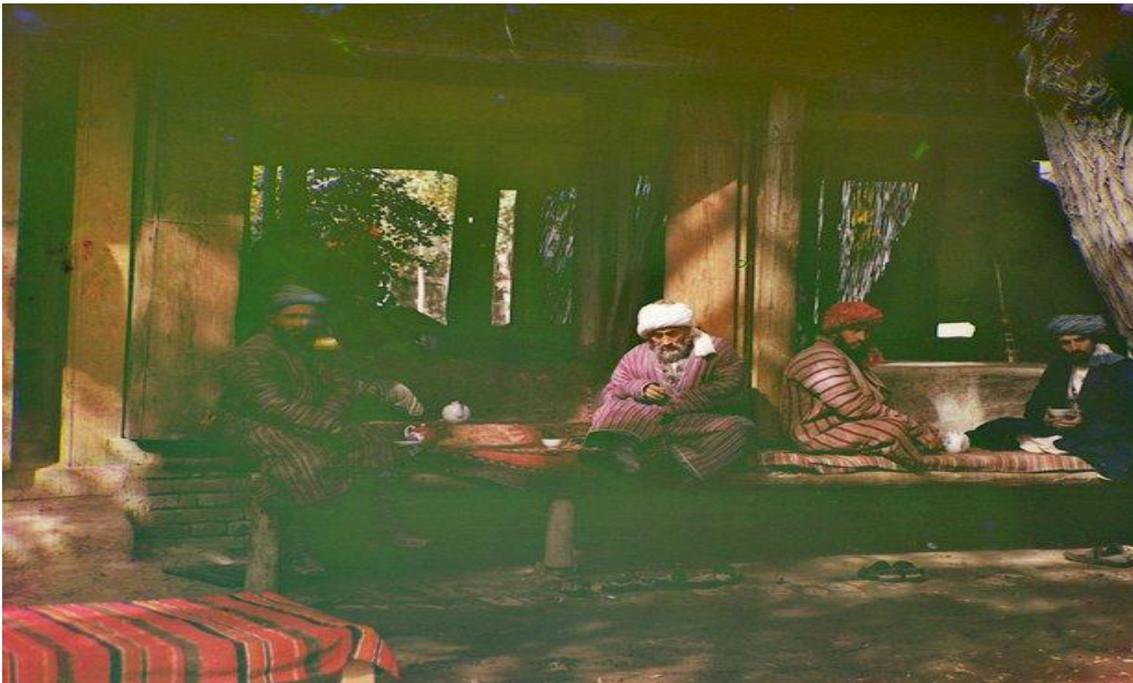
Pic. 4. A copper choydish is a vessel for boiling water and tea. 19th century From the fund of the Kashkadarya Regional State Historical and Cultural Museum.

In Central Asia, trading establishments were called teahouses, where they served green tea, sherbet and other soft drinks, as well as pilaf, fruits and other treats. The teahouse usually had light lattice walls and was located in the shade of trees, above the canal. The clients sat at the dastarkhan on carpets. They rested in the tea house, indulged in conversations and games.

Teahouses in the khanates of Central Asia were mainly located in and around the markets, on large and small transit routes, along canals or on the banks of rivers, in the centers of rural areas. Summer heat, in the absence of cold water, and winter cold, in the absence of premises adapted to combat it, rooted the historical habit of the population for tea, and the owners of teahouses never complained about the lack of customers.

The famous traveler Arminius Vamberi said that when he was in the city of Bukhara, he asked his guide to take him to a place where he could rest and refresh himself. They led him through Tim chai furushi (Tea Bazaar) to the famous Lyabi Hauz Divanbegi square, which Vamberi considered the most beautiful place in Bukhara [19; P. 152]. There they were invited to drink tea in tea shops (teahouses) with colossal samovars, which were made in Russia specifically for Bukhara.

Evgeny Markov, who traveled through Transcaucasia, Turkmenistan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent and Fergana regions, the Caspian Sea and the Volga at the end of the 19th century, described the teahouses of Tashkent Shaykhantaur in his historical essay. "Among the people of Tashkent, with the onset of night, the fun of breaking the fast began. All their "ash-khane" (taverns) and "chaikhana" (tea houses), bazaars and gardens were filled with crowds of dressed-up men and women and children who had dinner, drank tea and treated themselves to various sweets right in the open air, under the shade of trees and sheds [30; P. 481].



Pic. 5. Chaikhana (Tea houses) in Samarkand. 1900s.

<https://www.wdl.org/ru>

According to E. Markov, the Shayhantaur mosque served as a sacred center for a whole quarter of bazaars. A large garden surrounded him. Along long alleys, in the shade of very tall trees, at the foot of which there were stalls with all kinds of dishes, sweets and drinks, and at almost every step one could see a brightly lit teahouse, teeming with local people's dressing gowns, turbans and skullcaps. The folk tamasha (holiday) was in full swing. Simple Asian music was heard in different places, with the monotonous boom-boom of a Turkish drum and the piercing, pitiful whine of the pipes. Yellow-bellied Tula samovars of enormous size sparkled in countless numbers among the striped robes that had sown over them, 4, 5 in each teahouse. Asians sat importantly, legs crossed, on lockers and low wooden scaffolding, like beds, and for hours on end blew their cheap "kok-chai" (green tea) from huge earthenware cups without saucers (piala), the size of Russian rinsing cups [30; P. 481].



Pic. 6. Samovar. Vessel for boiling water and tea.

From the fund of the Shakhrisabz State Museum-Reserve.

According to P. Maev, people gather in teahouses to chat, smoke, drink tea, and listen to some singer or music in the evening [31; P. 276] When visiting a teahouse, local residents, first of all, expected to get a certain comfort here and satisfy petty ambition: they are pleased and dear that they are importantly sitting with guests in front of the people crowding in the bazaar, everyone sees this and many envy the fact that he can enjoy such benefits of the whole world. Therefore, the local population, when they worked out, were sure to retire either home or to the nearest teahouse, and parted with it no earlier than emptying their pockets [32; P. 8].

As A. Vamberi noted, sometimes carters and peasants talked about politics in front of tea shops (teahouses), poor people enthusiastically talked about the exploits of their emir; they said that from

Kokand the emir allegedly reached China and that, having extended his sovereign power to the whole East, he would also capture other neighboring countries, and thus the whole world would be divided between the sultan and the emir [18; P. 175].

The researcher A.I. Dobrosmyslov collected information about all types of crafts and trade in the city of Tashkent, and in this information for 1910 the number of teahouses in the old part of the city was 391, and the approximate turnover of these trading establishments was 700 thousand rubles. And there were 192 teahouses in the new part of the city, and the approximate turnover of these trading establishments turned out to be 300 thousand rubles [33; P. 398-402].

In conclusion, the data about Central Asian tea, tea trade, tea culture, choikhanas by Russian orientalists is very valuable and complements the overall picture of tea culture and trade in the Turkestan region.

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