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The History of Environmental Institutions and Societies Established in The Turkestan General Governorate

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Abstract: Under the orders of the Russian Empire, several administrative institutions and scientific societies were established in the Turkestan General-Governorship in the second half of the XIX century and the early XX century. This article examines the history of the activities of these environmental institutions and societies based on historical sources.

Keywords: Ecology, environment, scientific societies, animal protection society, scientific expeditions, natural sciences, flora and fauna, natural resources, environmental conservation.

Introduction: With the establishment of the Turkestan General Governorate, the study of the region's nature, flora and fauna, geography, water resources, and agricultural potential became one of the government's primary goals and tasks. To address these important issues, the General Governorate relied on the assistance of natural scientists from the scientific centers of the Russian Empire. The central authorities, aiming to strengthen the colonial system and exploit the region's wealth, gradually established scientific societies and institutions in Turkestan and kept their activities under strict control. It is worth noting that if the central authorities saw benefits from these scientific societies, they provided them with necessary funds and material-technical support.

From the second half of the XIX century, a number of scientific societies and institutions were established in Turkestan to study environmental and natural resources, as well as socio-economic issues. In 1867, the first meteorological station [1] was established in

Turkestan to study the climate. In 1869, the Central Asian Society was founded, followed by the Turkestan branch of the Society of Naturalists, Anthropologists, and Ethnographers in the 1870s. Other notable institutions include the Tashkent Chemical Laboratory (established on December 19, 1869), the Samarkand branch of the Russian Society for the Protection of Animals (established on August 20, 1892), the Turkestan branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (1895), the Turkestan Agricultural Society (1895), the Department of Agriculture and State Properties (1897), the "Locust Committee" under the Agricultural Society (1898), the Turkestan Medical Society (1899), the Tashkent Hunting Society (1901), and the Turkestan Entomological Station (1911), among others. This article focuses on the activities of some of these societies and institutions.

One of the first societies established in Tashkent in 1869 under the permission of the Turkestan General Governorate was the Central Asian Society. This society was organized by natural scientists led by A.P. Fedchenko. The society operated from 1869 to early 1872, with the primary goal of comprehensively studying the Turkestan region, including its environment and natural resources [2]. The society had its own charter, museum, library, and archive [3]. There are varying accounts regarding the exact date of its establishment, but archival documents confirm that it was founded in 1869. Some studies suggest that the society was established in 1871, based on the date of its first open meeting on January 28, 1871[4].

According to archival documents, the society paid special attention to personnel matters. The membership included not only natural scientists but also officials of the General Governorate, such as A.S. Tatarinov (chairman of the society), K.V. Struve (vice-president), N.F. Petrovsky (secretary and treasurer), A.K. Abramov (Major General, head of the Zarafshan district), and over 10 other officials. Additionally, local representatives such as Mirzahakim Dodho, Saidazimboy Muhammadboyev, and Hoji Yunusov were also members [5], reflecting the society's diverse composition. The significant presence of General Governorate officials in the society indicates that it primarily served the interests of the Russian Empire.

Researcher A. Nazarov notes that the society's activities were halted primarily due to insufficient financial support from the government, the transfer of most members to the Society of Naturalists, Anthropologists, and Ethnographers, and the departure of the society's chairman, A.S. Tatarinov, from Tashkent in 1873[6].

Despite its short existence, the society managed to

collect valuable information about the region's nature and natural resources, publishing it in newspapers and collections. Members of the society also actively participated in scientific expeditions, contributing significantly to the development of natural sciences in the region.

Another important society established in 1870 was the Society of Naturalists, Anthropologists, and Ethnographers [7], which played a significant role in collecting and scientifically studying important information about the region's ecological conditions, natural resources, and socio-economic life. Led by A.P. Fedchenko, this society organized numerous scientific expeditions and travels, gathering valuable data on the region's nature and ecology. However, this society also did not operate for long.

By the late XIX century, societies were established in Turkestan to protect animals, particularly vulnerable species. For example, on August 20, 1892, the Samarkand branch of the Russian Society for the Protection of Animals began its activities. According to a report covering the period from August 27, 1892, to January 1, 1893, the branch started with 31 founding members and admitted 10 more members on August 27[8]. By January 1, 1893, an additional 15 members had joined [9].

The society held four general meetings during this period and adopted several resolutions [10]. For example, the first resolution involved an inspection of the Samarkand city aviary by members Dr. B.U. Beynar, veterinarian Ye.V. Peplov, and police chief K.M. Duplitsky, who reported their findings to the military governor. Other resolutions included admitting local experts as members, enforcing the Ministry of Internal Affairs' circular No. 24, dividing the region into sections with appointed overseers, translating society rules into local languages for distribution, organizing concerts and literary evenings to promote animal protection, and establishing the region's first veterinary hospital [11].

The Turkestan branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, established on May 20, 1895, played a crucial role in studying the region's natural resources, flora and fauna, water resources, and other potentials. After lengthy discussions, the society was established under the order of Turkestan General Governor A.B. Vrevsky and the proposal of Russian researchers in the region [12]. The society's charter was approved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs on December 26, 1896[13], and the ministry was also responsible for its funding.

According to archival documents, General Governor A.B. Vrevsky led and patronized the society, and its first meeting was held at his residence on February 28,

1897[14]. The society's first chairman was topographer S.I. Zhilinsky (1838-1901) [15].

The society's primary goals were to study the natural and ecological conditions of Turkestan, Bukhara, Khiva, and adjacent regions, organize geographical and ethnographic research, support scientific communities studying the region, and collect and preserve educational manuals, books, manuscripts, and maps created as a result of expeditions [16].

The establishment of this society generated positive reactions among both Russian and local intellectuals. Consequently, the society's membership grew over the years. In 1897, the society had 78 members, which increased to 104 by 1903. However, membership fluctuated due to various reasons, and by 1912, it had decreased to 53 members [17].

The society's responsible officials regularly published reports, research findings, and scientific works based on expeditions and meetings. These publications were well-received by the international scientific community. Additionally, the society monitored and assisted foreign researchers and tourists conducting scientific expeditions in Turkestan, contributing to its emergence as a major scientific center in the region.

From the early days of the Russian Empire's conquest of Turkestan, significant attention was paid not only to cotton production but also to other agricultural sectors, such as horticulture and vegetable farming. The empire sent a number of specialists to the region to address agricultural issues, develop new crop varieties, and introduce new farming techniques.

In 1885, under the initiative of the Turkestan General Governor, the Turkestan branch of the Russian Horticultural Society was established to promote agricultural development in the region. The society's charter was approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties on January 11, 1885[18]. The society's management and membership included prominent natural scientists, General Governorate officials, and local representatives such as Saidghani Azimbayev, Akrom Askarov, Orifkhoja Azizkhoyayev, and Mirazim Mirayupov[19]. The society's leadership consisted of a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and 2 to 4 members. On March 5, 1885, the society held its first meeting, electing N.N. Kosyanov as chairman, D.P. Patsevich as vice-chairman, N.K. Smirnov as secretary, and I.I. Krauze, N.A. Mayev, V.F. Oshanin, and N.F. Ulyanov as members [20]. By the end of 1885, the society had 100 active members [21], indicating its effective operation.

The society made significant contributions to the development of agriculture in the region, particularly in forestry, horticulture, and vegetable farming. Due to

its broad scope of activities, the Turkestan General Governorate renamed it the Turkestan Agricultural Society in 1895[22]. The society conducted effective scientific research on land and water issues, irrigation systems, crop cultivation, and the introduction and adaptation of new plant varieties.

It is important to note that while these societies contributed to economic growth in agriculture, the exploitation of new lands, inefficient use of water resources, and the construction of new irrigation facilities began to cause significant harm to the region's environment and ecological conditions. However, the imperial government showed little concern for these issues. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the empire began specializing agriculture in the region, focusing primarily on cotton production, which was a crucial raw material for the Russian textile industry. This shift, coupled with the empire's disregard for natural laws, gradually led to a deterioration of the region's ecological conditions.

Societies in Turkestan also played a role in protecting wildlife, regulating hunting, and enforcing related laws and regulations. One such society was the Tashkent Hunting Society, established in 1901. This society actively participated in the development and amendment of legal documents related to hunting in the early 20th century, as confirmed by archival documents.

An annual report from 1911-1912 of the Tashkent Hunting Society provides valuable information about its members and activities. On July 9, 1912, the society held a meeting where its composition and activities were discussed. At the beginning of 1912, the society had 196 members, and by July 1, 1912, it had 232 members, including 3 honorary members [23]. The report also includes a list of members with their surnames [24].

According to the annual report, the society held four meetings in 1911, during which 16 issues were discussed [25]. The most important meeting took place on October 27, 1911, where new clauses in the lease agreements for hunting grounds in Toytepa, Gaybat, Maydontol, and Osmonota volosts were introduced. Notably, under the new terms, local residents were prohibited from hunting in areas leased by the Hunting Society without the society's permission. The new contracts were signed for 12 years, with an annual fee of 50 rubles per volost [26]. The society's chairman signed new contracts with Gaybat, Toytepa, and Maydontol volosts, while Osmonota volost refused to lease its hunting grounds to preserve its diverse fauna.

The Tashkent Hunting Society played a significant role in protecting the region's wildlife, preventing illegal hunting, and regulating hunting seasons. However,

despite the development of laws and regulations and the oversight of responsible organizations and the Hunting Society, illegal hunting persisted in the region. This not only caused significant harm to Turkestan's wildlife but also disrupted natural laws and negatively impacted the region's ecological conditions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ecology-related institutions and societies established in Turkestan during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to the development of natural sciences in the region. They studied the region's flora and fauna, water resources, climate, natural disasters, epidemics, and sanitary conditions, and sought solutions to existing problems. They also addressed ecological issues and appealed to the government to ensure environmental protection. However, challenges such as a lack of specialists, insufficient funding, and limited positions hindered the activities of some societies, leading to their eventual dissolution.

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