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ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE OF FRENCH SCHOLARSHIP IN COLONIAL TURKESTAN: THE CASE OF JOSEPH ANTOINE CASTAGNÉ

Abstract: This article examines archival evidence related to the scientific activities of the French scholar Joseph Antoine Castagné in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Based on official documents preserved in the National Archives of Uzbekistan, the study highlights Castagné's role in archaeological, ethnographic, speleological, and geographical research conducted under the Turkestan Governor-Generalship.

Keywords: Joseph Antoine Castagné, archival sources, Turkestan, colonial scholarship, Imperial Russian Geographical Society, archaeology, ethnography, speleology, regional studies.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, scientific research conducted in Central Asia, including the territory of present-day Uzbekistan, was carried out under historically complex political and social conditions. This period was closely connected with the colonial policy of the Russian Empire, and scientific investigations often served the strategic, administrative, and military interests of the empire. In particular, geographical, ethnographic, archaeological, and statistical studies were aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of colonial territories and facilitating their governance and control. Nevertheless, interpreting the scientific heritage of this period solely as a product of colonial policy does not fully correspond to historical reality.

Indeed, among the researchers who worked in Turkestan during the Russian imperial period were scholars who prioritized the interests of science and sought to record their observations and collected data as objectively,

systematically, and in accordance with scholarly standards as possible. They attempted to maintain a relatively independent academic position while studying the history, culture, customs, social life, and natural environment of local populations. This circumstance necessitates a deeper source-based examination of the scientific research of that period and its reassessment in accordance with the requirements of modern historiography.

One such researcher was the French scholar Joseph Antoine Castagné, who left a significant mark on the study of Turkestan through his multifaceted scientific activity. Castagné conducted research in archaeology, ethnography, speleology, linguistics, numismatics, and geography, and his works represent important source material for understanding the historical and cultural landscape of Central Asia. In particular, his expeditions, collected evidence, and prepared scientific reports made a substantial contribution to the development of Turkestan regional studies, historical-ethnographic research, and museology.

Joseph Antoine Castagné was born in 1875 in the small French town of Gaylac and died in 1958 in Montpellier. Although he was born and died in France, the most active and productive twenty years of his life were spent in the territory of the Russian Empire. It was during this period that Castagné formed his scholarly worldview, conducted extensive research, and gained recognition within the scientific community.

After obtaining a diploma granting him the right to teach French in secondary schools, Castagné arrived in Russia in the spring of 1899. In February 1901, having successfully passed an examination before the pedagogical council of the Vladikavkaz Gymnasium, he was appointed as a teacher of French. Alongside his teaching career, he deepened his interest in scholarly research and established contacts with various scientific societies.

In 1904, Castagné made his first journey to Turkestan, which became a turning point in his subsequent scholarly activity. He developed a particular interest in the region's historical monuments, natural conditions, and the

lifestyle of the local population. From 1909 onward, he worked as a curator at a museum under the patronage of the Orenburg Scientific Archival Commission, a position that allowed him direct access to archival documents, historical artifacts, and scientific collections.

In 1912, at his own request, Castagné was granted permission to transfer his professional activity to Tashkent, and on September 28, 1913, he accepted Russian citizenship. In Tashkent, while working as a French language teacher and class supervisor at a secondary specialized educational institution, he significantly expanded his scientific research in the territory of Turkestan. From this period onward, his archaeological, ethnographic, and speleological expeditions acquired a systematic character, and he actively cooperated with the Turkestan Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts.

In this respect, Joseph Antoine Castagné's scientific activity in Turkestan represents not only the personal scholarly pursuits of an individual researcher, but also an important historical phenomenon reflecting the complex, multi-layered, and often contradictory nature of scientific processes in the colonial period. Studying his activity on the basis of archival sources is of great importance for reconstructing a more accurate picture of scientific research conducted in Turkestan at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study of Joseph Antoine Castagné's activity during the period of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship and his scientific research in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan has been addressed rather narrowly in historiography.

Within the framework of the present study, priority was given to official archival documents from 1913–1917 preserved in the National Archives of Uzbekistan. These documents are exceptionally rich in both volume and content, directly reflecting Castagné's scientific, organizational, and administrative activity in Turkestan. The majority of the archival materials are connected with the activities of the Turkestan Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical

Society and the Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts, which played a central role in supporting Castagné's research.

Particularly significant among these sources are the official certificates issued in Castagné's name by the Turkestan Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. These documents indicate his scholarly status, official authority, and recognition as a full member of the society. They granted him the right to conduct research, organize expeditions, communicate with local administrative bodies, and use necessary technical equipment throughout the territory of Turkestan. This confirms that his activity was not incidental but coordinated and supervised by imperial scientific institutions.

A substantial portion of the archival material consists of Castagné's expedition plans and documents related to the preparation of scientific journeys. These plans clearly define research directions, geographical areas, scientific objectives, and expected outcomes, demonstrating a high level of methodological rigor and systematic organization. In particular, the integration of speleological, ethnographic, archaeological, and geographical research indicates Castagné's comprehensive scientific approach.

The archives also contain Castagné's official applications and correspondence addressed to the leadership of the Turkestan Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. These materials shed light on the organizational aspects of his work, including issues related to logistical support, transportation, scientific equipment, and auxiliary personnel. They reveal Castagné not only as a researcher but also as an organizer and leader of scientific expeditions.

Of particular importance are Castagné's technical requests, which list contemporary scientific instruments such as geodetic devices, cameras, barometers, and maps. These documents demonstrate his emphasis on empirical accuracy and modern research methods, providing further evidence of the scientific rigor of his work. Minutes of meetings and council decisions of the

Turkestan Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts are also valuable sources for examining the institutional aspects of Castagné's activity. Through these materials, it is possible to trace how his initiatives were discussed, approved, or rejected, as well as to assess his standing and reputation within the scientific community of Turkestan.

In general, the analysis of existing literature and, especially, archival sources indicates that Castagné's activity in Turkestan has not yet been studied in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Most existing works are descriptive in nature and do not sufficiently examine his specific expeditions, administrative interactions, or the source-based foundations of his scholarly legacy. Therefore, the present research, based on documents from the National Archives of Uzbekistan, contributes to a reassessment of Castagné's activity using new facts and sources and to clarifying his true role in the history of Turkestan regional studies.

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