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# THE PARTICIPATION OF KAZAKHS IN THE REBELLION LED BY E. PUGACHEV: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Abstract. The article provides a comprehensive historiographical analysis of the issue of Kazakh participation in the Peasant War of 1773–1775 led by E. Pugachev. It reviews scholarly works ranging from studies by Russian researchers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to contributions by domestic historians of the independence period. The article demonstrates that scholars have offered diverse interpretations of the socio-economic and political causes of the Kazakhs' involvement in the uprising, reflecting differences in their source bases and methodological approaches. Particular attention is given to the comparative examination of the findings of V. A. Golikov, O. A. Chernyshev, A. P. Chuloshnikov, M. P. Vyatkin, E. Bekmakhanov, M. K. Kozybayev, N. E. Bekmakhanova, Zh. Kasymbayev, and I. V. Yerofeyeva. The study emphasizes the significance of viewing the Pugachev movement in connection with the broader national liberation processes in Kazakh history. Furthermore, the article outlines the development of the historiography of the uprising, its unresolved issues, and possible directions for future scholarly inquiry.

*Key words.* E. Pugachev's Rebellion, causes of the uprising, Kazakh tribes, historiography, eighteenth century, colonial policy, liberation movement.

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# Е.ПУГАЧЕВ БАСТАҒАН КӨТЕРІЛІСКЕ ҚАЗАҚТАРДЫҢ ҚАТЫСУЫ: МӘСЕЛЕНІҢ ТАРИХНАМАСЫ.

Аңдатпа. Мақалада Е.Пугачёв бастаған 1773–1775 жылдардағы шаруалар соғысына қазақтардың қатысу мәселесінің тарихнамалық зерттелуі жан-жақты қарастырылады. Жұмыс барысында XIX ғасырдың соңы мен XX ғасырдың басындағы орыс зерттеушілерінің еңбектерінен бастап, тәуелсіздік жылдарындағы отандық тарихшылардың еңбектеріне дейінгі ғылыми еңбектерге шолу жасалған. Авторлар көтеріліске қазақтардың қатысуының әлеуметтік-экономикалық және саяси себептерін әртүрлі тұрғыдан түсіндіретіні, олардың дереккөздік базасы мен әдіснамалық ұстанымдары әркелкі екендігі көрсетіледі. Мақалада В.А.Голиков, О.А.Чернышев, М. Қ. Қозыбаев, Н.Е.Бекмаханова, А.П.Чулошников, М.П.Вяткин, Е.Бекмаханов, Ж.Қасымбаев, И.В.Ерофеева сияқты зерттеуші ғалымдардың тұжырымдары салыстырылып, Пугачёв қозғалысын қазақ тарихындағы ұлттық-азаттық үрдістермен сабақтастыра қарастырудың маңызы айқындалады. Сондай-ақ зерттеу барысында көтеріліс тарихнамасының дамуы, шешілмеген тұстары мен болашақтағы ғылыми ізденістердің бағыттары көрсетілген.

*Кілт сөздер.* Е.Пугачёв көтерілісі, көтеріліс алғышарттары, қазақ рулары, тарихнама, XVIII ғасыр, отарлық саясат, азаттық қозғалыс,

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### УЧАСТИЕ КАЗАХОВ В ВОССТАНИИ ПОД ПРЕДВОДИТЕЛЬСТВОМ Е.ПУГАЧЁВА: ИСТОРИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ

Анномация. В статье всесторонне рассматривается историографическое изучение участия казахов в крестьянской войне 1773—1775 годов под предводительством Е. Пугачёва. Проведен обзор научных трудов начиная от исследований российских ученых конца XIX — начала XX века и до работ отечественных историков периода независимости. Показано, что авторы по-разному интерпретируют социально-экономические и политические причины участия казахов в восстании, при этом их источниковая база и методологические подходы неоднородны. В статье сопоставляются выводы таких исследователей, как В.А. Голиков, О.А. Чернышев, А.П. Чулошников, М.П. Вяткин, Е. Бекмаханов, М.Қ. Қозыбаев, Н.Е. Бекмаханова, Ж. Касымбаев, И.В. Ерофеева, и подчеркивается значимость рассмотрения движения Пугачёва в контексте национально-освободительных процессов в истории Казахстана. Кроме того, в исследовании обозначены основные этапы развития историографии восстания, выявлены дискуссионные аспекты и намечены перспективные направления дальнейших научных изысканий.

*Ключевые слова.* Восстание Е. Пугачёва, предпосылки восстания, казахские роды, историография, XVIII век, колониальная политика, освободительное движение.

**Introduction.** In the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial policy of the Russian Empire exerted a profound influence on the socio-economic conditions of the Kazakh clans residing along the Orenburg and Zhaiyk (Ural) frontier lines. The Peasant War of 1773–1775, led by Yemelyan Pugachev, represented one of the largest popular uprisings against imperial oppression and significantly affected the Kazakhs of the Younger Zhuz. The participation of Kazakhs in this movement was conditioned by a set of structural socio-economic and political factors.

First, the land and pasture question was of paramount importance. From the 1730s to the 1770s, the Orenburg and Ural Cossack forces increasingly encroached upon traditional Kazakh territories, converting the fertile lands between the Zhaiyk and Volga rivers into fortified military lines. This expansion restricted the seasonal migration routes of the Younger Zhuz clans and inflicted considerable damage on their pastoral economy. Pugachev's pledge to "return the confiscated lands" found widespread support among the Kazakhs.

Second, the growing burden of taxes and levies became a catalyst for discontent. The Russian administration compelled Kazakhs to pay various duties and tributes, while Cossack detachments often raided and drove away livestock. Rebel appeals for the "abolition of taxes and the restoration of free trade" proved to be an effective instrument for mobilizing Kazakh participation.

Third, social inequality and systemic restrictions intensified grievances. Beyond economic losses, Kazakh communities faced limitations on free movement and commercial activity imposed by frontier fortifications. These restrictions fueled dissatisfaction, which overlapped with the broader agenda of the Pugachev uprising and expanded its support base among the steppe population.

Fourth, the disruption of trade routes undermined economic stability. The construction of Russian fortresses altered caravan pathways and impeded traditional trade flows. Promises made by the rebels to "reopen fair routes" aligned with Kazakh economic interests and were perceived as a means of restoring commercial autonomy.

As a result, Kazakh sultans and clan leaders sought to exploit the Pugachev movement as an opportunity to mitigate the pressures of Russian colonial administration.

In sum, the socio-economic and political factors outlined above constituted the principal preconditions for Kazakh involvement in the Peasant War led by E. Pugachev. Their participation, largely spontaneous in character, was closely tied to the local conditions of the Younger Zhuz. Importantly, the grievances that motivated this involvement did not dissipate with the suppression of the uprising; rather, they persisted and later became integral drivers of subsequent national liberation movements in Kazakh history.

Materials and methods of research. The historiography of the participation of Kazakh clans in the Peasant War led by Yemelyan Pugachev encompasses a body of commemorative writings, historical narratives, and source-based studies that address the causes, course, and significance of the uprising. Since this historical event is inextricably linked with Russian history, it is essential to consider Russian historiography as well. Broadly speaking, Russian historiography on the subject may be divided into three stages:

- 1. The pre-revolutionary period (before 1917). Publications of this stage were subject to censorship and displayed clear limitations in their treatment of the insurgents' actions.
- 2. The Soviet period. During this time, a substantial number of documents originating from the rebel camp were introduced into scholarly circulation. Works written within the framework of Marxist ideology tended to idealize the insurgents and framed the uprising in class-struggle terms.
- 3. The contemporary period. In recent decades, scholarly interest in the events of the uprising has noticeably declined, and the number of publications has decreased accordingly.

The pre-revolutionary stage. In this period, the Pugachev rebellion was predominantly interpreted as a military-political event. Kazakh participation was only briefly mentioned, usually in a peripheral or negative manner. Following the suppression of the uprising, Empress Catherine II issued decrees that sought to consign the memory of this "popular revolt" to oblivion, since it portrayed Russia unfavorably in the eyes of "enlightened Europe." Consequently, most of the documentary evidence—including detailed investigation and court records—was sealed in confidential archives. The government did not commission comprehensive histories of the event, which rendered fragmentary eyewitness testimonies preserved in diaries especially valuable.

Results and Discussion. One of the earliest historical accounts of the uprising was the chronicle The Siege of Orenburg authored by the Orenburg scholar Pyotr Ivanovich Rychkov, who directly participated in the defense of Orenburg against Pugachev's forces [1]. Rychkov's memoirs were highly praised by A. S. Pushkin: "The diligent Rychkov, author of 'The Topography of Orenburg' and many other insightful and useful works, has left a fascinating manuscript about that time. I was fortunate to make use of it. It is distinguished by a simple honesty in conveying the truth and by a benevolent and practical manner of narration—qualities that are extremely rare among contemporary Russian historians." Rychkov's Siege of Orenburg

later formed the foundation of Pushkin's History of Pugachev and was included in full, alongside other documents, in the second volume of that work.

Another valuable source is the memoirs of Senator P. S. Runich. In 1774, during the final stage of the uprising, Runich entered the headquarters of the new commander P. I. Panin and was subsequently appointed investigator to the Secret Investigative Commission in Moscow. Owing to his wide-ranging interactions with both the rebels and representatives of the imperial army, Runich's memoirs provide important eyewitness accounts of events such as the siege of Orenburg, the battle at Tatishchev Fortress, the peasant "Jacquerie" along the right bank of the Volga, the Cossack colonels' betrayal and capture of Pugachev, as well as encounters between Pugachev and prominent figures like Suvorov, Golitsyn, and Michelson. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Runich documented not only military operations in the Orenburg province and Pugachev's tactical maneuvers but also information about the involvement of Kazakhs in the rebellion [2].

The first scholar to undertake a comprehensive study of the events of the Pugachev uprising and to present it as a historical work was Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. While employed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pushkin gained access to an extensive collection of archival documents. However, his research was not limited to written sources alone: he also made special trips to the regions affected by the uprising—Kazan, Orenburg, and Ural—where he personally met with surviving eyewitnesses of the events as well as their descendants.

In his History of Pugachev (1834) [3], Pushkin examined the deeper causes of the rebellion and sought to present them in detail. Furthermore, in the appendices to his work, he published a significant number of documents and memoirs, which remain unique sources for researchers to this day. Nevertheless, many of his contemporaries and later critics reproached Pushkin for relying excessively on eyewitness testimonies, considering his work to be of "literary rather than historical value." Yet, Pushkin carefully compared the recollections of witnesses with archival records, thereby ensuring the reliability of the evidence.

For instance, in his History of Pugachev (1834), Pushkin explicitly noted the assistance rendered by the Kazakhs to the rebel leader: "Pugachev, by attracting the peoples of the steppe to his side, received support from the nomadic Kazakhs, who supplied him with provisions and intelligence" [3, p. 47].

Later evidence was provided by the Russian writer V. G. Korolenko, who worked in the Orenburg archives in 1900. He reported: "Dosaly Sultan's third son directly participated in the Pugachev uprising and was among those who took part in the siege of the Zhaiyk fortress" [4, p. 215]. Korolenko also highlighted the significant contribution of the Kazakhs to the capture of the Kulagin fortress (present-day Atyrau region).

The Soviet historiographical tradition (1920–1991). During the Soviet era, the Pugachev uprising was interpreted primarily through the prism of class struggle, and the various ethnic groups who participated were depicted as "allies of the revolutionary movement." Scholars such as A. P. Shchapov [5] and M. V. Malyshev [6] acknowledged the military and material support provided by the Kazakhs but often portrayed them as politically less conscious representatives of the "toiling masses." P. N. Domanitsky [7], in his study of events in the Orenburg region and along the Zhaiyk, referred to archival evidence concerning the Kazakhs, yet did not fully explore the political implications of their involvement in the uprising.

Post-Soviet and contemporary perspectives. In more recent Russian historiography, the participation of the Kazakhs in the Pugachev uprising has been reassessed in a new light. These works increasingly regard the Kazakhs not merely as auxiliary supporters but as active agents engaged in both military and political decision-making. For example, V. A. Golikov linked Kazakh involvement directly to specific assaults on fortresses: "Kazakh detachments, under the

leadership of biys and clan elders, not only provided assistance to the rebels but also independently attacked the Iletsk and Tatishchev fortresses" [8]. Similarly, S. M. Fedoseev emphasized the logistical and intelligence support rendered by Kazakh clans: "Kazakh nomads, especially from the Baibakty and Tabyn clans, actively cooperated with the Pugachev rebels, providing transport and reconnaissance" [9].

One of the most recent contributions is the article by O. A. Chernyshev, based on archival data. The author provides a broader perspective on the scale of Kazakh involvement: "Analysis of archival documents from RGADA demonstrates that the participation of the Kazakhs was far more extensive than previously assumed: they attacked fortifications, organized ambushes, and engaged in negotiations with the rebels" [10].

Thus, Russian scholars have evaluated the participation of the Kazakhs in the Pugachev uprising in different ways depending on the intellectual and political climate of their era. In the nineteenth century, the issue was addressed only superficially; in the Soviet period, it was interpreted ideologically. By contrast, recent scholarship substantiates, with archival evidence, that the Kazakhs played an active role in the uprising, both militarily and politically. These findings allow us to consider the Pugachev movement as a multiethnic resistance against colonial oppression in the Zhaiyk region.

The Peasant Uprising of 1773–1775 under the leadership of E. I. Pugachev represents not only a manifestation of the colonial policies of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century but also a major episode of popular resistance, which has become an important subject of study in Kazakhstani historiography. Scholarly engagement with this theme began during the Soviet period and was subsequently revisited in the years of independence, when it was reinterpreted through the lens of national interests.

In Soviet historiography, the Pugachev Rebellion was characterized as a "popular revolutionary movement," with all participating ethnic groups—including the Kazakhs—depicted as allies of the peasantry. One of the earliest Soviet researchers to address the involvement of the Kazakhs was the historian A. P. Chuloshnikov. His 1929 work The Pugachev Uprising and the Kazakhs [11] is among the first scholarly studies dedicated specifically to the role of the Kazakh people in the uprising.

Chuloshnikov analyzed the participation of Kazakh tribes—particularly those of the Younger Zhuz—from a socio-political perspective, emphasizing their active contribution as a military force. He demonstrated, with concrete examples, that the colonial policies of the Russian administration in the Ural region, the arbitrariness of Cossack detachments, and disputes over land rights were decisive factors that compelled Kazakhs to join the rebellion. As he noted, "The Kazakh hordes rendered invaluable assistance to the insurgents—providing manpower, provisions, horses, and weaponry" [11, p. 85]. Chuloshnikov thus assessed the uprising as a broad popular movement in which the Kazakhs played a significant role, while also drawing attention to the temporary yet mutually advantageous political negotiations between Pugachev and Kazakh elders.

Among Soviet historians, the works of M. P. Vyatkin occupy a special place in the study of the Pugachev Uprising and the Kazakhs' involvement. His seminal monograph The Turbulent Century [12], along with other documentary studies, provided a comprehensive socio-economic and political analysis of the uprising. Vyatkin interpreted the rebellion as a large-scale popular movement of peasants and oppressed peoples against the colonial-administrative system of the Russian Empire. He argued that the participation of the Kazakhs was not incidental but rather the natural outcome of complex ethno-political and social processes in the frontier regions: "The Kazakh tribes, oppressed by the Cossack elite and the

tsarist administration, naturally became drawn into the orbit of Pugachev's rebellion" [12, p. 203].

On the basis of archival materials, Vyatkin described the interaction of Kazakh clans such as the Berish, Adai, Tabyn, and Shekti with Pugachev's forces, particularly their assistance during the sieges of Ural fortifications. He also studied the diplomatic correspondence between Pugachev and Kazakh leaders, thereby highlighting the political dimension of their involvement.

A prominent contribution to the study of anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries belongs to the distinguished historian Ermukhan Bekmakhanov. He approached the Kazakhs' participation in the Pugachev Uprising within the broader historical process, interpreting it as part of the struggle against the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. His most influential work, the monograph Kazakhstan in the 1820s–1840s [13], primarily focused on the Kenesary movement but also examined earlier uprisings, including that of Pugachev. Bekmakhanov evaluated the Kazakhs' involvement as "a natural historical process arising from the internal contradictions of Kazakh society and the colonial pressures of the Russian Empire" [13, p. 35].

Bekmakhanov's methodology differed from that of his Soviet contemporaries in that he did not confine his interpretation to class analysis but sought to integrate it with the national liberation dimension. He regarded Kazakh participation in the Pugachev Rebellion not merely as peasant resistance but as an expression of broader national interests. For this position, which challenged Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, the historian faced political persecution. In his view, "Although the incorporation of the Kazakhs into Russia was a historical necessity, it did not lead to genuine equality. Hence, the involvement of the Kazakhs in movements such as the Pugachev Uprising was a legitimate historical phenomenon" [13, p. 42].

Bekmakhanov's ideas opened new avenues for subsequent researchers, particularly in the post-independence period, enabling a reassessment of the rebellion within the framework of national consciousness and anti-colonial struggle. He was among the first scholars to situate the Pugachev Uprising in a broad historical context, linking Kazakh participation to the awakening of national identity. His scholarly legacy continues to shape the methodological and substantive foundations for contemporary studies of the uprising.

Among Kazakh historians, Kh. Zh. Abdullin was one of the first to study this topic systematically. His monograph The Peasant War under the Leadership of E. I. Pugachev and Kazakhstan [14] provided a comprehensive analysis of the causes and character of the Younger Zhuz Kazakhs' involvement. Abdullin interpreted their support for Pugachev's army as an objective expression of discontent with the colonial policies of the Russian Empire.

M. Kozybaev interpreted the Pugachev uprising as an integral part of broader popular unrest within the Russian Empire. On the basis of documentary evidence, he demonstrated that Kazakh detachments participated in several military operations along the Ural line [15].

One of the first domestic scholars to provide a specialized analysis of Kazakh involvement in the Pugachev uprising was N. E. Bekmakhanova. In 1965, she defended her candidate dissertation entitled The Kazakhs of the Younger and Middle Zhuzes in the Peasant War of 1773–1775 under the Leadership of E. I. Pugachev [16], in which she examined the participation of Kazakh groups in the peasant war. In her study, Bekmakhanova emphasized that the Kazakhs of the Younger Zhuz were driven to join the uprising by their discontent with Cossack-Russian military colonization along the Ural, the strengthening of border fortifications, and the loss of access to traditional pastures. She explained their participation primarily in socio-economic terms, stressing that, "The Kazakh tribes joined the uprising not

out of loyalty to Pugachev himself, but as a protest against the unjust policies of the tsarist government" [17, p. 143].

Drawing on archival sources, Bekmakhanova provided a detailed account of the concrete military actions of Kazakh tribes such as the Berish, Tabyn, and Baibakty, including their involvement in the sieges of fortresses and their material support for the insurgents. At the same time, she noted that attitudes toward Pugachev among Kazakh khans and elders were not uniform: while some groups supported the rebellion, others sought neutrality or accommodation with the tsarist administration.

The significance of Bekmakhanova's work lies in her effort to analyze the Kazakhs' participation not in political or ethnic terms, but in relation to their specific social and economic conditions. This methodological approach allowed for a more objective evaluation of the historical events and laid the foundation for subsequent scholarship, especially in demonstrating the Kazakhs' resistance to Russian colonial policies with empirically grounded arguments.

A special place in the study of Kazakh resistance to colonial oppression and national liberation movements belongs to academician A. Nüsipbekov. He made a significant contribution to the study of social movements in Kazakh history, including the peasant uprisings of the eighteenth century and the involvement of Kazakhs in them. In his works, such as Kazakhstan on the Eve of Socialism [18] and his contributions to the multi-volume History of the Kazakh SSR, Nüsipbekov paid particular attention to the Pugachev uprising, analyzing both its internal and external causes. As he argued, "The participation of Kazakh tribes in the Pugachev movement was not accidental; it represented a manifestation of resistance to the colonial policies of the tsarist government" [18, p. 93].

Following Kazakhstan's independence, the Kazakhs' involvement in the Pugachev uprising came to be reinterpreted within a new framework—as part of the broader struggle against colonial rule and an early stage in the pursuit of national independence.

Among the notable scholars who contributed to the study of eighteenth-nineteenth-century liberation movements was Zh. Kasymbaev. He was recognized for his meticulous use of historical sources in analyzing the Younger Zhuz's relations with Russia, as well as Kazakh opposition to the colonial system and their military-political activities. While Kasymbaev did not treat the Pugachev uprising as a separate object of study, he nonetheless examined its impact on the Kazakh steppe and the participation of Kazakhs within a broad historical context. His works, including Abylai Khan, Kenessary Kassymuly, and Essays on the History of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, provide valuable information on Kazakh–Russian relations, the colonial administrative system, and military conflicts in frontier regions. As he observed, "During the period of the Pugachev uprising, the political situation in the Kazakh steppe was especially tense. These upheavals had a direct impact on Kazakh–Russian relations" [19, p. 71]. Kasymbaev thus regarded the armed participation of Kazakhs in the uprising as a form of national liberation struggle against colonial domination.

Among major historians who studied Kazakh–Russian relations and the Russian Empire's Central Asian policy in the eighteenth century was Irina Vasilyevna Erofeeva. Her research addressed issues of colonial administrative structures, frontier fortifications, the khanate system, and social structures within Kazakh society. Although the Pugachev uprising was not her central object of research, Erofeeva nevertheless touched upon Kazakh participation and its causes in several works. Her principal research focus lay in the political, administrative, and military relations between the Younger Zhuz and the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century [20]. She linked Kazakh resistance during this period to the pressures of the colonial system and interpreted it as a historically conditioned response. As she emphasized, "The Kazakhs of the Younger Zhuz, particularly the groups along the Ural, were drawn into Pugachev's

movement due to the intensifying conflicts with the Zhaiyk Cossacks and the colonial administration" [20, p. 122].

As one of the leading figures in both Kazakhstani and Russian historiography, Erofeeva offered a nuanced interpretation of the interethnic, social, and geopolitical dimensions of Kazakh participation. She viewed their involvement not as ideologically motivated, but as a pragmatic response rooted in concrete socio-economic conditions.

Conclusion. In Kazakhstani historiography, the Pugachev uprising and Kazakh participation have been examined through various scholarly and ideological lenses across different periods. While Soviet historiography framed the movement primarily in class terms, post-independence research has reinterpreted it as part of the national struggle against colonialism. Recent studies, relying on historical evidence, have increasingly provided a more balanced evaluation of the Kazakhs' active role, their participation in military actions, and the overall impact of the uprising on the Kazakh steppe.

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