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by Howard L. Weinert

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During Russia's expansion into Central Asia in the mid-nineteenth century, its army defeated the forces of the emirate of Bukhara in several battles from 1865 to 1868. The treaties of 1868 and 1873 made the emirate a de facto Russian protectorate, but preserved the power of the emir in internal affairs. The emir's authority gradually eroded, however, as Russia continued to expand its commercial activities and to solidify its military position in Central Asia, particularly vis-à-vis England. These efforts required the development of postal, telegraphic, and railway communication with Bukhara.¹

In both 1872 and 1874, when the Russians proposed the establishment of postal communication between Bukhara city and the Russian frontier post at Katta-Kurgan, the emir refused. At the beginning of 1881, Khalit Sabitovich Burnashev initiated a private postal service with the permission of the Russian government. He transported mail only between Katta-Kurgan and Bukhara city. Although the service was expensive and unsecured, it was still operational at the end of 1884. Burnashev charged the Russian and Bukharan governments 120 rubles per year to carry their official mail. Between August 1, 1882, and August 1, 1884, the amount of mail sent from Bukhara to Katta-Kurgan totalled 16,319 ordinary letters, 2,233 registered letters, 3,354 telegrams, 236 official packets, 376 money packets, and 558 valuable parcels. Sent from Katta-Kurgan to Bukhara were 17,094 ordinary letters, 2,193 registered letters, 3,739 telegrams, 97 official packets, 470 money packets, and 919 valuable parcels. No details are available on postmarks, the registration and insurance services, or the actual postal fees for any of the mail categories. No mail carried by this service has come to light.²

Negotiations on the establishment of a telegraph line between Bukhara city and Katta-Kurgan began on January 2, 1883, and terminated on October 21, with the emir's consent. The line was built during the summer of 1884 and inaugurated on August 28.³

A notice about it was published two days later in the *Government Herald*:

"By agreement of the Russian government and the Emir of Bukhara, telegraphic communication has been

established with Bukhara by the construction of a new line from our border station at Katty Kurgan to its chief town. The station in Bukhara is now open."⁴

The only known postmark of the telegraph office in Bukhara city, introduced in 1890 or 1891, reads БУХАРА ТЕЛЕГР. КОИТ. (Bukhara telegraph office), with serial number 1 and split year.

In 1885 the Russians decided to extend the Transcaspian Military Railroad from Kizil-Arvat across Bukhara to Samarkand. The emir's consent was obtained, and on December 3, 1886, the railroad reached the emirate at Chardzhui on the left bank of the Amu-Darya River. From there it crossed Bukhara and reached Samarkand on May 15, 1888. Beginning on May 25, mail was transported on the railroad between Chardzhui and Samarkand.⁵ The earliest postmarks read ПОЧТ. ВАГОНЪ ЧАРДЖУЙ-САМАРКАНДЪ (postal car Chardzhi-Samarkand) and ПОЧТ. ВАГОНЪ САМАРКАНДЪ-ЧАРДЖУЙ, with serial number 1, 2, or 3, and the date in three lines. The railroad was extended from Samarkand to Tashkent in 1898 and renamed the Central Asian Railroad. Postal wagon numbers 205/206 were assigned at the beginning of 1899.⁶

The first Russian postal establishment in the emirate opened in March 1887 in Chardzhui at the Russian settlement near the railroad station.⁷ This establishment was a postal branch office (otdelenie) with a staff of four. For the last nine months of 1887, the mail volume at Chardzhui was 9 percent that of Tashkent.⁸ The earliest postmark reads ЧАРДЖУЙ ЗАКАСП. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ОТД. (Chardzui Transcasp. dist. post. br.), with serial number 1 and the date in three lines. It was used from 1887 to 1889. Note that the postmark seems to indicate that Chardzhui was in the Transcaspia Territory (ЗАКАСПИЙСКАЯ ОБЛАСТЬ), which has led some to think that the postmark is in error. What the postmark is indicating, however, is that the Chardzhui branch office was subordinate to the postal administration of Transcaspia Territory, not that it was geographically located there. This branch office was upgraded to a fourth-class post and telegraph office (kontora) in November 1888.⁹ New postmarks were introduced in 1889 reading ЧАРДЖУЙ ЗАКАСП. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОИТ., with serial number 1 or 2, and the date in three

lines. A railroad postal branch office accepting only ordinary and registered mail opened at Chardzhui station at the beginning of 1899.¹⁰ Its postmark reads ЧАРДЖУЙ ЖЕЛЪЗНОДОРОЖ. П. О., with serial number 1 and split year.

A post office (kontora) opened, with a staff of two, in March 1889 in New Bukhara, which was the Russian settlement at the Bukhara railroad station eight miles south of Bukhara city. This post office was named simply Bukhara, which was also the name of the telegraph office in Bukhara city.¹¹ The confusing situation was permitted because the two offices were of different types. From 1889 until 1894 the post office in New Bukhara used postmarks reading БУХАРА ПОЧТОВ. КОТОРА, with serial number 1, 2, or 3, and the date in three lines.

Late in 1891, and certainly by January 1, 1892, the telegraph office in Bukhara city was converted to a fourth-class post and telegraph office accepting only ordinary and registered mail.¹² It first used the telegraph postmark described above, along with split-year postmarks reading БУХАРА ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОХТ., with serial number 1 or 2. In 1893 or early 1894 additional postmarks were introduced reading БУХАРА САМАРК. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОХТ., with serial number 3 or 4, and split year. These show that the office was subordinate to the postal administration of Samarkand Territory.

In February 1894 the post office in New Bukhara was converted to a fifth-class post and telegraph office.¹³ Now that the offices in Bukhara city and New Bukhara had the same status, they could no longer have the same name (Bukhara), so the names were changed to Old (Staraya) Bukhara and New (Novaya) Bukhara.¹⁴ The Old Bukhara office continued to use the existing postmarks described earlier until double-circle postmarks reading СТАРАЯ БУХАРА were introduced in 1904. The new name was used on registration labels, however, when they were introduced in 1899. At the New Bukhara office, split-year postmarks reading НОВАЯ БУХАРА САМАРКАНД. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОХТ., with serial number 1 or 2, were introduced in 1894. These show that the New Bukhara office was also subordinate to the postal administration of Samarkand Territory.

While the railroad provided postal transport into and out of Chardzhui and New Bukhara, mail to and from Old Bukhara was initially carried along the road connecting Old Bukhara and New Bukhara. In 1900

construction began on an eight-mile railroad branch line connecting the two cities. This line opened on October 15, 1901.¹⁵ No postmarks have been recorded. Before this branch line was built, the railroad station at New Bukhara was named Bukhara. Once the branch was operational, the name Bukhara was used for the station in Old Bukhara, and the one in New Bukhara was renamed Kagan.¹⁶

In anticipation of the added security provided by rail transport, the Old Bukhara post and telegraph office instituted insurance and parcel services (excluding money orders) in April 1901, which was announced in the Government Herald:

“From 1 April of this year at the Staraya Bukhara post and telegraph office, in addition to the services now carried out for ordinary and registered mail, there will commence, according to existing Imperial rules and rates, the acceptance and delivery of domestic and international money and declared-value packets, parcels with and without declared value, and bundles of Russian money.”¹⁷

Two months later on June 1, the office began to accept and deliver postal and telegraphic money orders.¹⁸

The other early post offices at Kerki, Kelif, and Termez were located on the Amu-Darya River, which formed the boundary between Bukhara and Afghanistan and flowed into the Aral Sea. Russian garrisons were established along the river starting in 1887, and late that year the Amu-Darya flotilla began transporting mail, freight, and passengers to those garrisons. The flotilla initially had two steamships, Tsar and Tsaritsa. The Tsesarevich was added in 1895, followed by the Grand Duke in 1896, the Grand Duchess Olga in 1898, and the Emperor Nicholas II in 1901. The ships sailed weekly between Chardzhui and Termez (287 miles) year-round, but occasional low water levels or freezing caused delays or interruptions. The upriver trip took six days in summer and ten days in winter, while the downriver trip required only a day or two in summer and five days in winter. No ship postmarks have been recorded. Mail was also transported by road along the riverbank, and on January 1, 1902, Termez was connected to Samarkand by a post road (240 miles).¹⁹

In June 1889 a post and telegraph branch office (otdelenie) accepting only ordinary and registered mail

opened in Karki on the Amu-Darya River, 137 miles upriver from Chardzhui.²⁰ One month later the name was changed to Kerki.²¹ No postmarks from this branch office are known. In late August or early September 1891, the Kerki branch office was upgraded to a sixth-class post and telegraph office (kontora) with a staff of three, accepting all types of mail.²² New postmarks were introduced reading КЕРКИ ЗАКАСП. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОИТ., with serial number 1 or 2 and split year. Like Chardzhui, this post office was subordinate to the postal administration of Transcaspia Territory.

In August 1898 a post and telegraph branch office (otdelenie) opened in Kelif, 75 miles upriver from

Kerki.²³ Its postmarks read КЕЛИФЪ ЗАКАСП. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. ОТД., with serial number 1 or 2 and split year. On September 23, 1899, a post and telegraph branch office (otdelenie) opened in Termez, 62 miles upriver from Kelif.²⁴ No postmarks from this branch office are known. The branch office was upgraded to a post and telegraph office (kontora) in 1902 after the post road from Samarkand was completed. Its postmarks read ТЕРМЕЗЪ ЗАКАСП. ОБ. ПОЧТ. ТЕЛ. КОИТ., with serial number 1 or 2 and split year. The offices in Kelif and Termez were both subordinate to the postal administration of Transcaspia Territory.

Illustrations



Figure 1: A double-weight registered cover sent from Chardzhui to a well-known wine trader, A.I. Arabazhi, in Moscow. Posted on 2 January 1891 and dispatched westward by rail the next day, reaching Moscow 17 days later.

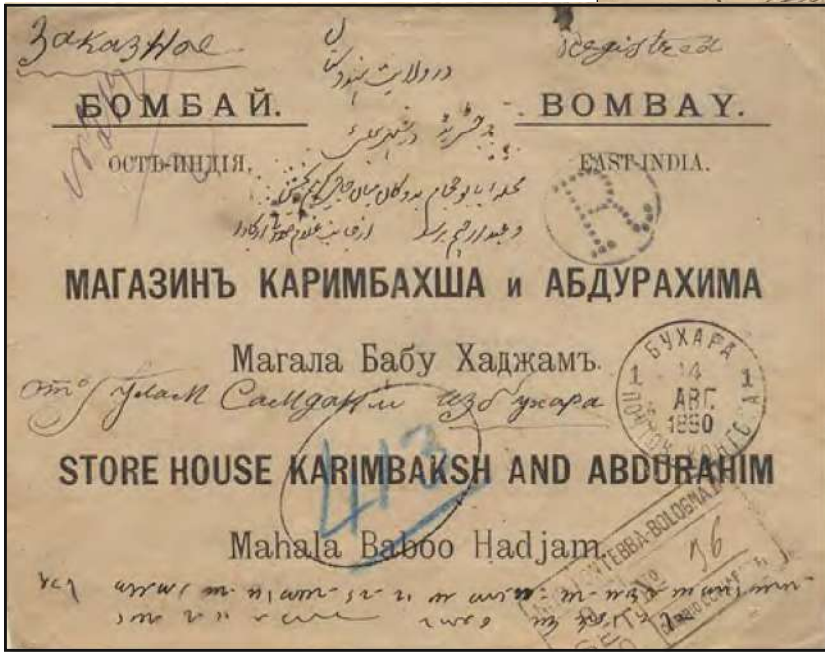


Figure 2: A double-weight registered cover sent from New Bukhara to Bombay. Posted on 14 August 1890 and dispatched westward by rail the next day, reaching Bombay by way of Italy 33 days later.



Figure 3: A triple-weight registered cover from New Bukhara with postmarks dated 15 and 16 September 1890. Transit time to Bombay via Italy was 29 days.

Figure 4: A letter-card sent from New Bukhara to Kokand. Posted on 5 October 1900 and dispatched eastward by rail, reaching Kokand the next day, and with a transit postmark of Postal Wagon No. 205 (Chardzhui-Tashkent line) on 5 October. Addressed to the Shlisselburg Calico Manufacturing Company warehouse, with a message in English reading “I am told they grow tobacco at Katta-Kurgan. You must make inquiries. Altogether, the more you keep your eyes and ears open in this interesting country, the better. Take notes of what you hear and keep them to yourself.”



Figure 5: A cover sent from Tashkent to Old Bukhara via New Bukhara. Posted on 27 December 1891 and dispatched the next day. Postmarked in both New and Old Bukhara on 2 January 1892.

Figure 6: A registered cover sent from Old Bukhara to Peshawar. Posted on 11 November 1893 and dispatched westward by rail two days later, reaching Peshawar in 32 days.



Figure 7: A postal stationery card sent from Kerki to Hildesheim, Germany. Posted on 19 February 1900, reaching the railroad at Chardzhui four days later (same postmark as in Figure 1), and arriving at its destination after 11 more days. Sent by a soldier in the 9th Turkestan line battalion who asked for a shipment of hair tonic.





Figure 8: A money letter sent from Termez to Berlin. Posted on 13 September 1904 and transported on the post road to Samarkand. Transit time to Berlin was 14 days. The postal fees included 10 kopeks for weight, 10 kopeks for registration, 4 kopeks for insurance, and 5 kopeks for sealing wax. The wording on the four small seals reflects the office's former status as a branch office (otdelenie).



Figure 9: A registered cover (with a provisional label) sent from Kokand to Old Bukhara. Posted on 18 February 1899 and dispatched westward by rail the next day, reaching Old Bukhara on 21 February. On the back is a manuscript transit postmark of Postal Wagon No. 206 (Tashkent-Chardzhui line) reading 20 II P. Vag. N 206 (arrow).

Notes and References

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15. Русскій Туркестанъ, 26 September 1901; Железнодорожный Ежегодникъ, p. 76, 1904.
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17. Прав. Вѣст., 11 March 1901.
18. Русск. Турк., 27 May 1901.
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20. Прав. Вѣст., 18 June 1889.
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New Applicants for Membership

- 2072 Carsten Alsleben, Germany
2073 Rev. Joseph Martin Running, North Carolina
628 Michael Carson, Illinois

For a list of nine other membership applicants in the period between the spring and fall issues of the 2014 *Rossica Journal*, please see *Rossica* summer *Bulletin* number 53.

