

**STUDYING THE VOLGA-URAL TATARS IN THE 18th CENTURY: THE
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND THE IMPERIAL APPROACH**

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Abstract

The article "Studying the Volga-Ural Tatars in the 18th Century: The Russian Academy of Sciences and the Imperial Approach" describes many important topics relating with Tatars in Russian Empire in the 18th Century: the Russian assimilation of Western categories for distinguishing populations; the role of the Imperial Russian government in the development of ethnography as a discipline; outside observers' impressions of Tatars in early modern Russia; the changing definition of the term "Tatar" in Russian discourse; and relations between Tatars and non-Tatars in the Russian Empire. It is clear that selected a very important and mostly uninvestigated topic for study . The article tries to integrate its approach within the different range of extant historiographical literature. And autor also consults to English-language sources. As a result, this article advances some intriguing ideas and investigate them, or document them with a array of sources.

Key words: The Volga-Ural Tatars, The Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Empire.

İdil-Ural Tatarlarının 18. yy'da Araştırılması: Rusya İlimler Akademisi ve İmparatorluk Yaklaşım

Özet

'İdil-Ural Tatarlarının 18. yy'da Araştırılması: Rusya İlimler Akademisi ve İmparatorluk Yaklaşım' makalesi 18 yy Rus İmparatorluğu'nda Tatarlarla ilgili olan nüfusun özelliklerini incelemek için Ruslar tarafından Batılı sistemlerin özümlemesi; etnografyanın bir disiplin olarak oluşması ve gelişmesinde Rus İmparatorluk hükümetinin rolü; dışarıdan davet edilmiş olan araştırmacıların ilk yakın çağda Rusya'daki Tatarlardan aldıkları izlenim; Rus diskurunda 'Tatar' kavramı anlamının değişmesi; Rusya İmparatorluğu'nda Tatarların diğer halklarla olan ilişkileri gibi bir sürü önemli konuyu tasvir etmektedir. Araştırma için çok önemli ve genelde az incelenmiş bir konu seçilmesi açıktır. Makalede günümüze kadar gelen farklı değeri taşıyan tarihyografik yazımları bir araya getirme yaklaşımı izlenmekte. Aynı anda müellif İngiliz yazılı kaynaklar da kullanıyor. Sonuç olarak bu makale bazı ilginç düşünceleri öne sürdü, toplu kaynaklarla bunları temsil etti ve inceledi.

Anahtar kelimeler: İdil-Ural Tatarları, Rusya İlimler Akademisi, Rus İmparatorluğu.

The 18th century had many rough errors, but, at least, it began on a true way of scientific knowledge.

A.N.Pypin

The ethnographic study of Tatars in the Russian empire in the 18th Century has been little studied. It is however a very important indicator of how the empire viewed non-Russian peoples and its policy towards them. The study of non-Russian peoples only started in the 18th Century, in parallel with the development of ethnography as an academic discipline. This article tries to illuminate this topic on the basis of sources from the 18th century.

The Russian scientific community began to pay greater attention to the description of the Empire's territories and its inhabitants in the first half of the 18th century. Scholars tried to reveal the similarities and differences between their own world and that of the peoples being studied. Already in ancient Greece the world was divided between civilized people, Ellins, and barbarians, that is all other peoples. This delineation was first made by Herodot, who juxtaposed Europe against Asia. By Europe he understood the system of Hellenic *polis* and by Asia - the Persian monarchy.¹

The state itself promoted the study of non-Russian peoples (*inorodtsy*) in the 18th century, for it required information on the state of affairs in the empire. By this period, the Russian Empire had become a huge country, however the government had inadequate data on its territories. This was the starting point for ethnography.

Russian ethnography was born in the first decades of the 18th century, with the reforms of Peter I and the first attempts to study Russian territory and its population. For example, the Senate Chief Secretary Ivan Kirillovich made a detailed description on the basis of news sent from regions in 1726 - 1734. It was issued by Pogodin as the bad list in 1831 - « The Blossoming Condition of the All-Russian State » book 1 and 2. M., 1831. This work was the first detailed description of the Russian empire, with information collected in 1724, in which there is a large description of Siberia, with rich data on geography, ethnography and history that was little known even among experts.² During this period for the first time in general there was a conscious idea of studying peoples, whether Russian or *inorodtsy*.³ Undoubtedly, this was the result of influence from Western Europe.

¹ Гумилев Л. Н. Этногенез и биосфера Земли. М., 2006, с.153.

² Татищев В. Н. Избранные труды по географии / под ред. А. Н. Андреева – М., 1950, с. 10.

³ См: Пыпин А. Н. История русской этнографии. Т.1. СПб., 1890, с. iii.

In the 18th century, Western European society became interested in "customs," in other words national differences, giving rise to archeological and ethnographic collections that in the 19th century would develop as a separate academic discipline. Interest in ordinary people grew due to academic interest, liberal-philanthropic theories of the 18th century, tenets of romanticism and because of internal political unrest in Western Europe.

Two tendencies encouraged the birth of Russian ethnographic science and the study of peoples in Russia, including the Volga-Ural Tatars:

1. Scholars–encyclopedicians – mainly figures connected to some extent to the Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Their research was directly authorized by the state.
2. Writers and travellers who visited those territories – mainly curious amateurs who engaged in non-authorized description

The Russian Academy of Sciences. Scholars - Encyclopedicians.

The Academy of Sciences was founded in Russia under Peter I. On 22 January 1724 the Tsar authorized the 'Position about establishment of the Academy of Arts and Sciences and university under it.'⁴ This move had great significance and represents the starting point in the development of the study of peoples in Russia. The Academy became both a scholarly community and educational establishment. German scholarly forces initially prevailed in Academy, but many Russian scientists were also trained: Michael Vasiljevich Lomonosov worked in its settings; Stepan Petrovich Krashenninikov, Ivan Ivanovich Lepyokhin, Nikolay Jakovlevich Ozeretskovsky and Stepan Jakovlevich Rumovsky were educated there; other people were linked by their academic interests and found support there, but did not belong to it (Peter Ivanovich Rychkov, Vasily Nikitich Tatischev, Vasily Vasiljevich Krestinin, etc.).

The main difference between the Russian Academy and those existing in Europe was that it had a well-defined state character – it was not a free society as in Europe and was included in the state budget.⁵ Throughout the 18th century

⁴ Добрецов Н. Доклад академика Н. Добрецова на тожественном собрании СО РАН, посвященном 275-летию Российской академии наук [Электронный ресурс] / Н. Добрецов // Наука в Сибири. Еженедельная газета сибирского отделения Российской академии наук. – 1999. – № 23 (июнь). – Режим доступа: <http://psb.sbras.ru/win/elbib/hbc/article.phtml?nid=143&id=2>, свободный. – Проверено 15.12.2007.

⁵ Там же.

this was strongly reflected in the research of the Academy, down to the control of the content of academic works.

The first duty of Academy was "to produce and make sciences" (Charter of the Academy, 1724). The second task was most brightly formulated by the permanent academic secretary academician A.H.Middendorf in a note "About measures to extract direct gain from the Academy of Sciences for the state ": "Nowhere else, rather than here, one of the most major tasks of the Academy must be research on the separate countries of our vast Fatherland and the discovery of new productive forces and sources of state wealth that are undoubtedly hidden in them". The Academy constantly and consistently carried out this task.⁶

Of greatest interest to us are the expeditions organized to study Russia's regions. They had a mainly natural-science and partly ethnographic character. These trips resulted in the first works on the natural and economic features of regions in the Russian empire. While describing these features, scholars began to pay attention to the peoples occupying a particular region, which was the beginning of ethnographic observation.

These trips had a special status because for the first time scholars went from the governmental center to different, and often remote, territories of the state. They were tasked to collect all possible data on the country and people, on nature and customs, on the historical past and the current character and work of the population, its achievements and problems, etc. They were obliged to send annual reports to the Academy entitled " Daily notes ".⁷

Whereas in the first half of the 18th century these expeditions was basically organized to study territories, in the second half of the 18th century, under Catherine the Second, these expeditions were focused more on travel «that promises to reveal the special, unusual, memorable ». ⁸

The Volga-Ural Tatars attracted the attention of these expeditions in the 1730s when by decree of Empress Anna Ioannovna in 1733 an overland scientific expedition was dispatched to study Siberia, up to the Pacific Ocean and Kamchatka. The main ideologist behind this expedition was chief secretary Ivan Kirillovich Kirilov, the Russian patriot and lover of geographical and statistical data.⁹ The expedition team consisted mostly of German scholars,

⁶ Там же.

⁷ См.: Гмелин С. Г. Путешествие по России для исследования трех царств природы. Ч. 2. Спб., 1777, предисловие.

⁸ См.: Гмелин С. Г. Путешествие по России для исследования трех царств природы. Ч. 2. Спб., 1777, предисловие.

⁹ Пекарский П. История императорской академии наук. Т.1. СПб., 1870, с. 320.

namely Gerhard Friedrich Miller, Johann Georg Gmelin, Georg Steller, Johann Fischer and astronomer Ludwig Delil de le Croyer, 6 students, two painters, a translator (Jacob Lindenau) and a geodesist. The purpose of expedition was to study the «physical, geographical and statistical features» of these territories. They traveled to Siberia and Kamchatka through the European part of Russia on a route Petersburg - Moscow - Tver - Kazan - Ekaterinburg. Of the ten-year duration of the expedition (1733-1743), it took about one year to reach Ekaterinburg. The Volga-Ural region was reflected in their observations and in the subsequent works that were written based on these observations. The most relevant to us is the book «Travel to Siberia» by Johann Georg Gmelin (1709 - 1765).¹⁰

The study of peoples (above all the peoples of Siberia) should have been carried out in line with the instructions prepared for Miller and his comrades.¹¹ In other words, the aim was the extensive historical and ethnographic study of peoples. Apart from these brief instructions, the expedition used a detailed program written by Tatischev. This specifies the coherent scientific approach taken, although it was at the same time a tool for controlling the content of scholarly output. It was not by chance that the Academic Office did not hide its disapproval of Gmelin's Siberian diary and ordered Miller not include anything in his travel reports that did not serve the "national interest".¹²

¹⁰ Dr. Iohann Georg Gmelins Reise durch Sibiren. Göttingen, 1751 г in 4 volumes. French translation of this travel has been issued with some reductions: Voyage en Sibirie, par Gmelin, traduction libre. Paris, 1767. [См: Чупин Н. Обзорение книг и журнальных статей, заключающих в себе географические и статистические сведения о Казанской губернии // Казанские губернские ведомости. 1851. №10, с. 89.]

¹¹ In the instruction it was supposed: « 1) ... to observe ... where there will be limits of each people, what borders and whether different origins and different sorts peoples are among themselves mixed, whether or not; 2) what the essence of each people started from their narration, what essence of each people ancient dwellings, settlements, busying, etc.; 3) what in each people there is a belief, and whether they have any natural?... 4) should notice national customs and ceremonies, domestic and marriage, etc. ...; 6) about language of each people should make some examples, for example: translations of Lord's prays, numbers, nouns, common names », etc. [Цит. по: Токарев С. А. История русской этнографии (Дооктябрьский период). М., 1966, с. 83.]

¹² Белковец Л.П. Иоганн Георг Гмелин: 1709 – 1755. М., 1990, с. 43.

For example, « during what time and what place have arrived, in the afternoon or at night, horses have got tired whether or not; whether they suffered to famine or thirst when had dinner and had supper, and that fur-trees or drank, the luggage has remained behind or with them has together arrived, is good or thin in the apartments have been accepted; whether offices soon sent them and whether him supplies or apartments soon allowed whether or not... ». [Цит. по: там же].

The second half of the 18th century is very important to the study of the Volga-Ural Tatars. The Volga-Ural region became a direct object of study during this period. Catherine II's travels along the Volga river in 1767 showed her how unexplored the region was and how it therefore required a special approach. The enlightenment ideas that she held at that time dictated the creation of a climate favorable to the peaceful co-existence of all subjects of the empire. Tatars, who by then had monopolized trade with Central Asia, became an important component of the empire. Their very oppressed position and the intention of the Empress to put her ideas into practice – not least to secure the support of non-Russians – led to greater leniency in religious and other matters. It also demanded the greater study of the Volga-Ural region. Just one year after «Travel across Volga» in 1768, five expeditionary groups were organized and sent to the Volga-Ural region. Each was led by a distinguished scholar, accompanied by four assistants with different specialisms: painters, taxidermist, huntsmen, pair of students, technicians and security.

In line with their main destinations, three expeditions were named Orenburg expeditions (headed by P.S. Pallas, I.I. Lepyokhin, I.P. Falk) and two after Astrakhan (S.G.Gmelin, I.A.Gildenshtend). However, the routes of these expeditions were not limited to these regions alone.

The expedition of academician Falk began in 1768 and took about six years. He traveled on the Oka, Sura and Volga rivers up to Tsaritsyn. In 1770 he arrived in Astrakhan, then traveled through the Kalmyk steppes to Uralsk. He was in Orenburg in 1771 and later in Siberia (Omsk, Barnaul and Tomsk).

In 1772 Falk's expedition returned via Tobolsk, Tyumen, Tura and Ekaterinburg, examining nineteen mountain factories and eventually arriving in Kazan. After resting and organizing his materials and collections, Falk traveled along the Volga to Astrakhan in 1773 and from there progressed through the Kuman steppes to Terek. At last, he returned to Kazan by the same route, where his life and work was cut short.

After I.P.Falk's death, his assistant and friend Johann-Gottlieb Georgi, an ethnographer-naturalist who accompanied him to Kazan, became the leader of the expedition.¹³

Georgi published « the Description of all peoples living in the Russian Empire» on the basis of the expedition's results and work of other scholars in 1776 –1777. In 1785, he organized the manuscripts of Falk and published his

¹³ Гарзавина А.В., Новицкая И.А. Знаменитые люди о Казани и Казанском крае. Казань, 2005, с. 53-54.

mentor's notes in German. The Russian translation was later issued as the « Full collection of scientific travels across Russia » in 7 volumes.¹⁴

Another Orenburg expedition was directed by Ivan Ivanovich Lepekhin and took place in 1768 – 1772. It crossed the central and lower Volga regions, the Orenburg steppes, Southern and Central Urals, Northern Dvina pool and coast of the White Sea down to the Kola peninsula. Lepekhin published «Daily Notes» on the basis of his observations from this expedition.¹⁵ The first volume of "Notes" is what interests us. Lepekhin provides information on the way of life of rural Tatars, using the example of inhabitants of the Cheremshan river. The author showed that Tatar, Russian, Mordovian and Chuvash cultures interacted and mutually influenced each other. This contradicts the viewpoint of historian B.N.Mironov, a researcher in Russian social history «that interaction between ethnic groups concerned mainly elites».¹⁶ In actual fact, the lower classes of various ethnic groups in the Volga region most frequently interacted due to their close proximity.

The development of scholarly-bureaucratic study was important to the study of Tatars. Such key representatives of this discipline as Vasily Nikitich Tatischev (1686-1750) and Peter Ivanovich Rychkov (1712-1777) played an important role in the ethnographic study of Tatars. They both closely worked with the Academy of Sciences by consulting and sending their work for assessment and scientific exchange. In a certain fashion, they were thus members of this community. Rychkov even became the first associate member of the Academy of Sciences. At the same time, Tatischev and Rychkov energetically corresponded between themselves, exchanging information,

¹⁴ «Полное собрание ученых путешествий по России» (« The full assembly of scientific travel across Russia ») has been issued in publishing house of the Imperial Academy of sciences under the offer of his president in Saint Petersburg in 7 volumes, in 1818-1825. last two volumes contain Falk's works : 6-th vol. «Записки путешествия академика Фалька» (“ the Notes of travel of academician Falk “) 1824, 446 pages; 7-th vol. «Заключаящий в себе дополнительные статьи к запискам путешествия академика Фалька» (“Concluding in itself additional articles to notes of travel of academician Falka “) 1824, 223 pages.

¹⁵ Дневные записки путешествия по разным провинциям российского государства (Day time notes of travel on different provinces of the Russian state), in 1768 – 1771 годах, in 3 parts, SPb. 1771 - 1780; 2-nd edition in the same place, 1795 - 1814; 4-th volume of "Notes", 1772 concluding travel has been issued already after Lepyokhin's death, SPb. 1805. Also Lepyokhin's "Notes" have been published in «The full assembly of scientific travel across Russia » which has been issued in publishing house of the Imperial Academy of sciences in Saint Petersburg in 7 volumes, 1818-1825.

¹⁶ Цит. по: Миллер А. Империя Романовых и национализм: Эссе по методологии исторического исследования. М., 2006, с. 20.

opinions and advice. Their work has much in common, even stylistically, and they frequently cite each other.

A separate element of research on the Tatar people was the study of the Tatar language. For example, Fischer collected a huge number of lexical samples from the languages of Tatars, Mongols and other eastern peoples. The manuscript of his lexical dictionary ended up at the University of Goettingen. In Russia (Saint Petersburg), he published an article 'About the Tatar name and people, as well as the ancient Mongols and their language' (Monthly texts to benefit and amuse employees. 1755. Vol. 2, pp. 455-484). V. N. Tatischev and P. S. Pallas conducted similar work, striving to produce dictionaries of different peoples.¹⁷ Tatischev even planned the establishment of non-Russian schools in Kazan, an idea that was partly carried out when a Tatar class opened at Kazan's grammar school in 1769. Falk also paid great attention to languages, comparing words in Tatar, Kalmyk, Persian, Armenian, Georgian, Chuvash and other languages. The philological hobbies of Empress Catherine II and her plans to create a dictionary of 200 languages also facilitated the study of Tatar language.¹⁸

It is important to establish how Russian academia in the 18th century understood the term "Tatars," for certain ideas and concepts are contained within this word. As we know, the meaning and breadth of this ethnonym changed frequently during the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is clear from work that researchers in the 18th century equated the ethnonym "Tatars" to the modern concept "Turks" even though they also included Caucasian (non-Turkic) peoples. The use of the term "Tatars" and "Tatar peoples" in relation to a wide group of peoples can be found in the works of Rychkov and Georgi. In particular, Georgi writes about «Russian Tatar peoples» and about the language of "Tatars":

« In the Russian state, Tatar peoples occupy the northern coasts of the Black and Caspian seas, the northern side of the Caucasian mountains, the extensive steppes of the Ural river, in the East up to Soongaria, on the Southern part of the Ural mountains, in Siberia in the Southern border mountains and steppes, from Tobol up to the Yenisey and beyond it, and in the wilderness near the middle of the Lena river; apart from this, many Tatar settlements are dispersed between Russian dwellings, especially in the Kazan, Orenburg and Tobolsk provinces. Near the Yenisey river there are various remainders

¹⁷ См: Попов Н. Василий Никитич Татищев и его время, М., 1861.

¹⁸ Харлампович К. Материалы для истории Казанской духовной семинарии в the 18th в. Казань, Типография Императорского Университета, 1903, с. 173 - 175.

of a people who because of similarities in everyday life and other circumstances are wrongly regarded as Krasnoyarsk Tatars. Ignoring those whose number is small, the Tatar people can in general consider themselves to be, except for natural Russians, the most populous in the entire Russian empire».¹⁹

« All Tatar generations speak in Turuk or Turkish language, which they sometimes call Turkostan language. Mohamedans, who are taught this language, speak and write it deliberately similar, using Arabian letters for this ... their language is rich in words, soft and reprimands are not harsh, but quiet, as though they were refrains. There are no schools or linguists for Tatars following pagan law; this is why their language has experienced a great decline, being mixed up deliberately with the languages of their neighbours and disintegrating into so many different dialects that this people barely follow other Tatars or else completely do not understand their words».²⁰

However, the author ignored the Osmanli Turks and also made a mistake in including Chuvashs in peoples of the Finnish tribe. He considered Chuvashs to be close to the Cheremis (which is true concerning culture, but not language),²¹ an opinion that can also be found in the work of Rychkov.²²

Nevertheless, the scholars did highlight how these peoples regarded the word "Tatars" as offensive. They had their own names and exoethnonyms. Thus, the Kazan and Orenburg Tatars in Central Asia were called "Nogays" in the 18th century and the Finnish peoples "Snas." Tatars united themselves with the general ethnonym "Turuk" (төрөк) or Turki (төрки).²³

In order to understand what interested scholars who were studying Tatars, it is necessary to look at the instructions given to them by the Academy (although Rychkov and Tatischev were not fully included) and of course examine their work.

¹⁹ Георги И-Г. Описание всех в Российском государстве обитающих народов, так же житейских обрядов, веры, жилищ, одежд и прочих достопамятностей / пер. с нем. Т.2. СПб., 1776, с. 5.

²⁰ Георги И-Г. Указ.соч., с. 7 – 8.

²¹ См: Токарев С. А. История русской этнографии (Дооктябрьский период). М., 1966, с. 107.

²² Рычков П. И. Топография Оренбургской губернии. Оренбург, 1887, с. 55 – 56.

²³ См: Георги И-Г. Указ.соч., с. 1.; Рычков П. И. Указ. соч., с. 270 – 272.

The issue of the ethnogenesis of Tatars also emerged as an academic question during this period. Rychkov paid particular attention to this and Tatischev was also indirectly engaged in it. More than others, Rychkov relied on history in his description of Tatars and tried to apply a historical approach. In his «Orenburg Topography» and «Experience of Kazan history» he included various versions of the origins of Tatars, based on Western European and Russian chronicles. Importantly, Rychkov included an interpretation that was disseminated among the Tatar elite of the 18th century through the book of Khivan khan Abul-Gazi "The Genealogical Tree of Turkis." This work was translated into French in 1726 and later from French into Russian. Tatischev prepared the comments for this translation. As Rychkov notes, the Orenburg ahun Ibrahim refers to this book in his discussion of the origin of Tatars.²⁴ Thus, both Tatischev and Georgi knew and used the interpretation of the origins of Tatars (Turkis) suggested by Abul-Gazi. Moreover, the latter scholar put forward the interpretation of Abul-Gazi as the main one.

Above all, it is important that we can obtain information about Tatars from works of the 18th century. Concerning the ethnic groups among the Volga-Ural Tatars, Russian scholars-travellers in the 18th century had already identified Kazan Tatars, Orenburg Tatars, Mescheryaks and Astrakhan Tatars. Nagaybakh were regarded as a special case – as a distinctive formation around the Nagaybakh fortresses consisting of diverse Christianised Tatars. Whereas Rychkov wrote that there were inorodtsy (non-Orthodox) among these Tatars, Georgi already called them all Orthodox.²⁵

It is possible to use the results of this research to refute the opinions of certain modern West-European researchers, for example Wim Van Myers, who asserted that early research expeditions were non-scientific and not guided by any selection criteria or thirst of collecting. He holds that they were organized by academic organisations from below and that the ethnography was produced by simple travelers.²⁶ In this way, he tries to transfer the history of the development of ethnography in Western Europe in the 18th century to Russia. However, it is clear from the material above that the state played a key role in the development of ethnography in Russia in the 18th century, achieving its aims through the Academy of Sciences. This was also a scientific community, but in contrast to Western Europe, being a scientific institute meant being joined

²⁴ Рычков П. И. Топография Оренбургской губернии. Оренбург, 1887, с. 51 – 54, 270 – 273.; Рычков П. И. Опыт Казанской истории древних и средних времен. СПб., 1767, с. 3 – 19.

²⁵ Георги И-Г. Указ.соч., с. 76.

²⁶ Ван Мейрс В. Советская этнография: охотники или собиратели? //Ab Imperio. 2001. №3, с.14 – 15.

to the machinery of the state. Western European scholars acknowledge this when studying Russian ethnography in greater detail.²⁷

The study of the Volga-Ural Tatars by the Academy of Sciences in the 18th Century can be divided into two periods that are closely connected with politics in the region:

1st period: first half of the 18th century. It is characterized by the poor study of the Volga-Ural region. The imperial administration was interested in research on the multi-ethnic population and natural riches of Siberia and the Far East. The study of Siberian Tatars was begun in this period. At this time, governors pursued policies of persecution, oppression and violent conversion to Christianity. They were little interested in local peoples, which did not encourage the study of this region because the policies being carried out did not demand special academic efforts. Only Gmelin-Senior and Miller provided small descriptions of this region, having passed through it en route to Siberia.

2nd period: second half of the 18th century, when increased attention was paid to the Volga-Ural region. Tatars in the region began to play an important role, especially in economic affairs. This was actually a result of earlier oppressive policies, as a result of which Tatars were compelled to migrate to the east and southeast, where they successfully established themselves as traders. Although this took place contrary to the desires and expectations of the authorities, the imperial administration had to make concessions. In 1755, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, the Senate allowed Seit Hayalin to create a settlement of «trading Tatars» from Kazan province near Orenburg.²⁸ The attention paid to Tatars only increased after this event. Catherine II abandoned the policies of previous monarchs that harshly discriminated against *inorodtsy*. At the beginning of her reign (1764), she abolished the Office of New Baptisms. The new attitude to the Muslim Tatar population was reflected in the invitation to send deputies to the Legal Code Commission in December 1766. She endorsed an ideology of peaceful co-existence of various faiths during her travel along the Volga, which was subsequently ratified in her 1773 decree «On the tolerance of all creeds and the prohibition of bishops to interfere in the affairs of believers of other faiths and the construction of prayer houses according to their laws » and also in a number of other laws.²⁹ All this led to the growth of interest in the given region. From 1768 to 1774 the region was studied by five expeditions organized by the Academy of sciences.

²⁷ Geraci Robert P. Window on the East. National and Imperial Identities in the Late Tsarist Russia. Ithaca; L.: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 158 – 160.

²⁸ Рычков П. И. Топография Оренбургской губернии. Оренбург, 1887, с. 255.

²⁹ Ибнеева Г. В. Путешествие Екатерины II по Волге в 1767 году: узнавание империи // Ab Imperio. 2002. №2, с.98.

However, it is necessary to take a critical approach to the work of scholars of this period. We must take into account psychological factors because during this period it was mainly foreign scientists who engaged in the study of Tatars, i.e. representatives of other beliefs and other cultures who could not always provide full and accurate data on the life, daily habits and values of society. A traveler could only observe isolated phenomena that he accidentally came across, on the basis of which he could not determine the beliefs of people. A lack of Russian and Tatar language skills led to erroneous opinions and conclusions. It is also necessary to acknowledge that travelers in the 18th century had to follow particular instructions during their expeditions.³⁰ Censorship compelled scholars to highly praise the civilized nature of Russian culture and way of life, although this was unsuccessful in relation to Tatars. For example, Gmelin-Senior preferred to print his work abroad, which was a good move in the opinion of the 19th Century historian and academician Pekarskiy, because the petty control of all printed materials in Russia would not have allowed him to keep his work intact.³¹ Despite the official line, scholars were sometimes compelled to note the superiority of Tatars over the dominant culture.

In general, information about non-Russian peoples was perceived by noblemen as exotic and entertaining, especially in the second half of the 18th century. An exotic, eastern image of Tatars formed among the supreme nobility of the imperial court, who required such myths. A vivid example is Catherine the Second's letter to Voltaire from Kazan. The greatly mythologized life of Tatars (Catherine the Second mostly saw and communicated with Tatar merchants and clergy who were culturally and visually strongly influenced by Central Asia) captivated the Empress and prompted her warm attitude to Tatars and the later granting of certain freedoms to them. It would be a mistake to only consider the political aspects of her rule. Writers also fed public consciousness with images of Tatars that greatly differed from reality. Their works played a role in creating the image of Tatars. However, the work of such researchers as Lepyokhin, Rychkov, Falk and S.G. Gmelin lacks such features and provides information on life, beliefs and traditions of Tatars without embellishment. However, there were already elements of mythologization and representation in the book of Georgi, for example. In this case, commercial factors most likely had an influence – the book was written in order to earn money and therefore it was necessary to write what buyers (the nobility) wanted to read.

³⁰ См.: Белковец Л.П. Указ. соч., с. 8, 43 – 44.; Токарев С. А. История русской этнографии (Дооктябрьский период). М., 1966, с. 83 – 84.; Миллер Г.-Ф. История Сибири. Т.1. М – Л., 1937, с. 460 – 461.

³¹ См.: Пыпин А. Н. История русской этнографии. Т.1. СПб., 1890, с. 105.