

Title: Steppe Realism: the Foreign and the Domestic in Nikolai Karazin's Turkestan Novels  
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Abstract:

In 1873 the Russian Empire conquered the Khanate of Khiva, the last independent Central Asian state to fall to Russia during the nineteenth century. The conquest completed Russia's physical expansion into Central Asia. The Khivan campaign was politically and symbolically important: the new acquisition "filled in" the map of Russian imperial holdings in Central Asia; and, because Russia had tried and failed twice before to take Khiva, the territory had acquired a reputation as impenetrable, inscrutable, and deadly. This paper will examine that reputation and, in particular, how imaginative literary engagements with the desert landscape surrounding Khiva negotiated both the Romantic Orientalist tropes Russian literature had inherited from its Caucasian encounter and the realist mode that Turkestan writers in the 1870s imported from the Russian heartland.

The paper focuses on Nikolai Karazin's 1876 novel, *Two-Legged Wolf* (*Dvunogii volk*), which provides a fictional account of the Russian conquest of Khiva, with an eye both to real historical developments in Russian Turkestan and to the region's meaning for Russian imperial literary and imaginative culture. I argue that the novel invests the desert around Khiva with symbolic, but shifting, meaning. Where Karazin first envisions the territory as a dangerously empty space, devoid of life-sustaining elements and liable to consume whatever enters it, he comes to portray that same space as available and open rather than dangerous. This vision of available desert space, akin to the blank space on imperial maps that signified pre-conquest Khiva, ultimately helped prepare the Russian imperial imagination to see Central Asia as a space appropriate for colonial settlement. Ultimately, I argue, Karazin presents a vision of a "domesticated" Turkestan nearly 20 years before Russian civilians settled the region.