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## Eastward Motion of Peter the Great's Empire

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**Abstract:** The time of Peter the Great is notable not only for the reforms that transformed the country, but also for the emergence of new ideas of the place of Russia as a great power in the world. Peter the Great's imperial dreams went far beyond the establishment of Russia's domination in the Baltic. He was mindful of the problem of the West-East relationship. It is important to take into account the tsar's economic considerations. He was fascinated by the ideas of mercantilism and dreamed of turning Russia into a transit space between the West and the East. It would allow enriching the country. He wanted to create a unified transport system (mainly waterway) that would connect the Baltic and the East. In addition, the myths about the fabulous wealth of the East heated Peter the Great's imperial imagination. It manifested itself in sending expeditions to Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. Their purpose was not only to explore, but also to annex new territories. Peter the Great's imperial dreams were expressed most vividly during the Persian campaign, the aim of which was not only to conquer the northern part of Persia, but also to create a base there for an expansionist campaign to India. Peter the Great's plans were extensive. He intended to create a new city-port in the mouth of the Kura similar to St. Petersburg and a center of eastern trade. Thus, he planned to transfer the traditional trade routes between the East and the West to the territory of Russia. However, the tsar's death prevented him from realizing these and other grandiose plans of conquest.

**Keywords:** Peter I, imperial imagination, expeditions to the East, India, Persian campaign, mercantilism, conquests

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## Движение империи Петра Великого на Восток

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**Аннотация:** Время Петра I примечательно не только реформами, преобразившими страну, но и появлением новых представлений о месте России как великой державы в мире. Имперские мечтания Петра выходили далеко за рамки установления русского господства на Балтике. Петр внимательно относился к теме отношений Запада и Востока. Тут важно учесть экономические соображения царя. Он был увлечен идеями меркантилизма и мечтал превратить Россию в транзитное пространство между Западом и Востоком. Это позволило бы обогатить страну. Он хотел создать единую транспортную систему (преимущественно водную), которая соединяла бы Балтику с Востоком. Кроме того, мифы о сказочном богатстве Востока распалляли имперское



воображение Петра. Это выразилось в посылке в Среднюю Азию и на Каспий экспедиций, перед которыми ставилась задача не только разведки, но и присоединения новых территорий. Наиболее ярко имперские мечтания Петра выразились во время Персидского похода. Целью похода было не только завоевание североиранских территорий, но и создание там базы для завоевательного похода в Индию. Планы Петра были обширны. Он намеревался создать в устье Куры новый, подобный Петербургу, город-порт и центр восточной торговли. Тем самым он намеревался перенести традиционные торговые пути между Востоком и Западом на пространство России. Однако смерть царя не позволила ему реализовать эти и другие грандиозные завоевательные планы.

**Ключевые слова:** Петр I, имперское воображение, экспедиции на Восток, Индия, Персидский поход, меркантилизм, завоевания

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## Introduction

As is known, the main goal of Peter the Great in the Great Northern War (1700–1721) was Russia's access to the Baltic Sea. This war was started by Peter the Great under the formal pretext of regaining the coastal territories. They had once belonged to Novgorod the Great, had become part of Muscovy; and then at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century they were annexed to Sweden according to the Treaty of Stolbovo concluded in 1617. However, Peter the Great was motivated not only by the desire to restore justice and regain the ancient coastal lands once taken by force. The access to the sea was important for the tsar as the first step in establishing reliable “communication” between the West and the East. This is not a new subject in the scientific literature in relation to the history of the Petrine period, and it was reflected in the literature on some specific aspects (see the References). However, there are actually no generalizing studies that would touch on the phenomenon of Peter the Great's imperial ideas in respect to the East. This article aims to fill this gap.

## Idea of West-East transit

The very idea of using Russia's space to establish the West-East transit had a long history. European merchants sought safer (than through the Middle East) ways to rich India and China; whereas the rulers of Russia wanted to transfer the main land trade routes connecting Europe with the East, the so-called “Silk Road,” to the north of its traditional direction (through the Middle East) to the territory of Russia and make this route predominantly a waterway – through the system of the rivers of the Great Russian Plain and the canals connecting them. There were prerequisites for this. From ancient times, Russia was a transit territory between the West and the East. More than once, Western European embassies and travelers going to Persia passed this way, and it was a convenient waterway from Moscow to the coast of Persia along the Moskva, the Oka, the Volga and the Caspian Sea. However, generally the route to the West through Russia was not developed and technologically arranged. Sweden owned the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, and it never interfered with Russian merchants' access to the sea both through the mouth of the Neva and through its Baltic ports – Riga, Revel, Pernau. The fact is that the waterways across the Great Russian Plain, as the most convenient in the conditions of impassability in Russia, were not connected into a single water transport system. At the same time, the route from the center to Arkhangelsk, the only Russian seaport, was quite well developed both by water and by land, and it fully satisfied the economic needs of Russia at that time; the rulers of the country were not particularly seeking trade routes to the Baltic Sea. The demands of Russian diplomats to regain Russia its territories

in the Baltic during the negotiations with Sweden throughout the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century were dictated by the considerations of prestige rather than by economic necessity. The situation changed when Peter the Great came to power in 1689.

### Cult of the Pier

The tsar dramatically changed Russia's foreign policy. From a young age, it was Holland that became a model for Peter the Great. The wealth and prosperity of this country were achieved through navigation and trade. Therefore, the tsar was immensely carried away by the ideas of mercantilism popular at that time; he considered the development of international trade to be the means of enriching Russia. Having conquered the mouth of the Neva, Peter the Great began to build not just the city and fortress of St. Petersburg, but, as they said then, a PIER. This capacious concept included a trading port, a harbor, a transit point, a maritime trade center, a port city with infrastructure and population. This Pier was for Peter not only, as they say, “the gate to Europe,” but also “the gate to the East,” deep into Russia. In its open spaces, foreign engineers and thousands of workers driven from everywhere quickly began to build canals and gateways that were supposed to connect the Russian rivers, flowing mainly meridionally, with each other and all the seas to which Russia had access. This whole system of waterways was, above all, to ensure the connection of the Baltic with the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and, ultimately, with the East. Peter the Great dreamed that someday he would board a ship in St. Petersburg, and land on the banks of the Indus!

By that time, Europe already knew quite a lot about the countries and peoples of the East. The scientific knowledge about Eastern civilizations appeared only 100–150 years later; however, in Europe there had already been accumulated extensive data on the economy, geography, life, and languages of the countries of the East. Information regarding this came to Russia in various ways; besides, thanks to its trade relations with China, Persia and Central Asia, Russia had extensive practical information about these regions. In addition, Peter the Great's Dutch experience should be taken into account. In Holland, during his two long visits, the tsar learned a lot about the East. He got acquainted with the collections of artifacts brought from many Dutch trading posts in the East (it is known that for many years the Dutch were the only Europeans that were allowed to come to Japan). Peter the Great visited the ships of the Batavian squadron which brought goods and rarities from Batavia (Indonesia). He knew the historical literature about the East, talked with people who had been there. Among them were travelers, merchants, diplomats. It can be stated that the tsar had a sincere interest in the East. Dutch traveler and artist Cornelis de Bruijn reported in his notes that Peter asked him about his journey to the East, examined his sketches, asked him to tell him about Egypt, the Nile,

about the city of Cairo, its size, how it was built, in what condition were the parts separated from ancient Cairo, about Alexandria and many other places, adding that he was aware that there was another place called Alexandretta.<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that Peter, as a professional military man and sailor, was well versed with maps. Not without reason, it was the map of the Caspian Sea that became the basis for the admission of Peter the Great to the French Academy of Sciences.

<sup>1</sup> K. de Bruin, “Puteshestvie v Moskoviyu,” in Iu.A. Limonov, ed. *Rossiiia 18 veka glazami inostrantsev* (Leningrad: Lenizdat Publ., 1989), 52.

## In search of the gold of the East

Certainly, at that time there gradually disappeared medieval legends about people with dog heads, about the Mountain of the Wise Men and other myths about the mysterious East, but still at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century people firmly believed in the myth about its incredible wealth. The Russian tsar did believe in it too. It is no coincidence that in 1714 he was fascinated by the stories about Irken or Yarkend, the mysterious wonderful city of gold. Peter the Great's belief in the possibility of easily enriching the treasury which had been emptied during the difficult war with Sweden became the reason for sending a military expedition of Prince A.B. Cherkassky (better known as Bekovich-Cherkassky) to Khiva. In the decree signed by Peter the Great, he was ordered to go to the ruler of Khiva allegedly

in order to congratulate him on becoming the khan; from there he was to go to Bukhara to find out about the city of Irken, how far it was from the Caspian Sea and whether there were any rivers from there (or at least nearby) to the Caspian Sea.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, a detachment of Lieutenant Colonel I.D. Buchholz was sent through Siberia; he was also instructed to find and capture Irken. Another myth connected with the search for Irken was the myth of the gold-bearing Amu Darya. The thought of the sparkling golden bottom of the Amu Darya haunted the tsar. He believed the stories of adventurers, such as Turkmen Hadji Nefes who convinced the tsar that in order to make it difficult for others to extract precious metal from the bottom of the river, the cunning Khivans built a dam and diverted the river from the Caspian Sea towards the Aral Sea. Peter the Great believed that it was possible to destroy this dam, to return the river to its old course, and thanks to this it would be easy to get to the gold deposits.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that both Bekovich-Cherkassky, and I.D. Buchholz had the task not only to get to Irken and the coveted banks of the Amu Darya, but along the way they were to build a chain of fortresses – strongholds of Russian domination (thus, Omsk was founded by Buchholz).<sup>4</sup> This manifested Peter the Great's imperial dreams of expanding the Russia's possessions in the East. The territorial expansion was an obligatory part of the plan of the eastward motion. All the great colonial powers of that time did this, and Peter the Great intended to make his state a world-class empire that would own many eastern colonies. But, as is known, “it was very smooth on paper”: both expeditions ended in failure, and there appeared an expression in the Russian folklore “Failed like Bekovich!”<sup>5</sup>

## To India via Persia

The failures in the implementation of the Central Asia project did not stop Peter the Great. After the 1721 Treaty of Nystad victorious for Russia, the imperial dreams of the tsar who soon became emperor took a different turn. The military power of Russia achieved during the Great Northern War combined with a drastic weakening of

<sup>2</sup> Archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, f. 272, op. 1, d. 75, l. 340.

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Andreev, “Kihvinskoe khanstvo v nachale 18 veka. Trudnosti politicheskogo razvitiia v usloviach vneshnego vlianiia,” in *Petrovskoe vremia v litsakh. 2015. Sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi Hermitage Publ., 2015), 23–24.

<sup>4</sup> E.N. Evseev, “Ekspeditsiia I.D. Buchgoltsa i osnovanie Omskoi kreposti,” in *Goroda Sibiri (ekonomika, upravlenie i kul'tura gorodov Sibiri v dosovetskii period)* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sib. otd-nie Publ., 1974), 47–59.

<sup>5</sup> See: I.G. Bezgin, *Knyazya Bekovicha-Cherkasskogo ekspeditsiya v Khivu i posol'stva flota poruchika Kozhina i murzy Tevkeleva v Indiyu k Velikomu Mogolu. (1714–1717 gg.): Bibliogr. Monografiya* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike Press, 1891).

the Safavid empire which at that time was exhausted under the onslaught of the Afghan tribes<sup>6</sup> gave Peter the idea of conquering Persia in order to move from there directly to India – the great goal of all European conquerors. Actually, the previous expeditions of Bekovich and Buchholz were also aimed at not only the search for gold, but also at the search for the route to India through Central Asia. Thus, experienced cartographer A.I. Kozhin was supposed to go with the Bekovich detachment; he was directly instructed

to sail along the Amu Darya river (or other rivers that flow into it), as far as possible to India under the guise of a merchant; and the real aim was to search a waterway to India.<sup>7</sup>

After reaching Bukhara Bekovich was to send

a reliable person who knew the local languages, through Persia to India; he ordered him to find out about all the lands through which he would pass, and write down everything in detail, and to return from there to Bukhara through the Chinese state.<sup>8</sup>

However, the death of Bekovich's detachment (to be more precise, its complete disappearance) made the backup plan for conquering the Caspian provinces of Persia and creating there a base for moving to India the main and non-alternative one for Peter. In 1718, there began an intensive study of the Caspian Sea coast. The matter concerned the “position on the map” of the western coast of the Caspian Sea from the mouth of the Volga to Esterabad on the southern coast of the sea.<sup>9</sup> The naval expeditions were formally seeking new trade routes, but they were essentially of reconnaissance character and were part of Peter the Great's general “Eastern program” focused on conquering the northern part of Persia adjacent to the shores of the Caspian Sea. As F.I. Soimonov, a member of one of these expeditions wrote,

the benefit of general trading served only as a guise, and the officer assigned to this expedition was instructed that they should voice this intention everywhere, and the merchants were not supposed to know other secret orders.<sup>10</sup>

However, it should be clarified: Peter the Great demanded that the participants of the expeditions should not only fix the places of the upcoming landing of troops on the coast, but also collect information about trade routes, goods exported from these places. We should remind: the motion to India was aimed at shifting the Silk Road towards Russia by using weapons.

### **Petersburg on the Kura?**

The Persian campaign which began in 1722 under the command of the emperor was a success. The weak troops of the Persians and the rulers of the western Caspian Sea region did not resist the Russian forces. On the contrary, they even had to restrain themselves so as not to irritate Ottoman Turkey with their conquests; it was also involved in the division of the weakened Persian state. In a few months the entire western coast of the Caspian Sea, or rather, a narrow strip of the sea coast came under Russia's rule, and

<sup>6</sup> L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge University Press, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> I.I. Golikov, *Deianiia Petra Velikogo. Mudrogo preobrazitelia Rossii, sobrannye iz dostovernnykh istochnikov i raspolozhennye po godam*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Nikolay Stepanov Press, 1838), 267.

<sup>8</sup> *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, vol. 5, no. 2994 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia 2 Otdeleniia Sobstv. e. i. v. kantselyarii, 1830), 198.

<sup>9</sup> T.S. Maykova, and A.A. Preobrazhenskii, eds. *Gistoriia Sveiskoi voiny (Podennaia zapiska Petra Velikogo)*, issue 1 (Moscow: Krug Publ., 2004), 477; I.I. Golikov, *Deianiia Petra Velikogo*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Nikolay Stepanov Press, 1789), 208–211.

<sup>10</sup> F.I. Soimonov, *Opisaniie Kaspiiskogo moria*, 33.

soon the Russian army annexed the northern Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran without a fight. Russia even managed to record a new acquisition in the Russian-Persian peace treaty of 1723. However, this treaty was not ratified by Persian Shah Tahmasp II, who by that time in fact was an illegitimate ruler.<sup>11</sup> But for Peter the Great it was not important in the light of the dizzying opportunities that opened up to start the conquest of India. Fyodor Soimonov, mentioned above, recorded a conversation with the tsar when they stood on the shore of the Caspian Sea. Soimonov, an experienced navigator and explorer, tried to convey to the tsar the idea that the task he had planned to conquer the eastern lands would not be easy to carry out because of the long distances and difficulties that the conquerors might face in the East, but

His Majesty did not allow me to utter a single word, and soon he told me: “Have you been to the Gulf of Esterabad?” And when I said “yes”, he said: “Do you know that it takes only 12 days to get from Esterabad to Balkh and to Vodokshan (Badakhshan – author’s note) on camels? <...>. And no one can prevent that way.”<sup>12</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of Soimonov's statement. Peter the Great had grandiose projects for the imperial development of the East. We know only details about them; one should not forget that Peter the Great died in January 1725 and did not have time to implement them. But even the information that we have is striking in the scale, radicalism and a certain degree of imperial adventurism inherent in Peter the Great's thinking. Thus, in the northern Iranian provinces, it was supposed not only to build a new city of Ekaterinopol – the capital of a new Russian colony, but also to banish the local Muslim population, and instead of them to settle Armenians from Transcaucasia, as well as Russians from Russia, which Peter the Great began to do in Dagestan, resettling the Cossacks to the newly built fortress of the Holy Cross. But still, Peter the Great's most dizzying idea was the intention to build on the territories annexed to Russia, to be more precise, at the mouth of the Kura, a new city, so to speak, East Petersburg. As in the Baltic, the emperor wanted to establish there a PIER – a city, a port, to make this place, as he said, the center of all “eastern commerce,”<sup>13</sup> the main base of Russia's rule in the East (perhaps, the name “Vladivostok” could have appeared even then). Peter the Great would send one expedition after another to this region of the Caspian Sea coast; he did not believe the sailors and hydrographers who told him about the impossibility of building a port and a city at the mouth of the Kura. Knowing that the great city of St. Petersburg arose from the “swamp,” one should not treat Peter the Great's plans as unrealizable fantasies. We should remind that the mouth of the Neva was also a place unsuitable for a city, but Petersburg was nevertheless built thanks to the iron will of Peter the Great and at the expense of the enormous sacrifices of the Russian people. Had the tsar lived for another ten years, there might have appeared the miracle on the Kura – Peter the Great never spared either people or money in the name of his lofty goals. Then the whole history of Russia and the East would have gone in a different way. Having extensive experience in the construction of St. Petersburg, understanding the difficulties of implementing his plan, Peter the Great decided to follow the path of the great colonial states, which in the development of distant colonies relied on powerful trading companies and resourceful businessmen. The tsar decided to turn to Europe. He intended to involve financial rogue John Law, who ruined France with his adventures. Through an intentionally sent agent, Peter the Great suggested that he establish a Persian trading

<sup>11</sup> Rudolph P. Mathee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver 1600–1730* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 175–230.

<sup>12</sup> L.A. Goldenberg, *Fedor Ivanovich Soimonov (1692–1780)* (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1966), 42–43.

<sup>13</sup> I.V. Kurukin, *Persidskii pokhod Petra Velikogo. Nizovoi korpus na beregakh Kaspia (1722–1735)* (Moscow: Kvadriga Publ., 2010), 88.

company with huge rights (following the example of the East and West India companies of England and Holland). Law was authorized with extensive powers both in the construction of a new city at the mouth of the Kura, and in the organization of trade infrastructure in order to turn the “Silk Road” towards Russia. He promised the adventurer unusually favorable conditions, titles and money from the treasury, but it soon failed.<sup>14</sup>

### Who is "Asian"?

At the same time, one should do justice to Peter the Great, a smart, observant person, in his comprehension of the East. At first, he had a typically Eurocentric idea of the East as a deserted “no one's” space, where “wild Asians” lived, who did not know the all-conquering European “subordination to rules.” Like his European contemporaries, he was convinced of the absolute superiority of European civilization over the Eastern one, which was embodied in the all-conquering power of the regular army. According to the Eurocentrists, in a large-scale military clash with the European army, the “Asian” enemy was weak and as it was written in the 20th century, they could be defeated by a “limited contingent of troops.” Russian Ambassador to Persia A.P. Volynsky, who was actually sent to the neighboring country in 1715 for reconnaissance, wrote disparagingly about the Persians:

...this war requires insignificant troops; Your Majesty already see for Yourself that these are not people, but brutes.<sup>15</sup>

He categorically argued that success was guaranteed to the tsar by virtue of “Russian courage,” as well as thanks to “good ammunition and supplies.” A.P. Volynsky believed that only ten infantry and four cavalry regiments would be enough to conquer Persia.<sup>16</sup> Like many conquerors of the East, Peter the Great did not see the hidden foundations of strength, power and traditions of the peoples of the East. Meanwhile, the moral, religious, mental principles of the life of the East consolidated, in the opinion of Europeans, this chaotic world of noisy “men in wide trousers,” making them dangerous opponents for Europeans. Having come into contact with the world of the East, Peter the Great gradually became imbued with the peculiarities of the mentality of the Eastern peoples, saw their difference from Europeans. In 1723 near Derbent there was an extraordinary bloody episode. There is a record about it in the diary kept during the campaign – “Extract” on the Persian campaign:

... the barbarians fought in a particularly desperate manner; thus, laying down arms, as if capitulating, they fought with daggers, one attacked with a saber, and our dragoons took him on bayonets...<sup>17</sup>

The witness of the incident adds that as soon as the prisoner began to be tortured, he snatched the sword from the officer and ran to the tent of Admiral General F.M. Apraksin, but the sentries who stood at the entrance “took him on bayonets”; but “falling, he tore a piece of meat out of the hand of one sentry with his teeth, after which he was killed...” The Russian soldiers were accustomed to the disciplined European system, and the frantic selflessness of the “Asians” seemed to them strange and incomprehensible. Later on, it was one of the features of the war in the East, the most mysterious and distressing for Europeans, who did not comprehend the local military rules and traditions. Peter the Great

<sup>14</sup> S.M. Troitskii, “‘Sistema’ Dzhona Lo i ee russkie posledovateli,” *Franko-russkie ekonomicheskie sviazi. Sbornik statei* (Moscow; Paris: Nauka Publ., 1970), 117–119.

<sup>15</sup> I.V. Kuruin, *Persidskii pokhod*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii i rasporyazhenii po vedomstvu pravoslavnogo veroispovedaniia*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Sinodalnaia tipografiia, 1872), 536.

and his soldiers were not ready to understand these rules either, and they sought to oppose them with the utmost cruelty in dealing with the local population. The Europeans did not understand the peculiarities of conducting negotiations in the East and knew nothing at all about the peculiarity of the attitude of local rulers and residents towards them, Christians, who seemed to Muslims “infidels,” “dirty ghouls.” Long before the Caucasian wars, even then, during the Persian campaign, there was formulated by the aforementioned A.P. Volynsky a rigid doctrine from a position of strength, which the Russian authorities adhered to for centuries with regard to many local (especially Muslim) peoples:

...it is impossible to attract the local peoples by politics to your side, if there are no weapons in the hands, because, although they are inclined (to compromises – author’s note), but only for money; one should not embitter them without a reason, and it is impossible to trust anyone.<sup>18</sup>

However, it is important to note that Peter the Great highly appreciated the courage of the prisoner that attacked the sentries at Apraksin's tent:

If this people had an idea of the art of war, then no nation could fight with them.<sup>19</sup>

Faced with the real East, Peter the Great understood a number of other verities as well. He realized that in the East there were no rivers at the bottom of which there was gold, that the nature and climate of Persia were almost unbearable for Russian people, that they were threatened not only by Mazandaran tigers, snakes, scorpions and malarial mosquitoes, but also by heat, unknown diseases, lack of drinking water; the stormy waters of the Caspian Sea did not make navigation safe and easy. The dream of transferring the Silk Road towards Russia turned out to be hard to realize. Peter the Great was surprised to learn that the powerful Armenian Julfa community which controlled the Persian silk trade was not at all going to lay new routes through Russia; but on the contrary, it was preventing other Armenian merchants attracted by Peter the Great from developing this route. This is easy to understand: for thousands of years, the well-established trade route through the Middle East, with all its difficulties and shortcomings, had its colossal advantages, the infrastructure which was lacking in the undeveloped and sparsely populated expanses of Russia with its impassability, lack of transport infrastructure, cold climate and rare cities. The Armenian merchants, wise with the thousand-year experience, could not trust the northern conqueror who, like many others, suddenly came to them, invaded, and then disappeared to no one knows where, although they would like to get preferences in trade in Russia – the entrepreneurial successes of several generations of merchants Lazarevs who settled in Russia are obvious.

### **Madagascar and the Bering Strait**

Understanding the complexity of the arising problems, Peter the Great was not going to give up the dream of decorating his imperial crown with Indian diamonds. He conceived two more stunning projects to find the path to the desired goal. In 1724, he ordered that there should be prepared a secret naval expedition to conquer Madagascar, where there was a republic of sea robbers, who by that time had been ousted by the British and French from the Caribbean. The pirates who moved to the Indian Ocean, founded a kind of republic in Madagascar, were seeking a suzerain in Europe who could create legal cover for them; the European maritime powers, protecting their trade routes, persistently fought against pirates. Peter the Great decided to become such a suzerain for the robbers offering Russian citizenship to the pirates. This was done in order to establish a colony in

<sup>18</sup> S.M. Soloviev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishich vremen. Sochineniia*, bk. 9 (Moscow: Golos Publ., 1993), 362.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in: Kurukin, I.V. *Persidskii pokhod Petra Velikogo*, 66–67.



Madagascar and use it as a base for a naval expedition to India. It is noteworthy that the Emperor signed the letter to the pirate “King of Madagascar” as follows: “Your friend.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas the planned expedition of Admiral D.Ya. Wilster did not take place (due to its poor organization in 1724), then the second project was quite a success: a few days before his death, Peter the Great signed a decree on sending an expedition of Captain Vitus Bering with the task to find out “whether America and Asia were joined”, whether there was a strait between the continents. This was not idle curiosity of the great emperor either – he was seeking a way to India through the Arctic Ocean, which ultimately contributed to the outstanding geographical discoveries.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusions

Thus, Russia's eastward motion was inevitable and natural, just as its westward motion. Both of these took place thanks to Peter the Great. In general, for Russia the world of the East turned out to be alien, but also somewhat close, both due to Russia's geopolitical position between Europe and Asia, and taking into account the peculiarities of the mentality and way of life of the Russian people that was in close contact with the Eastern peoples throughout its existence. The eastward motion decisively initiated by Peter the Great brought numerous bloody conflicts to imperial Russia, led to a colossal waste of forces and means for the colonial eastward motion. But at the same time, faced with the East, Russia enriched itself not so much with its diamonds, but with the priceless cultural values of the peoples of the East; it forever linked its history and ultimately its fate with them.

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<sup>20</sup> Kopelev, D.N. “Predystoriia sekretnoi ekspeditsii Petra na Madagaskar. 1723–1724 gg.” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 3 (2016): 103–104; *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, vol. 7, no. 4356, p. 157.

<sup>21</sup> Polevoi, B.P. “Petr Pervyi, Nikolai Vitsen i problema “soshlas’ li Amerika s Aziey.” In *Strany i narody Vostoka*. Issue 17, bk. 3 (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1975), 15–32.

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