

## Maintenance and supply of post and telegraph stations in the Semirechye

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### Abstract

*The article explores the material supply of post and telegraph stations in the Semirechye region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The management of postal routes, transport safety, and the construction and equipment of stations were determined by the state, private entrepreneurs, and the local Kazakh population, who were taxed for these services. In addressing these challenges, the Russian Empire drew from European experiences, directly applying the postal station management model from Russia. Postal routes facilitated the transportation of correspondence, cargo, and passengers, thus solving essential communication issues within society. Government officials and soldiers also relied on these stations as key support points. Although the station attendants (overseers) were under the authority of post offices, they independently managed operations and relied on station-generated income. This arrangement was cost-effective for the state, allowing it to minimize expenses on postal institutions. The Russian government consistently worked to improve postal communication, and the system was subject to ongoing changes. However, despite some positive developments, both the Russian Empire and the postal system in Semirechye lagged behind European standards of postal transport.*

**Keywords:** *Communication, Mail, Telegraph, Post Roads, Communication Routes, Employees of Postal and Telegraph Institutions.*

### Introduction

The emergence and implementation of communication tools such as post and telegraph in the region, and the growing need for their services make the study relevant. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was impossible to imagine a society without post, telegraph, and nowadays radio, television, Internet, and mobile communication. By studying the history of communication tools, it helps to understand the dynamics of the development of modern communication tools, to predict changes in them, to determine known laws by projecting the processes from the past to the present, and also to determine the impact on the development of society and people's minds.

One of the methods used in writing an article is the modeling method. The modeling method is widely used in the study of communication processes. Many communication models were created in the 20th century. Here we apply communication theory to general theoretical modeling. They are sociological, psychological, and semiotic models.

Consistency takes a leading place in scientific knowledge today. The systematic nature of communication allows us to determine the hierarchy of communication systems, to recognize the socio-cultural differentiation and variety of communication tools.

During the research, the systemic-theoretical analysis method is used as the guiding research approach. First, the structural elements that provide the structure of the mass communication process or the entire system of mass communication are described. Secondly, the mechanisms of interaction features of the elements within the research system are determined. Thirdly, the function of the research system in relation to the external environment is determined. Fourthly, taking into account the activity of the mentioned system and its impact on the general society, the typological characteristics of the research system are collected and the meaning and content of the received mass information is analyzed. The systematic method is based on the use of analysis and synthesis.

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A comparative analysis was made of the features of post and telegraph management at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century at the level of the whole of Russia and the world, in the region. In order to simplify the payment to the Post Office, the route book “Postal Route Book” was used as the main data. It was published for the first time under the name “Postal Calendar”. 1777, 1796, 1802, 1803, 1808, 1824, 1829, 1841, 1842, 1852, 1863, 1871, 1875, 1880, 1888, 1901, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1911 A comparative analysis was made of publications published in the period of 12 years (Pochtovyy dorozhnik, 1871).

The next group of analyzed data included “Obzor Semirechenskoi oblasti”, published annually in Verny between 1882 and 1915. These were the data published as an appendix to the governors' reports of the regional statistical committees. On January 13, 1879, "Obzor Semirechenskoy oblasti" began to be compiled in connection with the creation of the statistical committee of the Semirechye region. “Postal Tracks and Stations Post Offices” Public improvement (considered in the chapter (Obzor Semirechenskoy oblasti, 1899).

The postal and telegraph services in the Russian Empire, both in general and in specific provinces, have been thoroughly analyzed in the works of Bazilevich (1927), Buchheim (1906), Morev (2019, pp. 203-208), Muminova (2009), Romashov (2005), Voronov (2020, pp.165-173).

In addition, the experiences of the world postal service in European states like Germany, UK and one of the colonial states, India were considered by Daniel (2010), Devyani (2010), Rothe (1923), Segal (2014), Wilson (1989), and etc.

According to the “concept of information society”, modern technical tools are the driving force of social development of society. That is, the emergence of new types of communication systems affects the development of society and leads to a new level of culture and civilization. In Russia as a whole, the postal department was established in 1799 and united all postal departments and the central post office. Thus, the highest postal management in Russia was assigned to six post offices. In 1913, about 7.618 communication institutions worked throughout the territory of the Russian Empire. Their location was uneven. For example, 80% of them were located in the European part of Russia, and the rest were concentrated in the territory of Siberia and Central Asia. The development of the post office in the territory of the Russian Empire led to the emergence of new road systems, which led to the establishment of security and order in them. With the advent of the telegraph in 1832, the trend of merging post and telegraph offices began worldwide. And at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the development of railways and other transports increased the level of communication by raising the post and telegraph service to the national and international level. This increased the level of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic relations and made it possible to integrate the space we are considering into events and processes on a global, imperial scale. The purpose of the article under consideration is to consider the issues of material equipment of post and telegraph stations in the Semirechye region and solving their economic needs by the state. Ensuring continuous operation of roads, safety of transport, construction and equipment of stations was solved by the state not only from state funds, but also by attracting private entrepreneurs and forcing the local Kazakh people to pay taxes. It is known that the practice of developing roads and postal transport through private entrepreneurs was used in the British Empire (Daniel, 2010, pp. 51-65).

Postal service in the Semirechye region was started in 1867-1868. In the temporary regulation on management of Semirechye and Syrdarya regions, it is stated that the military governors of Semirechye and Syrdarya regions are entrusted with continuous provision of postal services. In addition, until the transfer of postal relations to the postal department, the governor-general was responsible for the inclusion of the costs of financial support of the post office in the budget of the military-people's administration. Postal transportation fee (progonnaya plata) was determined in agreement with the local administration and the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. In order to organize and manage postal correspondence, regional post offices were opened in regional cities such as Verny and Tashkent, and regional post offices subordinate to them in Sergiopol, Kapal, Issyk Kul. Similarly, in order to facilitate the postal relations of the residents of Semirechye and Syrdarya regions with other parts of the empire, it was possible to receive and send all types

of postal correspondence at all post offices and branches. They are simple: insurance, money, transportation, etc. (Ahmetzhanova, 2013, pp. 57-58).

During the period under consideration, postal traffic in the Semirechye region was carried out according to the schedule approved by the General Post and Telegraph Department (Glavnoe Upravlenie Pocht i Telegrafov) (Bazilevich, 1927, pp. 121-123). Six postal tracts were formed: Sergiopol-Verny-Kara-Balta, Sergiopol-Urzhar-Bakhty, Altyn-Emel-Khorgos, Lepsi-Abakumov, Kütemaldy-Naryn (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti, 1898, p. 40).

### *Postmasters in the Semirechye Region*

The Russian Empire attempted to introduce a unified postal system throughout the empire, including in Kazakhstan. However, the state did not take on the responsibility for maintaining postal routes and stations. As a result, in the second half of the 19th century, postal routes in the Russian Empire were leased to postal caretakers (postmasters) on a contractual basis for a certain period. These caretakers were usually private entrepreneurs. Due to insufficient care of the stations along the Sergiopol-Verney postal route, they were put up for sale. Every six years, when the contracts of the postal caretakers expired, the routes were either sold or leased to individuals. Several systems of leasing postal routes to entrepreneurs were in place, including maintenance under the trade system (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy po trgovoy sisteme) for 3 or 6 years, maintenance by evaluation (po otsenke) for 12 years, maintenance under free post office rights (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy na pravakh volnykh pocht) for 3 years, and administrative system maintenance (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy po administrativnoy sisteme) for 3 or 6 years.

The free post office rights system (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy na pravakh volnykh pocht) was particularly beneficial for certain regions and the state. It was used only on major postal routes, such as in the Russian provinces and the Kazan region. This system improved the care of postal stations and the speed of mail delivery but required significant financial resources.

In the evaluation system (po otsenke), the state set the price for station maintenance rather than using auctions. Since three years was deemed insufficient to establish a profitable postal business, postmasters were granted 12-year leases. However, this term was shortened to six years starting on June 1, 1848.

The trade system (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy po trgovoy sisteme) was used when entrepreneurs agreed to accept a lower price for station maintenance, with additional income earned through transporting mail, couriers, and passengers. This system was often employed when local administrations struggled to provide adequate support and when the evaluation system was inefficient. However, maintaining postal stations under the trade system was often unprofitable for entrepreneurs, especially in remote, underdeveloped areas. Postmasters suffered losses and were dependent on small-scale entrepreneurs who provided mail services. Most of the funds from the zemstvo levy were allocated to these small entrepreneurs, which made this system less favorable. As a result, other forms of postal station maintenance were increasingly adopted.

It is evident that all forms of postal maintenance were employed in the Russian Empire. However, the evaluation and trade systems were the most widespread. In 1860, 43 provinces and regions in Russia used the evaluation system, while 23 used the trade system (Blumenfeld, 1860, p. 34).

During the period under consideration, in the Semirechye region, postal stations were maintained under the administrative system (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy po administrativnoy sisteme) and the trade system (soderzhanie pochtovykh stantsiy po trgovoy sisteme). From 1890 onwards, postmasters were required by contract to carry out construction and repair work on postal stations (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti, 1892, p. 54). An analysis of the data shows that the work of postmasters in the Semirechye region was heavily criticized by the state. There were legitimate reasons for this: a lack of qualified personnel, poor overall station conditions, the absence of repairs for many years, exhausted and neglected horses, worn-out carriages, and unsorted piles of mail. Travelers even had to pass postal routes on foot due to these shortcomings (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, 59). Many stations were located far from settlements,

in arid areas, with distances between them averaging between 23 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and 34 versts, meaning that fodder had to be brought from distant areas. Additionally, postmasters largely relied on the labor of Russian Cossacks, with Cossacks managing the mail service. These workers were granted privileges by the state, but when these privileges were revoked in 1878, the postal service began to experience difficulties. The costs of maintaining the routes rose, as did the fees for using them (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1884, p.35). As a result, postmasters were often poorly rated.

For example, the stations at Lepsinsk, Ashybulaq, and Kanjyga-Bulaq (Kanzhiga) were leased to a merchant named Ostyakov for 3,000 rubles per year. The Verney-Sergiopol postal route was managed under contract by Kuznetsov Klimenko until January 1, 1885. However, due to improper care, the stations were transferred to other entrepreneurs on March 1, 1881 (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1886, p. 48).

The manager of the Tashkent-Orenburg postal route was the same individual (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, p. 59). The crisis on the Tashkent-Orenburg route also affected the Verney-Sergiopol route. Postal caretakers were criticized for their neglect, lack of qualifications, and inexperience, which had a negative impact on the development of the Verney-Sergiopol postal route. Consequently, this postal route was placed under the control of the regional administration in 1880. Due to inadequate maintenance, eight stations along the Sergiopol-Verney postal route were in extremely poor condition and were put up for sale. Issues included the poor road conditions between stations, which were salty and sandy, requiring oats for the horses to be transported approximately 200 versts from the south of Sergiopol; the lack of necessary equipment for the stations; and the need to source horse tack, horses, and other supplies from Semipalatinsk, Tyumen, and Irbit, which prolonged the use of these supplies (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1885, p. 48).

It seems that some of the well-known merchants of the late 19th century in Semirechye were among the postal caretakers. For example, in 1882, seven stations between Kopal and Verney were leased to the Verney merchant Ostyakov. From 1886 to 1890, the management of nine stations on the Verney-Sergiopol postal route was entrusted to the merchant Shcherbakov from Tara. This Shcherbakov may have been one of the two sons of Ivan Efimovich Shcherbakov (1804–1879) (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1886, p. 48).

On April 1, 1884, the maintenance period for the Altyn-Emel-Khorgos route expired. Previously, 24,065 rubles were paid annually for the maintenance of 43 pairs of horses at nine stations. In 1884, 27,426 rubles were paid for the maintenance of 34 horses. This price increase was explained by poor economic conditions in the Zharkent area, the lack of pastures near the stations, and the need to import fodder from distant locations. The influx of settlers from Kulja, poor harvests, and the resulting grain shortages, as well as the poor roads to stations such as Konur-Lensk, Borokhudzir, and Koibyn, also contributed to the deterioration of the horses (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1885, p. 47).

On July 1, 1884, the maintenance period for the Urzhar-Bakhtin postal route also expired. Following a trade auction, it was leased until January 1, 1890. The price rose from 5,504 rubles to 8,540 rubles, primarily due to the lack of competition and the high cost of fodder (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1885, p. 47).

In conclusion, the state was keen to lease postal stations to private entrepreneurs. However, postmasters in the Semirechye region struggled to maintain the stations successfully. Effective station maintenance was dependent on the availability of water resources, fodder, horses, and successful harvests. Most importantly, local climatic and economic conditions were not taken into account. The Russian model of postal station maintenance was directly applied in Kazakhstan, which ultimately doomed the maintenance efforts to failure.

### *Construction of Postal Station Buildings*

The buildings of postal stations were constructed along the route from Sergiopol to Verny, near Cossack pickets, based on need. In the 1840s-50s, they were built at the request and with the funding of the Siberian Cossack army, and until 1882, postal horses were maintained along this tract under a maintenance contract. Funding for postal stations from the state was provided in only two cases:

When there was a threat to the Kyzyl-Kiy station from the Ayaguz River, its building was relocated (costing 1.749 rubles and 59 kopecks).

From 1876 onwards, funds were allocated to dig special wells in Maly-Ayaguz, Altyn-Kalat, Zhyz-Agash, Argantin, and Ashybulak stations due to a lack of water (120 rubles allocated) (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, p. 47).

Between Verny and Tashkent, no special government buildings were constructed for the stations; they were located in the homes of postal attendants or rented houses.

After the station was moved from Kastek to Korday, many buildings were constructed between Uzynagash and Pishpek along the Verny-Pishpek route, including:

Targan and Korday (1871, 2.067 rubles and 9 kopecks).

Otar, Syugatin, and Konstantinov (1872, 3.548 rubles), and Pishpek (2.300 rubles and 27 kopecks).

In 1876, a new station was built near the Samen River in place of the Kastek station (costing 3.847 rubles and 55 kopecks).

In 1877, the Konstantinov station was relocated due to flooding from the Shu River (2.465 rubles and 19 kopecks).

In 1870, new stations were constructed along the road from Verny to Karakol, bypassing the Santash Mountains and passing through Zhil-Aryk. Other stations built between 1871 and 1873 include Kurumdinsk, Uyitalsk, Zhil-Aryk, Kok-Moynak, Kutemaldu, Tur-Agyr, Choktal, Chulakatinsk, Kungey-Aksu, Preobrazhensk, and Karakol (each costing 700 rubles) (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, p. 48).

Stations built along the Tokmak-Karabalty tract in 1877 included Issygatin (2.347 rubles and 74 kopecks), Sukuluk (2.503 rubles and 20 kopecks), and Karabalty (3.143 rubles and 93 kopecks). In 1879, Karabalty station was relocated to the left bank of the Shu River due to flooding (costing 2.448 rubles and 56 kopecks).

A single building was constructed on the Kutymaldy-Naryn tract at Kachkar station (costing 4,452 rubles and 12 kopecks) (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, p.48).

With the relocation of stations along the Sergiopol-Urjar tract, new buildings were constructed:

Karakol station (1879, 3.256 rubles and 40 kopecks).

Tesik-Tas, Burgonsky, Maly-Naryn, Zhartau, and Barakpai stations (1880-1881, costing 17.614 rubles and 47 kopecks).

In 1883, additional funds were allocated for these stations (costing 3.447 rubles and 29 kopecks).

In 1882, along the Altyn-Emel-Kulja postal tract, only the Konur-Lensk station was constructed (costing 2.063 rubles and 60 kopecks). Repairs to the built stations were carried out approximately every 6-7 years (Obzor Semirechenskoj oblasti 1883, p. 49).

### *Postal Operations and Taxes*

In the second half of the 19th century, many changes occurred in the Russian Empire, including the development of postal services for delivering periodicals and the introduction of newspaper operations. Prior to 1852, newspaper delivery through the postal service was managed by postal directors and postmasters, who collected the associated fees for personal gain. In early 1852, the postal department



purchased these operations, and new rules governing newspaper operations under state control were introduced (Bazilevich, 1927, p. 105).

With the state taking control of newspaper delivery, a tax on each annual subscription was established based on three categories:

ruble 50 kopecks for publications issued once a week.

rubles for those issued up to three times a week.

rubles for those issued more than three times a week.

The system for postal fees was updated in 1869, with a uniform tax of 20% of the annual cost of the publication applied. Subscription services were offered at all post offices.

In 1870, taxes were adjusted based on the frequency of publication, and by 1871, they were reduced to 8%, 12%, and 16%. In 1886, due to rising costs of packaging materials and transportation, taxes fluctuated between 10% and 18%.

In the second half of the 19th century, books and printed works were taxed by weight, with charges ranging from 10 to 30 kopecks per pound. Special postage rates were introduced in response to requests from the Literacy Committee, reducing the rate to 3-11 kopecks (Bazilevich, 1927, pp. 107-108).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we attempted to examine the operation of post stations along the postal routes in the Semirechye region and the organizational forms of their provisioning by the state, based on the model established in the Russian Empire. One of the practices used in the Russian Empire, where the care of post stations was handled by private entrepreneurs, proved ineffective in Semirechye due to the inexperience of local entrepreneurs and their failure to consider the local climatic and economic conditions. The model for maintaining post stations from Russia was applied directly.

The post stations were involved in transporting postal items, correspondence, and passengers. They functioned not only as postal services but also as public transport hubs. Subordinate to the post offices, the caretakers of the post stations operated independently and were dependent on the station's revenue. This arrangement was very advantageous for the state, which sought to minimize expenses related to postal institutions. The state continuously modified the structure of postal services in its efforts to establish effective communication. However, despite some positive trends, the postal services in the Russian Empire and in the Semirechye region lagged behind those of European countries.

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