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Saving Lost Souls or Doing Good Business? Interactions at the Russian-Kazakh Frontier and Strategies for Freeing Russian Slaves in Central Asia in the Early 19th Century[1]

Abstract

By examining patterns of ransoming strategies, this paper generates insights about the interactions between state, economic and social actors across the Russian-Kazakh frontier in the early 19th century. Generally, first encounters across borders and boundaries include violence and invasion. Accordingly, the enslavement and subsequent ransoming of captured people represent common practices in frontier regions. Analyses of these processes illuminate the nature of interactions between different actors along the border.

Securing release of slaves through ransom was a regular component of Russian foreign policy from the 16th century onwards. Imperial institutions were established for ransoming Russian Christian brothers-in-the-faith and, later, for other subjects of the Russian Empire who had been enslaved by the Ottoman Empire and Central Asian Khanates. With imperial financing, the Orenburg Border Commission (1799–1859) co-ordinated the ransoming process and developed networks for achieving the release of Russian subjects held in the Kazakh Steppe, in Khiva and Bukhara. Actors involved in these networks were of heterogeneous descent, including Russian imperial officials, Bukharian and Khivan merchants, Kazakh officials, as well as Russian agents. Drawing on archival research, this article explores ransoming networks and strategies along the Russian-Kazakh frontier and probes the motives of the actors involved.

Key words: slavery, captivity, ransom, frontier, Central Asia, Kazakh Steppe, Russian Empire

1. Introduction

Ransoming as a form of cross-border interaction in frontier regions aims for the release of captured persons who belong to the same group as those paying the ransom. This phenomenon was widespread across cultures and religions from ancient times.[2] Redemption of indentured servants or labourers by their relatives represented a widespread practice.[3] In addition, there was ransoming of captives of wars and border conflicts as well as of victims of kidnapping. This practice aimed to return captured – in

1 For the critical engagement, fruitful discussions and for sharing their suggestions as the paper developed, I thank Antía Mato Bouzas, Dietrich Reetz, Epifania Amoo-Adare, Andreas Wilde, Stephan Conermann, Reuven Amitai, Ehud Toledano, Alexander Morrison, Ingeborg Baldauf, Dittmar Dahlmann, Sergei Liubichankovski and Ricarda Vulpius.

2 Grieser and Priesching 2015, XIII; Grieser 2010, 510-526; Jaspert and Kolditz 2013, 11-37.

3 Hezser 2015, 3-9.

some cases enslaved – persons to their area of origin and to their religious communities.[4] In most cases, symbolic ties to ransomed persons legitimised the ransom. The pragmatic interactions required the co-operation of local actors based on economic profit, as we can see in the specific context discussed below. In medieval times, the ransoming forms and networks showed different forms of institutionalisation and interregional co-operation: from simple forms, which included mostly relatives, to the complex figurations of state, economic and religious actors.[5]

In addition to economic and political factors, religious factors also played an important role, especially in terms of how actors perceived themselves, and how actors perceived each other.[6] As a general rule, Christians and Muslims did not capture and enslave brothers-in-the-faith. Instead, only "the Others" – infidels or heretics in other countries – were considered to be potential captives.[7] As a natural consequence, religious belonging also played a crucial role in institutionalised and religiously legitimised ransoming networks.[8] In the specific case of Russia, such religious legitimisation and state funding were indeed crucial to imperial ransoming practice.

4 In Jewish tradition, the local religious societies organised and financially supported particular cases of captive release *(pidion shevium)*, paid for by the captive's relatives; Rotman 2009, 29-31. In the Roman Empire, *redemptio captivorum* was primarily the prerogative of the family. Christian communities such as the *familia Dei* first supported the redemption of captives through the provision of funds and later in the form of donations to the church; Grieser 2015, 25-41. In the Islamic context, the redemption (*al-raqaba*) was also theologically interpreted as a social and religious duty of all Muslims; Nassery 2015, 72-75.

5 The ransoming of Jewish captives was still regarded as a crucial religious duty (*mitzvah rabba*) and an act of human solidarity. The local Jewish community assumed responsibility for ransoming amounts through voluntary fundraising campaigns in local communities and through private donations. In some cases, the captives themselves contacted their communities and collected ransom sums; Frenkel 2015, 83-96. A similar procedure was applied to the ransoming of captives along the Ottoman-Hungarian frontier in the 15th to 18th centuries: a captive was sent to his community in order to collect the required amount for him and his fellow sufferers; Nógrády 2007, 27-34; Pálffy 2015, 35-36 and 57-63; Ivanics 2015, 213. The release of noble captives took place through diplomatic negotiations and agreements; Pálffy 2015, 55; Ivanics 2007, 208-213; Varga 2007, 169-181; Fodor 2007, 227-232.

6 Academic discourse regarding the role of religion as an identifying factor of actors and their conduct, e.g. in the early-modern Mediterranean, shows different positions. On the one hand, the religious factor might have covered up the crucial political and economic reasons; Lambert 2005. On the other hand, Leiner 2006 and Davies 2004 highlight the religious dimension as essential for the conflicts in the region.

7 Another aspect of these issues: Pahlitzsch 2015, 123-142 and Gräf 1962/63, 89-139.

8 Priesching 2012, 1. The Catholic Church mandated some brotherhoods – Trinitarian, Mercedarians, and the Brotherhood of Gonfalone – with the release and ransoming of Catholics; Bono 1999; Jaspert 2015; Priesching 2015, 206-208. In the Protestant context, we can find different forms of ransoming – from the private and local initiatives in the Netherlands to the state-organised structures in other parts of Northern Europe. The re-

For a clearer understanding of ransoming processes, it is essential to grasp the ambiguity within actors' agency. Whilst religious legitimisation explained the actions of Christian purchasers to an extent, they very clearly showed a mixture of interests when engaged in ransoming within the "contact zone".[9] Legitimacy may emerge in different ways: while pirates/freebooters acted on their own initiative and solely in their own interest, corsairs usually acted on behalf of an established political or religious authority.[10] In this regard, the justification of the "holy war" and the related violence against the infidels and people of other faiths resulted in a dichotomy between "civilised" Christians and "barbarian" unbelievers.[11] These ideas would continue to shape colonial discourse and legitimise colonial practice into the 20th century.

This paper sets out to analyse the political, economic and religious aspects of the interactions between various actors involved in ransoming Russian subjects who had been enslaved in the Central Asian frontier region during the 19th century. Who were the actors involved? What was their motivation and what strategies did they use? And what do these cross-border interactions tell us about the character of the frontier in the Kazakh Steppe?

The main studies on historical interactions in the Kazakh Steppe focus on identifying processes of demarcation, and on resulting conflicts in borderlands.[12] Even if the ransoming does indicate religious and political confrontation in the 18th and 19th centuries, these conflict discourses are not central to my analysis. Rather than simply focus on conflict, I analyse complex co-operation networks. I seek to identify the character and status of the various actors involved in these networks, patterns of interactions in play and the range of motivations underpinning actions. Based on archival research on the documents of the Orenburg Border Commission (1799–1859), I will explore networks and release practices used by Russian imperial officials at the Russian-Kazakh border as well as on Central Asian markets in the early 19th century.[13] When analysing diplomatic documents, institutional correspondence, and slave reports, I paid due attention to the terminology and categories used in imperial docu-

lease of captives was financed by taxes, like in England since 1642, or by establishing ransoming funds like the *case de redenzione* in Italy; Ressel 2015, 261-265.

9 The actions of these actors can be considered from different points of view; Priesching 2015, 208-210. In the case of the early-modern Mediterranean, the same actors might have been considered to be pirates or corsairs (ital. *corsaro* and span. *corsario*) and might have been involved in ship plundering and the capturing of persons of other religions or confessions as well as engaged in releasing brothers-in-the-faith, like the Knights of Malta, Knights of St. John or of St. Stephan; Kempe 2013, 105-108.

10 Bono 2009, 58-60.

11 Osterhammel 2010, 243-244.

12 Bekmakhanov 1947, Olcott 1995, Khodarkovsky 2002.

13 This historical material is partly stored at the State Archive of Orenburg (GAOO) (f. 222 "Orenburg Frontier Commission") and at the State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGARKaz) (f. 4 "Orenburg Frontier Commission").

ments. According to the hermeneutical approach, historical sources are written representations or interpretations of reality and are dependent on the position of actors.[14]

For a better understanding of the ransoming phenomenon, I will describe the frontier regime of the Kazakh Steppe in the early 19th century, as well as the main actors on the frontier and their interests. Then I will analyse ransoming processes – the collection of information, networks and practices – in the main part of this paper. I will discuss, in particular, the actors who were crucial to freeing Russian enslaved subjects in the Kazakh Steppe, their interests, and advantages they gained from participating in ransoming networks.

2. Ransoming Policy in the Russian Empire

The Russian imperial practice of ransoming was based on a policy established in the Tsardom of Moscow. In common with the ransom of Christian slaves in the Mediterranean area, Moscow established in the 16th century the practice of ransoming Russian Christian subjects, who were captured in the Southern borderlands of the Russian Empire.[15] Moscow paid the ransom from the state treasury. The Council Code of 1649 (part VIII) obliged the tsar to ransom Christian captives as well as to regulate the levy of ransom taxes (*polonyanichny sbor*) from the Christian population, and the ransom tariffs themselves.[16] The first official release of Russian slaves in Khiva and Bukhara took place in 1669 as part of embassy missions.[17] With the establishment of colonial administrative institutions in the Kazakh Steppe, e.g. the Orenburg Expedition of Border Affairs (1782–1799) and the Orenburg Border Commission (1799–1859), the Russian Empire enacted a local structure for ransoming captives and slaves. However, there was a mixture of different forms of ransoming which meant there was no uniform freeing process on the frontier of the Kazakh Steppe. These forms ranged from the private initiatives of relatives to the state-organised release through diplomatic agreements, as well as state-initiated ransoming through co-operation with local officials and merchants.

Whilst membership of the Russian Orthodox Christianity community was not necessarily a crucial factor for actors involved in ransoming processes, it played a significant role. Religion was certainly part of the epistemological framework of culture, and of self-perception, and it frequently informed the motives of participating actors.[18]

For the Russian Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church, the redemption of enslaved Russian subjects was legitimised by the salvation-historical ideas of loyalty and

14 Baberowski 2008, 98-103.
15 Ivanics 2007, 194; Zhukov 2012, 31-43.
16 Berezhkova 1888, 24-28; Witzenrath 2015; Zhukov 2014, 95-97.
17 Wesselowskij 1879, 534; Burton 1998, 355-360.
18 Witzenrath 2015, 38.

responsibility for the brother-in-faith and political subjects. Captive narratives became a permanent feature of colonial frontier accounts, i.e. travelogues, memoirs of colonial officials and published stories of enslaved captives in Central Asia.[19] The abduction and enslavement of Russian subjects by neighbouring raiders have long been emphasised, but their own practices of holding captives and slaves have remained overlooked.[20] In the next section I will continue to reconstruct cross-border interactions in the Kazakh-Russian frontier region, and to depict key actors, their interests and agency.

3. Steppe Region as a Russian-Kazakh Frontier and Contact Zone: Actors and Interests

Modern historians consider the Kazakh Steppe of the 18th and first half of the 19th century as a frontier region.[21] Nevertheless, the way this frontier is understood differs according to academic culture and time period. Studies by US researchers emphasise the combative nature of encounters between autochthonous populations and imperial actors.[22] Russian tsarist historiography legitimised the Russian presence in the Steppe through ideas about the "superiority" of Russian culture and the "backwardness" of the natives.[23] Early Soviet historiography focused on the exploitative nature of Russian policy in the Kazakh Steppe, and they also supported the exploiter-exploited paradigm.[24] After World War II, Soviet historians established a theory of "peaceful incorporation" and ascribed to themselves a progressive role for the development of Kazakhs.[25] Historians for post-Soviet Kazakhstan followed the Western research para-

19 'I can't describe enthusiasm of Russian captives, that we ransomed in Bukhara and on the way. They shed tears of joy. It's hard to believe, but Bukharian ruler was very tough and hindered theses ransomed Russians from returning home! […] Just one look at ill-fated Russian captives (*nevol'niki*) in Bukhara and Khiva inspired for their release. How can purchase of these people – robbed from home grounds during the peace-time – be considered as a form of legal property?'; Meyendorff 1975, 146. See also Dal' 1839; Efremov 1952; Galkin 1867.

20 Schiel and Hanss 2014, 12.

21 Khodarkovsky 2002, 47.

22 Martha Olcott regards the Russian-Kazakh relations in the 18th and 19th centuries as 'one of continuous popular opposition to Russian rule'; Olcott 1995, 44. Mikhail Khodarkovsky argues that contacts of colonial settlers and aborigines were shaped by 'the ever present and growing incompatibility between two very different societies'; Khodarkovsky 2002, 8.

23 Kazantsev 1867.

24 Lebedev 1940.

25 Bekmakhanov stressed that trade, cultural relations, and even military struggles against exploiters 'created objective preconditions for the development of friendship between Russian and Kazakh peoples'; Bekmakhanov 1947, 5.

digm of coloniser-colonised and questioned the imperial policy according to this.[26] In sum, historical research on Russian-Kazakh relations usually applies the term "frontier" in Frederick Turner's sense, as a history of confrontation written in terms of coloniser-colonised or exploiter-exploited dynamics.[27]

Recent research has, however, revisited the "frontier" as a zone of negotiation and mutual influence. This has been applied to studies on Russian frontiers in the Caucasus and Siberia.[28] Yuriy Malikov emphasises the importance of this approach in the Kazakh context when he says: '[...] as well as in the cases of North America and North Caucasus, The Northern Kazakhstani frontier was a zone of active cultural exchange. […] Violence, though present, coexisted with economic interactions and mutual support.'[29]

Gul'mira Sultangalieva also argues that the concept of "frontier" better fits the initial stage of the annexation of the Junior and Middle Horde to the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, and allows for the reconstruction of interactions between imperial and autochthonous actors.[30]

Applying "frontier" in this revised sense to the context of the Kazakh Steppe, we must ask: What characterised the frontier regime in the Kazakh Steppe? And, who were the crucial political and social actors on the frontier?

The power balance in the Kazakh Steppe during the 18th and 19th centuries was shaped by the ability of the Kazakhs to maintain relations with neighbouring rulers, like the Russian Empire, the Chinese Empire and Central Asian khanates, even if their interests were contradictory (See map 1). The Kazakh sultans ensured their authority through agreements with and affiliations to the Bukhara, Khiva, Qoqand, the Qing Dynasty and the Russian Empire. This kind of "shared" or "shifting" loyalty contradicted the imperial understanding of political belonging. Russian officials expected the absolute permanence of political agreements and expressions of loyalty. The Kazakh authorities usually acted according to situational power balance: an agreement could be dissolved by the resignation of a ruler, or by new contracts to other political actors. These differences in understanding of political agency created potential for conflict.[31]

26 'The two-century history of Kazakhstan during its colonial period knew not a single year of peace. Anti-colonial revolts on the national, regional, and local levels, unrest, uprisings, conflicts, and even mass first fights were constant'; Maduanov 1997, 65.

27 Turner 1931.

28 Barrett 1999. In this regard, David Moon considers the Russian-Siberian frontier as 'an intermediate zone of interaction and mutual accommodation between the Russian state and neighbouring state structure, Russian peasant-migrants and the environment, and agricultural peasants and pastoral nomads and other native peoples'; Moon 1997, 862.

29 Malikov 2011, 30 and 32.

30 Sultangalieva 2013.

31 Kappeler 2001, 155-158; Martin 2001, 28-33.

Map 1

© Yuri Bregel, 1999

In the 18th century, the Russian foreign policy focused, among other things, on enlarging their influence in the Kazakh Steppe. The Empire established its presence in the Kazakh Steppe through military outposts; it was interested in establishing a "secure border", as well as developing trade relations with Bukhara and Khiva.[32] At that time, the imperial settlement policy encouraged Cossack[33] and peasant migration into the southern regions of the Russian Empire. Consequently, Fort Orenburg, in 1734, became an administrative, military and trade centre. The Military Governor of Orenburg managed and supervised Russian relations with the Kazakh tribe leaders and military chiefs.[34]

To guarantee the power balance in this region, it was necessary to reach agreements that satisfied different interests. The ministers' imperial demands needed to be balanced with the needs of the Cossacks and settlers, and these needed to be balanced with the interests of the Kazakh tribes and their leaders. This produced a complex configuration of participating actors on the frontier. The ministers advocated the extension of trade relations in Central Asia and the establishment of "secure borders" along with military outposts, while the Cossacks sought the continuation of their privileged access to natural resources, as well as their right to self-determination, in exchange for their military service in the borderland. At the same time, the peasant settlers expected financial privileges (e.g. tax reductions) and access to agrarian land. As a matter of course, these expectations led to conflicts with the Kazakh population, who had previously used this land for their own purposes (e.g. to pasture their cattle).[35]

There was also a conflict of interests on the Kazakh side. The Kazakh Khans tried to strengthen their power, and to profit from financial support from contracts and agreements with the Russian Empire. The military chiefs (*batyrs*) also strived to gain more influence. This resulted in the consolidation of some tribes under their own leadership and the need to take into account the nomads' economic interests. Furthermore, the elders represented tribal economic and social interests; i.e. their access to pastoral land, horses and cattle to secure material prosperity, the release of captured Kazakhs and the maintenance of traditional social structures as well as hierar-

32 Between 1736 – 1742 the Orenburg military line was established in the Kazakh Steppe. The military line consisted of some outposts (along Ural or Yaik River) without being connected through a border wall. In addition, the Orenburg line was completed by the Samara line (along the Wolga River), the Ui line (along the Ui River), the Kama line (along the Kama River) and the Sakmara line (along the Sakmara River); Malikov 2011, 190-209.

33 Since the 16th century, Cossacks constituted a frontier population in the South of the Russian Empire along the rivers Don, Wolga, Yaik and Terek. They consisted of Russian and Ukrainian peasants that tried to escape high taxes and serfdom through their getaway in the Kazakh Steppe region. In return for their services as border guards, Cossacks used frontier land for agriculture, fishing and hunting. Cossacks established a social order with high levels of autonomy; Kappeler 2001, 50-52.

34 Paul 2012, 362-365.

35 Martin 2001, 60-83; Sunderland 2004, 35-50; Malikov 2011, 252-283.

chies.[36] The neglect of their requirements or the violent repression of their autochthonous living environment resulted in disturbances and uprisings along the border during the 17th and 18th centuries. More precisely these protests were expressed by their refusal to co-operate with the Russian administration by relocating to far distances and therefore more independent Steppe-areas, as well as by conducting raids on outposts and settlements along the border and abducting horses and cattle, i.e. the so-called practice of *barymta*. [37]

The main security problem in the frontier area was reciprocal raids of nomadic tribes by the Junior Horde – on the one side – and by Russian subjects – the Cossacks, Bashkirs and Kalmyks – on the other. Even after the Russian incorporation of the Junior Horde (in 1824), the conflicts continued. The Kazakhs reacted to the deprivation of their pasture with raids on Cossack military outposts and settlements, for the purpose of balancing losses. Horses, cattle and sometimes people were captured in exchange for pasturelands. Cossacks also responded with raids on Kazakhs in order to recuperate captured goods and people, as well as to punish the raiders. Furthermore, conflicts between Kazakhs and Bashkirs (nomadic Russian subjects) intensified from the middle of the 18th century.[38]

Following the understanding of "frontier" as a processual contact zone shaped by relations of varied actors' groups, the Kazakh Steppe in the 19th century constituted a zone of encounter that involved actors of different political, social, cultural and religious belonging. Consequently, the variety of actors and their interests implied both the possibility of conflict and of co-operation. The co-operation forms could be spontaneous and initiated by an authority. With the establishment of the Orenburg Border Commission, the Russian Empire claimed to have stopped this kind of vigilantism. Abandonment of practicing *barymta* and of raids on frontier settlements: these were amongst the range of crucial measures for the imperial regulation of frontier conflicts.[39]

4. Imperial Strategies for Controlling the Interaction at the Russian-Kazakh Frontier and Categorisation of Migration Processes

The Orenburg Border Commission (*Orenburgskaia Pogranichnaia Kommissiia*) was established in 1799 to influence autochthonous power structures through colonial adminis-

36 Martin 2001, 87-113; Crews 2006, 192-199.

37 '*Barymta* was a method of dispute resolution sanctioned by *adat* [customary law among nomads–E.S.] that involved the driving away of another nomad's livestock by an offended, usually accompanied by members of his kinship group or *aul* [temporary tent settlement of nomads–E.S.], in order to force the fair settlement of a conflict. […] *Barymta* could also be exercised as the abduction of a woman or confiscation of property from an *aul*. In general, it signified a claim to justice or a challenge of honor using property as ransom for that what was owed'; Martin 2001, 140.

38 Malikov 2011, 190-192, 252-268.

39 Viatkin 1940, 15-20.

trative institutions.[40] It was originally comprised of three representatives from the Kazakh tribes and three representatives from the Russian administration.[41] One of the Russian representatives functioned as a head of the group. This institution was subordinate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was represented by the Military Governor of Orenburg in the region. The Orenburg Border Commission was created as an arbitration board for regulation of frontier affairs with the involvement of Russian and Kazakh authorities. The institution adopted administrative functions (e.g. levying taxes for pasture areas) and judicial functions (e.g. resolving conflicts between the autochthonous population and frontier settlers) in the frontier area. It co-ordinated and managed Central Asian affairs, as well as collecting information about Khiva, Bukhara and Qoqand trade, economy and policy.[42]

Furthermore, the Orenburg Border Commission supervised "cross-border mobility" in the Kazakh Steppe. As part of this task, its statistical reporting in 1800 covered the capture of Russian subjects (i.e. Cossacks, fishers at the Caspian coast, settlers and laborers), the recuperation of Russian subjects, the recuperation of escaped and captured Russian subjects and finally those escaping from the Kazakh Steppe.[43]

Russian officials held an imperial bias, which was shaped by their view upon the political and religious belonging of mobile actors. This bias was reflected in the structure of statistical overviews. 'Ransoming' was applied to Christian subjects of the Russian Empire. Official documents never used the term 'slave' (*rab*) in relation to Russian imperial subjects, even if they were enslaved in Central Asia. Imperial overviews considered them to be 'captives' (*plennye* or *plenniki*). Imperial officials regarded the

40 Towards the end of the 18th century, the Orenburg Expedition Border Affairs (1782-1799) and the Border Court (1786-1799) were established to adopt parts of the administrative tasks. The Orenburg Expedition of Frontier Affairs was created as a colonial administrative institution for nomads of the Junior and Middle Horde. It was subordinated to the Military Governor of Orenburg. The Orenburg Frontier Court was established for cases of dispute between the Kazakh nomadic population and Russian subjects (Bashkirs, Kalmycks and Qossacks) as well as for Khiva and Bukhara merchants. This court included the commander of the Orenburg military units, two officers, two merchants, two peasants and six tribe elders of the Junior Horde. Jurisdiction was based on Russian law. The Orenburg Frontier Commission assumed its tasks in 1799; Gorbunova 1998.

41 The Kazakh representatives were to be elected by a session of Kazakh sultans, *biy*s and tribe elders for three years and defended the interests of the three main tribes: Bayuli, Alimuli and Zheteru. Nevertheless, the khan usually appointed them. After disempowering the khan in 1824, the Military Governor of Orenburg appointed Kazakh representatives at the suggestion of the Orenburg Frontier Commission.

42 Ogorodnikov 1995, 18-23.

43 The unpublished material comes from post-Soviet archives, and my citation of it follows the standard system in the field of Russian studies. The archival collection, the inventory, the files and the folio are thus indicated respectively with the following Russian abbreviations: f. (fond), op. (opus), d. (delo) and l. (list): Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan [TsGARKaz], f. 4, op. 1, d. 494, 497, 504, 581, 621; GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32.

terms 'Russian subjects/local people' (*rossiiskie/zdeshnie liudi*) and 'foreign people' (*nepoddanye Rossii*) as crucial for migrant categorisation. The second factor was religious belonging. The overviews did not mention Christians explicitly, but they did provide special tables for non-Christians (*inovertsy*) and Muslims (*magometane*). This demonstrates how religion played a crucial role for the identity and integration policy of the Russian Empire. One important motive for ransoming of Russian Christian subjects was the desire to release them from the infidels in order to save their souls. The naturalisation of non-Christian escapees, like the Kalmyks, involved Christianisation. This practice was not applied to Bashkirs, who were Muslim and became imperial subjects by the first half of the 18th century. According to the edict of tolerance of 1773, Islam was considered one of the official religions of the Russian Empire. However, the application of this edict did not affect foreign Muslims, like Afghans and Persian escapees. They had to be baptised if they wanted to stay in the Russian Empire. Otherwise, the Russian officials sent them back to their masters in the Kazakh Steppe.

5. Ransoming processes

5.1 Terminology and transition of meaning

The clarification of historical terms is essential for a better understanding of ransoming processes. In the Russian documents, Russian subjects captured in the frontier region were called 'captives' (*nevol'niki* or *plenniki*) in the sense of 'persons, who are held against their will', not necessarily in terms of 'captives of war'. In imperial administrative documents, the term 'slave' (*rab*) described a non-Christian unfree person that had been enslaved due to autochthonous social order. This term was applied to Afghans, Persians and other non-Christians. From the perspective of the Russian Empire, the capture and enslavement of Russian subjects by nomads of the Junior and Middle Hordes was not legal. By using the term 'captive', the Russian Empire indicated that this status was both temporary and illegal. In contrast, the enslavement and sale of indigenous non-Christian people by nomads was, to a great extent, accepted.

According to the nomadic social order, imperial subjects became legally dependent (turk. *qul*, pers. *bande*) when captured. The term *qul* included several types of dependency, e.g. slave, servant, serf or soldier.[44] At the semantic level, Turkic languages did not distinguish between slavery and servitude that we find in Western histories of slavery. For example, the hypernym *qulluq* covered different forms of dependency, including slavery, servitude, subjugation, devotion and loyalty. Its primary meaning was the sense of servitude, such as in the noun *qulčılıq* (service) and the verb *qullaq etmek* (to serve).[45] The term *bande* also covered several meanings of dependency, like captive,

44 Budagov 1871, 88-89; Zenker 1866, vol. 2, 719-720.
45 Budagov 1871, 88-89.

servant, serf and slave.[46] At the slave markets of Khiva and Bukhara, captured Russian subjects were treated by Central Asian slave traders and purchasers as ordinary slaves or servants (*qul*, *bandı uruslar*). The semantic specification referred mostly to ethnic or gender differences. For female slaves, the following Turkic terms were used: *kinīz*, *qız*, and *qırnaq*.[47] The term *kinīz* described a young girl, maidservant and female slave at the same time.[48] *Qız* was used for a young girl or female servant.[49] The raiding and slaving practices of nomadic actors in the frontier region were not greatly influenced by Islamic theological discourses. Instead, they were guided by the pursuit of profit. The purchase of enslaved persons from the Russian Empire and from other regions was considered as a common trading practice according to the local social and economic order.

Various understandings of status and the position of enslaved Russians clarified the motivation of involved actors from different social and political orders. Whereas Christian salvation discourses and ideas of the responsibility of rulers and officials for their subjects shaped ransoming motivations of Russian actors, Kazakh and Central Asian actors conducted enslavement practices more pragmatically, according to economic interests.

5.2 Networks and Strategies for Collecting Information about Missing Persons

The ransoming process was made up of several phases: registration of missing persons, investigation regarding the circumstances of the capture and enslavement, investigation regarding the whereabouts of slaves and their masters, ransoming of the Russian slaves in Central Asia and in the Kazakh Steppe, reimbursement of ransom expenses and re-integration of ransomed persons.

The first phase of the imperial ransoming process consisted of collecting information about missing people. The administration of military lines submitted registrations of missing Cossacks and soldiers to the Orenburg Border Commission, which then coordinated and supervised the investigations in these affairs. Government administrations also sent entries regarding missing civil populations to the Commission. This data was amalgamated with the general overview of missing Russian subjects.[50]

The next phase included investigations of the circumstances of the capture. For that purpose, the Orenburg Border Commission used different information sources. At first, witnesses on both the Russian and Kazakh sides were interrogated. Through these means, the Russian military administration collected information about raiders and submitted it to the Orenburg Border Commission. Military units posted near the place of capture chased the raiders and interrogated the Kazakh population in order

46 Zenker 1866, vol. 1, 212.
47 Golden 2001, 27-56.
48 Budagov 1871, 140.
49 Budagov 1871, 53.
50 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 497, l. 3-3a.

to find captives. If the investigations revealed that captives were murdered, their bodies were to be identified by family members or by military chiefs.[51]

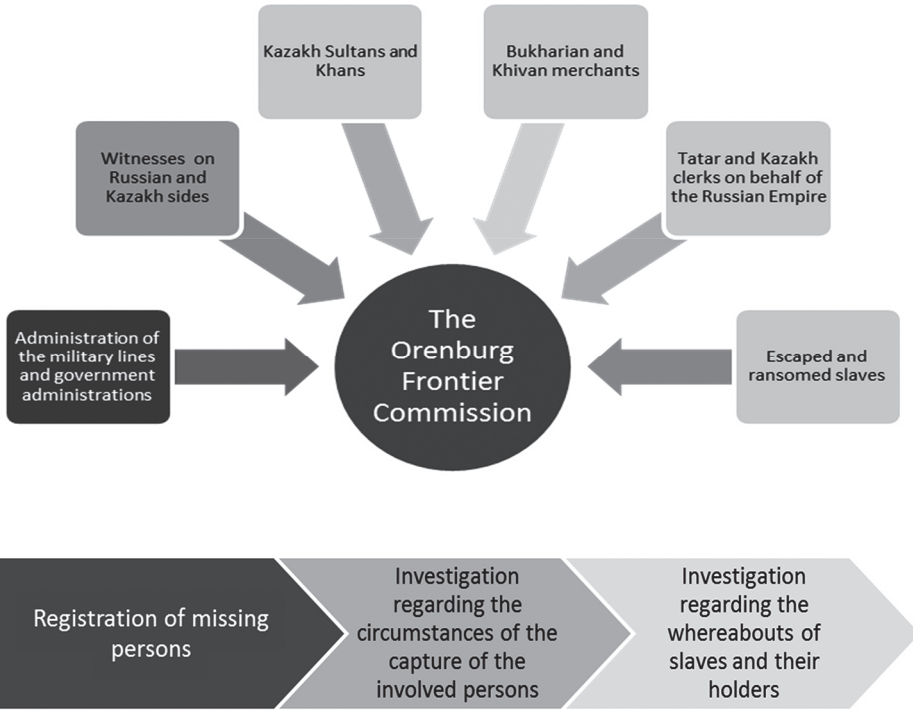
The official procedure involved co-operation with the Kazakh sultans and khans. These elites were granted financial support (generally 350 rubles per month), valuable gifts, assurance of Russian patronage and honorary awards in return for their loyalty. Furthermore, they could count on Russian support for strengthening their positions if they pledged their loyalty and assisted the Empire in times of disturbance. They were expected to check their area of influence in order to find captives and return them.[52] In some cases, Kazakh officials returned missing people; in other cases, the captives had already been sold to slave traders and were brought away from the Kazakh Steppe. To complicate matters, the power balance in the Junior Horde was not stable. Military chiefs (*batyrs*) competed with sultans for more influence and refused to release Russian captives. In order to strengthen their own position of power, sultans accused the disobedient tribe of wrongfully raiding Russian villages and capturing horses and people. In this case, sultans used their position as official partners of the Russian Empire to channel imperial anger against their own competitors.[53]

The next information source was Bukharian and Khivan merchants, who were embedded in the autochthonous social order and in trade networks. In order to release Russian captives captured during the Russian-Persian war (1826–1828) by the Persian army, and who were later sold to Khiva, the Orenburg Border Commission ordered custom offices in Orenburg to send Khivan merchants to inquire into these affairs. In exchange for medals and better trade conditions, the Russian officials expected them to collect reliable information about the names and whereabouts of Russian war captives.[54]

In order to receive more reliable information, the Orenburg Border Commission used the services of Tatar and Kazakh clerks and translators. They were encouraged to use their family networks and business trips to investigate the cases. Semi-official cooperation with Kazakhs found expression in the institution of the *konfidents* or unofficial informants. *Konfidents* were staff members of the Orenburg Border Commission and held a *14-rank* that according to the Russian Table of Ranks was comparable to a clerk in a government's administration. Their main tasks were to travel to the Junior or Middle Horde for the Kazakhs or on behalf of the Frontier Commission. In addition, they collected information about missing people, their whereabouts, their captors etc.[55]

51 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 621, l. 147-8.
52 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 219, l. 21.
53 Viatkin 1940, 12.
54 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 4765, l. 1-30.
55 For example, a ransomed slave (Ivan Matveev) reported that an enslaved Cossack wife (Arina Mikhailova) was captured in Orenburg in 1792 and was held captive by the Kazakh Maletbar of the Chikli tribe; TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 621, l. 126-7.

Figure 1: Collecting information: actors and processes



Finally, the escaped or ransomed slaves gave reliable information to the Orenburg Border Commission about the whereabouts of people with whom they had been captured or had met on their way.[56] With the help of this data (which could include the name of the slave, her whereabouts, and the name of her slave master), the Russian administration was able to easily find enslaved persons.

The information displayed in figure 1 was crucial not only for the ransoming of Russian slaves but also for finding and punishing raiders. The information sources mentioned above had different levels of reliability. Two factors must be considered: the embeddedness of informants in the autochthonous social order and the informants' loyalty to the Russian Empire. Even though Khivan merchants had the best local knowledge, they were less co-operative than imperial and affiliated actors. And although Kazakh sultans also possessed local knowledge and authority to exercise power over raiders, they preferred to pursue their own goals and to exploit the Russian administration to manipulate power balances in the Hordes. Kazakh informants in the imperial service had a "shared belonging" and also tried to take advantage of this situation. The loyal Cossacks and army did not have the necessary knowledge of

56 GAOO, f. 222, op.1, d. 32, l. 27-27a.

nomadic networks. Russian slaves provided reliable and capable reports, but they as informants were not easy to reach. But when taken as a whole, these reports offered sufficient information for the ransoming of Russian slaves.

Relating to the frontier nature of the Kazakh Steppe in the early 19th century, the process of collecting information involved actors with different political belonging: Russian officials, Kazakh elites as well as Bukharian and Khivan merchants. Their participation in the process was powered by both political, economic and religious intentions in the case of Russian officials and by pragmatic reasons in the case of Kazakh and Central Asian actors. In exchange for information, actors could receive financial rewards, the possibility of social mobility within the Russian society and symbolic validation. Co-operation was profitable for all parties.

5.3 The Ransoming Networks and Practice

Documentation of ransom cases included letters from merchants (for the reimbursement of expenses), reports of ransomed slaves, records about a case for internal documentation with cash notes and directives for further military or civil administration in order to organise the re-integration of the ransomed persons. By analysing the archival material, certain ransoming cases can be reconstructed, as outlined in table 1.

Table 1: Overview of selected ransom cases 1799-1812

Year	Ransomed person (social position, age)	Ransomer	Ransom expenses	Restored amount	Financial sources
1799	Cossack (33)[57]	Bukharian merchant	60 *tilla*[58] or 600 rubles	250 rubles	state treasury
1799	peasants (28 and 14)[59]	Bukharian merchant	800 rubles	300 and 200 rubles	"ransom taxes" of Kazakhs
1799	soldier (55)[60]	Bukharian merchant	30 *tilla* or 300 rubles	180 rubles	state treasury
1799	soldier (50)[61]	Khivan merchant	20 *tilla* or 200 rubles	100 rubles	state treasury

57 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 1, 2, 5, 15.
58 *Tilla wasvaluta* in Khiva und Bukhara. In 1799, the exchange value of one *tilla* was 10 rubles.
59 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 4, 5, 14.
60 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 18-20, 36, 41-42.
61 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 27-29, 36, 41-42.

Year	Ransomed person (social position, age)	Ransomer	Ransom expenses	Restored amount	Financial sources
1799	son of Russian merchant (20)[62]	Khivan merchant on behalf of a Russian merchant	600 rubles	300 rubles	state treasury
1799	serf (30)[63]	Russian merchant with involvement of a Khivan merchant	60 *tilla* or 600 rubles	150 rubles	state treasury
1806	serf (56)[64]	Khivan merchant	55 *tilla*[65], 743 rubles incl. transport	120 rubles	state treasury p.r.n. contribution of ransomed person
1809	soldier (52)[66]	Bukharian merchant	100 *tilla* or 1000 rubles	400 rubles	state treasury
1809	doctor (56)[67]	Bukharian merchant	60 *tilla* or 600 rubles	400 rubles	state treasury
1810	petty officer (34)[68]	Kazakh sultan	75 *tilla*[69] or 975 rubles plus 732 rubles for transport	600 rubles	state treasury and p.r.n. contribution of ransomed person
1812	child[70]	Armenian merchant	40 *tilla* or 440 rubles plus transport	537.50 rubles	"ransom taxes" of Kazakhs

62 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 52-56.
63 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 65-68, 74-75, 80.
64 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 504, l. 2-20.
65 According to records of the Khivan merchant Kurbanov, the exchange value of one *tilla* was 12 rubles in 1806.
66 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 581, l. 4, 78-79a.
67 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 581, l. 4, 78-79a.
68 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 621, l. 81-83, 92-94, 99, 109, 117.
69 According to records of the clerk Subkhankulov, the exchange value of one *tilla* was 13 rubles in 1810.
70 TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 621, l. 81-83, 92-94, 99, 109, 117.

Ransoming in the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia involved several imperial institutions, such as the Orenburg Border Commission, government administration, and administration of military lines. According to the Russian Orthodox Church's concern for salvation, saving lost Christian souls legitimised ransoming and its state funding.[71] Ransoming was not only prompted by the wishes of the relatives of enslaved persons, but generally as an act of responsibility of the Russian Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church for its political subjects and brothers-in-the-faith. In all the eleven cases in table 1, the ransomed persons were Christian imperial subjects.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Bukharian and Khivan merchants were important ransoming agents. In terms of the constellation of motives associated with ransoming, they simply followed their own economic interests. These merchants bought slaves from the nomadic raiders and transported this human capital to slave markets in Central Asia. But they also supported the ransoming of Russian slaves. Considering the selected cases presented above in table 1, we see that half of the ransomed slaves were older than age 50. This group of slaves was not profitable for their owners due to their old age, which is why they were often manumitted. In these cases, merchants could operate a good business by buying the elder slaves in order to sell them to the Russian Empire. In some cases, Bukharian merchants made a substantial profit (cf. cases 8 and 9) by selling old serfs or by quoting high prices for an old slave. Particularly remarkable is case 9, as the same merchant bought a captured doctor from Kazakh raiders, brought him to Bukhara, was his owner for several years and finally sold him to the Russian administration for a ransom.

Kazakh officials, like sultans, tribal elders etc., also operated as brokers (case 10) on behalf of the Russian Empire. As affiliated agents, they received more substantial reimbursement for their expenses, which included both the ransom price and the transportation costs. Through the "shared affiliation", the Kazakh agents had good connections to Khiva and Bukhara, so that they were able to buy Russian slaves. Moreover, kinship ties to other Kazakh tribes guaranteed secure transportation of ransomed slaves to the Russian Empire. Alongside compensation for their expenses, the Kazakh officials also received letters of commendations as symbols for their engagement and effort. The participation in the ransoming of Russian slaves brought Kazakh officials financial and symbolic benefits and strengthened their social and political position.

Russian merchants were not able to act autonomously in slave markets in Bukhara and Khiva. They had to rely on the participation of autochthonous merchants. This co-operation was effective in case 5. In this case, relatives of a slave initiated the ransoming. Russian merchants supervised its execution, and because the Russian administration trusted these merchants, they paid a decent sum of ransom from the state treasury. In case 6, Russian merchants seem to have been contact persons for a slave, who initiated his own ransoming. His identification was not precise, so he may have been an escaped and uncaptured serf who used the identity of another person to re-

71 Witzenrath 2015, 38-39.

turn home without punishment. Some Armenian merchants (case 11) focused their general business activity on cross-border mobility: capturing escaped Russian serfs and recruits and ransoming Russian slaves. Due to these efforts, they received better social positions and more authority within Russian society.

Analysing the ransoming cases in figure 2 the following actors and roles can be identified: the Orenburg Border Commission was a supervising institution; the Bukharian, Khivan and Armenian merchants acted as independent agents; Kazakh officials functioned as affiliated agents and informants; Russian merchants worked as agents on behalf of Russian actors; and, finally, slaves themselves were "saved Christian souls", returned subjects of the Russian Empire, as well as reliable informants.[72]

The strategy of the Russian Empire was based on co-operation with autochthonous political and economic elites. The most widespread model implied the involvement of Bukharian and Khivan merchants. The imperial decrees of the 24 October 1777 and the 22 May 1784 regulated the reimbursement of ransom expenses. The Orenburg Border Commission usually paid more than the budgeted 150 rubles in order to motivate Asian merchants to engage in ransoming, but that amount did not cover the merchants' expenses. This fact can explain the relatively small number of ransomed slaves each year.[73] Most attempts to involve ransomed people in covering the expenses were unsuccessful.[74] Other sources of compensation were "ransom taxes", which were levied from the Kazakhs. They can be considered as a kind of collective responsibility: the Russian administration made all members of the tribe responsible for capturing Russian subjects. The ransom amounts paid for different people reflected their relative social value. Old soldiers, those who were not able to serve, and serfs were usually valued at around 150 rubles (standard ransom amount). For younger people, who were likely to be able to re-integrate into the Russian social system, the state treasury paid more.

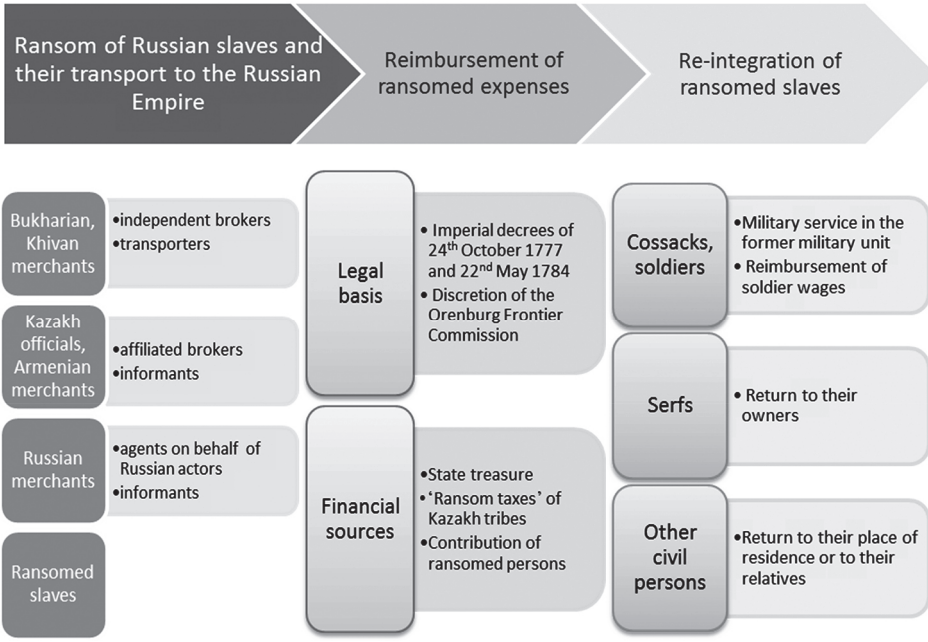
The imperial ransoming practice evidences co-operation processes on the Kazakh-Russian frontier. Motivated by their own interests, the Russian, Kazakh, Armenian, Bukharian and Khivan actors negotiated a variety of ransoming networks and patterns. Even if the raiding and enslavement of the frontier population constituted a space of conflicts, the ransoming practice established a space of exchange relations of frontier actors.

72 For more about "mobility of knowledge" between Central Asia and the Russian Empire in the 19th century and released slaves as "knowledge brokers" see Smolarz 2014.

73 According to official imperial reports, the amount of ransoming cases was not higher than 20 per year in the first half of the 19th century; TsGARKaz, f. 4, op.1, d. 497, 504, 581, 621 and GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32.

74 GAOO, f. 222, op. 1, d. 32, l. 65-68, 74-75, 80; TsGARKaz, f. 4, op. 1, d. 504, l. 2-20.

Figure 2: Ransoming actors and models



6. Conclusion

The Kazakh-Russian frontier in the 19th century included both conflicts and cross-border co-operation: drawing symbolic boundaries, establishing concepts for legitimising enslavement or ransoming based on perceptions of "selves" and "others", as well as negotiating pragmatic co-operation networks and patterns. While enslavement was legitimised through symbolic difference and in some cases superiority, most cases of ransoming, in contrast, required symbolic ties between those paying the ransom and the captured persons. These ties justified the ransom. Until the 19th century, religious factors played a crucial role in the identification of "selves" from "others". These religious aspects also shaped official "abolition" discourses. The cases analysed here involve different groups of actors, who sometimes form alliances, while at other times come into conflict, depending on their situated interests. The coerced cross-border mobility of enslaved captives combined both violent capture and enslavement as well as the co-operation of different frontier actors engaged in ransoming.

The growing political influence of the Russian Empire in the Kazakh Steppe resulted in the establishment of new co-operation patterns between autochthonous populations. The first type constituted co-operation with local elites, namely the khans and sultans. In return for their loyalty and support in capturing and returning Russian subjects, they were granted financial support, valuable gifts, assurance of Russian patron-

age and military support for strengthening their positions. The second type was the establishment of Kazakh clerks (official institutional co-operation) and *konfidents* (semi-official co-operation for collecting information). Finally, the co-operation of some – but not all – nomadic groups in the capture and return of Russian subjects may indicate segmentation within the wider nomadic tribes in the region. We can see their co-operation as a strategy for co-operation with a patron.

The nature of the frontier regime offered many opportunities for transcultural co-operation powered by varied reasons, ranging from the pragmatic to the idealistic. In ransoming Russian slaves, the Russian Empire had political, economic and religious interests. The Russian Orthodox Church highlighted its mission to save lost Christian souls from infidels. Ransoming mostly concerned the Christian slaves. The ransoming of Russian subjects was a sign of public welfare because the ransom amounts were paid from the state treasury. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs benefited from reliable information from ransomed slaves regarding trade, location, as well as the political and economic situation in Central Asia. For the Bukharian and Khivan agents, ransoming was a part of the slave trade – it was a good market for old slaves. Agents with political affiliations to the Russian Empire enjoyed better economic, social and symbolic benefits. For non-Christian subjects, participation in ransom activities provided a good way to prove their loyalty towards the Russian Empire.

Even if ransoming cases constituted just a small part of cross-border interactions in this frontier region in the early 19th century, further research on co-operation networks and practices will help to reconstruct the complexity of social and cultural entanglements in the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia in the 19th century.

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d. 494 'Vedomost' po chislu plennykh za 1800 god'.

d. 497 'Vedomosti o chisle plennykh s 1803 po 1812 goda'.

d. 504 'Delo ob udovletvorenii Khivinskogo kuptsa Niiazmeta Kurbanova za vyvezennogo im iz Khivy plennogo Ivana pokazavshegosja g. zavodchitsy Beketovoi krest'ianinom Ivana Malafeeva (1807) '.

d. 581 'Delo o plennykh, vyvezennykh iz Bukharskogo khanstva, 1809-1833'.

d. 621 'Delo o vyvezenii plennykh iz Sredneaziatskikh khanstv, o plenenii lits kazakhami, o beglykh plennykh (1810)'.

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