



Article

A Look at The Historiography of Joseph Antoine Castagne's Work

Dekhkonov Anvar Valijonovich¹

1. Researcher at Namangan Institute of Engineering and Construction

* Correspondence: guyosh0817@gmail.com

Abstract: This article analyzes the scientific studies and opinions expressed by contemporaries, Soviet-era, and modern researchers regarding the activities of French scientist Joseph Antoine Castagne in the territory of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: J. Castagne, Central Asia, Turkestan, Russian Empire, Soviet Union, Barthold, Masson, Gorshenina, Madji, Domrovsky, Zimin, Veselovsky, Babakhodjaev, Archaeology, Oriental studies.

1. Introduction

Although the scientific research conducted in our country during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries served the colonial and invasive policies of the Russian Empire, many researchers among them strived to maintain scientific objectivity in announcing, recording, and formalizing the information obtained through their research. One such researcher was the Frenchman Joseph Antoine Castagne. Castagne conducted scientific research in archaeology, ethnography, speleology, linguistics, numismatics, geography, and other fields, contributing significantly to the development of historical, ethnographic, and museological fields in Central Asia, particularly in Turkestan, through numerous scientific works and articles. Joseph Antoine Castagne was born in 1875 in the small town of Gaillac, France, and died in 1958 in Montpellier. Although he was born and died in France, he spent the most active 20 years of his life in the Russian Empire. After obtaining a diploma that gave him the right to teach French in secondary schools, J. Castagne came to Russia from France in spring 1899. In February 1901, after successfully passing the examination at the pedagogical council of the Vladikavkaz gymnasium, he was appointed as a French language teacher at the gymnasium. In 1904, Castagne made his first trip to Turkestan. From 1909, J. Castagne began serving as the curator of the museum under the patronage of the Orenburg Scientific Archive Commission. He obtained Russian citizenship on September 28, 1913. In 1912, at his own request, he received permission to transfer his work activities to Tashkent. Subsequently, he began serving as a French language teacher and class supervisor at a specialized secondary school in Tashkent. From this period, this Frenchman's research in the Turkestan region continued on a large scale.

2. Materials and Methods

J. Castagne's interesting and complex life and work can be considered among the relatively understudied topics. Several factors can be cited as reasons for this. In particular, Castagne's contemporaries did not recognize him as an archaeologist or researcher. As a result, his scientific works were not adequately valued as scientific sources during his time

Citation: Valijonovich D. A. A Look at The Historiography of Joseph Antoine Castagne's Work. Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History 2025, 6(2), 96-101.

Received: 01st March 2025

Revised: 02nd March 2025

Accepted: 03rd March 2025

Published: 05th March 2025



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

and later periods. Especially during the Soviet era, J. Castagne was viewed as a former spy for England and France. Consequently, even Castagne's scientific hypotheses and conclusions, which were proven correct over time, were not properly evaluated, and such evaluation was not even allowed. Only after the collapse of the Soviet state were several important steps taken towards studying J. Castagne's life and scientific heritage. Nevertheless, the scientific works conducted so far are absolutely insufficient compared to J. Castagne's more than 70 scientific works on the history and socio-political life of Central Asia and Turkestan. Taking this into account, in this article, we attempted to take a look at the historiography of J. Castagne's life and work.

3. Results

The historiography of J. Castagne's complex life path and diverse scientific research appears to be divided into 3 periods: 1) Research during the Russian Empire period; 2) Soviet-era research; 3) Scientific research conducted in post-Soviet years.

During the Russian Empire period, evaluations of J. Castagne's works varied. Especially in Tashkent's rapidly developing intellectual environment until the 1920s, many high-ranking orientalists were engaged in scientific activities. Among them, there was a tendency to view the work of scholars like J. Castagne, who were foreign to Russia, with jealousy and suspicion.

During the imperial period, Turkestan researchers criticized J.A. Castagne for his lack of specialized knowledge in oriental studies (although he knew Persian). They objected to the superficiality of his research conclusions, his tendency toward literary embellishment, several historical errors, and his use of translations that were considered "scientifically invalid." According to scholar S. Gorshenina, J. Castagne used translations of Arabic chronicles prepared by German scholar W. Tomaschek. He was also criticized for not knowing the rules of transcribing personal names and geographical objects, improper formatting of scientific reference systems, non-compliance with citation rules, incorrect historical parallels, and lack of knowledge of new research in oriental studies.

One such critic, archaeologist L.A. Zimin, strongly criticized Castagne's report about his journey to the Namangan district of Fergana province in an article published in "Turkestanskije Vedomosti" newspaper in 1914. Similar critical views were expressed by Professor N.I. Veselovsky, and there are records and letters showing that J. Castagne attempted to respond to these criticisms.

Nevertheless, V. Barthold, one of the most prestigious representatives of orientalists working in Turkestan during the Russian Empire period, after studying several of J. Castagne's scientific works, gave the following general assessment of his activities: "Among the personal archaeological collections I have examined, I can particularly highlight the collection belonging to I.A. Castagne. This collection, gathered through numerous business trips and travels, is preserved in complete order. The origin of each item is clearly indicated." Furthermore, in his post-1920 article "Immediate Tasks in the Study of Turkestan," V. Barthold wrote, "Researchers in archaeology must limit themselves to collecting, preserving, and externally describing scientific materials. It would be better to say it's too early for attempts to accurately evaluate these materials as historical sources. Because currently, most written sources (related to Turkestan history) remain unstudied. Turkestan researchers, even those who know oriental languages, can only partially manage to study these sources. At present, it's possible to create an archaeological map of Turkestan, although it will need to be modified and supplemented later. This work can be accomplished by researchers like Castagne, who had the necessary preparation and experience level and recently left our region."

It should be noted that during the Russian Empire period, J. Castagne's social status was very prestigious. Only a few of his contemporaries were considered worthy of giving

scientific evaluations of his research, especially critical ones. In most cases, J. Castagne's scientific research reports were well received.

During the Soviet period, many researchers who had been colleagues with J. Castagne came to terms with the government and continued their scientific work. As a result, attitudes toward J. Castagne's personality and scientific activities were also conducted within the framework of Soviet government criteria.

In 1918, the Bolsheviks attempted to arrest J. Castagne on suspicion of "participating in organizing actions against the revolutionary government." However, having been warned early, J. Castagne managed to hide in the Fergana mountains. After staying among national fighters against the Bolsheviks until February 1919, he succeeded in escaping to France. From this period onwards, a hostile and negative attitude toward J. Castagne began to develop in Russia and Turkestan. As a result, several Soviet archaeologists and historians expressed negative opinions about J. Castagne. Soviet historians A.Ch. Abutalibov, A.Kh. Babakhodjaev, A.I. Zevelev, Yu.A. Polyakov, L. Shishkina, and others believed Castagne was "affiliated with France's Second Bureau or one of the British intelligence service's spies." They described him as an "accomplice of bourgeois imperialism". In particular, A.Kh. Babakhodjaev, citing several of J. Castagne's works published in France, evaluated him as a spy similar to British military officer F. Bailey and the United Kingdom's chief ambassador in Kashgar, P. Etherton. However, in the cited passages, Castagne merely stated that he had complete information about how the British consul in Kashgar supported and inspired the national statehood movement against the Bolsheviks in the Fergana Valley.

In 1958, B.V. Lunin was among the first Soviet historians to illuminate Castagne's activities in archaeology. As a result, it became public knowledge that there were many studies associated with this French scholar's name.

In 1964, Yuri Dombrovsky took the first step toward a more objective study of the subject, free from Soviet government criteria, with his novel "The Keeper of Antiquities" (*Khranitel drevnostey*) and his extensive 1965 article "Who Are You Really, Joseph Castagne?" ("Kto zhe vy, Jozef Kastane?"). However, it should be noted that in Yu. Dombrovsky's creative works, J. Castagne's personality was approached with strong affection. His activities were described with strong artistic coloring. In fact, as noted by famous orientologists, J. Castagne's scientific works clearly lacked theoretical substantiation and ideological direction in scientific conclusions. However, considering the level of scientific development at that time and that the foundation of knowledge about the Central Asian region was just being formed, J. Castagne succeeded in going beyond the "tradition of limiting oneself to searching, gathering, and collecting materials for science" like most pre-revolutionary archaeologist-regional specialists, by attempting to present his research through scientific-comparative analysis.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, from the 1990s, articles containing results of broader and more detailed research about Castagne's life and scientific heritage began to appear.

Among the first, S. Madji published a major article about J. Castagne in 1993. The article presented analytical thoughts aimed at clarifying this Frenchman's political status and position regarding both the Soviet state and the national statehood movement fighting against it. According to S. Madji's conclusions, while J. Castagne was in close contact with representatives of anti-Soviet organizations, he did not act as an enemy of the Soviet state. Madji notes that there is no serious evidence proving he was a spy; on the contrary, in his political works published after 1920, J. Castagne attempted to analyze political processes by citing numerous quotations from newspapers published in the Soviet Union. Additionally, Madji emphasizes that today, J. Castagne's works on historical, archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic, and other topics serve as one of the main sources for conducting research about the Turkestan region.

4. Discussion

From the mid-1990s, researcher S. Gorshenina, originally from Uzbekistan, published a series of articles about J. Castagne's life and work. Unlike Soviet historians, her articles provide a subjective evaluation of J. Castagne's scientific works and biography. According to S. Gorshenina, J. Castagne's diverse works, resulting from his various interests, deserve worthy attention from orientalists, historians, and archaeologists.

S. Gorshenina points out that researchers like J. Castagne freely conducting scientific research in various fields, participating in archaeological expeditions, and even leading such expeditions did not raise any questions or objections at the time. She notes that no educational institution in the Russian Empire at that time trained specialists with knowledge in conducting archaeological research. She also mentions that at the initiative of A.V. Popov, a doctor and chairman of the Orenburg Scientific Archive Commission, a pamphlet titled "The Archaeologist's Companion" was compiled by commission members who included no professional archaeologists, and was provided as a guide to local historians and amateur archaeologists.

S. Gorshenina attempts to prove in her articles that Soviet historians' negative attitudes toward Castagne's personality and scientific research were an unjust consequence of the ideological politics of that time.

In 2000, orientalist academician L.I. Miroshnikov published part of the documents relating to J.A. Castagne's life and work. These documents were given to him in the 1960s by one of Castagne's daughters, O.I. Tikhanova.

At that time, in the 1960s, Castagne's youngest daughter Olga Iosifovna Tikhanova, who worked in UNESCO's Russian translation department, handed over her father's archive to L.I. Miroshnikov, which made it possible to end the search for Castagne's "lost" archive. According to L.I. Miroshnikov, this archive contained manuscripts, watercolor and ink drawings of pottery and other archaeological findings, Castagne's photographs and personal documents, and most valuably, two ancient manuscripts by N.N. Pantusov about Muslim cemeteries.

Interestingly, L.I. Miroshnikov was only able to publicly report about Castagne after nearly 40 years. This was because even for L.I. Miroshnikov, an academician of the former USSR Academy of Sciences, expressing opinions during the "Cold War" years about someone labeled as a "British spy" was quite a serious matter, and expressing positive opinions could even be considered a serious crime. As a result, L.I. Miroshnikov, a historian and orientalist who was also a World War II hero, refers in his articles about Castagne to the image of the "mysterious keeper of antiquities" created by Yu. Dombrovsky, focusing mainly on Castagne's activities as an antiquarian. Important information such as dates, correspondence, and photographs remains unilluminated, and ultimately, Castagne's biography remains practically unknown and full of mysteries.

B.A. Litvinsky, who considered S. Gorshenina's thoughts and information about J. Castagne debatable, published an article titled "Researcher-Scholar or Amateur Regional Specialist?" [review of S.M. Gorshenina's article] in Russia's "Vostok - Oriens" scientific journal in 1999. In the article, B.A. Litvinsky portrays J. Castagne as a simple amateur collector and person far from science, as he was described in former USSR-era research.

S. Gorshenina, while acknowledging the validity of several critical observations that emerged during the detailed analysis of J. Castagne's activities as an archaeologist and comparison with subsequent research results, emphasizes that many of B.A. Litvinsky's views are not free from doubt. S. Gorshenina justifies her views as follows: "In my opinion, Castagne's personality, despite all the shortcomings of my scientific approach, is not devoid of interest. Although J. Castagne was French by origin, he lived in the Russian Empire for more than 20 years, managing to publish more than 70 works dedicated to its Asian possessions and integrate into the intellectual life of Orenburg and Russian Turkestan. I recall that he was vice-chairman of the Orenburg Scientific Archive Commission from 1909-1912, where he was a member, curator of the commission's

museum, active member of TACE (Turkestan Amateur Circle of Archaeology) and the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, and officially served as a member of the supervisory committee at the Turkestan Public Library and Turkestan Museum, as well as vice-chairman of the Turkomstaris committee. In this respect, Castagne cannot be compared with any Western researcher of that time. Western researchers often either didn't pay attention to Turkestan due to the political situation or stayed here for a very short time.

In recent years, J. Castagne's scientific activities have been actively studied by Kazakhstani researchers. Particularly, his scientific works reflecting research conducted in the Kazakh steppes are now considered among very important scientific-historical and ethnographic sources.

In recent years, there have also been several scientific works and references in our country regarding J. Castagne's life and scientific activities. In particular, researchers such as V. Germanov, A. Azimov, E. Ryabov published broader articles containing analytical thoughts about J. Castagne's life and work. A. Tsapenko translated part of J. Castagne's book "Les Basmachis" from French to Russian. Additionally, many researchers including A.A. Anarbaev, Yu.F. Buryakov, V.S. Minasyants, R.Kh. Suleymanov have referenced J. Castagne's research in their scientific works.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, J. Castagne's scientific research should be studied extensively as an important source alongside the research of accomplished orientalists and archaeologists of his time, and should be recognized with appropriate scientific status. This is because J. Castagne's scientific works were recognized as research that adequately met the requirements of his era. It is quite close to the truth to say that even those who expressed critical views of his scientific activities conducted research with knowledge and skills at the level of J. Castagne in their time.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. V. Dekhqonov, "Foreign scholars in the study of our country's history: I. A. Castagne and his scientific activity," *Bulletin of the Khorezm Mamun Academy*, vol. 2022, no. 3, Khiva, 2022.
- [2] A. Dekhqonov, "Joseph Antoine Castagne's research in Akhsikent," in *Proceedings of the International Scientific-Practical Conference on the Socio-Economic and Political Life of the Peoples of Central Asia (from the Middle Ages to the Present)*, Andijan: Step by Step Print Publishing, Andijan State University, 2024, pp. 94-99.
- [3] S. M. Gorshenina, "Central Asia in the works of Joseph-Antoine Castagne," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Paris, 07 March 1997, p. 12. Available: svetlana.gorshenina.free.fr/castagne_rus.html.
- [4] S. Madji, "I. A. Castagne as a historian of Central Asia," *Social Sciences in Uzbekistan*, no. 6, pp. 15, 1993.
- [5] V. Bartold, *Collected Works*, vol. 8, Moscow, 1977, p. 337.
- [6] V. V. Bartold, *Collected Works*, vol. 9, Moscow, 1917, p. 549.
- [7] J. Castagné, *Les Basmachis: The National Movement of the Indigenous Peoples of Central Asia from the October Revolution 1917 to October 1924*, Paris, 1925, pp. 24-25.
- [8] A. Kh. Babakhojaev, "Response to falsifiers," *Social Sciences in Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, no. 11, pp. 48-50, 1961.
- [9] B. V. Lunin, *From the History of Russian Oriental Studies and Archaeology in Turkestan: Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts (1895-1917)*, Tashkent: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, 1958, pp. 41-134.
- [10] Y. O. Dombrovsky, *Guardian of Antiquities*, Moscow, 1991, p. 21.
- [11] Y. O. Dombrovsky, "Who are you, Joseph Castagne?" *Kazakhstan Pravda*, 15 August 1965.
- [12] S. M. Gorshenina, "The Strange Archaeologist Castagne," *Star of the East*, Tashkent, no. 3, pp. 146-159, 1996.

- [13] S. M. Gorshenina, "Non-Apology for Castagne," in *Aral-Caspian Region in the History and Culture of Eurasia*, Aktobe University, Kazakhstan, no. 1, pp. 104-111, 2006.
- [14] S. Uderbaeva, A. Sagatov, and E. Kakimzhanov, "Sacred Geography of Central Asia in the Works of Joseph-Antoine Castagne," *Bylye Gody – Historical Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 789-799, 2022.
- [15] U. Akhmetova, A. Mukhtar, and A. Nurmanova, "Historical and Ethnographic Research of Kazakhstan by Foreign Scientists of the 19th–20th Centuries (On the Example of the Scientific Research of the Frenchman J. A. Castagne)," *Bylye Gody – Russian Historical Journal*, Sochi State University, no. 42, pp. 1305-1314, 2016.
- [16] V. A. Germanov, "French People in Uzbekistan," *Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan*, Open Society Institute – Assistance Foundation, Uzbekistan, p. 234, 2002.
- [17] A. Azimov, "History of Turkestan, the Basmachi movement, and the fate of Qurboshi studied by the French scholar Joseph Antoine Castagne – What did he write?" *Oyina*, 21 June 2023.
- [18] E. Ryabov, "Here is Castagne, there is Castagne... The book 'Basmachi' and its author," *Vostok Svysh – Spiritual, Literary and Historical Journal*, Tashkent, vol. LVI, no. 2, pp. 77-86, April–June 2021.
- [19] J. Castagné, *Basmachi: The National Movement of the Indigenous Peoples of Central Asia After the Revolution (From October 1917 to October 1924)*, Translated from French by Anatoly Tsapenko, *Vostok Svysh – Spiritual, Literary and Historical Journal*, Tashkent, vol. LVI, no. 2, pp. 33-76, April–June 2021.
- [20] A. A. Anarbaev, "Akhsikent in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Soviet Archaeology*, no. 1, pp. 171-187, 1988.
- [21] Y. F. Buryakov, *Ancient and Medieval Cities of Eastern Maverannahr*, Tashkent, 1990.
- [22] M. Kh. Isammiddinov and R. Kh. Suleymanov, *Yerkurgan: Stratigraphy and Periodization*, Tashkent, 1984.
- [23] V. S. Minasyants, "On the History of the Archaeological Collection of the Museum of the History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan (1876-1917)," in *Thread Connecting the Times (Based on Museum Collections)*, Tashkent, 1992, pp. 22-23.
- [24] R. Kh. Sulejmanov, "The Monumental Architecture of Erkurgan: Religious and Community Complexes," in *History and Cults of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, eds. P. Bernard and F. Grenet, Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991, pp. 167-172.