Yermak's Campaign in Siberia

Terence Armstrong

THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY

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Yermak's Campaign in Siberia

A selection of documents translated from the Russian
by Tatiana Minorsky and David Wileman

Edited by
TERENCE ARMSTRONG

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Painting at the State Ru

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YERMAK'S CAMPAIGN IN SIBERIA

A selection of documents
translated from the Russian by
Tatiana Minorsky and David Wileman,
and edited,
with an introduction and notes,
by
TERENCE ARMSTRONG

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CONTENTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

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PREFACE

The Russian conquest of Siberia was an event of which the consequences have only slowly become apparent. Already great, they may come to dominate much of our world; with today's technology, a resource base of this size and richness confers immense power on the owner. The conquest was a gradual process of absorption. But if one had to assign a time and place for its start, then one would certainly choose the campaign of Yermak in the 1580's. This enterprise was by no means wholly successful, and probably fewer than a thousand Russians participated in it. But it was the first entry in force into Siberia, and Russian historians have long regarded it as crucial.

Among English-speakers, the events are not so well known. The object of this book is to provide the reader of English with translations of the most important documents relating to the campaign. There are several narrative accounts, collectively known as the Siberian chronicles. They tell a reasonably coherent story, but can be usefully supplemented by some background information about the region, the times, and the documents themselves. The introduction covers the more general points. Matters of finer detail are commented on in footnotes; but a footnote is not repeated, if the same matter arises in another chronicle, so the series should be read consecutively.

A new Russian edition of the Siberian chronicles is reported to be in preparation. Two groups of scholars are involved, one at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, the other at the Academy's Siberian Division at Novosibirsk. While the new edition will surely contain interesting new material, the scope and detail of that edition are likely to be such as to carry it far beyond the relatively modest aims of the present one, so that to delay publication until the appearance of the Russian edition does not seem justified.

The territory in which the events took place has been, ever since, part of Russia. So the place-names used here, if they are to be found on modern maps, should be those in current Soviet official use, which, in the best British and American usage, are transliterated according to the system approved by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use and the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. The same transliteration system has been used, for convenience, in rendering personal names and bibliographical references. Certain proper names in the accounts are non-Russian in origin, but the Russian or russianised forms are used here, because they are most commonly found in the literature, which is predominantly Russian.

Thus Kuchum, Mametkul, Khodzha are preferred to Kucum, Memetkul, Hoca. The foregoing refers to editorial use of proper names. The translations retain in transliteration whatever oddities and inconsistencies of spelling are found in the original documents. Variant forms are brought together in the index.

Many people have helped in the preparation of this edition. First I must record special thanks to Mrs Tatiana Minorsky and Mr David Wileman, the translators. Mrs Minorsky translated the Remezov chronicle and the royal charters and letters, and Mr Wileman translated the Stroganov and the Yesipov chronicles. Both performed their exacting task with great skill and meticulous care, and both also contributed many points of critical commentary. But as editor, I must accept responsibility for any error in the translations, for I made a number of adjustments in the cause of consistency.

I would like to record my appreciation of the late Mr A. M. Richwood, who took the initiative, together with Mr G. R. Crone, in proposing the edition to the Hakluyt Society, and who carried out a considerable amount of background research while serving on the library staff of the Royal Geographical Society. Mr W. Harrison of Durham University kindly contributed the section of the introduction on 'Yermak as folk-hero'. Very special thanks are due to Dr Nikolay Andreyev, Professor Elizabeth Hill and Dr Will Ryan for the care and trouble they have taken in checking my typescript. Help and advice on various matters was freely given by Professors Lucien Lewitter of Cambridge, M. I. Belov of Leningrad, Menahem Milson of Jerusalem and Marc Szeftel of the University of Washington; by Mr Paul Putz of Luxembourg; by Mr Peter Avery, Mr Nicholas Penny, and Dr Susan Skilliter of Cambridge; and by Mademoiselle de Bonnières, the most helpful librarian of the Institut des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris.

The Library of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Librarian, Dr D. V. Ter-Avanesyan) kindly allowed me to reproduce in its entirety the Mirovich version of the Remezov chronicle, which is held in the collection of that library. I am likewise indebted to the Director of the State Russian Museum in Leningrad for permission to reproduce Surikov's painting. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris provided much appreciated help in locating rare publications.

The maps were drawn by Miss Anne Swithinbank.

Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge TERENCE ARMSTRONG
March 1975

INTRODUCTION

Muscovy's eastern frontier in the 16th century

Ivan III, who ruled in Moscow from 1462 to 1505, earned his title of 'the Great' largely by his absorption of the territory belonging to Novgorod, hitherto the dominant Slav state in the Russian plain. In so doing, Ivan advanced his frontier to the northern Urals, for the Pechora basin, a region renowned for its fur resources, had long been a colony of Novgorod; and Novgorod, which was above all interested in trade, attached special importance to the fur trade. Ivan sent expeditions to this newly-acquired territory: one under Prince Fedor Kurbskiy in 1483 and another under Prince Semen Kurbskiy in 1499. These consolidated the Russian presence, chastened the native inhabitants, and carried their operations beyond the Urals into the lower Ob' valley. From 1484 Ivan added to his titles 'Lord of Yugra' – a somewhat vague place-name connoting the land on both sides of the northern Urals.[1]

But this eastward advance took place only north of about the 60th parallel, in a region, therefore, far to the north-east of Moscow. The more direct route to the east was blocked by the Tatar khanate of Kazan'. This was all that survived, in much diminished form, of the Golden Horde, the Mongol state which emerged in south Russia after the great conquests of half the world under Chingis (or Gengis) Khan. The Mongol, or Tatar, domination (Tatar is here used to signify the Turkic-speaking peoples who served in the Mongol forces) held Muscovy and other Slav principalities in subjection for well over two centuries, but for the latter part of this period its power was crumbling. The independent khanate of Kazan' was formed in the middle of the 15th century, and soon afterwards the land of Sibir', on the Irtysh river, also subject to the Golden Horde, broke away to become another independent khanate.[2] The process of dissolution made it likely that when a resolute blow was struck, resistance would not be great. That time came in 1552, when Ivan IV defeated the Tatar army and took Kazan'. Four years later, he took also the khanate of Astrakhan, and the

[1] Yugra comes from *yögra*, a word the Zyrians used for the Ostyaks, so it came to mean the lands the Ostyaks lived in (see below, pp. 22–3). In early times this was on both sides of the mountains, but later Yugra connoted only the eastern side. See L. S. Berg, *Istoriya russkikh geograficheskikh otkrytiy* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 59–60.

[2] The name Sibir' is used in these translations, in preference to the anglicisation Siberia, because Sibir' then connoted a very small part of what we now understand by Siberia; and the adjective Siberian refers to Sibir'.

whole length of the Volga was in his hands. The more direct route to the east now lay open.

The Siberian khanate was untouched directly by this conquest, but it was now, of course, dangerously exposed to Moscow's power. The only protection was the Urals, and not only are they a rather unimpressive physical barrier in these latitudes, but the Russians had already given ample evidence of their ability to cross them. The rulers of the khanate at this time were Yediger and Bekbulat, sons of Kasim, and in 1555 Yediger thought it wise to send ambassadors to Moscow, who acknowledged him a vassal of Ivan IV, and agreed to pay an annual tribute of furs. In this way Moscow secured some influence in their territory. Yediger's reason for making the arrangement seems to have been a desire to find an ally against his neighbours. But the arrangement was not long-lasting, for in 1563 both Yediger and Bekbulat were deposed and killed by Kuchum, son of Murtaza, the ruler of the Uzbeks. This move was one more act, and not the last, in the long-standing rivalry between the descendants of Taibuga and those of Sheiban, grandson of Chingis Khan. Yediger and Bekbulat were Taibugids, Kuchum was a Sheibanid.

The arrival on the scene of Kuchum, who was to be one of the chief actors in the drama of Yermak's campaign, and the one cast by all Russian historians in the role of villain, did not at once change things. He started by continuing the payment of tribute, but the last time he did so was in 1571. His emissaries to Moscow on that occasion came just after the city had been beseiged and partly burnt by the Tatar army of Devlet-Girey, khan of the Crimea, and they reported back, no doubt, on the disarray they had seen. Kuchum clearly intended to put an end to Russian encroachment. In 1572 the Cheremis (now called Mari), a Uralian people living on the Volga above Kazan', revolted against the Russians and pillaged settlements on the Kama and Chusovaya rivers. Kuchum, their neighbour across the mountains, may have had something to do with this. But the more open break came in the following year, when Ivan IV's ambassador, Tret'yak Chebukov, or Chubukov, who had arrived in 1572 to receive the tribute, and had been welcomed by Kuchum, was killed on Kuchum's orders when on his way back to Moscow. At the same time Kuchum's nephew Mametkul led a raid across the Urals into Russian territory. The vassal period was over, and Moscow reacted in 1574 by empowering the merchant family of Stroganov to establish strongholds on the *eastern* slopes of the Urals.

Before considering the role of this important and energetic family, let us take account of the nature of the frontier and of Moscow's attitude towards it. There was no exact line of demarcation on any map, much less on the ground. Persons owing allegiance to Moscow lived in lands which adjoined those of persons claimed by the khan of Sibir'; but much more than this could not be said. The situation was further complicated by the fact that there could be many degrees of vassaldom. The people

of Vyatka, for instance, though not necessarily whole-hearted in their allegiance, were at this time more reliable than the Cheremis, who were in turn less friendly than the Permians who lived to the north of them. Even the khanate of Sibir' itself might have been thought of as within the frontier after Yediger's agreement of 1555 to pay tribute; and indeed Ivan IV dubbed himself at that time 'Lord of all the Siberian land' (i vseya sibirskya zemli povelitel') – and instructed his ambassadors about how to answer questions foreigners might ask about this.

The eastern frontier was therefore an indefinite concept; and Moscow's attitude towards it was also somewhat indefinite. While there were no carefully-considered expansionist plans, there was no disinclination to move eastwards if opportunity offered. The economic motivation for such a move had long existed: it was the search for fur – a commodity which continued to be very valuable. It is not necessary to elaborate here on the great importance of the fur industry in the Russia of the 16th century, for it has been admirably described by R. H. Fisher in *The Russian fur trade*, 1550–1700 (Berkeley, 1943).[1]

The Stroganovs

Records of the Stroganov family go back to the 14th century (Vvedenskiy, 1962, pp. 15–16. This work is also a main source for the account which follows). Originally probably from the White Sea – the idea that they are descended from a *murza*[2] of the Golden Horde is now discounted – they moved eastwards and settled at Sol'vychegodsk, on the Vychegda near modern Kotlas, towards the end of the 15th century. Anika Fedorovich Stroganov (1497–1570) built up a great trading concern, based in Sol'vychegodsk, and dealing in agricultural products, furs, and salt. As regards salt, he was a pioneer in this region (Sol'vychegodsk means the salt works on the Vychegda), and he extended his operations over a wide area. Iron, both mining and working, was another major interest; copper followed. In 1558 Anika acquired from the tsar rights in the region of Perm' ('the Permian patrimony'), and soon Stroganov agents were seeking iron and copper on the Kama and its tributaries which come down from the western slopes of the Urals. In the other direction, the family was trading at Kola, close to the frontier with Norway; and there were even links with central Asia. So the firm's interests embraced a tremendous stretch of territory. Not all of it was owned by the Stroganovs, of course; but a remarkably large

[1] The main sources, for this section in particular, but also for much background information elsewhere, are the researches of Soviet scholars: S. V. Bakhrushin, *Nauchnyye trudy* (Moscow, 1955), Tom III, Chast' 1, pp. 15–71; A. P. Okladnikov, ed., *Istoriya Sibiri* (Moscow, 1968), Tom II, pp. 25–41; A. A. Vvedenskiy, *Dom Stroganovykh v XVI–XVII vekakh* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 15–110; and A. A. Preobrazhenskiy, *Ural i Zapadnaya Sibir' v kontse XVI–nachale XVIII veka* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 15–26. Full references are given in the list on pp. 296–303.

[2] Minor nobility in Turco-Tatar tribes. There is no glossary; the index may be used.

amount was. Anika had three sons, Yakov, Grigoriy and Semen. Yakov and Grigoriy took special interest in the eastern domains, while Semen, the youngest, was concerned more with the affairs at the headquarters, Sol'vychegodsk.

A commercial empire of this size was bound to attract the close attention of the central government. Moscow was very interested in many products of the Stroganov industries, and indeed it is chiefly through the surviving orders and instructions from the tsar that we learn of their activities. Not only did the tsar buy Stroganov goods, he also borrowed Stroganov money. A rather special relationship grew up. In a certain sense the Stroganovs became agents of the tsar, especially in the Urals region.

Anika died in 1570. He was a deeply religious man, caused many churches to be built in his domains, and a short time before his death became a monk (an action not unusual at that time). The patrimony was to be divided equally between the three sons. But there was a family row, for in 1573 we find Yakov and Grigoriy complaining to the tsar that Semen had got more than his share. This was adjusted, but bad feeling naturally remained.

Yakov and Grigoriy continued to spend most of their time in the Permian lands. But in 1577 and 1578 they died, and their mantles fell upon Yakov's son Maksim Yakovlevich and Grigoriy's son Nikita Grigor'yevich, young men of twenty-one and sixteen years of age respectively. It was these two who were most closely concerned, a year or two later, in the events described in these chronicles. It should be remembered, however, that Sol'vychegodsk remained, for the rest of the century, the main centre of the Stroganov commercial empire. Semen Anikiyevich lived there until his death, at the hands of some of his retainers, in 1586.

Let us now revert to the role of the Stroganovs in the eastward expansion of Muscovy. The fact that Ivan IV had approved in 1558 (text of charter on pp. 281–4) of the Stroganovs exploring and exploiting the Permian lands may be interpreted as a first move, at government level, in feeling the way eastwards. In 1572 another royal charter (see pp. 288–9) authorised the Stroganovs to send troops against the Cheremis. Then, in 1574, came the decree already referred to (see pp. 289–92) which authorised the building of strongpoints across the Urals, on the Tobol, Irtysh and Ob'. Ivan was clearly using his merchant friends to further aims in which his government was just as much interested as they were.

A central point in our narrative is now reached, when the cossack Yermak Timofeyevich first appears on the scene. The background to this is still controversial. His name is first mentioned in the royal charter of 16 November 1582 (see pp. 293–4), which roundly dresses down the Stroganovs for sending him and his men to the wrong place. The point still hotly debated is this: did the Stroganovs summon Yermak and his band to come and fight their war for them across the Urals; or did he

come of his own accord? In other words, was the initial Russian penetration into Siberia a Stroganov idea, planted in their minds perhaps by Moscow, or was it an idea of the simple man of the people, Yermak? The historians of Siberia take opposite sides on this issue. In the 19th century, most thought Yermak was summoned by the Stroganovs: N. M. Karamzin, N. G. Ustryalov, S. M. Solov'yev, L. N. Maykov, Ye. Ye. Zamyslovskiy, and A. A. Dmitriyev;[1] but P. I. Nebol'sin and S. A. Adrianov[2] held the view that the Stroganovs played no part in Yermak's campaign. The first group was joined in the 20th century by S. F. Platonov, V. I. Ogorodnikov, B. Nolde, S. V. Bakhrushin, V. I. Sergeyev, A. A. Vvedenskiy, and G. Vernadsky;[3] while new adherents to the second were A. M. Stavrovich and A. I. Andreyev.[4] Thus the two major contributors of the last twenty years, Vvedenskiy and Andreyev, are divided on this issue. A compromise position, that the Stroganovs provided none of the initiative, but were obliged, through fear of Yermak, to furnish him with supplies, was held by G. F. Müller, J. E. Fischer, P. A. Slovtsov and D. I. Ilovayskiy,[5] writing in the 18th and 19th centuries, but its only recent adherent is V. G. Mirzoyev.[6] The point here is that the so-called Stroganov chronicle (one of the three major chronicles

[1] The exact locations are as follows: N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva Rossiyskogo* (St Petersburg, 1821), Tom IX, pp. 380–8; N. G. Ustryalov, *Imenityye lyudi Stroganovy* (St Petersburg, 1842), pp. 17–19; S. M. Solov'yev, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen.* 2nd edition (St Petersburg, 1897), Tom VI, column 337–8; L. N. Maykov, 'Khronologicheskiye spravki po povodu 300-letney godovshchiny prisoyedineniya Sibiri k russkoy derzhave', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniya*, Tom CCXVII, Otdel 4 (1881), p. 26; Ye. Ye. Zamyslovskiy, 'Zanyatiye russkimi Sibiri', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniya*, Tom CCXXIII, Otdel 2 (1882), p. 232; and A. A. Dmitriyev, *Permskaya starina* (Perm', 1892), Vypusk 4, pp. 61–3, and 'Rol' Stroganovykh v pokorenii Sibiri', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniya*, Tom CCXCI, Otdel 2 (1894), p. 45.

[2] P. I. Nebol'sin, *Pokoreniye Sibiri* (St Petersburg, 1849), p. 63; and S. A. Adrianov, 'K voprosu o pokorenii Sibiri', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniya*, Tom CCLXXXVI, Otdel 4 (1893), p. 548.

[3] S. F. Platonov, *Proshloye russkogo severa* (Berlin 1924), pp. 100–1; V. I. Ogorodnikov, *Ocherki istorii Sibiri do nachala XIX st.* (Vladivostok, 1924), Chast' 2, Vypusk 1, pp. 25–7; B. Nolde, *La Formation de l'empire russe* (Paris, 1952), p. 160; S. V. Bakhrushin, 1955, pp. 20–32; V. I. Sergeyev, ' K voprosu o pokhode v Sibir' druzhiny Yermaka', *Voprosy istorii*, Tom I (1959), p. 129; A. A. Vvedenskiy, 1962, p. 97: and G. Vernadsky, *The tsardom of Moscow 1547–1682*, *Part 1* (New Haven, 1969), pp. 178–9.

[4] A. M. Stavrovich, 'Sergey Kubasov i Stroganovskaya letopis'', in *Sbornik statey po russkoy istorii, posvyashchennykh S. F. Platonovu* (Petrograd, 1922) pp. 279–93, and an unpublished work by her called *Sibirskiye letopisi. Etyud po istorii voprosa i analizu sibirskikh letopisey* (1920), in which she probably expresses the same views more fully (see Bakhrushin, 1955, p. 31); and A. I. Andreyev, *Ocherki po istochnikovedeniyu Sibiri.* 2nd edition (Moscow, Leningrad, 1960), Vypusk 1, p. 215.

[5] G. F. Müller, *Opisaniye Sibirskago tsarstva* (St Petersburg, 1750), p. 99; J. E. Fischer, *Sibirskaya istoriya s samogo otkrytiya Sibiri do zavoyevaniya sey zemli rossiyskim oruzhiyem* (St Petersburg, 1774), pp. 114–15; P. A. Slovtsov, *Pis'ma o Sibiri* (St Petersburg, 1826), pp. 49–52; and D. I. Ilovayskiy, 'Yermak i pokoreniye Sibiri', *Russkiy vestnik*, No. 9 (1889), p. 31.

[6] V. G. Mirzoyev, *Prisoyedineniye i osvoyeniye Sibiri v istoricheskoy literatury XVII veka* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 128, 163.

translated in this book) shows the Stroganovs as the motivating force; while the Yesipov chronicle – the other early one of the three – does not mention them at all. So the issue is closely connected with the view one takes of the Stroganov chronicle. If one believes it to be written by a Stroganov hireling who was willing to twist facts in order to glorify the family name, then one may doubt the whole Stroganov story. But, as Dvoretskaya and Vvedenskiy[1] show, Yesipov's silence is not conclusive, and the Stroganov writer need not have been doing anything more than interpreting facts from the Stroganov point of view. The important thing, says Vvedenskiy, is to judge the whole matter from the standpoint of Moscow's eastern policy; and in this context, Stroganov initiative was certainly to be expected: had Ivan not authorised them in 1574 to build strongpoints across the Urals? I find this view convincing. Besides, the New Chronicle (see pp. 278–80 below), probably written in 1630 and possibly the oldest account we have, states clearly that Maksim Stroganov summoned Yermak. Platonov (1924, p. 103) goes further than this, and postulates a two-pronged campaign against the Siberian khanate by the Stroganovs. For in 1581, he says, the Stroganovs were organising a sea-borne expedition to the Ob' by way of the Arctic Ocean, under the command of the Netherlander Oliver Brunel. But this seems somewhat far-fetched, for although Brunel did make journeys to the Ob' for the Stroganovs about this time, they were scarcely campaigns, serving rather the ends of trade and intelligence-gathering.

The event immediately preceding Yermak's advance over the Urals was the attack on the Stroganovs' Kama lands by Begbeliy Agtakov, a Vogul princeling. Although the Stroganov chronicle has this occurring on 1 September 1581, Vvedenskiy concludes this is a mistake for the year before (and not the only one of this kind in the chronicles, as we shall shortly see). Yermak's campaign was not just a reaction to this attack, however; for it had been planned (if we accept the Stroganov line) since some time before that.

The campaign

The progress of the campaign itself is best told by the chronicles. Although their tales are in some ways fanciful and in many ways confused, the story comes across quite clearly and requires no summarising here. The movements of Yermak and his men can be followed on Map 1, facing p. 18. A few points, however, require clarification or emphasis. The first of these concerns chronology.

The dates of various stages of the campaign, as given in the three major chronicles, are not always consistent either between one chronicle and another, or within a single chronicle. Impossibilities and unlikeli-

[1] N. A. Dvoretskaya, 'Ofitsial'naya i fol'klornaya otsenka pokhoda Yermaka v XVII v.', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoy literatury*, Tom XIV (1958), p. 334; A. A. Vvedenskiy, 1962, pp. 81–4.

hoods of several different kinds occur. For instance, the captured Tatar prince Mametkul is reported by the Remezov chronicle as being sent to Moscow in 1582, where he was brought before Tsar Fedor Ivanovich; but Fedor Ivanovich came to the throne only in 1584. In the Yesipov chronicle, Yermak's first advance into the Siberian khanate is given as 1581, and the capture of its capital, Isker, as 1580. There is generally good agreement as to day and month, but often there is doubt about the year. It would be tedious to discuss the reliability of every date given in the chronicles, for argument would be long and intricate. There are certain possibilities of cross-checking with outside sources, notably royal charters. On the basis of this kind of critical evaluation, Bakhrushin suggests[1] that the likeliest dates for the key events are as follows: Yermak's advance across the Urals started on 1 September (old style) 1581; that winter was passed in the mountains, and the party moved on down the rivers on the Siberian side in May–June 1582; the fight at Babasany was on 21 July, the capture of Karacha's stronghold on 1 August, the capture of Kuchum's capital, Isker, in October 1582; a message informing Moscow was sent off in December, and on 10 May 1583 the decree authorising reinforcements was issued; these, under Bol'khovskiy, spent the winter of 1583–84 in Perm', and reached Yermak only in November 1584. That winter there was famine in Sibir', and Yermak was killed on 1 August 1585. Mansurov, the next emissary from Moscow, arrived on the Ob' in the summer of 1586. These dates are fairly widely accepted now, but Sergeyev (1959, p. 126) has suggested that the initial advance could have been as early as 1578. Vvedenskiy (1962, p. 100) finds this suggestion 'interesting', but wants more documentary evidence before he accepts it. Preobrazhenskiy (1972, pp. 40–3), the most recent commentator, prefers the later date (1581) for the start of the campaign, and adduces more evidence in its support. Many points in the chronology are still unclear, and future research may clarify them. But the margin for doubt is generally only one year, and never more than three.

Something should be said about the adversary, Kuchum. From the chronicles he emerges as a double-dyed villain. It is clear that he was a redoubtable adversary. Kuchum son of Murtaza, the Sheibanid, took the khanate of Sibir' by force in 1563 from the Taibugids Yediger and Bekbulat. Thereafter he showed great energy, tenacity, and determination to resist any Russian advance, a contingency he no doubt foresaw. When it came, he organised a vigorous defence with the small numbers at his disposal, but lost. The Russians, after all, had firearms and their opponents did not. What impresses the non-partisan reader of the chronicles, however, is Kuchum's continuing resistance after he has lost

[1] In G. F. Müller, *Istoriya Sibiri* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1937), Tom 1, pp. 482–6, 492. This a modern edition, in two volumes out of a projected three, of Müller's *Opisaniye Sibirskago tsarstva* (St Petersburg, 1750), and has annotation by Bakhrushin, Andreyev and others.

his capital and many of his men. The old fox was prowling in the steppes and forests, always a threat, and finally, to Yermak, a fatal one. His victory at that time could not be followed up, however, for his Taibugid rival, Seydyak, deposed him. But he still had followers, and still played the part of the nomad marauder, attacking Tatars and Russians alike. Determined attempts were made to crush him, in 1591, 1595, and 1598. In the last, much of his army was killed or captured, as were many of his family, but he escaped. A surviving letter to him at this time from the khan of Bukhara urges him to stop fighting his own kind and to rally all Mohammedans against the Russians.[1] Finally he is said to have been killed soon afterwards by the Nogais, to whom he had turned for help. The fullest account of his wanderings after Yermak's death is given by Nebol'sin (1849, pp. 115–30), and Sinyayev, a more recent investigator, has looked into the final Russian campaign against him in 1598.[2] He is a figure worthy of respect, for although he was perhaps little more than a roving brigand who had usurped a throne, nevertheless he strove desperately for seventeen years to defend his country against what became hopeless odds. He was taken seriously in Moscow, and exchanged letters with the tsar (part of this correspondence survives[3]). But no historian, not even Soviet champions of the downtrodden, speaks well of him. Even the 16th-century Turkish historian Seyfi Çelebi regards him as a backwoodsman of little account, who lived among peoples (Ostyaks and Voguls, presumably) who were 'strange, of astonishing external appearance, no one understands their language, without religion or rite, almost like animals'.[4] The nearest thing to an appreciative reference to him is perhaps the 'Song of Khan Kuchum', one surviving verse of which was discovered by Radlov among the Siberian Tatars in the 19th century.[5]

Yermak's campaign, as such, ended in ignominy. The leader was killed, and the hard-pressed survivors of his small force, probably only about 150 men under the cossack Matvey Meshcheryak and the professional soldier Ivan Glukhov, slipped away from Sibir', leaving it to be reoccupied by the Tatars. But reinforcements under Ivan Mansurov, sent from Moscow, arrived on the scene soon afterwards. The Russians re-entered Sibir', and joined by further reinforcements under the *voyevodas*[6] V. B. Sukin and I. Myasnoy, established with very little

[1] Printed in H. Ziyayev, *Ortä Asiya vä Sibir'* (Tashkent, 1962), pp. 41–2, and kindly translated for me by Mr W. Feldman.

[2] V. S. Sinyayev, 'Okonchatel'nyy razgrom Kuchuma na Obi v 1598 godu', *Voprosy geografii Sibiri*, Sbornik II (1951), pp. 141–56.

[3] *Sobraniye gosudarstvennykh gramot i dogovorov* (St Petersburg, 1819), pp. 52, 63–5.

[4] J. Matuz, *L'Ouvrage de Seyfī Çelebī, historien ottoman du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1968), p. 88.

[5] W. Radlov, *Die Sprachen der Türkischen Stämme Süd-Sibiriens und der Dsungarischen Steppe. 1 Abtheilung. Proben der Volkslitteratur. Übersetzung. 4 Theil* (St Petersburg, 1872), p. 141.

[6] Military leaders. The word came later to mean the military governor of a town or region. The plural of transliterated words is anglicised with an s.

resistance a series of Russian strongpoints: Obskiy Gorodok (1586 – but it lasted only a few years), Tyumen', on the site of Chingiy (1586), Tobol'sk, close to Sibir' (1587), Berezov (1593), Tara (1594). By a shabby trick Danilo Chulkov, another Russian leader, broke the power of Seydyak and his adherents. This time the Russians had come to stay. Yermak's campaign had, after all, shown the Russians the way. It had been primarily a private affair, run, as I think, by the Stroganovs; or, if you will not accept that, then by Yermak himself. One thing certain is that it was not run directly by Moscow. Government support, which came only when there were clear indications of likely success, was too late in the first instance to stave off defeat. But the second and third waves made victory certain. So was the foundation laid of Russian power in Asia – of a great colonial empire, which was to grow up almost unnoticed by the countries of western Europe.

The cossacks, Yermak, and his band

Yermak is referred to in the chronicles as a Volga cossack, or an *ataman*, which means a cossack leader. Who were the cossacks in general, and the Volga cossacks in particular? And who was Yermak? The chronicles themselves say nothing about the first question, assuming the reader will know, and almost nothing about the second.

There is much obscurity about the origins of the cossacks. Lantzeff[1] thinks they were a social element of uncertain origin, existing in several different forms from early times: thus it was a militant border population, according to Solov'yev; bands of Turkish warriors, according to Karamzin and Pogodin; itinerant workers on the land, according to Klyuchevskiy; and border settlers holding back nomads, according to Ukrainian historians. The position is examined in detail in three recent books,[2] and Vernadsky devotes much space to them in his histories.[3] The word itself (Russian *kazak*) is plainly derived from the same word in Turco-Tatar languages, where it means a free man, hence a vagabond (Vasmer[4] specifically dissociates *kazak* from *kasog*, the early Russian term for a Circassian, from which some have derived cossack). Cossacks were by no means only Russian. On the contrary, in the fifteenth century they were often Tatars in Russian service.

By the time of Yermak, there were two main kinds of cossack. One kind was a sort of frontier force composed of men who were not nobles

[1] G. V. Lantzeff and R. A. Pierce, *Eastward to Empire* (Montreal and London, 1973), p. 73.

[2] G. Stökl, *Die Entstehung des Kosakentums* (Munich, 1953), P. Longworth, *The cossacks* (London, 1969), and A. A. Gordeyev, *Istoriya kazakov* (Paris, 1968–71).

[3] G. Vernadsky, *Russia at the dawn of the modern age* (New Haven, 1959), pp. 8, 112–13, 249–68; *The tsardom of Moscow, 1547–1682, Part I* (New Haven, 1969), pp. 8–11, 178–81.

[4] M. Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelburg, 1953–58), *sub nomine*.

but were not serfs either, and who were paid for their service by grants of land and remission of taxes. They were known as service cossacks (*sluzhilyye kazaki*), and were under direct government control. The other kind were independent settlers, especially in the south-east corner of Muscovy on the Don and Terek rivers, and lived in villages called *stanitsas* and were ruled by their own elected leaders, or *atamans*. The allegiance of these cossacks was to themselves, and only to the government when it suited them, which it seldom did. From this second group, loosely known as Don cossacks, some moved across to the lower reaches of the Volga, where a number became river pirates, plundering passing travellers. Hakluyt relates[1] how Jeffrey Ducket of the Muscovy Company of London had a very unpleasant experience near Astrakhan in 1573, when 'certain Russe Cassaks, which are outlawes or banished men' seized his ship and got away with much of his freight. The situation became so bad that Ivan was obliged to take action and sent a force under Ivan Murashkin in 1577 to disperse these cossack bandits. It was after this punitive campaign that one of the Volga cossack groups, led by the *ataman* Yermak, left the region and went upstream to the Kama and the Permian lands of the Stroganovs.

Yermak son of Timofey first appears in the chronicles as a fully-fledged *ataman*. No hint is given about his origin. But some relevant information is found in a later source, known as the Cherepanov chronicle. This is a crude compilation made in 1760 by the Tobol'sk coachman I. L. Cherepanov, and it contained an item called 'some Siberian history' (*Nekotoraya sibirskaya istoriya*). It was for some time disregarded as worthless. Nebol'sin (1849, pp. 65–6) was sceptical, and it was turned down in 1876 by L. N. Maykov for publication in the standard series then being prepared by the Imperial Archaeographical Commission.[2] But in 1894 the historian A. A. Dmitriyev showed that Cherepanov's 'some Siberian history' was probably derived from a genuine 17th century document, 'the story of the Siberian land' (*Skazaniye sibirskoy zemli*), part of which Dmitriyev discovered in a village near Solikamsk in 1893–94 (Vvedenskiy, 1962, pp. 86–8). Andreyev too (1942, p. 322) concluded that the Cherepanov chronicle was a valuable source after he had studied an unknown copy of the manuscript.

The part of the 'story of the Siberian land' that interests us here is a section called 'On Yermak, and where he was born'. This is the section Cherepanov is supposed to have seen, but which has not been found in other surviving copies. The section seen by Dmitriyev is written in an 18th-century hand, but internal evidence leads to the conclusion that this is a copy, or paraphrase, of a mid-17th-century document. It may

[1] R. Hakluyt, *The principall navigations, voiages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation* (London, 1598), Vol. 1, p. 421.

[2] A. I. Andreyev, 'Cherepanovskaya letopis'', *Istoricheskiye zapiski*, Tom XIII (1942), p. 311.

have been written therefore about the same time as two of our major sources, the Yesipov and the Stroganov chronicles. The information it gives about Yermak is as follows, and it purports to be derived from Yermak himself. His grandfather was called Afonasiy Grigor'yevich Alenin, and was from Suzdal', north-east of Moscow, where he was a *posadskoy chelovek*, or inhabitant of the town outside the walls of the central fortified area. Famine drove him to Vladimir, and he became a coachman, was hired by some robbers, captured in the forest near Murom, and imprisoned; he escaped, and died at Yur'yevets Povol'skoy on the Volga. He had two sons, Rodion and Timofey, whose poverty caused them to seek their fortune in the Stroganov lands on the Chusovaya river, a tributary of the Kama. Rodion had two sons, and Timofey three – Gavrilo, Frol and Vasiliy. Vasiliy was strong and self-confident and worked in the Stroganovs' river fleet on the Kama and Volga. There he gathered a band together, left his employment and became a river pirate. As leader of the gang, he was called *ataman* and acquired the nickname Yermak. So runs Cherepanov's story, which will be found in print in Karamzin (1819–29, Tom 9, note 664) (only odd pieces of this chronicle have ever been published).

Vvedenskiy, who quotes this information (1962, pp. 88–9), finds it plausible that Yermak Timofeyevich's real name should have been Vasiliy Timofeyevich Alenin. None of the other chronicles mentions his family name, and Vvedenskiy provides contemporary examples of Stroganov employees who had nicknames. A. Voronikhin is another historian of this century who supports this view, and he quotes[1] a source of 1792 which uses the name Yermak Vasiliy Timofeyevich. If this piece of genealogy is true, Yermak turns out to be a Volga cossack only in the sense that he spent some time cossacking (the Russians use the verb) on the Volga; he was brought up in the Stroganov lands and worked for a Stroganov enterprise. Vvedenskiy (1962, p. 90) finds it typical of the Stroganovs that they should turn to an old employee when they needed a man to do a particular job. Preobrazhenskiy (1972, p. 44), however, raises the awkward point that if Yermak was really brought up on the Chusovaya, then it is rather strange that he should lose his way on that river, as the Remezov chronicle (chapter 5) states that he did, when leading his band over the Urals. But many mysteries remain in this fragmentary story.

If one rejects the Cherepanov account, then all one is left with is the qualifying adjective Volga (or in some cases Don), signifying a region he was associated with. N. M. Mel'nikov, an émigré cossack writer,[2] lists sixteen reasons why Yermak should definitely be regarded as a Don cossack; but they are not very convincing, and their author is highly partisan.

[1] A. Voronikhin, 'K biografii Yermaka', *Voprosy istorii*, No. 10 (1946), p. 99.
[2] N. M. Mel'nikov, *Yermak Timofeyevich, knyaz' sibirskiy, yego spodvizhniki i prodolzhateli* (Paris, 1961), pp. 59–63.

There is no specific evidence to support the often-repeated view that Yermak had a price on his head when he left the Volga. But it is true in a general sense, in that he undoubtedly was a pirate, and the punitive expedition of 1577 had orders to hang any they caught (see the Remezov chronicle, chapter 5).

One rather unobtrusive ghost may be laid at this point. The suggestion has been advanced[1] that Yermak was a cossack leader from Mogilev, sent to the Urals by Ivan IV in 1581. Mel'nikov takes the same line (1961, p. 11). But it is clear that this is a case of mistaken identity. A letter to King Stephen Batory of Poland does indeed mention 'the cossack *ataman* Yermak Timofeyevich' as one of fifteen *voyevodas*; but the timing of events in 1581 makes it impossible that this could be the same man (Vvedenskiy, 1962, p. 62). A rather odd coincidence, perhaps, but history is full of them. Indeed, G. Ye. Katanayev[2] records yet a third Yermak Timofeyevich, and a Don cossack at that, active in 1581–84.

Despite the general lack of knowledge about Yermak's antecedents, a monument was erected to him at the end of the last century at Novocherkassk (Katanayev, 1893, p. 14) – the capital of the Don cossack country, a region which has long claimed him, but which he may never have visited. Some historians – Ilovayskiy, for instance – cast doubt on the enterprise at the time. For the statement sometimes made (see Mel'nikov, 1961, p. 11), that he was born at the cossack village of Kachalinskaya on the Don, there is no early documentary evidence.

There are several other statues and portraits of Yermak. There is a statue at Tobol'sk, one in the State Russian Museum at Leningrad by M. M. Antokol'skiy, another by S. G. Korol'kov; and there are paintings and engravings by A. Skarl'man, P. P. Beketov, Korol'kov, V. I. Surikov (the frontispiece of this book), by the illustrator of the Remezov chronicle, and no doubt others. Many of those mentioned are reproduced in Mel'nikov's book. All of them, of course, are imaginary. No one recorded his likeness; and the only guide of any authenticity that the artists might have had is the words of the Remezov chronicle, written over a century after Yermak's death, that he was 'flat-faced, black of beard and with curly hair, of medium stature and thickset and broad-shouldered' (chapter 106).

In short, little is known for certain of Yermak. But many legends grew up, and they are not to be disregarded as a historical source. Something is said of these in the section below, 'Yermak as folk-hero'. Yermak has been the subject of poems: K. P. Ryleyev (1795–1826), who was executed for his part in the Decembrists' uprising, wrote 'The death of Yermak' in 1821; and I. I. Dmitriyev (1760–1837) wrote a dramatic

[1] N. Shlyakov, 'Yermak Timofeyevich letom 1581', *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniya*, Tom CCCXXXVI, Otdel 2 (1901), pp. 33–45.

[2] G. Ye. Katanayev, 'Yeshche ob Yermake i yego sibirskom pokhode', *Zapiski Zapadno-Sibirskago otdela Imperatorskago Russkago geograficheskago obshchestva*, Kniga 15, Vypusk 2 (1893), p. 13.

poem 'Yermak'. His name has been used in various ways. There have been two icebreakers called *Yermak*, one the first major vessel of this kind ever built (completed in Newcastle in 1898 to the order of Admiral S. O. Makarov), the other the first of a powerful new class, which entered service in 1974. The town of Yermak lies on the upper Irtysh, and gives the name also to a giant thermal power station nearby. Derivatives of the name (Yermaka, Yermaki, Yermakovka, Yermakovo, Yermakovskoye) are attached to at least eight other places or geographical features in the Soviet Union. Thus the impact of Yermak on Russian cultural history has been significant.

The size of Yermak's army is another point on which it is hard to determine the truth. The Yesipov and Stroganov chronicles (chapters 7 and 8 respectively) mention that the band which came from the Volga numbered 540 men. The Stroganov chronicle (chapter 11) adds to these a further 300 men recruited on the Chusovaya, making an army of 840 which advanced into Siberia. The New chronicle has 600 men coming from the Volga, and 50 joining them – total 650. But the Remezov chronicle, in its chapter 6, which is one of the chapters interpolated from the Short Kungur Siberian chronicle, makes this an army of 5000 men. Bakhrushin (1955, p. 41) and Vvedenskiy (1962, p. 98) dismiss this as fantastic, and most contemporary scholars, including Vernadsky (1969, p. 179), agree with them. Only Sergeyev (1959, p. 123) and Mel'nikov (1961, p. 18) think a larger figure is right – and Sergeyev compromises at a suggested 1600 men. Their argument is that fewer men could not have done the job. But this depends on how numerous one thinks the opposition was. I have more faith in the broadly consistent figures which appear in the older chronicles (even if probably derived from the same source), than in the often fanciful Short Kungur Siberian chronicle.

Yermak as folk-hero[1]

Although folk-songs and legends about Yermak originated amongst the cossacks, on the Volga, Don, Ural and Terek rivers, in the Urals and Siberia, the distribution of songs collected since the 18th century (over 150) shows that his fame as a folk-hero spread throughout central and northern European Russia.

Most of the 'historical songs' (*istoricheskiye pesni*) begin with lines setting the scene, sometimes the Saratov steppes, sometimes the Caspian Sea, but, in the opinion of Ye. A. Aleksandrova[2], on the evidence of the songs the historically authentic location for Yermak's early exploits was the river Kamyshinka, a tributary of the Volga which rises near the

[1] This section was contributed by W. Harrison, University of Durham.

[2] Ye. A. Aleksandrova, 'K voprosu o metodike analiza istoricheskikh pesen', *Uchenyye zapiski Gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta, Daugavpils, seriya gumanitarnykh nauk*, Vypusk 2 (1959), p. 82.

Ilovlya, a tributary of the Don. Yermak and his men are brigands who have pillaged boats, both Russian and foreign, on the Volga and the Caspian for many years. In one song they attack a Turkish caravan and abduct a *murza*'s daughter, an incident which Likhachev links[1] with the incident when the Siberian chieftain Yelygay offered Yermak his daughter (Remezov chronicle, chapter 100). In another song Yermak is a captive of the Turks, and elsewhere he fights the *murza* Itslamber. It has been suggested[2] that songs of this group reflect a period when Yermak served Ivan IV and may have met Islam-Girey of the Crimea or the Nogai prince, Ismail, between 1555 and 1562. In another song Yermak's men kill the Muscovite ambassador to Persia named as Semen Konstantinovich Karamyshev.[3] Karamyshev was actually slain by the Don cossacks in 1630, but the Remezov chronicle (chapters 3–5) does tell of raids by Yermak and other cossack leaders on foreign envoys and merchant vessels. In folklore there is some merging of Yermak in these acts of piracy with the 17th-century figure of Stenka Razin, who apparently succeeded him as hero of the folk-drama 'The Boat' (*Lodka*).[4]

But the songs indicate that Yermak's deeds became troublesome to Moscow and so the cossack *krug*, or 'circle', convenes to debate where they should spend the winter, threatened as they now are by troops sent to curb their brigandage:

> 'Now the summer passes, the warm summer,
> And winter approaches, brothers, cold winter,
> How and where, brothers, shall we winter?
> To go to the Yaik the way is long,
> On the Volga to ply is to be branded as thieves,
> If we go to Kazan, there the awesome tsar stands,
> The awesome tsar, our sovereign Ivan.
> He has there a mighty multitude of men
> And you, Yermak, there will be hanged
> And we cossacks there shall be seized
> And imprisoned in sturdy gaols.'[5]

A version of the Stroganov chronicle not translated here[6] contains a passage very similar to this song.

One solution to their predicament is to win the tsar's favour by some

[1] D. S. Likhachev, *Russkiye letopisi i ikh kul'turnoistoricheskoye znacheniye* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1947), p. 416.

[2] A. M. Listopadov, *Donskiye istoricheskiye pesni* (Rostov-na-Donu, 1946), p. 4.

[3] V. F. Miller, 'Istoricheskiye pesni russkago naroda XVI–XVII vv.', *Sbornik Otdeleniya russkago yazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk*, Tom XCIII (1915), pp. 477–81.

[4] V. N. Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, *Russkaya ustnaya narodnaya drama* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 38 ff.

[5] V. K. Sokolova, 'Russkiye istoricheskiye pesni XVI veka, epokhi Ivana Groznogo', *Trudy Instituta etnografii im. N.N.Miklukho-Maklaya*, Tom XIII (1951), p. 90.

[6] *Sibirskiye letopisi* (St Petersburg, 1907), p. 56.

deed of service. In the songs of the Don cossacks,[1] this service is usually the capture of Kazan' – which had taken place twenty-five years earlier. Yermak appears at Ivan's court and offers to take Kazan' in order to redeem himself and his men. As a reward Ivan grants the cossacks the lands of the Don. So persistent is this theme in cossack folklore that the question of some connection between Yermak and Kazan' must arise – but are we concerned with the same Yermak? As implied earlier, Yermak was not so very rare a name in the 16th century. It is generally thought, however, that the scene at Ivan's court is an echo of the arrival in Moscow of Yermak's envoys after his Siberian successes.

In some songs the cossack *krug* decides to seek its fortune in Siberia: this solution is put forward in the songs of the Ural cossacks (Sokolova, 1960, p. 76):

> 'Shall we go, shall we not go to the river Irtysh,
> From the river Irtysh we'll take the town of Tobol
> And then go to the tsar and give ourselves up,
> To him we will take our rebellious heads
> And in the right hand take a block and axe.'[2]

Almost all versions of this song, without describing the Siberian campaign, pass straight to a scene at Ivan's court where Yermak cuts off the head of a boyar who demands that our hero be hanged; and then Yermak is commissioned to take Kazan' and Astrakhan. The absence of a warm welcome may be significant, implying that Yermak's actions were not entirely approved of in Moscow.

It seems that references in this song to places beyond the Urals could be later inventions, and that in the original version Yermak urged that they make for the Kama. It is true that the *Kama* is not mentioned and the river named is the *Kuma*, but as Aleksandrova points out, Yermak's description of the river with its dark forests abounding in marten, fox and sable is more appropriate for the Kama (Aleksandrova, 1959, p. 101; Miller, 1915, pp. 495–6). This point is all the more convincing if our Yermak *was* Vasiliy Timofeyevich Alenin: he was proposing to take his men to his native region which he accurately describes.

In the Urals and western Siberia oral accounts of Yermak's deeds were preserved and legends were created, not only by Russians but also by Tatars and other peoples (see for instance Radlov, 1872, pp. 141, 179–81). It may be that the Orthodox Church contributed to the formation of legends, for Archbishop Kipriyan in striving to enhance the prestige of his new archbishopric of Tobol'sk sought to present Yermak as champion of the faith, a saint almost, which would require miracles to be associated with him. In the 1890's Nemirovich-Danchenko found that the religious element persisted in Ural legends in which Yermak was

[1] V. K. Sokolova, 'Russkiye istoricheskiye pesni XVI–XVIII veka', *Trudy Instituta etnografii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaya*, Tom LXI (1960), p. 76.
[2] V. F. Miller (1915), p. 511.

remembered as conquering evil with the aid of the Cross (Sokolova, 1951, p. 35). At any rate we have the legend of Yermak's suit of armour with its miraculous powers, the healing power associated with his grave, the appearance of his ghost to Seydyak and the fiery pillar observed in the sky over his tomb (Remezov chronicle, chapter 113).

The influence of folk legend is evident in the song 'Yermak took Sibir' in the 18th-century *Sbornik Kirshi Danilova.*[1] Scholars have pointed out that parts of this piece do not read like a song and that it seems to be a combination of folk-song with an oral prose account of Yermak's expedition. This makes it the most important of the songs as a historical source. There is no mention in it of an invitation from the Stroganovs, but in the deliberations of the cossack *krug* Yermak says:

> Let us go to Usol'ye to the Stroganovs,
> To that Grigoriy Grigor'yevich
> To the lords Voronov:
> We'll collect there powder and shot and stocks of grain.

(It seems that in Grigoriy Grigor'yevich the song confuses two people, Grigoriy and Nikita Grigor'yevich; in some songs a Voronov is mentioned as a *prikazchik*, 'steward', of the Stroganovs.) The cossacks accept Yermak's advice, and after taking provisions and ammunition from the Stroganovs, they set off up the Chusovaya.

The route they follow is the Chusovaya-Serebryannaya-Zharavlya-Barancha-Tagil-Tura-Yepancha-Tobol-Irtysh. According to Gorelov[2] the song commits two errors: there is no river Yepancha (though there is a person and a place); and Yermak would have left his boats between the Serebryannaya and the Zharavlya (a tributary of the Tagil), not between the Zharavlya and the Barancha, as the song has it. The song also invents a manoeuvre by which at the confluence of the Tobol and Irtysh the cossacks split into three groups, Yermak taking the upper stream, whilst the others take the central and lower streams and reach the Irtysh just below Tobol'sk: the Tobol does not flow into the Irtysh by three streams.

The song continues in the realm of fiction with the capture of Kuchum by Yermak's band and a visit by Yermak to Ivan's court. It ends with his death in a clash with a superior force of Kott Tatars on the Yenisey. Leaping from one boat to another Yermak slips, breaks his head, and is killed. (According to some cossack legends, Yermak drowned because of the weight of his armour given him by the tsar.) Yermak never did battle with the Kott, who lived much further east than he ever reached: this is a reflection of the exploits of another *ataman*, Yermak Ostaf'yev in the 1620's (Gorelov, 1961, p. 371).

But this 'song' does contain some interesting historical details. We are

[1] A. P. Yevgen'yeva and B. N. Putilov, *Drevniye rossiyskiye stikhotvoreniya, sobrannyye Kirsheyu Danilovym* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1958), pp. 86–90.

[2] A. A. Gorelov, 'Trilogiya o Yermake iz Sbornika Kirshi Danilova: polemicheskiye zametki', *Russkiy fol'klor. Materialy i issledovaniya*, No. 6 (1961), p. 365.

told that Yermak spent the first winter in a cave in a cliff overhanging the Chusovaya river where, according to Ural legends, Yermak hid treasure. Writers who mention the cave include Witsen in *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, G. F. Müller who traversed those parts in the 1730's, and Mel'nikov-Pecherskiy, who was there in 1830. It is worth noting that in Ural legends Yermak still pursued from his cave a career of robbery and piracy.[1] We are told in the song that Yermak reached the Tagil and made a halt at Bear Rock where he stayed till Trinity Sunday building larger boats. The chronicles do not mention this halt, but excavations have shown that Kirsha Danilov was correct (Gorelov, 1961, p. 365).

Interesting too is the story of the straw warriors. Having reached the mysterious river Yepancha, the cossacks halted until St Peter's day. There they made figures of straw and put clothing on them:

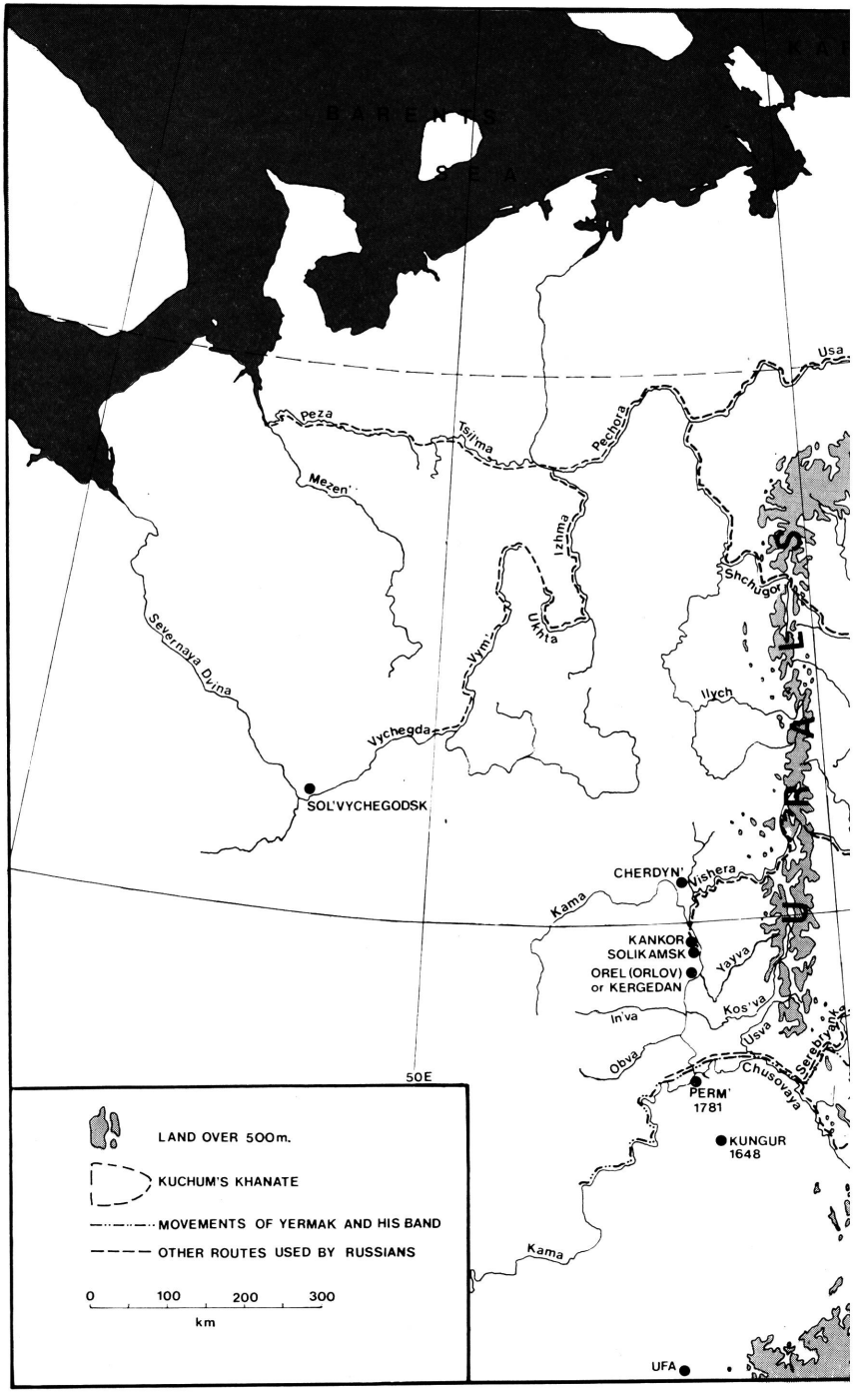
> 'Yermak had a *druzhina* of three hundred men,
> But with them [i.e. the straw figures] they
> became more than a thousand.'

When the cossacks attacked, the Tatars showered arrows on them and, deceived by the straw figures, believed that the cossacks could not be harmed. The origin of this story may have been the use of straw bales as protection, but its authenticity is supported by Tatar folklore. Müller heard it (see Remezov chronicle, chapter 38, note). According to A. Dmitriyev the Tatars of Tobol'sk recounted this legend in the 1890's (Gorelov, 1961, p. 366); and it is still current in the Urals today.[2]

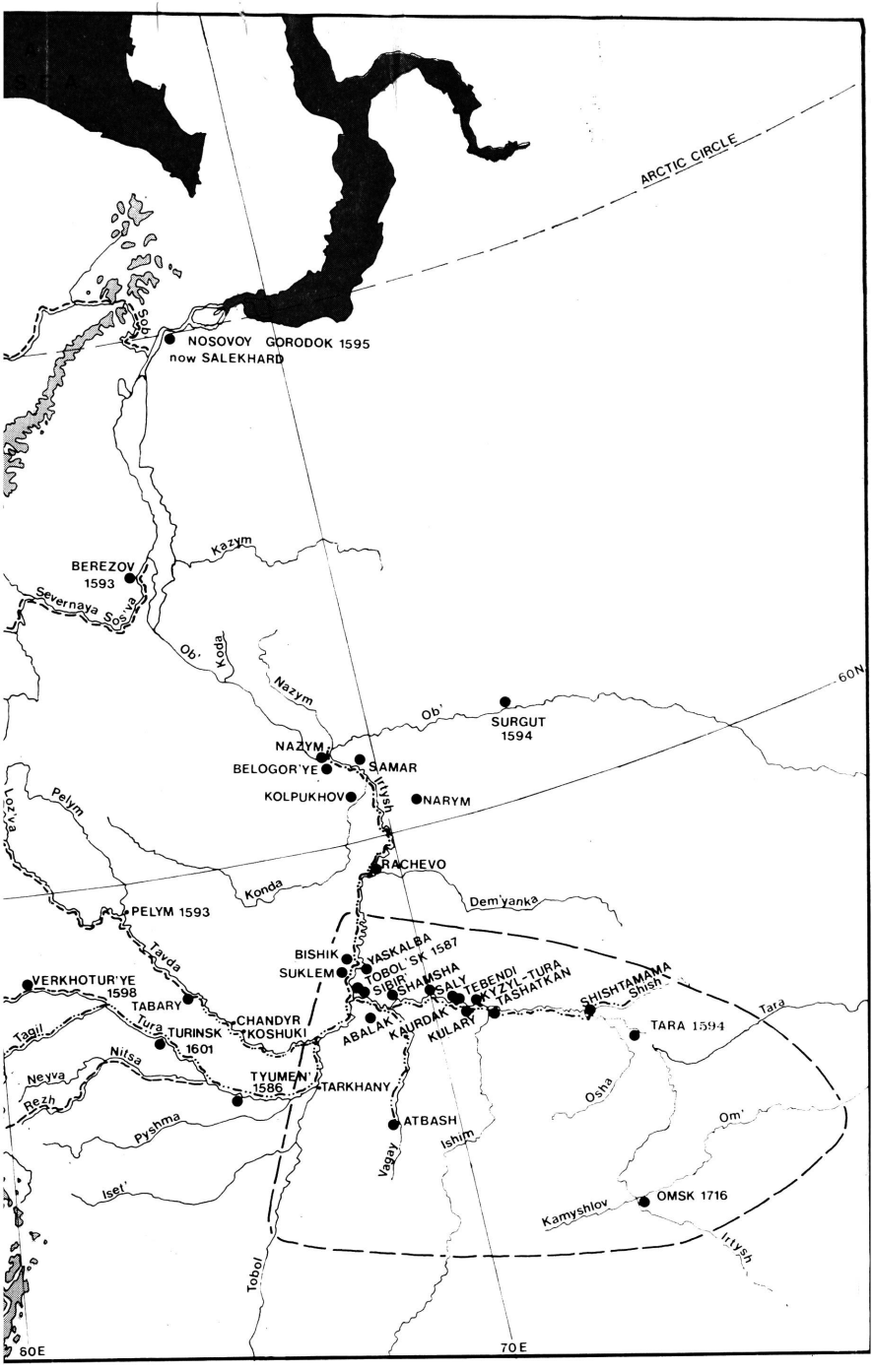
The song in the *Sbornik Kirshi Danilova*, then, contains information of historical interest. The same is true of the folk-songs as a whole, though in trying to interpret them as a historical source we can speak only of probabilities. But the story which the folklore seems to tell us about Yermak is as follows. He was active on the lower Volga for many years before his Siberian expedition. In that time he may have performed services for Moscow, but eventually he became a nuisance to the government and was forced to move from the Kamyshinka to the Urals, where he expected he would be more welcome. According to the songs the initiative for the expedition into Siberia is naturally Yermak's, not the government's, nor the Stroganovs', though he obtained supplies from the latter. He is an enterprising, daring, popular hero. As such he passed into the *byliny*, the epics set in Kievan times, where he stands alongside the other great warriors, the *bogatyri*, Il'ya Muromets, Dobrynya Nikitich, Alyosha Popovich, champions of Russia against foreign foes. But he is different from the others: he is impetuous, foolhardy. When told by the other *bogatyri* to climb a tree to spy out the Tatar host, instead of carrying out the reconnaissance mission he sets

[1] V. P. Kruglyashova, 'Predaniya reki Chusovoy', *Uchenyye zapiski Ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A. M. Gor'kogo*, Vypusk 18 (1961), pp. 35, 44.

[2] Ye. Dergacheva-Skop, *Iz istorii literatury Urala i Sibiri XVII veka* (Sverdlovsk, 1965), p. 107; Kruglyashova, 1961, pp. 37–8.



MAP 1. The area of operations of Yermak's campaign. Ru
with date of foundation. Main source: map at the end of
himself travelled in the Tobol-Irtysh region in the 1740's a



ssian towns founded after the time of the campaign are shown
G. F. Müller, *Istoriya Sibiri* (Moscow, 1937), Tom I. Müller
nd identified many places mentioned in the chronicles.