

3. Profile of the Country

3.1. Geography and Topography

The Republic of Kazakhstan is located in Central Asia and has a land area of 2,727,000 square kilometers, about seven times that of Japan, making Kazakhstan the ninth largest country in the world after Argentina. The Republic of Kazakhstan had the second largest land area in the former Soviet Union, behind Russia. Kazakhstan borders with Russia, China, Kyrgyz, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The total border length is about 12,000 kilometers. A small part of Kazakhstan is positioned in the most easterly part of Europe, where the Ural River, which separates Europe from the westernmost part of Asia, flows through Atyrau Oblast, which lies in the most westerly part of the country.

The geological conditions in Kazakhstan vary widely due to the vast land area. The northwestern part of the country lies in a depression on a sedimentary layer of ice and the south end of the Pre Ural Plateau (at an elevation of 354 meters). The flat lowland along the Caspian Sea stretches to the south of the northwestern part. The southwestern part consists of salt lowland under which impermeable cavities and clay layers overlap in the Mangyshlak Peninsula. The Ustyurt Plateau (at an elevation of 150 to 200 meters), the surface of which is composed of a limestone layer, spreads in the southern part. The northeastern part is comprised of the Turgay Plateau, which extends from the south end of the spine of the Ural and Mugozaal mountain ranges and then turns into the Turan Lowland as it approaches south where the Kyzylkum (red sand) Desert is located. The Karakum (black sand) Desert reaches to the north of the Aral Sea. The gently undulating Kazakh Highland stretches across the central part. The south of the central part joins the Moinkum Desert and the Betpacdala (hungry steppe) Desert, the driest desert in the country. The Balkhash Cavity and the sand massif of Sary-Ishikotrau lie in the east of the central part. The Balkhash Cavity is bordered in the south by the Ili Cavity and in the north by the Sasyk-Kol-Alakol Depression.

Ten percent of the national land is occupied by mountains. The Altai Mountains, which include Mt. Beluka with an elevation of 4,506 meters, are located in the northeastern part. The West Tian Shan Mountains lie in the area from the southern to southeastern part of the country. The West Tian Shan Mountains include some mountains of high elevation such as Mt. Zailiyskiy Alatau (an elevation of 4,973 meters), Mt. Terskei Alatau (an elevation of 4,488 meters), and Mt. Khan Tengri (an elevation of 6,995 meters).

After gaining independence from the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan conferred with Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, China, and Kyrgyz on the demarcation of the borders. In 2005, agreements on the demarcation of the borders were achieved with Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However, Kazakhstan has managed to obtain individual agreements with only Russia and Azerbaijan regarding the territorial waters of the Caspian Sea.



Figure 3.1 Elevation Figure

3.2. Climate

The climate throughout the year in Kazakhstan depends on the interaction between the Siberian high that develops in winter and the disturbance of low atmospheric pressure caused by the prevailing westerlies. The climate is characterized by the difference in regional rainfalls that occurs due to the location of the mountains. The climate in the north of the country is affected by the climate in Siberia. The climate in the south depends on the climate in central Asia. Therefore, there are great differences in temperature between the north and the south of the country. The temperature in the central and north parts drops to minus 40 degrees centigrade in winter and rises to 40 degrees centigrade in summer. The annual rainfalls vary widely from 129 millimeters in Kzyl-Orda in the southern part to 616 millimeters in Almaty, and annual rainfalls in mountain areas increase from 700 millimeters to 1,500 millimeters as the altitude increases.

Table 3.1 indicates the average yearly temperatures in Almaty in the south, a major city, and Astana in the north, the capital of the country. Figure 3.2 and 3.3 show the air temperature distributions in summer and winter respectively. Figure 3.4 gives the annual rainfall distribution.

Table 3.1 Climate in Almaty City and Astana City

Month	Almaty City				Astana City			
	Average temperature (degrees C)		Rainfall		Average temperature (degrees C)		Rainfall	
	Lowest temp.	Highest temp.	Rainfall (millimeters)	Number of rainy days	Lowest temp.	Highest temp.	Rainfall (millimeters)	Number of rainy days
1	-11.1	-1.3	33	7.6	-22.0	-12.6	17	3.9
2	-9.5	0.2	38	9.1	-21.8	-11.3	15	3.3
3	-2.4	7.1	62	15.7	-15.6	-5.0	15	3.3
4	5.6	16.5	109	20.4	-2.4	9.3	22	5.4
5	10.9	21.7	104	20.0	5.8	19.6	33	8.4
6	15.2	26.5	58	13.1	11.2	25.3	33	10.4
7	17.6	29.7	35	8.8	13.4	27.0	53	11.6
8	16.3	28.8	27	6.3	10.9	24.3	35	9.9
9	11.0	23.4	28	6.7	5.1	18.6	24	6.8
10	4.6	15.9	59	11.3	-2.1	8.5	30	7.4
11	-3.3	6.2	51	11.9	-11.2	-3.0	21	4.7
12	-8.8	0.4	37	9.1	-18.9	-9.7	20	3.9

Source: World Meteorological Organization

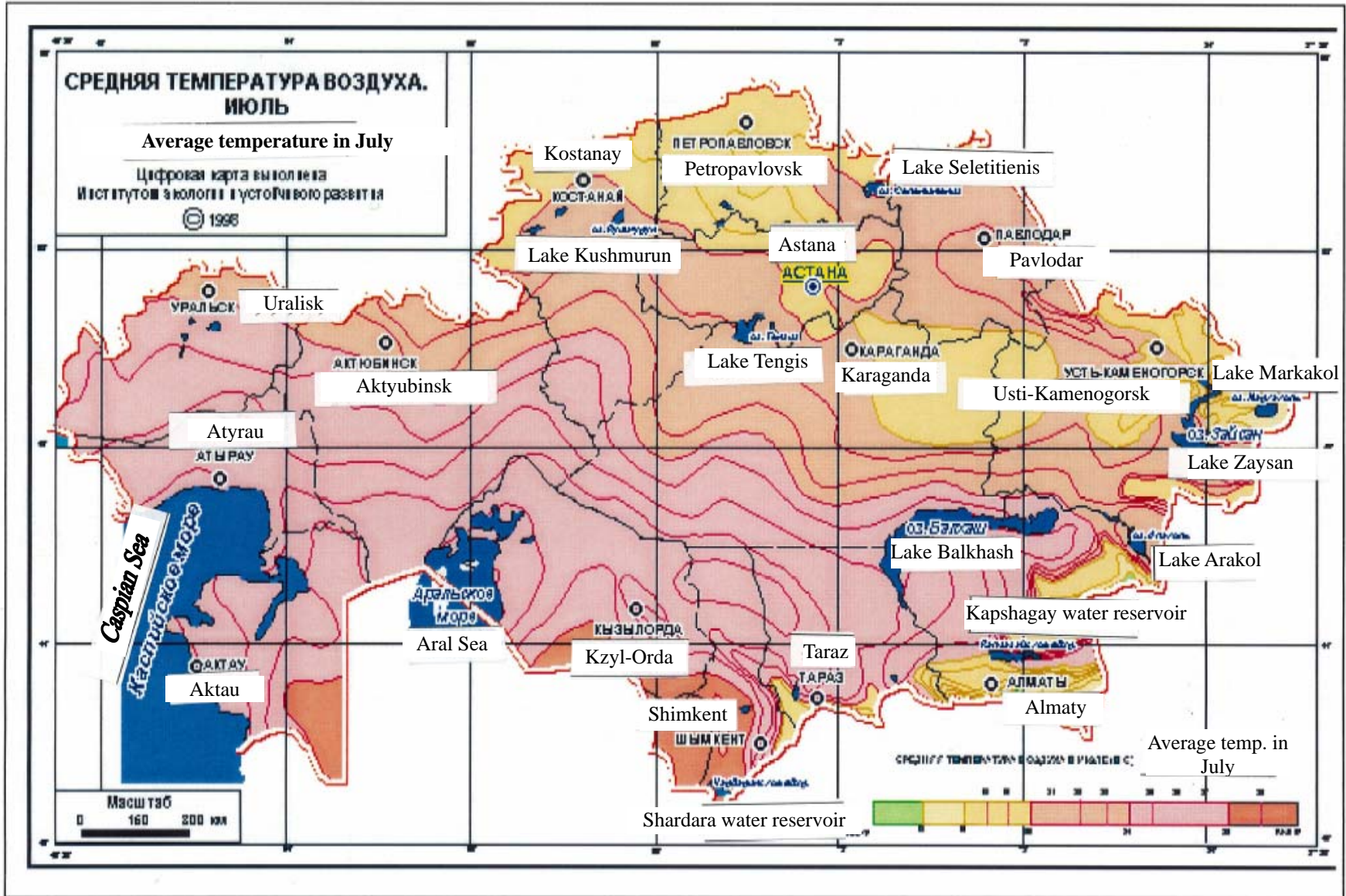


Figure 3.2 Average temperature distribution in July (Source: <http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/kazahst/soe2/soee/index.htm>)

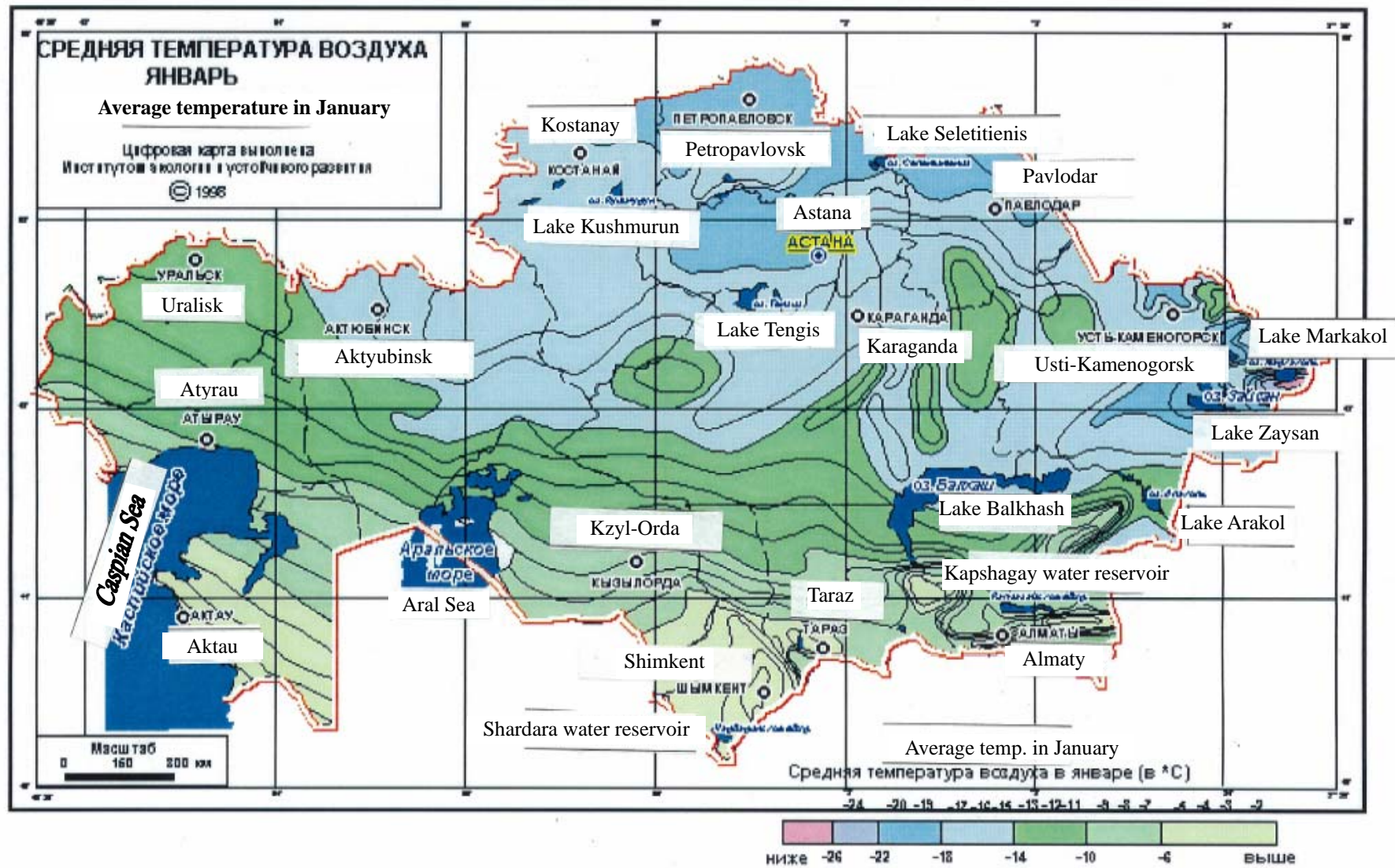


Figure 3.3 Average temperature distribution in January (Source: <http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/kazhst/soe2/soee/index.htm>)

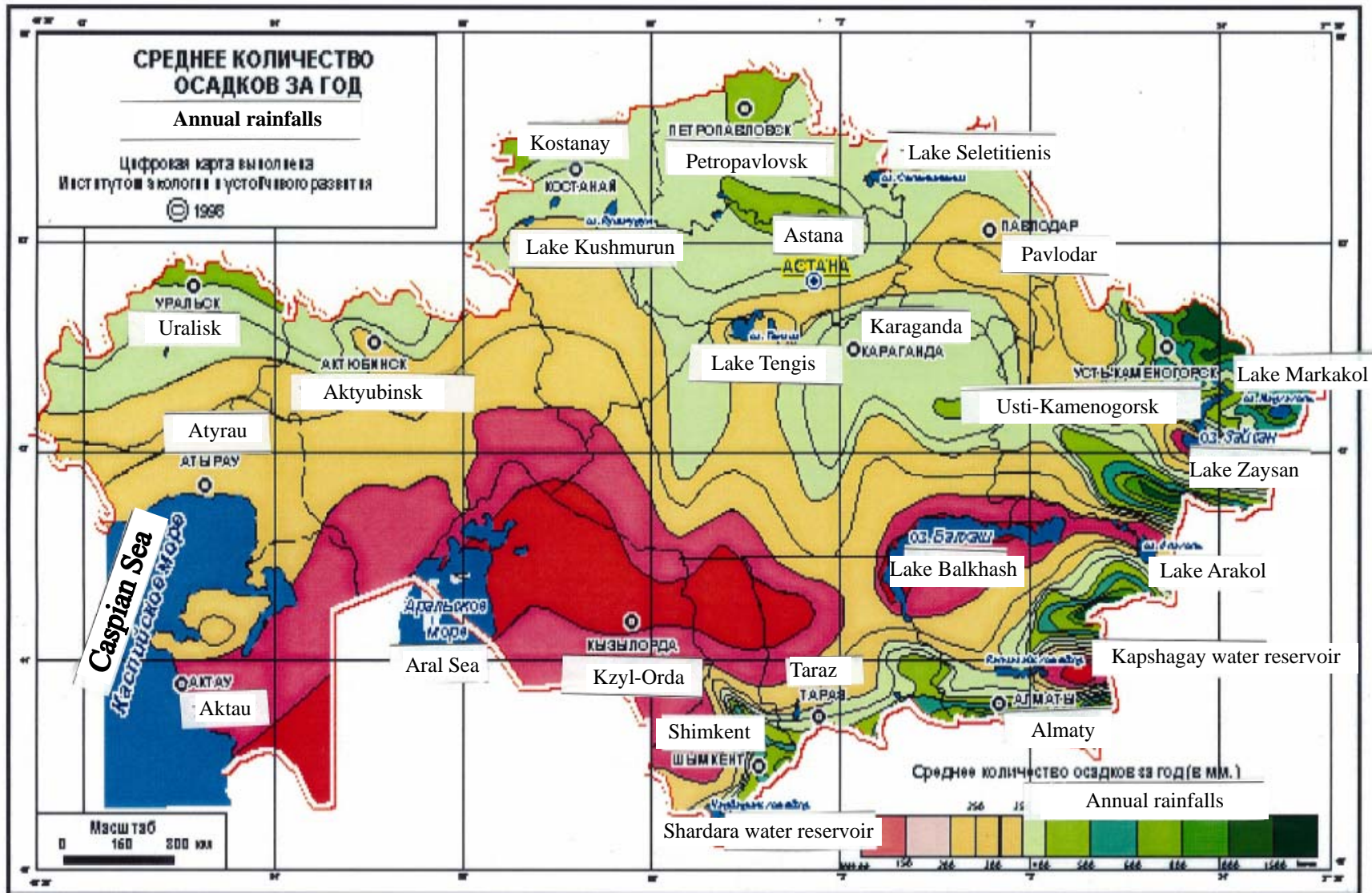


Figure 3.4 Annual rainfalls (Source: <http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/kazahst/soe2/soee/index.htm>)

3.3. History

A Bronze Age dwelling site dated from the tenth to ninth century B.C. has been discovered in Koktyube, a suburb of Almaty. It is also reported that a burial mound in Ishik, a suburb of Almaty, belonged to the Saka people who were engaged in farming and stock raising in this region in the fifth to fourth century B.C.

During the period from the sixth to seventh century, the eastern part of Kazakhstan became the territory of the Turk Horde, who had dominant power in Central Asia. The territory was invaded by the Uighur and the Khitan, and in the thirteenth century it was conquered by Mongolian troops led by Genghis Khan. Ovens called tandoors, baked bricks and money found at the habitation site discovered in the suburb of Almaty are believed to have been used in the period from the tenth to thirteenth century. “Almatu” is inscribed on the surface of the money, which is assumed to have been in circulation at that time. This indicates that economic activities were conducted in Almaty, which was an oasis on the Tian Shan Northern Route of the Silk Road.

In the fifteenth century, the dominant nomadic horde in this region led by the descendants of Jochi, the eldest son of Genghis Khan, established the Kazakh Khanate in the area spreading from Lake Balkhash in the north of Almaty to the surroundings of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyz, a neighboring country of Kazakhstan. The Kazakh Khanate were the ancestors of the present Kazakh people. They were divided into the Greater, Middle, and Lesser Hordes, which were called Juz. Almaty was the territory of the Greater Juz. In the period from the 17th to 18th century, the Kazakh Khanate suffered looting from the east by the Khanate of Dzungaria, founded by Mongolian nomads. In addition, Khanate of Kokand invaded from the south. Therefore, the Kazakh Khanate requested the support of Russia, which had taken the policy of moving southward at that time.

In 1854, Russia constructed the Zailiyskiy Fortress (later renamed the Vernoe Fortress) in what is now Almaty. In April 1867, the Vernoe Fortress was given the status of a town and renamed Verniy, which soon became the center of Semirechie Oblast.

In 1910, Verniy was renamed Alma-Ata. In 1929, after the Russian Revolution, the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republic was moved from Kzyl-Orda to Alma-Ata.

In December 1991, the Republic of Kazakhstan was created as an independent state due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Alma-Ata became the capital and was renamed Almaty. In 1997, the government decided to transfer the capital from Almaty to Astana, which was about 1,200 kilometers to the north of Almaty.