



Article

Some Aspects of The Khiva-Kazakh Relations in The 18th Century: Comparative Analysis of Narratives and Archive Documents

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Abstract: The article illustrates the peculiar character of Khiva-Kazakh relations in the 18th century through the direct involvement of the Russian Empire, which manifested itself in the form of Khiva-Russian-Kazakh relations. It analyzes the issue of accepting Russian allegiance by the Kazakh khanates and the attitude of the Khivan side towards it, was one of the important aspects of the tripartite nature of the Khiva-Kazakh relations. On the basis of the cross-referencing (comparative) analysis paper argues on the interpretation of the document – “the Abulkhair Khan’s letter to the Khan of Khiva” in 1731/1732. To reveal the nature of historical events there are compared historical materials of “Firdavs ul-iqbal” of Munis and Ogahiy is one of the Khorezmian chronicles with the Russian archival documents.

Keywords: Khiva-Kazakh relations, Russian Empire, Kazakh steppe, Khiva Khanate, Eastern policy, Abulkhair-Khan, Elbars-Khan, Nadir shah, Kaip-Khan, Nurali sultan.

1. Introduction

The peculiar character of Khiva-Kazakh relations in the 18th century is the direct involvement of a third party in them, namely the Russian Empire. In this regard, in many cases, the relationship between the two neighboring khanates manifested itself in the form of Khiva-Russian-Kazakh relations.

This configuration of forces, in turn, created the main atmosphere in the region, determining the most important moments of the political situation in Central Asia. The Kazakh Horde, as the central transit territory, have had a certain place in Russian Empire’s “Eastern policy” and was the main participant in the whole process. The political situation that emerged in the first quarter of the 18th century opened real opportunities, not only for the realization of the Russian emperor’s plans, but also for the advancement of the Dzungars deep into the Kazakh steppe.

Due to the invasion of Kazakh steppe by the Dzungars, the Kazakhs faced an extremely difficult situation, which reached its culmination in 1723. This year is known in history as *Aktaban shubryndy* – the Great Disaster [2:74].

M. Vyatkin, assessing the state of affairs, emphasizes that “if we proceed from the specific situation that developed in Kazakh Hordes in the 30s and early 40s of the 18th century, it will be remarked that Kazakhs faced an alternative: either subjection to Russia or Dzungaria” [5:131]. The Khan of the Junior Kazakh Horde (*Younger or Lesser juz*) Abulkhair Khan preferred to accept the allegiance of the Russian Empire.

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2. Materials and Methods

From The scholarly discussion of the question posed in the article requires cross-referencing (comparative) analysis – a method that makes it possible relatively to reveal the nature of historical events. Since “Firdavs ul-iqbal” of Munis and Ogahiy is one of the Khorezmian chronicles, written by the rulers’ order, mostly represents of the palace ideology. Even archival documents can only illustrate certain aspects of the real situation that in turn, narrows the perspective of the whole picture. It can be seen through the interpretation of “the Abulkhair Khan’s letter to the Khan of Khiva” in 1731/1732. This paper argues with the N.G. Apollova’s view that represents the khan of the Lesser Kazakh Horde as the influential person in the region. For instance, her work “Accession of Kazakhstan to Russia” is compared with the data of the “Firdavs ul-iqbal” and many scholars such as W.W. Velyaminov-Zernov, N.I. Veselovskiy, M. Vyatkin, B.Ya. Basin. At the same time, it should be noted that these works are directly devoted to the issue of the “annexation of the Kazakhs to the Russian Empire”. The above mentioned “Abulhair’s letter” also belongs to the Collection of documents “Kazakh-Russian relations in the 16-18th centuries (fund – 122)” of the archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire. Therefore, many details related to the history of the Khiva Khanate require additional analysis.

2. Results

The issue of accepting Russian allegiance by the Kazakh khanates and the attitude of the Khivan side towards it was one of the important aspects of the tripartite nature of Khiva-Kazakh relations.

Peter the Great gave a very accurate definition of Kazakhstan's place in Russian politics, which came down to the fact that the Kazakh steppes were the key and gateway to all Asian countries and lands:

“... and for this reason this horde must be under Russian protection, so that only through them in all Asian countries to have *comonikatsiya* [communication] and to the Russian side to take useful and capable measures” - declared Emperor Peter I [10: 15].

Abulkhair-khan understanding the importance for the Russian Empire of the establishment of its influence over the Uzbek khanates, he represents himself as the major figure who can regulate the situation. In this regard, the Russian archival documents have a valuable material, the interpretation of which affects the general picture in the region. Particularly, the letter of this Kazakh khan illustrate the picture that not only all Kazakhs confirmed their readiness to accept Russian citizenship, but also the Khan of Khiva (whom he called his cousin), as well as Bukhara rulers “express their desire to be under the rule of the Russian government” [2:79].

In the future, it is revealed that this statement was due only to the personal desire of Abulkhair-khan and these petitions were formalized without coordination with other khans. Trying to justify his actions, Abulkhair-khan explained that this was a tactic to attract the attention of the Russian government, than wanted to achieve the arrival of the envoy of the Russian tsar to the steppe and accelerate the process of “submission”.

On December 17, 1731 Abulkhair Khan arrived to Russian emperor’s official A.I. Tevkelev with a message about his intention to send his son Nurali Sultan to Elbars Khan of Khiva with a proposal to accept Russian allegiance. However, Nurali Sultan and his companions were met with hostility in Khiva, “and Abulkhair’s son left Khiva with anger without any satisfaction” [2:88].

Naturally, the adoption of “Russian subjection” was not part of the plans of the Khiva Khanate, and there were no reasons for it.

In this regard, the text of Abulkhair Khan’s letter to the Khan of Khiva, that reported by A.I. Tevkelev to the Russian government: “April on the 19th day [1732] Abulkhair Khan sent two people to Khiva with a letter, where he wrote:

From the Kirghis-Kaisak's (*Kazakh's*) khan Abulkhair to 24 people – the chief advisors in the city of Khiva: in the past 1731 year, December on the day [...] I sent my son Nurali Sultan to you, to Khiva to announce that me Abulkhair-khan, with my Horde accepted the Russian citizenship, and that His Imperial Majesty, upon my petition, may deign to release your previous guilt¹, and also agree on commerce. And you, the Khiva Pospolita², not only failed to honor my request, but showed all kinds of disobedience to my son. In the same way, two people who were with my son were put under guard in Khiva. And even though you would not accept Russian citizenship, you were not to do my son any grievous offence and disobedience, for my virtue and yours are so great that when the last envoy from the Khan of Aral [region] came to you, I freed you and gave you every kind of help, in which you promised me and swore that “as long as I live, you will obey my decrees and honor your Khan as my viceroy. But now you have all forgotten this and have begun to resist me in every way. And because of this, I declare to you that I have sent my son to join with the khan of Aral to fight against you Khivans, and then wait for me by war in this year, 1732, in the month of September [6:71-72].

N.G. Apollova, who considered the issue of Russian-Kazakh relations, notes that this letter sheds the light on some details of the relationship between Kazakh Hordes and Khiva khanate, on the personality of Abulkhair, who in this case acted as a full-fledged suzerain, pretending “to obedience of the Khan of Khiva as his viceroy” [1:26].

However, this letter should not be taken as a document characterizing Khiva-Kazakh relations or confirming Abulkhair Khan's authority over the Khiva Khanate.

To present a complete picture, it is also necessary to look at local narrative sources of Khiva. The dates mentioned in the above letter (1731-1732) fall during the reign of Elbars-khan and the “Firdavs ul-iqbal” describes that “eight years the country was in peace and prosperity” [7:102]. Also, according to this source, Elbars Khan was not only able to resist the opposite forces that had formed in the Aral region, but also having strengthened the khan's power, he organized a number of successful campaigns to Khurasan.

Abulkhair-khan, at the time of A.I.Tevkelev's arrival in the steppe, not only did not have the opportunity to interfere in the internal affairs of the Khiva Khanate and act as a “full-fledged suzerain”, but because of the weakening of his power, did not enjoy authority even among other Kazakh khans and sultans. Abulkhair-khan himself confessed that “khan only bears khan's name, but has no will over his subordinates” and compared the position of khan with a wild horse, which “both people beat and beasts catch” [5:122].

Thus, the question arises, what was the real influence of Abulkhair Khan on Khiva? The given “Decree to Khivan chief advisers” was not just a peculiar tactic of this Kazakh khan, who tried to appear before the Russian government as the most powerful ruler of the steppe?

Looking for answers to these questions in the events mentioned in the letter of 1731-1732 will lead to some confusion. A careful chronological analysis in the horizontal and vertical direction will give an opportunity to consider the situation in a more extended perspective. The point is that the promises of the Khiva elite “to listen to his decrees as long as that (Abulkhair Khan) is alive” should be attributed to the situation that arose in the 20s of the 18th century, namely during the crisis of central power in the Khiva Khanate.

It should be noted that at the end of the first quarter of the 18th century, the Arabshahids, the ruling dynasty of the Khivan authority, not only lost real power, but the pretenders to the throne were physically destroyed. Thus, there was a period (*khanbazi – game of throne*) when the Khiva Khanate was ruled by the “puppet khans”

¹ It can be assumed that this refers to the death of A. Cherkassky, who organized a military campaign to Khiva in 1714-1717.

² It means the principality or federal possession.

invited from the Kazakh steppe and from the neighboring Bukhara. According to Russian documents,

“In 1728, Shirgazy – khan of Khiva was killed by his servants, and after Shirgazy-khan the Khivians made Mamay-sultan, the brother of Abulkhair-khan’s cousin, who lived in Khiva only for one week, and the *Argamak* (horse) killed him. After Mamay, they by deceit made Batyr-sultan khan and married him to the daughter of Shirgazi-khan, who lived in Khiva only six weeks and left again to the Kirgis-Kaisak horde”.

Khorezm chronicles also report:

“After him [Shirgazi-khan] brought Sarig Aigir (Mamay), from the brothers of the Kazakh padishah Abulkhair-khan and proclaimed him khan. It was on Friday, on the way to the Friday prayer (namaz) he fell off his horse (*argamak*), crashed and died. Bahadur-khan. He was also one of Abulkhair Khan’s brothers. After Sarig Aigir, Ishmuhammad biy brought him [Bahadur-khan], put him on the throne and he fled at night [secretly] descending from the Akshaykh building after six months [7:101].

The above-mentioned Russian document, which states that “after Batyr-sultan, the Khivians asked Abulkhair Khan for the present-day Elbars Khan”, clarifies that the latter was “not relative to Abulkhair Khan, they were only in matchmaking relationship”. And the author of Firdavs ul-iqbal presents Elbars Khan as one of the last of the Arabshahids. In this passage, however, Agahi also notes that “some people consider him [Elbars-khan] to be one of the Kazakh sultans”, but he does not give any information about “asking him from Abulkhair-khan”.

These data show that in this crisis situation the local elite of Khorezm was interested in strengthening relations with the Kazakh khans. In connection with the loss of political power of the rulers of the Arabshahid dynasty, Kazakh khans and sultans, as descendants of Chigiz Khan, were often invited to the throne of the Khiva khanate from the second quarter of the 18th century. Moreover, if we take into account the fact that in the 20s of the eighteenth century, Abulkhair Khan, as the military commander of the united military forces of all three Kazakh juzs gathered against the invasion of the Dzungars, had a rather strong political position in the steppe. In this respect, the spread of his influence in the Khiva Khanate has a real basis.

However, subsequent events show that Abulkhair Khan lost his power in the 30s, including his threats to “pacify Khiva Khan with the help of the Aral forces”, which did not yield any results. Thus, we can conclude that Abulkhair Khan, with the above-mentioned “decree” sent to the Khiva advisors, was indeed trying to artificially exaggerate his power before the government of the Russian Empire.

As N.G. Apollova notes, by this time in the Khiva Khanate “an extremely unfavorable situation had developed for bringing the Khivians into Russian subjection, and that here the hostile attitude of the Khiva elders was determined both in relation to Abulkhair and to Russia”. In addition, the Khan of Khiva, fearing the strengthening of Abulkhair Khan’s power, sent his envoy to the steppe to persuade other Kazakh sultans, including Sultan Batyr, against Russian submission [2:87].

Political events related to the large-scale campaign of the Iranian Nadir Shah in Central Asia (1740) gave Abulkhair Khan the opportunity to intervene directly in the internal affairs of the Khiva Khanate. In particular, after the death of the Elbars Khan of Khiva, the local aristocracy appealed to Abulkhair Khan to accept the throne of Khiva, who could count on the support not only of the Kazakh Khan, but also, in his person, of Tsarist Russia.

H. Veselovsky, on the basis of the testimony of D. Gladyshev, the Russian ambassador, who arrived at Abulkhair Khan’s headquarters at that time, reports that:

“...When Gladyshev was led to Abul-Khair, noble Khiva elders sat on either side of him, a man of 40, and he Gladyshev, his Abul-Khair Khan congratulated him on taking over the Khanate in Khiva. Abul-Khair replied: “Thank God, Khiva is now under the rule of Her Imperial Majesty, and I am now the Khan of Khiva” [4:192].

Analysing the Kazakh Khan's actions, the scholar remarks that "Abul-Khair was probably forced to say this by his precarious position. Only by cloaking himself in Russian citizenship could he still hold on to Khiva, and only a Russian subject could still not be touched by Nadir Shah, who was on friendly terms with Russia".

In this situation, another important point in Khiva-Russian-Kazakh relations arises. In particular, if the presence of Kazakh khans on the throne of Khiva was one side of the problem, the other side was related to the fact that these Kazakh khans were officially subjects of the Russian Empire. It is not difficult to imagine what great hopes such a circumstance could promise. However, the available information shows that the situation in this respect remained unchanged. Veliaminov-Zernov, who studied the historical events of that period, stresses that "despite the fact that the person who proclaimed a subject of Russia became a ruler of Khiva, the relations of this possession (the Kanate of Khiva) with us did not change much" [3:42].

Taking into account the fact that the power of the Kazakh khans on the throne of the Khiva khanate was only nominal, this issue could not take any other form.

At the same time, this state of affairs led to certain difficulties. In particular, in 1750, when Shirbek, an envoy of the false Kazakh Khan Kaip, arrived in Orenburg from Khiva, A. Neplyuev did not know what to do. This was the first embassy from Khiva after independence from Persia, with a Kazakh Khan on the throne. In his report to the Russian Collegium of Foreign Affairs, A. Neplyuev said that Khiva often put Kazakh sultans on the throne who had sworn allegiance to Russia. In this context, he asked for clarification of what should be done in the event of such an election, which could be repeated many times. The Collegium, by a decree of 13 August 1750³, authorised the accession of the Kazakh Sultans to the Khivan throne, and the Governor-General of Orenburg was instructed to receive the newly elected Sultan, present him with gifts and demand the promotion of trade [4:218].

The further attitude of Kaip-khan towards the Russian government, as well as other events, indicate that the presence of a Russian subject on the throne of the Khiva Khanate did not really mean anything. Moreover, as N. Zalesov notes, when Kaip, the son of the Kazakh Batyr Sultan, came to the throne of the Khanate, the oppression of Russian merchants in Khiva began again. In his article he quotes the opinion of the Orenburg commander Zenbulatov about "this Khan [Kaip]":

"This Kaip sultan from the family of the Batyr sultan, the descendant of Shirgazi-khan, during whose reign in Khiva, in 1717, the captain of the guard, Prince Alexander Cherkassky with his army, was exterminated. And the interpreter, who was sent to Khiva with the caravan from Orenburg in 1752, was not only detained, but also "angered" by this Kaip⁴.

At the same time, the Russian Empire had a certain touch point in Khiva-Kazakh relations. In particular, the economic interests of the three sides, which overlapped in the Kazakh steppes, sometimes required the intervention of the stronger party. Kaip-khan, who sent ambassadors to Orenburg and Astrakhan in 1750-1751, sought the help of the Russian government not only to increase his influence in the Kazakh steppes, but also to gain a great material advantage. Kaip-khan asked the Russian government to allow trade caravans between Russia and the Khiva Khanate to pass through the estates of his father, the Batyr Sultan. In this way, Kaip-khan also hoped to deprive Nurali-khan, his main rival, of the great advantage he enjoyed from customs duties [9: 21]. This competition led to an intensification of the conflict between the Kaip-khan and the Nurali Khan of the Middle Kazakh Juz. As Veselovsky notes, raids followed one another until Russian intervention proved necessary. In this connection, in 1753 a caravan was equipped with

³ This decree cancelled the previous decree of 21 October 1745, issued during the possession of Shah Nadir in Khiva.

⁴ This note belongs to Zenbulatov, the Orenburg ober-commandant and regional commander, and is placed in the note of his report in 1783 to Anukhtin, the governor-general of Ufa and Simbirsk. See: [8:43].

20,000 rubles, to which the Orenburg official Chuchalov was appointed, and Gulyaev was there as chief envoy [4:222].

The caravan was also joined by ambassadors from Nurali-khan to settle disputes and offences between the Kyrgyz-Kaisaks (Kazakhs) and Khivinians [3:32;36]. The available material shows that the Russian envoys were of little use in this process. As the envoys themselves note, they were “ostensibly sent to take note of Khiva and its borders, but not to testify in the consideration of its affairs” [3]. As a result, the Khan “came to great distress” and put a guard on them. On the other hand, promises of material support from the Russian government “influenced Nurali-Khan in the most wonderful way” [3:222]. He himself volunteered to end the conflict with Kaip. The reconciliation of the warring parties was strengthened by the betrothal of Nurali-khan's daughter to the Khiva Kaip-khan.

Further events show that the Khiva Khanate did not even recognize the fact that the Kazakh Hordes had accepted Russian subjugation. This situation, in turn, led to a problem in which another factor of trilateral relations manifested itself. The problem was that the Kazakhs of the Lesser Horde, who had accepted Russian allegiance, and some Kazakh tribes roaming along the Sirdarya River, were considered by the government of the Russian Empire as “their Kazakhs”, and the Khiva khans made their claims on these territories, that historically some of them belonged to the khanate or were border zones. In this regard, the Khiva rulers not only interfered directly in the internal affairs of these peoples, but also continued to collect taxes (zakat) from these lands. In the first quarter of the 19th century, with the strengthening of the political power of the rulers of the Kongrat dynasty (1770-1917), the situation became even worse.

In particular, Russian documents record cases where “the Khiva official Qārli-makhram, sent by the Khan to settle various disputes between the Alimuli, Bayuli and Tabyn clans, came to the Kirghiz (Kazakhs) wandering along the northern outskirts of Ust-Yurt and the Ulu river, and brought to these Kirghiz a letter from his master” [8:54].

Such situations are also described in local narratives. In particular, “Firdavs ul-iqbāl” contains the information that in 1813/1814, when Muhammad Rahim I (1806-1825) – khan of Khiva, went hunting to the eastern part of Arnak Mountain, he began to restore order among the Kazakh elders (kadkhudā) living in that area.

According to this source, the Khan of Khiva reconciled these conflicting elders “and bestowed gifts on those he considered worthy, and sent an ultimatum (siyāsāt-nāma) to the Kazakhs, hostile peoples of Nazar ... and the Kazakh envoys were Muhammadjān kāḍi and Yamancha biy” [7:412].

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the peculiarity of Khiva-Kazakh relations was that any socio-political, climatic and economic changes directly affected both neighboring khanates. Moreover, the territory where the interconnection of these two states extended was at the center of the economic interests of the Russian Empire.

The activation of the “eastern policy” of the Russian Empire, aimed directly at annexing not only the Kazakh steppe but also the Central Asian khanates, was the main factor in the tripartite nature of Khiva-Kazakh relations.

In the first quarter of the 18th century, during the years of the “great disaster” that befell the Kazakh people, Kazakhstan was presented with two options, namely to accept the subjugation of Russia or Dzungaria. In this situation, the Khan of the Younger Kazakh Juz (Horde) Abulkhair-Khan took the role of the leader of the general Kazakh troops, who in turn preferred the path of accepting the allegiance of Tsarist Russia.

Abulkhair-khan, took active measures to swear in the khans of Khiva and Bukhara. He was well aware that only by involving the Central Asian khanates in this process would he be able to attract the attention of the Russian government. Thus, the question of

the acceptance of Russian subjugation by the Kazakh khanates and the attitude of the Khiva side to this event was one of the important aspects of the tripartite nature of bilateral relations between Khiva and Kazakh khanates.

The campaign of the Iranian Nadir Shah in the Khiva Khanate (1740) forced the Khiva elite to turn to Abulkhair Khan as a descendant of Chingissids. It also illuminates that “chingissid factor” had still a strong impact in the power legitimacy in almost all the Central Asian states, that’s according to the determined rule (Yasa), the supreme ruler should belong this family. Therefore, after the death of Elbars – khan of Khiva, the local aristocracy counted on the support not only of the Kazakh Khan, but also of Tsarist Russia in his person. According to their calculations, Nadir Shah, who was on friendly terms with Russia, could not touch a Russian subject.

However, the proclamation of the subject of Tsarist Russia as the ruler of Khiva did not change the existing situation. The power of the Kazakh khans on the throne of the Khiva khanate was only nominal, and the real authority was in the hands of the local aristocracy, which sought to strengthen close ties with the Shah of Iran. The colonial policy of the Russian Empire, as a factor of external influence, stimulated the Kazakh leaders' rapprochement with the Khiva Khans. This rapprochement manifested itself primarily in the military and political support of the Khiva side in the national liberation movements of Kazakh leaders against the Russian Empire.

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