



ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN OF IMAMKULI KHAN OF BUKHARA IN 1619

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the political relations between Imamqulikhan (1611–1642), a prominent representative of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty, and Kazakh sultans such as Yeshim Khan, Tursun Khan, and Abulai Sultan. Until the 1620s, the Bukhara Khanate was in competition with the Kazakh sultans over the territories of Tashkent, the banks of the Syr Darya, and the Ferghana Valley. The political processes of this period are comprehensively covered based on primary sources.

Keywords: Bukhara Khanate, Kazakh sultans, Imamqulikhan, Yeshim Khan, Abulai Sultan, Tursun Khan, Tashkent, Ferghana, Syr Darya basin.

Introduction. During the rule of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty, the Bukhara Khanate actively engaged in political and diplomatic relations with neighboring states. There were certain conflicts with the Safavids over the Khorasan issue and with the Mughal rulers concerning the regions of Badakhshan and Balkh. The Khorasan issue, beyond its political aspects, was intensified by deep-rooted religious disagreements, leading to severe military clashes, while relations with the Mughals were primarily regulated through diplomatic channels due to conflicting political interests. The relations with the Kazakh Khanate were particularly strained, as disputes over control of the Syr Darya basin and political influence in the Fergana Valley resulted in prolonged and relentless wars.

Literature Review. The analysis of the topic is mainly based on historical sources and, in some instances, on information from scholarly literature. Primary historical works like 'Imomqulixonnomma,' 'Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi Abbasi,' 'Bahr ul-asror,' and 'Tarikh' were compared and enriched with conclusions from Kazakh researchers' publications on the subject.

Methodology. The study employs an analytical approach. The primary sources used include historical documents from the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly 'Imomqulixonnomma' and 'Bahr ul-asror.' Modern research exploring relations between the Bukhara and Kazakh khanates was also examined. The data were analyzed using a comparative-analytical method, and events were presented logically and chronologically. Efforts were made to draw unbiased conclusions by comparing the details from available historical sources and verifying the evidence obtained. The actions of historical figures and the causes and consequences of political decisions were analyzed within their specific historical context. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the political landscape of this period, the relations between the Kazakh sultans



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and other states associated with the Bukhara Khanate were also considered. Most of the sources used in this study are Eastern manuscripts, translated and analyzed.

Discussion. During the reign of Imam Quli Khan, the Bukhara Khanate reached its peak of development. The early years of his rule were particularly intense politically, marked by conflicts over the Syr Darya region with the Kazakhs and over the Fergana Valley with one of the last representatives of the Shaybanid dynasty, Abul Muhammad Sultan. Initially victorious in these confrontations, Imam Quli Khan managed to annex the Fergana region to his territory while maintaining Abul Muhammad Sultan's rule. The alliance strengthened by familial ties between the Bukhara Khan and the local ruler led to a temporary warming of relations. However, Abul Muhammad Sultan's rapprochement with the Kazakh khans led to tension. While the ruler of Fergana sought to regain his former influence by allying with the Kazakhs, the Kazakhs found it beneficial to collaborate with figures like Abul Muhammad Sultan to challenge a strong rival like Imam Quli Khan.

However, the subsequent course of events took a completely different turn. In 1618, the Kazakh sultans — Yeshim Khan, Abulai Sultan, Nazar Sultan, and Kuchek Sultan — attacked Abul Muhammad Sultan to end his rule. According to sources, these sultans, who had been left without territories, sought to please Imam Quli Khan and hoped for some land in return, as well as to improve their financial situation through the looting of the valley. The fact that they quickly reached Andijan and besieged it indicates that the attack took Abul Muhammad Sultan by surprise, preventing him from preparing adequate defenses, while also demonstrating the large following the Kazakh sultans managed to gather. Although the sources do not specify, it is reasonable to assume that the sultans entered the valley through its northeastern borders, and some of the Kyrgyz tribes allied with Abul Muhammad Sultan joined the invaders.

After the siege of Andijan, the desperate Abul Muhammad Sultan attempted to escape but was caught and killed along with his family by the pursuing Kazakhs. The Kazakh sultans quickly conveyed this 'good news' to Imam Quli Khan, requesting control over the Fergana Valley as a reward for eliminating Abul Muhammad Sultan, who had refused to submit to the Bukhara Khan. Despite Tursun Khan, who owed his power along the Syr Darya and in Tashkent to Imam Quli Khan's support, being considered the latter's nominal deputy, he had become the primary ruler of the Kazakhs.

The remaining Kazakh sultans roamed homeless between the borders of Yarkand, the Dasht-i Qipchaq, and the Bukhara Khanate. Among them, Abulai Sultan stood out for his political activism. As previously mentioned, he had suffered defeat from the Ashtarkhanids around 1612–1613 and fled to Moghulistan. After a while, he allied with the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz to fight against Yarkand Khan Sultan Shuja-ud-Din Ahmad (1610–1618) and his eldest son Timur Sultan. Later, Abulai Sultan established marital ties with Timur Sultan, but following the latter's death in 1614, it appears Abulai returned to his homeland.

Thus, Abul Muhammad Sultan ruled the Fergana Valley from 1604 to 1617–1618. Due to the intense political situation, he primarily fought against the Bukhara Khanate alongside nomadic forces. The imbalance of power and his lack of significant support among the local population led to his governance of the valley under Ashtarkhanid suzerainty between 1614 and 1617. Ultimately, he was killed in 1618 during clashes with the Kazakh sultans.

The execution of Sultan Abul Muhammad came as an unexpected event for Imam Quli Khan. At first glance, the death of the governor of Andijan—who had formally acknowledged submission to the Khan of Bukhara but secretly sought alliances with forces opposing him—



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might logically have been favorable to Imam Quli Khan. However, the presence of Kazakhs in the eastern territories posed a far greater threat than Abul Muhammad Sultan ever had. The fact that the Kazakh sultans were currently landless yet had entrenched themselves in a strategically advantageous region cast a shadow over the interests of the Bukharan Khan. The transfer of the Fergana Valley into the hands of the descendants of the Kazakh Khan Shigay Khan would not only harm the Bukharan Khan's interests but also those of Tursun Khan, who belonged to the lineage of the Jolim Sultans. Furthermore, the assassination of Abul Muhammad Sultan—Imam Quli Khan's brother-in-law—by the Kazakh sultans directly undermined the political prestige of the Bukharan Khan. Meanwhile, the Kazakh khans who had occupied the valley allied with nomadic tribes hostile to Bukhara and began rising against him.

Due to these reasons, Imam Quli Khan began preparing for another major campaign to reclaim the Fergana Valley. Two factors explain why Imam Quli Khan could not aid his brother-in-law during the Kazakh sultans' capture of Andijan. First, in the winter of 1617, a 30,000-strong Bukharan army under the command of Nadr Devan-Begi Togai launched an attack on Marv, where they remained stationed for some time [4: 1145–1146; 5: 1151–1152]. Second, in 1618, forces from Balkh led by Yalangtosh Bahadur raided Herat, plundering parts of its surrounding territories [4: 1161–1162; 5: 1651–1652]. These two campaigns demonstrated that the Ashtarkhanids' primary focus was on their southwestern frontiers. Exploiting this situation, the Kazakhs easily assassinated Abul Muhammad Sultan.

The Bukharan Khan, Imam Quli Khan, began preparing to dispatch a third army toward Andijan under the leadership of his uncle Nadr Devan-Begi Togai. Tursun Khan, the ruler of Tashkent, was also mobilized for this campaign, as he, like Imam Quli Khan, opposed the establishment of hostile Kazakh sultans along his eastern borders. The forces led by the ruler of Tashkent and Nadr Devan-Begi Togai entered the valley around 1028 AH (1619 CE). Initially, the combined army laid siege to Margilan [1: 136b; 2: 234], which was defended by Nazar Sultan. Nazar Sultan and his men broke out of the siege to attack the Bukharan forces but were defeated and fled toward the Ulugh Mountains [1: 137b]. Nazar Sultan's retreat demoralized the other Kazakh sultans. Nadr Devan-Begi Togai and Tursun Khan swiftly advanced toward Andijan. Unprepared for the Bukharan army's rapid arrival, the panicked Eshim Khan and Kuchek Khan fled toward Uzgen. The allies pursued them relentlessly, reaching Uzgen and forcing the Kazakh sultans to retreat to the Dasht-i Qipchaq [1: 137b; 2: 234].

An analysis of these events yields several observations. The Kazakh sultans who occupied the valley split into two groups to defend it. Nazar Sultan, stationed in Margilan with the main force, was supposed to hold off the Ashtarkhanids as long as possible. Meanwhile, Eshim Khan and Kuchek Sultan in Andijan planned to seek aid from neighboring nomadic tribes. However, Nazar Sultan's decision to abandon the siege and engage in open battle led to his defeat. Although sources lack explicit details, it appears there was little unity among the Kazakh sultans. After his defeat, Nazar Sultan fled not to his allies in Andijan but toward the Dasht, suggesting internal discord. The Kazakh sultans likely failed to agree on dividing the Fergana Valley or selecting a leader. Without external support, Eshim Khan and Kuchek Sultan surrendered Andijan without resistance and withdrew to the valley's eastern fringes. Recognizing the situation, Nadr Devan-Begi Togai and Tursun Khan expelled them completely. Notably, the name of Abulay Sultan—who would later appear as the ruler of Andijan in the *Bahr al-Asrar* during the Battle of Shahrukhiya [6: 106b]—is absent among the



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fleeing Kazakh khans. It seems that around the time of the 1619 campaign, Abulay Sultan defected to Imam Quli Khan's side. After the campaign, the Fergana Valley's administration was entrusted to Abulay Sultan. This appointment also served to weaken the position of Tursun Khan, the ruler of Tashkent, as both he and Abulay Sultan belonged to rival lineages.

The third campaign toward the Fergana Valley is mentioned only in the work *Imomqulixonnoma*. Another important source of this period, *Bahr ul-Asrar*, does not discuss the aforementioned events. This situation can be explained as follows:

- The source in question (*Bahr ul-Asrar*) was written at the behest of Nadr Muhammad Khan, who did not participate in these events. Therefore, the historian may have been unaware of the events or deemed them unworthy of mention.
- Mahmud ibn Vali completed his work in 1640. While he made extensive use of various sources and witnesses during its composition, he primarily relied on books available in the royal library of Balkh. As a result, chronicles and sources from Bukhara, including *Imomqulixonnoma*, likely escaped his attention. *Imomqulixonnoma* concludes with events around 1623–1624, suggesting it was written around that time.

The successes of the 1619 Fergana campaign significantly strengthened the Ashtarkhanids' position on their eastern frontiers. Taking advantage of this, they decided to renegotiate the previous vassalage agreement with Tursun Khan on more favorable terms. A new agreement was concluded between Nadr Devan-Begi Togai and Tursun Khan. According to its terms, Tursun Khan would continue to govern Tashkent and Turkistan as a vassal of the Bukharan Khan, paying annual tributes and taxes while pledging full obedience to Imam Quli Khan. Tursun Khan willingly agreed to these terms. Following this, Nadr Devan-Begi Togai returned to Samarkand, and Tursun Khan went back to Tashkent [1: 138a–139b; 2: 234–235].

This agreement demonstrates that Imam Quli Khan's trust in the Kazakh khans had weakened. By this point, Tursun Khan remained the only force in the northeastern territories capable of opposing the Bukharan Khan. This is why Nadr Devan-Begi Togai renegotiated the 1021 AH (1612–13 CE) agreement with him. In a sense, Tursun Khan also benefited from this peace. The defeated Kazakh sultans in Fergana were not physically eliminated, leaving them the opportunity to launch raids into Tursun Khan's territories with new forces from the Dasht at any time. Notably, Eshim Khan's prestige among the Kazakh Khanate was significantly higher than Tursun Khan's. The relationship between the ruler of Tashkent and the Bukharan Khan directly or indirectly influenced the Fergana Valley.

Result and conclusion: This article analyzes the political relations between the Bukharan Khanate and the Kazakh sultans in the early 17th century, as well as the strategic importance of the Fergana Valley. The research findings indicate that the assassination of Abul Muhammad Sultan was a significant political event not only for the Bukharan Khanate but also for the Kazakh sultans. This event created new opportunities for Imam Quli Khan to strengthen his political influence on the eastern frontiers but also opened the door to potential threats from the Kazakh khans.

Throughout the article, the internal conflicts among the Kazakh sultans, their complex relations with the Bukharan Khanate, and the struggle for control of the Fergana Valley are deeply analyzed. This situation highlights the necessity for Imam Quli Khan to employ both delicate diplomacy and military force in his territorial expansion policies.

Based on the information presented in the article, it is clear that Imam Quli Khan's actions in the Fergana Valley held significant strategic importance, shaped by the internal discord among



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the Kazakhs and the Bukharan Khanate's balance-of-power politics. The results of this research may serve as valuable scholarly material for future researchers studying this historical period.

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