

The Significance Of The Political Portrait Of The Emir Of Bukhara Abdulahad Khan In The Study Of History

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Abstract

Abstract. The article sets out the theoretical foundations of the concepts of “political portrait” and “historico-political portrait”, and examines the possibilities of their application in studying the personality of the Emir of Bukhara, Said Abdulahad Khan. It is shown that the method of political portraiture serves as a means of bringing into a single system the psychological characteristics of a political leader, his political practice, and the various public perceptions of him. Using the example of Emir Abdulahad Khan, this method is demonstrated through a comparison of the contradictory images formed in the works of Ahmad Donish, Mirzo Salimbek, Sayyid Mansur Olimi, and other authors.

Keywords: Political portrait, historico-political portrait, psychological portrait, content analysis, interdisciplinary method, Emir of Bukhara Abdulahad Khan.

1. Introduction

In the 19th–20th centuries, historiography paid increasing attention to the role of the individual, which led to the development of biographical studies, historical portraits, and specialized works on political leaders. Within contemporary approaches, there has emerged a need to integrate methods from sociology, political science, and psychology into the study of historical figures. In this context, the concepts of the “political portrait” and the “historical-political portrait” have taken shape as an independent methodological direction.

The study of the personality of the Emir of Bukhara Said Abdulahad Khan (1885–1910) likewise requires precisely such an interdisciplinary approach. His reign is closely connected with the opening of the Bukhara Emirate to dialogue with foreign countries, the intensifying phase of the “Great Game,” the internal crisis of the feudal system, and cautious attempts at modernization. Local authors of this period — Ahmad Donish, Mirzo Salimbek, Sayyid Mansur Olimiy — as well as foreign travellers and researchers such as W.E. Curtis, P. Shubinsky, L.E. Dmitriev-Kavkazskii, G. Normann, and many others, left diverse and at times

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Article history

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: submitted: 2025/9/15 revised: 2025/10/23 accepted: 2025/11/10 published: 2025/12/11

sharply contradictory descriptions. It is precisely this set of conflicting images that clearly demonstrates both the necessity and the heuristic potential of the political portrait method [1].

In theoretical literature, the political portrait is interpreted as a scholarly model that comprehensively expresses the personality of a political leader at the intersection of psychological, socio-political, and cultural factors. In such a portrait, the leader appears as:

- an individual possessing unique personal traits;
- an agent operating within a specific political system;
- a figure connected with particular cultural and national traditions and with the existing “social demand” in society [2].

The historical-political portrait, in turn, expands the temporal and spatial dimensions of the political portrait, bringing together into a single system the biography of the individual, the political order of the era, contemporary evaluations, and the characteristics of the source base. In this case, the personality is considered within a “historical interior” — against the background of a specific political order, concrete historical processes, and social structures [3].

2. Materials and Methods

The existing scholarship on political and historico-political portraiture emphasizes its interdisciplinary nature, integrating historical analysis with insights from political science, sociology and psychology. Prior studies of Emir Abdulahad Khan, including those by Ahmad Donish, Mirzo Salimbek, Sayyid Mansur Olimiy, and several European travellers, present markedly divergent narratives, underscoring the need for a critical and comparative reassessment of these sources. This study employs the political portrait method as its principal analytical framework, enabling a systematic synthesis of biographical data, political behaviour, and the socio-cultural environment of the late-19th- and early-20th-century Bukhara Emirate. Content analysis is applied to identify recurring evaluative patterns and contradictions across the source base, while elements of psychological portraiture support the cautious reconstruction of the ruler’s character traits and leadership style. Methodologically, the research proceeds from the premise that political personalities must be examined within their structural context—namely the constraints of Russian protectorate status, internal institutional decline, and the symbolic strategies of religious legitimization. This integrated approach allows for a nuanced interpretation of Abdulahad Khan as a transitional figure shaped by intersecting political, cultural, and psychological factors

3. Results and Discussion

Using the example of Emir Abdulahad Khan, this can be demonstrated as follows:

• Ahmad Donish depicts him as a symbol of spiritual decline and political capitulation, interpreting the emir as a weak-willed ruler inclined to pleasures [4]. In many respects, this characterization resonates with the assessment of W.E. Curtis, who further specifies the emir’s image by describing his personal qualities and style of rule. According to Curtis, “Emir Said Abdulahad Khan was a frivolous Eastern man who loved luxury and was not inclined to work, a ruler who possessed all the shortcomings and virtues of his predecessors. He was deceitful, given to all kinds of excessive extravagance, and demanded that his subjects collect enough money from the people to cover these expenses.” The author emphasizes that Emir Said Abdulahad Khan did not control state affairs at all and, by granting the Russians broad opportunities and showing them favor, largely lost his authority among the people and officials [5]. At the same time, other sources contain information that paints a more complex and contradictory image of Emir Abdulahad Khan: alongside his personal weaknesses and dependence on his entourage, they underscore his erudition, interest in reforms, attempts to modernize certain spheres of administration, and his efforts to maneuver between Russian

pressure and internal conservative forces. All this allows us to argue that the one-sidedly negative portrait presented by Ahmad Donish and W.E. Curtis requires serious correction and comparison with a wider range of testimonies.

- Mirzo Salimbek describes Abdulahad Khan as an emir who managed to preserve peace and order, who led an active religious life and pursued a cautious policy of balance in relations with Russia [6]. As the English traveller I.M. Phipps notes, Emir Abdulahad Khan treated Europeans well. The author, with great admiration, also points out that, in order to receive travellers and accompany them around the city of Bukhara, the emir even sent his personal bodyguards (djigits), entrusting them with the task of showing guests the most interesting places in Bukhara [7].

- Sayyid Mansur Olimiy, in turn, emphasizes the sayyid origin of the emir and his religious-legitimizing policy associated with Mecca and Medina, interpreting it as a strategy for strengthening Bukhara's authority within the entire Islamic world [8]. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that Olimiy himself belongs to the dynastic milieu, which naturally influences his perspective and reinforces the tendency to stress the virtues of the ruling dynasty. In this sense, his assessments are particularly revealing as an internal view of the emir's figure and the ideology of power, although they must be carefully correlated with more distanced and critical testimonies by other authors.

Thus, the historical-political portrait of Emir Abdulahad Khan is formed at the intersection of several layers — political-moral, psychological, religious-legitimizing, and foreign-policy.

The historical-political portrait is constructed by combining biographical facts with an analysis of the epochal context. The materials relating to Abdulahad Khan show that his dynastic status, the nature of his education, the circumstances of his accession to the throne, and the status of Bukhara as a Russian protectorate are interlinked. Biographical information, interpreted within the framework of the intensifying phase of the “Great Game” and the redrawing of the political map of Central Asia, turns the portrait of the ruler into a key for understanding the overall political picture of the era.

In political portraiture, an important role is also played by attempts at indirectly reconstructing the leader's psychological type on the basis of memoirs, travel notes, and diplomatic reports [9]. If in Ahmad Donish's account Abdulahad Khan appears as a hedonistic, weak-willed ruler detached from the concerns of the people, then in Salimbek's portrayal he is a kind, generous emir who is not indifferent to the needs of his subjects and who maintains tranquility in all regions of Bukhara. Sayyid Mansur Olimiy, in turn, presents him as a ruler who, by means of religious symbols and sacred lineage (nasab), seeks to compensate for political weakness, strengthening his status through the sanctity of place and origin. These contradictory psychological images reveal the potential of remote psychodiagnostics within the framework of political portraiture and make it possible, with due caution, to draw conclusions about the leader's motivations, fears, and strategies of adaptation.

The methodology of the political portrait proceeds from the premise that the personality of a leader must be studied not in isolation, but in its interconnection with the political system, political culture, national-historical situation, and the “social demand” of society. In the era of Abdulahad Khan, Bukhara:

- outwardly preserved the appearance of an independent monarchy, while in fact being a Russian protectorate;
- internally faced a crisis of traditional feudal institutions and notable dysfunctions in the work of the court bureaucracy;
- externally became an arena of symbolic struggle for influence in the Islamic world (zawiyyas and ribats in Mecca and Medina, a mosque in St. Petersburg, etc.).

Therefore, in the political portrait of Abdulahad Khan there emerges the image of a ruler of a transitional period, who attempts to conceal the weakening of power through rituals, religious symbols, and demonstrative external loyalty.

To demonstrate more clearly the method of the political portrait, let us examine the figure of Emir Abdulahad Khan through several key layers.

Lineage (nasab) and religious-legitimizing foundation. In local sources, the Manghit dynasty is traced back to Ali and Fatima and is identified with the descendants of the Prophet (sayyids), while attempts to link it to the descendants of Chinggis Khan are rejected. The construction of a ribat in Mecca, the inscription of the emir's name on its gate, and the confirmation of this status by the Ottoman sultan are interpreted as policies aimed at strengthening Bukhara's prestige within the broader Islamic space. In this way, religious-legitimizing motives are used as a "compensatory resource" under conditions of weakened political sovereignty: real dependence is masked by appeals to sacred lineage and to the Islamic centers.

Personal qualities and character. The sources provide sharply divergent assessments of Emir Abdulahad Khan's character. In Ahmad Donish's account he appears as a morally degraded, hedonistic, weak-willed ruler who relies on "empty and impure" people. Mirzo Salimbek, on the contrary, portrays him as a gentle, kind, and generous ruler who managed to preserve peace and order. In Russian and other foreign descriptions there emerges the image of a monarch who attaches great importance to appearance and court etiquette, values discipline, is at times suspicious and quick-tempered, yet inclined to control affairs down to the smallest details [10]. These contradictory characterizations show the political portrait not as a simple opposition between a "good" and a "bad" ruler, but as the image of a complex personality filled with internal contradictions.

Domestic policy and personnel line. In Donish's interpretation, Emir Abdulahad Khan's internal policy manifests itself primarily in his personnel course and the degradation of the court milieu: reasonable and competent people are pushed aside, reliance is placed on low-qualified and flattering courtiers, the qazi-kalan and other dignitaries effectively concentrate power in their own hands, accelerating the decay of the feudal system. In his work Essays on Bukhara, P. Shubinsky records other aspects — the abolition or mitigation of certain punishments, reduction of the practice of brutal torture and imprisonment, the issuing of moral-legal decrees, and measures to stimulate trade through changes in customs policy. As a result, the internal political portrait of Abdulahad Khan combines, on the one hand, elements of decline and personnel mistakes, and on the other, cautious steps toward modernization.

Foreign policy and relations with Russia. In the sphere of foreign policy, the image of Emir Abdulahad Khan is likewise extremely contradictory. In Ahmad Donish's texts, the emir's open recognition of Russia's authority, his demonstrative readiness to act as its vassal, and even to send his son to the imperial court are interpreted as the highest point of political subordination. In Mirzo Salimbek's account, these same episodes are interpreted as an attempt to achieve stable and peaceful relations with Russia and to obtain external political protection for the sake of preserving internal order. In foreign descriptions Bukhara often appears as a "coquette in the arms of Russia" [11]: formal sovereignty is preserved, but key political decisions are made within the framework of imperial logic. In this context, Abdulahad Khan appears as a "flexible vassal" who acknowledges external dependence but strives to preserve internal traditional structures.

Economic and cultural policy. The sources emphasize that Emir Abdulahad Khan appears not only as a ruler of a complex transitional period, but also as a figure under whom steps were taken to develop trade and communications: railway links, postal services, and telegraph were established, and trade along the Amu Darya was expanded [12]. At the same time, he is known

as a poet under the pen name “Ojiz,” who studied fiqh, logic, and philosophy, surrounded himself with scholars and poets, and encouraged the creation of *tazkirahs* and historical works on the history and literature of Bukhara. The founding of zawiyyas in Mecca and Medina, the construction of a mosque in St Petersburg, and their maintenance at the expense of the Bukhara treasury are interpreted as a religious and cultural policy that symbolically links Bukhara both with the Russian and with the Islamic worlds.

IV. Discussion.

The theoretical and source-based observations presented above show that the historical-political portrait is not merely a biographical genre, but an interdisciplinary scholarly method that brings together various approaches — biographical, content-analytical, psychological, and contextual. By means of political portraiture, the researcher gains an opportunity to understand more deeply both the personality of the leader and the political system of his time[13].

Using Abdulahad Khan as an example, the method of the political portrait clearly reveals that:

- lineage (nasab) and religious-legitimizing symbols (sayyid status, zawiyyas and ribats in Mecca and Medina) perform the function of “compensatory legitimacy” under conditions of weakened sovereignty;
- sharp discrepancies in the assessment of personal qualities in different sources shape the image of a complex, internally contradictory ruler who goes beyond simple “good–bad” schemes[14];
- domestic policy simultaneously carries features of decline (personnel miscalculations, court intrigues) and cautious modernization (mitigation of punishments, incentives for trade);
- in foreign policy there emerges the image of a ruler balancing between loyalty to Russia and the desire to preserve at least symbolic sovereignty;
- in the economic and cultural sphere, there is a discernible aspiration to bring Bukhara into a new communicative and cultural space, although feudal–colonial constraints do not allow these intentions to be fully realized[15].

4. Conclusion

In this sense, the political portrait of Abdulahad Khan may be interpreted as an image arising at the intersection of tendencies toward decline and modernization, religious-legitimizing sacralization and imperial dependence, elements of enlightenment and the desire to preserve the traditional order. It is precisely this multilayered and contradictory character that confirms the scholarly value of the method of the historical-political portrait: through the analysis of a single ruling personality, it becomes possible to discern the entire complex of political structures, social crises, and strategies of adaptation of an entire era.

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