

## Reflections on the Geopolitical Dynamics Between Imam Quli Khan and Tursun Khan: A Case Study of the 1624 Events.

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the political situation of the Bukhara Khanate in the first quarter of the 17th century and its relations with neighboring states, particularly the Kazakh Khanate. The early years of Imam Quli Khan's reign were marked by a rather difficult political environment: in the south, the khanate constantly competed with the Safavids, and in the north with the Kazakhs. The fact that the Fergana Valley did not fully submit to the supreme authority of the Ashtarkhanids significantly hindered Imam Quli Khan's ability to wage a successful struggle against the Kazakhs.

**Keywords:** Bukhara Khanate, Fergana Valley, Imam Quli Khan, Abul Muhammad Sultan, Tursun Sultan, Ishim Sultan, Abulay Sultan, Kazakhs.

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence in the field of historiography, characterized by a more nuanced and profound approach to historical research. Much like other eras of Central Asian history, the study of the medieval period is entering a transformative new stage. In particular, substantial scholarly works have been published regarding the governance of the Ashtarkhanid (Janid, Tuqai-Timurid) dynasty within the Khanate of Bukhara [1].

However, since the majority of existing research focuses primarily on the khanate's central administration, economic systems, and cultural life, data concerning peripheral and frontier regions – such as the Fergana Valley – remains comparatively under-researched. This discrepancy underscores the urgent necessity of examining how the political evolution and eventual decline of the Bukharan state impacted the valley, as well as investigating the political catalysts that led to the emergence of the Khanate of Kokand in this territory [2].

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## 2. Research Method

This study primarily relies on seminal primary sources, namely Mahmud ibn Vali's *Bahr al-Asrar fi Manaqib al-Akhyar* and Hafiz Tanish Bukhari's *Imam Quli Khan-nama*. Furthermore, the scholarly contributions of contemporary historians such as A.Alekseyev, N.Atigayev, and Audrey Burton have been effectively utilized to provide additional context.

To ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the subject matter, scientific conclusions are presented through the application of standard historical research methodologies, including chronological analysis, micro-history, and comparative analysis.

## 3. Results and Discussion

From the onset of his reign, Imam Quli Khan directed significant efforts toward bolstering his political influence in the northeastern territories of the Khanate. This strategic focus was necessitated by the growing prominence of Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes in these regions compared to previous eras. The political weakening of the Khanate of Bukhara following the death of Boqi Muhammad Khan in 1605 – compounded by the protracted power struggles between Vali Muhammad Khan and his nephews, Imam Quli Khan and Nadr Muhammad Khan – provided the Kazakhs with a window of opportunity to firmly establish themselves within the Syr Darya basin [3].

Furthermore, the rise of the newly formed and increasingly aggressive Dzungar (Kalmyk) Khanate in Central Asia posed a significant threat to the region's southeastern borders. As the Dzungars gradually pushed Kazakh and Kyrgyz groups out of the Zhetysu (Yettisu, Semirechye) region, a massive migration toward the Syr Darya basin and the Fergana Valley ensued. This demographic shift made it increasingly difficult for the Ashtarkhanid (Janid, Tuqai-Timurid) dynasty to defend and maintain control over these frontier zones [4].

These circumstances compelled Imam Quli Khan to adopt a specialized policy for the country's northeastern marches. Until the 1620s, while local Shaybanid rule persisted in parts of the Fergana Valley, Kazakh influence began to surge in Tashkent and the territories to its north. Reclaiming or retaining these possessions demanded substantial military and economic resources from the Bukharan ruler [5].

Consequently, Imam Quli Khan was forced to navigate a complex path: at times engaging in direct military conflict with Kazakh sultans and at other times resorting to diplomatic maneuvers through peace treaties and matrimonial alliances.

The 1614 campaign against Abul Muhammad, the governor of Andijan, can be considered a relative success. During this expedition, Tursun Khan – a Kazakh sultan who recognized Imam Quli Khan as his suzerain – was appointed governor of the Tashkent province [6]. In the Fergana Valley, Ashtarkhanid authority was formally acknowledged, and the alliance was cemented by the marriage of Imam Quli Khan to Sohijamol-khanim, the sister of Abul Muhammad Sultan [7].

However, this stability was short-lived. In 1618, a Kazakh coalition led by Eshim Khan, Kuchek Sultan, Nazar Sultan, and Abulay Sultan invaded the valley. The incursion resulted in the death of Abul Muhammad Sultan and the establishment of Kazakh dominance over the Fergana territories [8].

As this shift directly contradicted the political interests of the Khanate of Bukhara, a subsequent campaign was launched a year later, led by Nadr Devonbegi and Tursun Khan.

Following decisive battles in Margilan and Andijan, the Kazakh forces were forced to retreat toward the Steppe (*Dasht*). These events effectively strengthened Ashtarkhanid political influence in territories stretching as far as Osh and Uzgen [9].

Imam Quli Khan's rising status and the extension of his influence as far as the Syr Darya basin did not sit well with Tursun Khan, the governor of Tashkent. This was because Tursun Khan was simultaneously regarded as a "Great Khan" within the Kazakh Khanate; he was recognized by Eshim Khan, who was stationed in Turkestan, and an alliance had even been formed between them. Consequently, he was no longer willing to remain merely one of the governors under Imam Quli Khan's administration. This led to a cooling of relations between them and soon became the catalyst for the outbreak of war [10].

The defeat of the Ashtarkhanids in two battles at Shahrukhiya in 1621 and 1623 strengthened Kazakh influence in the territories stretching from the banks of the Syr Darya to Shahrukhiya [11]. Emboldened by these victories, Tursun Khan sought to expand his domains toward the Fergana Valley. Abulay Sultan, another of Imam Quli Khan's deputies and a Kazakh khan himself, had been governing the Andijan province since 1619. The pretext given for the campaign by Tursun Khan and Eshim Khan was ostensibly to punish Abulay Sultan, the governor of Andijan [12].

The march of the unified Kazakh forces toward the Fergana Valley began in 1624. At this time, Abulay Sultan, the governor of Andijan, could not withstand the allied Kazakh sultans on his own. Therefore, he immediately requested assistance from Imam Quli Khan. This indicates that the Khan of Bukhara, despite considering Abulay Sultan the primary culprit for the defeat at the Battle of Shahrukhiya, forgave him due to the prevailing tense situation. It was evident that if the Kazakhs, having already fully seized control over Tashkent and the Syr Darya regions, were to annex the valley to their possessions, it would drastically increase their strategic capabilities. The expansion of Kazakh Khanate territories toward the Khanate of Bukhara posed a serious threat not only to the Fergana Valley but also to Uratapa and the Zarafshon Valley. Taking this situation into account, Imam Quli Khan began taking immediate measures [13].

By the decree of the Khan of Bukhara, the army of his brother, the governor of Balkh, Nadr Muhammad Khan, arrived in Samarkand with all haste. The entire military force of the Khanate was mobilized for the campaign against the Kazakh sultans. To provide reinforcements for Abulay Sultan, the Bukharan forces were led by Muhammadquli Ataliq Kenagas, while the Balkh forces were commanded by the governor of Badakhshan, Shoh Saidbiy Keroyit. There are certain controversial perspectives in scientific literature regarding this campaign. Notably, researchers such as A.K. Alekseyev, T. Sultanov, N. Atigayev, and Y.V. Pilipchuk have recorded that the governor of Andijan was Xonzoda during the 1624 Kazakh invasion of the valley. In contrast, O. Burton mentions Abulay Sultan as the governor of the Fergana Valley. It appears that earlier researchers either regarded Xonzoda and Abul Muhammad Sultan as separate individuals or, following a brief account related to Xonzoda on page 108<sup>b</sup> of the *"Bahr al-Asrar"* misinterpreted him as the governor of Andijan. As stated previously, the governor of Andijan in 1624 was indeed Abulay Sultan.

By the time the Ashtarkhanid army entered the valley, the Kazakhs were already besieging Akhsi. Upon the appearance of the Bukhara-Balkh forces, the Kazakhs immediately lifted the siege and engaged in combat. In the battle near Karahnnon (کره نان)\*, the Ashtarkhanids, who failed to act in a coordinated manner, suffered yet another defeat.

According to A.K. Alekseyev, it was Yalangtush Ataliq who saved the Ashtarkhanids from total defeat. However, since Mahmud ibn Vali does not mention the name of Yalangtush Bahadur among the commanders who participated in this campaign, it appears that the Ataliq did not take part in this battle. In 1623 and 1624, Yalangtushbiy Ataliq had been defeated in a war against Khanzadkhan, the Mughal governor in Kabul, and was in a somewhat despondent mood. It can be assumed that Nadr Muhammad Khan left him in Balkh, as the death of his nephew in that battle may have had a negative impact on him.

At this point, there are certain aspects that require clarification. Until now, Namangan had not been mentioned when listing the cities of the valley. In Muhammad Tahir ibn Abul Qasim's work "Aja'ib al-Tabaqat," it is stated that a very severe earthquake occurred in Akhsi in 1030/1620–1621 AD, as a result of which the city was completely reduced to ruins. Although Ibrat provides information based on this same historian, he emphasizes that the event took place in 1035/1625–1626. Namangan, the construction of which began during the reign of Abdullah Khan II, started to expand as a new administrative and military center north of the Syr Darya precisely due to the destruction of Akhsi caused by the aforementioned earthquake. Although the city of Akhsi did not vanish instantly, it gradually lost its former status. Akhsi, which had been famous and well-known for many years, was henceforth used only to denote the name of an administrative unit, i.e., a province, and was forgotten as a city name. Therefore, to make it understandable to everyone, Mahmud ibn Vali described the events as taking place in Namangan, which was in the vicinity or under the jurisdiction of Akhsi [14].

After the defeat in the Battle of Karahnon, the Ashtarkhanids retreated. The Kazakhs pursued them, attempting to crush them completely. However, thanks to the self-sacrifice of the soldiers from Balkh, the Bukhara and Balkh troops managed to enter the Chust fortress. O. Burton noted the name of the fortress as Tusi [5: 169], whereas in "Bahr al-Asrar" it is expressed as Chusi (چوسی). During the retreat, the chief commander of the Balkh forces, Shoh Saidbiy, along with Holim Chuhra Aghasi and Hajibek, were killed, while a commander named Yorbek fell from the Bukharan side [15].

The Kazakh army surrounded the Chust fortress and began to besiege it. Eshim Khan led the siege from the east, while Tursun Khan led from the west. This indicates that the Chust fortress was considered one of the strongest fortifications of its time and had two gates. Numerous attacks by the Kazakhs to capture the stronghold proved futile. At that very moment, unexpectedly, all the troops in the fortress, led by Olloberdibiy Buyrak and Muhammadquli Kenagas, launched a counter-offensive from the eastern section. First Eshim Khan, and then Tursun Khan, unable to withstand this assault, were forced to retreat. The defeat of the Kazakhs was so severe that they abandoned all the booty and prisoners they had captured during their retreat and returned toward Tashkent. Thus, the initial attack of 1624 did not yield the results expected by the Kazakh khans.

At this time, following the battle near Akhsi, Abulay Sultan moved from Andijon to Margilan, where he began awaiting assistance from the Khan of Bukhara. This was because, despite the Kazakhs having been defeated at Chust and having retreated from the valley, they launched a fresh offensive only two months later. Lacking sufficient forces to oppose them, Abulay Sultan had arrived in Margilan. This subsequent Kazakh attack was led by Murad Sultan, who had been appointed as the governor of Shahrukhiya by Tursun Khan. Once again, the Kazakhs failed to achieve their objective. As a result of the battles that took place at Sang Fortress, the Kazakhs were unable to capture the fortification and, losing all hope of conquering the valley, retreated.

Both Kazakh incursions occurred via the Kandirlik Pass. The Sang Fortress, in particular, continued to play a vital role even during the era of the Khanate of Kokand during Dzungar invasions. This serves as evidence that formidable fortresses were constructed along the northern borders of the valley specifically to counter external threats.

In conclusion, the Fergana Valley stood at the center of intense political processes during the first quarter of the 17th century. The Khanate of Bukhara exerted every effort to protect its eastern territories from nomadic pressure. Despite facing defeats on certain fronts, the Ashtarkhanids managed to preserve their sovereignty over the Fergana Valley.

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite the overall prosperity of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty during the reign of Imam Quli Khan, it is difficult to assert that his authority was fully consolidated over the northeastern territories of the khanate. Although in the early years, the Kazakh leader Tursun Khan in Tashkent and Abulay Sultan in Fergana acted as deputies on behalf of the Khan of Bukhara, their dependency was largely formal in nature. This situation indicates that during the first quarter of the 17th century, Imam Quli Khan did not yet possess sufficient power to bring these regions under absolute centralized control. It was only by the 1630s that Ashtarkhanid hegemony became fully established across the Syr Darya basin, Tashkent, and, most notably, the Fergana Valley.

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