

History of the “Khan Raising” Ceremony in the State Administration of the Khiva Khanate

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Abstract

This article examines issues related to state administration, particularly the “khan raising” ceremony within the state governance system of the Khiva Khanate. The study reveals aspects such as the procedure of conducting this ceremony, its location, timing, and participants. It also considers issues related to the legitimization of the authority of Khiva khans.

Keywords: state administration of the Khiva Khanate, khan, “khan raising” ceremony, closed council meeting, oath-taking (bay’at), chigatai, jiga, felt carpet (kigiz).

Introduction

For a long time, the “khan raising” ceremony, which possessed deep-rooted traditions, did not lose its political significance even in late medieval society. In this regard, studying this issue helps clarify a number of problems in the history of Uzbek statehood, including matters of state governance and its important aspects. The “khan raising” ceremony, as an important political event, was conducted on the basis of certain traditions. During the ceremony, the heir to the throne was seated on a white felt carpet and lifted high while being proclaimed khan.

The expression “khan raising” signified the enthronement of the crown prince to the khanate throne and the addition of the title “khan” to his name. In particular, the work Tarikhi Turkiston explains this as follows:

“In most of our manuscripts, instead of the phrase ‘made khan,’ the expression ‘raised as khan’ is written. The reason for this is that, according to Uzbek custom, after agreeing to make a man khan, he was placed upon a white felt carpet, and four men holding high-ranking positions lifted the felt from its four sides and placed him upon the throne. After this ritual was performed, the title of khan was bestowed upon that person. Therefore, it is written that he was ‘raised as khan.’” [1]

From this, it becomes clear that the definition given to the expression “raised as khan” demonstrates both the theoretical-political and practical aspects of this ceremony.

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Research Method

The article is written based on generally accepted historical methods and principles, including historicism, hermeneutics, sequential analysis, comparative-logical analysis, and objectivity.

According to researcher Ron Sela, the earliest information regarding the “khan raising” ceremony in the Khiva Khanate is connected with the enthronement of the Khivan ruler Hajim Khan (1558–1602). [2] He further notes that after Hajim Khan, information concerning the performance of the “khan raising” ceremony does not appear in historiographical studies until the nineteenth century. Although the Khorezm chronicles do not provide complete descriptions of the “khan raising” ceremony, they nevertheless make it possible to imagine the ritual. For example, the work *Shajarayi Turk* contains the following information regarding the enthronement ceremony of Elbars Khan, the founder of the Arabshahid dynasty:

“After holding a great feast, all the Uzbeks and Sarts gathered together, and by common agreement, in the year 911 and in the Year of the Sheep, they raised Elbars Khan as khan.” [3]

Likewise, although the source does not directly provide a full description of the ceremony, the use of expressions such as “was raised as khan,” “was proclaimed khan,” “became ruler,” “was raised as ruler,” and “was honored with the crown of kingship” in reference to the khans confirms the above conclusion. [4], [5].

In his memoirs, Arminius Vámbéry mentions that the “people of Urgench” seated Anusha Khan’s son Ernek Khan (1688–1690) upon a white felt carpet and lifted him up. [6] Seating the ruler on a white felt carpet and “raising him as khan” played an important role in legitimizing and strengthening political authority. For this reason, the ceremony was organized at a very high level while carefully observing established traditions. First, the heir to the throne was prepared for the ceremony. During this preparation process, he was bathed and adorned. At the same time, the necessary ceremonial objects and attributes—such as the felt carpet and the *jiga*—were prepared in advance. The time, place, and participants of the ceremony were clarified, and during a “closed council meeting,” issues concerning the final discussion of the future khan’s candidacy were also resolved. All of these constituted important components of a unified process.

Literature Review

Issues concerning state administration, the appointment of rulers holding the highest position in the Khiva Khanate, the legitimization of their authority, their activities, and the general history of the khanate are reflected in the materials of Fund I-125 of the National Archive of Uzbekistan, chronicles relating to the Central Asian khanates, including the Khiva Khanate, as well as in the memoirs of foreign ambassadors and travelers.

In addition, information related to the topic has been examined in the studies, monographs, and numerous articles by M. Yuldashev, O. Mutalov, U. Abdurasulov, K. Khudoyberganov, N. Toshev, and D. Begaliev, where data concerning the subject can be found.

Results and Discussion

Results

Organizational Aspects of the “Khan Raising” Ceremony

As noted above, according to custom, the appointed heir to the throne was specially washed and purified before the ceremony. Russian authors recorded that, while preparing the Khivan ruler Rahimquli Khan for enthronement, his clothes were removed, he was bathed, and then dressed from head to toe in new garments. [7], [8]. Naturally, this bathing of the heir to the throne differed from ordinary washing; it is not difficult to imagine that he was purified in water mixed with special fragrant substances while the necessary prayers were recited.

According to tradition, red-colored clothing was mainly worn during the “khan raising” ceremony. This was because the color red symbolized brightness, joy, celebration, the greatness of rank, and magnificent sovereignty. For example, when Bayani describes the enthronement of Amir Tora (1871–1872), he writes:

“He came to the Ark, became khan, wore a crimson coat upon his shoulders and a feathered telpak upon his head, and sat upon the throne.” [9]

According to information provided by the Iranian ambassador Rizaquli Khan, the Khivan khans also wore royal garments during battles. Describing the Khivan ruler Muhammad Amin Khan, he wrote:

“The khan’s special horse had a golden saddle, a jiga attached to the horse’s head, and golden tassels hanging from its tail, while the khan’s clothing was known to everyone. This was because a white-feathered jiga was fixed atop his helmet, or his headwear was sewn from red fabric, and in that country no one except the khan wore red-colored clothing upon their head.” [10]

An analysis of these accounts shows that the color red symbolized rulership not only during ceremonies, but also in military situations.

It is highly probable that during the “khan raising” ceremony, the heir to the throne was dressed in similarly bright garments decorated with various ornaments. Although the examined sources contain no information regarding the everyday clothing of representatives of the ruling dynasty, some travelers mention this in their memoirs. According to them, the rulers wore robes decorated with finely crafted looped buttons in order to distinguish themselves from ordinary people. [11] However, not all rulers favored luxury. Some deliberately dressed very modestly, which testified to their strict observance of Islamic principles.

The most important ceremonial object was the felt carpet, also called namad. [12] [13] Felt carpets were generally produced in plain white or black colors or decorated with various patterns. In Khorezm, two types were widespread. Patterned varieties were called takanamat, while plain ones were known as yona. [14] Felt made from the white wool of sheep and camels, densely and thickly pressed, was considered especially valuable. This type was known as Kashgar or Kashgar-style felt. [15] In the “khan raising” ceremony in Khiva, specifically the white “Kashgar” felt—regarded as a symbol of purity and greatness—was used. [16] It may be assumed that precisely this type of felt was used during the ceremony because, being strongly and carefully manufactured, it allowed the heir to the throne to be securely placed upon it and lifted according to tradition.

Another major ceremonial object was the jiga, about which historical works also provide information. Among Turkic peoples, the jiga had long been used as a decorative ornament. It was an adornment attached to headwear (such as turbans, skullcaps, or

crowns), mainly worn during weddings and ceremonial occasions. The *jiga* was also believed to protect against the “evil eye.” The word *jiga* means “royal feather,” and in sources its synonyms *utoga* and *ukpar* are also encountered. *Jigas* varied according to their manner of attachment and construction. These included single *jigas* worn by kings and princes, double *jigas* attached to both sides of women’s skullcaps (especially common in Khorezm), as well as *jigas* fastened to children’s headwear in order to protect them from the “evil eye.”

Jigas were made from thin double-layered silver, and a small tube was placed at the top for inserting peacock or owl feathers. Their surfaces were decorated with embossed patterns and gilded. They were additionally adorned with pearls, turquoise, colored stones, and glass. [17]

Eltuzar Khan’s crown was adorned with a golden *jiga* decorated with turquoise, small jewels, and diamonds, and 20–30 feathers of the *jiga* bird were attached to it [18], [19]. The *jiga* bird is not found in Khorezm and is assumed to have been the white heron (*Oqqoton–qarkara*). In addition, a *tamga* depicting the head of the *jiga* bird was also used in the making of seals in the khanate. In particular, information concerning the “feathered seal” (*jigali muhr*) mentioned in *Firdavs ul-Iqbol* confirms this view [20]. S. Turaeva also notes in her work that the *jiga* bird was the symbolic emblem of the Kungrat dynasty, and motifs in the form of its head were engraved on crowns, seals, the clothing of members of the khan’s household, saddlery, and certain weapons [21].

Jigas were attached to the khans’ fur hats (*telpak*), and they constantly wore such feathered headgear. These items were kept in special places within the palace, and the official responsible for them was called *jigador* or *jigachi*[22]. It is evident that even attributes which seemed simple at first glance played a special role in conducting the khan-raising ceremony and that every small detail had to be used according to its proper place and established rules during the ritual.

Thus, after preparing the future khan and the required ceremonial objects, he was brought before the elders of the dynasty and high-ranking officials, where a special council was convened and his candidacy was discussed once again.

Discussion

Closed Consultation

The special council held in a narrow circle before the beginning of the “khan-raising” ceremony may conventionally be called a “closed consultation” [23], [24], because only the most trusted persons close to the khan’s household participated in it.

According to the testimony of F. I. Baziner, who visited Khiva as part of a Russian embassy in 1842, several high-ranking officials gathered and held a private council before *Rahimquli Khan* was raised to the throne.

Shajarayi Khorezmshahi also emphasizes that before the enthronement of *Muhammad Rahim Khan II* in 1864, only trusted individuals were admitted to such a closed consultation, while special guards were appointed at the gates. In particular, the source states:

“*Hasanmurad Qushbegi* gathered all the emirs and state dignitaries and stationed *Karukli Bobo* and *Olloberdiboy* at the gate of the Ark, saying: ‘Allow only reliable and trustworthy people to enter; otherwise, do not admit anyone!’”.

The “closed consultation” was not held merely as a formality. In most cases, serious discussions took place regarding the claimant’s age, administrative abilities, and moral

qualities. As a result of these debates, there were instances when a younger brother was enthroned instead of the elder brother.

Although sources do not provide precise information regarding the “closed councils” during the Arabshahid dynasty, events related to the rise of Dostmuhammad Sultan provide some basis for assuming that such consultations existed. During the Kungrat dynasty, less attention was paid to the age of the heir to the throne, while the influence of high-ranking officials in discussions concerning the appointment of the future khan increased significantly. When the issue of raising Muhammad Rahim Khan II (Bobojon Tora) to the throne instead of his elder brother Amir Tora was discussed during the “closed consultation,” Amir Tora emphasized that his younger brother was still young and inexperienced. Therefore, he argued that a more capable and older person should become khan, implicitly referring to himself. The yasovulboshi sharply objected to this view, declaring:

“No one finds your becoming khan acceptable.”

At the conclusion of the consultation, Muhammad Rahim Khan II was enthroned instead of Amir Tora.

During the “closed consultation,” the oath-taking (bay‘at) ceremony was conducted in the form of questions and answers. It represented a process of mutual agreement between high-ranking officials and the new ruler. Anke von Kügelgen describes this as “recognition,” meaning the acknowledgment and acceptance of the ruler in a particular Muslim state, noting that it appears in sources as bay‘a or mubaya [25] ,[26]. This process embodied a distinctive idea of “unity” and imposed upon participants the obligation to recognize and obey the authority of the “khan appointed by God”.

The exact form in which the heir took the oath is not fully described in the sources. However, from expressions such as “took the oath,” “the oath ceremony was performed,” “the oath was accepted,” and similar phrases, it can be understood that this took place during the closed consultation. Most likely, the heir swore allegiance before the narrow circle of participants before being seated upon the felt carpet. After he was raised as khan and announced to the people, other officials and the population also pledged allegiance to him. For example, when Asfandiyar Khan ascended the throne, by the instruction of his minister and father-in-law Islamkhoja, the elders, mullahs, and citizens of all towns and villages came and began to swear allegiance [27].

The act of oath-taking consisted of a series of rules and customs and, at first glance, appeared connected with etiquette. In particular, when the throne was offered to the heir, he refused it several times. Relatives and high-ranking officials gathered at the council repeatedly pleaded with the prince to accept authority. Only afterward did the heir present himself as having accepted the offer “out of necessity and benevolence,” agreeing to ascend the throne. Rizaquli Hidayat, the Iranian ambassador who visited Khiva in 1851, wrote in his memoirs that:

“When the officials offered the throne to the heir, the future khan at first appeared to avoid and reject the proposal.”

Similarly, sources describing the enthronement of Eltuzar Khan state that the heir initially withdrew modestly and bashfully before finally accepting the requests and proposals of the official.

The source further states that Rahimquli Khan, in a similar situation, rejected the proposal by saying:

“This world itself is unfaithful; if kingship has one sweetness, it has a thousand stings; if it has one comfort, it has a thousand anxieties.”

Only under the insistence of those assembled did he agree to accept the khanship.

Members of the council referred to in the sources as ahl al-bay‘at (“people of allegiance”) even cried out and pleaded with the heir who had “refused the throne,” presenting various reasons to persuade him to accept authority. In particular, while persuading Rahimquli Tora, the assembly stated:

“O king with the nature of an angel, we know that you have no desire for kingship. We know that your wisdom is higher than kingship itself, but Allah Almighty, through His grace, grants sovereignty in both worlds to the ruler who governs with justice.”

They cited the hadith stating that one hour of justice is better than a lifetime of voluntary worship and urged Rahimquli Khan to accept the royal throne, govern justly, and gain the favor of God.

The heir’s refusal of power can be interpreted in different ways. N. Jabborov, who prepared *Zubdat ut-Tavorikh* for publication, explains this situation, following Agahi’s interpretation, by Rahimquli Khan’s “lack of desire for kingship,” as he was “consumed by love for the Almighty”.

According to H. Nazirova, Rahimquli Khan symbolically rejected the throne (symbolicheskiy otkaz – H.N.) [28]. Certainly, the heir’s observance of etiquette and his agreement only after a certain exchange of questions and answers and the insistence of the elders constituted a form of ethical norms and national traditions. However, serious political considerations lay behind these “rules of etiquette.” In particular, through reaching an agreement with the palace nobility and obtaining the oath of officials recognizing his authority, the ruler effectively secured their loyalty and faithful service. In Rizaquli Khan Hidayat’s *Safarnama*, although the future khan initially portrayed himself as avoiding and refusing the proposal, he later openly and firmly asked:

“If all of you equally agree to my becoming khan, then later, during my reign, should I as khan be compelled to issue severe decrees such as sentencing people to death, will none of you oppose them?”

The Qazikalon and others expressed their consent. After receiving an affirmative response, the oath-taking ceremony was completed.

It should be noted that when the future khan requested the officials’ agreement to carry out even “harsh decrees” during the process of reaching an accord with them, this effectively served as one of the important means by which the khan strengthened his political position from the very beginning of his rule by securing confirmation of his authority. In this way, he also attempted to prevent possible future opposition and obstacles.

Some rulers required their officials to “renew the oath of allegiance.” This was carried out when the ruler developed distrust or suspicion toward his subordinates during his reign in order to test them, or when the conditions of the oath had been violated by the other party. According to Komyob Tora’s work *Tavorikh ul-Khavonin*, when the conspiracy organized against the Khivan khan Abdullakhan by his brother Sayyid Mahmud Tora failed, the khan, having become suspicious of his subordinates, required all princes and beks to “renew their oath and swear upon the Qur’an” [29]. The ruler’s renewal of agreements with officials was aimed at strengthening authority and warning suspicious individuals inclined toward hostility. Thus, the future khan was determined and preparations for the ceremony were made.

The timing of the ceremony was connected with the death of the khan, and this fact was kept secret for a certain period. This was done primarily to prevent various political intrigues, conflicts, and unrest that could arise within the state over a short period. One reason for this temporary secrecy was that, at the time of the ruler's death, the heir was sometimes not in the capital, and time was needed for him to arrive. According to sources, when the Khivan khan Allakuli Khan died, his designated heir and eldest son Rahimquli Khan was serving as governor in Hazorasp. As soon as the ruler died, Rahimquli Khan was urgently brought to Khiva.

Only the mehtar and a few individuals at court knew of Allakuli Khan's death, and they kept it strictly secret, while others believed that the khan was seriously ill [30]. Fearing the outbreak of a struggle for the throne, they took precautionary measures and brought the heir Rahimquli Khan to Khiva at night and proclaimed him khan. The following morning, the death of the khan and the enthronement of the new ruler were announced.

This demonstrates that such measures were taken to preserve peace within the country and ensure state security. Therefore, before the "khan-raising" ceremony, the full authority of the khanate was transferred to the heir, while the funeral ceremony of the deceased khan was held the following day. Sources also mention that one day before the death of Muhammad Amin Inoq, according to his will, his son Avazbiy was appointed heir by the officials and entrusted with the authority of the khanate. After the heir was proclaimed khan, the funeral of the deceased ruler was conducted, food was distributed to the people, recitations of the Qur'an (khatm al-Qur'an) were performed for his soul, and only afterward did the celebratory feast honoring the new khan begin. Thus, the sequence of the ceremony was carried out in the form of khan raising – mourning – celebration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that the chronicles and sources of Khorezm, as well as their new interpretations, open new pages in the history of late medieval Uzbekistan. Moreover, despite being one of the important political ceremonies of the Khiva Khanate, this ritual has not yet been systematically studied. The "khan-raising" ceremony occupied a special place in legitimizing authority and was considered one of the principal political events confirming the khan's powers and status.

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- [16] In fact, the practice of raising the heir to the throne on a felt carpet and proclaiming him khan existed in all three khanates. Since this study is limited to the example of the Khiva Khanate, aspects relating to the Bukhara and Kokand Khanates were not examined separately. However, certain elements of this issue have been reflected in previous studies.
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